

Reflections on Du‘ā’ al-Bahā’ (al-Saḥar)

Ali H. Al-Hakim

Senior Research Fellow, ICAIR, London

ABSTRACT

This article will demonstrate the importance of a well-known supplication to be read during the nights of the holy month of Ramaḍān, known by the names Du‘ā’ al-Bahā’ and Du‘ā’ al-Saḥar. It is formulated in a unique and special way, as the supplicant first calls upon the Almighty by His utmost and highest attributes, so as to correct and remind himself that all of Allah’s attributes are to be characterised equally. Taking a critical look at the text leads one to question the philosophy of its style and to ask what reminder it intends to give the wayfarer or anyone else who reads it, or how one can be assured that this supplication is backed by the technical principles of hadith and accepted authentication methods. This article will explain that this supplication is unique and rich in information that could only have been issued and inspired by the Shī‘ī Imams.

KEYWORDS: Reflecting the Beauty – Divine Attributes – Supplication – Divine Interaction – Qur’anic Monotheism – Du‘ā’ Saḥar – Its Authenticity

Introduction

Du‘ā’ al-Bahā’ (al-Saḥar) consists of the elements of both supplication (*du‘ā’*) and invocation (*tawassul*), interspersed with reminders for the self as to the proper method by which to gain deep knowledge of Allah. In twenty-one parts, this supplication gives the petitioner the opportunity

to mediate with Allah at the time of *saḥar* (pre-dawn, early morning). Some of the invocations call on Allah by a particular divine name or attribute and end with that aspect of Him that is most encompassing and comprehensive; for example: “O Allah, I do entreat You by Your authority and omnipotence!” A quick comparison of the first to the penultimate invocations, however, shows that the prayer begins with the more specific attributes of Allah and continues by reminding the reader that Allah’s words are utterly complete and that His power is all-prevailing before moving on to invoking a more universal and absolute divine attribute, for example by saying: “O Allah, I do entreat You by all of Your words!” or: “O Allah, I do entreat You by all of Your power!”

From another angle, if we were to compare the twenty-first (and final) invocation we will see that it calls on Allah by one of His characteristics that is almost completely opposite to the one used in the first invocation. The final invocation suggests a movement from the universal, back to the particular. The supplicant begins by saying: “O Allah, I do entreat You by Your authority and omnipotence!” This description of God is absolute and universal. Gradually, then, the supplicant becomes more specific, saying: “I entreat You by each and every one of Your works and powers, one by one!” The supplicant concludes by invoking the Lord of lords and the All-Sovereign.

This article comprises two sections; the first discusses lessons to be learned from the supplication, followed by a comparison of Islamic teachings and Western thought in this field. The second section re-examines the authenticity of this supplication.

Section One

Lessons from the Supplication

There are three subtle lessons to be drawn from this supplication: one is spiritual, another is doctrinal, and the third and final one is to do with mystical metaphysics.

The Spiritual Lesson

The first lesson from this supplication is spiritual. One who is journeying to their Lord must carefully ponder the words of Du‘ā’ Abū Ḥamza al-Thumālī: “I knew You through You, You guided me to You, You called me to You, and were it not for You, I would not know anything about You.”

On one hand, one might turn to Allah in supplication because He is the proper destination of supplications. The Qur’an says: “Call on Me and I will answer you” (Q 40:60). This verse clearly enjoins people to supplicate to Allah. This is what Du‘ā’ Abū Ḥamza refers to when it says: “You called me to You,” as the purpose of supplication is not to satisfy the ego of the one being called upon, but rather to look after the needs of the one who calls out, and to fulfil their legitimate desires. At the same time, however, it is also an expression of humility and a plea, for the supplicant sees that he must invoke Allah with His best and nearest qualities to his own heart, and His most perfect attributes according to the supplicant’s own understanding and comprehension. Therefore, he humbly entreats Allah by His greatest attributes – His most-pervasive knowledge, His most-comprehensive names, and His all-extensive power.

It is then that the supplicant becomes aware that He only knows Allah according to his own limited understanding rather than as Allah truly is in terms of His absolute knowledge and absolute power, as all of God’s attributes are absolute and none are limited. Thus, the supplicant comes to grasp a more comprehensive understanding of divine unity in accordance with the Qur’an, which encompasses the teachings of all the prophets and messengers. Hence, the supplicant returns to Allah again, this time with the knowledge that all of Allah’s knowledge is all-pervasive, all of His power is all-extensive, and so on. He invokes Allah “by all of Your knowledge” and “by all of Your power.”

When the supplicant reaches the twenty-first part of the supplication, they have gone from spiritually travelling towards Allah to spiritually

travelling in Allah. The former state has an end and a limit, which Imam Zayn al-‘Ābidīn describes in Du‘ā’ Abū Ḥamza thusly: “For surely the wayfarer towards You is near in distance, and You are not veiled from them, but their deeds veil them from You!”

On the other hand, travelling in Allah is without end or limit, as described by Mullā ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī.¹

This journeying in Allah is without limit, and the supplicant will realise that they are standing before the Absolute, whose knowledge is all-permeating, whose power is all-pervading, and whose names are complete. Thereat, they will be overcome by divine bounties and lordly blessings, recalling the verses: “And as for your Lord’s blessing, proclaim it!” (Q 93:11); “So which of your Lord’s bounties will you both deny?” (Q55:13); and “If the sea were ink for the words of my Lord, the sea would be spent before the words of my Lord were spent” (Q 18:109).

