

A Comparative Study of Mulla Sadra and Henry Corbin: Their Views concerning the Impact of Revealed Teachings on Human Being

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Abstract

In the Islamic tradition, Mulla Sadra is foremost among the philosophers who have dealt with the issue of prophecy from all three theological, philosophical, and mystical perspectives. Among Western scholars of religion, Henry Corbin is the most prominent commentator of prophetic wisdom, who has provided a mystical reading of the problem of prophecy drawing on the ideas of Muslim philosophers. Given the wide scope of the works and ideas of Corbin regarding prophecy, this essay examines how much Corbin was influenced by Mulla Sadra's ideas about the effects of revealed teachings on humankind. The esoteric nature of prophetic wisdom, the role of God's saints in decoding sacred scriptures, the ontological and epistemological foundations of hermeneutics, and the correspondence between textual hermeneutics and hermeneutics of the soul represent the key constituents of Corbin's accounts regarding the educational effects of revealed teachings, whereas Mulla Sadra's doctrines of *wilayat*, the world of ideas, the active intellect, co-originality of revelation and inspiration, and the unity of the knower and the known have played a vital role in their development.

This essay has employed a method of phenomenology or uncovering the hidden in the sense that is used by Corbin in his various works. We attempt to show how prophetic religion can, based on such a notion of prophecy, provide an efficient educational program for humankind and therefore stop the secularization of religion.

Keywords: Henry Corbin, Mulla Sadra, prophecy, world of ideas, revelation and inspiration, unity of the knower and the known, active intellect.

Introduction

Henry Corbin (1903-1978) is an orientalist, and the most prominent Western interpreter of the prophetic wisdom. He has created a magnificent structure of research on religion in the West in the twentieth century. He has devoted himself to study comparative Islam and mysticism in the academic world. On the whole, he has succeeded in founding a philosophical structure through his intellectual efforts without involving his orientalism (Pazooki 2003, 162). Corbin's focus on the theosophical-philosophical system of Islam in Iran has its origin in his familiarity with the works of thinkers who have strengthened the fundamental bases of prophetic wisdom. However, Mulla Sadra, the founder of a splendid edifice of theosophy, has played a special role in this regard due to his efforts to integrate the aforementioned foundations with the particular innovative principles in his theosophy.

Corbin's attention to the mystical explanation provided by the founder of transcendent theosophy, Mulla Sadra, for the problem of prophecy clearly demonstrates that Corbin has had a determinate mental paradigm before his encounter with the Islamic tradition. This paradigm may be called a kind of universal theology of religions that was founded years before Corbin's familiarity with Iranian Utopia. It was indeed the events of previous years that made him enchanted with Islamic

spirituality, insofar as he considered Shia mysticism as the noblest manifestation of human thought. Corbin realized that “there is a common hermeneutical situation shared by all people of the Book and the esoteric intellectuals—i.e. mystics and mystically minded philosophers—in which they take similar measures in their readings of the Torah in the Christian world and of the Quran in the Islamic world”(Shayegan 1994, 27; Stoffer 2003, 107). This is, in fact, a method whose range goes beyond the geographical borders, and which gives meaning to sacred history via changing the secular linear time into a resurrection. The gnostic aspects of a universal religion contain the whole history of humanity, and Shia’s comprehensive reading of this spiritual truth is based on the concept of *wilayat* that incorporates the innermost truth of prophecy. Accordingly, Shiism as a universal theology of religions undertakes the task of disclosing the secrets of the celestial world, a task which is not only consistent with the very substance of the universal theology of religions but also given the highest position ever.

Corbin and Mulla Sadra on the Major Components of an Explanation of the Educational Effects of Prophetic Wisdom

There are a number of components in Corbin’s works that make his explanation of the prophetic wisdom as a living and dynamic tradition possible, and there are also specific principles in Mulla Sadra’s works that can be seen as a basis for an explanation of the spiritual and educational effects of prophetic wisdom on the audience of revelation. The debate over the impact of revealed teachings on human being is a sub-category of the mission that has been assigned to the prophets by the Lord. Thus although the title of the current research is concerned with the terrestrial aspect of prophecy, the present study also takes into account the philosophy of prophecy as a relevant debate that discusses the celestial aspect of prophecy. As we shall see, these

issues are connected in some way with the philosophical-mystical anthropology.

