

The Indescribability of God, the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.), and the (.Imams (A.S

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An Exposition of Hadith by Imam Khomeini

With my continuous chain of transmission reaching the august shaykh, the best of the traditionists, Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni, from 'Ali ibn Ibrahim, from his father, from Hammed, from Rib'i, from Zurarah, from Abu Ja'far (A), [Zurarah] says: I heard him say, "Verily, God, the Almighty and the Glorious, cannot be described, and how could He be described when He declares in His Book. 'And they measure not God with His true measure.' Hence, He cannot be described by any measure, and if described He would transcend it. And, verily, the Prophet (S) cannot be described, and how could be described a servant whom God, the Almighty and the Glorious, has concealed with seven veils and made obedience to him in the earth like obedience to him in the heavens, declaring, 'And whatsoever the Messenger giveth you, take it. And whatsoever be forbiddeth, abstain from it.' And [He has declared] 'Whoever obeys him assuredly obeys Me, and whoever disobeys him disobeys Me.' Hence, He has delegated authority to him. And we (Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt) cannot be described, and how could a people be described whom God has kept free from impurity, which is doubt. And neither can the believer be described. And indeed, when the believer takes his brother with the hand on meeting him, God looks at them and sins are shed from their faces in the way leaves fall from
".a tree

Exposition

and they measure not God...'), al-Jawhari) وما قدروا ...To take up the explication of the phrase both with fathah on the dal (i.e. qadar) and قدر says in this regard: "qadr means 'measure'. And sukun on it (i.e. qadr) has the same meaning. It is a verbal noun (masdar). God, the Exalted, they do not') مَا عَظَّمُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ قَدْرِهِ which means وَمَا قَدَرُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ قَدْرِهِ says: which means
venerate God in the way He ought to be venerated')."

In the opinion of this writer qadr apparently means 'measure,' and has been used figuratively to indicate the incapacity to describe and venerate adequately. Description (tawsif) itself is a kind of measurement of the object described in the apparel of characterization, and this-as shall be pointed out later, God willing-is neither possible nor permissible for anyone else to do in
relation to that Sacred Being.

with a ta, in the version of marhum al-Majlisi (M) **بِقُدْرَةٍ** there is **فلا يوصف بقدر** As to the phrase and he has considered it to signify comparison. Also, he is of the opinion that the singling out of Power (qudrah) from among the Attributes is due to its being closer to understanding. Then, affirming the possibility of error in the manuscript, he says, "Possibly, it may be read with fathah (i.e. qadar), as in some other traditions."

with ha', in some **قَدْرِهِ** The version of al-Wafi accords with his guess and perhaps it may be with ta', is an error in the manuscript, **بِقُدْرَةٍ** manuscripts. But it is probable, or rather certain, that for it is neither eloquent from the viewpoint of meaning nor proper on the basis of wording, for a masculine pronoun is referred to it, and to explain it away will be contrary to the rule.

The context offered little room for a maneuver and hence this explanation of marhum al-Majlisi, even though there is no reason for asserting that while it is possible to conceive the attribute of Power it is impossible to conceive other Attributes, thus distinguishing it from other

Attributes. Accordingly this explanation did carry much weight in his own blessed opinion. i.e. hatt means the **حَتَّ: الحَتَّ: حَكَّ الورق من الغصن** as Jawhari says in the Sihah **تَنَحَّطُ** As to the word which (i.e. tanathur) **تَنَاطَرَ: تَحَاتَّ الشَّيْءُ:** falling of leaves from the branch of a tree. He further says also gives the meaning of falling and scattering. Now we shall explain the relevant points of the .noble tradition in a number of sections

