



The Chapter Regarding Gnosis of the Fundamentals"

Imam al-Hādi ila al-Haqq Yahya bin al-Hussein

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By

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Translation's Introduction

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful...

All praise is due to Allah, the Exalted and Majestic; the One who has no partners or associates; the One who provides the light of guidance to His slaves so that they may attain spiritual perfection and illumination by means of it. May Allah send His choicest blessings upon His slave and seal of the Messengers, Muhammad bin 'Abdullah. May Allah bless his pure Progeny, righteous Companions, and those that follow them in excellence until the Day of Judgment. As to what follows...

The knowledge regarding the fundamentals of religion is considered the basis of the religious sciences. Without this knowledge, the performance of ritual actions is void and without meaning. Indeed, it is considered an obligation to have a proper understanding of those things that it is obligatory to believe in and perform. Allah, the Exalted says in His Book: {The only ones who fear Allah amongst His slaves are the knowledgeable ones} (Q. 35:28).

This concept was further elucidated by contemporary scholar, Dr. Al-Murtad'a bin Zayd al-Mahatwari said in his *Mukhtasar fīl- 'Aqīda*:

It is obligatory for every morally responsible person to know that which establishes his religion. One of the most important and greatest of these things is knowledge of Allah, the Glorified and Exalted. Islam and its pillars cannot be established except after attaining gnosis of the Creator, the Majestic and Supreme. In these lines, we are able to bring the novice closer to some aspects of correct creed, if Allah wills.

That being the case, it is logical that Imam al-Hādi Yahya bin al-Hussein, upon him be peace, would begin one of his two monumental works on jurisprudence, *Al-Muntakhab*. He wrote this book after being called to Yemen to serve as its imam. It was therefore necessary for him to present the foundations of the faith in a simple way. Unlike his multi-voluminous magnum opus, *Kitāb al-Ahkām fīl-Halāl wal-Harām*, which he wrote in the Hejaz prior to Yemen, his *Al-Muntakhab* was a fraction of the size and was set up in a question-answer format. This allowed it to be easily understood by adepts.

The present chapter is a brief introduction to *Al-Muntakhab*. It focuses on the foundation of the religion and is situated in a way in which the imam is answering the sincere inquiries of a student.

We pray that the reader is able to benefit from this translation and gain some beneficial knowledge concerning the content of this brief chapter of theology. We have attempted to stay close to a literal translation of the original meaning but yet evoke the use of idiomatic expressions when needed. If there are any mistakes, they are ours and if you are able to benefit, the praise belongs to Allah.

Imam ar-Rassi Society
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Translation of *Bab Ma'rifat al-Usūl* from *Al-Muntakhab*:

In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Gracious...

Amongst the first questions that were asked to the imam was: “O Imam, may Allah be pleased with you, what do you say is the first thing that Allah makes religiously compulsory upon His slaves?”

He replied: “The first thing that Allah makes religiously compulsory upon His slaves is Gnosis of Him¹.”

“What is the foundation of Gnosis?”

“The foundation of the Gnosis of Allah is His Divine Oneness (*at-Tawhīd*).”

“What is the perfection of the Gnosis of Divine Oneness?”

“It is to negate all of the attributes of likeness from Him².”

“Could you elucidate for me with a short, simple statement how does one negate the attributes of likeness from Allah?”

“Yes, *insha-Allah*. Know, may Allah be merciful to you, that He cannot be imagined by the imaginers. Nor can they liken Him by their minds with any similarity to the Divine Essence of Allah except that Allah differs from what they imagine and liken Him to. The Witness to this as well as the proof of this is the statement of Allah, the Blessed and Exalted: {He is unlike anything. He is the All-Hearing, All-Seeing} (Q. 42:11). If one understands this, this would be sufficient.”

“Then, what is after this?”

”It is that you know that He is All-Just in all of His actions³.”

“Then, what is after this?”

“It is that you know that He does not differ in His Divine Promises and Divine Threats⁴. These terms makes it evident to you as a proof for Gnosis of your Lord. Understand and contemplate it.”

“I have understood this. What is after that?”

“It is gnosis of the establishment of Prophethood and from where it was established⁵.”

“Could you elucidate that for me?”

“Know that Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, created creation and placed intellect in them as a proof for or against them. He placed it in them and demonstrated it in them by means of the effects of His creation and what He created. However, it was not possible for Him to demonstrate to them His desire to command or prohibit them by this. This is because this demonstration is not amongst His attributes. Therefore, creation is in need of a means of demonstrating to them what Allah desires from them.

