

## THE CONCEPTIONS OF DIVINE REVELATION: A Comparative Study of the Views of Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra

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**Abstract:** The issue of revelation is one of the most important issues in the divine religions. In Islam the issue revelation is of central importance, as the revealed word of God, the Qur'ān, is in itself a miracle in its inimitability, a unique masterpiece of the divine message that cannot be replicated. Revelation is understood as communication from the unseen world above, whereby God issues His divine commands to humankind. The eminent Muslim philosophers Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra discussed the concept of revelation in their works. Ibn Sina considered revelation as a specific sensory effect on the prophet's consciousness, whereby the Angel of Revelation cast the divine words into the prophet's heart. Mulla Sadra also considered revelation as a type of unseen form of communication, whereby the divine commands are shared with humankind. This article attempts to study the nature of revelation, the levels of revelation, and the manner of revelation from the point of view of Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra through a descriptive-analytical method. Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra, despite their differences in conceptualizing and explaining the process of revelation, agreed that the revealed message is from God directly, without the independent agency of the Angel of Revelation and the prophets, who only carry and receive the divine message, yet cannot alter it.

**Keywords:** Revelation; God; Prophet; Ibn Sina; Mulla Sadra; Angel of Revelation.

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## Introduction

In the Abrahamic religions, man's relationship with the unseen world is explained through revelation. Through revelation the prophets communicated with the unseen world by receiving divine messages carried by the Angel of Revelation to guide humankind. Therefore, revelation is a very important issue as it bridges the gap between man and the unseen world. In Islam the issue of revelation has received much scholarly attention, focusing on the Glorious Qur'ān is a book of revelation and has a central role in the religion. As all Muslim scholars before and after their time, the philosophers Ibn Sina (980-1037) and Mulla Sadra (1572-1641) closely examined the issue of revelation. According to Ibn Sina, revelation is a type of transmission between the prophet and the Angel of Revelation, where the divine message is revealed to the prophet. Mulla Sadra considers revelation as divine light that shines on the prophet's heart from Almighty God to guide God's servants to enlightenment.

Nadia Maftuni (2008) studied the nature of revelation and how it descended from the point of view of al-Farabi and Ibn Sina and explained their perspectives.<sup>1</sup> Mohammad Javad Pashaei (2018) placed his emphasis on the issue of face science to examine the nature of revelation from Mulla Sadra's point of view.<sup>2</sup> Further, Zahra Mahmoud Kalayeh (2018) examined the degree of compatibility of

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<sup>1</sup> Nadia Maftuni, "A Comparative Study of Revelation and Prophecy by Farabi and Ibn Sina", *Avicennian Philosophy Journal* 12, no. 39 (2008).

<sup>2</sup> Mohammad Javad Pashaei, "Rereading the Problem of Revelation with Emphasis on Mulla Sadra's Ontological Approach to Presence Science", *Journal of Modern Religious Thought* 14, no. 53 (2018).

Ibn Sina's views with the Qur'ānic verses about revelation.<sup>3</sup> Building on the existing body of research, this article follows an analytical approach to examine the definition of revelation, modes of revelation, and the different levels of revelation from the perspectives of Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra. The primary aim of this research is to examine these three aspects of revelation through the lens of Ibn Sina's and Mulla Sadra's thought and highlight the similarities and differences of their ideas.

This research tries to answer the following questions: What is the definition of revelation given by Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra? Is there a change in revelation? What is the philosophy of revelation? What are Ibn Sina's types and levels of revelation? What is Mulla Sadra's definition of revelation? What are their different approaches to explaining the process of revelation? What are the similarities and differences in their conceptualization of revelation?

### **Nature and Definition of Revelation according to Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra**

Before describing the nature and process of revelation, Ibn Sina explains the difference between thought and conjecture. In conjecture, an idea is suddenly formed in the mind, either due to an intellectual effort or without it. Some individuals do not need formal education to learn how to think and can rely on conjecture alone. This form of conjecture is excellent and noble and can be called the 'power of holiness'. Ibn Sina states that conjecture leads to the attainment of reason.<sup>4</sup> The souls of the prophets are such that due to the strong connection with the Active Intellect, they realize all or most of the intellects with a strong guess in the shortest time.<sup>5</sup> In fact, according to their high intellectual and spiritual status, the prophets

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<sup>3</sup> Zahra Mahmoud Kalayeh, "The Truth of the Revelation of the Prophets from Ibn Sina's Perspective and Its Comparison with the Quranic Teachings", *Bi-Quarterly of Wisdom of Ibn Sina* 22, no. 59 (2018).

