Mulla Ṣadrā’s imāma/walāya: An Aspect of His Indebtedness to Ibn ʿArabī

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This brief paper examines the role of the Shaykh al-Akbar Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240) in the formation of Mulla Ṣadrā’s thought, by examining the short passages that he quotes from an Akbarian text.

Ibn ʿArabī’s thought has been widely disseminated in Muslim countries from Andalusia to China.1 The philosophy of Mulla Ṣadrā (d. 1640) was also heavily influenced by the worldview of Ibn ʿArabī, often epitomized in the doctrine of the Oneness of Existence (wahdat al-wujūd).2 All existents are different manifestations of the Absolute, which is technically explained as manifestations of the absolute non-articulated Existence. However different they are, all existents are one in the sense that all are different manifestations of the same Absolute. Mulla Ṣadrā reformulates this mystical intuition in his philosophy and presents the thesis of the Primacy of Existence (aṣālat al-wujūd).3 He grasps different existents as different modes or different articulations of one Reality, namely, Existence, giving them their reality with different shades of meaning. Their identities, insofar as they are different from others, derive from their corresponding different quiddities (māhiyya), which are

1 Ibn ʿArabī’s influence covers a wide range of historical and geographical settings. A recent publication easily convinces us of his great influence on later generations. See Catalog for the Printed Books of the School of Ibn ʿArabī Collected in Japanese Libraries, ed. Tonaga Yasushi and Nakanishi Tatsuya, Center for Islamic Area Studies at Kyoto University, 2010 [Mostly in Japanese with bibliographical information in original scripts].


3 On the issue of the position and relation of existence (wujūd) and quiddity (māhiyya), Izutsu gives a clear survey of Islamic philosophy in his “The Fundamental Structure of Sabzawārī’s Metaphysics,” The Concept and Reality of Existence, 57–149.
mentally constructed in the human mind. Through their quiddities, non-articulated Existence transforms itself into actual things different from each other. Similar to Ibn 'Arabi's worldview, Mullâ Şadrâ intuits unity or oneness in different existents of the phenomenal world in the depth of pure Existence. In this way, Ibn 'Arabi and Mullâ Şadrâ share the same kind of mystical intuition, that is to say, the actual phenomenal world seemingly consists of many different things, but is one in the real sense, because seemingly different things are simply different manifestations of the same Absolute or Existence.

In Ibn 'Arabi's thought, the idea of the Perfect Man (al-insân al-kâmîl) also plays an important role as a mediator of the process of the self-manifestation of the Absolute in the actual world. A hierarchy of a series of Perfect Men spiritually controls the world. In his discussion of the spiritual hierarchy, Ibn 'Arabi introduces such various notions as messengership (risâla), prophethood (nubuwwa), and sainthood (walâya), in addition to Sufi terms like pole (qutb), pillars (awtâd), and substitutes (abdâl). His idea of spiritual hierarchy has enormously influenced later Islamic mysticism, as well as Shi'i mystical philosophy, in which Mullâ Şadrâ's work is counted.

It is clear that Mullâ Şadrâ is heavily indebted to his great predecessor Ibn 'Arabi, especially in his formulation of the Primacy of Existence, which has a cardinal significance in his philosophy. Although the concept of al-insân al-kâmîl or walâya may not occupy such an important position as wujûd in his system of thought, Mullâ Şadrâ discusses the issue in some of his works.

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In his *al-Shawahid al-Rubūbiyya* [Divine witnesses], one of the smaller compendia of his philosophical system, Mullā Ṣadrā deals with various topics on prophethood and, in its last part, with sainthood. In the present study, I take the idea of prophethood, or sainthood, and show Mullā Ṣadrā’s indebtedness to Ibn ’Arabī in a more concrete way.

