

Prophecy In Later Islamic Thought: The Mystical Views of Shāh Waliyyullāh Ad-Dihlawi

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Abstract

Scholarly interest in the thought and teachings of Shāh Waliyyullāh ad-Dihlawī has increased in recent years –not surprisingly, given the richness and profundity of his writings. This article explores the mystical dimension of prophecy emerging from Shāh Waliyyullāh’s insights and remarks, focusing on the key concepts such as the World of Images (*‘Ālam al-Mithāl*), the Highest Council of Angels (*al-Mala’ al-‘Alā*) and the Holy Enclave (*Haṣṣrat al-Quds*), which help explain how, from the sūfī point of view, prophecy is possible. The main task of a prophet is to set up order in social, political and economic life of people. The prophet receives revelation which enables him to communicate the Divine Message to mankind containing all that is necessary for their welfare both in this life and the next according to the Divine Plan.

Keywords: prophecy, prophetology, inspiration, World of Images, *‘Ālam al-Mitsāl*.

Introduction

Prophecy is so central and essential a concept to Islam that hardly can we find a Muslim thinker who did not talk or write about it. Philosophers and theologians from al-Jāhiẓ, Abū Hātim al-Rāzī and Ibn Taymiyyah to Abū al-Hasan al-Nadwī have set out to establish the legitimacy of prophecy and refute the arguments of pagan thinkers who advocated the sufficiency of human reason to arrive at truth and to attain happiness without the aid of prophets or

revelation.¹ The issue of prophecy may be examined in several approaches and in terms of the following questions: What exactly is prophecy? Is there such a thing as prophecy? How is prophecy possible? And, why on earth should there be prophets?

This article is an attempt to reconstruct and examine the views of Shâh Waliyyullâh ad-Dihlawî² on prophecy, drawing mainly on the most accessible and well-known of his works: the 'Conclusive Proof of God' (*Hujjatullâh al-Bâlighah*), the 'Abundant Good' (*al-Khayr al-Katsîr*), the 'Divine Insights' (*al-Tafhîmât al-Ilâhiyyah*), the 'Full Moon Appearing on the Horizon' (*al-Budûr al-Bâzighah*), 'Flashes' (*Satahât*) and 'Glimpses' (*Lamahât*). It will be noted that while he did not write a special treatise on prophecy, Shâh Waliyyullâh's scattered but insightful remarks pertaining to the subject are nonetheless quite as illuminating as that of Ibn Sina³ and Ibn Arabî.⁴

¹To mention but a few: al-Jâhiẓ (d. 255/868), *al-Hujjah fî Tatsbît al-Nubuwwah*, ed. Hasan al-Sandûbî in *Rasâ'il al-Jâhiz* (Cairo, 1933), p. 117-154; Abû Bakr al-Firyâbî (d. 301/913), *Dalâ'il al-Nubuwwah*, ed. 'Âmir Hasan Sabrî (Mecca: Dâr Harrâ', 1406/1986); Abû Hâtîm al-Râzî (d. ca. 322/934), *A'lâm al-Nubuwwah*, ed. Salâh al-Sâwî (Tehran: Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1977); al-Qâdî 'Abd al-Jabbâr (d. 415/1025), *Tatsbît Dalâ'il al-Nubuwwah*, ed. 'Abd al-Karîm 'Uthmân (Beirut, 1966-7); al-Mâwardî (d. 450/1058), *A'lâm an-Nubuwwah*, 'Abd al-Ra'ûf Sa'd (Cairo, 1971); Ibn Taymiyyah, *Kitab al-Nubuwwât* (Beirut: Dâr al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1985); Abû al-Hasan al-Nadwî, *al-Nubuwwah wa al-Anbiyâ' fî Daw' al-Qur'ân* (Dmascus: Dâr al-Qalam, 1420/2000) cf. Max Horten, *Texte zu dem Streite zwischen Glauben und Wissen in Islam. Die Lehre von Propheten und der Offenbarung bei den islamischen Philosophen Farabi, Avicenna und Averroes* (Bonn, 1913); David Pearson Brewster, *Philosophical Discussions of Prophecy in Medieval Islam*, Ph.D thesis, Oxford University, 1975; Fazlur Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1958; repr. The University of Chicago Press, 1979); Herbert A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes on Intellect* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

