Qur’anic Exegesis in Later Islamic Philosophy:
Mullā Ṣadrā’s Tafsīr Sūrat al-Fātiḥa

by

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Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations
University of Toronto

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Abstract

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The work of one of Islam’s most celebrated philosophers, Mullâ Şadrâ Shîrâzî (d. 1045/1635 or 1050/1640), is characterized by a unique synthesis of the main strands of Islamic thought. Yet Şadrâ’s role as a philosopher was not simply to synthesize. His penetrating intellect and ability to cast new light on some of the fundamental problems of Islamic thought ensured that all of his books would be landmarks of intellectual achievement in their own right. Amongst his most significant but seriously neglected writings are his compositions on the Qur’ân and its sciences. Broadly speaking, the present study investigates the manner in which scriptural exegesis, philosophy, and mysticism came together in Şadrâ’s writings on the Qur’ân. More specifically, this study aims to examine the sophistication of the discussions to be found in Şadrâ’s Qur’anic works by focusing on his last complete and most mature tafsîr, the Tafsîr Sûrat al-fâtiha.

After surveying the history, reception, and content of Şadrâ’s writings on the Qur’ân and presenting a coherent picture of the theoretical dimensions of his scriptural hermeneutics, we will go on to examine the Tafsîr Sûrat al-fâtiha’s structure and sources. This will set the stage for a
careful analysis of the problems in cosmology, metaphysics, anthropology, theology, and soteriology addressed by Şadrā in the work. Not only will our study demonstrate the manner in which Şadrā reads scripture, but it will also afford us a window into the development of his religious thought, since the Fātiḥa provides him with the opportunity to recast many of his philosophical concerns within the Qurʾān’s universe of discourse.
To Nosheen, for all her love and support
عقل جزوی عقل را بده نام کرد کار دنیا مرد را پی کام کرد

- مولوی
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Arabic and Persian names, words, phrases, and book/article titles have been transliterated in accordance with the system employed by the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (IJMES), with the exception that no distinction is made in transliterating consonants shared between Arabic and Persian. The names of authors who write in European languages in addition to Arabic/Persian have not been transliterated.
Introduction

Max Horten’s two books on Şadr al-Dîn Muḥammad b. Ibrāhîm al-Shîrâzî (d. 1045/1635 or 1050/1640)¹ (commonly known as Mullâ Şadrâ) at the turn of the twentieth century, as well as his other pioneering contributions to later Islamic philosophy, did not receive the scholarly attention one would have expected.² This is partly due to the fact that at the dawn of the twentieth century, the story of the earlier period of Islamic philosophy had not even begun to be told. There were indeed a number of general surveys (now outdated) on the history of Islamic philosophy written from approximately 1850 CE onwards, but the nature and scope of many

¹ Although Şadrâ’s commonly acknowledged death date is 1050/1640, it has recently been pointed out that his grandson, Muḥammad ʿAlam al-Hudâ (d. 1115/1703-4), records an earlier date for his death, placing him in Basra in 1045/1635-6. It was here that Şadrâ died en route to the Hajj. See Sajjad Rizvi, Mullâ Şadrâ Shîrâzî: his Life and Works and the Sources for Safavid Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 28-30.

² Horten’s first study on Şadrâ, Die Gottesbeweise bei Schirâzî (1640†) (Bonn: Friedrich Cohen, 1912), is a translation and commentary of texts from his oeuvre dealing with proofs for God’s existence. The second work, Das philosophische System von Schirázi (1640†) (Strasbourg: Trübner, 1913), represents an attempt to explain Şadrâ’s main ideas by summarizing his central teachings (ontology and physics in particular) as laid out in his magnum opus, the Asfâr. For critical remarks on this work, see Fazlur Rahman, The Philosophy of Mullâ Şadrâ (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), 20 and S. M. Bagher Talgharizadeh, “Einleitung,” in Şadrâ, Die Risâla flî l-hudâth (De Abhandlung über die Entstehung), trans. S. M. Bagher Talgharizadeh (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 2000), 4. See also Rizvi, Mullâ Şadrâ and Metaphysics: Modulation of Being (London: Routledge, 2009), 5-7. Despite their criticisms, Rahman, Rizvi, and Talgharizadeh also note this work’s importance. In this regard, the latter’s point is telling: “Nevertheless, Horten earns the merit for having recognized that aš-Šîrâzî’s work is ‘[a]s a whole, a first-class accomplishment and a unique work of art with regard to concept-formation [Begriffsbildung] and conceptual-poetry [Begriffsdichtung]. One will not be able to put it aside without admiration. The system is developed magnificently and carried out with consistency in its details’” (Talgharizadeh, “Einleitung,” 4-5 citing Horten, Das philosophische System von Schirázi, VI-VII; the translation is mine). For a listing and brief discussion of Horten’s many contributions to the study of earlier and later Islamic thought, see Gustav Pfammüller, Handbuch der Islam-Literatur (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1923), 353-6. It should be noted that before Horten’s studies, Muhammad Iqbal’s The Development of Metaphysics in Persia (London: Luzac, 1908) discussed some of later Islamic philosophy’s key figures, but in summary fashion.
early Muslim philosophers’ teachings were still largely unknown. Horten’s writings on later Islamic philosophy were, therefore, eclipsed by concurrent and later studies on some of the seminal figures in early Islamic thought, such as Fārābī (d. 339/950), Avicenna (d. 428/1037), Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), and Averroës (d. 595/1198).

Yet it was not always an interest in the history and development of Islamic thought which impelled scholars to take up its study. For many of these scholars—and not a few contemporary writers on Islamic philosophy—philosophical thinking in Islam only had life and/or interest insofar as it contributed to the development of Western philosophy. From the late nineteenth century to roughly the 1960s, Islamic philosophy was therefore primarily studied in order to understand its influence on the West. Since such important authors as Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191) and Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) had not been translated into Latin during the medieval period, they were not known to the Western world. Hence the study of Islamic philosophy came to be equated with the ill-defined sub-discipline of philosophical inquiry known as the “history of philosophy.” Succinctly stated, this meant the following: Muslims had taken knowledge from their more enlightened Greek predecessors and preserved many of their works (albeit in translation), only to pass them on to their true intellectual heirs.3

3 Tim Winter, “Introduction,” in The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology, ed. idem, 1-2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) attributes these older Western attitudes towards Islamic thought to Eurocentrism. To be sure, this antiquated approach to Islamic intellectual history was Eurocentric, since Islam’s intellectual history was simply an ingredient to the way Western/European scholars understood the development of their own intellectual history. Thus, the value and significance of Islamic thought was gauged through a Western/European lens. At the same time, many Muslims writing on Islamic thought in the later part of the nineteenth and early to mid twentieth centuries, influenced as they were by the works of Orientalists in their representations of Islamic civilization, tended to view their own religion’s intellectual legacy through the eyes of their colonial masters. See also Seyyed Hossein Nasr’s essay, “The Pertinence of Studying Islamic Philosophy Today,” in idem, Islamic Life and Thought (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), ch. 12, where he
Apart from the question as to why medieval Muslims would want to translate into their own language the writings of antiquity in the first place, this view of the historical role of Islamic philosophy went essentially unchallenged for the first half of the twentieth century. But this old story of Islamic philosophy was slowly approaching its end. Between 1938 and 1952, the French Iranologist and philosopher of religion, Henry Corbin (d. 1978), who had already made a name for himself by introducing Heidegger to the French-speaking world, published several groundbreaking books on Avicenna and Suhrawardi. From 1953 to the early 1980s came a steady stream of pioneering publications on later Islamic thought carried out by Jalāl al-Dīn

demonstrates how colonialism determined what brand of “Islamic” philosophy was circulated in the Muslim world, as views of Western philosophy prevailed amongst Muslims in accordance with the brand of philosophy given to them by their colonizers. Thus, in Egypt, because of the presence of the French, philosophy came to be identified with various forms of Marxism; and in India, where the British ruled, philosophy was of the logical positivist type. This phenomenon, in turn, had a devastating affect upon how Islamic philosophy was understood by those Muslims in the east who studied Islamic thought in early post-colonial times (Iqbal being one of them). See also Oliver Leaman, “Orientalism and Islamic Philosophy,” in History of Islamic Philosophy, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman, 2:1143-8 (New York: Routledge, 1996); Muhsin Mahdi, “Orientalism and the Study of Islamic Philosophy,” Journal of Islamic Studies 1, no. 1 (1990): 73-98. Cf. Dimitri Gutas, “The Study of Arabic Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: An Essay on the Historiography of Arabic Philosophy,” British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies 29, no. 1 (2002): 5-25.


5 Corbin’s seminal study on Avicenna was originally published in 1952 under the title Avicenne et le récit visionnaire, and was eventually translated as Avicenna and the Visionary Recital, trans. Willard Trask (Irving: Spring Publications, 1980). For Corbin’s earliest writings on Suhrawardi, see his Les motifs zoroastriens dans la philosophie de Sohrawardi, Shaykh-ol-Ishrāq (ob. 587/1191) (Tehran: Éditions Du Courrier, 1946); Suhrawardi d’Alep: fondateur de la doctrine illuminative (ishrāqi) (Paris: G. P. Maisonneuve, 1939). Corbin’s two volume critical edition of Suhrawardi’s Arabic works, entitled Opera metaphysica et mystica, was published in Istanbul in 1945 and 1946. The edition was reissued as the first two volumes of Suhrawardi, Majmū‘ah-yi muṣannafāt-i Shaykh-i Ishrāq, ed. Henry Corbin (vols. 1-2) and Seyyed Hossein Nasr (vol. 3) (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1976-7, repr. ed.).
These scholars’ contributions made it possible to discuss Islamic philosophical thinking on its own terms, and not just as an offshoot of the wider history of Western philosophy. They also helped pave the way for a substantially different picture of the development of philosophy in the heartlands of post-Averroës Islam.

This resuscitation of interest in later Islamic philosophy ensured that some of Islam’s most important and time-honoured scholars would be brought back into the spotlight. Amongst these figures, a good deal of interest was justifiably invested in the writings of Mullā Ṣadrā, whose thought revolutionized the discipline of Islamic philosophy for good.

Over the past three decades, scholarship on Ṣadrā’s life and thought in Persian, Arabic, English, French, and German has grown exponentially. Today we have a good idea of the main details of Mullā Ṣadrā’s life and times, especially since certain issues concerning his intellectual contacts, whereabouts, and time of death have recently been reconsidered. A number of studies have been carried out on Ṣadrā’s eschatology and psychology, epistemology, theodicy,

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6 See Muḥammad Khamenei, Mullā Ṣadrā: zindagī, shakhṣīyyat wa-maktab-i Ṣadr-i muta'allihīn (Tehran: SIPRIn, 2000); Rizvi, Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, ch. 1.

7 For two recent contributions, see Christian Jambet, Mort et résurrection en islam: L’au-delà selon Mullā Sadrā (Paris: Albin Michel, 2008); Mohammed Rustom, “Psychology, Eschatology, and Imagination in Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī’s Commentary on the Ḥadīth of Awakening,” Islam and Science 5, no. 1 (2007): 9-22. For a more complete set of references to this aspect of Ṣadrā’s thought, see p. 202 n. 51 of the present study.


doctrine of causality and physics,\textsuperscript{10} metaphysics,\textsuperscript{11} theory of perception,\textsuperscript{12} and spirituality.\textsuperscript{13} We are also well-informed of how Şadrā’s innovative philosophical insights relate to important non-Muslim philosophical figures. Particularly noteworthy in this regard are the studies carried out by David Burrell and Alparslan Açikgenç, which compare Şadrā’s ontology with the ontologies of St. Thomas Aquinas and Heidegger respectively.\textsuperscript{14}


\textsuperscript{11} The most recent discussions can be found in Cécile Bonmariage, \textit{Le Réel et les réalités: Mullā Şadrā Shīrāzī et la structure de la réalité} (Paris: Vrin, 2008); Kamal, \textit{Mulla Sadra’s Transcendent Philosophy}, chs. 4-5; Megawati Moris, \textit{Mullā Şadrā’s Doctrine of the Primacy of Existence (ašālat al-wujūd)} (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 2003); Rizvi, \textit{Mullā Şadrā and Metaphysics}. We will return to Şadrā’s metaphysics throughout the course of this study, particularly in chapters 2 and 4.


Şadrā was also thoroughly proficient in all aspects of what is known as the “transmitted” Islamic sciences (*al-ʻulūm al-naqliyya*).\(^\text{15}\) To this effect, he wrote a number of books on the Qurān and Ḥadīth. Yet when we consider the amount of attention paid by scholars to this aspect of Şadrā’s oeuvre, we notice that very little work has been done. This lacuna in Şadrian scholarship has resulted in a fairly unbalanced view of Mullā Şadrā’s specifically religious worldview. By “religious worldview” we have in mind those questions pertaining to the religion of Islam with which Şadrā’s philosophical writings proper are not concerned. What, for example, is his attitude towards Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), the Ḥadīth sciences,\(^\text{16}\) and the Qurān? Answering such questions is bound to shed a great deal of light on the relationship between Şadrā’s philosophical views and his “religion.”

Amongst Şadrā’s writings in the transmitted sciences, his work on the Qurān is most deserving of serious attention simply because the Qurān occupies central importance in his thought and the thought-world of his immediate audience. Although almost all of Şadrā’s major

\(^{15}\) For Şadrā’s training in the transmitted sciences, see Rizvi, *Mullā Şadrā Shīrāzī*, 5-14.

philosophical writings contain Qur’anic citations, from early on in his career to several years before his death Ṣadrā wrote a number of commentaries on individual chapters and verses of the Qur‘ān. He also devoted at least three other books to certain theoretical aspects of his understanding of Islam’s sacred text.

0.1 – A Survey of Scholarship on Mullā Ṣadrā’s Qur’anic Works

In contemporary scholarship, one of the first authors to devote a serious study to Mullā Ṣadrā’s work on the Qur‘ān was Seyyed Hossein Nasr. In his chapter on Ṣadrā’s Qur‘ān commentaries,17 which was reprinted the following year (1998) in an important collection of articles in memory of Izutsu,18 Nasr discusses the significance of Ṣadrā’s work on the Qur‘ān. He also takes stock of Ṣadrā’s writings related to the Qur‘ān and its sciences, which is a practice that would later be taken up by Ibrahim Kalin and Sajjad Rizvi.19 In many ways, Nasr’s seminal article lays the groundwork for further inquiry into Ṣadrā’s scriptural hermeneutics, as it effectively conveys the nature, content, scope, and significance of Ṣadrā’s work on the Qur‘ān.

It will be noted that we said Nasr’s work was “one” of the first pieces to draw attention to Ṣadrā’s function as an exegete in contemporary scholarship. Before his article appeared, several other studies were carried out on Ṣadrā’s hermeneutics in English, Persian, and Arabic, but none of which were as successful in demonstrating the importance of his work on the Qur‘ān. The first of these was undertaken by Muḥammad Khwājəwī in his Arabic introduction to his edition of

17 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī and his Transcendent Theosophy, 2nd ed. (Tehran: Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, 1997), 123-35. This essay is one of the book’s two new chapters.
19 See Kalin, “An Annotated Bibliography of the Works of Mullā Ṣadrā with a Brief Account of his Life,” Islamic Studies 42, no.1 (2003): 35-41; Rizvi, Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, 77-87. We will return to the phenomenon of modern scholarly annotations on Ṣadrā’s Qur’anic works in ch. 1 (section 1.2) of the present study.
one of Şadrā’s books on the Qur’anic sciences.\textsuperscript{20} In this introduction, Khwājawi devotes some attention to Şadrā’s scriptural hermeneutical methodology and its importance with respect to Şadrian metaphysics, while also listing in summary fashion his writings on the Qur’ān. Several years later, Khwājawi returned to the question of Şadrā’s Qur’ānic writings in his Persian monograph, \textit{Lawāmi’ al-‘ārifīn fī sharḥ aḥwāl Şadr al-muta’alihīn}.\textsuperscript{21} But nothing new is presented here which cannot be obtained by reading his fuller exposition of Şadrā’s hermeneutics in his earlier study.

An early and fairly helpful discussion concerning the nature and scope of Şadrā’s Qur’ān-related texts is to be found in Muḥsin Bīdārfar’s Arabic introduction to Khwājawi’s seven-volume uncritical edition\textsuperscript{22} of Şadrā’s \textit{tafsīr}.\textsuperscript{23} Although Bīdārfar devotes some room to Şadrā’s method (\textit{manhaj}) of interpretation, he also attempts to date the composition of each of his books on the Qur’ān and its sciences based on statements made by Şadrā in his vast oeuvre. Some dates are confirmed beyond doubt, but others are somewhat conjectural.\textsuperscript{24}

The earliest study carried out in English on Şadrā’s scriptural hermeneutics was a brief article published in 1991 by Latimah Peerwani.\textsuperscript{25} Peerwani lists most of Şadrā’s writings on the

\textsuperscript{20} See Muḥammad Khwājawi, “Muqadimmat al-muṣahhih,” in Şadrā, \textit{Mafātīḥ al-ghayb}, ed. Muḥammad Khwājawi (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Tārīkh al-‘Arabī, 2002, repr. ed.), 5-74 (from p. 54 in particular). Although not a “study” as such, it is worth noting that in 1971, Mehdi Mohaghegh published a manuscript containing a Persian translation (for its authorship, see p. 40 n. 32) of the introduction and first two parts of one of Şadrā’s important Qur’ānic works. See Mohaghegh, “\textit{Mafātīḥ al-ghayb}-i Mullā Şadrā,” in idem, \textit{Bist guftār} (Tehran: Naqsh-i Jahān, 1971), ch. 8.


\textsuperscript{22} Cf. Rizvi, \textit{Mullā Şadrā Shīrāzī}, 80.


\textsuperscript{24} See appendix one of the present study for a comprehensive chronology of their order of composition.

Qur’an and then goes on to show that Ṣadrā’s “method” of interpreting the Qur’an differs from the approach of the early Twelver Shī‘ī exegetes in that he is more philosophical and less concerned with making particular Shī‘ī theological arguments. Peerwani is correct to suggest that Ṣadrā’s concerns as an exegete are substantially different from other Qur’anic exegetes. She points out that this is because his approach to the Qur’an is fundamentally philosophical/mystical in its nature, which she seeks to demonstrate by citing a passage from Ṣadrā’s commentary on Q 24:35, the famous light verse. Peerwani also notes here how Ṣadrā expounds a four-fold methodology for interpreting the Qur’an, but bases her exposition on his explanation of different approaches to the Qur’an’s mutashābih or “ambiguous” verses. As Peerwani would later realize, an approach which limits Ṣadrā’s theoretical hermeneutics to his discussion of the mutashābih verses is problematic. This is precisely because Ṣadrā’s treatment of the mutashābih verses is problematic. This is precisely because Ṣadrā’s treatment of the mutashābih verses, to which he dedicated an entire treatise,\(^\text{26}\) belongs to a much wider body of writings in which he lays out his scriptural hermeneutics.\(^\text{27}\)


\(^{27}\) This treatise actually forms part of a much larger and significant work by Ṣadrā. See p. 68. For a survey of the reception of the muḥkam and mutashābih verses in *tafsīr* literature, and a discussion of the fluid nature of the categories of muḥkam and mutashābih, see Leah Kinberg, “Muḥkamāt and Mutashābihāt (Koran 3/7): Implications of a Koranic Pair of Terms in Medieval Exegesis,” *Arabica* 35 (1998): 142-72 (reprinted in *The Qur’an: Formative Interpretation*, ed. Andrew Rippin, ch. 14 [Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999]). This article’s annotated bibliography (pp. 66-70) discusses modern interpretations of these verses amongst both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars.
Peerwani returns to Ṣadrā’s hermeneutics in an article published in 1999. In her earlier study she simply lists Ṣadrā’s writings on the Qur’ān and its sciences. But in this piece, which is an expanded version of her 1991 article, she devotes several lines to three of his non-*tafsīr* works, in each instance following Nasr’s characterizations. As alluded to above, what appeared in Peerwani’s earlier study as Ṣadrā’s fourfold method for approaching the *mutashābih* verses appears in this updated version as Ṣadrā’s fourfold method for approaching scripture in general.

A key addition to this article is a brief discussion of Ṣadrā’s listing of the etiquette (*adab*) one must observe in order to understand the Qur’ān. Peerwani correctly notes that Ṣadrā borrows this material from Ghazālī’s *Iḥyā’ Ulūm ad-Dīn*. The most significant aspect of Peerwani’s revised study is her discussion of some of the prominent features of Ṣadrā’s “exoteric” philological, historical, and exegetical sources on the Qur’ān.

It would not be an understatement to say that, of all of Mullā Ṣadrā’s *tafsīrs*, his *Tafsīr Āyat al-nūr* has received the bulk of attention. This might have something to do with the fact that Ṣadrā’s commentary on the light verse was the first of his *tafsīrs* to have been translated into a European language. It was initially translated by Mohsen Saleh as a part of his 1992 Temple University doctoral dissertation, although it was never published. Peerwani, however, has published her translation of this text. Comparatively speaking, Saleh’s translation is more careful and accurate than Peerwani’s, although her annotations are more useful in that she tracks

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29 There is indeed good reason for this, as we will see in chapter two.

30 For Ṣadrā’s appropriation of Ghazālī’s rules for reciting the Qur‘ān, see pp. 80-1 n. 21.

31 See Mohsen Mahmoud Saleh, “The Verse of Light: A Study of Mullā Ṣadrā’s Philosophical Qur‘ān Exegesis” (PhD diss., Temple University, 1992). The translation of the work is on pp. 84-236 of the study.

down a number of Ṣadrā’s Sufi sources. At the same time, Saleh’s introduction to his translation, which was later reprinted as a separate article, attempts to explain the ways in which Ṣadrā develops the symbolism of light and darkness with respect to his major philosophical doctrines. Peerwani’s introduction, on the other hand, pales in comparison. Since her introduction is so closely based on her revised article on Ṣadrā’s hermeneutics, very little is done here by way of discussing the long history of mystical and philosophical hermeneutics which informs Ṣadrā’s approach to scripture in general, and his commentary on the light verse in particular. Not only does Peerwani’s introduction to her translation do an insufficient job in conveying the philosophical and mystical depth of Ṣadrā’s thought as reflected in the commentary, but she gives readers very little idea of the significance of Ṣadrā’s technical discussions in the commentary itself. A summary of the long tradition of philosophical and mystical commentaries on Q 24:35 seems to be in order here, since without a detailed historical and philosophical apparatus, a translation of Ṣadrā’s writings can say very little to non-specialists.

Two other scholars have devoted meaningful studies to the Tafsir Āyat al-nūr, each with their own points of emphasis. Like Peerwani, Marcia Hermansen’s study does a good job in situating this work within its Sufi context, but, by the same token, it implicitly downplays the importance of the long philosophical commentarial tradition on this verse. Bilal Kuspinar’s

33 See p. 63.
35 The same can be said about her annotations to the translation.
study, on the other hand, manages to bring out some of the philosophical significance of this work, although his treatment of the topic is rather short.  

Apart from the scholarship devoted to Şadrā’s Tafsīr Āyat al-nūr, two other short studies examine his insights on particular Qur’anic verses. The first of these studies is Christian Jambet’s brief inquiry into Şadrā’s treatment of Q 2:256, which states that “there is no compulsion in religion.” Şadrā, as one would expect, reveals himself here to be more concerned with an apolitical interpretation of this verse than anything else. Jambet astutely demonstrates how, for Şadrā, “religion” is understood in its deepest sense to be an interior matter. As an interior matter, there can be no compulsion in religion because following the interior life depends entirely on one’s own initiative, on whether or not one will submit to God’s will. It is interesting to note here that Jambet does not address what seems like an obvious question: could Şadrā have not been concerned with providing an interpretation of this verse because he himself fell victim to the persecution of the more exoteric ‘ulamā’ of his time, whose blindness to the inner life he repeatedly criticizes?

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39 See, in particular, the introduction to his Persian work on Sufi ethics, Risāla-yi sih așl, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Tehran: Tehran University Press, 1961). This edition also includes selections of Şadrā’s Persian poetry. Since the appearance of Nasr’s edition of this work, which was reprinted in 1998, another edition by Khwājāwī has also been published (see Rizvi, Mullā Şadrā Shirāzī, 90-1). For a translation of the Sih așl, see Şadrā, Challenging Islamic Fundamentalism: The Three Principles of Mullā Şadrā, trans. Colin Turner (London: Routledge, forthcoming). Although perhaps appealing to contemporary audiences, the title of this translation is certainly misleading.
A second and more substantial engagement with Ṣadrā’s approach to a single Qur’anic āya is Annabel Keeler’s study of his Tafsīr Sūrat al-sajda. This study is concerned with Ṣadrā’s interpretation of verse four of the sūra, in which he tackles the problem of creation in time within the framework of his ontology.⁴₀ Keeler’s article also includes some perspicacious remarks on Ṣadrā’s exegetical method. Unlike other scholars who have written on Ṣadrā’s Qur’anic hermeneutics, her exposition here, albeit brief, helps situate Ṣadrā’s work on the Qur’ān within the wider tradition of Sufi Qur’ān commentary, and does a good job in bringing out the significance of the rhetorical and exegetical function of this particular work’s introduction.

As for other studies on Ṣadrā’s writings on the Qur’ān, Sayyid Sadruddin Taheri’s study of resurrection in Ṣadrā’s Qur’anic commentaries does not focus on a particular tafsīr work, but does offer some interesting general observations on problems in his eschatology.⁴¹ He notes, for example, that Ṣadrā addresses a problem in one of his tafsīrs about a belief discussed by Avicenna and defended by Suhrawardī concerning the attachment of souls to celestial bodies in the afterlife in order to undergo physical punishment for sins committed on earth. Taheri’s observations on Ṣadrā’s position in this regard are undeveloped, as he does not explain how Ṣadrā addresses the issue in the context of his tafsīr. Significantly, Ṣadrā’s response to this long-standing debate in Islamic thought is resolved in one of his hadīth commentaries in which he draws on the notion of imaginal bodies, as discussed by Ibn ṬArabī and his followers. Ṣadrā later incorporated this commentary into his Tafsīr Sūrat yāsīn, perhaps because of the sūra’s eschatological nature.⁴²

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⁴₀ See Annabel Keeler, “Mullā Ṣadrā’s Commentary on Sūrat al-Sajda,” in Eschatology, Exegesis, Hadīth, 343-56.
⁴² See Rustom, “Psychology, Eschatology, and Imagination.”
The studies carried out by Mudabbir Azizi, Hasan Sa’idi, and Dihqan Mangabadi approach Ṣadrā’s Qur’anic hermeneutics in summary fashion. Azizi’s article offers a sampling of some of his comments on various āyās, both in his tafsīr and non-tafsīr writings. He moves between Ṣadrā’s interpretation of the light verse, stories of some Qur’anic prophets, and verses concerning the remembrance of God without any real sense of a unifying theme behind the interpretations presented. Azizi’s study, therefore, is a mishmash of different interpretations offered by Ṣadrā of a select number of Qur’anic verses.

Mangabadi’s essay, on the other hand, is generally better organized and thematically united. Its most useful discussion is its treatment of Ṣadrā’s critique of exoteric approaches to the Qur’ān. But how this aspect of Ṣadrā’s hermeneutics ties into Mangabadi’s discussion of his understanding of the different levels of scriptural interpretation, or the detached letters (al-ḥurūf al-muqattā‘a‘a), remains unclear. This is because the author does not attempt to draw a connection between these aspects of Ṣadrā’s hermeneutics. Mangabadi also considers the influences of earlier commentators on Ṣadrā’s tafsīr, but confines himself to scholars of tafsīr proper. This is indeed misleading, since there are many other source materials for Ṣadrā’s tafsīr writings.

Unlike Mangabadi, Sa’idi manages to account for some of Ṣadrā’s more mystical sources in his tafsīrs, and is able to draw a somewhat clearer connection between Ṣadrā’s critique of exoteric approaches to tafsīr and his insistence upon “unveiling” (kashf) as the most superior hermeneutic tool one can employ in understanding the Qur’ān. Yet when it comes to Ṣadrā’s


treatment of unveiling, Sa’idi ignores the long tradition of discussions on this topic which influenced him (particularly Ibn ‘Arabî). Nor does Sa’idi attempt to explain how Ṣadrā’s metaphysics relates to his understanding of the Qur’ān. This last dimension of Ṣadrā’s hermeneutics has been ignored by most authors, but is something which lies at the heart of his approach to the Qur’ān.

Apart from the aforementioned studies carried out by Khwājāwī and Āshtiyānī, we only have one monograph in Persian which engages Ṣadrā’s *tafsīrs*. Muḥammad Taqī Karāmatī’s aim in writing this book was, as its title suggests, to demonstrate the influence of philosophical arguments in Ṣadrā’s *tafsīr*. Thus, the work is not concerned with studying Ṣadrā’s *tafsīrs* as Qur’ān commentaries proper, a problem to which we will return shortly. Having said that, Karāmatī also does not successfully accomplish the task he set for himself. The work presents us with a fairly superficial discussion of how Ṣadrā makes philosophical arguments (such as proofs for the existence of God and bodily resurrection) in parts of his *tafsīrs*. Since the author does not pay attention to Ṣadrā’s use of Qur’ānic language in his explications of philosophical concepts within the context of *tafsīr*, the Qur’ān is simply regarded as the locus for Ṣadrā’s philosophical reflections. But why would a philosopher be concerned with commenting upon scripture? How does Ṣadrā use scripture to make his philosophical arguments? These are the types of questions Karāmatī should have asked before undertaking such a project.

The questions raised by Karāmatī’s monograph are in fact indicative of a much wider problem in current approaches to Ṣadrā’s work on the Qur’ān. A number of scholars besides

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Karâmatî, such as ‘Alî Arshad Riyâhi,47 and Taheri,48 all favour the position that Şadrî comments upon the Qur‘ân in order to demonstrate one of his philosophical teachings. As we will see later, this type of characterization creates an unnecessary dichotomy between the activity of philosophy and reading scripture. It also privileges the notion that Şadrî is a philosopher first and scriptural exegete second. But there is something much more organic happening when Şadrî, as an accomplished philosopher/mystic, draws on the Qur‘ân as an exegete. Indeed, a similar point has been made by Muṣṭafâ Burujirdî49 and, more forcefully, Muḥammad Bîdhandî in his short study of Şadrî’s use of ta’wîl.50 Examining Şadrî’s treatment of the relationship between the outer (zâhir) and inner (bâṭîn) approaches to the Qur‘ân, Bîdhandî argues that the basis of Şadrî’s esoteric interpretations (ta’wîl) is the Qur‘ân itself. This means that the Qur‘ân is not simply interpreted by Şadrî through the lens of his philosophy, thus reading inner meanings out of the text. Rather, it is the Qur‘ân which allows him to make his inner readings of its verses.

Like Mangabadi’s study, Abû l-Qâsim Ḥusayn-Dûst’s inquiry into the function of the detached letters in Şadrî’s hermeneutics is welcome, but significantly underdeveloped.51 Although one of the few scholars to have drawn serious attention to Şadrî’s treatment of the detached letters, Ḥusayn-Dûst does not fully demonstrate how the Tafsîr Sûrat al-baqara (which

contains a brief account of the nature of the detached letters) allows Šadrā to draw an important connection between God’s Speech and human becoming. Indeed, Šadrā’s treatment of the detached letters as laid out in the Tafsīr Sūrat al-baqara must be read in conjunction with his key discussion in the Mafāṭīḥ, in which he draws an important link between God’s words in their state of non-deployment and the detached letters of the Qurʾān. This insight, coupled with his ontology, allows Šadrā to discuss the intimate relationship shared between the Qurʾān and man.

Two Iranian scholars to have explicitly drawn the connection between Šadrā’s ontology and the Qurʾān are Fāṭima Ārānī52 and Muḥammad Khamenei, one of Iran’s foremost contemporary philosophers.53 In their studies, Ārānī and Khamenei demonstrate the fundamental importance of the notion of levels (marātib) in Šadrā’s Qur’ānic writings and their connection to his ontology. Human beings increase in perception as they shed their materiality, which means they become more real because they increase in being. The deeper one penetrates being, the deeper one penetrates the Qurʾān, which is the book of being. Khamenei also manages to touch on some of the basic issues relating to Mullā Šadrā’s Qur’ānic hermeneutics, particularly the ways in which his metaphysics ties into his understanding of the divine Word. But, given the brevity of Khamenei’s two studies, they leave much to be desired with respect to the theoretical development and practical application of Šadrā’s scriptural hermeneutics.


Returning to studies in modern European languages which engage Șadrā’s Qur’anic hermeneutics, Sasha Dehgani’s forthcoming anthology of German translations from Șadrā’s tafsīr is a welcome contribution. This book promises to offer the first selections of Șadrā’s work on the Qur’ān in German. It will be particularly interesting to see what kind of tafsīr materials Dehganli includes in his anthology, especially since, as the title of his anthology suggests, he clearly sees in Șadrā’s Qur’anic writings an underlying Shi‘ī theosophical perspective. If by “theosophy” Dehgani means an esoteric approach in which philosophy and mysticism are united to expound the deepest truths contained within the Qur’ān, then Șadrā would certainly agree that his tafsīr is “theosophical.” At the same time, a simple perusal of Șadrā’s tafsīr reveals very little explicitly “Shi‘ī” material. Indeed, answering the question of how Shi‘ī (whatever this may mean) Șadrā himself is seems to be the first step in determining whether or not we can call his writings in general, and his Qur’anic works in particular, “Shi‘ī theosophy” as Dehganli—undoubtedly following Corbin—would like to suggest.

Apart from Peerwani and Dehgani’s translations, the only other published work which makes materials from Șadrā’s Qur’anic writings available in a European language is Jambet’s recent monograph, Mort et resurrection en islam. In this excellent study of Șadrā’s eschatology, Jambet offers over sixty pages of select translated passages from Șadrā’s Qur’anic writings. In keeping with the monograph’s theme, these translations have to do with death, the

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55 For an insightful inquiry into the “Shi‘ī” nature of Șadrā’s works in general, see Hermann Landolt, “Henry Corbin’s Understanding of Mullā Șadrā,” in Mullā Șadrā and Transcendent Philosophy, 1:172 (reprinted in idem, Recherches en spiritualité iranienne [Tehran: University of Tehran Press, 2005], 364).
57 See Jambet, Mort et résurrection en islam, 209-18; 232-89.
day of judgement, resurrection, and Hell. Jambet’s introductions and notes to the selected passages help put their ideas in context, although his French translations are somewhat free. Perhaps the greatest merit of these translations is that they allow readers to see how Şadrā approaches scripture as a philosopher/mystic through a diverse selection of his comments on several key Qur’anic eschatological texts and symbols.

Jambet’s concern with Şadrā’s work on the Qur‘ān goes back to an earlier, groundbreaking study of Şadrā’s philosophy. Published originally in French and then refined and translated into English, Jambet’s The Act of Being goes a long way in relating how Şadrā’s ontology is an exposition of the self-revelation of being through its different modes (anîhâ) of gradation. Jambet is fundamentally concerned in this study with the main outlines of Şadrā’s metaphysics, psychology, and eschatology. He does a fine job relating all three of these domains to Şadrā’s teachings on the “movement” or “act” of being and how its devolution relates to man’s becoming/destiny. Jambet’s approach is certainly to be appreciated, since it helps make the ideas in Şadrā’s tafsîr more widely available. But, like Karāmatî’s Persian monograph mentioned earlier, Jambet treats Şadrā’s tafsîr like any of his other writings. Thus, Jambet is not concerned with demonstrating for his reader the manner in which Şadrā’s tafsîr reads as tafsîr, nor does he wish to bring Şadrā’s scriptural concerns into conversation with his ontology. Although Jambet’s purpose is not to discuss Şadrā’s Qur‘ānic hermeneutics as such, his book nonetheless manages to draw out the wider cosmological implications of the ways in which being is a form of revelation, and is thus one of the best expositions of the implications of Şadrā’s ontology available in Şadrian scholarship.
Yanis Ešots’ forthcoming article on Şadrā’s Qur’anic hermeneutics is devoted to the theoretical component to his understanding of scripture. To this effect, he mainly focuses on Şadrā’s Mafātīḥ al-ghayb. The Mafātīḥ has generally been considered to contain a summa of Şadrā’s scriptural hermeneutics. This is something we affirmed in a recent study, while also noting a further nuance to this general picture, namely the importance of the introduction to this work. By focusing on some of the Mafātīḥ’s central themes, Ešots therefore effectively demonstrates the range of Şadrā’s concerns as a philosopher/mystic commenting upon scripture. Here we learn of Şadrā’s understanding of divine and human speech, the reason for God’s revealing the Qur’ān, and, once again, the rules for interpreting the Qur’ān, and a typology of different approaches to the mutashābih verses. However, there are two fundamental flaws in this study.

Firstly, we are given very little idea of the nature of Şadrā’s reflections on the relationship between divine and human speech. Secondly, and more substantially, Ešots does not present Şadrā’s scriptural hermeneutics in its fully developed form. In order to do this, attention must be paid to his understanding of the detached letters (as already discussed) and the “Perfect Words” (al-kalimāt al-tāmmāt). Without a discussion of these concepts, a direct link between Şadrā’s Qur’anic hermeneutics and ontology cannot be made. And, without drawing this link, Şadrā’s understanding of the nature of the Qur’ān, and hence his approach to it in terms of theory and practice, will remain unclear. One example shall suffice. The author discusses Şadrā’s explanation of the manner in which the Word descends and becomes a book. Apart from missing

several crucial points mentioned in the text of the *Mafātih* itself, we walk away with very little understanding of how the descent of the Word is related to the ascent of man, which has everything to do with the connection Şadrā draws between the Qur‘ān and being, which itself presumes a thorough discussion of the detached letters and Perfect Words.

One of the most helpful treatments of Şadrā’s *tafsīr* comes from the pen of Shigeru Kamada in his study of the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-zilzāl*.60 Although Kamada overlooks several important points, his study of Şadrā’s hermeneutics is clear in its presentation and sound in its interpretations. After taking account of the different approaches to Şadrā’s thought and noting the relative paucity of thorough studies in Şadrian scholarship, Kamada turns to Şadrā’s *Mafātih*, demonstrating his reflections on the nature of the Qur‘ān and the manner in which it should be approached. He does this through citation and careful examination of several of the text’s most important passages. This then allows him to discuss Şadrā’s commentary on the *Sūrat al-zilzāl*, citing passages from this work and analyzing them with respect to Şadrā’s ontology and psychology. The most important aspect of Kamada’s study is the connection he draws between Şadrā’s understanding of the inner dimensions of scripture and the inner dimensions of man (a more or less classical Sufi trope), which results in an interesting discussion of the correspondence drawn by Şadrā between the imprinting of the soul and the unfolding of the text of being.

0.2 – The Scope of the Present Study

0.2.1 – Objectives and Argument

The above survey should make it clear that a significant amount of research remains to be carried out on virtually every aspect of Mullā Šadrā’s work on the Qur’ān. The next step in the right direction would be to closely study his *tafsīrs*, although it would be counterproductive to attempt to study them all at once. This is for a number of reasons. Firstly, Šadrā’s “*tafsīr*” does not, properly speaking, belong to the same genre of *tafsīr* as, for example, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s (d. 606/1210) *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*. Unlike Šadrā’s *tafsīr* compositions, Rāzī’s *tafsīr*, as Walid Saleh has pointed out, belongs to the category of encyclopaedic Qur’ān commentaries.61 Rāzī’s concern when writing his *tafsīr* was not just to comment upon the Qur’ān using the language of philosophical theology, but to expand the borders of what could be operative within the framework of *tafsīr*. He attempted to do this within the confines of the mainstream *tafsīr* tradition, which is how he has always been read. Šadrā’s writings in *tafsīr*, on the other hand, function as independent treatises with the explicit intention of producing philosophical *tafsīr* for an intellectual elite. This allowed him to avoid discussing many of the tangential issues taken up by Rāzī in his *tafsīr*.

Secondly, although Šadrā envisioned a complete commentary upon the Qur’ān—which was never completed—his *tafsīr* compositions were written at different periods of his life. This means that each of his *tafsīrs* were individual treatises sufficient unto themselves. From his earliest *tafsīr* piece to his last, Šadrā takes up many different issues, meaning that each of his

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commentaries upon parts of the Qur‘ān were guided by different concerns and, by extension, different stylistic considerations.

Thirdly, focusing on more than one commentary at a time will not allow for the depth of each *tafsīr* to emerge. Ṣadrā’s *tafsīr* writings tend to be long and involved. They draw upon the views of almost every major Qur‘ān commentator in Islam even when discussing minute points of grammar. Sometimes his *tafsīrs* are polemical in nature, presenting a number of possible views on a given doctrinal subject only to reject them at the end in favour of his own view—a practice which is also to be found in some of his other key works.

Despite the fact that Ṣadrā’s writings on the Qur‘ān span many different periods of his life and reflect different concerns, it is true that there is a great deal of unity to these texts. As this study will demonstrate, this is because Ṣadrā only took up writing on the Qur‘ān after his philosophical views had fully matured. Since his work on the Qur‘ān is informed by the same philosophical perspective, we can distinguish between the theoretical and practical dimensions of his scriptural hermeneutics. But this is not to suggest that the details of Ṣadrā’s theoretical hermeneutics were not more clearly fleshed out later on in his career. Indeed, this was the case, as is evidenced in the *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*.

In order to present as thorough a picture as possible of Ṣadrā’s theoretical Qur’anic hermeneutics, this study will work its way through his Qur’anic writings, paying particular attention to the *Mafātīḥ*. At the same time, we will be concerned with understanding the practical dimensions of his hermeneutics. In order to come to terms with this aspect of Ṣadrā’s work on the Qur‘ān, we will present a source-critical and analytical study of his commentary on the
chapter in the Qurʾān which occupies central importance in Muslim daily life, namely the Fātiha.\(^{62}\)

By the time Şadrā wrote the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa*, he had already penned over ten independent *tafsīrs*. He also had already written the *Mafāṭih*, where he was able to give full expression to the theoretical considerations involved in any act of scriptural interpretation. Thus, in the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa*, which is his last complete *tafsīr* composition, we encounter a Mullā Şadrā whose thinking on scripture had fully crystallized. His commentary on the Fātiḥa thus represents his most mature attempt to comment upon scripture, a fact which is evident throughout this pivotal text. We find in this book a very comprehensive, internally coherent picture of a number of key cosmological, psychological, theological, and soteriological teachings squarely situated within the Islamic intellectual traditions of Sufism and philosophy.

To say that Şadrā’s philosophical doctrines are given expression in the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa* is not to endorse the simplistic characterization (which we encountered in our survey of Şadrā’s Qur’anic hermeneutics) that reduces his work on the Qurʾān to nothing more than a set of philosophical “glosses” upon scripture. Something deeper is at work here. Şadrā does not simply approach the Qurʾān as a philosopher who seeks to justify his philosophical and mystical positions by using the Qurʾān’s dicta. Rather, he finds within the Qurʾān the same vision of reality at which he arrived through the long and arduous process of study and self-purification.

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\(^{62}\) Annemarie Schimmel aptly describes the Fātiḥa as “the true centre.” See Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 143 (her treatment of the Fātiḥa, which extends to p. 144 and beyond, is telling in this regard). For the attention the Fātiha has received in Muslim daily life, as well in Islam’s rich exegetical traditions, see also *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, s.v. “Fātiḥa” (by William Graham).
Thus, Şadrā’s approach to the Qurʾān is philosophical because his philosophy is Qurʾanic. The difference between his strictly-defined philosophical writings and his *tafsīr* compositions is that the former (although not entirely) are more concerned with explicating the nature of reality in purely philosophical terms. But when Şadrā approaches scripture, he is able to discuss the same themes he takes up in his philosophical works in more familiar “religious” language, as he is now operating, qua exegete, within the framework of the Qurʾān’s universe of discourse. As this study will demonstrate, it is here that the significance of Şadrā’s philosophical doctrines find their most eloquent articulation. This is why our study of his work on the Qurʾān is as much concerned with delineating his function as a scriptural exegete as it is with demonstrating his concerns and methods as a religious thinker.

0.2.2 – Method and Approach

Chapter one of this study seeks to outline the history of the reception of Şadrā’s Qurʾanic works in Safavid, Qajar, and Pahlavid learned circles. It then provides the most comprehensive overview to date of the chronology, scope, and contents of each of his writings on the Qurʾān and its sciences. After discussing the history behind, and the nature and scope of, Şadrā’s work on the Qurʾān, in chapter two we will be concerned with the theoretical dimension of his Qurʾānic hermeneutics. We will see that, although Şadrā wrote several theoretical works on the Qurʾān towards the end of his life, his thinking on the nature and function of scripture had already begun to crystallize at an earlier phase in his career. This consideration helps explain the conceptual consistency present in his *tafsīr* in general.

But this is not to say that Şadrā does not lay out his hermeneutical theory in one given work. As will be made clear in this chapter, his theoretical hermeneutics is most articulately

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63 Cf. Nasr, Şadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī and his Transcendent Theosophy, 71.
presented in the *Mafātīḥ*. While Ṣadrā makes explicit his intention that the *Mafātīḥ* is a theoretical exposition of the Qurʾān’s inner meanings, he also spends a good deal of time discussing the nature of the Qurʾān itself. Indeed, such a discussion seems almost necessary given the nature of his project in the *Mafātīḥ*. For both Ṣadrā and the long line of Sufis and Islamic philosophers before him, there is an intimate correspondence between the Qurʾān and the human self. Since being (*wujūd*) is a prototype of man, the Qurʾān is also a prototype of man. How this idea relates to Ṣadrā’s understanding of the Qurʾān and his hermeneutical theory is significant. Paying attention to this question will provide us with the occasion to trace the development of Ṣadrā’s understanding of the nature of scripture, his conception of revelation, and his self-perception as an exegete.

Chapter three will bring this study’s concern with Ṣadrā’s practical hermeneutics to the forefront, as we will turn our attention to his *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa*. This chapter will subject the text to very close source-critical analysis, taking account of the sources and various intellectual traditions which inform it and, in a sense, shape its discourse. We will also be concerned with outlining the form and content of this *tafsīr* work. This chapter, therefore, will set the tone for the remaining two chapters, which will be concerned with critically assessing the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa*’s most salient teachings.

In the fourth chapter, we will offer a close reading of the teachings in metaphysics, cosmology, and anthropology as laid out in the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa*. We will begin with a demonstration of the manner in which Ṣadrā employs the structure and language of the opening verses of the Fātiḥa to mould his famous thesis of the fundamentality of being (*aṣālat wujūd*) and
its gradation (tashkīk) into what Jambet calls the “theophanic model”\textsuperscript{64} of God’s divine essence and attributes, closely following—whether consciously or subconsciously—the teachings of Ibn ‘Arabī and his followers. The section on metaphysics will set the stage for a discussion of Ṣadrā’s unique cosmology of praise (hamd) and anthropology (taking their lead from the second and third verses of the Fātiḥa respectively), both of which admirably demonstrate the operative or practical dimension of Ṣadrā’s theoretical hermeneutics.

The verses of the Fātiḥa also prompt within Ṣadrā answers to two important questions, which will be the focus of the final chapter of this study. The first of these questions leads him to inquire into the nature of idolatry and its relationship to religious belief. We situate Ṣadrā’s response within the framework of similar discussions in later Islamic thought from Ibn ‘Arabī onwards, demonstrating how his meditations upon Q 1:1 allow him to articulate his position concerning the “God created in beliefs.” Not only does Ṣadrā show himself to be a faithful student of an important doctrine in later Islamic thought, but he also manages to tie this teaching into his explanation of the diversity of approaches to the Qur’ān.

The other issue which Ṣadrā attempts to tackle in the \textit{Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa} is the question of whether or not God’s mercy is open to all human beings in the afterlife, and, if so, how such a teaching relates to other scriptural statements which seem to indicate otherwise. The problem of soteriology, which Ṣadrā discusses in several of his other books, is the most important feature of this particular \textit{tafsīr} work. After discussing Ṣadrā’s treatment of this issue in his other philosophical writings, we then turn to his argument as laid out in the \textit{Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa}, demonstrating the manner in which his ecumenical stance is a corollary of his doctrine of the

\textsuperscript{64} That is, le modèle théophanique. See Jambet, \textit{L’acte d’être}, 402; idem, \textit{The Act of Being}, 403. Jambet employs this phrase with specific reference to what can be called the Ibn ‘Arabization of Ṣadrā’s ideas.
fundamentality and oneness of being, especially when this idea is cast in the language of the Qur’an in general, and the Fātiḥa in particular. Ṣadrā enlists the help of Ibn ‘Arabī to solve the dilemma, but with important adjustments and an argument more congruent with his psychology as discussed in the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa*.

Four appendices accompany this study. The first appendix presents, in two tables, the most updated (but tentative) chronology of the order of composition of Ṣadrā’s writings on the Qur’an: table one lists their order of composition with respect to themselves, and table two with respect to Ṣadrā’s other writings which are datable. Appendix two presents the core texts from Ibn ‘Arabī’s *al-Futūḥat al-makkiyya* which were reworked by Ṣadrā into the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa*. By juxtaposing, in translation, Ibn ‘Arabī’s originals with Ṣadrā’s renditions, this appendix aims to demonstrate (1) how significant Ibn ‘Arabī’s presence is in this *tafsīr* work, and (2) how carefully Ṣadrā recasts Ibn ‘Arabī’s points in his own unique style and language. This appendix serves as an effective aid to the argument made in chapter five of this study.

Appendix three presents over forty key texts from the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa* in translation. Many of these passages are also to be found in chapters four and five within the context of much larger and developed arguments. Apart from the obvious usefulness of making excerpts of an important commentary upon the Fātiḥa available in English,65 re-presenting Ṣadrā’s most salient

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points in the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa* in one place allows us to see his ideas in this work in their raw form, that is, as they immediately present themselves to readers. Appendix four contains a glossary of the Arabic technical terms found throughout the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa*. The purpose behind presenting this glossary is to demonstrate the range of philosophical/mystical vocabulary employed by Šadrā in this *tafsīr* work.

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translation of the author’s Ismā‘īlī commentary on the Fātiha); Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Mahallī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, trans. Feras Hamza (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae in association with the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2009); Sahl b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, trans. Annabel Keeler and Ali Keeler (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae in association with the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2009), passim. There are also several *tafsīrs* of the Fātiha written in the English language, amongst which is an important Sufi commentary. See Nasr, *The Garden of Truth: The Vision and Promise of Sufism, Islam’s Mystical Tradition* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 13-20. It can also be noted that we have a text in English which summarizes and translates remarks upon the Fātiha by over twenty important Sunnī exegetes (both classical and modern). See Abū Rumaysīh, *The Spiritual Cure: An Explanation to (sic) Sūrah al-Fātiḥah* (Birmingham: Daar us-Sunnah Publishers, 2006). Despite the impressive range of sources consulted in this anthology, it avoids the important theological, philosophical, and mystical discussions addressed in the very *tafsīr* works which it consults, consequently confining itself to a presentation of the Fātiha’s most basic interpretations.
Chapter 1

An Overview of Mullā Şadrā’s Qur’anic Works

Although Mullā Şadrā dedicated many individual works to the Qur’ān and its sciences, we only have a relatively good idea of what they are about. This is because no attempt has been made thus far to produce a thorough annotated list of his work on the Qur’ān. The absence of such a research tool is a serious stumbling-block in understanding Şadrā’s broad mystical and philosophical concerns as an exegete. In order to remedy this lacuna in Şadrian scholarship, this chapter will outline the structure, contents, and scope of Şadrā’s writings on the Qur’ān and its sciences.¹ This will allow us to better situate his Qur’anic hermeneutics in terms of both theory (to which we will turn in chapter two) and practice (which is the subject of chapters three to five).

Şadrā’s Qur’anic writings can be divided into four categories: commentaries on individual sūras (section 1.3), commentaries on individual āyas (section 1.4), theoretical works on the Qur’ān (section 1.5), and Qur’anic works of doubtful authenticity (section 1.6). However, before turning to the annotated list of these compositions on the Qur’ān, some comments are in order concerning earlier characterizations (or the lack thereof) of these writings.

¹ To some extent, my approach in this chapter has been influenced by the general method employed by Etan Kohlberg in his A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work: Ibn Ṭāwūs and his Library (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 25-69.
1.1 – The Historical Reception of Șadrâ’s Qur’anic Works

1.1.1 – Șadrâ’s Followers and Opponents

The intellectual activity of the school of Isfahan continued after the death of Mullâ Șadrâ, largely through such influential figures as his sons-in-law ʿAbd al-Razzâq Lâhîji (d. 1071/1661-2) and Mullâ Muḥsin Fayd Kâshânî (d. 1091/1680). Although Kâshânî and Lâhîji

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had the same teacher, their backgrounds and interests were quite different. Having been a student of Mājid BaÎrÁnÐ (d. 1028/1619), the possible founder of Akhbārī teachings in Shiraz, Kāshānī’s intellectual perspective was infused with the Akhbārī penchant for the transmitted sciences, which is evidenced in some of his principal books, such as his *Maḥjūjat al-bayḍāʾ*—which is a Shiʾī reworking of Ghazālī’s famous *Iḥyāʾ*—and his important Qurʾān commentary, *al-Ṣāfī*.  

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5 For this figure and his relationship to Fayḍ Kāshānī, see the important study by Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam: The History and Doctrines of the Akhbārī Shiʿī School* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 152-4. Gleave’s conclusions concerning the late crystallization of the Akhbārī school and Muḥammad Amīn Astarābādī’s (d. 1036/1626-7) relationship to the Muʿtazila, amongst other things, has justifiably been called into question by Wilfred Madelung. See Madelung, review of *Scripturalist Islam: The History and Doctrines of the Akhbārī Shiʿī School*, by Robert Gleave, *Journal of Islamic Studies* 19, no. 3 (2008): 398-400.

6 See *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Fayz-e Kāshānī.” At the same time, he also wrote a number of important Shiʾī mystical texts, such as the *Kalimāt-i maknūna*. For studies of this important text, see Kamada, “Fayḍ al-Kāshānī’s *Walāya: The Confluence of Shiʾī Imamology and Mysticism*,” in *Reason and Inspiration in Islam: Theology, Philosophy, and Mysticism in Muslim Thought: Essays in Honour of Hermann Landolt*, ed. Todd Lawson, 455-68 (London: I. B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2005); Lawson, “The Hidden Words of Fayḍ Kāshānī,” in *Iran: Questions et Connaissances*, ed. M. Szuppe et al., 427-47 (Louvain: Association pour l’avancement des Études Iraniennes, 2002). For Kāshānī’s teachings on imagination, see Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, 176-9; Lawson, “Akhbārī Shiʾī Approaches to tafsīr,” in *Approaches to the Qurʾān*, ed. G. R.
Along with his Akhbārism, Kāshānī also managed to assimilate Šadrā’s intellectual and spiritual perspective into his worldview.⁷

Unlike Kāshānī, Lāhijī appears to not have been interested in the transmitted sciences, primarily evidenced by the fact that he is not known to have left behind any significant works in *fiqh*, *hadīth*, or *tafsīr*.⁸ Lāhijī was a much more serious poet than Kāshānī, and was even given the penname “Fayyād,” it is said, by Mullā Šadrā.⁹ Lāhijī was also more concerned with the philosophical sciences than Kāshānī, and a number of his most important writings are squarely within the tradition of post-Avicennan Islamic philosophical theology.

Despite their differing intellectual perspectives, which could be one reason for the supposed rivalry between the two,¹⁰ Kāshānī and Lāhijī had different fates with respect to the ruling establishment. Although Kāshānī was accused of heresy in his own lifetime, he was nonetheless a favourite of Shāh ʿAbbās II (r. 1052-77/1642-66), and rose to considerable prominence during his reign.¹¹ Lāhijī, on the other hand, seems to have fallen out of favour with

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⁷ Šadrā’s influence on Kāshānī has been most recently discussed in Gleave, “Scriptural Sufism and Scriptural Anti–Sufism: Theology and Mysticism amongst the Shiʿī Akhbāriyya,” in *Sufism and Theology*, 170-1.

⁸ *Tabaqāt* writings note that he was not known for having been a master of the standard transmitted sciences. See Rizvi, “A Sufi Theology,” 89. For discussions of Lāhijī’s writings, see *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “ʿAbd al-Razzāq Lāhijī”; Rizvi, “A Sufi Theology,” 89-90.


¹⁰ The nature of this “rivalry” remains unclear. See *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “ʿAbd al-Razzāq Lāhijī”; Rizvi, “A Sufi Theology,” 89.

¹¹ *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Fayz-e Kāshānī.” For a translation of Kāshānī’s *ʿAʾīna-yi shāhī*, a book on political leadership fused with philosophical and Sufi teachings, see Chittick, “Two Seventeenth-Century Tracts on Kingship
Shāh ‘Abbās II at some point, despite the fact that he dedicated his important theological work, the *Gawhar-i murād*, to him. Lāhījī would continue his activity as a theologian and poet in Qum, whereas Kāshānī would eventually leave Isfahan for Kashan after the Shāh’s death.

Unlike Kāshānī, Lāhījī is not only clearly more Avicennan than Šadrian on a number of important philosophical issues, but also disagrees with his teacher on some of his principle ideas, like his innovative doctrine of substantial motion (*al-ḥaraka al-jawhariyya*). Both Kāshānī and Lāhījī were concerned with Sufism, although Kāshānī appears to have been a much more ardent supporter of Ibn ʿArabī than Lāhījī. Despite the fact that both Kāshānī and Lāhījī had a common teacher, neither of them helped usher in a commentarial tradition upon Šadrā’s writings, as was the case, for example, with the founders of the school of Ibn ʿArabī.

One of Kāshānī and Lāhījī’s students, Qāḍī Saʿīd Qummī (d. 1107/1696), wrote at least two treatises critiquing Šadrā’s position on the univocal (*mushtarak maʿnawi*) nature of the term “*wujūd*”—which itself forms the basis of Šadrā’s key doctrine of the fundamentality of being (*aṣālat al-wujūd*)—and substantial motion respectively. Qummī’s anti-Šadrian stance is largely...
due to the fact that his major philosophical influence was Mullā Ḥabīb ʿAlī Tabrīzī (d. 1080/1669-70), a first-rate philosopher and mystic who was directly opposed to Ṣadrā’s teachings. In his dense Arabic treatise, al-ʾAṣl al-aṣīl (also known as al-ʿUṣūl al-aṣāfiyya), Tabrīzī takes issue with Ṣadrā (and his followers) on their positions concerning the fundamentality of being, the related issue of mental existence, and substantial motion. In his Persian work, Ithbāt-i wājib, Tabrīzī argues for an equivocal conception of the term wujūd (ishtirāk lafzī), and draws on a number of important Sufis and philosophers, as well as the Shiʿī Imams, to prove that the terms “wujūd” and “mawjūd” are not applicable to God. What is particularly interesting to note is that in neither the ʾAṣl nor the Ithbāt does Tabrīzī mention his opponents by name.

One of the earliest “commentators” upon Ṣadrā’s works, and whose link to his thought remains somewhat ambiguous, was the famous “founder” of the Shaykhī school, Shaykh ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Jum’ah al-Jīlī. Lāhijī’s criticisms of Ṣadrā’s doctrine of substantial motion also cannot be counted out as having shaped Qummi’s philosophical perspective.

16 For Tabrīzī, see Corbin, La philosophie iranienne islamique, 83-96.
17 See ibid. for summaries of these two texts’ main arguments. Our annotated translations of the Ithbāt and ʾAṣl can be found in An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Mehdi Aminrazavi, vol. 5 (London: I. B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, forthcoming).
18 Consider the following statement, made in the context of Tabrīzī’s defence of the equivocal nature of the term wujūd: “Up to now, the opinion of the majority of people has been that nobody would adhere to this [position, i.e., that wujūd is an equivocal term], and if there were such a person, his name would not be recorded amongst the famous scholars because of the weakness—according to them—of this position. They have spoken vulgarities, since the foundations of religion and belief are based upon proofs, not upon following famous men!” (Tabrīzī, “On the Necessary Being,” forthcoming).
Aḥsā‘ī (d. 1241/1826).\textsuperscript{19} Having already critiqued Fayḍ Kāshānī in his \textit{Risālat al-‘ilmīyya},\textsuperscript{20} Aḥsā‘ī went on to comment upon at least two of Ṣadrā’s books: first the \textit{Mashā‘ir}, which is a veritable summation of his ontology, and then the ‘\textit{Arshiyya}, a late work primarily concerned with eschatology and psychology.\textsuperscript{21} In these commentaries and elsewhere, Aḥsā‘ī is very critical of Ṣadrā on a number of key points, such as his position on the oneness and gradation of being. Reminiscent of Mullā Rajab’s radical apophasis, Aḥsā‘ī’s critique of Ṣadrā’s ontology is based on the position, as Corbin puts it, that “no creature has access to the \textit{Wājib} (Necessary).”\textsuperscript{22} Yet


\textsuperscript{21} Aḥsā‘ī must have written his commentary on Ṣadrā’s \textit{Mashā‘ir} first, since he mentions the work in his commentary on the ‘\textit{Arshiyya}. See Aḥsā‘ī, \textit{Sharḥ al-‘Arshiyya} (Kirman: Chāpkhāna-yi Sa‘ādat, 1361 Sh/1942), 1:9. For translations from Aḥsā‘ī’s commentary on the ‘\textit{Arshiyya}, see Corbin, \textit{Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth}, 203 ff.

Aḥšāʾī falls under Ṣadrāʾ’s influence as well, which is clearly evidenced in his eschatology, especially with respect to his understanding of the nature and function of imagination and imaginal bodies in the process of resurrection. 23 Partly because of his critical attitude towards Ṣadrāʾ and partly because his own writings ushered in a new era of Shiʿī thought within its early modern Iranian context, Aḥšāʾī was never considered to be a follower of the school of Mullā Ṣadrāʾ, nor did his commentaries help shape the mainline of interpretation within the Ṣadrian tradition, although they did provoke responses by some of Ṣadrāʾ’s followers.

We only notice a philosophical commentarial tradition (in the sense defined by Robert Wisnovsky) 24 some two centuries after Ṣadrāʾ’s death. Beginning in the thirteenth/nineteenth

although downplaying Ibn ʿArabiʾ’s influence in this regard, can be found in Bonmariage, Le Réel et les réalités, 13-156.
23 For which, see Corbin, Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth, 180-221. Cf. Rustom, “Psychology, Eschatology, and Imagination.”
24 Wisnovsky challenges the widely held dogma that the philosophical commentaries in post-Avicennan Islamic theology represent a “stagnation” of philosophical thinking in Islam. He argues that such a view is symptomatic of an ill-informed dichotomy between “philosophy” and “theology” in later Islamic thought. The exegetical nature of later Islamic theological texts itself represents further developments in philosophical and theological thinking. Thus, theological and philosophical commentaries in post-Avicennan Islamic thought actually function as philosophical texts in their own right. See Wisnovsky, “The Nature and Scope of Arabic Philosophical Commentary in Post-Classical (CA. 1100-1900 AD) Islamic Intellectual History: Some Preliminary Observations,” in Philosophy, Science and Exegesis in Greek, Arabic and Latin Commentaries, ed. Peter Adamson, Han Baltussen, and M. W. F. Stone, 2:149-91 (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 2004). For the “stagnation” argument, see, in particular, Montgomery Watt, Islamic Theology and Philosophy: An Extended Survey, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985), ch. 17. For two pieces which complement Wisnovsky’s essay (treating as they do the development of post-Avicennan Shiʿī philosophical theology), see Ahmed al-Rahim, “The Twelver-Šīʿī Reception of Avicenna in the Mongol Period,” in Before and After Avicenna: Proceedings of the First Conference of the Avicenna Study Group, ed. David Reisman with the assistance of Ahmed al-Rahim, 219 (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Rizvi, “The Developed Kalām Tradition (Part II: Later Shiʿī Theology),” in The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology, 93-4. To be sure, this phenomenon is not unique to the development of Islamic thought. As Pierre Hadot argues, from early antiquity to the end of the “middle ages,” exegesis and philosophy came part and parcel
century, and undoubtedly due to the newly emerging religio-political climate in Qajar Iran, we find a resuscitation of the school of Isfahan in the figures of Mullâ ‘Alî Nûrî (d. 1246/1830) (himself once a student of Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsâ‘î) and Mullâ Hâdî Sabziwârî (d. 1289/1873). Both of these figures were major commentators upon Şadrâ’s principal philosophical works, and their own writings would go on to serve as important philosophical and gnostic texts within the

with the development of philosophy proper. See Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. Arnold Davidson, trans. Michael Chase (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1995), 71-7. As Niketas Siniossoglou argues, in late antiquity, it was the act of exegesis (or, as he would have it, the “(mis)appropriation”) of Plato’s eschatology and cosmology that allowed for Platonism to be integrated into a Christian philosophical framework. This tendency spurred serious Neoplatonic counter-responses, thus allowing philosophy to further develop along “exegetical” lines. See Siniossoglou, *Plato and Theodoret: The Christian Appropriation of Platonic Philosophy and the Hellenic Intellectual Resistance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

25 Rizvi, “‘Being (Wujûd) and Sanctity (Wilâya): Two Poles of Intellectual and Mystical Enquiry in Qajar Iran,’” in *Religion and Society in Qajar Iran*, 115, sees a link between the social and religious threat of millenarianism in thirteenth/nineteenth century Iran and the resurgence of Şadrian metaphysics (which received government support for the establishment of madrasas). See also Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy from Its Origins to the Present*, 237.


