

Home > Wilayah, the Station of the Master > From Human Servility To Divine Sovereignty > Stations And Stages

From Human Servility To Divine Sovereignty

Is it an offensive thing to say, from human servility to Divine Lordliness? Is it not possible for the slave to leave the boundary of his servility and take two steps within the Divine boundary?

In the words of Mahmud Shabistari:

سپه روئی ز ممکن در دو عالم

جدا هرگز نشد والله اعلم

“Non-being is not divorced from the contingent

In the two worlds: Allah is All-wise”. 1

True, but the meaning of ‘Lordliness’ is godliness, not God. Every person who has power is the ‘Lord’ over those things which are under his influence and in his possession. ‘Abdu ‘1- Muttalib said to Abrahah who had arrived with the intention of destroying the Ka’bah: “I am the lord (owner) of the camels (to claim which I have come to you), but the House has itself a Lord (to defend it) 2

We found the above expression from following a famous hadith which is found in Misbahu ‘sh-shari`ah. In that hadith it is said:

العِبُودِيَّةُ جَوْهَرَةٌ كُنْهَهَا الرِّبُوبِيَّةُ

"Servility is a jewel whose center is Sovereignty,"

Which means: Indeed, being the slave of Allah and travelling on the path of nearness to al- Haqq is a jewel whose center is lordship, that is, power and strength.

Man always was, and still is, seeking to find a way to have mastery over him and the world.

For the present we are not interested in the matter of which way to take for this purpose, nor in what leads to success or failure in that way. But among these ways there is one way which has a marvelous condition, in this sense that man, alone, takes this way, without having the formerly mentioned aim, that is his aim is not to gain power and control over the world; but rather his aim is at the opposite extreme to this aim, that is his aim is self-abasement, humility, self-annihilation and non-being, this amazing way is the way of servility.

آن کس که تو را شناخت جان را چه کند؟

فرزند و عیال و خانمان را چه کند؟

دیوانه کنی هر دو جهانش بخشی

دیوانه تو هر دو جهان را چه کند؟

"What can that person who has known you do with his soul?

What can he do with his children, his family, his home?

You make him delirious and You give him the two worlds,

What can someone who is delirious for

You do with both the worlds?"

Stations And Stages

Sovereignty, lordship, and wilayah, in other words, perfection and power, which are allotted to mankind as a result of servility, sincerity and true worship, have stations and stages.

The first stage is the giving of inspiration and the giving of control to man over his own soul. In other words, the smallest sign of the acceptance of man's deeds by Allah is that first of all he earns a penetrating insight, he becomes radiant and clear-sighted. The Qur'an says:

إِنْ تَتَّقُوا اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ فُرْقَانًا

“If you are careful of (your duty to) Allah, He will grant you a distinction” (8:29)

It also says:

وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا

“And (as for) those who strive hard for Us, We will most certainly guide them in Our ways.”(29:69)

Secondly, man conquers and subdues his own soul and physical forces; man's will-power becomes powerful over his bodily and animal desires; he becomes the master of his own existence; he acquires merited control within the limits of his own existence. The Qur'an says:

إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ

“Surely prayer keeps (one) away from indecency and evil.” (29:45)

About fasting, it says:

كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

“Fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard (against evil). (2: 183)

And about both forms of worship, it says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ

“ O you who believe! Seek assistance through patience and prayer.”(2: 153)

In this stage of servility, that which become man's lot is that through a kind of insight man's bodily passions and tendencies are conquered. In other words, the first effect of servility is sovereignty and wilayah over the carnal soul.

The second state is control and wilayah over various thinking processes, that is, control over the imagination.

The faculty of the imagination is one of our most astonishing powers. By virtue of this faculty, our mind can at any instant turn its attention from one subject to another, and, so to speak, take the form of an association of ideas or a chain of mental phenomena. This faculty is not under our control, rather we are surprisingly under its control, and so whatever we may want, it is impossible for us to fix our minds on one determined subject so that our attention does not turn to something else.

Without control, the faculty of the imagination pushes us in this direction, then in that. For example, however much we want to have presence of mind in prayer, that is to say, however much we want to keep this student present at the top of the class of prayer, we cannot. All at once, we understand that the prayer has reached its end, and that the student was absent during the whole period.

