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Love - Part III*

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Abstract



This part is about the pleasure achieved through the object of perception. Pleasures depend on perceptions, the human being has certain faculties, each faculty and instinct has its own type of pleasure. Therefore, their pleasure lies in their achievement of what is necessitated by their nature for which they are created. Concerning knowledge of God, the heart is involved in an impulse called the divine light, which is sometimes called the light of faith and certainty. This lends a clue to the fact that knowledge of God the Immaculate is the most pleasurable thing.

Keywords

Love; divine love; knowledge; divine light; mystical pleasure.

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The articulation of the fact that the most dignified and the highest pleasure is knowledge of God the Exalted and gazing upon His noble face, and the fact that it is inconceivable for another pleasure to be preferred over this except by someone who is deprived of this pleasure.

Know that pleasures depend on perceptions, that the human being has certain faculties and impulses, that there is a pleasure for each faculty and instinct, and that their pleasure lies in their achievement of what is necessitated by their nature for which they are created. These impulses are not accommodated in the human being purposelessly; rather, each faculty and impulse is created for something that is necessitated by its nature. Thus, the impulse for anger is created for relief and revenge, and its pleasure lies perforce in defeating and avenging, which are required by its nature. Moreover, the impulse for desiring foods is, for instance, created for acquisition of food through which one is sustained, and its pleasure lies perforce in acquiring food, which is necessitated by its nature. The same is true of the pleasure of audition, vision, and olfaction, which respectively lie in hearing, seeing, and smelling.

In this way, none of these impulses are without pain and pleasure relative to their perceptual objects. By the same token, the heart involves an impulse called the divine light, just as God the Exalted said: “Someone whose breast Allah has opened to Islam so that he follows a light from His Lord,”¹ and it is sometimes called the intellect or inner insight, and sometimes the light of faith and certainty. It makes no sense to be concerned with these expressions. The terms are different, but a cognitively impoverished person thinks that the difference lies in the meanings, since he always seeks the meanings from the terms,

1. Al-Zumar: 22.

which is the reverse of one's obligation. The heart is, thus, distinguished from the other parts of the body by an attribute with which it perceives meanings that are neither imagined, nor sensed, such as its perception of the creation of the world or its need for a wise directing creator which has the divine attributes. Let us refer to this impulse as an "intellect" with the proviso that the term "intellect" is not thought to imply the thing with which methods of debate and dialectics are learned. The term "intellect" has come to be known in this way, which is why it was censured in the way it was; otherwise, the attribute in virtue of which the human is discriminated from animals and knowledge of God the Exalted is obtained is the noblest attribute, which should not be censured. This impulse is created in the human being as a means by which he learns the truths of everything. The requirement of its nature is knowledge and understanding, which are also its pleasures, just as requirements of other impulses are their pleasures. Obviously, knowledge and understanding involve a pleasure such that when knowledge and understanding are attributed to someone, he will be happy even if his knowledge is concerned with something insignificant, and one to which ignorance is attributed will be sad even if the ignorance concerns something trifling. One cannot help challenging others with knowledge and seeking praise by knowledge of trifling things. Thus, one who knows the game of chess cannot stand remaining silent about it and refusing to teach it—his tongue will utter what he knows.

All this is due to the extreme pleasure of knowledge and what he intuits about the perfection of his own self, for knowledge is one of the most peculiar Lordly attributes, which is the ultimate degree of perfection. This is why one's nature is relieved when he is praised for his intelligence and the vastness of his knowledge, for when he hears the praise, he feels his own perfection and the perfection of his knowledge, and thus, he likes himself and enjoys it.

Moreover, the pleasure from the knowledge of farming,

knitting, and tailoring is not comparable to the pleasure from knowledge of polity and administration of people's affairs. The pleasure from the knowledge of syntax and poetry is not like the pleasure from knowledge of God the Exalted, His attributes, His angels, the dominion (malakūt) of the heavens and the Earth. The pleasure of knowledge is to the extent of the nobility of the knowledge, and its nobility is to the extent of the nobility of the known, such that someone who knows and reports the internal states of people will find pleasure therein, and if he is ignorant of it, his nature will require investigation about it. Thus, if he knows the internal states of the mayor and the secrets of his administration, he will find it more pleasurable and more pleasant than knowledge of the internal states of a farmer or a knitter; if he becomes aware of the secrets of the minister and his administration and what he is up to in his ministry, he will find it more gratifying and more pleasurable than his knowledge of the secrets of the mayor; and if he knows the internal states of the king who is superior to the minister, he will find it more pleasant and more pleasurable than his knowledge of the internal states of the minister; then he will praise the king for this, and his enthusiasm for inquiry into his states will be stronger and his love for him will be greater, since his pleasure here will be greater.

