

SCOPE AND QUIDDITY OF IMAM'S KNOWLEDGE

An Analytical Study of Physical and Intelligible Beings

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The subject of the Imam's nature and scope of knowledge, along with his other attributes, have been studied early on since discussions on Imamate were ushered in the Islamic world. Shia scholars, in particular, have adopted a variety of approaches to the topic and have put forward different, and at times contradictory, views. It is thus befitting to study the topic more closely from a comprehensive view and by employing effective statements and arguments. Scrutiny and explication of the existential dimensions of the Imams of the Prophet's (SAW) Ahl al-Bayt (AS) and the body of arguments regarding the nature and scope of their knowledge may indicate that the Imam, due to his intelligible (*malakūtī*) being, is endowed with all-encompassing (*tāmm*) knowledge that only excludes the quiddity and essential attributes of God. However, the Imam's knowledge in the physical or sensory (*mulkī*) realm is dependent on connectedness to his luminous and intelligible being, in that in case of total connectedness, his knowledge is all-encompassing, otherwise it is restricted to his will. It is to be noted that his knowledge is permanent and all-encompassing in certain matters, e.g., religious teachings and rulings commensurate with his spiritual and everyday life as well as with that of the *umma* (community of believers and followers). A significant achievement concerning the Imam's knowledge, this view, introduced by a number of eminent thinkers, is the subject of the present detailed and analytical study.

KEYWORDS: Imam; Ahl al-Bayt; physical and intelligible realms; all-encompassing knowledge; scope of knowledge; quiddity of Imam's knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

The Imam's knowledge and its scope have been discussed from different perspectives in Islamic, and in particular in Shia, sources. The intellectual and narrational arguments in such discussions, in particular the various and at times contradictory hadiths, have led to a variety of views on the topic and impeded the path to an explicit conclusion. A detailed and all-embracing study of the arguments regarding the Imam's knowledge, and in particular

concerning the hadiths narrated from the Prophet (SAW) and other eminent figures, may contribute to the scope and quiddity of his knowledge and provide us with a more precise understanding of the infallible Imams. The present study is an attempt to investigate analytically the arguments with respect to physical and intelligible realms, put forward in hadith sources regarding the infallible Imams, and thus arrive at reasonable conclusions regarding the scope and quiddity of Imam's knowledge.

It is to be noted that even though a number of sources, e.g., some works by 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī, some of his former students, and also other scholars, have touched upon the subject but an independent and analytical study, taking into account the existential dimensions and the physical and intelligible aspects, has been a desideratum. The present study touches upon the contributions made by other scholars from a critical point of view and attempts to conduct a detailed analytical investigation of the subject and thus attain to new horizons regarding the Imam's knowledge based on physical and intelligible realms.

Further, in this study, the present author adopted a library research approach to data collection and an analytical-critical approach in investigating the contents and based his research on intellectual and narrational arguments. It is worthy of note in passing that in this study, analytical research has been conducted regarding the Imam's knowledge on the basis of intellectual arguments, the Holy Qur'an, and hadith sources. Since the evidence derives from principal and authentic hadith sources, e.g., *Kāfi* and *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt* as well as other genuine and known hadith sources, e.g., the works of Ṣadūq, Mufīd, and Ṭūsī, no attempt has been made to conduct a detailed scrutiny of transmission chains and explicate topics regarding the narrators mentioned in hadith transmission chains (*rijāl*). It is to be noted that the successively narrated (*mutawātir*) hadiths incorporated in our study render us needless of investigating the transmission chains and narrators.

CLARIFICATION OF THE SCOPE AND QUIDDITY OF THE IMAM'S KNOWLEDGE BASED ON PHYSICAL AND INTELLIGIBLE REALMS

Investigating hadith and theology sources indicates that different intellectual and narrational arguments regarding the Imam's knowledge and its scope have been put forward, each of which contextually present different, and at times contradictory quiddities, in explicating the infallible Imams' knowledge. Their all-encompassing knowledge is reflected in the following themes: serving as the repository of divine knowledge (Kulaynī, 1407/1986, vol. 1, p. 192; Ṣaffār 1404/1983, vol. 1, p. 103); being endowed with all-embracing knowledge through their knowledge of the Qur'an (Kulaynī, 1407/1986, vol. 1, pp. 59, 228; Ṣaffār, 1404/1983, vol. 1, p. 103); all-encompassing knowledge of the past, present, and future (Kulaynī, 1407/1986, vol. 1, p. 260; Ṣaffār, 1404/1983, vol. 1, pp. 127, 129); knowledge of heavens and the earth (Kulaynī, 1407/1986, vol. 1, pp. 262-262; Ṣaffār, 1404/1983, vol. 1, p. 124); observation of the intelligible realm (Ṣaffār, 1404/1983, vol. 1, p. 106); all-encompassing knowledge of all matters (Ṣaffār, 1404/1983, vol. 1, p. 443; Ibn Bābawayh, 1958, vol. 2, p. 32; Majlisī, 1403/1982, vol. 26, p. 19); possessing the qualities of all-hearing and all-seeing (Kulaynī, 1407/1986, vol. 1, pp. 143, 145; Ṣaffār, 1404/1983, vol. 1, pp. 61-62).

