

A Comparative Interpretation of the Qur'an: the Case of Sūrat al-Qalam (verses 42-3)

ALI ASHRAF-EMAMI

Department of Comparative religions and Mysticism, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran
imami@um.ac.ir

MAHDI HASANZADEH

Department of Comparative religions and Mysticism, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran
hasanzadeh@um.ac.ir

ABSTRACT: Taking account of some narrative Shi'i commentaries as well as the principles of Islamic mysticism in the study of verses 42-43 of the Qur'anic chapter *Sūrat al-Qalam*, the present article deals with four propounded questions about the quality and conditions of a promised prostration on Doomsday, mentioned in verse 68:42. Applying the traditions mentioned in the statement, 'The day that the shin shall be laid bare and they shall be summoned to prostrate themselves' in the verse, as well as the transmutation ḥadīth (*ḥadīth-i taḥawwul*), we show that the two doctrines of Shi'ism and mysticism agree in associating the expression 'laying the shin bare' (*kashf 'an sāq*) with a divine theophany in the form of the Perfect Man. At the end of this paper, amalgamating the teachings of the two doctrines, we have concluded that the promised prostration on Doomsday is similar in cause and purpose to the angels' prostration before Adam.

KEYWORDS: Imam, Perfect Man, shin, prostration, the Day of Judgment

Introduction

According to Islamic teachings, prostration (*sajdab*) is the most influential

manifestation of submission as well as the best means of proximity to the Creator. In the earliest revealed chapter of the Qur'an, the Prophet Muḥammad is ordered to approach Allah through prostration (96:19), while elsewhere in the Qur'an, prostration is referred to as an act of worship: 'Prostrate to Allāh and worship Him' (53:62). Since the Prophet Muḥammad – regarded as the perfect exemplar for humanity – was ordered to prostrate, his true followers would also maintain the same form of servitude to God. Accordingly, the description of the true servants of God is given in the Qur'an as the ones who 'their mark is on their faces from the trace of prostration' (48:29).

The necessity of performing prostration as one of the main pillars of daily prayer indicates the significance of this act of worship in Islamic practice. In terms of appearance, the placement of the body in a reverentially prone position – so that the head, the most honourable part of the body, can touch the earth, the lowest element in the world – indicates man's absolute self-effacement, submission and abasement to God. Since the origin of all sins is assumed to be man's arrogance as well as his negligence of divine presence, the proclamation of this self-effacement by means of prostration, which connotes man's awareness of divine presence and his abasement, is trusted to result in God's remission¹.

Verses of obligatory prostration in certain Meccan chapters of the Qur'an (41:38; 32:15; 53:62; 96:19) shed more light on the meaning of prostration in Islam. As prominent features of Meccan chapters, descriptions of the scenes of the Hereafter and mention of the great fear man will feel on the Day of Judgement,² that fear of Doomsday plays an important role as the cause of prostration.

This article mainly focuses on one special scene described in Meccan verses 42:43 of the chapter *al-Qalam*, chronologically the second chapter of the Qur'an.³ Earlier in that chapter, polytheists are asked to bring their partners - i.e. the gods they associated in worship alongside God - if they are true in their claim of polytheism. As one understands from the context, this challenging scene is presumed to take place on the Day of Judgement, since that day is regarded as the time when all pseudo-gods worshiped by the pagans will be falsified by the manifestation of the divine sovereignty. In fact, the demand for bringing the pseudo-gods is to be considered as a kind of reduction to absurdity (*reductio ad absurdum*); for, according to the most dominant teaching of Islam, there exist no god but Allāh. Later, in verses 42 and 43, mention is made of a call for

prostration and of the pagans' inability to perform that prostration:

On the Day when the shin shall be laid bare, and they shall be summoned to prostrate themselves, they shall not be able. Their eyes will be humbled, and humiliation shall spread over them for they had already been summoned to prostrate themselves when they were undiminished (but they had refused to do so. (68:42-43)

Four important questions arise from these verses:

1. Is this call for prostration considered to be directed at all individuals -i.e. both pagans and non-pagans?
2. Considering the fact that according to Islamic teachings, prostration or any other act of worship on Doomsday would be of no use in approaching God, what would be the objective of this call for prostration?
3. What is the reason for the pagans' lack of ability to perform this prostration?
4. Before whom would this prostration be performed?

In the following discussion, we aim to provide answers to these questions with regard to mystical narrations and sayings as well as Shi'a interpretations of the verses under study.

Persons accountable for the prostration

There is no explication in the Qur'an regarding the universality of the call for prostration on Doomsday. As the verse apparently mentions the pagans' inability to perform it, they could be the exclusive addressees of the call. Al-Bayḍāwī, in his interpretation of these verses, associates the philosophy of this call with reproaching polytheists for their abandonment of prostration in their earthly life. In fact, the reproach is regarded to be the result of polytheists' postponement of prostration to the Resurrection Day.⁴

The implication of the universality of this call, however, is made through certain Qur'anic verses that suggest some sort of a connection between the universal divine attribute of Graciousness and prostration in general. In one of those verses, God's attribute of Graciousness, which

implies His compassion is bestowed upon all human beings - both believers and non-believers, has the bearing of the dignity which causes all creatures to bow down their heads in worship: 'There is no one in the heavens and earth but that he comes to the Most Gracious as a servant.'(19:93). In another verse a call for prostration, which refers to God as 'the Most Gracious', is aimed at polytheists: 'When it is said to them, "prostrate yourselves before the Most Gracious", they ask "And what is the Most Gracious?"...' (25:60). Moreover, the Qur'an mentions that when verses of the chapter *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* (The Most Gracious) is recited to the believers, 'they fell in prostration and weeping' (19:58). It can be inferred from these verses that there is a concomitance between man's prostration and God's attribute of Graciousness. Another point is that, according to Qur'anic verse 25:26, this attribute of God will be specially manifested on the Day of Judgement, when the true kingdom of God is revealed: 'The true kingdom on that Day shall belong to the Most Gracious...' (25:26).

