

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

# An Anthology of Avicennan Hermeneutics

*A Translation of the Extant Fragments from Ibn Sīnā's Exegesis*

Authored by:

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## Translator's Preface

When we hear the name “Ibn Sīnā”, the term ‘exegete’ (*mufasssīr*) does not usually come immediately to mind. Of course, other, more popular terms do—philosopher, logician, theologian (to an extent), scientist, visionary—yet, rarely, if ever, do we associate the Headmaster with revelatory sciences such as *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr*. And for good reason: the great philosopher left practically nothing in either science, and the bulk of his works deal almost entirely with metaphysics, epistemology, logic, and occasionally esoterica. Of course, he makes reference to Qurānic verses and *aḥādīth* within his works (contrary to the belief of many), but such references often serve as subsidiary detail rather than the primary consideration of those works.

Ibn Sīnā left little to no works within the *ḥadīth* sciences. Of his numerous works, the only works which deal most directly with the *ḥadīth* corpus (and which, to some extent, may be called ‘commentarial’ in nature) are:

1. *al-Risālah al-Aḍḥawiyyah*, a treatise on eschatology and resurrection; (Arabic)
2. *Mī'rājnāmah*, a line-by-line allegorical interpretation of the Makkan Ascension of the Prophet ﷺ. (Persian)

In the Qurānic sciences, however, we are more fortunate, for in this field the great philosopher left a handful of exegetical opuscles. These include:

1. *al-Risālah al-Nayrūziyyah* (or: *al-Nawrūziyyah*), a philosophical treatment of the arcane alphabetical openings to certain chapters of the Qurān;
2. *Tafsīr Āyat al-Nūr*, an exegetical reading of the 35th verse of the Qurān's 24th chapter.
3. *Tafsīr Fuṣṣilat*, an exegetical reading of verses 11-12 of Chapter 41, with an emphasis on the Neoplatonist cosmology of the superlunary and sublunary heavens and their material makeup.
4. *Tafsīr Sūrat al-A'lā*, a comprehensive exegesis on the entirety of Chapter 87 illustrating the chapter's comprehensive coverage of theology, prophetology, and eschatology.
5. *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*, once more a comprehensive exegesis on the entirety of Chapter 112, and particularly its intimation to the Principal Ipseity of God.

6. *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Falaq & Tafsīr Sūrat al-Nās*, a comprehensive exegesis on the entirety of Chapters 113 and 114, and particularly the relationship between Divine Lordship and the human soul.

This anthology is a translation of the latter four. While *al-Nayrūziyyah* is undoubtedly a work deserving translation, it is much longer than any of the other works in the abovementioned list, and so deserves its own independent composition (forthcoming, *in shā' Allāh*). And although I would have included *Tafsīr Āyat al-Nūr*, the specific pages in the PDF containing it were corrupted, and I have yet to procure another outlet containing those pages in uncorrupted form. For that matter, this work benefits entirely from the prodigious collection: *al-Tafsīr al-Qur'ānī wa al-Lughah al-Ṣūfiyyah fī Falsafat Ibn Sīnā*, by Ḥasan 'Āṣī.

## A Brief Note on Ibn Sīnā's Method of Exegesis

Ibn Sīnā was a philosopher through and through, and his method of exegesis reflects his trade accordingly. His language is consistently philosophical, engaging invariably with ontological, cosmological, and logical terms of the Peripatetic-Avicennan tradition. His exegesis on *Sūrah Fuṣṣilat* is really an exposition of the Avicennan model of the universe: the aether of the superlunary heavens, the elemental turbidity of the sublunary heavens, and the operation of each in relation to substantial transmutation (or lack, thereof). His exegesis on *Sūrat al-A'lā* is a philosophical demonstration of the need for a Wise, Volitional Creator, a promulgating Prophet, and an enduring Afterworld. His exegesis on *Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* is a masterclass on the mechanics of necessity (*al-wujūb*), possibility (*al-imkān*), quiddity (*al-māhiyyah*), existence (*al-wujūd*), and ipseity (*al-inniyyah*; selfhood), all trademarks of the Avicennan model of metaphysics. His exegesis on *al-Mu'awwidhatayn* is an explication of the relationship between the Lord-God Allah and the parts of the human soul, particularly the vegetative, animal, and rational faculties.

In this regard, Ibn Sīnā's exegetical exploits are decidedly allegorical; terms taken literally by some (perhaps many) are often interpreted to fit the Avicennan model. The 'smoke' of the heavens is interpreted as the turbid matter of the sublunary realm. The 'Ever-Withdrawing Whisperer (*al-Waswās al-Khannās*)' is interpreted as the

imaginative faculty forcing the upward-gazing intelligent soul toward the ‘caliginous darkness’ (*ghāsiq*) of the material world. The ‘Splitting Daybreak’ refers to the very existentiation of creation after its residence within the darkness of non-existence. These allegorical interpretations, some viable and others potentially less so, should not be seen as an unprincipled bias for his philosophical method, but instead as a manifestation of Avicenna’s belief in the consistency of logical truth. Whether or not these interpretations are objectively sound in and of themselves (indeed, an argument could be made for their secondary viability, as is done for the exegeses of many *Şūfiyyah*), the fact remains that they reflect Avicenna’s belief that a sound theory of philosophy should translate into a sound practice of philosophy wherever possible. If true rationale produces timeless truth across all conceivable worlds and realities, and the *Quran* likewise contains timeless truth, it follows that any productions of the rationale should serve as the most optimal, most truth-borne interpretations of the *Quran*.

Seeing as Avicenna truly believed in the logic of his philosophical conclusions, it follows that the exegesis he provides in this work represent what he believed to be the *truest* possible human interpretations for the word of God.

Apart from the philosophical nature of his exegesis, Ibn Sīnā’s exegeses also reflect a striking effort to showcase the coherency between the verses of the *Quran*. He showcases the logical connection between verses, the internal arguments within them, how those arguments contain their own premises, and how those premises ultimately yield the import and purport of any particular verse, set of verses, or even chapter. As such, even if readers disagree with the nature of his interpretations, there is much to learn from his model of hermeneutics as a whole, and from his disquisitions into the literary psychology of the *Quranic* word.

## Notes on the Translation

Because Arabic was Ibn Sīnā’s second language, the translation of his Arabic excerpts is often a difficult endeavor. Although I believe the ancients deserve relatively literal translations of their passages, on account of the inspired genius which informed their word-choices, phraseologies, and meanings, I also acknowledge that this belief often

makes for hard-to-read translations, especially in the case of someone like Ibn Sīnā. Nonetheless, I have retained my usual model of translation, hoping it may yield the same notions, thoughts, and discussions as the original Arabic may have so long ago. I supplant implied terms, arguments, or phraseologies with explanatory brackets, but ensure that any sentence or passage reads grammatically accurate even without those explanatory brackets. I also occasionally include footnotes explaining the gist of an argument or response, or providing liminal context. Being a lesser-known work of Avicenna, this work assumes the reader's familiarity with certain concepts, such as:

1. Ipseity (*inniyyah*): a thing's most fundamental and individual selfhood;
2. Quiddity (*māhiyyah*): the essence of a thing;
3. Existence (*wujūd*): the self-evident, noumenal being of any real thing;
4. Possibility (*imkān*): the essential equipoise of a thing between existence of non-existence, requiring an external cause to facilitate its existence;
5. Necessity (*wujūb*): the ontological necessity of a thing insofar as it does not require any external efficient cause for its existence; it exists by virtue of its definitive self;
6. Matter (*māddah*): the substrate of potential change in a substance;
7. Form (*ṣūrah*): the catalyst for active change in a substance;
8. Celestial Spheres (*al-aflāk*): nine spherical domains above the heavens composed of aether, in whose orbit the entire cosmos is contained.
9. Vegetative soul (*al-naḥs al-nabāṭiyyah*): the part of the human soul that grows and obtains nutrients, thus sharing its function with that of plants.
10. Animal soul (*al-naḥs al-ḥayawāniyyah*): the part of the human soul that senses, moves with sentience, and acts on instinct and desire, thus sharing its function with that of animals.
11. Rational soul (*al-naḥs al-nāṭiqah*): the part of the human soul that intellects universals and makes judgments via the use of cognitive inference. This function is unique to man.