In contrast, impediments to their knowledge are reflected, for instance, in the following themes: obtaining knowledge through divine revelation and narration (Kulaynī, 1407/1986, vol. 1, pp. 270, 381; Şaffār, 1404/1983, vol. 1, pp. 224-225, 234, 319-326, 466); inheritance (Kulaynī, 1407/1986, vol. 1, pp. 221-226, 263, 293; Şaffār, 1404/1983, vol. 1, pp. 48, 302-315, 468-470); Books of Prophets and trustees (*awṣiyā'*, pl. of *waṣī*; Kulaynī, 1407/1986, vol. 1, pp. 227, 238; Şaffār, 1404/1983, vol. 1, pp. 135, 150, 161); the Greatest Name (Kulaynī, 1407/1986, vol. 1, p. 230; Şaffār, 1404/1983, vol. 1, pp. 208, 217); column of light (Kulaynī, 1407/1986, vol. 1, p. 387; Şaffār, 1404/1983, vol. 1, p. 431); the Holy Spirit (Kulaynī, 1407/1986, vol. 1, pp. 271-274; Şaffār, 1404/1983, vol. 1, pp. 445-464); increase in knowledge (Kulaynī, 1407/1986, vol. 1, p. 254; Şaffār, 1404/1983, vol. 1, p. 395); restrictions to knowledge of certain topics (Kulaynī, 1407/1986, vol. 1, pp. 243, 256; Ṭūsī, 1428/2007, p. 299); dependence of their knowledge on divine will (Kulaynī, 1407/1986, vol. 1, p. 254; Şaffār, 1404/1983, vol. 1, p. 395); different degrees of Imams' knowledge (Şaffār, 1404/1983, vol. 1, p. 479).

Numerous religious texts, on the other hand, indicate the luminous and intelligible existence of the Infallible (AS), in particular, the Pure Five (AS),² referred to by 'lights' (*anwār*), 'shadows' (*aẓilla*),³ and 'phantoms' (*ashbāh*), i.e., the luminous entities pre-existing the material world, even other intelligible realms, e.g., the world of angels and spirits who glorified and praised God in their proximity (*qurb*) to Him.

For instance, Kulaynī narrated from Imam al-Bāqir (AS), on the authority of Jābir ibn Yazīd, as saying, "O Jābir, God, verily, first created Muḥammad (SAW) and his divinely guided household, the guides of people, and they were the phantoms of light before God." I asked, "What is intended by phantoms?" He replied, "That is, the shadow of light, luminous bodies without spirits, and Muḥammad was but supported by one spirit – the Holy Spirit through whom he and his household worshipped God" (Kulaynī, 1407/1986, vol. 1, p. 442).

In his *ʿIlal al-Sharāʿi*, Shaykh Şadūq says, "Ḥabīb ibn Muẓāhir al-Asadī is quoted as asking Imam al-Ḥusayn (AS), 'What were you prior to Adam's (AS) creation?' The Imam replied, 'We were phantoms of light circumambulating the Throne of God, the Most Merciful, and taught angels to praise and glorify God' (Ibn Bābawayh, 2006, vol. 1, p. 23).

Besides the hadiths, the luminous entities of the Ahl al-Bayt are also attested and emphasized in some prayers; for instance, clauses from the pilgrimage prayers of *Ḥamī'a al-Kabīra*⁴ reads, "God created you [as] lights and placed you around His Throne until He bestowed upon us your entities and placed you in mansions whose loftiness He willed and wherein His name is mentioned" (Ibn Bābawayh 1413/1992, vol. 2, p. 609; Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, 1407/1986, vol. 6, p. 95; Ibn Mashhadī, 1419/1998, p. 523).

The large number of the hadiths included in different books and having been accorded significance by scholars are indicative of their reliability; for instance, Shaykh al-Mufīd undeniably recognizes the validity of the hadiths narrated by reliable scholars (Shaykh al-Mufīd, 1413/1992, p. 27).

According to a number of those hadiths, the divine lights are the efficient cause (*'illa al-fāʿiliyya*) of the existence of other creatures (Ibn Bābawayh, 2006, vol. 1, p. 262; Shaykh al-Mufīd, 1413/1992, p. 39; Baḥrānī, 1415/1994, vol. 1, p. 197). They receive the existential emanation (*fayḍ*) from God Almighty and diffuse it in the world of existence (Majlisī, 1403/1982, vol. 25) such that even angels have received their existence and perfection, e.g.,

knowing God and the manner of worshipping Him, from the same intelligible essences (Ibn Bābawayh, 2006, vol. 1, p. 262; Kūfī, 1410/1989, pp 134-136; Astarābādī, 1409/1988, p. 833).

The aforesaid hadiths and the like of them support the intelligible, immaterial, and pre-eternal existence of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (AS) who are in possession of their particular characteristics differing from their material existence in the physical or sensory realm restricted by spatial and temporal limitations.

