

The Innate Gnosis of God Regarding Belief in God

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Abstract: *The unity and uniqueness of God, and the fact that there is no resemblance between the creator and his creation, is the foundation of religious divine perception. On the other hand, mankind does not have the capacity to mentally encapsulate the identity and attributes of a being with whom it has no compatibility or resemblance. Therefore it is not possible to describe God in person, and divine names cannot perform the role of attribution.*

On the basis of heart, felt perception of God, the divine names and attributes have an interpretary role in such a way that by recalling the cordial perception, they guide the man towards God; and the words and meanings of these names do not have any place : In this way, theoretical, cordial and interpretary divinities are considered complementary to the negative divinities.

Key words: *Description, Interpretation, Confirmatory divinities, Negative divinities, Theoretical divinities*

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Preface

In the two previous articles, a cordial (heart – felt) perception of God and its most important and special characteristics were discussed and it was stated that such perception is the foundation of the religion's insight of divinity.

The most vital question that the readers of those articles will face is: What is the connection between the discussions of names and attributes, with the cordial perception of divinity? In other words, on the base of cordial perception, what will be the status of divine names and attributes, and what will be the mode of using divine attributes?

The Innate Gnosis of God With Respect To The Names And Attributes Of God

Before entering the main discussion, it should be reminded that in the divine writings, mental description of God has been forbidden. Moreover, description of the divine Essence and conception of the divine attributes, too, has been negated and any kind of mental visage of God has been forbidden.¹

"Allah is greater than what can be described (about Him)".²

"The human-beings are incapable of describing Allah".³

"Allah is sublime and free from (all) descriptions".⁴

¹Regarding the traditions which shall soon follow, one should bear in mind that the word "Saffa" is actually an infinitive and literally it means "to describe" even though in several instances, it is used as an infinitive. Refer to Lisan al-Arab, Al-Mesbah al-Munir and Asas al-Balagha.

²Ma'ni al-Akhbar: page 11, tradition 1&2.

³Tauhid-Saduq; page 115

⁴Tauhid-Saduq; page 79

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"Intellect and its conceptions; reflection and all that passes through one's mind; wisdom and its reasoning cannot perceive the attributes of Allah".¹

"Depiction of Allah is forbidden for the "Ghavvas" (divers) i.e., (those who deeply reflect and deliberate over the notion of God).....it is impossible to fancy Him in the minds.....the intellects, in pursuit of perceiving Him have erred".²

In this connection, numerous traditions have come down in the books of Hadith. For example, we request our respected readers to refer to "Tauhid- Saduq".

In justification of the above matter, attention should be focused on the following two rudiments:

- a)The Creator and the creature bear no resemblance to each other and from the view-point of essence and attribute, they are different and discordant. If the Creator possesses the characteristics of a creature, he, too, would be called a creature and not a Creator:

"Nothing resembles Him." (Qur'an; 42:11)

"Allah is distinct from the creatures; so nothing resembles Him".³

"Allah is distinct from all the non-eternal beings in attributes".⁴

¹ Tauhid-Saduq; page 45

² Uyoon Akhbar al-Riza (A.S.) 1/121

³ Tauhid-Saduq; page 32

⁴ Tauhid-Saduq; page 69

"Verily, Allah is free from all (that particular attributes) of His creatures, and His creatures are devoid (of His special attributes)".¹ "Whatever is found in the creature cannot be found in the Creator. And whatever possibly can be found in the creature cannot be found so in the Creator".²

b) Man's recognition and the scope of his understanding are confined with respect to those beings which have some sort of a resemblance with him. Two beings, completely distinct from each other, cannot have real gnosis and personal recognition of one another except one is the Creator of the other one. In such a case the Creator has knowledge and acquaintance of His Creature or else He cannot be called a Creator. But, a creature perceives his Creator only through the signs of his Creator which he sees in himself and other creatures without having the real gnosis about Him.

We conclude from the above two rudiments that it's impossible for a creature to acquire true gnosis of his Creator by means of conceptual tools. Thus, it's also impossible for the creature to draw a mental depiction of the Creator.

Another reason that can be set forth regarding the impossibility of depiction is that any depiction which does not absolve God from two constrictions: "**ta'til**" (i.e., to negate the attribute of "existent" or any of His positive attributes) and "**tashbih**" (the similarity between God and His creatures in His "existent" or any other positive attributes) will amount to some sort of resemblance between the Creator and creature. This is because man's confirmative conceptions falls within the limits

¹ Tauhid-Saduq; page 105 & 106

² Tauhid-Saduq; page 40; Also refer to pages 36, 37, 41, 42, 58, 73 & 248.

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of a creature. On the other hand, if the Creator is like a creature, he can no longer be called the Creator because the Creator is distinct from the creature in essence and attributes. For this very reason, the verses and traditions come down with respect to God's attributes have negated any kind of resemblance with the creatures even in case of referring to God as a "thing".

