

God's Concomitance with the Temporal World in the Islamic Tradition

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Abstract

It is a complicated theological issue to provide an account of God's relationship with the temporal world. The issue was addressed in the hadiths from the Shiite Imams as well. The hadiths fall into various *prima facie* conflicting categories. Since it is crucial to consider revelatory sources on the matter, we should not exclude any of these hadiths; rather, we need to reconcile them based on the extant evidence. In the first instance, some hadiths apparently reject God's compresence with the temporal world, but upon closer reflection, it turns out that non-temporality of God does not rule out His concomitance with temporal entities. Instead, it amounts to rejection of His influence from, or being otherwise limited by, the passage of time. Such construal might be compatible with two interpretations: first, God is always concomitant with present or current events of temporal entities, and second, all entities are present to God from pre-eternity to post-eternity, and His concomitance is not confined to the present temporal entities. The first implies that the world was created on a gradual basis, and the second entails its instantaneous creation. In the final analysis, these views can be reconciled: all creatures were instantaneously created in a world other than the temporal world, but then they gradually unfolded in the temporal world.

Keywords: God's concomitance with time, hadiths, instantaneous creation, gradual appearance, temporal world.

Introduction

There are many complications in accounting for God's concomitance with the temporal world both in philosophical and religious textual terms. On the one hand, God's essence should not be deemed similar to, or mingled with, creatures, and on the other hand, God should not be conceived as divergent or abstracted from creatures (see Ibn Bābawayh 1398 AH, 306). Notwithstanding its long history, the issue is still a matter of controversy among great theologians

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and philosophers of religion. Some believe that God is outside of time and temporality (Alston 1989, 132-33). Others believe that although God is exalted from time, His essence is concurrent with current events (Craig 2001, 282). Still others believe that the entire temporal world is present to Him all at once (Augustine 1973, 11-14). There is a similar controversy among Muslim intellectuals as well (Ṭabarsī 1372 Sh, 9:346; Ghazālī 1383 Sh, 97-98; Mīrdāmād 1367 Sh, 123). Since it is necessary to consult religious texts on the matter, this article aims to draw on evidence from the remarks of Shiite Imams to account for the problem. As will be outlined below, the results are consonant with the relevant philosophical accounts.

1. Hadiths in Rejection of God's Presence in the Temporal World

The first class of hadiths are those that *prima facie* rejects God's concomitance with time and temporality, which are in turn divided into various categories.

The first category: hadiths in which God is not characterized by time. According to these hadiths, God's attributes are not temporal by character (see Kulaynī 1407 AH, 1:135; Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 1): "Verily, God the blessed and transcendent is not described by time or place or motion or transition or stillness. Rather, He is the creator of time and place and motion and stillness" (Ibn Bābawayh 1398 AH, 184).

There are two ways to interpret God's "not being characterized by time": first, the entity is not present in any time, and second, although it is concomitant with time and temporality, it is not affected by, or otherwise limited by, time and temporal changes. We do not need to restrict God's non-temporality to the first meaning, particularly if philosophical arguments and textual evidence repudiate the first and establish the second interpretation, as we will see later in the article. For this reason, many prominent Shiite scholars of hadith take it for granted that God is concomitant with the temporal world from pre-eternity to post-eternity. In their view, God's characterization by time in that sense is not rejected, but rather affirmed, by philosophical and textual arguments (see Majlisī 1403 AH, 54:284).

Moreover, many hadiths denote or at least imply that God is concomitant with temporal entities in time, and God is temporal in the second sense, which can serve as evidence in interpreting or constraining the first category of hadiths (see Kulaynī 1407 AH, 1:88, 8:122; Ibn Bābawayh 1398 AH, 173): "When did your Lord exist?" He told him: 'May your mother be bereaved for you. When did He not exist so that you talk about when He existed?'" (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 1:89-90). This hadith takes it for granted that God existed in time from pre-eternity to post-eternity. This is confirmed by other hadiths as well (see Ṭabarsī 1403 AH, 1:58; Majlisī 1403 AH, 91:151): "The skies and the earth and what is in between were never void of Him even for a blink of an eye" (Majlisī 1403 AH, 95:165).