After traversing the lines of this wonderful formulation of expression linked to one’s deeds and beliefs, it becomes apparent to the spiritual traveller that travelling to their Lord, travelling with their self, and travelling with their Lord and their self together must lead them to becoming a “wayfarer without a wayfarer” such that they do not see themselves as existing except on the level of spiritual annihilation (*fanā’*), about which the verse says: “And you did not throw when you threw, rather it was Allah who threw” (Q 8:17). In a similar vein, it is transmitted from Imam al-Ṣādiq: “It is as though I heard it from the One who spoke it!”²

The Doctrinal Lesson

Another lesson to be learned from this supplication is a doctrinal one.

¹ ‘Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī, *Mu‘jam iṣṭilāḥāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, v. 2, p. 31.

² Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Falāḥ al-sā’il*, p. 107. He narrates that the Imam would pray and recite the Qur’an in his prayer until he lost consciousness. When he regained consciousness, someone would ask: “What caused this state to befall you?” He would answer: “I recited the verse until I reached the state in which I heard it directly as it was revealed.”

In each part of the supplication, the supplicant begins by invoking that which he, in his limited understanding, believes to be the best and most perfect. However, on the subject of Allah's power, he invokes it again by recalling that there is no differentiation within Allah's power, as all instances of it are omnipotent. Equally, the supplicant recalls that all of Allah's splendour is splendid, and all of His words are complete. We, in our limited and deficient understanding, see things from just one angle rather than in their totality. Hence, the supplicant goes back and invokes Allah by His most absolute attribute – after all, does not Allah say of Himself that He is the First, the Last, the Outer, and the Inner? Hence, he says: “O Allah, I do entreat You by all of Your power!” and: “I do entreat You by all of Your words!” and so on.³

This does not mean, of course, that the supplicant has erred and corrected himself. Rather, what we see in this supplication is an ascent towards a broader, more comprehensive, and more complete understanding of Allah, one that distinguishes the teachings of Islam as brought to mankind by the Noble Messenger. In his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ* of Ibn ‘Arabī, al-Qayṣarī says about Prophet Muḥammad: “His is the wisdom of singularity because he is the most perfect creation of humankind, for which reason the whole affair begins and ends. He was a prophet when Adam was still between water and the clay, and he is, by his elemental makeup, the Seal of the Prophets, first of the three singular ones, as all other singulars derive from it. He was the clearest of evidence for his Lord, having been given the totality of the divine words.”⁴

In his commentary on this passage, al-Qayṣarī writes: “He was the most perfect creation of humankind, because the prophets – may Allah's blessings be upon all of them – were the most perfect creations of this species, and each of them is a locus of manifestation for a universal divine name (*ism kullī*), and all of these universal names are

³ See an extensive explanation to this *du‘ā* by Ayatollah Mazāhirī: <https://shorturl.at/qHR04>, accessed on 29.08.2023.

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, trans. R. W. J. Austin, p. 272.

subsumed beneath the divine name of which [the Prophet] is the locus of manifestation. Therefore, he is the most perfect member of this species, and because he is the most perfect member of this species, the affair of creation began with the origination of his spirit first and ended with the affair of his divine mission last. He is the archetype of Adam in the origination, and it is he who manifests the archetype of the finality of the species.”

This is not restricted to the Prophet being the seal of divine law (*sharī‘a*) alone, but encompasses everything that he brought in his message: ideas, laws, doctrines, and ethics. He said: “I have been sent only to complete the most noble of morals (*makārim al-akhlāq*).” Meanwhile, the Qur’an says through the Prophet: “Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed My blessing upon you, and I have approved Islam as your religion” (Q 5:3).⁵

The Metaphysical Lesson

I find myself compelled to elevate the present research to a more advanced level, rather than simple pantheism and deity metaphysics, perhaps to pure panentheism, because the divine names and attributes invoked in this supplication occur in comparison with one another and are arranged in order of precedence. How should this be done? The answer to this question will be even more lucid once we have processed the ideas within the doctrinal and spiritual lessons.

In the preliminary discussions of his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ* of Ibn ‘Arabī, and after explaining what will become of the unseen on the Day of the Greater Resurrection, al-Qayṣarī says: “He will cause things to pass into nothingness during the Greater Resurrection by becoming manifest in His oneness (*waḥda*) and overwhelming them by removing their individualities and qualities and rendering them evanescent, as per the verses: ‘To whom does the sovereignty belong today? To God, the One, the All-paramount!’ (Q 40:16), and ‘Everything is to perish

⁵ This is based on my explanatory text to *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ* of Ibn ‘Arabī, by al-Qayṣarī.

except His face' (Q 28:88).

"On the Lesser Resurrection, He will move from the realm of the visible to the realm of the unseen, or from one form to another in a single realm. Insofar as these are the forms of His entelechies and the manifestations of His names and attributes, they manifest first in knowledge (*'ilm*) and then in entity (*'ayn*) according to His desire to make manifest His signs and demonstrate His will. Thus they will multiply according to their forms, while He remains unchanged in His real sempiternal oneness. He comprehends the realities of things as He comprehends the reality of His own essence, not through some other means such as the First Intellect (*al-'aql al-awwal*), because those realities are also identical with His essence in reality (*ḥaqīqa*), even while they differ from it in entification (*ta'ayyun*).