In this way, it will be clear that the most pleasurable knowledge is the noblest knowledge, where its nobility is a matter of the nobility of the known. Thus, if there is a known thing which is the most majestic, the most perfect, the noblest, and the greatest, then knowledge of it will perforce be the most pleasurable, the noblest, and the most pleasant knowledge. I do not know whether there is anything in existence which is more beautiful, more exalted, nobler, and more perfect than the creator, perfecter, decorator, and originator, resurrector, director, and arranger of everything. Could one conceive a realm that is greater in kingdom, perfection, brilliance, beauty, and glory than the Lordly realm, the

principles of whose glory and the wonders of whose states cannot be captured by descriptions of describers? If you do not doubt this, then you should not doubt that awareness of Lordly secrets and knowledge of the hierarchy of divine entities encompassing all beings are the highest, the most pleasurable, the most pleasant, and the tastiest kinds of knowledge and awareness—the most preferable things people desire to be characterized by their perfection and glory and the worthiest thing involving greater delight, consolation, and joy.

In this way, it will be clear that knowledge is pleasurable, and that the most pleasurable knowledge is knowledge of God the Exalted, His attributes, His actions, and His administration of His kingdom from the top of His Throne to the bottom of the Earth. It should, thus, be known that the pleasure of knowledge is stronger than other pleasures; that is, the pleasure of lust and rage, as well as the pleasures of the five senses, since first of all there are different kinds of pleasures, such as the difference between the pleasure of sexual intercourse and that of *samā‘* dance, and the pleasure of knowledge versus that of rulership. Moreover, pleasures differ as to strength and weakness, such as the difference between the pleasure of sexual intercourse for a lascivious person and that of a person with a low sexual drive, or the difference between the pleasure from looking at an extraordinarily beautiful face and the pleasure from looking at a less beautiful face. The strongest pleasures are known by their preference over other pleasures.

Thus, if one is given a choice between looking at, and enjoying the observation of, a beautiful face, on the one hand, and smelling pleasant fragrances, and then prefers to look at cute faces, it will be known that the beautiful faces are more pleasurable to him than pleasant smells. Similarly, when food is ready, but a chess player continues playing the game and refuses to eat the food, it will be known that the pleasure of winning in chess is stronger for

him than the pleasure of eating. This is a veridical criterion for discovering the preference of pleasures.

Let us now return to our previous point and say: pleasures are divided into external pleasures such as those of the five senses and internal pleasures such as those of rulership, defeating, dignity, knowledge, and so on. For these pleasures are not for the eye, the nose, the ear, the touch, or the taste. In perfect people, interior meanings are more dominant than exterior pleasures. Thus, if one is given a choice between the pleasure of *harisa* [a kind of food made of ground wheat and meat], a fat chicken, and almond confectionary, on the one hand, and the pleasure of rulership, defeating the enemies, and achieving dominance, on the other hand, then if he is unambitious, downhearted, and voracious, he will choose the *harisa* and the confectionary, and if he is ambitious and perfectly rational, he will choose rulership, and it will be easy for him to tolerate the hunger and to rest content with only the necessary sustenance for many days. His preference for rulership indicates that this is more pleasurable to him than *harisa* and pleasant foods. Of course, an imperfect person whose interior meanings are still inchoate such as a child or a person whose inner faculties have died, such as an idiot, will probably prefer the pleasure of foods over that of rulership. And just as the pleasure of rulership and dignity are the most dominant pleasures for those who have gone beyond childish and idiotic imperfection, the pleasure of knowing God the Exalted, the study of the beauty of the Lordly realm, and looking towards the secrets of divine affairs are more pleasurable than rulership, which is the most dominant pleasure to people. The ultimate expression of this pleasure is to say: “No one knows what delights have been kept hidden for them”¹—preparations are made for them which no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard, and which have never occurred to a human heart. This is not known except by someone

1. Al-Sajda: 17.

who has experienced both pleasures, since he will perforce prefer abstinence, isolation, reflection, and remembrance (dhikr), and will indulge in the seas of knowledge, will abandon rulership, and will disregard people subject to his rulership since he knows that his rulership will perish, that subjects of his rulership will perish, that his rulership is tainted by glooms that can never evanesce, and that his rulership will cease with death which will inevitably come “when the earth puts on its luster and is adorned, and its inhabitants think they have power over it, Our edict comes to it....”¹

Thus, for him, the pleasure from knowledge of God the Exalted and the study of His attributes, actions, and the order of His kingdom from the highest of the high to the lowest of the low is great relative to it, since it is free from conflicts and tensions, and it has space for anyone who enters it; if their number keeps increasing, there will always be room for them. As to its size, its width is the heavens and the Earth, and regardless of measures, its width is infinite. He who knows God will always be in a heaven extending to the sky and the Earth, enjoying its gardens, imbibing from its ponds, and picking its fruits, while he is assured that they never end, since the fruits of this heaven are permanent and are not restricted—they are eternal and everlasting, and are not discontinued by death, since death does not destroy the locus of knowledge of God the Exalted, its locus being the spirit which is a Lordly heavenly entity, and death only changes its states, puts a stop to its concerns and obstacles, and frees it from its prison, but does not annihilate it. God the Exalted said:

Never think that those who are killed in the way of God are dead. They are alive, getting succour from their Lord, rejoicing at what God has given them of His grace, and happy for those who are trying to

