



BEGINNING OF CONTEMPLATION IN SIGHT OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS AND ALA-AL-DAWLA SEMNANI*

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Abstract: Contemplation is a central topic in the gnostic customs of Christianity and Islam. Christian and Islamic mystics, however, dissent on whether or not contemplation is a kind of position or an emotional mood. St. John of the Cross and Ala-al-Dawla Semnani are among the mystics of Christianity and Islam who have talked on contemplation, and comparison of views of these two can bring new sights on the subject. According to Ala-al-Dawla Semnani, disciples must strive to reach gnostic excellence by praising verbally and heartily. That is, the disciple must schedule praising around the clock and give all his or her attention to God and heartily pray for the gloriousness of the exalted God. According to John of the Cross, however, one must keep going forward only and only by heeding God without doing anything else. The mystics have different views about how to enter the course of contemplation. Ala-al-Dawla Semnani has covered this topic by outlining more features and in a more transparent manner. But according to John of the Cross, entry to a course of contemplation is a divine vague experience received passively not as a result of human's efforts.

Keywords: Contemplation, Meditation, Attention, Seclusion, God, John of the Cross, Ala-al-Dawla Semnani

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Introduction

CONTEMPLATION has been a subject of attention in all Gnostic schools where it implies concentrating on a certain topic and/or thing. Millstone of the gristmill of *Soluk* (Arabic: *Spiritual progress or pilgrimage*) has been acknowledged as contemplation. It has been impressed by this concept so that, seemingly, *Soluk* means contemplation and contemplation means *Soluk*.¹ Contemplation has been more reflected in both Christian and Islamic customs than other doctrine and customs. However, the discussion about contemplation is one of the important concepts among mystics of the two traditions.

St. John of the Cross (Spanish: *San Juan de la Cruz*) (1542-1591) is one of the most famous Christian mystics and Spanish poets, doctor of the church, reformer of Spanish monasticism, and contemplatives of Spanish poets. The works of Jon on apophatism, the soul, and mystical darkness show the effect of St. Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Neo-Platonism. He also recommends the works of the German and Flemish mystics, i.e., Ruysbroeck (1293-1381), Tauler (1290-1361), Suso (1300-1366), and Denis the Carthusian (1402-1472) for the three signs of the soul's entry into the mystical state, or degrees of love. In addition, the works of Tauler and Denis the Carthusian are more common among the works of John of the Cross.

John also achieves superiority in Spanish mystical literature because of the virtue in his intense poems "*The Spiritual Canticle*", "*The Dark Night of the Soul*", and "*The Living Flame of Love*". In the most famous work of John "*The Dark Night of the Soul*", he explains the process that the attachment of soul to everything sheds and finally soul passes from personal experience of Christ's Crucifixion to his glory.²

¹ Seyed Mohammad Hosseini Tehrani, *Labalbab: Mysticism, Self-Creation (Islam), Sufism, Mystical Ethics, Etiquette of the Path* (Tehran: Allameh Tabatabai, 2016), 119.

² Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalene, *St. John of the Cross: Doctor of Divine Love and Contemplation*, trans. A Benedictine of Stranbrook Abbey (The New Man, 1946), 101; Thomas Myladil, *St. John of the Cross and The Bhagavad-Gita: Love, Union, and Renunciation* (Cross Cultural Publications, Inc. Cross Roads Books, 2000), 79.

In the field of Islamic mysticism, Ala-al-Dawla Semnani (656-736) is one of the greatest mystics. He is the author of many valuable works in various religious fields such as the interpretation of the Qur'an, the explanation of Hadīth, jurisprudence, theology, and philosophy and mysticism. In addition, the books of "Chehl Majles", "Farsi Mosannafat", "Al-Urwa Leahle Al-Khelwa and Al-Jelwa", and the complete "Divan of Poetry", the treatise of "Fathol-Mobin Le Ahlol-Yaghin" are among his works. He has interpreted the Qur'an and the description of the prophetic Hadīths, and his mystical thoughts and practical conduct have been widely reflected in his contemporaries and future generations.³

Both Ala-al-Dawla Semnani and John have emphasized contemplation in many of their works. Moreover, comparing views of both mystics from these two major religions can unlock new windows toward comparative studies.

