Khuṭba on the `ilm al-ḥurūf

("The Sermon on the Science of the Letters").

Translated from INBMC 91: 30-36. See also INBMC 67: 228-233.


Last revised 21/11/07

The often faulty Arabic text here is gradually being modified and corrected...

(I)

[1] Praised be to God Who hath enabled the gnosia of His Essence to be realized through His verses which express theophanic self-disclosure (al-mutajalliyya) within the grandeur of the inmost heart (‘izz al-fū‘ād), though without hint of either anthropomorphism (tashbiyya) or differentiation (tafrīq) [within hypostatsis-personna of the Godhead]. [2] This such that all might bear witness within the Locus of the Divine

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

الحمد لله الذي قد عرف ذاته بآياته المتجليّة في عز الفوائد غير تشبيه ولا تفريق ليشهد الكل في مقعد الفضل صنع بأرنهم في مقعد الوصل أن لا الله إلا هو

Bounty (maq`ad al-faḍl) unto the ordered Handiwork of their Creator in the citadel of Reunion (maq`ad al-waṣl). No God is there except Him.

وقد أبدع مثل الاحدية في حقائق الخلق بلا مثل من الوصفية ولا شبه من الصورةعبد الله إلا هو قد اخترع مظاهر الجمع في كل التفريق بلا تعب الجوهرية ولا صورة العرضية ليوثن كل ذرات الوجود في تلبية وجه المعبد بنترية الوصف عن حكم الاسمية والنعت الوجودية إلا أنه هو

[3] He generated the likeness of Divine Oneness (al-ahadiyya) within the realities of Creation (haqā'iq al-khalq) though devoid of even the similitude of any depiction [of His Reality] or any hint of possible description [thereof], to the end that created things might, on every level, realize that the ordinance of Lordship exists within the Temple of servitude (hukm al-rububiyya fī haykal al-`ubudiyya) [for there is indeed] no God, except Him.

وقد أنشأ بعزم قدرته في ورقات شجرة السيناء صور الإبداع وما يمكن فيها ليخرج كل العباد كل حرف حكم مما يترك في القرآن وما قد أحاط علم الرحمن إلا أنه هو قد خلق في نقطة الخط علم الحروف وكل شيء لنال يقول أحد في صنع الله بعضا من القول وليرى في نقطة الذي حكم ما قد خلق الله في شجرة الأول أن لا أله إلا هو

[4] He indeed originated the Manifestations of Comprehensiveness (maẓāhir al-jam`) within every singularity (tafrīq) though without any description of [His] Essential Reality (ni`at al-jawhariyya) and without any form of disclosure [of His Reality] (sūrat al-`arḍiyya) to the end that He might impress certainty upon every atom of existence [when] confronted with the Countenance of the One Worshipped [God] (al-ma`bud) at [the moment of] the perception of union (bi-tatriyyat al-wasl) [exists only] at the very limit of [disclosure from the sphere of] the Divine Names (ḥadd al-asmā'iyya) for such is [nothing other than] the semblance of existence (ni`at al-wujūdiyya), for there is no God is there other than Him.

وقد أنشأ بعزم قدرته في ورقات شجرة السيناء صور الإبداع وما يمكن فيها ليخرج كل العباد كل حرف حكم مما يترك في القرآن وما قد أحاط علم الرحمن إلا أنه هو قد خلق في نقطة الخط علم الحروف وكل شيء لنال يقول أحد في صنع الله بعضا من القول وليرى في نقطة الذي حكم ما قد خلق الله في شجرة الأول أن لا أله إلا هو

[5] He generated through the Might of His Power in the leaves of the Sinaitic Tree (waraqat al-shajarat al-sīnā') the forms of the creative
generation (ṣuwar al-ibdā') and whatsoever came to be therein to the end that all of the servants (al-`ibād) draw out of it every letter (kull al-ḥarf) which is a token (ḥukm) of whatsoever was deposited in the Qur'ān. And no one hath encompassed the knowledge of the All-Merciful, except God, [no God is there] except Him. [6] He indeed created through the Locus-Point of the [Alphabetical] Script (fīl-nuqṭa al-khaṭṭ) the science of the letters (`ilm al-ḥurūf) and all things besides. This that any soul might give utterance and declare something of the handiwork of God (ṣan` Allāh) [7] and envision in a [Logos-]Point (nuqṭa) He Who decreed that which God created in the Primordial Tree (shajarat al-awwal). No God is there except Him.

