

Monotheistic Self-Improvement in the First Sermon of Nahjul Balagha and in Transcendent Theosophy

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ABSTRACT

One of the main missions of divine apostles was to develop self-improvement in society for the human's journey to perfection. Thus, this subject attracted the attention of saints, led by Imams and Imam Ali (PBUH). In this connection, Nahjul Balagha contains transcendental concepts about self-improvement and attributes (qualities) of self-developed humans. This self-improvement in the Alawite thinking is inextricably linked with the realization and ultimacy of monotheism. Included in Nahjul Balagha addressing the issue of monotheism is the first sermon that involves philosophically monotheistic concepts. The views expressed in the sermon inspire philosophers and theosophists such as Sadr al-Mutallehin in the field of Transcendent Theosophy. This sermon concerns with such issues as identity of essence and attributes, the adjunct rule, the indivisible entity of all objects, unity in multiplicity and multiplicity in unity, etc., each constituting the components of the Transcendent Theosophy. One would thus suggest utilizing Islamic theosophy would be a prelude to self-improvement and going through the stages of perfection and transcendence in the practical mysticism. This subject, however, did not receive attention in prior research.

Keywords: self-improvement, monotheism, Imam Ali (PBUH), Nahjul Balagha, Transcendent Theosophy

Introduction

As a seminal Shiite-Islamic work, Nahjul Balagha contains some sermons, letters and sayings by Imam Ali (PBUH). This book, collected by Seyyed Razi, aims to provide a concise albeit meaningful introduction to Imam Ali's words. To this aim, this book instructs some transcendental teachings which can quench the thirsty of [mystical] knowledge with the clear water of the Velaei and Alawite movement and outline an intelligible life for humans.

As one of the core messages of divine religions, self-improvement has always attracted the attention of divine saints, and in the same way, Nahjul Balagha, as a great and unparalleled work that incorporates rhetoric and transcendental concepts offered by divine leaders, clearly concerns with the subject of self-improvement. However, self-improvement in Imam Ali's thinking incorporates the subject of monotheism, which is the key and pivotal component of theosophy, and consequently, the Transcendent Theosophy. Transcendent Theosophy by itself emanates from the spring of Islamic verses and narratives. Thus, this study aimed to establish a relationship between self-improvement and the monotheistic approach in the first sermon of Nahjul Balagha and to explain that relationship by using Transcendent Theosophical approaches.

1. Self-improvement and its relationship with monotheism

Self-improvement is a concept that is clearly explained in Nahjul Balagha. Imam Ali (PBUH) clearly defines human perfection and the stages of journey to perfection by revealing the transcendental path ahead of him, while enumerating the characteristics of God-fearing people as those who attain the rank of mental self-improvement, (Sermon 87). In this sermon, Imam Ali introduces one of the ranks of the God-fearing as achieving the disposition of certainty. In Imam Ali's thinking, certainty is associated with such attributes as sincerity (Amadi, n.d., vol. 4:369), piety (ibid, vol. 1, 125), steadfastness (ibid, vol. 1, 133) and agreement (ibid, vol. 1, 190). These attributes are thought of as stages humans need to go through to attain self-improvement.

The prelude to arriving at this certainty is the knowledge about God and about monotheism. The Qur'an also considers the perceivers of divine verses as the people of certainty (Dhariat, 20-21). In Islamic thinking, self-improvement is truly related with religiosity, with Imam Ali (PBUH) suggesting that the beginning of religion comes from the knowledge about God (Sermon 1). By the same token, the thinking of Imam Ali (PBUH) concerns with religiosity as the prelude to self-improvement and the monotheistic knowledge as the beginning of religion, on the one hand, and describes the characteristics of the God-fearing as attaining the disposition of certainty in monotheism, on the other hand.

Imam Ali's words are the encyclopedia of monotheism, which calls on any seeker of theosophy to look deeper into himself. This study aimed to describe the monotheistic approach in some texts of the first sermon of Nahjul Balagha using the theoretical foundations of the Transcendent Theosophy.