Corbin and Mulla Sadra on the Necessity of Prophecy

According to Corbin and Mulla Sadra, spiritual leaders may play a major part in two domains: domain of creation and domain of guidance. Their mediating part in creation represents that Shia esoteric path is supposed to understand the true and esoteric meaning of divine revelation that has been extended through various levels; but such an understanding requires an earnest attention to its ontological aspects. Revealed teachings have traversed multiple levels from the world of Divine Command to the world of corporeal entities. Making the audience of revelation familiar with these teachings is merely one of the missions that have been assigned to Immaculate Imams. In addition to this role, these teachings need a mediator, a celestial truth, for their being. Despite his absence in the external sensory world, Perfect Man exists in reality and is a manifestation of Divine Essence. He takes precedence over angels not only in his knowledge of God but also in his existence, and this precedence is free from limitations of time and space in its nature (Corbin 2012a, 36-37; 2015, 442ff.). Muhammadan Reality in the Islamic mystical tradition is, as stated by Corbin, analogous to the celestial man in the Christian tradition (cf. Corbin 2012a, 89, 139, 417, 429, 425-26, 419, 417, 414; 2012a, 29).

From Mulla Sadra's mystical perspective, the focus of the debate over causality in terms of ontological and legislative sorts of divine will should shift from the quiddity-giving cause to the cause of existence and from gradation in the reality of existence to the personal unity of existence. Accordingly, divine action is conceived as a manifestation of the Names of Divine Essence in the external appearances. As effects are functions and properties of causes in a philosophical system,

worldly beings are manifestations of God in a mystical vision. That being so, the philosophical necessity of the mediation of emanation, which is relevant to the Principle of the One as well as the Principle of Superior Possibility based on the constitutional unity of existence, turns into the mystical conception of unity in existence. On this conception, in explaining the beings that one may encounter in the corporeal world one only needs knowledge by presence to intuitively understand the relation of God to His existential manifestations.

In the works of Mulla Sadra, the personal unity of existence is proved by two arguments: understanding causality based on the doctrine of graded stages (Mulla Sadra 1984a, 52-53; 1981, 2:299) and the rule of “The Simple Truth contains all beings as a whole and at the same time it is not any one of them” (Mulla Sadra 1981, 2:368). Thus conceived, objective diversities are considered to be the manifestations of active intellect. The bases of unity of divine acts are explained in terms of the manifestation of divine act and Unity of Existence. Philosophers’ First Intellect changes to the Breath of All-Merciful, Extended Existence, Transcendent Beam or Muhammadan Reality (Mulla Sadra 1981, 2:328; 2004, 1:218).

Besides the domain of creation, the Prophet plays a key role in the domain of guidance of humans. Accordingly, the necessity of prophecy is explained with reference to the creation of spiritual relation between humans and the invisible world and their guidance into the invisible spheres of existence. Hidden Treasure is unachievable and could be recognized in the mirror of its appearances, and one’s connection with the invisible world begins with the primary initiative of the sacred in its revelation. The problem of prophecy, in Corbin’s view, consists of two basic beliefs: first, “the intuition of metaphysical entities is indebted to a prophetic rite, a rite that endorses the necessity of a mediator between the inspiring divinity and human masses” (Stoffer 2003, 107); and

second, a continuous prophecy that covers the whole course of human history is associated with a book without understanding the esoteric truths of which the mission of a messenger is never accomplished. The eternal and primordial prophecy and wilayat (guardianship) both have their origin in Muhammadan Reality, and in fact “Muhammadan Reality has two sides: the visible side which is represented by the prophecy and the esoteric side which is represented by wilayat or Imamate” (Corbin 2012a, 417; Corbin 2013a, 76-77). The human and terrestrial reality of the Messenger of God (s) and also the role played by every prophet with or without legislation in the domain of human guidance are a manifestation of Muhammadan Reality just as an image may be reflected in a mirror (Corbin 2012a, 472-78). A Shiite Imam is a mediator who keeps the path to the heavens open for wayfarers and provides the ground for their meeting with God. This meeting takes the form of vision by the heart and knowledge by presence (Corbin 2012a, 382). Consequently, seeing God in this context does not refer to the knowledge of the innermost nature of Divine Essence; rather it represents the knowledge of Divine Countenance and His Attributes and Manifestations (Corbin 2013a, 329).

