

**The Spiritual Teachings of Imām J'afar al-Şādiq:
Doctrine, Method, and Practice**

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In Islam, after the Prophet Muḥammad, the Shiite Imams are the most virtuous, wise, and sanctified of Muslims. One key to understanding this is that in Sufism (the mystical and inner dimension of Islam), every Sufi order traces its spiritual lineage back through Imām Ṣādiq, through Imām ‘Alī, to the Prophet Muḥammad (and from the Prophet to the Archangel Gabriel and ultimately to God).¹ This study will deal with the sixth Shiite Imām – J‘afar al-Ṣādiq and will focus on his spiritual teachings: that is, 1) his metaphysical elucidations, 2) his discussions concerning mystical method and 3) his expressions about the virtues. The three-fold orientation of this study aims at addressing the Imām’s teachings that correspond to the three dimensions of the human being: 1) the intellect, by which metaphysics and doctrine are understood, 2) the will, at which the mystical method and its practice are aimed, and 3) the soul, with which the virtues and the spiritual stations are concerned (specifically, the transmutation and ascension of the soul through the doctrine and practice).² We will leave out the important subject of Imām Ṣādiq’s role in the establishment and teaching of the hermetic sciences, such as alchemy, which is certainly part of his spiritual teachings. But this is a

¹ Only one branch of the Naqshbandi order connects to Abu Bakr through Qasim ibn Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr. See, Hujwiri, *Kashf al-mahjub*, pp. 84–85 as quoted in Mohammad H. Faghfoory, "Shi'a 'Irfan," in Farhad Daftary, Shainool Jiwa & Aryn B. Sajoo (eds.) *The Shi'a World: Pathways in Muslim Tradition and Modernity*, London: Institute of Isma'ili Studies & I.B. Tauris, Muslim Heritage Series, forthcoming.

² The doctrine (or theory) is put into practice through the method, resulting in spiritual transformation and the attainment of virtues.

research endeavor unto itself, and with our specific schema in this study, we are unable to include research on the occult sciences. It is also beyond the scope of this study to deal with the complete cosmology (the hierarchic levels and structure of the created order, of time and becoming) and eschatology (the return of the created order unto God; the end of the universe) in Imām Ṣādiq’s teachings. In this paper we will let the sources “speak for themselves” as much as possible because it would be hubris to think that a total interpretation and clarification of Imām Ṣādiq’s teachings could be achieved by a scholar in a study of this limited scope. However, we will offer some commentary, synthesis, and analysis when it is appropriate or possible. The objectives of this thesis are to clearly and substantially deal with the essential components of Imām Ṣādiq’s spiritual perspective. It is an attempt to elucidate his doctrine, method, and spiritual ethics, thereby presenting these teachings and techniques as a complete esoterism representing this dimension of Shiite Islam.

Basic Details of His Life

Imām J’afar al-Ṣādiq was born in 702 AD (83 AH) in the city of Medina in Arabia. His father was the fifth Shiite Imam – Muhammad al-Bāqir, who had the opportunity, despite his family being oppressed by the Umayyad rulers of the Islamic world, to teach traditional sciences to his many students and guide them spiritually. His son J’afar was given a similar

opportunity (Shiites believe by Divine Providence) to teach and guide many in his lifetime.³ Imām Ṣādiq was a polymath and excelled in many disciplines including: jurisprudence, theology, metaphysics, natural philosophy, medicine, alchemy, agriculture, exegesis, hermeneutics, astronomy, mysticism and the science of numbers and letters. Among Imām Ṣādiq's many students and disciples, some of the most well know are: Jābir ibn Hayyān, Mufaḍḍal ibn 'Umar, Abū Ḥanīfah, Hishām ibn Hakam, Mālik ibn Anas, and his sons– Ismā'īl al-Mubāarak and Mūsā al-Kāzim. Imām Ṣādiq was harassed and oppressed towards the end of his life (by the first two 'Abbāsīd Caliphs and their regimes), was eventually poisoned (by the order of the 'Abbāsīd caliph Maṣṣūr who ruled from 754–775 AD) and died in Medina in the year 765 AD (148 AH).⁴

A Note on *Walāyah* and *Ta'wīl*

Two themes that should be briefly discussed before we begin to look at Imām Ṣādiq's esoteric teachings are: 1) *Walāyah*– initiatic power, sanctity, spiritual guidance and guardianship, and 2) *Ta'wīl*– spiritual hermeneutics, specifically the esoteric understanding of the Qur'ān, bringing something (a verse, word, or reality) back to its Source.

³ It was also a policy of Imām al-Bāqir and Imām al-Ṣādiq (and the other Twelver Shiite Imams until the Mahdī's soteriological return), following Imām al-Ḥusayn's death (680AD) to not uprising (revolt). This policy both ensured their safety, but also guaranteed the continuity of Islamic scholarship and spiritual transmission.

⁴ See: Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Shi'ite Islam* (Albany: State of New York University Press, 1975), 179–181.

In Shiite Islam, the Imāms are considered as ideal leaders because of their *walāyah* and their ability to perform *ta'wīl*. Prophethood and spiritual guardianship are considered to be spiritually complementary in Islamic theosophical and mystical thought. This is because prophethood has an exoteric function in revealing the divine Truth as a law for all people to follow in their daily lives, whereas *wilāyah* or spiritual guardianship involves an esoteric mission of unveiling the Truth to the spiritual and intellectual elite (those who have the discernment to intellect and the will to practice this esoteric dimension of the Truth) by taking the revelation back to its Source (the process called *ta'wīl*). Prophets, though, are spiritual guardians as well, and possess this initiatic power and esoteric guiding capacity in addition to their role as bringer of the law for the masses. The saints (*awliyā'*), or those with the power of *wilāyah*, can never have the prophetic function though.⁵ Part of the special position of the Imām is also to have the ability to understand the different layers of the Qur'ān's meaning and to be able to bring a particular word or verse (or phenomena) back to its Source (*ta'wīl*). In other words, the Imām is the most qualified person to interpret the sacred scripture and elucidate its esoteric as well as exoteric meanings in the absence of the Prophet. This is because the Prophet Muḥammad had brought up and trained 'Alī

⁵ Mohammad 'Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 29.

(the first Imām) and taught him all of his knowledge, transmitting all of his wisdom to him (in addition to the all the gnostic realizations which were given by God). Imām ‘Alī then passed this knowledge and wisdom, as well as his own gnostic realizations to his two sons Ḥasan and Ḥusayn (whom were born from Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’, the Prophet’s beloved daughter).⁶ Then, as Shiites believe, through God’s designation (*naṣṣ*)⁷, Imām Ḥusayn passed this to his son Zayn al-‘Abidīn (Imām Sajjād), and Imām Sajjād designated and transmitted this to his son Imām Bāqir, and Imām Bāqir designated and transmitted this to his son Imām Ṣādiq, and from Imām Ṣādiq this continued in succession.⁸ Always having a living Imām (either manifest or hidden) is vital for the continual preservation and emanation of this grace, knowledge and guidance to those qualified to receive it.

Consider the status of the Imāms after reflecting upon what Imām Ṣādiq said concerning the Qur’ānic verse: *No one will have the power to*

⁶ Fāṭimah is considered as “the confluence of two lights” (*majma’ al-nūrayn*) because as the daughter of the Prophet and the mother of the Imāms, she is the being in whom the light of prophecy and the light of sanctity (*wilāyah*) meet. See: Farhana Mayer, trans, *Spiritual Gems: The Mystical Qur’ān Commentary Ascribed to Ja’far al-Ṣādiq as Contained in Sulamī’s Ḥaqā’iq al-Tafsīr from the Text of Paul Nwyia*. (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae 2011), Introduction: xxxi– xxxvi.

⁷ Shiites believe that all Imāms are chosen by their spiritual predecessor based upon Divine designation (*naṣṣ*), beginning with the Prophet Muḥammad and Imām ‘Alī, then continuing through the line of Imāms.

⁸ Note that there are two main branches of Shiite Islam: the Ithna ‘Asharis or “Twelvers” and the Ismā‘īlīs. They differ in spiritual lineage after Imām Ṣādiq’s Imamate and trace their *walāyah* back to him through a different line of Imāms. Most of the Ismā‘īlīs have a present living Imām (one Ismā‘īlī branch has an occulted Imām), rather than a living but occulted Imām as the Twelvers believe their Twelfth Imām al-Mahdī to be. Nonetheless, they all emphasize the principles of *walāyah* and *ta’wīl*.

*intercede [with Allah], except for him who has taken a covenant with the All-Beneficent*⁹: “[This means] except for him who has been allowed intercession through his acceptance of the guardianship of the Commander of the Faithful, ‘Alī and the Imāms after him, as this is the covenant with Allah”.¹⁰ This sums up the background for what one should know before reading and studying the teachings and expositions contained below.

Chapter 2: Doctrine, Theory, and Principles

*Abu ‘Abd Allah [Imām al-Ṣādiq] took out a small box and took out from it a piece of paper which had the following written on it: Praise be to the One! There is no god but He. He is the Eternal, and the Originator without beginning. He is the Eternal, who does not tire. He is the Living, who does not die. He is the Creator of the seen and of the unseen. He is the Knower of Everything without being taught. Such is Allah who has no associate.*¹¹

First, let us begin with Imām Ṣādiq’s commentaries on several verses of the Qur’ān that specifically deal with metaphysical principles. Out of these examples, let’s begin with what he says about chapter 112 of the Qur’ān (*Sūrah al-Ikhlāṣ* or *al-Tawḥīd*). This short chapter is of utmost

⁹ Qur’ān 19:87.

¹⁰ Nazmina Virjee, trans, et al. *The Scale of Wisdom: A Compendium of Shī’a Ḥadīth* (London: Islamic College for Advanced Study Press, 2009), 576.

¹¹ Ibn Babuwayh al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, trans. Sayyid Ali Raza Rizvi (Qum: The Savior Foundation – Jamkaran Publication, 2009), 99.

importance because it summarizes the doctrine of *tawḥīd*. It is also important because it is often recited in the daily ritual prayers of Muslims throughout the world. This short *sūrah* distills, in a few short lines, a complete metaphysical exposition of amazing depth when contemplated. Let us look at what is attributed to him in this commentary.

Sūrah al-Ikhlāṣ/Tawḥīd

112:2 – *Allahu’l Ṣamad (God, the Everlasting, Self-Sufficient, Besought Lord)*

Ja’far said: *al-Ṣamad* [contains] five letters: The *alif* indicates His indivisible oneness (*aḥadīyah*). The *lam* indicates His divinity (*ulūhīyah*). These two letters are assimilated, they do not manifest upon the tongue (in uttered word) but do manifest in writing. This shows that His indivisible unity and His divinity are hidden, not known through the senses; and that He cannot be compared to people. The concealment (of these two letters) in the spoken word is an indication that the intelligence cannot perceive Him nor yet comprehend Him through knowledge. While the manifestation (of these two letters) in writing is an indication that He manifests in the hearts of the sages and that He appears to the eyes of the lover in the Abode of Peace. The *ṣād* is an indication that He is truthful in what He promises: His act is sincerity (*ṣidq*), His speech is sincerity (*ṣidq*), and He summons His slaves to sincerity (*ṣidq*). The *mīm* is an indication of His sovereignty (*mulk*) for He is the Sovereign King (Malik) in reality. The *dāl* is the mark of His permanence (*dawām*) in His eternal future and His eternal past – although there is neither past–eternity nor future–eternity for they are but terms which are used among His slaves according to the [perspective of] temporal variation

112:3 – *lam yalid wa lam yūlad (He did not beget nor was He begotten)*

“Ja’far said: Majestic is our Lord (beyond) that delusive imaginations, intelligences, or sciences should perceive Him. Rather He is as He described Himself – and the modality of His description is

not intellectually perceivable. Glory to Him (beyond) that understandings or intelligences should attain to His modality! *Everything is perishing save for His Face/Essence* (28:88). To Him belongs eternal subsistence, beginningless and endless eternity, eternal future, onliness, will and power;

Blessed and Most High is He!

