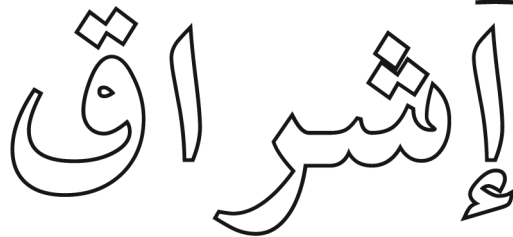


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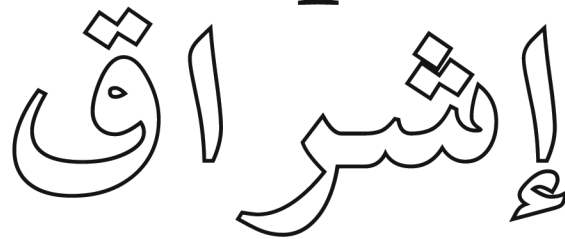
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The fifth issue of the yearbook of Islamic philosophy “Ishraq” (“Illumination”) contains some thirty articles in Russian, English and French, devoted to a wide range of issues, current in Islamic philosophical thought, written by the leading Russian and foreign experts in the field.

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V
ФИЛОСОФИЯ РЕЛИГИИ
*
PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Arzina R. Lalani
(Institute of Ismaili Studies, UK)

CONCEPT OF LIGHT
IN ISMAILI PHILOSOPHY

Light as an archetype, is used in most traditions and faiths as it is in Islam, where the most prevailing representations are in relation to Muḥammad's prophetic appearance. Within classical Shī'ī texts, this is linked to the light of leadership—*nūr al-imāma*. The paper draws on the teachings of the early imams on intellect, light, love and *ru'yat Allāh* in select Shī'ī texts, including the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' and Fāṭimid scholars. The experience of hearts perceiving the vision of light is unique to each individual, being a journey that needs a guide. Ibn Sīnā concedes to this in his later life, referring to it as the *ḥikmat al-mashriqiyya* which becomes fully developed under Suhrawardī, the founder of the school of illumination—*al-Ishrāq*. In this school, the guide is the angel of humanity, known to the philosophers as the active intelligence and recognised by al-Naysābūrī as the universal intellect.

The primordial notion of light is well-known in other faiths and traditions including Gnosticism. Such parallels exist in the Old and New Testaments too.¹ Light as an embodiment is used in most faiths as it is in Islam. *Nūr*—light is an integral part of the Qur'ān and of Islam. In Arabic literature, too, light is among the most prevailing representation used in relation to Muḥammad's prophetic

¹ See article on *Nūr* in *ET*², vol. 8, p. 121 by Tj. de Boer who gives parallels in the Old and New Testaments, citing Gen., i. 3; Isaiah, lx. 1, 19; Zech. iv; John, i. 4–9; iii. 19; v. 35; viii, 12; xii. 35 and Rev. xxi. 23–24; these extracts are from *Leadership and the Qur'an: Classical Arabic Exegesis* by Lalani, A. R. (forthcoming).

emergence.² An Arabic word, it is derived from the trilateral root *n-w-r*, which in its second form means to blossom, flower, bloom, light, illuminate, elucidate, enlighten, explain or clarify. The noun *nūr* in Lane's Lexicon refers to blossoms or flowers as well as to light and can be synonymous to *ḍiyya'* or *ḍaw'*, although *nūr* is less bright than *ḍiyya'*.³

In the Qur'an (Q.10:5 *ja'ala al-shams ḍiyyā'an wa' l-qamar nūran*), God created the sun as *ḍiyya'* and the moon as *nūr* that is, the sun as an indispensable light and the moon as accidental. The *Tāj al-'Arūs* cites two kinds of light: one relating to this world and the other for the world to come.⁴ The former is perceived either through sensory perception or through the eye of the intellect, also known as the light of reason, mentioned as the light of the Qur'an [Q.5:15; 24:35; 6:1 and Q.39:69]. The light of the world to come [celestial] is referred to in Q.57:12 and also in Q.66:8. The Qur'an speaks also of light in the literal sense as well as in figurative sense where besides *nūr* and *ḍiyya'* words such as *miṣbāḥ* and *sirāj* are also used (Q.71:16; cf. 25:61; 78:13).

In the Qur'an (Q.2:257; 5:16; 14:1, 5; 33:43; 57:9; 65:11), light is usually contrasted to darkness—*min al-zulumāti ilā al-nūri*, implying God's light of guidance related to revelation and prophecy which the Shī'a invariably link to the light of the leadership—*nūr al-imāma*. Imams receive this through inspiration. Thus, in Q.4:174, *O Mankind! Certainly a proof (burhān) has come to you from your Lord, and We have sent down to you a manifest light (nūran mubīnan)*. Shī'ī sources from al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq affirm that this is the manifest light of 'Alī and his authority, while Sunnī sources, based on Mujāhid, Qatāda and Suddī, report that this refers to the Qur'an. In terms of guidance and light, the Gospels [*Torah* and the *Injīl*] are referred to as *hudan wa nūran* in Q.5:44 and 46. In Q.6:91 Moses brings forth light and guidance and in Q.21:48 God gave him and Aaron the *furqān* and *ḍiyyā'an* and a reminder for the righteous.⁵ There are instances where light is used for revelation as in *Therefore believe in God*

² Uri Rubin, "Pre-existence and light: Aspects of the concept of *Nūr Muḥammad*," *Israel Oriental Series*, 5 (1975), pp. 62–119 and his "Prophets and Progenitors in the Early Shī'a Tradition," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, I, (Jerusalem, 1979), pp. 41–65.

³ Lane, E. W. *An Arabic-English Lexicon* under *n-w-r*. Cambridge, 1984.

⁴ Al-Zabīdī, Muḥammad al-Husaynī, *Tāj al-'arūs min jawāhir al-qāmūs*, Kuwait, 1386–1403/1966–1983; see also Henry Corbin, *Swedenborg and Esoteric Islam*, tr. Leonard Fox (Pennsylvania, 1999, pp. 43ff). Swedenborg speaks of this double light in his theory of correspondence between things we see externally and those that exist celestially. See chapter 1 in *The Principles of Correspondences* of S. A. al-Majid, trans. by Mukhtar H. Ali, United Kingdom, 2012.

⁵ Uri Rubin, "Prophets and Prophethood" in *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an* (ed. Jane McAuliffe, Leiden, 2001): "Moses is described as pure (*mukhlās*, Q.19:51) and as one whom God brought near in communion (*wa-qarrabnāhu najīyyan*, Q.19:52) and with whom God spoke (*kallama*, Q. 4:164). This is the origin of Moses' title, *kalīmu llāh*, by which he is known in Islamic tradition. Tradition also elaborates on Moses' communion (*munājāt*) with God." [*Mukhlās* is derived from *kh-l-ṣ* from which comes the word *ikhhlās* usually translated as "sincere" and so pure].

and His messenger and the *nūr*—light that we have sent (Q.64:8). As God and His Messenger are already mentioned in this verse, Shī'ī scholars reporting on the authority of al-Bāqir, interpret the *nūr* in this verse as referring to the *nūr* of 'Alī and the Imams.⁶ In many instances light is a reference to prophecy rather than revelation as in Q.7:157 and Q.33:46 where Muḥammad is explicitly mentioned as a light-giving lamp (*sirāj munīr*).⁷

Light as a symbol of eternal knowledge has come down to mankind ever since creation. God communicates his love and guidance to humanity which He created in a variety of ways, one of which is the inner mystical experience, known in various traditions by different terminologies. Muḥammad's own phenomenological experience is readily reflected in the Qur'ān and in the way he responded to situations as well as in his interactions with his fellow beings. The first eighteen verses in *Sūra al-Najm* clearly demonstrate his epiphanic vision⁸ as do other occasions including his ascent (*mi'rāj*) in *Sūra al-Isrā'*.⁹ This is more explicit in the “light verse” of *Sūra al-Nūr*:

God is the light of the heavens and of the earth; His light is like a niche in which there is a lamp; the lamp is in a glass and the glass is like a shining star; it is lit from a blessed tree, an olive-tree, neither an eastern nor a western one; its oil almost shines alone even if no fire touches it; light upon light. God leads to His light whom He wills, and He creates allegories for man, He indeed is all-Knowing (Q.24:35).

Such passages are and were interpreted in multiple ways by various scholars—theologians, philosophers and mystics in all faith communities.¹⁰ Muḥammad's experience had a far-reaching impact on the lives of the community of

⁶ See Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 194 and Lalani A. R., *Early Shi'i Thought*, pp. 79–81.

⁷ See Hanna Kassis, *A Concordance of the Qur'ān* (Berkeley, CA, 1983), pp. 868–869 for more verses on *nūr*.

