



Self-Knowledge and Its Role in Cultivating and Strengthening the Sense of Poverty and Need for God from the Perspective of the Holy Quran

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Abstract

Research Article

This research, using a descriptive-analytical method based on library studies and drawing upon verses from the Holy Quran and reliable religious sources, examines the role of self-knowledge in explaining the human sense of poverty and need for God as the Creator and ultimate cause of existence within the framework of Islamic teachings. The findings reveal that self-knowledge exposes human beings' existential poverty in relation to God and identifies the true self—the divine soul—as immortal and bestowed by God, the source of fulfillment for all needs. Consequently, by granting primacy to the unseen realm, the soul, and one's innate divine purity, one strengthens his connection with God and nurtures within oneself a profound sense of poverty and need for Him. Furthermore, by cultivating cognitive and spiritual stages of awareness, one reinforces the realization that he possesses nothing of his own and that God alone is his true refuge and source of strength. The results indicate that this sense of poverty and need for God enhances faith and spiritual connection with the Divine, ultimately leading to the attainment of "*ḥayāt-i tayyibah*" (good life).

Keywords: Self-knowledge, existential poverty, self-knowledge in the Quran, spiritual stages, cognitive stages.

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Introduction

According to religious teachings, “self-knowledge” or “ma‘rifat al-nafs” (knowledge of the soul) is a type of cognition that makes humans aware of their existential dimensions, needs, and capabilities. Based on this knowledge, it provides a comprehensive and appropriate program for utilizing abilities, fulfilling needs, and progressing on the path toward closeness to Allah.

Among the important roles of self-knowledge in accordance with the Holy Quran is drawing human attention to their poverty before God, which is the main focus of this paper: “*O mankind! You are the ones who stand in need of Allah, and Allah—He is the All-sufficient, the All-laudable*”⁴ (Quran 35:15). Philosophers consider this type of poverty as existential contingency and examine the nature of human beings and their existential conditions (Sajjādī 1983, 2:138). Mystics also interpret poverty as need, annihilation in God (*fanā’ fi Allah*), and the union of a drop with the ocean, stating: “This is the ultimate journey and station of the perfected ones, where the wayfarer becomes completely annihilated with nothing remaining of him, and he knows that whatever he attributed to himself was all from God, the Absolute Truth” (Ibn ‘Arabī 1945, 98). Self-knowledge, as a process that reveals human perfections and deficiencies, makes humans more aware of the source of their perfections and their existential poverty before the All-Sufficient God (Miṣbāḥ Yazdī 2009, 9). Therefore, God invites humans to pay attention to themselves and their innate nature (*fiṭrah*): “*Take care of your own souls. He who strays cannot hurt you if you are guided*”⁵ (Quran 5:105), and to understand divine signs both in the horizons and within themselves, to remind them that the truth of human beings lies in their poverty before the All-Sufficient God: “*and in your*

⁴. «يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ أَنْتُمُ الْفُقَرَاءُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ» (فاطر/١٥)

⁵. «عَلَيْكُمْ أَنْفُسُكُمْ لَا يَضُرُّكُمْ مَنْ ضَلَّ إِذَا اهْتَدَيْتُمْ» (المائدة/١٠٥)



souls [as well]. Will you not then perceive?”⁶ (Quran 51:21). Thus, self-knowledge leads to human growth in recognizing perfections and understanding their neediness and existential poverty before the All-Sufficient God.

Furthermore, considering the verse “one who purifies it, is felicitous”⁷ (Quran 91:9), self-knowledge encompasses a spectrum of various issues. However, what aligns with the purpose of this paper is that we should believe the true self of human beings is their divine spirit: “So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My spirit, then fall down in prostration before him”⁸ (Quran 15:29), which is imperishable, bestowed by God, and the source of fulfilling their needs. A question arises in this regard: Can self-knowledge and the feeling of poverty and the need for God lead to a real and deep connection between humans and Almighty God?

Answer: The complete fulfillment of innate human desires is only possible through a complete and conscious connection with the Origin of existence. All creatures have an inseparable bond with their Creator, and since humans can attain conscious intuitive knowledge (‘ilm ḥuḍūrī) of their own truth, and their truth is nothing but the relation to the Creator, therefore, they can also establish a complete conscious connection with Him. Intuitive knowledge of the soul is agreed upon by all divine philosophers. Whenever human attention shifts from sensory perceptions and egoistic thoughts toward their own essence, they will find it with direct knowledge. This knowledge also exists in other states, although due to engagement with other perceptions, they may not pay detailed attention to it. By reducing material attachments, practicing self-reflection, and focusing on oneself, it can be strengthened and brought to clarity and awareness.