Apart from the above, one may notice in the footnotes the comparative presence of quotations from Chinese masters and works as well, like Fuxi's *I Ching*, Lao Tzu's *Dao De Jing*, Confucius' *Analects*, as well as the *Liezi*, the *Huainanzi*, the *Zhuangzhi*, and the *Daxue*. These quotations were included for two reasons:

1. To underscore the consistency of philosophical precepts, premises, and even cosmologies (read: aspects of cosmology) across a wide range of traditions;
2. Because the Farther Eastern traditions often explicate the ethical entailments of the Avicennan metaphysical model. The turbidity of matter (Avicenna) has ethical entailments in how a human should live his life (Confucius), and the lack of distinct constituents in Allah (Avicenna) has entailments on how we approach our discussion and titling of Him (Lao Tzu). It is thought-provoking, to say the least, to reflect on how Avicenna might have considered these philosophers' own understandings, conceptions, or corroborations to his methods, arguments, and conclusions.

It is with great happiness that we were able to write the letters we have written herein, in the sequences in which they have been written, to produce written words and sentences of worthwhile and valuable consideration.

May Allah make it of benefit, and may He allow us to perceive the philosophical truths within His Word.

## Fuṣṣilat (41): II

*In the name of Allah, the Magnanimous, the Merciful.*

*The following is some part of the Headmaster's exegesis, may Allah be pleased with him, on the following verse of Allah:*

ثُمَّ أَسْتَوَىٰ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ وَهِيَ دُخَانٌ

*“Then He turned to the heaven while it was smoke...”*

By “smoke”, He intended the matter/material of heaven (*māddat al-samā'*):

1. For smoke is a dark substance (*jawhar zulmānī*);
2. And matter (*al-māddah*) is the source of darkness (*manba' al-zulmah*) insofar as it is the source of non-being (*manba' al-'adam*);
3. And darkness has no meaning other than non-being.<sup>1</sup>

فَقَالَ لَهَا وَلِلْأَرْضِ ائْتِيَا طَوْعًا أَوْ كَرْهًا

*“And He said to it and to the earth, ‘Come, disposed (ṭaw'an) or indisposed (karhan).’”*

This is an indication to what has been established [in our philosophical texts]: that the matter of the celestial sphere (*māddat al-falak*) differs in its quiddity (*māhiyyah*) from the matter of the elements (*māddat al-'anāṣir*). Thus, its reception of spherical form is disposed [i.e., naturally occurring], since prime matter (*al-hayūlā*) longs for form. Thereafter, considering it [i.e., the matter of the celestial sphere] has no receptivity to other forms [besides the sphere]—its receptivity being directed instead toward one

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<sup>1</sup> Therefore, if matter is darkness insofar as it is the locus of non-being, and smoke may be characterized as possessing a property of darkness, it follows that the verse employs the term ‘smoke’ as an imaginal representation of the intelligible concept of matter itself.

single form [i.e., the sphere]—and considering that [celestial] matter was never at any time in possession of another form that could act as an obstacle (*‘ā’iqah*) to the form being acquired, the acceptance of the celestial matter for that form is naturally disposed [to accept the command to shape accordingly].

As for elemental matter, it is shared among elemental [i.e., sublunary] forms. It has already been established [in our metaphysics] that corporeal form (*al-ṣūrah al-jismāniyyah*) is not eternal in existence, but rather generated and corruptible, and thus every form must necessarily come after the corruption of a prior form. In turn, as long as matter remains in the previous form, its receptivity to the [subsequent] form coming into being occurs by compulsion (*qahr*) and indisposition (*karāhah*) [on account of its preceding form].<sup>2</sup>

For example: when water is heated, the heat that arises within it occurs to the indisposition (*karāhah*, lit. ‘dislike’) of that water, and it is at this moment that [its] matter becomes commanded to accept, for instance, the form of air. Thus, celestial matter is commanded to accept the form of the sphere, and its matter obeys this command of its own self accord (*muṭṭah min nafsihā*), since there is no [internal] opposition whatsoever. However, for elemental matter: whenever it becomes commanded to accept another form, it is not obedient, and its acceptance and readiness to comply with the divine command occur instead with aversion on its part—that is, on the part of the preceding form, which acts as an impediment to the occurrence of the subsequent form coming into being.

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Additionally, given that the mention of heaven preceded that of earth—He said: “*Then He said to it and to the earth*”—it follows necessarily that the mention of disposition come after the mention of aversion, such that [the mention of] disposition refers back to the [matter of the] celestial sphere, and [the mention of] indisposition to the matter of the earth.

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<sup>2</sup> Consider the similarities to *Huainanzi* (3.1): “When Heaven and Earth were yet unformed, all was ascending and flying, diving and delving... That which was pure and bright spread out to form Heaven; that which was heavy and turbid congealed to form Earth.”

قَالَتَا أَتَيْنَا طَائِعِينَ ﴿١١﴾

*“They said, ‘We come willingly.’”*

Here there is a doubt, namely, that it may be said: “You explained that the coming of the earth must necessarily be with indisposition, yet this is negated by His Exalted Saying: ‘They said: “We come willingly.””

We respond: the matter of the earth, so long as it is occupied with the preparation to receive the command (*mashgūlah bi al-istiḍād li qabūl al-amr*), is indisposed. For water, so long as it remains water and is [only] in preparation to become air by way of a coercive heat that originates within it, would feel coerced by that heat, and thus such a state is naturally disliked and shunned (*makrūhan wa marghūban ‘anhā*). However, once the aqueous form vanishes and the aerial form comes into being, thence there is no impediment whatsoever in the substance of the matter to that form. Indeed, matter was created in its very substance receptive to all forms, and thus, at that point, its acceptance of the form after its occurrence is by willing disposition, not indisposition. Hence, indisposition in elemental matter is realized only during the state of preparation, which is the time of the command. As for after the form has been realized, its acceptance is an acceptance by essence and disposition (*bi al-dhāt wa al-ṭawā’iyyah*).

فَقَضَاهُنَّ سَبْعَ سَمَوَاتٍ فِي يَوْمَيْنِ

*“Thus, He decreed them as seven heavens in two days”*

This is an indication to the spheres as they bear the seven planets (*al-kurrāt al-ḥāmilah li al-kawākib al-sab’ah*). These [spheres] are seven, and the “two days” are [an imaginal intimation to] their two fundamental components: matter and form (*al-māddah wa al-ṣūrah*).

وَأَوْحَىٰ فِي كُلِّ سَمَاءٍ أَمْرَهَا<sup>ج</sup>

*“And He revealed in each heaven its command”*

This is an indication to the Separate Intellects (*al-‘Uqūl al-Mufāriqah*), which move themselves by way of incitement and cosmic love (*al-tashwīq wa al-ta‘shīq*).

*And Allah, Exalted is He, knows best the realities of things. All praise belongs to Allah, Lord of the worlds. And may Allah send benedictions upon our master Muḥammad, and upon his family and his companions all together.*

## al-A‘lā

*In the Name of Allah, the Magnanimous, the Merciful,  
Thus quoth the Headmaster, may his soul be sanctified:*

This sūrah comprises three major themes (maṭālib):

### The First Theme: Establishing the Existence of God

سَبِّحْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الْأَعْلَى ﴿١﴾ الَّذِي خَلَقَ فَسَوَّى ﴿٢﴾ وَالَّذِي قَدَّرَ فَهَدَى ﴿٣﴾ وَالَّذِي أَخْرَجَ  
الْمَرْعَى ﴿٤﴾ فَجَعَلَهُ غُثَاءً أَحْوَى ﴿٥﴾

*“Hallow the High Name of your Lord, the Most High: He Who created and proportioned; He Who determined and guided; He Who brought forth the pasture, and then made it dark stubble.”*

Know that the Divine intent here is to adduce two kinds of evidence for the existence of a Wise, Omniscient God.

#### The First Kind: Evidence by way of the creation of animals

This is what is meant by His saying, *“He Who created and proportioned.”* This [meaning] is [veritably intended] because the body of every animal is determined according to a specific measure, and that specific determination is its creation. Moreover, every body is composed of hot and cold, and moist and dry components. Each of these components must be apportioned to a specific measure for that particular temperament to arise: if any of these components were increased or decreased, the resulting temperament would be a different one, not that [present] temperament. This is what is meant by “proportioning” (*taswiyah*).

Now, as for evidence by way of the soul of the animal, this is proven by His saying, *“He Who determined and guided.”* This verse’s meaning is that He, exalted is He, determined for each of the specific organs a power particular to that organ, and then

He assigned to those powers the functions by which their benefits and interests are realized. Thus, He determined for the eye the power of sight, for the ear the power of hearing, and for the stomach the power of digestion.

### The Second Kind: Evidence by Way of the States of Plants

This [kind of evidence] is [adduced by] His saying: “*He Who brought forth the pasture, and then made it dark stubble.*” This [connection] is known evidently.

