

## Part 4: The “Philosophers”

### Chapter 45: Jalal al-Din Dawwani

#### A. Life and Works

Mohammad bin As‘ad Jalal al-Din was born in 830/1427 at Dawwan in the district of Kazarun, of which his father was the Qadi. Having received early education from his father and then from Mahjwi al-Ari and Hassan bin Baqqal, he studied theology under Muhyi al-Din Ansari and Hammam al-Din at Shiraz, where he ultimately became professor at the *Madrasat al-Aitam*. In a short time he became famous for his knowledge and learning, attracting students from far and wide. It was in recognition of his literary and academic fame that he received admission into the Cour of Hassan Beg Khan Bahadur (Uzun Hassan), the then Turkish ruler of Mesopotamia and Persia. He ultimately rose to the eminent position of the Qadi of the Court, which position he retained under Sultan Mantiq Ya‘qub as well. He died in 907/1501 or 908/1502, and he was buried in his native village Dawwan.<sup>1</sup>

Tusi revived the tradition of philosophical disciplines during the Mongol period; Dawwani did the same during the Ottoman period. Whereas the former gave a fresh impetus to the study of ibn Sina by writing commentaries on some of his works and by defending him against his detractors, the latter on his *Hayakil-i Nur* and elaborating his illuminative philosophy (*hikmat-i ishruq*) in his own works. Both are revivalists, but they differ in their approach to the truth. The one is a true Avicennian, the other a faithful Suhrawardian. Brockelman has enumerated 70 of his extant works,<sup>2</sup> of which the important ones are listed below:

1. *Sharh ‘Aqa’id-i ‘Adudiyyah*, Istanbul, 1817.
2. *Sharh Tahdhib al-Mantiq wa al-Kalam*, 1264/1847.
3. *Al-Zaura*, cairo, 1326–1908.

4. *Risalah fi Ithbat al-Wajib al-Qadimah wa-al-Jadidah.*
5. *Risalah fi Tahqiq Nafs al-Amr.*
6. *Risalah fi Ithbat al-Joauhar al-Mufariq.*
7. *Risalah fi 'Adalah.*
8. *Risalah fi-Hikmah.*
9. *Sharh al-Hayakil.*
10. *Anmudhaj al-'Ulum.*
11. *Al-Masa'il al-'Asr fi al-Kalam.*
12. *Akhlaq-i Jalali*, translated into English under the title of *The Practical Philosophy of the Mohammadan People*, by W.F. Thomson, London, 1839.

## **B. Ethics**

Dawwani was commissioned by Sultan Hassan Geg to revise the ethical treatise of Tusi with the express aim of “correcting and completing” it from the illuminative (*ishraqi*) point of view. The structure of *Akhlaq-i Jalali* is basically the same as that of *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, but in the execution of the work Dawwani has artistically ornamented it with the Qur’anic verses, precepts of the Prophet and his Companions and the moving utterances of the mystics. He not only abbreviated and simplified Tusi’s treatise but also amplified and elaborated it at places in the light of the philosophy of illumination; besides he added much by way of literary adornment.

Following ibn Miskawaih, Tusi regards ultimate happiness (*sa’adat-i quswa*) as the *summum bonum* of life. His concept of ultimate happiness because of its reference to the heavenly (*qudsi*) element is intrinsically different from the Aristotelian concept of happiness. Dawwani goes a step further and identifies the moral with the religious ideal. It is with reference to God intended vicegerency that the Qur’an distinguishes right from wrong, evaluates knowledge and appreciates power; therefore, vicegerency of God (*khilafat-i ilahi*) and not ultimate happiness should be the inspiring ideal of the “noblest position of man in the universe as determined by God and not by man himself, which is that of the vicegerency of God.

What entitles man to this high office of responsibility? Dawwani finds the answer in a saying of the Caliph ‘Ali. Man, according to this saying, occupies a middle position between the angels and the brutes. The former have intellect without desire and ire. They have no temptations, nor freedom of choice; being perfect by nature, they are above morality. The latter, on the other hand, have desire and ire without intellect, and thus, being incapable of controlling their irrational impulses, are below morality. Man has

both.

He can, however, rise above the angels by sub-ordinating desire and ire to intellect, and can also sink below the brutes if desire and ire enslave his intellect. The brutes can be excused for want of intellect, but not man. The excellence of man's perfection is enhanced by his natural temptation and deliberate resistance to evil; the angels have been spared the painful processes of conflict, deliberation, and choice. Thus, man alone is a free, responsible and, therefore, moral being, and his right to the vicegerency of God is established on this very ground.<sup>3</sup>

How is this vicegerency to be accomplished by man? Quoting the Qur'anic verse, "Whosoever gains wisdom, verily he gains great good." Dawwani holds that mature wisdom (*kikmat-i balighah*) is the royal road to this exalted position. By mature wisdom, being a happy blend of theory and practice is essentially different from the Socratic dictum: Knowledge is virtue. The Greeks were interested in ascertaining the speculative principles of morals; the practical aspect of ethics was quite alien to their temperament.

Mature wisdom can be acquired through intellectual insight as well as through mystic intuition. Both the philosopher and the mystic reach the same goal through different ways. What the former "knows," the latter "sees," there being complete harmony between the findings of the two.

Influenced by the Qur'anic doctrine of moderation<sup>4</sup> no less than the Aristotelian doctrine of the mean, Dawwani holds that the mean constitutes the good in all matters. But it is determined not by "reason" and "prudence," as held by Aristotle, but by the divine Law. Reason can at best determine the form of morality, the content whereof must come from the divine Code. Since the path of moderation is difficult to tread, Dawwani has identified it with the bridge over hell (*pul sirat*) – a bridge which is narrower than a hair and sharper than a sword.

Moral struggle pre-supposes that all dispositions (*khulq*), whether innate or acquired, are capable of modification and change. Constant instruction and discipline and punishment, as evidenced by experience, can change the wicked into the virtuous. By these means the evil is greatly reduced, if not completely eradicated. And since a person does not know beforehand that a particular evil disposition would resist all attempts to modify and change it, it is in consonance with the dictates of both reason and religion that he should exert his utmost for its modification.

To Plato, virtue was the moderation of human nature as a whole. Aristotle assigned to each virtue the place moderation would give it. Be he could go no further than this. The Greeks "systematized, generalized, and theorized," but the accumulation of positive knowledge based on patient, detailed, and prolonged observation was altogether "alien to their temperament." This weakness of the Greek genius was removed by a rather practical and penetrating mind of the Muslims,<sup>5</sup> who classified ethics as a "part of practical philosophy." With ibn Miskawaih, the first Muslim moralist, the emphasis shifted from broad generalizations to individual differentiation and specification of virtues. He not only determined seven,

11, 12 and 19 species<sup>6</sup> of wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice respectively – the four cardinal virtues of Plato – but also developed an attractive theory of the causes and cures of mental diseases, a process which culminated in al-Ghazali<sup>7</sup> with a shift from an intellectual to a mystic outlook.

Ibn Miskawaih had worked out the details of Plato's theory of virtue, but with Tusi the problem was that of improving and completing the Aristotelian theory of vice. He emphasized for the first time that deviation from the equipoise is not only quantitative but also qualitative, and, thus, added perversion (*rada'at*) as the third generic cause of vice<sup>8</sup> to the Aristotelian excess and deficiency of a state. Tusi also set the seal of completion on practical philosophy by including domestics and politics in his ethical treatise in order to meet the deficiencies of the ethical work of Ibn Sina (*Kitab al-Taharat*) and of that of Farabi. Lastly, Tusi revolted against the ascetic ethics of al-Ghazali. Asceticism, for him, is the negation of moral life, for man is by nature a social being as is indicated by the word for man in Arabic, *insan* (associating), and body is not an obstacle but an instrument of the soul for attaining the perfection it is capable of.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, he recognizes asceticism as a necessary stage in the development of mystic consciousness, of which he has had no personal experience. Inspired by the illuminative philosophy of Shihab al-Din Maqtul, Dawwani finds complete harmony between philosophy and mysticism. What the mystic "sees," the philosopher "knows," and the latter "knows," the former "sees." He, therefore, gave a Qur'anic bias to the ethics of Tusi.

## C. Politics

Following Tusi, Dawwani too has used *Siyasat-i Mudun* more in the sense of the science of civics than in the modern sense of politics. The origin, function, and classes of society and the need of a government headed by a just king are the same for Dawwani as for Tusi. Monarch is held to be the ideal form of government, in which king is the second arbitrator of justice, the first being the divine Law. After reproducing the general principles of distributive and corrective justice from *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, Dawwani adds ten moral principles of his own, which ought to be observed by a king in order to ensure efficient administration of justice.

In the first place, the king should invariably consider himself to be the aggrieved party while deciding a case, so that he may not wish for the aggrieved what is abhorrent to him. Secondly, he should see that the cases are disposed of quickly, for justice delayed is justice denied. Thirdly, he should not indulge in sensual and physical pleasures which ultimately bring about the ruin of a State in their wake. Fourthly, royal decision should be based on clemency and condescension rather than on rashness and wrath. Fifthly, in pleasing people he should seek the pleasure he should seek the pleasure of God. Sixthly, he should not seek the pleasure of the people by displeasing God. Seventhly, he should render justice if decision is left to his discretion, but forgiveness is better than justice if mercy is begged of him. Eighthly, he should associate with the righteous and lend ears to their counsels. Ninthly, he should keep everyone

to his rightful place and should not entrust high office to the low-born people. Lastly, he should not be content with personal abstention from injustice, but should conduct the affairs of the State that none under his authority is guilty of this offence.

## D. Metaphysics

Like Tusi and others, Dawwani's cosmology consists of the gradual emanation of ten intellects, nine spheres, four elements and three kingdoms of nature. The active intellect, the intellect of the sphere of the moon, bridges the gap between the heaven and the earth.

Quoting the Prophet's saying that intellect is the noblest of all the created things, Dawwani identifies the first intellect (*'aql-i awwal*) with the original essence of Mohammad. It conceives the idea of all things past, present, and future, just as a seed potentially contains roots, branches, leaves, and fruit. The spheres which are stationary in nature, but changeable in qualities, control the destiny of the material world. Fresh situations come into being through the revolutions of the spheres, and every moment the active intellect causes a new form into existence to reflect itself in the mirror of elemental matter.

Passing through the mineral, vegetative and animal states, the first intellect finally appears in the form of acquired intellect (*aql-i mustafad*) in man, and, thus, the highest point having coalesced with the lowest, the circle of being is completed by the two arcs of ascent and descent.

The first intellect is like the seed which sprouted into twigs, branches, and fruit, reverts to its original form of unity possessing collective potentiality. This circular process takes the form of motion (*harkat-i wada'i*), in growing bodies of increasing or decreasing their magnitude, and in the rational soul that of the movement of thought. All these motions are, in fact, shadows of the divine motion proceeding from God's love for self-expression, which in mystic terminology is called the flashing of Self upon Self. [10](#)

Dawwani's metaphysical treatise, *al-Zaura* is a critical evaluation of *Kalam* and of the teachings of the spiritual leaders, the philosophers, and the mystics, from the illuminative (*ishraqi*) point of view. He fully appreciates the utility and importance of the first three disciplines but takes serious notice of the inconsistency with Islam of some of the issues raised by them. He believes that philosophy and mysticism both ultimately lead to the same goal, yet he cannot shut his eyes to the eminence and superiority of the latter over the former. Mysticism, in his view, is free from doubt and uncertainty because it is due to divine grace and is, therefore, nearer to prophethood. [11](#)

## Bibliography

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- [4.](#) Qur’an, 2:190, 5:2.
- [5.](#) Briffault, *The making of Humanity*, p. 192.
- [6.](#) Tahdhib al–Akhlaq, pp. 15 – 20.
- [7.](#) Mazan al–‘Amal, pp. 83 – 91.
- [8.](#) Akhlaq–i Nasiri, p. 114.
- [9.](#) Ivanow, *Tasawwurat*, p. 92.
- [10.](#) Akhlaq–i Jalali, pp. 258 – 59.
- [11.](#) Al–Zaura, p. 116.

## Chapter 46: Ibn Khaldun

### A

Ibn Khaldun wrote no major work in fields accepted in the Muslim philosophic tradition or which he considered to be the proper fields of philosophic investigation – logic, mathematics, physics, and metaphysics – politics, ethics, and economics.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, he was not regarded by his contemporaries, or by subsequent Muslim students of philosophy, as a philosopher (*failssuf*) in the sense in which al–Farabi, ibn Sina, and ibn Rushd were identified as such. Nevertheless, both his contemporaries and later Muslim students of history and society were aware that ibn Khaldun had made the most significant contribution to these specialized fields through his undertaking a scientific investigation of them.

It was, however, the enhanced interest in the study of history and society in modern times which led to the devotion of increased attention of ibn Khaldun’s thought, to the recognition of his rank as a major Muslim thinker, and to the judgment that he was equal, if not superior, to the other well–known Muslim philosophers. This was in part the result of the higher prestige, and of the peculiar theoretical importance, which history and the sciences of society (as compared to the theoretical part of traditional philosophy) have come to enjoy in modern times.

But the more important reason for the singular interest in ibn Khaldun in modern times lies in the conclusions of his investigations in history and society. To the moderns, these conclusions appear to be more scientific than either the conclusions of the legal investigation of Muslim jurists or the politico–philosophic investigations of Muslim philosophers. Perhaps on the analogy of the revolt of modern

science against traditional philosophy, and especially of modern political philosophy and social science against traditional political philosophy, it has been assumed that ibn Khaldun must have attempted a similar, or parallel, revolt against traditional Muslim philosophy in general, and against traditional Muslim political philosophy in particular.

Because of its important implications for the understanding of ibn Khaldun's thought, this crucial assumption deserves critical examination. The larger context of the present work seems to warrant an inquiry into the precise relationship between ibn Khaldun's new science and the Muslim philosophic tradition. This relationship has been for the most part viewed in the perspective, and under the influence, of the modern philosophic and scientific tradition. In the present work, in contrast, the reader comes to ibn Khaldun through the preceding Greek and Muslim philosophic tradition, which ibn Khaldun knew and in relation to which he can be expected to have taken his bearing.

The reader, thus, must be shown, on the basis of ibn Khaldun's conception of philosophy and science, and of his conception of the relation between his new science and the established philosophic science, whether he was in fundamental agreement with that tradition (in which case it must be shown what the specific character of his contribution to that tradition was), a new, but a novel doctrine.

That this procedure is the sound historical procedure is usually admitted. But what has not been seen with sufficient clarity is that, in addition to providing the proper historical perspective for the understanding of ibn Khaldun's thought, it is of fundamental importance to elicit the basic principles or premises of his new science, and thus contribute to the understanding of its true character.

## B

Ibn Khaldun's place in the history of Muslim philosophy, and his contribution to the Muslim philosophic tradition, must be determined primarily on the basis of the "Introduction" (*Muqaddimah*) and Book One of his "History" (*Kitab al-'Ibar*).<sup>2</sup> That a work exploring the art of history, and largely devoted to an account of universal history,<sup>3</sup> should concern itself with philosophy is justified by ibn Khaldun on the ground that history has a dual character: (a) an external (*zahir*) aspect which is essentially an account of, or information about, past events, and (b) an internal (*batin*) aspect. With respect to this latter aspect, history "is contemplation (theory: *nazar*) and verification (*tahqiq*), a precise causal explanation of things generated (*ka'inat*) and their origins (or principles: *mabadi*), and a profound science (*'ilm*) of the qualities and causes of events; therefore, it is a firm principle part (*asl*) of wisdom (*hikmah*), and deserves, and is well fitted, to be counted among its sciences."<sup>4</sup>

Whatever ibn Khaldun's position concerning the relation between wisdom and philosophy may have been (ibn Rushd, who was the last of the major Muslim Philosophers whom ibn Khaldun studied, considered that the two had become identical in his own time),<sup>5</sup> he frequently uses the expressions "wise men" (*hukama'*) and "philosophers" (*Falasifah*) inter-changeably, and it is certain that he identifies the sciences of wisdom with the philosophic sciences.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, in his classification and exposition

of the various sciences, he defines the basic characteristics of these sciences, enumerates them, and makes ample reference to the Greek and Muslim authors, who represent the specific philosophic tradition which he accepts as *the* tradition.

Ibn Khaldun's definition of the philosophic sciences is based on an emphatic and clear-cut distinction, if not total opposition, between the sciences which are natural to man as a rational being (therefore, he names them also "natural" [*tabi'iyya*]) and "rational" or "intellectual" [*'aqliyyah*] sciences<sup>7</sup> and the legal, transmitted, or positive sciences based on the divine law, which are the special property of a particular religious community. In contrast, the philosophic sciences are "those which a human being can understand by (virtue of) the nature of his thought and the subjects, the problems, the ways of demonstration, and the modes of teaching to which he is guided by perception, until his contemplation and investigation lead him to understand the true from the false in as far as he is a human being possessing thought."<sup>8</sup>

The philosophic sciences are classified into four fundamental sciences or groups of sciences: logic, mathematics, physics, and metaphysics or the divine science.<sup>9</sup> This is followed by a concise history of these sciences (especially among the ancient Persians, the Greeks and the Muslims) which emphasizes (a) the relation between the rise and development of these sciences, and cultural development and prosperity, and their decline subsequent to cultural disintegration, and (b) the anti-philosophic attitude of the divine laws and religious communities, which led (especially in cases where sovereigns adopted this attitude, or religious orthodoxy was able to determine the type of learning pursued in the community) to deserting the philosophic sciences.<sup>10</sup>

The philosophic sciences reaching the Muslims were those of the Greeks.<sup>11</sup> Of the Greek philosophic schools Ibn Khaldun mentions specifically those of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, and also the commentators of Aristotle, i.e. Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius, and others. Aristotle is singled out as "the most well-grounded of them in these sciences."<sup>12</sup> Muslims recovered these sciences from the disuse to which they had fallen among the Byzantines, and after a period of searching for, acquiring, and translating the works preserved among the latter, Muslim scholars studied these Greek philosophic sciences, became skilled in their various branches, reached the highest level of proficiency in them, and surpassed some of their predecessors.

Although they differed with Aristotle on many issues, they generally recognized him as the foremost teacher (*Mu'allim-i Awwal*). Of Muslim philosophers, Ibn Khaldun mentions by name al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Bajjah, and Ibn Rushd. He indicates the decline of the philosophic sciences in Western Islam after the disintegration of cultural life in that region, and refers to reports concerning the then flourishing state of these sciences in Persia and eastward, and their revival and spread in Western Europe.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, there seems to be little doubt that when Ibn Khaldun says that the study of the internal aspect of history is to be made one of the sciences of wisdom, he does not simply mean that it deserves a systematic, rational, and scientific study in general. What he means is much more specific and precise.

The study of the internal aspect of history, if it is to be properly scientific, must be recognized as a significant part of, and is to be pursued as belonging to, one of the philosophic sciences or one of a group of the philosophic sciences (of the Socratic school)<sup>14</sup> epitomized in the works of Aristotle and also in those of the Muslim philosophers who belonged to that school and concentrated primarily on the exposition of the works of Aristotle.

## C

To which of these sciences or groups of sciences does the investigation of the internal aspect of history belong? To answer this question, a fuller statement of the character and principles of this investigation is needed. Ibn Khaldun first formulates what this investigation is to comprise, and how it is to be conducted through a critique of Islamic historiography and the examination of the causes of the errors of historians in the “Introduction,” in which he illustrates the distinction between the external and internal aspects of history and establishes that these errors are primarily due to the ignorance of the nature and causes of historical events, both in so far as these are permanent and homogeneous as well as in so far as they change and are heterogeneous

Then, in the first part of the introduction to Book One, the true character of history is said to be identical with “information about human association, which is the culture (*‘umran*) of the world, and the states which occur to the nature of that culture...(and) all that is engendered in that culture by the nature of (these) states.”<sup>15</sup> The primary cause of errors in transmitting historical information (and, consequently, in writing an untrue account of history), thus, becomes ignorance of the nature of the states of culture.

The states of culture and what is engendered in them is considered to form a part of all engendered things, whether essences or acts, each of which inevitably has a nature specific to its essence and to its accidental states. “What the historian needs for examining historical reports, and for distinguishing the true from the false, is knowledge “of the matters of engendered [existents] and the states in existents”<sup>16</sup> so as to be able to examine and determine the possibility or impossibility of the occurrence of the events themselves. Thus, the basic principles (i.e. the subject-matter, problems, method, and end) of a new investigation emerge, and are finally formulated as follows:

“The rule for distinguishing truth from falsehood in the [investigation of historical] information on the grounds of possibility and impossibility is for us to contemplate human association, which is culture, and to distinguish the states pertaining to its essence and required by its nature, what is accidental and need not be reckoned with, and what cannot possibly occur in it. If we do that, it would be for us a rule in distinguishing truth from falsehood in [historical] information, and veracity from lying, in a demonstrative manner admitting of no doubt. Then, if we hear about some states taking place in culture, we shall know scientifically what we should judge as acceptable and what we should judge as spurious. This will be for us a sound criterion by which historians will pursue the path of veracity and correctness in what they transmit. This is the purpose of this First Book of our work. It is, as it were, a science independent by

itself. For it has a subject (namely, human culture and human association) and has [its own] problems (i.e. explaining the states that pertain to its essence one after the other).”<sup>17</sup>

We then have a seemingly independent science the subject of which is human association or culture, the problems of which are the essential states of culture, the method is that of strict demonstration, and the end is that it be used as a rule to distinguish the true and the veracious from the false and the spurious in historical reports. To which philosophic science or group of sciences does this science belong, and in what way could it be characterized as a firm and principal part of philosophy?

That it does not belong to the logical or the mathematical sciences needs little argument. Logic is defined by ibn Khaldun as “the science which makes the mind immune to error in seizing upon unknown problems [or questions] through matters already realized and known. Its advantage is in distinguishing error from correctness in the essential and accidental concept and judgments, which he who contemplates aims at in order that he may understand the verification of truth in generated [things], negatively and positively.”<sup>18</sup> Logic is an organon of thought and a propaedeutical science making rules used in the contemplation of all generated things, and in ascertaining the sound definitions of their essences and accidents. Since the subject and problems of the science of culture are said to belong to generated things, it will have to use the rules devised by the logical arts, but it is not itself concerned with the problems of how to achieve sound abstractions or how to distinguish them from those unsound.

It is only necessary to add here, first, that ibn Khaldun accepted, without reservation, Aristotelian logic as found in the logical writings of Aristotle (with the addition of Porphyry’s *Isagoge*) and the commentaries of al-Farabi, ibn Sina, and ibn Rushd. Thus, logic for him deals with the mental forms abstracted from things and useful in the knowledge of the essences and the “truths” of things. Its central aim is demonstration or “the syllogism producing certainty,” and “the identity of the definition and [the thing] defined,” i.e., the subjects dealt with in the *Posterior Analytics* or “The Book of Demonstration.”<sup>19</sup> Ibn Khaldun doubts the validity of the attempts of Muslim dialectical theologians (*Mutakallimun*) who concentrate on purely formal syllogism and forgo the fruits of the works of the ancients in the field of material logic.<sup>20</sup>

Secondly, ibn Khaldun repeatedly emphasizes that the science of culture must be a demonstrative science in the sense specified here, to the exclusion of dialectical, rhetorical, and poetic arguments which are based on commonly known and commonly accepted premises rather than on self-evident, necessary, and essential premises, or premises that are the conclusions of syllogisms based on such premises, as required by posterioristic logic.

As to the mathematical sciences, they are concerned with measurements or quantities, either theoretically, such as the study of pure numbers, or practically as applied arts. In the latter case, they are useful in the study of culture, since they acquaint us with the mathematical properties of things, such as the stars, which exercise an influence on culture, and form the bases of many of the crafts which are an important aspect of cultural life.<sup>21</sup> But although the science of culture makes use of the conclusions

of the mathematical sciences and is concerned with quantity as one of the categories of all generated things, its subject is not quantity as such, but the nature and causes of a specific generated thing which is culture.

This leaves us with natural sciences and metaphysics, or the sciences of natural and divine existents. Since the study of generated things, their natures, their states, and all that is engendered in them,<sup>22</sup> is the specific subject of natural science or natural philosophy, the new science of that specific generated thing which is culture seems to form a part of natural philosophy and to belong to it by virtue of its subject. This statement must now be amplified by giving answers to: (a) why does the new science of culture deserve to be a natural science and counted among the natural sciences, and (b) how does ibn Khaldun establish it as a firm and principal part of natural philosophy?<sup>23</sup>

## D

Natural science is defined by ibn Khaldun as follows:

“Then [after logic], the contemplation among them [i.e. the philosophers] turns to: [a] the sensible, viz bodies of the elements, and those generated from them (viz minerals, plants and animals), celestial bodies, and natural motions, or the soul from which motions emerge, etc. This art is named “natural science,” and it is the second of these (philosophic) sciences. Or [b] the contemplation turns to the matters that are beyond nature.”<sup>24</sup>

This is explained further in the second and more elaborate definition supplied by ibn Khaldun in his own way:

“[Natural science] is the science which inquires about the body with respect to what adheres to it, viz. motion and rest. Thus, it contemplates the heavenly and elemental bodies, and what is begotten from them (man, animals, plants, and minerals), what is generated inside the earth (spring, earthquakes), in the atmosphere (clouds, vapours, thunder, lightning, and thunderbolts), etc, and the principle of motion in bodies, i.e. the soul in its various species in man, animals, and plants.”<sup>25</sup>

Then he mentions the standard works on natural science. The physical parts of the Aristotelian corpus, which have been followed, explained, and commented on by Muslim authors, the most well-known and reliable of these being ibn Sina in the corresponding parts of three major works (*Shifa'*, *Najat* and *Isharat*), and ibn Rushd in his summaries of, and commentaries on, Aristotle's works on physical sciences, with the difference that ibn Sina seems to disagree with Aristotle on many problems of natural science, while ibn Rushd remains in close agreement with him.<sup>26</sup>

These statements point to a conception of the character and scope of natural science, and the order of its parts, which is not ibn Khaldun's own, but one which was elaborated by ibn Sina and ibn Rushd on the basis of a tradition initiated in Muslim philosophy by al-Farabi, and which has a firm foundation in

Aristotle's own writings on nature. Following the scheme suggested by Aristotle, e.g. in the opening chapter of *Meteorology*,<sup>27</sup> these philosophers included within natural science or natural philosophy the works beginning with the *Physics* and ending with the *De Anima* and the *Parva Naturalia*, and arranged their objects, order, and rank, as follows: (1) the general or first principles of all natural existents or of all that is constituted by nature, or "the first causes of nature and all natural motion" (*Physics*), (2) the simple or primary parts of the world, or "the stars ordered in the motion of the heavens" (*On the Heaven and the World*), (3) the motion of the natural elements, or their generation and corruption, alteration and growth (*On Generation and Corruption*), and (4) the accidents and affections common to the elements (*Meteorology*).