²Perhaps the most prolific thinker of his age, Shâh Waliyyullâh al-Dihlawî, whose original name is Ahmad ibn 'Abd al-Rahîm, was born on 4 Syawwâl 1114 A.H. (21 February 1703). He wrote more than thirty works on various subjects. For a bio-bibliographical survey, see *the Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1965), s.v. "Dihlawî, al-, Shah Wali Allâh," by A.S. Bazmee Ansari; Abdul Hamid Siddiqi, "Shah Walî Allâh," in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, ed. M. M. Sharif, 2 vols. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1966), 2:1557-1579; J. M. S. Baljon, *Religion and Thought of Shâh Walî Allâh Dihlawî 1703-1762*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986); M. Ikram Chagatai, *Shah Waliullah: His Religious and Political Thought* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 2005), which is but a compilation of scholarly articles from various books and journals.

³ Ibn Sina, *Risâlah fî Ithbât al-Nubuwwât* (ed. M. Marmura, Beirut: Dâr al-Nahr, 1991).

⁴ Ibn 'Arabî, *Shajarat al-Kawn* (Cairo: Mustafâ al-Bâb al-Halabî, 1388/1968).

The Prophets as Saviors and Role-Models

Shâh Waliyyullâh's approach to prophecy is largely shaped by his view of the purpose of this phenomenon. His starting point is the traditional view that prophecy is the communication of a message from God to a chosen individual, which is transmitted in turn to the rest of mankind. The role of the prophet as God's messenger is underscored by the fact that Shâh Waliyyullâh employs the terms for prophet (*nabi*) and messenger (*rasul*) interchangeably. Drawing upon the Holy Qur'an, he views the messages of prophets as communicating truths about God's relation to the world in general and to humanity in particular. God sent prophets to raise humanity from their self-dug hole. This he tells us in the preface to his masterpiece, *Hujjatullâh al-Bâlighah*:

"Praise to God who created the human race with a predisposition to accept Islam and to follow right-guidance, and formed them with a natural disposition for the clear, easy, tolerant, monotheistic religion (*al-millat al-hanîfiyyah al-samhah al-sahlah al-baydâ'*). Then they became beclouded by ignorance and fell to the lowest of the low and suffering overtook them. But then God merciful to them, gracious to them, and sent the prophets to them so that through them they would be brought out from the darkness to the light, and from the constricted place to the vast expanse ..."⁵

While he definitely had no doubt concerning the historical value of the Qur'anic narrative of prophetic figures, Shâh Waliyyullâh gives those stories a deeper, esoteric meaning. In his kitab *Ta'wil al-Aḥadith*, the messengers of Allah become prototypes for individual spiritual development, illustrating the ability of human beings to receive divine inspiration and guidance. Shâh Waliyyullâh portrays them as role-models, exhibiting one or more aspects of the individual's search for truth and of his/her complete dependence on God. The prophets are seen as being quintessential servants (*'ibād*) and protégés (*awliyā'*) of Allah who serve as instruments in God's plan as they strive for human perfection in their devotion, self-control, and discipline.

Thus for example, on Shâh Waliyyullâh's view, Âdam is a microcosm of all the realities of the universe, physical as well as

⁵Shâh Waliyyullâh al-Dihlawî, *Hujjatullâh al-Bâlighah* (Cairo: Dâr al-Turâth, 1355/1936), p. 2 = *The Conclusive Argument from God*, trans. Marcia K. Hermansen (Leiden: Brill, 1996), p. 3.

spiritual. His fall from heaven was designed by God to ensure his becoming an earthly delegate (*khalîfah fî al-ard*), the prohibitions against eating from the “tree of eternity” (*syajarat al-khuld*) were revealed in a vision, and the violation of the prohibitions was brought about by satanic action. Nûh is the first messenger to lead a community forcibly to God’s will, bringing law in order to subordinate animal desires to spiritual impulses. Ibrâhîm exemplifies utter devotion to God and the unstinting pursuit of the true religion. Yûsuf triumphs over affliction by his perseverance, and Mûsâ is a man invested with ample authority, by whose agency one group of people would come to ruin and the other group would find salvation. Dâwûd is a brave and strong personality with exceptional governing talents, and ‘Îsâ is endowed with extraordinary spiritual power, who God has given a shape made of material of the ‘*Âlam al-Mitsâl*. As for Muhammad –may God grant him peace and grace– he is the exemplary, perfect man (*al-insân al-kâmil*), whose soul being similar to those of the *al-Mala’ al-A’lâ* and having been prepared for receiving various revelations would hold reflections of histories of bygone generations and of future events pertaining the Resurrection and the Day of Judgment.⁶

The Cosmological Context of Prophecy

Given the importance as well as the complexity of the nature of prophetic experience, a range of mystical vocabulary is necessary to explain the general conceptual scheme into which the doctrine of prophecy is fitted. This is because Shâh Waliyyullâh’s prophetology is so closely linked to his cosmology that a fuller understanding of the former is hardly possible unless we comprehend the latter.

