COMMENTARY ON A HADITH BY SADR AL-DIN QUNAWI

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ON the occasion of the fourteenth centenary of the hijrah, it may be interesting to recall that the number “fourteen” often carries a symbolic significance in Islamic sources. In connection with Shi’ism, one need only remember the “Fourteen Pure Ones” (chahārūdah ma’sūm). As a contribution to this topic, I offer below a translation of a passage by Sadr al-Din Qunawi (d. 673/1274), the foremost disciple of the celebrated Sufi Muhīy al-Din ibn al-‘Arabī.

Qunawi is the author of at least twenty works, among the most important of which is his “Commentary upon Forty Hadiths.” Although it was one of his most popular works for several centuries, it has not been studied or published in modern times. In discussing one of the forty hadiths, Qunawi refers to the symbolism of the number fourteen and its relation to the Divine Nature and to man.

This hadith, the twenty-first which Qunawi discusses, begins as follows: “It was related from Ibn ‘Abbās that the Prophet said, ‘My Lord came to me at night’ — or in another version, ‘I saw my Lord in a dream’ — ‘in the fairest form. He said, ‘O Muhammad!’ I answered, ‘Here am I, O Lord!’ He said, ‘Doest thou know about what the Supreme Council (of angels) disputeth?’ I said, ‘I do not know.’ Then He placed His hand between my shoulders, and I felt its coldness between my breasts . . . Then I knew all that is in the heavens and the earth,’ — or in another version, ‘all that is between the east and the west.’ . . .”

Qunawi discusses this hadith in great detail in one of the longest sections of his work. In what follows, I have translated the passage which relates directly to the symbolism of the number fourteen. Before offering the translation, however, it will be useful to explain the most important technical terms Qunawi mentions in the passage.

Qunawi is discussing the relationship between the “outward” or “manifest” (al-zāhir) and the “inward” or “nonmanifest” (al-bātin). The “outward” here refers to the “World of the Visible” (‘ālam al-shahāda), i.e., the world which we can observe with our physical eyes. The “inward” refers to the “World of the Unseen” (‘ālam al-ghayb), or more specifically, to God’s Knowledge of the things of this world. The outward world derives everything it possesses from God, since nothing but God truly exists.

“Being” (wujud) is God’s very nature, His Essence (dhāti). Other things exist or “have being” only because He bestows existence upon them. The outward world is thus one of the “Divine Presences” (al-hadarāt al-ilāhiyyaḥ), one of the loci within which God manifests Himself. It may be that we observe only individual things, but each thing derives its particular

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the entity itself is being discussed, with its "nonexistence" (‘adam), i.e., its state of non-existence in the sense of Knowledge.

A logical conclusion of this discussion is that God did not "make" (mā‘ūl), God did not "create" (makhfū‘), God did not "begin" (mujā‘), and so on. They are the objects of His Knowledge from the very beginning. In other words, they are a part of His Knowledge from the very nature of Being Itself. When an object of Being exists, God does not "make" it a being, but He makes existence upon a reality that He has known from the beginning.

With this introduction, we can turn to the hadith:

As for the mystery of the blow between the hands, the “back” is the symbol (rasm) of the unseen essence from behind the veil of existence (sūrah). For we have already explained the effect from it, that is only because of his relation to it. So understand this principle of a mighty knowledge for him who has eyes.

As for the mystery of the fingers (of the hand), they are symbols for the realities of the five pillars of outward submission (islām): the “Unseen Keys” and the source of the Unseen essence. These pillars were erected, i.e., "permitted" (halāl), "signified" (ma‘ṣūm), "recommended" (ma‘ṣū‘), or "blessed" (ma‘ṣū‘). Not to mention the five daily prayers. These are the Five Divine Presences, which are called the "mothers" (ummahāt) of all the Presence. Also, the Names called by our Shaykh (Ibn al-majā‘ī al-thānawī).4

As for the Five Divine Presences, the one which comprises the Names, Attributes, and the rest of the objects of God’s Knowledge, it is the World of Sensory Perception (‘alā ‘adad al-kāmil). Situated between these two worlds, among those things which pertain exclusively to the ‘adad al-kāmil. Between this center and the archetypal-entity is a Presence whose relation to the World is more complete. It is called the "World of the Worldly," or the "Presence of Sensory Perception."
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the entity itself is being discussed, without reference to its existence or its nonexistence” (‘adam), i.e., its state of nonmanifestation within God’s Knowledge.