2. A theosophical explanation of some texts of the first sermon of Nahjul Balagha in the field of monotheism

The first sermon of Nahjul Balagha contains some monotheistic teachings which are used by Imam Ali (PBUH) to explicitly refer to monotheistic teachings; the knowledge whose explicitness cannot be found in any other narratives by other Imams (PBUH). In the beginning of Sermon 3, the Commander of the Faithful (PBUH) mentions three subjects with regards to monotheistic knowledge.

a) Elocutionists are incapable of praising Him: This statement was quoted by Imam Sadegh (PBUH), when he defined the meaning of *Allah is the Greatest*, denoting that Allah is too great to be described. Whoever wants to get to know God requires to fall under the realm of His knowledge; however, God is not known and cannot be known due to His Omniscience and Infiniteness. This is what God describes in the Qur'an *The sights do not apprehend Him, yet He apprehends the sights, and He is All-attentive, the All-aware* (An'am, 103).

b) Enumerators are incapable of counting His blessings: From the viewpoint of the Transcendent Theosophy, the universe is finite because the specification of creatures, and consequently, their components are the components of the material universe. Unless the material creatures are essentially realized, they will not come into existence. For this, enumeration denotes separating and distinguishing the blessings. Determining and distinguishing characteristics is out of the sphere of human power as God says *If you enumerate Allah's blessings, you will not be able to count them. Indeed, Allah is All-Forgiving and All-Merciful* (Nahl, 18). Thus, from the viewpoint of all other than Allah, the number of creatures in the universe is infinite and from the viewpoint of the Omniscient, i.e., Allah, the universe is finite.

c) Allah whom no far-sighted thoughts would ever perceive and no meticulous minds would ever delve into His Glory and Omnipotence: This is inferred to suggest that God cannot be known. This is due to the fact that God is infinite and once man can get to know a being when he encompasses them and gets that being within his sphere of comprehension. God is infinite for being indivisible, and thus deprives anyone of being able to comprehend Him and consequently, His glory.

Continuing his sermon, Imam Ali (PBUH) refers to divine infiniteness, suggesting that "He is the One whose scope of attributes has no limits nor any ultimate ending". For Imam Ali (PBUH), the divine attributes, not the divine essence, are infinite and unlimited. According to this, Sadr al-Mutallehin Shirazi explains the subject and emphasizes the divine infiniteness of attributes in the form of theory of identity of entity and attributes, which are concerned with in the sermon (Shirazi, 1981: vol. 1, 431). Divine attributes are not limited; whatever that is limited cannot be known and whatever that cannot be known will not come into words and cannot be thus introduced.

"He who does not fit into time and accepts no duration": Neither God's essence nor His attributes are temporal, i.e., God is timeless and placeless. An object that is temporal will have a motion (ibid, 1981: vol. 3, 140); however, philosophers have considered God to be without any motions since the time of the Greek Aristotle, thus dealing with the subject of proof of God based on this theory. Temporality is by itself a rank of limitation.

"He created the creatures by His power and spread the winds by His Mercy and made the rocks firm in His earth": For philosophers, motion in creatures is a prelude to the macrocosm with its ultimate end being the journey to the microcosm.

"The pillar of religion is the knowledge about God": It is narrated that apostles were sent down to establish *There is no deity save Allah*. This denotes that religion is founded on monotheism, and Imam Ali (PBUH) also considers in his sermon the basis of religion to be the knowledge about Allah, which constitutes monotheism. God says *I did not create the Jin and the human except that they may worship Me*. This verse suggests that creation aims to get man to the position of worshipping God and this worship, as narrated by Imam Sadegh (PBUH), constitutes the substance of divinity¹. However, the ultimate end of human journey will be *godhood* rather than *deification* (Shirazi, 1984 (a):469). Quoting Ibn Abbas, some exegetes have interpreted "except for worshipping" as "except for acquiring knowledge" (Ghosheiri, 1995:21). So, religion has been sent down for knowledge and mysticism. Thus, the human's perfection ultimacy is to attain knowledge and mysticism, and the knowledge that brings felicity to humans is the knowledge about the Being, which if known,

¹ Servitude is a gem whose innermost being is divinity. Therefore, whatever is not obtained from servitude is found in divinity, and whatever is covered and hidden from divinity is obtained in servitude. (Jafar Ibn Muhammad (PBUH), 1980: 100)

all components of the universe will be known. This is because, as based on the rule of cognition between cause and effect, the knowledge about Cause of the causes of the universe will constitute the knowledge about the entire universe (Elahi-Ghomshe'ei, n.d. vol. 2, 317). Hence, the knowledge about monotheism will be as the knowledge about all truths of the universe.