1. Yunus: 24.

overtake them but have not joined them yet.....¹

Do not think that this is exclusive to those who are killed in battles, since the mystic has the degree of one thousand martyrs in every breath. According to a hadith, “The martyr wishes in the afterlife to return to this world so that he can be killed once more because of the great reward he has seen for martyrdom, and martyrs wish they were scholars because of what they see from the high degree of the scholars.”²

Thus, every quarter of the dominion of the heavens and the Earth is a field for the mystic; he settles in any of these quarters without a need to relocate his body and person. In virtue of his scrutiny of the beauty of the dominion, he is in a heaven extending to the heavens and the earth. Each mystic has the same heaven without straitening the space of other mystics. The only thing is that they differ as to the vastness of their gardens to the extent of their difference in open-mindedness and the vastness of their knowledge. There are different ranks with God, and their different ranks are innumerable.

It has become apparent that the pleasure of rulership—which is an internal pleasure—is stronger to perfect people than the pleasures of all the senses, and that such pleasure is not experienced by an animal, a child, or an idiot. Moreover, perfect people experience both the pleasure of the sensible and the lusts and the pleasure of rulership, but they prefer the rulership. The idea that knowledge of God, His attributes and actions, the dominion of His heavens, and the secrets of His kingdom involve a greater pleasure than rulership is exclusively grasped by one who has achieved and tasted the degree of mysticism. It cannot be

1. Al-i ‘Imran: 169-170.

2. Agreed upon from Anas’s hadith; cited previously.

proved to one who has no heart, since the heart is the center of this faculty, just as one cannot prove the preference of the sexual pleasure over the pleasure of the polo game to children or its preference over smelling a violet to an impotent person, because he lacks the feature with which this pleasure is perceived. However, if one does not suffer from impotence and has a healthy olfaction, he will perceive the difference between the two pleasures. On this account, we can only say: he who tastes knows.

I swear that students—even if they are not engaged in the pursuit of knowledge of the divine entities—have inhaled the fragrance of this pleasure when solving problems and resolving doubts whose solutions they are eager for. These are pieces of knowledge, even though their objects are not as noble as divine knowledge. However, if one pondered long on the knowledge of God the Immaculate, and has discovered the secrets of God’s kingdom, albeit a little bit of it, he will find in his heart a joy upon the discovery, floating on air—he is surprised that he stays in his place and can stand the weight of his joy and delight. This can only be perceived by tasting, and there is not much point in talking about it.

This much will give you a clue as to the fact that knowledge of God the Immaculate is the most pleasurable thing, above which there is pleasure. This is why Abū Sulaymān said: if one is concerned with himself today, he will be concerned with himself tomorrow, and if one is concerned with his Lord today, he will be concerned with his Lord tomorrow. Rābī’a was asked, “What is the nature of faith?” She said, “I did not worship Him out of fear of His Fire, nor from the hope for His Heaven, lest I would be like a bad hireling. Instead, I worshipped him from my love for Him and my longing for Him.” She has also composed verses concerning the meaning of love:

I love you in two ways: the appetitive love
and the love because You deserve it.

The one which is the appetitive love
 is my distraction from others by Your
 remembrance.
 And the one You deserve
 is Your removal of the veils so that I can see You.
 So there is no praise for me in this and that
 And the praise is Yours in this and that.

Perhaps by “appetitive love”, she means the love of God the Exalted because of His beneficence toward her and His blessings upon her with worldly bounties; and by love because He deserves it, she means love of God because of His beauty and glory as they are disclosed to her. The latter is the higher and stronger of the two loves. The pleasure of observing the Lordly beauty is what the Prophet, peace and greetings be upon him and his family, has referred to when he quoted his Exalted Lord as saying: “I have prepared for My righteous servants what no eye has ever seen and no ear has ever heard and what has never occurred to any human heart.”¹

These pleasures are also obtained if the purity of one’s heart is at the utmost. This is why it has been said, “I say ‘O Lord! O God!’ and I find it heavier on my heart than the mountains, because calling is always from behind the veils; have you ever seen a companion calling on his companion?” And it has been said, “When one obtains this degree of knowledge, people will throw stones at him. That is, his words will go beyond the limit of their intellects, and they treat what he says as madness and blasphemy.”

The destiny of all mystics is the union and meeting with Him. This is the consolation that was hidden for her, but no one knows. When it is obtained, sadness and all lusts will go away, and the

1. Transmitted by al-Bukhārī, vol. 4, p. 143 from Abū Hurayra’s hadith; cited previously.

heart becomes so indulged in its blessing that it would not feel the fire if it were thrown into it, and if one were offered the blessing of the Heaven, one would not notice it because of the perfection of one's own blessings to the highest degree. I wish I knew how one who only understands the love of the sensible can believe in the pleasure of looking at the face of God the Exalted, while He has no likeness and form and shape. How can he understand the meaning of the promise by God the Exalted to His servants and His reference to it as the greatest blessing? One who knows God will know that the pleasures accompanied by various lusts are subsumed under this pleasure, as is said [in a verse]:

My heart harbored assorted desires;
 my desires were concentrated since my
 eye saw you.
Those I envied began to envy me;
 I became people's lord since you became
 my lord.
I left to people their world and religion;
 I am concerned with your thought, O my
 religion and my world!

