

Nearness to Allah

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Among the most paramount issues related to human self-understanding that are found in various cultures and ages are questions of the perfection of man and ultimate human happiness. In Islamic texts, ultimate human perfection is described as nearness to Allah. This article offers a brief review of the teachings of the Qurʾān on this topic and a sketch of the history of discussions of nearness to God in some of the Islamic sciences, particularly jurisprudence (*fiqh*), mysticism (*irfān*), theology (*kalām*), and (Islamic) philosophy (*falsafah*). Each of these areas is an arena for the expression of a distinctive perspective on nearness to God. With regard to each of them, we consider the following questions: Is it possible for human beings to approach God? If it is possible, what is the maximum extent of nearness to the divine? Can one become God or divine, or is proximity to God more limited? And, finally, what is the nature of this nearness, and what happens to a person when one approaches God? The answers found to these questions allow for a comparison of the four perspectives on nearness to God. The method used in this article is both rational and scriptural, although particular emphasis is given to the Qurʾān.

Keywords: nearness to Allah, *qurb*, proximity, jurisprudence, *irfān*, philosophy.

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Introduction

Nearness to God is described in the Qur'ān as *qurb*, which in the form *qurbān* can mean either a sacrifice or a means of approach (9:99).

The special relationship between man and God, called “approximation to God” or “nearness to God,” which has degrees or ranks, is found in Judaism and Christianity, as well as in Islam (Dupre 2004, 4). It was also a major theme of the Neo-Platonists (Remes 2008, 179-86) and in the hermetic and gnostic currents of late antiquity (Filoramo 1999). The highest degree of proximity is taken to be an encounter with God or union with Him, which is achieved through the soul’s ascension toward God or through God’s self-manifestation to those He chooses among His creatures. In the Islamic tradition, the peak of this encounter is illustrated by the *mi‘rāj* or *ascension* of the Prophet (ﷺ); in Christianity, the ultimate divine encounter is represented in the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1–8; Mark 9:2–8; Luke 9:28–36) and in the beatific visions granted by God to some of His saints (Kākāeī 1381/2003, 106).

The emphasis on oneness (*tawḥīd*) in Islam leads to the view that since reality is (ultimately) God and the final purpose of man is to reach God, the final purpose is the achievement of reality; other goals are subordinate. Nearness to God is a spiritual connection with God and this connection constitutes human perfection (Muṭaḥḥarī 1368/1980, 162). From this perspective, the true believer only seeks God. Nothing else is desired except as a means to approach God (Ṭabāṭabā’ī 1406/1985, 1:363-4; 2:190-2). Although this goal also has incidental benefits and subsidiary goals, only proximity is inherently desirable.

In his attempts to draw near to God, the human being has a special advantage, for God breathed His spirit into him (Qur’ān 15:29) and made a covenant with him (7:172). Man has an inherent disposition to seek God through his ontological dependence on Him and in view of

the divine covenant. Hence, man finds his perfection through wayfaring toward God and approaching Him (Muṭahharī 1369/1991, 34).

A survey of the Islamic literature on this topic shows that most discussions of nearness to God are to be found in texts on mysticism (*irfān*) and ethics (*akhlāq*), as well as on philosophy (*ḥikmat*). The topic has attracted comparatively little interest in the fields of *kalām* (theology), *tafsīr* (exegesis of the Qur'ān), *ḥadīth* (the study of narrations), and *fiqh* (jurisprudence).

Attention to the topic is first found among the *'urafā*, the mystics of Islam, and it is one of the first topics to which they turned, which led to discussions of the nature of proximity to God, its degrees, and the means for attaining it. In the most important books of the *'urafā*, such as Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah* (*The Meccan Revelations*), Qayṣarī’s introduction to Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (*Bezels of Wisdom*), and Jāmī’s *Naqd al-nuṣūṣ*, there are extensive discussions of how to achieve nearness to God. It remains a topic to which attention is devoted in more recent works on spiritual wayfaring, such as *Risālat Liqā’ Allah* (*Epistle on Encountering Allah*) by Mīrzā Javād Malikī Tabrīzī, *Risālat al-Wilāyah* (*Epistle on Trusteeship*) by Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā’ī, *Chihil ḥadīth* (*Forty Hadiths*) by Imam Khomeini, and many others.

