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## Mullā Ṣadrā on the Efficacy of Prayer (*du'ā*)<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This paper presents the manner in which Mullā Ṣadrā explains the influence of prayer (*du'ā*) on the world, drawing as he does on Ibn 'Arabī's ideas against the backdrop of his own dynamic metaphysical psychology. Mullā Ṣadrā's eventually distances himself from Ibn Sīnā's position on the passive nature of prayer, and instead opts for Ibn 'Arabī's reading of the intimate divine-human interplay in prayer itself. In doing so, Mullā Ṣadrā provides a formulation of prayer in which the supplicant plays a more active role in eliciting the divine response to her prayer. For Mullā Ṣadrā, prayer therefore fashions the human soul, while the human soul also fashions the outcome of prayer.

### Keywords

Cosmology, cosmic change, divine providence, existential gradation, heavenly souls, imagination, imaginal power, perfect human, prayer, substantial motion.

### Introduction

The impact of prayer on the cosmos through the mediation of human agency, for example in praying for rainfall, particularly in the face of the law of causality has often attracted

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Professor Todd Lawson at University of Toronto for his insightful comments on the first draft of this paper and also the anonymous reviewers for their helpful notes and suggestions.

the attention of major Islamic philosophers.<sup>2</sup> They have not only contributed to developing a theoretical framework for explaining the influence of human prayers on the cosmos, but also have responded to possible objections to this influence from both theological (*kalām*) and philosophical (*falsafā*) quarters. Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī (d. 1050/1640), widely known as Mullā Ṣadrā, has a unique position on prayer owing to his synthetic and holistic approach toward core issues about the God-world relationship. Mullā Ṣadrā was heir to several intellectual and spiritual traditions of Islam in general, particularly the school of Ibn ‘Arabī. Relying on this heritage, he created a

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<sup>2</sup> Early Western literature on Muslim prayer mainly focused on ritualistic prayer (*ṣalā*) and was developed within a comparative context. Historical studies, particularly those with a comparative edge, have often been carried out as an attempt to understand Muslim faith and culture due to the fact that prayer reflects both the doctrinal and the social, not to say popular, aspects of the religion. In this regard, the pioneering work of Constance E. Padwick is important owing to her interpretation of Islamic prayer manuals in order to show the continuity between Islam and Christianity. She has been praised for her attempts to draw the attention of the scholars away from the apparent arid formality of prayers towards their inner meaning and spirituality. See Constance. E. Padwick, *Muslim Devotions: A Study of Prayer-manuals in Common Use* (London: S.P.C.K, 1961). Henry Corbin addresses prayer as "a dialogue between two beings" and explains it in terms of his thesis of creative imagination. See Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabī* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), 247. Following Corbin, there have been several other works on prayer in Ibn ‘Arabī's thought. Prayer in Ibn ‘Arabī has also been the subject of a special issue of *The Journal of Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabī Society*. See Stephen Hirtenstein, ed., *Prayer & Contemplation: Foundations of the Spiritual Life according to Ibn ‘Arabī* (Oxford, UK: Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabī Society, 1993). The mystical aspect of prayer in Islam has also been discussed by Annemarie Schimmel. She looks into some major Sufi works including poetry and prose in order to picture the meaning and function of prayer in spiritual Islam. See Annemarie Schimmel, "Some Aspects of Mystical Prayer in Islam," *Die Welt des Islams* 2 (1952). Recently Katz has tried to capture a wider scope of prayer in Islam by investigating prayer in relation to broader issues such as ethical transformation and social communication. See Marion Holmes Katz, *Prayer in Islamic Thought and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). For a noteworthy work on the nature and function of prayer in the context of Qur’anic and Sufi literature, see Atif Khalil, "Is God Obligated to Answer Prayers of Petition (Du‘ā)? The Response of Classical Sufis and Qur’anic Exegetes," *The Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 37:92 (2011).

complex system in which philosophical, theological, Sufi, and Shi'i discourses mingle in order to present a new narrative of creation that can accommodate both the absolute power of the creator and the relative, yet influential, force of human agency. In this regard, an investigation of Mullā Ṣadrā's discussion of prayer (*du'ā*) can be quite illuminating as he relies on his synthetic methodology to prove the influential role of human agency in the face of the doctrine of divine providence (*qaḍā' al-ilāhī*) and the logic of causal necessity.

This paper will focus on several major works by Mullā Ṣadrā in which he discusses prayer as a venue of change in the cosmos. After briefly explaining Mullā Ṣadrā's position on prayer in relation to his Sufi-oriented Shi'ism and against the background of Islamic philosophy, attention will be paid to Ibn 'Arabī because of his deep influence on Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophical system in general, and his view of prayer in particular. As we shall see, Mullā Ṣadrā's position on prayer can be best understood in the light of Ibn 'Arabī's influence. In his account of the efficacy of prayer, Mullā Ṣadrā also relies heavily on the conceptual framework provided by Ibn Sīnā. Nevertheless, he seems to finally break from the Peripatetic framework in order to offer a more organic view of prayer in relation to the human soul and the cosmos.

### **The Sufi-Shi'i Background of Mullā Ṣadrā's Thought**

Before discussing Mullā Ṣadrā's definition of prayer and his attempts to explain its nature and efficacy, it is important to delineate the relation of this topic to his Sufi-oriented Shi'ism. It is against this syncretic background that one can appreciate the significant place of prayer in Mullā Ṣadrā's thought. Apart from the fact that he was a practicing Twelver Shi'i living under the Shi'i rule of the Safavids (880-1101 /1501-1722), Mullā Ṣadrā was

also heir to the Shi'i tendency toward the esoteric aspects of faith that had gained force through Sufi influence.

It has been correctly argued that Sufism and Shi'ism were inspired by "the same sources" very early in their history and share many common characteristics.<sup>3</sup> This fruitful alliance that had a gradual formation showing up in a significant commentary on 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib's *Nahj al-balāghah* by Maytham Baḥrānī (d. 699/1299)<sup>4</sup> and culminating in a more systematic way in the works of Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. ca. 787/1385), was a significant influence on Mullā Ṣadrā. In this respect, a theme which is immediately pertinent to the present discussion of prayer is the Sufi-Shi'i doctrine of *wilāya*,<sup>5</sup> most

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<sup>3</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Shi'ism and Sufism: Their Relationship in Essence and History," *Religious Studies*, 6, no. 3 (1970): 242. Also, see Kāmil Muṣṭafā al-Shaybī, *al-Ṣilah bayna al-taṣawwuf wa-al-tashayyū'* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma 'ārif, 1969). On the esoteric aspects of imamate also see Henry Corbin, *En Islam Iranien, aspects spirituels et philosophiques*, 4 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 3:149-355; Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism: the Sources of Esotericism in Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); Amir-Moezzi and Christian Jambet, *Qu'est-ce que le Shi'isme?* (Paris: Fayard, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Maytham b. 'Alī Baḥrānī, *Sharḥ nahj al-balāghah*, eds. Team of scholars, 5 vols. (Tehran: Mu'assisat al-Naṣr, 1959). His book on theology is imbued with philosophical themes and terminology. See also Maytham b. 'Alī Baḥrānī, *Qawā'id al-marām fi 'ilm al-kalām*, ed. Sayyid Aḥmad al-Ḥusaynī (Qum: Kitābkhānah-i 'umūmī-i Āyat Allāh al-'Uẓmā Mar'ashī Najafī, 1398 A.H.). Also, see Majīd Rūḥī Dihkurdī, "Mu'arrifī wa rawish-shināsī-i *Sharḥ nahj al-balāghah* by Maytham Baḥrānī," *Ulūm-i ḥadīth* 48 (1378 sh. ): 56-77. For the influence of Maytham Baḥrānī on Shi'i imamology, see Hamid Mavani, "Doctrine of Imamate in Twelver Shi'ism: Traditional, Theological, Philosophical and Mystical Perspectives" (PhD diss., McGill University, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> The term *wilāya* is also used interchangeably with *walāya* comprising a complex semantic field referring to devotion, love, charisma, and authority which are complementary in the Shi'ite context. For a detailed discussion of this issue in the Shi'ite context, see Ḥaydar b. 'Alī Āmulī, *Jāmi' al-asrār va manba' al-anwār*, ed. Henry Corbin and Isma'il Othmān Yaḥyā (Tehran: Anīstūtū-i Īrān va Faransah, 1969); Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, "Notes on Imāmī Walāya," in *The Spirituality of Shi'i Islam: Beliefs and Practices*, ed. Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, 231-277 (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011); Maria Massi

