

remembrance (*dhikr*), recitation from the Qur'ān, prayers, and meditation (*murāqabah*) that a mystic can hope to attain his objective which is 'ubūdiyyah, perfect obedience to God. Sahl b. 'Abd Allah Tustari said about this stage: "When a man after passing through repentance, continence, and constancy in virtuous deeds reaches the stage of slavehood, he becomes totally passive towards the divine will and of his own free-will decides no longer to exercise his freedom of choice and action. Then he is granted full power of activity and freedom of action because he has identified himself with the will of God. His self-determination is equivalent to God-determination; the liability of his falling a prey to evil temptations and ignorance are totally obliterated."

According to Suhrawardi, the stage of giving up freedom of choice and action is the stage of annihilation, while the second stage where the mystic freely acts, because his will follows the will of God, is the state of abiding in God. It is the shedding of the mortal self for the eternal, material for the spiritual, human for the divine. The mystic at this stage is the perfect servant.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ 'Awāriḥ al-Ma'ārif, Chap. 59, pp. 585-600.

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Chapter XIX

SHIHĀB AL-DĪN SUHRAWARDI MAQTŪL

The intellectual life of Islam and that of Christianity—the two sister civilizations—in the Middle Ages can be compared with each other to a large extent through the role that Aristotelian philosophy played in them. Peripatetic science and philosophy entered the Western world through translations from Arabic in the seventh/thirteenth century and eventually became dominant to such an extent as to replace the Augustinian and Platonic wisdom of the earlier period only to be overthrown itself by the humanistic rationalism of the Renaissance. In Islam the attack of Sufis and theologians upon the rationalistic aspect of Aristotelian philosophy weakened its hold at the very time when that philosophy was gaining strength in the Christian West and was replaced in the Muslim world by two elements, the doctrinal Sufism of Muḥyī

al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabi and the *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*¹ or illuminative wisdom of Shaiḥ al-Ishrāq Shihāb al-Dīn Yahya Ibn Ḥabash Ibn Amīrak Suhrawardi,² both of which aimed at an effective realization of the "truth" and replaced the rationalism of Peripatetic philosophy by intellectual intuition (*dhawq*).

A

LIFE, WORKS, AND SOURCES OF DOCTRINES

Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardi, whose *ishrāqī* wisdom has played such a great role in the intellectual and spiritual life of Islam and especially of Shī'ism, was born in Suhraward, a village near the present city of Zinjān in northern Persia, in 549/1153. He studied at first with Majd al-Dīn Jili at Marāghah and later with Zāhir al-Dīn Qāri at Ispahān. Having finished his formal studies, he began to travel through Persia, meeting various Sufi masters and benefiting from their presence and teachings. During this period he spent much time in meditation and invocation in spiritual retreats. He also journeyed during the same period through the regions of Anatolia and Syria and acquired great love for the cities of these countries. On one of his journeys, he went from Damascus to Aleppo and met Malik Zāhir, the son of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Ayyūbi, the celebrated Muslim ruler. Malik Zāhir became much devoted to Shihāb al-Dīn and asked him to stay at his Court. It was here that the master of *ishrāq* fell into disgrace with the religious authorities in the city who considered some of his statements dangerous to Islam. They asked for his death, and when Malik Zāhir refused, they petitioned Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn himself who threatened his son with abdication unless he followed the ruling of the religious leaders. Shihāb al-Dīn was thereby imprisoned and in the year 587/1191, at the age of 38, he was either suffocated to death or died of starvation.³

Many miraculous features have been connected with the life of Suhrawardi

¹ The Arabic word *hikmah* is neither philosophy as currently understood in modern European language, i.e., one form or another of rationalism, nor theology. It is, properly speaking, theosophy as understood in its original Greek sense and not in any way connected with the pseudo-spiritualistic movements of this century. It is also sapiential inasmuch as the Latin root *sapere*, like the Arabic word *dhawq* by which this wisdom is known, means taste. Moreover, it can be designated as speculative wisdom because *speculum* means mirror and this wisdom seeks to make man's soul a mirror in which divine knowledge is reflected.

² Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardi is often called al-Maqtūl, meaning he who was killed, since he was put to death for certain indiscreet formulations. We, however, refer to him as *Shaiḥ al-Ishrāq* by which name he is universally known among his disciples.