Thereafter, the evidence [for His knowledge and wisdom] by way of the states of animals was given precedence over that of the states of plants. This is because animals are nobler, and because the marvels found in animals are much more and thus more deserving of precedence.<sup>3</sup>

If it is said: Why is it not permissible that the generation of animals and plants occurs due to nature (*ṭabīʿah*), and not due to a volitional agent (*fāʿil mukhtār*)?

We say: the proof against this is that the substance of semen is uniform in nature, and the influence of temperaments, celestial spheres, and stars upon it is likewise uniform. Now, when a uniform body is acted on in its entirety by a uniform influence, it is impossible for diverse states to arise from it. Do you not see that if a lamp is placed such that it illuminates five cubits on one side, it must illuminate the same measure on all sides? For it to illuminate, without any impediment, five cubits on one side and only half a cubit on the other is something unintelligible (*ghayr maʿqūl*). Thus, it is established that the influences of nature must be uniform influences.

Therefore, when we observe that from some parts of the semen generate bones, and from other parts nerves, veins, and ligaments, we understand that the influence is not of an agent acting by nature and necessity, but rather of an agent acting by power and volition.

## The Second Theme of This Sūrah: Establishing Prophethood

Know that this theme is completed through three matters:

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<sup>3</sup> This statement is not an arbitrary one. Given that the animal occupies a higher form of existence than the plant on account of its more complex soul (because of which it possesses more faculties, operative organs, and purposes), it follows that the animal possesses more marvels than the plant, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

1. The description of the Prophet ﷺ insofar as his own essence and substance;
2. The manner of engaging in calling those who are deficient;
3. The diversity of human dispositions in accepting that perfection from him.

As for the first matter-theme, that being an exposition of the description of the Prophet ﷺ and the modality of the substance of his soul (*kayfiyyat jawhar rūḥih*) in his knowledge and his character, then know it has been established in the foundational sciences (*al-‘ulūm al-aṣliyyah*) that the human soul possesses two faculties. The first of them is the theoretical faculty (*al-quwwah al-naẓariyyah*), and the second is the practical faculty (*al-‘amaliyyah*), or the faculty by virtue of which one is able to act upon his body, and through it upon the bodies of this world, in the most correct and fitting manner.

Therefore, since it has been proven through apodictic demonstrations (*barāhīn*) that the theoretical faculty is nobler than the practical, it follows that it should be mentioned first, and to this [fact] points His Exalted Saying:

سَنُقَرِّئُكَ فَلَا تَنْسَى

*“We shall cause you to recite, and you shall not forget.”*

In other words: He, exalted is He, strengthens the substance of his soul ﷺ and perfects it to the extent that it becomes a holy soul (*naḥṣan qudsiyyan*), ennobled by true sciences (*al-‘ulūm al-ḥaqīqiyyah*) and divine knowledges (*al-ma‘ārif al-ilāhiyyah*); it becomes such that once it knows a thing, it does not forget it. This is what we have understood from His saying: “We shall cause you to recite, and you shall not forget,” and from His saying:

إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ<sup>ج</sup>

*“Except what Allah wills.”*

The benefit of this clause is that the substance of the human soul does not, by its very nature, attain absolute power, and therefore it does not escape heedlessness and forgetfulness at certain times.

إِنَّهُ يَعْلَمُ الْجَهْرَ وَمَا يَخْفَى<sup>٧</sup>

*“Indeed, He knows what is spoken aloud and what is hidden.”*

The intended meaning is that He, exalted is He, promised to make the substance of his soul صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم knowledgeable of all knowables, corresponding to them and encompassing them [fully]. However, an effectuator, in every state and perfection, is stronger than its effect. As such, were He not, exalted is He, knowing of all knowables, He would not have been able to make the soul of the Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم knowledgeable of them, [nor] free from heedlessness and forgetfulness.<sup>4</sup>

Now, as for the indication to the perfection of the Prophet’s soul صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم in the practical faculty, this is intended by His saying:

وَنُيَسِّرُكَ لِلْيُسْرَى<sup>٨</sup>

*“And We shall facilitate you toward the easiest path.”*

All people share in the basic capacity for ugliness and beauty, for licentiousness and chastity. However, among them are those for whom one disposition is easier and whose nature inclines more [toward it], and this ease is what is referred to as “character” (*khuluq*). Thus, whoever is felicitous, pure, pious, and refined, his soul is marked by the character of chastity and purity; and whoever is wretched, Allah

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<sup>4</sup> This argument follows from the philosophical principle that a thing devoid of a principle cannot inundate it to other things (*fāqid al-shay’ lā yu’ṭīhi*).

forbid, is the opposite. Thus, His saying: “*And We shall facilitate you toward the easiest path,*” is an indication to this [felicitous] state in this verse. Thereafter, [recognize that] He characterized the Prophet’s ﷺ condition with perfection in the theoretical faculty first, and in the practical faculty second.<sup>5</sup>

### **The second matter-theme of prophecy: engaging in calling the creation to the path of truth**

This [matter] is [a proof of prophethood] because a person who is perfect in the theoretical and practical faculties, yet is unable to perfect others, is a saint (*waliyy*); but if he has the power to do so, he is a prophet.

There is no doubt that this [prophetic] station is more perfect [than sainthood], for absolute perfection is that which is complete (*tāmmān*) and then even beyond complete (*fawq al-tamām*).<sup>6</sup> As such, once his perfection ﷺ was realized through the perfection of his theoretical and practical faculties, it necessarily followed that he ﷺ should become ‘beyond complete’ by inundating perfections upon those who are deficient, and that [attainment of perfection through the inundation of perfections] is precisely [manifested through] the calling of creation to turn toward the Truth. For this reason, Allah, exalted is He, said after the preceding verse:

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<sup>5</sup> Wisdom in practice flows from wisdom in theory. Proper theory yields proper practice, and proper practice cannot consistently arise without the theory to inform it. This fact is well-detailed in our scholars’ metaphysical discussions on the typology of the sciences, as well as in their various preambles on ethics.

<sup>6</sup> Compare to Confucius’ explicit statement that sagehood, the level of perfection achieved only by the legendary and archetypal of men, is achieved only by the ability to save the multitudes. “Zigong said, ‘If there were one able to broadly extend his benevolence to the common people and bring succor to the multitudes, what would you make of him? Could such a person be called Good?’ The Master said, ‘Why stop at Good? Such a person should surely be called a sage! Even someone like Yao or Shun would find such a task daunting.’” True perfection, the rank of prophecy, thus lies in bringing perfection to others. As the *Zhongyong* writes: “In the world only someone of perfect [sincerity] is considered able to complete his nature. Someone who is able to complete his nature is then able to complete the natures of others. Someone who is able to complete the natures of others is then able to complete the natures of things. Someone who is able to complete the natures of things can then assist Heaven and Earth in their transforming and creating.” These excerpts reflect the Prophetic statement, “إِنَّمَا بُعِثْتُ لِأَتَمِّمَ صَالِحَ الْأَخْلَاقِ”.

*“So remind, if reminder truly benefits.”*

Thus, His saying “remind” is a command to call creation to the Truth. However, He then clarified that this call does not benefit everyone, because among the rational souls are those that accept discipline and refinement (*al-ta’dīb wa al-tahdhīb*), and those that do not; and even those that accept differ among themselves in strength and weakness, speed and slowness, abundance and paucity. For this reason He, exalted is He, said: *“If the reminder benefits.”*

Now, once Allah, Exalted is He, referenced this meaning in a general manner, He intended to clarify it in detail in the [following] cited verses. Their purpose is to explain the states of creation and the manner in which they accept that call, this being the objective of prophethood. For creation, upon hearing this call [of prophethood], is divided into two groups. Among them are those who benefit from it, and they are what is meant by His saying:

*“He who fears shall soon remember.”*

Such people benefit from the call of the prophets, accept it, and perfect their souls. The beginning of this acceptance arises from fear (*khawf*) and awe (*khashyah*): a person hears the call of the prophets, and then it occurs to his mind that this world is fleeting and perishing in every respect, and that if he does not occupy himself with cultivating the Afterworld, he may fall into eternal destruction. Thus, fear arises, and it is this fear that carries him to reflect and contemplate upon the call of the prophets, and summons him to turn away from the world and toward the Afterworld.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Compare to Confucius’ list of the three things the true gentleman fears: “The Master said, ‘The gentleman stands in awe of three things: the Mandate of Heaven, great men, and the teachings of the sages. The petty person does not understand the Mandate of Heaven, and thus does not regard it with awe; he shows disrespect to great men, and ridicules the teachings of the sages.’”

