

The Innate Gnosis of God

Ways of Remembering And Recalling

The Innate Gnosis

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Abstract: *All people have a kind of innate knowledge of God. Upon entering the materialistic world, they forget and neglect this knowledge. The Almighty God reminds them of His innate knowledge in various ways in which the most important of them are Severance, Signs, and worship. God, by making them suffer from problems and difficulties of life, reminds this knowledge to them without people's will; God's creatures are, all, one of the means of reminding of God. Human beings by thinking in God's creations and by their intellect can prove the Creator. But it is also possible that these creations themselves remind mankind of this knowledge. Worship of God is one of the ways of getting to the higher levels of knowing God innately.*

Keywords: *severance, signs, worship*

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Second Stage

On the basis of what was explained in the first stage “introduction” (Safinah, No.1), the human beings possess a clear and lofty gnosis about God, Exalted be He. Moreover, they have received this gnosis from His holy Essence. Once stepping into this world, man tends to neglect the innate gnosis and consigns this to oblivion, therefore God appoints the Prophets to remind him of this very innate gnosis. As such, the argument is finalized and the path of guidance and perfection is kept open before him.

Regarding the Prophet’s duties, Amir al-Mominin Ali (p.b.u.h.)¹ in sermon 1 of Nahjul Balagha says:

“Then Allah sent His Messengers and series of His Prophets towards them (mankind) to get them to fulfill the pledges of His innate disposition and to recall to them His forgotten bounties”.

The renowned historian al-Masudi has narrated in the beginning of his book “Muruj al-Zahab”, a very lofty and meaningful sermon from Imam Ali (p.b.u.h.) .

In this sermon, aside from the Prophet’s virtues, it has come down that the Prophet used to awaken the people about their pledge in the world of preexistence.

Moreover, numerous verses of the Qur’an reckon the Prophets role, the heavenly books and the creative signs to be nothing but “reminders”² and just as mentioned in the lexicons, “reminding” means to recall the rational and forgotten affair.³

¹p.b.u.h. stands for peace be upon him.

²For instance, refer to The Holy Qur’an, 88:21; 20:2-3, and 25:62.

³Ibn-e-Fares, Mu’jam Maqayes al-Lugha, vol.2, p.358; Al-Jowhari, Sihah, vol. 2, p.665; Al-Fayyomi, Al-Misbah al-Munir, p. 209.

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The divine holy Essence reminds man of His gnosis through numerous and diverse ways; the most important amongst them being “severance”, “signs” and “worship”. We shall explain each of these in length in the following.

• Severance

Severance and disconnection from the material attachments take place in various ways. Sometimes, it is achieved without man’s authority and sometimes through man’s authority, endeavors and struggle. Depending upon degree of this achievement, the level of granted gnosis varies from person to person.

Material attachment is the most vital factor in making man neglect the innate gnosis and with its elimination, the obstacles and material curtains are cast aside from the ‘Fitrat’ (innate disposition) and the light of innate gnosis begins to glow. This radiation is the same gifted gnosis which has been explained in the Qur’an as “...we have given them” (آتيناهم).¹

One instance where one experiences severance without authority (and described in numerous places of the Qur’an and traditions) is the state of helplessness and despair which befalls one during moments of severe hardships and calamities. Under such circumstances too, God’s introducer and the real reminder is God Himself. However, whenever the Infallibles (p.b.u.t.)² came across the true seekers of guidance and gnosis, they would remind them about these very situations and manifestation of gnosis (of God) in their hearts. This was so

¹ The Holy Qur’an, 16:53-54

² p.b.u.t. stands for peace be upon them.

that the people would recollect the gnosis which they had received during such moments.

As a proof and evidence, the outcome of such type of reminding is general guidance.

General and Special Guidance

The first degree of “general guidance” is the stage wherein the gnosis of God is granted to all of the common human beings. Pursuant to this, man is unable to deny it by heart.

If man disbelieves and turns his back to the reality acquired by him in this stage, he will stray (away) from the path of perfection. Besides, he might even become deprived from recollecting this very primary gnosis.

But, if man submits himself before the Compassionate God, innate gnosis will glow in his heart to the same extent of his submission and diligence. In such a case, the gnosis of God shall intensify and glow more than before.

This intensification of gnosis, which possesses countless stages, is called “special guidance” as it does not accrue to the common mass. Rather, it is peculiar to the believers.

The believer’s endeavors and diligence for overcoming the worldly attachments, their attention towards God and His worship can be named as “voluntary severance”. The result: Intense remembrance of divine and innate gnosis leading to higher level of special guidance.