"No one else comprehends Him, as per the verses: 'Human vision does not encompass Him, yet He encompasses human sight' (Q 6:103); 'but they cannot comprehend Him in their knowledge' (Q 20:11); 'They do not regard Allah with the regard due to Him' (Q 6:91); and 'Allah warns you to beware of Him' (Q 3:30). Allah admonishes His servants out of His sympathy and mercy for them, lest they squander their lives pursuing that which they can never obtain. If one understands that all existence (*wujūd*) is the Reality (*al-ḥaqq*), then one can know the secret behind His words: 'and He is with you wherever you may be' (Q 57:4); 'and We are nearer to him than you are, though you do not perceive' (Q 56:85); '... and in your souls. Will you not then perceive?' (Q 51:21); 'It is He who is Allah in the sky and Allah on the earth' (Q 43:84); 'Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth' (Q 24:35); 'He indeed comprehends all things' (Q 41:54); and an *al-ḥadīth al-qudsī*: 'And I was his hearing and his sight.'⁶ One can also know the secret of the Prophet's saying: 'If you

⁶ *Al-ḥadīth al-qudsī* narrations are the words of the Almighty, not stemming from the Qur'an but rather narrated by the Prophet. This particular hadith is narrated in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (v. 5, p. 2384), and by the Sunni sources *Musnad Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal* and *Sunan al-Bayhaqī*; see *Fath al-bārī fī sharḥ al-Bukhārī*, narration 6502. One may also read it in *Sharḥ al-ḥikam al-ghawthiyya*, p. 45 (by

were to lower a rope, it would land on Allah,⁷ as well as the secrets of other sayings like this that draw you towards true monotheism (*tawḥīd*) through allusive language.”

After expounding some of the attributes of the Necessary Being, al-Qayṣarī examines how He was invoked by the prophets and that He has the most beautiful names. Al-Qayṣarī has tried to elaborate on these names and on the fact that from Him is the origin and to Him is the return. After expounding on how He is described in the words of the prophets, in the words of beauty and perfection, and the phrase “He is with you wherever you are” – “with” here being used in the sense of ontological sustaining (*qayyūmiyya*), “Allah, there is no god except Him, the Living One, the All-sustaining” (Q 2:255) – al-Qayṣarī shows that neither the human being nor anything else possesses any special qualities. Humankind began by His word, marking His fixity as an individuated entity, not merely His simultaneity, and that is because what is meant by identity (*‘ayniyya*) does not contradict alterity (*ghayriyya*). If He is a boundless existence (*mawjūd muṭlaq*), however, then He is both self and other. Therefore, identity and alterity exist together as complementary opposites, not as contradictory elements. In other words, that to which is referred in this context as the most beautiful names and their unseen equivalents complement the visible ones.

Allah is both the Manifest and the Hidden. That is what the Commander of the Faithful and Master of the Monotheists, Imam ‘Alī referred to when he said: “He is within things but not through mixing,

Abū Midyan Shu‘ayb b. Ḥasan al-Tilmisānī al-Maghribī, published by Dār al-Āfāq al-‘Arabiyya, Cairo: 2008). It is also narrated by Shī‘ī sources, see *al-Kāfi*, v. 2, p. 253, narrations 7 and 8.

⁷ This is a narration that was transmitted by al-Tirmidhī, from Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, from Abū Hurayra. It is not authenticated in accordance with the principles of knowledge related to narrators of hadith, as it is unclear how Ḥasan al-Baṣrī could narrate from Abū Hurayra when their lives were separated by a long period of time.

and outside them but not through separation.”⁸ Through reflection, one may see that he is referring to the divine reflection post-creation.

There is also a hidden and unseen aspect that is not complemented by a manifest one, and this is the level of divine unicity (*maqām al-aḥadiyya*). Then there is alterity unmatched by identity, and this, too, is the station of unicity that is above the level of the First (*maqām al-awwal*).

Allah the Almighty says that He is absolute manifestation (*al-ẓuhūr al-muṭlaq*), the meaning of which was explained prior to this section. The absolute manifestation has no complementary opposite; Allah is the absolute manifestation, which is the station of the divine essence (*maqām al-dhāt*) that has no complementary opposite. Other narrations have referred to it as the absolutely unknown (*amma*),⁹ in accordance with Prophet Muḥammad’s answer, when he was approached about the divinity in this stage.

Were we to descend from the level of the divine essence to the level of entification (*maqām al-ta’ayyun*), insofar as our discussion is about the station of the essence of the unseen (*maqām dhāt al-ghayb*) (as a full negation, not as an affirmative proposition in negative form or a full affirmation), by “pure unseen” or “the unseen of the unseen” is not meant the “unseen” merely in the sense of “not visible” but also in the sense of “totally unseen”. At the level of entification, however, there are two identical existences. If one were to say: “There is the unseen and the visible,” and “These are the unseen and the visible,” they are one and the same, because this is a level beneath that of the divine essence.

Sometimes, we might say “there is the unseen” without anything being there to complement it, and this is the unseen at the level of the divine essence, which is without entification or opposite. As for

⁸ See *Nahj al-balāgha*, sermon 150, which begins: “All thanks belongs to Allah, who has manifested Himself through His creation.”

⁹ This narration has been transmitted in *Sunan Ibn Māja* and *Sunan al-Bayhaqī*, as well as by *al-Tirmidhī* in his *Sunan*, who considered it authenticated and/or described it to be “good” just like al-Dhahabī.

the unseen that exists at the level of visibility (*maqām al-shahāda*), meaning the hidden (*al-bāṭin*) that is the opposite of the manifest (*al-ẓāhir*), they are entifications that are sometimes expressed as “hidden and manifest” and sometimes as “unseen and visible”. All of these are entifications which exist only when we descend from the level of the Highest of the high, meaning the Absolutely Unseen in the sense of a simple negation (not in the sense of an affirmation by way of negation or a full affirmation), for at this level, He exists without predication or entification, and there is no opposite for Him. When we descend to the lowest level, which is that of manifestation, there is entification, and insofar as entification occurs, it can be divided into the categories of manifest, hidden, visible, and unseen. These four divine names all occur under the name of “the Absolutely Manifest” (*al-ẓāhir al-muṭlaq*), which is without opposite.