This is why it has been said, "the separation from Him is greater than His Fire, and the union with Him is more pleasant than His Heaven." And what is meant by this except the preference of the heart's pleasure from knowledge of God the Exalted over the pleasure of eating, drinking, and copulation? For Heaven is the center of sensory joy, and the heart's pleasure lies only in meeting God the Almighty the Majestic. An example of people's development in their pleasures is as follows: early in his development and discernment, a boy develops an impulse with which he enjoys playing and entertainment, and this becomes the highest pleasure for him. Later, the pleasure of ornaments, clothes, and riding vehicles appear to him, and with this, the

pleasure of playing diminishes in his eye. Subsequently, the pleasure of sexual intercourse and lust for women appear in him, and he abandons his previous pleasures to achieve this. Then, he comes to discern the pleasure of rulership, transcendence, and rivalry, which are the most loved, the most dominant, and the strongest pleasures in this world, as God said: “Know that the life of this world is mere diversion and play, glamour and mutual vainglory among you” to the rest of the verse.¹ After this, another impulse emerges with which one can perceive the pleasure of knowing God the Exalted and His actions. With this, the all the previous pleasures will look trifling. Each subsequent pleasure is stronger, as is the last pleasure in this, which emerges last; for the love of games emerges in childhood, the love of ornaments emerges at the age of discernment, the love of women emerges upon maturity, the love of rulership emerges after the age of twenty, and the love of knowledge emerges around forty, which is the highest end. Just as a child laughs at someone who leaves a game to flirt with women and seek rulership, chiefs also laugh at someone who leaves rulership and engages himself with knowledge of God the Exalted, and the mystics say: “If you ridicule us, we shall ridicule you just as you ridicule us.”

The articulation of the greatness of the pleasure of looking in the afterlife relative to knowledge in this world

Know that the perceived objects are divided into what can enter the imagination, such as various imaginable forms and colored, shaped bodies in individual animals and plants and what cannot enter the imagination, such as the essence of God the Immaculate and other non-physical objects, such as knowledge, power, will,

1. Al-Hadid: 20.

and so on. If one sees a human being and then closes his eyes, he will find the human form present in his imagination as if he is looking at it. However, when he opens his eyes and sees him, he will perceive a distinction between the two, and the distinction does not go back to a difference between the two forms, since the seen form is similar to the imagined form; instead, the difference lies in the intensity of clarity and lucidity. The seen form is more lucid and clearer by virtue of being seen. This is like seeing a person at dawn before the daylight, and then seeing him after full daylight—the only difference between these two states being the intensity of lucidity. Thus, imagination is the beginning of perception, and seeing is the completion of the perception by imagination—it is the ultimate degree of lucidity. It is called seeing because it is the ultimate degree of lucidity, not because it occurs in the eye—if God had created this complete and lucid perception, say, on the forehead or the breast, it would still count as seeing.

Now that you have learned this in the case of imagination, note that knowledge and perception of those objects of knowledge that cannot be imagined are also of two degrees: one is primary and the other is supplementary to it, and the difference between the second and the first boils down to the extent of lucidity and clarity between the imagined and the seen. The second is also called an observation, seeing, and meeting relative to the first, which is a proper appellation since seeing is called “seeing” because it is the ultimate degree of lucidity. Just as the practice of God the Exalted has been that the closure of the eyelids prevents a full-fledged discovery via seeing and is a veil between the eye and the seen object, and the veil has to be removed in order for seeing to take place. As long as the veil is not removed, the perception will be mere imagination. Similarly divine precedent requires that the soul cannot achieve the ultimate degree of observation and meeting in objects of knowledge outside the imagination as long as it is veiled by bodily accidents, the demands of appetites, and

its dominant human attributes.

Indeed, this life is necessarily a veil for it, just as the eyelids are veils precluding vision. The discussion of the reason why it is a veil would be lengthy and should not be presented in this science. This is because of the word of God the Exalted to Moses, peace be upon him, “You shall not see me”¹ and his word “the sights do not apprehend Him,”² that is, in this world. And the accurate view is that the Prophet, peace and greeting be upon him and his family, “did not see God the Almighty the Majestic at the Night of Ascension (mi‘rāj).”³

I say: The fact is that there is no difference between seeing in this world and seeing in the afterlife. Just as it is impossible to see God the Exalted with one’s eyes and vision in this world, it is not possible to see Him with one’s eye and vision in the afterlife, and just as it is possible for the insightful to see God in the afterlife with one’s heart and insight—that is, the ultimate degree of disclosure and lucidity culminating in observation and meeting—it is possible to see Him in this world in the same sense.