⁶. ﴿وَفِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَفَلَا تُبْصِرُونَ﴾ (الذاريات/ ٢١)

⁷. ﴿قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا﴾ (الشمس/ ٩)

⁸. ﴿فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتَهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي فَقَعُوا لَهُ سَاجِدِينَ﴾ (الحجر/ ٢٩)



As for the existential connection and dependence on the Creator, it can be proven through the principles of transcendent philosophy that Mullā Ṣadrā has explained (Miṣbāḥ Yazdī 2009, 50). That is, existence has hierarchical degrees, and the lower degrees are, in order, radiations of the higher degree, their effects, and are sustained by them. “True causality” (*‘illiyyat-i ḥaqīqī*) means an existential relation, not between two independent entities, for in that case, neither would need the other for existence. Rather, it is between an independent entity and a dependent one whose existence is purely relational and contingent upon its cause. Thus, the existence of an effect in relation to its true cause, which bestows existence upon it, is nothing but pure relation and an illuminative connection. If one were to perceive its true nature, he would find it sustained by the cause and a mere reflection of it (Miṣbāḥ Yazdī 2009, 51).

Thus, one who realizes his true essence will understand that he is sustained by and dependent on the Creator—essentially, he is nothing but pure relation and connection to Him. Such observation cannot be separated from observing a radiance of the “Sustaining, Exalted Light” (*Nūr al-Qayyūm al-Muta‘ālī*). Understanding the connection of a dependent being is impossible without recognizing the independent, Sustaining Being that it relies on. Observing the truth of the soul aligns with recognizing it as an independent radiance—a reflection of Divine Beauty and Majesty. The broader the sphere of the soul’s existence, the higher its rank; similarly, the deeper and more focused its observations, the clearer and more profound its perception of Divine Lights will become. The more one understands their own dependence and lack of independence, the more their focus shifts to the possessor of all relationships—the original and independent Being. As this happens, they will increasingly benefit from the brilliance of His Majesty. This continues until one becomes a perfect mirror and complete manifestation of the Divine Essence (Miṣbāḥ Yazdī 2009, 52). Generally, this research seeks to answer the question: “From the perspective of the Holy Quran, what role does self-knowledge play in creating and strengthening the human sense of poverty and need for God?”



Research Method

This study employs a descriptive-analytical method, focusing on the Quranic verses while utilizing rational analysis and examining religious texts and opinions of Islamic thinkers to investigate self-knowledge and its role in creating and strengthening the human sense of poverty and need.

Background Research

Regarding the topic of “self-knowledge” and “human poverty and need for God,” which originates from revelatory verses and teachings of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (a), valuable works have been written. For example, Ibn Sina’s *Al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbīhāt* (1991) discusses necessary and contingent existence, emphasizing creation’s dependence on the Creator. Ibn ‘Arabī in *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* (1945) addresses the connection between self-knowledge and God-knowledge, levels of self-awareness, etc. Muḥammad Jawād Rudgar’s article, “Human Existential Poverty in the Quran with a Philosophical-Mystical Approach” (2005), presents the theory of existential poverty as expressing all creation’s dependence on God, rooted in the Quran, examining it through a revelatory perspective and explaining its impact on human perfection.

The innovative aspects of this research encompass a direct engagement with the Quran, a comparative analysis of differing perspectives, an interdisciplinary approach, an examination of practical examples, and a consideration of contemporary challenges. In contrast, previous studies have primarily focused on “self-knowledge” and the “human experience of poverty and the need for God” from philosophical and ontological viewpoints.

Principles of Self-Knowledge in the Quran and Their Role in Creating Human Sense of Poverty and Need for God

As mentioned, self-knowledge seeks to explain humanity’s cognitive connection with God, discovering the source of perfection and existential poverty toward that creative source. This section discusses those principles



of self-knowledge that are effective in creating a sense of poverty and the need for God.

1. The Primacy of the Human Spirit

Human beings, by virtue of perceiving themselves through intuitive knowledge (*‘ilm ḥuḍūrī*) and comprehending other things through thought and reflection, possess an immaterial reality called the spirit (*rūḥ*), which is imperishable: “...ahead of them is a barrier until the day they will be resurrected”⁹ (*Quran 23:100*). The proof of the soul’s immateriality is a firm foundation for establishing many of humanity’s existential and essential characteristics and needs, including connection with and dependence upon God (Ṭabāṭabā’ī 1990, 41).

The Quran describes the command of the Lord as belonging to the realm of the unseen dominion, transcending time and gradual processes: “Our command is but a single [word], like the twinkling of an eye”¹⁰ (*Quran 54:50*). Its realization occurs instantly by divine will: “All His command, when He wills something, is to say to it ‘Be,’ and it is. So immaculate is He in whose hand is the dominion of all things, and to whom you shall be brought back”¹¹ (*Quran 36:82-83*). The command “Be!” is ontological—its addressee comes into existence immediately. Thus, the spirit is of the nature of the divine command (*Amr Allāh*), requiring only God’s will for its origination (Javādī Āmulī 1993, pp. 299-308). The verse, “So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My spirit...”¹² (*Quran 38:72*) refers to the spirit’s reality—an independent, immaterial entity possessing life, power, and knowledge, originating from the Divine Command (*‘Ālam al-Amr*). Mullā Ṣadrā notes that God

