

Twenty Sixth Hadith: The Pursuit Of Knowledge

بِالسَّنَدِ الْمُتَّصِلِ إِلَى ثِقَةِ الْإِسْلَامِ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ يَعْقُوبَ الْكُلَيْنِيِّ عَنْ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ الْحَسَنِ وَعَلِيِّ بْنِ مُحَمَّدٍ عَنْ سَهْلِ بْنِ زِيَادٍ وَمُحَمَّدِ بْنِ يَحْيَى عَنْ أَحْمَدَ بْنِ مُحَمَّدٍ جَمِيعاً عَنْ جَعْفَرِ بْنِ مُحَمَّدٍ الْأَشْعَرِيِّ عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ مَيْمُونٍ الْقَدَّاحِ وَعَلِيِّ بْنِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ عَنْ أَبِيهِ عَنْ حَمَّادِ بْنِ عِيسَى عَنْ الْقَدَّاحِ عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ: مَنْ سَلَكَ طَرِيقاً يَطْلُبُ فِيهِ عِلْماً سَلَكَ بِهِ طَرِيقاً إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ. وَإِنَّ الْمَلَائِكَةَ لَتَضَعُ أَجْنِحَتَهَا لِطَالِبِ الْعِلْمِ رِضاً بِهِ. وَإِنَّهُ يَسْتَغْفِرُ لَطَالِبِ الْعِلْمِ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاءِ وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ حَتَّى الْخُوتِ فِي الْبَحْرِ. وَفَضْلُ الْعَالِمِ عَلَى الْعَابِدِ كَفَضْلِ الْقَمَرِ عَلَى سَائِرِ النُّجُومِ لَيْلَةَ الْبَدْرِ. وَإِنَّ الْعُلَمَاءَ وَرَثَةُ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ. إِنَّ الْأَنْبِيَاءَ لَمْ يُورَثُوا دِينَاراً وَلَا دِرْهماً، وَلَكِنْ وَرَثُوا الْعِلْمَ. فَمَنْ أَخَذَ مِنْهُ أَخَذَ بِحِطٍّ وَافِرٍ.

With my chain of transmitters reaching up to the thiqat al-Islam Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni, from Muhammad ibn al-Hasan and 'Ali ibn Muhammad, from Sahl ibn Ziyad and Muhammad ibn Yahya, from Ahmad ibn Muhammad, from Ja'far ibn Muhammad al-'Ash'ari, from 'Abd Allah ibn Maymun al-Qaddah; and from 'Ali ibn Ibrahim, from his father, from Hammad ibn 'Isa, from al-Qaddah, from Abu 'Abd Allah (A) that he said: The Messenger of Allah (S) said, "One who proceeds on a path in the pursuit of knowledge, God makes him proceed therewith on a path to the Garden (Paradise). And, verily, the angels spread their wings for the seekers of knowledge out of delight. Verily, every creature of the heaven and the earth asks forgiveness for the seeker of knowledge, even the fish in the sea. The merit of the 'alim (the learned) over the 'abid (the devout) is like the merit of the moon over the stars on a full-moon night. The learned are the heirs of the prophets, for the prophets did not leave behind a legacy of wealth but that of knowledge. So whoever partakes of it derives a plenteous benefit."¹

Exposition

Know that the words of the noble tradition do not need an explanation. However, in the course of a few sections we shall expound the qualities ascribed by the Noble Messenger (S) to the learned and the seekers of knowledge. And in Allah is my trust and reliance.

The Path Of Knowledge And The Way To Paradise

At the outset, it should be known that the sciences are absolutely divisible into two kinds. One of these is the worldly sciences, whose ultimate purpose is to achieve worldly aims. The other is the sciences of the Hereafter, whose ultimate purpose is attainment of *malakuti* stations and degrees and reaching the otherworldly stations. Earlier it was pointed out that the distinction between these two kinds of sciences depends for the most part on the distinction between intentions and purposes (behind their pursuit), although they in themselves are divisible into the two kinds. From the viewpoint of appropriateness, the effects described in the noble tradition in relation to the pursuit of knowledge and the learned evidently correspond to the second type of knowledge, the knowledge of the Hereafter.

