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Part Two

Theology And Metaphysics Of Nahjul-Balagha

One of the basic issues dealt with in Nahjul-Balagha relates to theological and metaphysical problems. All in all, there are about forty places where the sermons, letters, and aphorisms discuss these issues. Some of these pertain to the aphorisms, but more often the discussion is longer, covering sometimes several pages.

The passages on Tawhid (Divine Unity) in Nahjul-Balagha can perhaps be considered to be the most wonderful discussions of the book. Without any exaggeration, when we take into account the conditions in which they were delivered, they can almost be said to be miraculous.

The discussions of this theme in Nahjul-Balagha are of a varied nature. Some of them constitute studies of the scheme of creation bearing witness to Divine creativity and wisdom. Here, Ali (as) speaks about the whole system of the heavens and the earth, or occasionally discusses the wonderful features of some specific creature like the bat, the peacock or the ant, and the role of the Divine design and purpose in their creation.

To give an example of this kind of discussion, we may quote a passage regarding the ant:

Have you observed the tiny creatures that He has created? How He has made them strong and perfected their constitution and shaped their organs of hearing and sight, and how He has styled their bones and skin? Observe the ant with its tiny body and delicate form. It is so small that its features can hardly be discerned by the eye and so insignificant that it does not enter our thoughts. See how it roams about upon the ground and arduously collects its livelihood. It carries the grain to its hole and deposits it in its store. It collects during the summer for the winter and, when winter arrives, it foresees the time to reemerge. Its livelihood is guaranteed and designed according to its built. The Benefactor and the Provider does not forget or forsake it. He does not deprive it, even though it should be in hard and dry stones and rocks. You will be amazed at the delicate intricacy of its wonderful constitution if you investigate the structure of its alimentary canals, its belly, and its eyes and ears which are in its head. (Sermon 185)

However, most of the discussions about Tawhid in Nahjul- Balagha are rational and philosophical. The rare sublimity of Nahjul-Balagha becomes manifest in these discourses. In these philosophical and rational discourses of Nahjul-Balagha on Tawhid, what constitutes the focus of all arguments is the infinite, absolute and self-sufficing nature of the Divine Essence. In these passages, Ali (as) attains the heights of eloquence, and none, neither before him nor after him, has come close to him in this aspect.

Another issue dealt with is that of the absolute simplicity (al- basatat al-mutlaqa) of the Divine Essence and negation of every kind of multiplicity, divisibility in the Godhead and refutation of separability of the Divine Attributes from the Divine Essence. This theme occurs repeatedly in Nahjul-Balagha.

Also discussed is a series of other profound problems which had never been touched before him. They are: "Allah being the First while also being the Last; His being simultaneously the Manifest and the Hidden; His precedence over time and number, i.e. His pre-eternity is not temporal and His Unity is not numerical; His Supremacy, Authority, and Self-sufficiency; His Creativeness; that attendance to one affair does not prevent Him from attending to other affairs; the identity of Divine Word and Act, the limited capacity of human reason to comprehend His reality, that gnosis (ma'rifa) is a kind of manifestation (tajalli) of Him upon the intellects, which is different from mental conception or cognition, the negation of such categories and qualities such as corporeality, motion, rest, change, place, time, similitude, antithesis, partnership, possession of organs or parts, limitation and number, and a series of other issues which we shall, by the will of Allah, mention later and give examples of every one of them.

Even a thinker who is well-versed in the beliefs and views of ancient and modern philosophers would be struck with wonder upon seeing the wide range and scope of the problems propounded in this wonderful book.

An elaborate discussion of the issues raised and dealt with in Nahjul-Balagha would itself require a voluminous book and cannot be covered in one or two articles. Unavoidably, we shall be brief; but before we commence our brief survey, we are compelled to mention certain points as an introduction to our discussion.

A Bitter Reality

We, Shia Muslims, must admit that we have been unjust with regard to our duty to the man whom we, more than others, take pride in following or, at the very least, we must admit falling short in our duty towards him. In substance, any kind of failure in fulfilling our responsibility is an act of injustice on our own part. We did not want to realize the significance of Ali (as), or we had been unable to do so.

All our energy and labor have been devoted to proclaiming the Prophet's statements about Ali (as) and to denouncing those who ignored them, but we failed to pay attention to the intellectual side of Imam Ali's personality. Sadi, the poet, says the following:

The reality of musk lies in its scent,
Not in the perfumer's advice.

Applying Sadi's words to our attitude regarding Imam Ali's personality, we did not realize that this musk, recommended by the Divine Perfumer, itself carried its own pleasant aroma and, before everything else, we should have tried to know its scent and become familiar with it. That is, we should have familiarized ourselves and others with its inner fragrance. The counsel of the Divine Perfumer was meant to acquaint the people with its pleasant redolence, not for the purpose that they may believe that it is musk then devote all their energies to convince others by arguing with them, without bothering to acquaint themselves with its real fragrance.

Had Nahjul-Balagha belonged to some other people, would they have treated it the way we treated this great book? the country of Iran is the center of Shiism and the language of its people is Persian. You have only to examine the translations and commentaries on Nahjul-Balagha to make a judgement about what our accomplishments amounts to.

To take a more general case, the Shii sources of hadith (tradition) and the texts of dua' (supplications) are incomparable with the texts of non-Shii works in the same field. This is also true of Divine teachings and other subjects. The problems and issues discussed in works like al- Kulayni's Al-Kafi, or Shaikh al-Saduq's Al-Tawhid, or al-Ihtijaj of al- Tibrisi are nowhere to be found among the works of non-Shiis. It can be said that if occasionally similar issues are dealt with in non-Shii books, the material is unmistakably spurious, for it is not only opposed to the prophetic teachings but also contradicts the Qur'anic principles. There is a strong smell of anthropomorphism which hangs around them. Recently, Hashim Ma'ruf al-Hassani, in his book Dirasat fi Al-Kafi lil-Kulayni wal- Sahih li Bukhari, which is an original but a brief comparative study of the Sahah of al-Bukhari and of al-Kulayni's Al-Kafi, has dealt with the traditions related to the problems of theology.

Shii Rationalism

The discussion of theological problems and their analysis by the Shi'i Imams, of which Nahjul-Balagha is the earliest example, was the main cause of the emergence of rationalistic approach and philosophic outlook in the Shi'i intellectual world since Islam's earliest days. This cannot be labelled as an innovation (bida) in Islam; rather, its basis was laid down by the Qur'an itself.

It was in accordance with the approach of the Qur'an and for the purpose of its interpretation that the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt (as) expounded such issues. If anybody can be reproached in this matter, it is those who did not adopt this method and abandoned the means to follow it.