A logical conclusion of this discussion is that the entities or things are not “made” (ma‘jūl), God did not “make” them the way they are, since they are the objects of His Knowledge for all eternity. As such they have no beginning. In other words, they are the “concomitants” (kawādīm) of the very nature of Being Itself. When a bird, a tree or a man enters into existence, God does not “make” it a bird, a tree or a man. He only bestows existence upon a reality that He has known for all eternity.

With this introduction, we can turn to Qunawi’s discussion.

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As for the mystery of the blow between the shoulders (mentioned in the hadith, the “back” is the symbol (mas̱har) of the World of the Unseen. Here it refers to God’s “effectuating power” (ta‘līḥ) in respect of His Unseen Essence from behind the veil of the symbol, which is the “form” (sūrāh). For we have already explained that no outward thing has any effect from it, that is only because of something inward within it or in relation to it. So understand this principle! For within it I have placed a mighty knowledge for him who has eyes.

As for the mystery of the fingers (of the hand which struck the blow), they are symbols for the realities of the principle Names, which are the “Unseen Keys” and the source of the Shari‘ite statues upon which the pillars of outward submission (istīlām), faith (imān) and virtue (iḥsān) were erected, i.e., “permitted” (ḥalāl), “forbidden” (harām), “reprehensible” (mukrūh), “recommended” (mandūb) and “indifferent” (mubah), not to mention the five daily prayers. The source and origin of all of these are the Five Divine Presences, which are the “principles” (usūl) and the “mothers” (ummahāt) of all the Presences. Beyond these are the Principle Names called by our Shaykh (Ibn al-‘Arabī) the “Secondary Keys” (al-mafātīh al-thānawī).

As for the Five Divine Presences, they are the Presence of the Unseen, which comprises the Names, Attributes, disengaged meanings, and the rest of the objects of God’s Knowledge. Facing it in the opposite position is the World of Sensory Perception (‘ālam al-hiss), called the “World of the Visible”. Situated between these two sides is a central Presence. It is among those things which pertain exclusively to the Perfect Man (al-‘insān al-kāmil). Between this center and the aforementioned World of the Unseen is a Presence whose relation to the World of the Unseen is stronger and more complete. It is called the “World of the Spirits” (‘ālam al-arwāh). And between the Center and the World of the Visible — which we said is the Presence of Sensory Perception — is a Presence whose relation with
the World of the Visible is stronger. It is the Presence of Delimited Imagination (khayāl muqayyad). So all the Presences and ontological levels attributed exclusively to God, or to the world, or to both together, are subordinated to these five. So understand! As for the “Secondary Keys”, I will give news of them shortly — God willing — in the midst of what I will mention concerning the mystery of the hand which struck the blow.

To continue: As for the question of which of the Lord’s hands struck the blow, know that it is one of the “two hands” through which Adam was created. It is referred to as the “handful” in God’s words, “The earth together shall be his hand” (Koran XXXIX, 67). In a ḥadīth upon whose authenticity all are agreed it is referred to as the “left hand” (al-shīmāl). Hence God also mentioned the “right hand” in the above verse: “And the heavens shall be rolled up in His right hand.”

As for the prophetic saying that both of God’s hands are right hands, this is true both out of courtesy (adab, towards God) and also when we investigate the matter. But it is only true when we consider the attribution of the two hands to Him, not when we study their effect in what they bring into existence. For that which is held in the “handful” referred to as the “left hand” is the world of the elements as well as those things which become compounded and are born from the elements. Among them is the elemental form (al surat al-unṣūri, i.e., the physical body) of Adam, for it is the result of this handful and becomes outwardly manifest in keeping with its attributes. Adam’s elemental form contrasts with his remaining dimensions, which are outside of his elemental plane, i.e., his spirituality and the loci through which he becomes manifest in the other worlds (or Presences), for these worlds are attributed to God’s right hand.