Here, the role of ethics and its importance becomes clear. Moreover, the close relation between ethics/real mysticism and the most fundamental matter of belief in the school of revelation becomes obvious. As such, ethics (not as a set of directions, but as a path which acquaints man with the real

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gnosis and the basic guidance), smoothes the way for ascension to the peak of servitude and perfection.

• **Signs**

One of the ways through which Allah, Exalted be He, introduces Himself is through His creatures and the affairs pertaining to them where in the terminology of the Qur'an, they are reminisced as signs, tokens and reminders.¹ From the viewpoint of divine gnosis, the creatures are signs of God's existence and His attributes; since contemplation and deliberation in them leads to the remembrance of innate gnosis of God.

In explanation of this discussion, it is worthy to mention the following points:

1. As mentioned before, in numerous verses of the Qur'an, God declares guidance as His exclusive act. Moreover, in the traditions too, the gnosis of God has been remembered as God's deed where none has any share in it.

By paying attention to this matter, it should be said that God has not only created the creatures, but has rather originated them as signs of His existence and attributes. Thus, the existence of the creatures and their status of being signs are both from God's side and God introduces Himself and His attributes through His creation. As such, in a few verses, God introduces Himself as the One who reveals the signs:

¹ The Holy Qur'an, 2:164, 10:6, 13:3-4, 16:11-13, 16, 17:66, 20:54, 21:32, 26:8, 30:20-26, 46, 31:31, 32:53, 40:13, 81, 25:62, 51:49, 55, 56:73, 10:3, 88:17-21, 87:1-10.

“We will soon show them Our signs in the Universe and in their own souls, until it will become quite clear to them that it is the truth”. (Qur'an; 41:53).

In another place, after describing the wonders of creation, He says:

“And He shows you His signs: which then of Allah's signs will you deny?” (Qur'an;40:81)

“Do you not see that the ships run on in the sea by Allah's favor, that He may show you of His signs? Most surely there are signs in this for every patient endurer, grateful one”. (Qur'an; 31: 31)

Basically, in the divine logic, man does not discover God by means of his own imagination and conception. Rather God manifests Himself either directly or through the ontological signs and man only perceives this manifestation and remembers God. Thereafter, he expresses this very manifestation in words and on occasions, utilizes it in debates and argumentation.

On this basis, the gnosis of God that is acquired via the spiritual journey in the horizons and the “self”, is also the gift of God¹ and not the outcome of man.

Thus, man is helpless in expressing the essence of such gnosis. He only confesses that he has perceived the Wise, the Powerful, the Compassionate and the Merciful God outside the

¹ Gnosis of God is among the clear evidences of this hadith just as the first and preferred guidance is true of gnosis of God. Another noteworthy point in this hadith is that submission is given priority over knowledge and guidance. This matter will be discussed in the third stage.

two constrictions (ta'til and tash'bih) and without any resemblance to creatures (in essence and attributes).

2.Regarding reflection on the creatures, the most important point is that God is remembered through deliberation, meditation and reasoning.

This is the fundamental point of difference between this method and the first method of reminding i.e., “severance”.

To elaborate further, in the first method (severance), the innate gnosis incarnates in man's heart without any deliberation and sometimes, man pays attention to God and His attributes, involuntarily. But, in the second method, remembrance (of God) takes place only after reflection and deliberation in the creatures and their order.

3. Contemplation of the creatures and ontological signs is a means not only for remembering God but also a tool that can be used in debates and arguments against the opponents and obstinate people. Similarly, this method can be employed by those who face difficulties and obstacles on the path of guidance or wish to seek reasoning and rational explanation about God.

In other words, due to differences in capabilities and alertness among individuals, the genetic signs and their rationalization have diverse effects and consequences. If an addressee aspires to guidance and seeks the truth, he can remember the innate gnosis of God through deliberation and meditation on the ontological signs. Contemplation of creatures will lead him to the gnosis of God and will obviate the obstacles lying on this path. If the addressee seeks rational proofs for God's existence, he will, through inferential proof of the creatures and the order prevailing in them, confess His

existence. Besides, if he possesses rational obstacles on the way of guidance, he can overcome it by such rationalization.

However, if the addressee happens to be an obstinate person who pursues some other aims, he can be made to surrender before the truth and silenced through such argumentation. Verily, rationalization through the signs is offered as argumentation in the case of the last three individuals. In the next issue, we will talk about the place of Argumentation and Disputation in the religious theology.

• **Worship**

Here, worship is used in the general sense, which includes obedience to God and acting upon the divine laws; remembrance of God; invocation and imploring forgiveness; meditation and devotion and in general, all the phases connected to obedience to God.