It was also mentioned earlier that all the sciences of the Hereafter are included in three categories. They either pertain to the knowledge of God and doctrines (*ma'arif*), or to spiritual instruction and wayfaring towards God, or to the laws and precepts of servitude. Now we say that the development (*ta'mir*) of life in the Hereafter depends on these three aspects, and hence there are three kinds of paradise: the Garden of Essence, which is the ultimate goal of the knowledge of Allah and the divine doctrinal truths; the Garden of attributes, which is the goal of self-purification and the disciplining of the soul; and thirdly, the Garden of acts, which is the (other-worldly) form of the observance of the duties of servitude as well as its result. Moreover, these gardens are not in a developed state (at the beginning).

Hence, the ground of the Garden of acts is a plain land, like the ground of the soul at the beginning. Their development is subject to the cultivation and flourishing of the soul. Therefore, should the soul in its Hidden aspect be not developed by the means of the divine teachings and the Hidden attractions of the Essence (*jadhadt al-ghaybiyyeh-ye dhatiyyeh*), man shall not attain to the Garden of the Essence and the Paradise of Tryst (*jannat al-liqa'*). Should the inner self be unrefined and the soul be unadorned, should the will and determination be not strengthened and the heart not receive the radiance of the Names and the Attributes, man will not attain to the Garden of the Names and the Attributes, which is the middle paradise. Should one fail to observe the duties of servitude, and his acts, works, movements and pauses be not in accordance with the precepts of the divine Law, one will not attain to the Garden of Acts, concerning which this has been said:

﴿وَفِيهَا مَا تَشْتَهِيهِ الْأَنْفُسُ وَتَلَذُّ الْأَعْيُنُ﴾

Therein being whatever the souls desire, and the eyes delight in.

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On the basis of these preliminaries, which are in accordance with philosophical proofs, the experience of the gnostics, and the traditions of the prophets and the *awliya* (A) in addition to being inferable from the Noble divine Scripture, the sciences—whatever their level, whether they pertain to the *ma'arif* or something else are a path for reaching the Garden appropriate to each of them, and the wayfarer of each of the paths of knowledge is a traveler on one of the paths of Paradise.

We have said earlier that knowledge is absolutely the way to action, even the knowledge of the *ma'arif*; which, however, involves the actions of the heart and inward gravitations, the result and inward forms of which are the Garden of the Essence and the Paradise of Tryst. Hence, the pursuit of the path of knowledge is the pursuit of the way leading to the path of Paradise, and the way to a path is also part of the path.

An Important Point

That journey on the path of knowledge has been ascribed to the creature and the movement towards the Garden to the Sacred Divine Essence (in the phrase سَلَكَ بِهِ طَرِيقًا إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ) is for the reason that on the level of multiplicity the acquisitive aspect of the creature has been given predominance, whereas on the level of return to unity the Divine aspect has been made to prevail. From another viewpoint, it may be said that the wayfaring towards the Garden is also ascribable to the creature:

﴿وَوَجَدُوا مَا عَمِلُوا حَاضِرًا﴾

And they find all that they did confronting them. (18:49)

﴿فَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْرًا يَرَهُ. وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُ﴾

And whoso doth good an atom's weight will see it, and whoso doth ill an atom's weight will see it. (99:7-8)

The authority amongst the philosophers and the pride of the righteous sect, Sadr al-Muta'allihin (R) has made statements in this regard indicating that the perception of favorable and repulsive things is by itself heaven and hell, and the 'knowledge' pertains to things favorable to the soul and 'ignorance' to those which are incompatible with it.