The veil between Him and His creatures is just ignorance and paucity of knowledge, rather than the body. God’s friends see Him in this world in all their states and deeds day and night, just as God the Exalted said: “And witnesses are with their Lord,”⁴ “God bears witness that there is no god except Him, and [so do] the angels and those who possess knowledge,”⁵ and “except those

1. Al-A‘raf: 140.

2. Al-An‘am: 103.

3. Al-‘Iraqī said: “What the author refers to as the accurate view is ‘Ā’isha’s word in the two books of *Ṣaḥīḥ* when she said: “If one tells you that Muhammad has seen his Lord, he is a liar.”

4. Al-Hadid: 19.

5. Al-i ‘Imran: 18.

who are witness to the truth and who know.”¹ God has referred to them as witnesses because of their observation during all their circumstances, just as God said: “So whichever way you turn, there is the face of Allah,”² “He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden, and He has knowledge of all things,”³ “There dost not takes place any secret talk among three...,”⁴ and “and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein.”⁵ And since God’s friends are certain of the meanings of these verses, they observe Him with the eyes of their hearts. Amīr al-Mu’minīn, peace be upon him, was asked: “Have you seen your Lord when you worshiped Him?” He replied: “Woe to you! I would not worship a lord I cannot see.” He was then asked, “How did you see Him?” He replied: “Woe to you! The eyes do not perceive Him in the observation of the visions, but the hearts see Him by truths of the faith.”⁶ His son, al-Ḥusayn - Sayyid al-Shuhada’ - said: “How can You be argued for through something that needs relies on You for its existence? Can anything other than You have a manifestation that You lack and thus it may make You manifest? When have You ever been absent so that You may need evidence to signify You? When have You ever been far-off so that traces may lead to You? Blind be the eye that cannot see You while you keep watching it. Losing is a servant’s deal that does not dedicate a share to the love for You.” He also said, “You have made Yourself known to everything so that nothing is ignorant of you,” and, “You have made Yourself known to me in everything.”⁷

1. Al-Zukhruf: 86.

2. Al-Baqara: 115.

3. Al-Hadid: 3.

4. Al-Mujadala: 8.

5. Qaf: 16.

6. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 97, no. 6.

7. See his supplication, peace be upon him, on the Day of ‘Arafa in the book *Iqbāl al-A‘māl* by al-Sayyid ibn Ṭāwūs.

There are other similar words said by Imams (a) which have the same sense. Of course, there might be more disclosure in the afterlife to the extent of the heart's purity and refinement.

Abū Ḥāmid said, "When the veil is removed by death, the soul remains tainted by this-worldly stains which will not be fully removed, although different people have different stains. Those with a dense amount of filth and rust become like a mirror that is rusted because of the density of the filth on it in a way that it cannot be mended and burnished—they are veiled from their Lord forever; we seek refuge in God from this. Some of them do not reach the point of filth and rust, and are therefore capable of purification and burnishing. Such people will be subjected to Hell so that their filth and rust are extirpated. The subjection to the Hell will be to the extent of the need for purification—the shortest is a brief moment and the longest in the case of believers is, as in certain hadiths, 7000 years. No one leaves this world without at least a pittance of stain and dust. This is why God the Exalted said: "There is none of you but will come to it [i.e. the Hell]: a [matter that is a] decided certainty with your Lord. Then We will deliver those who are Godwary, and leave the wrongdoers in it, fallen on their knees."¹ Every person will certainly enter Hell, but it is not certain whether he will come out of it.

When God the Almighty the Majestic fulfils his purification and refinement, his term is complete, all presentations and reckonings of the deeds and the like are done, and he deserves Heaven—and this is an indeterminate time revealed by God to any of His creatures, since all this takes place after the resurrection, and the time of resurrection is unknown—then he will engage in refining and cleaning himself from darkness so that no dust and no abasement overcast their faces in order for the Immaculate

1. Maryam: 71-72.

and Exalted Truth [i.e. God] to disclose Himself for him—when the lucidity of the disclosure relative to what he had known is like the lucidity of the disclosure of a mirror relative to what one had imagined before. This observation and the disclosure are called “seeing.” On this account, seeing does take place provided that it is not thought of as a completion of the imagination in an imagined conceived objected peculiar to a direction and place, since this is what the Lord of the lords is greatly exalted from. Instead, it will be as He was known in this world with real full-fledged knowledge without an imagination, conception, and assumption of a shape and form—this is how you will see Him in the afterlife. Let me go one step further and say: the knowledge acquired in this world is itself perfected, reaching the ultimate degree of disclosure and clarity, which then develops into an observation. There is no difference between observation in the afterlife and what is known in this world except with respect to increased disclosure and clarity, just like the example we gave in the perfection of imagination by seeing. Thus, if knowledge of God does not involve a form or a direction, then the perfection of the same instance of knowledge and its enhancement with respect to clarity to the utmost lucidity will not involve a direction or a form either, since they are identical, being merely different in the increased lucidity, just as the seen form is identical to the imagined form except that the former is more lucid.

