

Perception
According To
Mulla Sadra

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- ³⁹ Sadra, *Ittihad al-'Aqil wa'l-Ma'qul*, pp. 74-75.
- ⁴⁰ Idem. *The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra* (Albany: SUNY, 1975), pp. 210-229.
- ⁴¹ See, for instance, Mohammad J. Zarean, "Sensory and Imaginal Perception According to Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi (Mulla Sadra) 1569-1640," M.A. Thesis (Montreal: McGill University, 1994); Sayyed M. R. Hejazi, "Knowledge by Presence (*al-'ilm al-huduri*): A Comparative Study Based on the Epistemology of Suhrawardi (d. 587 / 1191) and Mulla Sadra Shirazi (d. 1050 / 1640)," M.A. Thesis (Montreal: McGill University, 1994); Ali Mesbah, "Human Cognitive Development in the Transcendental Philosophy of Sadr al-Din Shirazi and the Genetic Epistemology of Jean Piaget," M.A. Thesis (Montreal: McGill University, 1994).
- ⁴² Idem. *The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra*, p. 224.
- ⁴³ Sadra, *Shawahid*, p. 292.
- ⁴⁴ Sadra, *Kitab al-'Arshiyah* (Isfahan: Intisharat-i Mahdawi, 1962), p. 68. The quotation has been taken from James W. Morris, *The Wisdom of the Throne: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mulla Sadra* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 244-245.
- ⁴⁵ Idem., op. cit., p. 244, n. 293.
- ⁴⁶ Sadra, *Ittihad*, p. 98.
- ⁴⁷ Sadra, *Ittihad*, p. 75.
- ⁴⁸ Sadra's own expression is: "an-nafs fi wahdatiha kullu'l-quwa." *al-Asfar*, 4 / 1, pp. 51, 120-123. One can compare this with Suhrawardi's statement, "nur isfahad his jami u'l-hawass," (the Isfahad light, i.e. the rational soul is the sense of all the senses." *Hikmat al-Ishraq*, p. 227.
- ⁴⁹ Sadra, *al-Asfar*, 4 / 1, pp. 136-136.
- ⁵⁰ Sadra, *al-'Arshiyah*, p. 68; Morris, *Wisdom*, p. 245.
- ⁵¹ Sadra says: "this is the wisdom of the Creator." *Tafsir*, p. 162.

7. The Place of Prophecy in Mulla Sadra's Philosophy of Perception

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Abstract

For Mulla Sadra the station (*maqam*) and way-station (*manzil*) of every human being corresponds to the quality of his faculties of perception. In the final *mashhad* of *ash-Shawahid ar-rububiyya*, "On Prophethoods and Saint-hoods", he outlines four way-stations of man which correspond to four levels of perception. In the first three levels, man perceives only through the faculties of sense, imagination (*khayal*) and estimation (*wahm*). Due to his lack of perception, he is like a worm, a dumb beast or, at best, an intelligent beast. Only in the fourth way-station is man truly human, for he is able to see beyond the perceptual forms offered by the faculties of perception. To reach beyond such forms, one must, however, perfect the corresponding faculties. The station in which these faculties have been perfected is referred to by Mulla Sadra as "the station of angels." Those who have reached it have reached the limit of human perfection; they are the prophets and saints. For both prophets and saints the faculties of perception have been mended and therefore aid, rather than hinder, "seeing things as they are in themselves" through the intellect. Prophets and saints are able to witness archetypal realities without the intermediaries of study or reflection. Through intensity of *hads* (metaphysical intuition), the intellect is joined to the heavenly realm (*malakut*) such that intelligibles are perceived with speed and clarity. All stations and way-stations below this are thus defined by an inability to perceive which results from a paucity of *hads*. The path of spiritual perfection is thus the path of perfecting the faculties of perception until one is able to see beyond the perceptual forms of sense, imagination and estimation to the intelligibles perceived through the intellect. One who has attained to this, be he a saint or a prophet, perceives the intelligibles in the sensibles and orders the sensibles in accord with the intelligibles.

Prophecy (*nubuwwa*) is a philosophical problem particular to Islamic philosophy. As there was no claim to prophecy which informed the ancient Greek understanding of the world, the issue was not addressed by Greek philosophy. And as the

Christian tradition concentrated its intellectual efforts upon explicating the nature of Christ and the Trinity, Christian theology never developed a detailed explanation of prophecy itself, but instead developed Christianity and Trinitarian theology. Therefore, when Islamic philosophers examined this issue, they tread upon virgin philosophical territory. Earlier Islamic philosophers such as Ibn Sina and al-Farabi remained close to their peripatetic roots, treating prophecy in the context of a rational understanding of man's cognitive faculties in which the acquired intellect (*al-'aql al-mustafad*) is infused with the intelligible realities (*al-ma'qulat*) through connection (*ittisal*) with the active intellect (*al-'aql al-fa'`al*). They thus explained prophecy as a perfection of the passive intellect.