This contradicts his own view as expressed in his philosophical works, where he has refuted the belief of Shaykh Ghazali, as is narrated from him, that holds paradise and hell to be the pleasures and pains felt by the soul and denies their objective existence. This belief, besides being contrary to the proofs of the philosophers, is against the traditions of the prophets and the celestial scriptures, as well as the teachings of all the religions, and that great philosopher has himself refuted it and shown its invalidity.

But that honored personage has himself made similar statements in this relation, although he basically rejects Ghazali's belief. In any case, these statements do not appear to be appropriate in my humble opinion, though any further elaboration of this matter is not appropriate for these pages.

The Angels' Spreading Their Wings For The Seekers Of Knowledge

Know that the angels are of various kinds and species, and no one has the knowledge of them, who are God's hosts, except the sacred Essence of Him Who knows best the Hidden:

﴿وَمَا يَعْلَمُ جُنُودَ رَبِّكَ إِلَّا هُوَ﴾

And none knows the hosts of thy Lord but He. (74:31)

One of their kinds consists of those angels who are totally absorbed in the love of God (*muhayyamin al-majdhubin*), who have no awareness of the world of being; they know not whether God has created the world or not, and are immersed in Divine Beauty and Glory and are absorbed in the Majesty of His sacred Essence. It is said that the blessed letter *Nun*' in the noble verse:

﴿ن وَالْقَلَمِ وَمَا يَسْطُرُونَ﴾

Nun. By the Pen, and what they inscribe, (68: 1)

is a reference to them.

Another group of them is the archangels and the inhabitants of the higher *jabarut*, their being many species of them, each of which has its own specific work and administrative role in the worlds. Another group is the angels of the spheres of the higher *malakut* and the Upper Gardens (*jannat al-'aliyah*) and of them there are varied and different kinds.

Another group consists of the angels of the spheres of *barzakh* (the interworld) and *mithal* (the world of analogies). Another group consists of the angels charged with the affairs of the spheres of nature and *mulk*, each of whom is entrusted with a particular affair and managing function. This group of angels

that administers the world of *mulk* is different from the angels existing in the worlds of *barzakh* and *mithal*, as has been established in its proper place and as can also be inferred from traditions.

One should know that wings, feathers, and other like members are not common to all the kinds of angels. Rather, from the angels absorbed in Divine love to the inhabitants of the higher *malakut*—all of them are free and devoid of such members and extended parts. They are free from all forms of matter, its properties, essentials, and all that is necessarily associated with it. As to the angels of the worlds of *mithal* and the *malakuti* beings of *barzakh*, it is possible for them to possess parts, members, wings, feathers and the like. Since they pertain to the spheres of *barzakh* quantities and the *mithali* analogies, each of them is characterized by a particular quantity, members, and organs specific to itself. The verses:

﴿وَالصَّافَّاتِ صَفًّا﴾

By the rangers ranging. (37: 1)

﴿الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ فَاطِرِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ جَاعِلِ الْمَلَائِكَةِ رُسُلًا أُولِي أَجْنِحَةٍ مَثْنَى وَثُلَاثَ وَرُبَاعَ﴾

Praise belongs to God, Originator of the heavens and earth, who appointed the angels to be messengers having wings two, three and four. (35: 1)

refer to this kind of angels. But as to the archangels (*mala'keh-ye muqarrabin*) and the inhabitants of the higher *jabarut*, they can embody themselves in any world in accordance with its form and appearance, due to their encompassing ontic and sustentative character (*ihateh-ye wujudiyyeh-ye qaymumiyyeh*).

Hence Gabriel, the Trustworthy, who is one of the Near Ones to God and the bearer of the divine revelation and amongst the highest of the beings inhabiting the *jabarut*, incarnated himself continuously for the sacred essence of the Noble Messenger (S) in the world of limited *mithal*, twice in the world of absolute *mithal* and occasionally in the world of *mulk*. Sometimes he would even appear in the form of *Dihyah al-Kalbi*, who was the foster brother of the Noble Messenger (S) and was the most handsome of men.

