

## Editor's Introduction

The Straight Path Is One Which Combines  
the Exoteric and the Esoteric

*In the Name of Allāh, the Beneficent, the Merciful*

May Allāh's most exalted blessings be upon the immaculate spirit of the Seal of prophets, Muhammad al-Muṣṭafā, and his noble deputy and spiritual heir (*waṣī*) and possessor of the greatest sanctity (*wilāyah*), 'Alī al-Murtaḍā, and his glorious descendants, the Pure Imāms—especially the Pole of the contingent realm, the *baqiyyat 'allāh*, and His Proof (*ḥujjah*), son of al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī—may our souls be sacrificed for him.

The love of religion, the attraction toward the realm of the Invisible (*ghayb*), and the yearning to discover the mysteries of the world beyond matter are part of man's instinct and inherent in his nature. This yearning emanates from the power of Divine Attraction of the Lord that pulls the contingent world, especially the noblest of human beings, toward His boundless and Infinite station. The magnet that draws the soul is that very Soul of souls, which is interpreted in various terms as the Beloved (*jānān*), the Reality of all realities (*ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqā'iq*), the Eternal Principle (*aṣl-i qadīm*), the Source of Beauty (*manba'-i jamāl*), the Beginning of Being (*mabda' al-wujūd*), and the Ultimate of Perfection (*ghāyat al-kamāl*).

الْكُلُّ عِبَارَةٌ وَأَنْتَ الْمَعْنَى يَا مَنْ هُوَ لِلْقُلُوبِ مَغْنَاطِيْسٌ

The universe is expression and Thou art its meaning,  
O, Thou! Who art the magnet of the hearts.<sup>1</sup>

This magnetic attraction to the Truth, which results in tearing apart natural boundaries and limitations of the soul and traversing toward the realm of catharsis and boundlessness and, ultimately, annihilation in the Act, Names, Attributes, and Sacred Essence of [Allāh who is] the Origin of all origins, the Ultimate Goal of all goals, and the Worshiped One in whose Subsistence all being subsists; is more exalted and more magnificent than any act that can come to imagination.

جَذْبَةٌ مِنْ جَذَبَاتِ الرَّحْمَنِ تُوَازِي عِبَادَةَ الثَّقَلَيْنِ

A single attraction from God, the Most Compassionate, out-balances the worship of all men and *jinn*.

In the center of his innate nature and essence, man finds a desire to move toward this cynosure of all quests and the pivot (*qiblah*) of worship. With the God-given power of instinct and primordial nature, man sets out on a journey and with all his being goes toward that direction. Therefore, in the course of the journey all his bodily organs and his total being must be put to work to perform their functions. The physical world and corporeal faculties, which constitute his physical nature (*ṭabʿ*), the imaginal and archetypal world that constitute his intermediate world (*barzakh*), and the realm of intellect and spirit that constitute his reality, all must participate in this journey and collaborate with each other.

The body should turn toward the *Kaʿbah*, and set itself to stand [before God], bowing and prostrating, and performing the daily prayer (*ṣalāt*), the mind must keep itself immune from distracting memories and turn to [and concentrate on] the Lote Tree (*sidrat al-muntahā*).<sup>2</sup> The soul must be immersed in the light of the abode of Divine Sanctuary, and become intoxicated and annihilated in the Sacred Precinct of the One.

It becomes clear from the above discussion how cut off from the Real Goal and how far away from witnessing His Beauty are those people who preoccupy themselves solely with the outward, are satisfied with the crust rather than with the kernel and the essence, and from among all prayers and good deeds confine themselves to bodily movements. By the same token, those who are solely in search of inner meaning and evade observing the blessed rituals and rites of worship as prescribed by the *Sharīʿah*, are far from the reality. They [are the ones who] have been content with

derivatives and metaphors (*majāz*) instead of the truth, and with imagination and illusion rather than reality.

Is it not true that the light of God is immanent in all His manifestations in the realm of contingency? If so, why should we exclude the body from worship, close this microcosm to the theophany of Divine Light, and preoccupy ourselves and be content with such terms as “union” (*wuṣūl*), “kernel” (*lubb*), “essence” (*dhāt*), and “inward prayer”? Would that not be a one-dimensional and one-sided worship?

As to the middle position (*al-namaṭ al-awsaṭ*) and the median community (*ummatan wasaṭan*)<sup>3</sup> they are those groups of people who have combined the outward (*zāhir*) and the inward (*bāṭin*) within themselves, have made all levels and planes of their being worship the Beloved and submit to Him, and have prepared themselves adequately for this heavenly journey. They have made the outward a reflection of the inward, and the inward the soul and the reality of the outward, and have blended the two together as milk and sugar. They consider the outward as a means to reach the inward and regard the inward devoid of the outward as scattered motes (*habā'an manthūrā*).<sup>4</sup> (Holy Qur'ān, 25:23).