In addition to the social argument, which considers the existence of prophets necessary for organizing the relations between the individuals (Mulla Sadra 2004, 2:93), Mulla Sadra also formulates an argument from guidance which suggests that humans spiritually need the Perfect Man. Although the term ‘Perfect Man’ is essentially mystical, Sadra has used it in a discursive manner. The event of prophetic mission speaks of the manifestation of God in the mirror of the Perfect Man and the mobilization of knowledge through him into the world. Every prophet is a special manifestation of Muhammadan Reality, and represents one of the attributes possessed by the last prophet. Moreover, every saint represents the Perfect Man in his own way, and the Perfect Man is the

last of all saints and the occulted Imam of our time. Here the Perfect Man represents a comprehensive and extended existence that is regarded as a divine sign, and the knowledge of spiritual truths makes the presence of spiritual instructors in human life unavoidable (Mulla Sadra 2004, 2:375-80). The necessity of existence of a caliph (Baqara: 30) has its origin in human incapability of receiving the direct blessing and also in the irrelevance of the nobility of eternity and the inferiority of contingency (Mulla Sadra 1987, 1:302). Thus, Divine Essence holds the highest status while the contingent world occupies an inferior place as compared to Divine Majesty. Consequently, there is necessary to be a mediator who is related to both eternity and contingency on the one hand and represents the Perfect Man on the other (Mulla Sadra 1987, 2:302).

Accordingly, the necessity of prophecy leads to the necessity of wilayat. God's Perfect Essence as the source of all perfections and His initiative will to unveil His Essence from the divine aspect and the innate inclination of the audience of revelation for perfection and their struggle for achieving it from the human aspect are both the sides of the same coin that reveal the necessity of existence of a mediator who establishes the relationship between humans and the invisible world. Essential contingency, potential contingency and contingency based on existential poverty are three basic needs of human being. Here human potential contingency is at issue (Mulla Sadra 1987, 2:312-13; 5:64; 3:63-64). The spiritual leaders as the end of evolutionary initiation of humans assist the man for reaching this end in two ways: through showing him the truth behind things and through cultivating virtues in him and keeping him away from vices. They have received divine blessing either by means of revelation or by means of inspiration and undertaken the mission of guidance of their audience to the path of salvation (Mulla Sadra 2004, 2:194).

Esoteric Nature of Shiism and the Role of Spiritual Leaders in Hermeneutics (Interpretation of Sacred Text)

A major part of Corbin's writings are founded on the assumption that "Islam does not find its full and exact expression in jurisprudence" and "prophetic tradition cannot belong to the appearance as such" (Corbin 2012a, 433, 187; 2013a, 33). He believed that one's continuous intimate association with Shiism puts him in the center and heart of the spiritual (Corbin 2005b, 293). Divine Word is multidimensional, and prophetic revelation conveys esoteric meanings which go beyond the relevant conventional meaning. Prophecy and Imamate in the form of two compatible and simultaneous circles have become actualized in the course of sacred history and in the world of omnipotence before the emergence of man on the earth. Then they have transferred from the level of pure time to the level of dark time, i.e. the course of empirical history, and this is how we become familiar with a more general aspect of prophecy, i.e. more general aspect of legislative prophecy" (Corbin 2016, 196; 2012a, 273). This type of notion of religiosity in three vertical stages of jurisprudential canon, spiritual initiation and mystical truth have been reflected in Islamic mysticism insofar as the issue of prophecy is discussed from three perspectives of mission, Imamate and wisdom (Corbin 2016, 424-25). The role of a prophet is to receive the Revealed Book and to uncover its superficial meaning while Shiism initiates a reversed movement for returning to the esoteric nature of the Book (Shayegan 1994, 107, 137).

One requires spiritual leadership to find one's path to the Truth, and it is a striking feature of shallow minded religious people and jurists to deny vertical horizons (Corbin 2013a, 33-34; 55). Revival of tradition is indebted to the ideas of philosophers who have simultaneously grounded their reading of Shia spirituality in the sacred texts and philosophical ideas (Corbin 2005b, 196). They have offered the

hermeneutical interpretation of the sacred texts and this refers to the expansion of prophecy in wisdom. Corbin states that “the followers acquire self-knowledge under the sincere guidance of Imams and have a share of wilayat” (Corbin 2013a, 59). Accordingly, in the absence of revealed evidence from God, the path to the heavens remains open and prophetic experience is considered to be a repeatable experience and the spiritual properties of apostles, prophets, Imams and saints are the same. Legislative prophecy belongs to the resolute prophets while the conventional prophecy includes the other levels. Epistemic prophecy has taught us the Divine Names and Attributes and the prophets who belong to this class of prophecy cover the whole history of religions.

