Khutba 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 21/1/07

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

(I)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

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

الحمد لله الذي قد عرف ذاته بأبياته المتجلية في عز الفوائد غير تشبهه ولا تفريع ليشهد الكل في مقعد الفضل صنع بارنهم في مقعد الوصل أن لا آله إلا هو

[1] Praised be to God Who hath enabled the gnosis of His Essence to be realized through His verses which express theophanic self-disclosure (al-mutaqliliyya) within the grandeur of the inmost heart (‘izz al-fū‘ād), though without hint of either anthropomorphism (tashbīliyya) or differentiation (tafrīq) [within hypostatis-personna of the Godhead]. [2] This such that all might bear witness within the Locus of the Divine Bounty (maq`ad al-faḍl) unto the ordered Handiwork of their Creator in the citadel of Reunion (maq`ad al-wasāl). No God is there except Him.

قد أبدع مثل الإحدية في حقائق الخلق بلا مثل من الوصفية ولا شبه من الضندية ليعلم الخلق في كل شان حكم الروبية في هيكل العبودية ألا أن الله إلا هو اخترع مظاهر الجمع في كل التفريق بلا نعت الجوهرية ولا صورة العرضية ليوقن كل ذرات الوجود في تلقائه وجه المعبد بتنزية الوصف عن حد الاسمية ونعت الوجودية إلا أن الله إلا هو

[3] He generated the likeness of Divine Oneness (al-ahādiyya) 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 fi haykal al-`ubudiyya) [for there is indeed] no God, except Him.

[4] He indeed originated the Manifestations of Comprehensiveness (maţāhir al-jam`) within every singularity (tafrīq) though without any description of [His] Essential Reality
(ni`at al-jawharyyya) and without any form of disclosure [of His Reality] (sūrat al-ardīyya) 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-tatiyyat al-wasīl) [exists only] at the very limit of
[disclosure from the sphere of] the Divine Names (ḥadd al-asma`iyya) for such is [nothing
other than] the semblance of existence (ni`at al-wujūdyya), for , there is no God is there
other than Him.

و قد إنشا بعُز قدرته في ورقات شجرة السيناء صور الإبداع و ما يمكن فيها ليخرج كل العباد
كل حرف حكم مما ترك في القرآن و ما قد أضاف علم الرحمن إلا أنه الا هو قد خلق في نقطة
الخط علم الحروف و كل شيء لن يقُول أحد في صناعة الله بعضا من القول و لبرى في نقطة الذي
حكم ما قد خلق الله في شجرة الأول أن لا اله الا هو

[5] He generated through the Might of His Power in the leaves of the Sinaitic Tree
(waraqat al-shajarat al-sinā`) the forms of the creative generation (šawar al-ibdā`) and
whatsoever came to be therein to the end that all of the servants (al-`ibād) draw out of it
every letter (klīl al-harf) which is a token (hukm) 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-nuqţa al-khatṭ) the science of the letters (`ilm al-ḥurūf) and all
things besides. This that any soul might give utterance and declare something of the
handwork of God (ṣan` Allāh) [7] and envision in a [Logos]-Point (nuqţa) He Who decreed
that which God created in the Primordial Tree (shajarat al-`awwal). No God is there except
Him.

(II)

و لقد نرى اليوم عن نفس في السفينة حب علم الحروف و اخترقا بعد ما قد سنى حكم اجلها
بالعبان فأشار أن نرسل من نقطة الاله حكما من نقطة علم الحروف و اخترقا ليشهد الناظرون
في تساوحا حكم الشجرة على الطرق الا اله الا هو و أن مثل ذلك فيعمل العاملون الا إذا حرك
خيط الضوء من نور الحراء هناك أن يضيء السوريين من أهل السراء و ليشهدون الموجودون
في أفق السمو طلوع خيط البيضاء من أفق السوداء اليسار البحرين من نور الجلال فيها فق بلي
ر ربي ليأتيكم لم لم علم الحروف و اخترقا لا يعذر ص 32 من علمه شيء وكل شيء قد فضله
في كتاب حفيظ
[1] We have indeed this day have observed a person in the boat (ark) (safinah) [with a] love of the science of the letters and their culmination [fulfillment/eschaton] (hubb 'ilm al-ʔurūf wa akhiratihā). Subsequently he had enquired about the mode of their appointed time (ʔukm ʔalaihā) as observable phenomena (bi'l-ʔiyān). [2] So it was desired that We dispatch a resolution (ʔukm an) [of the enquiry] from the Point of the Bayān (nuqtāt al-bayān), from the Point of the science of the letters (nuqtat 'ilm al-ʔurūf) [= the Bab] and their culmination (akhiratihā). This that the observers of their reading (tālāwathā) might bear witness unto the judgment of the Tree upon the [Sinitic] Mount (hukm shajarat ʔalā al-ʔūr), no God is there except Him. [3] And [that they may] realize that their likeness is even as the activity of causative agents (al-ʔamīliān), save that, is, when the thread of resplendent light (al-khāy al-dīwāʾ) is set in motion through the crimson Light (al-nūr al-hamrā'). [4] At this the Sinitic dwellers [lit. `mountītes'] (al-ʔūrlyyūn) among the denizens of the Divine Cloud (ʾahl al-ʔamāʾ) are assuredly made to swoon away and the proponents of Divine oneness (al-mawḥīdūn) at the horizon of heaven (ufq al-samāʾ) bear witness unto the rising up of the snow-white thread (khayt al-bayḍāʾ) from the black horizon (ufq al-sawḍāʾ).