One must know that the assumption of *mulki* form by the angels is not something at the level of the *mulki* beings, which can be seen by anyone with a sound visual sense. Rather, even then, their *malakuti* aspect prevails over their *mulki* aspect, and that is why people could not see them with their corporeal eyes even after their assumption of *mulki* form. Rather, only some of the Companions could see Gabriel when he appeared in the form of *Dihyah al-Kalbi*, and then only with God's approval and the leave of the Seal of the Prophets (S).

Hence all the angels of God are benignly disposed towards those of the spiritual progeny of Adam—the

elect of God (A) to whom the angels prostrated and whose command was obeyed throughout the realms of being—who seek knowledge and gnosis and, having turned toward God and the truth, tread the path of God’s good pleasure, and they (i.e. the angels) are charged with helping and training them. And when this *mulki* being becomes *malakuti*, and when this terrestrial creature becomes a celestial one, he walks on the wings of the angels; and should the eyes of his *malakuti* and *mithali* vision open, he would see himself standing on the wings of angels and walking on his path with their assistance. This was concerning those who travel from *mink* to *malakut*, though they are still on the way.

As to those who are *mulki* and have not entered the *malakut*, it is possible that the inhabitants of the *malakut* may come to their help and, out of humility for them, spread their wings under their feet out of their delight on account of their conduct, as is indicated by this noble *hadith* from *Ghawali al-la’ali*:

عَنِ الْمُقَدَّادِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ أَنَّهُ قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ يَقُولُ: إِنْ الْمَلَائِكَةُ لَتَنْضَعُ أَجْنِحَتَهَا لِطَالِبِ الْعِلْمِ حَتَّى يَطَأَ عَلَيْهَا رِضًا بِهِ.

It is narrated from Miqdad (R) that he said: I heard the Messenger of Allah (S) say, “Verily, the angels spread out their wings for the seeker of knowledge out of their delight for him, so that he walks over them.”²

From this, we come to know that one who takes the first step towards God and His good pleasure, stands over the shoulders of the angels and sits on their wings and this celestial carpet remains until the ultimate stages of acquisition of knowledge and learning. The levels, however, differ, and the angels who are the helpers of this wayfarer change, until he reaches a stage where he puts his feet on the middle of the heads of archangels, and then traverses certain worlds and ascends through certain levels where the way is closed to the archangels and where Gabriel, the one entrusted with delivering Divine revelations, confesses his inability and declares:

لَوْ دَنَوْتُ أُنْمَلَةً لَاحْتَرَقْتُ.

Should I approach to the extent of an inch I will be burnt down.³

The above description not only does not conflict with philosophical proofs but is in conformity with them and does not stand in need of any interpretation (*ta’wil*), as has been offered by the sublime philosopher, Sadr al-Muta’alihin, although he himself affirms (the existence of) the angels of the world of *mithal* and their incarnation in *mulk* and *malakut* in his philosophical books and scientific works, with expositions that are unparalleled and exclusive to that honored personage.

The Inhabitants Of The Heaven And Earth Asking Forgiveness For The Seeker Of Knowledge

Know that it is established in its proper place that the reality of being is in to the Excellences, Names, and Attributes of God. Pure existence is pure excellence, and hence God, the Glorious, being pure existence, is the totality of all excellence and all the Names and Attributes of Beauty (*Jamal*) and Glory (*jalal*). And it is mentioned in *hadith* that:

عِلْمُ كُلِّهِ قُدْرَةُ كُلِّهِ.

Knowledge in its entirety is power in its entirety.

And it has been demonstrated that the mirrored reality of existence is the same as the totality of excellences, from which none of the excellences can possibly be separated. However, the manifestation of those excellences is in accordance with the extent of the vastness or narrowness of a being and the burnish or obscurity of the mirror. In this respect, the entire realm of being comprises the signs of the Essence, and beings are mirrors that reflect the Names and the Attributes.

