

Understanding of Glorification toward God through Mullā Ṣadrā's Commentary on Q.S. al 'a 'lā

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Abstract-This article will try to explain Ṣadrā's views and thoughts contained in one of his monumental work, *Tafsīr al Qur'ān al karīm*. The main problem which is the object of this research is Sadra's philosophical views and thoughts in Ṣadrā's interpretation (*tafsīr Q.S. al 'a 'lā*). This study is an attempt to explore the benefits of these important aspects of religious sources unearthed from the instructions of Qur'an combined with rational principles of philosophical and mystical experiences (intuitive) of Ṣadrā. This study is important because it is till now emerging groups that debating the importance of philosophy. Some groups consider that the philosophical teachings is foreign things and contrary to the teachings of religion, especially to the Qur'an and sunah of the prophet; the notion that between philosophy and the Qur'an have a distance that cannot be put together. Of course, such view is contrary to the views of the Muslim philosophers. The Muslim philosophers believe that between philosophy and revelations (divine laws) are not contradictory. In fact, both have a synergistic relation.

Keywords : *al mabda'*, *Ḥikmah Muta'āliyah*, *irfān*, *Q.S. al 'a 'lā*, *ma'ād*, *nubuawah*, *Ṣadrā*, *tafsīr*, *tasbīh*.

Sadr al-Dīn Mohammad Shirazi (979 - 1050/1571 - 1640), who titled Sadr al Muta'ālihīn, and is also known as Mullā Ṣadrā or Ṣadrā. He, like Avicena, is one of the greatest Muslims philosophers. He lived during the Safavid dynasty. He studied directly with prominent figures like: Shaykh Baha al - Din 'Ameli and Mir Muhammad Baqir Hussayni (Mir Damad). Shaykh Baha greatly affected him in terms of spiritual, moral and scientific character. While Mir Damad affected him in rational sciences, especially in philosophy of Peripatetic and illumination.

Ṣadrā is a philosopher who is very active in writing. He had stopped writing when he was in time solitude (asceticism). After a period of solitude (about 15 years), he became active again to teach and write several important works related to the maturity of his philosophy. He has written about 50 pieces of titles related to the philosophy, the interpretation of the Qur'an and *hadith*¹. His most famous work and fonumental is *al Aṣfār al Arba'ah*, which consists of nine volumes.

Ṣadrā has found a new school of philosophy known as transcendent philosophy (*Ḥikmah Muta'āliyah*); a school of philosophy that combines the basic ideas of some of the earlier schools of philosophy (from the Peripatetic, Illumination and Sufism/ *Irfān*). Even, at the same time, with the spirit of the Qur'an and the *Hadith*, He succeeded in bringing Islamic philosophy to the top².

Related to the interpretation of the Qur'an, Ṣadrā has a fairly unique position. When doing exegesis, He is capable of holding himself as a philosopher with a strong stick to the tradition of the *Shia Imamah* which he believed. He also strongly emphasizes an effort in which philosophy and gnosis (*irfān*) are able to collaborate in order to interpret religious texts, especially the Qur'an. Among several philosophers who have written books of *tafsīr al Qur'ān*, He was the one, including the leader

¹ M. Khamenei, *the Qur'anic Hermeneutics of Mulla Ṣadrā*, (Tehran: Ṣadrā Islamic Philosophy Research Institute (SIPRIIn) Publication, 2006), p. 28-29. See also: M. Khamenei, *Mulla Sadra's Transcendent Philosophy*, (Tehran: Sadra Islamic Research Institut (SIPRIIn), 2004), p. 23-24

² *Ibid*, p. 29

and has a special place. When we analyze works of his *tafsīr*, the elements of philosophical and mystical thoughts could be clearly identified.

The Important Values in *Tafsīr Q.S. al A'lā*

In short, Mullā Ṣadrā's Commentary on *Q.S. al 'a'lā* has three basic principles. They are about divinity, prophet hood and hereafter. Divinity is reviewed by Ṣadrā in the first *tasbīh* and the second; prophecy is in the third *tasbīh*. He provides enough space wide for the study of happiness and the issues related to hereafter (*ma'ād*). He discusses from the fourth *tasbīh* till the seventh. Those issues are basic principles of the Islamic religion. He describes those principles in the introduction of the seventh *tasbīh*. Sadra states:

*"Knowledges (ma'ārif) referred to in this surah is the foundation of reality, which begins with the knowledge of the divinity (ma'rifah al ilāhiyāt), mediated by knowledge of the prophetic (ma'rifah al nubuwwāt), and ends with knowledge of the final day (ma'rifah al ma'ād). Such knowledge is a divine religion and the straight path"*³.