After the mystics, Muslim theologians and philosophers added their own views to the discussion: Ibn Sīnā in the ninth *namaṭ* of *al-Ishārāt* (*Remarks and Admonitions*), Kh^wājah Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī in *Risālat al-Nafs* (*Epistle on the Soul*), Mullā Ṣadrā in his *Asfār* (*The Four Journeys*), and, more recently, Shahīd Muṭahharī in *Insān-i kāmil* (*The Perfect Man*), Ayatollah Javādī Āmulī in *Tafsīr tasnīm* (*The Accession Exegesis*), and Ayatollah Miṣbāḥ Yazdī in *Bi sū-yi khudsāzī* (*On the Way to Self-Construction*), to mention just a few.

This has not been taken up as a particular topic of study in Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), although Shī‘ī jurists have maintained that the

intention of approaching God (*qurbat^{am} ilā Allah*) is obligatory for every act of worship, which will be invalid without this intention.

In what follows, we discuss the references in the Qur’ān to man’s ultimate goal and the nearness to God before reviewing the perspectives of (1) the *‘urafā* (the mystics of Islam), (2) the *ḥukumā’* (Muslim philosophers), (3) the *mutakallimūn* (theologians), and (4) the *fuqahā’* (jurists). Following this, we consider how each of these groups would respond to the following questions: To what extent is it possible for human beings to approach God? Can one achieve complete union with God, or does some distance always remain? What is the nature of proximity to the divine?

The Ultimate Goal

The ultimate goal of human beings is discussed in the scriptures of different religions and in the works of philosophers, theologians, and other thinkers. There are differences about whether there is such an ultimate end, and, if there is, how it is to be understood. According to Islam, the ideal and final goal is achieving the station of nearness to God and divine intimacy. This ultimate goal is considered to be intrinsically desirable and motivating.

The goal for human beings is described in the Qur’ān through the use of a number of terms, which are often paired with the terms for failure. The success terms are often associated with heavenly rewards, and failure with the fire of hell. An explicit link between nearness to God and heavenly bliss is to be found in one of the earliest revelations: “for the God-wary there will be gardens of bliss near their Lord” (68:34). In another Meccan *āyah*, the idea of the ultimate goal is made explicit with the phrase “the final end (*muntahā*) is unto your Lord” (53:42).¹

1. A similar phrase is found at (79:44).

Another important term for the ultimate goal is found in the call to prayer, which includes the phrase “*ḥayy ‘alā al-ṣalāh; ḥayy ‘alā al-falāḥ!*” We are called to hurry, or somewhat more literally, to make ourselves lively, toward the prayer (*ṣalāh*) and toward the “*falāḥ*.” This last word is usually translated as “prosperity” or “success.”

The ultimate success in philosophical traditions as diverse as those of Aristotle and Mengzi¹ has been described as happiness, (Aristotle’s *eudaimonia*, εὐδαιμονία), and, by subsequent writers in these traditions, as *flourishing*. Muslim philosophers translated Aristotle’s *eudaimonia* as *sa ‘ādah*, while Latins used *beatus* or *felicitas* (from *felix*) to describe the ultimate goal of life, from which the English *beatific* and *felicity* are derived.

There are two occurrences of words with the same root as *sa ‘ādah* in the Qur’ān: (11:105, 108). *triumph* or *victory*, using words derived from the root *f-w-z*. A frequent phrase is “the great triumph” (*al-fawz al-aẓīm*). *falāḥ* is sometimes coupled with the promise of the great triumph to the God-wary. Two derivatives from the root *falāḥ* occur forty times in the Qur’ān: *aflaḥa* twenty-seven times and *muflīḥūn* thirteen.