Şadrian tradition. Both Nūrī and Sabziwārī had a lasting influence on the following generation of scholars who would come to form the “school of Tehran.” The school of Tehran flourished under such hakīms as Mullā ‘Alī Zunūzī (d. 1307/1889), Mullā Riḍā’ Qumshāṭ (d. 1306/1889), and Mīrzā Abū l-Ḥasan Jilwa (d. 1314/1896), who was also a critic of Şadrā, and who seems to have taken after Mullā Rajab. These and other philosophers following in their wake into the fourteenth/twentieth century ensured Şadrian metaphysics a permanent home on Iranian soil.

Despite the fact (or perhaps because of the fact) that the commentarial tradition upon Şadrā’s writings came about relatively late, no attempts were made to catalogue his oeuvre, much less his writings on the Qur’ān and its sciences. But there are some noteworthy exceptions to the general lack of interest in Şadrā’s work on the Qur’ān. In an anonymous Persian commentary on the Fāṭiḥa written some time after Fayḍ Kāshānī’s death, passing references are made to some of Şadrā’s Qur’anic works. It is also well-known that Sabziwārī wrote a

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28 That is, what is conventionally referred to as “ḥikmat” in its later Shi‘i milieu. One fine example of a work within the ḥikmat tradition is Sabziwārī’s commentary upon Rūmī’s famous Mathnawī. For this work, see John Cooper, “Rūmī and Ḥikmat: Towards a Reading of Sabziwārī’s Commentary on the Mathnawī,” in The Heritage of Sufism, 1:409-33.

29 See Corbin, with Nasr and Osman Yahia, Histoire de la philosophie islamique (Paris: Gallimard, 1986, repr. ed.), 476-81; Nasr, Islamic Philosophy from Its Origins to the Present, 236-7. Nasr argues that while the school of Tehran represents philosophical continuity with the school of Isfahan, it also represents a discontinuity with the latter on account of the fact that the school of Tehran belongs to a new phase of the Islamic philosophical tradition, namely its first encounter with Western thought.

30 Summaries of the teachings and influence of these and other related figures can be found in idem, Islamic Philosophy from Its Origins to the Present, 237-47; idem, “The Metaphysics of Şadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī and Islamic Philosophy in Qajar Iran,” 190-2; Rizvi, “‘Being (Wujūd) and Sanctity (Wilāya),” 116-22. For the activity of the school of Tehran from the fourteenth/twentieth century onwards, see Nasr, Islamic Philosophy from Its Origins to the Present, 247-56.

31 For an edition of this work, see Āshtiyānī (ed.), Tafsīr Fāṭiḥat al-kitāb (Mashhad: Chāpkhāna-yi Dānishgāh-i Mashhad, 1357 Sh/1978).
commentary on Şadrā’s *Mafātih al-ghayb* (see section 2.5.2 below) which was, in turn, translated into Persian in the late Qajar period by the courtier Ḥusām al-Dīn Shīrāzī. But it is really Mullā ʿAlī Nūrī’s writings which are most noteworthy in this regard, as he is the author of a series of glosses (*ta’līqāt*) upon a number of Şadrā’s books on the Qurʾān. These glosses are particularly helpful for shedding light on difficult phrases and concepts which appear in these texts. However, Nūrī does not attempt to explain the logic behind Şadrā’s Qurʾānic writings as a whole, nor do his glosses assist one in determining the scope and contents of Şadrā’s work on the Qurʾān and its sciences.

1.1.2 – *Biographical and Historical Sources*

Biographical and historical materials written during the Safavid, Zand, Qajar, and Pahlavi periods also reveal very little information concerning the scope and content of Şadrā’s writings in general. One biography contemporaneous with Şadrā is Nūr Allāh Shūshtarī’s (d. 1019/1606)

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32 See Kalin, “An Annotated Bibliography,” 37; Rizvi, *Şadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī*, 78 (I have followed Rizvi in identifying Shīrāzī as a courtier). We cannot rule out the possibility that the manuscript discovered by Mohaghegh in the Kitābkhāna-yi Millī, which contains a Persian translation of the introduction and parts of Şadrā’s *Mafātih*, is by this same figure. See Mohaghegh, “*Mafātih al-ghayb*-i Mullā Şadrā,” 137 for Mohaghegh’s comments on the anonymous nature of the manuscript, and pp. 138-50 for the text of the Persian translation of the *Mafātih*’s introduction and opening chapter.

Majālis al-muṭminīn. Since this work is likely to have been written before Ṣadrā rose to prominence, it does not include an entry on him. To be sure, we would have to wait nearly a century for Ṣadrā’s name to appear in ṭabaqāt literature, the first instance of which appears to be Ibn Maʾṣūm Shīrāzī’s (d. 1118/1707) Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr. Ibn Maʾṣūm’s entry in the Sulāfat is significant, not because of what it says about Ṣadrā’s Qur’anic works (neither of Ibn Maʾṣūm’s books mention Ṣadrā’s writings on the Qurʾān), but because it would become one of the standard sources for contemporaneous and later biographical writings. This is clearly evidenced in Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī’s (d. 1104/1692) famous Amal al-āmil, which, citing recent study examines the manner in which Islamic biographical literature functions as history-making from the perspective of the ‘ulamā’: “Biographical Dictionaries as the Scholars’ Alternative History of the Muslim Community,” in Organizing Knowledge: Encyclopaedic Activities in the Pre-Eighteenth Century Islamic World, ed. Gerhard Endress, 23-76 (Leiden: Brill, 2006). For the construction of religious authority in early Shīʿī biographical literature, see Liyakat Takim, The Heirs of the Prophet: Charisma and Religious Authority in Shiʿite Islam (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006). In dating the biographers and historical writers of these three periods, I follow the dates provided by Gleave, Scripturalist Islam, 40-60; Rizvi, Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, 154-76. For the evolution of Safavid historical writing in the context of the Safavids’ attempts at negotiating their legitimacy, see Sholeh Quinn, Historical Writing during the Reign of Shah ʿAbbas: Ideology, Imitation, and Legitimacy in Safavid Chronicles (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2000), particularly chs. 3-5.


his source, reproduces Ibn Maʿṣūm’s entry in toto, as does the other Safavid biographer, Mīrzā ʿAbd Allāh Afandī (d. 1130/1717) in his Riyāḍ al-ʿulamāʾ. What also makes Ibn Maʿṣūm’s entry in his Sulāfat important is that it only mentions Ṣadrā’s Sharḥ Uṣūl al-kāfī. Between Āmilī and Afandī’s sole mention of this commentary in their verbatim entries from Ibn Maʿṣūm, the earliest Safavid biographical sources—whether conscientiously or not—tended to recycle the image of Ṣadrā as a famous philosopher who was in some sense concerned with “scripture,” but only in terms of hadīth and not necessarily Qur’anic exegesis.

The Akhbārī scholar Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Baḥrānī’s (d. 1186/1772) Luʿluʿat al-Baḥrayn does not have a separate entry on Ṣadrā. Rather, he mentions him in passing in an entry on Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, which is not surprising, given the aforementioned influence of Akhbārism upon Kāshānī’s thought. Interestingly, Baḥrānī’s brief mention of Ṣadrā is quickly followed up with a longer note on Ṣadrā’s son, Mīrzā Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī (d. 1070/1659). As would be expected of an Akhbārī, Baḥrānī is quick to note that this son of Ṣadrā’s was opposed to his father’s

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38 Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿāsr, 499.

39 I did not have access to this text, although this particular entry is reproduced in Maʿṣūm ʿAlī Shāh’s Ṣarātīq al-ḥaqāʾiq, ed. Muḥammad Jaʿfār Mahjūb (Tehran: Kitābkhāna-yi Sanāʿī, 1960), 1:181-2. For the entry on Ṣadrā in the Sarātīq, see p. 44. For the Akhbārī-Uṣūlī conflict in Baḥrānī’s Luʿluʿ and another biographical text, see Gleave, “The Akhbārī-Uṣūlī Dispute in tabaqāt Literature: An Analysis of the Biographies of Yusuf al-Baḥrānī and Muḥammad Bāqīr Bihbīhānī,” Jusur 10 (1994): 79-109. I have not seen this study.
mystical and philosophical teachings.⁴⁰ Significant for our purposes here is Baḥrānī’s attribution of a Qur’anic work to Ṣadrā’s son which would traditionally come to be associated with Ṣadrā himself, namely the so-called Tafsīr al-ʿUrwaṭ al-wuthqā.⁴¹

Just as there is no entry on Ṣadrā in ʿAbd al-Nabī Qazwīnī’s (fl. 12th/18th century) Tatmīm (which is a supplement to ʿĀmīlī’s Amal al-āmil similar to Afandī’s Takmīla), so too is there no entry in Muḥammad Tunkābūnī’s (d. 1302/1884-5) Qiṣāṣ al-ʿulamāʿ.⁴² Muḥammad Bāqir Khwānsārī’s (d. 1313/1895) Persian biographical work, the Rawḍāt al-jannāt, contains the largest listing of Ṣadrā’s writings thus far considered.⁴³ It relies upon the Amal al-āmil and the Mutammīm al-amal (another supplement to the Amal) by a certain Sayyid Ibrāhīm Qazwīnī. We learn from Khwānsārī that Qazwīnī’s Mutammīm lists a number of Ṣadrā’s books, the ones

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⁴⁰ Incidentally, Muḥsin al-Amīn, Aʾyān al-ṣhiʿa, 2:202, points out this fact in the entry on Mīrāz Ibīrāhīm Shārzī. Given the Aʾyān’s general attitude towards Ṣadrā, its inclusion here may have a polemical function. Cf. al-Amīn’s entry on Ṣadrā in the Aʾyān with Maʿṣūm ʿAlī Shāh, Ṭarāʾīq, 1:182, which seeks to exonerate certain of Ṣadrā’s statements (not specified here) of any charges of takfīr by the ‘ulamāʾ. In connection to this, Maʿṣūm ʿAlī Shāh says the following: “Because of these words, he has met with the bad opinion of a group of jurists. Indeed, they issued a fatwā condemning him of kufr. For example, one of them said, with respect to [his] Sharḥ Usūl al-kāfī, ‘The first person to comment upon it with statements of kufr was Ṣadrā’ [ba-wāṣīta-yi in kalimāt sūr-i ẓann barāyi jamāʿ az fuqāhā ba-ham rasūda bal-kī fatwā ba-kufrash dādand chunānchi bādī dar ḥaqq-i sharḥ-i ʿusul-i kāfī gufta awval man sharaḥahu bi-l-kufr Ṣadrā].”

⁴¹ ʿAbd al-Nabī Qazwīnī, Tatmīm Amal al-āmil, ed. Sayyid Ahmad Ḥusaynī (Qum: Maktabat ʿĀyat Allāh Marʿashī, 1987), 51 seems to attribute this work to Ṣadrā’s son as well, but refers to it as Tafsīr Āyat al-kursī. Al-Amīn, Aʾyān, 2:202, follows Baḥrānī in titling the work. There is a very good reason for why the Tafsīr al-ʿUrwaṭ al-wuthqā is sometimes referred to as the Tafsīr Āyat al-kursī. See pp. 61-2.


pertaining to the Qurʾān being the *Aṣrār al-āyāt* and the *tafsīrs* on *Āyat al-nūr* and *sūras Jumuʿa*, Ṭāriq, Wāqiʿa, and Yāsīn.\(^{44}\) Khwānsārī also makes mention of Ṣadrāʾs *Sharḥ Usūl al-kāfī*\(^ {45}\) and adds to the list of his Qurʾānic compositions with a passing reference to the *Mafātīḥ* and *Tafsīr Āyat al-kursī*.\(^ {46}\) He also seems to be the first biographer to discuss Ṣadrāʾs *tafsīrs* as a single corpus: “A sizeable volume of his grand Qurʾān commentary [*mujallad-i ḍakhīmī az tafsīr-i kabīr-i ū*], which he wrote employing Illuminationist language [*ba-zabān-i ishrāq*], is with us.”\(^ {47}\) One other source worthy of mention is the Niʿmat Allāhī Sufi Maʿṣūm ʿAlī Shāh’s (d. 1344/1926) *Ṭarāʾi iq al-ḥaqāʾiq*, despite the fact that the historical accuracy of its reports has been called into question.\(^ {48}\) The author makes good use of the major sections of the entries on Ṣadrā to be found in Bahrānī’s *Luʿluʿ*, Qazwīnī’s *Mutammim*, and Khwānsārī’s *Rawḍāt*. Thus, it provides a convenient listing of Ṣadrāʾs writings on the Qurʾān, but does not speak of his “grand Qurʾān commentary” in the manner of Khwānsārī.\(^ {49}\)

By the beginning of the fourteenth/twentieth century, therefore, Ṣadrāʾs writings on the Qurʾān were known through two mediums. Thanks to Mullā ʿAlī Nūrīʾs glosses on many of his Qurʾānic works, followers of the school of Mullā Ṣadrā would presumably have had a fairly good

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\(^{44}\) Ibid., 4:240.

\(^{45}\) Ibid., 4:240-1.

\(^{46}\) Ibid., 4:241.

\(^{47}\) Ibid.

\(^{48}\) See Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā Shirāzī*, 160.

\(^{49}\) For Maʿṣūm ʿAlī Shāhʾs discussion of Ṣadrāʾs work on the Qurʾān, see *Ṭarāʾi iq*, 1:181-2. I have been referring to Qazwīnīʾs glosses on the *Amal* as the *Mutammim al-amal*. Khwānsārī does not give this book a title, but at *Rawḍāt*, 2:240, simply refers to it as a set of glosses on the *Amal* (*ḥāshiya-yi Amal al-āmil*). Maʿṣūm ʿAlī Shāh refers to it by its proper name at *Ṭarāʾi iq*, 182. It is interesting to note that although Khwānsārī and Maʿṣūm ʿAlī Shāh both rely upon the *Mutammim*, Khwānsārī, unlike Maʿṣūm ʿAlī Shāh, fails to mention that Qazwīnī lists the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-qadr* as one of Ṣadrāʾs works (Qazwīnī seems to be the first to do so). In all likelihood, Ṣadrā did not author such a work. For more on this title, see p. 69.
idea of the nature and contents of these writings, even if they did not attempt to catalogue them.
And, thanks to the more popular ṭabaqāt literature, there was some vague notion that he was a scriptural exegete.

1.2 – Modern Annotations on Ṣadrā’s Qur’ānic Works

It was not until the fourteenth/twentieth century, largely in the wake of the Ṣadrian revival discussed in the introduction to this study, that annotated lists of Mullā Ṣadrā’s writings began to appear. Because of this renewal of interest in Ṣadrā’s teachings, we have several useful bibliographies of his works in general, be they lists or annotated bibliographies. What we have by way of annotations on Ṣadrā writings on the Qur’ān form a part of the existing annotated bibliographical literature on his writings. We can, therefore, classify these entries on Ṣadrā’s Qur’ānic compositions into three broad categories: (1) brief entries on most of his Qur’ānic works which attempt to date their order of composition; (2) brief entries on most of his Qur’ānic works (usually treating his tafsīrs in a single entry) which do not include attempts at dating their order of composition; and (3) individual entries on all of his Qur’ānic works which contain descriptive and/or structural details for each work.

50 The following works fall under this category: Bīḍārī, “Ṭaqdīm,” 1:92, 94, 102-3, 105, 108-11; Eḥsān, “The Qur’ānic Hermeneutics of Mullā Ṣadrā”; Christian Jambet, Mort et résurrection en islam, 20; Muhammad Khamenei, Ḥikmat-i muta‘āliya wa-Mullā Ṣadrā (Tehran: SIPRIn, 2004), 32. Although they do not attempt to date them, Jambet and Khamenei list what they deem to be the order in which Ṣadrā composed his tafsīrs. On p. 34, however, Khamenei goes on to give dates for two of Ṣadrā’s Qur’ānic compositions. Yet in his article, “Zindagi, shakhshiyyat, wa-maktab-i Ṣadr al-Muta‘allihin,” Khurad-Nāma 32 (1382 Sh/2003) 29, Khamenei does attempt to date Ṣadrā’s tafsīrs in the context of a general dating of other compositions within his oeuvre.

51 The following representative works fall under this category: Jalāl al-Dīn Āshṭīyānī, Sharḥ-i ḥāl wa-arāʾī-yi falsafī–yi Mullā Ṣadrā (Mashhad: Chānpkha-ya-yi Khurāsān, 1962), 211-2, 222-3; Corbin, “Introduction,” in Ṣadrā, Le livre des pénétrations métaphysiques, 35-6; 39-40; Muḥammad Taqī Dānishpāzhū, “Fihrist-i Nigārīsh-hā-yi Ṣadrā-yi
The titles belonging to categories one and two do not have much to offer by way of annotations on Şadrā’s Qur’anic writings. By contrast, the titles in the third category do. Therefore, when referring to “annotations” on Şadrā’s Qur’anic writings, we have in mind books which belong to the third category, to which we will now turn.

1.2.1 – Category # 3

We find a number of entries on Şadrā’s works devoted to the Qur’ān in Āqā Buzurg Tīhrānī’s (d. 1391/1970) monumental Dharā. These entries can be categorized as follows: (1) “basic tafsīr entries,” that is, individual entries which simply list the tafsīrs attributed to Şadrā; (2) “isolated tafsīr entries” which treat each tafsīr work individually; and (3) “isolated non-tafsīr entries” which treat Şadrā’s other writings on the Qur’ān individually.

Like the other entries in the Dharā, Āqā Buzurg’s remarks on Şadrā’s Qur’anic writings rarely go beyond basic descriptions. Of the twenty respective entries, eleven are straight-forward, rarely go beyond basic descriptions. Of the twenty respective entries, eleven are straight-forward,
in that each work’s contents and structural descriptions are omitted, although its opening lines may be given. Of the remaining nine entries, seven of them provide the respective work’s content and/or structural descriptions, and two provide both. Yet Āqā Buzurg’s entries on Ṣadrā’s Qur’anic writings are helpful for two reasons. Firstly, they represent the earliest attempt at describing these works in modern scholarship. Secondly, and more important for our purposes here, they provide us with a fairly reliable list of Ṣadrā’s writings on the Qur’ān which can, for the most part, safely be attributed to him.

After Henry Corbin’s brief remarks on Ṣadrā’s Qur’anic writings, Muḥammad Khwājāwī attempted to describe his Qur’anic works as a whole in his Lawāmī’ al-ʿārifīn. Khwājāwī’s annotations form part of a larger annotated list of the Ṣadrian oeuvre, and thus remain somewhat brief. When his entries on Ṣadrā’s Qur’anic compositions do go beyond basic structural entries, they essentially amount to “bare bones” sketches of the respective title’s contents. Thus, they remain effective summaries of what some of the books contain, but they have next to nothing to say about such things as Ṣadrā’s exegetical method, the development of doctrinal issues amongst his different Qur’anic works, and his sources.

57 Like other Arabic and Persian mss./book catalogues, twelve of the Dharā’s twenty entries on Ṣadrā’s Qur’anic writings give us the opening lines of the work in question—a feature which is indeed helpful for those engaged in archival research, but which does not reveal a great deal of information concerning the respective work’s structure and content.

58 For exceptional cases, see pp. 69-72.


60 See Khwājāwī, Lawāmī’, 107-27.
Seyyed Hossein Nasr’s essay on Șadrā’s Qurʾān commentaries includes concise annotations on each of his *tafsîrs*. Elsewhere in the same book, Nasr summarizes three of his compositions on the Qurʾānic sciences. Taken together, these summaries form the first set of annotations on Șadrā’s Qurʾānic writings in a European language.

One of the ambitious projects of the Tehran-based Șadrā Islamic Philosophy Research Institute (SIPRIn) was to produce a manuscript catalogue of Șadrā’s extant writings. With the publication of the *Kitabshināsī-yi jām‘-i Mullā Șadrā*, SIPRIn’s goal was realized. This research tool describes each item in Șadrā’s oeuvre, gives both their opening and closing lines, and then goes on to list where manuscripts of these titles are to be found in Iran’s major libraries. Sajjad Rizvi notes that this book is not as exhaustive as it claims to be. This appears to be the case, especially with respect to its entries on Șadrā’s Qurʾānic writings. Taken as a whole, the annotations on these works are more adequate than most others.

Although Latimah Peerwani’s descriptions of Șadrā’s Qurʾānic writings closely follow Nasr, Kalin and Rizvi’s annotations are the most useful. Both Kalin and Rizvi’s descriptions form part of their larger, annotated bibliographies of books by Șadrā. Concerning Șadrā’s Qurʾānic works, Kalin and Rizvi usually provide each title’s structural details and discuss its

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61 See p. 7 for an appraisal of this essay in the context of our discussion of scholarship on Șadrā’s work on the Qurʾān.
62 Nasr, Șadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī and his Transcendent Theosophy, 40, 43, 45.
63 Nahīd Bāqīrī Khurramdastī (with the assistance of Fāṭima Aḵtarī), *Kitabshināsī-yi jām‘-i Mullā Șadrā* (Tehran: SIPRIn, 1999).
64 Rizvi, *Mullā Șadrā Shīrāzī*, 51 n. 186.
philosophical and mystical content. Building on Kalin’s bibliography of Ṣadrā’s writings on the Qur’an, Rizvi also provides extensive manuscript details for these books, dates many of them, lists and/or discusses their editions and (where applicable) translations, takes into consideration a number of titles whose ascription to Ṣadrā is questionable, and addresses some of the hermeneutical issues which are raised by Ṣadrā in his function as an exegete.

1.3 – Commentaries on Individual Sūras

1.3.1 – *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiha* 68

This book is Ṣadrā’s last complete commentary upon a Qur’anic sūra. Appended to the Khwājawī edition of this *tafsīr* are Mullā ‘Alī Nūrī’s glosses. 69 In both its philosophical and mystical content, the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiha* is one of the most profound of Ṣadrā’s writings on the Qur’ān, as he brings to bear in his function as an exegete of this sūra the entire range of his learning, synthetic abilities, and original insights. See chapters three to five of the present study for a detailed discussion and analysis of this commentary’s chronological placement, structure, sources, exegetical method, and theoretical content.

1.3.2 – *Tafsīr Sūrat al-baqara* 70

This *tafsīr* work is likely Ṣadrā’s last commentary proper. 71 Although the commentary is incomplete (it stops at the end of the sūra’s sixty-fifth āya), it is Ṣadrā’s longest work dedicated

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68 Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, 1:1-183/Majmū‘at al-tafāsīr, ed. Ḧāmad Shīrāzī (Tehran, lithograph, 1322 AH/1904), 2-41. The first time I mention one of Ṣadrā’s *tafsīrs*, where applicable, I provide the page numbers to both the printed and lithographed editions. But subsequent references to the *tafsīr* work in question are to the printed edition only.


to the Qurʾān, comprising over 1100 pages. Like the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa, this commentary is also appended with Mullā ʿAlī Nūrī’s glosses.\textsuperscript{72}

More than any of his other tafsīrs, Šadrā is, in a sense, the most “polemical” in this commentary: in a manner not unfamiliar to his method in several sections of the Asfār, he dedicates a good deal of time to refuting a number of the theological positions held by the Ashʿarites and Muʿtazilites, particularly with respect to the question of the temporal origination of God’s Speech (kalām) and its mode of existence.\textsuperscript{73}

Šadrā’s concern with theology is evident in this tafsīr in the detailed section devoted to īmān or “faith,” which forms part of his commentary on Q 2:4. After explaining the inadequacy of several of the definitions of īmān, he divides its contents into fairly standard and broad categories: sayings (aqwāl), states (ahwāl), and actions (aʿmāl). What is interesting in his discussion here is how he relates these three categories to what he calls “the levels and ranks of faith” (darājāt al-īmān wa-marātibuhu). Although his general discussion of faith can be traced back to the standard texts on theology with which he was familiar,\textsuperscript{74} Šadrā seems to have a unique understanding of what constitutes īmān as such. Here, he makes it clear that everyone is a person of faith (muʿmin).\textsuperscript{75} What distinguishes them is the level of their understanding (fiqh). It is

\textsuperscript{71} At Tafsīr, 1:349, Šadrā explicitly makes mention of his Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa, which, as the present study will demonstrate, is his last complete commentary on a Qurʾanic sūra.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 1:496-513; 2:377-413; 3:475-528.

\textsuperscript{73} As will be demonstrated in the following chapter, Šadrā’s concern with this question is related to his understanding of “the modality of revelation” (kayfiyyat inzāl al-wahy), and thus to his scriptural hermeneutics.

\textsuperscript{74} For an annotated listing of Šadrā’s remarkable library, see Rizvi, Mullā Šadrā Shīrāzī, 117-35.

\textsuperscript{75} In rendering īmān, I follow Chittick’s nuanced discussion of the term in his Faith and Practice of Islam: Three Thirteenth Century Sufi Texts (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 1-23. See also Izutsu, The
to the degree of one’s understanding of his faith that he will be characterized as more or less faithful.

Important for Ṣadrā’s understanding of the Qur’an is the section devoted to its inimitability (iʿjāz al-qurʿān), which he is prompted to discuss based on the challenge made in Q 2:23 to produce “a sūra like it” (sūra min mithlihi). Also, there is one particular section in this commentary in which Ṣadrā discusses the “detached letters” (al-ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭa’a) of the Qurʾān. The treatment of the topic is not as important here as it is in one of his other writings.76

1.3.3 – Tafsīr Sūrat al-sajda77

In the introduction to this commentary, Ṣadrā lists eight tafsīrs which he had previously written. Based on Rizvi’s recently published archival research and Muḥsin Bīdārfar’s observations, we can specifically date four of them.78 These dates, along with some internal evidence in one of Ṣadrā’s tafsīrs (see the entry on the Tafsīr Sūrat al-zilzāl below), allows us to safely conclude that the earliest this tafsīr could have been written is 1037/1628. The latest it could have been written is 1042/1632, when Ṣadrā wrote his Mafātīḥ al-ghayb (see section 2.5.2 below).

The Tafsīr Sūrat al-sajda is 135 pages long. It offers a commentary on each of the sūra’s verses, and contains an introduction and conclusion, but lacks chapter divisions. More than anything else, it is structured as a running commentary on Q 32. Although there are subheadings throughout the work, as is the case with a number of Ṣadrā’s other tafsīrs, they do not seem to

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76 See pp. 104-6.
78 Bīdārfar, “Taqdīm,” 1:110-11; Rizvi, Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, 77-87. For Ṣadrā’s list, see Tafsīr, 6:6.
play a significant role or have any discernable linguistic/stylistic unity. Rather, they appear to simply divide Ṣadrā’s arguments as he proceeds with his points.

Although Ṣadrā is concerned with questions of eschatology in this work, his meditations on the nature of the Qurʿān and its mysterious letters are amongst its unique features. Several verses prompt him to elaborate on his cosmology, especially as it relates to the temporal incipience (ḥudūth) of the world and God’s attributes—which leads to some interesting discussions on psychology, such as the nature of the heart and its relation to the divine Throne, the levels of the “Folk of God” (darājāt ahl allāh), and the function of the Perfect Man (al-insān al-kāmil).

1.3.4 – Tafsīr Sūrat yāsīn

This commentary was written in 1030/1621. It is essential for dating Ṣadrā’s other writings and for its incorporation of earlier materials, both by himself and, surprisingly, Afḍal al-Dīn Kāshānī (d. 610/1213-4).80 Over 450 pages in length and accompanied by Mullā ‘Alī Nūrī’s glosses,81 there are no real divisions in this work, although it does have a number of generic subheadings. By virtue of the eschatological content of the sūra in general, the most significant aspect of this tafsīr is its treatment of bodily resurrection and the states of the afterlife. Ṣadrā’s Tafsīr Sūrat yāsīn is, in fact, more concerned with issues of eschatology than any of his other books on the Qurʿān. He presents here his fully mature views on the modality of the afterlife with particular reference to the becoming of the soul and the forms it will experience in its

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79 Ibid., 5:10-480/Majmūʿat, 457-93.
80 See the entry on the Tafsīr Sūrat al-jumā’a below. For an introduction to Kāshānī’s life and thought, as well as a translation of more than half of his published works, see Chittick, The Heart of Islamic Philosophy: The Quest for Self-Knowledge in the Writings of Afḍal al-Dīn Kāshānī (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
81 Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 5:482-514.
posthumous states. Ṣadrā’s psychology and eschatology as detailed here parallel some of his discussions in his *al-Mabda’ wa-l-ma‘ād* and his treatment of the states of the afterlife in the *Asfār*.

One of this *tafsīr*’s unique features is its heavy reliance upon the work of Ibn ʿArabī and his followers. Although this is clearly the case in Ṣadrā’s other works, this particular book demonstrates the effectiveness of the formulations of the school of Ibn ʿArabī in discussing some of the most vexing and age-old philosophical problems. In particular, Ṣadrā attempts to address the belief, discussed by Avicenna and defended by Suhrawardī, concerning the attachment of souls to celestial bodies in the afterlife in order to undergo physical punishment for sins committed on earth.  

As mentioned in the introduction, although Taheri’s study of resurrection in Ṣadrā’s Qur’anic commentaries notes the presence of this discussion in the *Tafsīr Sūrat yāsīn*, he does not explain Ṣadrā’s solution. A close reading of Ṣadrā’s response to his predecessors reveals that, through the lens of Ibn ʿArabī and his followers, he offers a remarkable solution which is entirely consistent with his philosophical perspective. Indeed, Ṣadrā’s position here sheds a great deal of light on his understanding of the creative aspect of imagination in the next life.

1.3.5 – *Tafsīr Sūrat al-ḥadīth*\(^\text{84}\)

This book was written between 1022/1613 and the composition of the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-sajda*. Mullā ʿAlī Nūrī’s glosses are also appended to the work.\(^\text{85}\) This *tafsīr* is over 280 pages

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\(^{83}\) The discussion is prompted by the famous ḥadīth of awakening. See Rustom, “Psychology, Eschatology, and Imagination.”

long, and contains an introduction and a conclusion. Like the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-sajda*, it does not consist of chapters as such. Unlike the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-sajda*, however, it makes consistent use of subheadings throughout the work, each of which is entitled *mukāshafa* (“unveiling”).

This commentary contains a fine example of how Ṣadrā’s transcendent philosophy (*al-ḥikma al-muta‘aliya*) relates to the Qur’anic message. His doctrine of substantial motion is briefly discussed here, and is linked to his treatment of the increased levels of perception human beings experience in this world and in the next. Consequently, a good deal of this commentary is devoted to matters of psychology and eschatology.

Significantly, Ṣadrā draws on several well-known Qur’anic symbols, such as the “preserved tablet” (*al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*) and the “inscribed book” (*al-kitāb al-maṣṭūr*), to discuss how the soul’s descent into the world, its subsequent development and return to God, and God’s foreordination of its destiny tie into one another. Here, again, we clearly notice the influence of the school of Ibn ʿArabī upon Ṣadrā’s formulations, especially with respect to his identification of the heart as the locus of the name Allāh, and his understanding of the function of the divine names in the *telos* of the cosmos.

**1.3.6 – *Tafsīr Sūrat al-wāqiʿa***

The date of this work’s composition is not known, but we can certainly place it between 1022/1621 and some time before Ṣadrā penned his *Tafsīr Sūrat al-sajda*. This *tafsīr* is over 120 pages in length and comes with an introduction, subheadings (but no chapter headings), and a

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87 At *Tafsīr* 7:93, Ṣadrā alludes to his *Tafsīr Sūrat yāsīn*, which was written in 1022/1621 (see pp. 52-3 and pp. 55-6). The *Tafsīr Sūrat al-sajda* is also one of the eight *tafsīrs* listed by Ṣadrā in his *Tafsīr Sūrat al-sajda*. 
conclusion. It is a straightforward running commentary on the sūra’s principal themes: the final day and the afterlife.

Ṣadrā makes it clear in his introduction that one cannot understand these eschatological realities without “direct mystical experience” (lit. “tasting” (dhawq)) and “consciousness” (wijdān). Consequently, this commentary contains fairly detailed discussions concerning the states of the grave, the resurrection, and the ranks of souls in the afterlife. As in a number of his other books, Ṣadrā states that the forms of knowledge souls will have in the next life will be commensurate with their levels of knowledge in this life. In his treatment of the function of imagination and its relation to the levels of wujūd, Ṣadrā bases himself on Ibn ‘Arabi’s Futūḥāt and Fuṣūṣ. Perhaps the most interesting features of this commentary are Ṣadrā’s interpretations of the many eschatological symbols mentioned in the sūra. In this sense, this work resembles sections of the Tafsīr Sūrat al-ḥadīd and the later parts of the Asrār al-āyāt and ‘Arshiyya.

1.3.7 – Tafsīr Sūrat al-jumu’ā

The exact date of this work’s composition is not certain. Bīdārfar considers it to have been written between 1041/1631 and 1050/1640 (Ṣadrā’s commonly acknowledged death date), while Rizvi dates its composition between 1041/1631 and 1043-4/1634 (a year before Ṣadrā’s newly proposed death date). In the introduction to his translation of Ṣadrā’s Iksīr al-ʿārifīn, William Chittick argues that the Iksīr, itself a significant reworking of Afḍal al-Dīn Kāshānī’s Jāwidān-nāma, was written in 1030/1621 or perhaps earlier, since the Tafsīr Sūrat

88 Ibid., 7:10.
89 Ibid., 7:36-7.
90 Ibid., 7:136-305/Majmū‘at, 565-89.
92 Rizvi, Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, 84. For Rizvi’s argument in favour of Ṣadrā’s earlier death date, see p. 1 n. 1.
yāsīn, definitively composed in 1030/1621, contains an expanded version of material already contained in the Ikhār. This leads Chittick to conclude that the Ikhār must have been written some time before the Tafsīr Sūrat yāsīn. This is significant, Chittick argues, because the Ikhār itself contains an expanded version of material from Ṣadrā’s Tafsīr Sūrat al-jumu‘a. If Chittick’s observations are correct, the Tafsīr Sūrat al-jumu‘a would have to be placed before the Ikhār and thus in an earlier phase of Ṣadrā’s career as opposed to a later phase. Bīdārfar and Rizvi, on the other hand, do not consider this particular tafsīr to be early, most likely because Ṣadrā does not mention it in the introduction to his Tafsīr Sūrat al-sajda. But there seems to be another good reason to not consider the Tafsīr Sūrat al-jumu‘a an earlier work, namely Ṣadrā’s explicit mention of his Tafsīr Sūrat yāsīn in the Tafsīr Sūrat al-jumu‘a itself.

Ṣadrā’s Tafsīr Sūrat al-jumu‘a is a complete commentary on this sūra. The commentary contains an introduction, twelve chapters called “dawning places” (maṭla‘), and a conclusion. Mullā ‘Alī Nūrī’s glosses (and apparently some of Khwājāwī’s as well) are appended to the work. Each of the Tafsīr Sūrat al-jumu‘a’s maṭla‘s are centred around one verse of the sūra, the

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94 See idem, Tafsīr, 7:218. Moreover, some other internal evidence seems to suggest that this book was written after the Asfār (see ibid., 7:256), which was completed in 1037/1628 (see Rizvi, Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, 54). Ṣadrā also explicitly refers to his Tafsīr Sūrat al-ḥadīd at Tafsīr, 7:251, although this does not help us in dating the Tafsīr Sūrat al-jumu‘a, since we do not have an established date for the Tafsīr Sūrat al-ḥadīd.
95 Those familiar with the Sufi commentarial tradition will immediately recognize the (Qur’anic) term maṭla‘, since it functions as one of the “senses” of Sufi Qur’anic exegesis. It can be translated in several ways: anagogic sense, lookout point, transcendent perspective. The way Ṣadrā employs the term here indicates that we should understand it within the context of his treatment of hierarchies (both cosmological and psychological), which are developed throughout the tafsīr work. Thus, in this context, I have translated the term as “dawning place.” For a discussion of this term within the context of the Sufi Qur’anic exegetical tradition, see Kristin Zahra Sands, Ṣūfī Commentaries on the Qur’ān in Classical Islam (New York: Routledge, 2006), 8-12.
96 Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 7:446-67.
exception being the sixth \textit{maṭla‘}, which contains comments on verses six and seven, and \textit{maṭla‘}s nine and ten, which, combined, do the same for verse ten. The chapters are composed of the generic subheadings characteristic of a number of Šadrā’s \textit{tafsīrs}. Each \textit{maṭla‘} generally contains several \textit{ishrāqāt} (illuminations) and any one of a number of subheadings, with names such as “moonlight” (\textit{nūr qamarī}), “earthly shadow” (\textit{zīl fārshī}), “moon-shadow” (\textit{zīl qamarī}), and “Throne-light” (\textit{nūr ‘a[rshī}).

The opening lines of \textit{Sūrat al-jumu‘a} say that “All that is in the heavens and the earth glorify \textit{yusabbi‘u} God.” This verse allows Šadrā to introduce the well-known distinction between necessary and contingent being, since the fact that all things glorify God is itself an indication that they are contingent. Yet not all existents are the same, as some are less dense than others by virtue of their detachment from matter. Thus, the more an existent is characterized by materiality the less intense its glorification of God, and the less it is characterized by materiality the more intense its glorification.

Although Kalin and Rizvi seem to imply that this commentary has to do with questions of ontology more than anything else,\textsuperscript{97} this is only true with respect to the first \textit{maṭla‘}. The remaining \textit{maṭla‘}s discuss in some detail the divine wisdom behind God’s sending prophets to humankind, the nature of knowledge and wisdom, and the meaning of death and eschatology. As a corollary of the latter, some attention is paid to questions of psychology. Characteristic of some of his other writings, such as the \textit{Sih aṣl}, Šadrā also spends a good deal of time contrasting people who love this world (especially worldly scholars) with those who love the next world.

\textsuperscript{97} Cf. Kalin, “An Annotated Bibliography,” 39; Rizvi, \textit{Mullā Šadrā Shīrāzī}, 84.
This commentary’s main area of focus is the “levels of faith” (marātib al-īmān), which is in keeping with Ṣadrā’s pronouncements in his introduction to the text, where he states that this work contains “the mothers of the objectives of faith” (ummahāt al-maqāṣid al-īmāniyya).98 Perhaps more than his other tafsīrs, in the Tafsīr Sūrat al-jumu’ā Ṣadrā has a lot to say about that aspect of the religious life which complements faith, namely practice (in all of its dimensions, whether it be ritual prayer (ṣalāt), intimate conversations (munājāt), or religious actions in general (a‘māl)). Ṣadrā’s concern with religious practice comes out best towards the end of the tenth maṭla‘, where he dedicates a profound discussion to the “levels of invocation” or “remembrance” (marātib al-dhikr).99

1.3.8 – Tafsīr Sūrat al-Ṭāriq

This is the second shortest of Ṣadrā’s commentaries. It was composed in 1030/1621. Just over 50 pages in length, the Tafsīr Sūrat al-Ṭāriq comes with an important introduction, several subheadings with various titles, and a brief concluding paragraph. In his introduction, Ṣadrā’s language betrays its indebtedness to the Sufi Qur’anic exegetical tradition, as he speaks of his unveiling the “beauty of the brides” (jamāl al-ʿarā’īs) and “virgins” (abkār) of the Qur’ān’s sūras and āyas.101 He also alludes to the function of the bestowal of divine mercy in comprehending the Qur’ān.102

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98 Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 7:139.
99 To the best of my knowledge, the only scholar to have dealt with this question in Ṣadrā’s tafsīr is Mudabbir Azizi in his “Mullā Ṣadrā’s Gnostic Approach Towards the Qur’ānic Verses.” For more on this work, see p. 14.
100 Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 7:308-59/Majmū‘at, 589-98.
101 Idem, Tafsīr, 7:308.
102 Ibid., 7:309.
Thematically, the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-ṭāriq* is similar to parts of the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-wāqī‘a*. The most interesting section of the commentary is its discussion of cosmology and how the existence of the heavens (*samā‘*) mentioned in the opening verse of *Sūrat al-ṭāriq* point to the existence of God. Here Şadrā attempts to establish the contingency of the heavens, and, in doing so, goes on to show how that which is contingent necessarily points to that which is beyond itself, namely the Necessary (*al-wājib*). One aspect of this commentary not to be found in Şadrā’s other *tafsīrs* is his treatment of the stages of man’s development (prompted by verses six and seven of *Sūrat al-ṭāriq*), beginning with his being a sperm drop (*manī*) to his physical formation, and finally to his psychological and spiritual constitution. This point is a perfect complement to Şadrā’s doctrine of substantial motion, although he does not draw the connection here.

### 1.3.9 – *Tafsīr Sūrat al-‘ālā*\(^{103}\)

Like several of the other *tafsīrs* described above, this work was most likely written after 1022/1613, and certainly before the composition of Şadrā’s *Tafsīr Sūrat al-sajda*. A relatively short treatise, the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-‘ālā* is the most structured of all of Şadrā’s writings on the Qur’ān. It contains an introduction, seven chapters,\(^{104}\) and a very short concluding paragraph. Each chapter is entitled *tasbīḥ* (“declaration of transcendence” or “glorification”), and each *tasbīḥ* is devoted to one or more of the *sūra*’s verses.

The *sūra* begins in the imperative, commanding readers to glorify the name of God (*sabbiḥ ism rabbika l-‘ālā*), and this is the reason Şadrā names the chapters of his commentary *tasbīhs*. He begins his commentary by explaining that the primary denotation (*al-maqṣūd al-aṣlī*)

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\(^{103}\) Idem, 7:362-407/*Majmū‘at*, 598-607.

of the root *s.b.ḥ.* is God’s transcendence and exaltedness. Although the root denotes “glorification,” it does so as a result of stating how other and far removed God is. Thus, each chapter begins with God’s transcendence and then attempts to tackle a variety of issues, such as God’s providence and solicitude for His creatures, His attributes, and the types of damnation and felicity people will experience in the afterlife.

1.3.10 – *Tafsīr Sūrat al-zilzāl*\(^{105}\)

By far the most modest of Ṣadrā’s commentaries on the Qurʾān—both in size and scope—this thirty-four page work contains a short introduction, generic subheadings, and a brief conclusion. We know that this *tafsīr* was written some time before 1042/1632, since Ṣadrā refers to it by name in his *Tafsīr Sūrat al-sajda*. And, more significantly, he explicitly mentions his famous *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya* in this *tafsīr*.\(^{106}\) As Rizvi correctly observes, the *Shawāhid* must have been completed before 1041/1631, since in this text Ṣadrā speaks of his esteemed teacher, Mīr Dāmād (d. 1041/1631), as still alive.\(^{107}\) The *Shawāhid* is a very mature work and was the subject of a number of important commentaries, the most important of which is by Sabzawārī. According to Rizvi, the *Shawāhid* was completed between 1030/1621 and 1040/1630, but certainly before 1041/1631. Since the *Asfār* was completed in 1037/1628 and the *Shawāhid* was in all likelihood written after the *Asfār*’s completion, it would be safe to date the *Shawāhid*’s completion somewhere between 1037/1628 and 1041/1631. Since the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-zilzāl* mentions the *Shawāhid*, the earliest it could have been written is 1628. We can therefore locate the date of this *tafsīr*’s composition somewhere between 1037/1628 and 1041/1632.


There are a few instances in this tafsîr where Şadrâ directly links the notion of “scripture” to his ontology and cosmology. Some interesting points also emerge through his exposition of the nature of the scrolls (suḥuf) of peoples’ deeds which will be brought forth on the final day. Although this particular sūra does not mention these scrolls, its last two verses speak about people “seeing” their good and evil actions. The notion of “seeing” in the afterlife is therefore one of the major themes which runs through this commentary.

1.4 – Commentaries on Individual Āyas

1.4.1 – Tafsîr Āyat al-kursî

As Şadrâ notes, this work was written in 1022/1613. It is most likely the first of his books devoted to the Qur’ân. Contrary to what the work’s title indicates, it is not only a commentary on the Throne verse (Q 2:255). Half of the work is actually a commentary upon the two verses which follow it. The text is divided into an introduction, twenty discussions (maqāla) with different generic titles, and a conclusion. The first eleven discussions are devoted to commenting upon the Throne verse, discussions twelve to fifteen to Q 2:256, and discussions sixteen to twenty to Q 2:257. Like his Tafsîr Sūrat al-baqara, Şadrâ’s comments on this sūra’s other three verses also prompt him to discuss questions such as the meaning of faith and unbelief. The central concern of this commentary, at least the first eleven discussions, is

108 See Kamada, “Mullâ Şadrâ Between Mystical Philosophy and Qur’ân Interpretation through his Commentary on the “Chapter of the Earthquake”” for a helpful discussion. Our assessment of this work can be found on p. 21.


110 See Şadrâ, Tafsîr, 4:342.
ontology and theology. Here, Şadrā deals in depth with the nature of God’s mercy, being (his clear espousal of wahdat al-wujūd is expressed here), and the divine names and attributes. Şadrā will go on to develop the relationship between being and God’s mercy in several places, most prominently in the course of his disquisition on Q 1:3, which forms part of his Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa.

The mention of “intercession” in Q 2:255, “the firm handle” (al-ʻurwat al-wuthqā) in Q 2:256, and God’s walāya in Q 2:257 prompts Şadrā to discuss the institution of the Imamate and its legitimacy as well as the reality of “intercession” on the day of judgement, concerns which he does not display in his other tafsīrs. It is difficult to determine why the distinctly Shi‘ī character of this book almost disappears by the time we reach Şadrā’s final tafsīr. At the same time, his last work on “scripture,” the Sharḥ Uṣūl al-kāfī (completed in 1043-4/1634), is just as Shi‘ī as the Tafsīr Āyat al-kursī.

1.4.2 – Tafsīr Āyat al-nūr

Completed in 1030/1621, Şadrā’s commentary on the light verse contains an introduction, six sections (fuṣūl, often divided into subsections with various generic subtitles), and a concluding statement (khātima wa-waṣiyya). Of all of his works on the Qur’ān, this tafsīr has received the most attention in modern scholarship. There seems to be good justification in

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111 One of the alternative titles of this work is Tafsīr al-ʻUrwat al-wuthqā, which is inspired by a Qur’anic phrase. This term may be linked with the intercession granted by the Imams and the well-known hadīth of the “ship of Noah” (saḥīfat Nūḥ). See Khwājāwī’s introduction in Şadrā, Tafsīr, 4:5. As we saw earlier, the same title is attributed to Şadrā’s son.

112 Ibid., 4:345-427/Majmū‘at, 358-75. Various medieval and some modern Muslim interpretations of Q 24:35 can be found in Feras Hamza, Sajjad Rizvi with Farhana Mayer (ed.), An Anthology of Qur’anic Commentaries, ch. 4.
this, since this particular *tafsīr* represents Ṣadrā’s central concerns as a “philosopher/mystic” (*ḥakīm ilāhī*) commenting upon scripture.

Since there is a fairly long commentarial tradition on the light verse, Ṣadrā devotes some room to discussing previous views on the subject, citing the commentaries on this verse by Avicenna, Ghazālī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, and Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274). Apart from his citations from the Imams, he also demonstrates his familiarity with the sayings of the Sufis, citing figures such as Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), Kharrāz (d. 286/899), Dhū l-Nūn (d. 245/860), Bastāmī (d. 234/848 or 261/875), Shiblī (d. 334/946), and, indirectly, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī (d. 526/1131).113

As would be expected, Ṣadrā clearly identifies light with being in this commentary and brings it to bear upon the verse’s pregnant symbology. This then allows him to relate the fundamentality of light and the verse’s symbols to his psychology, cosmology, and anthropology. The nature and cosmic function of the Perfect Man is brought out particularly well here. Unlike Ṣadrā’s other *tafsīrs*, there seems to be more emphasis here on the question of self-knowledge, which may once again evince the influence of the work of Afḍal al-Dīn Kāshānī.

1.4.3 – *Tafsîr Q 27:88*\textsuperscript{114}

This short and incomplete commentary upon Q 27:88, “And you look at the mountains, deeming them to be still...,” seems to have first been identified by Āqâ Buzurg\textsuperscript{115} as one of Şadrâ’s works. Although some have accepted Āqâ Buzurg’s identification, no other author in “Category # 3” (see section 1.2.1 above) follows his lead. It would seem best to place this work at a very early period in Şadrâ’s career because of its distinctly Shi‘î undertones (cf. 1.4.1 above).\textsuperscript{116} Assuming that this treatise is an early work, it might be a good example of what Şadrâ had in mind when he spoke of his “miscellaneous writings” (*mutafarraqât*) on the Qur‘ân, and which he distinguished from his more complete *tafsîrs*.\textsuperscript{117} Indeed, the work is “scattered” in that it reads like a set of stray reflections on Q 27:88. In terms of both style and content, this text resembles Şadrâ’s other *tafsîrs*, and so there is no good reason to assume that he is not its author, especially since the treatise clearly alludes to (but does not develop) Şadrâ’s doctrine of substantial motion.

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{114}Şadrâ, *Majmû‘at*, 614-6.
\textsuperscript{115}See Āqâ Buzurg, *Dharû‘a*, 4:278.
\textsuperscript{116}In two places, the text mentions the *tafsîr* of a certain “‘Alî b. Ibrâhîm,” which is most likely a reference to the important early Shi‘î Qur‘ân commentator, al-Qummî (d. 307/919), whose complete name is Mu‘âammad b. ‘Alî b. Ibrâhîm al-Qummî. Also, Şadrâ refers to the “exalted ‘Alawî line, which is witnessed by the *shiqshiqiyya*.... [al-khâtiyya al-‘âlîya al-‘alawiyya al-shuhûda bi-l shiqshiqiyya].” To readers of the famous *Nahj al-balûgha*, one of the “scriptures” of the Safavid period attributed to ‘Alî, the odd term *shiqshiqiyya* calls to mind this book’s famous (and polemical) third sermon. Şadrâ appears to be linking this with the “people of intelligence” (*ahl al-fatâna*), from whom the reality of the final hour is not hidden. See Şadrâ, *Majmû‘at*, 615. For Qummî’s role in Şadrâ’s *Tafsîr Sûrat al-fâtiha*, see p. 129.
\textsuperscript{117}See Şadrâ, *Tafsîr*, 6:6 and pp. 51-2 above.
\end{footnotes}
1.5 – Theoretical Works on the Qur’ān

1.5.1 – *Asrār al-āyāt wa-anwār al-bayyināt* ¹¹⁸

This and the following two titles are not works of *tafsīr* as such. They are, in a sense, more concerned with the theoretical aspects involved in any interpretation of scripture, although this holds true more for the following entry. The *Asrār al-āyāt* was written during the final phase of Ṣadrā’s career. It is over 200 pages in length and Mullā ‘Alī Nūrī’s glosses are longer than the book itself.¹¹⁹ The *Asrār* contains an introduction and three sections (*taraf*). Each section is subdivided into several subsections known as “places of witnessing” (*mashhad*), each of which contains several principles (*qā’ida*). The scope of this work is vast, for in it Ṣadrā attempts to discuss a wide range of theological and philosophical topics, often drawing upon verses of the Qur’ān in his discussions.

The *Asrār* deals with various philosophical and mystical issues: the path of the wayfarers to God and the method of those who are “firmly rooted in knowledge” (an allusion to Q 3:7), proofs for God’s existence, the entification (*ta’ayyun*)¹²⁰ of the Greatest Name (*al-ism al-a’ẓam*) and its locus of manifestation (*maẓhar*, i.e., the Perfect Man), the Muḥammadan Reality, the temporal origination of the world, meditations on the transience of this worldly life, and eschatology. In the *Asrār*, Ṣadrā also discusses the names and qualities of the Qur’ān, the difference between God’s Speech and His book, the modality of revelation to the Prophets, the

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 223-522.
¹²⁰ This term is a synonym for *tafalā* (self-disclosure) and *zuhūr* (manifestation). See Ṣadrā, *The Elixir of the Gnostics*, 95 n. 11.
nature of the divine book, God’s address (*khiṭāb*) to His creatures, and the “Perfect Words” (*al-kalimāt al-tāmmāt*) referred to in a famous ḥadīth.

1.5.2 – *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*

As mentioned earlier, the *Mafātīḥ* was written in 1042/1632. In the final phase of Ṣadrā’s career, his writings on the Qurʾān take on a slightly different focus. Whereas before 1041/1631 he had written a number of independent commentaries on *sūras* and *āyas*, from 1041/1631 to the end of his life he begins to produce books which deal with a variety of hermeneutical questions and themes related to the Qurʾān. This shift in focus is best evidenced in the *Mafātīḥ*.\(^{121}\)

Why Ṣadrā would not devote a treatise to independent questions concerning the Qurʾān until a much later date in his intellectual life is not quite clear. It would be incorrect to say that the *Mafātīḥ* was written after Ṣadrā’s intellectual perspective had crystallized, since his first *tafsīr* work is quite mature, and was completed a considerable time after the commencement of the *Asfār*. We can reject Brockelmann’s suggestion that this work is a “defence of mysticism” (*Verteidigung der Mystik*).\(^{122}\) Nor would it be correct to say that Ṣadrā wrote the *Mafātīḥ* as an introduction to his Qurʾānic commentaries, since there is little evidence in the *Mafātīḥ* itself which suggests this. All that we can say with certainty is that, after having already written over ten *tafsīrs*, Ṣadrā’s perspective deepened by the time he penned the *Mafātīḥ*, and was thus in a better position to address the general hermeneutical questions and important themes related to the Qurʾān. Thus, the *Mafātīḥ* can be said to present an epitome of Ṣadrā’s hermeneutical approach to the Qurʾān.

\(^{121}\) It should be noted here that the relevant sections of the *Mafātīḥ* which deal with Qurʾānic hermeneutics are expanded versions of a corresponding section in Ṣadrā’s *Asfār*. See pp. 76-7.

The published version of the *Mafātīḥ* is over 700 pages long\textsuperscript{123} and is accompanied by Mullā ‘Alī Nūrī’s extensive glosses.\textsuperscript{124} The book contains a very important introduction and twenty chapters or “keys” (*miftāḥs*), the first ten of which comprise part one, and the last ten of which comprise part two. Each chapter consists of various subtitles, all of which have specific titles. A close reading of the introduction to the *Mafātīḥ* reveals this entire work as providing the “keys” to Ṣadrā’s hermeneutical perspective.\textsuperscript{125} Technically speaking, the *Mafātīḥ* is not a work on the Qur’ān or on Qur’anic hermeneutics, since only the first two *Miftāḥs* are concerned with the Qur’ān as such. *Miftāḥ 1* (which, as will be shown in the following chapter, is a significantly expanded discussion of several sections of Ṣadrā’s *Asfār*) and *Miftāḥ 2* inform the remaining eighteen *Miftāḥs* in such a way that, without them, understanding how the *Mafātīḥ* in its entirety is meant to outline Ṣadrā’s hermeneutics is impossible. Thus, *Miftāḥ 4*, which is about the different types of “inspiration” (*ihlām*) a person may receive, cannot in and of itself function as outlining Ṣadrā’s hermeneutics. But it does inform what Ṣadrā says in *Miftāḥ 1*, where he discusses “revelation” (*waḥy*). What this means is that the book’s chapters beyond *Miftāḥ 2*—dealing as they do with such topics as the nature of knowledge, angelology, eschatology, the creation of the world, and wayfaring on the path to God—do not allow one to abstract Ṣadrā’s hermeneutical theory as such. They function as practical applications of the theoretical considerations laid out in *Miftāḥ 1* and *Miftāḥ 2*, or, in rare cases, elaborate upon some of the ideas discussed in them. From this perspective, those sections in *Miftāḥs* 3-20 where Ṣadrā deals

\textsuperscript{123} Ṣadrā, *Mafātīḥ*, 75-782.

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 787-881.

\textsuperscript{125} See Rustom, “Mullā Ṣadrā’s Prolegomenon to the *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*.�
with the Qurʾān resemble his reflections on its verses to be found in his *tafsīr* and non-*tafsīr* compositions.

### 1.5.3 – *Mutashābihāt al-qurʾān*¹²⁶

Although we do not have a date of composition for this short treatise on the “ambiguous” verses of the Qurʾān, it may have been written after the *Mafātīḥ*, since parts of the treatise seem to expand on shorter discussions in sections of the *Mafātīḥ*.¹²⁷ The treatise consists of an introduction and five chapters (*fuṣūl*).

Ṣadrā begins this text by summarizing the problem of the ambiguous verses and briefly highlighting the views of his predecessors. Here, he charges a number of Qurʾān commentators’ interpretations of these verses as being nothing more than sophistry. Ṣadrā then launches an attack on the interpretations of scripture carried out by “the deniers of the divine attributes” (*ahl al-taʾṣīl*). After clearing the ground, so to speak, he moves on to his own treatment of the ambiguous verses, discussing the nature of metaphor and how unveiling (*kashf*) functions in the interpretation of these verses. Ṣadrā is careful to tell his readers that not all verses which cannot be understood rationally are to be interpreted metaphorically. It is precisely through “unveiling” that one can come to know the reality of those Qurʾanic passages which seem to defy reason.

¹²⁶ Ṣadrā, *Sīh risāla*, 257-84.

¹²⁷ Cf. Āṣhiyānī, “Muqaddima-yi muṣṭaḥḥih,” 77; Bīdārī, “Taqdīm,” 102-3; Khamenei, *Ḥikmat-i mutaʿāliya*, 37. Āṣhiyānī’s glosses to this text, which are to be found in Ṣadrā, *Sīh risāla*, 285-310, mainly consist of those excerpts from the *Mafātīḥ* which discuss the Qurʾān’s *mutashābih* verses.
1.6 – Qur’anic Works of Doubtful Authenticity

1.6.1 – 1.6.3 – *Tafsīrs Sūrat Yūsūf, ṭalāq, qadr*

Brockelmann ascribes the *Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsūf* to Ṣadrā. But no reference to this work is to be found in Ṣadrā’s writings, whereas there appears to be one rather late reference to the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-ṭalāq*.128 With respect to the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-qadr*, the first reference to this work, as mentioned earlier, is to be found in Qazwīnī’s *Mutammin*. There do not appear to be any extant manuscripts of the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-ṭalāq* or the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-qadr*.

1.6.4 – *Tafsīr Sūrat al-ḍuḥā*

Several authors have ascribed this title to Ṣadrā, the first of whom appears to have been Āqā Buzurg. The *Tafsīr Sūrat al-ḍuḥā* is listed in the *Dharī’a*’s “individual tafsīr entries,”129 but does not appear amongst the titles listed in its “basic tafsīr entries.” It is difficult to determine whether the first of the two “basic tafsīr entries” was written before the entry on the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-ḍuḥā* found its way into the list of “individual tafsīr entries.” Although the former’s entry number is 1283 as opposed to the latter’s being numbered 1466, its precedence simply has to do with alphabetical order. Thus, it is not possible to judge whether or not Āqā Buzurg wished to amend his first list of “basic tafsīr entries” but did not have the opportunity to do so. In fact, the volume in which both of these entries appear was edited and printed after Āqā Buzurg’s death under the care of his sons.130 This problem is further complicated by the fact that the first list of “basic tafsīr entries” says that its source for its listing of Ṣadrā’s tafsīrs is a collection of Ṣadrā’s tafsīr printed in 1333/1914. But the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-ḍuḥā* is reported by Āqā Buzurg to have also

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129 Āqā Buzurg, *Dharī’a*, 4:338.
130 See *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v.v. “al-Ḍarī’a elā taṣānīf al-ṣī’a.”
been found in a printed collection of his *tafsīrs* dating to 1332/1913.\textsuperscript{131} All subsequent entries in the *Dharṣa* which make reference to this printed collection date it to 1332/1913, so the 1333/1914 date is likely to have been a slip of the pen on the part of the author. The fact that Āqā Buzurg does not have an entry on this work in his listing of “individual *tafsīr* entries” may also call its attribution to Ṣadrā into question. According to the *Kitabshināsī-yi jāmʿ-ī* Mullā Ṣadrā, this title is extant in manuscript form.\textsuperscript{132}

1.6.5 – *Tafsīr Sūrat al-ikhlāṣ*\textsuperscript{133}

This title is not commonly ascribed to Ṣadrā, but is included in some of the more recent bibliographies of his works.\textsuperscript{134} Because this text cannot be dated to any particular period, if Ṣadrā is its author, he could have written it at any point in his career. Compared to his other *tafsīrs*, the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-ikhlāṣ* is structured differently, and its discussions are not as detailed as they are in texts of a similar size. The *tafsīr* is strangely divided into two parts, which seem to be two separate treatises. Part one consists of an introduction composed of six sections or “merits” (*fāʿida*), comments on the *sūra*’s verses, and a conclusion which is composed of two “merits.” The first part of the commentary is mostly concerned with proving God’s oneness. There is nothing specifically Ṣadrian about this part of the commentary. The language is fairly straight-

\textsuperscript{131} Āqā Buzurg, *Dharṣa*, 4:338. The collection of Ṣadrā’s *tafsīr* used by Āqā Buzurg seems to be different from the lithographed edition in our possession, because the latter was printed some ten years earlier and, more importantly, because it does not contain the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-ḥuḥā*.

\textsuperscript{132} Khurramdashti and Aṣgharī, *Kitabshināsī-yi jāmʿ-ī* Mullā Ṣadrā, 72.


forward, and a reliance upon the terminology of the school of Ibn ʿArabī is evidenced throughout.

The second part of the *tafsīr* is also a running commentary on each of the verses of Q 112. In the introduction to the second part, which is the most important section of the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-ikhlāṣ*, the author briefly discusses the symbolism of the letters of the basmala.

1.6.6 – 1.6.8 – *Maʿānī al-alfāz al-mufrada min al-qurān, Risāla fī rumūz al-qurān, Taʿlīqa ʿalā Anwār al-tanzīl*

The *Maʿānī* was first listed by Khurramdashtī and Aṣghārī.135 They say that it is a short treatise which discusses some of the individual terms and/or phrases found in the Qurān. Şadrā does not appear to refer to this work in his writings. In all likelihood, it too is a section from a larger work. This hypothesis may be correct, since in Āqā Buzurg’s content description of Şadrā’s *Mafātīḥ*, he states that one of the sections in *Miftāḥ 1* is about the “*maʿānī al-alfāz al-mufrada*” of the Qurān.136 Going on this description alone, it appears to correspond to *Miftāḥ 1:1–3*. The *Risāla fī rumūz al-qurān*, which is only listed by Brockelmann,137 is likely to be the same as the *Maʿānī*, or at least a part of it, since its title indicates that it corresponds to *Miftāḥ 1:1*, which is about the symbols (*rumūz*) of the Qurān.

Thanks to Şadrā’s inventory of books in his personal library,138 we know that he was familiar with the *tafsīr* of the famous Sunnī theologian and exegete, ʿAbd Allāh al-Baydāwī (d.