اللَّهُمَّ نَوِّرْ ظَاهِرِي بِطَاعَتِكَ، وَبَاطِنِي بِمَحَبَّتِكَ، وَقَلْبِي بِمَعْرِفَتِكَ،  
وَرُوحِي بِمُشَاهَدَتِكَ، وَسَرِّي بِاسْتِقْلَالِ اتِّصَالِ حَضْرَتِكَ، يَا ذَا  
لِجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ.

O God, illuminate my outward with [the light of ] obedience to Thee and my inner being with Thy Love, my heart with knowledge of Thee, my spirit with Thy vision, and my inmost consciousness (*sirr*) with the independence of attachment to Thy Threshold, O Lord of Majesty and Munificence.<sup>5</sup>

The above discussion makes it abundantly clear that in order to guide the soul toward spiritual perfection and traverse through the phases and stages of human perfection, reliance on acquiring intellectual and contemplative sacred sciences, such as teaching and/or learning philosophy, will not be sufficient at all. Although syllogism (*qiyās*) and rational reasoning (*burhān*) based on valid premises and sound logic can offer the mind

convincing conclusions, nonetheless, they do not satisfy the heart and the soul, and cannot quench the spirit's thirst for attaining the truths and witnessing the intuitive subtleties.

It is true that the sciences of theosophy and philosophy are genuine and indubitable sciences, constitute the noblest of all intellectual and contemplative sciences, and have established the idea of the Divine Unity (*tawḥīd*) on the basis of reason and have closed the door to any kind of doubt or uncertainty. It is also true that the Glorious Qur'ān as well as many traditions of the Immaculate Shī'ite Imāms—who are guardians and protectors of Revelation and prophethood, and steadfast in knowledge and religion (*rāsikhūn fi'l 'ilm*)—emphasized and prescribed contemplation, intellection, logic, reason, and rational argumentation.<sup>6</sup> However, it is a futile attempt to rely solely on the rational and philosophical [approach to] *tawḥīd*, as followers of the rationalist school do, without submission of the heart, the inmost consciousness (*wijdān-i ḍamīr*), and to inward witnessing (*shuhūd-i bāṭin*).

To deprive the heart and the inward of spiritual nourishment emanating from the Invisible World, and of Divine rays of Heavenly Beauty and Majesty, and to content oneself to cruise through books, libraries, schools, and courses of study or teaching even at the highest level amounts to satisfying the needs of only one faculty and leaving higher faculties un-nurtured. The Distinguished Religion, which is based on the straight path, observes both aspects, brings perfection to all faculties, and actualizes the hidden potentials and capabilities of the human being in both directions. On the one hand, it encourages intellection and contemplation, and on the other hand, commands one to cleanse and purify the heart from contamination of carnal desires, so that one can find peace, serenity, and tranquillity in one's heart. As the Holy Qur'ān declares after reciting eleven majestic oaths:

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّيْهَا وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّيْهَا

Whoever purifies it finds deliverance,  
whoever corrupts it loses. (91:9–10)

These Qur'ānic verses, which address the human soul and speak to man's inner self, summon individuals from among thinkers, scholars,

teachers of philosophy, and masters of intellectual reasoning to servitude (*ta'abbud*), attentive regard (*murāqabah*), and accounting of one's inward state (*muḥāsabah*); so that, by sincere acts exclusively for God's pleasure, the springs of Divine Knowledge may spout forth from the depth of their hearts and flow out to their tongues; and eventually the thundering flow of thoughts, inspirations, and Merciful Divine intuition will gush forth from the center of their being, as the Prophet stated:

مَنْ أَخْلَصَ لِلَّهِ أَرْبَعِينَ صَبَاحًا ظَهَرَتْ يَنَابِيعُ الْحِكْمَةِ مِنْ قَلْبِهِ إِلَى  
لِسَانِهِ.