Shâh Waliyyullâh sees the world as a manifestation of God’s effective attributes, which he classifies into four three: [i] origination (*ibdâ’*), [ii] creating (*khalq*), and [iii] governing (*tadbîr*). According to him, *ibdâ’* is the bringing into existence of something from nothing, in contrast to *khalq*, which is the bringing into being of something from something else, as God created Adam from clay, and the jinn from smokeless fire. Next, as the completion of *khalq*, there is the

⁶ See his *Ta’wil al-Aḥādith fî Rumûz Qiûû al-Anbiyâ’* (Hyderabad: Shâh Waliyyullâh Academy, 1966) = *A Mystical Interpretation of Prophetic Tales by an Indian Muslim*, tr. J.M.S. Baljon (Leiden: Brill, 1973), *passim*.

divine governing activity of *tadbîr* which works effective changes in the world so that what happens in it is in conformity with the divine planning and with the universal expediency of nature. Finally, in addition to those three attributes, there is what he calls *tadallî*, understood as God's coming to the rescue when the world runs into trouble.⁷ This, Shâh Waliyyullâh declares, would bring about disclosure of knowledge, right-guidance and perfection of soul in such various forms as revelation (*wahy*), inspiration (*ilhâm*) and wisdom (*hikmah*).⁸

It important to note that Shâh Waliyyullâh belongs to the sûfî school of Muhyiddîn Ibn 'Arabî (d. 638/1240), 'Abd al-Karîm al-Jîlî (d. 820/1417) and Nûruddîn Jâmî (d. 898/1492) who sought to explain the cosmological mysteries of creation in terms of divine emanation (*fayḍ ilâhî*).⁹ According to him, the first entity to emanate from the Absolute Existence (God) is one Single Intelligence (*al-wâḥid al-'aqlî*). Shâh Waliyyullâh calls such a process the First Determination (*ta'ayyun awwal*).¹⁰ From this First Emanant proceeded the Macroanthropos (*al-syakha al-akbar*)—i.e. the universe with all its multitude and plenitude of beings, spiritual as well as physical. The coming into existence of the universe was made possible through a series of manifestation (*tajalliyât*) of Divine Names, the last of which being the Will (*irâdah*) of God, which binds all essences to their natural properties, such as fire with heat, etc.

The entire cosmos, we are told, being Macroanthropos and hence like human beings, is possessed as it were of body and soul, intellectual as well as spiritual faculties. Analogically speaking, if its body comprises the celestial spheres, the four elements (water, fire, air, and earth) and the three kingdoms of nature (i.e. those of man,

⁷ See *Hujjatullâh al-Bâlighah*, p. 11-12 = *Conclusive Proof*, p. 33; and *Lama 'ât.*, p. 54-55.

⁸ See his *al-Tafhîmât al-Ilâhiyyah* (Hyderabad: Shâh Waliyyullâh Academy, 1970), 1:66; cf. *Hujjatullâh al-Bâlighah* (ed. M. Sâlim Hâshim, Beirut: Dâr al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1995), 1:25..

⁹ See Ibn 'Arabi, *Syajarât al-Kawn* (Cairo: Mustafâ al-Bâb al-Halabî, 1388/1968) = *L'Arbre du Monde*, tr. with intro. and notes by Maurice Gloton (Paris: Lex Deux Océans, 1990), where the cosmos is seen as a tree and where Prophet Muhammad is its seed and fruit, its essence and form, and ultimately, its meaning; 'Abd al-Karîm al-Jîlî, *al-Insân al-Kâmil fî Ma'rîfat al-Awâ'il wa al-Awâkhir* (Cairo, 1949); and Nûruddîn Jâmî, *al-Durrah al-Fâkhirah*, ed. Nicholas Heer and A. Musavi Behbahani (Tehran, 1980) = *The Precious Pearl*, tr. Nicholas Heer (New York: SUNY Press, 1979). Cf. S.M. Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1995), 267ff.

