



## **The Spirituality of Prophet Muḥammad in the Thought of Aḥmad Ibn ‘Ajība**

Omneya Ayad<sup>1</sup>

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### **Abstract**

Aḥmad Ibn ‘Ajība (d. 1224/1809) is one of the prominent Sufi mystics who lived in Morocco during the 13<sup>th</sup>/ 17<sup>th</sup> century. His importance in Sufi scholarship is due to him being one of the original Sufi scholars who contributed immensely to elucidating ambiguous Sufi concepts that were enigmatic by nature and only accessed by Sufi adepts. In this article Ibn ‘Ajība’s esoteric interpretation of the Quranic verses addressing Prophet Muḥammad’s spirituality and his divinely lofty status are studied in detail. In his commentary, Ibn ‘Ajība emphasizes on different themes related to prophetic spirituality. The article starts by discussing the spiritual fatherhood of Prophet Muḥammad as he is considered the seed of existence. This theme leads to exploring the famous concept of the Muhammadan light and how the light of Prophet Muḥammad was the first to be created and out of which stems the light of different beings who had their shares of the Prophetic light according to their degree of proximity to God and their spiritual readiness. Prophetic mercy is also discussed in detail along with its relationship with the Prophetic ethical character. Ibn ‘Ajība further explains that if the All-Merciful had a son, then it would be Prophet Muḥammad who is the most entitled of this affinity because he is the first who worshipped God in pre-eternity as his light was the first thing to appear in existence. Ibn ‘Ajība presents to us another aspect of the prophetic spirituality which is mercy and how all prophets were created from mercy and Prophet Muḥammad was the heart of mercy. The great ethical manners that were bestowed upon Prophet Muḥammad was discussed in a separate theme and was used by Ibn ‘Ajība as an evidence of divine election (khuṣūṣiyya). Many more themes of Prophetic spirituality are discussed in detail along with the opinions of two of the most influential Sufi scholars, Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān al- Baqlī al- Shīrāzī, who both left an indelible impact on Ibn ‘Ajība’s Quranic commentary.

Keywords: Prophet Muḥammad, sufism, spirituality, Ahmad Ibn Ajiba, fatherhood, Adam

### **Introduction**

The Prophet’s spirituality is one of the key topics in Sufi literature and its different aspects were the subject of great attention from Sufi poets and scholars alike along centuries. The interest in the subject of the Prophet extended to esoteric commentaries on the Quranic verses related to Prophet Muḥammad. One of the commentators who deeply explored this subject is the prominent Moroccan Sufi mystic Aḥmad Ibn ‘Ajība (d. 1224/1809).

This article discusses Ibn ‘Ajība’s esoteric commentary on the spiritual prominence of Prophet Muḥammad and his lofty status which sets him apart from other prophets. The article analyzes various aspects of the Prophet’s spirituality starting with the argument that Prophet Muḥammad was the seed of existence and the start of creation which in turn makes him in reality the father of all spirits. One of the concomitants of the Prophet’s spiritual fatherhood is the concept of the Muhammadan light which

<sup>1</sup> omneya.ayad@uskudar.edu.tr

indicates that the Prophetic light was the first to be created and out of which stems the light of different beings who had their shares of the Prophetic light according to their degree of proximity to God and their spiritual readiness. Another important aspect of the Prophet's spirituality that light will be shed on is the prophetic pre-eternal mercy. Ibn 'Ajība explains how this leading attribute was essential for shaping the Prophet's ethical character and moral virtues. Ibn 'Ajība makes an association between the divine mercy and divine unity as the Prophet represents the perfect mirror reflecting the divine names and attributes. In this context the subject of opening the Prophet's chest and his ascension to heaven will be discussed in detail. Moreover, the spiritual leadership of Prophet Muḥammad leads Ibn 'Ajība to explore the concept of lordship and servanthood and how servanthood is the highest status that a servant can ever reach in proximity to his Lord. The article will conclude with the significance of sending salutations upon the Prophet along with exploring its meaning and effect on the saluter.

Also, a cross-examination of the opinions of classical Sufi scholars will be conducted, focusing on two of the most heavily quoted scholars in Ibn 'Ajība's mystical commentary: 'Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1074) and Rūzbihān al-Baqlī (d. 606/1210). The aim of this comparison is to study both the level of originality and the degree of influence reflected in Ibn 'Ajība's mystical Qur'ānic commentary in relation to the spiritual eminence of Prophet Muḥammad.

### Prophet Muḥammad and the Seed of Existence

Ibn 'Ajība in his Qur'ānic commentary builds a spiritual paradigm for Prophet Muḥammad and establishes an intellectual framework to teach us how to approach the subject of the prophetic spirituality. In his esoteric interpretation of this verse, "Muḥammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the messenger of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets; and Allah has knowledge of all things"<sup>2</sup> Ibn 'Ajība indicates that Prophet Muḥammad is the father of all spirits in reality as the whole existence is an extension of his light. He also is the father of the physical bodies as his light preceded all creation in appearance and existence. In other words, Prophet Muḥammad is the seed of existence. Ibn 'Ajība emphasizes that the spiritual celestial traits along with the earthly terrestrial features of fatherhood of Prophet Muḥammad negates his biological fatherhood to any man.<sup>3</sup>

Al-Qushayrī in his *tafsīr* comments on the same verse saying that although the lineage of Prophet Muḥammad was well-established, he was never known by his biological lineage but rather recognized for his affiliation with God. Therefore, we notice how rare it is for Prophet Muḥammad to be called, "Muḥammad the son of Abdullah" (*Muḥammad Ibn 'Abdullah*), as he is better known as, "Muḥammad the Messenger of God", (*Muḥammad rasūl-lu Allāh*). Al-Qushayrī adds further how the name of the Prophet is adjacent to God in the slogan of faith (*shī'ār al-imān*) and the word for divine oneness (*kalimat al-tawhīd*) "there is no god but God and Muḥammad is His messenger".<sup>4</sup> As for Al-Baqlī, he did not have any commentary on this verse. Here we see how Ibn 'Ajība discusses the spiritual and physical fatherhood of Prophet Muḥammad to all creation and how he is considered the seed of existence; a concept that was not discussed by al-Qushayrī.

Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240) as well discusses the eminent spiritual status of Prophet Muḥammad being the perfect man and resorts the reason of his perfection to the Prophet combining the spiritual readiness (*isti'dād*) of both Adam and Eve. Thus, according to Ibn 'Arabī the spirit of Prophet Muḥammad is the origin of all spirits and this makes him spiritually the first father, whereas Adam is physically the first father. This spiritual fatherhood made Prophet Muḥammad the most knowledgeable of God and this divine gnosis can only be the result of manifestation (*tajallī*) and witnessing (*shuhūd*). Ibn 'Arabī states that the Prophet's ethics is the embodiment of his spiritual eminence and these ethics

<sup>2</sup> *The Majestic Quran: an English Rendition of its Meanings*, trns. Ali Özek et al. (Chicago: The Nawawi Foundation, 2000), 4<sup>th</sup> ed., Al-Aḥzāb (33:40), 423.

<sup>3</sup> Aḥmad Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, ed. Ahmad al-Qurashī Raslān (Cairo: Maṭba'at Ḥasan 'Abbās Zakī, 1999), vol.4, 439.

<sup>4</sup> Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Masriyya li al-Kitāb, 2000), 3<sup>rd</sup> ed, vol. 3, 164.

are pure reflection of the Quran. In other words, the Prophet's relationship with the Quran is like a mirror whenever one looks at the Quran, he finds its live sensible version in the image of Prophet Muḥammad. Ibn 'Arabī continues explaining that the Quran is God's divine word and His attribute and in turn Prophet Muḥammad in the whole sense is a divine attribute. For this reason, Ibn 'Arabī adds, whoever obeys the Prophet obeys God because he does not speak out of whims as he is the voice of God. From this perspective, according to Ibn 'Arabī, Prophet Muḥammad was never missed from this world as he is the image of the Great Quran.<sup>5</sup>

The understanding of the spiritual fatherhood of Prophet Muḥammad was reiterated by 'Umar Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 633/1235), in his poem "The Ode of the *Tā'iyya*" or *Nazm al-sulūk*,

And though in outward form I be a son of Adam,  
yet within him is a truth bearing me witness to my fatherhood<sup>6</sup>

Sa'īd al-Dīn al-Farghānī (d. 699/1299-1300) in his commentary on these verses elaborated on how Prophet Muḥammad is resembling Adam as they both share clay-made physical bodies. That being said, in the core of Adam lies a meaning testifying to the Prophet's fatherhood in reality. Al-Farghānī explained further that the reality of Prophet Muḥammad is the grand barzakh (*al-barzakhīyya al-kubra*) and the truth of all truths (*ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqā'iq*) with which all manifestations started to appear. As for the reality of Adam, it is considered as the second barzakh (*al-barzakhīyya al-thāniya*) which is a derivative of the original stem found in the first barzakh. This means that the second barzakh is the apparent image of the first barzakh. For this reason the names Allah and the Merciful which are manifested in the second barzakh are but images or replicas to its originals in the first barzakh. Al-Farghānī adds that this meaning is found in the Prophetic tradition, "God created Adam in His image" or "in the image of the Merciful". From this al-Farghānī concludes that the reality of Adam and its spirituality are witnesses to the fatherhood of Prophet Muḥammad although the apparent image indicates the opposite.<sup>7</sup>

The reality of Prophet Muḥammad and his spiritual truth was touched upon by al-Buṣayrī in his famous poem "*al-Burda*" when he said,

How in this world can his true nature be grasped  
By a people of sleepers concerned only with their dreams?<sup>8</sup>

Ibn 'Ajība in his commentary on these verses indicates that the Prophet's spirituality is a wonderous secret as his heart contains divine knowledge and sacred realities which cannot be grasped by people who are in slumber. This means that what the companions were able to capture from the Prophet's high esteem is only the amount of what the sleeper comprehends from the dream he sees during his slumber. Ibn 'Ajība adds that what the companions grasped from the Prophet is only his outer human image, as for his inner divine secrets, they were not realized by them or anyone else for that matter. For this reason the Prophet once said to Abu Bakr, "I swear by the One who sent me as a messenger, no one knows my reality except my Lord" (*walladhī ba'athanī bilḥaq lam ya'rifnī ḥaqīqatan ghayra rabbī*).<sup>9</sup> This understanding led Uwais al-Qaranī to say, "You have not seen from the Prophet except his shadow".<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Maḥmūd al-Ghurāb, *al-Insān al-kāmil min kalām al-shaykh al-akbar* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1990), 2nd ed., 28.