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138 See Şadrā, *Yāddāsht-hā-yi Mullā Şadrā hamrāh bā fihrīst-i kitābhāna-yi shakhṣī-yi Mullā Şadrā*, ed. Muḥammad Barakat (Qum: Intishārāt-ī Bīdār, 1377 Sh/1998). It is reproduced in English in Rizvi, *Mullā Şadrā Shīrāzī*, 117–35. For the entry on Baydāwī, see ibid., 118–9. This inventory of works, although very useful, certainly does not present us with a complete listing of all of the texts in Şadrā’s possession over the course of his career. This
716/1316), parts of whose *Anwār al-tanzīl* were in his possession.\textsuperscript{139} However, the common attribution of a set of glosses upon this text to Şadrā under the title *Tālīqa ʿalā Anwār al-Tanzīl*,\textsuperscript{140} is in all likelihood mistaken.\textsuperscript{141}

1.7 – Conclusion

In this chapter we had the opportunity to survey the reception of Mullā Şadrā’s works on the Qurʾān by providing a detailed overview of the manner in which these writings were documented and commented upon in Safavid, Qajar, and Pahlavid learned circles. It was shown that, amongst Şadrā’s followers, it was not until about a century after his death that his writings on the Qurʾān began to attract serious scholarly attention. This fact is symptomatic of a wider trend in the development of a commentarial tradition proper upon Şadrā’s philosophical writings: it was not until the Qajar period that followers and opponents of his teachings decided to write extensive commentaries upon his most important philosophical works.

In contrast to the nuanced understanding of Şadrā’s intellectual concerns amongst philosophers and mystics in late medieval and early modern Iran, biographical and historical writings from the Safavid, Qajar, and early Pahlavid periods tended to recycle the image of his being a philosopher first and scriptural exegete (mostly concerned with ʿhadīth literature) second.

\textsuperscript{139} For this work, see Baydāwī, *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-ʿasrār al-taʿwīl* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, 1911).

\textsuperscript{140} See, for example, Mangabadi, “Mullā Şadrā’s Method of Qurʾānic Commentary,” 441 (where the author has “Hahiyyah (sic.) bar (marginal gloss on) Tafsīr Bayḍārī (sic!)”; Muḥammad ʿAlī Mudarris, *Rayḥānat al-adab* (Tehran: Kitābfūrūsh-yi Khayyām, 1369 Sh/1990), 4:419.

It was not until the twentieth century, beginning with Aqā Buzurg’s Dharīṯa, that this image began to change. Annotated bibliographies of Šadrā’s oeuvre from the middle of the twentieth century onwards present a much more balanced picture of his scholarly activities. Thanks to a number of these bibliographies, we now have a fairly good idea of the nature of Šadrā’s works on the Qurʾān and its sciences. Yet, these bibliographies are also limited when it comes to describing the nature and scope of Šadrā’s works on the Qurʾān. In the last part of this chapter, therefore, we provided the most comprehensive overview to date of the chronology, scope, and contents of each of Šadrā’s writings on the Qurʾān and its sciences. This presents us with a good picture of his Qurʾānic writings, and sets the stage for an in-depth inquiry into the theoretical dimension of his Qurʾānic hermeneutics.
Chapter 2

Mullā Ṣadrā’s Qur’anic Hermeneutics

In this chapter we will attempt to articulate as clear a picture as possible of Mullā Ṣadrā’s theoretical scriptural hermeneutics. This will pave the way for the remaining chapters of this study, which will be concerned with the practical dimension of his hermeneutics. As was made clear last chapter, Ṣadrā’s most important theoretical work on the Qurʾān is the Mafātiḥ al-ghayb, one of his last compositions. The Mafātiḥ is a text which is not easy to characterize. Its style is somewhat forbidding, since Ṣadrā often breaks out into rhetorical flourishes when making a simple point. There is thus the difficulty of simply coming to the point that he is trying to make. The subheadings contained in the text are often helpful in discerning where the discussion is headed, but this is not always the case.

A thinker who wrote as widely and rapidly as Mullā Ṣadrā would naturally draw on other authors’ books, either by way of direct citation or indirect adaptation. In the following chapter we will demonstrate just how indebted Ṣadrā’s tafsīr is to the writings of his predecessors, amongst whom are some of the most seminal figures in Islamic thought. With respect to the Mafātiḥ, we find many direct references to Ibn ʿArabī’s Futūḥāt, along with several references to Ghazālī’s writings, particularly the Munqidh.1 S. J. Badakhchani, following Ḥasanzādah Āmulī,2 suggests that a later section of the Mafātiḥ is nothing more than a translation of Naṣīr al-Dīn

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1 See pp. 80-1 n. 21 for Ṣadrā’s appropriation of Ghazālī’s rules for reciting the Qurʾān.
Tūsī’s (d. 672/1274) Ismā’īlī Persian eschatological work, Āghāz wa-anjām. Although upon closer inspection the section in question is characteristically reworked by Sadrā with more attention to detail, this may be the first indication that Tūsī’s “influence” upon Sadrā’s philosophical teachings is more a result of his familiarity with Tūsī’s work as an Ismā’īlī thinker rather than as a Twelver thinker. With respect to Sadrā’s theoretical understanding of scripture as laid out in the Mafāṭīḥ, however, it would be incorrect to say that it has been influenced by the work of Tūsī or Ghazālī. The only directly discernable influence on Sadrā’s scriptural hermeneutics in terms of its theoretical articulation can be traced back to the work of Ibn ʿArabī, as will be discussed below.

We saw in the previous chapter how internal references within Sadrā’s oeuvre can help us solve questions concerning the chronology of his compositions on the Qurʾān and its sciences. At times, however, such references can be misleading for the simple reason that Sadrā is known to have rewritten some of his earlier books, but which refer to texts that were definitively penned after the former work’s completion (but before its revision). Although this kind of practice can often lead to a dead end with respect to dating particular texts, it is probably safe to assume that, on the whole, references to Sadrā’s earlier writings in his later books are to be taken at face

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5 As I will demonstrate in chapter four of this study, although there is no concrete evidence to suggest that Tūsī’s Ismā’īlī writings heavily influenced Sadrā’s work on the Qurʾān, Sadrā’s treatment of ontology as discussed in the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fāṭiha may have had an eye on some of Tūsī’s Ismā’īlī-inspired ideas.
value. This is likely more true of later texts which noticeably modify or correct the positions and arguments mentioned in the earlier texts to which they refer.

It is with the above point in mind that we should seek to understand the statement in a recent article by Sajjad Rizvi, who remarks that Ṣadrā’s *Mutashābihāt, Asrār,* and *Mafāṭīḥ* were written “as a preparation for his own incomplete mystical and philosophical commentary.”⁶ This observation is surprising because we know, largely based on the dating provided by Rizvi himself, that these three books were written after Ṣadrā had completed most of his *tafsīrs.*⁷ With respect to the *Mutashābihāt* and *Asrār,* there is little in these two texts which would indicate that they were meant to function as preparations for Ṣadrā’s *tafsīrs.* With respect to the *Mafāṭīḥ,* however, Rizvi is not far from the mark.

The *Mafāṭīḥ,* like the *Mutashābihāt* and *Asrār,* was written towards the end of Ṣadrā’s career. But unlike these two titles, the *Mafāṭīḥ*’s most significant discussion vis-à-vis Ṣadrā’s Qur’anic writings was originally a part of the *Asfār.*⁸ The section in question, namely Miṭlāḥ 1 of the *Mafāṭīḥ*’s twenty Miṭlāḥs, deals with such topics as the nature of revelation and the different levels of the descent of God’s Word and its correspondences to the inner layers (darajāt) of man’s soul. Since the *Asfār* was written over a twenty-two year period, it is difficult to determine when the theoretical sections on the Qur’ān (later to be incorporated into Miṭlāḥ 1 of the

⁷ See appendix one of the present study for a tentative chronology of the order of composition of Ṣadrā’s writings on the Qur’ān and its sciences.
⁸ We list here the volume and page numbers from the *Asfār* and their corresponding, expanded sections in the *Mafāṭīḥ.*

- *Asfār,* 7:44-6 → *Mafāṭīḥ,* 85
- *Asfār,* 7:50-4 → *Mafāṭīḥ,* 88
- *Asfār,* 7:2-4 → *Mafāṭīḥ,* 93
- *Asfār,* 7:32-4 → *Mafāṭīḥ,* 97-8
- *Asfār,* 7:30-2 → *Mafāṭīḥ,* 98-9
- *Asfār,* 7:10-8 (cf. *Asfār,* 7:10-3 with *Elixir,* 27) → *Mafāṭīḥ,* 100-5
- *Asfār,* 7:19-28 → *Mafāṭīḥ,* 106-13
- *Asfār,* 7:34-6 → *Mafāṭīḥ,* 113
- *Asfār,* 7:36-40 → *Mafāṭīḥ,* 115.
Mafātiḥ) were written. But we can be sure that these relevant sections were written concurrently with if not before most of Ṣadrā’s tafsīrs. Miftāḥ 1 of the Mafātiḥ, therefore, occupies a special place amongst Ṣadrā’s writings on the Qurʾān. As we will see later in this chapter, the general hermeneutical observations contained in this text do indeed act as preparatory reflections for Ṣadrā’s commentaries on individual Qurʿanic sūras and āyas.

2.1 – The Mafātiḥ’s Introduction

Miftāḥ 1 is complemented by another brief text which is not to be found in the relevant sections of the Asfār, namely the introduction to the Mafātiḥ itself. Taken together, Miftāḥ 1 and the introduction to the Mafātiḥ can, generally speaking, be said to encapsulate Mullā Ṣadrā’s esoteric hermeneutical vision of the nature of the Qurʾān.⁹ At present, we will therefore turn our attention to Ṣadrā’s pronouncements in the introduction to the Mafātiḥ, which will facilitate our analysis of Miftāḥ 1.

At the beginning of the Mafātiḥ, Ṣadrā tells his readers that he had been meaning to write this work for quite some time:

For some time now I have longed to bring forth the Qurʾān’s meanings. [With] my previous reflections I attempted to walk its roads and [by means of] the way stations of the pious explore its paths. In order to attain this goal I would consult my soul [nafs], casting aside the arrows of my own opinion.¹⁰

Ṣadrā says that he was reluctant to carry out this endeavour because of the weight of the task itself.¹¹ The passage above states explicitly that some preparatory work was required on the

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⁹ A number of scholars have noted the theoretical importance of the Mafātiḥ in general. See, for example, Nasr, Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī and his Transcendent Theosophy, 127; Peerwani, “Translator’s Introduction,” 11; Saleh, “The Verse of Light,” 42. Cf. Bīdārfar, “Taqdīm,” 1:109; Khwājāwī, Lawāmi’, 123.

¹⁰ Ṣadrā, Mafātiḥ, 77.

¹¹ Ibid.
part of the author in order to undertake this task. These are the words of someone who had already written some ten commentaries on independent chapters or verses of the Qurʾān. Shortly before this, Ṣadrā remarks that the work was written as the result of a spiritual experience which compelled him to bring forth what he knew of the Qurʾanic sciences. That this passage would precede the one cited above, where Ṣadrā expresses his wish to write the *Mafātīḥ*, may come as a surprise. It may come as even more of a surprise given that what follows the introduction, namely Miftāḥ 1, was written before the introduction to the *Mafātīḥ* itself, albeit in a much more condensed version. But the reasons for this are purely stylistic. The following lines are dramatic and compelling; they are written with vigour, a sense of urgency, and in mellifluous Arabic. They are, in effect, Ṣadrā’s meditations after-the-fact, summarizing the end of his endeavours which he will go on to explicate in more or less straight-forward fashion for the remainder of the introduction:

A command has issued from the Lord of my heart [*āmir qalbī*], and a spiritual allusion has come forth from my innermost recesses [*waradat ishāra min sirr ghaybī*]. God’s judgement and decision have come to pass and He has decreed that some of the divine symbols [*al-rumūz al-ilāhiyya*]¹² become manifest, and that the matters related to the Qurʾanic sciences, Prophetic allusions, secrets of faith, flashes of wisdom, esoteric glimmerings connected to the wonders of the glorious revelation, and the subtleties of Qurʾanic interpretation, be brought forth.¹³

The wording here is very important. Ṣadrā was commanded by God to bring forth the “divine symbols,” the “matters related to the Qurʾanic sciences,” and the “subtleties of Qurʾanic interpretation.” As it soon becomes apparent from the contents of Miftāḥ 1, the fulfilment of this

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¹² I translate *rumūz* as “symbols” following Corbin, “Introduction,” 23. In the singular (i.e., *ramz*), Corbin also renders the term as “chiffre” or “cipher.” See idem, *En islam iranien*, 217.

command was articulated in discussions dealing with such phenomena as the Qur’an’s use of allusory language and the senses of scripture.

Ṣadrā also notes in the introduction that the Mafātīḥ was an inspired work, since it was the result of an “opening” (fāṭḥ):

The Master of the holy realm of the Divinity [ṣāḥib quds al-lāhūt], the Owner of the Kingdom of the Dominion [mālik mulk al-malakūt], granted me a new opening [fāṭḥ jadīḍ], made the sight of my insight piercing with His light, revealing to my heart an opening which drew me near...  

Ṣadrā further remarks that this opening granted him new knowledge of the “treasures of the symbols of the divine realities [kunūz rumūz al-ḥaqāʾiq],” which, it will be recalled, he was commanded by the Lord of his heart to bring forth. This “opening” may be one reason why Ṣadrā would go on to incorporate the sections of the Asfār having to do with the Qur’an into Miftāḥ 1. Yet this spiritual experience was also accompanied by a great burden of responsibility. Ṣadrā says, “I said [to myself] after this opening within myself [fāṭḥ li-nafsī], ‘now is the time to begin mentioning the principles [uṣūl] from which the branches [of the Qur’anic sciences] derive.’”

This approach would be characterized by its sapiential perspective and would not delve too deeply into matters pertaining to exoteric exegesis, such as the fine points of Arabic. He notes that excessive concern with language is characteristic of the approach of the exoteric scholars who “have the outward [zāhir] and the legal aspects [ḥadd],” whereas we have the inward aspect

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14 Ibid., 78.
15 Ibid., 79.
16 Ibid.
17 There is some disagreement in Sufi texts as to the precise meaning of this term in the context of mystical exegesis. It can either refer to the lawful and unlawful (and hence “legal”) dimensions of a specific Qur’anic verse, or to the utmost limit of one’s understanding of a specific Qur’anic verse. See Gerhard Böwering, The Classical Vision of Existence in Islam: The Qur’ānic Hermeneutics of the Šūfī Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1979),
[bāṭin] and the transcendent perspective [matla‘]! It has been said, ‘He who comments [upon the Qur‘ān] using his own opinion has concealed the truth [fa-qad kafara].’“¹⁸ Ṣadrā then provides us with a theoretical definition of ta‘wil:

As for ta‘wil, it does not spare nor leave anything out [lā tubqi‘a‘a-lā tadhar] [Q 74:28],¹⁹ for it comes—thanks be to God!—as a discourse [kalām] in which there is no crookedness, nor does doubt or confusion assail it.²⁰

Before this definition of ta‘wil, Ṣadrā lists some of the conditions which are necessary for approaching the Qur‘ān. These are not conditions for the appropriate recital of the Qur‘ān, nor are they hermeneutical principles as such.²¹ They are, rather, those spiritual prerequisites which

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²⁰ Ṣadrā, Mafātīḥ, 79.

²¹ Ṣadrā’s practical guidelines for approaching the Qur‘ān can be found in the second Miftāḥ of the Mafātīḥ. These points are partially translated and summarized in Peerwani, “Translator’s Introduction,” 23-8 and Ešots, “The Qur‘ānic Hermeneutics of Mullā Ṣadrā.” For some reason, Peerwani does not count numbers 1 and 10, thus
are absolutely necessary in order for one to penetrate the Qurʾān’s symbols. The interpreter is expected to (1) have patience and purity, (2) continuously profess the *shahāda* or statement of God’s oneness, (3) undergo spiritual discipline, (4) spend time in solitary retreat, and (5) abstain from the sciences and character traits of the common folk. Ṣadrā lists other—albeit mysterious—requirements, such as (6) the need to learn the “science of swimming in the Ocean (*bahr*),” (7) knowledge of the “language of the birds,”22 (8) an understanding of the “language of the Dominion” (*malakūt*), and (9) having been granted the secrets of the “realms of the Divinity (*lāhūt*) and Invincibility (*jabarūt*).”23 Although he does not elaborate at great length upon these conditions, nor is this exposition systematic, Ṣadrā makes it known that without meeting these basic prerequisites, *taʾwīl* is not possible.

Yet he lays out another “condition” when it comes to interpreting the Qurʾān. He addresses his readers in the following manner:

> O intelligent, discerning one! If you want to investigate the science of the Qurʾān, the wisdom of God and the principles of faith—that is, faith in God, His angels, books, messengers, and the Final Day—then you need enumerating only eight points. These guidelines are derived from Ghazālī, who relies on Sarrāj (see Sands, *Sūfī Commentaries on the Qurʾān in Classical Islam*, ch. 3). It should be noted that Peervani, “Translator’s Introduction,” 9-22, attempts to reconstruct from Ṣadrā’s oeuvre his rules for interpreting scripture. Apart from failing to distinguish between the principles and preconditions required for reading scripture, her approach is misleading since Ṣadrā’s hermeneutics cannot be summarized by a set of formal rules. Rather, it must be understood through his ontology, which we will turn to in the following section of this chapter. A proper grasp of the manner in which Ṣadrā’s ontology relates to his understanding of scripture precludes the need to construct a formal listing of his “conditions” for interpreting scripture. This may be why Ṣadrā does not attempt to lay out such a list anywhere in his works.

to return to the guardians [ḥafāẓa] of the secrets of the Qurʾān and its meanings, seek out its folk and those who bear it, and ask the “people of remembrance” about its contents. As He—exalted is His name—says, *Ask the people of remembrance if you do not know* [Q 16:43], just as, with the rest of the arts and sciences, you would seek out their folk.  

It is the inner purity of the “people of remembrance” which makes them receptacles for the secrets of the divine book. They have died to themselves and live in God. To this effect, Ṣadrā cites an unnamed sage, and then, in the following order, Plato, Jesus, the Prophet, and ʿAlī. Commenting upon ʿAlī’s saying, “God loves courage, even if it be in the slaying of a snake,” Ṣadrā says:

> There is no snake like your soul, so slay it and purify it of the stain of its false beliefs and ugly opinions; or, subjugate it until it becomes a *muslim* in your hand. First cast it aside like the staff of Moses, then pick it up with your right hand after it has returned to its primordial nature [*sīratihā al-ʿūlā*] and original disposition [*fiṭratihā al-ašliyya*]. It shall then live an intellectual life, striving for the Return [*al-maʿād*] and the final abode [*al-mathwā*].

Ṣadrā then advises those seeking knowledge of the Qurʾān but who do not have access to any of the “people of remembrance”:

> O you in pursuit of the Real and the science of the First and the Last! If none of the folk of this kind—whom you can ask concerning the goal of the Qurʾānic sciences—are destined for you, then you should study this book. It contains beneficial principles [*al-qawānīn al-nāfiʿa*] pertaining to the knowledge of revelation [and] is comprehensive in its foundations which allude to the secrets of *taʾwil* [*al-muḥīṭ bi-qawāʾidhi mushīra ilā asrār al-taʾwil*].

The *Mafāṭīḥ*, therefore, does not introduce Ṣadrā’s individual *tafsīr*. Rather, it introduces the basic hermeneutic-cum-esoteric principles underlying these commentaries themselves. In

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25 This phrase harks back to Q 20:21, where *sīra* takes the accusative case ending.
27 Ibid.
other words, the *Mafāṭih*, in keeping with its title, provides the keys which will allow one to access the hermeneutical perspective Ṣadrā adopts in his Qur’ān commentaries. More specifically, this perspective is most clearly articulated in Miftāḥ 1.

2.2 – The Word Made Book

Although the introduction to the *Mafāṭih* prepares us to read Miftāḥ 1 of the book’s twenty Miftāhs, we would need to look in every possible corner within the text to see how Ṣadrā’s statements in the introduction relate to the remaining Miftāhs. When Ṣadrā deals with, for example, God’s attributes much later in the *Mafāṭih*, we may have some idea of how his introduction can inform such a discussion, namely that the secrets contained within the Qur’ān reveal to the one who looks close enough—that is, has the ability to “see”—the knowledge appropriate to a true understanding of God’s attributes. The first Miftāḥ, on the other hand, follows quite smoothly from the *Mafāṭih*’s introduction, and the implications of the discussions there are clearly discernable when juxtaposed with the stated intent in the text’s introduction. It is, therefore, in the first Miftāḥ’s directness that Ṣadrā’s theoretical hermeneutics is best displayed. The other parts of the *Mafāṭih* can function as elucidations on the points raised in the book’s first Miftāḥ, and in this sense, they elucidate his general hermeneutical perspective.

Hence, one is fully justified in focusing on the first Miftāḥ of the *Mafāṭih* to discern Ṣadrā’s theoretical scriptural hermeneutics. For the remainder of this chapter, therefore, our discussion will be limited to Miftāḥ 1.28 But before turning to Miftāḥ 1, an overview of Ṣadrā’s

28 Since the text is quite theoretical in nature, there are several instances in which Ṣadrā does not develop the points he makes because he explicates their details in another one of his works. We will indicate where this happens in Miftāḥ 1 insofar as it has a bearing on our treatment of Ṣadrā’s scriptural hermeneutics, and will draw on these texts to help complete the picture.
ontology is in order, since its basic principles inform the entire argument of this section of the Mafātīḥ. Without doing so, it will be difficult to appreciate the text’s discussions concerning the intimate relationship shared between the Qur’ān and being. As will be seen below, Ṣadrā only makes this connection in relatively vague terms in his writings, and this is because he assumes that his readers will be able to relate his theoretical pronouncements on the nature of the Qur’ān to his ontology.

2.2.1 – The Two Senses of Being

Ṣadrā distinguishes between two senses of being (wujūd): there is its concept (mafhūm) and then there is its reality (ḥaqīqa).²⁹ The reality of being, he says, is completely simple and indefinable, and is the most hidden thing. As Aristotle demonstrates in his Topics, in order for a thing to be defined, it must have a genus (jins) and differentia (faṣl).³⁰ Being, however, has neither genus nor differentia, and thus is not susceptible to any form of definition. What is communicated in an essential definition, that is, when we know a thing’s genus and differentia, is the quiddity (māhiyya) or the “what-it-is-ness” (that by virtue of which the thing is what it is) of


its species.31 Thus, when we bring together “animal” (genus) and “rational” (differentia), we are
given the descriptive expression “rational animal.” “Rational animal” conveys to us the quiddity
of a particular species, namely “man,” which is subsumed under the wider category “animal.”
Thus, by defining the species “man” as a “rational animal,” man’s quiddity or that by virtue of
which man is a man (and not a horse, for example), is conveyed. Since the reality of being does
not have a genus or differentia, it cannot be defined, meaning that its quiddity cannot be
conveyed.32 Therefore, the quiddity of being cannot be got at, since there is nothing about being
which allows it to be subsumed into any general category (genus), let alone a more particularized
category of the genus (differentia).

Despite the fact that the reality of being is indefinable and hidden, its “anniyya,”33 Şadrā
tells us, “is the most evident of things ….”34 Or, as Sabziwārī famously put it:

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and Hossein Ziai (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1999), 197, describe an essential definition as a
“definition that conveys the quiddity of the species by naming the proximate genus and the differentia.” See also p.
151 n. 14.

32 It is important to distinguish between two types of quiddity: there is (1) quiddity in the most specific sense (al-
māhiyya bi-ma‘nā al-akhasṣ), and (2) quiddity in the most general sense (al-māhiyya bi-ma‘nā al-a‘amm). The first
type of quiddity is simply the answer to the question, “what is it?,” whereas the second type is a thing’s essence
proper, that is, that by virtue of which it is what it is. Being does have a quiddity in the most specific sense, since if
we were to ask what being is, we can answer “being.” But being does not have a quiddity in the most general sense,
since it escapes all definition, and that because it does not have a genus or differentia. See Izutsu, The Concept and
Reality of Existence, 75 n. 34, 101; Nasr, Islamic Philosophy from its Origins to the Present, 66.

33 In later Islamic thought, the important philosophical term anniyya becomes a synonym for wujūd. See Chittick,
also Corbin’s note in Şadrā, Le livre des pénétrations métaphysiques, 181-2, where he cites a comment from Shaykh
Ahmad Ahsā’ī’s Sharh al-Mashā‘ir, which reads as follows: “The thing’s anniya is its reality when one considers
this thing as positive and real.” For a survey of the opinions of Western historians of Islamic philosophy concerning
the term’s provenance, and a thorough discussion which suggests its possible Syriac origins, see Richard Frank,
“The Origin of the Arabic Philosophical Term ‘anniya,’” Les Cahiers de Byrsa 6 (1956): 181-201 (reprinted in idem,
Its notion is one of the most recognizable of things, although its reality lies in utter hiddenness.35

Being is self-evident \((\text{badīhī})\) from two perspectives: (1) by virtue of its simple givenness to us, which is tantamount to saying that the very fact or reality of being is itself self-evident,\(^{36}\) and (2) its notion or concept. Turning our attention to the first of these two perspectives, we notice that being is the very ground of our experience of reality, and is therefore the most general and comprehensive of things, since it applies to all things. This explains why any predicate with which we can qualify being is subsumed under being itself. If, for example, we speak of “horses” or “books,” we can only do so with reference to existent entities, that is, entities that participate in some mode of being, even if these entities do not exist extra-mentally. In other words, the being of horses and books is what allows us to talk about them. Therefore, when we look at any

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34 \(\text{Ñadrā, al-MashāÝir} (\text{Beirut: Mu'assasat al-TÁrÐkh al-ÝArabÐ, 2000, repr. ed.}), 57. \text{See also ibid.}, 58; \text{idem, AsfÁr, 1:83. In the MashāÝir, one of \text{Ñadrā’s most mature philosophical compositions, he explains the fundamentals of his ontology in remarkably lucid fashion. The most useful discussion of this text remains Corbin, “Introduction.” An English translation of this work is available, although it is not as nuanced as Corbin’s French translation, and contains many inaccuracies: \text{Ñadrā, The Metaphysics of Mullā Ñadrā: The Book of Metaphysical Prehensions}, trans. Parviz Morewedge (New York: Society for the Study of Islamic Philosophy and Science, 1992). For more on this text and its manuscripts, see Rizvi, Mullā Ñadrā ShÐrÁ, 66-8.}

35 \(\text{MafhÚmuhu min aÝrafi l-ashyÁÞi / wa kunhuhu fÐ ghÁyati l-khafÁÞi} (\text{SabziwÁrÐ, SharÎ, 4}). \text{For alternative translations of this couplet, see Nasr, Islamic Philosophy from its Origins to the Present, 297 n. 29; Sabziwáři, The Metaphysics of Sabzaváři, 31.}

36 \(\text{Talk of the self-evidentiality of the reality of being should not be confused with the self-evidentiary nature of the concept of being. The former, as Izutsu, The Concept and Reality of Existence, 78 puts it, “forever escapes direct conceptualization.” But the later can be conceived and its structure analyzed.}
particular thing—whether it exists extra-mentally or not—we can say that it “is” being. At the same time, since being is so all-pervasive, any attempt to define its reality will end up in error, since one can only define being through what is more obscure than it. Being’s self-evidentiary nature is, in the final analysis, what veils it from us. It is the most proximate of things to us, and by the same token it is the most distant of them as well. This order of being’s self-evidentiary nature is concerned with its reality as it is self-evident by virtue of its very givenness, although it cannot be defined because of its fundamental hiddenness, which obtains because of its all-pervasiveness and manifestness.

With respect to the other sense in which being is self-evident, namely its concept, we can make concrete judgements about its structure. As a notion, in other words, being is not entirely hidden from us. When, for example, we are presented with the statement, “This is a house,” the notion “house”—which is an existent in one form or another—immediately occurs to the mind. This understanding of being is what Izutsu refers to as the “preconceptual” notion of being, since it forms the basis through which we understand the world. In a sense, the preconceptual notion of being resembles the reality or givenness of being, although, as seen above, the givenness of being refers to the very fact of its apparentness in its hiddenness and its hiddenness in its apparentness. The preconceptual understanding of being, insofar as individual existents are conceived by the mind, is simply a preparatory stage in which the concept of being is self-

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37 We cannot, strictly speaking, say that particular things “have” being, for they are nothing but instantiations of being. Or, as Plato would put it, they “participate in existence.” To say that B has A is to say that the two are distinct. But if A itself is the ground for B and without which B would be nonexistent, it would be absurd to say that B “has” A. Rather, it would be more fitting to say that B “is” A, but in a limited sense. On how we can talk about instantiations or particularizations of being, see pp. 88-9.

38 Şadrā, Mashāʿir, 57.

evident to the mind based on the apprehension of a term or concept, such as “house.” The concept of being proper, on the other hand, again mediated by a concept such as “house,” is what Izutsu refers to as a “secondary elaboration” of the conceived object, which is to say that the image is “a step removed from the concrete and intimate kind of presence in the consciousness [afforded to the mind by the self-evidentiary nature of being through the concept encountered by the mind].”

Izutsu’s distinction between the preconceptual notion of being and the concept of being proper does not, technically speaking, affect one important point: the concept of being, however conceived, is intimately linked to the existence of quiddities. Thus, however we conceive of being, when we attempt to understand it conceptually, we must posit a quiddity. Being is the most self-evident concept, and it is known through particular quiddities. Quiddities are discernable through the gradation of being. Hence the reality of being is unknown, although its concept is self-evident. In other words, the self-evidentiary nature of the concept of being is itself a given. Applied to things, which is that to which the concept of being must necessarily attach,

40 Ibid., 76.

41 Although at ibid., 77 Izutsu notes that these two orders of the concept of being are linked by quiddities, he is more concerned with analyzing the structure of the notion of being proper, which is why he posits these two orders. To be sure, Izutsu himself notes at ibid., 76-7 that the *hikmat* philosophers often do not make this two-tiered distinction of the notion of being explicitly, instead using the term *mafsūm* to denote both senses of notion.

42 See the remarks in Sabzivârî, *Sharḥ-i Manzūma*, 42; idem, *The Metaphysics of Sabzavârî*, 31-2. Indeed, a basic Şādrian principle is that the less there is of being, the more there is of quiddity, and the more there is of being, the less there is of quiddity. See Bonmariage, *Le Réel et les réalités*, 66 ff; Jambet, *The Act of Being*, ch. 4; Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullâ Ṣadrâ*, 29-31, 35 ff. Although the notion of degrees of intensity and weakness in existence is a cornerstone of Şadrâ’s philosophy, this teaching has its roots in earlier Islamic thought, particularly in some passages of Avicenna’s *Mubâḥathât*. See Mayer, “Fakhr al-Dîn al-Râzî’s Critique of Ibn Sinâ’s Argument for the Unity of God in the *Ishârât* and Naṣîr al-Dîn al-Ṭûsî’s Defence,” in *Before and After Avicenna*, 199-218. For a study of Avicenna’s *Mubâḥathât*, see David Reisman, *The Making of the Avicennan Tradition: The Transmission, Contents, and Structure of Ibn Sinâ’s al-Mubâḥathât (The Discussions)* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).
the only way being can be conceptualized is through its instantiations or particularizations, since quiddity is what allows for the “concept” of being to arise in our minds in the first place. In other words, the concept of being cannot arise out of a vacuum, but rather through being itself. If we attempt to conceptualize being without particular references, we would be inquiring into the reality of being, to which we have no access. The reality of being, therefore, is indefinable and inaccessible, although its concept—which is signalled in the first instance by quiddities, which come about as a result of being’s individual instantiations, or what Şadrā calls specifications (takhaṣṣuṣ),43 individuations (mutashakhkhas),44 or modes (naḥw)45 of being—can be accessed and, from this perspective, “defined.”

2.2.2 – The Scroll of Being

Early on in Miṭṭāḥ 1, Şadrā employs several images to convey the significance of the Qurʾān. Some key points are made here which, when read in the context of Şadrā’s treatment of the modes of descent of the divine Word, allow us to walk away with a clearer picture of his understanding of the nature of the Qurʾān. Alluding to an observation made in the introduction of the Ṿafāṭīḥ, Şadrā tells his readers that the Qurʾān, by its very nature, is meant to make human beings ascend. Here he notes that each of the Qurʾān’s letters contains a thousand allusions and symbols, which is a fairly common trope in Sufi Qurʾanic exegesis. Şadrā likens the Qurʾān’s letters to hunting nets which are outspread with meanings in order to capture the birds that are in

43 See Şadrā, Asfār, 1:44 ff.
44 See idem, Mashāʾir, 57-8.
45 See idem, Asfār, 1:56 ff., 427-46. For expositions of Şadrā’s concept of the gradation or modulation of being (tashkīk al-wujūd), see Bonmariage, Le Réel et les réalités, part 1; Kamal, Mulla Sadra’s Transcendent Philosophy, ch. 5; Rizvi, Mullā Şadrā and Metaphysics, chs. 2-5. See also Jambet, The Act of Being, ch. 4.
the sky. The image used here, which Şadrâ draws on in at least one of his *tafsîrs*, is quite telling. Every bird (read “human soul”) finds its “sustenance” (*rizq*) in the Qur’ân, but very few of them will be captured by the Qur’ân’s hunting nets. Most birds are contented with taking what little sustenance they need in order to get by, who are likened here to those human beings who read the Qur’ân only to obtain particular types of knowledge, such as legal injunctions. These forms of knowledge, if followed, will grant human beings salvation. But there are other birds who seek a different kind of sustenance from the Qur’ân. They hover over the Qur’ân’s hunting nets, seeking their nourishment from the Qur’ân’s letters and sounds since they contain the meanings of God’s Word. Since their sustenance in the deepest sense is contained in the Word itself and not just in its surface meanings, they immerse themselves within the Qur’ân’s universe and become its “prisoners.” These prisoners of the Qur’ân cannot but be captured by the Qur’ân’s hunting nets, seeing as it is that they expend all their efforts grappling with its nets, but which, in the end, must necessarily overpower them.

On a number of occasions the Qur’ân refers to itself as a “cure” (*shifâ*), and the Prophet is reported to have said that “the Qur’ân is the cure.” We are thus not surprised to find references to the “hospital of the Qur’ân” (*shifâ*-khâna-yi Qur’ân) in Sufi literature. Souls will naturally gravitate towards the Qur’ân since, as Şadrâ remarks, it contains the cure to the greatest sickness

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47 Şadrâ, *Mafâtih*, 86.
48 Ibid.
49 See Q 17:82, 10:57.
50 ‘Allâma Muḥammad Bâqîr Majlîsî, *Bihâr al-anwâr* (Qum, 1956-72), 92:176 (also on *Nûr* (CD-ROM) [Qum: Computer Research Center of Islamic Sciences, 1999]).
which plagues human beings, namely ignorance (jahl). Hence, the deeper one is immersed in the Qur’an, the more entangled he finds himself in its hunting nets, and the less ignorant he becomes. It is with this consideration in mind that we should read an important statement about the Qur’an in one of Ṣadrā’s early tafsīrs, namely the Tafsīr Sūrat al-wāqi‘a. Here, he employs several other images to convey the book’s depth and significance. We find that ignorance, here identified with blindness, is what keeps human beings fettered from attaining true life:

Every one of its chapters is an ocean saturated with gems of meaning and exposition; rather, it is a celestial sphere filled with the stars of divine realities and essences.... The verses are shining stars which adorn and illuminate the heaven of guidance, prophecy, and sainthood [walāya], because of whose flashes and illuminations man and jinn attain unto the last configuration [al-nash‘at al-ukhrā] [Q 53:47] and the abode of life, being freed from the darkness of blindness and deprivation, the punishments of the grave, and the fires of Hell.

We have already seen how Ṣadrā refers to the Word of God as that by virtue of which man “ascends.” By extension (and paradoxically), the less immersed/imprisoned one is in the Qur’an, the more pinned down one is by other than it, which is tantamount to darkness, blindness, and ignorance. But what exactly is this book that contains the cure for the illnesses of man’s existential condition and allows him to ascend? Drawing on another image, Ṣadrā alludes to the Qur’an’s nature by referring to it as a “rope” that descends from Heaven in order to save all those trapped in what Henry Corbin would call the “cosmic crypt”:

52 Ṣadrā, Mafātiḥ, 85. For the healing nature of the Qur’an, see idem, Tafsīr, 6:8. Cf. ibid., 1:2, 6:10. See also Mangabadi, “Mullā Ṣadrā’s Method of Qur’ānic Commentary,” 436; Sa‘idi, “Illumination, Unveiling and Intuition in Mullā Ṣadrā’s Qur’ānic Commentary,” 521-2.

53 Depending on the context, the term nash‘a, which denotes the makeup of a particular thing, can either refer to the configuration of a place or world (as it is used in this passage), or a human being’s constitution. For discussions of this term, see Ṣadrā, The Elixir of the Gnostics, 98 n. 31; idem, The Wisdom of the Throne, 250 n. 302.


55 See Corbin, Avicenna and the Visionary Recital, 16-28.
The Qurʾān is God’s firm rope [ḥabl allāh al-maṭīn]56 which was sent down from Heaven in order to save those shackled in the cradle of satans and the abyss of those who have descended. It is one of God’s lights [nūr min anwār allāh]: it contains guidance for wayfarers, and through it one can ascend from the lowest of worlds to the highest way stations [manāzīl] of the ‘Illiyyūn57 and the most exalted levels of those seated upon the chair of truth [Q 54:55] and certainty. So read it, O impoverished one, and advance!58

It is significant that Ṣadrā refers to the Qurʾān in the above-cited text from the Mafātīḥ as “one of God’s lights.” This reference, as we will see in chapter four of this study, is all the more important because of the emphasis placed in the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa on the nature of light and its identity with God’s Essence. In the present context, it is worth noting that Ṣadrā does not provide us with a clear-cut definition of the nature of the Qurʾān. All we have to work with are several stock images, and in each case Ṣadrā employs them, his intention is to convey the salvific role of the Qurʾān and not its status as such. The reason he does not attempt to provide a definition of the book for us seems to be because, in one sense, he identifies the Qurʾān with being. Although Peerwani59 and Khwājawi60 insist that Ṣadrā does this explicitly, there is not one clear-cut text in his oeuvre which makes this point.

56 A clear allusion to Q 3:103, which speaks of “God’s rope” (ḥabl allāh).
57 Mentioned in Q 83:18-9, this term in early Qurʾanic exegesis was understood to refer to an exalted station in Paradise, whereas later commentators took it to mean the “inscribed book” (kitāb marqūm) (mentioned in Q 83:20), which contains a record of the deeds of the righteous. In this context, Ṣadrā clearly favours the earlier interpretations. See Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān, s.v. “‘Illiyyūn” (by Frederik Leemhuis; cf. Ṣadra, The Elixir of the Gnostics, 98 n. 34). See also Dictionare du Coran, s.v.v. “‘Illiyyûn et Sijjîn” (by Daniel De Smet).
58 Ṣadrā, Mafātīḥ, 89. Cf. the following statement: “The Qurʾān was revealed to creation with thousands of veils in order for those with weak intellects and blind eyes to comprehend. If, given its greatness, the Throne [‘arsh] of the basmala were to descend to the earth [farsh], the earth would perish and become annihilated. There is an indication to this meaning in His saying, Were we to cause this Qurʾān to descend upon a mountain, you would see it humbled and split apart out of fear of God [Q 59:21]” (ibid., 98-9).
Yet Peerwani and Khwājawi are not mistaken in their insistence on Šadrā’s identification of the Qurān with being from one perspective, even if he does not explicitly make this connection. There is one text in Miftāḥ 1 in particular which provides us with a key piece to the puzzle, but to which neither of the aforementioned authors seem to give much weight. In the passage in question, Šadrā notes that the Qurān is one in its reality, but multiple in its levels of descent:

> Although the Qurān is one reality, it has many levels in its descent \([nuzūl]\)\(^{61}\) and many names\(^{62}\) in accordance with these levels. So in every world and configuration it is called by a name which corresponds to its specific station and its particular rank.\(^{63}\)

As was seen above, Šadrā’s fundamental ontological stance is that there is one underlying reality, namely being, which in and of itself is indefinable. Yet we know of being through its many instantiations, all of which help define it in some limited fashion. The Qurān, likewise, cannot be defined, which is why Šadrā does not provide us with a definition of it, and limits himself to allusions of its true nature by employing symbolic imagery. Yet how is the Qurān one in its reality and multiple in its instantiations? The missing ingredient here, and which is essential to a proper understanding of Šadrā’s Qur’anic hermeneutics, lies in the function of God’s Speech.

We noted above that the Qurān can be identified with being, but in one sense only. Because the Qurān is God’s Word, it is not to be identified with being as such. As we will see in chapters four and five of this study respectively, being can, strictly speaking, only be identified with God’s Essence (\(dhāt\)) and mercy (\(raḥma\)). The primary reason being cannot be identified

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\(^{60}\) See Khwājawi’s introduction in Šadrā, \(Mafātīh\), 57. See also Ārānī, “Ṭaṭābuq-i madārij-i qurān wa-ma’ārij-i insān az manzar-i Šadr-i muta’allihin,” 48-9.

\(^{61}\) Lit. “its reality has many levels in descent.”

\(^{62}\) Reading \(asmā’\) for \(asmā’\).

\(^{63}\) Šadrā, \(Mafātīh\), 98.
with the Qur‘ān is because the Qur‘ān, by virtue of being God’s Word, is itself an instantiation of being. That is to say that as soon as there is “movement” within being as such, it will necessarily be delimited and hence “defined” in some sense. As Şadrā reminds us, God’s Word comes about through the Qur‘ānic Command “Be!” (Q 2:117):

The Word is the High Spirit which is said not to fall under the shade of “Be!,” for it is the Word “Be!” itself which is the very Command itself, because it is God’s Command through which things are existentiated. There is no doubt about the fact that the Speech [gawl wa-kalām] of the Real is above existing beings and higher than them, since through God’s Speech, actuality [fi‘l], the exercising of effects [ta‘thīr],64 and engendering [takwīn] occur. So how can God’s Word be under existent things? He says, God’s Word is the highest [Q 9:40].65

When God wills for His Word to emerge from its primordial silence and state of latency within the divine Essence, the Command sends out reverberations, which make up the “stuff” of the cosmos.66 Yet the Word or Command67 is “above” existent things, which explains why, in

64 Cf. idem, The Elixir of the Gnostics, 95 n. 10.
65 Idem, Asrār, 76. A page earlier, Şadra makes the following remark: “[In] His saying, If the sea were ink for the Words of my Lord, the sea would be exhausted before the Words of my Lord would be exhausted, even if we were to come with its like in assistance [Q 18:109], the ‘Words’ are an allusion to the luminous essences through which the effusion of being [fayḍ al-wujūd] reaches bodies and corporeal entities; the ‘sea’ is an allusion to the prime matter of bodies which are characterized by reception and renewal. The renewal of the effusion occurs in accordance with the succession of the bodies’ passivities and preparednesses” (ibid., 75).
67 That the Word and the Command are, from one perspective, the same reality, is confirmed by Şadrā at Asrār, 75-6: “From the perspective of various standpoints, the names are many and the Named one. Insofar as the knowledge-giving [fīlām] of the realities from God occurs through them, they are called ‘Words.’ Insofar as the existence of existing beings [wujūd al-kā‘īnāt] is necessitated by them—each at its appropriate moment—they are called God’s ‘Command’ [amr allāh] and ‘Irrevocable Decree’ [qadā‘ūhu al-ḥatmī]. Insofar as the life of existing things is through them, they are called God’s ‘Spirit’ [rūḥ]: Say, ‘The Spirit is from the Command [amr] of my Lord’ [Q 17:85]. In its essence, the names are one: Our Command [amrunā] is nothing but one [Q 54:50]. But they are numerous by virtue of the numerous types of effects: And He revealed in each heaven its Command [amrahā] [Q
one sense, we can identify the Qur'ân—God's Word—with being. Since God's Speech (kalâm) is the first movement of being, that is, the first instance in which being makes itself known, it is, in a sense, hidden and yet completely manifest. This explains why the cosmos only comes about through Speech and can be identified with it.\(^68\)

 Employing the language of theoretical Sufism, Şadrā identifies the cosmos with the articulation of the Breath of the All-Merciful (al-nafas al-raḥmân), a term based on a famous ḥadīth and made popular by Ibn 'Arabī. Şadrā identifies the Breath of the All-Merciful with self-unfolding being (al-wujūd al-munbasīṭ) and the Real through whom creation takes places (al-ḥaq al-makhlūq bihi).\(^69\) Following Ibn 'Arabī, he likens this Breath to human breath. Just as human breath gives rise to articulated forms through the act of speaking, so too do the various levels of being take on concretized form within God's Breath, that is, through His act of speaking.\(^70\) In other words, just as the forms of words become articulated in human breath (this

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\(^{41:12}\) Or, from the perspective of their directions of their effusions upon the things or their attachments to them, they become ‘many’ through their abundance, just as being is one reality which becomes numerous through the abundance of quiddities—not because the quiddities exercise effects upon being, but because of the unification of quiddity with being.” See also Corbin’s remarks in Şadrā, Le livre des pénétrations métaphysiques, 208 n. 79. At Tafsîr, 1:190-1, Şadrā makes a similar point with respect to the fragmentation of letters, that is, they are one but take on different designations (alqâb) because of the diversity of ranks and loci of manifestation (mazâhir). He also relates this phenomenon to the many names taken on by God, who is, however, One in Himself. For Şadrā’s discussion of this point in the context of his Tafsîr Sûrat al-fâtiha, see pp. 158-64.

\(^{68}\) Idem, Mafâṭîh, 93-4.

\(^{69}\) Şadrā seems to take the former term from Qûnawî, al-Tafsîr al-ṣâfî li-l-qur'ân (Ijâz al-bayân fi ta'wil umm al-qur'ân), ed. ‘Abd al-Qâdir Ahmad ‘Atâ (Cairo: Dâr al-Kutub al-Ḥadîthâ, 1969), 193. However, Şadrā will more commonly speak of “self-unfolding being” (al-wujūd al-munbasîṭ), for which, see p. 159 n. 41 of the present study.

\(^{70}\) Şadrā, Mafâṭîh, 100-1. See also ibid., 93-4: “The cosmos [‘âlam] does not become manifest except through Speech. Rather, the cosmos is Speech itself, its parts being commensurate to its twenty-eight stations [maqâmât] and ranks [manâzîl] within the Breath of the All-Merciful [nafas al-raḥmân] [for the Breath of the All-Merciful and its relation to the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet, see Chittick, The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-'Arabî’s Cosmology (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), xxviii-xxxii], just as words and vocal
being nothing other than the outward manifestation of an inward form), so too do the things which are formed within the divine Breath take on corporeal form through God’s act of existentiation (effectively bringing the latent possibilities contained within God’s “mind” from potentiality into actuality). Just as when a speaker conceives of saying something there occurs in his mind a form of what he wants to say, and then there exits from within him, articulated in air, the form of his speech, so too are the realities of things, which are fixed in God’s knowledge, contained in the Preserved Tablet (al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ), which Şadrā identifies with the Angelic Intellects.71 God’s knowledge, likewise, is brought into being (izhār) (this is a term which will have a great deal of significance in Şadrā’s Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiha) from the Unseen to the seen, until a Command issues forth.72

God’s Command, however, itself has levels. For if this were not the case, then all of His Commands would have the same ontological status, which would mean that His Speech would ontologically be on the same level as, for example, His creatures, who are lesser manifestations of the Word or Command. Strictly speaking, Speech consists of three levels: the highest, the mid-most, and the lowest.73 God’s Speech at the highest level is referred to by Şadrā, following the wording of a well-known Prophetic supplication, as the Perfect Words (al-kalimāt al-tāmmāt):

letters [al-ḥurūf al-ṣawtiyya] subsist within the self of the human speaker commensurate to his points of stopping and articulation [manāzil wa-makhārij] [cf. ibid., 42]. The speaker’s aim in speaking is, firstly, to produce the entities of letters and existentiate them from the points of articulation. This is the very essence of making-known [iḥlām].” This passage is reproduced in slightly different form in Şadrā’s Tafsīr Sūrat al-baqara (see idem, Tafsīr, 1:188), which was written after the Mafātīḥ.

71 Idem, Mafātīḥ, 104.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid., 94. Cf. ibid., 103-6, where Şadrā describes the manner in which speech is formed intellectually and then verbally.
The highest level of Speech is Speech itself in terms of its principal purpose \([\text{maqūd} \ awwal]\), there being no other purpose after it because of the nobility of its existence, the perfection of its being, and because of its being the final goal \([\text{ghāya}]\) of whatever is beneath it. This is like God’s originating the World of the Command through the Command “\(\text{Be!}\)” and nothing else. These are God’s Perfect Words \([\text{al-kalimāt} \ al-tāmmāt}\) which are never exhausted, nor do they perish, since there is no aim other than God’s Command in their being produced from Him through the Command “\(\text{Be!}\)”\(^{74}\)

Ṣadrā goes on to tell us that the highest form of Speech corresponds to the Originating Command (i.e., the world of the Decree); the mid-most to the engendering Command (i.e., the world of temporal measuring out); and the lowest to the prescriptive Command.\(^{75}\) The engendering Command must be obeyed, whereas obedience to the prescriptive Command is entirely man’s decision. The engendering Command must be obeyed since human beings do not have a say in whether or not they will come to exist. The prescriptive command, on the other hand, corresponds to God’s rules as laid out in the religious law.\(^{76}\)

As for the originating Command, being ontologically higher than both the engendering and prescriptive Commands, it is of a completely different order. The intellective and disembodied forms of being which emerge from the Command are known as God’s “Words.” As intermediaries between God and His creatures, the function of these Words of God is to carry out His will in the created order.\(^{77}\) Just as human commands—which proceed from human volition—

\(^{74}\) Ibid., 94. Corbin renders \(\text{al-kalimāt} \ al-tāmmāt\) as “Paroles parfaits” and “Verbes parfaits.” See Ṣadrā, \textit{Le livre des pénétrations métaphysiques,} 208 n. 79.

\(^{75}\) Idem, \textit{Mafātīh,} 94-5.


\(^{77}\) Cf. Ṣadrā, \textit{Tafsīr,} 1:9-10: “His Speech \([\text{qawl}]\) and Word \([\text{kalima}]\) are not of the genus of sounds and letters, just as His Essence and attributes are not of the genus of bodies and modalities. Nor are they of the genus of substances and accidents. Rather, His Speech \([\text{qawl} \ wa-kalām]\) and Command \([\text{amr}]-\)as has been stated in the \textit{Mafātīh}-is pure intellective disembodied being. So His Words are holy existents [and] spiritual matters which are the intermediaries...
come about through the function of our words, so too do the Perfect Words proceed from God’s Command. And, just as the individual letters which make up the words of a human command arise spontaneously—that is, not gradationally—our words carry out our commands in a manner that is more primary than the actual object of the command. Likewise, God’s Words embody His Command and are thus complete and perfect, since they come about as a direct result of the originating Command. That which is the object of the Command, namely the things in the cosmos, all of which come into being by virtue of the Command “Be!,” are thus weaker in being and less potent in effects than the Perfect Words themselves. Since these words are “Perfect,” they inform the less perfect words, which are nothing but the shadows of the Perfect Words.

God’s Speech is therefore the mode in which He reveals His will to the cosmos. 78 His Speech is the “stuff” of the cosmos since the cosmic order is nothing but the articulated form of the originating Command “Be!,” which means that all the beings in the cosmos are simply instantiations of the Perfect Words which themselves are the primary instantiations of the originating Command. The highest level of God’s Speech, that is, His most principial Command which is identified with the Qur’ân, is therefore the prototype of being. 79 As the scroll of being, the Qur’ân’s verses are everywhere, since they are entities of being which are to be found in the parchment of the cosmic order:

> Just as when the Command becomes an act, as in His saying “*Be!*, and it becomes [Q 2:117], when Speech becomes individuated

between God and the creatures, and through which is realized His knowledge, power, and the penetration of His will and desire amongst the existent things.” We will turn to Şadrâ’s treatment of the Perfect Words in the context of the Tafsîr Sûrat al-fâtiha in chapter four of this study.


[tashakhkhaṣa] and descends, it becomes a book. The scroll [ṣahīḥa] of the being of the created world is the book of God [kitāb allāh], and its signs [āyāt] are the entities of the existent things [a'yān al-mawjūdāt]: In the alternation of night and day, and in what God created in the heavens and on earth, are signs for a people who are God-wary [Q 10:6].

The fact that the Qurʾān is the prototype of being explains why Şadrā does not attempt to define the Qurʾān’s nature. The Qurʾān is not being as such, since, as the Word, it emerges through a delimitation of being. But, since it is the first delimitation of being, the Word of God cannot properly be encompassed. It is, as the highest of the Perfect Words, the most inaccessible of them as well. Like the Intellect in Neoplatonism which contains all the archetypal forms and thus “is” the forms, so too can we say that the Qurʾān contains all of being and “is” being.

2.3 – Levels of the Qurʾān, Levels of the Self

In his tafsīr, Şadrā occasionally alludes to the correspondences which exist between the Qurʾān and man. He tells us, for example, that all of the Qurʾān’s verses are “hidden shells containing valuable and precious pearls, every one of which corresponds to the soul of man.”

As is the case with his other theoretical discussions concerning the Qurʾān, Şadrā’s most important treatment of the correspondences shared between the Qurʾān and man is to be found in Miḥtaḥ 1 of the Mafāṭīḥ. In one key passage, he addresses a version of the famous Sufi doctrine of the Qurʾān’s senses:

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80 Şadrā, Mafāṭīḥ, 103.

81 Cf. Izutsu’s observation: “What makes revelation such a particular non-natural kind of linguistic behaviour is that here the speaker is God and the hearer is a man, that is to say, the phenomenon of speech occurs here between the supernatural order of being and the natural order of being, so that there is in fact no ontological balance or equilibrium of rank and level between speaker and hearer” (“Revelation as a Linguistic Concept in Islam,” Studies in Medieval Thought 5 [1962]: 127).

Know that the Qurʾān, like man, is divided into a manifest [ʿalan] and hidden dimension [sirr], each of which has an outer [zahr] and inner [baṭn] aspect. Its inner aspect has another inner aspect known only to God: and none knows its interpretation but God [Q 3:7].

It has also been related in the ḥadīth, “The Qurʾān has an outer and inner aspect.” Its inner aspect consists of up to seven inner dimensions [abṭun] which are like the levels of man’s inner dimensions, such as the soul [nafs], heart [qalb], intellect [ʿaql], spirit [rūḥ], innermost mystery [sirr], and the hidden and most hidden [al-khafī wa-l-akhfā].

Although the above-cited text occurs quite late in Miftāḥ 1 and Ṣadrā does not develop it in any significant fashion, some of the earlier discussions in Miftāḥ 1 shed a good deal of light on his statement concerning the relationship shared between the Qurʾān and man. At the beginning of Miftāḥ 1, Ṣadrā drives home the point that outward faculties will only be able to perceive the outward realities of things. The more outward and exoteric one’s outlook, the more exoteric his vision of reality. Ṣadrā gives the example of Abū Lahab and Abū Jahl. Both of these individuals were eloquent in Arabic, yet neither of them saw the Qurʾān for what it was. Their inner-sight was blinded by the defilement of exterior forms, and hence their hearts were unable to perceive the truth of the Prophet’s message. The more one is immersed in outward forms, the less opportunity will he have to purify his inward state. The less purified one’s inward being, the less will he be able to perceive inward realities.

83 For a discussion of this verse, see Sands, Ṣūfī Commentaries on the Qurʾān in Classical Islam, ch. 2.


85 Ṣadrā, Mafāṭīḥ, 87.

86 Ibid., 88.
Yet Şadrā clearly does not limit his criticisms of exoteric individuals to the early enemies of Islam. There are many Muslim scholars who, despite their knowledge and formal learning of the Islamic sciences, when it comes to the Qur‘ān, do not even “hear” one of its letters as they should be heard, and thus do not truly understand its words. Şadrā makes it very clear that, when interpreting the Qur‘ān, one cannot depart from conventions of the Arabic language, since this can only lead to mistaken interpretations of scripture. At the same time, there is a difference between remaining faithful to the written Word and being confined by its most outward expressions. In his Persian work, Sīh ʿasl, which is anything but mild in its condemnation of the exoteric ‘ulamā’, Şadrā makes his point clear:

That which Zamakhsharī and his likes understand from the Qur‘ān is not, in reality, knowledge of the Qur‘ān. Rather, it goes back to the sciences of lexicography, grammar, verbal expressions, and scholastic theology. But knowledge of the Qur‘ān is other than these sciences, just as the skin and husk of man is not man in reality, but only metaphorically. This is why when one of the people of the heart [aṣḥāb al-ʿulūb] read the

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87 Ibid., 92. See also idem, Tafsīr, 4:164 for the necessity of esoteric interpretation.
88 Cf. ibid., 6:30-1, where Şadrā emphasizes the need to remain close to the conventions of the Arabic language. For the passage in context, see Saʿīdi, “Illumination, Unveiling and Intuition in Mullā Şadrā’s Qur‘ānic Commentary,” 525. See also Şadrā, Tafsīr, 4:150-1 (translated in Saʿīdi, “Illumination, Unveiling and Intuition in Mullā Şadrā’s Qur‘ānic Commentary,” 528) for further appeals to clarity when there is no need to be esoteric. See also Peervani, “Translator’s Introduction,” 22-3. Şadrā seems to closely follow Ibn ʿArabī on this point, for which, see Chodkiewicz, An Ocean Without Shore, ch. 1.
89 It is unclear who Şadrā intends by this appellation in this context. In another work, he employs the term in what is likely an allusion to Ghazālī. See Morris’ note in Şadrā, The Wisdom of the Throne, 183-4 n. 174. Although Ghazālī was a much older contemporary of Zamakhsharī, he could not have been the critic of the Kashshāf mentioned in the passage, since the work was written after Ghazālī’s death. For the Kashshāf’s dates, see Andrew Lane, A Traditional Muʿtazilite Qur‘ān Commentary: The Kashshāf of Jār Allāh Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 48 ff. For an updated account of Ghazālī’s life and times, see Frank Griffel, Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), ch. 1.
Kashshāf, he said to its author, “You are one of the scholars of the husk [qishr].”

Zamakhsharī and his likes are on the receiving end of Śadrā’s criticisms here because they approach the Qurʾān through exoteric lenses, devoting the bulk of their reflections on scripture to issues related to grammar, language, theology, and law. The correspondence between the Qurʾān and man in this text is telling. Śadrā likens the outer reality of the Qurʾān to the outer reality of man, just as he likens the inner reality of the Qurʾān to the inner reality of man. The most superficial aspect of scripture is its husk, just as the most superficial aspect of man is his outward form or “skin.”

Returning to Miftāḥ 1 of the Mafātīḥ, Śadrā again draws on the image of husks and outer coverings in discussing the relationship between the Qurʾān and man. This time, however, he juxtaposes the image with the necessary complement to the outward, namely the inward:

The Qurʾān has degrees and ranks, just as man has levels and stations. The lowest level of the Qurʾān is like the lowest level of man: the Qurʾān’s lowest level is what is contained in the book’s binding and covering [jild wa-aghlāf], just as the lowest rank of man is what is in the outer covering and skin [al-ihāb wa-l-bashara]. The husk [qishr] of man attains nothing but the blackness of the Qurʾān and its sensory form. The man of the outward husk only perceives husk-like meanings [al-maÝáni al-qishriyya]. As for the spirit of the Qurʾān, its kernel [lubb],91 and its secret, none but the possessors of the kernels [ūlū-l-albāb]92 perceive it. They do not attain this through knowledge acquired by way of learning and thinking. Rather, [they attain this] through God-given [laduni] knowledge.93

90 Śadrā, Sih aṣl, 84. Cf. the summary of this passage in Peerwani, “Translator’s Introduction,” 29. See also Corbin, “Introduction,” 24.

91 The word lubb (pl. albāb) signifies the innermost aspect or quintessence of a thing, as well as the heart or intellect. I translate it here as “kernel” in order to demonstrate its concrete juxtaposition with the term qishr or “husk.”

92 A phrase which occurs in the Qurʾān on sixteen occasions, such as Q 12:111, 13:19, etc.

93 Śadrā, Mafātīḥ, 117. Note here the Qur’anic provenance of īlm laduni (i.e., Q. 18:65). See also Śadrā, Tafsīr, 1:206 for a fine characterization of the different types of knowers with reference to the language of shells, outer layers, etc.
Since the Qurʾān can in one sense be identified with being, like being, it is, as we have seen earlier in this chapter, both one and multi-level.

Thus, the more one penetrates the Word of God, the closer one moves towards the undifferentiated aspect of being, and hence the closer one moves towards unity. Since the Qurʾān’s levels correspond to the levels of being, and Şadrā notes that the levels of man correspond to the levels of the Qurʾān, the more man penetrates being, the more “real” he becomes, and the more he understands of the Qurʾān. Put differently, we can say that the more he understands the Qurʾān, the more intensely he “is.”

In order to penetrate the Qurʾān’s deepest levels man must therefore penetrate his own deepest levels. This can only be done when he engages in a taʾwīl of his soul, that is, when he causes his soul to return to its true Origin. The Origin is undifferentiated, which explains why, as Corbin suggests, taʾwīl is a metahistorical “event.” A return to one’s Origin necessitates the crushing of the ego, which is to say that the self leaves the self and transcends time, space, and “history.” Thus, the more one dies to the self, the deeper one becomes immersed in his true Self. The deeper one becomes immersed in his true Self, the deeper will he be able to penetrate being on the one hand, and the Qurʾān—the prototype of being—on the other.

Penetrating the veils of being is, as Şadrā notes elsewhere, akin to self-knowledge, and having self-knowledge is akin to having knowledge of the heart. To proceed from the husk of


95 Cf. Rizvi, “‘Au-delà du miroir’ or Beyond Discourse and Intuition.” In his *Sih ašl*, 13-4, Şadrā makes the following point: “The foundation of faith in the afterlife and knowledge of the gathering and resurrection of souls and bodies lies in knowing the heart. But most people are ignorant of it—and this is the greatest cause of wretchedness and unhappiness in the end—since they are engulfed in the world. So whoever has not acquired self-knowledge does not know God, since ‘He who knows himself knows his Lord.’ And whoever does not know God is
the Qurʾān to its kernel, one must be able to proceed from the husk of his own existence to its kernel, which is the heart. This heart-knowledge is tantamount to what Ṣadrā referred to in the above passage as “God-given knowledge.” This type of knowledge allows one to read both the book of the soul and the book of God. And since the human soul and the Qurʾān share such an intimate relationship, a completely refined soul shares an affinity with the Qurʾān in a principal manner.

The Qurʾān, as we observed in the previous section of this chapter, is, as the Word of God, the first instantiation of the Command “Be!” In its originary unity, the Qurʾān contains the forms of all things within it, and is, from this perspective, akin to being. The individual words contained in the Qurʾān appear in the written text of the Qurʾān as collective words, just as all the existents in the cosmos are comprised of composite parts. But in the realm of the unseen, in the most unmanifest aspect of being, these collective words of the Qurʾān subsist on their own as

better off being with beasts of burden and cattle: They are like cattle. No, they are more misguided! [Q 7:179]. Thus will the blind-hearted be resurrected on the Final Day, Deaf, dumb, and blind—they will not return [Q 2:18]. Concerning these people, God says, They forgot God, so God caused them to forget themselves [Q 59:19], which is an obversion of ‘He who knows himself knows his Lord.’ Since forgetfulness of God is the cause of forgetfulness of self, remembering the self will necessitate God’s remembering the self, and God’s remembering the self will itself necessitate the self’s remembering itself: Remember Me and I will remember you [Q 2:152]. God’s remembering the self is identical with the self’s existence [wujūd], since God’s knowledge is presental with all things. Thus, he who does not have knowledge of self, his self does not have being [wujūd], since its being is identical with light, presence, and perception. From these premises it becomes clear that whoever does not have self-knowledge does not know God and will be unfortunate in the next life: Remember God much so that you may prosper [Q 8:45]. It is in this context that ʿAṭṭār says:

This advice will suffice you in both the worlds:
let not your self take a breath without mention of God.
So much must you remember God that,
were you to relinquish His remembrance, you would be lost.”

individual letters. The detached letters (al-ḥurūf al-muqāṭṭa‘a) in the Qur‘ān, therefore, indicate something of the primordial nature of being, that is, before the full deployment of the Word. Indeed, for Ṣadrā, the detached letters are not only limited to the mysterious letter combinations at the beginning of some Qur‘anic sūras. Rather, they make up the entirety of the Qur‘ān. The reason people do not see all the letters of the Qur‘ān as detached is because they are too tied down to the husk of the book, which is another way of saying that they are confined to the husks of their own beings:

Because the people of this world are in the station where forms are gathered and meanings separated [al-jam‘iyya al-ṣāriyya wa-l-tafāruqāt al-ma‘nawiyya], they witness various letters as unified and letters which are of one species as numerous individual parts. Thus, when they look at the letters ْحُبُوْم وَيْلُوْهُ [yuḥbuhum wa-yuḥbūnahu] [Q 5:54], they see them as a unified species which is divided in its parts. However, those who have divested themselves of this world—for whom the veil has been lifted and the clouds of doubt and blindness have dispersed from the face of their insight—see these letters through inner sight in this way: ِهِلَٰوُسِهِم [y̱-ḥ̱-ḇ-ẖ-m̱]. Then, when they ascend from this station to a higher station, they see them as tiny dots [niqā‘].