⁸ Q.53:1–18; See the comparative study of Wesley, W. W., *Tajallī wa Ru'ya: A Study of the Anthropomorphic Theophany and Visio Dei in Hebrew Bible, the Qur'ān and Early Sunni Islam*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 2008.

⁹ Q.17:1; al-Qummī, Abū'l Ḥasan 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, ed. al-Ṭayyib al-Jazā'irī, Najaf, Iraq: 1966, vol. 2, pp. 3–14 has a detailed account on the Prophet's *isrā'* (night journey) and *mi'rāj* (ascension) reported by al-Ṣādiq. See several articles on this in *The Prophet's Ascension: Cross-cultural Encounters with the Islamic Mi'raj Tales*, eds. Christiane Gruber and Frederick Colby, Indiana University Press, 2006. See also, J. W. Morris, “The Spiritual Ascension: Ibn 'Arabī and the Mi'rāj” Part 1, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 107, no. 4 (Oct.–Dec. 1987), pp. 629–652.

¹⁰ See I. Goldziher in *Die Richtungen der Koranauslegung*, pp. 183–185. The Qur'ān has other verses Q.33:45 (Muḥammad as a lamp); Q.61:8–9 (God's light); Q.64:8 (the light sent down as revelation). The article on *Nūr* in *EF* by Tj. de Boer gives a good account of light as depicted in al-Kumayt to Sahl al-Tustari to the Neo-Platonists as well as al-Fārābī, Ibn Sina and other philosophers and mystics, although he ignores the position of the Shī'a for whom, too, light is an essential qualification of the Imam's leadership and guidance. See Uri Rubin, *ibid.* and also refer to Ismail K. Poonawala, “Ismā'īlī *Ta'wīl* of the Qur'ān,” in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, edited by A. Rippin, Oxford, 1988.

believers, especially his notion of knowledge as it occurs in the Qur'ān set the course of their intellectual development, influencing and enriching them socially, materially and academically.¹¹

Within the Shī'ī tradition, the spiritual influence of Muḥammad is discernible particularly in the teachings of 'Alī and the imams on several notions, including those of love, light, intellect knowledge and vision, which in due course were interpreted by several Shī'ī scholars. The experience of hearts perceiving visions of light is unique to each individual, being a journey that needs a guide and known in different traditions by different names. 'Alī guided some followers through the *ta'wīl* of the Qur'ān by unfolding layers of meanings for those capable of understanding. The knowledge he imparted to certain specific individuals including Salmān al-Fārisī, Kumayl b. Ziyād and others was special, allowing them to comprehend the Qur'ān experientially. 'Alī's unique and miraculous ability lay in enabling people to understand and emulate Muḥammad's inexplicable spiritual phenomenon. Many recognise this pre-eminent role of his as the supreme *walī* whose love for God—losing oneself in the essence of God—is epitomised in the prophetic tradition “he who knows his self, knows his Lord.” When 'Alī referred to his close disciples as his *Shī'a*—his followers during the life-time of the Prophet, attested in early historical sources such as the *Kitāb al-zīna* of Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 322/933), it is in the sense of initiating them into their own inner reality.¹² 'Alī's love of God was such that he only feared being cut off from God's presence. This then is the meaning and essence of the Shī'ī *ḥaqīqa*, that is, the reality of being a Shī'a of 'Alī. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that *ru'ya* or [pure] vision has always been a controversial subject in Islamic theology. The Mu'tazila held that the faithful would know God in their heart, the heart being the seat of knowledge. Others refuted this, while al-Ash'arī insisted on the vision to be understood “without specifying how,” while emphasizing at the same time, that references to God must be devoid of human qualities of similarity or comparison.¹³

The Shī'a take this light as a symbol of God's good guidance and knowledge on the Imams described in Q.3:7 as the *rāsikhūn fī'l 'ilm*. On the light of the intellect, al-Kulaynī records a tradition of the prophet: “O 'Alī, no poverty is more severe than lack of knowledge and no wealth, more profitable than intellect.” 'Alī said that “reflection gives life to a heart of an insightful individual just as light protects those walking in the dark and reaching their destination with little

¹¹ The word *'ilm* and all its derivatives occur frequently and persistently in the Qur'ān. See *EQ* and *EF* for details.

¹² Lalani, A. R., “Alī b. Abi Talib,” in *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia*, ed. O. Leaman, London and New York, 2006, pp. 28–32.

¹³ See *Risāla fī'l Imān* of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' in ed. and tr. Lalani A. R., OUP-IIS, forthcoming; see “Faith and the Faithful,” in Van Reijn, Eric. *The Epistles of the Sincere Brethren* (Rasā'il Ikhwan al-Safā'): *An Annotated Translation of Epistles 43–47*, Montreux, 1995, whose translations vary; Watt W. M., *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, p. 86, Edinburgh, 1962.

endurance.” In Shī‘ī thought, the recipients of this light of the intellect depicted in Q.3:33–34 *Inna’llāha aṣṭafa Ādam* are Muḥammad and the imams from the Prophet’s family. Imam al-Bāqir taught that God made the imams “people of knowledge,” enabling them to extract this light of knowledge from Him.¹⁴

Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq reports ‘Alī as saying that “it is intellect that extracts the depths of wisdom and with wisdom, the depth of intellect is extracted, just as sound behaviour is attained through good upbringing.”¹⁵ This does not mean that such individuals refute the authority of the intellect or that of the community, but they recognize that the reality of faith is from the prophets and the imams who form the point of this contact between man and God. Early traditions reveal intellect or *‘aql* as an exclusive gift of God to humans through which He is worshipped and through whose discernment the knowledge of good and bad is acquired. Such knowledge allows an individual to acquire virtues and thereby refine his character as a means of attaining purity.¹⁶ A report from Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq succinctly relates this:

“Intellect is a [central] pillar in a human being. From it (the intellect), arise astuteness, comprehension, reminiscence and knowledge. A person becomes perfect through it and it is his guide, discriminator and a key to his every affair. When an individual’s intellect receives the aid or support (*ta’yīd*) of [celestial] light, he becomes knowledgeable with a good memory, and is learned and judicious. With this, he [also] knows how, why and where [of things] and is able to decipher who is advising him and who is misguiding him. As he realises this, he knows what its source is, what connects and what divides, attaining sincerity and oneness of God, acceptance of belief, and steadfastness in obedience. When he reaches this stage, he has redressed every loss and acquired every gain he can secure. He swiftly comprehends where he stands [in life], what is what, which is which and why he is sent to this world and where he needs to go. He attains all this through the support (*ta’yīd*) of the intellect (*‘aql*).”¹⁷

¹⁴ For a full discussion on the several positions of *rāsikhūn fī’l-‘ilm*, see Jane D. McAuliffe, “Text and Textuality: Q.3:7 as a Point of Intersection,” in Issa J. Boullata, ed., *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur’an* (Richmond, Surrey, 2000), pp. 56–76. For al-Bāqir’s position, see pp. 63–66 in Lalani, *Early Shī‘ī Thought*, and al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Da‘ā’im*, vol. 1, p. 31, and al-Kāshshī, Muḥammad Murtaḍa, *Aṣ-Ṣāfi fī tafsīr kalām Allāh*, Tehran, 1283/1866–1867 on the “Light Verse” in Helmut Gätje, *The Qur’an and its Exegesis*, tr. and ed. A. T. Welch (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), pp. 243–245.

¹⁵ Al-Kulaynī, “Kitāb al-‘aql wa’l-jahl,” in *Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, pp. 10–29.

¹⁶ Al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, pp. 10–29; see also M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi‘ism*, tr. David Streight (Albany, N.Y., 1994), pp. 5–16.

¹⁷ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 25, tradition no. 23; this idea of *ta’yīd*, i.e., the intellect being aided is fully developed in Fāṭimid philosophy. See Paul Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism*, Cambridge, 1993, chapter 11 on Prophecy, the deputy of intellect, pp. 114–123 on *ta’yīd* and *mu‘ayyad*; his complete translation of the *Kitāb al-Yanābī‘* as *The Wellsprings of Wisdom*, Salt Lake City, 1994, pp. 54–66 includes significant aspects on the intellect; Ahmad al-Naysābūrī in his *Ithbat al-Imāma* in Lalani, A. R., *Degrees of Excellence: A Fatimid Treas-*

These views of Ja‘far disclose how individuals attain sincerity, recognition [of belief], steadfastness and unity of purpose in their lives when their intellect is swiftly supported by the celestial light. The Fāṭimid work, *Asās al-Ta‘wīl* of al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, offers a theory of inner experience and ascension too, from the Qur‘ān in relation to two prophetic exemplars of Abraham and Muḥammad.¹⁸ In philosophy, the focus of epistemology or the theory of knowledge is to understand the relationship between the one who intellects (*‘āqil*) and the object of intellection (*ma‘qūl*) and to determine whether or not oneness or *ittiḥād* is possible between them.¹⁹ This primary aspect in the theory of knowledge, i.e., the interaction between the subject and the object, has given rise to a number of positions in philosophy.

Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī depicts this in relation to the function of prophecy, which he views as an agency that transfers information from the realm of eternity to that of change. Plotinus understood this clearly as did the neo-Platonists, and al-Sijistānī calls prophecy the deputy of the intellect in the physical world. The Greek sages allocate this function to philosophers only, while for Muslims only a prophet or a series of prophets, who came intermittently, could perform this function alongside legislating or promulgating law. For the philosophers, attaining contemplation does not need to be translated into explanation or teaching but the Prophet responds to the multiple circumstances of his time, and translates his perfect intellection to turn his vision into a social code for humanity to conform to the spiritual realm.²⁰ He receives the call to undertake prophecy gradually and feels the responsibility to make it accessible to others, relating also the complex powers of the prophet in terms of *jadd* (good fortune), *fath* (intuitive opening) and *khayāl* (prophetic vision).²¹ According to his *Kitāb al-maqālīd*, the prophet’s task is

tise on Leadership in Islam, London, 2010, par. [45] demonstrates the Imam as the universal intellect (*‘aql al-kullī*) in whom all human intellects unite.

¹⁸ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Asās al-ta‘wīl*, ed. ‘Aref Tamer, Beirut, 1960; see also E. R. Alexandrin, “Prophetic Ascent and Initiatory Ascent in Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s *Asās al-ta‘wīl*,” in *The Prophet’s Ascension: Cross-cultural Encounters with the Islamic Mi‘rāj Tales*, eds. Christiane Gruber and Frederick Colby, Indiana University Press, 2006. The prophet’s ascension is also described in Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Proofs of Prophecy*, trans. by Tarif Khalidi, pp. 164–165.

¹⁹ Ibrahim Kalin discusses this in “Knowledge as the Unity of the Intellect and the Object of Intellection in Islamic Philosophy: A Historical Survey from Plato to Mullā Ṣadrā,” in *Transcendent Philosophy: An International Journal for Comparative Philosophy and Mysticism*, vol. 1, No. 1 (June 2000), pp. 73–91.

²⁰ Al-Sijistānī offers a theoretical premise on the cosmic necessity and function of a prophet. See the fourth treatise on pp. 119–144 with twelve different sections on ascertaining prophethood in *Ismaili Philosophy: Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī, Kitāb Ithbāt al-Nubuwwāt*, ed. ‘Aref Tamer (Beirut, 1966).

²¹ Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Iftikhār*, ed. with an intro by I. Poonawala, Beirut, 2000, pp. 116–122, where he explains how the Prophet’s heart receives the revelation directly from the Intellect through these three spiritual entities of *jadd*, *fath* and *khayāl*, identified as angels Gabriel, Michael and Israfil. See also Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007, pp. 134–136.

to end warfare, killing, shedding of blood, plundering of wealth and taking of captives. People accept his words as they resonate within them as though these embodied the cream of all they themselves have said.²²

For al-Sijistānī, happiness is the ultimate reward of all that individuals crave for. However, as happiness of the senses is short-lived, transient and ephemeral and its reward impermanent, he concludes that the most sublime, pure and eternal happiness can only be derived from knowledge. That, according to the Qur'ān, is the requital of the God-conscious,²³ who are rewarded by such happiness of knowledge, known also as the knowledge of the Oneness or Unity of God—*tawhīd*. Just as worldly gardens adorned with fruit trees, sweet-scented plants and gushing water calm the senses, soothing and relaxing them, similarly, knowledge and benefits to the intellect and the soul, are gardens of internal perception (*tamyīz*). The *tamyīz* is adorned by the *nutaqā'*, the *asās*, the Imams and their associates as well as through the knowledge that flows from them, replenishing the concealed forms with solace, satisfaction, tranquility, intimacy and composure. However, such knowledge is as yet knowledge which is merely blended with words and verbal expressions, whose reality would be made known at a predetermined time. At that time, knowledge would reach its objective, settling in its purest form, throwing aside its shackles and attaining sublimity. It will then appear in its purest form at the highest level in a manner that no eyes have seen, no ears have heard and no mind has ever conceived.²⁴

Further, al-Sijistānī observes that if people were to cling to revealed laws without knowledge, it would not only destroy the subtle human form but create doubt and confusion, and torment the souls, which is what eternal hellfire really means. On the other hand, paradise means knowledge attained by the individual of the Oneness of God. Each individual experiences different levels of happiness depending on how one prepares for it. Every soul desires things according to the purity and refinement of their real being. The knowledge one arrives at and, consequently, the happiness one attains depends on one's spiritual preparedness. The purer and more subtle one's desire for attaining knowledge of the supra-sensible things, the more sublime will be his happiness. The individual attains this happiness according to the extent of his capacity to apprehend the knowledge of the Unity of God. This capacity in turn depends on one's mental and spiritual preparedness. The more an individual prepares his soul and mind to receive this truth,

²² Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Maqālīd al-malakūtiyya*, critically edited with an intro by I. Poonawala, Beirut, 2011; see chapter 11 on Prophecy, pp. 114–123, especially in Paul Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism*, Cambridge, 1993.

²³ Q.13:35.

²⁴ Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Yanābi'*, pp. 64–70 in H. Corbin, *Trilogie ismaélienne*, ed. and partially translated into French with an introduction and commentary, (Tehran and Paris, 1961); see also Sami Makarem, *The Doctrine of the Ismailis* (Beirut, 1972), pp. 23–26, whose translations I have adapted here. Paul Walker has fully translated this work with commentary in *Wellsprings of Wisdom: A Study of Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī's Kitāb al-Yanābi'*, Salt Lake City, 1994, pp. 88–91.

the more knowledge he will attain of this truth. His happiness consequently, increases. If he is not prepared to receive this truth, he will be struck down and become overwhelmed by the excessive power of this truth. It is for this reason that God bestows this knowledge gradually in stages in accordance with one's spiritual preparedness and in proportion to the extent of his apprehension.²⁵

This knowledge of the truth and the happiness attained therein, is described as *ru'yat Allāh* (vision of God) in several treatises of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' and is the pinnacle of all faith experiences.²⁶ At the same time, the Ikhwān are adamant that this vision represented by light which the *awliyā'* experience is not the same as that attained by average individuals.

[16 §] فصل: 27. واعلم أيها الأخ أيديك الله بروح منه،²⁸ بأن رؤية أولياء الله تعالى²⁹ ليست كرؤية الأشخاص والأشباح والصور والأنواع والأجناس³⁰ والجواهر والأعراض³¹ والصفات والموصوفات في الأماكن³² والمحاذيات، ولكن بنوع أشرف وأعلى وفوق³³ كل وصف جسماني و نعت جرماني. وهي رؤية نور بنور لنور،³⁴ في نور من نور على نور³⁵ كما ذكر الله تعالى فقال³⁶ «الله نور السماوات والأرض مثل نوره كمشكاة فيها مصباح»³⁷ إلى قوله «زيتونة لا شرقية ولا غربية» أي لا صورية ولا مادية، فافهم هذه الأشياء والمرامي لأن في بيان ذلك انتباه النفوس من نوم الغفلة، فاجهد يا أخي أن تعلم معاني هذه الإشارات كما ينبغي لعلك³⁸ تتجو من بحر الهيولى وتخلص من قعر الهاوية وسجن الدنيا.³⁹

²⁵ See sections on *Sa'āda* in al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Yanābi'*, pp. 64–70, in H. Corbin ed., *Trilogie ismaélienne*; S. Makarem, *The Doctrine of the Ismailis* (Beirut, 1972), pp. 23–26.

²⁶ I have restricted this to the Epistles of Love and Faith on which I am preparing critical editions and translations. See also Carmella Baffioni, "From Sense Perception to the Vision of God: A Path towards Knowledge according to the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'," in *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, vol. 8 (1988) pp. 213–231.

²⁷ فصل، سقط في خ، ز.
²⁸ واعلم أيها الأخ أيديك الله بروح منه: واعلم يا أخي، ع، خ؛ واعلم يا أخي أيديك الله إيا بروح منه، ك؛ واعلم يا أخي أيديك الله وإيانا بروح منه، ز.
²⁹ أولياء الله تعالى: الله تعالى، ل؛ الله عز وجل، ك، ز.
³⁰ والأنواع والأجناس: والأجناس والأنواع، ع، ك، ز.
³¹ الأعراض: الأعراض، خ؛ الصور: زيادة في ف.
³² في الأماكن: من الأماكن، خ.
³³ بنوع اشرف واعلى وفوق: بنوع هو اشرف وأعلى فوق، خ؛ بنوع اشرف منها واعلى وفوق، ع، ك، ز.
³⁴ نور بنور لنور: بنور لنور في نور، خ؛ لنور: كنور، ع؛ النور، ك.
³⁵ في نور من نور على نور، سقط في خ؛ على نور: سقط في ف.
³⁶ كما ذكر الله تعالى فقال: قال الله تعالى، ع، كما ذكر الله عز وجل فقال، خ؛ كما ذكر الله تعالى بقوله، ز.
³⁷ «المصباح في زجاجة الزجاج كأنها كوكب دري توفد من شجرة» الآية، زيادة في ع، ك، ز، خ؛ شجرة مباركة، ز. هذا من سورة 24 النور 35.
³⁸ لعلك: لعل، ف.
³⁹ إلى قوله وسجن الدنيا: سقط في ع، ك، ل، خ، ز.