(II)

[1] We have indeed this day have observed a person in the boat [ark] (safinat) [with a] love of the science of the letters and their culmination [fulfillment/eschaton] (ḥubb `ilm al-ḥurūf wa akhiratihā). Subsequently he had enquired about the mode of their appointed time (ḥukm ajalihā) as observable phenomena (bi'l-`iyān). [2] So it was desired that We dispatch a resolution (ḥukm an) [of the enquiry] from the Point of the Bayān (nuqṭat al-bayān), from the Point of the science of the letters (nuqṭat `ilm al-ḥurūf) [= the Bab] and their culmination (akhirati-hā). This
that the observers of their reading (tilāwathā) might bear witness unto the judgment of the Tree upon the [Sinaitic] Mount (hukm shajarat `alā al-ṭūr), no God is there except Him. [3] And [that they may] realize that their likeness is even as the activity of causative agents (al-`amilūn), save that is, when the thread of resplendent light (al-khayt al-ḍīwā') is set in motion through the crimson Light (al-nūr al-hamrā'). [4] At this the Sinaitic dwellers [lit. `mountites'] (al-ṭūriyyūn) among the denizens of the Divine Cloud (`ahl al-`amā') are assuredly made to swoon away and the proponents of Divine oneness (al-mawḥidūn) at the horizon of heaven (ufq al-samā') bear witness unto the rising up of the snow-white thread (khayt al-bayḍā') from the black horizon (ufq al-sawdā').


(III)

و أن في تلك النقطة قد حارب عقول الحكماء من قبل و ضالت أنفس العلماء من بعد حل قد اعترف الكل بالعجز من علماءها وأقروا لاثاباق بالعدل لآل الله و لمن شابا لافت ما يشاؤه ألا أن يشاء الله و كان الله على كل شيء مقتدر* ألا أدل ذلك العلم أخت النبوة في هيكل الروبية و نعت من المعابنة في هيكل الإنسانية لن محيط علمها أحد ألا ما شاء الله أنه تعزز حكيمه ماذا نطق الإنسان في الورقاء أن اتفقوا الله فان هذا البلد و عر شكواه قد رشح من طيطام ألفة البيان و قد غرق فيها خلق كثير و كثر و يمشي بآذن الله عليها فتنة قليلة لا يعلم علقم إلا الله و سبحان الله عفا يصفونه.

[1] With respect to this Point (al-nuqṭa) the intellects of the philosophers of old (hukamā' min qabl) are bewildered and the `ulama (divines) of subsequent times have gone astray. This until all became well aware of the weakness of their `ulama' and gained solace on account of its establishment in justice through the family of God for whomsoever they will for they [the Imams] do not will save God Himself hath willed. And God hath ever been Powerful over all things. [2] Is it
not the case that this science [of the letters] (‘ilm) is the sister of prophethood in the Temple of Lordship (ukht al-nubuwwa fi'l-haykal al-rubūbiyya) as well as an aspect of servitude in the Temple of the Divine Oneness (ni`at min al-`ubudiyya fi haykal al-ahadiyya). [3] And no soul can encompass the knowledge of this science save such as God Himself, the Mighty, the Wise, doth will. [4] Wherefore does humankind (al-insān) cry out through the Dove [Bird] (al-warqa’), "Fear ye God! This is indeed the Path (al-sulk) so CHECK THIS. [5] There hath sprinkled forth from the billowing sea of God (tamaṭam Allāh) the Bayan (Exposition) and many multitudes of creatures have drowned therein. [6] And with the permission of God I shall proceed with respect to it, [disclosing] but the merest shadow for none is aware of [the extent of] its magnitude save God. And Glorified be God above that which they suppose.

(IV)

[1] So O thou Onlooker! Examine carefully, refine the gaze and blind thine eyes! so as to render delicate the sensitive feelings (al-raqā'iq) then be restrained over reality generating mi`rāj journeys (ma`arīj al-haqqā'iq) and cast forth what in in thy right hand and in what is thy left of the subtle allusions about things intricate (ishārāt al-daqā'iq). [2] Then rise up upon the Path (al-sirat) and know that for this science (‘ilm) are seven foundations (uṣūl). [3] It is not possible for anyone to draw out of this ocean even those waves which constitute but a drop of the Cosmic Watery Expanse (al-ma'), save, that is, subsequent to attaining into its gnosis (ma`rifat) and a state of certitude regarding it. [4] Know then [something of] the reality of the Point (al-nuqṭa) in its very beginning (fi awwaliha) and the [nature of] the luminous Letters (huruf al-nuraniyya) and those of darkness (al-zullmaniyya) with respect to their ultimacy.
(akhiriha) as well as the knowledge of their modes of activity on every level (wajh).