The Indescribability Of God

It should be known that the indescribability of God, the Exalted, mentioned in this tradition refers to the characteristics of God given by some victims of ignorance and disputation from among the theologians (mutakallimun) and others, whose statements implied finitude (tahdid) and anthropomorphism (tashbih) or rather the very denial of the Divine Attributes (tatil). That Some **وَمَا قَدَرُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ قَدْرِهِ.** such is the case is indicated by this phrase in the noble tradition traditions of the noble al-Kafi, in the chapter concerning prohibition on characterization (nahy 'an al tawsif), also affirm this: In al-Kafi (al-Kulayni reports) with his isnad from 'Abd al-Rahim ibn 'Atik all-Qasir that he said: I wrote a letter to Abu 'Abd Allah (A) which I sent through 'Abd al-Malik ibn A'yan, informing him that there are some people in Iraq who characterize God with form and features (takhtit). I wrote: May God make me your ransom, if you consider it fit, write to me the correct doctrine of Divine Unity. He wrote back to me, "May God be merciful to you, you have questioned me concerning tawhid and the belief held by a group of people over there. Exalted is God, and there is nothing like Him, and He is the All-hearing and the All-seeing. He is above the descriptions of the anthropomorphists (mushabbihah) who liken God to His creation and ascribe falsehoods to Him. May God have mercy upon you, know that the right doctrine of tawhid is that which has been revealed in the Qur'an concerning the Attributes of

God, the Almighty and the Glorious. Negate ta'til (the negation of Attributes) as well as tashbih in relation to God, the Exalted. Hence neither the Attributes are to be negated, nor God is to be likened to anything. He is God, the Self-Subsisting (al thabit) and the Existent (al-mawjud), exalted is He above what the describers attribute to Him. Go not beyond the Qur'an, or you will go astray after the clear exposition [of the truth]."

If one reflects properly on the contents of this noble tradition and its earlier and latter parts one comes to know that the prohibition concerning the characterization of God does not mean, as stated by some eminent traditionists, that one should refrain absolutely from reflecting on the Attributes or describing the Attributes of God, because this tradition, like some others, directs one to negate ta'til and tashbih-something which is not possible without reflection on the Attributes and a complete knowledge of them. That which the Imam wants to say is that one should not attribute to God, the Exalted, anything that is not worthy of His sacred Essence, such as the attribution of form, features, and other characteristics of the creatures, which entail imperfection and contingency (imkan), and God is above these.

However, as to describing God, the Exalted, by attributes that suit Him, it has a sound discursive basis in the transcendental sciences ('ulum-e 'aliyah). Hence, it is something desirable, and the Book of God, the Sunnah of the Messenger (S) and the traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt are replete with it. The Imam himself has made a brief reference in this noble tradition to that right discursive approach, though any elaboration of it is outside the scope of our discussion.

As to the statement of Imam al-Sadiq (A) that one should not go beyond the Divine Scripture in one's descriptions of God, it is a prescription for those who are ignorant of the criterion concerning [metaphysical speculation about] the Attributes. It does not mean that it is impermissible to ascribe an attribute that is not mentioned in the Book of God. Accordingly that master, despite prescribing this for his addressee, mentions two Attributes and Names of God, "Self-subsisting" (al-thabit) and "Existent" (al-mawjud), which as such do not occur in the Divine Scripture.

True, if someone with an undeveloped intellect, full of conjectures and imaginings and unilluminated with the light of gnosis (ma'rifah) and hidden Divine assistance, were to describe God with some attribute, he would inevitably fall either into the error of ta'til and negation [of the Attributes] or into the perdition of tashbih. Hence it is essential for persons like us whose hearts are covered with thick veils of ignorance and self-love and perverse habits and dispositions to refrain from reaching out toward the world of the Hidden and abstain from carving out deities for ourselves, for whatever we may conceive in our imagination would be no

more than our own creation.

However, it should not remain unsaid that when we say that such persons should not extend their hand towards the world of the Hidden we do not mean to recommend that they continue to remain in ignorance and egoism, nor, na'udhubillah, we call them to blaspheme His names,

[regarding which it has been said: And leave those who blaspheme His Names. (7:180)

Nor do we stop them from learning the transcendental teachings (ma'arif) which are the apple of the eye of the awliya' of God and the basis and foundation of religion. Rather, this is itself a call for the removal of these dark curtains, and a warning that as long as man remains a victim of self-attention and the love of the world, a captive of mundane ambition, love of wealth and the self, and, like this author, a prisoner within the walls of nescience, error, egoism and narcissism, which are the thickest of all darkening veils, he would remain deprived from

knowing the true teachings (ma'arif) and attaining to his real goal.

If, God forbid, there were no hidden succor from God, the Exalted, and His perfect awliya', one would not know where his matter would ultimately end and to what destination his movement and journey would lead him.