“Know oh brother, may God help you with a part of His spirit [to understand] that the vision (*ru'ya*) of the Friends of God is not similar or even parallel to the vision of individuals [in relation to its] forms, images, pictures, species, genus, substances, accidents, qualities or descriptions of places. Their vision is of a more honourable and exalted type, beyond any description, be it physical depiction or of any specific bodily traits. Their vision is that of light by light with light, in a light from light upon light just as God Almighty mentions in His Book saying: ‘God is the light of the heavens and the earth!’ His Light can be compared to a niche in which there is a lamp ... to His words ‘a blessed olive tree, which is neither eastern nor western,’ that is, it has no form or substance. So, understand these things and the aspects that are aimed at, because in that, there is an explanation for souls to awaken from the slumber of ignorance. Therefore, strive oh brother, to learn the meanings of these signs just as it is incumbent that you may find deliverance from the ocean of the prime matter and become sincere [in arising] from the abyss of worldly attachment and the prison of this world.”⁴⁰

Not content to merely remain on the level of faith, the believer yearns to grasp the object of faith, God Himself directly. In their *Epistle of Faith* [46], the Ikhwān explain this vision of God, as seeing things that are invisible to corporal eyes but arise involuntarily in the mind.⁴¹ Known also as beatific vision, it transcends the power of intellect. This is why intellect needs an additional support, known in Fatimid philosophy as *ta'yīd*.⁴² This is the light of splendor enabling souls to experience God with the light of their intellect in the same way as physical light enables human eyes to view objects. Several theories exist on this, one of which is that this light is a quality infused by God into an individual soul as a sanctifying grace and as a virtue of faith. In the Indian tradition, it is known as *darshan* and *didār* as well as articulated in words such as *prakash*, *nur* and *anand* that occur repeatedly in the quatrains and refrains of the Ismaili Ginan Tradition.⁴³ We find this eloquently expressed in the Qur'ān in several verses including Q.75:22–23, 18:110 and 92:18–20.

This pure vision is a mystery as it happens in a realm of perception or *tamyīz* described earlier by al-Sijistānī. Over the centuries, theologians have not only debated on this but also distinguished between primary and secondary objects of beatific vision, the primary being God Himself as He is. His Presence is experi-

⁴⁰ See section [16] in the Ikhwān *Risāla fi'l 'Ishq*, ed. and tr. A. Lalani, forthcoming.

⁴¹ Thomas Aquinas maintains that beatific vision surpasses both faith and reason. Beholding God face to face gives the created intelligence perfect happiness, which is why the vision is known as “beatific”—unmediated access to God’s presence [*Summa Contra Gentiles*].

⁴² See Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Yanābi‘*, on *ta'yīd*, the fortieth wellspring in H. Corbin, *Trilogie ismaélienne*, pp. 94–97, and the translation and commentary by Walker in his *Wellsprings of Wisdom*, pp. 109–111 and 190–191.

⁴³ The theme of attaining oneness is explicitly found in the Navroz Ginan and also exists in numerous Granth Literature including the *Buj Nirinjan* and *Brahm Prakash* of Shams Sabzwari or in Ginans such as *Bindara re van ma*, *Kesri sinha swarup bhulayo* and numerous others.

enced by direct intuition by the fortunate ones. As a natural complement to this vision, there is knowledge of various things external. Beatitude has a natural kind of felicity which may accompany the primary aspect of direct intuition, also known as intellectual vision in ontology, religious experience in faith traditions or pure intuition in Bergson's philosophy. William James defines this mystical experience as being transient, ineffable, noetic and passive, implying its transitory and inexplicable aspects alongside its relation to the intellect and how such an experience happens beyond one's conscious control.⁴⁴

So, how is vision (*ru'ya*) connected with illumination (*ishrāq*)? To put it simply, there is no radiance without apparition. The word "Ishrāq" is derived from the fourth form [*ashraqa*] of the Arabic trilateral root *sh-r-q* which means "to rise, shine, illumine or radiate." Thus, *ashraqa* means "to give light" and *ishrāq* suggests radiance, emanation or illumination. It occurs in the Qur'ān 39:69 in this sense quite categorically and this verse has been variously explained in the early and classical exegeses to elucidate the inner and outer meanings of this verse.⁴⁵

وَأَشْرَقَتِ الْأَرْضُ بِنُورِ رَبِّهَا وَوُضِعَ الْكِتَابُ وَجِيءَ بِالنَّبِيِّينَ وَالشُّهَدَاءِ وَقُضِيَ بَيْنَهُمْ
بِالْحَقِّ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ

The earth became illumined by the light of her Lord when the Book was established. The prophets and witnesses came, judging among the people with truth and without suppressing them.⁴⁶

God Almighty here states that the earth becomes radiant not by itself but from the light of her Lord in the same way as the moon shines not of its own accord, but reflects the light of the sun. Ibn Sīnā, famous for his *mashshā'ī*—peripatetic works, viewed these works of his as general and his works on the *ḥikmat al-mashriqiyya*—the eastern or oriental wisdom as specific. This relates to the world of light based on illumination of the soul as well as to the world of logic. It sees the cosmos as a subterranean cellar through which a true philosopher journeys with the help of a guide who is none other than the Divine Intellect. This is expressed in symbolic language rather than discursive vocabulary. Ibn Sīnā concedes to this in his later life, referring to it as the *ḥikmat al-mashriqiyya* which becomes fully developed under Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī, the founder of the illumination school—*al-Ishrāq*.

⁴⁴ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, see Lectures XVI and XVII on Mysticism, pp. 365ff., 397, 457, 498, as well as his lectures on Saintliness, The Electronic Classic Series, Jim Manis, Pennsylvania 2002–2013.

⁴⁵ See the several exegeses on this verse in *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, tr. Feras Hamza, *Tafsīr Ibn 'Abbās*, tr. Mokrane Guezzou, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, tr. Annabel Keeler and Ali Keeler in *The Great Commentaries of the Holy Qur'ān Series*, Amman, 2011.

⁴⁶ Earth in Arabic is feminine and so read "her Lord."

Ibn Sīnā's works on oriental wisdom or *ḥikmat al-mashriqiyya* are not particularly well-known, as for instance, the *Dānish nāmāh-yi 'alā'ī* which is in Persian. It contains the *Ilāhiyyāt* (Metaphysics) and the *Ṭab'iyyāt* (Physics) which mentions the active intellect ('*aql al-fa'āl*) acting on the intellect whereby the potential is actualised in the same way as sunlight acts upon darkness. Also within this category are several other works including his allegorical tale of *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān* in which he actually mentions the Sage and his *Risāla fī'l 'Ishq*, parts of his *al-Shifā'* and the *Kitāb al-Ishārāt wa'l-tanbīhāt*.⁴⁷ Ibn Sīnā demonstrated that the hierarchy of angels in Islam corresponded to grades of intelligences as discerned by philosophers. In so doing, he provided a religious basis for theories on existence [ontology] portrayed in other philosophical treatises. The concept of angels as light rather than intellect that Avicenna perceived is best exemplified in al-Suhrawardī (d. 578/1191) who integrated the Qur'ānic, Platonic, Zoroastrian and Hermetic elements in his levels of light with God being pure light as the source of all existents and knowledge. The inner aspect according to him of all the knowledge and existents is its angel. Angels in Suhrawardī are emanations of light from the Divine and his *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* portrays besides a cosmology also philosophical mysticism.⁴⁸

Enlightenment of the heart is a path that needs trust, sincerity, patience and perseverance in order to develop the desire and love divine that is needed to perceive the vision of light. Thus, the discipline invariably requires a guide, for the journey is unique to each individual. The guide is variously named in different traditions but its function as an adept is to direct the novice into the intrica-

⁴⁷ Ibn Sina, *Kitāb al-Ishārāt wa'l-tanbīhāt*, relates the stations and ranks of the Knowers (*al-'arīfīn*) on pp. 198–120, in Jacques Forget as *Le Livre des théorèmes et des avertissements*, ed., in *Islamic Philosophy*, vol. 36, ed. Fuat Sezgin, Frankfurt, 1999 [reprint of the Leiden Edition 1892]; the edition with al-Ṭūsī's commentary in ed. S. Dunyā (Cairo, 1968, 2nd edition), vol. 4, pp. 47–110; S. H. Nasr and Aminrazavi, ed., *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia* (London, 2008), vol. 1, pp. 243–322 and 303–311; H. Landolt in *Miroir et savoir. La transmission d'un thème platonicien, dès Alexandrins à la philosophie arabo-musulmane. Actes du Colloque International, tenu à Leuven et Louvain-la-Neuve, les 17 et 18 novembre 2005*, ed. Daniel De Smet et al. (*Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*, 38), pp. 244–245, Louvain, 2008. (Many thanks to Reza Shah-Kazemi for his help with this French article as well as sharing his own views and the reference to a study by Emil Fackenheim on this subject.) Refer to *An Anthology of Ismaili Literature: A Shi'i Vision of Islam*, ed. H. Landolt, S. Sheikh and K. Kassam (London, 2008) for several articles on this.