It was asked: "Is it proper to refer to Allah as a thing?" Imam replied: "Yes, in the sense that this will absolve Him from two constrictions: **Ta'til and tashbih.**"¹

Notwithstanding the above reasoning, the following two cases are applicable to man:

1. Confession and belief in God's existence as a result of one's attention to other creatures which is a rational and general recognition (as explained in the preceding discussions). In this type of recognition, the intellect does not establish a direct gnostical link with the entity of God. Rather, it acquires, through the creatures (which are the signs of the Creator), a general recognition confined to absolving God from ta'til and tashbih i.e., proving (God) without tashbih. In the final analysis, this type of recognition amounts to absolving (God) from ta'til (negation) and tashbih (anthropomorphism) and this cannot be called depiction. This is because in depiction, the Holy Essence is depicted through rational conceptions and considering that God does not possess an attribute above His essence, any depiction of attribute will amount to depiction of essence. Conversely, in

¹ Kafi 1/85

this type of recognition, merely a confession is made of the existence of a Creator and nothing is set forth about His essence.

2. Introduction (recognition) of God through Himself or innate gnosis. Although, this introduction (recognition) is a personal gnosis yet it is God's creation and not man's work.

Overlooking the above two instances, man is indeed helpless in recognizing his God in the true sense. In this connection, whatsoever is conceived and imagined will fall in the category of depiction while God is free from all such depictions.

In the doctrine of depiction, the Divine Essence is introduced (recognized) through intellectual conceptions and imaginations. Gnosis of God comes later than His depiction. In other words, just as in the school of "rationalism",¹ God's existence, prior to rational reasoning, is considered to be unknown and negative, here too, God, before depiction, is considered to be "**Ghayeb**" (concealed)". Thus, for recognizing Him, one has to resort to intellectual depiction. The more the conceptions and imaginations about God and His attributes, the better the recognition of God and the one who depicts Him more will enjoy a better and higher level of divine mysticism.

¹This school applicable to Aristotle's school has been analyzed at length in author's previous book:

"Fundamentals of Knowing God in Greek philosophy and divine religions." The manner in which this school has been utilized in the Greek philosophical theology has also been explained.

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Question: What roles do the Divine Names and Attributes, based on innate gnosis, play in theology and introduction (recognition) of God?

Utilization of the Names and Attributes based on "innate theology", refers to the Holy Essence of God which has been seen before in the light of innate gnosis and the innate gnosis justifies such utilization. In other words, the Names and Attributes altogether are the means of remembering God and explication of the holy divine essence.

In the doctrine of explication, the Names and Attributes comes later than innate gnosis of God; and the divine holy essence, prior to explication is "**Shahed**" (evident), not "**Ghayeb**" (concealed).

In a famous sermon delivered by Imam Riza (p.b.u.h.) in the presence of Ma'mun after the former's migration to Tus, Imam (p.b.u.h.) explains the basis of monotheistic gnosis. This sermon is very similar to the first sermon in Nahjul Balagha and begins as follows:

"The foremost in religion is His Ma'refat (gnosis), the perfection of His Ma'refat is to believe in His Oneness and the perfection of believing in His Oneness is to avoid describing Him....."¹

Thereafter, he says:

In another tradition, the aforesaid difference concerning depiction and explication has been explained:

"The one, who asserts that he worships the meaning of the names with God's description (mentally), has indeed invited a hidden (unknown) God. They asked: So what is the way of monotheism? He said: The way is open and there lies a

¹ Uyoon Akhbar al-Riza 1/150-151

solution. Verily, a visible and existing entity is recognized first and then his attributes (but), in the case of a hidden one, his attribute is recognized before his essence".¹

"(His) Names and Attributes are something created and the meaning (of these Names and Attributes) is the same as Allah".²

"Whoever has worshipped the meaning (of the word Allah) apart from the name, he, in reality, has worshipped the One God..... "Allah" is the One Reality to which all His names point. And all these names are other than Allah Himself. "O Hisham, bread is the name of something to be eaten. Water is the name of something to be drunk....."³

Thus, the meaning of God's names and attributes which is the same as Allah is different from their customary meaning applicable in the case of creatures:

"The meanings appropriate for the human-beings are not applicable to God."⁴

"God is named as "The Knower" because He is not ignorant of anything. So verily, the name "Knowledge" is common for both the Creator and the creature but the meaning differs in the case of both.....Thus, the name "Hearer" is common for both but the meaning differs. The same is true for the name "Seer". "⁵

"He is "The Hearer" but not like other hearers".⁶

"He is distinct from all creatable beings in attributes".⁷

¹ Tuhaful-Uqool; page 326

² Bihar al-Anwar 1/114; tradition 2

³ Kafi 1/114; tradition 2.