<sup>6</sup> 'Umar Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *The Mystical Poems of Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, trns. A. J. Arberry, Chester Betty Monographs No. 6 (Dublin: Emery Walker, 1956), p. 64. See also 'Umar Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Diwān Ibn al-Fāriḍ* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥaram li-Turāth, 2014), 1st ed., 120.

<sup>7</sup> Sa'īd al-Dīn al-Farghānī, *Muntahā al-Madārik fī sharḥ tā'iyya Ibn al-Fāriḍ* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2007), vol.2, 198.

<sup>8</sup> *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa*, ed. Stephen Sperl and Christopher Shackle (Leiden, New York, Köln, Brill, 1996), vol. 2, 395. See also, Aḥmad Ibn 'Ajība, *al-'Umda fī sharḥ al-Burda* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2013), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 127.

<sup>9</sup> Aḥmad Ibn 'Ajība, *al-'Umda fī sharḥ al-Burda* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2013), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 127.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 127.

Ibn ‘Ajība comments on these quotes by emphasizing that the reality of Prophet Muḥammad and the divine secrets he holds is not known except for God.<sup>11</sup>

‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Manāwī (d. 1031 /1621) emphasizes the precedence of Prophet Muḥammad as a Prophet when he comments on the Prophetic tradition, “I was a Prophet when Adam was between spirit and body”. Here al-Manāwī affirms that the Prophet neither said that he was only human (*insān*) nor that he simply existed before Adam was created. He rather referred to his prophethood directly and how it existed at the beginning of creation in the world of the unseen before becoming a reality in the world of witness. He pointed out that in the world of witness where the Prophet’s spirit was connected to his body, he took the leadership over all previous religions just as he did before in the world of the unseen. He also mentioned that at the day of *alastu* when God asked all creation, “am I not your Lord?”, Prophet Muḥammad was the first one to answer affirmatively and said, yes “*bala*”.<sup>12</sup>

### The Muḥammadan Light

One of the most popular aspects of Prophet Muḥammad’s spirituality is the Muḥammadan light (*al-nūr al-Muḥammadī*). Ibn ‘Ajība explains the issue of the original light of Prophet Muḥammad in his interpretation of this verse, “Say (O Muḥammad) ‘If the All-Merciful had a son, I would be first among his worshippers’”,<sup>13</sup> where he points out that Prophet Muḥammad is a divine manifestation of God. He illustrates that the secrets of the Self sprouted from the Prophetic light, and germinated the lights of the attributes, and from the extension of the Prophetic light appeared all creation. Ibn ‘Ajība emphasizes that if the All-Merciful had a son, it would be Prophet Muḥammad, who is the most entitled of this affinity as he is the first who worshipped God in pre-eternity and his light was the first thing to appear in existence. Thus, Prophet Muḥammad worshipped God for long years and out of his light the whole creation came along. Ibn ‘Ajība proposes the assumption that if Prophet Muḥammad took precedence in worship, he would certainly take the lead in proximity to God by being his son and neither Prophet Jesus, nor the angels should take this title as was claimed by the Christians and the polytheists. Here Ibn ‘Ajība demonstrates that the precedence of Prophet Muḥammad in worship and how all creation was only an extension of his light, entitles him to be in a close proximity to God as his son, but the truth is God does not have a son, and thus Prophet Muḥammad is His servant and messenger.<sup>14</sup>

Rūzbihān al-Baqlī in his commentary on the above- mentioned verse emphasizes how Prophet Muḥammad was the first to transcend and glorify God beyond the claims of anthropomorphism. He adds further that referring to the Prophet as the first being who worshipped God, indicates the existence of the Prophetic light before the existence of all beings and points out to the Prophet’s precedence, being the first divine manifestation. This meaning was reiterated in one of the Prophetic tradition, “the first thing that God created was the light of Muḥammad before everything, and the first out of creation that was created was the lineage of Muḥammad, and the first thing that the pen wrote was there is no god but God, and Muḥammad is His messenger”.<sup>15</sup>

On the contrary to both Ibn ‘Ajība’s and al-Baqlī’s exposition of the above- mentioned verse, we find al-Qushayrī in his short commentary on the same verse indicating that if polytheists believe that the Merciful were to have a son, Prophet Muḥammad would be the first one to reject this statement.<sup>16</sup> Here we find that al-Qushayrī’s explanation is direct and abrupt with no room for entertaining the claim that if God had a son, it would be Prophet Muḥammad. ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 561/1166) in his commentary on the verse, “Allah is the light of the heaven and the earth. The likeness of His light is that of a niche in which is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass, the glass, is as it were a glittering star, lighted from

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 127.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Manāwī, *Fayḍ al-qadīr sharḥ al-jāmi‘ al-ṣaghīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifā, 1972), vol. 5, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ḥadīth no. 6424, 53.

<sup>13</sup> *The Majestic Quran*, Al-Zukhruf, (43:81), 495.

<sup>14</sup> Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 5, 274.

<sup>15</sup> Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān fī ḥaqā’iq al-Qur’ān*, ed. Aḥmad Farīd al-Mazīdī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2008), 1<sup>st</sup> ed. vol. 3, p. 284.

<sup>16</sup> Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 3, p. 377.

a blessed tree, an olive, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would almost glow forth, even if no fire touched it, light upon light. Allah guides whom He wills to His light, and gives examples to the people, and Allah knows everything”<sup>17</sup> explored the concept of the Muḥammadan light and indicated that when the light of Prophethood shined upon the lantern of the Prophet’s heart, the mirror of his heart was polished and thus was able to witness the unseen (*al-ghayb*) as the divine secrets were disclosed to him and for this reason he became a bridge between the Ever-lasting and the contingent beings (*al-qadīm wa al-ḥadīth*).<sup>18</sup>

Ibn ‘Arabī as well emphasized on the paramount divine station of Prophet Muḥammad and how his light was in the nearest proximity to the Divine light. He illustrated that God existed and nothing else existed along His side and His status now is the same as before He created the universe. This means that there was not any attribute that was gained after creating the universe as all His attributes were attached to Him from the beginning. So when God wanted to create the universe, His divine will resulted into a divine manifestation which appeared as a reality called (*haba*) and this is like an initial clay material ready to be shaped into different forms and shapes. This was the first existent in this world and God manifested with His light in this (*haba*) and all beings according to their readiness took their share of the divine light. In other words, the closer the one is to the divine light, the greater the share he has from it. Ibn ‘Arabī in his commentary on the *nūr* verse explained that the divine light is like a lamp and the closest being to it was Muḥammad’s reality (*ḥaqīqat Muḥammad*) i.e. the intellect (*al-‘aql*) and thus his existence is from this divine light. For this reason Prophet Muḥammad became the master of the whole universe and the first manifest in this world and out of his manifestation the world was created.<sup>19</sup>

Shaykh Yūsuf al-Nabahānī (d. 1849/1932) referred to the Muḥammadan light in his commentary on the verse, “...now there has come to you light from Allah, and a clear book.”<sup>20</sup> Here he interpreted the mentioned light to be Prophet Muḥammad. In another verse where God says, “O Prophet! We have sent you as a witness and a bringer of good news and warner. And as a summnor to Allah by His permission and as a lamp that gives light”,<sup>21</sup> he resembled the Prophetic guidance with the lantern which enlightens the spirit and paves its path to guidance. He then compared the Prophet’s sacred spirit with the light of the sun and he affirmed that just like the sun selflessly shines upon beings in the corporeal world with no reciprocal benefit, the Prophet’s spirit equally provides light to intellects and spirits. It is also interesting to note that God did not only describe His prophet as a light, He more importantly described Himself as a light too when He says, “Allah is the light of the heaven and the earth. The likeness of His light is that of a niche in which is a lamp.”<sup>22</sup> Al-Nabahānī commented on this verse saying that this means that there is nothing in the heaven and the earth except God and His sacred light i.e. Prophet Muḥammad who is the secret of existence, life, beauty and perfection. This divine light shined upon the spiritual world and angels took their share of light and became beacons of light and then it shined upon the human spirits and from there to the human bodies which took their share of light according to their spiritual readiness.<sup>23</sup>

‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh (d. 1131/1719) explained that Prophets’ body was made of clay and thus the spirit with all its secrets was veiled in the clay nature of the body which naturally prevails and impedes the penetration of light to it. This general rule has its exception when it comes to prophets as their creation was accompanied by the light of prophethood and thus the turbidity of the self is lightened and the veils of darkness are lifted. Thus the prophets became in a close proximity to God and act only by

<sup>17</sup> *The Majestic Quran*, al-Nūr, (24:35), 354.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Alī Ibn Yūsuf al-Shaṭnūfī, *Bahjat al-asrār wa ma‘dan al-anwār fī manāqib al-bāz al-ashhab al-Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī* (Fās: al-Munazzama al-maghribiyya li-l tarbiya wa-l thaqāfa wa-l ‘ulūm, 2013), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 294.