My God, I address my complaint to Thee and seek Thy help!

We, wanderers of the realm of ignorance, lost in the wilderness of error, and self-seeking and self-centered amusements, who came into the dark world of mulk and nature and, like bats, did not open the eye of real vision to behold the fair reflection of Thy Beauty in the mirror of things, big and small, nor the manifestations of Thy Light throughout the levels of the heavens and the earths! Blind of eyes and insensate of heart, we have passed our days and spent a lifetime in ignorance and self forgetfulness.

Should Thy unbounded grace and Thy infinite and effulgent mercy assist us not by lighting a spark within the heart and infusing a passion within the soul, we would languish forever in this such is not what we expect of Thee!!- هَكَذَا الظَّنُّ بِكَ perplexity of ours and get nowhere! But Thy favors preceded any worthiness [on our behalf) and Thy mercy is [ever] unearned. O God, out of Thy kindness succor us and guide us to the lights of Thy Beauty and Majesty and !illuminate our hearts with the radiance of Thy Names and Attributes

Impossibility Of Knowing The Reality Of The Names And The Attributes

It should be noted that the knowledge of the reality of the Divine Attributes and their encompassment as well as their nature is something whose summits lie beyond the reach of metaphysical proof (burhan) and whose kernel is beyond access to the yearning of the gnostics. That which has been said from the viewpoint of metaphysical proof in the speculative thought of scholars of formal metaphysics or in the discussions of the adept in the terminology

of gnosis concerning the Names and the Attributes is correct and well-reasoned in accordance with their approach.

However, learning ('ilm) itself is a thick veil, and as long as it is not pierced with the succor of the All-Glorious and in the shadow of perfect piety, intense mortification, complete dedication and sincere supplications to the Lord, the lights of Divine Beauty and Glory do not appear in the wayfarer's heart, and the heart of the emigrant towards Allah does not succeed in attaining to the witness of the Unseen (mushahadeh-ye ghaybiyyeh) and the manifest presence (hudur-e'ayani) of the manifestation of the Names and the Attributes, to say nothing of the manifestations of the Essence.

These statements should not deter one from research and study, which are themselves reminders of the Truth, for it happens only rarely that the sacred plant of ma'rifah grows and reaches fruition in the heart without the seed of the true sciences and their customary conditions. Hence one should not abstain at the outset from the pursuit of the sciences with due observance of all its prerequisites and auxiliaries, for it has been said: The sciences are the seed of (gnostic) disclosures.

And should the sciences fail to produce for one a complete result in this world on account of certain obstacles, they would inevitably bring the desired fruits in the other worlds. But the main thing is the observance of their prerequisites and conditions, some of which were .discussed in the exposition of certain foregoing traditions

Knowledge Of The Spiritual Reality Of The Prophets And The Awliya' Is Unattainable Through Rational Thought

It should be known that the knowledge of the spirituality and the station of perfection of the major prophetic figures and the infallible awliya' (A) in general, and those of the Seal of the Prophets (S) in particular, is not attainable by means of thought or journey through the 'horizons and the souls' (afaq wa anfus; 41:53).

That, because those venerable personages belong to the Divine lights of the Unseen and are the complete manifestation and the manifest signs of Divine glory and beauty, having reached, in the spiritual journey towards God, the ultimate extremity of self-annihilation (fana'-e dhati) and the ultimacy of ascent, to the point of 'two bows length or nearer' (qaba qawsayn aw adna; 53:9), though the latter station belongs [specifically] to the Seal of the Prophets and other wayfarers in their ascension are followers of his sacred being.

Here we do not intend to describe the nature of the journey of that sacred personage and the difference between his spiritual ascent (mi'raj) and the ascents of other prophets and awliya' (A). For the sake of the present discourse we shall confine ourselves to mentioning one

tradition pertaining to their luminosity, for the perception of their luminosity also requires an inner light and a divine gravitation: [In al-Kafi (al-Kulayni reports) with his isnad from Jabir, from Abu Ja'far (A). Jabir says: I asked him concerning the knowledge of the Knowing One (al-'Alim, i.e. an Imam.) He replied saying, "O Jabir, verily, there are five spirits in the prophets and the awsiya' the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Faith, the Spirit of Life, the Spirit of Power, and the Spirit of Appetite. By the means of the Holy Spirit, O Jabir, they know everything from the Throne to underneath the earth." Then he added, "O Jabir, all the four spirits are subject to vicissitudes, but not the Holy Spirit, which does not engage in diversion or play."

