Beyond Metaphysical Idolatry:
Mullā Ṣadrā on Mental Constructs of God[1]

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It is now common knowledge that the famous Safavid philosopher, Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1640), wrote a number of books on the Qurʾān and its sciences.[2] Amongst his Qurʾānic exegetical works, the most profound of them is undoubtedly his *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa*. One of the issues which Ṣadrā takes up in this text concerns his inquiry into the nature of idolatry and its relationship to religious belief. In this article, I will attempt to situate Ṣadrā's understanding of idolatry within the framework of similar discussions in later Islamic thought, demonstrating how his meditations upon Q 1:1 allow him to articulate his position concerning the "God created in beliefs." Not only does Ṣadrā show himself here to be a faithful adherent of an important doctrine in later Islamic thought (and indeed a "student" of Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240)), but he also manages to tie this teaching into his explanation of the diversity of approaches to the Qurʾān.

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[1] This article is adapted from chapter five of Mohammed Rustom, *The Triumph of Mercy: Philosophy and Scripture in Mullā Ṣadrā* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012).

[2] For the structure, content, and chronology of Ṣadrā's Qurʾānic writings, see Rustom, "The Nature and Significance of Mullā Ṣadrā's Qurʾānic Writings," *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 6 (2010): 109-130.

As an astute reader of scripture, Ṣadrā observes that since the Qurʾān is the word of God and manifests delimited aspects of itself through its various verses, it is synonymous with being (*wujūd*) in a certain sense, since being also manifests delimited aspects of itself through its various modes. And, like being, the Qurʾān, too, has many levels of descent: "Although the Qurʾān is one reality, it has many levels in its descent and many names in accordance with these levels."[3] Such an understanding naturally allows Ṣadrā to refer to the Qurʾān as the book of being.[4] Because of the fact that Ṣadrā understands the Qurʾān to be the book of being, he also maintains that whatever can be said about being can also be said about the Qurʾān. This means that one's understanding of the Qurʾān is closely tied to one's understanding of being. And since being and God are synonymous from one perspective, one's understanding of the Qurʾān will naturally reflect one's understanding of God.

In explaining why there are different types of readers of the Qurʾān, Ṣadrā underscores the fact that these approaches are closely linked to the diversity of approaches to understanding God. Since people take different positions with respect to God, they will naturally have different understandings of His Word. According to Ṣadrā, this fact is itself proof of the Qurʾān's perfection. It, like God, is open to all types of readings, although not all interpretations are necessarily correct:

> *Just as there are differences of opinion in peoples' positions and beliefs concerning God—i.e., between the one who declares God bodily and the one who declares Him dissimilar; the philosopher and denier of God's attributes; the one who ascribes partners to God and the*

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[3] Ṣadrā, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, ed. Muhammad Khwājawī (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Tārīkh al-ʿArabī, 2002), 98. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

[4] Cf. Ṣadrā, *Mafātīḥ*, 103.

*one who declares Him one—so too are there differences
of opinion between them in understanding (the Qurʾān).
This is one of proofs of the Qurʾān's perfection, for it is a
deep ocean in whose current most people drown, and from
which none are saved except a few.*[5]

People may either remain on the surface of an ocean
or plunge into it. The deeper one goes, the more likely he is
to reach its bottom and resurface with its hidden treasures.
Likewise, there are many positions on God, but not all of
them are correct, since some of them are necessarily more
superficial than others. It is only those who plumb the depths
of being who can lay claim to understanding God, just as it is
only those who plumb the depths of the ocean of the Qurʾān
who can lay claim to understanding His Word.