prominently in Ibn 'Arabī's intricate formulation of it in terms of the doctrine of "the perfect human" (*al-insān al-kāmil*). In his commentary on *Nahj al-balāghah*, Baḥrānī draws on both philosophical and Sufi ideas. For him God has given His Friends (the *awliyā*) "the ability" to receive His mercy (*raḥma*) and expand his grace (*ni'ma*) that He has bestowed on them so they can be in His exalted presence with ultimate felicity and happiness (*sa'āda*), and perform miracles."<sup>6</sup> Mullā Ṣadrā is inspired by Ḥaydar Āmulī's identification of the Sufi spiritual Pole (*quṭb*) with the Imam<sup>7</sup> by introducing the "People of the House" (*ahl al-bayt*) who were the genealogical descendants of the Prophet, as the best embodiments of *wilāya*. The concluding paragraph of *al-Shawāhid al-rububiyya* that deals with the continuation of prophethood in the form of *wilāya* is found to be an adaptation of a passage from Ibn 'Arabī's *The Meccan Revelations (al-Futūḥāt al-makiyya)*. Mullā Ṣadrā introduces "the people of the House" within the quotation from Ibn 'Arabī.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, in line with Ibn 'Arabī, he keeps the scope of *wilāya* wide enough to go beyond the Twelve Imams:

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Dakake, *The Charismatic Community: Shi'ite Identity in Early Islam* (Albany: University State of New York, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Baḥrānī, *Sharḥ nahj al-balāghah*, 2: 317.

<sup>7</sup> Ḥaydar b. 'Alī Āmulī, *Jāmi' al-asrār va manba' al-anwār*, ed. Henry Corbin and Isma'il Othmān Yahyā (Tehran: Anīstītū-i Īrān va Faransah, 1969), 223. For the influence of Ibn 'Arabī on Shi'i theology through Ḥaydar Āmulī, see Robert Wisnovsky, "One Aspect of the Akbarian Turn in Shi'i Theology," in *Sufism and Theology*, ed. Ayman Shihadeh (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007); Khanjar Ḥamīyah, *al-'Irfān al-Shī'i: dirāsah fī al-ḥayāh al-rūḥīyah wa-al-fikrīyah li-Ḥaydar al-Āmulī* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Hādī, 2004); Herman Landolt, "Ḥaydar Āmulī et les deux mi'rāj," *Studia Islamica* 1:91 (2000): 91-106.

<sup>8</sup> Shigeru Kamada, "Mullā Ṣadrā's Imāma/Wilāya: An Aspect of His Indebtedness to Ibn 'Arabī," *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 6 (2010): 71. For an elaborate discussion of this

Thus *wilāya* is a divine quality (*naʿt*) and so is a [divine] inheritance. And *walī* will not receive this position from the prophet unless God would take it from the prophet through inheritance to confer it on *walī* so that the position would be in its fullest and most perfect form. However, some of the *awliyā* receive this position from the prophet as a heritage such as the People of the House (*ahl- al-bayt*)-peace be upon them- who saw the Prophet in person... As for the rest of *awliyā*, they receive the position directly from God because God Himself is the inheritor [of *wilāya*] and bestows it on them.<sup>9</sup>

While having a pivotal place in Mullā Ṣadrā's metaphysics in general, *wilāya* also has a special place in his narrative of human agency through prayer. This theme will be discussed further in the next section of the paper.

## Prayer and the Creative Power of the Human Soul

### a. Substantial Motion and Evolution

One of the hallmarks of Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophy is the doctrine of substantial motion (*al-ḥarakat al-jawhariyya*), according to which the whole world in both substances and accidents is a movement toward perfection.<sup>10</sup> Although this doctrine has crucial implications in both the physical and spiritual domains, it is only the substantial motion of the soul that is directly related to the present discussion of prayer.

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issue, see Maria Massi Dakake, "Hierarchies of Knowing in Mullā Ṣadrā's Commentary on the *Uṣūl al-kāfi*," *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 6 (2010): 5-44.

<sup>9</sup> Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī, *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya*, ed. Seyyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī (Mashhad: Dānishgāh-i Mashhad, 1968), 377-78. The quotation is translated in Sayeh Meisami, *Mulla Sadra* (London, UK: Oneworld, 2013), 112.

<sup>10</sup> For substantial motion, see Mahdi Dehbashi, *Transubstantial Motion and the Natural World: With a Translation of Volume III, Stage 7, Chapters 18-32 of the Asfar of Mulla Sadra*. London, ICAS Press, 2010. For a comprehensive explanation of substantial motion, see Eiyad S. al-Kutubi, *Mullā Ṣadrā and Eschatology: Evolution of Being* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), chapter 4.

According to the thesis of substantial motion, "the individual human soul is an evolving entity<sup>11</sup> which is material in its early phases, being essentially connected to and dependent on the body, but capable of crossing over the bodily borders" and soaring up to immaterial heights.<sup>12</sup> According to Mullā Ṣadrā, "the soul is bodily in its origination but spiritual in its subsistence."<sup>13</sup> At first the soul is mere potentiality, and in its early phases is even devoid of perceptual faculties. These phases are connected with and dependent on the life of the body from embryonic evolution up through infancy and later phases in the life of the individual. The soul goes through the phases of the vegetative, the animal, and the rational. The human soul is also characterized by "an encompassing unity (*waḥdat al-jam'iyya*) that is a shadow of divine unity (*waḥdat al-ilāhiyya*) in being by itself intellectual (*āqila*), imaginative (*mutakhayyila*), and sentient (*ḥassāsa*)."<sup>14</sup> These faculties of the soul correspond at the cosmic level to the hierarchical ranks of being, that

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<sup>11</sup> Mullā Ṣadrā scholars have frequently explained that this should not be confused with Darwinian evolutionism. See Herman Landolt, "Being-toward-resurrection as a Theme of Shi'i Philosophy: Mullā Ṣadrā," unpublished manuscript, pdf file, 13. (courtesy of Todd Lawson)

<sup>12</sup> Meisami, *Mulla Sadra*, 73.

<sup>13</sup> Shīrāzī, *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya*, 221.

<sup>14</sup> Shīrāzī, *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya*, 228; *al-Ḥikmat al-al-muta'āliya fi asfār al-aqliyat al-arba'a*, ed. Muḥammad Reḍa Muẓaffar, 9 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-iḥyā' al-turāth al-'arabī, 1999), 3: 362. Mullā Ṣadrā is indebted to *Ibn 'Arabī* for this encompassing unity. In *Faṣṣu ḥikmatin ilāhiyya fi kalimatīn Ādamiyya*, Ibn 'Arabī describes human being as the togetherness (*jam'iyyat*) of all the truths and the mirror of all divine Names. See Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, trans. Muhammad Ali Muvahḥid and Ṣamad Muvahḥid (Tehran: Nashr-i kārnāmeḥ, 1385 sh.), 157. On the influence of Ibn 'Arabī on Mullā Ṣadrā, also see Mohammed Rustom, *The Triumph of Mercy: Philosophy and Scripture in Mullā Ṣadrā* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012).



is, they respectively correspond to the intellectual world, the imaginal world, and the sensible world.