Taking all these verses into consideration, one can infer that the call for prostration on Doomsday is meant for both pagans and non-pagans, as God's graciousness fully manifested on that Day applies to all human beings. The statement, 'On the Day when the shin shall be laid bare' is a metaphor, probably referring to the all-encompassing fear on the Day of Judgment; this point lies in the use of the term 'to lay the shin bare' in the context of the Arabic language, which connotes the preparation for facing hard situations in general, and wars in particular.⁵ Besides, in the Qur'anic verse 53:58, the root 'lay bare' (*k.sh.f*) is found to give the impression of withdrawal of punishment, damage, suffering, and fear on Doomsday: 'No (soul) but Allah can lay it bare' (53:58). Taking this sense of the root into consideration, Ibn 'Abbās interprets the phrase 'the shin shall be laid bare' (68:42) to refer to the uncovering of the overwhelming event of Resurrection. On the whole, that phrase is said to function as a metaphor representing the severity and devastation of an event on Doomsday.⁶ The fact that that phrase in the verse is followed by the sentence 'and they shall be summoned to prostrate themselves', reveals that the emergence of that event, whether it is the Resurrection itself or not, entails the prostration of human beings.

It can be concluded from the above-mentioned arguments that, although the verse only mentions the polytheists' failure to prostrate, the call for prostration on Doomsday is meant for all human beings. The

same inference of verses 68:42-43 is drawn by a few other Qur'anic commentators; Mujāhid ibn Jabr and Qatādah ibn Di'āma both state: 'the *Mu'azzin* calls [for prostration] on the Day of Judgement. The believers prostrate whilst the hypocrites' backs stiffen. Thus, the hypocrites envy the believers for their prostrations.'⁷ The phrase '*Mu'azzin* calls' implies the generality of the call for prostration, just as Sharīf Lāhijī states in his interpretation of those verses, 'and people are called for prostration to the Almighty God for the evaluation of their faith.'⁸

The Objective of the Prostration

The objective of prostration on Resurrection Day can be explained by understanding the motive behind the necessity of prostration in Islamic worship in general. Some commentators suggest that the act of prostration is established in order to dominate and compensate for sins, as sins are believed to originate from arrogance, the opposite of which is modesty. As a consequence of this viewpoint, one who has faith in God shall fulfil his command of prostration in order to receive dispensation from sins; for committing sins while being faithful to God is regarded as a breach of trust.⁹

The use of the word 'trust' in this sense reminds us of the Qur'anic expressions: repository (*Mustawdi'*) and residence (*Mustaqar*) (6:98); both of these expressions, in Shi'i commentaries, are mentioned with reference to faith in God. Faith, in this sense, is regarded as a trust in being consistently vulnerable to annihilation unless it is safely resided in the heart.¹⁰

This kind of faith is presumed never to fade away. The believers are supposed to be careful in preserving this divine trust, as al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī suggests in regard to the verse, 'Those who believe and have not confounded their belief with harm, security belongs to them; and they are guided.' (6:82). What is meant by harm to the belief in this verse, according to al-Tirmidhī, is the confusion and impurity of faith, brought about by sins. Besides, based on the *ḥadīth*, 'The believer is like a horse in its stable where it returns after wanderings,' a picture is provided by al-Tirmidhī, describing the condition of the believers: the rope of Islam laid on their neck, and the end of the rope held by the Almighty God. In other words, al-Tirmidhī concludes from the above-mentioned *ḥadīth*

that the believers commit sins only by mistake, but will always return to their God. He also mentions that they fulfil this return by feeling as humble as the earth through prostration, as instructed by God.¹¹

Ibn 'Arabī in his allusive interpretation of the verse, '...the righteous among my worshipers, shall inherit the earth,'³(21:105) gives credence to the claim that God's servants have inherited the feature of obedience and submission from the earth, as Heaven and Earth willingly obey God's will (41:11). According to him, those who prostrate to God are divided into two groups: those who prostrate willingly and those who do so with reluctance. A submissive human being prostrates willingly just as the earth does. Ibn 'Arabī specifies a necessary condition for a humble prostration: humility to God merely due to being His servant, but not for the sake of any promised reward. Such humility is not performed obligatorily, but is in fact considered as an emotional state of the humble human being in the earthly life and the Hereafter. Hence, on the Day of Judgement when the obligation of worship is removed, such humility will appear.¹²

Furthermore, Ibn 'Arabī associates the act of bowing down in prostration with the declaration of God's sublimity. Since assigning sublimity to anything other than God would be deviation from principle, man is told to bow down in order to relinquish his illusive sense of self-majesty, descend from his imaginary elevation, and perceive his own essence.¹³

Ibn 'Arabī mentions dependency on God (*iftiqār*) as the essence of humanity. By considering the root of the word *iftiqār* deriving from *fiqār* - i.e. spinal column, he analogizes dependency on God to having a fracture in the back, which makes it impossible for man to hold his head up again. Hence, man is permanently in the state of prostration.¹⁴ This hidden phenomenon, which is expected to be unveiled on Doomsday, when all truths are revealed, is symbolized by the worldly image of natural prostration of shadows before their owners. Shadows prostrate unto their origins, and God being the origin of their origins is regarded as the main recipient of prostrations: 'Do they not see how everything Allāh created casts its shadow right and left, prostrating itself before Allāh in all humility?' (16:48).