As for those who do not accept the call of the prophets and do not benefit from it, they are indicated by His saying:

وَيَتَجَنَّبُهَا الْأَشْقَى ﴿١١﴾ الَّذِي يَصْلَى النَّارَ الْكُبْرَى ﴿١٢﴾

*“And the most wretched will avoid it: he who shall burn in the greatest Fire.”*

This is because those who turn away from seeking the Afterworld—those who are immersed in love of the world and devoted to seeking its pleasures, delights, and desires—when they die, they part from what they loved and go to a place with which they have no familiarity and no prior intimacy.<sup>8</sup> Separation from the beloved kindles the fire of longing and sorrow, and entering a place with whose inhabitants one has no intimacy produces estrangement and aversion.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the one who avoided accepting the call of the prophets will surely “burn in the greatest Fire.”

ثُمَّ لَا يَمُوتُ فِيهَا وَلَا يَحْيَى ﴿١٣﴾

*“Then, he will neither die therein nor live.”*

As for the sensible fire (*al-nār al-mahṣūṣah*), it will be joined to this animistic fire (*al-nār al-rūḥāniyyah*), and thus the torment will intensify.

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<sup>8</sup> Liezi describes the man who forgets the Afterworld as a traveler who has forgotten his home. “The men of old called a dead man ‘a man who has gone back.’ Saying that the dead have gone back they implied that the living are travellers. The traveller who forgets to go back is a man who mistakes his home.”

<sup>9</sup> When one is entrenched in his worldly passions, the worst punishment he could ever face is the full experience of those passions without the ability to fulfill them. For this reason, the *Huainanzi* argues that enticement of the natural world violates one’s ability to enjoy the tranquil heavenly pattern. “When perception comes into contact with things, preferences arise. When preferences take shape and perception is enticed by external things, our nature cannot return to the self, and the heavenly patterns are destroyed. [...] [This is] because you do not use what is intrinsic to bring contentment to what is extrinsic but, rather, use what is extrinsic to bring contentment to what is intrinsic. So when the music is playing, you are happy, but when the songs end, you are sad. Sadness and happiness revolve and generate one another; your Quintessential Spirit becomes chaotic and defensive and cannot get a moment’s rest.” The *Daodejing* warns of similarly of jading the senses with the world: “The five colours turn a man’s eyes blind; The five notes turn a man’s ears deaf; The five tastes turn a man’s palate dull; Racing through fields hunting turns a man’s heart wild; Goods hard to obtain cause a man’s progress to halt. For this reason, the ruling of the Sage is by the belly not by the eyes.”

Now, know that when Allah, Exalted is He, mentioned at the beginning of this division His verse, “*He who fears shall soon remember*,” He then returned to expound this group in detail, and thus He said:

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ تَزَكَّى ۖ وَذَكَرَ اسْمَ رَبِّهِ فَصَلَّى ﴿١٥﴾

*“Successful indeed is the one who purifies himself; who remembers the Name of his Lord then prays.”*

Thus, He mentioned that among the perfections of the states of those who benefit are three levels:

1. The first level: purification of the soul from false beliefs and reprehensible traits. This is an indication of removing what ought not to be, and there is no doubt that removing false inscriptions from the tablet of the soul must come before acquiring perfect and pure inscriptions upon it.<sup>10</sup>
2. Then, once the soul has been purified of all that is improper, it must then perfect its theoretical faculty through holy knowledges (*al-ma'ārif al-qudsiyyah*) and divine sciences (*al-'ulūm al-ilāhiyyah*). This is the level indicated by His saying, “*Who remembers the Name of his Lord...*” This is because knowledge of Allah and His remembrance are the chief of all sciences and enlightenment.<sup>11</sup>
3. Thereafter, it is inescapably necessary that one seek assistance by perfecting the practical faculty through correct actions (*al-af'āl al-ṣā'ibah*) and beautiful effects (*al-āthār al-jamīlah*). This is the level indicated by His saying, “*And he prays...*”

<sup>10</sup> The *Huainanzi* writes: “The inner cultivation through which sages are able to realize the Way and practice non-action entails the systematic elimination of the emotions, distractions, desires, preferences, thoughts, deliberations, and attachments to the sense-objects that usually flood the conscious mind. Through this, one may break through to the level of ‘spiritlike illumination’ (*shenming*) and realize what lies deep within the innermost core of one’s being, the one Way.”

<sup>11</sup> *Zhongyong* writes: “If he exerts his strength on this over a long time, he will suddenly come to understand how things are and will have a thoroughgoing comprehension of them. Then, for the multitude of things, what is manifest or hidden, what is fine or coarse, will in all cases be reached, and his mind in its whole substance and great workings will be entirely illuminated. This is what is meant by investigating things. This is what is meant by the perfecting of knowledge.”

This is because the head of righteous deeds is duty to Allah and service to Him.<sup>12</sup>

Here completes the discourse on the levels of prophethood; He clarified the perfection of the Prophet ﷺ by perfecting his theoretical and practical faculties, He commanded him to call to Allah, Exalted is He, and then He followed that by explaining that among the listeners are those whom fear and awe lead to acceptance, and among them are those who are not so led, and who thus fall into excruciating punishment: punishment by fire in a state wherein there is neither death nor life. Then, He mentioned the levels of the states of the felicitous among the followers of the prophets—these being the very states which we have mentioned and regarding which we have made clear that there is nothing beyond them. This is because what is sought is:

1. Either removal of what ought not to be, which is [alluded to by] His saying, *“Successful indeed is the one who purifies himself”*;
2. Or perfection of the theoretical faculty through divine enlightenment, which is [alluded to by] His saying: *“Who remembers the Name of his Lord”*;
3. Or perfection of the practical faculty through righteous deeds, which is [alluded to by] His saying: *“And then he prays.”*

Here ends the discourse on the explanation of the matter of prophethood, and Allah is the Guardian of Rectitude (*Waliyy al-Rashād*).

## The Third Theme among the Themes of This Chapter: Establishing the Matter of Resurrection

To this points His Exalted Saying:

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<sup>12</sup> Master Fuxi writes in the *I Ching*: “The sage advances in virtue and improves his deed. With true heart and good faith he advances in virtue. With attention to his word and stable sincerity he improves in deed. Knowing the utmost point to be reached and reaching it, he is able to grasp opportunity.”

بَلْ تُؤْثِرُونَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا ﴿١٦﴾ وَالْآخِرَةَ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى ﴿١٧﴾

*“But instead, you prefer the life of this world, even though the Afterworld is far better and more enduring.”*

Know that this exposition is complete and perfect in establishing the matter of the Resurrection. Its clarification is as follows:

1. Pleasure is sought for its own sake,
2. Creation, having perceived in this worldly life various kinds of bodily pleasures, while not having perceived anything of the otherworldly felicities, is therefore bound to persist in seeking worldly pleasures and turning away from otherworldly pleasures. To this points His Exalted Saying, *“But instead, you prefer the life of this world...”*

This exposition is the furthest limit of what can be mentioned in this chapter, and its clarification proceeds by explaining two matters [read: premises].

#### **A. The first premise: otherworldly pleasure is better than worldly pleasure.**

Its [i.e., this premise's] truth is indicated by several considerations:

1. Bodily pleasure is shared among humans, beasts, worms, and beetles, whereas animistic pleasures are shared among humans, prophets, and messengers. Thus, animistic pleasures are superior.
2. If bodily pleasure were true good and felicity, then the greater these things were, the greater felicity and perfection would be. But it is known that this is not so. For if we were to suppose a rational person whose only concern was eating, drinking, and sexual intercourse, and whose lifetime was devoted solely to attending to these matters, he would be regarded as base and ignoble, and as being like an animal. Conversely, the more one turns away from these states and distances oneself from them, the closer one is to perfection and spirituality. Thus, we know that spiritual pleasure is better than bodily pleasure. For this reason, a human being does not engage in sexual intercourse in the presence of others; for if that pleasure belonged to the category of

perfection, its exposure would necessarily be preferable to its concealment. Likewise, a rational person does not boast of excessive eating. All of this indicates toward the soundness of what we have stated.

3. The substance of the soul is nobler than the substance of the body, and delight in knowing Allah, Exalted is He, and in loving Him is nobler than delight in food, drink, and sexual intercourse. By these considerations it is established that the Afterworld is better than this world.

**B. As for the second premise, which is that the Afterworld is better and more enduring,** then this [premise] is evident for two reasons:

1. Death is inevitable, and at that point all bodily pleasures cease.
2. The pleasures that arise from eating, drinking, and sexual intercourse occur only during the act itself; after that moment, the pleasure leaves no trace whatsoever, and may even turn into pain.
3. As for the joy that arises from divine enlightenment, holy sciences, and virtuous character, it is immortal and everlasting, secure from cessation and transition.