112:1 – *qul: huwa'llahu aḥad* (Say: He, God, is One)

[It is related] from Ja'far b. Muḥammad concerning His above words: This means: He has manifested what the souls desire in the written form of the letters. For the deepest realities are well-guarded from being attained by delusive imagination or understanding. The manifestation of that in letters is so that he be rightly guided who *gives ear* (5:37); it is an allusion to the Unseen. The letter *hā'* (of the word *huwa*) tells of the immutable reality [of God] while the (letter) *waw* is an allusion to that which is hidden from the senses.¹²

This *sūrah* features a heavy emphasis on God's transcendence and incomparability. A number of times the Imām mentions God as being beyond the senses, and also beyond the imaginal faculty, and yet still beyond the intellect. What he is saying is that God cannot be sensed, imagined or thought about in His Essence. Only through intuition and illumination manifested in the heart of a sage as the Imām says, can God be "known" (and this is a knowledge which transcends the common rational and empirical epistemological modes). Certainly he is referring to God's Essence, because the name *Huwa* (He) is considered as the highest pronoun used to talk of God, as it transcends the "I-Thou" relationship.

¹² Mayer, *Spiritual Gems*, 192-195.

Also from another perspective, the name *al-Ṣamad* is one of the names of God's Essence, beyond duality, as it means needlessness and implies eternal self-sufficiency. With the words *al-Ṣamad* and *Huwa*, two of the most important words in this short *sūrah*, the Imām uses the science of letters to interpret an inner meaning of these words. His interpretation is meant for contemplation and subsequently an existential realization rather than just a quick conceptual understanding. This existential realization is alluded to in a narration by the Imām concerning *ikhhlāṣ* (sincerity) the name of the above *sūrah*, but in regard to the first testimony of faith, which is closely related in meaning to *Sūrah al-Ikhlāṣ* (or *Tawḥīd*), as they both express pure *tawḥīd* (Divine Unity or Oneness). Imām Ṣādiq said: "Whoever *sincerely* says: 'there is no god but Allah', will enter Heaven. If the person is *sincere*, the profession 'there is no god but Allah will refrain him from whatever Allah, the Mighty and High has forbidden".¹³ So we see that knowledge and being are united at this level of existential realization; knowledge of the Truth and actualization of the Truth in one's very mode of being – this is sincerity (*ikhhlās*).¹⁴

The next verse from the Qur'ān to meditate upon is a cherished verse for mystics and metaphysicians because of the astounding way the revelation

¹³ Al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 70.

¹⁴ More will be said about this in Part 3 of this study concerning "Virtue".

expresses Divine Unity (*tawḥīd*). Through this verse, contemplative believers may come to realize this principle (*tawḥīd*):

Sūrah al-Ḥadīd

57:3 – *huwa’l-Awwalu wa’l-Akhīru wa’l-Zāhiru wa’l Bāṭin (He is the First and the Last and the Manifest and the Hidden)*

Ja’far said: He is the one who makes first the first and makes last the last, who manifests the manifest and conceals the hidden. Then these concepts fall away and there remains [only] He.

Ja’far [also] said: The Hidden – He is hidden in every place. [No place is] ever without Him, for His being was when no place was. Through His kindness, He veiled the essential nature of ‘He was’ while, through His power He made visible the fixedness of ‘He was’. Thus He made clear to us ‘He was’ but He veiled from us the essential nature of ‘He was’; but He disclosed to us the manifestation of the perfection of ‘He was’ – through the realization of which faith is perfected.¹⁵

This verse deals with the “frame of reference” of existence. Nothing with being (besides God) is beyond these four points of reference. The First and the Last imply temporality, but also signify the Divine Reality which is beyond time, that Reality which is the Source of the beginning and the Finality of the end of things. The Imām mentions how ultimately these categories dissolve and only “He” remains – the Beyond-Being, the Absolute Perfection of God’s Essence. The other two categories, the Manifest and the Hidden, or the Outer and the Inner, imply the formal dimensions of reality, because the Manifest is the sensible reality and the

¹⁵ Mayer, *Spiritual Gems*, 162.

Hidden is the imaginal reality, both of which have forms (although the imaginal forms lack corporeality). But again these categories (Manifest and Hidden) point to the Formless, just as the first two categories (First and Last) point to the Timeless. Yet still from another perspective, this verse could be interpreted as a Qur'ānic reference to the metaphysical doctrine of later Sufi masters and theologians called the Unity of Being (*waḥdah al-wujūd*). In this doctrine, God's immanence is expressed, while His transcendence is the necessary basis and is implicit. If all things exist between the First and the Last and are Manifest and/or Hidden, then that means that God is within (underlying) everything while at the same time transcending everything. This is an elaborate and complicated issue that we cannot go into here. God is (in) all things, but all things are not God.

Finally it is worth considering one more metaphysical verse from the Qur'ān, and that is the famous "Light Verse". This verse has been commented upon and interpreted over the centuries by great scholars and mystics.¹⁶

Sūrah al-Nūr

24:35 – *Allahu nūru'l-samāwāti wa'l-arḍ (God is the light of the heavens and the earth)*

Ja'far b. Muḥammad said: The lights are varied: the first of them is the light of the protection of the heart; then there is the light of fear; then the light of hope; then the light of recollection; then

¹⁶ Two famous examples are: al-Ghazzālī's "*Mishkat al-Anwār*" and Ṣadr al-dīn Shīrāzī's "*Tafsīr al-Ayah al-Nūr*".

there perception through the light of knowledge; then the light of shame; then there is the light of the sweetness of faith; then the light of surrender; then the light of goodness; then there is the light of blessing; then the light of grace; then the light of favours; then the light of generosity; then the light of compassion; then the light of the heart; then there is the light of encompassment; then the light of awe; then the light of bewilderment; then the light of life; then the light of intimacy; then the light of integrity; then there is the light of quiescence; then there is the light of tranquility. Then there is the light of sublimity; then the light of majesty; then the light of power; then the light of strength; then there is the light of Godhood; then the light of the (divine) onliness; then there is the light of the (divine) singularity; then is the light of (God's) eternal future; then the light of beginningless and endless eternity; then there is the light of permanence; then the light of (God's) eternal past; then the light of eternal subsistence; then there is the light of totality; then there is the light of the Ipseity.

Each one of these lights has its people; it has its state and its locus. All (the lights) are from the lights of the Truth, which God, most high, has mentioned in His words: *God is the light of the heavens and the earth*. Each one of His slaves has a drinking place at one of these lights; and it might be that (a slave) has an apportioned lot from two lights or three. These lights are never perfected except for *al-muṣṭafā*, the Chosen One – for he stands with God most high through the condition of having perfected slavehood and love. For He is Light, and he from his Lord is in possession of light.¹⁷

This commentary goes into great detail in describing the hierarchy of lights, which are at once: levels of knowledge, grades of being, and most explicitly expressed here, as stations of the human soul in its ascent to the Supreme Principle, the Light of Lights, the Divine Essence. Again, this interpretation should be contemplated in depth and can only be fully realized as one traverses the levels of being and light mentioned here with one's own consciousness or soul.

¹⁷ Mayer, *Spiritual Gems*, 97–98.

The Divine Essence, Names, and Attributes¹⁸

So with these Qur'ānic verses above we have seen God being understood through His Divine Names and Qualities (there are traditionally 99 Names) with which He addresses Himself in the Qur'ān. For example we have seen: *al-Aḥad* (the [Transcendent] One, the Unique One), *al-Ṣamad* (the Eternal and Self-Sufficient), *al-Nūr* (the Light), *al-Awwal* (the First), *al-Akhir* (the Last), *al-Zāhir* (the Manifest), and *al-Bāṭin* (the Hidden). This is the best way to contemplate and come to gain insight into the Divine Reality. Imām Ṣādiq said: “The correct view about Divine Unity is to be found in the attributes that Allah, the Mighty and High, revealed in the Qur'ān. Reject anthropomorphism, and do not apply to Allah what is vain. Allah is Firmly Present. Allah is high above the descriptions of the describers. Do not exceed the Qur'ān, as you will be misled after the clear explanation has reached you”.¹⁹ It is important to note here that although some of God's Attributes are qualities that humans also possess, such as hearing, seeing, will and knowing, this is not an anthropomorphic view of God (as God does not have materiality and thus has no sensory organs or even substance).²⁰ Rather it is human beings, created in the form or

¹⁸ A formula used to understand these categories is this: The Essence + an Attribute = A Name. An example is: Dhāt Allāh (God's Essence) + Ḥikmah (Wisdom) = the Name al-Ḥakīm (the All-Wise).

¹⁹ Al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 191-192.

²⁰ Imām Ṣādiq said to an atheist whom asked “What is He?”: “He is a Thing unlike other things. If you consider the meaning of the word ‘thing’, He is indeed a Thing by definition [al-shay'iyah], with the exception that He has neither substance nor shape”. See: Al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 195-196.

image of God who are theomorphic beings and thus all attributes that we seem to share with God are not human projections upon the Divine, but rather are God inscribing upon and manifesting His Names to the human being. God says in the Qur'ān that the human creation is honored by being created in the best form, being His vicegerent on earth, and having been bequeathed with the pre-eternal knowledge of the Names (inner realities and essential meanings) of all things.²¹ It is hard to do justice in explaining this, especially because Imām Ṣādiq has addressed this issue in a clear manner when discussing Divine Unity:

He, the Mighty and High, is undoubtedly Existent [Being]. He is not vain or numerable, nor can He be described on the basis of the attributes of creation. He, the Mighty and High, possesses Qualities [*nu'ūt*] and Attributes [*ṣifāt*]. There are Attributes which apply to Him which can also be applied to the created such as hearing [*samī'*], seeing [*baṣīr*], affectionate [*ra'ūf*], merciful [*raḥīm*], and their likes. Whereas the Qualities are Qualities of Essence; they do not befit anyone but Allah, the Blessed and Exalted. Allah is Light as there is no darkness in Him. He is Ever-Living as there is no death for Him. He is All-Knowing as there is no ignorance in Him. He is Needless [*Ṣamad*] as there is no need in Him. Our Lord is Light by Essence, Ever-Living by Essence, All-Knowing by Essence and Needless by Essence.²²

This narration touches upon a very important issue, which is the difference between the Divine Essence (Qualities) and the Divine Attributes (Attributes). We have already considered this briefly after we looked at the interpretation of *Sūrah al-Ikhlāṣ*. The Names of God's

²¹ See: Qur'ān 2:30-31 and 95:4.

²² Al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 268.