The point Ṣadrā is trying to make here would be
difficult to understand without contextualizing his discussion.
Before introducing the idea of the correspondence between
different approaches to understanding God and the Qurʾān, he
devotes some space to explaining how people have employed
various linguistic tools in their attempts to comprehend the
meanings of the Qurʾān's verses. Such people (whom Ṣadrā,
in keeping with the long-standing Sufi tradition, refers to as
the *ahl al-ʿibāra* or "the people of outward expressions")[6]
are used by God for a higher purpose. God has effectively
set them up to learn these partial sciences, rooted as they are
upon the Qurʾān's linguistic forms only. These people thus
act as servants and instruments for the true purpose behind
the Qurʾān, namely human perfection.[7] Human perfection,
Ṣadrā assures us, is not attained through outward, formal
learning. Although outward knowledge is a necessary
preparatory step for most seekers of truth, it cannot in and

[5] Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-karīm*, ed. Muḥammad Khwājawī (Qum:
Intishārāt-i Bīdār, 1987-1990), 1:30

[6] See Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, 1:28.

[7] Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, 1:28.

of itself lead to that truth. Thus, the more exoteric forms of learning related to the Qurʾān exist as a means of facilitating a deeper understanding of the book.[8]

In Sufi Qurʾānic exegetical literature, the term ʿ*ibāra* is often juxtaposed with the term *ishāra*, a word denoting the allusion to or indication of something which, by virtue of its depth, escapes outward expression.[9] Expressions, in other words, deal with the outer form of a deeper reality which can only be denoted by allusions. Because of the limitations of language and discursive thought (to which language is intimately tied), we can only allude to the Qurʾān's inner realities. Thus, if the ocean of the Qurʾān has outward expressions (i.e., its surface and waves), it also has an inner reality (i.e., its hidden pearls). In the following passage, Ṣadrā relates this basic exoteric/esoteric dichotomy in the universe to several cosmic realities, and explains the fundamental difference between those concerned with the outer and inner dimensions of the Qurʾān:

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[8] Cf. the discussion in Rustom, *The Triumph of Mercy*, 28-29.

[9] The distinction appears to have first been made in an early Sufi Qurʾānic exegetical maxim, often attributed to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 765). See Paul Nwyia, "Le tafsîr mystique attribué à Ğaʿfar Sâdiq," *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 43 (1967): 179-230. Cf. Kristin Sands, *Ṣūfī Commentaries on the Qurʾān in Classical Islam* (London: Routledge, 2006), 35. It should also be noted here that the term ʿibāra is not to be confused with a word we also encounter in Sufi Qurʾānic exegesis, namely *iʿtibār*. This latter term has a positive connotation, and, according to Denis Gril (who renders it as "transposition symbolique" or "symbolic transposition"), is equivalent to *ishāra*, although *iʿtibār* is more explicit than *ishāra* in its reliance on the existence of an intimate relationship shared between the Qurʾān, the self, and the cosmos. See Gril, "L'interprétation par transposition symbolique (*iʿtibār*) selon Ibn Barraǧan et Ibn ʿArabī," in Bakri Aladdin (ed.), *Symbolisme et herméneutique dans la pensée de Ibn ʿArabi* (Damascus: Institut français du Proche-Orient, 2007), 147. Cf. William Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-ʿArabī's Cosmology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 263-265.

Expressions are like the enshrouded dead person whereas allusions are like the subtle, recognizing, knowing (faculty) which is man's reality. Expressions come from the World of the Visible, whereas allusions come from the World of the Unseen. Expressions are the shadows of the unseen, just as a person's individuation is the shadow of his reality.

As for the people of outward expressions and writing, they have wasted their lives away in acquiring words and foundations, and their intellects have drowned in perceiving expositions and meanings. As for the people of the Qurʾān and the Word—and they are the people of God who have been singled out for the divine love, lordly attraction, and prophetic proximity—God has facilitated the way for them and accepted from them few works for the journey. That is because of the purity of their intentions and their hearts.[10]

Since God's being encompasses outward and inward realities, like the readers of the Qurʾān, it will necessarily be comprised of people who swim on the surface of its ocean and those who plunge into its depths. Those who plunge into its depths are the "people of God," just as those who plunge into the Qurʾān's depths are the "people of the Qurʾān." For Ṣadrā, modes of being are darker, murkier, denser, and more shadow-like (i.e., manifest more essence) the lower they stand on the scale of being. The higher they stand on its scale, the less concretized they are, which is to say the less defined they become by their own outward forms or "expressions." As modes of being, the more individuated they are, the less shadow-like their natures, meaning they manifest more being, more depth, more "allusion," and less "expression."