History shows that from the earliest Islamic era, the Shia, more than any other sect, were interested in these problems. Among Ahl al- Sunna, the Mutazilites, who were nearer to the Shia, did possess similar inclinations. But, as we know, the general view predominant among Ahl al-Sunna did not welcome it

and, as a result, the Mutazilite sect became extinct about the end of the 3rd Hijri/9th A.D. century.

Ahmed Amin, the Egyptian writer, confirms this view in the first Volume of his Zuhur al-Islam. Having discussed the philosophic movement in Egypt during the reign of the Fatimids, who were followers of a Shia sect, he writes the following: "Philosophy is more akin to Shiism than it is to Sunni Islam, and we witness the truth of this in the era of the Fatimide rule [in Egypt] and in that of the Buwayhids [in Iran]. Even during the later centuries Persia, a Shiite country, has paid more attention to philosophy than any other Islamic country. In our own times, Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Asadabadi, who had Shiite inclinations and had studied philosophy in Iran, created a philosophic movement in Egypt when he arrived here.

Curiously, Ahmed Amin, in his explanation of why the Shia showed more inclination towards philosophy, commits an error, willfully or otherwise. According to him, "The reason for greater inclination on the part of the Shia towards rational and philosophical discussions is to be found in their esotericism and their flair for tawil.[1]

They were compelled to seek the assistance of philosophy for defense of their esotericism. That is why the Fatimide Egypt and Buwayhid Iran, and Iran during the Safawid and Qajar (Czarist) periods, were more disposed towards philosophy than the rest of the Islamic world."

This is sheer nonsense on the part of Ahmed Amin. It was the Imams of the Shia School of Yought who, for the first time, introduced the philosophical approach, and it was they who introduced the most profound and intricate concepts with regard to theological problems in their arguments, polemics, sermons, ahdith and prayers, of which Nahjul- Balagha is one example.

Even with regard to the prophetic traditions, the Shia sources are far more sublime and profound than the traditions contained in the non-Shii sources. This characteristic is not confined to philosophy alone but is also true of kalam, fiqh, and usul al-fiqh, in which the Shia enjoy a status of distinction. All this owes its origin to one and the same source: emphasis on rationalism.

Some others have tried to trace the origin of this difference [between the Shii and the Sunni mind-sets] in the concept of a Shiite nation. According to them, since the Persians are Shiite and the Shia are Persian and, since the Persians are a people with a philosophical temperament, fond of the intricacies of speculation and pure thought, with the help of their rich and strong philosophical tradition, they succeeded in raising the level of Shia thought, giving it an Islamic hue.

Bertrand Russell, in A History of Western Philosophy, expresses a similar view based on the above-mentioned argument. With his habitual or inherent impoliteness, he puts forth this opinion. However, Russell lacks the capacity of vindicating his claim, since he was totally unfamiliar with Islamic philosophy and basically knew nothing about it. He was not qualified to express any informed opinion about the origins of the Shia thought and its sources.

Our rejoinder to the upholders of this view is: First of all, not all Shias were/are Persian, nor all Persians

were Shia. Were not Muhammad ibn Yaqub al-Kulayni, Muhammad ibn Ali ibn al-Hussain ibn Babawayh al- Qummi and Muhammad ibn Ab Talib al-Mazandarani Persian?!

Were not Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari, Abu Dawud al-Sijistani and Muslim ibn Hajjaj al-Nishaburi Persian, too?! Was not Sayyid ar-Radi, the compiler of Nahjul-Balagha, of a Persian origin?! Were not the Fatimids of Egypt of Persian descent?

Why was philosophical thought revived in Egypt with the inception of the Fatimide rule, and why did it decline with their fall? And why was it revived later, after a long interval, only through the influence of an Iranian Shia?

The truth is that the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt (as) were the only real dynamic force behind this trend of thinking and this kind of approach. All scholars of Ahl al-Sunna admit that among the Prophet's Companions only Ali (as) was a man of philosophic wisdom, the man who had an altogether distinct rational approach. Abu Ali ibn Sina (Avicenna) is quoted as having thus remarked: "Ali's status among the companions of Muhammad (S) was that of the 'rational' in the midst of the 'corporeal'."

Obviously, the intellectual approach of the followers of an Imam such as Ali (as) should be expected to be radically different from that of those who followed others. Moreover, Ahmed Amin and others have been susceptible to another similar misunderstanding. They express doubts with regard to the authenticity of ascription of such philosophic statements [as exist in Nahjul-Balagha] to Ali (as).

They say that the Arabs were not familiar with such issues, arguments and elaborate analyses like the ones found in Nahjul-Balagha prior to becoming acquainted with the Greek philosophy, and evidently, according to them, these discourses should have been composed by some later scholars familiar with the Greek philosophy then were attributed to Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (as).

We also accept that the Arabs were not familiar with such ideas and notions. Not only the Arabs, the non-Arabs, too, were not acquainted with them, nor were those notions familiar to the Greeks and Greek philosophy. Ahmed Amin first brings down Ali (as) to the level of such Arabs like Abu Jahl and Abu Sufyan, then he postulates his minor and major premises, building his conclusion on their premises: "The Arabs were unfamiliar with philosophical notions; Ali (as) was an Arab; therefore, Ali (as) was also unfamiliar with such philosophical notions.

One should ask him whether the Arabs of the Jahiliyya were familiar with the ideas and the concepts propounded in the Holy Qur'an. Had not Ali (as) been brought up and trained by the Messenger of Allah himself? Did not the Prophet (S) introduce Ali (as) to his companions as the most learned and knowledgeable among them? Why should we deny the high spiritual status of someone who enriched his inner self by drawing on the bounteous wealth of Islam in order to protect the prestige of some of the Prophet's companions who could never rise above the ordinary level?

Ahmed Amin says that prior to being acquainted with the Greek philosophy, the people of Arabia were

not familiar with the ideas and concepts found in Nahjul-Balagha. The answer to this is that the Arabs did not become acquainted with the ideas and notions propounded in Nahjul-Balagha even after centuries of familiarity with the Greek philosophy.

Not only the Arabs, even the non-Arab Muslims, were not acquainted with these ideas for the simple reason that there is no trace of them whatsoever in the Greek philosophy itself! These ideas are exclusively specific to the Islamic philosophy. Muslim philosophers gradually picked these ideas up from the basic Islamic sources, incorporating them in their thought under the guidance of revelation.