Essence (called “the Qualities” by the Imām) stand alone without any consideration for creation or any implication of relationality between the Creator and the created. Nor can humans and creatures share (participate) in the Qualities in the same way they can the Attributes. The Names of the Attributes are those Divine Names which imply creation, emanation and/or manifestation and thus relation. In reality there is unity or integration with the Divine Attributes and Actions and the Divine Essence, but conceptually they are not identical. To resolve this seeming paradox or dilemma, the Imām offers us this teaching:

Even in His Essence, and before anything existed, Allah, our Lord, the High and the Mighty, possessed all knowledge. Even in His Essence, and before a sound could be heard, He was All-Hearing. Even in His Essence, when there was nothing to be seen, He was All-Seeing. Even in His Essence, when there was no physical existence, He was Omnipotent. Although they existed prior to creation, it was only upon creation that these attributes manifested themselves: His Hearing upon the heard, His Seeing upon the seen, and His Omnipotence over the physical world”. Abū Baṣīr then asked the Imām: ‘Then, Allah was not a Speaker?’ He replied: ‘Verily, speech is an accidental [*muḥdathah*] attribute and not sempiternal [*azaliyyah*]. Allah, the Mighty and High, existed when no speakers existed’.²³

Divine Unity and Divine Justice

Lets now consider two of the five principles of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*) in Shī‘ah Islam: *tawḥīd* (Divine Unity) and *‘adl* (Divine Justice). Imām Ṣādiq was asked about the easiest and most efficient way to understand and

²³ Ibid., 265–266. The last line in this quote should not be confusing, if one notices a Name like “al-Kalīm” (“the Speaker”) is not among the canonical Names of God.

live according to these two principles and in a way that would be easy to retain in memory. He told this inquirer that *tawhīd* was to not describe his Lord in the manner which the inquirer would describe himself and that *‘adl* was to not blame God for that which he was blameworthy (the inquirer’s own shortcomings).²⁴ This means to not take oneself as the source or cause of anything which is True, Beautiful or Good independent of God as the Necessary Being; and to accept all deficiency, incapacity and evil as a contingent being with no real independent existence. We are merely a channel or instrument for God to express Truth, Beauty and Goodness. We only exist through God’s Being. Any ontological independence that is perceived or asserted is an illusion and the source of all our limitations and sufferings. But according to Islam, ultimately Truth conquers falsehood and illusion, as both the Qur’ān and Imām Ṣādiq have confirmed this reality.²⁵

There is a brilliant and clear argument the Imām gives to a skeptic, where he argues and defends Divine Unity as well as theism in a way that cannot be refuted. It is worth quoting at length:

If you say that there are two gods, then they are either in complete agreement on everything or completely separate in all aspects. But when we look at this orderly creation, the continuous orbits, the alternation of night and day, and the sun and the moon, the soundness of the situation

²⁴ Virjee, *The Scale of Wisdom*, 713.

²⁵ See Qur’ān – 17:81 and Nazmina Virjee, *The Scale of Wisdom*, 298.

and the organization and sound management of it indicates that the Director [of all creation] is One. Then if you still claim that there are two gods, then there must necessarily be some kind of difference between them for them to be two [and therefore distinct from each other], and this distinguishing characteristic between them is itself eternal like them, so you are forced to accept three such beings. And if you hold that there are indeed three, then you have to admit the same thing that we said for two such that they [the three] necessarily have two distinguishing characteristics between them [to differentiate them from each other] so then there are five [such eternal beings] altogether, and thus does the multiplication continue until infinity.²⁶

In another famous narration, a disciple asks the Imām to enlighten him about God – asking if the believers will see Him on the Day of Judgment. The Imām replies that they will indeed, but also says that they have seen him before the eschatological events unfold. When questioned about when this happened, he then related the event of the “Covenant of Alast” mentioned (by God) in the Qur’ān²⁷ where God asks humanity in pre-eternity; Am I not your Lord? And they testify that indeed He is.²⁸ Then after some time of silence, the Imām says that the believers see God even in this world before the Day of Judgment, and questions his disciple if he sees God at that moment. His disciple is astonished and asks for approval to transmit the discussion to others, whereby the Imām refuses, saying that ignorant ones and skeptics will misunderstand the meaning. He finishes the discussion by telling his disciple that the vision of the heart

²⁶ Virjee, *The Scale of Wisdom*, 714.

²⁷ See Qur’ān – 7:172.

²⁸ The full verse for 7:172 in *Sūrah al-Ā’rāf* is: *When thy Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam— from their loins— their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves, (saying): "Am I not your Lord (who cherishes and sustains you)?"— They said: "Yea! we do testify!" (This), lest ye should say on the Day of Judgment: "of this we were never mindful."*

is different than the vision of the eyes.²⁹ This narration tells us that there are three situations in which we see God in a mystical mode: 1) in pre-eternity when we made a covenant with Him, 2) during this life if one's heart is purified and illuminated, and 3) on the Day of Resurrection. The vision of the heart is an important statement of epistemology that goes back to our discussion about the senses, the imaginal faculty and the intellect failing to attain knowledge of God. The intellect mentioned earlier means the conceptual or partial intellect (reason) and not the true intuitive intellect, which is another way of talking about the vision of the heart. This is related to *tawḥīd* because for the enlightened and sanctified person, God as the Real (*al-Ḥaqq*) is realized before creation, in this world, and in the Hereafter. There is no reality in time or beyond time in which God's Presence is not The Reality; He is Omnipresent.

Omnipotence, Omniscience, and Omnipresence

It is crucial to contemplate this forthcoming narration because it clearly tells of the intimate connection between Omnipotence, Omniscience and Omnipresence. In fact, ultimately they are not really separate Attributes. Omnipresence in this saying is mentioned not by this exact word, but

²⁹ Al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 217–218. See also: Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Kernel of the Kernel: Concerning the Wayfaring and Spiritual Journey of the People of Intellect – A Shī'ī Approach to Sufism*, trans. Mohammad H. Faghfoory (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 140.

rather by mentioning God’s “supervision”, that nothing is distant from Him, and that He “encompasses” everything:

He is One, Unique, and Evident to His Creation. He encompasses everything by supervision, omniscience, and omnipotence. Nothing in the heavens and the earth is distant from Him, be it the size of an atom, or smaller or larger than that He does not encompass through His Knowledge. He encompasses everything by means of His Knowledge, but not by means of His Essence, because space is comprised of four dimensions. If He embraced everything by means of His Essence, there would imperatively be a boundary for Him.³⁰

In relating this last narration to two other sayings in order to clarify a point about the Absolute Essence, let's consider how the Imām describes³¹ God as: “...Light without darkness, Truth without falsehood, Justice without oppression, and Reality without non-reality”³², also Knowledge without ignorance as well as Life without death.³³ It would do us well to look at the Divine Names and contemplate them in their Absoluteness. There is *al-Nūr* (Light), *al-Ḥaqq* (Truth and Reality), *al-‘Adl* (Justice), *al-‘Alīm* (Knower) and *al-Ḥayy* (Ever-Living). Now these are Qualities of the Divine Essence and although God is Omnipresent through His Qualities, these Qualities in their Absoluteness are Beyond Being; however, it is in Existence that Omnipresence is fully realized (once space is created).

³⁰ Al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 249.

³¹ Note that even though the Imām says that God cannot be described in an earlier narration, he is likely speaking to people who are not at the level of sanctity which the Qur’ān refers to when speaking of the “sincere ones”. Consider verses 37:159-160: *Glory to Allah! (He is free) from the things they ascribe (to Him)! -- Not (so do) the servants of Allah, sincere and devoted.*

³² Al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 244.

³³ *Ibid.*, 261.

Now Omniscience is Essential to God as the Imām says: “Knowledge is His very Essence and not the object of knowing [or a known], and when He created things and the object of knowledge came into existence, knowledge was projected from Him onto the known things”.³⁴ God’s Knowledge has been a confusing issue that many people have struggled to understand throughout the ages. Take for example, this question asked of the Imām, which could have just as well been uttered by a secular skeptic of our own day:

‘Did He have knowledge of locations before He created location? Or did He come to know of it when He was creating it or after He had created it?’ So he [Imām Ṣādiq] replied: ‘Exalted is Allah! Verily, He knew about space before He created space in the same fashion that He knew about it after He brought it into being. His Knowledge of space is the same as His Knowledge of all things’.³⁵

This may make some people begin to think about pre-determination and free will. So perhaps it is helpful to look at what Imām Ṣādiq says about this as well.

Pre-Determination and Free Will

According to the Imām, whatever the human can be blamed for is because of his free will and whatever you cannot blame a human for is

³⁴ Virjee, *The Scale of Wisdom*, 718.

³⁵ Al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 260.

because of God's Will. For example, God will question the human about his actions of goodness, beauty and obedience and also of disobedience, ugliness and evil because they are of his own doing. But God will not question humans about that which is beyond their control, such as many illnesses, being tall or short, skin color and the like.³⁶ So the reality is not totally free will or totally pre-destination, but something in between.

When asked about this state in between the two, the Imām answered:

It is like when you observe a man in sin and you advise him against it but he does not desist from it, so you leave him to his sin. Leaving him to sin after he has rejected your advice does not mean that you commanded him to sin.³⁷

Going back to issue of the illusory perception and assertion of the human's ontological independence, we can say that we are more on the side of free will when we are farther from God existentially and spiritually speaking, like when we live with these illusions. But the closer we move toward God, the more we become determined by Him, and our individual will becomes replaced by His Will.³⁸ Human free will is ultimately (and finally) an illusion, but it is relatively real in that it is the Divine Infinity and Freedom that must manifest this possibility. We will say a few more words about this issue below.

³⁶ Virjee, *The Scale of Wisdom*, 185–186.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 186–187.

³⁸ That is why the prophets, who were the closest creatures to God, had no will of their own, speaking and acting by God's Will.

Cosmogony and God's First Creations and Manifestations

One major question that should be answered by doctrine is why the universe exists; why did God create? Imām Ṣādiq answered this when a skeptic asked him: “For what purpose did He create humanity if He had no need for them and neither was compelled to create them, and nor would it proper for Him to create us in vain’?, [Imām] replied, ‘He created them to reveal [to them] His Wisdom, to execute His Knowledge, and to carry out His Plan’”.³⁹ So the answer is: because of His Knowledge which is the basis of the Divine Plan whereby He reveals His Wisdom to his representative within creation; and His representative, if loyal to his covenant with Him, reflects and manifests the Divine Names or inner realities of everything which God taught him in pre-eternity. Therefore God fully manifests His Infinitude (Infinite Possibility and Freedom) by creating a representative to reflect Himself in the lowest possible level of existence whereby the freedom to either ascend back to the Source or negate the very Sublime Reality where it comes from is possible.

There are many narrations in *ḥadith* literature about what was the first thing God created. One way to understand these seeming contradicting reports is that they are different aspects of the same reality. For example: Being, Spirit, Intellect, the Muḥammadan Light, and Will are all different

³⁹ Virjee, *The Scale of Wisdom*, 121.

ways of expressing the same Supernal Reality. At the level of this first creation it is still in the intelligible realm of Being and beyond the created order as such, in other words, beyond the sensible and imaginal realms where there is form and becoming. Take for example these sayings by Imām Ṣādiq: “Allah created the Will itself, then created everything by means of the Will”.⁴⁰ As well as “Verily Allah, exalted be His praise, created the Intellect, and it is the very first thing He created amongst all the spiritual beings from the right hand side of His Throne out of His Light”.⁴¹ As we had said earlier that God’s Omnipotence and Omniscience were ultimately united, one way to interpret these two sayings is that the Will as the first creation is the manifestation of principle of Omnipotence and the Intellect as first creation is the manifestation of the principle of Omniscience and that they too are ultimately two aspects of the same Reality.

This chapter has surely not exhausted all the theoretical and doctrinal teachings concerning metaphysical principles and the nature of God by Imām Ṣādiq, nor offered a final interpretation. We think though, that this is a good introduction and a taste of the type of profound discourse and the wisdom that is contained in the recordings of Imām Ṣādiq’s teachings.

⁴⁰ Al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 279.

⁴¹ Virjee, *The Scale of Wisdom*, 761.

Chapter 3: Spiritual Method and Practice

The path [ṣirāṭ] is the way [ṭarīq] to the inner knowledge of God [m'arifah Allah], and there are actually two paths – one in this world and one in the Hereafter. As for the path in this world's life, it is in the Imām whom one is obliged to obey. He who acknowledges him in this world and follows his guidance will be able to [successfully] cross the path of the Hereafter, which is a bridge outstretched over the Fire.⁴²

This part will investigate the spiritual disciplines and mystical methodology or “way” of Imām Ṣādiq. All sacred traditions and their mystical paths offer methods for reaching enlightenment and realizing the Truth in this life. These mystical methods are not in conflict with the exoteric dimensions of a sacred tradition. In fact, the laws and rituals (exoteric dimension) are transcended not by leaving them behind, but rather by perfecting and reaching the hidden heart and essence of this dimension and by doing what is beyond obligatory. Therefore, it is an interiorizing of the outward and hence is esoteric. Regarding the Qur’ānic verse:

...guiding to the Truth and to a harmonious path⁴³...

