

تَوْحِيدٌ وَأَسْمَاءُ وَصِفَاتُ

THE ONENESS OF GOD HIS NAMES AND ATTRIBUTES

الله

BY USTĀD MUHAMMAD BIYĀBĀNĪ USKŪYĪ
TRANSLATED BY SYED AHMED ALI

The English Translation of:

تَوْحِيدَ وَ أَسْمَاءَ وَ صِفَاتِ

The Oneness of God

His Names and Attributes

Written by:

Ustād Muḥammad Biyābānī Uskūyī

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Diacritics Guidelines

Symbol	Arabic Letter	Sound	Example
◌َ	أ \ ع	A (normal a)	Mu ^{◌َ} min
◌ِ	ع	A (heavy; middle of throat)	‘Il ^{◌ِ} m
Ā / ā	ا	aa	Jawā ^{◌ِ} d
Ī / ī	ي	ee	Amī ^{◌ِ} r
Ū / ū	و	oo	Mūsā ^{◌ِ}
Ḥ / ḥ	ح / ح	H (heavy; middle of throat)	Ḥ ^{◌ِ} asan
Ṣ / ṣ	ص	S (heavier; emphasized)	Ṣ ^{◌ِ} ifāt
Ṭ / ṭ	ط	T (stronger; emphasized)	Ṭ ^{◌ِ} alib
Dh / dh	ذ	Light dh	Dh ^{◌ِ} ikr
Ḍ / ḍ	ض	Dh (heavier; emphasized)	Riḍā ^{◌ِ}
Z / z	ظ	Dh (between th and z)	Kāz ^{◌ِ} im

Terms

Term	Arabic Transliteration	Translation
(swt)	<i>Subḥānahu Wa Ta‘ālā</i>	Glorified and Exalted is He
(ṣ)	<i>Ṣallallāhu ‘Alayhi Wa Ālih</i>	Blessings of Allah be upon him and his family
(‘a)	<i>‘Alayhi al-Salām</i> <i>‘Alayhā al-Salām</i>	Peace be upon him Peace be upon her
(‘as)	<i>‘Alayhim al-Salām</i>	Peace be upon them
(r)	<i>Riḍwānullāh ‘Alayh</i>	May the pleasure of Allah be upon him

Formatting Conventions

Book names are underlined.

- Eg. al-Kāfī, al-Biḥār, al-Amālī, ‘Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā, etc.
- Except in footnote references.

Ḥadīth Arabic is blue and bolded.

- Eg. **كُلُّ مَوْلُودٍ يُوَدُّ عَلَى الْفِطْرَةِ**

Ḥadīth translation is blue and italicized.

- Eg. *“Everyone was born upon the Fiṭrah”*

Quranic Text is red and bolded.

- Eg. **قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ**

Quran Translation is red and italicized.

- Eg. *“Say, He Allah is One.”*

Words of Scholars/Philosophers/Theologians is green and italicized.

- Eg. *“It has also been said”*

Some *Arabic word transliterations* are italicized.

- Eg. *Ma‘rifah ‘Ilm, Dhāt, Ṣifāt*, etc.

Sūrah references are listed as: ‘Sūrah Name, Verse No.’ in footnotes.

- Eg. Sūrah al-Ra‘d, Verse 10.

Chapter 1

The Foundations of Doctrinal Knowledge: Understanding Divine Recognition and the Meaning of *Ma‘rifah* and ‘*Ilm*

Learning Outcomes of this Chapter:

- Comprehend the significance of doctrinal knowledge (‘*ilm al-i‘tiqādī*) in Islamic thought.
- Appreciate the necessity of divine recognition (*ma‘rifah*) and its role in faith.
- Differentiate between *ma‘rifah* (recognition) and ‘*ilm* (knowledge) in theological discourse.
- Analyze various scholarly perspectives on the conceptual and epistemological distinctions between knowledge and recognition.

Introduction

The pursuit of knowledge is a fundamental aspect of Islamic teachings, and among the most significant forms of knowledge is doctrinal knowledge (‘*ilm al-i‘tiqādī*), which pertains to one’s understanding of fundamental beliefs. Central to this discourse is the *ma‘rifah* of Allah (swt), a concept that extends beyond mere intellectual awareness to a deep, intrinsic acknowledgment of the Divine. Islamic scholars have long debated the nature of *ma‘rifah* and its distinction from ‘*ilm*, exploring whether divine recognition is an innate, intuitive understanding or an acquired intellectual process.

This chapter delves into the importance of theological knowledge, emphasizing the necessity of recognizing Allah (swt) as a fundamental pillar of faith. It also examines the scholarly perspectives on the nuanced differences between *maʿrifah* and *ʿilm*, shedding light on how these concepts shape one’s understanding of divine attributes and the path to certainty (*yaqīn*). By engaging with classical and contemporary discussions, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the role of knowledge and recognition in strengthening one’s doctrinal foundations.

Belief and Recognition: The Actions of the Heart

Religion comprises a set of teachings that encompass both belief and practice, including doctrines (*Aqāʿid*), religious laws (*Aḥkām*), and ethics (*Akhlāq*). While religious laws and ethics regulate human actions, doctrinal beliefs primarily aim to cultivate *maʿrifah*. In this context, action refers to the external movements of the body and limbs. However, human beings also engage in internal actions through their hearts, as belief and recognition originate from the soul.

Emphasizing the voluntary nature of the heart’s actions, Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) states: *“One of the organs of a human being is his heart [soul], through which he understands. The heart is the commander of the body, and the bodily organs do not move without its opinion and command. ... Regarding faith, Allah has enjoined upon the heart affirmation (Iqrār), Maʿrifah, belief (Īmān), contentment (Riḍā), submission (Istislām), and testifying that there is no god but Allah, without any partners. ... This obligatory affirmation and recognition is the action of the heart. ... This is the peak of faith.”*¹

In this narration, Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) distinguishes between the actions of the heart and those of the bodily organs, illustrating that faith (*Īmān*) in its broader sense encompasses both. Since the heart governs all

¹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 2:33-34; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*. Vol 66:23.

other organs and limbs, its actions hold greater significance than those of the external body.

Importance of Recognition of Allah (swt)

The significance of knowledge is intrinsically linked to the status and value of its subject. Since Allah (swt) is beyond all comparison and resemblance, recognizing Him holds unparalleled importance. As the central axis of human existence, His *ma'rifah* constitutes the pinnacle of all religious beliefs. Without this foundational recognition, all other forms of knowledge lose their ultimate purpose and meaning.

Imam Ali ('a), the Commander of the Faithful, emphasizes this reality, stating: *"The essence of His religion is the recognition of God."*¹

He ('a) further asserts: *"The recognition of Allah, the Almighty, is the highest form of recognition."*²

Divine Recognition as the Foundation of Worship and Servitude

The *ma'rifah* of Allah, the Almighty, is one of the fundamental purposes of human creation. Allah (swt) states in the Quran:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

"I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me." (51:56)

However, true worship (*'Ibādah*) is contingent upon recognizing Allah (swt); without recognition, worship remains incomplete. Imam al-Riḍā ('a) affirms this, stating:

أَوَّلُ عِبَادَةِ اللَّهِ مَعْرِفَتُهُ

*"The foundation of worshipping Allah is His recognition."*³

The ultimate objective of a servant is to fulfill their duty towards their Master by attaining true servitude (*'ubūdiyyah*). The highest level of

¹ Imam Ali ('a), *Nahj al-Balāghah*. Sermon #1.

² al-Āmidī, *Taṣnīf Ghurar al-Ḥikam Wa Durar al-Kalim*. Page 8.

³ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, Page 34; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:227.

servitude is achieved through absolute submission and unwavering devotion to Allah (swt). However, this level of spiritual perfection is only attainable through divine recognition. Without it, an individual may unknowingly deviate from true servitude, inadvertently serving others instead of their Creator. This is why Imam al-Ḥusayn (‘a) declares:

أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ جَلَّ ذِكْرُهُ مَا خَلَقَ الْعِبَادَ إِلَّا لِيَعْرِفُوهُ فَإِذَا عَرَفُوهُ عَبْدُوهُ فَإِذَا
عَبْدُوهُ اسْتَعَفَّوْا بِعِبَادَتِهِ عَنْ عِبَادَةِ مَنْ سِوَاهُ

“O people, Allah the Almighty did not create His servants except to recognize Him and worship Him. When they recognize Him, they free themselves from the bondage of others by worshiping Him.”¹

The Superiority of Divine Recognition Over All Other Forms of Knowledge

When individuals cultivate a profound connection with Allah (swt), they assess the significance of all things based on their proximity to Him. Anything that diverts one from Allah (swt) is regarded as inconsequential. Since Allah, the Almighty, is the Creator and Sustainer of all blessings, establishing a relationship with Him and attaining His *ma‘rifah* renders a person independent of everything else. One who internalizes this understanding perceives worldly temptations as trivial and remains unshaken by fear or hardship.²

The recognition of Allah (swt) transforms darkness into enlightenment, incapacity into strength, illness into health, and isolation into love and companionship. It serves as the ultimate source of solace and guidance. Emphasizing the unparalleled value of divine recognition, Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) states:

¹ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 5:312; al-Ṣadūq, *‘Ilal al-Sharā‘i’*. Vol 1:9.

² Of course, this does not mean that a person is not affected by physical weakness, worldly poverty, and physical illness; Rather, it means that despite all these physical difficulties, their soul remains strong because of their relationship with the creator.

“If people understood the worth of recognizing Allah—the Exalted—they would not fix their eyes on the fleeting blessings of this world, which Allah has granted even to His enemies. For them, worldly possessions would be no more valuable than dust beneath their feet. Through the recognition of Allah, they attain blessings and pleasures akin to those of one who eternally resides in the gardens of Paradise among the friends of Allah.”¹

Indeed, the recognition of Allah (swt) is a person’s strength in every fear, their companion in every moment of solitude, their light in every darkness, their fortitude in every hardship, and their cure for every ailment.

The Distinction Between Knowledge (‘*ilm*) and Recognition (Ma‘*rifah*)

A narration from Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) states that the ma‘*rifah* of Allah, the Almighty, serves as a source of comfort and as a companion in times of fear. In continuation of this discussion, it is essential to examine the precise meaning of ma‘*rifah* and how it differs from ‘*ilm*.

The Linguistic Meaning of Ma‘*rifah*

Lexically, ma‘*rifah* is often defined as a form of knowledge. For instance, al-Fayūmī explains: “‘*Araftuhu* (عَرَفْتُهُ) means ‘I knew him’ through one of the five senses. Ma‘*rifah* (مَعْرِفَة) is a noun derived from ‘*arafa* (عَرَفَ).”

Similarly, Ibn Manẓūr defines ‘*Irfān* (عرفان) as knowledge, stating: “*He introduced something to someone, meaning he made him aware of it. He showed him his house and taught him its location. He made it known to him, meaning he provided a sign for it.*”

Aḥmad ibn Fāris identifies two primary meanings for ‘*arafa* (عَرَفَ): one referring to things that are sequential and interconnected, and

¹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 8:347.

the other signifying peace and tranquillity. He affirms that *maʿrifah* and *ʿirfān* align with the second meaning, stating: “*The root letters ‘ayn (ع), ‘rā (ر) and ‘fā (ف) have two valid origins. One indicates the sequence of things connected to one another, while the other signifies tranquillity and assurance.*”¹

This definition, as found in Maqāyīs al-Lughah, suggests that *maʿrifah* denotes a type of knowledge that brings peace and tranquillity. This idea is further supported by the phrase:

من أنكر شيئاً توخّش منه و نبا عنه

“Whoever denies something experiences estrangement from it and withdraws from it.”

This implies that tranquillity is achieved when a person is familiar with what they encounter, possessing a comprehensive and detailed understanding of its attributes and effects. In contrast, a general and vague awareness does not necessarily bring about this sense of security and assurance.

From these linguistic analyses, it becomes evident that while *ʿilm* (knowledge) is a broad and general concept, *maʿrifah* refers to a specific type of knowledge that is accompanied by a sense of peace and tranquillity. The depth of this peace varies depending on the object of recognition. For instance, when one is deeply immersed in recognizing something, it can become their sole focus, surpassing all other concerns.

Thus, *maʿrifah* is a specialized form of perception—one that not only involves awareness but also instills tranquillity. Due to this added dimension, *maʿrifah* cannot be used interchangeably with *ʿilm* or *idrāk* (perception).

In Arabic, *al-maʿrifah* (المعرفة) denotes the direct perception of an entity itself, which engenders *sukūn* (peace/tranquillity). This

¹ Ibn Fāris, *Maqāyīs al-Lughah*. Vol 4:281.

understanding stands in direct contradiction to the linguistic roots of the term and is inconsistent with the contextual usage found in the narrations of the A'imma ('as). Within the framework of these narrations, the recognition of Allah (swt) leads to nearness (*qurb*) to Him, which in turn results in *sukūn*. Such tranquility cannot be attained by the mere recognition of any other being.

The opinions of some scholars about the difference between '*ilm* and *Ma'rifah*

In this section, we explore the differing views of several scholars regarding the distinction between '*ilm* (knowledge) and *ma'rifah* (recognition), with an emphasis on their conceptual and terminological differences as found in Islamic discourse.

Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī's Perspective

In his work Muʿjam al-Furūq al-Lughawīyyah, Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī posits that *ma'rifah* is more specific than '*ilm*, defining *ma'rifah* as the detailed knowledge of a particular thing, which distinguishes it from others. On the other hand, '*ilm* can be either concise or detailed. Al-ʿAskarī further asserts that *ma'rifah* pertains to the perception of simple elements (*basā'it*) and details (*juz'īyyāt*),¹ while '*ilm* pertains to compound and complex things (*murakkabāt*) and overarching or general concepts (*kullīyyāt*).² He claims that *ma'rifah* is related to *idrāk taṣawwūrī* (إدراك تصوّري — perception of imaginings)³, while '*ilm* is associated with *idrāk*

¹ *al-Basā'it* (البسائط) refers to simple or primary entities, while *al-Juz'īyyāt* (الجزئيات) pertains to particulars or specific instances. In Islamic philosophy, *al-Basā'it* denotes fundamental, indivisible realities that are not composed of multiple parts, whereas *al-Juz'īyyāt* represents specific, contingent particulars that exist within a broader ontological framework.

² *al-Murakkabāt* (المركبات) refers to composite or complex entities, whereas *al-Kullīyyāt* (الكليات) signifies universals or general concepts. In philosophical and epistemological discourse, *al-Murakkabāt* denotes entities formed by the combination of multiple elements, while *al-Kullīyyāt* refers to overarching, abstract universals that subsume numerous particular instances.

³ *Idrāk Taṣawwūrī* (إدراك تصوّري) is a philosophical term denoting conceptual perception or apprehension without judgment. It refers to the mind's ability to conceive an object—such as

taṣdīqī (إدراك تصديقي) —confirmative perception)¹. Furthermore, he argues that *maʿrifah* occurs when one understands an object after forgetting it, which he interprets as the reason why the term *ʿĀlim* (one who knows) is used in relation to God, as opposed to *ʿarīf* (one who recognizes).

After discussing these most famous definitions of *maʿrifah*, he says that *“It has also been said that maʿrifah is used when something is understood by its effects, even though its essence is not understood. However, ʿilm is often used when the object’s essence is understood. Therefore, it is said that so-and-so recognizes God instead of saying he knows God.”*²

Shaykh Bahāʾ al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī

Shaykh al-Bahāʾī, may Allah be pleased with him, states:

“In most cases, maʿrifah is attributed to the latter of two perceptions of the same entity, provided that there is an interval between them. That is, when a person first perceives something, subsequently forgets it, and then later recollects it, realizing that it is the same entity they had initially apprehended. This is why the Ahl al-Ḥaqq (the people of truth) are referred to as the Ahl al-ʿIrfān (the people of mystical recognition). As indicated in the narration, ‘Allah (swt) created the souls prior to the bodies, and thus, the souls had awareness of certain ishrāqāt shuhūdiyyah (evident illuminations).’ As Allah (swt) states: ‘Am I not your Lord?’ They said: ‘Yes’ (Quran 7:172), the souls bore witness to the Divine Lordship. However, as they developed ḥubb (attachment) and mawaddah (affection) for the corporeal bodies (abdān ḡulmāniyyah) and became veiled by ḥujub hayūlāniyyah (material barriers), they became heedless of

a human, tree, circle, square, unicorn, or mermaid—without asserting any truth claim about its existence or properties.

¹ In contrast, *Idrāk Taṣdīqī* (إدراك تصديقي) refers to cognitive perception accompanied by judgment or affirmation. This involves asserting propositions about an entity, such as “the tree is tall,” “unicorns do not exist,” or “a circle is not a square,” thereby engaging in epistemic validation or negation.

² Abū Hilal, *Muʿjam al-Furūq al-Lughawīyyah*. Page 500-502.

their Master and Sustainer. When these souls free themselves from the captivity of this abode of deception through spiritual purification and mystical striving (sulūk), detaching themselves from the illusory attachments of the material realm, they regain the recognition of that primordial covenant—a recognition that had become obscured by the passage of time and the transience of worldly existence. This second recognition is nothing but nūr ‘alā nūr (light upon light).”¹

Āyatullāh Ṣāfi Gulpāygānī

Finally, we turn to the perspective of Āyatullāh Ṣāfi Gulpāygānī, may Allah be pleased with him, on this subject. He states:

“Ma‘rifah and ‘irfān (gnosis) refer to the perception of an entity attained through contemplation (tafakkur) and deliberation (tadabbur) upon its effects. It is thus inferior to ‘ilm, which denotes absolute comprehension (idrāk muṭlaq) and is acquired through direct intellectual engagement with the essence of the object itself. In other words, one may assert that ma‘rifah is general and indirect in nature.”

After interpreting the narration:

مَنْ عَرَفَ نَفْسَهُ فَقَدْ عَرَفَ رَبَّهُ

“Whoever recognizes himself recognizes his Lord”, he further elaborates:

“Recognition of Allah (ma‘rifatullāh) is attained through contemplation of His signs (āyāt). Since man acquires this recognition by pondering upon His Af‘āl (Actions) rather than His Dhāt (Essence), we state that he ‘recognizes’ Allah rather than that he ‘knows’ Him.”²

Analyzing these scholars’ opinions

Āyatullāh Ṣāfi Gulpāygānī and Abū Hilāl’s arguments hinge upon the observation that the term  is not explicitly employed in the Quran

¹ Shaykh al-Bahā’ī, *Minhāj al-Barā’ah Fī Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*. Vol 1:318.

² Ṣāfi Gulpāygānī, *Ma‘rifat Hujjat e Khudā*. Page 39-30.

or the narrations of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘as) with regards to Allah (swt). However, the absence of this phrase does not substantiate the claim that *ma‘rifah* entails knowledge of something through its effects, whereas *‘ilm* pertains to direct cognition of the essence of an entity. This proposition lacks textual substantiation, as we find instances where the A‘immah (‘as) explicitly employ the concept of *‘ilm* with regards to Allah (swt). For example, Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) said:

ثَلَاثُ هُنَّ مِنْ عَلَامَاتِ الْمُؤْمِنِ عِلْمُهُ بِاللَّهِ وَ مَنْ يُحِبُّ وَ مَنْ يُبْغِضُ

*“There are three things that are among the signs of a believer: his knowledge of Allah, whom he loves, and whom he dislikes.”*¹ He also said:

أَفْضَلُ الْعِبَادَةِ الْعِلْمُ بِاللَّهِ

*“The best form of worship is the knowledge of Allah”*²

These instances indicate that the terms *‘ilm* and *ma‘rifah* are employed in an overlapping manner in reference to Divine cognition, thereby aligning with the lexical meaning of *ma‘rifah*.

Furthermore, in linguistic usage, *ma‘rifah* is not employed to denote cognition of a thing through its effects, nor are the effects mentioned in this context understood as signs (*āyat*). On the contrary, linguistic analyses explicitly negate this meaning, and the narrations provide no evidence in its support. Accordingly, human cognition of God through His effects—without consideration of His Essence—is only defensible on the assumption that *ma‘rifah* itself is divinely bestowed. In such a case, God Himself constitutes the object of cognition, even if effects function as the epistemic means. It may be suggested that a distinction exists between cognition of a thing through its effects and direct cognition of the thing itself, such that the former yields a vague and indeterminate knowledge, whereas the latter constitutes encompassing cognition.

¹ al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*. Vol 1:215.

² al-Majlisī. Vol 1:215.

However, God, who is a manifest and transcendent reality, cannot have a recognition that is vague and superficial because He is more manifest than all manifestations. If cognition of God occurs through God Himself, ambiguity is excluded; if it occurs through any other means, it cannot be considered as *ma'rifah* of God.¹ On this basis, the definition of *ma'rifah* as cognition of the thing through its effects stands in tension with the effects attributed to *ma'rifah*. These effects—such as intimacy with God, tranquility, and inner peace—are exclusive to cognition of God and do not arise from cognition of other objects. While cognition of certain divine signs may also produce such effects, this is so only insofar as the signs are His signs. In this respect, such cognition ultimately reduces to *ma'rifah* of God.

As we will discuss in future chapters, pondering the signs and effects of Allah (swt) is not the only way to recognize Him. Instead, according to the narrations, Allah (swt) bestows His recognition to the creatures. Even recognition through pondering on the signs of Allah (swt) is His recognition given by Him. And if we were to assume that recognizing the effects and thinking about them is the sole way to recognize Allah (swt), can we say the prophets and A'imma (‘as) recognize Allah (swt) only through his signs? Other people can also use this alternative method if that is not the case.

Key Points

1. **Religion** (*al-dīn*) constitutes a system of doctrinal beliefs (*i'tiqādāt*) and practical obligations (*a'māl*).
2. **Beliefs** (*i'tiqādāt qalbiyyah*) are internal acts of the heart (*'amal al-qalb*). Since the heart governs the faculties of the body, its actions hold primacy over physical deeds.

¹ This will be discussed at length in later chapters.

3. **Recognition of Allah**, the Almighty (*maʿrifatullāh al-ʿAzīz*) serves as the foundation of religion and represents the most exalted form of knowledge.
4. **The attainment of Divine recognition** is among the ultimate objectives of human existence and creation.
5. **Divine recognition** is a prerequisite for servitude (*ʿubūdiyyah*), and such servitude liberates the individual from dependence upon creation, rendering them truly self-sufficient (*istighnāʾ ʿan al-khalq*).
6. **Maʿrifah of Allah (swt)** serves as a source of tranquility in moments of fear, illumination in states of darkness, and a means of spiritual well-being amid affliction and suffering.
7. **Recognition** (*maʿrifah*) is a form of comprehension (*idrāk*) that engenders inner peace and tranquility (*tumaʾnīnah wa sukūn*).
8. **Knowledge** (*ʿilm*) and understanding (*idrāk*) possess a broader connotation than recognition, as recognition encompasses both knowledge and the additional quality of inner serenity.
9. The conceptualization of recognition as merely ‘perception of an entity through its effects’ contradicts both its lexical definition and the narrations of Ahl al-Bayt (ʿas).
10. Both “**knowledge of Allah**” (*ʿilm billāh*) and “**recognition of Allah**” (*maʿrifatullāh*) are employed within the narrations, indicating their distinct but interrelated epistemic dimensions.
11. **Recognition of Allah**, the Almighty, is not restricted to inferring His existence through signs (*āyāt*); rather, Allah (swt) bestows Divine recognition upon His servants and bestows His recognition to them through His will.

Chapter 2

Fiṭrah and Divine Recognition: The Innate Awareness of Allah (swt) - Quranic Verses – Part 1

Learning Outcomes of this Chapter

- Attain familiarity with the lexical and terminological meanings of *fiṭrah* (فطرة) in the Arabic language.
- Understand the theological significance of the innate recognition (*maʿrifah*) of Allah (swt).
- Comprehend the Quranic description of Islam as *ṣibghatullāh* (the divine imprint) and *ḥanīfiyyah* (the primordial uprightness).
- Analyze Quranic verses that categorically negate any epistemic doubt regarding the existence of Allah (swt).

Introduction

In the preceding discussion, we established that *maʿrifah* denotes the direct apprehension (*idrāk*) of an entity in its essence (*ʿayn al-shayʿ*). This comprehension is not necessarily in opposition to knowledge attained through the effects (*athār*) of the object. Rather, both modes of cognition coexist within the broader epistemological framework of Islamic thought.

This chapter delves into the etymology and conceptual scope of *fiṭrah*, followed by an examination of select Quranic verses that affirm the intrinsic (*fiṭrī*) nature of divine recognition (*maʿrifatullāh*) in human consciousness.

Lexical Analysis of *Fiṭrah*

The term *fiṭrah* (فِطْرَة) derives from the trilateral root *fa-ṭa-ra* (ف - ط - ر).

Aḥmad ibn Fāris, in *Maqāyīs al-Lughah*, defines its fundamental meaning as “splitting” or “unveiling,” akin to the breaking of a fast (*al-fiṭr* – الفِطْر). The verbal noun *al-faṭr* (الفَطْر) is employed in contexts such as *faṭartu al-shāh faṭran idhā ḥalabtahā* (فَطَرْتُ الشَّاهَ فَطْرًا إِذَا حَلَبْتَهَا), referring to exposing the udder while milking a sheep. In theological discourse, *al-fiṭrah* is associated with the innate disposition instilled by Allah (swt) within human beings.¹

Al-Fīrūzābādī, in *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, expands on these meanings, explaining that *al-faṭr* (الفَطْر) signifies *al-shaqq* (الشَّقْ – a fissure or a narrow opening). The term undergoes semantic variation depending on its morphological form: with *ḍamma* (ُ) or *ḍammatayn* (ُ), it refers to “a lethal variety of fungus” (*ḍarb min al-kam’ah qattāl* – ضرب من الكنء قتال – *ru’ūsuh* – العنب إذا بدت رؤوسه – *al-‘inab idhā badat*).

Within the context of Islamic metaphysics, *fiṭrah* refers to the primordial nature upon which human beings are created, as mentioned in the Quran:

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا ۚ فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا ۚ لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ۚ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

“So, direct your face toward the religion, as one inclining to truth—the *fiṭrah* of Allah upon which He has created [all] people. No change should there be in the creation of Allah.” (30:30).

This innate disposition is not merely a passive inclination but an active epistemic state that allows human beings to recognize their Creator.²

¹ Ibn Fāris, *Maqāyīs al-Lughah*. Vol 4:510.

² al-Fīrūzābādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*. Vol 2:193.

Al-Zamakhsharī, in *Asās al-Balāghah*, states that the phrase “*sayf fuṭār*” (سَيْفُ فُطَار) refers to a newly forged sword that has not yet been placed in its scabbard, signifying something in its original, unaltered state. The term also appears in the proverb “*lā khayr fī al-ra’ī al-faṭīr*” (لا خير في الرأي الفطير), meaning, “There is no good in an opinion formed hastily,” which implies that *fiṭrah* (innate disposition) is associated with a state of completeness and maturity rather than premature judgment.¹

Ibn Manẓūr, in *Lisān al-‘Arab*, defines *faṭr* as *shaqq* (شَقَّ – to split or cleave). In the context of fasting, *fiṭr* denotes the act of breaking the fast by opening one’s mouth to eat. The phrase “*sayf fuṭār*” is used to describe a sword with cracks or fissures, further reinforcing the semantic link between *faṭr* and the concept of breaking or emerging. The verb *faṭara* (فَطَرَ) is also used to describe the eruption of a camel’s teeth through the gums. Similarly, the derivatives “*infīṭār*” (انْفَطَر) and “*tafaṭṭar*” (تَفَطَّر) are employed in reference to tears or ruptures in fabric, as well as the emergence of vegetation from cracks in the soil (*tafaṭṭara* referring to the sprouting of plants).²

The noun *al-fuṭr* (الْفُطْر) refers to a seedling that has just sprouted, as well as to a type of white mushroom that grows from the earth by ‘splitting’ it open. The word *al-fuṭr* is likewise used to describe the budding of grapes on a vine, reinforcing the association of *fiṭrah* with natural emergence and development.

When the verb *faṭara* is attributed to Allah (swt), it signifies His act of creation and origination (*ibdā’ wa ibtida’* – إبداع وابتداء). The term *al-fīṭrah* is thus linked to divine innovation and the intrinsic nature with which Allah (swt) has endowed creation....”³

Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī, in *Kitāb al-‘Ayn*, defines *al-fuṭr* as a type of plant (*al-kam’ah* – الكَمْأَة), while *al-faṭr* refers to a small quantity

¹ al-Zamakhsharī, *Asās al-Balāghah*. Vol 2:28.

² Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*. Vol 10:285-286.

³ al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Fā’iq fī Gharīb al-Ḥadīth*. Page 128.

of milk that has just been drawn from an animal. He further explains that *faṭara* describes the emergence of a camel's teeth through its gums, illustrating its association with natural development. The verb *faṭartu* (فَطَرْتُ) is used in the context of kneading dough or clay and immediately cooking it before it has fully risen, as well as using incompletely mixed clay in construction.

Al-Farāhīdī also interprets the Quranic phrase:

فَطَرَ اللَّهُ الْخَلْقَ

“Allah initiated the creation”

as a reference to divine origination, signifying both the act of bringing entities into existence and establishing them upon an innate disposition (*fiṭrah*). He elucidates that *al-fiṭrah* in this context denotes the primordial religion (*dīn*) embedded within human nature, through which Allah (swt) has instilled the recognition (*ma'rifah*) of His Lordship in all of creation. Additionally, in the domain of textiles, the verbs “*infiṭār*” (انْفَطَرَ) and “*tafaṭṭar*” (تَفَطَّرَ) are used to denote the tearing of fabric, reinforcing the concept of splitting and emergence.”¹

A comprehensive analysis of linguistic sources such as Lisān al-‘Arab and Mu‘jam Maqāyīs al-Lughah reveals that the root *faṭr* (فَطَرَ) and its derivatives encompass the following meanings:

1. “*Sayf Fuṭār*” (سَيْفُ فُطَارٍ) – A newly forged sword that has not yet been used or placed in a scabbard, symbolizing originality and purity.
2. “*Faṭīr*” (فُطِيرٍ) – Dough that has just been kneaded and has not risen, or an opinion formulated hastily without sufficient reflection.
3. “*Fiṭrah*” (فِطْرَةٌ) – The act of creation, origination, and divine innovation (*ibdā‘ wa ibtida‘* – إِبْدَاعٌ وَابْتِدَاءٌ).

¹ al-Farāhīdī, *Kitāb al-‘Ayn*. Page 747.

4. **“Fuṭr” (فُطِرَ)** – Vegetation, particularly mushrooms, that emerge from the earth by splitting the soil.
5. **“Fuṭr” (فُطِرَ)** – The eruption of teeth through the gums, signifying natural emergence and development.
6. **“Fuṭr” (فُطِرَ)** – The budding of grape clusters from the vine, reinforcing the notion of organic growth and formation.
7. **“Anā Faṭartuhā” (أَنَا فُطَرْتُهَا)** – A phrase used by Arabs to describe the act of digging a well for the first time, signifying initiation and establishment.

Conclusion

An analysis of *fiṭr* (فطر) and its derivatives within classical Arabic lexicons suggests that its core meanings revolve around the concepts of initiation, origination, and creation. The term conveys the idea of bringing something into existence in its primordial form, as well as processes of emergence and development. Additionally, it carries nuanced meanings related to prominence, separation, and the unfolding of natural phenomena, all of which reinforce its theological significance in relation to human disposition (*fiṭrah*), divine creativity, and the inherent recognition of Allah (swt).

Innate Recognition (*Maʿrifah Fiṭriyyah*) of Allah (swt) in the Holy Quran

The Verse of *Fiṭrah*

Allah (swt) states in the Holy Quran:

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا ۚ فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا ۚ لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ
اللَّهِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

“Turn your face towards the religion, inclining towards the truth—[in accordance with] the innate nature (*fiṭrah*) of Allah upon which He has

created [all] people. There is no alteration in the creation of Allah. That is the correct religion, but most people do not know.”¹

This verse holds profound theological significance, highlighting the divine *fiṭrah*—the primordial nature upon which human beings are created.

Firstly, Allah (swt) commands His servants to adhere to the religion without deviation. Here, *dīn* (religion) refers to servitude (*‘ibādah*) to Allah (swt), as He has prescribed a set of obligations for His creation across different times and places. This verse instructs believers to submit to Allah (swt)’s Will in the manner He has decreed, ensuring that they do not stray from the essence of servitude.

Furthermore, Allah (swt) affirms that this *fiṭrah*—the innate disposition of creation—is attributed to Him. It is an intrinsic part of human existence, established since the beginning of creation, and remains immutable. The phrase *“There is no alteration in the creation of Allah”* underscores the unchanging nature of this divine imprint within humanity. Although human beings may neglect or become unaware of their *fiṭrah*, its fundamental existence remains intact.

The Quran reiterates this concept in multiple verses, emphasizing that when people are asked about their Creator, their innate disposition inclines them towards the recognition of Allah (swt). However, external influences, heedlessness, and worldly distractions may obscure this inherent awareness.

The Universality and Unchanging Nature of Divine Religion

The latter part of the verse establishes that true religion is firmly grounded and unalterable. Every prophet has conveyed the same essential message of monotheism (*Tawḥīd*) and submission to Allah (swt). The Holy Quran reinforces this universality:

¹ Sūrah al-Rūm, Verse 30.

إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ

“Indeed, the religion with Allah is Islam.”¹

Similarly, Allah (swt) declares regarding Prophet Ibrāhīm (‘a):

مَا كَانَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ يَهُودِيًّا وَلَا نَصْرَانِيًّا وَلَكِنْ كَانَ حَنِيفًا مُّسْلِمًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

“Ibrāhīm was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he was upright and a Muslim, and he was not among the polytheists.”²

Furthermore, in Sūrah Āl ‘Imrān, Allah (swt) explicitly states:

أَفَغَيْرَ دِينِ اللَّهِ يَبْغُونَ وَلَهُ أَسْلَمَ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ طَوْعًا وَكَرْهًا وَإِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٨٣﴾ قُلْ آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنْزِلَ عَلَيْنَا وَمَا أُنْزِلَ عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطِ وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَالنَّبِيُّونَ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿٨٤﴾ وَمَنْ يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ ﴿٨٥﴾

“Do they seek a religion other than Allah (swt)’s, while to Him submits everything in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly, and to Him they will be returned? Say: We believe in Allah and what has been revealed to us, and what was revealed to Ibrāhīm, Ismā‘īl, Ishāq, Ya‘qūb, and the tribes, and what was given to Mūsā, ‘Īsā, and the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between them, and to Him do we submit. And whoever desires a religion other than Islam, it shall not be accepted from him, and in the Hereafter, he will be among the losers.”³

These verses emphasize that divine religion, rooted in *fiṭrah*, remains unchanged across generations, reinforcing the universality of Islam as the final and perfected divine path.

¹ Sūrah Āl ‘Imrān, Verse 19.

² Sūrah Āl ‘Imrān, Verse 67.

³ Sūrah Āl ‘Imrān, Verses 83-85.

Narrations on *Fiṭrah*

Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) expounds upon the verse:

فَطَرَتِ اللَّهُ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا

by stating:

فَطَرَهُمْ جَمِيعاً عَلَى التَّوْحِيدِ

*“Allah has created all human beings upon Tawḥīd.”*¹

In another narration, Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) further clarifies:

*“Fiṭrah is Islam. When Allah (swt) took the covenant from humanity, He created them as monotheists.”*²

Moreover, narrations emphasize that *fiṭrah* is fundamentally tied to *ma‘rifah* (cognition and recognition of Allah). Imam al-Bāqir (‘a) elaborates on this in his discourse with Zurārah regarding this verse:

“When Allah took the covenant from them concerning the recognition (ma‘rifah) of His Lordship, He created them upon Tawḥīd.”

Zurārah then inquired whether Allah (swt) directly addressed them. Imam al-Bāqir (‘a) lowered his blessed head and responded:

لَوْ لَا ذَلِكَ لَمْ يَعْلَمُوا مَنْ رَبُّهُمْ وَلَا مَنْ رَازِقُهُمْ

*“If it were not so, they would not have recognized their Sustainer.”*³

The linguistic analysis of *fiṭrah* reveals that it denotes the act of initiating and originating. The Quranic discourse, along with Prophetic and Imāmic explanations, establishes that Allah (swt) has created human beings upon the *fiṭrah* of Tawḥīd, Islam, and intrinsic recognition (*ma‘rifah*) of His Lordship from the inception of their existence. This divine nature is immutable—humans have never been, nor will they ever

¹ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 3/278; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 2:12.

² “Covenant” in this narration and the coming narrations refers to the covenant humans made with Allah (swt) during the previous worlds. These previous worlds will be discussed in future chapters.

³ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 330.

be, separated from it. However, while *fiṭrah* remains an inherent reality, external circumstances may obscure its presence, necessitating divine guidance through revelation, tests and calamities to reawaken this innate recognition.

The Verse of *Ṣibghatullāh* (صِبْغَةُ اللَّهِ)

In Sūrah al-Baqarah, Allah (swt) says:

“And they say: Be Jews or Christians, [so] you will be guided. Say: Nay! [We follow] the religion of Ibrāhīm, the Ḥanīf, and he was not of the polytheists. Say: We believe in Allah and in what has been revealed to us, and in what was revealed to Ibrāhīm, Ismā‘īl, Ishāq, Ya‘qūb, and the tribes, and in what was given to Mūsā and ‘Isā, and in what was given to the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him do we submit. So if they believe in the like of what you believe in, then they are surely guided; but if they turn away, then [know that] they are only [steeped] in defiance. Allah will suffice you against them, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing.”

صِبْغَةُ اللَّهِ وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ مِنَ اللَّهِ صِبْغَةً وَنَحْنُ لَهُ عَابِدُونَ

Ṣibghatullāh (the colour of Allah)—and who is better than Allah in colouring? And to Him alone do we worship.”¹

In this verse, Allah (swt) instructs believers that, contrary to the claims of the Jews and Christians—who assert that guidance is exclusive to their respective religions—true guidance lies in believing in Allah (swt) and all that He has revealed through His prophets, without making distinctions among them. In essence, guidance equates to absolute obedience, wholehearted submission, and sincere servitude to Allah (swt). If an individual attributes obedience to any entity besides Allah (swt), thereby following another in a manner reserved for Him alone, they have effectively assigned divine authority to someone else. Such a person

¹ Sūrah al-Baqarah, Verses 135-138.

distances themselves from the ranks of Allah (swt)’s sincere servants and removes the divine mark of servitude from their being. The most honorable identity and distinction one can bear is the sign of their Creator and Sustainer.

The term *ṣibghatullāh* (صِبْغَةُ اللَّهِ), often translated as “the colour of Allah,” signifies the divine imprint upon human beings—an inherent disposition (*fiṭrah*) towards servitude to Allah (swt). This divine mark of servitude is the most exalted state for a human being, reflecting one’s ultimate submission and obedience. When an individual ascribes obedience to any authority besides Allah (swt), they have, in essence, attributed divine authority to another entity, thereby deviating from pure monotheism (*tawḥīd*). Such deviation results in the erasure of one’s divine identity and detachment from the ranks of the sincere servants of Allah (swt). This concept aligns closely with another Quranic verse:

“The fiṭrah of Allah upon which He has created all people. There is no altering the creation of Allah. That is the correct religion, but most people do not know.”¹

Both verses emphasize that all human beings are inherently created with the divine imprint of servitude to Allah (swt). This *ṣibghah* (divine colour) represents the primordial covenant between human beings and their Creator, wherein they were endowed with the intrinsic recognition (*ma‘rifah*) of His Lordship.

Islamic narrations further elucidate the theological depth of *ṣibghatullāh*. Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) interprets *ṣibghatullāh* as Islam², reinforcing the idea that this divine colour symbolizes absolute submission to Allah (swt). However, another narration from Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) provides a more specific exegesis, stating that *ṣibghatullāh* refers to the

¹ Sūrah al-Rūm, Verse 30.

² al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 3:280; al-‘Ayyāshī, *Tafsir al-‘Ayyāshī*. Vol 1:62.

wilāyah (divinely appointed guardianship) of the Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali (‘a), at the time of the primordial covenant (*Mithāq*)¹.

These two interpretations are not contradictory but rather complementary. The recognition (*ma‘rifah*) and acceptance of *wilāyah*—the divinely ordained leadership of Imam Ali (‘a)—is a prerequisite for the true recognition of Allah (swt). Consequently, *ṣibghatullāh*, as the divine imprint upon creation, encompasses both the recognition of Allah (swt)’s Lordship and the acceptance of His divinely appointed authority on Earth. The verse thus affirms that the most exalted *ṣibghah* (divine identity) that a person can bear is their adherence to *wilāyah*, as it is the means through which one attains the full recognition of Allah (swt).

The Quranic concept of *ṣibghatullāh* signifies the intrinsic divine imprint in humans, manifesting through Islam, *ma‘rifah*, and *wilāyah*. This divine colour represents complete submission to Allah (swt), aligning one’s identity with divine guidance and linking Islam to *wilāyah*.

The Verse of *Afillāhi Shakk* (أَفِي اللَّهِ شَكٌّ)

In Sūrah Ibrāhīm, Allah (swt) questions:

أَلَمْ يَأْتِكُمْ نَبَأُ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ قَوْمِ نُوحٍ وَعَادٍ وَثَمُودَ ۚ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ لَا يَعْلَمُهُمْ إِلَّا اللَّهُ ۚ جَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَرَدُّوا أَيْدِيَهُمْ فِي أَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَقَالُوا إِنَّا كَفَرْنَا بِمَا أُرْسِلْتُمْ بِهِ وَإِنَّا لَفِي شَكٍّ مِمَّا تَدْعُونَنَا إِلَيْهِ مُرِيبٍ ﴿٩﴾ قَالَتْ رُسُلُهُمْ أَفِي اللَّهِ شَكٌّ فَاطِرِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۖ يَدْعُوكُمْ لِيَغْفِرَ لَكُمْ مِنْ ذُنُوبِكُمْ وَيُؤَخِّرَكُمْ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى

“Has the account of those before you—the people of Nūh, ‘Ād, and Thamūd, and those after them—not reached you? None knows them but Allah. Their apostles came to them with clear arguments, yet they thrust their hands into their mouths and said: ‘Surely we deny that with which you have been sent, and we are indeed in grave doubt concerning that to which you invite us.’ Their apostles said: ‘Is there any doubt about Allah,

¹ al-‘Ayyāshī, *Tafsir al-‘Ayyāshī*. Vol 1:62.

the Originator of the heavens and the earth? He invites you to forgive your sins and grant you respite until an appointed term.'''¹

These verses establish the existence of Allah (swt) as beyond doubt, affirming that His *ma'rifah* is *fiṭrī* (innate). As demonstrated in the preceding verses, all human beings possess an inherent recognition of Allah (swt) from the moment of their creation. However, according to narrations, Allah (swt) causes His servants to forget this recognition ² upon entering this world. The prophets serve as the means by which Allah (swt) lifts this veil of forgetfulness, thereby making Himself manifest to His servants through divine guidance.

The impossibility of doubting Allah (swt)'s existence arises from this inherent recognition. Those who are unaware of Allah (swt) lack *ma'rifah* of Him, rendering denial or doubt meaningless, as one cannot reject or question that which they do not recognize. Conversely, those who attain this recognition cannot doubt it, for it is Allah (swt) Himself who grants it. However, after receiving this recognition, individuals retain free will—either to accept and submit or to reject and rebel. Thus, while Allah (swt)'s existence is not subject to doubt, human beings exercise their volition in choosing between disbelief (*kufṛ*), rejection (*takdhīb*), submission (*islām*), and faith (*īmān*).

In subsequent discussions, the theological principle that divine recognition is an act of Allah (swt) will be examined in greater depth. Since He instills His recognition within human nature at the moment of creation, it follows that *ma'rifah* of Allah (swt) is neither acquired nor contingent upon subjective reasoning or rational inquiry. Therefore, there is no epistemic space for doubt regarding His existence.

In conclusion, this verse, like the preceding ones, reaffirms that the recognition of Allah (swt) is innate (*fiṭrī*), as it is a direct consequence

¹ Sūrah Ibrāhīm, Verses 9-10.

² Here, the author refers to the recognition humans got in the worlds that preceded this world, like *'Ālam al-Dharr*. In future chapters, this issue of humans not remembering the Covenant and recognition from the previous worlds will be discussed in more depth.

of His divine action. Consequently, no human being can harbour genuine doubt regarding His existence.

The Verse of *Ḥunafā' Lillāh* (حُنَفَاءَ لِلَّهِ)

Allah (swt) command in the Holy Quran that:

فَاجْتَنِبُوا الرِّجْسَ مِنَ الْأَوْثَانِ وَاجْتَنِبُوا قَوْلَ الزُّورِ حُنَفَاءَ لِلَّهِ غَيْرَ مُشْرِكِينَ بِهِ

“...Therefore, avoid the uncleanness of the idols and avoid false words being upright for Allah, not associating aught with Him...”¹

Avoiding polytheism (*shirk*) and idolatry is an act of *ḥanifiyyah*—uprightness that entails no deviation. Every human being is born with an inherent recognition of Allah (swt), divine unity (*tawḥīd*), and submission. Allah (swt) has imprinted upon them the mark and sign of servitude. Consequently, a person who adheres to the path of monotheism and servitude naturally distances themselves from polytheism and falsehood. This alignment with *fiṭrah* (innate disposition) is free from deviation. However, one who engages in polytheism and adheres to falsehood has deviated from their innate nature.