The Prophet gave news of this situation when he reported that God let Adam choose one of His two hands, when both were closed. God said to him, “Choose whichever you like.” Adam answered, “I choose the right hand of my Lord, although both of my Lord’s hands are right, blessed.” So God opened His right hand, and within it were Adam and his descendants. So Adam was outside of this one hand. He was given a choice and he chose. When the hand was opened, he was inside it along with his descendants. So in respect of his being outside of the hand, Adam possesses one property. And in respect of his choice and his being within the right hand which he chose he possesses another property. So attend carefully what I have brought to your ears in keeping with what is hidden in these allusions! You will see wonders.

To continue: Since the World of the Elements and of those things dominated by opacity, darkness and grossness (kathāfah) dominated what was held in the aforementioned handful — as we have said — God attributed the wretched (al-ashqād) to these things. For the wretched are dominated by the characteristics of composition and grossness, a fact to which the Prophet alluded in his words: “Believer’s skin on the Day of Resurrection journey.” God called attention to this in the book of the licentious is in Sijjin’ (Koran LXXXIII, 18). This is like saying “rolled up in His right hand” (Koran LXXXIII, 18).

The secret of the fact that the pious work in the parts of their gross plane and their parts have become “transubstantiated” (tajallā). Through the sanctification and purification of knowledge, works and becoming adorned with elevated moral-qualities, the parts of their souls have been transmuted into pure, immutable, inherent within their “souls possessing righteousness.” God gave news of this in the following words of the souls: “Saved is he who purifies himself, who does not give my soul its godfearlessness and purity who purify it!”

The state of the wretched is the opposite; the attributes have become effaced by their gross substance turns to nothing. It is as if it is non-existent. The necessary result is that when God has “rolled up” bodies and natural planes, which had been on account of the corrupt beliefs and blameworthy moral-qualities which would have remained for long years in this (lower) plane compouds these things (once again) in a new way which becomes actualized from all this requisite thickness of his body’s skin will be equal to his face, in contrast to what I said concerning the transubstantiation which had been related in prophetic sayings concerning the people of Paradise appear as a single matter to take their pleasure in each one of their forms in all the forms they desire. They are said: the gross parts of their plane have lost (latā’if) of their substances and coloured characteristics of their souls and spiritual faculties or of their natural constitutions. Thus they are said: They appear in whatever forms they desire.
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which the Prophet alluded in his words, “Verily the thickness of the unbeliever’s skin on the Day of Resurrection will be equal to three days’ journey.” God called attention to this with His words, “No indeed, the book of the licentious is in Sijjin (Koran LXXXIII, 7). Now Sijjin is the lower world, which is attributed to the hand referred to by the terms “handful” and “left hand.” Concerning the Companions of the Right Hand (ashāb al-yamin) God said, “No indeed, the book of the pious is in Illyyun” (Koran LXXXIII, 18). This is like saying, “And the heavens shall be rolled up in His right hand” (Koran XXXIX, 67).

The secret of the fact that the pious and their book are in Illyyun is that the parts of their gross plane and their constitutional and natural faculties have become “transubstantiated” (tajawwad), purified and transformed. Through the sanctification and purification which are actualized by knowledge, works and becoming adorned with praiseworthy attributes and elevated moral-qualities, the parts of their gross plane and their faculties have been transmuted into pure, immutable, angelic attributes and faculties inherent within their “souls possessing peace” (cf. Koran LXXXIX, 27). God gave news of this in the following words which explain the states of the souls: “Saved is he who purifies it” (Koran LXI, 9). In the same way the Prophet alluded to this in the words of his supplication: “O God, give my soul its godfearingness and purify it! Thou art the best of those who purify it!”