⁹. ﴿... مِنْ وَرَائِهِمْ بَرْزَخٌ إِلَى يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ﴾ (المؤمنون / ١٠٠)

¹⁰. ﴿وَمَا أَمْرُنَا إِلَّا وَاحِدَةٌ﴾ (القمر / ٥٠)

¹¹. ﴿فَسُبْحَانَ الَّذِي بِيَدِهِ مَلَكُوتُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ﴾ (يس / ٨٢-٨٣)

¹². ﴿فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتَهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي﴾ (ص / ٧٢)



distinguishes between “*taswiyah*” (perfecting the form) and “*nafkḥ al-rūḥ*” (breathing of the spirit) in human creation. *Taswiyah* pertains to physical stages, while the inbreathing of the spirit signifies transcendence (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī 1989, 8:42). This verse applies universally, as the spirit breathed into humans is from ‘*Ālam al-Amr*—the same human spirit that animates the body (Ṭabāṭabā’ī 1996, 12:236).

Beyond the shared human spirit, the Quran mentions the “spirit of faith”¹³ and the “word of piety,”¹⁴ which are divine lights residing only in believers’ hearts.¹⁵ The spirit originates from realms of divine proximity, but its descent into materiality distances it from perfection. This descent awakens awareness of human poverty before God, for the spirit is of the nature of God’s command¹⁶ and a divine inbreathing.¹⁷ Recognizing this dependence cultivates a need for God, the spirit’s source. In the soul’s ascending journey, humans return to perfection through realms like the intermediate realm between death and the Day of Resurrection (*barzakh*) and the gathering of all souls on the Day of Judgment (*ḥashr*), attaining divine proximity. Faith and piety strengthen this connection, as the spirit is intrinsically divine (Javādī Āmulī 2012, pp. 96,99).

2. The Primacy of the Unseen Realm (‘*Ālam al-Ghayb*)

According to the verse: “...on the day when the Trumpet will be blown. Knower of the sensible and the Unseen...”¹⁸ (Quran 6:73). The universe comprises two domains, the unseen and the manifest, linked existentially and causally. However, the question arises: How can humans connect with

¹³. ﴿... أُولَئِكَ كَتَبَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمُ الْإِيمَانَ وَأَيَّدَهُم بِرُوحٍ مِنْهُ...﴾ (المجادلة / ٢٢)

¹⁴. ﴿وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ يَكْتُبُ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ كَلِمَةَ التَّقْوَى﴾ (الفتح / ٢٢)

¹⁵. ﴿وَيَجْعَلُ لَكُمْ نُورًا تَمْشُونَ﴾ (الحديد / ٢٨)

¹⁶. ﴿وَمَا أَمَرْنَا إِلَّا الْوَاحِدَ كَلِمَةً بِالْبَصَرِ﴾ (قمر / ٥٠)

¹⁷. ﴿فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتَهُ وَنَفَخْتَ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي﴾ (ص / ٧٢)

¹⁸. ﴿... يَوْمَ يُنْفَخُ فِي الصُّورِ عَالِمُ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ...﴾ (الانعام، ٧٣)



the unseen realm? From Mullā Ṣadrā's perspective, the human soul is like a polished and pure mirror. Yet, the presence of veils, rooted in the soul's material origination and humanity's entanglement with the imperfections of this worldly existence, causes humans to remain oblivious to the higher realm (Javādī Āmulī 2012, 302). On the other hand, humans can prepare their souls for ascent to higher spiritual ranks. Thus, self-knowledge, both in essence and action, serves as a ladder toward divine knowledge. By distancing themselves from moral corruption, engaging in spiritual discipline, purifying the soul (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī 2018, 188), performing righteous deeds and worship, and adhering to the principle of moderation, humans can remove these obstacles.

In summary, such matters lead the spiritual seeker to intellectual perfection and pure knowledge, which serves as the means for ascending to higher existential ranks and witnessing divine truths. Mullā Ṣadrā states: "Knowledge is the seed of divine vision" (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī 1981, 9:25). In *ḥikmat al-muta'āliyah*, this vision is achieved through the actualization of the human rational and imaginative faculties, as well as the process of perception and connection with the supra-natural realms. As a result, when the soul unites with the active intellect, it becomes possible to attain awareness of what lies in the realm of Divine Command. In conclusion, it can be asserted that the manifestation of divine truths on the tablet of the soul necessitates the actualization of the soul in both the theoretical and practical intellects. Only in this way can the soul restore its capacity to connect with the higher levels of existence and perceive the truths of the unseen realm through presential knowledge. (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī 2003, pp. 242-249)