According to the verse above, shadows prostrate just unto God who is their real owner, and not unto material objects. Based on the principle of the dependence of the minor on the major, shadows apparently adhere to

objects' motion, but in truth, they submit to the stimulus and the root of objects. Since God is regarded as the primary stimulus of all moving things, and since everything other than God is considered to be movable,¹⁵ every part of every creature is assumed to surrender humbly to Him: '... there is not a moving creature, but He has the grasp of its forelock...' (11:56). Considering that the manifestation of such humbleness is made possible through prostration, it can be inferred that sinners who are assumed to be taken hold of by God's anger, are essentially forced to prostrate, but such a prostration which is performed with reluctance is not expected to result in proximity. Hence, humankind is ordered to seek proximity to God through the wholehearted act of prostration: 'Let him beware! If he desist not, We will seize him by the forelock * A lying, sinful forelock! * ... Nay, indeed; do not obey him! Prostrate and come nearer (to Allāh)!' (96:15-19).

As one example of a forced and false prostration, one can think of the deceitful prostration of hypocrites at the time of their prayers. It is believed that such a prostration does not lead to proximity, either. Hence, according to one *ḥadīth*, when everyone is called for prostration on Doomsday, the hypocrites' backs stiffen and they are not able to prostrate at all.¹⁶

Having said that, how can the obligation of prostration on Doomsday be explained? Is it not the case that the degree of prohibition as well as worship assignments are with respect to the earthly world, not the Hereafter? Some probable answers to these questions are suggested as follows: First, al-Bayḍāwī suggests that 'The Day that the shin shall be laid bare' (68:42) refers to when the moment of death arrives. Perhaps, this interpretation results from his comparison of the word 'shin' (*sāq*) in the verse above with the word 'leg' (*sāq*) in the verse: 'And leg (*sāq*) will be joined with another leg' (75:29). According to al-Bayḍāwī, the word '*sāq*' in the latter verse alludes to the hardship of leaving this world and the intensive fear of the Hereafter.¹⁷ Hence, the lack of ability to prostrate is a consequence of human's fright at the time of death.¹⁸

Another argument al-Bayḍāwī makes about verse 68:42 is that even if 'The Day' refers to Doomsday, the prostration mentioned in the verse may not be intended as an assignment of worship. He states that the admonishment of non-believers will take place on Doomsday; for the time to fulfil the prostration as an assignment of worship will have been passed by then.¹⁹

In his interpretation of the verse, Ḥamzah al-Fanari suggests another argument, namely that the obligation of prostration on Doomsday is upon those who are in Purgatory with their good and bad deeds balanced equally. They have their eyes on both Heaven and Hell at the same time from Purgatory, but there is no determinant weight on their final balance of deeds, which can lead them to any of the two places. This is when they are called for prostration in order to enhance the weight of their good deeds and to end up in Heaven.²⁰ Al-Fanari must have been influenced in this idea by Ibn 'Arabī; for the latter discusses the continuation of shariah (i.e. prostration) in the Hereafter in two stages: Before and after stepping into Heaven or Hell. According to Ibn 'Arabī, shariah will be eliminated only in the second stage. Instead, prior to stepping into the mansion of eternity, this very slight task of shariah is to be performed at God's will.²¹

Al-Kāshānī mentions a subtle point, explaining the reason for this final assignment. According to him, since the Hereafter is the realm of reward and punishment resulting from God's satisfaction or wrath, this final divine assignment is postponed to Doomsday in order that God's attribute of justice (*al-ʿAdl*) will be manifested thoroughly. Therefore, it will be understood that the reward or the punishment originates from man's own obedience or disobedience.²²

The Inability to Prostrate

The verses under study explicate the inability of some individuals who have already been healthy to prostrate. Ibn 'Arabī believes that these verses address individuals such as Abu Jahl, who are not capable of obeying God in this world.²³ But could this incapability be indispensable, as the Ash'arites claim when speaking of the impossibility of Abu Jahl's faith due to God's previous knowledge about his faithlessness? To put it straightforward, do these verses indicate the permissibility of 'duty beyond power' as the author of *Tafsīr Ruḥ al-Bayān* concludes?²⁴ Or could there be any particular interpretation for the word 'inability', which would fit the assumption that the assigned person's ability to carry out the assignment is a requisite for any duty?²⁵ Interpreting these verses 'Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī associates this inability in the Hereafter to the absence of the state of submission to God. People lacking this state of submission will not be able to prostrate on Doomsday.²⁶ Although, in the

context of worldly life, ability means physical health, some people are described as not having the power and health to do their assignments in this world as a result of destroying their own power for the sake of the love of worldly desires and passions.²⁷ Also, regarding the same subject, it has been narrated from the Prophet Muḥammad that those who have prostrated in the world for the mere reason of hypocrisy will be unable to perform the prostration on that Day. They may try their best, but they cannot do it. It is because their backs stiffen like a plank of wood.²⁸