Then follows the study of particular existents that are generated and corrupted: (5) the minerals which are the simplest and closest to the elements (*On Minerals*), (6) plants (*On Plants*), (7) animals (*The Parts of Animals*, etc.), and (8) the general principles of the soul and its parts (*On the Soul*), followed by the particular powers of the soul and the accidents existing in plants and animals by virtue of their possessing soul (*Parva Naturalia*).<sup>28</sup>

According to this scheme, the science of the soul, which is the form of animal and plant bodies, falls within the scope of the science of nature, and the science of the intellect, which is one of the faculties of the soul, falls to the connection of nature to soul, and of soul to intellect, and the study of these connections certainly did not mean, nor did it lead to, the reduction of one to the other. For the scheme was not merely a deductive one by which the more complex is deduced from the more simple or the particular from the general, but a methodological plan of investigation beginning with the general and simple and leading to the particular and complex, recognizing their substantial heterogeneity, and using observation, enumeration, and induction, to a greater extent than, and in conjunction with, syllogistic reasoning.

Furthermore, the study of soul and intellect leads the investigator to matters that are beyond nature, and that could no more be, strictly speaking, considered within the scope of a natural investigation, but in this case, these matters cannot claim the advantages enjoyed by natural investigation which are solidly based on human experience and perception. One could then perhaps speak with ibn Rushd of the possibility of delimiting the investigation of soul and intellect to what corresponds most to the manner of investigation conducted, and, thus, arrives at explanations similar in character to those given by natural science – taking this to be more fitting to the purpose of Aristotle.<sup>29</sup>

But to grant the difficulties raised by this scheme does not alter the fact that both for Aristotle and the Muslim philosophers mentioned above, the inclusion of the study of soul and intellect within the general science of nature is legitimate. Consequently, the study of man and of all that concerns man is considered an integral part of the study of nature or of natural science. This does not hold true only for his body in so far as it shares common properties with all natural bodies, for the properties of generation and corruption which he shares with all composite things, and for the faculties of his soul which he

shares with plants and other animals, but also for his specific differentiae as a rational being: his sociability and his association with others and co-operation with them in the development of the arts, his appetites and desires, his purposeful, organized social activity, his practical and theoretical intellect, and his ability to comprehend things through visions, dreams, and prophecy, and to use what he comprehends in ordering his political life. All such matters are dealt with in the science of the soul.<sup>30</sup>

Human association or culture, as ibn Khaldun conceived it, is a natural property of man as a rational being. He intended to investigate its modes or states, the various accidents that occur in it, and its generation and corruption; and to develop this investigation into a full-fledged inquiry or science. Since the basis of man's sociability, and its primary manifestations, can legitimately fall within the scope of natural science, the elaboration of this natural property of man, and the investigation of the various aspects of social organization to which it leads man, can also legitimately belong to natural science and be counted as one of the natural sciences.

Whether the new science will in fact prove well-fitted to be considered a natural science, will of course depend on whether it will remain loyal to the method of investigation followed in the natural sciences. Ibn Khaldun was aware of the fact that the subject he intended to investigate had been studied in contexts other than natural science, notably in the Muslim legal sciences and in the practical philosophic sciences. Thus, even if he had insisted on a science of human association or culture which had to be a part of philosophy or wisdom, he could have chosen to study it as a practical science.

The reason for not choosing this alternative will be discussed in a subsequent chapter.<sup>31</sup> It is sufficient in the present context to insist that what he sought was a natural science of human association. He examined the works of Plato and Aristotle, and of Muslim thinkers, and found<sup>32</sup> that they had not elaborated such a science before. Thus he set out to make good this deficiency in the natural sciences. But if he is to succeed in his effort, he must show unequivocally that the new science is indeed being firmly established on the foundation of natural philosophy.

## E

The "History" was originally divided by ibn Khaldun into an "Introduction" (*Muqaddiman*) and three Books. The "Introduction" deals with the problem of history in general, Book One contains the new science of culture, Book Two contains the history of the Arabs and other peoples (except the Berbers) down to ibn Khaldun's own time, and Book Three contains the history of the Berbers in Western Islam.<sup>33</sup>

*Muqaddimah* is a technical term meaning "premise." It can be generally defined as that upon which what follows depends and which does not itself depend upon that which follows.<sup>34</sup> It can be a general discussion or explanation introducing a subject, a book, or a science, the emphasis here being upon what needs to precede these rather than that upon which they strictly depend. In this sense the "Introduction" precedes the three Books and is a useful discussion clarifying the problems that are to follow. But this "Introduction" together with Book One came also be known as the *Muqaddimahi*, as an

introduction to the last two books, or the historical account proper. This is a usage which is closer to the technical definition of the word, since, as ibn Khaldun explains, the writing of a correct historical account depends upon a prior understanding the science of culture.

The proper technical definition of *muqaddimah*, however, which is the specific definition used by logicians in the study of syllogism, induction, and analogy, is “that upon which the soundness of the proof depends, without an intermediary” or “a proposition made a part of syllogism or an argument.”<sup>35</sup> Such a premise should be veracious and properly related to the question or problem. It is of two kinds: (a) definitive (such as being primary, based on observation or experience, or on multiple authoritative reports, or being the conclusion of a syllogism based on such premises and (b) based on opinion (generally known or accepted notions, etc.)<sup>36</sup>

These can be made the premises of a single syllogism or argument, or of a whole science. In this latter case, they are named the “premise(s) of the science” and are defined as those upon which the setting out upon the science depends, and upon which its problems depend.<sup>37</sup> Apart from the general usages mentioned above, ibn Khaldun uses *muqaddimah* in this specific “logical” sense,<sup>38</sup> and the first section of Book One, which treats “human culture in general,” is made up of six such premises. Since the new science “depends” upon the character of these premises, we must examine them in detail.

## 1. Association is Necessary for Man

Ibn Khaldun presents this premise or proposition as being the same as what the wise men express when they say that “man is ‘political’ by nature, i.e., he cannot dispense with association, which in their technical usage is the *polis*’, and this is the meaning of culture.”<sup>39</sup> It is significant, however, that ibn Khaldun substitutes, here at the outset, “necessary” for “by nature” and his explanation of the first premise indicates that this substitution was deliberate on his part. For, the way he grounds the need for association in human nature is by explaining that, while the “animal nature” of human beings are the same as those of the rest of the animals (in that like them they cannot exist except through nourishment and self-defence), they are inferior to some animals in that the ability of a single human being cannot possibly be equal to meeting his needs for nourishment and self-defence.

Therefore, man associates with others and develops the arts and tools, and the social organizations, necessary for nourishing and defending himself, not because his specifically “human nature” is essentially superior to the rest of the animals, or because he needs these arts and tools and organization to satisfy his specifically human needs, but because his natural constitution is deficient for conducting a solitary life, and because without associating with others he remains helpless and unable even to exist.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, ibn Khaldun, while purporting simply to “explain” what the philosophers meant by “man is political by nature,” in fact concentrates on those traits of man’s animal nature which render association a necessary condition for the very life and continued existence of man. Nevertheless, he emphasizes that

this premise and its explanation as he presents them are also based on the conclusions of the investigation of animal and human natures conducted by the philosophers and confirmed by the investigation of the organs of the human body conducted by Galen – more specifically, that the “demonstration” of this premise was presented by the philosophers<sup>41</sup> referring to the appropriate passages of *De Anima* and the commentaries of them.<sup>42</sup>

On the surface, ibn Khaldun’s only object is to the attempt of the philosophers to “add” a rational proof of prophecy to their demonstration of the political nature of man, while in fact he seems also to object to the widening of the scope of the proposition in such a manner as to state that association is necessary for man’s well-being in addition to its being necessary to his existence. What he seems to indicate is that the study of human nature within the scope of natural science cannot demonstrate this proposition in this wider sense; therefore the science of culture must restrict itself to accepting the proposition in its narrower sense, susceptible to demonstration within natural science, only. In other words, according to him, the study of culture should be a sociological one without ethical extensions.

## **2. Distribution of Culture on Earth**

This premise simply recounts what has already been explained by the wise men who have contemplated the states of the world relative to the shape of the earth, the generation of animals and of human species, and the inhabited parts of the earth; it is a summary of the geography of the seven zones and the information available concerning the conditions prevailing in each.<sup>43</sup> Here, ibn Khaldun restates the various conclusions demonstrated in such parts of natural philosophy as the investigation of the nature of elements of generation and corruption, of minerals, and of localities of animals,<sup>44</sup> and completes them through such information as has been supplied by observation and authenticated multiple reports found in the works of astronomers, and, in particular, in the works of Greek and Muslim geographers like Ptolemy, al-Mus‘udi, and al-Idrisi.<sup>45</sup> It is also in these works that the word *‘umran*, which ibn Khaldun used as a technical term indicating the subject of his new science, is most frequently encountered.

## **3. Temperate and Intemperate Zones and the Influence of the Atmosphere upon the Colour of Human Beings and many of their States**

This premise is again based on the investigation of the nature of generated beings, and the nature of heat and cold and their influence upon the atmosphere and the animals generated in it, proving that the colour of human beings and many of their arts and modes of life are caused by atmospheric conditions.<sup>46</sup> The only specific authority he invokes here is ibn Sina’s *rajaz* poem on medicine.<sup>47</sup> He refutes the errors of genealogists which he attributes to their inattention to the natural basis of such matters as colours and other characteristic traits.<sup>48</sup>

Throughout, the emphasis is upon the natural (in contrast to the specifically human or the divine) basis of culture as a whole, for in addition to relatively, elementary things (such as colour and other bodily traits, and the manner of preparing food and housing), ibn Khaldun indicates the dependence of even

the highly complex aspects of culture (such as the sciences, political authority, and whether there are prophets, religions, and divine Laws) upon the nature of the elements and their effects upon the atmosphere.<sup>49</sup>

#### **4. Influence of the Atmosphere upon the Habits of Character (akhlaq) of Human Beings**

Ibn Khaldun indicates that the valid causal explanation of this premise has been established in the proper place in philosophy where gladness and sadness are explained as the expansion and contraction of the animal spirit, and are related to the more general premise establishing the effect of heat in expanding the air.<sup>50</sup> This completely natural explanation, founded on the properties of the elements, is made the basis of mirth, excitability, levity, etc. In contrast, the opinion of al-Mas'udi (copying Galen and al-Kindi), which attributes these habits of characters to the weakness or power of the brain, is considered inconclusive and undemonstrated.<sup>51</sup>

#### **5. Effects of the Abundance and Scarcity of Food upon the Bodies and Habits of Character of Human Beings**

The causal explanation of this premise is based on the investigation of the quantity of food and the moisture it contains in the various localities of animals, their action in expanding and contracting, and in increasing and decreasing the moisture of the stomachs of all animals, including human beings, and the effect of this upon the coarseness or delicacy of bodies, and upon the habits of character of human beings, including their piety and religion.<sup>52</sup> This natural causal explanation is based on experience and confirmed by the students of agriculture.<sup>53</sup>

#### **6. Classes of those who perceive the “Unseen” (ghaib) among Human Beings by Natural Disposition or by Exercise**

##### **6. Classes of those who perceive the “Unseen” (ghaib) among Human Beings by Natural Disposition or by Exercise<sup>54</sup>**

This premise is introduced in a discussion on prophecy and dream-vision which deals with (1) practical guidance as the aim of prophecy, and (2) the signs of prophetic mission: (a) the psychological state at the time of revelation, (b) good character prior to embarking upon the prophetic mission, (c) the call to religion and worship, (d) noble and pedigree, and (e) marvels and miracles. The difference between the dialectical theologians and the philosophers concerning how marvels and miracles take place through the power of God or through the power of the prophet himself. The philosophers assert the latter on the basis that “the prophetic soul, among them, has essential properties from which these invasions (of nature) (*khawariq*) emanate through his (i.e. the prophet's) power and the obedience of the elements to him in this generation (of these invasions of nature).”<sup>55</sup>

As distinct from this introduction, ibn Khaldun presents his own statement (*qual*) in which he sets down “the interpretation of the true meaning (*haqiqah*) of prophecy as explained by men of verification (*muhaqqiqun*),” and mentions the real meaning of soothsaying, dream–vision, etc. The verified interpretation which ibn Khaldun adopts as the basis for his explanation of the true meaning of these phenomena proves to be a summary recapitulation of the entire subject of natural science, i.e., the observable world (*‘alam*) and the observable effects of unseen powers, sensible bodies, the elements, the spheres, the generable (minerals, plants, and animals ending in man), and the human soul and its powers.

These powers are again arranged in an ascending order: (1) the active powers, (2) the apprehensive powers which include (a) external senses, (b) internal senses, i.e. (i) common sense, (ii) imagination, (iii) estimation, (iv) memory, and (v) the power of thought which the philosophers call the rational calculative (*natiqah*) power.

“They all ascend to the power of thought (intellect) the instrument of which is the middle hollow of the brain. It is the power by which take place the movement of deliberation and the turn toward intellection, the soul is moved by it (i.e. this power) constantly through the longing instituted in it (i.e. the soul) towards that (intellection), to deliver (itself) from the abyss of potency and preparedness which belongs to human (nature) and to come out into act in its intellection (with which) it makes itself like the Heavenly Spiritual Host and comes at the lowest rank of the Spiritualities when it apprehends without bodily instruments. Thus, it moves constantly and turns toward that (intellection).

It may pass over altogether from human (nature) and its form of spirituality to the angelic (nature) of the upper region, not by (any) acquiring (of something from outside), but by the original and primary natural disposition toward it which God has placed in it.”<sup>56</sup> On the basis of the structure and nature of the observable world, and the structure and nature of the human soul, and on the basis of the natural powers inherent in the latter, ibn Khaldun proceeds to classify and explain the various types of the activity of the soul in relation to the unseen world.

Thus, ibn Khaldun’s own explanation of the foundation and the true meaning of these phenomena can be seen to be indeed based on the explanations of the natural world, and of the nature and powers of the human soul, as presented by “most” philosophers. Like them, he considers all such activities to be grounded throughout in the natural properties of the human soul which, in turn is closely related to the human body and the world of generation, of the elements, of sensible bodies, and of their motion and rest.<sup>57</sup> All other explanations are the “guesses and conjectures” of those who are not well grounded in these matters or who accept them from those who are not such, and are “not based on demonstration or verification.”<sup>58</sup>

## F

These, then, are the premises, and the only premises, of ibn Khaldun's new science of culture. Even a superficial examination of them reveals that they are all conclusions of inquiries undertaken by other sciences which are all *natural* sciences. The new science of culture, therefore, does not make a clear, a first, or a true beginning; it is not a pre-suppositionless science. It pre-supposes not only all the natural sciences that have provided it with premises, but also the validity of their principles, the soundness of their procedures and explanations, and the veracity of their judgments and conclusions.

The inquiry into the place of ibn Khaldun's new science of culture within the Muslim philosophic tradition thus indicates beyond reasonable doubt that (a) ibn Khaldun conceived of the new science as a philosophic science, and that by philosophy he understood the sciences originated by the Socratic school, and elaborated by Aristotle and his Muslim followers, (b) the new science falls within the general scope of traditional natural science or natural philosophy, and (c) more especially, all of its premises are drawn exclusively from the various natural sciences, and, thus, it is indeed firmly grounded in these sciences because it pre-supposes their conclusions, and builds itself on the firm foundation.

Ibn Khaldun's science of culture was conceived by him as a contribution to the established philosophic sciences within a limited field. The grounds for this science, or its basic premises, were already established by traditional natural science or natural philosophy. No philosopher before him had used these premises to develop a science of human association or culture based exclusively on them. The Greek and Muslim philosophers, with whose works on practical philosophy ibn Khaldun was acquainted, invariably found it necessary to proceed by utilizing other premises which could not claim the same solidity and demonstrable character as the premises provided by natural philosophy. Therefore, the understanding of the specific character of ibn Khaldun's contribution requires an examination of the relation between his new science of culture and traditional Greek and Muslim political philosophy. This will be attempted in Chapter 49 of this work.

## Bibliography

The following list contains ibn Khaldun's surviving works (cf. above, n. 1). For a more detailed bibliography of editions, translations, and studies, cf, Walter J. Fischel, "Selected Bibliography" in F. Rosenthal's translation cited below, Vol. 3, pp. 485 – 512.

*Kitab al-ʿIbar* (The History), ed. Nasr al-Hurini, 7 vols., Bulaq, 1284/1867; *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldun* (Prolegomenes d'Ebn-Khaldoun), ed. E. M. Quatremere ("Notice et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliotheque du Roi et autres bibliotheques, publies par l'Institut Imperial de France," t. 16 – 18, premieres parties; also "Tirage a part des..."), Paris, 1858. The three volumes correspond to the Bulaq ed., vol. 1; *The Muqaddiman: An Introduction ot History*, English tr. by Franz Rosenthal (Bollingen Series 43), 3 vols., Pantheon, New York, 1958; *Les prolegomenes d'Ibn Khaldoun*, French tr. by M. de Slane, 3

vols., Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, Paris, 1934 – 38; *al-Ta'rij bi ibn Khaldun wa Rihlatuhu Gharban wa Sharqan* (Auto-biography), ed. Mohammad ibn Tawit al-Tanju (*Athar ibn Khaldun*, vol. 1), Lajnah al-Talif, Cairo, 1370/1951; *Lubab al-Muhassal fi Usul al-Din* (Extracts from Fakhr al-Din al-Razi's *Muhassal*), ed. P. Luciano Rubio, Editori Marroqui, Tetuan, 1952; *Shafa' al-Sa'il li Tahsil al-Masa'il* (Answers to Questions on Mysticism), MS No. 24299B, Dar al-Kutub, Cairo, edition in preparation by Tanji.

[1.](#) The summaries of “many” of the works of ibn Rushd, which he wrote as a young man (reported by ibn al-Khatib, cf. al-Maqqari, *Nafh al-Tib*, ed. Mohammad Muhyi al-Din ‘Abd al-Hamid [10 vols., Cairo, al-Maktabat al-Tijariyyah, 1367/1947, vol. 8, p. 286]), may prove of value in corroborating the philosophic notions found in the “History.” Ibn Khaldun himself did not evidently consider them of permanent value; they have not as yet been recovered and it is not known whether they have survived at all.

[2.](#) The Introduction and Book One are known together as the “Introduction” (Muqaddimah), cf. below p. 898. References in this chapter and in that on ibn Khaldun’s Political Philosophy (cf. below, Book 4, part 6, Chap 49) are to the volumes, pages (and lines) of the Quatremere edition (Q) together with the corrections and/or additions supplied by the de Slane and F. Rosenthal in their respective French and English translations, both of which reproduce the pagination of the Quatremere edition on the margin. Cf. the Bibliography at the end of this chapter.

[3.](#) Cf. the account of the parts of the ‘Ibar, below, p. 898.

[4.](#) Q 1, 2: 17 – 19.

[5.](#) Or that philosophic questions (i.e., the quest for wisdom) have become scientific logoi. Therefore ibn Rushd omits the well-known opinions and dialectical arguments found in Aristotle’s works and does not enumerate the views current in his own time as Aristotle did, “because wisdom in his (Aristotle’s) time had not become complete, and contained opinions of groups who were believed to be wise. But now that wisdom had become complete, and there being in our time no groups (merely) believed to be wise...the contemplation of these sciences must according to the mode in which mathematics is contemplated today. For this identical reason we must omit from them also the dialectical arguments.” Ibn Rushd, *Talkhis al-Sama’ al-Tabi’i* (“Paraphrase of the Physics”), MS. Cairo, Dar al-Kutub, Hikmah, No. 5, fol. 1 of Ahmad Fu’ad al-Ahwani, *Talkhis Kitab al-Nafs* (Paraphrase du “De Anima”), (Cairo, Imprimerie Misr, 1950), Introduction, p. 16; *Kitab al-Sama’ al-Tabi’i*, (Hyderabad, Dairatul-Maarif, 1365/1945) pp. 2 – 3.

[6.](#) Cf., eg. Q. 2, 385:5, 3, 87:3 – 4 (where both wisdom and philosophy are used together in naming these sciences), 210.

[7.](#) Q. 2, 385, 3, 86 – 87.

[8.](#) Q 2, 385:5 – 9.

[9.](#) There are three schemes according to which these sciences are enumerated. The four sciences or groups of sciences mentioned here appear in all of them. The order is that of the central scheme which divides the philosophic sciences into seven (mathematics, being sub-divided into arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music) (Q. 3, 88:12 – 19). This scheme seems to emphasize the order in which, according to ibn Khaldun himself, these sciences follow one another. Consider the characterization of logic as that which comes first (muqaddam) – (note also the use of muqaddimah as “principle” or premise”) – and of mathematics as “coming after” logic (ba’dahu). In the first scheme (logic, natural science [or] metaphysics, and mathematics), the order seems to be in accordance with the contemplation of these sciences as pursued among them (‘indahum), i.e. among the philosophers (Q. 3, 87 – 88). The third scheme (mathematics, logic) gives a summary exposition of these sciences “one by one” (Q. 3, 88:19 – 20, 93ff.).

[10.](#) Q. 3, 88 – 92.

[11.](#) Cf. Q. 1, 62 – 63.

[12.](#) Q. 3, 90:14.

[13.](#) Q. 3, 90 – 93.

[14.](#) For the distinction among the various Greek philosophic schools (which had equally distinct groups of followers in Muslim philosophy), and of their different attitudes to divine Laws, cf. al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal w-al-Nihal*, ed. Ahmad Fahmi Mohammad, three volumes, Cairo, Maktabat al-Hussein al-Tijariyyah, 1367 – 68/1647 – 48, vol. 2, pp. 104 – 07,

231ff.

[15.](#) Q. 1, 56:6 – 13.

[16.](#) Q. 1, 57 – 58.

[17.](#) Q. 1, 61:7 – 19.

[18.](#) Q. 3, 87:5 – 9.

[19.](#) Q. 3, 108 – 12.

[20.](#) Q. 3, 112 – 16.

[21.](#) Cf. Q. 3, 87 – 88, 93 – 108.

[22.](#) Cf. above p. 893

[23.](#) See above, p. 890.

[24.](#) Q. 3, 87:9 – 15.

[25.](#) Q.3, 116:12 – 17.

[26.](#)

Q. 3, 116 – 17. This judgment is based on ibn Sina's own statements and the accusations levelled against him by ibn Rushd.

[27.](#) *Meteorologica* 1, i. 338a, 20 – 39a, 9.

[28.](#) *Ibid.*, al-Farabi, *Falsafah Aristutalis* (The Philosophy of Aristotle), MS., Istanbul, Aya Sofia, No. 4833, fols. 34b ff; ibn Sina, "al-Nafs," *Shifa'*, 2, 6. "Psychologie d'Ibn Sina (Avicenne) d'apres son oeuvre As-sifa," ed. Jan bakos, Prague, L'Academie Tchecoslovaque des Sciences, 1956, pp. 7 – 8 (where he defends changing the order with respect to the soul and to treating it before plants and animals); al-Najat, 2nd printing, Cairo, 1357/1938, Part 2; 'Uyun al-Hikmah (*Fontes Sapientiae*), ed. Abdurrahman Badawi (Memorial Avicenne 5), Cairo, Institute Francais d'Archeologie Orientale, 1954, pp. 16 – 46; ibn Rushd, *Kitab al-Athar al-'Ulwiyyah*, Hyderabad, Dairatul-Maarif, 1365/1945, pp. 2 – 5; "al-Nafs," *op. cit.* pp 1 – 5.

[29.](#) "al-Nafs," *op. cit.*, p. 3.

[30.](#) Cf. the references given in note 42.

[31.](#) Below, Chap. 49.

[32.](#) To his surprise, for he expected to find such a science elaborated by them; and only they could have elaborated it.

[33.](#) Q. 2, 16

[34.](#) Al-Tahanawi, *Kashshaf Istilahat al-Funun* (A Dictionary of Technical Terms), Eds. M. Wajih et al. Calcutta, Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1853 – 62, pp. 1215:21, 1217:2 – 6.

[35.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 1216:4ff. (Cf. Q. 1, 308:7 – 8, 345:30).

[36.](#) *Ibid.* p. 1216:20 – 1217:2.

[37.](#) *Ibid.*, 1217:5 ff.

[38.](#) Cf. Q. 1, 71 – 78.

[39.](#) Q. 1, 68:14 – 16.

[40.](#) Q. 1, 69 – 72.

[41.](#) Q. 1, 68:14 – 16, 11 – 12, 72:3 and 7.

[42.](#) Cf. Q. 2, 368 – 71, where the same argument is present in connection with the practical intellect, with a similar reference to the philosophers. Aristotle, *De Anima*, 3, 4 – 7; ibn Sina, *Nafs*, pp. 198ff.; *Najat*, pp. 163 – 65; *Kitab al-Isharat w-al-Tanbihat* (Le livre de theorems et des avertissements), ed. J. Forgot, Leyde, E. J. Brill, 1892, pp. 134 – 37; 'Uyun, pp. 44 – 46; bin Rushd, *Nafs*, pp. 69 – 72.

[43.](#) Q. 1, 73 – 148.

[44.](#) Q. 1, 73, 75, 82 – 85, 88 – 89, 94 – 95.

[45.](#) Q. 1, 75, 82, 84 – 88, 92, 93. 97.

[46.](#) Q. 1, 48ff., 151, 153 – 54.

[47.](#) Q. 1, 153.

[48.](#) Q 1, 151, 154.

[49.](#) q. 1, 149 – 59, 153 – 54.

[50.](#) Q 1, 155 – 56.

[51.](#) Q. 1, 157.