In reply to the question: ‘What is worship?’ Imam Sadiq (p.b.u.h.) said:

“Good (and correct) intention by following God through the ways that leads to obedience of God.”¹

Concerning the importance of worship, it is suffice to say that it has been propounded as the goal of creation:

“And I have not created the Jinn and the men except that they should serve Me”. (Qur’an; 51:56)

The fundamental role of worship will be known only when the meaning of worship and its various dimensions and diverse effects are clarified.

¹ Al-Kulayni , Al-Kafi, vol. 2, p.83

That which will be pointed out in this regard will be the reminding aspect of worship.

After acquiring the general guidance, man is now prepared to acquire, through the afore-mentioned ways, the special guidance and the journey to God, i.e., wider remembrance vis-a-vis the innate gnosis and wider attention to the lofty levels of gifted gnosis which was bestowed to man in the worlds of preexistence.

Now, the question is how and by what means can this remembrance and intensification of innate gnosis take effect? Can it be achieved through greater imagination about God? Or is it possible through various asceticism, seclusion and withdrawal from society?

In this regard, the divine religions have set forth remembrance (of God) through worship and emphasized that worship is the only means for gaining proximity to God and the only channel for gaining access to the lofty divine gnosis and guidance.

In the verses and traditions, worship is remembered under such names as *“remembrance”*¹, *“the right path”*², *“light emitting from heart”*³, *“the lovers delight”*⁴, *“the way of the prophets”*⁵, *“the path of attaining God”*⁶, and *“confession of God’s divinity”*⁷.

¹ Qur’an, 20:14, 62:9, 5:91, 87:14-15.

² Qur’an, 3:51, 43:64, 36:61.

³ Al-Amodi, Ghurur al-Hikam, Hadith No.6103.

⁴ Ibid., Hadith No. 670.

⁵ Al-Saduq, Al-Khesal, p. 621.

⁶ Al-Majlesi, Bihar al-Anwar; vol.84,p.134.

⁷ Al-Saduq, Elal al-Sharay’a; p. 114.

Amongst the consequences of worship, we come across such names as “guidance”¹, “faith and the light of gnosis”², “abundance in religion and remembrance of God”³, “fear of God and feeling of needlessness”⁴, “salvation”⁵, “seeking nearness to God”⁶, and “satisfaction of God”⁷. And the devotees on the path of devotion and remembrance are called by such titles as “the people of God”⁸ and “God’s companions”⁹.

In this manner, worship is the path illuminating the heart and a means for deriving the divine gnosis of God and His remembrance. In general, it is the way of acquiring the special guidance and recognizing God at the highest level.

Similarly, “*Salat*” (prayers) and other divine worships are the only way for gaining proximity to God. Compare this matter with this view: “With the discovery of the self and opposition with the apparent state of religious laws, the divine duty ceases because, there is no duty for the enchanted ones.”¹⁰ The difference between these two reveals the difference

¹ Qur’an, 24:54, Al-Saduq, Al-Khesal; p. 621.

² Al-Saduq, Ibid., p. 621.

³ Al-Saduq, Elal al-Sharaye’a, p. 114.

⁴ Al-Kulayni, Al-Kafi, Vol.2, p.83.

⁵ Qur’an, 87:14-15, 62:10.

⁶ Dua-Kumail

⁷ Al-Saduq, Al-Khesal; p. 621.

⁸ Al-Amodi, Ghurul al-Hikam: Hadith No.1467.

⁹ Ibid, Hadith No. 322.

¹⁰ Al-Qaisari, “*Rasa’el Qaisari: risalah al-Tawhid wa’l nabuwah wa’l wilayah*”, Chapter 2; section 1; p. 24. While summing up the matter of the mystics, Lahiji, a researcher says: “ If the absolute enchanted one is spiritually intoxicated and dying to self then, there remains no divine duty for him. If he belongs to the group of perfect ones (who were referred to as the third kind) then, although his obligation to guide others and the divine commandments and prohibitions does not cease, nevertheless, he need not observe (the rules) for perfection of the self as he has reached the extreme level of perfection.”

between the divine way and the human way of gaining proximity to God.

From the above discussion, the role of religious laws and commandments, as a means of special guidance and intensification of innate gnosis, becomes clear. It also reveals that religion without the divine laws and commandments is imperfect. By pursuing this discussion and explaining its diverse aspects, one can unfold the firm connection between gnostic dimension of religion; and practical dimension of religion and in the final analysis, come to this conclusion that the teachings of the Prophets and divine Imams is a collection, inter-related and inter-connected to each other where, separation between their elements and disbelief in some of them would take one to a deviated path.