In Mullā Ṣadrā's anthropology, human beings can, through the process of perception, achieve presence before the known and ultimately attain "direct knowledge" (*idrāk-i ḥudūrī*) of various levels of existence. Regarding knowledge of God as the supreme and only true reality, Mullā Ṣadrā not only denies "conceptual knowledge" (*idrāk-i ḥuṣūlī*) of the Divine Essence but also rejects direct visionary knowledge of His

innermost reality, due to the lack of connection between the Divine Essence and created beings. However, he affirms intuitive knowledge of the Divine Essence proportionate to the existential capacity of the perceiver. This intuitive knowledge is of three types: the knowledge of a cause about its effect; the knowledge of an immaterial being about itself; and the knowledge of an effect about its cause. Intuitive knowledge of the Divine Essence does not belong to the first two types, because in the first type, the knower encompasses the known, and in the second type the knower and known are identical. Rather, every contingent being, as an effect of the Necessary Being and a manifestation of its cause, perceives the Divine Essence according to its capacity (Javādī Āmulī 1997, pp. 182-183). Thus, the levels of knowledge of the unseen vary according to the existential station of human beings. The more successful one is in removing obstacles and establishing proper means of perception and knowledge in accordance with truth, and the more one expands one's existential capacity by lifting the veils of materiality and removing the curtains of negligence, the deeper will be one's access to the truths of the unseen realm, at whose apex is the Lord of the worlds.

3. The Primacy of Man's Divine Innate Nature (*Fiṭrah*)

Attention to the metaphysical realm and faith in the Origin are among the innate tendencies of human beings according to the Quran: "*So set your heart on the religion as a people of pure faith, the origination of Allah according to which He originated mankind; There is no altering Allah's creation; that is the upright religion...*"¹⁹ (Quran 30:30). According to this verse, God-seeking is part of human creation, and his nature demands that he submit to the unseen Origin who holds his creation, sustenance, and happiness, and harmonize the aspects of his life with the real laws governing existence (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1996, 8:299).

¹⁹. ﴿فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ...﴾ (الروم/30)



We now seek to understand how the issue of *fiṭrah* establishes man's connection with God and creates in him a sense of poverty and need.

3.1. Semantic Analysis of the *Fiṭrah* Verse

In the verse, “*So set your heart on the religion as a people of pure faith, the origination of Allah according to which He originated mankind; There is no altering Allah's creation; that is the upright religion, but most people do not know*”²⁰ (Quran 30:30), the phrase “*set your heart on the religion*” means seeking God (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1996, 16:178). The term “*ḥanīf*” refers to inclination toward truth, steadfastness upon it, and turning away from falsehood. Here, the “truth” that must be turned to certainly refers to the true religion and man's God-seeking nature (Jazā'irī 1995, 4:176). Thus, the meaning of the verse, in light of the concept of *ḥanīf*, can be understood as: O Prophet! Turn your full attention to the religion and the God-seeking nature, while maintaining your inclination toward the Truth and turning away from falsehood.

Most exegetes interpret “*fiṭrah*” as meaning “creation” - indicating that the true religion being recommended is identical with God's creation upon which He originated mankind (Ḥawī 2003, 8:4272). Some consider the attribution of *fiṭrah* to be based on an implied “I mean” or “I intend,” meaning: By that true religion I intend the creation upon which I created mankind (Khaṭīb 1983, 11:514).

In any case, God establishes a connection between these two parts of the verse, creating an existential relationship between human creation and the true religion. If faith and disbelief are two opposing categories, then faith in truth and monotheistic religion are embedded in human nature and creation, while disbelief is an accidental matter external to man's essential monotheistic nature and creation.

Continuing with the verse, the phrase “*there is no altering Allah's creation*” employs the term “*khalq*” (creation), indicating that man's God-

²⁰ «فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ» (الروم/ ٣٠)

seeking nature is intrinsically linked to divine creation. In other words, the monotheistic nature, the existential structure of man, is created based on recognition of the Lord and inclination toward Him, making this innate disposition unchangeable (Hawī 2003, 8:4272).

The emphatic phrase “*that is the upright religion*” underscores the innate nature of religion. Thus, the religion grounded in human divine innate nature admits no error or deviation. Such a religion, being intrinsic and innate, can be relied upon to reach the ultimate destination. Finally, the phrase “*but most people do not know*” raises the question: If God-seeking and innate awareness are inherent to human creation, why are most people unaware of it? Exegetes differ in interpreting this: Some argue most people are unaware that human nature aligns with the pure religion (*ḥanīf*) (Makārim Shīrāzī 1994, 16:418). Others attribute this ignorance to a lack of intellectual maturity (Khaṭīb 1983, 11:515). Some restrict “*most people*” to the polytheists of Mecca who lacked knowledge of Divine Unity (Shīrāzī 2002, 419).

Some exegetes have offered an alternate interpretation, suggesting that many individuals remain unaware of this truth because the veils created by actions, behavioral deviations, and the allure of worldly attractions obscure the inner self. As a result, the pure monotheistic nature becomes shrouded, and reasoning and contemplation yield little clarity (Balāghī 2007, 5:151). Other exegetes believe that most people, whether out of ignorance or willful disregard, are unaware of this innate truth. Of course, the God-seeking nature of man pushes aside obstacles in times of distress and reveals itself. It is as if in times of distress, the truth-seeking nature of man does not wait for obstacles to be removed and manifests itself, whether man wants it or not, whether he engages in thought and reasoning or not. (Ṣādiqī Tihirānī 1998, 407). This point is also confirmed by the verses of the Quran.

