

## THE DIVINE RELATIONSHIPS OF THE INSIGHTFUL HUMAN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF IMAM ALI IBN ABI TALIB

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### Abstract

The journey of the insightful human towards establishing a profound connection with God and gaining knowledge about Him involves the discernment and intuition of divine truths, which are beyond the grasp of mere sensory perception; it necessitates the "eye of the heart." Insight is governed by specific criteria, and an individual at this level has surely developed these criteria internally. This study aims to examine the divine interactions of the insightful human with God as seen through the lens of Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib. It addresses questions such as what constitutes the knowledge of Allah and how an insightful individual can acquire it. How does mystical intuition contribute to an understanding of the divine? Human knowledge of God, derived from reflecting on His creations and understanding His names and attributes, is confined by human limitations; truly grasping His essence is beyond human comprehension. Genuine intuition involves reaching a state of certainty and grasping truths that are elusive to the average person. Various verses in the Holy Quran point to a unique form of knowledge that is not achieved through conventional academic pursuits, philosophical reasoning, or empirical science, but through adherence to Sharia, closeness to Allah, and immersion in the sacred domain. This knowledge is accessible to those who have attained certainty through devotion and servitude and for whom the mysteries of existence are unveiled. The methodology of this research is rooted in content analysis, documentary studies, and library research.

**Keywords:** Divine relationships, Insightful human, Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib, Nahj al-Balagha

### Introduction

The term "insight" is defined in the dictionary as knowledge, vision, awareness, alertness, shrewdness, inner vision, and certainty. An insightful person is one who, through an inner force and the power of the heart—referred to as insight—recognizes and comprehends the essence of truths (Dehkhoda, under the entry "insight," 1993).

According to the Holy Quran, a person who seeks happiness outside of servitude to God and the straight divine path is misguided and unjust to themselves, and for such a person, even the divine words of the Quran have no effect. By their inherent nature, all beings, as creations of God, have a creator-creature relationship, and each, in their way, praises their creator. Humans, as the noblest of creatures, endowed with reason and language and possessing diverse existential and personal dimensions, certainly have a unique and more conscious relationship with their Creator

and the Lord of both worlds. The Creator, who has placed His spirit within humans, guides those who nurture this aspect of their existence and their relationship with Him to the ultimate goal of this world and the final destination, which is the divine encounter, a journey that requires insight.

In this article, the researcher explores the divine relationships of the insightful human and seeks to answer the question: How does an insightful human attain knowledge of God and the vision of truth in their relationship with Him? To answer this question, the valuable book *Nahj al-Balagha* has been used as the primary source, along with verses and narrations that *Nahj al-Balagha* also references.

Given the importance of the topic of knowledge of God and the vision of truth, which represents a high stage in the ranks of mysticism and is one that the insightful human aspires to, this article addresses these themes.

### Knowledge of Allah

The term "knowledge" encompasses two primary meanings: one involves a sequence of connected elements, while the other implies tranquility and calmness. The latter meaning is the foundation for knowledge and mysticism, as the unknown often evokes fear (Ibn Faris, 1984: 281). Knowledge is also described as the understanding of something through contemplation of its effects, distinguishing it from general knowledge; the opposite is denial. The expression "so-and-so knows God" pertains to human comprehension of God, but the phrase "he knows God" is not used transitively with a direct object, as human understanding of God is derived from reflecting on His works rather than grasping His essence. The term "knowledge" thus refers to the limited understanding achieved through contemplation (Al-Raghib al-Isfahani, 1992: 560).

"Knowledge" is often equated with "science," defined as "belief in something accompanied by the tranquility of the soul, as it truly is" (Tusi, 1986: 155). Some have also defined "knowledge" based on the Burhan of "AL-SABRU WA AL-TAQSIM," which sometimes refers to the understanding of particulars perceived through the five senses, such as "I know the thing" (عرفت الشيء أعرفه عرفانا); at other times, it denotes a simple and specific understanding distinct from sensory perception, as in "I know God" (عرفت الله) and not "I understand Him" (علمته). It is also used to describe understanding that follows a period of ignorance or the reacquisition of knowledge after it has been forgotten. Additionally, it refers to making a judgment about something, whether affirmative or negative (Turayhi, 1996: 97).

Human understanding of God is attained through contemplation of His works, without grasping His essence (Al-Raghib al-Isfahani, 1992: 561). Specifically, "knowledge of Allah the Exalted" refers to an awareness of God's majestic and beautiful attributes to the extent that human capacity allows. However, comprehending the sacred essence of God is beyond anyone's reach. It is said that knowledge has levels, similar to the levels of fire. The lowest level is merely hearing that something called fire exists in the world and destroys anything it encounters, akin to those who follow religion without understanding its rationale.