[52.](#) Q. 1, 157 – 61, 165.

[53.](#) Q. 1, 164.

[54.](#) Q. 1, 165ff. The sections translated by D.B. Macdonald (The Religious Attitude and Life in Islam, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1909, pp. 43ff.) remain the most exact rendering of the Arabic text.

[55.](#) Q. 1, 170:8 – 9.

[56.](#) Q. 1, 176:9 – 18. Cf. Macdonald, op, cit. p. 57.

[57.](#) Q. 1, 181, 186 – 87, 190, 192 – 93.

[58.](#) Q. 1, 196, 203 – 04.

## Chapter 47: The School of Ispahan

### A. Introduction

It is one of the most curious aspects of the Western study of Muslim intellectual life that with one or two exceptions practically no serious research has ever been made into the spiritual and intellectual treasures of 12 Imam Shi'ism in any of the European Languages.<sup>1</sup> As a result, not only Westerners but even the Muslims whose contact with the Shi'ah world is mainly through Western sources have remained totally ignorant of the remarkable intellectual life which has persisted to this very day in the centres of Shi'ism, especially in Persia. Inasmuch as it was mostly in the Shi'ah world that much of the intellectual life of Islam, especially in the sciences and traditional wisdom (*Hikmat*),<sup>2</sup> took refuge after the seventh/13th century this ignorance has helped to strengthen the totally erroneous notion that Islam fell into complete decadence after the Mongol invasion.

Just as a closer study of the Muslim world at large will show that in art, government, Sufism and many other aspects of Muslim life there was anything but decadence until fairly recently, a study of the Shi'ah world will reveal that even in the sciences, philosophy, and gnosis the Muslims have, with one gap of a century and a half, continued to flourish up to the present century. It will reveal that just as Safawid art is one of the high points of Muslim art, so the intellectual life of Shi'ism in this period one of the apogees of Muslim history, producing sages like Sadr al-Din Shirazi, usually known as Mulla Sadra.

Perhaps one day histories of philosophy will not have chapters on Islam which end abruptly with ibn Rushd or possibly ibn Khaldun but will trace the chain to the present century and end once and for all the dangerous illusion that the present day Muslims are separated from their own tradition by centuries of Safawid Persia, where 12 Imam Shi'ism became for the first time a completely independent political and cultural entity, an entity which has dominated every phase of life in Persia ever since.

The coming to power of the Safawids in Persia is one of the most fascinating chapters of Muslim history

and marks one of the instances in which the influence of Sufism upon the social and political life of Islam is felt directly. Beginning as a Sufi brotherhood which traced its lineage as well as its name to the great saint Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili,<sup>3</sup> the Safawids soon developed into a well organized political unity for the first time since the fall of the Sassanid Empire.

The Sufi order continued under the spiritual direction of a series of descendants of Sheikh Safi, and its members in the ninth/15th century adopted a 12-sided red hat for which they became known as the *qizil-bash* (red heads). The order grew in power in the politically disorganized Persia of the ninth/15th century and under Isma'il (892/1487 – 930/1523 – 24) succeeded in defeating the local rulers and unifying the whole of Persia.

Shah Isma'il was crowned in Tabriz in 905/1499 marking the beginning of the reign of the Safawids which was to last over two centuries until in 1133/1720 the Afghans conquered Persia, sacked the Safawid capital at Ispahan and killed Shah Hussein, the last of the Safawid rulers. During this wavering between these two orthodox perspectives of the Islamic revelation, became completely 12-Imam Shi'ah and Shi'ism, which had until now remained a minority creed, found itself as the official religio of an empire and had to face political and social issues it had never been forced to face before.<sup>4</sup>

No longer molested by an external force and face with a large number of practical social problems, Shi'ah theology, *Kalam*, which had always served as the walls of the citadel of the faith,<sup>5</sup> lost much of its earlier vigour while jurisprudence, *Fiqh*, having to face new situations, became highly developed. More important for our purpose is the fact that the pre-dominantly Shi'ah culture of Persia prepared the background for the flourishing of the doctrines of *israqi* gnosis (illuministic wisdom),<sup>6</sup> philosophy, and the sciences. The efforts of the chain of sages after Khuwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi, who had kept the study of these subjects alive suddenly found the necessary environment for the development of this form of wisdom.<sup>7</sup>

We have connected this wisdom symbolically with the school of Ispahan, which spread throughout Safawid Persia as well as in Iraq, Syria, and India with which the Persians had very close contacts. The centres of its life were not only Ispahan, the Safawid capital, but also other cities like Shiraz, Kashan, Qazwin, and Tabriz. Furthermore, some of the most important figures like Sheikh Baha' al-Din Amili, and Sayyid Ni'matullah Jaza'iri, who played a vital role in the establishment of Shi'ism in Persia, were Arabs from Amil near Damascus and Bahrain, two centres which had been preserving the Shi'ah tradition for centuries.<sup>8</sup>

The Shi'ahs have developed the Ja'fari School of Law named after the sixth Imam, Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, as well as theology (*Kalam*) and other traditional studies, namely, language, history, hadith and commentary upon the Qur'an, jurisprudence (*Fiqh*), principles of jurisprudence (*Usul*),<sup>9</sup> theology,<sup>10</sup> and *Hikmat*, this last being a combination of gnosis, theosophy, and philosophy which forms the main subject of our present study.

## **B. Hikmat**

The form of wisdom which has survived until today in the Shi'ah world as *Hikmat* can neither be wholly identified with philosophy as currently understood in the West, not with theosophy which has unfortunately become identified in the English speaking world with pseudo-spiritualist movements, nor with theology. [11](#) As developed in the Safawid period and continued to the present day, *Hikmat* consists of several threads knit together by the matrix of Shi'ism.

The most important of these elements are the esoteric teachings of the Imams, especially as contained in the *Nahj al-Balaghah* by the first Imam 'Ali, the *ishraqi* wisdom of Suhrawardi which contains in itself aspects of ancient Persian and Hermetic doctrines, the teachings of the earlier Sufis, especially the gnostic doctrines of ibn 'Arabi, and the heritage of the Greek philosophers. It is, therefore, not too surprising if many of the treatises on *Hikmat* begin with logic and end with ecstasy experienced in the catharsis (*tajrid*) and illumination of the intellect. They contain as a necessary basis some preparation in logic which they share with the Peripatetics (Masha'iyun), but instead of remaining bound to the plane of reason they use this logic as a springboard for their flight into the heaven of gnosis.

The group of sages who between the death of ibn Rushd, the so-called terminating point of Muslim philosophy, and the Safawids prepared the ground for the intellectual revival of the school of Ispahan are usually not much better known outside Persia than the Safawid sages themselves. They include a series of philosophers and scientists like Khuwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi, better known in the Western world as a scientist than a philosopher and theologian, Qutb al-Din Razi, Mir Sayyid Sharif Jurjani, Jalal al-Din Dawwani, and ibn Turkah Ispahani, [12](#) all of whom sought to reconstruct Muslim intellectual life through a gnostic interpretation of the writings of ibn Sina, Suhrawardi, and the Sufis, and who carried further the attempt already begun by al-Farabi, extended by ibn Sina in his Qur'anic commentaries, and carried a step further by Suhrawardi, to correlate faith (*iman*) with philosophy. [13](#)

The precursors of the Safawid sages include also a series of pure gnostics, both Shi'ah and Sunni, although this distinction is not essential in Sufism, who spread the doctrines of ibn 'Arabi, the Andalusian sage and the formulator of gnostic doctrines in Islam in the Eastern lands of Islam. [14](#) These Sufis include Sadr al-Din Qunawi, Fakhr al-Din 'Iraqi, 'Abd al Razzaq Kashani, 'Ala al-Daulah Simnani, [15](#) 'Abd al-Rahman Jami, [16](#) and two others who are especially important in introducing the gnostic doctrines of ibn 'Arabi into the Shi'ah world, ibn Abi Jumhur and Mulla Haidar 'Ali Amuli. [17](#) One must also mention another great spiritual leader, Maulana Jalal al-Din Rumi, whose influence has extended throughout Persia during the past seven centuries.

## **C. Major Figures of the School of Ispahan**

To write down even the mere names and works of all the important authors of the Safawid period would in itself require a book because in nearly every field of religious science many notable figures arose

during this period of great intellectual activity. In theology, jurisprudence, and related sciences it is enough to mention only a few names like that of Zain al-Din ibn 'Ali ibn Ahmad Jaba'i (911/1505 – 966/1558), commonly known as the second martyr (*shahid-i thani*) because of his having been put to death by the Ottomans, the author of numerous treatise which still form a part of Shi'ah religious education, 'Ali ibn 'Abd al-'Ali 'Amili known as Muhaqqia-i Karaki (d. 945/1538), the author of *al-Najmiyyah* in theology and many other treatises and commentaries, the two Majlisis, Mohammad Taqi (1003/1594 – 1070/1659), the author of *Raudat al-Muttaqin*, and his son Mohammad Baqir (1037/1628 – 1110/1699), the greatest of the Safawid theologians and scholars to whom we shall turn later. [18](#)

As for the *hukama'*, those who cultivated this particular form of wisdom which they called *Hikmat*, they include Sadr al-Din Shirazi, better known as Mulla Sadra, to whom a separate chapter has been devoted in the present work, Sayyid Ahmad 'Alawi, Mir. Damad's Sabziwari (d. 1090/1669), the commentator of the *Isharat* and the metaphysics of the *Shifa'*, and the *Dhakhirat al-Ma'afi*, Rajab 'Ali Tabrizi (d. 1080?/1670), a thinker with nominalist tendencies and the author of *Risaleh-i Ithbat-i Wujud*, 'Abd al-Razzaq Lahiji (d. 1071/1661), a student of Mulla Sadra and author of some of the most important books on *Hikmat* in Persian like the *Guhar Murad*, *Sarmayeh-i Iman*, and the *Mashariq al-Ilham*, glosses upon the commentary of Khuwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi upon the *Isharat*, and the commentary upon Suhrawardi's *Hayakil al-Nur*, and Qadi Sa'id Qumi (1049/1640 – 1103?/1692), a gnostic and theologian, the author of the *Ara'inat*, *Kilid-i Bihisht*, and a commentary upon the *Athulujjiyya* attributed to Aristotle but now known to be a paraphrasis of the *Enneads* of Plotinus.

In addition to these authors, there are a few other major figures about whom we have chosen to speak somewhat more fully hoping that in this way we can depict the various aspects of the intellectual life of the Safawid period. These figures include Sheikh Baha' al-Din Amili, Mir Damad, [19](#) perhaps the central figure in the school of Ispahan, Mir Abu al-Qasim Findiriski, Mulla Musin Faid Kashi, and the second Majlisi whom we have already mentioned.

If space had allowed, we would have also considered the purely Sufi writings like the commentary upon the *Gulsham-i Raz* by Mohammad Lahiji, which is one of the best books on Sufism in Persian, and the works by the masters of other Sufi orders like the *Tuhfih'*– by the *Dhahabi* sheikh, Sheikh Mu'adhhdhin Khurasani.

### [Sheikh Baha' al-Din 'Amili](#)

The most colourful figure of the Safawid period was without doubt Baha' al-Din 'Amili, better known as Sheikh-i Baha'i. [20](#) His father was the leader of the Shi'ah community of 'Amil and a student of Shahid-i Thani. After his teacher's death in 966/1559, he set out with his son towards Persia. Baha' al-Din, who was born in Baalbek in 953/1546, was then only 13 years old and well qualified to master the Persian language. In Persia he continued his studies in the religious sciences, poetry, and *Hikmat* and soon became the leading scholar of his day and the *Sheikh al-Islam* of Ispahan. Despite his nearness to the Court and necessary participation in the worldly life he was a gnostic and spent many of the last years of

his life travelling with the dervishes and visiting various Sufi masters. He finally passed away in 1030/1622 while returning from Hajj.[21](#)

Sheikh Baha' al-Din was the leading theologian and jurist of his time and the leader of the '*ulama*' of Ispahan. He was at the same time an outstanding Sufi, one of the best of the Safawid poets who revived the 'Iraqi style and wrote poetry in the tradition of Rumi and Hafiz, the leading architect of the Safawid period, whose masterpieces like the Shah mosque of Ispahan still stand among the summits of Muslim architecture,[22](#) and the greatest mathematician and astronomer of his period.

In an age when the theologians, jurists, *Hakims*, natural historians, sophists, logicians, and Sufis were well-marked groups, sometimes in external conflict with one another, Sheikh-i Baha'i was respected by all these groups, from the wondering dervishes, the *qalandars*, to the Court '*ulama*' each of which considered the Sheikh its own. His genius lay precisely in showing the nothingness of all sciences before divine gnosis, while at the same time having a mastery of each science. Yet each of Sheikh-i Baha'i's writings has become a standard source of reference in its own field.

Some of his important works include *Jami'i-i 'Abbasi* on theology in Persian, *Fawa'id al-Samadiyyan* on Arabic grammar which is still in wide use, a treatise on algebra, the *Khulasah fi al-Hisab*,[23](#) several treatises on astronomy including the *Tashrih al-Aflak*, a treatise on the astrolabe, '*Urwat al-Wathqa*, general Qur'anic commentaries, many works on various aspects of the Hari'ah, the *Kashkul*, a collection of Arabic and Persian writings which ranks among the most famous Sufi works, and a series of *mathnawis* like *Bread and Sweet*, *Cat and Mouse*, *Milk and Sugar*, and the *Tuti-Nameh*.[24](#)

It is especially in the didactic poems, the *mathnawas*, that the particular genius of Sheikh-i Baha'i for expressing sublime truth in simple language and in witty anecdotes becomes manifest. In these poems his spirit is very similar to that of Maulana Jalal al-Din Rumi whom he follows in spirit as well as in form. In the long poem of *The Cat and the Mouse* in which the cat symbolizes exoteric and formal knowledge and the mouse esotericism, the theme is the danger of hypocrisy which the exoteric view always faces and the necessity in the religious and social structure for exoteric knowledge. Sheikh-i Baha'i also emphasizes throughout the work the supremacy of intellectual intuition over discursive knowledge. As an example we mention below the story of Mu'tazilite and a Sufi who appears in the guise of a madman named Buhlul.

During the reign of one of the Caliphs, a Mu'tazilite was chosen as the Imam of the mosque. One day Buhlul entered the mosque with a brick hidden under his dress and joined the congregation after the prayers to listen to the Imam's sermon. The Imam in the Mu'tazilite fashion mentioned that Satan is not harmed in hell because he is made of fire and since a thing cannot harm its own kind, the fire of hell cannot harm him. Upon hearing this, Buhlul became infuriated but held back his anger.

The Imam continued his sermon by saying that both good and evil are by divine consent. Again Buhlul became angry but once again succeeded in remaining quiet. The Imam added that on the Day of

Judgment man would actually be able to see God. Upon hearing this, Buhlul took out the brick from under his dress, threw it at the Imam injuring his head and ran away. The Caliph raging with fury was about to call for Buhlul when he walked into the palace and without any greetings sat at the head of the Court. The Caliph asked him with great anger as to why he had attacked the Imam. Buhlul answered by pleading to the Caliph to give him permission to explain how by his act he had done nothing discourteous and when given permission addressed the bleeding Imam and said that since according to his own words a thing cannot harm its own kind, a brick cannot harm the Imam's head since both are made of clay.

Furthermore, he asked the Imam if he had felt any pain upon being hit on the head and if he could see the pain. Upon receiving the reply that the Imam did not see the pain, Buhlul asked how a man could be unable to see pain, a creation of God, see the Creator. Finally, Buhlul added that since all acts are done through divine consent, God must have given consent to his throwing the brick and so the Imam should not complain of an act to which God had consented. Upon hearing this, the Imam, the symbol of rationalism, had to remain silent before Buhlul, the symbol of intellectual intuition.[25](#)

The writings of Sheikh-i Baha'i are also replete with passages about the nothingness of all human knowledge as against divine gnosis. For example, in the poem *Nan wa Halwah* (Bread and Sweet) he says:

Formal science is nothing but altercation,  
It results in neither intoxication[26](#) nor contemplation.  
It continually brings congelation to man's nature,  
What's more, the Maulana[27](#) does not believe in it.

If someone tells thee that of thy life,  
There remains with certainty but a week,  
Thou in this one week will busy thy self  
With which science, oh accomplished man!  
There is no science but the science of love,[28](#)  
The rest is the deception of the wretched Satan.  
There is no science but the Qur'anic commentary and Hadith,  
The rest is the deception of the perverse Satan.

The mysteries will never become known to thee,  
If thou hast for student a hundred Fakhr-i Razi.[29](#)  
All who do not love the face of the beautiful  
The saddle and the rein are appropriate for them[30](#)  
That is, he who does not have love for the Friend,  
Bring for him the saddle and the headstall.[31](#)  
He who has not fallen in love with his beautiful Face,

Erase his name from the tablet of humanity.  
A breast that is empty of the love of the Beautiful,  
Is an old leather bag full of bones.  
A breast if devoid of the Beloved,  
Is not a breast but an old chest.  
A heart which is empty of the love of that Beauty,  
Count it as a stone with which the Devil cleans himself.

These sciences, these forms and imaginings,  
Are the excrements of Satan upon that stone.  
If thou allowest other than the science of love in thy heart,  
Thou wilt be giving Satan the stone to clean himself.  
Be ashamed of thyself, oh villain,  
That thou carriest the Devil's cleaning stone in thy pocket.  
Wash the tablet of the heart from the Devil's excrement,  
Oh teacher, give also the lesson of love.

How long wilt thou teach the wisdom of the Greeks?  
Learn also the wisdom of those who have faith.[32](#)  
How long with this jurisprudence and baseless theology,  
Wilt thou empty thy brain? Oh exuberant one,  
Thy life is spent in discussing conjugation and syntax,  
Learn also a few words about the principles of love.

Illuminate thy heart with resplendent lights,  
How long wilt thou lick the bowl of Avicenna?  
The Lord of the universe, the King of this world and the next[33](#)  
Called the left-over of the believer a remedy, Oh grieved one,  
But the left-over of Aristotle and Avicenna,  
When has the illuminated Prophet called it a remedy?  
Go rip thy breast in a hundred places,  
And clear thy heart of all these stains.[34](#)

Not only does Sheikh-i Baha'i suggest that man should not busy himself solely with formal science and that he should seek to reach the divine gnosis hidden in the revelation, but he also reminds man that he should not become so accustomed to his world as to forget his original home. It has been a constant theme of the gnostics throughout the ages that the spiritual man being a stranger in this world must take the perilous journey to return to his original abode.[35](#) In the same *Nan wa Halwah*, while commenting upon the Prophet's saying, "The love of the country comes from faith," he writes,[36](#)

"This country is not Egypt, Iraq or Syria,

It is a city which has no name.  
Since all these countries belong to this world,  
The noble man will never praise them.  
The love of this world is the source of all evil,  
And from evil comes the loss of faith.

Happy is the person who, through divine guidance,  
Is led in the direction of that nameless city.  
Oh son, thou art a stranger in these countries,  
How wretched art thou to have become accustomed to it!  
Thou hast remained so long in the city of the body,  
That thou hast completely forgotten thy own country.  
Turn away from the body and gladden thy soul,  
And remember thy original home.  
How long wilt thou, oh victorious falcon,  
Remain away from the sphere of the spirit?  
It is a shame for those, oh artful one,  
To shed thy feathers in this ruin.  
How long, oh hoopoe of the city of Saba,<sup>[37](#)</sup>  
Wilt thou remain in estrangement with feet tied?  
Seek to untie the cords from thy feet,  
And fly where ‘there is no space’”.<sup>[38](#)</sup>

Shekhi-i Baha’i was one of those rare falcons who, while outwardly in the midst of this world, had flown to the “land of nowhere.” He did not write in the technical sense so much about the *Hikmat* as Mir. Damad or Mulla Muhsin Faid did, but he reached such a degree of spiritual realization above and beyond theoretical formulations that all of his writings are spiritually precious. Even his compositions in the various religious and natural sciences bear the perfume of his spirituality. His writings present a balance between the exoteric and the esoteric, the metaphysical and the cosmological, which serve as an example of what the relation between the various aspects of a tradition, might be and could be when the principal integrating influence of gnosis is present.

## Mir Damad

One of the most influential figures of the Safawid School was Muhammad Baqir Damad, better known as Mir Damad. He and his student, Mulla Sadra, must be considered to be the greatest *Hakims* of the period. Being the grandson of Muhaqqia-i Karaki and descendant of a distinguished Shi’ah family, Mir Damad received the best education possible in all branches of learning. His most famous teacher was Sheikh Hussain ibn ‘Abd al-Samad ‘Amili, the father of Sheikh-i Baha’i, who later on became his most intimate friend and companion at the Safawid Court.<sup>[39](#)</sup> Mir Damad soon became a leading authority on

*Kalam, Hikmat, Fiqh* and even in the occult and natural sciences.[40](#)

In Isfahan he attracted numerous students to himself. His most famous disciples were Mulla Sadra, Sayyid Ahmad 'Alawi, the commentator of the *Shifa'*, Mulla Khalil Qazwini whose commentary upon the *Usal al-Kafi* is very well known in Persia, and Qutb al-Din Ashkiwari, the author of a universal sacred history and several philosophical and gnostic treatises.[41](#) Mir Damad, more than anyone else, was responsible for the revivification of ibn Sina's philosophy and *ishraqi* wisdom within the context of Shi'ism and for laying the ground for the monumental work for Mulla Sadra. Mir. Damad did much to revive what he referred to as the Yamani wisdom (*falsafih-i Yamani*), the wisdom of the prophets, in contrast to the more rationalistic philosophy of the Greeks.[42](#) He has been entitled the Third Teacher (*Mu'allim-i thalith*) after Aristotle and Farabi.

The writings of Mir Damad, both in Arabic and Persian, many of which are incomplete, are written in a very difficult style which adds to the difficulty of understanding their contents. These writings include several treatises on *Kalam*, works on *Fiqh* like *Shari' al-Najat*, *al-Ufuq al-Mubin* on Being, time, and eternity, *al-Sirat al-Mustaqim* on the relation between the created and the eternal, *Taqwim al-Imam* on Being, creation, and God's knowledge, several other major treatises on *Hikmat* including the *Qabasat*,[43](#) *Taqdisat*, *Jadhawat*, and *Sidrat al-Muntaha*,[44](#) several Qur'anic commentaries like *Amanat-i Ilahi*, commentaries upon the *Istihzar* of Khuwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi and the metaphysics of the *Shifa'*, the *Khalsat al-Malakut* on gnosis,[45](#) and a collection of poems in Persian and Arabic including the *Mushariq al-Anwar*, written under the pen name, *Ishraq*.

After a life-time spent in writing, teaching, and reading the Qur'an to which he was much devoted, and having prepared the ground for the whole group of sages, especially Mulla Sadra, who were to carry his ideas to their ultimate perfection, Mir Damad died on the way between Najaf and Karbala in Iraq in 1041/1631.

The thought of Mir Damad is marked by two features which distinguish him from the other *Hikims* of the period, the first the organization of his treatises and the second the notion of eternal creation, *huduth-i dahri*, which is the central and ever-recurring theme in his writings. As for the organization of his works, like the *Qabasat* and *Taqdisat*, it differs for the most part from that of the traditional Muslim books on philosophy and *Hikmat* which usually begin with logic and then proceed to natural philosophy (*tabi'iyat*), mathematics (*riyadhiyyat*), and theology (*ilahiyyat*).[46](#)

For example, in the *Qabasat* the ten chapters of the book concern the various meanings of creation and the division of Being, kinds of anteriority, multiplicity, appeal to the Qur'an and the Hadith, nature, time, and motion, criticism of logic divine omnipotence, and intellectual substances, chain of Being, and finally pre-destination.[47](#)

The second marked feature of Mir Damad's exposition of *Hikmat* concerns the notion of time. It is well known that the question whether the world is created (*hadith*) or eternal (*qadim*) has been one of the

major points of dispute between the philosophers and theologians in both Islam and Christianity as well as among the Greeks.<sup>48</sup> Mir Damad seeks a solution to this question by dividing reality into three categories: *zaman* or time, *dahr*, and *sarmad*; the latter two are kinds of eternity. This division is ontological and not just logical or theoretical.<sup>49</sup>

The divine essence or ipseity (*dhat*) is above all distinctions and qualities; yet it is also the source of the divine names and attributes which are both one with the essence and yet distinct from it. This immutable relation between the essence and the attributes, which cannot be changed from either side, the attributes being a necessary determination (*ta'ayyun*) of the essence to Itself by Itself, Mir Damad called *sarmad*. It is an eternity in the absolute sense, above all contingencies. The names and attributes, which are the same as the archetypes, Platonic ideas, or the lords of the species (*rabb al-nau'*) as the Ishraqis call them, in turn generate the world to change.

They are the immutable intelligences of this world, and each species in this world is a theurgy (*tilism*) for its archetype. The relation between the immutable archetypes and the world change is like the reflection of the moon in a stream of water in which the image of the moon remains unchanged while the substance in which it is reflected, i.e. water, flows on continually. This relation between the immutable and the changing Mir Damad calls *dahr*. Finally, the relation between one change and another is called time (*saman*), in the sense of quantity and measure of change as Aristotle had already described it.<sup>50</sup>

Since the world was brought into being through the intermediate world of archetypes, its creation is *dahri* not *zamani*, i.e. the world was not created in a time which existed before the world came into being but with respect to a *dahr* which stands above the world.<sup>51</sup> The creation of this world is, therefore, *huduth-i dahri*, *ibda'*, and *ikhtira'* and not *huduth-i samani*, *wad'*, and *lakwin*. Time has a reality in its own plane of being, but the world of *dahr*, the world of the archetypes, time does not even exist. Moreover, the changing physical world (*'alam-i jismani*) depends for its existence upon non-existence (*'adam*) in the world of archetypes.

While it exists in time (*zaman*), it is non-existent in *dahr* and has no share in the angelic mode of being, proper to the world of *dahr*, of which it is no more than coagulation. Likewise, the world of *dahr*, of the archetypes, is non-existent in the divine essence, in the world of *sarmad* (the eternal world). In the divine essence (*dhat*) there is neither *dahr* nor *zaman*, neither archetype nor body; God is alone in His majesty.<sup>52</sup> Yet, *dahr* exists on its own level and *zaman* on its own. *Sarmad* is the cause of *dahr* and *dahr* the cause of *zaman*,<sup>53</sup> so that ultimately the divine essence is the cause of all things, while in its essence nothing may even be said to exist.