Ṣadrā also refers to the Qurʾān as "one of the flashes" of God's Essence.[11] Since God's light pervades the cosmos, all of the latter's contents, in one form or another, reveal the

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[10] Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, 1:28-29. Cf. *Tafsīr*, 6:10.
[11] Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, 1:30. Cf. *Tafsīr*, 1:36.

light of God's being. However, some things reveal this light more clearly than others. This is to say that some things can either convey the nature of this light by their very existence, or they can play a subtler role by way of alluding to this principal Light of which all things are merely rays.[12] Since being and the Qurʾān are two sides of the same coin, the most outward forms of knowledge of the Qurʾān, like the most outward forms of knowledge of God, are less real and furthest from that form of knowledge only accessible to the people of the Qurʾān.

Idols of Belief

Approaches to the Qurʾān which are confined to the surface necessarily limit the Qurʾān's treasures from emerging. As has been seen throughout the history of Islamic thought, such a tendency is often an extension of, and/or something that informs, a more exoteric approach to scripture. It would be an unhelpful exercise on our part if we were to attempt to determine whether one's reading of scripture colours one's understanding of reality, or whether one's understanding of reality informs one's reading of scripture. This is because these approaches are not mutually exclusive, as they both seem to inform one another.

In Ṣadrā's case such a question becomes all the less important, since he sees the Qurʾān as the prototype of being. It is perhaps for this reason that Ṣadrā will often not draw as explicit a link between approaches to scripture and approaches to God. Thus, when he discusses the controversial question of the nature of idolatry, he takes it for granted that his discussion is as much concerned with understanding the Qurʾān as it is with understanding the nature of God.

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[12] For a lucid exposition of this point, see Toshihiko Izutsu, *Creation and the Timeless Order of Things: Essays in Islamic Mystical Philosophy* (Ashland: White Cloud Press, 1994), 38-65.

In texts of Islamic thought, particularly Sufi writings, it was commonplace to say that concern with anything other than God was tantamount to idolatry. The early master of moral psychology, al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 857), was one of the first authors to have theoretically discussed the manner in which religious ostentation acts as a hidden form of idolatry (*al-shirk al-khafī*).[13] This hidden form of idolatry can indeed manifest itself in a variety of forms. This explains why in Sufi literature we come across many synonyms for the hidden idolater, amongst which are such pejorative titles as "form-worshipper" (*ṣūrat-parast*). Consider the following lines by Rūmī (d. 1273), where he admonishes the exoterically inclined believer who only sees "forms" but not their inner meanings:

> *Go, strive towards meaning, O form-worshipper!*
> *For meaning is the wing of form's body.[14]*

The famous Sufi martyr, ʿAyn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī (d. 1131), a figure whose work influenced Ṣadrā, even identifies "habit-worship" with idolatry. In the context of his treatment of awakening to one's true nature, he cautions, "O dear friend! If you want the beauty of these secrets displayed to you, then let go of habit-worship, for habit-worship is idol-worship."[15] What is clear from these two examples is that "idolatry" encompasses a much wider spectrum than one would normally assign to the term. ʿAyn al-Quḍāt warns us not to fall into "habit-worship," and Rumi encourages us to strive towards the inward meaning of things and not be

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[13] See Muḥāsibī, *al-Riʿāya li-ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. ʿAbd al-Qādir Aḥmad ʿAṭāʾ (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, 1971), 177-355.

[14] Rūmī, *Mathnawī-yi maʿnawī*, ed. and trans. R. A. Nicholson as *The Mathnawí of Jalálu'ddín Rúmí* (London: Luzac, 1924-1940), book 1, line 710.

[15] ʿAyn al-Quḍāt, *Tamhīdāt*, ed. ʿAfīf ʿUsayrān, 4th ed. (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Manūchīrī, 1994), 12.

confined to the forms that contain these meanings, lest we become "form-worshippers."