Though the philosophy of Mulla Sadra employs the same model and many of the same technical terms, he diverges from his philosophical predecessors, presenting philosophy not only as a perfection of perceptual faculties, but as perfection in being (*wujud*) -- the prophet being the most perfect of creation through which creation is ordered and maintained. He is thus the summit of creation, and only by understanding the prophetic function can man understand himself. As the Islamic philosophical tradition maintains, "Philosophy issues from the niche of prophecy." In Sadrian philosophy, philosophy and prophecy have the same fundamental objective: "to know things as they are in themselves." In the beginning of the *Asfar* Sadra writes, "Know that philosophy is the perfection of the human soul to the extent of human possibility through perception of the realities of existent things as they are in themselves and judgement of their existence verified through demonstrations, not derived from opinion and tradition."¹ He then relates this to the famous prayer of the prophet Muhammad, "Lord show us things as they are!" and to the prayer of Abraham "Lord give me wisdom!"²

The final end of prophecy and philosophy is thus the same; on the highest level, that of the intellect (*al-'aql*), the

prophet and the philosopher perceive intelligible realities without intermediary. But in *ash-Shawahid ar-rububiyya* Sadra provides important information on the other dimensions of prophecy which establish a clear break between prophecy and philosophy. The true philosopher participates in the perfection of the intellect, but unlike the prophet his faculty of imagination (*khayal*) is not perfect. Through the perfection of the intellect and the faculty of imagination the prophet transfers intelligible realities into imaginal representations which reveal the true nature of reality for all human beings. The philosopher, however, has only the perfected intellect by which he witnesses the true nature of reality. So although he can know things as they are in themselves, without the assistance of revelation he will not know how to live in complete conformity with reality. The prophet is thus a vehicle for revelation, whereas the philosopher can only partake of inspiration (*ilham*).

* * *

Mulla Sadra's most focused treatment of prophecy is found in the last chapter of *ash-Shawahid ar-rububiyya fi l-manahij as-sulukiyya* (The Lordly Witnesses Concerning the Paths of Wayfaring) entitled, "On Prophethoods and Saint-hoods." Commonly referred to simply as the *Shawahid*, this work is considered by many to be Mulla Sadra's last philosophical work and most mature philosophical expression. It is divided into five large chapters entitled "Locality of Witness" (*mashahid* (s. *mashhad*)), which are described in Sabzawari's commentary as "the meeting point of self-disclosure and the podium of manifestation, all of which shapes the heart into a locus of manifestation, a locus of witnessing and a locus for the self-disclosure of the light of being, even in knowledge, for the subject of divine wisdom is the reality of Being ..."³ Each locus is divided into several smaller "Witnesses" (*shawahid* (s. *shahid*)), which serve as indications and clarifications. And each Witness is composed of many "Illuminations" (*ishraqat*) which

are "like the varieties of self-disclosures and the branches of inspirations."⁴

The last locus of Witness is devoted to prophecy. It is divided into two Witnesses and nineteen Illuminations dealing with topics ranging from the degrees of humanity to the affirmation of prophecy, to the secrets of the religious law and its outward (*zahir*) and inward (*batin*) aspects. The core of Sadra's theory of prophecy is contained in the first three Illuminations of the first Witness in which he presents prophecy in relation to the stations (*maqamat*) and ranks (*darajat*) of humanity. The rest of the chapter can therefore not be understood without a solid grounding in the principles established here and summarized in a "footnote from the throne" with which he closes the third Illumination.

The ten Illuminations of this first Witness elucidate the nature of man and the hierarchy of human states, prophecy reigning supreme. The nine Illuminations of the second Witness are, however, more dispersed, dealing with disparate issues that are connected to the more central themes of the first Witness. This paper will therefore focus upon the first Witness, where the core of Mulla Sadra's philosophy of prophecy is to be found.

The first Illumination, "On the rank of the prophet in comparison with the ranks of man," presents the four way-stations (*manazil* (s.*manzil*)) of man. In the first way-station, man is of the rank of sensible things and his ruling property (*hukm*) is as that of a worm which only acts in accord with what is in its immediate range of sense perception. In the second way-station, man acts in accord with the images preserved after they are absent from the senses. Here his ruling property is as that of dumb beasts who react not only to the senses, but also according to images of sensorial things which they have perceived, but are nonetheless unable to make discernments so that they flee from most animals, whether they pose a danger or not.