A higher level is when one perceives the smoke of the fire and recognizes that fire has an effect, attributing the existence of smoke to the fire. This is similar to the knowledge of those who use reasoning and evidence to conclude the existence of a creator. An even higher level is when

one feels the heat of the fire due to proximity, sees things illuminated by its light, and benefits from its effects. This level of knowledge is akin to the sincere believers whose hearts are assured in God and who are certain that God is "the light of the heavens and the earth."

The highest level is to be completely consumed by the fire and to perish in it. This level of knowledge is akin to the knowledge of those who witness and are annihilated in the path of God, reaching the highest degree (Turayhi, 1996: 97).

Human comprehension of the external environment and inner self is attained through two forms of knowledge: intuitive (direct) and acquired (indirect). Similarly, the knowledge of God can be understood in both intuitive and acquired manners. In intuitive understanding, knowledge directly relates to the essence of the known without any intermediary, revealing the real and tangible existence of the known to the knower (Misbah Yazdi, 2013: 166). However, the intensity of intuitive knowledge varies; sometimes it is sufficiently strong and consciously realized, while at other times, it is weak and faint (ibid: 172).

Humans are capable of having an intuitive knowledge of God's essence and attributes; this innate awareness of the Exalted God is present in all individuals. Innate intuitive knowledge of God implies that the human heart has a profound connection with its Creator, and when one delves into the depths of their heart, they will discover this relationship (Misbah Yazdi, 2014: 38). Through the covenant made with God in the realm of pre-existence, humans inherently possess this intuitive knowledge of God. Imam Ali states: "God, who has revealed Himself to the hearts of His servants through His proof" (Makarem Shirazi, 2008: 228).

What greater proof exists than when a person turns inward, they hear the call of monotheism resonating from every part of their heart? Therefore, regardless of how much the devils attempt to deny His pure essence and mislead the servants, when the pressures are alleviated and the dark clouds of satanic whispers dissipate, the innate tendency towards monotheism emerges, and humans return to God (Makarem Shirazi, 2007: 510).

This form of intuitive knowledge diminishes due to the weakening of one's existential state, material distractions, and a reduced connection with God. Nonetheless, it manifests in special circumstances when one is detached from all material influences. In such moments, a person realizes their dependence on God. Through the perfection of the soul, decreased focus on material matters, and an intensified heartfelt connection with God, this knowledge attains levels of awareness to the extent that one might say: "Can anything other than You have an appearance that You do not?" (Misbah Yazdi, 2013b: 8; 2013a: 173/1).

The intensity of this intuitive knowledge varies according to the different existential states and levels of spiritual perfection among individuals. The knowledge possessed by The Fourteen Infallibles surpasses that of scholars and mystics. For example, when "Dhulab Yamani" asks Imam Ali: "Do you see your Lord?" Imam replies: "Would I worship something I do not see?" When further asked: "How do you see Him?" Imam responds: "Eyes do not see Him openly, but hearts perceive Him through the truths of faith" (Makarem Shirazi, 2008: 398). Thus, Imam Ali was at the highest level of heartfelt observation of God, as he stated: "If the veils were removed, my certainty would not increase" (Majlesi, 1983: 40/153).

Every individual has the potential to attain a state where they can perceive God with their

heart, rendering logical reasoning unnecessary. By embarking on a spiritual journey endorsed by divine religion, a person can progressively detach from all that is not God, thereby deepening their understanding of God and His attributes. In this condition, even while interacting with others, they sustain an unbreakable connection with their Creator (Misbah Yazdi, 2014: 40).

### Acquired Knowledge

In this form of understanding, the external reality of what is known is not directly perceived by the knower. Instead, awareness is achieved through something that represents the known, referred to as a mental image or concept. Essentially, there is an intermediary between the knower and the essence of the known (Misbah Yazdi, 2013a: 166-167). Thus, acquired knowledge never leads one to the actual and external reality of the known; what is obtained through this knowledge is either a mental concept or image (Misbah Yazdi, 2013b: 7). Acquired knowledge about God does not lead a person to the essence of God; rather, it provides concepts such as omniscience, omnipotence, and similar attributes. Sensory perception, reason, experience, and tradition are tools of acquired knowledge.

After understanding the types of knowledge, it is important to know how the perfection of knowledge is achieved. In the first sermon of Nahj al-Balagha, the perfection of knowledge is described as affirming and believing in God: "The perfection of knowing God is believing in Him; the ultimate belief in Him is acknowledging His oneness, and the ultimate acknowledgment of His oneness is being sincere to Him. The highest level of sincerity to Him is negating attributes (beyond His essence) from Him" (Makarem Shirazi, 2008: 22).