**Mullā Ṣadrā’s Idea of Sainthood**

The human being who attains a degree of perfection combines in himself the three worlds that correspond to the different principles of cognition of sensation, imagination, and intellection. He who reaches the stage of comprehensiveness (*jamā‘iyat*) of the perfection at these three levels is one of the very few men who has the status of the divine vicegerency (*al-khilāfa al-ilāhiyya*) and is entitled to the leadership (*riyāsā*) of human beings (*khalq*). He is called a messenger (*rasūl*) of God. Thus, the person who combines three levels of perfection in himself can be called a prophet in a general way.

According to his emanative cosmic view, all knowledge is eternally recorded (predetermination, *qadar*) in the Preserved Tablet, which is never altered. From the Tablet located at the intellective level, the noble tablets at the psychic level receive emanation in the form of imaginal forms. When human souls establish a connection with the noble tablets, they receive the imaginal forms, which are knowledge of the particulars. The knowledge that the messengers of God transmit to people can be explained as emanation of realities from the One with the intermediary of the Preserved Tablet and the psychic tablets.


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6 *al-Shawahid al-Rubūbiyya fi l-manahij al-sulakīyya*, ed. Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshṭiyānī (Mashhad: Dānīshgāh-i Mashhad, 1346/1967). This work is referred to in the following notes as *Shawahid*.

7 Discussion in this section is based on a part of my previous study, “Mullā Ṣadrā’s Notion of Prophecy (*nubūwah*) in the Context of Spiritual Perfection of Soul,” which I presented for International Colloquium “Cordoba and Isfahan” in April 2002 in Isfahan, Iran.

8 *Shawahid*, 344.

9 Ibid., 341.

10 Ibid., 346.
channels are specific to the ordinary speculative thinkers (nuẓẓār), saints (awliyā'), and prophets (anbiyā'), respectively. The common characteristic that acquisition and inspiration share is the knowledge acquired through either channel; a knowledge that is based on the emanation of forms of knowledge (fayāḍān al-ṣuwār al-īlmiyya). The only difference is the ways the veils disappear and its direction. In a similar way, the difference between inspiration and revelation is a matter of degree; namely, difference of intensity of clarity (wuḍūḥ) and of luminosity (nūriyya). They are common in receiving knowledge through angels, that is, the productive intellects (al-ʿuqūl al-faʿāla), and the difference between them is that one (i.e., revelation) is accompanied with the vision of an angel, while the other is not. In this way, the substance of the revelatory knowledge consists of emanated forms, just as that of speculative thinkers, but it completely differs in its intensity from knowledge of inspiration or acquisition.\footnote{Ibid., 348-349.}

Of all creatures, human beings unite in themselves angelic and animal aspects, and are higher in degree than either angels or beasts because of their comprehensiveness. Among the various groups of human beings are those who sit on the common border between the world of the intelligible and that of the sensible. They are sometimes with the Absolute (al-Ḥaqq) in His love, and sometimes with creatures (khalq) in mercy (raḥma, shafaqa) to them. They are messengers (mursalīn) and saints (ṣiddiqīn).\footnote{Ibid., 355.} They comprehend in themselves the two aspects, namely, the intelligible realm and the sensible. They can receive divine messages and give proper guidance to their fellow men. They can communicate either with God or with creatures. Thus, they are men who have the most comprehensive ability, and, therefore, occupy the highest position among creatures. The prophets or the messengers of God come under this category of human beings. In Mullā Ṣadrā's understanding, prophets in general have two kinds of specific abilities; one is the ability to receive knowledge from the Preserved Tablet, and the other is a keen sense perception that affects matter and causes miracles.\footnote{Ibid., 356.}

Mullā Ṣadrā elucidates the necessity of prophets in the following way: Human beings cannot live as isolated individuals,
and civilization, society, and cooperation are necessary for them when they live in this world (duńyā). They are essentially social beings. Without the regulation of the social life, they would violently compete with each other; all of them would perish and their progeny would cease to exist. The divine law (shar’ī) is absolutely necessary for the existence of human beings. From the necessity of shar’, a lawgiver (shārī) is naturally indispensible. A lawgiver must be human, because angels cannot properly work on the earth to teach human beings and animals cannot lead them because of their lower status.\footnote{Ibid., 359–360.}

In sum, the prophet is a comprehensive existent who comprises in himself perfection at the intellective, psychic, and sensual levels. He receives knowledge as emanation from the Absolute One with the intermediary of the cosmologic psychic tablets. At the same time, as a human being, he communicates his knowledge, or sharī’a to his fellow people with miracles if necessary.