At first *tasbīh tafsīr Q.S. al a'lā*, Ṣadrā describes the sanctity of God Essence with arguments of the animals creation, while in the second *tasbīh*, he explains His *ināyah*, His wisdom (*ḥikmah*) and His sanctity with the argument of the plant existence.

In the third *tasbīh* of this *tafsīr*, Ṣadrā specifically reviewed the characteristics of a prophet, especially about the perfection owned by the Prophet Muhammad. Its perfection is the ultimate perfection, which has perfection in two faculties, theoretical (*al quwwah al nazariyyah*) and practice (*al quwwa al 'amaliyyah*). The Prophet has ability to take the revelation of God, present it to the creatures (especially humans) and guided them toward the perfection (*takammul*)⁴. The one who has the real knowledge of perfection implies that he has perfection in the overall properties of the perfect (*kamīlan fī jamī' al sifāt al kamāliyah li al maujūd bimā huwa maujūd*), and free from any deficiency. He is the reflection of perfection, the evidence (*hujjah*) and the greatest mark (*ayāt*) of God.

Through such arguments, Ṣadrā concludes that a person who only reaches perfection in charity (*amal*) without knowledge (*ilm*) could not be called as a person who has attained the ultimate perfection; and not worthy of carrying prophetic position or Caliphate (*khilāfah*)⁵.

The perfection of this kind has significant value because, as one of the goals of the coming of the prophet is to provide guidance and a way for human beings to God. Someone who does not have the perfection of this kind is impossible for him to be able to carry out this difficult task. Therefore, Ṣadrā states that: *"Someone who only reached the theoretical course, immersed in witnessing the beauty and greatness of God and unable to escape from the busyness to return attention to the reality outside himself, so he just called a religious leader (wali) who experienced fanā"*⁶.

Ṣadrā also has two concepts of prophecy, the special and general. The special prophet hood (*al nubuwwah al tashrī'iyah*) that God gives him treatise (*risālah*) through the angel of revelation carrier. Its kind is special for the prophet. Such prophet hood has ended, and there is no prophet after Muhammad, while the general prophet hood will continue. Prophet hood and exoteric knowledge of this kind is given to a person who has an access to sources of knowledge; to the level of his spiritual journey to God.

From this perspective, it is clear that in view of Ṣadrā, the general prophetic still remains. This kind of prophetic is called '*wilāyah*'. The Prophets are link and intermediary (*al ḥad al mushtarak*) between men and God; intermediary between '*ālam al amr* and '*ālam al khalq*; between '*ālam ma'qūlāt* and '*ālam mahsūsāt* (of the senses)⁷.

One of the characteristics for those who occupies that position (*al ḥad al mushtarak*) is on one side sometimes he is busy with worship and love of *al Haq*, and sometimes he is busy with creatures with love, affection and mercy. When he returned from God to the creature, he becomes one with the

³ Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr Al Qur'ān al Karīm*, (Qum: *Intishārāt Bīdār*, 1344 H), v. 7, p. 401

⁴ Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, v. 7, p. 374

⁵ Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, v. 7, p. 374

⁶ Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, v. 7, p. 374, 379

⁷ See: Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, v. 7, p. 379. See also: Ṣadrā, *al Shawāhid al Rubūbiyah fī al Manāhij al Sulūkiyah*, (Mashhad: al markaz al jami'i li al nashr, 1981), p. 355

creature, and seemed not to know God. And when he is alone with his God, he is busy with *dhikr* and solemn (*khidmat*) in Him as if he does not know the creature (*khalq*). Ṣadrā states that: *'this is the way the apostles and the righteous people (ṣiddīqīn)'*⁸.

Ṣadrā's idea implies the continuity and existence of the perfect man in the earth. The explanation like this is a sign that Ṣadrā wish to justify the belief and the truth of the Twelver Shi'ite theology. There must always be a proof, whether he is a prophet, priest (*imām*), *walī* or *waṣī*.

Although the theory offered Ṣadrā about this kind of prophecy is very rational and do not seem apologetic as a theologian, but this shows that Ṣadrā was influenced by Shia's doctrines (teachings) that Ṣadrā believed. Ṣadrā wishes to justify the truth of *Shī'ah imāmiyah* theology beliefs based on rational principles and verses of the Qur'an.

Furthermore, in the fourth *tasbīḥ* till the seventh *tasbīḥ* in this *tafsīr*, Ṣadrā reviews on the level of the human soul, happiness and suffering in the Hereafter after death and he also offers the concept of ethics (morals).

In the last four chapters (the fourth *tasbīḥ* to the seventh) Ṣadrā emphasizes the importance of knowledge as basis of happiness achievement in the hereafter later.