Therefore, talking about “He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden” entails our descent to a third level, which means restraining ourselves from the level of the Absolutely Unseen (*al-ghayb al-muṭlaq*), which takes the form of a simple negation, our descent to the level of the Absolutely Manifest, which is the level of entification, and to the level of the entifications of the unseen, the visible, the manifest, and the hidden.

Therefore, as you can see, the question is not resolved, and the commentator has dealt with it in a disorganised fashion. How can those things exist at the level of entification when He says: “He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden?” In reality, the commentator has said that He is not things without bringing any evidence to support this claim! Therefore, it is an attempt at a response, but the commentator has not done the topic justice. He provides no evidence for Him being other than things; instead, he has satisfied himself with referring to Qur’anic verses without delving into any arguments.

In fact, to rephrase the same using a theological concept and recorded narration, one may refer to the time when Imam ‘Alī was approached about the term “face of Allah” (*wajh allāh*) and said that he could not

describe it; instead, he implemented a physical, albeit very convenient example. He ordered a fire to be lit, and then asked the enquirer as to where the face of the fire was. The answer was, of course, “The fire has different faces, depending on which angle one would like to observe it. Also it is almost inaccessible, as it is continuously and constantly changing!” Thus the Imam concluded that the fire was metaphorically synonymous with the face of Allah, the Almighty.

What is meant in the Qur’anic verse by the face of a deity or the “countenance of Allah”?

J. Seydanloo and M. Karaminia wrote in an article on the subject that they believe the term “countenance” in the Holy Qur’an has several meanings, the highest of which is attributed to Allah. A correct understanding of the meaning of “Allah’s countenance” like other divine names and attributes, plays a great role in creating a true monotheistic belief in Allah. Misunderstanding its correct interpretation will cause fault in belief, and polytheism in belief and practice.

For example, some commentators suggest a material and physical interpretation of Allah’s countenance, relying on the apparent meaning of the verses; some do not interpret such verses, and others interpret them as the divine essence, His attributes, divine will and satisfaction, as well as prophets and divine authorities. One must deal with the semantics of Allah’s countenance in contemporary exegeses, presenting the perspective of some contemporary philosophers of metaphysics, and conclude from the evidence with this point of view that the essence of Allah is not visible to any creature.

One should be able to imply the verse of “and whither so ever ye turn, there is Allah’s countenance”¹⁰ and the illusion of death and destruction also has no place in it to seek exemption from “Everything will perish save His countenance.”¹¹ Based on that, one may conclude that “the countenance of Allah” actually means His attributes and revelations,

¹⁰ See Q 2:115.

¹¹ See Q 28:88.

the highest examples of which are the prophets and the Shī‘ī Imams. ‘Allāma Ḥillī reports that it is narrated from Ḥamīd b. al-Muthannā, who narrated from Imam al-Bāqir:

قال إن الله خلو من خلقه وخلقته خلو منه

“God does not contain His creation, and His creation does not contain Him.”¹²

Despite the fact that the Almighty is reflected in His creation, there is a clear distinction between Him and His creation, such that He cannot be described in the same way His creations are described, nor the other way round.

It is also narrated from Imam ‘Alī:

بان من الأشياء بالقهر لها والقدرة عليها، وبانت الأشياء منه بالخضوع له
والرجوع إليه

“He is to be distinguished from His creation through His omnipotent power over them; and they are distinguished from Him through being in total need of Him and humbled before Him.”¹³

With this narration one may be able to grasp the exact meaning of the interpretation of al-Qayṣarī. As the quoted words indicate, there are two aspects of hiddenness: the first belongs to the divine essence, and the other belongs to the divine manifestations (*maẓāhir*). That is why Allah attributes hiddenness to Himself at the level of the divine attributes (*maqām al-ṣifa*) and sometimes at the level of the divine acts (*maqām al-fi‘l*). According to the principles of metaphysics, His attributes cover everything, because He has mastery over everything; hence, He must be other than everything, because He has control over everything. This alterity is an opposite attribute to identity.

Then there is alterity at the level of the divine acts, or hiddenness

¹² Al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, v. 1, p. 105; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, v. 1, p. 82.

¹³ See *Sharḥ Mullā Ṣāliḥ al-Māzandarānī*, at <https://bit.ly/3zppyoj>, accessed on 25.07.2022.

at the level of action, which exists beneath the divine names of *al-shāfi* (the Healer) and *al-kāfi* (the Sufficer), and beneath the divine manifestations of *al-mumrid* (the One Who Causes Sickness) and *al-rāziq* (the Provider). Therefore, He expounds His own nature at the level of action, and this is what distinguishes this world from the hereafter, or, as we have explained, the lesser resurrection from the greater resurrection. Sometimes, Allah becomes manifest as the Creator and the Provider, and sometimes He becomes manifest as the All-Paramount. He has neither veil nor manifestation in the sense that His attributes overwhelm all other attributes; otherwise, it would make no sense to say that He becomes manifest without any veil.

Clearly, it is difficult to draw a clear distinction between these different levels, so what can the spiritual wayfarer do in this situation but be astonished and give no heed to the perfection with which his Master addresses him, while He exists in His own self on different levels.

