

THE POSITION OF FAITH IN THE IDEAS OF IBN ARABI

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ABSTRACT

Faith and belief as well as ratification and believe in the doctrine have always been regarded as key concepts in gnostic doctrine either in the field of practical gnosis or theoretical gnosis. Defining faith and the way to explain it depend on the presupposition that faith should be regarded from the perspective of Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi, one of the greatest Muslim mystics. This research tries to explain faith from the perspective of Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi (the father of or theoretical gnosis); it also reviews faith from a phenomenological viewpoint based on his book *The Meccan Openings (Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya)*. For Ibn Arabi, faith is a knowledge and perception including both spiritual aspect of mysticism and its a posterior aspect. This virtue is the performance of beliefs. In this manner, faith is a path through which heart gathers reason and religion. Thus, ratification and belief are the prerequisite to enter the path of theoretical mysticism. Hence, walking in the path is acquirement of the real knowledge. Religion is essential for mysticism and finding truth.

Keywords: *Faith, knowledge, theoretical mysticism, practical mysticism, Ibn Arabi*

Introduction

Mysticism and mystical vision have always had its place in theology for the distinction from philosophical and scientific knowledge in the hearts of believers. The great mystical teachings and the seekers in the divine path are always in search of language, information, and signs in order to acquire a drop from the sea of perfection and God's mercy that will be inspired to them. In fact, allegorical, metaphorical, and symbolic language is limited to express the least acquired teachings due to intuition; but the only way to analogize perfect divine nature to human aspect is the employment of such language.

Undoubtedly, the situation of a mystic is a life in the valley of isolation that echoes the pain of separation from eternal beloved and deity. The languages of reason and philosophy as well as the language of science are incapable for becoming close to the situation of the burning and isolated mystic in the valley of isolation in order to be his companion to his internal experience. Language targets signification, not implication. The will of man is important for reaching the sea of revelation. It requires strict determination and a firm will. Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi opened a way in which human beings can understand the mood of mystics using allegorical and descriptive language in both practical and theoretical aspects. Faith is the inner and ideological ratification, which acquirement, position, or mood. It also may be inner knowledge to see being from manifestations or to see hidden aspects from manifestations and expressions. One falls in love and disregards all evidences and logical arguments.

Ibn Arabi's mystical spirituality addresses acquirement of inner knowledge from the rules of Islam and prophetic revelation by achieving numerous inspirations and revelations so that it mentions in self's confession and takes extensive endeavor from God to express the observations. This certain issue is understanding mysticism and theorization of acquired knowledge for attracting audiences' attention to God's presence.

Islamic Mysticism and Sufism

In his book "The Mystics of Islam", Reynold Allen Nickson compares the ideas of Dionysius and Zuluon, and Egyptian; he states about Zuluon that he known primary sciences like Jabir ibn Hayyan (Zarrinkoub, 2006: 50).

This group of researchers, which link the origins of mysticism to Greek, believes that many of the concepts used in mysticism have a Greek origin. Implications such as 'body is a prison for soul', 'knowledge of self', 'man as the microcosm', and 'emanation' are entered into Islamic philosophy and mysticism from Greek philosophy (Ghani, 2007: 111). Moreover, exterior theory about the origins of the term "Sufi" can be placed on the list of these comments because Abu Rayhan Biruni regards the origin of term Sufi as the Greek equivalent meaning wisdom and knowledge.

Some foreign scholars and Muslim writers and scholars such as great masters of Sufism believe that mysticism is derived from Islam and teachings of Quran. Louis Massignon (1883-1963), French researcher on the East and Islamic studies, insists on this idea. Louis Massignon argues that mysticism is a phenomenon that emerged in Islam and it is regarded as the following of evolutionary sequence of ascetic tendencies in the first century Islamic leadership. In addition, Ilya Pavlovich Petrushevsky (1898-) agrees this idea. Confirming this idea, he states that Sufism emerged in the Islamic context, as a result of the evolution of Islam, and in the conditions of feudal society; non-Islamic doctrines are not the causes for emergence of Sufism. However, it has little effect on its development later (Petrushevsky, 1984: 334). Some believe that Islamic mysticism is rooted in earlier ages, even divine and non-divine religions before Islam. Zarrinkoub says:

"This method have been attracted some minds as this way of understanding has been introduced even more useful than reasoning. There are even some simpler and primitive forms of this manner in old religions and sects. For instance, worshipers of Totem and rituals worshiping spirits have some sort of mysticism; old Hindu, Persian, Greek, Jewish, and Christian rituals have some examples in this regard" (Zarrinkoub, 2006: 90).