From the perspective of commentators of both Islamic schools (Shi‘a and Sunni), the emergence or non-emergence of human innate nature (*fiṭrah*) is fundamentally connected to: conscious reflection on the universe and theological proofs; practical and ethical responses; the presence or



removal of veils (obstacles); exposure to challenging and critical situations; and disillusionment with all worldly and natural causes. At the outset of one's spiritual journey, it is essential to engage in rational contemplation to actualize the potential of *fiṭrah* and facilitate the acceptance of monotheistic faith. Whenever one becomes entangled in worldly desires, irrational prejudices, or unethical inclinations, deliberate effort must be made to eliminate these barriers and sustain the innate truth-seeking disposition and love for the Divine Origin within the soul. Nevertheless, even if one fails to actively remove these obstacles, the inner force of *fiṭrah*, when confronted with inescapable exigencies, will inevitably guide the individual toward the Origin of existence and the Eternal Truth that transcends temporal boundaries.

4. Self-Knowledge and the Actualization of Cognitive and Spiritual Stations in the Quran: Strengthening the Sense of Poverty and Need for God

Based on the preceding discussions, the principles of self-knowledge (*khud-shināsī*), while elucidating the relationship between humans and God, cultivate within individuals a profound sense of innate poverty and existential dependence on the Divine. This awareness demonstrates that human beings are, by their very nature, in absolute need of the Origin of existence, and that all things lie within the omnipotent grasp of the Absolute Truth: “*So immaculate is He in whose hand is the dominion of all things...*” ²¹ (Quran 36:83). For those who attain self-knowledge, “witnessing the dominions” (*shuhūd-i malakūt*) becomes attainable: “*Thus did We show Abraham the dominions of the heavens and the earth...*”²² (Quran 6:75).

If an individual possesses innate spiritual awareness (*ma'rifah*) and intrinsic self-knowledge, they will not only attain the capacity for intuitive

²¹. ﴿فَسُبْحَانَ الَّذِي بِيَدِهِ مَلَكُوتُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ...﴾ (يس/٨٣)

²². ﴿وَكَذَلِكَ نُرِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ مَلَكُوتَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَ الْأَرْضِ...﴾ (الانعام/٧٥)



knowledge (*ma'rifat-i shuhūdī*) of the Divine Essence throughout existence but will also perceive the manifestations of the Sacred within their own soul. As Imam Ali (a) states: "Purify your souls from the filth of desires, and you shall attain sublime stations"²³ (Tamīmī Āmudī 1987, 4:257).

4.1. Self-Knowledge and the Actualization of Cognitive Stations in Revealing Existential Poverty

Self-knowledge in the Qur'anic perspective carries profound ontological and theological significance. The Qur'an conceptualizes the human being as a manifestation of the Divine Names of Beauty (*Asmā' al-Jamāl*) and Majesty (*Asmā' al-Jalāl*), a vicegerent (*khalīfah*) entrusted with divine custodianship, and an honored being whose intrinsic dignity is affirmed within the realm of creation. This is so that through "*honoured scriptures*"²⁴ (*Quran 80:13*), in the legislative realm, they may be elevated to the "abode of honor" (*dār al-karāmah*). This path is actualized through righteousness: "*Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most Godwary among you*"²⁵ (*Quran 49:13*) and "*a good life*"²⁶ (*Quran 16:97*) is attained through faith, righteous deeds, and responding to the call of God and His messenger.

Those who attain divine guidance achieve ultimate perfection through *Tawhīd* (Divine Unity), prophethood, imamate, and *wilāyah* (divine guardianship). They embark on an eternal journey of ascension characterized by luminosity, manifestation of divine mercy, salvation, perfection, goodness, and spiritual elevation. As the verse, "*Allah created you from dust, then from a drop of [seminal] fluid, then He made you mates. No female conceives or delivers except with His knowledge, and no*

²³. امام علی علیه السلام: «طَهِّرُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ مِنْ دَنَسِ الشَّهَوَاتِ، تُدْرِكُوا رَفِيعَ الدَّرَجَاتِ».

²⁴. «صُحُفٍ مُكَرَّمَةٍ» (عبس/ ۱۳)

²⁵. «إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ» (الحجرات/ ۱۳)

²⁶. «حَيَاةً طَيِّبَةً» (نحل، ۹۷)



*elderly person advances in years, nor is anything diminished of his life, but it is [recorded] in a Book. That is indeed easy for Allah*²⁷ (Quran 35:11) points to, they attain proximity to and vision of the Divine, realizing the station of “*in the abode of truthfulness with an omnipotent King*”²⁸ (Quran 54:55). They implement the noble verse: “*And worship your Lord until certainty comes to you*”²⁹ (Quran 15:99) and reach perfection.

