The Knowledge of Allah

With a continuous chain of authorities reaching up to Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni, from 'Ali ibn Muhammad, from someone who reported it, from Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn 'Isa, from Muhammad ibn Humran, from al-Fadl ibn al-Sakn, from Abu 'Abd Allah (A) who said: The Commander of the Faithful (A) said, "Know God through God, the Messenger through the Messengership, and the wali al-amr by his commanding to what is right (amr bil-ma'ruf), his justice and kindness."[1]

Exposition

There is an evident difference between the terms 'irfan and 'ilm, recognition and knowledge. It is said that 'ilm (knowledge) in its original sense specifically relates to the universals, and ma'rifah (recognition, gnosis) is specific for that which relates to particulars and persons. They say that an 'arif billah (a gnostic of God) is someone who knows God through direct witnessing (mushahadah huduriyyah) and an 'alim billah is someone who attains the knowledge of God through philosophical proofs.

Some say that 'ilm and 'irfan differ in two respects; first, in respect of the related object (of cognition), as mentioned above, and secondly, a prior state of forgetfulness is assumed in ma'rifah. Hence when something becomes the object of cognition for the first time, one is said to acquire its 'ilm, and when something was known and forgotten to be known for a second time, one is said to obtain its ma'rifah. And the 'ari f is called 'arif because of his recollection of his existence and stages of life preceding his natural and mulki existence, and some of the people of the path of wayfaring claim to have remembered the world of dharr.[2]

They say that if the veil of physical nature, which causes forgetfulness and negligence, were to be removed from the wayfarer's eyes, he would recall the previous worlds through which he has passed. And someone from among the people of spirituality (dhawq) would say that the reality of the spiritual ascent (mi'raj) is the recollection of the past days. When one tries to go back into the past to recall one's earlier states, each of us, in accordance with the difference among individuals, can recollect things when he was seven, five, or three years old.

It is rare to find someone who has recollections from earlier years. It is said of the Shaykh al-Ra'is (Ibn Sina) that he claimed to have memories from the first moments of his birth. he would say that it was possible for one to have recollections which go back to earlier times, for instance, when one has been in one's mother's womb or in one's father's loins, and remember

all the developments that one has undergone in the realm of mulk, going back to the previous realms until the higher malakut, the realm of the jabarut, the higher jabarut, culminating in the recollection of his state in Divine knowledge, and this recollection is the reality of mi'raj and the ultimate height of spiritual ascent. (Here end his words).

Although this matter may be true in itself, but interpreting the reality of mi'raj as the regressive return into the past does not fit with. the exquisite teaching of gnosis and the creed of the people of the heart. Rather, the reality of spiritual ascent is the curvilinear spiritual movement with which is completed the circle of existence, culminating in the return to the reality of the ghayb of all that which is in the chain of shuhud.

This takes place in the form of a curvilinear movement along all ascending arc, whereas this regressive returning movement is contrary to the Divine law (sunnah) active in the realm of being, especially in respect of the prophets, particularly their Seal (S). This kind of coursing is like the absorption in the love of the Essence of the Glorious One of one kind of angels, who are bewildered and absorbed, and totally oblivious of multiplicity, not knowing that any man or world has been created.

The perfect gnostic Shaykh Shahabadi, may my spirit be his ransom, would say that the spiritual state of Hadrat Adam, play peace be upon him, was such that he was oblivious of his own physical nature (mulk) and was totally absorbed in the world of ghayb and the realm of the Divine, and this movement of Adam (A) negated his humanity (adamiyyat). Then God, the Exalted, gave Satan power over him in order to turn him towards the tree of nature, to deflect him from the gravity of the malakut towards the realm of mulk.

