

Thirty-Sixth Hadith: The Attributes Of God

بِالسَّنَدِ الْمُتَّصِلِ إِلَى ثِقَّةِ الْإِسْلَامِ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ يَعْقُوبَ الْكَلِينِي عَنِ عَلِيِّ بْنِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ عَنْ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ خَالِدِ الطَّيَالِسِيِّ عَنْ صَفْوَانَ بْنِ يَحْيَى عَنِ ابْنِ مَسْكَانَ عَنْ أَبِي بَصِيرٍ قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ يَقُولُ: لَمْ يَزَلِ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ رَبَّنَا وَالْعِلْمُ ذَاتُهُ وَلَا مَعْلُومٌ، وَالسَّمْعُ ذَاتُهُ وَلَا مَسْمُوعٌ، وَالْبَصَرُ ذَاتُهُ وَلَا مُبْصِرٌ، وَالْقُدْرَةُ ذَاتُهُ وَلَا مَقْدُورٌ. فَلَمَّا أَحْدَثَ الْأَشْيَاءَ وَكَانَ الْمَعْلُومُ، وَقَعَ الْعِلْمُ مِنْهُ عَلَى الْمَعْلُومِ وَالسَّمْعُ عَلَى الْمَسْمُوعِ وَالْبَصَرُ عَلَى الْمُبْصِرِ وَالْقُدْرَةُ عَلَى الْمَقْدُورِ. قَالَ: قُلْتُ: فَلَمْ يَزَلِ اللَّهُ مُتَحَرِّكًا؟ قَالَ: فَقَالَ: تَعَالَى اللَّهُ عَنِ ذَلِكَ، إِنَّ الْحَرَكَةَ صِفَةٌ مُحْدَثَةٌ بِالْفِعْلِ. قَالَ: قُلْتُ: فَلَمْ يَزَلِ اللَّهُ مُتَكَلِّمًا؟ قَالَ: فَقَالَ: إِنَّ الْكَلَامَ صِفَةٌ مُحْدَثَةٌ لَيْسَتْ بِأَزَلِيَّةٍ، كَانَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ وَلَا مُتَكَلِّمٌ.

With my continuous chain of authorities reaching up to the Thiqat al-Islam Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni, from 'Ali ibn Ibrahim, from Muhammad ibn Khalid al-Tayalisi, from Safwan ibn Yahya, from Ibn Muskan, from Abu Basir who said: I heard Abu 'Abd Allah (A) say, "God, the Almighty and the Glorious, was our Lord even at a time when Knowledge was His Essence and there was no knowable, Hearing was His Essence and there was no audible thing, seeing was His Essence and there was no visible thing, and Power was His essence and there was nothing subject to power. Thus when He created things and the knowable came into being, His Knowledge pertained to the known thing, His Hearing to that which is audible, and His Sight to that which is visible, and His Power to that which is subject to power." Abu Basir says: I asked him, "Hadn't God been ever-moving?" He replied, "Exalted is God above that! Indeed movement is a quality that comes into existence (muhdath) by action." Abu Basir says: I asked him, "Hadn't God been ever-speaking [in pre-eternity?]" He replied, "Speech is a quality that comes into existence (sifatun mahdathah) and is not eternal (azal). God, Almighty and Glorious, existed, and He was not speaker."¹

Exposition

In the statement رَبَّنَا اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ رَبَّنَا is apparently the predicate (*khobar*) of زال , and the phrase وَالْعِلْمُ ذَاتُهُ is the adverb of condition (*hall*) for it. However [such an assumption] does not give smooth (*salis*) meaning, nor does it achieve the purpose. Because the purpose is not to affirm the eternity of [God's] Lordship, but to affirm the pre-eternity of His Knowledge and its precedence over the knowable.

It may be said the phrase رَبَّنَا is in the nominative case (*marfu'*) and is appositive to the noun (*ism*) of زال with the predicate (*khobar*) being omitted (*mahdhuf*), as indicated by the phrase والعلم ذاته. Assuming the ellipsis, the sentence would be like this: لَمْ يَزَلِ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ رَبَّنَا وَالْعِلْمُ ذَاتُهُ. And it is possible that زال is a perfect verb (*tammah*), sufficing with the nominative case, on the basis of which it would be زال يزول not زال يزال for the past tense of يزال is always defective (*naqis*), contrary to يزول which is always perfect.

And in the phrase وكان المعلوم, كان is here complete, meaning that 'when He created the things and the knowable came into existence.

In the phrase محدثة بالفعل it is probable that the expression بالفعل is opposed to بالقوة and maybe in the sense of verbal noun, meaning that an Attribute that is realized with creation cannot be God's Attribute. There are some noble topics that have been referred to in this *hadith*, and we shall discuss some of them to an extent appropriate to this discourse.

The Identity of God's Attributes with His Essence

It should be known that there is a reference in this noble tradition to God's Sacred Essence being identical to His true Attributes of perfection, like Knowledge, Power, Hearing and Sight. This is one of the important topics (of philosophy and *kalam*) whose elaborate treatment is, however, outside the scope of this treatise. Here we will refer to the true position in this regard in accordance with firm metaphysical proofs' of the philosophers (*hukama'*) and the way of the people of gnosis (*ahl al-ma'ri fat*).