<sup>4</sup> Hossein Ibn Abdullah Ibn Sina, *al-Isharāt wa al-Tanbihāt*, Vol. 2, edited by Nasir al-Din Tusi (Qom: Nashr al-Balāghah, 1996), 354.

<sup>5</sup> Maftuni, "A Comparative Study of Revelation and Prophecy by Farabi and Ibn Sina". Compare with Ghorbanali Karimzadeh Gharamaleki, Abdullah HosseiniEskandian, and Nur Hidayat Wakhid Udin. "Divine Revelation in the Philosophical Essays of al-Fārābī in Comparison with the Mystical Thoughts of Ibn 'Arabi". *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf dan Pemikiran Islam* 11, no. 1 (2021): 122–141. <https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2021.11.1.122-141>.

can understand the message of the angels and convey it to their people.

In his encyclopedia, Ibn Sina offers a simple definition of revelation and expresses it as a direct transmission between the prophet and the Angel of Revelation. He writes, "Revelation is a kind of connection between the prophet and the Angel of Revelation which has an effect on the prophet's consciousness".<sup>6</sup> However, in his *Risāla al-'Arshīyya fī Ḥaqā'iq al-Tamhīd wa Ithbāt al-Nubūmwa* (Sublime Treatise on the Truths of Unity and Confirmation of Prophethood), he gives a more comprehensive definition of revelation and writes, "Revelation is the induction of an object to a prophet, who has no time nor face, and is conceived in the pure existence of the prophet, just as in the mirror where the opposite face is engraved".<sup>7</sup> Ibn Sina believes that time in revelation has no meaning and time in revelation is different from the time as other people experience it. According to Ibn Sina, the prophets enjoy such an elevated status that they are able to receive revelation and have the ability to receive and understand the words of Almighty God in their hearts.

Elsewhere in the definition of revelation he says: "Revelation is like the effect of the senses on the senses, and the secret induction from the intellect to the worthy people. If this induction happens in the awakened state it is called revelation, and if he is asleep it is called throwing into the soul and spirit".<sup>8</sup> Revelation takes place only in the state of being awake; therefore, the command given to Abraham by God in a dream to sacrifice Isma'il is not revelation.

According to Ibn Sina, one of the main elements in revelation is the Angel of Revelation, which he calls the Active Intellect or the Tenth Intellect. Through the Angel's agency every piece of knowledge is revealed to the prophet through enlightenment, and the prophet guides mankind in the shadow of that knowledge. It is the duty of every man and woman to listen to the words and instructions of the divine prophets and to apply them in their daily life and be guided;

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<sup>6</sup> Hossein Ibn Abdullah Ibn Sina, *Alaei Encyclopedia*, with introduction, Margin and Correction by Seyyed Mohammad Meshkooh, Hamedan, Bu Ali Sina (n.p.: University Press and Cultural Honors Association, 2009), 145.

<sup>7</sup> Ibn Sina, *al-Risāla al-'Arshīyya fī Ḥaqā'iq al-Tamhīd wa Ithbāt al-Nubūmwa* (Qom: Bidar Publications, 1979), 252.

<sup>8</sup> Hossein Ibn Abdullah Ibn Sina, *Ibn Sina's Treatise on the Interpretation of the Qur'an*, research by Mohsen Bidarfar (Qom: Tafsir and Quranic Sciences Publications, 2007), 287.

otherwise, they will be among the sinners and the misguided, and they will not benefit from it.

In Ibn Sina's view revelation has the following characteristics: It is from God, revealed to the prophet through the tenth intellect or directly, induced secretly on the prophet; has a sensory effect on the prophet, requires a special status and qualities, occurs while awake and in different forms, is independent of time and space, and is a rational concept.

Ibn Sina writes of the power of conjecture when discussing revelatory knowledge and underlines its difference from rational knowledge. He believes that the difference between a prophet and a philosopher lies in the way both attain rational knowledge; the philosopher connects to the through his intellectual effort, while the prophet receives this grace through his guessing power, and the knowledge of the prophet is higher than that of the philosopher.

On the other hand, the prophets have a sacred intellect and are directly and immediately connected to the source of grace. He writes, "It is possible for a person to have a self-affirming soul because of his inner purity and connection to rational principles, to the extent that he is ignited in all cases by the intensity of the senses, that is, the acceptance of knowledge from the Active Intellect, and all the forms that are active in the intellect are embodied in it either repulsively or almost repulsively, and this is a kind of prophecy, and it is appropriate that this power be called the holy power because it is the highest level of human power."<sup>9</sup>

Ibn Sina considers receiving revelation as the most important characteristic of the prophets and called it the 'power of holiness' related to the theoretical intellect which receive knowledge from the Active Intellect.<sup>10</sup> Only the faculties of those humans are worthy of receiving this knowledge, who have attained the highest levels of the soul and the intellect. In addition to the theoretical intellect, the prophets' practical intellect is also at the highest level of perfection.