The *Jadhawat*, the contents of which we will now briefly survey, is one of the works in which Mir Damad presents the complete cycle of his metaphysical ideas combined as usual with the Qur'anic text, the Hadith, and his own verse.<sup>54</sup> In the first *judhwah* or particle of fire, of which the word *jadhawat* is the plural, Mir Damad divides the "book of divine existence," of the chain of Being, into two parts, one in which there is an effusion or theophany (*tajalli*) away from the divine essence and the other in which

there is a return to the origin: the first extending from the divine essence to prime matter or *hyle* and the other from the *hyle* back to the origin of all existence. Moreover, each chain is divided into a longitudinal (*tullil*) order and a latitudinal (*'ardi*) order.<sup>55</sup> The longitudinal order of the chain of effusion includes five essential degrees:

1. The degree of pure intelligences, the Victorial lights (*anwar-i qahirah*) the first member of which is the universal intellect (*'aql-i kull*), i.e. the first light to issue forth from the Light of lights (*nur al-anwar*).
2. The degree of heavenly souls (*nufus-i falakiyyah*), the governing lights (*anwar-i mudabbirah*), the first number of which governing the first heaven is called the universal soul (*nafs-i kull*).
3. The degree of the natural souls (*nufus-i muntabi'ah*) and the archetypes of the heavens, the planets, the four natures, the elements, and compounds.<sup>56</sup>
4. The degree of bodily form (*surat-i jismiyyah*), i.e. the Aristotelian form, which is an extended substance and is of one species.
5. The degrees of *hyle*, from the matter of the highest heaven to that of the world of generation and corruption.<sup>57</sup>

As for the longitudinal order of the chain of return to the divine essence, it too, includes five stages:

1. The degree of absolute body (*jism-i mutlaq*) and bodies comprising the elements and the heavens.
2. The degree of composed bodies which come into being from the combination of the elements and have a species of their own, e.g. minerals.
3. The degree of plants possessing the vegetative soul.
4. The degree of animals possessing the animal soul.<sup>58</sup>
5. The degree of men possessing the intellectual soul which is of the same substance as the intelligences of the descending chain, above both of which there is nothing but the Truth (*Haqq*) Itself.<sup>59</sup>

Each of these degrees, both in the descending and the ascending chains, have their several members that constitute the latitudinal extension of each degree.

The world of the intelligences (*mujarradat*) is called the world of the invisible (*ghaib*), or command (*amr*), or *malakat*, or intellect (*'aql*) or life (*hayat*), or light (*nur*), while the world of bodies is called the world of creation (*khalq*), vision (*Shahadat*), or dominion (*mulk*), or death (*maut*), or darkness (*zulmat*). Man's nature is composed of these two worlds in such a way that he contains the whole world in himself; he is the microcosm as the world is the macrocosm. His intellect is like the sun, his soul like the moon, and his body like the earth, and as is the case with the heavens, man can also have an inner eclipse, i.e. the earth of his body can prevent the light of the sun of the intellect to shine upon the moon of the soul. The

purpose of the two chains of descent and ascent is to bring into being man, who contains both the chains within himself and who can, therefore, ascend to heaven as well as descend to the lowest depths of existence.

The macrocosm is a conscious being whose head is the highest heaven, whose heart is the sun and whose other organs correspond with those of man. It is compared symbolically to a man whose head is pointed towards the North Pole, the right side towards the west, the face towards heaven, the feet towards the south, and the left side towards the east.

The totality of these degrees, the macrocosm and the microcosm together, is the book of God, in which each being is a word or rather a letter.<sup>60</sup> These words and letters are written by the divine Pen (*qalam*) which symbolizes the intellect. The Pen writes the truth of things upon the human soul which is called the *ispahbad* light (*nur-i ispahbadi*). More specifically, the Pen writes the truth of things upon the soul of the prophet who in turn “writes” the knowledge of things upon the soul of man and through the intelligences, upon the pages of creation and existence. The intelligences are not limited to the nine heavens, but as the Ishraqis have asserted, in number they equal the fixed stars in addition to the heavens and extend all the way down to the heaven of the moon. The intelligence of this heaven is called “the giver of forms” (*wahib al-suwar*) or the active intellect (*aql-i fa‘al*) which gives being as well as form to the sublunary region.<sup>61</sup>

The heaven of the fixed stars is the meeting place of the corporeal and intellectual lights, the boundary between formal and formless manifestation. This heaven has its own soul and intelligence but, in addition, each star in it is also a possessor of intelligence and a soul proper to itself. As to the other heavens, they also have their general intelligence and soul as well as particular intelligences and souls all of which cast their illuminations upon the sublunary region. The intelligence of the heaven of the sun is Gabriel whose grace is spread throughout the heavens and the earth.

Having considered the chain of Being, Mir Damad turns to a discussion of unity (*tauhid*) starting from “there is no divinity but God” (*la ilaha illa Allah*) to, “there is no being but He and no truth but He” (*la maujudun illa Huwa wa la haqqun illa Huwa*).<sup>62</sup> For the real gnostic every being is nothing but Being. Mir Damad compares the relation of Being to existence with that of the number one to other numbers, which runs through all numbers without entering into them, which relation neither the soul nor the intellect can understand, yet its effect is felt everywhere.<sup>63</sup>

The Divine Being by His essential unity encompasses all things; His unity is before, with, and after both *dahr* and *zaman*. His unity before *dahr* is the unity of His command, with *dahr*, the unity of the universal intellect, after *dahr*, the unity of the universal soul, unity with time (*zaman*) and unity of the elements and compounds.

As for the generation of multiplicity from unity, Mir Damad rejects the Peripatetic view of authors like ibn Sina who consider that the first intellect brings multiplicity into being by the three relationships possible

for it: necessity by something other than self, the intellection of the divine essence, and the intellection of its own essence. For Mir Damad just as the number of intelligences is unlimited so are there possible relationships beyond the number determined by the Peripatetics.<sup>64</sup> Likewise, the intelligences have a great many illuminations and effusions beyond the categories set forth by the Aristotelians, one intelligence being victorial (*qahir*) and the other passive and receptive (*maqhur*). Each heaven as well as each body, simple or composed, has its archetype (*rabb al-nau'*) in the world of divine command (*'alam-i amr*) which is changeless and is to its species what the soul of man is to his body.

Between the world of intelligences and the physical world there is an intermediary world, the so called eighth climate which Mir Damad, following the ancient Ishraqi sages calls *hurqalya*,<sup>65</sup> the world of separated imagination (*khayal-i munfasil*), or the purgatory (*barzakh*). Human imagination regarded as a gulf extending from this vast cosmic ocean. This world contains the forms or Platonic ideas of all physical bodies without being in a specific place. The mythical cities of Jabulqa and Jabulas<sup>66</sup> are located in it, and bodily resurrection on the Last Day, miracles, and the passage of great distances in a short time, all take place in this intermediary world which is a bridge to be crossed before reaching the spiritual world.

In order to cross this bridge and make the return journey through the ascending chain, man must become familiar with the divine names, especially the Great name (*ism-i a'zam*) which contains all the others. All the prophets and saints derive their being from these names, and the creatures are their effects. The spiritual world is called the world of invocation (*'alam-i tasbih*) because the realities of that world are the divine names. Man, therefore, can regain the world only by invoking the names and becoming unified with them.<sup>67</sup>

The gnostic who has achieved this end sees the whole world through the intelligible world; in fact, he sees nothing outside the Divine. As long as man lives in this world no matter how much he has separated his soul from his body and achieved *catharsis* (*tajrid*), he is still in time and space. It is only when he dies and leaves the world of darkness for that light that he becomes completely free from the conditions of terrestrial existence of *zaman*, and it is only then that he enters into eternity (*dahr*).

The inner constitution of man forms a bridge between the worlds of time and eternity, the sensible and the intelligible. Man possesses four degrees of perception: sensation (*ihsas*), imagination (*takhayyul*), apprehension (*tawahkum*), and intellection (*ta'qqul*), the degrees which stretch between these two worlds; on the one hand, it abstracts perceptions from the sensible world and, on the other, receives the illumination of the intelligible world which it clothes in the forms of sensible, i.e. words and names which are the external dress of truth.<sup>68</sup>

Mir Damad echoes earlier Sufi and Pythagorean doctrines in assigning a particular significance to the numerical symbolism of letters. He writes, "The world of letters corresponds to the world of numbers, and the world of numbers to the world of Being, and the proportion of the world of letters to the proportion of the world of numbers and the proportion of the world of numbers to the combinations and

mixtures of the world of Being.”<sup>69</sup> He calls the sciences of the properties of letters and their combination divine medicine and says that letters have come into being from the conjunction of planets with the signs of the Zodiac, for example *alif* has come into being by Mars crossing the first degree of Aries. He establishes correspondence between the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet and the equal number of the stations of the moon and works out this correspondence in great detail.<sup>70</sup>

In establishing a relation between numbers, letters of the alphabet, and the heavens, Mir Damad, like many sages before him, seeks to point out the common ground between the book of revelation and the book of nature, as well as the relation between the sensible world and the intelligible world. In his writings it is quite clear that both metaphysics and cosmology are to be found in the esoteric (*batini*) meanings of the Qur’an and that through the understanding of the symbolism of letters and numbers and the sapiential exegeses of sacred books one can come to know not only the Qur’an which corresponds to the world of creation, the *Qur’an-i tadwini*, i.e. the *logos* or the reality of Mohammad (*haqiqat al-Mohammadiyyah*).

### Mir Abu al-Qasim Findiriski

The third famous triumvirate of sages from Isphan,<sup>71</sup> Mir Findiriski, spent much of his life travelling outside Persia, especially in India where he was highly respected by most of the princes and where he made the acquaintance of many Hindu sages. He became well acquainted with Hinduism and even wrote a commentary upon the Persian translation of the *Yoga Vasistha* by Nizam al-Din Panipati, which is one of the major works on Hinduism in Persian. In the Muslim sciences he was a master in philosophy (*Hikmat*), mathematics, and medicine and taught the *Shifa’* and the *Qanun* of ibn Sina in Ispahan where he died in 1050/1640.

The most interesting aspect of Mir Findiriski’s life is his complete detachment, even externally, from the world. As a Sufi, in spite of his having advanced very far upon the Path and having reached the state of pure contemplation and illumination, he mingled with the common people and wore the coarsest wool and yet he was one of the most respected men in the Safawid Court.<sup>72</sup> His manner resembled that of the Hindu Yogis with whom he had had so much contact. He was a real man among men and one of the most striking Sufis of his time. While completely detached from the world and even from purely formal learning, he composed several important treatises including one on motion (*al-harakah*), another on the arts and sciences in society (*sand’iyyah*), the book on Yoga already mentioned, *Usul al-Fusul* on Hindu wisdom and a history of the Safawids.

Moreover, he, like Mir Damad and Sheikh-i Baha-i, was an accomplished poet showing the development in him of the gnostic element which is the only possible common ground between traditional philosophy and poetry. The most famous of his poems is a *qasidah*, based upon that of Nasir ibn Khursau Dehlawi, which is one of the best known poems on *Hikmat* in Persian. It has been taught and commented upon many times since its composition, the more famous commentaries on it being those of Mohammad Salih Khalkhali and Hakim ‘Abbas Darabi. Because of the importance of this poem

in summarizing some of the basic elements of *Hikmat* as it was revived during the Safawid period, English translation of some of the verses is given below.

“Heaven with these stars is clear, pleasing, and beautiful,  
Whatever is there above has below it a form.[73](#)

The form below, if by the ladder of gnosis  
Is trodden upward, becomes the same as its principle.  
No outward apprehension can understand this saying,  
Whether it be that of an Abu Nasr or of an Abu ‘Ali Sina.[74](#)

If life were not an accident under this ancient heaven,  
These bodies would be forever alive and erect.  
But whatever is an accident must first have a substance,  
The intellect is our loquacious witness to this claim.  
If one can obtain these qualities[75](#) from the sun,  
The sun is itself light and shines upon all things while keeping the unity.

The intellect form which is endless and immortal  
Of the life of the universe, I say that if thou knowest the relation of the soul and the body,  
In the heart of every particle, then life becomes both evident and hidden.  
God has placed seven heavens above us,  
And seven others on the other side of the world in the life to come.  
Thou canst reach heaven by their means,  
Be true and walk the straight path for there is no falsehood there.  
He who worships the world, the door of heaven will never open to him,  
The doors will not open even if he stands before them.  
He who is annihilated in Him finds eternal life,  
He who is busy with himself, his affair is doubtless a failure.  
The jewel is hidden in the mysteries of the ancient sages,  
Only he who is wise can discover the meaning of these mysteries.

Pass beyond these words for they are forsaken by the people of the world,  
Find the Truth and tread its path, if thou art righteous.  
Whatever is outside the essence will do thee no good,  
Make thyself harmonious whether it be today or tomorrow.  
The Being that is pure has no limit or description,  
It is neither outside of us, nor with us, nor without us.

A beautiful thought is only beneficial when combined with virtuous deeds,  
A thought with virtuous action is competent and beautiful.  
To talk of goodness is not like doing good,

The name of sweetmeat on the tongue is not like sweetmeat itself....

In this world and the next, with the world and without it,

We can say all these of Him, yet He is above all that.

The intellect is a ship, passion a whirlpool, and knowledge the mast,

God is the shore and the whole cosmos the sea.

The shore is reached with certainty; the sea of the possible has become the necessary...[76](#)

How good it would be if the sages before us had said everything completely,

So that the opposition of those who are not complete[77](#)would be removed.

Desire keeps the soul in bondage in this world,

While thou hast desire, thy feet are tied.

Each wish in this world is followed by another wish,

The wish must be sought beyond which there is no other.”

Mir Findiriski occupied himself not only with metaphysics and the theoretical sciences but also with the sciences of society, of traditional society in which the social structure itself has a direct bearing in metaphysical principles. In this treatise on arts and sciences (*sana'iyah*),[78](#) he distinguishes 12 vocations or arts and sciences in society depending upon the subject with which each one deals. The subjects of the arts and sciences he enumerates are as follows: (1) The subject is universal and the discussion concerns knowledge as well as action from both of which there comes only good, (2) the subject is universal and the discussion concerns both knowledge and action from both of which there comes evil, (3) the subject is universal and the discussion concerns knowledge from which there comes only good, (4) the subject is universal and the discussion concerns knowledge from which there comes evil, (5) the subject is universal and the discussion concerns action from which there comes only good, and (6) the subject is universal and the discussion concerns action from which there comes evil.

To this list Mir Findriski adds a series of arts and sciences the subject of which is no longer universal. These include: (7) those arts and sciences the subject of which is particular and the discussion concerns knowledge and action from which there comes only good, (8) the subject is particular and the discussion concerns knowledge and action from which there comes evil, (9) the subject in particular and the discussion concerns only knowledge from which there comes only good, (10) the subject is particular and the discussion concerns the knowledge from which there comes evil, (11) the subject particular and the discussion concerns only action from which there comes only good, and, finally (12) the subject is particular and the discussion concerns only action which there comes evil.[79](#)

The first 12 categories listed above concerns the prophets, saints, and sages, the most exalted of men, who maintain the order of the universe, there being a prophet for each cycle of history and each people. The second concerns those who oppose the prophets and sages, those who are the deniers of truth, and the sophists and agnostics who are the lowest of men. The fourth class is the opposite of the first, i.e., the enemies of *Hikmat* and theology, of those who, seeing differences in the expressions of the

various sages, have denied the one truth which lies behind the diversity.<sup>80</sup> The fifth category is that of the jurists (*juqaha'*) who cultivate the practical sciences, and the sixth is that of their opposites like Mazdak,<sup>81</sup> who concern themselves only with their bodies and remain oblivious of the order of both this world and the next.

The last six categories concern particular arts and sciences. The first of them, or the seventh in our list, is that of professionals in particular arts, like physicians, engineers, and astronomers, and the eighth is that of their opposites, i.e. those who misuse each of these arts. The ninth category is like the particular sense of an organ of the body and concerns people who have only a theoretical knowledge of various arts and sciences, like music, medicine, or the principles of jurisprudence. The tenth is its opposite and in it are included those who make a false claim to know those sciences theoretically. The 11th category concerns arts and sciences which are limited to a particular subject and the 12th its opposite which concerns the rejection of these same arts and sciences.

In this classification we can already see the hierarchic structure of society at the top of which stand the prophets and saints in whom knowledge and action are combined, below them the *hukama'* and the theologians, then those concerned with practical arts and the particular sciences. The nobility of a vocation in each case depends upon the nobility of the subject-matter treated. Likewise, the degree of degradation of a person or group depends upon the truth that has been denied, the higher the degree of a truth, the baser is he who denies it. The categories outlined by Mir Findiriski reflect the hierarchy within *Hikmat* itself. In both cases the religious sciences, like theology, and the wisdom of the prophets and saints above all the other categories.

### Mulla Muhsin Faid-i Kashi

Mohammad ibn Shah Murtada ibn Shah Mahmud, better known as Mulla Muhsin or Faid-i Kashi, is the most famous of the sages of the generation following that of Mir Damad, Sheikh-i Baha'i, and Mir Findiriski. Born in Kashan in 1007/1600, he spent some years at Qum and then went to Shiraz to complete his studies with Mulla Sadra whose daughter he later married. He also studied with Mir Damad and Sheikh-i Baha'i but was more closely associated with Mulla Sadra. Just as Mir Damad produced a series of outstanding students, the best known of whom was Mulla Sadra – the greatest of the Safawid Hakims to whom we shall turn in a separate chapter – Mulla Sadra in turn produced a galaxy of famous students among whom Faid-i Kashi and Mulla 'Abd al-Razzaq Lahiji, both his sons-in-law, are the most important.<sup>82</sup>

The genius of Mulla Sadra consisted largely in unifying the three perspectives of formal revelation of *shar'*, purification of the soul leading to illumination (*kashf*), and rational demonstration (*falsafah*) into a single universal vision in which all these paths lead to the same truth. All of his followers sought to preserve the unity established by their master, each emphasizing some one aspect of it. For example, later sages like Qadi Sa'id Qumi, Mulla 'Ali Nuri, and Aqa 'Ali Zunuzi sought to correlate revelation and reason, and Aqa Mohammad Bidabadi and Aqa Mohammad Rida' Qumshih, reason and gnosis. Others

continued the path trodden by Mulla Sadra himself and emphasized the harmony of all the three paths mentioned above. Mulla Muhsin Faid and Haji Mulla Hadi Sabziwari, the most famous Persian thinker of the last century, belong to the last group. Mulla Muhsin's writings display a harmonious integration of reason, revelation, and gnosis with lesser emphasis upon reason. He succeeded perhaps more than anyone else in the Shi'ah world to bring about a complete harmony between Law and spiritual life, *Shari'ah* and *Tariqah*.

In many ways Mulla Muhsin may be considered to be a Shi'ah Ghazali, not only because of his pre-occupation with harmonizing the exoteric and the esoteric views, but also for his treatment of a spiritualized ethics which forms the requirements for the following Path. He even re-wrote the well-known *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* of Ghazali under the name of *al-Mahajjat al-Baida' fi Ihya' al-Ihya'*, substituting traditions (Hadith) from the Shi'ah sources for those from the Sunni ones given by Ghazali.<sup>83</sup>

The writings of Mulla Muhsin both in Arabic and Persian are too numerous to mention here.<sup>84</sup> Among the more famous, one may name *Haqq al-Yaqin*, *'Ain al-Yaqin*, and *'Ilm al-Yaqin* on *Hikmat*, *al-Safi*, *al-Wafi*, and *al-Shafi* on Qur'anic commentary and Hadith, *Mafatih al-Sharaya'* on jurisprudence, *al-Tathir* on ethics, *Jala al-'uyun*, *Zad al-Salik*, and *Kalimat-i Maknunah* on Sufism, numerous treatises on esoteric meaning of acts of worship, on various invocations, on particular sciences including astronomy, selections from and commentaries on the *Rasa'il* on the Ikhwan al-Safa, the *Futuh al-Makkiyyah* of ibn 'Arabi, and the *Mathnawi* of Jalal al-Din Rumi, and a large collection of poems consisting mostly of verses of Sufi inspiration. His works both in poetry and prose have remained very popular in Persia and ethical and social teachings have attracted particular attention in the past decades.

Mulla Muhsin's thought marks the final integration of *Hikmat* into Shi'ism. *Hikmat* in Persia had been moving in this direction for many centuries from the time of al-Farabi and ibn Sina. Suhrawardi Maqtul took the decisive step in regarding knowledge as personal illumination by the heavenly guide or "guardian angel." Mulla Sadra following him made the universal intellect the criterion of knowledge. Mulla Muhsin took a further step in this direction in identifying this intellect with the Shi'ah Imams, in whom the light of Mohammad (*al-nur al-Mohammadiyah*) is manifested and who are called the innocent (*ma'sum*) intellects.<sup>85</sup> Only by union with them, with the pure intellects, can one gain ultimate knowledge.

One of the important treatises of Mulla Muhsin, in which gnosis, *Hikmat* and *Shar'* are blended in characteristic fashion in the *Kalimat-i Maknunah* written in a mixture of Arabic and Persian.<sup>86</sup> It treats a complete cycle of theoretical gnosis so that its discussion gives a fair example of the totality of Mulla Muhsin's general perspective.

The work begins by assuring the reader that there is no way of reaching the essence of the Truth because the Truth encompasses all things. Everything is its manifestation, but only the *elite* (*khwass*) know what they see. Being is like light, but since its opposite does not exist in this world as in the case

of light which stands opposed to darkness, one cannot come to know it so easily. God is hidden because of the excess of His light, no veil can cover Him because every veil is a limitation and God is above all limitations.<sup>87</sup> Being *is* the Truth which subsists by Itself, while everything else subsists by consisting only of a reflection of Being itself.

The divine attributes and names are identical with the divine essence, while in themselves they are distinct. Likewise the forms of all beings in the divine intellect, i.e., the quiddities or essences, the *mahiyat* or *a'yan al-thabitah*,<sup>88</sup> are in one respect identical with and in another distinct from essence. Each being subsists by one of the divine names and its very existence consists in the invocation of that name. The archetype, *a'yan al-thabitah*, have two aspects; on the one hand, they are hidden and Truth is manifest, and on the other, Truth is the mirror in which they are reflected, in which case truth is hidden and they are manifest. These two aspects correspond also to two states of contemplation: one of Truth (*Haqq*) and the other of creation (*khalq*). The perfect gnostic contemplates both mirrors, he sees the cosmos as a mirror in which Truth is reflected, and his own essence as a mirror in which both the cosmos and Truth are reflected. Mulla Muhsin advises the sage to take a further step in eliminating himself also so that there remains nothing but Truth.<sup>89</sup>

Mulla Muhsin follows certain earlier Sufis in considering the world to be re-created at every instant,<sup>90</sup> so that its continuity is only apparent. The real continuity is “vertical,” i.e. between Truth and its manifestations, not “horizontal” and “substantial,” i.e. between parts and instances of the created world. The world is like a flowing stream which, although apparently a continuous and subsistent body, changes at every instant and a new particle coming to take its place.

The creation of the world or the effusion of unity into multiplicity does not take place immediately but through the divine names, each creature being the theophany (*tajalli*) of a particular name. The name Allah is the supreme master (*rabb al-arbab*) of all the names of theophany of which is the universal man (*al-insan al-kamil*). Although the stages in which creation comes into being are numerous, Mullah Muhsin names five degrees which mark the main steps. In the first degree is the divine essence which is above all distinctions and determinations; in the second are the names which are the manifestations of Truth in the world of divinity, *uluhiyyah*, in the third are the divine acts and world of spirits which are the manifestations of Truth in the world of Lordship, *rububiyyah*, in the fourth is the world of “ideas” and imagination (*khayul*)<sup>91</sup> which is the manifestation of Truth in the world of varying forms, and in the fifth is the world of the senses which is the manifestation of Truth in determined forms.<sup>92</sup> Everything in the physical world has its archetype in the world of imagination, while everything in the world of lordship is a form of one of the divine names, each name an aspect of the divine essence.

Man alone among creatures is able to cast aside these veils and reach the divine origin of things. He has a particular soul brought into being with his body, which soul is independent of matter, and also a universal soul which exists before the body and is manifested only in the spiritual *elite*. Moreover, man has a vegetative soul consisting of the faculties of attraction, repulsion, digestion, growth, and retention

originating in the heart, a sacred rational soul (*nafs-i natiqah-i qudsiyyah*) with the faculties of meditation (*fikr*) and invocation (*dhikr*), and the universal divine soul (*nafs-i kulliyah-i ilahiyyah*), not possessed by all men, with the faculty of reaching the station of annihilation (*fana`*) in the Divine.<sup>93</sup>

The goal of each man should be to awaken the potential faculties within him until all the accidental obstacles are removed and he becomes identified with the universal man, the theophany of the supreme name. Then he will be able to contemplate Absolute Being and thereby fulfil the purpose of all creation and sustain the whole universe.