Philosophical Notions Concerning Metaphysics

As stated above, Nahjul-Balagha adopts two kinds of approach to the problems of theology. The first kind of approach calls attention to the sensible world and its phenomena as a mirror reflecting the Knowledge and Perfection of the Creator.

The second approach involves purely rationalistic and philosophical reflections. The latter approach accounts for the greater part of the theological discussions of Nahjul-Balagha.

Moreover, it is the only approach adopted with regard to the discussion of the Divine Essence and Attributes.

As we know, the value of such discussions and the legitimacy of such reflections have always been questioned by those who consider them improper from the viewpoint of reason or canon, or both. In our own times, a certain group claims that this kind of analysis and inference does not agree with the spirit of Islam and that the Muslims were initiated into such kind of speculations under the influence of the Greek philosophy and not as a result of any inspiration or guidance effused from the Qur'an.

They say that had the Muslims adhered closely to the Qur'anic teachings, they would not have entangled themselves with these tortuous webs. For the same reason, they view with suspicion the authenticity of such speculations found in Nahjul-Balagha and their attribution to Imam Ali (as).

During the second and third centuries, a group of people opposed such kind of discussions, questioning their legitimacy and raising doctrinal objections thereto. They insisted that it is obligatory on Muslims to be satisfied with the literal and commonly understood meaning of the words of the Qur'an. They regarded every kind of inquiry into the meaning of the Qur'an as an innovation (bid'a) in religion.

For instance, if someone inquired about the meaning of the Qur'anic verse "***The all-Compassionate seated Himself upon the Throne***"(***Qur'an, 20: 5***), he was confronted by the displeasure of those who regarded such questions as not only improper but distasteful. He would be told: "The exact meaning is unknown and questioning is heresy."[2]

During the 3rd A.H./ 9th A.D. century, this group, which later came to be called Asharite, overwhelmed

the Mutazilites who considered such speculations to be within the bounds of legitimacy. This victory of the Ash'arites delivered a severe blow to the intellectual life of Islam.

The Akhbaris, who followed a Shii school which flourished during the period between the 10th A.H./16th A.D. And the 14th A.H./20th A.D. centuries, particularly during the 10th A.H./16th A.D. And 11th A.H./17th A.D. centuries, followed the Asha'ris in their ideologies and convictions. They raised doctrinal objections against ratiocination. Now we shall proceed to discuss the objections raised from a rationalist point of view.

As a result of the triumph of the empirical and experimental method over the deductive approach in Europe, especially in the physical sciences, the view began to prevail that rational speculation was unreliable not only in the physical sciences but also in all scientific disciplines and that the only reliable method was that of empirical philosophy. The result was that the problems of theology were viewed with doubt and suspicion because they lay beyond the domain of experimental and empirical observation.

The past victories of the Asharites, on one hand, and the amazing triumphs of the empirical method, which followed one another in quick succession, on the other hand, drove some non-Shiite Muslim writers to the extremes of excitement. The outcome was the eclectic opinion that from the religious (Shari) as well as the rational point of view, the use of the deductive method even in problems of theology should be discarded.

From the Shari viewpoint, they made the claim that according to the outlook of the Qur'an, the only valid theological approach was the empirical and experimental method and the study of the natural phenomena and the system of creation; the rest, they declared, is no more than an exercise in futility. They pointed out that in scores of its verses, the Qur'an in most unequivocal terms has invited mankind to study the phenomena of nature; it considers the keys to the secrets of the origin and the workings of the universe to be concealed within nature itself.

In this way, they echoed, in their writings and speeches, the ideas expressed by the European proponents of empirical philosophy.

In Farid al-Wajdi's book Ala atlal al-madhhab al-maddi (On the Ruins of Materialism), and in Sayyid Abul-Hassan al-Nadawi's Matha khasira al-alam bi-inhitat al-Muslimin ("What the World Lost Through the Decline of Muslims"), as well as the writers belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood (al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun) such as Sayyid Qutb and others, have all supported this view, vehemently attacking the opposite viewpoint.

Al-Nadawi, in his above-mentioned book, says the following: "The prophets informed men about the existence of Allah and His Attributes and acquainted them with the origin and the beginning of life on the planet as well as the ultimate destiny of man, putting this free information at their disposal.

They relieved mankind of the need to understand and discuss these problems the basics of which lie

beyond our reach (because these problems belong to the sphere of the supra-sensible, and our knowledge and experience is limited to the physical and the sensible, the tangible).

But men did not value this blessing; therefore, they entangled themselves in debates and speculations about these problems, striding into the dark regions of the hidden and the unknowable.[3]

The same author, in another chapter of the same book, where he discusses the causes of the decline of Muslims, under the heading 'The Neglect of Useful Sciences, criticizes the Muslim Ulema' in these words: "The Muslim scholars and thinkers did not give as much importance to practical and experimental sciences as they gave to debating about metaphysics, which they had learned from the Greek philosophy.

The Greek metaphysics and theology is nothing more than the Greeks' polytheistic mythology presented in a philosophical outfit and is no more than a series of meaningless conjectures expressed in an absurd jargon. Allah has exempted the Muslims from such a debate, speculation and analysis regarding these matters which are not much different from the analytic pursuits of the Alchemists. But out of ingratitude for this great blessing, the Muslims wasted their energy and genius in problems of this sort.[4]

Without any doubt, the views of the likes of Farid al-Wajdi and of al-Nadawi should be regarded as a sort of return to Asharism, though dressed in contemporary style akin to the language of empirical philosophy.

Here, we cannot enter into a philosophical discussion about the value of philosophic reflection. In the chapters titled The Value of Information and The Origin of Multiplicity in Perception in the book titled The Principles and Method of Realism, we have discussed the matter in sufficient details. Here, we shall confine ourselves to the Qur'anic aspect of this problem and investigate whether the Holy Qur'an considers the study of nature to be the only valid method of inquiry into theological problems, or whether it allows for another approach besides the one mentioned above.

However, it is essential to point out that the disagreement between the Asharites and the non-Asharites is not about the legitimacy of the use of the Book and the Sunnah as sources in the problems of theology; rather, the disagreement concerns the manner of their utilization.

According to the Asharites, their application should not exceed mute acceptance. According to them, we assign the various Attributes like Unity, Omniscience, Omnipotence and the rest to Allah because they have been ascribed to Him by the Sharia; otherwise, we would not know whether or not Allah is as such because the basic principles and essentials dealing with Allah are beyond our reach.

Therefore, according to them, we are forced to accept Allah as such, but we cannot know or understand that Allah is as such. The role of the religious texts is that they prescribe for us the way we ought to think and believe so that we may follow it in our ideology and convictions.