In al-Kafi, al-Kulayni reports with his isnad from Abu Basir that he said: I asked Abu 'Abd Allah (A) concerning the statement of God, the Blessed and the Exalted, "And thus have We inspired in thee (O Muhammad) a Spirit of Our Command. Thou knewest not what the Scripture was, nor what the Faith' (42:52)." He replied, "(The Spirit mentioned in the verse) is one of the creatures of God, the Blessed and the Exalted, greater than Gabriel and Michael, that was with the Messenger of God (S) and which used to inform and guide him, and after him it is with the Imams (A)."

From the first tradition one comes to know that the prophets and the awsiya' (A) possess a sublime spiritual station which is called the Holy Spirit (ruh al-qudus; lit, 'the Spirit of Holiness'). By the means of that station they encompass all the particles of the universe epistemically and ontologically (ihateh-ye 'ilmi qayyumi). In that spirit, there is no negligence, sleep, error, forgetfulness and other vicissitudes associated with contingency or any of the changes and deficiencies pertaining to the realm of mulk.

Rather, it belongs to the world of the immaterial Unseen and the greater Jabarut. From the second tradition, one comes to know that that spirit is perfectly non-material and greater than Gabriel and Michael, who are the greatest inhabitants of the station of proximity of the Jabarut. Yes, the awliya', whose natural form (tinah) has been fashioned by God, the Exalted, with the mighty hands of His own Beauty and Majesty, and manifested Himself, in the first manifestation of the Essence (tajalliye dhati-ye awwali), with all the Names, Attributes and the all-inclusive station of Unity (maqam-e ahadiyyat-a jam') in their perfect mirror, and initiated them into the reality of the Names and the Attributes in the Unseen privacy (khalwatgah-e ghayb) of the Divine Ipseity-the majesty of their glory and beauty is beyond the reach of the aspirations of the gnostics, and the summit of their perfection is beyond access to the gnostic endeavors of the people of the heart. And it is mentioned in a tradition of the Prophet (S): 'Ali is immersed in the Essence of God, the Exalted.

In former days, this author, like a bat describing the world-illuminating sun, has described a

modicum of the station of prophethood and wilayah in a separate treatise named Misbah al-hidayah.

The Waiting Of 'The Seven Hijabs' Mentioned In Relation To The Prophet

Several probable meanings have been suggested for these words of the noble tradition: كَيْفَ يُوصَفُ عَبْدٌ اخْتَجَبَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ بِسَبْعٍ. and here we shall mention some of them.

First is the one suggested by the perfect gnostic and traditionist, the marhum Fayd (M). It is narrated in a tradition that there are seventy thousand veils of light and darkness for God, the Exalted; were He to remove them, the lights of Divine Beauty will burn down everything that His sight falls upon. Accordingly, it is probable that [for كَيْفَ يُوصَفُ عَبْدٌ اخْتَجَبَ اللَّهُ بِسَبْعٍ] means that [for the Prophet, most of] all those veils have been removed so that out of the seventy-thousand only seven remain. According to this interpretation, the phrase involves an ellipsis and means

[احتجب الله عنه بسبع with God, the Glorious, as the active subject [of the verb احتجب]].

Although this interpretation is perhaps more appropriate than the other probable meanings, it is not indisputable. From the viewpoint of wording, a more appropriate expression for the description to convey such a sense would be: ما احتجب الله عنه إلا بسبع or ما احتجب عن الله إلا بسبع. As in accordance with this interpretation, the perfection of the Messenger and the impermissibility of describing him relates not to the presence of the seven veils but to the absence of the other veils, it would have been more appropriate to mention them.

Moreover, from the viewpoint of meaning, since, apparently, these veils of light and darkness that belong to God, the Exalted, pertain to creation and not to the Names and the Attributes, it entails that there is a creature nearer [to the Divine Essence] than the sacred light of the Noble Messenger (S) whereas it has been established that his being is the nearest veil and the first creature and there are not even any veils of Names and Attributes for that master, as has been proved in its own proper place, and the sevenfold stations and mysteries of that master are also not a veil for himself.