In Mulla Sadra’s view, wilayat is the innermost essence of prophecy and has a Quranic and mystical bent. The universal wilayat includes all believers who have faith and righteous deed while the special sense of wilayat implies the annihilation of the loving wayfarer in the Divine Essence and Attributes (Mulla Sadra 1987, 5:254).

A friend of God is viewed as a Perfect Man and His mystic and vicegerent on the earth. The special wilayat is sometimes granted and sometimes acquired. The acquired wilayat is obtained through spiritual efforts while the granted wilayat is the result of divine illumination and it is given to the one who has an inherent capacity for it (Mulla Sadra 1984b, 776-77).

Mulla Sadra regards philosophers, prophets, Imams, divine scholars and mystics as examples of the absolute friend of God and believes that wilayat continues even after the end of prophecy. In his view, revelation serves to educate the audience of revelation and such a task will continue. If by revelation we mean the embodiment of the angel of revelation who is brought near to God [Archangel] and hearing his voice, then such an event will not be repeatable after the Prophet (s) (Mulla Sadra 1984b, 118). Having distinguished between the existence

in itself for-something-else and existence for-something-else, Sadra contends that the wilayat of prophets and Imams over people is an additional accidental quality, and their essence is associated with the people in this aspect and if there were no people, there would have been no authority too and in this case they would continue their existence in their truth in Divinity (Mulla Sadra 2004, 2:467-68).

Ontological and Epistemological Ground of Hermeneutics in Prophetic Wisdom

As mentioned earlier, prophetic wisdom is esoteric. Its meaning can be grasped by virtue of hermeneutic interpretation. The agents and executives of this hermeneutic interpretation are divine saints. The realization of hermeneutics, that is, one's having the permission to enter the sacred sphere of the world, is contingent upon certain ontological and epistemological principles that have been discussed in Corbin's works in full detail. In the current essay, among these principles, we shall discuss the world of ideas as an ontological basis for the development of mysteries and the active intellect as the source of prophetic knowledge and review the ideas of the founder of Transcendent Theosophy in this regard.

Ontological Foundation of Hermeneutics according to Corbin and Mulla Sadra

The type of knowledge involved in prophetic wisdom is knowledge by presence. This type of knowledge whose fundamental feature is presence requires space to realize. Human love and divine love are sacred events that need space and time in order to occur and the world of ideas provides such space and time. It is through the world of ideas that Imam can be simultaneously present and absent in our transitory world (cf. Corbin 2013a, 55, 225; 2013b, 141). The object of mystical love is the Perfect Man who is the beloved one, and man takes him as a

witness, and he who is beautiful refers us to other beautiful entity that is the center of beauty. Divine Countenance, the revealed face of God, is represented by eternal personalities who are created by God and whose manifestations exist in various levels of the world (the realms of divinity, omnipotence, sovereignty and humanity) (Corbin 2012a, 139; 2015a, 34, 463). Accordingly, presence extends to the stage of knowledge of Imam, and in Corbin's opinion, prophetic philosophy which is focused on the chief teachings of Shia immaculate Imams leads this illuminative tree to a type of evidential metaphysics an evidence which is the very presence of eye witness (Corbin 2012b, 145).

According to Corbin, existence, presence and intuition are three interrelated concepts and the existential notion of world of ideas sets the scene for the invention of correct theory of intuitive knowledge (Corbin 2013b, 141). The realization of the highest perfection which results in deliverance and redemption opens the path of perennial wisdom before the wayfarer; the ideal of this perfection that has been provided by the sacred intellect is to change material sensory data into spiritual forms that are uncovered in the ideal world of the soul (Corbin 2013b, 197). Thus a spiritual reality becomes realized in man (cf. Corbin 2012b, 50ff.). This type of realism is equally alienated from the dogmatic acceptance of the superficial meaning of the sacred texts and from pure mental and philosophical abstractions.