The universal man is either a prophet or a saint. Absolute prophethood (*nubuwwat-i mutlaq*) is the supreme station, the perfect “form” of unity, the first pen, and the Pole of Poles, *qutb al-aqtab*, upon which all the prophets and saints depend. The inner (*atin*) dimension of this prophecy is absolute sainthood (*wilayat-i mutlaq*). Mulla Muhsin identifies absolute prophethood with the light of Mohammad, and absolute sainthood with the light of ‘Ali. The prophethood of all prophets depends upon absolute prophecy as the sainthood of all saints depends upon absolute sainthood. Prophethood began with Adam and found its completion in Prophet Mohammad. Sainthood will reach its completion gradually until it culminates in the 12th Imam, the Mehdi. Absolute prophethood is the treasure of all possible perfections and the whole cosmos in the expansion and manifestation of its inner qualities.<sup>94</sup>

Gnosis and illumination are themselves the fruit of the tree of prophethood. Mulla Muhsin insists that the source of *Hikmat* was originally the sacred spirit of the prophets; this wisdom, however, was misunderstood and misinterpreted by men of the later period, i.e. the Peripatetics and other later schools of Greek philosophy, and was revived only in the light of the revelation of the Prophet of Islam and his family. He who wishes to be initiated into it must, therefore, seek the aid of the prophets and saints and this can be achieved only by invocation and meditation and the purification of the heart. Only he who has trodden this path and become a true Hakim can be considered the real heir to the saints and the prophets.<sup>95</sup>

### **Mulla Mohammad Baqir Majlisi**

One cannot terminate a study of the intellectual life of the Safawid period without mentioning the two Majlisis, father and son, especially the son Mohammad Baqir who stands as one of the outstanding figures of the period. The first Majlisi, Mohammad Taqi (1003/1594 – 1070/1659), was one of the students of Sheikh-i Baha’i and an outstanding theologian and Sufi of his time.<sup>96</sup> His son, the second Majlisi (1037/1628 – 1110/1699), however, surpassed his father in fame and power and became the most dominant figure of Shi’ism. Having studied with his own father, Mulla Khalil Qazwini and Mulla Muhsin Faid, he in turn became the master of over a thousand disciples including Sayyid Ni’matullah Jaza’iri, well known for his many writings, especially the account of his own life as a student.

The second Majlisi is especially famous for revivifying the various branches of the Shi’ah sciences and for assembling the writings of the earlier doctors of Shi’ism and prophetic *hadith* into encyclopaedias

which have henceforth become the main reference for all who undertakes religious education in the Shi'ah *madrasahs*. The most important and famous of these is the *Bihar al-Anwar* summarized in the *Safinat al-Bihar* of Sheikh 'Abbas Qumi, the lithographed edition of which occupies 24 volumes: *Haqq al-Yaqin* in *Usul*, *Hayat al-Qulub*, a commentary upon the *Mir'at al'Uqul*, a 12 volume commentary writing career enters into purely intellectual (*'aqli*) questions and treats of many essential religious subjects, especially eschatology and the conditions before the appearance of Mehdi, from an intellectual rather than a purely "confessional" point of view.<sup>97</sup>

Of special interest in the religious life of Persia is Majlisi's opposition to Sufism and even the denial that his own father, the first Majlisi, was a Sufi.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, supported by the Court and many of the theologians and doctors, he opposed the intellectual method of the Hakims and philosophers with the result that both the Sufis and the Hakims fell into disgrace and had a lot of difficulty in official religious circles. The dynasty which had begun as the extension of Sufi order ended by opposing all Sufism and gnosis itself. It was not long after the death of the second Majlisi in fact that the Safawid dynasty itself fell before the Afghans, and Ispahan, the historic as well as the symbolic centre of this period of great intellectual activity was sacked and its libraries burnt.

## D. Conclusion

This form of wisdom or *Hikmat*, some features of which we have sought to outline here, did not die with the termination of the Safawid dynasty. In the 13th/18th century Sufism was revived in Persia by Ma'sum 'Ali Shah and Shah Tahir Dakani, two Ni'matullahi masters sent by Rida' 'Ali Shah from the Deccan to Persia. It was persecuted for a period but began to expand with the establishment of the Qajars. Likewise, the school of *Hikmat* continued through the students of Mulla Sadra and others from one generation to another until it produced Sheikh Ahmad Absai'i, the founder of the Sheikhi movement,<sup>99</sup> Haji Mulla Hadi Sabizwari, and several other outstanding figures in the Qajar period, the light of whose teachings has not yet disappeared from the horizon of Persia. One can hardly understand the intellectual life of Islam in its totality without taking into account this last major period of Muslim intellectual activity, lasting from the Safawid period to the present, to the understanding of which we hope this chapter will serve as an introduction and as an incentive for further exploration.

## Bibliography

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1. A few authors like Gobineau, Donaldson, and E. G. Browne have touched upon certain aspects of Shi'ism in their writings. The only European author, however, who has delved with serious intention into the Shi'ah intellectual world is Henri Corbin, who during the past 20 years has done much to introduce the rich heritage of Shi'ism, especially as it has developed in Persia, to the Western world.
2. For the meaning of this word which denotes wisdom refer to the chapter on Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi Maqtul.
3. Sheikh Safi (647/1249 – 735/1334), one of the most important of Shi'ah Sufi saints, is still greatly respected by the Sufis, his tomb in Ardibil has remained until today an important place of pilgrimage. Being the disciple of Sheikh Zahid Gilani he was already a significant figure in his own day as testified by the biographical works like the *Safwat al-Safa'* by ibn Bazzaz, and Rashid al-Din Fadl Allah's letters to the saint and to the governor of Ardibil in his *Munsha'at-i Rashidi*. See also E. G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, vol 4, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1924, Chap. 2.
4. For a history of the Safawid period, see E. G. Browne, op. cit., vol 4; L. Lockhart, *The Fall of the Safawid Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1958, and the traditional sources of which some of the more important include the *Safawat al-Safa'* by ibn Bazzaz, *Ahsan al-Tawarikh* by Hassan Baik Rumlu, *Zubdat al-Tawarikh* by Mohammad Muhsin ibn 'Abd al-Karim, and the universal history *Nasikh al-Tawarikh* by Mriza taqi Sipih.
5. The purpose of the theology is to protect the truth of a revelation against false reasoning; its role is, therefore, defensive. It is the shell which protects the inner spiritual life, not that life itself. If there were no danger of rationalism and false reasoning, there would be no need for theology. We, therefore, see theology coming into being with rationalistic philosophy, and where there is no tendency toward rationalism, there is no theology as this word is currently understood.
6. For a discussion of the meaning of ishraqi wisdom, refer to the chapter on Suhrawardi Maqtul.
7. The reason why the pre-Safawid sages of Persian like 'Ali Turkah Ispahani and ibn Abi Jumah as well as the Safawid authors themselves have been neglected in the Western world, is that the quality of their wisdom is primarily gnostic ('irfani) like that of Sheikh al-Akbar Muhyi al-Din ibn 'Arabi by whose doctrines they were all influenced, that like him they can be understood neither by the rationalistic philosophers nor by the mystics as they have come to be understood since the Renaissance.
8. For the name of some of these Arab Shi'ah scholars, see E. G. Browne, op. cit., vol. 4, Chap. 8.
9. The science of Usul as an independent science has grown into monumental proportions only in the past few centuries reaching its height in the hands of Sheikh Murtada Ansari, the famous doctor of the Qajar period, who only a century ago made Usul into a science matching Kalam in its logical subtleties.
10. Shi'ah theology reached its height in the seventh/13th century in the hands of men like Khuwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi and 'Allamah-i Hilli.
11. See the chapter on Suhrawardi Maqtul. Generally, Hikmah in Arabic or Hikmat in Persian means wisdom in addition to the particular sense given to it as a divine science.
12. For the series of commentators and expositors of ishraqi wisdom, see the chapter on Suhrawardi Maqtul.

- [13.](#) It is unfortunate that in books treating of the relation between faith and reason in Islam like A. J. Arberry's *Revelation and Reason in Islam*, London, 1957, most of these authors are not taken into serious consideration.
- [14.](#) For an account of the doctrines of ibn 'Arabi, see T. Burekardt (Tr), *La sagesse des prophetes*, Paris, 1955; also idem, *Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, tr. M. Matheson, Sh. Mohammad Ashraf, Lahore, 1959, which is an excellent general introduction to ibn 'Arabi's school of Sufism. See also Corbin, *L'imagination creatrice dans la souflame d'Ibn 'Arabi*, Flammarion, Paris, 1958, which contains some useful chapters on his ideas and their spread in the east.
- [15.](#) See S.M. Sadr, *Sheikh 'Ala al-Daulah Simnani*, Danish Press, Teheran, 1334/1915.
- [16.](#) This great Persian Sufi poet and sage has written several well-known summaries of ibn 'Arabi's doctrine including the *Lawa'ih* translated by Whinfield and Qazwini, Luzac & Co., London, 1928, the *Asha'at al-Lama'at*, and the *Naqd al-Nusus*.
- [17.](#) The *Kitab al-Mujli* of ibn Abi Jumhur and *Jami' al-Asrar* and *Jami' al-Haqa'iq* of Mulla Haidar 'Ali Amuli are among the most important sources of Shi'ah gnostic doctrines.
- [18.](#) The best traditional sources for these earlier Shi'ah authors are the *Raudat al-Jannat* of Mohammad Baqir Khunsari, lithographed edition, Teheran, 1306/1888; *al-Dhari'ah* of Agh Buzurg Tihrani, al Gharra Press, Najaf 1355/1936 on; the *Tarikh-i Alam Ara-yi Abbasi* of Iskandar Baig Munghi, Teheran, 1334/1915; and of more recent composition the *Raihanat al-Adab* of Mohammad 'Ali Tabrizi, Sa'di Press, Teheran, 1331 – 33 Solar; the *Qisas al-'Ulama'* of Mirza Mohammad Tunikabuni, Islamiyyah Press, Teheran, 1313 Solar; *Fihrisi-i Kutub-i Ihada'i Aqa-yi Mishkat* by M.B. Danish Puzhuh, University Press, Teheran, 1335/1916; see als H. Corbin, "Confession extatiques de Mir Damad" in the *Melanges Louis Mussignon*, Institut Francais de Dames, Damas, 1955, pp. 331 – 78.
- [19.](#) See Corbin, op. cit., pp. 333ff.
- [20.](#) His name should not in way be connected with the heterodox Baha'i movement of the 13th/19th century.
- [21.](#) For an account of the life and works of Sheikh-i Baha'i, see *Tarikh-i 'Alam Ara-yi 'Abbasi*, pp. 155 – 57; also Naficy, *Ahwal wa Ash'ar-i Farsi-i Sheikh-Baha'i*, Eqbal Press, Teheran, 1316/1898.
- [22.](#) Sheikh-i Baha'i is said to have built a bath house name Gulkan which had always had hot water without any fuel being used in it. When it was pulled down, people discovered a single candle burning under the water tank.
- [23.](#) This book on mathematics which helped greatly in reviving the study of the mathematical sciences in Persia was a standard text-book for centuries and has been commented upon several times and translated into Persian by Mohammad Amin Najafi Hijazi Qumi and into German by G. H. F. Nesselmann who published the text and the translation in Berlin in 1843. Sheikh-i Baha'i revived the study of mathematics and astronomy in Persia after 100 years of neglect, having himself learned these sciences in Herat.
- [24.](#) For a list of the nearly 90 works attributed to him, see his *Kulliyat-i Ash'ar-i Farsi*, ed. M. Tauhidiput, Mahmudi Press, Teheran, 1336/1917, pp. 42 – 45.
- [25.](#) Ibid., pp 164 – 66.
- [26.](#) Intoxication symbolizes ecstasy and spiritual union.
- [27.](#) Maulan Jala'i al-Din Rumi is commonly referred to as Maulawi in Persian. This verse refers to Maulawi's well-known rejection of rationalism in favour of gnosis. (The leg of rationalist is a wooden leg...).
- [28.](#) Love symbolizes gnosis or the science which comes through contemplation and illumination rather than analysis and discursive thought.
- [29.](#) Reference is to the famous theologian Imam Fakhr al-Din Razi.
- [30.](#) This verse is in Arabic and is repeated immediately with only a little change in Persian.
- [31.](#) That is, he is like a beast of burden.
- [32.](#) Reference is to the wisdom of the Sufis are contrasted with that of the Greeks, the *Hikmat-i Imani* and the *Hikmat-i Yunani*.
- [33.](#) The Prophet Mohammad (upon whom be peace).
- [34.](#) Sheikh-i Bhah'i, *Kulliyat...*, pp. 18 – 19.
- [35.](#) This theme appears in certain Hermetic writings, the Acts of Thomas, the Grail story, as well as in Islam in the visionary narratives of ibn Sina and many of Suhrawardi's gnostic tracts like *Qissah Ghurbat al-Gharbiyyah*; see H. Corbin, *Avicenne et le recit visionnaire*, Institut Franco-iranien, Teheran, and A. Maisonneuve, Paris, 1952 – 54, vol. 1, chap. 3, and Suhrawardi, *Oeuvres philosophiques et mystiques*, vol. 2, Institut Franco-Iranien, Teheran, and A. Maisonneuve, Paris,

1954, Prolegomene by H. Corbin.

[36.](#) Sheikh-i Baha-i, *Kulliyat...*, p. 23.

[37.](#) A city in the south of Arabia with which the name of the Queen of Sheba is associated.

[38.](#) La makan, meaning beyond the world of cosmic manifestation. Suhrawardi refers to this point which is the top of the cosmic mountain Qaf, as na kuja abad; see Suhrawardi, "Le bruissement de l'aile de Gabriel," tr. H. Corbin and P. Kraus, *Journal Asiatique*, Juillet-Sept., 1935, pp. 41 – 42.

[39.](#) For an account of the life and writings of Mir Damad, see M. Tunikabuni, *Qisas al-'Ulmaa*, pp. 333 – 35; *Raihanat al-Adab*, vol. 4, pp. 117 – 21; *Raudat al-Jannat*, pp. 114 – 16; *Tarikh-i 'Alam Ara-yi 'Abbasi*, pp. 146 – 47; Danish Pazhuh, *Fihrist...*, Vol. 3, 1, p. 152 and the good Introduction of his life and thought by Corbin, "Confessions extateiques de Mir Damad," pp. 340ff.

[40.](#) It is said that he had a lot of interest in the life of the bees and had accumulated a good deal of observational data about them.

[41.](#) For an account of these and other students of Mir Damad, see H. Corbin, *op. cit.*, pp 345 – 46.

[42.](#) The "Yamani philosophy" means the wisdom revealed by God to man through the prophets and through illumination; Yaman (Yemen) symbolizes the right or oriental (Mashriqi) side of the valley in which Moses heard the message of God. It is, therefore, the source of divine illumination in contrast to the Occident, the source of Peripatetic philosophy, the Occident symbolizing darkness and being on the plane of philosophy, i.e. rationalism. See. H. Corbin, *Le recit d'initiation et l'hermetisme en Iran*," *Eranos Jahrbuch*, vol. 17, 1949, pp. 136 – 37. For the symbols of the orient and Occident in ishraqi wisdom see the chapter on Suhrawardi Maqtul.

[43.](#) This major work has been commented upon several times. One of its most curious commentaries is that of Mohammad ibn 'Ali Rida ibn Aqajani, one of the students of Mulla Sadra; it runs over a thousand pages.

[44.](#) These last two works are among the important books on Hikmat in Persian, the others being in Arabic. Some manuscripts attribute *Sidrat al-Muntaha* to Mir Damad's student, Sayyid Ahmad 'Alawi, although in the *Jadhawat* Mir Damad refers to this work as being his own. In any case it is a product of his school.

[45.](#) For a translation and discussion of this work, see H. Corbin, *op. cit.*, pp. 350ff.

[46.](#) See for example the *Shifa'* or *Najat* of ibn Sina and the *Kitab al-Mu'tabar* of Abu al-Barakat al-Baghdadi. In some cases as in the *Danish Nameh-i Ala'i* of ibn Sina and many later ishraqi writings, the book begins with metaphysics and then proceeds to natural philosophy in the manner of Plato rather than Aristotle.

[47.](#)

See Mir Damad, *Qabasat*, Sheikh Mahmud Burujirdi, Shiraz, 1315/1897.

[48.](#) For a general discussion of this question, see L. Gardet, *La pensee religieuse d'Avicenne*, J. Vrin, Paris, 1951, pp. 38ff, and A. K. Coomarasawany, *Time and Eternity*, *Artibus Asiaticae*, Ascona, 1947, Chap. 4.

[49.](#) Mr. Dmad, *Qabasat*, pp. 1 – 10.

[50.](#) *Ibid*, p. 7.

[51.](#) Mir Damad argues that time itself is the measure of the movement of the heavens and a condition for the existence of this world so that one cannot speak of a time before the creation of the world; *Qabasat*, p. 20.

[52.](#) For a comparison and affinity of these ideas with those of ibn 'Arabi, see *La sagesse des prophets*, Chapters One and Two.

[53.](#) In presenting this view of creation, Mir Damad draws heavily on earlier writings from Plato's *Timaeus* and the so-called *Theology of Aristotle* to the *Shifa'* of ibn Sina and the *Kitab al-Mu'tabar* of Abu al-Barakat. In each case he also criticizes the view of the previous writers who considered the world either to be eternal in itself or created in time from outside. Mir Damad's *Risalah fe Madhhab Aristotalis* is devoted to a discussion of the difference between the views of Plato and Aristotle on the question time and eternity drawing on Farabi's *Kitab Jam' bain al-Ra'yain*. Mir Damad's treatise is published on the margin of the *Qabasat*, pp. 140 – 57.

[54.](#) The *Jadhawat* (Bombay, lithographed edition, 1302/1884, pp. 203) begins with a poem in praise of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib the first lines of which are as follows:

Oh herald of the nation and the soul of the Prophet,  
The ring of thy knowledge surrounds the ears of the intelligences.

Oh thou in whom the book of existence terminates,  
To whom the account or creation refers  
The glorified treasure of the revelation,  
Thou art the holy interpreter of its secrets.

[55.](#) Suhrawardi also divides the angelic world into the longitudinal and the latitudinal orders, a division the influence of which upon Mir Damad is easy to discern. On the question of angelology the Safawid sages remained faithful to the ishraqi scheme combined with that of ibn Sina. See the chapter of Suhrawardi Maqtul.

[56.](#) The natures refer to the warm and cold, wet and dry, and the elements to the four traditional ones, fire, air, water and earth.

[57.](#) Mir Damad and Mulla Sadra, unlike Aristotle and his followers, posit some form of matter in every degree of formal manifestation.

[58.](#) Mir Damad mentions that there are 1,400 species of animals, 800 belonging to sea and 600 belonging to land.

[59.](#) Jadhawdat, pp. 2 – 13.

[60.](#) Ibid., pp. 13 – 18.

[61.](#) Ibid., pp. 18 – 28..

[62.](#) Ibid., pp. 28ff.

[63.](#) In discussing tauhid, Mir Damad draws not only on ibn Sina and Suhrawardi but even on the Nahj al-Balaghah of the first Shi'ah Imam, the Sahifah-i Sajjadiyyah of the fourth Imam and other Shi'ah sources. He regards Pythagoras as the Imam of the Seitic sages (Hukama-i Sami) and one who received his wisdom through revelation. This view going back to Philo is held among the great majority of the Muslim sages and historians of philosophy.

[64.](#) Jadhawat, pp. 38ff.

[65.](#) This intermediary region plays an important role in the thought of Mulla Sadra and even more in the writings of Sheikh Ahmad Asha'i, the founder of the Sheikhis who still survive in Kerman.

[66.](#) These are two famous mythical cities through which initiates pass in their journeys and they appear often in initiatic narratives in Persian.

[67.](#) Jadhawat, pp. 54 – 63.

[68.](#) Ibid., p. 100.

[69.](#) Ibid., p. 103. In the same work, p. 92, the last part of which is wholly devoted to the important traditional Muslim science of jafr, he considers numbers to be the principles of beings, the illumination from the intelligible world, the "Michael of the degree of existence" and adds that if a person acquires all the knowledge of numbers he will gain complete knowledge of the physical world. This view is very close to that of Pythagoras and his school. See Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, Book 5. In both cases number is not just the quantity of modern mathematics, but a "personality," an entity which possesses a definite qualitative aspect. For the notion of the Pythagoreans, see H. Keyser, *Akroasis*, Verlag Gert Jatje, Stuttgart, 1947.

[70.](#) For a profound study of this subject as developed before Mir Damad, see S. T. Burckhardt, *La cle spirituelles de l'astrologie musulmane d'apres Ibn 'Arabi*, Editions Traditionelle, Paris, 1950.

[71.](#) The other two are Sheikh-i Baha-i and Mir Damad who were close friends of Mir Findiriski and shared with him the respect and honour of the Safawid Court. For an account of the life of Mir. Findiriski whose complete name is Mir Abu al-Qasim ibn Mirza Baik Husain Findiriski, see *Raihanat al-Adab*, vol. 3 pp. 231 – 32.

[72.](#) The story is told of him in most biographies that one day Shah 'Abbas, trying to admonish him for mixing with the common people, said, "I hear some of the leading scholars and sages have been attending cock-fights in the bazaar." Mir Findiriski, knowing that the remark was meant for him, replied, "Your majesty, rest assured, I was present but I saw none of the 'ulama' there." See *Riyad al-'Arifin*, p. 276.

[73.](#) The text of this qasidah and the commentary by Khalkali have been published in Teheran, lithographed edition, 1325/1907. This verse means the celestial archetypes of Platonic ideas and their earthly reflections or shadows.

[74.](#) Reference is to Farabi and ibn Sina, the two early masters of masha'i philosophy in Islam.

[75.](#) "Qualities" means multiplicity of forms which become evident only when light shines upon them.

[76.](#) The later Muslim authors following ibn Sina divide reality into the Necessary Being (*wajib al-wufud*), the possible being (*mumkin al-wufud*) and the being that is impossible (*mumtani' al-wujud*).

- [77.](#) All the arguments begin because each side considers only one aspect of the Truth. But those who are “complete,” that is, have a vision of the totality of the Truth, never enter into arguments.
- [78.](#) Mir Findiriski, Raisaleh-i Sand'iyah, Sa'adat Press, Teheran, 1317 Solar.
- [79.](#) Ibid., pp. 13 – 54.
- [80.](#) Mir Findiriski adds that all the Greek philosophers before Aristotle were saying the same thing in different languages and that if one is instructed in the secrets (rumuz) of Hikmat, Hindu wisdom, and the Theology of Aristotle (i.e. the Enneads of Plotinus), all the different expressions will have the same meaning for him.
- [81.](#) Mir Findiriski mentions Mazdak as the person who by a false interpretation of the Avesta preached the communization of women and property. He also mentions Carmathians (Qaramitah) as belonging to this group.
- [82.](#) Mulla-i Lahiji, known as Fayyad author of several important treatises on Hikmat in Persian and Arabic mentioned already, deserves a separate study as one of the major figures of this period. There are brief accounts of him in E. G. Browne, op. cit., vol 4, pp. 408 – 09, 435. See also the introduction by Sayyid Mohammad Mishkat to the new edition of al-Mahajjat al-Baida', vol. 1, Islamiyyah Press, Teheran, 1380 Solar, in which the significance of Faid's doctrines and in particular the present work on ethics is discussed.
- [83.](#) See Mulla Muhsin Faid-i kasha, al-Mahajjat al-Baida' fi lhya' al-lhya', four volumes, Islamiyyah Press, Teheran, 1380 – 81 Solar, in which in ten sections he deals with Sufi ethics based on Shi'ah sources but following closely the model of lhya'.
- [84.](#) The Raihanat al-Adab, vol. 3, pp. 242 – 44, mentions 120 works by him. For the account of Mulla Muhsin's life and writings, consult also Qisas al-'Ulama', pp. 322 – 33, and Riyad al-'Arifin, pp. 388 – 89.
- [85.](#) Mulla Muhsin Faid, A'inih-i Shahi, Musawi Press, Shiraz, 1320/1902, p. 5.
- [86.](#) Kalimat-i Maknunah, Teheran, lithographed edition, 1316/1898. Henceforth, our reference to this work will be to this edition.
- [87.](#) Ibid., p. 15.
- [88.](#) For an explanation of these terms see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Being and Its polarisation,” Pakistan Philosophical Journal, Vol. 3, No. 2, October 1959, pp. 8 – 13. In the general discussion among the Hakims as to whether these essences (or Being) are principal, Mulla Muhsin sides with the school of isalat-i wujud, the principality of Being, and considers the mahiyat to be the accidents of Being. This question has been dealt with in the chapter of Suhrawardi Maqtul.
- [89.](#) Kalimat-i Maknunah, pp. 31ff. Mulla Muhsin describes these stages also as the 'ilm al-yaqin, in which one “sees” nothing but the divine essence names, and acts; the 'ain al-yaqin, in which one “sees” nothing but the essence and names, and the haqq al-yaqin in which there remains only the divine ipseity.
- [90.](#) See T. Burckhardt, Introduction to Sufi Doctrine, pp. 64ff.
- [91.](#) This term should not be taken in its negative connotation; it has a positive meaning in Sufi cosmology and marks an intermediate stage between the sensible world and the spiritual world. See H. Corbin, Imagination creatrice..., Chap. 2.
- [92.](#) Kalimat-i Maknunah, p. 61.
- [93.](#) Ibid., pp. 74 – 75.
- [94.](#) Ibid., pp. 167ff.
- [95.](#) Ibid., pp. 214 – 19.
- [96.](#)  
Raihanat al-Adab, vol. 3, pp. 460 – 62. The Mar'at al-Ahwal-i Jahan Numa' by Ahmad ibn Mohammad Baqir Ispahani Bihbahani is devoted to his life and works.
- [97.](#) For the writings and life of the second Majlisi, see Raihanat al-Adab, vol. 3, pp. 455 – 60; Danish Pazhuh, Fihrist... vol. 5, p. 1137. The Faid-i Qudsi by Mirza Hussain Nuri is devoted completely to his life and writings. Majlisi wrote 13 Arabic and 55 Persian books with altogether occupy nearly a million and a half lines.
- [98.](#) He devoted a treatise, the 'Itiqadat, to rejecting Sufism.
- [99.](#) Sheikh Ahmad is responsible for the last important religious movement within Shi'ism and should be studied separately as a founder of a particular sect. The leaders of this sect called the Sheikhis claim to have knowledge of all things, and so each of them from the time of Sheikh Ahmad to the present has composed a large number of treatises on all the sciences., For a list of the works of Sheikh Ahmad and other leaders of the Sheikhis, see Abu al-Qasim ibn Zain al-'Abidin ibn Karim, Fihrist-i Kutub-i Marhum- Ahsu'i wa Sa'r-i Mashayikh-i 'Izam, two vols. Sa'adat Press, Kerman, 1337, Solar.