³ The best source for the biography of Shihāb al-Dīn is the *Nuḥat al-Arwāḥ wa Rauḍat al-Afrāḥ* of his disciple and commentator Shams al-Dīn Shahrazūri. See also O. Spies and S. K. Khattak, *Three Treatises on Mysticism*, Verlag W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart, 1935, pp. 90-101; H. Corbin, *Suhrawardi d'Alep fondateur de la doctrine illuminative (ishrāqī)*, G. P. Maisonneuve, Paris, 1939.

and many stories told of his unusual powers. His countenance was striking to all his contemporaries. His illuminated and ruddy face and dishevelled hair, his handsome beard and piercing eyes reminded all who met him of his keen intelligence. He paid as little attention to his dress as he did to his words. Sometimes he wore the woollen garb of the Sufis, sometimes the silk dress of the courtiers. His short and tragic life contains many similarities to the life of Hallāj, whom he quoted so often, and to that of the Sufi poet 'Ain al-Qudāt Hamadāni who was to follow a similar career a few years later.

The writings of Suhrawardī are numerous despite his short and turbulent life. Some of them have been lost, a few published, and the rest remain in manuscript form in the libraries of Persia, India, and Turkey.⁴ Unlike his predecessors, ibn Sina and al-Ghazālī, he was never translated into Latin and, therefore, never became well known in the Western world. Yet, his influence in the East can almost match that of ibn Sina, and any history of Islamic philosophy written without mentioning him and the school of *Ishrāq* is, to say the least, incomplete. Histories of Muslim philosophy written by Westerners, like Munk and de Boer, usually end with ibn Rushd because the authors have considered only that aspect of Muslim philosophy which influenced Latin scholasticism. Actually, the seventh/thirteenth century, far from being the end of speculative thought in Islam, is really the beginning of this most important school of *Ishrāq*. Suhrawardī's writings came to the East at the same time as Peripatetic philosophy was journeying westward to Andalusia and from there through the influence of ibn Rushd and others to Europe.

There are altogether about fifty titles of Suhrawardī's writings which have come down to us in the various histories and biographies.⁵ They may be divided into five categories as follows:⁶

1. The four large doctrinal treatises, the first three dealing with Aristotelian (*mashā'i*) philosophy with certain modifications and the last with *ishrāqī* wisdom proper. These works, all in Arabic, include the *Talwihāt*, *Muqawwamāt*, *Mufarahāt*, and the *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*.⁷

2. Shorter doctrinal treatises like *Hayākil al-Nūr*, *al-Alwāh al-'Imādiyyah*, *Partau-Nāmeḥ*, *I'tiqād al-Hukamā'*, *al-Lamahāt*, *Yazdān Shinākht*, and *Bustān*

We are most grateful to Prof. M. Minovi and Mr. M. Dānehpazhuh of the University of Teheran and to Dr. M. Bayāni, the head of the Teheran National Library, for making these manuscripts available to us.

⁵ See the introduction in M. Bayāni, *Dau Risālah-i Fārsi-i Suhrawardī*, Teheran, 1925.

⁶ We follow in part the classification of H. Corbin, however, with some modifications. See Suhrawardī, *Opera Metaphysica et Mystica*, ed. H. Corbin, Vol. I, Ma'ārif Mathaasi, *Bibliotheca Islamica*, Istanbul, 1945, "Prolégomène," pp. xviff.

⁷ The metaphysical sections of the first three treatises have been published in the first volume of the *Opera* by Corbin and the complete *Hikmat al-Ishrāq* in the second volume entitled *Oeuvres philosophiques et mystiques (Opera Metaphysica et Mystica, II)*, Institut Franco-Iranien, Teheran, and Andrien Maisonneuve, Paris, 1952. Henceforth we shall refer to the two volumes as *Opera*, Volumes I and II.

*al-Qulūb*⁸ all of which explain further the subject-matter of the larger treatises. These works are partly in Arabic and partly in Persian.

3. Initiatory narratives written in symbolic language to depict the journey of the initiate towards gnosis (*ma'rifah*) and illumination (*ishrāq*). These short treatises, all written in Persian, include 'Aql-i *Surkh*, *Āwāz-i Par-i Jibra'il*, *al-Ghurbat al-Gharbiyyah* (also in Arabic), *Lughat-i Mūrān*, *Risālah fi Ḥālat al-Tuḥūliyyah*, *Rūzi ba Jam'at-i Šūfiyān*, *Risālah fi al-Mi'rāj*, and *Safir-i Simurgh*.

4. Commentaries and transcriptions of earlier philosophic and initiatic texts and sacred Scripture like the translation into Persian of the *Risālat al-Tā'ir* of ibn Sina, the commentary in Persian upon ibn Sinā's *Ishārāt wa Tanbihāt*, and the treatise *Risālah fi Ḥaqīqat al-'Ishq* which last is based on ibn Sinā's *Risālat al-'Ishq* and his commentary upon the verses of the Qur'ān and on the Ḥadīth.⁹

5. Prayers, litanies, invocations, and what may be called books of the hour, all of which Shahrāzūrī calls *al-Waridāt w-al-Taqdīsāt*.