The higher one ascends the scale of wujūd, the closer he ascends to the undifferentiated nature of being. Since the original Command was one Word, namely “Be!,” the gnostic is able to see the vast panorama of existence in its full potentiality, thus grasping the nature of things as so many individually differentiated species. At the furthest reaches of being, which is to say at the deepest

97 Idem, Mafātīh, 90.
99 Ṣadrā, Mafātīh, 90-1.
level of the penetration of the Qurʾān and the human soul, the gnostic sees all things in existence as so many tiny traces of the divine Command.

2.4 – Conclusion

We began this chapter with an inquiry into Mullā Ṣadrā’s most important theoretical work on the Qurʾān, the Mafāṭīḥ al-ghayb. Although this work is a rather late addition to the Ṣadrian oeuvre, we know that several parts of it were written earlier on in his career, as portions of Miftāḥ 1 are expanded version of sections from the Asfār. This indicates that Ṣadrā’s understanding of the nature of scripture had already begun to crystallize even before he had completed his independent tafsīr works, which in part accounts for the consistent doctrinal perspective we find amongst these tafsīrs. At the same time, in Miftāḥ 1 of the Mafāṭīḥ, Ṣadrā’s presentation of the theoretical underpinnings of his Qurʾanic hermeneutics is most consistently presented, and there is an added dimension of depth not to be found in the corresponding sections of the Asfār. This explains why Ṣadrā understood the Mafāṭīḥ to have occupied a special place amongst his writings on the Qurʾān, a point which, as demonstrated in this chapter, he was especially concerned to drive home in the introduction to the Mafāṭīḥ.

The central importance of the Mafāṭīḥ in general, and Miftāḥ 1 in particular, is, therefore, not in its being an introduction to Ṣadrā’s individual tafsīrs, but, rather, in its ability to summarize the general hermeneutical perspective which informs these tafsīrs. The hermeneutical perspective argued for in Miftāḥ 1 takes Ṣadrā’s ontology for granted. Like being, the Qurʾān is also revealed in “modes” and grades. And, since being is the prototype of man, so too is the Qurʾān the prototype of man. The levels of being therefore find their perfect parallel in the levels
of the human soul, just as the levels of the Qurʾān, and, hence, its types of readers, find their perfect parallel in the levels of the human soul.
Chapter 3

*Tafsîr Sûrat al-Fâtiha I: Sources, Structure, Content*

In the previous chapter we outlined Mullâ Şadrâ’s Qur’anic hermeneutics in terms of theory. For the remainder of this study, we will closely examine how his hermeneutics relates to his work on the Qur’ân in terms of practice. The following three chapters will therefore be dedicated to Şadrâ’s last complete *tafṣîr* work, namely the *Tafsîr Sûrat al-fâtiha*. But before determining the extent to which Şadrâ’s theoretical scriptural hermeneutics informs his *tafṣîr* on the Qur’ân’s opening *sûra*, some preliminary considerations are in order with respect to this work’s sources and content. Thus, in this chapter we will address the following questions: (1) what are the sources for Şadrâ’s *Tafsîr Sûrat al-fâtiha*?, and (2) how is the work ordered, and what are its contents?

The reason our first encounter with the the *Tafsîr Sûrat al-fâtiha* must be a discussion of the work’s sources is quite pragmatic: this text is a late work of Şadrâ’s and is a fine presentation of both the theoretical and practical dimensions of his teachings with reference to scripture. Since Şadrâ was not writing or thinking out of a vacuum, we must be able to take account of those materials, figures, and ideas which make the text what it is. Failure to acknowledge the historical and intellectual background to the ideas in the *Tafsîr Sûrat al-fâtiha* will impede us from understanding the influence exercised by the cumulative weight of the Islamic intellectual tradition upon Şadrâ’s thought. By extension, we will not be able to properly determine just what it is that Şadrâ is doing that is so unique in this *tafṣîr*. It is quite difficult to say something “new” after over a thousand years of the development of Islamic philosophy, scriptural exegesis, and
mysticism. Yet Şadrā does say something new here, and his statements are knowingly (and perhaps unknowingly) formulated in response to, and in dialogue with, the “old.”

There is also another sense in which the exercise in determining Şadrā’s sources for the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiha* will prove to be useful. He takes great pains in this book to supplement his usual philosophical, theological, and mystical sources with citations from a surprisingly diverse range of disciplines: ḥadīth literature, *tafsīr*, poetry, anecdotes, maxims, and fine points of grammar and rhetoric. Taking stock of Şadrā’s use of these sources should serve to indicate just how serious he considered his work as a commentator upon scripture to be.

Outlining the structure and content of the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiha* is just as important as determining the work’s sources. What the text is about and how its contents are ordered can tell us a great deal about Şadrā’s practical hermeneutics. Like his philosophical treatises, he argues for similar points in this work, but within the context of a commentary upon the Qurʾān. Thus, the way arguments are formed, ordered, and delivered in this *tafsīr* gives us a good indication of how Şadrā situates his arguments within the context of the Qurʾān’s universe of discourse and its interpretive traditions. Furthermore, since we will be closely examining Şadrā’s most important teachings in the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiha* in the following two chapters, outlining the work’s content here will allow its less important, but by no means insignificant, features to emerge.

### 3.1 – Background Texts and Source Materials

Determining the texts which Mullā Şadrā draws upon in his writings is not an easy task. As was shown in the previous chapter, Şadrā at times incorporates expanded versions of discussions from his earlier writings into later writings. At the same time, any of his given writings could reproduce materials from a variety of sources in Islamic thought. We must also
seriously entertain the possibility that some of Şadrā’s books, whether in part or whole, are reworked versions of texts written by other authors.¹

In almost all of his writings, when Şadrā does cite an authority belonging to the Islamic intellectual tradition, he often refers to him with such generic titles as “the realized gnostic” (al-‘ārif al-muḥaqiq) or “the lordly knower” (al-‘ālim al-rabbānī). At other times, he will tell his readers the name of the book he is about to cite (as well as the chapter number, in some instances), but this does not necessarily make locating that particular passage any easier. With respect to Şadrā’s tafsīrs in general, we are fortunate in that their editor, Muḥammad Khwājawī, has been able to identify many of their sources. Simple perusal through the notes to any of these tafsīrs will serve to indicate the vast range of materials drawn upon in each text. But concrete judgements concerning Şadrā’s sources for his tafsīrs cannot solely rely on Khwājawī’s notes. With respect to the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiha, after subjecting it to very close textual scrutiny, a number of important points emerge which are not indicated in the editor’s notes.

3.1.1 – Qurʾān and Ḥadīth

3.1.1.1 – Qurʾanic Verses

It is often assumed that Islamic philosophical texts have very little to do with the Qurʾān. If we turn, for example, to the work of Fārābī, we indeed do notice that citations from the Qurʾān are infrequent if not nonexistent. Yet this is not to say that key Qur’anic themes and concepts do not underlie Fārābī’s worldview.² In the writings of other earlier Muslim philosophers, such as...

¹ As noted in chapter one of this study, Şadrā’s Iksīr al-ʿārifīn is a thorough reworking of Bābā Afdāl’s Persian treatise, Jāwidān-nāma. For a summary of how Şadrā revised Bābā Afdāl’s text in writing the Iksīr, see Chittick, “Translators’ Introduction,” xxxii-v.

² Cf. the observations in Ian Richard Netton, Allāh Transcendent: Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology, and Cosmology (London: Routledge, 1989), 102-3, 127, despite the author’s insistence on the “un-Qur’anic substrate of the universe of Alfarabism” (p. 125). See also Fakhry, Al-Fārābī, Founder of Islamic


5 Many allusions and direct references to the Qur’ān can be found throughout his philosophical oeuvre. We find, for example, several citations from the Qur’ān in his treatise on the soul, which is likely his last work. See Gutas, Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition: Introduction to Reading Avicenna’s Philosophical Works (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 72, 75, 77. Avicenna’s famous argument from contingency (known as the burhān al-siddiqīn argument) actually uses the Qur’ān to prove his point. See the insightful observations in Toby Mayer, “Ibn Sīnā’s ‘Burhān al-Ṣiddiqīn’,” Journal of Islamic Studies 12, no. 1 (2001): 18-39; idem, “Theology and Sufism,” in The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology, 278-9. To be sure, Avicenna also wrote several commentaries on āyas and sūras of the Qur’ān. As Gutas, Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition, 164 n. 41 notes, Avicenna actually
post-Avicennan Islamic philosophical texts we find an even greater reliance upon the Qur’an and its terminology, especially in Ishrāqī writings. Indeed, there seems to be a correlation between the increased attention paid to the Qur’an in post-Avicennan Islamic philosophy and the sizeable increase of Islamic philosophers in this period who wrote on religious topics. By the time we get to Mullā Ṣadrā, his philosophical writings are so thoroughly infused with references to scripture


See, for example, Rustom, “The Symbology of the Wing in Suhrawardi’s The Reverberation of Gabriel’s Wing”; Suhrawardī, Kitāb al-talwīḥāt, in Majmūʿah-yi muṣannafat-i Shaykh-i Ishrāq, 1:91-4. Cf. Mīr Dāmād’s work, such as his al-Ufāq al-mubīn, ed. ‘Abd Allāh Nūrānī (Tehran: Society for the Appreciation of Cultural Works and Dignitaries, 2006), which does not cite the Qurʾān a great deal (see the index on p. 520), but whose title is inspired by Q 81:23.

and “religious” language that we can safely say that his writings mark the culmination in Islamic philosophy of the integration of philosophy and scripture.

With respect to the Tafsîr Sûrat al-fâtîha, we would naturally expect to find many citations from the Qur’ân. Out of the work’s 182 pages, there are some 335 citations from or allusions to the Qur’ân, most of which Khwâjâwî was able to identify. So infused is Şadrâ’s worldview with the Qur’ân that he will seamlessly weave into the fabric of any given argument a number of Qur’anic verses. It can also be noted that since the Qur’ân was second (if not first) nature to Şadrâ, in this work he at times inadvertently cites the Qur’ân incorrectly, or modifies its wording so that he can make his point within a particular context. Apart from the verses of the Fâtiha itself, Şadrâ’s most significant use of the Qur’ân in this tafsîr work occurs in the context of his treatment of God’s mercy, to which we will turn in chapter five of this study.

3.1.1.2 – Shî‘î and Sunnî Ḥadîth Sources

Just as Mullâ Şadrâ was the philosopher most concerned with the Qur’ân, so too was he the philosopher most concerned with Ḥadîth. For one thing, he left behind an incomplete philosophical commentary on al-Kulaynî’s (d. 329/940-1) famous book of Shî‘î Ḥadîth, al-Uṣûl al-kâfî, and is known to have written several discrete commentaries on various other important

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9 This is also the case with some of Şadrâ’s other writings. See Chittick, “Translator’s Introduction,” xxxv.
10 Şadrâ, Sharh Uṣûl al-kâfî, ed. Muḥammad Khwâjâwî (Tehran: Mu’assasa-yî Muṭâla’ât wa-Taḥqîqât-i Farhangî, 1366 Sh/1987). For some studies of this work, see Karim Crow, Mullâ Şadrâ on the First Intellect in his Sharh Uṣûl al-Kâfî”; Maria Dakake, “The Origin of Man in Pre-Eternity and His Origination in Time: Mullâ Şadrâ and Imâmî Shî‘îte Tradition.” See also Devin Stewart’s brief inquiry which seeks to situate Şadrâ’s Sharh Uṣûl al-kâfî within the Akhbârî-Uṣûli debate in its Safavid context: “Mullâ Şadrâ’s Commentary on Uṣûl al-Kâfî as a Response to the Akhbârî Revival.” While Stewart’s approach is novel, the contents of Şadrâ’s commentary on the Kâfî do not give us any particularly good reason to assume that it was written in response to the revival of Akhbârîsm during the Safavid period. For an interesting discussion concerning Şadrâ’s relationship to the Akhbâriyya, see Rizvi, Mullâ Şadrâ Shirázî, 37-46. A partially annotated listing of various commentaries on the Kâfî written in the Safavid period
Ṣadrā’s concern with “scripture” is, therefore, not only limited to the Qur’ān. To be sure, based on what we know of Ṣadrā’s education, his interest in scripture is something which occupied him from early on in his life.¹²

In the context of his *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa*, Ṣadrā demonstrates his knowledge of ḥadīth, citing or alluding to some ninety-four traditions in total. Of these ninety-four traditions, twenty are of the “sacred” or *qudsī* type, that is, where God speaks in the tongue of the Prophet.¹³ Of the twenty ḥadīth *qudsī* cited, we have been unable to trace three of them.¹⁴ The remaining seventeen are found in Sunnī and Shī‘ī ḥadīth literature, with eleven of them going to back to Sunnī sources,¹⁵ one to a Shī‘ī source,¹⁶ and five to both Sunnī and Shī‘ī sources.¹⁷

“Ḥadīth” in a Twelver Shī‘ī context includes the sayings of the Prophet, Fāṭima (d. ca. 11/633), and the twelve Imams. Yet Ṣadrā’s usage of traditions in the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa* is not distinctively Shī‘ī. Of the seventy-four non-*qudsī* traditions cited or alluded to, only three of

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¹¹ For a commentary on the famous ḥadīth of the hidden treasure commonly attributed to him, see Armin Eschraghi, “‘I Was a Hidden Treasure’: Some Notes on a Commentary Ascribed to Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī”; Ja‘farī, “Sharḥ-i ḥadīth ‘kuntu kanzan makhfyyan’ (sic).” For Ṣadrā’s commentary on the ḥadīth of awakening, which he later reincorporated into his *Tafsīr Sūrat yāsīn*, see Rustom, “Psychology, Eschatology, and Imagination.”


¹⁵ Ibid., 1:71, 81, 93, 96, 151, 155, 156, 157-8, 162.

¹⁶ Ibid., 1:9 reproduces a ḥadīth *qudsī* from Kulaynī’s *Kāfī*. Ṣadrā refers to the collection as “one of the divine books.”

¹⁷ Ibid., 1:47, 70, 105, 159, 180.
them are sayings of the Imams, all of which are to be found in Shi‘i sources. Of these seventy-four sayings, fifty-two go back to Sunnī sources, nine to Shi‘i sources, seven to both Sunnī and Shi‘i sources, and six remain untraceable.

Eleven of the fifty-two traditions from Sunnī sources which appear in this work come from the writings of the Sunnī authors whom Šadrā cites, namely Ghazālī, Rāzī, Ibn Ṭarābī, and Qūnawī. Yet there are forty-one other traditions from Sunnī sources which Šadrā draws on, and does not seem to have a problem in doing so. Despite the astounding number of traditions from Sunnī sources which figure in the text, it does not seem that this alone calls Šadrā’s Shi‘iism into question, particularly if we take the following into consideration: (1) after writing his tafsīrs, Šadrā would go on to pen the aforementioned incomplete commentary on Kulaynī’s Kāfī; (2) the few times the names of the Imams, Shi‘i scholars, or books within the Shi‘i tradition are mentioned in the text, they are done so reverentially; (3) Šadrā offers a novel Shi‘i reading of the Qur‘ān’s detached letters in his appendix to the work.

What the absence of a heavy Shi‘i substrate to the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa (and almost every other work in tafsīr by Šadrā) seems to indicate is that he was less concerned with

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18 Ibid., 1:40, 168 (two).
19 Ibid., 1:9; 12 (two); 15; 24; 25 (two); 31; 33; 44; 72 (cf. ibid., 1:71, where Šadrā cites this tradition as a hadīth qudsī); 73 (two); 74; 75; 76 (three); 77; 106-7; 107 (two); 108 (two); 109 (two); 119 (three); 125; 128; 130 (three); 147 (two); 150; 152 (two); 153 (three); 156; 158 (three); 168 (two); 171; 176; 179; 181; 182. Indeed, Šadrā’s heavy reliance on Sunnī hadīth sources is reminiscent of the same practice in earlier Shi‘i tafsīr. See Lawson, “Akhbār Shī‘i Approaches to tafsīr,” 175.
20 Šadrā, Tafsīr, 1:40, 70, 78, 90, 130, 135, 152, 168, 169.
21 Ibid., 1:6, 8, 25, 46, 71, 157, 181.
22 Ibid., 1:76, 123, 153, 168, 169 (two).
24 See p. 272.
reconciling his mysticism and philosophy with traditional Shīʿī dogma than he was with explicating his vision of reality, which could be done independent of particularly Shīʿī teachings. Indeed, it is for similar reasons that Hermann Landolt calls into question the specifically Shīʿī nature of Ṣadrā’s thought.25

3.1.2 – Philosophical and Theological Materials

3.1.2.1 – Ṣadrā’s Other Works

In the previous chapter, it was argued that the Mafātīḥ, a very late work, occupies a special role amongst Ṣadrā’s Qurʾānic writings, as it lays out the esoteric perspective which informs his Qurʾān commentaries. It was also shown that, since the Mafātīḥ had its roots in an earlier text which was written concurrently with at least some of Ṣadrā’s Qurʾān commentaries, the perspective argued for in the Mafātīḥ is certainly not an afterthought. But with the advantage of hindsight, this perspective is fully explained, and its implications entirely drawn out.

The question that remains is this: does the Mafātīḥ inform Ṣadrā’s later works on the Qurʾān, and, if so, in what manner? Turning to the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa, we notice that, in the context of his treatment of such topics as the “Perfect Words,” Ṣadrā explicitly refers to the Mafātīḥ five times.26 The fact that the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa mentions the Mafātīḥ several times

25 See Landolt, “Henry Corbin’s Understanding of Mullā Ṣadrā,” 1:172 (reprinted in Landolt, Recherches en spiritualité, 364). Cf. Newman, Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), 69-70; Rizvi, Mullā Ṣadrā and Metaphysics, 129-30. It is also interesting to note that although Ṣadrā accepts the long-established tradition in which ‘Alī says that he is the dot under the bāʾ of the basmala, he does not develop its implications in any significant manner. See Ṣadrā, Mafātīḥ, 97-9. This is not to suggest that Ṣadrā’s worldview remains uninformed by Shīʿī categories. For the figure of ‘Ali in one of his Persian poems, see Mohammed Ali Amir-Moezzi, “‘Le combattant du ta’wil’: Un poème de Mollâ Ṣadrâ sur ḳAli,” in Reason and Inspiration in Islam, 432-54 (reprinted in idem, La religion discrète: croyances et pratiques spirituelles dans l’islam shi’ite [Paris: Vrin, 2006], 231-51).

26 Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 1:4, 9, 10, 33, 69.
allows us to safely conclude that it was written some time after the Mafātiḥ. This explains why
the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa has a dimension of depth not to be found in Ṣadrā’s other tafsīrs. From
this perspective, we can say that Ṣadrā’s primary source for the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa was his
own Mafātiḥ.

With respect to his other writings, Ṣadrā explicitly refers to four titles in the Tafsīr Sūrat
al-fātiḥa: al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya,27 the Asfār,28 al-Risāla fī l-ḥudūth,29 and his glosses
(ḥāshiya) on Ṭūsī’s Tajrīd.30 None of these well-known texts figure in this Tafsīr in a significant
manner, although Ṣadrā’s treatment of the “path” (ṣīrāt) mentioned in Q 1:6-7, and the question
of God’s mercy, are partly derived from the Asfār.31

3.1.2.2 – Avicenna, Suhrawardī, Ṭūsī

The only philosopher explicitly cited by Ṣadrā in the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa is Avicenna.
He is cited twice in the context of a discussion concerning the different levels of certainty.
Avicenna is referred to as “the author of the Ishārāt” (ṣāḥib al-ishārāt)32 and, in the next
paragraph, “the author of the maqāmāt” (ṣāḥib al-maqāmāt).33 the maqāmāt being the ninth
namaṭ (class) (entitled fī maqāmāt al-ʿārifīn) of the section devoted to metaphysics in Avicenna’s
famous al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīḥāt (Remarks and Admonitions). Both citations from Avicenna are
actually from the ninth namaṭ.34 It is perhaps significant that Ṣadrā would cite this part of
Avicenna’s work, which belongs to a larger section (namaṭs eight to ten) simply called “On

27 Ibid., 1:11.
28 Ibid., 1:92 (alluded to), 1:112.
29 Ibid., 1:11. For a translation of this work, see idem, Die Risāla fī l-ḥudūth (De Abhandlung über die Entstehung).
30 Ibid, Tafsīr, 1:54.
31 See p. 217 ff.
32 Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 1:90.
33 Ibid.
Sufism” (fi l-taṣawwuf), especially since Şadrā unqualifiedly praises the spiritual accomplishments of someone whose spirituality (or the lack thereof) he is otherwise critical.\(^{36}\)

Şadrā says that through invocation and increased knowledge of and proximity to God, one will eventually become one of the “people of witnessing” (ahl al-mushāhada).\(^{37}\) A common notion in Sufi literature is that what is actually witnessed cannot be spoken of or described, and thus only allusions (ishārāt) are possible. The apophasis invoked by Şadrā is linked with one of Avicenna’s statements concerning the fruits of the spiritual life in which he says that this station cannot be described by ordinary language. Thus, although Şadrā makes use of a well-known philosophical work, he explicitly draws on its more “mystical” aspect in order to bolster an argument which is decidedly Sufi.

Suhrawardī does not appear in Şadrā’s Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa, although he seems to identify Suhrawardī with the Stoics in one passage.\(^{38}\) The most significant allusion to Suhrawardī is Şadrā’s passing reference to one of the Illuminationist tradition’s well-known technical terms,
“lords of species” (arbāb al-anwā). Coined by Suhrawardī, the term is equivalent to the Platonic forms (muthul), which Ṣadrā prefers to use, not least for the reason that the Platonic forms figure differently in the Ishrāqi cosmic hierarchy than they do in Ṣadrā’s cosmology. Ṣadrā for his part does not dedicate a discussion to the Platonic forms in this tafsīr work, nor are his references to the “lords of species” anything more than passing.

Since Ṭūsī’s Ismā‘īlism had a direct (albeit minor) influence upon Ṣadrā’s Qur‘ānic hermeneutics, when approaching the latter’s tafsīr writings, one would naturally expect to find a similar phenomenon at work. With respect to Ṣadrā’s Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiha, we find no explicit mention of Ṭūsī or any of his books. However, as we will see in the following chapter, he may lurk in the background.

3.1.2.3 – Schools of Kalām

Apart from a brief section dedicated to explaining and then refuting Jabirite and Qadirite positions on the isti‘ādha formula, Ṣadrā does not engage the views of any theological groups in the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiha. He does, however, mention the Mu‘tazilites’ position concerning the

39 Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 1:75, 78.
40 See Suhrawardī, The Philosophy of Illumination, 101 ff. Although Suhrawardī has arbāb al-aṣnām al-naw‘iyya al-falakiyya here, it is synonymous with arbāb al-anwā’. See ibid., 182 n. 10.
42 This section follows parts of Rāzī’s tafsīr. See pp. 131-3. It can also be noted that at Tafsīr, 1:146, Ṣadrā mentions the Ash‘arites, along with the colleagues of Democritus, in passing. For a discussion of Ṣadrā’s use of important tafsīrs by Ash‘arite authors in his Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiha, see pp. 129-33.
“fixity” of quiddity, that is, that quiddities have the status of quiddities before effectuation.\(^{43}\) Zamakhsharī appears in this \textit{tafsīr} work, although his positions are not discussed qua Muʿtazilite thinker. Rather, Ṣadrā deals with him qua Qurʾan commentator, and we will thus turn to his treatment of Zamakhsharī below.\(^{44}\) Other than Zamakhsharī, the only Muʿtazilite we encounter in the \textit{Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa} is the famous early figure Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī (d. 303/915), whose interpretations of the words “day of judgement” (\textit{yawm al-dīn}) are given in the context of Ṣadrā’s treatment of Q 1:4.\(^{45}\) Jubbāʾī interprets the phrase to mean “the day of being rewarded for one’s observance of the religion [\textit{yawm al-jazāʾ alā l-dīn}].”\(^{46}\) There is nothing particularly Muʿtazilite about this interpretation, although one may speculate that Jubbāʾī’s exegesis was carried out with two of the five fundamental Muʿtazilī principles in mind, namely God’s justice (\textit{ʿadāla/ʿadl}) and “the promise and the threat” (\textit{al-waʿd wa-l-waʿīd}).


\(^{44}\) See pp. 129-30.

\(^{45}\) Ṣadrā, \textit{Tafsīr}, 1:85.

3.1.3 – Sufi Texts and Authors

3.1.3.1 – Ibn ʿArabi

Ṣadrā explicitly cites Ibn ʿArabi five times throughout the work,\(^47\) reworks or cites texts from the *Futūhāt*—without acknowledging their source—another four times,\(^48\) cites an author who cites Ibn ʿArabi’s *Futūhāt* once,\(^49\) and refers to Ibn ʿArabi in passing once.\(^50\) The texts from Ibn ʿArabi which Ṣadrā draws upon in the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fāṭiha* range from his famous catch phrase, “he who does not have unveiling does not have knowledge,”\(^51\) to more substantial


\(^50\) (11) Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, 1:144.

\(^51\) See n. 48 #7.
materials with an eye to proving a particular point, such as the fact that God is really the object of worship in every act of worship.\footnote{See n. 48, # 8.}

The most important issue which Şadrā addresses with recourse to Ibn ʿArabī’s teachings is the question of God’s mercy and its relationship to His wrath. Here, Şadrā is particularly concerned with the age-old theological problem of the existence of eternal suffering for finite actions, and how this is to be reconciled with the existence of a God who is purely merciful on the one hand, and who is unaffected by the wrong actions of His creatures on the other.

Needless to say, Şadrā is cognisant of the conflicting accounts in scripture concerning the status of people consigned to Hell, but he does not take up the issue in his Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa. Turning our attention to the Asfār, we notice that he treats the problem of eternal suffering, but with an eye to resolving contradictory scriptural passages and with explicit recourse to Ibn ʿArabī and Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī (d. 751/1350). The section which corresponds to the question of eternal suffering in the Asfār is partly reproduced in the relevant section of the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa. However, not only is the question of conflicting scriptural statements removed in the latter, but Şadrā cites some of the same texts from Ibn ʿArabī which he used in the Asfār. The only difference here is that these words reappear not as Ibn ʿArabī’s, but as Şadrā’s.\footnote{See p. 206 ff.}

3.1.3.2 – The “School” of Ibn ʿArabī

There is little doubt that Şadr al-Dīn Qūnawī (d. 673/1274) and his followers played a very important role in spreading the teachings of Ibn ʿArabī. However, they tended to emphasize issues which may not have occupied a central role in Ibn ʿArabī’s writings, or at least were not
given systematic philosophical expression by him. Indeed, it is Qūnawī’s work which marks the rapprochement between the scripture-based language of Ibn ‘Arabī’s worldview and the technical discourse of falsafa. From this perspective, it may even be more fitting to speak of the “school of Qūnawī” rather than the school of Ibn ‘Arabī. Whatever term we give to the “school” which helped spread Ibn ‘Arabī’s ideas in Iran, Central Asia, Anatolia, and India from the seventh/thirteenth century onwards, one thing remains certain with respect to Mullā Šadrā: he found in the writings of Qūnawī and his followers a highly developed technical vocabulary which could suit his purposes in articulating his profound philosophical and mystical vision.

There are three instances in which Šadrā anonymously cites a person belonging to the school of Ibn ‘Arabī, introducing him as “one of the people of God,” “one of the unitarian gnostics” (al-‘urafā’ al-muwahhidīn), and “one of the verifiers” (al-muḥaqiqīn). Given the fact that the technical terminology of the citations clearly belongs to the developed form of theoretical Sufism, it is safe to say that these anonymous references belong to a member or members of the school of Ibn ‘Arabī.

The only explicit reference we find in the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiha to a follower of Ibn ‘Arabī is a short passage which cites Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Irāqī’s (d. 688/1289) highly influential Persian work, the Lamaʿāt. The passage occurs in the context of Šadrā’s treatment of the function of God’s mercy on the final day. After citing an important passage from Ibn ‘Arabī’s Futūḥāt,

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55 Šadrā, Tafsīr, 1:35.
56 Ibid., 1:91.
57 Ibid., 1:100.
Şadrâ recounts an incident related by ʿIrāqî in the *Lamaʿāt* concerning Abū Yazīd Baṣṭāmī’s (d. ca. 260/874) famous question (see below) and Ibn ʿArabi’s reply to him.⁵⁸

The only other follower of Ibn ʿArabi who definitely figures in Şadrâ’s *Tafsîr Sûrat al-fātiḥa* is Qūnawi.⁵⁹ Apart from an anonymous passage cited from his *Ijâz al-bayān* (Şadrâ refers to him as “one of the gnostics”⁶⁰), Şadrâ draws on the same work towards the end of the text. Here, however, he offers a reworking of sections of the book, and incorporates them into his discussion concerning the levels of God’s wrath.⁶¹ Close comparison between the relevant part of the *Ijâz* with its corresponding section in the *Tafsîr Sûrat al-fātiḥa* reveals that Şadrâ was able to recast Qūnawi’s words in a manner not unlike his much more significant reworking of Bābā Afdâl’s *Jâwidān-nâma* into the *Iksîr*.

3.1.3.5 – Baṣṭāmī, Anṣârī, Ghazâlî

Mullâ Şadrâ’s thorough knowledge of the Sufi tradition did not stop with the writings of Ibn ʿArabi and his followers. As Carl Ernst has shown through his statistical analysis of the names of figures which appear in the *Asfâr*, Şadrâ was thoroughly familiar with the earlier

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⁵⁸ See p. 125.

⁵⁹ It is interesting to note that in the *Tafsîr Sûrat al-fātiḥa* Şadrâ does not draw on the writings of the famous Shiʿī mystical philosopher, Haydar Āmulî (fl. 8th/14th century) (for whom, see Corbin, *En islam iranien*, 3:149-213), who managed to put a unique Twelver Shiʿī spin on some of Ibn ʿArabi’s ideas. Since Şadrâ was not attempting to reconcile his teachings in the *Tafsîr Sûrat al-fātiḥa* with Shiʿī dogma, he may not have found Āmulî’s work entirely pertinent to his concerns in this particular text.


tradition of Sufism as well.\textsuperscript{62} This is also clearly evidenced in the \textit{Tafsîr Ayat al-nûr}, where a number of important early Sufi figures are cited, either explicitly or implicitly.\textsuperscript{63}

Turning to the \textit{Tafsîr Sûrat al-fâtîha}, we find Şadrâ drawing on the famous \textit{shaṭh} by Bastâmî in which he says that even if God’s Throne and all that it contains were to enter a corner of the gnostic’s heart a thousand times, it would be unable to fill it.\textsuperscript{64} This saying is cited some ten pages after the aforementioned incident related by ʻIrâqî, which runs as follows: upon hearing Q 19:85, “The day We muster the godfearing to the All-Merciful in droves,” Bastâmî let out a cry and asked how God will bring to Him those that are already with Him. Ibn ʻArabi responds to Bastâmî’s question with reference to the divine names, saying that those who are with Him will be taken “From the name ‘the Compeller’ to the name ‘The All-Merciful,’ and from the name ‘the Overbearing’ to [the name] ‘the Compassionate.’”\textsuperscript{65}

In another passage, Şadrâ introduces an Arabic saying by the famous Ḥanbalî Sufi ʻAbd Allâh Anşârî (d. 481/1089), referring to him with the honorific of the Sufi master Junayd (d. 297/910), namely “master of the tribe” (\textit{shaykh al-ţâ'ifa}). Anşârî is cited as saying that the different faces of God vis-à-vis mercy and wrath are actually a manifestation of mercy.\textsuperscript{66}

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{62}] See Ernst, “Sufism and Philosophy in Mullâ Şadrâ.”
\item[\textsuperscript{63}] See Şadrâ, \textit{On the Hermeneutics of the Light Verse of the Qur’ân}.
\item[\textsuperscript{65}] See n. 49 above for Şadrâ’s sources for this incident. See also Şadrâ, \textit{Tafsîr}, 4:71.
\item[\textsuperscript{66}] For the citation, see ibid., 1:109. I was unable to locate this statement in Anşârî’s writings.
\end{itemize}
We also find a reference in this tafsīr to “the books of the people of the heart.” Although this may be an allusion to the work of Ghazālī, explicit references to Ghazālī total two. Ṣadrā demonstrates his familiarity with his famous al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl early on in the tafsīr, linking Ghazālī’s observations concerning his pursuit of knowledge with his own point that the one who wishes to know the Qur’ān’s meanings has to undergo very rigorous training. Another instance in which Ghazālī figures in this text is through a citation from Rāzī’s al-Tafsīr al-kabīr, which cites Ghazālī’s explanation of the different levels of the tahlīl formula.

Ṣadrā’s most extensive use of Ghazālī is to be found in his treatment of blessings (nīma), which is prompted by the first part of Q 1:7. After a discussion concerning the nature of the Perfect Man, the flow of Ṣadrā’s tafsīr abruptly changes. Readers familiar with the eloquent prose and taxonomic approach of Ghazālī’s Iḥyā‘ ʿulūm al-dīn would immediately recognize the change in style. As Khwājawī rightly notes, the entire section is nothing more than a reworking of a section from book thirty-two of Ghazālī’s Iḥyā‘, the Kitāb al-ṣabr wa-l-shukr. Ṣadrā may have borrowed this section from the Iḥyā‘ because of the clarity with which Ghazālī treats the topic of blessings.

3.1.4 – Shī‘ī and Sunni Tafsīr

3.1.4.1 – Exegetical Notes within both Traditions

One of the most impressive features of Ṣadrā’s work as a commentator on the Qur’ān is his clear mastery of both Shī‘ī and Sunni tafsīr literature. As we saw last chapter, Ṣadrā has some

67 Ibid., 1:47.
68 See p. 102 n. 89.
69 Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 1:31.
70 Ibid., 1:47-8.
very harsh things to say about the exoteric mufassirūn, whom he accuses of wasting time in trivial details of lexicography. Yet their contributions are nonetheless important, and Sadrā is fully aware of this. His engagement with questions in tafsīr seems to give his criticisms all the more credibility, since he is not simply rejecting something with which he is unfamiliar or ignorant. As was shown last chapter, Sadrā wants his readers to know that he is well-versed in the tafsīr sciences, and that he is not satisfied with the enterprise as it is generally pursued in the books of scholars.

As a lead-in to further study, exoteric tafsīr is helpful, but it cannot give one access to truth. This is why Sadrā, for all his knowledge of tafsīr literature, devotes comparatively little space to it in his tafsīrs. He will often begin a discussion on a verse with the relevant exegetical remarks within the tradition. Once he has displayed his erudition and familiarity with the opinions of a number of scholars of tafsīr, he will then proceed to comment upon the Qurʾān in his usual philosophical and mystical manner.

In the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa, Sadrā cites a number of various exegetical remarks which are often common to both the Shiʿī and Sunnī traditions. In this work we encounter a host of different short interpretations on such topics as the following: why the Fātiḥa is called “doubled” (mathānī),72 the different but equal readings of the ḥamdala formula,73 various positions on how one should read and understand the term mālik in Q 1:4,74 different interpretations of the term širāṭ found in Q 1:7,75 and the views of the Qurʾānic exegetes on the identity of the maghdūb and

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72 Sadrā, Tafsīr, 1:1.
73 Ibid., 1:74.
74 Ibid., 1:84.
75 Ibid., 1:98.
mentioned in Q 1:7. We also encounter a number of important figures within the genre of *tafsīr* literature: ‘Alī, Āśim (d. 128/745), Kisā‘ī (d. 89/805), Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), Ibn Mas‘ūd (d. 31/652), Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767), Ibn ‘Abbās (d. ca. 68/688), ‘Umar (d. 23/644), Ibn al-Zubayr (d. 73/692), Ḥasan al-巴ṣrī, and ‘Abd al-Qāhir Baghdādī (d. 429/1037).

3.1.4.2 – ‘Ayyāshī, Qummī, Ṭabrīsī

Just as the *ḥadīth* sources employed by Ṣadrā in the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa* are predominantly Sunnī, so too are his references from *tafsīr* literature. We only encounter two explicit and minor references to the famous Shī‘ī Qur‘ān commentator Muḥammad b. Mas‘ūd al-‘Ayyāshī (d. 320/932), who, according to Meir Bar-Asher’s useful periodization of early Imāmī *tafsīr*, belongs to the pre-Buwayhid (r. 334/945447/1055) school of Twelver Shī‘ī scriptural exegesis. Ṣadrā cites a *ḥadīth* from ‘Ayyāshī’s *tafsīr* in his treatment of the merits of the Fātiha,

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76 Ibid., 1:143.
77 Ibid., 1:142.
78 Ibid., 1:84.
79 Ibid., 1:98, 142.
80 Ibid., 1:99-100, 125.
81 Ibid., 1:99-100.
82 Ibid., 1:124.
83 Ibid., 1:143.
explicitly providing his name. In the case of Tabrisî (d. 548/1154), a key post-Buwayhid Shi‘ī exegete, he simply refers to a reading of the first part of Q 1:7 as having derived from “the Majma‘ al-bayān,” a reference which would have been familiar to any reader of Ṣadrā’s tafsīr. As for Qummī, another important pre-Buwayhid Imāmī exegete, Ṣadrā does not mention his name, although Khwājawi traces one of Ṣadrā’s grammatical discussions centred around the first part of Q 1:7 back to both Qummī and Tabrisî’s tafsīrs.

3.1.4.3 – Zamakhsharī, Rāzī, Bayḍāwī, Nasafī, Nīshāpūrī

In the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiha, Ṣadrā refers to Zamakhsharī on four occasions, two of which are rather insignificant. One of the two significant references to Zamakhsharī is an allusion to his view—with which Ṣadrā takes issue—that God’s ascribing mercy to Himself is simply a metaphor for His blessings to His servants. Elsewhere, in a passage in which Ṣadrā offers his

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Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 1:168.

For studies of Tabrisî’s tafsīr, see Musa Abdul, The Qur‘ān: Shaykh Ṭabarsi’s Commentary (Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1977), which is particularly useful for its comparisons with the tafsīrs of Zamakhsharī and Rāzī on some key theological questions; Bruce Fudge, Shi‘ī Exegesis in the Twelfth Century: The Major Qur‘ān Commentary of al-Ṭabrisī (Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, forthcoming); Ḥusayn Karīmān, Ṭabrisī wa-Majma‘ al-bayān (Tehran: Châpkhâna-yi Dânishgâh-i Tîhrân, 1341 Sh/1962).

Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 1:125.

Ṣadrā records this work amongst the inventory of books in his personal library. See Rizvi, Mullâ Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, 117-8.

Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 1:124. For an important discussion of Qummī’s tafsīr, see Bar-Asher, Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shi‘ism, 33-56. See also Regula Forster, Methoden mittelalterlicher arabischer Qur‘ānexegese am Beispiel von Q 53, 1-18 (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 2001), 57-64.

Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 1:67 (implicitly), 98.

Cf. Lane, A Traditional Mütazilite Qur‘ān Commentary, 68.
advice to those seeking knowledge of the Qur’anic sciences, he refers to Zamakhsharī by name and is somewhat favourable. He notes that those who wish to know the specifics of the detailed discussions concerning the placement of letters in the *basmala* formula should read the *Kashshāf*, since they will find such information in that work. Although Šadrā goes on to praise the book for its unsurpassed linguistic analysis, it is clear from what follows that the linguistic sciences, like the other sciences not rooted in unveiling, are all based upon personal opinion and therefore fall short of the goal.

Bayḍāwī appears three times in the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa*. These appearances are all significant for one reason or another. In one passage, Šadrā seems to paraphrase a small portion of Bayḍāwī’s commentary on the Fātiḥa in his *Anwār al-tanzīl*, but does not state that he is doing so. In another passage, Šadrā prefaces his significant discussion concerning the Perfect Man and his relationship to the Qur’ān with a citation from the *Anwār*. In this citation, Bayḍāwī displays his philosophical know-how in explaining the meaning of the term ‘ālamīn to be found in Q 1:2. Šadrā then voices his disagreement with another one of Bayḍāwī’s interpretations of Q 1:2, in which he argues that the verse indicates that all things are ordered and depend upon God.

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93 Ibid.
94 See ibid, 1:93. The corresponding section can be found in Bayḍāwī, *Anwār*, 1:29. I am indebted to William Chittick for pointing this out to me. The passage does not appear to be in Mahmūd b. ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāfʿ an-ghawāmiḍ ḥaqāʾiq al-tanzīl wa-ʿuyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūḥ al-taʿwīl* (Beirut: Dār al-Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 2001). For a discussion of Šadrā’s listing of sections of Bayḍāwī’s *Anwār* as a part of his personal library, as well as the set of glosses upon this *tafsīr* work wrongfully attributed to him, see pp. 71-2 of the present study.
The Madārik al-tanzīl, written by another key Sunnī theologian, ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAlīmd al-
Nasafī (d. 710/1310), also figures in Ṣadrāʾ’s Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa. Since Nasafī for the most part
presents a condensed version of Bayḍāwīʾs Anwār, it is difficult to determine whether or not Ṣadrā draws on the Madārik directly. But, since Ṣadrā is known to have had a copy of the first
quarter of this text,97 and some of the specifically grammatical discussions are reminiscent of the
style of Nasafīʾs tafsīr,98 we cannot rule out the possibility that the Madārik in some manner or
another figures in the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa.

The most important exegetical source for the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa is Rāzīʾs al-Tafsīr al-
kabīr, which Ṣadrā draws upon on four occasions. The first instance in which we encounter Rāzī
is in Ṣadrāʾs treatment of the standard formula in Islamic praxis known as the istiʿādha (“seeking
refuge”), where he relies heavily on the corresponding (but much longer and detailed section) in
Rāzīʾs tafsīr.99 Later in the text, Ṣadrā discusses how calling on Godʾs names can also pose

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97 See Rizvi, Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, 118.
98 See p. 170 n. 68.
99 See Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 1:4-27, which closely follows, at times word-for-word, sections from Rāzī, al-Tafsīr al-kabīr
(Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Bahiyya al-Miṣriyya 1934-8), 1:74 ff (especially 64, 68-73). For a typology of the istiʿādha
formula, see Constance Padwick, “‘I Seek Refuge’,” Muslim World 28 (1938): 372-85. It can be noted that parts of
Rāzīʾs commentary on the istiʿādha from his tafsīr can be found, albeit in the context of his rebuttal of Muʿtazilite
exegeses of the Fātiḥa, in Rāzī, al-Maṭālib al-ʿalīya, 9:179-82. Two helpful studies of Rāzīʾs tafsīr are Roger
al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210): Philosopher and Theologian as Exegete” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2005). For a
recent discussion of Rāzīʾs treatment of the mutashābihāt and muḥkamāt verses of the Qurʾān, see Carl Sharif El-
Tobgui, “The Hermeneutics of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī,” in Coming to Terms with the Qurʾān: A Volume in Honor of
Professor Issa Boullata, ed. Khaleel Mohammed and Andrew Rippin, 125-58 (North Haledon, NJ: Islamic
limitations upon the servant. One important passage here is a slightly reworded reproduction of Rāzī’s arguments from his ṭafsīr.\textsuperscript{100}

Another instance in which Rāzī appears in the ṭafsīr Sūrat al-fātiha is in the albeit minor final appendix to the work, which, by Ṣadrā’s own estimation, was meant to be a supplement to the text.\textsuperscript{101} Ṣadrā says that this appendix is derived from the ṭafsīrs of Rāzī and Niẓām al-Dīn Nīshāpūrī (d. 730/1329), although on closer inspection, it turns out that all of the passages are actually from Rāzī’s ṭafsīr.\textsuperscript{102}

The most significant appearance Rāzī makes in this ṭafsīr work is in the context of Ṣadrā’s treatment of the levels of dhikr.\textsuperscript{103} Ṣadrā states that the highest form of invoking God is the formula “O He other than whom there is no He” (yā man lā huwa illā huwa). He then cites Rāzī’s meditation upon Ghazālī’s explanation of this formula. Ghazālī states that these words correspond to the station of the most elect of the elect (akhaṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ), and Rāzī says that he affirmed this point through scripture and demonstrative proof (burhān). Rāzī argues that the statement “O He other than whom there is no He” proves that God’s effectuation (ta’thīr) does not take place by giving quiddities the quality of being, for if quiddities were given the quality of

\textsuperscript{100} Ṣadrā, Ṭafsīr, 1:44, reworking Rāzī, al-Tafsīr al-kabīr, 1:147. The influence of Rāzī’s understanding of the divine names upon later Islamic thought remains unexplored. See the significant discussion in ibid., 1:134 ff. See also Wisnovsky, “One Aspect of the Akbarian Turn in Shi‘i Theology,” in Sufism and Theology, 61-2 n. 10, for a suggested possible influence of Rāzī’s treatment of the divine names upon Ibn ‘Arabī. My thanks go to Robert Wisnovsky for drawing my attention to this point in an email correspondence (February 15th, 2008), and for sending me his article before I was able to obtain a copy of the volume in which it appears.

\textsuperscript{101} Ṣadrā, Ṭafsīr, 1:179.

\textsuperscript{102} Ṣadrā only cites Nīshāpūrī once in the text, in the same section where Rāzī is first cited (i.e., Ṭafsīr, 1:47). For a thorough study of Nīshāpūrī’s “scientific” exegesis of the Qur’ān and its relationship to his theology, see Robert Morrison, Islam and Science: The Intellectual Career of Niẓām al-Dīn Nīsābūrī (London: Routledge, 2008), chs. six and seven.

\textsuperscript{103} Ṣadrā, Ṭafsīr, 1:48-64.
being, as a predicable quality, would itself require a quiddity.\footnote{Ibid., 1:48. At ibid., 1:47 n. 1, Khwājawd notes that the citation from Rāzī is to be found, with variations, in his \textit{al-Tafsīr al-kabīr}, 117, but I have not been able to locate the reference.} Rather, God’s effectuation is nothing more than the effectuation of quiddities, which are nothing before their instantiation, just as being is “nothing” before God gives it effectuation. One of the implications of this position is that essence precedes existence, and this gives Šadrā occasion to step in and defend his famous thesis of the fundamentality of being. The response, as Šadrā makes clear, is derived from his other works, although he does not state his sources.\footnote{See Šadrā, \textit{Tafsīr}, 1:49. Cf. ibid., 1:54, where Šadrā states that there are several insightful points (\textit{istībṣārāt}) concerning the fundamentality of being which he has already discussed in his books, and which he has incorporated into the \textit{Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa} as a “single treatise” (\textit{risāla mufrada}). Indeed, Šadrā ends this section with the type of blessings upon the Prophet and his family which customarily mark the end of a treatise. It can also be noted that at ibid., 1:55, Šadrā responds to the view, argued for by Suhrawardī, that being is merely a “rational construct” (\textit{īṭibār ‘aqlī}) (in rendering this term I follow ṬAbd al-Rasul ‘Ubudiyyat, “The Fundamentality of Existence and the Subjectivity of Quiddity,” trans. D. D. Sodagar and Muhammad Legenhausen, \textit{Topoi} 26 [2007]: 202; cf. Bonnariage \textit{Le Réel et les réalités}, 37; Kalin, “Mullā Šadrā’s Realist Ontology of the Intelligibles and Theory of Knowledge,” \textit{Muslim World} 94, no. 1 [2004]: 84) by which being—which does not correspond to anything in concreto because it is a secondary intelligible (\textit{ma‘qūl thānī})—is grafted by the mind onto quiddities. For a discussion of Suhrawardī’s position on rational constructs, see ‘Ubudiyyat, “The Fundamentality of Existence and the Subjectivity of Quiddity”, 202-4; Walbridge, \textit{The Science of Mystic Lights: Qūbih al-Dīn Shīrāzī and the Illuminationist Tradition in Islamic Philosophy} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 45-6. At ibid., 45 n. 3, Walbridge notes that there is a slight difference between intellectual operations (what he somewhat misleadingly calls “intellectual fictions”) and secondary intelligibles. To the best of my knowledge, Izutsu is the first author to suggest that the adjective \textit{īṭibārī} be understood as “fictitious.” See Izutsu, \textit{The Concept and Reality of Existence}, 46 (reprinted in idem, \textit{Creation and the Timeless Order of Things: Essays in Islamic Mystical Philosophy} [Ashland: White Cloud Press, 1994], 83). Izutsu, however, prefers to understand the term as meaning “mentally posited.” See idem, \textit{The Concept and Reality of Existence}, 99 ff. With respect to being as a secondary intelligible, Šadrā also takes this position, but contra Suhrawardī, understands being to be a secondary intelligible in the “philosophical” sense, not in the logical sense. See ibid., 82-4.}
3.1.5 – Other Materials

3.1.5.2 – Anecdotes, Maxims, Poems

Several anecdotes\(^\text{106}\) and two maxims\(^\text{107}\) are to be found in the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa*, most of which do not have any particular significance to the development of the work’s main ideas. One anecdote which plays a somewhat important role in the *tafsīr* is taken from Ibn Hishām’s (d. ca. 213/828 or 218/833) famous biography of the Prophet, in which ‘Abd Allāh Ibn al-Zab‘arī al-Sahmī objects to the Prophet upon hearing Q 21:67. Ṣadrā uses this incident to explain how objects of worship other than God to which people may incline are themselves one of the acts of Satan, and should thus be avoided.\(^\text{108}\) He then contrasts people who incline to the acts of Satan with the perfect gnostics, who worship God without any delimitations of His reality.\(^\text{109}\)

The only other significant anecdote in the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa* occurs shortly after the Ibn al-Zab‘arī narration, in which Ṣadrā explains the Prophet’s method for elucidating the path of truth and the path of falsehood.\(^\text{110}\) This is an important piece of information as it appears in Ṣadrā’s text, since he gives it an interpretation to which many would object, tying it in as he does to the ultimate salvation of all human beings.\(^\text{111}\)

It is well-known that Ṣadrā wrote poems in Persian, and several of his books include citations from such important Persian Sufi poets as Farīd al-Dīn Ḥāṭṭār (d. 618/1221) and Jalāl al-

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\(^{107}\) Ibid., 1:7, 84.


\(^{109}\) See p. 259 for the passage in translation.

\(^{110}\) Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, 1:42.

\(^{111}\) See pp. 259-60 for the passage in translation.
Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273). In some of his writings, Ṣadrā also displays his knowledge of Arabic poetry, and even tries his hand at composing his own verses. With respect to Ṣadrā’s work on the Qur’ān, it seems that the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa contains more citations of Arabic poetry than any of his other tafsīrs. Fourteen poems appear in the text, eleven of which are anonymous citations of earlier materials. Of these eleven anonymous poems, two of them are important for Ṣadrā’s understanding of the relationship between the Qur’ān, the cosmos, and the Perfect Man. In two cases, Ṣadrā identifies the poet whose words he cites. The first of them is Labīd (d. ca. 41/661), a convert to Islam who was one of the seven so-called mu‘allaqāt poets of pre-Islamic times. The second is al-Ma‘allī, a poet of the Banī Salūl tribe.

The most significant poem in the text seems to be by Ṣadrā himself. It is a terse couplet that has to do with the different positions “the people of caprice” (ahl al-hawā‘) take with respect to God, and how Ṣadrā does not fall into that trap because he has a single position in which he alone dwells. The insertion of these verses occurs at a crucial moment in the text, where Ṣadrā distinguishes between the different types of knowers of the Qur’ān.

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112 Selections from Ṣadrā’s Persian dīwān are appended to his Sīh aṣl. For one of his citations from Rūmī’s Mathnawī, see Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 6:23-4. For a citation from ‘Aṭṭār in the Sīh aṣl, see p. 104 n. 95.

113 For these poems, see Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 1:73, 78, 81, 86, 119, 130, 147, 158, 163, 163, 171.

114 Ibid., 1:163. See pp. 177-80 for a discussion of Ṣadrā’s treatment of the Perfect Man in this tafsīr work.

115 Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 1:78.

116 Ibid., 1:142. At ibid. n. 1, Khwājah notes that ‘Alī resembled the poet a lot. For the Banī Salūl, see Encyclopaedia of Islam, s.v. “Salūl” (by Michael Lecker).

117 Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 1:30. It is also a possibility that Ṣadrā’s authorship of this couplet comes by way of one of the accepted forms of sariqa or “plagiarism.” For more on this phenomenon in classical Arabic literature, see Encyclopaedia of Islam, s.v. “Sariqā” (by Wolfhart Heinrichs).

118 See p. 195.
3.2 – Structure and Content

3.2.1 – A Note on Method

Mullā Ṣadrā is generally not always as systematic a writer in his tafsīrs as he is in his strictly philosophical writings. To be sure, there are plenty of instances in his tafsīrs where he digresses from the topic at hand. Such digressions may at times lead one to assume that the work in question lacks thematic unity. What augments the difficulty in reading Ṣadrā’s tafsīrs in general are the lack of helpful indicators of where the respective discussion is heading. The generic subheadings in these works may mislead one into thinking that the point under discussion is crucial to the text, which is often not the case.

In our attempt to explicate the structure and content of Ṣadrā’s Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa, we have not simply provided a diagram or description of the work’s structure and then followed it up with a discussion of the content in each of its sections. Apart from being somewhat prolix, such an approach would present us with the same kind of confusion a reader of the original is bound to encounter when first reading the text, as it would not give us an adequate idea of how

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119 Ṣadrā was writing for an audience who would have shared his assumptions about textual linearity/non-linearity, and would have been used to the digressive style of philosophical and theological discourse. With that in mind, lengthy digressions in the text should be viewed as supplementary material to the point at hand. In modern scholarship, the function of these digressions would quite literally be equivalent to the function of the footnote/endnote. Since Ṣadrā was writing as a Qur’ān commentator, the normal digressive style of philosophy and theology is further augmented, because, as a commentator on scripture, he had more ground to cover than he normally would in a philosophical or theological treatise.

120 Cf. the introduction in Ṣadrā, The Wisdom of the Throne, 57-8 n. 63, where Morris states that these subheadings “indicate the decisive realization of enlightenment or the “unveiling” of Being....” Although this interpretation is open to debate, at ibid., 99 n. 22, Morris rightly notes the Ishrāqī roots to some of these subheadings. See also ibid., 94 n. 11 and 98 n. 21. It can be noted that in his edition of Ṣadrā’s tafsīr, Khwājawi will often insert his own explanatory titles alongside any given subheading. His purpose in doing so is to provide a summary of the heading’s contents, although such insertions are far from helpful.
the work coheres as a whole. Our approach, therefore, is to provide, as concisely as possible, an outline of the work’s structure alongside an explanation of its contents.\textsuperscript{121}

3.2.2 – \textit{Tafsîr Sûrat al-Fâtiha: Structure and Content}

Mullâ Şadrâ’s \textit{Tafsîr Sûrat al-fâtiha} is 183 pages long. It consists of an introduction, eight parts or chapters with various subdivisions, and three appendices. Of the book’s eight parts and three appendixes, Şadrâ only gives titles to parts one, six, and the first two appendices. We have included these below, and have given our own titles to the text’s unnamed sections. For reasons that will be made clear shortly, Şadrâ devotes the bulk of his attention to verses one, two, six, and seven of the Fâtiha.

\textit{Introduction to the Tafsîr Sûrat al-Fâtiha (Tafsîr, 1:1-3)}

The introduction begins with a listing of several names traditionally associated with the Fâtiha, and briefly discusses the question of whether or not it consists of six or seven verses. Şadrâ announces in the introduction that the time has come to reveal the Qur‘ân’s meanings. He goes on to single out the Fâtiha as the most special ray of God’s lights, noting that it brings together the secrets of the Origin and the Return.

\textit{Part I: Seeking Refuge (Tafsîr, 1:4-28)}

Each of the book’s last seven parts are dedicated to one the verses of the Fâtiha. Its first part deals with what is normally recited before the Fâtiha (but is not a part of it), namely the \textit{isti‘âdha}. Şadrâ notes that his goal in this unexpectedly long section, parts of which are based on the corresponding section in Râzî’s \textit{al-Tafsîr al-kabîr}, is to explain the \textit{isti‘âdha} formula’s

\textsuperscript{121} To avoid confusion, I summarize each part of the work rather than give the details of the subdivisions in each part, and discuss noteworthy digressions along the way. The most important issues in the \textit{Tafsîr Sûrat al-fâtiha} will be fully discussed in chapters four and five of this study.
intellectual meaning as opposed to its verbal meaning. To accomplish his goal, Şadrā discusses the different aspects of seeking refuge, which range from the one seeking refuge to why one seeks refuge. Taken together, Şadrā’s treatment of the *isti‘adha* can be said to explore the theme of the reality of evil and man’s weakness before it. Because man is so weak, he is constantly in need of God’s help and mercy, the physical manifestation of which is voiced in the *isti‘adha* formula.

What emerges from Şadrā’s explanations is significant to the development of the entire work. Several important points are made here concerning the function of the “Perfect Words” in the cosmos. The sections on cosmology in this section of the book, therefore, shed a great deal of light on the development of Şadrā’s theoretical and practical hermeneutics.

An important excursus in this part of the text, in part following Rāzī, is the brief discussion Şadrā devotes to the arguments of the Jabirites and the Qadiriites concerning the efficacy of seeking refuge. Şadrā states that neither side will arrive at the correct answer unless God protects them and teaches them directly from Him.

**Part II: The Name and the Named (Tafsīr, 1:29-77)**

This section is devoted to Q 1:1. It contains a full engagement with the philosophical and mystical implications of the name Allāh, and a meditation on God’s names “the Merciful” (*al-rahmān*) and “the Compassionate” (*al-rahīm*).

After discussing the different types of approaches to scripture (i.e., outward and inward), Şadrā contrasts those people who are bound to particular fixed categories of interpretation and cannot go beyond them (i.e., exoteric scholars) with those who are not bound by any particular opinion, and who therefore get to the heart of the Qur‘ān (i.e., the esoteric scholars). He ties this
discussion into the point he is trying to make: just as there are different views of God, so too will there necessarily be different approaches to His Word.

Ṣadrā goes on to discuss how the name Allāh is the first manifestation of multiplicity, acts as an isthmus (barzakh) between the Presence of Unity and the loci of the Command and creation, and unites all the contradictory names. We are then given a fairly standard explication of how multiplicity comes about in the cosmos by virtue of the different ruling properties of the divine names.

Ṣadrā’s discussion of the divine names and the inaccessibility of the divine Essence allow him to introduce two important themes in this book: the gods of belief, and why only the Perfect Man worships God as God. These points are then linked with the author’s treatment of the invocation/remembrance (dhikr) of God. We learn that the highest form of dhikr is invocation of the name “Huwa,” which denotes the Essence Itself. One can only arrive at this practice after having realized that invocation of God’s other names, such as “the Merciful” and “the Gentle,” lead us to particular aspects of His reality, the invocation of which ultimately entail limitations. This section then leads Ṣadrā to go into his long and detailed response to Rāzī, which arises out of the latter’s explanation of the dhikr formula, “There is no He but He.”

Ṣadrā ends this section with several comments upon the divine names “the Merciful” and “the Compassionate.” After discussing the fact that mercy really only comes from God and refuting Zamakhsharī’s view that the ascription of mercy to Him is purely metaphorical, Ṣadrā introduces this book’s most important themes: the fundamentality of God’s mercy, the accidental nature of His wrath, and how all human beings will ultimately end up in felicity.
Part III: The Act of Praise (Tafsîr, 1:73-82)

Ṣadrâ begins this section by discussing the relationship between “praise” (ḥamd) and “gratitude” (shukr). Praise for God, we are told, is actually a part of speech, and is thus an “act.” Since God’s act is nothing but existentiation, being, insofar as it is separate from God, is an act of praise for Him. Thus, everything praises God, which means that each thing is both an act of praise and that which praises. The highest level of praise is the level of the Muḥammadan Seal, which Ṣadrâ connects here with the famous tradition in which the Prophet says that he will be given the “banner of praise” (liwâ’ al-ḥamd) on the final day.

The discussion of the levels of praise, taken together with what Ṣadrâ said earlier in Part II concerning the Perfect Man, informs what he says in this section. Here, Ṣadrâ speaks of the correspondence between the macrocosm and the microcosm—the great book and the small book—which is prompted by his meditations on the last part of Q 1:2. It is in the context of Ṣadrâ’s treatment of the words “Lord of the worlds” (rabb al-ʿālamîn) that he refutes Bayḍawî’s interpretation of this verse, tying it into his famous doctrines of substantial motion and the gradation of being.

Part IV: Reflections on Q 1:3 (Tafsîr, 1:82)

Since Ṣadrâ dealt with the implications of the divine names the Merciful and the Compassionate in Part II, this section is very short. He simply states that the occurrence of this verse here could be rhetorical and for purposes of confirming what came before it (i.e., the basmala formula in Q 1.1). Or, it could be there to stress the ḥamd and shukr mentioned in the previous verse, which emphasize God’s divinity (ulûhiyya) and man’s servanthood (ʿubûdiyya).
Part V: The Specification of Praise (Tafsīr, 1:83-6)

Prompted by Q 1:4, Şadrā discusses some of the grammatical and lexical usages of the term mālik. He then briefly relates how the verse in question conveys the principles of spontaneous, temporal origination and the gradation of being. Şadrā eventually goes on to explain how, in the next world, God’s control of things will be made crystal clear because things will then exist in their full potentiality. Since a thing’s existing in full potentiality necessitates that there be no receptacle for the locus of God’s control, the actualized thing will itself become a self-evident manifestation of God’s exclusive effective power.

The most important discussion in this part of the tafsīr is Şadrā’s treatment of the modes in which ḥamd becomes specified in the cosmos as mediated by God’s merciful qualities (recall that in Part II Şadrā says that ḥamd is both an act of praise and the act of existentiation: thus we see why mercy is being and vice versa). This pivotal section not only elucidates what Şadrā says in Part II, but it informs the most important discussions in the remainder of the text.

Part VI: The Precedence of Worship over Seeking Help (Tafsīr, 1:87-97)

Just as Şadrā linked the function of ḥamd to his cosmology in the previous section, so too does he link ḥamd to worship in this section, although his treatment of the question here is quite circumspect. This is because Şadrā’s main concern in this part of the tafsīr is to explain why the wording in Q 1:5 puts “worship” (ʿibāda) before “seeking help” (istiʿāna). In other words, why does the verse teach people to say “We worship You” before saying “We seek help from You”? Şadrā offers several explanations for why the words “We worship You” come first: they (1) are a way of admonishing the worshipper not to have self-interest in his devotions, (2) emphasize God’s lordship and thus strengthen the servant’s servanthood, (3) help avoid Satan’s insinuations, and (4) allow one to realize his servanthood, which then leads to asking the Master
for help. Furthermore, the precedence of “We worship You” over “We seek help from You” is similar to the Islamic testimony of faith, which puts servanthood over messengerhood, that is, it puts that which is lasting over that which is not, since servanthood does not end with the cessation of the world, whereas messengerhood does.

**Part VII: The Straight Path (Tafsīr, 1:98-123)**

Ṣadrā offers several interpretations of the expression “the straight path” (al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm) to be found in Q 1:6. We are told, for example, that it can be the Qur’ān, Islam, God’s religion, or the Prophet and the Imams. Ṣadrā’s preferred understanding of the ṣirāṭ, which he states in the Asfār as well, is that it is made of the stuff of the soul itself.