⁴² Ibid., 622.

⁴³ Qur’ān 46:30

Imām Ṣādiq interprets this verse by saying: “He/it leads to the way of the Truth, by bringing (people) forth from known things and rituals, and (to) the *realization* of the Truth – that is the harmonious way”.⁴⁴

First let us consider what the purpose of a mystical method is in the context of Islam generally, and in the teachings of Imām Ṣādiq specifically. Above I mentioned “enlightenment” and “realization of the Truth”, but these are just different ways of speaking of the higher spiritual stations of gnosis (*m‘arifah*) and mystical union (*waṣl*).

Ultimately, gnosis and union are the same station because gnosis is illuminative and unifying knowledge where the subject–object duality is transcended.⁴⁵ Imām Ṣādiq says:

Worshippers are of three kinds: Those who worship God out of fear (that is the worship of slaves and bondsmen); those who worship Him out of greed (that is the worship of merchants); and finally, those who worship Him out of love, and this is the worship of free–spirited men [i.e. gnostics (*‘urafā’*)].⁴⁶

The methodology may differ depending on the mystic or sage but the goal is the same: gnosis (*ma‘rifah*), the truth of certainty (*ḥaqq al–yaqīn*), spiritual liberation and sincerity (*ikhhlāṣ*), and Unity (*tawḥīd*).

⁴⁴ Mayer, *Spiritual Gems*, 138.

⁴⁵ See: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989) 50 and 130–132.

⁴⁶ Ṭabāṭabā‘ī, *Kernel of the Kernel*, 139.

Spiritual Guidance and Initiatic Power

The first aspect of Imām Ṣādiq's mystical method is to accept the spiritual guardianship and initiatic power of the Imām of the time. This is crucial because everything is based upon the guidance and spiritual power which the Imām can channel from the Divine to the seeker or disciple. This is so important, that Imām Ṣādiq says that one who denies this guidance is basically without faith:

The Imām is a guide between Allah and His creation, therefore whoever acknowledges him is a believer, and whoever rejects him is a disbeliever.⁴⁷

This does not negate the direct connection that each Muslim has to God, but rather is stating that the Imām can facilitate a stronger connection and render a worshipper's deeds and knowledge as more spiritually efficacious. This is mainly due to the intimate knowledge of the Qur'ān on all of its levels, and of Prophetic practices and teachings concerning all dimensions of life, which the Imām possesses. Thus Imām Ṣādiq says:

By Allah, certainly I know the Book of Allah from its beginning to its end, as if it is in my palm. In it is contained the information about the heavens and the earth, about all that existed and all that is to be. Allah, Mighty and Exalted, has said: '*In it is clarification of all things*'.⁴⁸

Concerning the verse of the Qur'ān:

⁴⁷ Virjee, *The Scale of Wisdom*, 49.

⁴⁸ Virjee, *The Scale of Wisdom*, 59. The Qur'ānic verse in this quote is 16:89.

*And I did not create the jinn and mankind except for them to worship Me.*⁴⁹

Imām Ṣādiq says that this worship means really to know God (to have gnosis). After this gnosis is attained, then true and beautiful worship can be practiced.⁵⁰ This principle of guidance and initiatic power (*imāmah* and *walāyah*) which allows the seeker of Truth to be properly oriented towards It so that spiritual practices become more efficacious is alluded to in the mysterious saying of Imam Ṣādiq that: “It is through us that God is known and it is through us that God is worshipped”.⁵¹ In other words, for humans to actualize and truly fulfill the purpose of their existence (in light of the Qur’ānic verse and Imām Ṣādiq’s interpretation above) they must worship, know and reach the Divine in this life. This path is not for everyone (because for the majority of people they will know and reach the Divine only after death), but the Imams (and the Prophets before them) are there to enable this teleological reality to be actualized.

The Spiritual Meaning of Exoteric Rites

As we have already said, the esoteric is not a negation of the exoteric, but is its underlying essence and that which transcends it. To demonstrate this it is helpful to look at what Imām Ṣādiq elaborates concerning some

⁴⁹ Qur’ān: 51:56

⁵⁰ Mayer, *Spiritual Gems*, 147.

⁵¹ Ṭabāṭabā’ī, *Kernel of the Kernel*, 140.

of the exoteric rites. First and arguably the central and quintessential of the exoteric rites (“the five pillars”) is the ritual prayer (*ṣalāh*) and that which is inseparable from it, namely the ablutions which must precede it. When the seeker makes an ablution before his prayer it is to become ritually pure. Now if the seeker is already in a state of ritual purity, but makes an ablution anyway (to prepare for the prayer) although it is not required, then he receives additional grace and purity. The Imām says: “Ablution upon ablution is light upon light”.⁵² This is one of the levels of meaning contained in the part of the Qur’ānic verse which says:

*...Light upon Light! Allah doth guide whom He will to His Light...*⁵³

Also regarding the ablution, the Imām brings out the correspondence between water and the Divine Mercy⁵⁴:

If you seek purification and ablution (*wuḍū’*), then go to water as you would go to the mercy of Allah (SWT), for He has made water the key to being near to Him in intimate conversation, and a guide to the domain of His service. Just as the mercy of Allah purifies the wrong actions of His bondsmen, so are outward impurities cleansed only by water.⁵⁵

⁵² Virjee, *The Scale of Wisdom*, 1150.

⁵³ Qur’ān 24:35.

⁵⁴ As the Hermetic adage says “In truth certainly and without doubt, whatever is below is like that which is above, and whatever is above is like that which is below, to accomplish the miracles of one thing”. In the Islamic tradition Hermes is identified with the Prophet Idrīs. Hermes/Idrīs is whom the Hermetic aphorisms are attributed to. See – Titus Burckhardt, *Alchemy: Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul*, (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2006), 18 and 196.

⁵⁵ Al-Imām Ja’far ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq, *Lantern of the Path*, trans. Faḍlullāh Hāerī (Qum: Ansariyan Publications, 2007), 72.

If the ritual prayer is the quintessential exoteric rite in Islam, then the prostration (*sajdah*) is the quintessential element of the ritual prayer. Prostration in its outward form and inner meaning (*ma'anā*), and done with presence (*ḥudūr*) and realization (*taḥqīq*) is considered as the human's highest mode of worship⁵⁶ and is the perfect symbol of our servanthood (*'ubūdiyyah*). In the small esoteric treatise of collected teachings of Imām Ṣādiq called "Lantern of the Path" (*Miṣbāḥ al-Sharī'ah*) he says of prostration:

Allah (Glorified and Exalted) made prostration the occasion to draw near to Him in one's heart, innermost being and spirit. Whoever draws near to Him is far from all that is other than Him. Do you not see that in its outward appearance the state of prostrations is not complete except by disappearing from all things and being veiled from all that the eyes see? Thus does Allah (Glorified and Exalted) want the inward being to be. If someone's heart is attached to something other than Allah (Glorified and Exalted) in prayer, he is near to that thing, and far from the reality of what Allah (Glorified and Exalted) desires in His prayer. For He has said, *Allah has not made for any man two hearts in his breast.* (33:4)... In the words of the Messenger of Allah: 'Almighty Allah (Glorified and Exalted) said, When I look on the heart of a bondsman, I know if he has sincere love and obedience for My sake and seeks My pleasure in it. Then I take charge of him and draw near to him. Whoever is occupied with other than Me in his prayer is one of those who mocks himself, and his name is recorded in the register of the losers''⁵⁷.

⁵⁶ Virjee, *The Scale of Wisdom*, 510.

⁵⁷ Imām al-Ṣādiq, *Lantern of the Path*, 53.

Thus we see through the example of the ritual prayer, the central exoteric rite, that there is indeed an inward dimension involved, which when realized, allows these rites to be not only legal and ritualistic, but mystical, salvific and enlightening. Through prostration (within the ritual prayer, and indeed as a practice in and of itself) we can seek proximity to God in the deepest, or if you like, the most numinous levels of our being. Then if this is done with sincerity and presence, God will allow for further intimacy and, ultimately, if He wills, mystical union (which is the death and absorption of the human self into the Divine Reality).

The Sacramental and Salvific Role of Qur'ānic Recitation

The Qur'ān, being God's Words and a locus for His Presence, has a sacramental role in the Islamic tradition. The sacred arts of Islam are all related to the Qur'ān. The supreme sacred art in Islam is the psalmody of the Qur'ān; and the other two are calligraphy or the beautiful writing of the Qur'ān and mosque architecture, which is a sacred space designed for Qur'ānic recitation to resonate therein.⁵⁸ Imām Ṣādiq mentions some conditions and qualities regarding the human's relationship with the Qur'ān. Any serious investigation into and attempt at reconstructing the mystical methodology of Imām Ṣādiq needs to consider what he teaches about the Qur'ān.

⁵⁸ See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987) 13.

Imām Ṣādiq, with respect to Allah’s verse in the Qur’ān: ‘*Those to whom We have given the Book follow it as it ought to be followed*’⁵⁹ said:

They recite its verses and understand its meanings and act according to its laws. They hope for its reward, fear its punishment, take examples from its stories, take lesson from its parables, perform its orders, stay away from what it has prohibited. By Allah, it is not just memorizing its verses, citing its words, reciting its chapters, and learning its parts. They have memorized its words and lost its limits. That which is important is contemplating into its verses,

Allah Almighty says:

[It is] a blessed Book that We have sent down to you, so that they may contemplate its signs^{60,61}

So according to the Imām, what is important in following the Qur’ān as God wants us to is contemplating the meanings of the verses of the revelation. When the seeker is in a contemplative state, only then can he be worthy and ready for the alchemical transformation of the soul in light of the sacred presence which emanates from the sacred art of psalmody.

Imām Ṣādiq says:

The person who recites the Qur’ān needs three things: a fearful heart, a tranquil and receptive body, and an appropriate place to recite... When his heart fears Allah (Glorified and Exalted), then the accursed Satan flees from him... when he frees himself of all attachments, then his heart is devoted to recitation and nothing impedes him from obtaining the blessing of the light of the Qur’ān and its benefits. When he finds an empty place and withdraws from people, having acquired the two qualities of humility of heart and tranquility of body, then his soul and his

⁵⁹ Qur’ān 2:121

⁶⁰ Qur’ān 38:29

⁶¹ Virjee, *The Scale of Wisdom*, 899.

innermost being will feel communion with Allah (Glorified and Exalted)...If he drinks a cup of this drink, he will never prefer any other state to this nor any other moment to this. He will prefer this to every act of obedience and devotion, since it contains intimate conversation with the Lord, without any intermediary.⁶²

This teaching reveals the crucial importance of Qur'ānic psalmody done with humility, calmness, and in a spiritual ambiance for the mystical methodology of Imām Ṣādiq. The mystical aspect is mentioned when he talks about “communion” and “intimate conversation” with God (without any intermediary, including even an Imām⁶³).

Divine Invocation (Remembrance)

There is a narration where the Prophet tells Imām ‘Alī (the first Imām) after the latter asks about the shortest, easiest yet most sublime way leading to God: “O ‘Alī, you have to practice the invocation incessantly, sometimes in silence and sometimes aloud...”.⁶⁴ The function of all rites, whether they be exoteric or esoteric, aim at increasing the seeker’s remembrance of God. Besides the ritual prayer and fasting, which help the seeker to remember God, there is also the practice of invoking Him through repeatedly mentioning one of His Beautiful Names, especially the

⁶² Imām al-Ṣādiq, *Lantern of the Path*, 15.

⁶³ As we said before, the Imām is not needed because the seeker/worshipper is incapable of connecting with God directly, but rather because the Imām can guide the seeker as to how to be most efficacious in his worship and how to follow and attain wisdom.

