

The Truth of Certainty

Moses said to his household: Verily beyond all doubt I have seen a fire. I will bring you tidings of it or I will bring you a flaming brand that ye may warm yourselves. Then when he reached it he was called: Blessed is He who is in the fire and He who is about it, and Glory be to God the Lord of the worlds. (Q. XXVII: 7–8)

In every esoteric doctrine there are references to three degrees of faith, and in Islamic Mysticism, that is, in Sufism, these three degrees are known as the Lore of Certainty (*'ilmu 'l-yaqīn*), the Eye of Certainty (*'aynu 'l-yaqīn*) and the Truth of Certainty (*ḥaqqu 'l-yaqīn*). The difference between them is illustrated by taking the element fire to represent the Divine Truth. The lowest degree, that of the Lore of Certainty belongs to one whose knowledge of fire comes merely from hearing it described, like those who received from Moses no more than “tidings” of the Burning Bush. The second degree, that of the Eye of Certainty, belongs to one whose knowledge of fire comes from seeing the light of its flames, like Moses before he reached the Bush. The highest degree, that of the Truth of Certainty, belongs to one whose knowledge of fire comes from being consumed by it and thus becoming one with it, for this degree belongs only to the One. The realization of this Oneness is here implied for Moses in that he is summoned into the Divine Presence with which the Bush is surrounded. Entry into that presence is the equivalent of entering into the fire. *Blessed is He who is in the fire and He who is about it.*

In another chapter of the Qur'ān, also with reference to the Burning Bush, this supreme experience is confirmed by an additional symbolism:

And when he reached it, he was called: O Moses! Verily I am thy Lord. So take off thy sandals. Verily thou art in the holy valley of Tuwa. (Q. XX: 11–12)¹

When Moses reached the Burning Bush his extinction in the Truth of Certainty is represented by his taking off his sandals, that is, by removing the very basis of his apparent existence apart from the Creator in the two created worlds, Heaven and earth. Nor could he do otherwise, for the name of the valley means, according to the commentary, “rolling up”, as in the verse which describes the Last Day as:

The day when we shall roll up the heavens as at the rolling up of a written scroll . (Q. XXI: 10)

1. Since the Qur'ān is direct revelation, there can be no common measure between a translation and the original. A translation may serve to convey some of the meaning, but is of no value whatsoever for ritual purposes. The original, which has been preserved exactly as it was transmitted to the Prophet by the Archangel Gabriel, holds in Islam the central place that is held in Christianity, not by the New Testament, but by Christ himself, who is likewise “the Word of God” (Q. III: 31, 45; IV: 171).

To have been divested of all “otherness” is to have attained the degree of Universal Man (*al-insānu 'l-kāmil*), who is also called the Sufi. But strictly speaking, It cannot be considered as a degree at all, for It is no less than the Eternal and Infinite Oneness of God, the Certainty of Whose Truth effaces all except Itself. Therefore it is sometimes said that “the Sufi is not created”,² since the Truth Itself is not created, and It has effaced in the Sūfi all that was created, leaving only Itself. This Identity of Universal Man with the Divine Truth is affirmed in a holy utterance (*ḥadīth qudsī*)³ of the Truth Itself speaking through the mouth of the Prophet:

“My slave ceaseth not to draw nigh unto Me through devotions of free-will until I love him; and when I love him, I am the Hearing Wherewith he heareth and the Sight Wherewith he seeth and the Hand Wherewith he fighteth and the Foot Whereon he walketh.”

The same is also expressed in another utterance attributed by Sufis to the Prophet:

“I am Aḥmad without the letter *mīm*. I am an Arab without the letter ‘*ayn*. Who hath seen Me, the same hath seen the Truth.”⁴

The letter *mīm* is the letter of death, that is, of ending, and the letter ‘*ayn* is the letter of the source of creation, that is, of beginning, and in the Truth of Certainty all that has to do with beginning and ending has been reabsorbed, leaving only That Which has neither beginning nor end, namely *aḥad*, One, and *rabbī*, my Lord. These words refer especially to that aspect of the Truth which is named Eternity after extinction (*al-baqā ba‘d al-fanā*), for all that is subject to change has been extinguished, and That which remains, the Eternal (*al-bāqī*), is beyond all change whatsoever. This Remainder is the Real Self, and the self which has a beginning and an end, and which corresponds to Aḥmad the Arab, is only an appearance. That the Real Self is none other than God is also affirmed in yet another utterance of the Prophet:

“Who knoweth himself, the same knoweth his Lord”

The Self is All that is left to Universal Man in whom the veils of the self which hid It have been utterly consumed by the Truth. Thus it is said in the Chapter of the Cow:

We make no distinction between any of His Apostles.