Islamic Sources and Western Thinkers

The best elaboration for the Western think tank is produced by the term “panentheism”, a word constructed from the Greek terms “pan” meaning all, “en” meaning in, and “theism” derived from the Greek “*theos*” meaning god. As such, panentheism considers “God” and the world to be interrelated, with the world being in God and God being in the world. While panentheism offers an increasingly popular alternative to classical theism, both it and classical theistic systems affirm divine transcendence and immanence. By prioritising the difference between God and the world, however, classical theistic systems reject any influence by the world upon God, while panentheism affirms it.

On the other hand, while pantheism emphasises God’s identity with the world, it also maintains the identity and significance of the non-divine, as one has to distinguish between the advanced and elevated status of divinity, but also accept that God is already manifested in His creation. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy has explained the

exact meaning of panentheism by stating:

“Anticipations of panentheistic understandings of God have occurred in both philosophical and theological writings throughout history (Hartshorne and Reese, 1953; J. Cooper, 2006). However, a rich diversity of panentheistic understandings has developed in the past two centuries primarily in Christian traditions responding to scientific thought (Clayton and Peacocke, 2004a).

Although panentheism generally emphasises God’s presence in the world without losing the distinct identity of either God or the world, specific forms of panentheism, drawing from different sources, explain the nature of the relationship of God to the world in a variety of ways and come to different conclusions about the nature of the significance of the world for the identity of God.

Panentheists have responded to two primary criticisms: 1) the panentheistic God is a limited God, and 2) panentheism cannot be distinguished from other forms of theism such as classical theism or pantheism ...”¹⁴

It goes on to distinguish between the various forms of panentheism within Western European notions of it, i.e. the modern term of panentheism has developed through different minds, including German Idealism, Whiteheadian process philosophy, and current scientific thought. Panentheists employ a variety of terms with meanings that are understood by the relevant experts. However, here and now we shall dedicate our discussion about this term from a purely Islamic angle, starting with the words of Iṣḥāq al-Qūnawī.

The Explanation of a Profound Islamic Pioneer

Muḥammad b. Iṣḥāq al-Qūnawī, in his *Risālat al-nuṣūṣ*, has given the best explanation of properly distinguishing between the perfection of the divine essence (*al-kamāl al-dhātī*) and that of the divine names (*al-kamāl al-asmā’ī*):

¹⁴ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/panentheism/>, accessed on 25.08.2022.

Naṣṣ on perfection and most-perfectness

“Know that the Real possesses perfection at the level of the divine essence and perfection at the level of the divine names, whose manifestation necessitates the bringing into being of the world, and the two beauties (*al-jamālān*) together with regards to the entification of the two names, because the predication of every predicator, whatever it may be, is preceded by the determination of the thing predicated in the mind of the predicator. Hence, were it not for the cognisance of the essence of the Real before the addition of the divine names to Him and His distinction by virtue of its being without need of anything else for the realisation of its existence, perfection of essence could not be predicated to Him.

There is no doubt that every determination of which the Real is cognisant is a name of His, for surely the names according to the verifying mystic are nothing but the determinations of the Real. After all, every perfection that is attributed to the Real applies to Him as a perfection of the divine names from this angle. With regard to the Real’s total absorption in the divine presence of His oneness (*ḥaḍrat waḥdatihi*), which is a corollary of His essence, all of the perfections with which He is described are perfections of His essence.

“Having established this, we say that He has this perfection because of and from His essence, for it is not diminished by external accidents or exigencies at some levels of being in the sense that these do not affect His perfection, and it is impossible to conceive of His perfection admitting any defect in that He is perfect by virtue of it. In fact, some of the accidents and exigencies manifest at some levels of being and operate as qualities of His most-perfectness. One example of this is the knowledge that this is His status.”¹⁵

Mīrzā Hāshim Ishkawārī commented on this with the following: “And know that the conclusion of [al-Qūnawī’s] investigation is that the Real is described with contingent attributes and His manifestation according

¹⁵ *Risālat al-nuṣūṣ*, pp. 51-52.

to the levels of contingency and, in short, the categorical attachment of contingent attributes to Him. This shows His perfection and most-perfectness because these are signs of His power and attestations of His abounding grace and His all-encompassing providence, such that were He not described with the attribute of one of His manifestations, this would circumscribe the extent of His providence in spite of His transcendence, metaphysical simplicity, and essential lack of need for anything other than Himself. These attributes of His at the level of Himself and fixity (*ithbāt*), demonstrate His attribute of perfection, because they represent the negation of the effects of His not needing anything else and the transcendence of His essence.

On the other hand, from the perspective of realised existence (*thubūt*), they are evidence of His power, tremendousness, and all-encompassing-ness. Therefore, these attributes are neither categorically affirmed for Allah nor categorically denied for Him. On the contrary, it makes sense to affirm them for Him in one or more conditions and negate them in others.

This is a door of knowledge behind which further doors await ... one is that whoever understands this will understand the secret of verses and traditions which might be misread as advocating anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*), such that they do not need interpretation (*ta’wīl*) because their meanings are real with regard to their being manifestations of Allah, nor do they fall within the scope of anthropomorphism, because the Real is transcendent above it with regards to His unseen oneness and His perfect ontological necessity.

The basis for all of this is what He mentioned in the *naṣṣ* ... so ponder and reflect on these, as whatever we have mentioned here we took directly from the words of the Shaykh [Ibn ‘Arabī].”¹⁶

¹⁶ *Ta’līqa bar Risālat al-nuṣūṣ-i Ṣadr al-Dīn-i Qūnawī*, pp. 51-52.

Section Two

Evidence for the Authenticity of the Supplication: Reaching Confidence

It is well known among the experts of hadiths that the supplication is narrated from Imam al-Riḍā and regarded as one of the supplications recited by Imam al-Bāqir at daybreak in the month of Ramaḍān.