Considering the two modes of existence, the different and contrary themes regarding the knowledge of the Infallible, and the arguments put forward, it may be suggested that in the intelligible realm and based on the luminous existence, the Imam (AS) is endowed with all forms and scope of knowledge of a contingent entity. On the other hand, the Imam's physical existence, when perfectly connected to the luminous existence, is endowed with the knowledge commensurate with the scope of the intelligible existence and all the realms of existence as well as the entire occurrences and phenomena happened and happening in the past, present, and future and thus realization in the sphere of existence falls within the scope of his knowledge.

As mentioned above, the Imam's restrictions to knowledge and its incomprehensiveness are supported by certain arguments resulting in contrariety in hadiths and inconsistency between the physical and intelligible aspects. Certain arguments are thus put forward, aiming at resolving the inconsistency and prioritizing the two views of comprehensiveness or incomprehensiveness of the Imam's knowledge. As reflected in the present study, the hadiths concerning the Imam's knowledge, considering the apparent differences and inconsistencies in their entirety, are indicative of uniform and consistent contents. The consistency needs to be clarified and demonstrated based on related arguments.

The process of investigating the arguments, in particular the hadiths regarding the Imam's knowledge, leads us to the conclusion that in his intelligible realm and luminous existence, the Imam is endowed with knowledge in its entirety, since, as mentioned above, numerous religious texts and arguments demonstrate the luminous and intelligible existence of the Infallible, in particular that of the Pure Five,⁵ which is referred to as 'lights' (*anwār*), 'shadows' (*aẓilla*), and 'phantoms' (*ashbāh*). The luminous entities pre-existing the physical realm and even other intelligible realms, e.g., those of angels and spirits worshipping and glorifying God Almighty in their proximity to Him, form the efficient cause and the channel of receiving the emanation for other phenomena.

The intelligible realm, on the other hand, is not restricted by limitations of the physical or sensory realm, but it is endowed with its particular qualities and properties, the most significant of which is its immateriality, a state of transcending temporality and spatiality. As a result, physical restrictions, e.g., temporal and spatial limitations as well as their concomitants (*lawāzim*), are lacking in the intelligible realm and this quality of significance requires the intelligible and luminous existence of the *Ahl al-Bayt's* (AS) knowledge of all other existential realities, in that when the intelligible realm is immaterial, unrestricted, and free from physical and worldly dimensions, e.g., space and time, the intelligible entities are also free from such restrictions and imperfections and depending on their stages are endowed with their existential extent and intelligible concomitants, since the intelligible realm encompasses all immaterial realms, and numerous stages are thus imaginable for the intelligible realm, ranging from the imaginal or intermediate realm (*ālam al-barzakh*) to

the realm of omnipotence (*jabarūt*)⁶ and the divine realm (*lāhūt*), each of which includes different degrees and stages and the inhabitants of each are thus endowed with their particular existential degrees and characteristics; the higher the intelligible degree of an entity, the more exalted in the possession of intelligible qualities. In other words, the closer an entity is to higher realms, the more the entity transcends restrictions and imperfections and the more it is granted further existential degrees. Based on numerous arguments, the Imams from the Ahl al-Bayt (AS), having been granted the highest form of intelligible existence, were the first creations in the form of phantoms and lights, pre-existing other realms and entities, in having been emanated from God, and worshipping and glorifying Him by the divine Throne and being closest to Him. It is through their entities that other realms have been existentially differentiated and through whom they have received divine emanations. Accordingly, they are cognizant of all other existential realms and degrees and endowed with unrestricted knowledge of all creatures.

Besides their exalted existential degree and being granted the most comprehensive and the highest form of knowledge of God and divine attributes and names, they are also endowed with the knowledge of other entities created by God as the acts, attributes, and names of God. Accordingly, the luminous entities of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) are not only endowed with comprehensive knowledge of God, but they are also granted the knowledge through their knowledge of God, His names and acts, i.e., the creatures, in the highest possible degree.

Furthermore, other clarifications and explications deriving from serving as the perfect man, the perfect manifestation of the divine, and also being intermediary of divine emanations, related to their intelligible and luminous entities, also demonstrate their knowledge of divine omniscience, except for divine essence knowing which transcends any being other than Him.

Numerous texts and hadiths also indicate the comprehensive knowledge of the intelligible and luminous entities of the Imams, one of which follows as an instance. Quoting ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad, Sahl ibn Ziyād, Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm, and ‘Alī ibn Ḥammād, al-Mufaḍḍal is narrated as saying, “I asked Imam al-Ṣādiq (AS), ‘What were your qualities when you were in shadows?’ He replied, ‘We were with our Lord. There was no one with Him besides us. We were in shadows of green. We worshipped and glorified Him and there was neither an angel in the proximity of God nor any other living entity besides us until God willed the creation of entities and things and as He willed, He created angels and other entities and granted us the knowledge’” (Kulaynī, 1407/1986, vol. 1, p. 441).

The intelligible and luminous entity of the Imam, taking into account all the said arguments, is endowed with comprehensive knowledge of any contingent (*mumkin*) entity. The Imam is also endowed with a physical entity similar to other beings of the physical realm wherein life, with its entire conditions and characteristics, e.g., its restrictions, encompasses mankind, including the Infallible (AS), whose bodies are subject to the laws of the physical realm.