¹⁰ *Sata'at*, p. 3.

animal and plant), its soul is what Shâh Waliyyullâh calls the Universal Soul (*al-nafs al-kulliyah*), which is the vital principle (*rûh*) of the cosmos as a whole. In addition, it also possesses a fine neuma (*nasamah*) which permeates its bodily organs (i.e. the elements and the spheres).¹¹ Standing for the mind and heart of this Macro-anthropos are the World of Images (*'Âlam al-Mithâl*) and the Holy Enclave (*Haḥîrat al-Quds*) respectively, which enable it to participate in the knowledge of Its Lord (*Rabb*) and to receive and reflect the light of Grand Manifestation (*tajallî a'zam*) of its Creator, so that Divine Knowledge could enter its mind.¹²

The World of Images (*'Âlam al-Mitsâl*)

In addition to the doctrine of Emanation and Macro-anthropos outlined above, Shâh Waliyyullâh's prophetology should be understood against the backdrop of his account of the World of Images (*'Âlam al-Mitsâl*), which is but one of the mediums through which God imparts His knowledge and communicates His messages to the creatures. Indeed, according to Shâh Waliyyullâh, the *'Âlam al-Mitsâl*, together with the Highest Council of Angels (*al-Mala' al-A'lâ*) and the *Haḥîrat al-Quds* (Holy Enclave) make up the foundations of Prophecy.¹³

On Shâh Waliyyullâh's view, the World of Images is a non-elemental—that is, immaterial world in which abstract meanings are represented by quasi-bodily forms corresponding to them in quality (*'âlam ghayr 'undurî tatamatstsalu fîhi al-ma'ânî bi-ajsâm munâsibah lahâ fî al-difah*), where things take on their materialization in some form before they are materialized on earth.¹⁴ It is an intermediary realm (*barzakh*) between the sensible and divine world.¹⁵ It is where the Highest Council of Angels resides. This World of Images performs for the Universal Soul of the World and everything therein the

¹¹ *Tafhimât*, 1:46-53. Shâh Waliyyullâh defines *nasamah* as the physiological and psychic dispositions of man and universe, conveying potencies of perception, nourishment and growth (*Tafhimât*, 1:34). Cf. *al-Budûr al-Bâzighah* (Hyderabad: Shâh Waliyyullâh Academy, 1970), p. 12.

¹² For an extensive discussion on this, see *Lama'ât*, p. 77-83.

¹³ See *Hujjatullâh*, 1:34 (Beirut edition).

¹⁴ See *Hujjatullâh*, 1:13 (Cairo edition).

¹⁵ *Tafhimât*, 1:220.

function of imagination (*khayâl*)¹⁶ in such a way that when God decrees the existence of something, its existence is first determined in that chasm. This, for instance, is the case with the abstract notion of blood-relationship (*rahim*), for we read in a tradition that the Prophet said: "When God had created *rahim*, it stood up and said: 'This is the place of taking refuge with You from being cut off.'"¹⁷ In short, the World of Images reflects realities in the world of pure intelligibles.¹⁸

Because of its intermediate position the 'Âlam al-Mitsâl receives impulses (*dawâ'î*) both from above as well as from below. Impulses received from above –such as conditions arranged for human individuals- are passed on to hearts of men by the intermediary of the Highest Council of Angels (*al-Mala' al-A'lâ*).¹⁹ As such they act as ambassadors of God to the creatures and are responsible for inspiring (*mulhimîn*) or causing to inspire good impulses (*khawâtir al-khayr*) in them. Thus, for instance, somebody is inspired with a plan to escape from ruin, or he is informed of the true state of affairs through a vision or a heavenly voice. In support of his argument, Shâh Waliyyullâh quotes this tradition: "When He decides on a decree, the bearers of the throne glorify Him, then the inhabitants of the upper heaven following them, until the glorification of the inhabitants of the heaven reaches the world. Then those after the bearers of the Throne ask, 'What did your Lord say?' They inform them of what He ordered and the people of the heaven tell each other until the news reaches the people of this sphere."²⁰

¹⁶ Cf. S. M. Naquib al-Attas, *The Nature of Man and the Psychology of the Human Soul* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993), p. 30-31: "Imagination is a cognitive power of the soul. We are not here referring to that aspect of imagination that is called phantasy, but to a spiritual, or intellegential 'creative' imagination reflective of a real world of images ('âlam al-mithâl) ontologically existing independently between the world of gross matter and the world of pure ideas."