This matter is in conformity with philosophical proofs, or rather there are few issues of *hikmah* that equal it in respect of the strength and firmness of its proof. It is also in accordance with the experience of the mystics and the apprehensions of the gnostics, in addition to being in conformity with the noble verses of the Sacred Book and the traditions of the pure and infallible Ahl al-Bayt (A). Hence, in several places in the divine Scripture all the existents are mentioned as being engaged in the glorification of God:

﴿يُسَبِّحُ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ﴾

All that is in the heavens and the earth magnifies God.[4](#)

﴿تُسَبِّحُ لَهُ السَّمَاوَاتُ السَّبْعُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ﴾

The seven heavens and the earth, and whosoever in them extol Him; nothing is, that does not proclaim His praise, but you do not understand their extolling.[5](#)

It is quite clear that extolling the perfection (*tasbih*) and sanctity (*taqdis*) of God, the Exalted, and praising Him requires the knowledge and gnosis of His sacred station and His Attributes of Beauty and Glory, and these cannot occur where there is no trace of knowledge and gnosis. This sublime fact has been so explicitly mentioned in the noble traditions that there is no room for any interpretation (*ta'wil wa tawjih*).

However, those who dwell in nescience, from among traditional philosophers and dialecticians, from whom the divine truths are veiled, have tried to offer stale interpretations of the words of God which in addition to being contrary to their literal meanings (*zawahir*) as well as unambiguous verses, in some cases—such as in the story of the ant’s speech in the Surat al-Naml—are opposed to many explicit statements narrated from the Infallible Imams (A) besides being against firm metaphysical proofs. However, to engage in the description of that proof and its preliminaries is not fit for these pages.

Hence, the existents’ extolling of God is on the basis of their consciousness. It is mentioned in a *hadith* that the Noble Messenger (S) said:

Before my ministry, there was a time when I used to look after the sheep and camels as a shepherd (and there has been no prophet who has not tended the sheep). As I watched them, I noticed that all of a sudden they would get alarmed and take to flight without there being anything around that might agitate them. I used to wonder about its reason until Gabriel came to me. On my asking him about it, he said, “The unbeliever (after death) is dealt such a blow that everything that God has created, except mankind and the jinn, get terrified on hearing it.”⁶

The *urafa* say that man is the most isolated of beings from *malakut* as long as he is preoccupied with *mulk* and it cares, and since this preoccupation of his is stronger than that of all other beings, his separation and nescience, as well as his deprivation from attaining to *malakut*, is greater than that of all others.

Furthermore, all beings have a *malakuti* aspect by means of which they possess life, consciousness, and all other functions of life. The verse:

﴿وَكَذَلِكَ نُرِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ مَلَكُوتَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلِيَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُوقِنِينَ﴾

Thus We showed Abraham the malakut of the heavens and the earth, so that he might be of those having sure faith, (6: 75)

also bears testimony to the fact that consciousness and life pervade all existents. Now that it is known that all existents possess knowledge and consciousness and that all of them have a *malakuti* aspect, since man does not stand with them on the same plane and is in addition veiled from *malakut*, there is no wonder if they should ask forgiveness for the human being pursuing the path of knowledge and moving towards God, Who is the Source of existence and the Provider of the realm of being, and implore His sacred Merciful Essence with their clear *malakuti* voices –which are audible to open *malakuti* ears—to immerse this total offspring of *mulk* and this pride of the children of nature in the ocean of His forgiveness and to cover all his shortcomings.

It is also possible that as all other existents know that it is not possible for them to attain to the courtyard of the Sacred Essence and to dive into the ocean of perfection except through the mediation of the

sacred essence of the Perfect Man—who has the gnosis of God and knowledge of the divine teachings and unites knowledge and action within himself, as has been established in its proper place—for this reason they beseech of God, the Exalted, man’s perfection, which is attained through immersion in the ocean of God’s forgiveness, so that they, too, through his means, may attain to the excellences appropriate for them. And God knows best.