Whoever sincerely purifies his heart for God for forty days will find springs of wisdom gush forth from his heart and flow toward his tongue.<sup>7</sup>

Ṣadr al-Mut'alliḥīn Shīrāzī, the pride of the philosophers of the East, or rather of the world, spent a lifetime on [studying and teaching] transcendental theosophy (*al-ḥikmat al-muta'āliyah*), but finally was so immersed in the worship of God and servitude to Him and in purification of the inmost consciousness that he wrote eloquently in the introduction to his *Asfār-i arba'ah*:

وَإِنِّي لِأَسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا مِمَّا ضَيَّعْتُ شَطْرًا مِنْ عُمْرِي فِي تَتَبُعِ آرَاءِ  
الْمُتَفَلْسَفَةِ الْمُجَادِلِينَ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكَلَامِ وَتَدَقِّقَاتِهِمْ وَتَعَلُّمِ جُرُؤَتِهِمْ فِي  
الْقَوْلِ وَتَفَنُّنِهِمْ فِي الْبَحْثِ حَتَّى تَبَيَّنَ لِي آخِرَ الْأَمْرِ بِنُورِ الْإِيمَانِ وَتَأْيِيدِ  
اللَّهِ الْمَتَانِ إِنَّ قِيَّاسَهُمْ عَقِيمٌ وَصِرَاطُهُمْ غَيْرُ مُسْتَقِيمٍ؛ فَأَلْقَيْنَا زَمَامَ أَمْرِنَا  
إِلَيْهِ وَإِلَى رَسُولِهِ النَّذِيرِ الْمُنْدِرِ، فَكُلُّ مَا بَلَّغْنَا مِنْهُ آمَنَّا بِهِ وَصَدَّقْنَاهُ وَلَمْ  
نَحْتَلْ أَنْ نُحِبَّ لَهُ وَجْهًا عَقْلِيًّا وَمَسْلَكًا بَحْثِيًّا بَلْ اقْتَدَيْنَا بِهِدَاةِ وَأَنْتَهَيْنَا

بِنَهْيِهِ إِمْتِنَالًا لِقَوْلِهِ تَعَالَى : « مَا أَنَاكُمْ الرَّسُولُ فَخُذُوهُ وَمَا نَهَاكُمْ عَنْهُ فَانْتَهُوا »، حَتَّى فَتَحَ اللَّهُ عَلَيَّ قَلْبِنَا مَا فَتَحَ فَأَفْلَحَ بِبِرَكَّةٍ مُتَابِعْتَهُ وَأُنْجِحَ.

Indeed, I seek profuse forgiveness from God for having wasted a part of my life studying the opinions of the pseudo-philosophers and the polemicists from among the theologians and the intricacies of their discussions, learning their clever tactics of speech and their arts of debate, until at last with the light of faith and the assistance of God, the Munificent, it became clear to me that their syllogisms were sterile and their path not straight. Thereafter, I surrendered my affair to Him and His Messenger, the Warner and the Warned, believed earnestly in all that had reached us from him, accepting it without making any attempt to find some rational justification or scholarly interpretation for it. Rather, I followed His Prophet's guidance, refrained from what was forbidden, and submitted to his injunction—as God, the Exalted has said: “Take and follow whatever injunctions the Messenger brings you and refrain from what he forbids you” (Qurʾān, 59:7)—until God opened my heart to what He willed, and by the grace of following His Prophet, I was delivered and saved. (*al-Asfār al-arbaʿah*, Introduction)<sup>8</sup>

It is appropriate here to remember the most celebrated, the eternal jurist, Lordly sage, and Divinely inspired gnostic who lived at the beginning of the last century, namely, the Sign of the Truth (*āyat al-Ḥaqq*) Ākhūnd Mawlā Ḥusayn Qulī Hamadānī. This great jurist, unrivaled thinker, and exalted philosopher incorporated all true sciences in light of the science of gnosis and purification of the soul; and combined all of them in the lights of the Divine Image, assigned to every science its appropriate place and status, and considered attainment to the Divine Sanctuary as the ultimate goal. He trained many students and presented them to the world of gnosis. Each one of them became a shining star in the firmament of virtues and *tawhīd*, and illuminated the world with the rays of his insight and wisdom. Among them one can mention Āqā Sayyid Aḥmad Karbalāʾī who was a saintly gnostic, and his student Ḥājj Mīrā ʿAlī Āqā

Qāḍī, the pride of the jurists and the pearl of the gnostics, may God elevate their noble stations.