The state of the wretched is the opposite, for their spiritual faculties and attributes have become effaced by their natural faculties. So their spiritual substance turns to nothing. It is as if it is transformed and becomes gross. The necessary result is that when God gathers together the parts of their bodies and natural planes, which had become decomposed and are coloured by the properties of the corrupt beliefs and opinions, the base acts and the blameworthy moral-qualities which were theirs during the time they remained for long years in this (lower) plane and abode, and when He compounds these things (once again) in the plane of the Resurrection, what becomes actualized from all this requires that for each one of them the thickness of his body’s skin will be equivalent to three days’ journey — in contrast to what I said concerning the state of the pious. Hence it has been related in prophetic sayings concerning the paradisial state that the people of Paradise appear as a single moment in numerous palaces. They take their pleasure in each one of their families, and they undergo transformations in all the forms they desire. This is only because of what we said: the gross parts of their plane have been effaced by the subtle essences (lātā‘if) of their substances and coloured by their attributes. The characteristics of their souls and spiritual faculties have dominated over the faculties of their natural constitutions. Thus they have become like the angels. They appear in whatever forms they desire . . . .
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To continue: I have just called attention to the fact that forms and loci of manifestation are veils over the realities to which they are ascribed, and that effects belong to the realities hidden behind the loci of manifestation. So the form of the hand and the fingers are veils upon the realities of the Divine Names which cause effects.

Now this sacred hand (which struck the low) — as well as the other — possesses “partitions” (jusūl) and “principles” (usūl). Its partitions are fourteen, while five principles are outward and five inward.

The partitions (of the hands also) possess an inward sense, i.e., the realities of the 28 letters (of the Arabic alphabet). These letters are divided into two equal kinds, for fourteen of them are dotted, and fourteen are undotted. Their loci of manifestation within the universal forms (literally, the “mothers”) of the world pertaining to God’s right hand (i.e., the celestial world) are the 28 stations of the moon. Now those stations which are outwardly manifest are fourteen, and those which are hidden are fourteen. So remember what I pointed out concerning the mystery of loci of manifestation and the fact that they act as veils. And remember that God causes effects from beyond them in the Unseen. Keep in mind that the hand which pertains to the outward human form in respect of form corresponds to the attributes of the “handful”, while in respect of its inward the human form corresponds to the attributes of the other hand, i.e., the right hand. Finally, take note of the joints (of your hand), you will find that they do not exceed fourteen.

As for the “principles” of which the fingers are the loci of manifestation, they are five and they vary in degree. The highest and most all-encompassing is Knowledge, which is the central principle. To the right are two principles, Life and Power. And to the left are two principles, Will and Word. Each principle has three parts except for Power, for it alone has two. The third part was deleted by reason of two great secrets.

The first secret is that each of the other four becomes connected to all things, in contrast to Power, for its property is limited, not nondelimited (mutlaq). This is because its property only becomes connected to the possible-existents, so its influence is not all-pervading. Among the things which will open the gate of awareness to something of what I have alluded to is the study of the word ḥā’ ("he") wherever it is mentioned in the Koran and the hadith literature. It gives news that whatever is mentioned along with it will never happen. This is an instance of “ambiguity”.

The other secret is that the manner in which Power becomes joined to the “object of Power” (maqād) is not clear. The manner in which it brings about the bestowal of existence is hidden in the limit of obscurity. For the ontological theophany which spreads light (= existence) among the possible-existents — which are hidden from themselves in the darkness (= nonexistence) of their possibility — is “unmade”. In respect of their realities entified within God’s Knowledge described as having been made — as several places in my works.

So if one studies the effect of Power, the effused existence (al-wujūd al-mufrad) to the possible entity. Suffis other than a “connection” a kind of intelligible mode brings about “joining” (ittisāl). But not the non-composite (basīl), disengaged (muja), however, “connection” is a relation (nisbat) of wujūd. So in the eyes of him who localized from the meaning of Power’s effect and gives each thing its due will we have a station of “ambiguity” (ibtā), which is the locus of manifestation of the property is not all pervading, and its effect ambiguity. Thus it is appropriate for it in spite of the fact that one cannot clarify the thing. Rather (one can only say that) of relation, nothing else.