Thus, by this resplendent exposition, it is established that “*the Afterworld is far better and more enduring.*”

[C.] Added to these premises is another premise: that whatever is ‘better’ and ‘more enduring’ must be sought by rational beings. It is even permissible that this second premise be omitted, since it is a self-evident axiom (*al-badīhah al-muqaddarah*) inherent in sound intellects.

Thereafter, know that once Allah, Exalted is He, established these three themes, He concluded the *sūrah* with His saying:

إِنَّ هَذَا لَفِي الصُّحُفِ الْأُولَى ﴿١٨﴾ صُحُفِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُوسَى ﴿١٩﴾

*“Indeed, this is even in the former scriptures: the scriptures of Ibrāhīm and Mūsā.”*

The meaning [of this verse] is: All the books which Allah, Exalted is He, sent down upon His prophets have no purpose besides establishing these three themes:

1. Theology (*ilāhiyyāt*) first,
2. Prophetology (*maʿrifat al-nubuwwāt*) second,
3. And eschatology (*maʿrifat al-maʿād*) third.

Know [also] that in pondering the secrets of this *sūrah*, one is alerted to the fact that engaging in anything else besides these three themes is futile, and that man’s felicity cannot be acquired except by knowing these three [subjects].

And with Allah is all providence, and from Him is any hope for aid.

*Thus concludes this treatise. Peace [be unto you].*

*In the Name of Allah, the Magnanimous, the Merciful*

## *An Exegesis on Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*

*By the Headmaster, Abū ‘Alī al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Abd-Allāh b. Sīnā, may Allah sanctify his soul.*

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ

*“Say: ‘He is Allah, [Who is] Absolutely Singular.’”*

“The Absolute He” (*al-Huwa al-Muṭlaq*) is that entity whose ipseity (*huwiyyah*) is not dependent on anything besides itself. For indeed, any entity whose ipseity is dependent on anything besides itself is thereby acquirable from that other (*mustafādah minh*), and so when that other is not considered, it cannot be itself. On the other hand, when an entity’s ipseity is acquired from its own being, then regardless of whether an ‘other’ is considered or not, it will be itself [as its true ipseity].

Now, every contingent entity (*mumkin*) derives its existence from something besides itself, and if an entity derives its existence from besides itself, the preponderant specificity of its own existence from something besides itself will have been for a cause, and that othering cause is the real ipseity [of that thing]. In turn, the ipseity of every contingent being belongs to an ‘other’. Ergo, only that entity whose ipseity is its own being can be the Necessary Existent (*wājib al-wujūd*).

Moreover, anything whose quiddity (*māhiyyah*) is other than its existence (*mutāghiyarah li wujūdiḥ*) will derive its existence from something other than itself, and thus, the ipseity of its quiddity will not be due to its own quiddity, and it[s ipseity] will not be itself by virtue of its being. On the other hand, the First Principle (*al-mabda’ al-awwal*) is itself by virtue of itself, for its quiddity is its very being. Therefore, the Necessary Existent is that which is nothing but itself (*lā huwa illā huwa*), in that everything besides it has no ipseity *qua* itself (*fa lā huwiyyah lahū min ḥaythu huwa huwa*) and instead derives its ipseity from something other than itself,

whereas the Necessary Existent is that [entity] which is itself by virtue of its own being, nay, whose very being is that it is itself and none other. That ipseity and specificity are a meaning devoid of a [distinct] name; it cannot be explained except through its necessary concomitants (*lawāzim*).<sup>13</sup> Of these concomitants, some are relational (*idāfiyyah*), and others are apophatic (*salbiyyah*). Relational concomitants are more defining (*ashadd ta'rīfan*) than apophatic matters [read: concomitants], and the most complete definition is the [one which comprises the] necessary concomitant that combines both species of relation and apophasis. That [necessary concomitant] is that this ipseity be a divinity (*ilāh*), for it is the Divine to which [all] things other than Itself are related, while It is not related to any other. The absolute Divine is the One for Whom this [principle of independence] holds with all existents; thus, the relation of others to Him is relational, and His not being related to anything else is apophatic.

Now, since the Divine Ipseity, due to its own majesty and grandeur, cannot be expressed except by saying that It is It Itself (*bi annahū huwa huwa*), and the exposition of that Ipseity can only be through its concomitants; and since we have clarified that some concomitants are apophatic and others relational, and shown that the most complete manner of definition and exposition of that Ipseity is to mention both; and since the Name “Allah” encompasses both together... It is no wonder that he followed His statement “He” with the mention of [the Name] “Allah”, so that [the Name] “Allah” would act as an unveiling of what the word “He” indicates, and as an explanation thereof.

There are further subtleties herein:

A. Among them: when He defined that ipseity—namely, [the ipseity of] divinity—by its concomitants, He indicated that it [i.e., the Divine Ipseity] has no subsistent constituents (*muqawwimāt*). Otherwise, turning away from them [i.e., the constituents] to the concomitants would be [a] deficient [definition].

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<sup>13</sup> Compare to Lao Tzu's opening sentiments in the *Tao Te Ching*: “The way of which one can speak as ‘way’ is not the eternal Way (Tao). The Name that can be named is not the eternal Name... In the state of eternal Non-Being we see the invisible depth of the Tao; while in the state of Being, we see the determinations of the Tao. These two are originally the same; but they are called differently as they reveal themselves.” (See: Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, and Toshihiko Izutsu. *A Sufi Commentary on the Tao Te Ching: The Way and Its Virtue*. Translated by Mohammad H. Faghfoory. Fons Vitae, 2024. 27)

B. Among them also: when he elucidated that ipseity with the concomitant of divinity and then followed that by saying that He is Absolutely Singular, that [Divine unicity] being the ultimate limit of singularity, this [subsequence] served as an indication that, since He is at the furthest extreme of singularity and possesses no constituents, it necessarily becomes impossible to define that ipseity *except* by mentioning its concomitants. Thus, the purport of the verse becomes: the [Divine] ipseity that admits of no explanation has its constituents omitted in its definition, and its definition is restricted to mentioning its concomitants—namely, divinity—due to the extremity of its singularity and the perfection of its simplicity, which intellects fall short of comprehending and of fully grasping, stopping instead at the beginnings of the effulgence of its luminosities.

C. Among them further: the ipseity of the First Principle has many concomitants, but all those concomitants exist in a hierarchy. This is because concomitants are effects, but a thing that is truly singular (*al-wāḥid al-ḥaqq*) and simple in every respect (*al-basīṭ min kull wajh*) cannot cause to emanate from itself more than one thing [read: effect] except in a hierarchy descending from it, both vertically and horizontally. Moreover, a nearer concomitant is more defining (*ashadd taʿrīfan*) than a more remote concomitant; the fact that a human is capable of wonder (*al-insān mutaʿajjiban*) is more defining [of his essence] than the fact that he laughs (*kawnihī ḍāḥikan*).<sup>14</sup> For this reason, whoever seeks to define the quiddity of a thing by one of its concomitants [should know]: the nearer the concomitant, the more intense and precise the definition.

Let us restate this discussion in another mode, one that is even more truth-borne:

The remote concomitant of a thing is not really caused by the thing itself. Rather, it is caused by the cause of that thing, and a thing that has a cause cannot be truly known except through knowledge of its causes. Therefore, according to this truth-borne verification, if one were to mention, while defining a quiddity, any of its remote concomitants, that definition would not be a real definition (*taʿrīfan ḥaqīqiyyan*). A real definition is one which mentions, in its definition, the closest possible proximate

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<sup>14</sup> Since laughter derives from the human capability of wonder, and thus is farther from the human essence on account of that derivation, whereas wonder derives from the rational faculty itself, and is thus closer to the human essence.

concomitant of the definiendum, one that the definiendum necessitates by its very essence, not by something other than itself.

Now, the First Principle has no concomitant prior to the necessity of [its] existence, for it is Necessary Existence itself. And by virtue of the necessity of its existence, it necessarily follows that it is the Principle of all that is other than it. The totality of these two matters constitutes divinity (*al-ilāhiyyah*). Hence, when He indicated, by His saying “He”, to the sheer, truly simple ipseity (*al-huwiyyah al-mahḍah al-basīṭah*)—which cannot be expressed by anything other than that it is He—and since it was necessary to define it by something from among its concomitants, He followed [the ipseitic mention of “He”] by mentioning the closest of the things that necessarily belong to it, namely divinity, which comprehends the two concomitants of apophasis and affirmation.