Establishing Three Methods

The primary intention of this article is to establish the link between this supplication and the eighth Imam, ‘Alī al-Riḍā, not necessarily as its author, but as the one who informed and/or inspired an individual about its contents.

To establish such link, one of the following three methods could be implemented:

1. quoting actual verifiable historical documents;
2. presenting solid and undisputed testimonies of trustworthy witnesses that the supplication was narrated by reliable narrators; and
3. introducing compelling evidence based on an intertextual and contextual hermeneutical and semantic analysis of the supplication text. Without a doubt, and more preferably, a combination of all three methods, or at least an amalgamation of two of them (i.e. the second and third), should serve our cause in a much stronger way.

The First Method

My claim is that the supplication did appear in an ancient source of hadith, namely one by Ibn Ṭāwūs, who was an expert in the field of prayers and supplications. It was later recorded and further narrated

in the encyclopaedia of hadiths, *Bihār al-anwār*, by the late ‘Allāma al-Majlisī. It is not claimed that this proof reaches the level of a thorough and undisputed assessment of a historical testimony of witnesses; however, Shaykh al-Ṭūsī narrated the supplication from the book *Miṣbāḥ al-mutahajjid*, from which Ibn Ṭāwūs recorded and narrated this supplication in his book, *Iqbāl al-‘māl*. Other well-known scholars at later stages wrote extensively on the interpretation of its elevated teachings, for example, M. Qāsim Khalkhālī (who lived during the 13th century AH);¹⁷ Mullā Ḥabīb Kāshānī (1340 AH);¹⁸ Mullā Ḥusayn Tawīsarkānī (1286 AH);¹⁹ the author of *Qiṣaṣ al-‘ulamā’*, M. b. Sulaymān al-Tankābunī (1304 AH); M. Ṣāliḥ Māzandarānī Ḥā’irī (1391 AH); Mullā Hidāyat-Allāh Āshtiyānī; Rafī‘ī Qazwīnī; and the late Ruhollah Khomeini (d. 1989) in his well-known book, *Sharḥ Du‘ā’ Saḥar*.

One may claim that all these narratives and interpretations do not add to the credibility of the supplication’s contents and that the chain ought to be authenticated. That will be discussed under the second method. This method, however, seems to indeed be realistic if combined with other methods, which should multiply the probability of its authentication and transmission.

The Second Method

Let us now deal with the second method, i.e. confirmation of narration by reliable narrators.

It is mentioned in the book of fasting and narrated by Ibn Abī Qurra with identical wordings as narrated from Ayyūb b. Yaqṭīn that he wrote to Abū l-Ḥasan, ‘Alī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā, asking him to approve this prayer. The Imam wrote back to him: “Yes, it is correct. Indeed it is my father’s prayer, as he used to recite it during the nights of Ramaḍān. If people were aware of the greatness of these phrases before Almighty Allah and

¹⁷ See *Tarājum al-rijāl*, by S. Aḥmad Ḥusaynī, v. 2, p. 757.

¹⁸ See *Libāb al-alqāb fī alqāb al-ṭyāb*, p. 87.

¹⁹ See *al-Dharī‘a ilā taṣānīf al-Shī‘a*, by Āqā Buzurg Tihrānī, v. 19, p. 9.

of how it enables them to receive a positive answer to their prayers, they would be willing to sacrifice their souls to memorise it, and Allah's mercy belongs solely to those who deserve it. And my father said: 'Imam al-Bāqir said: "If I swear by His holy name, I would not be consider it as lying that the great name (*al-ism al-a'zam*) of Almighty Allah is included within it! If you invoke Him, then you should do it praying wholeheartedly! It is indeed meant to remain secret, and knowledge of its secrets should not be disclosed to any except the privileged ones. The hypocrites, the liars, and the disbelievers must not be informed about it.'"

Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī recalled (in *Bihār al-anwār*): "We narrated it by ascribing it to my grandfather, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, Abū Ja'far al-Ṭūsī, on his support for 'Alī b. al-Ḥasan b. Fadhdhāl from *The Book on Fasting*.

It is also narrated by Ibn Abī Qurra with identical wording, as they have both narrated that Ayyūb b. Yaḡṡīn wrote to Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Mūsā al-Riḏā asking him to explain the authenticity of this prayer. The Imam wrote to him: 'Yes, it is correct. Indeed it is my father's prayer, as he used to recite it during the nights of Ramaḏān. If people were aware of the greatness of these phrases before Almighty Allah and of how it enables them to receive a positive answer to their prayers, they would be willing to sacrifice their souls to memorise it, and Allah's mercy belongs solely to those who deserve it. And my father said: "Imam al-Bāqir said: 'If I swear by His holy name, I would not be considered as lying that the great name (*al-ism al-a'zam*) of Almighty Allah is included within it! If you invoke Him, then you should do it praying wholeheartedly! It is indeed meant to remain secret, and knowledge of its secrets should not be disclosed to any except the privileged ones. The hypocrites, the liars, and the disbelievers must not be informed about it.'"

One has now to elaborate on the chain of narrators. Shaykh al-Ṭūsī has narrated the supplication from 'Alī b. al-Ḥasan b. Fadhdhāl in a chain to Muḥammad b. al-Zubayr. Most of the narrators in this chain are reliable (*thiqa*), but the only individual for whom there is no clear

explicit statement about his reliability is Muḥammad b. al-Zubayr. He has been praised as a scholar, but has no explicit authentication. Some may be satisfied with the fact that he was a scholar and that Shaykh Ijāza issued the permission to narrate from him; others, however, may not consider that to be enough.