Mullā Ṣadrā agrees with Ibn ‘Arabī on the purpose of creation. They both believe that God, as a hidden treasure, makes Himself known through the humankind<sup>15</sup> due to the comprehensiveness of the human soul that encompasses all the levels of existence, meaning, the intellectual, the imaginal, and the material. Furthermore for Mullā Ṣadrā, the human soul is a dynamic whole that "gains new forms and moves from one grade to the other. That we find ourselves different to what we were in the past or what we shall be in the future cannot be all due to accidental changes, but rather because of the change in the very substance of our soul."<sup>16</sup>

Humankind is supposed to be capable of moving from the level of a material being to higher spiritual levels and in doing so complete the circle of creation, that is, the descent from the immaterial to the material and the ascent back to the immaterial:

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<sup>15</sup> Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī, "Sharḥ-i ḥadīth kuntu kanzan makhfiyyan," in *Majmū‘a-yi rasa‘il-i falsafī-yi Ṣadr al-muta‘allihīn*, ed. Ḥāmid Nājī Iṣfahānī (Tehran: Ḥikmat, 1385 sh.), 356. On this subject, see Armin Eschraghi, "‘I was a Hidden Treasure’. Some Notes on a Commentary Ascribed to Mulla Sadra Shirazi: Sharḥ ḥadith: ‘Kuntu kanzan makhfiyyan’" in *Islamic Thought in the Middle Ages: Studies in Text, Transmission and Translation, in Honour of Hans Daiber*, ed. Anna Akasoy and Wim Raven, 91-100 (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Meisami, *Mulla Sadra*, 74-75. In *Kitāb al-‘arshiyya*, Mullā Ṣadrā supports substantial motion by alluding to several Qur’anic verses. See *Kitāb al-‘arshīyah*, ed. Fātin Muḥammad Khalīl al-Labūn, and Fu‘ād Dakār (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-tārīkh al-‘Arabī, 2000), 25. See also Seyyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshṭiyānī's explanatory notes on the meaning of "perfect human" in Mullā Muḥammad Ja‘far Lāhījī, *Sharḥ risālat al-mashā‘ir-i Mullā Ṣadrā*, ed. Seyyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshṭiyānī (Qum: Būstān-i kitāb, 1386 sh.), 391-92. For Mullā Ṣadrā's thesis of motion in substance in comparison to classical philosophy, see Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā*, 94-113. Also on connections between metaphysical psychology and epistemology in Mullā Ṣadrā, see Ibrahim Kalin, *Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy: Mullā Ṣadrā on Existence, Intellect, and Intuition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Human perception of every level of the world consists in unification (*ittihād*) with [that level] and it is actualized by its being. Some of these beings are sensible, some imaginal, and some intelligible. Thus, being was first an intellect, then a soul, then sensation, then matter; but it turned around and became a sensation, then a soul, then an intellect and rose up to where it had fallen from, and God is the origin and the end. When the human being reached this divine station, he was informed of the divine providence (*al-qaḍā' al-ilāhī*) and the Lord's predetermination (*al-qadar al-rabbānī*).<sup>17</sup>

The perfection of the human soul is essentially associated with the Sufi doctrine of the perfect human (*al-insān al-kāmil*) which is also identified with "the Muḥammadan Reality (*al-ḥaqīqat al-Muḥammadiyya*)."<sup>18</sup> According to Mullā Ṣadrā, "the perfect human is the one over whom no other takes priority in being the goal (*ghāya*) of the creation."<sup>19</sup> At this level, the soul is capable of creating images which possess imaginal reality like in

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<sup>17</sup> Shīrāzī, *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya*, 351. Mullā Ṣadrā supports his view on the fall of the soul and its return by resorting to both his philosophical past masters, religious, and spiritual texts. See Shīrāzī, *al-Hikmat al-muta'āliya*, 8: 355-58. Also on this issue, see Maria Massi Dakake, "The Soul as Barzakh: Substantial Motion and Mullā Ṣadrā's Theory of Human Becoming," *The Muslim World* 94, no. 1 (2004): 107-130. The difference between *qaḍā'* and *qadar* is a complicated matter in philosophical theology. According to Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī's reading of Ibn Sīnā on this distinction, "*qaḍā'* is the existence of all things in the intelligible world (*al-'ālam al-'aqlī*) together in a general (*mujmala*) state by way of transcendent innovation (*ibdā'*). And *qadar* is the existence [of those things] in the external matter after the fulfilment of particular conditions one after the other." See Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt wa al-tanbihāt*, ed. Sulayman Dunya (Cairo: Dār al-ma'ārif, 1960), 3-4: 729.

<sup>18</sup> On this doctrine, see William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn 'Arabī's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989). In Sufi discourse, the station of the Pole of the Poles (*quṭb al-aqtāb*) is represented by the very inner reality of Prophet Muḥammad. See Kamāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī, *Iṣṭilāḥāt al-ṣūfiyya*, ed. Muḥammad Kamāl Ibrāhīm Ja'far (Qum: Maṭba'at al-Amīr, 1370 sh.) 145. Mullā Ṣadrā has a long passage about the perfect human and his identification with the Imam in his *Sharḥ uṣūl al-kāfi*, ed. Muḥammad Khājavi, 4 vols. (Tehran: Pizhūhishgāh-i 'ulūm-i insānī va mutāla'āt-i farhangī, 2004/1383sh), 2: 487-88. For the translation of the passage, see Herman Landolt, "Being-toward-resurrection as a Theme of Shi'i Philosophy," 26.

<sup>19</sup> Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī, *Mazāhir al-ilāhīyyah fī asrār al-'ulūm al-kamāliya*, ed. Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī (Qum: Būstān-i kitāb, 1387 sh.), 116.

the case of Moses' staff appearing as a serpent. Changes in the cosmic picture that come to exist through the power of the soul in prayer are in certain cases dependent on the intermediary (*barzakhi*) level of being, that is, the imaginal level.

### b. The Power of Imagination

The attribution of marvels and miracles to the Friends of God (*awliyā*) is a common theme of Sufi literature. For example, there are many accounts about the power of *awliyā* over the world.<sup>20</sup> Part of Ibn 'Arabī's contribution to systematizing Sufi beliefs is the explanation for the perfect soul's causing changes in the world. In *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, Ibn 'Arabī regards imagination as "the vastest of Presences (*ḥaḍarāt*)" as it combines both the unseen and the seen worlds. He attributes this level of being to the human soul:

And there is no doubt that you are more entitled (*aḥaqq*) to the Presence of Imagination than are meanings and spiritual beings, for within you is the imaginal faculty (*al-quwwat al-mutakhayyila*) which is one of the faculties that God gave you when He brought you into existence. So you are more entitled to possess (*mulk*) and control (*taṣarruf*)...The common people (*al-'amma*) do not know imagination or enter into it except when they dream and their sensory faculties (*al-quwā al-ḥassāsa*) return into it. The elite (*al-khawāṣṣ*) see it in wakefulness through the power of realizing it.<sup>21</sup>

This quotation refers to a unique creative function that works through the venue of autonomous of imagination. According to Henry Corbin, this is "Active Imagination" that

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<sup>20</sup> For examples of these accounts and sources on this topic, see John Renard, *Friends of God: Islamic Images of Piety, Commitment, and Servanthood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 106-12.

<sup>21</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, *The Meccan Revelations*, ed. Michel Chodkiewicz, trans. William Chittick, Charles-André Gilis, and Michel Chodkiewicz, annot. James Morris, 2 vols. (New York: Pir Press, 2004), 2:172-173. The translation of this passage is by William Chittick. Also, see Ibn 'Arabī, *Le livre des chatons des sagesses*, trans. and ed. Charles-André Gilis (Beirut: Al-Burāq, 1997), 243-54; Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 122.

is "capable of creating objects, of producing changes in the outside world."<sup>22</sup> The imaginal world fits well into Mullā Ṣadrā's gradational (*tashkīkī*) view of being.<sup>23</sup> In this light, the imaginative forms as mental beings and their extra-mental counterparts exist for real like two parallel worlds whose difference lies in the intensity of their being. The mental sphere resembles the creation of God in that the soul is capable of creating mental beings as God creates the world of substantial forms both material and immaterial.<sup>24</sup>

Mullā Ṣadrā believes that the soul is capable of creating mental beings in the absence of matter. His evidence for this is what happens in dreams, and the miraculous creation of images by the prophets. However, the question is whether every soul at any phase of its evolution has the actual ability to create. The answer is negative. Although the soul, in its proximity to the divine realm, is given the power to create, in the beginning

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<sup>22</sup> Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), 223. The imaginal world is also mentioned in Ibn 'Arabī, "Inshā' al-dawā'ir" in *Kleinere Schriften des Ibn al-'Arabī: nach Handschriften in Upsala und Berlin*, ed. Henrik Samuel Nyberg (Leiden: Brill, 1919).

<sup>23</sup> According to Mullā Ṣadrā, the concept of being applies to its instances univocally because of the unity of its reality, and conceptual differences are only due to essences. On the other hand, essences have no reality of their own. Based on these two premises, one could come into the counterintuitive conclusion that diversity is not real. Gradation (or modulation) of being (*tashkīk al-wujūd*) is Mullā Ṣadrā's way of avoiding this counterintuitive implication and to create a system in which the apparently monistic worldview of Sufism is reconciled with the realistic pluralism of classical philosophy and our common sense. According to this doctrine, being, as one simple reality, comes in grades as the light of Sun and candlelight are the same reality of different grades. See Shīrāzī, *al-Ḥikmat al-al-muta'aliya*, 9:186. For a technical explanation of the doctrine and its implications in other areas of Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophy, see Sajjad H. Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā and Metaphysics: Modulation of Being* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Cécile Bonmariage, *Le réel et les réalités: Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī et la structure de la réalité* (Paris: J. Vrin, 2007).