When man, through self-knowledge, reaches a profound understanding and conviction of his existential poverty, he establishes the developmental connection mentioned in the verse: “*O mankind! You are the ones who stand in need of Allah, and Allah—He is the All-Sufficient, the All-laudable*”³⁰ (Quran 35:15). ‘Allamah Ṭabāṭabā’ī explains: “Poverty is confined to creation, and self-sufficiency confined to God. All poverty belongs to them; all richness belongs to Him. Since richness and poverty are existential realities, and God’s richness is absolute, creation has only poverty, and He has only richness. God is inherently rich—He could annihilate all creation and remain unaffected—while creation is inherently poor, incapable of independence” (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 1996, 17:33).

From a philosophical standpoint, the relationship between the contingent and the Necessary—and between the effect and its cause—suggests that the effect embodies the very connection to its cause. It exists as a mode and manifestation of that cause until the category of pure relation becomes evident. This serves as the philosophical basis for interpreting the relationship between the contingent/effect and the Necessary/cause. Ayatullah Javādī Āmulī, interpreting the

²⁷. ﴿وَاللَّهُ خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ جَعَلَكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا وَمَا تَحْمِلُ مِنْ أُنْثَىٰ وَلَا تَضَعُ إِلَّا بِعِلْمِهِ وَمَا يُعَمِّرُ مِنْ مَعْمَرٍ وَلَا يَنْقُصُ مِنْ عُمُرِهِ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ إِنَّ ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ﴾ (فاطر/١١)

²⁸. ﴿فِي مَقْعَدِ صِدْقٍ عِنْدَ مَلِكٍ مُقْتَدِرٍ﴾ (القمر/٥٥)

²⁹. ﴿وَاعْبُدْ رَبَّكَ حَتَّىٰ يَأْتِيَكَ الْيَقِينُ﴾ (الحجر/٩٩)

³⁰. ﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ أَنْتُمُ الْفُقَرَاءُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ﴾ (فاطر/١٥)



hadith, “Whoever knows himself knows his Lord”³¹ (Ṣadūq 1981, 58), writes: “Is knowledge of God through self-knowledge an *innī* (a posteriori) or *limmī* (a priori) proof? Conventional wisdom suggests *innī*: inferring the Cause from the effect. But in Transcendent Philosophy, it is *limmī*: knowing the Cause first, then the effect. The latter is the correct view” (Javādī Āmulī 2000, 179).

He further analyzes in a footnote that because human identity and essence, like all contingent beings, is a relational existence (*wujūd-i rabṭī*) rather than an independent existence (*rābiṭī*), let alone the soul and its intuition. Relational existence is preceded by the intuition of its relatum (*marbūṭun ilayh*), because that relatum, which is the Divine, serves as the constitutive principle (*muqawwim*) for this relation. Just as proper knowledge of the constitutive principle is impossible without prior proper knowledge of the constituted entity, the intuition of the relation is likewise impossible without prior intuition of the relatum. Therefore, until the One God, who is the relatum of human identity and constitutes man’s existential principle, is known, self-knowledge is impossible. Since this knowledge is intuitive (*shuhūdī*) rather than conceptual (*ḥuṣūlī*), it does not follow the rules of conceptual and logical proofs. However, in terms of priority, the knowledge of God’s Oneness precedes the presential knowledge (*ma’rifat-i ḥudūrī*) of the soul, resembling a *limmī* proof [that the cause is known first, then the effect]. In this way, if intuitive knowledge were to transition into acquired knowledge, it would manifest, as previously stated, in a manner analogous to the “*limmī*” argument (Javādī Āmulī 2000, pp. 179-249).

In *Tafsīr Nimūnih*’s interpretation of verse: “O mankind! You are the ones who stand in need of Allah, and Allah—He is the All-Sufficient, the All-laudable...” (Quran 35:15), it is stated: “The only truly Self-Sufficient and Self-Subsistent Being in all existence is God. All humans, indeed all creatures, are utterly needy and dependent on that Independent Existence.

³¹. «من عرف نفسه فقد عرف ربه».



If their connection were severed for even a moment, they would be reduced to nothingness. Just as He is absolute richness, humans are absolute poverty; as He is Self-Subsisting, all creation subsists through Him...” (Makārim Shīrāzī 1994, 3:249). This realization brings two positive outcomes: 1. Dismounting from the steed of arrogance, pride, and selfishness; 2. Seeking needs solely at God’s door, embracing His servitude, and refraining from reaching out to or worshipping anything other than Him (ibid). The self-aware, self-knowing human who transcends veils perceives this pure ontological connection to Almighty God and attains existential proximity to Him.

