



Sacred Law Has Both a Form and a Reality ¹

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Praise be to Allāh ﷻ and peace be upon His chosen servants.

Know that the Sacred Law has both a form and a reality. The form of the Sacred Law entails the fulfillment of the rulings encompassed by it after having belief in Allāh ﷻ and His Messenger and in all that has come from Allāh ﷻ (i.e. as revelation and all that it requires). Faith (*imān*) co-existing with the *nafs al-`amāra* ³ and its admixed disputation (*munāẓaba*), licentiousness (*ibāha*), transgression (*tughyān*) and denial (*inkār*) is simply a form of faith. Likewise ritual prayer (*ṣalāh*) and ritual fasting (*ṣawm*) with their prerequisites and integrals are similarly simply forms of ritual prayer and ritual fasting. In this vein follow the other rulings encompassed by the Sacred Law.

The *nafs* ⁴ is the basis of a person being known by its attributing to itself the word ‘I’, and as such, along with its (state of) extreme rejection (*kufr*) and denial (*inkār*), how can it be said that it possesses the reality of faith and righteous actions? It is simply through the mercy of Allāh ﷻ that He accepts this mere form of faith and blesses it with entrance into the Garden of Eternity (*Jannah*) that which is the realm of His Good Pleasure and Mercy. Out of His generosity Janna that He accepts such a *nafs*’ faith (here the author seems to imply the *nafs* as being an individual person) via its hearts submission (*tasdiq al-qalb*) without demanding compliance to Him from it (*nafs*).

Yes, even the Garden has both a form and reality. He who had only a ‘form of faith’ takes pleasure in the ‘form’ of the Garden, while he who attained to the ‘reality of faith’ takes pleasure in the ‘reality’ of the Garden. The people of the Garden, both of form

¹ Letter Fifty, Vol. 2. Written to Mirāz Shamsuddīn instructing him that the Sacred Law has both a form and reality.

² A master of the Naqshbandī Tarīqah, the Reviver of the Second Millennium, Sayyidinā wa-Mawlānā Imām Rabbānī Ahmad al-Farūqī al-Sirhindī. [d. 1034H]

³ *al-Nafs al-`Amāra* is the self bent on evil : the insinuating self which is wholly evil and totally under the control of passions and bent only on self-gratification. It is totally blind to any higher reality. **“The lower self of man commands to evil acts”** (12:53)

⁴ *Nafs* lexically means soul, the psyche, the ego, self, life, person, heart or mind. (*Mu`jam, Kassīs*)

and reality, shall partake from the same fruit of the fruits of the Garden, yet the person of 'form' shall experience one type of taste while he of 'reality' shall experience one quite different. (We may understand the truth of this by looking at the example of) the pure wives of the Prophet, the mothers of the faithful, who shall be with him in one garden eating all of them from the same fruit. However, the tastes and joy that each one experiences shall be distinct (one from another). If this were not the case then the mothers of the believers would be the best of creation immediately after the Prophet; for a man who has some superiority over another likewise that mans wife also has a similar superiority over the other due to her marital relationship and intimacy shared with the husband.

The form of the Sacred Law, conditioned by adherence to it, necessitates success and inevitably leads to the acquisition of salvation for the people of the hereafter and certifies paradisaical felicity, as has been previously stated. When one has confirmed his 'form' of the Sacred Law then he is included among the (degree of the) generality of near-ones of Allāh (*wilāyat 'l āmm*), as indicated in the divine statement:

Allāh is the protector (wali) of those who believe.

Now at this time the spiritual wayfarer has become prepared to place his feet firmly on the spiritual path (*tariqā*) and proceed on to the degree of special nearness (*wilāyat 'l kbāss*) and transpose his *nafs* from the quality of insinuation (*amāra*) to that of tranquility (*itm'inān*).

It should be known, however, that the stations to arrival to this *wilāyat 'l kbāss* are conditioned upon the performance of the Sacred Law [along with] divine remembrance (*dhikr ilāhī*), these being the foundation in this path based on the commands of the Sacred Law, also, avoidance of proscribed acts as defined by the Sacred law are from the necessities of the spiritual path. Regular performance of obligatory acts (*farā'id* pl. of *fard*) of worship is essential (to this path). The seeking of a qualified spiritual guide (and his subsequent acquisition) who acts as a means (*wasīla*) is also from the generosity of divine commands for Allāh ﷻ has said:

And seek a means to Him.