In the next phase following recognition and affirmation, to attain complete monotheism, one must regard the essence of God as devoid of any likeness or similarity. This is because God is an infinite being in all aspects and independent of everyone and everything. Naturally, anything that has a likeness is limited, as each of the two similar entities is distinct from the other and lacks the perfections of the other. Following the stage of monotheism, the stage of ideological sincerity is reached, where sincerity attains perfection and becomes more detailed. To achieve sincerity in monotheism, any attributes of creatures that are mixed with imperfection and additional to the essence must be negated from Him, whether this attribute involves composite parts or otherwise, because God's attributes are identical to His essence, and no form of composition exists in God. As Imam Ali states: "Every attribute (of possible beings) testifies that it is different from the described, and every described (of possible beings) testifies that it is different from the attribute" (Makarem Shirazi, 2008: 23).

To attain divine knowledge, a discerning individual must understand the attributes of God. This topic is extensively covered in the sermons and letters of Nahj al-Balagha.

Imam Ali, in the opening part of Sermon 133 of Nahj al-Balagha, states:

"The world and the Hereafter have surrendered their reins to God and are obedient to Him. The heavens and the earth have placed their keys into His powerful hands, and the green trees bow before Him every morning and evening. By His command, they ignite bright fires from their branches, and their ripe fruits, by God's decree, provide sustenance for humans at all times." (Makarem Shirazi, 2008: 286)

In this passage, Imam Ali highlights some of the exalted attributes of God and, in five sentences, provides detailed insights on this matter. He compares the world and the Hereafter to well-trained and obedient animals whose reins are in God's hands, guiding them wherever His will dictates.

In the second sentence, he further elaborates on this concept, emphasizing that God opens and closes wherever He wills, and all His actions are governed by wisdom.

«وَأَنقَادَتْ لَهُ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةُ بِأَرْمَتِهَا، وَقَدَّعَتْ إِلَيْهِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضُونَ مَقَالِيدَهَا، وَسَجَدَتْ لَهُ بِالْعُدْوِ وَالْأَصْنَالِ الْأَشْجَارُ النَّاصِرَةُ، وَقَدَحَتْ لَهُ مِنْ قُضْبَانِهَا النَّيِّرَانَ الْمُضِيئَةَ، وَأَنْتَ أَكْلَهَا بِكَلِمَاتِهِ النَّمَارُ الْيَانِعَةُ.»

In the third sentence, he mentions the prostration of the vibrant trees before His pure essence. It is clear that the focus on "green trees" is not exclusive but rather highlights an example of the most beautiful living beings in creation, with each leaf serving as evidence of the Creator's knowledge. Furthermore, "morning and evening" signifies all times, similar to when we say we serve Islam morning and evening, meaning continuously. Hence, the Holy Quran states broadly: "The stars and the trees prostrate." (Surah Ar-Rahman, Verse 6)

It is also plausible that the manifestations of God's greatness in the trees are more evident at sunrise and sunset than at other times.

This prostration might be metaphorical, indicating that the precise order of their creation reflects the infinite knowledge and power of their Creator. Alternatively, it could be literal, suggesting that all particles of the world's creatures possess knowledge and consciousness, and they consciously glorify and prostrate to God.

In the fourth sentence, Imam Ali states: "By His command, they ignite bright fires from their branches." This highlights one of the marvels of God's power, where He creates a substance from water and soil that serves as a source of fire and light, which in turn resolves many human challenges.

In the fifth and final sentence, he mentions: "Their ripe fruits, by God's command, provide sustenance for humans at all times."

Just as Islam presents humans as inherently aware of God, Imam Ali also views the recognition and belief in God as an innate conviction.

At some point, all humans have perceived the existence of their Creator and acknowledged His lordship, possessing an inherent understanding of their Creator according to their nature.

To know God, one must utilize the senses that God has endowed them with from birth. A person must develop their eyes, ears, and intellect to grasp the truth. Those who use their sensory faculties to gain better understanding and comprehension, and who purify their soul, progress more swiftly through the stages of growth and development, making the attainment of perfection more achievable. Purifying the soul grants a unique clarity, enabling one to distinguish truth from falsehood.

A crucial point to understand is that before pursuing divine knowledge, one must first achieve self-awareness and understanding.

When a person truly know themselves, they will recognize the origin of the universe and believe in the afterlife, prioritizing eternal life above all else and becoming deeply connected to it. They will also comprehend the journey from the beginning to the end. Conversely, if they do not

know themselves, they will forget the origin, which is God, and ignore the afterlife and eternal life. Essentially, by neglecting their soul, they will miss out on all forms of knowledge (Javadi-Amoli, 2000: 84).

Human intellect and superficial senses, such as the physical eye, can never fully comprehend God in His true essence. In this context, Imam Ali states in Sermon 152 of Nahj al-Balagha:

«لَا تَسْتَلِمُهُ الْمَشَاعِرُ، وَلَا تَحْجُبُهُ السَّوَاتِرُ، لَا فِتْرَاقَ الصَّانِعِ وَالْمَصْنُوعِ، وَالْحَادِ وَالْمَحْدُودِ، وَالرَّبِّ وَالْمَرْيُوبِ.»