<sup>19</sup> Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiya*, ed. ‘Uthmān Yahyā, (Cairo: al-Majlis al-‘Alī, 1983), vol.1, p. 184.

<sup>20</sup> *The Majestic Quran*, al-Mā‘ida, (5:15), 110.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, al- al-Aḥzāb, (33: 45-46), 424.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, al-Nūr, (24:35), 354.

<sup>23</sup> Yūsuf al-Nabahānī, *al-Anwār al-Muḥammadiyya min al-mawāhib al-ladunniyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1997), 1st ed., 253.

Him and find their peace only with Him.<sup>24</sup> Al-Dabbāgh continued elaborating that the light of prophethood reached its peak with Prophet Muḥammad who in the day of *alastu* divided his light among the believers and the saints who replied affirmatively to the divine question and according to the amount of light that the spirit of the believers and the saints were exposed to their degree of proximity to the Divine differed.<sup>25</sup>

The emphasis on the Prophet Muḥammad being the first divine light was also made by Shihāb al-Dīn al-Alūsī (d. 1270/1854) who pointed out that Prophet Muḥammad is the mediator of the divine fusion (*al-fayḍ al-ilāhī*) which is manifested according to the degree of readiness of different created beings.<sup>26</sup>

### The Prophet's Pre-eternal Mercy

Ibn 'Ajība presents another aspect of the prophetic spirituality which is mercy in his esoteric interpretation of the verse, "We have sent you but as a mercy to the worlds".<sup>27</sup> In his commentary on this verse Ibn 'Ajība quotes Abū al-'Abbās al-Mursī (d. 686/1286) who explained that all prophets were created from mercy and Prophet Muḥammad was the heart of mercy. He also added that prophets were sent to their nations as charity (*ṣadaqa*), whereas Prophet Muḥammad was sent to us as a gift (*hadiyya*) because charity is for the poor and gift is for the exalted ones. Therefore, Prophet Muḥammad says, "I am the blessed gift". The purpose of mercy as Ibn 'Ajība explains is reaching the special divine oneness (*tawḥīd khāṣ*) as it is the only gate for reaching proximity to God.<sup>28</sup> This explains the degree of closeness that Prophet Muḥammad has to the Divine given that he is the heart of mercy.

Al-Qushayrī in his commentary on the same verse emphasizes the importance of Prophetic mercy which equally encompasses those who believe in the Prophet and those who don't as the unbelievers are saved from torment due to the existence of Prophet Muḥammad among them. This explains how the Prophetic mercy embodies all creation.<sup>29</sup> Rūzbihān al-Baqlī in his commentary on the same verse explored further the Prophetic mercy and considered it as the reason for the existence of creation and the origin of divine mercy upon all created beings. Therefore, Prophet Muḥammad is a sufficing mercy (*raḥma kāfiya*). Al-Baqlī continued to explain that all creation is created images void of spirit until the advent of Prophet Muḥammad whose presence gave life to all creation as he is the spirit of all created beings. Also, it is only due to the existence of Prophet Muḥammad that divine knowledge became available and accessible to creation who all found their way from non-existence to existence while lacking the secrets of perfect divine knowledge. Only through the divine ascension (*mi'rāj*) of Prophet Muḥammad to heaven, divine forgiveness was granted to all creation both believers and unbelievers as Prophet Muḥammad is a pre-eternal mercy (*raḥma azaliyya*) who represents a drop from the sea of the divine mercy and a sip of the divine river of forgiveness.<sup>30</sup>

Here we notice how Ibn 'Ajība explores the importance of Prophet Muḥammad being the heart of mercy and how this is a key to divine oneness and proximity.

Ibn 'Ajība continues his explanation of the original light of Prophet Muḥammad through his interpretation of this verse, "Yours is indeed a tremendous character".<sup>31</sup> Here he emphasized that the great ethical manners that was bestowed upon Prophet Muḥammad, on top of which is mercy, was an evidence of divine election (*khuṣūṣiyya*). Ibn 'Ajība quoted Sīdī 'Abdulraḥmān al-'Ārif who explained

<sup>24</sup> Aḥmad al-Sijlimāsī, *al-Ibrīz min kalām sayyidī 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Dabbāgh* (Cairo: Dār Jawāmi' al-kalim, 2006), 305.

<sup>25</sup> Khaldūn al-Haytī, *Ishārāt al-'arīfīn fī tanzīh al-awliyā' wa al-mursalīn* (Cairo: Dār al-Wābil al-Ṣayyib, 2023), 1st ed, 310.

<sup>26</sup> Shihāb al-Dīn al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ al-ma'ānī fī tafsīr al-Qurān al-'adhīm wa al-sab' al-mathānī* (Beirut: Mu'asasat al-Risāla, 2010), 1st ed., vol.17, 220.

<sup>27</sup> *The Majestic Quran*, al-Anbiyā', (21: 107), p.331.

<sup>28</sup> Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 3, p. 507.

<sup>29</sup> Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, vol. 2, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., p. 526.

<sup>30</sup> Al-Baqlī, *'Arā'is al-bayān fī ḥaqā'iq al-Qur'ān*, vol.2, p. 528-529.

<sup>31</sup> *The Majestic Quran*, al-Qalam (68:4), p. 564.

that ethical manners are the result of opening the Prophet's heart with light and filling it with wisdom and light. Therefore, the Prophet's heart had no attachments to anything but God and that is the reason why his ethics were associated with the Quran as it became as pure and untarnished as the Quran itself.<sup>32</sup> Al-Qushayrī in his commentary on the same verse explained how the ethical character of Prophet Muḥammad is a combination of all the sparse ethical characteristics of all the prophets. Also, the Prophet was offered the keys of the treasures of the earth, but he did not accept it. Furthermore, during the night of ascension, he was exposed to the beauties of the heaven, but did not pay any attention to it either as his eyes were fixated upon God. For this reason, God described him with having great moral ethics as the Prophet neither backed out of his love for God due to the befallen calamities nor his heart was dazzled by bounties and grants. The Prophet was rather enduring patiently the pain of broken teeth and injured head while praying for his people saying, "Oh my Lord forgive my people as they do not know". Moreover, in the day of judgement when all the prophets will be seeking their own salvation repeating, "myself, myself", the Prophet selflessly will be saying, "My nation, my nation". For all these reasons and more Prophet Muḥammad deserved to be granted the title of having great ethical manners above all creation.<sup>33</sup>

Rūzbihān al-Baqlī in his esoteric interpretation of the same verse emphasized that the high ethical character of Prophet Muḥammad represents in essence the divine light that was bestowed upon him in pre-eternity. Due to this divine light, Prophet Muḥammad was granted great divine ethics which include divine attributes and qualities exclusively assigned to him. The divine trust of carrying all the divine names and attributes was not given to any other created being as through the ethics of the Prophet, God tasted the beauty of witnessing Himself. Thus, it became easy on Prophet Muḥammad to witness in full contentment divine Providence and destiny. In other words, due to the divine ethics of the Prophet, the whole world with all its creation was belittled in his eyes due to witnessing the grandiosity of its Creator. Rūzbihān al-Baqlī quoted al- Wasitī who explained that God's power was manifested in Jesus and His wrath was demonstrated in the staff of Moses. As for the divine attributes and ethics they were bestowed upon Prophet Muḥammad.<sup>34</sup>

### **Divine unity between God and Prophet Muḥammad**

Ibn 'Ajība discusses another aspect of the Prophet's spirituality which is reaching the state of unity (*jam*) with God in his interpretation of the verse, "(O Prophet) those who swear allegiance to you, swear allegiance only to Allah...".<sup>35</sup> Here he quotes Rūzbihān al-Baqlī who explained that in this verse God thought of Prophet Muḥammad as a mirror reflecting his divine Self and Attributes and this is the station of unity (*ittiḥād*). In this station the light of the Self (*nūr al-dhāt*) appears in the light of the attributes (*nūr al-ṣifāt*) and in turn the light of both the Self and the attributes appeared on the light of action (*nūr al-fi'l*). In this case he (the Prophet) becomes He (God) (*huwa huwa*). Al-Baqlī expounds further that the action disappeared in the attribute and the attribute disappeared in the Self. This state led Mansour al-Hallaj to say, "I am the Truth", (*anā al-ḥaqq*) and also drove Bāyazīd al-Bistāmī to say, "Glory be to me, Glory be to me" (*subḥānī subḥānī*).<sup>36</sup> In his commentary on this verse Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī stated that this is the most praise worthy verse in the Quran for the Prophet because God literally placed the Prophet's name instead of His and accepted oaths and rulings to be taken by the Prophet on His behalf. Also, the honorable status of Prophet Muḥammad is highlighted when God chose not to add the letter *kaf* which means 'as if or like' which indicates assimilation (*tashbīh*), instead He rather chose direct association and this share of lordship (*rubūbiyya*) to creation was not given to anyone except to the Prophet.<sup>37</sup> This led al-Hallāj to believe that God did not reveal the state of divine unity (*jam*) in such straightforwardness (*taṣrīḥ*) to anyone except to the noblest and the most honorable Prophet Muḥammad. This means that the one who pays allegiance to the Prophet is in reality paying allegiance

<sup>32</sup> Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 6, p. 224, 225.

<sup>33</sup> Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, vol. 3, p. 617.

<sup>34</sup> Al-Baqlī, *'Arā'is al-bayān fī ḥaqā'iq al-Qur'ān*, vol.3, p.444-445.

<sup>35</sup> *The Majestic Quran*, al-Fath, (48:10), p. 512.