“The perfect knowledge about Him will be the assertion of His existence”: This text of the sermon is extracted from the “adjunct rule” of the theosophy that states: the key to the issuance and ascription of any ruling to any subject will be adjunct to the subject (Sajjadi, 1994: vol 3, p. 1458).

“The perfection of assertion to His existence is to consider Him as the One and the perfection of belief in His Oneness is to make the existence pure for Him”: From the viewpoint of theosophy, the assertion of God will be the rational proposition of “God does exist” which, according to the adjunct rule of the ascription of existence to God, will require the presence of the subject of the proposition which is God. Thus, the proof of God’s existence lays hidden in the proposition of asserting His divinity. Since this proposition relates to the attribution of God to existence and that existence 1) lacks a second one, 2) lacks the other and 3) lacks a part (simple and indivisible) (Shirazi, 1981: a 6 and 7), it denotes the monotheism of *Allah on whom all depend* where there will be no being in the universe except for God (Motaheri, 2010: vo. 6, 388). This is thus the ultimate meaning of monotheism and oneness of God.

In the meantime, according to Sadra’s Transcendent Theosophy, when the indivisible God is proved, the meaning of “the indivisible entity of all objects” will be realized to humans (Shirazi, 1981(b) 51). Hence, no absolute negation of multiplicity will arise.

Being purified from other than Him will be void of any suspicion or misgivings when His essence is stripped of any attributes for every attribute is evidence that it is other than its described and every described is evidence that it is other than its attribute. Whoever ascribes God Almighty to an attribute beyond His essence, he has compared Him to something, and whoever compares Him to something, he has conceived of two things. Whoever conceives of two things, he has divided it into its components and whoever divides Him into His components, it is as though he did not know Him and has known Him not. No combination does find its way to God, even that of the attribute and the described. Although the attribute and the described is a relative unification, the relative unification is not realized in God, either, and whatever proof that fails to prove the simplicity and indivisibility of God is intermingled with polytheism and will not produce knowledge about God.

This statement by Imam Ali (PBUH) underlies the viewpoints of theosophists, and in particular, Mulla Sadra, who presented Theory of the Identity of Essence and Attributes. The investigation of the relationship between divine attributes and essence has received the attention of theologians and Islamic theosophists, particularly following the emergence of the Sadra thinking. Sadr al-Mutallehin has generally described the core viewpoints as follows:

«صفات الواجب جل اسمه ليست زائدة على ذاته كما يقوله الأشاعرة الصفاتيون و لا منفية عنه كما يقوله المعتزلة المعطلون النافون لصفاته المثبتون لأثارها تعالى ذاته عن التشبيه و التعطيل جميعا و عن الغلو في حقها التقص» (شيرازي، ١٩٨١: ٢٨)

In other words, there are some viewpoints concerning the relationship between divine essence and attributes:

1. Contradiction of the essence and the attributes by primary essential predication and by common technical predication: Here, the essence and the attributes contradict both in terms of examples and concepts. Some believe in the createdness (origination in time) of attributes and consider the divine essence to be the place of events. Advocates of this viewpoint are referred to as “Keramyā”. In the same way, in the book “Sharh al-Manzoumeh”, Haji Sabzevari writes:

«نغمة الحدوث أى حدوث صفاته الحقيقية فى الطنبور أى طنبور معرفة الصفات قد زادها القائل الخارج عن مفطور» (سبزواری، ١٣٧٩: ج ٢، ٥٥٧).

Opponents of this viewpoint are Ashaere who considered God’s perfection attributes to be superadded to His essence. However, they believed in the pre-eternity of the attributes in order to address the problem with the Keramyā’s viewpoint. Haji Sabzevari described this viewpoint by suggesting “The Ashaere believe in God’s perfection attributes to be superadded [to essence]”.

If the attributes are thought of as being superadded to the essence, there will arise some problems, which mainly include the negation of the essence’s simplicity.