The narrations (*riwāyāt*) from the A'immaḥ (‘as) interpret this verse within the framework of divine unity (*tawḥīd*), paralleling the meaning of the verse of *fiṭrah*. Imam al-Bāqir (‘a) states regarding this verse:

“Being ‘ḥanīf’ (upright) corresponds to the innate disposition (fiṭrah) upon which Allah has created people. There is no alteration in Allah (swt)’s creation. He has formed them upon His recognition.”²

Similarly, in the exegetical discussions of the verse of *fiṭrah*, it is stated:

¹ Sūrah Ḥajj, Verses 30-31.

² al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 2:12 and al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 64:135.

“Allah has created them upon monotheism.”¹

Thus, both verses affirm that human beings are inherently predisposed toward *tawḥīd*, and deviation from this path constitutes a corruption of one's innate nature.

Key Points

1. According to the verses of the Holy Quran, the recognition (*maʿrifah*) of Allah (swt) is innate (*fiṭrī*) to human beings.
2. In its essence, *fiṭrah* refers to originating and innovating something or unveiling and bringing forth what is inherent.
3. *Fiṭrah* embodies the *maʿrifah* of Allah (swt) and submission (*islām*) to Him, with which human beings have been created from the very beginning.
4. *Islām*—meaning submission—is the innate disposition of human beings and the universal religion of all divine prophets.
5. Allah (swt) has imprinted His recognition upon His servants, marking them with His divine sign (*ṣiḡhatullāh*).
6. All human beings recognize Allah (swt) through His own introduction of Himself. When reminded by divine prophets, they become consciously aware of this recognition; thus, no room for doubt regarding Allah (swt) remains.
7. Recognizing and submitting to Allah (swt) aligns with human *fiṭrah*, whereas failing to submit constitutes a deviation from one's innate nature.

¹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 2:13; al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 330; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 3:277.

Chapter 3

Fiṭrah and Divine Recognition: The Innate Awareness of Allah (swt) - Quranic Verses – Part 2

Learning Outcomes For This Chapter

- Recognize that all human beings inherently possess the recognition (*ma 'rifah*) of Allah (swt).
- Understand how humanity was originally a unified community (*ummah wāḥidah*) before Allah (swt) sent the prophets.
- Explain the relationship between prophetic reminders and the innate recognition (*fiṭrī ma 'rifah*) of Allah (swt).
- Analyze the impact of calamities on human beings and their spiritual awareness.

Introduction

In the previous chapter, it was established that the recognition of Allah (*ma 'rifah*) is innate (*fiṭrī*) within human beings. The term *fiṭrah* denotes an act of origination and initiation. Allah (swt) has created humanity with an intrinsic awareness of His existence, which is termed innate recognition (*fiṭrī ma 'rifah*). The previous discussion examined certain Quranic verses affirming this concept. In this chapter, additional verses that reinforce this idea will be analyzed.

The Verses of *La'in Sa'altahum* (لَئِنْ سَأَلْتَهُمْ مِنْ خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ)

وَلَئِنْ سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَسَخَّرَ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهُ ۗ فَأَنَّى يُؤْفَكُونَ ﴿٦١﴾ اللَّهُ يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَيَقْدِرُ لَهُ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِكُلِّ

شَيْءٍ عَلَيْهِمْ (٦٢) وَلَئِنْ سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ نَزَّلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَحْيَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ مِنَ
بَعْدِ مَوْتِهَا لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهُ قُلِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ (٦٣)

“And if you ask them, who created the heavens and the earth and made the sun and the moon subservient, they will certainly say, Allah. Whence are they then turned away? Allah makes abundant the means of subsistence for whom He pleases of His servants and straitens them for whom (He pleases) surely Allah is Cognizant of all things. And if you ask them, Who is it that sends down water from the clouds, then gives life to the earth with it after its death, they will certainly say, Allah. Say: All praise is due to Allah. Nay, most of them do not understand.”¹

قُلْ لِمَنِ الْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهَا إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ (٨٤) سَيَقُولُونَ لِلَّهِ قُلْ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ (٨٥) قُلْ مَنْ رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ السَّبْعِ وَرَبُّ الْعَرْشِ الْعَظِيمِ (٨٦)
سَيَقُولُونَ لِلَّهِ قُلْ أَفَلَا تَتَّقُونَ (٨٧) قُلْ مَنْ بِيَدِهِ مَلَكُوتُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ يُجِيرُ
وَلَا يُجَارُ عَلَيْهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ (٨٨) سَيَقُولُونَ لِلَّهِ قُلْ فَأَنَّى تُسْحَرُونَ (٨٩)

“Say: Whose is the earth, and whoever is therein, if you know? They will say: Allah (swt) ’s. Say: Will you not then mind? Say: Who is the Lord of the seven heavens and the Lord of the mighty dominion? They will say: (This is) Allah (swt) ’s. Say: Will you not then guard (against evil)? Say: Who is it in Whose hand is the kingdom of all things and Who gives succour, but against Him, succour is not given, if you do but know? They will say: (This is) Allah (swt) ’s. Say: From whence are you then deceived?”²

These verses affirm that every human being possesses an inherent recognition of Allah (swt). When reminded by divine prophets, individuals acknowledge Him as the Creator, Sustainer, and Supreme Authority. Thus, through their innate recognition and prophetic guidance, humans come to realize that Allah (swt) is their Creator, the One who regulates their affairs and provides for them. However, due to the limitations of human perception, they cannot perceive Allah (swt) through their senses at will.

¹ Sūrah al-‘Ankabūt, Verses 61-63.

² Sūrah al-Mu’minūn, Verses 84-89.

His recognition transcends empirical experience, rendering Him beyond the grasp of limited human faculties. Consequently, He is referred to as “Allah,” signifying that while He is recognized, human beings remain dependent on Him and incapable of fully comprehending Him through sensory perception alone.

Zurārah narrates from Imam al-Bāqir (‘a) that the Holy Prophet (ṣ) stated:

كُلُّ مَوْلُودٍ يُوَلَّدُ عَلَى الْفِطْرَةِ يَعْنِي عَلَى الْمَعْرِفَةِ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ خَالِقُهُ فَذَلِكَ قَوْلُهُ وَ لَئِنْ سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهَ.

“Every child is born with innate nature (fiṭrah), meaning that he inherently recognizes that Allah, the Almighty, is his Creator. This is the meaning of the verse: ‘If you ask them, Who is the Creator of the heavens and the earth? They will say, Allah.’”¹

In another narration, Abū Hāshim al-Ja‘farī asked Imam al-Jawād (‘a) about the meaning of “Wāḥid” (One). The Imam (‘a) responded:

الَّذِي اجْتَمَعَ الْأَلْسُنُ عَلَيْهِ بِالتَّوْحِيدِ كَمَا قَالَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ وَ لَئِنْ سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهَ

“‘Wāḥid’ means that all tongues acknowledge His monotheism, as Allah, the Almighty, states: ‘If you ask them Who is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, they will say, Allah.’”²

Similarly, in another narration, Imam al-Jawād (‘a) states:

“‘Wāḥid’ means that all tongues concur on His oneness.”³

The exegesis of these verses and narrations illustrates that the recognition of divine unity (*tawḥīd*) is ingrained within all human beings.

¹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 2:12; al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 331; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 3:279.

² al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 83; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 3:208.

³ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 82; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 3:208.

This recognition is universal and inherent, rather than acquired. If knowledge of monotheism, lordship, creation, and divinity were acquired, it would not be an intrinsic and universal aspect of human nature. Hence, the Quran and the teachings of the A'imma (‘as) affirm that the recognition of Allah (swt) is an innate truth embedded in human existence.

Verse of Humanity Before Prophethood (كَانَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً)

كَانَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً فَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ النَّبِيِّينَ مُبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنْذِرِينَ وَأَنْزَلَ مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ لِيَحْكُمَ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ فِي مَا اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ ۚ وَمَا اخْتَلَفَ فِيهِ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ أُوتُوهُ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَتْهُمْ الْبَيِّنَاتُ بَغْيًا بَيْنَهُمْ ۚ فَهَدَى اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لِمَا اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ مِنَ الْحَقِّ بِإِذْنِهِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ (٢١٣)

“(All) people were a single nation. So Allah raised prophets as bearers of good news and as warners. He revealed with them the Book with truth that it might judge between people in that in which they differed. None but the very people who were given it differed about it after clear arguments had come to them, revolting among themselves. So Allah has guided by His will those who believe the truth about which they differed, and Allah guides whom He pleases to the right path.”¹

This verse has been the subject of various exegetical interpretations regarding the nature of human unity before the advent of prophets. Some commentators have erroneously suggested that Allah (swt) sent prophets to cause discord among the *ummah* (nation). This misinterpretation arises from altering the understanding of the term *ikhtilāf* (إِخْتِلَاف – they differed), interpreting it as a reference to differing destinies or pre-existing disputes within the community that necessitated the sending of prophets.

For instance, al-Zamakhsharī interprets:

كَانَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً

¹ Sūrah al-Baqarah, Verse 213.

as a reference to their adherence to Islam, asserting that Allah (swt) only sent prophets after people fell into disagreement: “*The phrase ‘people were a single nation’ means they belonged to the religion of Islam. ‘God sent His prophets’ means that they disagreed, so God sent the prophets. The word ‘ikhtilāf’ (disagreement) is omitted here, but it is implied by the phrase ‘to rule among the people in what they disagree.’*”¹

Similarly, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī states: “*The people were a united nation upon righteousness, then they disagreed. The root cause of their differences was oppression, jealousy, and conflict over worldly matters.*”²

Some exegetical interpretations of the verse posit that the *raison d’être* for the advent of prophets was communal discord rather than unity.³ While this interpretation may resonate with prevailing social norms, it appears to contradict the explicit wording of the verse. The verse suggests that the appointment of prophets was necessitated by the existence of unity within the *ummah*.

An Alternative Interpretation: Unity Preceded Prophethood

The late Āyatullāh Mālikī Miyānjī, may Allah be pleased with him, presents a different understanding, aligning with narrations from the Ahl al-Bayt (‘as). He argues that: “*The raison d’être for the ba‘th (deputation) of prophets and messengers transcends mere resolution of societal differences. Rather, their mission encompasses the elucidation of farā‘id (obligations) and ‘ibādāt (acts of worship), the guidance of humanity towards the Ākhirah (Hereafter), the refinement of spiritual and moral states (tazkiyah), the elevation of humankind to the highest levels of kamāl (perfection), and their preparation for qurb (proximity) to the Divine. Furthermore, they serve to adjudicate disputes concerning factual*

¹ al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*. Vol 1:255.

² al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*. Vol 10:153.

³ Ṭabāṭabā‘ī, *al-Mīzān Fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*. Vol 2:130; Makārim Shīrāzī, *Tafsīr e Namūneh*. Vol 2:94-5.

disagreements, establish universal legal principles (qawānān kulliyyah), and resolve hostilities and conflicts.”¹

This view finds strong support in the narrations from Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a), who provides an explicit explanation of this verse. When asked about the meaning of the *umma*’s unity in the verse, he (‘a) responded: “*The ummah before Nūḥ (‘a) was a united ummah.*” When further inquired whether they were guided, he (‘a) clarified:

“No, they were lost (ḍāllūn) ... they were not guided. They were upon the innate nature (fiṭrah) which Allah created them upon. There is no change in Allah (swt)’s creation. And they do not attain guidance until Allah guides them. Have you not heard the words of Ibrāhīm (‘a):

لَنْ لَمْ يَهْدِنِي رَبِّي لَأَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ الضَّالِّينَ

*‘If my Lord had not guided me, I should certainly be of the lost ones’
(6:77)?*

This means: I would have remained in the forgetfulness of the covenant (Mīthāq).²

In another narration, he (‘a) states: “*They were lost (ḍāllūn – unaware). They were neither believers, rejectors, nor polytheists.*”³

Furthermore, Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) elaborates: “*Allah Almighty created people upon the innate nature (fiṭrah) which has been ingrained in them. They neither knew belief in the Sharī‘ah nor disbelief through rejection. Then, He sent messengers to call them to faith in Allah so that they [the prophets] would serve as His proof (ḥujjah) over them. So, Allah guided some of them and did not guide others.*”⁴

These narrations establish that mere possession of innate recognition (*ma‘rifah fiṭriyyah*) does not equate to immediate belief in

¹ Malikī Miyānījī, *Manāhij al-Bayān Fī Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān*. Vol 2:186.

² al-‘Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī*. Vol 1:104.

³ al-‘Ayyāshī. Vol 1:104.

⁴ al-Ṣādūq, *Ilal al-Sharā‘i*. Page 121.

Allah (swt). Rather, human beings are created with this intrinsic recognition, but Allah has veiled it from their conscious awareness. Consequently, in this state of *ghaflah* (heedlessness), they neither affirm belief in Allah (swt) nor reject Him through disbelief or polytheism.

This state is described in the narrations as *ḍalāl* (ضلال – being lost), signifying a condition of being devoid of divine guidance. It is only upon the arrival of divine revelation, conveyed through the prophets, that individuals are reminded of the *fiṭrah* upon which they were created and made cognizant of their innate recognition of Allah (swt).

With the advent of divine guidance, individuals gain awareness of Allah (swt)’s teachings and the significance of faith, worship, and the rejection of arrogance, denial, and polytheism. This newfound awareness leads to the emergence of differences within the *ummah*, as individuals exercise their free will in either accepting or rejecting divine guidance. Thus, while the pre-prophetic *ummah* was united in its oblivion toward divine truth, the arrival of revelation resulted in the divergence of belief and disbelief.

Hence, this verse underscores the essential role of prophets in awakening humanity to their *fiṭrah* and facilitating their journey toward divine recognition. Through their teachings, Allah reminds people of their primordial covenant and provides them with the necessary guidance to navigate the path toward *tawḥīd* (monotheism) and ultimate proximity to Him.

The Verse of Reminder

Almighty Allah says:

أَفَلَا يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَى الْإِبِلِ كَيْفَ خُلِقَتْ ﴿١٧﴾ وَإِلَى السَّمَاءِ كَيْفَ رُفِعَتْ ﴿١٨﴾ وَإِلَى الْجِبَالِ كَيْفَ نُصِبَتْ ﴿١٩﴾ وَإِلَى الْأَرْضِ كَيْفَ سُطِحَتْ ﴿٢٠﴾ فَذَكِّرْ إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُذَكِّرٌ ﴿٢١﴾ لَسْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِمُصَيِّرٍ ﴿٢٢﴾

“Will they not then consider the camels, how they are created? (17) And the heaven, how it is raised aloft? (18) And the mountains, how they are

firmly fixed? (19) And the earth, how it is spread out? (20) Therefore, remind (fa dhakkir), for you are only a reminder (mudhhakkir). (21) You are not a controller (muṣayṭir) over them.”¹

He also states:

هُوَ الَّذِي يُرِيكُمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُنَزِّلُ لَكُمْ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ رِزْقًا وَمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ إِلَّا مَنْ يُنِيبُ ﴿١٣﴾
“He is the One who shows you His signs and sends down sustenance for you from the heavens, yet none takes heed (yatadhakkur) except the one who turns to Him in repentance.”²

The concept of *dhikr* (ذِكْر), as used in these verses, is fundamental to understanding prophetic guidance and the nature of human recognition (*ma‘rifah*). Linguistically, *dhikr* is the opposite of *nisyān* (نِسْيَان — forgetfulness). While *nisyān* refers to forgetting something after previously knowing it, *tadhakkur* (تَذَكَّرُ) signifies the act of recalling something after it has been forgotten. Ibn Manẓūr, in Lisān al-‘Arab defines *dhikr* as follows:

“Al-Dhikr refers to preserving something in memory. Al-Dhikr and al-Dhikri (with a kasrah) are antonyms of nisyān (forgetfulness), while al-tadhakkur means recalling something that was forgotten.”³

From a semantic perspective, *tadhakkur* is employed when an individual initially possesses awareness of something, then experiences a lapse in memory, and subsequently recollects it. In this context, *tadhakkur* implies reminding, and anything that facilitates this process is termed *mudhakkir* (a reminder).

As discussed in the analysis of the verse *Kāna al-Nās* (كَانَ النَّاسُ) (2:213), *tadhakkur* pertains to reminding individuals of an innate recognition (*ma‘rifah fiṭriyyah*). Human beings, by their inherent disposition (*fiṭrah*), possess an intrinsic awareness of Allah (swt), as He has introduced Himself to them prior to their worldly existence. However,

¹ Sūrah al-Ghāshiyah, Verses 17-22.

² Sūrah al-Ghāfir, Verse 13.

³ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*. Vol 5:48-9.

at the moment of birth, they experience a form of forgetfulness (*ghaflah*), rendering them unaware of this pre-existing recognition. To counter this state of heedlessness, Allah (swt), in His divine wisdom, appointed prophets (*anbiyā`*) to remind humanity of what they already know innately but have forgotten due to worldly distractions.

The term *mudhakkir* is thus used in reference to something that aids in overcoming negligence and forgetfulness. However, in light of Quranic exegesis (*tafsīr*) and narrations concerning the recognition of Allah (*ma`rifatullāh*), His messengers, and the Quran itself, the role of the Prophet (ṣ) as a *mudhakkir* is not to introduce an entirely new concept of divine recognition but rather to remind people of what they already possess within their innate nature. His mission is to rekindle an awareness that has been obscured by worldly distractions, guiding them back to the primordial covenant (*mīthāq*) they made with their Lord.

Thus, the Quranic emphasis on *tadhakkur* underscores the restorative function of revelation and prophetic guidance, reaffirming the intrinsic bond between humanity and their Creator.

In the verse *Kāna al-Nās (2:213)*, we discussed that “*tadhakkur*” (تذَكَّرَ) means reminding people of what they know due to their innate nature. Humans recognize Allah (swt) through His introduction. But when they are born, they forget what they recognize innately and are unaware of it. Then, Allah Almighty raised His prophets among them to remind them of what they innately recognize.

The term “*mudhakkir*” (مَذَكِّرٌ) is used to describe something that helps to overcome forgetfulness and negligence. However, based on the evidence from other verses and narrations about the recognition of God, the prophet, and the Holy Quran, the term “*mudhakkir*” refers to reminding people of Allah (swt) rather than creating a new recognition.

The Verses on *Ba`ṣā`* and *Ḍarrā`* (Calamities)

In the Quran, Almighty Allah says:

أَمَّنْ يُجِيبُ الْمُضْطَرَّ إِذَا دَعَاهُ وَيَكْشِفُ السُّوءَ وَيَجْعَلُكُمْ خُلَفَاءَ الْأَرْضِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ ۖ
 اللَّهُ ۖ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٦٢﴾

“Or, Who answers the distressed one (muḍṭarr) when he calls upon Him and removes the affliction (sū’), and He will make you successors (khulafā’) in the earth? Is there a deity with Allah? Little is it that you reflect.”¹

قُلْ أَرَأَيْتَكُمْ إِنْ أَتَاكُمْ عَذَابُ اللَّهِ أَوْ أَتَتْكُمُ السَّاعَةُ أَغَيْرَ اللَّهِ تَدْعُونَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ
 صَادِقِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾ بَلْ إِلَٰهَهُ تَدْعُونَ فَيَكْشِفُ مَا تَدْعُونَ إِلَيْهِ إِنْ شَاءَ وَتَنْسَوْنَ مَا
 تُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

“Say: Tell me, if the punishment of Allah should overtake you or the Hour should come upon you, will you call (on others) besides Allah, if you are truthful? Rather, you only call upon Him—and if He wills, He removes that for which you supplicate Him—and you forget what you used to associate [with Him].”²

These noble verses underscore the innate recognition (*ma’rifah fîṭriyyah*) of Allah, the Almighty, within all human beings. This intrinsic disposition manifests most clearly in moments of hardship (*ba’sā’*), weakness, incapacity, and despair. When individuals find themselves powerless against adversity, they instinctively turn to Him, seeking assistance and placing their hopes in His divine intervention.

Innate Recognition of Allah (swt) in Times of Hardship

Imam Hasan al-‘Askarī (‘a), in his commentary on “*Bismillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*”, elucidates this concept, stating:

“Allah is the One to whom every creation takes refuge in times of need and hardship when there is no hope other than Him. ‘In the name of Allah’ means I ask Allah—the Helper (al-Nāṣir) when pleading and the Answerer (al-Mujīb) when supplicating—to assist me in all my affairs.”

¹ Sūrah al-Naml, Verse 62.

² Sūrah al-An‘ām, Verses 40-41.

A similar notion is conveyed in a dialogue between Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) and an inquirer:

A man once asked Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a): “O son of the Messenger of Allah! Guide me to God, for the various theological arguments have left me in confusion.”

The Imam (‘a) responded: “O servant of Allah! Have you ever been aboard a ship?”

The man replied affirmatively. The Imam (‘a) then asked:

“Has it ever occurred that the ship broke down, and there was no other vessel to save you, nor did you know how to swim to rescue yourself?”

The man replied: “Yes.” The Imam (‘a) continued:

“At that moment, did you feel in your heart a hope for something that could deliver you from that catastrophe?”

The man replied: “Yes.” Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) then declared:

“That entity in which you placed your hope is Allah, the One who transcends all saviors in the universe. He is the One who, when human efforts fail, comes to their aid.”¹

Imam al-‘Askarī (‘a) further narrates an account regarding the exegesis of *Bismillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*. A man approached Imam Ali ibn al-Ḥusayn (‘a) and inquired about its meaning. The Imam (‘a) recounted a narration transmitted through his father, Imam al-Ḥasan (‘a), from his father, Amīr al-Mu’minīn Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib (‘a), in which a person asked him about the meaning of *Bismillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*. Amīr al-Mu’minīn (‘a) responded:

“When you say ‘Allah,’ you invoke one of the great names of God Almighty—a name that none deserves to bear nor is anyone entitled to be called by it.”

¹ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 230.

The man then asked: “What is the meaning of ‘Allah’?”

Imam Ali (‘a) explained: “‘Allah’ is the One to whom every creation turns for refuge in times of need and distress—when all other means fail and hope in all else is lost. Although people may perceive themselves as masters and significant figures in the world, possessing vast wealth and dominion, and serving as means for others to fulfill their needs, there inevitably arise moments when they themselves stand powerless. At such times, they find no alternative but to detach from worldly dependencies and turn to Allah. However, once Allah grants them relief, they revert to their former state of heedlessness and polytheism (shirk). Have you not heard the words of Allah: ‘Say: Tell me if the punishment of Allah should overtake you or the Hour should come upon you, will you call (on others) besides Allah if you are truthful? Rather, you only call upon Him—and if He wills, He removes that for which you supplicate Him—and you forget what you used to associate [with Him].’ (6:40-41)”¹

According to the aforementioned Quranic verses and narrations, human beings, when faced with distress and adversity, instinctively turn to the God they innately recognize. In such moments, they experience His presence (*wijdān*), emerging from states of negligence (*ghaflah*) and forgetfulness (*nisyān*). The Holy Quran elucidates this innate recognition of Allah, the Almighty, in the following verse:

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَعْمَالُهُمْ كَسَرَابٍ بِقِيَعٍ يَخْسَبُهُ الظَّمْآنُ مَاءً حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَهُ لَمْ يَجِدْهُ شَيْئًا وَوَجَدَ اللَّهَ عِنْدَهُ فُوفَاءً حِسَابُهُ ۖ وَاللَّهُ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ (٣٩)

“As for those who disbelieve, their deeds are like a mirage in a desert, which the thirsty person perceives as water—until when he comes to it, he finds it to be nothing, and there he finds Allah, who repays him in full for his deeds. And Allah is swift in reckoning.”²

¹ al-Ṣadūq, Page 231.

² Sūrah al-Nūr, Verse 39.

This verse illustrates that the presence of Allah (*wijdānullāh*) is felt in moments of profound desperation, such as when one, thirsting in a barren desert, strives to find water but ultimately fails, losing all hope. The recognition of Allah (swt) in this context is not the product of rational deduction or intellectual reasoning but rather an existential and experiential realization.

The A'imma of the Ahl al-Bayt ('as) further elaborate on this concept, emphasizing that in times of complete despair, when all worldly means and intermediaries prove futile, every human being—regardless of prior beliefs—turns to the Almighty, calls upon Him alone, and seeks His divine assistance. This universal phenomenon affirms that the recognition of Allah (*ma'rifatullāh*) is deeply embedded in the human disposition (*fiṭrah*), manifesting most vividly in moments of vulnerability and helplessness.

The Manifestation of Innate Recognition in Hardships

The phenomenon of *fiṭrah* (innate recognition of Allah) becomes most apparent in times of hardship and tribulation. In discussing the divine statement:

كَانَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً

“Mankind was but one community [united in faith]”¹

it has been established that all human beings are created upon an intrinsic recognition of Allah. This is affirmed by the Prophetic narration:

كُلُّ مَوْلُودٍ يُوَدُّ عَلَى الْفِطْرَةِ

“Every newborn is born upon the innate nature (fiṭrah).”

However, despite this inherent recognition, individuals remain heedless of their Lord due to the veils of negligence (*ghaflah*) and forgetfulness (*nisyān*) that Allah (swt), in His divine wisdom, has placed

¹ (Sūrah al-Baqarah, Verse 213).

upon them. Since Allah (swt) has deliberately caused this forgetfulness, human beings can only rediscover this recognition through the guidance of the prophets. In this state of forgetfulness, individuals are neither categorized as disbelievers (*kuffār*) nor as believers (*mu'minūn*), nor as polytheists (*mushrikūn*). Thus, divine argumentation (*hujjah*) is established against them only through the prophets and their teachings.

Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) elaborates on this reality, stating:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّوَجَلَّ خَلَقَ النَّاسَ عَلَى الْفِطْرَةِ الَّتِي فَطَرَهُمُ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهَا لَا يَعْرِفُونَ إِيْمَانًا بِشَرِيْعِهِ وَلَا كُفْرًا بِجُحُودِ نَمَّ ابْتَعَثَ اللَّهُ الرُّسُلَ إِلَيْهِمْ يَدْعُوْنَهُمْ إِلَى الْإِيْمَانِ بِاللَّهِ حُجَّةً لِلَّهِ عَلَيْهِمْ

“Surely, Allah, Mighty and Majestic, created the people upon the innate nature (fiṭrah) upon which He originated them. They do not possess an understanding of faith (īmān) through a Sharī‘ah, nor disbelief (kufr) through rejection. Then, Allah sent messengers to them, calling them to faith in Allah. These messengers serve as Allah (swt)‘s proof (hujjah) upon them.”¹

This narration establishes that disbelief (*kufr*) and faith (*īmān*) only manifest following the prophetic invitation and divine teachings. However, in the Quranic verses concerning *bā’sā’* (adversity) and *ḍarrā’* (affliction), Allah states that human beings incline toward disbelief and polytheism once their distress is alleviated. The Quran states:

فَلَمَّا نَجَّاهُمْ إِلَى الْبَرِّ إِذَا هُمْ يُشْرِكُونَ

“But when He delivers them safely to land, they associate others [with Him].”²

فَلَمَّا نَجَّاهُمْ إِلَى الْبَرِّ أَعْرَضْتُمْ ۚ وَكَانَ الْإِنْسَانُ كَفُورًا

¹ *Bihār* 11/39; *‘Ilal al-Sharā’i’* 1/121.

² *Sūrah al-‘Ankabūt*, Verse 65.

“But when He delivers you to land safely, you turn away, and man is ever ungrateful.”¹

These verses do not present a contradiction. Rather, they indicate that innate recognition (*fiṭrah*) is made manifest in hardship, irrespective of whether an individual is a disbeliever (*kāfir*), a polytheist (*mushrik*), an ignorant person (*jāhil*), or someone who is lost (*dāll*). In moments of extreme difficulty and despair, all human beings experience an existential realization of Allah (swt)’s presence. The role of the prophets, then, is to remind both believers and non-believers of this recognition before they encounter such tribulations.

Moreover, trials serve different purposes depending on one’s spiritual state. For believers, hardships are a manifestation of divine grace and love, serving to strengthen their faith and elevate them to higher levels of recognition. For disbelievers and polytheists, trials function as a demonstration of Allah (swt)’s power and authority or as divine retribution for their deeds. Even those who are categorized as *ḍullāl* (the lost)—those who have not received prophetic teachings—experience a sense of divine presence in times of hardship. However, this does not necessarily lead to faith (*īmān*), disbelief (*kufṛ*), or polytheism (*shirk*).

The verse *“Mankind was but one community”²* and its corresponding Prophetic narration substantiate this understanding. Furthermore, Allah explicitly declares: *“We do not punish until We have sent a messenger.”³*

Therefore, the polytheism (*shirk*) and disbelief (*kufṛ*) that manifest after tribulation, as mentioned in the Quranic verses, do not represent an initial state of polytheism or disbelief. Rather, they denote a return to pre-existing states of disbelief and polytheism following a temporary recognition of divine presence during hardship.

¹ (Sūrah al-Isrā’, Verse 67.

² Sūrah Baqarah, Verse 213.

³ Sūrah al-Isrā’, Verse 15.

Therefore, the polytheism and disbelief after trouble in the verses is not initial polytheism and disbelief. Instead, the verses discuss returning to pre-existing polytheism and disbelief. This concept is further reinforced in the Quranic verse:

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَعْمَالُهُمْ كَسَرَابٍ بِقِيَعِهِ

“And those who disbelieve—their deeds are like a mirage in a desert.”¹

As previously discussed, this parable addresses the disbelievers and polytheists, likening their worldly pursuits to a mirage. In the desert, extreme thirst leads them to perceive an illusion of water, prompting them to pursue it. However, upon reaching it, they realize it was merely an illusion. In their moment of desperation, they sincerely turn to Allah (swt), yet He punishes them for their deeds.

In this analogy, Allah, the Almighty, illustrates the fleeting and deceptive nature of worldly pursuits. Disbelievers and polytheists, engrossed in materialism, strive toward worldly gains with insatiable greed, only to realize—after death—that they are utterly bereft. At that moment, they will be held accountable for their actions and face divine recompense.

Key Points

1. **Innate Recognition of Allah (swt):** All human beings possess an inherent recognition (*fitrah*) of Allah (swt). When reminded by the prophets, they acknowledge His role as their Creator, Lord, and Sustainer.
2. **Neutral State Before Prophetic Guidance:** Prior to the advent of divine messengers, humanity was neither categorized as believers (*mu'minūn*), disbelievers (*kuffār*), nor polytheists (*mushrikūn*). They existed in a neutral state regarding faith and disbelief.

¹ Sūrah al-Nūr, Verse 39.

3. **Forgetting Innate Recognition:** Although human beings are born with an innate recognition of Allah, He, in His divine wisdom, causes them to forget it. If prophetic guidance does not reach them, they remain in a state of being *ḍāll* (lost).
4. **Concept of *Tadhakkur* (Reminding):** The term *tadhakkur* (تَذَكُّر) denotes the act of reminding someone of knowledge they once possessed but have forgotten. The role of the prophets is to awaken this innate recognition within individuals.
5. **Recognition in Hardship:** Since divine recognition is ingrained in human nature, even those who are otherwise heedless recall and invoke Allah during times of distress and hardship (بِأَسَاءِ وَضَرَاءِ).
6. **Trials as Divine Favour and Proof:** For believers, tribulations serve as a manifestation of divine grace, elevating their levels of faith and certainty. For disbelievers and polytheists, hardships serve as an additional means of establishing divine proof (*hujjah*) against them.
7. **The Case of the *Ḍāll* (Lost Ones):** If those categorized as *ḍullāl* (the lost) turn to Allah in times of adversity, it does not automatically result in faith (*īmān*), polytheism (*shirk*), or disbelief (*kufir*). Their state remains dependent on whether they receive and accept prophetic guidance.

Chapter 4

Fiṭrah and the Human Connection to the Divine: A Ḥadīth-Based Analysis

Learning Outcomes of this Chapter

- Examine the function of prophets in guiding humanity toward faith and how their teachings serve as a criterion for distinguishing between belief and disbelief.
- Understand the Concept of the validity of *fiṭrah* (Innate Disposition) and Reason.
- Investigate why the Ahl al-Bayt (‘as) and their followers are uniquely aligned with the original *fiṭrah* upon which the Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) was sent, distinguishing them from other theological schools.
- Critically assess the role of intellect in human cognition of the Divine, emphasizing how *‘aql* is inherently created upon the recognition of Allah (swt).

Introduction

Continuing the discussion on the innate recognition of Allah (*ma‘rifatullāh*), this chapter explores a collection of narrations that affirm this foundational concept in Islamic theology. The notion that human beings possess an intrinsic awareness of their Creator is deeply rooted in Islamic teachings, reflected both in the Quran and in the sayings of the Infallibles (‘as). While previous discussions have examined relevant Quranic verses alongside their exegetical narrations, this section shifts focus to additional narrations from authoritative sources that further substantiate the idea that divine recognition is embedded within the very nature of human existence.

Islamic scholars have long debated the nature of *maʿrifah*, questioning whether it is purely an innate cognition or whether it requires intellectual engagement to be fully actualized. Some argue that the human soul, created in accordance with the divine *fiṭrah* (innate disposition), is naturally inclined toward recognizing its Creator without external instruction. Others contend that while this recognition is inherent, it requires contemplation and guidance to reach a level of certainty (*yaqīn*). The narrations examined in this chapter contribute to this discourse by elucidating the relationship between innate recognition, acquired knowledge, and the role of divine guidance in strengthening one's theological understanding.

Moreover, the distinction between *maʿrifah* (recognition) and *ʿilm* (knowledge) plays a crucial role in comprehending the depth of belief. *Maʿrifah* implies a personal, experiential awareness that transcends abstract knowledge, forming a direct connection between the individual and the Divine. On the other hand, *ʿilm* encompasses intellectual understanding, often acquired through study and reflection. By analyzing these narrations, this chapter aims to clarify the nature of divine recognition, its epistemological foundations, and its implications for doctrinal knowledge.

This discussion not only reinforces the significance of recognizing Allah (swt) as an essential component of faith but also highlights the importance of engaging with authentic sources to deepen one's understanding. Through these narrations, readers will gain insight into how divine recognition is affirmed, nurtured, and actualized, ultimately guiding them toward a more profound comprehension of Islamic theology.

Narrations on Innate Recognition of Allah (swt)

First Narration

The Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali (ʿa), states:

اصْطَفَىٰ سُبْحَانَهُ مِنْ وَلَدِهِ أَنْبِيَاءَ أَخَذَ عَلَى الْوَحْيِ مِيثَاقَهُمْ وَ عَلَى تَلْبِيغِ الرِّسَالَةِ
 أَمَانَتَهُمْ لَمَّا بَدَّلَ أَكْثَرَ خُلُقِهِ عَهْدَ اللَّهِ إِلَيْهِمْ فَجَهِلُوا حَقَّهُ وَ اتَّخَذُوا الْأَنْدَادَ مَعَهُ وَ
 اجْتَالَتْهُمْ الشَّيَاطِينُ عَنْ مَعْرِفَتِهِ وَ اقْتَطَعَتْهُمْ عَنْ عِبَادَتِهِ فَبَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رَسُولَهُ وَ
 وَاتَرَ إِلَيْهِمْ أَنْبِيَاءَهُ لِيَسْتَأْذِنُوهُمْ مِيثَاقَ فِطْرَتِهِ وَ يُذَكِّرُوهُمْ مَنْسِيَّ نِعْمَتِهِ وَ
 يَحْتَجُّوا عَلَيْهِمْ بِالتَّلْبِيغِ

“Allah selected prophets from among the descendants of Ādam, entrusting them with revelation, divine covenants, and the propagation of His message at a time when most of creation had altered the covenant they had made with their Lord. They violated His rights and associated partners with Him. Satan led them astray from recognizing Allah (ma‘rifatullāh) and hindered them from worshiping Him. Then, Allah, the Almighty, raised His messengers among them and sent His prophets, one after another, to reclaim the innate covenant from them, remind them of the forgotten divine blessing, and establish the conclusive proof (ḥujjah) upon them through propagation.”¹

In the preceding discussion, the Quranic verse: *“Mankind was a single nation”*² was examined, highlighting that Allah dispatched prophets due to humanity’s collective state of heedlessness (*ghaflah*) concerning their Lord. Imam Ali (‘a), in this sermon, further elaborates that the reason for sending prophets was the gradual decline of divine awareness among people in the absence of revealed guidance. Over time, human societies deviated from their innate recognition of Allah (*fiṭrah*), leading to negligence in fulfilling their obligations of servitude (*‘ubūdiyyah*). Before holding them accountable for their transgressions, Allah, out of His mercy, sent prophets to serve as teachers and awaken their innate awareness.³

Despite the inherent inclination toward divine recognition, Shayṭān obstructs the path to servitude and worship (*‘ibādah*).

¹ Imam Ali (‘a), *Nahj al-Balāghah*. Sermon #1.

² Sūrah al-Baqarah, Verse 213.

³ This concept was explained in the Chapter 3 under the verse *“كَانَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً”*.

Consequently, some individuals stray into disbelief (*kufīr*) and polytheism (*shirk*).¹ In such instances, Allah (swt) continuously sends His prophets to renew the divine covenant and remind people of the blessing of divine recognition. The prophets' mission is to rekindle the latent recognition of Allah (swt), ensuring that humanity remains steadfast in their primordial commitment to monotheism (*tawhīd*) and servitude to the Creator.

Thus, this narration affirms that the prophets strive to restore humanity's awareness of Allah (swt)'s unity (*tawhīd*), recognition (*ma'rifah*), submission (*islām*), and servitude (*'ubūdiyyah*), which are inherently embedded within human nature.

Second Narration

Imam al-Ṣādiq ('a) states:

مَا مِنْ مَوْلُودٍ يُوَلَّدُ إِلَّا عَلَى الْفِطْرَةِ فَأَبَوَاهُ اللَّذَانِ يَهُودَانِهِ وَ يُنَصِّرَانِهِ وَ
يُمَجِّسَانِهِ

*“No child is born except upon the divine innate disposition (fiṭrah). Then their parents make them a Jew, a Christian, or a Magian.”*²

A similar narration is also reported by Imam al-Bāqir ('a), quoting the Holy Prophet (ṣ):

كُلُّ مَوْلُودٍ يُوَلَّدُ عَلَى الْفِطْرَةِ يَعْنِي عَلَى الْمَعْرِفَةِ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَ جَلَّ خَالِقُهُ فَذَلِكَ
قَوْلُهُ- وَ لَئِنْ سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَ الْأَرْضَ لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهُ

“Every child is born upon the innate disposition (fiṭrah).’ This means that the child is born with the recognition that Allah is its Creator.

¹ The covenant, as articulated in verses 60 and 61 of Sūrah Yāsīn, mandates the exclusive worship of God, the rejection of any partners associated with Him, and complete submission to His will. This is further emphasized by the divine query: *“Did I not charge you, O children of Ādam, that you should not serve Shayṭān? Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy. And that you should serve [only] Me? That is the straight path.”* (Quran 36:60-61).

² al- Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*. Vol 15:125.

The Quranic verse, ‘And if you ask them who created the heavens and the earth, they will certainly say: Allah’ (31:25), affirms this meaning.”¹

This narration unequivocally establishes that all human beings are born with an inherent recognition of Allah (swt) as their Creator. However, as previously discussed, this does not imply that an individual will spontaneously recognize and worship Allah (swt) without guidance. Rather, divine messengers (*rusul*) and their teachings are necessary to awaken and nurture this recognition. If an individual is raised without the guidance of a divinely appointed instructor, their innate recognition of Allah (swt) may be misdirected toward deities fabricated by their surroundings, such as the gods of Jews, Christians, or Magians. This misdirection prevents them from attaining the true monotheistic faith in the One and only Creator who alone is deserving of worship.

Third Narration

Imam al-Riḍā (‘a) states:

“Through the intellect (‘aql), recognition [of Allah] is established in the heart, and through the innate disposition (fiṭrah), the divine proof (ḥujjah) is completed.”²

In this narration, Imam al-Riḍā (‘a) elucidates the interplay between the intellect and the innate disposition in recognizing Allah (*ma‘rifatullāh*). Firm belief in Allah (swt)’s existence is attained through the intellect, while His authority over creation is affirmed through *fiṭrah*, completing the divine proof.

The narrations emphasize that the intellect is the most fundamental and distinctive argument (*ḥujjah*) that Allah (swt) has placed over humankind, as all other arguments derive their validity from it. However, Imam al-Riḍā (‘a) further establishes *fiṭrah* as an independent divine argument alongside the intellect. This signifies that had Allah (swt)

¹ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 331; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 2:12.

² al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 35; al-Ṣadūq, *‘Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*. Vol 1:149.

not introduced Himself to humanity and embedded this recognition within them, the intellect alone would not have been capable of independently attaining His recognition. Thus, both the intellect and the innate disposition necessitate that human beings submit to Allah (swt) 's commands, serve Him, and humble themselves before Him.

Fourth Narration

Regarding the verse: *“Say: He, Allah, is One”*¹ (112:1), Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) states:

مَعْرُوفٌ عِنْدَ كُلِّ جَاهِلٍ

*“He is known to every ignorant person.”*²

Commenting on this narration, the scholar Mullā Ṣāliḥ al-Māzandarānī explains that since all individuals, regardless of their belief in Him, instinctively turn to Allah in times of hardship and distress, His recognition must be innate.³

This ḥadīth further demonstrates that even those who reject Allah (swt) (*munkirūn*) do so despite an inherent awareness of Him. The Quran attests to this reality:

*“So, when Our clear signs came to them, they said: This is clear enchantment. And they denied them unjustly and arrogantly, while their souls had been convinced of them.”*⁴

This verse highlights that rejection of Allah (swt) is not due to a lack of awareness but rather stems from arrogance (*istikbār*) and injustice (*ẓulm*).

Fifth Narration

The Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali (‘a), states:

¹ Sūrah al-Ikhlāṣ, Verse 1.

² al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:91:2, al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:286.

³ al-Māzandarānī, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfī*. Vol 3:184.

⁴ Sūrah al-Naml, Verses 13-14.

إِنَّ أَفْضَلَ مَا تَوَسَّلَ بِهِ الْمُتَوَسِّلُونَ إِلَى اللَّهِ جَلَّ ذِكْرُهُ الْإِيمَانُ بِاللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَمَا
جَاءَتْ بِهِ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ وَالْجِهَادُ فِي سَبِيلِهِ فَإِنَّهُ ذِرْوَةُ الْإِسْلَامِ وَكَلِمَةُ الْإِخْلَاصِ
فَإِنَّهَا الْفِطْرَةُ

*“The most excellent means by which supplicants seek nearness to Allah is faith in Allah and His Messenger, and striving in the way of Allah (jihād), which is the pinnacle of Islam. And His word is ‘ikhhlās – sincerity,’ for it is innate (fiṭrah).”*¹

This noble ḥadīth aligns with the previously discussed narration interpreting the verse: *“The innate disposition (fiṭratallāh) upon which He has created mankind...”*²

The earlier narrations identified *fiṭratallāh* as monotheism (*tawḥīd*), and this ḥadīth reinforces the same concept by equating *ikhhlās*—sincerity in faith—with innate recognition. In subsequent discussions, it will become evident that Allah (swt)’s *Tawḥīd* is inseparable from His recognition, as the recognition of Allah (swt), by His own introduction, is inherently tied to His unity. Human beings do not first intellectually establish His existence and then proceed to affirm His *Tawḥīd*; rather, His recognition is inherently monotheistic, embedded within their very being.

Sixth Narration

Imam al-Ḥusayn (‘a) states:

نَحْنُ وَشِيعَتُنَا عَلَى الْفِطْرَةِ الَّتِي بَعَثَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهَا مُحَمَّدًا (ص)

*“We and our Shia are upon the fiṭrah on which Allah sent Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ).”*³

This narration reaffirms that Allah (swt) dispatched prophets to remind humanity of their Creator, thereby upholding the innate covenant (‘*ahd fiṭrah*). Among the Ummah of Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ), only the

¹ al-Ṣadūq, ‘*Ilal al-Sharā’i*’. Vol 1:24; al-Ḥarrānī, *Tuḥaf al-‘Uqūl*. Page 149.

² Sūrah al-Rūm, Verse 30.

³ al-Kashshī, *Ikhtiyār Ma‘rifat al-Rijāl*. Page 114.

A'immaḥ from the Ahl al-Bayt ('as) and their Shia have remained steadfast upon this divine covenant. Since the path of *Tawḥīd* and innate recognition is defined by the exclusive guardianship (*wilāyah*) of Allah (swt), no other group has founded their belief and practice upon true monotheism. As Allah has absolute guardianship and has entrusted it to the A'immaḥ ('as), only the Shia remain firm upon the covenant of *Tawḥīd*.

Seventh Narration

Imam al-Bāqir ('a) states:

كَانَتْ شَرِيعَةُ نُوحٍ (ع) أَنْ يُعْبَدَ اللَّهُ بِالتَّوْحِيدِ وَالْإِخْلَاصِ وَخُلْعِ الْأَنْدَادِ وَهِيَ الْفِطْرَةُ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا وَأَخَذَ اللَّهُ مِيثَاقَهُ عَلَى نُوحٍ ع وَعَلَى النَّبِيِّينَ ع أَنْ يَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى وَلَا يُشْرِكُوا بِهِ شَيْئًا

*“The Shari‘ah of Prophet Nūḥ ('a) mandated that Allah be worshipped with Tawḥīd, sincerity (ikhlās), and rejection of shirk. This is the fiṭrah upon which Allah created humanity. Prophet Nūḥ and all prophets covenanted to worship Allah alone and never associate partners with Him.”*¹

This narration emphasizes the innateness of Tawḥīd, the rejection of polytheism, and sincerity in servitude. It also highlights the covenant ('*ahd*) that Allah (swt) established with His prophets to affirm His exclusive worship.