This is why Allah makes it known that it is a proof for creation. This is so that it makes it necessary to convey to them and establish rulings upon them. This was by means of sending the prophets as a proof to them. If He had not sent the prophets, creation would have a proof against Him. It is as Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, says—in a way to repudiate the repudiators and to respond to the critics: {...so that men will not have an argument against Allah after the Messengers...} (Q. 4:165). Also, so that they may not say: {...There has not come to us a bringer of good news or a bringer of warning!} (Q. 5:19). Therefore, Allah sent His Messengers as a proof against

His creation. They were to teach His creation what they needed, and it was necessary that they be from amongst them. This should be sufficient for you.”

“I have understood the establishment of Prophethood. What is after that?”

“It is gnosis of the establishment of the Imamate, as well as the statements concerning it and from where the Imamate is established⁶.”

“Could you elucidate for me with a short, simple statement until I understand?”

“The answer to that can be found in what preceded. It is that Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, created creation and placed in them intellect. However, He did not demonstrate His Will to them. Creation is in need of a means of demonstrating His Will to them. Therefore, He sent Messengers to them as a proof.

Then, after the Messenger is the imam who takes the place of the Messenger once the Messengership is finalized. He is not ignorant of any of the [the Messenger’s] actions and rulings. The one who was after the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, and has these characteristics is the imam. The whole Muhammadan Community (*al-ummah*) can bear witness from the narrated reports that no one after the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, embodied these characteristics except *Amīr al-Muminīn*, ‘Ali bin Abi Ṭālib⁷, may Allah be pleased with him.”

“How did the whole Muhammadan Community bear witness to that regarding ‘Ali?”

“They all collectively narrate that the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, said to his Companions: ((The most expert amongst you regarding the Qur’ān is Ubayy. The most expert amongst you regarding the laws of distribution is Zayd. The most expert amongst you regarding judgments is ‘Ali))⁸. The knowledge of judgments encompasses the Qur’ān, distribution laws, and all other laws.

They all collectively narrate that the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, said: ((‘Ali is to me as Aaron was to Moses, except that there will be no prophet after me))⁹. By his statement, he, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, demonstrated that ‘Ali was his successor in all of his affairs just as Aaron was Moses’ successor in all of his affairs.

They all collectively agree that the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, formed brotherhoods between the Muslims. He formed a fraternal connection between Abu Bakr and ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān and ‘Abdur-Rahmān bin ‘Awf, Talha and az-Zubayr, Sa’d and Sa’īd, and others amongst the Muslims. Ali then said: ‘O Messenger of Allah, you have formed brotherhoods between the Muslims but left me?’ The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, said to him: ((O Ali, are you not pleased to be my brother?)) Then, he made ‘Ali his brother.

Similarly, Kādih bin Ja’far¹⁰ narrated that the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, said: ((O ‘Ali, you are my brother and intimate in Paradise)). All of that from the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, is a proof for ‘Ali. This is because he was the imam after him. So, understand.

Similarly, he, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, indicated that concerning al-Hassan and al-Hussein by his statement: ((They are the masters of the youths of Paradise, but their father is greater than them.¹¹ The *Mahdi* is from their descendants)). He also said to Fātima during his illness in a long *hadīth*: ((By He in whose Hand is the soul of Muhammad, the *Mahdi* of this community is from us))¹². All of this from Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, proves that the Imamate belongs to the *Ahl al-Bayt*, the children of Fātima.

We have elucidated and explained that the Imam is from the children of Fātima. He must be willing to sacrifice himself, unsheathe his sword, call to the Book of his Lord, be strong in Allah, be trustworthy regarding the rulings and resources of Allah, and be scrupulous regarding his religion. This is how the Imamate is known, so understand.”

“Then, what is after that?”

“It is the research and examination concerning the lawful and unlawful in all of the religion.”

¹ The obligation of the gnosis of Allah is established by the Qur'ān, the *Sunnah*, and the statements of the imams of *Ahl al-Bayt*.

Regarding the Book of Allah, the Exalted states: {Allah testifies that there is no god but He; as do the angels and those of knowledge} (Q. 3:18); {Know that there is no God but Allah} (Q. 47:19); and {I did not create *jinn* and humans except to worship [i.e. to know] Me} (Q. 51:56).