**Mullā Šadrā’s Adaptation of Ibn ‘Arabī’s Text**

As discussed, divine law and its transmitter, namely the prophet, are indispensible for human existence. The question arises, how do human beings order their lives once the prophet passed away? Divine law that the Prophet left is enough. This is one possible answer. But there are those who are not satisfied with this answer and search for an extension of the idea of a prophet. In addition to Ibn ‘Arabī, Mullā Šadrā in particular and Shi‘a in general are among them.

In the last section of the *Shawahid al-rububiyya*,\footnote{Ibid., 376–379.} Mullā Šadrā discusses the problem of the continuation of prophethood. This section is an almost complete quotation from Ibn ‘Arabī’s magnum opus, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (*Meccan Revelations*), though the name of the original writer is not mentioned.\footnote{Ibid., 377. On this reference and others, A. K. Moussavi comments: “The words [muṭtahid and faqih] seem to be used in a much broader sense than their technical meaning” in his *Religious Authority in Shi‘ite Islam—From the Office of Mufti to the Institution of Marja‘* (Kuala Lumpur, 1996), 122 with reference to the usage in Mullā Šadrā’s *Arshiyya*. The word *ijtihād* (mašdar of muṭtahid) is used in the sense of the spiritual efforts toward the perfection of the soul as found in Mullā Šadrā’s *al-Hikma al-muta‘aliyya fi l-asfar al-aqliyya al-arba‘a* (Qum: Maktabat al-Mustafawi, n.d.), 5:197 and 347, not}
With regard to the continuation of prophethood, Mullâ Şadrâ in the sense of Islamic jurisprudence. However, from one of Mullâ Şadrâ's minor works, the Kitâb al-arshiyya (Arabic edition and Persian translation by Ghulâm Husayn Ahani [Isfahan: Intishârât-i Mahdawi, n.d.], 64; English translation by J. W. Morris in The Wisdom of the Throne—An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mullâ Şadrâ (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 233–234), we know that 'ulama' (fuqaha in another reading in the footnote) and mujtahids are the followers of the Prophet (nabi) and his Trustee (wâsi), both in the rational sciences ('ulum 'aqliyya) and in the legal understanding (furru'îyya) until the Resurrection. About the 'ulama's authority, another of his works, al-Mabda' wa-l-maad, ed. S. J.-D. Ashtiyâni (Tehran: Anjuman-i Shâhanshâhi-yi Falsafa-yi İrân, 1354S/1976), 489 mentions that the 'ulama' are mediators (wasâ'î) between the Imams and the general believers (awamm).

In the same paragraph (377) of the Shawâhid where appears the word mujtahid to which the present note refers, Mullâ Şadrâ, based on Ibn 'Arabi, states that they (ahl al-dhikr, taken from Q 16:43, i.e., musbashhir, imam and mujtahid in his context) give him (who lacks knowledge) formal legal opinions (yûtûna-hu) through that to which their independent judgment (ijtihad) leads, and again, that to everyone a mujtahid provides law (shîrâ) out of his proof (dalîl). He also writes on the following page (378) that after the awliya' take it (al-warâtha; divine inheritance) as the Prophet's inheritance, the scholars of formalities ('ulama' al-rusûm) take it (al-warâtha) in place of forefathers (I read khalafl an 'an salafin, based on Ibn 'Arabi's text, instead of salafan 'an khalaflin in Mullâ Şadrâ's) until the Day of Resurrection.

In the Shawâhid and some of his other works, Mullâ Şadrâ presents his discussion on the mujtahid in a framework of Islamic legal thinking, namely, that a mujtahid is qualified as a scholar of the formal aspect of religion, with a function of giving a fatwa. From his several references above to mujtahid, we may infer that in Mullâ Şadrâ's understanding, the 'ulama', or mujtahids, serve as intermediaries between the Imams and the general believers until the Day of Resurrection and that their important function is that of the Islamic jurists as the heirs of the Prophetic authority.