Eighth Narration

Imam al-Ṣādiq ('a) states:

كَانَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ (ع) فِي شَبَابِهِ عَلَى الْفِطْرَةِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ الْخَلْقَ عَلَيْهَا حَتَّى هَذَا اللَّهُ تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى إِلَى دِينِهِ وَاجْتَبَاهُ

¹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 8:282; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*. Vol 11:331.

“During his youth, Prophet Ibrāhīm (‘a) remained upon the fiṭrah on which Allah created humanity, until Allah guided him to His religion and chose him as a prophet.”¹

In the discussion of the holy verse “كَانَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً” (Mankind was one community), we referenced a narration indicating that before the time of Prophet Nūḥ (‘a), people were *ḡullāl* (lost), meaning they lacked guidance, though they remained on the innate nature (*fiṭrah*) that Allah (swt) created them upon.²

This narration clarifies that during his youth, Prophet Ibrāhīm (‘a) was on the innate nature of humanity, but he remained oblivious to the divine covenant until Allah (swt) guided him to His religion and granted him prophethood. This statement does not imply any deficiency in Prophet Ibrāhīm (‘a); rather, it highlights that innate nature and divine guidance operate on multiple levels.

Innate nature is a foundational disposition, while guidance unfolds through stages of spiritual realization. Although a person’s existential reality (*ḥaqīqah*) may hold a higher degree of divine awareness, they may remain unaware of it until they reach that level of guidance. In the case of Prophet Ibrāhīm (‘a), the highest degree of guidance coincided with his divine selection as a prophet, marking the culmination of his innate nature with the ultimate realization of divine truth.

Ninth Narration

Imam Ali (‘a) says:

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الْمُنْهَمِ عِبَادَهُ حَمْدَهُ وَفَاطِرِهِمْ عَلَى مَعْرِفَةِ رَبُّوبِيَّتِهِ

“Praise be to the true God who inspired His praise to His servants and made them aware of His Lordship.”³

¹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 8:370; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 12:44.

² al-Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr al-Ayyāshī*. Vol 1:104.

³ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:139; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 54:166.

Creation of Intellects on Tawḥīd

Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) supplicates:

أَسْأَلُكَ بِتَوْحِيدِكَ الَّذِي فَطَرْتَ عَلَيْهِ الْعُقُولَ

“O Allah, I call upon You by the Tawḥīd upon which You established the intellects.”¹

Similarly, in a prayer taught by Imam Ali (‘a), Imam al-Bāqir (‘a), and Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a), we recite:

اللَّهُمَّ خَلَقْتَ الْقُلُوبَ عَلَى إِرَادَتِكَ وَفَطَرْتَ الْعُقُولَ عَلَى مَعْرِفَتِكَ

“O Allah, You created the hearts according to Your will and based the intellects on Your recognition.”²

Furthermore, the Friday morning *Nawāfil* prayer includes:

يَا مَنْ فَتَقَ الْعُقُولَ بِمَعْرِفَتِهِ وَ أَطْلَقَ الْأَلْسُنَ بِحَمْدِهِ

“O You who created the intellects upon Your recognition and opened the tongues for Your praise.”³

These narrations emphasize that Allah (swt) created the human intellect on the foundation of His Tawḥīd and recognition. The use of the plural term ‘*uqūl*’ (عُقُول — intellects), despite intellect being an indivisible light, signifies that many human beings have received this divine faculty.⁴ Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) further affirms this concept, narrating that Mūsā ibn ‘Imrān (‘a) asked Allah (swt):

¹ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 91:27; Shaykh al-Bahā’ī, *Miftāḥ al-Falāḥ Fī ‘Amal al-Yawm Wal Laylah*. Page 102.

² al-Kafa’ mi, *al-Balad al-Amīn Wal Dar‘ al-Ḥaṣīn*. Page 378; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 95:403.

³ al-Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā’il Wa Mustanbiḥ al-Masā’il*. Vol 13:4; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 86:306.

⁴ Several textual sources, including specific verses of the Quran and related narrations, suggest a universal glorification of Allah (swt) by all creation, encompassing both celestial and terrestrial beings, including humans, animals, and even inanimate objects. Furthermore, these sources indicate the presentation of *Wilāyah* (Guardianship/Authority) to all of creation.

قَالَ مُوسَى بْنُ عِمْرَانَ يَا رَبِّ أَيُّ الْأَعْمَالِ أَفْضَلُ عِنْدَكَ فَقَالَ حُبُّ الْأَطْفَالِ فَإِنَّ
فِطْرَتَهُمْ عَلَى تَوْحِيدِي فَإِنْ أَمْتَهُمْ أَدْخِلُهُمْ بِرَحْمَتِي جَنَّتِي

“Which deed is most beloved to You?” Allah replied: “Loving children, for their innate nature is upon My Tawhīd. If I take their souls in childhood, I admit them to My paradise through My mercy.”¹

This ḥadīth reaffirms the concept of innate divine recognition (*fiṭrah*), aligning with the ḥadīth:

كُلُّ مَوْلُودٍ يُولَدُ عَلَى الْفِطْرَةِ

“Every child is born on innate recognition.”

While this ḥadīth affirms that children who die are granted paradise, other narrations explain that on the Day of Judgment, the mentally deficient, those are deemed weak and incapable (*mustaḍ‘af*), stillbirths, and children will be tested with a trial by fire. Those who obey Allah (swt)’s command will enter paradise, and those who disobey will face punishment.²

Animals’ Recognition of Allah (swt)

Imam Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (‘a) says:

مَا بَهَمَتِ الْبِهَائِمُ فَلَمْ تُبْهَمْ عَنْ أَرْبَعَةٍ مَعْرِفَتِهَا بِالرَّبِّ وَ مَعْرِفَتِهَا بِالْمَوْتِ وَ
مَعْرِفَتِهَا بِالْأَنْثَى مِنَ الذَّكَرِ وَ مَعْرِفَتِهَا بِالْمَرْعَى عَنِ الْخِصْبِ

“While often characterized as lacking comprehensive understanding, non-human animals are not devoid of fundamental awareness. Specifically, they possess an innate, non-acquired knowledge: Allah, death, mates, and fertile pastures.”³

Similarly, Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) affirms:

¹ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 101:105.

² al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*. Page 383; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 3: 248.

³ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 6:539.

مَهْمَا أَتَيْتَهُمَا عَلَى الْبَهَائِمِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَلَا يُبْهَمَنَّ عَلَيْهِمَا أَرْبَعَةٌ خِصَالٌ مَعْرِفَةُ أَنَّ لَهَا خَالِقًا وَ مَعْرِفَةُ طَلَبِ الرِّزْقِ وَ مَعْرِفَةُ الذِّكْرِ مِنَ الْأُنْثَى وَ مَخَافَةُ الْمَوْتِ.

“Animals, no matter their ignorance, are aware of four things: recognition of their Creator, sustenance, mates, and fear of death.”¹

A narration recounts a severe drought during the time of Prophet Sulaymān (‘a). The people appealed to him, requesting his supplication for rain. He responded, *“After the morning prayer, we will ask for rain.”* Following the morning prayer, he proceeded with the people. En route, he encountered an ant which had raised its forelegs toward the sky while its other feet remained on the ground, supplicating, *“O God, we are one of your creatures, and we are in constant need of your sustenance. Do not destroy us because of the sins of the children of Ādam.”* Upon witnessing this, Prophet Sulaymān (‘a) instructed the people to return, stating, *“Return, for it will rain due to the prayer of another.”* That year, the rainfall was unprecedented.²

These narrations affirm that animals possess an intrinsic recognition of Allah (swt) and supplicate in times of distress. However, as a divine action, their recognition transcends human comprehension. Humans cannot rationally analyze this recognition, just as they cannot fully analyze their own perception of Allah (swt). This limitation often leads those who rely solely on sensory perception to distort the Quranic verses and narrations regarding animals’ glorification and accountability (تَكْلِيفٌ — *taklīf*).

These narrations suggest that animals possess a recognition of God and supplicate to Him during times of hardship and tribulation. This recognition, being an act of divine origin, transcends human comprehension and defies rational analysis. Consequently, no recipient of this divine recognition, whether human or animal, can fully analyze its nature. Just as human beings cannot rationally explain their own innate

¹ al-Kulaynī. Vol 6:539; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 51:61.

² al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 8:246; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 61:260.

recognition of God, they are similarly unable to dissect the recognition of God in animals. Indeed, the latter presents an even greater challenge to human understanding due to the lack of interspecies communication, which hinders the exploration of shared experiences in this regard.

Therefore, individuals who exclusively rely on perceptual faculties to comprehend all phenomena encounter difficulties in understanding animal recognition and glorification of God, the nature of animal accountability (*taklif*),¹ the existence of animal free will, and the proper interpretation of relevant Quranic verses and narrations. These individuals, due to their limited understanding, often misinterpret such verses and narrations, neglecting clear scriptural statements, such as the following:

وَأِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ

“And there is nothing but glorifies Him with praise, but you do not understand their glorification.”²

Thus, recourse to authentic scholars, the Ahl al-Bayt (‘as), and adherence to their teachings is essential. This verse does not imply that human beings are inherently incapable of understanding the recognition and glorification of other beings. Rather, it emphasizes that those who currently lack this understanding must acknowledge its existence. One cannot deny a reality simply because it lies beyond the scope of one's current perceptual abilities.

Key points

1. **Role of Prophets in Awakening Innate Recognition:** Prophets were sent to humanity to remind them of their innate recognition of Allah (swt) and to rescue them from heedlessness and forgetfulness. This negligence may stem from a lack of access to divine proofs or warnings, or from succumbing to the temptations

¹ Being responsible for one's actions in front of Allah (swt).

² Sūrah al-Isrā', Verse 44.

of devils despite having reminders aligned with their innate nature.

2. **Universal Innate Recognition of Allah (swt):** Every human being is born with an inherent recognition of Allah (swt), even if they are unaware of it due to external influences or personal neglect.
3. **Completion of Divine Proof through Innate Nature:** Innate nature (*fiṭrah*) serves as Allah (swt)’s ultimate argument over His creation. Intellect, guided by innate recognition, leads to a firm and unwavering belief in Allah (swt).
4. **Primacy of Innate Recognition Over Intellect:** Human intellect alone cannot independently reach the recognition of Allah (swt). Instead, the innate recognition of Allah (swt) obliges the intellect to submit to Him.
5. **Innate Recognition Beyond Denial:** All human beings, whether believers or atheists, recognize Allah (swt) at an innate level. Atheists only deny this recognition out of obstinacy and opposition, not due to a lack of awareness.
6. **Unity of Divine Recognition and Tawḥīd:** The recognition of Allah (swt) is inseparable from His *Tawḥīd* (absolute oneness). Hence, *ikhhlās* (sincerity) and *Tawḥīd* are referred to as “*Fiṭratallāh*” (Allah (swt)’s innate nature).
7. **Wilāyah (Guardianship) as an Extension of Tawḥīd:** Since the guardianship (*Wilāyah*) of the A’immah (‘as) originates from Allah (swt), accepting their guardianship is a continuation of monotheism and innate recognition. Therefore, only the Ahl al-Bayt (‘as) and their Shias remain steadfast on the *fiṭrah* upon which Allah (swt) sent His Messenger (ṣ).
8. **Prophetic Covenant on Tawḥīd:** Allah (swt) has taken a covenant from all His prophets regarding servitude to Him and the rejection of polytheism. This covenant aligns with the innate nature of every human being.

9. **Degrees of Guidance Within Innate Nature:** Human beings possess all levels of guidance within their existential reality. Thus, at any level of divine guidance they attain, they remain on the innate nature that Allah (swt) has created them upon in relation to a higher level of guidance.
10. **Plurality of Intellects and Recognition of Allah (swt):** The usage of the plural form “*‘uqūl*” (intellects) in narrations indicates that Allah (swt) created multiple intellects upon His recognition. When He introduced Himself to these intellects, they received the light of knowledge and divine awareness.
11. **Innate Nature of Children and Tawḥīd:** The innate disposition (*fiṭrah*) of children is based on the *Tawḥīd* of Allah (swt), as affirmed in the ḥadīth:

كل مولود يولد على الفطرة

“Every child is born upon the innate nature”

12. **Universal Recognition Among All Creatures:** All created beings are brought into existence upon the recognition of Allah (swt). Consequently, they inherently recognize their Creator, each in a manner appropriate to their nature.

Chapter 5

Realms of Divine Recognition - The World of Souls – Part 1

Learning Outcomes of this Chapter

- Present evidence supporting the existence of the *‘Awālim al-‘Ahd* (Worlds of the Covenant).
- Demonstrate familiarity with the pre-temporal realms that existed before the material world.
- Recognize that there are *mutawātir*¹ (widely transmitted) narrations affirming that souls were created before bodies.

Introduction

Based on Quranic verses and narrations, Allah (swt) has introduced Himself to His servants, granting all creatures innate recognition of Him. This chapter explores the stages of bestowing recognition and the pre-temporal realms experienced by human souls.

According to narrations from the A’immah (‘as), human beings existed in multiple worlds prior to their earthly lives. In these realms, Allah (swt) endowed them with the light of recognition and intellect, introducing them to His Lordship. When He asked, “*Am I not your Lord?*” they acknowledged Him, and a covenant was established with the angels as witnesses. However, Allah (swt) caused humanity to forget these pre-temporal experiences, making divine revelation through the Quran and the Infallibles (‘as) the only means to affirm their existence.

¹ *Tawātur* (Arabic: **تواتر**) is a term used in the science of ḥadīth and the *Uṣūl al-Fiqh* to describe a report that has been narrated by numerous narrators through various chains of transmission, thereby substantiating its authenticity. Such a report is called *mutawātir*.

Evidence for the Worlds of the Covenant

- **Innate Recognition:** Previous chapters established that “*Every child is born on innate recognition (fiṭrah),*” of Allah (swt), which implies pre-earthly experiences.
- **Inexplicable Emotions:** Love, hatred, or sorrow without apparent cause, as described in Ahl al-Bayt (‘as)’s narrations, stem from friendships or enmities formed in prior worlds.

Jābir recounts his inquiry to Imam al-Bāqir (‘a) regarding unexplained periods of sadness observable by his family and friends. The Imam (‘a) responded, stating,

*“O Jābir, Allah Almighty created believers from the fīnah¹ of paradise and breathed His Spirit into them. Therefore, a believer is the biological brother of another believer. Thus, when one soul in any city experiences sadness, others are also affected, as they all originate from the same essence.”*²

Two further narrations attributed to Imam al-Bāqir and Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘as) clarify the nature of this brotherhood, stating to their Shia:

*“You have not become brothers due to wilāyah; rather, you have recognized each other based upon it.”*³

Commenting on this, the late Mullā Ṣāliḥ al-Māzandarānī suggests that this narration indicates that Allah (swt) established a religious brotherhood, and a brotherhood based on *wilāyah* amongst believers in the World of Souls (‘*ālam al-arwāḥ*), not solely in this temporal world.⁴ He subsequently cites narrations concerning the creation of souls to support this interpretation.

¹ *Ṭīnah* (طينة): A technical term in referring to the primordial ontological substance of creation from which human beings are formed before the creation of the current existence of human beings on Earth.

² al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 2:166; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 58:148.

³ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 2:168.

⁴ al-Māzandarānī, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfī*. Vol 9:36.

Regarding the creation of souls, narrations exist which state that Allah Almighty created the souls of all human beings two thousand years prior to their physical bodies. In that primordial realm, believers were friends and allies to one another, while harboring enmity towards the infidels and polytheists.

Is There Only One World of the Covenant?

The question arises whether there exists a singular world of covenant. Narrations indicate at least two distinct pre-corporeal realms experienced by humankind. The first is the World of Souls (‘*ālam al-arwāḥ*’), wherein Allah Almighty created all human souls and placed them within the *malakūt*¹ and the air. The second, distinct from the World of Souls, is the World of Particles (‘*ālam al-dharr*’). In this realm, Allah (swt) created all descendants of Ādam (‘a) in the form of minute particles, ensouling them. A covenant concerning His recognition was then established, mirroring that of the World of Souls. This discussion will initially focus on the World of Souls, citing relevant narrations from the A’immah (‘as), followed by a subsequent exploration of the World of Particles.

Regarding the creation of souls, narrations relate that Allah Almighty created human souls two thousand years prior to their physical bodies, situating them in the air. Within this realm, these souls developed affinities, affections, enmities, and animosities. Furthermore, they manifested belief or disbelief, acceptance or rejection of guardianship (*wilāyah*). The Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said:

“Allah created the souls two thousand years before the bodies, then settled them in the air. The souls who were friends and had affection

¹ *Malakūt* (مَلَكُوت): An Arabic theological and philosophical term denoting the inner, unseen, or metaphysical realm of reality, as opposed to the outward world which can be perceived with the five senses.

*there maintain these qualities in this world. And those who were enemies and haters there are likewise here.”*¹

Imam Ali (‘a) similarly attributed seemingly inexplicable love and friendship in this world to the World of Souls, stating:

“O my son, the souls were like organized armies who have looked at each other out of friendship and are whispering. It is the same with enemies. So, if you love someone without reason, have hope in him. And if you have enmity against someone who has done you no harm, avoid him.”

²

Other narrations convey that the friends of the A’immah (‘as) in the World of Souls were presented to them, allowing the A’immah (‘as) to recognize them, and vice-versa. Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) narrates an incident wherein a man professed his love and friendship to Amīr al-Mu’minīn (‘a). Amīr al-Mu’minīn (‘a) responded,

“You are not as you say. Woe to you; Allah created the souls two thousand years before the bodies and showed us our friends. I swear by God; I have not seen your soul among the souls of my friends who were presented to us. So where were you?” The man remained silent.³

From these narrations, several points can be deduced:

1. All souls, independent of their physical forms, are distinct and recognizable, not only prophets and their successors, but all souls interacted with each other, forming friendships and enmities.
2. Souls existed in the air prior to the creation of bodies.
3. Souls possessed complete understanding and consciousness in the World of Souls (‘*ālam al-arwāḥ*).
4. Souls in that realm believed or disbelieved, accepting or rejecting the friendship and guardianship (*wilāyah*) of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘as),

¹ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 47:356; al-Kashshī, *Ikhtiyār Ma’rifat al-Rijāl*. Page 396.

² al-Ṭūsī, *al-Amālī*. 595; Biḥār 42/247.

³ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:4381; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 58:138; al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā’ir al-Darajāt*. Page 86.

which is tantamount to accepting or rejecting Allah (swt)’s guardianship. Conversely, enmity towards them constitutes enmity towards God.

5. Unexplained initial love or hate in this world is indicative of similar sentiments in the World of Souls.
6. Friends and enemies in this world mirrored those relationships in the World of Souls.
7. Souls were created two thousand years before bodies.
8. Souls engaged in conversation with one another.
9. Allah Almighty created all souls simultaneously, not sequentially. This is further supported by other narrations concerning the creation of souls from the *ṭinah* of the ¹, *Sijjīn*², and *Fawq al-‘Illiyīn*.³

Pre-Embodiment of Souls: *Mutawātir* Testimonies from the Ahl al-Bayt (‘as)

The narrations concerning the creation of souls prior to their physical bodies are considered *mutawātir*. While *tawātur* is definitively established regarding the general theme and subject matter of these narrations, some scholars even claim *tawātur* in the precise wording of certain narrations. Despite this, Shaykh al-Mufīd categorized these narrations as *āḥād* or singular reports⁴. Conversely, Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī

¹ *‘Illiyīn* (عَلِيّين): Refers to a high metaphysical stratum of creation from which the souls of the righteous were formed. Creation from the *ṭinah* of *‘Illiyīn* indicates an elevated primordial origin associated with purity and proximity to divine guidance.

² *Sijjīn* (سَجِّين): Denotes the lowest metaphysical stratum of creation, characterized by distance from divine light. Souls created from the *ṭinah* of *Sijjīn* possess an innate resistance to truth and a predisposition toward moral and spiritual limitation, without implying compulsion.

³ *Fawq al-‘Illiyīn* (فَوْقَ الْعَلِيِّينَ): Indicates a transcendent level beyond even the highest created strata. In this context, it refers to the unique primordial origin of the most perfected souls—particularly the Prophet (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt (‘as)—whose creation surpasses the ordinary hierarchy of created souls.

⁴ al-Mufīd, *Taṣṭīḥ al-I’tiqādāt*. Page 80-81, al-Mufīd, *al-Masā’il al-Sarawīyyah*. Page 5.

deemed these narrations as so numerous that the pre-corporeal creation of souls constitutes a fundamental tenet of the faith.¹

‘Allāmah al-Majlisī, may Allah (swt) be pleased with him, considered the narrations pertaining to the World of Souls as *mutawātir*, arguing that contrary evidence presented concerning the simultaneous creation of souls and bodies is distorted. He posits that such limited and flawed evidence should not be used to refute the extensive body of narrations supporting the pre-corporeal existence of souls.² Similarly, the late Sayyid Ni‘matullāh al-Jazā‘irī also regarded these narrations as *mutawātir*.³

The late Āyatullāh Shaykh ‘Abd al-Nabī ‘Irāqī, may Allah be pleased with him, categorized the narrations concerning the worlds of covenant into nine distinct groups, several of which relate to the creation of souls before bodies. He describes the first group as narrations stating that souls were created two thousand years prior to bodies, asserting that this category exhibits *tawātur* in its wording.⁴

The second group, according to ‘Irāqī, describes souls residing in the *malā’ al-‘alā’*⁵ before their descent into this world, existing in groups and sects. He argues that these narrations also exhibit *tawātur* in their wording, explaining that pre-existing affinities and animosities in that realm explain similar sentiments in this world.⁶

Introducing the sixth group, he states that it establishes the pre-corporeal creation of the souls of the Prophet (ṣ), the A’immah (‘as), the

¹ Ṣadrah, *Kitāb al-‘Arshiyyah*. Page 23.

² al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 61/141.

³ Jazā‘irī, *Anwār al-Nu‘māniyyah*. Vol 1:268.

⁴ ‘Abd al-Nabī, *Ruḥ e Īmān*. Page 186.

⁵ *al-Malā’ al-‘alā’* (الملا الأعلى): A pre-terrestrial domain in which souls existed collectively prior to their descent into the material world, forming affinities and aversions that later manifest in earthly life.

⁶ ‘Abd al-Nabī. Page 197.

prophets, the Shia, or indeed all souls. He considers this group *mutawātir* in meaning, particularly with regard to the fourteen infallibles (‘a).¹

The seventh group, he continues, narrates that Allah created all souls, testing them before their corporeal creation and gradual descent into this world. This realm of responsibilities and obligations (‘*ālamī taklīf*) is referred to by various names, including *ashbāh* (forms), *arwāh* (souls), *alast*, ‘*ahd* (covenant), *dharr* (particle), *dmānāt* (trusts), *malakūt*, *nūr* (light), and *ẓill* (shadow), though *mīthāq*, the world of oath, is most frequently used. ‘Iraqi notes that this group contains the most narrations, exhibiting the highest degree of *tawātur*, numbering approximately seven hundred across various *ḥadīth* collections.²

Āyatullāh Jahrumī Sharī‘atmadārī, may Allah be pleased with him, writes that the texts concerning the precedence of the creation of souls over bodies are numerous, echoing ‘Allāmah al-Majlisī’s assessment in his *Bihār al-Anwār* that these narrations approach the level of *tawātur*. Shariatmadari affirms the veracity of Majlisi's statement, citing twenty-five narrations in this chapter, some with strong chains of transmission, classified as *ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic) and others as *ḥasan* (good), which are considered equivalent to *ṣaḥīḥ*.³

Therefore, based on the narrations, the World of Souls undoubtedly existed. Despite this, some prominent scholars, due to doubts or insufficient investigation, have denied the existence of such a world as described in the narrations, offering alternative interpretations. These doubts will be addressed in the subsequent discussion.

¹ ‘Abd al-Nabī. Page 222.

² ‘Abd al-Nabī. Page 223.

³ al-Jahrumī Sharī‘atmadārī, “Kalimah Mūjazah fī al-Arwāḥ wal Ashbāḥ wal Mīthāq wal Dharr” Page 62.

Key Points

1. **Existence Through Multiple Realms:** According to numerous narrations, human beings have traversed through different realms prior to their worldly existence.
2. **Divine Self-Disclosure:** In the pre-worldly realms, Allah (swt) introduced Himself to human souls, bestowing upon them the light of knowledge and intellect, thereby granting them innate recognition of His Lordship.
3. **Primordial Covenant and Testimony:** Before their earthly existence, Allah Almighty demanded acknowledgment of His Lordship from His servants, and they affirmed it. Subsequently, He established a divine covenant with them.
4. **Indicators of Pre-Existence:** Innate recognition of Allah (swt), instinctive love or aversion upon first encounters with others, and unexplained feelings of sorrow without an apparent cause all serve as experiential proofs of a pre-worldly existence, as attested by narrations from Ahl al-Bayt (‘as).
5. **Two Pre-Worldly Realms:** Human beings experienced at least two distinct worlds before their earthly life:
 - a. **The World of Souls (‘*ālam al-arwāḥ*):** Where human souls existed independently before association with bodies.
 - b. **The World of Particles (‘*ālam al-dharr*):** Where souls appeared in the form of particles, and Allah took their testimony regarding His Lordship.
6. **Primordial Creation of Souls:** Human souls were created two thousand years prior to the creation of their physical bodies, as reported in the narrations.
7. **Spiritual Relationships and Belief in Guardianship:** In the world of souls, human spirits experienced bonds of friendship or enmity, love or hatred. Additionally, they either accepted or rejected the guardianship (*Wilāyah*) of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘as).

8. **Distinctiveness of Souls:** Souls, despite their pre-bodily state, were distinct and distinguishable from one another. They existed in a realm described as “the air” (*al-hawā`*) before being associated with their respective bodies in the material world.
9. ***Tawātur* of Narrations:** The narrations concerning the world of souls hold *Tawātur* (i.e., multiple independent chains of transmission ensuring authenticity) in both meaning and subject matter. Based on these numerous narrations, the existence of the world of souls is established beyond doubt.

Chapter 6

Realms of Divine Recognition - The World of Souls – Part 2

Learning Outcomes of this Chapter

- Identify and articulate common objections to the concept of a pre-corporeal World of Souls.
- Formulate responses to these objections, providing reasoned arguments in support of the World of Souls.
- Comprehend the implications of the precedence (*taqaddam*) of souls over physical bodies.

Introduction

In the preceding chapter, we explored the evidence supporting the existence of pre-corporeal realms, with a particular focus on the World of Souls (*‘ālam al-arwāḥ*). This realm, as indicated by numerous narrations, is believed to be a metaphysical domain where souls existed before their embodiment in the material world. The concept of *‘ālam al-arwāḥ* holds significant theological implications, particularly in discussions on divine preordination, human accountability, and the nature of innate recognition (*fiṭrah*).

Despite the strong narrative foundation affirming the existence of this pre-material realm, some scholars have raised objections, questioning its ontological status, scriptural validity, and compatibility with rational thought. Their reservations stem from various concerns, including differing interpretations of Quranic verses, theological perspectives on the nature of existence, and the epistemological distinction between symbolic and literal understandings of narrations.

This chapter aims to critically examine these objections, providing a comprehensive analysis of the scholarly arguments for and against the concept of the World of Souls. Additionally, it delves into closely related theological discussions, such as the implications of *'ālam al-arwāḥ* on human cognition, the pre-existential covenant (*mīthāq*), and its role in shaping one's innate awareness of the Divine. By addressing these issues, this chapter seeks to offer a clearer understanding of the significance of pre-corporeal existence and its impact on Islamic thought.

Debating the World of Souls: Objections and Counterarguments

Shaykh al-Mufīd, may Allah be pleased with him, after classifying the narrations concerning the pre-corporeal creation of souls as *āḥād* (singular reports), raises two primary objections to the existence of such a realm. He argues that if the creation of souls *before* the body is a *kawnī* (ontological) reality, and not merely *'ilmī* (epistemological), then souls must exist independently and without need of a *murakkab* (composite being, i.e., the body). Furthermore, he contends that we should possess awareness of our existence in that world, analogous to our knowledge of events post-corporeal creation. The absence of such awareness, he asserts, invalidates the claim of a pre-corporeal World of Souls.¹

In his Taṣḥīḥ al-I'tiqādāt, Shaykh al-Mufīd reiterates these doubts and further suggests that Shaykh al-Ṣadūq's belief in the pre-corporeal creation of souls borders on reincarnation.²

Thus, Shaykh al-Mufīd's discourse raises four key objections:

1. The narrations concerning the pre-corporeal creation of souls are *āḥād*.
2. The existence of a World of Souls necessitates the independent existence of souls.

¹ al-Mufīd, *al-Masā'il al-Sarawīyyah*. Page 53.

² al-Mufīd, *Taṣḥīḥ al-I'tiqādāt*. Page 87.

3. Cognizance of such a world should be inherent, yet it is absent.
4. Belief in the pre-corporeal creation of souls is akin to belief in reincarnation.

The first objection, concerning the classification of narrations as *āḥād*, has been previously addressed. The narrations concerning the pre-corporeal creation of souls are considered *mutawātir* in meaning and subject matter, as discussed in the previous chapter, which also detailed various scholarly opinions on this matter.

The second objection, regarding the independent existence of souls, is consistent with narrative traditions. These traditions clearly delineate the distinct and distinguishable nature of souls even in the absence of physical bodies, placing them within the air in the World of Souls prior to corporeal creation.

The third objection, the lack of awareness, is refuted by the principle that absence of knowledge does not constitute proof of non-existence. Analogous to the human experience within the maternal womb, where existence is a reality despite a lack of recollection, the narrations concerning the World of Souls explain that while Allah (swt) has instilled within humans the capacity for recognition, He has also willed their forgetfulness of the circumstances of this primordial realm. Therefore, recourse to the Quran and ḥadīth is necessary to establish the existence of these realms. As previously discussed, these sources provide ample confirmation and proof.

Āyatullāh Jahrumī, may Allah be pleased with him, addresses these three objections, stating that Shaykh al-Mufīd's assertion regarding the *āḥād* nature of the narrations is invalid. Furthermore, he argues that there is no rational impediment to the independent existence of souls or their residence outside the body, such as in the air, as corroborated by numerous narrations. He acknowledges the limitations of human comprehension regarding the true nature and attributes of the soul. Finally, he attributes our lack of awareness of the World of Souls to divine wisdom,

noting that Allah (swt), in His wisdom, often withholds remembrance of past experiences, even within the span of a single lifetime. He suggests that while such recollections may be absent in this world, they will be accessible in the afterlife.

In conclusion, the existence of the World of Souls prior to corporeal creation is firmly established by the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt ('as). However, the precise details of its reality, essence, modalities, actions, and circumstances remain beyond human comprehension. This realm is also referred to as *'ālam al-ashbāh* (World of Shadows).¹

Addressing the fourth objection concerning reincarnation, Āyatullāh Ṣāfi Gulpāygānī, may Allah be pleased with him, in his article reconciling the views of Shaykh al-Ṣadūq (r) and Shaykh al-Mufīd (r), argues that while the realities of the soul, intellect, and inner human existence remain largely unknown, the pre-corporeal creation of souls is established through narrative traditions. Shaykh al-Ṣadūq's acceptance of these narrations does not equate to a belief in reincarnation. Reincarnation, he clarifies, involves the transmigration of a single soul into multiple earthly bodies across time, with rewards and punishments accruing to the soul based on its actions in previous lives. This contrasts sharply with the pre-corporeal creation of souls, where each soul is uniquely created and associated with a single, distinct physical body. Even if the pre-corporeal existence of souls is not definitively proven (though, according to scholars like Shaykh al-Ṣadūq (r), who possessed mastery of the narrations, it is indeed established), the concept should not be conflated with reincarnation.²

Challenging the Eternity of Souls: A Critical Examination

Another point of contention concerns the eternality (*qidam*) of souls. Some argue that the pre-corporeal existence of souls implies their eternality. This misconception, while seemingly more prevalent among

¹ al-Mufīd, *al-Maqālat wa al-Rasā'il*. Vol 53:1-9.

² al-Mufīd. Vol 53:3.

proponents of *rūḥāniyyat al-ḥudūth* (the soul's spiritual origination)¹, also affects those who adhere to *jismāniyyat al-ḥudūth* (the soul's corporeal origination)². Mullā Ṣādrah al-Shīrāzī, may Allah be pleased with him, despite acknowledging the numerous narrations concerning the pre-corporeal creation of souls, maintains that souls are temporally created from the body (*jismāniyyat al-ḥudūth*). Thus, he rejects the pre-existence of individually distinct souls as described in the narrations, offering alternative interpretations.

Mullā Ṣādrah, may Allah be pleased with him, posits that human souls come into being when the *nutfah* (sperm) achieves the requisite *isti'dād* (preparedness) for its reception. He likens the *ḥudūth* (temporal creation) of souls at the moment of completed *isti'dād*, termed *taswīyah* (equalization or proportioning), to the *ḥudūth* of the image in a polished mirror.³ He then presents arguments against the pre-existence of human souls with their individual characteristics. Regarding the narrations concerning the pre-corporeal creation of souls, he suggests that they do not imply the existence of souls with all their distinctions prior to the body. Instead, he argues that these narrations refer to the existence of souls in *taqdīr* (divine decree) or the existence of their origin and source, not their fully realized individual selves.⁴

Elsewhere, Mullā Ṣādrah, may Allah be pleased with him, explains that the precedence of souls over bodies signifies another form of existence related to their origins, located within the *'ālamī 'ilmi ilāhī* (world of divine knowledge). This existence, he suggests, takes the form of

¹ [Translator's Note] *Rūḥāniyyat al-ḥudūth* denotes the view that the soul's origin is not derived from the sperm (*nutfah*); rather, it becomes associated with the fetus four months post-fertilization. Prior to this, the soul exists independently of the body in an undifferentiated, abstract state. Individualization of the soul occurs at the four-month juncture upon its union with the body.

² [Translator's Note] *Jismāniyyat al-ḥudūth* represents the belief that the soul does not pre-exist the sperm (*nutfah*) from which it is created. The soul's temporal origin is thus derived from the body.

³ Ṣādrah, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfī*. Vol 3:391.

⁴ Ṣādrah. Vol 3:392.

abstract intellectual forms (*ṣuwari mujarradi ‘aqlī*) akin to the divine prototypes (*muthuli ilāhī*) discussed by Plato and his predecessors.¹

While Ṣadrah al-Shirāzī doesn’t explicitly affirm the eternity (*qidam*) of souls in the cited passage, despite his arguments resembling those used to defend Plato’s belief in this concept, his student, in his commentary on al-Shawāhid al-Rubūbiyyah, explicitly articulates this view.

The commentary presents several perspectives on the soul’s *ḥudūth* (temporal creation) and its absence, stating, “*The fourth statement is that the soul possesses a collective unity (waḥdati jam ‘ī) and multiple inherent qualities (shu ‘ūni muta ‘addidi dhātī).*”² *Therefore, the soul is eternal (qadīm)*³ *due to the eternity of the universal active intellect (‘aqlī fa ‘‘ālī kullī)*⁴ *, which is the universal agent (rabb al-naw ‘)*⁵ *in its state of abstraction (tajarrud). Because the soul is also temporally created (ḥādith) at the level of its natural and bodily existence, which is ḥādith through the body—not that it is ḥādith with the temporal creation of the body—this statement is strong, and the author also agrees with it. So, if you say the soul is eternal (qadīm), you are right. And if you say it is ḥādith, you are also correct. And if you say it is abstract (mujarrad), you have spoken the truth. And if you say it is corporeal (jismānī), you are still correct.*

¹ Ṣadrah, *al-Ḥikmat al-Muta ‘āliyah Fil Asfār al-‘Aqliyyat al-Arba ‘ah*. Vol 8:332.

² [Translator’s Note] Some Philosophers’ hypothesis is that the soul, while possessing a singular *dhāt* (essence/nature), manifests diverse *ṣifāt* (attributes) and *aḥwāl* (functions). This underscores the soul’s *waḥdah* (unity) within its *kathrah* (plurality), highlighting the inherent multiplicity within its unified nature.

³ [Translator’s Note] As per most philosophers, *Qadīm* signifies eternity or pre-existence, denoting that which has always existed and will continue to exist *ab initio ad infinitum*.

⁴ [Translator’s Note] The ‘*aqlī fa ‘‘ālī kullī* (universal active intellect) is a technical term in Islamic philosophy referring to a divine and eternal substance that illuminates and actualizes the potential intellect within humanity. This ‘*aql* is conceived as a universal, all-encompassing intellect, transcending individual minds and responsible for the cosmic order and structure. The term *kullī* (universal/total) modifies *fa ‘‘āl* (active/operative), thus designating it as the “universal active intellect”.

⁵ [Translator’s Note] *Rabb al-naw ‘* (principle of the species) is a philosophical concept denoting the principle or cause of a specific species or kind. In this context, it refers to the cause or principle underlying the soul’s existence.

Likewise, suppose you say the soul is an angel, a fairy, an animal, a plant, or anything else. In that case, it is all correct without excluding it from its other context. This is because the soul, after God, is a simple and fundamental entity that is all things.”¹

This theory attempts to reconcile the *mutawātir* (widely transmitted) narrations concerning the pre-corporeal creation of souls with the perceived impossibility of such a creation due to the souls' inherent distinctions. It achieves this by reinterpreting these narrations, effectively removing them from their literal meaning. This approach not only rejects the apparent meaning of the narrations but also introduces a concept inconsistent with the established principles of the Ahl al-Bayt ('as)'s teachings. According to these teachings, creation is not based on causality ('*illiyyah*)² or a hierarchical system of intellects ('*uqūli ṭūlī wa 'ardī*)³. Similarly, the soul does not possess the kind of abstraction (*tajarrud*) described in the aforementioned statement. The narrations of the Ahl al-Bayt ('as) clearly state that no human soul, at any level of existence (*martabayi wujūdī*)⁴, is equivalent to angels, animals, or plants.

The *mutawātir* and highly authentic narrations explicitly establish the creation of souls two thousand years prior to bodies, specifying that these souls were distinct and differentiated from one another. These facts must be accepted, and our understanding of souls and bodies should be grounded in their implications. These narrations, originating from the source of true knowledge, are incomparable to human analogies.

¹ Ṣadrah, *al-Shawāhid al-Rubūbiyyah*. Page 698.

² [Translator's Note] Causality ('*illiyyah*) in philosophy describes the principle that every event or phenomenon has a necessary and sufficient cause or causes.

³ [Translator's Note] '*Uqūl ṭūlī wa 'ardī* (longitudinal and latitudinal intellects) are terms in Islamic philosophy describing distinct aspects of the human intellect. *Ṭūlī* (longitudinal) refers to the rational and logical faculty responsible for abstract thought, deduction, and problem-solving. '*Arḍī* (latitudinal) designates the imaginative and creative faculty associated with intuition, insight, and artistic expression. These two aspects are considered essential for a holistic understanding of the world.

⁴ [Translator's Note] *Martabayi wujūdī* (level of existence), a philosophical term, denotes the degree or level of a being's existence, representing the extent of its reality.

Souls and Their Collective Creation: Exploring Theological Foundations

The narrations concerning the pre-corporeal creation of souls suggest a simultaneous, rather than gradual, creation. Given that these narrations establish the creation of all souls two thousand years prior to bodies, it logically follows that these bodies were also created en masse, not progressively. These simultaneously created bodies could not have been created within this *‘ālam al-dunyā* (world of generation and corruption), as human birth occurs generation after generation. The creation of bodies will be discussed in the subsequent chapter.

Regarding the simultaneous creation of souls, the late Sha‘rānī argues that it is improbable that the narrations imply the individual creation of each soul two thousand years before its respective body. He reasons that such an interpretation would lead to inconsistencies. For example, if a friend of an Imam (‘a) is born three thousand years after the Imam (‘a), then that friend’s soul would be created one thousand years after the Imam (‘a). This would contradict the Imam (‘a)’s statement that all his followers were presented to him in the World of Souls, a claim that presupposes their existence at that time.¹

Great Philosopher Miṣbāḥ Yazdī, may Allah be pleased with him, suggests that *“One point worthy of consideration regarding the creation of souls two thousand years before bodies is that it does not mean each soul was created precisely two thousand years before its individual body. If this were the case, many souls would not have existed at the time of Imam Ali (‘a), let alone before him, because Allah created numerous bodies thousands of years after the Imam (‘a). Therefore, ‘two thousand years’ likely expresses a protracted period. Rather, the ‘two thousand years’*

¹ al-Māzandarānī, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfi*. Vol 1:135.

refers to taqaddumi ‘aqlī (rational precedence)¹ and taqaddumi mithālī² (precedence of Forms/Ideal Forms). ”³

This interpretation, however, presupposes the absence of an intermediary world between the World of Souls and the *‘ālam al-dunyā* (world of generation and corruption) where all human bodies were created simultaneously. As will be explored in the following two chapters, narrations indicate the existence of such a world.

The late Sayyid Ni‘matullāh al-Jazā’irī, may Allah be pleased with him, suggests that the Prophet (s)’s statement, “*By two thousand years,*” refers to the precedence of the soul over the body, even if that body is only the body of Ādam (‘a). He argues that otherwise, every soul would precede its respective body by thousands of years.⁴ This explanation, however, is also problematic and will be addressed later. Jazayeri’s view is surprising given his belief in the World of Particles, where, he posits, Allah (swt) extracted the progeny of Ādam (‘a) from his loins, and souls were attached to these particle bodies.

He cites a narration describing Allah (swt)’s intention to create humankind, creating *ṭīnah* (clay) and dividing it into two parts. He commanded the companions of the right to be created, and they were created as particles. The same process was repeated with the companions of the left. Then, both groups were commanded to enter the fire. The companions of the right obeyed, while those on the left disobeyed, a process repeated three times. Finally, Allah (swt) created Ādam (‘a) from clay.

¹ [Translator’s Note] In Philosophy, it refers to the ontological or temporal priority of the human spiritual or intellectual dimension over the corporeal. It suggests a pre-corporeal existence of souls and the fundamental nature of the soul relative to the body.

² [Translator’s Note] *Taqaddumi mithālī* can be interpreted as the precedence of Forms. The *‘ālamī mithāl* (world of Forms) is conceived as a realm of eternal and immutable truths, contrasting with the mutable and transient material world. Thus, *taqaddumi mithālī* in this context could denote a hierarchical ordering of archetypes or a ranking of souls based on their proximity to, or alignment with, these archetypes.

³ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 61:142.

⁴ Jazā’irī, *Anwar Numaniyyah*. Vol 1:268.

He cites a narration wherein Allah (swt), intending to create humankind, fashioned *ṭīnah* and divided it into two portions. To the *aṣḥāb al-yamīn* (Companions of the Right), He commanded, “*Be created by My permission,*” and they were created in the form of particles. The same process occurred with the *aṣḥāb al-shimāl* (Companions of the Left). Subsequently, both groups were commanded to enter the fire. The *aṣḥāb al-yamīn* obeyed, while the *aṣḥāb al-shimāl* disobeyed. This scenario was repeated three times, with the *aṣḥāb al-shimāl* disobeying each time. Finally, He fashioned all of them from clay and created Ādam (‘a).

From this narration, al-Jazā’irī infers that this obligation pertained to the souls connected to the particles *prior* to Ādam (‘a)’s creation. He further states, “*After creating and shaping Ādam (‘a), He extracted the same particles from his loins, attached the souls to them, and then took their pledge and covenant.*”¹

Key Points

1. The **independent existence of souls** is firmly established, as evidenced by the narrations of Ahl al-Bayt (‘as), which affirm the existence of souls distinct from their physical bodies.
2. **Lack of awareness or memory** of the World of Souls does not constitute a valid basis for rejecting its existence.
3. The doctrine of **souls being created before bodies** is fundamentally different from the concept of **reincarnation** (*tanāsikh*). While reincarnation involves the soul’s transfer across multiple earthly bodies, the pre-bodily creation of souls entails that each soul is associated with only one specific earthly body.
4. The **pre-bodily creation of souls** does not imply the **eternality of souls**, as their creation remains contingent upon Allah (swt)’s will and decree.

¹ al-Jazā’irī. Vol 1:280.

5. Both **souls and bodies** were created collectively, though there was a temporal gap of **two thousand years** between their respective creations.
6. The **precedence of souls over bodies** should not be understood as a **rational precedence** (*taqaddum 'aqlī*) or **precedence of Forms** (*taqaddum mithālī*).
7. The **precedence of souls over bodies** refers not to an individual precedence over each physical body but rather to the **universal creation of all souls prior to all bodies collectively**.

Chapter 7

Realms of Divine Recognition - World of Particles – Part 1

Learning Outcomes of this Chapter

- Analyze the relationship between the World of Particles (‘*Ālam al-Dharr*’) and the World of Souls (‘*Ālam al-Arwāḥ*’).
- Explain the divine wisdom behind the attachment of souls to bodies.
- Interpret the exegesis (*tafsīr*) of the Verse of Particles and compare various scholarly views regarding its meaning and implications.

Prior chapters established the existence of at least two distinct pre-corporeal realms experienced by humankind. Following the discussion of the World of Souls (‘*ālam al-arwāḥ*’), this chapter will examine another locus of divine recognition known as the World of Particles (‘*ālam al-dharr*’).

The World of Particles is a realm wherein Allah Almighty extracted the progeny of Prophet Ādam (‘a) from his loins in the form of particles. He (swt) then revealed Himself to them and established a covenant concerning His Lordship. Following the completion of this oath, He gathered them back within Prophet Ādam (‘a). These descendants subsequently traversed the generations through loins and wombs until their divinely appointed time of birth into this world (‘*ālam al-dunyā*’).