It is to be noted that the Imam is not precisely similar, in terms of all physical aspects, to other men, in that the existence of other aspects may affect his physical aspect and some of his physical characteristics may be dominated by the intelligible aspect and thus be different from other men. For instance, mankind in the material world is endowed with an immaterial and abstract existence termed as ‘spirit’ (*rūḥ*) or ‘soul’ (*nafs*). The spirit, due to its strong connection to the body, has accepted many material restrictions and will only be free of them

when it separates from the body and regains its completely intermediate (*barzakhi*) aspect. The spirit's being affected by the physical body results in the former's playing a role within temporal and spatial limitations and other characteristics of the material world. The Imam (AS), despite being human and restricted by temporal and spatial limitations, can transcend the physical realm, through his spiritual strength and his exalted spiritual rank, and have access to matters transcending temporal and spatial limitations, since he is endowed with a holy spirit as well as other powers through which he is able to relate and connect to the world of simple substances (*mujarradāt*) and higher realms, i.e., the intelligible realm.

Accordingly, there are two manifestations in the physical existence of the Imam. He is at times connected to the intelligible realm and his physical existence is entirely in the light of his intelligible existence, in which case, his knowledge in the physical realm is totally on a par with his knowledge in the intelligible realm; as a result, it encompasses one single extent and ray which is the infinite and boundless ray and knowledge of all things. However, when the Imam attends, in the physical realm, to a lesser and more limited ray commensurate with the necessity of his intelligible entity, a more limited scope of knowledge is called to his mind. Based on this theory, all the arguments supporting his infinite and all-encompassing knowledge, or regarding his intelligible entity, or concerning the time spanning between his physical and intelligible aspects fall into a perfect connection.

The traditions indicative of limited knowledge, on the other hand, concern the Imam's physical aspect, granted that he is not perfectly connected to the intelligible realm. It is in this stage that knowledge is actualized for his physical aspect with regard to any matter and to whatever extent he is connected to the luminous existence. Therefore, he is supposed to be permanently and actually cognizant of matters that, based on intellectual and narrational arguments, are the concomitants and necessities of imamate, e.g., knowledge of religious laws and teachings, where he is in the light of his luminous and holy spirit. However, his knowledge regarding other matters – e.g., hidden matters, past and future, various languages, and those playing no direct role in his imamate and guiding but required in particular cases – is actualized when he turns towards and connects to his intelligible entity whose knowledge is all-encompassing.

In other words, when the Imam wills to become aware of something and know it, he can turn towards his luminous and intelligible aspect and obtain knowledge of what he wills by availing himself of that aspect, in which case it would be similar to someone who has something in his hands and may become aware of it by looking at it or to a *mujtahid*⁷ who finds the ruling of a particular matter by simply applying independent judgment in a legal or theological question based on his interpretation and application of the four principles.

Therefore, connection to luminous and intelligible entity is not something beyond the Imam's scope of existence, but what is intended is turning towards the aspect which lies in his entity that encompasses his physical aspect and existence in which respect he is different from other beings encompassed by their physical existence. Similar to a body encompassed by the spirit that forms the individual's actual existence, the Imam's luminous aspect forms his actual existence that encompasses his body and soul, and connecting to the aspect herein implies turning towards it. Accordingly, the Imam's connection to the luminous aspect lies in his will to avail himself of it and the scope of his knowledge falls within the scope of his will to make use of it.

Although the Imam may become entirely cognizant of all forms of knowledge, but it lies in his continuous and permanent will to know them and when he does not will to know or avoids it for any reason, he will need to turn towards it and connect to it once more.

The scope of knowledge is likewise dependent on the Imam's will and extent of connection; as a result, the connection can be permanent in certain matters but limited in terms of contents, but in other matters the connection can be, content-wise, spontaneous and also unlimited. For instance, the Imam's knowledge on the Night of Qadr⁸ when he becomes knowledgeable of all matters in one single night, but he is able to become constantly knowledgeable of individual matters on a daily basis as required by availing himself of his luminous entity.

In certain texts, e.g., the first hadith narrated below, mention is made of the intelligible realm and being knowledgeable of all matters, but in some others, reference is made to the connection to obtain knowledge each day and night or each Friday night.

The Imam's knowledge and its scope as well as the time of obtaining it, therefore, depend on his will and connection to the luminous aspect. It is worthy of note that the Imam's physical existence, besides direct connection, in limited or unlimited form, to the luminous existence, results in the actualization of unlimited or limited forms of knowledge for the physical existence and making use of other means of obtaining knowledge, e.g., heredity, knowledge of former books and scriptures, and hearing from angels, and such means provide the Imam with knowledge with respect to their scope. However, the said means and the knowledge obtained through them constitute some forms of knowledge available to the Imam in an actualized (*bi-l-fi'l*) and presential (*ḥudūrī*) form, and when the earthly form (*nash'a*) is totally attached to the luminous form, knowledge is totally actualized in the physical realm without any need for the means.