In sum, the essence and all attributes of God the Immaculate are, as He has characterized them in His Book and as was recounted by His prophet, immaculate and exalted from any likeness, similarity, and resemblance with the creatures—other essences do not resemble His essence, and other attributes do not resemble His attributes. Who can resemble an eternal, living, all-sustaining, endless, unique, sole, and one Lord—who has always been characterized by His supreme attributes and His Best Names: All-knowing, All-powerful, All-willing, All-hearing, and

All-seeing? How might He be analogized to a powerless, incipient, created being? A being which was nothing in its origin, and was then created by God's power and originated as He wanted by His wisdom, creating in his imperfect, unstable, and indirect attributes, and then put in it defects, varieties of flaws, different afflictions, and kinds of disquietudes and sufferings, such as hunger, thirst, lust and debauchery, wonder, boredom, anxiety, medications, sickness, illness, and infinitely many other things. He then takes him to the threshold of death, giving him the bitter cup of decease. After death, He will hold him captive in the soil until the time of presentation and the Day of Reckoning. Next, God will resurrect him on a day the circumstances of which cannot be described by tongues or enumerated by speech. He will go through stations and positions of which the saints and even certain messengers and prophets are afraid. He will be thus led forward until he inhabits the heavens with ease, abundance, comfort, and gratification or is imprisoned in the confinement of the Hell and levels of fires with embarrassment, humiliation, wretchedness, and degradation. I wish I knew how this could be analogous to God or how an ignorant idiot can think of a resemblance between the creator as we have characterized Him and the creature as we have described it, let alone rational people and those who possess intellects and the Lord of the intellects. Highly exalted is God from what the unjust, the polytheists, the anthropomorphists, believers in God's resemblance to the creatures, and deniers of divine attributes.

Yes, the perennial wisdom and the divine will require creation, innovation, production, and invention. Thus, He has produced different kinds of creatures and created varieties of beings in accordance with His will and providence without there being a precedent for it in the creation and origination of the world. He divided the children of Adam into two groups prior to any obedience and sins on their part: the wretched and the felicitous,

the guided and the perverted. He illuminated the felicitous with the light of knowledge and faith, and left the wretched in the throes of the darkness of disbelief and rebellion. And then in the realm of eternity and the position of seeing and meeting, He will complete the light and radiance. This is referred to in the word of God the Exalted: "Their light will move swiftly before them and on their right. They will say, 'Our Lord! Perfect our light for us'"¹ since the perfect light only yields further lucidity, which is why only those who have acquired knowledge in this world will achieve the stage of seeing and watching, since knowledge is a seed which grows into vision in the afterlife, just as a kernel grows into a tree and a seed into a plant. If one has no kernel, how can he have a palm tree; if one does not sow a seed, how can he harvest? Similarly, if one does not know God the Almighty the Majestic in this world, how can he see Him in the afterlife?

Moreover, since there are different degrees of knowledge, there are different degrees of divine disclosure as well. The difference in kinds of disclosure relative to different kinds of knowledge is like the difference in kinds of plants relative to different kinds of seeds; seeds are different as to their abundance and paucity, their goodness and poorness, as well as their strength and weakness. Just as you see in this world that there are people who prefer the pleasure of rulership over copulation and foods, and you see those who prefer the pleasure of knowledge and discovery of the problems of the dominion of the heavens, the Earth, and other divine phenomena over rulership as well as copulation and foods, there are those in the afterlife who prefer the pleasure of looking at the face of God the Exalted over the blessing of the Heaven, since its blessing goes back to copulation and foods, and these people are the same people who, in this world, preferred knowledge and awareness of Lordly secrets over the pleasure of

1. Al-Tahrim: 8.

copulation and drinks, while other people were indulged in these pleasures. This is why, when Rābi‘a was asked, “What do you say about Heaven?”, she said, “First the neighbor, and then the house.” Then she explained this by saying that her heart does not lean toward Heaven, but toward the Lord of Heaven. Thus, if one does not know God the Almighty the Majestic in this world, he will not see Him in the afterlife, and if one does not find the pleasure of such knowledge in this world, he will find the pleasure of looking at God in the afterlife, since one is not given in the afterlife what he did not have in this world—one only harvests what one has sowed; one is only resurrected in the state in which he has died, and one does only dies in the way he has lived. Thus, only a person who has knowledge will enjoy it insofar as his knowledge grows into observation when the veil is removed. In this way, his pleasure will be doubled, just as a lover’s pleasure becomes greater when, instead of perceiving an image of the beloved’s face, he sees his face, which is the ultimate pleasure. What is good about Heaven is that everyone there has what he desires; if one only desires to meet God the Almighty the Majestic, he will enjoy anything but Him—indeed, he might be bothered by things other than God. Therefore, the blessing of Heaven is to the extent of one’s love for God the Exalted, and the love of God the Exalted is to the extent of one’s knowledge of Him. On this account, the origin of happiness is knowledge, which religion has referred to as “faith”.

Objection: If the pleasure of seeing is in proportion to the pleasure of knowledge, it will be trifling, even if it is intensified, since the pleasure of knowledge in this world is insignificant, so its intensification cannot render it so strong that other pleasures of the Heaven seem trifling relative to it.