As previously noted, direct empirical validation of these pre-corporeal realms is beyond the scope of human comprehension. Therefore, reliance upon revealed texts is essential for their affirmation. Fortunately,

both the Quran and the Aḥādīth contain substantial evidence regarding the World of Particles, precluding both denial and subjective interpretation.

From Souls to Particles: Understanding Pre-Earthly Realms

The relationship between the World of Souls and the World of Particles requires further examination. As previously discussed, Allah Almighty created all human souls simultaneously, two thousand years prior to their physical embodiment. This simultaneous creation and gathering of souls implies a corresponding simultaneous creation of bodies. However, corporeal creation in this *‘ālam al-dunyā* (material world) is a gradual process, occurring *not* precisely two thousand years before the respective souls, but rather through the processes of conception and birth. Therefore, these simultaneously created bodies must have originated in a realm distinct from this world. Within Islamic tradition, this realm is variously designated the World of Particles (*‘ālam al-dharr*), the World of Covenant (*‘ālam al-mīthāq*), or the World of *Alast* (*‘ālam alast*).¹

The rationale behind the ensoulment of these bodies is elucidated in a narration explained by Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a). The Imam (‘a) explains that souls, residing in the *‘ālam al-a‘lā* (supreme realm) prior to their placement in bodies, were susceptible to arrogance. Their elevated status predisposed them towards a sense of superiority, bordering on claims to Lordship. Therefore, through His grace and mercy, Allah (swt) associated them with physical bodies to avert such transgression. The Imam (‘a) states,

*“Indeed, Allah Almighty knew that if the souls were left alone with the honor and highness they have, most would claim Lordship before Allah. So, by His power, grace, and mercy, He placed them in the bodies He had decreed for them from the beginning of His destiny.”*²

¹ [Translator’s Note] Referring to the question *‘أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ – Am I not your Lord?’* [7:172].

² al-Ṣadūq, *‘Ilal al-Sharā‘i’*. Page 15; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 58:133.

This narration suggests that Allah Almighty had preordained a specific body for each soul. In His wisdom and exigency, He created these independent souls with their inherent position and status. Having established the divine argument with them in that pre-corporeal state, He then placed them within their destined physical forms.

The proofs for the existence of the World of Particles will now be examined. The subsequent two chapters will focus on the Verse of *Dharr* (*āyat al-dharr*) and related narrations.

Quranic Discourse on ‘*Ālam al-Dharr* (World of Particles)

The Verse of *Dharr*

The World of Particles in the Quran is primarily referenced in the Verse of *Dharr*:

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِنْ بَنِي آدَمَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَى أَنْفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ قَالُوا بَلَى شَهِدْنَا أَنْ تَقُولُوا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّا كُنَّا عَنْ هَذَا غَافِلِينَ ﴿١٧٢﴾
أَوْ تَقُولُوا إِنَّمَا أَشْرَكَ آبَاؤُنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَكُنَّا ذُرِّيَّةً مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ أَفَتُهْلِكُنَا بِمَا فَعَلَ
الْمُبْطِلُونَ ﴿١٧٣﴾

“And when your Lord brought forth from the children of Ādam, from their loins, their descendants, and made them bear witness against themselves: ‘Am I not your Lord?’ They said: ‘Yes! We bear witness.’ Lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection: ‘Indeed, we were heedless of this,’ (172)

Or you should say: ‘Only our fathers associated [others with Allah] before, and we were descendants after them. So will You destroy us for what the falsifiers did?’” (173)¹

This verse indicates that Allah (swt), at a specific juncture, extracted the descendants of Ādam (‘a) from their loins, arraying them before Him. Upon the query, *“Am I not your Lord?”*, they responded, *“Yes! We bear witness.”* The phrase *“أَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَى أَنْفُسِهِمْ”* (made them bear

¹ Sūrah al-A‘rāf, Verses 172-173.

witness against themselves) suggests their self-awareness and distinct identities within this assembly.

While the verse explicitly mentions the extraction of Ādam (‘a)’s progeny from the loins of his immediate children, it does not explicitly mention the extraction of those children from Ādam (‘a)’s loins, although it doesn’t preclude it either. The verse implies the presence of all descendants, generation after generation, within this gathering, each distinct and recognizable.

The phrase “*shahidnā*” (we bear witness) suggests the presence of witnesses beyond Ādam (‘a)’s direct descendants. The phrases “**أَنْ تَقُولُوا**” (lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection) and “**أَوْ تَقُولُوا**” (or you should say: “*Only our fathers associated [others with Allah]*”) elucidate the wisdom underlying the World of Particles. This pre-corporeal covenant serves as a *ḥujjah* (argument) against Ādam (‘a)’s descendants. Without it, humans might claim ignorance of Allah (swt) due to the veils and distractions of this world, or attribute their beliefs solely to parental influence and environmental factors. However, such claims are rendered invalid by the clear and unveiled recognition of Allah (swt) in the World of Particles, where all generations were present, clarifying the familial link between fathers and their progeny.

The verse specifies that the offspring were taken from the loins of Ādam (‘a)’s children. Narrations, however, mention the progeny being taken from Ādam (‘a)’s back. This apparent discrepancy can be reconciled. While the narrations don’t detail the process of extraction, the verse provides this detail. The verse suggests a progressive extraction—Ādam (‘a)’s progeny from his loins, their children from their loins, and so on, mirroring the generational sequence in this world. Thus, the verse and narrations are consistent; the verse elaborates on the how of the extraction, while the narrations focus on the what.

Shaykh al-Mufīd (r) concurs that Allah extracted all of Prophet Ādam (‘a)’s descendants from his loins or “*back*,” (as some translations

render it). However, he does not subscribe to the concept of the World of Souls and disputes certain key characteristics attributed to the World of Particles. He states, *“It is true that Allah brought forth the progeny of Prophet Ādam (‘a) from his loins in the form of particles and filled the expanse with them. Some had light without darkness, some had darkness without light, and the rest both light and darkness.”* He then suggests that Allah (swt)’s purpose in this act was to demonstrate to Prophet Ādam (‘a) the vastness of his progeny, reveal His power, and convey the glad tidings of the continuation of his lineage. He further posits, *“Almighty Allah possibly could have removed the actual bodies of the descendants of Ādam from his loins, not their souls.”*¹

Therefore, Shaykh al-Mufīd (r) accepts the extraction of Ādam (‘a)’s descendants in the aforementioned sense. However, he disagrees with the notion that these particles possessed intelligence, understanding, and free will, or that they were subjected to a test. He categorizes narrations suggesting these attributes as belonging to those who believe in reincarnation.²

This stance creates a tension with the meaning of the previously cited Quranic verse, as he attributes narrations corroborating the verse to the doctrine of reincarnation. Shaykh al-Mufīd faces a significant challenge here, as, in his view, these particles cannot be subjects of questioning or bearers of the divine trust. His reasoning stems from his belief that if souls were initially associated with these particle bodies and then subsequently associated with another body in this world, it would constitute reincarnation.

This line of thinking, however, is not consistent with the narrations. Allah Almighty did not associate souls with the particle bodies only during the World of Particles, to be detached later. Instead, the narrations indicate a continuous association of souls with these particle

¹ al-Mufīd, *al-Masā’il al-Sarawīyyah*. Vol 7:45-46.

² 7/45-46 al-Mufīd. Vol 7:45-46.

bodies, persisting from that primordial realm until the moment of death in this earthly life.

Analysis of the Verse of *‘Ālam al-Dharr* in Tafsīr Literature

Various interpretations of the Verse of *Dharr* exist among religious scholars.

Zamakhsharī, a Mu‘tazilite commentator, interprets the verse allegorically. He argues that the exchange, “*Am I not your Lord? They said: Yes, we bear witness,*” is not a literal event but rather a metaphorical representation. He suggests that Allah (swt) presented proofs of His Lordship and Oneness, to which human intellects inherently testify. The insights placed within humanity, he continues, allow for the discernment between guidance and misguidance. Thus, it is as if Allah (swt) made them witness against themselves, clarifying the truth. Zamakhsharī concludes that the entire exchange is figurative, reflecting the allegorical nature of much of divine and prophetic discourse.¹

Unable to reconcile the concept of a World of Particles with his understanding, Zamakhsharī rejects its literal existence, thereby interpreting the verse in a way that deviates from its apparent meaning.

Shaykh al-Mufīd, may Allah be pleased with him, offers a similar interpretation, also viewing the verse as allegorical. He suggests that the Verse of *Dharr* represents a covenant established by Allah (swt) concerning His Lordship with every *mukallaf* (legally responsible individual) brought forth from the loins of Ādam (‘a) and his descendants. This covenant, he argues, perfects their intellects and demonstrates the effects of creation within their very being. The testimony, “*They said: ‘Yes,’*” signifies not a literal verbal affirmation but rather the inherent recognition of the Creator’s existence through the undeniable evidence of creation itself.²

¹ Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*. Vol 2:176.

² al-Mufīd, *al-Masā’il al-Sarawīyyah*. Vol 7:48.

According to this view, neither a pre-corporeal human existence nor a World of Particles, where Allah (swt) directly addressed humankind, ever existed. Only this world and the hereafter exist, and all events described in the verse are understood to occur within this world. Consequently, the narrative presented in the verse is not a factual account but rather a symbolic representation.

Şadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, may Allah be pleased with him, rejects these interpretations, characterizing them as conjecture and lacking substantive evidence. He argues that true understanding requires revelation through observation (*mushāhadah*)¹ and mystical insight. He posits that human souls possess multiple existences (*wujūd*)² and manifestations (*mazāhir*)^{3, 4}.

Interpreting the verse, he suggests that “*the children of Ādam*” refers to human souls when they existed within the loins of their “intellectual ancestors” (*āba’i ‘aqlī*) and “original sources” (*ma ‘ādinī aṣlī*). “And made them witness over themselves,” he explains, signifies that within this intellectual and perceptual realm, they were granted awareness of their rational essence (*dhāti ‘aqlī*) and luminous truths (*ḥaqā’iqi nūrī*). Thus, they perceived the query, “*Am I not your Lord?*”, intellectually and responded affirmatively through the “tongues of their intellect.”⁵

This explanation, however, diverges from the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘as) and contradicts fundamental religious principles. Interpretations and justifications are only acceptable when the explicit meaning of the Quran or a narration from the infallible A’immah (‘as) conflicts with established religious principles or presents a clear

¹ [Translator’s Note] In philosophical and mystical discourse, *mushāhadah* can denote the experiential perception of spiritual or metaphysical realities.

² [Translator’s Note] *Wujūd* signifies existence or being, often employed to describe the fundamental nature of reality or ultimate reality within Islamic philosophy and Sufism.

³ [Translator’s Note] *Mazāhir*, in a philosophical context, generally refers to the perceptible appearances or manifestations of reality. It concerns how entities present themselves in the phenomenal world, as distinct from their underlying essence or nature.

⁴ Şadrah, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfī*. Vol 3:373.

⁵ Şadrah. Vol 3:373.

intellectual contradiction. Since the apparent meaning of the Quranic verses and narrations concerning the existence of the World of Particles does not conflict with reason or fundamental religious tenets, these texts must be accepted as they are presented. Contentment with the information provided by these revealed sources is essential.

Sayyid al-Jazā'irī, may Allah be pleased with him, relying on the narrations and explanations from the Ahl al-Bayt (‘as), interprets the verse according to its apparent meaning. He states that most commentators understand the Verse of Particles to mean that Allah extracted the descendants of Ādam (‘a) from his loins in the form of particles, displaying them all to Ādam (‘a). Allah (swt) then declared, *“Indeed, I take a covenant from your descendants that they worship Me and do not associate anyone with Me, and it is My responsibility to provide for them.”* He then asked, *“Am I not your Lord?”* They replied, *“Yes, we bear witness that you are our Lord.”* Allah (swt) then addressed the angels, *“Be witnesses,”* and they responded, *“We are witnesses.”* Finally, Allah (swt) returned the particles to the loins of Ādam (‘a), where they remained until their destined time of birth.¹

Concerning the absence of explicit mention of the extraction of offspring from the loins of Prophet Ādam (‘a) in the verse, **Āyatullāh Jahrumī Sharī‘atmadārī**, may Allah be pleased with him, suggests that Allah Almighty first extracted the descendants of Prophet Ādam (‘a) from his loins, and subsequently, descendants from the loins of those descendants. He argues that the term “offspring” encompasses more than just those born into this world. The verse, he notes, does not mention the extraction of Ādam (‘a)’s immediate children from his loins, and the order of extraction is not specified in the revealed texts. This omission, he contends, is similar to other Quranic narratives where detailed accounts are often absent, perhaps because such detail is not essential to the narrative's central purpose—in this case, the establishment of divine proof. This

¹ Jazā'irī, *Anwār al-Nu‘māniyyah*. Vol 1:277.

explanation serves to reconcile the apparent discrepancy between the verse and the narrations.¹

The late **Mullā Ṣāliḥ al-Māzandarānī**, may Allah be pleased with him, reinforces this point, stating that the extraction of offspring from the loins of Ādam (‘a)’s children signifies their extraction from subsequent generations in their natural order. He argues that the particles of all humans existed within Ādam (‘a)’s loins in the same generational sequence as their eventual births in this world. Therefore, extracting them from the loins of Ādam (‘a)’s children is, in effect, extracting them from Ādam (‘a)’s loins. Thus, he concludes, the verse does not contradict the narrations that specify extraction from Ādam (‘a)’s loins.²

The verse establishes the existence of a realm containing all of humankind. The narrations offer more detailed explanations regarding this realm, which will be examined in the following chapter.

Key Points

1. The evidence supporting the existence of the World of Particles (‘*Ālam al-Dharr*’) is extensive, with a degree of *tawātur* (concurrent transmission) that renders the narrations highly reliable.
2. In the World of Particles, all human bodies were created collectively.
3. Prior to their association with bodies, souls existed in an elevated and noble realm. However, due to the arrogance and sense of superiority displayed by many souls, Allah Almighty placed them into physical bodies to make them aware of their dependence, weakness, and neediness.
4. In the World of Particles, all the progeny of Ādam (‘a)’ were brought forth from his back and addressed with the divine question: “*Alastu bi-Rabbikum (Am I not your Lord)?*”.

ص 19 و 20 . سلسلة مقالات كنز شيوخ مفيد، ش 35 مقاله «كلمه موجزه في الارواح و الاشباه»¹

² al-Māzandarānī, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfī*. Vol 8:17.

5. Each particle (soul) in the World of Particles was distinct and fully aware of its individual state and condition.
6. Besides the descendants of Prophet Ādam (‘a), other beings were also witnesses to the covenant taken from the children of Ādam (‘a).
7. Allah (swt) made His recognition known to all souls in the World of Particles, thereby establishing the divine *ḥujjah* (proof) upon them.
8. The verse regarding the World of Particles (*Āyah al-Dharr*) refers to the extraction of progeny, indicating that each generation was brought forth from the loins of the preceding one. However, this sequential detail is not explicitly mentioned in the narrations.
9. The subtle particle-like bodies (*ajsām dharrīyyah*) that housed the souls in the World of Particles remain with them throughout their life in this world, from the moment of their association with the body until death.
10. Since the existence of previous worlds cannot be comprehended by human reason alone, it is essential to rely on revelatory texts, particularly narrations, rather than engaging in speculative interpretation or rationalization.

Chapter 8

Realms of Divine Recognition - World of Particles – Part 2

Learning Outcomes of this Chapter

- Identify and understand the various categories of aḥādīth concerning the World of Particles (‘*Ālam al-Dharr*’).
- Analyze the perspectives of scholars regarding these narrations.
- Recognize and critically evaluate the objections raised about the existence of the World of Particles, along with their respective responses.

Introduction

Building upon the previous discussion on the *Āyah al-Dharr* (Verse of Particles) and its interpretations, this chapter delves deeper into the concept of the World of Particles by examining narrations from Ahl al-Bayt (‘as). These narrations provide crucial insights into the pre-temporal covenant between Allah (swt) and human souls, a foundational belief in Islamic theology that has been subject to various interpretations and scholarly debates.

The chapter is structured to achieve three main objectives. First, it identifies and categorizes the different types of narrations related to the World of Particles, offering a comprehensive understanding of the textual evidence supporting this concept. Second, it examines the perspectives of scholars who have engaged with these narrations, highlighting their interpretations, justifications, and methodological approaches. Finally, the chapter addresses the objections raised regarding the existence and theological implications of the World of Particles, presenting responses that reconcile these critiques with scriptural and rational evidence.

By engaging with both the affirmations and criticisms of this doctrine, this chapter aims to provide a balanced and scholarly examination of the World of Particles, shedding light on its significance in Islamic thought and its role in shaping the discourse on divine knowledge, human accountability, and the nature of pre-temporal existence.

A Discourse on the Realm of Particles: An Exegesis of Narrations

The narrations concerning the *‘Ālam al-Dharr* are categorized into several distinct themes. The following represents a selection of narrations representative of each category:

1. Narrations Expounding the Verse of *Dharr* (7:172)

Imam al-Bāqir (‘a) states:

*“Allah, the Exalted, extracted the progeny of Prophet Ādam (‘a), until the Day of Judgment, from his loins. They emerged in the form of particles. Subsequently, He introduced Himself to them, clarifying His existence. Had He not done so, none would have recognized their Lord.”*¹

Imam Ali (‘a) narrates:

*“He distinguished the messengers, prophets, and vicegerents, commanding the people to obey them, to which they assented in the covenant (mīthāq).”*²

2. Narrations Interpreting the Verse of *Fiṭrah* (30:30): ***“The Fiṭrah of Allah upon which He has created mankind,”***

Zurārah (r) recounts: “I inquired of Imam al-Bāqir (‘a): ‘May Allah grant you health and well-being! What is the meaning

¹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 2:12; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 3:278.

² al-‘Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī*. Vol 2:41; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 5:258.

of the verse ‘Allah (swt)’s Fiṭrah upon which He has created mankind [30:30]’?’ The Imam (‘a) responded:

‘At the time of the covenant (mūthāq), He established everyone’s innate disposition (fiṭrah) upon Tawḥīd and the recognition of His Lordship.’ I then asked, ‘Did they converse with Him?’ After a moment, the Imam (‘a) replied: ‘Had He not done so, they would not have recognized Allah—their Sustainer.’”¹

3. Narrations Explaining the Verse (10:74): **“But they would not believe in what they had rejected before,”**

Imam al-Bāqir (‘a) connects faith (īmān) in this verse to belief in guardianship (wilāyah) in the World of Particles. He (‘a) states:

“Then He called them to our guardianship (wilāyah). Thus, I swear by Allah, those who loved us affirmed [it], while those who held enmity towards us rejected [it]. This is [the meaning] of Allah (swt)’s statement: ‘They will not believe in what they had already rejected [10:74]’.” He (‘a) then added: “The denial (takdhīb) occurred there”²

4. Narrations Explaining the Verse (54:16): **“This is a warner from the previous warners,”**

Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) states:

“When Allah Almighty created humankind in the first World of Particles, He arranged them in rows before Him and elevated Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ). Consequently, some believed, and some denied. When Almighty Allah states, ‘This is a warner from the previous warners, [54:16]’ He signifies that the Prophet (ṣ) called them to Allah (swt) in the first [World of] Particles.”³

¹ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 330; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 3:278.

² al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 2:10; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 5:244.

³ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 5:234; al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*. Vol 2:340.

This narration indicates that this event transpired in the first World of Particles. From the apparent meaning of some narrations, it can be inferred that there existed two Worlds of Particles following the World of Souls. The first occurred when Allah (swt) created clay, divided it into two portions, dispersed humankind in particle form, and exacted a covenant from them. Subsequently, Allah (swt) returned everyone to their original state—clay—and created Prophet Ādam (‘a) from that clay. The second World of Particles occurred after Prophet Ādam (‘a) descended to Earth. There, Allah Almighty extracted all of Prophet Ādam (‘a)’s progeny in particle form from his loins and took a covenant from them, similar to the previous instance.

The late Āyatullāh Murvārīd, may Allah be pleased with him, elucidates: *“According to the collected narrations, Allah Almighty, after taking the covenant from the souls... and after taking the covenant from the particle bodies that possessed souls and the light of knowledge, created the body of Prophet Ādam (‘a) from clay... He placed the clay, containing all the particle bodies, within Ādam’s loins at the time of his creation... then He bestowed life upon him by breathing into him the soul that was created previously... After Prophet Ādam (‘a) consumed the fruit of the forbidden tree and was expelled from Paradise, descending to Earth, Allah extracted his descendants from his loins in a desert called “al-Rawḥā’,” situated between Makkah and Ṭā’if. He then made a covenant with them as He had done previously. This constitutes the second World of Particles.”*¹

5. Exegesis of the Verse (22:5): **“formed (mukhallaqah) and unformed (ghayr mukhallaqah),”**

In explaining this verse, Imam al-Bāqir (‘a) states:

¹ Murvārīd, *Tanbīhāt Ḥawl al-Mabda’ Wal Ma’ād*. Page 222.

“The term ‘mukhallaqah’ refers to the offspring that Allah created within the loins of Prophet Ādam (‘a), with whom He made a covenant, and whom He then caused to pass through wombs and loins. These individuals are born to be questioned regarding the covenant. Conversely, ‘ghayr mukhallaqah’ refers to creatures that Allah did not create during the creation of particles and the taking of the covenant in the loins of Prophet Ādam (‘a). These are the fetuses aborted before the blowing of the soul (rūḥ) and the bestowal of life.”¹

6. Narrations Concerning the Ḥajar al-Aswad (The Black Stone)

These narrations relate that the Ḥajar al-Aswad was a magnificent angel. When Allah Almighty took a covenant from the descendants of Prophet Ādam (‘a), He designated the Ḥajar al-Aswad as a witness. Subsequently, He placed the names of those who affirmed the covenant within the mouth of the angel, transforming it into the Ḥajar al-Aswad. Prophet Ādam (‘a) then placed it in its current location. Those who perform Ḥajj in Makkah stand before the Ḥajar al-Aswad and renew their covenant; it will bear witness for them on the Day of Resurrection. Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) states:

“Indeed, when Allah took a covenant from His servants, He commanded the Ḥajar al-Aswad to swallow it. This is why [we address the stone] thus: ‘I have fulfilled my trust and renewed my covenant. So, testify to the loyalty of my covenant.’”²

7. Narrations Describing Fetal Development

These narrations describe the process of fetal development within the womb. Upon the fetus reaching four

¹ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 57:342; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 6:12.

² al-‘Āmilī, *Wasā’il al-Shī‘ah*. Vol 13:314.

months of gestation, Allah Almighty dispatches two angels to the womb. Imam al-Bāqir (‘a) states:

*“Then Allah sends two angels to create what Allah wills within the wombs... So, they enter the womb. Within the womb resides the primordial soul (rūḥ qadīm), which is present in the loins and wombs. They then bestow upon it the soul of life (rūḥ ḥayāt).”*¹

This narration describes the association of a soul (rūḥ), created two thousand years prior, with a particle body in the ‘Ālam al-Dharr. These two are transmitted through the loins and wombs across generations.

According to some narrations, upon the birth of a fetus, Allah (swt) sends an angel named Zājir, who cries out to the fetus. As a result, the fetus turns and emerges crying, forgetting all about the ‘Ālam al-Dharr. The Imam (‘a) continues,

*“When the Almighty Allah completes the pregnancy, He sends an angel to expel the baby from the womb, and the baby emerges while forgetting the covenant.”*²

8. Narrations Concerning ‘Azl (Coitus Interruptus)

Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) narrates that Ali ibn al-Ḥusayn (‘a) stated,

*“I see no harm in ‘azl,” and he recited the verse “and when your lord took covenant... [7:172]”. [Then he said:] “Thus, from whatever Allah has taken the covenant, it will emerge, even if it is located on a hard rock.”*³

¹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 6:13; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 57:344.

² al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 6:13.

³ al-‘Āmilī, *Wasā’il al-Shī’ah*. Vol 20/149, al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām*. Vol 7:417.

9. Narrations Concerning the Blood Money for a Fetus

While describing the *diyah* (blood money) for a fetus, Imam Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (‘a) states:

“If it is a nutfah (sperm drop), twenty dinars... and if it emerges as an ‘alaqah (blood clot), it is forty dinars... And if it is aborted as a mudghah (lump of flesh), it incurs sixty dinars of blood money... And if it is aborted after its creation is complete, then its blood money is full.”

He was asked: “Does the transformation of the fetus in the mother’s womb from one state to another occur with or without the soul (rūḥ)?” He replied:

“With a soul other than the soul of life (rūḥ ḥayāt). It is the primordial soul (rūḥ qadīm) that is transmitted in the loins of men and the wombs of women. And if this soul—which is not the soul of life—were not present in the fetus, it would not have transformed from one state to another within the womb. In that case, the blood money would not have been due to the person who caused its death.”¹

This ḥadīth indicates that the *nutfah* transferred from the loins to the wombs contains a primordial soul (*rūḥ qadīm*). This soul was created two thousand years before the bodies. After associating with the particle bodies, it is present in the loins and wombs.

10. Narrations Concerning the *Ghusl* of a Corpse as a *Ghusl* of *Janābah* (Major Ritual Impurity)

A man inquired of Imam al-Bāqir (‘a) regarding the rationale behind administering a *ghusl* of *janābah* to a corpse. The Imam (‘a) responded:

¹ al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām*. Vol 10:281.

“When the soul departs the body, the nutfah from which the human being was created exits him/her. In this instance, there is no distinction between individuals: young or old, male or female. For this reason, the corpse is given ghusl.”¹

Human creation commences with a particle termed *nutfah*, which represents the particle body that was united with the primordial soul in the *‘Ālam al-Dharr* and is present within the loins and wombs. Upon death, this *nutfah* and the soul are separated from the body. This can be inferred from a narration attributed to Imam al-Bāqir (‘a), who states,

“Indeed, when Allah wills to create the nutfah from which He has taken the covenant in the loins of Ādam...”²

11. Narrations Pertaining to Human Beings in Loins and Wombs

The late al-Kulaynī dedicated a chapter in his al-Kāfī titled “Creation of a Believer in the Loins of a Disbeliever.” Within this chapter, he narrates from Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a):

“Indeed, when the nutfah of a believer resides within the loins of a polytheist, nothing harmful can affect it. Even if it is placed within the womb of a polytheist woman, no harm from her can reach it.”³

The meaning of *nutfah* within these narrations likely refers to the particle body and primordial soul (*rūḥ qadīm*), which traverse the wombs and loins. While there is ample supporting evidence for this within *du‘ā* and *ziyārāt*, their inclusion here is deemed unnecessary.

¹ al-‘Āmilī, *Wasā’il al-Shī‘ah*. Vol 2:487.

² al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 6:13; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 57/344.

³ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 2:13.

The *Tawātur* of Narrations Concerning the ‘*Ālam al-Dharr*

These eleven categories represent only a selection of narrations pertaining to the World of Particles. It is probable that other categories of narrations also address this topic. Regardless, narrations within some of these categories have reached the level of *tawātur* (mass transmission), while others are classified as *ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic) narrations, which cannot be disregarded, justified away, or rejected. Instead, they warrant careful reflection and belief in their conveyed meanings. Considering the principles and fundamentals of the Quran and narrations, we should contemplate the World of Particles, the manner of human creation, and its implications.

Scholarly Perspectives on Narrations Concerning the ‘*Ālam al-Dharr* (World of Particles)

The following presents a review of the views of several prominent Islamic scholars regarding the narrations concerning the ‘*Ālam al-Dharr*:

Shaykh Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī (r)

In his al-Fuṣūl al-Muhimmah, Shaykh Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, may Allah be pleased with him, dedicates Chapter 106 to the topic, entitling it: “*Innallāha subḥānahu kalla al-khalq kulluhum bil iqrār bil Tawḥīd wa naḥwahu fī ‘Ālam al-dharr* (Indeed, Allah Almighty tasked all of creation with acknowledging *Tawḥīd* and its related concepts in the World of Particles).”

After narrating seven aḥādīth within this chapter, he comments: “*al-Ṣadūq has narrated these and similar narrations in his books. Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī [author of Baṣā’ir al-Darajāt], al-Barqī [author of al-Mahāsīn], al-Ḥimyārī, and others have also mentioned them in their works. In my opinion, the narrations concerning this topic are so numerous that they exceed the level of tawātur. All ḥadīth collections combined contain more than a thousand aḥādīth on this subject. Some of*

our companions, who are mutakallimūn (theologians)¹, have rejected them based on conjecture, even though the answers are apparent within the narrations themselves... Thus, this weak reasoning cannot challenge the Quranic verses and authentic narrations.”²

‘Allāmah al-Amīnī (r)

‘Allāmah al-Amīnī, may Allah be pleased with him, also authored a 150-page treatise expounding upon the World of Particles. Within it, he cites nineteen verses and 130 narrations that indicate the existence of the ‘Ālam al-Dharr. Among these, he considered forty aḥādīth to be *ṣaḥīḥ*.³

Namāzī Shāhrūdī (r)

In his Mustadrak Safīnat al-Biḥār, the late Āyatullāh Namāzī Shāhrūdī asserts that the World of Particles constitutes one of the previous worlds. He considered this to be proven and established based upon the explicit texts of the Holy Quran and authentic narrations.⁴

The Late Mālīkī Miyānjī

The late Āyatullāh Mālīkī Miyānjī considered the narrations pertaining to the Worlds of Covenant (‘*awālim al-mūthāq*) to be *mutawātir*. He states: *“There are numerous narrations concerning this matter, exceeding the level of tawātur. These worlds are mentioned within the [Holy Quran] and the narrations. After excluding repetitive and similar*

¹ The term *mutakallimūn* designates those Islamic theologians and scholars specializing in *kalām*, the discipline concerned with Islamic theology and doctrinal matters. Active primarily during the classical period of Islamic history (8th-14th centuries CE), they engaged in intra- and inter-religious debates and discussions concerning Islamic creeds, beliefs, and philosophy. The *mutakallimūn* played a crucial role in the development of Islamic thought and theology, and their works remain the subject of ongoing scholarly inquiry.

² al-‘Āmilī, *al-Fuṣūl al-Muhimmah Fī Uṣūl al-A’immah*. Vol 1:420-425.

³ al-Amīnī, *al-Dhurriyyah al-Ṭāhīrah*. Vol 4:323.

⁴ Namāzī Shāhrūdī, *Mustadrak Safīnat al-Biḥār*. Vol 4:18.

aḥādīth, approximately one hundred and thirteen narrations remain on this topic.”¹

Āyatullāh Jahrumī Sharī‘atmadārī

Āyatullāh Jahrumī Sharī‘atmadārī writes: *“Indeed, the World of Particles is established due to the sheer number of narrations on this subject. In particular, the narrations of the A‘immah (‘as) concerning this matter, and the chain of narrators for some of them, are authentic. Their proof regarding the existence of the World of Particles is clear. Tawātur of the meaning of these narrations is also a distinct possibility.”²*

Addressing Skepticism Regarding the ‘Ālam al-Dharr

In previous discussions, the distinction between narrations and the Verse of the *Dharr* (7:172) was explored. However, certain questions persist concerning the principle of human existence within the ‘*Ālam al-Dharr*, the nature of intellect and free will in particles, and the concept of Allah Almighty directly addressing them. These questions, while framed as improbabilities, warrant examination. The following addresses some of the doubts raised by Fakhr al-Rāzī’s³ along with detailed responses:

1. A covenant (*mīthāq*) necessitates an intelligent party. Therefore, the descendants of Ādam (‘a) – in their particle form – must have possessed intellect during the covenant. If this were so, why do they not retain any memory of it?
2. How could the entirety of Prophet Ādam (‘a)’s progeny be contained within his loins?
3. How can a particle possess life, intellect, and comprehension?

¹ Malikiy Mianji, *Tawḥīd al-Imāmiyyah*. Page 122.

² al-Jahrumī Sharī‘atmadārī, *Kalimah Mūjazah fī al-Arwāḥ wal Ashbāḥ wal Mīthāq wal Dharr*, Page 12.

³ al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥfīr al-Kabīr*. Vol 15:40.

4. The purpose of Allah (swt) establishing a *mīthāq* is to establish proof (*ḥujjah*) against humankind. How can this *ḥujjah* be complete if individuals have no recollection of it?

Another objection, raised by Shaykh al-Mufīd (r), concerns the potential for reincarnation. These objections, along with their responses, have been addressed in the discourse on the World of Souls.

Those who accept the concept of the *‘Ālam al-Dharr*, as presented in narrations and the Quran, have offered responses to these questions. Some examples of these responses are presented below:

The late Āyatullāh Namāzī Shāhrūdī, may Allah be pleased with him, addressing the question of forgetting the covenant states: *“Based on the verses and narrations, human beings possessed complete intellect (‘aql kāmīl) within the World of Particles and Covenant, and Allah tasked them accordingly. This forgetting is an act of Allah. As the narrations explicitly state, ‘He caused them to forget its vision but established the recognition within their hearts...’ This forgetting is analogous to forgetting the insights gained during wakefulness in a dream. Human beings are, in a sense, asleep in this world as well. Upon death, they awaken.”*¹

Regarding the question of containing a multitude of particles within Ādam (‘a)’s loins, he asserts: *“The placement of all particles behind Ādam (‘a) is not improbable, considering Divine power.”*²

The late Sayyid Ni‘matullāh al-Jazā’irī, may Allah be pleased with him, similarly responds: *“Do not discount the possibility of Ādam (‘a)’s body containing all his descendants. His blessed body was grand and magnificent, even if the particles were minute.”*³

Āyatullāh Mālikī Miyānjī, may Allah be pleased with him, addressing the question of the completeness of the argument, states: *“The*

¹ Namāzī Shāhrūdī, *Tārīkh Falsafah va Taṣawwuf*. Page 219.

² Namāzī Shāhrūdī. Page 220.

³ Jazā’irī, *Anwār al-Nu‘māniyyah*. Vol 1:280-281.

covenant ultimately retains its intensity and strength. Only the specific context in which it was taken has been forgotten.”¹

Āyatullāh Jahrumī writes: *“In response to the questions concerning intellect, in short, we can say: Firstly, these questions regarding intellect do not demonstrate the impossibility of the existence of the World of Particles. Rather, the question objects to evidence that cannot be readily resolved. This is because we do not comprehend its subtilities, as our intellects are primarily acquainted with the natural world. Consequently, we cannot fully grasp supernatural phenomena such as Paradise, Hell, and Purgatory. The deceased may experience torment or bliss within their graves, yet these occurrences remain beyond the scope of our physical senses. Secondly... the Creator’s argument against humankind in this world is complete with their innate recognition of Him. This recognition stems from the ‘Ālam al-Dharr*, as explained by Imam al-Bāqir and Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a)... [These particles] are not earthly materials and substances that transform into sperm. Rather, they are subtle (*laṭīf*) and sublime (*‘ālī*) components that are specifically intertwined with earthly matter for the creation of humankind by the Creator.”²*

Key Points

- Narrations interpreting verses such as al-A‘rāf (7:172-173), al-Rūm (30:30), Yūnus (10:74), al-Qamar (54:16), and al-Ḥajj (22:5) make reference to the ‘Ālam al-Dharr.
- Narrations concerning *“fiṭratallāh allatī faṭara al-nās ‘alayhā (the fiṭrah of Allah upon which He has created mankind) [30:30]”* explicitly mention Allah (swt)’s direct address to humankind.
- Affirmation or denial of faith in this world is prefigured by affirmation or denial in the ‘Ālam al-Mīthāq (World of the Covenant).

¹ Mālikī Miyānjī, *Tawḥīd al-Imamiyyah*. Page 151.

² al-Jahrumī Shari‘atmadārī, *Kalimah Mūjazah fi al-Arwāḥ wal Ashbāḥ wal Mīthāq wal Dharr*, Page 21.

- The Holy Prophet (ﷺ) was also sent as a messenger to the inhabitants of the *‘Ālam al-Dharr*.
- Some narrations suggest that the *‘Ālam al-Dharr* occurred in two distinct phases.
- All individuals who existed within the *‘Ālam al-Dharr* will be born into this world.
- The *Ḥajar al-Aswad* (Black Stone) was originally an angel who received and preserved the written covenant between humankind and Allah (swt).
- The soul (*rūḥ*) created two thousand years prior to the physical body is transmitted through the loins and wombs.
- *‘Azl** (coitus interruptus) does not affect the **nutfah** present in the **‘Ālam al-Dharr*.
- Due to the presence of the primordial soul (*rūḥ qadīmah*) from conception and prior to four months gestation, abortion necessitates compensation (*diyah*).
- Humans are in a state of *janābah* (major ritual impurity) upon death, signifying the departure of the *nutfah* from which they were created.
- Numerous categories of narrations exist concerning the *‘Ālam al-Dharr*. Some of these have reached the level of *tawātur* (mass transmission), while others are considered *ṣaḥīḥ al-sanad* (authentically transmitted).
- Doubts raised regarding the *‘Ālam al-Dharr* primarily constitute a series of perceived improbabilities.

Chapter 9

The Path to Knowing Allah (swt): Recognition Through Allah (swt) Alone

Learning Outcomes of this Chapter

- Comprehend that the sole path to recognizing Allah (swt) is through His self-introduction.
- Explain why divine recognition is expressed through exculpatory attributes (*Awṣāf al-Tanzīhiyyah*).¹
- Analyze the role of Allah (swt)’s names (*Asmā’*) and attributes (*Ṣifāt*) in facilitating recognition.
- Understand why complete recognition of Allah (swt) remains beyond the reach of creation.

Introduction

Allah (swt) has introduced Himself to His servants, and indeed, every created being possesses an innate cognizance of Him. As previously discussed, humankind has experienced existence in at least two primordial realms prior to this terrestrial world. Within those realms, Allah (swt) introduced Himself to all and established a covenant with them concerning the acknowledgment of His Lordship, a covenant to which they assented.

¹ Exculpatory Attributes (*Awṣāf al-Tanzīhiyyah* - أوَصَافُ تَنْزِيهِيَّة) refer to attributes that describe Allah (swt) by negating all imperfections, deficiencies, and limitations. They emphasize that Allah is free from any resemblance to creation or any flaw. This form of recognition is known as *Tanzīh* (تَنْزِيه), meaning to declare Allah (swt)’s transcendence and incomparability.

This discourse will examine, based on the Holy Quran and the narrations of the Infallible A'imma (‘as), that the sole means of attaining *ma‘rifah* (recognition) of Allah (swt) is through His own self-introduction. There exists no other avenue for comprehending Him except through Him.

Allah (swt) is the Exclusive Path to the *Ma‘rifah* of Allah (swt)

The Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali (‘a), states:

اعْرِفُوا اللَّهَ بِاللَّهِ وَالرَّسُولَ بِالرِّسَالَةِ وَأُولَى الْأَمْرِ بِالْأَمْرِ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ

“Recognize Allah through Allah, and the Messenger through his Messengership, and those in authority (Ulil Amr) through their righteousness, justice, and benevolence.”¹

In this narration, Imam Ali (‘a) elucidates that the *ma‘rifah* of Allah (swt) necessitates recognizing Him through Himself. Similarly, the recognition of the Messenger (‘a) is achieved through the verification of his Prophethood. Likewise, the *Ulil Amr* are to be recognized through their adherence to righteousness, kindness, and justice.

In another ḥadīth, *Imam Ali (‘a) was asked: “How did you recognize Allah?” He (‘a) replied:*

“By that with which He introduced Himself to me.” Upon further inquiry as to how He introduced Himself, the Imam (a.) stated: “There is no image like Him. The senses do not perceive Him, and He cannot be likened to human beings. He is near, yet far, and He is far, yet near...”²

¹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:85; al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 275, al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 3:270.

² al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:85; al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 275, al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 3:270.

Description of *Maʿrifah* with Exculpatory Attributes (*Awṣāf al-Tanzīhī*)

In the aforementioned ḥadīth, Imam Ali (ʿa) describes the *maʿrifah* of Allah (swt) through attributes that Allah (swt) *does not* possess (*Awṣāf al-Tanzīhī*). This, however, does not confine the *maʿrifah* of Allah (swt) through Allah (swt) solely to these attributes. Human intellects naturally associate words with their common usages. Therefore, the utilization of such terms to introduce Allah (swt) generates an analogy within the minds of the recipients. Consequently, the Imam (ʿa) employed descriptors that negate specific characteristics in Allah (swt). It is crucial to understand that transcendence (*tanzīh*) pertains to the real and true God, not merely a mental construct of God. In other words, human beings acknowledge the transcendence of the God they recognize through His own self-introduction.

The *maʿrifah* of Allah (swt) through Allah (swt) (*Maʿrifatullāh billāh*) does not refer to a general and rational comprehension of transcendence. The bestowal of *maʿrifah* is an act of Allah (swt). Allah (swt)’s actions, like His Essence, are beyond human comprehension and description. Furthermore, describing Allah (swt) through positive attributes carries the risk of anthropomorphism (*tashbih*).¹ Therefore, the Imam (ʿa) draws attention to Allah (swt), whom humanity recognizes innately, by articulating the characteristics that Allah (swt) does not possess.

The *Maʿrifah* of Allah (swt) Through Allah (swt) is Synonymous with His Innate Recognition (*Fiṭrah*)

In another narration, Imam Ali (ʿa) states:

“O You who is the proof of Your own Essence.”²

¹ [Translator’s Note] The term *tashbih* (تشبيه) refers to the act of ascribing likeness to God, which is considered a violation of Tawḥīd (توحيد), the Islamic doctrine of God’s absolute Oneness and incomparability.

² al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 91:242.

Similarly, Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) states:

أَنَّهُ قَدْ احْتَجَّ عَلَيْكُمْ بِمَا قَدْ عَرَفْتُمْ مِنْ نَفْسِهِ

“He has completed His argument against you by introducing Himself to you.”¹

Imam Ali al-Riḍā (‘a) also states,

بِالْفِطْرَةِ تَثْبِتُ حُجَّتَهُ

“With the innate nature (fiṭrah), His proof is established.”²

These narrations indicate that recognizing Allah (swt) through Allah (swt) is equivalent to innate recognition, which completes Allah (swt)’s argument against humankind. Without this *ma ‘rifah*, no one could recognize their Creator, Sustainer, and Lord. Likewise, without this *ma ‘rifah*, the divine argument against creation would be incomplete.³ In Du‘ā’ Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī, we supplicate:

“I recognized You through Yourself, and You guided me to Yourself and called me to Yourself. And if it were not for You, I would not have recognized You.”⁴

Imam Ali Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (‘a), in his supplication on the 14th of Ramaḍān, beseeches:

يَا رَبِّ بِكَ عَرَفْتُكَ، وَأَنْتَ دَلَّلْتَنِي، وَلَوْلَا أَنْتَ، مَا دَرَيْتُ مَنْ أَنْتَ

“O my Lord, I recognized You through Yourself. You guided me, and if it were not for You, I would not know who You are.”⁵

Imam Ḥasan al-Mujtabā (‘a) states:

¹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:86.

² al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*. Page 35.

³ Islamic narrations emphasize that humans are not obligated to independently recognize God; rather, God reveals Himself, demanding acceptance, belief, and submission. This concept will be addressed in subsequent lessons.

⁴ Ibn Tāwūs, *Iqbāl al-A‘māl*. Page 67; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 95:82.

⁵ Ibn Tāwūs, *Iqbāl al-A‘māl*. Page 148; Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (‘a), *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah*. Page 248.

إِلَهِى بِكَ عَرَفْتُكَ، وَ بِكَ اهْتَدَيْتُ إِلَى أَمْرِكَ، وَ لَوْلَا أَنْتَ لَمْ أَدْرِ مَا أَنْتَ

*“My God, I have recognized You through You. And through You, I have been guided to Your command. Were it not for You, I would not have known what You are.”*¹

These narrations explicitly state that if Allah (swt) did not introduce Himself to His servants, no one could attain *ma`rifah* of Him, as there would be no means to do so. These narrations corroborate other narrations that consider *ma`rifah* as an act of Allah (swt). They also substantiate the verses that affirm that even a prophet cannot guide a person to Allah (swt) if they lack this innate recognition.² Imam Ali Zayn al-`Ābidīn (‘a), in the prayer of “*taḥmīd*,” expresses:

*“True praise is for Allah, for introducing Himself to us, and for inspiring gratitude within us.”*³

The Introduction of Allah (swt) through His Names (*Asmā`*)

In his supplication to Allah (swt), the Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali (‘a), states:

*“I ask You to introduce Yourself to me by the name by which You introduced Yourself to Your chosen ones, with which they accepted Your Tawḥīd (Oneness), recognized You, and worshipped You with Your truth. So, grant me Your ma`rifah so that, with true faith, I can affirm Your Lordship. O Allah, do not make me one who worships the name without meaning. Grant me Your grace to illuminate my heart with Your ma`rifah...”*⁴

Imam Ali (‘a) explains that Allah (swt) introduces Himself through His Names (*Asmā`*). This is an act of Allah (swt), not an inherent

¹ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 91/190; Ibn Tāwūs, *Muhaj al-Da`awāt Wa Manhaj al-Ibādāt*. Page 144.

² Of course, we will discuss later whether the Prophets and A`immah (‘as) are the means of recognizing Allah (swt) or not.

³ Zayn al-`Ābidīn (‘a), *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah*. Page 28

⁴ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 96:91,

quality of the names themselves. Allah (swt) chooses to designate something as His Name or Sign (*āyah*), and through these Names and Signs, He draws humanity to Himself and makes Himself known. Therefore, individuals utilize these Names to recognize and worship Allah (swt) Himself. One cannot utilize the Name independent of this divine introduction, as it would hold no significance. It is crucial to note that Allah (swt) does not need to introduce Himself through Names and Signs. However, He chooses to do so to reveal and make Himself known to His servants.