As to the phrase والعـــــدل والإحســـــان, justice and kindness), apparently these two are in conjunction with الأمـر بـالمعروفِ meaning) commanding to what is right:إعرفـوهم بِـالأَمْرِ بِـالمَعْرُوفِ وَالعَدْلِ وَالإِحْسَانِ. Or it is probably a conjunct of the phrase إعرفوا الله بالله meaning:

The Meaning Of The Phrase 'Know God By God'

It should he known that eminent scholars have given different explanations in expounding the in the noble tradition, each in accordance with the character of his scholarship المعــروف phrase and philosophical approach. Here we will briefly mention some of their views for the sake of benefiting from the barzakah of the speech of the great ones.

First is that which has been stated by the Thiqat al-Islam Kulayni (R), which, to put it briefly, is that God, the Exalted, has created the bodies, the spirits, and the lights, and He is their sole creator, without anyone sharing their creation with Him, nor is He is like any of them. Hence whoever likens God to any of them, does not know God; but should he negate God's similarity

to them he would he knowing God by God (Here end his words).[3] It is strange that Hadrat Sadr al-Muta'allihin (Q) has imagined these words (of Kulayni) to he part of the tradition and offered elaborate interpretations of it in accordance with his own philosophical approach.[4]

Second is the statement of Shaykh Saduq (R) whose gist is that knowing God through God means that should we know God with our intellects, God, the Exalted, is the one who has bestowed there; and should we know Him through the prophets and God's Proof, hujaj (A), then God has raised them and made them His Proofs; and should we know Him through our souls, God is their creator.[5]

Third is that which has been indicated by Sadr al-Muta'allihin, according to which the way to the ma'rifah of God is of two kinds. One of them is through epiphany and direct gnosis, and the second is through negation of His likeness to anything (tanzih) and assertion of Ibis transcendence (taqdis). As the first way is not possible except for the prophets and the perfect ones, the second path has been mentioned in the tradition (here ends his statement).[6] This interpretation of his is based on his taking the statements of Shaykh Kulayni as part of the noble tradition and as the exposition of the words of Hadrat Amir al-Mu'minin by Hadrat Sadiq (A).

Fourth is the interpretation of the muhaqqiq Fayd (M). The gist of it is that every being has an essence (mahiyyah) and an existence (wujud). The essences of things consist of their own particular delimitations and their essential aspect, whereas their existence consists of their Godward aspect, by virtue of which their entities subsist and their effects, potency, and efficiency become manifest.

Hence if one were to take the essences of things into view and their delimitations, and try to know God through their aspect of contingency and their dependence on God, he would be knowing God by things not by God. Moreover, this knowledge and gnosis is innate and not acquired. But if one were to know God through the existential aspect of things, which is their Godward aspect, he would be knowing God by God, and it is this Godward aspect of things which is referred to in these noble verses: He is with you where you may be. (57:4)

Everything is fated to perish save His Face. (28:88)

Fifth is the probability that has occurred to the mind of this author, and that will be understood after an introduction relating to the science of the Names and Attributes, which is as follows. There are several considerations for the Sacred Essence of God, Almighty and Exalted, each of which has been designated by a term.

One of them is the Essence when considered as such. In accordance with this consideration, the Divine Essence is absolutely unknowable, beyond any name or description, and beyond the

reach of the aspirations of the gnostics and the yearnings of the people of the heart and the awliya'. At times it is expressed as the 'inaccessible phoenix' ('anqa-e mughrib) in the idiom of the gnostics: Take thy net away for none can ever catch the phoenix.[7]

and at times referred to as 'ama' or 'amd: It has been narrated that the Prophet (S) was asked, "Where was your Lord before He created the creation!" He replied, "In an ama (cloud)."[8]

And at times, it is referred to as the 'Occult of the Occult' (ghayb al-ghuyub) or the Absolute Occult (ghayb-e mutlaq) as well as with other terms, although all such terms fail to express it. In accordance with the gnostic approach and according to a kind of metaphysical proof, the terms 'anqa, 'ama' and other terms do not apply to this station.

Another consideration is that of the Essence at the plane of occult conditioning (ta'ayyun ghaybi) and the non-existence of absolute manifestation ('adam-e zuhur-e mutlaq), which is called the station of ahadiyyah (unity at the plane of unity), and it is with this station that most of those [aforementioned] terms are consistent.