¹⁷ *Hujjatullâh*, 1:32 (Beirut edition).

¹⁸ According to al-Attas, the idea of 'âlam al-mitsâl and the science of symbolism pertaining to the interpretation of the reflections of that world in our world of sense and sensible experience, have their roots in al-Ghazâlî and perhaps also in ibn Sînâ. Later it was developed in Muslim metaphysical thinking especially by ibn 'Arabî. In al-Attas' view, the 'âlam al-mitsâl corresponds in theological terms to the *barzakh*, that is, an intermediary world into which he who dies enters and remains for a period from the time of death to resurrection. (See al-Attas, *Nature*, 31; footnotes # 62-3).

¹⁹ *Tafhimât*, 1: 220.

²⁰ Transmitted by Muslim, Tirmidhi and Ahmad, see *Hujjatullah*, 1:32 (Beirut).

Likewise a stream from the opposite direction (the earth) arrives at the *'Âlam al-Mitsâl*. According to Shâh Waliyyullâh, when these two impulses (from above and below) collide, they are provided with a special form. Analogically, just as vapors ascending from the earth and reaching an intensely cold stratum of air above, are transformed into rain, pour down on the earth and appear effective in refreshing the air and causing the grass to grow, so is the case with human knowledge and affairs.²¹ In connection with this we are told that dreams are founded on the correlations that exist between the World of Images and our material world.²² Comparing the two phenomena, Shâh Waliyyullâh reiterates Imam al-Ghazâlî's explanation the *Iḥyâ' 'Ulûm al-Dîn* about the punishment of the dead in the grave:

"Know that you have three positions in believing this type of thing [i.e. torment in the grave]. One of them, the most evident, sound and safe, is that you believe that they [i.e. the snakes] exist and that they bite the corpse but that you do not witness it. For this physical eye is not capable of perceiving heavenly matters (*al-umûr al-malakûtiyyah*) ...The second position is that you should recall the case of the sleeping person who may see a snake biting him in his dream and feels the pain so that perhaps you will observe him cry out and see the sweat on his forehead and he may be aroused from his place. He perceives all of this within his own mind yet he suffers as the one who is awake suffers while he witnesses it. You see his exterior quiet and you do not see around him any snake or scorpion, but the snake exists so far as he is concerned and torture occurs, although it is not witnessed by you. Since the punishment is due to the pain of the biting, there is no difference between a serpent which is imagined or which is seen with one's own eyes. The third position is that you know that the snake itself does not cause pain but rather what you experienced from it was the pain of its poison. The poison itself is not the pain but your torment lies in the effect which the poison has on you."²³

Now, with regard to the effect exerted on earth by *'Âlam al-Mitsâl*, Shâh Waliyyullâh goes on to explain: "When the universal power of the World of Images is connected with a place on earth, an intermediate state between it and the material world arises. As a result, a continuous and unbreakable body appears in the material world

²¹ *Tafhimât*, 1:91-92.

²² *Lamahât*, p. 81-82.

²³ *Hujjatullah*, p. 14 (Cairo) = *Conclusive Proof*, p. 41-42.

with a distinctive quality, predicament, shape and size but without any flaw or defect. The fire seen by Prophet Mûsâ is an instance of such a body.”²⁴

To recapitulate, on Shâh Waliyyullâh’s view, ‘*Âlam al-Mithâl* is a world of pre-figuration in which abstract meanings are represented by quasi-bodily forms corresponding to them in quality. In the World of Images, things and events take on their representations in some form before they are brought into actual reality on earth.²⁵ This World of Images is directly linked with the Throne (‘*arsh*) of God where all Divine Planning (*al-tadbîr al-ilâhî*) is set up.²⁶ As such it also becomes the source from which the celestial spheres, human beings and animals derive their powers of imagination which enable them to become informed of God’s decrees.