Quranic self-knowledge necessitates the realization of humanity’s absolute existential poverty before the Majestic and Exalted Truth (*Ḥaqq jall wa ‘alā*), which signifies complete ontological dependence and the attribution of all perfections to the Divine Source (Muḥammadī Ashnānī 2022, 87). The Quran presents a revolutionary perspective on humanity and man’s relationship with God, self, world, and society, becoming a profound epistemological source for people of intellect.

The supplications of the Prophet (s) and the Infallibles (a) have opened new doors in philosophical-mystical knowledge, including the noble hadith: “Poverty is my pride”³² (Majlisī 1983, 69:56) which has taken on philosophical-mystical interpretive colors and become a comprehensive analytical source for people of rational philosophy and spiritual wayfaring. This hadith conveys at least two meanings:

First meaning: The poverty which constitutes my very existence and essence, such that I am nothing but this poverty, becomes my point of pride in relation to the Lord, and the source of servitude, perfection, proximity, union, and encounter with God. As Imam Ali (a) said after describing perfect detachment: “My God, it suffices as honor that I am Your servant, and suffices as pride that You are my Lord”³³ (Majlisī 1983, 11:95).

³². «الفقر فخري».

³³. «إلهي كفي بي عزاً أن أكون لك عبداً، وكفي بي فخراً أن تكون لي رباً».



Second meaning: The perfect human, while possessing complete self-sufficiency and full actuality in terms of perfection, and exhibiting the closest proximity to Absolute Being from an ontological perspective, simultaneously embodies the highest degree of poverty. This implies that the more enriched a human is in relation to divine creation and creatures, the more impoverished they are in relation to their Creator. In other words, their richness derived from anything other than God renders them increasingly destitute before God (Sajjādī 1983, 341).

In explicating the hadith “Poverty is my pride,” Martyr Muṭahharī states that “the more enriched a human is in comparison to other beings, the more impoverished they are in relation to God. This is because poverty, in this context, denotes neediness, and an individual who possesses nothing has no need for the Creator or Cause. Conversely, the more one possesses, the greater their dependence on the Cause and Creator, as the relationship between the created and the Creator, or the effect and the Cause, is fundamentally one of need and nothing else. In other words, ‘the more existent, the more existent; the more impoverished, the more impoverished,’ existence and poverty are inextricably intertwined in this relationship. One who is poorer in relation to the Creator becomes richer in relation to creation, for possessing within the realm of creation signifies poverty and neediness toward the Creator. The poverty of the Prophet (s) stems from his station of utter neediness before the Divine Essence, which in turn constitutes his richness in relation to all other created beings” (Muṭahharī 1987, 2:206).

4.2. Self-Knowledge and Actualization of Rational Stations in Discovering Existential Poverty

The theory of “existential poverty” in the trajectory of human perfection has not emerged abruptly or instantaneously but has developed gradually within the context of prophetic missions. This theory was formulated with the aim of fostering the blossoming of rational faculties and unveiling the scientific and practical mysteries inherent in human essence and structure. Human existential perfection is realized inwardly through the faculty of “reason” and outwardly through the guidance of “revelation.” Ultimately,



this process leads to the liberation of humanity from mental idols, inner tyrannies, and the attainment of spiritual free-thinking. This process has not only been effective in addressing ontological questions within philosophy and wisdom but has also manifested practically and tangibly in mysticism, epistemology, and spiritual wayfaring, enabling humanity to achieve cognitive, existential, and divine unity (*tawhīd*). Thus, the theory of existential poverty is contingent upon and interconnected with past rational-inward transformations and subsequent intellectual, ethical, and mystical developments. The role of revelation, its divine teachings, and the “perfect human,” from the Seal of the Prophets (s) to the Seal of the Successors (a), in this regard is beyond doubt.

Indeed, whenever philosophical poverty has flourished under the light of manifest revelation, shining like the sun upon the horizon of existence and the inner depths of man, it elevates humanity from the realm of nature to the supernatural, from the threshold to the sanctified court of Divine Lordship, and from the station of “attendance” to the abode of “presence.” It manifests a comprehensive understanding and Quranic intuition upon the tablet of the heart and the intellect, establishing the theory of existential poverty upon metaphysics, anthropology, and theology, transcending even the categories of wisdom and mysticism, leading to religious cognition and the transformative states of faith.

4.3. Self-Knowledge and the Actualization of Spiritual Stations through the Discovery of Existential Poverty

“Existential poverty,” in addition to its fundamental significance in “transcendent philosophy,” constitutes a crucial principle for transformation within the domains of epistemology and spiritual practice. It serves as a pivotal factor in the human journey toward the Divine, facilitating proximity and spiritual elevation. This transformative impact becomes possible and manifest when the “unity of manifestation” (*waḥdat-i tajallī*) in practical philosophy is understood as the realization of unity and singularity within the essence of the human being. Through embracing this manifestation, the individual attains “divine unity”

(*tawhīd*), “transcendence” (*tajarrud*), “asceticism” (*tazahhud*), and “individuation” (*tafarrud*). It is noteworthy that when the understanding of “existential poverty” transitions from intellectual recognition to heartfelt conviction and affirmation, it liberates the individual from the shackles of materialism, worldly veils, and all forms of “attachment” (*ta‘alluq*) or even “determination” (*ta‘ayyun*), thereby enabling progress toward the path of absolute perfection.