Reply: Know that the source of this downgrading of knowledge is the absence of knowledge. If one has no knowledge, how can he perceive its pleasure, and if one has a small degree of knowledge,

while his heart is replete with this-worldly attachments, then how can he perceive its pleasure? The mystics take pleasure from their knowledge, their thoughts, and their supplications with God the Almighty the Majestic, such that if Heaven is offered to them in this world in exchange for these pleasures, they would not accept it.

Moreover, as perfect as this pleasure is, it is not comparable to the pleasure of meeting and observing, just as the pleasure of imagining the beloved is not comparable to that of seeing him, or just as the pleasure of smelling delicious foods is not comparable to tasting them, or just as touching the body with one's hand is not comparable to the pleasure of sexual intercourse.

The considerable difference between them can only be illustrated by an analogy: the pleasure of looking at the face of one's beloved in this world differs in virtue of certain criteria: one is the beauty of the beloved or lack thereof, since it is inevitably greater to look at a more beautiful face. The second is the perfection of the power of love, lust, and passion, since the pleasure of a person with a strong passion is not like that of a person with a low degree of lust and love. The third is the perfection of the perception, since the pleasure of seeing the beloved in darkness or from behind a thin veil or from a distance is not like that of perceiving him up close without a veil under a perfect light, or the feeling the pleasure of coitus with intervening clothes is not like feeling it nakedly.

The fourth is the absence of disruptive obstacles and pains that distract the heart. A healthy untroubled and free observation of the beloved is more pleasurable than a scared, terrified look or a sick look or than looking while the heart is concerned with something important. Now imagine a lover whose love is not strong while looking at the face of his beloved from behind a thin veil from a distance such that he cannot fully see the beloved's face, and all this happens while scorpions and bees have

surrounded him, stinging him, and distracting his mind. In such circumstances, he will still have some pleasure from watching his beloved, but if all of a sudden the veil is removed, the place is illuminated by light, the insects are repelled, he stays healthy and undistracted, and he feels a strong lust and an extreme passion to the highest degree, his pleasure will intensify such that the first instance of pleasure will not be comparable to it. This is how the relation between the pleasure of seeing and the pleasure of knowledge should be conceived. Thus, the thin veil is a likeness of the body and engagement therewith; the scorpions and bees are the appetites dominating the human being, such as hunger, thirst, rage, sadness, sorrow, and lust; and the love is analogous to the human failure in this world to have a passion toward the Supernal Elite (al-mala' al-a'lā) and its engagement with the lowest of the low. This is like the child's failure to grasp the pleasure of rulership and his engagement with playing with sparrows.

Thus, even if the mystic has strong knowledge in this world, his knowledge will not be free from these disturbances, and of course, it cannot be conceived to be free from these. Yes, these obstacles are less strong under certain circumstances and do not last forever. From the beauty of knowledge, something emerges that astounds the intellect and involves such a great pleasure that it would tear the heart apart. This pleasure is, however, like an ephemeral thunder, which does not tend to last long—distractions, thoughts, and memories might disturb and interrupt it. This is inevitable in this mortal life—this pleasure is always interrupted until death, the good life is just after death, and the only delight is that of the afterlife: “The abode of the Hereafter is indeed Life.” If one reaches this stage, he will love to meet God the Almighty the Majestic, and he will love, and never dislike, death unless in order to improve his knowledge in this world; for knowledge is like a sea, and the sea of knowledge has no shore, and it is impossible to encompass knowledge of God. The greater

and the stronger one's knowledge of God the Almighty the Majestic, His attributes, His actions, and the secrets of His kingdom is, the more and greater the afterlife blessing will be, just as more and better seeds lead to more and better harvests. This seed can only be obtained in this world, it can only be planted in the heart, and it can only be harvested in the afterlife. This is why the Prophet, peace and greeting be upon him and his family, said: "The greatest happiness is a long life spent for the obedience of God the Almighty the Majestic."¹

This is because knowledge is completed, amplified, and expanded in a long life by persistent thinking, commitment to remembrance, longtime struggle, detachment from this-worldly interests, and freedom for the pursuit, and all this will inevitably take time. If one loves death, then it is because he is sure of his knowledge and has obtained as much knowledge as possible, and if one dislikes death, it is because he wishes to acquire more knowledge throughout a longer life, and if he is given a long life, it would see himself as falling short of his own capacity. This is the reason why the mystics dislike and love death. Other people, however, are narrow-mindedly focused only on this-worldly appetites—if these appetites are fulfilled, they will choose to survive, and if they are limited, they will wish for death, and both of these are deprivations and losses arising from ignorance and negligence. Ignorance and negligence are the roots of every mistake and wretchedness, whereas knowledge and mystical understanding are the foundations of all happiness.

From what we have said, you have learned the meaning of love, the meaning of passion (which is an extreme, intense love), the

1. It was transmitted by al-Quḍā'ī in his *al-Shahāb* and al-Daylamī in *al-Firdaws* from Ibn 'Umar's hadith in this way: "Happiness, all of happiness, is a long life spent in the obedience of God." Its chain of transmission is accurate as in *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaghīr*.

meaning of knowledge, the meaning of seeing, and the meaning of it being more pleasurable than other joys to rational and perfect people, even though it is not more pleasurable to imperfect people, just as rulership is not more pleasurable than foods and games to children.