At this station, the Names of Essence, in accordance with the terminology of the adept in the Science of the Names, are considered, such as the Absolute Inward (Batin-e mutlaq), the Absolute First (Awwal-e mutlaq), the Most Exalted (al-'Ali), and the Greatest (al-'Azim), as can be inferred from the tradition of al-Kafi that the first Names that God assumed for Himself were al-'Ali and al-'Azim.[9]

Another of the considerations of the Essence is in accordance with the station of wahidiyyah (unity at the plane of multiplicity) and the inclusion of the Names and the Attributes. This station is referred to by such terms as 'the station of wahidiyyah,' 'the all-inclusive station of ahadiyyah of the Names' (ahadiyyat-e jam'-e asma) and 'the inclusive inclusiveness' (jam' al-jam'), and so on. This station, in consideration of the inclusive ahadiyyah (ahadiyyat-e jam') is called the station of the Greatest Name (ism-e a'zam) and the station of Allah, the All-inclusive Divine Name (ism-e jami' Allah).

Another consideration is that of the Essence at the plane of the Sacred Emanation (fayd-e muqaddas) and the station of the manifestation of the Names and the Attributes in the mirror of the Archetypes (a'yan), as the station of wahidiyyah is through manifestation of the Most Sacred Emanation (fayd-e aqdas). This station of manifestation of Names is also called 'the station of absolute manifestation' (zuhur itlaqi) and 'the station of divinity' (maqam-e uluhiyyah) and 'the station of Allah' in accordance with the considerations relating to the Names and the Attributes, as explained by this author in Misbah al-hidayah.[10]

It should be known that these considerations, which exist in the terminology of the gnostics and the people of the heart, are indicative of the (hierarchic) scheme of manifestation

(tajalliyat) of the Truth as reflected in their clear hearts, and those tajalliyat, in accordance with the stations and ranks of the wayfaring of the awliya' and the stages and phases of the journey of Godward wayfarers, begin at the plane of the manifestation (zuhur) of Names and Attributes, which, as said, is also called the station of divinity or 'the station of Allah', and the verse: God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. (24:35)

is considered by them to refer to it. And they terminate at the plane of the ghayb of altadiyyah and end at the plane of the Names of the Essence (asma' dhatiyyah) and the Exclusive Name (ism musta'thar), which is the ultimate goal and end of wayfaring. And it may be said that the aforementioned plane is the one referred to in these words of God, the Exalted: A bow's length away or nearer. (53:9)

Now, after this introduction, we say that as long as man seeks the Truth and journeys towards God with the feet of thought and philosophical argumentation, his wayfaring is rational and epistemic ('aqli 'ilmi), and he is not one of the people of ma'rifah and gnosis.

Rather, his vision is obstructed by the greatest and the biggest of veils, whether he seeks the Truth through viewing the essences (mahiyyat) of things, which constitute the curtains of darkness, or he seeks It through their existences, which constitute the curtains of light, as indicated in the statements of marhum Fayd.

The first condition for the realization of wayfaring towards God is to abandon the dark abode of the self and self-seeking. In the same way as, in external and sensible journeying, as long as one remains in one's house and dwelling, one's journey is not actualized no matter however one may imagine oneself to be traveling and regard oneself as a traveler, in the Shari'ah, too, one is not considered a traveler without leaving one's home and hometown and traversing a distance from where the traces of one's town become invisible.

Similarly, the gnostic journey towards God and the spiritual migration does not take place without leaving the dark house of the self and the disappearance, of its traces. So long as the walls of particularity are visible and the inviting call (adhan) of multiplicity can be heard, one is not a traveler, though one may imagine oneself to be in journey and claim to be wayfaring. God, the Exalted, has said: Whoever leaves his home as an emigrant towards God and His Messenger, then depth overtakes him, his reward has indeed fallen on God. (4:100)

After that the Godward wayfarer leaves his house with the feet of spiritual exercise (riyadah) and complete Godwariness (taqwa), without taking along with him the burden of attachments and particularity, and the Godward journey is realized, the first manifestation (tajalli) of the Exalted Truth that appears in his sacred heart is the manifestation at the plane of Divinity and the plane of manifestation (zuhur) of the Names and Attributes.