(V)

و علم الاهام عند أخذ الإعداد بعد فثبت النواي عدد الحساب و حكم ألايام و نسبتها إلى كواكب السبعة ذلك حكم الله في علم النقطة. مما قد رأى الفؤاد بالحق و ما كذب الفؤاد ما رأى ذلك ربع مما أخذت من جعفر الأكبر خذ بقوة الله ما أليقت اليد و كن من الشاكرين

[5] And [know also that] the science of the letter هـ "H" (al-ha') is realized through a counting of successive numbers [through gematria : 5 = 1-2-3-4-5] (‘ind adha al-a‘dād). [6] Then the [letter] و "W" (al-wāw) is realized through numerical calculation [5+1=6= abjad wāw] (fi ‘adad al-hisāb) for He decreed the days (al-ayyām) and their measure (nisba) relative to the seven stars (al-kawākib al-sab`a). [7] Such is the decree of God relative to the science of the Point (‘ilm al-nuqṭa) since the inmost heart (al-fū‘ād) [of the Bab] hath, in very truth, seen and the inmost heart (al-fū‘ād) does not liet not about what it seeth (cf. Q.53:11). [8] Such is a sprinkling [of knowledge] derived from what was taken from the Greatest [Āqā Sayyid] Ja‘far [ibn Abī Ishāq Kashfi Darābī] (d.1267/1850-1) (Ja‘far al-akbar). Take ye then, through the power of God (bi-quwwat Allāh), what hath been cast upon thee and be numbered among the thankful.

[VI]

عن أن اتبع حكمي في أرض النقطة جافا هي شجرة لا شرقيه ولا غربية قد سبئت مظاهرها كل حرف إلى ما لا غاية أن الأقرب إليها ألف الغبيبة كلم الدينية ثم الجوهرية في أحرف التوراتية ثم العرضية في أحرف الضدية ثم السواكن ثم المتحرك ثم التلف في أول كل حرف فإن حكمها في الكتاب ما نشاهده. مماثل السنة و اعرف بعد حكم التلف في أحرف الثمانية و العشرين. ممثلا دون حرف التي اختصها الله بنفسها من دون مثل يشاكلها و أن لكل حرف من النقطة في مظاهرها حكم لا يعلم لأحد إلا الله و من شاء أنه عزيز ص 33 حكيم و هنا أنا أذكر وجهها من وجهها ليعلم أهل الأفادة من كل حرف حكمها ر

[6] Then the letter "A" (al-alif) which is at the beginning of every letter, the wisdom thereof being in the Book (al-kitāb) which We evidence by the example of the tradition (sunna). [7] So be aware that the after the decree regarding the letter "A" (al-alif) which is [scribed] within the eighteen letters after its [own] likeness there is something other than a letter which God singled out for His Own Logos-Self and which has other than the likeness of their form [cf. al-Ahsai‘i, Jawāmi‘ al-kalim vol. II: 312]. [8] For every letter derived from the Point (al-nuqṭa) there is a wisdom to its manifestations which none can fathom aside from God Himself and whomsoever He willeth for He is the Mighty, the Wise. [9] Of such [wisdoms] I shall mention but one of their aspects in order that the people of the inmost heart (ahl al-af’ida) might know what [manner of] wisdom lieth within every letter.

[VII]

[10] So O Thou Onlooker! If thou did know what is alluded to therein thou would reckon that the result would accord with the wisdom of the knowledge of the Point (hukm `ilm al-nuqṭa) and its consequent realities [alphabetical "sisters"] (ukht). [11] Such is the wisdom which I cast unto thee regarding the dual dimensions of the [word] Bāb (ithnayn al-bāb) [= its 2 letter ﺔـ"B" s] resulting from the seven letters [ this duality ﺔـ"B" = B+B with "a" is expressed as Bab = `Ali + Muhammad = 3+4 = 7 letters].