Jalal Al-Din Homaie believes that since the advent of Islam, Islamic mysticism have been under the teachings of Holy Quran, Prophet Muhammad, and the Prophet's Companions, especially Ali bin Abi Talib that is the head and chief of all mystical groups" (Homaie, 1993: 17).

Mysticism is divided in two types of theoretical mysticism and practical mysticism. Theoretical mysticism contains a set of ideas about the essence of God and his appearances including names, attributes, and actions. Theoretical mysticism or mystical viewpoint has five main subjects:

1. Mystical epistemology;
2. Mystical ontology;
3. Mystical theology;
4. Mystical cosmology;
5. Mystical anthropology;

Practical mysticism is passing the steps of human perfection based on a specific method to reach divine closeness and achieve divine knowledge and the highest levels of guardianship (the level of true certainty) (Rahimiyani, 2009: 5-9).

Ibn Arabi, Life, and Works

Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Ahmad ibn Abdullah Hatam Tai, the brother of Odai ibn Hatam, was born in Murcia, Taifa of Murcia on Sunday, 17th of Ramaḍān 560 AH (25 July 1165 AD) at the night of first anniversary of the declaration of the Feast of the Resurrection by Hasan ibn Muhammad ibn Bozorg Omid in the preparedness of Alamut in a dignified, great, and pious family (Jahangiri, 2011: 2-3).

His nickname is mentioned Abubakr in most materials; some has mentioned the nickname of Abu Abdullah for him. In his book Meccan Openings, he expresses Abu Abdullah as his nickname. Most likely, he was known by both names. He also had been known as ibn Falaton and Ibn Soraqa. In West, he is known by Ibn Arabi (Ibid, 2011: 5). In his mysticism tries to be acquainted with the great

scholars and mystics, Ibn Arabi travelled a lot and arrived in Mecca in 598. There, he met many scholars and devotees including Sheikh Makin al-Din Isfahani. He met Sheikh's girl named Nezam who was known as Ayn-ul-Shams val-Baha, (a pious and beautiful girl; he was fascinated by her appearance and spirituality and felt in love with her so that he composed a collection of lyrics titled "Translation of Longings". Moreover, he continued his journey after Mecca. Finally, he inhabited in Damascus after much journey and familiarity with men and women of spirituality by accumulation of abundant mystical experiences in 620 in the age of sixty. He stayed there to the end of his life. At last, he died in 638 in Damascus in a region called Salehiya.

"Meccan Openings" and "The Bezels of Wisdom" are the most important books written by Ibn Arabi. Writing Meccan Openings have lasted about 37 years. He began in 599 and finished it in 636, two years before his death. The Bezels of Wisdom was also written in Damascus in the last years of his life (Hekmat, 2010 a, 15-17).

Ibn Arabi's Philosophical and Mystical Ideas

A. Ontology and Unity of Existence

The most important term in theoretical mysticism, especially Ibn Arabi's mysticism, is "existence". Indeed, mystical worldview emphasizes on the centrality of God, existence, and unity. In terms of unity of existence, Ibn Arabi's mysticism regards the true nature of God as the only real object; but it believes that existence, in the level of essence, is unknowable and hidden. One can observe only manifestation of divinity, which has been emerged due to arbitrary plurality; without any formal way to discuss existentialism or essentialism, he, and his followers, believed that only real object is existence (that is the objectivity of divine essence).