Ṣadrā makes it clear that everyone is on a “path” to God which is their straight path as determined by their primordial dispositions and modes of descent. Here, he anticipates several objections to this point. These objections have to do with why wrongdoers are punished if they are doing nothing but following their “path,” (i.e., their natures); why the world should be created when all things eventually return to God; and why priority in rank and differences in peoples’ primordial dispositions exist, and how these disparities do not compromise God’s justice. Ṣadrā’s responses to these objections allow him to drive home an important point: although people are all on a straight path with respect to their essential natures (which he calls essential motion), they also have the ability to choose (which he calls volitional motion). Volitional motion allows people to freely choose their destinies within the confines of the possibilities presented to them by their essential natures.

**Part VIII (a): The Nature of Blessings (Tafsīr, 1:124-41)**

This section of the tafsīr is prompted by the first part of Q 1:7, which speaks of those upon whom God has bestowed His blessings. Since a good portion of this part of the work is a
reworking of a section of book thirty-two of Ghazâlî’s Ḥyâ’, it is one of the least important in terms of the main ideas addressed by Ṣadrâ throughout the text. The gist of the reworked section from the Ḥyâ’ is that true blessings have to do with felicity in the next world, although we can speak of blessings in this world as well. When Ṣadrâ departs from paraphrasing Ghazâlî, we learn that blessings are to be found everywhere, and that the entire universe is actually a theatre for God’s blessings, all of which work in harmony with one another.

Part VIII (b): God’s Mercy and Wrath (Tafsîr, 1:142-62)

Although Ṣadrâ reworks here passages from Qûnawî’s ʿIjâz concerning the different levels and functions of God’s wrath, the reworked passages from Ibn ʿArabî’s Futûhât play a much more significant role. Situating the Qur’anic image of God’s “two hands” within the framework of a cosmology largely borrowed from Ibn ʿArabî, Ṣadrâ demonstrates how God’s mercy will triumph over His wrath for all creatures in the end. He also elucidates the manner in which the cosmos is pure beauty (again reworking a passage from Ibn ʿArabî’s Futûhât), and describes how, as a mirror for the divine, the cosmos relates to the function of ḥamd. In a sense, this last section ties together many of the points Ṣadrâ makes throughout the tafsîr work.

Appendix I: On Some of the Merits of the Fatiha (Tafsîr, 1:163-71)

Ṣadrâ notes that he decided to include this section, which is quite commonplace in tafsîr literature, as a way of supplementing the points made in the tafsîr proper. This appendix draws links between the correspondences between the Qur’ân and the cosmos on the one hand, and the Fâtiḥa and the Qur’ân on the other. Of course, the Perfect Man is equivalent to the Fâtiḥa, as he is a transcription of the cosmos/Qur’ân, and this is a point that Ṣadrâ is particularly interested in conveying here. Because the Faṭiḥa contains everything, Ṣadrâ says that the realized gnostics find in it what is contained in the entire Qur’ân. By extension, the Fâtiḥa contains all that one
needs to know about eschatology. Another theme covered in this appendix is the structural and doctrinal similarities shared between the Fātiḥa and the last two verses of Sūrat al-baqara, which are traditionally known as the “closing verses” (khawātīm).

**Appendix II: On the Order and Structure of the Fātiḥa (Tafsīr, 1:172-5)**

This brief section deals, by and large, with the psychological awareness of the servant’s existential situation, which is then translated into his recital of one of the given verses of the Fātiḥa. Ṣadrā also links the structure of the Fātiḥa with the circle of life: verses two to four deal with the Origin, five to six with the present world, and seven with the Return.

**Appendix III: Selections from Rāzī’s Tafsīr (Tafsīr, 1:176-83)**

This book’s final appendix is a collection of some of Rāzī’s comments on the merits and structure of the Fātiḥa. Ṣadrā provides four discussions from Rāzī’s tafsīr as a way of supplementing the book and listing more of the Fātiḥa’s merits. Rāzī observes the importance of the number seven: there are seven verses of the Fātiḥa, seven sensible actions of the ritual prayer, seven levels of man’s creation, and seven levels of the substance of his soul. He also discusses the symbolism of the ritual prayer’s gestures, and explains how the basmala formula contains all that is needed to repel the devil’s insinuations.

**3.3 – Conclusion**

In his philosophical works, Mullā Ṣadrā demonstrates his remarkable familiarity with the textual traditions of theology, philosophy, and mysticism. In his tafsīr works, on the other hand, he has the opportunity to display the full range of his synthetic abilities, as he draws on texts and ideas in virtually every major discipline amongst the Islamic sciences in his capacity as a scriptural exegete. In this chapter, we had the opportunity to see how this phenomenon manifests
itself in the *Tafsîr Sûrat al-fâtîha*. This has allowed us to walk away with a very good idea of the key Qur’anic passages, *hadîths*, texts, and figures which appear, either explicitly or implicitly, in this important work. At the same time, we also attempted to provide a concise summary of the main themes and doctrinal issues taken up in the *Tafsîr Sûrat al-fâtîha*. This exercise has the advantage of enabling us to discern the text’s less significant aspects as well as its most important philosophical and mystical ideas.
Chapter 4

*Tafsîr Sûrat al-Fâtiha* II: Metaphysics, Cosmology, Anthropology

In the introduction to the *Tafsîr Sûrat al-fâtiha*, Mullâ Şadrâ explains that, amongst the Qur'ân’s “lights” (*lum'ân*), the Fâtiha is particularly special. Despite its concision, it brings together the secrets of the Origin (*al-mabda*) and the Return (*al-ma‘âd*), as well as the states of people in the afterlife. What is needed in order to understand the Word is submission, an attentive ear, God-fearing, and a pure heart:

> The light of guidance and the life of faith proceed from His lights [*lum'ân*], especially this *sûra* which, despite its concision, contains all of the verses of the Qur'ân and the sum total of the secrets of the Origin, Return, and the states of creatures on the final day before the All-Merciful. So listen with the ear of your heart to the recitation of God’s verses, and let the lights of the miracle of the Messenger of God penetrate your insides.

Several points emerge from this important passage. Şadrâ argues that the Fâtiha contains the entire Qur'ân. A page earlier, we are told that the Fâtiha is also called the “mother of the Qur'ân” (*umm al-qur'ân*) because it contains all of the Qur'ân’s meanings. Since the Fâtiha contains the entirety of the Qur'ân’s meanings, it naturally brings together all of its inner teachings as well.

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2. Ibid., 1:2.
The Qurān repeatedly informs its readers that they came from God and, after a short time on earth, will return to Him. From this perspective, it would not be an overstatement to say that the fundamental message of the Qurān is the Origin and the Return. As soon as we speak of these two realities, what lies between them a fortiori becomes all the more important, since our actions in this world will determine the route of our return. Thus, Ṣadrā is calling our attention here in this introduction to the all-encompassing nature of the Fātiḥa. As the Qurān’s introductory chapter, it in a sense is a foreshadowing of what is to follow.

That Ṣadrā sees in the Fātiḥa the entire enfolding of the human drama is also made clear towards the end of the book, where in an appendix, he draws several links between the Fātiḥa’s verses and its correspondences to the three “days” of man’s life, that is, his Origin (Q 1:2-4 = morning), mid-way point (Q 1:5-6 = the present day), and Return (Q 1:7 = night). Man’s Origin corresponds to God’s lordhood (rubūbiyya), since it was His will to bring him into existence; man’s mid-way point corresponds to his servanthood (‘ubūdiyya), since during his life on earth he should be concerned with worshipping God and purifying himself; and his Return corresponds to the science of the soul in the afterlife. Thus, in the Fāṭiḥa, man has a roadmap which “brings together” all that he needs for his journey.

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4 See Ṣadrā, Tafṣīr, 1:165, where he states that the Fāṭiḥa, along with the closing lines of Q 2, contain “the goal of human perfection.”

5 Ibid., 174-5. Elsewhere in the Tafṣīr Sūrat al-fāṭiḥa, Ṣadrā offers a justification for his position: “If this sūra did not, as we said, contain the secrets of the Origin and the Return and the science of man’s wayfaring to his Lord, the reports about its superiority would not have been related. Indeed, [reading innahā instead of annahā] it is equal to the entire Qurān, since, in reality, a thing does not have rank and excellence except on account of its containing divine matters and their states …” (Ibid., 1:164).

6 Ibid., 1:174. See also Martin Whittingham, Al-Ghazālī and the Qurān: One Book, Many Meanings (London: Routledge, 2007), 76 for Ghazālī’s division of the verses of the Fāṭiḥa into theoretical and practical dimensions, although Whittingham’s suggestion that this division is essentially Aristotelian should be taken with a grain of salt.
Because the Fātiḥa is primarily concerned with the Origin and the Return, Ṣadrā spends a good deal of time discussing these two realities. In this chapter, therefore, we will investigate the manner in which Ṣadrā tackles the first of these two topics. It will be shown how he presents us with a well-ordered and tightly argued picture of the nature of God, the manner in which multiplicity proceeds from Him, and the role of man in the cosmic scheme.

4.1 – The Nameless and the Named

As noted in the previous chapter, Ṣadrā will normally discuss the grammar, derivation, and general meanings of certain key words which occur in the Fātiḥa. One would therefore expect him to devote some discussion to the first verse of the Fātiḥa, namely the basmala. Yet in this tafsīr work, Ṣadrā pays little attention to the basmala. Consequently, we find none of the typical discussions in tafsīr literature centred around topics such as the grammatical points concerning the basmala, the debate over the legality of reciting it in the ritual prayer (i.e., whether it was mandatory to recite or not), and the question of whether or not it is specific to the Islamic community.

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7 A typical linguistic approach to the basmala can be found in Rāzī’s tafsīr: “We have shown that the bā’ in ‘In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful’ attaches to an object of a preposition. We therefore say: it is possible for this object of a preposition to accompany a noun or a verb, which can either be precedent or antecedent to it in four ways: (1) when the verb is precedent to it you say, ‘I begin in the name of God’; (2) when the noun is precedent to it you say, ‘The beginning of the discussion is in the name of God’; (3) when the verb is antecedent to it you say, ‘In the name of God, I begin’; (4) and when the noun is antecedent to it you say, ‘In the name of God is my beginning’” (Rāzī, al-Tafsīr al-kabīr, 1:101).

8 Cf. Ayoub, “The Prayer of Islam,” 642. I cite here two interesting approaches to the question. In his tafsīr, the important Shi‘ī exegete of the Buwayhid era, Muḥammad b. Ḥasan (Abū Ja‘far) al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067), says the following: “Members of our school agree that the basmala is a verse of Sūrat al-ḥamd and every [sic] sūra, and that whoever neglects it in the prayer, his prayer—whether obligatory or supererogatory—will be invalid. It is mandatory to recite aloud when the recitation of the prayer is aloud, and it is desirable to recite aloud when the recitation of the prayer is silent” (Muḥammad b. Ḥasan Ṭūsī, al-Tīḥān fī tafsīr al-qurān, ed. Ahmad al-Amīn and Ahmad al-‘Āmilī
Why Şadrā would choose to record the debates and discussions in *tafsīr* literature concerning other verses of the Fātiḥa but not the all-important *basmala* is unclear. What is even more surprising is that he devotes no attention to the Sufi interpretations of the *basmala* formula that we find in the works of such important authors as ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī (d. after 520/1126), and Ḥabīb al-Kūfī (d. 346/958). The Qurʾān reciters and the legal experts of Madīna, Basra, and Sham hold that the *basmala* is not a verse from the Fāṭiḥa, nor is it a verse in the other *sūra* s. It is only there to divide the *sūras* and for the blessings of beginning with it, just as every significant matter is begun by saying it. This is the opinion of Abū Ḥanīfa—God have mercy on him—and those who follow him. This is why they do not recite it aloud in the prayer. The Qurʾān reciters and legal experts of Makka and Kufa hold that it is a verse of the Fāṭiḥa and every [sic] other *sūra*. Shāfiʿī and his circle—God have mercy on them—hold to this position, which is why they recite it aloud in the prayer” (*Kashshāf*, 1:35).

9 The great Irāqī Sufi and exegete, Maḥmūd b. ʿAbd Allāh Ḥālūsī, offers a fine summary of the problem in his *tafsīr*:

“The scholars differ about this: is it specific to this community or not? Ḥallāma Abū Bakr al-Tunāṣī has reported that the scholars of every religious community have agreed that God began every book with it. Suyūṭī has narrated, based on what has been transmitted to him from al-Sarmānī—who holds responsibility for reporting it—that the phrase ‘In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful’ is the opening for every book” (Maḥmūd b. ʿAbd Allāh Ḥālūsī, *Rūḥ al-maʿānī* [Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1970], 1:52).


11 With respect to the *basmala*, Maybudī sees in the beginning of this formula a fundamental metaphysical principle, namely the unfolding of the divine hiddenness into the realm of multiplicity through the name “Allāh.” God’s name here becomes the means of access to Him, and must thus be the starting point for any and all human transactions: “‘In the Name of God’ means, ‘I began in the name of God, so you too begin!’ He says, ‘I began through My name,
832/1428). In fact, there is only one passing reference to the basmala formula in the entire work, and even this comes from the pen of Rāzī.

Rather than engage any of the long-established exoteric and esoteric approaches to the basmala formula, Şadrâ chooses to get to the heart of the matter, and he does this very quickly. After discussing the different types of knowers of the Qurʾān, he offers a long meditation on the nature of the name (ism) Allāh. Since Q 1:1: begins “with” or “in” the name of God, the very structure of this verse seems to prompt within Şadrâ several questions: how can God, who is beyond the reach of creation, also be accessible to creation? After all, it is God who begins with/in His own name, but why does this happen? What is the nature of that name of God with/in which He Himself begins? Questions such as these, although implicit, lurk in the background as Şadrâ introduces his detailed discussion concerning God’s reality.

4.1.1 – The Essence

In the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiha Şadrâ says that God’s Essence (dhāt) is beyond definition, description, name, denotation, and delimitation. In Its pure simplicity and uniqueness, It is only was united with My name, and commenced in My name, so begin through My name, unite with My name, and commence in My name’” (Rashīd al-Dīn Maybūdī, Kashf al-asrār wa-uddat al-abrār, ed. A. A Ḥikmat [Tehran: Dānishgāh, 1952-60], 1:4). This interpretation offered by Maybudī, as we will see below, is very much in keeping with Şadrâ’s description of the two faces of the divine Essence. For a study of Maybudī’s Kashf, see Keeler, Ṣūfī Hermeneutics.


13 Şadrâ, Tafsīr, 1:182. Here, the basmala is given its other title, namely the tasmiya.
known to Itself, and forever escapes the grasp of the human intellect: “It has neither essential
definition [hadd],14 nor name [ism], nor description [rasm], and intellectual perception does not
have a way to It.”15 So beyond the grasp of human cognition is God’s Essence that all we can do
is describe It as transcending the very categories which transcend our perception and
understanding. Since human beings cannot conceive of anything greater than infinity, we can
describe the Essence as being beyond infinity. As Șadrā puts it, “His Essence, in the intensity of
light, is infinity beyond the infinite.”16 If the Essence is “infinity beyond the infinite,” this is only
because It must be understood in relation to that which the human mind cannot grasp, namely
infinity, but the measure and incomprehensibility of which it has some vague notion.17

14 Following Izutsu, Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts, 2nd ed. (Berkeley:
Illumination, 197, I render ḥadd as “essential definition,” as opposed to simply “definition,” which is denoted by the
general and more widely-applicable Arabic term, taʿrīf. Cf. Josef van Ess, Die Erkenntnislehre des ʿAṭîbaddīn al-Īcī
(Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1966), 445; index, s.v. ʿ-r-f ֌ taʿrīf, who understands taʿrīf as “Bestimmung” and “Definition,”
but notes that it is different from the term ḥadd, which he also translates as “Definition.” See also Kalin, “Mullā
Șadrā’s Realist Ontology of the Intelligibles and Theory of Knowledge,” 82, who renders ḥadd as “logical
definition.”
15 Șadrā, Tafsīr, 1:39. Needless to say, the terms for definitions employed by Șadrā here became standard in Islamic
philosophy from Avicenna onwards. For the evolution of definitions in early Islamic philosophy, see Kennedy-Day,
Books of Definition in Islamic Philosophy, part 1.
16 Șadrā, Tafsīr, 1:44. Cf. the pertinent remarks in Rizvi, Mullā Șadrā and Metaphysics, 71-2.
17 Technically speaking, even the qualifications “infinite” and “beyond infinity” are not predicable of the divine
Essence, since the terms “beyond” and “infinity” presuppose space and time respectively, and hence some mode of
delimitation. Delimitation would, therefore, lead to God’s knowability. But if God as such is knowable, the object of
knowledge cannot be God. Recall here Teerstegen’s famous remark: “A God understood is no God” [Ein begriffener
Gott ist kein Gott]. Yet God is an object of knowledge. Thus, the quest to know God becomes, as David Burrell
would have it, an attempt at “knowing the unknowable God.” See Burrell, Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina
(sic), Maimonides, Aquinas (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986). Put metaphysically, there is a
manner in which the Essence can and must be delimited, for which, see below.
Şadrâ’s language here indicates his indebtedness to Ibn ‘Arabî and his followers’ treatment of the divine Essence or the Absolute (al-muţlaq).\textsuperscript{18} At the same time, it would not be unreasonable to look to sources other than the school of Ibn ‘Arabî. We know that the early Ismâ‘îlî philosophers in general and Abû Ya‘qûb al-Sijistânî (d. 361/971) in particular,\textsuperscript{19} had developed an important doctrine of the inaccessibility of God. God was not confined to the category of being. Rather, He was beyond being itself.\textsuperscript{20} According to this conception, God was


\textsuperscript{19} Paul Walker rightly observes that, unlike the early Ismâ‘îlî philosophers Abû Ḥâtim al-Râzî (d. 322/934) and Muḥammad al-Nasafî (d. 332/943), we have a better picture of Sijistânî’s views because of the sheer abundance of his writings that have come down to us. See Walker, “The Ismâ‘îlîs,” in \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy}, ed. Peter Adamson and Richard Taylor, 81 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). For Sijistânî’s life and thought, see Walker, \textit{Early Philosophical Shî‘ism: The Ismâ‘îlî Neoplatonism of Abû Ya‘qûb al-Sijistânî} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

\textsuperscript{20} For lucid presentations of the general Ismâ‘îlî teaching on the God beyond being, see Corbin, \textit{Historie de la philosophie islamique}, 122-6; Madelung, “Aspects of Isma’îlî Theology: The Prophetic Chain and the God Beyond Being,” in \textit{Ismâ‘îlî Contributions to Islamic Culture}, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 57-9 (Tehran: Imperial Iranian
“not-being.” This apophatic theology necessarily entails that the most we can say about God is simply that He is “not” like anything we know, which is in keeping with the Qur’anic picture of God’s transcendence. Since God is not like anything we know, He is also not like being itself, and, thus, is “not being” but beyond being.

We also find a similar doctrine in earlier authors, such as Plato and Plotinus. Yet the Ismāʿīlī philosophers develop the notion in a slightly different manner, confining themselves to...
what Michael Sells calls the lower scale of apophatic discourse’s “performative intensity.”

Thus, not only is God not being, He is also not not being. In other words, to say that God is not being is, nonetheless, to impose a limitation upon God, for if we say that He is not being, we are still confining Him both linguistically and intellectually by trapping Him in negation. Since God transcends all conceptual and linguistic frameworks, the statement that He is not being in some way traps Him within our own thought and language worlds.

By negating the original negation, the Isma‘īlí philosophers overcome this difficulty, since God is not not being, which is to say that that prior attempt to maintain God’s transcendence, confining as it was, is itself negated so as to do away with any notion of limitation upon God. However, as Sells astutely observes, the very nature of apophatic discourse necessarily results in an infinite regress in which each statement made about God is then corrected by a counter statement, ad infinitum. The reason the Isma‘īlīs do not go beyond the double-negation of God’s transcendence is likely because their fundamental concern, especially by the time we get to Sijistānī, was to articulate a coherent theoretical perspective on God’s

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transcendence which could adequately fit into their wider, cosmological system. Thus, Ismā‘īlī apophasis functions differently than it does in a figure like Plotinus, whose treatment of apophasis is intimately tied to “naming,” which significantly extends the problem of conceptually delimiting God through saying that He is “beyond being” by focusing on the limitations of language and the act of “naming.” The Ismā‘īlī double negation, on the other hand, does not seem to concern itself with the problem of language in this regard. Their double negation of God, therefore, more or less serves as a heuristic device which is designed to help pave the way for explanations of the nature of the universe, and the role of the Imam and man within it.

Even when we turn to the Ismā‘īlī writings of Ţūsī, we notice an emphasis on apophasis only insofar as it serves as the fundamental basis for a much more intricate presentation of cosmology, psychology, and anthropology. Yet Ţūsī’s discussion of God’s transcendence, which closely follows in the wake of Sijistānī’s presentation, may have had a role to play in the formation of Šadrā’s understanding of God’s transcendence. After all, Šadrā was very well-versed in Ţūsī’s writings from his Twelver Shi‘ī phase, and some of these writings, as we now know, were not always free of distinctively Ismā‘īlī content.

While Ţūsī’s Ismā‘īlī writings may have had an influence upon Šadrā’s understanding of God’s transcendence, Šadrā’s ontology may have also been formed in response to the implications of Ismā‘īlism’s radical emphasis on God’s transcendence. Šadrā’s ontology, which

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27 See Sells, Mystical Languages of Unsaying, 15 ff.

28 See pp. 74-5.
posits the univocality of being, squarely contradicts the Ismā‘īlī emphasis on the fundamental discontinuity between God and creation. For the Ismā‘īlī’s, the term “being” can only equivocally relate to God (who is beyond “being”) and His creation, a thesis defended by Mullā Rajab—himself influenced by Ismā‘īlī notions of divine transcendence—in a treatise which attempts to refute Ṣadrā’s thesis concerning the univocal nature of the term *wujūd*.

If Ṣadrā’s ontology was in fact informed by his engagement with Ṭūṣī’s Ismā‘īlī writings, by the time we get to his presentation of God’s inaccessibility in the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa*, any naturalization of Ṭūṣī becomes doubly obscured, since in this text, Ṣadrā clothes his ontology in less philosophical (and hence more religious) terminology. Readers familiar with Ṣadrā’s philosophical writings are sure to notice the parallels between the descriptions of God’s Essence as discussed here and his treatment of the nature of *wujūd* or “being” in his more philosophical writings. To be sure, terms such as the “Absolute” and the “Essence” are, in the language of theology and mysticism, what “being” is in the language of philosophy, at least from the perspective of the school of transcendent philosophy. The reason being is identical to God’s Essence is because they both denote God’s “reality.”

Since God in His reality is completely hidden and inaccessible, and the terms “being” and “Essence” refer to this reality, they too are hidden and inaccessible, and therefore completely unknown.

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29 See the astute comments in Madelung, “Aspects of Isma‘īlī Theology,” 63.

30 See Corbin’s remarks in his *La philosophie iranienne islamique*, 83-96.

31 See p. 35 for a discussion of this work.

32 See Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 14 and Izutsu, *The Concept and Reality of Existence*, 64. It must be noted that the term “God” in this context does not refer to that God who is an object of worship. Rather, “God” as used here refers to the Absolute, that is, the God beyond all conception and accessibility. See below for a discussion of this crucial point.
That we are justified in identifying being with the Essence is clearly evidenced in Şadrā’s *Mashā’ir*. As we saw in chapter two, in the beginning of the *Mashā’ir* we are told that the reality of being is completely indefinable. This discussion parallels Şadrā’s treatment of the utter transcendence of the Essence in the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa*. Yet there is another sense in which being and God’s Essence are one and the same reality: they are also the most evident of things, since there is nowhere that being and God’s Essence are not to be found. This point will become clear if we recall our discussion of Şadrā’s treatment of being in chapter two of this study, since whatever can be said about being in purely philosophical terms can be said about the Essence in theological and mystical terms.

We saw above that Şadrā described the Essence as “perfect” and “simple” in Its reality, and that It is “unseen” and “infinity beyond the infinite.” When he seeks to explain the notion of the Essence’s accessibility, he employs the traditional language of theology and mysticism, just as he employs the standard language of philosophy in his explication of being’s accessibility. Like the particularizations of being, the Essence’s particularizations are to be found everywhere as well. In more poetic language, Şadrā refers to the modes of being as “drops of the ocean of the Necessary Reality” and “rays of the sun of Absolute Being.”33 Indeed, the Essence, like being, can only make Itself known through particularizations of Itself. Once the Ultimate Reality becomes particularized, we can speak about It in more concrete and manageable terms. In other words, the vagueness which envelops all things disappears, in a sense, once we are able to delimit God’s Essence.

4.1.2 – The Names

The Essence can only become delimited when we provide an essential definition of It. By defining It, we bring It into the scope of our own partial and limited frames of reference. Yet how can the Essence in Itself remain indefinable and inaccessible on the one hand, and definable and accessible on the other? As with a number of the crucial points made in the Tafsîr Sûrat al-fâtîha, Şadrâ addresses this question based on a statement made by Ibn ‘Arabî in the Fuşûş. In the text in question, Ibn ‘Arabî says that God lies at the root of every definition given in the cosmos: “The Real is defined by every essential definition [al-ḥaqq maḥdûd bi-kull ḥadd].” Şadrâ affirms this point on the logic that since all things in the cosmos point to God, He is “defined” by all things in the cosmos. Yet the God defined in the cosmos is not the Essence proper. With the concern of a theologian, Şadrâ seeks to clarify Ibn ‘Arabî’s point:

What was intended by “the Real” in Ibn ‘Arabî’s saying “The Real is defined by every essential definition,” was that which is meant by [muḥdâ] the word “God” [allâh] from the standpoint of its universal meaning and intellectual concept, not from the standpoint of the reality of its meaning, which is the Essence of Exclusive Oneness [al-dhât al-aḥadiyya] and the Unseen of the unseens [ghayb al-ghuyûb], since It has neither essential definition, nor name, nor description, and intellectual perception does not have a way to It.

The distinction which Şadrâ makes here between the Unseen of the unseens and God corresponds to Ibn ‘Arabî’s well-known distinction between the Essence’s Exclusive Oneness

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34 Ibn ‘Arabî, Fuṣûş, 67; cited at Şadrâ, Tafsîr, 1:38.
36 Ibid. For a related passage from Şadrâ’s Asfâr, see Jambet, The Act of Being, 182-5.
37 For the term ghayb al-ghayûb in Şadrâ’s writings, see Asfâr, 2:345 ff.; idem, The Elixir of the Gnostics, 31, 103-4 n. 35. For a similar term (ghayb al-ghayûb), see Mu’ayyid al-Dîn Jandî, Sharh Fuṣûş al-ḥikam, ed. Jalâl al-Dîn Āshîyânî (Mashhad: Dânishgâh-i Mashhad, 1982), 707.
(aḥadiyya) and Its Inclusive Oneness (wāḥidiyya). Some Sufi theoreticians couch the same dichotomy in different terms, referring to the levels of the non-entified Essence (lā taʿayyun) and the first entified Essence (al-taʿayyun al-awwal) from which multiplicity proceeds, or the non-manifest and manifest faces of the Essence. Whereas the non-manifest face of the Essence remains inaccessible and unattainable forever except to Itself, Its manifest face is that to which humans have access and to whom they return.

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38 See Ibn ʿArabī, Fuṣūs, 90-4 (for a discussion of aḥadiyya); Izutsu, Sufism and Taoism, 112, 115 n. 8. See also Dagli’s note in Ibn ʿArabī, The Ringstones of Wisdom, 81 n. 13.

39 See Jandī, Sharḥ, 707.

40 See Saʿīd al-Dīn Farghānī, Muntahā l-madārik (Cairo, 1876), 1:15 ff. Talk of the manifest and non-manifest faces of the Essence is tantamount to speaking about God as the Manifest (al-ʿāhir) and the Hidden (al-bāṭīn). See Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge, 95; Corbin, Creative Imagination in the Ṣūfism of Ibn ʿArabī, 186 ff.

41 Ṣadrā also refers to the “pervasiveness” (shumūl) of being, which is identical to the manifest face of the Essence. One of his standard philosophical expressions for the pervasiveness of being, which we discussed in chapter two of this study, is “self-unfolding being” (or “the self-unfolding of the light of being” (inbisāt nūr al-wujūd)). Other terms for the manifest face of the Essence (or being) employed by Ṣadrā, the first two of which we have encountered in chapter two, are “the Breath of the All-Merciful” (or “the All-Merciful breath” (al-nafās al-raḥmānī)), “the Real through whom creation takes place,” and “the mercy which encompasses all things” (al-raḥmat al-latī wasīṭat kull shayṭ). See Ṣadrā, Maṣṭāḥ, 100; idem, Mashāʾir, 59. See also, Jambet, The Act of Being, 183-4; Nasr, Islamic Philosophy from its Origins to the Present, 226. A fine discussion of the unfolding of the Essence can also be found in Corbin, La philosophie iranienne islamique, 66-9, although here Corbin discusses the Essence’s self-unfolding in three stages: (1) the Essence as unconditioned (lā bi-sharṭ), (2) the Essence negatively conditioned (bi-sharṭ lā), and (3) the Essence unconditioned by a negative condition (bi-lā sharṭ bi-sharṭ lā). The last two really belong to the same movement of the Essence, that is, the turning of Its face to the cosmos. Here, this movement is divided into two steps because of the logical precedence of the Essence’s becoming “negatively conditioned” in order for It to enter the domain of negative unconditionality. Along with Corbin’s discussion, see also the sophisticated presentation in Landolt, “Sīnnānī on Wahdat al-Wujūd,” in Collected Papers on Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism, ed. Mehdi Mohaghegh and Hermann Landolt, 93-111 (Tehran: McGill University Institute of Islamic Studies, 1971). This article served as the basis for part one of Landolt’s lengthy piece: “Der Briefwechsel zwischen Kāšānī und Simnānī über Wahdat al-Wujūd,” Der Islam 50 (1973): 29-81 (reprinted in idem, Recherches en spiritualité iranienne, 245-300; see pp. 257-67 in particular).
The Essence must in one respect remain hidden, for if It were to be known even in Its hiddenness, It would not be absolute, but relative. That is, It would not remain completely unconditioned and therefore unknown if It were conditioned by the knowledge of a knower outside of It. Yet insofar as the Essence makes Itself known, It must make Itself relative in one sense. The only manner in which It can do this is by turning one side of Its face to the cosmos. In the language of Islamic theology, the Essence makes Itself known through the divine names. As Şadrā puts it:

With each quality, the Essence takes on a [specific] name—the names articulated in speech being the “names of the names”—and the multiplicity in them is in accordance with the multiplicity of the [names’] characteristics and attributes. This multiplicity is nothing but the standpoints [iÝtibÁrÁ] of His unseen levels and His divine tasks [shuÝn iláhiyya], which are “the keys to the unseen” [mafáïî h al-ghayb], whose shadows and reflections fall upon the existing things.

The cosmos, therefore, is composed of the names of God. Since these names are nothing other than particularizations of the manifest face of the Essence, each name denotes a specific aspect of the Essence’s relationship to the cosmos. Thus, the multiplicity introduced into the Essence is nothing other than Its own multiple standpoints and faces turned towards the cosmos, or what Şadrā calls, following Ibn ʿArabī and his school, the “divine tasks.” As seen in the passage above, the divine tasks are a synonym for the Qur’anic expression “keys to the unseen.” These terms refer to the multiplicity which comes about by virtue of the disclosure of the Essence’s

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42 For a helpful attempt at widening the notion of “theology” in classical Islam, see Winter, “Introduction,” 2-4.
43 Following Sachiko Murata (Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light: Wang Tai-yü’s Great Learning of the Pure and Real and Liu Chih’s Displaying the Concealment of the Real Realm [Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000], index s.v. “tasks”), I render shaÝn (derived from Q 55:29) as “task.” Although “operation” or “function” may also be suitable translations, “task” is a more concrete (and hence less abstract) term, and conveys something of the “concern” of the Essence in Its mode of deployment. See below for a more extensive discussion of the divine tasks’ relationship to the manifest face of the Essence.
44 Şadrā, Tafsîr, 1:34. For the “keys to the unseen,” cf. Qûnawî, NuÝûs, 57 ff.
manifest face. Once the Essence takes on different positions with respect to that which is strictly speaking outside of It, the names emerge with their own particularized qualities, which allow them to be distinguished from one another on the one hand, and from the Essence on the other. The level at which this takes place is what is denoted by the terms “divine tasks” and “keys to the unseen.” Ṣadrā points out that it is the shadows and reflections of the divine tasks and keys to the unseen which fall upon existent things. These shadows are nothing but names which appear in the cosmos, and which Ṣadrā refers to as the “names of the names,” a point which again harks back to Ibn ‘Arabī. The names of the names are the tasks of the Essence found throughout the cosmos, which is to say that they are Its properties and traces.

Since the Essence must remain utterly hidden and inaccessible, how do the names come about from It without compromising Its fundamental obscurity? In the following passage, Ṣadrā asserts that the names have no proper existence of their own. Rather, they are relationships formed between the Essence and the cosmos. Since they are relationships, no change is introduced in the Essence:

All that is in the world of contingency is a form of one of the names of God and a locus of one of the tasks. So God’s names are intelligible meanings in the Unseen Being of the Real, meaning that the Essence of Exclusive Oneness is that which the intellect has no way of conceiving, since, were It to “exist” or occur to the intellect in order for the intellect to grasp It, these meanings would be divested from It, and the intellect would [be unable to] qualify It with itself. Thus, given Its unity and simplicity, the Essence of Exclusive Oneness allows for the predication of these meanings to It without there being an added quality [to It] ….

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46 Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, 1:34. The passage continues: “Like all of the universal concepts, these meanings are, in themselves, neither existent nor nonexistent, neither general nor specific, and neither universal nor particular. They are not like the existential ipseities which are existent in themselves and individuated in their ipseities, since these latter are like rays and connections to the existence of the Real: when they come to one’s mind, something bound to God’s Essence—which is existent through His existence and necessary through His necessity—is thought of. They are
Since the divine names are nonexistent entities which come about in relation to a particular face of the manifest Essence, they denote a particular reality of God’s Essence. As was seen in chapter two, the concept of being is known through particularizations of being. The particularizations of being can only be apprehended through quiddities, since quiddities, as entities entirely devoid of any reality, only emerge by virtue of the gradation of being. Likewise, each divine name denotes the Essence, but all the divine names are nonexistent entities. It can be noted here that the divine names with respect to the Essence do not correspond, in philosophical language, to quiddities with respect to being. Although both the names and quiddities are actually nonexistent, the names are relationships between the manifest face of the Essence and the cosmos, whereas the quiddities are not relational, but, rather, mental abstractions which emerge through the concretizations attendant upon the gradation of being.

That which corresponds to the notion of quiddity in Ṣadrā’s philosophy to his explication of the unfolding of the Essence in his religious writings is the notion of the fixed entities (al-a’yān al-thābita). As Ibn ʿArabī tells us, the fixed entities are nothing but the objects of God’s
knowledge as they are known to Him forever. Whether God brings them into existence or not, the fixed entities never leave their state of fixity, and, hence, nonexistence. When and if they are brought into existence, they can only do so by virtue of the names. As we saw in the above-cited passage, Şadrā says that “All that is in the world of contingency is a form of one of the names of God, and a locus of one of the tasks.” The objects in the cosmos are loci of God’s self-disclosure (mazāhir), which is to say that they are receptacles which come about in accordance with their fixity. The loci are, in other words, nothing but the existentiated objects of God’s knowledge “forever” known to Him (i.e., the fixed entities). In order for these fixed entities to emerge, the manifest face of the Essence must turn to them, and as soon as the Essence makes Its turn to these entities, relationships and hence names emerge between the manifest face of the Essence and the fixed entities, which at this later stage are to be understood as the names’ loci.

While it is true that Şadrā does not refer to the fixed entities in this tafsīr work in the context of his explication of his ontology, talk of “loci” presupposes the notion of fixed entities, since the loci are simply the fixed entities in their state of existentiation, which is to say that each fixed entity is a “form of one of the names of God, and a locus of one of the tasks.” Furthermore, the reason quiddities in Şadrā’s metaphysics correspond to the fixed entities is because they both

later Islamic philosophical theology. For Taftazānī’s (d. 791/1389) disapproval of this concept, see Knysh, Ibn ‘Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 153-4 and 340 n. 78. Although this particular phrase seems to have been coined by Ibn ‘Arabī, he acknowledges his debt to the Mu’tazilites (who spoke of the ashyā’ ma’dūma, etc.) for first discussing the notion. See p. 120 n. 43 and Nyberg’s introduction in Ibn Arabī, Kleinere Schriften des Ibn Arabī, ed. H. S. Nyberg (Leiden: Brill, 1919), 44 ff. See also Chodkiewicz, “Les trops cailloux du Shaykh ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī,” in Mystique Musulmane, ed. G. Gobillot, 147 (Paris: Carisscript, 2002) for an interesting suggestion concerning Ibn Sab’īn’s rejection of the Mu’tazilite notion of the ma’dūmāt as actually being aimed at Ibn ‘Arabī’s doctrine of the fixed entities.
denote the same thing: the particular reality of the thing in question, that is, its “what-it-is-ness.” This is a point which Šadrā himself states elsewhere.48

On account of the fact that the fixed entities denote the quiddities, we may be justified in asking what the divine names denote. In other words, do the divine names have an equivalent in Šadrā’s philosophical system? Indeed, the function of the standpoint of the existent with respect to existence, which emerges as a result of the gradation of being and which determines the nature of the resultant quiddity, is akin to the function of the divine names in their relationality to the Essence on the one hand, and their colouring the loci49 on the other. Technically speaking, however, the divine names do not figure in Šadrā’s philosophical writings, since there is no direct conceptual equivalent in his philosophical lexicon. This is perfectly understandable, since the divine names are theological categories and thus more appropriately belong to Šadrā’s “religious” writings, which is why they figure so prominently in his Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiha.

4.1.3 – The Name Allāh

What prompted Šadrā’s long meditation on Q 1:1 was the divine name Allāh. According to a long-standing tradition in Islam, this name is unlike God’s other names. Whereas each divine name denotes a specific aspect of the Essence’s manifest face,50 the divine name Allāh does not function in the same way. Firstly, it does not denote any particular quality of the Essence, as, for example, “al-raḥmān” would denote the mercifulness of the Essence’s manifest

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48 See Šadrā, Mashā‘ir, 81, where he identifies the quiddities with the fixed entities in his famous “conversion” account: “the quiddities are the fixed entities [al-māḥiyyāt hiya al-d’yān al-thābīta].” For the passage in translation, see Izutsu, The Concept and Reality of Existence, 104. See also Chittick’s note in Šadrā, The Elixir of the Gnostics, 106-7 n. 15.

49 That is, the existentiated fixed entities, i.e., quiddities.

50 From the perspective that the names denote the Essence, It can also be called the “Named” (al-musammā). See Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge 385 n. 6.
face, or “al-qahhār” would denote the dominating aspect of the Essence’s manifest face. As the Islamic tradition suggests, Allāh is a proper name (ism ʿalam). Since the name Allāh signifies God’s Essence but does not denote a particular quality of It, it is what the Sufi tradition refers to as an All-Gathering name (ism jāmīʾ), which is to say that it brings together all of the meanings of the divine names, each of which denote the Essence in a particular way.51

In keeping with a fundamental axiom of Šadrān metaphysics, “the simplicity of reality is all things [basīt al-haqqā kull shayʾ],”52 the name Allāh brings together all the standpoints which the Essence assumes with respect to the cosmos in terms of the Essence’s manifestness, since it

51 The term jāmīʾ in this context is fairly difficult to translate in a completely unambiguous manner. Following Chittick (The Elixir of the Gnostics, 110 n. 43), I have rendered it as “All-Gathering” in order to convey the sense, when qualifying the term ism and describing the function of the word Allāh, of “bringing together,” “collecting,” and “encapsulating” all of God’s divine names. For the name Allāh and its signification of the Essence, see ibid., 66-7.

52 See Rizvi, Mullā Šadrā and Metaphysics, 104-6; Šadrā, Asfār, 2:368-72. See also Rizvi, “‘Au-delà du miroir’ or Beyond Discourse and Intuition,” 269 n. 61 for some references to the Neoplatonic roots of this doctrine. Rahman, The Philosophy of Mullā Šadrā, 39, says that, in Islamic thought, this teaching was first introduced by Šadrā. It is unclear why Rahman would say this. The Islamic philosophical doctrine which states that “None proceeds from the One but the one” (lā yaṣdashuʾan l-wāḥid illā l-wāḥid) can arguably be viewed as another way of saying the same thing. For this doctrine in Islamic thought, which is inspired by yet distinct from the Neoplatonic teaching on how multiplicity emerges from the One, see Adamson, The Arabic Platonist, 137-8; Herbert Davidson, Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes: Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, and Theories of the Human Intellect (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 75 ff.; John Dillon and Llyod Gerson (ed. and trans.), Neoplatonic Philosophy: Introductory Readings (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), 83-6, 264, 266-7; Ibn Sinā (Avicenna), The Metaphysics of the Healing, trans. Michael Marmura (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 328-30 (especially p. 330: “from one, inasmuch as it is one, only one proceeds”); Mullā Rajab, “The Fundamental Principle.” For Ghazālī’s rejection of the notion that only one proceeds from the One, see Ghazālī, The Incoherence of the Philosophers, trans. Michael Marmura, 2nd ed. (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2000), 65 ff. For Ibn ʿArabī’s nuanced understanding of this doctrine, see Chittick, The Self-Disclosure of God, 18-9, 148-9, 229 (objection); 75, 137, 169 (approval). Cf. Qūnawī, Nuṣūṣ, 74. I am grateful to Llyod Gerson and Michael Marmura for sharing their insights with me concerning this teaching, and for pointing me to some relevant sources.
is the one name which denotes the entire manifest aspect of the Essence on account of its being
the first level of the Essence’s self-unfolding:

According to the great ones amongst the gnostics, the name “God” [ism allāh] is an expression of the All-Gathering Divine Level [martabat al-ullāhiyya al-jāmi‘a] for all of the tasks, standpoints, descriptions, and perfections, within which all of the names and attributes—these being nothing but the flashes of His light ⁵³ and the tasks of His Essence—are ranked. This Level marks the first instance of multiplicity to come about in existence, and ⁵⁴ is an isthmus between the Presence of Exclusive Oneness [al-ḥadra al-ahadiyya] and the loci of creation and the engendered Command [al-mażāhir al-amriyya wa-l-khalqiyya].⁵⁵ In itself, this name brings together every contrary quality and opposing name, as you have already come to know.⁵⁶

From the perspective that the Essence is everywhere, the names are to be found everywhere as well. And since the cosmos is saturated with the names which name God, all that is in the cosmos also names Him. Taken as a whole, the entire cosmos names the Essence by naming the name Allāh.

Since all things in the cosmos name Allāh, they can be said to “define” Him, since everything in the cosmos denotes an aspect of the reality of the name Allāh which itself denotes the Essence. Since the name Allāh brings together every other name, it is the least particularized of the Essence’s particularizations and is, thus, the most entitled to being called the Essence’s

⁵³ Cf. Ṣadrā, Ṭafsīr, 1:39: “The people of unveiling and witnessing cannot attain a flash of the Essence’s light except after the passing away of their identities, and the crumbling of the mountain of their existence.” The “crumbling mountain” mentioned in the passage is a clear reference to Q 7:143. As will become clear in what follows, the name Allāh is more apt to be called the Essence’s “light.”

⁵⁴ Although the printed version of the Ṭafsīr Sūrat al-fātiha does not contain the wāw, the lithograph version of the text (Ṣadrā, Majmū‘at al-ṭafsīr, 9) does. Without the conjunction, the passage is incomprehensible.

⁵⁵ It will be recalled from the preceding discussion that the loci of God’s self-disclosure, here referred to as “the loci of creation and the engendered Command,” are the fixed entities (i.e., the objects of God’s knowledge forever fixed in His “mind”) in their state of existentiation through their receiving the divine names, that is, through the particular aspect of the manifest face of the Essence turned towards them.

⁵⁶ Idem, Ṭafsīr, 1:34.
manifest face\(^{57}\) simply because it is the “the first instance of multiplicity to come about in existence.” The name Allāh, therefore, corresponds to what we normally refer to as “God,” that is, the God that is worshipped by people and to whom they will return in the next life.\(^{58}\) Since any talk of the name Allāh automatically brings us into the sphere of the ultimate end of religion, Șadrâ’s concern with Ibn ‘Arabi’s statement that the Real (al-haqq)—a term that is synonymous with the name Allāh\(^{59}\)—is defined in every definition, therefore becomes clear. In fact, Șadrâ goes on to tell us that although the name Allāh is defined in every definition, it itself cannot be exhausted in its meanings:

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\text{The concepts [mafhūmāt] of all the divine names and their existential loci [mażāhir], which are parts of the cosmos—both outwardly and inwardly—despite their multiplicity, [form] a real definition [ḥadd haqīqī] in signifying God’s name [ism allāh]. It follows that all the meanings of the realities of the cosmos are a definition of God’s name, just as all the meanings of the divine names define Him, except that it is possible for the human intellect to encompass [iḥāta] all the definitions of defined things in their particulars, as opposed to the meanings of the particulars of His definition, because the meanings cannot be confined [ghayr maḥṣūra].}\(^{60}\)
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The Essence of Exclusive Oneness, therefore, forever remains out of the reach of the cosmos by virtue of the fact that It does not turn Its face towards the cosmos. And when It does turn to the cosmos, that which emerges are the names, which are not, strictly speaking, ontological entities, but relationships. In fact, the name which denotes the manifest face of the Essence, namely Allāh, cannot be exhausted and defined in its entirety, since, as Șadrâ explains, this name brings

\(^{57}\) Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 66.

\(^{58}\) This distinction is important with respect to Șadrâ’s cosmology and soteriology, which will be dealt with in the following section of this chapter and the second section of the next chapter respectively.

\(^{59}\) See Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 49.

\(^{60}\) Șadrâ, *Tafsīr*, 1:39. Here Șadrâ follows Ibn ‘Arabi, *Fușūs*, 67, which is cited at Șadrâ, *Tafsīr*, 1:38. Cf. ibid., 1:44: “What escapes the servant is infinitely more than what is witnessed. Thus, He is unseen by everything in His perfect, simple reality, even though He is witnessed by the servant.”
together all of the names and hence all of the meanings in the cosmos.\footnote{It can be noted here that the pronoun \textit{huwa} ("He," "It") which, as Şadrā notes, is "that which is praised for His Essence in His Essence" (\textit{Tafsīr}, 1:44), denotes the Essence in an even more primary sense than does the name Allāh. However, as Şadrā observes, \textit{huwa} does not “define” the Essence in any way, and is the exclusive preserve of the spiritually elect in their invocation of God once they have transcended the particularized names of the Essence, and even the name Allāh: “Know that the relationship of the name ‘He’ to the name ‘God’ is like the relationship of being to quiddity in a contingent thing, except that the Necessary has no quiddity other than being [\textit{anniyya}]. It has already been discussed that the concept of the name ‘God’ is one of the things that has a true essential definition, but that intellects are unable to encompass [\textit{iṭṭa}] all of the meanings that enter into its essential definition. For the form of a definition is only known when the forms of the essential definitions of all the existents are known. If this is not the case, then the form of the essential definition cannot be known [\textit{wa-idh laysa fa-laysa}]. As for the name ‘He,’ It has no definition and no allusion can be made to It. So It is the most exalted station and the highest rank. For this reason, the perfect arrived ones have been singled out [\textit{yukhtāṣu}] with perpetually being [\textit{mudāwama}] in this noble invocation [cf. Rāzī, \textit{Tafsīr al-kabīr}, 1:147]. A fine point in this is that when the servant invokes God with some of His attributes, he is not drowned in knowledge of God, because when he says ‘O All-Merciful,’ he is invoking His mercy, and his nature inclines to seeking it ... [cf. Şadrā, \textit{Tafsīr}, 1:44-5]. But when he says ‘O He!,’ while knowing that He is a pure ipseity which is uncontaminated by generality, specificity, multiplicity, plurality, finitude, and definition, this [then] is the invocation which does not denote anything at all except Perfect Existence [\textit{al-aniyya al-tāmma}], which is uncontaminated by a meaning dissimilar to It. At that time, the light of Its invocation will settle in the servant’s heart. This light cannot be defiled by the darkness generated by invoking other than God. This is the perfect light and the complete unveiling (Ibid., 1:42-3).} Thus, although all things in the cosmos define God, they cannot confine Him through their act of definition, seeing as it is that they themselves are particularized definitions which “define” the whole.

4.2 – The Cosmology of Praise

4.2.1 – \textit{The Perfect Words Revisited}

After commenting upon the first part of Q 1:1 and devoting some discussion to God’s attributes of mercy and compassion,\footnote{See p. 198 ff. for Şadrā’s treatment of God’s mercy.} Şadrā turns his attention to Q 1:2, the first part of which announces the famous \textit{hamdala} formula: “Praise is for God [\textit{al-ḥamd li-lāḥ}], the Lord of the worlds.” Indeed, by the time we get to Q 1:2, we have already encountered God as He is in terms...
of His hiddenness and accessibility. According to Ṣadrā, Q 1:2 addresses another key point: the manner in which the cosmos comes about through the Supreme Reality. The notion of “praise” (ḥamd) which figures in this verse is all-important for Ṣadrā, since it is the link between the manifest face of God and the cosmos, which is traditionally defined in Islamic texts as “everything other than God” (mā sīwā-llāh).

It was mentioned last chapter that Ṣadrā’s actual tafsīr on the Fātiḥa is preceded by a fairly lengthy commentary on the istiʿadha formula, a part of which is derived from Rāzī’s tafsīr. In his treatment of the istiʿadha, Ṣadrā raises several important points concerning the nature of God’s Speech in the generation of the cosmos, but does not develop them in any significant manner. As shall be made clear in this section, these points inform his treatment of Q 1:2, particularly with reference to the function of praise.

In an important section in his discussion of the istiʿadha, Ṣadrā returns to the theme of the nature of God’s Speech which he developed in the Mafātiḥ. After stating that God’s Speech is not of the order of the genus of sounds and letters, or of the order of the genus of substances and accidents, Ṣadrā reiterates his teaching that it comes about through God’s Words by virtue of His Command. As the first existentiations from the manifest aspect of God, that is, as parts of His Speech, these Words are God’s “Perfect Words,” an important phrase which we encountered in chapter two. Since the realm of multiplicity and change emerges through the Perfect Words, their emergence into the cosmos is gradational and not spontaneous. It is worth citing Ṣadrā’s

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63 Ṣadrā also tells us towards the end of the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiha that the ḥamdala formula contains an allusion to the proof of God’s existence, and that it also alludes to the beginning of the chain of existents. See ibid., 1:170 and 174 respectively. For the ḥamdala’s relationship to the emergence of existence, see pp. 171-4.

64 See p. 89 ff. for Ṣadrā’s treatment of God’s Speech and its relation to his scriptural hermeneutics.
explanation here in the context of the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa, since it will help set the stage for his discussion of the cosmic function of “praise”:

There is a fine point [daqīqa] here: the origination of bodies—their substances, dark and other accidents, natures, and natural effects—is only gradational [tadrīj], [proceeding] bit by bit.65 [This is] similar to motion, which is the exiting [khurūj] from potentiality into actuality. As for innovated things, their existentiation and exiting [potentiality and going] into actuality only obtains in one instant: And Our Command is nothing but one, like the blink of an eye [Q 56:5]. When the Command is like this, its origination from God resembles the origination of letters which only come to exist in one instant, that is, at that very indivisible moment.66 Because of this likeness, their completion is their very beginning. That which comes about through the carrying out of His determination is called the “Word,” and is described as “Perfect.”67

4.2.2 – The Act of Praise

Like his predecessors in the Qurʾanic exegetical tradition, Ṣadrā’s commentary on Q 1:2 typically discusses the linguistic sense of ḥamd and how it relates to other cognate but structurally different terms, such as madḥ and thanā.68 He treats these discussions as more of a

65 Cf. Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 1:84-5.
66 As was seen in chapter two, Ṣadrā refers to the “alphabetical” nature of existents in explaining how the cosmos and its contents form a “text” which is penned by the wise Author. Cf. ibid., 1:135: “All of the cosmos is His writing. Indeed, the writing of authors derives from His writing which He caused to be written through the medium of the hearts of His servants. So there is nothing astonishing about an author. Rather, there is astonishment over the one who subjected him.”
67 Ibid., 1:10-1. Cf. ibid., 1:85. A well-known position of Ṣadrā’s is that quiddities, as fundamentally non-existent, are “evil.” Thus, by answering the question of how quiddities come about, Ṣadrā can explain how evil comes about: “The first of existent things to issue from Him is the world of His Command and Decree, in which there is fundamentally no evil (as has been mentioned), except, by God, what becomes hidden under the radiance of the First Light. This is the murkiness which necessitates contingent quiddities, which arise from the diminution of their existential ipseities from the divine Ipseity” (ibid., 1:16).
68 For representative discussions of the differences between ḥamd and cognate terms, see Rāzī, al-Tafsīr al-kabīr, 1:218 ff.; and, in the following order, Zamakhsharī, Kashshāf, 1:8-11; Bayḍāwī, Anwār, 1:25; ‘Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad al-Nasafī, Madārik al-tanzīl wa-ḥaqāʾiq al-taʾwīl, ed. Marwān Muḥammad Shaʿār (Beirut: Dār al-Nafāʾis, 1996), 1:32. Ṣadrā seems to follow the latter quite closely in his discussion of madḥ and thanā. 
formality, perhaps because he would like to demonstrate how different his approach will be. This is clearly evidenced early in his commentary upon Q 1:2.

Ṣadrā observes that for the people of unveiling, “‘praise’ is a kind of speech [nawf min al-kalām].” Referring to his earlier treatment of the nature of “speech,” he notes that speech is not that which is spoken by the tongue. As we saw in chapter two and above, God’s Speech arises from His Command. The Word of God is, thus, something that comes about through the divine will. Praise is a “part of speech” because it comes about through speech. Since speech is an act, praise, too, is an act:

The reality of praise, according to the verifying gnostics, is the act of making God’s attributes of perfection manifest [iẓhār al-sifāt al-kamāliyya]. This could either be through words [qawl]—as is well-known amongst the masses—or it could be in act [bi-l-fi’il], which is like God’s praise for Himself and the praise of all things for Him.

This passage is crucial for the distinctions Ṣadrā will set out to explicate for the remainder of his commentary upon Q 1:2. Praise, as an act, makes “God’s attributes of perfection manifest.” This can be done in one of two ways. Either the attributes of perfection are made manifest through words of praise, usually through the hamdala formula. Or, God’s attributes of perfection are made manifest through the act of praise, which, Ṣadrā tells us, is akin to God’s self-praise and all things praising Him. Insofar as God is the object of praise through speech, the praise that is allotted to Him in human speech may not bring about His attributes of perfection in a complete manner. This is because that which is denoted by words may actually differ from the

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69 Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 1:74.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
word itself. A human being can, for example, praise God with his tongue, but if his mind is not focused upon God at that moment, his praise of Him may be nothing more than an empty set of words. In fact, his act of praising God while something else is on his mind is akin to his praising that thing upon which his mind is fixated. But when God’s praise is completely actualized, it is the very act of praise that does complete justice to His attributes of perfection. It is, therefore, this second notion of praise which draws Ṣadrā’s interest.

Ṣadrā says that the act of praise which brings about God’s attributes of perfection is akin to God’s praising Himself. But how does God praise Himself? This is made clear once we consider the wording of Q 1:2. In this verse, the speaker is none other than God, and He declares His own praise. While human praise, when done properly, can only bring about God’s attributes of perfection by way of declaring them, God’s praise for Himself, which is pure actuality, does more than simply “declare” God’s perfection. As Ṣadrā tells us, God’s praise for Himself is nothing but His act of bringing things into existence:

God’s praise for Himself—which is the most exalted level of praise—is His existentation [jād] of every existing thing…. His existentation of every existent is “praise” in the infinitive sense, similar to the way speaking denotes beauty [of voice] through speech. The existent itself is “praise” in the sense of actualizing the infinitive.

As was said above, the cosmos only comes about by virtue of the divine Essence’s turning towards the fixed entities. But why did the Essence wish to bring about the cosmos? The Sufi tradition tells us that it is because It wanted to know Itself objectively, whereas before It had

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72 Cf. ibid.
73 Cf. ibid.
known itself in a purely subjective manner.\textsuperscript{75} And the manner in which God qua Absolute can
know Itself objectively is by bringing Itself into the realm of relativity. The act of praise is
therefore a form of existentiation primarily with respect to God’s self-knowledge. By praising
Himself, God proceeds from obscurity into apparentness, from hiddenness into manifestness. Yet
God’s praise for Himself necessitates that the objects of His knowledge become objectified, for it
is through the objects of His knowledge that He can come to know Himself. Hence, praise
pertains as much to God’s self-awareness as it does to the existentiation of His creatures, for they
are, in a sense, two sides of the same coin.

Since God, who is pure being, brings about the cosmos by praising Himself, each existent
which arises out of His self-praise is itself a mode of that act of praise. As modes of the act of
praise, or what Şadrā calls the specification (\textit{takhšiš}) of praise,\textsuperscript{76} each existent is “praisified,”
meaning that each existing thing is both a form of praise and that which praises:

\begin{quote}
In this sense, it is valid to call every existent thing “praise.” And just as
every existent is a “praise,” so too is it a praiser \([\textit{hāmid}],\) because of its
being composed of an intellectual constituent and a rational substance…. This is why this intellectual
denotation has been expressed in the Qur’ān as “speech,” \([\textit{nuṭq}]: \textit{God, the one who causes all things to speak, caused
us to speak}” \([Q \ 41:22].\) Likewise, every existent, with respect to the
totality of its arrangement, is a single praise and a single praiser \([\text{cf. Q
59:24, 62:1}].\)\textsuperscript{77}
\end{quote}

All things in existence, as specified instantiations of God’s single act of praise, cannot but praise
God because they themselves are acts of praise.\textsuperscript{78} And the act of praise, as Şadrā pointed out, is

\textsuperscript{75} For a fine discussion of this point, see Corbin, \textit{Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn ‘Arabī}, 112-7. Also, see
below.

\textsuperscript{76} Cf. Şadrā, \textit{Tafsīr}, 1:76-7 (cited at n. 85 below).

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 1:75.

\textsuperscript{78} There is a telling narrative in Ṭabarī and Tha‘labī which states that Adam’s first words were “Praise is for God,
the Lord of the worlds” (the same wording as Q 1:2). See Chodkiewicz, “The Banner of Praise,” trans. Cecilia
the most complete manner in which God’s attributes of perfection become manifest. “Praise,” therefore, is “for God” (li-llāh) because existence belongs to Him.

4.2.2 – The Muḥammadan Reality

Just as every existent is a word of God proceeding from His Perfect Words which arise out of His Command, so too is each creature an act of praise which proceeds from God’s self-praise. Yet there seems to be an ontological fissure here between God’s self-praise and the emergence of the individual instantiations of this praise (i.e., the cosmos and its contents). As Ṣadrā demonstrated, the cosmos does not come about as a result of the Command, but through the intermediary of the Perfect Words, which can be understood as so many fragmented portions of the single Command “Be!” Since in the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiха Ṣadrā wishes to connect his cosmology of the Command and the Perfect Words with his cosmology of praise, there must be something which takes the place of the Perfect Words in his cosmology of praise. To be sure, although Ṣadrā does not make the connection explicit, he provides us with the missing link in the following crucial passage. Each existent in the cosmos is both an act of praise and praise itself, Ṣadrā explains, because

the sum total [al-jamī] is like one large man with one reality, one form, and one intellect. This is the First Intellect, which is the form and reality

Society, 1997). It is clear how Ṣadrā would understand this tradition. Cf. Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 1:76-7: “All levels of existents (with respect to spirit, body, intellect, and sense perception) in every tongue (with respect to speech, act, and state) praise God, glorify Him, and magnify Him in this world and the next world in accordance with their primordial disposition [sic: fiṭra aṣlī] as required by their essential drive [al-dā‘īya al-dhātiyya]. There is no doubt that every innate act [fi‘l gharīẓī] has an essential end and original calling [ghāyat al-dhātiyya wa-bā‘īth aṣlī]. It has been established that His Essence is the Final Goal of final goals [ghāyat al-ghāyat] and the End for [all] objects of desire. For this reason, it is possible that His saying, Praise is for God [al-hamdu li-llāh] [Q 1:2] is an allusion to the Origin of existence and its End. Likewise, the [first] lām in for God [li-llāh] is [an allusion] to the Final Goal, or to the specification [of praise].” See also Ayoub, “The Prayer of Islam,” 643.
of the world, and is the complete Muḥammadan reality \([al-ḥaqīqa al-
Muḥammadiyya al-tamāmiyya]\). So the most exalted and most
tremendous level of praise is the level of the Muḥammadan Seal, which
subsists through the existence of the Seal \([al-martaba al-khatmiyya al-
Muḥammadiyya al-qā’ima bi-wujūd al-khātam]\) on account of his arrival
at the promised praiseworthy station in His saying, *Perhaps your Lord
will raise you to a praiseworthy station* \([Q\ 17:79]\). So his hallowed
essence is the utmost level of praise through which God praises Himself.
This is why he has been singled out with the banner of praise \([liwā’ al-
ḥamād]\), and was called ḥammād, ahmad, and maḥmūd….\(^{79}\)

By the time Ṣadrā wrote these words, it had become commonplace to speak of the
Muḥammadan Reality as the root and form of the world. Yet Ṣadrā’s linking the level of the
Muḥammadan Reality with what he calls the “most exalted and most tremendous level of praise”
is very telling in the context of his commentary on Q 1:2. The Muḥammadan Reality is nothing
other than the eye through which God sees Himself objectively in the cosmos. As Ibn ʿArabī
makes clear in the *Fuṣūṣ*, each Prophet is a manifestation of the Muḥammadan Reality, a reality
which, from the time God brought the cosmos into existence, has percolated throughout the
generations and become particularized in God’s many messengers and prophets sent to
humanity. Since the Muḥammadan Reality is the first thing created by God, Ibn ʿArabī also calls
it the Word of God. As was seen above, God’s Word only comes about by virtue of the
Command. Indeed, there is a clear correlation between the act of praise and God’s creative
Command \(al-amr al-takwīnī\). Just as God causes the cosmos to come about by saying “Be!,” so
too does He cause the cosmos to come about by praising Himself. And, just as the Perfect Words
are the first entities which emerge by virtue of the Command, so too does the Muḥammadan
Reality emerge by virtue of God’s act of self-praise. This parallel is all the more telling since the
Command is a form of speech which produces that which is related to speech, namely “words,”

\(^{79}\) Ibid., 1:75. Ṣadrā goes on to explain that the Muḥammadan Reality, as the utmost level of praise, does not
contradict the Prophet’s elemental existence as a part of the macrocosm since all things are stronger than a single
denotation, namely a part of the world. Cf., ibid., 1:79-80; idem, *Asrār*, 110-2.
just as the act of praise (hamd) is a form of speech which produces something which is related to it, namely that which is praised (Muḥammad). This interpretation is given further support by Ṣadrā’s own statement, discussed above, that hamd is “a form of speech.”

Although Ṣadrā states that the Perfect Words emerge through the Command, it is not incorrect to say that one single Word or Logos emerges from the Command. This is why he referred to that which emerges from the Command as “a Perfect Word.” Since a Perfect Word is nothing but a fragmentation of the Command, one Word must logically precede the others. That Ṣadrā wishes to equate the Muḥammadan Reality with the first Perfect Word is clear by the identification—which was well-established in theoretical Sufism several centuries before him—of the Muḥammadan Reality with the First Intellect.