⁴⁸ Stephen R. Burge, "The Provenance of Suhrawardian Angelology," in *Archiv orientální* (*Oriental Archive*), 76/4 (2008), pp. 435–456, Oriental Institute, Prague. See also his new study on *Angels in Islam: Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's al-Ḥabā'ik fī Akhbār al-malā'ik* (London, 2012). For a translation of Suhrawardī, see S. H. Nasr and Aminrazavi, eds., *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia*, vol. 4 (London, 2012), which deals specifically from the school of illumination to philosophical mysticism. See part 1 on the School of Illumination which contains a reprint of *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, tr. by John Walbridge and Hossein Ziai, pp. 26–52 of the *Anthology*.

cies of the soul and the spirit. In the school of illumination, this guide is called the angel of humanity, known to the philosophers as the active intelligence and recognised by al-Naysābūrī as the universal intellect who is none other than his Imam of the Time.

In addition to the Qur’ān, the term *ishrāq* occurs in the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* which is much earlier than either Ibn Sīnā or Suhrawardī. The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ in their *Risāla fī ‘Ishq* relate that all beauty, merits and virtues stem as emanations from the Lord as illumination from His light that shines on the universal intellect which then shines on the universal soul and then on to primordial matter. This is what individual souls observe on physical bodies, in the same way as light from the sun is reflected on the moon perceived on a moonlit night:

[23] فصل: 49 واعلم أيها الأخ البار الرحيم أيديك الله وإيانا بروح منه⁵⁰ بأن تلك المحاسن والفضائل⁵¹ والخيرات كلها إنما هي من فيض البارئ جل ثناؤه⁵² وإشراق نوره على العقل الكلي، ومن العقل الكلي على النفس ومن النفس⁵³ على الهيولى، وهي الصورة التي تری الأنفس الجزئية⁵⁴ في عالم الأجسام على ظواهر⁵⁵ الأشخاص والأجرام التي من محيط الفلك⁵⁶ إلى منتهى مركز الأرض.⁵⁷

Know oh faithful and caring brother, may God help you and us with a part of His spirit [in knowing] that all such beauty, merits and virtues are, in fact, emanations (*fayḍ*) from the Creator, may His majesty be praised, and from the radiance of His Light (*wa ishrāq nūrihi*) on the Universal Intellect (*‘aql al-kullī*) and from the Universal Intellect on to the [Universal] Soul (*nafs*) and from the [Universal] Soul to the *hayula* (prime matter). This is the form or outward appearance that partial souls see in the world of corporal bodies on the exterior of individual while the celestial bodies which are from the heavenly ocean [extend] to the utmost nucleus of the Earth.⁵⁸

⁴⁹ فصل: سقط في ز.

⁵⁰ واعلم أيها الأخ البار الرحيم أيديك الله وإيانا بروح منه: واعلم يا أخي أيديك الله، ع؛ واعلم يا أخي، ل، خ؛ واعلم يا أخي أيديك الله وإيانا بروح منه، ز.

⁵¹ بأن تلك المحاسن والفضائل: بأن تلك الفضائل والمحاسن، خ؛ أن تلك المحاسن والفضائل والملاذ، ز.

⁵² جل ثناؤه: جل وعز، ف؛ سبحانه وتعالى زيادة في خ؛ جل وعلى، ز.

⁵³ النفس: النفس الكلية، ل، خ، ز.

⁵⁴ وهي الصورة التي تری الأنفس الجزئية: وهي الصور التي لأنفس الجزوية، خ؛ تری: سقط في، خ، ل.

⁵⁵ ظواهر: جواهر، ز.

⁵⁶ محيط الفلك: محيط فلك القمر، ز.

⁵⁷ واعلم أيها الأخ الأرض: سقط هذا الفصل في ك.

⁵⁸ § 23. Section: This section is deleted from the MS Koprulu [ل]. See “*Epistles of the Brethren of Purity. On the Essence of Love Divine: An Arabic Critical Edition and Translation of Epistle 37*” by A. R. Lalani (OUP–IIS, forthcoming).

واعلم بأن مثل⁵⁹ سريان تلك الأنوار⁶⁰ والمحاسن من أولها إلى آخرها⁶¹ كمثل سريان النور⁶² والضياء الذي يرى في ليلة البدر من الشمس⁶³ والذي على جرم الشمس والكواكب جميعاً، من إشراق نور النفس الكلية والتي⁶⁴ يشرق عليها فمن العقل الكلي، والذي يشرق على العقل الكلي فمن⁶⁵ فيض البارئ سبحانه⁶⁶ كما ذكر فقال⁶⁷: «الله نور السماوات والأرض مثل نوره كمشكاة فيها مصباح»⁶⁸ إلى آخر الآية.⁶⁹

Know that the simile of those streaming lights and attractions from its beginning to its end is similar to the streaming light (*nūr*) from the sun's light (*diyā'*) which can be seen on a full moon's night reflected from the sun. That which is on the celestial sun and the planets all together are from the illumination of the light (*ishrāq al-nūr*) from the Universal Soul and that which illumines the Universal Soul is from the Universal Intellect (*'aql al-kullī*), while that which illumines the Universal Intellect is from the Emanation (*fayḍ*) of the Creator (may He be glorified!), as God has mentioned [in His Holy Book], saying: "God is the Light of Heaven and Earth. His Light may be compared to a niche in which there is a lamp, [the lamp that is in a glass, the glass which is as though it were a glittering star kindled from a blessed olive tree, neither of the East nor the West, whose oil will almost glow though fire has never touched it. Light upon light, God guides whom He wishes to His Light]."⁷⁰

These two passages citing the terms *ishrāq* are from the *Treatise of Love Divine* of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' and, at the same time, the term *ru'ya* signifying the vision of God occurs in numerous instances within the Ikhwān *Treatise of Faith*

⁵⁹ واعلم: واعلم يا أخي أيديك الله وإيانا بروح منه بان مثل، ع، ك؛ واعلم يا أخي بأن مثل، ل؛ وأعلم يا أخي، خ؛ واعلم أيها الأخ أيديك الله وإيانا بروح منه أن مثل، ز.

⁶⁰ الانوار: النور، ع؛ المحاسن والانوار، ل.

⁶¹ مثل سريان تلك الأنوار والمحاسن من أولها إلى آخرها: سقط في ع

⁶² كمثل سريان النور: مثل سريان الأنوار، ع؛ كمثل سريان ضوء النور، ز.

⁶³ والذي يرى في ليلة البدر من الشمس: والذي منبثاً في جرم القمر على الهواء والذي على، ع؛ الذي يرى منبثاً من جرم القمر ليلة البدر في الهواء والذي يرى على جرم القمر على الشمس، ك؛ والذي يرى في ليلة البدر منبثاً في جرم القمر على الهواء والذي على في الشمس، ع، خ.

⁶⁴ والتي: والذي، ك، ز؛ من العقل الكلي الذي على العقل الكلي، خ.

⁶⁵ والتي يشرق عليها فمن العقل الكلي والذي يشرق على العقل الكلي فمن: والذي على النفس الكلية من العقل الكلي والذي على العقل من، ع؛

⁶⁶ سبحانه: جل ثناؤه وإشراقه، خ، ك

⁶⁷ كما ذكر فقال: فقال سقط في ع؛ كما ذكر الله تعالى بقوله: ك؛ كما ذكر الله تعالى جل اسمه بقوله، خ.

⁶⁸ سورة ٢٤ النور: ٣٥ .

⁶⁹ مثل نوره كمشكاة فيها مصباح إلى آخر: ، سقط في ك، خ، ز.