Thus, if preoccupation with forms or the idols of the self are types of idolatry, then intellectual constructs of God conjured up by the self can also be called "idols." Although this idea lurks in the background of numerous Sufi texts, the first explicit, theoretical discussion of the notion of "idols of belief" is to be found in the work of Ibn ʿArabī, who speaks of the "God of one's belief" and "the God created in faiths."[16] As he famously (and controversially) puts it, "Neither heart nor eye ever witnesses anything except the form of one's belief concerning God."[17] And, even more shockingly, he insists that "there are none but idol-worshippers."[18] After Ibn ʿArabī, a number of authors took up this idea, particularly the great Persian sage Maḥmūd Shabistarī (d. 1339).[19] Thus, by the time we get to Mullā Ṣadrā, the "God created in faiths" and "idols of belief" were stock expressions, and they would have immediately been recognizable as having derived from Ibn ʿArabī and his school.

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[16] See, Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 162-165; Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabī's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 335-344; Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Ṣūfism of Ibn 'Arabī*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 124, 195-200.

[17] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. A. E. Afifi (Cairo: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, 1946), 121.

[18] Cited in Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 150.

[19] For an excellent study of Shabistarī's life and thought, see Leonard Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith and Infidelity: The Sufi Poetry and Teachings of Maḥmūd Shabistarī* (Richmond: Curzon, 1995). Some striking parallels between Ibn ʿArabī's position and a fifteenth century Ismaili author can be found in Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages: A History of Survival, a Search for Salvation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 148-154.

In the context of his explanation of the nature of the divine names and how they relate to what the Sufi tradition calls the All-Gathering name Allah (i.e., the one name of God under which all of God's other names and qualities are subsumed), Ṣadrā draws on the notion of idols of belief. He ventures into a fairly detailed excursus to explain the fact that most people do not worship God as He should be worshiped. Confined as they are to their own methods and intellectual constructs (like the people of expressions' approaches to the Qurʾān), they fashion and carve God in their own image and according to their own beliefs. Having crafted an image of the deity with their own interpretive tools, He then becomes fit for their worship:

> *Most people do not worship God insofar as He is God. They merely worship the objects of their beliefs in accordance with what they have formed for themselves as objects of worship. In reality, their gods are those imaginary idols which they form and carve with the potency of their intellectual or imaginary beliefs.*[20]

Like Ibn ʿArabī, Ṣadrā closely follows the Qurʾān's wording when discussing the idea of "carving" an idol.[21] Whereas the people of Abraham carved an idol out of physical matter, those who worship the objects of their beliefs carve idols out of the "stuff" of their souls. As Ṣadrā puts it, these objects of belief are formed and sculpted through man's use of his imagination and intellect, or what he also refers to as the

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[20] Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, 1:40, citing *Tafsīr*, 4:49.

[21] See Q 37:95, where Abraham says to his people, who were idol-worshippers, "Do you worship what you carve (*tanḥitūna*)?" According to Chittick (*Imaginal Worlds*, 185, n. 7), Ibn ʿArabī clearly has this verse in mind when he says that "Every believer has a Lord in his heart that he has brought into existence, so he believes in Him.... They worship nothing but what they themselves have carved" (Cited in Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 151).

"hands" of people's intellects.[22]

Idolatry, therefore, is not only worship of a physical image or even preoccupation with other than God. It is also to conceive of God in accordance with one's own selfish whims and desires. Since a mental image of God cannot be God as such, it can only be an object of one's belief, created by the self for the self. Because this is the case, there is no difference between those who worship physical idols and those who worship the God of their beliefs:

> *A believer amongst the veiled ones—those who create the divinity in the forms of the object of their belief and nothing else—only worships a god on account of what he creates within himself and forms using his imagination. In reality, his god is created for himself and sculpted with the hand of his potent free-disposal. So there is no difference between those idols which are taken as gods (externally) and his god, owing to the fact that they are all created for the self, whether they be external or internal to it.[23]*

Why do people create idols? Ṣadrā, again following Ibn ʿArabī, offers an explanation. He says that an idol is taken as an object of worship simply because of the belief on the part of the one worshipping the idol that it is divine and, therefore, worthy of worship:

> *External idols are also only worshipped because of their worshipper's belief in their divinity. The mental forms are the objects of their worship essentially, and the external forms are their objects of worship accidentally. Thus, the objects of worship of every idol-worshipper are nothing but the forms of his beliefs and the caprices of his soul, as has been alluded to in His saying, Have you seen the one who takes his caprice for his god? (Q 65:23). Just as worshippers of bodily idols worship what their hands*

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[22] See Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, 1:41.
[23] Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, 1:40, drawing on *Tafsīr*, 4:50.

have created, so too do those who have partial beliefs
concerning God worship what the hands of their intellects
have gathered.[24]

Ṣadrā acknowledges in this passage that it is essentially "caprice" which incites one to fashion an idol. This caprice forms into a mental image first, and then, in the case of a material idol, is made into a physical image. Whether the image remains physical or mental, the God created by the self for the self is only worshipped because the self considers it to be divine. Thus, what the self ultimately worships is nothing but its own whims and desires, since an idol—whether physical or mental—is nothing but a projection of the self. Since one's caprice is a projection of the content of the self, when one forms an idol one is really only worshipping oneself. All beliefs in which God is delimited by the self are nothing but constructions of the self. This explains why one believes in the divinity of the idol which he creates: the image is "divine" because it is proximate to the self, which is to say that it *is* like the self.

From another perspective, it is God's theophanies, or self-disclosures, which determine a servant's object of worship. In other words, by delimiting God with his intellectual and imaginal faculties, the servant necessarily brings within his field of worship certain qualities of the divinity to the exclusion of others. Most people, therefore, worship God from behind the veil of some of His self-disclosures. But because God's manifestations are perpetually different, perspectives on Him, that is, idolized delimitations of His true nature, will naturally be different as well. Depending on which self-disclosure veils the servant, he will deny God in His other self-disclosures because he is unable to recognize anything as divine other than the idol that he has created for himself. This, according to Ṣadrā, is

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[24] Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, 1:40-41, citing *Tafsīr*, 4:50. Cf. *Tafsīr*, 1:6 and 30.

the height of displaying poor etiquette towards God:

> From this veiling, differences amongst people in matters of belief come about. Thus, some of them anathematize others and some curse others, while every one of them affirms for the Real what the other denies, thinking that what they opine and believe is the highest form of exaltation of God! But they err and display bad etiquette towards God while they think that they have attained the highest rank in knowledge and etiquette![25]

The Religion of the Perfect Human

If people are idol worshippers who must necessarily limit God according to their own specifications, thereby allowing some of God's self-disclosures to be operative within them rather than others, what does this mean with respect to their fate in the afterlife? Are those who deny God in all of His self-disclosures condemned "forever" for their idolatry? We know what Ibn ʿArabī would say if he were asked such a question. Although idolatry is an "error," so too is "belief" in God, since every belief in God is ultimately a delimitation or an idolized conception of Him. Thus, Ibn ʿArabī explains, all are pardoned in the end:

> *If God were to take people to account for error, He would take every possessor of a belief to account. Every believer has delimited his Lord with his reason and consideration and has thereby restricted Him. But nothing is worthy of God except nondelimitation.... (S)o He delimits, but He does not become delimited. Nevertheless, God pardons everyone.[26]*

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[25] Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, 1:42, citing *Tafsīr*, 4:50.
[26] Cited in Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 153.

Perhaps with Ibn ʿArabī's point in mind, Ṣadrā juxtaposes God's true servants with those who are servants of their own opinions and caprices, implying that the latter are unable to love and seek God by virtue of their self-imposed limitations in knowing His true nature. But, by virtue of God's mercy and compassion, those who do not worship Him as He truly should be worshipped are, nevertheless, upon a path of guidance facilitated by God:

> *The Real, out of the perfection of His compassion and mercy towards His servants, the all-encompassing nature of His benevolence, the unfolding of the light of His being towards the contingent things, and the self-disclosure of the (manifest) face of His Essence to the existent things, made for each of them a likeness which they could imitate, a refuge towards which they could strive, a path which they could traverse, a direction towards which they could aspire, a prayer-direction (qibla) with which they would be satisfied,[27] and a law in accordance with which they could act. He says, "For everyone there is a direction to turn, so vie for the good. Wherever you are, God will bring you all together" (Q 2:148); "For each of you We have made a law and a way" (Q 5:48); "Each party rejoicing in what is with them" (Q 30:32).[28]*

This passage provides us with an added nuance to Ṣadrā's stance on how people see their created idols as "divine." From one perspective, it is because of their caprice that people fashion an idol of God. But from another perspective, it is because God allows Himself to be delimited so that they can serve Him in a form suitable to their natures.

