

The Architecture of Time, Space, & Motion in Islam

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Introduction

The subject of time and space has generated much interest among scholars both within and outside of Islam for many centuries. The knowledge of time, space, and motion within the domain of serial time is generally accessible from sense perceptions. However, there are other domains or levels of time that can be ascertained only from spiritual experience, the route to which appears to be based on the knowledge of one's inner self.

This chapter assesses time, space, and motion in Islam from the perspective of the Qur'an, the Hadith, articles by learned scholars, and relevant reference literature. The aim is to produce a comprehensive and interesting examination and assessment of a range of issues contained in this subject. The knowledge of time, space, and motion in Islam, within the limits of human knowledge and resources, has been gained from a careful analysis of what happens in these domains of time, which spaces are known, and which are in use. The result has been a deeper understanding of essences and existences within the various domains of time and space. It has also been recognized that the understanding of time and space is closely related to the understanding of the inner self, defined in the Qur'an as *nafs*, and the changing state of all creations. The interrelationships of these subjects, as they exist in the Qur'an, have been clarified to produce a comprehensive examination of this area.

Allah is described in the Qur'an as the one unique God:

There is nothing like unto Him, and He alone is All-hearing, All-seeing. (42:11)

And no human being can imagine what blissful delights, as yet hidden, await them as rewards for all that they did. (32:17)

The impossibility of humankind "imagining" Paradise was summed up by the Prophet in the following well-authenticated hadith:

God says: "I have prepared for My righteous servants what no eye has seen, and no ear has ever heard, nor has it occurred to any human heart."¹

Correspondingly, the Qur'an says:

Whenever they are granted fruits from there as their appointed sustenance, they will say: "It is this which in the old days was granted to us as our

¹ Ezzedin Ibrahim and Denys Johnson-Davies, translators, *Forty Hadith Qudsi* (Cambridge, UK: The Islamic Text Society, 1997), hadith 37.

sustenance!” – for they shall be given something that will recall that past. And there they shall have pure spouses, and there they shall abide. (2:25)

However, this possibility of an intellectual comparison between the two stages of human existence is limited largely by the fact that all human thought and imagination are firmly based on the concept of finite time, finite space, and finite change. This means that human beings cannot imagine infinity in time or space, and therefore cannot imagine an existence independent of time and space. The Qur’anic statement “a Paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth” depicts Paradise as spacious in human language, though in reality it is allegorical to the human mind.

Let us now look at a dialog between God and the unbelievers as described in the Qur’an:

He will ask: “How many years did you spend on earth?” They will answer: “We spent a day or perhaps part of a day; but ask those who count time.” He will say: “You spent only a short while there, had you but known. Did you think that We created you in mere idle play, and that you would not have to return to Us?” (23:112–115)

This dialog demonstrates how uncertain people are and will be about the concept of time. Many verses in the Qur’an describe the illusory character of the human consciousness of time, thus emphasizing the relativity of its concept.

Time Concepts in the Qur’an & Hadith

Al-Zaman

The Qur’an says:

Consider the flight of time! Indeed, man is bound to lose himself, unless he be of those who attain to faith, do good works, enjoin upon one another the keeping to truth, and enjoin upon one another patience in adversity. (103:1–3)

The term *‘aṣr* denotes time that is measurable, consisting of a succession of periods. Hence, it implies the passage or flight of time. Islamic literature often refers to this sort of time as *zaman* (see Appendix A).

Ma tsbiq min ummatin ajalaha ma yasta’ khirun: “No community can ever forestall its term – neither can it delay it.” (15:5). Here, *ajal* is used for “term,” that is, the movement from the beginning to the end of the term appointed for each creation. *Li kullin naba`in mustaqarrun, wa sawfa ta`lamun*: “Every tiding has a term set for his fulfillment: and in time you will come to know” (6:67). Every community – and, in the widest sense of the term, every civilization – has an organic lifespan willed by God. It resembles in this respect all living organisms

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destined to grow, to reach maturity, and ultimately to decay. *Wa likulli 'ummatin ajalun, fa idhā ja'a ajaluhum la yasta'khiruna sa`atun wa la yastaqdimun*": "For all the peoples a term has been set; and when their term approaches, they can neither delay it by a single moment, nor can they hasten it" (7:34). All human beings have a lifespan decreed by God, during which they are free to accept or reject the guidance offered to them by revelation. In Arabic usage, the word *sa`ah* signifies not only an astronomical hour, that is, the twenty-fourth part of a mean solar day, but also "time" in an absolute sense, or any fraction of it, whether large or small. In verse 7:34 above, it has clearly been used in the sense of "the smallest fraction of time" or a single moment, whereas, again, *ajal* is used in the sense of "term."

Al-Dahr

The awareness of time without succession is achievable by the knowledge of one's inner self. In other words, one must move out of unreal time or serial time to make contact with pure duration. Human beings are the reality of time; their very selves are time. Time is at work making people achieve their goals. Time is the inner secret of human beings, and human beings are the inner secret of time. If people do not search their inner selves, they will be lost in the material world and therefore unable to discover the origin and true potential of time. The Qur'an and Hadith provide numerous methods by which people can approach God through their inner selves.

The Qur'an says: "And on the Day when He shall gather them as if they had not tarried longer than an hour of a day, knowing one another" (10:45). Likewise, in many other places, the Qur'an describes the earthbound concept that, we are told, will lose all its meaning in the context of the Ultimate Reality. "Time without succession," defined as *dahr*, signifies the life of the mind, which in its cumulative sense means a person's religious experience. The real time that people experience in their intuition works within them as an organic whole, where the present does not break from the past, and the future does not break from the present. According to the Qur'an:

They say: "There is nothing but our life of this world; we die and we live and nothing destroys us except time [*dahr*]." They have no knowledge of it; they only conjecture. (45:24)

Al-Dahr is the subject of the following two hadiths:²

Allah the Exalted says: "The son of Adam annoys Me when he curses *al-dahr*, while I am *al-dahr*. In My Hand are all the matters; I cause the alternation of his days and nights.

² Shaykh Safiur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri, et al., *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* (Riyadh, Houston and New York: Dar-us-Salam Publishers, 2000), vol.9, p.32; vol.8, p.42.

Do not curse *al-dhar*, for Allah is *al-dahr*.

The texts of these two hadiths and Ibn Kathir's comment in his *Tafsir* clearly show that Ibn Hazm and the Zahirites made an error when they used these hadiths to justify the inclusion of *al-dahr* among the names of God. These hadiths do not imply that time is the name of God or even an attribute of God. "I am *al-dahr*" means "I am the Creator of Time, and I manage the affairs of all creations, including Time." One should not attribute anything, whether pleasant or disastrous, to Time, for everything is in the Hands of God and only He is the disposer of everything.

The Qur'an uses the phrase *rayb al-manun*, where *manun* is the synonym of *al-dahr*, that is, time without succession: "[He is but] a poet. Let us await what time will do to him" (52:30). The Qur'an also says: *Hal ata 'alal insani hinu min al-dahri lam yakun shay'un mazkura?:* "Has there [not] been a period from an endless span of time for man in which he was not yet a thing to be thought of?" (76:1). In this verse, *al-dahr*, according to Al-Tabari, refers to the time of Adam's creation, before the creation of the universe, and it is expressed as the time in place, for which there is no known limit. Hence, it denotes the time that has no succession, that is, unlimited time without beginning or end; in other words, absolute time.³ Verse 76:1 also informs us that Adam was created in *al-dahr* before being caused to appear in time, that is, *zaman*. Instead of consisting of a series of unconnected leaps, this kind of time is a continuous organic process and is generally described as non-serial time.

Al-Sarmad

Let us examine the following Qur'anic verses:

Say: "Have you ever considered: If God had willed that there should always be night about you, without a break, until the Day of Resurrection – is there any deity other than God that could bring you light? Will you not then listen?" (28:71)

In this verse, *in-ja`alal-lahu`alaykumul-layla sarmadan* describes the perpetual and transcendental nature of night that can be created by God, if He so desires.

Say: "Have you ever considered: If God had willed that there should always be daylight about you, without a break, until the Day of Resurrection – is there any deity other than God that could bring you night? Will you not then see?" (28:72)

In this verse, *`alaykumun-nahara sarmadan* describes the perpetual and transcendental nature of daylight that can be created by God, if He so desires.

³ Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Tafsir al-Qur'an*, vol.29 (Cairo and Bulaq, Egypt: 1329 AH), p.126.

What, then, is the time of God? What is the time that existed before humankind was created? What then is the time of humankind? What is the time of all creatures? What is the time of all the planets? Clearly, it is necessary to make a comprehensive analysis of all the concepts of time and space from the knowledge that can be accessed from the Qur'an and the Hadith.

There are many other instances where time and space have been used in the Qur'an, as in the following: *Bal-lahum-maw'idun*: "but they have a specified period of time" (18:58). *Idhan abada*: "no time limit" (18:57) – in relation to Paradise. *Al-Azal* is the beginning of the world; *Al-abad* is eternity. *Sa'ati al-'usrati*: "the time of despair" (9:117). It is interesting to note that here time is referred to as a moment. Generally, when the word *al-sa'ah* is used, it refers to the final Hour of Judgment.