In mysticism, discussions about unity, as one of the main teachings or the most important one, affect all other teachings so that one can consider the true goal of mysticism as finding unity in the created world (Vakili & Tajiki, 2010: 134). In historical development of the idea, Ibn Arabi is known as the author of this idea. He was the first person who regarded unity of existence as the base of his mysticism; he explained the base so that he is considered as the pioneer of this idea (Jahangiri, 2011: 262-264).

B. The Meaning of Unity of Existence

The meaning of unity for mystics is obvious, without the need of definition because they argue that unity is associated with existence and its definition is not possible, the same as definition of existence; unless we use vicious circle to define the object (Tabatabaei, 1994: 138). Wise men articulate on types of unity, or unit, that unit is either real or unreal. Real unit occurs when unity is the attribute of one and it has no intermediate in its chain such as unit man. Unreal unit occurs when unity is not an attribute of the object, but there is an intermediate in the chain such as man and horse, which are common in animality (Ibid: 14). It seems the key to solve problems about unity of existence should be found in manifestation. Manifestation is one of the central issues in mysticism that is present in all mystical discussions with a key role so that correct understanding of manifestation leads to the correct understanding of mysticism; other mystical issues are regarded as its results and consequences (Rahimian, 1997: 14).

C. Unity of Existence in the Ideas of Ibn Arabi

Mystical ontology pays attention to the unity of existence and subject. In other words, the only true being belongs to the true essence of God. If existence has a single meaning (that implies unity of existence), being is also not plural; it is single. Hence, it is called unity of existence and subject. In this regard, Hatef Esfahani writes:

"There is one, and there is nothing except Him,
Alone is God, not but Him"

In mystical vision, plurality and plural objects are manifestations of the true essence of God; thus, Muslim mystics have accepted the unity of existence and subject; they claim that they have

experienced it. Ibn Rabi describes unity of existence and subject as well as plurality of manifestations in these words:

“Since man can see his picture in a mirror, he recognizes that he has understood his face so that he cannot deny recognition of his face. While he knows that the picture in the mirror is not his real face and there is no person between him and the mirror, he tells both lie and truth if he asserts that can see and he cannot see his face. So, what is the observed face and picture? Where is it? It is both rejected and accepted; it is both present and absent, both known and unknown. God manifests this truth as an instance for his servants so that he will know that he is not capable of understand this reality and unreality while he is a part of the material world; in the same argument, he is more incapable of understanding his creature (Hasanzadeh Amlı, 1984: 48).

D. Ibn Arabi's Anthropology

In mysticism, anthropology is regarded as understanding of self and introduction to the understanding of God. Understanding of God has different degrees based on the level of human beings' understanding of self. In Ibn Arabi's mysticism, man is considered in two levels: (1) developmental level and (2) personal level.

Human developmental (existential) dimension: In this level, the “perfect man” and “human type” are subjects who are the perfect appearance since they are God's manifestation. They are the little universe as the soul of great universe. This reality appears in the Nasout world, and the world of witness in form of human. Therefore, the necessity of such being is proved, as it is the panoramic mirror of perfection and attributes of divine beauty and glory, and the indicator of God's names. It is the real instance of “perfect man” (Rahimiyan, 2009: 236-237).

Personal (instance) level: As every man has integrity in himself/herself (since he is a man), every man is “the perfect man” in the existential level. The differences are due to the differences in the level of one's understanding of himself. Some are so aware of the integrity that the degree of their awareness becomes close to the level of knowledge of God's attributes and names. Only in this group, self can play the role of a mirror that represents truth. Some may decline to the level of unawareness and idiocy. In this manner, it is said that not all people are complete in personal level; their differences result from the diversity of capabilities and manifestations of God for them (Ibid: 2009: 315).