The concept of contemplation has been a central subject reflected sporadically in Gnostic works of both mystics, but they have adopted different classifications, which are the subject to be scrutinized in this study. The best of our knowledge, there is no similar work in Persian and English literature, while some works have separately scrutinized opinions of these two mystics previously, but neither of them has compared their views on contemplation. In the past, some papers have been published about contemplation from the view of John of the Cross, but none of them have compared the view of this mystic with that of an Islamic mystic.⁴ The present study principally aims to apprehend similarities between the two mystics' opinions on contemplation to compare the views of these two Christian and Muslim mystics in order to reveal common and applicable points or points of difference for the readers. Here, views of the two mystics on contemplation will be scrutinized using descriptive, analytical, and comparative methods.

³ Meysam Nasrillahi, *The Survey of Ala-Al-Dawla Semnani's Mystical Views and Thoughts* (Adyan, 2011), 89-94.

⁴ Tibur Heli, "St. John of the Cross' Teaching on Contemplation," 南山神学 40, no. 3 (2017): 153-176.

Requirements to Enter Contemplation According to St. John of the Cross

St. John of the Cross has reflected three points to enter contemplation: First, in contemplation, we reach a nebulous experience of the God that is present inside us; second, Contemplation is started generally with a dark and soothing space; and we reach this experience passively, not by our efforts. At first, we experience contemplation in darkness, as we only have an indefinable presence of the God. Such an experience is indefinable itself because, it has no sensual or imagery mediators. According to John of the Cross, the main point is that this dark, passive, and simple manner of prayer is truly the contemplation. In this phase of contemplation, when the soul emerges from speech into skill, then it is the God who works in it. Thus, the God links inner abilities and leaves no support in intellect, will, and recollection in memory. Under this situation, the God does not communicate with his senses as in the past, rather begins a simple act of thinking, in which there is no alternate for discourse, and communicates through the pure soul.⁵

With patience and resilience in prayer, he does lots of activities without being engaged. Here, what is expected from him is freedom of the soul to liberate himself from restraint and fatigue of ideas and thoughts and not to care about perception and contemplation. He shall merely fall in a peaceful love with the God, and live under no worry, effort, and a desire to sense or feel him. Such desires upset the soul and take it away from peaceful and thoughtful silence of contemplation that is being transmitted.

Here, St. John of the Cross teaches that if we fail to do contemplation with sensible images, imaginations, logical thoughts, and emotions, then we should not cope with our natural abilities, rather come to contact with the God in peace and silence⁶. Quite simply, we must be confident and mindful in the presence

⁵ A, 2, 13, 7. The abbreviations for St. John's writings cited in this paper are: A = *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*; DN = *The Dark Night*; C = *The Spiritual Canticle*; F = *The Living Flame of Love*. Also see Kieran Kavanaugh, *John of the Cross: Doctor of Light and Love* (New York: A Crossroad Book, 1999), 118; James W. Kinn, "The Central Paradox of John of the Cross," *Review for Religious* 68, no. 3 (2009): 290.

⁶ Kavanaugh, *John of the Cross*, 118.

of the God. The God constantly assures us that the main factor in this prayer is contemplation for the God. Since, natural functions of intellect and determination fail to capture a direct experience of the God; the best thing is to calm them down. When we exclude all sensible ways of apprehending the God, there will be an opportunity for such a direct and further experience of the God. We attempt to be quiet, peaceful, outspoken, and amenable to this new experience.⁷

What St. John of the Cross attempts to say is when no longer we are powerful to work or meditate, the God will shortly take us from pondering to contemplation "As early as physical things are expelled from the fascinated soul, the divine affairs will join to us naturally and unexpectedly, because typically there will be no interruption".