⁷⁰ Paragraph 23 in Ikhwan Treatise on Love: Sūrat 24 al-Nūr: 35; the section in brackets is deleted in other manuscripts including MSS Koprulu, Bodleian and Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

as well, besides being cited in the *'Ishq Epistle*. The question remains: how does one attain this zenith of all experiences which believers crave for and the answer seems to be in nurturing love divine—*al-'ishq*—love so tender, it would break asunder the heart, described by Nizārī Ismā'īlī Pīrs in the Ginans as "*antar padiyo ched*"—an opening of the soul/heart. Until such time as one attains focused attention, be it for a split second, an aperture within the inner self will not take place to allow the flow of joy and bliss resulting in epiphany or *tajallī*.⁷¹ This epiphanic experience is a sudden intuitive leap of understanding, especially through an ordinary but striking occurrence. Ṣadr al-Dīn Sabzwārī, known in the Ismā'īlī community as Pīr Ṣadardīn, has a long ginan called *granth*, ascribed to him, entitled *Buj Niranjān* (Recognise the Almighty) that has a pertinent verse:

*Kheti boiyen prem ki, ane pani dije ginan; nur tajalli phool fale, jo lage piya
sun dhyan
Plant the farmland (kheti) with love, and water it with knowledge divine
(ginan)
The light of epiphany (nūr tajallī) will bloom in blossoms
When attention (dhyan) focuses on the loving beloved*

In this same work of *Buj Niranjān*, Pīr Ṣadardīn uses the metaphor of the vast limitless ocean to portray an experience of momentary oneness in *Doobki lele gotha khave; Pīr Paygambār toye na pave* alluding to the immense infinity of the Ocean that even Pīrs and Messengers have not managed to attain.⁷²

Among the many visible indications is the love and bliss generated in the hearts of individuals who witness this vision. Love is as old as creation itself and an integral aspect of spirituality within all traditions and faiths. The Ginan Tradition of Nizārī Ismā'īlīs depicts the cosmos as arising from love, which means love is the cause of the creation. Indra Imamdin encapsulates this skillfully in his ginan:⁷³

*Het dhari dhari finn jo kiya, finn thi indh nipaya ji;
indh madhe thi sarve rachna kidhi, tare sarjiya pindh ne kaya;
jugesar jogi te dhyan ma tariya ji.....*

⁷¹ Besides the treasure trove of Ginans, see the *Blossoms of Recognition (Ma'rifat na Phool)* translated and edited by R. D. Shariff. These are original Gujarati lectures of N. A. Kassmani, edited and published by S. B. Haji in 1971.

⁷² *Buj Niranjān* (Recognise the Almighty) by Pīr Ṣadardīn and the theme of the ocean is to be found with line beginning with *Ati acharat kahun ek paheli*—"I am going to relate an absolutely wonderful riddle." Compare the study of Ali Asani on *Buj Niranjān* and his arguments on authorship.

⁷³ First verse of the Ginan by Indra Imamdin in 600 Ginans, Recreation Club Institute, Bombay, Khoja Sindhi Printing Press, 1934. (I would like to acknowledge the help of Sadrudin Hassam in translating this verse from which I have adapted my own version.)

Pouring forth immense love, the Lord generated the cosmic froth from which
emerged an egg;
From this celestial egg the entire cosmos was created,
Only then did the inner and outer physical self become framed.
O worldly creatures, a seeker of union is he who loses himself in contempla-
tion to attain liberation

The Ikhwān recognised this notion of love divine, and it has been reiterated time and again, both before and after the Ikhwān, in early and medieval literature, in both prose and poetry by scholars of all traditions and faiths including Ismā‘īlīs.⁷⁴

The Ikhwān treatise on love is by no means the first or even the earliest. Neither is Ibn Sīnā’s *Risāla fī’l ‘ishq*, a misperception held by Ritter and corrected by Emil Fackenheim.⁷⁵ The Ikhwān treatise on *māhiyat al-‘ishq* divides the soul into nutritive, emotional and rational constituents. The first is the greedy, vegetative, plant soul (*al-nafs al-nabātiyya al-shahwāniyya*), interested only in eating, drinking and reproducing, the second is the animal, overbearing indignant soul (*al-nafs al-ghaḍabiyya al-haywāniyya*), which likes to control and overpower people, and the third is the rational thinking soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqā*), whose love inclines it towards knowledge and acquiring virtues — *‘ishquhā yakūnu naḥwa’l ma’ārif wa iktisābī al-faḍā’il*.

The Ikhwān describe love as a value within the human soul, a virtue and a grace whose aim is to awaken the soul from the slumber of negligence and prepare her [the soul] to attain oneness with the Almighty God who is the true beloved.⁷⁶ They illustrate several kinds of love in their treatise, including the love of scientists and scholars for sciences and literature, the teaching of mathematics and of researching into records of nations over the centuries, which enliven souls and improve characters whilst at the same time, present worldly and religious advantages. Within this is the love of devoutness and performing deeds as though the Almighty was watching even if the worshipper cannot see Him (*iḥsān*). There also exists love of one human being for another, and all such

⁷⁴ Philo (c. 13 B.C.–A.D. 45): “The kingdom of God is within us, even in this life; for this life’s reward is holiness, the vision of God; its punishment, that of being what sinners are. The vision or knowledge of the Most High is the direct personal communion of a soul that no longer reasons, but feels and knows.” O. B. Duane, *Mysticism*, p. 14, in *The Origins of Wisdom* (London, 1997). (Special thanks to Rita Bishop for the gift of this book.)

⁷⁵ Emil Fackenheim, “A Treatise on Love by Ibn Sina,” *Mediaeval Studies*, 7 (1945), pp. 208–228.

⁷⁶ The soul in Arabic is of a feminine gender so all human souls are referred to as her even when it belongs to a male. “*Epistles of the Brethren of Purity On the Essence of Love Divine: An Arabic Critical Edition and Translation of Epistle 37*” by A. R. Lalani (OUP–IIS, forthcoming); See also Llewellyn Vaughan Lee, *Love is a Fire: The Sufi’s Mystical Journey Home*, California, 2000.

situations and conditions in their souls with respect to thoughts, desires, joys and sorrows that they experience. Thus, they say:

So, had love not been present in the creatures, all these virtues would have remained hidden and no vices would be known too. We have explained in what we have mentioned that love and affection are a grace that appears in created beings as an exalted wisdom and an awe-inspiring characteristic from God's grace. It is His mercy on his creatures for their welfare and as a means of showing them what they have in their midst and to incline them even more towards Him.⁷⁷

Thus, in all its expressions, love is a quality of the soul whose desire it is to attain oneness with the object of its love, oneness being an entirely spiritual state in which physical bodies may attain proximity and union. All love is a grace, wisdom and understanding endowed in humans through which they gradually incline towards goodness to attain oneness.

A treatise written by al-Naysābūrī, a Fāṭimid scholar of early fifth/eleventh century, examines the perennial need and necessity for an Imam as the loving beloved and guide of humanity in all matters spiritual and mundane. He states the prophet's immunity from error at the outset of his treatise after which, in several instances, he describes the gradations of the spirits in the universe and how the imam as the successor of the Prophet is endowed with the sanctified spirit besides other spirits, thus allowing him to become the pinnacle of purity.⁷⁸ The Imam is the light in individual souls from whom they derive intellectual light (*al-nūr al-'aqlī*), motion (*al-ḥaraka*) and elevation (*al-'uluww*). No principle or religious realm is complete without him.⁷⁹ While scholars of his time used the term *nafs* as in the Ikhwān, al-Naysābūrī distinctly uses *rūḥ* as in *rūḥ al-namā* (spirit of growth), *rūḥ al-ḥiss* (spirit of sensation) and *rūḥ al-nuṭq* (spirit of reason) or articulated speech distinct in humans. It is also al-Naysābūrī who informs us that the Imam is endowed with additional spirits, purity and powers on undertaking the office of the Imamate:

[32] ...So when the Imam undertakes the charge, he is endowed with additional spirits as well as powers and purity that no ordinary human being possesses. Thus, the pinnacle of purity in the human animal is combined in the Imam along with the subtlety and refinement of nature. The peak of the sen-

⁷⁷ Ikhwān Treatise on Love, section 9, "On the types of beloveds and the wisdom in loving them."

⁷⁸ Al-Naysābūrī, Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm, *Kitāb Ithbāt al-Imāma*, ed. and tr. Lalani, A. R., *Degrees of Excellence: A Fatimid Treatise on Leadership in Islam* (London, 2010). See paragraphs 1, 32–33, 39, 47 and others including 57–58, 60–61 and 67 which demonstrate how the Imam guarantees purification of those led by him. See also paragraphs 47, 57–58, 60–61 and 67 on *shafa'a*, given by the Imam to his followers on account of his purity.