Regarding the *Sunnah*, it is narrated that a man asked the Prophet: "What deed is the best?" He, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, replied: ((Knowledge of Allah)). The man then asked, "After that, which action is the best?" He replied: ((Knowledge of Allah)). The man asked the same question the third time and the answer was the same.

Regarding the statements of the imams of *Ahl al-Bayt*, Imam 'Ali bin Abi Ṭālib, may Allah ennoble his face, said: "First priority in the religion is gnosis of Him." Imam Zayn al-'Abidīn 'Ali bin al-Hussein, upon them be peace, said: "Know that the worship of Allah is preceded by gnosis of Him." Imam al-Qāsim ar-Rassi, upon him be peace, said: "Worship is based upon three principles: Gnosis of Allah, knowledge of what pleases and angers Him, and following what pleases Him while refraining from what angers Him."

² It is narrated on the authority of Ibn al-'Abbās and Ad-Ḍahāk that a man came to the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, and asked: "What gnosis of Allah is true gnosis?" The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, replied: ((It is that you know that He has no likeness and comparison. It is that you know that there is One God, the First and Last, the Hidden and the Manifest. He has no equal or likeness)).

³ Allah's being All-Just is established by the Qur'ān, the *Sunnah*, and the statements of the *Ahl al-Bayt*.

Regarding the Book, the Exalted says: {Allah does not commit injustice; even an atom's weight} (Q. 4:40); {Allah does not desire injustice for His slaves} (Q. 40:31); and {Verily, Allah is not unjust to man a bit. But, it is he that is unjust to himself} (Q. 10:44).

Regarding the *Sunnah*, it is narrated in a *hadīth qudsi* that the Exalted said to the Messenger, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny: ((I have made injustice prohibited upon Myself as well as My slaves)).

Regarding the statements of the imams of *Ahl al-Bayt*, Imam 'Ali bin Abi Ṭālib, may Allah ennoble his face, said: "It is not for Allah to do injustice to his slaves." He also said: "I bear witness that he is the most Just of the just!" and "He raises His slave from injustice."

⁴ The establishment of the Divine Threat and promise is in the Qur'ān, *Sunnah*, and statements of the *Ahl al-Bayt*.

Regarding the Book of Allah, the Exalted says: {And who is truer in speech than Allah?} (Q. 4:87); {"This is what the Most-Merciful has promised! The Messengers spoke the truth!"} (Q. 36:52); and {Who is truer in His promises than Allah?!} (Q. 9:111).

Regarding the *Sunnah*, the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, addressed the dead disbelievers at Badr and asked: ((Did you find what Allah promised you to be true?! We have found what Allah promised us to be true!))

Regarding the statements of the imams of *Ahl al-Bayt*, Imam 'Ali, may Allah ennoble his face, said regarding Allah: "He [i.e. Allah] is the One who is truthful in what He promises."

⁵ The truthfulness of Prophethood is established in the Qur'ān, *Sunnah*, and statements of the *Ahl al-Bayt*.

Regarding the Book of Allah, the Exalted says: {Say: "We believe in Allah, and the revelation sent to us, and to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to all prophets from their Lord: We make no difference between them. And we bow to Allah"} (Q. 2:136).

Regarding the *Sunnah*, when the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, was asked "What is belief (*al-imān*)?" he said: ((It is that you believe in Allah, His Angels, His Books, His Messengers, and the Last Day)).

Regarding the statements of the imams of *Ahl al-Bayt*, Imam 'Ali, may Allah ennoble his face, said regarding the Prophets, upon them be peace: "The Glorified chose from the sons [of Adam] Prophets to take upon the contract of Prophetic inspiration and the trust of the deliverance of the Divine Message when the majority of creation substituted the contract of Allah."

⁶ The establishment of the Imamate is in the Qur'ān, *Sunnah*, and statements of the *Ahl al-Bayt*.

Regarding the Book of Allah, the Exalted states: {O you who believe, obey Allah, obey the Messenger and the holders of authority among you} (Q. 4:59); {And We made from them imams guiding by Our command because of their patience and they were certain of Our signs} (Q. 32:24); and {Charity [i.e. *zakāt*] is only for the poor, destitute, the ones **charged with collecting it...**} (Q. 9:60).