So ponder what I have mentioned to there is nothing among the ontological trial, which is not related to God and as known as the “Names and Attributes”, will become aware of the secret of the relations between outward forms and Unseen realities in appropriate forms, and the secrets between the forms and realities. And if one come to understand the secret of God by the mystery of His “similarity” (tasbīh) and the correct and incorrect mode of comprehend the meaning of the Prophet Adam upon His own Form”, even though Him” (Koran XLII, 11) is established mentioned something for every person of with these words. If its riddle is solved, he sciences and mysteries pertaining to universe.

NOTES

1. See my article, “The Last Word and Disciple and Some notes on its Author” pp. 43–58; also my forthcoming book on Q.
realities entified within God’s Knowledge, the possible-existents are not described as having been made — as I have established and clarified in several places in my works.

So if one studies the effect of Power, one can only imagine that it causes the effused existence (al-wujūd al-mufād) to “become connected” (īqrān) to the possible entity. Sufis other than the Perfect Men imagine from this “connection” a kind of intelligible movement (harakah ma’qūlah) which brings about “joining” (ittisāl). But no movement can be imagined in non-composite (bashīt), disengaged (mujarrad) realities and meanings. Moreover, “connection” is a relation (nisbah), not an ontological thing (amr wujūdī). So in the eyes of him who looks carefully, what becomes actualized from the meaning of Power’s effect? Whoever investigates the situation and gives each thing its due will know that in this respect, here also we have a station of “ambiguity” (ibhām). Necessarily the thumb (ibhām), which is the locus of manifestation of Power, has only two joints. For its property is not all pervading, and its effect can not be ascertained without ambiguity. Thus it is appropriate for it to have such a name. This is all in spite of the fact that one cannot claim that Power is not an ontological thing. Rather (one can only say that) the result of its effect is some sort of relation, nothing else.

So ponder what I have mentioned to you. You will come to know that there is nothing among the ontological forms, whether celestial or terrestrial, which is not related to God and ascribed to Him in one of the respects known as the “Names and Attributes”. And if you go a little higher, you will become aware of the secret of the exact-correspondence (mutābaqah) between outward forms and Unseen realities, the appearance of these realities in appropriate forms, and the correctness of the parallelism (between the forms and realities). And if you are taken still higher, you will come to understand the secret of God as manifest in loci of manifestation, the mystery of His “similarity” (tashbīh) and “incomparability” (tanzih), and the correct and incorrect mode of understanding each. You will also comprehend the meaning of the Prophet’s words, “Verily God created Adam upon His own Form”, even though the property of “Nothing is like Him” (Koran XLII, II) is established. So understand! For I have mentioned something for every person of wakefulness and insight who ponders these words. If its riddle is solved, he will gain knowledge of many of the sciences and mysteries pertaining to the Lord and to the engendered universe.

NOTES

CONTRIBUTION OF ISLAM PERENNIS TO THE PROBLEM
Mr. A. K.

"There is a ship on which all good is launched upon the high seas of life as a painfully acquired treasure. Religion is perilous but hopeful voyage. It is in the interest of interests makes all men partners in the great enterprise of good with better, so as to achieve both of religion and of every religion and of every religion's purpose and to hearten men in this..."

The contribution that universal religion problems of world peace is of paramount resort, considering the world as it is one potent weapon to negate peace than to face of mankind, namely, religion, which ever capable of serving as "last resort of earthly misery." Its basic teaching, namely, that all are brothers unto one another if only one and same holy spirit unto which there is a sense of inner belonging, sympathy and harmony, because we truly human. Of course there have been many of religion even as there have been, up until insight into the nature of things. But in Philosophia Perennis (made famous by heating) and so also there is Religio Perennis. This philosophy through various traditions of celebration and epiphany of what Arnold Toynbee calls, "the only of the essence, if not the quintessence to state concisely the relationship which peace on earth has with religion. Defined in its most generic and universal way by R. B. Perry, "Religion is man's deepest endowment, that which he accounts most valuable of our outdoor, men will always prize and will recognize it or less hopeful belief." Now if this is necessary result of being human and

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