Certain characteristics, mentioned in different hadiths about the Imam's knowledge indicating his limited knowledge or even being unaware of certain matters, thus concern the physical aspect and the stage wherein knowing those matters is not willed by him; even though, if he only wills and turns towards his luminous existence, he will be able to be fully cognizant of them, since his luminous existence is instantly fully aware of the entire realm of existence. It may help us to understand the increase in the extent of his knowledge at certain times, e.g., on Friday nights and on the Night of Qadr. Accordingly, there is perfect consistency between the arguments regarding the Imam's knowledge in his intelligible entity and those concerning his knowledge of his physical entity and its different and contrary characteristics.

The hadiths supporting this perspective include those indicative of the connection between the Imam's physical existence to the intelligible realm. The hadiths, as mentioned above, include those regarding the prophet and the Imam's observation of the intelligible realm. The Infallible (AS) connect, according to those hadiths, observation of the intelligible realm to the all-encompassing knowledge, an explicit instance of which follows. The Commander of the Faithful, Imam 'Alī (AS), is narrated as saying, "Verily, I looked at the intelligible realm by divine permission, and nothing happening in the past nor in the future is hidden from me" (Ibn Bābawayh, 1984, vol. 2, p. 415; Ṣaffār, 1404/1983, vol. 1, p. 201; Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, 1414/1993, p. 205; Daylamī, 1412/1991, vol. 2, p. 256). The hadith demonstrates that the Imam's connection to the intelligible realm results in all-encompassing knowledge.

It goes without saying that the hadith in question and also similar ones concern the connection to or observation of the intelligible realm in universal terms, but no mention has been made therein of the Imam's connection to or observation of his intelligible entity; however, it mentions the intelligible realm of all the actualized forms of the world, from the Throne and even beyond it down to the lowest degree of existence and it also encompasses all the degrees of the world and all creatures, e.g., the luminous entity of the Infallible (AS) and their phantoms (*ashbāh*), established on the highest degree of the intelligible realm. However, taking into account the diffusion of the entire divine emanations through the channels of lights and their holy phantoms, and also their existence in the most exalted degree and considering the intelligible realm are equal to giving consideration to the sphere of those lights and phantoms that, based on intellectual and narrational arguments, are the manifestations of the entire divine attributes, names, and knowledge. As a result, intuitive knowledge of the actualized forms of existence is obtained through observing those luminous entities as the most exalted instance of the intelligible realm encompassing other degrees of higher realms. Such observation results in the Imam's knowledge of all the actualized forms and phenomena existing in the domain of existence.

Further, mention is made of the Imam's ascension to the higher realm and the divine Throne, and also his return with an abundance of knowledge reflected in all the hadiths regarding the increase in the Imam's knowledge on Friday nights. Those hadiths, similar to the aforesaid one, supports the perspective regarding investigating the Imam's knowledge while taking into account the physical and intelligible realms. Further similar hadiths will be mentioned below.

1. Al-Mufaḍḍal is narrated as saying, "One day, Imam al-Ṣādiq (AS) said to me, 'O Abā 'Abd Allah, and he had never called me by my agnomen (*kunya*). I replied, 'Here I am!' He said, 'We are happy on each Friday night.' I inquired, 'May God grant you more blessings, what is that happiness?' He replied, 'When it is Friday night, the Prophet (SAW) and the Imams reach the divine Throne and we are with them. Then, our spirits would not return to our bodies unless with applied knowledge, or else our knowledge would be exhausted'" (Kulaynī, 1407/1986, vol. 1, p. 254; Ṣaffār, 1404/1983, vol. 1, p. 130).
2. Abū 'Abd Allah [Imam al-Ṣādiq] (AS) said, "We make a journey to our Lord each Friday night and we never return unless we are endowed with new knowledge (Ṣaffār, 1404/1983, vol. 1, p. 131).
3. Abū 'Abd Allah [Imam al-Ṣādiq] (AS) is narrated by Abū Yaḥyā al-Ṣan'ānī as saying, "O Abā Yaḥyā, Friday nights are of great significance to us." I inquired, 'May I be your ransom, what is the significance?' He replied, 'The spirits of the deceased prophets and trustees and also the spirit of the trustee who is among you [i.e., the Imam of your time] are allowed to ascend to the heavens to reach the divine Throne and circumambulate it seven times and establish a two-*rak'a* [i.e., unit] prayer at each pillar of the Throne and then return to their physical bodies. The prophets and trustees will be filled with joy in the morning and the knowledge of the trustee who is among you has increased abundantly'" (Kulaynī, 1407/1986, vol. 1, p. 253; Ṣaffār, 1404/1983, vol. 1, p. 131).