The Qiblah (the direction of the Ka'ba)

Our answer to this question mainly makes use of some anthropomorphic narrations, which do not seem acceptable but through esoteric interpretations (*tawīl*) based on principles of theoretical mysticism. The basis of anthropomorphism in such narrations lies in the word 'shin' (*sāq*) in verse 68:42. As narrated in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, regarding this verse, Prophet Muḥammad said: 'The Almighty God will show his shin on Doomsday, so that all believers, man and woman, will prostrate to Him...'.²⁹

Shi'i narrations, however, give more emphasis to God's transcendence and incomparability to the creation. In one tradition, Imam Ṣādiq in response to Ibn Zararah's question about whether God would raise his robe that Day, said: 'My Almighty God is purified.'³⁰ The Imam's brief reply suggests that the divine presence is free from any likeness or similarity to human beings. In another tradition, when asked about the meaning of the phrase 'the shin shall be laid bare', 'Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā explained: 'A part of the light is unveiled, then all believers do prostrate, but hypocrites are not able to do the same, as their backs are stiffened (like a plank of wood).'³¹ In this interpretation, the act of 'laying bare' is regarded as unveiling a divine truth. Mulla Sadrā describes this scene as such: 'All the veils between God and human beings are removed and nobody remains in a cult, but performing the due prostration.'³² Thus the expression 'lay the shin bare' could esoterically imply a visible manifestation of God's glory to the monotheists who would perform the prostration. In line with this assumption, there exists a famous *ḥadīth* known among Muslim mystics as transmutation *ḥadīth* (*ḥadīth-i taḥawwul*). According to this *ḥadīth*, God will reveal Himself on

Doomsday, and every nation will follow what or whom it used to worship in earthly life. When it is the turn for the true monotheists to meet God, He will reveal Himself to them in familiar earthborn forms. He will say, 'I am your Lord.' The monotheists will reply, 'We seek refuge to God from you,' and they will wait for their God to appear. Then God will ask 'Is there any sign between you and Him, which would let you recognize Him?' They will answer 'Yes, we recognize Him with that sign.' Then God will reveal Himself in the form known to them and will order them to prostrate.³³

In *Tafsīr Ruḥ al-Bayān*, the above-cited *ḥadīth* is narrated by Abu Bardah from his father, Abū Musā al-Ash'arī. It is mentioned in the same text that when Abu Bardah narrated this *ḥadīth* for Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz, the latter adjured him to reveal if the *ḥadīth* had really been narrated by his father. After Abu Bardah swore three times, 'Umar stated that he had never heard any better *ḥadīth* from the monotheists.³⁴ Having extracted this *ḥadīth* from Ḥamzah al-Fanari's *Tafsīr Fatīḥat al-Kitāb*, the author of *Tafsīr Ruḥ al-Bayān* mentions the 'consensuality' of the transmutation *ḥadīth* (*ḥadīth-i taḥawwul*), and explains that this self-transmutation is an effect of the divine attributes, and it is like seeing Allāh's face in our dreams. Having said that, he emphasizes that Allāh is essentially transcendent of having any shape.³⁵

The remarkable point in this *ḥadīth* is the concomitance between the prostration of monotheists and the concrete recognition of God on Doomsday. In other words, according to this *ḥadīth*, true monotheists will not prostrate unless they observe the 'Truth' in its promised form. The mystery, here, lies in the concomitance of observation and knowledge, for, according to mystical teachings, ultimate knowledge is the knowledge of observation (*mushāhadah*).³⁶ This observation occurs only after God's self-revelation. Ibn 'Arabī claims that the perfect one in knowledge and observation is the one who combines the two concepts of assimilation (*tashbīḥ*) and incomparability (*tanzīḥ*).³⁷ In fact, believers of religions around the world usually portray God in earthly forms, and they recognize Him only through those forms. Ibn 'Arabī describes those forms as the believed god of any religion (*ilāh al-mu'taqad*). He applies this same attitude towards meeting God on the Day of Resurrection: Theophanies take place to the followers of any religion in the form of what they thought God would be like. Thus, they can recognize Him and will acknowledge their faith.³⁸ Ibn 'Arabī's textual evidence of this

argument is one *ḥadīth* narrated by 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Mas'ūd from the Prophet Muḥammad:

The Almighty God gathers all human beings in a place [in the Hereafter] and descends in several clouds. Then the herald of Truth will call: Oh people! Have you been satisfied with your Lord who created, formed and fed you all, with whatever you loved [tawalla] and worshipped in the world? Is it not justice from God? "Yes", they will reply. Then the herald of Truth will say, each of you should go to what you worshipped in the world, so that they can be represented to you.³⁹