"The intellects cannot grasp the essence of His being, and the veils cannot conceal His existence, for the Creator and the created are different, the limiter and the limited, the nurturer and the nurtured are distinct."

Human faculties, including both external and internal senses, intellect, and reason, cannot reach the essence of His being. The reason is clear: He is an infinite and boundless existence in every respect, while human intellects are limited in every way; the infinite can never fit into the finite. Moreover, His sacred existence has so permeated the world with His manifestations that no veil can conceal Him. His essence remains hidden from everyone, yet His signs are evident everywhere.

### **Levels of Divine Knowledge**

The understanding of God encompasses various levels, from the most basic, superficial comprehension to the highest level, where God is perceived with the heart's inner vision. Imam Ali stated: "I do not worship a God whom I do not see with the eyes of my heart." (Al-Shaykh al-Saduq, 1995: 305)

Broadly, the knowledge of God can be classified into two levels: 1. Rational and inferential; 2. Heartfelt and intuitive. Rational knowledge is general and obtained through mental concepts, covering everything from basic reasoning to advanced philosophical arguments. Heartfelt knowledge, on the other hand, is immediate and does not involve conceptual mediation. This form of knowledge cannot be encapsulated within the scope of teaching and learning, as these processes rely solely on words and concepts.

### **Rational and Inferential Level**

The level of rational contemplation and inference is crucial because it is teachable and plays a key role in solidifying and strengthening belief and enhancing understanding. For this reason, the Quran consistently calls people to this path: "Had there been therein (in the heavens and the earth) gods besides Allah, then verily both would have been ruined" (Surah Al-Anbiya, Verse 22). In this verse, the Quran presents a conditional statement, negates the premise, and dismisses the conclusion. By emphasizing reason, the Quran seeks to refute the claim of some religions that faith is disconnected from reason and that to become a believer, one must cease thinking and solely engage the heart to allow the light of God to enter.

The path of reason employs philosophical and theological arguments to prove the existence of God and familiarize humans with the Creator of the universe. Generally, it can be said that the path of reason discovers and proves the existence of metaphysical truths. Rationality and logical arguments are highly esteemed in the narrations from the Fourteen Infallibles. According to these narrations, the purpose of the prophets' mission is for people to contemplate God, and among them, those who perfect their intellect will attain higher ranks in both this world and the hereafter (al-

Kulayni, 1987: 19).

### **Heartfelt and Intuitive Level**

In the context of mysticism and Sufism, "intuition" denotes the perception of truths through the heart and soul after progressing through various spiritual stages and comprehending the nature of different states.

Mohammad-Taqi Ja'fari describes "intuitive perception" as follows: "Intuitive knowledge refers to the direct inner connection with a reality that cannot be reached through natural sensory or rational perception. Essentially, intuition is the inner vision of reality with a unique clarity that surpasses both sensory perception and rational understanding. Considering the diverse internal states in contact with realities, this form of vision is indisputable. Intuitive knowledge is more prominent in dreamlike and abstract states than in natural conditions." (Ja'fari, 1998: 8281)

Javadi-Amoli outlines the attributes of intuitive knowledge as follows:

Individuals endowed with intuitive knowledge perceive truths and hear words that others cannot. Similar to how people feel the warmth of fire or distinguish various sounds and their sources, those with intuitive knowledge discern different sights and sounds when observing objects or dealing with various matters, without any doubt or uncertainty. This form of knowledge initially manifests in humans during sleep, through truthful dreams that reveal past, present, or future realities related to distant or nearby locations, signifying the presence of an inner eye and ear.

The ability to perceive such truths is not limited to those who are asleep; an awake individual can also observe distant things or detect their scent. These perceptions are not contingent on sleep; rather, anyone who engages in introspection and purifies their heart can access the foundation of this knowledge, thereby gaining insight into the external world. However, because the spirit is initially weak, external senses and natural distractions impede its inner perception. In this state, by removing external distractions during sleep, a conducive environment for inner exploration is created. Otherwise, the faculties that perceive truths in sleep are also available to an individual when awake (Javadi-Amoli, 2014: 407-409).

One of the most significant ways to gain knowledge of God is through the discovery and witnessing of truth. Recognition through discovery and witnessing is one of the paths to knowing God, which will be elaborated upon in detail later.

### **The Discovery and Intuition of Truth**

Abd al-Razzaq al-Kashani describes intuition as the perception of Truth through Truth itself. He explains that concise intuition within the detailed context involves perceiving Unity within multiplicity, while detailed intuition involves recognizing multiplicity within the Essence of Unity (al-Kashani, 1991: 153-154).