# Chapter 48: Sadr al-Din Shirazi

Sadr al-Din Shirazi (Mulla Sadra)<sup>1</sup>

## A. Life and Works

The intellectual activity revived in Persia during the Safawid period, some features of which we have discussed in previous chapters, “The School of Ispahan,” found its culmination in Sadr al-Din Shirazi known to his compatriots as Akhund Mulla Sadra and to his disciples as simply Akhund or as *Sadr al-Muti’allihin*, i.e. the foremost among the theosophers. This figure, about whom the whole intellectual life of Persia has revolved in the past three and half centuries and who is one of the major expositors of Islamic intellectual doctrines in the Shi’ah world, has remained until today almost completely unknown outside Persia, even in other Muslim countries. Many have heard of his name, and nearly all travellers to Persia since the Safawid period, who have been interested in the intellectual life of the country, have recognized his importance have been impressed by his fame,<sup>2</sup> yet no one outside a group of his disciples in Persia, who have kept his school alive until today, has done justice to his doctrines in presenting them to the world at large.

Mulla Sadra, whose complete name is Sadr al-Din Mohammad, was born in Shiraz in about 919/1571,<sup>3</sup> the only son of Ibrahim Shirazi. A member of the famous Qawam family of Shiraz, Ibrahim held the post of a vizier and was a powerful political and social figure in his native city. The young Sadr al-Din exhibited his exceptional intelligence from childhood and was given the best possible education in Shiraz.

Having completed his early studies, he became intensely interested in the intellectual sciences (*al-‘ulum al-‘aqliyyah*), especially metaphysics, and, therefore, left Shiraz for Ispahan which was at that time the capital and major seat of learning in Persia. In Ispahan he studied first with Baha’ al-Din ‘Amili, learning the transmitted sciences (*al-‘ulum al-naqliyyah*) from him and later with Mir Damad who was his most famous master in the intellectual sciences.<sup>4</sup> Within a few years he became himself a recognized master in all the branches of formal learning especially in *Hikmat*<sup>5</sup> in which he soon surpassed his own teachers.

Not satisfied simply with formal learning, Mulla Sadra left the worldly life in general and retired to a small village named Kahak near Qum where he spent 15 years in asceticism and purification of his soul until, as he claims in his introduction to the *Asfar*, he became endowed with the direct vision of the intelligible world. He now came to “see” through illumination (*ishraq*) what he had previously learned theoretically from books.

Having reached both formal and spiritual perfection, Mulla Sadra returned once again to the world.

Meanwhile, Allahwirdi Khan, the Governor of Shiraz, had built a large *madrasah* and invited Mulla Sadra to return to Shiraz as the head of the new school. Akhund accepted the offer and returned to his native city, making the school of Khan the major centre of intellectual sciences in Persia.<sup>6</sup> He remained there until the end of his life spending the last period of his terrestrial existence entirely in teaching and writing.

Despite his extreme piety which is shown by the fact that he made the pilgrimage to Mecca seven times on foot – he died in Basrah in 1050/1640 during the seventh journey – Mulla Sadra was often molested by some of the exoteric '*ulama*' who could not accept his gnostic interpretation of the doctrines of the faith and who denounced him publicly on more than one occasion. It was only the influence of his powerful family that made it possible for him to continue his teaching activities.

Mulla Sadra's life, then, can be divided into three distinct periods: the period of childhood and schooling in Shiraz and Ispahan, the period of asceticism near Qum at the end of which the composition of the *Asfar* was begun, and the period of teaching and writing which represents the result and fruition of the other two periods. His life is itself the testimony of one of the main aspects of his wisdom, that in order to be effective theoretical knowledge must be combined with spiritual realization.

The writings of Mulla Sadra, nearly all of which were composed in the last period of his life, are almost without exception of great merit and have been among the main sources from which the later generations of theologians, philosophers, and gnostics have drawn their inspiration. All his writings concern religious sciences or metaphysics, theodicy or *Hikmat*,<sup>7</sup> and are in a very clear and fluent style making them more easily understandable to the reader than the writings of his predecessors like Mir. Damad.<sup>8</sup> Since Mulla Sadra's writings are nearly completely unknown outside Persia, we take this opportunity to list the works which, according to the leading living authorities and the best historical evidence, were written by him.<sup>9</sup>

The works dealing with metaphysics and intellectual sciences include: *al-Asfar al-Arba'ad*, *al-Mabda' w-al-Ma'ad*, *Sirr al-Nuqtah* (possibly not authentic), *al-Shawahid al-Rububiyyah*, his most lucid and masterly work, *al-Hikmat al-'Arshiyah*, glosses upon the *Hikmat al-Ishraq* of Suhrawardi Maqṭul, commentary (*sharh*) upon the *Hidayah* of Athiri,<sup>10</sup> glosses upon the metaphysical parts of ibn Sina's *Shifa'*, *Fi Ittihad al-'Aqil w-alMa'qul*, *Fi Ittisaf al-Mahiyyah w-al-Wujud*, *Fi Bad' Wujud al-Insan*, *Fi al-Tasawwar w-al-Tasqid*, *Fi al-Jabr w-al-Tafwid*, *Fi Huduth al-'Alam*, *Fi Hashr*, *Fi Sarayan al-Wujud*, *fi al-Qada' w-al-Qadar*, *Fi Tashakhkhus*, *al-Masa'il al-Qudsiyyah*, *Iksir al-'Arifin*, *al-Waridat al-Qalbiyyah*, *al-Qawa'id al-Malakutiyyah*, *Hall al-Mushkilat al-Falakiyyah*, introduction to '*Arsh al-Taqdis* of Mir Damad, *al-Mazahir*, glosses upon *Rawashih al-Samawwiyyah* of Mir Damad, *Khalq al-'A'mal*, *Kasr al-Asnam al-Jahiliyyah*, *al-Mizaj*, *al-Ma'ad al-Jismanim*, *Tanqiyah* in logic, *diwan* of poems in Persian, and answers to various questions on philosophy.

The works that are primarily concerned with the religious sciences include the Qur'anic commentary: *Mafatih al-Ghaib*, *Asrar al-Ayat*, commentary upon a large number of the verses of the Qur'an, commentary upon a few prophetic *Ahadith fi Imamah*, glosses upon the Qur'anic commentary of

Baidawi, glosses upon the Khwaja Nasir al-Din al-Tusi and upon Qushji's commentary upon the *Tajrid* (of doubtful authenticity), glosses upon the commentary of the *Lum'ah*, commentary upon the *Usul al-Kafi* of Kulaini, one of the four major sources of Shi'ah Law,<sup>11</sup> *Mutashabih al-Qur'an*, and a Persian treatise called *Sih Asl* on the soul and its destiny.<sup>12</sup>

Mulla Sadra composed also several quatrains in Persian, a few of which are mentioned in the traditional sources and some appear in his own handwriting on the first page of his commentary upon the *Hidayah*.<sup>13</sup> They deal mostly with the Sufi doctrine of the unity of Being (*wahdat al-wufid*), which may be considered to be the central theme of Mulla Sadra's doctrinal formulations. For example, in one of the quatrains he says,

The Truth is the spirit of the universe and the universe of the body,  
And the orders of the angels are the senses of the body,  
The heavens, elements, and compounds are its organs,  
Lo! Unity is this, and the rest nothing but rhetoric.

In dividing the writings of Mulla Sadra into the intellectual and the religious ones, we do not in any way wish to imply that these two categories are completely separated in his view. On the contrary, one of the major achievements of Mulla Sadra consisted in uniting and harmonizing religion and the intellectual sciences. All of his works, even in philosophy, are replete with the Qur'anic verses in support of his conclusions, and all of his religious works, even the Qur'anic commentaries, are full gnostic and intellectual interpretations. One can only say that some of Akhund's writings are concerned more with religious questions and others more with intellectual ones.

Likewise, among the above-mentioned works some are more gnostic in character and others are presented in a more discursive language, although they all bear the fragrance of gnostic doctrines. Among writings which are of a more gnostic vein one may mention *al-Shawahid al-Rububiyyah*, *al-'Arshiyyah*, *Asrar al-Ayat*, and *al-Waridat al-Qalbiyyah*, and among those which are presented in a more discursive language are the *Sharh al-Hidayah* and the commentary upon the *Shifa'*.

Without a doubt the most important work of Mulla Sadra is the *Asfar al-Arba'ah*. It is comparable in dimension and scope to the *Shifa'* and the *Futuh al-Makkiyyah* and in a way stands midway between the Peripatetic encyclopedia of ibn Sina and the compendium of esoteric sciences of ibn 'Arabi. The title of *Asfar* itself has been the cause of much difficulty to the few Orientalists who are acquainted with the book. The word *Asfar* is the broken plural for *safar* meaning journey as well as *sifr* meaning "book" from the Hebrew *sefer*. So it was that Gobineau considered the work to be a series of four books."<sup>14</sup>

Both views are, however, erroneous. Actually, *asfar* means journeys but not the account of travels in the ordinary sense of the word as Gobineau understood it to be. As Mulla Sadra himself mentions in his introduction to the book, the *Asfar* consists of the following four stages or journeys of initiatic realization (*suluk*): (1) the journey of the creature or creation (*khalq*) towards the Creator or the Truth (*Haqq*), (2)

the journey in the Truth with the Truth, (3) the journey from the Truth to creation with the Truth, and (4) the journey with the Truth in the creation. This monumental work is, therefore, an account of the stages of the journey of the gnostic, systematized in a logical dress.

In content, the first book of the *Asfar* deals with Being and its various manifestations, the second with the simple substances, i.e. the intelligences, souls, and bodies and their accidents including, therefore, natural philosophy, and the third with theodicy, and the fourth with the soul, its origin, becoming and end. All these topics are treated in detail taking into account the voluminous. [15](#) In a sense, this vast *opus* is the culmination of a thousand years of contemplation and thought by Muslim sages as well as the foundation of a new and original intellectual perspective which issues forth from within the matrix of the Muslim tradition.

## **B. Sources of Mulla Sadra's Doctrines**

According to Mulla Sadra, there are two forms of knowledge: that derived from formal instruction (*al-'ilm al-suwari*) and that which comes from intellectual intuition (*al-'ilm al-ladunni*). The first is acquired in school with the aid of a teacher, and the second based upon a greater degree of certainty than the first, is the science possessed by the prophets and saints through the purification of the soul and the catharsis (*tajrid*) of the intellect. [16](#) There are then, according to this view, two sources for Mulla Sadra's ideas, one formal and in a sense historical, i.e. manifested in history before him, and the other spiritual and invisible. Regarding this second source, which may be called his "guardian angel" or "hidden Imam," the source of all inner illumination, we have little to say except to emphasize its importance in Mulla Sadra's view.

It was the first category that we are primarily concerned here. There are five principal elements which are clearly detectable in the new analysis brought about by Mulla Sadra; they are also found, though less explicitly, in the doctrines of the Safawid sages before him. These elements include the philosophy of Aristotle and his followers, the doctrines of the Neo-Platonic sages, especially Plotinus whose *Enneads* the Muslims considered to be a work of Aristotle, the teachings of ibn Sina, the gnostic doctrines of ibn 'Arabi, and the principles of the Islamic revelation, especially the more esoteric teachings of the Prophet and the Shi'ah Imams. [17](#)

Among these sources the last two are of particular importance. Mulla Sadra created a new school of *Hikmat*, on the one hand, by putting the intuitions of the gnostics and especially of ibn 'Arabi and his followers into a logical dress and, on the other hand, by drawing out the philosophical and metaphysical implications of the teachings of the Imams especially as contained in the *Nahj al-Balaghah*, creating thereby for the first time what may be called a distinctly Muslim school of *Hikmat* based especially upon the inspired doctrines which form the very basis of Shi'ism.

Mulla Sadra, like Suhrawardi, held in great esteem the pre-Socratic philosophers and sages of Greece, both historical and mythological, and regarded Thales, Anaximander, Agathedemon, Empedocles,

Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle as the last group of sages in the ancient world to have possessed wisdom in its entirety. He, like many other Muslim Hakims, considered Greek philosophy not to have started with Aristotle but to have ended with him and believed all the later Greek sages to have been masters of various arts and sciences other than metaphysics. [18](#)

For Mulla Sadra, therefore, Greek philosophy was essentially the wisdom of the Hebrew prophets inherited, systematized, and later in part forgotten by the Greeks, a wisdom which was integrated into the Muslim intellectual perspective and brought to full fruition in the light of the Islamic revelation. That is why Mulla Sadra wishes to reject some aspects of the teachings of either the Peripatetics or the Illuminationists he appeals so often first to the Qur'an and the Hadith and then to those fragmentary sayings of the pre-Socratic philosophers with which the Muslims were acquainted.

### **C. Mulla Sadra's Method and the Characteristics of His School**

The particular genius of Mulla Sadra was to synthesize and unify the three paths which lead to the Truth, viz. revelation, rational demonstration, and purification of the soul, which last in turn leads to illumination. For him gnosis, philosophy, and revealed religion were elements of a harmonious ensemble writings. He formulated a perspective in which rational demonstration or philosophy, although not necessarily limited to that of the Greeks, became closely tied to the Qur'an and sayings of the Prophet and the Imams, and these in turn became unified with the gnostic doctrines which result from the illuminations received by a purified soul. [19](#)

That is why Mulla Sadra's writings are a combination of logical statements, gnostic intuitions traditions of the Prophet, and the Qur'anic verses. Through the symbolic interpretation of the sacred text he demonstrated the gnostic quality of the esoteric meaning of revelation and through intellectual intuition he made rational and discursive thought subservient to the universal truths of gnosis. In this fashion he achieved that synthesis of science and revelation in the light of gnosis and in the general perspective of Islam towards which Farabi and ibn Sina – the latter particularly in his Qur'anic commentaries – had aimed and which Ghazli, Suhrawardi and the whole chain of sages extended from the Saljuq to the Safawid period had sought to achieve from various points of view. [20](#)

In metaphysics or, more generally speaking, *Hikmat* itself, Mulla Sadra is credited with founding the third major school of Muslim "philosophy," the first two being the Peripatetic school, the greatest exponent of which in the Islamic world was ibn Sina, and the Illuminationistic or *ishraqi* school founded by Suhrawardi Maqtul. [21](#) Mulla Sadra adopted certain principles from each school as, for example, the hylomorphism from the Peripatetics and the gradation of Being and the celestial archetypes from the Illuminationists. Moreover, he added certain principles drawn from the teachings of the Sufis like ibn 'Arabi such as the continual becoming of the substance of the world and unity of Being which had never appeared as principles of any school of *Hikmat* and were never systematized in the logical language of the Hakims before Akhund's time. That is why Mulla Sadra is often credited with founding a new and

original form of wisdom in the Muslim world is usually called *al-Hikmat al-Muti'aliyyah* as distinguished from *al-Hikmat al-Masha'iyyah* (Peripatetic philosophy) and *al-Hikmat al-Ishraqiyyah* (Illuminationist theosophy).<sup>22</sup>

## D. Division of the Sciences

Before discussing the basic features of Mulla Sadra's doctrines it is useful to consider his conception of the relation of the sciences to one another and especially the meaning and significance accorded to *Hikmat*. In the introductory chapter of the *Asfar*, he divides the sciences, following the Peripatetics, into theoretical wisdom consisting of logic, mathematics, natural philosophy, and metaphysics and practical wisdom consisting of ethics, economics and politics.<sup>23</sup>

In the treatise *Iksir al-'Arifin*, he outlines a somewhat more complete and in a way more original division of the sciences.<sup>24</sup> According to this scheme, the sciences (*'ulum*) are either of this world (*dunyawi*) or of the other (*ukhrawi*). The first is divided into three categories: the science of words (*'ilm al-aqwal*), the science of acts (*'ilm al-af'al*) and the science of states of contemplation or thought (*'ilm al-ahwal* or *afkar*).

The science of words comprises the sciences of the alphabet, word-construction, syntax, prosody, poetics, and the meanings of terms in logic. The science of acts consists of what belongs to various material objects from which the arts of weaving, agriculture, and architecture come into being, what is of a higher degree such as the art of writing, the science of mechanics, alchemy, etc, what belongs to providing a living for the individual and the society from which the sciences of family, law, politics, and the *Shari'ah* are created, and, finally, what belongs to the acquisition of spiritual and moral virtues and the casting away from evil from which the "science of the path" (*'ilm al-tariqah*), i.e. Sufism, comes into being. As for the science of thought, it consists of the sciences of logical demonstration, the science of arithmetic, the science of geometry including astronomy and astrology, and the sciences of nature including medicine and the various sciences dealing with minerals, plants, and animals.

The sciences of the other world which are not accessible to the ordinary intelligence of men and are not destroyed with the death of the body include the knowledge of angels and intellectual substances, the knowledge of the Preserved Tablet (*lah al-mahfuz*), and the knowledge of the Exalted Pen (*al-qalam al-a'la*), i.e. of the divine decree and of the first determination of the divine essence which Mulla Sadra, following the earlier Sufis, calls also by the name of the reality of Mohammad (*al-haqiqat al-Mohammadiyyah*). These sciences also include the knowledge of death, resurrection, and all that pertains to life hereafter.<sup>25</sup>

Among the pursuits with which man can occupy himself in this life, none stands in as exalted a position as *Hikmat* the divisions of which we have outlined above. And among its branches none is as important and principled as metaphysics or the science of the principle of things, so that this branch of knowledge alone is often considered worthy of being called *Hikmat*. Mulla Sadra defines this science as "coming to

know the state of the essence of beings as they are, to the extent of human capacity” or “ a man’s becoming an intellectual world (microcosm) corresponding to the objective world (macrocosm),” or, to quote still another definition, “the comprehension of universals and catharsis from the world of matter.”<sup>26</sup>

The above definitions imply that *Hikmat* is a purely intellectual form of knowledge in which the knower himself undergoes a certain transformation in the process of knowing and his soul becomes a mirror in which the cosmic hierarchy is reflected. With such a conception then it is no wonder that Mulla Sadra spent so much of his life in teaching and writing about *Hikmat* only and regarded all the other sciences as its subsidiaries.

## **E. Principles of Mulla Sadra’s Doctrines**

In discussing the basic principles of *Hikmat* as understood and expounded by Mulla Sadra, we have chosen to mention those major principles of his thought which distinguish him from his predecessors and which are the characteristic elements of his metaphysics. The doctrines of the Peripatetic and Illuminationistic schools as well as the ideas of ibn ‘Arabi and his followers form the common background for the metaphysics of Mulla Sadra.

There are four topics in each of which Mulla Sadra has departed from earlier philosophical perspectives and which form the principles of his whole intellectual vision. These four subjects concern (1) being and its various polarizations, (2) substantial motion or the becoming and change of the substance of the world, (3) knowledge and the relation between the knower and the known, and (4) the soul, its faculties, generation, perfection and final resurrection. We shall consider these questions in the above mentioned order, emphasizing in each case the particular complexion given to these subjects by Mulla Sadra.

### **1. Unity and Polarization of Being**

The cornerstone of Mulla Sadra’s doctrines is the principality and the unity and gradation of Being. As we have already mentioned,<sup>27</sup> one of the major points of contention among Muslim philosophers and theologians concerned the question whether Being or the quiddities (*mahiyyat*) of things are principal. We saw that the Muslim Peripatetics like the Sufis believed in the principality of Being, i.e. the objective reality of Being independent of mental abstractions and considered the quiddities to be nothing but accidents, while the Illuminationists beginning with Suhrawardi Maqtul and followed by Mulla Sadra’s own teacher, Mir Damad, developed a “metaphysics of essences” and held the opposite view that existence is an accident and that the essences are principal. In this debate Mulla Sadra sided definitely with the Peripatetics and Sufis in accepting the principality of Being, and opposed the Illuminationists.

On the question of unity and gradation of Being, however, Mulla Sadra departed from peripatetic teachings completely. In the view of the Muslim Peripatetics the being of each thing is in essence different and distinct from other beings while it is principal with respect to its own quiddity. According to Akhund, however, Being is the same reality in all realms of existence, it is a single reality but with

gradations and degrees of intensity. Just as we say the light of the sun, the light of a lamp, or the light of a glow-worm and mean the same subject, i.e. light, but with different predicates, i.e. under different conditions of manifestation, so in the case of Being, the being of God, of a man, of a tree, or of a heap of earth are all one Being or one reality but in various degrees of intensity of manifestation.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, Being, no matter where it manifests itself, appears always with its attributes or armies (*'asakir*), as they are traditionally called, such as knowledge, will, power, etc.<sup>29</sup> A stone, because it exists, is a manifestation of Being and, therefore, has knowledge, will, power, and intelligence like men or angels. However, since at the level of a stone the manifestation of Being is very weak, these attributes are hidden and not perceptible.<sup>30</sup>

The various beings in the world of manifestation are limitations of the one reality or Being. These limitations are abstracted by the mind and become the forms of quiddities (*mahiyyat*) of things, and when transposed into the principle domain, they become the Platonic ideas or archetypes. Unlike Being which is objectively real and in fact is the reality of the cosmos, the *mahiyyat* are accidents of Being abstracted by the mind without having a reality independent of Being. Even the archetypes (*al-a'yan al-thabitah*) possess a form of Being which in this case is God's knowledge of them.

What distinguishes the earthly manifestation of things from their celestial archetypes is not a gradation of the *mahiyyat* from more subtle to more gross modes of existence, as certain followers of the Illuminationist school believe. Rather, it is the intensity of Being which determines the level of existence of each creature. If the light of Being shines upon the form or quiddity of a man with a greater intensity than now, he will become the man of the intermediate world (*barzakh*) and if the intensity is greater still he will become the celestial man identified with his heavenly archetype.

Absolute Being itself, which is the proper subject for metaphysics, is above all limitations and, therefore, above all forms or *mahiyyat*, above all substances and accidents. It is the "Form of forms" and the Agent of all acts. By manifesting Itself longitudinally (*tuli*) It brings into being the various orders of Being from the archangels to terrestrial creatures and by manifesting itself latitudinally (*'ardi*) It creates the various members of each order of Being.<sup>31</sup> Being is the reality of all things so that the knowledge of anything is ultimately the knowledge of Its being and, therefore, of Being itself. Likewise, the archetypes exist eternally through God's knowledge without which they would have no share whatsoever in Being.

Since Being is unity in multiplicity and multiplicity in unity,<sup>32</sup> it partakes of logical distinctions and divisions while remaining in essence indivisible and above all polarizations. Mulla Sadra goes into great detail about the various divisions and categories of Being and in fact most of the first book of the *Asfar* is concerned with them. We mention here a few of the division which Akhund discusses with great rigour in his writings, especially in the monumental *Asfar*.

One division of Being is into connective being (*al-wujud al-irtibati*) and self-subsistent being (*al-u'ujud al-nafsi*). Connective being is that which connects a subject with a predicate as in the statement, "Man

is a rational animal.” Self–subsistent being is one which stands independently by itself and is not simply the means of connecting two terms. This category of being which exists in itself is in turn divided into three kinds: that which is objective existence is not the quality of something else and is called substance (*jauhar*), that which is the quality of something else and is called accident (*‘ard*), and, finally, that which has need of no cause outside itself, i.e. the Being of God. From another point of view Mulla Sadra considers the being of all things other than God to be the connective being (*wujud al-rabit*) and only the Being of God to be Being *per se*.<sup>33</sup>

Another division of Being adopted by Mulla Sadra is that of the necessary (*wajib*), possible (*mumkin*), and impossible (*mumtani‘*) beings which nearly all the Muslim philosophers and many theologians coming after ibn Sina and following his example, have accepted.<sup>34</sup> If the intellect considers a being and finds that the meaning of being is essential to it, i.e. lies in its essence, and that there are no causes outside it which have brought it into being, that being is called the Necessary Being. If it has need of a cause outside itself it is called possible being. Moreover, the attribute of possibility pertains to its quiddity as well as to its being. The possibility of its quiddity concerns its relation to *its particular being*, and the possibility of its being pertains to its relation to *the Necessary Being*. The *being* or existence of each object, therefore, depends upon the being of God and the knowledge of anything upon the knowledge of the root or principle of its own being. Since the root or basis of the Necessary Being is unknowable, the knowledge of the being of things remains also unknowable to us and it is only the quiddities or *mahiyyat* which we can know.

These quiddities, as already mentioned, are the limitations placed upon being and abstracted by the mind. The intellect in perceiving any object immediately analyses it into being and quiddity, the latter consisting of the limit determination of the former. It is only in the case of the Divine Being that such an analysis cannot be made because Absolute Being has no *mahiyyah*. One can say that It is without *mahiyyah* or that Its Being and *mahiyyah* are identical.

The quiddities in themselves are only mental concepts without a separate objective existence so that the effects produced by things come from their being and not from their quiddity. Likewise, cause and effect are categories of being which in one case becomes the cause and in the other the effect of things.

The *mahiyyat* are either particular or universal; the latter either exist before or are abstracted by the intellect from particulars.<sup>35</sup> The universals which exist independently of all particulars are the archetypes of Platonic ideas upon the reality of which Suhrawardi Maqtul had insisted against the view of the Peripatetics. Mulla Sadra likewise criticizes Aristotle and ibn Sina for considering the Platonic ideas to be nothing but the forms of things impinged upon the divine intellect. He insists upon the reality of the archetypes in a spiritual world that is completely independent of the world of particulars as well as of all mental images formed in the human mind.<sup>36</sup>

Akhund praises Suhrawardi Maqtul and accepts fully the reasons he had given for the existence of the Platonic ideas or “masters of the species” (*arbab al-anwa‘*). There is a spiritual man in the spiritual world

who is the real cause for the activities and ontological qualities of the terrestrial man; likewise in the case of other species each has an intelligible idea or archetype which governs all the activities and life of that species on earth.

The archetype is in essence one with its particulars but differs from them in characteristics which arise from the substance or “matter” of the particulars. The archetype appears different in each stage (*taur*) of manifestation while in the realm of reality it is one and the same truth. The beings of this world are the reflections and shadows of the archetypes so that they are like them and share in their reality and at the same time are different from them in being less real and farther removed from the source of Being.

One of the principles for which Akhund is famous is called *imkan al-ashraf* or “the possibility of that which is superior.” According to this principle, just as each being in treading the path of perfection passes through various stages from the lowest to the highest, so it is necessary that for each imperfect being in this world there be degrees of being in the higher stages of the cosmic hierarchy, since each being has descended from the divine Principle through intermediate states of being. For example, the being of man on earth in his present state of imperfection necessitates the being of man in the intermediary world of souls, and the latter the being of the spiritual man in the intelligible world. According to this principle, therefore, the very existence of quiddities in their earthly state of souls or the world of inverted or reflected forms (*al-amthal al-mu’allaqah*) and these in turn necessitate their existence in the spiritual world of simple intellectual substances.