In many verses (for example, 7:54, 19:33, 55:29) *yawm* is interpreted as a "day." However, in some cases, it means a day in serial time – sometimes in this world; elsewhere, it relates to the Hereafter and God. It can be concluded, therefore, that *yawm* can refer to an "aeon," which is extremely long, or to a moment, which is extremely short. However, it is also used to mean an (earthly) day. *Wa lasawfa yarda*: "in time well pleased" (92:21).

The Change of State in All Creations

On the day when the earth will be changed
to another earth, as shall be the heavens, and when
insan [humankind] shall appear before God, the
One Who holds absolute sway over all that exists.
(14:48)⁴

Consider those that rise only to set, and
move steadily, float serenely, yet overtake swiftly,
and thus fulfill their behest. (79:1–5)⁵

Qatadah, al-Ṭabari, al-Baghawi, al-Hasan al-Baṣari, Abu 'Ubaydah, and al-Razi all support Muhammad Asad's interpretation of the above verses from the Qur'an. The description in verses 79:1–5 of the daily movement of the stars refers to the different speeds as well as the extent of their orbits and movements in space in relation to one another.

But no! I call to witness the sun's afterglow,
the night and what it unfolds, and the moon as it
grows to its fullness: [even thus, O men] are you
bound to move from stage to stage. (86:16–19)

God calls humankind to witness the fact that nothing in this creation is ever at a standstill. Every entity moves unceasingly from one state of being into another, at every moment changing its aspect and its condition.

⁴ Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1993), p.380.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.926.

Since the inexorable movement of everything that exists from stage to stage or from one condition to another corresponds to a fundamental divine law evident in all creations, it is unreasonable to assume that humankind alone should be an exception. This onward movement in human beings should cease at the moment of their bodily death. After a period of *barzaq* (a barrier between death and resurrection), there will be a transformation into another state of being at resurrection.

Nothing in life is fixed or lasting. The stage-to-stage progression of life is itself merely a brief phase, and disappears, as it were, in the twinkling of an eye. Life is, therefore, a fleeting show. Its completion is to be sought elsewhere. For example, the sun seems such a great reality. However, the beautiful glow that it leaves when it sets is short-lived, for it changes every moment and vanishes with the twilight. The night is a phenomenon that is experienced for nearly half of every 24 hours in equatorial latitudes. At nightfall, all the wandering flocks and herds come home. The people scattered abroad for their livelihood return home to rest and sleep. The night gathers them in their homes, and yet this homing phase lasts only a little while.

The astronomical full moon does not last even a moment. The instant that the moon is full, it begins to wane, and as soon as it is in an “inner lunar swoon”, it begins to wax anew. The inexorable movement of all that is created and that exists, from one stage to the next, proceeds in an unceasing progression: conception, birth, growth, decline, death, and finally, resurrection.

Humankind travels and ascends in stages: intellectual, emotional, and/or spiritual. Spiritual life ascends layer by layer (*tabaqah*). Humankind’s success is achieved in stages. God’s revelations were brought to humankind stage by stage in the form of the Qur’an. Presently all is silent and still. So it will be with our souls when our lives in this world are ended with our death. We shall be gathered for the transfer to another, larger, homing stage.

The divine law also dictates that the stage-to-stage change is in time. All the external changes described above occur in relation to time and space. The velocity of the movement of bodies is directly proportional to the space traveled and inversely proportional to time. The rotation of the earth and the moon around the sun causes physical and visual changes in their properties.

The Qur’an says:

Glorify the name of thy Guardian-Lord most High, Who has created and, further, given order and proportion, Who has ordained laws and granted guidance, Who brings forth pasture and then turns it into dark stubble. By degrees shall we teach you to declare? (87:1–5)

The Qur’an came in stages and we can learn it only in stages. God brings us into being. Then He endows us with forms and faculties exactly suited to what is expected of us and to the

environments in which our lives will be cast, giving to everything due order and proportion. Accordingly, He endows human life with inner coherence and with qualities consistent with the functions that it is meant to perform, and so shapes it primarily for the exigencies of its existence.

It is also recognized that the human mind comprises conscious thinking, imagination, dream world, intuition, memory, etc. Its function is based only on perceptions that it has previously experienced and it produces new combinations or series of combinations. Since the metaphysical ideas of religion correspond to a realm beyond the reach of human perception, the human mind is not capable of reaching its true meaning by apperception and cognition recorded in it and based on previous experiences.

The Qur'an says: "From changing the nature of your existence and bringing in a manner unknown to you" (56:61). Divine law also governs internal intellectual, emotional, and spiritual changes in humankind, that take place in stages. It is recognized that these changes are also related to time. If every movement is related to time and space, then what are the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual movements? It appears that they are represented by the amount of knowledge, emotional maturity, and spiritual depth or knowledge gained over time. It is known that physical space or distance does not represent these movements, which remain zero in time. These intellectual, emotional, and spiritual changes are parabolic: they reach a peak at some point in a person's life and then decline until his/her death. If time is inversely proportional to zero, then it is infinite. Nevertheless, the changes in humankind's intellectual, emotional, and spiritual condition occur in relation to finite time in material and physical surroundings. So, are the timelessness and infinite time of humankind's intellectual, emotional, and spiritual movements related to time without succession, or does humankind share the timelessness of God? That is to say, if humankind is allowed to share the timelessness of God, then this must be spiritual. If the spiritual state of humankind is taken to be proportional to the infinite time, then the intellectual and emotional states can be taken as directly proportional to the spiritual state.

The Qur'an says: "And you will see the mountains, which you thought so firm, pass away as clouds pass away: a work of God, Who has ordered all things to perfection" (27:88). There seems to be nothing more firmly fixed or permanent than the mountains. However, at the moment of this world's transformation into the next, they will be as flimsy and insubstantial as the clouds. Likewise, when this parable is applied to the change from human beings' worldly experience into spiritual experience, their ideas will become visionary and they will begin to live in the new order of things.

It can be agreed, therefore, that there is an inherent relationship between change and movement. Change does occur in all things with movement in time. The movement can be internal or external to their structure. For instance, there may be changes to the external structure of a metal as it corrodes in time, or there may be other internal changes because of

changes in the environment. Even in the physical sciences, movement is absolute in time duration. Humankind perceives duration, change, and movement in relation to reality. Change in the state of a thing thus requires a time duration. From the perspective of the physical sciences, it is impossible to perceive a change in the state of a thing in time duration that is not measurable. When something moves, that movement can be observed only by the observer. This is still explicable and provable by the results. However, spiritual changes also occur, and, at times, human beings experience them and can see them in others. It is, therefore, very difficult to explain or relate to a change in the spiritual state of creation that is known to exist but is beyond description. Spiritual changes can be ascribed to changes in consciousness and intellect. Numerous facts observable by humankind are related to human intuition, which, in turn, is related to human consciousness and intellect. Human instinct is a recognizable form of intuition and consciousness that governs human intelligence. Although none of these changes is directly measurable, their results are important in human functioning. It has been known to require material and spiritual changes to affect development, change, and movement. Whereas the material development of these activities leads to material knowledge, the spiritual development of these activities results in changes in human feelings, which influence other activities and enhances people's knowledge of themselves.

Sempiternality: The Pre-Universal Existence

In his work, *Zaman-i-Afaqi*,⁶ Ala al-Daula Simnani describes the universe as sempiternal, implying that singularities did not exist before visionary universal time. However, universal time means the beginning of the movement of the celestial sphere.

In his article, Simnani states that there was neither day, nor night, nor year, nor hour (p.??). According to the Qur'an, "Are, then, they who are bent on denying the truth not aware that the heaven and the earth were one single entity, which We then parted asunder?" (21:30). Elsewhere in the book, it is stated that cosmologists in the twentieth century recognized that there were many stages of expansion following the Big Bang. Time and space came into being when God separated the heavens from the earth and only He knows exactly when the expansion began. Accordingly, intrinsic wisdom pre-existed. By the second stage of superabundance there appeared the essence of shape, and by the third stage of expansion the essence of matter. Eventually, as the heavens and the earth were reconstructed, there appeared a wide gap between these high and low entities. Therefore, the term "sempiternal" does not necessarily mean that the universe was "sempiternal" or pre-existent.

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⁶ Ala' al-Daula Simnani, *Zaman-i-Afaqi* [Universal Time], in Shaykh Tajuddin Ushnobi, *Asar-i-Farsi*, ed. Mael Harovi (Tehran: Kutub Khana Tahuri, Khiyaban-i-Inqelab, 1368 F [Farsi calendar]), p.147. See also Appendix B.