<sup>24</sup> Shīrāzī, *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya*, 31-2.

this is only a potentiality. Apart from some unique cases of spiritually evolved souls, the souls of common humans are dependent on matter as long as they live in this world.

According to Mullā Ṣadrā, the stages of knowledge formation, that is, sense perception, imagination, and intellection are parallel with “the three worlds,”<sup>25</sup> that is, the intellectual, the imaginal and the sensible. Thus, what happens in the soul matches the hierarchical ontology of the three worlds which stand in a vertical (*ṭūlī*) relationship, that is, the one on top is superior to the one below it in the grade of existence.

Through the power of imagination, all human souls are capable of creating bodies for themselves in afterlife.<sup>26</sup> However, in this world only the perfect souls of prophets, Imams, and *awliyā* are invested with the power to objectify imaginative forms. These are

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<sup>25</sup> Shīrāzī, *al-Ḥikmat al-al-muta‘āliya*, 3:362.

<sup>26</sup> Imaginal bodies are immaterial; yet they are possessed of the formal dimensions of the physical body which makes them capable of all kinds of feelings compared to our experiences in dreams. As long as we are bound up with matter, our imaginations are merely subjective. But, if the soul can free itself from physical preoccupations and reach a higher level of spirituality, it can give objective dimensions to imaginations. At this level, imaginative forms are not imprinted in the brain so they are categorized as “detached imagination” (*al-khayāl al-munfaṣil*). This is the point of departure between Mullā Ṣadrā and Ibn Sīnā who rejects the possibility of ontological independence of imaginal forms from the brain. Mullā Ṣadrā follows Suhrawardī and Ibn ‘Arabī in this regard and posits an intermediary world between the intellectual and the material world, which is the locus of detached imaginal forms. According to Ibn ‘Arabī “the difference between attached and detached imagination is that the attached disappears with the disappearance of the imaginer, while the detached is an essential presence (*ḥaḍara dhātiyya*).” See Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makiyya*, Beirut, Dār Ṣadir, n.d, 2:312, cited in al-Kutubi, *Mullā Ṣadrā and Eschatology*, 97. He believes that the prophets and *awliyā* have access to the imaginal world and as a result are capable of objective imagination, as in the case of miracles; Yet all will have this power in the life to come. So in his eschatology, in order to make this notion more comprehensible, Mullā Ṣadrā compares the otherworldly bodies to “reflections in the mirror.” For the mirror analogy, see Shīrāzī, *Maṣāḥir al-ilāhiyyah*, 126. On the imaginal body, see Christian Jambet, *L’actre d’être: La philosophie de la révélation chez Mollâ Sadrâ* (Paris: Fayard, 2002), 296-327; Mohammed Rustom, “Psychology, Eschatology, and Imagination In Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī’s Commentary on the *Ḥadīth* of Awakening,” *Islam and Science* 5:1 (2007).

"the possessors of marvels (*aṣḥāb al-karāmāt*)"<sup>27</sup> as they reach the highest degree through substantial motion. This theme is expressed with an emphatically spiritual tone in *Wāridāt al-qalbiyya* with regard to prophetic miracles. Mullā Ṣadrā says:

The quintessence of the soul is of the same kind and origin of the spiritual world (*malakūt*) whose inhabitants are by nature influential on beings possessed of directions and sides (*jihāt and samūt*) [i.e. material substances]. This is owing to the fact that the matter and natural dispositions are under the control of the world of transcendent innovation (*al-ʿālam al-ibdāʿ*), be it out of compulsion or submission. Thus, the soul that is a flame of that fire acts in the same fashion in accordance with her capacity. Just like the flame that does the job of the fire including burning and causing other effects in accordance with its capacity. And, the first effect that appears from the essence of the soul is the body and the base of its forces and organs, with every individual soul being conscious of this mode of hers. If this seems right at first glance, so the realization of a great soul (*nafsu kabīra*) should be sufficient for administrating her territory upon a wider and longer scope in a way that the command of her control and administration over the subdued material bodies would encompass all and reach the whole world of origination and corruption (*al-ʿālam al-kawn wa al-fasād*). It was in this way that with the permission of God the fire around Abraham turned into air as He said "O fire, be cool and safe for Abraham [(Q 21:69)]."<sup>28</sup>

### c. Influencing the Material world

The power of the imagination is a good ground for the possibility of miracles in the sense of bringing into life a previously non-existent form of being, or imaginal bodies in afterlife; yet it is not enough for explaining the changes that some miracles and prayers cause in the sensible reality, such as causing rainfall or splitting the Red Sea. For this reason, Mullā Ṣadrā also identifies a particular power of the soul that he calls "practical

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<sup>27</sup> Shīrāzī, *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya*, 264.

<sup>28</sup> Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī, *al-Wāridāt al-qalbiyya wa maʿrifat al-rubūbiyya*, ed. Ahmad Shafīʿihā (Tehran: Anjuman-i falsafa-yi Īrān, 1980), 113-14.

(*'amalī*)" and relates it to "the sensory faculties (*quwā al-taḥrīkiyya*)."<sup>29</sup> Through this power,

[The soul] influences the matter of the world by abstracting the form (*ṣūra*) and stripping it of matter, and by finding it and dressing it in any way. This is how [the soul] can cause the weather to become fine, and the rain to fall and the storms to break out, and demolish a community that turned immoral and disobeyed the command of their Lord and His messengers, and cause sick people to be cured, and the thirsty to be satiated, and the beasts to subdue.<sup>29</sup>

This passage and similar ones in Mullā Ṣadrā's writings on the agency of the human soul in prayer are all followed by his insistence on the similarity between the heavenly and the human souls in influencing the material world:

And this is possible since it has been proved in theology that the matter submits to the souls and is influenced by them, and that the natural forms (*al-ṣuwar al-kawniyya*) succeed one another in the matter under the influence of the heavenly souls. And, the human souls are of the same substance as the heavenly souls, strongly resembling them, because their relation to them is like that of children to their parents. Thus, the human soul affects matter in this world although it is often through the effusion of its effect over a certain domain, that is, her body.<sup>30</sup>

In a similar passage from *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya*, Mullā Ṣadrā limits the strong resemblance between the human souls and heavenly souls to those human souls that have "gained strength,"<sup>31</sup> which in his philosophy refers to substantial motion by which the soul is promoted to a higher degree of being. Thus, souls with a high degree of existential intensity are invested with the power both to create and to influence matter. According to Mullā Ṣadrā, the perfect human or "perfect *walī*" is able to "cross over all

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<sup>29</sup> Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī, *al-Mabda' wa'l-ma'ād*, ed. Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtīyānī (Tehran: Anjuman-i shāhanshāhī-i falsafah-i Īrān, 1976/1354), 482.

<sup>30</sup> Shīrāzī, *al-Mabda' wa'l-ma'ād*, 482.

<sup>31</sup> Shīrāzī, *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya*, 343.

times and spaces and bring all things under control in the same way that the souls control bodies."<sup>32</sup> This is the domain where prayer is used as a link between the human and the divine in order to cause certain effects in the world:

And at times the soul may reach such a degree of sagacity and purification from bodily concerns and sensual pleasures that there shall be bestowed on her from the Supreme Origin (*al-mabda' al-a'lā*) such a power and dignity by which the soul becomes influential on the world of natural elements (*al-'ālam al-'anāšir*). As a result, the soul would heal the sick, sicken the evil, transform one element into another, and move those objects that she is not typically capable of moving like in unhinging the door of Khaybar [by 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib]. This is due to the fact that bodies are subject to influences by the souls.<sup>33</sup>

However, any new appearance (*badā'*)<sup>34</sup> or change along these lines would seem not only to defy the necessity of universal causal laws, but also to rival the doctrine of divine providence. Like earlier Muslim philosophers, Mullā Ṣadrā considers possible objections and his solution is similar to those of his philosophical predecessors. However, the following sections will show that although Mullā Ṣadrā follows his philosophical past masters by considering the efficacy of prayer as both one of the links in the chain of causation and part of the divine providential plan, he shapes his solution within a different philosophical framework that is deeply influenced by Ibn 'Arabī.

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<sup>32</sup> Shīrāzī, *al-Wāridāt al-qalbiyya*, 120.

<sup>33</sup> Shīrāzī, "Risalah fi'l-qaḍā' wa'l-qadar," 208.