Since the First Intellect is the first entity to come about in the cosmic order, and the act of bringing into existence is nothing other than the actualization of “praise,” Ṣadrā describes the Muḥammadan Reality as the highest level of praise through which God praises Himself. In other words, since God brings about the cosmos by praising Himself, the first entity to emerge as a result of this act of self-praise is the Muḥammadan Reality. As the highest level of God’s self-praise, the Muḥammadan reality is also the being which praises God most, which, as Ṣadrā

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80 We can also note that there has been a long-standing debate in tafsīr literature over whether or not the ḥamdala formula is a declarative sentence (al-jumla al-inshā‘īyya) or an informative sentence (al-jumla al-khabariyya). If it is the former, then it is to be understood not as “Praise is for God, the Lord of the worlds,” but as “Praised be God, the Lord of the Worlds.” Thus, understood as a declarative sentence, the ḥamdala would correspond to God’s creative Command. Although Ṣadrā is silent on this question, Ibn ‘Arabi’s position is that the ḥamdala can only be an informative statement and not an inshā‘ī one, although by inshā‘ī he understands the notion of “declaration” and not necessarily “command.” See Chodkiewicz, “The Banner of Praise,” 45.

81 For the Muḥammadan Reality as the First Intellect, see Rustom, “Dāwūd al-Qayṣāri,” 57 ff. For an important distinction between the Muḥammadan Spirit (rūḥ Muḥammadī) and the Muḥammadan Reality, see Chittick, Imaginal Worlds, ch. 2.
explains, is why the person of the Prophet—who is the physical manifestation of the Muḥammadan Reality—is given the banner of praise (liwāʾ al-ḥamd) on the final day.82

4.3 – The Perfect Man

After laying out the fundamentals of his metaphysics and cosmology, Ṣadrā then proceeds in the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiha to discuss what can be called his anthropology. Drawing on a well-known theme in Sufi literature and later Islamic philosophy, he discusses the nature of the Perfect Man (al-insān al-kāmil). His treatment of this topic does not exactly follow his discussion of the Muḥammadan Reality, since in explicating the nature of the Muḥammadan Reality he was more concerned with demonstrating the manner in which the Muḥammadan Reality, as the highest level of praise, comes about through God’s act of self-praise. At the same time, since the Perfect Man is nothing but a particular manifestation of the Muḥammadan Reality, it seems clear that Ṣadrā’s treatment of the cosmology of praise was intended to serve as a lead-in of sorts to his treatment of the Perfect Man. What is certain is that Ṣadrā’s discussion of the Perfect Man ties into an important point with respect to the Sūrat al-fātiha, namely the identification of one with the other.

In introducing the notion of the Perfect Man, Ṣadrā takes his lead from a discussion on Q 1:2 in Bayḍāwī’s Anwār, in which the author discusses the different senses of the word ‘ālam

82 Cf. Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 1:76-7: “The reality of existence (or all its individual parts) is ‘for’ God [li-llāh]. Since they are ‘for’ Him, He is also ‘for’ them. As the Prophet says, ‘Whoever is for God, God is for him.’ God’s Essence is the Final Cause of all things and the Final Goal of the perfection of every form of existence, either without an intermediary, as is the case with the Muḥammadan reality, which is the form of the world’s arrangement and its root and origin; or through the medium of His most holy effusion and His hallowed existence, as is the case with the rest of the existents. In this lies the secret of intercession and the banner of praise.” For a subtle treatment of the Muḥammadan Reality, see Frithjof Schuon, “The Spiritual Significance of the Substance of the Prophet,” in Islamic Spirituality: Foundations, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 48-63 (New York: Crossroad, 1987).
which figure in the verse.\(^{83}\) Şadrā is particularly interested in demonstrating the manner in which man shares an intimate relationship with the cosmos by virtue of his very constitution. Just as the world contains signs through which God can be known, so too does man contain signs through which God can be known. Bayḍāwī explicitly says that gazing upon the cosmos and man are equal acts, since they share the same qualities.\(^{84}\) Şadrā concedes that most people are created in a manner similar to the macrocosm, although he notes that most of them do not ever escape their animal nature and rise to the station of the intellect.\(^{85}\) But how can man contain within himself, even potentially, the cosmos? In explaining this question, Şadrā draws on his earlier discussion of God’s names and attributes:

With respect to the point of view that man contains something of all that is in the macrocosm \([al-\text{‘}ālam\text{ al-kabīr}]\), it is because his perfect configuration \([nash’atuhu\text{ al-kāmilā}]\) is the locus of all the divine names and attributes, and is the gathering place of all of the existential realities, as is known to those who assiduously pursue the signs in the horizons and within the selves.\(^{86}\) So man is a prototype for all of what is in the cosmos. From this perspective, he is a small world \([\text{‘}ālam\text{ saghīr}]\), which is why he is called the “microcosm” \([al-\text{‘}ālam\text{ al-saghīr}]\). \(^{87}\)

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83 I provide here Şadrā’s citation of Bayḍāwī’s explanation of the meaning of this term: “In Bayḍāwī’s \(tafsīr\), [he says the following]: ‘It is said that by it He means ‘people,’ for every one of them is a ‘world’ insofar as he contains, in a manner similar to the macrocosm, the substances and accidents through which the Artisan is known, just as He is known through what He created in the macrocosm. This is why gazing upon the two is equal. God says, \(And within yourselves—do you not see?\) \([Q 51:21]\)” \((Tafsīr, 1:79)\). See also Ayoub, “The Prayer of Islam,” 642-4.
84 Cf. Zamakhsharī, \(Kashšāf\), 1:53-4, who limits his treatment of the term ‘\(ālam\)’ to several basic lexical considerations.
85 Şadrā, \(Tafsīr\), 1:79.
86 An allusion to \(Q 41:53\), which is a common Qur’anic proof-text for this position: “We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves, until they know that He is the Real.” For a discussion of the complementary relationship shared between humans and the cosmos, see Chittick, \(Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul: The Pertinence of Islamic Cosmology in the Modern World\) (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007).
87 Şadrā, \(Tafsīr\), 1:79. See also Jambet, \(The Act of Being\), 412-3 for a useful discussion of the Perfect Man as the microcosm.
As was seen earlier, the cosmos is nothing but a synthesis of God’s names, which themselves come about as relationships between the manifest face of the Essence and Its respective loci of manifestation. Just as the cosmos is the theatre for the manifestation of God’s qualities, so too is man, who was, as the famous tradition tells us, created in the image of Allāh. As mentioned earlier, the name Allāh is an All-Gathering name since it brings together all of the divine names. It will also be recalled that the divine names are found throughout the cosmos, which, as Şadrā explained earlier in the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiha*, as a whole “defines” Allāh. Thus, created in the image of Allāh, man contains all of the divine names within himself. Since the divine names are found throughout the cosmos, man also contains the cosmos within himself. But Şadrā does not just have in mind any man, since, as he notes, it is man’s “perfect configuration” that is the locus of all of God’s names and attributes. The man with a “perfect configuration” can only be the Perfect Man.

We saw at the beginning of this chapter how Şadrā follows a long tradition of commentators upon the Qurʾān when he says that the Fātiḥa contains all things. It is in the context of his anthropology that he seeks to make the logical connection between the Fātiḥa and the Perfect Man:

The relationship of the *Sūrat al-fātiha* to the entire Qurʾān is like the relationship of man—who is the small world—to the world, which is the great man. And just as the Perfect Man is a succinct book [kitāb wajīz] and an abridged transcription [nuskha muntakhaba] within whom is found all that is in the All-Gathering great book [al-kitāb al-kabīr al-jāmiʿ]… so too is the Opener of the book, within which, despite its

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brevity and concision, is found the sum total [majāmiʿ] of the aims of the Qurʿān and their secrets and lights. This All-Gatheredness [jāmiʿiyā] is not for the other Qurʿānic sūras, just as none of the forms of the world’s parts have what man has with respect to [his bringing together] the form of the Divine Gatheredness [al-ṣūra al-jamʿiyyya al-ilāhiyya].

Since the Fātiḥa contains all things, and man is potentially the entire cosmos, man potentially contains the Fātiḥa within himself. As a prototype of the cosmos the Perfect Man is a microcosm. Likewise, as prototypes of the book of being, he and the Fātiḥa are “small books.” Both the Perfect Man and the Fātiḥa share in common the qualities of gatheredness: they both bring together what is contained in the “big book,” that is, the macrocosm. Since the Fātiḥa and the Perfect Man are identical, the Perfect Man contains within himself all of the Fātiḥa’s secrets concerning the Origin and the Return. This is an important point, for it is from the perspective of the Perfect Man that Ṣadrā goes on to reveal some of the Fātiḥa’s secrets, as we will demonstrate in the following chapter.

4.4 – Conclusion

A close reading of the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa’s teachings in metaphysics reveals that Mullā Ṣadrā, taking his lead from Q 1:1, was able to successfully recast his sophisticated ontology of the fundamentality of being into a theological and scripture-based framework. This allowed him to then go on to address two questions which are central to his theoretical scriptural hermeneutics (as demonstrated in chapter two of this study): (1) what is the nature of the

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91 Cf. Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 1:164: “The gnostic who verifies the truth within himself [al-ārif al-muḥaqiq] understands from this one sūra all of the sciences and universal forms of knowledge spread throughout the verses and sūras of the Qurʿān.” For an inquiry into the significance of realization or ṭaqīq in Ṣadrā, see Morris, “The Process of Realization (ṭaqīq): Mullā Ṣadrā’s Conception of the Barzakh and the Emerging Science of Spirituality,” in Eschatology, Exegesis, Hadith, 93-102.
cosmos?, and (2) what is the nature of man? By presenting his ontology in less philosophical language (and relying, instead, upon the language Ibn ʿArabī and some of his “followers”), Şadrā demonstrates how these two theoretical questions are to be answered in the context of his commentary upon the Fāṭiḥa.

The mention of ḥamd or “praise” in Q 1:2 gives Şadrā the opportunity to explicate how his doctrine of the gradation of being, when wedded with his understanding of the deployment of the Perfect Words in the cosmic order, results in a picture of the cosmos in which all things are simply modes of praise for God, beginning with God’s own act of self-praise. He seems to want to connect his cosmology of praise with his answer to his other theoretical hermeneutical question concerning the nature of man. If all things are modes of praise in the cosmos, then human beings are themselves modes of God’s praise. As a manifestation of the Muḥammadan Reality, the Perfect Man is the most perfect mode of praise for God amongst all of His creatures. Since the Perfect Man is the highest mode of praise for God and the Fāṭiḥa contains all that is in the Qurʾān, and, hence, in existence, the Perfect Man and the Fāṭiḥa share a special relationship. It is, therefore, only the Perfect Man who can interpret the Fāṭiḥa, since, in reading it, he offers a reading of himself.
Chapter 5

*Tafsîr Sûrat al-Fâtiha* III:
Theology and Soteriology

In the previous chapter we had the opportunity to evaluate the manner in which Mullâ Ṣadrâ recasts his ontology in his commentary on the Fâtiha. It was shown that he was able to weave his distinctly philosophical position concerning the fundamentality of being into the fabric of his commentary in seamless fashion. This then allowed for a proper exposition of the *Tafsîr Sûrat al-fâtiha*’s sophisticated cosmology of praise and its attendant anthropology. We will now turn our attention to two related themes addressed in the *Tafsîr Sûrat al-fâtiha*, both of which are natural corollaries of the topics covered in chapter four. By extension, the discussions introduced here are also corollaries of Ṣadrâ’s worldview when applied to the content of the Fâtiha.

In this chapter, we will highlight how Ṣadrâ attempts to shed light on two important issues in Islamic thought, namely the idea of the God created in beliefs (theology), and the problem of the all-pervasive nature of God’s mercy in the afterlife (soteriology). As will become clear, Ṣadrâ’s discussions in this *tafsîr*, particularly with respect to soteriology, have clear antecedents in his other writings. But since the *Tafsîr Sûrat al-fâtiha* serves as the locus in which he refines his earlier positions, these discussions reemerge in this text in their fully worked out form. To be sure, we still lack a comprehensive picture of Ṣadrâ’s theology (as defined here) and soteriology, and this is because his *Tafsîr Sûrat al-fâtiha* has largely been ignored. Apart from bringing to light some unknown aspects of Ṣadrâ’s teachings, this chapter will also demonstrate how influential Ibn ʿArabî has been upon these teachings.
5.1 – Beyond Idol Worship

5.1.1 – *From Outer to Inner*

We demonstrated in chapter two that Şadrā has very little patience for the more exoteric types of *tafsīr*, although he was thoroughly conversant in its methods. It is clear that Şadrā acknowledges non-mystical and non-philosophical scriptural exegesis as a legitimate enterprise, but nowhere in his corpus does he devote a lengthy discussion to account for why these approaches exist, and how they ultimately tie into the wider picture of his metaphysics. One of the major exceptions to this is to be found in the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa*. Here, Şadrā attempts to explain why there are different types of readers of the Qurʾān, the exposition of which is closely linked to his treatment of the diversity of approaches to understanding God.

Since people take different positions with respect to God, they will naturally have different understandings of His Word.¹ According to Şadrā, this fact is itself proof of the Qurʾān’s perfection. It, like God, is open to all types of readings, although not all interpretations are necessarily correct:

> Just as there are differences of opinion [*ikhtilāf wa-tafāwut*] in peoples’ positions and beliefs concerning God—i.e., between the one who declares God bodily [*mujassim*] and the one who declares Him dissimilar [*munazzih*]; the philosopher [*mutafalsif*] and denier of God’s attributes [*muʿāṭṭil*]; the one who ascribes partners to God [*mushrik*] and the one who declares Him one [*muwaḥhid*]—so too are there differences of opinion between them in understanding [the Qurʾān]. This is one of proofs of the Qurʾān’s perfection, for it is a deep ocean in whose current most people drown, and from which none are saved except a few.²


People may either remain on the surface of an ocean or plunge into it. The deeper one goes, the more likely he is to reach its bottom and resurface with its hidden treasures. Likewise, there are many positions on God, but not all of them are correct, since some of them are necessarily more superficial than others. It is only those who plumb the depths of being who can lay claim to understanding God, just as it is only those who plumb the depths of the ocean of the Qur’ān who can lay claim to understanding His Word.3

The point Ṣadrā is trying to make here would be difficult to understand without contextualizing his discussion. Before introducing the idea of the correspondence between different approaches to understanding God and the Qur’ān, he devotes some space to explaining how people have employed various linguistic tools in their attempts to comprehend the meanings of the Qur’ān’s verses. Such people (whom Ṣadrā, in keeping with the long-standing Sufī tradition, refers to as the ahl al-‘ibāra or “the people of outward expressions”)4 are used by God for a higher purpose. God has effectively set them up to learn these partial sciences (al-‘ulūm al-juz‘iyya), rooted as they are upon the Qur’ān’s linguistic forms only. These people thus act as servants (khawādim) and instruments (ālāt) for the true purpose behind the Qur’ān, namely

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3 As we saw in chapter two, there is a clear correlation between being and the Qur’ān, a point which, although lurking in the background, is made more explicit by Ṣadrā later.

4 See ibid., 1:28: “Know, O one concerned with understanding the meanings of the book!—God guide you to the right way—that here there are investigations into written expressions [lafz]. Some of these are related to the imprints of the letters and their written appearances, and forms of words and their sonal qualities, for [all of] which God put in place a people—such as scribes, reciters, and memorizers—and rendered the utmost of their endeavours to be knowledge of the proper recitation and beautiful writing of these expressions. Some of these are related to knowing the states of [their] structure, derivation, the states of inflection, and the building of words. And some of these are related to knowing the primary senses of the individual and composite terms. All of these [forms of investigation] fall short of the furthest goal and the loftiest station [al-maqsad al-aqṣā wa-l-manzil al-asnā]. A party of each of these [investigators] has reached the boundary of the end and risen therein to the utmost expanse [of these investigations into written expressions].”
man’s perfection. Human perfection, Ṣadrā assures us, is not attained through outward, formal learning. Although outward knowledge is a necessary preparatory step for most seekers of truth, it cannot in and of itself lead to that truth. Thus, the more outward forms of learning related to the Qurʾān exist as a means of facilitating a deeper understanding of the book.

In Sufi tafsīr, the term ‘ibāra is often juxtaposed with the term ishāra, a word denoting the allusion to or indication of something which, by virtue of its depth, escapes outward expression. Expressions, in other words, deal with the outer form of a deeper reality which can

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5 Ibid.
6 At ibid., 1:31-2, Ṣadrā says that the one who wants to know the Qurʾān’s meanings has to go through some very rigorous training. He must know all the tafsīrs and, like Ghazālī, be completely conversant with all the different creeds and sects (he recounts here Ghazālī’s autobiographical sketch of his quest for truth in his famous al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl—Ṣadrā was fond of this book, as is evidenced, for example, in Mafāith, 123-4). This is to be done until the bonds of blind faith (taqlīd) are broken, which will induce within the seeker of knowledge a sense of deficiency and longing for the truth until God opens up a way for him and he comes to know the secrets of the Qurʾān. Yet slightly earlier (Tafsīr, 1:29), Ṣadrā says that “the people of God” (for whom, see below) do not need to bother with accumulating a great deal of knowledge of the exoteric sciences. Judging by the amount of emphasis Ṣadrā places on exoteric learning in his other writings, it seems that the people of God must go through the same process as those advised several pages later. If this is the case, then after having “arrived,” they need not busy themselves excessively with formal learning since they now partake in a different mode of knowing—what Ṣadrā, in keeping with many of his predecessors, calls “unveiling” (kashf). Indeed, this appears to be the very manner in which Ṣadrā himself gained access to unveiling. See Rizvi, Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, 1-30.
7 The distinction appears to have first been made in an early Sufi Qur’anic exegetical maxim, often attributed to Ja’far al-Ṣādiq. See Nwyia, “Le tafsîr mystique attribué à Ga’far Ṣâdiq,” Mélanges de l’Université Saint-Joseph 43 (1967): 179-230; Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulami, Haqā’iq al-tafsîr, MS British Museum Or. 9433, fol. 2a (translated in Rustom, “Forms of Gnosis,” 329). See also Keeler, Sufi Hermeneutics, 55, 96 n. 2; Nwyia, Exégèse coranique et langage mystique, 175. Cf. Corbin, En islam iranien, 1:116; Sands, Šūfī Commentaries on the Qurʾān in Classical Islam, 35. The term ‘ibāra is not to be confused with a word we also encounter in Sufi tafsīr, namely īṭibār. This latter term has a positive connotation, and, according to Gril (who renders it as “transposition symbolique” or “symbolic transposition”), is equivalent to ishāra, although īṭibār is more explicit than ishāra in its reliance on the existence of an intimate relationship between the book, the self, and the cosmos. See Gril, “L’interprétation par transposition symbolique (īṭibār) selon Ibn Barraḡān et Ibn ʿArabī,” in Symbolisme et
only be denoted by allusions. Because of the limitations of language and discursive thought (to which language is intimately tied), we can only allude to the Qurʾān’s inner realities. Thus, if the ocean of the Qurʾān has outward expressions (i.e., its surface and waves), it also has an inner reality (i.e., its hidden pearls). In the following passage, Ṣadrā relates this basic exoteric/esoteric dichotomy in the cosmos to several cosmic realities, and explains the fundamental difference between those concerned with the outer and inner dimensions of the Qurʾān:

Expressions are like the enshrouded dead person whereas allusions are like the subtle, recognizing, knowing [faculty] which is man’s reality. Expressions come from the World of the Visible [ʾālam al-shahāda], whereas allusions come from the World of the Unseen [ʾālam al-ghayb]. Expressions are the shadows of the unseen, just as man’s individuation [tashakhkhūṣ] is the shadow of his reality.

As for the people of outward expressions and writing [ahl al-ʿibāra wa-l-kitāba], they have wasted their lives away in acquiring words and foundations, and their intellects have drowned in perceiving exposition and meanings. As for the people of the Qurʾān and the Word [ahl al-qurʾān wa-l-kalām]—and they are the people of God [ahl allāh] who have been singled out for the divine love, lordly attraction, and prophetic proximity—God has facilitated the way for them and accepted from them few works for the journey. That is because of the purity of their intentions and their hearts.

Since God’s being encompasses outward and inward realities, like the readers of the Qurʾān, it will necessarily be comprised of people who swim on the surface of its ocean and those who plunge into its depths. Those who plunge into its depths are the “people of God,” just as those who plunge into the Qurʾān’s depths are the “people of the Qurʾān.” As we have seen earlier in this study, modes of being (anḥāʾ al-wujūd) are darker, murkier, denser, and more shadow-like (i.e., manifest more essence) the lower they stand on the scale of being. The higher they stand on its scale, the less concretized they are, which is to say the less defined they become.

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by their own outward forms or “expressions.” As modes of being, the more individuated they are, the less shadow-like their natures, meaning they manifest more being, more depth, more “allusion,” and less “expression.”

At the beginning of chapter four we saw that Şadrā refers to the Qurʾān as being one of the rays of God’s light. Elsewhere in the Tafsīr Sūrat al- modalità he refers to it as “one of the flashes of His Essence.” 9 Since God’s light pervades the cosmos, all of the latter’s contents, in one form or another, reveal the light of God’s being. However, some things reveal this light more clearly than others. This is to say that some things can either convey the nature of this light by their very existence, or they can play a subtler role by way of alluding to this principal Light of which all things are merely rays. 10 Since being and the Qurʾān are two sides of the same coin, the most outward forms of knowledge of the Qurʾān, like the most outward forms of knowledge of God, are less real and furthest from that form of knowledge only accessible to the people of the Qurʾān.

5.1.2 – Idols of Belief

Approaches to the Qurʾān which are confined to the surface necessarily limit the Qurʾān’s treasures from emerging. As has been seen throughout the history of Islamic thought, such a tendency is often an extension of, and/or something that informs, a more exoteric approach to scripture. It would be an unhelpful exercise on our part if we were to attempt to determine whether one’s reading of scripture colours one’s understanding of reality, or whether one’s

9 Şadrā, Tafsīr, 1:30. Cf. ibid., 1:36.

understanding of reality informs one’s reading of scripture. This is because these approaches are not mutually exclusive, as they both seem to inform one another.

In Mullà Šadrà’s case such a question becomes all the less important, since he sees the Qur‘ān as the prototype of being (from one perspective). It is perhaps for this reason that in his *tafsîrs*, Šadrà will often not draw as explicit a link between approaches to scripture and approaches to God. Thus, when he discusses the controversial question of the nature of idols of belief in the context of the *Tafsîr Sûrat al-fâtiha*, he takes it for granted that his discussion is as much concerned with understanding the verses of the Qur‘ān as it is with understanding the nature of God.

In texts of Islamic thought, particularly Sufi writings, it was commonplace to say that concern with anything other than God was tantamount to idolatry. One of the first authors to make an explicit connection between self-absorption and idolatry was the early master of moral psychology, al-Ḥârith al-Muḥâsîbi (d. 243/857), who spent a good deal of time demonstrating the manner in which *riyā* (religious ostentation) acts as a hidden form of idolatry (*al-shirk al-khaﬁ*). This hidden form of idolatry can manifest itself in a variety of forms. This explains why in Sufi literature we come across many synonyms for the hidden idolater, amongst which are

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such pejorative titles as “form-worshipper” (ṣūrat-parast)\textsuperscript{12} and “habit worshipper” (‘ādat-parast).\textsuperscript{13}

If preoccupation with the idols of the self is a form of idolatry, then surely the intellectual constructs of God conjured up by the self can also be called “idols.” Although this idea lurks in the background of numerous Sufi texts, the first explicit, theoretical discussion of the notion of “idols of belief” is to be found in the work of Ibn ʿArabī, who spoke of the “God of one’s belief” (al-ilāh al-muṭaqad) and “the God created in faiths” (al-ilāh al-makhlūq fī-l-ʿaqāʾid).\textsuperscript{14} As he famously (and controversially) puts it, “Neither [the worshipper’s] heart nor [his] eye ever witness anything except the form of his belief concerning God”;\textsuperscript{15} and “there are none but idol worshippers.”\textsuperscript{16} After Ibn ʿArabī, a number of authors took up this idea, particularly the great Persian Sufi poet, Maḥmūd Shabistārī (d. 740/1339).\textsuperscript{17}


\begin{quote}
Go, strive towards meaning, O form-worshipper! \textit{[raw bi-maʿnā kūsh ay ṣūrat-parast]}
For meaning is the wing of form’s body \textit{[zānki maʿnā bar tan-i ṣūrat par ast]}.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{13} ʿAyn al-Quḍāt, \textit{Tamhīdāt}, 98: “O friend! If you want the secrets of the unseen to be manifested to you, then desist from habit-worship, for habit-worship is idol worship \textit{[but-parast]}.”

\textsuperscript{14} See Chittick, \textit{Imaginal Worlds}, 162-5; idem, \textit{The Sufi Path of Knowledge}, 335-44; Corbin, \textit{Creative Imagination in the Šūfism of Ibn ʿArabī}, 124, 195-200.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibn ʿArabī, \textit{Fuṣūṣ}, 121.

\textsuperscript{16} Cited in Chittick, \textit{Imaginal Worlds}, 150.

By the time we get to Mullā Ṣadrā, references to the “God created in faiths” or “idols of belief” would have immediately been recognizable as having derived from Ibn ‘Arabī and his school. This was the case with a number of important terms, such as the “Oneness of Being” (waḥdat al-wujūd), the “Perfect Man” (al-insān al-kāmil), and the “Five Divine Presences” (al-ḥaḍarāt al-ilāhiyya al-khams). Ṣadrā’s writings are replete with discussions of these terms. But when it comes to the notion of idols of belief, the only extensive discussion he devotes to it is to be found in the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa. The section in this tafsīr where Ṣadrā takes up the question occurs in the context of his treatment of Q 1:1.

After explaining the nature of the divine names and how they relate to the All-Gathering Name Allāh, Ṣadrā ventures into a fairly detailed excursus to explain the fact that most people do not worship God as He should be worshiped. Confined as they are to their own methods and intellectual constructs (like the people of expressions’ approaches to the Qurʾān), they fashion and carve God in their own image, and according to their own beliefs. Having crafted an image of the deity with their own interpretive tools, He then becomes fit for their worship:

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18 For the Oneness of Being in Ṣadrā, see idem, Asfār, 1:53, 433; 2:291, 300, 335, 339; 4:183; 6:18, 24, 335, 348; idem, al-Shawāhid al-rubābiyya, ed. Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī ( Mashhad: Chāpkhānah-yi Dānishgāh-i Mashhad, 1346 Sh/1967), 51. See also Nasr, “Mullā Ṣadrā and the Doctrine of the Unity of Being.” For the Perfect Man in Ṣadrā, see idem, Asfār, 6:296; 7:7, 181-3, 188-91; 8:140; 9:61, 284. I have not as of yet come across the Arabic term for the Five Divine Presences (likely to have been coined by Qūnawī) in Ṣadrā’s writings, although his cosmology and anthropology clearly assume the same (or a similar) cosmic picture. For a good summary of the development of the doctrine of the Five Divine Presences in Islamic thought, see Chittick, “The Five Divine Presences: From al-Qūnawī to al-Qāṣṣarī,” Muslim World 72 (1982): 107-28. See also Ṣadrā, Elixir, 53, 110 n. 43. For a thorough index of books, names of figures and schools, technical terms, and scriptural references in Ṣadrā’s Asfār, see Sayyid Muḥsin Miṭ and Muḥammad Ja’far ‘Alī (ed.), Fihrist-i mawdū‘i-yi Kitāb al-Ḥikma al-muta‘aliyya fi-l-asfār al-arba‘a (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Ḥikmat, 1374 Sh/1995). A useful—but by no means exhaustive—glossary of technical terms in Ṣadrā’s writings can be found in Samih Dughaym (ed.), Mawsū‘at muṣṭalaḥāt Ṣadr al-Dīn Shirāzī (Beirut: Maktabat Lubnān, 2004).
Most people do not worship God insofar as He is God. They merely worship the objects of their beliefs in accordance with what they have formed for themselves as objects of worship. In reality, their gods are those imaginary idols which they form [yatašawwara] and carve [yanhitüna] with the potency of their intellectual or imaginary beliefs.\(^{19}\)

Like Ibn ʿArabī, Ṣadrā closely follows the Qurʾān’s wording when discussing the idea of “carving” an idol.\(^{20}\) Whereas the people of Abraham carved an idol out of physical matter, those who worship the objects of their beliefs carve idols out of the “stuff” of their soul. As Ṣadrā puts it, these objects of belief are “formed and sculpted” through man’s use of his imagination and intellect, or what he also refers to as the “hands” of man’s intellect.\(^{21}\)

Idolatry, therefore, is not only worship of a physical image or even preoccupation with other than God. It is also to conceive of God in accordance with one’s own selfish whims and desires. Since a mental image of God cannot be God as such, it can only be an object of one’s belief, created by the self for the self. Because this is the case, there is no difference between those who worship physical idols and those who worship the God of their beliefs:

A believer amongst the veiled ones—those who create the divinity in the forms of the object of their belief and nothing else—only worships a god on account of what he creates within himself and forms [tašawwara] using his imagination. In reality, his god is created for himself and sculpted with the hand of his potent free-disposal. So there is no difference between those idols which are taken as gods [externally] and his god, owing to the fact that they are all created for the self, whether they be external or internal to it.\(^{22}\)

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\(^{19}\) Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, 1:40.

\(^{20}\) See Q 37:95, where Abraham says to his people, “Do you worship what you carve [tanhitüna]?” According to Chittick (*Imaginal Worlds*, 185 n. 7), Ibn ʿArabī clearly has this verse in mind when he says that “Every believer has a Lord in his heart that he has brought into existence, so he believes in Him.... They worship nothing but what they themselves have carved” (cited in ibid., 151).


\(^{22}\) See ibid., 1:40.
Why do people create idols? Șadrā, again following Ibn ʿArabī, offers an explanation. He says that an idol is taken as an object of worship simply because of the belief on the part of the one worshipping the idol that it is divine, and therefore worthy of worship:

External idols are also only worshipped because of their worshipper’s belief in their divinity. The mental forms are the objects of their worship essentially, and the external forms are their objects of worship accidentally. Thus, the objects of worship of every idol-worshipper are nothing but the forms of his beliefs and the caprices [ahwāʾ] of his soul, as has been alluded to in His saying, Have you seen the one who takes his caprice for his god? [Q 65:23]. Just as worshippers of bodily idols worship what their hands have created, so too do those who have partial beliefs concerning God worship what the hands of their intellects have gathered.23

Șadrā acknowledges in this passage that it is essentially “caprice” which incites one to fashion an idol. This caprice forms into a mental image first, and then, in the case of a physical idol, is made into a physical image. Whether the image remains physical or mental, the God created by the self for the self is only worshipped because the self considers it to be divine. Thus, what the self ultimately worships is nothing but its own whims and desires, since an idol—whether physical or mental—is nothing but a projection of the self. Since one’s caprice is a projection of the content of the self, when one forms an idol one is really only worshipping oneself. All beliefs in which God is delimited by the self are nothing but constructions of the self. This explains why one believes in the divinity of the idol which he himself creates: the image is “divine” because it is proximate to the self, which is to say that it is like the self.

From another perspective, it is God’s self-disclosures (tajalliyāt) which determine a servant’s object of worship. Since some of the divine names predominate over others in each individual, it is these divine names that become the servant’s object of worship. In other words, by delimiting God with his intellectual and imaginal faculties, the servant necessarily brings

23 Ibid., 1:40-1. Cf. ibid., 1:6, 30.
within his field of worship certain qualities of the divinity to the exclusion of others. Most people, therefore, worship God from behind the veil of some of His self-disclosures. But because God’s self-disclosures are perpetually different, perspectives on Him, that is, idolized delimitations of His true nature, will naturally be different as well. Depending on which self-disclosure veils the servant, he will deny God in His other self-disclosures because he is unable to recognize anything as divine other than the idol that he has created for himself. This, according to Ṣadrā, is the height of displaying poor etiquette (adab) towards God.24

5.1.3 – The Religion of the Perfect Man

If people are idol worshippers who must necessarily limit God according to their own specifications, thereby allowing some of God’s self-disclosures to be operative within them rather than others, what does this mean with respect to their fate in the afterlife? Are those who deny God in all of His self-disclosures condemned “forever” for their idolatry? In one passage, Ṣadrā juxtaposes God’s true servants (on whom, see below) with those who are servants of their own opinions and caprices. He implies here that the latter are unable to love and seek God by virtue of their self-imposed limitations on knowing God’s true nature. But then he says that by virtue of God’s mercy and compassion, those who do not worship Him as He truly should be worshipped are nevertheless upon a path of guidance facilitated by God:

The Real, out of the perfection of His compassion [ra'fā] and mercy [raḥma] towards His servants, the all-encompassing nature [shumūl] of His benevolence ['ātifā], the unfolding [inbisāt] of the light of His being towards the contingent things, and the self-disclosure [tajallī] of the [manifest] face of His Essence to the existent things, made for each of them a likeness [mithāl] which they could imitate, a refuge [mathāba]

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24 Cf. ibid., 1:42: “From this veiling, differences amongst people in matters of belief come about. Thus, some of them anathematize others and some curse others, while every one of them affirms for the Real what the other denies, thinking that what they opine and believe is the highest form of exaltation of God! But they err and display bad etiquette towards God while they think that they have attained the highest rank in knowledge and etiquette!”
towards which they could strive, a path which they could traverse, a direction towards which they could aspire, a qibla with which they would be satisfied, and a law in accordance with which they could act. He says, *For everyone there is a direction to turn, so vie for the good. Wherever you are, God will bring you all together* [Q 2:148]; *For each of you We have made a law and a way* [Q 5:48]; *Each party rejoicing in what is with them* [Q 30:32].

As we will see later on in this chapter, Ṣadrā’s notion of the path specific to each individual mentioned in this passage has the utmost importance for his soteriology. For our purposes at the present moment, we can note that this passage also provides us with an added nuance to Ṣadrā’s stance on how people see their created idols as “divine.” From one perspective, it is because of their caprice that people fashion an idol of God. But from another perspective, it is because God allows Himself to be delimited so that they can serve Him in a form suitable to their natures.

Ṣadrā also acknowledges the possibility of there being a group of individuals who do not confine God to their own intellectual and imaginary constructs, and who thus follow God as He should be followed. The religious positions taken by most people are always in accordance with their caprices, or what they love. But the position of the people of God is in accordance with their object of love, namely God. Since God is their only object of love, they can be completely sincere towards Him in their “religion.” From this perspective, their religion is God, and they

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25 This is an allusion to Q 2:144.

26 Ṣadrā, *Tafsir*, 1:30. Ibn ʿArabī is more explicit on this point: “If God were to take people to account for error, He would take every possessor of a belief to account. Every believer has delimited his Lord with his reason and consideration and has thereby restricted Him. But nothing is worthy of God except nondelimitation.... [S]o He delimits, but He does not become delimited. Nevertheless, God pardons everyone” (cited in Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 153).

27 His position in this regard is similar to Ibn ʿArabī. See Ṣadrā, *Tafsir*, 1:151-5.

28 Ibid., 1:30.

29 An allusion to Q 3:39, which Ṣadrā himself makes at *Tafsir*, 1:30.
are effectively “the servants of the All-Merciful” (ibād al-raḥmān) mentioned in Q 25:63.30

Significantly, the only time in the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa Ṣadrā makes an explicit personal claim occurs in the context of his treatment of the religion of the people of God. At a climactic moment in the text, he interjects the following couplet:

Those who love out of caprice take diverse positions.
As for me, I have a single position, and dwell in it alone.31

Himself one of the “people of God” or “servants of the All-Merciful,” Ṣadrā is able to lay claim to a special position (madhhab) when it comes to conceptualizing and worshipping the divinity. Unlike people who delimit God according to their own needs, Ṣadrā’s position allows him to worship God in all of His multiplicity, thereby always showing proper etiquette to God because of his perpetual affirmation of Him in all of His self-disclosures.32 This quality, Ṣadrā reminds us, only belongs to the Perfect Man. Since the Perfect Man does not deny God in any of His self-disclosures, He is able to witness Him in everything, and recognize Him in every form:

As for the Perfect Man, he knows the Real in every object of witnessing mashāhid and religious rite mashā’ir. He worships Him in every homestead mawṭin and locus of manifestation, so he is the servant of God ’abd allāh who worships Him in all of His names and attributes. On account of this, the most perfect of human individuals—Muḥammad, God bless him and his family—was given this name. Just as the divine name Allāh brings together all the names—which are unified because of the Exclusive Unity of All-Gatheredness—so too does its path bring together the paths of all the names, even if each of these paths are specified by a name which sustains its locus, and each locus is worshipped and its straight path particular to it is traversed from that perspective.33

The path of the Perfect Man is the path of the name Allāh, which naturally entails that those traversing it not delimit God in any fashion. The path of the name Allāh brings together all the

30 Ibid.
31 Madḥāhib shattā li-l-muḥibbīn fī-l-hawā / wa-lī madhhab fard a’īshu bihi wahdī (ibid.).
32 Ibid., 1:42.
33 Ibid., 1:41-2.
other names. Since each divine name is a delimitation of the Essence, it manifests a delimited
and therefore particularized form of God’s true nature. Particularized forms of God result in idols
and particular forms of worship. Since the name Allâh contains all the other names, its path
contains all the other particularized paths to God. The one on the path of the name Allâh has thus
transcended both physical and what Corbin would call “metaphysical” idolatry.\(^3^4\) By virtue of
having smashed “the idols of the age of ignorance,”\(^3^5\) such an individual is able to behold that
formless form which contains all forms.\(^3^6\)

Free of human limitations and having transcended divinizing only particular self-
disclosures of God to the exclusion of His other self-disclosures, the gnostic is able to perceive
God in any of the forms in which He discloses Himself. When he looks at the world, which is
created upon the form of God’s beauty, he cannot help but see Him. The gnostic thus gazes upon

\(^3^4\) That is, idolâtrie métaphysique. For Corbin’s most extensive treatment of this idea, see Corbin, *Le paradoxe du
monothéisme* (Paris: L’Herne, 1981), 7-17. Thanks go to Tom Cheetham for supplying the reference. See also
Corbin, *En islam iranien*, 1:289, where he uses this phrase to render the Arabic term *tashbîh*.

\(^3^5\) I take this phrase from a title of one of Şadrâ’s treatises on the spiritual life in which he criticizes false Sufis. See
English translation of the book has recently been published: *Breaking the Idols of Ignorance: Admonition of the Soi-

\(^3^6\) Since the Perfect Man can only perceive the formless with the heart, that is, his instrument of spiritual
“cognition,” the heart itself must be formless. Only by being nothing can one contain everything. The heart, literally
no-thing because it acts as a perfect mirror in which God sees His own formless form, is thus not possessed of any
forms and is itself formless. For a discussion of this phenomenon in Sufism, see Rustom, “The Metaphysics of the
Jambet, *The Act of Being*, 491 n. 29. For a preliminary attempt at understanding Şadrâ’s treatment of the heart, see
84. See also the insightful points in Corbin, *En islam iranien*, 1:234. One of the key aspects of Şadrâ’s teaching on
the heart is its close connection to self-knowledge. Although he does not discuss this point in the *Tafsîr Sûrat al-
fâtiha*, he devotes some attention to it in a few of his other works. In his *Sih aşl* in particular, he makes this point
explicitly. See pp. 103-4 n. 95.
God within the multiple refractions of forms in the mirror of the cosmos, beholding His beauty in all things, in every object of worship, and through every form of belief. He is thus in love with the cosmos, since it is nothing other than his Beloved:

It has been reported that God is beautiful and He loves beauty. He is the artisan of the cosmos and brings it into existence in His form [shākila], as He says, [Say:] “everyone acts according to their form” [Q 17:84].... So the entire cosmos is of the utmost beauty because it is a mirror for the Real. This is why the knowers become enraptured by it and the verifiers realize love for it. For He is the object of gaze in every eye, the beloved in every form of love, the object of worship in every act of worship, and the Final Goal in both the unseen and the seen. The entire cosmos prays to Him, praises Him, and glorifies Him.37

This passage draws an important link with Şadrā’s cosmology of praise outlined in the previous chapter. The Perfect Man is able to see the manner in which all things in the cosmos are modes of praise for God, and by virtue of this fact, nothing appears to him as ugly. Rather, as the passage states, the cosmos is “of the utmost beauty.” As the mirror in which the divine Beloved’s face is reflected in all of its unitary multiplicity, the Perfect Man also understands the teleological purpose of the cosmos: not only is it the arena in which the One manifests Itself in Its multiplicity. It also signals, by its very nature, that all of its contents—which are so many modes of praise—must return to the Object of all praise and glorification.38 The minute we speak

37 Şadrā, Tafsīr, 1:153-4. This passage is a reworking of Ibn ‘Arabī, Futūḥāt, 3:449 (translated in Chittick, The Self-Disclosure of God, 28). For a complete translation of the passage, a part of which I have followed here, see Ibn ‘Arabī, “Towards God’s Signs.” Also, see p. 217 ff. for more examples of Şadrā’s appropriation of texts from the Futūḥāt and their incorporation into the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiha, as well as a discussion of this phenomenon. For replies to Ibn ‘Arabī’s position on the fact that God is the sole object of worship in the cosmos, see Knysh, Ibn ‘Arabī in the Later Islamic Tradition, 342 n. 112. For Ibn ‘Arabī’s treatment of this idea, see Fuṣūs, 68-74. See also Chittick, Imaginal Worlds, ch. 9; idem, The Sufi Path of Knowledge, 356-81; idem, The Self-Disclosure of God, 86-7; Corbin, Creative Imagination, 184 ff.

38 We can also say that the Perfect Man glorifies God through every act of glorification to be found in the cosmos, since the Perfect Man himself is a transcription (nuskha) of the cosmos. Thus, the very act of glorification becomes
of a return of all modes of praise to their Object of praise, we are naturally faced with a much wider problem: if all things come from the One and return to the One, then do they not all, in their being reabsorbed back into the One, end in a state similar to their origin? In order to understand how Mullâ Šadrâ approaches this question, we must now turn our attention to his soteriology.

5.2 – The Triumph of Mercy

In Islamic thought, the basic principle that all human beings will return to God after their bodily deaths has, for the most part, been a given. Yet according to both the Qur‘ân and hadîth, “inscribed” upon the Perfect Man’s being, and he therefore glorifies God by his very nature in every one of his modes. Cf. Ibn ‘Arabî, Futûhât, 3:77. See also pp. 174-80.

We know, for example, of views during the formative period of Islamic thought amongst the Qadirites and Jahmites which maintained that Heaven and Hell would eventually cease to exist, and that only God would remain. See Binyamin Abrahamov, “The Creation and Duration of Paradise and Hell in Islamic Theology,” Der Islam 79 (2002): 87-102 (particularly p. 99); Christian Lange, Justice, Punishment, and the Medieval Muslim Imagination (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 117-8. It is interesting to note that when we consider the charges of heresy laid against such figures as Ibn al-Rîwândî (d. ca. 245/860 or 298/912) or Abû Bakr al-Râzî (d. 313/925 or ca. 323/935), they were never accused of not believing in the Return to God, even if, in the case of Râzî, he upheld a doctrine of reincarnation. See Sarah Stroumsa, Freethinkers of Medieval Islam: Ibn al-Rîwândî, Abû Bakr al-Râzî, and their Impact on Islamic Thought (Leiden: Brill, 1999), chs. 2-3 in particular. See also Fakhry, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 95-109 who, in addition to Ibn al-Rîwândî and Râzî, lists Omar Khayyâm amongst the so-called “freethinkers of Islam,” likely following Fitzgerald’s romanticized depiction of Khayyâm. A much more nuanced approach to Khayyâm’s thought can be found in Mehdi Aminrazavi, *The Wine of Wisdom: The Life, Poetry and Philosophy of Omar Khayyam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005). Taking her lead from authors such as Fakhry, Stroumsa sees no problem in employing the term “freethinker” to refer to the intellectual activity of the likes of Ibn al-Rîwândî and Râzî, and even attempts to justify this appellation in the context of medieval Islam (see Stroumsa, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam*, 8-10). Stroumsa’s justification for her usage of the term ultimately hinges back on the idea that her freethinkers in Islam thought outside of the confines of revelation since they rejected the Qur‘ân. But owing to the particular late European usage of this term and its original meaning as connoting those who think “freely” or “independently” of the Church (that is, an organized governing religious body), applying the term “freethinker” to individuals belonging to a completely different cultural and religious milieu in which there was no
the return to God is not the same for all individuals. The fortunate are promised Paradise and the unfortunate are promised Hell. This basic picture of Islam’s anthropology of the next life, however, has posed some serious difficulties for a number of leading Muslim thinkers. By the second/eighth century we already encounter important debates in Islamic theology concerning the question of not only the cessation of Hell as a place of torment, but also whether or not Hell itself was/is eternal.⁴⁰

Despite the fact that both Sunnī and Shi‘ī teachings erred on the side of caution and maintained the eternal nature of Hell and its torments,⁴¹ in later Islamic thought we find several coherent arguments, all based upon statements in the Qur‘ān and hadīth, amongst thinkers of

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⁴¹ For a presentation of the eternal nature of chastisement in Hell, see Nerina Rustomji, The Garden and the Fire: Heaven and Hell in Islamic Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 79-83. Although Rustomji’s concern with portrayals of Islam’s eschatological landscape is confined to its re-presentations in medieval Islamic material culture, discussions of Hell’s pleasurable nature (for which, see below) may have also had some type of influence upon Islamic material culture, if not directly, then at least indirectly (i.e., metaphysically). After all, some of Islam’s most basic geometric patterns reflect the unity of all things and, by extension, the return of all multiplicity to this principal state of unity. For the logic behind Islamic patterns, see Keith Critchlow, Islamic Patterns: An Analytical and Cosmological Approach (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976). With respect to Islamic architecture, one of the first places to look for reverberations of Sufi metaphysical doctrines, particularly because of the amount of stress the work places upon Ibn ‘Arabi’s teachings (which are seminal for what is to follow in this chapter), is Samer Akkach, Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam: An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).
very different intellectual persuasions in favour of the cessation of punishment in Hell and the ultimate salvation of all human beings. Amongst the most influential authors who upheld such positions, we can mention Ibn ʿArabī, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), and the latter’s student, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350). We are also told that the first Ottoman Shaykh al-Islam and important interpreter of Qūnawī, Muḥammad b. Ḥamza al-Fanārī (d. 834/1431), believed that punishment in Hell would eventually come to an end.45

Ibn ʿArabī seems to have been the most unequivocal on the question of the cessation of punishment in Hell, even arguing that Hell’s flames will become a source of pleasure for its inhabitants, a position which has aptly been described as “sweet torment”46 and “infernal felicity.”47 Although Ibn ʿArabī’s argument in this regard is quite unique, rooted as it is in his metaphysics, he does not seem to have been the first Islamic thinker to uphold the view that Hell would become a place of comfort. According to the crypto-Ismāʿīlī Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153), the famous adīb al-Jāḥiz (d. 256/868) believed that since Hell’s inhabitants will not be chastised in the Fire eternally, they will eventually end up becoming a part of the Fire’s constitution.48

By the time we get to Mullā Ṣadrā, therefore, the problem of the cessation of punishment in Hell and the possibility of mercy for all had already been almost a millennium in the making

42 See below.
43 See Mohammad Hassan Khalil, “Muslim Scholarly Discussions on Salvation and the Fate of ‘Others’” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2007), ch. 4.
44 Ibid.
46 See Chittick, Ibn ʿArabi, ch. 9.
48 See Shahristānī, Milal, 60. My thanks go to Mohammad Hassan Khalil for drawing my attention to this passage. See also Khalil, “Muslim Scholarly Discussions on Salvation and the Fate of ‘Others’,” 99-100.
in texts of Islamic thought. But what distinguishes Ṣadrā’s approach to the question of the eternity of Hell from the likes of an Ibn Taymiyya is that Ṣadrā, like Ibn ‘Arabī before him, roots his treatment of the problem as dealt with in scripture within the wider framework of his ontology. As we saw last chapter, a principle of Ṣadrian metaphysics is that being is one and, at the same time, multi-level. Thus, not only does the oneness of being pervade the cosmos, but, a fortiori, all of the multiplicity in the cosmos must eventually return to its original state of oneness.

Since scripture and being for Ṣadrā are one and the same reality, it is all the more fitting that scripture would also detail the ultimate return of all things to God. Thus, since all things come from the One, who is the Source of all beauty and goodness, so too must they return to the One, enveloped by Its goodness and beauty. This means that Hell, which is a place of torment, anguish, suffering, and distance from the One, must be finite; for all creatures, regardless of their actions, must return to their original home. Indeed, such a position seems to be the logical outcome of the wedding of religious eschatological teachings with an ontology that posits absolute oneness as the basis for the multiplicity in the cosmos. This is why we find similar discussions amongst a number of medieval Christian scriptural exegetes. The ancient Christian doctrine of apokatastasis or “restoration” was upheld by such important figures as St. Clement of Alexandria (d. 216), Origen (d. 254), Gregory of Nyssa (d. ca. 395), and Scottus Eriugena (d. ca. 877).49 We also find similar discussions in Jewish mysticism. As Moshe Idel notes, the famous

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Spanish mystic and disputed author of the Zohar, Moses de Leon (d. 1305 CE), is known to have believed in the finite nature of punishment in Hell. He argues that since the soul is a “part” of God, it is impossible for God to punish Himself eternally.\textsuperscript{50}

Despite the fact that we have a relatively comprehensive picture of Mullâ Šadrâ’s eschatology, especially with respect to the “bodily” nature of the Return,\textsuperscript{51} how his doctrine of “salvation” fits into his eschatology has received very little attention. This is quite surprising, owing to the fact that, as will be seen below, this is a question which occupied Šadrâ from early on in his career. The first treatment of Šadrâ’s soteriology is to be found in Seyyed Hossein Nasr’s seminal English article on Šadrâ written over four decades ago.\textsuperscript{52} In that article, Nasr notes that Šadrâ upholds the view that Hell’s punishments will eventually come to an end, and that all human beings will return to God. A decade later, in his study of Šadrâ’s \textit{Zād al-musāfir},

\textsuperscript{50} See \textit{Encyclopaedia Judaica\textsuperscript{2}}, s.v. “Kabbalah” (by Moshe Idel). Idel goes on to note that this position is implied in the Zohar.


\textsuperscript{52} Nasr, “Šadr al-Dīn Shîrâzî,” 292.
the late scholar of Islamic philosophy, Jalāl al-Dīn Āshṭīyānī, also noted the presence of this idea in Ṣadrā’s writings. The appearance in 1981 of James Morris’ English translation of one of Ṣadrā’s later works may have complicated matters, since in that text, Ṣadrā seems to take a different stance on the question.

The most extensive discussion we have to date on Ṣadrā’s soteriology can be found in Khwājāwī’s *Lawāmi‘ al-ʿārifīn*. Khwājāwī notes that Ṣadrā does not treat the problem specifically; rather, he states the different views on the issue and is aware of the position of the school of Ibn ʿArabī. Khwājāwī then goes on to cite several passages, all in Persian translation, of Ṣadrā’s treatment of the problem. In all cases cited, Ṣadrā is portrayed as siding with the position that punishment in Hell is eternal for those who did not believe in God’s unity. In the process, however, Khwājāwī overlooks a number of important passages within Ṣadrā’s oeuvre which clearly complicate the author’s cut-and-dry presentation of the problem. Lurking in the background of Khwājāwī’s discussion is a failure to distinguish between two important issues, namely the problem of the eternality of Hell and the question of the ultimate felicity of all humans. As we will see in the following section, this distinction lies at the heart of Ṣadrā’s soteriology.

5.2.1 – *From the Mabda‘ to the Asfār*

One of the first instances in which Ṣadrā addresses the question of the problem of Hell’s eternity is to be found in his *al-Mabda‘ wa-l-ma‘ād*. This text is Ṣadrā’s first full-length book,

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54 See pp. 234-5.
56 Cf. Bīdārfar, “Taqdīm,” 1:46-50, which closely follows Khwājāwī. As will be seen below, Ṣadrā’s most comprehensive treatment of this problem is to be found in his *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa*, which, ironically, was edited by Khwājāwī.
and was completed in 1015/1606,\textsuperscript{57} which places its composition in the period of his retreat in Kahak. Although this is Šadrā’s earliest book, it already represents his mature thinking, and is written, like every other work which follows this one, from the perspective of \textit{aṣālat al-wujūd}. Indeed, the date of its completion coincides with the commencement of Šadrā’s magnum opus (the \textit{Asfār}), a project which he did not complete until 1037/1628.\textsuperscript{58}

In the context of his discussion of common mistakes amongst people when it comes to interpreting eschatological realities, Šadrā introduces another mistaken belief to which most people adhere, namely the fact that (a) grave sinners (\textit{ahl al-kabār}) will reside in Hell for eternity (\textit{khulūd}), and (b) God’s mercy will never reach them. In refuting this belief, Šadrā calls attention to the fact that such a perspective both engenders despair amongst those aspiring towards God and contradicts the primary purpose of revelation, which is to facilitate for human beings a path to salvation:

They do not know that God’s mercy is all-encompassing, that His forgiveness takes precedence, and [that] the shortcoming is from us. They do not realize that this opinion is one of the things on account of which man despairs of God’s mercy and thus diminishes in [both his] desire for the pleasures of the Garden and in [his] awe of the chastisements of the Fire.\textsuperscript{59} For those seeking God, heading towards Him, and longing to meet Him, having little desire and awe makes the path leading to God and His Dominion distant.\textsuperscript{60}

\begin{itemize}
\item Every belief and position which is inconsistent with God’s mercy and guidance and makes the path leading to Him distant is
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{57} Rizvi, \textit{Mullā Šadrā Shīrāzī}, 64.

\textsuperscript{58} We know that Šadrā underwent his conversion to the position of the fundamentality of being some time during his stay in Kahak. According to Rizvi, \textit{Mullā Šadrā Shīrāzī}, 14, the Kahak period is likely to have lasted for a period of five years. Judging from our knowledge of Šadrā’s whereabouts in 1010/1601-2, we can safely estimate that the Kahak period was from 1013/1604 to 1018/1609. If this is the case, then we can assume that his conversion took place before 1013/1604, which would be before he began the \textit{Mabda’} and \textit{Asfār} in 1015/1606.

\textsuperscript{59} Lit., “and decreases in desire for the pleasure of the Gardens and being in awe over the chastisement of the Fires.”

\textsuperscript{60} Alternatively, this last line could be translated as follows: “Having little desire and awe makes distant from the path leading to God and His Dominion those seeking Him, heading towards Him, and longing to meet Him.”
undoubtedly false. For such a position is inconsistent with the establishment of revealed religions and contradicts the sending of Messengers and the revealing of scriptures, since the purpose behind all of these is nothing but to lead creatures close to their Lord’s mercy by way of the nearest of paths and the easiest of means.61

This passage is significant for a number of reasons. Not only does it give us a window into Ṣadrā’s earlier thought on the question of eternal suffering, but it also provides us with a clear picture of his view of the purpose of religion and revelation. As we will see later in this chapter, it is not without purpose that Ṣadrā ends this passage by saying that the purpose behind revelation is to provide for human beings the “nearest of paths” and “easiest of means” to their Lord’s mercy.

Furthermore, it was noted above that by this point Ṣadrā had espoused the position of the fundamentality of being. *Wujūd* for Ṣadrā, it must be remembered, is identified with *raḥma*, as is the case with Ibn ‘Arabi.62 Thus, the very nature of being itself necessitates mercy, since revelation is nothing but the deployment of being. This explains why, as Ṣadrā says in no

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61 Ṣadrā, *al-Mabda‘ wa-l-ma‘ād*, ed. Jalāl al-Dīn ʿĀshṭīyānī (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1976), 460-1. Although Ṣadrā’s point is clear, his Arabic style in this passage forbids an entirely eloquent translation of some sentences. For this reason, I provide here a complete transliteration of the text:


62 For the identification of *wujūd* with *raḥma*, see idem, *Tašīr*, 1:70 (cited below). It can also be noted here that in the previous chapter we identified the Essence (*dhāt*) with *wujūd*. This is because God’s Essence, insofar as we can and cannot speak about It, is nothing other than *raḥma*. Cf. ibid., 1:48. See also the pertinent remarks in Lawson, “Divine Wrath and Divine Mercy in Islam: Their Reflection in the Qur‘ān and Quranic Images of Water,” in *Divine Wrath and Divine Mercy in the World of Antiquity*, ed. Reinhard Kratz and Hermann Spieckermann, 250 (Tuebingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), where the notion of the cosmos as “mercification” is discussed in juxtaposition to other philosophical cosmologies in medieval Islamic thought.
uncertain terms, that any position which goes against the basic teaching of God’s mercy is false, for such a position would have to negate being itself, which is impossible.

Ṣadrā returns to the problem of the question of eternal chastisement towards the end of the Asfār, treating the issue under the subheading “On How the People of the Fire Abide in the Fire Eternally” (fī kayfiyyat khulūd ahl al-nār fī-l-nār). He begins this section by saying that the question of eternal chastisement is a theologically difficult problem, and one concerning which there are differences of opinion, both amongst the exoteric scholars (‘ulamā’ al-rusūm) and the people of unveiling (ahl al-kashf). He summarizes the position of those who believe that God’s chastisement is not eternal. They maintain that since all people are created with yearning (īshq) for existence and longing for its perfection, the essential end of all is their source, which means that they all end up in goodness because all things seek God and yearn to meet Him as He is the source of love and longing. There are indeed obstacles on the way to Him, but they are not eternal, for if this were the case, then people would be unable to search for what is good. To this effect, Ṣadrā cites a prophetic tradition which states that those who love to meet God, God

63 Ṣadrā, Asfār, 9:346-62. For an English translation of this section, see idem, Spiritual Psychology: The Fourth Intellectual Journey in Transcendent Philosophy: Volumes VIII & IX of The Asfar, trans. Latimah Peerwani (London: ICAS Press, 2008), 666-80. If we were to assume that the book’s order reflects the order of its chronological composition, then this would place Ṣadrā’s treatment of this problem closer towards 1037/1628, roughly two decades after he dealt with the issue in his Mabda’.


65 The Avicennan notion of love moving all things in the cosmos is commensurate with Ṣadrā’s understanding of substantial motion, since motion can be defined as the inclining (ma‘l) of one thing towards another. Since the Ṣadrian doctrine of substantial motion posits that all things in existence are in an upward flow of motion back to their Source and thereby increasing in intensity, their very inclination to and arrival at their Source necessitates that they increase in love at every stage of their upward ascent, and, at the time of their arrival, become reabsorbed into their Source of love once again.

loves to meet them, whereas those who dislike to meet Him, He dislikes to meet them. Then Ṣadrā says that since love is essential and disliking is accidental, the people who love to meet God do so as a result of an intrinsic quality (bi-l-dhāt), whereas those who dislike to meet Him do so in an accidental manner (bi-l-ʿarad).67

As for those who uphold the view that Hell and its chastisement are eternal, Ṣadrā goes on to explain their position, playing it seems the role of devil’s advocate. He states that without sin, pain, and difficulties, the order of the cosmos would become corrupted, and this would nullify God’s wisdom. Thus, the order of things can only be upheld through the existence of lowly and base things. Since divine wisdom demands that there be different ranks, levels, and preparednesses of people, His decree requires that some of these people be felicitous and some wretched.68

Ṣadrā clearly does not favour this position. In fact, he says that since each party—whether felicitous or wretched—comes about by virtue of God’s will and in accordance with a particular divine name, they will still return to their essential natures. Returning to one’s essential nature itself entails delight and bliss. But the contrary qualities of the divine names must still obtain. Be they names of beauty (jamāl) or majesty (jalāl), God’s names must always have their respective loci in which they can manifest His infinite self-disclosures.69

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67 Idem, Asfār, 9:347. Nevertheless, there are people who do not like to meet God. Concerning them, Ṣadrā states the position that after some time in which the sicknesses in their souls are cleansed through chastisement, they will either return to their original disposition or, after their chastisement, will return to their sickness but with the difference that the chastisement and pain will be removed in place of a second disposition which will be a form of despair (qunūt) over God’s mercy, although God’s general mercy will be available to all. Ṣadrā does not develop this position here, and it remains somewhat unclear until he discusses the notion of disparity in Hell in his Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiha, for which, see below.


Ṣadrā cites a passage from Ibn ʿArabī’s *Futūḥāt* which states that people will enter either Heaven or Hell on account of their actions, and will remain in their respective abodes by virtue of their intentions. Although this means that there will be people in Hell who are eternally tormented, Ibn ʿArabī says that this torment will be agreeable to their natures, meaning their “torment” will actually be pleasure. This is primarily because, as the ḥadīth qudsī says, “My mercy outstrips My wrath,” which means that God will not simply punish His servants without allowing mercy to predominate. In fact, Ibn ʿArabī asserts, were the people of Hell to enter Heaven, they would feel pain because its “pleasures” would not be agreeable with their natures.\(^\text{70}\)

Although we will see below how Ṣadrā returns to this idea in the *Asfār* and in his commentary on the Fātiḥa, it is worth citing one of Ibn ʿArabī’s more detailed explanations of this point elsewhere in the *Futūḥāt*. The passage occurs in the context of his discussion of the two forms of chastisement in Hell which are mentioned in the Qur′ān, namely Fire (*nār*) and Bitter Cold (*zamharīr*):

> The person of a cold constitution will find the heat of the Fire pleasant, and the person of a hot constitution will find the Bitter Cold pleasant. Thus Gehenna brings together the Fire and the Bitter Cold—because of the diversity of constitutions. What causes pain in a specific constitution will cause bliss in another constitution that is its opposite. So wisdom is not inoperative, for God keeps the Bitter Cold of Gehenna for those with hot constitutions and the Fire for those with cold constitutions. They enjoy themselves in Gehenna, for they have a constitution with which, were they to enter the Garden, they would suffer chastisement, because of the Garden’s equilibrium.\(^\text{71}\)

\(^{70}\) Ibid., 9:349, citing Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 3:648. Cf. Ṣadrā, *The Wisdom of the Throne*, 239. In section 5.2.2, we will return to Ibn ʿArabī’s argument—reproduced by Ṣadrā in the *Asfār* as well as the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātīha* (but with one very important difference)—concerning the manner in which chastisement in Hell becomes a form of pleasure for its inhabitants.

Ṣadrā also cites a passage from Qayšarī’s commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ*, which states that God’s chastisement is not eternal. Rather, it is there to purify people, just as gold and silver are placed in fire in order to separate base metals from pure substances. Thus, chastisement in Hell is there insofar as humans need to be purged of the base characteristics which they acquired on earth and which prevent them from being in God’s company.

There is clearly a contradiction in the reports cited by Ṣadrā. Ibn ʿArabī says that the chastisement is eternal, but that it is somehow pleasurable for those subjected to it because it is agreeable with their natures. Qayšarī, on the other hand, says that punishment in Hell is simply there to purge people of their sins, and, once purified, they will no longer be chastised. Ṣadrā assures us that there actually is no contradiction between these two accounts. People can simultaneously be punished eternally and yet this punishment can come to an end:

If you say that these statements which indicate that the cessation [*inquiṭā*] of chastisement for the people of the Fire is inconsistent with what I have just said concerning the lastingness of pain for them, I say [the following]: I do not agree that these are inconsistent with one another [*munāfāt*], for there is no inconsistency between the non-cessation [*adām inquiṭā*] of eternal chastisement for the people of the Fire and its cessation for each of them at one moment.

What Ṣadrā means by this statement is not altogether clear. We know that he is trying to defend a position which reconciles the idea of some form of abiding punishment in Hell with God’s all-encompassing mercy. Several pages later, he clarifies his point. He says that the statements of the “people of unveiling” regarding the cessation of punishment in Hell are not inconsistent with those Qur’anic verses which speak of chastisement in Hell. Much like the Kabbalist doctrine of

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72 Ṣadrā, *Asfār*, 9:349-50. The idea that punishment is a form of cleansing is not unique to Qayšarī. For similar points made by Ghazālī, Ibn Taymiyya, and especially Ibn al-Qayyim, see Khalil, “Muslim Scholarly Discussions on the Afterlife and the Fate of ‘Others’,” chs. 2 and 4.

transmigration (gilgul), which sees at the root of the transmigration (and therefore punishment) of souls an act of God’s mercy, Şadrā maintains that something can both be chastisement and mercy at one and the same time: “the existence of something as chastisement in one respect does not negate its being mercy in another respect.”