As well, Suhrewardi argued that the attributes of Majesty are the same as Him and there is no attribute to be superadded to the essence. This is because if the attributes are known to be superadded to the essence, it is in that case that the All-highest Almighty Light will combine two dark and illuminous aspects, and there will be no pure light, whereas the All-highest Almighty Light is pure light (Suhrewardi, 1996:132/2).

According to Avicenna, the belief in the attributes to be superadded to the essence will create some actions and reactions in the essence, with this multiplicity removing the simplicity of the essence (Avicenna, 2000:218). Mulla Sadra, however, emphasized unity in the attributes and argued that the essential attributes are inherent in God, concluding that there is no need to express the simplicity of the essence (Shirazi, 1981: vol. 6:147).

Some others such as Mu’tazele believe in stripping God of the existence of the attributes. Haji Sabzevari writes of this: “The Mu’tazele believe in deputyship”. By deputyship, it means no real attribute was included and the essence represents the deputyship of the attributes.

2. Theory of union of the essence and the attributes by primary essential predication and by common technical predication: Mulla Sadra considers this viewpoint to be based on the primacy of

quiddity, denoting it as negation of any kind of multiplicity (ibid, 1981: vol. 6, 111). Criticizing this theory, Mulla Sadra argues that the reciprocal relationship between the attributes reveals that when one [attribute] is applied, there will be no need to apply the other, resulting in the stripping of God of His attributes; hence, he considers this viewpoint to be obscenely perishable whose perishability is explicit (ibid, 149).

3. Contradiction of the essence and the attributes by primary essential predication and union by common technical predication: This viewpoint corresponds to Mulla Sadra's viewpoint in the Transcendent Theosophy, which is examined in the following:

«وجوده الذي هو ذاته هو بعينه مظهر جميع صفاته الكمالية من غير لزوم كثرة و انفعال و قبول و فعل و الفرق بين ذاته و صفاته كالفرق بين الوجود و الماهية في ذوات الماهيات إلا أن الواجب لا ماهية له لأنه صرف الوجود» (سبزواری، ۱۹۸۱: ۲۸).

Consistent with this viewpoint, the attributes are the origin of multiplicity for embracing concepts. That said, they have a single actualized existence and enjoy among themselves a unified relationship, diffused from the unification with the essence (Sabzevari, 1993:412). Thus, the attributes of the Majesty are not the accidents superadded to the essence; rather, the attributes manifest by the most scared effusion of God in the pane of oneness and represent in the cover of the attributes and names. For this, some scholars have posited:

الكمالات هو و أنه عالم، القدرة كلها هو و أنه كله الحياة و الحياة كلها هو و هو جميع الكمالات و جميع «أ أنه كله العلم و العلم كله هو و أنه كله القدرة و ج: 2008 الوجود بذاته و واجب الوجود بذاته واجب الوجود من جميع جهاته» (امام خميني، قادر، مريد، مدرک و حی، مع أ أنه صرف الوجود و هو واجب ۲، ۱۳۵).

“Whoever refers to Him has considered Him confined”: Whatever referred to by humans means it is limited and cannot be referred to as infinite. This reference may be both objective and spatial and also rational, internal and conceptual, because God must not be confined in the mind, either.

“Whoever confined Him has enumerated Him. Whoever says in what thing God is fit has put Him within something and whoever says onto what God is has considered Him void of other places”: This subject refers to numerical monotheism, because God cannot be counted. As suggested above, an unlimited thing and infinite existence will have no alternative (the second or the other); thus, determining limits for a being presumes a second or a latter one for it, though this won't apply to an unlimited thing.

This is the true meaning of unity in multiplicity and multiplicity in unity. By the same token, if one would say God is in something, he has confined God to that thing; on the other hand, if one would say God is not in there, one has considered that thing void of God's existence, again confining God. God is in everything and is not in anything. This is evidenced by some texts of the first sermon which says: **“God is with everything without being adjacent to it and contradicts anything without being separated from it”**. This text is one of the major and fundamental elements of this sermon, denoting unity in multiplicity and multiplicity in unity (a subject described in the Transcendent Theosophy in detail). We see creatures intermingled with nonexistence and confinement, while the unlimited God cannot be conceived of within a limited and confined object. The existence of these objects is blended with quiddity, while God has no quiddity (quiddity denotes nonexistence and nothingness). In his book “Tamhid al-Ghawa'ed”, Mr. Mohammad Reza Ghomshe'ei writes of three general viewpoints in this regard:

“There are three viewpoints concerning the multiplicity and unity of explicit objects in existence, including the necessary and the contingent and the accident or substance.... Against theologians is a group of Sufis who maintain that multiplicity is neither in the frame of the existence nor as a thing in itself; rather, what exists in these two is only a single simple essence which is Being Necessary in Itself and is independently subsistent.... Accordingly, the real unity and multiplicity will be purely arbitrary and they may attribute this theory to their mystical intuition.... Against both groups, i.e., theologians and Sufis is a group of scholars and high-ranking mystics, as well as Mutallehin theosophists who maintain the explicit multiplicity in existence is real and its unity real, too.... Therefore, unity becomes diverse through multiplicity, and multiplicity is the subject of unity” (Ibn Taraka Isfahani, 2014: 191-192 in the footnote).

Understanding the contradiction of unity and multiplicity is a tricky issue, as interpreted by Mulla Sadra:

“The quality of contradiction between unity and multiplicity falls under the category of divine sciences which have astounded scholars and theorists and knowledge of which has been the only benefit those scholars have taken” (Shirazi, 1981: vol. 2, 132). Unity is the constituent and the cause of emergence of multiplicity and has priority² over it (multiplicity is an aggregate of single unities) where there is no contradiction whatsoever:

1. There is no contradiction or disposition or lack of which, because there is no contradiction of meaning between the object and its constituent and this kind of contradiction lacks any meaning;
2. The contradiction between affirmation and negation is peculiar to propositions but excludes single elements
3. In mutual correlation, equivalence is stipulated, as in unity and multiplicity, where one of them takes precedence and the other comes next (posterior), so, there is no equivalence but mutual correlation exists.

² Priority is divided into causal priority, priority by nature, priority by virtue, and priority by rank. Mohaghegh Damad added naturalist or eternal priority.

Unlike some mystics who believe in the negation of multiplicities, Mulla Sadra, in his works, never negated multiplicity, and has criticized³ those who attributed this to the mystics of Allah. He maintains that unity and multiplicity are both existential matters and none of them negates the other. Presenting his viewpoint concerning ambiguity, Mulla Sadra describes this relation in details. Each rank of existence includes the weakest rank while it is itself included by the most intense existence, except for the mere existence that includes all ranks, though it is not included itself. Thus, here multiplicity is within the heart of unity.

For this, Mulla Sadra argues that the truths of contingent things are not purely arbitrary nor illusionary; rather, they are considered to be real. However, he considers their multiplicity to be purely arbitrary and the arbitrariness of the existence of contingent things to be other than the arbitrariness of their multiplicity.

«فالحقائق موجودة متعددة في الخارج لكن منشأ وجودها و ملاك تحققها أمر واحد هو حقيقة الوجود المنبسط بنفس ذاته لا بجعل جاعل و منشأ تعددها تعينات اعتبارية فالمتعدد يصدق عليها انها موجودات حقيقية لكن اعتبار موجوديتها غير اعتبار تعددها فموجوديتها حقيقية و تعددها اعتباري» (شيرازي، ١٩٨١: ج ٢، ٢٢١).

Annotating this subject, Haji Sabzevari writes:

«و أن الكثرة ... لا تنافي الوحدة الحقّة، بل تؤكّدها؛ فإنّها كاشفة عن الأشمائية و الأوسعية؛»

(١٩٨١: ج ٢، ٢٢١) annotated by Mulla Hadi. (شيرازي)

He regards such a multiplicity as "luminous multiplicity"⁴.

Focus on the issue of unity and multiplicity has led to the presentation of some theories to explaining the position of multiplicity within the system of existence, the most important of which that has brought about numerous challenges is Theory of "Unity of Existence".