The state of flourishing is what results from the purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-naḥs*): “Felicitous [flourishing] is he who purifies himself, remembers the Name of his Lord, and prays” (Qur’ān 87:14-15). This admonition is followed by the statement that one should have God-wariness (*taqwā*) in order to flourish or attain success (*falāḥ*). The promise of success for the God-wary is expressed with a derivative of *f-w-z* in the following Meccan *āyah*: “Allah will deliver those who were God-wary with their salvation (*mafāzat*). No ill shall touch them, nor will they grieve” (39:61).

1. Aristotle (384–322 BCE) was contemporary with the Confucian scholar Mengzi or Mencius (391–308 BCE); and both of them emphasized the importance of virtue.

In *Sūrat al-Tawba*, we find a link between the two terms for the ultimate goal, *falāḥ* and *fawz*, together with a reference to jihad (9:88-89). In another *āyah*, we read, “indeed the victorious” (5:56).

The Prophet (ṣ) formed a community or nation, *ummah*, in Medina. In *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān*, calling for unity and warning against factionalism, flourishing (*falāḥ*) is introduced as the outcome of the mission of this *ummah* (3:104).

Felicity is not merely a matter of personal piety; it has a social dimension as well. However, this social dimension is bound to the moral mission of the new community. The unity of the new community in Medina was threatened by divisions between the immigrants from Mecca (*muhājirūn*) and the Medinans who hosted them, the helpers (*anṣār*). Through their love for the *muhājirūn*, the *anṣār* are counted among the felicitous, for they were saved from their own stinginess (Qur’ān 59:9).

The *sa’ādah* or felicity described in these passages of the Qur’ān is an ultimate rather than an instrumental goal. It is not sought for its utility with regard to some more ulterior motive (Miṣbāḥ Yazdī 1376/1998, 1:28).

This is a dominant recurring image in the Qur’ān. There is a path or road to be taken that leads us to heaven and God. In *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah*, we pray to be guided on the “straight path,” *al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* (1:6). Often, this is described as a path from darkness to light, as in the beautiful opening of *Sūrat Ibrāhīm* (14:1-4).

Two Kinds of Nearness

Nearness to God is not a symmetrical relation. Even when we are far from Him, God is near to us. While both are valuable, it is only the first that is sought through divine guidance. We could say that the nearness to be attained by the servant has a positive prescriptive value, while the nearness of God to the servant is without any burden of

obligation. The *ʿurafā* speak of these as *qurb-i sulūkī*, the nearness of wayfaring, and *qurb-i wujūdī*, existential nearness. They are also referred to as *qurb-i takwīnī*, ontic nearness, and *qurb-i tashrīʿī*, prescriptive nearness.

There are many *āyāt* and hadiths that speak about ontic nearness; for example: “He is with you wherever you may be,” (Qurʾān 57:4) and “Certainly We have created man, and We know to what his soul tempts him, and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein” (50:16). Here, there is no distance between God and His creatures, and nothing is far from God or absent from Him. In another verse we find, “Allah intervenes between a man and his heart” (8:24). This ontic proximity is not limited to humans; God is present within each particle (Ṭabāṭabāʾī 1406/1985, 18:347). Ontic proximity, therefore, is not a virtue for human beings; and despite His nearness to them, God will do away with those of His servants who defy him (Qurʾān 11:68; 23:44). It is because of this distance that man needs to approach God. Prescriptive nearness to God involves the servant’s turning to Him. The servant must engage in a kind of spiritual wayfaring to approach the divine. The imagery is that of a spatial distance that needs to be crossed by the servant so that he can enter the divine precincts. If there were no distance, nearness to God would be meaningless (Jāmī 1373/1995, 226).

The kind of nearness to God commended in religious texts and in the teachings of the mystics is not ontic, but prescriptive. So, Ibn al-ʿArabī says that what is beneficial for the servant is to be with God (Ibn al-ʿArabī 1405/1983, 3:457).