Rather, the universe is that phenomenon which was the result of the revolution of celestial bodies, and their repetition produced days, weeks, months, and years. So how could wisdom predate and postdate universal time? It pre-existed and it is widespread. Celestial bodies are composed of the essence of shape and matter, and they have emerged from the essence of wisdom by Allah's command. It has been proven that wisdom is responsible for not only the *lauhiyyat* (visibility or appearance) of the universe, but also for its *fa`iliyyat* (activity), an arrangement that is supported by the Eternal Truth.

To find the real sempiternal, Simnani goes on to explain the truth of this question in stages. According to this presumption, the *qadīm* (ancient) is that which always exists and is self-sufficient. The Exalted Being is *wajib al-wujūd* (the Essential Being) if He needs support to exist, although "Being" is His attribute. However, that is not included in His command *kun* (Be!). It is sempiternal like the Being Himself. It is never separated from him. Those are attributes of the Exalted Truth, and they do not need Being to sustain them. Such a possible need is mentioned only to help us understand the difference between the Being and the Attributes. Therefore, the need exists only in our perception, not in accordance with the Exalted Truth. If it is not sempiternal, we will see whether or not it comes under the command "*kun!*". If it does not, it will be called *qadīm al-`illi* (ancient causative), which comes before all phenomena, since it is the cause of every existence. Like an act of God, it needs an origin from which God wished to manifest Himself. If it is under the command (of *kun*), we should see whether it existed before universal time. Where it did exist, those are classified as *haqaiq basita* (basic facts) or *haqaiq nisbiyah* (relative facts). *Al-haqaiq basita* also need the blessing of their inventor for their existence. This antiquity is old in the sense that it preceded universal time, rather than that it is sempiternal. Where it did not precede universal time, it is called ancient because of the length of time. Those components need the blessings of an old sempiternal inventor, and their composition should include elements like *`urjun*, "ancient family," etc., so that we can differentiate between them.

An earlier examination of the state of changes showed that the period of changes is called Time. According to Afzal al-Dīn Kashani,

Although there is no time for matter and the endurance of effects, the period of their durability is called *al-dahr*. The beginning of the existence of matter is called sempiternity (*al-azal*) in the sense that matter had originated before it. Its end is called Eternity (*al-abad*), which means that it has no end to terminate. So in between the Ultimate Sublime Truth and the kingdom of souls, there should not be a medial time for their advent. Instead, the kingdom of souls should be medial

between the ultimate Truth and metamorphosing matters so that change and time can continue.⁷

Comment [SJH4]: Please insert page ref. in footnote 7.

Ancient Philosophies of Essences and Existence

Al-Zaman: Universal Time

Human beings, like any other creature, are subject to time, space, and the change of state of all creations. The Qur'an repeatedly points out that the lives of human beings in this world are very short compared with their lives in the Hereafter. It also stresses the moral responsibility of human beings for all their conscious actions, for which they will be subject to the consequences in the Hereafter. It means that good deeds will be rewarded with something far better than life in this world, whereas bad deeds will result in punishment. The time of the *insan* (humankind) can therefore be divided into three categories:

1. Serial time is what humankind encounters every day. It has succession and is periodic. It is referred to in the Qur'an as *'aşr*, and is also known as *zaman*. This kind of time is measurable and is used as such by the Qur'an.
2. The lifetime of human beings, which is hidden to them, determines their present, based on their historical background and past experience, and then determines their future, based on their present and their past. Although this time moves in a straight line, it is the summation of human serial time and it is also measurable. The limit of this time is set by the lifespan of each human being in this world.
3. The hidden time of human beings is their God-given capacity for intuition, and enumeration of physical observations that are not possible without God's participation. This is represented by *kalamhin bil-başr* in the Qur'an: "And Our commandment is but one as the twinkling of an eye" (54:50). According to this verse, in the twinkling of an eye, human beings can react to their intuition and enumerate their physical observations, which would otherwise seem impossible without God's help during every moment of their lives.

Al-Dahr

Al-dahr is the period of the long duration of subjects without the influence of other incidents that are seen in time. It can be regarded as time without change, hence stationary, because it is immutable and inexhaustible. The infinity of the Ultimate Truth is regarded as *al-dahr*, which encompasses time. "[The philosophers] have said, '*Al-dahr* is the container of time.'"⁸ Tushiko Izutsu states that Mir Damad called *al-dahr* a "Meta-Time" or the meta-temporal dimension of being.⁹ According to Kashani,

Comment [SJH5]: Please insert page ref. in footnote 8.

⁷ Afzal al-Dīn Kashani, "On the *Tahqiq* of *Al-Dahr* and *Al-Zaman*," ("Identification of Eternity and Time") in Ushnohi, *Asar-i-Farsi*, p.147. See also Appendix B.

⁸ Kashani, "On the *Tahqiq*," Appendix B.

⁹ Tushiko Izutsu, "Introduction," in Mir Damad, *Al-Qabāsāt*, ed. M. Muhaqiq (Tehran: Tehran University Press, 1367 F), p.4.

In the “diction of sages,” the relationship of an immutable with another immutable is called *al-dahr*, because here an immutable means the Being of Allah Most High and the other immutable is *al-dahr* itself. It means that the perpetuity of His Being is *al-dahr*. However, it does not necessarily mean similitude, because the duration of *al-dahr* is governed by His Being and His infinity by Himself.¹⁰

Comment [SJH6]: Please insert page ref. in footnote 10.

In order to have a glimpse of humankind’s association with *al-dahr*, it is important to seek the help of the Qur’an in understanding one’s inner self. The inner self’s approach or proximity to the Ultimate Reality undergoes a transformation from *zaman* into *al-dahr*, and from *al-dahr* into *zaman*. The more human beings are conscious of their inner selves, the more they will be able to approach the association with “pure time without succession.” The awakening of the inner self brings one close to the Ultimate Reality and close to time without succession.

Al-Sarmad

The challenge in both of the Qur’anic verses 28:71–72 gives us observations concerning God’s signs of His capacity and original instance. In the first case, His ability to impose continuous darkness demonstrates the immutability of the nighttime. In the second case, His ability to impose continuous daylight again demonstrates the immutability of the daytime. These events then become perpetual realities (perpetual nighttime that shuts out light, or perpetual daytime that shuts out darkness), and create an effect of transcendental enumeration. Outside the domain of Night and Day, therefore, there seems to be timelessness. Thus, Night and Day are God’s blessings inherent in the creation of a time cycle that allows for the alternation of rest and work. This arrangement is the result of divine attention to our temporal concerns and provides the justification to lead a good and pure life. By means of these analogies, humankind is given a glimpse of God’s timelessness. How these conditions are physically imposed is beyond humankind’s imagination and understanding in many ways. One possible explanation is that the rotation of the earth around the sun creates the interacting forces necessary to maintain life on earth.

Scholars’ Views

Iqbal says:

According to physical science, the cause of your sensation of red is the rapidity of wave motion, the frequency of which is 400 billions per second. If you could observe this tremendous frequency from outside, and count it at the rate of 2,000 per second, which is supposed to be the limit of perceptibility of light, it will take you more than six thousand years to finish the

¹⁰ Kashani, “On the *Tahqiq* of *Al-Dahr* and *Al-Zaman*,” Appendix B.

enumeration. Yet a single momentary mental act transforms succession into time without succession.¹¹

This means that the transformation of *al-zaman* into perpetual time and of perpetual time into *al-zaman* is an act that is given by the Creator to human beings as their intuition.

Ushnohi cites numerous zones of time and space that now need to be examined from the point of view of the above discussions. According to this work, there are three orders of time:

1. Time of the material bodies, which is governed by the revolution of the heavens, and is subject to change in terms of day and night;
2. that of the immaterial bodies, which, too, is not wholly immune to change and alteration of a sort, so much so that a passage spread over a hundred years is equivalent to a day in their calculation; and
3. that of celestial beings or creatures, which knows neither change nor succession nor linearity, but flows unimpeded.¹²

Comment [SJH7]: Please insert page ref. in footnote 12.

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Razi undertook an extensive survey of time in his work *al-Mabahith al-Mashriyyah* ("Eastern Discussions"), in which he described all the theories of time known during that period.¹³ Among the theories that he presented were those which denied the objectivity of time and those which affirmed it. He concluded that motion was the cause of time, and time in turn was the number of motion.¹⁴ According to him, the status of instant time divided the past from the future and united the past with the future. In the view of later scholars, this philosophy placed al-Razi closer to Plato. His entire discussion on time was determined by his objective view of it. He could not discover the importance of time and he admitted that he could not solve the mystery of the nature of time. Later scholars, such as Iqbal, have related time to the psychic life of the human being: in its creation is the life of nature.¹⁵

In the view of Ibn Sina, time was real and objective, and its existence was weaker than that of movement.¹⁶ He believed that temporal movement, like its counterpart, the spatial

Comment [SJH8]: Please insert name of publisher & date in footnote 16.

¹¹ Mohammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, edited and annotated by Saeed Sheikh (Lahore, Pakistan: Iqbal Academy & Institute of Islamic Culture, 1989; Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1934), p.39.

