

# 'Mother of her Father': An Esoteric Interpretation of a Prophetic saying concerning Fātima

By Mahmoud Bina and Shabram Khodaverdian

There is a well-known *badīth qudsī*<sup>1</sup> according to which God addressed the Prophet Muhammad as follows: *law lāk lama kbalaqtu'l-aflāk* ' [O, Prophet], had it not been for you, I [God] would not have created the cosmos.'<sup>2</sup>The elliptical mode of expression here is akin to the Prophet's reference to his daughter Fātima as the 'mother of her father' (*umm abībā*). In terms of the conventional, exoteric perspective, such sayings are understood as indications of the unrivalled status and supereminence of the Prophet and Fātima. The present study addresses the metaphysical and esoteric interpretation of these two sayings, doing so with reference to the doctrines of the divine Names and the hierarchy of causes. We will also offer some metaphysical reasons for the mysterious absence of any physical grave for the physical remains of Fātima.



The first saying alludes to what is called, in Platonic discourse, the 'final cause' of creation. According to Proclus, the six Platonic causes are classified as follows:<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Hadīth qudsī*, literally 'sacred tradition', is the name given to a *badīth* or tradition which records divine utterances in contrast to those of the Prophet Muhammad. The latter type of *badīth* is referred to as a *badīth nabawī*, literally 'prophetic *badīth*,' a saying of the Prophet.

<sup>2</sup> *Aflāk*, literally 'heavenly spheres,' taken as synecdoche of the whole of creation.

<sup>3</sup> Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, Vol. II, Book 2: *Proclus on the Causes of the Cosmos and its Creation*, translated with an Introduction and Notes by David T. Runia and Michael Share, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 110.

- final cause
- paradigmatic cause
- efficient or productive cause
- instrumental cause
- formal cause
- material cause

The ‘final cause’ is, so to speak, the origin of all other causes, since it is *the end for the sake of which a thing is done*.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the ‘final cause’ is the *telos*, or purpose of being *per se*.

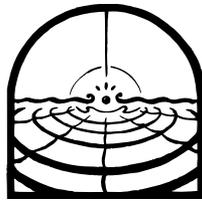
Also, related to the concept of the hierarchy of causes is the well-known Arabic dictum *awwal al-fikr ākbir al-‘amal*: ‘What is first in thought is (or shall be) the last in action.’ To bring out more clearly the metaphysical implication here, we could translate this principle as follows: ‘What is first in the principial order, is last in the manifested order.’<sup>5</sup> This essentially refers to the fact that the ‘final cause,’ as the origin or the very root of all other causes, is in fact *the first* or the prior idea (*awwal al-fikr*) in divine Consciousness; and will be therefore actualized or manifested as *the last*, and specifically as the final fruit of creation (*ākbir al-‘amal*). From a Sufi perspective, this final fruit of existence is identified with the ‘Universal Man’ (*al-insān al-kāmil*), or the earthly personification of the *Haqīqah Muhammadiyyah* (the ‘Muhammadan Reality’). It must be noted that this is an ‘ontological’ priority rather than a ‘temporal’ one. Ontologically speaking, the prior idea (*awwal al-fikr*) is ‘the most inward’ in the principial order, and by the inherent nature of things, it perforce appears in the realm of formal manifestation as ‘the most outward,’ at the furthest rim of existence.

Rumi expresses the same essential doctrine and recognizes the ‘universal Intellect’ as the ‘mind’ of the *aflāk*, that is, the summit of the cosmos (the prior idea, *awwal al-fikr*), which will necessarily be personified in the furthest rim of the Creation as the Prophet (*ākbir al-‘amal*), who is mentioned as the *sāhibu law-lāk* (the lord of ‘if

<sup>4</sup> For further discussion, see Mahmoud Bina & Alireza K. Ziarani, *Philosophy of Science in the Light of the Perennial Wisdom*, Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 2020, pp. 57-68.

<sup>5</sup> William Chittick, *The Sufi Doctrine of Rumi*, Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, illustrated edition, 2005, p. 50.

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