

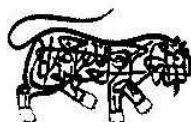
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The Supernatural Knowledge and Powers of the Imāms

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Apologetics Department of the Ahlul Bayt World Assembly

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Preface

Man is an amalgam of matter and spirit each of which has an effect on the other. Medical science has proven that many diseases originate in the psyche, especially diseases such as stomach ulcers and diabetes, which are called "psycho-somatic" (or mind-body) diseases. Consequently, the approach to the cure of many of these kinds of diseases such as depression and schizophrenia is psychological rather than chemical.

On the basis of scientific advances in this field, and building upon research which clarifies the relationship between the material and spiritual dimensions of man and their effects on each other, the science of "character analysis" has been founded whose objective is to give better direction to forces within society working on the reform and

optimization of how people relate to themselves and to others.

Of course these objectives must be pursued only after one has attained to an understanding of the limits of the individual's psychological capabilities and talents so as not to burden him with a responsibility that is more than he can handle. The reform and optimization of one's capabilities and talents must also be pursued in a similar vein, so that the proper groundwork is laid for encouraging the doing of that which is right and discouraging the doing of that which is wrong.

On the other hand, man can affect his future and can be affected by the past by discovering the depths of the past, such as the truths which the Noble Qoran has expressed to the Prophet ﷺ as provisions for him in his ministry of reform. Examples of these teaching stories from the past are the stories of the Israelites and the great prophet Moses ﷺ, the plots and intrigues of the Jews against their prophets, the difficulties that were faced by the prophets Joseph ﷺ and Jesus ﷺ, and so on.

The Qoran differs in its depiction of the past from the reports which the Jews have in the heavenly books that are in their possession but whose contents have been distorted. God the Sublimely Exalted states:

[11:49] These accounts of something that was beyond the reach of thy perception We [now] reveal unto thee, [O Muhammad: for] neither thou nor thy people knew them [fully] ere this. Be, then, [like Noah,] patient in adversity - for, behold, the future belongs to those who are conscious of god [and who abide by His will]!

Anyone who is engaged in the struggle for the establishment of a *towhīdic*¹ or integral Islamic society will feel himself to be in need of a conception of how the world is ultimately to be conceived because he wants to ensure that the direction he is taking and the actions that are taken in that direction are in accord with those ultimate objectives; he wants his bearing to be based on solid presuppositions and assumptions, not on illusions, deceptions and distortions of the truth.

At the same time, talk of domains of reality which are beyond the ken of ordinary human perception (*al-ghayb*) and of the prediction of future events and seeing back into an otherwise inaccessible past is not an empty claim

¹ *Towhīd* is the first principle of the Islamic faith and is usually translated as Monotheism or as the unicity of God. Here it refers to the unicity of God not just in His capacity as Creator (i.e. unicity of Creatorship), but also refers to the seamlessness of the *order* within creation (including man's social order) as a corollary of that act of creation. Thus, *towhīd* here refers to the *integrality* of creation with the social order that is intended for that creation by God: the *integral (towhīdic)* Islamic society.

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with no basis in reality; rather, such supernatural knowledge has deep historical roots and is a part of the human experience which mankind has been witness to in various forms throughout its history.

The subject of supernatural² knowledge has been a concern common to all mankind and which religious and

² The word supernatural is one of the words which I have used to translate the Qoranic word *al-ghayb*. The first *sura* (or "chapter") of the Qoran after its opening *sura*, opens as follows: [2:2] This divine writ – let there be no doubt about it – is [meant to be] a guidance for all the God-conscious... [2:3] Who believe in [the existence of] that which is beyond the reach of human perception (*al-ghayb*), and are constant in prayer, and spend on others out of what We provide for them as sustenance... *Al-ghayb* refers to a domain of reality (or knowledge of the world or "the unseen", as it is usually translated erroneously) that is beyond the ken of ordinary human perception, such that a third faculty is necessary to process and comprehend it. The first faculty is the body, which comprehends sensory data. The second faculty is *al-'aql* or the faculty of intellect, which comprehends concepts and universal theories. The third faculty is the heart, which comprehends the reality of this third domain which is referred to by God in the Qoran as *al-ghayb* and which is a third domain of reality that is beyond the ken of ordinary human perception, and which includes anything from inspiration to its highest knowledge form which is revelation, and everything in between (such as knowledge of past and future events, being able to read the hearts and minds of others, and so on). This is obviously a special form of knowledge which God grants access to on a very limited basis to His prophets, Imams, and *owlīā* (those who are pure of heart and thus enjoy spiritual proximity to Him).

non-religious groups have been preoccupied with in their own unique ways; and it is a phenomenon whose reality has not been denied by anyone other than those who either have questionable political agendas or have become so alienated from their own primordial disposition (*fetra*) as to have arrived at a psycho-spiritual state that enables them to deny this reality.