(III)

و أن في تلك النقطة قد حارث عقول الحكماء من قبل و ضل أنفس العلماء من بعد حلقد اعترف الكل بالعجز من علومهم وأقر أثاثا بالعدل لله و لمن شابا لافت ما يشاؤه إلا أن يشاه نه اد ذلك العلم أخفت الثنية في هيك النروبية و نعت من المعابدية في هيك الإندية لن محيط بعلها أحد إلا أن شاء الله أنه عزى حكمة ماما نطق الإنسان في الورق أن أتقو الله وان هذا البلد وعر شعواء قد رشح من طمام ألهة البيان و قد غرق فيها خلق كثير و كثر و يمشي باذن الله عليها فنة قليلة لا يعلم عقلم إلا الله و سبحان الله عفا يصفونه

[1] With respect to this Point (al-nuqtā) the intellects of the philosophers of old (hukamāʾ min qaḥīl) are bewildered and the ʾulama (divines) of subsequent times have gone astray. This until all became well aware of the weakness of their ʾulamaʾ and gained solace on account of its establishment in justice through the family of God for whomsoever they will for they [the Imāma] 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] (ʾilm) is the sister of prophethood in the Temple of Lordship (ukht al-nubwaww ḥaykal al-nubūbiyya) as well as an aspect of servitude in the Temple of the Divine Oneness (nīʿat min al-ʾubūdiyya fi haykal al-ʾahadīyya). [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-warqaʾ), "Fear ye God! This is indeed the Path (al-sulṭ) so CHECK THIS. [5] There hath sprinkled forth from the billowing sea of God (tamaṭam Allāh) the Bayān (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)

أبي الناظر و تدق النظر وصف البصر وأغمض عينيك و ترق الرقائق و تعقد في معارج الحقائق و ألق ما في يمينك و الشمائل من إشارات الدقائق ثم استقم على الضرائب ثم اعرف أن لهذه العلم أصول سبعة لا يقدر أحد أن يخرج من هذا البحر ص 33 المواد قطرة من الماء ألا بعد معرفتها والإيقان ما أن اعرف حق النقença في أولها و علم حروف الطورانية والإلمانية في آخرها ر علم مراتب الفعل في كل وجه منها

[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‘rīfat) 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 الهاء عند أخذ الأعداد بعد فُثِّبَت الواو ني عدد الحساب و حكم أليام و نسبتها إلى كواكب السبعة ذلك كله الله في علم النقença. مما قد رأى الفؤاد بالحق و ما كَذَب الفؤاد ما رأى ذلك ربع مما أخذت من جعفر الأكبر خُذ بقوة الله ما أقيمت البد و كن من الشاكيين

[5] And [know also that] the science of the letter 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-ḥisāb) for He decreed the days (al-ayyām) and their measure (nisba) relative to the seven stars (al-kawkāb 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 [Aqā Sayyid] Ja‘far ibn Abī Ishāq Kashīfī 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 through the thankful.

[VI]

[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-Ahaṣ'ī, Jawāmiʿ al-kalim vol. II: 312].[8] For every letter derived from the Point (al-nuqtā) 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-aflīda) might know what [manner of] wisdom lieth within every letter.

[VII]


[8] And that which was sent down of its manifestations is a Mighty Book in a Manifest Tablet, a Pathway unto the the Real Truth (al-haqq). [9] Their [mathematical] doubling [subersion ghamasaka ?] of these Luminous Letters (ahraf al-nuraniyya) yields fourteen [7x 2 =14].