<sup>36</sup> Al-Baqlī, *'Arā'is al-bayān fī ḥaqā'iq al-Qur'ān*, vol. 3, p. 318.

<sup>37</sup> Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 5, p. 389.

to God. Al-Wāsiṭī in his commentary on this verse illustrated that the human condition (*bashariyya*) in Prophet Muḥammad is a loan and an addition with no reality.<sup>38</sup> Ibn ‘Ajība emphasizes that this verse indicates the state of unity between Prophet Muḥammad and God as the lover is united with the Beloved in His attributes. This understanding is reinforced by the *ḥadīth*<sup>39</sup> which states, “and if I loved him, I would become his eyesight, hearing, tongue and hand”.<sup>40</sup> As for al-Qushayrī, he did not make an esoteric commentary on this verse.

The state of divine unity which the prophet was honored to reach is also illustrated in the verse, “...and you (O Muḥammad) did not throw when you threw, but Allah threw”<sup>41</sup> where Ibn ‘Ajība quoted al-Bayḍāwī who expounded that although the Prophet threw the pebbles in appearance (*ṣūra*), in reality (*ḥaqīqa*) God is the one who achieved the purpose of throwing the pebbles, i.e reaching the eyes of the enemies until they were defeated. This means that although the Prophet in appearance did the throwing, in reality God is the one who did it.<sup>42</sup> Rūzbihān al-Baqlī in his commentary on the same verse explained in detail how the Prophet was immersed in the divine lights of the manifestation of the Self, the attributes and the actions. He also referred to how the Prophet reached this complete state of unity (*ittiḥād*) by the virtue of which he became the mirror of divine manifestations in all forms. This explains the prophetic *ḥadīth*, “whoever sees me, sees the Truth, and whoever knows me, knows the Truth” (*man ra’ānī faqad ra’ā al-ḥaqq wa man ‘arafanī faqad ‘arafa al-ḥaqq*).<sup>43</sup>

As for Al-Qushayrī in his esoteric interpretation of the same verse, he emphasized on the theological understanding of the concept of acquisition (*kasb*) which is defined as the power of human beings to perform an action. This power is only associated with actions which are performed out of choice (*ikhtiyār*), intention (*qaṣd*) and inclination (*mayl*) according to human will. That being said, it would be a mistake to believe that the divine power has nothing to do with human actions performed out of choice. On the contrary, God is the one who creates the human being’s intentions and inclinations in the first place as well as creating the human being’s ability to perform an action at the exact time the human being willingly chooses to perform an action.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, the actions which are outwardly associated with the human being’s choice and will are inwardly solely created by God. According to Ibn ‘Ajība, those who reach the balance of being able to witness God in both the eternal world of *qudra* in which all actions are single-handedly performed by Him and the temporal world of *ḥikma* in which human beings have a choice to perform or withhold actions are those who become the true lovers of God. This understanding of the concept of acquisition was clearly defined by al-Qushayrī when he indicated that the role of the Prophet was limited to acquisition which means that he was the one who took a speck of dust and pebbles and throw it. Yet the Prophetic action of throwing was the result of the divine power and the fact of the pebbles reaching the eyes of the enemies was a pure divine creation. Thus, the one who negated (the result of throwing) what he confirmed (the act of throwing) and confirmed what he negated was God. This means that the act is one and the difference only is regarding the doer of the act.<sup>45</sup>

Al-Qushayrī after explaining the concept of acquisition, he draws the attention of the readers to a related concept that is widely used among Sufis which is the doctrine of separation (*farq*) which means witnessing one’s existence and be in total awareness of his actions, whereas unification (*jam’*) means being in a state of self-annihilation where the gnostic is unable to realize his own actions as he fails to

<sup>38</sup> Al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān fī ḥaqā’iq al-Qur’ān*, vol. 3, p. 319.

<sup>39</sup> *Al Sunan al-kubrā li’l-Bayhaqī*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Attā, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2003), 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., vol. 10, pp. 370, ḥadīth no: 20980.

<sup>40</sup> Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 5, p. 389. See also Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān*, vol.1, pp. 317, see also Laury Silvers, *A Soaring Minaret: Abu Bakr al-Wāsiṭī and the Rise of Baghdadi Sufism*, (Albany, SUNY press, 2010), pp. 58.

<sup>41</sup> *The Majestic Quran*, al-Anfāl, (8:17), p. 179.

<sup>42</sup> Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 2, p. 314.

<sup>43</sup> Al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān fī ḥaqā’iq al-Qur’ān*, vol. 1, p. 518-519.

<sup>44</sup> Jamāl Fārūq, *Baṣā’ir azhariyya ‘ala sharḥ al-kharīda al-bahiyya*, (Cairo, Kashīda publications, 2013), 1<sup>st</sup> ed., pp. 87.

<sup>45</sup> Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, p. 610.

witness anything save God. In al-Qushayrī's interpretation of the above-mentioned verse, he confirmed that the part of the verse where it says, "when you (Muḥammad) threw" is *farq*, whereas, "but God is the one who threw" is *jam*. Al-Qushayrī adds that although separation is the attribute of servanthood and unification is the attribute of lordship, every separation contains unification and every unification is overlapped with the servant's attributes of separation.<sup>46</sup> This means that Al-Qushayrī is encouraging us to maintain a balance between the two concepts in order to reach an equilibrium between witnessing the secrets of Lordship while abiding by the laws of servanthood.

The differences between separation and unity is addressed thoroughly in Ibn 'Ajība's identification of the term unity (*aḥadiyya*) as an exaggerated form of unicity (*waḥda*), which indicates an ultimate degree of the perfection of God's oneness, one that determines all created forms as non-existent. In other words, God's utter oneness leaves no room for duality or plurality.<sup>47</sup> This meaning was eloquently expressed in poetry:<sup>48</sup>

Is there a god and a servant	and negation and opposite?
I said to him, "not for me"	So he said, "what is it for you?" and I said
The existence of absence	and the absence of existence
The Oneness of the Truth	by abandoning truth
And there is no truth	except mine solely
قلت له ليس ذاك عندي	أرب وعبد ونفى وضد
وجود فقد وفقد وجد	فقال ما عندكم فقلنا
وليس حق سواي وحدي	توحيد حق بترك حق

Ibn 'Ajība interpreted these elliptical verses by saying that the poet denies the state of separation (*farq*) by which there is a possibility of observing the imaginary independent existence of servanthood apart from the secrets of the meaning of Lordship. There is no doubt that according to separation (*farq*) servanthood is in total opposition to the attributes of Lordship, yet the definition of divine oneness negates the existence of any opposites. Therefore, the poet denies the separate independent existence of servants (devotees) whose attributes of servanthood are in total opposition to that of Lordship. Ibn 'Ajība further explained that God manifested His Lordship in created forms, and thus, in essence, nothing exists except Him. This state is attained through the existence of the absence of all save God, along with the absence of self. In other words, the way to testify to the truth of God's oneness is through denying and abandoning the truth of existence of anything save Him, as the poet concludes: "there is in reality none exists save Me". Ibn 'Ajība's comment on this last verse was that the poet was in a state of total annihilation (*fanā*).<sup>49</sup>

Ibn 'Ajība discusses the divine opening (*fath*) for Prophet Muḥammad through his commentary on the verse, "(O Prophet), We have indeed given you a manifest victory, that Allah may forgive you of your sin that which is past and that which is to come, and may perfect His favor upon you, and may guide you on a right path".<sup>50</sup> Here Ibn 'Ajība expounds that the divine victory and the spiritual opening is the revealing of the secrets of the Self, the lights of the divine attributes, and the beauty of the divine actions. In this way, Prophet Muḥammad witnessed God with God and that is the ultimate understanding of divine forgiveness (*maghfira*) which means here that the Prophet was annihilated from his own self existence and was immersed in witnessing the Beloved. In this moment the sensual and physical realms are concealed as the Prophet only remained with God. Ibn 'Ajība quoted the commentary of al-Qushayrī here who added that the sin of existence (*dhanb al-wujūd*) is co-existence which means sharing existence with God (*al-shirk fī al-wujūd*) and the way of forgiveness to this sin is concealing the finite human existence with the infinite light of unity (*nūr al-waḥda*) to eradicate the darkness of duality (*zulmāt al-ithnayniyya*). Ibn 'Ajība comments on al-Qushayrī's opinion by stating that the perfection of

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 610.

<sup>47</sup> Ibn 'Ajība, *Iqādh al-himam fī sharḥ al-ḥikam*, ed. Muḥammad Naṣṣār, (Cairo: Dār Jawāmi' al-Kalim, 2005), pp. 323, 324.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, pp. 324

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, pp. 183.

<sup>50</sup> *The Majestic Quran*, al-Faṭḥ, (48: 1-2), p. 511.