In summation the Sacred Law does exist as both form and reality. The very foundation of all spiritual perfections whether of *wilāya* or *nabūwa* stem from the whole of divine rulings encompassed by the Sacred Law, the perfection of *wilāya* being the fruit of the form and the perfection of *nabūwa* being the fruit of the reality as we shall explain.

Proximity to the Divine is the spiritual path (*al-Wilāya hiyya at-Tariqā*). This *wilāya* being the negation of all other than the Divine, who is the One sought. *Wilāya* is the removal of all others (*ghayr*) and otherness (*ghayrāt*), this being its goal. When, by His blessings, the complete removal from ones attention of all things other than the Divine occurs, when neither name nor form remain of the perception of others (*aghyār*), it is at this time that annihilation (*fana*) has transpired and one has arrived to the end of *wilāya*. The completion of 'journeying to Allāh' (*sayr ilā Allāh*) has been achieved.

Now begins the commencement of the station of establishment (*maqām al-ithbāt*) known as 'journeying in Allāh' (*sayr fi Allāh*) it being the station of permanence (*baqā*), the realm of reality (*baqīqa*), which is itself the desired goal of *wilāya*. It is by means of these two,

tariqa and *baqīqa/fanā* and *baqā* that *vilāya* can be said to truly be realized and the *nafs 'l amārah* becomes *mutmā'in*.⁵ The *nafs* at this time sets aside its *kufr* and *inkār* and becomes content (*radhyan*) with its Lord and its Lord is content with it. The baseness that existed in its nature dissipates. Many of the perfected ones say that once a *nafs* has arrived to this station of contentment it cannot return back to its original state of *tughyān*.

Even if the soul arrives to its (state of) contentment it never is free from temptation!

Many of the people of Sūfism have said concerning the [ascribed] statement of the Prophet on the 'Greater Jihad' (*jihād al-akbar*), "We have returned from the lesser jihad to the greater jihad" that it refers to the jihad against the *nafs*. However, it is from one of the unveilings (*kashf*) of this needy one and something that he has come to understand that the reality of the affair is something else. I personally do not see that after the *nafs* has arrived to the degree of contentment that it has any more obstinacy and rebellion. I see it firmly fixed in the station of absolute submissiveness. Indeed, I see it as a firmly fixed heart that has forgotten every thing (other than its Lord), free from the vision of the other (*ghayr*)

We have no point of contention if others have attributed to the soul before its arrival to the degree of contentment any and all types of obstinacy and rebellion, or that there can exist in such a *nafs* variation in its states and 'coloring'; however, once the *nafs* has attained to the degree of contentment there is absolutely no possibility for there to arise from it any opposition and rebellion.

This needy one has exerted himself much in examining this issue, reflecting greatly on this obscure topic, for there is much disparity of opinion in the writings of the People of the Way even with the great depth of thought given concerning this issue. Only with the assistance of Allāh ﷻ did he realize that a tranquil, content soul (*nafs mutma'ina*) has not even a hairs breath of obstinacy nor rebellion left in it. He only sees in it non-existence (*istiblāk*) and passing away (*idhmiblāl*).

When the *nafs* has offered itself as a sacrifice to its Lord how could there possibly remain in it any opposition? And when the *nafs* has become contently accepting of its Lord and its Lord accepting of it how is it possible for [to remain] any tyranny (*tughyān*), which is the opposite of acceptance (*ridā*)? The good pleasure of Allāh ﷻ once it is given does not return to displeasure.