In the third way-station, man is of the rank of the things perceived by the faculty of apprehension (*wahm*) which is like a fallen intellect, in that it organizes all the faculties below it and thus functions like the intellect in relation to them, but cannot perceive the intelligibles perceived by the intellect except in so far as they are bound to particularity. The faculty apprehension in animals is thus like the intellect in man. So this is the way-station of brutish humans who are like perfect beasts such as horses, which, unlike dumb beasts, are able to distinguish between that which bears harm and that which does not.

The fourth way-station is that of the human world. At this level man is able to perceive things which are hidden to the senses, to imagination (*khayal*) and to the faculty of apprehension. This is the world of the spirit (*ar-ruh*) referred to in the Qur'anic verse, "So I blew into him from my spirit" (15:29). Although the first three way-stations are technically part of the human world, it is only when man arrives at the fourth way-station that he becomes a spiritual being and thus deserves to be called "human" (*insan*). Regarding the capacities of one who has achieved this, Sadra writes:

In this world the doors of the heavenly realm are opened to him and he witnesses the spirits disengaged (mujarrad) from the covering of these receptacles . . . [i.e.,] the sheer realities disengaged from the apparel of clothing and the covering of images which are the various forms which the companions of the nocturnal ascensions among the prominent masters of the [spiritual] paths have witnessed.⁵

Sadra believes that this is the rank to which Plato, Socrates, Pythagoras, Empedocles and Aristotle attained. Whereas the coming and going of the sensory world, which is more immediate for those in the first three way-stations, is akin to walking on the earth, the inmost reality (*sirr*) of the human world is as the likeness of walking on water. Beyond this there is a level where the likeness is as that of walking on air; this is the world of angels.

Mulla Sadra thus sees three worlds -- sensory, human and angelic -- which comprise all the degrees, stations and way-stations of man and correspond to the faculties of sense, imagination and intellect. Between these worlds lies the world of the Satans which corresponds to the things perceived by the faculty of apprehension (*al-mawhumat*). This, however, is not a world in the same sense as the others, because the faculty of apprehension to which it corresponds is dependent upon imagination and the intellect and thus has no reality apart from them. As Sadra writes:

... the faculty of apprehension has no world outside of the three worlds because what is perceived by the faculty of apprehension is not other than what is perceived by the imagination and the intellect. It is only something going back and forth between the two with no established position. So it is the same for the ruling property of its world. The inclination of the Satans, their progeny and their band is towards perdition and passion -- towards the fire of evils.⁶

The defining characteristic of every human being is thus the quality of his perception, and it is only in the last world, that of the intellect, that one perceives well enough to be truly guided and is thus truly human. As Sadra writes:

All of these worlds are way-stations of guidance, but the guidance which is related to God is found in the last world which is the world of spirits ... So the station (*maqam*) and the way-station, both high and low, of every human is in accord with his perception ... so man is between being a worm, a beast, a horse or a Satan. Then, when he passes beyond that, he becomes an angel.⁷

Among the angels there are stations and ranks. The first three of which are: 1) earthly angels, 2) heavenly angels and 3) those who are brought near (*al-muqarrab*), whose attachment to heaven and earth has been broken and who are "devoted to beholding the lordly presence and are perpetually in the abode of subsistence (*baqa*)" while all else progresses towards annihilation

(*fana*).⁸ According to Mulla Sadra, this is one of the meanings of the Qur'anic assertion "All that dwells upon the earth is perishing yet still abides the face of thy Lord, majestic, splendid" (55:26).

Here Mulla Sadra employs the well known Sufi stations of annihilation and subsistence, which for many Sufis constitute the final two stations of the spiritual path. But rather than seeing them as separate stations of spiritual perception, Sadra represents them as two aspects of the same station. And rather than making subsistence the highest station, he sees a station which surpasses both annihilation and subsistence. This is the station of the elect among the angels. As Sadra writes, "From the rank of the angels one ascends to the rank of the lovers among them who are intent upon being in the proximity of His Honorableness, devoted to beholding the beauty of the Divine Presence, glorifying the face [of God] and calling Him holy without abating."⁹ "This is the utmost limit of human perfection which is the station shared by the prophets and saints."¹⁰

As the stations and way-stations of man correspond to his capacity for perception, to reach the limit of human perfection is to have mended the three faculties of perception: intellect, imagination, and sense. Every perceptual form (*sura idrakīyya*) is a kind of existence (*wujud*), and for each existence there is a faculty, a preparedness (*isti'dad*) and a perfection. There is therefore a corresponding perfection for the faculties of perception. The perfection of the human intellect is to witness the angels who have been drawn near (to God). Rather than using imagination to discuss the next level, Sadra speaks of the form-bearing faculty (*al-musawwar*), which is the imagination considered in its function of preserving perceived forms. The perfection of the form bearing faculty is witnessing the archetypal forms (*al-ashbah al-mithaliyya*) and encountering things unseen. On the lowest level, that of the senses, perfection demands intensity of influence over bodily matter, the submission of the base faculties to the sense faculty and the compliance of the bodily com-

ponents with the sense faculty. The perfection of these three faculties of perception is the mark of prophecy;