These works and the large number of commentaries written upon them during the last seven centuries form the main corpus of the tradition of *ishrāq* and are a treasure of traditional doctrines and symbols combining in them the wisdom of Sufism with Hermeticism, and Pythagorean, Platonic, Aristotelian, and Zoroastrian philosophies together with some other diverse elements. There is little doubt that Suhrawardī is greatly indebted to the Muslim philosophers, especially ibn Sina, for the formulation of many of his ideas. Moreover, inasmuch as he is a Sufi as well as a philosopher or, more properly speaking, a theosophist,¹⁰ he is in debt, both for spiritual inspiration and for his doctrines, to the great chain of Sufi masters before him. More specifically he is indebted to Hallāj whom he quotes so often and to al-Ghazālī whose *Mishkāt al-Anwār* played so important a role in his doctrine of the relation of light to the Imām.

Suhrawardī came also under the influence of Zoroastrian teaching, particularly in angelology and the symbolism of light and darkness.¹¹ He identified

⁸ The treatise *Yazdān Shinākht* has often been attributed to 'Ain al-Qudāt Hamadāni and its authorship remains in any case doubtful. *Bustān al-Qulūb* has also appeared under the name *Rauḍat al-Qulūb* and has been occasionally attributed to Sayyid Sharif Jurjāni.

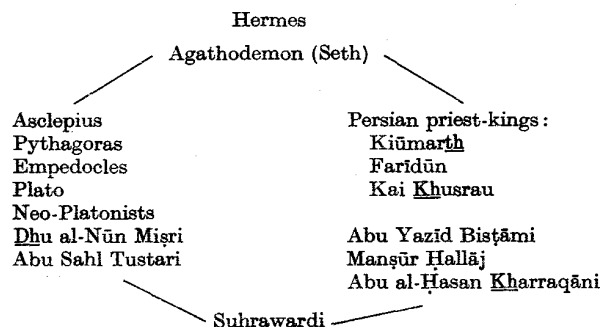
⁹ A commentary upon the *Fuṣūṣ* of Fārābī of which no trace has as yet been found is also attributed to him.

¹⁰ The *hakim muta'allih* which Suhrawardī considers himself and other sages before him to be is exactly *theosophos* by which the Greek sages were designated. See the Prolegomene by H. Corbin to Suhrawardī's *Opera*, Vol. II, p. xxiv.

¹¹ Suhrawardī is careful in distinguishing between exoteric Zoroastrians and the sages among Zoroastrians whom he follows. As he writes in *Katimāt al-Taṣawwuf*: "There were among the ancient Persians a community of men who were guides towards the Truth and were guided by Him in the Right Path, ancient sages unlike those who are called the Magi. It is their high and illuminated wisdom, to which the spiritual experiences of Plato and his predecessors are also witness, and

the wisdom of the ancient Zoroastrian sages with that of Hermes and, therefore, with the pre-Aristotelian philosophers, especially Pythagoras and Plato, whose doctrines he sought to revive. Finally, he was influenced directly by the vast tradition of Hermeticism which is itself the remains of ancient Egyptian, Chaldaean, and Sabaeen doctrines metamorphosed within the matrix of Hellenism and is based on the primordial symbolism of alchemy. Suhrawardī considered himself to be the reviver of the perennial wisdom, *philosophia perennis*, or what he calls *Hikmat al-Ladunnīyyah* or *Hikmat al-ʿAtiqah* which existed always among the Hindus, Persians, Babylonians, Egyptians, and the ancient Greeks up to the time of Plato.¹²

The concept of the history of philosophy for Suhrawardī and his school is itself of great interest. This school identifies philosophy with wisdom rather than with rational systematization. Philosophy for it does not begin with Plato and Aristotle; rather, it ends with them. Aristotle, by putting wisdom in a rationalistic dress, limited its perspective and separated it from the unitive wisdom of the earlier sages.¹³ From the *Ishrāqī* point of view, Hermes or the Prophet Idrīs is the father of philosophy, having received it as revelation from heaven. He was followed by a chain of sages in Greece and in ancient Persia and later in Islam which unified the wisdom of previous civilizations in its milieu. The chain of transmission of *ishrāqī* doctrines, which must be understood symbolically rather than only historically, may be schematized as follows:



which we have brought to life again in our book called *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*." MS., Ragip, 1480, fol. 407b, Istanbul, cited in H. Corbin, *Les motifs zoroastriens dans la philosophie de Suhrawardī*, Editions du Courrier, Teheran, 1946, p. 24. Also Teheran University Library MS. 1079, pp. 34ff.