It is possible that the intent of the 'greater jihad' of which the Messenger of Allāh [allegedly] spoke, and Allāh is the best in knowing, is a 'jihād' against the 'frame of the physical body' (*qalab*), which is a composite of various natural constituents with each individual constituent being the locus where a divine command is either obeyed or disobeyed. Both ardent physical passionate desire and anger arise from the physical frame. Do you not see that various types of animals while being devoid of the 'speaking

⁵ *al-Nafs al-Mutma'ina*. The content soul or self at peace, which is illuminated and acts according to the good i.e. rulings of Shari'ah, and is therefore liberated. "**O self at peace, return to your Lord, well-pleased, well-pleasing. Enter among My servants. Enter My Garden.**" (89:27)

soul' (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqā*) also possess these blameworthy qualities? Many animals are characterized with desire and anger, gluttony and avarice. This jihad is constantly arising [in an individual] and neither the state of the content soul nor the submissiveness of the heart causes them to subside.

With the permanence of this jihad however there arise many benefits collectively aiding to the purification of the physical body. The perfections attained both by Sūfīs and the physical bodies determine the issues of the afterlife. For in the perfections of the Sūfīs the physical body follows the heart, but in the perfection of others [i.e., Sūfī spiritual paths which stress opposition to the physical body and its appetites as spiritual exercises] the opposite is true, the heart follows the dictates of the physical body.

When an impediment occurs [in our understanding of the true nature of this jihad] then the commonly held understanding [i.e., that it is only of the *nafs* and not the physical body] takes precedence and this jihad grinds to a halt and this battle is set aside [with the result that the benefits of this greater jihad being lost].

When the *nafs* by the grace of Allāh ﷻ attains to the station of contentment and becomes compliant to the divine rulings it has attained to true submission (*islām haqqīqī*) and the reality of faith sets in. From now on what ever is done is done with its reality. When the ritual prayer is performed, it is truly performed in its reality. When a fast is held, the reality of the fast is held. When a pilgrimage is performed, a pilgrimage in its reality is carried out. In this vein all other acts entertained by Sacred Law flow. All this is due to *tariqa* and *haqqīqa*, which act to differentiate between the form of Sacred Law and its reality.

Whoever has not been honored with being from the generality of the near-ones of Allāh (*wilāyat al-kebās*) will never be able to attain to even the figurative Islam, let alone to the reality of Islam. However, when one becomes placed, by the grace of Allāh ﷻ, in the reality of the Sacred Law and his Islam becomes realized he is now prepared to attain to an abundant good and a complete share from the perfections of Prophethood due to (1) faithful obedience to the prophets and (2) from their inheritance.

Just as the form of the Sacred Law is as a pure tree and the perfections of *wilāya* are as its fruit, so too the reality of the Sacred Law is as a blessed tree and the perfections of Prophethood are its fruit. And as in as much as the perfections of *wilāya* are the fruit of the form so too the perfections of Prophethood are the fruit of the reality of that form, the perfections of *wilāya* are by necessity the form of the perfections of Prophethood which is itself the source of realities for all the forms.

One should know the difference between the form of the Sacred Law and its reality arise from the *nafs*, for the *nafs al-`amāra* possesses tyrannical rebellion in the form [of Sacred Law] and is in a condition of denial of it, the *nafs* becomes content and submissive [to the Sacred Law] when it attains to the reality of the Sacred Law. Similarly the difference between the perfections of *wilāya*, which are as the form, and the perfections of Prophethood which are as the realities arise from the physical body.

The various parts of the physical body [as classically understood to consist of four base elementals: earth, air, wind and fire along with the *nafs*] do not end nor set aside their rebellion and obstinacy in the station of *wilāya*. It is good here to take the example of the fire elemental which does not egress from its claim of good and self-exaltation. Similarly

the earthy elemental does not repent of baseness and sordidness. In this vein the other elementals follow suit.

In the station of the perfections of Prophethood however, the various parts of the physical body themselves attain to a state of equilibrium and no longer tend to excess and neglect. Perhaps we can understand the reality of this from the saying of the Prophet, “*My shaytān has submitted.*” Just as there is a *shaytān* in the physical world, so too does there exist a *shaytān* in the *nafs*, it being the fire elemental. This elemental proclaims its own excellence and demands obedience due to its arrogance and its own self-advancement, all this being from the worst of blameworthy quality traits. Its submission [as mentioned in the prophetic narration] is an allusion to the removal of these blameworthy quality traits, they being the most base of the basest of characteristics.