The Western cultural heritage has also paid attention to this matter despite its materialist bias and despite having distanced itself from the logic of divine revelation. The prophecies of Nostradamus (1530 – 1556) are a prominent case in point.

Nostradamus has prophesied events from his own time until the end of time; but the prophecies that have been collected in his book have to do with the events of the 15th to the 20th centuries. For various reasons, these prophecies have gained wide renown in the West, to the point that this book has been reprinted 26 times, in addition to the four editions which were printed with distortion between 1555 and 1643.

The prophecies of Nostradamus have come to pass exactly as predicted, whether they refer to incidents having to do with individuals or to events that affect society as a whole; these include historical events in the field of politics, science, geographical discoveries and intellectual advancements, including advances in military weaponry,

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the invention of atomic bombs, the use of space for military purposes, etc.

Nostradamus even provided detailed prophecies concerning certain conspiracies, assassinations and revolutions, the predictions of which would have been impossible for someone who lived during his era; these include the French Revolution, the French invasion of Russia of 1812, the Siege of Paris, the Battle of Waterloo on the 18th of June 1815, the death of Henry the 2nd in 1559, the death of Sultan Salīm the 3rd in 1807 or 1808, and the Napoleonic conquests.

Because of all this, there has been no shortage of commentary on these prophecies as there was similarly no dearth of interest on the parts of the rulers and great leaders who lived during the period covered by the prophecies. These rulers and great men held the prophecies in high regard, promulgated them and even used them for propagandistic purposes in their own interest.

For example, when hostilities broke out in the war of 1939-45 and reached their peak, involving the ministries of information (or war propaganda) of England and Germany, the prophecies of Nostradamus were used as instruments of propaganda for and against the warring sides. It is said that pilots from the allied forces dropped leaflets with forged Nostradamus prophecies over the heads of German

soldiers as a scare tactic and as a way of robbing them of their hope of victory.

The prophet of Islam used information from "the world of the unseen"³ in exactly the opposite way: when the Prophet ﷺ set out to do battle with the idolaters, he would give his army the glad tiding that God would help them be victorious over their enemy, and the Moslem warriors would head to battle with the certainty of victory in their hearts. The Noble Qoran has affirmed this matter, itself promising the certainty of victory in certain instances:

³ Or of the "occult" if one can disentangle the negative connotations of magic and sorcery which are always associated with the word in English, which is meant by the phrase "the world of the unseen" is the domain of knowledge that is usually hidden from the perception of ordinary people. Access to this knowledge is sometimes granted by God to those of His creatures who have relative spiritual proximity to Him, such as prophets, *owsiā* and *owliā* or saints. (*owsiā* is the plural of *wasī* which is a word which refers to those who are the inheritors, legatees, executors and successors of prophets through the ages; the *Shī'a* refer to these as *Imāms*). Some of the *olamā* or religious scholars who are adepts are also granted access to this source of knowledge. On the other hand, access to such knowledge and powers can also be had by illegitimate means such as sorcery and magic, which are prohibited by the sacred law of Islam.

[48:27] Indeed, God has shown the truth in His Apostle's true vision: most certainly shall you enter the Inviolable House of Worship...⁴

By this same token, the religious heritage of Islam mentions matters relating to the domains of reality which are beyond the ken of ordinary human perception (*al-ghayb*), to the occultation of the Twelfth Imām, the 'Imā al-Mahdī (may God hasten the advent of his noble person), and to his reign at the End of Time.

In this heritage, such matters are not limited to social and military affairs, but encompass the fate of certain individuals as well. Nostradamus has gone one step beyond this, prophesying the fate of animals as well. One of Nostradamus' friends wanted to test his occult powers. He asked Nostradamus about the fate of two piglets that were in his (the friend's) house. Nostradamus prophesied, "The black pig, you will eat; and the white one will be eaten by a wolf."

⁴ The reference here is to the Treaty of Hodaybīya, which was a pivotal treaty between the Most Noble Prophet ﷺ, representing the state of Medina, and the Quraysh tribe of Mecca, in March 628 (Dhu'al-Qidda, 6 HQ). It helped to decrease tension between the two cities, affirmed a 10-year peace, and authorized the Moslems to return the following year in a pilgrimage to Mecca in peace. The Moslems had been prevented from making the pilgrimage and war would have broken out had the Prophet ﷺ not negotiated the treaty which allowed them to return and carry out their pilgrimage to Mecca after a year.