Many mystics have understood that discovery and intuition necessitate a criterion and measure. This is because satanic suggestions and imaginations can sometimes take root in the seeker's mind, causing illusions to appear as reality.

In the introduction to "The Bezels of Wisdom," Gheisari notes that mystical revelations are not always immune to error and mistake. Often, what seems to be revelation, intuition, and truth

is a product of imagination and satanic suggestions. These do not reveal the truth but rather distort it, leading to misguidance and error. He explains that the human heart, the seat of intuition, is like a house with multiple doors through which various states enter, affecting the delicate human existence (Gheisari, 1996: 633 and 636).

Ibn Arabi asserts that as long as individuals remain bound to their physical and worldly bodies, they are vulnerable to Satan's influence. However, this vulnerability does not apply to figures like the Prophet Muhammad and the Fourteen Infallibles, whose bodies, akin to their souls, have ascended to a realm beyond both the material and spiritual worlds (Ibn Arabi, 1998: 39).

The Holy Quran contains numerous verses that point to a unique form of knowledge, one that cannot be obtained through study, discourse, philosophical reasoning, or scientific and experiential methods. Instead, this knowledge is attained through adherence to Sharia, spiritual journeying, drawing closer to God, and focusing on the divine realm. As Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i explains: "Through sincerity and servitude, they have reached certainty, and as a result of this certainty, the celestial kingdom of the heavens and the earth, along with the eternal life of the everlasting world, has been revealed to them" (Tabataba'i, 1981: 33).

Imam Ali also discussed this subject, which serves as a pathway to divine knowledge, in his sermons. In Sermon 87 of Nahj al-Balagha, he declares:

"O servants of God, the most cherished of God's servants is the one whom He aids in overcoming the rebellious desires of the self. Such an individual wears sorrow as their inner garment and fear of God as their outer garment. The lamp of guidance illuminates their heart, and they have made the necessary preparations for the future. They have eased the burdens of hardships, viewed this world with insight, and become the keys to the doors of guidance and the locks to the doors of destruction."

The core message of this sermon is that God's beloved servants possess the lamp of guidance in their hearts and find it easy to prepare for hardships. Their outlook on the world is one of insight into its truths, making them the keys to guidance and the locks to misguidance. This clearly and explicitly aligns with our goal of attaining a form of knowledge that surpasses science and philosophy, reaching the stage of intuitive insight.

Sermon 222 of Nahj al-Balagha (Makarem Shirazi, 2008: 534) explains:

"God has made His remembrance a polish for the hearts, enabling ears that were once deaf to hear and eyes that were once blind to see. Throughout every era and time, God, whose blessings are immense, has had servants to whom He has inspired thoughts and with whom He has communicated in the domain of intellect and reason. These servants have illuminated their minds with the light of awakening, bringing clarity and insight to their eyes, ears, and hearts.

These individuals serve as guides in deserts. Although they exist in this world, it is as if they have detached themselves from it and connected with the Hereafter. They have perceived what lies beyond this world, as if they have emerged from behind its walls, observing the realm of the afterlife and its enduring residence. It is as though the Day of Resurrection has already fulfilled its promises for them. They have lifted the veils, seeing what others cannot see and hearing what others cannot hear. This knowledge transcends scientific and philosophical understanding; it is akin to mystical intuition."



In Sermon 4 of Nahj al-Balagha (Makarem Shirazi, 2008: 42), Imam Ali, addressing the people of Basrah, stated: "The sincerity and purity of my intention have made me perceptive towards you." Imam Ali asserts that the purity of his heart has enabled him to discern the hypocrisy of the hypocrites in Basrah.

Ibn Maitham al-Bahrani, in his commentary on this statement, clarifies that Imam Ali's mention of the sincerity of his devotion to God Almighty and the purity of his heart's mirror signifies that this has endowed him with the light of insight into people's conditions and the outcomes of their actions (al-Bahrani, 1983: 273).

In Sermon 179 of Nahj al-Balagha, Imam Ali explains: "Eyes can never perceive Him directly, but hearts understand Him through the truths of faith. He is near to everything, but not in a manner that suggests physical closeness, and He is distant from everything, but not in a way that implies separation. He speaks without the need for contemplation and wills without the need for decision-making. He is the Creator and Maker, but not with hands and bodily parts. He is subtle, but not in the sense of being hidden, and He is great and powerful, but not in the sense of being harsh. He sees, but not with physical sight, and He is compassionate, but not in the sense of being tender-hearted. Faces bow down in humility before His greatness, and hearts tremble in awe of His majesty." (Makarem Shirazi, 2008: 398)

The phrase "realities of faith" pertains to fundamental beliefs and knowledge. To elucidate this concept, it is essential to recognize that observation can be categorized into three types:

1. *Sensory Observation*: This type involves the use of the eyes and can be augmented with instruments such as binoculars and telescopes.