Ibn Sina believes that revelation has an epistemic nature and is considered a type of perception. Hence, knowledge analysis receives great importance due to its guessing forces and the grace of the

<sup>9</sup> Hossein Ibn Abdullah Ibn Sina, *The Soul of the Book of al-Shifā*, Research by Hassan Hassanzadeh Amoli (Qom: Islamic Propaganda Office, 2006), 340.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Adamson, "Logic and knowledge", Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna): A Very Short Introduction, Very Short Introductions (London: Oxford, 2023). <https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780192846983.003.0002>,

Active Intellect.<sup>11</sup> Ibn Sina believes that not all human beings enjoy the powers of conjecture equally, and that there are people who can derive no benefit from it at all. On the other hand, the prophets have the highest degrees of conjecture. Ibn Sina emphasizes that all the steps of sending and receiving revelation are done with the permission of God and the Angel of Revelation who casts revelation into the prophet's heart by the command of God.

Meanwhile, Mulla Sadra believes that revelation is a light that shines on the heart, mind and imagination of the prophet. If this light shines on the intellect of an ordinary human being, he will become a pious divine sage, and if the same light shines on an individual's imagination, he will reach the degree of prophethood and mission.<sup>12</sup> Mulla Sadra considers the prophets as intermediaries between the world of angels and the world of human beings, who guide people back to unity. Mulla Sadra considers revelation to be related to the imaginative power of the prophets and believes that divine revelation is manifested in this power.

One of the important issues that Mulla Sadra uses when discussing revelation is the unity of reason and wisdom. Examining the concept of perception he points out that a person perceives what bears some resemblance or unity with it.<sup>13</sup>

Mulla Sadra writes, "It has been repeatedly said by me that the perceiver is always of the kind of perception, so the touch perceives the tangible because it is of its kind. Taste understands matters of taste because it is of its kind. Illusions also understand illusions, and reason also understands rational matters."<sup>14</sup> Mulla Sadra believes that Prophet Muhammad saw the Angel Jibril with his own eyes, heard revelatory verses from him with his ears, and communicated them to the people. According to Mulla Sadra, the Angel of Revelation

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Mohammad Ibn Ibrahim Sadr al-Din Shirazi, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim* (Qom: Bidar Publications, 1987), 356.

<sup>13</sup> Mohammad Ibn Ibrahim Sadr al-Din Shirazi, *The Evidence of Godliness in Behavioral Methods*, edited by Jalal al-Din Ashtiani (Mashhad: University Publishing Center, 1981), 183; Yahya Bouzarinejad, "Philosophical Explanation of Revelation from Mulla Sadra's Point of View", *Quarterly Journal of Modern Religious Thought* 3, no. 11 (2007), 55.

<sup>14</sup> Mohammad Ibn Ibrahim Sadr al-Din Shirazi, *al-'Arshiyah*, edited by Mohammad Khalil al-Labun (Beirut: Institute of Arabic History, 2002), 252. Zailan Moris, *Revelation, Intellectual Intuition and Reason in the Philosophy of Mulla Sadra: An Analysis of the al-Hikmah al-'Arshiyah* (London: Routledge, 2013).

manifested himself in human form, and the prophets received divine revelation from him. Mulla Sadra tries to explain the concept of revelation in a way that, on the one hand, does not contradict the teachings of the Qur'ān and hadith and, on the other hand, does not contradict rational and philosophical principles.<sup>15</sup>

According to Mulla Sadra, revelation has the following characteristics:

Viewed from an esoteric perspective, the rational soul of man is first perfected and able to control the restraint of the soul in such a way that nothing can stop it. It means that the physical senses do not prevent the attention of the rational senses, and the imagination does not prevent the attention to the upper world. In this case, the person can understand the facts of the upper world and observe them in a waking state.<sup>16</sup>

Viewed from a scientific perspective, man acquires knowledge regardless of formal education and without reasoning and logical principles. If his soul is polished and perfected, truths from the higher world are revealed to him and he can receive the knowledge of that cannot be acquired through the senses due to the divine grace.