<sup>34</sup> The Shi'ī doctrine of *badā'* refers to a new consideration by God and the possibility of change in the divine plan. It is in opposition to Sunni theology and even among Shi'ite theologians, there are different ways to approach it. See Mahmoud Ayoub, "Divine Preordination and Human Hope: a Study of the Concept of Badā' in Īmāmī Shī'ī Tradition," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 106, no. 4 (1986): 623-632; Martin J. McDermott, *The Theology of al-Shaikh al-Mufīd* (Beirut: Dar el-Mashriq éditeurs, 1978), 329-339. Also, see Colin Turner, "Aspects of Devotional Life in Twelver Shi'ism," in *Shi'ism*, ed. Paul Lutf and Colin Turner, vol. 3 (London: Routledge, 2008).



### Prayer within the Domain of Divine Providence

Mullā Ṣadrā was well aware of the theological context and controversial nature of prayer with respect to divine providence. That is the reason why most of his passages on prayer appear within his writings on divine providence and predetermination, with his main focus being on the influence of prayer on the sensible world. Following Ibn Sīnā, he attests to the efficacy of prayer and regards the agent of prayer and his invocation as "one of the causes (*asbāb wa 'ilal*) of the whole cosmos (*kawn*)."<sup>35</sup> Ibn Sīnā offers a rational explanation for the fulfilment of prayers within a causal order that is originated in the eternal knowledge of God.<sup>36</sup> According to him, the human soul is capable of exerting influence on the world in the form of miracles and receiving answers to prayers. However, in the case of prayers, "responses" (*istijābat*) are bestowed only if God finds it in agreement with the cosmic order.<sup>37</sup> Thus, prayers should not be considered as breaches in the causal order of the universe. In effect, prayers are links within the causal chain in the sense that like all the other secondary causes in the universe they play an intermediary role between the final effects and the First Cause. Ibn Sīnā explains the necessary role of prayers by using the analogy of patient and

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<sup>35</sup> Shīrāzī, *al-Ḥikmat al-muta'aliya*, 6:402.

<sup>36</sup> For Ibn Sīnā's views on the origin of creation in the divine knowledge, see Ibn Sīnā, *The Metaphysics of the Healing : a Parallel English-Arabic Text (al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifā)*, trans. and ed. Michael Marmura (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 283-291.

<sup>37</sup> Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ta'līqāt*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-miṣrīyah al-‘āmmah lil-kitāb, 1973), 47.

medication. He says that "God is the one who makes prayer the cause for the existence of a thing, just like He makes certain medicine the cause for the cure of a patient."<sup>38</sup>

In this regard, Mullā Ṣadrā also repeats a passage from Mīr Dāmād, without mentioning the author, where the latter formulates the problem of prayer as a dilemma: If the fulfilment of prayers is not determined by God, what is the point in praying to Him, and if it is, why should we take the trouble of praying in the first place?<sup>39</sup> Like his teacher, Mullā Ṣadrā turns to Ibn Sīnā for the solution and quotes several passages from the latter on the harmony between fulfilment of prayers and the divine order. Mullā Ṣadrā's position on divine providence and predetermination should be understood not only as a continuation of Ibn Sīnā's world-order in which all wills and agencies are connected in a hierarchy of powers and potentialities, but also as more meaningful within his own gradational ontology. In a short treatise on the theme of human action versus divine providence, after reviewing and evaluating major theological positions, including Mu'tazilī and Ash'arī- and the rational position of Ibn Sīnā which he praises as "the most correct" among all - he goes on to his most favoured position that he attributes to "those firmly grounded in knowledge (*al-rāsikhūn fi'l- 'ilm*)."<sup>40</sup> His account of this position is completely based on his own gradational ontology:

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<sup>38</sup> Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ta'liqāt*, 47.

<sup>39</sup> Shīrāzī, *al-Ḥikmat al-al-muta'āliya*, 6:403; *Sharḥ uṣūl al-kāfī*, 4:200-201. In these works, Mullā Ṣadrā is quoting from Muḥammad Bāqir Mīr Dāmād, *Kitāb al-qabasāt*, ed. Mehdi Mohaghegh and Charles Adams (Tehran: The Institute of Islamic Studies of McGill University, 1977), 450.

<sup>40</sup> "He it is Who has sent down to thee the Book: In it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning); they are the foundation of the Book: others are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical, seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings, but no one knows its

And the other group who are the most firmly grounded in knowledge believe that all beings regardless of their differences in the order and nobility of existence, and their diversity of essences and actions, and their variety of attributes and effects, are gathered by the one all-encompassing Divine Reality that includes all their realities and degrees...Therefore, just like there is no mode [of glory] (*sha'n*) that is not His<sup>41</sup>, there is no action that does not belong to Him...[Yet,] it is correct to attribute the action and its actualization to the servant (*'abd*) as existence and individuation (*tashakhkhus*) are attributed to him regarding their relation to the Exalted One, just like the existence of Zayd is in itself a fact which is actualized in reality while it is one of the modes (*sha'n*) of the First Reality (*al-Haqq al-awwal*).<sup>42</sup>

Mullā Şadrā also discusses the function and efficacy of prayer in his *Risalah fi'l-qaḍā' wa'l-qadar*.<sup>43</sup> After explaining the meaning of divine providence and predetermination, he

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*hidden meanings except Allah. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: "We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord:" and none will grasp the Message except men of understanding.*" (Q 3:7) Translation by Abdulla Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an* (New York: Islamic Propagation Centre International, 1946) retrieved from [http://www.searchtruth.com/chapter\\_display.php?chapter=3&translator=2&mac=](http://www.searchtruth.com/chapter_display.php?chapter=3&translator=2&mac=)

<sup>41</sup> "Of Him seeks (its need) every creature in the heavens and on earth: every day in (new) State of Glory." Translated by Muhammad Habib Shakir retrieved from [http://www.searchtruth.com/chapter\\_display.php?chapter=55&translator=3&mac=](http://www.searchtruth.com/chapter_display.php?chapter=55&translator=3&mac=)

<sup>42</sup> Şadr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Shīrāzī, *Khalq al-a'māl*, ed. Sayyid Muḥsin Yāsīn (Baghdād: Maṭba'at al-ḥawādith, 1978), 30. In his summary of philosophical issues based on Mullā Şadrā's philosophy, Fayḍ Kāshānī rephrases the above words by saying that although God has given us freedom to choose whether or not to do a particular thing, our wills all go back to His providence. See Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *Uṣūl al-ma'ārif*, ed. Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtīyānī (Qum: Daftar-i tablīghāt-i islāmī, 2006/1375 sh.), 139. For more on this issue see Jamīlah Muḥyī al-Dīn Bishtī, *Şadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī wa-mawqifuhu al-naqdī min al-madhāhib al-kalāmiyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-'ulūm al-'Arabīyah lit-ṭibā'a wa'l-nashr, 2008), 238-46.

<sup>43</sup> For Mullā Şadrā's views on providence, human action and will, see David Arnold Ede, "Mullā Şadrā and the Problem of Freedom and Determinism: A Critical Study of the *Risalah fi'l-qaḍā' wa'l-qadar*," (PhD diss., McGill University, 1978). For my references to Mullā Şadrā's *Risalah fi'l-qaḍā' wa'l-qadar*, I am using the manuscript that has been published as an appendix to the above dissertation. The only printed version of this treatise can be found under the title "al-Qaḍā' wa'l-qadar fi af'āl al-bashar" in Seyyed Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtīyānī, ed. *Rasā'il* (Qom: Maktabat al-muṣṭafawī, 1302 A.H).

proceeds to remove the ambiguity over the function of prayer in relation to providence. He criticizes an "erroneous" view according to which acts of worship and prayers are useless in a predetermined world order, and using Ibn Sīnā's frequently quoted analogy of patient and medicine, he immediately presents the gist of his description of prayer as "one among the causes of the thing prayed for."<sup>44</sup> Unlike in his writings mentioned before, here Mullā Ṣadrā does not delimit his methodology to a rational explanation based on the causal chain of creation; instead he explains the function of prayer within a context of intimacy between the Lord and His Servant:

The prayer and the answer to it are both from the command (*amr*) of God, with the servant's tongue being the interpreter (*tarjumān*), and whoever takes an action upon someone's order his hand is the hand of the command just like in the case of a king who orders some servant to punish the prince. If the hand [of the servant] were not that of the king, he would not be able to touch the king's son.<sup>45</sup>

This view of prayer as "a translation" of God's words in this treatise is a deviation from Ibn Sīnā's narrative of prayer that was the dominant one among philosophers of the time such as Mīr Dāmād. This new account resembles Ibn 'Arabī's identification of human prayer with the prayer of God and Corbin's interpretation of it in terms of "a dialogical situation."<sup>46</sup> The similarity is reinforced by Mullā Ṣadrā's many allusions in the following

<sup>44</sup> Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī, "Risālah fi'l-qaḍā' wa'l-qadar," in *Rasā'il* (Tehran: Lithographed edition, 1302 sh.), 206. Ibn Sīnā explains the necessary role of prayers by using the analogy of patient and medication. He says that "God is the one who makes prayer the cause for the existence of a thing, just like He makes certain medicine the cause for the cure of a patient." See Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ta'līqāt*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-miṣriyyah al-'amma li'l-kitāb, 1973), 47.