According to these hadiths, God existed at all times and moments.² This claim can be rationalized by philosophical arguments:

1. If there is a time in which God does not exist, then He is nonexistent at the time (because of the law of excluded middle).

2. If (1) is true, then nonexistence can occur to God, because He does not exist in the time in question, as existence can occur to Him, because He exists at other times.

3. If (2) is true, then a contradiction ensues about God, since such an entity is a possible or contingent being; that is, its existence is intrinsically equal to existence and nonexistence, but this is contrary to the assumption that God is a necessary being.³

Therefore, there is no time in which God does not exist in the world. Accordingly, although God's essence is exalted from motion and change, the temporal world is concomitant not with God's nonexistence but rather with His existence, without implying any changes in God.

The second category: hadiths in which God is described as not being concomitant with time and temporality. These hadiths are explicit that God is not concurrent or simultaneous with creatures (see Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 163; Ibn Bābawayh 1398 AH, 50): "Places do not contain Him and times do not incorporate Him and attributes do not restrict Him and drowsiness does not befall Him" (Ibn Bābawayh 1398 AH, 37; Kulaynī 1407 AH, 1:139).

The points about the first category of hadiths apply here *mutatis mutandis*, since non-concomitance with time might be interpreted in one of two ways: first, a constant entity is by no means concomitant with changing temporal entities, and second, although the former is concomitant with the latter, it is not affected by them and not constrained by time and place. In our view, rejection of God's concomitance with time in these hadiths should be interpreted in the second way. This is evidenced by a passage that follows the above in some hadiths: "He is not forced into absence by 'since' and not drawn closer by 'has been' and not veiled by 'maybe' and not timed by 'when' and not included by 'while' and not accompanied by 'with'" (Ibn Bābawayh 1398 AH, 37).

Given the explanations provided about the first category of hadiths, not to be characterized by "when" is not to be constrained by a particular time. Moreover, the phrase "He is not forced into absence by 'since'" implies that God is present at all times, since "absence" is often contrasted to "presence" (see 'Askarī 1400

2. Other relevant hadiths will be cited in what follows on various occasions.

3. In Islamic philosophical jargons, the necessity of existence for the necessary being (God) is an eternal (*azaliyya*) necessity, which is not restricted by any constraints (see Javadi Amoli 1386 Sh, 220). The core of this argument can be found in some hadiths, as in a hadith (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 1:191), the middle term of proving that something was created or incipient is taken to be the possibility of both existence and nonexistence occurring to its essence, such that its essence exists under certain circumstances (hence, the possibility of the occurrence of existence to it) and does not exist under other circumstances (hence, the possibility of the occurrence of nonexistence to it).

AH, 88): “Every secret before Thee is open and for Thee every absent is present. Thou art everlasting; there is no end to Thee” (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 109). This implies that God is present at all times. One might object that God’s presence might be His knowledge by presence, which does not imply His presence to, or concomitance with, creatures.

In response, we can say that this epistemic interpretation of the hadith is not compatible with the literal meaning of the term *shuhūd* (presence, which also literally means witnessing) (see Kabīr al-Madanī al-Shīrāzī 1384 Sh, 2:366; Ḥusaynī al-Zubaydī 1414 AH, 6:286). If someone knows about an event without having been present in it, then he cannot serve as a witness (*shāhid*) in the court. Moreover, a martyr is called *shahīd* (cognate with *shuhūd*) because he or she is present to God (see Ṣāhib b. ‘Abbād 1414 AH, 3:388). God’s knowledge is superior to knowledge obtained from something despite absence, as the Quran says: “Then We will surely recount to them with knowledge, for We had not been absent” (Q 7:7). For this reason, there are other hadiths in which God’s knowledge of creatures is accounted for in terms of His actual compresence or concomitance with them: “Verily, God the Almighty the glorified has no veil between Him and His creatures. For His is with them wherever they are” (Majlisī 1403 AH, 3:330). As we will see in what follows, such hadiths attest to the fact that God is concomitant not only with creatures that exist at present, but also with those that existed in the past and those that will exist in the future.