¹² *Muṭarrahāt*, Physics, Book VI, cited by H. Corbin in Suhrawardī, *Opera*, Vol. I, p. xli.

¹³ Originally, philosophy like all forms of wisdom consisted of a doctrine, a rite, and a "spiritual alchemy." In Greek civilization the first element gradually separated from the others and became reduced to a theoretical form of knowledge which came to be known as philosophy. In the 55th section of *Talwihāt*, Suhrawardī writes how he saw Aristotle, who is most likely Plotinus, the author of the *Theology of*

In the introduction to his *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, Suhrawardī states explicitly the nature of *ishrāqī* wisdom and its relation to ancient doctrines. As he writes: "Although before the composition of this book I composed several summary treatises on Aristotelian philosophy, this book differs from them and has a method peculiar to itself. All of its material has not been assembled by thought and reasoning; rather, intellectual intuition, contemplation, and ascetic practices have played an important role in it. Since our sayings have not come by means of rational demonstration but by inner vision and contemplation, they cannot be destroyed by the doubts and temptations of the sceptics. Whoever is a traveller (*sālik*) on the way to truth is my companion and a help on this Path. The procedure of the master of philosophy, the divine Plato, was the same, and the sages who preceded Plato in time like Hermes, the father of philosophy, followed the same path. Since sages of the past, because of the ignorance of the masses, expressed their sayings in secret symbols (*rumūz*), the refutations which have been made against them have concerned the exterior of these sayings and not their real intentions. And the *ishrāqī* wisdom the foundation and basis of which are the two principles of light and darkness as established by the Persian sages like Jāmāsp, Farshādshūr, and Būzarjumīhr is among these hidden, secret symbols. One must never think that the light and darkness which appear in our expressions are the same as those used by the infidel Magi or the heretical Manichaeans for they finally involve us in idolatry (*shirk*) and dualism."¹⁴

Aristotle, in a dream and asked if the Islamic Peripatetics were the real philosophers. Aristotle answered, "No, a degree in a thousand." Rather the Sufis, Bisṭāmī and Tustarī, are the real philosophers. Aristotle told Suhrawardī to wake into himself and to pass beyond theoretical knowledge (*ʿilm ṣūfī*) to effective realization or the "knowledge of presence" (*ʿilm ḥudūrī* or *shuhūdī*). See the Prolegomene of H. Corbin in Suhrawardī, *Opera*, Vol. I, p. lxx.

¹⁴ Suhrawardī, *Opera*, Vol. II, pp. 10–11. Some modern interpreters of Suhrawardī have considered him to be anti-Islamic and of Zoroastrian sympathy. A. von Kremer in his *Geschichte der Herrschenden Ideen des Islam*, Leipzig, 1868, pp. 89ff., writes that Suhrawardī was part of the current directed against Islam. On the other hand, the scholarly and sympathetic interpreter of Suhrawardī, H. Corbin, insists on the role of *Shāikh al-Ishrāq* in reviving the philosophy of Zoroastrian Persia and on his sympathy for Zoroastrian and Manichaean ideas, although he does not consider this revival to be a movement against Islam but rather an integration of ancient Persian myths in "the prism of Islamic spirituality." In any case, all views which consider *ishrāqī* wisdom to be simply a revival of Zoroastrianism or Manichaeism confuse the form with the spirit. There is no doubt that Suhrawardī makes use of Mazdaean symbols especially with regard to angelology, but that is no more reason for calling him Mazdaean than it is to call Jābir ibn Ḥayyān a follower of Egyptian religion, because he used Hermetic symbols. The only criterion of orthodoxy in Islam is the first *shahādah* (*la ilāha ill-Allah*) and, according to it, Suhrawardī cannot be said to lie outside the pale of Islam, no matter how strange his formulations may be. Furthermore, the disciples of the *Ishrāqī* school consider the Persian sages of whom Suhrawardī speaks to have lived before Plato and Pythagoras and not during the Sāsānid period. The genius of Islam to integrate diverse elements into itself is evident here as elsewhere and should not be inter-