⁷⁹ Refer to paragraph [16] in the text and translation of al-Naysaburi, *Ithbāt al-Imāma* in *Degrees of Excellence*.

suous animals, their choicest parts, the furthest felicity of the celestial spheres, the balance of nature and the subtlest influence of the entire celestial spheres and stars, are so combined that he [the Imam] becomes the quintessence of the whole world. Then, the subtleties of the spirit of reason, pure thought and the entire intellectual spirit, unite in the Imam and the total sanctified spirit (*rūḥ al-quds*). Man only possesses a portion from this spirit, no more than what he acquires from the Imam and [no more than] on whom he chooses to bestow by his grace. Connected to this is the creative spirit (*rūḥ al-ibdā'*), which is the perfect seventh spirit prepared by God for humanity in the world of reward. It is the spirit of Oneness (*rūḥ al-waḥda*).

Al-Naysābūrī connects this light of the intellect derived from the imam, in whom all spirits unite as the sanctified spirit, to the spirit of creation and the spirit of Oneness. This becomes clearer when we learn that 'aql is also what the Qur'ān calls *al-rūḥ*—the spirit, *rūḥ* being referred to also as *al-ḥaqīqa* (reality) or *al-sirr* (the secret) at times. This human intellect is veiled behind the discursive thought or reason and essentially is derived from the divine intellect which not only transcends but informs the human intellect.⁸⁰ This faculty of 'aql in humans is an embodiment of being/existence (*wujūd*) or spirit (*rūḥ*). It is this which sets him apart from the animals entitling him to the status of God's viceroy on Earth, *khalīfatullāhi fī'l-arḍ*.⁸¹ In al-Naysābūrī, this is so ever since creation and in Ismā'īlī Gnosis, therefore, the primeval universal Adam (*Ādam awwal kullī*) is invested with the light of leadership—the *nūr al-Imāma* and immunised against all impurity. This is then revealed through a succession of epiphanic prophetic forms, beginning with the visionary dignity conferred upon Adam. The spiritual Adam (*Ādam rūḥānī*) was invested with the primordial imamate. The celestial anthropos Angelos Christos is the same as the spiritual Adam whom Ibn Sīnā identifies as the *rūḥ al-quds* and the angel Gabriel. Christ is a saviour not because he shed blood but because he kindled in mankind the perfect knowledge.⁸² In Ismā'īlī Philosophy, this knowledge is perennially nec-

⁸⁰ Inaugural Speech of H. H. The Aga Khan, AKU Faculty of Health Sciences, 11th November 1985, Karachi, Pakistan.

⁸¹ Q2:33. See al-Naysābūrī, *Ithbāt*, and see Cyril Glassé, 'aql, nafs and rūḥ, in *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam*, London, 1989, pp. 45, 295–296 and 338. Also, refer to *EQ* and *EP* articles on Intellect, Spirit and Soul. (I would like to thank Toby Meyer for the term *wujūd* translated as being/existence each with different philosophical implications.) See Nelson, Michael, "Existence" <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/existence/> in *SEP (The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)*, Winter 2012 Edition, ed. Edward N. Zalta.

⁸² Henry Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* (London, 1983); see chapter on *Divine Epiphany and Spiritual Birth in Ismailian Gnosis*, tr. Ralph Manheim, pp. 59–150, especially, pp. 69–72. For further connection between Ismā'īlīs and Suhrawardī [*ḥikmat al-ishrāq*], see pp. 98, 112, 131, 132 and 133 in the above work and also J. Morris, *The Master and the Disciple*, which is an edition, translation and analysis of Ja'far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman's work, *'Ālim wa'l Ghulām*. See also Eric Ormsby, *Between Reason and Revelation*, being a new Persian

essary in order to prepare humans for the return journey home expressed in the Qur'ān as *inna lillāhi wa inna ilayhi rāji'ūn*—verily, we belong to God and to Him, indeed, is our return.⁸³ Thus, the need of a perpetual light which guides in the Imam of the Time is a cornerstone of Nizārī Ismā'īlī Philosophy.

The method of achieving this real destiny is knowledge of one's own self, one's own self-worth exemplified in a Prophetic tradition, reported by 'Alī, that he who knows his own self, knows His Lord—*man 'arafa nafsahu fa qad 'arafa rabbahu*. Scholars and mystics alike from all persuasions, Sunnī, Ṣūfī and Shī'ī, use this particular tradition: to know one's innermost heart is to discover the point at which the divine is found, as the meeting point of the human and the divine. The Qur'ānic verse *We shall show them our signs on the horizons and within themselves...*⁸⁴ is interpreted as God's command to look deeper in the inner recesses of one's hearts to find the source of knowledge and eventually the divine beloved, who is "closer to him than his jugular vein."⁸⁵ This tradition of knowing oneself is used usually as a synopsis of the mystical experience, an inner journey into one's heart. The loving heart (*qalb*) is the dwelling place of God, encapsulated in the tradition "heaven and earth contain me not, but the heart of my faithful worshipper contains me." It is true that the heart is the mirror in which God reflects Himself, but the heart needs to be pure so that the primordial divine light can reflect itself. In the time of the Prophet and 'Alī, this purity was epitomised by Salmān al-Fārisī whom Muḥammad accorded a unique status of being part of his family, addressing him endearingly *Salmān min ahl al-baytī*—"Salmān is from my family." The ultimate wish and desire of all believers is to attain that status and rank which obviously is one of spirit rather than the physique.⁸⁶

How does this happen? Al-Naysābūrī uses a biological metaphor to explain this, relating that just as plants tilt intrinsically towards sunlight so do hearts find repose innately in the imam's love. A Gīnan encapsulates this role of the Imam in how God's light created the earth, established the heavens without pillars and then revealed the Imam:

*Noor te khāk nīpaya, vann thambh rachīyo asmān ji
Qudrat apni zahir kidhi ane pragatiya din ka Imam ji*

translation of Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Kitāb i-Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, p. 83, which has a passage on "the universal human" and a reference to Empedocles on p. 250 with aspects on the seven illustrious lights on pp. 103–107.

⁸³ Q.2:156 *Sūra al-Baqara*; see al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, pp. 70, 72, 118, 276–277 as revised by Ismail Poonawala and also Nāṣir Khusraw in an *Anthology of Ismaili Literature*, p. 207, translated by F. M. Hunzai.

⁸⁴ Q41:53 is cited by many scholars including al-Naysābūrī in *Degrees of Excellence*.

⁸⁵ Q50:16.

⁸⁶ *Faṣl dar bayān-i shanākht-i-Imām* as "On the Recognition of the Imam," tr. W. Ivanow from Persian in *Texts and Translations: The Ismaili Society Series*, Bombay, 1947, p. 31.

The light [from God] created this dust on the earth, establishing the heavens without pillars.

In this way did God make His creative power apparent, and revealed the Imam of the faith.⁸⁷

There are many Ginans—devotional lyrics whose aim is ethical and moral exhortations with a view to inculcating a sense of detachment in the disciple whereby he learns gradually to renounce attachment to the world although living fully in it. It is then that the individual cultivates that love in his heart which eventually generates manifestation of light with true concentration on the Word given by the Lord. Yet, it is imperative to note the difference between God and His light as Sultan M. Shah Aga Khan III observes:

For Muslims, there has been a similar personal influence, and in many ways it resembles the position that St. Thomas Aquinas took in the Catholic Church. First of all, as regards the idea of the divinity of God: a great deal of the Koran is taken up with God's creation, with God's intimate presence in the world, with the importance of each human being's relations with the Creator; but only in one chapter—the chapter on Light—is the nature of the divinity referred to in a very clear form. Although of course we do not believe that the person of the Creator is a form of light, either in waves or in the minutest association of myriads of points, yet the consequence of the light, as seen in the universe, is the nearest we can imagine or hope to believe about the person of our Creator.

In a community directive, the Aga Khan III said that the foundation of faith is love (*din no payo ishq chhe*) or love is the foundation of faith. He reiterated this in India saying that just as the foundation of faith is love, so too action (*'amal*) is the foundation of worship (*'ibādāt*) in the same way as love (*'ishq*) is the basis of action and the foundation of faith. Reminding the Jamnagar congregation in India that faith is [actually] within the control of individuals, he said that if hearts were staunch, faith would remain so too, and added that faith (*īmān*) is light (*nūr*). Unless one enkindles the fire of love in the heart, true worship (*'ibādāt*) will not lead to oneness, he said poignantly.⁸⁸

Rūmī explains the state of oneness in his *Mathnawī* [II, 1170], calling it the *ittihād-i-nūr*, as being one with the light and at the same time distinguishes it from *ḥulūl* (incarnation) or even infusion [V, 2038].⁸⁹ In his *Mathnawī*, he re-

⁸⁷ Ginan of Hassan Shah in *600 Ginans*, Recreation Club Institute, Bombay: Khoja Sindhi Printing Press, 1934. Hazrat 'Alī has said: "Creation is like a dust in the air, only made visible when struck by light" (C. Glassé, "al-Hayūla," in *Short Encyclopedia of Islam*, p. 151).