Mullâ Şadrâ does not discuss law a great deal and, therefore, gives us no clear view of his understanding of it. However, his sporadic references to legal matters, in which he seems to use the word ijtihad in a legal sense, may lead us to understand that he is sympathetic to a rational type of jurisprudence in which ijtihad has a significant role. Since the passages that refer to mujtahid in the Shawâhid are based on Ibn 'Arabi's text, the opinion expressed there may not exactly reflect Şadrâ's own idea. However, he quotes them from Ibn 'Arabi without alteration while he changed the texts in other quotations where he thought changes necessary. It seems to me, therefore, that Mullâ Şadrâ accepts the authority of mujtahids as heirs of the Prophet and Imams. His position might be close to that of the Shi'i Usuli school, though he has no clear reference to Uṣûli or Akhbarî legal positions. Sajjad H. Rizvi's judgment of Mullâ Şadrâ's legal position may be what we can say in the present state of research. Cf. Sajjad H. Rizvi, Mullâ Şadrâ Shirazi: His Life and Works and the Sources for Safavid Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 45.
(based on Ibn 'Arabi) states that, though prophets or messengers of God disappear from the earth and their message of God's revelation is interrupted with their death, “Prophethood (nubuwwa) and messengership (risāla), insofar as their quiddities and essential mode (ḥukm) are concerned, neither cease to be nor perish.”17 He thinks that a certain essential part of prophethood is enduring and continues in different forms. Even after the disappearance of the prophets or the messengers, the prophetic authority remains in the form of bringers of good news (mubashshirat), the infallible Imams (al-ʿimma al-maʿṣūmin), and expert jurists (mujtahidīn), though the titles of prophet or messenger are not applicable to them.

As he mentions, “Saints (awliyāʾ) have an especially large fountain in this messengership (risāla),”18 the saints of God have very close common characteristics with the prophets and messengers. The term “prophethood” (nubuwwa) in this context of his thought is used either as that of the prophets in a specific sense, namely, as those who receive the revelation from God through the angel of revelation, or as that of the prophets in a general sense, which is usually expressed by the word “sainthood” (walāya). The prophethood in this general sense continues in the form of the infallible Imams and expert jurists.

From Mullā Ṣadrā’s discussion, we understand that prophethood of such messengers or prophets as Muhammad and Mūsā stops at the time of their death, while the essential aspect of prophethood does not cease; it continues in such different forms as imams or expert jurists (mujtahids). This idea may lead to the conclusion that Shīʿī Imams and Shīʿī expert jurists embody the prophetic authority.

Mullā Ṣadrā conducts the above discussion by quoting approximately one-third of the entire text of chapter 155 of al-Futuḥat al-Makkiyya.19 The quoted text correctly reflects Ibn ʿArabi’s original text, though there are some minor but important additions and omissions in Mullā Ṣadrā’s text. By examining the alterations made by Mullā Ṣadrā, I would like to clarify his understanding of prophethood and imāma. He changed four places in Ibn ʿArabi’s text, as follows.

17 Shawāhīd, 377.
18 Ibid.
1. Insertion of “Authority of the Infallible Imams”

Ibn `Arabi’s text mentions only the authority of mubashshirat and mujtahidin as the enduring aspect of prophethood. Mullâ Ṣadrâ inserts between the mubashshirat and the mujtahidin a phrase “the authority of the infallible Imams”.