⁶⁴ Edin Lohja, trans., *Spiritual Teachings of the Prophet: Hadith with Commentaries by Saints and Sages of Islam* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2011) ,134.

Supreme Name – Allah. This is ultimately a Divine act though, because God’s remembrance of the seeker precedes the seekers remembrance of God. If God did not remember him first and grace him with the discernment, will and sincerity to invoke Him, then the seeker could not do so of his own mere contingent self. Ultimately, it is the Divine within us which invokes the Divine. Hence the Imām emphasizes:

...whoever wants to remember Allah (Glorified and Exalted)
should know that as long as
Allah (Glorified and Exalted) does not remember the bondsman
by granting him success in remembering Him,
that bondsman will not be able to remember Him.⁶⁵

The Imām tells us that in invoking God through speech, what we mention with our tongues should be oriented to and concentrated in our hearts.⁶⁶ Moreover, there are two types of invocation, one of which is at a higher degree.

There are two sorts of remembrance: sincere remembrance with which the heart is in harmony, and remembrance which arises through banishing any remembrance of other than Allah (Glorified and Exalted).⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Imām al-Şādiq, *Lantern of the Path*, 32.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

The first type of invocation – sincere remembrance (*dhikr khāliṣ*)– is the ideal mode because the heart is integrated and the remembrance is pure and free of all impurities. The second type of invocation, while still effective, is less pure because the heart is still struggling to integrate and remove or banish impurities (the remembrance of any thing other than God). Either this pure and sincere remembrance is graced by God to the worshipper, or if this does not happen (which is more common) then the worshipper must strive and persevere with the “banishing remembrance” until he eventually purifies and perfects his invocation. This spiritual endeavor is mentioned by the Prophet Muḥammad in the narration that says:

Whoever sincerely purifies his heart for God for forty days will find springs of wisdom gush forth from his heart and flow toward his tongue.⁶⁸

This saying also mentions this same “sincerity (*akhlāṣa*)” and tells of how this spiritual purification results in wisdom (*ḥikmah*). Wisdom, like gnosis is existentially transformative and is not just mere knowledge of a rational kind; it changes who we are in our very being. Also the Prophet refers to a forty-day period during which this alchemy takes place. The number forty may not be literal, but it alludes possibly to a spiritual retreat (*khalwah*) or at the very least a period of asceticism (*zuhd*) with

⁶⁸ Ṭabāṭabā’ī, *Kernel of the Kernel*, 133.

which we will deal shortly. Thus the more we invoke or remember God the more pure and wise we become. It is in this light that the Imām says:

Remember Allah frequently as much as you can every hour of the day and night, for verily Allah has commanded [us] to remember Him abundantly.⁶⁹

Perpetual remembrance of God is one of the main goals of spirituality and mystical methods, because in attaining this, we transform in ways and realize that which humans normally wait until after death for. If we remember God always and sincerely, thereby being present with Him, this implies that we have already undergone a death – a death of our egos, of our normal consciousness, our passions and or forgetfulness.

Asceticism: Spiritual Retreat, Silence, and Hunger

Asceticism is a necessary element of the spiritual life. It is emphasized sometimes more, sometimes less in all the esoteric traditions of the world; even within one sacred tradition there are some mystical methodologies which emphasize asceticism more and some less. Imām Ṣādiq, following the earlier Imams and the Prophet Muḥammad, definitely stresses a type of asceticism. Asceticism in Islamic spirituality is not abandoning society, family and work to be celibate and in a constant retreat like in monasticism, but rather is more about humility, simplicity,

⁶⁹ Virjee, *The Scale of Wisdom*, 409.

avoiding excess, avoiding luxury and avoiding frivolity, being detached inwardly, combating one's egoic self, being altruistic and chivalrous, and maintaining an inner state of spiritual poverty (recognizing our ontological poverty). Sometimes temporary retreats may be undertaken. Other spiritual practices such as certain modes of prayer or fasting overlap with and are a part of asceticism. Let us consider how the Imam defines an ascetic (*zāhid*):

The man of abstinence is the one who chooses the next world. He chooses abasement over might and this world, striving over rest, hunger over being full, the well-being of what is to come later over immediate trials, and remembrance over heedlessness. His self is in this world and his heart is in the next world.⁷⁰

Because our souls are inclined to excess, heedlessness, and concupiscence, there are four ascetic practices emphasized in Islamic esoterism and the Imām's methodology specifically.⁷¹ These practices are: 1) Silence– undergoing periods of silence. Either “fasting” from speaking for a certain period of time or just limiting speech to worship or for issues related to wisdom or that which serves the truth; 2) Hunger– not only fasting at times that are obligatory as an exoteric rite, but also to do supererogatory fasts. Moreover, this “hunger” refers to eating the simplest and minimal amount of food in order to have strength to work,

⁷⁰ Imām al-Ṣādiq, *Lantern of the Path*, 77.

⁷¹ See for example– Ibn 'Arabi, *The Four Pillars of Spiritual Transformation (Ḥilyah al-Abdāl)*, trans. Stephen Hirtenstein (Oxford, UK: Anqa Publishing, 2008).

pray and/or contemplate. It means not to ever fill the stomach completely and to only take food when it is necessary for strength. It is to be able to resist cravings; 3) Retreat– this is to withdraw from human interaction in order to be alone with God or to contemplate Him and His signs in virgin nature; 4) Keeping Vigil– this means sleeping little and staying awake during the night to pray and contemplate (this fourth practice– vigil, will be dealt with more in another section below). These practices train our souls to not be so attached to bodily, sensory, and emotional distractions and pseudo–demands. The Imām says:

There is no veil between the bondsman and Allah (Glorified and Exalted)
which is darker or more desolate than that of the self and passion;
there is no better weapon to fight and destroy them than total need of Allah (Glorified and
Exalted), glory be to Him, fear, hunger, thirst in
the day and wakefulness at night.⁷²

Concerning the making of a spiritual retreat and its conditions, Imām Ṣādiq offers this elucidation:

Any one who embarks on a retreat (*'uzlah*) from the world is fortified by Allah and protected by His guardianship. What joy there is for the person who has withdrawn with Him, secretly and openly! To do this, he must differentiate between truth and falsehood, love poverty, choose hardship and abstinence, and seize every opportunity for retreat. He must contemplate the outcome of his actions, seeing his incapacity for worship while worshipping as much as possible, abandoning pride, and constantly engaging in remembrance without showing heedlessness, which

⁷² Imām al-Ṣādiq, *Lantern of the Path*, 95.

is the hunting ground of Satan and the beginning of every affliction and the reason for all that is obscure. He should also rid his house of everything he has no immediate need for.⁷³

Other Modes of Prayer

There are two other types of prayer which should be mentioned in addition to the ritual prayer and the Divine invocation (quintessential prayer). The first of these is supplication. It is free dialog with God where the worshipper requests, complains and confides in God with regards to his problems, hopes and fears. Supplication has a very special role in the spiritual arsenal of the Shiite Imams. Imām Ṣādiq says a few things worth quoting here as regards supplication:

I urge you to supplicate, for verily in supplication is a cure for every ailment.⁷⁴

When any of you feels softness and compassion, then he should supplicate, for no sooner does the heart soften than it becomes pure and sincere.⁷⁵

Certainly, among the “ailments” mentioned in this first quote above are included “psycho-spiritual” ailments. Diseases of the psychic substance are a major obstacle in the spiritual life and any true esoteric path must be able to cure the souls it guides. As for the second quote, again we

⁷³ Ibid., 57.

⁷⁴ Virjee, *The Scale of Wisdom*, 369.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 374.

learn that supplication is especially efficacious when the heart becomes pure and soft as opposed to impure and hard. This narration teaches us that to supplicate when one reaches the station of sincerity is to have the supplication accepted by God because of the purity and sincerity of the seeker's heart, intention, and request.

Perhaps the most important of the other prayers is the night prayer (*tahajjud* or *ṣalāh(t) al-layl*). This night prayer is directly connected to the practice of keeping vigil mentioned above in the section on asceticism. There is an illuminating blessing that is said to result from the night prayer.

Every single good deed that the servant carries out has a reward mentioned for it in the Qur'ān except for the night prayer, for verily Allah has not expressed its reward because of the great significance it holds with Him. Thus He says,

*'Their sides vacate their beds to supplicate their Lord
in fear and hope... No one knows what has been kept hidden from them
of comfort as a reward for what they used to do'.⁷⁶*

According to Imām Ṣādiq, the night prayer is what gives a Muslim his dignity and honor⁷⁷ and that if one does not do the night prayer he is losing a true spiritual opportunity for grace and enlightenment.⁷⁸ He also

⁷⁶ Virjee, *The Scale of Wisdom*, 642. Qur'ānic verse quoted is 32:16–17.

⁷⁷ Ibn Babuwayh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāḥ*, trans. Ali Peirazi and Talat June Peirazi (Qum: Ansariyan Publications, 2008), 28.

⁷⁸ Virjee, *The Scale of Wisdom*, 641.

has a very beautiful saying about enlightenment and salvation from the dramatic eschatological events. The practices mentioned in this saying are: contemplation (*tafakkur*), crying (*bukā'*), giving charity (*ṣadaqah*) and the night prayer (*ṣalāh(t) al-layl*). The Imam says:

I sought for light of the heart and found it in contemplation and crying. I sought for crossing the Bridge [on the Day of Resurrection] and found it in giving charity. I sought for light of the face and found it in the night prayer.⁷⁹

Reflection and Meditation

The last practice of Imām Ṣādiq's mystical methodology that we will look at is reflection, meditation and contemplation. There is also a more sublime mode of contemplation (*shuhūd*), which is not being mentioned here, but what we mean by contemplation here is the lower type which is akin to reflection and meditation. Nevertheless, this reflection and contemplative way is considered as among the best forms of worship especially when God's Power is contemplated.⁸⁰ In line with what we said earlier about enlightenment, gnosis, and unity being the purpose of mysticism, the Imām says that reflection is the light of the heart, it allows one to have insight into the consequences of actions, and it raises one's level of knowledge, but that true reflection is only attainable by those

⁷⁹ Ibid., 1107.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 888.

whom God has chosen to receive the light of gnosis and unity.⁸¹ He teaches that contemplating death specifically is very spiritually beneficial to the seeker:

Contemplating death kills desire, cuts the roots of heedlessness and strengthens the heart with Allah (Glorified and Exalted)'s promise of life hereafter. It refines nature, breaks the signs of passion, extinguishes the fire of greed and renders this world vile; this is the meaning of the Holy Prophet's words (peace be upon him): 'To reflect for an hour is better than a year of worship'. That hour of reflecting is the moment when you untie the ropes binding you to this world and fasten them to the next. The descent of mercy from Heaven never ceases when death is remembered in this way.⁸²

The saying of the Prophet in this quote is noteworthy; that one hour of reflection is better than a whole year of praying. Of course this means prayer or worship that is devoid of the contemplative state. But it tells of how prayer and worship do not necessarily lead to the soul being connected to the spiritual world; however on the other hand contemplation (especially of death) has a profound effect upon the soul and provides the necessary support for the soul to bind itself to the spiritual world, thus making worship sincere.

So, from the little we compiled and analyzed, we can see that Imām Ṣādiq offers us a total method for curing and transforming our souls, and a

⁸¹ Imām al-Ṣādiq, *Lantern of the Path*, 65.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 96.

complete way to realizing the Truth. The purpose of a “way” or method and its practice, is to lead one to the realization of the Principle, the Truth. This can only be done with the guidance of a spiritual master, or Imām, who because of his knowledge of the nature of things, gnosis of God, and initiatic power can cure and guide the soul. In addition, the seeker or devotee of Truth, after accepting guidance and being initiated, must follow not only the obligatory exoteric rites and laws, but also must follow with diligence and sincerity, the esoteric methodology and whatever specific personal spiritual prescriptions given by the guide. Only then can the devoted seeker hope to adorn his soul with virtues and ascend through the spiritual stations (*maqāmāt*).