Ṣadrā also acknowledges the possibility of there being a group of individuals who do not confine God to their own intellectual and imaginary constructs, and who thus follow God as He should be followed.[29] The religious

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[27] This is an allusion to Q 2:144.

[28] Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, 1:30.

[29] His position in this regard is similar to Ibn ʿArabī's. See Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*,

positions taken by most people are always in accordance with their caprices, or what they love. But the position of the people of God is in accordance with their object of love, namely God.[30] Since God is their only object of love, they can be completely sincere towards Him in their "religion."[31] From this perspective, their religion *is* God, and they are effectively "the servants of the All-Merciful" mentioned in Q 25:63.[32] To illustrate his point, Ṣadrā interjects the following couplet:

> *Those who love out of caprice take diverse positions.*
> *As for me, I have a single position, and dwell in it alone.*[33]

To the extent that he considers himself one of the "people of God" or "servants of the All-Merciful," Ṣadrā is able to lay claim to a special position when it comes to conceptualizing and worshipping the divinity. Unlike people who delimit God according to their own needs, Ṣadrā's position allows him to worship God in all of His multiplicity, thereby always showing proper etiquette to God because of his perpetual affirmation of Him in all of His self-disclosures. This quality, Ṣadrā reminds us, only belongs to what the Sufi traditions call the perfect human (*al-insān al-kāmil*). Since the perfect human does not deny God in any of His self-disclosures, he is able to witness Him in everything, and recognize Him in every form:

1:151-155.

[30] Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, 1:30.

[31] An allusion to Q 3:39, which Ṣadrā cites at *Tafsīr*, 1:30.

[32] Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, 1:30.

[33] Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, 1:30. Ṣadrā also cites these verses—which date back to at least the 13th century, albeit in different form—in the introduction to his famous Persian treatise on the spiritual life. See Ṣadrā, *Sih aṣl*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Tehran: Tehran University Press, 1961), **5. A translation of this work is forthcoming:** *The Three Principles of Mulla Sadra: Divine Gnosis, Self-Realisation and the Dangers of Pseudo-Knowledge in Islam*, trans. Colin Turner (London: Routledge).

As for the perfect human, he knows the Real in every object of witnessing and religious rite. He worships Him in every homestead and locus of manifestation, so he is the servant of God who worships Him in all of His names and attributes. On account of this, the most perfect of human individuals—Muhammad, God bless him and his family—was given this name. Just as the divine name (Allah) brings together all the names ... so too does its path bring together the paths of all the names, even if each of these paths are specified by a name which sustains its locus, and each locus is worshipped and its straight path particular to it is traversed from that perspective.[34]

The path of the perfect human is the path of the name Allah, which naturally entails that those traversing it not delimit God in any fashion. The path of the name Allah brings together all the other names. Since each divine name is a delimitation of the Essence, it manifests a delimited and, therefore, particularized form of God's true nature. Particularized forms of God result in idols and particular forms of worship. Since the name Allah contains all the other names, its path contains all the other particularized paths to God. The one on the path of the name Allah has thus transcended both physical and what Henry Corbin (d. 1978) would call "metaphysical

idolatry" (idolâtrie métaphysique).[35] By virtue of having smashed "the idols of the age of ignorance,"[36] such an

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[34] Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, 1:41-42.

[35] Corbin *Le paradoxe du monothéisme* (Paris: L'Herne, 1981), 7-17. See also Corbin, *En islam iranien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971-1972), 1:289, where he uses this phrase to render the theological term *tashbīh*.