(Q. II: 285)

for in the Truth of Certainty each of them is nothing but the Self, and the Self is always One and the Same; and it was because of the Self above all that the Angels were told to prostrate themselves before Universal Man in the form of Adam.⁵ The Self, Which is the Truth of

2 . *al-ṣūfī lam yukhlaq.*

3 . A distinction must be made between the *ḥadīth qudsī* in which the Divinity speaks directly, in the first person, and the *ḥadīth sharīf* (noble utterance), in which the Prophet himself speaks in the first person as a human individual.

4 . *ana aḥmadun bilā mīm; ana ‘arabiyyun bilā ‘ayn; man ra’ānī faqad ra’ā ‘l-ḥaqq. Aḥmad*, like *Muḥammad* (the Glorified) of which it is the superlative form, is one of the names of the Prophet. Another name is *Ṭā Hā*.

5 . In Islam it is lack of spiritual courtesy (*adab*) to speak of a Prophet by his bare name. The original version reads “our liege-lord Adam (our liege-lord Jesus, etc.)—Peace be on him!” But we have reluctantly decided to conform in this to European custom, so as to avoid unnecessary strangeness.

Certainty, is One; but It is not one with the oneness of a single thing among many, but with Oneness Which Eternally annihilates all duality, and nothing can be added to It so as to make more than One, for It is already Infinite. This Infinite Unity (*al-ahadiyyah*) is sometimes called He (*huwa*) or the Essence (*al-dhāt*). The Garden of the Essence is therefore the Highest of all the Paradises, or rather, in the Truth of Certainty, It is the One Paradise, the Paradise of Him, and nothing may enter It since Everything is already there. Thus if it be said that one has entered the Garden of the Essence, the meaning is that his self has been reduced to nothing and that he has thus been changed from one into nought, since only nought may enter It. This knowledge of the nothingness of oneself is what is called poverty (*al-faqr*) and it is implied in the utterance of Jesus: "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven." In respect of poverty one may see a further meaning in the words: "We make no distinction between any of His Apostles," considering this time not so much the Self as the selves of the Apostles; for though it is said in the Chapter of the Night Journey:

And We have favoured some of the Prophets above others, and unto David we gave the Psalms . (Q. XVII: 55)

these distinctions of favor only refer to what is below the Paradise of the Essence, whereas in the Essence Itself they are all equal in realizing the truth:

God is the Rich and ye are the poor . (Q. XLVI:38)

It is in this equality that the Prophets are rated at their highest worth; for they are incomparably greater and richer by reason of their poverty than by reason of all their earthly and heavenly plenitudes, since this nothingness and poverty is the key by which alone one may have access to the Infinite Riches of the Truth; and yet since the being is utterly extinguished in the Truth he cannot be said to have gained possession of Its Riches, for in Reality He has never ceased to possess Them.

Before extinction, the being is veiled by the Qualities⁶ from the Essence, that is, by multiplicity from Unity, and at extinction he is veiled by the Essence from the Qualities, whereas in Eternity after extinction He is veiled neither by the Qualities from the Essence, nor by the Essence from the Qualities, yet the Qualities are not other than the Essence. This Greatest of all Mysteries, the Mystery of the Infinitely Rich Who is One, is expressed in the Supreme Name *Allāh* (God, the Divinity), which signifies the Essence together with all the Qualities in Indivisible Unity. In view of this Mystery it is said:

Say: He, God, is One, God, the Eternally Sufficient unto Himself . (Q. CXII: 1-2)

lest in the weakness of human conception the Infinite Riches contained in God should as it were overflow into duality, the Supreme Name is safeguarded between two affirmations of His Unity, "He" signifying the Pure Essence in Itself without any differentiation as regards the Qualities. Then, to wipe away the stain of any idea of limitation or insufficiency that the human intelligence might conceive, the Name of Divinity is uttered again, and with it the Name of Absolute Plenitude, the Eternally Sufficient unto Himself (*al-ṣamad*).