The happiness in Sadra's philosophy is synonymous with perfection and goodness. The way to achieve perfection is found in the form of mental perception and self-awareness. The perception is graduated according to the level of object perception; it necessitates the level of existence is according to the extent perception that one achieves. The level of knowledge depends on the level from the glory of knowledge object (*ma'lūm*)⁹. So, the ultimate happiness Ṣadrā means is not something related to the particular sciences but knowledge related to God, His attributes and His acts (*'af'āl*); it is also related to the arrangement of the angels, the universe, His book and the Prophet.

Such knowledge will give us the great pleasure when all the veils will be revealed in the hereafter later. The knowledge that is based on strong arguments (convincing) will enhance human life. It eliminates all the veils that lead man to be able to witness the realities as such in the hereafter later.

Based on that theory, the ultimate happiness is contained in the intellectual perception (*al idrāk al 'aqlī*). Agree with the principle of rule *al imkān al ashraf*, the enjoyment related to the spirit (*rūh*) is nobler than the pleasure associated with the substance of the body. The soul is nobler than the substance of body. In his *tafsīr*, Sadra states:

*"... Science (ilm) is the finisher of spirit (rūh); while the charity (amal) is a complement ... The substance of the soul is nobler than the substance of the body. Therefore the one pleasure and perfection is nobler (ashraf) compared to the perfection of the body. The enjoyment about ma'rifatullah is nobler than the pleasures associated with the enjoyment of food, lust and beauty of dress ..."*¹⁰.

Furthermore, one of the greatest obstacles to achieve the happiness is love with the world. Ṣadrā states: *"veil between us and God is the world. Our world is our business with worldly attachments..."*¹¹.

Therefore, in order to erode that barrier, Ṣadrā emphasizes a process of purification of the soul (*suluk* and *tazkiya al nafs*), ie with two processes of *suluk*; *suluk* in knowledge (*ilmi*) and charity (*amali*). Although Ṣadrā emphasizes both, but it is impressed that Ṣadrā gives priority to theoretical (*suluk ilmi*) than practical (*amali*). This is due to ignorance (*al jahl*) to the reality of the human world and men will cause the ignorance (*al jahl*) to the creator (God). And conversely, ignorance (*al jahl*) to God will also lead a fool to everything. That ignorance pulls someone from his nature (*insāniyah*). In this *tafsīr*, Ṣadrā states: *"Sins and evils follow ignorance (al jahl al murakkab), while all goodness follow the science"*¹². He also asserts: *"the pain of ignorance is more severe than the pain of disobedience of body"*¹³. In *Mafātīḥ*, he states the same thing: *"... The base of any good is knowledge of reality and*

⁸ Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, v. 7. p. 379

⁹ See: Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, v. 7, p. 397. See also: Ṣadrā, *Kasr al Aṣnām al Jāhiliyyah*, (Tehran: Bonyad Hikmat-e Islami Sadra Publishers, 2002), p. 235.

¹⁰ Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, v. 7, p. 397.

¹¹ See: *Ibid.*, p. 398

¹² Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, v. 7, p. 387

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 388

charity toward all, while the base of all evils is ignorance and any action directed against lust and anger ..."¹⁴.

From that description, we know that although Ṣadrā very stressed pious and charity, but he gives appreciation greater on the theoretical (*ilm* and *ma'rifāt*) than the practical (*amal*). It is based on a principle that closeness to God and happiness hereafter cannot be achieved except by knowledge, not only in charity and obedience. Closeness to God (*liqā' billah*) is the goal, while the charity as a means of (a vehicle) to achieve that goal. With piety (*taqwā*), someone will get to safety, while the knowledge of closeness someone will get a high position on the side of God.

Thus, the concept of ethics (moral) contained in *tafsīr Q.S. al 'a'lā*, in general, is based on the principle of the middle and balance (*adālah* and *tawassuṭ*), the harmony between knowledge and charity; not be extreme, and exaggerate (*ifrāt*) or not also too underestimate and lazing (*tafrīt*); not forced (*jabr*) or free fully (*tafwīd*) but between them; harmony between ratio and *shāria*, *zāhir* and *bāṭin*, individual and social.

Spiritual Reflection toward Human Potential

Beside some important messages above, there are other important messages that colouring this *tafsīr*, which is about *tasbīh*. Ṣadrā himself choses the word '*tasbīh*' as the name for each chapter in this *tafsīr*.

The real person who purifies (*musabbih*) must realize that all of existences (*maujūdāt*) that are *zāhir* and *bāṭin*; the whole of nature both visible (*zāhir*) and unseen – everything (*ghaib*) - are in manifestation of names of God. The entire universe is based on self-existence comes from the name of the greatest of God (*al ism al 'a'zam*). All entities which are genetically (*takwīnī*) and intrinsic (*dhātī*) does *tasbīh*.