B

THE MEANING OF *ISHRĀQ*

The Arabic words *ishrāq* meaning illumination and *mashriq* meaning the east are both derived etymologically from the root *sharq* meaning the rising of the sun. Moreover, the adjective illuminative, *mushriqiyyah*, and Oriental, *mashriqiyyah*, are written in exactly the same way in Arabic. This symbolic identification of the Orient with light which is inherent in the Arabic language and is employed often by the *Ishrāqī* sages, has given rise to many difficulties in the interpretations of that wisdom which is both illuminative and Oriental. Already in his *Manṭiq al-Mashriqiyyīn* most of which is lost, ibn Sīna refers to an Oriental wisdom which is superior to the commonly accepted Peripatetic (*mashā'i*) philosophy.¹⁵ Due to the fact that the word *mashriqiyyūn* could also be read as *mushriqiyyūn* in Arabic, the latter meaning illuminative, one could interpret the esoteric teachings which ibn Sīna proposes as being illuminative as well as Oriental. Since the famous article of Nallino,¹⁶ it has become common opinion that the reading is Oriental and has nothing to do with illumination. Yet, this opinion, however correct it may be linguistically, is essentially limited in that it does not take into account the profound symbolism inherent in the language and does not consider the great debt which Suhrawardi and *ishrāqī* wisdom owe to ibn Sīna.

Suhrawardi writes that ibn Sīna wanted to recapture Oriental philosophy but did not have access to the necessary sources.¹⁷ Yet, if we consider how the sacred geography of the Orient of light and the Occident of darkness in the initiatory trilogy of ibn Sīna, *Ḥayy Ibn Yağzān*, *Risālat al-Ṭā'ir*, and *Salāmān wa Absāl*, is followed by Suhrawardi, how the *Shaiḫ* al-*Ishrāq* translated several of the treatises of ibn Sīna into Persian, and how parts of *Hikmat al-Ishrāq* resemble closely the commentary of ibn Sīna upon the *Theology of Aristotle*, it will become clear how profoundly the roots of *Ishrāqī* philosophy lie in certain of the later non-Aristotelian works of ibn Sīna and how illumination and the Orient are united in this form of wisdom.

The unification of the meaning of illumination and the Orient in the term

interpreted as a sign of departure from the straight path (*ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*) or the universal orthodoxy which embraces all the perspectives within the tradition. The vocation of Islam is the re-establishment of the primordial tradition so that all the streams of the ancient religions and cultures have flowed into it without in any way destroying its purity.

¹⁵ Ibn Sīna, *Manṭiq al-Mashriqiyyīn*, Cairo, 1338/1919, pp. 2-4.

¹⁶ A. Nallino, "Filosofia 'orientale' od 'illuminativa' d'Avicenna," *Rivista degli studi orientali*, Vol. X, 1925, pp. 433-67. H. Corbin rightly emphasizes the illuminative as well as the Oriental aspect of ibn Sīna's Oriental wisdom and its profound connection with the *Ishrāqī* school of Suhrawardi. See Corbin, *Avicenne et L'écrit visionnaire*, Institut Franco-Iranien, Teheran, 1952-54, Vol. I, Introduction, p. iii.

¹⁷ Suhrawardi, *Opera*, Vol. I, p. 195.

ishrāq is connected with the symbolism of the sun which rises in the Orient and which illuminates all things so that the land of light is identified with that of gnosis and illumination.¹⁸ Inasmuch as the Occident is where the sun sets, where darkness reigns, it is the land of matter, ignorance, or discursive thought, entangled in the mesh of its own logical constructions. The Orient is, on the contrary, the world of light, of being, the land of knowledge, and of illumination which transcends mere discursive thought and rationalism. It is the land of knowledge which liberates man from himself and from the world, knowledge which is combined with purification and sanctity.¹⁹ It is for this reason that Suhrawardi connects *ishrāqī* wisdom with the ancient priest-kings of Persia like Kai *Khusrau* and with the Greek sages like Asclepius, Pythagoras, and Plato whose wisdom was based on inner purification and intellectual intuition rather than on discursive logic.²⁰

In a historical sense, *ishrāqī* wisdom is connected with pre-Aristotelian metaphysics. Jurjāni in his *Ta'rifāt* calls the *Ishrāqīs* "the philosophers whose master is Plato." 'Abd al-Razzāq *Kāshānī*, the celebrated Sufi, in his commentary upon the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* of ibn 'Arabi writes that the *Ishrāqīs* derive their chain from Seth, often identified with Agathodemon, from whom craft initiations and Hermetic orders also derive their origin. Ibn Wahshiyyah in his *Nabataean Agriculture* mentions a class of Egyptian priests who were the children of the sister of Hermes and who were called *Ishrāqīyyūn*.²¹ Suhrawardi himself writes in his *Mufārahāt* that the wisdom of *Ishrāq* was possessed by the mythological priest-kings of ancient Persia, Kūmārth, Faridūn, and Kai *Khusrau* and then passed on to Pythagoras and Plato, the latter being the last among the Greeks to possess it, and was finally inherited by the Muslim Sufis like *Dhu al-Nūn Miṣri* and Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī.²²

Both metaphysically and historically, *ishrāqī* wisdom means the ancient pre-discursive mode of thought which is intuitive (*dhawqī*) rather than discursive (*baḥṭhi*) and which seeks to reach illumination by asceticism and purification. In the hands of Suhrawardi it becomes a new school of wisdom integrating Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy with Zoroastrian angelology and Hermetic ideas and placing the whole structure within the context of Sufism.