It should –be known that it has been clearly established in its appropriate place that that which belongs to the categories of perfection and beauty derives from the mainspring of existence and the root of the reality of being, and that in the realm of existence there is no more than one noble principle, which is the mainspring of all perfections and the source of all goodness, and that is the Reality of Being (*haqiqat al-wujud*). And were the totality of perfections not the same as the Reality of Being, and were there some kind of duality in the context of concrete reality; of whatever form, or separation from It, that, would 'imply that there are two principles in the domain of Being, which in turn implies many inadmissible conclusions. Hence whatever that is perfection, is not such on the basis of meaning and essence, but by virtue of its actualization and realization in the context of concrete reality, and that which is real in the context of concrete reality is one principle, which is existence. Hence, all perfection derives from one principle, which is the reality of existence.

It has also been clearly established that the reality of existence is sheer simplicity in all aspects, and composition is absolutely precluded from its sacred precincts, as long as it retains its essential and original sheerness and purity of its own reality. However, when it descends from its original reality, it assumes composition in an accidental manner, at the plane of the intellect as well as external reality, in accordance with its planes and stations (*mashahid wa manazil*). But in respect of its essence (*dhat*), it remains single, and composition is something alien to it and accidental.

Two sublime principles are inferred from these explanations:

First, that which is simple in all aspects is the totality of perfections in one and a single aspect. And in the same aspect that It is existent, It is also Knowing, Powerful, Living, and Willing and all the other names and Attributes of beauty and glory are true of It. He is Knower in the [same] aspect that He is Powerful, and Powerful in the [same] aspect that He is Knower, without there being any difference of consideration (*i'tibar*) even on the plane of the intellect. And as to the difference of the concepts of the Names and the words that are used to represent them, which are unconditioned (*la bi shart*) intellectual concepts, it does not correspond to a difference in concrete reality, and it has been clearly established that numerous concepts of perfection are abstracted from one thing.

Rather, that which is implied by the foregoing explanation is that all the concepts of perfection are abstracted from a single aspect (*haythiyyat al-wahidah*). And if the concepts of perfection were to be abstracted from different aspects, as in the case of some contingents, this is accidental, and that is due to the descent (*tanazzul*) of the reality of existence and its accidental mingling with non-existences.

The second principle is that that which is perfect in all aspects and is absolute perfection and goodness must be simple in all aspects. And from these two, another principle is inferred, that that which is composite, in whatever manner, is not perfect in all aspects and is subject to deficiency and nonexistence as well, and that which is deficient is not absolutely simple.

Therefore, as God, the Exalted, is completely simple, and composition, which implies contingency, – poverty, and dependence on another, does not affect Him absolutely, He is perfect in all aspects and possesses all the Names and Attributes, and He is the very ground of reality and the essence of being, without His existence bearing any taint of non-existence, and without His perfections bearing any taint of imperfection. Hence – He is sheer being, for were non-existence to find way into Him; the evil of composite things, which consists of the composition of existence and non-existence, would find way into Him. Thus He is the sheerness of Knowledge, the sheerness of Life, the sheerness of Power, the sheerness 'of Sight,' of Hearing and all other perfections. This explains the statement of Imam Sadiq (A) that

وَالْعِلْمُ ذَاتُهُ وَالْقُدْرَةُ وَالسَّمْعُ وَالْبَصَرُ ذَاتُهُ.

And Knowledge is His Essence, and so are Power, Hearing, and Sight His Essence.

The Statements Of The Philosophers On The Division Of Divine Attributes

It should be known that the divine philosophers have divided the Attributes of God, the Exalted, into three kinds:

First, the true Attributes (*sifat haqiqiyyah*), and these have been divided into two kinds: the absolute true Attributes (*sifat haqiqiyyah mahdah*), such as Life, Subsistence, eternity and the like, and the relational true Attributes (*sifat haqiqiyyah dhat al-idafah*), like Knowledge, Power, and Will, which involve a relation to the objects of Knowledge, Power and Will (*ma'lum, maqdur, and murad*). These two kinds of Attributes are considered by them to be the same as the Essence (*dhat*),

Second, the absolutely relative Attributes (*sifat idafiyyah mahdah*), such as [the Attributes of] being the Originator, Provider, Merciful, Omniscient, Omnipotent, and the like.

Third, the absolutely negative Attributes (*sifat salbiyyah mahdah*), such as Unlikeness [to creatures] (*quddusiyyah*), Oneness (*fardiyyah*), Transcendence (*subbuhiyyah*), and the like.