Ontic proximity is universal: God is with all His creatures. This leads to a universal guidance for all existence: “Our Lord is He who gave everything its creation and then guided it” (Qurʾān 20:50). The proximity of wayfaring, on the other hand, is specific to believers, to those who are God-wary, who strive to advance on the path toward Him, who do the beautiful: “Indeed Allah is with those who are God-

wary and those who are virtuous (or those who do the beautiful, *al-muḥsinūn*)” (16:128; also 29:69, 2:194), and “Allah is with the faithful” (8:19). The Prophet said to his companion when he was in the cave: “Do not grieve; Allah is indeed with us” (9:40), and Moses said: “Indeed my Lord is with me, He will guide me” (26:62).

Nearness in 'Irfān

As mentioned earlier, the topic of nearness to God was first subject to extensive discussions by the Sufis, and it was one of the first topics they discussed. Very early in the history of *'irfān*, *qurb* (nearness) was used as a technical term for one or more stations on the path toward unity with God. However, the term also retained a more general sense, as indicated by Abū Ḥāmid Ghazzālī's definition of Sufism as nearness: “And by Sufism (*taṣawwuf*), I mean that for which the human being (*al-insān*) was created: wayfaring (*sulūk*) the path of nearness (*qurb*) to Allah, the exalted” (Ghazzālī 1964, 378).

The discussions of nearness to God are so extensive in mystical sources that a book-length study is needed to review them. Here, we provide only a few representative examples.

In the 3rd/9th century, we find fairly extensive discussions of proximity to God in the works of Ḥakīm Tirmidhī. The detail and complexity of his writings on the topic suggest that even at this early period in the development of Islamic mysticism, there were already fairly technical discussions of *qurb* (nearness) as a station on the path toward God (Svirī 2002, 203). In some of his writings, Tirmidhī suggests the ascent of the soul through the cosmos until it reaches the border between the created universe and the divine realms of light. This is the sphere of the divine throne, and it is also called the locus of nearness (*maḥall al-qurbah*) (Radtke and O'Kane 1996, 64-65).

Another early controversy arose with regard to the extent to which, with divine grace, one could attain nearness to God. According to

Tirmidhī, the *walī Allāh* has the station of standing in God's unicity (*wahdāniyyah*) (Radtke and O'Kane 1996, 131).

By the 5th/11th century, the Sufī tradition was well established and a number of manuals had been written, the most popular of which was the *Risālah* (Epistle) of 'Abd al-Karīm Qushayrī. One of the chapters of the *Risālah* is devoted to the topic of *qurb*. While Qushayrī considers union with God possible, his explanation of it is epistemological rather than ontological.

As for the nearness to the identity [essence] (*dhāt*)—Allah, the king, the real, is exalted beyond it. He is transcendent to all boundaries, areas, ends, and measures. No created being attains union with him. No originated being preceded by him can separate from him. His *ṣamadiyya* [the property of being the everlasting refuge, see Qur'ān (112:2)] is too sublime for any union or separation. There is a quality of nearness that is impossible: the coming near of essences [*dhawāt*]. There is a quality of nearness that is necessary: the nearness through knowledge and vision. There is a quality of nearness that is possible; he singles out those of his servants he wishes for it. This is the nearness of favor through graciousness (*lutf*). (Sells, 1996, 141)

The topic of divine nearness was not confined to the theoretical texts and practical manuals of the Sufis. In the 7th/13th century, we have the following exquisite treatment from Rumi's *Mathnavī*:

The Prophet said: "My *mir'āj* (ascension) is not preferable to the *mir'āj* of Jonah—

Mine through the celestial spheres, while his through the depths—
For nearness (*qurb*) to *Ḥaqq* (the Truth, Reality) is beyond calculation.

Nearness is going neither up nor down.

Nearness to *Ḥaqq* is escaping from being.

What place has nothing up there or down?

Nothing is neither early, far, nor late!

The workshop and treasure of *Ḥaqq* is in nothingness.