On Corbin's esoteric reading of the prophetic wisdom, the scope of understanding and as a result, the scope of existence culminate in the invisible world of existence, and the presence of subject in other spheres allows for understanding the nobler levels of truth. Here two questions may be raised as to the nature of these "other spheres" and the required conditions for one's entering into each one of these spheres. Sadra's ideal world has a central role in Corbin's esoteric reading of the prophetic wisdom. In Mulla Sadra's view, there are three worlds of

existence and the human soul gets the required qualification for entering each one of these triple worlds retaining its specific identity. These three worlds are encompassed by each other and vertically related. The material world is the most inferior level of the existing worlds and is always exposed to corruption and change and is the domain of conflict. After it we have the world of imagination in which the incorporeal perceptual forms exist. The highest level belongs to the ideal world which is the sphere of pure incorporeal entities, i.e. the world of rational forms (Mulla Sadra 1975, 388-90).

Presence in the transcendent spheres of existence and understanding various levels of truth are closely related to the degree of piety and honesty possessed by the subject. The eternal slate is a substance where all divine ordinances have been registered until the Day of Judgment. On the other hand, the human soul is capable to reflect the truth of all objects. If the mirror of the human soul is exposed to the eternal slate, then the truths of sciences will become reflected in the slate of the human soul through the slate of Divine Intellect. However, material veils separate the soul from the eternal slate and if this veil is torn the soul will achieve what is essentially desirable for it. This veil can be torn in two ways: one through thinking by which man reaches the unknown forms via the known forms and the other is through the divine blessing (Mulla Sadra 2003, 348; 1975, 608-9). If someone, who is living in this world with its material limitations, succeeds in breaking the chains, and turns his face towards the illuminations of the divine world, and purifies his soul through self-discipline, he will be able to leave his body and external senses and connect himself with the angel of revelation who is brought near to God or with any other angel and benefit from the heavenly knowledge and wisdom (Mulla Sadra 1987, 24-26, 295-99). The genuine world in this context refers to the world of ideas.

Corbin and Mulla Sadra on the Epistemological Foundation of Hermeneutics

The spiritual reality to which we referred in the previous section is indebted to the active intellect as a luminous truth that provides the ground for the co-originality of the prophetic revelation and theosophical inspiration. Thus it can distinguish the understanding of hidden meaning of the Divine Words—the mission of active intellect—from the mere theological or philosophical speculation. Luminosity of active intellect in the form of numerous human souls leads to the emergence of various spiritual entities which are called Perfect Essences and features the singularity of the unique relationship of the angel of humanity, i.e. human goddess, with every human individual. He is our eternal identity (I-ness) and is the medium through which the divine secrets dawn onto human individuals (Corbin 2012 b, 242).

Accordingly, the harmony between the missions of a prophet and a philosopher indeed expresses that the theologians' angel of revelation (who is brought near to God), philosophers' active intellect and mystics' Perfect Essences are identical. Thus conceived, the active intellect is man's spiritual twin that helps him to conquer the invisible spheres of existence and accomplish his mission of discovering the ideal world when we speak of a mental and spiritual movement and initiation (Corbin 2012a, 406; 2013a, 90). Besides the kind of knowledge peculiar to the grand prophets which is referred to as revelation, we encounter a wealth of knowledge that is acquired by the men of knowledge through inspiration and dawns onto their hearts in an unexpected and effortless way (Corbin 2013a, 90-91). This sort of knowledge occurs to everyone in an individual manner and provides a basis for going on a spiritual journey "through which the soul is awakened by the illumination of the spiritual guide from the slumber of negligence" (Corbin 2015a, 401-2, 406; 2015b, 144-45). (For more

details on the identity of active intellect and angel of revelation cf. Corbin, 2013b, 55, 146; 2015b, 146; 2012b, 241-44, 537; 2005, 31, 83; 2008, 146, 346). Gabriel, the angel of revelation, instills into the prophets, saints and righteous ones respectively revelation, inspiration and true dream and thus brings about similar intuitions in them.