These two [latter] kinds of Attributes are considered by them to be additional to the Sacred Essence, and all the negations are considered to derive from a single negation, which is the negation of contingency (*salb al-imkan*). Similarly, all the relations are referred to a single relation, which is the relation of Creatorhood (*muwajjidiyyah*), and the source of relations is referred to the illuminative and emanative relation (*idafah-ye ishraqiyyah wa idafah-ye i fadiyyah*).²

This author does not consider as valid these divisions, along with the identification of the 'true Attributes' [with the Essence] and the consideration of the relative and negative Attributes as additional, as mentioned by them with their proofs, and he considers them neither in conformity with the firm metaphysical proofs nor with the correct conceptions of gnosis. That is because none of the Attributes are to be considered as being identical with the Essence—when dealing with the concepts of the Names and the Attributes from the viewpoint of conceptual multiplicity. And should we regard the Essence as being identical with the relative or the negative Attributes, that would imply that God; the Exalted, is pure relation and identical with the negative aspect.

Similarly, if He is regarded as being identical with the true Attributes, that implies that God, the Exalted, is the same as derivative conceptions (*mafahim i'tibariyyah*) and rational ideas (*ma'ani' aqliyyah*), and He is exalted above' that. And should we consider the realities of the Attributes and the concrete instances of the Names and the Attributes, then all the Names and the relative as well as the true Attributes are found to be the same as the Sacred Essence, and the difference between 'knowledgeability' (*'alimiyyah*) and knower (*'alim*), and 'powerfulness' (*qadiriyyah*) and powerful (*qadir*) is only that of conceptual consideration, and all the relational Attributes derive from His Essential Mercifulness (*rahimiyyah*) and Beneficence (*rahmaniyyah*), even the Attributes of being the Provider (*raziqiyyah*) and Creator (*khaliqiyyah*), and the rest.

Also, with respect to their reducing all the negations to the negation of contingency and all the relations to a single relation, and their abstaining from reducing the true Attributes to anything, it may be remarked that should we consider the matter from a conceptual viewpoint, none of them derives from another, neither the negations, nor the relations, nor the true Attributes. But if the realities are taken into view, all

the true Attributes also refer to the One Necessary Reality.

The Identity Of The Attributes With The Sacred Essence

The true position concerning the Attributes, in the idiom of theoretical philosophy (*hikmat al-nazari*), is that the true and relative Attributes are absolutely different from a conceptual viewpoint, and none of them is the same as the Sacred Essence. From the viewpoint of reality, all of them are the same as the Sacred Essence. However, there are two planes of the Attributes: one is the plane of the Essence and Attributes of the Essence (*awsaf dhatiyyah*) from which we can abstract Knowledge and Knowledgeability, Power and Powerfulness. The other one is the station of the Attributes of Act (*awsaf fi'liyyah*), from which, too, one can abstract the concepts of Knowledge and, Knowledgeability, Power and Powerfulness.

As to the negative Attributes, such as His Unlikeness to creation (*quddasiyyah*) and His Transcendence (*subbuhyyat*) and the Names of *tanzih* (negation of the finite characteristics of the creatures with respect to God), they are implied by the Sacred Essence, and the Sacred Essence is an accidental instance (*misdaq bi al-'arad*) in relation to them.

Because God, the Exalted, is absolute perfection and the essential instance of absolute perfection. That is because He is the principle of reality and negation of deficiency is among its implications, and perfection is the accidental instance of the negation of deficiency. The gnostics and the people of the heart consider the station of manifestation (*maqam al-tajalli*) at the plane of the most sacred emanation (*fayd al-aqdas*) as the source (*mabda'*) of the Names of Essence, and the station of manifestation at the plane of the sacred emanation (*fayd al-muqaddas*) as the source of the Attributes of Act.³

They do not consider the manifestation at the plane of the sacred emanation as 'other' [than the Essence], in the same way that they do not consider it to be the same (*ayn*) [as the Essence] either. A discussion around this topic will lead up to a discussion of the Names and the Attributes in accordance with their way, and that will take us beyond our present purpose.

And some have referred Divine Attributes to privative matters, considering 'Knowledge' as the non-existence of ignorance and 'Power' as the non-existence of inability. And among the people of *ma'rifah*, someone whom I have seen insisting on this matter was the august gnostic *marhum* Qadi Said Qummi,⁴ who, in the course of a discourse mentioned in *Sharh al Tawhid*⁵ has apparently followed his teacher, the *marhum* Mullah Rajab 'Ali. Aforetime we had given a reply, based on metaphysical reasoning, to his argument, replying as well to his recourses to the literal meanings of some traditions.

The Priority Of Knowledge To Creation

Among the noble issues referred to in this sacred tradition is that knowledge with its knowables precedes creation in pre-eternity, a matter which itself as well as its character—as to whether it is detailed or non-

detailed—are subjects of a great controversy. There is also a controversy as to whether it is additional to the Essence (*dhat*) or the same, whether it precedes creation or accompanies it, with all the related details, which are in their books? We will confine ourselves to establishing the truth of the matter and refrain from criticism or refutation of other opinions.

It should be known that that which stands established with the people of metaphysical reasoning and the companions of gnosis is that which has been indicated in this noble tradition, that the knowledge of the known things precedes creation in pre-eternity (*azal*), and that it is the same as the Essence. That His Knowledge is detailed is indicated by the statement that He was the Seer when there was nothing visible, and Hearer when there was nothing audible, because sight and hearing entail the observation of visibles and audibles in a detailed manner, as is clear enough. Also, it refers to His detailed knowledge, where it says:

فَإِذَا أَحْدَثَ الْأَشْيَاءَ وَكَانَ الْمَعْلُومُ، وَقَعَ الْعِلْمُ مِنْهُ عَلَى الْمَعْلُومِ.