The Holy Enclave (*Hazîrat al-Quds*)

Let us now turn to what Shâh Waliyyullâh calls the Holy Enclave (*Hazîrat al-Quds*). According to him, the term refers to an area of the heavens where the Highest Council of Angels, together with select human souls convene to assist the future course of human affairs.²⁷ Sometimes in the Holy Enclave a consensus is reached to establish a means of saving human beings from the disasters of this life or the next world. This consensus requires representation in heart of the purest man of the age (i.e. prophet) of branches of knowledge so as to make people obey him and enable him to guide them either by revelation (*wahyan*), by dreams (*ru’yan*), or by a voice from the Unseen (*hatfan*) whereby members of the Holy Enclave appear to him or directly speak to him.²⁸

Shâh Waliyyullâh further tells us that the *Hazîrat al-Quds* is originally the place where the Self-Existent first manifested (*tajallâ*)

²⁴ *Ta’wîl al-Aḥādîth* (Hyderabad: Academy of Shâh Waliyyullâh, 1966), p. 45.

²⁵ *Hujjatullâh*, 1:27 (Beirut edition).

²⁶ *Tafhimât*, 1:163.

²⁷ This term is also found with the same usage in al-Ghazalî’s *Misykât al-Anwâr* together with other aspects of his angelology such as the discussion of the Highest and Lower Councils of angels. According to al-Ghazali, this place is called *Hazîrat al-Quds* because nothing foreign to it can enter or join (See *Mishkât al-Anwâr*, Arabic text, 66). The term, however, first appears in a tradition transmitted by Ahmad ibn Hanbal in his *Musnad*, V, p. 257.

²⁸ *Hujjatullâh*, 1:34 (Beirut edition).

Himself. It appeared for the first time when the celestial spheres (*aflâk*) came into existence. Then, soon after the *Hazîrat al-Quds* was brought into being, the angels and the souls of men were urged by their nature to enclose and become drawn towards it like iron is to magnet. This spiritual concentration of angels and souls produced a flood of light and formed a halo around the Divine Man (*Insân Ilâhi*)—that is, the human archetype, thus resembled rays shining from a jewel.²⁹ It is the locus of the most magnificent theophany called *tadallî* (meaning literally condescending or drawing near after being high).³⁰ According to Shâh Waliyyullâh, *tadallî* signifies God's coming to the rescue when the world or anything therein runs into trouble. It results in disclosure or revelation of knowledge, right guidance and perfection of souls. Such act of *tadallî*, while being one by itself, can assume manifold appearances (*burûzât*) and be adapted to the attendant circumstances (*mu'addât*) on earth. This is why on one occasion it may appear in the shape of prophecy and on another in the form of wisdom.³¹

We have so far discussed Shâh Waliyyullâh's explanation of the various processes such as *tadallî*, *wahy*, *ilhâm*, *ru'yâ*, etc. which enable the universe and the living beings therein to have contact with and to receive knowledge from God through the intermediacy of the World of Images, the Highest Council of Angels, and the Holy Enclave. It seems that on Shâh Waliyyullâh's account, however, the major instrument for divine revelation is the *Hazîrat al-Quds*, particularly when it concerns the benefit of the earth population. On the basis of this line of thought we can now proceed to discuss Shâh Waliyyullâh's views on prophetic revelation (*wahy*) in contradistinction to non-prophetic one (i.e. *ilhâm* or inspiration for ordinary human beings, animals, plants, etc.).³²

The Nature of Prophetic Revelation (*Wahy*)

Concerning the manner in which God communicates with His prophets, Shâh Waliyyullâh calls attention to the Qur'anic verse: "It

²⁹ *Tafhîmât*, 1:65 and *Hujjatullâh*, p. 16, 36 and 67 (Beirut edition).

³⁰ In the Qur'an, this was said of the Archangel Jibrîl as we read: "Then he approaches and came closer." (*al-Najm*: 8), tr. Abdullah Yusuf Ali.

³¹ *Lamahât*, p. 75.

³² The Qur'an mentions many instances of ordinary revelation, such as those conveyed to the mother of Prophet Moses, to the bee, to the earth, to fire, etc.

is not proper for the human being that God may speak to him except through a revelation, or from behind the veil, or else He may send a messenger who would reveal to him with His permission what He likes" (42:51). Taking this verse as his point of departure, he goes on to categorize the prophetic revelation into several different kinds.