Third category of hadiths: those that reject the temporality of God’s pre-eternity. According to these hadiths, God’s pre-eternity and post-eternity are not temporal, which means that God is not concomitant with time or temporality (see Fayḍ al-Kāshānī 1406 AH, 1:429; Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 186; Kulaynī 1407 AH, 1:139; Majlisī 1403, 4:301): “Verily, God the blessed and transcendent was never without time and without place, and now He is as the news was” (Ibn Bābawayh 1398 AH, 179).

At the factual level, God’s post-eternity is identical to His essence and is accordingly void of the accidents of the temporal world, such as change, extension, and increase or decrease. At the epistemic level, however, our minimum understanding⁴ of an eternal and constant entity is that it is existent, rather than nonexistent, throughout time (see Majlisī 1403 AH, 54:284). For this reason, creatures can temporally survive with His eternity, without implying any changes or variations in God’s essence: “Immaculate is God, an immaculateness that persists with His persistence and survives with His survival in the years of the two worlds and the months of ages and the days of the world and the hours of day and night. And immaculate is God for the eternity of eternities and with an eternity that is not counted by numbers and does not perish

4. If our minimum understanding were not accurate in such cases, then all paths to knowledge of God’s attributes would be closed, which is rejected by philosophical arguments and textual evidence (see Kulaynī 1407 AH, 1:82).

with duration and is not cut by eternity” (Majlisī 1403 AH, 95:214). According to this supplication, a creature can persist with God’s persistence, without implying God’s temporality.

Fourth category of hadiths: those that reject the ascription of creaturely attributes to the creator. Although these hadiths do not explicitly reject God’s temporality, they suggest that no creaturely attribute exists in the creator, which includes temporality and spatiality. Indeed, they say that God cannot be characterized by what He has created (see Kulaynī 1407 AH, 1:94, 103): “All that is in the creature is not found in its creator and all is possible in it is impossible in its maker and no motion and stillness occur to it” (Mufīd 1413 AH, 257).

These hadiths cannot be taken at face value, since that would entail the rejection of attributes such as knowledge, power, and existence in the case of God. By negation of creaturely attributes about God, they mean the attributes that are specific to possible beings. However, God’s presence in time is dissimilar to creatures’ presence in time, as the latter are constrained by their time, while God is existentially unbounded, and despite not being constrained by time, He is concomitant with all times. So, God’s concomitance with time does not entail the ascription of a creaturely attribute to Him.

As noted before, God exists concomitantly with His temporal creatures. Let us now see how this essence is concomitant with His creatures. Muslim intellectuals disagree over the issue. Muslim theologians (*mutakallimūn*), who believe in the divergence of existences, tend to endorse the necessary being’s concomitance with His creatures, but deny His spatial concomitance with them (Majlisī 1403 AH, 54: 284). In their view, God exists in such and such a time, although He cannot be said to exist in such and such a place. In fact, He has epistemic and administrative dominance over spatial entities (Majlisī 1403 AH, 3:337-40). Later Muslim philosophers and mystics, who deny the divergence of the creator and creatures, provide a “sustaining” (*qayyūmiyya*) account of the concomitance, on which no time or place is void of God’s existence (Javadi Amoli 1393 Sh, 9:456). Some contemporary neo-Sadraean philosophers propose a temporal-spatial account of God’s concomitance with creatures in terms of the intermeshing of existences (see Kavyani and Fayyazi 1396 Sh). A study of God’s spatial concomitance with creatures is outside of the scope of this article, but temporal concomitance between them, which we propose here, can be deemed compatible with all of these views, since they all agree that, at all times, God is present and is concomitant with temporal entities as their creator and the source of their constant emanation. In the second section, we delve further into this claim.

2. An Account of God's Concomitance with Temporal Entities

2.1. A Consideration of Relevant Quranic Verses

There are Quranic verses, which are cited to account for God's concomitance with temporal entities, including the following: "All His command, when He wills something, is to say to it 'Be,' and it is" (Q 36:82), "and Our command is but a single [word], like the twinkling of an eye" (Q 54:50), and "Your creation and your resurrection are not but as of a single soul" (Q 31:28).