The Path of Allah (swt)'s Recognition is Blocked for Creations

The path to the *ma'rifah* of Allah (swt) is inherently inaccessible to creation without divine guidance. A narration of Jāthliq recounts his query to Imam Ali (‘a): “*Tell me, did you recognize Allah (swt) through Muḥammad (ṣ) or [recognize] Muḥammad (ṣ) through Allah (swt)?*” The Imam (‘a) responded:

“I did not recognize Allah (swt) through Muḥammad (ṣ); rather, I recognized Muḥammad (ṣ) through Allah (swt). This is because I observed that He created him and placed ḥudūd (dimensional limits of length and breadth) within him. Thus, I understood that he was created and subject to the control of another. This ma'rifah was based on His burhān (proof), ilhām (inspiration), and irādah (will), just as Allah (swt) inspired obedience to Him in His angels and bestowed His ma'rifah upon them without any shabahāt (similitude) or kayfiyyah (how-ness).”¹

This narration underscores that the *ma'rifah* of Allah (swt) is not contingent upon the *ma'rifah* of the Prophet (ṣ). If one posits that the Prophet (ṣ), a paramount sign of Allah (swt), is not an intermediary for recognizing Allah Almighty, how can one then accept that *maḥāhīm* (mental concepts) can lead to Allah (swt)'s *ma'rifah*? How can mental

¹ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. 3/272; al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 286.

concepts serve as a means for recognizing Allah when the Holy Prophet (‘a) himself is not considered such a means? Such a belief appears contradictory, as the Prophet’s (s) *ma ‘rifah* of Allah (swt) is a fundamental tenet of the Islamic faith. Maṣṣūr bin Ḥāzīm narrates that he said to Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a):

*“I debated with a group and said to them: ‘Allah Almighty is greater and more exalted than to be recognized through creation. Rather, creation is recognized through Him.’” Imam (‘a) responded: “May God have mercy upon you.”*¹

All these narrations converge on the principle that Allah (swt)’s *ma ‘rifah* is solely granted by Him. According to the Commander of the Faithful (‘a), even the actual *ma ‘rifah* of a created being is intrinsically linked to Allah (swt)’s *ma ‘rifah*. He (‘a) stated that he recognized Prophet Muḥammad (s) through Allah (swt). In other words, the Imam (‘a) recognized him as Allah (swt)’s creation because he perceived the signs of divine creation within the Prophet (s) through Allah (swt)’s *ilhām* (inspiration), *irādah* (will), and *ta ‘rif* (introduction). He (‘a) then elucidates that this *ma ‘rifah* was bestowed upon him precisely as Allah Almighty has introduced Himself and inspired His obedience in the angels.

This is why Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) supplicates to Allah the Almighty:

*“O God, introduce Yourself to me. If You do not introduce Yourself to me, I will never recognize You. O God, let me recognize Your Prophet. If You do not introduce him, I will never recognize him. O God, let me recognize your Ḥujjah (Proof). If you do not introduce him to me, I will deviate from my religion.”*²

In this supplication, the Imam (‘a) beseeches Allah (swt) for His *ma ‘rifah*. If Allah (swt) does not introduce Himself, humankind cannot attain His *ma ‘rifah*. Allah (swt)’s *ma ‘rifah*, in this narration, is not merely the recognition of *athar* (effects). Rather, it is a *ma ‘rifah* that is a

¹ al-Ṣādūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 285.

² al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1/342.

prerequisite for recognizing those effects. Based on the Commander of the Faithful ('a)'s narration, the signs of divine creation in creatures are entirely dependent upon Allah (swt)'s *ma 'rifah*.

This narration and the preceding ones indicate that He can only be recognized when He Himself makes Himself known. The message conveyed in all these narrations emphasizes that *ma 'rifah* is a divine act. Therefore, no one can truly recognize the Almighty without His *ta 'rīf* (introduction). Even His prophets and chosen ones cannot independently provide *ma 'rifah* of Allah (swt) to any individual.

Key Points

- Allah must be recognized through Himself, the prophets through their prophethood, and the *Ulil Amr* through their enjoinder of good (*Amr bil Ma 'rūf*), benevolence, and justice.
- Employing exculpatory attributes (*Awṣāf Tanzīhiyyah*) is essential to prevent anthropomorphic misconceptions in the recognition of Allah.
- The recognition of Allah (swt) is identical to innate recognition (*ma 'rifah fiṭriyyah*), through which His proof (*Hujjah*) over creation is fully established.
- Without Allah (swt)'s self-introduction, no servant could attain the knowledge of His essence.
- Allah (swt) manifests Himself through His names (*Asmā'*), making them pathways and signs for attaining deeper recognition of Him.
- The recognition of Allah (swt) is independent of the recognition of His Messenger; rather, the Messenger is recognized through Allah (swt).
- Without Allah (swt)'s self-introduction, recognizing Him, His Messenger, or His *Hujjah* would be impossible.

Chapter 10

Divine Recognition Without Intermediaries

Learning Outcomes of this Chapter

- Analyze why recognition of Allah (swt) cannot be attained solely through attributes, universal concepts, or intellectual reasoning.
- Explain how true worship of Allah (swt) is contingent upon His recognition.
- Evaluate the role of divine recognition as a prerequisite for the acceptance of supplications.
- Discuss the implications of worshipping Allah (swt) through mere descriptions and how it equates to referring to an absent entity (حالة بلغائب – *hawālah bil ghā'ib*).

Introduction

Building upon the previous discussion on the narrations of Ahl al-Bayt ('as) affirming that the only path to recognizing Allah (swt) is through Himself, this chapter delves deeper into the nature of divine recognition (*ma'rifatullāh*). It examines the limitations of attaining recognition of Allah (swt) solely through attributes, universal concepts, or intellectual reasoning, as well as the theological consequences of relying on such methods.

The chapter is structured to achieve four main objectives. First, it analyzes why true recognition of Allah (swt) cannot be confined to attributes or conceptual descriptions, demonstrating that such an approach ultimately falls short of grasping His reality. Second, it explores how genuine worship (*'ibādah*) is intrinsically linked to divine recognition, emphasizing that true servitude is contingent upon knowing Him as He has

introduced Himself. Third, it evaluates the role of divine recognition as a prerequisite for the acceptance of supplications, illustrating how a lack of proper understanding impacts one's spiritual connection with the Divine. Finally, the chapter discusses the theological implications of worshipping Allah (swt) through mere descriptions and how this practice equates to referring to an absent entity (*hawālah bil ghā'ib*), highlighting the dangers of an abstracted or conceptualized approach to *ma'rifah*.

By engaging with narrations that reinforce these principles, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive examination of the nature of divine recognition in Islamic theology. It underscores the necessity of recognizing Allah (swt) as He has revealed Himself, rather than through humanly constructed attributes, ensuring a more profound and authentic connection with the Divine.

The Challenge of Divine Recognition

Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (‘a) states:

“Whoever believes that they recognize Allah through a veil (ḥijāb), an image (ṣūrah), or a similitude (mithāl) is a polytheist. For, a veil, an image, and a similitude are all distinct from Allah. Allah, the Almighty, is One and Unique. How can a person who claims to recognize Allah through something other than Him truly believe in Tawḥīd? Indeed, one who attains recognition of Allah does so through Allah Himself. And one who does not recognize Allah through Himself has not recognized Him at all. Rather, such a person has recognized something other than Allah... And whoever believes in a deity they do not recognize is lost in their recognition. A created being does not recognize anything except through Allah, and the recognition of Allah is attained solely through Him.”¹

This narration refutes the validity of employing any intermediary to describe God or construct a mental image of Him. General descriptions, titles, and conceptualizations, regardless of their scope, are incapable of

¹ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 142; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:160.

providing *ma'rifah* of Allah (swt), as they are inherently distinct from His essence. To equate these constructs with Allah Almighty is to compare the finite to the infinite, or, more precisely, to compare that which is comprehensible through intellectual processes (i.e., a general concept) to that which transcends intellectual grasp (i.e., Allah (swt)). Crucially, this distinction between finite and infinite does not posit a shared *dhāt* (essence) between Allah (swt) and creation, differentiated only by *hudūd* (limits) and *shiddah* (intensity). Rather, the very notion of a boundary or limit between creation and the Creator is rejected, as He is beyond the capacity of human thought and ideation.

Allah (swt) can only be truly recognized through Himself; no alternative pathway exists. Any purported *ma'rifah* of Allah (swt) derived through means other than Allah (swt) Himself is not authentic *ma'rifah*, but rather a recognition of something other than Him. Consequently, attempts to recognize Allah (swt) through individuals or general concepts that are not Allah (swt) will not lead to genuine *ma'rifah*. True knowledge and recognition of Him are exclusively attainable through *ma'rifah* of Him through Himself.

Furthermore, the narration highlights the paradoxical state of those who believe they have faith in a God they do not truly recognize; they are, in fact, distant from true *ma'rifah*. Worship and belief in *Tawhīd* are contingent upon *ma'rifah*. This *ma'rifah* is not a product of human thought or intellectual exertion; it is a divine bestowal, granted only through His self-*ta'rīf* (introduction).

Recognition of Allah (swt) is Crucial for the Efficacy of Prayer

Given that humans attain *ma'rifah* (recognition) of Allah (swt) through His self-*ta'rīf*, *ṣalāh* and *du'ā'* directed towards Him are necessarily predicated on this *ma'rifah*. This principle is illustrated by the Imam ('a)'s response to the question of unanswered prayers:

“Because you are calling upon someone you do not recognize.”¹

Consequently, those who seek to approach Him and invoke Him with genuine *maʿrifah* must avoid those factors that impede their *maʿrifah* of Allah (swt). If an individual, whose understanding of Allah (swt) is limited to general concepts and mental constructs, calls upon Him in this manner, their supplication is, in effect, directed towards those mental constructs, not Allah (swt) Himself. Such a person has deviated from true *maʿrifah* of Allah (swt) and is, unknowingly, invoking something other than Him, hence the lack of response to their prayers.²

Furthermore, if, as some assert, it was impossible for human beings to truly recognize Allah (swt), and He remained inherently unknowable, this narration would be rendered meaningless. The Imam (ʿa) clearly establishes that individuals *can* recognize Allah (swt) Himself, not merely abstract ideas, concepts, or manifestations of His divine names. Therefore, his (ʿa) statement that prayers may be rejected due to a lack of *maʿrifah* of the one being supplicated to holds significant weight.

This narration also highlights a crucial complementary point, which becomes clearer in light of other narrations. While the bestowal of *maʿrifah* is an act of divine grace, human beings bear the responsibility of *taslīm* (submission), *qabūl* (acceptance), *iqrār* (acknowledgment), and *taṣdiq* (affirmation). Thus, when the Imam (ʿa) attributes the lack of Allah (swt)’s *maʿrifah* in those whose prayers are unanswered, he (ʿa) implies a failure on their part to accept and submit to Him after He introduces Himself.

This *kufr* (disbelief) and lack of *taslīm* (submission) can stem from two potential causes: either they engage in *taṣawwūr* (conceptualizing), *tawahhum* (imagining), *taʿaqqul* (rationalizing) God

¹ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*. Page 288; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 90:368.

² It is important to acknowledge that the aforementioned explanation represents only one potential factor contributing to the non-responsiveness of a supplicant's invocation. A multitude of other legitimate theological and practical considerations may also account for this phenomenon.

lieu of submitting to Allah (swt)’s self-introduction thereby distancing themselves from His *ma ‘rifah*, or they call upon Him without fulfilling their divine *wājib* (obligations) and the duties inherent in *ma ‘rifah*. If a person genuinely believes in Allah (swt) and accepts His *ma ‘rifah*, they are obligated to heed His commands and obey Him, rather than presuming to act independently.

The Recognition of Allah (swt) through Allah (swt) in the Narration of Ṣaḍīr al-Ṣayrafī

Ṣaḍīr al-Ṣayrafī narrates a ḥadīth from Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) wherein he (‘a) explicitly states that the recognition of Allah (swt) is through Himself, without intermediary or external means. He (‘a) states:

“Whoever claims to recognize Allah (swt) by the conjecture of the heart is a mushrik (polytheist). Whoever claims to recognize Allah (swt) by name without its meaning has affirmed an insult towards Him, because the name is a creation. Whoever claims to worship both the name and the meaning has associated a partner with Allah (swt) (shirk). Whoever claims to worship the meaning without awareness has turned towards something absent. Whoever claims to worship both the attribute/characteristic (ṣifah) and the described (mawṣūf) has annulled Tawḥīd, because the attribute is distinct from the described. Whoever claims to attribute the ṣifah to the mawṣūf has belittled the Sublime. [Allah (swt) says:] ‘And they have not honoured Allah with the honour that is due to Him’ [39:67]. Indeed, the recognition of the one who is present precedes its description. And the recognition of the characteristics of the absent precedes its presence.”

He was asked: “How can a present being be recognized before his characteristics?” He (‘a) said:

“You recognize Him and become knowledgeable through His knowledge, and you recognize yourself through Him. [You do] not recognize yourself through yourself and by yourself. In this way, you understand that everything you have in you belongs to Him and is

*dependent on Him. Yūsuf's brothers said to him, 'Are you indeed Yūsuf?' He said: 'I am Yūsuf, and this is my brother; Allah has been gracious to us' [12:90]. So, Yūsuf was known as Yūsuf himself, not through other than him. And they did not establish his [identity] through themselves and with the conjecture of their hearts."*¹

In this narration, Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) clearly explains that the recognition of Allah (swt) is through Allah (swt). Recognizing Allah (swt) means recognizing Allah (swt) as God through Himself and His own self-description (*ta’rīf*), just as Yūsuf (‘a)’s brothers knew him. They did not recognize him through their own minds and thoughts. Further contemplation on this analogy presented by Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) reveals that the recognition of Allah Almighty has been bestowed upon everyone. However, human beings have forgotten Him due to their negligence and heedlessness. According to His *sunnah* (established practice), Allah (swt) reminds them again by presenting His signs and making them aware of Himself. Yūsuf (‘a)’s brothers recognized him when he revealed himself, thereby dispelling their forgetfulness and negligence. For this reason, the infallible A’immah (‘as) call upon human beings to contemplate and reflect upon creation, and to observe it with consideration of Allah (swt) and how His power is at work within it.

Therefore, the Imam (‘a) encourages servants to use their intellect to ponder and reflect on the aspects of created beings, such as their neediness, dependence, and creation. This reflection will enable them to witness the signs of the Creator. This means studying creation with the perspective of Allah (swt)’s recognition. It does not mean that we can attain Allah (swt)’s recognition through creation, because all of creation exists because of Him. If they perceive Him, they will see this more clearly in creation. If people pay closer attention to creation, they will perceive signs of the One they recognize [i.e., Allah (swt)] within it. Since Allah (swt) has designated His signs, He increases His manifestation by making

¹ al-Ḥarrānī, *Tuḥaf al-‘Uqūl*. Page 325; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 65:275.

His signs more apparent to those who strive on this path. When Prophet Yūsuf (‘a) introduced himself to his brothers, they recognized him as Yūsuf (‘a). Yūsuf (‘a)’s recognition became apparent to them, eliminating their negligence and forgetfulness.

Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) explicitly states that names can never introduce the one who is named, regardless of whether they are verbal (*lafẓī*) or nonverbal (*ghayr lafẓī*). Instead, one must recognize the named entity before recognizing the name, because a name is merely a symbol or sign with no inherent connection to the named object. The named object is distinct from the name because the two share no common *waṣf* (characteristic). Almighty Allah (swt) has placed His names as signs so that humans can turn their attention towards Him and become aware of His recognition. The significant point in this narration is the phrase of Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a):

مَنْ زَعَمَ أَنَّهُ يَعْبُدُ الْمَعْنَى بِالصِّفَةِ لَا بِالْإِدْرَاكِ فَقَدْ أَحَالَ عَلَى غَائِبٍ

“Whoever thinks that he worships the meaning [God] by describing it, not by understanding, he has referred to the absent one.”

This means the person has not worshipped the present God and has taken an absent being as his God.

How can a worshipper address an absent god?! How can one say, *“We only worship You” [1:4]* to an absent deity? Thus, the Imam (‘a) clearly explains that Almighty Allah Himself—who is the meaning of words and names—is recognized through His own *ta’rīf*, not through conjecture and thought.

‘Allāmah Ṭabaṭabā’ī’s Exegesis on the Ṣadīr al-Ṣayrafī Narration

‘Allāmah Ṭabaṭabā’ī, may Allah (swt) be pleased with him, in his footnote to Tuḥaf al-‘Uqūl concerning Ṣadīr al-Ṣayrafī’s narration, elucidates: *“For example, when we observe Zayd in the external world and perceive him visually, we recognize Zayd as distinct from others, identifying him in numerical unity (waḥdat-e-‘adadī) without mistaking*

him for someone else.¹ After recognizing Zayd's presence, our recognition of him and his circumstances is completed when we recognize his individual attributes. Suppose we have not seen him with our own eyes and wish to acquire recognition of him through his attributes. In that case, we will recognize him only through general understandings and concepts that do not distinguish him from others. Thus, numerical unity and personal unity (*waḥdat-e-shakhṣī*)² are not established. For example, let us say we have not seen Zayd and only know that he is a tall, white, and handsome human being. Until we see him externally and match these attributes with him, he shares these attributes with other human beings. This is what Imam al-Ṣādiq ('a) means when he says, 'Indeed, the recognition of the one who is present precedes its description, and the recognition of the characteristics of the absent precedes its presence.'³

Having articulated these points in his explanation of the narration, 'Allāmah Ṭabaṭabā'ī, may Allah (swt) be pleased with him, clarifies that this narration pertains to the recognition of Allah (swt) through Allah (swt). He writes, "*The ḥadīth states that the true recognition of Allah Almighty cannot occur except through Him. The recognition of Allah is only through Himself, and others are recognized through Him. This narration is similar to what al-Ṣadūq (r) narrates from Imam al-Ṣādiq ('a)*".⁴⁵

Therefore, based on Ṣadr's narration, the concept of recognizing Allah (swt) through Allah (swt) signifies that humans cannot attain *ma'rifah* of Allah (swt) by reflecting on His creation and their characteristics—which are, in fact, His signs. In other words, creation does

¹ Visual differentiation of an individual from others is facilitated by their presence within our perceptual field. Even in the hypothetical scenario of two individuals sharing identical phenotypic characteristics, spatial distinctness allows for their individuation.

² [Translator's Note] This concept, commonly discussed in philosophical discourse, addresses the principle of individual distinctness and uniqueness, even within the framework of a unified existential reality. While acknowledging the interconnectedness of all beings through shared existence, this principle emphasizes the unique and irreducible identity of each individual.

³ al-Ḥarrānī, *Tuḥaf al-'Uqūl*. Page 325; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 65:275.

⁴ This narration will be mentioned in the chapter on "recognition is the creation of Allah".

⁵ al-Ḥarrānī, *Tuḥaf al-'Uqūl*. Page 325; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 65:275.

not, and cannot, introduce the Almighty Allah (swt), because creation shares no commonality with Him, be it in existence, knowledge, power, life, or any other attribute. Thus, it is erroneous to assert that Allah (swt) possesses a more intense version of these qualities. A consequence of this flawed perspective is the implication that the existence and attributes of the Creator and creation are inherently the same, with the Creator merely possessing a higher degree of the same existence and attribute. Another misconception arises from the belief that the concept of existence and other attributes we understand from creation share commonalities with the Almighty God in their general sense, even though we cannot fully comprehend these concepts in relation to Him. Such individuals, through this line of reasoning, establish their principles within Him and consider the meanings adaptable. According to the narrations, such a conceptualization of Allah Almighty does not constitute true recognition of Him. Instead, it is a recognition of a created being—not Allah (swt).

Conclusions from Narrations Regarding the Recognition of Allah (swt) Through Allah (swt)

The narrations discussed in this chapter yield the following conclusions regarding the recognition of Allah (swt) through Allah (swt):

1. The recognition of Allah (swt) is the recognition of the entity designated “Allah,” and nothing else. In other words, the one designated “Allah” is the ultimate reality that transcends intellectual comprehension, leaving human thought in awe.
2. True recognition of Allah (swt) is bestowed solely by Himself. Almighty Allah guides humanity to Himself, and He is the one who introduces Himself to them. This self-introduction can occur through His designated names and attributes, as conveyed by the prophets; through the signs evident in creation; or through trials and calamities (mentioned in the Quran as “*ba’sā’ wa ḍarrā’*”), which can lead to a complete sense of helplessness.

3. This recognition is not veiled. Therefore, those who believe they recognize Allah (swt) through a *hijāb* (veil), *mithāl* (similitude), or *ṣuwar* (image) do not truly recognize Him. Allah (swt) alone is the active agent in this process, as His recognition is exclusively through Him. Even in moments of distress and despair, when individuals turn to Him through His names, attributes, or signs, they are, in essence, remembering Him through Him and His will. While the study of signs in the human soul and the cosmos can lead one towards Allah (swt), the ultimate recognition occurs through His self-introduction. He reveals Himself to the individual in all these instances, through Himself.
4. If humans genuinely recognize Allah (swt) and supplicate to Him, He will respond. This recognition removes the obstacles that hinder the acceptance of prayers.
5. Recognition provides meaning to *ṣalāh*, *ʿibādah* (worship), *Tawhīd*, *īmān* (faith), *taṣdīq* (affirmation), *taslīm* (submission), the understanding of divine *āyāt* (signs), and the true significance of His names and attributes (*Asmā' wa Ṣifāt*). Through these, the individual is guided to the true God.
6. Since recognition is a direct act of Allah (swt), no creature bears responsibility for its bestowal. Therefore, the statement of Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a), "*Recognize Allah through Allah*," emphasizes the necessity of refraining from seeking Allah (swt)'s recognition through other means. We must adhere to the path of divine self-introduction that He has designated. Analogously, while Allah (swt) heals the sick, He has also commanded the use of medicine. This signifies that Allah Almighty, in accordance with His *sunnah* (established practice), creates the act of healing within the medication—healing is not inherent to the medicine itself. Just as He has prescribed a specific remedy for every ailment, He has also provided a unique path to His recognition. Therefore, thinking,

imagining, or conceptually formulating His essence does not constitute His self-introduction.

7. This recognition gives meaning to *tanzīhāt* (purifications) and *taqdīsāt* (sanctifications), because it is illogical to purify or sanctify an unknown entity. Therefore, purification and sanctification are meaningless and futile without this prior recognition.
8. Only with this recognition do phrases such as *ziyāratullāh* (visitation of Allah), *liqā'ullāh* (meeting with Allah), *ru'yatullāh* (seeing Allah), *wijdānullāh* (finding Allah), *wisāhullāh* (union with Allah), *ḥudūrullāh* (presence of Allah), *khiṭāb billāh* (addressing Allah), *ṭakallum billāh* (talking to Allah), and *qurb billāh* (nearness to Allah), which are abundant in the Quran, narrations, prayers, and supplications of the A'imma (‘as), acquire true meaning. Only with such recognition can humans connect with their true God, perceive Him, feel His presence with their entire being, and attain spiritual proximity to Him. Of course, the meaning of these phrases is not the same as the conventional meanings we apply to created beings. This is because “seeing” and “meeting” are not uniform across all entities. The nature of these experiences depends on the nature of the being involved. The “seeing” of Allah (swt) never occurs through the physical eye.
9. Only with this recognition do humans acquire the *taklīf* (religious obligation) to pray, fast, and perform acts of worship (upon reaching puberty). Most people cannot establish *Tawḥīd* through logical proofs, even if we assume the validity of such proofs. With this recognition, the *īmān* of many individuals (even those who have reached the level of *ijtihād* in jurisprudential matters but lack sufficient philosophical and theological grounding) becomes understandable. Indeed, the faith of such individuals is often stronger and more authentic than that of some philosophers and theologians (especially those who do not recognize the true God).

Their philosophical and theological discourse may not necessarily result in *khawf* (fear of God), *tā'ah* (obedience), *taslīm* (submission), or true *īmān*. Conceptual and logical reasoning differs fundamentally from the true and divinely bestowed recognition that humans obtain through the guidance of Almighty Allah (swt).

Key Points

- The recognition of Allah (swt) is a direct act of His and does not require any intermediary.
- General descriptions and conceptual frameworks—no matter how vast—are insufficient to introduce Allah (swt).
- Recognizing Allah (swt) through anything other than Himself results in recognizing something other than Allah (swt), not Allah (swt) Himself.
- Intellectual reasoning and speculative thought cannot independently lead to the recognition of Allah (swt); without divine recognition, true worship is unattainable.
- The fulfillment of supplications is contingent upon the recognition of Allah (swt).
- While recognition is an act of Allah (swt), human beings bear the responsibility of submitting to, affirming, and acknowledging this divine bestowal.
- Creation should be examined through the lens of Allah (swt)'s recognition; in doing so, one finds the signs of the One they already recognize.
- A name does not independently introduce the named entity; rather, the recognition of the named entity must precede the recognition of the name.
- Worshiping Allah (swt) merely through descriptive attributes amounts to referring to an absent being, whereas true perception of Allah (swt) is attained through His self-introduction.

Chapter 11

Harmonizing Narrations on the Recognition of Allah (swt)

Learning Outcomes of this Chapter

- Analyze narrations that appear to contradict the concept of recognizing Allah (swt) through Allah (swt).
- Synthesize a coherent perspective that aligns all narrations within the broader teachings of Ahl al-Bayt ('as).

Introduction

After examining the narrations affirming that the recognition of Allah (*ma'rifatullāh*) can only be attained through Himself, it becomes imperative to critically analyze certain narrations that, at first glance, appear to contradict this principle. These narrations seemingly suggest alternative modes of divine recognition, raising theological questions about their interpretation and compatibility with the broader teachings of Ahl al-Bayt ('as).

This chapter focuses on four specific narrations that have been a subject of scholarly debate due to their apparent divergence from the established doctrine. The objective is not merely to highlight these narrations but to engage in a systematic analysis that reconciles them with the foundational teachings of Ahl al-Bayt ('as). By doing so, we aim to demonstrate that any perceived contradiction is a result of misunderstanding or miscontextualization rather than an actual conflict within the narrations themselves.

To achieve this, the chapter will first present the narrations in question, outlining the interpretations that have led to the perception of contradiction. It will then synthesize a coherent perspective that aligns

these narrations with the overarching theological framework established by the A'imma (‘as). Through this approach, the discussion will reaffirm the principle that divine recognition is not attainable through external attributes, conceptual definitions, or intellectual constructs but solely through Allah (swt)’s own self-disclosure.

Examining the Boundaries of Human Perception in Knowing Allah (swt)

Imam Ali (‘a) states:

لَيْسَ بِإِلَهِ مَنْ عَرَفَ بِنَفْسِهِ هُوَ الدَّالُّ بِالذَّلِيلِ عَلَيْهِ وَ الْمُؤَدِّي بِالْمَعْرِفَةِ إِلَيْهِ

“One who is known by Himself is not God. [Rather] He is the one who guides to Himself through a proof, and He is the one who conveys recognition of Himself.”¹

The initial clause, *“One who is known by Himself is not God,”* may, at first glance, appear to contradict the principle of recognizing Allah (swt) through Allah (swt), as articulated in other narrations. However, such an interpretation is inaccurate when considering the second part of this narration and its alignment with other relevant traditions.

If an entity can be recognized without any form of self-disclosure, it cannot be God. Therefore, the recognition of God necessitates a prior introduction by Himself. We cannot attain *ma‘rifah* of Allah (swt) independently of His self-*ta‘rīf*. Consequently, any attempt to recognize Allah (swt) through means other than His own self-revelation is fundamentally flawed.

While Allah Almighty can be recognized through His creation, this recognition is ultimately granted by Allah (swt) Himself, utilizing creation as a medium. The signs and proofs present in creation are His own, and these signs do not possess any independent capacity to introduce Him. The act of introducing Allah (swt) is not inherent within creation

¹ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:253; al-Ṭabṛasī, *al-Iḥtijāj ‘alā Ahl al-Lajāj*. Vol 1:198.

itself. That which is known by itself is, by definition, a creature. Imam al-Riḍā (‘a) states:

“He who has recognized Allah through similitude has not recognized Him. And he who thinks he has completely understood Him has not affirmed His Tawḥīd (Oneness).¹ He who has established a being similar to Him has not reached Him... He who imagines Him has not intended Him. Everything that is known by itself is a creature.”²

This statement, similar to the previous one, does not contradict the concept of recognizing Allah (swt) through Allah (swt). It emphasizes that recognizing Almighty Allah (swt) is only possible through His own self-introduction. Any being that can be recognized without self-disclosure is a creature, and Allah (swt) is fundamentally different in this respect.

In his commentary on the phrase *“Everything that is known by itself is a creature”* Sayyid Hāshim al-Ḥusaynī al-Ṭahrānī, in his footnote to Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, explains: *“What is known by its dhāt (essence) and through picturing its quiddity (whatness) is a creature. This does not contradict either Imam Ali’s (‘a) statement, ‘O One who guides to Himself,’ or Imam al-Ṣādiq’s (‘a) statement, ‘Recognize Allah through Allah.’ This is because the meaning of these two sentences is that, in the universe, there is no cause or path to recognize Allah except through Himself. Therefore, the particle ‘bā’ (ب) here [in “kullu ma rūf bi nafsīhi”] indicates al-musāḥabah (association) and al-ḥisāq (connection). A being which is fully understood and recognized by the association of the being’s essence and quiddity with the essence of the recognizer is a creature. And ‘bā’ (ب) there [in “yā man dalla ‘alā dhātihi bi dhātih”] indicates sababiyyah (causation).”*

He underscores that the recognition of Allah (swt) is granted solely through Himself. However, this does not imply that the recognizer

¹ Complete comprehension of an entity, in the conventional sense, implies its apprehension by the intellect. Such intellectual apprehension allows for the conceptual modeling or mental representation of the entity.

² al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 34.

fully comprehends Allah (swt)'s essence. Rather, Allah (swt) Himself introduces Himself to His servants. Human beings cannot achieve His recognition through their intellect or other perceptual faculties. It is impossible to describe Allah (swt) using attributes and meanings that are understood within the context of creation. When humans receive this recognition, they are called to *taslīm* (submit), *iqrār* (acknowledge), and believe in this divine self-revelation.

While a person can perceive created beings through the power of comprehension bestowed by Allah (swt), enabling analysis, understanding, and reflection, the recognition of Allah (swt) Himself is fundamentally different. Human intellect is inherently incapable of grasping His essence. Even when Allah (swt) introduces Himself to an individual intellectually, the intellect cannot independently recognize Allah (swt) in any meaningful way.

Humans can recognize objects through their senses, given the appropriate conditions. For example, an individual who opens their eyes and focuses their attention can perceive colours when the necessary environmental conditions for sight are present. This principle applies to all other comprehensible beings. The intellect can recognize an object if the conditions required for intellectual apprehension are met.

These narrations clarify that humans cannot recognize Allah Almighty (swt) through their own means because He is beyond the scope of human comprehension. The fulfillment of all cognitive conditions, even the possession of highly developed perceptual faculties, is insufficient. The recognition of Allah (swt) can only be attained through His grace and benevolence.

The Limitations of Human Perceptual Faculties in Attaining *Ma‘rifah* of Allah (swt)

The limitations of human perceptual faculties in attaining *ma‘rifah* (recognition) of Allah (swt) is a recurring theme in Islamic theological discourse. Following the recitation of the verse,

وَأِنْ تَعَدُّوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ لَا تَحْصُوهَا

“And if you count Allah (swt) ’s favours, you will not be able to number them,”¹

Imam al-Sajjād (‘a) offers a supplication:

“Glory be to the Creator who has not granted recognition of His blessings except the inability to recognize them. He has not been given the power to perceive Him, except for the recognition that perception is incapable of perceiving Him. Allah the Almighty has appreciated His servants’ admission of their inability to express gratitude towards Him. He considers their admission of inability as a form of gratitude, similar to how He considers the scholars’ acknowledgment of not fully knowing God as a sign of faith. He knows the limits of servants’ powers, which they cannot go beyond. None of His creations can reach the reality of His worship. How can one reach the reality of His worship if there is no limit or kayfiyyah (quality) for Him? Allah is too exalted for anyone to comprehend Him.”²

This supplication reinforces the narrations concerning the recognition of Allah (swt) through Allah (swt). Allah (swt) Himself bestows His recognition upon His servants. As this recognition is His act, human beings cannot fully perceive or rationally explain it. The narrations presented in this chapter, as well as those in the chapter on innate recognition, have established that without Allah (swt)’s bestowal of recognition, humans could not attain it. Consequently, *‘ibādah* (worship)

¹ Sūrah Ibrāhīm, Verse 34.

² al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*. Vol 8:349; Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (‘a), *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah*. Page 25; al-Ḥarrānī, *Tuḥaf al-‘Uqūl*. Page 283; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*. Vol 75:141.

would be impossible. Numerous narrations emphasize that human beings are not inherently obligated to recognize Allah (swt); rather, He must introduce Himself to them.¹

The Shortcomings of Creation in Relation to Allah (swt)'s *Ma'rifah*

Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā'ī, in *'Awālī al-La'ālī*, narrates from the Holy Prophet (ṣ):

"If you recognized Allah as is His right, you would uproot the firm mountains with your prayers. No one reaches the depths of the recognition of Allah." Someone inquired, "O Messenger of God, does that include you?" He (ṣ) replied, "Yes, I also; Allah is higher and greater, [than] for anyone [to] reach the depths of His recognition." This is why he (ṣ) would say in his prayer: "O He who no one knows His quiddity (whatness) except Himself." He (ṣ) also said: "O God, You are glorified and exalted. We have not recognized You as is Your right." ²

The concept that Allah (swt)'s recognition is His act, and that He is responsible for making Himself known to His servants (who, in turn, must accept and believe in this recognition), will be explored further in the subsequent discussion. It will be shown that those who are more obedient and devoted to their Master and Owner receive a higher degree of recognition, bringing them closer to Him.

Mu'āwiyah ibn Wahb asked Imam al-Ṣādiq ('a), "O son of the Messenger of Allah, what do you say about the narration 'The Messenger of Allah (ṣ) saw Allah'? How did he (ṣ) see God? And what do you say about the narration 'believers will see Allah in Paradise'? How will they see Him?" Imam ('a) responded,

"O Mu'āwiyah, how terrible it is for a human to live seventy to eighty years in the kingdom of Allah and utilize His blessings yet not

¹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:162.

² Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *'Awālī al-La'ālī*. Vol 4:132.

recognize Allah as is His right of recognition!” He (‘a) then added: “O Mu‘āwiyah, Muḥammad (ṣ) did not see Allah Almighty with the physical eye. Seeing is of two kinds: seeing with the heart and seeing with the eyes. He who believes in the sight of the heart has attained the reality, and he who believes in the sight of the eye has disbelieved in Allah and His revelations.”¹

While the Holy Prophet (ṣ) negated the possibility of recognizing Allah (swt) as is His due right, this narration affirms it. Similarly, in another ḥadīth, Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) states:

“Indeed, for our Shias, there are hidden and evident signs by which they are known.” A man asked, “What are these signs?” The Imam (‘a) replied, “These are the characteristics: The first of them is that they have recognized Tawḥīd to the extent of the right of recognition and have strengthened the knowledge of His Tawḥīd...”²

Based on these narrations, the right of Allah Almighty’s recognition is contingent upon the degree of an individual’s *īmān* (faith).

In a ḥadīth, the Prophet (ṣ) was asked about the starting point of knowledge. He (ṣ) replied,

“Recognizing Allah as is His right of recognition.” He (ṣ) was asked, “What is Allah (swt)’s recognition as is His right?” He (ṣ) said: “Recognize Allah without similitude, likeness, and opposite, and that Allah is One, Unique, Apparent, Hidden, First, Last, and has no equal. This is the right of recognition of Allah Almighty.”³

Another ḥadīth states that the Holy Prophet (ṣ) said to Imam Ali (‘a):

¹ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:54.

² al-Majlisī. Vol 65:275.

³ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 284; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. 3/269.

“O Ali, no one recognized Allah to the right of His recognition except you and I. And no one recognized you to the right of your recognition except Allah and I.”¹

Therefore, in the narration of Ibn Abī Jumhūr and similar narrations, not reaching the right of recognition of Allah Almighty means that humans can never recognize Him fully through their intellect alone. This is because the human intellect can only grasp universal concepts and ideas. Other narrations explain that the right of Allah (swt)’s recognition can be achieved through *īmān*, obedience to Him, absolute servitude, and adherence to divine commands. The right of recognition entails exalting Him above all creation, based on the recognition He has bestowed. It requires refraining from thinking, reasoning, or imagining what Allah (swt) is, or rationally analyzing those things that God has designated as His signs. In the narration of Mufaḍḍal, Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) states:

“If someone says: ‘You have described the limitations of human beings in reaching Allah in such a way that it seems that humans can never truly recognize Allah,’ in response, [you can say]: ‘This statement is correct because if people rely solely on their intellect, they cannot fully comprehend and encompass Allah. However, from another perspective, Allah is closer to humans than anything else. This occurs when valid signs guide the person.’ Therefore, Allah is clear and evident from one aspect, not veiled, hidden, or mysterious. But He is difficult to comprehend from another aspect. And the intellect is the same way. Its evidence is apparent, yet its essence remains veiled.”²

This narration clarifies that Allah (swt), whose essence is beyond the grasp of human intellect, is nonetheless manifest to the extent that His existence is undeniable. This manifestation occurs specifically when the correct path and appropriate proofs are employed in the pursuit of His recognition.

¹ Ibn Shahr Āshūb, *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*. Page 179; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 3:148.

² al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 3:148.

It is noteworthy that the Imam (‘a) uses the intellect itself as an analogy to elucidate the concept of recognizing Allah (swt). Just as the true God cannot be apprehended through intellect (because whatever is grasped by the intellect is an object of perception, not the Creator Himself), so too is the intellect itself perceived. We perceive all things through the intellect, but the intellect itself is recognized through itself. We cannot intellectualize our intellect because, if it becomes an object of perception, it ceases to be the intellect itself but rather a mental construct about the intellect. Therefore, just as the intellect is known through itself, Allah (swt) must be known through Himself. Similarly, human beings can never perceive Allah (swt) directly, just as the intellect cannot be directly perceived or imagined.

In other words, analogous to how we recognize the intellect through the *wijdān* (inner consciousness) of the intellect itself, we recognize Allah (swt) through the *wijdān* of Him. It is crucial to emphasize that these two *wijdān* are not equivalent. Rather, as previously stated, the intellect and knowledge are signs of Allah (swt), not similar to Him.

Key Points

- Any entity that is self-evident and does not require divine self-disclosure for its recognition is, by definition, not God.
- Even if an entity other than God plays a role in facilitating His recognition, that entity functions merely as a divinely ordained intermediary, acting in accordance with His will and established *sunnah* (practice).
- Allah (swt) designates certain entities as *āyat* (signs) pointing towards Him. These signs do not possess independent agency to introduce the Almighty Lord.
- The bestowal of Allah (swt)’s recognition is an act of divine grace. The individual who recognizes Allah (swt) based on His self-introduction does not thereby comprehend or encompass Him intellectually.

- Even following divine self-revelation to an individual possessing intellect, the human intellect does not independently achieve intellectual *ma‘rifah* (recognition) of Him.
- Allah (swt)’s recognition through Himself is an act solely attributable to Him. This divine act transcends human perceptual capabilities and cannot be fully explicated or comprehended through rational discourse.
- The “right of recognition” of Allah (swt) entails that human beings sanctify Him beyond all aspects of creation and refrain from contemplating or conjecturing about His essence. Even the attributes He has designated for Himself should not be treated as mere concepts within the human intellect.
- Despite the inherent limitations of the intellect in comprehending Allah (swt), His existence is self-evident to the extent that it is beyond doubt.
- The manner in which the intellect is recognized provides an analogy for understanding the recognition of Allah (swt). Just as all things are perceived through the intellect, while the intellect itself is recognized through itself, so too is Allah (swt) recognized through Himself.

Chapter 12

Divine Recognition as a Created Act

– Part 1

Learning Outcomes of this Chapter

- Analyze Quranic verses and narrations affirming that Allah (swt)’s recognition is a manifestation of His creation (*ṣunʿ*).
- Understand that Allah (swt) does not burden His servants with acquiring His recognition independently; rather, recognition of Allah (swt) is His own act.
- Comprehend that once granted divine recognition, servants are responsible for submitting to and affirming it both inwardly and outwardly.

Introduction

In the preceding chapters, we established that the recognition of Allah (*maʿrifatullāh*) can only be attained through His own self-disclosure. Without Allah (swt) unveiling Himself to His servants, true recognition of Him would remain beyond human reach. Furthermore, anything that human perceptual faculties can independently grasp is inherently limited and, therefore, cannot encompass the divine reality. This underscores the fundamental distinction between human-conceived notions of the divine and the recognition granted by Allah (swt) Himself.

Building upon this foundation, this chapter delves into Quranic verses and narrations that explicitly affirm that Allah (swt) is the one who imparts His recognition to His servants. These sacred texts clarify that divine recognition is not an intellectual construct nor a product of abstract reasoning but rather a bestowal from Allah (swt). However, while recognition itself is purely a divine act, its reception is contingent upon

human submission and acknowledgment—both internally, through heartfelt conviction, and externally, through verbal affirmation.

Furthermore, some narrations emphasize the significance of this voluntary submission by referring to it as “recognition” itself. This suggests that while the essence of divine cognition originates solely from Allah (swt), the servant’s acceptance and affirmation play a crucial role in actualizing this recognition. By examining these Quranic and narrational evidences, this chapter seeks to elucidate the nature of this process, highlighting the interplay between divine bestowal and human receptivity in attaining true recognition of Allah (swt).

Quranic Verses on Guidance and Recognition of Allah (swt)

The Holy Quran explicitly states that guidance is the exclusive responsibility of Allah (swt):

إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا لَلْهُدَىٰ

“Indeed, guidance rests with Us.”¹

إِنَّكَ لَا تَهْدِي مَنْ أَحْبَبْتَ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۚ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ
“You cannot guide whomever you wish, but [it is] Allah [who] guides whomever He wishes, and He knows best those who are guided.”²

لَيْسَ عَلَيْكَ هُدَاهُمْ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۚ

“It is not up to you to guide them; rather, Allah guides whomever He wishes.”³

وَمَنْ لَّمْ يَجْعَلِ اللَّهُ لَهُ نُورًا فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ نُّورٍ

“One whom Allah has not granted any light has no light.”⁴

From these verses, it is evident that guidance, which entails recognizing Allah (swt), is an act exclusive to Him. Before one can fulfill

¹ Sūrah al-Layl, Verse 12.

² Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ, Verse 56.

³ Sūrah al-Baqarah, Verse 272.

⁴ Sūrah al-Nūr, Verse 40.

any religious obligations, one must first attain the recognition (*ma'rifah*) of Allah (swt). Servitude, devotion, and moral responsibility become meaningful only after this recognition is granted. However, not every form of guidance results in direct accountability; rather, it is the recognition of Allah (swt), His Prophet (S), and the divinely appointed A'imma ('as) that establishes moral and religious obligations. Once an individual attains this recognition, they are required to submit, express gratitude for divine guidance, and adopt humility before Allah (swt)'s grace.

The intellect, upon recognizing Allah (swt), dictates gratitude, obedience, and submission as necessary responses, while viewing arrogance and disobedience as reprehensible. Without divine recognition, these concepts—such as servitude, worship, submission, obedience, defiance, and rejection—lack true significance. Furthermore, recognizing Allah (swt) leads to recognizing the rights of others, particularly those who are near to Him due to their faith and servitude. As a result, arrogance or hostility toward those appointed by Allah (swt) (*awliyā*) is also considered arrogance before Him.

Divine Recognition as an Exclusive Act of Allah (swt)

Since the human intellect and sensory faculties are incapable of perceiving Allah (swt) independently, divine guidance must originate from Him alone. Even the most exalted Prophets ('as) and their successors cannot introduce Allah (swt) except through the recognition granted by Him. This divine prerogative is precisely why the Quran attributes guidance solely to Allah (swt), as seen in the aforementioned verses. The inability of human perception to recognize Allah (swt) independently negates any expectation that people should arrive at such recognition on their own. Language itself relies on prior knowledge of its referents; thus, terms like “Allah” and “He” hold significance only when their referent has been introduced by Allah (swt) Himself.

The prophets, despite possessing the highest degree of divine knowledge, remain dependent on Allah (swt) for their own recognition of

Him. They cannot guide others to Allah (swt) without His introduction. This reinforces the principle that divine recognition is an act of Allah alone. Even the prophets' role in guiding people ultimately depends on Allah (swt)'s will, demonstrating that human efforts remain secondary to divine action.

Accordingly, these verses align with the narrations that affirm Allah (swt)'s recognition through Himself. They establish that there is no path to divine knowledge except through Allah (swt)'s own introduction and guidance. These verses and narrations also emphasize that human beings cannot attain divine recognition through their faculties alone; rather, it is Allah (swt) who bestows both recognition and guidance.

The Role of Intellect and Prophetic Guidance

While Allah (swt)'s recognition is solely His action, the human intellect (*'aql*) plays a significant role in responding to this divine knowledge. The intellect, granted by Allah, serves as a means for individuals to comprehend and affirm Him. Thus, individuals may accept or reject this recognition based on their reception of divine guidance.