<sup>45</sup> Shīrāzī, "Risalah fi'l-qaḍā' wa'l-qadar," 207.

<sup>46</sup> Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, 247.

passages to Sufi figures such as Dhu'l-nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 246/859) and Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d. 334/946) who are said to have regarded prayer as a path to spiritual advancement.<sup>47</sup> In this section of the treatise, Mullā Ṣadrā emphasizes the effect of prayer on the human soul. Rather than being a mere request or petition, prayer is a worthy act of worship that leads to a higher degree of spirituality through accepting our dependence and need:

And from the benefits of prayer are the proclamation of humbleness (*dhill*) and brokenness (*inkisār*), confession to weakness and poverty, the correction of our relation of servanthood (*'ubūdiyya*) and our immersion in the excess of contingent deficiency (*nuqṣān al-imbkānī*) and the fall from the zenith of highness and sufficiency to the bottom of degradation and needfulness and poverty and fearfulness.<sup>48</sup>

Along the same lines, Mullā Ṣadrā explains that prayer will divert the attention of the soul from the body that "veils her from the Sacred World (*al-'ālam al-quds*)" toward God who would then bestow on her all that befits her.<sup>49</sup> Thus, speaking from a nobler vantage point, the function of prayer is over and above making a request, and its transforming effect on our soul is the reason why God urges us to pray as in "Call unto me and I will answer to you" (Q 40:60). In this sense, prayer is not a deviation from the providence; the act of praying is rather part of the divine wisdom to "keep the servant suspended between fear and hope."<sup>50</sup> At the cosmic level, prayer is a continuation of the primordial function of human being as the medium of divine revelation in the world.

### **The Role of the Heavenly Souls of the Spheres (*affāk*) in Human Prayers**

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<sup>47</sup> Shīrāzī, "Risalah fi'l-qaḍā' wa'l-qadar," 207-8.

<sup>48</sup> Shīrāzī, "Risalah fi'l-qaḍā' wa'l-qadar," 208.

<sup>49</sup> Shīrāzī, "Risalah fi'l-qaḍā' wa'l-qadar," 208.

<sup>50</sup> Shīrāzī, "Risalah fi'l-qaḍā' wa'l-qadar," 209.

In *Risalah fi'l-qadā' wa'l-qadar* and, more elaborately, in *al-Asfār* Mullā Ṣadrā modifies Ibn Sīnā's account of the influence of the heavenly souls. Under the section that is called "on prayer as coming itself from divine providence," Mullā Ṣadrā devotes several passages to prayers that are answered. For him, prayers can "knock on the door of the spiritual world (*malakūt*)<sup>51</sup> and impress the ears of the inhabitants therein."<sup>52</sup> Before relating Ibn Sīnā's argument, Mullā Ṣadrā offers in a nutshell his view on the relation of heavenly souls to the world below because there is a technical difference between his position on this issue and that of Ibn Sīnā. While Ibn Sīnā explains the relation between the heavenly souls and the world below as a one-way relation in which the former have only an active role, Mullā Ṣadrā believes in a mutual relationship in which the heavenly souls are impressed by the prayers, hence, the image of knocking their doors and being heard by them. He agrees with Ibn Sīnā that a nobler being cannot be directly affected by the lower ones, but diverges from him on the impressionability of the heavenly souls by adding two conditions. First, for Mullā Ṣadrā, affecting the higher being is not impossible if it is not overall and in every respect. Second, noble human souls have a more effective agency in comparison to ordinary people. He attributes to the heavenly soul a state between substances that are purely active (*fā'āl*) or merely passive (*munfā'il*).<sup>53</sup> In Ibn Sīnā's philosophy, the former state is that of the intellects (*al-'uqūl*), and the latter is attributed to the primary matter (*hayūlā*) and the

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<sup>51</sup> For the characteristics of this intermediary realm of being in the context of Islamic philosophy, especially the influence of Ibn 'Arabī and the scriptural connections of the doctrine, see Corbin, *En Islam iranien: Aspects spirituels et philosophiques*, 4 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 4:106-22.

<sup>52</sup> Shīrāzī, *al-Ḥikmat al-muta'ālīya*, 6:402.

<sup>53</sup> Shīrāzī, *al-Ḥikmat al-muta'ālīya*, 6:402-3.

bodily form (*al-ṣūrat al-jismiyya*). The heavenly (or the Spheres') souls (*al-nufūs al-falakiyya*) can only be affected by the intellects and through them by the Necessary Being (*al-wājib al-wujūd*).<sup>54</sup> Yet, Mullā Ṣadrā considers the human soul as capable of affecting the higher rank of the heavenly souls under the two conditions mentioned above. He does not argue sufficiently for his position in this context, but we can try to understand him based on his overall ontology: While in Ibn Sīnā's ontology substances are separate, for Mullā Ṣadrā "there is no complete separation in the longitudinal hierarchy of being."<sup>55</sup> Accordingly, the heavenly souls possess an ontological status between purely active intellectual beings and passive material beings. Furthermore, Mullā Ṣadrā's psychology is based on a spiritual metaphysics of descent and ascent. The human soul, though temporarily trapped in the world below, is actually from above and through substantial motion can rise above the present level of bodily attachment and enter into a state of unification (*ittiḥād*) with higher beings. Considering the ontological continuity of beings along the hierarchical/gradational ladder of existence and the possibility of ascent for the human soul, there is room in Mullā Ṣadrā's system for the impression of the human soul on the heavenly souls through prayers.

With this in mind, we can now explain the role of the Spheres with regard to those prayers that bring about changes in the physical world. In order to understand their role, one need to explain both the form of knowledge that is possible in their case, as well as

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<sup>54</sup> On Ibn Sīnā's definition of substance and his general categorization of it, see Ibn Sīnā, *The Metaphysics of the Healing: a Parallel English-Arabic Text (al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifā)*, trans. and ed. Michael Marmura (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 45-57.

<sup>55</sup> Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā and Metaphysics*, 117.

their active place in the chain of wills that precede the occurrence of events in the natural world. Mullā Ṣadrā explains heavenly knowledge and the mechanism of heavenly influence on the world by quoting Ibn Sīnā.<sup>56</sup> According to Ibn Sīnā, the heavenly souls are said to have knowledge of particular meanings (*ma'ānī al-juz'iyya*) through a kind of perception which is not purely intellective. What is realized in them is an imaginative perception of particular states and events in the world. This kind of perception shares with the intellects the active/causal function but differs from them in that the intellects only have "knowledge of particulars in a universal way,"<sup>57</sup> to the exclusion of any imaginative state and imaginative forms.

The heavenly souls are also said to exert influence on the world below through imagination. First, Mullā Ṣadrā draws on Ibn Sīnā's arguments in favour of the active role of Spheres, that is, their heavenly souls. Accordingly, the occurrence of wills (*irādāt*) behind actions and events is preceded by their non-existence, that is, they are temporally originated (*al-ḥādith al-zamānī*), so they should have causes other than either wills or the nature of the subject of the will (*al-ṭabī'at al-murīd*). What existentiates a particular will cannot be another will because this would lead to an infinite regress of wills, which is logically impossible. On the other hand, the cause cannot be a natural disposition (*ṭabī'ā*) in the willing agent because particular natures are existentiated by heavenly or earthly causes. If the cause of that particular natural disposition is a complex of heavenly and earthly causes, the philosophers' point about the role of the Spheres is proved. But, if the cause is only an earthly one, it would be temporally originated and last for a limited time,

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<sup>56</sup> Shīrāzī, *al-Ḥikmat al-muta'āliya*, 6:406-10.