Chapter 4: Virtues

One can never gain success until he understands and one can never understand until he acquires knowledge. One who understands can very soon excel. One who exercises patience can very soon triumph. Knowledge serves one as a shield, truth is honor, ignorance is humiliation, sharp-wittedness is glory, generosity is success and moral excellence attracts friendship. One who possesses the wisdom of his time does not become frustrated by confusion.⁸³

In fully dealing with the spiritual teachings of Imām Ṣādiq’s life and thought we need to turn to the virtues. Virtues are the manifestation of realized doctrine and an actualization of the method. Although virtue is

⁸³ Muḥammad ibn Y’aqūb al-Kulaynī, *Kitāb al-Kāfi: Volume 1.*, trans. Muhammad Sarwar (Woodside, NY: The Islamic Seminary INCNY, 2004), 14.

the fruit of doctrine and method, it is also a support for deepening and intensifying ones contemplation and concentration.⁸⁴ Virtue is inner beauty of the soul, which reflect the Divine Names and Attributes, manifesting them in a clear way into this level of being. Throughout this section, we are looking to answer the following question: What are the origins and conditions of the virtues? What virtues are central? What are the purposes or ends of the virtues? The words in Arabic that denote “virtue” in English are: *faḍl* (pl. *faḍā'il*), meaning grace, merits, and /or virtue; *ḥusn* (pl. *maḥāsīn*), meaning beauty, excellence, and/or virtue; and *akhlāq*, meaning moral characteristics or virtues.

We will begin with several narrations in which Imām Ṣādiq presents students with several typologies of the virtues. These narrations are not identical and feature different schemas, but together these four narrations constitute a clear exposition of what the vital virtues are according to Imām Ṣādiq.

Imām Ṣādiq's Typologies of Virtue

The first narration describes the virtues as being seven critical aspects of the Islamic religion. These virtues are found in varying degrees and proportions among Muslims. When all seven virtues are found together in harmony in one person then that person has perfected his faith, or in other words, has reached sanctity.

⁸⁴ See: Titus Burckhardt, *Introduction to Sufi Doctrine* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, Inc.) 75–82.

God the Blessed the Sublime has partitioned Islam into seven parts,
and has distributed them amongst the people.

These are perseverance (*al-ṣabr*), honesty (*al-ṣidq*), certitude (*al-yaqīn*),
contentment (*al-riḍā*), loyalty (*al-wafā'*), knowledge (*al-'ilm*), and patience (*al-ḥilm*).

Whoever possesses all seven has perfect faith and is strong.⁸⁵

The seven parts of lived and actualized religion are not only moral traits, but are actually stations of being and knowledge. As levels of knowledge, they are the manifestations of theory (doctrine), and as levels of being they are the actualization of the spiritual method and practice. *Ṣabr* is translated here as perseverance, but it is important to note that this word also contains the meanings of patience, endurance and fortitude. *Ṣabr* is also a Divine Attribute (one of the Names of God is al-Ṣabūr, “the Most-Patient One”).⁸⁶ *Ṣidq* is translated as honesty, but could also be rendered as truthfulness. *Yaqīn* is certitude or certainty, which is one of the pinnacles of the lived virtues. *Riḍā* is contentment and implies being satisfied with God’s will and decrees. *Wafā'* is loyalty and is unwavering commitment or devotion to an ideal, person, oath, and on the highest level, to God. *'Ilm* is knowledge, and while ordinarily is not considered as

⁸⁵ Al-Ṣadūq, *Al-Khiṣāḥ*, 574–575.

⁸⁶ As mentioned in the first chapter, in Islam there is a canonical collection of 99 Divine Names with corresponding Attributes which God mentions for Himself in the Qur’ān. In theology and especially mysticism these Names of God are considered as the Numinous Archetypes, the Principles of all manifested existence. So the imaginal and also sensible worlds with all their phenomena are reflections and manifestations of God’s Names/Attributes in different degrees and proportions. Only the human being has the possibility of reflecting and realizing all of the Divine Names/Attributes. See the Qur’ān 2:30–34 for scriptural confirmation of this principle.

a virtue in the sense of a moral characteristic, it is nonetheless a virtue in the sense of being a dignified attribute which reflects one of the Divine Attributes and Names, that of *al-‘Alīm* (The All-Knower/Omniscient). *Ḥilm* is mentioned last and should be translated as forbearance rather than patience. But it does have some connotations of the English word “patience”. It is to show restraint and to forgo exacting punishment, exposure, or retribution out of kindness done for God’s sake. This is also a Divine Attribute, as *al-Ḥalīm* (the Forbearing One) in one of God’s Names.

The next narration lists ten virtues that were the noble characteristics of the Prophet Muhammad. We are encouraged by the Imām to strive to attain them, and when attained, to exert oneself in deepening their roots within and perfecting their fruits.⁸⁷

Indeed the Blessed, the Sublime God has granted God’s Prophet noble characteristics (*makārim al-akhlāq*). Try to attain them if you can.

If you have them, praise the Honorable and Exalted God and try to reinforce them in yourself. They are as follows:

certitude (*yaqīn*), contentment (*qanā‘ah*), perseverance (*ṣabr*),

⁸⁷ The symbol of fruit is very appropriate in a discourse on virtues. The cycle of: seed, rooted sapling, the tree’s maturation, fruition, and then back to the seed as contained in the ripe fruit corresponds to the seed of realized-contemplative doctrine (although its principle is actuality, in the new fertile environment of a neophyte soul it is only potential yet to be fully actualized, but intuited and anticipated), becoming rooted in the Ground of Being, growing into a tree with the nurturing of the spiritual method, leading to the fruits of virtue, which then contain the totally realized doctrine and method in the seeds ready to be planted into a suitable environment or soul.

gratitude (*shukr*), contentedness (*riḍā*), being good–tempered (*ḥusn al–khulq*), generosity (*sakhā'*), zeal (*ghayrah*), bravery (*shajā'ah*) and chivalry (*murūww'ah*).⁸⁸

Some of the virtues mentioned in this narration are the same as the previous one, namely: certitude, patience/perseverance (*ṣabr*), and contentedness. *Qanā'ah* is translated as contentment here, but also includes the meaning of detachment. The way it differs from *riḍā* (contentedness, or better yet, satisfaction) is that *qanā'ah* has a specifically material dimension in the sense that it means one being content with what God gives him in terms of material wealth, with one's lot, to live with what God grants him, hence, being detached from worldly desires and thus having contentment with regards phenomena in the sensible realm. *Shukr* means gratitude, especially toward God whom truly possesses and bestows everything. *Shukr* is also a Divine Attribute, as *al–Shakūr* (the Most Thankful One) is one of God's Names. *Ḥusn al–khulq* is translated as “being good–tempered”, but perhaps a more accurate translation is “beauty of character”. This “beauty of character” is a general trait and could be applied to any and all of the virtues, but specifically it refers to a benevolence that radiates outward to all of creation. *Sakhā'* is generosity, the giving of oneself, one's earnings, and that which God has given you to other creatures for the sake of Him alone. *Ghayrah* is zeal and ardor, or in other words, a passionate and diligent striving to

⁸⁸ Al–Ṣadūq, *Al–Khiṣāl*, 718–719.

accomplish a dignified aspiration. *Shajā'ah* is bravery and courage; it is to not act with or upon fear (except as regards God) striving to conquer vices and foes alike. The last virtue mentioned in this narration is *murūww'ah* or chivalry, but to be more precise – gallantry and magnanimity – because chivalry could be used to refer to a code of life which is dedicated to upholding all the essential virtues. *Murūww'ah* is the ideal behavior of a man (though it could concern women too, depending on circumstances) and is a crucial component of chivalry.

The third narration of Imām Ṣādiq to be contemplated in this section lists five irreducible virtues that God spreads among His servants. All of the virtues mentioned are featured in the two previous narrations except for the fifth one here, which is *'aql* (intelligence or better yet, intellect). This can be related though to the virtue of knowledge (*'ilm*) mentioned before. What should be emphasized here is that the virtue of intellect is considered as perfecting (*yukamil*) the rest. This means that this group of virtues is incomplete without the presence of the virtue of intellect, and hence implies that intellect is the most essential and crucial of these virtues.

No less than five characteristics are
distributed among the servants of God:
certitude (*yaqīn*), contentment (*qunū'*), perseverance (*ṣabr*),

gratitude (*shukr*), and intelligence (*'aql*) which perfects them all.⁸⁹

The last typological narration of this section lists three virtues in a slightly more specific manner.

A believer is not perfectly virtuous unless he enjoys three characteristics—
understanding [deep knowledge] of religion (*al-tuḥāḩ fī al-dīn*),
moderation [beautiful measure] in lifestyle (*ḩusn al-taqdīr fī al-m'aīshah*),
and patience upon misfortunes (*al-ṣabr 'alā al-nā'ibah*).⁹⁰

This “understanding of the religion” (or [sacred] tradition) again is related to the virtues of *'ilm* and *'aql* mentioned previously. The reason we are grouping these together are because they all have to do with a mode or modes of consciousness (and thus are seemingly related to the chapter on doctrine and theory) rather than action. Although consciousness on a deeper level is intimately connected to character and action, from another point of view contemplation or consciousness (intellect) precedes what we normally think of as action, while in reality it is the highest, and as it were, most essential of actions. This is why Imām Ṣādiq taught that *'aql* perfects the other virtues. This “understanding” or “deep knowledge” of religion, does not only narrowly refer to the science of jurisprudence (*fiqh*), but also refer to theology (*kalām*) and mysticism (*taṣawwuf*,

⁸⁹ Ibid., 460–461.

⁹⁰ Badr Shahin, trans., *Tuḩaf al-'Uqūl: The Masterpieces of the Intellects* (Qum: Ansariyan Publications, 2004), 423.

'irfān).⁹¹ The second virtue mention in this teaching is moderation in livelihood. The Arabic phrase implies a beautiful or excellent measuring in issues of lifestyle, for example being moderate, frugal, ecological and economical.⁹² The third virtue mentioned is patience (*ṣabr*) in times of affliction.

To summarize this first part, in four different teachings, Imām Ṣādiq presents an overview of essential virtues. When combined and listed together without repetition, these virtues, numbering fifteen are thus: patience, truthfulness, certainty, satisfaction, loyalty, intelligence (including knowledge and understanding of religion), forbearance, detachment, gratitude, benevolence, generosity, ardor, courage, gallantry, and moderation. One more theme is worth being mentioned in this first part.

In one of the most remarkable teachings on the relation between intellect and virtues, Imām Ṣādiq describes a cosmic battle between light and

⁹¹ In the most holistic interpretation, *fiqh* can refer to a deep understanding of any branch of knowledge (including: Arabic language, logic, natural philosophy, mathematics, and metaphysics). This is because there is no secular dimension in the Islamic tradition, and heavy emphasis is placed upon seeking knowledge in both the Qur'ān and the Prophetic traditions.