Reference is herein made to ascension towards the divine Throne and God Almighty, the spiritual ascension to heavens, arriving at the divine Throne, and returning to physical bodies. Considering what was mentioned above regarding the intelligible realm and its scope clarifies that the ascension and arriving at the divine Throne, lying in the divine intelligible realm, implies connection to the intelligible realm, i.e., the highest of intelligible realms extending to the entire higher realms. It was mentioned above, on the other hand, that the divine, perfect manifestation and the channel through which divine emanations are diffused constitute the Infallible's (AS) luminous and intelligible entities through whom all forms of knowledge and entities are realized. Those luminous, actualizing entities encompass all the lower as well as intelligible realms, and connection to the divine Throne and the Highest Assembly (*mala' al-a'lā*)⁹ lies in connecting to those lights or luminous entities. The hadiths in question clearly indicate that Friday nights, the Imams connect to the Highest Assembly, i.e., the intelligible realm, and their knowledge is thus increased.

An ambiguity may arise here, in that based on certain arguments, any entity is endowed with an intelligible and higher aspect; as a result, being endowed with the intelligible aspect is not particular to the Ahl al-Bayt (AS), but all phenomena, even inanimate beings, animals, and mankind are endowed with it, since what lies in the material realm has a higher and imaginal (*mithālī*) dimension, hence their being endowed with intelligible knowledge, whereas this is neither acceptable nor actualized.

In response, we need to take into account that although the arguments based on the verses of the Qur'an (e.g., 15:21) as well as the hadiths (Baḥrānī, 1415/1994, vol. 3, pp. 238-336, vol. 5, p. 635; Majlisī, 1403/1983, vol. 55, p. 34), all beings have been endowed with divine and higher realities, but it does not necessarily follow that they are endowed with higher degrees in the intelligible realm and transcend other realms, since the ultimate form of the higher existence with which those entities are endowed is the imaginal form and existence in the imaginal realm or the lowest intelligible degree of the intelligible realm, a degree incomparable with the Ahl al-Bayt's (AS) luminous existence and intelligible entities lying on the highest existential and intelligible degrees. Further, those entities, unlike the Ahl al-Bayt (AS), are neither endowed with the knowledge of their higher and imaginal existence, nor are they granted the possibility of connecting to it. Accordingly, they are not comparable with the Imams and their intelligible entities and there exists neither an ambiguity nor any contradiction regarding the said matter and the connection to the Imams.

PROPONENTS OF THE PERSPECTIVE IN QUESTION

In addition to the hadiths supporting the perspective of investigating the Imam's knowledge based the physical and intelligible realms, the perspective has been put forward and accepted by some distinguished scholars. Some others have also made mention of it as an acceptable argument to understand certain hadiths concerning the Imam's knowledge.

ʿAllāma Ṭabāṭabāʾī (2011, vol. 18, p. 192) is among the scholars supporting the perspective regarding the Infallible's (AS) all-encompassing knowledge. Having made a distinction between luminous and physical aspects, he explicitly puts forward and accepts the perspective, "Based on their luminous degree, the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) are endowed with all-

encompassing knowledge in its actualized form, but based on the physical existence, when they will to know, they, by divine permission, connect to the luminous degree and when they do not intend to make the connection, they do not know (Nādim, 2009, p. 352).

He says elsewhere, “The Imam (AS) knows, by divine permission, the realities of the world of existence, under any circumstances, encompassing sensory and intelligible entities; the latter include heavenly entities and past and future occurrences. Numerous hadiths narrated through undisrupted transmission chains, included in Shia hadith collections, e.g., *al-Kāfī*, *Baṣā’ir*, Sadūq’s books, and *Biḥār*, support the view that the Imam, through divine blessing rather than acquisition, is all-aware and all-knowledgeable and is able to know, by divine permission, anything by the least attention to it... There are intellectual arguments supporting that the Imam (AS), based on his degree of luminosity, is the most perfect man in his time and the manifestation of all divine names and attributes, and he is actually all-aware of any matter and occurrence in the world; it is based on his physical existence that when he turns towards anything, all the realities concerning it will be manifest to him (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 2009, vol. 1, pp. 194-195; Nādim, 2009, pp. 356-357).

In response to a question concerning the meaning of the hadith “if they willed, they would know” (*law shā’ū ‘alimū*), he says, “Those hadiths indicate that the Imams, whenever they willed to know something, they turned towards their high degree of luminosity and were capable of knowing it; however, they did not turn towards it at all times, similar to a jurispudent who does not know everything instantly, but he is capable of formulating independent decisions in legal or theological matters based on the interpretation and application of the four principles¹⁰ and find replies to questions put forward to him (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 2009, vol. 1, p. 197). Elsewhere, in clarification of the growth of the Imam’s knowledge in Friday nights, he says, “The hadith ‘When they will they know’ may well be through the ascension of their spirits in Friday nights” (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 2009, vol. 1, p. 201). The latter interpretation seemingly rests on their high rank of luminosity to which he referred elsewhere but he explicates it here as the ascension of spirits to the higher and intelligible realm.