Mullâ Ṣadrâ retains the two words mubashshirat and mujtahidin in his text without further elucidations. In comparison to imams and mujtahids, which have definite significance in Shi'i thought, the term “mubashshirat” has no specific Shi'i equivalent. We may understand it, based on its usage in the Qur'ān, as persons qualified to convey divine knowledge. Since his insertion of the Imams after mubashshirat gives an appositional context to mubashshirat, we can understand them here as those similar to the Imams. While mujtahid in the Sunnī usage is restricted to a small number of great scholars of law, such as the founders of the authorized schools of law, in the Shi'i usage, it refers to an expert jurist qualified to make independent legal judgments, who has the authority in everyday legal rulings in the life of Shi'i Muslims. In modern times, especially, the increase of the authority of mujtahid is remarkable. In Shi'i legal theory, mujtahids derive their authority from the idea of their vicegerency of the Imams, who are, in turn, successors of the Prophet Muḥammad. From Mullâ Ṣadrâ’s text, we thus draw the impression that he views both Shi'i Imams and Shi'i expert jurists (mujtahids) as heirs of the prophethood.

How can we understand this passage in Ibn `Arabi’s original context? Mullâ Ṣadrâ gives no elucidations of these terms, i.e., mubashshirat and mujtahidin, though Ibn `Arabi explains them in detail.

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20 al-Futūḥat al-Makkiyya, 2:252, l. 3 from the bottom.

21 The word mubashshirat is found in the Qur'ān 30:46 in the sense “bearing good tidings.” The word mubashshir/bashir (or mubashshirUN) is, in most cases, paired with mundhir/nadhir (mundhirUN) in the Qur'ān (e.g., 34:28, 17:105, 2:213, etc.) and refers to a prophet (nabī rasūl Allāh). Ibn `Arabi's usage of mubashshirat certainly has a wider connotation than that which we find in the Qur'ān. According to Ibn `Arabi’s text (2:252, l. 3 from the bottom), an aspect of prophethood (messengership), namely, the concrete presence of a prophet, ceases to be, while another aspect, namely, mubashshirat and hukm al-mujtahidin continues to be.
With regard to the *mubashshirat*, Ibn 'Arabī presents some examples\(^{22}\) that Mulla Ṣadrā omits. They are told as his own experience; in a dream Ibn 'Arabī meets the Prophet Muhammad and finds that the Prophet does not like for the bier of the funeral procession to enter the mosque, or for the male corpse to be covered with an additional piece of cloth on the shroud. Further, the Prophet ordered Ibn 'Arabī himself, in his dream, to prepare hot water to conduct ablution for the major ritual impurity, since it was a cold day. In the dream Ibn 'Arabī receives knowledge directly from the Prophet. Thus it is the *mubashshirat* who acquire knowledge through such a supra-sensory function as a dream. Ibn 'Arabī himself is one of the *mubashshirat*. The quality of *mubashshirat* is, essentially, sainthood, in the context of Islamic mysticism. It has no connotation of Shī‘ī *imāma* that strictly limits its qualification to the Prophet’s direct descendants.

Ibn 'Arabī also refers to *mujtahid* and *ijtihād* as related to the essential aspect of prophethood. A *mujtahid* is a man who is entitled to independent judgment in legal questions. Ibn 'Arabī counts as *mujtahids* the most respected scholars of law established in Sunnī Islam, namely, Abū Ḥanīfa, Mālik, al-Shāfī‘i, and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal\(^{23}\)—all founders of Sunnī legal schools. Their opinions may differ from each other, but their position is high because they are concerned with the divine law (*sharī‘*), on which everything in this community (*umma*) is based, though their position (as *mujtahids*) is inferior to that of messenger of God. A *mujtahid* leads people to the right way, and in this way his work is similar to that of prophets or messengers of God; but the name/title (of *nabī* or *rasūl*) cannot be applied to him. A *mujtahid* is neither a prophet nor a messenger of God, but is an heir of the Prophet in his enduring aspect and shares a prophetic authority. Mullā Ṣadrā's insertion of the word "Imams" transforms Ibn 'Arabī's original idea that mystic saints and authoritative jurists are the heirs of the prophet into a Shī‘ī imamology, in which imams and (Shī‘ī) expert jurists are his heirs.

\(^{22}\) *al-Futūḥat al-Makkiyyā*, 2:253.