[12] Now regarding that which We [now] cast upon thee about the modes of activity associated with the celestial orbs [stars] (marātib al-fi`l...


[13] Now regarding the wisdom about what is indicated of the days [of the week] (al-ayyām). The first [day configures to] is al-mashiyya (the Divine Will), the second to al-irāda (the Divine Intention), the third to al-qadar (the Divine Foreordainment), the fourth to al-qiḍā’ ("the Divine Accomplishment"), the fifth to al-imḍā’ (the Divine Realization) and the [sixth] to Friday which is the Day of al-ajal (the Divinely allotted Time”) while the seventh (al-sabt) [Saturday] configures to the [Cosmic] Book (al-kitāb). [14] Such then is the decree of God in this connection and I have not found in for the ways (al-sunna) of God with respect to the Letters (al-ḥurūf) [of the Alphabet] any alteration. [15] This is the wisdom respecting the fact that God created [everything] in six days from the Divine Authorization (min al-idhn).

[IX]
[1] Now regarding the wisdom which We cast unto thee respecting the decree about the letters [the threefold letter wāw = 6 \( w+a+w \), abjad numerical value = 6 [13]). [2] So [it is necessary that you] rise up upon the throne of allusion (`arsh al-ishārat) and if the [celestial] veil (al-hijāb) is especially fine and delicate (raqīq wa raqīq), the [cosmic] ocean deep and impenetrable (`amīq `amīq) and the decree (ḥukm) complex and intricate (anīq anīq) then desire that thou partake of the fruit of that knowledge (thamarat al-`ilm) which involves obtaining of the wisdom [decree] (hukm) respecting the Arabic letters (bi'l-ahraf al-'arabiyya) through the knowledge that results from [an awareness of] the numerical value of the letters (`adad al-ḥurūf).

[3] So preserve [safeguard-memorize...] thy day and its designation (nisba) relative to the levels of activity (ilā marātib al-fi`l) and the celestial orbs (al-kawākib) then subtract from the head of all the tens the number of the three from the six (= wāw = 6) adding [multiplying?] there after all the seventeen letters from a letter from the letter "H" (min harf min al-hā') unto the number of the threefold sixth (= wāw = 6) and count from the threefold letter J" (thulth al-jim) and preserve [divine?] the two thirds of the numbers (thulthā al-`ādād) at the moment of subtraction. [4] Then when [you have] added up [gathered together] the [value of the] letters are gathered together [added up] take the units [cardinal numbers (al-iḥād) and the double [multiple] (ḍā`if) for in their image (bi-mithlihā) are seven letters the like of which hath been indicated unto thee before. [5] [Then] relinquish [omit] the tens and there shall emerge the valuation (ḥukm) with the permission of thy Lord, that which the eye doth not see nor had ever occurred to the heart aforetime. [6] Such is the bounty of God (fadl Allah) which He bestoweth upon whomsoever He willeth for God is the One possessed of Great Bounty (fadl `azim).

[X]

و أما حكم أخت النبوة فاعرف أن الأمر قد نزلت من مقام كن إلى مقام الجن
ثم، مما قابلت من حكم ربك فيما الحكم في ماء الفواد و تزيد ربك عن الأشياء
و الأمثال لذا حكت المثال بالمثال فقد قضى الأمر صرء3 و كان الحكم
Regarding the matter (ḥukm) of the sister of prophethood (ukht al-nubuwwa), know that the divine Command (al-amr) was [in this respect] sent down from the level of [the creative imperative] "Be!" (kun) unto the level of the jinn ("spirits") and then in line with what preceded it according to the decree (ḥukm) of thy Lord.

And as for the matter (ḥukm) pertaining to the world of the inmost-heart (`alam al-fu'ad) and the ability to glimpse [?] (tatriyya) thy Lord abstracted from existing things and likenesses (al-imthal). When the similitude is narrated as similitude [parable] (al-mithāl bi'l-mithāl) the matter is [divinely] authorized [sanctioned] and the [veracity of the] matter was, in this connection, sealed up (makhtūm an). Wherefore is it that in every world whatsoever pertains to whatever is computed has confirmation through the Book (li'l-kitāb) which is His Command (amr) [see Q. 36:12; 58:6; 72:28;78:29].