Whoever achieves the level of bringing together the perfection of these three configurations has the rank of the divine vicegerent and is worthy of being the head of mankind. So he is a messenger of God to whom revelation comes and who is supported by miracles as an aid against enemies and he has three endowments.¹¹

These three endowments (*khasa'is*) correspond to the three levels of perception. The first endowment is that the soul be pure in its capacity for consideration and have a strong similarity to the "Great Spirit" such that it can connect to it without great effort or reflection (*tafakkur*). This is the best part of prophecy because it is that which leads to "knowledge of things as they are in themselves."¹² In a poetic commentary on the Qur'anic verse of light¹³ which is borrowed from Ibn Sina's *Is-harat*, Sadra says of this endowment, "The oil of his passive intellect is on the verge of being illumined due to the extent of his preparedness for the light of the active intellect . . . even though the fire of human instruction does not touch him with the flint of reflection and the fire-iron of frequent examination."¹⁴ For Sadra, as for Ibn Sina, this capacity corresponds to "metaphysical intuition" (*hads*). Following in Ibn Sina's footsteps, Sadra notes that the prophet is marked by speed and intensity of *hads*, "From great intensity of *hads* in both quantity and quality there is speed of union with the world of the heavenly realm. In a short span of time, he perceives most of the intelligibles through *hads* in accordance with it with a noble luminous perceiving which is called his holy soul."¹⁵ All other stations and way-stations of humanity are various degrees of the diminution and degeneration which result from a lack of *hads*.

One who transcends the lower degrees of *hads* and reaches the extremity of perfection attains to the holy soul and realizes the

last of the intelligibles quickly, without the intermediary of instruction. He thus perceives the hidden things which most others do not. This is the level of both prophets and saints.

Whereas saints share with prophets in the perfection of the intellect, they do not share in the perfection of imagination. Through the perfection of this latter faculty, prophets witness the unseen Platonic forms and hear audible voices from the intermediary of the angels. The visions are of angels carrying the revelation, while the auditions are the commands of God. Through this second endowment, the prophets experience in wakefulness the world of the unseen which others encounter only in sleep.

Though Sadra does not specify, it appears that both prophets and saints can attain to perfection of the sense faculty. For it is through this faculty that both prophetic miracles (*mu'jizat*) and saintly miracles (*karamat*) are performed. When one possesses this endowment, the motive faculties of the soul are strengthened such that they have power over the *materia prima* (*hayula*) of the world. They can thus eliminate a particular form and redress matter in another form. For Sadra the power which the saint and the prophet have over the whole of the material world is akin to the power which each soul has over its own world. Just as every individual has some influence over the world, some souls have complete influence over principles and thereby become like the soul of the world itself.¹⁶ This is a defining characteristic of prophecy, because the prophet gathers together the three "configurations" of the intellect, the spirit and the sense within himself. Sadra concludes the third Illumination with a "Footnote from the throne" which elucidates the nature of this conjunction and serves as a summary of his understanding of prophecy.

The substance of prophecy is as if it were the gathering place for the lights of the intellect, the soul and sensory perception. So through his spirit and his intellect, he is an angel among those who are brought near, and through the visions of his soul and his mind he is a heavenly body raised

beyond the blemishes of animals and a tablet preserved from the touch of Satans. Through his senses, he is an angel, a heavenly body and a king. For he is that which gathers together the three configurations in their perfection. His spirit is from the highest empyreal realm, his soul is from the intermediate empyreal realm and his nature is from the lowest empyreal realm. He is thus the vicegerent of God and the locus in which are gathered the manifest things of the divine names and the perfect words of God.¹⁷