The ‘Alim’s Superiority Over The ‘Abid

Know that the reality of knowledge and of faith—whose strength is also based on knowledge—is light. This issue, besides being in accordance with philosophical proof and mystic experience, is also in conformity with unambiguous texts and traditions of the pure and infallible Ahl al-Bayt (A). That is because the characteristic of ‘light’, which consists of its being manifest in itself and its ability to make manifest other than itself, is also true of knowledge.

Rather, its being true of the reality of knowledge is factual, whereas its ascription to sensible lights is more akin to figurative usage. That is because sensible light does not even possess self-manifestation in the real sense; it possesses quiddity and is one of the instances of that concept. However, the reality of knowledge is by essence existence itself; though in conception it is contrary to it, it corresponds and is associated with it in the context of objective reality. The reality of existence is identical with ‘light’ and identical with consciousness:

﴿اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ﴾

God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. (24:35)

Hence, knowledge is same as light and in the noble verses faith (*iman*) and knowledge have been referred to as ‘light’.

﴿وَمَنْ لَمْ يَجْعَلِ اللَّهُ لَهُ نُورًا فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ نُورٍ﴾

And to whomsoever God assigns no light, no light has he. (24:40)

In the noble Light Verse, ‘light’ has been interpreted as ‘knowledge’ according to the exegesis of the Infallible Ahl al-Bayt (A):

عَنِ الْفُضَيْلِ بْنِ يَسَارٍ قَالَ: قُلْتُ لِأَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ الصَّادِقِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ: ﴿اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ﴾ قَالَ: كَذَلِكَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ. قَالَ: قُلْتُ: ﴿مَثَلُ نُورِهِ﴾ قَالَ: مُحَمَّدٌ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ. قُلْتُ: ﴿كَمْشَكَاةٍ﴾ قَالَ: صَدْرُ مُحَمَّدٍ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ. قَالَ: قُلْتُ: ﴿فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ﴾ قَالَ: فِيهِ نُورُ الْعِلْمِ – يَعْنِي النُّبُوَّةَ. قُلْتُ: ﴿الْمِصْبَاحُ فِي زُجَاجَةٍ﴾ قَالَ: عِلْمُ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ صَدَرَ إِلَى قَلْبِ عَلِيِّ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ... الحديث

Al-Fudayl ibn Yasar says: I asked Abu ‘Abd Allah al-Sadiq (A) concerning the meaning of ‘Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the earth.’ He replied, “Such is Allah, the All-mighty and Glorious.” I asked him (about the meaning of the phrase) ‘the likeness of His Light.’ He said, “(It means) Muhammad (S).” I asked him, “(What is meant by) ‘as a niche’?” He said, “The breast of Muhammad (S).” I asked him, “(What is meant by) ‘wherein is a lamp’?” He said, “(It means) in it is the light of knowledge that is prophethood.” I asked him, “(What is meant by) The lamp is in a glass?” He said, “(It means) the knowledge of the Messenger of Allah (S) emanated towards the heart of ‘Ali’ (A)...”⁷

وَعَنِ الْبَاقِرِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ... أَنَّهُ يَقُولُ: أَنَا هَادِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ؛ مَثَلُ الْعِلْمِ الَّذِي أُعْطِيَتْهُ وَهُوَ نُورِي الَّذِي يُهْتَدَى بِهِ مَثَلُ الْمَشْكَاةِ فِيهَا الْمِصْبَاحُ. فَالْمَشْكَاةُ قَلْبُ مُحَمَّدٍ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ، وَالْمِصْبَاحُ نُورُهُ الَّذِي فِيهِ الْعِلْمُ.