6. Such as, for example, His Mercy, Majesty, Beauty, Strength.

The Truth is One, yet Its Unity implies, for the believer, no fear of any loss, since the Truth is also the Infinitely Good (*al-rahmān*⁷) and the All-Bountiful (*al-karīm*). That which is taken away by extinction is restored in Eternity according to the Infinite measure of Its Real Self. The different beings are extinguished in the Truth as different colours that are reabsorbed into the principal whiteness of light. Yet as it were on the other side of the Whiteness are the True Colors, Each incomparably more distinct in the Eternal Splendor of Its Reality, as revealed in the Light of the Whiteness, than ever it was in its illusory self; and yet at the same time there is no duality, no otherness.

That Which is named the Garden of the Essence inasmuch as It is the Paradise of Him, is named Firdaws inasmuch as It is the Paradise of God. The Prophet said:

“If ye ask a boon of God, ask of Him Firdaws for it is the midmost Paradise and the highest Paradise, and from it flow forth the rivers of Paradise.”

Here the Beloved⁸ have attained to eternity after the extinction, which is the Divine Station (*al-maqāmu ’l-ilāhī*), the Station of Immutability; but lest their plurality should seem to imply a plurality in God, they are, when spoken of, as it were separated from the divinity being named “those who are brought nigh” (*al-muqarrabūn*). It is they who drink at Kawthar (Abundance), the Supreme River whence flow all others and of which the Prophet said:

“There are on its banks as many cups of silver as there are stars in the firmament. Whoso drinketh thereof shall never thirst.”

In Firdaws the nigh drink also from a Fountain which, like Kawthar, is perfumed with musk and which is named Tasnīm (Exaltation). Yet the name Tasnīm, in its expression of highraisedness, is an understatement pregnant with significance, as is the name of the River in its expression of abundance, for Kawthar is no less than the flow of the Infinite Beatitude of the All-Holy (*al-quddūs*). Nor is it otherwise with the name of those who drink thereat in its expression of nearness, which must be measured in the light of the definition of the Nearness of God:

We are nearer to him (man) than his jugular vein. (Q. L: 16)

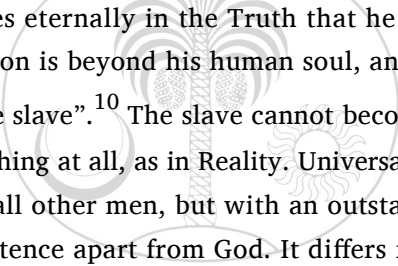
To speak of the Gardens and Fountains of Paradise, as also of Its Rivers, Fruits and Consorts, is to speak the truth, whereas to speak of such blessings in this world is only a manner of speaking, for the Realities are in Firdaws, and what we see in this world are only the remote shadows of Reality.

The Divinity, Immutable and Indivisible, is the Truth besides Which all other truths cease to exist. One such relative truth is that of the religious Law, and it is said that this truth may be expressed in the words “I and Thou”, whereas the Truth of the Path, that is, the direct way of return towards God, may be expressed: “I am Thou and Thou art I”. But the Truth Itself is: “There is neither I nor Thou but only He”.⁹

7 . This name denotes the Essential Source of Mercy, whereas its manifestation depends on the All-Merciful (*al-rahīm*).

8. They to whom may be applied the utterance: “...and when I love him, I am the Hearing Wherewith he heareth...”

9 . *al-sharī’atu: anā wa anta; al-ṭarīqatu: anā anta wa anta anā; al-ḥaqīqatu: lā anā wa lā anta, huwa.*