In light of this, each endowment should be seen as the gathering together and actualisation of all the potentialities of its corresponding faculty and thus the perfection of that faculty. Through the perfection of each faculty of perception the prophet possesses all that is in the world which pertains to it. Through his spirit he possesses all that is perceived by the intellect, through his soul he possesses all that is in the world of imagination and through his senses he possesses all the sensibiles of the sensible world. This concurrence is based upon the unity (*ittihad*) of the perceiver and the perceived which is central to Sadra's epistemology. As Sadra writes in *Kitab al-masha'ir*, "Every perceptual form, be it intelligible or sensible, is the unifying of being with the being of the one who perceives it ... every perceptual form -- let it be intellectual [form] -- its being in its intelligible self and its being for the one who intellects it is one thing with no variation."¹⁸ The perfection of the faculties of perception is thus not simply intellectual perfection, but more importantly an ontological perfection; for "knowledge is nothing but the presence of being without any cover."¹⁹ The prophet is more present than others and through his being present is able to make others more present to the reality of Being in itself and in its self-disclosure in contingent beings. Through the perfection and strength of his imaginal faculty he brings imaginings which are pure reflections of intelligibles to those who do not have a perfected intellect and are thus unable to witness intelligible realities. Through the religious law he gives human be-

ings a way to actualise the potentiality of the soul by conducting themselves in a way which conforms to intelligible realities.

To discuss the relation between the worlds and their corresponding faculties of perception Sadra uses Qur'anic symbolism, portraying the soul as the preserved tablets (*lawh*) and the intellect as the divine pen (*al-qalam al-ilahi*). Through them we can understand the relation of engendered existents with their archetypal realities. Engendered existents are the things of this world which come from "exalted tablets" upon which they have been preserved. Their forms exist in the world of the "wise invocation" and they are "written by the First Real (*al-haqq al-awwal*) upon the tablets of heavenly souls."²⁰ As such, they do not follow immediately from the first principle, but come after "hidden likenesses" (*muthulun ghaybiyyatum*) which are for Mulla Sadra the Platonic forms.

This provides a metaphysical hierarchy for all existent things which is crucial to Sadra's epistemology. For man does not know through the mind, but rather through the soul and the spirit. The latter of which is equivalent to the intellect. The connection between the two is necessarily present in every experience of perception. But most humans are impaired such that they are not fully aware of this and thus do not directly participate in the soul and the spirit. For Mulla Sadra, the perception of any manifest thing through the senses is in fact the perception of the archetype which it reflects in the soul. One who has ascended to a higher station perceives all things in their principal reality through the soul and the spirit. To realize this mode of knowing is for the soul to ascend. As Sadra writes:

Ascension to it is due to the union of our souls with the exalted substances of the soul which comprise the temporal particulars from the universals as a reflection of people's perception. So they have universal controlling agents from which the particulars are configured such that they pour from the intellectual principles upon the tablets of exalted

souls as modelled forms by which these souls are affected from the direction of their faculties of imagination.²¹

Through such union, the vision and admonition of the soul becomes sound and one encounters the things of the hidden world. This comes about in two ways. In the first, the lower sensations do not distract the soul from the higher perceptions and its imagination is strong such that it witnesses both the manifest and the non-manifest. Among such realizations are both those which are pure revelation and those weaker and thus more akin to visions seen in dreams. The latter is the realization achieved by those whose faculties are weaker but are nonetheless able to achieve union due to their capacity for study and the relative weakness of their impediments.

For Sadra, the human soul is by nature disposed towards union with intelligible realities. As he writes at the opening of the sixth Illumination, "On the difference between revelation, inspiration and instruction."

... the human soul is prepared to receive the disclosure of the reality of all things -- both their necessities and their possibilities. The soul is only veiled from them through external causes ... like the obstructing barrier between the soul and the preserved tablet which is the substance engraved with all that God has decreed until the day of resurrection.²²

Thus the prophet who, by definition, gathers together the perfection of the three worlds within himself and is able to perceive the things of all worlds as they are in themselves, is the true human, and all other states of humanity are a reflection of his state. The process of moving towards the fulfilment of the human state is thus one of unveiling or of disengaging; rather than of attaining attributes which improve one's state or dropping what is added. The veils which hide the true state are removed as the perceiver disengages from *wujud* to *wujud* and

moves from world to world until the soul becomes intellect, intellect and intellect.²³ When the veils between the soul and the intellect vanish, "the realities of the sciences from the mirrors of the tablet of the intellect are disclosed to the tablet of the soul."²⁴ This occurs either through effort and reflection or through grace. The first constitutes study and instruction, what Sadra calls "the path of obtaining (*iktisab*)," while the latter is the source of both revelation and inspiration. In the *Shawahid* Sadra emphasizes the common source and goal of both paths and makes little comparative evaluation of the modes of instruction and grace, but in other writings, it is clear that he believes true knowledge ultimately comes through grace. In a passage on *nubuwwa* from *Mafatih al-ghayb*, he details the method by which one can arrive at the reality "whose essence is the simplicity of reality," through the use of independent reflections, which is the central tool on the path of instruction and obtaining, but remarks that such realization "is only the seed of witnessing -- it does not bring connection (*wisul*) to the root of roots."²⁵ So although he acknowledges both forms of realization, he gives preference to grace in which "the wind of divine blessings blows so that the veils are removed and the coverings lifted from the eye of his vision and some of what is established in the highest tablet is disclosed ..."²⁶

Such "blowing of the spirit," as Sadra calls it, is of two kinds: inspiration which pertains to saints and revelation which pertains to prophets. In both forms "It is to witness the angel which inspires realities from God, and this angel is the active intellect which inspires the sciences in the passive intellect ..."²⁷ Sometimes it occurs through the dissolution of veils and sometimes it is like a sudden flash of lightening.