According to the contestants of this view, these issues, as is the case with any other rational concept or idea, are amenable to human understanding, that is, there exist certain principles and essentials which, if properly known, enable man to understand them. The role of the religious texts lies in their capacity to inspire, motivate, and guide the human intellect by putting understandable principles and essentials at its disposal.

Basically, servitude in intellectual matters is absurd. It is like ordering one to think in a certain fashion, and asking him to derive certain prescribed conclusions. It is like ordering someone to see a thing in a certain fashion then asking him the following: “How do you see it? Is it big or small? Is it black or white?! Servitude in thinking does not mean anything other than absence of thinking and acceptance without reflection.

In short, the question is not whether it is possible for man to go beyond the teachings of the Revelation. Allah be our refuge, there is nothing that lies beyond them because that which has reached us through Revelation and through the Household of Revelation (i.e. Ahl al-Bayt [a.s]) is the utmost limit of perfection concerning the knowledge of the Divine.

Here, our debate centers upon the capacity of the human thought and reason, whether or not it can, when supplied with the basic principles and essentials, undertake an intellectual journey through the world of theological problems[5] or not.

As to the invitation of the Qur’an to study and inquire about the phenomena of creation and its emphasis on nature as a means for attaining the knowledge of Allah and the super-natural, it should be said that it is, indubitably, a basic principle of the Qur’anic teachings. It is with extraordinary insistence that the Holy Qur’an asks the human beings to inquire into the nature of the earth, the sky, the plants and animals, and man himself, urging them to study them scientifically.

It is also indubitable that the Muslims did not take enough worthy strides in this direction. Perhaps the real reason behind it was the Greek philosophy, which was deductive and based on pure speculation. They used this approach even in the field of the physical sciences.

Nevertheless, as the history of science bears testimony, the Muslim scientists did not altogether abandon the experimental method in their studies as did the Greeks. The Muslims, not the Europeans, as is commonly thought, were the pioneers of the experimental method. The Europeans followed on the tracks first laid by the Muslims.

The Value Of Studying The Natural Phenomena

Aside from all of this, the question worthy of consideration is whether the Qur’an, besides its emphasis on the study of the creating of earth, water and air, allows other ways of approaching the issue, or if it closes all other doors. The question is whether the Qur’an, even as it invites people to study the signs of

Allah (ayat), also welcomes other modes of intellectual endeavor.

Basically, what is the value of inquiry into the works of creation (an inquiry which the Qur'an urges us, explicitly or implicitly, to undertake), from the viewpoint of initiating us into the awareness and consciousness which this heavenly Book aims to cultivate?

The truth is that the measure of assistance provided by the study of the works of the creation in understanding the problems explicitly pointed out by the Holy Qur'an is quite restricted. The Holy Qur'an has propounded certain problems of theology which are by no means understandable through the study of the created world or nature.

The value of study of the system of creation is limited only to the extent to which it proves that the world is governed by a Power which knows, designs, plans, and administers it. The world is a mirror, open to empirical experiment, only to the extent that it points towards something that lies beyond nature and discloses the existence of a Mighty Hand which runs nature's cosmic wheels.

But the Holy Qur'an is not content that man should only know that a Mighty, Knowing, and Wise Power administers this universe. This may perhaps be true of other heavenly scriptures, but is by no means true of the Holy Qur'an, which is the final and ultimate heavenly message and has a great deal to say about Allah and the reality transcending nature.

Purely Rationalistic Problems

The most basic problem to which the mere study of the world of creation fails to provide an answer is the necessity of existence and uncreated nature of the Power which transcends natural phenomena. The world is a mirror in the sense that it indicates the existence of a Mighty Hand and a Wise Power, but it does not tell us anything more about its nature.

It does not tell us whether that Power is subservient to something else or not, or if it is self-subsisting. And if it is subject to something else, what is that? the objective of the Holy Qur'an is not only that we should know that a Mighty Hand administers the world, but that we may know that that Administrator is Allah and that Allah is the indefinable: "There is nothing like Him, the One whose Essence encompasses all perfection or, in other words, that Allah signifies Absolute Perfection and is the referent of "His is the loftiest likeness." How can the study of nature give us an understanding of such notions and concepts?

The second problem is that of the Unity of Allah (Tawhid). The Holy Qur'an has stated this issue in a logical form and used a syllogistic argument to explain it. The method of argument which it has employed in this regard is called "exclusive syllogism" or burhan al-tamannu'.

Occasionally, it eliminates the possibility of multiplicity in the efficient cause as in the following verse36: ***"If there had been*** (***multiple***) ***gods in them*** (***i.e. in the earth and the heavens***) ***other than Allah, they would surely go to ruin***"(**21: 22**).

At other times, it argues by eliminating the possibility of multiplicity in the final cause: ***"Allah has not taken to Himself any son, nor is there any god besides Him, for then each god would have taken off that he created and some of them would have risen up over others"***(***23: 91***).

The Holy Qur'an never suggests that the study of the system of creation can lead us to the knowledge of the Unity of the Godhead so as to imply that the essential knowledge of the transcendental Creator be considered attainable from that source. Moreover, such a suggestion would not have been correct.

The Holy Qur'an alludes to various problems as indicated by the following examples:

Nothing is like Him. (***42: 11***)

And Allah's is the loftiest likeness. (***16: 60***)

To Him belong the most Beautiful Names. (***20: 8***)

And His is the loftiest likeness in the heavens and the earth. (***30: 27***) ***He is Allah, there is no god but He. He is the King, the All-holy, the All-peaceable ,the All-faithful, the All-preserver, the Almighty, the All-compeller, the All-sublime.*** (***59: 23***)

And to Allah belong the East and the West; whither so ever you turn, there is the Face of Allah. (***2: 115***)

And He is Allah in the heavens and the earth; He knows your secrets, and what you publish. (***6: 3***)

He is the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward; He has knowledge of everything. (***57: 3***)

He is the Living, the Everlasting. (***2: 255***)

Allah, is the Everlasting, [***Who***] ***has not begotten, and has not been begotten and equal to Him is not any one.*** (***112: 2-4***)

Why does the Holy Qur'an raise such issues? Is it for the sake of propounding mysterious matters incomprehensible to man who, according to al-Nadawi, lacks the knowledge of its essential principles, then asking him to accept them without comprehending their meaning? Or does the Holy Qur'an actually want him to know Allah through the attributes and descriptions that have come in it?