Regarding thy station (maqām) which pertains to this world. Obtain the Sinatic Tree (shajarat al-sīnā') from the head of the Youth (ra`sa l-fatā)! than cleanse [wash] (gh-s-l) it at the very apex of purity (`alā ḥadd al-ṣāfā) Then extract its liquid-water (mā') [= mercury] four times. If you extract a fifth part the liquid (khāmis al-mā') without fail it will be a subtle yellow (ṣafrā' raqīq). Then preserve it and extract oil from that oil which is a fourth part sulphur (duhn min duhn rābi` kibrīt) after you have abandoned the first portion of the initial liquid [=mercury] (al-mā' al-awwal) and the likeness of that first semblance (mithl dhalik shubba al-awwal). When you have attained that limit [apex] (hadd) at seven [times] there will be manifest the Name of God, the Living One (al-ḥayy) [= abjad 18] then abandon-divide through the Bounty of God (fayḍ Allāh) according to the extent that you desire for there is not found for the Bounty of God any interruption.

[1] Now regarding the matter (ḥukm) of the sister of prophethood (ukht al-nubuwwa), know that the divine Command (al-amr) was [ in this respect] sent down from the level of [the creative imperative] "Be!" (kun) unto the level of the jinn ("spirits") and then in line with what preceded it according to the decree (ḥukm) of thy Lord.

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SOME NOTES

FN. Hadith from Imam Ja`far al-Sadiq:


In its Kitāb al-tawḥīd (Book of the Divine Unity) the centrality of mashiyya as a theological-cosmological concept is evident. References to al-mashiyya in Bābī-Bahā’ī scripture are most centrally rooted in a number of key Shi‘ī traditions deriving from various of the the (twelver) Imams. Among them the following tradition related from Abī `Abd-Allāh [= Imam Ja`far al-Sadiq] (d. c. 148/765) which is frequently cited and commented upon by the Bāb:

"There is not a single thing in the heavens or on the earth but came to be through these seven factors (khiṣāl):


An almost identical hadīth to the above, narrated through Abū'l-Ḥasan Mūsā ibn Ja`far, reads:
"There is not a single thing in the heavens or on the earth but came to be through these seven [factors]:

[1] qiḍā’ ("the Divine Accomplishment");


[3] irāda ("the [Divine] Intention");


[6] ajal ("the [Divinely] allotted Time");


And whoso supposes [the centrality] other than this [schema] assuredly attributes a lie unto God or disputes with God who is to be exalted and glorified (ibid 1:149-150).

Following these two traditions (cited above) there is a section in al-Kāfī entitled, bab al-mashiyya wa'l-irāda ("Section on the Divine Will and the Divine Intention") which contains six traditions (see ibid 1:150-152). In the first of them Abī `Abd Allāh [=Imām Ja`far al-Ṣādiq] is cited as having said,

"There is naught that hath come into being save that which God hath willed (sha`a Allāh) and intended (cf. irāda), foreordained (cf. qadar) and accomplished (cf. qiḍā’). I enquired, `What is meant by `He [God] hath willed?’ He [the Imam] replied, `It is the commencement of action’. I then enquired, `What is meant by His foreordaining’. He [the Imam] replied, `It is the determining of something in terms of its length (tūl) and its width (`arḍ)’. I further enquired, `What is meant by the [Divine] accomplishment?’ He [the Imam] replied, `When something is ordained such is
[assuredly] carried out. This then is what cannot be annulled.' (ibid).

The next tradition set down in Kulayni’s al-Kāfī is unusual in that it records Imam Ja`far reporting that God had no particular liking when He was involved in willing, intending, foreordaining and accomplishing (cf. 1->4 in the first tradition cited). This enigmatic ḥadīth is probably intended to indicate God's remoteness, his abstraction from these processes in the light of His transcendence and incomprehensibility

NOTES

VI:7. "So be aware that the after the decree regarding the letter "A" (al-alif) which is [scribed] within the eighteen letters after its [own] likeness there is something other than a letter which God singled out for His Own Logos-Self and which has other than the likeness of their form."

There would seem to be allusion to the tradition ascribed to the fifth Imam, Muhamad al-Baqir also recorded in the Usul al-Kafi of Kulayni:

"God created a Name by means of unpronounced letters and by means of an unuttered Word".

This mysteries "Word" is described as the "Complete Word". It is fundamental to created existence (for details see al-Ahsa'i, Jawāmi` al-Kalim vol. II: 312) This has been noted by Cole, 1994:155 and others.

Add here complete text and translation.