God's favor upon the Prophet is by combining witnessing lordship (*shuhūd al-rubūbiyya*) while performing the duties of servanthood (*adāb al-'ubūdiyya*).<sup>51</sup>

Al-Qushayrī comments on how God perfected His favor upon the Prophet and mentioned the countless blessings bestowed on the Prophet such as being the seal of prophethood, intercession, seeing God and listening to the divine speech at the Night Journey and that he was sent to all nations. Al-Qushayrī also explored the meaning of guidance to the Prophet and confirmed that it has three meanings, the first is staying steady on the path of guidance so his guidance is increased, the second is Prophet Muḥammad being the source of guidance for creation to their Lord and the last is being guided to the straight path by abandoning all his egoistic tendencies and whims of the lower self.<sup>52</sup>

Al-Baqlī in his commentary on the same verse discusses the fact that the doors of eternity are not to be accessed by contingent beings, yet it was wide open to Prophet Muḥammad so he was able to see God with His eyes and listen to His divine speech. Also, God opened the door of the Prophet's heart and soul in order to make Himself known to the Prophet. At this point the doors of the treasures of the unseen knowledge were open and the Prophet's whole existence was saturated by the lights of divine oneness. The overwhelming lights of divine reality were shining upon the Prophet and thus was easily detected by human beings. Al-Baqlī also quoted the commentary of Ibn 'Atā' on this verse who said that this verse combines multiple favors and blessings, such as divine opening which is a sign of answering prayers, forgiveness which is a sign of love, perfection of favor which is a sign of selectivity (*ikhtisās*), victory which is a sign of friendship with God which in turn allows the Prophet to see all beings coming from God without seeing anything but Him. Ibn 'Atā' continued that the special status of Prophet Muḥammad in comparison to other prophets can also be understood when the sins of all prophets were revealed, and those of the Prophet Muḥammad were concealed and forgiven in this verse, "Allah may forgive you of your sin that which is past and that which is to come".<sup>53</sup>

### The Prophet's spiritual leadership

Ibn 'Ajība draws the attention of the aspirant to follow the honorable example of the Prophet, even if this aspirant reached a high spiritual status in his commentary on this verse, "Say (O Muḥammad) 'O Mankind truly I am the Messenger of Allah to you all; (the Messenger of) Him to whom belongs the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth. There is no god save Him. He gives life and He gives death. So believe in Allah and His Messenger, the unlettered Prophet who believes in Allah and His words, and follow him that you might be rightly guided".<sup>54</sup> In this verse there is an emphasis on the concept of guidance (*hidāya*) which is only possible through following the footprints of the Prophet as Ibn 'Ajība indicates that there is no end-goal of guidance. Ibn 'Ajība explains that the manners of servanthood (*adāb al-'ubūdiyya*) is related to the grandiosity of lordship (*adhamat al-rubūbiyya*). Therefore, just as the ascension in witnessing lordship is endless, so are the manners of servanthood. Ibn 'Ajība adds that there is no way of learning the etiquettes and manners except through the teachings of Prophet Muḥammad and thus his noble guidance is not apart from the gnostic no matter how far he reached in knowledge.<sup>55</sup>

In al-Qushayrī's commentary on this verse, he explored how God asked the Prophet to reveal his elevated status and disclose the bounties bestowed upon him. The Prophet in turn explained how he was favored among people and that His lord, who has no partners in sovereignty, had sent him to guide people to His path of guidance.<sup>56</sup> Al-Baqlī in his interpretation of the same verse emphasized on the role of the Prophet who was bestowed with divine gnosis and was sent as a messenger to people in order for them to witness the divine attributes in him. He was also sent to show us how he believes in God with

<sup>51</sup> Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 5, p. 385.

<sup>52</sup> Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, vol. 3, 418-419.

<sup>53</sup> Al-Baqlī, *'Arā'is al-bayān fī ḥaqā'iq al-Qur'ān*, vol. 3, 313, 314.

<sup>54</sup> *The Majestic Quran*, al-A'rāf, (7:158), p. 170.

<sup>55</sup> Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 2, p. 271.

<sup>56</sup> Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, p. 578

full contentment (*riḍā*) with divine providence and how his heart is the manifestation of divine revelation (*kashf*). Also, al-Baqlī added that God considered following the Prophetic footprints a key to access the treasures of divine gnosis of God's self and attributes. Following the Prophet should be through the path of love, he continues, as only then people may be guided to witness the lights of the self in the divine attributes and the manifestations of the attributes in divine actions which is the attribute of friendship with God (*wilāya*).

Ibn 'Ajība emphasizes on the Prophet's spiritual leadership in his interpretation of the verse, "Say: 'if you love Allah, then follow me, for then Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. Allah is Forgiving, Compassionate'".<sup>57</sup> He explains how following the Prophet is a cornerstone in the spiritual path to God and one of the conditions for the secrets of divine reality to shine upon the disciple. This means the one who does not follow the Prophet, lost his spiritual path and thus stands no chance in reaching his divine destination. Ibn 'Ajība demonstrates that the Prophet is the guard of the gate of the divine presence, thus whoever approaches through the Prophet's love and guidance, he is allowed to enter the divine presence and reside in it, otherwise he is banished and expelled. In this regard one of the poets says,<sup>58</sup>

You are God's gate and whoever comes to the gate  
Through other means but you, does not enter.

Also in this regard Ibn al-Mubārak said,

You disobey the Lord yet pretend to His love  
This is impossible and logically strange  
Had your love been sincere you would have obeyed Him  
For the lover is submissive before the one whom he loves<sup>59</sup>

Al-Qushayrī again in his commentary on the same verse signifies the importance of differentiating between the concept of separation (*farq*) where the devotee is aware of his own actions and unification (*jam*) where the devotee is in a state of total self-annihilation so he is unable to recognize in existence anything save God. Al-Qushayrī applied these two concepts during his interpretation of this verse and mentioned that 'they love God' is *farq*, whereas 'God loves them' is *jam*. He explained further that 'they love God' is always associated with a reason, whereas 'God loves them' has no reason and this is the reality of intimacy (*haqīqat al-waṣl*). The love of the devotee to God is a fine state of the heart which encourages him to obey divine commands in total contentment and to favor God over all others. The condition of love is that it is unconditional with no reason attached. This means whoever did not cleanse himself from all his desires, did not taste a drop of love. As for God's love to the devotee, it indicates the divine will to bestow bounties and blessings upon his devotee.<sup>60</sup>

Al-Qushayrī places total self-annihilation of the lover in the beloved as a cornerstone of love and that was the difference between the lover (*ḥabīb*) and the intimate friend (*kahlīl*). Ibrahim al-Khalil said, "He who follows me, he is of me",<sup>61</sup> whereas the Prophet said, "follow me, for then God will love you". This means the follower of the *kahlīl* belongs to Ibrahim himself, whereas the follower of the *ḥabīb* is beloved by God Himself. Al-Qushayrī added that this verse indicates that love is unconditional and not based on reasons and thus does not sprout from obedience because God says He loves you and forgives your sins which means that a devotee can have a lot of sins and then God loves him and he loves God back. Also, we notice here in this verse that between love and forgiveness there is 'and' or *wāw* letter which indicates following a certain sequence for us to recognize that love is prior to forgiveness. So first He loves them

<sup>57</sup> *The Majestic Quran*, Āl-Imrān, 3:31, p. 54.

<sup>58</sup> Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 1, 344.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, vol.1, pp. 345

<sup>60</sup> Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, 235.

<sup>61</sup> *The Majestic Quran*, Ibrahim, (14:36), 260.

and they love Him and then He forgives them and they ask for His forgiveness. In other words, love necessitates forgiveness.<sup>62</sup>

Al-Baqlī in his commentary on the same verse emphasized the lofty status of Prophet Muḥammad and how he is the master of lovers, the chief of the truthful ones, the leader of the messengers and the guide for the aspirants. Therefore, the Prophet provides an excellent example for the devotee as the secrets of love and the lights of proximity were revealed to him and thus following the Prophet is an expression of gratitude to God and the more the devotee thanks God through following the Prophetic example, the more God increases his love and gnosis. The origin of love, according to al-Baqlī, is for the lover to embrace the ethics of the beloved and witness the beloved in all things along with burning the heart with the fire of longing and immersing the senses in the sea of companionship. When it comes to the consequences of love, al-Baqlī here agrees with al-Qushayrī when he confirmed that conformity with the beloved in all His commands and accepting calamities with contentment and surrendering to the divine providence are all part of following the Prophetic example. Also, one of the consequences of love is starting supererogatory prayers and acts of worship in order for the devotee to fully embrace the divine attributes of the Truth.<sup>63</sup>

Ibn ‘Ajība expounds on the marvelous event of the Night Journey and Ascension to heavens in order to emphasize the impeccable status of Prophet Muḥammad in his commentary on these verses, “Your companion (Muḥammad) is not in error, nor is he deceived. Nor does he speak out of passion, this is but a revelation that is revealed”.<sup>64</sup> Ibn ‘Ajība explains the lofty status of Prophet Muḥammad who does not speak out of whims or passion as he is indulged in witnessing the Truth and therefore nothing but the Truth is manifested in him. He adds that the manifested revelation is only a divine inspiration (*ilhām ilāhī*) which is originated from the presence of dominance (*ḥaḍrat al-qahhār*). Thus, this inspiration conquers all the other non-divine thoughts.<sup>65</sup>

Rūzbihān al-Baqlī in his commentary on these verses believed that these verses indicate the perfection and the great honor of Prophet Muḥammad. He went further to explain that speaking out of whims is impossible for someone who does not have whims, as the Prophet was elevated from the impurities of creation and enlightened with the lights of reality. Therefore, the Prophet’s speech is the divine speech and his actions are the divine actions and his heart is the locus and manifestation of the Truth. In this case, al-Baqlī asks in denial, how can satanic whims and self- passions be accessible to the Prophet’s heart?<sup>66</sup>

Al-Qushayrī in his interpretation of the same verse mentions how God, Himself, defended the Prophet from the accusations of speaking out of whims and passions. This divine defense and support were not given to any other Prophet. For example, Prophet Noah defended himself by saying, “no error is in me”,<sup>67</sup> and Hud when he said, “there is no foolishness in me”,<sup>68</sup> and Moses when he said to the Pharaoh “O Pharaoh, I think you are doomed”<sup>69</sup>, among many other examples which indicate that the divine defense only was invoked by God for Prophet Muḥammad’s sake. It is also interesting to note that when God addressed Prophet David he said, “...judge aright between mankind and follow not passions...”,<sup>70</sup> whereas God is the one who immediately defended Prophet Muḥammad by saying, “he does not speak out of whims and passions”.