⁸⁸ Community guidance in Zanzibar, 18th August 1905, Pune (Poona), 28th June 1908 and Jamnagar, India 4th April, 1900 in *Ruhani Rāz*, Spiritual Mysteries, pp. 56 and 75, ITREB, Canada.

⁸⁹ *Rumi Poet and Mystic*, the classic translation by R. A. Nicholson (London, 1978), p. 178.

lates that the light of the eye is the light of the heart and the light of the heart is the light of God.⁹⁰ In a doctoral study on the Intellect, Karim Douglas Crow surveys several ancient wisdom literatures while portraying the contributions of Ja‘far al-Šādiq. He focuses on the intellect as a light in the heart and how intellect pre-exists in the divine realm, depicting also ‘*aql*—intellect as a drop of light cast into the human heart by the angelic ‘*aql*.⁹¹

A citation in Margaret Smith captures the aspects of intellect, light, love and vision leading to gnosis (*ma‘rifā*) succinctly. On the subject of the vision of God, Junayd says:

God gives to the adept the sharp desire to behold His Essence, then knowledge becomes vision, and vision revelation, and revelation contemplation, and contemplation existence (with and in God). Words are hushed to silence, life becomes death, explanations (necessary for finite minds in this world) come to an end, signs (a concession to those who are weak in faith) are effaced, and disputes are cleared up. Perishability (*fanā’*) is ended and subsistence (*baqā’*) is made perfect. Weariness and care cease, the elements perish and there remains what will not cease, as time that is timeless ceases not.⁹²

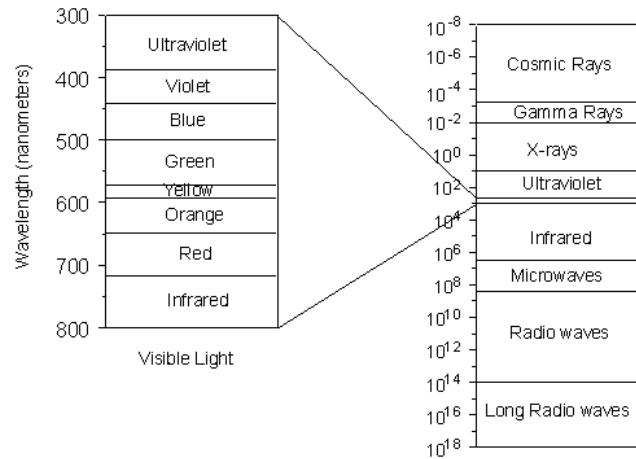
In the physical world, the metaphor of light relates equally to notions of oneness within humanity and the uniqueness of God (*tawhīd*), depicted by the white light. As is well-known, “visible light” contains within it frequencies of the spectrum that reflect the plurality of the human family in cultures, colours, features, beliefs, faiths and interpretations. Our eyes interpret the frequencies of the spectrum as wavelengths of different colours: violet, indigo, blue, green, red, orange and yellow, known as “vibgroy” in science education. This depends on the absence or the presence of wavelengths. When all wavelengths of visible light are present, eyes interpret it as white light while absence of wavelengths in the visible range is interpreted as darkness. If only a single wavelength or a limited range of wavelengths is present, eyes read this as a certain colour. In the presence of a single wavelength, there is *monochromatic* light, meaning it only has one wavelength.⁹³

⁹⁰ Lines from Rūmī [*Mathnawī*], recently cited by His Highness at the Toronto Museum Foundation on May 28, 2010. (My thanks to Mumtaz and Mohsin for drawing attention to these lines of Rūmī.)

⁹¹ Karim Douglas S. Crow, “The Role of al-‘Aql in Early Islamic Wisdom with Reference to Imam Ja‘far al-Šādiq,” Ph.D. thesis, McGill University, 1996; see his introduction and especially pp. 172–173 for aspects on *bulūgh al-‘aql* and refer to a chapter on “Knowledge is Light” in Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp. 156ff.

⁹² Margaret Smith, *Muslim Women Mystics*, p. 120, citing Muhammad al-Munawwar, *As-rār al-Tawhīd*, p. 378, Petrograd, 1899.

⁹³ Ref: <http://www.tulane.edu/~sanelson/geol211/proplight.htm>. (Special thanks to Dr. Karim Valimohamed for the diagram, reference and his insight of connecting the light metaphor to “visible light” with notions of oneness and pluralism.) The diagram below depicts this. “Light is an electromagnetic radiation with properties of waves. The electromagnetic spectrum can be divided into several bands based on the wavelength of the light waves. Visible light represents a narrow group of wavelengths between about 380 nm (1 nm = 10⁻⁹ m) and 730 nm.”



In addition to physical and intellectual concepts of light in the universe and in faith, literature and philosophy, light serves as a foundation for a recent contemporary architectural design. In a letter, the Aga Khan describes why light would be an appropriate design direction for the new museum in Toronto: “The notion of light has transversed nearly all of human history, and has been an inspiration for numerous faiths, going as far back of course to the Zoroastrians and their reverence for the Sun, to the Sūra in the Holy Qur’ān titled *al-Nūr*. Decades of Western history are referred to as the ‘enlightenment’ for good reason.” He adds:

...I hope that the building and the spaces around it will be seen as the celebration of Light, and the mysteries of Light, that nature and the human soul illustrate to us at every moment in our lives. I have explained at the beginning of this letter why I think Light would be an appropriate design direction for the new museum and this concept is of course particularly validated in Islamic texts and sciences: apart from the innumerable references in the Qur’ān to Light in all its forms, in nature and in the human soul, the light of the skies, their sources and their meaning have for centuries been an area of intellectual inquiry and more specifically in the field of astronomy. Thus the architecture of the building would seek to express these multiple notions of Light, both natural and man-made, through the most purposeful selection of internal and external construction materials, facets of elevations playing with each other through the reflectivity of natural or electric light, and to create light gain or light retention from external natural sources or man-made internal and external sources.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Correspondence of His Highness to Professor Fumihiko Maki [January 3, 2006] in Philip Jodidio, *Under the Eaves of Architecture: The Aga Khan: Builder and Patron*, pp. 206–210, Munich–Berlin–London: Prestel Verlag, 2007.

There is a clear depiction of multiple and indispensable notions of light from the Qur'an to light in all its forms, in nature and within the human soul. The light he refers to crosses through civilisations and religions as the source of life depicted in a light emanating from God's creation, and "light ... which emanates from human sources, in the form of art, culture and well-inspired human knowledge."⁹⁵

To conclude, light is an essential concept common to the essence of all traditions and faiths. The most widespread representation in Islam refers to Muḥammad's prophetic message of the Qur'an which the Shī'a link to the light of leadership—*nūr al-imāma*. The Imam undertakes this leadership as a trust (*amāna*) from God that renders him a link with the celestial world for those who accept him. His task then is man's purification and preparing receptacles for the *ḥaqīqa* which is the *raison d'être* of "history"—achieving cognition of the heart (*ma'rifa qalbiyya*) and being restored to the original abode. An illustration of this role of the imam as an embodiment of the knowledge and light that he radiates can be gleaned from a dialogue between Imam al-Bāqir and Jābir al-Ju'fī:

Jābir relates that he once visited Imam al-Bāqir's house and found him reciting words of praise with prayer beads in his hand. Jābir said within himself, in awe of the imam's presence, "Truly you are great." Jābir's account continues:

The imam raised his head and said to me, "Truly, he is great whom He has made great; and he is knowledgeable whom He has made knowledgeable, through what has come from Him to me. I am the servant of God, glorified and exalted be He!"

I said within myself, "This is [but] the veil: so what will the Veiled be like!" Then he raised his head towards me, and I saw a tremendous radiance, and a dazzling light that my sight could scarcely bear, and my intellect could scarcely comprehend. Then the imam said [speaking to God], "This is indeed one of Your Friends." He then asked me, "Shall I give [you] more?" I said "This is enough for me."⁹⁶

Thus the Shī'ī tradition reflects and highlights in particular this characteristic of the imamate, where the concept of "light" becomes associated with the spiritual quality of the imam's knowledge and of his role as a spiritual guide. These two corresponding dimensions of knowledge, formal and spiritual, are what make an imam an imam. It is the Imam who guides and initiates his disciples into the inner dimensions of knowledge, knowledge that is experiential and realised in the hearts of believers. Among the philosophers, this function is per-

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn, *Zahr al-ma'āni*, ed. M. Ghālib (Beirut, 1991), pp. 215–216; extracts from Lalani, A. R., *Early Shī'ī Thought*, pp. 127–128 (with thanks to Reza Shah-Kazemi who helped in refining and formatting the epilogue).