Spiritual men's dialogue with Gabriel on their own existence (*la manifestation de l'Ange (l'angélophanie)*) takes place in various degrees and the levels of primordial knowledge and esoteric training have various manifestations in respect of the type of elimination of the veils: wakeful vision (*vision à l'état de veille*), vision in dream (*vision en songe*) and hearing the word (*perception purement auditive*) (Corbin 2012a, 402-7). Thus prophetic tradition continues to exist in the form of an esoteric prophecy and the status of prophets and the status of philosophers are two sides of the same position (Corbin 2015a, 476; Corbin 2002, 32). Religion and mysticism have come together and made a coalition in order to allow men to have a vision of the Divine Beauty without needing any human mentor. The fact that man is independent of a human mentor is a prerequisite of the esoteric nature of religious doctrines and the identity of the active intellect and Gabriel.

In the writings of Mulla Sadra, there is also an allusion to the identity of the angel of revelation and the Knowledge Endower which suggests the shared nature of prophetic revelation and mystical intuition. Sadra's characterization of Gabriel is pertinent to what is offered in the works of Corbin regarding various manifestations of active intellect in the form of *Anthropos teleios* (anthropomorphic manifestation of the angel). In his explanation of the rule of *haqiqat* (*existentially strong*) and *raqiqat* (*existentially weak*), Mulla Sadra regards the universal truth of Gabriel as belonging to the sphere of Divine Command that is affiliated to God and he believes that Gabriel is His interlocutor; but

through the anthropomorphic manifestations of the universal angelic truth, divine teachings are instilled into three groups: prophets, saints and their inheritors (Mulla Sadra 1981, 9:127). As viewed by Mulla Sadra, active intellect exists in two forms: intellectual form and subjective form. In the latter form, it exists inside us and belongs to us and its existence consists in its pure connection to our soul (Mulla Sadra 2003, 290). Accordingly, due to the ontological aspect of active intellect, the human soul joins up with her existential efficient cause and thus the efficient cause and final cause of the soul unite to form one entity.

Presupposing that the active intellect is present in the domain of changes in the human soul is a substantial move. The human rational soul in view of its relation to human body is contingent due to the contingency of the body while it is eternal in respect of its rational aspect (Mulla Sadra 1981, 8:337). The soul is of a fluid nature and with its gradual actualization it becomes competent in receiving knowledge and in this way the active intellect which is the totality of all conceivable perfections assists the human soul to reach the heavenly blessing and divine light (Mulla Sadra 2003, 292); insofar as passing through the initial imperfect physical states, the soul reaches the imaginative stage and after it comes to the station of full immateriality, in this course the mediation of a wholly immaterial entity is necessary (Mulla Sadra 2004, 3:469).

Moreover, Mulla Sadra also insists on the shared nature (co-originality) of revelation and inspiration in his discussion of the divine interlocution and training. He maintains that different paths through which humans reach the Truth depend on the answer they have given to the divine question of “Am I not your Lord?” Then it is the answer one has given to the latter question that determines the quality of his relation with the Lord God. Thus conceived, God’s interlocution with His

servants consists of the revelation of sciences to servants' souls in various ways such as revelation (exclusive path of the prophets), inspiration (exclusive path of saints) and divine messengers (ordinary people through acquisition). Inspiration is a method through which man acquires knowledge without bearing hardships or any intellectual struggle. In this method, Truth descends into the human spirit and the soul and its difference with revelation lies in the intensity of clarity and vision of an angel (Mulla Sadra 2003, 349; 1975, 609; 1987, 4:335). Then transcendent theosophy considers revelation to be fluid in all levels of existence and the essential nature of the truth of revelation transforms into an existential nature. Divine revelation features the discovery of truth via esoteric vision and it is co-original with inspiration and intuition and is explained in terms of a belief in the ascending spheres of existence (Mulla Sadra 1981, 7:28; 1987, 2:144; 6:323; 2003, 150-52, 349).

The Meaning of Hermeneutics in Prophetic Wisdom and Its Educational Effects

Heretofore we have remarked on the esoteric nature of revealed teachings, hermeneutical mission of Imams and philosophers, and the co-originality of revelation and inspiration. It at first seems to be just an act of textual interpretation to hermeneutically interpret a text; but when we contemplate more precisely on it, we find out that it is in fact correspondent with the interpretation of soul. Corbin states: "Now, *what* does this *hermeneutical interpretation* or *ta'wil* trace back, and *to what* is it traced back? This question implies another: *whom* does it take back and *to whom* does it take back?" (Corbin 2008, 126). The Khidr of everyone's existence is an experience that is revealed to him as an ideal individual: "an invisible master who reveals the esoteric meaning of Quranic verses to the mystic and with his esoteric interpretation makes the universal prophetic knowledge possible for his audience" (Corbin

2005, 123-24 and cf. Corbin 2015a, 522). This sort of knowledge is knowledge by presence which, as we noted earlier, becomes realized through one's presence in the transcendent spheres of existence (the ideal world) and understanding the distinguishing characteristic of Imam as the Divine Saint (his visible and present existence).