The pride of all commentators and the guide of seekers of the Truth, our revered teacher, His Holiness Āyatullāh 'Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, may God prolong his ennobling presence, had from the first days of life been flying on the two wings of knowledge and action, and had traveled on the path of philosophy as well as gnosis under the tutelage of the late Āyatullāh Qāḍī. He spent his entire life mastering syllogism, reason and oratory, and devoted himself to advancing the intellectual sciences and activities [e.g., working on] the *Ishārāt* [*Ishārāt wa Tanbihāt*], and the *Shifā'* [of Ibn Sīnā] and the *Asfār* [*Asfār-i arba'ah* of Mullā Ṣadrā], and writing commentaries on them. At the same time he was totally preoccupied with inward retreat and Divine mysteries and constant attention (*murāqabah*), until finally he landed at the sacred threshold of the Qur'ān. He became so immersed in the praiseworthy verses of the Qur'ān that recitation and interpretation of those verses, contemplation, and symbolic interpretation (*ta'wīl*) and commenting upon them became a more important preoccupation for him than any other contemplative activity. For him contemplation on the verses of the Qur'ān was a more exalted and more pleasing activity than any discursive reasoning as though he had given up everything but total submission and servitude to the Master of the majestic *Sharī'ah* and his honored deputies and spiritual heirs (*awṣiyā'*).

Our honored friend and eminent master, kinder than any brother, the late Āyatullāh Shaykh Murtaḍā Muṭahharī<sup>9</sup> with whom my friendship extended over thirty-five years, may God bestow His pleasure upon him, had a brilliant mind and critical vision. He spent a lifetime studying, teaching, writing, preaching, and investigating and seeking the truth on issues related to philosophy. However, thanks to his alert mind and critical soul, in the last few years of his life he fully realized that one cannot find inner peace without reaching the inward and without connecting with the Munificent Lord. He learned that without quenching one's thirsty heart at the wellspring of Divine effusion, one cannot attain serenity and inner peace and will never be able to enter the sacred sanctuary of God, or circumambulate around it and reach the *Ka'bah* that one yearns for. So Muṭahharī entered the path like a candle that burns constantly and dissolves, or like a moth that flings itself into the fire. Like a passionate and committed believer overwhelmed by fervor and annihilated in the

shoreless ocean of the Names, Attributes, and the Essence of the Worshiped One, and whose whole being grew infinitely drawing on the infinitude of the Divine Being, Muṭahharī stepped into the center of this vast arena. His wayfaring was characterized by frequent night vigils, lamentation, and invocation in the solitude of the dawn, immersion in contemplation and invocation, persistent devotion to learning lessons of the Qur'ān, withdrawal from world-loving people and slaves of desire, and association with God-fearing people and friends (*awliyā'*) of God. May God's endless mercy be upon him:

مِثْلَ هَذَا فَلْيَعْمَلِ الْعَامِلُونَ

And for the like of this let the workers toil! (Qur'ān, 37:61)

إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ مُحْسِنُونَ

Indeed God is with those who keep their duty unto Him and those who are doers of good. (Qur'ān, 16:128)

Some time ago they asked this humble being to write something on the occasion of the commemoration of Āyatullāh Muṭahharī's martyrdom. Poor being that I am, I considered myself unqualified for the task and refused to accept such an assignment due also to my preoccupation with and involvement in other responsibilities. More recently, when that request was brought up again the spirit of that honored friend came to my assistance; therefore, I wrote down these short passages and attached them as an introduction to a treatise that I had compiled on wayfaring and spiritual journey, and made it available, for the pleasure of the exalted soul of my departed friend, to the seekers of the Truth and the wayfarers on the path of Truth and Peace.

بِيَدِهِ أَرْمَاءُ الْأُمُورِ وَبِهِ أَسْتَعِينُ.

In His hands are the reins of all affairs and it is His help that I seek.



As to its origin, the seeds of this treatise in essence were the first round of lessons on ethics and gnosis delivered to a selected group of students in the theological school (*Ḥawza-yi 'ilmīyah*) in Qum in A.H. 1368/1949–1369/1950 by our revered master and teacher, Āyatullāh 'Allāmah Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, may my soul be ransomed for him. This humble being had taken notes during those sessions and often referred to them. I always found them a source of spiritual illumination and comfort for my soul during times of distress, contraction, and tedium. The present book is, indeed, the revised and greatly expanded version of those class notes with some elaboration and additions. Whatever spiritual rewards there may be in this undertaking is dedicated to the spirit of that honorable friend, the late Āyatullāh Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, may God elevate his noble station.

اللَّهُمَّ احْشُرْهُ مَعَ أَوْلِيَانِكَ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ، وَاخْلُفْ عَلَيَّ عَقِبِهِ فِي الْغَابِرِينَ،

وَاجْعَلْهُ مِنْ رُفَقَاءِ مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ الطَّاهِرِينَ، وَارْحَمْهُ وَإِيَّانَا بِرَحْمَتِكَ يَا

أَرْحَمَ الرَّاحِمِينَ، بيده أزمة الأمور وبه نستعين.

O God, gather him with Your intimate friends (*awliyā*) and be protector of his descendants in the future, and place him among the companions of Muhammad and his immaculate Household, and be merciful to him, and to us, for the sake of Your Mercy, O Most Merciful of the merciful.