A human being cannot achieve connection with God until he attains complete detachment from all that is other than God: “Whoever loves to meet Allah, the Exalted, becomes detached from the world”³⁴ (Tamīmī Āmudī 1987, 339). The reason for severing ties with all that is other than the Divine is to enable the human being, through the discernment and conviction of existential poverty, to achieve a state of attachment and devoted servitude to the Divine Essence, seeking perfection. In other words, by recognizing the absolute dependence of existence on the Divine and attributing both oneself and all else to the Divine Essence, one attains the “pure life” (*ḥayāt-i ṭayyibah*). This, at minimum, results in outcomes such as the illumination of the heart, divine confirmations, immersion in the comprehension of spiritual realities, acquiring an angelic disposition, witnessing the divine realm, perceiving God with the eye of the heart, realizing the truth of faith, and more. Furthermore, it involves overcoming obstacles such as sin, heedlessness, and distance from the remembrance of God (Javādī Āmulī 2000, pp. 168-172), to prepare and make ready one’s intellect, reason, and heart, so as to circumambulate the divine abode and become wholly absorbed in the True Beloved. Through self-awareness, self-discipline, and self-examination, one attains immediate, intuitive knowledge, faith-based wisdom, and the meeting with the Divine. As stated: “The mystic is one who knows himself, liberates himself, and purifies himself from all that distances and ruins him” (Tamīmī Āmudī 1987, 48). Thus, the recognition of “existential poverty” elevates one to

³⁴. «مَنْ أَحَبَّ لِقَاءَ اللَّهِ. سُبْحَانَهُ سَلَا عَنِ الدُّنْيَا».



the station of “divine guardianship” (*wilāyat ilāhiyyah*), and the essence of their secret and mystery becomes this truth: “*These are accounts from the Unseen, which We reveal to you and you were not with them when they conspired together and schemed*”³⁵ (*Quran 12:102*).

This existential perfection, grounded in both theoretical and practical domains and rooted in spiritual poverty, has led him to attain “unity in divine guardianship.” Consequently, while distancing himself from any authority other than God, he has come under divine guardianship, thereby progressing from darkness toward light and from light within light (Javādī Āmulī 2000, 47).

If the belief in spiritual poverty takes root in the heart and soul, it will wholly immerse the wayfarer in a state of need and intimate supplication. This entails seeking from the divine court of the Exalted and engaging in heartfelt communion with the Beloved through prayer and worship, imploring forgiveness during the pre-dawn hours, detaching from the comforts of sleep, remaining awake in the depths of the night for devotion, and seeking solitude with the true Beloved. In other words, such a prayer encompasses within its essence the meanings of burning and building, knowing and transforming, changing and effecting change, being and non-being, remaining and not remaining, annihilation and subsistence, effacement and manifestation. As Imam Sajjad (a) expressed in his supplication: “O my Lord! Who is the one that has tasted the sweetness of Your love yet seeks a substitute for You? And who is the one that has found intimacy in Your proximity yet desires separation from You?”³⁶ (Majlisī 1983, 2:148). This reflects that human beings are the very

³⁵. ﴿ذَلِكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الْغَيْبِ نُوحِيهِ إِلَيْكَ وَ مَا كُنْتَ لَدَيْهِمْ إِذْ أَجْمَعُوا أَمْرَهُمْ وَ هُمْ يَمْكُرُونَ﴾ (يوسف/١٠٢)

³⁶. «إِلَهِي مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي ذَاقَ خِلَاوَةَ مَحَبَّتِكَ قَرَامَ مَنِّكَ بَدَلًا؟ وَمَنْ ذَا الَّذِي أَسَّ بِقُرْبِكَ فَأَبْتَغَى عَنْكَ جَوْلًا؟». (المناجاة التاسعة: مناجاة المحبتين)



essence of poverty, engaging in a path of humble devotion and perpetual need.

Conclusion

The present study, which investigates self-knowledge and its role in fostering and reinforcing the sense of poverty and neediness toward God from the perspective of the Holy Quran, demonstrates that, based on divine revelations, self-knowledge unveils the existential poverty of the human being in relation to God. It recognizes the true self—namely, the divine spirit—as imperishable and bestowed by God, who is the source of fulfilling all human needs. Consequently, by prioritizing the spirit, the unseen realm, and the pure divine nature, the individual seeks to strengthen their connection with God, which lays the foundation for cultivating a sense of poverty and neediness toward Him within the human soul. Following the emergence of this sense of poverty toward God, the individual, by nurturing cognitive and spiritual dimensions within their being, reinforces the realization that they possess nothing of their own and that God alone is their true refuge and source of strength. This process enables them to comprehend their position in this relationship, acknowledging their state of poverty and neediness before the absolutely self-sufficient Lord.

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