God has always existed and is free from any createdness flaws. He is a being not like what has come into being from non-existence. It is an existent on whose realm of Majesty no dust of creation has ever settled, while appearing not from the boundary of non-existence. He is with all beings albeit in a discontinuous form and is separate from them not like an outsider: In

general, two impressions arise when defining createdness: The first impression is that createdness denotes the contingency of the existence of something on the other, i.e., when comparing something to other things and seeing those things existed once but this thing did not exist at that time. So, it is clear that createdness, in this sense, is relative and comparable; the second impression in defining createdness is that it denotes the contingency of the existence of something to its non-existence, and this part of createdness is divided into two parts: temporal contingency and essential contingency. By temporal contingency, it is meant the contingency of existence of something to temporal non-existence, i.e., something came into being after not having existed at an earlier time. For example, Zeid was born today and did not exist yesterday. Here, one would say Zeid is created by temporal contingency. This suggests that his existence is contingent on his non-existence yesterday. It is clear that consistent with this interpretation, the time, as a whole, cannot be referred to as created because temporal contingency becomes meaningful only when there has been a "time" prior to it where no "time" has ever been there. If true, it may be necessary for "time" to be existent when presumed to be non-existent, though this is wrong (Fakhr Razi, 1992:133). Createdness causes to confine God and to consider Him as One who has needs.

The following text refers to Theory of Unity in Multiplicity and Multiplicity in Unity, which was referred to earlier.

"He is the active (agent) not in a sense that He may have a motion or possess some instruments. He is One for there is no confidant to get along with Him (Of course He needs no confidant and hence fears not having one): God is an active subject (agent) but whose activity needs no instrument.

Activity refers to Him being an active doer. It is known that an active doer is he who does an action (Amid, 2010:784). Philosophically, an active is used against "recipient", meaning He affects and gives effects. He is one from whom an act is issued, as recipient denotes accepting of effects from the active (Saliba, 2014:492). Philosophers have distinguished between the necessitating agent and the voluntary agent, considering the former as being synonymous with the cause and suggesting "the active is one who requires the existence of the effect and makes its actualization necessary" (Dhirazi, 1981: vol. 2, 223-226). If the being receives the principle of existence from the active, it is the existential active and if it acquires an attribute from His attributes, it is called the "natural active". In various philosophical schools, one of the major topics of interest about the creation of the world is the activity of the "necessitating active", and in other words, the activity of His Majesty about the universe. Prior to discussing the "necessitating activity" from the viewpoint of Mulla Sadra, it is required to investigate types of agents to better understand the position of the Transcendent Theosophy in relation to other mentioned viewpoints:

In the second volume of the book "Al-Asfar", Sadr al-Mutallehin first divided the agents into seven types (Shirazi, 1981: vol. 2, 220-224).

³ Some Sufi scholars speculate that the essential oneness, known in mysticism as oneness and the Unseen and unknown of the unknown, cannot be actually realized apart from manifestations, arguing that what is real is the form and spiritual and sensory faculties, and God is nothing but a collection of forms and faculties... and this is manifest and pure atheism which no one, even one who has even little knowledge, may adhere to" (Shirazi, 1981: vol. 2, 345).

⁴ Luminous multiplicity is a multiplicity that is compatible with and emphasizes unity. This multiplicity requires a criterion for individuality and plurality.

According to knowledge and will, types of agency can be listed as follows:

1. Agent-by-nature: it is the agent from whom the act is issued without knowledge and authority and corresponds to the nature and structure of its existence. In the agent-by-nature, the negative aspect of knowledge also entails lack of authority because, for Mulla Sadra, the will is like knowledge and rather the same as knowledge and existence. Since knowledge and authority diffuse in all ranks of existence (*There is not a thing but celebrates His praise, but you do not understand their glorification*⁵), the agent-by-nature won't be realized through this aspect.

2. Agent-by-being-pushed: Like the agent-by-nature, it is the agent from whom the act is issued without knowledge and authority, except that its act is not compatible with its nature and is contrary to what its nature requires. Since the Wise Origin does not do act in vain and does not place a characteristic within creatures that contradicts the perfection of nature and causes degradation, this agency involves some problems.

3. Agent-by-being-forced: It is knowledgeable of its act, and for this, assumes authority. However, the act is not issued based on the authority, i.e., its knowledge will not be decisive in what it does. Put more clearly, this type of agent primarily and essentially wields authority, but secondly and accidentally has its authority negated due to the force of an external matter.

4. Agent-by-intention: It has knowledge and authority over the act it does and its will is contingent upon its knowledge to the good intention it envisages by doing the act. Hence, this type of agent lacks agency without motion and intention superadded to the essence.