The central point in this tradition is the connection between worship in the earthly life and the representation of the worshipped one on Doomsday. Another point is that the word loved (*tawallā*) is used alongside with the word 'worship'. Hence, it can be inferred that each person on Doomsday will be linked with his/her protector (*walī*), whom he used to love and worship in earthly life. Examples of different protectors and their followers are given in the rest of the *ḥadīth*: 'Jesus worshippers will observe Jesus, Ezra worshippers will observe Uzayr, and those who worshipped the trees, wood, and stone will observe the same representations'. The only ones who will remain [exclusively] different are the believers in Islam. God will reveal Himself to them and ask: 'Why don't you go just like others?' they will reply: 'We have a God whom we haven't seen yet, to go to him'. God will ask: 'How do you recognize him if you see him?' They will answer: 'Between Him and us there is a clue based on which we may identify Him.' 'What would be that clue?' God will query. They will reply: 'The shin shall be laid bare.' Then, He shall lay His shin bare. Whoever had been a prostrator in the worldly life would maintain prostration there. But, those whose backs are stiff like a plank of wood will fail to prostrate. They would desire to prostrate, but cannot do so.⁴⁰

In alignment with this narration, al-Bayḍāwī states that the sign of the worshipped one of the true monotheists' is 'laying the shin bare'. Considering the word 'shin' (*sāq*) in the expressions 'the shin of the tree' (*sāq al-shajar*) and 'the shin of the human' (*sāq al-insān*) as a metaphor implying human's essence and truth,⁴¹ 'laying the shin bare' could mean unveiling the truth and essence of all matter; a notion equivalent to the

Qur'anic concept of the 'Face of God' (*wajh of Allāh*), as according to Ibn 'Arabī 'the face of a thing is its truth.'⁴² Therefore, mystical interpretations lead to the inference that, on Doomsday, the true monotheists will recognize God by the appearance of His 'Face' (*wajh*). Ibn 'Arabī emphasizes that this statement is the truth on which mystics need to focus their entire attention. He believes that according to the esoteric command of the Qur'anic verse, 'whichever way you turn, there is the face of Allāh' (2:115), mystics shall concentrate on the true *qiblah* in all situations, because human beings do not know when and in what state they would pass away.⁴³

In *Al-Futūḥāt al Makkīyah*, Ibn 'Arabī refers to the presence of 'Face of Allāh' both in the Perfect Man, with regard to form and figure, and in God, Himself, with regard to the essence and truth. Then he mentions man's perplexity at the time of prostration, which results from observing the 'Face of God' both in the Perfect Man and in God. Ibn 'Arabī's answer to this perplexity is simply to choose any of the two alternatives. He suggests that since the 'Face of God' is present both in the essence of Reality (*al-Haqq*) and in the figure of Reality (the Perfect Man), prostration toward any of them will be accepted.⁴⁴ Furthermore, mentioning the divine saying (*al- ḥadīth al-qudsī*), '...But I reside in the heart of My faithful servant', Ibn al-Fāriḍ attributes a saying to 'the Reality of Muḥammad' (*al-ḥaqīqat al-Muḥammadīyyah*) in the following poem:

...No wonder that in conducting the prayer the Imam faced toward me, as in my heart dwelt the one who is the *qiblah* of my *qiblah** All the six directions along with every prayer and pilgrimage set their faces toward me.* In the presence of the unity, we are all one prostrator, bowing down to our own truth at every prostration.⁴⁵

Mawlānā also refers to the emergence of the truth in the heart of the Perfect Man, and introduces such a heart as the theosophist's inner mosque and the *qiblah* of all prayers: 'The mosque inside the heart of the awliyā' (plural of walī), is the place of worship for all. God is there.'⁴⁶

In this viewpoint, when the Perfect Man prostrates and concentrates at the same time on his unity with the truth, other creatures and particularly human beings must prostrate to him for their own existential perfection.⁴⁷ Such a prostration is regarded just as the angels' prostration

toward Adam. Ibn al-Fariḍ refers to this argument in the continuation of his previously mentioned poem:

... And in myself I beheld those who bowed in worship to my
 theatre of manifestation, and I knew for sure that I was the
 Adam to whom I bowed.⁴⁸

This feature bears relation to the Perfect Man's existential perfection as absolute and unlimited. As already seen, the *transmutation ḥadīth* involves two statuses of absoluteness and determination. It can be inferred from the *ḥadīth* that those who believe in God with either anthropomorphic or transcendent attributes, would deny His manifestation through other possible ways.⁴⁹ But, it is assumed that the true monotheists' belief in the sublimity of the full manifestation of God, beyond absoluteness and determination, results in their observing God through the essence of the Perfect Man.

Humility toward the Perfect Man or the Reality of Muḥammad (*ḥaqīqat al-Muḥammadīyyah*) is regarded as equal to humility toward divine presence. This is because according to mystics, the inner state of God, which is compassionate as well as comprehensive, is equivalent to the Perfect Man's exterior, and God's exterior, which is determinate (*muta'ayyin*), is equivalent to the Perfect Man's inner state which is assumed to be transformable at any time or situation.⁵⁰ This may explain the anthropomorphic verses in the Qur'an, which seem paradoxical to the verses of transcendence. Based on this argument, God's presence in all domains is possible through His universal manifestation, i.e. the Perfect Man. This statement is regarded as a clue to why God is mentioned in the Qur'an and *sunnah* through some tangible, as well as anthropomorphic remarks such as the 'Face of God', sunshades of clouds, and the throne.