This tajalli is also in a graded order, from the partial to the inclusive Names, in accordance with the strength and weakness of the wayfarer's heart and his wayfaring-whose details cannot be contained in this brief discourse.-until it culminates in the detachment from all finite expressions (ta'yyunat) of the world of existence, whether pertaining to himself or others, which in the subsequent stages and phases also derive from the self. And after absolute detachment, there occurs the tajalli at the station of Divinity and the station of Allah, which is the station of ahadiyyah of inclusion of all manifesting Names, and here the wayfarer attains to the Know God by) إعْرِفُوا اللهَ بِاللهِ [preliminary and lower degree of [gnosis represented by the phrase God).

At the outset of the gnostic's attainment to this station and stage, he becomes annihilated (fani) in that tajalli, and if eternal grace were to embrace him, he obtains a recovery (uns) and the toil and forlornness of the journey is cast away. He returns to himself, and not being content with this station starts on the journey with the feet of love. In this journey, the love of the Truth is the origin and end of wayfaring, as well as the journey itself.

He walks in the lights of the tajalliyat and hears the call of 'Come on!' (taqaddam),[11] until, at the station of wahidiyyah, the Names and Attributes shine on his heart in a graded order until there manifests the station of inclusive ahadiyyah and the station of the Greatest Name, which are fulfilled at an exalted plane. إعْرِفُوا اللهَ بِاللهِ is the Name 'Allah' and at this stage the words And after this there is another station which is now beyond our present purpose.

In accordance with what has been mentioned, the station of the knowledge of the Messenger by Messengership and of [the knowledge of] the Uli al-amr by amr bil-maruf, 'adl and ihsan, has a subtle gnostic explanation which requires an elaborate discussion of the stations of Messengership (risalah) and sainthood (wilayah), though it is outside the scope of these pages, having been treated in the aforementioned treatise (Misbah al-hidayah).

Traditions Dealing With The Higher Teachings Should Not Be Interpreted In A Plebeian Sense

It should not be imagined that these expositions of ours of the noble tradition on the basis of the approach of the gnostics are meant to confine the meaning of the tradition to them, or that they are conjectures about the realm of the occult or interpretation based on subjective opinion. 'The purpose, rather, is to dispel the notion that the meanings of traditions relating to the ma'arif (the higher teachings) are limited to common plebeian meanings.

Those who are familiar with the style of speech of the Imams (A) know that the traditions relating to the ma'arif and sacred doctrine do not correspond to ordinary plebeian understanding of these teachings and that they contain the most subtle of philosophical

conceptions and the most profound teachings of gnosis. Anyone who refers to the Usul al-Kafı or the Tawhid of Shaykh Saduq (M) will confirm this matter. And this does not preclude the point that these Imams of the gnostics and knowers of God should have made their noble statements in such a comprehensive manner that every group profits from them in accordance with it own creed and approach, and none of then has a right to confine their meanings to what they have understood from them. For instance, this noble tradition can be given a common-sense interpretation in accordance with ordinary language and literal meanings. For example the statement إعْرِفُـــوا اللّٰهَ بِـــاللهِ can be said to mean that one should know God through the effects of His craftsmanship and their perfect design, which are the works of the Divine. Similarly, it may be said, the Messenger is to be known through his Messengership and the consummate effects of his call. The Uli al-amr is to be known by the quality of his actions, such as commanding to what is right and his implementing justice. Hence each of them is to be known through his effects.

This does not preclude that the tradition should have a subtler meaning which may be said to be its inward sense (batn), and beyond this meaning there might be another subtler layer of meaning which may be referred to as the inward of the inward (batn-e batn). In fine, one should not liken the speech of the awliya' to the likes of oneself, in the same way as it is wrong and improper to compare oneself to them, and we cannot elaborate here this point which has been stated concisely here.