Everywhere there is breathing flame of love, St. John of the Cross considers the Holy Spirit to be origin of further unity and evolution of the soul. "Such flame of love interested by the soul is the Holy Spirit". Thus, at this early stage and all stages of contemplation, our unprecedented effort will be soundless and considerate. At first, our natural sense of the presence of the God will be dark and unsatisfied. We will appear weak and meaningless. However, this is the only way to learn not to trust our intellectual skills, rather esteem entirely in Jesus himself.

St. John of the Cross refers to contemplation as "*secret wisdom*," "*wisdom of love*," "*inner wisdom*," "*mystical wisdom*," and "*infinite wisdom*". According to him, the added wisdom is a "*secret ladder*". Reflecting on this "*hidden ladder*,"⁸ Edith Stein states that: "Basically, contemplation is called a ladder, as it is a science of love and a loving acquaintance of the God, which both enlightens and incites the soul with love and approaches him gradually to the God, the Creator".⁹

⁷ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁸ Daniel Chowning, "Lecture," in *John of the Cross: A Spirituality of Wisdom* (Presented at the the Annual Seminar on Carmelite Spirituality, Saint Mary College Notre Dame Indiana, 2009).

⁹ Edith Stein, *The Science of the Cross*, trans. Joesephine Koeppel (Washington DC: ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies, 2002), 143.

In addition, Edith explicitly identifies and summarizes St. John's description of the ten steps of the ladder leading to the God as follows. The first step will infect the soul in favor of the pilgrim, but such illness is not for death, rather glory and grace of the God. The second step makes a pilgrim to constantly inquire about the God.¹⁰ The third step takes the love of souls' ladder to practice and awakes the pilgrim with a passion so that, he or she does not get wasted. The fourth step begins with constant suffering for the sake of the beloved in the soul. The fifth step enables the soul to hasten towards the God instantly. The sixth step of the soul usually notices him or her consciously. In the seventh step, the soul is quite strong. Then, the soul reaches the eighth step, in which the beloved takes it and unites. The ninth step involves those who are perfect, which have already burned in delicious love of the God and the tenth and last step is about the secret of love that no longer belongs to this life, making the soul quite like the God because of seeing the God .

According to St. John, however, thinking is not simply a ladder but a "secret", for two main reasons. First of all, it is exceeding what we can perceive with our senses or any clear image or idea. Secondly, it is an indescribable experience. Such an experience is difficult to express. This is the wisdom that is transmitted directly to the soul. *"Divine wisdom is a way to go beyond human experience".¹¹*

The wisdom of the God is "*wisdom of love*". According to St. John of the Cross, the wisdom of the God drives us to "*heart of the science of love*". Wisdom and love are inseparable. Wisdom leads to love and love leads to the deepest wisdom. Furthermore, in the provoked state of contemplation, the love of the God becomes stronger and deeper. This is a new love of the God arising from experience of loving him.¹² For those who have not experienced

¹⁰ Ibid., 143–145.

¹¹ *DN*, 2, 17, 2. All quotations from St. John of the Cross are taken from *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington DC: ICS Publications, 1991). For *The Ascent and Night*, the references are given to book, chapter, and paragraph.

¹² Thomas Dubay, *Fire Within: St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and the Gospel-on Prayer* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 345.

the advanced worship, it is presumably really tough to understand all of these expressions. For mystics or spiritual people, however, this is the best way to show experience of the God's presence in the soul.