¹⁸ In European languages the word "orient" means both the east and the placing of oneself in the right direction, and refers to the same symbolism.

¹⁹ As Corbin states, "*Ishrāq* is a knowledge which is Oriental because it is itself the Orient of knowledge." Suhrawardi, *Opera*, Vol. I, p. xxix.

²⁰ Throughout our writings we use the word "intellect" as the instrument of gnosis, of direct intuitive knowledge where the knower and the known become identical, and distinguish it from reason which is its passive reflection.

²¹ Ibn Wahshiyyah, *Ancient Alphabet and Hieroglyphic Characters*, London, 1806, p. 100. These historical connections are discussed by H. Corbin in *Les motifs zoroastriens dans la philosophie de Suhrawardi*, Editions du Courrier, Teheran, 1325 Solar, p. 18, and the Prolegomene to Suhrawardi, *Opera*, Vol. I, pp. xxv ff. We are indebted to him for drawing our attention to them.

²² Suhrawardi, *Opera*, Vol. I, pp. 502-03.

C

THE ORIENT AND OCCIDENT IN SACRED
GEOGRAPHY

In reading the texts of Suhrawardī one is particularly struck by the large number of quotations from the Qur'ān, Ḥadīth, and the sayings of earlier Sufis and by the profound transformation into the Islamic mould of all the diverse ideas which Suhrawardī employs. It is by virtue of such an integration and transformation that the *ishrāqī* wisdom could come to play such a major role in Shi'ism.

In the introduction to *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, Suhrawardī outlines the hierarchy of those who know in a manner which demonstrates how he integrates ancient wisdom into the perspective of Islam. There are, according to this scheme, four major types of "knowers": —

1. The *ḥakīm ilāhī*, or *theosophos*, who knows both discursive philosophy, i.e., Aristotelianism, and gnosis (*ta'alluh*). Suhrawardī considers Pythagoras, Plato, and himself among this group.
2. The sage who does not involve himself with discursive philosophy but remains content with gnosis, like Hallāj, Bistāmī, and Tustarī.
3. The philosopher who is acquainted with discursive philosophy but is a stranger to gnosis like Fārābī or ibn Sīnā.²³
4. He who still seeks knowledge (*ṭalīb*) but has not yet reached a station of knowledge.

Above all these degrees is that of the Pole (*Qutb*) or Leader (*Imām*) who is the head of the spiritual hierarchy and of his representatives (*khulafā'*).²⁴

The stations of wisdom are also described in a purely Sufi fashion as degrees of penetration into the divine unity expressed by the *shahādah*. In his initiatory treatise, *Ṣafīr-i Simurgh* (Song of the Griffin), Suhrawardī enumerates five degrees of unity:²⁵ *la ilāha il-Allāh*, none is worthy of worship but God, which is the common acceptance of the oneness of God and rejection of any other divinity; *la huwa illa huwa*, there is no he but He, which is the negation of any otherness than God, i.e., only God can be called "He"; *la anta illa anta*, there is no thou but Thou, which is the negation of all thouness outside of God; *la ana illa ana*, there is no "I" but the divine "I", which means that only God can say "I"; finally, the highest station of unity which is that of those who say *wa kullu shai'in hālikun illa wajhahu*, i.e., all things perish except His face (essence).²⁶ The formulations of Sufism become, therefore, the framework of his classification of knowledge into which he tries to place the heritage of universal gnosis and philosophy inherited by Islam.

²³ Suhrawardī is considering only the Peripatetic aspect of ibn Sīnā.

²⁴ Suhrawardī, *Opera*, Vol. II, pp. 10–11. Actually, the stations mentioned are more numerous; we have described only the major ones.

²⁵ Suhrawardī, *Risāleh Ṣafīr-i Simurgh*, MS. Teheran National Library, 1758, pp. 11–12.

²⁶ In this same treatise Suhrawardī writes that the most noble knowledge is gnosis which lies above human reason. As he says, "To seek the knowledge of God through reason is like seeking the sun with a lamp." *Ibid.*, p. 14.