[36] I take this phrase from a title of one of Ṣadrā's treatises in which he criticizes false Sufis. See Ṣadrā, *Kasr aṣnām al-jāhiliyya*, ed. Muḥam-

individual is able to behold that formless form which contains all forms. Since the complete human can only perceive the formless with the heart, that is, his instrument of spiritual "cognition," the heart itself must be formless. Only by being nothing can one contain everything. The pure heart, which is no-thing because its function is merely to act as a perfect mirror in which God sees His own formless form, is thus not possessed of any forms and is itself formless.[37]

Free of human limitations and having transcended divinizing only particular self-disclosures of God to the exclusion of His other self-disclosures, the perfect human is able to perceive God in any of the forms in which He discloses Himself. When he looks at the world, which is created upon the form of God's beauty, he cannot help but see Him. The perfect human thus gazes upon God within the multiple refractions of forms in the mirror of the cosmos, beholding His beauty in all things, in every object of worship, and through every form of belief. He is thus in love with the cosmos, since it is nothing other than his Beloved:

> *It has been reported that God is beautiful and He loves beauty. He is the artisan of the cosmos and brings it into existence in His form, as He says, (Say:) "everyone acts according to their form" (Q 17:84)…. So the entire cosmos is of the utmost beauty because it is a mirror for the Real. This is why the knowers become enraptured by it and the verifiers realize love for it. For He is the object of gaze in every eye, the beloved in every form of love, the object of worship in every act of worship, and the Final Goal in both*

mad Taqī Dānishpazhū (Tehran: University of Tehran Press, 1962). A translation of this book is available: *Breaking the Idols of Ignorance: Admonition of the Soi-Disant Sufi*, trans. Mahdi Dasht Bozorgi and Fazel Asadi Amjad (London: ICAS Press, 2008).

[37] For this phenomenon in Sufism, see Rustom, "Rumi's Metaphysics of the Heart," *Mawlana Rumi Review* 1 (2010): 69-79.

*the unseen and the seen. The entire cosmos prays to
Him, praises Him, and glorifies Him.*[38]

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A Select Glossary of Key Terms in
Mullā Ṣadrā's *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*

ʿālam al-ghayb
World of the Unseen; World of the Mystery.[39]

ʿālam al-shahāda
World of the Visible.[40]

fiṭra aṣliyya
primordial disposition.[41]

ghayb al-ghuyūb
Unseen of the unseens, i.e., God's Essence of Exclusive Oneness.[42]

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[38] Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, 1:153-154. This passage is a reworking of Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1968), 3:449 (Cited in Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 28). For a complete translation of the passage, a part of which I have followed here, see Ibn ʿArabī, "Towards God's Signs," trans. William Chittick in Ibn ʿArabī, *The Meccan Revelations*, ed. Michel Chodkiewicz (New York: Pir Press, 2002-2004), 1:182.
[39] *Tafsīr*, 1:28.
[40] *Tafsīr*, 1:28.
[41] *Tafsīr*, 1:3, 19, 118.
[42] *Tafsīr*, 1:39. Cf. Ṣadrā, *The Elixir of the Gnostics*, ed. and trans. William Chittick (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2003), 103-104, n. 35.

ḥudūth
temporal origination.[43]

ḥukm
ruling property, i.e., of each divine name.[44]

ʿibāra
expression.[45]

ibdāʿ
spontaneous origination.[46]

idrāk
perception.[47]

ishāra
allusion.[48]

ikhtiṣāṣ
specification, i.e., each thing's specificity with respect to *wujūd*.[49]

al-ʿināya al-ilāhiyya
divine solicitude.[50]

inbisāṭ
unfolding, self-unfolding (of being).[51]

iʿtibārāt

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[43] *Tafsīr*, 1:84.
[44] *Tafsīr*, 1:150. Cf. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 39-41.
[45] *Tafsīr*, 1:28.
[46] *Tafsīr*, 1:84.
[47] *Tafsīr*, 1:89.
[48] *Tafsīr*, 1:28.
[49] *Tafsīr*, 1:20, 76, 84-87, 89, 100, 103, 129, 131, 145, 148 (*takhṣīṣ*), 155.
[50] *Tafsīr*, 1:120-121, 131.
[51] *Tafsīr*, 1:30.