⁴ Tauhid-Saduq; page 79

⁵ Uyoon Akhbar al-Riza 1/147

⁶ Tauhid-Saduq; page 65

⁷ Tauhid-Saduq; page 69

Confirmative, Negative And Innate Theology

On the basis of the above matters, one can divide theology as follows:

1. Confirmative theology (conceptual)
2. Negative theology (transcendence)
3. Innate theology (at heart)

1. Confirmative theology (conceptual)

This type of theology (also called human theology) was analyzed for the first time in Greece and Aristotle succeeded in discovering and compiling its logic.

In this type, the only source and basis of recognition relied upon is the intellect and mental faculties. On the other hand, the intellect is capable of perceiving the mental conceptions and universal ideas only.

In this school, recognition and judgment about anything takes place by means of conceptual tools and the proof and recognition of God too is no exception to this rule. Thus, in order to recognize God and His attributes, we have, first of all to focus our attention on the conceptions and mental ideas; and then set these conceptions as a means for His recognition. In this manner, God and His attributes are put to imagination. In the subsequent stages, these very perceptions and mental ideas are proved and confirmed by means of philosophical reasons.

The motive behind this type is a series of general notions concerning God. The reason we name this mental disposition

as conceptual and positive theology is because in this method, the general conceptions acquired through subjective journey are applied to God and proved with respect to Him.¹

2.Negative theology (transcendence)

In this method, all the conceptions attributed to God in the first method are put away for the reason that God, Exalted be He, is pure and free from every description. The restricted human intellect is unable to perceive His holy status, and the human conceptions lack the power of gaining access to the sanctuary of His Essence and Attributes. Thus, His holy Essence is transcendental and free from such conceptions.

This method was explained,² in a very clear manner, by "Plato" (Platonism) towards the end of the Greek culture. Later, in the middle century, "Dionysius" reviewed and analyzed this method.

All the conceptions and attributes that were attributed to God by the preceding philosophers, particularly, Aristotle were negated by Plato.

Platonism believes that God is Absolutely Sublime. He is One (Unique); He is distinct from every thought and existence; words cannot describe and comprehend Him; intellect cannot know Him. Whatever is said about Him is beyond His essence. Neither **essence**, nor **existence**, nor **life** (as we perceive) can be thought for the One (the Unique). Of course, it does not mean

¹ About the manner of application of this method in theology, refer to the book: "Fundamentals of knowing God in Greek philosophy and divine religions."

²The author of the book "Philosophy of dialectical theology" believes that "Albinus" was the first who explained this matter.

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that He is lower than these things. Rather He is above all things."¹

It should not remain unsaid that some of the Muslim theologians too set forth the matter of theology and recognition of divine attributes in this negative form.

They believe that man possesses only negative gnosis with respect to God and His attributes. Even they interpret God's positive attributes as His negative attributes. This negative theology is among the teachings of religion, in the traditions of the Ahl al-bayt (in the topic concerning Names and Attributes).²

However, it should be noted that this is only a part of the reality. By relying on this aspect only and by neglecting all that has come down in the Book and traditions on innate gnosis of God, one can never attain the truth.

3. Innate theology (at heart)

This matter is one of the special features of divine religion and among the scholastic miracles of the school of revelation and messenger ship. Not even a trace of this wonderful way and this lofty fact can be found in any of the human schools. In this method, God has bestowed His Grace and granted His gnosis along with His attributes to all mankind. Besides, He has set various ways for making the people remember this divine Ma'refat (gnosis). Thus, the human-beings possess a non-conceptual gnosis about God and

¹ Fredrick Kaplestone; History of philosophy 1/645

² For example: Tauhid-Saduq; page 185-223 chapter concerning Divine Names and pages 65, 70, 76, 98, 99.....

His Attributes at heart. Through worship, God is recognized and His gnosis remembered and increased.

One of the basic differences between this theology and the aforesaid confirmative theology is that in the latter, mental faculties and conceptions are considered to be the basis and standard for recognizing God. The more individual's abstract and wresting powers, the better his recognition about God.

However, in the case of the former, inasmuch as the essence of gnosis, its remembrance, and intensification are from God's side, the more an individual gains satisfaction of God. The greater he strives on the path of worship and sincerity, the greater would be his share of gnosis and knowledge about God, His Names and Attributes.

This innate gnosis is a positive and heart-related fact which cannot be grasped through words and expressions. On the other hand, man's intellect has failed to find a way to understand this reality and concept. For this reason, the only way for elucidating the innate gnosis via the rational tongue is negation of the Divine names and attributes. In this manner, the negative theology plays a fundamental role as far as rational explanation of innate gnosis and its difference with the mental conceptions is concerned. It is set forth to strengthen further the innate theology. Thus, glorification and transcendence (of God) finds a special place in the total divine gnosis.