These verses are said to imply that God bears an equal relation to all times, and indeed, all past, present, and future events are equally present to Him, as if God has created the entire world instantaneously, although it appears to us on a gradual basis⁵ (see Mīrdāmād 1367 Sh, 123-28; Fayḍ al-Kāshānī 1406 AH, 1:354). It should be noted, however, that these verses are not explicit, particularly in that there are other Quranic verses to the effect that the divine creation is gradual: "Every day He is engaged in some work" (Q 55:29) and "Allah, who created the heavens and the earth in six days" (Q 7:54). Accordingly, the *prima facie* implications of these verses are conclusive. To adjudicate the matter, we need to refer to the relevant hadiths.

2.2. Hadiths Confirming God's Instantaneous Concomitance with the Temporal World

There are different groups of hadiths here. First, there are those that explicitly say that no time passes through God, and in fact, different times are equally related to God, which implies that God is instantaneously concomitant with the entire world of time: "Time does not change over Him, so as to admit of any change of condition about Him" (Ibn Bābawayh 1398 AH, 49; Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 91). In his interpretation of this passage, Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd says: "this is because the necessary being is superior over time and age, and hence, His essence is related to time and age in its entirety, and the articulation of its parts is a unified relation" (Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd 1404 AH, 6:400).

The same theme appears in other hadiths as well (Ibn Bābawayh 1398 AH, 50; Majlisī 1403 AH, 3:315): "Praise be to Allah for Whom one condition does not proceed another so that He may be the First before being the Last or He may be Manifest before being Hidden" (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 65).

One might object that what these hadiths actually mean is that God is a constant entity that is equally related to all times, such that passage of days and nights makes no changes in His essence, not that all events are actual before Him and He created the world of time instantaneously.⁶ However, this objection does not stand closer scrutiny because, for one thing, it is incompatible with the causal

5. The following verses were also cited in this connection: Q 15:21; 16:96; 18:49; 57:4, and 13:39.

6. This possibility is confirmed by Majlisī in his interpretation of the above passage from Nahj al-Balagha (see Majlisī 1403 AH, 4:309).

clause in the first hadith, since it literally and *prima facie* says that time does not come upon God (see Ṣāḥib b. 'Abbād 1414 AH, 4:346). So, the cause of God's condition not changing is that time does not come upon him, not that no changes occur in God in passage of time. For another, this interpretation is not consonant with other relevant hadiths here: "He has had no 'was'" (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 1:88) and "time does not pass through Him" (Ibn Bābawayh 1398 AH, 175).

According to these hadiths, time does not pass-through God; that is, past, present, and future are all equally present to Him, not just that His essence does not change over time.

The second category of hadiths includes those asserting that nothing is absent to God. As noted in section 1, some hadiths suggest that nothing is absent to God, and indeed, all creatures are present to Him. This implies that God is actually concomitant with all of His creatures: "Every secret before Thee is open and for Thee every absent is present. Thou art everlasting; there is no end to Thee" (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 109).

One might object that while nothing is absent to God and everything is present to Him, the secret is what exists but is absent to us, not what does not exist at all. According to the gradual view of creation, future and past events cannot rightly be described as absent, because they do not exist in the first place.

However, reference to religious texts reveals that, in many hadiths, the future and the past are described as the "hidden" or "absent," which contradicts this objection (see Ibn Bābawayh 1395 AH, 2:340; Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 128). For instance, the Quran says: "These are accounts of the Unseen [the hidden or the absent], which We reveal to you" (Q 11:49).

The third category of hadiths includes those according to which God has an equal relation to all times, just as He has an equal relation to all places. The mention of "places" is evidence that the account of God's relation to places applies to His relation to times as well (see Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 91): "times do not accompany Him and places do not contain Him" (Ibn Bābawayh 1398 AH, 37). Accordingly, just as God has an equal relation to all places (see Kulaynī 1407 AH, 1:128), He has an equal relation to all times, which means that He is instantaneously present at all times.⁷

The fourth category of hadiths deny attributes about God. Some scholars have sought to show that rejection of divine attributes in hadiths (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 1:140) is indeed rejection of attributes of action. In their view, this means that God instantaneous creates the world as if everything existed since pre-eternity, although it gradually unfolds for contingent beings. This means that God always was the creator (see Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī 1981, 6:141; Fayḍ al-Kāshānī 1406 AH, 1:449; Fayḍ al-Kāshānī 1375 Sh, 27).