And, if this is true, what reliable approach does it recommend? How is it possible to acquire this knowledge through the study of the natural phenomena? The study of the creation teaches us that Allah has knowledge of all things; that is, all things that He has made were created knowingly and wisely. But the Holy Qur'an expects us not only to know this but also stresses that:

Indeed, Allah has the knowledge of everything. (***2: 231***)

And not so much as the weight of an atom in earth or heaven escapes from your Lord, neither is aught smaller than that, or greater, but in a Manifest Book. (***10: 61***)

Say: If the sea were ink for the Words of my Master, the sea would be spent before the Words of my Master are spent, though We brought replenishment the like of it. (***18: 109***)

This means that Allah's knowledge is infinite and so is His power. How and wherefore is it possible through perception and observation of the world of creation to reach the conclusion that the Creators Knowledge and Power are infinite? The Holy Qur'an, similarly, propounds numerous other problems of the kind.

For instance, it mentions al-lawh al-mahfuz (the Protected Tablet), lawh al-mahw wa al-ithbat (The Tablet of Expunction and Affirmation), jabr and ikhtiyar (determinism and free will), wahi (revelation) and ilham (intuition), etc.; none of which are susceptible to inquiry through the empirical study of the world of creation.

It must be admitted that the Holy Qur'an, definitely, has raised these problems in the form of a series of lessons and has emphasized their importance through advice and exhortation. The following verses of the Holy Qur'an may be quoted in this regard:

What?! Do they not meditate on the Qur'an? Or is it that there are locks upon their hearts? (***47: 24***)

(***This is***) ***a Scripture that We have revealed unto thee, full of blessing, that they may ponder on its revelations, and that men of understanding may reflect.*** (***38: 29***)

Inevitably, we are forced to accept that the Holy Qur'an assumes the existence of a reliable method for understanding the meaning of these facts which have not been revealed as a series of obscure incomprehensible things out of the reach of the human intellect.

The scope of problems propounded by the Holy Qur'an in the sphere of metaphysics is far greater than what can be resolved or answered through the study of physical creation. This is the reason why the Muslims have pursued these problems, at times through spiritual and gnostic efforts, and at other times through speculative and rational approach.

I wonder whether those who claim that the Holy Qur'an considers the study of nature as the sole, sufficient means for the solution of metaphysical problems, can give a satisfactory answer with regard to the various problems propounded by it, a characteristic which is specifically relevant to this great heavenly Book.

Ali's sole source of inspiration in his exposition of the problems mentioned in the previous chapters is the Holy Qur'an, and the sole motive behind his discourses is exegetical. Perhaps, had it not been for Ali (as), the rationalistic and speculative aspects of the Holy Qur'an would have forever remained without an

interpretation.

After these brief introductory remarks on the value of these issues, we shall go on to cite some relevant examples from Nahjul- Balagha.

The Divine Essence And Attributes

In this section, we shall cite some examples of Nahjul-Balagha's treatment of the problems of theology relevant to the Divine Essence and Attributes. Later, we shall make a brief comparative study of the issue in various schools then conclude our discussion on this aspect of Nahjul- Balagha.

However, before proceeding further, I solicit the reader's pardon on account of the discussion in the last three sections becoming a bit technical and philosophical, something which is not very welcome for those who are not used to it. But what is the remedy?

Discussing a book such as Nahjul-Balagha does entail such ups and downs. For this reason, we shall limit ourselves to giving only a few examples from the book on this subject and refrain from any elaborate discussion. This is so because if we were to comment on every sentence in Nahjul-Balagha, the result will be, as is said,

My Mathnawi requires seventy mounds of paper.

The Divine Essence

Does Nahjul-Balagha have anything to say about the Divine Essence and how to define it? The answer is: Yes, and a lot. However, much of the discussion revolves around the point that the Divine Essence is the Absolute and Infinite Being, without a quiddity.

His Essence accepts neither limits nor boundaries, as is the case with other beings, static or changeable, which are limited and finite. A changeable being is one which constantly transcends its former limits and assumes new ones. But such is not the Divine Essence. Quiddity, which may qualify and confine Him within limits of finitude, is not applicable to Him.

None of the aspects of beings are devoid of His Presence, and no kind of imperfection is applicable to Him except the absence of any imperfection whatsoever: The only thing "missing" in Him is absence of defect or inadequacy of any kind. The sole kind of negation applicable to Him is the negation of all negations. The only kind of non-being attributable to Him is the negation of any kind of imperfection in relation to Him.

He is free from all shades of non-being which characterize creatures and effects. He is free from finitude, multiplicity, divisibility and need. The only territory that He does not enter is that of nothingness and non- existence. He is with everything, but not in anything, and nothing is with Him. He is not within

things, though not out of them. He is over and above every kind of condition, state, similarity and likeness. This is so because these qualities relate to limited, and they determinate beings characterized by quiddity:

“He is with everything but not in the sense of [physical] nearness. He is different from everything but not in the sense of separation” (Sermon 1).

“He is not inside things in the sense of physical [pervasion or] penetration and is not outside them in the sense of [physical] exclusion [for exclusion entails a kind of finitude].”(Sermon 186)

“He is distinct from things because He overpowers them, and the things are distinct from Him because of their subjection to Him.”(Sermon 152)

That is to say, His distinctness from things lies in the fact that He has authority and control over them, all of them. However, His power, authority and sovereignty, unlike those of the creatures, are not accompanied with simultaneous weakness, subjugation and subjection.

His distinction and separateness from things lie in the fact that things are totally subject to His power and authority, and that which is subject and subordinate can never be like the one who subjugates and commands control over it. His separateness from things does not lie in physical separation but is on account of the distinction which lies between the Provider and the provided, the Perfect and the imperfect, the Powerful and the weak.

These kinds of ideas are replete in Ali’s discourses. All the problems which shall be discussed later are based on the principle that the Divine Essence is Absolute and Infinite, and the concepts of limit, form and condition do not apply to it.

Divine Unity: Ontological, Not A Numerical Concept

Another feature of Tawhid (monotheism) as propounded by Nahjul-Balagha is that the Divine Unity is not numerical but is something else. Numerical unity means the oneness of something which has the possibility of recurrence or multiplicity.

It is always possible to imagine that the quiddity and form of an existent is realizable in another individual being. In such cases, the unity of an individual possessing that quiddity is numerical oneness and stands as the antithesis of duplicity or multiplicity.

It is one means that there is unique, none, nobody, nothing is like it. Inevitably, this kind of unity entails the quality of being restricted in number, which is a defect because one is less in number as compared to two or more of its kind.

But if a being is such that the assumption of a recurrence with regard to it is impossible, since it is infinite

and unlimited, and if we assume another like it exists, it will follow that it is the same as the first being, or that it is something which is not similar to it and, therefore, it cannot be called a second instance of it.