The path of inspiration corresponds to that of obtaining in its receptive nature, its locus and the manner in which it pours forth, but is separate in the manner of removing veils and in the

direction it takes. Revelation on the other hand, is not separate from inspiration in anything except "the intensity of clarity and luminosity and witnessing the angel who informs the intellectual forms."²⁸ Ultimately, all three are modes of the same process, "For the sciences . . . do not come to us except by mediation of the angels of the intellect -- which are the active intellects . . ." ²⁹ The importance of this common source is that it provides an epistemology which allows legitimacy to all forms of intellectual and religious sciences or, as Sadra calls them, the "instructional sciences" (*al-'ulum at-ta'limiyya*) and the "presential sciences" (*al-'ulum al-laduniyya*).

A central feature of this discussion is Sadra's belief that perception (*idrak*) is equivalent to unity (*ittihad*) such that attainment to any type of knowledge constitutes an ontological transformation in which both the perceiver and the perceived ascend the path by which the creation of the worlds descended.

The world of the intellect is equivalent to the divine pen, while that of the soul contains both the preserved tablet (*al-lawh al-mahfuz*) and the tablets of erasing and affirming on which are written God's judgements. All existent things come from what the divine pen writes upon these tablets. Every existent thing thus results from the imprint of the intellect upon the tablet of the soul from which arise the material forms below. As Sadra writes, "existence is first intellectual, then of the soul, then sensory and then material."³⁰

Human knowledge works to ascend the path by which existence descends. When one perceives a bodily existent, it registers in the senses, then in the faculty of imagination, and if he is at a higher level of knowledge, its principal intelligible reality will be perceived by the intellect. So that the ascent of knowledge is the inverse reflection of the descent of being and, as Sadra asserts, ". . . God is the origin and the aim." As one climbs the ladder of knowledge, perceiving higher realities, he also increases in being.

This occurs because all existence is a face of the Divine, who is Absolute Being. The perception of any being thus constitutes a degree of unity with God; for "human perception of a form of the world at any level is his unity with it and his perception of its being (*wujud*)."³¹ The one who has ascended to the highest level, the intellect, is thus united with all things in principle; for he has reached the "lordly station" of which Sadra writes:

When the human has reached this lordly station, he ascends to what is in the divine decree and the lordly power and he witnesses the pen and the tablet as the prophet reported of himself that he travelled by night until he heard the scratching of pens -- as God says -- "in order to show him by our signs that He is the Hearing the Seeing" (17:1).³²

Sadra's sees two levels of pens and two levels of tablets. The highest pen writes the realities of intellectual sciences upon the preserved tablet in an inscription which cannot change, while the lower pens write the divine judgements upon the tablets which are susceptible to abrogation. Nonetheless, these lower tablets have an exalted status, for it is from them that the religious laws and the books descend upon the messengers.³³ Sadra makes his most definitive statement regarding the relation of these levels when he writes, "The relation of the highest pen to these pens is like the relation of our intellectual faculty to our imaginal and sensorial sensations and the relation of the preserved tablet to these tablets is like the relation of the storehouse of our universal intelligibles to the storehouse of particular sensations."³⁴

This relation is for Sadra the key to understanding the religious law; for all that is written upon the tablets and pages which contain the law is also written by the First Real with the highest pen. The religious law is thus a reflection of the principles in the intellect by which the world below, which is itself modeled upon the intellect, is ordered in accord with the intellect. The religious law is thus the means by which the continu-

ity of the principle is preserved in the world of sensible realities. It is a metaphysical necessity because nothing, no matter how base, is completely removed from the worlds above which determine its reality. Or, as Sadra affirms, everything has a face, particular to it, which is turned to God.³⁵ In light of this, Sadra views obedience to the religious law as a means whereby one maintains the proper continuity of both his own nature and the world. For one who is completely obedient, "his act is the act of the Real, absent of any motive in his act other than the volition of the Real, and his volition is consumed in His volition."³⁶ To live in accord with the religious law is thus to live in accord with one's human nature, the pureness of which is the prophetic nature. It is to live in accord with the judgements written by the lower pens upon the lower tablets and thus to live in accord with the divine decree which is written by the highest pen upon the preserved tablet, for "the highest pen inscribes upon the preserved tablet the form of everything which flows from these pens -- both erasing and preserving."³⁷ The religious law is thus a mercy which works to rectify the human nature of he who is obedient to it, by making his being conform to the intelligible realities from which it flows.