In his commentary on the verse 6:75, “In this way We showed Abraham [God’s] mighty dominion over the heavens and the earth, so that he might be a firm believer,” he says, “The verse literally intends to say that bestowing the intelligible realm on Abraham preceded granting him firm belief, whereby it is clarified that firm belief is not different from observing the intelligible realm, as it is seemingly intended by the outward meaning of verses 102:5-6, “Verily, if you were to know with certainty, you would have seen the Hellfire,” in that the Imam is supposed to be an individual endowed with certainty to whom the intelligible realm is visible. The outward meaning of the verse 6:75, “In this way...” indicates that showing the intelligible realm to Abraham (AS) preceded bestowing certainty on him, from which it may be concluded that the knowledge of certainty is not discrete from observing the intelligible realm, as understood from the outward meaning of verses 102:5-6. The Imam (AS) is necessarily endowed with certainty and to whom the intelligible realm is visible” (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 2009, vol. 1, p. 272).

Accordingly, ‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī considers knowledge of and observing the intelligible realm as a necessary quality of the Imam which necessitates being endowed with the knowledge of certainty regarding the realities of the matters.

He, therefore, holds that the Imam's knowledge lies in the two contexts of luminous and physical entities and argues that the former requires all-encompassing knowledge and the latter is dependent on connecting to the former, and thus resolves the contrariety of the hadiths regarding the Imam's knowledge. It is worthy of note in passing that the similitude mentioned by him regarding a jurispudent capable of formulating independent decisions in legal or theological matters based on the interpretation and application of the four principles does imply that the Imam's knowledge is as such, but, taking into account his arguments elsewhere, it can be safely said that the similitude simply implies that the jurispudent, attending to his sources, understands jurisprudential issues and laws and the Imam, by turning towards his luminous aspect, obtains knowledge.

In his commentary on the pilgrimage prayer of *Jāmi'a* [i.e., *Ziyāra al-Jāmi'a*] and in explaining the phrase *khuzzān al-'ilm* (lit. 'treasurers of knowledge'), Ayatollah Jawādī Āmulī puts forward the concept of the two luminous and physical or sensory aspects in understanding the Imams' knowledge and its finiteness or infinity, "The Imams, endowed with all-encompassing existence and all the earthly forms (*nash'āt*, pl. of *nash'a*), by divine grace, dominate – in the degree of luminosity and universal guardianship, i.e., the perfect degree wherein lies the reality of their imamate – the entire world of existence and nothing is hidden from their scope of knowledge. In other words, any significant or insignificant occurrence in the realm of existence, even the twinkling of an eye and an individual's rising and prostration, and falling a leaf from a tree are visible to them, and past, present, and future may in no way serve as impediments to their all-encompassing knowledge. Nonetheless, in the material stage and realm, i.e., the imperfect stage, they resemble others, in that they may not will to know anything beyond the scope of their knowledge. However, unlike them, others have no access to the endless treasure, and they may intend to know something, but be not able to do likewise; however, the Infallible Imams are the treasurers of that boundless treasure and capable of knowing what they will" (Jawādī, 2006, vol. 1, p. 176).

Akhund Khurāsānī is another distinguished scholar who, in explicating the Imams' knowledge, treads a similar path. In his treatment of abrogation (*naskh*) and in his reference to the issue of alteration in divine will (*badā'*), he says, "Yes, one endowed with divine blessings whose immaculate soul connects to the 'Well-Guarded Tablet' (*Lawḥ al-Maḥfūz*), one of the greatest of divine realms, i.e., the 'Mother of the Book' (*Umm al-Kitāb*), the realities will be visible to him as they exist, similar to what occurred to the Seal of the Prophets (*Khātam al-Nabiyyīn*)¹¹ and some trustees endowed with encompassing knowledge of creatures in the past, present, and future" (Khurāsānī, 1409/1988, p. 240). He makes mention of the connection of the Prophet (SAW) and some trustees, i.e., the Twelve Imams (Jazā'irī, 1415/1995, vol. 3, p. 667) to the realm of the Well-Guarded Tablet, which is from the degrees of the intelligible realm, resulting in granting encompassing knowledge of beings in their entirety. Although his argument is simply a reference to connecting to the intelligible realm in the general sense of the term, rather than connecting to the Imam's luminous existence, but it implies that the Imams' being endowed with all-encompassing knowledge of the entire world of existence is the result of such connection and it suffices to substantiate the all-encompassing knowledge of the Imams' luminous existence and their being endowed with all-encompassing knowledge through their connection to that form (*nash'a*).

In his commentary on Ākhund's argument, Muḥaqqiq Iṣfahānī, referring more explicitly to the prophet's (AS) ascension to higher realms, says, "Why should it not be likewise when the Prophet (SAW), in his ascension to holy realms connects to the realm of universal intellect and rests in the degree of the first intellect transcending the realm of universal spirit, i.e., the realm of the Well-Guarded Tablet; even though, it is mentioned in *Kifāya* that the highest degree of the noble Prophet's (SAW) ascension in his evolutionary motion is the one made towards the Well-Guarded Tablet" (Iṣfahānī, 1428/2008, vol. 2, p. 488). The argument, in particular its attending to the usage of terms like 'universal intellect' and 'first intellect', employed by philosophers in the narrow sense of the term and commensurate with the Infallible's (AS) divine lights is self-evident.