This is followed by the emergence of non-sensory truths in the waking state. If the human soul becomes so transcendent that it leaves the world of matter and sensory occupations and is liberated and in the state of awakening, truths are revealed to it that cannot be achieved in the normal state and through sensory means. The divine words of revelation are also truths that cannot be perceived and understood using sensory tools, and only the power of reason and wisdom of the prophet can receive and comprehend these truths in the light of the perfections he has achieved and the grace that God has bestowed upon him.

According to Mulla Sadra, a soul can receive divine truths that can travel outside the material world of the senses. By freeing themselves from the material world, the prophets are able to understand the divine word.

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<sup>15</sup> Azam Sadat Hoseini Hosein Abad and Zahra Khazaei, "Divine Revelation and Justification of Belief in God: A Comparative Study of the Views of Paul Moser and Mulla Sadra", *SOPHLA* (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11841-022-00929-w>.

<sup>16</sup> Mohammad Ibn Ibrahim Sadr al-Din Shirazi, *The Evidence of Godliness in Behavioral Methods*, edited by Jalal al-Din Ashtiani. Mashhad: University Publishing Center, 1981), 346.

## Levels of Revelation

When discussing the levels of revelation, Ibn Sina first describes the human faculties. The first faculty is the faculty of common sense which is an established concept among the Muslim philosophers. He explains, “Raindrops falling from the sky are seen in the form of lines and fire that rotates in the hearth in the form of a circle. The eruption of these two cannot be in the human eye because the eye sees only what is connected between it and the opposite object. On the other hand, external raindrops and fire in the imagination, their trace is stored, and man can re-imagine it when needed”.<sup>17</sup>

The second faculty is the imagination which is responsible for storing the image perceived by common sense. In fact, the perceived image in common sense disappears shortly after the eye is disconnected from the external object but is stored in the faculty of imagination. Therefore, imagination comes after common sense, and its task is storing the perceptions obtained.

The third faculty is the faculty of fear which is responsible for understanding the partial meaning. Minor meanings are concepts that are not comprehensible using the external senses, but the mind perceives them by observing external sensations, such as the perception of a mother’s love for her child. Ibn Sina describes this faculty with the words, “Indeed, animals perceive in partial senses, partial intangible meanings that have not come through the external senses. It is as if the sheep understands an intangible meaning about the wolf, or as if the male sheep understands an intangible meaning about the female sheep. In fact, these cases are related to partial perceptions, just as the sense of observation is partial. Therefore, we have a faculty that has the dignity of these perceptions.”<sup>18</sup>

The fourth faculty is the faculty of memory which retains the partial meanings perceived by the faculty of fear. This faculty can imagine the highest meanings, such as the concept of God. The fifth faculty is the faculty of imagination which carries out activities that do not take place in other faculties. Another name for this faculty is the thinking power.

Ibn Sina differentiates between three levels of revelation, which are: explaining how the revelations of reason to the prophets without

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<sup>17</sup> Ibn Sina, *Treatise on the Soul and Survival and Resurrection*, Vol. 2, Research by Aḥmad Fuād al-Ahwānī (Beirut: Dār al-Iḥyā, 1952), 426.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 433.



any human knowledge, explaining how the unseen is revealed to the prophets, which are minor matters, and expressing the great things that the prophets.<sup>19</sup>

Regarding the first level, Ibn Sina believes that revelation to the rational is obtained by connecting the prophet's soul to the Active Intellect. During this process, intellectual and general affairs are induced in the prophet's soul without any mediation from the Active Intellect. The second and third stages, according to Ibn Sina, are related to revelation in minor matters. The specific process of minor matters is different in these two levels. In the second level, the partial sciences and knowledge related to the universe are obtained by connecting the prophet's soul to the constellations and receiving the details directly from them. In the third level, after imparting the intellects by the Active Intellect the prophet imagines these intellects and shows them in the form of seeing a beautiful face or showing a mysterious word.<sup>20</sup> In the last level, the revelation is revealed to the prophet who recites that revelation in the form of words to the people in order to inform them of the commands of God, lead them out of their ignorance, and guide them to enlightenment.

Ibn Sina believes that the grace of the first intellect always exists; however, most people are not worthy of receiving those blessings due to their low level of existence and lack of perfection. Therefore, if a person acquires the necessary knowledge, he will be able to receive the blessings of the first intellect and connect to the unseen world. Also, there should be no obstacle to this connection, which is the same as the limitations of human existence and its lack of perfection.

Ibn Sina considers that the most important characteristic of a prophet is receiving revelation from God. For this reason he expresses two meanings of revelation and prophecy, which are the special order for the animal motives and the special order for the imaginative faculties, each of which is a different order of receiving revelation.