It is also noteworthy that "St. John does not consider contemplation a complete worship unless it is woven like a light in the soul, which is natural result of contemplation".¹³

In simple terms, even if the provoked contemplation is a completely free gift from the God, we must prepare ourselves to receive it by practicing a vocalized contemplation in prayer. In addition, St. John of the Cross talks not only about injecting divine light but also about the provoked love.¹⁴ Therefore, St. John defines contemplation as "*something other than a secret and peaceful flow and the love of the God, which, if left uncontrolled, burns the soul in the psyche of love*". At this stage, "we enter thoroughly into realm of the provoked love aimed at terminating such a passive spiritual bond. The desire for love has the fullest union with the God".

In brief, if contemplation strengthens our love, deliberation of love is integrated, that is a full union with The Triune God (*tathlith*). Simply putting, St. John of the Cross uses a variety of expressions to refer to contemplation, deepening and enriching his teachings.

Importantly, the mystical scholars and poets have further experienced it as what they called "*entering into unknowing*" before experiencing contemplation. Contemplation, similar to entering beyond human experiences, is an ocean of love toward the God without knowing where we are, but remaining just in love, peace, and joyfulness of loving the God.¹⁵

Requirements to Enter Contemplation According to Ala- al-Dawla Semnani

Verbal and heartily praising and its continuity are a prerequisite for realization of solitude according to Ala-al-Dawla

¹³ Magdalene, *St. John of the Cross*, 53.

¹⁴ DN, 1, 10, 6; Dubay, *Fire Within*, 63; John Welch, *An Introduction to John of the Cross: When God's Die* (Mahwah JN: Paulist, 1990), 97.

¹⁵ James W. Kinn, "Beginning Contemplation According to John of the Cross," *Review for Religious* 66, no. 2 (2007): 177.

Semnani.¹⁶ Disciple (*pilgrim*) reaches contemplation and prepares his or her soul to accept nominal, qualitative, and inherent manifestations by praising. He or she must schedule praising ("La Elaha Ela Allah" (Arabic: There is no deity but God) around the clock and give all his or her consideration to the God and heartily pray for gloriousness of the exalted God. For this purpose, disciple must devote all his or her seven limbs from hair to nails to praising, and to persist fearlessly and resolute when facing with strange emotions, observations, smells, and songs stimulating the intellect, and what threatens life, as all of them are to test him or her to discover how long he or she keeps praising in order to turn his/her human mood to a divine one, which cannot be expressed in words and seems to be irrational to disciple.¹⁷

During praising, disciple must sit in front of the *qibla* while bowing down, as the exalted God has pointed: "Angel is not the one who reminded me, and I am with the male servant if he does" (Arabic: I will sit with someone who prays me and will stay with a prayer when praising me). Disciple must pray with all attention and see the God present in front of him or her and avoid absentmindedness during the course.

Thus, he or she must avoid neglecting duties and attempt to bow down during praying. When disciple feels warmth of the word "Allah" in his or her pineal fleshy heart, it causes his/her bosom to dilate and the heart will be reassured, and it is better to circumscribe concupiscence as much as possible that is a continuation of warmth of praying, making the heart to be affected forthwith and the septum pellucidum to burn. Then, the light lies in the name of "Allah" irradiates the true heart, making window of the true heart open, by which dark home of the soul is illuminated by light of the heart, but all of these require disciple to pray for secret.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ala-al-Dawla Semnani, *Farsi Mosnefat* (Tehran: Scientific and Cultural Publishing Company, 1990), 92.

¹⁷ Ibid., 282.

¹⁸ Ibid., 92–94.

Ala-al-Dawla believes that solitude has not been more than 30 days in principal¹⁹, and after presenting the definition, considers expression of requirements and customs of solitude. In his two treatises, he describes the eight prerequisites for solitude in detail. In the treatise entitled as "Ma Labod Menho Fid Deen" (Arabic: "What is inevitable for religion"), he has outlined the eight conditions for solitude, which are as follows as quoted by Sheikh Junaydi (*died in 1460*) :

The first condition is restricting the five senses, by going into a dark and narrow room, in which windows are fully covered by curtains to prevent light penetrating the interior part. The house space should not be too much and shall just possess the required space for praying. It shall be with no opening, in which no voice should be heard, and disciple cannot leave the solitude except for purification, ablution, and congregational prayer.