¹² Ushnohi, *Asar-i-Farsi*, p.50. See also Appendix B.

¹³ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Razi, *Al-Mabahith al-Mashriyyah* (Hyderabad, India: Dairat al-Ma'arif, 1924), vols.1 & 2, pp.642–644.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.677.

¹⁵ S. Alam Khundmiri, "Iqbal's Conception of Time: Its Relation to Contemporary Thought," PhD Thesis (Hyderabad, India: Osmania University, 1969), p.77.

¹⁶ Sadr al-Dīn Shirazi, *Al-Hikma al-Muta'aliyah fi al-Asfar al-'Aqliyyah al-Arba'a*, ed. M. Rida al-Muzaffar ["The Transcendental Wisdom Concerning the Four Intellectual Journeys"] (Beirut: 1981), vol.3, part 1. Urdu translation by Darul Tarjuma (Hyderabad, India: Osmania University Press), vol.2, p.1105.

point, did not have a real existence, but was only imaginary.¹⁷ Ibn Sina developed the theory of “essential origination” (*hudūth dhāti*) or the logical priority of the non-being or a thing over its being. According to his theory, essence and existence identified God as the self-necessary Existent among all the other existents, including the Intelligences. Everything else in existence, other than God, was contingent on God. Intelligences were placed in the realm of *al-sarmad*, not at the level of the temporal.

Fazlur Rahman quotes the following passage by Ibn Sina in Mir Damad’s *al-Qabasat*:

The originated beings which are non-temporal are either those whose existence comes after an absolute non-existence or those whose existence comes after a non-absolute non-existence – indeed, in the latter it comes after a particular non-existence in relation to an existent matter (i.e., wherein it is first non-existent and then becomes existent, but without involving time)... Now if its existence supervenes upon absolute non-existence, its emanation from its simple cause is called “simple origination,” this being the most excellent manner of bestowing existence since, in any case, non-existence has been simply prevented (and not just removed) and existence has been imposed. If non-existence could have actually found its way there, preceding existence, then the origination of such a thing would have been impossible, except through matter.¹⁸

In his work, *al-Shifā’*, Ibn Sina said:

Now the thing existing together with the whole of the continued existence (*istimrar*) of time is endless duration (*al-dahr*); and a whole continued existence of a single existence (*kullu istimrari wujūdin wahid*) is in endless duration. (I mean by “continued existence” [that] its very existence is like what is together with each moment of time one after another, continually.) It is as if endless duration is a comparison of permanence to impermanence, where the relation of this togetherness to endless duration is like the relation of that instant (*faina*) of time.

The relation of some permanent things to others and the togetherness which belongs to them from this perspective is an intention beyond endless duration (*fawqa al-dahr*), and appears to be the most worthy of what is called “eternity” (*al-sarmad*). Every continued existent’s being (*wujūd*), in the sense of absolute denial of change

¹⁷ Khundmiri, *Iqbal’s Conception of Time*, p.60.

¹⁸ Fazlur Rahman, “Mir Damad’s Concept of *Hudūth Dahri*,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 2 (1980); quoted from Mir Damad, *Al-Qabasat*, p.3.

without a comparison (*qiyas*) to one moment after another, is eternity. One marvels that someone could say that endless duration is the interval of rest or a time unnumbered by motion, when one cannot grasp an interval or time in whose being there is neither a before nor after; but if there is in it a before or after, then a state must be renewed according to what we said. So [endless duration] is not devoid of motion, whereas priority and posteriority exist in rest solely according to the manner of what we said previously.¹⁹

In his work, *Al-Najah*, Ibn Sina writes as follows:

[T]he things that exist in time, first are [time's] divisions, i.e., the past and the future, and its limits, which are the "nows"; second is motion; and third are mobiles. For the mobiles are in motion and motion is in time; thus the mobiles are in a certain way in time. The existence of the now in [time] is like the existence of the unit in number; the existence of the past and the future in it are like the divisions of number in number; and the existence of the mobiles in it are like the countable in number. But whatever is excluded from this group is not in time. However, if it is compared with time and considered with it, and has a permanence corresponding with the permanence of time, and what is in [time], then that relationship and that consideration is [*sic*] given the name endless duration (*al-dahr*); for endless duration encompasses time. Just as every continuum of existing measures may be cut up, so that number falls to [what is continuous], so it is no surprise if time is cut up by the imagination, so that it makes days and hours, and indeed years and months; for that is either by the design of the estimative faculty, or by the consideration of the correspondence of the number of motions with it.²⁰

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In his work, *Hikmat al-Ishraq*, Shaykh al-Ishraq Shihab al-Dīn al-Sahrawardi, who was the master of the Ishraqi School about two hundred years after Ibn Sina, states:

The Essence of the First absolute Light, God, gives constant illumination, whereby it is manifested and it brings all things into existence, giving life to them by its rays. Everything in the world is derived from the Light of His Essence and all beauty and perfection are the gift of His

¹⁹ Jon McGinnis, "Time and Time Again: A Study of Aristotle and Ibn Sina's Temporal Theories," PhD Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1999, pp.374–393; quoted from Ibn Sina, *Al-Shifā'*, vol.1, *Al-Samā'*, ed. Said Zayed (Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organization, 1983), 171.15–172.5.

²⁰ McGinnis, "Time and Time Again," pp.397–405.

bounty, and to attain fully to this illumination is salvation.²¹

Al-Sahrawardi and his Ishraqi School led the doctrine of “essentialism,” meaning that essence has priority over existence. Hence, the philosophy of Ibn Sina began to be examined in this light beyond the *huduth dhati*. Al-Sahrawardi regarded existence as a mental abstraction to which nothing corresponded in reality. He wanted to restrict conceptual or logical priority to priority by essence. Nevertheless, although existence was a mental abstraction, it was a factual experience and therefore could not be ignored. Priority by essence meant that a certain essence was constituted logically before another. Priority by nature, on the other hand, although it was still in the conceptual realm, contained a reference to existence.²² Al-Sahrawardi insisted on the Principle of Higher Contingency, which stated that if a lower order of being was found to exist, it existed in a prior higher order of reality. Al-Sahrawardi conceived that if an essence was real, then that did not imply that there would be an existence corresponding to it. In fact, it was quite possible that it pointed to nonexistence. The essence that resulted in an existence was regarded as being related to it. The importance attached to essence over existence, however, was due to al-Sahrawardi’s contention that existence was unreal. In his view, these essences existed in the higher realm as independent, individual existents.²³

Thus the thought of Mir Damad was also influenced by the priority of essence over existence, which resulted in developing his doctrine of perpetual origination (*huduth dahri*).²⁴ The level of eternity, or *al-sarmad*, is where nothing exists except God, though the essences of all things are present. This is the basic philosophy of Mir Damad, which regards the existence of essences prior to real existence. Nevertheless, these essences are still contingents of God because they depend on Him as the source, whereas God does not have a source or essence for His existence. Mir Damad calls this essential or logical priority *taqaddum dhati*, and essential or logical origination *huduth dhati*. It is in the next category of *dahr* in which is seen the posterior of “essential contingents” that are translated into real existence, preceded by nonexistence, where the real origination or *huduth* in *dahr* takes place as caused by God. This order of existents is the most logical in *dahr*, for they cannot be at the temporal level. In addition, Mir Damad distinguishes between the temporal (*zamani*) and eternal (*dahri*). In the temporal realm, things exist at different times and in different places. However, in the eternal realm, where they become objects of God’s knowledge, they exist

²¹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), p.175.

²² Rahman, “Mir Damad’s Concept,” p.67.

²³ Fazlur Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1975), p.48.

without special and temporal differentiation, even though they are not abstracted from matter.²⁵ Mir Damad conceives that prior to the real existences, their essences exist with God and are caused by Him. This will be discussed in the following section on “Religious Philosophy.”

On the other hand, a pupil of Mir Damad, Mulla Sadra, was an existentialist. He rejected the priority of essences over existences and asserted that nothing was real except existence. In his view, essences arose in the mind only from particular forms or modes of existence. This clearly contradicted the Muslim Peripatetic view that regarded essences as real and existence as mere abstractions from essences.

The fundamental concepts of time, as presented by Mulla Sadra, deal with the dynamic nature of substance itself.²⁶ Motion is not merely an accident; rather, it is the essence of substance. The world of nature is in perpetual motion, constantly changing and becoming; it is never at rest. Its essential characteristics are growth and development. God’s manifestation becomes clear in the continual round of creation, existence, and nonexistence. This is where Ibn al-‘Arabi recognizes the dynamic nature of the universe, which became part of Sadra’s work. In Sadra’s opinion, all types of movement are caused by nature or substance: if the cause is unchanging, it cannot produce any changing effect.²⁷ He opposed Ibn Sina’s view that change is caused by external forces, saying that change is inherent in nature itself. The universe is undergoing perpetual change and creation. Change and becoming are essential features of the substance of this universe. Sadra added that the soul of man did not pre-exist, for its actual creation resulted – thus had a beginning in time – in the creation of its body, giving unity to the changing human personality. Time is, therefore, one of the essential features of reality. According to Sadra, time is not external to motion, for its reality is the same as that of motion. The source of this motion, as a cosmic principle, is the infinite knowledge of God, Who illuminates each moment of existence. Everything in the universe is aspiring to perfection and turning to the Highest Source. Sadra quotes Ibn al-‘Arabi, who states:

Human beings are constantly progressing toward higher forms. However, owing to “veils” and the similitude of forms, they do not recognize this unending progress and change toward higher levels of being. ...[He adds:] The whole order of existence is in a state of continuous movement in this world and the Hereafter.²⁸

Sadra regards time as an integral element of the process of nature, with its source in the

²⁴ Rahman, “Mir Damad’s Concept,” p.67.