The divine tradition (*sunnatullāh*) dictates that human intellect functions in harmony with prophetic teachings and reminders. When an individual is exposed to the guidance of the prophets, their intellect is awakened, making them responsible for fulfilling their obligations toward Allah (swt). Conversely, those who are deprived of prophetic teachings remain veiled from divine recognition. Such individuals neither belong to the category of believers (*mu'minīn*), nor disbelievers (*kāfirīn*), nor polytheists (*mushrikīn*). Rather, in light of the narrations, they are classified as *ḍallāl* (those who are lost).

Divine Recognition as Beyond Human Capability

The Quran unequivocally states that Allah (swt) does not impose obligations beyond human capacity:

لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا

“Allah does not impose on any soul a responsibility beyond its ability.”¹
(2:286)

وَلَا تُكَلَّفُ نَفْسٌ إِلَّا مَا فِي وُسْعِهَا

“No soul is responsible for what is beyond its ability.”²

لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا مَا آتَاهَا سَيَجْعَلُ اللَّهُ بَعْدَ عُسْرٍ يُسْرًا

“Allah does not lay on any soul a burden except to the extent to which He has granted it.”³

Every obligation in Islam is contingent upon the individual’s capacity to fulfill it. It is unreasonable to impose a duty that lies beyond human capability. Since divine recognition is an act exclusive to Allah (swt), human beings cannot independently attain it. Therefore, making it an obligatory requirement would contradict the divine principle of responsibility.

Although the Quranic verses do not explicitly state that recognition of Allah (swt) is exclusively His action, a narration related to the exegesis of a noble verse further establishes this connection. This narration clarifies that divine recognition is not a burden upon human beings but rather a gift bestowed by Allah (swt) through His mercy and guidance.

¹ Sūrah al-Baqarah, Verse 286.

² Sūrah al-An‘ām, Verse 152.

³ Sūrah al-Talāq, Verse 7.

Narrations on Divine Recognition and Human Accountability

1. Recognition as a Divine Bestowal

‘Abd al-A‘lā narrates that he asked Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (‘a):

“May Allah set your affairs in order! Do human beings possess any means to attain the ma‘rifah of Allah?” The Imam (‘a) replied, “No.”

‘Abd al-A‘lā then inquired, “Has Allah obligated them to acquire this recognition?”

*The Imam (‘a) answered, “No. It is solely up to Allah to bestow recognition. Allah does not burden a soul beyond its capacity [2:286] nor does He impose obligations except according to what He has granted [65:7].”*¹

Similarly, Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) stated:

“Allah has not obligated His servants to attain recognition, nor has He provided a means for them to achieve it.”

²

These narrations explicitly negate the notion that human beings have an inherent capacity or obligation to attain recognition of Allah (swt) independently. The second narration further asserts that Allah (swt) has not established a pathway by which His servants can acquire recognition on their own. This implies that recognition cannot be attained through rational inquiry or empirical observation. Consequently, no one can claim that there exists an independent or assured method to attain divine

¹ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 5:302; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:163; al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsīn*. Vol 1:276.

² al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 5:222.

recognition, for all paths to it remain inaccessible except through Allah (swt)'s will.

In the first narration, Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) clarifies that Allah (swt) has not endowed human beings with the faculties necessary to achieve recognition nor provided a means to acquire it. In other words, all intellectual and sensory faculties that Allah (swt) has granted to humans do not, in themselves, lead to divine recognition. It is solely by Allah (swt)'s bestowal that recognition is attained, thereby rendering individuals accountable for religious obligations. Until He introduces Himself to a person, no such obligation can be established.

Furthermore, “knowledge” in these narrations does not refer to knowledge in a general sense but rather to the type of recognition that carries moral and religious responsibility. The most critical form of knowledge is the recognition of Allah (swt). The narrations indicate that *al-ma‘rifah* specifically refers to divine recognition, which cannot be attained through conventional means. While the five senses serve as instruments for perceiving empirical realities and the intellect serves as a tool for comprehending rational matters, divine recognition is unique in that it does not depend on any sensory or rational faculties. Rather, human perceptual abilities are inherently incapable of perceiving the Creator. Allah (swt) can only be known when He introduces Himself to His servants.

2. Allah (swt)'s Argument Against His Creation

Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) stated:

“All the affairs (amr) of Allah are enigmatic, except when He establishes His argument (hujjah) against you based on what He has made known to you from your own selves.”¹

¹ al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsīn*. Vol 1:236; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 5:301.

Similarly, Ḥamzah ibn al-Ṭayyār narrates that Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) instructed him to write and then, the Imam (‘a) dictated:

“Verily, among our beliefs is that Allah establishes His argument against His servants based on what He has given them and what He has made known to them.”¹

These narrations emphasize that divine recognition is an act exclusive to Allah (swt). The process of establishing divine argumentation (*iqāmat al-ḥujjah*) first requires Allah (swt) to make Himself known to His servants. Only then does He hold them accountable. If this initial introduction does not occur, divine proof (*ḥujjah*) cannot be established upon His creation.

Previously, we discussed that Allah (swt) granted this recognition in the primordial worlds (‘*ālam al-dharr*). In those pre-existent realms, He introduced Himself to His servants and took a covenant from them regarding this recognition. Thereafter, He implanted the reality of this recognition within them. Through this initial introduction, Allah (swt) completed His argument over creation.²

However, upon entering this world, human beings were made to forget this pre-worldly recognition and covenant. To re-establish His argument upon them in this world, Allah (swt) revives that recognition through revelation and divine guidance. The Prophets (‘as) play a fundamental role in this process by continuously reminding people of the recognition they once possessed. If the teachings and reminders of the Prophets (‘as) do not reach an individual, then divine argumentation has not been completed upon them.

¹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:164; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*. Vol 2:280.

² Imam al-Riḍā (‘a): *“With fītrah, His argument is established.”* al-Ṭabṛasī, *al-Iḥtijāj ‘alā Ahl al-Lajāj*. Vol 2:361; al-Ṣadūq, *‘Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*. Vol 1:151; al-Mufīd, *al-Amālī*. Page 245.

3. Recognition and Free Will in the Context of Divine Creation

‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Quṣayr wrote a letter to Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) in the presence of ‘Abd al-Malik ibn A‘yun, discussing various theological disputes, including whether divine recognition and its denial are acts of Allah (swt) or not. Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) responded:

“May Allah have mercy on you! Be aware that recognition (ma‘rifah) is a creation of Allah within the hearts of His creation, and the servants have no independent role in its origination. However, they have free will in choosing their stance. If they are inclined toward faith, they opt for recognition and become believers by choosing it. Conversely, if they desire disbelief, they choose denial and consequently become disbelievers, rejecters, and those who have gone astray. Both outcomes—guidance (tawfiq) and abandonment (khidhlān)—occur through divine decree. Accordingly, based on their choice, Allah either rewards or punishes them.”¹

This narration aligns with the Quranic principle:

إِنَّا هَدَيْنَاهُ السَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِرًا وَإِمَّا كَفُورًا

“Indeed, We have guided him to the path: he may be grateful or ungrateful.”²

Allah (swt) has shown humanity the paths of righteousness and transgression and has instilled within them an innate recognition of both. He has granted them free will to choose between these paths, making faith and disbelief contingent upon their volition. If an individual chooses the path of corruption,

¹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*. Vol 1:86.

² Sūrah al-Insān, Verse 3.

they become a disbeliever. Conversely, if they choose the path of servitude and righteousness, they become a believer.

The crucial theological point in this narration is that while Allah (swt) creates within human beings the recognition of His path and the path of deviation, the choice of faith or disbelief remains theirs. However, it must be noted that faith (*īmān*) and disbelief (*kufr*) are not direct acts of Allah (swt); rather, it is Allah (swt)'s actions that create the conditions for faith and disbelief to manifest.

Furthermore, the narration affirms that Allah (swt) first grants recognition of Himself before presenting His path to humanity. Since divine guidance has no meaning without divine recognition, this narration implies that even the recognition of Allah (swt) is His own action. Before guiding humanity toward His path, He first makes them aware of His existence. Only then are human beings able to recognize His path and, with free will, move toward Him or turn away.

4. Faith, Islam, and the Divine Bestowal of Recognition

Sulaym ibn Qays once asked the Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali ('a):

“O Commander of the Faithful! What is īmān (faith) and Islam?” The Imam ('a) replied:

“īmān is the iqrār (acknowledgment) of ma'rifah, and Islam is the acceptance, submission, and obedience to the prophets and their successors.”

Sulaym further inquired: “Is faith the acknowledgment that follows recognition?” The Imam ('a) responded: “When Allah acquaints a person with Himself, His Prophet, and His Imam, if that person acknowledges and obeys their commands, he is a believer.”

Sulaym then asked: “Is ma ‘rifah from Allah and iqrār upon the servant?” The Imam (‘a) explained: “Ma ‘rifah from Allah is an invitation (da ‘wah), a proof (ḥujjah), a favour (ni‘mah), and a blessing (faḍl), while iqrār is the acceptance (qabūl) of the servant whom Allah chooses to bestow His favour upon. Recognition is the act of Allah within the heart, while acknowledgment is the action of the heart that manifests through acceptance of Allah, His infallibility (‘iṣmah), and His mercy (raḥmah).”¹*

This narration explicitly establishes that *ma ‘rifah* is an act of Allah (swt), whereas *iqrār* is the action of the servant in response to that recognition. However, even the servant’s ability to acknowledge and submit is facilitated through divine assistance (*tawfīq*). Thus, recognition is not something that can be independently attained; rather, it is a divine bestowal, while acknowledgment is the acceptance of this divine truth by the servant whom Allah (swt) has guided.

Key Points

- **Divine Responsibility of Guidance:** The guidance and bestowal of *ma ‘rifah* are solely Allah (swt)’s responsibility.
- **Inaccessibility of Recognition Through Human Perception:** Human faculties and perceptual abilities are incapable of attaining Allah (swt)’s recognition independently, making it an unattainable task without divine intervention.
- **Role of Prophets in Divine Recognition:** Prophets and their teachings serve as the means through which Allah (swt) introduces Himself to His servants, but the act of recognition itself remains exclusively His.

¹ al-Hilālī, *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays*. Vol 2:610 Ḥadīth 7.

- **Veiling of Innate Nature:** Those who remain distant from prophetic teachings and divine reminders experience a veiling of their innate nature (*fiṭrah*), leading to neglect and forgetfulness of Allah (swt).
- **Exclusivity of Divine Will in Recognition:** No path to divine recognition exists except through Allah (swt)'s will.
- **Limitations of Human Faculties:** Human intellect, perception, and sensory tools cannot, by themselves, lead to Allah (swt)'s recognition.
- **Divine Proof and Responsibility:** Allah (swt) establishes His proof (*hujjah*) upon His servants by making Himself known to them.
- **Free Will in Choosing Guidance or Misguidance:** Allah (swt) presents both the path of guidance and the path of misguidance, leaving it to the servant's free will (*ikhtiyār*) to choose between the two.

Chapter 13

Divine Recognition as a Created Act

– Part 2

Learning Outcomes of this Chapter

- Understand that servants cannot independently acquire Allah (swt)’s recognition.
- Comprehend that recognition, by its very nature, is not an attainment but a bestowal.
- Analyze how faith and disbelief among servants are contingent upon the divine bestowal of recognition.
- Define and differentiate between Primary Recognition (معرفة أولى — *ma ‘rifah awwalī*) and Secondary Recognition (معرفة ثانوي — *ma ‘rifah thānawī*).
- Explain the concept of levels of recognition and the process of its augmentation.

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we examined Quranic verses and narrations that establish divine recognition (*ma ‘rifatullāh*) as an act initiated solely by Allah (swt). This foundational principle underscores that human beings cannot independently attain knowledge of the divine; rather, it is a bestowal from Allah (swt) Himself. Recognition is not the product of intellectual inquiry, deductive reasoning, or sensory perception, but a reality granted by Allah (swt) to whom He wills.

Building upon this understanding, this chapter will further explore additional narrations that reaffirm this concept, while also providing a structured analysis of the varying levels of recognition. A key focus will be distinguishing between Primary Recognition (*ma ‘rifah awwaliyyah*),

which is innate and universal to all of creation, and Secondary Recognition (*ma'rifah thanawiyyah*), which deepens through divine guidance and individual receptivity. This distinction is crucial in understanding how faith and disbelief among servants are contingent upon the divine bestowal of recognition.

Moreover, this chapter will examine the gradational nature of recognition and the process of its augmentation. While all humans are endowed with an innate awareness of Allah (swt), the degree to which they actualize and refine this recognition varies. Some ascend in recognition through submission and divine guidance, while others remain veiled due to their own rejection. By analyzing key textual evidence and scholarly interpretations, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how divine recognition is granted, developed, and sustained within the framework of Islamic thought.

The Role of Divine Bestowal in Faith and Disbelief

Sulaym ibn Qays narrates that an individual once asked the Commander of the Faithful ('a):

“O Commander of the Faithful, what is the lowest degree of faith, disbelief, and being deviated?” He ('a) replied:

“You have posed a significant question, so listen attentively to the answer. The lowest level of faith is when Allah grants a person recognition of Himself, and the individual acknowledges His Lordship and Oneness. When Allah introduces His Prophet to him, he submits to his prophethood and message. And when Allah acquaints him with His authority on earth—who is His divine proof over creation—the person acknowledges his obedience to him...”

“The lowest degree of disbelief is when an individual believes in something, assuming it to be commanded by Allah, while in reality, Allah has forbidden it. He then adopts it as part of his religion and establishes his associations (tawallī) and disassociations (tabarrī) based on it,

believing that he is worshipping Allah in accordance with divine command.”

“And the lowest degree of being deviated is when a person fails to recognize Allah (swt)’s authority on earth and His proof over creation—whom He has commanded to be obeyed and whose guardianship He has made obligatory.”¹

In this narration, the Imam (‘a) elucidates that divine recognition (*ma‘rifah*) is the primary blessing that Allah (swt) bestows upon human beings. Upon receiving this recognition, individuals become accountable for faith (*īmān*), which entails the acknowledgment of divine lordship (*rubūbiyyah*), monotheism (*tawhīd*), prophethood (*nubuwwah*), and Imamate (*imāmah*). Furthermore, the Imam (‘a) categorizes the lowest level of being deviated (*ḍalāl*) as the absence of this recognition, indicating that such an individual has not received divine recognition from Allah (swt).

This narration underscores that faith is contingent upon divine bestowal. It is only after Allah (swt) grants recognition that human beings can fulfill their religious obligations. Faith, therefore, is not merely an intellectual endeavor but a response to the recognition conferred by Allah (swt). The Imam (‘a) further clarifies that the lowest degree of being lost stems from the absence of recognition, emphasizing that such a condition results not from personal negligence but from the lack of divine bestowal.

The phrase “لا يعرف حجه الله” (*does not recognize Allah (swt)’s authority*) negates *ma‘rifah qashūriyyah* (involuntary ignorance). This means that the individual’s inability to recognize divine authority was not due to personal failure but because Allah (swt) had not actualized His action of bestowing recognition upon him. Consequently, non-acceptance of divine authority in this context does not carry any culpability, as the recognition itself was never granted. This aligns with the theological

¹ al-Hilālī. Page 613; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 2:414.

principle of *sālibah bi intifā' al-mawḍū'*¹ (negation due to the absence of a subject), meaning that rejection or denial of recognition in such a case is meaningless since the recognition itself does not exist within the person's reality.

The Divine Bestowal of Recognition: Beyond Human Acquisition

Abu Baṣīr narrates that a person inquired from Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a):

“Is ma‘rifah something that can be acquired?” The Imam (‘a) responded: “No.” The person then asked: “Is recognition an act (fi ‘l) of Almighty Allah and one of His gifts?” The Imam (‘a) replied:

“Yes, the servants have no role in acquiring recognition, and their responsibility is to perform deeds.”²

This narration establishes that recognition is an act of Allah (swt), independent of human effort. Any religious obligation imposed upon individuals necessitates prior recognition; otherwise, the obligation itself would lack validity. Since human actions require recognition as a prerequisite, it follows that Allah (swt), before assigning any duty, must bestow recognition upon His servants. Without divine bestowal, an individual cannot attain recognition through personal effort. Moreover, actions performed without recognition would be fundamentally problematic, as they would lack an essential foundation. Consequently, recognition from Allah (swt) is paramount and takes precedence over all other forms of knowledge. Until Allah (swt) bestows recognition upon an

¹ [Translator's Note] The logical principle of *sālibah bi intifā' al-mawḍū'* (negation due to the non-existence of the subject) posits that if a subject is non-existent within a given context, any predicates or attributes pertaining to that subject are necessarily negated. To illustrate, the proposition “Almighty God has no capable and powerful partner” exemplifies this principle. Given the axiomatic non-existence of a divine partner, the attribution of capability or power to such a non-existent entity becomes logically irrelevant and thus negated.

² al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 416.

individual, any obligation imposed by Him would be devoid of meaning. Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) further states:

*“There are six things that are not the creation (ṣun‘) of servants: recognition and ignorance, pleasure and anger, sleep and wakefulness.”*¹

Additionally, Muḥammad ibn Ḥakīm narrates that he asked Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a):

“Whose creation (ṣun‘) is recognition?” The Imam (‘a) responded:

*“It is Allah (swt)’s creation (ṣun‘illāh). Servants have no role in acquiring recognition.”*²

These two narrations emphasize that all recognition, whether it pertains to Allah (swt) or to creation, is exclusively an act of Allah (swt). Therefore, it is beyond doubt that every form of recognition is ultimately bestowed by Him. However, a critical question arises: Are all forms of recognition granted by Allah (swt) of the same nature and from the same source? Are all types of recognition conferred upon human beings in the same manner?

Allah (swt) has endowed human beings with faculties and instruments that enable them to attain recognition in specific domains. Through these faculties, humans acquire knowledge and recognition of empirical (*ḥissī*) realities. However, this process does not entail direct divine creation of recognition within the individual. Rather, Allah (swt) has granted human beings cognitive means—such as the five senses—through which they can engage with and learn about their surroundings. Although Allah (swt) possesses the absolute power to grant recognition without intermediaries, His normative practice (*ṣunnatullāh*) is to facilitate recognition through sensory faculties illuminated by the divine light of knowledge.

¹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:164; al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*. Vol 1:325.

² al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:163; al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 410.

This principle extends beyond external sensory faculties to include internal cognitive mechanisms and higher epistemic faculties. Among these, the most exalted is the *nūr al-‘ilm wal ‘aql* (light of knowledge and intellect), whose intrinsic nature is self-revelation (*kashf*). When Almighty Allah grants this light to an individual, it enables perception and comprehension in accordance with the extent of the bestowed illumination. Possessing this divine light is tantamount to possessing knowledge and understanding. Since the light of intellect and knowledge is itself a divine gift, the recognition derived from these faculties is also a manifestation of Allah (swt)’s bestowal.

However, the bestowal of the *nūr al-‘ilm wal ‘aql* does not equate to directly granting recognition or knowledge of a specific entity. Human beings utilize this divine gift to attain recognition of particular objects, but their perceptive faculties—even when enlightened by the divine light of knowledge and intellect—remain inherently incapable of recognizing Almighty Allah, His attributes, and His actions. Thus, the recognition of Allah (swt) is entirely distinct from the recognition of creation, and only He can grant it to His servants in a unique and specific manner. In conclusion, Allah (swt)’s act of bestowing recognition of Himself is fundamentally different from His act of enabling the recognition of other realities.

However, the gift of the light of knowledge and intellect is not equivalent to bestowing recognition and knowledge of a specific object. Human beings acquire recognition of a particular object by using Allah (swt)’s gift. But human perceptive powers—even the light of knowledge and intellect—cannot recognize Almighty Allah and His attributes and actions. Thus, only Allah the Almighty can grant His recognition to His servants in a specific way. In conclusion, Allah (swt)’s action regarding His own recognition is distinct from His action of bestowing the recognition of other matters.

The Inability of Creation to Attain Divine Recognition

Şafwān narrates that he asked Imam al-Kāzīm (‘a):

“Do the servants possess a faculty with which they can acquire ma‘rifah?” The Imam (‘a) replied:

“No, recognition is a bestowal (hibah) from Allah.”

He then asked: “If they cannot acquire recognition, is there still a reward for them in their acts of worship, such as bowing and prostrating, which they are commanded to perform?” The Imam (‘a) answered:

“They do not deserve the reward. Rather, recognition is a grace (faḍl) and kindness (lutf) from Allah. The reward for it is also His grace.”¹

This narration specifically discusses the reward associated with the type of recognition that leads to religious obligations and corresponding recompense, rather than general forms of recognition. An example of such recognition is that of Almighty Allah. By negating any human ability to acquire recognition, the Imam (‘a) establishes that Allah (swt)’s recognition is exclusively His action. Since Almighty Allah is not obligated to bestow recognition upon His servants, its bestowal is purely an act of divine grace and beneficence. Similarly, when Allah (swt) grants reward for recognition, it is still an act of divine favour, as servants do not inherently deserve any recompense for it.

A similar concept is conveyed in another narration. Mu‘āwiyah ibn al-Ḥakam narrates that he asked Imam Abū al-Ḥasan al-Riḍā (‘a):

“Do people have a role in creating recognition within themselves?” The Imam (‘a) responded: “No.” He then asked: “Are they rewarded for their recognition?” The Imam (‘a) answered:

“Reward is grace and favour, just as recognition itself is grace and favour.”²

¹ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 5:223; al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsīn*. Vol 1:281.

² al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 5:221; al-Ḥimyarī, *Qurb al-Isnād*. Page 151.

The meaning of this narration aligns with the previous one, affirming that both recognition and its reward originate solely from Allah (swt)'s grace. Imam al-Bāqir ('a) further emphasizes this principle, stating:

*“It is not up to people to know until Allah teaches them. It is up to them to know when Allah has taught them.”*¹

This narration reinforces that recognition is an act of Allah (swt) and not the responsibility of humankind. Additionally, al-Bazantī narrates that he said to the Imam ('a):

*“May Allah rectify your affairs. A group of our companions believe that recognition is acquired and claim that if they seek it in the right direction, they will attain understanding.”*²

The Imam ('a) categorically rejected this view.

Theological Implications of the Above Verses and Traditions

- 1. Recognition is exclusively attributed to Allah (swt)** – Similar to the theological principle of “recognition of Allah through Allah” (*ma 'rifatullāh billāh*), this group of narrations and Quranic verses attribute recognition solely to Allah (swt) while negating its acquisition from any other source.
- 2. Recognition is a direct act of Allah (swt)** – Servants lack the faculties or perceptive abilities necessary to attain it independently.
- 3. Human beings do not possess the capability to acquire Allah (swt)'s recognition** – It is neither accessible through empirical (*ḥissī*) knowledge nor intellectual speculation.
- 4. There is no path to Allah (swt)'s recognition except through His self-disclosure** – No effort or reasoning can independently lead to it; Allah (swt) must introduce Himself to His creation.

¹ al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsīn*. Vol 1:200; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 5:222.

² al-Ḥimyarī, *Qurb al-Isnād*. Page 156; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 5:199.

5. **Recognition is an act of Allah in which servants have no role** – Despite this, Allah (swt), out of His boundless grace, grants them reward for it.
6. **Bestowing recognition is an act of divine grace and beneficence** – It is neither an obligation upon Allah (swt) nor a right owed to servants.
7. **Divine obligations are contingent upon recognition** – If Allah (swt) imposes a responsibility upon a person, they must possess the necessary capacity to fulfill it. Since recognizing Allah (swt) is beyond human capability, it cannot be considered an obligation.
8. **All religious duties are founded upon divine recognition** – If a person lacks recognition of Allah (swt), they are not accountable for fulfilling religious obligations.
9. **Recognition of Allah (swt) differs from other types of recognition** – While Allah (swt) creates the means for humans to attain knowledge about worldly matters through sensory and cognitive faculties, no such faculty can lead to His recognition. Therefore, He must make Himself known to His servants.
10. **Recognition is dynamic and subject to increase** – Once Almighty Allah bestows recognition upon His servants, they are responsible for adhering to it. As they fulfill their obligations, Allah (swt) grants them an even deeper level of recognition, further illuminating their understanding.

This theological framework firmly establishes that recognition is not an acquired human capability but a divine endowment that underpins all religious belief and practice.

Recognition as a Divine Bestowal: The Journey from Initial to Advanced Stages

Thus far, it has been established that Allah (swt)'s recognition (*ma'rifah*) is His exclusive act; therefore, He must make Himself known to His servants. In this section, we explore the different levels and degrees of

recognition.¹ As individuals ascend to higher ranks of recognition, their corresponding obligations and responsibilities also increase.

The first level of recognition is the foundational recognition that Allah (swt) bestows upon all His servants. When a servant is granted this divine blessing, they must fulfill their duties towards Him and embody servitude (*'ubūdiyyah*). Hence, every servant who submits to Allah and acknowledges His greatness (*'aẓamah*), majesty (*jalālah*), ownership (*mulk*), and guardianship (*wilāyah*) expresses gratitude for this immense blessing of recognition.

Allah promises an increase in blessings for those who are grateful:
“If you are grateful, I will surely increase you [in favour].”²

Through obedience and submission, a person attains a higher level of recognition. Each stage of recognition necessitates new duties and obligations of gratitude. As one grows closer to Almighty Allah, their recognition intensifies through acts of gratitude and servitude. Eventually, this leads to a state in which they never forget Allah (swt) and rely upon Him in all circumstances. Such an individual perceives everything as intrinsically connected to Allah (swt) and realizes that nothing exists independently of Him.

¹ The concept of varying degrees or ranks within the *ma'rifah* (recognition) of Allah (swt), with secondary recognition surpassing primary recognition, finds scriptural support in the verse, *“And (as for) those who follow the right direction, He increases them in guidance and gives them their guarding (against evil)” [47:17]*. However, the nature of this increase in guidance requires careful consideration. The verse prompts the question: What precisely is being augmented? Does this increase pertain to strength or weakness, perfection or imperfection, clarity or ambiguity, or degrees of apparentness? Given that the augmentation of divine recognition is an act of Allah (swt), these conventional descriptors of recognition, which are typically acquired through perceptual and cognitive processes, are inapplicable. The *ma'rifah* of Allah Almighty is categorically distinct from these modalities of human understanding. Furthermore, as this increase is divinely ordained, its *kayfiyyah* (how-ness) is inherently indescribable.

² Sūrah al-Ibrāhīm, Verse 7.

The Quran highlights these two types of recognition—primary and secondary—in various verses. Allah (swt) states: *“Indeed, We guided him to the way, be he grateful or ungrateful.”*¹

At first glance, this verse appears to reference primary recognition. However, considering the different degrees and levels of recognition, it applies to both primary and secondary recognition. This is because each level of recognition carries specific responsibilities. Fulfilling these responsibilities constitutes gratitude for that particular level, while neglecting them signifies ingratitude. Therefore, this verse can be understood as a general principle of divine guidance.

Most verses addressing primary recognition emphasize *fiṭrah* (innate recognition). However, the Quran also discusses secondary or compound recognition in the following verses:

- *“Whoever believes in Allah, He will guide his heart.”*²
- *“And those who strive for Us – We will surely guide them to Our ways.”*³
- *“And Allah increases guidance for those who were guided.”*⁴
- *“And those who are guided – He increases them in guidance.”*⁵

Although the last verse (Quran 14:7) does not explicitly mention secondary recognition, when understood in the context of gratitude for divine guidance, its relevance becomes clear. Accepting and acting upon recognition is itself a form of gratitude, and this gratitude leads to further recognition.

Allah (swt) further states: *“So remember Me; I will remember you.”*⁶

¹ Sūrah al-Insān, Verse 3.

² Sūrah al-Taghābun, Verse 11.

³ Sūrah al-‘Ankabūt, Verse 69.

⁴ Sūrah Maryam, Verse 76.

⁵ Sūrah Muḥammad, Verse 17.

⁶ Sūrah al-Baqarah, Verse 152.

Allah (swt)'s remembrance (*dhikr*) of His servants manifests His grace (*rahmah*), generosity (*karam*), favour (*lutf*), and kindness (*ihsān*). It is a divine blessing that enhances one's recognition of Him and facilitates spiritual closeness (*qurb*). When a person initially attains recognition of Allah (swt), they can engage in His remembrance. This cycle of recognition and remembrance leads to further elevation in divine proximity.

Moreover, in Sūrah al-Fātiḥah, Allah (swt) instructs His servants to seek divine guidance and recognition, regardless of their current level of understanding:

“Guide us to the straight path.”¹

Regarding this verse, Imam al-Riḍā ('a) explains:

“‘Guide us to the right path’ means seeking the way of divine training, grasping Allah (swt)'s rope, and seeking an increase in recognition of Allah and His greatness.”²

This explanation affirms that no matter how advanced one's faith and recognition may be, believers continuously request Allah (swt) for further recognition and deeper understanding of how to draw closer to Him.

Conclusion

In every degree and level, recognition is ultimately the act of Allah (swt). The distinction between primary and secondary recognition lies in the nature of divine bestowal. Allah (swt) is not obligated to grant primary recognition; it is purely an act of His grace. However, concerning higher levels of recognition, Allah (swt) has promised that if a servant submits, He will increase their recognition. When a servant acknowledges and expresses gratitude for the divine blessing of recognition, Allah (swt)

¹ Sūrah al-Fātiḥah, Verse 6.

² al-Ṣadūq, *Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*. Vol 2:107, al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 6:68.

elevates them to a higher spiritual rank, fulfilling His divine promise of guidance and enlightenment.

Key Points

- **The Lowest State of Misguidance (*Dalāl*):** The most fundamental level of being “lost (*dalāl*)” is the absence of divine recognition (*maʿrifah*). A person who does not receive recognition from Allah (swt) remains in a state of misguidance.
- **Recognition as a Prerequisite for Actions:** No action holds true value unless it is accompanied by recognition. Without recognition, an action cannot be rightfully attributed to its doer in a meaningful way.
- **Recognition as a Divine Bestowal:** All recognition is granted by Allah (swt). While He has provided human beings with faculties and means to acquire knowledge in certain domains, ultimate recognition of Him remains a divine bestowal.
- **The Light of Knowledge and Intellect as a Gift from Allah (swt):** Human intellect and the light of knowledge are blessings from the Creator. Since recognition is an extension of knowledge, it too is a bestowal from Allah (swt).
- **Distinction Between Knowledge and Recognition:** The bestowal of knowledge and intellect differs from the bestowal of specific recognition. While intellect enables human cognition, the direct recognition of Allah (swt) and His realities requires His own introduction of Himself.
- **Recognition and Reward as Divine Favours:** Just as recognition itself is a divine favour and kindness, the reward for recognition is also an act of Allah (swt)’s generosity and grace.
- **Ranks and Levels of Recognition:** Recognition, being an act of Allah (swt), exists in degrees and levels. Each level entails specific responsibilities, commandments, and duties that guide the servant toward higher stages of spiritual elevation.

- **The Necessity of Initial Recognition:** The foundational level of recognition is necessary for advancing toward higher stages of divine understanding. Without this initial bestowal, further spiritual ascension is unattainable.
- **Divine Bestowal and Obligation:** The initial bestowal of recognition is not obligatory upon Allah (swt), as it is purely an act of His grace. However, Allah (swt) has promised to increase recognition for those who submit and express gratitude, making the bestowal of higher ranks a divine commitment rather than an obligation.

Chapter 14

Does Recognition Originate from Allah (swt) or Human Effort - A Thematic Analysis of Traditions

Learning Outcomes of this Chapter

- Accurately interpret narrations that appear to contradict the principle that recognition (*ma'rifah*) is an act of Allah (swt).
- Comprehend the correct meaning of recognition as the foundation of religion.
- Understand the rationale behind divine commandments requiring human beings to acquire recognition and knowledge.
- Reconcile seemingly conflicting narrations regarding the role of Allah (swt) and His servants in recognition.

In the previous chapter, we established, through Quranic verses and narrations, that *ma'rifah* of Allah (swt) is solely His act, and human beings are not inherently responsible for attaining it. Rather, it is Allah (swt) who introduces Himself to His servants, making it their duty to accept, submit, and acknowledge His existence and authority. Imam al-Šādiq (‘a) states:

“It is not the duty of the servants to recognize Allah; rather, it is Allah’s responsibility to make Himself known to His creatures. When He introduces [Himself] to them, it is up to them to accept.”¹

Recognition exists in two forms: primary and secondary. Primary recognition is a divine bestowal granted to all without preconditions, whereas secondary recognition is contingent upon acceptance and faith in

¹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:164.

this initial introduction. However, certain narrations appear to suggest that recognition is a duty upon the servant, leading to a seeming contradiction. This chapter will critically analyze these conflicting narrations, clarify their intended meanings, and provide a comprehensive understanding of how they align within the broader framework of divine recognition.

Recognition as the Foundation of Religion and Worship

The Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali (‘a), states:

*“The beginning and foundation of [Allah (swt) ’s] religion is His recognition”*¹

This narration highlights that *ma ‘rifah* of Allah (swt) is the most fundamental principle of religion, without which one cannot be considered religious. Similar narrations have been reported from Imam al-Kāzīm and Imam al-Riḍā (‘as), with slight variations in wording. Imam al-Kāzīm (‘a) states:

*“The beginning of religiosity is His recognition, and the perfection of His recognition is His Tawḥīd.”*²

Likewise, Imam al-Riḍā (‘a) says:

*“The beginning of religiosity is the recognition of Allah, and the perfection of His recognition is His monotheism.”*³

In another narration, Imam al-Riḍā (‘a) states:

*“There is no religion except after recognition, and there is no recognition except with sincerity.”*⁴

At first glance, these narrations seem to suggest that recognition, like other religious obligations, is a human responsibility—implying that one must actively seek recognition to become religious. This interpretation appears to contradict other narrations that establish recognition as an act of

¹ Imam Ali (‘a), *Nahj al-Balāghah*. Sermon 1; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:247.

² al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:140.

³ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 56; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:284.

⁴ al-Ṭabṛasī, *al-Ihtijāj ‘alā Ahl al-Lajāj*. Vol 2:400; al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 40.

Allah (swt). However, upon deeper examination, it becomes clear that either “recognition of Allah” or “religion” has distinct meanings in different contexts.

If we understand “religion” as the set of duties and obligations imposed on individuals, then “recognition of Allah” in these narrations does not refer to the recognition that Allah (swt) bestows upon His creation. Instead, the term “recognition” here signifies the acknowledgment, submission, and acceptance of the recognition initially granted by Allah (swt). In this sense, recognition is a human action and responsibility, making it the first step in religious commitment. Later, we will examine additional narrations that support this second meaning of recognition, where belief, affirmation, and commitment to the initial recognition are also referred to as “recognition”. Under this interpretation, there is no contradiction between these narrations and those that establish recognition as an act of Allah (swt).

Alternatively, if we maintain that “recognition” is solely an act of Allah (swt), then “religion” must be understood in a broader sense—one that includes both divine acts and human responsibilities. In this view, recognition, as a divine act, serves as the foundation of religion because, without Allah (swt) bestowing recognition, religious obligations would not have any significance. Thus, Allah (swt)’s act of granting recognition is the primary step that makes religious responsibilities meaningful. When He provides His recognition, the expectations and duties of religion become applicable.

Therefore, the narrations that establish recognition as the foundation of religion can be interpreted in two valid ways, neither of which contradict the narrations that define recognition as a divine act.

Recognition as the Basis of Worship

Imam al-Riḍā (‘a) further states:

“The foundation of worshiping Allah is His recognition.”¹

Similarly, the Holy Prophet (ṣ) advised Abū Dharr:

“O Abā Dharr! Worship Allah as if you see Him. And if you do not see Him, [know that] He sees you. Know that the foundation of His worship is His recognition—knowing that He is the First, and there is nothing before Him; He is Unique, and He has no second.”²

Like the previous narrations, these traditions affirm that recognition is the fundamental basis of worship. Regardless of whether recognition is granted by Allah (swt) (first meaning) or acquired through human acknowledgment and faith (second meaning), it remains a prerequisite for worship. The phrase “أَوَّلُ عِبَادَةِ اللَّهِ — the first step of worship” indicates that recognition is an integral part of worship, where it means conscious acknowledgment and belief. This type of recognition is distinct from the original recognition, which is an act of Allah (swt).

Divine Command to Acquire Knowledge and Recognition

Allah the Almighty commands:

“So know that there is no deity except Allah.”³

Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, may Allah be pleased with him, in his commentary on this verse, explains: *“‘Know, O Muḥammad, that there is no god but Allah,’ meaning that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah. This verse indicates that recognition is acquired because if it were ḍarūriyyah (self-evident), He would not have commanded it.”⁴*

Similarly, regarding the verse: *“Know that Allah is severe in penalty and that Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.”⁵* Shaykh al- Ṭūsī states: *“This noble verse indicates that recognition of Allah and His attributes is*

¹ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 34; al-Ṣadūq, *Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*. Vol 1:150.

² al-Ṭūsī, *al-Amālī*. Page 525.

³ Sūrah Muḥammad, Verse 19.

⁴ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān Fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*. Vol 9:200.

⁵ Sūrah al-Mā’idah, Verse 98.

not ḍarūriyyah because if it were self-evident, there would be no need for a divine command to acquire it. It cannot be argued that the command in this verse is merely a reminder, as this contradicts its apparent meaning.”¹

The late Mīrzā Mahdi Iṣfahānī, may Allah (swt) be pleased with him, commenting on the first verse, states: “*The noble verse does not instruct: ‘Learn about the meaning of the Kalimah of Tawḥīd.’ Rather, it commands: ‘O audience! Know and be aware that there is no god but Him.’*”²

In Arabic, the word “اعْلَمْ (a ‘lam) — know” functions both as a directive to acquire knowledge and as a warning or declaration of truth. According to Mīrzā Iṣfahānī, based on *mutawātir* verses and narrations affirming that recognition is a divine act, the term “a ‘lam” in this verse serves as a warning rather than an instruction to actively seek recognition. This interpretation aligns with an established and widely accepted linguistic usage. Even if this interpretation diverges from the apparent meaning of the verse, it remains valid due to overwhelming textual evidence establishing recognition as an act of Allah (swt).

The Primacy of Recognizing Allah (swt)

Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) states: “*Indeed, the best and most obligatory of duties for human beings is recognition of Allah and acknowledgment of His servitude.*”³

In another narration, some of his companions inquired, “*Which deed is superior?*” He (‘a) replied: “*That you consider your Lord to be the Only One and Unique (Tawḥīd).*”⁴

Although this narration does not explicitly mention *ma ‘rifah*, it equates *Tawḥīd* with Allah (swt)’s recognition, indicating that these two

¹ al-Ṭūsī. Vol 4:33.

² al-Iṣfahānī, *Manāṣib al-Nabī*. Page 2.

³ al-Khazzāz al-Rāzī, *Kifāyat al-Athar Fī al-Nuṣūṣ ‘alā al-A‘immat al-Ithnay ‘Ashar*. Page 261.

⁴ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Amālī*. Page 687; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 8:3.

concepts are inseparable. Therefore, this narration also serves as evidence in our discussion.

The late Āyatullāh Mīrzā Mahdi Iṣfahānī clarifies this theological point: *“An objection may arise, questioning how Tawḥīd and recognition can be identical if we previously established that recognition is an act of Allah. How, then, does the Imam (‘a) consider it among human actions in this ḥadīth? Our response is that human beings exercise free will in submitting to divine recognition. Therefore, the responsibility lies upon them. In this manner, Tawḥīd becomes an action of the servant. The meaning of human Tawḥīd is that the servant willingly submits to divine self-disclosure. Thus, the person enters the ranks of those who recognize Allah and become part of the muwaḥḥidūn (monotheists). However, Tawḥīd itself remains an act of Allah, just as His self-introduction is His act.”*¹

Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) further emphasizes the value of divine recognition, stating:

*“If people knew the virtue of recognition of Allah, they would not stretch their necks towards the pleasures and blessings of this world, which Allah Almighty has granted to His enemies. In their eyes, worldly possessions would be worth less than what they place beneath their feet.”*²

Similarly, when Imam Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (‘a) was asked about the most virtuous deed in the sight of Allah (swt), he (‘a) responded:

*“After the recognition of Allah Almighty and the recognition of His Messenger (s), no action is superior to hatred of the world (bugḥd al-dunyā).”*³

Imam al-Riḍā (‘a) also underscores the hierarchical importance of recognition, stating:

¹ al-Iṣfahānī, *Manāṣib al-Nabī*. Page 60.

² al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*. Vol 8:247.

³ al-Kulaynī. 2/130; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 70/59.

“The best of duties—after the recognition of Allah Almighty—is the five daily prayers.”¹

In another instance, when Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) was asked, *“Which action does Allah love most after His recognition?”* He (‘a) replied: *“Bringing joy to a believer.”²*

Furthermore, Imam Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (‘a) states: *“Allah does not love an action more than guarding the stomach and chastity.”³*

Similarly, Imam al-Bāqir (‘a) defines the essence of divine command and obedience, stating: *“The height, peak, and key of the divine command (amr), as well as the gateway to all matters and the source of Allah (swt)’s pleasure, is obedience to the Imam after recognizing him.”⁴*

The interpretation of this narration depends on whether the pronoun in *ba‘da ma ‘rifatihi* (after recognizing him) refers to Allah (swt) or the Imam. Both interpretations are possible. The late Mullā Ṣāliḥ al-Māzandarānī supports the first interpretation, stating: *“The Imam (‘a) emphasized that recognition of Allah Almighty is superior to obedience to the Imam by using the phrase ‘after His recognition’. How could it not be superior? Recognition is the foundation of obedience, even though its perfection is attained through obedience. In summary, the system of obedience depends on the system of recognition, while the perfection of recognition is realized through obedience.”⁵*

Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) further elaborates on the essence of knowledge, stating: *“I found the knowledge of people in four matters: first, to recognize your Lord; second, to recognize what He has done for you;*

¹ al-Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā’il Wa Mustanbiḥ al-Masā’il*. Vol 3:43, al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 80:20.

² al-Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā’il Wa Mustanbiḥ al-Masā’il*. Vol 12:400.

³ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 75:141; al-Ḥarrānī, *Tuḥaf al-Uqūl*. Page 2.

⁴ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:185.

⁵ al-Māzandarānī, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfī*. Vol 5:181.

third, to recognize what He requires of you; and fourth, to recognize what will lead you away from your religion.”¹

At first glance, this narration seems to contradict earlier narrations that establish recognition as an act of Allah (swt) and not a human obligation. However, a closer analysis reveals that, as in previous narrations, the term “recognition” here carries a second meaning. In this context, recognition signifies conscious acknowledgment, belief in Allah (swt), appreciation of divine blessings, awareness of religious obligations, and knowledge of what causes one to deviate from the divine path.

Such recognition is a human action and can be classified as “human knowledge”. When Allah the Almighty grants recognition, human beings become its bearers. Consequently, this knowledge can be referred to as “human knowledge” while still being bestowed by Allah (swt). This dual aspect allows us to reconcile the first meaning of recognition (as an act of Allah) with this narration without contradiction.

However, if one insists that recognition in this narration is solely a human action, then it should be understood as *taṣdīq* (affirmation) and *īmān* (faith) rather than innate divine bestowal. This interpretation remains consistent with all narrations.

In conclusion, the narrations that initially appear inconsistent with the previous narrations—those affirming recognition as Allah (swt)’s act—do not, in fact, contradict them. Rather, they highlight an additional dimension of recognition that falls under human responsibility.

It is also important to note that in common usage, “recognition” is often understood as a form of submission to divine knowledge. A person who fails to act upon their awareness of Allah (swt) is still considered ignorant and heedless. The narrations under discussion reinforce the idea

¹ al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*. Vol 1:239; al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsin*. Vol 1:365, al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:50.

that recognition is intertwined with action. In other words, where there is no action, there is no true recognition.

Reconciling the Apparent Conflict Between Two Sets of Narrations

Some argue that *maʿrifah* is solely a human act, citing specific narrations to support this view. However, a comprehensive analysis necessitates considering other traditions as well. Numerous narrations attribute recognition to Allah (swt), including those that affirm recognition of Allah (swt) through Allah (swt) Himself, as well as those that describe divine recognition as an innate faculty, beyond human acquisition. Given these narrations, the seemingly unequivocal claim that recognition is purely a human act becomes more complex. Consequently, one must either disregard the numerous opposing narrations or avoid limiting interpretation solely to the apparent meaning of a particular subset of aḥādīth.

Additionally, another fundamental principle prevents us from disregarding the apparent meanings of both categories of narrations. Instead, we must acknowledge that the term “*maʿrifah* (recognition)” is employed with two distinct meanings within these traditions. In the second category of narrations, recognition refers to *īmān*. This distinction resolves the apparent contradiction between the two sets of narrations.

Imam al-Riḍā (ʿa), as recorded in Fiqh al-Riḍā, states:

*“I narrate that recognition is affirmation, submission, and sincerity—both in private and in public. And I narrate that the right of recognition is that the possessor of recognition must obey and not disobey, and express gratitude and not ingratitude.”*¹

This narration establishes that *maʿrifah* is used within the narrations of Ahl al-Bayt (ʿas) to denote meanings beyond its primary

¹ al-Riḍā (ʿa), *Fiqh al-Riḍā* (ʿa). Page 65; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 3:14.

theological sense of divine bestowal. A similar understanding emerges from the interpretation of the verse:

*“So that you may glorify Allah for that to which He has guided you, and perhaps you will be grateful”*¹. Imam (‘a) explains: *“Gratitude is recognition.”*²

Likewise, regarding the verse: *“He does not like disbelief for His servants, and if you are grateful, He is pleased with you”*³, it is narrated that: *“Disbelief in this verse refers to rejection of the A’immah, while gratitude refers to wilāyah and recognition.”*⁴

Here, recognition is equated with gratitude, which is an action of the servant. Similarly, Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) states:

*“Allah does not accept any action without recognition, and recognition is always accompanied by action. For the one who acts, his recognition leads him to action, and for the one who does not act, he has no recognition. Be aware that faith is interdependent.”*⁵

This noble ḥadīth affirms that recognition is inseparable from action, meaning that true recognition only manifests through righteous deeds. While Allah the Almighty grants primary recognition to humans as He wills, this divine endowment does not necessarily translate into action. The Quran states:

*“Indeed, We guided him to the way, whether he be grateful or ungrateful,”*⁶

This verse affirms that Allah (swt) has provided guidance to all, leaving it to individuals to choose whether to follow the divine path or reject it.