The second prerequisite is persistence in ablution. Disciple should not be without ablution at any time and is not allowed to take a single step without ablution, as the enemy "Satan" is in shade and ablution is a weapon – "LanYohafizo Elalvozoo El al-momen" (Arabic: Nothing can protect a believer but ablution). Disciple should renew ablution when he or she is obedient and a heavy interval befalls. However, there is no need to renew ablution when disciple is obedient and just a minor interval is between the two ablutions. When the devil tempts disciple to renew, he or she must pay no attention to such an induction, because the enemy wants to take back the solitude from Salik.

The third prerequisite is continuity of fasting. Disciple is forced to eat less, and for this, he or she must diminish eating to a limited amount to reach this goal and yet benefit from fasting. This should be done moderately, without extremity in all affairs. Disciple must be cautious in diminishing the food to avoid losing the outcomes of solitude and he/she must be informed about the secret of a mouthful.²⁰

¹⁹ Ala-al-Dawla Semnani, *Chehel Majles*, ed. Sistani Amir Eghbali and Haghigat Abdorafi (Tehran: Asatir publication, 1979), 256.

²⁰ Ibid., 85.

The fourth requirement is silence, in which disciple must stay silent and say nothing but for praying the exalted God.²¹

The fifth requirement is persistence in praying. As it has been ascertained that "the human soul has been in misery in this body after forgetfulness of the exalted God", and wise philosophers have constantly declared that "disciple must heal the disease by continuity of praying so that, he achieves healing for illness of forgetfulness".²²

The sixth provision is persistence in denying thoughts - "good or bad, beneficial or harmful", and this is the most important stage for the journey. Not observing this requirement will not result in inner separation, and it is obligatory in achieving the solitude.

In the solitude, disciple must engage in praying and attempt to deny emotions and minds. In turn, the Great Jihad with the soul and the devil will be manifested here. If disciple fails to engage in praying by sincerity for a long time in denial of thoughts, then the patterns that have been engraved on his or her heart from the beginning of creation until today, because of forgetting the exalted God, cannot be eradicated. However, if disciple denies the five senses and prevents thoughts to appear in his heart from outside, then, suddenly, the hearts' board will become plain and physical sciences and divine inspiration will play a role in him or her.²³

The seventh provision is building a close connection with the Sheikh, that is seeing the Sheikh present in all circumstances, and asking help from him inwardly by which, the devils will not appear and attributes of concupiscence will run away. At the beginning of every praying, it is obligate to remind the Sheikh, which is saying: "*O Sheikh! Stay as a witness to me when I am claiming that I want nothing but the God*".²⁴

The eighth provision is remaining pleased to judgment of the exalted God, and leaving objection to him in secret and evident and comfort and harms.²⁵

²¹ Ibid., 88–90.

²² Semnani, *Farsi Mosnefat*, 419.

²³ Ibid., 91.

²⁴ Ibid., 99–100.

²⁵ Ibid., 104.

About fulfillment of the eighth condition, Ala-al-Dawla maintains that for reaching completeness, disciple must enter stages of pleasing and trust and learn its etiquette so that, he or she becomes fascinated in faith of the believers and senses wine of spiritualism.

After affirming the eight provisions of solitude, Semnani classifies types of solitude into seven stages and holds conquering of each of the seven stages conditional on observance and full realization of these eight provisions. In each stage, solitude gets more intricate and internal. When the solitude is accomplished following these conditions, the heavenly souls come under dominance of Salik, resulting in appearance of divine sciences, the rule of faith, and luminous faces. In simple terms, these virtues will all vanish under shade of the God for the sake of efforts made by Salik, and at every stage, a variety of divine perfections will appear inside Salik. In his treatise entitled as "Fathol-Mobin Le Ahlol-Yaghin", Ala-al-Dawla denotes the eight provisions of solitude based on his opinion and reveals special etiquette in each of the situations encountered by the disciple due to realization of solitude conditions, in addition to expressing many mystical points and tricks on solitude.