After showing the *mahiyyat* are in reality limitations of being, Mulla Sadra goes on to assert that the logical distinction made by Aristotle and all the later philosophers between substance and the accidents which together form the ten categories concerns only the *mahiyyat*; Being properly speaking, is neither substance nor accident but above both. When we say of a thing that it is such and such a substance or that its particular quality and quantity are its accidents we refer only to its *mahiyyahi* and not to its being.

The relation of cause and effect, however, contrary to that of substance and accidents, concerns only the being of things.<sup>37</sup> All things in the universe have a cause and an effect and since everything is a manifestation of Being, every effect is but an aspect of its cause and cannot in essence differ from it. That is why the well-known principle that from unity only unity can issue forth, *ex uno non fit nisi unum*, must be true. From the divine essence which is simple and one, only a simple being can issue forth. Mulla Sadra calls the first manifestation of the divine essence extended being (*wujud al-munbasit*), the first intellect, the sacred effusion (*faid al-muqaddas*) or the Truth of truths (*haqiqat al-haqa’iq*) which he considers to be one in essence but partaking of degrees and stages of manifestation.<sup>38</sup>

He divides reality into three categories: of the divine essence, of “Absolute Being” which he identifies with extended being, and of relative being which that of the creatures is.<sup>39</sup> The cause of all things, therefore, is extended being which in turn the first determination of the divine essence. God is, thus, the Cause of causes and the Ultimate Source of all effects to be seen in the universe, because all causes and effects arise from the beings of things and all beings are in reality the stages of the One Being.

To terminate our discussion of the polarizations of Being in cosmic existence we must also consider the question of form and matter. On this question Mulla Sadra sides with the Peripatetics and is against the Illuminationists in accepting the theory of hylomorphism. In his view, however, matter is not limited to the corporeal domain. Rather, it is the aspect of potentiality which manifests itself in all the realms of existence according to the conditions of that particular realm. Bodies have a matter belonging to the corporeal world, and souls (*anfas*), a matter conformable to the subtle world of the psyche, moreover, in each world matter is a lower degree of being of the form with which it is united and for that reason accompanies it in all realms of existence until the highest realm which is the world of pure intelligences (*mujarradat*). That is why, as Akhund expresses it, matter has love for form which forever compels it to seek union with it (form). Only in the intelligible world, which is also called the '*alam al-jabarut*', are the spiritual realities completely separated from and free of all species of matter, even the most subtle.

## 2. Substantial Motion

The question of potentiality leads to that of motion because motion, as Aristotle said, is becoming actual of that which is potential. Mulla Sadra rejects the possibility of sudden change from one substance to another which the Peripatetics accepted along with gradual change. Rather, he considers all change to be a form of motion and introduces the idea of substantial motion (*al-harakat al-jauhariyyah*),<sup>40</sup> which is another of the well-known principles associated with his name, as a basis of his whole outlook from which he goes on to prove the creation of the world in time, bodily resurrection and many other doctrines that will be discussed in the course of this chapter.

It is well known that the Muslim Peripatetics, following Aristotle, limited motion to only four of the ten categories, i.e. quantity (*kam*), quality (*kaif*), place (*makan*), and substance,<sup>41</sup> the last understood only in the sense of generation and corruption. Ibn Sina rejected completely substantial motion in any sense other than instantaneous coming into being and passing away and argued that since the essence of a thing depends on its substance, if that substance were to change; its essence would also change and lose its identity.<sup>42</sup>

Following the Sufis, Mulla Sadra considered the world to be like a stream of water which is flowing continually and believes motion to be nothing but the continuous regeneration and re-creation of the world at every instance.<sup>43</sup> According to him, it is not only the accidents but the substance of the universe itself that partakes of motion and becoming, i.e. continuous re-creation and rebirth.<sup>44</sup> In order to prove this assertion, Akhund makes use of several arguments. For example, he writes that it is an accepted fact that accidents have a need of a substance upon which they depend for their being and properties. Their subsistence depends upon the subsistence of their substance and their creation and regeneration upon its creation and regeneration. Therefore, every change which takes place in the accidents of a body must be accompanied by a corresponding change in the substance; otherwise the being of the former would not follow the being of the latter. Or, in other words, since the effect must be the same as its cause, the cause or substance of a changing accident must itself be changing.

In addition, it is known that all beings in the universe are seeking perfection and are in the process of becoming and change in order to overcome their imperfections. Since divine manifestation never repeats itself, God creates new theophanies at every moment in order to remove imperfections and bring new perfections to things. The matter of each being, therefore, is continuously in the process of wearing a new dress, i.e. being wed to a new form, without, however, casting away its older dress. It is only the rapidity of this change that makes it imperceptible and guarantees the continuity and identification of a particular being through the stages of substantial motion.

According to Mulla Sadra, each body consists of matter and two forms: one, the form of the body which gives matter dimensions and the possibility of accepting other forms, and the other the form of the species (*surah nau'iyah*) which determines the species and identity of the body. Each of these two forms is at every instant changing, and matter is taking on new forms at every moment. Moreover, at each stage of substantial change the totality of a being which itself consists of form and matter may be considered to be the matter of the aspect of potentiality for the next stage the actualized aspect of which then becomes the form.

The power or force which motivates this change in nature which is a force hidden within the cosmic substance. In fact, since Being comes before nothingness, motion in this world comes before rest through the force immanent in the cosmos. Needless to say, this motion is limited to the degrees of cosmic existence in which matter is present, i.e. to corporeal and subtle manifestation, and does not extend to the world of pure intelligences or archetypes which are beyond all change.

Substantial motion itself has also the two aspects of change and permanence. Each form has two faces, one in the world of archetypes and the other in nature, the first permanent and the second in continuous renewal. The substance of the world itself is, therefore, the intermediary between permanence and change; it possesses two aspects, one which is continuously in motion and the other, which Mulla Sadra identifies with the intelligences, above all change.

Time, for Akhund as for Aristotle, is the quantity of motion, which, in a world of continuous substantial motion, becomes an inherent feature of cosmic existence.<sup>45</sup> It is, more specifically, the measure of the substantial motion of the heavens but not the measure of their rotation as held by the Peripatetics. The heavens, according to Mulla Sadra, are in continuous contemplation of the perfection of their beloveds, i.e. the universal intellects which at every instant cause a new form to be projected upon the essence of the universal souls. The cause of celestial motion is, therefore, the desire to reach perfection, a goal which, because of its limitlessness, makes celestial motion endless. The heavens are in continuous creative worship, their motion being a sign of their contemplation of the divine by means of the intelligences, and their causing generation and growth in nature through their illumination being a sign of their act of creation. The whole world, therefore, both in its gross and subtle domains, partakes of substantial motion, and time is the measure of this motion as it occurs in the heavens where it is most regular as well as regulatory.<sup>46</sup>

Mulla Sadra makes use of the principle of substantial motion to explain many of the most intricate problems of metaphysics and physics including the relation between permanence and change which we have already mentioned, the creation of the world, the creation of the soul, and various eschatological questions. This principle can, therefore, be regarded as one of the distinguishing features of his doctrinal formulation.

As to the question of creation Akhund opposes the simple creation *ex nihilo* of the theologians who believe the world to have been brought into being in time from utter nothingness. Likewise, he rejects the view of the Peripatetics who believe the world to have been created only in essences or in *principio* but not in time and the view of Mir Damad about *al-huduth al-dahri*.<sup>47</sup> Mulla Sadra believes that creation is in time (*al-huduth al-zamani*) because through substantial motion the being of the universe is renewed at every moment or, more explicitly; that the world is created at every instant, so that one can say that the being of the world depends upon its non-being at a previous moment. Where he differs from the theologians is that his conception of creation *ex nihilo* is complementary to the view that the archetypes of the world of creation exist changelessly in the intelligible world and that the world is connected with its divine origin through a permanent hierarchy.

This hierarchy begins with the first determination of the essence which Akhund, following the Sufis, calls the reality of Mohammad.<sup>48</sup> This is followed by the pure intelligences which are completely separated from matter and potentiality, the last of which is the giver of forms to the universe and the governor of the world of generation and corruption.<sup>49</sup> This last intellect is like a mill that grinds out new forms at every moment to feel the *hyle* of the world. It governs the world according to divine decree and gives revelation to prophets an inspiration to saints. Following the intelligible hierarchy there is the world of cosmic imagination or inverted or reflected forms or the purgatory between the intelligible and the material domains and, finally, the visible universe. The world is, therefore, created in time in the sense that its being is renewed after a moment in which it “was not”; at the same time it is the terminal state of an immutable hierarchy which through the subtle and angelic realms of being relates the visible cosmos to its divine source.

### [3. Divine and Human Knowledge](#)

From what we have already said, it is clear that for Mulla Sadra knowledge forms the very substance of cosmic manifestation itself and is moreover the gate to and means of salvation for the soul. Like all other gnostics Akhund considers knowledge and being, or, from another point of view, the knower and the known,<sup>50</sup> to be essentially the same and identifies the being of things with God’s knowledge of them.<sup>51</sup> God knows His own essence and His essence is none other than His being, and since His Being and essence are the same, He is at once the knower, the knowledge, and the known.

In the case of pure intellects or forms that are completely divorced from matter also, the intellect and the intelligible are the same, the difference in the two instances being that, although knowledge of the intellects is identical with their being, it is not identical with their quiddities, since their being surpasses

their quiddities, whereas in the case of God's knowledge is identical both with Being and quiddity, since God's quiddity is the same as His Being.[52](#)

Mulla Sadra rejects the Peripatetic notion that God's knowledge of things is the projection of their forms upon His essence as well as the idea followed by many Illuminationists that God's knowledge is the presence of the very forms of things in His essence. Rather, he uses the gnostic symbol of a mirror and considers the divine essence a mirror in which God sees the forms or essences of all things and in fact, through the contemplation of these forms or archetypes in the mirror of His own essence, He brings all things into being. Moreover, since the forms of all creatures, universal as well as particular, are reflected in His essence, God has knowledge of every particle of the universe.[53](#)

Mulla Sadra divides knowledge (*'ilm*) into acquired (*husuli*) knowledge and innate (*huduri*) knowledge and, like the Illuminationists, divides the latter category into the knowledge of a thing in itself, of a cause of its effect, and of an effect of its cause. Perception is for him a movement from potentiality to actuality and an elevation in the degree of being in which the perceiver or knower rises from his own level of existence to the level of existence of that which is perceived through the union between the knower and the known which characterizes all intellection.

As for acquired knowledge or the knowledge of the human soul of things other than itself, it is not a reflection of the forms of things upon the soul and the soul does not have a passive role in the act of knowing. Rather, since man is a microcosm composed of all degrees of existence, his knowledge of things comes from the contemplation of these forms in the mirror of his own being much like divine knowledge with the difference that God's knowledge leads to objective existence (*al-wujud al-'aini*) of forms, while man's knowledge leads only to their mental existence (*al-wujud al-dhihni*). Otherwise, man's soul has a creative power similar to that of God; its knowledge implies the creation of forms in the soul – forms the subsistence of which depends upon the soul as the subsistence of the objective universe depends upon God.[54](#)

According to Mulla Sadra, mental existence or the presence in the mind of forms that yield knowledge of things as well as knowledge of itself is above the categories of substance and accidents and is identical with Being Itself. The knowledge that the soul has of things is just like the illumination of the light of Being. This knowledge established the form of that which is perceived in the mind, as Being establishes and manifests the forms and quiddities of things externally. Moreover, it repeats in an inverted order the degrees of cosmic manifestation. Just as cosmic existence originates from the divine essence through the world of the intelligences and consists of the degrees of cosmic souls, bodies, forms, and matter, so knowledge begins from the senses, then rises to the level of the imagination, apprehension, and finally intellection ascending the scale of Being to the summit from which the whole of universal manifestation has descended.

#### 4. Soul, Its Origin, Becoming and Entelechy

Another of the important changes which Mulla Sadra brought about in the formulation of *Hikmat* was the emphasis he laid upon the importance of psychology or the science of the soul (*'ilm al-nafs*) above and beyond what Peripatetic philosophy had accorded to it. Moreover, he removed the discussion of psychology from physics or natural philosophy and made it a branch of metaphysics and a study that is complementary to the science of the origin of things.<sup>55</sup>

The soul (*nafs*), according to Mulla Sadra, is a single reality which first appears as the body (*jism*) and then through substantial motion and an inner transformation becomes the vegetative soul, then the animal soul, and finally the human soul. This development occurs from within the substance of the original body without there being any effusion from the heavenly souls or the active intellect.<sup>56</sup> The substance of the human sperm is at first potentially a plant, and then as it grows in the womb it becomes actually a plant and potentially an animal. At birth, it is actually an animal and potentially human, and finally at the age of adolescence it is actually human potential either an angel or a disciple of the devil.<sup>57</sup>

All these stages lie hidden within the first substance or germ which through substantial motion traverses the degrees of being until it becomes completely divorced from all matter and potentiality and enjoys immortality in the world of pure intelligences.<sup>58</sup> The soul is, therefore, brought into being with the body but it has spiritual subsistence independent of the body.<sup>59</sup> Or, to be more precise, the soul at the beginning "is" the body which through inner transformation passes through various stages until it becomes absolutely free from matter and change.

The soul in each stage of its journey acquires a new faculty or set of faculties. As a mineral it has the faculty of preserving its form and as a plant, the faculties of feeding, growth, and the transformation of foreign substances into its own form. As an animal the faculties of motion and various forms of desire are acquired, and as a higher animal it develops in addition to the external senses the inner faculties of memory and imagination.<sup>60</sup> Finally, in man the five inner faculties: *sensus communis* (*hiss al-mushtarik*) which perceives forms, apprehension (*wahm*) which perceives meanings, fantasy (*khayal*) which preserves forms, memory (*dhakirah*) which preserves meanings and the double faculty of imagination (*mutakhayyilah*), and thought (*mutafakkirah*) which in the first case governs the sensible and in the second the intelligible domains, are also acquired.<sup>61</sup>

Throughout its development it is the same single soul which in one case appears as sight, in another as memory, and in yet another as desire. The faculties are not something added to the soul but it is the soul itself, or, in a more esoteric sense, being itself which appears in various forms in each case.<sup>62</sup> The soul passes through this stream of becoming – this world – and the parts of its course are marked by the archetypes or Platonic ideas that distinguish one species from another. It wears a new dress and a new guise at each point of the stream but the traveller is throughout one and the same.<sup>63</sup>

Although the enumeration of the inner faculties of Mulla Sadra is essentially the same as that made by

previous Muslim authors borrowing it from Aristotle, there is one point in which Mulla Sadra departs from the Peripatetics completely. It is well known that Aristotle considered only the universal intellect to be immortal and the Muslim Peripatetics like ibn Sina accorded immortality only to the intellectual part of the human soul. Mulla Sadra, following certain Sufi and hermetic teachings, asserts that the faculty of imagination enjoys also a form of immortality or at least existence independent of the body. He considers the universe to consist of three domains: the intelligible world, the sensible world, and an intermediate world (*barzakh*) of imagination which is macrocosmic as well as microcosmic.

The faculty of imagination in man as well as in some of the higher animals is, according to Akhund, a microcosmic counterpart of the cosmic imagination and has the power of creating forms. Upon the death of the body, this faculty, like the intellectual part of the soul, enjoys a form of life of its own and may in fact lead the soul to the intermediate world if it is the dominant element in the soul.

Mulla Sadra, like other Sufis, compares the soul to the cosmos on the one hand and to the Qur'an on the other, identifying the higher states of being of the soul with the esoteric meanings of the Qur'an.<sup>64</sup> There are seven degrees of existence for the soul as there are seven heavens and seven levels of interpretation of the Qur'an. These degrees he enumerates as nature (*tab'ah*), soul (*nafs*), intellect (*'aql*), spirit (*ruh*), secret (*sir*), hidden secret (*khafi*), and the most hidden state (*akhfa*) which is that of perfect union with God.<sup>65</sup> Each corresponds to a state of being, the totality extending from the life of nature or the senses to the divine life of union with God.

According to Mulla Sadra from another point of view the soul has two faculties, the practical (*'amali*) and the theoretical (*'ilmi* or *nazari*), which the latter at first is dependent upon the former but later becomes completely independent. The practical faculty consists of four stages: making use of the Law (*Shari'ah*) of various religions sent to guide mankind, purifying the soul from evil qualities, illuminating the soul with spiritual virtues and the sciences, and finally, annihilating the soul in God, beginning with the journey to God and then in God and finally with God.<sup>66</sup>

As for the theoretical faculty it, too, is divided into four stages: the *potential* or *material* intellect (*'aql al-hayulani*) which has only the capability of accepting forms, *habitual* intellect (*'aql al-malakah*) which knows only simple and preliminary truths such as the truth that the whole is greater than its parts, the *active* intellect (*'aql bi al-fi'l*) which no longer has need of matter and concerns itself solely with intellect demonstrations and is either acquired or bestowed as a divine gift and finally the *acquired* intellect (*'aql al-mustafad*) which is the active intellect that has been united with the divine origin of all existence and is the highest degree attainable by man and the purpose of cosmic existence. These stages are also road-marks upon the path trodden by the soul without implying any form of multiplicity; the soul remains the one traveller traversing all these stages on the road to perfection, the fruit and end of which is union with God.

Mulla Sadra deals with eschatology in great detail in many of his works and departs completely from the usual philosophical language in the treatment of this subject. His language is primarily that of the Qur'an

and the hadith and of the gnostics. According to Akhund, the relation of this world to the next is like that of the mother's womb to this world. While the child is in the mother's womb he is actually in this world as well, but being separated from this world does not know of its existence. Likewise, man, while in this world is also in the next but the majority of people are unaware of the invisible world. Only the gnostics "see" the other world while they are here on Earth and that is because for them terrestrial existence has become transparent.

Akhund divides cosmic being into five classes each of which has a destiny and an end proper to its nature:<sup>67</sup> the pure intelligences separated from all potentiality, the intelligences which govern the heavens, the various psychic entities belonging to the world of the imagination such as the *jinn* and certain parts of the human soul, animal and vegetable souls, and, finally, minerals and elements. The separated intelligences subsist forever in the divine essence and are never separated from it. As for the rational soul (*al-nafs al-natiqah*), it is either perfect, as the souls of the heavens and of some men, and, in both cases, returns to God, or else it is imperfect. In the latter case it is either devoid of all desire for perfection as in the animals and those human beings who have committed much evil in this life, or it is desirous of perfection like many persons who, having chosen the wrong path, realize their mistake and wish to be guided towards the Truth.

In the former case the soul, like other psychic entities belonging to the intermediary world, after separation from the body becomes united with the forms of the intermediary world of imagination (*'alam al-mithal*);<sup>68</sup> in the latter case the soul suffers after its separation from the body until it is finally purified and united with God.

Plants are either used as food by men and animals and, therefore, share in their destinies, or have an independent existence, in which case, after the end of their terrestrial existence, they join their archetypes in the world of pure forms. Likewise with minerals and the elements, they too become united with their intelligible counterparts after their terrestrial existence terminates. In fact, these terrestrial beings are united with their archetypes even while they are on Earth, but only the gnostics are aware of this reality.

As for man's bodily resurrection on the Last Day, Mulla Sadra considers it to be one of the great mysteries of metaphysics revealed only to those who have reached the highest stage.<sup>69</sup> He accepts bodily resurrection which he interprets in a particular fashion. It is known that man's individuality and distinguishing characteristics come from his soul and not from his body because the substance of the body changes every few years without in any way destroying the unity of human beings. Of the faculties of the soul, however, intellection and imagination are innate to it, while the vegetative and animal faculties such as the external senses and passions are received by it through the body.

According to Akhund, in the next world all souls will receive the power to create external forms as prophets and saints do here in this world. For example, each soul can create the pleasure received through sight from within itself without the need of what appears to us here as an external organ. In

other words, the organs of the body which appear as “external” to the soul are created from within the soul in the next world so that the resurrection of the soul is really complete with body according to all the meanings we can give to the word “body.”

Difference between paradise and hell lies in that the souls in paradise have the power to bring into being all the forms that are beautiful and pleasant, all the flowers and *houris* of paradise, while the impure souls in hell have only the power to bring into being ugly and unpleasant forms and are in fact forced to suffer by the very forms they will have created. Mulla Sadra adds, however, that ultimately the pains suffered in the inferno will come to an end and, as ibn ‘Arabi had said, the fires of hell will freeze and all will return to the divine origin of things.<sup>70</sup>

## **F. Significance of Mulla Sadra and His Influence**

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the importance of Mulla Sadra lies not only in rekindling the lamp of learning and reviving the intellectual sciences fully for the first time in the Muslim World after the Mongol invasion, but also for uniting and harmonizing revelation, gnosis, and philosophy together. Some authors have criticized Mulla Sadra for taking certain principles from ibn ‘Arabi, Farabi, and Suhrawardi Maqṭul and have, therefore, refused to accept his “originality.” But as Aristotle has said so justifiably, there is nothing new under the sun. One cannot create metaphysics of one’s own as if the metaphysics were a mechanical invention. The principles have always been and always will be the same. What determines the originality of author in a traditional civilization like that of Islam is his ability to re-interpret and reformulate the eternal verities in a new light and thereby create a new intellectual perspective.

Regarded in this way, Mulla Sadra must certainly be considered to be one of the most significant figures in the intellectual life of Shi‘ah Islam. Coming at a moment when the intellectual sciences had become weakened, he succeeded in reviving them by co-ordinating philosophy as inherited from Greeks and interpreted by the Peripatetics and Illuminationists before him with the teachings of Islam in its exoteric and esoteric aspects. He succeeded in putting the gnostic doctrines of ibn ‘Arabi in a logical dress. He made purification of the soul a necessary basis and complement of the study of *Hikmat*, thereby bestowing upon philosophy the practice of ritual and spiritual virtues which it had lost in the period of decadence of classical civilization. Finally, he succeeded in correlating the wisdom of the ancient Greek and Muslim sages and philosophers as interpreted esoterically with the inner meaning of the Qur’an.

In all these matters he represents the final stage of effort by several generations of Muslim sages and may be considered to be the person in whom the streams, which had been approaching one another for some centuries before, finally united.<sup>71</sup>

More specifically, Mulla Sadra was able to harmonize his doctrinal formulation with the teachings of Islam in such a way as to over-come all the major difficulties which the Peripatetic philosophers met in the face of the teachings of the Qur’an and for which al-Ghazālī criticized them so severely.<sup>72</sup> Of

particular significance was his divorcing metaphysics to a large extent both from Ptolemaic astronomy and Aristotelian physics. While in Europe, Galileo, Kepler, and Newton were destroying the homogeneity of Aristotelian cosmology and physics and in this way weakening the medieval Christian world-view which was closely linked with it, Mulla Sadra, through his doctrine of substantial motion and through considering the science of the soul to be independent of physics, separated metaphysics to a large extent from medieval natural philosophy.

This separation, although perhaps not of immediate significance in the 11th/17th century Persia, which was still immune from European ideas, became of great importance in the later centuries. As the modern scientific world-view became more and more accepted in Persia during the Qajar period, the separation brought about by Akhund between metaphysics and natural philosophy helped to preserve the traditional wisdom in the face of attacks by modernists whose only weapon was modern scientific theories connected with the world of matter. In this way also, Akhund rendered great service to the Muslim intellectual sciences and helped their preservation until today.

There is no doubt that nearly the whole of the intellectual life of Persia during the past three and half centuries has centred on Mulla Sadra. Of his immediate students, Mulla Muhsin Fa'id, 'Abd al-Razzaq Lahiji, and Qadi Sa'id Qumi, all of whom are among the leading figures of Shi'ah Islam, we need say little here for they have already been discussed in a previous chapter.<sup>73</sup> It need only be added that these men in turn produced a generation of students who extended the teachings of Akhund far and wide.<sup>74</sup> In the Qajar period, after a short interim of anarchy caused by the Afghan invasion, the school of Mulla Sadra was once again revived, the most famous of its members being Jaji Mulla Hadi Sabziwari, Mulla 'Ali Nuri, author of one of the most important commentaries upon the *Asfar*, Sheikh Ahmad Ahsai'i, founder of the Sheikhi movement and the commentator upon Mulla Sadra's *Masha'ir*, Mulla 'Ali Mudarris Zunuzi, author of a significant work *Bada'i' al-Hikam* in Persian and glosses upon the *Asfar*, and Mohammad Hidaji, also the author of a commentary upon the *Asfar*.<sup>75</sup>

The influence of Akhund is to be met with wherever the traditional school of *Hikmat* is still preserved and taught in Persia.<sup>76</sup> All the adherents of this school have regarded Mulla Sadra as their master and it is no exaggeration to say that Akhund stands along with Farabi, Ibn Sina, al-Ghazali, Nasir al-Din Tusi, Suhrawardi Maqtul, and Ibn 'Arabi among the principal formulators of the Muslim intellectual sciences and, though not well known outside Persia, is no less a figure than his more famous predecessor.<sup>77</sup> In him the many spiritual streams of the earlier centuries met and united in a new river which has watered the intellectual soil of Persia during the past four centuries; his teachings are as alive today as they were at the time of their formulation.

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1. This chapter has been written with the invaluable help of Hajj Mohammad Hussain Tabataba'i, one of the leading authorities on the school of Mulla Sadra in Iran today, the author of the 20-volume Qur'anic commentary al-Mizan and the editor and commentator of the new edition of the *Asfar*.

2. Comte de Gobineau, one of the most observant of travellers who has visited Persia during the past few centuries, was quite aware of Mulla Sadra's significance although not quite well acquainted with his ideas, for in a well-known passage he writes, "Le vrai, l'incontestable metite de Moulla Sadra reste celiui pue j'ai indique plus haut: c'est d'avoir ramine, rejeuni, pour le temps ou il vivait, la philosohpie antique, en lui conservant les moins possible de ses forms avicenniques..." Gobineau, *Les religions et les philosophies dans l'Asie central*, Les Editions G. Gres et Cie, Paris, 1923, p. 102.