When Ibn Arabi talks about man, he implies “the perfect man”, not ignorant and silly people we know. As noted in advance, he considers them from two different perspectives because he differentiates between their hidden reality in the knowledge of God and their manifestation in the worldly universe. His purpose of the “truth of perfect men” is a fixed and eternal instance of all people for perfect man. Be manifestation, he indicates prophets and saints in their historical realizations. According to Islamic worldview in general, and based on Ibn Arabi's ideas in particular, God has employed all other creatures to create man; then, HE created man as the last creature. As the final loop in the great chain of beings, man connects the other loops and organizes them. Man has not only inanimate, plant, and animal characteristics but also it reflects the hierarchy of unseen world and testimony of world. The hierarchy, which begins by first reason, is followed by the holistic soul, first matter, holistic body, God's seat, God's throne, Atlas Falak, al-Boroj region, seven stars, and the world of elements. Every man has all worlds inside himself mysteriously (Chittick, 2006: 81-82).

E. Imagination and its Levels

For Ibn Arabi, imagination can be considered in three main levels: the world, the middle macrocosm, and middle microcosm. The main characteristic of imagination is its inherent ambiguity. In every level of conceptualization, imagination is always a purgatory or interface world between two objects or two worlds; it should be defined in this framework inevitably.

In the holistic level of the world, ambiguity of imagination belongs to all objects except God because universe and all we call ‘existence’ placed between absolute existence and absolute lack. If one says God exists, it is not possible to say the same words with the same sense for universe. Thus, universe

should be regarded as nonexistent; but it is known that universe exists from one perspective. Otherwise, we have not been here to talk about it. Hence universe in both existence and non-existence. Moreover, universe is 'other than God' while it teaches us something because God's signs are represented in it.

In other words, universe is God's manifestation in one sense. When Sheikh named universe as imagination, he refers to the ambiguity of all objects 'other than God'; besides, universe represents God as the face in the mirror shows the reality of one who looks at the mirror.

Imagination in the second sense is the intermediate world between two basic created worlds: the spiritual world and the material world. These two types of opposite features such as brightness and darkness, unseen and visible, internal and external, stealth and appearance, superior and interior, and delicate and dirty are in contradiction. However, imagination is purgatory between the two sides and it has the characteristics of both sides. Accordingly, the great macrocosm of imagination should be described by two opposite terms. This world is neither bright nor dark, or both bright and dark; neither seen nor unseen or both seen and unseen. The macrocosm is bright comparing to matters and it is dark comparing to souls. The beings living in the world of imagination are neither angels nor matters but they have characteristics of both spirituality and matter; they are both bright and dark. This idea is included in the mythological argument that jin is created of fire. Fire is placed between the heavenly light and the material soil. Thus, they have material figures as a matter while they can change their forms as non-material beings.

Whenever imagination is considered as a fact in the human microcosm, the term is applied for too close implications. In the first sense, imagination is the very self and the "world of imagination" is corresponded to the microcosm, in this case, imagination is man that acts as an intermediate between divine abstract bright spirit and the dirt dark matter. Soul and body- or light and soil- have not common features. Soul is unit, bright, delicate, superior, and unseen while matter is plural, dark, dirty, inferior, and seen. Self is both unit and plural, both bright and dark, both delicate and dirty, both superior and inferior, and both seen and unseen. Self is the network of imagination; it uncovers its close resemblance to Jen and to especially Satan (Chittick, 2006: 153-156).

In the level of human self, self is a tangible perception of God's manifestation so that it combines spiritual and material affairs with inner intuition and achieves understanding of God. The level of imagination that covers sense (intuition) and meaning dilute tangibles and intensifies meanings.

Ibn Arabi regards the knowledge of imagination as "a major pillar of pillars of knowledge" and expresses the following words in this regard. It is the knowledge of isthmus, the knowledge of bodily world in which spiritualities are manifested, the knowledge of market in the heaven. Discussion the seven steps of knowledge, the importance of knowledge of imagination as well as its coverage is placed after the knowledge of God's names and the knowledge of manifestation. Therefore, while it is regarded as the intermediate link between senses and concepts, senses have ascending movement toward imagination. Concepts are declining to imagination. They met each other there and united. Accordingly, imaginary experiences lead to wonder of both reasons (Hekmat, 2010 a: 59-61).