Moreover, Semnani has various interpretations arising from his personal experiences, such as "*spiritual world courtship*", "*touching evident verses*" and "*Hugging pictures of the saints*". Comprehensive perception and expression of the above stages are not something simple that are achieved except through spiritual journey. He has fully explained success in accomplishing the seven stages and how they proceed.²⁶ According to Semnani, discovery of all the divine secrets and reaching to power to seize the divine depend on solitude and its eight provisions. However, achieving such excellence is not possible without ignoring yourself. Spiritual opportunities support disciple to endure bitterness and hardships of solitude. Awareness of higher realms or discovery of truths of

²⁶ Abdullah bin Muhammad by Riahi Mohammad Amin Najmuddin Razi, *Mersad al 'Ebad menal Mabda elal Ma'ad* (Tehran: Scientific and Cultural Publishing Company, 1994), 279–281.

the universe gives such a pleasure that no interested disciple replaces it for temporary worldly sensual pleasures.²⁷

Discussion

According to Semnani, preparations before contemplation and special solitude require disciple to enter solitude in the third year, if he or she possesses the required talent. Verbal and heartily praying and pursuing is for walking through the divine route, achieving completeness, and saying "La Elaha Ela Allah". During praising, disciple must sit in front of the qibla while bowing down. Then, disciple feels warmth of the word "Allah" in his or her heart, causing his/her bosom to dilate and the heart will be reassured. Then, light lies in the name of "Allah" illuminates the true heart, making window of the true heart open, by which gloomy home of the soul is illuminated by light of the heart, but all of these require disciple to pray for a secret.

According to Ala-al-Dawla Semnani, public solitude and avoiding attendance in wrong gatherings and joining wrong attendants are public duties of each disciple, yet each Muslim. Disciple must abstain from consuming an excessive food and not consider its type and quantity rather focus on whether it is halal and pure. He or she must care about what to quote, not too much or too little, and in solitude, he or she should be under supervision of the mentor, and do according to instructions given by the mentor based on the events that happen.

St. John of the Cross, however, outlines three basic characteristics for contemplation, including 1) In contemplation, we reach a nebulous experience of the God that is present inside us; 2) Contemplation is started generally with a dark and soothing space; and 3) We reach this experience passively, not by our efforts. St. John says that instead of relying on his or her own abilities and rational efforts, disciple considers the Holy Spirit to be "guiding and motivating factor" in all prayers of contemplation. Throughout this gloomy night, the Holy Spirit continues to add such a contemplative prayer to our souls. "This connection [dark contemplation] is for functioning of the intellect, and other

²⁷ Semnani, *Farsi Mosnefat*, 256–264.

capabilities are secret and dark until he does not acquire it." But, the Holy Spirit adds and puts it in the soul". In fact, at the beginning of this state, loving acquaintance is nearly senseless, mainly for two reasons. Firstly, loving acquaintance is quite precise at first, and almost imperceptible. Secondly, a person who is accustomed to contemplation, which is quite wise, finds this new irrational and totally spiritual experience difficult to understand or feel.²⁸

St. John emphasizes resilience as tranquility that cannot be analyzed and described. The inner tranquility imagined here is not something to be occasionally achieved with our efforts, but it is a new experience. It is not an oriental technique or a random procedure. At first, work is delicate and difficult to understand, even if it is real.

According to Ala-al-Dawla Semnani, solitude entails special prerequisites and preparations, the most important of which are 1) solitude, 2) permanent ablution, 3) permanent fasting, 4) silence (unless talking to the Sheikh to solve an issue), 5) continuity of saying of La Elaha Ela Allah, 6) continuity of denial of memory, 7) relating the heart to guardianship of his sheikh and asking for his efforts (as a mediator of association with guardianship of the Prophet), and 8) satisfaction and abandonment of protesting about all affairs, such as contraction and expansion, illness, health, etc.