⁹² Economy and ecology are really two sides of the same coin. Traditionally, when one lived economically, it meant that one also lived with ecological integrity. This is because the human lifestyle –its consumption and reliance on natural resources – were understood as being intimately connected to the environment. For example, the importance of “recycling, reducing, and reusing” was realized more deeply by traditional civilizations; whereas modern civilization, having divorced economy and ecology, and having made economy superior at the expense of ecology, struggles to understand and implement this principle mentioned by Imām Ṣādiq above.

darkness in the form of Intellect versus Ignorance. Both Intellect and Ignorance here refer to cosmic principles, each possessing its own armies which combat each other on the cosmic and human planes (macrocosm and microcosm). The Imām presents the army of the Intellect as virtues and the army of Ignorance as the vices opposite those virtues. In this way, we also learn which vices correspond to the virtues, and hence which vices are to be conquered with or for the attainment of certain virtues. An example of some of these antithetical pairs are (virtues/vices): Justice (*al-‘adl*)/Injustice (*al-jawr*); Humbleness (*al-tawāḍu‘u*)/Arrogance (*al-kibr*); Patience (*al-ṣabr*)/Impatience (*al-jaza‘a*); Truthfulness (*al-ṣidq*)/Duplicity (*al-kadhib*); Sincerity (*al-ikhlāṣ*)/Distortion (*al-shawb*); Wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*)/Desires (*al-hawā’*); Generosity (*al-sakhā’*)/Stinginess (*al-bukhl*).⁹³ This teaching recalls the narration above, where Imām Ṣādiq tells us that intellect perfects the other virtues, which explains why Intellect leads [the army] of virtues. Although this teaching from *Uṣūl al-Kāfī* is dealing with the principal macrocosmic creature of Intellect, the microcosm, as alluded to, also reflects this. In other words, this same battle between Intellect leading the virtues versus Ignorance leading the vices is also taking place simultaneously within our human souls.

Now that we have considered some of the theoretical configurations of virtue by Imām Ṣādiq, let us now examine several of the specific virtues

⁹³ Al-Kulaynī, *Kitāb al-Kāfī*, 9-11.

and what Imām Ṣādiq says about them. The virtues we shall deal with now are all featured in at least one of the teachings in the first part, so they are all recognized as crucial by Imām Ṣādiq. However, the virtues we choose to explore and focus on in the rest of this study are based on our own understanding of their essentiality and their integral quality.⁹⁴ First, we will make some notes about patience, which Imām Ṣādiq emphasizes so much, especially noting its relationship with humility – the first of the three essential and universal virtues. Then we will consider the tripartite division of these essential virtues: humility, generosity, and truthfulness. In the final section, we will present two more virtues or stations, which can be understood to summarize, integrate, and perfect all the other virtues, namely sincerity and certainty.

Reflections on Patience (*Ṣabr*)

In the first part, we can see that all the narrations mentioned have patience named in them. It is the only virtue repeated in all five teachings presented above. We argue that this emphasis comes from the fact that patience, in its intimate relation to humility, constitutes the first major phase in the quest for attaining virtues in order to then reach God. Patience is emphasized because without attaining this virtue first (which

⁹⁴ See: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Garden of Truth: The Vision and Promise of Sufism, Islam's Mystical Tradition* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 126–127, for a detailed discussion of the significance of this essentialist triadic schema of the spiritual virtues.

is contained in humility), one cannot make any more advancement in the spiritual life. This is because the self or ego of the wayfarer must first endure a death (of its desire, delusions, and limitations) or a major state of contraction before entering a state of expansion (nobility).

In the teachings of *Miṣbāh al-Sharī'ah* (Lantern of the Path), Imām Ṣādiq contrasts patience with anxiety and panic. Only the humble ones are truly established in their patience. This is because arrogance, which is the opposite of humility, is based in a perspective of concern for status, image, and power. When one clings to these delusions and seeks these ephemeral qualities, one is unable to be humble, or to realize one's nothingness before the Divine Reality. Therefore the slightest trial will plunge the arrogant one into panic and anxiety. This is the connection between patience and humility which the Imām mentions below, on the one hand, and the implicit connection then between arrogance and anxiety (although anxiety can have other causes and relations to other vices). The Imām also mentions here how the manifestation of patience during affliction serves as criteria for knowing who is truthful and who is a liar.

Patience reveals whatever light and purity there is in the innermost being of Allah's servants, while anxiety shows up the darkness and bereftness inside them. Everyone claims to be patient, but only the humble are firm in it. Everyone denies his anxiety, although it is quite obvious in a hypocrite because

the onset of trials and afflictions tells you who is truthful and who is a liar.⁹⁵

Moreover, patience is not something which manifests occasionally when one encounters an ordeal, but is rather an inner station based on certainty – “patience is from certitude”⁹⁶ – and adorns the person with a poise and serenity at all times.

Patience is a sensation that continuously prevails in one's consciousness, but what occurs upon a sudden upset cannot be called patience. Anxiety is what disturbs the heart and brings the person sorrow, changing his complexion and his state. Every event whose beginnings are without humility, repentance, and humble supplication to Allah comes from someone who is anxious, not someone who is patient.⁹⁷

Again, we see that humility is related to patience, and that without a humble and contrite attitude at the outset, one's actions will be rooted in anxiety, not patience. Among those who are patient, there are two modes mentioned by Imām Ṣādiq: the patience of the commoner and the patience of the adept.

Whoever is unwillingly patient, who does not complain to people and does not become anxious when his veil is rent, is counted among the common people.

Whoever meets affliction with an open heart, showing patience with tranquility and dignity, is counted among the elite...⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Imām al-Ṣādiq, *Lantern of the Path*, 103.

⁹⁶ Virjee, *The Scale of Wisdom*, 1206.

⁹⁷ Imām al-Ṣādiq, *Lantern of the Path*, 103.

Those who are naturally patient during trials, and do not trouble others or show anxiety display the common type (lower level) of patience, as difficult as this is for some. But the higher-level patience is quite something else.⁹⁹ The former is the minimum requirement of patience, while the latter comes from an intense willpower, itself deriving, as we learned, from deep certainty, or a clear spiritual vision of reality.

Humility (Tawāḍu‘)

Let us for a moment think of the spiritual way as a series of concentric circles with the outermost circle being the first station and each inner circle being a higher (or “deeper” depending on the perspective) station. Thus, the first outermost circle would be the station or virtue of humility. Before attaining or realizing any of the inner circles one must obviously cross the threshold of this first outermost circle. It is in this sense that humility “embraces every precious and noble rank and high position”.

Humility embraces every precious and noble rank and high position.

If humility had a language which people understood,

it would speak about the realities which are hidden in the outcomes of affairs.

Humility is whatever is undertaken for Allah and in Allah, and anything other than that is trickery...

The people of humility have recognizable signs.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 103–104.

⁹⁹ All of the virtues mentioned: humility, generosity, and truthfulness have degrees. At the least, we should be aware of an initial, lower level attainment of the virtue, and then eventually a perfected, realized level of the virtue, which come from sincerity and certainty, which as it were, polish and purify those initial virtues.

When one of them was asked about humility, he said,

'It means you are humble to the truth and follow it, even if you hear it from a child.'

Many types of pride keep one from using, accepting and following knowledge.¹⁰⁰

The Imām teaches here that it is pride which is a major obstacle to knowledge, and that through humility this barrier can be dissolved, allowing one to realize the truths (*ḥaqā'iq*) underlying phenomena (“realities hidden in the outcomes of affairs”). Humility is the beginning of devoting oneself to the Truth and orienting oneself to Its signs, which are phenomena whose inner realities (*ḥaqā'iq*) flow from and back to the Truth (*al-Ḥaqq*), the Divine Reality. In order to begin this process of orientation and devotion, the seeker must be poignantly aware of God’s majestic (*jalālī*) attributes and manifestations, because contraction must come before expansion. The carnal soul must be tamed and transformed before the soul can expand into a noble form. But even when the soul expands, it does not leave behind humility and reverence. The seeker first needs to prove oneself through humble adoration and service before God takes him as a friend. Once friendship and intimacy is established then the soul exists in a noble form (the prototype of which is that of the prophets and imams). The mode of humility is different in one who reaches the station and attains the virtue of nobility/generosity, not to speak of one who attains truthfulness. Thus there are degrees of humility (as with the other virtues).

¹⁰⁰ Imām al-Ṣādiq, *Lantern of the Path*, 42.

The root of humility comes from the majesty, awe, and immensity of Allah.
Allah is not pleased with any act of worship, nor does He accept it unless it comes with humility.

No one knows what is the true meaning of humility
except those of His bondsmen who are close and connected with His unity.¹⁰¹

These “bondsmen who are close and connected with His Unity” and who know the true meaning of humility are those who have realized the station of truthfulness after humility and generosity. The Imām clearly mentions humility as the prerequisite of nobility/generosity in this narration:

From humility grow submission, humility, fear and modesty;
it is only from within humility that these qualities appear.
True and perfect nobility is only given
to those who are humble in the essence of Allah.¹⁰²

Again, those who reach the Truth, the Divine Reality through completing the station of truthfulness (in the widest sense of the term) are only then able to realize fully humility and nobility (as the last two narrations teach) even though the seeker had already lived through these two stations prior, though not at the highest level of actuality. How can one begin this spiritual journey of ascent through these three essential virtues/stations? Imām Ṣādiq gives simple instructions for implementing humility:

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 43.

¹⁰² Ibid., 43.

Humbleness is to be content to sit in any place and not a particular place, to greet those he meets, to leave disputation even if he is right, and to not like to be praised for piety.¹⁰³

In other words, do not desire distinguished positions, do not see yourself as better than others or others as unworthy of friendliness, do not fall into the trap of pride which disputation can foster, and do not seek attention and recognition for spiritual acts and endeavors. In order to accomplish all of these, it is implicit that one needs to have both detachment and vigilance. Detachment is needed from the ego's desires, and vigilance is needed to keep an awareness of the ego's insidious urges, and justifications.

Generosity (Sakhā')

Generosity (*sakhā'*) and nobility (*karama, sharafa*) are going beyond the limits of the ego and entering into the Prophetic/Imamic mold of the perfect man (*al-insān al-kāmil*). This is confirmed in the Imām's saying: "Generosity is part of the nature of the prophets...".¹⁰⁴ Generosity is among the criteria for being considered as one of the faithful, but it also presupposes certainty and spiritual aspiration (or determination), at least in its truly realized mode. Not just anyone can go beyond their own ego's limits. It takes both a real gnostic certainty (or at the very least a certainty

¹⁰³ Virjee, *The Scale of Wisdom*, 1152.

¹⁰⁴ Imām al-Ṣādiq, *Lantern of the Path*, 47.

of realities and Truth based upon clear intuitive anticipation) as well as a spiritual will which would transform the impetus towards virtue and gnosis into actuality.

A person cannot be a believer unless he is also generous;
he must also have certainty (*yaqīn*) and high aspiration (*himmah*),
because generosity is a ray of the light of certainty (*nūr al-yaqīn*).

Effort is easy for him who knows his objective.¹⁰⁵

When one knows his objective, that is, when one has certainty of the Truth, then virtuous action (effort) becomes easy and flows freely from the Spirit¹⁰⁶ and through the soul of the gnostic. The detachment (from the fruits of one's action) gained from the station of humility shines through in the station of generosity. Such is one's trust (*tawakkul*) in God and certainty of the Truth at this station that one does not selfishly worry about one's wellbeing. One still puts forth efforts toward righteous action and one's duties, but remains detached from the results, giving of oneself, one's sustenance and fortunes to others and trusting that God will take care of them.

Generosity is bestowed upon everyone beloved of Allah who has little of this world. One of the signs of generosity is a lack of concern with the wealth of this world, and with whoever owns it, believing or unbelieving, obedient or rebellious, noble or low. The generous man feeds others

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 47.

¹⁰⁶ The Spirit (or Logos) being the principal creation or emanation from of the Truth (the Divine Essence) through which all other manifestation and phenomena come into existence.

while he himself is hungry; he clothes others while he is naked; he gives to others while he refuses to accept the gifts of others. He is favored by that, and does not indebt others by his graciousness. If he were to possess the entire world, he would see himself merely as an alien in it. If he spent it all for Allah in a single hour, it would not be irksome for him.¹⁰⁷

This is of course the ideal mode of nobility and generosity, but it nonetheless provides criteria by which we may gauge our attainment and transformation. After humility and nobility one is then ready to enter into the Truth.