The terms "sequential order" and "simultaneous structure" as used by Corbin seek to convey the latter meaning that we have discussed earlier. Corbin states: "As to Divine Words the heavenly, spiritual and natural levels proceed in a sequential manner and at the end in the form of a simultaneous structure; in other words, the heavenly and spiritual meaning of Divine Word simultaneously exists in the superficial natural meaning too"¹ (Corbin 2012a, 254).

Sequential order in this context refers to a semantic hierarchy of divine revelation that is fluid in the descending levels of existence. Simultaneous structure is the result of the evolution of meanings in subject's mind and is a product of his esoteric vision, and creates a specific existential history for every individual (Corbin 2015a, 392; 2012a, 251-54; 2005a, 74). Ta'wil (hermeneutic interpretation) represents one's ascension from the material levels into higher ones which brings about a spiritual birth inside his soul. Therefore, mysticism and rebirth are inseparable. Meaning is an objective entity that exists in the external world and by means of grasping it, man becomes able to attend the ascending arc of knowledge. Hermeneutical interpretation of the soul features one's departure from the non-reality and servitude of the superficial text, departure from the Occident and exile of the appearance to the Orient of genuine esoteric meaning.

1. Dans le cas de la Parole divine, le céleste, le spirituel et le naturel procèdent en ordre successif, et, pour finir, se présentent en une structure simultanée : sens céleste et sens spirituel de la Parole sont simultanément dans le sens naturel ou littéral, lequel en est le contenant et l'enveloppe.

Therefore, the world of illuminationists actualizes the essence of prophecy and prophetic mission in the Mount Sinai of their existence and this understanding “not only brings man near to the level of Khidr¹ but also makes him identical with that level” (cf. Corbin, 2008, 126, 303; 2012a, 287, 314; 2011, 19, 67; 2015a, 512-13).

Doctrine of Unity of the Knower and the Known and Human Impression of Revealed Teachings

Corbin’s ideas regarding the educational effects of prophetic wisdom suggest that insistence on tradition as the evolution of an event in the past is due to the reason that it should let its spirit host the recreation of that event and it is based on the thesis that acquisition and reception are distinguished from self-habituation and finding oneself. Such an exposition of the spiritual effects of prophetic wisdom can be found in the works of Sadra and his alternative interpretation of the course of evolution of human perceptions, an interpretation that goes beyond the conventional notion supported by previous philosophers. They think of perceptions as mental qualities and speak of knowledge as an event inside human being and thus it makes a room for what Shaykh Ishraq has recommended: “You have to read the Quran as if it has been revealed just for you” (Suhrawardi 2001, 4:139).

From the theosophical standpoint of Mulla Sadra, the unity of the knower and the known is one of the principles that can be explained in virtue of the gradation in the truth of existence. This principle explains the quality of human perceptions in a way that it would provide the development of human truth and his orientation towards immateriality (Mulla Sadra 1981, 3:292). Accepting this principle poses a challenge to philosophers prior to Sadra who have a specific concept of the quality

1. is a name ascribed to a figure in the Quran as a righteous servant of God possessing great wisdom or mystic knowledge

of perception. Therefore, there is no reason to abstract the perceived object from the matter and its requirements in order to distinguish between types of human perception rather the analogical gradation of existence allows us to draw the needed distinctions in the process of perception.

Philosophers prior to Mulla Sadra considered perception to be a subcategory of accidents and according to their views, perceptions included the sensory, imaginative and illusive ones. They believed that rational acquired knowledge can only be regarded as a type of immaterial mental quality (Bahmanyar 1996, 401). That being so, in the process of perception the perceptual faculties of the soul, which are passive and exist in the soul before every perception, create the perceptual forms and the relation of the aforementioned forms to the soul is like the relation between a substance and an accident that resides in it.