As the reader may already know, there are many narrations in the Shi'i tradition indicating that God's throne and seat had been created from 'the Light of Muḥammad' (*nūr-al-Muḥammadī*).⁵¹ It is also narrated that before creation, the Light of Muḥammad had been hidden under twelve veils until manifested in the throne and resided on the 'shin of the throne'.⁵² In another narration, 'shin of the throne' is introduced as a transcendent position where the light of *tawḥīd* and the lights of the Five Holy Ones gather.⁵³ A commentator on *al-tajalliyāt al-ilāhiyyah*,

considers 'the shin' in verse 68:42 as a mainstay or pillar of light (*nūr*) which sustains the life of the soul and the existence and from which these two transmit to other ranks of creation. He thinks of this pillar as the perfect and righteous form of human.⁵⁴ After clarifying Ibn 'Arabī's word, al-Jīlī, in his comments on al-Futūḥāt, interprets the verse, 'And leg [sāq] will be joined with another leg.* Upon that day the driving shall be to your lord' (75:29-30), and mentions that the expression 'leg will be joined with another leg' is a metaphor implying the joint as well as the unity of the human and divine essences. Then he states that on Doomsday everything will be directed toward man, just as the beginning and emanation of all things had been from him.⁵⁵

The above-mentioned argument is found to be compatible with the Shi'i assumptions of the concept of the Perfect Man and the spiritual authority of the Imams. The Qur'an explicitly speaks of the return of the affairs and of the human beings to the truth (*al-Ḥaqq*): 'For to Us will be their return. Then it will be for Us to call them to account' (88:25-26). In some Shi'i sources, this return and evaluation is attributed to the Perfect Man and the Imams.⁵⁶ In a Shi'i interpretation of the Qur'anic verse, '[On the Day of Resurrection] the earth will shine with the glory of its Lord' (39:69), we read that 'Lord of the earth is the Imam of the earth.'⁵⁷ Likewise, in the Shi'i narrations we hear that Imams are the gate of Allāh, the Face of Allāh, and the eye of Allāh among his creatures ...⁵⁸

In addition, according to another Shi'i narration, what caused Adam to deserve the prostration of angels was the transmission of the Imams' spirits from the summit of Heaven to Adam's loin. This transmission made Adam the repository of the lights which were derived from four divine names (Maḥmūd, 'Alī, Fāṭir, Muḥsin). Hence, Adam became the manifestation of those divine names and prostrating him as *qiblah* became equal to the worship of God.⁵⁹

In some Shi'i commentaries, Adam is regarded as a repository of heavenly lights including 'the Light of Muḥammad' which is closely connected with the concept of 'the Reality of Muḥammad' (*ḥaqīqat al-Muḥammadiyyah*). As we already mentioned, according to some mystics, 'the Reality of Muḥammad' is a manifestation of the Face of God. Thus, prostration before Adam is regarded as equal to humility to God. This definition of *qiblah* as the direction toward the Face of God is also suggested in the Qur'anic *Sūrat al-Baqara*, before the remark on the determination of *Ka'abah* as the tangible *qiblah*: 'to Allāh belong the East

and the West. Whichever direction you turn, there is the face of Allāh...'(2:115)

Furthermore, in the state of intuiting *bayt al-m'amūr*, *al-Niffarī* (d. 354 AH) gives an account of the reality of *baytullāh* toward which a genuine believer should turn: 'And He told me: "My face is his *qiblah* and My eye is his *bab*."'⁶⁰ According to this statement, the Face of God is the true *qiblah* or *baytullāh* and the mystic should humbly turn his head [and attention] toward the gate. It is considerable that in Shi'i narrations, the gate of Allāh is referred to as the spiritual authority of the Imams (*wilāyat al-kullīyyah*).⁶¹ Besides, in Shi'i narrative interpretations, the expression 'lay the shin bare' is seen to be associated with the Imams' spiritual authority,⁶² including that of Imam 'Alī, as Fayḍ al-Kāshānī has stated:

Their necks will stiffen [on Resurrection Day] like a plank of wood and they will not be able to prostrate anymore. Thus is their punishment; for they did not obey the command of their Lord in the worldly life; that was when He commanded them to prostrate and they were able to do so - He commanded them to acknowledge the *wilāyat* of Imam 'Alī, and (this was when) they were able to do so.⁶³

Conclusion

It is possible to view prostration on Resurrection Day, in a way, similar to the angels' prostration before Adam. We have shown through mystical interpretations and narrations that just as Adam, due to his being a manifestation of the Face of God, deserved the angels' prostration, the Perfect Man on Doomsday would deserve the prostration of all human beings. One should always bear in mind that in any of the two cases the true purpose of the prostration is God.

According to Shi'i commentaries mentioned above, and as a result of the significance of the concept of *wilāyat al-kullīyyah* in Shi'ism, one can infer that Imam 'Alī as the perfect manifestation of such *wilāyat* on earth is one ideal representative of the perfect man before whom the prostration could be performed on Doomsday.

Notes

¹ Muḥammad ibn 'Ali al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Al-Ṣalat wa Maqaṣidihā*, ed. Ḥusni Zaydan (al-Qahirah: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabī, 1965), 23.

² William Montgomery Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University press, 1970), 159; Regis Blachere, *Introduction Au Coran*, (Paris: Librairie G.-P. Maisonneuve, 1953), 23.