The first kind of prophetic revelation is that which was given during ascension (*mi'râj*), which took place in a state of wakefulness. The Prophet was capable of it because the singular perfections are united and thus enjoy some kind of nearness to God. Another form of revelation is vision (*ru'yâ*), such as that related to events of the Other World (*al-Âkhirah*). A third kind of revelation is the appearance of Archangel Jibrîl to the Prophet in a form visible to people, as is the case of the angel who appeared before Maryam as a man (*tamatstsala lahâ basyaran*). According to Shâh Waliyyullâh, this is possible since the angels, when they feel pleased, by means of preparatory familiarity, are capable of appearing in the bodily forms. Finally, it could also happen that the revelation came through the breathing into the Prophet's heart of the Divine Word, which Shâh Waliyyullâh explains as follows: the hearts are just like mirrors, and the form reflected in one of them will be found reflected in the other when placed opposite to it.³³ It was during such moments that the Prophet felt like losing his senses and was getting out of them on account of the pressure of angelic forces and of his absorption in them.³⁴

In view of the actual process of revelation which the prophets received, Shâh Waliyyullâh notes: "This prophetic revelation (*wahy*) originated in and is a representation of the Divine Speech (*kalâm*) which is 'one of the planes (*ḥaḍarât*) of the divine Will –if viewed as outpouring (*ifâḍah*) into the region of Divine Knowledge. In the outpouring of Divine Word, a sacred form is given to every actuality. God speaks only by means of the outpour of meaningful concepts (*ḍuwar 'unwâniyyah*) which sound in the ears of the hearers (i.e. prophets) like real speech and audible letters. And the prophets will just have to copy those concepts with his tongue."³⁵ In other words,

³³ *Al-Khayr al-Katsîr*, p. 101.

³⁴ See *al-Khayr al-Katsîr*, trans. G.N. Jalbani, Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1974), p. 108-110.

³⁵ *Al-Khayr al-Kathîr*, p. 31. cf. Avicenna's doctrine of the visual and acoustic symbolization, by imagination, of the intellectual phenomena, which seems to regard the appearance of the angel and the hearing of the angel's voice as purely mental phenomena.

wahy creates in the prophet's mind an idea or an understanding when he concentrates his mind upon the Unseen World.³⁶ Thus, according to Shâh Waliyyullâh, the Speech of God is a 'mental speech' (*kalâm nafsi*) and not an 'oral speech' (*kalâm lafdî*) which is characteristic of human utterance.³⁷

As to the question whether the words found in the Holy Qur'an belong to God or to the Prophet himself, Shâh Waliyyullâh explains as follows: "... the words of the Qur'an are in the Arabic language that is known and intelligible to the Prophet (*ya'rifuhâ wa yatakhayyaluhâ*); and the meaningful concepts pouring [into his mind] from the Unseen, which are meant as guidance for him and which signifies his drawing near to the Truth, becomes the Divine Speech (*kalâm ilâhî*); and that is because the prophet's desire for the well-being of mankind extends in his imagination and it is this Will which collects the words, arrange them [in meaningful order] and later dresses them up with the Divine Clothe (*libâs ilâhî*)."³⁸

Finally, Shâh Waliyyullâh makes clear the distinction between prophetic revelation (*wahy*) and ordinary inspiration (*ilhâm*). According to him, the big difference between the two lies in the fact that the prophetic revelation is all truth without any trace of falsehood and hence provides assured knowledge, whereas ordinary inspiration might contain errors and heresies. The reason is that in the case of ordinary inspiration, the particularizations of words, rather than the particularizations of the spiritual garments in which the words are dressed, are the innovations of the constitutional (*mizâjî*) form of the receiver.³⁹ It is *ilhâm* if somebody is prepared for God's teaching in a special way; but if the emanation (*ifâzah*) following the Divine Planning occurs to prophets without such preparation, it is *wahy*.⁴⁰ Moreover, in contrast to *ilhâm*, what is conveyed by God through *wahy* would normally constitute the works of obedience and forms part of the Sharî'ah.

For further detail, see Fazlur Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 36-45.

³⁶ *Al-Budûr al-Bâzighah*, p. 108.

³⁷ *Al-Khayr al-Kathîr*, p. 31.

³⁸ *Tafhîmât*, 1:247.

³⁹ *Al-Khayr al-Katsîr*, p. 32.

⁴⁰ *Tafhîmât*, 2:28.

Conclusion

Shâh Waliyyullâh accords a high status to prophecy and the prophetic mission. He considers it to be obligatory for all to believe in God, prophecy, and the life hereafter. The main task of a prophet is to set up order in social, political and economic life of people. The prophet receives revelation which enables him to communicate the Divine Message to mankind containing all that is necessary for their welfare both in this life and the next according to the Divine Plan. The communication between God and the prophet takes place through the World of Images as well as the Highest Council of Angels and the Holy Enclave. []

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