Therefore one may follow other paths, such as: 1) according to the late Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr (*naẓariyyat al-ta‘wīd*), the theory of relying on extra chains that are narrated in other books but related to the same narrator, i.e. Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan b. Fadhdhāl; or 2) basing its authenticity on a mathematic guess that when one analyses the same chain, which is narrated from al-Najāshī, one is led to certainty that it is the same chain, or that it is narrated at least two times through two chains, one by Shaykh al-Ṭūsī and one by Shaykh al-Najāshī. This evidence will lead one to the certainty of the perfection of its contents.²⁰

The Third Method

A scholar was asked about the chain of narrators for this supplication, and he responded with a passage from Du‘ā’ al-Ṣabāḥ of the Commander of the Faithful: “O He who guided to His essence with His essence and is transcendent beyond all likeness to His creatures!” Some might think that this response has nothing to do with the question, but in fact what the speaker intended to say was that the brilliance of the contents of Du‘ā’ al-Saḥar is in itself the best evidence for its authenticity, such that it needs no chain of narrators. Its contents correspond to the verses of the Qur’an and other authentic supplications, such as Imam al-Ḥusayn’s supplication on the Day of ‘Arafa, Du‘ā’ al-Ṣabāḥ, Du‘ā’ Abū Ḥamza al-Thumālī, and Du‘ā’ Jawshan al-Kabīr.

To illustrate this, let us take a verse of the Qur’an that corresponds to the teachings of this supplication: “God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His light is a niche ...” (Q 25:35). The Qur’an uses the word “light” (*nūr*) to describe Allah as “the Light of the heavens

²⁰ See <https://bit.ly/3QurawP>, accessed on 25.07.2022.

and the earth.”

In his commentary on this verse, Mullā Ṣadrā writes: “Sensible light is only called light because it is self-evident and needs nothing else to make it evident. On the contrary, it makes other things evident and brings them out of darkness.”

Mullā Ṣadrā further writes: “The third aspect, which Sufis of recent times have mentioned, is in accordance with the ‘possessors of unveilings (*mukāshifāt*)’, ‘the possessors of direct experience (*adhwāq*)’, and the ‘people of illuminations (*ishrāqāt*)’. It is based on the doctrines of the illuminationist philosophers and the ancient sages of Persia, which correspond to the traditions of the Prophet.

It is a narrative regarding the Prophet’s Night Journey. He was questioned about his ‘vision’ to which he answered: ‘It was a light that I saw,’ meaning the Exalted is ‘the light’. As it is impossible to connect the vision to Him, the Exalted, he assigned the word ‘light’ to Him, the Exalted.” Then he goes on: “We have already delved into the position of [the illuminationist philosophers’] school of thought regarding light. In short, when the word is applied to sensible light (*al-nūr al-maḥsūs*) the light is manifest by itself and makes other things manifest. Its property is that it is sensible to the sense of sight and manifests objects of sight.

There is no problem in applying the word ‘light’ to it because sensible light is not the meaning of the word ‘light’ but an instance of it. If one were to find something else in this world that has the same property, the word would apply to it equally. It is akin to the meaning of scale (*mīzān*), which is ‘something by which a thing is weighed’ regardless of whether it has a lever and two pans or not – even though this is a common form of scale in this world ... According to this, applying ‘light’ to Him, the Exalted, would be based on the idea that it is the corroboration of its meaning and the subject of its name, because His essence is absolutely manifest by itself and manifests others. That is why the illuminationist philosophers technically apply ‘Light of lights’ to Him, the Exalted.”

Then he goes on to state: “‘Light’, despite being something essential, is not other than the necessary essence of immaterial lights, both

intellectual and spiritual [related to the psyche], except for the fact that it differs between them in terms of perfection and deficiency and there exists a hierarchy of greater and lesser intensity. Therefore it is applied to the essences of light by way of analogical gradation (*tashkīk*) because it cannot be proven logically that an essence can apply to many individuals by gradation. This is the reality of light: it has different levels of intensity, both strong and weak, and perfect and deficient. The apex of its perfection is the divine light (*al-nūr al-ilāhī*) – the Light Without Need (*al-nūr al-ghanī*) – beneath which lights are divided into intellectual and spiritual [related to the psyche] lights, while the next lower level of lights is divided into cosmic and terrestrial lights. In truth, the realities of ‘light’ and ‘existence’ are the same thing, and the existence of each thing is its manifestation ...

“In accordance with these definitions, the meaning of ‘God is the Light of the heavens and the earth’ would correspond to their saying ‘Light of lights’ or ‘Existence of existences’, for we have learned that the reality of everything is its existence, which is its luminosity. For example, Zayd, in reality, is a particular existence, and the light of his individual existence is evident in itself while making others evident ...

“Based on the last two aspects of these three interpretations, the word ‘light’ cannot be applied to the Necessary, the Exalted, merely as a metaphor or similitude, even though the theologians of Islam and a number of exegetes of the Qur’an have said that this phrase is meant to draw a similitude between the Real One and light, or that the meaning of light here is the Creator of light ...

“If one reflects deeply on the meaning of this derivative, they will arrive at the conclusion that the Exalted is, in reality, the Illuminator; in other words, He is the light in reality. Every agent in essence having the meaning of existential perfection must have within it that meaning of perfection, for the giver of perfection cannot be deficient in it, as intuition rules and demonstration agrees. If the meaning of light is found in Him, then either it is precisely the same as His essence or something additional to it ...