Position of Faith from the Perspective of Ibn Arabi

For Ibn Arabi, the guide for one's self-understanding in the path to perfection has been set as a capability and potential understanding of divine attributes and names inside human beings; it requires a long ambition to decrease one's need to the guide and the right way to truth, which embodies religion and divine revelation. Prophet and the perfect man present the path and journey process to people as knowledge helmsman and guide of pilgrims. As the bearer of wisdom, prophet is the manifestation of God's name in a course of history when the name is dominant. The name has been set as the bright guide of prophethood as its bearer; it provokes people to accomplish spiritual journey in an artistic form by adjusting the artistic imagination to the guide. The end of one's journey in this regard is construction of God's name in the age by the prophet living in the age.

From the viewpoint of Ibn Arabi, one of the names of God is dominant in every age; the rules and requirements of the name makes different aspects of human life vivid. The principles of every age are understood by learning the name of age and its rules. In this way, one can select the best way according to the name (Hekmat, 2010 b: 206).

Such a mystical journey calls for a stable man who is able to extract the names of God from spirit of the age and history with his great soul. Ibn Arabi believes that men will discover divine secrets only through faith. Now one can answer, "What is the position of faith in Ibn Arabi's ideas?" For Ibn Arabi, faith indeed denies instrumental reason. The position of faith for Ibn Arabi moves toward reason in the levels of receiving esoteric secrets, receiving apparent secrets, and the acquisition and knowledge of laws and rules and principles of revelation. It also moves toward heart and imagination in the levels of insight, observation of real reasons, and the latent secrets of the world. In fact, Ibn Arabi's mystical journey is formed in a particular order of religious practices.

Ibn Arabi's mystical journey begins by accepting religion; then, enters the realm of spirituality and truth. On the one hand, it is an epistemological category; then, the existential presence and intuition of divine attributes appear. In Ibn Arabi's mystical journey, the role of imagination is more prominent than reason, sense, and emotion; the world of imagination is available as the leader of superior world while imagination is an epistemic capability in human beings. The control room is heart. On the other hand, man or the comprehensive being does transform to divine mood and status more and more by realization and manifesting divine names and attributes; then, he wears off in God. In the mysticism of unity of existence proposed by Ibn Arabi, there is no place for reincarnation because reincarnation disregards the status of being creator and being created. All objects and humans are manifestations and illuminations of God although they are the same neither as Him nor beyond Him. Ibn Arabi's idea does not propose personal conceptualization of God, not the mere resemblance and materiality of God, although reason tends to purification and imagination to anthropomorphism; comprehensive discovery of both is purification and anthropomorphism.

In addition, faith is a declarative knowledge; it is a presupposition by which a believer and seeker walks the path. It is an epistemological approach, both acquisition and presence. Faith in the ideas of Ibn Arabi is more subscription to religion and beliefs. It is passage to the divine positions. Accordingly, faith acts like a passage and rule; the real knowledge is acquired only by the support of faith.

Conclusion

Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi's mysticism is theoretical. In Ibn Arabi's mysticism, a person enters the path of religion and spirituality as soon as he decides to repent; then, he begins to stop evil deeds after that, he becomes the forbiddener of evil deeds and commender of good deeds. Ibn Arabi rejects reason; the reason reject by him is the one occupied the position of knowledge, not as an instrument for knowledge because reason is a good instrument for perception, and objective experimental and scientific reasoning and deduction along with sense, intuition, and reflection.

Rejecting reason (reason as an agent), Ibn Arabi introduces instrumental reason for realization of divine and religious commandments; finally, it is a tool for accepting divine manifestations and a capability for manifestation of God's names and attributes. He regards heart as the base instead of reason and proposes the model of following God, which has been instituted in in the heart prophets as well as divine and religious commandments. Using imagination, he sees reality not in objects, but in the essentiality of world and souls. He sees objects (that is the presence of God) in it. Accordingly, heart employs instrumental reason through real subscription, declarative knowledge, and faith on the one hand; it observes hidden provisions and divine secrets in the self due to imagination on the other hand.

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