Regarding the *Sunnah*, the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him and his progeny, said: ((Whoever dies without knowing the Imam of his time dies the death of pre-Islamic ignorance (*jāhiliya*)); ((Whoever dies without the pledge of allegiance [to an imam] on his neck dies the death of pre-Islamic ignorance)); and ((This affair [i.e. rule] will remain with the Quraysh, even if there are only two people left)).

Regarding the statements of the imams of *Ahl al-Bayt*, Imam al-Qāsim ar-Rassi, upon him be peace, said: "In the Qur'ān is the proof for the Imamate against whomever may oppose it, and it establishes it." Imam al-Hādī ila al-Haqq, upon him be peace, said: "Know that it proves that the Imamate is Allah's contract upon whoever has taken it upon themselves, and it is the Glorified's judgment upon them."

⁷ The establishment of the Guardianship (*al-Wilāyat*) of Imam 'Ali bin Abi Ṭālib is in the Qur'ān, *Sunnah*, and statements of the *Ahl al-Bayt*.

Regarding the Book of Allah, the Exalted: {Verily your only Guardian is Allah, His Messenger, and those who believe--those who establish the prayer and pay the alms (*Zakāt*) while bowing.} (Q. 5:55)--[Ibn 'Abbās said that this verse was revealed concerning 'Ali].

Regarding the *Sunnah*, it is mass-transmitted that the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, said: ((Whomever I have authority over, 'Ali has authority over. O Allah, help those that help him and oppose those that oppose him! Assist those that assist him, and abandon those that abandon him!))

Regarding the statements of the imams of *Ahl al-Bayt*, Imam 'Ali, may Allah ennoble his face, was reported to have said regarding the previous Caliphs: "We were upset with them that they should assume rule over us because we are the Progeny of the Messenger of Allah, but we forgave them for that." Imam Zayd bin 'Ali, upon him be peace, said: "'Ali, may Allah bless him, had more right over the people by Allah and His Messenger, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny. He was their imam after their Prophet." Imam al-Qāsim ar-Rassi, upon him be peace, said: "The imam that it was obligatory to obey after the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, was 'Ali bin Abi Ṭālib, may Allah be merciful and pleased with him."

⁸ This narration, known as the *Hadīth* of the Jurist (*al-Qāḍā*), appears with various wordings in texts such as *Fat-hal Bāri Sharh Sahīh al-Bukārī and Sunan Ibn Mājah*.

⁹ Imam Majiddīn al-Mu'ayyadī narrated in his *Lawāmi' al-Anwār* concerning the narrations of this *hadīth*:

Regarding the remaining groups of the Community, the great Imam al-Hujjah 'Abdullah bin Hamza, upon him be peace, said: "In the well-known books of the opponents, it is narrated with forty chains other than the narrations of the Shi'ites and the *Ahl al-Bayt*."

¹⁰ Imam Ibn Abi Hātim narrated in his *Al-Jahr wa at-Ta'dīl* regarding Kādih bin Ja'far that Ahmed bin Hanbal said: "There is no problem with him." Imam adh-Dhahabi said in his *Mīzan al-'iḍāl*:

Abu Hātim said: "He is extremely truthful (*saddūq*)." Al-Azdi said: "He is weak." Ahmed bin Hanbal said: "He was a righteous man."

Regarding the opinion of al-Azdi, Ibn Hajar said in his introduction to *Fat-hul Bāri*: "One does not rely upon al-Azdi when he is alone. How much more so, when he is opposed?!"

¹¹ Imam as-Suyūti said in his *Al-Jāmi' as-Saghīr* regarding this *hadīth*: "It is mass-transmitted."

¹² Imam Ahmed narrated in his *Musnad* as well as Ibn Mājah in his *Sunan*, on the authority of Imam 'Ali, may Allah ennoble his face:

The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, said: ((The Mahdi is from the *Ahl al-Bayt*. Allah will grant him victory at night)).

Imam Abu Dawūd narrated in his *Sunan* on the authority of Umm Salama:

I heard the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny, say: ((The Mahdi is from my Descendants. He is from the offspring of Fātima)).

Imam at-Tabarāni narrated in his *Al-Mu'jam al-Aswat* on the authority of Imam 'Ali, may Allah ennoble his face:

I asked the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny: "O Messenger of Allah, will the Mahdi be from us or other than us?" He replied: ((Indeed, he shall be from us. Allah will seal it by us just as He began it by us)).