²⁵ Rahman, *Philosophy of Mulla Sadra*, p.47.

²⁶ Shirazi, *Asfar*, vol.3, part 1.

²⁷ Khundmiti, *Iqbal’s Conception of Time*, p.89.

Being of God. There is nothing prior to time other than the Divine Self. Divine life is prior to all events and is the source of all emanations and illuminations. All existents possess two aspects: that of change and becoming, and that of identity and permanence. Sadra adds that material substance is neither spatial nor temporal, but spatial-temporal. It is unfortunate that the later, particularly the modern, philosophers ignored this very important contribution to philosophical thought. Iqbal, who did not quote Sadra and may not have seen much of his writing, later accepted Sadra's view of the whole structure of nature as an orderly process. He does not refer to Sadra's concept of life as a continuous movement of time, although he acknowledges it in the writings of Whitehead.

Khvajah Afzal al-Din Kashani says:

The beginning of the existence of matter is called sempiternity (*azal*) in the sense that matter had not originated as matter before it. Its end is called eternity (*abad*), which means that it has no end to reach.²⁹

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The Guided Philosophy of Essences and Existences

The philosophy presented below is based on knowledge and guidance from the Divine Scriptures and the Traditions and Sayings of the prophets. Therefore, it can be regarded as the "guided philosophy." It is a philosophy in which the Ultimate Reality is recognized in seeking straight answers. In presenting their philosophy of essence and existence, Ibn Sina, al-Suhrawardi, Mir Damad, and Mulla Sadra created a strong basis for their arguments at different levels. Some tended to be closer to the Qur'an than others, and some were still influenced by Greek thought, as has been discussed earlier. The following discussion attempts to clarify areas of confusion among these well-known scholars. The religious philosophy or the "guided philosophy" of essences and existences provides a basis on which to study the theory of this subject.

According to a hadith of the Prophet, "Allah was before everything, and His Throne was over the water. He then wrote in the Preserved Tablet, mentioning everything."³⁰ This hadith and earlier verses imply that God existed before anything was created or existed, that there was nothing prior to His Existence, and that He will always exist. At the level of *sarmad*, only God exists. It can therefore be seen that in this state when nothing else existed (prior to other existences), only the level of *sarmad* existed in which God lives, has lived, and will live forever. We also refer to His Existence as complete and we know it to be an Absolute Existence. Since His Existence is complete, His Essence (for His Existence) does not exist, nor is it fully united with His Existence. However, there is another co-notion to His

²⁸ Shirazi, *Asfar*, vol.3, part 1, pp. 3 & 5.

²⁹ Kashani, "On the *Tahqiq*," Appendix B.

³⁰ Al-Mubarakpuri et al., *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, vol. 5, p.24.

Essence than that for His Existence. It is His Essence for other essences, which will be shown below as prior to the existences of all things contingent to His Existence. It should be pointed out here that the essences and existences in the guided philosophy are most likely to be at different levels than those presented in the previous section. In addition, the creation of a thing should be discussed together with its essence and its existence.

God's Existence and His knowledge of other existences can be regarded as the Absolute Reality. Although the contingents have been given the faculties to approach the knowledge, their limitations make it impossible to reach the Absolute Reality. With His knowledge, God can form ideas about His creations. Therefore, even before the first creation, God must have formed essences of all contingent existences in His Mind. It was Ibn al-'Arabi who regarded essences as subsisting in God's Mind.³¹ In this context, this subsistence is about nonexistents, implying that God has a definite idea in His Mind of what He is about to create. God's knowledge can also be said to be extensive since He is expected to know every detail of all His creations. God knows all things with their distinctive characteristics, for His knowledge is original: it does not depend on any of His future creations. Ibn Sina was correct in his view that God's knowledge cannot derive from anything, since He does not depend on anything but Himself.³² Accordingly, things are created by His knowledge. In this context it is described as "simple knowledge" or "creative knowledge." It is also known as "ordered knowledge," since every future creation is based on "cause and effect."

At this very important stage, we should be aware that God lives at the level that we call eternity, where there exist timelessness and spacelessness. This level is usually described as *al-sarmad* in the Qur'an. This level is occupied only by God, for no other creation is allowed to exist there. It will be clear later that God creates other temporal and spatial levels where His creations can reside. This, too, is part of His essences or subsistence in His Mind. It is also regarded as Divine Nature in the modes of His future creations.

Consider this Qur'anic verse: "Verily, when He intends a thing, His command is 'Be!' and it is" (36:82). The verse shows that when God intends to create something, at the level where He is about to create it, His action, for Himself, is neither temporal nor spatial. Here, the existence is made to wait on His Will, Plan, or Intention. When He intends to create something, His Word becomes a command, and His Divine Nature is able to transform His knowledge first into essences or subsistence in His Mind. However, since the creations are to be placed at temporal and spatial ordered levels, they are made to follow cause and effect.

³¹ Rahman, *Philosophy of Mulla Sadra*, p.148.

³² *Ibid.*, p.151.

“God knows everything – all particulars to their last details and including temporal and priorities and posteriorities – even though He does not possess sense perception.”³³

According to the Qur’an: “He it is Who has created the heavens and the earth in six aeons; [and ever since] the Throne of His Omnipotence has rested upon water”(11:7).³⁴ It should be noted that this statement is included in a hadith.³⁵ God said:

Are, then, they who are bent on denying the truth that the heavens and the earth were [once] a single entity, which We parted asunder? And [that] We made out of water every living thing? Will they then not believe?” (21:30)³⁶

The implication here is that God willed the evolution of all life from water, and that only water has the peculiar properties necessary for the emergence and development of life.³⁷ It also highlights the unitary origin of the physical universe, the emergence of life from and within an equally unitary element, and it supports the existence of essence of a unitary plan underlying all creations, and the Existence and Oneness of the Creator. It is the means whereby our spiritual life develops with such free will as we have.

Human beings, by virtue of their various faculties, have the opportunity to acquire knowledge of the Absolute Reality by seeking knowledge of other existences or created things. However, the limits of these faculties may also divert human beings from the straight path to the knowledge of the Absolute Reality. In addition, humans do not have direct access to the essences for the existences. So they can only indirectly learn about the limited aspects of essences by using their ability to analyze the knowledge of existences. In acquiring knowledge of the existences of all things, humans create theories in an effort to find the truth behind all creations. If the theories are correct, they lead to useful knowledge. However, if they are incorrect, they take humankind along another path.

Let us look at the following two hadiths:

The first thing Allah created was the Pen; right after that He commanded it: “Record,” and the Pen recorded everything that will occur until the Day of Resurrection.³⁸

When Allah created the creations, He wrote in a book that He had with Him above the Throne: “My Mercy overcomes My Anger.”³⁹

Since only God’s Existence can occupy the level of *al-sarmad*, we can conclude that the

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Asad, *Message of the Qur’an*, pp.313–314.

³⁵ Al-Mubarakpuri et al., *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, vol.9, p.496.

³⁶ Asad, *Message of the Qur’an*, p.491.

³⁷ Ibid., 21:30; footnote 39, pp.491–492.

³⁸ Al-Mubarakpuri et al., *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, vol.9, p.371.

level of *al-dahr* was created at the same time as His first creation or that it existed as the Divine Nature. Thus the Pen was created and it recorded His command at the level of *al-dahr*. However, there arises a difficulty. The above hadith also states that He wrote the essences of things in “a book that He had with Him over the Throne.” This statement indicates that God’s Mind contained the essence for the creation of the essences of all things yet to be created and the first reflection of His Essence for contingents, not His Essence for His Existence, and then they were written in a book. May God guide me and forgive me for my errors. If nothing can exist at the level of His Existence, then the book in which the essences are written must exist at the level of *al-dahr*, which can extend over the Throne; or, He maintains His access to both *al-sarmad* and *al-dahr*. Therefore, *huduth dhāti* is where God’s Essence exists at the level of *al-sarmad*, and *huduth dahri* is where the essences for all things exist at the level of *al-dahr*. This discussion helps us to understand everything clearly so that the analysis can continue according to a guided philosophy.