2. *Intellectual Observation*: This form is attained through reasoning, where one perceives truths with the mind's eye as clearly as seeing the sun. For instance, as noted by the late Maghniyyah in his commentary on Nahj al-Balagha, figures like Isaac Newton discerned the law of gravity by observing an apple falling from a tree—a phenomenon not visible to the physical eye but understood through intellectual insight.

3. *Inner Intuition*: This is an internal form of perception that does not rely on reasoning. An individual perceives reality with the heart's eye and accepts it without the need for logical proof. This level of understanding and vision is challenging to grasp until one experiences it firsthand.

### **Levels of Unveiling and Intuition**

In his introduction to the commentary on "The Bezels of Wisdom" by Ibn Arabi, Gheisari states: "In linguistic terms, unveiling (*kashf*) means the removal of the veil, and in technical terms, it refers to the awareness of what lies beyond the veil of hidden meanings and true realities, either in existence or in vision, encompassing both conceptual and visual aspects" (Gheisari, 1996: 107).

The perception and intuition of truths within the realm of the Imaginal World are termed "visual unveiling," whereas the revelation of truths beyond the Intermediate World (*Barzakh*) and the stages of absolute and separate imagination are known as "conceptual unveiling" (Akhlaghi, 2004: 99). Visual unveiling in the absolute Imaginal World is attained through the five senses, while conceptual unveiling, which involves the manifestation of hidden meanings and truths, encompasses various levels.

1. Unveiling of meanings in the faculty of thought without the use of premises and syllogisms, referred to as "intuition."

2. Spiritual unveiling within the rational faculty (a non-physical, spiritual faculty not present in bodies, known as the sacred light) for uncovering truths; this is regarded as the lowest level of unveiling.

3. Unveiling at the heart's level, where if the result of this unveiling is hidden meanings, it is called "inspiration." If the unveiled is a spirit from immaterial spirits or an entity, it is termed "heartfelt observation."

4. Unveiling at the soul's level, known as "spiritual witnessing." In this state, the soul, according to its inherent and original capacity, receives hidden meanings and truths directly from the Divine and conveys them to other hidden faculties of a person, such as the heart, intellect, and other immaterial and physical faculties. One who reaches this level is connected to the hidden meanings present in divine knowledge.

5. Unveiling of truths and witnessing of hidden meanings at the level of the secret.

6. The level of the hidden, which represents the highest level of unveiling truths. The truths unveiled at this level are indescribable and cannot be expressed in words. A seeker who attains this level has knowledge directly connected to Divine knowledge, akin to the connection of a branch to its origin and the subtle to the real. In this state, the highest levels of unveiling and intuition are achieved, which are exclusive to the great prophets.

7. The level of the most hidden secret, which is the rank of the truth of the Prophet Muhammad. This is the highest degree of unveiling and intuition, the source of the revelation of divine secrets and hidden truths in the oneness of existence, and the reception of truths in the state of "two bow-lengths or nearer" without any intermediary. This level represents the absolute proximity and the collective rank unique to the station of Muhammad (PBUH) and is only granted to the heirs of the knowledge of the union. (ibid: 100)

Based on the concept of the unity of existence, the seeker begins their spiritual journey toward God from the natural world. As they progress and unveil the veils, the first truth revealed to them encompasses the realities of the intermediate world (Barzakh) and the realm of absolute and separate imagination. Moving through the stages of Barzakh, they enter the realm of meaning, encountering pure intellects and pure spirits, and perceive these truths with the eye of the heart. The world of spirits and its inherent truths become apparent to them. Transitioning from the realm of intellects to the realm of names and attributes, they establish a connection. However, since names and attributes, along with their determinations, can also act as veils between the Creator and creation, true witnessing and genuine unveiling only occur through the dissolution of the imaginary existence and immersion in the true existence of the Creator. The seeker perceives pure existence, recognizing everything other than the Creator as illusions and falsehoods, with God being the true known and witnessed reality.

According to the concept of the unity of witnessing, the seeker reaches a point in their spiritual journey where they are free from self-centeredness and all egoistic desires. This leads them to a heightened state of awareness where they see themselves as separate from the Divine, and the lover, the beloved, the witness, and the witnessed become one. In this state—known as

"sobriety in union" or "sobriety after annihilation"—the existence of the witness is absorbed into the existence of the witness, leaving no trace of the former, similar to how stars disappear in the presence of the sun. In this condition, the enlightened seeker becomes an instrument of the Divine will, and their actions are essentially the acts of the Divine. In such a state, their words take on a mystical tone; they become their qibla and Kaaba, and they pray to themselves.