A second interpretation is the one proffered by the erudite traditionist, the marhum Majlisi, may God elevate his station in the realm of sanctity, which he also narrates from some others. According to this interpretation, this sentence is mentioned in the way of introduction and intended to describe the Prophet through later sentences.

That is, it means to say: 'How could be described a servant, for whom God, Who is concealed from the creatures with seven veils, has made obedience in the earth like obedience to him in the heaven-like a king who is situated beyond seven curtains for his subjects, who cannot have access to him except through the mediation of a vizier appointed for them, and who sends a decree declaring that his command is mine.'

And that which is meant by the sevenfold veils are the seven heavens from beyond which the revelations of God reach us through the Messenger. He has also mentioned another possible interpretation close to this one wherein the sevenfold veils are identified as the luminous veils of the Names. Although this interpretation, like the former, is not contestable from the viewpoint of meaning, it is inadequate or rather more farfetched from the viewpoint of wording and description.

There is another probable interpretation of it which is much sounder and convincing and more appropriate to the occasion. However, the correctness of this interpretation depends on one of or that it حَجَبَ has been used in a transitive sense in the sense of احتجب two things: either that be permissible to make it transitive with a ba; and in both the cases there be an ellipsis involving the object (maf'ul).

Assuming the propriety of one of these two matters mentioned, this is what is meant in accordance with this interpretation: 'How could a creature be described whom God, the Exalted, has concealed with seven veils, and for whose beauty and spirituality, which are on a par with the Divine will (mashiyyah), He has assigned seven veils extending from the plane of corporeal nature to the plane of the absolute mashiyyah, or from the plane of the corporeal realm of mulk of that master to the Unseen station (maqam-e ghayb) of his ipseity (huwiyyah). I could not find any instance in the lexicon and usage for the transitive meaning of although some scholars state that there is no impediment to making it transitive with a ba'. And all knowledge is with God, and perchance He may make something to come about .hereafter

The Delegation (Tafwid) Of The Affair To The Messenger Of God (S), As Indicated By This And Many Other Traditions

It should be known that the term tafwid is used in a special sense in discussions on jabr and tafwid (predestination and total human freedom).

According to this sense of tafwid, it means that God, the Exalted, has na'udhubillah, dissociated Himself in some respect from making any kind of dispositions in the world, right from the remotest extremity of creation pertaining to the Unseen immaterial spheres to the other end of the realm of creation and [corporeal] existence and delegated its administration to a being which is either a perfectly and completely spiritual and immaterial being possessing will and freedom of action, or a physical existent devoid of will and consciousness, which has a complete freedom of independent action therein.

Tafwid in this sense of delegation of Divine functions to someone, either in the matter of creation (takwin) or that of legislation (tashri') or on the plane of administration of the affairs of

the creatures and their instruction (ta'dib), is impossible, and it implies the affirmation of deficiency and contingency in relation to the Necessary Being and negation of contingency and need in relation to contingent being.

Opposed to it is jabr, which means negation of causal efficiency in relation to the various planes of existence and an outright negation of the entire system of causes and effects. This notion is also absolutely false and contrary to firm metaphysical proofs. This is not restricted to the acts of legally responsible persons (mukallafun) as is generally known. Rather, the negation of jabr and tafwid in this sense is the operating sunnah of God in all the planes of being and in all the spheres of the Seen and the Unseen. However, the proof of this matter lies outside the scope of these pages.

The traditions negating jabr and tafwid are to be taken to apply to these meanings of the terms. [The term tafwid] has some other meaning in those traditions which do affirm tafwid [such as the following tradition of al-Kafi from Imam al-Baqir concerning the legislation of certain laws by the Prophet himself], or those which mention the delegation of all the affairs of the creatures [to the prophet], like the [second] tradition of al-Kafi given below.

In the first noble tradition of al-Kafi it is narrated with isnad from Imam al-Baqir (A) that he said, "The Messenger of God (S) prescribed the damages (diyah) for loss of an eye and life, and he forbade nabidh and every intoxicant." Someone asked him, "Was that without anything being revealed to him?" The Imam replied, "Yes. That was in order [that God may] know those who obey the Messenger of God (S) and those who disobeyed him."