\(^{23}\) Ibid.
2. **Insertion of the Word imām after mujtahid**  
*(Shawāhīd, 377, l. 10)*

The essential aspect of prophethood and messengership does not cease to be, “but either mujtahid or imām cannot be called prophet or messenger of God.” Mullā Ṣadrā’s text runs in this way. But Ibn Ḥaḍī’s original refers only to mujtahid with no mention of imām. I suggest that the addition of imām in this passage is done in order to harmonize the insertion of imām between mubashshirāt and mujtahidūn in the previous passage, which suggests that both Imams and mujtahids are heirs of the Prophet.

3. **Addition of hadīths:** *(Shawāhīd, 377, ll. 11–14)*

In order to support the thesis that saints (awliyā’) have a large share in the (enduring aspect of) prophethood, Ibn Ḥaḍī quotes only one hadīth, namely, “He who retains the Qurān in his memory has a prophethood in his soul (janbay-hi).”24 In addition to this, Mullā Ṣadrā quotes two more hadīths. They are: “God has servants who are not prophets, but who are envied by prophets”25 and “In our community are those who are talked to and spoken to (by God).”26 These two hadīths may have nothing specific to Shi’i thought, but can be interpreted as referring to the Shi’ī Imams. The addition of hadīth quotations gives much support to the enduring aspect of prophethood in those who are neither prophets nor messengers of God [i.e., Imams].

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4. Omission of the word “Companions” (ṣahāba) and insertion of “People of the Household” (ahl al-bayt)
(SHAWĀHID, 378, l. 2)
Mulla Ṣadrā writes: “Some of the saints take prophethood as a legacy of the Prophet, and they are those who witnessed him (Muḥammad) like People of the Household.” In this sentence, he regards People of the Household, namely, the direct descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad, as the saints sharing the (essential aspect of) prophethood. However, Ibn Ṭarabī’s original text runs as follows: “Some of the saints take prophethood as a legacy of the Prophet, and they are either Companions who witnessed him, or those who saw him in a dream.”

The Companions are the first generation Muslims who met the Prophet Muḥammad, and they are the most respected Muslims in Sunni Islam. Most of them did not accept ʿAlī’s leadership as imam immediately after Muḥammad’s death. Therefore, Shīʿi Islam considers most of them unreliable in religious matters. It is natural that Mulla Ṣadrā, a Shīʿi thinker, erased the word “Companions” (ṣahāba) in the original text and inserted “People of the Household” in its place.

Mulla Ṣadrā basically accepts Ibn Ṭarabī’s mystical framework of sainthood, though Ibn Ṭarabī’s idea, in its original form, does not relate to the Shīʿi concept of ṭāḥid. Mulla Ṣadrā adapted Ibn Ṭarabī’s text to his own Shīʿi way of thinking when he incorporated it into his work. Specifically, he changed Ibn Ṭarabī’s reference to saints (in mysticism) to Shīʿi imams; he omitted the connotation of mujtahid as Sunni legal authority, and indirectly subscribed to the Shīʿi concept of mujtahid; and he inserted a Shīʿi concept “People of the Household” in place of the Sunni “Companions.” In this way Mulla Ṣadrā transformed Ibn Ṭarabī’s mysticism into Shīʿi mystical thought.

Conclusion

It is well known that Mulla Ṣadrā’s thought is much indebted to the mystical intuition of the Oneness of Being (wahdat al-wujūd) of Ibn Ḥārīm, with whom Ibn Sinā and the Shaykh al-Iṣḥāq al-Suhrawardī should also be mentioned. As an aspect of his indebtedness to his preceding thinkers, Mulla Ṣadrā incorporates or quotes in his works various texts of the forerunners of Islamic thought, with or without mentioning names. The present study, which takes a short section of his Shawāhid as an example to show how Mulla Ṣadrā modified Ibn Ḥārīm’s text to his own understanding, can help us better understand Mulla Ṣadrā’s text with Ibn Ḥārīm’s original in the background. When we study Mulla Ṣadrā’s thought, we should pay more attention to the texts which Mulla Ṣadrā incorporates in his works often without mentioning the names of their original authors, in order to understand his thought better and more correctly.