The doctrine of unity of the knower and the known is possible within the framework of trans-substantial motion. The soul's trans-substantial motion and its entrance into higher degrees of perfection vary according to different levels, and the principle of unity of the knower and the known is explained in terms of the analogical gradation in the truth of existence, that is to say, the physical contingency of the soul provides the ground for the material conditions that in turn set the scene for the emergence of the relevant bodily potentiality and subsequently, the trans-substantial motion of the soul leads it to come in various existential degrees. Consequently it can simultaneously contain immateriality, materiality, happiness and misery. Beings ascend through the intensifying existential degrees and acquire their deserved existential perfections due to the maintenance of gradational unity of the truth of existence in the degrees and its oneness with the personal identity of the being in motion (Mulla Sadra 2003, 212-13; 1981, 9:188-90; 1975, 386-87).

From a mystical point of view, the human soul is deemed as a spark of the Divine Soul, and the secret of human enthusiasm for worshiping is traced back to his disposition towards the perfections that contingently exist inside him. Therefore, one's movement from deficiency to perfection prepares him for receiving all perfections with which he has been innately endowed as a source of his eternal inclination towards the sacred. If a person theoretically and also practically manages to reach perfection at his own will, then his substantial existence will be intensified and turn into an immaterial identity (Mulla Sadra 1982, 235; 1981, 3:433-34; 8:38).

It is possible for the soul to get into the rational world by obtaining spiritual virtues and perfections. In this course the revealed teachings play a decisive role insofar as they have multilayered structure, and in fact, the gradational nature of existence makes the difference and distinction in the process of perception. Thus, the human soul undergoes certain developments that do not occur within the context of the profane time. Moral virtues, as an outcome of performing repeatedly morally right acts and avoiding morally wrong ones, play a role in the existential intensification of human being and the quality of higher actualities. The intensification of perceptual forms depends on the intensity of human existence and this sort of intensification can reach an extent that would allow it to have stronger objective effects. The Revealed Book is full of the wisdoms that endow its audience with growth and transcendence both in the domains of theory and practice and guides the human soul through an intensifying movement from a formless hyle to the highest level of actualized intellect. As we mentioned earlier, keeping oneself away from such impediments to knowledge as sin and carnal desires prepares the ground for the wayfarer to ascend through the invisible heights of spirituality. When the soul devotes its actions to divine causes they can set the scene for

actualizing human potentialities and its close attention to the divine injunctions prepares the ground for one's ascension into the sphere of divinity; of course one should not turn a blind eye to the fact that righteous actions are preceded by beliefs (theoretical reason) and morality (practical reason) and are considered to be the outcome of these two elements. According to Mulla Sadra, tolerance is the end of practical wisdom while light is the end of theoretical wisdom and a divine philosopher and a man of wisdom are the ones who have these two together (Mulla Sadra 1981, 3:95).

Conclusion

Corbin's insistence on the revival of transcendent theosophy, as the capital of a dynamic and living tradition with specific educational effects, is to affirm the interrelation of knowledge and spirituality once again. The dynamicity and liveliness that Corbin sees in the educational effects of prophetic wisdom owe their existence to the subject's presence in the invisible spheres of existence and the capacity of sacred history for hosting the developments of the human soul. This is indeed a conception that makes the union of the human soul and spiritual teachings meaningful and Corbin's debt to Sadra clear; since the presence of man in the arc of ascension and the impact of revealed teachings on him is not possible but through the doctrine of the world of ideas, active intellect, co-originality of revelation and inspiration which have been discussed in Sadra's works. Corbin's works contain other valuable points concerning prophecy that can be traced back to the works of Muslim philosophers and Corbin's presence as a scholar of comparative mysticism in the field of Islamic studies provides the ground for new comparative researches on other relevant theological issues in the Islamic and Christian traditions.

Basically Corbin's view of prophetic philosophy, as he has delineated it, rests on the works of Mulla Sadra. However it can be

traced back to the works of other Muslim philosophers and mystics, and it can provide us with a secure barrier against the process of secularization with which the modern man is grappling. This process has made its way not only into the social domains of human life but also into the religious institutions of monotheistic religions particularly into the institution of church in Christianity. If we fail to resist it the mission of prophets will seem to remain unfinished. In the present article we sought to provide the ground for such an encounter with secularization depending on a comprehensive understanding of theological, philosophical, and mystical spheres.

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