In the station of the perfections of Prophethood [three fundamentals come to perfection]:

- (1) the hearts submission,
- (2) the tranquility of the soul and
- (3) equilibrium in the physical body’s elementals.

As for *wilāya* [two fundamentals come to perfection]:

- (1) the hearts submission and then step-by-step
- (2) tranquility of the soul [is realized].

We have mentioned ‘step-by -step’, because for perfect attainment of the tranquility of the soul, meaning without effort, the physical body’s elementals must be brought to equilibrium. Because of this it is possible for possessors of *wilāya* [with its corresponding state of] tranquility to have a reoccurrence of base human qualities resulting from the non-equilibrium of the physical frame’s elementals, as we have previously discussed. The state of tranquility which occurs to the soul after the physical body’s elementals have attained equilibrium is free and safe from returning back to base human qualities.

The point of disagreement [among adepts of Sūfism] concerning whether a soul that has attained to tranquility can fall back into base quality traits, centers on an understanding of the stations of the soul, with each person giving information from the station of his soul, speaking from his own conscience.

If it were said: When the physical bodies frame attains a state of equilibrium and is free from obstinacy and rebellion how can it be characterized with having a ‘jihad’? When in reality it seems that the ‘jihad’ has now subsided.

I would answer: The differentiation between contentment [of the soul] and [equilibrium] of the physical body lies with the fact that the person possessing a content soul is one who is in a state of self-non-existence and passing-away associated with the realm of Divine Concern (*‘alam al-amir*) and is definitely characterized with complete self-non-existence and ‘spiritual drunkenness’ (*sukr*). The physical body though has no association with either spiritual drunkenness or self-non-existence due to its obedient fulfilling of

rulings of Sacred Law, which is itself built upon sobriety (*sabm*) [the opposite of spiritual drunkenness]. It is therefore impossible for there to occur to it self-non-existence which can result in opposition [to the Sacred Law], for that which possesses sobriety if there does arise from it something that appears as opposition [to Sacred Law] in relation to some affairs it is only an [apparent opposition] subsumed in benefits and well being [for the physical body]. This is itself perfectly permissible. However, it is desired that these ‘oppositions’ by the grace of Allāh ﷻ are only to the degree of non-performance of certain desired acts of Sacred Law (*mustababāt*), not to or beyond the degree of performing religious disliked acts (*makrūh tanzīhiyya*), from this understanding there is leeway for the physical body with its equilibrium to have a form of opposition, but in the station of the content soul there is absolutely no possibility of it.

When, by the grace of Allāh ﷻ, the perfections of Prophethood are attained resulting in the realization of the Sacred Law, its realization being its fruits, all spiritual journeying associated with effort ceases. Any further spiritual ascent is simply form the free and absolute generosity of Allāh ﷻ. Neither held creedal beliefs nor any ruling of Sacred Law whether of knowledge or praxis has any affect here, only generosity in generosity and grace in grace. This station in relation to the previous stations is indeed exalted; it possesses an expansiveness and illumination which is not present in previous stations. This Station is originally exclusive for the exalted prophets and [their] faithfully obedient followers and inheritors. Whoever attains to is has simply been shown great honor and attention.

There is no hardship in any affair when coupled with Grace!

Let not any one say that he has attained this station and proclaim that he is free from the ‘form’ of Sacred Law and its reality; saying he has no need of performing the rulings of Sacred Law.

We say that Islamic Sacred Law is the Origin of this affair and the Foundation of this activity! However high a tree grows or however tall a building is raised, even later when there are defects and unbecoming traits, nevertheless they are never independent of their foundation and origin. A tall building for example is never independent from its lower level, never being free of it. If an imperfection occurs in the lowest level the levels built above it are never free of that imperfection. The loss of the lower level means the loss of all higher ones. Islamic Sacred Law therefore is necessary in all states and times, ever individual is bound and dependent upon performing the rulings of Sacred Law. When this work has proceeded from this level to that of pure divine grace [as mentioned above], and has altered from being an affair of grace to one of love one has indeed achieved an extremely exalted station, something of the Original belonging to the Seal of the Prophets, upon him and them be peace and blessings. Whoever is divinely willed is honored [by this] out of obedience and inheritance.