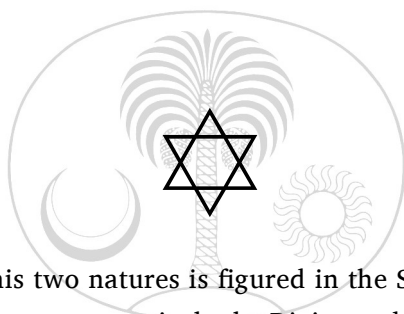


Universal man realizes eternally in the Truth that he is nothing and yet that He is Everything. But such realization is beyond his human soul, and this is what is meant by the saying: “The slave remains the slave”.¹⁰ The slave cannot become God, since he is either the slave, as in appearance, or nothing at all, as in Reality. Universal man cannot make his human soul divine; like the souls of all other men, but with an outstanding difference of quality, it implies the illusion of an existence apart from God. It differs from them not in kind, but in what might almost be called an organic consciousness that this separate existence is in Truth no more than an illusion. There is a saying that “Muhammad is a man, yet not as other men, but like a jewel among stones.” Albeit the soul remains the soul, just as night remains night, or else it vanishes and there is day. But though the soul of Universal Man cannot itself attain to the direct knowledge of the Truth of Certainty, yet unlike other souls it is touched in its centre by a ray of light proceeding from the sun of the Spirit of the Truth; for this perfect soul, represented in Islam by the soul of the Prophet, is none other than the Night of Power (*laylatu 'l-qadr*),¹¹ into which *descend the Angels and the Spirit*; and the Heart, that is, the point of this spiritual ray's contact, is as a full moon in the unclouded night of the perfect soul making it *better than a thousand months* of other nights, that is, peerless among all other souls. This Moon, from which the soul looks towards the Sun of the Spirit, is the Eye of Certainty; and its presence makes the soul at peace *until the break of dawn*, until the night vanishes, until the soul together with its peace is extinguished in the Light of Reality, leaving only the Absolute Peace of Unity.

Although the existence of any perfection or indeed of anything at all apart from God is an illusion, the illusory perfections of the created Universe may none the less serve as guides and incentives to one who has not yet attained to the Truth, inasmuch as they are images of His Perfection. Of these images the highest and fullest which can be readily conceived by one who has not passed beyond the limits of this world is the human perfection itself. Moreover this perfection, unlike other earthly perfections, is a state through which the traveller (*al-sālik*) must himself pass on his way to the Truth. Therefore the religions have greatly extolled the state of human perfection, setting it up as a lamp to mark the end of the first stage of the journey, just as one might tell a man who had long lived in darkness to look at the full moon, knowing that the light of the sun would serve at first rather to blind than to guide him; and so Universal Man, whose state is the End of the journey, is represented as having two perfect natures, the perfect human nature (*al-nāsūt*) being merely a reflection or image of the Divine Nature (*al-lāhūt*), besides Which in Reality it is nothing, though to the traveller it seems nearer and more accessible. In accordance with what has already been said, the two natures might be called the perfect self and the Perfect Self, the former corresponding to Aḥmad the Arab, and the Latter being the One Lord. The perfect human nature stands as it were between the traveller and the Divine Nature, in the sense that he must acquire the one before he may rise from it to the Other; and here lies one of the interpretations of the saying that no one may meet God if he has not first met the Prophet.

10 . *al-'abdu yabqā 'l-'abd.*

11. See Qur'ān, XC VII.



Universal man with his two natures is figured in the Seal of Solomon, of which the upper and lower triangles represent respectively the Divine and the human nature. In virtue of this duality he is the mediator between Heaven and earth, and it is owing to this function that he is sometimes referred to as “the isthmus”¹² (*al-barzakh*) as in the Chapter of the Distinct Revelation:

And He it is Who hath let loose the two seas, one sweet and fresh, the other salt and bitter, and hath set between them an isthmus, an impassable barrier. (Q. XXV: 53)

In His Heart alone does the sweet sea of the next world meet the salt sea of this; and by reason of this meeting his human nature itself is the noblest and best of all earthly things as is affirmed in the Chapter of the Fig:

Verily We created man in the fairest similitude. (Q. XCV: 4)

The nearness of Heaven, by reason of his presence, even causes sometimes the laws of earth to cease perceptibly, just as the moon grows pale at the approach of day; and it is at such moments that a miracle may take place, such as the changing of water into wine, or the step which leaves a print upon the rock and none upon the sand. As in the Seal of Solomon, his central function as mediator is also figured in the Cross,¹³ which is another symbol of Universal Man in that the horizontal line represents the fullness of his earthly nature, whereas the vertical line represents his heavenly exaltation; and yet another of his symbols is the Crescent, for like a cup it indicates his function of receiving the Divine Grace, and at the same time, like the horns of the bull, it indicates his majesty, his function of administering this Grace throughout the whole Universe.

Blessed be He Who hath made the distinct revelation unto His servant, that he might be for all the worlds a warner. (Q. XXV: 1)



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12 . The isthmus, which has the same symbolic meaning as a bridge, recalls the ancient Roman title of *Pontifex*, “Bridgemaker” (between Heaven and earth).

13 . “If Christians have the sign of the Cross, Muslims have its doctrine.” This saying of the Shaykh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ‘Ulaysh al-Kabīr is quoted by René Guénon, *The Symbolism of the Cross* (London, 1958), chapter iii, note 2.