

Mohammed Rustom. *The Triumph of Mercy: Philosophy and Scripture in Mullā Ṣadrā*; Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2012 • xii+210 pp. • 978-1438443416.

The Triumph of Mercy: Philosophy and Scripture in Mullā Ṣadrā is a critical study of Ṣadrā's *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa*. The text guides the reader through Ṣadrā's oeuvre, bringing each exegetical concern from the *Tafsīr* into conversation with the philosophical and spiritual lexicon established in the fuller range of Ṣadrā's writing. The text consists of seven chapters which roughly follow the structure of the *Tafsīr*, notes, a bibliography, three indexes, and three appendices in which Rustom provides translations from the *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, the *Tafsīr*, and those sections Ṣadrā utilized from Ibn 'Arabī's *Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*. While the smooth and accessible style of the text make it a great introduction to Ṣadrā's thought, Rustom's manner of weaving the various texts by Ṣadrā and ideas from the Islamic intellectual tradition into a single discussion make this an excellent scholarly resource for specialists in Islamic thought.

The primary concern of the monograph is to show how Ṣadrā explained the Qur'ānic principle of God's mercy and its precedence over His wrath by relating his philosophical and scriptural thought. Rustom emphasizes how several issues related to the principle of divine mercy are only fully addressed by Ṣadrā in his *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa*, where he grapples with related questions such as: What is the nature of praise and how does it relate to being? Is hell an eternal abode or will it come to an end? If hell is eternal, is the suffering experienced in hell eternal? Can hell be a source of felicity?

In the first chapter ("Qur'ānic Hermeneutics"), Rustom outlines Ṣadrā's approach to scriptural exegesis as it is defined in his *Mafātīḥ*. Ṣadrā's mode of exegesis is grounded in his ontology. For Ṣadrā, being is a single graded reality which has both inwardly hidden and outwardly apparent modes. Although in itself being is inward and unified, it becomes outwardly apparent and diversified when it is instantiated in particular delimited modes. The same can be said about the Qur'ān and human beings, each of which has various grades or levels. On Ṣadrā's view, the Qur'ān is a synonym of being or a mode of the

divine command “Be!” and an exegete’s access to its meanings is determined by the extent to which he has penetrated the inwardly hidden dimensions of their own being. For this reason, Ṣadrā believes the scriptural exegete is only qualified to perform interpretation (*ta’wīl*) when he has undergone a disciplined spiritual purification which grants him access to the inner meaning of the scripture.

The second chapter (“Formal Considerations”) examines the sources of Ṣadrā’s *Tafsīr*, its structure, and its content. Rustom begins with a discussion of Ṣadrā’s influences that exposes the complexity of his thought and its close relationship to Ibn ‘Arabī and his school. Rustom then presents the Qur’ānic exegetes, schools of Hadith literature, theologians, philosophers, Sufis, and poets who were most formative of Ṣadrā as a thinker and shows where they appear in his writing. We learn interesting facts about Ṣadrā, like how despite being a Shī‘ī himself, Ṣadrā draws more heavily from Sunnī Hadith literature. Rustom finds the numerous references to Ibn ‘Arabī and his school and Ṣadrā’s tendency to paraphrases their ideas without any reference a strong evidence of their integration within the structure of Ṣadrā’s thought. Then, Rustom briefly outlines the issues at stake in each of the eight chapters of Ṣadrā’s *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa*.

Ṣadrā claims the *Fātiḥa* contains the essential message of the entire Qur’an (55), a major reason why the author has chosen to focus on this particular *Tafsīr*. The third chapter (“Metaphysics”) explains why Ṣadrā held this view and how he considered the relationship between man and God in terms of the scriptural teachings of the Origin, path of return, and final Return to God. The chapter discusses God as the Essence, the divine names and their loci, and the all-comprehensive name Allah, further clarifying the influence of Ibn ‘Arabī upon Ṣadrā. Rustom elucidates Ṣadrā’s position on the paradoxical nature of the Essence, which despite being inwardly hidden is also the most evident of things, since there is no place where we can find being without finding the Essence. Ṣadrā’s ontology is further explained in terms of a hidden Essence which becomes known by taking on the characteristics of relativity and delimitation. The infinite and hidden Essence takes on the attribute of finitude and becomes known through particular modes, specifically, those divine names which serve as the loci in which being appears. The loci are existentially mediated modes of God’s knowledge: they have no reality qua themselves but are fixed entities in God which emerge when He bestows being upon them by turning His face toward them. Ṣadrā refers to the all-comprehensive name *Allah* as the one name that does not denote a specific aspect of the face of the manifest Essence and represents the Essence without any qualifications. Ṣadrā’s metaphysical worldview can be summarized by saying that although the Essence qua Itself is utterly hidden, it is everywhere and thus, the names are everywhere. Since for Ṣadrā, each name denotes a particular quiddity and all of the names are

encompassed by the all-comprehensive name *Allah*, the “entire cosmos names the Essence by naming the name Allah” (63).