standpoints, expressions.[52]

istiʿdād
preparedness.[53]

jabarūt
Invincibility, i.e., the world beyond the Sovereignty and equivalent to the world of the First Intellect.[54]

jabbār
Compeller.[55]

jamʿ
All-Gathering.[56]

jamʿiyya
All-Gatheredness.[57]

jāmiʿiyya
Gatheredness.[58]

kalimāt tammāt
Perfect Words.[59]

khazānat al-ghayb
treasury of the unseen.[60]

malakūt

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[52] *Tafsīr*, 1:34.
[53] *Tafsīr*, 1:19, 86, 117.
[54] *Tafsīr*, 1:17.
[55] *Tafsīr*, 1:71.
[56] *Tafsīr*, 1:164.
[57] *Tafsīr*, 1:163-164.
[58] *Tafsīr*, 1:164.
[59] *Tafsīr*, 1:9ff.
[60] *Tafsīr*, 1:119.

Sovereignty, i.e., the spiritual realm; it is below the Invincibility and is equivalent to the world of universal imagination/images, that is, the Platonic Forms.[61]

martaba ulūhiyya jāmiʿa
All-Gathering Level Divine, i.e., the level of the name Allah; it is an isthmus (*barzakh*) between the Presence of Exclusive Oneness and the loci of the Command.[62]

mawāṭin
homesteads, i.e., loci of manifestation (synonymous with *maẓāhir* or "loci of manifestation"); the next world (*mawṭin*).[63]

muʿayyana
entified, determined.[64]

nashʾa
configuration, constitution,[65] (of the next life).[66]

nuskha
transcription.[67]

al-qalam al-aʿlā
Supreme Pen.[68]

shumūl
pervasiveness, pervading, encompassing.[69]

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[61] *Tafsīr*, 1:17, 30, 69, 84. Cf. *The Elixir of the Gnostics*, 96, n. 18.
[62] *Tafsīr*, 1:34.
[63] *Tafsīr*, 1:41 (homesteads); 85, 113 (next world).
[64] *Tafsīr*, 1:86.
[65] *Tafsīr*, 1:84, 113. Cf. *The Elixir of the Gnostics*, 98, n. 31.
[66] *Tafsīr*, 1:113.
[67] *Tafsīr*, 1:163.
[68] *Tafsīr*, 1:102.
[69] *Tafsīr*, 1:30.

shuʾūn

tasks, i.e., the divine properties and traces found throughout creation insofar as the things in the cosmos are the "names of the names" (*asmāʾ al-asmāʾ*); but when the tasks are at the level of the divine names (which are relationships (*nisab*) between the manifest "face" of God and the loci of manifestation), they are the "divine tasks" (*al-shuʾūn al-ilāhiyya*) and "unseen levels" (*al-marātib al-ghaybiyya*), thus corresponding to the "keys to the unseen" (*mafātīḥ al-ghayb*).[70]

al-ṭabīʿa al-ūlā

primordial nature.[71]

al-ṭabīʿa al-ukhrā

other nature, i.e., the second constitution.[72]

tadarruj

gradation.[73]

taḥawwul

transmutation.[74]

takwīn

engendering; synonymous with *ḥudūth* and *tadarruj*.[75]

takawwun

self-engendering.[76]

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[70] *Tafsīr*, 1:34. Cf. *The Elixir of the Gnostics*, 104 n. 37; Sachiko Murata, *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light: Wang Tai-yü's Great Learning of the Pure and Real and Liu Chih's Displaying the Concealment of the Real Realm* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 120 and index s.v. "task."

[71] *Tafsīr*, 1:121-122.

[72] *Tafsīr*, 1:121-122.

[73] *Tafsīr*, 1:84.

[74] *Tafsīr*, 1:154. Cf. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 100-101.

[75] *Tafsīr*, 1:84.

[76] *Tafsīr*, 1:113.

tashakhkhuṣ
individuation.[77]

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[77] *Tafsīr*, 1:28.