As it is designed to conform to the human nature which is open to both the sensible and the intelligible -- the outward and the inward, the religious law is also two. This dual nature of the religious law is its defining characteristic.

It is like a human individual who has an outward [nature] which is well known and an inward [nature] which is covered -- and he has a first which is sensible and a last which is intelligible. This latter is his spirit and his meaning. His outward abides through his inward and his inward is personified by his outward. His first is a sustaining shell and his last is a pure engendered core.³⁸

The religious law is therefore less efficacious if one fails to approach both its outward and inward, both its letter and

spirit. If one practices its rights and observes its stipulations seeking something for oneself, he is without the intention which conforms to the inward. Thus the religious law does not help him ascend, for he is using it to serve his own desires. For Mulla Sadra, such people are entrenched in "... the ephemeral sensible matters by which those who are ossified in form and separated from the spirit of certainty are deceived." On the other hand, one who is near to the sciences of realities, which pertain to the inward, but fails to observe the judgements which pertain to the outward, attains nothing. As Sadra writes:

When he wants to realize his disengaged form prematurely, before it is established, and speak wisdom before its maturity and completion without its ripening, there is no doubt that his reality (haqq) will come to nothing and his knowledge will disintegrate.³⁹

The prophet is the vicegerent, who "is sitting on the common border between the world of intelligibles and the world of sensibles."⁴⁰ This two-fold nature of vicegerency is based upon the two-fold nature of the heart which has two doors: one opened to the world of the preserved tablet and the other opened to the cognitive and motive faculties. In so far as it is opened to the preserved tablet, the heart is oriented towards the intellect and in so far as it is opened to the lower faculties, it is oriented towards the passions. The human being is thus the unique creature in whom both the intellect and the passions are mounted, while in the angels there is only intellect and in the animals there is only passion. This is why he is the one for whom there is a religious law which orders the passions in accord with the intellect.

Based upon this two-fold disposition, Mulla Sadra recognizes three types of human beings. The lowest are those who are devoted to the passions and thus "detained in the prison of the world, bound in its chains and manacles . . . to whom the door of the empty realm is closed and the doors of hell-fire are opened, save he who

repents and reforms himself."⁴¹ Juxtaposed to them are "those who are immersed in gnosis (*irfan*) of God and his *malakut*, trembling with the invocation of God . . . these are the elect among the friends of God to whom the doors of the empyreal realm are open."⁴² At the highest level is the prophet who is "sometimes with God through love for Him and sometimes with mankind through mercy and compassion for them."⁴³ The prophet is fully open to both the passionate and intellectual dimensions of his human nature and thus brings them together. Through his very being, he orders the sensibles in accord with the intelligibles from which they derive. Thus establishing the crucial link by which the lower is made to conform with the higher, and ultimately with the principle itself.

The heart of the prophet also has two doors, an inner door opened to the divine tablet by which he receives knowledge and a door opened towards the senses by which he is able to understand the human condition and thus guide men to good and repel them from evil.⁴⁴

This is the highest degree of humanity,

This human has perfected his very essence . . . Through what God pours upon his heart and his disengaged intellect, he is a friend among the friends of God and a divine sage and through what pours from Him upon his faculty of imagination and storing forms, he is a messenger and a Warner of what will be and a reporter of what was and what exists now.⁴⁵

* * *

Mulla Sadra's theory of prophecy borrows extensively from the psychological and "naturalized" understanding of prophecy developed in Ibn Sina's writings. But rather than maintaining Ibn Sina's more cognitive psychological explanation, Sadra portrays the psychological and intellectual dimension of prophecy as part of a greater ontological function. The prophet's ability to perceive the perceptual forms of intelligible, imaginal and sensible realities indicates both a perfected cogni-

tive ability and a perfected being, for he can perceive all things as they are in themselves and thus is as he is in himself, the being of the perceived and the being of the perceiver being the same being with no variation. As the prophet is perfect in being, he is the locus through which it is kept in conformity with that source and through which it returns to its final end. Without prophecy there would be no intermediary by which the lower realms are maintained in continuity with the highest principle -- "the root of roots." There would thus be no creation.