“The second would entail the dependency of the Exalted on a cause to emanate the meaning of light, because being attributed with something additional can only be through receptivity or deriving benefit from another, which is the opposite of originating something in another or providing benefits to another. If His essence is the illuminator of His essence, it necessitates His essence being receptive and active, in which case He would not be the simple reality. His simplicity, His oneness, and His sanctity from the blemishes of all compositions, however, have already been established; thus, this leads to a contradiction. Furthermore, it would entail His essence being more illuminating than Himself, which is impossible. If the principle of His luminosity is other than His essence, and other than His essence is one of the contingents, that would entail the dependence of the Necessary Being on the contingent for the attribution of perfection.

“If anyone denies the light to be perfection for being qua being, then let his mind be remedied if it has stopped [reflecting]. If he is arrogant, then Allah will sentence him to hell, where he will abide forever. However, he who contemplates on the knowledge that existence and light are united in meaning and reality but different in linguistic expression will no doubt hold that existence is perfection and good for every being qua being, and the Necessary is pure existence, so He is sheer light ...

“It has been investigated and established that light is the very reality of the Necessary Being Himself, may His glory be exalted. This is supported by the saying of the Commander of the Faithful and the Leader of the Monotheists: ‘I would not worship a Lord I had not seen,’ and it is strengthened by the saying of the Seal of the Prophets: ‘There is no peace for the believers without meeting Allah.’”²¹

As such, this supplication contains lofty concepts about the unity and knowledge of Allah that corresponds to what can be understood from the verses of the Qur’an and the contents of other well-known

²¹ Translation adapted from Mullā Ṣadrā, *On the Hermeneutics of the Light Verse of the Qurān*, trans. Peerwani, pp. 41-43.

supplications from the school of the Prophet’s Ahl al-Bayt, such as those we have mentioned above. What is argued has been established, that Du‘ā’ al-Bahā’ (al-Saḥar) was inspired to be transcribed (not authored) by one of Imam al-Riḍā’s companions. Therefore, there is no reason to doubt the validity of its contents because its spiritual light is manifest for all those with sense or who give ear to it!

My efforts while applying the third method have most probably enabled us to achieve the goal of establishing that the content of this supplication is completely acceptable and in harmony with Shī‘ī teachings endorsed by Muslim scholars. The reader can conclude from this article that this supplication contains interesting ideas, which one can counterfactually claim that had the eighth Imam, al-Riḍā, been present, he would have endorsed its reading by his followers. As such we do not need to insist that the author of the supplication was the Imam himself, as I have already established in the previous paragraphs. Indeed, all three methods were practically helpful, either separately or in combination, and lead us to increased confidence about the validity and authenticity of this supplication.

Conclusion

Du‘ā’ al-Bahā’ (al-Saḥar) is the means by which a spiritual wayfarer journeys to Allah and in Allah while invoking the Lord of lords. It completes the supplicant’s understanding of Allah as He has described Himself, not according to what the wayfarer’s limited understanding comprehends. As such, one may conclude:

1. Du‘ā’ al-Bahā’ (al-Saḥar) amongst the followers of the Ahl al-Bayt is a channel through which Muslims can become closer to the Almighty, while at the same time increase their knowledge and wisdom in recognising divinity.
2. Du‘ā’ al-Bahā’ (al-Saḥar) is a perfect example of how to pray to the Almighty. To trace its chain of narrators (*sanad*), it was narrated by al-Majlisī in *Biḥār al-anwār*, and one may support

the reliability of its contents from the perspectives of theodicy, the technical rules within the science of narrations (*ilm al-ḥadīth*), and the contents of the Qur'an.

Bibliography

The Holy Qur'an.

S. Aḥmad Ḥusaynī, *Tarājum al-rijāl* (Majma' al-Dhakhā'ir al-Islāmiyya: 1414/1993).

Ibn 'Arabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, trans. R. W. J. Austin (Paulist Press: 1980).

'Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī, *Mu'jam iṣṭilāḥāt al-Ṣūfiyya* (Maktabat al-Ādāb: 2007).

Mullā Ḥabīb-Allāh Kāshānī, *Libāb al-alqāb fī alqāb al-atyāb* (Kitāb Furūshī-yi Bū Dharr-i Jumharī: 1958).

Muḥammad b. Ishāq al-Qūnawī, *Risālat al-nuṣūṣ* (Āyat-i Ishrāq: 1390 Sh./2011).

Mīrzā Hāshim Ishkawārī, *Ta'līqa bar Risālat al-nuṣūṣ-i Ṣadr al-Dīn-i Qūnawī*, ed. Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī (Markaz-i Nashr-i Dānishgāhī: 1983).

Mullā Ṣadrā, *On the Hermeneutics of the Light Verse of the Qurān*, trans. Peerwani (Islamic College for Advanced Studies Press: 2004).

Nahj al-balāgha, ed. Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ (Dār al-Kitāb al-Misrī: 2004).

Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Falāḥ al-sā'il* (al-Maktaba al-Ḥaydariyya: 2019).

Āqā Buzurg Tihirānī, *al-Dharī'a ilā taṣānīf al-Shī'a* (Ismā'īliyyān: 1408/1988).

Websites:

Stanford, "panentheism". Accessed 25 August 2022, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/panentheism/>

Ayatollah Mazāhirī, *Sharḥ Du'ā' Saḥar*. Accessed 29 August 2023,

<https://shorturl.at/qHR04>

Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, *Fihrist*. Accessed 25 July 2022, <https://bit.ly/3QurawP>

Shia Online Library, *Sharḥ Mullā Ṣāliḥ al-Māzandarānī*. Accessed 25 July 2022, <https://bit.ly/3zppyoi>