

Stations of the Spiritual Journey

The *'arif* desires the Real (God) not for the sake of something else, and he values nothing above his knowledge of the Real, and his worship of Him is because He is worthy of worship and it is a worthy way of relating himself to Him; it is not out of desire (for rewards) or fear (of chastisement). The meaning of this is that in terms of his aims the *'arif* is a *muwahhid*. He seeks only God, yet his desire of God is not on account of His gifts in this world or in the Hereafter. Were such to be the case, the real object of his desire would be the gifts, God being only the preliminary means by which the desired gifts are sought. In such a case, in reality, the final object of worship and desire would be one's own self; for the purpose of seeking those gifts is the pleasure of the self.

The *'arif* desires whatever he desires for the sake of God. When he desires the gifts of God he does so because they are from Him and are His favours. They represent His Grace and Magnanimity. So, while the *non-'arif* seeks God for the sake of His gifts, the *'arif* seeks the gifts of God for the sake of God.

The *'arif* sees perfection in reaching rather than in understanding. And in order to reach the principal goal and the stage of true gnosis, he views the traversing of several stages and stations as being necessary and essential. This he calls *sayr wa suluk*, the science of inward wayfaring. These stages and stations have been discussed in great detail in the books of *'irfan*. Here it is not possible to explain, even briefly, each and every one of them. However, in order at least to give a general impression, I believe that we can do no better than to turn to the ninth section of Ibn Sina's *al-'Isharat*. Although Ibn Sina is mainly a philosopher, not a mystic, he is not a 'dry' philosopher, and especially towards the end of his life he developed mystic inclinations. In his *al-'Isharat*, which appears to be his last work, he has devoted a whole section to the 'stations' of the gnostics. This section being extraordinarily sublime and beautiful, we consider it more suitable for our purposes to present a summary of this section, rather than citing or translating suitable passages from the books of the *'urafa'*.

The first level of the *'arif's* journey is what they call 'resolution' (*al-'iradah*), and this is a fervent desire to catch hold of the Firm Tie (*al-'urwat al-wuthqa*) that catches hold of one who is perceptive of true proofs, or who has settled his self through the covenant of faith, so that it impels his heart towards the Holy in order to attain the spirit of connection (with Him).

To sum up, Ibn Sina means that *iradah* is a desire and longing that, after deep feelings of alienation, loneliness and estrangement, makes its appearance in the human being and motivates him to seek reunion with the Real, a union which puts an end to the feelings of alienation, loneliness, and helplessness.

Then what is certainly required is exercise (*riyadah*), and it is directed towards three ends - the first is to clear the path of all but the Real; the second is to subjugate the 'commanding self' (*al-nafs al-'ammarah*) to the 'contented self' (*al-nafs al-mutma'innah*); the third is to render the heart subtle for awareness. After having commenced the journey at the stage of *iradah*, the next stage is that of exercise and preparedness. This preparedness is termed *riyadah*.

Then, when *iradah* and *riyadah* reach a certain degree, flashes (*khalasat*) of the dawning light of the Real will descend upon him, delightful as they are, they are momentary like flashes of lightning appearing and instantly vanishing. These they call 'moments' (*awqat*), and these flashes increase in frequency with greater diligence in *riyadah*. As he advances deeper into this, they descend upon him even when he is not exercising. Now often he will glance at something and his glance be deflected from it towards the Holy, bringing to his attention some aspect of the Divine, and a state of trance (*ghashyah*) descends upon him, in which, as if, he sees God in everything.

Perhaps it is at this stage that his states overwhelm him, disturbing his equanimity, a change that would be noticed by anyone near him. Then, he reaches a point in his exercises when his 'moments' change into stable tranquility, the brief snatches become familiar and the flashes become a prolonged blaze. Then he achieves an enduring gnostic state which permanently accompanies him from which he derives an ecstatic delight. And when it departs him he becomes sad and bewildered.

When he crosses from the stage of *riyadah* to that of attainment, his inward becomes like a clear mirror facing in the direction of the Real. Sublime delights shower upon him, and he rejoices at his self for what is there of the Real. Now (like one viewing an image in a mirror, who looks either at the image or at the mirror reflecting the image) he is perplexed by two views: the view of the Real and the view of his own self.

Then, he becomes oblivious to his own self and views only the Holy. And if he notices his self it is for the reason of its being the viewer, not for the sake of its own beauty (like one who when looking at an image in a mirror, views the image only; although he does not pay attention to the mirror itself, nevertheless the mirror is seen while viewing the image, though the mirror is not viewed for its own beauty). It is at this point that the wayfarer attains union (and his journey from *khalq* to Haqq becomes complete).

Source:

Introduction to Irfan

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