With the vanity of being, what do you know of what nothing is?

(Mathnavī 3:4512-16)

Here, Rumi (604/1207 – 672/1273) treats being as a property that needs to be abandoned if one is to reach beyond what can be positioned in spatial or temporal dimensions, beyond extended being. This approach contrasts with the tendency to understand divinity as absolute or unconditioned being that is common in the school of Ibn al-‘Arabī (560/1165 – 638/1240).

Ibn al-‘Arabī’s discussion of nearness is especially concerned with *hadīth al-nawāfil* (narration on the supererogatory prayers). This hadith was also subject to commentary by Tirmidhī and Qushayrī in their discussions of approaching the divine. The *hadīth al-nawāfil* is included, with slight variations, in both Sunni (e.g., *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*) and Shī‘ī collections (e.g., *al-Kāfī*), and is regarded as authentic by the consensus of the Muslims (Khomeini 2003, 577). Imam Khomeini gives a commentary on the hadith in his *Forty Hadiths*. A translation of the relevant section of the text of the narration as given in *al-Kāfī* follows:

When the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his Household, was taken on his [celestial] journey, he said [to God]: “My Lord, what is the state of the believer before Thee?” He replied, “O Muhammad, ... there is nothing dearer among things that bring a servant of Mine near to Me than the obligations that I have assigned to him. And indeed he draws nearer to Me gradually through supererogatory acts until I love him, and when I love him, I become the hearing with which he hears, the sight wherewith he sees, the tongue wherewith he speaks, and the hand wherewith he holds, and if he calls Me, I answer him, and if he asks Me I grant him.” (Khomeini 2003, 573-74)

Qurb (nearness) is often contrasted with the complementary concept of *bu‘d* (farness). In pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, the hero was expected to travel far and wide, while those who lacked sufficient strength would remain near to home (Bravmann 1972, 32-38). With Ibn al-‘Arabī, the perfect man is one who realizes his own ontological poverty and farness from God; and through this realization of farness and wayfaring across

the long distance, he is brought into the divine proximity (Chittick 1989, 319). All things are governed by divine Names; so, Ibn al-‘Arabī holds that there can be nearness with respect to some of these names but farness with respect to others. When a believer finds refuge in some Names and is thus able to achieve felicity, he considers himself to have achieved nearness. The idea of nearness of the ordinary believers is the nearness of felicity; and this idea is reflected, Ibn al-‘Arabī tells us, in the common definition of nearness by Sufis as “undertaking acts of obedience” (Chittick 1989, 151). Far superior to the nearness of felicity, however, are the two kinds of nearness indicated in the *hadīth al-nawāfil*: *qurb al-farā’id* (the nearness brought about through the performance of obligations) and *qurb al-nawāfil* (the nearness gained through the performance of supererogatory works). Ibn al-‘Arabī holds that nearness attained through the obligatory works is superior to that obtained through the supererogatory, since in the hadith, God says: “There is nothing dearer among things that bring a servant of Mine near to Me than the obligations that I have assigned to him.” Yet, it is by the supererogatory works that God becomes the servants hearing and seeing (Ibn al-‘Arabī 1405/1983, 2:354). This state is sometimes called “annihilation (*fanā’*) in the [divine] attributes” (Āshtiyānī 1370/1992, 578). This is not because God somehow enters into the person, but because the acts of hearing and seeing of the person may be correctly attributed to God. This state is often illustrated by the following *āyah*: “[Y]ou did not throw when you threw; rather, it was Allah who threw” (8:17). Thus, the Prophet’s hand becomes the divine hand, and He who threw was not the Prophet (Jāmi 1370/1992, 152). Similarly, Imam Ali says, “I am the eye of God, I am the hand of God, and I am the side of God” (Kulaynī 1407/1986, 1:145). What could be superior to that?