³ Abu 'Abdullah al-Zanjani, *Tārīkh al-Qur'an* (Tehran: Maktabat al-Ṣadr, 1378 AH (Solar)), 36.

⁴ 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar al-Bayḍāwī, *Tafsīr al-Bayḍāwī al-musamma 'Anwār al-Tanzīl and Asrār al-Ta'wīl* (Beirut: Mu'assisat al-Iman; Damishq: Dar al-Rashid, 1421 AH), vol. 3, 436.

⁵ 'Aishah 'Abd al-Raḥmān bint al-Shaṭī, *I'jaz al-Bayani lil-Qur'an wa Masa'il-u ibn al-Azraq* (al-Qahirah: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1391 AH), 403-404.

⁶ Ismā'il Ḥaqqī al-Barusawī, *Tafsīr Ruḥ al-Bayān* (Beirut: Dar Iḥyā' al-Turath al-'Arabī, 1985), vol. 10, 121.

⁷ Abū 'Ali Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar Iḥyā' al-Turath al-'Arabī, 1379 AH), vol. 10, 339; see also 'ī, *Laṭā'if al-Isharat bi-Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, ed. by Ibrahim Basyuni (al-Qahirah: Dar al-Katib al-'Arabī li-Ṭiba'ah wa al-Nashr, 1390 AH), 189.

⁸ Baha' ad-Din Muḥammad Sharif Lahiji, *Tafsīr-i Sharīf-i Lāhijī*, ed. by Mir Jalal ad-Din Urmawī (Tehran: Daftar-i Nashr-i Dad, 1373 AH (Solar)), vol. 4, 553.

⁹ Muḥammad ibn 'Ali al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Kitāb Itbbāt al-'Ilal*. ed. Khalid Zahri (al-Rabaṭ: Kulliyat al-Adab wa al-'Ulum al-Insaniyyah bi al-Rabaṭ, 1998), 106.

¹⁰ Muḥammad ibn Murtaḍa Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *Al-Ṣafī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an* (Tehran: Kitābfurushi-yi Islamiyyah, 1356 AH (Solar)), vol. 1, 534.

¹¹ Al-Tirmidhī, *Kitāb Itbbāt al-'Ilal*, 106-107.

¹² Muḥammad ibn 'Ali ibn al-'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyah*, ed. by Aḥmad Shams al-Din (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1420), vol. 3, 42.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Muḥammad ibn 'Ali ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣuṣ al-Ḥikam*, ed. by Abu al-'Ala' 'Afifi (Tehran: Intisharat-i al-Zahra', 1370 AH (Solar)), 106.

¹⁶ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr fī al-Tafsīr bi-al-Ma'thur* (al-Qahirah: Markaz-i Hijr lil-Buhuth wa al-Dirasat al-'Arabiyah, 1426 AH), vol. 14, 647-48.

¹⁷ Al-Bayḍāwī, *Tafsīr al-Bayḍāwī*, 474.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Ḥaqqī al-Barusawī, *Tafsīr Ruḥ al-Bayān*, 122.

²¹ Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣuṣ al-Ḥikam*, 137.

²² 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī, *Sharḥ-i Fuṣuṣ al-Ḥikam* (al-Qahirah: Muṣṭafa al-Babi al-Ḥalabi, 1407 AH), 206-207.

²³ Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣuṣ al-Ḥikam*, 137.

²⁴ Ḥaqqī al-Barusawī, *Tafsīr Ruḥ al-Bayan*, 123.

²⁵ Ḥasan ibn Yusuf ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī, *Kashf al-Murād fī Sharḥ Tajrīd al-I'tiqād* (Qum: Shakuri, 1371 AH (Solar)), 348.

²⁶ Al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mizan fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an* (Qum:

Jama'at al-Mudarrisin fi al-Hawzih al-'Ilmiyyih), vol. 19, 385.

²⁷ Haqqi al-Barusawi, *Tafsir Ruh al-Bayan*, 124.

²⁸ Hafiz Ahmad ibn 'Ali ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari fi Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari*, ed. by 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abdullah ibn Baz (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1420 AH), vol. 9, 664; see also: Rashid al-Din Abu al-Faql Maybudi, *Kashf al-Asrar wa 'uddat al-Abrar*, ed. by 'Ali Aşghar Hikmat (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1371 AH (Solar)), vol. 10, 196; Shah Wali Allah Dihlawi, *Fath al-Rahman bi Tarjumat al-Qur'an*, ed. by Mas'ud Anşari (Tehran: Ihsan, 1385 AH (Solar)), 566; Al-Suyuti, 254.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn Babawayh al-Qummī, *al-Tawhid*, ed. by Hashim al-Husayni al-Tihrani (Tehran: Maktabat al-Şaduq, 1387 AH), 155.

³¹ Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn Babawayh al-Qummī, *'Uyun akhbār al-Riḍā*, ed. by Sayyid Mahdi Husayni (Qum: Kitabfurushi-yi Ṭus, 1363 AH (Solar)), vol. 1, 121.

³² Muhammad ibn Ibrāhīm Şadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, *Asrar al-Ayat*, tr. by Muḥammad Khajawi (Tehran: Mawla, 1380 AH(Solar)), 306.

³³ Ibn al-'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al Makkīyah*, vol. 1, 473; see also: William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (New York: State University of New York press, 1989), 62, 100-101, 107.