<sup>57</sup> Shīrāzī, *al-Ḥikmat al-muta'āliya*, 6:407.



which means that the will at issue would be existent as long as the earthly nature is there. To sum up, Mullā Ṣadrā agrees with Ibn Sīnā that "it is owing to the gathering, interference and continuation of these [various] causes that the system [of the world] runs under the influence of the heavenly motion."<sup>58</sup>

Thus, according to Mullā Ṣadrā, for Ibn Sīnā the sufficient cause (*al-'illat al-tāmma*) of all the changes in the world consists in the hierarchical impact of causes beginning with the Necessary Being (*al-wājib al-wujūd*) down to the intellects, the heavenly souls, human souls, and natural dispositions. All changes in the world, as well as the order of natural events depend on the intermediary role of the heavenly soul owing to the existence of imaginative conceptions of events prior to their realization in the material world:

[The heavenly souls] know in the majority of particulars that mode which is the best and the fittest and the closest to the absolute good between two possible states; and we proved that the [imaginative] conceptions (*taṣawwurāt*) possessed by these causes are the origins of the existence of these forms here when they are possible, and there has not been any heavenly causes stronger than these [imaginative] conceptions. When such is the case, it would be necessary for the possible state to become existent not by an earthly cause or a natural cause in the heavens [alone] but as a certain kind of impact by these things on the heavenly affairs. Yet, this is not a real impact but the impact of the heavenly principles (*mabādī*) of the existence of this thing. So, by grasping those [universal] principles, this thing is thought, and when this thing is thought, the state which is more suitable for it will also be thought, and when it is thought, there would be no obstacle but either the nonexistence of an earthly natural cause or the existence of an[other] earthly natural cause. In the case of the nonexistence of the earthly natural cause, for example, causing heat where there is no earthly natural potential for heat, the heat would be produced by the heavenly imagination of the benefit in it, just like heat can be produced in people's bodies as a result of imagining it, which you learned before. As an example for the second possibility, that is, not only the nonexistence of the cause for heating but also the existence of a cooling

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<sup>58</sup> Shīrāzī, *al-Ḥikmat al-muta'āliya*, 6:407.

nature, the heavenly imagination of the benefit in the opposite of what is necessitated by the cooling agent would overpower the latter.<sup>59</sup>

While confirming the general framework of Ibn Sīnā's position on the causal relation between the heavenly and the earthly, and praising his attempts to show that the divine realm of providence is not affected by the things below, Mullā Ṣadrā criticizes him on two grounds. He regards the changes in the natural world in response to prayers as evidence, contrary to Ibn Sīnā's account, that the heavenly souls of the spiritual realm (*malakūt*) are impressed by the earthly domain.<sup>60</sup> This point will be explained below. Second, he criticises Ibn Sīnā for denying the existence of Platonic Ideas which he praises as the key to "the mystery of interaction" between different domains of existence.<sup>61</sup> The existence of Platonic Ideas is one of the major gaps between the philosophical systems of Ibn Sīnā and Mullā Ṣadrā.<sup>62</sup> Far from trying to argue for or against this doctrine, which is beyond the

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<sup>59</sup> Shīrāzī, *al-Ḥikmat al-muta'aliya*, 6:408.

<sup>60</sup> Shīrāzī, *al-Ḥikmat al-muta'aliya*, 6:411.

<sup>61</sup> Shīrāzī, *al-Ḥikmat al-muta'aliya*, 6:412.

<sup>62</sup> Shīrāzī, *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya*, 171-5. Platonic Ideas in Mullā Ṣadrā are similar to Ibn 'Arabī's "immutable entities (*al-'ayān al-thābita*)" as "the non-existent objects of God's Knowledge." See William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn 'Arabī's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 11. The concept "immutable entity," though originated in Platonic Ideas, is comparable to "forms of contingency" (*al-ṣuwar al-mumkināt*) in Peripatetic philosophy where Platonic Ideas are denied independent existence, and are simply transferred to the world below as forms of objects inherent in them. Ibn Sīnā's "universal nature" (*al-kullī al-ṭabī'ī*) or "unconditioned quiddity," (*māhiyya bi lā sharṭ*) which has mental existence in the mind and universal 'reality' inherent in particular objects and shared by all individuals under the same species, rivaled Platonic Ideas. For Ibn Sīnā's rejection of Platonic Ideas, see Ibn Sīnā, *The Metaphysics of the Healing*, 243-57. The most technical critical commentary on Platonic Ideas in Mullā Ṣadrā appears in 'Abd al-Rasūl 'Ubūdiyyat, *Nizām-i ḥikmat-i Ṣadrā'ī*, 2 vols. (Qom: Mu'assasah-i āmūzishī wa pizhūhishī-i Imām Khumeini, 1385 sh.), 2:170-83. See also Ibrahim Kalin, "Mullā Ṣadrā's Realist Ontology of the Intelligibles and the Theory of Knowledge," *Muslim World* 94 (2004): 90-92. On the vertical hierarchy of

scope of the present paper, I would like to emphasize its significance for Mullā Ṣadrā's view of the efficacy of prayer since it implies real correspondence between things of different existential domains along the vertical hierarchy of being, with the imaginative forms bridging between the intellective and the material. As mentioned before, in Mullā Ṣadrā's world, there are no existential gaps, but merely different grades of beings.

It is based on the gradation of being that Mullā Ṣadrā argues for the unification of intellect with the intelligible (*ittiḥād al-'āqil wa'l-ma'qūl*), imagination with the imaginal (*al-mutakhayyil wa 'l-mutakhayyal*), and sentient with the sensible (*al-ḥāss wa'l-maḥsūs*). On the whole, the unification doctrine is built on several premises such as the primacy of being as the only authentic reality, the gradation of being in different degrees of intensity, the possibility of substantial motion of the soul, and the identification of knowledge as a form of being. According to the unification doctrine, the subject of knowledge and its object are two levels of the same reality. Knowledge is the actualization of the potential knower by the immediate object of knowledge, be it sensible, imaginative or intelligible forms that in Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophy are forms of being.<sup>63</sup>

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worlds and the rank of the human soul, also see Mullā Hādī Sabzivārī, "Hidāyat al-ṭālibīn fi ma'rifat al-anbīyā' w'al-a'immat al-ma'ṣūmīn" in *Majmū'a-yi rasā'il-i fiṣṣūf-i kabīr Hāj Mullā Hādī Sabzivārī*, trans. and ed. Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Ashtīyānī (Mashhad: Mashhad University Press, 1970). Following Mullā Ṣadrā on Platonic Ideas, Sabzivārī also explains the latter's position in comparison to his predecessors in a very clear way. See Ghulām Hossein Reḏānījād, *Ḥakīm Sabzivārī* (Tehran: Kitābkhāna-yi Sanā'ī, 1371 sh.), 736-49. For a study of Ibn Sīnā's critique of Platonic Ideas, see Michael Marmura "Avicenna's Critique of the Platonists in Book VII, chapter 2 of the Metaphysics of his Healing," in *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy. From the Many to the One: Essays in Celebration of Richard M. Frank J.E. Montgomery*, ed. Michael E. Marmura (Louvain: Peeters, 2006), 355-69.

<sup>63</sup> For an analysis of the unification doctrine in Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophy, see Kalin, *Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy*, 159-165; Meisami, *Mulla Sadra*, chapter 3.

With this in mind, the unification of imagination with the imaginal should be considered as Mullā Ṣadrā's key to accepting the confluence of human souls and heavenly souls through prayer. In *Risāla fi'l-qaḍā' wa'l-qadar*, he explains the influence of the perfect human souls on the heavenly souls along the lines of *al-Asfār* by using the same arguments and terminology. He also elaborates on the influence of the heavenly souls on the human souls through imaginal unification. The heavenly souls are said to inspire the purified human souls by guiding their prayers toward a direction beneficial to the world. Thus "the relation of humility (*taḍarru'*) to summoning (*istid'ā'*) demands and the fulfilment of requests is similar to the relation between thinking and the summoning of expressions and speech. And all is emanation from above"<sup>64</sup> that happens upon the unification of the imagination of the praying soul and the imaginative conceptions of the heavenly souls who play intermediary between the human and the divine. Mullā Ṣadrā's last passage on the efficacy of prayer is a useful summary of his position on its compatibility with the providence and the role of the Spheres:

Thus, it is learned from what has been said that all the events that occur in our world emit from the Spheres' [imaginative] conceptions (*al-taṣawwurāt al-falakiyya*), the angelic intellections (*al-ta'aqqulāt al-malakiyya*) and the knowledge(s) of the Exalted One (*al-'ulūm al-subḥāniyya*). Therefore, the truly influential agent on the existence of things is nothing but the Origins' (*mabādī'*) knowledge of what is beneficial for the existent world. So, one should not be surprised by the providential knowledge (*ināyat*) of the Exalted One and His Grace concerning the betterment of the state of the creation. Learn from this the truth of miraculous affairs that descend from the First Reality (*al-Ḥaqq al-awwal*) in a special way which is denied by those philosophers who are ignorant of the invisible means which control natural dispositions (*ṭabā'ī'*).<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Shīrāzī, "Risalah fi'l-qaḍā' wa'l-qadar," 211.