¹ Sūrah al-Baqarah, Verse 185.

² al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsīn*. Vol 1:149; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:60.

³ Sūrah al-Zumar, Verse 7.

⁴ al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsīn*. Vol 1:246.

⁵ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*. Vol 1:44.

⁶ Sūrah al-Insān, Verse 3.

Thus, when narrations describe recognition as a human act, they refer to recognition in the sense of affirmation, submission, faith, and acknowledgment that leads to righteous action. In this sense, recognition can also be understood as a form of worship and gratitude. Numerous narrations employ *maʿrifah* to signify affirmation and submission. Consider the following aḥādīth:

*Abū Ḥamzah narrates from Imam al-Bāqir (ʿa): “Only those who recognize Allah truly worship Him. But one who has not recognized Allah worships Him in misguidance, like the majority of people.” When asked, “What does recognition of Allah mean?” The Imam (ʿa) responded: “It is to accept Allah Almighty, His Messenger (ṣ), the wilāyah of Alī (ʿa), to follow the Aʿimmah of guidance, and to disassociate from their enemies for the sake of Allah the Most Glorious.”*¹

This narration explicitly defines divine recognition as acceptance of *Tawḥīd*, *Nubuwwah*, *Wilāyah*, and the Aʿimmah’s authority, demonstrating that recognition in this context refers to human action rather than Allah (swt)’s bestowal. Thus, when narrations assert that recognition is the most essential duty, they refer to this secondary meaning—affirmation, faith, and acceptance—rather than the original theological meaning of divine bestowal, awareness, and understanding. Imam al-Ṣādiq (ʿa) further states:

*“The Imam is a flag between Allah the Almighty and His creation. Whoever recognizes the Imam is a believer, and whoever denies him is an infidel.”*²

In this ḥadīth, recognition is placed in direct opposition to disbelief (*kufr*), implying that *maʿrifah* here does not mean divinely bestowed awareness but rather faith and affirmation.

¹ al-Kulaynī. Vol 1:180.

² al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-Dīn Wa Tamām al-Niʿmah*. Vol 2:412; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 33:88.

A similar contrast appears in another ḥadīth where the Imam (‘a) describes the armies of intellect (‘*aql*) and ignorance (*jahl*), stating: “Recognition, and its opposite: denial (*inkār*).”¹

Additionally, he (‘a) states: “People are not excused for failing to recognize us. Whoever recognizes us is a believer, whoever denies us is a disbeliever, and whoever neither recognizes nor denies us is astray (*dāll*).”²

Denial presupposes knowledge—one cannot reject something they are unaware of. Consequently, denial cannot be the opposite of recognition if *ma‘rifah* were solely defined as divine bestowal of awareness. Instead, in these narrations, recognition signifies affirmation and faith after understanding, as seen in numerous other aḥādīth.

Key Points

- **Essentiality of *Ma‘rifah* for Religiosity:** To be deemed “religious” within the Islamic paradigm, an individual must attain *ma‘rifah* of Allah Almighty. This constitutes a foundational axiom of *dīn* (religion), underscoring its indispensability to the believer’s identity and practice.
- **Interrelationship Between *Ma‘rifah* and ‘*ibādah*:** The ‘*ibādah* of Allah (swt) is predicated upon *ma‘rifah*. The *ma‘rifah* preceding ‘*ibādah* is an act initiated by Allah (swt), manifesting as divine bestowal, whereas the *ma‘rifah* that initiates worship is characterized as *taslīm* (submission), an intentional human response to divine disclosure.
- **Human Agency in *Ma‘rifah* and *Tawḥīd*:** Servants possess *ikhtiyār* (free will) to acquiesce to Allah (swt)’s act of *ma‘rifah*. Correspondingly, *Tawḥīd*—ontologically equivalent to *ma‘rifah*—also emerges as a volitional act of the servants, bridging divine

¹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:22.

² al-Kulaynī. Vol 1:187; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 32:325.

initiative and human responsibility within the theological framework.

- **Primacy of *Maʿrifah* and *Tawḥīd*:** The *maʿrifah* and *Tawḥīd* of Allah (swt) are posited as the most meritorious deeds (*aʿmāl*) and the paramount obligations (*wājibāt*). This elevates them to the apex of both ethical and juridical hierarchies in Islamic thought.
- **Praxis as Constitutive of Authentic *Maʿrifah*:** Genuine *maʿrifah* is inherently performative, necessitating action (*ʿamal*) as its concomitant. Absent praxis, *maʿrifah* is rendered void, highlighting the inseparability of recognition and its behavioral manifestation.
- **Dual Dynamics of *Maʿrifah*:** Initially, *maʿrifah* is conferred upon servants without their agency, as an unelicited divine grace. However, progression to elevated degrees of *maʿrifah* requires *taslīm* (submission), *tasdīq* (acknowledgment), and *īmān* (faith). Consequently, numerous narrations employ “*maʿrifah*” as a terminological proxy for these responsive acts, reflecting their role in its consummation.
- **Semantic Duality of *Maʿrifah*:** In certain contexts, *maʿrifah* functions as an antithesis to *juḥūd* (denial), signifying *īmān* and *qabūl* (acceptance) rather than mere *ʿilm* or *waʿy* (awareness). This semantic shift underscores its connotative flexibility within Islamic discourse.

Chapter 15

The Limits of Human Understanding in Recognizing Allah (swt)

Learning Outcomes of this Chapter

- Understand that Allah Almighty has prohibited humans from engaging in speculative thought regarding His essence.
- Recognize the inherent limitations of human intellect in attaining knowledge of Allah (swt) independently.
- Explain the self-evident nature of divine recognition and how it is embedded within creation.
- Analyze the role of intellect in guiding individuals toward submission after receiving divine recognition.

Introduction

As previously established, Allah (swt) has instilled within every human being an innate recognition (*ma 'rifah*) of Him, rooted in prior realms. This intrinsic awareness, however, remains dormant until awakened by divine messengers and their appointed successors. Unlike other forms of knowledge that can be acquired through reasoning, empirical observation, or intellectual speculation, the recognition of Allah (swt) is not something that human faculties can attain independently. Rather, it is a bestowal granted solely by Allah (swt), and any attempt to comprehend Him through intermediaries or speculative inquiry results in misguidance and illusion.

This chapter delves deeper into the theological premise that human perception is inherently incapable of grasping Allah (swt)'s essence. It will explore how divine recognition is exclusively an act of bestowal and why the intellect, despite its significance, cannot serve as an

autonomous means of knowing Allah (swt). Instead, the intellect functions as a receptor that must submit to divine revelation rather than attempt to deduce the divine reality on its own.

Additionally, we will examine the indispensable role of prophets and divine guidance in facilitating recognition. While recognition originates solely from Allah (swt), it is through His chosen messengers that this recognition is articulated and revived in the hearts of people. This chapter will also highlight the distinction between submission-based recognition and speculative recognition, emphasizing that true understanding of the divine is not the product of philosophical or theological inquiry but rather a response to Allah (swt)’s own self-disclosure. Through analyzing key narrations and theological perspectives, we will establish that recognition of Allah (swt) necessitates receptivity and surrender, rather than intellectual construction.

The Prohibition of Speculating on Allah (swt)’s Essence

Human perceptual abilities are inherently limited, as all human beings—whether possessing profound intellectual depth or lacking advanced reasoning—are part of Allah (swt)’s creation. This fundamental limitation remains unchanged regardless of an individual’s intellectual capacity. For this reason, Allah (swt) has prohibited His servants from engaging in speculative contemplation about His essence, reminding them in the Holy Quran that “*when you discuss your Lord then stop*”¹. This divine directive implies that any attempt to comprehend His reality should be abandoned, as such speculation inevitably leads to confusion and perplexity.²

Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) emphasizes this restriction by stating: “*When speech reaches Allah, stop.*”³ This injunction underscores the principle

¹ Sūrah al-Najm, Verse 42.

² al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*. Vol 1:92.

³ al-Kulaynī. Vol 1:92; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 2:264.

that discussion and inquiry into the divine essence must cease at a certain threshold.

A narration records that some scholars of *kalām* (theology) argued that the prohibition on discussing divine matters only applied to those who were ignorant, whereas individuals with advanced knowledge were permitted to engage in such discussions. However, Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) refuted this claim, declaring: *“Both the wise and the unwise should refrain from discussing this, as the sin outweighs the benefit.”*¹

This statement makes it evident that the restriction applies universally, regardless of one’s level of intellectual or theological expertise. Since speaking about religious matters is already cautioned against², delving into speculation about Allah (swt), the core of religious belief, is even more impermissible.

The Inability of Human Perception to Recognize Allah (swt)

Just as navigating in complete darkness is impossible, attempting to recognize Allah (swt) using mere intellect and human reasoning leads only to confusion and bewilderment.

Lady Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ (‘a) affirms this truth, stating: *“The eyes cannot perceive Him, knowledge cannot encompass Him, measures cannot define Him, and contemplation cannot grasp Him, for He is the sovereign king.”*³

This noble ḥadīth highlights that Allah (swt)’s dominion and sovereignty transcend all other forms of power, and no being holds authority over Him. His divine greatness is beyond the grasp of even the

¹ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 459; al-‘Āmilī, *Wasā’il al-Shī’ah*. Vol 16:201.

² Examples of matters that transcend the capacity of human intellectual comprehension include the specific number of daily prayer units (17) and the prescribed sevenfold circumambulation (*tawāf*) of the Ka’bah. These are instances of divinely ordained prescriptions whose rationale is not necessarily accessible to human reason.

³ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 83:85.

most refined intellects, as no human mind—regardless of its capacity—can fully comprehend Him. In another narration, Lady Fāṭimah (‘a) states:

*“Allah is more glorious, more honorable, and greater than ... hearts being able to find the way to the truth of His greatness.”*¹

Regardless of the level of enlightenment a person attains, the essence of Allah (swt) remains beyond human comprehension.

Imam Ali al-Riḍā (‘a) further illustrates this limitation, saying:

*“Indeed, the thoughts [and perceptions] of the heart are greater than the sight [and vision] of the eyes. Therefore, those thoughts should not attempt to understand Allah, but He can understand them.”*²

This statement clarifies that even the most profound human thoughts and reflections remain insufficient in grasping Allah (swt)’s reality. The A’immah of Ahl al-Bayt (‘as) have consistently emphasized this fundamental principle, affirming that Allah (swt) is far beyond the imagination and intellect of His creation.

Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) states: *“Whatever comes into imagination, Allah is not that.”*³

Similarly, Imam al-Riḍā (‘a) advises: *“Whatever you bring to your mind and imagine, know that Allah is distinct from that.”*⁴

Thus, any mental image, concept, or notion that a human intellect conceives does not reflect the reality of Allah (swt). Instead, such attempts at conceptualizing Him only highlight the necessity of purifying one’s understanding from any anthropomorphic or finite qualities.

Imam al-Riḍā (‘a) further explains: *“Everything that is recognized by itself is created.”*⁵

¹ al-Majlisī. Vol 83:165 al-Ṭūsī, *Miṣbāḥ al-Mutahajjid Wa Silāḥ al-Muta’abbid*. Page 320.

² al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:77.

³ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 80; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 3:290.

⁴ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 113; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:100.

⁵ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 34; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:227.

This profound statement establishes that anything the human intellect can independently perceive is necessarily part of creation and, therefore, cannot be the Creator. Similarly, Imam Ali (‘a) affirms this principle, stating: “*Allah is not known by itself.*”¹

In summary, the perceptive faculties of human beings are inherently incapable of attaining direct recognition of Allah (swt). The only intellectual conclusion that one can reach is that Allah (swt) must be purified from all forms of conceptualization and comparison. Everything that a human intellect can grasp is part of creation, not the Creator. Therefore, rather than attempting to define or comprehend Allah (swt)’s essence, one must acknowledge His transcendence and submit to His divine guidance.

The Interplay Between Intellect and Innate Recognition of Allah (swt)

Although human perception cannot directly grasp the essence of Allah (swt), and speculative thought concerning Him is prohibited, ‘aql nonetheless plays a crucial role in recognizing Him. Through the ‘aql, humans receive divine self-disclosure (*ta’arruf*), which enables them to attain *ma’rifah* of Allah (swt). The very nature (*māhiyah*) of intellect is inherently linked to the recognition of the Almighty.

Imam al-Šādiq (‘a) states: “*O Allah, I call upon You by Your Tawhīd, upon which You have created the intellects.*”²

Similarly, in the supplication of *Faraj* recited on Friday mornings, we invoke: “*Allah, who created the intellects based on His recognition.*”³

¹ al-Ṭabṛasī, *al-Ihtijāj ‘alā Ahl al-Lajāj*. Vol 1:198; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:253.

² Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Muhaj al-Da’awat Wa Manhaj al-Ibādāt*. Page 179; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 91:274.

³ al-Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā’il Wa Mustanbiḥ al-Masā’il*. Vol 13:41; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 84:288.

This indicates that Allah (swt) has illuminated and made comprehensible the fundamental aspects of *Tawhīd*. Lady Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' ('a) affirms:

*“Allah, the Exalted, has illuminated and made clear what is rationally comprehensible from the word of Tawhīd.”*¹

This statement implies that *Tawhīd* is made so evident within the human intellect that it becomes undeniable. A rational person, upon reflecting on the signs of Allah (swt)'s omnipotence and creative power, cannot reject the existence of the Creator. Thus, contemplation on Allah (swt)'s creation serves as a reminder of His presence, leading individuals toward recognition of Him.

Imam Ali al-Riḍā ('a) further explains: *“With Allah (swt)'s creation, God should be proven, and with intellects, God's recognition should be believed, and with innate recognition (fiṭrah), the argument against creation is complete.”*²

This narration underscores the interconnection between creation, intellect, and *fiṭrah* in the process of recognizing Allah (swt). The intellect completes the divine proof (*hujjah*) against creation only when it aligns with innate recognition. Once Allah (swt) introduces Himself to humanity, the intellect plays a role in affirming this recognition. Thus, human belief in divine recognition is established through intellect, but the initial act of recognition itself remains Allah (swt)'s prerogative.

The Boundaries of Intellectual Inquiry and Divine Bestowal of Recognition

While human intellect is instrumental in recognizing Allah (swt), it must operate within divinely ordained boundaries. Humans are encouraged to ponder, reflect, research, and seek understanding of Allah (swt)'s signs and actions within creation, but they must not attempt to

¹ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 29:253.

² al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*. Page 35.

comprehend His essence. Those who remain within these limits are recipients of divine grace (*lutf*), and as per divine tradition (*sunnatullāh*), Allah (swt) grants them further awareness of Himself.

The great scholar Murtaḍā Muṭahharī highlights the significance of contemplating creation as a means to awaken innate knowledge. He states: *“The notable point here is that the Holy Quran refers to creations and natural phenomena as ‘signs’ (ayat), and the awareness gained through reflecting upon them is called ‘remembrance’ (tadhakkur). The Quran aims to make the study of creation a means of awakening and alerting one’s innate nature (fiṭrah). In other words, the Quran affirms the study of creation as a confirmation of the path of innate nature and places it in the heart. The purpose of encouraging the study of creation is to promote alertness and remembrance, not argumentation and deduction.”*¹

The late Mullā Ṣāliḥ al-Māzandarānī rejects the efficacy of *istidlālī innī* (proof from effect to cause) as a valid means of attaining *ma’rifah* of the Divine. He asserts that *“Allah is recognized without rawiyyah.”* The term *rawiyyah* signifies deliberation, reflection, or opinion. Māzandarānī’s assertion implies that the existence of Allah Almighty is recognized without recourse to discursive thought or argumentation. This recognition is either self-evident (*badīhī*)—as some scholars have suggested—or, alternatively, it is because rational proofs are incapable of establishing a *specific* recognition of Allah Almighty. This incapacity stems from the inherent limitations of both *istidlālī limmī* (proof from cause to effect) and *istidlālī innī*. *Istidlālī limmī* is inapplicable to Allah (swt) due to the fundamental principle that He is *bilā ‘illah* (without a cause). Similarly, *istidlālī innī* is insufficient because reasoning from the effect can, at best, lead only to the recognition of a *mu’athhir kullī* (general effector), not the *mu’athhir khāṣ wa mu’ayyan* (specific and determinate effector) which is Allah (swt). In essence, while *istidlālī innī* may point

¹ Muṭahharī, *Uṣūlī Falsafah va Ravishi Ri’ālism*. Vol 5:71.

towards a general causal principle, it cannot establish the unique and specific identity of the Divine *Dhāt* (Essence). ¹

The Self-Evidence (*Badāhah*) of Allah (swt)'s Recognition

Some scholars maintain that Allah (swt)'s recognition is self-evident (*badīhī 'aqlī*), meaning that it does not require elaborate reasoning. They argue that by merely observing the effects (*athar*) of Allah (swt)'s creation, one can naturally recognize the Creator (*mu'athhir*). This intuitive knowledge (*badāhah*) is realized through innate recognition (*fiṭrah*), which aligns with the teachings and guidance of Allah (swt)'s prophets.

All beings endowed with intellect possess an inherent recognition of Allah (swt). However, they require reminders (*tadhakkur*) to awaken them from heedlessness (*ghaflah*). The role of the prophets, therefore, was to serve as *mudhakkirūn* (reminders), calling their communities to recognize the signs of Allah (swt) in creation. This is why the Quran conveys the words of the prophets to their people:

“Is there any doubt in God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth?”²

The Role of Prophets and Their Successors in Allah (swt)'s Recognition

As established earlier, Allah (swt)'s recognition (*ma'rifatullāh*) and guidance (*hidāyah*) are solely His actions; no one else can independently guide others. Allah states in the Holy Quran:

“Indeed, you cannot guide whomever you like. Rather, it is Allah who guides whom He wills.”³

¹ al-Māzandarānī, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:26.

² Sūrah Ibrāhīm, Verse 10.

³ Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ, Verse 56.

In a supplication narrated by Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a), he instructs his followers to recite the following supplication during the occultation (*ghaybah*) of the Imam of the time:

“O Allah, make Yourself known to me. If You do not introduce Yourself to me, I will never recognize You.

O Allah, let me recognize Your Prophet. If You do not introduce him to me, I will never recognize him.

O Allah, introduce Your proof (hujjah) to me. If You do not introduce him to me, I will deviate from my religion.”¹

This supplication reaffirms that true recognition of Allah (swt), His Messenger, and His divinely appointed proof (*hujjah*) is only possible through Allah (swt)’s bestowal of knowledge.

Lady Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ (‘a) narrates from the Holy Prophet (‘a) regarding Imam Ali (‘a) and the eleven A’immah from his progeny: *“Allah can only be recognized through their recognition.”²*

Similarly, Imam al-Bāqir (‘a) states: *“Allah is worshipped and recognized through us, and Allah is ascribed to monotheism (Tawḥīd) through us.”³*

If Allah (swt) had willed to introduce Himself to His creation directly, He could have done so. However, in accordance with divine wisdom, He has chosen to execute His actions through intermediaries. Just as healing is an act of Allah (swt) yet occurs through physicians and medicine, so too is divine recognition facilitated through the prophets and their successors. Amīr al-Mu’minīn (‘a) clarifies this principle, stating:

¹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:342.

² al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā’ir al-Darajāt*. Page 496; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 36:351.

³ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:145; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 23:102.

“Indeed, if Allah the Almighty willed, He would make Himself known to His servants [directly]. But He has made us the doors, the paths, the ways, and the means through which [people] can reach Him.”¹

While divine recognition is exclusively Allah (swt)’s action, He has established conditions and means for its attainment. This does not imply that Allah (swt) is incapable of granting recognition without intermediaries, but rather that His boundless wisdom dictates the necessity of a structured process.

Thus, the role of the Prophets and the A’immah in facilitating divine recognition becomes evident. There is no contradiction between narrations that assert recognition as purely Allah (swt)’s action and those that establish the Ahl al-Bayt (‘as) as the means of recognition. This is because Allah (swt), in His divine wisdom, has chosen to bestow recognition through the teachings and reminders of His chosen representatives.

Key Points

- Human beings, along with their perceptual faculties, are inherently finite and contingent. Consequently, speculative contemplation regarding the Essence (*Dhāt*) of Allah the Almighty is prohibited.
- No rational being (*dhi ‘aql*) can conceptualize Allah (swt) within the confines of human intellect, as His reality transcends the limits of human cognition.
- Regardless of the purity of an individual’s heart and soul, they cannot independently attain the ultimate reality of Allah (swt)’s absolute greatness (*‘azamah*).
- Any conceptualization or mental image that emerges in human thought does not correspond to the Divine Essence, as Allah (swt) is beyond all forms of imagination.

¹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:184; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*. Vol 24:253.

- The recognition (*ma'rifah*) of Almighty Allah is only attainable through divine self-disclosure (*ta'arruf ilāhī*) and the bestowed faculty of intellect (*'aql*).
- Intellect (*'aql*), in the absence of innate recognition (*fiṭrah*), remains insufficient in establishing a complete divine argument (*hujjah*) against humanity.
- Reflection (*tafakkur*) and contemplation (*tadabbur*) upon the created order serve as a means of awakening and reinforcing the innate recognition (*fiṭrah*) of Allah (swt) within human consciousness.
- While divine recognition is ultimately an act of Allah (swt) (*fi'l ilāhī*), this act is actualized in accordance with divine tradition (*sunnatullāh*) through the teachings (*ta'līm*) and reminders (*tadhakkur*) conveyed by the prophets and divinely appointed guides.

Chapter 16

Understanding Tawḥīd - The Essence of Monotheism

Learning Outcomes of this Chapter

- Comprehend the intrinsic relationship between *Tawḥīd* (Divine Unity) and innate recognition (*fiṭrah*), understanding them as fundamentally the same.
- Identify and explain the various dimensions of *Tawḥīd* within Islamic theological discourse.
- Differentiate between *Tawḥīd al-Dhāt* (Divine Unity of Essence) and *Tawḥīd al-Ṣifāt* (Divine Unity of Attributes), recognizing their theological implications.
- Analyze the meanings and significance of *Tawḥīd al-Afʿāl* (Divine Unity in Actions) and *Tawḥīd al-ʿIbādah* (Divine Unity in Worship).

Introduction

The concept of *Tawḥīd* lies at the core of Islamic theology, shaping the foundation of belief and worship. As previously established, the recognition of Allah (swt) is an innate reality (*fiṭrah*) embedded within every human being. This chapter explores the intrinsic connection between *Tawḥīd* and innate recognition, demonstrating that they are fundamentally the same—both representing a direct, unmediated awareness of Allah (swt) instilled by Him.

To deepen our understanding of *Tawḥīd*, this chapter will examine its various dimensions as articulated within Islamic theological discourse. These include *Tawḥīd al-Dhāt*, which affirms that Allah (swt)'s essence is absolutely unique and indivisible, and *Tawḥīd al-Ṣifāt*, which asserts that

Allah (swt)’s attributes are not separate from His essence but are instead intrinsic to Him.

Additionally, we will explore *Tawḥīd al-Afʿāl*, which emphasizes that all actions and effects in existence ultimately originate from Allah (swt) alone, negating any notion of independent causation. Finally, *Tawḥīd al-ʿIbādah* will be analyzed, highlighting the necessity of directing all forms of worship exclusively to Allah (swt), without associating any partners with Him.

By distinguishing between these dimensions and examining their theological implications, this chapter aims to clarify the comprehensive nature of *Tawḥīd* and its vital role in shaping Islamic belief and practice. Through this discussion, we will see how *Tawḥīd* is not merely an abstract concept but a reality that permeates every aspect of existence, requiring both intellectual acknowledgment and practical devotion.

The Universality of Tawḥīd: An Innate and Unshakable Reality

Building upon the previous discussions, the recognition of the Creator is inherently tied to His *Tawḥīd*. The Aʿimmah (ʿas) have explicitly affirmed that *Tawḥīd* is an innate recognition (*maʿrifah fiṭriyyah*), deeply embedded within human nature. The Quranic verses that describe how individuals are reminded of this intrinsic recognition, particularly in times of adversity, reinforce the universality of *Tawḥīd* in *rubūbiyyah* (lordship), *khalq* (creation), and *ulūhiyyah* (divinity). The Almighty states:

“If you ask them who created the heavens and the earth, they will surely say: Allah.”¹

“If you ask them who sends down water from the sky and revives the earth with it, they will surely say: Allah.”²

¹ Sūrah Luqmān, Verse 25, Sūrah al-Zumar, Verse 38.

² Sūrah al-ʿAnkabūt, Verse 63.

These verses, alongside numerous narrations, underscore that the recognition of Allah (swt) as the Creator, Sustainer, and Provider is universally acknowledged, residing within the depths of human consciousness—even if not always articulated verbally. This inherent recognition manifests as an instinctive response during moments of distress, when individuals, regardless of their beliefs, call upon Allah (swt).

However, it is crucial to distinguish the term *fiṭrī* (innate) as used in theological discourse from its definition in logic, where it refers to self-evident truths. In this context, innate recognition refers to the primordial knowledge that Allah instilled within humanity prior to their earthly existence. This recognition is embedded within *fiṭrah*, but external veils—such as worldly distractions and spiritual negligence—may obscure its manifestation. When these veils are lifted, the innate recognition of the Divine becomes undeniable. Despite this, individuals may still choose to reject it outwardly due to arrogance or the pursuit of dominance, as the Quran states:

“When Our verses came to them clearly, they said: ‘This is manifest sorcery.’ And they denied them out of oppression and arrogance, while their hearts were certain about them.”¹

In light of this, Imam al-Jawād (‘a) affirms that *Tawḥīd* is not confined to any specific group, culture, or geography. Rather, it is a universal truth recognized by all tongues, as evident in the Quranic verses regarding *ḍarrā’* (times of distress). This universal acknowledgment is rooted in the primordial covenant (‘*ahd al-dharr*’), where all human souls bore witness to the Divine before their earthly existence. Consequently, in moments of hardship, individuals instinctively remember and call upon Allah (swt), as the prophets (‘as) continually remind them of this forgotten truth.

Thus, *Tawḥīd* is not merely an abstract theological principle but an innate, universal, and undeniable recognition of Allah (swt). Both Quranic

¹ Sūrah al-Naml, Verses 13-14.

discourse and the Prophetic traditions emphasize monotheism as the foundational reality of existence, rejecting all forms of *shirk* (polytheism) and anthropomorphism.

Furthermore, when the Quran presents arguments for Divine Unity, its purpose is not to establish *Tawḥīd* through logical deduction but to serve as a reminder of the intrinsic knowledge that already resides within the human soul. Any claim that contradicts this foundational truth is inherently flawed and lacks rational credibility. In essence, belief in *Tawḥīd* is deeply embedded in human nature, whereas *shirk* is an unnatural deviation from this truth. Even if an individual cannot articulate the logical basis of *Tawḥīd*, their innate disposition instinctively rejects the fallacies of literalism (*ẓāhiriyyah*) and anthropomorphism. This innate recognition remains intact despite external influences that may obscure it.

Types of Tawḥīd

In Islamic theological discourse, *Tawḥīd* is traditionally categorized into four primary dimensions:

1. *Tawḥīd al-Dhāt* (Divine Unity of Essence)
2. *Tawḥīd al-Ṣifāt* (Divine Unity of Attributes)
3. *Tawḥīd al-Afʿāl* (Divine Unity in Actions)
4. *Tawḥīd al-ʿIbādaj* (Divine Unity in Worship)

Although some scholars classify *Tawḥīd* into only two fundamental aspects—*Tawḥīd al-Dhāt* and *Tawḥīd al-Ṣifāt*—the prevalent categorization provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding monotheism.

Divine Unity of Essence (*Tawḥīd al-Dhāt*)

Islamic teachings emphasize that Allah (swt) is described with two fundamental attributes: *Wāḥid* (One) and *Aḥad* (Indivisible). Both terms originate from the root *wa-ḥa-da* (و - ح - د), indicating absolute oneness. While these terms are similar, Imam al-Bāqir (ʿa) clarifies their theological significance:

*“Aḥad and Wāḥid have the same meaning. They denote a Being with no equal. Tawḥīd is the acknowledgment of His absolute oneness. Wāḥid refers to a Being completely distinct from others—One who did not originate from anything and does not merge with anything.”*¹

Tawḥīd al-Dhāt affirms that Allah (swt) is absolutely unique, incomparable, and free from any resemblance to creation. He is not derived from anything, nor does He unite with anything. This absolute transcendence implies that He cannot be comprehended through human perception, imagination, or reason. Any attempt to conceptualize Him results in a mere illusion rather than an actual understanding of His reality. Lady Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ (‘a) articulates this profound truth:

*“His description is beyond description, and it is impossible to recognize the modality (kayfiyyah) of His being.”*²

Since human intellect and language are inherently limited, they are incapable of fully grasping or articulating the essence of the Divine. If Allah could be comprehended or described in human terms, He would cease to be transcendent (baynūnah), thereby negating the very concept of Tawḥīd. Any assertion of a divine partner or resemblance is inherently irrational, as even the most advanced human reasoning cannot encompass Him. Imam Ali (‘a) succinctly states:

*“Tawḥīd is that you do not imagine Him.”*³

Thus, any conception of God formed within the human mind is not the reality of Allah (swt) but rather an imagined construct. Imam al-Ḥusayn (‘a) further emphasizes:

*“Whatever occurs in the imagination, He is contrary to it.”*⁴

¹ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 90.

² al-Ṭabṛasī, *al-Iḥtijāj ‘alā Ahl al-Lajāj*. Vol 1:98; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 29:220.

³ *Nahj al-Balāghah* Saying 480; *I’lām al-Dīn* pg. 318; *Biḥār* 5/52.

⁴ *Tuḥaf al-‘Uqūl* 244; *Biḥār* 4/301.

Therefore, *Tawḥīd al-Dhāt* establishes that Allah (swt)’s essence is beyond human comprehension. His reality can only be known through His self-description in revelation. Human reasoning and perception are incapable of grasping His essence, as logical and empirical proofs operate within the realm of creation, whereas Allah (swt) transcends all limitations.

From a philosophical perspective, a truth can only be proven through reason if it falls within the scope of intellectual perception. However, the Divine Essence surpasses all categories of perception. The very intellect that attempts to comprehend Him is itself a creation, and thus cannot serve as a measure to define its Creator. Just as the intellect cannot comprehend itself as an object of knowledge, it is even more incapable of encompassing the Creator of intellect. Consequently, the Divine Unity of Essence remains an absolute and transcendent reality, beyond human speculation and conceptualization.

The Absolute Oneness of Allah (swt)’s Attributes *(Tawḥīd al-Ṣifāt)*

The attributes of Allah, the Almighty, are broadly categorized into two fundamental types: eternal attributes and contingent attributes.

1. **Eternal attributes (*ṣifāt azaliyyah*)** refer to those inherent qualities that can never be negated from Allah (swt). For instance, it is inconceivable to say that Allah (swt) existed at any time but was not knowledgeable (‘*ālim*). His knowledge, power, and life are intrinsic to His being, and they have always existed without beginning or end.
2. **Contingent attributes (*ṣifāt ḥudūthiyyah*)**¹, on the other hand, are those that may or may not be manifested at a given time

¹ [Translator’s Note] Within Shia theological discourse, the distinction between *ṣifāt ḥudūthī* (contingent attributes) and *ṣifāt azalī* (eternal attributes) is fundamental. *Ṣifāt ḥudūthī* denote attributes or qualities that are contingent upon the divine *irādah* (will) and are therefore created. These attributes are subject to divine instantiation or negation, reflecting God’s absolute sovereignty over creation. Conversely, *ṣifāt azalī* represent intrinsic and immutable qualities inherent to the divine *dhāt* (essence), existing eternally and beyond the realm of contingency. *Ṣifāt ḥudūthī* are not considered essential to the divine *dhāt* but rather manifest

without implying deficiency in Allah (swt). For example, one can say that Allah (swt) existed and had not yet willed (*irādah*) a particular event to occur. His will is an expression of His power and wisdom, not an inherent necessity of His existence.

Thus, *Tawhīd al-Ṣifāt* encompasses both eternal attributes (*ṣifāt azaliyyah*) and contingent attributes (*ṣifāt ḥudūthiyyah*). When discussing *Tawhīd al-Af'āl* (Divine Unity in Actions), statements such as “*There is no effective agent in existence (wujūd) except Allah*”, “*There is no creator except Allah*”, and “*There is no true doer (fā'il) except Allah*” ultimately affirm *Tawhīd al-Ṣifāt*. Similarly, the declaration “*There is no deity (ma'būd) worthy of worship except Allah*”, which expresses *Tawhīd al-'Ibādah* (Divine Unity in Worship), also affirms Allah (swt)’s unique attribute of divinity (*ma'būdiyyah*).

In discussing Allah (swt)’s actions, we refer to qualities such as intention (*irādah*), will (*mashī'ah*), creation (*khalq*), agency (*fā'iliyyah*), sustenance (*rizq*), healing (*shifā'*), giving life (*ihyā'*), and causing death (*imtāt*). These attributes are associated with Allah (swt)’s interaction with creation and can, in a limited sense, also be ascribed to human beings. However, when discussing attributes and perfections that are not considered actions, we classify them under *Tawhīd al-Ṣifāt*. These include knowledge (*ilm*), power (*qudrah*), and ever-living (*ḥayyiyyah*), which are intrinsic attributes of Allah (swt) and are not shared with creation in any independent or self-sufficient manner. Similarly, the attribute of divinity (*ulūhiyyah*) falls under *Tawhīd al-'Ibādah*.

With the aforementioned foundations, we can now delve into the concept of *Tawhīd al-Ṣifāt*. This principle asserts that just as Allah (swt)’s *Dhāt* is inherently one and unique, so too are His attributes. He alone is the All-Knowing (*al-'Alīm*), the All-Powerful (*al-Qadīr*), and the Ever-Living (*al-Ḥayy*). No being possesses knowledge, power, or life comparable to

in God's acts or interactions with the created order. A paradigmatic example of a *ṣifāt ḥudūthī* is the act of creation itself, which is contingent upon God’s *irādah*.

His. Every other entity derives its knowledge, power, and existence from Him. However, Allah (swt)'s attributes are not contingent or acquired but rather essential and inseparable from His essence. Lady Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' ('a) beautifully articulates this truth in her supplication:

*“Glory be to Him who sees the footprint of an ant on a hard and smooth stone. Glory be to Him who perceives the fluttering of a bird’s wings in the air. Glory be to Him who is like this, and nothing else is like this.”*¹

Her statement *“Glory be to Him who is like this, and nothing else is like this”* underscores that Allah (swt)'s inherent knowledge (*‘ilm dhātī*) is unique and incomparable. No created being can perceive or comprehend except by His bestowal of that ability. However, Allah (swt) perceives all things without the need for instruments, intermediaries, or conditions. His knowledge is absolute, self-sufficient, and intrinsic, whereas the knowledge of creation is acquired, finite, and dependent. Imam Ali ('a) further expounds on this principle in Nahj al-Balāghah:

*“Every noble being other than Allah is humbled, and every powerful entity other than Him is powerless. Every owner other than Him is owned, and every knower other than Him is a learner. Every entity with an ability other than Him first becomes able and then turns weak. Every listener other than Allah cannot hear subtle sounds; loud noises deafen their ears, and distant sounds do not reach them. Every observer other than Him is blind to hidden colours and subtle objects.”*²

Similar to Lady Fāṭimah ('a)'s narration, these words emphasize that no created being inherently possesses perfection. Allah (swt) alone is the absolute possessor of all perfections, and nothing shares in His attributes in an independent or equal manner. The knowledge, power, and attributes of creation are not extensions of Allah (swt)'s attributes, nor do

¹ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 88:180, al-Ṭūsī, *Miṣbāḥ al-Mutahajjid Wa Silāḥ al-Muta’abbid*.

² Imam Ali ('a), *Nahj al-Balāghah*. Sermon 65, al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*.

they resemble them in nature or essence. He remains absolutely unique, transcendent, and unparalleled in all His perfections.

Divine Unity in Actions (*Tawḥīd al-Af'āl*)

Tawḥīd al-Af'āl asserts that all actions—whether related to will (*mashī'ah*), intention (*irādah*), choice, pleasure, aversion, or any deed, whether good or evil—occur solely by the permission and will of Allah (swt). The ultimate sovereignty over all actions belongs to Allah (swt), who grants existence and allows actions to unfold through His decree (*taqdīr*) and permission (*idhn*). This principle establishes that even when human beings act voluntarily, their actions remain dependent on Divine permission and will. Consequently, Allah (swt) is the only independent creator (*Khāliq*) and doer (*Fā'il*) whose actions are not contingent upon anything external to Himself.

However, this does not negate human agency. While human beings possess volition (*ikhtiyār*), *irādah*, and *mashī'ah*, these faculties exist within the framework of Divine decree and permission. When an individual performs an action, they do so within the parameters that Allah (swt) has established in accordance with His *Ḥikmah* (wisdom) and *maṣlaḥah* (expediency). If an action aligns with the divine order and benefits creation, Allah (swt) does not obstruct it. Conversely, if an action contradicts divine wisdom, He has the authority to prevent its occurrence.

Therefore, *Tawḥīd al-Af'āl* does not imply that created beings lack independent *mashī'ah* and *irādah*. Instead, their will and intention exist as a consequence of His Divine will and permission. Some theological perspectives erroneously assert that the will and intention of any being are merely manifestations of Allah (swt)'s will and intention, leading to the conclusion that no agent, creator, or causal force exists except Allah (swt).¹ On the contrary, human beings exercise volition, Allah (swt)'s role is to

¹ Ṣadrah, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*. Vol 4:57 and 211; Ṭabaṭabā'ī, *al-Rasā'il al-Tawḥīdiyyah*. Page 66.

determine and permit the realization of their choices. Thus, human actions are attributed to themselves and not to Allah (swt).

Certain mystical interpretations of *Tawhīd al-Af‘āl* deviate from the correct understanding. Mystics claim that: *“The state of ‘annihilation’ (maḥw)¹ is achieved when the seeker (sālik) perceives all actions as manifestations of the Ultimate Reality (i.e., Allah), such that they recognize nothing other than Him as the agent (fā‘il) and giver of effect (mu‘athhir).”²*

This interpretation leads to the erroneous belief that the actions of creation are indistinct from the actions of Allah (swt), thereby denying any real agency to created beings. However, the correct doctrine affirms that all actions occur under Divine sovereignty and within His dominion, yet created beings remain accountable for their deeds. At any moment, Allah (swt) has the power to intervene, alter, or prevent actions according to His will.

Lady Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ (‘a) articulated this principle in her supplication:

“O Allah, You are not a deity that we have created, nor did You require assistance in our creation. There is no deity that shares in Your divinity. You alone are our Lord, just as You declare, beyond what others claim.”³

This statement reinforces the idea that only Allah (swt) possesses absolute Lordship (*rubūbiyyah*) and Creatorship (*khāliqīyyah*). Any authority or power granted to others is entirely dependent on His will, intention, and permission, and such authority does not resemble His in any

¹ [Translator’s Note] In mystical and Sūfī discourse, *maḥw* (annihilation) denotes a spiritual phenomenon characterized by the attenuation or effacement of self-consciousness and egoic awareness through profound contemplation of the Divine. This state signifies a condition of radical selflessness and absorption within the Divine Presence, culminating in a subjective experience of perceived unity and the transcendence of individual self-limitations.

² Sajjādī, *Farhang-e Eṣṭelāḥāt va Ta’bīrāt e ‘Erfānī*. Page 269.

³ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 83:168; al-Kaf amī, *Miṣbāḥ*. Page 76.

way. This distinction is crucial because it emphasizes that, while creatures perform actions, the nature of Allah (swt)'s actions is fundamentally different. Just as His *Dhāt* and *Ṣifāt* are incomparable, so too are His actions *Af'āl*. No being can be likened to Him in any aspect of existence.

Divine Unity of Worship (*Tawḥīd al- 'Ibādah*)

The doctrine of *Tawḥīd al- 'Ibādah* asserts that no being other than Allah (swt) is worthy of worship (*'ibādah*) and absolute obedience. He is the only true and ultimate deity (*Ilāh*), and exclusive devotion belongs to Him alone. Lady Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' ('a) articulates this reality in her supplication:

“Glory be to the One before Whose greatness everything humbles itself. Glory be to the One before Whose honor everything abases itself. Glory be to the One by Whose command and dominion everything submits.”¹

This statement encapsulates the fundamental principle that all creation is inherently subservient to Allah (swt) and that ultimate reverence and obedience must be directed toward Him alone. Accordingly, no individual or entity should be worshiped, glorified, or obeyed in a manner that infringes upon Allah (swt)'s exclusive sovereignty (*rubūbiyyah*).

However, the principle of *Tawḥīd al- 'Ibādah* does not negate the legitimacy of authority (*wilāyah*) among created beings. Rather, it emphasizes that all legitimate authority, governance, and command must derive from Allah (swt)'s decree and permission. Any form of independent or rival authority that challenges Divine sovereignty contradicts the essence of *Tawḥīd al- 'Ibādah*.

Lady Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' ('a) narrates from the Messenger of Allah (ṣ) a profound testimony concerning Divine exclusivity:

¹ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 83:115; Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Falāḥ al-Sā'il Wa Najāḥ al-Masā'il*. Page 251.

*“O Lord, I testify that You are the only God and deity, and there is no god but You. You are the One, Unique, and there is no partner for You. Muḥammad (ṣ) is Your servant and messenger. And I bear witness that every object of worship, besides You, between the Throne and the seventh earth, is false and futile.”*¹

This narration reinforces that anything worshiped or obeyed independently of Allah (swt) is inherently null and devoid of truth. The *Kalimat al-Tawḥīd*—“*There is no god but Allah, and He has no partners*”—serves as the foundational principle that mandates exclusive reliance on Him, seeking His assistance, obeying His commands, and fearing only Him.

A correct understanding of *Tawḥīd al-‘Ibādah* also clarifies linguistic expressions related to reliance on intermediaries. Statements such as “*I would be ruined without so-and-so*” or “*First, God, then so-and-so*” do not constitute a violation of *Tawḥīd* if they are intended to acknowledge that Allah (swt) is the ultimate cause while recognizing His means of assistance. The principle remains that all help, intervention, and authority ultimately stem from Allah (swt), and any reliance on created beings must be understood within the framework of His divine will and permission.

Key Points

1. **Recognition of Allah (swt) and the Principle of Tawḥīd:** The fundamental recognition (*ma‘rifah*) of Allah (swt) is established through His absolute Divine Unity (*Tawḥīd*).
2. **Universality of Tawḥīd:** The concept of *Tawḥīd* is a universal theological principle acknowledged across various intellectual and religious traditions, though its articulation may differ.
3. **Classifications of Divine Unity:** *Tawḥīd* is systematically categorized into:

¹ Shaykh al-Islāmī, *Musnad Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’*. Page 241; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 83:165.

- Divine Unity of Essence (*Tawḥīd al-Dhāt*)
 - Divine Unity of Attributes (*Tawḥīd al-Ṣifāt*)
 - Divine Unity in Actions (*Tawḥīd al-Afʿāl*)
 - Divine Unity in Worship (*Tawḥīd al- Ibādah*)
4. **Divine Unity of Essence (*Tawḥīd al-Dhāt*):** *Tawḥīd al-Dhāt* necessitates an unwavering belief in Allah (swt)’s absolute transcendence (*tanzīh*), thereby negating any form of anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*) or conceptualization (*taṣawwur*) of His essence. It mandates the avoidance of speculative rationalization regarding His essence, affirming that human intellect cannot encompass His reality.
5. **Eternal and Contingent Divine Attributes:** The attributes (*Ṣifāt*) of Allah (swt) are classified into:
- Eternal Attributes (*ṣifāt dhātiyyah*): These are intrinsic and inseparable from His essence, such that their negation is impossible (e.g., Ever-Living; All-Knowing).
 - Contingent Attributes (*ṣifāt fiʿliyyah*): These are related to His actions and are not intrinsic to His essence. Their negation is permissible, as they manifest according to divine wisdom (e.g., being a Creator before creation).
6. **Divine Unity in Actions (*Tawḥīd al-Afʿāl*):** *Tawḥīd al-Afʿāl* signifies that all causality and agency ultimately derive from Allah. Phrases such as “*There is no creator except Allah*” and “*There is no giver of effect (mu’athhir) in existence except Allah*” are expressions of this doctrine. While secondary causes exist, they operate solely within the framework of Divine decree (*qadar*) and permission (*idhn*).
7. **Distinction Between Attributes of Essence and Attributes of Action**
- Attributes related to actions, such as *al-Rāziq* (The Sustainer), *al-Khāliq* (The Creator), and *al-Fāʿil* (The Doer), fall under *Tawḥīd al-Afʿāl*.