The Prophet makes an elegant comparison in this matter. He compares the heart – the heart of someone who is overcome by his imaginative powers to a feather which is hanging from a tree in a desert, and which every breath of wind blows to and fro. He said:

مَثَلُ الْقَلْبِ، مَثَلِ رِيْشَةٍ فِي الْفَلَاةِ تَعَلَّقَتْ فِي أَصْلِ شَجَرَةٍ تُقَلِّبُهَا الرِّيحُ ظَهْرًا لِبَطْنِ

“The heart is like a feather in the middle of an open desert, hanging from a tree and blown to and fro by the wind.”

گفت پیغمبر که دل همچون پری است

در بیابانی اسیر صرصری است

باد پر را هر طرف راند گزاف

گه چپ و گه راست با صد اختلاف

در حدیث دیگر آن دل را چنان

کآب جوشان ز آتش اندر غازقان

هر زمان دل را دگر رایی بود

آن نه از وی بلکه از جایی بود

The Prophet said that the heart is like a feather in the desert, a captive of a violent blast. The wind drives the feather recklessly in every direction:

“Now left, now right, with a hundred diversities.

In another tradition (the Prophet said)

Deem this heart to be as the water boiling in a cauldron from the fire.

At every time the heart has a different resolution.

That (resolution) is not from it, but from some place.”³

The other tradition that Rumi indicates in these verses is:

لَقَلْبُ ابْنِ آدَمَ أَشَدُّ انْقِلَابًا مِنْ الْقَدْرِ إِذَا اجْتَمَعَتْ غُلْيَا

“Surely, the heart of man is in more upheaval than a pot when it is completely on the boil.”

But is man condemned compulsorily and necessarily to be doomed forever to his thinking, and is this mysterious power, which, like a sparrow, is always flying from branch to branch, to be an absolute ruler over his existence? Or does this condemnation in the face of the imaginative faculty stem from rawness and immaturity? Those who become whole, the people of wilayah, are they powerful enough to subjugate this force?

The second alternative is correct; one of the duties of man is to gain mastery over the capriciousness of his imagination. If not, this power of Shaytan (Satan) will give a quality of chance to Allah and to travelling this way to nearness, and will cancel and ruin all the power and ability in man's being.

How great was Rumi who said:

جان همه روزه لگدکوب از خیال

وز زیان و سود و از خوف زوال

نی صفا می ماندش نی لطف و فر

نی به سوی آسمان راه سفر

“All day long, from the buffets of fantasy, and from loss and gain and from fear of decline.

There remains to the soul neither joy, nor grace and glory,

Nor way of journeying to heaven.” 4

گفت پیغمبر که عینای تنام

لا ینام القلب عن رب الانام

چشم تو بیدار و دل رفته به خواب

چشم من خفته دلم در فتح باب

هم نشینت من نی ام سایه من است

برتر از اندیشه ها پایه من است

زان که من ز اندیشه ها بگذشته ام

خارج از اندیشه پویان گشته ام

حاکم اندیشه ام محکوم نی

ز آنکه بنا حاکم آمد بر بنی

جمله خلقان سخره اندیشه اند

زین سبب خسته دل و غم پیشه اند

من چو مرغ اوجم اندیشه مگس

کی بود بر من مگس را دسترس

چون ملایم گیرد از سفلی صفات

برپرم هم چون طیور الصافات

"The Prophet said: "My eyes sleep,

But my heart is not asleep to the Lord of created beings.

Your eyes are awake and your heart is sunk in slumber,

My eyes are asleep, but my heart is at the

opening of the door.

'Tis not I that am seated beside you, 'tis my shadow,

My station is higher than thoughts. Because I have passed beyond thoughts,

I have become a swift traveler outside of thought.

I am the ruler of thought, not ruled by it, because the builder is ruler over the building.

All creatures are subject to thought;

For that reason they are sore in heart and practiced in sorrow.

I am as a bird of the zenith, thought is a gnat; how should a gnat have power over me?

When weariness at the qualities of the low seizes me,

I soar up like birds which spread their pinions.” 5

Let us look at a man like `Ali (a. s.) or Zaynu 'l-`Abidin (a.s.) who were so absorbed in Divine reality during their prayer that, for instance, when they took an arrow out of `Ali's foot, he did not come back from his state of total concentration, and did not notice what had happened or the young child or Zaynu 'l-`Abidin (a.s.) who, when the latter was in a state of complete absorption in worship, fell down from a height and broke his hand.

The cries of the children and the women of the house made quite a disturbance, and in the end the bone setter arrived and set the child's hand. When Zaynu 'l-`Abidin had finished his prayer, that is to say when he had returned from his heavenly journey, his eyes fell on the child's hand, and, astonished, he asked what had happened that it was bandaged up. We can see how these cries and the uproar could not bring the Imam out of his concentration in Divine reality.