In such a case, unity is not numerical. That is, this kind of unity is not one opposed to duplicity or multiplicity. And when it is said, “It is one, it does not mean that there are no two, three or more of its kind, but it means that a second to it is inconceivable.”

This notion can further be clarified through an example. We know that the astronomers and physicists are not in agreement about the dimensions of the universe, whether it is limited in size or infinite.

Some scientists have favored the idea of an unlimited and infinite universe; others claim that the universe is limited in dimensions so that if we travel in any direction, we shall reach a point beyond which there is no space. The other issue is whether the universe in which we live is the only universe in existence, or if there are other universes existing besides it.

Evidently, the assumption of another physical world beyond our own is a corollary to the assumption that our universe is not infinite. Only in this case is it possible to assume the existence of, say, two physical universes each of which is limited and has finite dimensions. But if we assume that our universe is infinite, it is not possible to entertain the assumption of another universe existing beyond it. Whatever we were to assume would be identical with this universe or a part of it.

The assumption of another being similar to the Being of the One God, such as the assumption of another physical universe besides an infinite material universe, amounts to assuming the impossible, for the Being of Allah is absolute: “Absolute Selfhood and Absolute Reality.”

The notion that the Divine Unity is not a numerical concept, and that qualifying it by a number is synonymous with imposing limits on the Divine Essence, is repeatedly discussed by Nahjul-Balagha:

“He is the One, but not in a numerical sense.”(Sermon 152)

“He is not confined by limits, nor is He counted by numbers.”(Sermon 186)

“He who points to Him admits for Him limitations, and he who admits limitations for Him has numbered Him.”(Sermon 1)

“He who qualifies Him limits Him. He who limits Him numbers Him. He who numbers Him denies His pre-eternity.”(Sermon 152)

“Everything associated with unity is deficient except Him.”(Sermon 65)

How beautiful, profound, and full of meaning is the last statement! It says that everything except the Divine Essence is limited if it is one. That is, everything for which another of its same kind is conceivable is a limited being and an addition of another individual would increase its number. But this is not true of

the Unity of the Divine Essence, for Allah's Unity lies in His greatness and infinity for which a peer, a second, an equal or a match is not conceivable.

This concept, that the Divine Unity is not a numerical notion, is exclusively an Islamic concept, original and profound, unprecedented in any other school of thought. Even the Muslim philosophers only gradually realized its profundity through contemplating on the spirit of the original Islamic texts, in particular the discourses of Ali (as), ultimately formally incorporating it in the Islamic metaphysical philosophy. There is no trace of this profound concept in the writings of the early Islamic philosophers like al-Farabi and Ibn Sina (Avicenna). Only the later philosophers ushered this concept into their philosophic thinking calling it Really True Unity, in their terminology.

Allah, The First And The Last; The Manifest And The Hidden

One of many issues discussed in Nahjul-Balagha is that Allah is the First and the Last, the Hidden and the Manifest. Of course, like other notions, this, too, has been deduced from the Holy Qur'an, although here we are not going to quote the verses of the Holy Qur'an. Allah is the First, but His precedence is not temporal so as to be in contradiction with His being the Last. He is the Manifest, but not in the sense of being physically visible or perceptible by the senses; His Manifestness does not contradict His Hiddenness. In fact, His being the First is identical to His being the Last; similarly, His being Manifest and Hidden are identical; they are not two different things:

"Praise be to Allah, for whom one condition does not precede another, so that He may he the First before being the Last or may be Manifest before being Hidden."(Sermon 65)

"Time is not His accomplice, nor does He need the assistance of tools and agents His Being transcends time. His Existence transcends nothingness and His pre-eternity transcends all beginning."(Sermon 186)

The Divine Essence's transcendence over time, nothingness, beginning, and end is one of the most profound concepts of al-hikma philosophy. Allah's pre-eternity does not mean that Allah has always existed. Certainly Allah has always existed but the Divine pre-eternity (azaliyya) is something greater in meaning than "existence at all times" because, "existing at all times" assumes existence in time; but Allah's Being has not only been at all times, It precedes time itself.

This is the meaning of the Divine pre-eternity. This shows that His precedence is something other than temporal precedence. Praise be to Allah Whose creation bears testimony to His Existence; temporality (huduth) of whose creation is the testimony of His "pre-eternity" the similarity and likeness among whose creation proves that He is unique. The senses do not perceive Him and nothing can conceal Him (Sermon 152).

That is to say, Allah is both Hidden and Manifest. By Himself, He is Manifest but is Hidden from, undetectable by, the human senses. His Hiddenness from the senses is due to man's own limitations,

not because of Him.

It needs no proof that existence is synonymous with manifestation; the more powerful the existence of a being, the more manifest it will be. Conversely, the weaker its being is and the more intermingled with non-being, the less manifest it is to itself and to others.

For everything, there are two modes of being: its being-in-itself (wujud fi nafsih), and its being-for-others (wujud fi ghayrih). The being of everything for us depends upon the structure of our senses and on certain special conditions. Accordingly, the manifestation of a thing, a being, is also of two kinds: its manifestation-in-itself (zuhur fi nafsih) and its manifestation-for-others (wujud fi ghayrih).

Our senses, on account of their limitations, are able to perceive only a limited number of finite objects possessing the characteristics of similarity and opposition. The senses can perceive colors, shapes, sounds, etc. which are limited temporally and specifically; that is, their existence is confined within a particular time and place. Now, if there existed a uniform light, always and everywhere, it would not be perceptible. A continuous monotonous sound heard always, constantly, and everywhere, it would not be audible.

The Being of Allah, the Absolute Being and the Absolute Reality, is not confined to any particular time or place and is hidden from our senses. But Allah in Himself is absolutely manifest; the perfection of His manifestness, which follows from the perfection of His Being, is itself the cause of His hiddenness from our senses. The two aspects of His manifestness and hiddenness are one and the same in His Essence. He is hidden because He is perfectly manifest, and this perfect manifestness conceals Him:

"You are hidden on account of Your perfect brilliance; You Art the Manifest, the Hidden in Your manifestness. The veil on Your face is also Your; so manifest You are, Your manifestness conceals Thee from the world's eyes."

An Appraisal

An appraisal, however brief, of the approach of Nahjul-Balagha and its comparison with that of other schools of thought is essential for discovering the true worth of its views on the problems of theology. We shall confine ourselves to the brief, though not quite sufficient, examples quoted in the foregoing pages and proceed to evaluate them.