[VIII]

فيا أيها الناظر أن كنت تعرف ما أشرت فيها تقدر أن تخرج حكم علم النقطة و أختها ذلك حكم
ما ألقته أليك في أثين باب من أحرف السبعه و أما ما نلقي أليك من مراتب الفعل الكواكب أن
الشامس كوكب الضفة و القمر نجم الإرادة و الخمسة نحم الخمسة لا تبديل لحكم الله في بعض
من الشبيه ر كان الله ركب لقى عجز و أما حكم ما أشارت في علم الأيام أحد للمشينة و
الاثنين للإرادة و الثلاثي للقدر و الأربعا للقضاء و الخمسة للمائدة ديماء اليوم الجذع و
السبع للكتاب ذلك حكم الله فيها و ما أجد لسنة الله في بعض من الحروف تحوياً* ذلك حكم ما قد
خلق الله ص 35 في ستة أيام من الأذن

[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 ʾilm al-nuqta) and its consequent realities [alphabetical "sisters"] (ukht). [11] Such is the wisdom which I cast unto thee regarding the dual dimensions of the [word] بُب (ithnayn al-bāb) [= its 2 letter ب B s] resulting from the seven letters [ this duality باب = B+B with "a" is expressed as Bab = ʾAli + Muhammad = 3+4 = 7 letters].


[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-qidāʾ (the Divine Foreordainment), the fourth to al-qidāʾ ("the Divine Accomplishment"), the fifth to al-imdāʾ (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-huruf) [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]

و أما حكم ما ألقى أليك من حكم الهباء بعد حكم ثلث السادس منحرف فاستقر على عرض الإشارة فان الحجاب رقيق ورقيق وكان معمق و الحكم ألقى أن أدرت أن تأخذ ثمرة العلم بأخذ حكم الأحرف بالعربية من علم ما تزيد على عدد الحروف ثم احظي بموكع و نسبته إلى مرتب الفعل والكواكب ثم اطرح من رأس كل عشر عدد ثلث السادس من السادس و زد بعد كل عشرة سبعة من حرف من الهباء و عدد من ثلث الهباء و احظي النثلي الأعداد حين الطرح فاذا جمعت الأحرف نxz أحدم و ضاعف ممثلها سبعة حرفو كما أشرت لك من قبل و أترك العشرات يخرج الحكم بأذن ربك ما ل ترى عين و يخطر بقلب من قبل ذلك ففضل الله يوتيه من يشاء و الله ذو فضل عدماً

[1] Now regarding the wisdom which We cast unto thee respecting the decree about [letter] H (hukm al-ha') following the decree about threefold sixth among the letters [the threefold letter w w + 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 (rqiq wa rqiq), the [cosmic] ocean deep and impenetrable (amiq `amiq) and the decree (ňukm) complex and intricate (aniq aniq) then desire that thou partake of the fruit of that knowledge (thamarat al-`ilm) which involves obtaining of the wisdom [decree] (ňukm) 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-ňurūf).

[3] So preserve [safeguard-memorize...] thy day and its designation (nisba) relative to the levels of activity (ilā marātib al-fī`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 (thultha al-adā`d) 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] (dā`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 (ňukm) 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 أخذت النبوة فاعرف أن الأمر قد نزلت من مقام كن إلى مقام الجبن ثم مما قيلت من حكم ربك فيما الحكم في مار الفوائد و تزيد ربك عن الأشياء و الأمثل ماذا حكت المن(vertical) بالمثل فقلى الأمر صرء و كان الحكم محتوياً وكان في كل عالم بلما أحسى للكتاب أمره و أن في مقام ثلاثة هذا العام حذ شجرة السبائ من رأس الفن ثم اغسله على حد الصافي ثم ذكر منها أربعة مرات فإذا أخذت ماء الخاسر لا بد أن يكون صفراء رقيق ثم احظه و خذ دهن من دهن رابع
s

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

[2] And as for the matter (hukm) 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). [3] When the similitude is narrated as similitude [parable] (al-mithāl bīl-mithāl) the matter is [divinely] authorized [sanctioned] and the [veracity of the] matter was, in this connection, sealed up (makhtūmān). [4] 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].

[5] Regarding thy station (maqām) which pertains to this world. [6] Obtain the Sinatic Tree (shajarat al-sīnā) from the head of the Youth (ra‘is al-fatā)! than cleanse [wash] (ghs-l) it at the very apex of purity (‘alā ḥadd al-ṣāfā) [7] Then extract its liquid-water (mā‘) [= mercury] four times. [8] If you extract a fifth part the liquid (khāmis al-mā‘) without fail it will be a subtle yellow (ṣafra‘ raqīq). [9] Then preserve it and extract oil from that oil which is a fourth part sulphur (dhun min “dhun rābī‘ kibrit) [10] 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). [11] When you have attained that limit [apex] (ḥadd) at seven [times] there will be manifest the Name of God, the Living One (al-hayy) [= abjad 18] [12] then abandon-divide through the Bounty of God (fayḍ Allāḥ) according to the extent that you desire for there is not found for the Bounty of God any interruption.

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 Shī‘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:

https://web.archive.org/web/20150404171844/http://www.hurqalya.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/0...
"There is not a single thing in the heavens or on the earth but came to be through these seven factors (khīṣāl):


An almost identical hadīth to the above, narrated through Abūl-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] qidda' ("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. qiddā`). 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 (`ard).'' 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 encoded 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 othes.

Add here complete text and translation.