According to the Qur’an, God says:

It is God Who has created seven heavens and of the earth the like thereof. His Command descends between them, that you may know that God has power over all things, and that God surrounds all things with [His] knowledge. (65:12)

According to the Hadith:

Have you what has been spent since the creation of the heavens and the earth? Verily, it does not diminish what is in His Right Hand, and His Throne was over water. In His Hand is the scale and He lowers and raises it.⁴⁰

It was God’s knowledge that effected the creation of the universes and the earths from every surrounding atom. The Prophet was awarded vast knowledge by various forms of revelation, as indicated in the following hadiths:

Verily, Allah recorded the measurements for the creatures fifty thousand years before He created the heavens and the earth.⁴¹

I [Prophet Muhammad] was written with Allah as the Last and Final of the prophets, even when Adam was still clay. I will tell of the first good news announcing my advent, the result of the invocation to Allah, made from my father Ibrahim, the good news ‘Isā conveyed, and the dream that my mother saw. The mothers of all prophets see similar dreams.⁴²

³⁹ Ibid., vol.3, p.319.

⁴⁰ Ibid., vol.5, p.25.

⁴¹ Ibid., vol.9, p.372; vol.10, p.496.

⁴² Ibid., p.619.

The creation of the last Prophet and his Prophethood was therefore decided long before the creation of humankind. Thus the essences of the human existence were written in *huduth dahri* long before the actual reality of the existences. The creation of humankind, which occurred long after the creations of the heavens and the earth, was granted as a favor and a kindness by subjecting the heavens to the cause of humankind. Even before the creation of the heavens and the earth, their essences and that of humankind existed in reality. Therefore, the essences of all created things exist in reality before the actual creation of a thing, which results in the existence of a thing. These essences are recorded and must exist in reality at the level of *al-dahr* before their existences are created. Since the Pen was created when even the universes did not exist, it was the first creation and, in *huduth dahri*, it wrote the essences of the universes and all other creations. The heavens and the earth were created long afterwards and humankind even later.

The following Qur'anic verses provide further information on the subject:

Do they not reflect in their own minds? God created the heavens and the earth only for just ends and for a fixed term. (30:8)

We did not create the heavens, the earth, and all between them merely in [idle] sport. We created them for just ends, but most of them do not understand. (44:38, 39)

God, it is He Who has subjected to you all that is in the heavens, and all that is in the earth; it is all [as a favor and kindness] from Him. Verily, in it are signs for people who think deeply. (45:13)

And I have created the invisible beings and humankind only in order that they might worship Me. (51:56)

The main purpose of the creation of all beings is their cognition (*ma'arifah*) of the Existence of God. All created beings consciously and willingly conform to their own existence in respect of their perception of God's will, the reason why the heavens and the earth were created, and the fact that they were created with due proportions. Those who worship the One Unique God deserve to receive true benefits from God's other creations and thus discover how to make use of Nature. Hence, the heavens and the earth had their essence established before their existence. The essence also seems to exist in two forms:

1. in the Mind of God, at *al-sarmad* level, Who originates all creations; and
2. in a recorded form, as stated earlier, most likely held at *al-dahr* level and not available to the created beings.

Therefore, there is Reality in both the essence and existence of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them. We are also reminded that there is a fixed term for their existence.

In addition, the heavens and the earth exist at the level of *al-zaman* and their essence is recorded at the level of *al-dahr*.

The guided philosophy provides the reality of various levels of essences and existences. According to this philosophy, when God wishes to create the existence of something, He uses its essence from the *sarmad* level and causes the nonexistence at the *dahr* level to be transformed into existence. This existence of a thing at the *dahr* level creates its life at the level of *al-zaman* (time). A fixed succession of time is assigned to its existence there, after which it must return to the level of *al-dahr*. Here, according to this concept, it must either continue to exist for an unspecified period or revert to nonexistence at the level of *al-dahr*. Only God knows the exact nature of essences and existences. We can transform our thoughts only within the boundaries of the Divine Scriptures and the Traditions of the prophets, much of whose knowledge was gained from revelation.

The proof of God's existence is the creations that exist after they have been nothing (or nonexistent) and perish after they have existed. The Qur'an says: "And every living creature on earth depends on God for its sustenance; He knows its time limit and its resting place; all is laid down in a clear decree" (11:6). It is from the knowledge of all existences that the best possible knowledge of God's Existence is available. God has also subjected some existences to others, although He eventually provides all of them with sustenance.

"God! None has the right to be worshiped but He, the Ever Living, Who sustains and protects all that exists" (3:2). Although creations are subject to time, their Creator is not. His word is the key that opens the door of existence. It is not only the starting point of existence, but also the whole measure and standard of Truth and Right. His judgment seat will, with perfect justice, restore the dominion of Right and Reality, for His Knowledge and Wisdom cover all reality.

Various existences are also created in different planes and spaces. Some of the existences are not visible to others. Thus the existences are also created in various times and spaces. Some are created where serial time exists, and others exist in a flux of time where time scales are different than serial time.

According to Mir Damad:

The existences caused by God are His effects, not just his concomitants such as pure essences. Since these positive existents exist in themselves, are truly caused by God, and are really originated, they cannot exist at the level of God's eternity (*al-sarmad*); but the discontinuity of their being with God's eternity requires that they exist at a lower level of being regarded as *al-dahr*.

The realm of *al-dahr*, then, is real but pure origination: real because it is not just nominal origination like the origination of essence from God and pure because it occurs in pure time or

perpetuity without the extension or quantification of time.⁴³

The interaction of various existences created by God is also worthy of discussion. Human existence serves a primary purpose in the existence of all creations because many other existences, including the heavens, the earth and all that is between them, are subject to human existence. This is due to human knowledge and the human ability to utilize other creations. Provided that they are fully committed to God's plan and purpose for all creations, human beings will regard them in that light and use them accordingly. Humans are also gifted with the mental ability to acquire and store the knowledge of all the creations that they experience, and form essences in their minds for future use. However, if their thinking does not fully conform to the divine purpose, then their knowledge and understanding of all creations in their view and their use will be extremely limited, even though they may enjoy the freedom of their small visible gain. Other creations, which either are not endowed with a mind or are of low intelligence compared with humans, have consequently not been given a basic responsibility over the surrounding existences. It is also important to note that human beings are capable of exhibiting their creativity in the direct use of God's other creations in various combinations. For instance, humans can combine hydrogen and oxygen in certain proportions (H₂O) to form water, or break down water into hydrogen and oxygen. They can invent machines that perform functions by combining various materials in a certain way. History has shown that human beings are capable of exploring and using the knowledge of the universes. However, history has also shown that knowledge put only to material use limits the knowledge itself. As the following discussion will indicate, if human beings are cognizant of their primary divine responsibility, they will give equal importance to gaining spiritual knowledge alongside material knowledge. The result of this venture will reveal the hidden knowledge of the purpose of the creations and other existences.

God controls all existences with His knowledge of every atom of all created existences, Yet He has imparted freedom to all creations in a process established and known only by Him. The Ash`arite School promoted the doctrine of atomism, which states that God is the free Creator of the atoms of the universe at every moment, for His creativity is boundless. This doctrine helped the Ash`arites to repudiate the rationalists, who regarded existence and essence as identical.⁴⁴ The Ash`arites maintained that existence constitutes the very being of essence. Human existences have no knowledge of the true nature of all existences. The only recourse given to the human existences, or all existences, for that matter, is to seek material or spiritual knowledge according to a procedure established by Him. The knowledge sought and gained by human existences cannot reach the level of the

⁴³ Rahman, *Mir Damad's Concept*, p.67.

⁴⁴ Mohammed Iqbal, *Metaphysics of Persia* (London: Luzac, 1908), p.82.

true knowledge of God's purpose, but only to an extent allowed by Him. The knowledge of His Existence is therefore limited to the knowledge of the truth of all existences.

Finally, the concept of essences and existences according to the Peripatetic philosophy, subsequently enumerated by al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, al-Sahrawardi, Khvajah Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, Mir Damad, Mulla Sadra, and others, provides various definitions of essences and existences in an epistemological context, at least partially, that cannot be complete. However, the guided philosophy has given us, in very precise detail, knowledge of essences and existences from higher to lower levels provided systematically in the Divine Scriptures. Clearly, when we refer to various existences such as the universes, the earth, human beings, and all the other creations of God, their essences are prior to them according to His definite plan. Ibn Sina was right when he declared existence to be the sole nature or reality of God, although the existences of the contingents have, according to His plan, something in common with His attributes, yet some do not. Al-Sahrawardi and his Ishraqi School presented the doctrine of the priority of essence over existence, regarding existence only as an attribute of essence. Mir Damad's philosophy deals with essence as the primary reality and existence as a secondary manifestation of it, though not real. With regard to human knowledge of existence, Mulla Sadra considered existence to be reality and the essence only a reflection of it in the mind. Clearly, when we are dealing with human existence and the human formation of the knowledge of other existences in the mind, then the essences of the existences are constantly developing in the mind. This is where existences take priority over their essences.

The guided philosophy clearly defines the spatial and temporal presence of essences and existences. Religious philosophy regards both the essences and existences as having a reality. Therefore, the guided philosophy deals with the lower level essences, which have been described as existing in the human mind.