5. Agent-by-foreknowledge: It is an agent that has knowledge over its act and this knowledge (knowledge of the object being good per se) is the cause of the act being issued. In other words, this agent lacks any motive or intention to be superadded to the knowledge.

6. Agent-by-agreement: It is an agent whose knowledge of its essence, which is the same as its essence, causes the creation of an act, and that act is the same as its knowledge of the act. This type of agent lacks knowledge (detailed knowledge) of its act prior to being created. Detailed knowledge arises after being created and denotes the act itself.

7. Agent-by-self-manifestation: In the book "Sharh al-Masha'er", Imad al-Doala argues that the agent-by-self-manifestation is the agent whose act depends on its evolution and manifestation in the form of objects (Shirazi, 1984:202). In some of his works, such as al-Mazahir al-Elahya (Shirazi, 1999: 57), Sadr al-Mutallehin divides types of agent based on knowledge and of the will into six parts, while in some other works, such as al-Masha'er (ibid, 1984:58) and al-Shawahid al-Raboubya (ibid, 1981 (b): 55), he divides types of agent into seven parts, describing the seventh part as the agent-by-self-manifestation without specific explanation, and attributing it to the Sufis not theosophists. In some other works, he has not mentioned this theory (Javadi-Amoli, 2007: vol. 2-4:71-82). Mulla Sadra has attributed this meaning to the Sufis (Shirazi, 1984 (b): 58), while attributing it to Ahl Allah, in some other works (Shirazi, 1981 (b): 55).

For Mulla Sadra, God is either agent-by-foreknowledge or agent-by-agreement. He also suggests that "No doubt that the Truth is the former, because the general agent is knowledgeable of all objects prior to their existence, of the knowledge that is the same as His essence and of the objects that are the same as His essence; He is the origin of their existence. For this, He is the agent-by-foreknowledge" (ibid, 1981, vol. 2, 224-225). Here, the mere divine will and foreknowledge help to realize the act. This is a statement that Imam Ali (PBUH) reaffirmed in the sermon.

"He is All-seeing even when there was no creature to be seen": God has had knowledge over all components of the universe since eternity. Through the analysis given by Mulla Sadra, the necessary knowledge over trivial matters is the same as connection to the cause and has no other identity except for this pure attachment. Consequently, they are as if present before their real causes. Although to Mulla Sadr, the presence of these materials is realized by some knowledge-based lights which are attached to them and actually constitute their entire quiddity (Shirazi, 1981: vol. 6: 164). He benefited from approaches taken by Avicenna, the Sheikh of Ishraq (Illumination) and some other mystics about divine knowledge to take later stages. In the first step, he considered knowledge to be of the category of existence, maintaining that all other than Allah are the components of the external existence of the Supreme Being, because the Necessary Being has no subjective quiddity and existence to have external objects be regarded as its components (Shirazi, 1981:52).

Mulla Sadra's innovation lies with developing an independent existence to elucidate a credible type of presence; a presence that involves an absolute attachment with and dependence on the party it attaches to, shadow with the owner of the shadow, manifestation with the manifested, and dignity with the dignified. In his works, Mulla Sadra has described some major themes about divine knowledge which have led to his final take in the issue. Sadr al-Mutallehin holds that forms of object before the divine knowledge do not differ from the issuance of external, objects and the intelligible is the cause of the existence of external objects (Shirazi, 1981: vol. 6, 207).

Criticizing the viewpoint of the Sheikh of illumination, Mulla Sadra maintained that Suhrawardi had failed to justify and analyze the detailed knowledge prior to creation. For this, he strives to investigate in his own words the subject of divine detailed knowledge prior to the creation of creatures. Besides, the argument raised by scholars could no longer establish that the knowledge of the Essence of Necessary follows the essence not the same as the essence, because they reasoned that there were four matters:1) the Essence of Necessary; 2)

⁵ Surah Isra, 44

knowledge of Being Necessary in itself; 3) existence of the effect (the caused) and 4) knowledge of the effect, which are reciprocally unified.

1. Essence of Necessary of the cause and the universe and these two are the same as each other
2. The caused and the known universes are the same as each other.

The Essence of Necessary is the cause of all objects and the world of creation is created by Him. Since the Being Necessary has knowledge of itself and the knowledge of the cause also requires the knowledge of the effect, so, the knowledge of the Being Necessary in itself is the cause of the knowledge of the effect (caused) world and any cause precedes its effect.