In the fourth chapter (“Cosmology”), Rustom presents Ṣadrā’s commentary on the *ḥamdallāh* (Q 1:2), in which he demonstrates the relationship between the coming-about of the cosmos, God’s Act of self-praise, and the praise of God by the human servant. Here we are shown the connection between the hidden Essence and the cosmos in terms of the existentialization of the Divine Word or scripture. The aforementioned isomorphism between being, the Qur’ān, and man is brought under examination. The cosmos is explained as coming about through God’s Perfect Word. Here the cosmos is discussed in terms of the Muḥammadan Reality. God’s creative command “Be!” is defined as an Act of God’s self-praise which produces the “structurally related” servants or “ones who praise,” beginning with the Muḥammadan Reality itself. The chapter culminates in a discussion of the Perfect Man, which Rustom describes as a discussion from Ṣadrā’s anthropology which relates the human being to the Muḥammadan Reality in terms of a microcosm-macrocosm relationship. The Perfect Man, according to Ṣadrā, has actualized within himself all the names and attributes of God and is therefore the prototype of the Muḥammadan Reality. He contains within himself the inner secrets of the *Fātiḥa*, and thus of the entire Qur’ān.

The fifth chapter (“Theology”) sheds light on Ṣadrā’s worldview as it relates to Ibn ‘Arabī’s notion of the “God created in beliefs.” Rustom presents a link between the diverse approaches to God and the diverse approaches to scriptural exegesis. The different levels of the Qur’ān are shown as corresponding to the different capacities of its exegetes, each of whom sees the scripture at the level of his own capacity. Ṣadrā sees the ‘God created in belief’ as prefigured in the primordial nature of man, whose existence as an instantiated mode of being will naturally reflect a particular grade of being and set of divine names, and thus approach God and scripture from the vantage point of his unique modality. Rustom then grapples with the theological consequences of having a ‘God created in beliefs,’ such as whether it is possible to know and worship God according to His true nature and whether or not a man can be rightly guided while worshipping God according to the ‘God created in beliefs.’ For Ṣadrā, both questions are answered in the affirmative for two reasons: first, because the Perfect Man is able to worship God according to the nature of the manifest Essence or all-comprehensive name *Allah*; and second, because of the nature of God’s mercy, Ṣadrā thinks that all creatures, regardless of the ‘God created in their beliefs,’ are guided on a straight path in one way or another.

In the sixth chapter (“Soteriology I”), Rustom shows how Ṣadrā responds to widely-held notions of eternal punishment in hell by emphasizing the precedence of divine mercy. Ṣadrā addresses this issue differently throughout his texts, which Rustom attributes to the gravity of the issue at hand and later as

in his *ʿArshiyya* to Ṣadrā's state of political duress. In his *Tafsīr Āyat al-kursī*, Ṣadrā has accepted that punishment in hell is an eternal affair. Toward the end of his career, when Ṣadrā wrote the *Aṣfār*, Ṣadrā grapples with Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī's notion that the eternality of punishment in hell does not contradict the possibility of its cessation, since each human, depending on their constitution, may come to experience hell without it being a kind of suffering. On this topic Ṣadrā turns to Ibn ʿArabī, who believes that while hell is a punishment, it is foremost an abode where sins are washed away, thus opening the possibility that this suffering may encompass an element of pleasure or relief. Here we find an instance in which Ṣadrā departs from Ibn ʿArabī, favouring the idea that the people of the fire were destined to be there according to their nature, whereas Ibn ʿArabī sees that people only become 'people of the fire' once they have had their natures become agreeable to fire, through residing in it. This chapter fully demonstrates how the thought of Ibn ʿArabī and his school became the underlying structure of Ṣadrā's own thought, despite the occasional, nuanced disagreement.

Rustom continues this discussion in "Soteriology II," where he expounds Ṣadrā's position that all things are rooted in divine mercy as it is expressed in his *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa*. Ṣadrā finds the quality of divine mercy synonymous to being, which he considers the essential reality behind all its instantiated modes. All modes of being, including those which appear to contain elements of wrath, are for Ṣadrā aspects of divine mercy. Here both Ṣadrā and Ibn ʿArabī's stance on the potential pleasure of chastisement are shown in connection to the subtleties of the Arabic language, in which punishment (*ʿadhāb*) comes from the same root as the word for sweetness (*ʿadhb*). Rustom weaves some of Ṣadrā's philosophical discussions of concepts such as substantial motion into his discussion of the path of mercy. While contextualizing Ṣadrā's exegesis in other scriptural and philosophical debates, he points out some interesting moments in Ṣadrā's *Tafsīr*, such as his interpretation of Ibn ʿArabī's view on the hands and feet of God as symbols of divine oneness and multiplicity.

The Triumph of Mercy paints a unique and much needed portrait of divine mercy in Islam. Rustom has provided for the reader an important resource that will help scholars to navigate Ṣadrā's writing and its relationship to various aspects of the Islamic intellectual tradition. Most importantly, unlike most studies which have emphasized the philosophical nature of Ṣadrā's work, this text clarifies that Ṣadrā is a unique figure precisely because of his complete integration of philosophical and scriptural thought.

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