In other such instances, the Prophet (S) added a number of rak'ahs to the daily prayers and made fasting during the month of Sha'ban and on three days of every month mustahabb.

The second tradition is as follows: (Al-Kulayni reports) with his isnad from Zurarah that he said: I heard Abu Ja'far and Abu 'Abd Allah (A) say, "Verily, God, the Almighty and the Glorious, has delegated the affair of His creatures to His Prophet, to see how they obey him." Then he recited this verse: Take whatever the Messenger brings you and refrain from whatever he forbids you.

Eminent scholars have mentioned certain probable meanings and interpretations. One of them is that which the erudite traditionist al Majlisi (M), relates from Thiqat al-Islam al-Kulayni and most of the traditionists and which he himself favors. The gist of it is that God, the Exalted, after that He made the Messenger so perfect that he would not opt for anything that is not in conformity with what is true and correct and nothing would enter his blessed mind which is opposed to God's will, delegated to him the determination of some matters, such as adding to the number of rak'ahs in obligatory prayers, the determination of supererogatory matters

relating to prayer and fasting and so on.

This delegation (tafwid) was to make manifest the dignity and majesty of the station of that Master near God, the Glorious. However, his determinations and choices are not without inspiration and revelation, and after that Master prescribed something, the matter was affirmed by revelation? Marhum Majlisi, may God elevate his station, also mentions other matters similar to this one, such as the matter of teaching, instructing, and administering the creatures, which has been delegated to him, or that of proclaiming and expositing of the ahkam, or refraining from that, in accordance with the exigencies of time-such as while observing taqiyyah-which have been delegated to him and the other Ma'sumun?

However, in any of the two interpretations offered by these revered scholars the scope of tafwid has not been explained as a rational principle consistent with established principles. Moreover, the distinction between this tafwid and the tafwid which is impossible remains unexplained. Rather, that which is implied by their statements-especially those of marhum Majlisi (M) is that it would be [affirmation of impermissible] tafwid to believe that someone other than God, the Exalted, can create, cause death, provide sustenance and give life, that one who holds such a belief is an unbeliever (kafir) and no rational person would doubt its being tantamount to apostasy.

Moreover, they have considered the matter of miracles (mu'jizat) and miraculous feats (karamat) as being totally a result of answered prayer, wherein God is the agent of the occurrences. However, the tafwid of the teaching and instruction of creatures and the bestowal and withholding of anfal and khums and the laying down of certain laws is considered correct and proper. This topic is one of those which have rarely been clarified and hardly ever brought under a correct criterion.

Mostly what they have done is to take an aspect of the matter and discuss it. This author, too, with his inadequate capacity and ineptitude and the poverty of his equipment and means cannot enter this perplexing valley by starting from the preliminaries. However, he is compelled to make a brief allusion in the way of a metaphysical conclusion, for the disclosure of truth is .unavoidable

Brief Allusion To The Meaning Of Tafwid

It should be known that there is no difference whatsoever between big and small matters in regard to the impossible tafwid, in the sense of total suspension of Divine Activity (maghluliyat-e yaddullah) and independence of the efficiency of any creature's will and power. In the same way as the giving of life, the causing of death, creation, annihilation, and the transformation of one element into another cannot be delegated to any being, so also the

delegation of the movement of a piece of straw to any creature is impossible, though it be an archangel, an apostle, or any other being from the non-material intellects and inhabitants of the highest jabarut to the realm of primal matter. All the particles of the universe are subject to the

perfect Divine will and have no independence whatsoever of their own in any respect.

All of them are needy and poor in their being, as well as in their ontic perfections, movements and pauses, power and will, and all their functions. Rather, they are sheer poverty and absolute need. Similarly, there is no distinction between major and insignificant matters in respect of God's sustaining power over being and the negation of independence of creatures and the manifestation and influence of the Divine will and its all-pervasiveness. In the same way as such weak creatures as we have the power to carry out feeble actions, such as our [bodily] movements and pauses and all the other activities, the elect of God and the non-material angels are capable of performing such great acts as giving life, causing death, providing sustenance, creation, and annihilation.