Ibn al-‘Arabī’s explanation is that while the hand of the servant becomes God’s hand through the supererogatory works, through the obligatory works, it is the servant who becomes God’s hearing and seeing! At this station, the hand of God becomes the hand of the servant,

so that what God does can be attributed to His servant. Imam Khomeini explains that this is a station of sobriety following annihilation in the attributes and may be considered an annihilation in the divine essence, or absolute *fanā'* (Khomeini 2003, 587).

The commentators of *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* have designated this as the station of the *perfect man* (Qayṣarī 1375/1996, 351). Such a person is said to have *wilāyah takwīnī*, an ontic guardianship and mastery over the natural world. According to Ibn al-‘Arabī, the perfect man is the cause of the maintenance and persistence of the universe (Ibn al-‘Arabī 1405/1983, 2:345).

In short, when we survey the history of the literature in *‘irfān*, we find a wide variety of views on divine proximity. Some deny that proximity ever reaches union with the divine essence, while the school of Ibn al-‘Arabī generally affirms this. Some consider proximity to result from the acts of worship or good works, while most have insisted that divine grace is needed. Often, nearness to God is described as becoming similar to God; that is, as taking on divine attributes. Generally speaking, nearness to God is considered as a state or station that the wayfarer attempts to realize within him.

Philosophical Nearness

Many of the Islamic philosophers have interpreted nearness to God in terms of perfection. Since, God is perfect, one can be considered close to God to the extent one acquires perfections. Since the distinguishing feature of man is the intellect, and since it is the intellect that is immortal, the perfection of man requires the perfection of the intellect (Mullā Ṣadrā 1374/1996, 161). The intellect is divided into practical and theoretical aspects. According to Mullā Ṣadrā (c. 979/1571 – 1045/1636), the perfection of the practical intellect is a prerequisite for the perfection of the theoretical intellect, which is considered to be the ultimate human perfection. Through the perfection of the practical

intellect, the vegetative and animal faculties of the soul come under the domination of the intellect. Without this domination, the lower faculties would be obstacles to the soul's perfection.

According to al-Fārābī (c. 260/878 – 339/950), ultimate felicity is achieved through the perfection of the intellect, and this comes about when it is joined to the *active intellect*, which is the source of all intelligibles. Majid Fakhry explains:

This stage, al-Fārābī sometimes calls conjunction (*ittisāl*), sometimes proximity (*qurb*, *muqārabah*), in which humans' ultimate happiness consists. At that point humans become, according to al-Fārābī, intellects in themselves and from being material beings (*hayūlānī*), they become divine beings (*ilāhī*). Al-Fārābī goes so far as to identify the Active Intellect, with which humankind is now conjoined, with the Qur'anic Faithful Spirit (*al-Rūh al-Amīn*) or Gabriel (*Jibrīl*) and the Holy Spirit (*al-Rūh al-Qudsī*).

Al-Fārābī dwells on this divine or semi-divine goal of happiness in a number of works.... And although a primary means of attaining this goal is theoretical, Al-Fārābī does not ignore the many practical means, or moral virtues contributing to this good. (Fakhri, 2002, 93)

These themes are reiterated by Avicenna, and further developed. While for al-Fārābī, there is no greater perfection than conjunction with the active intellect, according to Avicenna, this conjunction takes place whenever a person grasps a universal. The active intellect directs the development of the individual's intellect through successive stages until a permanent conjunction or union with the active intellect is achieved (Ibn Sīnā 1380/1959, 68). The acquired intellect at this stage is also called *al-'aql al-qudsī*, "the holy intellect."

There he argues that felicity consists in the perfection of the rational soul. The perfection of the rational soul comes about through the acquisition of knowledge. The attainment of the higher forms of knowledge requires that one free oneself from material attachments and, to this end, undergo ascetic disciplines. Those who gain *gnosis* (*al-*

‘ārīfūn), are properly prepared, and are released from preoccupation with corporeal matters will arrive at the *‘ālam al-quds wa al-sa‘ādah* (the world of sanctity and felicity) (Ibn Sīnā 1968, 32) (Inati 1996, 77).