3. The date of Mulla Sadra's birth was unknown until quite recently when in preparing the new edition of the *Asfar*, Tabataba'i collected a large number of handwritten manuscripts of the work. On the margin of one of the manuscripts dated 1197/1782 with marginal notes by Mulla Sadra himself, the authenticity of which cannot be doubted, there appears this statement, "This truth was revealed to me on Friday, the seventh of Jamadi al-Ula 1037 A.H. when 58 years had passed from (my life)..." Therefore, the date of his birth can be established as 979/1571 or 980/1572.

For the traditional accounts of the life of Mulla Sadra and his works, see M.B. Khunsari, *Raudat al-Jannat*, Teheran, lithographed edition, 1306/1888, vol. 2, pp. 331 – 32; M.A. TABRIZI, *Raihanat al-Adab*, Sa'di Press, Teheran, 1331/1912, vol. 2, pp. 458 – 61; Mir Khwand, *Raudat al-Safa*, Teheran, lithographed edition, 1270/1853, vol. 8, p. 120; T. Tunikabuni, *Qisas al-'Ulama'*, 'Ilmi Press, Teheran, 1313/1895, pp. 329 – 33, and Agha Buzurg Tihrani, *al-Dhari'ah al-Gharra* Press, najaf, 1355/1936, on dealing with various writings of Akhund.

As for secondary sources see M. Mudarrisi Chahardihi, *tarikh-i Falasifih-i Islam*, 'Ilmi Press, Teheran, 1336 Solar, vol, 1, pp. 179ff; A. A. Zinjani, *al-Filsuf al-Farsi al-Kabir Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi*, al-Mufid Press, Damascus, pp. 212 – 18, no. 3, 1951, pp. 318 – 27; J. 'Ali Yasin, *Sadr al-Din al-Shrazi Mujaddid al-Falsifat al-Islamiyyah*, al-Ma'arif Press, 1375/1956, and the introduction by M.R. mazaffar, in the new edition of the *Asfar, Da'ir al-Ma'arif al-Islamiyyah*, Qum 1378/1958.

For an account of the life and doctrines of Mulla Sadra in European languages, see Gobineau, *op. cit.*, pp. 91 – 103; E. G. Browne, *A Literary history of Persia*, University Press, Cambridge, 1924, Vol. 4, pp. 429 – 30; and m. Horten, *Die Philosophie des Islam*, Verlag Ernst Rheinhardt, Munchen, 1924, pp. 57ff. Also Browne, *A year Amongst the Persians*, Adam & Charles, London, 1950, pp. 141 – 43.

4. Concerning Baha' al-Din 'Amili and Mir Damad, see the preceding chapter.

To know the names of the masters of a Hakim is important because learning Hikmat from "within" is impossible without a master for the majority of even of those who are gifted to pursue it. One can learn certain ideas from books alone but to really understand what Hikmat means and what the various authorities meant by various expressions there is a need of a master who himself learned the doctrines from another master and so on going back to the early masters. The Hakim is, therefore, as insistent upon the authenticity of his chain of masters as a verifier of hadith is about the ismad of a tradition or a Sufi master about the isilsilahi or chain of his tariqah.

5. We have already discussed in detail in previous chapters the meaning of this term as used here, i.e. a combination of gnosis, illuminationist and Peripatetic philosophy which is neither theology nor philosophy as currently understood but theosophy in the proper and original sense of the term and not in its present usurpation by various pseudo-spiritualist groups.

6. The Khan school which is one of the most beautiful edifices of the Safawid period had fallen into ruins for some years when about ten years ago the Bureau of Archaeology of the Persian Government undertook the task of repairing it. It is now operating once again as a madrasah for traditional learning.

7. He in fact criticizes ibn Sina for having spent his time composing works on other sciences like mathematics and medicine.

8. The story is told in most of the traditional sources mentioned above that Mulla Sadra once asked Mir Damad why he was respected by all the religious authorities while Akhund, despite his powerful family, was molested so much by some of the 'ulama'. Mir Damad answered that although they were both saying the same thing, he hid his ideas within so many difficult expressions that only the elite would be able to understand them while Mulla Sadra wrote so clearly that anyone with a knowledge of Arabic could detect the trend of his ideas.

9. See also Raihanat al-Adab, pp. 458 – 61, where 50 works by him are mentioned, and A. A. Zanjani, *op. cit.*, pp. 19 – 22 where he mentions 26 metaphysical and philosophical and 17 religious works some of which are of doubtful authenticity. Refer also to J. 'Ali Yasin, *op. cit.*, pp. 58 – 62, where 26 works are named.

10. The *Kitab al-Hidayah* dealing with the complete cycle of Hikmat, i.e. logic, natural philosophy, and metaphysics was composed by the seventh/13th century Persian author, Athir al-Din Mufaddal ibn 'Umar al-Abhari, it soon became one of the basic books of instruction in the madrasahs. The tenth/16th century commentary upon it by Kamal al-Din Mibudi was the best known before Mulla Sadra composed his own commentary upon it.

11. The *Usul al-Kafi* was also commented upon by Majlisi as we have mentioned in the previous chapter. The commentary of Mulla Sadra which is of a more intellectual nature is one of the most important Shi'ah works written in the Safawid period and is perhaps his most significant religious composition.

12. The unpublished treatise the manuscript of which exists in the Majlis Library (MS. 103) in Teheran is the only known prose work of Mulla Sadra in Persian, all the other above mentioned writings being in Arabic.

13. The manuscript of the *Sharh al-Hidayah* in the Mishkat Collection at Teheran University, MS. 254, is in Mulla Sadra's own handwriting, several quatrains appear in the opening pages which are without doubt his own.

14. E.G. Browne, *op. cit.*, vol 4, p. 430.

15. The 1282/1865 Teheran lithographed edition with the commentaries of Sabziwari on the margin runs over 1,000 large

pages and the new edition by Mr. Tabataba'i with running commentary by himself and several other Hakims of the Qajar period including Sabziwari and Mulla 'Ali Nuri is planned in nine 400–page volumes of which three have appeared so far. The Asfar which is used in graduate school of theological faculty in Teheran University is taught over a three year period and then only a part of the First Book is covered. It is said that Haji Mulla Hadi Sabziwari, the greatest Persian Hakim after Mulla Sadra, taught the complete Asfar to his advanced disciples over a six year period.

[16.](#) Mulla Sadra, *Mafatih al-Ghaib, al-Miftah al-Thalith, al-Mashhad al-Thamin*.

[17.](#) See the preceding chapter in which the formative elements of Shi'ah intellectual life leading to Mulla Sadra and of the Safawid sages have been discussed.

[18.](#) See Asfar, Teheran, lithographed edition, 1282/1865, Book 2, Section 4. Mulla Sadra writes that these pre-Socratic philosophers actually spoke in a symbolic language (ramz) and implied by their theory that the world was composed of a single element, the doctrine of the unity of Being or wahdat al-wujud which is the basis of the gnostic doctrines of Ibn 'Arabi. Mulla Sadra, in fact, identifies the water of Thales with the nafas al-Rahman or the breath of the Compassionate which the Sufis consider to be the ultimate substance of the universe. These early Ionians who are considered by some today to be the founders of the modern quantitative sciences of nature appear to the Muslims in a different light as expositors of universal gnosis and those whom, as Mulla Sadra writes, "have adopted the light of Hikmat from the lamp of prophecy."

[19.](#) For an account of the relation of Mulla Sadra to Shi'ism and his success in unifying the three above-mentioned elements, see M. H. Tabataba'i, "Musahibih-i Ustad 'Allamih Tabataba'i ba Professor Henri Corbin dar Barih-i Shi'ah," *Salanah-i Maktab-i Tashayyu'*, No. 2, 1339 solar, pp. 61 – 64. This is one of the most important works written recently by a Shi'ah authority on the general perspective of Shi'ism and the various sciences developed by the Shi'ahs, and is the result of a series of meetings between him and H. Corbin in which the latter posed several basic questions about the spiritual attitude of Shi'ism and the relation between Shi'ism and Hikmat and Sufism. The book was written in answer to H. Corbin's questions and contains a wealth of precious knowledge about the intellectual life of Shi'ism.

[20.](#) It may at first seem surprising that Mulla Sadra wrote a treatise against those who called themselves Sufis. But if we consider the social and political conditions of the later Safawid period in which Sufism was greatly disdained by political authorities and much of it had become body without a soul, we can perhaps understand some of the motifs for Mulla Sadra's attack on it. However, the "Sufis" whom Mulla Sadra attacked were not the Sufis proper but those who were seeking to destroy the exoteric truths and bring about social anarchy in the name of esotericism that they themselves did not possess. Otherwise, there is not the least doubt of Mulla Sadra's connection with Sufism – although he preferred to use the name gnostic ('arif) rather than Sufi – nor can one doubt in any way to the gnostic quality of his doctrines.

[21.](#) See the chapter of Suhrawardi Maqtul.

[22.](#) If we have translated Hikmat as philosophy in one case and as theosophy in the other, it is because the meaning of the term includes both the wisdom belonging to the rational and mental plane or philosophy and the wisdom which transcends the level of the ordinary human mind and which, properly speaking, belongs to the angelic order and cannot be called philosophy as the term is currently understood in European languages.

[23.](#) See J. Muslib, *Falsafih-i 'Ali ya Hikmat-i Sadr al-Muti'allihin*, vol. 1, University Press, Teheran, 1337 Solar, p. 3.

[24.](#) Sadr al-Din Shirazi, *Rasa'il*, Teheran, lithographed edition, 1302/1884, pp. 279 – 86.

[25.](#) Mulla Sadra adds at the end of this discussion that the causes for the difference of view among various schools regarding different sciences are four in number: (1) differences in the science of unity leading to the creation of sects like the atheists, etc., (2) the science of prophecy leading to separation between Muslims, Christians, Jews, and other religious groups, (3) the science of Imamate leading to division between the Shi'ahs and Sunnis, and, finally, (4) the science of jurisprudence leading to the creation of various schools and interpretations of law. Mulla Sadra adds that the main cause of multiplicity lies in misunderstanding the science of unity and the science of the soul or the science of the beginning and end of things. *Rasa'il*, pp. 287 – 88.

[26.](#) J. Muslih, *op. cit.*, pp 1 – 2.

[27.](#) See Chapter 19 on Suhrawardi Maqtul.

[28.](#) Mulla Sadra regards light as a perfect and intelligible example of the unity and gradation of Being and praises the Illuminationists on this point. See the first of the Asfar.

- [29.](#) See Seyyed Hossain Nasr, "The Polarisation of Being," *Pakistan Philosophical Journal*, vol. 3, no. 2, October 1959, pp. 8 – 13.
- [30.](#) The doctrine of the unity and gradation of Being in Mulla Sadra is not new, it was expressed clearly five centuries before him by ibn 'Arabi. Mulla Sadra, however, was the first person to give it a logical dress and introduce it as a principle of Hikmat as distinct from pure gnosis which does not concern itself with various logical distinctions.
- [31.](#) In dividing the hierarchies of universal existence into longitudinal and latitudinal orders Mulla Sadra follows the scheme of ishraqi angelology, which was discussed in the chapter on Suhrawardi Maqtul.
- [32.](#) What distinguishes the gnostics from the Hakims in this subject is that the former formulate the illuminations they receive which differ depending upon the degree of their inner realization. One gnostic in a certain state of contemplation (hal) may have been aware of only the creatures or multiplicity as a reflection of unity, another of only God or unity, and a third of unity in multiplicity. The Hakims, however, from a theoretical and more logical point of view, do not take particular perspective of the traveller upon the path (salik) into consideration and have even criticized some of the gnostics for considering multiplicity to be completely unreal.
- [33.](#) By this latter distinction, Mulla Sadra implies the difference which exists, or at least used to exist, in European languages between Being and existence. All creatures exist but only in the case of God can one, properly speaking, say that He "is." See Seyyed Hossein Nasr "The Polarisation of Being," *op. cit.*, pp. 8 – 13.
- [34.](#) See ibn Sina, *Kitab al-Shifa' (Ilahiyyat)*, Teheran, lithographed edition, pp. 291ff.
- [35.](#) The feature which distinguishes particulars from one another and determines all other qualities in them is, according to Mulla Sadra, their degree of being.
- [36.](#) Mulla Sadra writes that it was Hermes who learnt about the truth of the "Platonic ideas" when he became illuminated by the light of the intelligible world and separated from the world of the senses. In this state Hermes met an illuminated figure in the spiritual world who taught him all the sciences and when he asked the figure who he was, the figure answered, "I am thy perfect nature (ana taba'aka al-tam)," Asfar, p. 121. For a study of the rich symbolism of "perfect nature," which means the celestial or angelic part of the human soul, see H. Corbin, "Le recit d'initiation et l'hermetisme en Iran," *Eranos Jahrbuch*, vol. 17, 1949, pp. 121 – 88.HHHHHHHHHH
- [37.](#) For the general discussion on cause and effect, see J. Muslih, *op. cit.*, pp. 85ff.
- [38.](#) It is this "simple being" or the supreme intellect which the Sufis before Mulla Sadra identified with the reality of Mohammad. See ibn 'Arabi, *La sagesse des prophetes*, tr. T. Burckhardt, Albin Michel, Paris, 1955, pp. 181ff.
- [39.](#) According to a principle – which is another of the well-known doctrines formulated by Mulla Sadra and is called *basit al-haqiqah kull of al-ashya'*, i.e., Truth in its state of simplicity contains all things – the divine essence in its state of simplicity and "contraction" contains all realities within itself. This is indeed a direct consequence of the principle of the unity of Being; if there is but one Being and the whole universe is nothing but Being, the universe and all its realities are contained in a state of "contraction" in that One Being.
- [40.](#) See J. Muslih, *op. cit.*, p. 100. This distinction may seem to differ from what was said previously. But it must be remembered that the divine essence cannot be limited to Being, which is its first determination as well as the principle of universal manifestation. It is this distinction to which Akhund is referring here.
- [41.](#) Mulla Sadra placed a lot of emphasis upon this point that he discussed it not only in the First Book of the Asfar but in many other chapters of the work and nearly all of his other books as well. See also H. A. Rashid, *Dau Filsuf-i Sharq wa Gharb*, Parwin Press, Ispahan, 1334 Solar, pp. 50ff. and J. Muslih, *op. cit.*, pp. 128ff. Mulla Sadra in the second Book of the Asfar and other places insists that he is not the first among the Hakims to have introduced this idea but that the pre-Socratic philosophers had indicated although not explicitly the existence of substantial motion. Moreover, he gives the Qur'anic verses such as "Do ye create it or are We the Creator? We mete out death among you, and We are not to be outrun, that We may transfigure you and make you what ye know not" (51:59 – 61, Pickthall's translation) in support of his view.
- [42.](#) See ibn Sina, *Danish-Nameh-i 'Ala'i (Tabi'iyat)*, University Press, Teheran, 1331/1912, pp. 3ff. Aristotle also in *De Generatione et Corruptione* (319b, 31 – 320a, 2) divides motion into the four categories of quantity, quality, place, and substance and speaks of substantial change as one of the processes which characterize the sub-lunary region. But the substantial change Aristotle means only generation and corruption and for that reason later Muslim philosophers did not

even apply the term “motion” to it and considered motion to belong only to the categories of quantity, quality, locomotion, and posture.

Mulla Sadra, however, considers substantial motion to be an inner transformation of things somewhat in the alchemical sense in which there is not simply a coming into being and a passing away but a process through which a new state of being is reached. Moreover, substantial change for the Aristotelians is sudden and instantaneous while for Akhund it is gradual like other forms of motion. Also, substantial change in the Aristotelian sense is limited to the sublunary region, while for Mulla Sadra the whole of gross and subtle manifestation partakes of substantial motion. Akhund’s conception of substantial change therefore cannot be identified with that of Aristotle and should not be confused with it because of similarity in terminology.

For an analysis of Aristotle’s doctrine of motion, see also H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1929, pp. 512ff.

[43.](#) Ibn Sina, *Shafa’ (Tabi’iyyat)*, pp. 43 – 44.

[44.](#) The idea that God annihilates and re-creates the world at every moment is one that is shared by the majority of the Sufis. Jalal al-Din Rumi expresses it:

“Every moment the world is being renewed, and we  
unaware of its perpetual change.

Life is ever pouring in afresh through the body  
it has the semblance of continuity.”

R. A. Nicholson, *Rumi, Post and Mystic*, George Allen Unwin, London, 1950, p. 117. See also T. Burckhardt, *Introductio to Sufi Doctrine*, tr. D. M. Matheson, Sheikh Mohammad Ashraf, Lahore, 1959, chap. 4.

[45.](#) Substantial motion is essentially a rebirth because it always means the attainment of a new state of Being.

[46.](#) From what we have said above it is clear that in Mulla Sadra’s view motion is principal, for it is an inherent characteristic of corporeal and even subtle existence, and time is subservient to it contrary to the view of many previous philosophers who considered motion to be subservient to time. Mulla Sadra’s conception of time as the quantity of substantial motion, which is itself the renewal of cosmic existence, bears much resemblance to the doctrine of Abu al-Barakat al-Baghdadi for whom also time is the measure or dimension of existences. See S. Pines, *Nouvelles etudes sur Awhad al-Zaman Abu’l Barakat al-Baghdadi*, Librairie Durlacher, Paris, 1955, Chap. 2.

[47.](#) In Fasl 33 of the first book of the *Asfar*, Akhund writes that all bodies are limited within the four dimensions of length, breadth, depth, and time, and are differentiated by the division inherent in time, while their unity is preserved through celestial archetypes or Platonic ideas.

[48.](#) See Chapter 47.

[49.](#) See Mulla Sadra, *al-Waridat al-Qalbiyyah, Rasa’il* pp., 243 – 49.

[50.](#) The world of change here as in the case of Suhrawardi Maqtul means the whole visible universe and not only the sublunary region of the Aristotelians. According to Mulla Sadra, the difference between the sublunary region composed of the four elements and the heavens composed of ether lies only in that the matter of the heavens is more subtle than the gross matter of the terrestrial environment and is governed by pure souls that are free from the passions of earthly souls.

[51.](#) The principle that the intellect, intelligence, and the intelligible are one (*ittihad al-‘aqil w-al-ma‘qul*) is another point in which Mulla Sadra opposed the previous Muslim philosophers. This principle, which was accepted by the Neo-Platonists, was rejected by Ibn Sina (see *Isharat*, Haidari Press, Teheran, 1379/1959, vol. 3 pp. 292 – 93) and other Peripatetics.

Akhund, while acknowledging his debt to Porphyry and earlier Greek philosophers (see his *Rasa’il*, p. 319), considered himself the first among Muslims to have reinstated this principle which is made a cornerstone of his intellectual edifice. Actually, Afdal al-Din Kashani and before him Abu al-Hassan ‘Amiri in his *Kitab al-Fursul fi al-Ma‘alim al-Ilahiyyah* had accepted this principle (see M. Minosie, “Az Kaza’in-i Turkiyyah,” *Revue de la Faculte des Lettre, Universite de Teheran*, vol. 4, no. 3, Mars 1957, p. 50) but it was Mulla Sadra who first systematized this principle and demonstrated it clearly. For a discussion of the principle of the union of the intellect and the intelligible, see *Asfar*, pp. 277ff.

[52.](#) “God’s knowledge of things is identical with their being” (Mulla Sadra, al-Shawahid al-Rububiyah, Teheran, lithographed edition, 1236/1820, p. 36).

[53.](#) See Mulla Sadra, Sharh al-Hidayah al-Athiriyah, Teheran, lithographed edition, 1315/1897, pp. 308 – 09.

[54.](#) See his Rasa’il p. 240, where he quotes the Qur’anic statement that “not a particle of dust in the heavens and earth is hidden from God’s knowledge” as support and consequence of his conception of divine knowledge.

[55.](#) Akhund adds that in the case of prophets and saints, the creative power of the soul becomes so great that like God Himself it can even create objective and external forms.

[56.](#) The whole of the fourth book of the Asfar is devoted to the science of the soul where the soul takes on a meaning totally different from the quasi-material substance of the Aristotelians.

Mulla Sadra often speaks of the complete science of things as mabda’ w-al-ma’ad, the origin and end, and has even a book by this name. He identifies the science of mabda’ with theodicy and metaphysics and that of ma’ad with psychology and eschatology.

[57.](#) The view of Mulla Sadra regarding the growth and perfection of the soul resembles the alchemical view in which the power to reach perfection is considered to lie within matter itself and not outside it.

[58.](#) Mulla Sadra, al-Shawahid al-Rububiyah, pp. 152ff.

[59.](#) That is why Akhund writes that “the first seed of the universe was the intellect and the last stage is also the intellect which is the fruit of the same tree” (ibid., p. 165.)

[60.](#) This principle which In Arabic is called jismaniyat al-huduth wa ruhaniyat al-baqa’ is another of the doctrines for which Mulla Sadra is famous.

[61.](#) We have not enumerated these faculties in detail because Mulla Sadra follows the earlier Muslim authors especially ibn Sina on this point. See Chapter 66 on “Natural History” regarding the various faculties.

[62.](#) Al-Shawahid al-Rububiyah, pp. 134ff.

[63.](#) By emphasizing the immanent aspect of the development of the soul, Mulla Sadra does not forget the transcendent factor, for in the treatise Iksir al-‘Arifin he writes the Arch-angel Israfil blows life into the body and gives it the power of sensation and motion, that Mika’il enables the body to assimilate food and sends it its sustenance, that Jibril gives it instruction regarding the revelation and acts of worship and finally that ‘Izra’il enables the soul to abstract forms from matter and to separate itself from the body. Rasa’il, pp. 306 – 07.

[64.](#) Concerning the traditional conception of cosmic becoming, see A. K. Coomaraswamy, “Gradation and Evolution,” Isis, 35, 1944, pp. 15 – 16; 38, 1947 – 48, pp. 87 – 94.

As for the unity of the soul which form the gnostic point of view is identified with the divine essence or self, see A. K. Coomaraswamy, “On the One and Only Transmigrant,” Journal of the American oriental Society, June 1944, No. 3, pp. 19 – 43.

[65.](#) According to a famous hadith of the Prophet, accepted by the Shi’ahs and the Sunnis alike, the Qur’an has seven levels of meaning the last known only God. It is from the esoteric interpretation of the revealed book that Mulla Sandra and Sufis before him have drawn the gnostic doctrines inherent and hidden in the Islamic revelation as they are in all other revelations.

[66.](#) Iksir al-‘Arifin, Rasa’il, p. 295. This terminology is a very old in Islam, it was adopted by the early Sufis from the traditions of the Prophets and Imams.

[67.](#) Al-Shawahid al-Rububiyah, p. 140.

[68.](#) Mulla Sadra, Risalah fi-al-Hashr, Rasa’il pp. 341 – 58.

[69.](#) In the case of animals, after death they join the masters of their species (rub al-nau’) or archetypes except the higher animals who have the faculty of imagination developed in them. They have an independent existence in the world of cosmic imagination without, however, being distinct individually as in the case of people.

[70.](#) See Mulla Sadra, al-Mabda’ w-al-Ma’ad, Teheran, lithographed edition, 1314/1896, pp. 272ff.

He criticizes both the naturalists who deny the existence of the soul after death and the Peripatetics who accept only the resurrection of the soul but not of the body.

[71.](#) This esoteric view expressed in his commentary upon the Usul al-Kafi as well as in the Asfar was one most attacked by

the exoteric 'ulama'. The religious perspective which appeals essentially to the sentimental or passionate aspect of human nature must insist upon "eternal" punishment and reward in order to have its laws accepted in human society. Only the exoteric view meant for the saintly and appealing to the contemplative aspect of man, can take into consideration the relatively of heaven and hell with respect to the divine essence without in any way denying the reality of "eternity" of reward and punishment in the life hereafter with respect to human existence here.

[72.](#) For the background leading to Mulla Sadra, see chapter 47 on "The School of Ispahan in this work. See also Mulla Muhsin Faid, *al-Mahajjat al-Baida'*, vol. 1, Islamiyyah Press, Teheran, 1379/1959, introduction by Sayyid Mohammad Mishkat , pp. 10 – 23, in which the background leading to Mulla Sadra as well as the distinguishing principles of his own doctrines is discussed.

[73.](#) It will be remembered that al-Ghazali in his *al-Munqidh min al-Dalal* considered the philosophers to be infidel on three points: their rejection of resurrection of bodies, their limiting God's knowledge to universals, and their belief in the eternity of the world. See. W. Montgomery Watt, *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazali*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1953, p. 37. From what we have discussed of Mulla Sadra's doctrine it is clear that he accepted the resurrection of bodies, God's knowledge of particulars, and creation of the world in time though not quite in the sense as that of the theologians.

[74.](#) Mulla Sadra's doctrines were especially influential in India to which country one of his disciples by the name of Mohammad Salih Kashani migrated – after reaching a wild state of ecstasy during one Mulla Sadra's lessons –and where he attracted many disciples. The works of Mulla Sadra have continued to be taught in the Islamic schools of the Indian sub-continent, especially his *Sharh al-Hidayah* which came to be known by the author's name as Sadra. Many glosses have been written on it by various philosophers and scholars in India such as Mohammad Amjad al-Sadiqi (d. 1140/1727), Mulla Hassan al-Lakhnawi (d. 1198/1783), Mohammad A'lam al-Sindili (d. 1250/1834), and 'Abd al-'Ali Bahr al-'Ulum who lived in the 13th/19th century. Numerous manuscripts of these and other glosses on the *Sharh al-Hidayah* are to be found in such libraries as the Raza Library of Rampur and the Khuda Basksh Library in Patna (see the *Catalogue of Arabic and Persian Manuscripts in the Oriental Library at Bankiput*, vo. 20 (Arabic MSS), Bihar and Orissa, 1936, MSS. No. 2351, 2386, 2371 – 78).

[75.](#) See Chapter 47 on "The School of Ispahan."

[76.](#) For a list of the names of Mulla Sadra's disciples in the Qajar period, see *Raihdnat al-Adab* and Gobineau, op. cit., pp. 103ff.

[77.](#) Iqbal's statement that, "It is, moreover, the Philosophy of Sadra which is the source of the metaphysics of early Babism" (*Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, London, 1908, p. 175) is true only in a negative sense in the same way as the doctrine of the Rhenish mystics might be considered to be the source of the Protestant revolt during the Renaissance.

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