The Nature of Time and Space

It is very difficult to imagine God as infinite in the sense of spatial and temporal infinity. God's creativity can be understood only from the Divine Scriptures, the Traditions of the prophets, and a deeper understanding of His creations. Iqbal states:

The infinity of the Ultimate Ego consists in [*sic*] the infinite inner possibilities of His creative activity, of which the universe, as known to us, is only a partial expression. In one word, God's infinity is intensive, not extensive. It involves an infinite series, but is not that series.⁴⁵

For God, past, present, and future are all the same. God, self, and time are three different parts of the Ultimate Reality. In relation to God, we refer to timelessness and

⁴⁵ Iqbal, *Metaphysics of Persia*, p.52.

spacelessness, whereas His creations are subjected to finite time and finite space, and changes in their state. He, therefore, is the Creator of infinite space that contains all the universe. His Oneness and Uniqueness are fundamentally different from all created beings beyond the boundaries of human thought. According to the Qur'an: "Say: He is One God, God the Eternal, the Uncaused Cause of all that exists. He begets not, nor is He begotten; and there is nothing that could be compared to Him" (112:1-4).

Time is an essential element in the Ultimate Reality. As we know from the Qur'an, God is continually occupied in creative activity. The universe is in a state of "continuous creative movement", unlimited in its possibilities owing to God's unlimited creativity that is beyond human understanding. Time in essence is the name of God's creative expression. It is God Who has chosen time for expressing His creativity.

God is limited in neither time nor space, nor is He definable in terms of comparison, nor can He be categorized in human thought or comprehension. We can only make generalized metaphors about His existence and activity. We cannot interpret literally the Qur'anic references to His being "in the heavens" or "established on His Throne," since the implication would be that God is limited in space. Similarly, when the Qur'an describes Him as "all seeing," "all hearing," or "all aware," we know that these descriptions do not refer to the physical senses. They are simply linguistic vehicles used to convey ideas that are beyond all human experience and therefore need to be expressed in terms understood by human beings. As the Qur'an says: "No human vision can encompass Him, whereas He encompasses all human visions" (6:103).

According to the well-known hadith, when 'Ali ibn Abi Ṭalib was asked: "Where is God?", he is said to have answered: *La yahuduhu la zaman wa la makan*: "he is timeless and spaceless.". The Qur'an says: "And that with your Sustainer is the beginning and end [of all that exists]" (54:43).

The Attributes of God described in the Qur'an do not circumscribe to His reality, but rather the perceptible effect of His activity on and within the universe created by Him. What human beings regard as "time" has no meaning in relation to God because He is timeless, so for Him one day and a thousand years are alike. We must realize the difference between whatever we experience after resurrection and whatever we experience in this world.

According to the Qur'an, "The originator is He of the heavens and the earth; and when He wills a thing to be, He says to it, 'Be' – and it is" (2:117). In this verse, *amr* is a commandment or direction by God. The term *khalq* is also used by the Qur'an to refer to creation by God relating to the universe of matter. It means that *amr* is a commandment by God expressed in human terms. Let us look at the following Qur'anic verse: *Wa ma amruna illa wahidatun-kalamhim-bilbaṣar*: "And Our commandment is only a single [act] – like the twinkling of an eye" (54:50). The commandment (*amr*) can be a single act, followed by enumeration. The use of the term *nazzala* in many places in the Qur'an implies the gradual

bringing down (to earth) of the Creation. Therefore, God in a timeless act can combine numerous steps into a single act, whereas the *insan* (man or woman) has to confront the various stages of time, space, and circumstances, requiring finite time and finite space to complete the task. God has thus chosen human language to convey to us that His timelessness in performing a task is similar to the twinkling of an eye. Although comparable to the smallest fraction of time as understood by humans, it is still finite. Therefore, human language can only make allegorical conclusions about timelessness in the creativity of God.

We become aware of His existence when we observe the effects of His unceasing activity within and upon the universe created by Him. In the Qur’anic verse given above, God is described as *latifun khabir*, referring to His inaccessibility by human perception and imagination. The term *latif* means something that is extremely subtle in quality, intangible, and unfathomable, and *khabir* means “all aware.” According to the Qur’an, “He is the First and the Last, and the Outward and the Inward; and He is the Knower of all things” (57:3). Khwaja Muhammad Parsa writes as follows:

The Ultimate Truth is Omnipotent by means of His unique potency in unlimited resources. Compared with His potency, both sempiternity and eternity are just like the twinkling of an eye. He is pure and untouched by the past and the future, from coming and going, from plurality or demarcation. This is the discernment of the world of antiquity. Since the nonconformists remain apart from the mysterious divine light, they disavow the antiquity of the Qur’an, saying: “When there was no Moses, nor Mount Sinai, how could God the Most High have addressed him: “Therefore, remove your shoes, you are in the sacred valley of Tuwa.” If they had been able to travel back into the compression of past time, if they had been free of the narrowness of the visible world even for a while, and had passed through the time of spirits, no one could have led them astray from the path of true belief.⁴⁶

Comment [SJH11]: Please insert page ref. in footnote 46.

According to another hadith cited earlier, “Do not curse *al-dahr*, for God is *al-dahr*.” In the light of the above discussion in “Religious Philosophy of Essences and Existences,” it is possible to make a careful analysis of the true nature of time and space. As described in the philosophy, there was a time when only God existed – and nothing else. Following this stage, according to another hadith, the first creation took place – that of the Pen, which wrote the essences of all the future creations. It is amazing to recognize these realities that give us the basic knowledge of events that are consecutive without overlapping one another. Therefore, time as the descriptor of consecutive events existed even before the events

⁴⁶ Ushnohi, *Asar-i-Farsi*, p.156. See also, Appendix B.

themselves, beyond God's existence, were created. Since the Pen was the first creation, time was not the first creation, nor was any other creation the first to be associated with the Ultimate Reality of God or His Ultimate Nature. It is has also been described earlier in the "Religious Philosophy of Essences and Existences" that only God exists at the level of *al-sarmad*, since none of God's creations is allowed to exist at this level. Therefore, if time exists before even the first existence, since it needs to have priority over consecutive creations, and if it must exist at the level of *al-sarmad*, then it must be either an essence in the Mind of God, corresponding to future existences, or a Divine Nature. It is further recognized that, at the level of *al-sarmad*, God can see the past, present, and future together in a timeless activity for Himself. However, He can apply His Divine Nature to all His creations contingent to Him to subject them to the principle of consecutiveness by means of a time lag among them.

There is another feature of priority that must be recognized. According to the Qur'an, God gives us the knowledge that everything is created in pairs (51:49). For example, where there exists "good," there is also "bad," also "hot" and "cold," and so on. It is not difficult to accept, therefore, that even before the first creation and the writing down of the essences of all existences and contingents, the very essences of creating everything in pairs must have a prior Essence in the Mind of God or something that is in His Divine Nature.

As Khvaja Mehboob Ilahi Dehlvi writes:

His Being and Attributes are purer and more sacred to an extent far beyond the greatest stretch of our imagination, the limit of our intellect and our conception, and the grasp of our understanding. Nevertheless, He is nearer than our jugular vein. In His vision He is nearer than your [faculty of] sight, and in His hearing he is far more sensitive than your [faculty of] listening. It is the same for other faculties such as speech or comprehension. The real proximity is the nearness of God, because *qurb* (immediacy) is His Attribute and His Attribute can only be actuality. The real nearness is that to which inaccessibility is impossible.

Apparently God exists among all existents, yet His alliance is neither like that of a body with a body, nor like the union of a rudiment with a rudiment, nor similar to the combination of an element with another element. The affinity of the soul with the body is like the communion of God with the whole universe. He is neither inside the body nor outside of it, neither associated with it nor separate from it. He is nowhere in bodies, yet no molecule is devoid of Him. "He who is cognizant of himself" has the same meaning. The body is in a space and He is in a space that suits Him. According to a Saying of the Prophet:

“God the Most High said: ‘By My Power, Grace, and Unity, and the need of all creatures of Me, and by the banner of My Throne and the subtlety of My elevated position, I feel abashed before My servant and My people [Ummah], who grow old in Islam. Then I chastise them.’”

‘Ali and Thawban transmit from the Prophet: “Moses said to God, ‘O my Lord, are You near me so that I can speak in a whisper to You, or are You far from me so that I have to call out loud? Because I sense the beauty of Your voice, though I cannot see You. Where are You?’”

God the Most Exalted said: ‘I am behind you and in front of you; on your right side and on your left side. I am the companion of My servant when he remembers Me and in close proximity to him when he calls Me.’”⁴⁷

Comment [SJH12]: Please insert page ref. in footnote 47.