So hallowed is He! How tremendous is He, and how overpowering is His dominion! He is the One Who is the ultimate end of all needs, and from Him proceeds the attainment of all requests. Neither the furthest reach of the evocations of those who evoke, nor the greatest descriptions of those who describe, could attain even the slightest of what He has reserved for Himself of majesty, greatness, bliss, and delight. Rather, the only possibly describable measure, whose exceedance is impossible, is what He Himself has mentioned in His noble Book, and what He has deposited in His sacred revelation, and in the pure and minute (*daqīqah*; subtle) symbols.

There is, however, a doubt here: namely, that although His Quiddity, exalted is He, cannot be known by others except through relations and negations, He, glorious and majestic, is knowledgeable of it; and there [i.e., in the simple non-space of God], the intellect, the intelligizer, and the intelligible are all one [and the same]. Why, then, was that [Divinely intellected] quiddity not mentioned, and only the concomitants cited instead?<sup>15</sup>

We reply: the First Principle has no constituents whatsoever. It is Divested Unity (*Wahdah Mujarradah*) and Pure Simplicity (*Bisāṭah Mahḍah*); there is no multiplicity

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<sup>15</sup> In other words, when God thinks of Himself, He is the thinker (‘intelligizer’), the object of thought (‘the intelligible’), and the mode of thought (‘intellect’, since God cannot have a separate part of Himself doing the thinking for Him) all at once. Therefore, technically, God has intellected His Own Ipseity! Why not, then, mention that ipseity in the *sūrah* instead of concomitants?

nor any duality in it to any fundamental extent. Its intellection of itself is not because it apprehends within itself any constituents; rather, it apprehends from itself nothing but the pure, divested ipseity (*al-huwiyyah al-mahḍah al-ṣīrfah*); it is utterly transcendent of multiplicity in every respect. That singularity, however, has concomitants, and therefore, the [singularly simple] ipseity was mentioned and explained by means of its proximate concomitants. Thus, He intimated His particular mode of existence as His existence is in itself (*‘alā mā huwa wujūdihū ‘alayh*).<sup>16</sup>

This has a principle in philosophy (*ḥikmah*): namely, that defining simple entities by their proximate concomitants, in terms of perfection, is like defining composites by mentioning their constituents. A complete definition is that whereby a form corresponding to the intelligible is obtained in the soul: if the object is composite, its parts must be obtained in the soul; and if it is simple and has concomitants, then when these are obtained in the intellect in that manner, the intellectual form is likewise corresponding. Thus, in this [simple] domain, definition by concomitants [in simplicities] is analogous to definition by constituents in composites.

The full and exhaustive exposition of this chapter is presented in [the chapter on] logic, among my own writings, in the book *al-Shifā’*.

Thereafter, His Saying “*Absolutely Singular*” is an intensification of [natural] singularity. Now, intensification in perfect singularity is realized only when the singularity is such that it cannot be more intense or more complete than it already is. For [the intention of] ‘singular’ is predicated of what falls under it by [manner of] gradation (*tashkik*): that which does not admit division in any respect whatsoever is more entitled to singularity than that which admits division in some respects; that which admits only intellectual division is more entitled to singularity than that which admits sensible division; and that which admits sensible division merely potentially is more entitled to singularity than that which admits it actually. Therefore, that which possesses a comprehensive singularity is more entitled to singularity than that which is actually divided and has no comprehensive singularity, [i.e.,] that whose singularity

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<sup>16</sup> Avicenna’s response says that When Allah intellects His Selfhood or Ipseity, what He intellects is a divine simplicity free of every multiplicity. However, a divine simplicity cannot, by its very essence, be expressed in composite formulation. Therefore, He must still express that divine simplicity through its various concomitants.

exists only by virtue of its relation to a principle—just as one says ‘medical’ of a book, a scalpel, and a medicine, or ‘healthy’ of food and plants.

Once it is established that singularity admits of stronger and weaker degrees, and that ‘singular’ is predicated of what falls under it by gradation, then the most perfect in singularity is that beyond which nothing can be stronger in singularity. Otherwise, it would not be at the utmost degree of intensification in singularity, and thus it would not be absolutely ‘singular’, but instead ‘singular’ in relation to [only] some things and not others.

Therefore, His saying, exalted is He: ‘Singular’ indicates that He is singular in every respect, and that there is no multiplicity within Him at all—neither conceptual multiplicity, such as the multiplicity of constituents like genera and differentiae; nor multiplicity of intellectual parts, such as matter and form in a body; nor sensible multiplicity, whether potential or actual, as in bodies. This [comprehensive singularity] entails the clarification that He is transcendent above genus and differentia, matter and form, accidents, parts, members, shapes, colors, and all other modes of similitude which compromise the perfect singularity and true simplicity befitting the nobility of His Ineffable Face, mighty be His Glory and exalted be He from anything that could resemble Him or be equal to Him.

If it is said: We accept that the claims of this issue are subsumed under this single word, but where is their demonstration in this *sūrah*?

We reply: its demonstration is that whatever has its ipseity realized only through the conjunction of parts has an ipseity that depends on the realization of those parts, and thus it is not itself by virtue of itself, but by virtue of another. But the First Principle is Itself by virtue of Itself, and this is indicated by His saying, exalted is He: ‘Say: *He is Allah, Singular.*’<sup>17</sup>

This is the extent to which my understanding has reached regarding this verse, and [only] Allah encompasses the secrets of His speech.

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<sup>17</sup> In other words, the fact that Allah predicates utter singularity of Himself is proof that He is His Own Ipseity, unrequiring of any internal or external constituents or causes to make Himself Himself.

## *“Allah, the Necessary, Principle Existent (al-Ṣamad)”*

The [Arabic] word *al-Ṣamad* has two linguistic explanations:

1. One: “that which has no cavity,”
2. The other: “the master” or “sovereign.”

According to the first interpretation, its meaning is apophatic; it points to the negation of quiddity. Everything that has a quiddity has an interior and an inner reality, and that interior is precisely its quiddity, but that which has no interior, yet exists, has no aspect or consideration in its essence other than existence itself. And that [entity] whose only consideration is existence is not susceptible to non-existence, for a thing insofar as it is existent is not receptive to non-existence. Thus, “*al-Ṣamad*” signifies [according to this interpretation] the Absolute Truth, the Necessary Existent in every respect.

According to the second interpretation, its meaning is relational: it denotes His being the master of all—that is, the originating principle (*mabda'*) of all.

It is also possible that both meanings are intended by the verse, as though its sense were that divinity consists in this very combination of apophasis and cataphasis.

لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ

## *“He neither generates, nor is He generated.”*

Once He, hallowed and exalted be He, made clear that all things depend upon Him and are in need of Him, and that He is the giver of existence to all beings—the One Who emanates existence upon all quiddities—He then made clear that it is impossible for something like Him to be generated from Him. For even if it occurs to some

imaginations that, since His ipseity entails divinity—whose meaning is the effusion upon all and the bringing-into-being of all—it might be supposed that from His existence there could emanate the existence of one like Him, such that it would be His child, He clarifies that nothing like Him can proceed from Him.

Whatever gives rise to another like itself must have a quiddity shared between itself and another; and whatever has a quiddity shared with another is individuated only through matter and its attachments; and whatever is material, or related to matter, is generated from something else. The sense of the statement thus becomes: ‘He does not generate, *because* He [Himself] is not generated.’

If it is said: What indication is there in this *sūrah* that He is not Himself generated?

It will be said in response: because He has no quiddity or consideration other than that He is “He” (*Huwa*)—whose mention the *sūrah* begins with. Therefore, since His ipseity is by His very essence, it necessarily follows that He is not generated from another, for if He were generated from another, His ipseity would be derived from something else, and He would not be “He” (*Huwa*) by His own essence.

Here there is an indication of a profound secret, one to which the severe warning in the Quran against those who attribute offspring or a consort to Him returns toward. A child is that which separates from a thing while being like it; one who has no *like* cannot be said to have a child. Such separation occurs only when a specific quiddity becomes multiple, and that happens by virtue of matter, as we have explained, and whatever is material does not have its quiddity identical with its identity. For the Necessary Existent, however, His quiddity is His very ipseity, and thus, nothing else can be generated from Him, and He Himself is not generated from anything else.

وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ

*“And there is none comparable to Him.”*

After He made clear that He is not generated from an entity like Himself, nor does an entity like Himself proceed from Him, He further clarifies that no one can be equal

or comparable (*kufū*) to Him—that is, nothing matches Him in the strength or degree of [His] existence.

Equality in the strength of existence can be conceived in two ways:

1. First, that something be equal to Him in specific quiddity.
2. Second, that it not be equal to Him in specific quiddity, yet be equal to Him in the necessity of existence.

As for something being equal to Him in specific quiddity, this is nullified by His saying: “*He is not generated*,” for whatever has a quiddity shared between itself and another has a material mode of existence, and thus is generated from something else; but He is not generated from anything else.