Ibn Sina explains the special order of animal motives, "When man's existence becomes strong and honorable, he becomes like the principles of the world and the elements of the world of creation

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<sup>19</sup> Ibn Sina, *al-Shifā'* (Tehran: Nasser Khosrow Publications, 1984), 115.

<sup>20</sup> Kalayeh, "The Truth of the Revelation of the Prophets from Ibn Sina's Perspective and Its Comparison with the Quranic Teachings", 45.

obey him. What he imagines will affect the elements of the world, because the nature of the world is subject to the soul and the intellect, and there are forms in the existence of the cause of the forms of this world. Human existence is also from the existence of the world, but it is weakened and can affect the body. For example, if he imagines something disgusting, his body will cool down, and if he thinks erotically, heat will be created in him. Man's existence is related to his body and therefore affects it, but because it is not as powerful as the world, its effect is weak. It is even possible that human existence affects other bodies with eye sores, so it is not forbidden and irrational for someone to have such a strong existence that he can do great things in the bodies of this world and create miracles".<sup>21</sup>

Ibn Sina considers that receiving revelation from the world of angels is an entirely rational and conceivable notion. The prophets, due to their spiritual and intellectual merits, have reached that level and are able to communicate with the unseen world. Concerning the special faculty of the imagination, he writes, "In some people, the imagination is created very intensely and prevails so that the external senses cannot overcome it, and existence is strong and does not distract the mind. So, in awakening, they have what others see in their dreams".<sup>22</sup> He considers this faculty as the practical intellect which, with the cooperation of the imaginative faculty, receives partial sciences from the other world through divine grace.

From Mulla Sadra's point of view, the divine prophets have pure souls who have attained the perfection of the theoretical intellect through their inner purity. By conjecture and without any intellectual effort, they have attained the highest intellectual knowledge in the shortest possible time. Hence, divine knowledge is not of the kind of imitation, nor of the kind of thought that is achieved through the medium but is of the kind of discovery and intuition that understands the truth and essence of things as they are. The forms in the world of example are the manifestation of the general meanings that are present in the world of intellect, which take on a sensory aspect and are perceived in the form of eloquent speech. In other words, taking into account the arc of descent and ascent in the system of existence, God creates the version of the world in the world of intellect, then

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<sup>21</sup> Ibn Sina, *The Soul of the Book of al-Shifā*, 274.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 240.

brings it to the world of imagination, and finally into the world of sense.

According to Mulla Sadra, there must be complete harmony between the perceiver and the perceived, which is why the prophet's soul must be perfected and be worthy of receiving the divine word and be in harmony with it. In the second discussion of revelation which is derived from the perfection of the prophet's imaginative power, the images of the unseen world are represented for man, and the truth of its representation cannot be perceived except through the union of the soul with the represented forms, their existential presence in the scene of the soul, and its existential connection with these forms. The same is true in the second realm of revelation, which is one of the highest levels of human perception. The reasons for the realization of present knowledge with a feature of it, such as existence and unity, reveals itself.<sup>23</sup> Mulla Sadra explains, "From what has been said about the union of the rational and the wise, the sensible and the feeling, the imaginative and the imagination, it has become clear that human perception at all times is the union with one level of the world. Existence is first the intellect, then the soul, then the senses, and finally matter".<sup>24</sup>

Mulla Sadra considers that one of the conditions for receiving revelation is that the prophetic intellect is freed from material and worldly occupations. By ridding itself of these matters the intellect acquires the ability to achieve its completion and is able to receive divine revelation. He emphasizes that not all intellects are capable of receiving divine revelation, and only the intellect of the prophet can receive revelation.

Furthermore, revelation has different levels, and not all prophets can reach all levels of revelation. Receiving revelation communicated directly by God is very heavy, and some prophets' intellect is unable to acquire this strength. Mulla Sadra believes that Prophet Muhammad reached all levels of revelation and received direct revelation from God.

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<sup>23</sup> Pashaei, "Rereading the Problem of Revelation with Emphasis on Mulla Sadra's Ontological Approach to Presence Science", 145-146.

<sup>24</sup> Sadr al-Din Shirazi, *The Evidence of Godliness in Behavioral Methods*, 351.