The issue of opening the Prophet’s chest and filling it with faith and wisdom during the Night of Ascension was explored by Ibn ‘Ajība even further in his interpretation of the verse, “Have We not

<sup>62</sup> Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, 235-236.

<sup>63</sup> Al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān fī ḥaqā’iq al-Qur’ān*, vol. 1, 141.

<sup>64</sup> *The Majestic Quran*, al-Najm, (53:2-4), p. 526.

<sup>65</sup> Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 5, 503-504.

<sup>66</sup> Al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān fī ḥaqā’iq al-Qur’ān*, vol. 3, 356.

<sup>67</sup> *The Majestic Quran*, al-A’rāf, (7:61), p. 158.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, al-A’rāf, (7:67), p. 158.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, al-Isrā’, (17:102), p. 292.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, Ṣād, (38:26), p. 454.

expanded your breast for you”<sup>71</sup> in which he indicates that the expansion of the chest of the Prophet allowed him to contain both the Unseen Realm (*ghayb*) and the world of witnessing (*shahāda*). In this way, the earthly terrestrial world did not prevent him from capturing the lights of spiritual subtilities. Also caring for people’s affairs was not a stumbling block to indulge in witnessing the Truth.<sup>72</sup> Ibn ‘Ajība at this juncture draws our attention to the lofty status of Prophet Muḥammad who without requesting the expansion of his chest, was granted it as a gift, whereas Prophet Moses had to ask for it when he said, “My Lord expand my breast for me”.<sup>73</sup>

Al-Qushayrī in his commentary on the above- mentioned verse referred briefly to the divine expansion of the Prophet’s chest to embrace Islam and how it was softened to receive faith. Another reason for the Prophet’s chest expansion was to be able to bear the divine manifestations and the light of divine message.<sup>74</sup>

Al-Baqlī in his esoteric interpretation of the same verse explored that the expansion of the Prophet’s chest indicates the rise of the sun of divine majesty in him, which enlightened his spirit, heart and mind. Al-Baqlī emphasized that God was the one who took upon Himself the task of expanding the Prophet’s chest and did not want to leave it to anyone else and thus the pre-eternal divine attributes and self was revealed to the Prophet. Thus, the Prophetic chest was expanded with the expansion of the divine self and its attributes. This means that the process of expansion of the Prophet’s chest continues for eternity because the divine majesty is ceaseless and the Prophet’s chest was the locus of the divine majestic manifestations. This allowed the Prophet to remain with God where there is no time and place as he is indulged in the light of the self and the light of the attributes and between these two lights of reality the Prophet remains veiled from the illusion of creation.<sup>75</sup>

Here we find how Ibn ‘Ajība’s interpretation of the incident of opening the Prophet’s chest and filling it with divine light revolves around creating a balance between the earthly terrestrial world of witnessing and the heavenly celestial world of the unseen. Creating this fine balance was essential for the Prophet in order to run the affairs of the people and the state without being veiled from indulging in the divine lights manifested in his heart.

### **Servanthood ( *‘ubūdiyya*) vs. lordship ( *ulūhiyya*)**

The lofty status of servanthood ( *‘ubūdiyya*) of Prophet Muḥammad was also emphasized in Ibn ‘Ajība’s esoteric interpretation of the verse, “Transcendent is He Who carried His slave by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque whose surrounding we have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs, for He is the Hearer, the Seer”.<sup>76</sup> Ibn ‘Ajība draws our attention to the unique status of Prophet Muḥammad as God addressed him in the Quran with the title, “servant” ( *‘abd*), rather than calling him a “messenger” or a “prophet”. He explains further that servanthood ( *‘ubūdiyya*) is the highest title that anyone can earn and this title proves that Prophet Muḥammad perfected servanthood and thus was rewarded with ascension to heaven. Ibn ‘Ajība adds that travelling at night ( *isrā’*) was only physically accessible to Prophet Muḥammad, as for the saints, they can only experience spiritual travelling based on the degree of the purity of their spirit and its absence from the materialistic world. Travelling at night in particular is of important significance as night is the time of intimate conversations ( *munājā*) and connection ( *waṣl*).<sup>77</sup>

Ibn ‘Ajība here quoted al-Qushayrī’s opinion who noted that God sent Prophet Muḥammad to the earthly world in order to teach people how to worship Him and then He elevated him to heaven in order for

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, al- Sharḥ, (94: 1), p. 596.

<sup>72</sup> Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 6, p. 476-477.

<sup>73</sup> *The Majestic Quran*, Ṭaha, (20:25), p. 313.

<sup>74</sup> Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 3, p. 743.

<sup>75</sup> Al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān fī ḥaqā’iq al-Qur’ān*, vol. 3, p. 514.

<sup>76</sup> *The Majestic Quran*, al-Isrā’, (17:1), p. 282.

<sup>77</sup> Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 3, p. 181.

angels to learn the secrets of worship. He added further that during his time on earth and heaven, the Prophet's eyes and heart were not dazzled or distracted by worldly bounties or heavenly grants as he did not desire a certain lofty position or was attached to any spiritual manifestation, he was rather freed from every aspiration and ambition that night. Ibn 'Ajl̄ba comments on al-Qushayrī's opinion and emphasizes that due to Prophet Muḥammad's detachment to any of the spiritual beauties, he was rewarded with seeing God; unlike Prophet Moses whose request of seeing God was denied.<sup>78</sup>

When we delve into al-Qushayrī's commentary on this verse, we find that he emphasized on the differences of the status of both Moses and Prophet Muḥammad as the former was addressed in the Quran as following, "when Moses came to Our appointed time", whereas the later was addressed with, "the One who carried His servant at night". This means that Moses came on his own and asked for the meeting which indicates the status of *farq*, whereas Prophet Muḥammad was asked for and called upon to meet his Lord which pinpoints the status of *jam*'. Al-Qushayrī also discusses the importance of choosing nighttime rather than daylight as a time for the divine meeting and he explains that night was the time of intimacy where no one is watching and also the meeting time was not previously known by the Prophet as there was no need for prior preparations as it is a meeting of lovers.<sup>79</sup>

Ibn 'Ajl̄ba quotes Rūzbihān al-Baqlī who explained how the Prophet was elevated from witnessing divine actions to witnessing divine attributes and then was elevated even further to witnessing the divine Self as God allowed him to witness the manifestations of His beauty. At this moment the Prophet witnessed the Truth with the Truth (*al-ḥaqq bil-ḥaqq*).<sup>80</sup>

Al-Baqlī in his commentary on the same verse draws the reader's attention to the depth of the intimate relationship between God and Prophet Muḥammad when he referred to the allusion of jealousy (*ishārat al-ghayra*) which was indicated when God chose not to reveal His name as God or the Merciful (Allah or al-Raḥmān), and He rather preferred to stay anonymous by employing the relative pronoun "the one who" (*alladhī*) because of His jealousy to be seen by anyone except His servant. Also, God refrained from addressing the Prophet with his name out of jealousy and thus the two names of the Lord and the servant were left out and were concealed from all creation from earth to the throne.<sup>81</sup>

Al-Baqlī also mentioned another significant allusion which is the allusion of the unseen (*ishārat al-ghayb*) when he indicated that the verb carrying by night (*asra*) is linguistically coming from the word secret (*sir*) between the Lord and His servant and night was chosen as it is the time for intimate conversation and the manifestation of secrets. Prophet Muḥammad with divine grace travelled from the locus of will (*maḥal al-irāda*) to the locus of love (*maḥal al-maḥabba*) and then he was elevated to the status of gnosis (*ma'rifa*) and then oneness (*tawḥīd*), after which he reached the state of singleness (*tafrīd*) then annihilation (*fanā'*) and subsistence (*baqā'*). At this point the Prophet was at the station of unification (*ittiḥād*) where he was completely stripped of all the attributes of contingency (*ḥudūth*) and was totally immersed in the unseen and annihilated in God with the attribute of servanthood.<sup>82</sup>

Ibn 'Ajl̄ba expounds further the divine secret between God and Prophet Muḥammad in his commentary on this verse, "O Messenger! Make known that which has been sent down to you from your Lord, for if you don't you will not have conveyed His message. Allah will protect you from men (who mean you harm). Allah guides not those who disbelieve".<sup>83</sup> Ibn 'Ajl̄ba quoted the commentary of Rūzbihān al-Baqlī who pointed out that God asked Prophet Muḥammad to inform people regarding the rulings of servanthood (*'ubūdiyya*), but did not command him to reveal the divine secrets between him and God which is the reality of Prophethood. Al-Baqlī added further that the core essence of the Prophetic message is revealed through the lights of lordship (*ulūhiyya*) shining upon his heart and declared by the

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, vol. 3, p. 182.

<sup>79</sup> Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, vol. 2, p. 334.

<sup>80</sup> Ibn 'Ajl̄ba, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 3, p. 182.

<sup>81</sup> Al-Baqlī, *'Arā'is al-bayān fī ḥaqā'iq al-Qur'ān*, vol. 2, 346.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, vol. 2, 346-347.