Yet let us look at this degree of man. Among their followers, we have seen a number in our life that had such peace of mind and concentration of spirit in the time of prayer that they were assuredly unaware of anything apart from Allah. Our great and respected teacher, the late Hajj Mirza `Ali Agha Shirazi Isfahani 6, was a man of this degree.

In order to win this victory, there is nothing like worship, whose foundation is concentration on Allah. Self-discipline can be counted among other ways, and, at the most, self-mortification and self-mutilation fall a little into this category, but Islam secures this result from the way of worship without having recourse to these unacceptable practices.

Fixing the attention of the heart towards Allah, and meditating, that which is directed towards the Lord of Lords and the Creator and Disposer of all things, prepares the basis of gatheredness of thought and concentration of the mind.

زلف آشفته او باعث جمعیت ماست

چون چنین است پس آشفته ترش باید کرد

“His disheveled lock (of hair) is the cause of us gathering.

Since it is this way, then he must make it more disheveled.”

It would be a pity not to mention here something which can help us from the Shaykh of the philosophers of Islam (Ibn Sina), the prodigy of his time, who, by the grace of the teachings of Islam, took philosophical thought to places where his Greek, Iranian, and Indian predecessors had never reached.

In the ninth section of his *al-Isharat*,⁷ after a description of ordinary worship which is done only for reward and has little value, this great man proceeds to worship in its relationship with *`irfan* (gnosis).

He says: "Worship as seen by the people of gnosis is the training of aspirations and faculties, the imagination and thought, which, as a result of repetition and habituation of appearance in the presence of Allah (*al-Haqq*), continually draws them away from attention to problems of nature and matter, towards the perception of *Malakut*. And, in the end, these faculties submit to the secret of the heart and to the innate instinct of man to seek Allah, and become obedient to Him so that whenever he wills that he should engage himself in union with Allah (*al-Haqq*), these powers do not do any- thing in way of opposition, and do not start a conflict between two desires, a stronger one and a weaker one, and the hidden, inner secret occupies itself with illumination without their interference."

The third station is that the spirit, in its stages of strength, power, sovereignty and *wilayah*, reaches a stage in which, in a great deal of things, it becomes able to do without the body, so that the body is one hundred percent subservient to the spirit.

The spirit and the body are in need, one of the other; the life-force of the body is the spirit, the spirit is the preserver of the form of the body; removing the regulating attachment of the spirit from the body necessitates the corruption and ruin of the body. On the other hand, the spirit, in its activities, is in need of the services of the body; without the use of the limbs and organs and the instruments of the body it would be impossible to do any work. The spirit's not needing the body, in so far as in some of its activities it is not in need of the services of the body, appears sometimes for a few moments and sometimes repeatedly, and sometimes permanent! This is what is known as *`divorce from the body*'.

Suhrawardi, the famous Hakim Ishragi, said"

"We do not recognize a hakim (a theosophist) as a hakim unless he can practice divorce from the body."

Mir Damad says: "We do not recognize a hakim as a hakim unless divorce from the body has become his possession, and every time he wills it, it happens."

As these enquirers after truth have expressed it, divorce from the body is not evidence of great perfection. It is possible that those who still have not crossed over from the world of *mithal* (the world of form) and have not set foot in the hidden world of contemplation may have reached this station.

The fourth station is that his body, in every respect, comes under the control and will of the individual, in such a way that in the realm of his body the individual originates extraordinary actions. This subject gives scope for much discussion.

Al-Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq, may peace be upon him, said:

مَا ضَعْفَ بَدَنٍ عَمَّا قَوَّيْتُ عَلَيْهِ النِّيَّةَ

"Nobody is weak in that about which his decision is firm." i.e. with strong determination, any weakness and feebleness can be overcome."

The fifth station, which is the highest station, is that even the external world comes under the control of man's will as well as becomes obedient to man. The miracles and wonders of the prophets and the walis of Allah are in this category.

The problem of miracles and wonders is itself a matter of discussion which must be treated separately by way of explanation. Piety in any of the revealed religions is a pre-requisite for the acceptance of and faith in supernatural phenomena and miracles.

For instance, no-one can be a Muslim and believe and have faith in the Qur'an, but deny miracles and supernatural events. From the point of view of Islamic meta-physics, the difficulty concerning a miracle is a difficulty which must be solved; of course, investigating this problem requires the discussion of many preliminaries.

Here we shall discuss this matter from the point of view of wilayah-tasarruf and naturally there are some people opposed to what we say who have faith and believe in the Qur'an and admit that miracles take place. What we have to say to those people is directed towards showing that a miracle is part of the manifestations of wilayah-tasarruf and creative wilayah.