## How Revelation was Revealed

In his *Risāla al-‘Arshīyya fī Haqāiq al-Ṭawḥīd wa Ithbāt al-Nubūwwa* (Sublime Treatise on the Truths of Unity and Confirmation of Prophethood) describes the stages of receiving revelation in this way: First, the prophet receives the knowledge of the unseen world from God through the perfections he has attained and the blessings that have been bestowed upon him. Then, the imagination of the prophet stores that knowledge and imagines them in letters and forms, which is followed by the prophet hearing a word from those images engraved in his soul, and sees a person in the form of a human being who is the Active Intellect and receives revelation from him.<sup>25</sup>

Ibn Sina believes that hearing unseen voices as well as hearing the word of God directly from the prophet are perceived in the faculty of common sense. He writes, “The prophet receives the knowledge of the unseen world through the angel of revelation, and the imaginative faculty receives and imagines it through various letters and forms, and liberates the soul, and engraves those expressions and forms in it. So, on the tablet of the soul, he hears a poetic word and sees a human being. We perceive things by external forces, while the prophet understands objects by internal forces. We first see and then find knowledge, but the prophet first finds knowledge and then sees.”<sup>26</sup> Ibn Sina considers common human perception to be rather weak; only the prophets, due to God’s grace and their efforts to purify their souls, have reached a high level of perception and feeling and are able to receive meanings from other worlds. Ibn Sina identifies two distinctive elements in explaining the manner of revelation: the role of the heavenly souls and the role of imaginative faculty.

From Ibn Sina’s point of view, the faces of the creatures of the natural world, in addition to being generally patterned in the Active Intellect, are also partially patterned in the constellations because these souls also have partial knowledge and will. However, more important is the role he assigns to the imaginative faculty in formulating and detailing the revelatory facts. Its importance is clear from his emphasis on the pivotal role of this power in the process of revelation. Perhaps, the reason for his emphasis on the role of the

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<sup>25</sup> Ibn Sina, *al-Risāla al-‘Arshīyya*, 252.

<sup>26</sup> Ibn Sina, *The Soul of the Book of al-Shifā*, 12.

imaginative faculty in the partial teaching of revelation refers to sciences and teachings that are induced by the Angel of Revelation.<sup>27</sup>

In explaining the barriers to connection, Ibn Sina first refers to one characteristic of the faculties of the soul, namely the conflict between the powers. He stipulates that there is a severe conflict between the faculties; if one of these faculties is activated it prevents the other faculties from interfering. For example, when the faculty of anger overwhelms a person, it affects other faculties of the soul, such as the faculty of nutrition, and that is why man does not have an appetite for food when he is very angry.<sup>28</sup> Ibn Sina explains, "The faculties of the soul are in conflict with each other. When the faculty of anger prevails it preoccupies the soul with the faculty of lust, and vice versa. When he engages in the act of esoteric sense, he is deprived of the sense of appearance. Thus, he is close to hear and see nothing, and when the inner sense is fascinated by the senses, the intellect loses its tools and stops at its much-needed intellectual movement."<sup>29</sup>

According to Ibn Sina, the 'holy faculty' (*qudsiyyah*) or 'holy intellect' is introduced as a special place of the characteristics of prophecy. When discussing the first dimension of prophecy he uses the term 'conjecture' according to which knowledge of something is obtained through mediocre knowledge, without intellectual movement. In other words, the mind realizes the middle directly as and without intellectual movement. Since not all human beings have the same middle order, and some are at the base of the pyramid and some are at the top, the objects are the same, using a faculty called the 'holy power' or the 'holy intellect'. At the highest level of theoretical intellect is man who, as a result of moving away from the material world and attending to the supreme principles and the realm of the unseen receives general revelatory truths from the Active Intellect and through conjecture.<sup>30</sup>

According to Mulla Sadra, the source of revelation is with God, and the prophet has no involvement in it. It is God who communicates all divine revelation to the material world. If Jibril, the

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<sup>27</sup> Mohammad Dargahzadeh, "Philosophical Explanation of Revelation from Ibn Sina's Point of View", *Journal of Theological Knowledge* 8, no. 1 (2012), 41.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>29</sup> Ibn Sina, *al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbihāt*, 116.

<sup>30</sup> Ibn Sina, *al-Shifā'*, 219; Pashaei, "Rereading the Problem of Revelation with Emphasis on Mulla Sadra's Ontological Approach to Presence Science", 142.