If you ask whether the locus of this seeing in the afterlife is the eye or the heart, then note that people have disagreed over this, and insightful people disregard this disagreement and do not take it into consideration. In fact, a rational person eats a vegetable and does not ask about the vegetable farm, and if one longs for seeing his beloved, his love will distract him from thinking about whether his seeing the beloved will occur via his eye or his forehead—he just aims to see and take pleasure from seeing, be it with the eye or not. Indeed, the eye is a locus and a container, so it should not be taken into consideration. And the truth is that the eternal power is extensive, so it cannot be said that it fails to do either of the two alternatives—this is as far as possibility is concerned, but as to which of these two possible states of affairs actually occurs in the afterlife, it cannot be known except through narratives. In this respect, the truth is what is implied by religious evidence for Sunni people to the effect that this will occur in the eye in order to take terms such as “seeing,” “looking,” and other terms appearing in this body of transmitted evidence at face value, since one cannot reject the *prima facie* meaning except when there is a necessity to do so; but only God knows.

I say: The truth is what we have mentioned before, and for which there is accurate transmitted evidence from Ahl al-Bayt (the Prophet’s Household), peace be upon them, who know the secrets of prophethood and are the loci of the revelation, frequently visited by the angels. The narration is that this occurs only in the heart, and not in the eye, and that it is impossible to see God the Exalted with one’s eye in this world or in the afterlife. Our master Thiqat al-Islām Muḥammad ibn Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī,

may God bless him,¹ and our master al-Ṣadūq Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn Bābawayh, may he rest in peace,² have quoted al-Ṣādiq, peace be upon him, through their accurate chain of transmission. According to them, he was asked about what is recounted about seeing, and he replied: “The sun is one of the 70 parts of the light of the veil, and the veil is one of the 70 parts of the light of the cover; now if they are honest, they should be able to fill their eyes with the sun’s light when is not occluded by clouds.”

They have also transmitted a hadith from Aḥmad ibn Ishāq who said: “I wrote to the third Abu-l-Ḥasan, peace be upon him, asking him about seeing [God] and people’s disputes over the matter. He wrote back: ‘It is impossible to see as long as there is no air between the seer and the seen, which the vision penetrates; when there is no air between the seer and the seen, it will be impossible to see, and this involves a similitude, since when the seer is equal to the seen in the cause that enables the seeing, there will inevitably be similitude, and this is anthropomorphism, since causes must be connected to their effects.’”

And al-Ṣadūq, may God bless him, has transmitted the following from Abū Baṣīr from al-Ṣādiq, peace be upon him. Abū Baṣīr said:

I said to him, “Tell me about God the Almighty the Majestic: do believers see him on the day of resurrection?”

He said: “Yes, and they have already seen him before the day of resurrection.”

I asked, “When?”

“When He told them ‘Am I not your Lord?’ and

1. See *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, the section on repudiation of seeing.

2. See *al-Tawḥīd*, the section on what is transmitted about seeing.

they said ‘Yes, indeed!’”

He stayed silent for a moment, then said, “And the believers see Him in this world before the day of resurrection; do you not see Him at this moment?”

I told him, “May I be a ransom for you! Can I quote this from you?”

He said, “You cannot, since if you talk about it, a denier may deny it because of his ignorance of what your word means, and then he might think that this is anthropomorphism and disbelief. To see by one’s heart is not like seeing by one’s eye—Exalted is God from how He is described by anthropomorphists and disbelievers.”

Summary

Pleasures depend on perceptions, the human being has certain faculties, and there is a pleasure for each faculty and instinct. Therefore their pleasure lies in their achievement of what is necessitated by their nature for which they are created. Concerning knowledge of God, the heart involves an impulse called the divine light, and it is sometimes called the light of faith and certainty. This will give you a clue as to the fact that knowledge of God the Immaculate is the most pleasurable thing.

The idea that knowledge of God, His attributes and actions, the dominion of His heavens, and the secrets of His kingdom involve a greater pleasure than rulership is exclusively grasped by one who has achieved and tasted the degree of mysticism.

The perceived objects are divided into what can enter the imagination, such as various imaginable forms and colored, shaped bodies in individual animals and plants, and what cannot enter the imagination, such as the essence of God the Immaculate and other non-physical objects, such as knowledge, power, will,

and so on. Knowledge and perception of those objects of knowledge that cannot be imagined are also of two degrees: one is primary and the other is supplementary to it, and the difference between the second and the first boils down to the extent of lucidity and clarity between the imagined and the seen.

From what we have said, you have learned the meaning of love, the meaning of passion which is an extreme, intense love, the meaning of knowledge, the meaning of seeing, and the meaning of it being more pleasurable than other joys to rational and perfect people, even though it is not more pleasurable to imperfect people, just as rulership is not more pleasurable than foods and games to children.