The Angel of Death is encharged with taking life and his taking of life is not something like the fulfillment of prayer, and Israfil is encharged with the giving of life, which is not of the nature of a prayer answered, and these actions do not fall under invalid tafwid. In the same way, if a perfect wali and a potent pure soul—such as the spirits of the prophets and the awliya'—are—were to have the power to annihilate and create, to cause death and give life, a power given to them by God, the Exalted, it would not be an instance of impossible tafwid and should not be considered invalid. The delegation of the affair of the creatures to a perfect spirit whose intention is annihilated in the Divine intent and whose will is an image of the Divine will, and which does not will anything except what God wills and makes no move except that which is in accordance with the best system (nizam-e aslah), whether in creation and bringing into being or in legislation and instruction, that is not only not impossible but quite proper. In fact, this is

not tafwid, as pointed out in the tradition narrated by Ibn Sinan to be cited in the next section. In fine, tafwid in the first sense is not permissible in any matter and is contradictory to firm metaphysical proof. In its second sense, it is permissible in all matters. Rather, the system of the universe is not realized without the order of causes and effects: God does not make things happen except through their means and causes.

It should be known that that which has been said here briefly is rational and in accordance with sound metaphysical proof and mystic teaching as well as in conformity with tradition. And God .is the guide

The Station Of The Imams (A.S.)

Know that the pure and infallible Ahl al-Bayt (A) have certain lofty spiritual stations on the

spiritual journey towards Allah whose epistemic apprehension is beyond human capacity and above the intellects of the people of reason and the intuitions (shuhud) of the gnostics. As is apparent from the noble traditions, they share the spiritual station of the Noble Messenger (S) and their immaculate lights were engaged in the glorification and praise of the Sacred Essence before the creation of the worlds.

In al-Kafi [al-Kulayni reports] with his isnad from Muhammad ibn Sinan that he said: I was with Abu Ja'far, the Second (A) when I mentioned before him the disagreement amongst the Shi'ah. Thereat he said, "O Muhammad, verily God, the Blessed and the Exalted, is ever unique in His Unity. Then He created Muhammad, 'Ali and Fatima. They remained for a thousand eons, then, He created all the things and made them witness their creation and decreed them to obey them, delegating their affairs (i.e. of the creatures) to them. Hence they permit whatever they will and forbid whatever they will and they will not anything except what God, the Exalted, wills.' Then he said, 'O Muhammad, whoever goes beyond this creed transgresses the bounds of right doctrine and whoever lags behind perishes, and whoever adheres to it attains to the truth. So hold on to it, O Muhammad!"

In al-Kafi, al-Kulayni reports with his isnad from al-Mufaddal that he said: I said to Abu 'Abd Allah (A), "How was your state when you were in the Shadows?" He replied, "O Mufaddal, we were with our Lord and there was none else except us in the Green Shadow: we glorified Him, called Him Holy and One and extolled Him. Besides us, there was neither any archangel nor any spirit, until when it appeared to God to originate the creation. Thereupon, He created whatever He will and howsoever He will of the angels and the other creatures. Then He gave the knowledge of that to us."

The traditions relating to the nature (tinah) of their bodies and the creation of their spirits and hearts, and those which speak of their having been given [the knowledge of] the Greatest Name (ism-e a'zam) and the sciences-bestowed upon them from the Unseen divine stores-of the prophets and the angels and what is above that and that which does not enter into the imagination of you and me, and that which is mentioned of their other excellences in the various chapters of reliable works of our associates, especially in the Usul al-Kafi, are such as to confound the intellect.

No one can apprehend their mysteries and realities except their own sacred beings. In this noble tradition in whose exposition we are presently engaged, there is a reference to one of their excellences, which is the Verse of the Purification (al-ayat al-tathir; 33:33), which, in accordance with mutawatir traditions narrated through Sunni and Shi'i chains of transmission, was revealed concerning the Infallible Ahl al-Bayt.

Those who are meant by “ahl al-bayt” in the noble verse, as affirmed by the consensus of the Shi’ah and abundant or mutawatir traditions narrated through non-Shi’i (‘ammah) chains of transmission, are the Household of infallibility (‘ismah) and purity (taharah). This is a point whose elaboration would be explanation of what is evident

Reality Of ‘Ismah

In this, as well as other noble traditions, rijs [in verse 33:33] has been interpreted as doubt (shakk), and in some traditions, it is interpreted as freedom from all defects. A study of the exposition of some of the earlier traditions shows that the negation of doubt implies the negation of all inward and outward defects and, in fact, implies infallibility (‘ismah). That is because infallibility is not something contrary to free will, as in the case of matters relating to nature and instinct.