So when He brought the things into being and the known came into existence, His knowledge pertained (corresponded) to the known.

That is because His knowledge did not obtain a new subsistence after creation, but pertained to the known after its acquiring subsistence. Now we shall explain the meaning of the Knowledge pertaining to the known.

The explanation of this noble faith-related theme, on the basis of the approach of the authorities among the philosophers, is that, as known from the preceding section, God, the Exalted, is absolute existence and absolute perfection. Absolute existence, with its complete simplicity and unity, encompasses all perfections and all existents, to utmost perfection.

That which is outside the realm of its existence is non-being, deficiency, and inadequacy, and, in a word nothingness (*la shay'yyah*). The relation of other planes of existence to that Sacred Essence is that of deficiency to perfection. The knowledge of absolute perfection is the knowledge of perfection in its absoluteness, without deficiency or inadequacy, and this is the very universal, simple, and detailed disclosure, as not even an iota of existence, from pre-eternity to eternity, is beyond the realm of His knowledge and there can be no trace of plurality and composition in it.⁶

According to the approach of the gnostics, God, the Exalted, encompasses all the Names and the Attributes at the plane (*hadrat*) of *wahiddiyyah* and the station of nominal inclusiveness (*jam' asma'i*). The fixed archetypes (*a'yan thabitah*) of all existents are implied in the Divine Names at the plane of inclusiveness prior to creation in pre-eternity, and the absolute manifestation of the Essence (*tajalli-ye mullaq al-dhat*) from the plane of *ahadiyyah* and the *ghayb* of ipseity is the disclosure of all the Names and Attributes and all their implications, which are the fixed archetypes of all the existents, with a single

manifestation and disclosure that is absolutely simple (*kashf al-basil al-mutlaq*).

Hence with the epistemic disclosure (*kashf-e'ilmī*) at the plane of the manifestation of the most sacred emanation (*fayd aqdas*) takes place the disclosure of the Essence, the Names, the Attributes and the archetypes without there being any multiplicity or compositeness.⁷

These two approaches possess utmost firmness and sublimity, but as they are extremely subtle and based on multiple principles, until these preliminaries are not learnt and as long as there is complete and consummate intimacy and thorough immersion, as well as perfect good will towards those who possess Divine gnosis (*ulama billah*), one can not derive anything from philosophy and the terminology of the men of God and the people of the heart and from these discourses, which pile bewilderment on bewilderment.

Accordingly, it is preferable to give a simpler explanation that is closer to the understanding of the common people. And so we say that the causality and creativity of the Necessary Being, the Exalted, is not like the causality of natural agents which combine or dissociate the existing matters, such as the carpenter who brings about changes in an existing material by arranging and separating, or like the mason who combines the existing materials.

Rather, God, the Exalted, is the Divine Agent Who brings things into being, without, any prior existence, by His very will, and 'His will and' knowledge' by themselves constitute the cause for the appearance and existence of things. Hence the realm of reality is within the purview of His Knowledge and they appear from the hidden realms of Divine Ipseity (*ghayb al-huwiyyat*) by His making them manifest:

﴿وَعِنْدَهُ مَفَاتِحُ الْغَيْبِ لَا يَعْلَمُهَا إِلَّا هُوَ﴾

And with Him are the keys of the Unseen, none knows them but He. (6:59)

It is said that the realm of concrete existents in relation to the Sacred Essence of God, the Glorious, is like the relation of the mind to the human soul, which brings into being [thoughts, ideas and images] by mere willing and manifests that which lies in the hidden realms of ipseity (*ghayb-e-huwiyyat*). Hence, the entire realm of reality is within His knowledge, from which they appear and to which they return:

﴿إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ﴾

*Verily, We belong to God and to Him do we return.*⁸

To offer a clearer explanation, the knowledge of the complete cause of a thing implies the knowledge of that thing. For example, the astronomer's knowledge of the timings of solar and lunar eclipses is due to his knowledge of their causes. By recording the movements of the sun, moon, and the earth, he

calculates the time when the earth will be positioned between the sun and the moon, or the moon between the earth and the sun. And should his records be correct his forecast will not fail by a single second. And since the entire chain of causes and effects terminates in the Sacred Essence, the Source of all sources, and since God, the Exalted, has the knowledge of His own Essence, which is the cause of all existents, being the cause He has also the knowledge of the effects.

From among the above-mentioned explanations, everyone adopts one which corresponds to his plane, and some of them are firmer and more adequate in meeting the purpose than others.

The Meaning Of Hearing And Sight In Relation To God

One of the topics discussed by major philosophers in relation to the Names and Attributes of God, the Glorious and the Exalted, is the affirmation of Hearing and Sight' in relation to Him. The majority of the metaphysicians and theologians reduce Hearing and Sight to Knowledge, and the august Shaykh al-Ishraq has reduced Knowledge to Sight and Hearing.⁹

Each of them has offered an explanation in this regard whose mention will take us beyond the requirements' of brevity: We will explain the predominant view and approach with an explanation that Will *clarify* the truth in regard to the Names and the Attributes in general.