Angel of Revelation also has a role in this, it is only a mediating role. The prophet must have a two-dimensional (i.e., esoteric and exoteric) personality to carry out his mission. The prophet looks at the world from the inside and through his heart, understands the Preserved Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*) and is informed of the truths of the unseen world.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, in the other dimension and in close association with other humans, the prophet shares his new knowledge and guides them to the path of truth. In other words, the prophet receives high intellectual meanings and divine revelation through his divine self and propagates it with his human self.<sup>32</sup>

According to Mulla Sadra, the prophet's existence is a sublime existence and has access to the knowledge of all sciences. Due to his high level of spiritual development, he connects to the world of reason with the level of his intellect and receives high revelatory meanings through spiritual discovery. He connects to the imaginary world with his imaginary order and receives forms and words through formal discovery before communicating them to his fellow men in the natural world.<sup>33</sup>

Mulla Sadra considers the perfection of man in the exaltation of all his faculties (*al-insān al-kāmil*), each perfected faculty receiving the divine word. The perfection of the intellectual faculty is to be able to see the approaching angels and receive divine revelation. He explains, "To the extent that he bears a general resemblance to the great spirit, that is, to the general intellect of the universe, and as a result, whenever he wants, he can find a general connection with the great spirit without the need for much thought and reflection".<sup>34</sup>

The perfection of imagination is in observing otherworldly forms and figures and is aware of future and past events. Mulla Sadra describes, "So much so that in the world of awakening, he sees the unseen world with his esoteric eyes and the forms of examples hidden from the eyes of the people are revealed to him, and hears the sounds, words and phrases from the realm of the unseen. He sees the face of the angel carrying revelation, and what he hears from his mouth is the

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<sup>31</sup> Muhammad Kamal, *Mulla Sadra's Transcendent Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2006). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315596211>.

<sup>32</sup> Hossein Ali Montazeri, *Ambassador of Truth and Ambassador of Revelation* (Qom: Kherad Ava Publications, 2008), 149.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>34</sup> Mohammad Ibn Ibrahim Sadr al-Din Shirazi, *The Beginning and the Resurrection*, edited by Seyyed Jalaluddin Ashtiani (Qom: Islamic Propaganda Office, 2001), 605.

word of God.<sup>35</sup> Despite the faculty of imagination, the prophet can see the angel of revelation clearly and is ware of every detail.

According to Mulla Sadra, the perfection of the faculties of the senses is equal to the perfection of the faculty of stimulation and causes the passivity of materials and faculties.<sup>36</sup> With this perfection, the prophet can alter the course of natural events and do extraordinary things that others call miracles.

Finally, these perfections enable the prophet to receive divine revelation and communicate it to the people as part of fulfilling his mission. The soul of the prophet becomes actualized after receiving the divine revelation, and his rational faculty connects to the actual intellect. In this way the prophet is able to convey the divine message to the people and connects the rationality of the other world with the material realm.

Just as the prophet receives the rational meanings of revelation from God, he receives the divine message from God. He does not interfere with its content and communicates the same words to the people. According to the principle of the originality of existence in Mulla Sadra's philosophy, any essence in which intensification and connection is possible, whenever it is promoted to a higher degree and perfection, forms the same degree of identity. Based on this principle, only the prophet's soul, due to its high degree of perfection, can be worthy of receiving revelation.

### **Comparison of the Views of Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra**

God sent prophets to guide humankind out of their ignorance to enlightenment, and He adorned those prophets with His revelation so that they might convey His commands to His servants so that they might be guided by them.<sup>37</sup> 'The issue of revelation in the Abrahamic religions is central' therefore, they are called 'revealed religions'. Since the coming of Islam, Muslim scholars have exerted great efforts to explain the issue of revelation and have consulted the Qur'ān and hadith as well as philosophical arguments to explain the concept of revelation.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 606.

<sup>37</sup> Archbishop Rowan Williams, *Communicating the Word: Revelation, Translation, and Interpretation in Christianity and Islam*, Edited by David Marshall (United States: Georgetown University Press, 2011). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2tt5k3>.

Ibn Sina, one of the most eminent Muslim philosophers, has exerted a great influence on the growth and development of Islamic philosophy and contributed significantly to eastern and western thought. In his works he paid special attention to the issue of revelation and discussed it on much detail. Similarly, Mulla Sadra, one of the most illustrious Shi'ite philosophers, examined the issue of revelation through linking reason and hadith. Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra agree that revelation is a divine blessing that God sent down to humankind, received by the prophets to guide the people towards the light. Both emphasize that receiving revelation is a privilege granted only to the prophets; ordinary people cannot reach this level of rational competency. When defining revelation, Ibn Sina points out that revelation is the induction of a timeless and pristine object into a prophet who perceives its opposite image like in a mirror. The meanings are communicated by God and through the Angel of Revelation. On the other hand, Mulla Sadra considers revelation as a light manifested in the heart and mind of the prophet, which allows him to grasp the meaning of the divine word. According to Ibn Sina, one of the main elements in the process of revelation is the Angel of Revelation whom he calls the Active Intellect or the Tenth (and highest) Intellect through which every piece of knowledge is revealed to the prophet through the process of enlightenment. Therefore, the prophet guides mankind in the shadow of those teachings.<sup>38</sup> Mulla Sadra understands the Active Intellect as the mediator between God and the prophet who conveys the divine words to guide the people.