7. Nevertheless, the implication of these hadiths is not as strong as that of the hadiths in the first and second categories.

Assuming that God's attributes of action are not identical to His essence, rejection of such attributes about God is indeed a repudiation of the Ash'arite view of divine attributes. It just means that God does not have the limited attributes of His creatures, since they would imply limitations about Him, while God is an unlimited existence. Moreover, these attributes are incipient and extraneous to essences of the creatures, indicating a change therein, while God's attributes are identical to His essence and no change is possible about Him (see Ibn Bābawayh 1398 AH, 35).

The fifth category of hadiths are those asserting that God was a creator when there was no creature: "God was a knower when there was nothing to be known, and was a creator when there was no creature, and was a Lord when there was no servant" (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 1:141).

Since in this hadith, "knower" is conjoined with "creator," it implies that being a creator is like God's being a knower; that is, it is not the case that He was not a creator at first and then became a creator. In other words, God was a creator since pre-eternity, although His creation unfolded for contingent beings over time (see Mīrdāmād 1367 Sh, 138).

That said, this hadith cannot be taken at face value, since there is a correlation between a creator and creatures, in the sense that one cannot be conceived without the other. So, something should be taken as elliptical in this hadith, such as the "power to create" (see Majlisī 1403 AH, 4:241).

The sixth category of hadiths includes those that say: the pen with which God wrote destinies and fates has dried up (see Ibn Bābawayh 1398 AH, 340): "the Prophet went to al-'Abbās and said, 'O uncle! Woe to my children from your children!' [That is, your children will harm mine.] He said, 'O the Apostle of Allah! Should I neuter myself?' He said, 'the pen dried up on this'" (Ibn Bābawayh 1385 Sh, 2:348). This has been interpreted as follows: the present and the absent are the same to God; that is, nothing is hidden from Him (see Kabīr al-Madanī al-Shīrāzī 1409 AH, 5:16).

Although these hadiths might refer to existential fates, they cannot be relied on here, because there are other possibilities about divine destinies, the secrets behind which we do not know (see Majlisī 1403 AH, 28:50). For this reason, they are probably concerned with God's epistemic predestination, in which case they cannot establish the instantaneous view of the creation of the world.

2.3. Hadiths about Gradual Creation

There are different categories of hadiths here. First, there are those asserting that the world was created on a gradual basis. Corroborated by some Quranic verses, these hadiths say that the world was created not instantaneously, but gradually (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 8:145): "He created the heavens and the earth in six days, while He was dominant on His Throne, and was able to create it in a blink of an eye, but He, the almighty the glorified, created it in six days to reveal

to the angels what He created piece by piece, and each time, argue from the occurrence of what occurs for God, may His name transcend” (Ibn Bābawayh 1398 AH, 320).

Furthermore, there are hadiths to the effect that, except God, all entities are in constant change, and the beginning of their existence is different from its end (see Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 91; Kulaynī 1407, 3:256-57): “everything perishes or changes or the change and destruction enter it or moves from color to color and from form to form and from attribute to attribute and from increase to decrease and from decrease to increase except Lord of all the worlds, who always was and will always be in the same condition” (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 1:115).

These hadiths are explicit that the world of time (including the sky and the earth) was created on a gradual basis, but the latter hadith is unqualified, embracing all creatures. Nevertheless, given the disjunctive “or” used here, implies that there are several conditions all of which cannot be found in all creatures. Some might perish or be destroyed. For this reason, the hadith allows the existence of creatures that are instantaneously created or destroyed in a world other than the temporal world.

The second category of hadiths says that God’s providence is not eternal: “I said, ‘God was always willing.’ He said, ‘No willing can be there without what is willed. God was always a knower and powerful, and then He willed’” (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 1:109). According to these hadiths, God did not have a “will” since pre-eternity, which means that He did not create since then. Consequently, God does not have an actual concomitance with His creatures in pre-eternity. It should be noted, nevertheless, that God’s will differs in type from that of creatures. In fact, His will is an abstraction from His concomitance with temporal entities, and His lack of will is an abstraction from His lack of concomitance with creatures (Ibn Bābawayh 1398 AH, 338): “As for God the transcendent, His will is his creation, not anything else” (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 1:109).