As for something being equal to Him in generic quiddity—namely, in being necessary of existence—this too is refuted by the same verse. For in that case, He would have a genus and a differentia, and His existence would be generated from the conjunction arising from His genus, which would be like a mother, and His differentia, which would be like a father. Yet, He is not generated.

This [idea] is also refuted by the opening of the *sūrah*: for whatever has a quiddity composed of genus and differentia does not have its ipseity by itself; whereas He is ‘*He*’ by His very being.

## Sūrat al-Falaq

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ الْفَلَقِ

*“Say: ‘I seek refuge in the Lord of the Splitting Daybreak.’”*

He splits the darkness of non-existence with the luminosity of existence. He is the First Principle, an existent Necessary by His Being, and this [emanation of existence] is one of the primarily-intended concomitants of His absolute goodness in His intended ipseity.

The first of all existents to emanate from Him is His Decree (*Qaḍāʾ*), and it contains absolutely no evil, except what becomes concealed beneath the radiance of the first light cast upon it. This [concealment] is the turbidity that accompanies its quiddity, and it originates from its very ipseity.

Thereafter:

1. Causes, through their collateral interactions (*muṣādamātihā*), give rise to evils that necessarily follow from them.
2. The fulfillment of His decree (*qaḍāʾ*), He being the first causator of His own effects, is His determination (*qadr*), and his determination is His creation (*khalq*).

For these two reasons [read: premises], He, exalted is He, declared:

مِنْ شَرِّ مَا خَلَقَ

*“From the Evil of what He Created.”*

He placed evil in the realm of creation and determination, for indeed, evil arises only from bodies endowed with determination. Furthermore, considering bodies are a

result of (*min*) His determination, not His decree, and considering they are the source of evil insofar as matter is realized only there [i.e., in created, material bodies], it follows that evil be attributed to what He created. Thus, He, Exalted be He, gave precedence to the daybreak (*al-infilāq*)—that is, the effusion of the luminosity of existence upon all possible quiddities—over the evil that necessarily follows from what is created, because [existential] daybreak is prior to the evils that follow from some existents. Hence, good is an objective of primary intention, while evil occurs as a secondary intention.

Thus, the upshot becomes: He Who Splits the darkness of non-existence with the luminosity of existence is the Necessary Existent: evils do not necessarily proceed from Him primarily in His decree, but secondarily in His determination. As such, one is commanded to seek refuge in the Lord of the Daybreak from the evils that necessarily arise from [His determined, dark] creation.

Now, if one asks: “Why did He say ‘the *Lord* of the Splitting Daybreak’ and not ‘the *God* of the Daybreak,’ or something else similar?”

It may be said in return: In this lies a subtle secret from the realities of knowledge. A “lord” (*Rabb*) is lord of that which is *loded* (*marbūb*), and a “loded” entity is one that is never independent of its lord in any of its state of affairs. Consider a child whose parents nurture (*yurabbīhi*) him: so long as he is nurtured (*marbūb*), can he be independent of his nurturer (*rabb*)?

Likewise, considering possible quiddities are never, at any moment of their existence nor in any of their states of subsistence, independent of the effusion of the First Principle, it follows that this [existential dependence] is expressed by the term “Lord” (*Rabb*). The term “God” (*Ilāh*) is also similar, except that actions are in need of God *not* insofar as He is God. God, insofar as He is God, is an entity deserving of worship, but what is loded is not syllogistically relative (*maqbul bi al-qiyās*) to that which is deserving of worship. Therefore, the daybreak must have a splitter, a Lord, and an efficient cause, but it does not need a Worshipped entity insofar as He is such.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> In other words, the term ‘God’, according to Ibn Sīnā, would be syllogistically inconsistent with the purport of the existential daybreak mentioned thereafter, for there is no concomitant relationship between the two insofar as the latter is existentially dependent. The term ‘God’ denotes an entity demanding worship, but a ‘God’ does not need a creation to be worthy of worship. On the other hand, ‘Lord’ is a term with inherent ties to a *loded* item, viz. creation.

Know also that within this verse is another intimation from amongst the subtleties of matters and the sciences, and that is:

In the Arabic language, the terms “*al-isti‘ādḥah*”, “*al-‘awḍḥ*”, and “*al-‘iyādh*” are all expressions signifying the seeking of refuge in an ‘other’. As such, when He commanded [us] purely to seek refuge in an ‘other’, such command indicates that the absence of perfections does not arise from anything pertaining to the Emanator of Good (*al-Muḥīd li al-Khayrāt*), but rather from something pertaining to their recipient. This [fact] confirms the established discourse that neither all the perfections nor any one of them are withheld from the First Principle. Rather, all are acquired [by Him], and dependent [only] upon someone prepared to direct the face of his receptivity toward them. This is the exact meaning of the Prophetic intimation, upon its speaker be benedictions and peace, “Indeed, your Lord has, in the days of your lifetimes, afflatuses (*naḥāṭ*; ‘breaths’) of His mercy, so expose yourselves to them.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, he ﷺ clarified that the afflatuses of divine solicitude are constant; the only deficiency lies within the recipient. Beneath this [statement] lie tremendous indications toward noble principles and momentous foundations, which ponderance may apprehend without [needing] explicit statement.

وَمِنْ شَرِّ غَاسِقٍ إِذَا وَقَبَ

*‘And from the evil of caliginous darkness when it settles’*

The particular soul (*al-naḥs al-juz’iyyah*) of the particular human (*al-insān al-juz’ī*) seeks refuge from the evils inherent in existent determined things (*dhawāt al-taqdīr*) as they occur within the domain of determination (*ṣaq’ al-qadar*) [i.e., domain of creation]. And the gravest of these determined things, in terms of effectuation and insofar as they [may potentially] harm the essence of the human soul, are the things that enter with it into the sheath of the body (*ihāb al-baḍn*). They serve as instruments for it [the soul] from one aspect, but as a bane for it from another; from one aspect, all of them are with it, but from another aspect, all of them are against it. These things are: the

<sup>19</sup> *al-Mu‘jam al-Kabīr* of Ṭabarānī: إِنَّ لِرَبِّكُمْ فِي أَيَّامٍ دَهْرِكُمْ نَفَحَاتٍ فَتَعَرَّضُوا لَهُ، لَعَلَّهُ أَنْ يُصِيبَكُمْ نَفْحَةٌ مِنْهَا فَلَا تَشَقُّونَ بَعْدَهَا أَبَدًا.

animal faculties (*al-quwā al-ḥayawāniyyah*) and the vegetative faculties (*al-quwā al-nabātiyyah*).

As for the animal faculties, they are dark (*ẓulmāniyyah*), caliginous (*ghāsiqah*), and turbid (*mutakaddirah*); you have already learned that matter (*al-māddah*) is the source of darkness, evil, and nonexistence. The rational soul (*al-naḥs al-nāṭiqah*), the one seeking refuge, was created in its essence (*fī jawharihā*) pure and clear, absolved from the turbidities of matter and its attachments and receptive to all forms and realities. That pure subtlety and those luminosities do not break away from it [i.e., the soul] except through dispositions impressed upon it by the imaginative and instinctive animal faculties (*al-quwā al-ḥayawāniyyah al-takhayyuliyyah wa al-wahmiyyah*), as well as other faculties, such as concupiscence (*al-shahwah*) and irascibility (*al-ghaḍab*). The matters that acquire to a thing from the outside are ever-renewed, and thus that darkness [in the pure soul] is also ever-renewed.

Now, since the essence of the soul becomes a caliginous darkness that settles (*ghāsiq waqab*), that is, a darkness that approaches [the soul]; and since what is nearest to the essence of the rational soul becomes turbid through those darkening dispositions when they settle—that is, when they assail and approach [the soul]—Allah mentioned this verse following the aforementioned, more general verse [i.e., *from the evil of what He created*]. The evils arising from the settling of the caliginous faculties share with “the evil of what He created” a relation of hypernymy (*al-akhaṣṣ wa al-a‘amm*). However, since this [evil] in particular possesses the distinctive ability to render the soul dark, it was therefore fitting to mention it [explicitly] so that one may consolidate within his soul the proclivity to recognize it as one of the greatest vices, and thus in turn magnify his avoidance of it and strengthen his deterrent against admixture.