How, then, can something be punishment and mercy at one and the same time? Although he alluded to a solution earlier when he spoke of the intrinsic and accidental qualities with respect to those loving/disliking the meeting with God, Şadrā returns to this question later on in the text. He cites Ibn ‘Arabī’s meditation on the fact that since God created people for the sole purpose of worshipping Him, their innate disposition (fitra) is to only worship Him. As Ibn ‘Arabī argues elsewhere, one of the verses upon which this argument is based is Q 17:23: “And your Lord has decreed [qadā] that you worship none but Him.” For Ibn ‘Arabī, the “decree” in this verse is not merely prescriptive (taklīf), but engendering (takwīn), meaning that it is in the very nature of things, based on the divine decree, that God be the only object of worship in the cosmos. Thus, when people worship gods other than God, they do so because of their belief that their worship will bring them closer to God, which explains Q 39:3, “‘We only worship them to draw us closer to God’.”

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74 See Encyclopaedia Judaica², s.v. “Gilgul” (by Gershom Scholem).
75 Şadrā, Asfār, 9:353 (cf. idem, Spiritual Psychology, 672).
77 For Ibn ‘Arabī’s argument as laid out in the Futūḥat, see Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge, 342-3, 381.
Since God’s creatures ultimately worship none but Him, albeit in different forms, they all truly uphold their primordial covenant with God that they would worship none but Him. Şadrā notes that behind all forms of worship lies essential worship, and that that which is accidental, that is, what comes about by virtue of man’s choices made during his life, will be accountable and chastised. Thus, the human constitution (nash’a), which is accidental and animal, will face torment whereas the substance related to man’s soul (jawhar nafsânî) will not receive corruption.\(^7\) This means that the lowly qualities which a person acquires during his stay on earth will eventually be effaced through torment and chastisement in the afterlife. After this period of torment, he will return to his innate disposition. As for the one who had incorrect and false beliefs concerning God, his suffering will also come to an end, but he will be unable to return to his innate disposition (fîtra) and will thus be “transferred to another innate disposition.”\(^8\)

Yet by virtue of the economy of the divine names, there are some who must indeed reside in the fire, that is, who have been destined to come under the purview of God’s names of majesty and wrath. Ibn ‘Arabî takes his lead from two important texts, one a verse from the Qur’an and the other a hadîth. Q 7:36 refers to the “people of the fire” (aṣḥāb al-nâr) as residing in it eternally (hum fîhâ khâlidûn). The Prophet says that “none will remain in the Fire except for those who are its folk [al-ladhîna hum ahlûhâ].” The fact that these references in scripture refer to the people of the Fire as being “people” and “folk” gives Ibn ‘Arabî cause to explain his position on why punishment in Hell is a good thing for its inhabitants: since Hell was always meant to be their home and is therefore suitable to their natures, were they to leave it, they would

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\(^7\) Şadrā, Asfâr, 9:351.

\(^8\) Ibid. (cf. idem, Spiritual Psychology, 671). This, Şadrā explains, is the sense in which they will have “eternal” punishment, since they will suffer from “the punishment of compound ignorance [‘adhâb al-jahl al-murakkab].” Cf. Chittick, Imaginal Worlds, 101-2.
suffer immensely because of departing from their homestead.\footnote{Şadrā, \textit{Asfār}, 9:352; citing Ibn ʿArabī, \textit{Futūḥāt}, 3:24 (translated in Chittick, \textit{The Self-Disclosure of God}, 188).} As we saw earlier, this means that were the “people” or “folk” of the Fire to be taken out of Hell and led into the Garden, they would actually suffer pain because their constitutions would not be suited to the joys of the Garden. The reason their constitutions are not suited to other than the Fire, Ibn ʿArabī tells us, is because God has given them a constitution which is only suitable for residence in Hell.\footnote{Şadrā, \textit{Asfār}, 9:352.}

Mullā Şadrā stands in complete agreement with Ibn ʿArabī concerning the pleasurable nature of residence in Hell. At the same time, he notes that he considers Ibn ʿArabī’s understanding of the terms \textit{aṣḥāb} and \textit{ahl} used in the aforementioned Qur’ānic verse and \textit{ḥadīth} to be weak. Şadrā understands the terms \textit{aṣḥāb} and \textit{ahl} to be have relational meanings, which means they do not indicate “residence.”\footnote{Ibid.} He then seems to disagree with Ibn ʿArabī again, noting that the only way the people of the Fire’s departure from their homestead could be an intense chastisement would be, if by “departure,” the “natural homestead \textit{[al-mawṭin al-ṭabīḥ]} is meant.”\footnote{Ibid. (cf. idem, \textit{Spiritual Psychology}, 671).} Although Ibn ʿArabī speaks of a constitution being given to the people of the Fire so that they can bear and derive pleasure from its torments, it is unclear whether there is any real disagreement here between Şadrā and Ibn ʿArabī’s positions. This is because they both indicate that Hell will, in one manner or another, be a necessary permanent abode for some people whose natures will be made suitable for it. Ibn ʿArabī refers to this nature as a “constitution,” while Şadrā refers to it as a “natural homestead.”

Where Şadrā stands in clear agreement with Ibn ʿArabī is on how Hell will become agreeable:
There is no doubt that the entry [into Hell of] the creature whose end is that he should enter Hell—in accordance with the divine lordly decree—will be agreeable [muwāfiq] to his nature and will be a perfection of his existence. For the end, as has been stated, is the perfection of existents. The perfection of something which one finds agreeable to his nature [al-muwāfiq lahu] is not chastisement with respect to him. It is only chastisement with respect to others who have been created in higher ranks.\textsuperscript{85}

If Śadrā is in fact disagreeing with Ibn ʿArabī, it could have to do with the particular details of how this “natural homestead” comes about. If this is the case, then Śadrā understands Ibn ʿArabī to say that the people of the Fire take up residence in it after their natures have been made agreeable to it, whereas Śadrā’s position is that the “natural homestead” of the people of the Fire has always been, by virtue of the divine decree, the Fire and nothing else. Since Śadrā understands the Fire to be the natural homestead for some people, it is a form of perfection for them in accordance with the principle of substantial motion, namely that all things are constantly in motion towards their substantial perfection as they ascend the scale of being. The most important point which emerges from this discussion is that Śadrā sets forth an argument for how punishment in Hell can be eternal while not compromising the fundamentality of God’s mercy.

Yet what, exactly, does Śadrā mean when he speaks of “the creature whose end is that he should enter Hell?” The reason Hell comes about, Śadrā will go on to say, is because of the configuration of the cosmos itself. The cosmos is nothing but differentiated modes of God’s creative and engendering Word. The duality which emerges in the cosmos, therefore, is a natural and necessary result of the dispersion of God’s Word which becomes fragmented the further it falls away from its Source. The two “rivers” which proceed from the Ocean of Oneness, therefore, account for the ontological roots of both good and evil.\textsuperscript{86}


\textsuperscript{86} Idem, \textit{Asfār}, 9:355-6.
Because Hell exists by virtue of the “left” side of the river, and insofar as the “left” represents God’s names of wrath and majesty, it must necessarily manifest God’s qualities of wrath.\(^87\) Although the river branches off into two, it comes from the same source of water. This source of water is nothing other than God’s mercy, which for Şadrā, as we have already seen, is a synonym for being.

By the time we get to the Asfār, therefore, Şadrā is mostly concerned with reconciling the problem of eternal suffering in Hell with God’s mercy. In fact, in the relevant sections of the Asfār, he relies mostly upon Ibn ʿArabi’s Futūḥāt. Yet in one of these sections Şadrā consciously or unconsciously rephrases a key passage from the Futūḥāt. This paraphrase could be read as an attempt on Şadrā’s part to explain why God’s mercy must prevail.\(^88\) Reproduced on the following page is the text from the Futūḥāt and the same text cited by Şadrā in the Asfār. I have juxtaposed these texts with one another in order to facilitate a line-by-line comparative reading. Both in the translation and its accompanying transliteration, Şadrā’s alterations to the text of the Futūḥāt have been indicated in bold.\(^89\)

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\(^{87}\) See also ibid., 9:357.

\(^{88}\) It is unlikely that the manuscript of the Futūḥāt in Şadrā’s possession offered this alternate reading. For one thing, of all of Ibn ʿArabi’s books, the Futūḥāt has historically been the best-preserved and the one most faithfully transmitted throughout the generations. See Chodkiewicz, “Towards Reading the Futūḥāt Makkiyya,” 5-7 and Osman Yahya, Histoire et classification de l’oeuvre d’Ibn ʿArabī (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1964), 1:201-35 for the text’s mss. and their accompanying samā‘ certificates. Secondly, other parts of the Futūḥāt are cited by Şadrā elsewhere in the same discussion in the Asfār, and in all cases his citations are almost identical to the text of the Futūḥāt that has come down to us. See Asfār 9:349 → Futūḥāt, 3:648; Asfār, 9:350 → Futūḥāt, 3:24; Asfār, 9:353-5 → Futūḥāt, 2:225; Asfār, 3:357-9 → Futūḥāt, 3:462-3.

\(^{89}\) Except in cases where Şadrā’s reading differs from Ibn ʿArabi’s, I have reproduced the passages in both cases from Chittick, The Self-Disclosure of God, 188-9.
The two abodes will be populated, and mercy will take precedence over wrath and embrace everything [Q 7:156], including Hell and everyone within it. God is the Most Merciful of the merciful [Q 12:64], as He said about Himself. We have found in ourselves, who are among those whom God has innately disposed toward mercy, that we have mercy on all God’s servants, even if God has decreed in His creating them that the attribute of chastisement will remain forever with them in the cosmos. This is because the ruling property of mercy has taken possession of our hearts. The companion of this attribute is I and my peers, and we are creatures, companions of caprices and personal desires. God has said about Himself that He is the Most Merciful of the merciful. So we have no doubt that He is more merciful than we are towards His creatures. So we have no doubt that He is more merciful than we are towards His creatures who have this all-inclusive attribute of mercy? God is more merciful than we are towards His creatures, companions of caprices and personal desires. The companion of this attribute is I and my peers, and we are creatures, companions of caprices and personal desires. There is no doubt that He is more merciful than we are towards His creatures. And He has said about Himself that He is the Most Merciful of the merciful. So we have no doubt that He is more merciful than we are towards His creatures, while we know from our own selves this extravagant mercy. So how could chastisement be everlasting for them when He has this all-inclusive attribute of mercy? God is nobler than that. This is all the more true because rational proofs have affirmed that the Author is neither benefited by acts of obedience nor harmed by acts of opposition; that everything flows in accordance with His decree, His measuring out, and His judgment; and that the creatures are compelled in their choosing.90


Asfār, 9:352-3 (citing Futūḥāt, 3:25)

The two abodes will be populated—that is, the abodes of felicity and fire—and mercy will take precedence over wrath and embrace everything [Q 7:156], including Hell and everyone within it. God is the Most Merciful of the merciful [Q 12:64]. We have found in ourselves [that we] are among those who have been innately disposed towards mercy. Since God has decreed it in His creation, He will remove the attribute of chastisement in the cosmos. God has given this quality, and the giver of perfection has more claim to it. The companion of this attribute is I and my peers, and we are servants, creatures, companions of caprices and personal desires. For a different translation of this passage, see Sadr, Spiritual Psychology, 672.
In Šadrā’s important addition to the Futūḥat text, “God has given this quality, and the giver of perfection has more claim to it,” the quality in question here is, of course, the mercy towards which God has allowed some to be predisposed. This insertion at least gives us a window into why Šadrā feels so strongly about the ultimate end for all being in mercy. But by far Šadrā’s most important alteration to this passage is where he has “Since God has decreed it in His creation, He will remove the attribute of chastisement in the cosmos”\textsuperscript{92} for Ibn ‘Arabi’s, “even if God has decreed in His creating them that the attribute of chastisement will remain forever with them in the cosmos.” The effect produced here by Šadrā’s reading is that those who are innately disposed towards mercy simply act in conformity with the nature of God’s will, namely that He does not wish for chastisement to persist in the cosmos. This alteration further drives home the point that Šadrā would like to make: it is in the very nature of the divine decree that all things end in mercy and that chastisement come to an end, the knowledge and realization of which is the exclusive purview of those who have been innately disposed towards God’s mercy.

For Ibn ‘Arabi, the attribute of chastisement must remain in the cosmos by virtue of the distribution of the divine names. This is something that Šadrā would not disagree with. But why then does he alter the passage to make it seem like chastisement will not at all remain in the cosmos? This could be because, as Šadrā and Ibn ‘Arabi see it, the root of “chastisement” is actually mercy, and from this perspective, the attribute of chastisement qua pain and punishment

\textsuperscript{92} Another possible reading of the passage could be, “For if God has decreed it in His creation, then He will remove the attribute of chastisement in the cosmos.” In both cases, the Arabic particle \textit{law}, which indicates an impossible or unlikely hypothetical clause, is to be read in conjunction with \textit{bi-ḥayth}, thus losing its sense of impossibility/improbability. The construction \textit{ḥattā law} in the Futūḥat to be found in place of Šadrā’s \textit{bi-ḥayth law}, also carries the effect of the \textit{law} losing its sense of impossibility/improbability, and is thus translated by Chittick as “even if ....” See p. 215 n. 90-1 for the respective passages in transliteration.
must eventually perish. It can again be recalled that since the root of the cosmos is being and being and mercy are the same reality, all that is accidental to being must eventually come to an end. Likewise, since wrath is accidental to mercy, so too must it come to an end.

5.2.3 – The Tafsîr Sûrat al-Fâtiha’s Soteriology in Context I

Ṣadrâ’s treatment concerning the ultimate fate of human beings in the afterlife is quite consistent in the Mabda’ and the Asfâr. The most important point we walk away with from his discussion in the Mabda’ is that the purpose of religion is to lead people back to God’s mercy through the shortest route possible. In the Asfâr, Ṣadrâ drives home the message that it is in the nature of things itself that there be mercy and wrath, and that, ultimately, all things must devolve back on God’s mercy. In elucidating his point in the Asfâr Ṣadrâ draws quite freely on Ibn ‘Arabî’s soteriology, or at least the terms in which Ibn ‘Arabî expressed it. It will also be recalled that he recasts an important point in the Futûhât to read not that both mercy and chastisement will persist in the cosmos, but that only mercy will persist. Upon closer inspection, this reading of Ṣadrâ’s is not incongruous with Ibn ‘Arabî’s point. This is why he seems to use Ibn ‘Arabî’s soteriology to justify his position that there is no incongruity between calling a thing mercy and punishment at one and the same time.

Yet in neither the Mabda’ nor the Asfâr does Ṣadrâ attempt to explain his soteriology as such. We know from these two texts that he takes a number of positions for granted. But he does not present us with a coherent argument for how mercy will triumph in the end. What we have, rather, are tidbits of information which, when pieced together, give us a glimpse into Ṣadrâ’s reflections on the issue. But it would be extremely difficult to draw any concrete conclusions from Ṣadrâ’s pronouncements in the Mabda’ and the Asfâr concerning soteriology other than the
fact that he upholds a position that all creatures will end up in God’s mercy, despite the outward appearance of punishment for some (which is in accordance with the divine will).

Turning our attention to the \textit{Tafsìr Sùrat al-fàtiha}, we find a much more detailed and internally coherent explication of Šadrà’s soteriology. In a sense, Šadrà’s discussions in this text have in mind the relevant sections of the \textit{Mabda’} and the \textit{Asfàr} (as will become clear shortly, this is more true for the latter). But he also draws some important connections between ideas in these texts against the backdrop of his commentary on the Fàtiha. It is as if Šadrà is prompted by the verses of the Fàtiha to redress his treatment of soteriology, and by virtue of the unity of the \textit{sùra}, is compelled to bring unity to his ideas on the issue.

In his commentary upon the Qur’ân’s opening \textit{sùra}, Šadrà returns to an important point to which he alluded in the \textit{Asfàr}, namely that mercy is essential whereas wrath is accidental.\footnote{For the essential nature of mercy and the accidental nature of wrath, see Chittick, \textit{Imaginal Worlds}, 113; Ibn ʿArabî, \textit{Fuṣûṣ}, 177-80; Izutsu, \textit{Sufism and Taoism}, 99 ff; Šadrà, \textit{The Wisdom of the Throne}, 217.} Freely employing the language and symbolism of scripture to state his point, he introduces the problem of mercy’s essentiality in philosophical yet familiar terms:

Know that God’s mercy embraces all things with respect to existence and quiddity. So the existence of wrath, in terms of the entity of wrath \textit{[‘ayn al-ghàdah]}, is also from God’s mercy. For this reason, His mercy outstrips His wrath, since being is that very mercy which encompasses \textit{[shàmila]} everything, as He says, \textit{And My mercy embraces all things} [Q 7:156].\footnote{Note the allusion to the \textit{ḥadîth qudsî} discussed above: “My Mercy outstrips My wrath.” Along with Q 7:156, another important verse, which Šadrà does not draw upon in the \textit{Tafsìr Sùrat al-fàtiha}, is Q 6:12, part of which states that God has written mercy upon Himself (\textit{kataba ġalà nafsihi al-raḥma}). For a variety of medieval and modern Muslim interpretations of this verse, see Feras Hamza, Sajjad Rizvi with Farhana Mayer (ed.), \textit{An Anthology of Qur’anic Commentaries}, ch. 3.} Amongst the totality of entities and quiddities—all of which the existential mercy \textit{[al-raḥma al-wujûdiyya]} reaches—are the entities of wrath and vengeance. Through mercy, God gives existence to the
entity of wrath, so its root is good, as is what results from it, such as pain, sickness, tribulation, trial, and the like…

Since all things arise from being and return to being, they are nothing in and of themselves, which means that their qualities are at best accidental. Things which seem to be evil, such as sickness or pain, spring up therefore within being, but by virtue of being’s diminution and not its perfection. Yet since they are modes of being, their source is good, even if they bring along with them some temporary harm. This temporary harm and perceived evil is a necessary part of the structure of reality, which, by its nature, is graded and multi-level. The multi-level nature of the stratification of being entails that those modes of being which come about at the lower end of the scale of being be more dense, dark, tenebrous, material, and hence “evil.” Thus, sicknesses and tribulations are simply depravations of being. Stated another way, they are “non-existence.”

In non-philosophical language, we can say that since things arise out of mercy and return to mercy, whatever negative qualities become attached to them must naturally peel away. Creatures who return to God with negative qualities encounter God’s wrath. Yet just as negative qualities are accidental, so too is the quality of wrath which they encounter. Wrath only arises out of mercy, which means that God’s wrath is nothing but His mercy. However, because wrath

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96 See Şadrā, Tafsīr, 1:71: “Whoever closely examines the concomitants of wrath [lawāzim al-ghaḍāb], such as sickness, pain, poverty, ignorance, death, and others, will find all of them to be nonexistent in themselves [bi-mā hiya] or nonexistent matters considered to be amongst the evil things. With respect to them being existents, they are all good, pouring forth from the well-spring of the mercy that is all-embracing and the existence that pervades all things. Because of this, the intellect will judge that the attribute of mercy is essential to God and that the attribute of wrath is accidental, which arises out of the causes either because the contingent existents lack perfection in accordance with the ranks of their distance from the Real, the Self-Subsisting, or because of the incapacity of matter to receive existence in the most perfect manner.”
is one of God’s qualities, like mercy, it must embrace all things. But because God’s mercy outstrips His wrath, the essentiality of mercy will necessarily outstrip the accidentality of wrath. This is why Şadrā, following Ibn ʿArabī (but not acknowledging his source), says very early on in the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa that “the end for all is mercy.” Despite the fact that the end for all is mercy, Şadrā insists that the routes individuals take to return to their Source of mercy are radically divergent.

5.2.2.1 – Paths to Mercy

In the context of his commentary on Q 1:6 Şadrā makes a number of important statements which shed a great deal of light on remarks made earlier in the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa. Following his meditations on the ʂirāt made in the Asfār, Şadrā says that each individual has a path that he must traverse, and which ultimately leads him to God:

Know that the path [ṣirāt] is not a path except through one’s traversing it. An allusion has been made to the fact that every creature is heading towards the direction of the Real, towards the Causer of causes [musabbib al-asbāb] in an innate manner of turning [tawajjuh gharāẓī] and a motion of natural disposition [haraka jibilliyya]. In this motion of natural disposition, diversion and fleeing from what God has fixed for each of them cannot be conceived of with respect to them. God takes them by their forelock, as He says, “There is not a creature except that He takes it by its forelock. Verily my Lord is upon a straight path” [Q 11:56].

This path that an individual traverses belongs to him in an “innate manner of turning” and is a “motion of natural disposition.” The path, therefore, is traversed in accordance with what Şadrā identified as the fiṭra in the Asfār. But it would seem that, despite the fact that everyone is

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97 Ibid., 1:151-2.
98 Ibid., 1:71. For the statement in Ibn ʿArabī, see Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge, 120, 130, 226, 338.
99 The relevant section in the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa is 1:111-23, which is based on Asfār, 9:284-90. The latter itself serves as the basis for a similar discussion in Şadrā, The Wisdom of the Throne, 191-7.
100 Idem, Tafsīr, 1:111; based on Asfār, 9:284. Cf. idem, Spiritual Psychology, 605; idem, Mafātīḥ, 732-4. Ṭūsī, Āghāz, 7, may be an indirect source.
heading to God in an innate manner of turning, there are nevertheless differences amongst them in the route of their return, and, ultimately, their final fate.

Understanding these different routes taken by people to their destination (which is in accordance with their innate disposition and to which they innately turn) can only be made sense of once we have understood the nature of the path itself. The path, according to Šadrā, is nothing other than the human soul:

On the day of resurrection, and according to the view of the people of insight who have been overcome by witnessing the configuration of the afterlife, it is spread out for you as a sensory bridge [jisr maḥṣūs] extended over the surface of Hell, its start being in [this] place, and its end being at the door of Paradise. Whoever witnesses it will know that it is of his design and building, and that it is an extended bridge in this world over the surface of his Hell in the fire of his nature within which is the shadow of his reality.  

Hasanzādah Āmulī seems to stop short of suggesting that Šadrā borrowed the idea of the soul being the path from Tūsī’s Āghāz wa-anjām. Yet, as with all ideas which Šadrā derives from his predecessors, they take on a completely different character by virtue of his unique philosophical outlook. One important principle of Šadrā’s doctrine of substantial motion—which, as Corbin astutely notes, lies at the heart of Islamic teachings on the Origin and the Return—is that the very idea of change occurs within the category of substance itself. Indeed,

101 Šadrā, Tafsīr, 1:122; based on idem, Asfār, 9:289 (cf. idem, Spiritual Psychology, 610). Cf. idem, The Wisdom of the Throne, 196. See also Maria Massi Dakake, “The Soul as Barzakh: Substantial Motion and Mullā Šadrā’s Theory of Human Becoming,” Muslim World 94 (2004): 107-30. Šadrā may derive his teaching on Hell’s correspondence with the earth from Neoplatonic sources. See, for example, Šadrā, Risālat al-ḥashr, ed. and trans. Muḥammad Khwājawi (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mawłā, 1362 Sh/1983), 110-1 (Arabic text). As Rizvi, Mullā Šadrā Shirāzī, 100 notes, this treatise was completed in 1032/1623.

102 See Tūsī, Āghāz, 129 (section containing Āmulī’s Taʿlīqāt).

103 See Corbin, En islam iranien, 1:302.
this is an important departure from traditional Aristotelian substance metaphysics. \textsuperscript{104} Şadrā tells us that the soul is “corporeal in temporal origination and spiritual in subsistence [\textit{jismāniyyat al-ḥudūth rūḥāniyyat al-baqā‘}].”\textsuperscript{105} As the underlying stuff of the human totality, the soul partakes in substantial motion (read “change”), or what Şadrā also calls “essential motion” (\textit{ḥaraka al-dhātiyya}).\textsuperscript{106} Since the very substance or essence of the soul partakes in motion, the distance it traverses is nothing other than itself.\textsuperscript{107} Thus, the higher the soul ascends the scale of being, the more real it becomes, meaning the more it strips itself of its materiality and returns to its true nature.\textsuperscript{108}

One of the implications of the identification of the soul with the path is that, because all of one’s actions in this world are imprinted upon the soul, the nature of the human soul itself determines the route one will take in his journey back to God. The state of the soul, in other words, will become imaginalized in the next world, thus creating a pathway for man to his ultimate place of residency. The soul extends from Hell to Paradise by virtue of the fact that Hell for Şadrā is nothing other than the corporeal world in which the soul is pinned down by matter.\textsuperscript{109} If the soul cannot rise beyond the prison of corporeality, it will end up in Hell, that is, it will remain in its fallen state. Souls which have become fully actualized will on the other hand enter Paradise, which was/is their original home.\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{104} For a helpful discussion of substantial motion in Şadrā, see Kalin, “Between Physics and Metaphysics.” See also Corbin’s comments in \textit{En islam iranien}, 4:84-95 and in Şadrā, \textit{Le livre des pénétrations métaphysiques}, 226 n. 108.

\textsuperscript{105} See Chittick, “Translator’s Introduction,” xxviii.

\textsuperscript{106} Şadrā, \textit{Tafsīr}, 1:112.

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 1:112. Cf. idem, \textit{The Wisdom of the Throne}, 193.

\textsuperscript{108} Cf. idem, \textit{Tafsīr}, 1:80, 113. See also Jambet, \textit{The Act of Being}, 414.

\textsuperscript{109} See Şadrā, \textit{Asfār}, 9:356.

\textsuperscript{110} Idem, \textit{Tafsīr}, 1:175. Since the Perfect Man is the original end purpose of creation, Şadrā says that he is guided, blessed, and under the divine solicitude from his beginning to his end. He also makes it clear that those who do not
Man, Şadrā tells us, gradually proceeds from the most manifest to the most inner, or from the most dense to the most subtle, “until he ends at his homestead which has been fixed for him by God.”¹¹¹ The idea that man’s destiny is inextricably linked to his place of return is something we have already seen in the Asfār. In the context of the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiha, Şadrā attempts to answer the problem of how, if everyone simply follows their instinctive nature and original disposition in accordance with the divine decree, the wicked amongst them will be punished while the righteous will be rewarded. He says that there is a difference between being distant from God but nevertheless felicitous, and being proximate to Him by way of the removal of intermediaries.¹¹² Yet it could be asked that if everyone is created with the disposition of love and desire for God, how can there be differences amongst humans with respect to these types of proximity and distance?¹¹³

These differences amongst creatures, Şadrā tells us, exist because souls are not created with the same innate disposition: some souls are more disposed towards purity than others, receive this solicitude are afflicted (ibid., 1:102-3). Cf. the following passage: “Just as these special qualities [khaṣāṣīs] and miracles—such as being created upon the form of the All-Merciful, having been breathed into with His Spirit, ennobled with the miracle of being taught the names, entrusted to the land of the body and the sea of spirits, kneaded in the clay of the soul and intellect by the two hands, specified [makhṣūṣ] with being God’s representative in the great and small worlds, prostrated to by God’s angels in the bodily and spiritual constitutions—are only for the Real Spiritual Man, not these resemblances and likenesses in formal numbers, so too is arrival to Him through the ascent of the spirit and the inner journey on the straight path of God specified [yukhṭaṣṣu] for him and not others. If this were not so, then every walking animal and others would be traversing His path which He has specified [yakhuṣṣuḥu], heading towards the direction [an allusion to Q 2:144] of the Real” (ibid., 1:108). The Perfect Man, unlike others, receives this distinction because he has extinguished the fire of his Hell with the light of his faith. Cf. idem, The Wisdom of the Throne, 197.

¹¹¹ Idem, Tafsīr, 1:113. He goes on to cite Ibn ‘Arabī to prove substantial motion. See ibid., 1:114. Cf. Jambet, The Act of Being, 185, where the author suggests that Şadrā’s doctrine of substantial motion was intuited on the basis of Ibn ‘Arabī’s “theosophy.”


¹¹³ Şadrā, Tafsīr, 1:117.
whereas others are more disposed towards murkiness. In the material realm, various factors in
the world also have an effect upon the reason for why souls are so disparate. At the same time,
while all creatures are created upon the path of uprightness (‘alā nahj al-istiqāma), it is their
choices which end them up in either proximity to or distance from God.\textsuperscript{114} Despite these points,
Ṣadrā concludes that, ultimately, these souls differ because “of the preeternal decree.”\textsuperscript{115}

God’s preeternal decree is what determines a soul’s starting point, and, by virtue of the
limitations imposed upon a human being by virtue of his inborn capacity, his ending point as
well. This explains why Ṣadrā is adamant that each soul has its own mode of return back to God
which is specific to it alone. As he puts it, every soul comes from “a specified point of origin
[ma‘dān makhṣūṣ] amongst the spirits’ points of origin [ma‘ādin al-arwāḥ],” which necessitates
that each soul comes from a point of origin unique unto itself alone.\textsuperscript{116} Since for Ṣadrā the point
of one’s origin is also the point of one’s return, the place to which one returns is also specific for
each individual. If the point of origin and place of return for each soul is different, then surely the
path that each soul treads along—namely what it becomes, for the soul is the path itself—will be

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 1:111.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 1:118. Ṣadrā also anticipates another objection: why is there preference/priority in rank and difference in
the fitra itself, and does that not compromise God’s justice? He begins by answering that, firstly, this question has
given many thinkers a particularly hard time. The differences exist as a result of the very structure and order of
being. If there were no gradation, there would not be a multiplicity of things. It is because of God’s justice and
equanimity that grades exist. See ibid., 1:119-22. In this context, Ṣadrā states: “In sum, the disparity in creation in
terms of perfection and imperfection and felicity and wretchedness is either by way of substantial essential matters,
or by way of accidental matters acquired by means of religious devotions and actions. So the difference is in
accordance with the essential matters by way of the pure divine solicitude, which calls for beauty of order and
excellence of arrangement [in the cosmos]” (ibid., 1:121). For the logic underlying this position, see Kalin, “Mullā
Ṣadrā on Theodicy and the Best of All Possible Worlds.”
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 1:108.
different. When humans ask God to guide them along the straight path in Q 1:6, therefore, they ask for nothing but guidance upon their own path, which will lead to their felicity.\textsuperscript{117}

The foregoing considerations seem to be on Şadrā’s mind from early on in the \textit{Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa}. In a very crucial passage which occurs in the context of his discussion of the different paths of belief, Şadrā identifies the words \textit{ṣirāṭ} and \textit{sabīl}.\textsuperscript{118} He makes a subtle distinction between the different paths available to an individual and the path appropriate for him:

\begin{quote}
It is just as He says, \textit{And do not follow the paths [al-subul], for they will divert you from His path [sabīlihi]} [Q 6:153], that is, the path which is for you contains felicity and salvation, for if this were not the case, then all paths would lead to Him, since God is the end-point of every purpose and the Final Goal [\textit{ghāya}] of every endeavour.\textsuperscript{119} However, not everyone who returns to Him will attain felicity and salvation from dispersion and chastisement. For the path to felicity is one: \textit{Say: “This is my path [sabīl]. Upon insight I call to God myself and those who follow me”} [Q 12:108].\textsuperscript{120}
\end{quote}

This statement requires some clarification. It is significant that Şadrā draws on Q 6:153 to make his point. The verse distinguishes between “paths” and “His path,” and then Şadrā glosses the latter by saying “the path which is for you contains felicity and salvation [\textit{al-sabīl al-latī lakum fīhā al-sa‘āda wa-l-najāt}].” But then Şadrā surprises us. He goes on to say that the path that is particular to an individual brings felicity and salvation. Had this not been the case, then all paths would lead to God. But by virtue of the nature of being, we know that all paths do in fact lead to God. What Şadrā seems to have in mind here is that since each individual has a path to God

\textsuperscript{117} Recall the famous Sufi dictum which states that there are as many paths to God as there are children of Adam. See Algar, “Silent and Vocal \textit{dhikr} in the Naqshbandī Order,” in \textit{Akten des VII. Kongresses für Arabistik und Islamwissenschaft}, ed. Albert Dietrich, 38-46 (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976), which takes this saying as its point of departure.

\textsuperscript{118} Şadrā, \textit{Tafsīr}, 1:42.

\textsuperscript{119} Cf. ibid., 1:166.

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 1:42.
specific to him, the other paths which are available to him are not actual options in terms of his return to God. He has the option to tread upon them, but the truth is, in accordance with his innate disposition, there is only one path that is open to his soul, and it is that path that he must follow. Şadrā then says that not everyone who returns to God will attain felicity. This is because, in accordance with the divine decree, there are some who must end up in misery and wretchedness, and some who must end up in felicity. Thus, while all souls return to God, some meet His names of beauty and others His names of majesty.

Yet there is a further complication: Şadrā clearly does not have in mind a cut-and-dried presentation of the nature of the afterlife where some end up in bliss and others suffer eternally. As we have seen, he seeks to retain the truth of scriptural statements concerning infernal punishment; but, by virtue of the precedence of God’s mercy, he argues that this punishment is actually a form of comfort. Since the name Allāh is the All-Gathering name, every servant, Şadrā reminds us, must return to Him. The different grades of individuals, whether felicitous or wretched, will become differentiated through their encounter with the name Allāh. According to a hadīth, on the Day of Judgement, after the angels, prophets, and believers have all interceded, only the intercession of the Most Merciful of the merciful (arḥam al-raḥīmīn) will remain. The names Most Merciful of the merciful or All-Merciful (al-raḥmān), therefore, are commonly associated in texts of Islamic thought with divine intercession and the ultimate salvation of human beings. Since the All-Merciful is one name that will intercede on behalf of all servants, Şadrā tells us, those who meet God’s names of majesty in the next life will eventually

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121 Cf. ibid., 1:47-8.
come face-to-face with God as the All-Merciful, a name which will subsist amongst His servants for all of eternity:

As for the other paths, all of their goals is God firstly. Then the All-Merciful [al-raḥmān] will take over for Him [yatawallāhu al-raḥman] at the end, and the property of the All-Merciful will subsist amongst them for eternity, whose subsistence has no end. This is a strange affair! I have not found anyone upon the face of the earth who knows it as it truly should be known.¹²³

For Şadrā’s part, although he had not come across any of his contemporaries who had known the truth of the ultimate salvation of human beings as it “truly should be known,” it is safe to assume that he did not count himself amongst them. Indeed, the rest of the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa assumes the soteriological picture laid out in the above two passages.¹²⁴

5.2.2.2 – God’s Hands and Feet

We have already seen how Mullā Şadrā speaks of the fundamental rootedness of all things in God’s mercy. All things come from God and return to Him. Since the Source of all things is mercy, they will all return to their Source. But insofar as creatures are not with their Source, they are in the realm of multiplicity. Mercy, like being, becomes fragmented as it spreads throughout the cosmos and, to use a Platonic term, “shares” itself with the rest of the

¹²³ Şadrā, Tafsīr, 1:42.
¹²⁴ In yet another passage towards the end of the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa, Şadrā elucidates the point he made earlier. Meditating on Q 1:7, which speaks of those with whom God is angry (al-maghḍūb ʿalayhim), Şadrā, most likely under the influence of Ibn ʿArabī (although I have been unable to locate the passage in Ibn ʿArabī’s writings), states that there will come a point when even those with whom God is angered will eventually be pardoned because God will transmute [tahāwwala] Himself in the form of bliss. Since the return for all is back to God, the God with whom they will abide eternally will be one who is pleased with them by virtue of the preponderance of the ruling property of His contentment: “The last form into which He will transmute Himself for His servants will be the ruling property of contentment [riḍā]. So the Real will transmute Himself into the form of bliss… He will be gracious towards, and forgive on His own behalf, those who angered Him by removing whatever there was in Him of annoyance, distress, and wrath. Then He will apply this to those who are objects of wrath [al-maghḍūb]” (ibid., 1:154).
cosmic order. The further a thing is from its Source of mercy, the less mercy it will manifest, just as the further a thing is from its Source of being, the less being it will manifest. In the language of Islamic theology, we can say that the equilibrium of the divine names necessitates that God’s names of beauty be complemented by His names of majesty.

Employing the imagery and language of Ibn ‘Arabî and his followers, Ṣadrā speaks of the structure of the cosmos in terms of God’s “two hands.” As the ḥadīth tells us, God has two hands and they are both blessed and “right.”125 But not each hand manifests the same attributes. One hand gives preponderance to God’s attributes of mercy and the other to His attributes of wrath.126 From this perspective, we can speak of God’s “left” and “right” hands, or the divine qualities which manifest leftness and rightness:

Know that the ruling property [ḥukm] of the divine wrath is the perfection of the level of the grip of the left hand [qabdat al-shimāl], for although both of His hands are holy, blessed, and right, the ruling property of each of them—leftness [shimāliyya] and rightness [yamīniyya]—is in opposition to the other from the standpoint of their owners.127

Just as two human hands are in opposition to each other, so too are the qualities denoted by God’s two hands. Each of God’s two hands are nothing other than corollaries of the different types of souls which have come about through the downward flow of the river of being.128 Thus, the properties of each hand manifest themselves in accordance with the attributes of the people who fall under their sway: there are some who uphold God’s oneness and give Him His rights of lordship, whereas others do not.129

125 Ṣadrā refers to this famous tradition at ibid., 1:149.
126 Ibid.
128 See pp. 213-4 for Ṣadrā’s use of this image.
Because God’s hands are both “right,” they are naturally both good. This idea again accords with a point Şadrā made in the Asfār and to which he returns in several places in the Taṣīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa: despite the outward appearance of a thing as wrath and punishment, inwardly, it is pure mercy. This does not mean that both of God’s hands are equal. Insofar as His hands are different and there are differences amongst His creatures, those who do not maintain the rights of lordship will be held responsible for their negligence. The general outcome will nevertheless be mercy. With this point in mind, Şadrā offers a reading of Q 39:67. The verse states that the entire earth will be in God’s grip on the day of resurrection, and the heavens will be folded in His right hand. Şadrā understands this to mean that all things will be enfolded back into God’s mercy, despite the disparity amongst creatures with respect to their place of return. That is to say, the scroll upon which the entire cosmic drama was written will simply be rolled back up and returned to its original author.

Şadrā devotes much more time to God’s feet than he does to His hands. This is partly because any talk of God’s “feet” in Islamic thought automatically calls to mind two other important Qur’ānic symbols, namely His Footstool (kursî) and Throne (‘arsh). The image of God’s two feet as sources for the diversity in the cosmos therefore allows Şadrā to explain how multiplicity and opposition result from harmony, and how wrath and mercy become fragmented from mercy itself. The Throne is the seat or locus of mercy in accordance with the divine

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130 Cf. ibid., 1:157. Cf. also ibid., 1:159-61, where Şadrā follows Qūnawī, Ḥāz, 475-8 (not 465-78 as noted by Khwājawi at Şadrā, Taṣīr, 1:162 n. 1) in his discussion of how chastisement exists either to protect or purify the servant.
131 Şadrā, Taṣīr, 1:151.
132 Cf. ibid.
command “Be!” According to Q 20:5, the All-Merciful seats Himself upon the Throne.\(^\text{133}\) Since the All-Merciful sits on the Throne, each of His two feet dangle from it and are placed upon the Footstool. Basing himself on Ibn Ṭarab’s *Futūḥāt*,\(^\text{134}\) Ṣadrā explains this phenomenon as follows:

When God created the Throne, He made it the locus of the establishment of existential mercy and the Unity of the Word of existentiation, which is the saying “Be!” [Q 2:117] And He created the Footstool, and the Word was divided into two commands—Command and creation—so that He could create a pair of everything.… The two feet were let down onto the Footstool until the Word of the Spirit became divided in the Footstool, for the Footstool is the second in form and shape after the Throne. From the Footstool, two shapes came about in the body of the natural world. So the two feet were let down onto the Footstool, and each foot alighted in a place. One place was called the “Garden” and the other “Hell.”\(^\text{135}\)

The Footstool ontologically stands at a level lower than the Throne and also acts as the locus through which the polarity of God’s divine names (symbolized by the two feet) become operative in the cosmos.\(^\text{136}\) Although the two feet existed before they came to rest upon the Footstool, the Footstool is what allows the feet’s properties to become actualized, that is, materialized. It is clear from Ṣadrā’s discussion concerning the path of the soul that the place into which each foot alights is the Garden and the Hell of the soul respectively, since the path

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\(^{133}\) According to Qaṣṣaṣ, the Throne is the seat upon which the Muḥammadan Reality is seated, and from which mercy is distributed throughout the cosmos. This reading is in keeping with the Qur’anic idea of the All-Merciful establishing Himself upon the Throne, for the Muḥammadan Reality is the locus of manifestation for the name al-raḥmān. See Rustom, “Dāwūd al-Qaṣṣaṣ,” 57 ff. See also Jambet, *The Act of Being*, 414.


\(^{136}\) Cf. ibid., 1:149, where Ṣadrā takes his lead from Ibn Ṭarabī and his followers when discussing God’s feet: “In His establishing Himself upon the Throne, He also has two feet which were let down onto the Footstool. The one which designates the foot of firmness [allusion to Q 10:2] gives fixity [thubūt] to the people of the Gardens in their Gardens, while the other one, which designates the foot of domination [jabarūt], gives fixity to the people of Hell in Hell.” Cf. Murata, *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook of Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 85-8.
traversed by the individual will ultimately lead him back to his own reality, namely to Heaven or Hell.

Since the cosmos and all that it contains came about by virtue of the All-Merciful extending His two feet and allowing their properties to take on corporeal form, what will happen when the cosmos will cease to exist? Quite naturally, the cosmos will cease to exist when the All-Merciful draws up His feet, thus having all properties in the cosmos—whether they manifest God’s attributes of wrath or mercy—return back to their Source of mercy. Şadrā goes on to make this point in beautifully poetic language. It can be noted that the same passage will also be found in the relevant section in the Asfār. However, the account of the folding of the legs of the All-Merciful figures differently in both texts. For one thing, in the Asfār, Şadrā does not provide as detailed an account as he does in the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa with respect to how all things are rooted in mercy. No less important is the fact that in the Asfār, the passage in question is ascribed to Ibn ʿArabī, to whom it indeed belongs.137 Yet in the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa, the same text now becomes Şadrā’s. It is perfectly naturalized into his treatment of the two feet of the All-Merciful, and, without explicitly citing Ibn ʿArabī, he explicates “his” important point. In the end, God’s walking staff will be cast aside, and all things will end in repose and tranquility:

The feet will not be contracted except from the root from which they became manifest, namely the All-Merciful. So they only give mercy, for by virtue of wisdom, the end returns to the beginning, except that between the beginning and end there is a path. If this were not the case, there would be no beginning and end to it. The journey is where one can expect to find [mazinna] fatigue, misfortune, and toil. This is the cause of the emergence of the wretchedness that has become manifest in the cosmos in terms of this world, the next world, and the isthmus [barzakh]. At the end of the sojourn, the walking staff [ʿāṣā al-tasāyur] will be cast aside and repose [rāḥa] in the abodes of permanence and perdition will reign.138

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137 Ibn ʿArabī, Futūḥāt, 3:462.
138 Şadrā, Tafsīr, 1:155; slightly altered from Asfār, 9:357 (cf. idem, Spiritual Psychology, 675-6).
Ṣadrā freely borrows material from the Futūḥāt again, this time in slightly paraphrased fashion.\(^{139}\) Ibn ʿArabī/Ṣadrā anticipate a possible objection to the question of how residence in Hell can entail repose and comfort for its dwellers. They acknowledge that, although from one perspective it is correct to say that Hell is not a place of comfort, such a one who does so has not given the matter “complete consideration” (al-naẓar al-tām̄m).\(^{140}\) Then the example of two types of wayfarers is given. One of these wayfarers lives an opulent and easy life. Such a person is like the one who arrives to the Garden. The other type of wayfarer travels by foot and has paltry provisions along the way. When he reaches his home, he is tired and miserable for a while. Then, when his fatigue wears off, he finds repose. The latter wayfarer is like the person in Hell. He is chastised for a while, and then, by virtue of God’s all-embracing mercy, is given repose.\(^{141}\) These people will be ranked in Hell according to the level of punishment owed to them. Once the punishment expires, that is, once they are purged of the dross of their sins (just as the wayfarer suffers fatigue until he is restored to full health), they will be placed in the Garden.\(^{142}\)

According to several Qur’anic verses, a party of individuals will reside in Hell forever.\(^{143}\) But, as a number of prominent Muslim thinkers have observed, an eternal state of suffering in Hell seems problematic for several reasons. Firstly, it would seem senseless for a human being to suffer eternally for actions which are purely finite in their nature. Secondly, since God is not being wronged or offended by the servants’ wrong actions, and punishment is a form of cleansing for them, surely there must come a point when they will become purified, at which

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\(^{139}\) Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 1:155; paraphrasing Ibn ʿArabī, Futūḥāt, 3:462; also cited by Ṣadrā at Asfār, 9:357-8 (cf. idem, Spiritual Psychology, 676).

\(^{140}\) Idem, Tafsīr, 1:155. At Futūḥāt 3:462, Ibn ʿArabī simply has “reflection” (naẓar).

\(^{141}\) Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 1:155.

\(^{142}\) See ibid.

\(^{143}\) See, for example, Q 2:39, 13:5, 43:74, and 58:17.
time suffering in Hell would be superfluous. After all, if God is all-merciful, then an eternal state of suffering for any human being would seem to contradict this principle.\textsuperscript{144} But the most important reason the idea of an eternal state of suffering in Hell was problematic for these Muslim thinkers is because it contradicts scripture. As Ibn ʿArabī argues,\textsuperscript{145} although the Qurʾān speaks of people abiding in the Fire forever (\textit{khālidīnā fīhā abadan}), it does not state that they will be punished in it forever.\textsuperscript{146} Another important scriptural reference which the notion of eternal suffering in Hell would seem to contradict—and one upon which, as we have seen, Ibn ʿArabī and Mullā Ṣadrā base their argument—is the fact God says in the famous \textit{ḥadīth qudsī} that His mercy outruns His wrath. Thus, the most faithful reading of scripture would be to maintain that although there will be people in Hell forever, they will not be punished therein eternally.

\textsuperscript{144} Another argument for the noneternity of Hell is that since human beings did not will to come into existence, placing some of them in Hell eternally would violate God’s responsibility towards His creatures. See the penetrating remarks in Martin Lings, \textit{A Return to the Spirit: Questions and Answers} (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2005), 77: “God knows that the worst sinners in Hell are totally innocent of one thing, namely their own existence, for which He alone is responsible.”

\textsuperscript{145} See Ibn ʿArabī, \textit{Futūḥāt}, 3:77.

\textsuperscript{146} Ibn ʿArabī says that in the expression \textit{khālidīnā fīhā}, the feminine pronoun \textit{hā} always goes back to the word Fire (\textit{nār}) and not to chastisement (\textit{adhāb}), which is masculine at any rate. In other words, Ibn ʿArabī argues, there will indeed be people who abide in Hell forever, but they will not abide in their state of punishment forever. See Chittick, \textit{Imaginal Worlds}, 113; Ibn ʿArabī, \textit{Futūḥāt}, 3:77. Cf. Abrahamov, “The Creation and Duration of Paradise and Hell in Islamic Theology,” 94. Cf. the discussion on \textit{khālidīnā fīhā abadan} in James Robson, “Is the Moslem Hell Eternal?,” \textit{Muslim World} 28 (1938): 386-93 (pp. 386-8 in particular). See also the nuanced approach to the question in \textit{Encyclopedia of the Qurʾān}, s.v. “Hell and Hellfire” (by Rosalind Gwynne). It is interesting to note that, according to Lory, \textit{Les commentaries ésotériques du Coran d’après ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī}, 129-32, Kāshānī also upholds the position of the non-eternity of Hell, although he is not as explicit as Ibn ʿArabī in this regard.
We have already considered how the argument for the change of state in Hell is put forth by Şadrā on the grounds that the divine decree demands that Hell and Heaven both be filled.\(^{147}\) By virtue of the all-pervasiveness of mercy and its essentiality, human beings will eventually be enveloped in mercy, despite the fact that the structure of the cosmos in terms of the distribution of the divine names demands that some people be in Hell and others in Heaven.

### 5.2.4 – A Contradiction in the ʿArshiyya?

With the above points from the Asfār and Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa in mind, it is significant that in his ʿArshiyya, Mullā Şadrā takes the exact opposite view on the question of the pleasurable nature of Hell: “[I]t would appear that Hell is not an abode of comfort. Rather, it is only a place of pain, suffering, and endless torment.”\(^{148}\) We are certain that the ʿArshiyya was written after the Asfār, since it mentions this book on a number of occasions and reproduces much of its material. In the ʿArshiyya, Şadrā also makes mention of his Taʾlīqāt Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-îshrāq,\(^{149}\) which in turn mentions the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa.\(^{150}\) As we have seen in chapters one and three of this study, Şadrā sometimes inserts the titles of later writings into his earlier works, thereby making it almost impossible to date some of his compositions. But if we were to assume that the ʿArshiyya was in fact written after the Taʾlīqāt and the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa, we appear to have a contradiction with respect to Şadrā’s position in the Asfār concerning the pleasurable nature of Hell, a view which he confirms and upon whose details he elaborates in the Tafsīr.

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149 See ibid., 135.
150 This point was communicated to me by Hossein Ziai—whose edition of Şadrā’s Taʾlīqāt is forthcoming—in an email correspondence (February 11th, 2008).
Sūrat al-fātiḥa. How, then, are we to reconcile this passage in the ‘Arshiyya with Ṣadrā’s statements in the Asfār and the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa?

The operation does not seem difficult when we consider the circumstances under which Ṣadrā wrote the ‘Arshiyya. The ‘Arshiyya, unlike the Asfār and Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa, is a much less technical book, and hence more accessible to nonspecialists. As has been noted by Michel Chodkiewicz, prudence at times forced Ṣadrā to conceal his borrowings from Ibn ‘Arabī. ¹⁵¹ This is undoubtedly because Sufism, especially the more theoretical type, was not always viewed favourably by the Safavid ‘ulamā’. ¹⁵² Indeed, one of the reasons Ṣadrā was exiled is because of his Sufi sympathies. Thus, Ṣadrā’s distancing himself from his true position concerning the nature of Hell in the ‘Arshiyya was a cautionary move so as to forestall condemnation by the ‘ulamā’. This point is confirmed by Morris, who notes that “Sadra’s suppression here in the ‘Arshiyya of all but the faintest allusion to his agreement with Ibn Arabi is in keeping with one level of intention of his work.”¹⁵³ This “level of intention,” Morris tells us, was dictated by Ṣadrā’s awareness of his social and political context, which necessitated that he conceal his more extreme interpretations from ‘ulamā’ hostile to anything against what they considered the norm.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² See Cooper, “Some Observations on the Religious Intellectual Milieu of Safavid Persia”; Pourjavady, “Opposition to Sufism in Twelver Shiism.” But by the same token, Ṣadrā did not view the exoteric scholars of his day too favourably. See, in particular, the introduction to his Sīh aşl. See also Corbin, “Introduction,” 23-4.
¹⁵⁴ See Morris, “Introduction,” in Ṣadrā, The Wisdom of the Throne, 43. Indeed, as Rizvi, notes, one of Ṣadrā’s positions which was later condemned by the famous author of the Bihār al-anwār, Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (d. 1111/1699), was his belief in the non-eternity of Hell. See Rizvi, Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, 33. At the same time, as
5.2.5 – *The Tafsîr Sûrat al-Fâtiha’s Soteriology in Context II*

5.2.5.1 – *Chastisement’s Sweetness*

Returning to the *Tafsîr Sûrat al-fâtiha*, it should be clear that, in this text, Şadrâ treats the question of the nature of eternal residency in Hell in a much more explicit manner than he does in the *Asfâr*. Reproduced below is Şadrâ’s final citation from the *Futûhât*. This passage, more than any other, demonstrates his stance on the question of eternal suffering and serves as an effective summary of his arguments in the *Asfâr* and the earlier parts of the *Tafsîr Sûrat al-fâtiha*. At the same time, it goes beyond what Şadrâ had stated earlier, demonstrating the logical outcome of his own ontology when expressed in the language of scripture. Ibn ‘Arabî/Şadrâ tell us that the last batch of people in Hell who are there by virtue of God’s solicitude (*‘inâya*) will be trapped in Hell and surrounded by its flames. Like the nonbelievers mentioned in Q 60:13 who despair over “the people of the graves” (*ašhâb al-qubûr*) (i.e., in their thinking that death is the end of all things and that the people of the graves will not be brought back to life), the people enclosed by Hell’s fires will also despair. It is at that moment that God’s mercy will overcome them and provide for them a constitution which will allow them to experience joy in the Fire. Their chastisement (*‘adhâb*) will therefore become sweetness (*‘adhb*):

They will find the chastisement [*‘adhâb*] sweet [*yasta‘dhibûna*], so pains will cease and the chastisement [*‘adhâb*] will become sweetness [*‘adhb*]….155 God willing, the inhabitant of every abode will taste sweetness. So understand! Do you not see the truth of what we have said? Because of the deficiency and nonexistence of fullness that is in it, the Fire will not cease to be painful until the Compeller places His foot in

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155 Cf. Chittick, “Ibn al-‘Arabî’s Hermeneutics of Mercy,” 166; Ibn ‘Arabî, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, translated by Ralph Austin (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1980), 109-10. After this point, Şadrâ makes it clear that he is reporting a text from Ibn ‘Arabî, but does not note that what had preceded this and what is to follow is also from the latter’s pen.
it, as has been related in the tradition. This is one of the two aforementioned feet on the Footstool. The other [foot] is the one whose resting place will be the Garden: *Give glad tidings to those who believe, that they have a foot of firmness with their Lord* [Q 10:2]. The name “Lord” will be with them, and the name “Compeller” will be with the others because the Fire is the abode of majesty, domination, and awe, whereas the Garden is the abode of beauty, intimacy, and the subtle divine alighting place [manzil al-ilāhī al-laṭīf]. The two of them are face to face with the two grips mentioned in the Sacred tradition: “One for the people of the Fire, and I don’t care; the other for the people of the Garden, and I don’t care.” He does not care because the end for both is to the all-embracing mercy.

### 5.2.5.2 – From Philosophic Language to Scriptural Discourse

We have by this point seen a number of instances in both the *Asfār* and the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa* in which Mullā Ṣadrā freely borrows material from Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Futūḥat*. In all cases in which Ṣadrā cites Ibn ‘Arabī in the *Asfār*, he does so explicitly. At the same time, both Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ* and *Futūḥat* are cited explicitly in the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa*. It would seem that

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156 For the ḥadīth which speaks of God (as al-jabbār) extinguishing the flames of Hell by placing His foot in Hell, see Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 361; Murata, *The Tao of Islam*, 86.


159 Cf. Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, 1:71-2; citing Ibn ‘Arabī, *Futūḥat*, 2:86-7: “In *The Meccan Openings*, Shaykh al-‘Arabī says: ‘Know that God intercedes with respect to His names. His name ‘the Most Merciful of the merciful’ intercedes for His names ‘the Compeller’ and ‘Terrible in Chastisement’ in order that He may withdraw His chastisement from these parties. Thus, the one who did no good whatsoever [for this tradition, see Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 197] will exit the Fire. God has called attention to this station: *The day We muster the godfearing [muttaqīn] to the All-Merciful in droves* [Q 19:85]. The ‘god-fearing’ person merely sits with that divine name on account of which fear [khawf] falls into the hearts of servants. His intimate is called ‘fearful of Him’ [muttaqī minhu]. God will lift him from this name to that name which gives him safety from that which he was fearful. For this reason, the Prophet said concerning the intercession, ‘the Most Merciful of the merciful remains.’ This relationship relates to intercession to the Real from the Real with respect to His names.’ In his treatise entitled *The Flashes*, Shaykh al-‘Irāqī relates that Abū Yazīd al-Baṣtāmī heard the verse, *The day We muster the godfearing to
when Ibn ‘Arabi is acknowledged as a direct source for one of Şadrā’s statements, it is because the latter is trying to demonstrate how a problematic theological question had been dealt with by his most illustrious predecessor—someone for whom he had unqualified admiration. This is a rare exception, given how critical Şadrā is of almost all of his predecessors, from Avicenna\textsuperscript{160} to his own teacher Mîr Dâmād.\textsuperscript{161}

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\textit{the All-Merciful in droves}. So he let out a cry and said, ‘How will He muster to Him those who are with him?’ The other one [i.e., Ibn ‘Arabi] came and said, ‘From the name ‘the Compeller’ to the name ‘The All-Merciful,’ and from the name ‘the Overbearing’ to [the name] ‘the Compassionate.’” For this passage in ‘Irāqī, see his \textit{Divine Flashes}, 95. For Ibn ‘Arabi’s reply, see Chittick, \textit{The Sufi Path of Knowledge}, 37; idem, \textit{The Self-Disclosure of God}, 23. See also Ibn ‘Arabi, \textit{Bezels}, 108-9.

\textsuperscript{160} See, for example, Jambet, \textit{The Act of Being}, 211, 386-98, 470 n. 44; Şadrā, \textit{Asfār}, 8:135-6 (translated in Chittick, “Translator’s Introduction,” xxvi).

\textsuperscript{161} Rizvi, \textit{Mullā Şadrā Shīrāzī}, 11-3 makes it clear that Mîr Dâmād and Şadrā had great affection for one another. At the same time, Mîr Dâmād’s position concerning the existence/essence debate was that essence was real and principal and existence unreal and accidental. There is no doubt therefore that Şadrā’s conversion to the position of the fundamentality of being was a direct consequence of his reaction to his teacher’s ideas. In the case of Ibn ‘Arabi, Şadrā seems to side with him almost unequivocally on every issue (cf. p. 212 for Şadrā’s slight disagreement with Ibn ‘Arabi, as well as Şadrā, \textit{Risālat al-ḥashr}, 112-4 [Arabic text]). One can aver that this is because the position of the fundamentality of being, although worked out by Şadrā in its philosophical form against the backdrop of his highly original dynamic metaphysics (and thus outside of the framework of traditional Aristotelian substance metaphysics), is nothing other than what would later be called \textit{wahdat al-wujūd}. With this point in mind, we nevertheless differ with Jambet (\textit{L’acte d’être}, 173), who translates the expression \textit{wahdat al-wujūd} as “l’unité foncière d’acte d’exister” (“the fundamental unity of the act of existing”; cf. the English translation of the phrase in Jambet \textit{The Act of Being}, 182), since the expression does not necessarily imply \textit{wujūd}’s movement. Rather, it simply refers to the fact that all things in being are “one.” See Chittick, “Rûmî and \textit{wahdat al-wujūd},” in \textit{Poetry and Mysticism in Islam: The Heritage of Rûmî}, ed. Amin Banani, Richard Hovannisian, and Georges Sabagh, 89 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). For an argument on why \textit{wahdat al-wujūd} should be rendered as the “oneness of being” instead of the “unity of existence,” see Chittick, “The Central Point,” 27-8 n. 5. For Şadrā, the notion of \textit{wujūd}’s dynamism and hence its “act” is a natural corollary to his doctrine of \textit{wujūd}’s gradational nature. For a pertinent discussion of the important precursors to Şadrā’s ontology in the thought of members of the school of Ibn ‘Arabi, see Dagli, “From Mysticism to Philosophy (and Back): An Ontological History of the School of the Oneness of Being” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2006). Cf. Rizvi, \textit{Mullā Şadrā and Metaphysics}, 45-6.
Interestingly, a number of Ibn ‘Arabi’s statements from the *Futūḥât* explicitly cited by Ṣadrā in the *Asfār* appear, as we have seen above, as Ṣadrā’s own words in the *Tafsîr Sûrat al-fâtiḥa*. This would lend support to our argument that the latter text, by virtue of having been written several years after the *Asfār*, gave Ṣadrā the perfect chance to present a much more coherent soteriological argument than he could in the *Asfār*. Thus, when in the *Tafsîr Sûrat al-fâtiḥa* Ṣadrā reworks Ibn ‘Arabi’s statements into his writings and does not acknowledge his source or seems to do so in a somewhat vague manner,¹⁶² it might be because he is trying to be as direct as possible in making his point, a point which doubtless came from the pen of Ibn ‘Arabi,¹⁶³ but which Ṣadrā was then able to integrate into his perspective as his “own” point.¹⁶⁴ Hence, despite the fact that Ṣadrā lifts these passages from Ibn ‘Arabi almost verbatim, we have every reason to assume that the soteriology articulated in these passages is his soteriology as well.

Why Ṣadrā would resort to a scriptural mode of expression concerning the final return of all creatures as opposed to his more philosophical arguments found in the *Asfār* is in keeping with the overall goal of his work on the Qurân, namely to clothe within the garb of scriptural symbols the philosophical truths which he had verified for himself. At the heart of this personal experience undergone by Ṣadrā was his profound encounter with being. Since mercy is to

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¹⁶² Cf. n. 151 above.

¹⁶³ It can be noted here that few if any readers familiar with Ibn ‘Arabi’s writings would not notice Ṣadrā’s borrowings from the former. Cf. Chodkiewicz, “The *Futūḥât Makkiyya* and its Commentators,” 221, where he notes that even when Ṣadrā had to conceal his borrowings from Ibn ‘Arabi for reasons of prudence, they “are easily identifiable nonetheless.”

religious language what being is to philosophical language,\textsuperscript{165} when tackling the problem of soteriology, which for Şadrā is naturally discussed within the universe of the Islamic revelation, it was all the more fitting that he would choose to express himself most clearly within the context and terminological “ confines” of his commentary upon the Qurʾān’s most widely known and recited \textit{sūra}.

5.3 – Conclusion

In the \textit{Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa}, Mullā Şadrā demonstrates his reliance upon the teachings of Ibn ‘Arabī to address two important questions: (1) what is the nature of idol worship?, and (2) what is the ultimate fate of all human beings? In tackling the first problem, Şadrā articulates a version of the position—well-known to Islamic thought by his time—concerning the “God created in beliefs.” Şadrā relates this idea to his theoretical scriptural hermeneutics: since the Qurʾān and being are two sides of the same coin from one perspective, those who remain on the surface of being, who have a particular idolized conception of the nature of reality, will likewise remain on the surface of the Qurʾān. It is only when man penetrates being, that is, shatters his intellectual constructs concerning the nature of reality (and, hence, God), that he may penetrate the ocean of the Qurʾān. Such a profound view of things is reserved for the Perfect Man, who, by virtue of not falling into the trap of “metaphysical idolatry,” sees the cosmos for what it truly is: a theatre for the manifestation of God. The Perfect Man, therefore, is able to read the Qurʾān as it should be read.

Understanding the nature of being is the same thing as understanding the nature of God’s mercy. Since all things issue from God and are nothing but modes of God’s being, they can also

\textsuperscript{165} See n. 62 above for the identification of God’s Essence with \textit{rahma}, and \textit{rahma}’s identification with \textit{wujūd}. 
be said to issue from mercy and be nothing but modes of God’s mercy. Likewise, since all modes of being must return to their Source of being, so too must all modes of mercy return to their Source of mercy. Hence, the end for all creatures is mercy. This point, which Şadrā articulates most clearly in his *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa*, is, again, indebted to Ibn ʿArabī. But Şadrā attempts to address another important question which appears to be demanded by the content of the Fātiḥa itself, namely the fact that there are differences in grades of individuals. As Q 1:7 asserts, there is the path of those who have received God’s mercy, and the path of those with whom God is angry and those who have gone astray. In attempting to address the problem of how one can maintain felicity for all human beings while also taking into account the obvious disparity in types of human beings, Şadrā articulates a picture of the afterlife in which the form of salvation received by human beings is shaped by the differing paths which they had chosen during their time on earth. The result is a highly individualized presentation of the nature of human beings’ return to their source of mercy. Thus, although in the end God’s mercy will triumph for all human beings, the form in which they receive His mercy will depend upon the diverse paths which they had taken during their lives on earth.
Conclusion

For all of our knowledge of Mullā Ṣadrā’s life and philosophical teachings, a number of aspects of his thought remain terra incognita. His work on the Qur’ān, we argued, is a good place to start. Not only were Ṣadrā’s compositions on the Qur’ān and its sciences voluminous, but he made sure that his writings on scripture would give a more concrete form to the abstract ideas contained in his philosophical books. For Ṣadrā, the Qur’ān and being are, from one perspective, two sides of the same coin. This fundamental insight allows his work on the Qur’ān to demonstrate the manner in which his philosophical teachings can be modulated into religious language.