<sup>83</sup> *The Majestic Quran*, al-Mā'idā, (5:67), 119.

rulings of servanthood in his inner spirit (*sir*).<sup>84</sup> Ibn ‘Ajība also referred to al-Qushayrī’s interpretation of this verse saying that the Prophet was commanded not to hide any of the revelation that descended upon him out of being occupied with others as in reality there are no others as they are only figures which are subjected to divine destiny. Also, God promised to protect the Prophet’s heart from being influenced or distracted by anyone save Him.<sup>85</sup> Al-Qushayrī added that in this verse the Prophet was commanded to reveal to all people that he is the master of all Adam’s sons and that Adam himself comes under his command. Also, another possible interpretation for this verse according to al-Qushayrī is that God asked the Prophet to declare that He is the one who forgives sinners with no prior conditions and also is the one who can turn down the obedient if He wishes.<sup>86</sup>

The unique status of Prophet Muḥammad among other prophets is expressed in Ibn ‘Ajība’s interpretation of the verse, “We have surely given you abundance”.<sup>87</sup> Ibn ‘Ajība narrates that one of the reasons of the revelation of this verse is that Prophet Muḥammad was conversing with God saying, “O Lord, you have taken Ibrahim as your intimate friend (*khalīl*) and Moses to be Your converser (*kalīm*), what have you given me especially?”. In response this verse was revealed, “Did He not find you an orphan and give you shelter?”<sup>88</sup> However, Prophet Muḥammad was not satisfied and Ibn ‘Ajība justifies the Prophet’s position by saying that he was rightfully not content because ‘contentment with what comes from God is deprivation’ (*al-qanā‘a min Allāh ḥirmān*) and settling for the statuesque cuts off abundance. Thus, in response angel Gabriel came to the Prophet and said, “God the Almighty sends you His regards and says to you, ‘If I had chosen Ibrahim to be my intimate friend, and chosen Moses to be My converser, I have chosen you to be My beloved (*ḥabībī*) and with My majesty I swear that I choose My beloved over My intimate friend and over My converser’. Only then the Prophet’s heart found peace.”<sup>89</sup>

Al-Qushayrī’s commentary on the same verse is brief as he only referred to the multiple possible meanings of *Kawthar* which could be a river in heaven, abundance in provision, companions and followers, light in his heart and gnosis of lordship.<sup>90</sup>

Al-Baqlī’s commentary on the same verse was brief as well and he mentioned that the word *Kawthar* reveals the reality of the Prophet’s immersion in the sea of divine beauty and his proximity to the Divine. He also added that *Kawthar* is a river running in the Prophet’s heart which contains the lights of witnessing the Divine from the seas of pre-eternity.<sup>91</sup>

It is interesting to note that Ibn ‘Ajība’s interpretation of the word ‘abundance’ was directly associated with the level of proximity of Prophet Muḥammad to God and how the Prophet would not settle for less than being God’s beloved; a special status that was only assigned to the Prophet.

### Exaltation and Salutations upon the Prophet

One of the most popular verses which Ibn ‘Ajība employs in illustrating the great status of Prophet Muḥammad is, “Allah and His angels bless the Prophet. O you who believe! Bless him and salute him with a worthy salutation”.<sup>92</sup> In his esoteric commentary on this verse Ibn ‘Ajība points out that sending salutations upon the Prophet is a great way of ascension to God because the abundance of Prophetic salutations sent by a devotee leads the Prophet to love him, which in turn leads God to love him. When God loves a servant, He draws him near to His divine presence and for the servant to attain the presence of the king, he has to serve his minister. Ibn ‘Ajība here quotes Shaykh al-Jazūlī who wrote in his

<sup>84</sup> Al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān fī ḥaqā’iq al-Qur’ān*, vol. 1, 322-323.

<sup>85</sup> Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 2, p. 61.

<sup>86</sup> Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 1, 438.

<sup>87</sup> *The Majestic Quran*, al-Kawthar, (108:1), p. 106.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, al-Duḥā, 93:6, p. 596.

<sup>89</sup> Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 6, p. 522, 523.

<sup>90</sup> Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 3, 775.

<sup>91</sup> Al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān fī ḥaqā’iq al-Qur’ān*, vol. 3, 529.

<sup>92</sup> *The Majestic Quran*, al-Aḥzāb, (33:56), P. 426.

masterpiece, *Dalā'il al-khayrāt*, how sending salutations upon the Prophet is one of the essential gates of proximity to God as seeking the intercession of the Prophet is the best means of closeness to the divine presence. Also, al-Jazūlī mentioned that sending salutations upon the Prophet is a divine command which indicates the glorified status of the Prophet. God also promises the one who sends salutations to be rewarded abundantly as it is one of the great deeds which purifies our hearts, and brings us closer to God as well as being the reason for our prayers to be answered and for our spiritual status to be elevated. It is reported that God asked Prophet Moses, “do you want me to be closer to you than words to your tongue, your soul to your body, and the light of your vision to your eyes?, Moses said in response, “yes my lord”, So God replied, “ if so then send abundant blessings and salutations upon Muḥammad”.<sup>93</sup>

Al- Jazūlī expounded that Prophet Muḥammad is beloved to God and enjoys a lofty status which led God and his angels to send salutations upon him. Therefore, it is an obligation upon us to love the beloved and to take the Prophetic love as a means to reach divine love. Loving the Prophet has many indications such as glorifying his status in our hearts and following his prophetic path. Ibn ‘Ajība comments on this lofty status of the Prophet by indicating that the exaltation of Prophet Muḥammad is greater than the exaltation of Prophet Adam to whom angels were commanded to prostrate because it was not possible for God to be along side the angels during their prostration to Adam, whereas God joined the angels in sending their salutations upon Prophet Muḥammad.<sup>94</sup>

Al-Jazūlī explained further how part of sending salutations upon the Prophet is an act of gratitude and thankfulness to the medium through which all the divine blessings came to us including the blessings of existence (*ijād*) and sustaining providence (*imdād*). Another great benefit of sending salutations upon the Prophet is that it indicates the optimum status of servanthood (*‘ubūdiyya*) which originally requires from the servant to attain divine proximity through being occupied only with God. However, as a matter of fact, sending salutations upon the Prophet is an act which requires being occupied with someone other than God, i.e. Prophet Muḥammad, but since being occupied with Prophet Muḥammad is a divine command, obeying the divine command is a symbol of servanthood. The same happened when God commanded the angels to prostrate before Adam, the angels in turn rushed in compliance with the divine order, whereas Satan in contradiction refused to follow the divine command.<sup>95</sup>

Ibn ‘Ajība comments on al-Jazūlī’s opinion by emphasizing the deep relationship between sending abundant of salutations upon the Prophet and finding the Sufi shaykh who guides your Sufi path as he is the vicegerent of the Prophet. He adds further that when the Sufi shaykh sees a potential in a disciple, they ask him to make remembrance with the single name (*al-ism al-mufrad*) in order to reach a status of annihilation from his own self and the world around him, after that he is required to send salutations upon the Prophet to bring him back to the state of subsistence (*baqā’*) where the disciple sends salutations upon the Prophet’s spirit with no veil left as he now is able to witness the Prophet all the time.<sup>96</sup>

Al-Qushayrī discussed in his commentary on this verse how the Prophet is a source of blessing for all people as he was bestowed with intercession for them and therefore God in return commanded the believers to send their salutations upon him.<sup>97</sup>

Al- Baqlī agrees with al-Qushayrī’s interpretation that God’s salutation upon the Prophet raised him to the favorable station (*al-maqām al-maḥmūd*), a lofty status which granted him intercession for his nation. As for the salutations of the angels upon the Prophet, it is their prayer for his status to increase by the grace of their love to him and their seeking forgiveness to his nation. When it comes to the salutations of the nation of the Prophet upon him, it is an expression of following his footsteps, loving

<sup>93</sup> Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.4, 458-459.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, vol.4, 459.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 4, 460.

<sup>97</sup> Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 3, 170

him and praising him with lovely poems. Al-Baqlī quoted Abū ‘Abdulrahman al-Sulamī who in turn asked ‘Abdulwāhid al- Sārī regarding whether sending salutations upon the Prophet is enough to pay back the debt his nation owes. ‘Abdulwāhid al- Sārī in turn replied in negative as the Prophet’s rights cannot be fulfilled even by the whole nation. This means the benefit of sending salutations upon the Prophet is bringing mercy upon the saluter.<sup>98</sup>

Ibn ‘Ajība discusses how God explicitly mentioned the spiritual status of Prophet Muḥammad in the verse, “Yāsīn”<sup>99</sup> and quoted al-Qushayrī’s opinion who believed that *yāsīn* here means ‘o master’ and this indicates the elevated status of Prophet Muḥammad who was seen by his tribe as only an orphan who does not deserve prophethood, whereas in God’s knowledge Prophet Muḥammad was already chosen to be the only one worthy of the final message.<sup>100</sup> Ibn ‘Ajība also mentions Rūzbihān al-Baqlī’s esoteric commentary on the same verse in which he indicated that the letter *yā* refers to the day of covenant and the letter *sīn* specifies God’s secret with His beloveds. So here God swore with the day of covenant and with His divine secret with His beloveds, and with the Quran that Prophet Muḥammad is a messenger. Ibn ‘Ajība adds that it is mentioned that the heart of the Quran is the chapter of Yasin and the heart of Yasin is the verse, “‘Peace!’ will be the word from a Merciful Lord”<sup>101</sup>. This verse refers to the secret of proximity which the Quran is drawing our attention to when God explicitly stated that He sends his divine salutation and greeting to His servants with no medium as they find their abode with Him and taste sweetness in His divine converse (*munājā*).<sup>102</sup>

Ibn ‘Ajība concludes by illustrating how glorifying and exalting the Prophet is one of the great reasons which leads to divine proximity because the Prophet is the greatest gate to God and the most exalted means between God and His servants. This is shown in his commentary on the verse, “And when they see you they take you only for a mockery (saying): ‘Is this he whom Allah sent as a messenger?’”<sup>103</sup> Therefore, whoever glorifies and exalts the Prophet is led to the divine presence and whoever deviates from the Prophetic route, then he is like the one who enters the house of the divine presence by jumping from the fence and not through the gate and thus deserves nothing but banishment and remoteness. In other words, whoever belittles the magnificent spiritual status of Prophet Muḥammad is similar to the one who took his own lower self and its whims as his lord and thus fell to the status of the cattles and even lower. Ibn ‘Ajība clarifies that the one who follows the medium i.e. Prophet Muḥammad, his wishes become in line with and the self-same destiny revealed from God.<sup>104</sup>