'Allāma Majlisī, in his commentary on the Imams' increase in knowledge on Friday nights and the meanings intended in the abovesaid hadiths, e.g., ascending towards the divine Throne and making a journey towards God, puts forward certain meanings and possibilities, e.g., connection of the Imam's spirit to the Highest Assembly (*mala' al-a'lā*), i.e., the intelligible realm (Majlisī, 1404/1983, vol. 3, p. 105), that, based on the said elucidation, may put forward the same perspective.

Considering Mullā Ṣadrā's statements concerning the knowledge of the holy lights in the intelligible realm, some scholars hold that he is a proponent of the said perspective and even say that he first introduced the perspective. According to those scholars, other proponents following in the footsteps of Mullā Ṣadrā on this matter include 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī and Ayatollah Jawādī Āmulī (Hāshimī, 2020, p. 332, except for the passages in which the intelligible realm and the all-encompassing knowledge in that realm are reflected; Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, 1989, vol. 2, p. 616, no other explicit reference to this perspective nor any passage implying that Mullā Ṣadrā was its first proponent could be found elsewhere).

It may be concluded, as the last perspective, that the Imam is endowed with two degrees in two realms: the degree of the intelligible realm and luminosity, and that of the physical or sensory realm. Based on his degree of luminosity, the Imam is endowed with all-encompassing knowledge in actualized form, but in terms of physical degree, he is endowed with more restricted knowledge and when he turns towards his luminous and intelligible degree he will be endowed with all-encompassing knowledge. The hadiths supporting the Imam's all-encompassing knowledge make references to the degree of the intelligible realm and the time when he turns towards that degree, and the hadiths in which references are made to restricted knowledge concern his degree of the physical realm. It is evident that the Prophet's (SAW) knowledge is explicated similar to the Imams or preceding them.

It goes without saying that according to this perspective, none of the verses or hadiths negating the Imam's all-encompassing knowledge stands in contradiction to the all-encompassing knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) and the relevant traditions, since those hadiths concern two different themes: the intelligible entity and/or the physical existence connected to the intelligible realm; the physical existence without being connected to the intelligible realm. As explicated above, the scope of the Imams' knowledge in the physical degree depends on connection to the divine knowledge available to their intelligible aspect and the scope of knowledge is actualized commensurate with the connection willed by the Imam. Restriction on knowledge, mentioned in the said verses and hadiths, concerns the physical aspect without the will to have access to the actualized and all-encompassing

knowledge. Therefore, there exists no contradiction between being endowed with all-encompassing knowledge in the intelligible degree and the all-encompassing knowledge accompanied by will in the physical realm and the hadiths regarding all-encompassing knowledge and those related to restricted knowledge are authentic. Further, topics like the Imam's evolutionary knowledge, the difference between the Imam's knowledge and his pre-imamate knowledge, and Imams privileges over each other make sense when looking at them from this perspective and considering the physical and intelligible realms.

CONCLUSION

An investigation of intellectual and narrational arguments led us to conclude that the Infallible Imams, endowed with intelligible entities and, based on hadiths, endowed with luminosity in the highest existential degree of contingents and all attributes of perfection are able to have access to actualized and all-encompassing knowledge. The argument is supported by numerous hadiths. As a result, endowed with their luminous existence, the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) are all-aware of all matters and occurrences and their knowledge transcends spatial and temporal bounds; however, knowledge of divine essence is an impossibility for any being other than God and it thus transcends the scope of their knowledge. The hadiths regarding all-comprehensiveness and unrestrictedness of the Ahl al-Bayt's (AS) knowledge concern their luminous existence.

The physical existence of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS), subject to temporal and spatial restrictions, may only be endowed with all-encompassing knowledge through a complete connection to the intelligible aspect. In contrast, the restrictions on knowledge, as reflected in other hadiths, concern the physical realm when unconnected to the luminous existence. The hadiths regarding the Imam's all-encompassing and/or restricted knowledge, without being contradictory, are related to different realms and different circumstances.

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NOTES

- 1 Also known as *Aṣḥāb al-Kisā’* (lit. Companions of the Mantle), i.e., the Prophet, ‘Alī (AS), Faṭīma (SA), al-Ḥasan (AS), and al-Ḥusayn (AS) [transl.].
- 2 Duplicated plural, pl. form of *zīlāl* (lit. shadows), which is in turn the plural form of *zill* (shadow). *Azilla* herein implies ‘beyond the spheres of the heavens’ [transl.].
- 3 Lit. ‘The Great Compendium’ [transl.].
- 4 See above, 2.
- 5 The highest realm above *malakum* and *mulk*.

- 6 A jurisprudent or expert in Islamic law formulating independent decisions in legal or theological matters based on the interpretation and application of the four principles (*addila al-arba'a*), e.g., the Qur'an, Sunna, reason (*'aql*) or according to the Sunnis, analogy (*qiyās*), and consensus (*ijmā'*) [transl.].
- 7 According to Chapter 97, the Holy Qur'an was revealed on the 'Night of Power' or *Laylat al-Qadr* which is celebrated during the night between the 26th and 27th of Ramaḍān [transl.].
- 8 That is, the realm of abstract intellects and spirits [transl.].
- 9 See above, n. 4 [transl.].
- 10 I.e., Prophet Muḥammad (SAW) [transl.].