This explains why, in his function as a scriptural exegete, Ṣadrā does not simply read the Qur’ān as a philosopher. Just as he ably articulates his experience of being in his philosophical writings, so too does he convey his experience of the Qur’ān in his works on scripture. This phenomenon is illustrated very well in the *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, Ṣadrā’s most important theoretical work on scripture. The *Mafātīḥ* is unique in that Ṣadrā viewed it as occupying a special place amongst his writings on the Qur’ān. It articulates the basic esoteric perspective which informs all of his writings on the Qur’ān by demonstrating the intimate link shared between the book of being and the becoming of the human soul.

If the *Mafātīḥ* is Ṣadrā’s most important work on the Qur’ān in terms of theory, the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fāṭiḥa*, which is his last complete tafsīr, is his most important work on the Qur’ān in terms of practice. As a commentator upon the Fāṭiḥa, a sūra which occupies central importance in Muslim daily life, Ṣadrā is impelled by it verses to reflect upon and provide solutions to some of the core issues which lie at the heart of human existence itself: what is the nature of gratitude,
mercy, compassion, praise for God, belief, and unbelief? To aid his meditations on the Fātiḥa, Ṣadrā incorporates into his unique philosophical perspective the teachings of a number of his illustrious predecessors who tackled similar issues. At the same time, while the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa* presents us with a handy exposition of Ṣadrā’s key doctrines, a number of positions taken in his earlier books undergo modifications in the context of his commentary on the Fātiḥa’s verses.

The practical nature of the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa* is best displayed by the manner in which Ṣadrā is able to recast his complex ontology into the language of theology and scripture. The cosmology of praise attendant upon Ṣadrā’s ontology as laid out in the context of his commentary upon the Fātiḥa’s verses allows his theoretical discussions from the *Mafātīḥ* to come to life. Here we see how God’s self-praise results in the emergence of the cosmos, and how the cosmos, as the “stuff” of God’s self-praise, is nothing other than a seamless expression of modes or instantiations of praise. Since being is graded and multi-level, the more one manifests of praise, the more he manifests of being.

The Perfect Man, as the pinnacle of existence, is, therefore, the most perfect form of praise in the cosmos since he has ascended the scale of being and reached the highest possible point on the ladder of praise. The station of praise in which the Perfect Man stands allows him to understand the nature of existence in its entirety. And, since the Qur’ān and being can be said to have the same reality, the Perfect Man can likewise understand the nature of the Qur’ān in its entirety.

Drawing on Ibn ʿArabī, Ṣadrā also reminds us that knowing the nature of existence is tantamount to knowing God’s mercy, since mercy and being are the same reality. Understanding God’s mercy demands a vision of the cosmic order in which all things proceed from mercy and
return to mercy. At the same time, Şadrā avers, the route that each soul takes as it descends the scale of being/mercy is entirely unique to it, just as the route each soul takes in ascending the scale of being/mercy is entirely unique to it. This leads Şadrā to make his most important observation in the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiha (which, incidentally, is not to be found in any of his other works): each human being must follow the path that is particular to him, which means that each human being will, in the end, receive a mercy from God that is particular to him. This, of course, does not negate God’s wrath. Some people, in returning to the abode of mercy, must come through the door of wrath. But, despite the fact that human beings will return to God in very different states—some in beautiful robes of honour and others in tattered garments of humiliation—in the end, it is God’s mercy that shall have the final say.

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It is hoped that this study was able to demonstrate the extraordinary range of Mullā Şadrā’s sources and synthetic abilities as a late Islamic philosopher concerned with scripture. It is also hoped that we have been able to raise questions concerning the function of scripture in Şadrā’s thought in general, and his most important tafsīr in particular. Studying the way in which one of Islam’s major philosophers expresses his philosophical teachings through the symbolic language of scripture can be instructive in another manner as well: we witness here a fine example of a wider trend in later Islamic thought in which philosophy learns to speak the language of scripture and religious dogma.
Appendix I

A Tentative Chronology of Ṣadrā’s Qur’anic Works

Below is a tentative chronology of Ṣadrā’s Qur’anic works. The first table considers their order of composition with respect to themselves, and the second with respect to his other, datable writings. In order to avoid confusion, I have only employed Gregorian dates.

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1 The dates given in this tentative chronology are based on the following (in their order of usefulness): Rizvi, Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, 51-135; references within Ṣadrā’s writings; Bidārīfār, “Taqdim,” 110-1; Chittick, “Translators’ Introduction,” xix-xx; email correspondences with Hossein Ziai (February 11th 2008) and Sajjad Rizvi (February 12th 2008).
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<tr>
<td><em>Ca. 1613</em></td>
<td><em>T. Ā. Kursī</em></td>
<td>Before <em>T. S. Sajda</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1614</td>
<td><em>Wāridāt</em></td>
<td>1621?</td>
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<tr>
<td>1618</td>
<td><em>Kār</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1606-20</td>
<td><em>Sh. al-Hidāya</em></td>
<td>Completed around 1606, reworked in 1620</td>
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<td>Before <em>T. S. Sajda</em></td>
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<td><em>Ikšīr</em></td>
<td>Possibly before <em>T. S. Yāsīn</em></td>
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<td><em>T. S. Ḥādīd</em></td>
<td>Before <em>T. S. Sajda</em></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Before <em>T. S. Sajda</em>; After <em>T. S. Yāsīn</em></td>
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<td>1628-31</td>
<td><em>Shawāhid</em></td>
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<td>Before <em>T. S. Sajda</em></td>
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<td>Most likely after <em>Mafātīḥ</em></td>
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<td>After <em>Mafātīḥ</em></td>
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<tr>
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<td>After <em>Shawāhid</em></td>
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<td><em>Arshiyya</em></td>
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Appendix II

Texts from the *Futūḥāt*
Reworked into the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*

Presented below are the key texts Mullā Ṣadrā assimilated into his *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa* from Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Futūḥāt*. I have juxtaposed the relevant sections with one another in order to demonstrate the carry-over of ideas from one text to the other. The *Futūḥāt* passage in text I is taken from Ibn ‘Arabī, “Towards God’s Signs,” trans. William Chittick in Ibn ‘Arabī, *The Meccan Revelations*, 1:182. A part of the *Futūḥāt* passage in text IV is reproduced from Chittick, “Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Heremeneutics of Mercy,” 166. In both cases, I have modified these translations in order to maintain terminological/conceptual consistency amongst the texts presented.

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I

*Futūḥāt, 3:449*

It is reported in the Ṣahīḥ [of Muslim] that the Messenger of God said, “God is beautiful and He loves Beauty.” It is He who made the world and brought it into existence upon His own form [*ṣūrā*]. So the whole world is beautiful in the extreme; there is no ugliness in it…. That is why the knowers become enraptured by it and the verifiers realize love for it. And that is why we have said concerning it in some of our explanations of it that it is God’s mirror. So the knowers see nothing in it but God’s form…. For He is the one revealed in theophany in every face, the object of gaze in every eye, the object of worship in every act of worship, and the Final Goal in both the unseen and the seen…. So the whole cosmos prays to Him, prostrates itself before Him, and glorifies His praise.

*Tafsīr, 1:153-4*

In a narration it has been related that God is beautiful and He loves beauty. He is the artisan of the cosmos and brings it into existence in His form [*shākila*], as He says, [Say:] "everyone acts according to their form” [Q 17:84]…. So the entire cosmos is of the utmost beauty because it is a mirror for the Real. This is why the knowers become enraptured by it and the verifiers realize love for it. For He is the object of gaze in every eye, the beloved in every form of love, the object of worship in every act of worship, and the Final Goal in both the unseen and the seen. The entire cosmos prays to Him, praises Him, and glorifies Him.
When God made the Throne the locus for the oneness of the Word, which is the [name] the All-Merciful and none other than it, and [when] He created the Footstool, He divided the Word into two commands in order to create two pairs from everything so that one of the two pairs would be qualified by highness and the other by lowness (one being active and the other passive). The two feet were let down onto the Footstool when the Word of the All-Merciful became divided in the Footstool, for from the Footstool itself the division of the Word became manifest. This is because amongst the forms of bodies which become manifest in the primary substance the Footstool is second after the all-encompassing Throne, while they are both forms in the universal natural body. So the two feet were let down onto the Footstool, and each foot alighted in a place which was not the place in which the other alighted. This was the end of their alighting. One place was called the “Garden” and the other “Hell.” There is no place to which the two feet can travel beyond these two places. And they will not be contracted except from the root from which they became manifest, namely the All-Merciful. So they only give mercy, for by virtue of wisdom [Iṣâma], the end [nihāya] returns to the beginning [bidâya], except that between the beginning and end there is a path. If it were not for this path, there would be no beginning and goal [ghāya]. A journey is what occurs between the beginning and the goal, and is where one can expect to find fatigue and misfortune. This is the cause of the emergence of the wretchedness that has become manifest in the cosmos in terms of this world, the next world, and the isthmus. At the end of the sojourn, the walking staff will be cast aside and repose in the abodes of permanence and perdition will reign.
If you were to say that the matter is not such that repose is to be found should one dwell in a place called “the Fire,” we would say [the following]: you are correct, but reflection [naẓar] has escaped you! This is because travelers are of two types: one traveler’s journey is as if he did not move anywhere because of the state of comfort he was in by virtue of his being served—all of his needs being provided for him on a platter which is supported by the necks of men—and protected from change in climate. In arriving to his home he is like the people of the Garden in the Garden. [The other] traveler treads on the path with his feet, has paltry provisions, and diminished supplies. When he arrives home, fatigue and hardship remain with him for a while, until they depart him. Then he finds repose. This is like the one who is punished and wretched in the Fire (which is his home), and then the mercy which encompasses all things becomes widespread. Between these two types of travelers there is a traveler who does not have the comforts of the person of the Garden, nor the chastisement [ṣaḥaf] of the person of the Fire. So he is between repose and fatigue. [He belongs to] a party which will be taken out of the Fire through the intercession of the interceders and the removal of the Most Merciful of the merciful. And this party will be in ranks. This is why amongst them there will be those who are ahead and those who lag behind, in accordance with the fatigue that remains with them. In the Fire, the fatigue will be removed bit-by-bit [ṣayyān ba’ad shay]. When [the one in the fire’s] time is up, he will be taken to the place of repose, which is the Garden.

To the one who says that the matter is not such that one will find repose should he dwell in a place called “the Fire,” it could be said to him: you are correct, but complete reflection [al-naẓūr al-tāmm] has escaped you! This is because travelers are of two types: one is in a state of comfort on his journey because of his being beloved, served—all of his needs being provided for him on a platter which is supported by the necks of men—and protected from change in climate. His likeness in arriving to home is like the people of the Garden in the Garden. [The other] traveler treads on the path with his feet, has paltry provisions, and diminished supplies. When he arrives home, fatigue and hardship remain with him for a while, until they depart him. Then he finds repose. This is like the one who is punished and wretched in the Fire (which is his home), and then the mercy which encompasses all things becomes widespread. Between these two types of travelers there is a traveler who does not have the comforts of the person of the Garden, nor the chastisement [ṣaḥāb] of the person of the Fire. So he is between repose and fatigue. [He belongs to] a party which will be taken out of the Fire through the intercession of the interceders and the removal of the Most Merciful of the merciful. And this party will be in ranks in accordance with the fatigue that remains with them. In the Fire, the fatigue will be removed bit-by-bit [ṣayyān fa-ṣayyān]. When their time is up, they will be taken to the place of repose, which is the Garden.
Those remaining will be the ones whom the Most Merciful of the merciful will cause to come out. They are the ones who did no good whatsoever, neither by way of having faith nor by way of displaying excellent character traits. It is just that they were preceded by solicitude [‘ināya], [which demands] that they should be amongst the people of this abode…. Then the doors will be locked, and the Fire will surround [them] and there will be despair over getting out. At that time, mercy will spread amongst the Fire’s inhabitants, because they had despaired getting out of it. They had feared leaving [i.e., despaired leaving] the Fire when they saw that the Most Merciful of the merciful was taking people out, whereas God had given them a constitution which is agreeable to one who inhabits this abode…. So when they despair, they will rejoice—their bliss will be the measure [of their despair], this being the first bliss that they will find and their [first] state in the Fire, as we have mentioned…. Thus they will find the chastisement [‘adhāb] sweet [yasta‘dhibūna], so pains will cease and the chastisement [‘adhāb] will become sweetness [‘adhāb]…. God willing, the inhabitant of every abode will taste sweetness. So understand! Do you not see the truth of what we have said? Because of the deficiency and nonexistence of fullness that is in it, the Fire will not cease to be painful until the Compeller places His foot in it, as has been related in the tradition. This is one of the two aforementioned feet on the Footstool. The other [foot] is the one whose resting place will be the Garden: Give glad tidings to those who believe, that they have a foot of firmness with their Lord [Q 10:2]. The name “Lord” will be with them, and the name “Compeller” will be with the others because the Fire is the abode of majesty, domination, and awe, whereas the Garden is the abode of beauty, intimacy, and the subtle divine descent [manzil al-ilāḥī al-latīf]. The two of them are face to face with the two grips mentioned in the Sacred tradition: “One for the people of the Fire, and I don’t care; the other for the people of the Garden, and I don’t care.” He does not care because the end for both is to the all-embracing mercy.
Appendix III

Key Texts from the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*

I have reproduced here, with my own descriptive headings, the most important passages to be found in Šadrā’s *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa*, many of which have been translated in their entirety (either in the text or footnotes) throughout the course of this study. I have sought to present these translated texts (a) in the order in which they unfold within the *tafsīr*, and (b) in isolation from the detailed historical and theoretical issues considered in the previous chapters, thereby allowing Šadrā’s key teachings in the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa* to stand on their own.

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**Introductory Remarks**

*Tafsīr, 1:1*

Now is the time to penetrate the loci of witnessing [*mashāhid*] of the Qurān’s signs, after laying out the keys to the doors of paradise, making clear the lamps of the lights of guidance and gnosis, and firmly planting the foundations of wisdom and faith.

**The Mother of the Qurān**

*Tafsīr, 1:1*

It is called the Mother of the Qurān [*umm al-qurān*] because of its containing [*iḥtiwā*] all of the meanings which are in the Qurān.

**The Nature of the Qurān**

*Tafsīr, 1:2*

Each of its *sūras* is an ocean full of jewels of meaning and exposition. Rather, [they are] celestial spheres filled with the stars of the realities and essences. Every one of its verses is a shell within which are hidden precious pearls, all of which are valuable for man’s soul.
The Special Nature of the *Fātiḥa*

*Tafsīr, 1:2*

The light of guidance and the life of faith proceed from His lights (*lumān*), especially this sura which, despite its concision, contains all of the verses of the Qurān and the sum total of the secrets of the Origin, Return, and the states of creatures on the final day before the All-Merciful. So listen with the ear of your heart to the recitation of God’s verses, and let the lights of the miracle of the Messenger of God penetrate your insides.

On the *isti‘āda* Formula

*Tafsīr, 1:7*

The better and more illustrious one is, and the higher and more perfect his rank, his devil is stronger, more seductive, more astray, and has subtler ruses, more intricate and hidden ways, is further off the course of the straight path, more averse to the right-guiding practices, and more blind to seeing the Real. Since the status of reciting the revelation and listening to its verses is the most illustrious status, the command has been instituted to seek refuge in God from the devil, who is distant and banished from oneness. This is why he is qualified by the exaggerative form of being accursed [in the *isti‘āda* formula].

God’s Words

*Tafsīr, 9-10*

His Speech [*qawl*] and Word [*kalima*] are not of the genus of sounds and letters, just as His Essence and attributes are not of the genus of bodies and modalities. Nor are they of the genus of substances and accidents. Rather, His Speech [*qawl wa-kalām*] and Command [*amr*]—as has been stated in the *Mafātīḥ*—is pure intellective disembodied being. So His Words are holy existents [and] spiritual matters which are the intermediaries between God and the creatures, and through which is realized His knowledge, power, and the penetration of His will and desire amongst the existent things.

The Perfect Words

*Tafsīr, 10-1*

The proof that, by the “Words of God,” the absolute, intellective divine existences are what is intended, is that the Words are described as “Perfect.”... So God, glorified and exalted is His Word, is above completion and is the End of ends, since through Him is the completion
of everything, the life of every living one, the light of everything that is illuminated, and the medicine and cure of every sickness and ailment.

There is a fine point here: the origination of bodies—their substances, dark and other accidents, natures, and natural effects—is only gradational [tādrij], [proceeding] bit by bit. [This is] similar to motion, which is the gradual exiting from potentiality into actuality. As for innovated things, their existentiation and exiting [potentiality and going] into actuality only obtains in one instant: And Our Command is nothing but one, like the blink of an eye [Q 56:5]. When the Command is like this, its origination from God resembles the origination of letters [comprising a word] which only come to exist in one instant, that is, at that very indivisible moment. Because of this likeness, their completion is their very beginning. That which comes about through the carrying out of His determination is called the “Word,” and is described as “Perfect.”

How Evil Comes About

*Tafsîr*, 1:16

The first of existent things to issue from Him is the world of His Command and decree, in which there is fundamentally no evil (as has been mentioned), except, by God, what becomes hidden under the radianse of the First Light. This is the murkiness which necessitates contingent quiddities, which arise from the diminution of their existential ipseities from the divine Ipseity.

The Different Approaches to the Qur'ân

*Tafsîr*, 1:28

Know, O one concerned with understanding the meanings of the book!—God guide you to the right way—that here there are investigations into written expressions [lafz]. Some of these are related to the imprints of the letters and their written appearances, and forms of words and their sonal qualities, for [all of] which God put in place a people—such as scribes, reciters, and memorizers—and rendered the utmost of their endeavours to be knowledge of the proper recitation and beautiful writing of these expressions. Some of these are related to knowing the states of [their] structure, derivation, the states of inflection, and the building of words. And some of these are related to knowing the primary senses of the individual and composite terms. All of these [forms of investigation] fall short of the furthest goal and the loftiest station [al-maqāṣid al-aṣâw wa-l-manzil al-asnâ]. A party of each of these [investigators] has reached the boundary of the end and risen therein to the utmost expanse [of these investigations into written expressions]. God has set them up to acquire these partial sciences [al-‘ulûm al-juz’îyya]—which are relied upon for
understanding the realities of the Qurʾān—so that their rank may be the rank of servants and instruments for that which, in reality, is the result and end, and which leads to the perfection of the human species.

Know that speech consists of expressions and allusions, just as the existence of man is composed of an unseen and visible dimension [ghayb wa-shahāda]. Expressions are for the people of observance [ri‘āya], and allusions are for the people of solicitude [‘ināya]. Expressions are like the enshrouded dead person whereas allusions are like the subtle, recognizing, knowing [faculty] which is man’s reality. Expressions come from the World of the Visible ['ālam al-shahāda], whereas allusions come from the World of the Unseen ['ālam al-ghayb]. Expressions are the shadows of the unseen, just as man’s individuation [tashakhkhūṣ] is the shadow of his reality.

As for the people of outward expressions and writing [ahl al-‘ibāra wa-l-kitāba], they have wasted their lives away in acquiring words and foundations, and their intellects have drowned in perceiving exposition and meanings. As for the people of the Qurʾān and the Word [ahl al-qurʾān wa-l-kalām]—and they are the people of God [ahl allāh] who have been singled out for the divine love, lordly attraction, and prophetic proximity—God has facilitated the way for them, and accepted from them few works for the journey. That is because of the purity of their intentions and their hearts.

The Religion of the Folk of God

Tafsīr, 1:30

Every party has a position [madhhab] and an opinion [ra‘y] in accordance with what they think draws them near to God and [increases their] servanthood to Him. Because of the differences in their positions [mashārib wa-madhāhib], they pursue it and aspire towards it, rejoicing in what is with them [Q 30:32] and mocking what someone else comes with, even if he is on clear evidence from his Lord [Q 11:17]. People take positions concerning what they love. But the position of the folk of God is something else: their religion is the sincere religion [Q 3:39]. Rather, they have no position other than God, and no religion other than Him: Is sincere religion not for God? [Q 3:39].

Those who love out of caprice take diverse positions.

As for me, I have a single position, and dwell in it alone.

In reality, they are the servants of the All-Merciful [Q 25:63], while the others are the servants of their positions and opinions, and students of their egos and caprice. This is because servitude and obedience towards the Lord is a branch of knowledge and seeking proximity to Him, since seeking the unknown is impossible. Thus,
whoever is not a knower of God or of His Sovereignty [malakūt], how can he love and seek Him and endeavour to become proximate to and intimate with Him?

However, the Real, out of the perfection of His compassion [ra'fa] and mercy [rahma] towards His servants, the all-encompassing nature [shumūl] of His benevolence [āṭifa], the unfolding [inbisāl] of the light of His being towards the contingent things, and the self-disclosure [tajallī] of the [manifest] face of His Essence to the existent things, made for each of them a likeness [mithāl] which they could imitate, a refuge [mathāba] towards which they could strive, a path which they could traverse, a direction towards which they could aspire, a qibla with which they would be satisfied, and a law in accordance with which they could act. He says, For everyone there is a direction to turn, so vie for the good. Wherever you are, God will bring you all together [Q 2:148]; For each of you We have made a law and a way [Q 5:48]; Each party rejoicing in what is with them [Q 30:32].

The Word of God is one of the flashes of His Essence. Just as there are differences of opinion [ikhtilāf wa-tafawwut] in peoples’ positions and beliefs concerning God—i.e., between the one who declares God bodily [mujassim] and the one who declares Him dissimilar [munazzih]; the philosopher [mutafalsif] and denier of God’s attributes [mu’aṭtil]; the one who ascribes partners to God [mushrik] and the one who declares Him one [muwaḥhid]—so too are there differences of opinion between them in understanding [the Qur’ān]. This is one of proofs of the Qur’ān’s perfection, for it is a deep ocean in whose current most people drown, and from which none are saved except a few.

**How Supplication Produces Effects**

*Tafsīr, 1:33*

According to the verifiers amongst the scholars, it has been affirmed that the effecter [mu‘aththīr] of the substances of existents is none other than the Originator—exalted be His name!—or, with His permission, one of His angels brought near. So, in terms of bringing into or out of being, bodily accidents do not produce effects [ta‘thīr] in substantial things. The best of invocations and supplications merely bring about effects from the side of their meanings and the soul’s being connected—when it invokes—to their active principles. Thus, the world of the wise remembrance [Q 3:58] is the well-spring of success-giving to matters of concern and the beginning-point of answers to supplications, not the clashing or letters and sounds and the movement of lips with words and expressions.
That the Name is not Accidental  
*Tafsîr, 1:33*

It appears as if the gnostics’ customary usage corresponds to the customary usage of the Qur’ân and Ḥadîth. For the name in His saying, *Glorify the name of your Lord the Most High* [Q 87:1] and *Blessed is the name of your Lord, Possessor of Majesty and Generosity* [Q 55:78], is far from having been intended to be a letter or sound and what is connected to them, for they belong to the accidents of bodies. And what is like this is the most vile of things…. So, according to them, God’s name is a meaning sanctified beyond the blemish of temporal origination and renewal [*waṣmat al-ḥudîth wa-l-tajaddud*], [and] is exalted above the deficiency of becoming [*takawwun*] and change [*taghayyur*]. For this reason, seeking assistance and blessings [*isti‘âna wa-tabarruk*] fall upon His name.

On the Divine Names  
*Tafsîr, 1:34-6*

According to the great ones amongst the gnostics, the name “God” [*ism allâh*] is an expression of the All-Gathering Divine Level [*martabat al-ulâhiyya al-jâmi‘a*] for all of the tasks, standpoints, descriptions, and perfections, within which all of the names and attributes—these being nothing but the flashes of His light and the tasks of His Essence—are ranked. This Level marks the first instance of multiplicity to come about in existence, and is an isthmus between the Presence of Exclusive Oneness [*al-ÎaÊra al-aÊadiyya*] and the loci of creation and the engendered Command [*al-ma‘âhir al-amriyya wa-l-khalqiyya*]. In itself, this name brings together every contrary quality and opposing name, as you have already come to know. With each quality, the Essence takes on a [specific] name—the names articulated in speech being the “names of the names”—and the multiplicity in them is in accordance with the multiplicity of the [names’] characters and attributes. This multiplicity is nothing but the standpoints [*îtibârât*] of His unseen levels and His divine tasks [*shu‘ûn ilâhiyya*], which are “the keys to the unseen” [*mafâîth al-ghayb*], whose shadows and reflections fall upon the existing things.

All that is in the world of contingency is a form of one of the names of God and a locus of one of the tasks. So God’s names are intelligible meanings in the Unseen Being of the Real, meaning that the Essence of Exclusive Oneness is that which the intellect has no way of conceiving, since, were It to “exist” or occur to the intellect in order for the intellect to grasp It, these meanings would be divested from It, and the intellect would [be unable to] qualify It with itself. Thus, given Its unity and simplicity, the Essence of Exclusive Oneness allows for the predication
of these meanings to It without there being an added quality [to It], as has already been discussed.

Like all of the universal concepts, these meanings are, in themselves, neither existent nor nonexistent, neither general nor specific, and neither universal nor particular. They are not like the existential ipseities which are existent in themselves and individuated in their ipseities, since these latter are like rays and connections to the Being of the Real: when they come to one’s mind, something bound to God’s Essence—which is existent through His being and necessary through His necessity—is thought of. They are unlike the universal meanings because they may become universal in the mind, but particular externally; and they may be existent in the intellect, but nonexistent in reality. Yet they do have properties and effects in actual existence. Rather, the properties of existence are applied to them accidentally, and, from the pre-eternal necessity and oneness, the properties become illuminated through His light and tinged with His colour.

One of the People of God said: “The Real Existent is God exclusively with respect to His Essence and Entity, not with respect to His names. For the names have two denotations: one of them [denotes] It Itself, which is the Essence of the Named. The other is what denotes Him, namely that through which one name is differentiated from another and what is distinguished in the intellect. So that through which every name is the other name itself, and that through which it is other than it, has become clear to you. That through which one name is identical [with the other names] is the Real, and that through which one name is other than [the other names] is the imagined Real…. So glory to the One who has no denotation other than Himself, and whose being is not affirmed except by Himself!”

The Nonexistence of the Entities

_Tafsīr, 1:36_

So all of the intelligible entities and universal natures are, in reality, nothing but imprints and signs denoting the modes [anḥā] of contingent existents which are drops of the ocean of necessary reality, rays of the sun of the Absolute Being, and loci of His names, attributes, beauty, and majesty. As for these very entities and quiddities which in a specific sense are secluded from the existents, they are fundamentally nonexistent, both to the eye and intellect. Rather, they are only names, as He says, _These are merely names that you and your fathers have given to them. God has not revealed an authority concerning them_ [Q 53:23].
The Indefinable Essence

*Tafsîr, 1:37*

God’s Essence has no definition, just as there is no proof for It. As for what is understood by the expression “God,” does it have a definition or not? The Real is the First because the meaning predicated of Him is a sum total which gathers the meanings of all the attributes of perfection. Thus, every meaning of God’s names forms a part of this Name, when the Name is differentiated.

Obtaining a Flash of the Essence

*Tafsîr, 1:39*

The people of unveiling and witnessing cannot attain a flash of the Essence’s light except after the passing away of their identities, and the crumbling of the mountain of their existence.

The Inaccessibility of the Name

*Tafsîr, 1:39*

The concepts *mafhûmât* of all the divine names and their existential loci *maâhir*, which are parts of the cosmos—both outwardly and inwardly—despite their multiplicity, [form] a real definition *hadd haqiqî* in signifying God’s name *ism allâh*. It follows that all the meanings of the realities of the cosmos are a definition of God’s name, just as all the meanings of the divine names define Him, except that it is possible for the human intellect to encompass *[ihâta] all the definitions of defined things in their particulars, as opposed to the meanings of the particulars of His definition, because the meanings cannot be confined [ghayr mahsûra].

On Ibn ʿArabî’s Reference to “the Real”

*Tafsîr, 1:39*

What was intended by “the Real” in Ibn ʿArabî’s saying “The Real is defined by every essential definition,” was that which is meant by *mufâd* the word “God” *allâh* from the standpoint of its universal meaning and intellectual concept, not from the standpoint of the reality of its meaning, which is the Essence of Exclusive Oneness *al-dhât al-ahadiyya* and the Unseen of the unseens *ghayb al-ghuyûb*, since It has neither essential definition, nor name, nor description, and intellectual perception does not have a way to It.
Idols of Belief

*Tafsîr, 1:40-2*

Know O saint!—May God illumine your heart with faith—that most people do not worship God insofar as He is God. They merely worship the objects of their beliefs in accordance with what they have formed for themselves as objects of worship. In reality, their gods are those imaginary idols which they form [*yataṣawwarūna*] and carve [*yanḥitūna*] with the potency of their intellectual or imaginary beliefs. This is what one of the knowers of the People of the Household—namely Muhammad b. ‘Alî al-Bâqîr—alluded to [when he said], “Whatever distinction you make using your imagination in coming up with the most precise of meanings is something created like you, and returns to you.”

That is, a believer amongst the veiled ones—those who create the divinity in the forms of the object of their belief and nothing else—only worships a god on account of what he creates within himself and forms [*tasawwara*] using his imagination. In reality, his god is created for himself and sculpted with the hand of his potent free-disposal. So there is no difference between those idols which are taken as gods [externally] and his god, owing to the fact that they are all created for the self, whether they be external or internal to it.

External idols are also only worshipped because of their worshipper’s belief in their divinity. The mental forms are the objects of their worship essentially, and the external forms are their objects of worship accidentally. Thus, the objects of worship of every idol-worshipper are nothing but the forms of his beliefs and the caprices of his soul, as has been alluded to in His saying, *Have you seen the one who takes his caprice for his god?* [Q 65:23].

Just as worshippers of bodily idols worship what their hands have created, so too do those who have partial beliefs concerning God worship what the hands of their intellects have gathered. His words have proven true against them and their objects of worship: *Woe to you and what you worship apart from God!* [Q 21:67]. Likewise are His words, *You and what you worship apart from God will be rocks for Hell* [Q 21:98]. Because of his deficiency in understanding the meaning [of this verse], Ibn Zâbrâr objected to the Messenger of God, stating that the angels and the Messiah are also worshipped. But he and those who had his rank did not know that the object of worship of the one who worships the angels and the Messiah is itself one of the acts of Satan.

As for the perfect ones amongst the gnostics, they are the ones who worship the Absolute, the Real—who is given the name “God”—without the delimitation of a particular name or a specified quality. The Real who is described by every name discloses Himself to them and they never deny Him in any of the self-disclosures of His names, acts, and traces, unlike the delimited and veiled one who worships God according to a specific wording: *if good befalls him, he reposes in it; if affliction
befalls him, he turns away on his face [Q 22:11]. That is because of the predominance of the properties of some of the homesteads and the veiling of his vision by some of the loci of self-disclosure over others.

From this veiling, differences amongst people in matters of belief come about. Thus, some of them anathematize others, and some curse others, while every one of them affirms for the Real what the other denies, thinking that what they opine and believe is the highest form of exaltation of God! But they err and display bad etiquette towards God, while they think that they have attained the highest rank in knowledge and etiquette!

So also is the case with many of the people of declaring God’s incomparability—because of the predominance of the properties of disengagement upon them, they are veiled like the angels [who are veiled] by the light of declaring God holy, while they are opposed to those who declare God’s similarity, who, like animals, are veiled by the darknesses of declaring God bodily.

As for the Perfect Man, he knows the Real in every object of witnessing [mashāḥīd] and religious rite [mashā‘īr]. He worships Him in every homestead [mawṭin] and locus of manifestation, so he is the servant of God [‘abd allāh] who worships Him in all of His names and attributes. On account of this, the most perfect of human individuals—Muḥammad, God bless him and his family—was given this name. Just as the divine name [Allāh] brings together all the names—which are unified because of the Exclusive Unity of All-Gatheredness—so too does its path bring together the paths of all the names, even if each of these paths are specified by a name which sustains its locus, and each locus is worshipped and its straight path particular to it is traversed from that perspective. There is no path that brings together the paths of all of the loci of manifestation except the one upon which the locus of the Gathering Prophetic Seal travels—which, being the path of declaring God’s oneness and upon which were all of the Prophets and saints—is travelled by the elect of the Prophet’s community, which is the best of communities.

The Precedence of Mercy

_Tafsīr, 1:42_

It is just as He says, _And do not follow the paths [al-subul], for they will divert you from His path [sabīlihī]_ [Q 6:153], that is, the path which is for you contains felicity and salvation, for if this were not the case, then all paths would lead to Him, since God is the end-point of every purpose and the Final Goal [ghāya] of every endeavour. However, not everyone who returns to Him will attain felicity and salvation from dispersion and chastisement. For the path to felicity is one: _Say: “This is my path [sabīlī]. Upon insight I call to God myself and those who follow me”_ [Q
As for the other paths, all of their goals is God firstly. Then the All-Merciful \([al-raÎmÁn]\) will take over for Him \([yatawallâhu al-raiman]\) at the end, and the property of the All-Merciful will subsist amongst them for eternity, whose subsistence has no end. This is a strange affair! I have not found anyone upon the face of the earth who knows it as it truly should be known.

### The Names “God” and “He”

*Tafsîr*, 1:42-3

Know that the relationship of the name “He” to the name “God” is like the relationship of existence to quiddity in a contingent thing, except that the Necessary has no quiddity other than existence \([anniyya]\). It has already been discussed that the concept of the name “God” is one of the things that has a true essential definition, but that intellects are unable to encompass \([ihâta]\) all of the meanings that enter into its essential definition. For the form of a definition is only known when the forms of the essential definitions of all the existents are known. If this is not the case, then the form of the essential definition cannot be known \([wa-idh laysa fa-laysa]\). As for the name “He,” It has no definition and no allusion can be made to It. So It is the most exalted station and the highest rank. For this reason, the perfect arrived ones have been singled out \([yukhtaÒÒu]\) with perpetually being \([mudÁwama]\) in this noble invocation. A fine point in this is that when the servant invokes God with some of His attributes, he is not drowned in knowledge of God, because when he says “O All-Merciful,” he is invoking His mercy, and his nature inclines to seeking it .... But when he says “O He!,” while knowing that He is a pure ipseity which is uncontaminated by generality, specificity, multiplicity, plurality, finitude, and definition, this \([\text{then}]\) is the invocation which does not denote anything at all except Perfect Existence \([al-aniyya al-tÁmma]\), which is uncontaminated by a meaning dissimilar to It. At that time, the light of Its invocation will settle in the servant’s heart. This light cannot be defiled by the darkness generated by invoking other than God. This is the perfect light and the complete unveiling.

### The Light of the Essence

*Tafsîr*, 1:44

His Essence, in the intensity of light, is infinity beyond the infinite. So what escapes the servant is infinitely more than what is witnessed. Thus, He is unseen by everything in His perfect, simple reality, even though He is witnessed by the servant.
The End for All is Mercy
Tafsîr, 1:70-2

Know that God’s mercy embraces all things with respect to existence and quiddity. So the existence of wrath, in terms of the entity of wrath [ṣayn al-ghâdâb], is also from God’s mercy. For this reason, His mercy outstrips His wrath, since being is that very mercy which encompasses [shâmîla] everything, as He says, And My mercy embraces all things [Q 7:156]. Amongst the totality of entities and quiddities—all of which the existential mercy [al-raḥma al-wujûdiyya] reaches—are the entities of wrath and vengeance. Through mercy, God gives existence to the entity of wrath, so its root is good, as is what results from it, such as pain, sickness, tribulation, trial, and the like....

Whoever closely examines the concomitants of wrath [lawâzim al-ghâdâb], such as sickness, pain, poverty, ignorance, death, and others, will find all of them to be nonexistent in themselves [bi-mâ haiya] or nonexistent matters considered to be amongst the evil things. With respect to them being existents, they are all good, pouring forth from the well-spring of the mercy that is all-embracing and the existence that pervades all things. Because of this, the intellect will judge that the attribute of mercy is essential to God and that the attribute of wrath is accidental, which arises out of the causes either because the contingent existents lack perfection in accordance with the ranks of their distance from the Real, the Self-Subsisting, or because of the incapacity of matter to receive existence in the most perfect manner. On account of this, it is unveiled that “the end for all is mercy.” As has been related in the tradition, God says, “The angels have interceded, the prophets have interceded, and the believers have interceded—there remains none but the Most Merciful of the merciful.”

In The Meccan Openings, Shaykh al-‘Arabî says: “Know that God intercedes with respect to His names. His name ‘the Most Merciful of the merciful’ intercedes for His names ‘the Compeller’ and ‘Terrible in Chastisement’ in order that He may withdraw His chastisement from these parties. Thus, the one who did no good whatsoever will exit the Fire. God has called attention to this station: The day We muster the godfearing [muttaqîn] to the All-Merciful in droves [Q 19:85]. The ‘godfearing’ person merely sits with that divine name on account of which fear [khawf] falls into the hearts of servants. His intimate is called ‘fearful of Him’ [muttaqî minhu]. God will lift him from this name to that name which gives him safety from that which he was fearful. For this reason, the Prophet said concerning the intercession, ‘the Most Merciful of the merciful remains.’ This relationship relates to intercession to the Real from the Real with respect to His names.”

In his treatise entitled The Flashes, Shaykh al-‘Irâqî relates that Abû Yazîd al-Bastâmî heard the verse, The day We muster the godfearing to the All-Merciful in droves. So he let out a cry and said, “How will He
muster to Him those who are with him?’ The other one [i.e., Ibn ‘Arabî] came and said, “From the name ‘the Compeller’ to the name ‘The All-Merciful,’ and from the name ‘the Overbearing’ to [the name] ‘the Compassionate’.”

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**The Cosmology of Praise**

*Tafsîr, 1:74-5*

As for the customary usage of the unveilers, “praise” is a kind of speech [*naw‘ min al-kalâm*]. It has already been said that “speech” [*kalâm*] is other than that which is specified by the tongue. This is why God praises Himself by means of that which He is worthy and deserving, just as the Prophet said, “I cannot enumerate Your praises. You are as You have praised Yourself.” Likewise, everything praises and glorifies Him, as He says, *There is nothing except that it glorifies His praises; but you do not understand their glorification* [Q 18:44]. So the reality of praise, according to the verifying gnastics, is the act of making God’s attributes of perfection manifest [*ižhâr al-šifâ al-kamâliyya*]. This could either be through words [*qawl*]—as is well-known amongst the masses—or it could be in act [*bi-l-fi‘l*], which is like God’s praise for Himself and the praise of all things for Him....

God’s praise for Himself—which is the most exalted level of praise—is His existentation [*iǧâd*] of every existing thing.... His existentation of every existent is “praise” in the infinitive sense, similar to the way speaking denotes beauty [of voice] through speech. The existent itself is “praise” in the sense of actualizing the infinitive. In this sense, it is valid to call every existent thing “praise.” And just as every existent is a “praise,” so too is it a praiser [*ḫâmid*], because of its being composed of an intellectual constituent and a rational substance.... This is why this intellectual denotation has been expressed in the Qur‘ân as “speech,” [*nutq*]: “God, the one who causes all things to speak, caused us to speak” [Q 41:22]. Likewise, every existent, with respect to the totality of its arrangement, is a single praise and a single praiser.

[This is] in accordance with what has been affirmed, namely that the sum total [*al-jâmî‘*] is like one large man with one reality, one form, and one intellect. This is the First Intellect, which is the form and reality of the world, and is the complete Muhammadan reality [*al-ḥaqîqa al-Muḥammadiyya al-tamâmiyya*]. So the most exalted and most tremendous level of praise is the level of the Muhammadan Seal, which subsists through the existence of the Seal [*al-martaba al-khatmiyya al-Muḥammadiyya al-qâ‘îma bi-wujûd al-khâtam*] on account of his arrival at the promised praiseworthy station in His saying, *Perhaps your Lord will raise you to a praiseworthy station* [Q 17:79]. So his hallowed essence is the utmost level of praise through which God praises Himself.
This is why he has been singled out with the banner of praise [liwā’ al-ḥamād], and was called ḥammād, aḥmad, and mahmūd.

The Specification of Praise

All levels of existents (with respect to spirit, body, intellect, and sense perception) in every tongue (with respect to speech, act, and state) praise God, glorify Him, and magnify Him in this world and the next world in accordance with their primordial disposition [sic: fiṭṭā ḥālāt] as required by their essential drive [al-dā’iyya al-dhātiyya]. There is no doubt that every innate act [fi’il ḥa’ilī] has an essential end and original calling [ghayat dhātiyya wa-ḥā‘ith aṣlī]. It has been established that His Essence is the Final Goal of final goals [ghayat al-ghayāt] and the End for [all] objects of desire. For this reason, it is possible that His saying, Praise is for God [al-ḥamdu li-llāh] [Q 1:2] is an allusion to the Origin of existence and its End. Likewise, the [first] lām in for God [li-llāh] is [an allusion] to the Final Goal, or to the specification [of praise].

The reality of existence (or all its individual parts) is “for” God [li-llāh]. Since they are “for” Him, He is also “for” them. As the Prophet says, “Whoever is for God, God is for him.” God’s Essence is the Final Cause of all things and the Final Goal of the perfection of every form of existence, either without an intermediary, as is the case with the Muḥammadan reality, which is the form of the world’s arrangement and its root and origin; or through the medium of His most holy effusion and His hallowed existence, as is the case with the rest of the existents. In this lies the secret of intercession and the banner of praise.

Man is a Macrocosm

In Bayḍāwī’s tafsīr, [he says the following]: “It is said that by it [i.e., the word ‘ālamīn in Q 1:2] He means ‘people,’ for every one of them is a ‘world’ insofar as he contains, in a manner similar to the macrocosm, the substances and accidents through which the Artisan is known, just as He is known through what He created in the macrocosm. This is why gazing upon the two is equal. God says, And within yourselves—do you not see? [Q 51:21]”

I say that the existence of every individual person (or most of them), as a locus of gazing, is composed in a manner similar to the macrocosm, whether it be most or all of it. Most people do not go beyond the confines of animality to the station of the intellect. So man’s comprising some of the things in a manner similar [to the macrocosm] is not peculiar to him.
By “the worlds” [ālamīn], He could mean the “scholars” [ʿulamāʾ min al-insān]. With respect to the usage common [ʿurf] amongst the lexicographers, this is clear. With respect to what is customary usage [mutaʿāraf] amongst people, it is because every knower (with a kasra) [ʿālim] is a world (with a fatha) [ālam]. With respect to the point of view that man contains something of all that is in the macrocosm [al-ʿālam al-kabīr], it is because his perfect configuration [nashʿatuhu al-kāmila] is the locus of all the divine names and attributes, and is the gathering place of all of the existential realities, as is known to those who assiduously pursue the signs in the horizons and within the selves [cf. Q 41:53]. So man is a prototype for all of what is in the cosmos. From this perspective, he is a small world [ālam ṣaghīr], which is why he is called the “microcosm” [al-ʿālam al-ṣaghīr], for it is as if he is a book that has condensed and abridged the entire cosmos [kitāb mukhtaṣar muntakhab min jamīʿ al-ʿālam], leaving out neither that which is great nor small except that it takes account of it [Q 18:49], just as the Qurʾān, despite its concision, contains all of the heavenly books.

**The Path**

*Tafsīr, 1:111*

Know that the path [ṣirāt] is not a path except through one’s traversing it. An allusion has been made to the fact that every creature is heading towards the direction of the Real, towards the Causer of causes [musabbib al-asbāb] in an innate manner of turning [tawajjūh gharīzī] and a motion of natural disposition [ḥaraka jibilliyya]. In this motion of natural disposition, diversion and fleeing from what God has fixed for each of them cannot be conceived of with respect to them. God takes them by their forelock, as He says, “There is not a creature except that He takes it by its forelock. Verily my Lord is upon a straight path” [Q 11:56].

**Substantial Motion**

*Tafsīr, 1:112-3*

As for essential motion [ḥaraka dhātiyya], it is substantial motion [ḥaraka jawhariyya]. As with all types of motion, it has an agent, receptacle, traversed distance, beginning, and end, except that motion in substance differs from the others in one manner: the distance traversed in this motion is the moving body [mutaḥarrīk] itself, both in reality and existence. The agent of this essential human motion is God, and its receptacle, that is, its object, is the human soul with respect to the potency of the receptivity of its soul [quwwatiḥā al-istīʿādiyya al-nafsāniyya] and its passive hylic intellect.
Why Peoples’ Natures Differ

_Ταφςιρ, 1:118-21_

It is because of their disparities in purity and murkiness, power and weakness, and nobility and lowliness; it is also in accordance with the bodily causes and worldly states—such as the material preparednesses and the continuous chain of accidents ending in the high matters—which occur to them. And [it is because] of the preeternal decree....

In sum, the disparity in creation in terms of perfection and imperfection and felicity and wretchedness is either by way of substantial essential matters, or by way of accidental matters acquired by means of religious devotions and actions. So the difference is in accordance with the essential matters by way of the pure divine solicitude, which calls for beauty of order and excellence of arrangement [in the cosmos].

The Path is the Soul

_Ταφςιρ, 1:122_

Know that were you to traverse the path and were God to firmly place your feet upon it such that He causes you to arrive to Paradise, [it would be] the form of guidance which you created for your soul in the abode of this world by virtue of God’s guiding you by way of actions related to the heart and body. In this abode, it is not witnessed as a sensory form. On the day of resurrection, and according to the view of the people of insight who have been overcome by witnessing the constitution of the afterlife, it is spread out for you as a sensory bridge [jisr maḥṣūs] extended over the surface of Hell, its start being in [this] place, and its end being at the door of Paradise. Whoever witnesses it will know that it is of his design and building, and that it is an extended bridge in this world over the surface of his Hell in the fire of his nature within which is the shadow of his reality.

God’s Writing

_Ταφςιρ, 1:135_

All of the cosmos is His writing. Indeed, the writing of authors derives from His writing which He caused to be written through the medium of the hearts of His servants. So there is nothing astonishing about an author. Rather, there is astonishment over the one who subjected him.
God’s Hands and Feet

*Tafsîr, 1:149-50*

God—hallowed is His Essence and exalted are His attributes above being composed of parts and limbs—has two holy hands, both of which are right [*yamîn allâh*]. These exalted acts are face to face with the two contrary attributes, such as the attributes of mercy and wrath, and good-pleasure and anger. Each of the contrary attributes has a grip [*qabîda*], as is indicated in His saying, *The entire earth will be in His grip on the day of resurrection, and the heavens will be folded in His right hand* [*Q 39:67*]. It has been related in a tradition that the Messenger of God said, “God will fold the heavens on the day of resurrection. Then He will take them by His right hand and will say, ‘I am the King. Where are the haughty ones? Where are the proud ones?’ Then he will fold the earth in His right hand.” And in a [different] narration, [the Prophet said], “He will take them by His other hand, and then will say, ‘Where are the haughty ones? Where are the proud ones?’”

In His establishing Himself upon the Throne, He also has two feet which were let down onto the Footstool. The one which designates the foot of firmness gives fixity [*thubût*] to the people of the Gardens in their Gardens, while the other one, which designates the foot of domination [*jabarût*], gives fixity to the people of Hell in Hell. These matters are amongst the divine levels and their concomitants amongst the general matters, which are accidental to contingent existents because of the inability of their rank in perceiving the divine levels.

Know that the ruling property [*Îukm*] of the divine wrath is the perfection of the level of the grip of the left hand [*qabîat al-shimâl*], for although both of His hands are holy, blessed, and right, the ruling property of each of them—leftness [*shimâliyya*] and rightness [*yamîniyya*]—is in opposition to the other from the standpoint of their owners. For this reason, He says, *The entire earth will be in His grip on the day of resurrection, and the heavens will be folded in His right hand.* He will render the earth “gripped” and the heavens “folded.” So understand! The hand to which all of the felicitous belong contains mercy and Gardens, while the other contains chastisement and Fires.

The Triumph of Mercy

*Tafsîr, 1:151-2*

The general mercy will necessitate the all-encompassing bestowal upon everything. There is no doubt that the affair will take place in this way. So the Word will prove true and blessings will be general. Wrath’s ruling property will become manifest, and then mercy will overcome [it]. Nothing of the contingents will be without mercy, each of them
[receiving it] in accordance with their states and the rank of their way stations.

Just as His mercy encompasses and embraces all things, so too does His wrath, except that the side of mercy is preponderant because of its being essential, while wrath is accidental because of the inability of contingents in their contingency to receive the complete light. There is an allusion to this in the saying of the Commander of the Faithful [i.e., ‘Ali, the first Imam]: “Glory to the one whose mercy embraces His friends in the intensity of His vengeance, and His vengeance is intensified towards His enemies in the embrace of His mercy.”

None Worships Anyone but Him

In a narration it has been related that God is beautiful and He loves beauty. He is the artisan of the cosmos and brings it into existence in His form [shākila], as He says, [Say:] “everyone acts according to their form” [Q 17:84]…. So the entire cosmos is of the utmost beauty because it is a mirror for the Real. This is why the knowers become enraptured by it and the verifiers realize love for it. For He is the object of gaze in every eye, the beloved in every form of love, the object of worship in every act of worship, and the Final Goal in both the unseen and the seen. The entire cosmos prays to Him, praises Him, and glorifies Him.

The Transmutations of God

The last form into which He will transmute Himself for His servants will be the ruling property of contentment [ridā']. So the Real will transmute Himself into the form of bliss…. He will be gracious towards, and forgive on His own behalf, those who angered Him by removing whatever there was in Him of annoyance, distress, and wrath. Then He will apply this to those who are objects of wrath [al-maghḍūb]. Whoever understands this will be safe from His wrath, but will not “feel safe from God’s deception” [cf. Q 7:99], and whoever does not understand will come to know, and will understand that the end is to Him.

The End of the Sojourn

When God created the Throne, He made it the locus of the establishment of existential mercy and the Unity of the Word of existentiation, which is the saying “Be!” [Q 2:117] And He created the Footstool, and the Word was divided into two commands—Command and creation—so that He
could create a pair of everything.… The two feet were let down onto the Footstool until the Word of the Spirit became divided in the Footstool, for the Footstool is the second in form and shape after the Throne. From the Footstool, two shapes came about in the body of the natural world. So the two feet were let down onto the Footstool, and each foot alighted in a place. One place was called the “Garden” and the other “Hell.” There is no place to which the two feet can travel beyond these two places. And they will not be contracted except from the root from which they became manifest, namely the All-Merciful. So they only give mercy, for by virtue of wisdom [hikma], the end [nihāya] returns to the beginning [bidāya], except that between the beginning and end there is a path. If this were not the case, there would be no beginning and end to it. The journey is where one can expect to find [mażinna] fatigue, misfortune, and toil. This is the cause of the emergence of the wretchedness that has become manifest in the cosmos in terms of this world, the next world, and the isthmus. At the end of the sojourn, the walking staff [‘asā al-tasāyur] will be cast aside and repose [rāḥa] in the abodes of permanence and perdition will reign.

The Likeness of Two Travelers

Tafsīr, 1:155

To the one who says that the matter is not such that one will find repose should he dwell in a place called “the Fire,” it could be said to him: you are correct, but complete reflection [al-naẓar al-tāmm] has escaped you! This is because travelers are of two types: one is in a state of comfort on his journey because of his being beloved, served—all of his needs being provided for him on a platter which is supported by the necks of men—and protected from change in climate. His likeness in arriving to his home is like the people of the Garden in the Garden. [The other] traveler treads on the path with his feet, has paltry provisions, and diminished supplies. When he arrives home, fatigue and hardship remain with him for a while, until they depart him. Then he finds repose. This is like the one who is punished and wretched in the Fire (which is his home), and then the mercy which encompasses all things becomes widespread. Between these two types of travelers there is a traveler who does not have the comforts of the person of the Garden, nor the chastisement [‘adhāb] of the person of the Fire. So he is between repose and fatigue. [He belongs to] a party which will be taken out of the Fire through the intercession of the interceders [Q 74:48] and the removal of the Most Merciful of the merciful. And this party will be in ranks in accordance with the fatigue that remains with them. In the Fire, the fatigue will be removed bit-by-bit [shay‘an fa-shay‘an]. When their time is up, they will be taken to the place of repose [maḥall al-rāḥa], which is the Garden.
Chastisement’s Sweetness

*Tafsır*, 1:156

The last of those who remain are those who did no good whatsoever, neither by way of having faith nor by way of displaying excellent character traits. It is just that they were preceded by solicitude [*‘ināyā*], [which demands] that they should be amongst the people of this abode…. Then the doors will be locked, and the Fire will surround [them] and there will be despair over getting out. At that time, mercy will spread amongst the Fire’s inhabitants because they had despairing getting out of it, *just as the nonbelievers despair over the people of the graves* [Q 60:13]. He had given them a constitution which is agreeable to one who inhabits this abode. So when they despair, they will rejoice—their bliss will be the measure [of their despair], this being the first bliss that they will find and their [first] state in the Fire, as we have mentioned…. Thus they will find the chastisement [*‘adhāb*] sweet [*yastā‘dhibūna*], so pains will cease and the chastisement [*‘adhāb*] will become sweetness [*‘adhb*]…. God willing, the inhabitant of every abode will taste sweetness. So understand! Do you not see the truth of what we have said? Because of the deficiency and nonexistence of fullness that is in it, the Fire will not cease to be painful until the Compeller places His foot in it, as has been related in the tradition. This is one of the two aforementioned feet on the Footstool. The other [foot] is the one whose resting place will be the Garden: *Give glad tidings to those who believe, that they have a foot of firmness with their Lord* [Q 10:2]. The name “Lord” will be with them, and the name “Compeller” will be with the others because the Fire is the abode of majesty, domination, and awe, whereas the Garden is the abode of beauty, intimacy, and the subtle divine alighting place [*manzil al-ilāh al-latīf*]. The two of them are face to face with the two grips mentioned in the Sacred tradition: “One for the people of the Fire, and I don’t care; the other for the people of the Garden, and I don’t care.” He does not care because the end for both is to the all-embracing mercy.

The Fātiḥa and the Perfect Man

*Tafsır*, 1:163-4

By my life, it is like the form of the All-Gatheredness of the world, which is created upon the form of the All-Merciful [and] denotes, in its appearance, structure, and its comprising the loci of the attributes of beauty—such as the angels and their lights—and the attributes of majesty—such as bodies and their faculties—the existence of the one to whom belong the creation and the Command [7:54].

The relationship of the *Sūrat al-fātiḥa* to the entire Qurʾān is like the relationship of man—who is the small world—to the world, which is
the great man. And just as the Perfect Man is a succinct book [kitāb wajīz] and an abridged transcription [nuskha muntakhab] within whom is found all that is in the All-Gathering great book [al-kitāb al-kabīr al-jāmi'] … so too is the Opener of the book [fātiḥat al-kitāb], within which, despite its brevity and concision, is found the sum total [majāmī'] of the aims of the Qur'ān and their secrets and lights. This All-Gatheredness [jāmī‘iyya] is not for the other Qur'anic sūras, just as none of the forms of the world’s parts have what man has with respect to [his bringing together] the form of the Divine Gatheredness [al-ṣūra al-jam‘iyya al-illāhiyya]. As it is said:

God does not find it objectionable
that He should gather the cosmos in one individual.

As has been indicated, the gnostic who verifies the truth within himself [al-zarif al-muhaqqiq] understands from this one sūra all of the sciences and universal forms of knowledge spread throughout the verses and sūras of the Qur'ān. So whoever does not understand this sūra so as to derive from it the support of the secrets of the divine sciences and lordly forms of knowledge, such as the states of the Origin and the Return and the science of the soul and what is below and above it—which is the key to all the rest of the sciences—is not a lordly knower and is not guided in his interpretation [tafsīr].

If this sūra did not, as we said, contain the secrets of the Origin and the Return and the science of man’s wayfaring to his Lord, the reports about its superiority would not have been related. Indeed, it is equal to the entire Qur'ān, since, in reality, a thing does not have rank and excellence except on account of its containing divine matters and their states, as has already been stated.

The Return of All things to God
Tafsīr, 1:166

His saying Master of the Day of Judgement [Q 1:4] is an allusion to the reality of the Return and the return of everything to Him, because He is the Final Goal of final goals [ghāyat al-ghāyāt].

The Path is the Qur'ān
Tafsīr, 1:166-7

It [i.e., the word širāt in Q 1:6] is an allusion to the Majestic Qur'ān, which is the noblest of heavenly books which [themselves] are the spiritual Tablets [al-alwāh al-nafsiyya] that have been revealed to the previous prophets. [The reason the Qur'ān has been
revealed to the Prophet is] because his intellectual, spiritual substance (this being the substance of prophecy) is, from one perspective, a divine Word, and, from [another] perspective, a clarifying book [Q 5:15] in which there are verses of wisdom and gnosis .... In himself, the Prophet is “the Path of God, the Exalted, the Praiseworthy” [cf. Q 14:1], since the servant’s arrival to God is not possible except after arriving at knowledge of the Prophet’s essence. Likewise [is the case with] the one who represents him, as the detached Qur’anic letters indicate: “Alī is the path of truth to which we cling ['alī širāt ḥaqq numsikuhu']”

A Tradition on the Distinction of the Fātiḥa

Tafsīr, 1:168

The Prophet said, “By the one in whose hand is my soul, God did not reveal its like in the Torah, Gospels, Psalms, or [anywhere else in] the Qur’ān. It is the mother of the book and the doubled seven [allusion to Q 15:87]. It is divided between God and His servant, and for His servant is what he asks.”

A Merit of the Fātiḥa

Tafsīr, 1:170

One of the merits of this sūra is that it brings together [jāmī’ā] all that man needs with respect to knowledge of the Origin, the middle, and the Return.

The Path is the Soul Revisited

Tafsīr, 1:175

With respect to its containing the science of the Return, which is the science of the states of the human soul that is perfect in knowledge and action, [and] free from the disease of ignorance and the deficiency of sin, His saying, the Path of those whom You have favoured ... [Q 1:7] is an allusion to the science of the soul. And it is “the Path of God, the Exalted, the Praiseworthy” [cf. Q 14:1], and God’s gate .... Through the acting and knowing perfect soul that is guided by God’s Light, people are driven to God, and, from this gate, all created things enter the path of return to the Creator, for being is in the form of a circle whose second part [i.e., the arc of descent] joins with the first part [i.e., the arc of ascent].
Appendix IV

Glossary of Technical Terms in the Tafsīr Sūrat al-Fātiḥa

Provided here is a glossary of the technical Arabic terms employed by Mullā Ṣadrā in the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa. Each entry contains a transliteration and translation(s) of the technical term in question, followed by a listing of the page numbers in which it is to be found in the text. Where pertinent, I have provided cross-references to (a) Ṣadrā’s other works in which the respective term figures, and (b) relevant primary and secondary literature. I have, for the most part, followed William Chittick’s translations in cases where Arabic terms employed in the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa also appear in Ṣadrā’s Iksīr al-ʿārifīn (The Elixir of the Gnostics).

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ʿālam al-ghayb → World of the Unseen; World of the Mystery

Tafsīr, 1:28. Cf. Le livre des pénétrations métaphysiques, 221

ʿālam al-shahāda → World of the Visible

Tafsīr, 1:28. Cf. Le livre des pénétrations métaphysiques, 175

fitra ašliyya → primordial disposition

Tafsīr, 1:3, 19, 118. Cf. Tafsīr, 1:119 (“primordial dispositions”)

ghayb al-ghuyūb → Unseen of the unseens, i.e., God’s Essence of Exclusive Oneness

**harf** → *letter*
*Tafsîr*, 1:28

**ḥudūth** → *temporal origination*

**hukm** → *ruling property*, i.e., of each divine name

**‘ibâra** → *expression*
*Tafsîr*, 1:28

**ibdã‘** → *spontaneous origination*
*Tafsîr*, 1:84. Cf. *Le livre des pénétrations métaphysiques*, 221

**idrâk** → *perception*

**ishâra** → *allusion*
*Tafsîr*, 1:28

**ikhtisâs** → *specification*, i.e., each thing’s specificity with respect to being
*Tafsîr*, 1:20, 76, 84-7, 89, 100, 103, 129, 131, 145, 148 (*takhşîš*), 155

**al-‘inâya al-ilâhiyya** → *divine solicitude*
inbisāt \(\rightarrow\) unfolding, self-unfolding (of being)


al-insān al-maʿnawī \(\rightarrow\) the true man

*Tafsīr*, 1:102, 108 (“the true maʿnawī man”)

iʿtibārāt \(\rightarrow\) standpoints, expressions


istīʿdād \(\rightarrow\) preparedness


jabarūt \(\rightarrow\) Invincibility, i.e., the world beyond the Sovereignty and equivalent to the world of the First Intellect.


\(\rightarrow\) domination

*Tafsīr*, 1:150

jabbār \(\rightarrow\) Compeller

*Tafsīr*, 1:71

jamʿ \(\rightarrow\) All-Gathering


jamʿiyya \(\rightarrow\) All-Gatheredness

jāmiʿ \(\rightarrow\) comprehensive, gathering


jāmiʿa \(\rightarrow\) gatherer; [that which] brings together

*Tafsīr*, 1:170

jāmiʿiyya \(\rightarrow\) Gatheredness


kalimāt tammāt \(\rightarrow\) Perfect Words


khazānat al-ghayb \(\rightarrow\) treasury of the unseen

*Tafsīr*, 1:119

khitāb \(\rightarrow\) addressing

*Tafsīr*, 1:88 ff.

lafz \(\rightarrow\) word

*Tafsīr*, 1:28

al-lawh al-nafsi \(\rightarrow\) spiritual tablet

*Tafsīr*, 1:102

maʿwā \(\rightarrow\) abode

*Tafsīr*, 1:85
**madhhab** → *position* (intellectual)

*Tafsīr*, 1:30

**malakūt** → *Sovereignty*, i.e., the spiritual realm; it is below the Invincibility and is equivalent to the world of universal imagination/images, that is, the Platonic Forms


**marhūn** → *appointed*

*Tafsīr*, 1:86-7

**martaba ulūhiyya jāmiʿa** → *All-Gathering Level Divine*, i.e., the level of the name Allāh; it is an isthmus between the Presence of Exclusive Oneness and the loci of the Command

*Tafsīr*, 1:34

**mawātin** → *homesteads*, i.e., loci of manifestation or the next world (*mawṭin*)

*Tafsīr*, 1:41 (loci); 85, 113 (next world)

**mukhtāsar** → *condensed*

*Tafsīr*, 1:79, 163

**muntakhab** → *abridged*

*Tafsīr*, 1:79

**muʿayyana** → *entified, determined*

nash’a → configuration; constitution


→ of the next life

*Tafsîr*, 1:113

nuskha → transcription


al-qalam al-a’lâ → supreme pen


sahîfa → scroll

*Tafsîr*, 1:174

surâdiq → canopies


shâmîla → encompasses/encompassing; similar to ihâtâ

*Tafsîr*, 1:39, 42-3, 70

shumûl → pervasiveness, pervading, encompassing

*Tafsîr*, 1:30

shu’ûn → tasks, i.e., the divine properties and traces found throughout creation in so far as the things in the cosmos are the *names of the names* (*asmâ’ al-asmâ’*); but when the *tasks* are at the level of the names, they are the *divine tasks* (*shu’ûn ilâhiyya*) and *unseen levels* (*marâtib al-ghaybiyya*), thus corresponding to the *keys to the unseen* (*mafâtîh al-ghayb*).

**al-ṭabî‘a al-āṣli** → *primordial nature*

*Tafsîr*, 1:121-2

**al-ṭabî‘a al-ukhrā** → *other nature*, i.e., the second constitution


**al-ṭibâ‘ al-āṣli** → *primordial imprint*

*Tafsîr*, 1:113

**tadarruj** → *gradation*

*Tafsîr*, 1:84

**taḥjawwul** → *transmutation*

*Tafsîr*, 1:154. Cf. Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge, 100-1

**takwîn** → *engendering*; synonymous with *hudûth* and *tadarruj*

*Tafsîr*, 1:84. Cf. Le livre des pénétrations métaphysiques, 211

**takawwun** → *self-engendering*

*Tafsîr*, 1:113

**tashakhkhus** → *individuation*

**wajāza** $\rightarrow$ **succinctness**

_Tafsīr, 1:79_

**wajīz** $\rightarrow$ **succinct**

_Tafsīr, 1:163_

**wusʕ** $\rightarrow$ **embracing**; similar to **iḥtiwāʔ**

_Tafsīr, 1:70 ff._
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