The function of the prophet as messenger, Warner and guide is the means by which God orders the creation. His position as vicegerent is not simply a representative function but a necessary ontological reality. It is the totality of which all other humans are a part and the source from which all the stations and way-stations of humanity flow forth. All humans thus partake of it to some degree, otherwise they would not be human. As one ascends the stations and way-stations, he becomes his true self and partakes of the human reality to a greater degree. Not only does he perceive more, he is more. This is the path of philosophy. The one who has attained to the higher way-stations is the philosopher-saint. Like the prophet, he sees things "as they are in themselves," but unlike the prophet he does not see intelligible realities in wakefulness as in sleep and his imaginative faculty does not present intelligibles in a form which is accessible to many. With each step that he ascends he becomes more, for he perceives the higher intelligible realities and becomes fully present to them, for the being which is perceived and the being of the perceiver are one and the same.

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Notes

¹ Sadr ad-Din Shirazi. al-Hikma al-muta`alliyya fi l-asfar al-arba`a al-aqliyya, vol. 1, part 1, Tehran 1387/1958, p.20.

² Ibid. p.21.

³ Hajj Mulla Hadi Sabzawari. Ta`liqat bar ash-Shawahid ar-rububiyya. Ed. Jalal ad-Din Ashtiyani. Tehran, 1981, p.384.

⁴ Ibid. p.384

⁵ Sadr ad-Din Shirazi. ash-Shawahid ar-rububiyya fi l-manahij as-sulukiyya Ed. Jalal ad-Din Ashtiyani. Tehran, 1981, p.339.

⁶ Ibid. p.339.

⁷ Ibid. p.339-40.

⁸ Ibid. p.340.

⁹ Ibid. p.340.

¹⁰ Ibid. p.340.

¹¹ Ibid. p.341.

¹² Ibid. p.344.

¹³ "God is the light of the heavens and the earth. The semblance of His light is that of a niche in which is a flame, the flame within a glass, the glass a glittering star as it were, lit with the oil of a blessed tree, the olive, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil appears to light up even though fire touches it not, light upon light. God guides to His light whom He will . . ." (24:35).

¹⁴ ash-Shawahid ar-rububiyya, p.341.

¹⁵ Ibid. p.342.

¹⁶ Ibid. p.343.

¹⁷ Ibid. p.344.

¹⁸ Sadr ad-Din Shirazi, Kitab al-masha`ir, Ed. Henri Corbin, Tehran, 1982, p.51.

¹⁹ Ibid. p.50.

²⁰ ash-Shawahid ar-rububiyya, p.346.

²¹ Ibid. p.347.

²² Ibid. pp.347-8.

²³ al-Asfar, v.3, p.362.

²⁴ ash-Shawahid ar-rububiyya, p.347.

²⁵ Sadr ad-Din Shirazi. *Mafatih al-Ghayb*. Ed. Muhammad Khajavi. Tehran, 1984. pp. 483-4.

²⁶ *Shawahid*. p.348.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p.349.

²⁸ *Ibid.* p.349.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p.349.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p.351.

³¹ *Ibid.* p.351.

³² *Ibid.* p.351.

³³ *Ibid.* p.351.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p.353.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p.352.

³⁶ *Ibid.* p.352.

³⁷ *Ibid.* p.353.

³⁸ *Ibid.* p.370.

³⁹ *Ibid.* p.372.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p.355.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p.355.

⁴² *Ibid.* p.355.

⁴³ *Ibid.* p.355

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p.356.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p.356.

8. Mullâ Sadrâ on Imaginative Perception and Imaginal World

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Abstract

The question of perception constitutes one of the most complex and important sections of Islamic philosophical psychology particularly the imaginative perception (*al-idrâk al-khayâlî*). In this paper I will discuss the nature of imaginative perception, its various functions, and 'imaginal world' (*âlam al-mithâl*) from the point of Mullâ Sadrâ. It will include the issues concerning how the imaginative perception occurs, the organ of imaginative perception whether it is a part of the material physical brain or it is an immaterial psychic faculty, and its role after the death of the corporeal body. It will also discuss in brief the macrocosmic Imaginal World, its nature, and its connection with the microcosmic human imagination according to Sadrâ. These issues addressed and demonstrated by him will be compared in brief with those of his predecessors from both Peripatetic and Illuminationist schools of Thought, and some conclusions will be drawn at the end.

A-1: Definition of Perception

The word *idrâk* (perception) in the early medieval Islamic dictionary of al-Jurjânî¹ has been given three definitions: (1) "thorough encompassing of the thing"; (2) "acquisition of a form for the rational soul"; (3) "conception of the reality of the thing alone without any negative or affirmative judgment on it". The term '*ilm* (knowledge) is also defined by him as the "acquisition of the form of the thing in the intellect" which is one of the definitions of *idrâk*.

Mullâ Sadrâ defines *idrâk* as "meeting (*liqâ'*) and arriving (*wazûd*)" and explains "when the intellectual faculty reaches