Describing his chosen theory, Mulla Sadra explains the following five themes:

1. God is wholly noncorporeal and devoid of faculty and matter. For this, He is the Intelligent, the Intellect and the Intelligible;
2. All other than Allah are attributed to Him and are emanated from Him by means of the cause and the caused and are returned to Him. Thus, God is the beginning and end of all the universe and the issuing origin of all creatures, both celestial and elemental, both composite and simple, and both inseparable accident and separable accident. The issuance of multiplicity or composites will not violate His unity and simplicity (indivisibility). Thus, all need Him and He is the cause of all causes of the contingent things;
3. The relation God to separate and material-substance creatures is the same, with the Necessary Being having a rational and affirmative relation with them, while His relation is not situational to be considered mutually required. On the other hand, the relation of objects to Him is of a necessary one, i.e., they have contingency and gradation toward themselves, whereas they are not so toward God. The necessary agency, for this reason, is not considered potential toward anything, with all objects eternally present before Him;
4. God's knowledge of objects is not out of suspicion, because the means by which they are existent are completely present before Him, and if there is no knowledge about them, the future may be of a possible one and not clear; however, God is Himself the creator of the means, and this knowledge about them causes them to arrive at certainty of the Causer, thus eliminating the presence of any suspicion. Thus, the knowledge of the Majesty about the accidents that have occurred or will occur will be out of certainty, and
5. God's knowledge of His essence is by way of His essence and the knowledge of the Majesty about externally made things (the forged things) is through the knowledge about their essences, while His Self-existent addition to objects will be the same as intuitional luminous addition, as advocated by proponents of Suhrawardi (Shirazi, 1974:229).

In other words, Mulla Sadra's approach about divine knowledge is underlined by the following four principles, as reflected in his thinking.

1. Principality of existence
2. Identity of attributes and essence in the Self-existent
3. Rule of "Indivisible entity of all objects"
4. Indivisibility and simplicity of the a priori divine knowledge

The late Akhund has founded the theory of "a priori knowledge within detailed discovery" on these basics. Since the late Akhund believes that the Qur'an, the simple truth of Allah words and the Forqan⁶ of its details, was in the form of words and verses, he has exemplified a priori simple knowledge within detailed discovery in the form of the difference between the Qur'an and the Forqan.

Later in the sermon, Imam Ali (PBUH) describes the ways to acquire knowledge about God: God commenced the creation and created the creatures, without the need to think or use any experiences, without making any flows or flawed determination. Here, the Commander of the Faithful talks about the creation and says: God did not think of how to create objects. For this, creatures are known to God. Existence is the same as being known, so there is no need to think of how to construct creatures. Being known is also a component of objects' essence; so, when become known is when they fall under the divine knowledge. For this, there is no need for thinking how they are created. The phrase "without making any flows" suggests that changes lie in the heart of motions, as changes mean defects. Since motion is the same as the conversion of the potential into the actual, one would not attribute such a characteristic to God, who is needless and infinite.

The sermon subsequently describes some examples of divine creation and considers them as God's glorified signs.

Conclusion

There is a credible link between Imam Ali's thinking in Nahjul Balagha and the Transcendent Theosophy. In the first sermon of Nahjul Balagha, Imam Ali has addressed the most fundamental theosophical rules in monotheism. This sermon deals with the following:

1. Impossibility of perceiving God as the Absolute Existence;
2. Using the adjunct rule to perceive and know God;
3. Reference to the rule of the indivisible entity of all objects;
4. Emphasizing unity in multiplicity and multiplicity in unity in the universe;
5. God as being agent-by-foreknowledge, and

⁶ Distinction between truth and falsehood

6. Identity of essence (being) and attributes for God

These principles constitute the pillars of the Transcendent Theosophy. Hence, self-improvement is dependent on religiosity and, as interpreted by the Imam, the beginning of the religion is knowledge about God. Imam Ali (PBUH) also considers certainty to be an attribute of the God-fearing, who have gone through stages of mystic journey in self-improvement. One would conclude that understanding these theosophical and monotheistic knowledge, as elaborated in the works of Transcendental scholars, is the prelude to improvement of self.

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