It is narrated from Imam al-Baqir (A) that he said, “I am the guide of the heavens and the earth. The likeness of the knowledge that I have been given—which is the light wherewith they are guided—is as a niche, wherein is a lamp. ‘The niche’ is the heart of Muhammad (S) and ‘the lamp’ is the knowledge: that is, its light that is in it.”⁸

وَفِي رِوَايَةٍ: فَالْمُؤْمِنُ يَنْقَلِبُ فِي خَمْسَةِ مِنَ النُّورِ: مَدْخَلُهُ نُورٌ وَمَخْرَجُهُ نُورٌ وَعِلْمُهُ نُورٌ وَكَلَامُهُ نُورٌ وَمَصِيرُهُ إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ نُورٌ.

In a tradition, it is stated, “The man of faith moves in five lights: his entry is light; his exit is light; his knowledge is light; his speech is light; and his passage towards Paradise on the Day of Resurrection is light.”⁹

And this is mentioned in a famous *hadith*:

الْعِلْمُ نُورٌ يَقْذِفُهُ اللَّهُ فِي قَلْبِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ.

Knowledge is a light that God casts into the heart of anyone that He wishes.¹⁰

There are various degrees of this light according to the different levels of the faith and knowledge of persons. It should be known that this real light that is in those who possess faith and knowledge, as it pertains to the lights of the world of the Hereafter, manifests itself in that world in the form of sensible radiance that varies with the soul’s activity, and it is this light that shall illuminate the *Sirat*. Hence, the light of a group is like the light of the sun, that of another like that of the moon, and so on until it is just sufficient to illuminate the ground around one’s feet.

Though, as we have known, knowledge is ‘light’ and ‘manifestation’, in their real sense and without any trace of metaphorical expression, we-poor folk—are veiled from the real sun of knowledge by the dark

curtain of carnal nature and dwell in the gloomy night of the realm of *mulk*. We are veiled from the daily intensifying light of wisdom and insight and imagine that these are parables based on allegory and metaphor and on surmise and reification.

Yes, as long as we remain stupefied by the slumber of life and intoxicated by carnal nature, we cannot differentiate reality from allegory, and reality appears to be an allegory to our eyes, for, in fact, in the world of metaphors reality takes the form of allegory.

النَّاسُ نِيَامٌ، فَإِذَا مَاتُوا انْتَبَهُوا.

The people are asleep and they wake up on death. [11](#)

When our eyes are opened, we shall see that in the same way as the light of the sun and the moon is luminous and illuminating, so is the light of the man of knowledge. In this world he illuminates the gloomy hearts and brings to life the dead of nescience and ignorance by the light of his knowledge, and in that world, too, his light is encompassing; and by the means of that encircling radiance, he intercedes in favor of those who derive light from the niche of his knowledge and are attached to the courtyard of his sanctity.

It should be known that *'ibadah*, too, cannot take place without knowledge, and hence the *'abid* too has a light that is particularly his. Rather, the essence of faith in God and worship of Him are light, with the difference that the *'abid's* light is confined to himself; it illuminates the path beneath his feet, but does not give light to others.

Therefore, their likeness is that of stars on a full-moon night wherein their brilliance is dimmed due to the light of the moon. They shine for themselves and their light does not benefit others. Hence the similitude of the *'abid* in comparison with the *'alim* is that of a star, though not that of a star on a moonless night wherein it is a source of illumination to some extent, but of a star on a full-moon night when it just shines without illuminating other things.

Sadr al-Muta'allihin (Q) says, "That which is meant by *'alim*' in this noble *hadith* is other than the divine man of knowledge (*'alim al-rabbani*) whose knowledge is immediate (*ladunni*), obtained through Divine gift, like the sciences of the prophets and the *awliya'* (A) as is shown by the metaphor of moon; for otherwise the metaphor of sun would have been more appropriate, because its light is by Divine beneficence, without there being any intermediary belonging to the recipient's species or genus." Here ends his statement—may God elevate his station.