Rather it is a spiritual state and a light acquired by means of the perfect light of certainty (yaqin) and total tranquility (itminan). The errors and sins that are committed by human beings are due to inadequate conviction and faith. The degrees of conviction and faith are so various as to be beyond description. The perfect certainty of the prophets and their complete tranquility, acquired through unmediated knowledge (mushahadeh-ye hudariyyah), makes them immune to error. The conviction of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (A) had brought him to the station that he declared: “Even if I were to be given the whole world in order to unjustly deprive an ant of a grain, I would not do it. “

In any case, by God’s pre-eternal design, they have been cleansed of shirk and doubt, purified from the impurities and defilements of the world of physical nature (‘alam-e tabiat) and the darkness of attachment to other than God, the Exalted, freed from the obfuscations of the ego and the thick sheaths of egoism and attention to other [than of God], becoming sacred divine lights and complete signs of the Lord, Who has made them purely and sheerly His own. Hence their stations are such as cannot be properly described and explained and, like the phoenix of the ghayb of Divine Ipseity, the peaks of their glory are beyond the reach of [gnostic] aspirations: Take thy net away for none can ever catch the phoenix

The Indescribability Of Faith

It should be known that iman (faith) is also one of the spiritual perfections whose radiant reality can rarely be known by anyone. Even the faithful, so long as they remain in the world and in the darkness of nature, are unaware of the radiance of their faith and the dignity they have before God.

As long as man remains in this world, he becomes so accustomed to its conditions and habits

that when he hears anything about the nobilities and bounties of the other world and its punishments and disappointments, he immediately compares them to a similar form in the realm of mulk. For instance, he compares the nobilities promised by God, the Exalted, to the faithful and the bounties He has prepared for them, and whose news has been conveyed by the prophets (A) to the gifts and honors received by men from princes and suzerains or something better and higher. He assumes the bounties of that world to be like those of this world, though somewhat more refined and superior.

Such a comparison is altogether invalid. The bounties of that world, its delights, and fragrance cannot be truly imagined by us, and anything like them does not enter our minds. We cannot conceive how a drink of the water of Paradise can possess all the imaginable and possible pleasures, each of which is distinct from the other, for the quality of any delight [of that world] has no similarity to the pleasures of this world.

In this noble tradition, there is a mention of one of the nobilities of the faithful which, in view of the people of gnosis and the people of the heart, are incomparable to anything and cannot be measured by any measure, and that is the statement of the tradition where it says, "Indeed, when the believer takes his brother with the hand on meeting him, God looks at them and sins are shed from their faces in the manner leaves fall from a tree." The same theme recurs in many other traditions, such as the following one: In al-Kafi, al-Kulayni reports with his isnad from Abu Ja'far (A) that he said, "When the faithful meet and take one another by the hand, God, the Exalted, turns to them with His face, and their sins fall from them in the manner leaves fall from a tree."

God only knows what inner luminosity and nobility is associated with this look of God, the Exalted, and this attention of His with His noble face, and what veils are removed from between the faithful servant and the lights of the Beauty of the Sacred Essence and what succor it provides to the faithful. However, one should know the reality and actual secret behind these nobilities and one should not be heedless of it.

The heart's attention should be turned so that the act attains its perfect luminosity and a divine breath is blown into the act's body. That reality and secret truth lies in strengthening the bond of love and cordiality and renewal of the covenant of love and brotherhood for the sake of God. A great significance is attached to this point in the noble traditions and is also hinted at in traditions relating to this topic: In al-Kafi [al-Kulayni reports] with his isnad from Abu Ja'far (A) that he said, "When the faithful meet and take one another by the hand, God places His hand between their hands and shakes hand with the one who has greater love for his companion."

It is stated in another tradition that when the faithful meet and shake hands, God, the Exalted,

sends His mercy down upon them; nine-tenths of it belong to the one who has greater love for his companion, and if they should be equal [in love], the mercy envelopes them. There are many traditions on this topic and that which have been cited will suffice. And all praise is God's, at
.the beginning and the end