Such knowledge will provide awareness for us that the one who purifies (*musabbih*) is a part of nature. He himself is microcosm. He will purifies God because God Himself, who has been removing him from potentiality to the actuality; from deficiency toward perfection. He realizes that the man is the final product (fruit) produced by nature; which has passed through a long substantive motion; moves from chemical element, mineral, herbs, and veterinary to reach humanity. A symbolism which expresses that the whole nature back to God passes (through) man. Furthermore, because the existence is graded and stratified, then when person increases his awareness, the more he will reflect and manifest that existence. Prophet Muhammad described by Ṣadrā in his *tafsīr* is the perfect form of *musabbih* who have reached the top of the point of perfection (*takammul*) to the God; who becomes the intermediary (*ḥad al mushtarak*) between God and creatures, intermediate between *ālam al amr* and *ālam al kholq*; between *ālam ma'qulāt* and *ālam mahsusāt* (of the senses).

Referring to one of the most important principles of Ṣadrā's philosophy, which is about the substantial motion theory (*ḥarakah jauhariyah*), we know that it is possible for a person to perform self improvement (*takammul*). Knowledge possessed by a person will greatly affect him. Knowledge related to divinity (*mabda'*), prophet hood (*nubuwah*) and resurrection (*ma'ād*) will drive the awareness of one's existence and his ideology, because potentially it is possible for every human being to raise awareness and his existence.

In *tafsīr Q.S. al 'a'lā*: 6 and 9, Ṣadrā appointed the self of Prophet Muhammad, Peace be upon him, as a perfect human being (*al insan al kamil*) that covered the overall perfections. Departing from the self of prophet, we are invited to imitate the figure. He has succeeded to carve perfectly noble qualities, both inner aspect (*bāṭin*) and outer side (*zāhir*). We are also invited to be loyal and obedient to practice the religious teachings (*shāriah*) brought by the Prophet as a way of salvation itself. The consciousness (awareness) is not only knowledge, but must be equipped with charity (*amal*). The purpose of religion is that the followers (*ummah*) should be busy to carve the noble properties introduced through His prophets. The effects of these ideals are human life (religions) drive to be noble, compassionate, and generous and other noble qualities.

Here, it becomes clear that happiness in view of Sadra in *tafsīr Q.S. al 'a'lā* is synonymous with perfection and goodness. To achieve it, one should increase his existence (*wujud*). The way to achieve

¹⁴ Ṣadrā, *Mafātih al Ghayb*, (Tehran: Cultural Researches Institution, 1982), p. 195

it is stored on mental perception and self-awareness. Because happiness is rooted in perception, and it is known that the perception was stratified according to the potential and the object of perception, of course it is necessary to establish the level of happiness in accordance with the extent to which perceptions are acquired. Levels of intellectual perception meant by Sadra is not related to the particular sciences such as the science of nahwu, sharf, engineering, sewing skills and other types, but the sciences related to God, His attributes, angels, and the reality of nature.

Sadra describes the level of achievement of the human spirit (as described earlier) that there are people who have the holy spirit as the prophets so that they do not require human teaching. There are also people whose souls are so weak that they desperately need other human teaching to acquire knowledge (science). And there are also people who have a soul dumb and petrified that would not be beneficial even after getting instruction, although the teaching of the prophet¹⁵. For those who do not reach that station (as the sanctity of the holy prophets and saints), there is no way for them excepting the prophets of God by faith. But, for the group of people who are not just satisfied with these conditions, and want to get directly through disclosure or through argumentation (*burhān*), they must fight hard and do *Jihad* of the nafs. Because this road is not an easy, they should try to do the purification of the soul (*nafs al Tazkiyah*); softens the soul, purify the soul and substance of mind (theoretical and practical)¹⁶.

Conclusion

From the description above we know that religion is born to introduce the noble qualities of God that was exhibited by the holy men (prophets). Outer side of religion is a collection of Shari'a law, while the inner side of religion is self and soul prophet itself. As explained previously that the prophets are men who had achieved a meaningful intrinsic perfection, both from the theoretical and practical. So, the prophets are a straight path (*sirāt al mustaqim*) that would deliver to essential human happiness. They are the path of truth, which link to divinity (*al mabdā*) and resurrection (*al ma'ād*), which lead people to the real perfection.

Through this *tafsīr*, we know that Ṣadrā succeeds in harmonizing the rules of rational with religious teachings (religious doctrine); especially related to three significant issues; the divinity (*mabda'/ tauhīd*), the prophethood (*nubuwwah*) and the resurrection (*ma'ād*).

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¹⁵ Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, J. 7, hal. 373-375

¹⁶ Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, J. 7, hal. 403 – 404