It should be known that most of the philosophers and major thinkers, in order to disregard some 'aspects, have reduced some of the Names and Attributes to some others. As it is well known and established among them, the Will of God; the-Exalted, consists of His Knowledge of what is 'appropriate (*salah*) and of the perfect 'order, like the controversy in relation to Hearing, Sight and Knowledge and reducing each of them to the other, as mentioned: This matter is contrary to the truth and amounts to disregarding these aspects. Because, if what is meant by reducing Will to the Knowledge of what is appropriate, or by reducing Knowledge to Hearing, or Hearing to Knowledge, is that God, the Exalted, does not possess a will or that He does not possess hearing or sight and that Knowledge is considered by them to include Will, Hearing and Sight, it is an invalid position and an unseemly statement.

That is because it implies that God, the Exalted, is the Source of existence without possessing a will or the power of choice. Moreover, the criterion in regard to ascription of the Attributes of perfection to God is that the attribute should be an attribute of perfection for existent *qua* existent, and that it should be an attribute of the very reality of existence and from among the perfections of the very essence (What) of existence. And there is no doubt that will is one of the attributes of perfection of the absolute reality of being.

Accordingly, the more existence descends to the lower planes, the weaker it is in respect of will, until it reaches the point where it become totally devoid of it whereat it is consider by all to lack will, like the natures, such as minerals and plants. And the more it rises towards perfection and the higher horizon, will becomes more manifest in it and stronger.

Accordingly, we observe that in the chain of natural existents, when they cross the stages of prime matter, body,–element, mineral, and plant, will and knowledge become manifest in them, and the higher they rise the more this noble faculty becomes perfect, so that the Perfect Man possesses such a perfect will that by his mere will he transforms one element into another and the world of nature is subject to his will. Thus we find that will is an attribute of perfection of existence *qua* existence, and this meaning is affirmed concerning God's Sacred Essence without being referred to another meaning.

Similarly, Hearing and Sight are, in accordance with confirmed truth, among the perfections of the absolute existent, and the reality of hearing and sight is not one dependent on physical organs and they do not constitute modes of cognition limited to organs and instrumental means. Rather, the need for organs is for manifestation of the soul's hearing and sight in the realm of nature and the *mulk* of the body, even as it also needs the *pia mater* for knowledge to be manifested in the realm of physical nature.

And this deficiency pertains to the world of nature and *mulk*, not to knowledge, hearing and sight as such, which observe the realities of the world of the Unseen (*ghayb*) and hear the *malakuti* speech of the angels and the higher spirits, as in the case of Moses, the *Kalimullah* (God's interlocutor), who would hear the speech of God in his intimate supplications (*munajat*), and the Noble Ultimate Prophet; who spoke with the– angels and would see Gabriel in his *malakuti* form when no other ear would hear what he heard nor any eye see what he saw, though they would be in the same gathering with the Messenger at the time of the descent of the revelations (*wahy*).

Moreover, hearing and sight are among modes of cognition which are additional to the principle of knowledge and are other than the' reality of knowledge, and they are among the perfections of absolute existence. Hence their affirmation in relation to God, the Exalted, Who is the very reality of existence and the mainspring of the perfection of being, is necessary.

And should the purpose of those who reduce Will, Hearing, and Sight to Knowledge, or Knowledge to them, be that Knowledge and Will are posited of God in a single aspect (*haythiyyat al-wahidah*) and that Hearing, Sight, and Knowledge do not have different aspects in the Sacred Divine Essence, this is true and in accordance with metaphysical proof. However, there is no reason to limit the matter to these Attributes, for all Attributes reduce to the reality of sheer existence, and this matter is not contrary to positing different multiple Attributes for the Divine Essence, or rather it corroborates it.

That is because, as has been clearly established, the nearer an existent is to unity and farther it is from the horizon of multiplicity and freer, it is more inclusive in relation to the names and attributes, so that That which is pure existence, the simple, necessary Reality, glorious is His majesty and majestic is His power, is ultimate unity and simplicity and inclusive of all perfections and possessing all Names and Attributes, and to Him literally apply all concepts of perfection, glory, and beauty, and their applicability to the Sacred Divine is worthier and prior, with all the degrees of worthiness and priority.

To sum up, the stronger and more complete is the unity (*wahdah*) [of an existent], the applicability of the concepts of perfection to it is greater, and the greater is the number of [its] names and attributes. Conversely, the closer an existent is to the horizon of multiplicity, the lesser is the applicability of the concepts of perfection to it, and this applicability also becomes weaker and closer and similar to metaphor (*majaz*). And this is because unity (*wahdah*) is concomitant (*musawiq*) with existence and is a perfection of being qua being. The meaning of concomitance here is that although unity and existence are conceptually different, but in external reality the reality of existence is the same as the reality of unity.