Hadiths in the third category are those that attribute a temporal beginning to the world. According to some scholars, if a type of instantaneous creation is attributed to temporal events,⁸ then it cannot logically be established that there is a beginning point for the chain of temporal events, while it has no ending point (see Mesbah Yazdi 1366 Sh, 2:281; Mesbah Yazdi 1393 Sh, 190). However, the hadith seems to imply that although the chain of temporal events has no ending point, it does have a beginning point (see Ibn Bābawayh 1398 AH, 297; Kulaynī 1407 AH, 1:288): “the Apostle of Allah turned toward materialists (*al-dahriyya*) ... and then said, ‘Do you say what is before you—

8. That is, if a correct criterion is found for the instantaneous coexistence of temporal events in another realm (the world of *dahr* or the sempiternal world). This is fleshed out in texts on Islamic philosophy under the principle of “things scattered in the sempiternal realm gather together in the temporal realm.”

the night and the day—is finite or infinite? If you say that it is infinite, then an end has reached you with an unlimited beginning” (Ṭabarsī 1403 AH, 1:25-26).

On this account, the instantaneous account of the creation of the temporal world is implausible. Note that this hadith does not imply the essential impossibility of the existence of an infinite entity qua an infinite entity, because there are other hadiths that explicitly suggest that God’s knowledge and predestination are infinite (see Ibn Bābawayh 1398 AH, 65, 447; Ibn Bābawayh 1378 AH, 1:118). Rather, the idea is that an infinite entity cannot be created on a gradual basis, just as a limited contingent being cannot travel an infinite path. Accordingly, it is not impossible for something infinite to exist instantaneously.⁹

Reconciliation of the Hadiths

These hadiths should be reconciled as far as there is internal evidence and there are no rationally false consequences. In an attempt to do so, some scholars have sought to show that God is equally related to all times; that is, past, present, and future only make sense about temporal events. This means a moving object is moving only from the perspective of temporal entities, but from the viewpoint of a constant entity, like God, it is constant. This implies that the world was indeed created instantaneously, although it gradually unfolded for temporal beings (see Mīrdāmād 1381 Sh, 1:197; Fayḍ al-Kāshī 1375 Sh, 27). This is not plausible, however, because constancy and motion are not relational extrinsic concepts. Rather, they are intrinsic concepts such that parts of a being are either existentially instantaneous (in which case it is constant) or not (in which case it is moving), without having anything to do with any other entities (unlike relational concepts such as being above or being under). It is contradictory to say that something moving is constant from the perspective of a constant being (see Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī 1981, 3:414; Javadi Amoli 1393 Sh, 12:357).

The proper way to reconcile the relevant hadiths should take the following into consideration:

1. According to the first category of hadiths, all creatures from pre-eternity to post-eternity are instantaneously present to God, and indeed, they were instantaneously created.

2. According to the second category of hadiths, God created the temporal world on a gradual basis such that the existence of each part of the temporal world is conditioned upon the nonexistence of its antecedent and subsequent parts. This means that the temporal world cannot be created by God instantaneously.

9. This counts as a great piece of evidence that, if instantaneous creation of creatures is accepted, this should occur in a world other than the temporal world in that the latter is gradual. As we explain below, this world is the imaginal world (*‘ālam al-mithāl*).

This entails the existence of a distinct world, other than the temporal world, in which all creatures were instantaneously created and then gradually unfolded in the temporal world. An elaborate account of the world in which such instantaneous creation occurred falls outside of the scope of this world. Given some hadiths, we might say that the world of the Divine Throne (*al-‘arsh al-ilāhī*) is a candidate for such a world (see Fattāl al-Nayshābūrī 1375 Sh, 1:47; Ibn Bābawayh 1414 AH, 45). Put concisely, this world should exemplify the imaginal properties of material entities so that there would not be an obstacle for their concomitance with each other (see Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī 1981, 5:259). There are hadiths pointing toward the reality of the imaginal world (*‘ālam al-mithāl*). For instance, in explaining the hadith that those who are about to die see the Shiite Imams simultaneously in East and West (see Qummī 1404 AH, 2:265; Mufīd 1413 AH, 7), we should accept their imaginal existence, because the material body cannot possibly exist in two different places at the time because of its temporal and spatial limitations (see Majlisī 1403 AH, 54:354-55). The assumption of the imaginal world can enable us to account for implications of many hadiths according to which the Prophet and Imams (and even some other divine saints) saw future or past events, without implying any rational predicament (e.g., the impossibility of “leap” (*tafra*) or return in time), since imaginal entities instantaneously exist alongside each other, without being separated by past, present, and future points. Let us consider some relevant hadiths:

1. Imam al-Ṣādiq saw the prospective station of the promised Mahdī (the Twelfth Shiite Imam) in al-Sahla Mosque (Majlisī 1403 AH, 97:435).

2. Hārith b. al-Malik saw the conditions of the resurrection (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 2:54; Barqī 1371 AH, 1:247).

3. Seeing that certain things went to the heaven or the hell (Barqī 1371 AH, 2:508-18).

4. Seeing scenes from the prospective uprising of Imam al-Mahdī (Khazzāz al-Rāzī 1401 AH, 296; Ibn Abī Zaynab 1397 AH, 309-18; Ibn Bābawayh 1395 AH, 2:671-72).

5. Imam ‘Alī, the first Shiite Imam, saw certain future states of the Mosque of Kufa (Ibn Abī Zaynab 1397 AH, 318; Ibn Bābawayh 1413 AH, 1:231).

6. The Prophet saw the future state of his own minbar or pulpit (Ibn Ḥayyūn 1409 AH, 2:150).

7. Seeing the future state of people’s commitment to religion (Ibn Ḥayyūn 1409 AH, 3:393).

8. The Prophet and Imam ‘Alī saw the Event of Karbala before it happened (Ibn Qūlawayh 1356 Sh, 67-79).

9. The Prophet saw the state of his daughter, Lady Fatima, on the day of resurrection (Ibn Bābawayh 1376 Sh, 486).

10. The Prophet saw that his people would fight on the day of resurrection when visiting the pond (Ṭabarsī 1390 AH, 188).

11. The Prophet saw the future states of his great grandson Imam Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (Ibn Shahrāshūb 1379 AH, 4:167).

12. Imam al-Bāqir saw the past states of the Prophet (Astarābādī 1409 AH, 811).

13. Imam al-Ṣādiq saw the conditions of the world before the prospective uprising of Imam al-Mahdī (Majlisī 1403 AH, 52:215).

14. Imam ‘Alī saw strange future events (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 101).

As an offshoot, this reconciliation can provide us with a plausible account of the events of the Prophet’s ascent to the sky (*Mi‘rāj*), because according to the narratives, he saw the fates of future people. In this way, no esoteric interpretation of these hadiths would be needed¹⁰ (see Ibn Bābawayh 1378 AH, 2:10).

Conclusion

There are different hadiths concerning God’s concomitance with the temporal world, but their denotations or implications are sometimes contradictory. In this article, we offered a reconciliation of these hadiths without excluding any of them. The upshot is that although God is free from any change or motion, He is not detached from His temporal creatures. Accordingly, to say that God is non-temporal is not to say that God is not concomitant with time. Rather, it is to reject His change and limitation over time. In this way, God is present at all times as the creator of, and source of emanation for, temporal entities, although His essence is not limited to any specific time. This is consonant with the views of Muslim philosophers and theologians on the matter, although there are major differences in details. In the second section, we argued that temporal concomitance is not just concomitance with present temporal beings, but also with past and future entities. Nevertheless, the realm of time does not have the capacity for such an instantaneous concomitance. It follows that there should be another non-temporal (imaginal) realm in which all entities from pre-eternity to post-eternity are instantaneously present to God, while in the temporal realm, only present events are concomitant with God. On this account, the world was gradually created in the temporal realm and instantaneously created in the imaginal realm. In this way, we can account for the hadiths concerning the observation of past and future events by the Prophet and Imams.

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10. Some contemporary scholars offer a similar account of *Mi‘rāj* (see Hadavi Tehrani 2014).

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