As already mentioned, the term *ishrāq* is closely connected with the symbolism of directions and sacred geography which are essential elements of the traditional sciences. In the trilogy of ibn Sīnā to which we have already referred, the disciple passes from the Occident which is the world of matter, through intermediate Occidents and Orients which are the heavens and separate substances, to the Orient proper which symbolizes the world of archangels. A similar division of the cosmos occurs in the writings of Suhrawardī. The Occident is the world of matter, the prison into which man's soul has fallen and from which he must escape. The Orient of lights is the world of archangels above the visible cosmos which is the origin of his soul (*rūh*). The middle Occident is the heavens which also correspond to the various inner faculties of man. It is important to note that, contrary to Peripatetic philosophy, the *Ishrāqīs* hold that the boundary between the Occident and the Orient is set at the *primum mobile*; all that is visible in the cosmos including the celestial spheres is a part of the Occident, because it is still connected with matter, however subtle it may be. The Orient, properly speaking, is above the visible cosmos; it is the world of informal manifestation with its boundary at the heaven of the fixed stars.

In his treatise *al-Qiṣṣat al-Ghurbat al-Gharbiyyah*, "the Story of the Occidental Exile," in which Suhrawardī seeks to reveal the secrets of the trilogy of ibn Sīnā, the universe becomes a crypt through which the seeker after truth must journey, beginning with this world of matter and darkness into which he has fallen and ending in the Orient of lights, the original home of the soul, which symbolizes illumination and spiritual realization.²⁷ The journey begins at the city of Qairawān in present-day Tunis, located west of the main part of the Islamic world.²⁸ The disciple and his brother are imprisoned in the city at the bottom of a well which means the depth of matter. They are the sons of *Shāikh* Hādī ibn al-Khair al-Yamānī, i.e., from the Yaman, which in Arabic means also the right hand and, therefore, symbolically the Orient, and is connected traditionally with the wisdom of the Prophet Solomon and the ancient sages as the left is connected with matter and darkness.²⁹ Above the well is a great castle with many towers, i.e., the world of the elements and the

²⁷ There is a profound correspondence between the microcosm and the macrocosm in all traditional wisdom so that the inward journey of man through the centre of his being corresponds to a journey through the various stages of the universe and finally beyond it. To escape from the prison of the lower soul (*nafs ammārah*) is also to pass beyond the crypt of the cosmos.

²⁸ Suhrawardī, *Opera*, Vol. II, pp. 274 ff.

²⁹ It is said that when Christian Rosenkreutz, the founder of the order of the Rosy-Cross, abandoned Europe, he retired to the Yaman.

heavens or the faculties of the soul. They will be able to escape only at night and not during the day which means that man reaches the intelligible or spiritual world only in death, whether this be natural or initiatory, and in dream which is a second death. In the well there is such darkness that one cannot see even one's own hands, i.e., matter is so opaque that rarely does light shine through it. Occasionally they receive news from the Yaman which makes them homesick, meaning that they see the intelligible world during contemplation or in dreams. And so, they set out for their original home.

One clear night an order is brought by the hoopoe from the Governor of the Yaman telling them to begin their journey to their homeland, meaning the reception of a revelation from the intelligible world and the beginning of asceticism. The order also asks them to let go the hem of their dress, i.e., become free from attachment, when they reach the valley of ants, which is the passion of avidity. They are to kill their wives, i.e., passions, and then sit in a ship and begin their journey in the name of God.³⁰ Having made their preparation they set out for their pilgrimage to Mount Sinai.

A wave comes between the disciple and the son, meaning that the animal soul is sacrificed. Morning is near, that is, the union of the particular soul with the universal soul is approaching. The hero discovers that the world in which evil takes place, meaning this world, will be overturned and rain and stones, i.e., diseases and moral evils, will descend upon it. Upon reaching a stormy sea he throws in his foster-mother and drowns her, meaning that he even sacrifices his natural soul. As he travels on still in storm, i.e., in the body, he has to cast away his ship in fear of the king above him who collects taxes, meaning death which all mortals must taste. He reaches the Mount of Gog and Magog, i.e., evil thoughts and love of this world enter his imagination. The *jinn*, the powers of imagination and meditation, are also before him as well as a spring of running copper which symbolizes wisdom. The hero asks the *jinn* to blow upon the copper which thus becomes fiery, and from it he builds a dam before Gog and Magog. He takes the carnal soul (*nafs ammārah*) and places it in a cave, or the brain which is the source of this soul. He then cuts the "streams from the liver of the sky," i.e., he stops the power of motion from the brain which is located in the head, the sky of the body. He throws the empyrean heaven so that it covers all the stars, the sun, and the moon, meaning all powers of the soul become of one colour, and passes by fourteen coffins, the fourteen powers of *ishrāqī* psychology,³¹ and ten tombs, the five external and the five internal senses. Having passed through these stages he discovers the path of God and realizes that it is the right path.