Wherever there is multiplicity, there is also to be found deficiency, nonbeing, evil, weakness and disability, and this is for the reason that the lower that existence descends through the planes of deficiency, multiplicity is greater than at all the other planes of existence. The station of the Lord and the Sacred Divine Being, Glorious and Exalted, which is sheer existence, is absolute unity and simplicity, and there is no way that multiplicity and compositeness should find way into Him.

We have pointed out earlier that existence is the principal reality of perfection and the mainspring of glory and beauty. Hence, sheer existence is sheer unity and sheer perfection, and, therefore, sheer unity is sheer perfection. Thus all the Names, Attributes and perfections are true of That which stands at the highest' plane of unity, and the applicability of each of them to It is more justified and prior. Conversely, that which is closer to multiplicity has more of deficiency in it, and the applicability of the concepts of perfection and the names and attributes is deficient in its case and the quality of their applicability is also weak. Hence, God, the Exalted and the Glorious, possesses all the perfections and encompasses all the Names and Attributes without any of them being reducible to another. Rather, each of them is true of His Sacred Essence in the literal sense, His Hearing, Sight, Will, and Knowledge, all are in their true literal sense without implying multiplicity in the Sacred Essence in any respect whatsoever.

فَلَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَى وَالْأَمْثَالُ الْعُلْيَا وَالْكَبْرِيَاءُ وَالْآلَاءُ

To Him belong all the Beautiful Names and the highest metaphors, and all majesty and bounties.

Character Of The Relation Of God's Knowledge To The Knowables

One should know, as pointed out earlier, that all existents, *qua* existents, with their aspects of ontological perfection, *qua* aspects of perfection, are known and disclosed to the Sacred Essence of God, the Exalted, with His simple essential knowledge (*'ilm al-basil al-dhati*) and a single pre-eternal disclosure (*kashf al-wahid al-azali*). This disclosure, with its very simplicity and complete unity, is detailed so that not an iota of the heavens of spirits nor a particle of the earths of corporeality is outside the realm of His knowledge from pre-eternity to eternity (*azalan wa abadan*).

This knowledge and disclosure is in pre-eternity and the same as the Sacred Essence, and the knowables with their conditionings and limits (*ta'ayyunat wa hududat*), which derive from nonbeing and deficiency, find an accidental occurrence (*tahaqquq bi'l-'arad*) posterior to creation and relate to Knowledge accidentally, and this accidental relation is posterior to creation. And to this reference is made in the noble tradition where it is stated:

فَلَمَّا أَحْدَثَ الْأَشْيَاءَ وَكَانَ الْمَعْلُومُ، وَقَعَ الْعِلْمُ مِنْهُ عَلَى الْمَعْلُومِ.

And when He brought the things into being, and the known came into being, His knowledge pertained to the known.

It is probable that this statement refers to active knowledge (*'ilm al-fi'li*) which is obtained by manifestation (*tajalli*) through the sacred emanation (*fayd muqaddas*), and that which is meant by the 'knowables' are the knowables-by-essence (*ma'lumat bi'l-dhat*), which are existential entities (*huwiyyat wujudiyyah*) which are existential entities (*huwiyyat wujudiyyah*) related to the sacred emanation and the light of manifestation.

Hence, in accordance with the first probability the meaning of the first statement would be as follows:

فَلَمَّا تَجَلَّى بِفَيْضِهِ الْمُقَدَّسِ وَظَهَرَ الْكَوْنُ بِالْعَرَضِ وَقَعَ الْعِلْمُ عَلَى الْمَعْلُومِ: أَيْ ظَهَرَ الْفَيْضُ فِي مِرَاةِ الْمُسْتَفِيضِ بِالْعَرَضِ.

When He manifested Himself through His sacred emanation and the accidental being appeared, the knowledge pertained to the known; that is, the emanation appeared in the mirror of the receiver-by-accident of the emanation.

In accordance with the second probability, it would mean:

فَلَمَّا تَجَلَّى بِفَيْضِهِ الْمُقَدَّسِ وَظَهَرَ وُجُودُ الْكَوْنِ بِالذَّاتِ: أَيْ بِإِذَا حَيْثُ تَقْيِيدِيَّةٍ وَقَعَ الْفَيْضُ عَلَى الْمُسْتَفِيضِ بِالذَّاتِ.

When He manifested Himself through His sacred emanation and the existence of the existents-by-essence became manifest—that is without the limiting aspect—the emanation pertained to the receiver-by-essence of the emanation.

On the basis of both the interpretations, this manifestation through the sacred emanation is not subject to temporal events and changes, and the creation of God, the Exalted; is free from and above any trace of temporality and change, or, rather, from all conditioning and limitation. And since the essential Knowledge (*'ilm al-dhati*) is simple in all aspects and encompasses all aspects, active Knowledge (*'ilm al-fi'li*), which is the real sign of God and the manifestation of the essential Knowledge and its mirror, is

completely simple and absolutely one, encompassing the entire circle of existence without there being any conditioning, change, or composition in it.