Truthfulness (Ṣidq)

We begin with the essential virtue of truthfulness (*ṣidq*).¹⁰⁸ Authentic truthfulness is the result of certainty, along with the spiritual vision and realization of God's Unity (*al-tawḥīd*), which is the Truth/Reality (*al-ḥaqq*). It is to be devoted to expressing and upholding the One Ultimate Truth (*al-ḥaqq*), and also its manifestations, which are all the truths (*ḥaqā'iq*) of existence (as each phenomenon has its truth or inner reality – *ḥaqīqah* – which reflects *al-ḥaqq* in some degree). With regard to the reality of truthfulness itself, the Imām says that it requires Allah to purify (*tazkiyah*) his servant.¹⁰⁹ This purification is what removes the cloudiness of falsity and allows the light of truthfulness to shine forth:

¹⁰⁷ Imām al-Ṣādiq, *Lantern of the Path*, 47–48.

¹⁰⁸ The central place of this virtue in Islam is proved by the many times words related to this consonantal root (ṣ–d–q) are mentioned in the Qur'ān (155 times).

¹⁰⁹ Imām al-Ṣādiq, *Lantern of the Path*, 19.

Truthfulness is a light which radiates its reality in its own world:
it is like the sun, from whose reality everything seeks light
without any decrease occurring in this reality. A truthful person, in fact,
is a man who believes every liar, due to the reality of his own truthfulness.
It means that nothing which is opposed to truthfulness, nothing,
even that which is not truthfulness, is permitted to coexist with it...¹¹⁰

The truthful person at the deepest level is so immersed in truth that he cannot even recognize lying and falsehood even it were right before him. This is not due to naiveté, but rather is because of total concern for the all-embracing truth and from giving everyone the benefit of the doubt. In other words, a truthful one does not waste his time in suspicion and anticipation of falsehood, but is always oriented towards the truth. This is why “truthfulness is an honor”.¹¹¹ Truthfulness is an honor when one becomes truth embodied; when truth is no longer abstract, potential or occasional, but is lived, concrete, and actualized. This is what the Imām means when he said: “Better than the truth itself is the one who tells it...”¹¹² Truthfulness is like a blade whose very presence cleaves the falsity away [from the Truth]. As Imām Ṣādiq says:

The Commander of the Faithful [Imām ‘Alī] said,
‘Truthfulness is the sword of Allah in His heaven and earth:

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 19.

¹¹¹ Virjee, *The Scale of Wisdom*, 609.

¹¹² Ibid., 609.

it cuts everything it touches’.

If you want to know whether you are truthful or lying,
then look into the truthfulness of what you mean and the conclusion of your claim.

Then gauge them both according to a scale from Allah,
as if you were present on the Day of Resurrection...

If there is balance and harmony in what you mean,
then your claim is successful, and your truthfulness is in the fact
that the tongue does not differ from the heart, nor the heart from the tongue.¹¹³

The sword of truthfulness itself establishes the criteria for knowing honesty and reaching objectivity. As we are told in the above teaching, first one must measure the truthfulness (validity and authenticity) of what is meant as well as the conclusion of what is claimed. In other words the origin (intention) and end (result) of the issue being stated needs to be weighed (in the presence of God) by the scale of revelation (Quran) and intellect (the manifest intellect which is prophecy and sanctity, as well as the hidden intellect which is one’s own *‘aql*). If one’s intention and claim are both legitimate according to revelation and intellect, and the intention is in harmony with what is claimed, only then is one’s claim truthful because one’s intention is the same as one’s words.

In the final section of this chapter, we will focus on two sublime spiritual stations and the pinnacles of the virtues. These are sincerity and certainty and if one looks closely at the sources and expositions of Imāmī

¹¹³ Imām al-Şādiq, *Lantern of the Path*, 19–20.

spirituality, one will likely realize that there is a special connection between these two stations.¹¹⁴ They both signify the passing beyond an exalted alchemical transformation of the soul because a soul which has reached these stations cannot but have been transmuted existentially. Of course there are degrees of even sincerity and certainty, but here we are talking about a completed station, rather than transient states where the spiritual traveler may experience these virtues for a time and at a partial degree. Sincerity and certainty may be said to be the essential reality of one who has traversed and combined humility, nobility and truthfulness (these three virtues which in turn become completed and realized).

Sincerity (Ikhlaṣ)

Divine love is considered the basis for sincerity. This is because love is the principle force of existence. The alchemical power and intensity of love transforms the soul like no other. Love corresponds to the station of generosity discussed above, because it is based upon going beyond and giving of oneself completely to Truth and Its manifestations, which is beauty.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ More investigation needs to be done on this theme. In the near future we intend to publish research on this topic.

¹¹⁵ As the well-known Platonic adage says: "Beauty is the splendor of Truth".

The lover is the most inwardly sincere of all people for Allah [*al-muḥibb akhlaṣ al-nās sirr Allāh*]. He is the most truthful in his words, the most faithful in his pledge, the most astute in his actions, the purest in remembrance, and the greatest in devoting his self in worship.¹¹⁶

The signs of the sincere devotee or lover are that he is “the most truthful in words”, meaning he never utters anything other than truth; “he is the most faithful in his pledge”, meaning he fulfills what he promises and is ever loyal to the way of Truth; “he is the most astute in his actions”, meaning he always acts on wisdom and never acts on delusion or whim; “he is the purest in remembrance”, meaning he remembers God perpetually and invokes Him with total concentration; and “he is the greatest in devoting himself in worship”, meaning all prayers, disciplines, and actions are done only for the sake of Truth, for God. As Imām Ṣādiq says: The sincere action is that which the serving-devotee does not seeking praise or attention from anyone except God.¹¹⁷ One who has reached such a station does not live through the ego anymore. He has become annihilated in the Truth. His actions on the human plane are all with and through God.

...The self of the sincere one is consumed,
and his life is spent so as to put what he has in order,
unifying knowledge and action, the doer and what is done by the action...
and that is brought about by purifying

¹¹⁶ Imām al-Ṣādiq, *Lantern of the Path*, 106.

¹¹⁷ Virjee, *The Scale of Wisdom*, 335.

the meanings of disassociation (*tanzih*) in His unity.¹¹⁸

The sincere one becomes the very essence of sincerity himself in his existential mode. What one knows, and one's actions are in complete harmony. This is a result of the devotee becoming nothing before the Truth and from establishing total objective Truth as the Transcendent Reality – where the creation is ultimately nothing and God Alone is.

Certainty (Yaqīn)

In a crucial narration by Imām Ṣādiq, it is taught that there are three levels of the religion (*al-dīn*): submission, faith, and the highest/deepest is that of certainty. He says that faith (*imān*) is better than submission (*islām*) and certainty (*yaqīn*) is better than faith, and there is nothing more honorable than certainty.¹¹⁹ This triadic division of the levels in the religion corresponds to the three essential virtues we have discussed. Submission is the domain of the virtue of humility, faith is the domain of the virtue of generosity, and certainty is the domain of the virtue of truthfulness. But from another perspective, some degree of certainty is required for any of these virtues to actualize. The Imām teaches of the hierarchy of certainty and its ascending path:

¹¹⁸ Imām al-Ṣādiq, *Lantern of the Path*, 20.

¹¹⁹ Virjee, *The Scale of Wisdom*, 1203.

Certainty will take the bondsman to every sublime state and every wondrous station... Certainty is ever increasing, and remains so throughout eternity. Believers also vary in the strength and weakness of their certainty.¹²⁰

Again, Imām Ṣādiq offers us criteria by which to discern the approximate degree of certainty of a devotee:

A person whose certainty is strong may be recognized by the fact that he finds himself stripped of all ability and power other than what Allah has given him, and by his keeping to Allah's command and worship both outwardly and inwardly. He considers the states of having and not having, increase and decrease, praise and blame, might and abasement, all to be the same because he considers them all on an equal level.¹²¹

The limit or highest level of certainty according to Imām Ṣādiq, simply put, is “to fear nothing besides Allah”.¹²² This implicitly says that one who has reached this limit has such a clear vision of Truth, and is so consumed in the Divine Presence that no worldly phenomena, no matter how dangerous or ominous comes close to the majesty of God. Indeed, all the majestic phenomena of creation are relative expressions of God's Majesty, which alone the devotee has reverential fear of, rather than the phenomena in themselves or in their material effects.

¹²⁰ Imām al-Ṣādiq, *Lantern of the Path*, 99.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹²² Nazmina Virjee trans., *Combat with the Self* (London, UK: Islamic College for Advanced Study Press, 2003), 46.

Likewise, he informs us of the characteristics of one with weak certainty. They include: being attached to material and worldly pleasures and concerns, allowing the ego to be unbridled in such a selfish and hedonistic immersion, blindly following the behavior and manner of speech of people without confirming their worth or verifying their truth, exerting effort only for material advantages and desires, and being greedy for accumulating wealth and then being miserly with it.¹²³

This whole discussion of virtues has been summed up in fact with this discourse about sincerity and certainty, because they represent the zenith and totality of the virtues – the actualization of metaphysical doctrine and the fruition of the spiritual methodology. But let us end this part with a synthesis of what was said in the beginning (Imām Ṣādiq’s typology of virtues) and what was said in the second half of this part (the distilling down of the virtues into humility, generosity, and truthfulness). In the first four teachings presented in this part by Imām Ṣādiq (not including the introductory quote) when clarified and listed without repetition are the following: patience, truthfulness, certainty, satisfaction, loyalty, intellect (including knowledge and understanding of religion), forbearance, detachment, gratitude, benevolence, generosity, ardor,

¹²³ Imām al-Ṣādiq, *Lantern of the Path*, 99.

courage, gallantry, and moderation. If we consider each of the virtues emphasized by the Imām and classify them according to the triadic schema of humility, generosity, and truthfulness, we derive the following associations: patience, detachment, ardor, courage, and moderation are part of the station of humility; satisfaction, loyalty, gratitude, benevolence, gallantry and forbearance are part of the station of generosity; and intellect as well as certainty¹²⁴ are part of the station of truthfulness.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that Imam Ṣādiq's teachings offer us a metaphysical doctrine by which we can know Reality, and a spiritual method of guidance and disciplines allowing us to attain sincerity, realization and integration. In addition, Imām Ṣādiq's teachings offer us profound insight into moral and spiritual virtues giving us the ability to measure our soul's transformation and ascent. We looked largely at primary sources which included: the Qur'ān, Shiite ḥadith collections and

¹²⁴ For the sake of this synthetic categorization this is so because certainty concerns knowledge, as does truthfulness ultimately. From another perspective however as we have mentioned, truthfulness is actually a part of certainty (when sincerity and certainty are taken to be the most essentially refined formulation of the virtues). In this latter perspective, both humility and generosity (and all the virtues/stations they imply) are contained in sincerity (ikhlāṣ), while truthfulness (and all the stations/virtues this implies) is contained in certainty (yaqīn).

anthologies, and mystical texts attributed to Imām Ṣādiq such as “Spiritual Gems” the mystical commentary of the Qur’ān and “Lantern of the Path” an epistle of his gnostic teachings. If asked to summarize Imām Ṣādiq’s esoteric system in a concise paragraph it would be this:

The Divine Essence is Pure Oneness and all Divine Attributes are contained in the Essence. God’s Creativity allows the manifestation of all Attributes and of Infinity. The One God is Omniscient, Omnipresent, Omnipotent, as well as Eternal and Completely Just. God determines some phenomena and leaves humans to free will regarding other circumstances. Human beings must be vigilant with their exoteric rituals and actions, that they may ultimately understand the inner realities contained in these forms which point to the Truth and thus sincerely devote their souls totally to It. Additionally, the invocation of God, contemplation, recitation of the Qur’ān, the night prayer, asceticism, and seeking the guidance and leadership of the Imām are essential to ascending the spiritual path to God. Intellect is the leader (*imām*) of one’s inner being and it leads the beautiful virtues in combat against vices and corruption. Patience, detachment, satisfaction, and gratitude are special keys to traversing the way and these are strengthened as one’s degree of sincerity and certainty increases. Truly realized sincerity and certainty represent the highest stations, the zenith of the intellect, the completion of the virtues, and are at the level of union with God.

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