³⁴ Haqqi al-Barusawi, *Tafsir Ruh al-Bayan*, 122.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ 'Abdullah ibn 'Ali Abū Naşr al-Sirāj, *al-Luma' fi al-Taşawwuf*, ed. by R. A. Nicholson (Leiden: Brill, 1914), 41.

³⁷ Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣuṣ al-Ḥikam*, 181.

³⁸ Ibid., 113.

³⁹ Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, 649-50.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 650.

⁴¹ Al-Bayḍāwī, *Tafsir al-Bayḍāwī*, 436.

⁴² Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣuṣ al-Ḥikam*, 113.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibn al-'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al Makkīyah*, vol. 5, 232.

⁴⁵ Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Farghānī, *Mashariq al-Darari*, ed. by Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Mirī Aşhtiyānī (Tehran: Intishart-i Anjuman-i Hikmat wa Falsafih-yi Islami, 1357 AH(Solar)), 189-192.

⁴⁶ Mawlānā Jalāl al-Din Rumi, *The Mathnawi of Jalaluddin-i Rumi*, tr. by R. A. Nicholson (Tehran: Su'ad, 1381 AH(Solar)), Daftar-i 2th, 3109-3111.

⁴⁷ see: Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahristānī, *Tafsir Shahrestānī* (called *Mafatih al-Asrar wa Maşabiḥ al-Abrar*), ed. by Muḥammad 'Ali Adharshab (Tehran: Mirath Maktub, 2008), vol. 1, 280; Jabir ibn Ḥayyan, *Essai sur l'histoire des idées scientifiques dans l'Islam*, ed. by Paul Kraus (Paris: G.P. Maisonneuve; Le Caire: El-Khandgi, 1935), vol. 1, 79.

⁴⁸ Farghānī, *Mashariq al-Darari*, 392.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 436.

⁵⁰ Abu al-Ma'ali Şadr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ishāq al-Qūnawī; Muḥammad Ḥamzah al-Fanari, *Miftāḥ al-ghayb wa sharḥuhu Mişbāḥ al-Uns*, ed. by Muḥammad Khajawi (Tehran: Mawla, 1374 AH(Solar)), 711.

⁵¹ Qāḍi Sa'id al-Qummi, *Sharḥ al-Arba'in*, ed. by Najaf-quli Ḥabibi (Tehran: Mirath Maktub, 1379 AH(Solar)), 324.

⁵² Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn Babawayh al-Qummī, *Ma'ani al-Akbbār*, ed. by 'Ali-Akbar

Ghaffari (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, 1399 AH), 307-308.

⁵³ Ibn Babawayh al-Qummī, *Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*, 307.

⁵⁴ Muḥammad ibn 'Ali ibn al-'Arabī, *Al-Tajalliyāt al-Ilāhiyyah hamrah ba ta'liqat-i ibn Sudakin wa Kashf al-Ghayat fi Sharḥ-i ma iktanafat 'alayhi al-Tajalliyāt*, ed. by 'Uthman Ismā'il Yahya (Tehran: Markaz-i Nashr-i Danishgahi, 1998), 125-26.

⁵⁵ 'Abd al-Karīm ibn Ibrāhīm al-Jilī, *Sharḥ Mushkilat Al-Futūḥāt al Makkīyah*, ed. by Yusuf Zaydan (al-Qahirah: Dar al-Amin, 1419 AH), 154-55.

⁵⁶ Muḥammad ibn 'Ali ibn Babawayh al-Qummī, *Man lā Yaḥḍuruh al-Faqīh*, (Beirut: Al-A'lami lil-Maṭbu'at, 1426 AH), 420.

⁵⁷ 'Ali ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, ed. Ṭayyib al-Mūsawī al-Jazayirī (Qum: Dar al-Kitab li-Tiba'ah wa al-Nashr, 1404 AH), vol. 2, 253.

⁵⁸ 'Abd al-Ṣamad Hamadānī, *Baḥr al-Ma'arif*, ed. and tr. by Ḥusayn Ustad-wali, (Tehran: Ḥikmat, 1374 AH(Solar)), vol. 2, 420.

⁵⁹ Fayḍ al-Kashānī, *Al-Ṣafi fi Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, vol. 1, 78.

⁶⁰ Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Niffarī, *Kitab al-Mawāqif wa yalib-i Kitab al-Mukhaṭbat*, ed. by Arthur John Arberry (al-Qahirah: Dar al-Kutub al-Miṣriyah, 1934), 40; cf: 'Afif al-Dīn al-Tilmisānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif al-Niffarī*, ed. Jamal al-Marzuqī (al-Qahirah: al-Hay'at al-Miṣriyah al-'Amah lil-Kitab, 2000), 247.

⁶¹ See: Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan Ṣaffār Qummī, *Baṣa'ir al-darajāt fi 'Ulum Al-i Muḥammad*, ed. and tr. by Arīreza Zakizadih Rinani (Qum: Wuthuq, 1389 AH(Solar)), vol. 1, 254-55; cf: Fayḍ al-Kashānī, *Al-Ṣafi fi Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, vol. 1, 95-6.

⁶² cf: Ibn al-'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al Makkīyah*, vol. 5, 225.

⁶³ Fayḍ al-Kashānī, *Al-Ṣafi fi Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, vol. 2, 735.