At the most it is sustained in its essence (*mutaqawwam bi al-dhat*) by the Sacred Divine Essence and is the very sheerness of dependence, and, in this respect, is annihilated (*fani*) in Divine Majesty and is the very presence before the Lord of Glory, and therefore it is considered God's knowledge, in the same way that the very creation by the rational soul of intelligible realities in the realm of the intellect and of the imaginary images in the tablet of imagination, are the active knowledge (*'ilm al-fi'li*) of the soul and annihilated (*fani*) in its essence (*dhat*).

The metaphysicians have said that the relation of the tablet of reality to God is like the relation of the forms of knowables to the soul. Due to this encompassment, simplicity, and influence they have said that God, the Exalted, knows the particulars with His universal knowledge (*'ilm al-kulli*); that is, the particularly, limitation, and being contained of the known does not cause limitation in [Divine] knowledge.

Hence [Divine] knowledge is encompassing, pre-eternal (*qadim wa azali*) and unchanging, while the known is contained, limited, temporal, and changing. Those who are unfamiliar with the manner of their speech have been led to imagine that they have negated God's knowledge of the particulars, taking (*kulliyah*) and particularly (*juz'iyyah*) in the sense current in the jargon of logicians and lexicographers, ignorant of the fact that these terms have another meaning in the terminology of the people of gnosis (*ma'rifah*) and at times speculative philosophers (*ahl al-nazar*) have followed them in this regard. Rather, this conception pertaining to the topic of the knowledge of the Necessary Being, glorious is His Name and exalted is His station, has been borrowed by the metaphysicians from the gnostics.

The Criterion Relating To Positive And Negative Attributes

The criterion relating to the positive and negative Attributes of the Sacred Essence of the Necessary Being, glorious is His Name, is that every attribute pertaining to the attributes of perfection and excellences of beauty that applies to the Principle of the reality of being and the absolute essence of existence, without any dress of conditioning or change from one realm to another, and refers to the actual haecceity and luminous essence of being, is among the Attributes that are necessarily subsistent and necessarily realized for the Sacred Essence, exalted is Its station.

That is because should it not subsist, it would imply either that the Sacred Essence is not sheer existence and absolute being, or that sheer existence is not sheer perfection and absolute beauty. Both of these are false conclusions from the viewpoint of the path of gnosis as well as the way of metaphysical reasoning, as stands established in its own place.

And no attribute and excellence is established for an existent except after its descent to one of the stages of conditioning and its assumption of one of the forms of limitations and its embracing one of the planes of deficiency with its accompanying limits of finitude and feebleness, and, in brief, that which does not

pertain to the essence (*dhat*) of being and derives from limits and essences (*mahiyyat*) is from attributes whose negation is necessary and whose realization is impossible in respect of the absolutely perfect Essence. That is because in the same way as the absolutely perfect Essence and Absolute Being is the instance of sheer perfection, it is also the instance of the negation of deficiency, limits, non-existences and essences (*mahiyyat*).

And that which is well-known among the authorities, that the negative Attributes reduce, to a single negation, which is the negation of contingency, does not appear to be correct to this author. Rather, in the same way that the Sacred Essence is the essential instance (*misdaq dhati*) of all attributes of perfection, and none of them reduce to another; as clarified, above, so also it is the accidental instance of the negation of each of the deficiencies.

And one cannot say that non-existences 'and defects make' a single aspect and that there is no distinction between, non-existences (*la mayza fi al a'dam*); because if one were to consider the matter in the context of actual reality; in the same way that absolute non-existence is a single 'aspect while representing all non-existences, so also absolute existence has a single aspect and is possessor of all perfections.

Hence, from this viewpoint, which is the consideration of *ahadiyyah* and of the Unseen of the Unseen (*ghayb al ghuyub*), one cannot posit any attribute, neither the real positive, attributes, nor the negative Divine attribute.

But from another viewpoint, which is the consideration of the station of *wahidiyyah* and the inclusion of the Names and Attributes, as there is a multiplicity of positive attributes of perfection, every attribute of perfection implies a negation of the deficiency opposed to it. And in the same aspect that the Sacred Essence is the essential instance of Knower. It is the accidental instance of 'not ignorant,' and as it is 'Powerful,' it is 'not powerless. And as it is established in the science of the Names that among the Names and the positive Attributes there is a relationship by virtue of which some of them encompass and dominate others, which are encompassed and overlooked by them by implication these concepts also apply to the negative Names and Attributes.

Now that we know the criterion of the positive and negative Attributes, we can understand that motion—which subsists through potentiality and prime matter, and temporality and renewal are in its very essence—does not apply to the Sacred Divine Essence, the Glorious and the Exalted.

And 'speech' (*takallum*) in the ordinary sense, about which the narrator poses the question, is an attribute that is time-bound and subject to renewal and so does not apply to the Essence of God, the Exalted. But this does not preclude the positing of 'essential speech' (*takallum dhati*) for God, the Exalted, on the plane of the Essence, in a sense that is free from temporality and renewal (*huduth*).