An amazing thing is what certain persons say by the way of objection and challenge, that the statements of the Imams of guidance (A) were made for the guidance of the people and that they should be in accordance with the understanding of the common people, and beyond that nothing that has any profound philosophical or gnostic meaning should emerge from them. This is an atrocious and a most ugly slander whose cause, in addition to some other matters, is a lack of reflection on the traditions of the Prophetic Household (A) and neglect of their close study.

Strange! If the prophets and the awliya' do not teach the people the subtleties of tawhid and the higher teachings, then who is to do that? Is it the case that there are no subtleties involved in tawhid and the other teachings and that all people are equal in respect of their understanding of the ma'arif? Is the understanding of the Commander of the Faithful (A) the is same as ours and that it consists of the ordinary plebeian notions? Or is it the case that it is different, but it is not necessary, or even desirable, to teach them to others? Or is it that it is neither necessary nor desirable, and that the Imams (A) did not give them any importance? Did they, who did not ignore or omit even the details of the etiquette and manners of sleeping,

dining, and going to the toilet, have neglected the Divine teachings, which are the ultimate aspiration of the awliya'?

What is more amazing is that some of these same people who deny this matter resort to such hairsplitting discussions on traditions relating to fiqh tradition wherein common usage and understanding are definitely the criterion of meaning and interpretation-that even Reason itself is incapable of understanding them, to say nothing of commonsense, and yet they subscribe to the spontaneity of normal usage!

Whoever has any doubt in this regard should refer to the discussions [mentioned in the works of fiqh] relating to the topic of 'ala al-yad and similar general juristic rules, especially those which pertain to transactions (mu'amalat)?[12] This was a digression from the topic and an act of defiance of the pen. And God, the Blessed and Exalted, is witness that this author has in view no purpose by this discourse other than to familiarize his brothers-in-faith with the Divine teachings.

I beseech God's forgiveness from lapses and front lethargy and laziness, and all praise is .God's, firstly and lastly

Notes:

[1] Usul al-Kafi, i, 4, "kitab al-tawhid," "bab annahu la yu'arafu illa bih," hadith 1.

[2] This is referred to in the following Qur'anic verse: And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their backs, their .seed (dhurriyyah), and made them testify touching themselves, 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Yes, we testify-[this], lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, 'As for us, we were unaware of this.' (7:172)

[3] Usul al-Kafi, i, 85, "kitab al-tawhid;" "bab annalhu la yurafu illa bih," under hadith 1.

[4] Sharh Usul al-Kafi, pp. 233-234.

[5] Tawhid, p. 290 bab 41.

[6] Sharh Usul al-Kafi, pp. 233-234.

[7] Hafiz:

عنقا شكار كسي نشود دام بازگير كانجا هميشه باد به دست است دام را

[8] 'Awali al-li'ali, i, 54; Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal, iv, 12, with a small difference of wording.

[9] This is a reference to the following tradition of Usul al-Kafi, i, 113, "kitab al-tawhid," "bab huduth al-asma'," hadith 2: It is narrated on the authority of Muhammad ibn Sinan that he said, "I asked Abu al-Hasan al-Rida (A), 'Did God, Almighty and Exalted, know Himself before He created the creation?' 'Yes,' he replied. I said, 'Did He see it and hear it?' He said, "He had no need for that, for He neither required anything of it nor sought from it. He was His Self and His

Self was He. His power was all-pervasive, so He had no need to name Himself. But He chose for Himself Names for others to call Him by their means, for if He were not called by His Name He would not have been known. So the first that He chose for Himself was: 'The Most Exalted, the Greatest' (al-Ali al 'Azim), for He is exalted above all things. Its meaning is Allah and His name is al-'Ali al-'Azim. It is the first of His names, exalted is He above everything."

[10] Misbah al-hidayah ila al-khilafah wa al-wilayah, pp. 33-38.

[11] "Taqaddam," said by, God to the Prophet during his cosmic journey, the mi'raj.

[12] This is a reference to a well-known fiqhi rule which states