- Attributes that do not denote actions, such as *al-‘Alīm* (The All-Knowing) and *al-Qadīr* (The Omnipotent), pertain to *Tawḥīd al-Ṣifāt*.
8. **Uniqueness of Divine Attributes:** *Tawḥīd al-Ṣifāt* asserts that Allah (swt)’s attributes are neither contingent nor separate from His essence. His knowledge, power, and will are unique and unlike any created attribute.
 9. **Human Agency Within the Framework of Divine Will:** Although human beings possess will (*mashī‘ah*), intention (*irādah*), and free will (*ikhtiyār*), their capacity to act remains subject to Allah (swt)’s decree and permission. Consequently, individuals are morally and legally responsible (*taḳlīf*) for their actions, and divine justice (*‘adl*) necessitates that human accountability is not attributed to Allah (swt).
 10. **Divine Unity in Worship (*Tawḥīd al-‘Ibādah*):** *Tawḥīd al-‘Ibādah* mandates that exclusive worship (*‘ibādah*) and absolute obedience (*tā‘ah*) belong solely to Allah (swt). Any form of servitude, obedience, or reverence must not equate or rival Allah (swt)’s divine sovereignty (*rubūbiyyah*).

Chapter 17

The Names and Attributes of Allah (swt) - An Exposition Based on Ahl al-Bayt ('as)'s Teachings – Part 1

Learning Outcomes of this Chapter

- Explain the linguistic definitions of *ism* (name) and *ṣifah* (attribute) and their significance in Islamic discourse.
- Analyze the meanings of *ism* and *ṣifah* as derived from the narrations of Ahl al-Bayt ('as).
- Categorize and examine the different types of narrations from Ahl al-Bayt ('as) concerning the divine names and attributes (*Asmā' wa Ṣifāt*).
- Understand the theological rationale behind the usage of transcendent attributes (*awsāf tanzīhiyyah*) and attributes of negation (*awsāf salbiyyah*) in reference to Allah the Almighty.

Introduction

The concepts of *ism* (name) and *ṣifah* (attribute) play a central role in Islamic theological discourse, particularly in discussions about the divine nature of Allah (swt). Understanding their meanings, as well as their application in the Quran and narrations of Ahl al-Bayt ('as), is essential for comprehending how Allah (swt) is described and recognized within Islamic teachings. While names serve as linguistic signifiers through which humans refer to Allah (swt), attributes provide descriptions of His actions and qualities, yet neither fully encapsulates His essence.

This chapter begins by exploring the linguistic definitions of *ism* and *ṣifah*, analyzing their significance in theological discussions. We will

then examine the meanings of these terms as derived from the narrations of Ahl al-Bayt (‘as), clarifying how they distinguish between Allah (swt)’s *Dhāt*, His names (*Asmā*), and His *Ṣifāt*.

Furthermore, this chapter will categorize and analyze different types of narrations concerning divine names and attributes, shedding light on their theological implications. Special attention will be given to *awṣāf tanzīhiyyah* (transcendent attributes), which affirm Allah (swt)’s perfection by negating any form of deficiency or limitation, and *awṣāf salbiyyah* (attributes of negation), which emphasize what Allah (swt) is not, thereby preserving the purity of *Tawhīd*.

Through this discussion, we will uncover the theological rationale behind the use of divine names and attributes, recognizing that while these descriptions guide human understanding, they remain inherently limited. Ultimately, the goal is to appreciate how the Ahl al-Bayt (‘as) have provided a framework for understanding Allah (swt)’s names and attributes in a way that upholds His transcendence while allowing for meaningful human recognition of Him.

The Linguistic Meaning of *Ism* (Name) and *Ṣifah* (Attribute)

The term “*ism* (إِسْم)” has two possible etymological origins:

1. It is derived from the root “*wa – sa – ma* (وَسَمَ)”, meaning “sign” or “mark.” In this case, the original form of the word is “*wasam*”, and the initial *wāw* (و) has been converted into a *hamzah* (ء) at the beginning of the word.¹
2. It is derived from the root “*summū* (سَمُوْ)” meaning “height” or “elevation.” In this derivation, the final *wāw* (و) is omitted, and instead, a *hamzah* (ء) is added at the beginning of the word.²

¹ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*. Vol 14:401.

² Ibn Manẓūr. Vol 14:401.

Both linguistic roots indicate that a name (*ism*) serves as a distinguishing marker that signifies and elevates the entity it refers to.

The term “*ṣifah* (صفة)”, meaning “attribute,” is a verbal noun (*maṣdar*) derived from the root “*wa – ṣa – fa* (وَصَفَ)”, which means “to describe” or “to qualify”. In its formation, the initial *wāw* (و) is omitted, and instead, a *tā marbūṭah* (ة) is added at the end of the word.

The renowned Islamic scholar Sayyid Sharīf al-Jurjānī defines *ṣifah* as a necessary sign for the object being described (*mawṣūf*), meaning that it is an inherent quality through which an entity is identified.¹

From a lexical perspective, there is not a significant difference between *ism* and *ṣifah*. A name (*ism*) functions as a general sign that indicates the essence of an entity, whereas an attribute (*ṣifah*) serves as a specific sign that qualifies and defines the characteristics of that entity. Thus, while all attributes are names, not all names necessarily function as attributes.

The Meaning of *Ism* and *Ṣifah* in the Narrations of Ahl al-Bayt (‘as)

The infallible A’immah (‘as) have employed the terms “*ism*” and “*ṣifah*” in a manner that aligns with their linguistic meanings while also providing deeper theological insights. Imam al-Riḍā (‘a) clarifies the meaning of “*ism*” when explaining the phrase “*Bismillāh*” (In the name of Allah):

“I mark my soul with one of the signs (Asmā’) of Allah the Almighty, which is worship.” When asked about the meaning of “*simah* (سمه)”, the Imam (‘a) responded: *“It means a sign (‘alāmah).”*²

¹ al-Jurjānī, *al-Ta’rīfat*. Page 58, Ibn Fāris, *Mu’jam Maqāyis al-Lughah*. Vol 6:5.

² al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 229; al-Ṣadūq, *Ma’ānī Al-Akhbār*. Page 3.

This explanation reinforces the notion that a name (*ism*) is fundamentally a sign that designates a specific meaning. Similarly, Imam al-Riḍā (‘a) provides another definition, stating:

*“Ism is an attribute (ṣifāh) for the described (mawṣūf).”*¹

This statement suggests that divine names (*asmā’*) are not independent labels but attributes that qualify and describe Allah (swt)’s essence. Imam al-Bāqir (‘a) further substantiates this idea by explicitly identifying all of Allah (swt)’s names as attributes:

*“Indeed, the names of Allah are the ṣifāt with which Allah has described Himself.”*²

Likewise, Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) emphasizes the connection between divine names and attributes in the context of worship:

*“Those who worship Allah by invoking His names based on the attributes with which He has described Himself and who believe in their hearts... they are truly the companions of Amīr al-Mu’minīn (‘a).”*³

These narrations indicate that Allah (swt)’s names are not arbitrary designations; rather, they function as specific attributes that describe His divine essence and actions. Since every *ism* is a sign, and *ṣifāt* are specific identifying signs, it follows that all of Allah (swt)’s names inherently possess descriptive meanings. Consequently, there is no divine *ism* that lacks an inherent *ṣifāh*.

The Apparent Contradiction in Narrations and its Resolution

While the aforementioned narrations equate *ism* (name) with *ṣifāh* (attribute), another ḥadīth from Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) appears to introduce a distinction between them:

¹ al-Ṣadūq, *‘Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*. Vol 1:129; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:113.

² al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:87.

³ al-Kulaynī. Vol 1:87; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:165.

*“There are names (asmā’) and attributes (ṣifāt) for Allah. So, the ṣifāt [exclusively] belong to Him. [But,] His Asmā’ can also be used for creation, such as hearing (Samī’) and seeing (Baṣīr).”*¹

At first glance, this narration may seem to contradict the previous aḥādīth, as it suggests that while attributes are unique to Allah (swt), names may be shared between the Creator and His creation. However, a deeper analysis resolves this seeming contradiction. Hishām bin Sālim narrates an incident where he described Allah (swt) as “hearing (Samī’)” and “seeing (Baṣīr)”. Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) responded:

*“This is an attribute that the creation shares with Him.”*²

This statement clarifies that certain divine names are linguistically applicable to both Allah (swt) and His creation but differ in their ontological meaning. When applied to Allah (swt), the attribute “samī’” signifies absolute, unrestricted, and all-encompassing hearing. In contrast, when applied to human beings, it refers to limited and contingent hearing.

Thus, the term “sharing in attributes (*ishtirāk fī al-ṣifāt*)” does not imply equivalence in reality (*ḥaqīqah*); rather, it signifies a commonality in linguistic expression while maintaining a fundamental distinction in meaning. This reinforces the idea that while divine names and attributes may sometimes overlap in terminology with created beings, their theological implications remain wholly unique to Allah (swt).

Understanding Allah (swt)’s Names and Attributes: Ahl al-Bayt (‘as)’s Perspective

Allah (swt)’s Transcendence from Attributes Ascribed to Created Beings

The Holy Quran emphasizes Allah (swt)’s transcendence beyond human descriptions:

¹ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 140; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:68.

² al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 146; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:70.

“He [Allah] is exalted from and superior to what they describe.”¹

The A’immah of Ahl al-Bayt (‘as) have repeatedly affirmed that Allah the Almighty is beyond human comprehension and that He cannot be described in the same manner as created beings. Imam al-Riḍā (‘a) states:

“Exalted is He beyond what the describers describe, and He is exalted beyond what the attribute-givers attribute.”²

Similarly, Imam Mūsā ibn Ja‘far (‘a) says:

“Surely, Allah is greater than and exalted beyond the attributes of the creation.”³

Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) also states:

“Allah is above all description.”⁴

This principle arises from the fundamental epistemological reality that a person cannot describe something unless they have fully recognized it. Since true recognition of Allah (swt) is beyond human capability, no created being can provide a comprehensive description of Him. As the Creator of reason, thoughts, and intellect, Allah (swt) transcends all cognitive and conceptual limitations.

Amīr al-Mu’minīn (‘a) articulates this theological reality in the following statement:

“Allah, the Most High, is beyond what describers can comprehend. They describe Him to the extent of their comprehension, not to the extent of His greatness and magnitude. Indeed, Allah is superior to what describers can fathom.”⁵

¹ Sūrah al-An‘ām, Verse 100.

² al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Vol 1:137; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:290.

³ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 76; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:296.

⁴ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 213; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*. Vol 1:118.

⁵ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 238; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 81:131.

This indicates that human descriptions of Allah (swt) are inherently limited by finite intellect and cannot capture His absolute and infinite reality.

Only Allah (swt) Can Describe Himself

The A'imma of Ahl al-Bayt ('as) have consistently emphasized that the only valid description of Allah (swt) is the one He has provided for Himself. Any attempt to describe Him beyond what He has revealed is a deviation from divine guidance. Imam al-Ḥusayn ('a) states:

*"I describe my God by what He has described Himself."*¹

Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) reiterates this by saying:

*"Glorified be He, He is what He describes Himself to be."*²

Imam al-Bāqir ('a) further explains the nature of divine names:

*"Indeed, the divine names are the attributes with which He described Himself."*³

Likewise, Imam Mūsā ibn Ja'far ('a) commands:

*"Describe Him by what He has described Himself and refrain from anything else."*⁴

This group of narrations explicitly instructs believers to adhere strictly to Allah (swt)'s own descriptions and to refrain from attempting to define Him based on speculative reasoning. Since no created being can fully comprehend Allah (swt)'s essence, human descriptions of Him would inevitably fall short of reality.

A true believer, therefore, does not exceed the divine attributes mentioned in the Quran and the narrations of the Holy Prophet (ṣ) and his purified Household ('a). This approach is not only a theological principle

¹ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 79; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:297.

² al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 41; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:134; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:269.

³ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:87.

⁴ al-Kulaynī. Vol 1:102, al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 3:266.

but also an intellectual necessity, as attempting to define Allah (swt) beyond His own descriptions would lead to error and misguidance.

The role of intellect (*'aql*) in understanding divine attributes is significant. A rational individual will recognize that human intellect is limited and should be guided by divine revelation. When a person follows divine guidance, they remain on the path of enlightenment and reach their destination. However, when they rely solely on their subjective reasoning, they risk falling into misguidance and intellectual ruin.

Negation of All Attributes from Allah the Almighty

Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) makes a profound theological statement regarding divine unity (*Tawḥīd*):

*“The system of His Divine Unity is by negation of attributes from Him.”*¹

He ('a) also elaborates:

*“The perfection of sincerity (ikhlāṣ) for Allah is the negation of His attributes, because every attribute is proof that it is distinct from the one being described, and every described one testifies that it is distinct from the attribute.”*²

Imam al-Riḍā ('a) reaffirms this concept, stating:

*“The system of divine unity (Tawḥīd) is the negation of attributes from Him, because intellects testify that every attribute and described one are created.”*³

To understand these statements, it is essential to consider the two categories of narrations discussed earlier:

¹ al-Ṭabṛasī, *al-Iḥtijāj 'alā Ahl al-Lajāj*. Vol 1:398; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:253.

² Imam Ali ('a), *Nahj al-Balāghah*. Sermon 1, al-Ṭabṛasī, *al-Iḥtijāj 'alā Ahl al-Lajāj*. Vol 1:198.

³ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 34, al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:227.

1. The first category of narrations asserts that Allah (swt) transcends all attributes that human thought and imagination may ascribe to Him.
2. The second category of narrations affirms the divine names and attributes that Allah (swt) has used to describe Himself.

By combining both sets of narrations, it becomes clear that believers must acknowledge only those attributes that Allah (swt) has revealed. However, human intellect remains incapable of fully comprehending these divine attributes.

Imam al-Riḍā (‘a) explains that *Tawḥīd* necessitates the negation of all attributes that originate from human reasoning. This is because every attribute and description created by human intellect is a product of human limitations. Therefore, believers must refrain from assigning attributes to Allah (swt) based on intellect, imagination, or speculative theology. Instead, they must recognize Him through the *ma‘rifah* He has placed in human nature and the descriptions He has provided in divine revelation.

The following narration highlights this principle: Muḥammad ibn Muslim narrates that he once asked Imam al-Bāqir (‘a):

“[A group of Iraqis] think that God is all-seeing in the way that they understand.” The Imam (‘a) responded:

“Allah is exalted [beyond the understanding of intellects]. Surely, what is intellect and understood is the attribute of creatures, while Allah is not like that.”¹

This statement reinforces the idea that divine attributes do not resemble the attributes of created beings. While humans may use the same words, their meanings in relation to Allah (swt) are fundamentally different. Imam al-Riḍā (‘a) provides a decisive rule regarding the limitations of human thought in relation to Allah (swt):

¹ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 144; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:108.

“Whatever comes to your imagination and thoughts, consider God distinct from it.”¹

Similarly, Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) states:

“Whatever comes in the imagination, He is distinct from it.”²

These narrations emphasize that Allah (swt) is not subject to human perception or conceptualization. Any attempt to comprehend His essence using rational speculation or philosophical constructs will inevitably lead to misguidance. Instead, believers must rely on divine revelation and the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘as) to understand the nature of Allah (swt)’s names and attributes.

All Attributes Ultimately Lead to Transcendence

The A’immah of Ahl al-Bayt (‘as) have emphasized that all of Allah (swt)’s attributes ultimately signify His absolute transcendence (*tanzīh*) and complete distinction from the limitations inherent in created beings. Imam Mūsā ibn Ja‘far (‘a) describes the divine attributes as follows:

“Allah is the Living One who does not die, and the Mighty One who is not weak, and the Dominant One who is not defeated, and the Patient One who does not hasten, and the Everlasting One who does not get destroyed, and the Eternal One who does not perish, and the Stable One who does not decline, the Sufficient One who does not need [anything], and the Honored One who does not have any humiliation, and the Wise One who does not have ignorance, and the Just One who does not oppress, and the Generous One who does not [become] stingy.”³

This narration illustrates that every affirmative divine attribute (*ṣifāh thubūtiyyah*) inherently negates its opposite, affirming that Allah

¹ al-Ṣādūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 113; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:100.

² al-Ṣādūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 80; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 3:290.

³ al-Ṣādūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 76; al-Fattāl al-Nīshāpūrī, *Rawḍat al-Wā‘izin*. Vol 1:35.

(swt) is free from all forms of deficiency and imperfection. This methodology is further elaborated by Imam al-Jawād ('a), who states:

*“When you say, ‘Allah is powerful,’ you are announcing that nothing can weaken Him. So, with this phrase, you negate weakness from Him and attribute weakness to other than Him. Similarly, when you say, ‘He is knowledgeable,’ you negate ignorance from Him and attribute it to other than Him.”*¹

Likewise, Imam al-Riḍā ('a) reinforces this principle by stating:

*“Allah is named the All-Knowing because He is not ignorant of anything.”*²

These narrations highlight a fundamental theological principle: every affirmative attribute ascribed to Allah (swt) simultaneously serves as a negation of its contrary. This means that when we affirm that Allah (swt) possesses an attribute such as knowledge, power, or justice, we are simultaneously asserting that ignorance, weakness, and oppression have no existence in Him.

The Methodology of the A’immah ('as) in Explaining Divine Attributes

This group of narrations reveals a deliberate method employed by the A’immah ('as) in describing Allah (swt)’s attributes. They do not merely affirm positive qualities but also clarify the nature of these attributes by negating their opposites. This methodology is rooted in the reality that human understanding of divine names and attributes is inevitably shaped by their own experiences and perceptions of the world. Because people recognize attributes such as knowledge and power within the constraints of created beings, they may inadvertently apply anthropomorphic limitations to Allah (swt)’s attributes.

¹ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Pae 193; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:116; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:153.

² al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:120.

To prevent such misconceptions, the A'immaḥ (‘as) paired affirmative attributes (*awsāf al-thubūtiyyah*) with descriptions of transcendence (*awsāf al-tanzīhiyyah*) to ensure that Allah (swt)’s attributes are not understood in a way that likens Him to His creation.

This approach serves as a safeguard against anthropomorphism (*tashbīḥ*), which is the erroneous tendency to conceptualize Allah (swt) in human-like terms. Imam Mūsā ibn Ja‘far’s (‘a) narration, for example, does not simply state that Allah (swt) is “Living (*al-Ḥayy*)”, but rather that He is “*the Living One who does not die (al-Ḥayy alladhī lā yamūt)*,” explicitly negating any mortal limitations that could be mistakenly inferred from the word “Living” alone.

The Role of Transcendent and Negational Attributes

The A'immaḥ (‘as) have advised their followers to avoid conceptualizing Allah (swt) or His attributes through human imagination and sensory experience. This is achieved through:

1. **Transcendent Attributes** (*awsāf al-tanzīhiyyah*) – Attributes that affirm Allah (swt)’s absolute distinction from all imperfections (e.g., *He does not die, He does not become weak*).
2. **Negational Attributes** (*awsāf al-salbiyyah*) – Attributes that explicitly negate deficiencies and limitations from Allah (swt) (e.g., *He is not ignorant, He is not unjust*).

By emphasizing both affirmation and negation, the A'immaḥ (‘as) guide their followers toward a correct understanding of Allah (swt)’s names and attributes, ensuring that these attributes are interpreted in accordance with divine transcendence (*tanzīḥ*) and without anthropomorphic distortion.

Furthermore, these teachings remind people of their innate recognition (*fiṭrah*) of Allah (swt), which inherently rejects any notion of similarity (*mithliyyah*) between the Creator and the created. This innate knowledge prevents individuals from falling into conceptual errors by

assuming that Allah (swt)’s attributes function in the same way as human attributes.

Key Points

- **Etymology of “*Ism* (اسم)” in Arabic Linguistics:** The term *ism*, meaning “name,” originates either from “*wasm* (وسم)”, which denotes a sign or symbol, or from “*summū* (سُمُو)”, which signifies loftiness and exaltation.
- **Distinction Between “*Ism* (اسم)” and “*Ṣifah* (صفة)”:** A name (*ism*) functions as an absolute sign or symbol of an entity, whereas an attribute (*ṣifah*) is a specific descriptor that qualifies the one to whom it is ascribed.
- **Divine Names as Self-Attributed Descriptions:** The names of Allah (swt) are not mere designations; rather, they are attributes through which Allah (swt) has described His own Essence (*Dhāt*).
- **Descriptive Nature of Divine Names:** Every divine name possesses an inherent descriptive or attributive meaning (*ma ‘nā i wasfī*), indicating that the names of Allah (swt) are not arbitrary labels but convey specific divine realities.
- **Human Limitation in Describing Allah (swt):** Human beings lack the cognitive capacity to fully describe Allah, the Most High, as their intellects are inherently limited and incapable of comprehending the divine essence.
- **Restrictions on Ascribing Attributes to Allah (swt):** An attribute can only be ascribed to Allah (swt) if He Himself has employed it in describing His own essence. Any attempt to attribute qualities to Allah (swt) beyond those explicitly stated in revelation is considered speculative and impermissible.
- **Prohibition of Unwarranted Speculation in Describing Allah (swt):** Theological discourse must refrain from employing intellectual speculation or personal reasoning when ascribing attributes to Allah (swt). Instead, descriptions must be confined to

divine revelation as transmitted through the Quran and the teachings of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) and the A'imma (عليه السلام).

- **Methodology of the A'imma (عليه السلام) in Safeguarding *Tawḥīd*:**
The A'imma (عليه السلام) have employed transcendent attributes (*awṣāf al-tanzīhiyyah*) and negational attributes (*awṣāf al-salbiyyah*) to prevent anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*)—the likening of Allah (swt) to His creation. This approach directs individuals toward an innate recognition (*fiṭrah*) of Allah (swt)'s absolute uniqueness and transcendence.

Chapter 18

The Names and Attributes of Allah (swt) - An Exposition Based on the Ahl al-Bayt (عليه السلام)'s Teachings – Part 2

Learning Outcomes of this Chapter

- Analyze the commonality between the names and attributes of Allah (swt) and those of His creation.
- Differentiate between linguistic commonality and ontological distinction in the shared terminologies of divine and created attributes.
- Evaluate theological objections regarding the shared usage of names and attributes and formulate appropriate responses.
- Understand the theological position that names and attributes are created and its implications.

- Distinguish between intrinsic attributes (*ṣifāt dhātīyyah*) and action-related attributes (*ṣifāt fi 'liyyah*) in Islamic theology.

In the previous chapter, we established that divine *asmā'* attributes *ṣifāt* hold the same essential meaning when ascribed to Allah (swt). That is, every name designated for Allah (swt) possesses an inherent descriptive quality through which He has introduced Himself. Moreover, since Allah (swt) is absolutely transcendent, there is no ontological commonality between Him and His creation.

In this chapter, we will explore an important theological inquiry: How can certain names and attributes be shared between Allah (swt) and His creation? For instance, Allah (swt) is described as *al-Samī'* (the Hearing) and *al-Baṣīr* (the Seeing), yet humans also possess hearing and sight. This apparent commonality raises significant theological questions regarding the nature of divine names, their meanings, and their relationship to creation.

Furthermore, this discussion addresses the classification of divine attributes, particularly the distinction between intrinsic attributes (*ṣifāt dhātīyyah*), which pertain to Allah (swt)'s essence, and action-related attributes (*ṣifāt fi 'liyyah*), which relate to His interactions with creation. Additionally, we will examine the theological position that names and attributes themselves are creations, analyzing its implications within the framework of divine transcendence (*tanzīh*) and unity (*tawḥīd*).

Through this discussion, we will clarify how the shared terminology of divine and created attributes does not imply shared reality, ensuring that the uniqueness and transcendence of Allah (swt) remain uncompromised.

Linguistic Commonality vs. Ontological Distinction in Divine Names

Imam al-Ṣādiq ('a) states:

“When a human is said to be 'one,' this is a name for him, but he has similitude [to others]. Though Allah is one and has a name, there is nothing like Him. The meaning is not the same. As for the names, they are our means of referring to the named.”¹

This narration establishes a fundamental distinction between linguistic commonality and ontological distinction in divine and created attributes. While the term one (*Wāḥid*) is used to describe both Allah (swt) and created beings, its ontological application differs entirely. The term, when applied to Allah (swt), denotes absolute uniqueness and incomparability, whereas, for creation, it signifies numerical singularity, which exists within the realm of similitude.

Similarly, Imam al-Riḍā (‘a) elaborates on the meaning of divine names that appear to be shared with creation. He states:

“Our Lord is called the All-Hearing [but it does not mean that] He has an organ with which He hears and cannot see with that organ just like we cannot see with the organ we hear. As opposed to [humans] being named ‘hearing,’ [God’s hearing] means that the sounds are not hidden from Him. God and humans share the name ‘Hearing’ but with different meanings. This also applies to ‘All-Seeing.’”²

Here, the Imam (‘a) negates any form of corporealism (*tajsīm*) in divine attributes. While humans hear through sensory organs that limit their capacity, Allah (swt)’s hearing is absolute, unrestricted, and transcendent of any physical medium. The same applies to divine sight. Imam al-Riḍā (‘a) further emphasizes:

“He hears with what He sees, and He sees with what He hears. He sees, but not with eyes like those of created beings. He hears but not like the hearing of listeners. Nevertheless, there is nothing hidden from Him.”³

¹ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 3:194.

² al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 186; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:176.

³ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 64; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:292.

This narration dismantles any corporeal interpretations of divine attributes by affirming that Allah (swt)'s perception is not partitioned into faculties, as is the case with humans.

The A'imma (‘as) emphasize that human understanding of divine attributes is shaped by experiential and conceptual limitations. As created beings, our comprehension is bound by empirical perception, whereas Allah (swt) transcends all forms of limitation. This does not imply divine unknowability (*ta'īl*), but rather that Allah (swt) must be recognized on His own terms, rather than through human-derived conceptualizations.

Imam al-Ḥusayn (‘a) affirms this principle:

*“The intellectuals cannot grasp Him with their intellects, nor can the thinkers comprehend Him through their thoughts except by achieving a firm conviction (taṣdīq yaqīnī) in the unseen. This is because He cannot be described with any of the attributes of creatures. He is the One, the Self-Sufficient. He is contrary to what is conceived in the imaginations... He is veiled from the minds just like He is veiled from the eyes... He describes the attributes; He is not described by the attributes. Recognition is achieved through Him; He is not recognized through recognition.”*¹

This narration highlights that divine knowledge is obtained through Allah (swt)'s self-disclosure, not through independent intellectual reasoning. The names and attributes serve as means of divine recognition, yet their meanings, when applied to Allah (swt), transcend the conceptual limits of human language and cognition.

Divine Names as Created Entities

Allah (swt) has prescribed specific names and attributes for Himself, commanding His servants to invoke Him through them. If Allah (swt) had not provided this guidance, they would not have known how to address Him. The purpose of these names is not to encapsulate Allah (swt)'s reality, but to provide a linguistic framework through which human

¹ al-Ḥarrānī, *Tuḥaf al-‘Uqūl*. Page 244; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:301.

beings can engage in worship and supplication. Imam al-Jawād (‘a) clarifies this in response to a theological inquiry wherein a man asked Imam al-Jawād (‘a), “*Are Allah (swt)’s names and attributes Himself [His essence]?*” Imam (‘a) replied:

“If by ‘being Himself’ you mean that He has multiplicity and abundance, then He is transcendent from this. But if you mean that the names and attributes are eternal, then [know that] the eternality of the names and attributes has two meanings. If you intend that the Exalted Lord eternally knows them and is deserving of them, then that is a correct statement. However, if you say that the names and attributes’ forms, letters, and alphabets are eternal, then [I] seek refuge in Allah from anything existing besides Him.

Rather, He was Allah, and there were no creations. He then created these names and attributes to serve as a means [of communication] between Him and His creation and to enable them to worship and supplicate to Him through these means. His names and attributes are His remembrance (dhikr), and He was God, and there was no remembrance. What is remembered through this remembrance is the Eternal God. The names and attributes are created for the sake of the meaning. The meaning of all these names and attributes is Allah. There is no division and multiplicity in Him.”¹

This narration provides a clear ontological distinction between Allah (swt)’s absolute reality and the created nature of divine names. The letters, forms, and expressions of these names are created entities, designed to serve as a bridge between the Creator and His creation. Their purpose is instrumental, not ontological—meaning they are means of divine invocation rather than representations of the divine essence.

Allah, the Almighty, has assigned specific names and attributes to Himself and directed His servants to call upon Him using those names. This guidance is essential for the worshippers as they would have

¹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:116; al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*. Page 193.

encountered difficulties expressing their requests and supplicating without it. If Allah (swt) had not provided this guidance, they would not have known how to address Him.

Objection

It may be argued that the divine names and attributes resemble those applied to created beings in wording alone, not in meaning. However, some divine names and attributes appear in the *afʿal* (comparative) pattern, which implies a shared core meaning between the Creator and creation, differing only in degree, rank, and intensity.

Response

When a verb or adjective follows the *afʿal* pattern, it often denotes superiority, where the subject (*mufaddal*) is greater than the object (*mufaddal* 'alayh). However, this comparative implication is not absolute. In many cases, the *afʿal* form conveys the meaning of an active participle (*ism fā'il*) or a constant attribute (*ṣifah mushabbahah*), rather than a relative comparison. For instance, in the Quranic verse:

قَالَ رَبِّ السِّجْنُ أَحَبُّ إِلَيَّ مِمَّا يَدْعُونَنِي إِلَيْهِ

“My Lord, prison is dearer to me than that to which they invite me.”¹

Here, the term *aḥabb* (dearer) follows the *afʿal* pattern. If it carried a strictly comparative meaning, it would suggest that Prophet Yūsuf (‘a) had affection for both prison and sin, preferring prison more. However, this is clearly false, as Prophet Yūsuf (‘a) despised the sinful act entirely. Similarly, divine names and attributes in the *afʿal* pattern do not inherently imply comparison.

Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) illustrates this principle when explaining the phrase “*Allāhu Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest)”.

¹ Sūrah Yūsuf, Verse 33.

A man once said “Allāhu Akbar” in the Imam’s presence. The Imam (‘a) asked,

“Allah is greater than what?” The man responded, “Greater than everything.” Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) replied, “You have limited Allah.” The man then asked, “How should I say it?” The Imam (‘a) answered, “Say: ‘Allah is greater than can be described.’”¹

In another narration, when a narrator stated, “Allah is greater than everything,” Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) responded, “Was there anything alongside Him for Allah to be greater than?” He then reiterated his explanation, emphasizing that “Allāhu Akbar” signifies Allah (swt)’s absolute transcendence beyond all description and limitation.²

Imam al-Jawād (‘a) stated, “The image, alphabet, and letters of names and attributes are not eternal. Rather, Allah was there, and there were no creatures. Then, He created names and attributes to be a means between Him and His creation. His servants worship and call upon Him through them. The names and attributes of Allah are His remembrance. He was there while His remembrance was not there...”³

Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) reinforces this point:

“A name is distinct from the named. The one who worships the name without meaning has become a disbeliever and has not worshiped anything. And the one who worships the name and meaning has become a disbeliever because he has worshiped two things. Tawḥīd is worshipping the meaning without names. ... Allah has ninety-nine names. So, if the name is the same as the named one, then every name must be Allah. Instead, Allah Almighty is the meaning indicated by these names, and all of them are distinct from Him.”⁴

¹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:118; al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 312.

² al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:118; al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 312.

³ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 193.

⁴ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:87.

This narration provides a critical theological framework for understanding the function of divine names:

- Divine names are linguistic constructs, created by Allah (swt) to facilitate worship and remembrance.
- They do not encapsulate Allah (swt)'s essence, nor do they constitute a separate divine reality.
- True worship is directed toward the Named (Allah), not toward the names themselves.

Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) further emphasizes that innate recognition of Allah (swt) is independent of His names:

“Only the ones who recognize Allah are those who recognize Allah through Allah. He who does not recognize Allah through Himself does not recognize Him. Rather, the person has recognized someone else. There is nothing else between the creator and the created. He created all things from nothing. He is called upon through His names but distinct from His names. His names are also distinct from Him.”¹

In these narrations, “name” refers to the linguistic constructs designated by Allah Almighty as His remembrance and sign. These names were created to serve as a medium through which His servants invoke Him, engage in His worship, and guide others towards Him. These names constitute His remembrance, facilitating human recollection and directing attention towards Him. Consequently, the names themselves are not objects of worship. Rather, they function as conduits through which humans worship and submit to the named entity. The named entity, and the semantic content of these names, is Allah (swt), whose recognition is intrinsically present in every human being. This is articulated by Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a),

معروف عند كل جاهل

¹ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 143; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:160.

Allah (swt) is “*known to every ignorant person.*”¹

However, these names are merely linguistic symbols, and their isolated worship constitutes the worship of nothingness. This is why Imam al-Šādiq (‘a) clarified that whoever worships the name devoid of its meaning has engaged in vacuous worship.

The Distinction Between Intrinsic and Action-Based Attributes in Islamic Theology

The Created Nature of Action-Based Attributes

Abū Bašīr narrates that he asked Imam al-Šādiq (‘a), “*Was Allah eternally a mutakallim (speaker)?*” Imam (‘a) replied, “*Speaking is a ḥādīth (created) attribute and is not eternal. Allah the Almighty was there, but He was not a speaker.*”²

Similarly, in another narration, ‘Āṣim bin Ḥamīd asked Imam al-Šādiq (‘a), “*Did Allah eternally possess irādah (intention)?*” The Imam (‘a) responded, “*A person who possesses intention is always accompanied by an intended object. However, Allah was All-Knowing and All-Powerful, and then He desired.*”³

Furthermore, Imam al-Šādiq (‘a) stated unequivocally, “*Mašhiyyah (providence) is ḥādīth (created).*”⁴

Imam al-Riḍā (‘a) likewise clarified to Sulaymān al-Marwazī, “*Irādah (intention) is ḥādīth. O Sulaymān, if something is not eternal, it is ḥādīth...*” He further elaborated, “*O Sulaymān, tell me: Is Irādah (intention) an act (fi ‘l) or not?*” Sulaymān answered, “*Irādah is an act.*” Imam (‘a) then said, “*So, irādah is ḥādīth because all actions are created.*”⁵

¹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Vol 1:91.

² al-Šadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 139; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:71.

³ al-Šadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 146; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:144.

⁴ al-Šadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 147; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 5:122.

⁵ al-Šadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 444.

In another narration, Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) states, “*Allah Almighty was there, but He was neither a mutakallim (speaker), nor a murīd (intender), nor a mutaḥarrrik (mover), nor a fā’il (doer). Our Lord is Great and Exalted. All these attributes are created through His creation of action.*”¹

These narrations provide a foundational distinction between *ṣifāt al-dhāt* (intrinsic attributes) and *ṣifāt al-fi’l* (action-based attributes). The key characteristic of action-based attributes is that they are not eternal descriptions of Allah (swt) but are attributed to Him upon the occurrence of an action. In contrast, intrinsic attributes are eternal and can never be negated from Allah (swt).

Intrinsic Attributes: Independence from Creation

A further distinction between *ṣifāt al-dhāt* and *ṣifāt al-fi’l* lies in their dependence on external factors. *Ṣifāt al-fi’l*, such as *mashiyyah* (providence) and *irādah* (intention), necessitate a *maqṣūd* (intended object). Conversely, *ṣifāt al-dhāt*, like *‘ilm* (knowledge), do not require a *ma’lūm* (known object); *qudrah* (power) does not necessitate an external existence; and *ḥayāt* (life) does not necessitate anything distinct from Him. The A’immah (‘as) have elucidated the nature of *ṣifāt al-dhāt* in various ways:

Imam al-Riḍā (‘a) states, “*Allah (swt)’s ‘ilm is qadīm (eternal), preceding all things before He created them. Our Lord is All-Knowing, the Most High and Great. He creates things as He wills, and His ‘ilm precedes them. Similarly, our Creator is Eternal, All-Knowing, All-Hearing, and All-Seeing.*”²

In a debate, Sulaymān al-Marwazī equated *irādah* with hearing, sight, and *‘ilm*, asserting their eternal nature. Imam al-Riḍā (‘a) responded:

“*Are hearing, sight, and ‘ilm, ḥādith (created)?*”

¹ al-Ṣadūq, Page 226; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 5:30.

² al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 136; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:78.

Sulaymān: “No.”

Imam (‘a): “If *irādah* (intention) is not *ḥādith* (created), then how do you negate it by saying ‘He has not intended’ and affirm it by saying ‘He has intended’?”

Sulaymān: “It is like saying sometimes that He knows and sometimes that He does not know.”

Imam (‘a): “These two cases are not the same. Negating the *ma‘lūm* (known) does not negate ‘ilm (knowledge), but negating the *maqṣūd* (intended) negates the existence of *irādah*. In contrast, ‘ilm is always established, even if there is no *ma‘lūm*. Likewise, a person is sighted even if there are no visible things.”¹

Intrinsic Attributes: Essential to Divine Perfection

Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) further elucidates: “Allah the Almighty, our Lord, is *Qadīm* (eternal), and ‘ilm was His *Dhāt* (Essence), yet the *ma‘lūm* (known) did not exist. *Sam‘* (hearing) was His *Dhāt*, but there was no *ṣawt* (sound) to be heard. *Baṣār* (seeing) was His *Dhāt*, but there was nothing to be seen. *Qudrah* (power) was His *Dhāt*, but there was nothing to have power over.”²

In another narration, he (‘a) says, “Allah is ‘*Alīm* (All-Knowing), *Samī‘* (All-Hearing), and *Baṣīr* (All-Seeing). He is inherently knowing, hearing, and seeing.”³

He (‘a) also states, “Our God is inherently *Nūr* (Light), *Ḥayy* (Living), ‘*Alīm* (All-Knowing), and *Qayyūm* (Self-sufficient).”⁴

An atheist once asked Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a), “Do you say that Allah is *Samī‘* (All-Hearing) and *Baṣīr* (All-Seeing)?” The Imam (‘a) replied, “He is *Samī‘* and *Baṣīr*. He is All-Hearing, not through an organ, and All-

¹ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 448; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 10:334.

² al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 139; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:71.

³ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 139; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:72.

⁴ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 140.

Seeing, not through any physical instrument. Rather, He hears and sees through Himself. When I say that He hears through Himself, I do not mean that He is one thing, and He is also something else. I phrase it this way to make you understand. So, I say He hears all things, not that everything is part of Him. My purpose is to make you understand that He is All-Hearing, All-Seeing, All-Knowing, and Aware, without any distinction in His Dhāt and meaning.”¹

These narrations emphasize that Allah the Exalted is inherently ‘*Alīm* (Knowledgeable), *Qadīr* (Powerful), *Ḥayy* (Living), *Baṣīr* (All-Seeing), *Samī‘* (All-Hearing), and *Qayyūm* (Self-sufficient). Since these are *ṣifāt al-dhāt* (intrinsic attributes), their opposites—*jahl* (ignorance), ‘*ajz* (incapability), *mawt* (death), and *ḥājah* (need)—are impossible for Him. This is because ‘*ilm* is in opposition to *jahl*, *qudrah* (power) to ‘*ajz*, *ḥayāt* (life) to *mawt*, and *nūr* to *ḡulmah* (darkness).

The Limitations of Human Conceptions in Understanding Divine Attributes

Affirming Allah (swt)’s inherent ‘*ilm*, *qudrah* (power), *ḥayāt* (life), *baṣar* (seeing), and *samī‘* (hearing) does not imply a separation between His *Dhāt* (essence) and *Ṣifāt* (attributes). Rather, these attributes are *lāzim dhāt* (necessary to His essence) and do not introduce *kathrah* (multiplicity) within Him. The conceptual distinctions among these names do not result in a division within Allah (swt)’s reality; they serve as *dalāl* (indicators) pointing towards the recognition of His divine perfections.

Attempting to comprehend Allah (swt) solely through human-conceived attributes and analogies risks confining Him within concepts that are mere products of human ‘*aql* (intellect) and *wahm* (imagination). Allah Almighty, being the Creator of ‘*aql*, *wahm*, and human understanding, transcends these faculties.

¹ al-Ṣadūq. Page 144; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:69.

Imam al-Ḥasan (‘a) states: “‘*Uqūl (intellects) and awhām (illusions), afkār (thoughts) and takhayyulāt (imagination), and afhām (understandings) and dhuhūn (minds) cannot comprehend His Ṣifāt (attributes).*”¹

Conceptualizations, irrespective of their breadth, are inherently finite. The *mafhūm* ‘*umūmī* (general concept) of ‘*ilm*, for instance, differs from the *mafhūm* ‘*umūmiyyah* (general concepts) of *qudrah* (power), *wujūd* (existence), and *ḥayāt* (life). Allah Almighty, however, is devoid of any limitations. Consequently, any attempt to recognize Him through conceptual frameworks inevitably reduces and confines Him within the boundaries of those concepts. Instead, when employing His *Asmā*’ (names) and *Ṣifāt* (attributes), we must transcend conceptual limitations and regard them as *dalā’il* (signs) indicative of His *Wujūd*.

Asmā’ and *Ṣifāt* function as symbolic representations distinct from the *musammā* (named entity). This distinction, however, does not impede our *ma’rifah* of Allah (swt), as His *ma’rifah* and His perfections are intrinsically present within us. These *alfāz* (words) and *asmā*’ serve as instruments for *dhikr* (remembrance) and focusing our attention upon Him. The relationship between a *dalīl* (sign) and its *madlūl* (signified) is secondary to the *ma’rifah* of both. Comprehending this relationship facilitates our connection with Allah (swt).

The *Tawqīf* (Restriction) of Divine Names and Attributes

This principle elucidates the necessity of *tawqīf* (restriction) regarding divine names. Only Allah (swt) can designate a name or *dalīl* (sign) for Himself, as His *ma’rifah* is solely attainable through Him. Had He not dispatched His prophets to impart these *asmā*’ (names) and *alfāz* (words) for His invocation, we would have been incapable of addressing Him by any name during *ṣalāh*. Analogously, when one intends to address an individual by name, communication and permission from that

¹ al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Page 45; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Vol 4:289.

individual are required. As we lack the inherent *ma'rifah* of Allah (swt) to select His *asmā'* and *dalā'il* (signs), He has graciously provided this through His revelation.

Similar to *ṣifāt al-dhāt* (intrinsic attributes), Allah (swt)'s *Af'āl* (actions) transcend the limitations of concepts and *takhayyulāt* (imaginings). Allah (swt)'s *Af'āl*, like His *Dhāt* (essence), are devoid of *ṣūrah* (form) and *kayfiyyah* (how-ness). Therefore, they cannot be described using *'aql*. Consequently, just as reliance on verses and narrations is indispensable when describing Allah (swt)'s *Ṣifāt al-Dhāt* (intrinsic attributes), we must not exceed the boundaries of verses and narrations when discussing His *Ṣifāt al-Fi'l* (action-based attributes).

Key Points

- **Distinction Between Divine and Created Attributes:** While the terminology used for both the Creator and the created beings may appear similar, the meanings of these attributes are fundamentally distinct. The divine attributes transcend any anthropomorphic connotations.
- **Incomprehensibility of Divine Attributes:** The attributes of Allah (swt) cannot be fully comprehended or intellected by human reasoning. Any attempt to encapsulate divine attributes within human conceptual frameworks results in an inadequate and deficient understanding.
- **Conceptualization as a Form of Denial:** Any recognition of Allah (swt) that is constructed from human concepts, imaginings, or conceptual descriptions is inherently flawed. Such attempts at defining the divine reality equate to a form of negation, as they impose limitations upon the Absolute.
- **The Nature of Divine Names and Their Meaning:** The names and terms used to refer to Allah (swt) do not inherently possess independent meanings. Rather, their significance lies in Allah

(swt) Himself, who is recognized through innate, intuitive recognition (*ma 'rifah fiṭrīyyah*).

- **Absence of Comparative and Superlative Meanings in Divine Names:** Even when the *afʿal* (comparative/superlative) grammatical pattern is used in divine names, it does not imply relational comparison. Instead, these names function as active participles (*ism fāʿil*) or constant attributes (*ṣifāt mushabbahah*), emphasizing the transcendence and absoluteness of Allah (swt)'s attributes.
- **Created Nature of Linguistic Expressions:** The words used to articulate Allah (swt)'s names are created entities. These linguistic forms serve as a means for human beings to direct their attention toward Allah (swt) and engage in remembrance (*dhikr*).
- **The Name as a Means, Not the Object of Worship:** In the worship of Allah (swt), divine names do not possess intrinsic subjectivity (*mawḍūʿiyyah*); rather, it is the divine reality they signify that is to be worshipped. The names function as conduits through which worship is directed towards Allah (swt).
- **Distinction Between Intrinsic and Action-Related Attributes:** Allah (swt) is not eternally described by action-related attributes (*ṣifāt fiʿliyyah*), as these pertain to His interactions with creation. However, intrinsic attributes (*ṣifāt dhātīyyah*)—such as knowledge, power, and life—are eternally inseparable from His essence.
- **Divine Names as Signs Beyond Conceptualization:** The names and attributes of Allah (swt) must be understood beyond the limitations of human conceptual thought. Rather than defining Him, these names serve as signs (*āyāt*) that guide the intellect towards the reality of His existence.
- **The Restriction of Divine Names by Allah (swt) Himself:** Since Allah (swt) can only be recognized through Himself, He alone determines the names and signs by which He is to be known.

These names are a means of divine self-disclosure, chosen by Him to facilitate human recognition of His existence.

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تَوْحِيدٌ وَأَسْمَاءُ وَصِفَاتٌ

THE ONENESS OF GOD HIS NAMES AND ATTRIBUTES

At the heart of Islamic belief lies Tawhīd—the absolute Oneness of God. In this significant theological work, Ustād Muhammad Biyābānī Uskūyī investigates fundamental doctrines concerning the Divine Essence. Drawing exclusively from the Quran and the traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt, this book offers a systematic exploration of how the Creator introduces Himself. It delves into the innate human disposition towards the Divine (fiṭrah) and provides a detailed, scripturally-grounded examination of God's beautiful Names and lofty Attributes, presenting a pure theology based on revelation.

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