In this way, disciple can capture the seven esoteric conditions and achieve a wide variety of heartily perceptions, facial and spiritual revelations, as well as psychic and spiritual possessions. Most importantly, disciple reaches the degree of being with the God and the state of being killed for him, as well as survival after death. According to Semnani, disciple holds a more prominent role and uses verbal praying.

According to St. John, having patience, resilience, and comfort by removing obstacles, mental images and logical thoughts, and most importantly loving the God are basic prerequisites for contemplation. Since, natural functions of intellect and determination fail to capture a direct experience of the God; the best thing is to calm them down. That is, when we stay calm and

²⁸ Kinn, "Beginning Contemplation," 177.

attentive to the presence of the God, and all our efforts are to be calm, peaceful, explicit, and accept the direct experience added by the God, by which the God fills the void caused by such a feeling with his presence. St. John considers contemplation a ladder by which the soul reaches the God.

St. John, however, presents that thinking is not simply a ladder but a "secret", for two main reasons. First of all, it is exceeding what we can perceive with our senses or any clear image or idea. Secondly, it is an indescribable experience. Such an experience is difficult to express. This is the wisdom that is transmitted directly to the soul. Divine wisdom is a way to go beyond human experiences.

Semnani considers the attainment of the seeker's peace, in the shadow of connection and humanity with the Almighty, as a way to reach the peace of the soul and body. whilst in the transcendent meditation there is no connection between the Creator and the origin, the actions of the individual are not important, basic preparations for meditation and mantra is not need, and the peace achieved is only due to mental fatigue and brain failure.

Peace as the result of transcendental meditation is in fact the release of mental and intellectual pressures that have been imposed on a person, and it is a false and temporary peace that is close to John's view, while peace in Islamic meditation is approaching the Almighty.

Ala-al-Dawla Semnani mentions that disciples must strive to reach Gnostic excellence by praising verbally and heartily, that is, the disciple must schedule praising around the clock and give all his or her attention to the God and heartily pray for the gloriousness of the exalted God While John of the Cross declares that one must keep going forward only and only by heeding the God without doing anything else.

The mystics have different views about how to enter the course of contemplation. Ala-al-Dawla Semnani has covered this topic by outlining more features and in a more transparent manner. But according to John of the Cross, entry to a course of contemplation is a vague experience of the God that we receive passively from our efforts.

Conclusion

According to Ala-al-Dawla Semnani, for strengthening attention and consequently deepening contemplation, one should meditate in a narrow and dark room without any light. As it directs the human senses from the outside towards his inner part and deepens contemplation. St. John also holds such idea regarding contemplation in his opinions. Therefore, both mystics agree on the issue.

Disregarding the surroundings, flipping and sinking into it, and achieving deep contemplation and consequently, annihilation are effective according to both mystics.

Both mystics consider natural functions of the humans' intellect to be incapable to know the God in the stage of deep contemplation, for which the only thing to do is to calm the mind and deny the thoughts.

Similarly, both mystics point to gradual progress of contemplation along with sense of appearance and negation of memory, self-knowledge. Both mystics believe that it is necessary to stay away from cravings and mental constraints to meditate and thus, see the truth. Both mystics disagree on how to enter contemplation.

According to Ala-al-Dawla Semnani, disciple must try to reach mystical perfection by praying verbally and heartily. The Sheikh attaches special importance to praying in mystical conduct. According to him, solitude is considered as principle of conduct and the disciple does not become aware of the truth of knowledge except in solitude, which is discovery of the truth of La Elaha Ela Allah. According to St. John of the Cross, however, one should keep going forward only according to the God, without doing any special duty. Semnani has declared the provisions and methods of contemplation in more detail and clarity.

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