Leaving aside the Qur'an, which, in addition to being a miracle, is the word of Allah not the word of the Prophet, and has an exceptional position among all miracles, the occurrence of miracles is due to a kind of power and will which was given to its bearer from Allah so that he can, through the permission and command of Allah, bring about changes in creation: he causes a rod to appear as a serpent, he gives sight to a blind man, he causes the dead to live, he is aware of what is concealed.

This power and awareness were given to him only as a result of his following the way of becoming and closeness to the Centre of Being and wilayah-tasarruf is nothing else but this.

Some people imagine that in the existence of a miracle the individuality and the will of the miracle-doer do not interfere in any way;

He is only the cinema screen; the Essence of Oneness, directly and without intermediary, brings it into existence. For some event reaches the boundary of the supernatural, it is beyond the power of man at whatever level it may be. So wherever a miracle takes place, man has not brought about any change in creation, for it is the Essence of Oneness itself which directly, and without the intermediary of the will of

man, has brought about a change in the universe.

This view is mistaken. Apart from the fact that it denies the sublimeness of the Purest and Unique Being, that physical fact, without intermediary and outside the order of things, should emanate from Him, this concept is against what is explicitly stated in the Qur'an. The Qur'an, in the perfection of its unambiguity, acknowledges its prophets as the bringers of 'ay at ' (which also means miracles as well as signs), but of course with the leave and permission of the Unique Being.

It is clear that the permission of the Unique Being is not of the same kind as human permission which is produced by words or by indication of social or ethical restrictions. The permission of the Lord is this granting of a kind of perfection which is the source of such an effect and if Allah had not willed it. He would take this perfection from him.

In the blessed surah al-Mu'min, it is written

وَمَا كَانَ لِرَسُولٍ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ بِآيَةٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ

“And it was not meet for a messenger that he should bring a sign except with Allah's permission”
(40:78)

In this ayah it is made known that the bringers of the ayah were prophets, but by the leave of the Lord. Specifically, the words 'leave of Allah' were added so that it should not be fancied that anyone himself has independence vis-a-vis the Being of Truth, and that all should know that 'there is no might and no power except with Allah'.

Any common 'might or power', from the least to the most, the small to the great, depends on the Holiest Unique Being; every existent, in every stage, is a channel for the Divine Will and Decree and is one of His manifestations. The prophets, in every work, and among them their miracles, are channels, and they are those who fill their pens from the eternal spring of the Unseen.

In the blessed surah an-Naml, the story of Suleiman and the Queen of Saba' (Sheba) is told. Suleiman summoned the Queen of Saba', and the Queen set out to present herself to Suleiman. Suleiman wanted from those present in the assembly that her throne should be brought before him before she herself came. Some volunteered, and Suleiman became happy at their way of work, until:

قَالَ الَّذِي عِنْدَهُ عِلْمٌ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ أَنَا آتِيكَ بِهِ قَبْلَ أَنْ يَرْتَدَّ إِلَيْكَ طَرْفُكَ

“One who had the knowledge of the Book said: I will bring it to you in the twinkling of an eye”

(27:40)

The meaning of the Qur'an is that the one who knew said, 'I am the one who can bring it in this short space of time'. Therefore he attributed the 'might and the power' to himself, and, moreover, it says that 'he who possessed knowledge of the Book said . . .'; pointing to the fact that he did this extraordinary feat by virtue of a kind of knowledge, and that kind of knowledge is a kind of science which till now has not been recorded in any human book, it is a knowledge which can only be obtained from the Guarded Tablet, that is, from nearness to the Essence of Truth.

Again, the Qur'an explicitly states, while talking about the same prophet:

فَسَخَّرْنَا لَهُ الرِّيحَ تَجْرِي بِأَمْرِهِ رُخَاءً حَيْثُ أَصَابَ وَالشَّيَاطِينَ كُلَّ بَنَّاءٍ
وَعَوَّاصٍ وَأَخْرِينَ مُقَرَّنِينَ فِي الْأَصْفَادِ هَذَا عَطَاؤُنَا فَامْنُنْ أَوْ أَمْسِكْ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ

“So, we subjected to him the wind that ran at his commandment, softly, wherever he might light on, and the Satans, every builder and diver and others also, coupled in fetters: “This is our gift; bestow or with- hold without reckoning” (38: 36 –39).