By this, the mystery behind the explanation of negation by the Infallible Imams, with respect to the Divine Names and Attributes becomes obvious.

The traditions supporting this matter are numerous and from the viewpoint of explanation are diverse.¹ A few of these traditions have cast aside the curtain from this lofty meaning under the title "Absolution from two constrictions"².

The constriction of "Negating God's existence and His positive Attributes" and the constriction of similarity between Him and his creatures in His 'existence' or any of His other positive Attributes is a universal concept which should be absolved from God. In fact, if we wish to explain the innate (at heart) gnosis through words and expressions, we cannot come upon any expression as audible as the expression "Absolving God from two constrictions". The real point and the key to the problem of uniting the negative theology and the innate theology lie hidden in the following sensitive point:

From the viewpoint of monotheistic gnosis, the matter of "Absolving God from two constrictions and negative gnosis has been presented only at intellectual level and as a theoretical recognition. This is pursuant to the Prophets great emphases on referring to innate disposition and conscience as an affirmative and real gnosis.

When man refers to the innate disposition, he conscientiously perceives the real God (not an unknown and dubious God and not an imaginable and conceptual God) and calls Him by His good Names...He talks to Him and whispers to Him the secrets and the pains prevailing in his heart...He perceives a God Who is nearer to him than his jagular vein and more familiar to Him than he is to himself...He perceives a

¹ Tauhid-Saduq; page 65-99 and page 185-223

² Kafi 1/82, 84 and 85; Tauhid-Saduq page 81, 101, 102, 104 and 107

God Who is Compassionate and a friend¹; an associate and a companion; Merciful and generous...and not that he imagines these attributes but rather, perceives by heart, that He is his Healer and Beloved One.

When a servant conscientiously perceives his Deity through a true knowledge (even if it is at the lowest level), he does not possess any imagination and affirmation in mind about his Deity. Thus when he discovers his "self" and realizes that there exists no image in his mind about his Lord he turns perplexed and befuddled. He perceives that He is similar to nothing and that He cannot be conceived by any notion, imagination, or analogy. So he goes in the state of prostration; praises (God) and absolves Him from similarity or anthropomorphism (the similarity between Him and His creatures in His existence or any of His other positive attributes).

The human mind allures: If it is not imagination or conception then what is it!?

The innate disposition i.e., Fitrat intercedes and reveals that He exists (although not mentioning in what way) and that He is more apparent than all other apparent things². Then, the innate disposition warns the mind (intellect): If the eye of conception is narrow (blind), you have no right to deny. By following the conscience, the mind too confirms His existence. (Absolving God from ta'til i.e., negating God's existence and His positive attributes.)

¹Dua-Mashlul; Mafati al-Jinan, Abbas Qumi

² Second section of Dua-A'rafa from Imam Husain (a.s.); Mafatih al-Jinan and Eqbal al-A'mal, page 348

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With this explanation, it becomes obvious that those who figure the negative gnosis in the above sense as "**ta'til**" are far from truth. Verily, those who concentrate their mind on the negative aspect only and pay no regard to the lofty innate gnosis belong to this category.

From the view of the Book and the Sunnah "Absolution from two constrictions" and negative gnosis are a way by which the mind (intellect), by declaring its helplessness opens the path for the heart-related (sacred) journey and prepares Fitrat to embrace the divine grace.

Note: In the traditions of the Ahl al-bayt , apart from the negative attributes, the attributes related to the action too have been confirmed and emphasized.

Considering that this matter cannot be fully explained in this article and requires various other discussions too, suffice it to mention a few points only.

The explanation of attributes of action i.e. restituting God's perfect attributes to His actions and that God is the Creator of such perfections is endowed with a special quality. This is due to this very creation (of perfections). Regarding the importance of such depiction, suffice it to set forth the statement of Amir-ul- Mominin Ali (p.b.u.h.) where in his famous sermon he says:

"When the Prophets were questioned about God they did not describe Him in terms of any limit, scope, extent or in terms of constituents. Rather, they described Him in terms of His actions."¹In the famous hadith of Ehlilajah when Imam Sadiq (p.b.u.h.) was asked to describe God's Power, he replied: "Allah is called Powerful because He has created magnificent

¹Kafi 1/141

and powerful things like the earth, the mountains, the seas, etc. Thereafter, he said: The great, magnificent and delicate attributes are of the same type."¹

According to whatever was explained, we can conclude:

From the viewpoint of the Islamic verses and traditions, the divine names and attributes possess three fundamental aspects: expression, negation and action. Each of these three aspects possesses special foundations and effects.

¹ Bihar al-Anwar 3/193-195. Also, refer to Tauhid-Saduq, page 163 & 252; kafi 1/112 & 119.