The subject of the Divine Essence and Attributes is one which has been discussed a lot by the ancient and modern philosophers, mystics and Sufis of the East and of the West. But, in general, their method and approach is totally different from that of Nahjul-Balagha whose approach is highly original and unprecedented. Only in the Holy Qur'an can a precedent for Nahjul-Balagha be found. Apart from the Holy Qur'an, we do not find any other source that provides some ground for the discourses of Nahjul-Balagha.

As pointed out earlier, some scholars because of their failure to trace back to some earlier source the notions elaborated in Nahjul- Balagha have questioned the authenticity of ascription of these discourses to Ali (as). They have suggested that these discourses appeared in a later period, after the appearance of the Mu'tazilites and the assimilation of the Greek ideology, heedless of the following saying: "The mean earth with the sublime heaven does not compare!

How ignorant it is to compare the Mu'tazilite and the Greek ideologies with the teachings of Nahjul-Balagha!

Nahjul-Balagha And The Notions Of Kalam

While ascribing all the Attributes of perfection to Allah, the Exalted One, Nahjul-Balagha negates any separation of these Attributes from His Essence and does not consider them as an appendage of the Divine Essence. On the other hand, the Ash'arites, as we know, consider the Divine Attributes to be additional to the Essence, so the Mutazilites negate all Attributes.

An Asharite Believes In The Separation Of The Attributes From The Essence

A Mutazilite speaks of subservience [of the Attributes to the Essence]. This has led some people to imagine that the discourses found in Nahjul-Balagha on this topic are fabrications of a later period under the influence of Mutazilite views whereas anyone with some insight can readily perceive that the Attributes negated by Nahjul-Balagha with respect to the Divine Essence are qualities of imperfection and limitation:

The Divine Essence, being infinite and limitless, necessitates identity of the Attributes with the Essence, not negation of the Attributes as professed by the Mutazilites. Had the Mutazilites reached such a notion, they would never have negated the Divine Attributes, considering them subservient to the Essence.

The same is true of the views on the creating or temporality (huduth) of the Holy Qur'an in sermon 184. One may imagine that these passages of Nahjul-Balagha relate to the latter heated controversies among the Islamic theologians (mutakallimun) regarding the eternity (qidam) or temporality (huduth) of the Holy Qur'an and which might have been added to Nahjul-Balagha during the latter centuries.

However, a little reflection will reveal that the discourses of Nahjul-Balagha relevant to this issue have nothing to do with the debate on the Holy Qur'an being either created or uncreated, which was a meaningless controversy, but relevant to the creative command (amr takwini), and to the Will of the Almighty. Ali (as) says that Allahs Will and Command represent the Divine Acts and, therefore, so are ahadith posterior to the Essence, for if the Command and the Will were co-eternal and identical with His Essence, they will have, necessarily, to be considered His associates and equals. Ali (as) says the

following:

“When He decrees the creation of a thing, He says to it, and it assumes existence; but not through an audible voice which strikes the ear or a cry that can be heard. Indeed the speech of Allah, glory be to Him, is but His created Act, which did not exist before [it came into existence]. Had it (The Divine speech) been itself eternal, it would be another god besides Him.”(Sermon 186)

In addition, there are other musnad traditions on this subject related from Ali (as), only some of which have been collected in Nahjul- Balagha, and can be traced back to his time. On this basis, there is no room for doubting their genuineness.

If any superficial resemblance is observed between the statements made by Ali (as) and some views held by the Mu’tazilites, the probability to be allowed in this connection is that some of his ideas were adopted by the Mu’tazilites.

The controversies of the Muslim theologians (mutakallimun), both the Shia and the Sunni, the Asharites as well as the Mutazilites, generally revolved around the doctrine of rational basis of ethical judgement concerning good and evil (al-husn wa al-qubh al-“aqliyyan). This doctrine, nothing but a practical principle operating in the human society, is considered by the mutakallimun to be also applicable to the Divine sphere and govern the laws of creation; but we find no trace of it in Nahjul-Balagha. Similarly, there is no sign of it in the Holy Qur’an. Had the ideas and beliefs of the mutakallimun found their way into Nahjul- Balagha, first of all, the traces of this doctrine should have been found in that book.

Nahjul-Balagha And Philosophical Concepts

Some others, having come across certain words such as “existence” (wujud), “non-existence”(adam), “temporality” (huduth) and “pre-eternity”(qidam) and so on in Nahjul-Balagha, have been led to assume that these terms entered the Muslim intellectual world under the influence of the Greek philosophy and were inserted, intentionally or unintentionally, into the discourses of Ali (as).

Had those who advocate this view gone deeper into the meanings of these words, they would not have heeded such a hypothesis. The method and approach adopted in the arguments of Nahjul-Balagha are completely different from these of the philosophers who lived before Sayyid al- Radi or during his time, or even those born many centuries after the compilation of Nahjul-Balagha.

Presently, we shall not discuss the metaphysics of the Greek or of the Alexandrians (the neo-Platonic) philosophy but shall confine ourselves to the metaphysical views propounded by al-Farabi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Khwajah Nasir al-Din al-Tusi.

Undoubtedly, Muslim philosophers introduced new challenges into philosophy under the influence of Islamic teachings which had not existed before, and in addition to them, introducing radically original ways of demonstration and inference to explain and argue their points with regard to some other

problems.

Nevertheless, what we learn from Nahjul-Balagha is obviously different from this approach. My teacher, allama Tabataba'i, in the preface to his discourse on the traditions of Islamic scholarship, writes the following: "These statements help resolve a number of problems of theological philosophy. Apart from the fact that Muslims were not acquainted with these notions, and they were incomprehensible to the Arabs, basically there is no trace of them in the writings and statements of pre-Islamic philosophers whose books were translated into Arabic and, similarly, they do not appear in the works of Muslim philosophers, Arab or Persian. These problems remained obscure and unintelligible, and every commentator discussed them according to his own conjecture until the eleventh century of the Hijra (17th century A.D.).

Only then were they properly understood for the first time, that is, the problem of the True Unity (al-wahda al-haqqa) of the Necessary Being (wajib al-wujud) (a non-numerical unity); the problem that the proof of the existence of the Necessary Being is identical with the proof of His Unity (since the Necessary Being is Absolute Existence, His Being implies His Unity); the problem that the Necessary Existent is the One known-in-His-Essence (ma'lum bil dhat); the Necessary Being is known directly without the need of an intermediary, and that the reality of everything else is known through the Necessary Being, not vice versa."[6]

The arguments of early Muslim philosophers like al-Farabi, Ibn Sina and Khwajah Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, such as the discussions on the Divine Essence and Attributes like Unity, Simplicity (basata), Self-Sufficiency, Knowledge, Power, Will, Providence, and so on, revolve around the conception of the necessity of existence (wujub al-wujud), from which all of them are derived, and the necessity of existence itself is indirectly deduced.