In an ayah which was revealed concerning Prophet `Isa – May peace be upon him – the Messiah, mention is made of the meanings of the Qur'an in this matter; we excuse ourselves and refrain from extending the matter through mentioning them.

The point is that according to the Qur'an, wilayah-tasarruf in the universe cannot be denied. But if someone wants to, he may investigate this subject merely according to the standards of science and philosophy. Of course there are other stories, but these are beyond our present objective.

In the last point which we made at the beginning of this discussion, we explained that all these stations were the result of nearness to the Lord, and nearness to the Truth is a fact and a reality, not a figurative explanation, or one depending on perspective.

In the famous and remarkable al Hadithu l-qudsi, which both the Shi`ahs and the Sunnis relate, this reality is explained in a very beautiful manner. Al-Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) narrated from the Holy Prophet.

قَالَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ: مَا تَقَرَّبَ إِلَيَّ عَبْدٌ بِشَيْءٍ أَحَبَّ إِلَيَّ مِمَّا افْتَرَضْتُ عَلَيْهِ، وَإِنَّهُ
لَيَتَقَرَّبُ إِلَيَّ بِالنَّوَافِلَةِ حَتَّىٰ أَحِبَّهُ، فَإِذَا أَحَبَبْتَهُ كُنْتُ سَمْعَهُ الَّذِي يَسْمَعُ بِهِ، وَبَصَرَهُ
الَّذِي يُبْصِرُ بِهِ، وَلِسَانَهُ الَّذِي يَنْطِقُ بِهِ، وَيَدَهُ الَّتِي يَبْطِشُ بِهَا، إِنْ دَعَانِي أَحَبَبْتَهُ، وَ

إِنْ سَأَلَنِي أُعْطِينَهُ

Allah says: “No slave has become near to Me by anything more pleasing to Me than what I have made obligatory on him; and surely he can approach Me through works of supererogation more than what is obligatory on him, until I love him. Then when I love him, I will be his ear through which he hears, his eye through which he sees, his tongue through which he speaks, his hand with which he strikes. If he calls, I will reply to him; if he asks from Me, I will give to him”. 8

In this hadith the essence of the matter is set down: worship causes approach, and approach causes belovedness near to Allah; that is to say, by worship man becomes near to Allah, and as a result of this nearness he becomes worthy of special favor, and as a result of that favor his ears and eyes and hands and tongue become, as it were, Divine. By Divine nearness he hears, and sees, and speaks and strikes; his supplication is accepted and his request is granted.

The fact is that the spirit of Shi`ism, which distinguishes it from other schools of Islam, and gives it a special Islamic insight for its followers, is the special view of this school concerning Man. On the one hand, it acknowledges that man's powers are truly wonderful, as was pointed out before, and it makes it known that the world of man is never without the being of the Perfect Man in whom the potentialities of man are actualized; and on the other hand, according to the insight of this group, servility is the sole means of arriving at the stations of men, and travelling the way of servility in a perfect and complete manner is not possible except with spiritual favor and with the leader of the caravan, the Perfect Man, who is the wali and hujjah (Proof) of Allah.

For this reason, the walis of this school have said:

بَنِيَ الْإِسْلَامُ عَلَيَّ خَمْسًا: عَلَيَّ الصَّلَاةِ وَالزَّكَاةِ وَالصَّوْمِ وَالْحَجِّ وَالْوَلَايَةِ. وَ
لَمْ يُنَادَ بِشَيْءٍ كَمَا نُودِيَ بِالْوَلَايَةِ.

“Islam is founded on five things: On salat, on zakat, on sawm (fasting), on hajj, and on wilayah: and we were not called for anything as we were called to wilayah”.9

1. Sa'du'd-Din, Mahmud Shabistari, (d.720/1320) author of Goshen-e raz from which the present verse is taken.

2. See A. Guillaume: Ibn Hisham's Life of Muhammad (1955), pp. 24 – 25.

3. Mathnawi, bk. III, 1. 1641–1644 Rumi. (trans. R. E. Nicholson)

4. ibid. bk. i, 1. 411–414.

5. ibid.

6. One of the great teachers of recent times. He was a faqih of the rank of mujtahid, a theosophist, a gnostic, a tabib

(traditional doctor) and a writer of excellence. In some subjects, for example, tibb (traditional medicine), he was of the highest rank. He was, over and above this, a pious man, a lover of Allah, the Prophet and his family – the blessings of Allah and His peace be upon them.

7. Kitabu '1-isharat wa 't-tanbihat.

8. al-Kafi, vol. i, p.352.

9. Wasa 'ilu 'sh-Shi`ah, vol.I, p.4.

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