<sup>65</sup> Shīrāzī, "Risalah fi'l-qaḍā' wa'l-qadar," 212.

## Conclusion

Major Islamic philosophers seem to have all confirmed an active role for human agency in causing changes in the world through praying. On the other hand, they have all considered the efficacy of prayers in harmony with divine providence. Nevertheless, Mullā Ṣadrā's position on this metaphysical harmony, though appearing to be the same as his predecessors, has a unique character due to its dependence on a different cosmological framework within which causality takes a position between the pluralistic realism of Ibn Sīnā and the existential monism of Ibn 'Arabī.<sup>66</sup> Mullā Ṣadrā's follows an organic approach in the light of the unity of all realities in being. The present paper has focused on this approach in order to show that for Mullā Ṣadrā, prayer has a real influence as a link between the macrocosm and microcosm due to the continuity between different levels of being.

Classical Islamic philosophy explains the causal relation between the created beings and the Giver of being based on necessary/contingent dualism. The world is the effect of and dependent on the First Cause in almost the same way that the agent's actions (as accidents) depend on her as a substance. According to Ibn Sīnā, "nothing comes into

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<sup>66</sup> Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophy is based on the primacy of being (*aṣālat al-wujūd*). The most systematic explanation of the primacy of being appears in *al-Mashā'ir*. See the annotated edition of it by Seyyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī in Mullā Muḥammad Ja'far Lāhijī, *Sharḥ risālat al-mashā'ir Mullā Ṣadrā*, ed. Seyyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī (Qum: Būstān-i kitāb, 1386 sh.), 163-207. For a useful introduction to *al-Mashā'ir*, see Henry Corbin, introduction to *Le livre des pénétrations métaphysiques = Kitāb al-mashā'ir* by Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Shīrāzī, trans. Henry Corbin (Paris: Verdier, 1988). For the most recent annotated translation of Mullā Ṣadrā's *al-Mashā'ir*, see Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, *The book of metaphysical penetrations: a parallel English-Arabic text*, trans. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, annot. İbrahim Kalın. 2014.

existence unless its existence is necessitated."<sup>67</sup> Mullā Ṣadrā is critical of this existential gap and, by way of objection to his past masters, says that "they have argued for a second being, trying to prove existence for the contingent next to the Being of the Real (*al-Ḥaqq*)."<sup>68</sup> For Mullā Ṣadrā,

The effect is not another thing next to its cause, and the mind cannot point to the identity of the effect separately from the cause...the mind can, however, think of the quiddity of the effect separately but we already know that the real effect is being not quiddity. Now it is clear that the existence of the effect, which is not complete in its identity, is only existent with regard to its relation to the cause. Apart from the One Transcendent Reality, every being is only a ray of the Light of His very Being...He is the Real and the rest are His manifestations. He is the Light and the rest are the streaks of that Light.<sup>69</sup>

Nevertheless, the relational (*rabṭī*) state of the created world does not imply its illusoriness for Mullā Ṣadrā. Everything in the world including the immaterial and material, substantial and accidental are relational in the sense that in their reality they are only manifestations of the One who is Absolute (*muṭlaq*) and Independent (*mustaqil*). Far from being illusions, the manifestations are different grades and intensities of the same reality, i.e. being. "The doctrine of gradation not only supports the reality of diversity, but also points out the all-encompassing simplicity of being qua being."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-najāt*, 262.

<sup>68</sup> Shīrāzī, *al-Ḥikmat al-muta'ālīya*, 1:330.

<sup>69</sup> Lāhījī, *Sharḥ risālat al-mashā'ir Mullā Ṣadrā*, 450. This quotation and the one before it are translated by Meisami, *Mulla Sadra*, 39-40.

<sup>70</sup> Sayeh Meisami, "Mulla Sadra," in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, October 2013, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/sadra/> (accessed April 10, 2014). on the tension between monism and pluralism, see Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā and Metaphysics: Modulation of Being*, 120-4. Bonmariage, *Le réel et les réalités: Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī et la structure de la réalité*, 139-51.

According to Mullā Şadrā, "the Simple Reality (*al-basiṭ al-ḥaqīqa*) is all things but none of those things in particular."<sup>71</sup>

This metaphysical paradox of diversity in unity is the background against which Mullā Şadrā's discussion of prayer can be best understood. The above mentioned doctrine of the existential dependence on the part of the beings in the world as relational, together with the gradational reality of those beings form a conceptual framework within which Mullā Şadrā tries to solve problems in areas where philosophy and theology overlap. One of the most significant issues of this type is the nature of the God-world relationship. As we have seen so far in this paper, the efficacy of prayer is related to the God-world relationship and Mullā Şadrā's answer to the problems that rise from attesting to this efficacy is based on his view of the dynamics of that relationship.

As discussed in the paper, every action associated with a free agent, though dependent on the will of God, also possesses a degree of reality just like every being is a flash of the light of God. It is in this context that the Qur'anic verse (8:17) can be interpreted not as the dismissal of human action, but as regarding human agency as a degree of the Absolute agency of God.<sup>72</sup> Along the same lines, the efficacy of prayer is appreciated in its own right as a flame from the fire of the divine act. For Mullā Şadrā, to

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<sup>71</sup> Shīrāzī, *al-Ḥikmat al-muta'āliya*, 6:111. For more on this doctrine, see Ghulām Ḥossein Ibrāhīmī Dīnānī, *Qawā'id-i falsafa-yi islāmī*, 3 vols. (Tehran: Mu'assasa-yi muṭāla'āt wa taḥqīqāt-i farhangī, 1370 sh.), 1:108-15.

<sup>72</sup> "It is not ye who slew them; it was Allah: when thou threwest (a handful of dust), it was not thy act, but Allah's: in order that He might test the Believers by a gracious trial from Himself: for Allah is He Who heareth and knoweth (all things)" (8:17). Abdullah Yusuf Ali, trans, [http://www.searchtruth.com/chapter\\_display.php?chapter=8&translator=2&mac=](http://www.searchtruth.com/chapter_display.php?chapter=8&translator=2&mac=)

be existentially dependent on God would not contradict the reality of beings; nor would it contradict the reality of our wills, wishes, and actions.

With the above in mind, I can now summarize Mullā Ṣadrā's position on prayer in terms of its dual effect on the inner and outer worlds: Prayer as the invocation of the human soul to higher ranks of existence can be effective in the sense of diverting the course of natural events to a particular direction desired by the soul. The will to change is not wayward but inspired by the heavenly souls to the benefit of the world at large. However, the relationship between the human and the heavenly souls is not a one-way relation; nor can we interpret the heavenly inspiration as a mechanical inculcation of ideas with the human soul having a merely instrumental role. Rather, the relationship is mutual owing to the existential parallelism between the imaginative forms of the two realms. This is made possible owing to the substantial evolution of the soul through which the faculty of imagination gains the power to create imaginative forms that correspond to the imaginal entities of the spiritual realm. The human soul also has the power to cause changes in the material world. While the result of change in this case is to be distinguished from the creation of imaginative forms by the imaginative faculty, the process is similarly based on the existential correspondence between two grades of being, that is, the sensible forms created by the faculty of sensation parallel to the substantial forms which are bestowed on matter by the heavenly souls.

Thus, for Mullā Ṣadrā the creative power of the human soul is the key to the efficacy of prayer. Like spirituality (*rūḥāniyyat*) itself, creativity is only potential in the beginning and needs to be actualized once the soul reaches the high stages of her substantial evolution. Naturally, only certain souls manage to reach such heights including prophets,



Imams and *awliyā* as previously explained. On the other hand, the prayer is not only efficacious when originating in great souls, but also it has the power to help the process of existential advancement by increasing the average soul in humbleness and directing her attention towards the spiritual domain above.