In this fashion, it is demonstrated that the existence of all possible existent beings (mumkinat) cannot be explained without assuming the existence of the Necessary Being. Although the argument used for proving the truth of this argument cannot be called a demonstration of the impossible (burhan khulf), in view of its indirect mode of inference, it resembles burhan khulf and, hence, it fails to provide a completely satisfactory demonstration, for it does not explain the necessity of the existence of the Necessary Being. Ibn Sina, in his Al- 'Isharat, claims that he has succeeded in discovering the "Why?" (lima) of it and, hence, chooses to call his argument Aburhan al-siddiqin (burhan limmi, i.e. causal proof). However, the latter philosophers considered his exposition of "the Why?"(lima) as insufficient.

In Nahjul-Balagha, the necessity of existence is never used to explain the existence of possible beings (mumkinat). That on which this book relies for this purpose is the real criterion of the necessity of existence, that is, the absolute reality and the pure being of the Divine Essence.

Allama Tabataba'i, in the above-mentioned work, while explaining one hadith by Ali (as), found in Al-Tawhid of Shaikh al-Saduq, says the following: "The basis of our discussion rests upon the principle that

the Divine Being is a reality that does not accept any limits or restrictions whatsoever. Because Allah, the Most Exalted, is the Absolute Reality from Whom the existence of all other beings is derived within the on to logical limits and characteristics peculiar to themselves, and their existence depends on that of this Absolute Being."[7]

In Nahjul-Balagha, the very basis of all discussions revolving on the Divine Essence rests on the status that Allah is the Absolute and Infinite Being Who transcends all limits and finitude. No point of space time, or anything at all is devoid of Him.

He is with everything, in everything, yet nothing is with Him or in Him. Since He is the Absolute and the Infinite, He transcends time, number, limit and proximity (all kinds of quiddities). That is, time and space, number and limit are applicable to a lower stage, i.e. The stage of the Divine actions and of creation. Everything is from Him and returns to Him. He is the First of the first and the Last of the last. He precedes everything and succeeds everything.

This is the idea that forms the axis of all discourses of Nahjul- Balagha and of which there is no trace in the works of al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, al-Ghazali, and Khwajah Nasir al-Din al-Tusi.
As pointed out by allama Tabatabai, these profound discussions of theology proper (ilahiyyat bil-mana al-akhass) are based on a series of inter-related problems which have been posited in metaphysics (al-umur al-ammah).[8] An elaborate discussion of those theological problems and their relevant issues mentioned above is outside the scope of our present discussion.

There are two reasons for rejecting the claims that the theological discussions of Nahjul-Balagha were inventions of later writers familiar with philosophical notions. Firstly, the kinds of problems discussed in Nahjul-Balagha were not at all raised by any philosopher till the time of Sayyid ar-Radi, compiler of Nahjul-Balagha.

That the Unity of the Necessary Being is not of the numerical kind and that the Divine Essence precedes number, that the existence of the Necessary Being implies Its Unity; the simple reality of the Necessary Being; His immanence and other such notions were not known to philosophy during or before Sayyid ar-Radis times. Secondly, the axes of arguments presented in this book are altogether different from the axes of philosophical discussions which have been prevalent throughout history until the present day.

Nahjul-Balagha And Western Philosophic Thought

Nahjul-Balagha has played a great role in the history of Eastern Philosophy. Mulla Sadra, who brought a revolution in theological thought (al-hikmat al-ilahiyya), was under the profound influence of Ali's discourses. His method of argument with regard to the problems of Tawhid is the method of inferring the Essence from the Essence, and also deducing the Attributes and Acts from the Essence, and all these arguments are based on the belief that there exists the Necessary Being only. These arguments are based on radically different general principles which are elaborated in his system of metaphysics.

Eastern theological thought (al-hikmat al-“ilahiyya) attained fruition and strength from the sources of Islamic teachings and was firmly established on inviolable foundations. However, theological philosophy in the West remained deprived of such a source of inspiration.

The widespread philosophical malaise of inclination towards materialism in the West has many causes whose discussion is outside the scope of our discourse. But we believe that the major cause of this phenomenon is the weakness and insufficiency of theological conceptions of Western religious thought. 9

Anyone interested in making a comparative study of the approaches pointed out in these chapters should first study the arguments advanced by Western philosophers such as Anselm, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Kant and others for proving the existence of Allah and their discussions about acceptance or rejection of various arguments, then he should compare them with the burhan al-siddiqin argument advanced by Mulla Sadra under the inspiration of Ali’s words. He would see for himself the wide chasm that separates one from the other.

1. The term tawil has been defined in various different ways. Generally speaking, when used in the opposition to tafsir (which is applied to the explanation of the literal and explicit meanings of the Qur’anic texts), it is applied to the interpretation of the Qur’anic verses which goes beyond their literal meaning. According to Imamiyya Shia, no one except the Prophet (S) and the twelve Imams is entitled to draw tawil of the Qur’anic verses.
To illustrate what is meant by ta’wil, consider these examples: (1) According to Shi`a ahadith, verse 2: 158, A Where ever you maybe, Allah will bring you all together, pertains to the 313 companions of Imam al-Mahdi (as) whom Allah will gather in a certain place [around the Kaba] from various parts of the earth in a single night. (2) According to another hadith, verse 67: 30, “Say: What think you? If your water (in the wells) should have vanished into the earth, who would then bring you running water?” pertains to the ghayba (occultation) of Imam al-Mahdi (as). Such interpretations, which obviously go beyond the apparent meaning of the Qur’anic verses, are called ta’wil.
2. Allama S.M.H Tabatabai, Usul e falsafah wa rawish e riyalism (The Principles and Method of Philosophy of Realism), Introduction to Vol. 1.
3. Muhammad Sulayman Nadawi, Matha khasara al-alam bi inhitat al- Muslimin, Vol. 4, p. 97.
4. Ibid. p. 135.
5. Allama Tabatabai, Op. Cit
6. Maktab-e-tashayyu No. 2, p. 120.
7. Ibid. p. 126.
8. Ibid. p. 157.
9. See Murtada Mutahhari, Ilal-e-garayesh beh maddigari (The cause of inclination towards Materisalism) under the chapter: Naresa iha you mafahi me faisafil (The inadequacies of [Western] Philosophical Ideologies).

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