This is why they say, "I saw my Lord with the eye of my heart." Since only the eye of the Divine can witness the Divine, those who reach this level of knowledge speak of the inherent manifestation of the Divine. It is in this state that Al-Hallaj says, "O God, from every direction I observe, I see Your manifestation, yet You are not confined to any direction. There is not a moment when You are hidden from me. This manifestation is so profound that my body is dissolved in the radiance of Your essence, and my human nature is absorbed into Your divine nature" (Ebrahimi Dinani, 2000: 209).

### **Tawhid and Its Levels**

Seyyed Haydar Amuli, in his explanation of Tawhid, describes it as "the negation of the existence of anything other than God and the affirmation of the existence of the Truth, both in Sharia and the spiritual path," or "the unification of two entities into one," or "merging two existences into a single existence." The purpose of Tawhid is to affirm the oneness of God and to reject the notion of multiple deities, as expressed in the phrase "La Ilaha Illa Allah." The exoteric interpretation holds that "He made the deities one God," which represents the Tawhid of the adherents of Sharia, known as divine Tawhid. The esoteric interpretation, which pertains to the path of the saints, involves negating multiple existences and affirming a single existence, encapsulated in the phrase "There is nothing in existence except God." This represents the Tawhid of the followers of the spiritual path, known as existential Tawhid (Amuli, 1998: 81).

In the first sermon, Imam Ali states: "The foundation of religion is the knowledge of God, and the pinnacle of this knowledge is the affirmation of His essence. The ultimate affirmation of His essence is to acknowledge His oneness, and the highest form of acknowledging His oneness is sincerity. True sincerity involves purifying Him from the attributes of contingent beings, as every attribute indicates that it is distinct from the one it describes, and every described entity indicates that it is separate from the attribute. Whoever ascribes the attributes of contingent beings to God has associated Him with something else; whoever associates Him with something else has implied duality; and whoever implies duality has divided His essence. Dividing His essence means not knowing Him.

Those who do not know Him point towards Him, and those who point towards Him have imposed limits on Him. Imposing limits means enumerating Him, and asking 'Where is God?' confines Him within a location while asking 'Upon what is He established?' implies He is absent from someplace. He has always existed, without being brought into existence by anything. He is an existence without a precedent of non-existence. He is present with everything, but not in a physical sense, and He is distinct from everything, but not separate from it." (Makarem Shirazi, 2008: 22)

Haydar Amuli posits that the definitions provided serve more for elucidation and notification

rather than for empirical proof and detailed investigation. After referencing definitions from both earlier and contemporary scholars, he concludes that there is minimal difference among them, as they all aim to affirm the existence of the Truth and negate the existence of anything else, both mentally and externally. To elucidate the true meaning of Tawhid or the essence of Tawhid, he offers an analogy, explaining that the relationship between existence and its manifestations, which appear as phenomena, is akin to the relationship between a pen and the letters it writes. Just as the number of letters does not affect the unity and subtlety of the pen, the multiplicity of beings, as manifestations of existence, does not undermine the true unity of existence.

Thus, the unity of existence is defined as disregarding all forms, beings, and their multiplicities, and perceiving existence as it truly is. The existence of beings is a conceptual matter and lacks true reality outside the mind. What genuinely exists externally is nothing but existence itself. Consequently, the realized mystic understands that, in reality, nothing exists externally except ink and the existence of letters is entirely dependent on the pen; without it, they cease to exist. Similarly, in the realm of existence, the mystic observes that, in truth, nothing exists except "existence," recognizing that the existence of all beings is derived from Him. Such a mystic "unifies two things into one, both in knowledge and in reality, both factually and metaphorically," and "this is the intended outcome of the discussion on Tawhid in this context" (Amuli, 1989: 70-76).

According to all scholars of Sharia, Tawhid is limited to one type: divine Tawhid, which entails the denial of multiple deities and the affirmation of the one God. Scholars of the spiritual path (Tariqah) also interpret divine Tawhid in this way. This understanding is consistent with the teachings of prophets and saints. On the other hand, existential Tawhid, which involves the denial of multiple existences and the affirmation of a single existence, is unique to the scholars of the spiritual path.

In his book "*Anwār al-Ḥaqīqah wa Atwār at-Tarīqah wa Asrār ash-Sharī'ah*," Haydar Amuli describes the Tawhid of the people of Sharia, whether imitative or investigative, as active Tawhid. This is because they demonstrate the existence of the Creator through the acts of creation (Amuli, 1998: 70-81).

Thus, all actions and actors lose their independence, leaving only the true action and the true actor. Haydar Amuli views the Tawhid of the people of the spiritual path as attributive Tawhid because, from the mystic's perspective, every attribute and its subject vanish, leaving only God's attributes, who is the true possessor of all perfect attributes. He considers the Tawhid of the people of truth to be essential Tawhid, which encompasses the previous stages. This means that all essences and existences are set aside, and only their true originator, God, remains the focus.