The Ulama Being The Heirs Of The Prophets

This inheritance is spiritual, for the descent of the *ulama* from the prophets is of a *malakuti* nature. In the

same way as the human being is an offspring of *mulk* by virtue of his *mulki* life, he undergoes a *malakuti* birth under the rearing care of the prophets and after obtaining the station of the heart. As the source of the former birth is the physical father, the source of the latter birth is the prophets (A).

Hence, they are the spiritual ancestors; their inheritance is spiritual and inward and the birth is a second, *malakuti* birth. After the prophets, the function of instruction and rearing lies with the *ulama*, who are the real heirs of the prophets. The prophets (A) by virtue of this spiritual station, were not owners of wealth or concerned with the world of *mulk* and its corporeal affairs. Their inheritance, in virtue of this station, was nothing except knowledge and divine teachings, though by virtue of their corporeal birth and terrestrial life they possessed all the statuses associated with a human being:

﴿قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَنَا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ﴾

Say: I am only a moral the like of you. (18: 110)

By virtue of this human status, their heirs were not the learned but their own physical offsprings, and hence their legacy in respect of this bodily station can be material wealth.

This noble *hadith* clearly implies or rather categorically states the fact of spiritual inheritance as explained. And that which the Noble Messenger (S) meant by the words ascribed to that master, that:

نَحْنُ مَعَاشِرَ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ لَا نُورِثُ.

We, prophets, do not leave any inheritance,¹²

if we assume the authenticity of their ascription to him—is that the legacy of the prophets by virtue of their prophetic function and spiritual inheritance is not wealth and treasure; rather, it is knowledge, as is quite evident. *Wa al-salam*.

1. Al-Kulayni, Usul al-Kafi, i, kitab fadl al-'ilm, bab thawab al-'alim wa al-muta'allim, hadith 1.

2. Ibn Abi Jumhur, Ghawali al-la'ali, i, 106.

3. Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-'anwar, xviii, 382.

4. 62: 1

5. 17:44

6. This refers to the following hadith of Furu' al-Kafi, iii, 233:

عَنِ الْبَاقِرِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ قَالَ: قَالَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ: إِنِّي كُنْتُ أَنْظُرُ إِلَى الْإِبْلِ وَالْغَنَمِ وَأَنَا أَرْعَاهَا - وَلَيْسَ مِنْ نَبِيٍّ إِلَّا وَقَدْ رَعَى الْغَنَمَ - وَكُنْتُ أَنْظُرُ إِلَيْهَا - قَبْلَ النَّبُوَّةِ - وَهِيَ مُتَمَكِّنَةٌ فِي الْمَكِينَةِ مَا حَوْلَهَا شَيْءٌ حَتَّى تَذَعَرَ فَتَطِيرَ، فَأَقُولُ: مَا هَذَا؟ وَأَعْجِبُ، حَتَّى حَدَّثَنِي جِبْرِيلُ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ أَنَّ الْكَافِرَ يُضْرَبُ ضَرْبَةً مَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ شَيْئًا إِلَّا سَمِعَهَا وَيَذَعُرُ لَهَا إِلَّا الْفُلَّيْنِ.

7. Al-Shaykh al-Saduq, Kitab al-Tawhid, 157.

8. Tafsir nur al-thaqalayn, iii, 605.

9. Al-Bahrani, Tafsir al-burhan, iii, 135.

[10.](#) Author's Note: This is part of a long hadith that appears in the gloss on the Munyat al-murid of the blessed Shahid (al-Shahid al-Thani) which has been published together with the Ruwad al-jinan. (See also Bihar al-'anwar, i, 225, where it appears with a slight difference in wording.)

[11.](#) Ibn Maytham al-Bahrani, Sharh al-sad kalimeh-ye qisar, 54.

[12.](#) Musnad Ahmad, ii, 463.

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