The Inner Self

The guided philosophy of the self, on the other hand, stresses more religious purification to achieve reality. As Mohammed Iqbal remarked:

In fact, religion, for reasons which I have mentioned before, is far more anxious to reach the ultimate reality than science. And to both, the way to pure objectivity lies through what may be called the purification of experience.⁴⁸

As stated by Fazlur Rahman:

The affinity of this doctrine of movement to Mohammed Iqbal’s view of the dynamic process of reality resulting in the evolution of more concrete and spiritual selfhood of man is obvious enough.⁴⁹

The Qur’an says:

Now, verily, it is We Who have created man, and We know what his innermost self whispers within him; for We are closer to him than his jugular vein” (50:16). This appears to be a statement by God about the life of the individual self on earth. The next verse deals with the struggle within the individual over the choice to be made between

⁴⁷ Ushnobi, *Asar-i-Farsi*, p.150. See also, Appendix B.

⁴⁸ Iqbal, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought*, p.155.

⁴⁹ Rahman, *Mir Damad’s Concept*, p.36.

right and wrong: “Not even an atom’s weight on earth or in heaven escapes your Sustainer’s knowledge; and everything smaller than that and everything larger are recorded in His clear decree (10:61).

Let us not judge the above verses, according to the premise of the Qur’an, in human terms. Let us accept that Divine Life is in touch with the whole universe on the analogy of the soul’s contact with the body. We can therefore begin to see that, although God does not exist in space, there is some existence of space, which befits the subtlety of the soul.

We now move forward to the benefits of the enlightenment of the inner self. The Qur’an refers to *al-najmuth-thaqib* “the piercingly bright star”. In the darkest sky, the light of this star shines most brilliantly. Many commentators have called it the morning star, or Saturn, or Sirius, or a shooting star, etc.

However, the star in this verse may have been used as a parable: namely, during a night of spiritual darkness or distress shines the glories of God’s revelation. A human being lost in the deepest distress and sorrow may encounter a sudden intuitive enlightenment which disperses the darkness of uncertainty. Finally, Divine Revelation knocks, as it were, at the door of the human being’s heart and thus fulfills the functions of both solace and enlightenment. The enlightenment will be that of the *nafs lawwamah* or *shahid*. Development of this aspect of the inner self, therefore, should be our primary focus, which seems possible only by creating a relationship with God.

It is most important, then, that the inner self be awakened to develop the self-control needed to defend against the temptation to sin. *Inna Allaha la yughayyiru ma bi-qawmin, hatta yughayyiru ma b- anfusihim*: “Verily, God does not change the condition of a nation, until they change their inner selves” (13:11).⁵⁰

The individual thus awakened and developed is now responsible for helping the community move in the right direction. In its wider sense, this is an illustration of the law of cause and effect, which dominates the lives of both individuals and communities, and the rise and fall of civilizations dependent on people’s moral qualities and changes in their inner selves. Communities consisting of awakened individuals will be capable of confronting and solving the difficult problems ahead. God helps these people and participates with them in their endeavors.

If human beings have true spiritual understanding, they have nothing to fear. God protects them in many ways, of which they are not even aware. Although they may be insignificant creatures, their souls raise them to a level of dignity above other creations. The

⁵⁰ Asad, *The Message of the Qur’an*, p.359.

relationship with God can be established only by methods clearly described in the Qur'an, which need to be adopted as the primary objectives.

According to the Qur'an:

Soon We will show them Our signs on the farthest horizons and within themselves, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the truth. Is it not enough that your Lord witnesses all things? (41:53)

The *insan* (human being) has therefore been given the opportunity to develop an insight into the wonders of the universe by making progressive efforts to understand the depth of these creations. Similarly, the *insan* has been given the opportunity to develop insight into the inner self and discover spiritual knowledge. These insights, physical and spiritual, indicate the existence of the Creator. Here is what Iqbal says on the subject:

Thus, there is nothing static in my inner life; all is constant mobility, an unceasing flux of states, a perpetual flow in which there is no halt or resting place. Constant change, however, is unthinkable without time. On the analogy of our inner experience, then, conscious existence means life in time. A keener insight into the nature of conscious experience, however, reveals that the self in its inner life moves from the center outward.⁵¹

The movement from the center outward needs to be analyzed further in the sense of the true Qur'anic view as known to us. Iqbal states clearly that it is in a "perpetual flow," apparently from the duration containing time without succession to time in succession, which is outward. This view is different than the philosophy of Bergson, who considers perpetual flow to be entirely in the realm of succession in movement. Therefore, the inner self movement should be regarded as a movement from nonsuccession to succession of the inner possibilities of the human self. When the inner self is developed with its spiritual life, then the individual truly finds this center and its outward movement reforms the outward or worldly life under guidance from the center.

Although the innermost self-conscious states dissolve into one another, they have no numerical character: "time without succession" is therefore purely qualitative, including no successions. This "time without succession" is free from any space limitations, and there are no reversible instants.

Space

Below are the space limitations of human beings, as described in the Qur'an:

Verily, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the succession of the night and the

⁵¹ Iqbal, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p.38.

day, are signs for men of understanding, who, standing, sitting, and reclining, bear God in mind and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth, and say: "O our Lord! You have not created this in vain." (3:19)

And God has produced you from the earth in steady growth, and thereafter He will return you to it. And God will bring you forth in resurrection. And God has made the earth a wide expanse for you, so that you might walk in it on spacious paths. (71:17-20)

The definition comprises all things physical and spiritual: watercourses disappearing underground and reappearing; the metamorphosis of seeds into plants and of vegetation into oil and coal; traces of old artifacts and entire civilizations buried in the earth and reappearing within the sight and consciousness of later generations of people; the biological breakdown of the corpses of animals and people into elements of nourishment for new life; the evaporation of earthly waters toward the skies and their descent as rain, snow, or hail; the ascent toward the heavens of people's longings, hopes, and ambitions, and the descent of divine inspiration into the minds of people; finally, a revival of faith and thought, and with it, the growth of new artifacts, new skills, and new hopes; in short, the endless recurrence of birth, death, and rebirth, which characterizes all of God's creation. The Qur'an says:

He knows all that enters the earth and all that comes out of it, as well as all that descends from the skies, and all that ascends to them. And He alone is a dispenser of Grace, truly forgiving. (34:2)

And He it is Who has brought you [all] into being out of one live entity, and a time limit and a resting place. Clearly, We have spelled out these messages for people who can grasp the truth. (6:98)

The terms *mustaqarr* and *mustawda'* in the above verse are very important. *Mustaqarr* is the limit of a course, a term set for the fulfillment of something. *Mustawda'* is a place of consignment or repository. As described earlier, the destiny of the human being has therefore been linked to time, space, and the changing state of all creations.

God contains every atom of the universe within Him and we do not know, nor can we understand anything relating to His space. Our understanding in this area is further constrained by the limitations of human language and the human mind. Ushnohi has defined spaces of corporeal things, dense and lighter bodies, and the spiritual entities.⁵²

⁵² Ushnohi, *Asar-i-Farsi*, p.50.

Ushnohi also speaks of three categories of space:⁵³ that of material bodies, that of immaterial bodies, and that of God. The space of material bodies is further divided into three kinds. Firstly, there is the space of gross bodies, on which we predicate roominess: movement in this space is associated with time. Secondly, there is the space of subtle bodies, such as air and sound: movement is also associated with time in this kind of space. Thirdly, there is the space of light. The second category of space is that of immaterial bodies such as angelic or ethereal beings, closely resembling the incredible speed of light through the void, which is beyond human imagination. The third category is the space of God or Divine space.⁵⁴ As mentioned earlier, God has neither space nor time. So there must be some space that He operates for Himself, for He asserts that He knows every item in the space. At the highest level of our spiritual movement, we have a glimpse of His timelessness and the Divine space.

Ibn Haytham's treatise on space is another important work. In his view:

Comment [SJH13]: Please insert page ref. in footnote 55.

Space is a common noun, applicable to numerous things, and each of them may be called "space." This is because the space (or place) is the thing with which the questioner is answered about the place of body, while the answer for the questioner about the place of body may be for each of so many things.

Each body has two things and each of them may be named its space. One is the level (surface), with which the body is surrounded, that is, the surface of the air that surrounds the body which is in the air, and the level of water that surrounds the body which is in the water, while the level or surface of each body has internally a body that is separated from it. This is the idea adopted by one of the two contending groups.

The imaginary vacuum is the imaginary dimensions, which are void of material, and which are between the opposite points of the level or surface that surrounds the vacuum.⁵⁵

As Khwaja Muhammad Parsa writes:

Further, you know that if the human soul acquires strength by various means of purification and purgation in following the Master of the Shari'ah, it can swiftly draw the dense body toward the time of subtle bodies and accomplish more work in a day than others can perform in a year. It is stated in the episode of Khizr that, in his human

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ See Appendix C.

condition, he displaced that portion of mountain in a single day and flattened it, shifting its dust to somewhere else. This story has been related in *Nawadir al-Usul* in full detail.⁵⁶

Comment [SJH14]: Please insert page ref. in footnote 56.

⁵⁶ Ushnohi, *Asar-i-Farsi*, p.156. See also, Appendix B.