وَمِنْ شَرِّ النَّفَّاثَاتِ فِي الْعُقَدِ

*‘And from the evil of the blowers into knots’*

[This verse is] an intimation to the deputed vegetative faculties (*al-quwā al-nabāṭiyyah al-muwakkalah*). The vegetative faculties are charged with governing the body, its emergence, and its growth; and the body is a knot (*‘uqdah*) that has arisen from knots formed between various elements (*‘anāṣir mukhtalifah*). These elements contend toward separation, yet through the intensity of their mutual interaction with one another they become an animal body. The ‘blowers’ within these elements are the vegetative faculties, for ‘blowing’ (*al-naftḥ*) is a cause for the substantial essence of a thing to become increased in magnitude in all its dimensions, viz. length, width, and depth. Likewise, these faculties are those which cause the increase of a nourished and growing body in the same aforementioned directions, viz. length, width, and depth.

It is not possible for any of the crafts to produce increase in one dimension alone without necessitating diminution in another. For example, if a blacksmith takes a piece of iron and desires to increase its length, he must inevitably decrease its width or thickness, or he must otherwise join to it another foreign piece from outside. As for the vegetative faculties that are compelled toward blowing (*taḍṭar ilā al-naftḥ*), they are those that cause the parts of nourishment to penetrate into the interior of the nourished body, make them similar to it, and increase the substance of the limbs in their three dimensions.

Thus, the closest analogue to the effect of the vegetative faculties is ‘blowing’; for blowing is the cause by which a thing swells and becomes greater in magnitude than it was in all dimensions. In turn, the ‘blowers into knots’ are the vegetative faculties. Furthermore, considering the relation between the human soul and the vegetative faculties exists by means of the animal faculties, the mention of the animal faculties [i.e., verse 2: ‘caliginous darkness’] was necessarily placed before the mention of the vegetative faculties [i.e., verse 3: ‘blowers into knots’].

In sum, the evil which inevitably arises from these two faculties within the essence of the soul is: 1) the strengthening of bodily attachments, and 2) the obstruction of its nourishment from the food that *truly* suits it and is fitting to its essence, that being an encompassment of the Kingdom of the Heavens (*Malakūt al-Samāwāt*) and an inscription of the enduring inscriptions (*al-nuqūsh*; forms).

وَمِنْ شَرِّ حَاسِدٍ إِذَا حَسَدَ

*‘And from the evil of an envier when he envies.’”*

By this, He refers to the conflict arising between the body with all its faculties on the one hand, and the soul on the other. For indeed, after He first alluded to the evils necessarily entailed by nourishment, He then intimated toward a [more] detailed exposition [of said evils]. Thus, He began with the evils arising from the animal faculties, then those stemming from the vegetative faculties, and then those pertaining to the body insofar as it possesses the two faculties. Moreover, between the body and the soul there is another conflict, and that conflict is the envy originating between Ādam ﷺ and Iblīs, that grievous disease. Thus, He commands [us] to seek refuge even from its [i.e., evil’s] originating principle.

This *sūrah* therefore indicates the manner in which evil enters into the divine decree. Evil is intended *per accidens* (*bi al-‘araḍ*) rather than *per se* (*bi al-dhāt*), and the source of evils, with respect to the human soul, lies in the animal and vegetative faculties and the attachments of the body. If those [faculties and attachments] become a burden and a hardship upon it [i.e., the soul], then how excellent will be its state when it finally turns away from them, and how great its pleasure when it separates from them? [This is] provided its separation from them is by essence, and by relational separation in all circumstances.

May Allah grant us complete divestiture (*al-tajarrud al-tāmm*) and perfect theosis (*ta’alluh*), by the right of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ and his pure family.

*Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds, and may benedictions be upon the Prophet ﷺ  
and his family altogether.*

## al-Nās

*Thus quoth He, mighty be His glory, glorious be He, hallowed be His Names, and there is no god but He:*

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ النَّاسِ ﴿١﴾ مَلِكِ النَّاسِ ﴿٢﴾ إِلَهِ النَّاسِ ﴿٣﴾

*“Say: ‘I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind... The King of mankind... The God of mankind.’*

We have already mentioned the term “Lord” signifies a lordship, and lordship is an indication of the balancing of temperament (*taswiyat al-mizāj*). For the human being does not come into existence unless the body is prepared for it; and such preparedness arises only through a subtle lording [read: nurturing] and a delicate mixture beyond the grasp of intellects. This is what is intended by His saying, exalted is He, “So, *when I have proportioned him (fa idhā sawwaytuhu)*.”<sup>20</sup>

The first of the degrees [of subtle nurturing] is lording through the balancing of the temperament. Thus, the first of Allah Most High’s blessings upon the particular human being is that He lorded him by balancing his temperament. Then, after lordship comes domination (*al-qahr*) and subjugation (*al-ghalabah*), in that He poured forth upon it a rational soul (*nafs nāṭiqah*), and made the bodily organs—together with what they contain of sensory, imaginative, and estimative faculties, as well as cogitation, memory, hearing, sight, olfaction, gustation, tactile perception, concupiscence, irascibility, their combination, the faculties that move the muscles, and the vegetative faculties such as nutrition and its branches of retention, attraction, digestion, and expulsion, along with the faculty of growth and the generative faculty... in sum, its vegetative and animal powers, despite the diversity of their acts, the divergence of their objects, and the branching of their sources—subjugated under the governance of the rational, animistic, noble, and entelechous soul.

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<sup>20</sup> Quran 15:29; 38:72

When He first balanced the temperament, He made it subjugated to the soul. In this respect, He is an absolute King (*malik muṭlaq*), that is, He possesses the delegation of bodily governance to the soul, for the owner both possesses and empowers. Thereafter, the soul, by its very essence, becomes desirous of union with those separate principles (*al-mabādi' al-mufāriqah*), of abiding upon the “carpet” of their nearness and remaining in their presence, rejoicing in their contemplation, and finding intimacy in proximity to them. This longing, firmly established in the human constitution and rooted in its innate nature, impels it in seeking and inquiry to remain in constant supplication toward those principles, that they might bestow upon it something of their holy theophanies (*al-jalāyā al-muqaddasah*), whether through intellectual motions, transitional movements if its soul is an intellect in potentiality, or through the assistance of the inner faculties by combining their forms and meanings and setting them into various kinds of motion, whereby it becomes prepared to receive effusion (*fayḍ*). All of these expressions arise from it toward those principles, such that the soul at this degree becomes devoted in worship (*muta'abbidah*), those principles the worshipped (*ma'būdah*), and God the One Worshipped.

Thus, those principles have [corresponding] names in accordance with each phase:

1. The first name, in accordance with the coming-to-be of the temperament, is ‘Lord’ (*al-Rabb*);
2. The second name, in accordance with the the effusion of the soul, is ‘King’ (*al-Malik*);
3. And the third name, in accordance with the soul’s longing, is ‘God’ (*al-Ilāh*). Here, the degrees of the kinds of relations between the principles and the souls come to an end, this being the principle that bestows forms, and the governor of what lies beneath the lunar sphere.

Thereafter, considering in the former *sūrah* He already explained the manner of seeking refuge in the First Principle—the principle of daybreak (*al-infilāq*), that is, the principle of existence—and clarified there how evil enters into His determination, in this *sūrah* He explains the manner of seeking refuge in the proximate principle, the bestower of forms, and those degrees.

مِنْ شَرِّ الْوَسْوَاسِ الْخَنَّاسِ

*‘From the evil of the ever-withdrawing whisperer.’*

The Whisperer (*al-Waswās*) is the faculty that produces whispering; it is the imaginative faculty (*al-quwwah al-mutakhayyilah*) insofar as it becomes employed by the animal soul (*al-nafs al-hayawāniyyah*). Yet its motion is in retrograde: the soul is oriented toward the separate principles (*al-mabādi’ al-mufāriqah*), but when the imaginative faculty draws it toward engagement with matter and its attachments, that faculty [i.e., the imaginative faculty] withdraws (*yakhnas*) into motion in the opposite direction and pulls the human soul toward the reverse. For this reason it is called ‘ever-withdrawing’ (*al-Khannās*).

الَّذِي يُوسَّوْسُ فِي صُدُورِ النَّاسِ

*‘Who whispers in the breasts of mankind.’*

This means that the ever-withdrawer, the imaginative faculty, whispers only in the breasts, the primary mount of the soul, considering it has been established that the first locus of attachment of the human soul is the heart; and through it the faculties are diffused into the rest of the organs. Thus, the effect of whispering occurs first in the breast.

مِنْ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ

*‘Whether from djinnkind or mankind.’*

“Djinnkind” signifies concealment (*al-istitār*), and “humankind” signifies familiarity (*al-isti’nās*). Thus, these two [categories] represent the outward and inward senses.

*This is what the intellect has reached in regards to the meanings of these two sūrahs; and Allah  
Most High knows best the realities of His wisdoms and the signs of His secrets.*

*May Allah make us among His people.*