#### Notes

1. Sabzawārī, Mullā Muhammad Hādī, *Manzūma-yi Ilāhīyāt fi af'ālihī ta'ālā ghurar fi anḥā' taqsimāt li fi'l Allāh Ta'ālā*, Nāṣiri ed., p. 183.
2. *Sidrat al muntahā* is considered the highest grade of existence of the outermost region of the cosmos. Higher than that is the immediate proximity to God described as *qāb al-qawsayn* or the distance of two bows where the Prophet was taken on the night of his ascension to

Heaven, or *laylat al-mi'rāj*. See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Muhammad: Man of God* (London: Muhammadi Trust, 1982) p. 14. See also Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 1991), (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions International, 1983), pp. 102–103.

3. On several occasions the holy Qur'ān calls Muslims the median community. See for instance 2: 143.

*We have appointed you a middle nation that you may be witness against mankind, and the messenger may be a witness against you.*

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا.

4. *And We shall turn what act they committed and make it scattered motes.* Holy Qur'ān, 25:23
5. This prayer is cited from a supplication attributed to Amīr al-Mu'minīn 'Imām 'Alī, may peace be upon him, expounded by Ḥājj Mawlā Kabūtar-Āhangī and has been published in a pocket-size edition. In his book, *Kalamāt-i mahnūnah*, Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī says that this prayer has been mentioned in the supplications of the Imāms, may peace be upon them. For a short biography of Kabūtar-Āhangī, see Mas'ūd Homāyūnī, *Tārīkh-i silsilahā-yi tarīqah-yi ni'matullāhīyah dar irān* (Tehran, 1358–1979), pp. 92–94.
6. Holy Qur'ān, 3:7, and 4:162.
7. This sacred tradition has been narrated from the Messenger of God through several chains of authority with different wordings but with the same meaning. It is cited in *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-Dīn* [of Imāmā Muhammad Ghazzālī], vol. 4, pp. 322; and its glossary on p. 191. It is also cited in *'Awārif al-ma'ārif* published on the margins of *Iḥyā' al-'ulūm*, ii, 265. Among other Shī'ī sources, it is cited in *'Uyūn akhbār al-riḍā* (by 'Alī ibn Mūsā al-riḍā, the eighth Imām), p. 258, *'Uddat al-dā'ir*, p. 170, and *Uṣūl al-Kāfī* (Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulaynī), vol. II, pp. 16. The tradition is cited in the *'Uyūn al-Akhhbār*, along with the chain of authorities from *ḥaḍrat Imām al-Riḍā*, may peace be upon him, from his father, from his grandfather, from *ḥaḍrat Muhammad ibn 'Alī al-Bāqir*, from his father, *ḥaḍrat Sajjād*, from

Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī, and finally from Amīr al-Mu'minīn, may peace be upon him.

In his book entitled *Rūḥ-i Mujarrad*, Āyatullāh Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayni Tihrānī quotes the following explanation from his spiritual master, Sayyid Hāshim Ḥaddād, concerning different kinds of thoughts: "Thoughts are of four categories. First, those which are sacred and these are thoughts that turn one's attention away from oneself and toward God and call one to Him. Second, satanic thoughts that make one oblivious to God, and cause anger, enmity, greed, and envy to grow in one's heart. Third, the Heavenly (*malakūtī*) thoughts are those that lead human beings toward the worship of God and fear of Him. Fourth, the psychic (*naḥsānī*) thoughts which allure one toward the world's adornments and desires. Human beings have a sublime faculty which can turn all satanic and psychic thoughts into virtues, and employ all of them in the way of God so that the earning of wealth, fulfillment of desires, and the cultivation of adornments all are done for the sake of God, and not for the self. He also has a faculty that is higher and can transform all those thoughts, including spiritual thoughts, into Divine thoughts; leading one to regard them as ensuing from God, and encountering nothing save God."

8. Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, known as Mullā Ṣadrā (979–1050/1571–1640).
9. Āyatullāh Shaykh Murtaḍā Muṭahharī (d. 1358/1979) an Islamic scholar and activist who studied with 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī in Qum and received modern education at the University of Tehran. He was a major intellectual force and theoretician of the Islamic revolution who was assassinated in 1979. Among his writings are, *Nahḍathā-yi Eslāmī dar Ṣad Sāl-i Akhīr* (Tehran, 1978); *Pīrāmmon-i Enqilāb-i Eslāmī* (Tehran, 1892), *Islām wa muqtaḍīyāt-i zamān* (Tehran, 1983), and numerous other works.