In other words, the soul should pass from the sensual world to the rational world. At this stage, it becomes a mirror of the objective world. Mullā Ṣadrā believes that when all perceptual forms are realized in one, the form of the whole universe stamps on him and his soul becomes an intellectual world corresponding to the objective world. Here, man becomes a mental version of the outside world, and his soul becomes the perfect mirror of the real world (Mullā Ṣadrā 1981, 1:120; 1366/1988, 2:338; 1360/1982, 250; 1380/2002, 100). The soul at this stage becomes the perfect man, and the forms of all creatures subsist in it (Mullā Ṣadrā 1981, 9:7; 1380/2002, 437), as he sees all things as parts of his nature (Mullā Ṣadrā 1981, 8:132).

Of course, there is a difference between Mullā Ṣadrā and philosophers before him; he goes ahead one step further. He believes that the soul, after attaining the rank of the acquired intellect, receives the forms of the intelligences from the active intellect, which is the director intellect of the material world and has all the virtues and realities of this world, and then unites with it (Mullā Ṣadrā 1981, 8:64; 9:140; 3:336). He believes that when the soul attains the acquired intellect and unites with the active intellect, it will be free of the material world (Mullā Ṣadrā 1981, 3:395, 461).

Of course, according to Mullā Ṣadrā, the perfection of practical intellect is detachment from material concerns and purification of all immoralities and removing the rusts of heart (Mullā Ṣadrā 1981, 9:7). Finally, he believes that the ultimate end of the human being is to attain the annihilation in God (*fanā’ fī Allah*) and the vision of God (*liqā’ Allah*) and that previous steps are preliminaries to this vision and nearness (Mullā Ṣadrā 1981, 6:380). The perfect man, thus, finally

walks beyond the active intellect and brings himself to the Origin of the universe.

Avicenna, who combines philosophy with *'irfān* in the last volume of his *Remarks and Admonitions (al-Ishārāt wa al-tanbīhāt)*, says that the final degree of the journey to God is the vision of God (*liqā' Allah*). Here, the soul is totally absent from itself and only sees God (Ibn Sīnā 1403/1982, 3:386-7).

Nearness in *Fiqh*

The subject of nearness to God has been discussed in jurisprudence (*fiqh*). A believer has to do the religious rites with the intention of getting closer to God or with similar godly intentions; without such intentions, his worship would be invalidated. The Prophet (ﷺ) is reported to have said, “The reward of deeds depends upon the intentions, and every person will receive the rewards according to what he has intended” (Majlisi 1403/1982, 67:210). According to the Qur’ān, worship has to be done purely for the sake of God: “[T]hey were not commanded except to worship Allah, dedicating their faith to Him as men of pure faith” (98:5). Anyway, it means that Therefore, the servant has to worship only to get closer to God or to gain His satisfaction and pleasure, not to gain social, political, or other benefits (Khomeini 1417/1996, 1:141).

According to Muslim jurists, this intention is a part of worship and must accompany it until the end. It may have various forms. The highest level of intention, which leads to the highest degree of closeness to God, is to worship Him because He is worthy of worship, as Imam ‘Alī said: “I did not worship You coveting Your Paradise, nor fearing your Fire, but found you worthy of worship” (Kulaynī 1407/1986, 3:135); and the lowest level of intention is to worship God in order to gain entrance to Paradise or salvation from hell (‘Āmilī n.d., 1:77).

Conclusion

It can be concluded that although mysticism paid great attention to the discussion of nearness to God, it is the Qur'ān that has provided most references and keywords for this topic. Qur'ānic approach is that since the Qur'ān is the book of *sharī'a*, its contents, especially in this discussion, are sensible and achievable for all people—unlike mystical and philosophical approaches that are not much accessible to ordinary believers.

In all these approaches, human beings are considered able and obliged to approach God, and nearness to God is regarded as the true source of human perfection and felicity. Man can approach God as far as his existential limits allow. In other words, he will always remain a created, contingent being and a servant of God.

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