Al-Qushayrī in his brief commentary on the same verse, draws the reader’s attention to a fine meaning when he explained that the Prophet chose to refrain from complaining to God about what the non-believers accused him although it ached his heart. Had the Prophet complained to God, he would have found consolation in confining to Him. In an act of love, God in turn was the One who narrated the accusations addressed to the Prophet and defended him which created a deeper sense of consolation and intimacy between the lover and the Beloved.<sup>105</sup>

Ibn ‘Ajība in his commentary on another verse, “There are some among them who injure the Prophet, saying ‘he listens to everyone and is disposed to believe. Say: he hears only what is best for you. He believes in Allah and trusts the believers. He is a mercy to those who have believed among you...’”<sup>106</sup> continues discussing the lofty spiritual status of Prophet Muḥammad. Here he indicates that glorifying the Prophet, praising him and mentioning his beauties is one of the greatest ways of proximity to God and one of the best acts of obedience. This glorification is originated from loving him and loving the

<sup>98</sup> Al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān fī ḥaqā’iq al-Qur’ān*, vol. 3, 147-148.

<sup>99</sup> Yāsīn, (36:1).

<sup>100</sup> Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 3, 211.

<sup>101</sup> *The Majestic Quran*, Yāsīn, (36:58), p. 444.

<sup>102</sup> Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 4, 556-557, see also al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān fī ḥaqā’iq al-Qur’ān*, vol. 3, 165-166.

<sup>103</sup> *The Majestic Quran*, al-Furqān, (25:41), p. 363.

<sup>104</sup> Ibn ‘Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol.4, p. 104.

<sup>105</sup> Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, vol. 2, 637.

<sup>106</sup> *The Majestic Quran*, al-Tawba, (9:61), 196.

Prophet is actually one of the covenants of faith. Thus, not fulfilling the part of loving the Prophet is one of the greatest sins in God's eyes. For this reason, God condemned both the Jews and the hypocrites as they were harming the Prophet and belittling his prophethood.<sup>107</sup>

Al-Qushayrī in his commentary on the same verse stated that what the hypocrites criticized the Prophet for is actually an ethical virtue as the Prophet listens to what is said to him and repeats only the good part in it.<sup>108</sup>

## Conclusion

Throughout this article we studied how Ibn 'Ajība built a spiritual hierarchal paradigm for prophets where he placed Prophet Muḥammad at the pinnacle of spiritual realization and celestial prominence. Ibn 'Ajība had a unique understanding of the spirituality of Prophet Muḥammad which not only precedes other prophets, but also represents the seed for existence of all creation both in the spiritual realm and the physical one. This unique understanding was not echoed by either al-Qushayrī or al-Baqlī.

Ibn 'Ajība went further explaining that the concept of the Muḥammadan light is rooted in the Prophet being the first locus of the divine manifestations where divine attributes are reflected. Out of this divine Muḥammadan light appeared all creation. This means that the light of Prophet Muḥammad was the first to appear in existence and thus he was the first to worship God in pre-eternity. This close affinity to God leads Prophet Muḥammad not only to be the first worshipper, but also to be the perfect candidate as a son of God had God had a son. Entertaining the assumption, as false as it is, that if God were to have a son, it would be for certain Prophet Muḥammad, is a view that was not clearly stated by al-Baqlī and certainly was not shared by al-Qushayrī who dismissed the idea all together as a false premise.

We also noticed how Ibn 'Ajība explored the prophetic mercy and how he described Prophet Muḥammad as the heart of mercy. The centralization of Prophet Muḥammad as the source of mercy was taken further by Ibn 'Ajība who placed it as a key to reaching the special divine oneness.

Ibn 'Ajība addressed as well the ethical aspect of the Prophet's character and resorted its perfection to the concept of the Muḥammadan light and the divine election. He explained further that the opening of the Prophet's chest and filling it with wisdom and light led the prophetic heart to have no attachments to anyone save God and thus his moral ethics were closely tied to the Quran. This understanding of the prophetic ethics echoes al-Baqlī's opinion in this regard as he expanded the issue of the divine light and how it was reflected on the Prophetic heart where divine attributes and manifestations took place. Thus, the prophetic heart became a divine tapestry where God sees Himself. This explains how the Prophet's heart was full of contentment towards divine Providence as the whole world was belittled in his eyes and he was totally immersed in witnessing the grandiosity of God. In al-Qushayrī's commentary on the moral and ethical character of Prophet Muḥammad, we notice that he went directly to the consequences of having great ethics such as his detachment from worldly pleasures and heavenly rewards as his noble heart was solely attached to God, but he did not explain how the Prophetic heart was purified and what was the role of the divine Muḥammadan light in the process.

It was also interesting to study Ibn 'Ajība's explanation of the incident of the Prophet's chest opening and how it led the Prophet to have a balanced heart which is able to indulge in the Unseen world without putting aside the world of witnessing. To the same effect, engaging in worldly affairs did not prevent his heart from enjoying and tasting spiritual subtilities. In other words, caring about people's interests did not impede him from witnessing the divine beauty. Al-Qushayrī briefly touched upon the incident of the prophetic chest opening without mentioning the created balance in his heart between the terrestrial materialistic sphere and the celestial spiritual one. We also notice how al-Baqlī instead of discussing the balance of the Prophet's heart, he emphasized that the incident of the expansion of the prophetic chest is an ongoing process which continues for eternity as the divine manifestations residing in the Prophet's

<sup>107</sup> Ibn 'Ajība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 2, p. 399.

<sup>108</sup> Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, vol. 2, 40-41.

heart are ceaseless. Al-Baqlī added that the continuous exposure of the heart to the divine lights leaves no room for witnessing the contingent world.

We also notice how in the commentary of some verses Ibn ‘Ajība fully adopts the opinion of al-Baqlī without making any further additions or comments. For example, the Quranic verse which confirms that giving allegiance to the Prophet means giving allegiance to God, Ibn ‘Ajība quoted al-Baqlī’s esoteric commentary on this verse who emphasized that this verse represents a perfection of spiritual union between God and Prophet Muḥammad who acts as a divine mirror reflecting divine attributes and actions.

The spiritual divine unity between God and Prophet Muḥammad is also discussed in the verse of throwing pebbles and while in appearance the Prophet was throwing the pebbles, in reality it was God who did the throwing. For Ibn ‘Ajība, this verse represents another aspect of divine unity and how Prophet Muḥammad became the mirror of divine manifestations in all forms. Again Ibn ‘Ajība largely adopted al-Baqlī’s commentary on this verse.

Ibn ‘Ajība addressed an important aspect of Prophetic spirituality which is servanthood in his esoteric commentary on the night journey and ascension to heaven. Here Ibn ‘Ajība emphasized that servanthood is the highest status that anyone can reach and therefore God chose to address Prophet Muḥammad as a servant and not with any other title. Also travelling at night was significant for Ibn ‘Ajība as night is the time of intimacy of lovers. Moreover, Ibn ‘Ajība drew our attention to the fact that Prophet Muḥammad did not desire with his heart any spiritual beauties as he was not attached to anything save God and thus was rewarded with seeing God; a request that was denied when asked by Moses.

Ibn ‘Ajība draws an interesting association between Prophet Muḥammad being the perfect divine mirror where divine attributes are manifested and the concept of forgiveness. For Ibn ‘Ajība the real victory and spiritual opening is for the heart to become a locus for divine manifestations and at this point self-annihilation is in motion where one is totally annihilated from his lower self and become totally immersed in witnessing the divine beauty.

Another aspect of prophetic spirituality is emphasized by Ibn ‘Ajība when he interpreted the word ‘abundance’ to be associated with the lofty status of Prophet Muḥammad as God’s beloved (*ḥabīb*); a status that was not given to anyone but the Prophet. Ibn ‘Ajība also highlights the concept of guidance as an essential part of the Prophet’s spirituality as the Prophet presents the epitome of servanthood and thus all who seek guidance should follow his footprints. In addition, the Prophet provides a great example for ethical manners through which one is able to witness the grandiosity of lordship. The only way of following the Prophet is through the path of love as Ibn ‘Ajība emphasizes that through love the secrets of divine realities are to be revealed upon the heart of the disciples of the Prophet.

Ibn ‘Ajība concludes that praising the Prophet, exalting him and sending salutations upon him is one of the fastest routes to divine proximity and divine presence. Ibn ‘Ajība makes an association between sending salutations upon the Prophet and finding the Sufi shaykh who acts as a guide in the Sufi path as he is the vicegerent of the Prophet. Ibn ‘Ajība explains further that glorifying the Prophet is originated from loving him and loving him is an essential part of the covenant of faith. This means that not fulfilling that part of the covenant is one of the greatest sins in God’s sight.

In conclusion, through his esoteric commentary on the verses related to different aspects of Prophet Muḥammad’s spirituality, Ibn ‘Ajība drew a vivid picture of the Prophet’s spiritual leadership which precedes all prophets along with emphasizing his noble status as an essential connection between the heavenly celestial world of spirits and the earthly terrestrial world of corporeal subjects. He also emphasized the key role that Prophet Muḥammad plays in order for the servant to be in a close proximity to God as this proximity is determined based on the amount of Prophetic light that one is exposed to and according to which his closeness to divine light is measured.

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