To put this noble topic briefly, the reality of speech does not depend on the vocalization of speech from certain organs. This limitation, pertaining to ordinary language and general usage, derives from habit

and familiarity as well as thoughts and ideas. Otherwise there is no limitation or conditioning in the meaning [of speech] itself. 'Knowledge' comprises of sheer cognition and the manifesting of a thing to the knower and it is not confined to being cognized through some material means such as the brain, or through such non-material means as the common sense (*hiss al-mushtarak*) or the tablet of imagination, for instance.

If, supposedly, one were to acquire the knowledge of something through his hand or foot, or see or hear something, it would still be knowledge; hearing, and sight. Similarly, when someone sees, hears and speaks in the world of dreams, all these concepts apply to that [that which is, heard, seen or spoken in dreams] without any trace of metaphor, although none of the specific sense organs is employed.

Hence, the criterion of cognition as such depends on the applicability of these meanings and concepts. The reality of speech is the expression of that which is in one's mind and consciousness with or without the mediation of any special organ. Even if, supposedly, it should be metaphorical in accordance with language and usage, these limitations do not exist in the concepts and meanings themselves and are applicable in accordance with reason. We do not have any philological discussion on the topic of the Names and Attributes, and the purpose here is affirmation of the meanings themselves, though language and usage should not be helpful to their affirmation.

Accordingly, we say that the reality of speech is the expression of one's intent whether or not it occurs through sensible means, and regardless of whether it belongs to the category of sound, words, or aspiration. 'Speech' in this sense is among the attributes of perfection of existence, for [self]manifestation and expression belong to the reality of existence and subsist through the reality of existence, and the more existence ascends towards perfection and strength, its [self-]manifestation and expression become greater, until it reaches the highest horizon and the exalted station of Necessity, which is the Light of lights, and light upon light, and manifestation upon manifestation, expressing that which lies in the Unseen (*ghayb*) of the station of *wahidiyyah* (Unity, i.e. at the plane of the sacred emanation), through the unconditioned sacred emanation (*fayd al-muqaddas al-itlaqi*) and the existential word 'Be!', and expressing, through the most sacred emanation and the essential *ahadi* manifestation, the absolute *ghayb* and the stationless station of *ahadiyyah* (Unity, i.e. at the plane of the most sacred emanation).

And in this *ahadi* manifestation, the speaker is the *ahadi* Sacred Essence, and the speech is the most sacred emanation and the manifestation of Essence (*tajalli dhati*), and the listener the Names and the Attributes. By that very manifestation, the conditioned expressions (*ta'ayyunat*) of the Names and the Attributes comply and obtain occurrence in Knowledge (*tahaqquq al-'ilmi*). In the *wahidi* manifestation, through the sacred emanation (*fayd muqaddas*), the speaker is the *wahidi* Sacred Essence, inclusive of all the Names and the Attributes, and speech is the manifestation itself, and the listener and the compliant one on the [plane of] realization are the cognitive archetypes (*a'yan 'ilmiyyah*) implied in the Names and-the Attributes, which obtain concrete realization by the command 'Be!'

فَإِذَا قَالَ لِكُلِّ عَيْنٍ أَرَادَ إِجَادَهَا: كُنْ، فَيُطِيعُ الأَمْرَ الإِلَهِيَّ، فَيَكُونُ وَيَتَحَقَّقُ.

So when He says ‘Be! To every archetypes that He wills to create, it complies with the Divine command, and it as and actualized

And there are many traditions, which we have not mentioned, that may be cited as evidence on this topic. And all Praise belongs to God firstly and lastly.

- [1.](#) Usul al-Kafi, i, 107, “kitab al-tawhid” “bab sifat al-dhat” hadith 1.
- [2.](#) Al-Asfar al-arba’ah, vi, 118, safar 3, mawqif 2 on the discussion of the Sifat. See also Sabzawaris gloss at this place.
- [3.](#) Misbah al-uns, 130–131; Naqd al-Nusus, fasal 2, p 38.39.
- [4.](#) Muhammad Sa’id ibn Muhammad Mufid Qummi, known as Qadi Said, was an eminent Shi’i Scholar well versed in hadith, philosophy, and literature and strongly inclined towards ‘irfan. A pupil of Mulla Muhsin Fayd Kashani Mulla ‘Abd al-Razzaq Lahiji and Mulla Rajab ‘Ali Tabrizi, he held the office of judgeship in Qum and so came to be known as ‘Qadi’. He died in 1103/1691–2 at Qum. Among his works are, al-Arba’un hadith, Asrar al-salat, Hashiyah Uthululjiya, a hashiyah on al-Isharat, Haqiqat al-salat, a sharh of al-Tawhid by al-Shaykh al-Sad’uq (r), al-Bawariq al-malakutiyyah, and Kelid al-behesht.
- [5.](#) Sharh al-Tawhid iii, 54; MS. in Ayatullah Mar’ashi Public Library, Qum.
- [6.](#) Al-Afsar al-arb’ah, vi, 263–277, safar 3, mawqif 3, fasl 12.
- [7.](#) Al-Afsar al-arb’ah, 280–290.
- [8.](#) 2: 156
- [9.](#) Sharh Hikmat al-ishraq, 358–366; al-Asfar, vi, 423, safar 3, mawqif 6.

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