Both Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra agree that the prophet can see the Angel of Revelation and hear his words as clearly as if they were spoken by a human. However, not all prophets can receive direct revelation from God, which is reserved for those who have reached the highest level of spiritual and intellectual perfection. Both scholars emphasize that Prophet Muhammad received direct revelation from Almighty God and often received revelation directly from God, which marks his elevated status among the prophets. Both also point out that revelation is a rational-spiritual process that is not accessible to normal humans. Theoretically, the human soul can receive revelation from the unseen world and can connect with it to receive

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<sup>38</sup> Mohammed Rustom, "Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy: Mullā Ṣadrā on Existence, Intellect, and Intuition", *Iranian Studies* 45, no. 3 (2012), 457-461. DOI: 10.1080/00210862.2012.655066.



its truths. However, one condition for receiving revelation is one's complete liberation from the material world. Both agree that revelation occurs in the waking state and not in sleep.

Regarding the process of revelation, Ibn Sina states that revelation is first placed in the faculty of common sense and then enters the faculty of imagination, which is responsible for storing the image. It then disappears once the eye is disconnected from the external object and stored in the faculty of imagination and remains there. The faculty of fear is responsible for understanding the partial meaning, while the faculty of memory is used to receive the partial meanings perceived by the faculty of fear and can process the highest meanings. The imaginative faculty is reached in the last stage of revelation. However, Mulla Sadra believed that the process of revelation cannot be described in words. In his view, the prophets have pure and polished souls and have attained the perfection of theoretical intellect. Through conjecture and without any intellectual effort they have achieved the highest intellectual knowledge in the shortest possible time. Therefore, the divine knowledge is neither a type of imitation nor thought; rather, it is a type of discovery and intuition that realizes the truth and essence of things as they are. Unlike Ibn Sina, Mulla Sadra considers revelation to be inherently intuitive and not reliant on different actions performed in different faculties.

According to Mulla Sadra, a prophet has access to the knowledge of all the sciences and is able to connect to the world of reason, which allows him to receive high revelatory meanings and retain them. He then connects to the imaginary world and receives forms and words through immediate discovery. He then communicates them to the people in the material realm and the natural world. In this way the prophet leads the life of an ordinary man who eats and drinks; however, this is only one aspect of his existence. Similarly, Ibn Sina concludes that the prophet receives the knowledge of the unseen by God communicated through the Angel of Revelation, perceives in his imaginative faculty various forms and meanings that are engraved in his heart. He hears the words and sees the image of a human form communicating with him. However, while normal people perceive things through their external faculties, the prophet understands objects through his internal faculties. Thus, people see first and then learn new knowledge, whereas the prophet

learns first and then sees. Ibn Sina argues that the intellect of the prophet connects to another world and receives revelation, while Mulla Sadra argues that the prophet's imagination connects to the other world and receives divine revelation and meanings. Therefore, both scholars give the imagination a place and a role in receiving revelation.

Despite the differences in the ideas of Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra concerning the process of revelation, both emphasize that revelation is truth communicated by God, and that the scriptures are indeed the divine word communicated through the Angel of Revelation and received by the prophets in the roles of mediator and receptor. Also, both philosophers agree that receiving revelation is the prerogative of the prophets, and that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was the final messenger. Finally, that revelation is a divine grace and mercy on His servants who are shown right and wrong and, thus, can longer claim ignorance.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The issue of revelation is an important theological and philosophical issue in Islamic scholarship. Muslim philosophers have discussed this concept in much detail to support their belief that the Glorious Qur'ān is a revealed miracle of perfection and in line with rational principles. Two of the most eminent Muslim philosophers, Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra, discussed the nature of revelation in their works. The differences in their intellectual approaches, classifications and explanations notwithstanding, including the role of the intellectual and spiritual faculties of the prophets, both agreed that revelation is a grace of God communicating with the select few to guide all of mankind. Equally, they agreed that neither the prophets nor the Angel of Revelation had any independent agency during the process of revelation. In line with the basic Islamic teachings, Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra considered revelation as God's benevolent instruction so that mankind can achieve true and everlasting happiness; whosoever follows it will be saved, and whosoever ignores it will remain in error and misguidance and ignorant of his deplorable state.

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