He then references the well-known prayer of the Prophet Muhammad: "O Allah, I seek refuge in Your pardon from Your punishment, and I seek refuge in Your pleasure from Your wrath, and I seek refuge in You from You." The first part of this prayer pertains to active Tawhid, the second to attributive Tawhid, and the third to essential Tawhid. Mystics label the first type of monotheist as "the one with intellect," the second as "the one with vision," and the third as "the one with both intellect and vision," because the third type encompasses and surpasses the other two, ensuring that observing one aspect does not obscure the other. Otherwise, they fall outside

the realm of Tawhid.

Anyone who perceives existence and essence as free from all limitations and independent of all considerations, and who views everything else as absolute nonexistence, proclaiming "There is nothing in existence but Him," possesses only half of the knowledge and witnessing. This is because, by focusing on existence and essence, they become veiled from the names, attributes, and both detailed and general perfections manifested in their forms, resulting in partial, rather than complete, witnessing. Since the Exalted God, by His very essence, has always been and will always be described by all perfections and has eternal and everlasting manifestations in the forms of all beings, a person in such a state remains veiled from the perfections and particularities of that essence due to their partial witnessing.

Similarly, if an individual perceives the singular existence as fragmented into multiple forms and defined by specific attributes, and declares, "This is a manifestation of grace, this is a manifestation of wrath, this is a manifestation of majesty, and this is a manifestation of beauty," implying that they do not recognize Him apart from these manifestations, and they see no distinction between multiplicity and unity, the apparent and the manifested, separation and union, and believe that "He is everything and there is nothing in existence but Him," they too have only half of the knowledge, and their witnessing is incomplete. This is because, although the Exalted Truth, in His very essence, is free from external and mental multiplicities and determinations, all multiplicities and determinations are His attributes and names that exist at a secondary level of determination and ultimately refer back to His essence.

However, if one simultaneously perceives both the levels of unity and multiplicity, separation and union, the absolute and the contingent, and the general and the detailed—meaning they see the absolute within the contingent and the contingent within the absolute, the general within the detailed and the detailed within the general—such a person is not veiled from either. Such an individual is undoubtedly a complete and perfect mystic who realizes that "there is nothing in existence except God, His names, His attributes, and His actions." They truly understand that "everything is Him, by Him, from Him, and to Him," and with the language of their state, they proclaim, "He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden, and He has knowledge of all things." They certainly grasp the meaning of the verse, "Allah is the Light of the heavens and earth. The likeness of His light is that of a niche in which is a lamp; the lamp is in a glass; the glass is like a shining star – it is lit by [the oil of] a blessed olive tree, which is neither of the east nor the west." (An-Nur, 35). This station is where the realized mystic possesses both the Furqan and the Quran. The Furqan represents the detailed knowledge specific to Moses and Jesus, while the Quran represents the comprehensive knowledge that includes the detailed, specific to Muhammad (PBUH) (Amuli, 1989: 114-117).

## Conclusion

In the context of narrations and prayers, insight is likened to the eye of the heart. Just as a person sees external objects with their physical eyes, insight enables them to perceive the inner reality and essence of things and matters.

To achieve insight, one must gain knowledge of God. According to Imam Ali's teachings on

recognizing God, there is a specific type of knowledge that is not acquired through study, discussion, philosophical thought, or science and experience. Instead, it is obtained through adherence to Sharia, spiritual journeying, drawing closer to God, and focusing on the divine realm.

Generally, God can be known in two ways: direct and acquired. In acquired knowledge, the external existence of the known is not directly witnessed by the knower; rather, the person becomes aware of it through something that represents the known, referred to as a mental image or concept. In this case, there is an intermediary between the knower and the essence of the known. However, in direct knowledge, the knowledge pertains to the essence of the known without any intermediary, and the real and actual existence of the known is revealed to the knower. Innate direct knowledge of God means that the human heart has a deep connection with its Creator, and when a person delves deeply into their heart, they will discover such a relationship.

*Intuitive knowledge possesses distinct characteristics:*

1. To acquire this type of knowledge, one must adhere to specific methods, attain "inner insight," and utilize this insight to access the knowledge.

2. This process entails spiritual discipline and divine attraction. This attraction and discipline must persist until they bring an individual to a state of "annihilation," where one's individuality, identity, and ego are dismantled and dissolved into the essence of existence. Such a condition of non-individuation, absoluteness, and universality enables one, through inner insight, to uncover and witness the truth of existence.

3. The aim of this knowledge is not to comprehend the truth but to become united with it and be annihilated within it.

4. This form of knowledge is inherently a personal experience and, therefore, cannot be articulated. As it cannot be expressed, it is also not teachable, explainable, or transferable to others.

5. The fullest expression of this knowledge can be observed in the understanding and wisdom of Imams and Prophets, which is a divine endowment granted by God according to the capacity and capability of certain individuals.

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