³⁰ Suhrawardī indicates here the main technique of Sufism which is the invocation (*dhikr*) of one of the names of God and which Sufi masters call the sacred barque that carries man across the ocean of the spiritual path to the shore of the spiritual world.

³¹ These fourteen powers are: Attraction, retention, purgation, repulsion, digestion, growth, sleep, imagination, anger, lust, and the four humours.

The hero passes beyond the world of matter and reaches a light, the active intellect which is the governor of this world. He places the light in the mouth of a dragon, the world of the elements, and passes by it to reach the heavens and beyond them to the signs of the Zodiac which mark the limit of the visible cosmos. But his journey is not yet at an end; he continues even beyond them to the upper heavens. Music is heard from far away, and the initiate emerges from the cavern of limitation to the spring of life³² flowing from a great mountain which is Mount Sinai. In the spring he sees fish that are his brothers; they are those who have reached the end of the spiritual journey.

He begins to climb the mountain and eventually reaches his father, the archangel of humanity, who shines with a blinding light which nearly burns him. The father congratulates him for having escaped from the prison of Qairawān, but tells him that he must return because he has not yet cast away all bonds. When he returns a second time, he will be able to stay. The father tells him that above them is his father, the universal intellect, and beyond him their relatives going back to the Great Ancestor who is pure light. "All perishes except His essence."³³

From this brief summary we see how *ishrāqī* wisdom implies essentially a spiritual realization above and beyond discursive thought. The cosmos becomes transparent before the traveller and interiorized within his being. The degrees of realization from the state of the soul of fallen man to the centre of the soul freed from all limitation corresponds "horizontally" to the journey from the Occident of matter to the Orient of lights, and "vertically" to the ascent from the earth to the limits of the visible universe and from there, through the world of formless manifestation, to the divine essence.

Hikmat al-Ishrāq

Ishrāqī wisdom is not a systematic philosophy so that its exposition in a systematic fashion is hardly possible. What Suhrawardī says in one text seems at first sight to be contradicted in another work, and one has to discover the point of view in each case in order to overcome the external contradictions. In expounding the major points of *ishrāqī* wisdom we will, therefore, follow the outlines of *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, the most important text in which this wisdom is expounded, drawing also from the shorter treatises which Suhrawardī wrote as further explanations of his major work.

Hikmat al-Ishrāq is the fourth of the great doctrinal works of Suhrawardī the first three dealing with Aristotelian philosophy which is the necessary prerequisite and foundation for illuminative wisdom. It deals with the

³² The inward journey beyond the carnal soul (*nafs*) corresponding externally to the journey beyond the visible universe is described by the *Ishrāqīs* symbolically as reaching the fountain of life in which there are found the jewels of the purely spiritual world.

³³ Suhrawardī, *Opera*, Vol. II, p. 296.

philosophy of *Ishrāq* itself which is written for those who are not satisfied with theoretical philosophy alone but search for the light of gnosis. The book which in the beauty of style is a masterpiece among Arabic philosophical texts was composed during a few months in 582/1186, and, as Suhrawardi himself writes at the end of the book, revealed to him suddenly by the Spirit;³⁴ he adds that only a person illuminated by the Spirit can hope to understand it.³⁵ The work consists of a prologue and two sections: the first concerning logic and the criticism of certain points of Peripatetic philosophy, and the second composed of five chapters (*maqālāt*), dealing with light, ontology, angelology, physics, psychology and, finally, eschatology and spiritual union.

In the section on logic he follows mostly the teaching of Aristotle but criticizes the Aristotelian definition. According to the Stagirite, a logical definition consists of genus plus differentia. Suhrawardi remarks that the distinctive attribute of the object which is defined will give us no knowledge of that thing if that attribute cannot be predicated of any other thing. A definition in *ishrāqī* wisdom is the summation of the qualities in a particular thing which when added together exist only in that thing.

Suhrawardi criticizes the ten categories of Aristotle as being limited and confined only to this universe. Beyond this world there is an indefinite number of other categories which the Aristotelian classification does not include. As for the nine categories of accidents, he reduces them to four by considering relation, time, posture, place, action, and passivity as the one single category of relation (*nisbah*) to which are added the three categories of quality, quantity, and motion.

Suhrawardi alters several points of Aristotelian philosophy in order to make it a worthy basis for the doctrine of illumination.³⁶ A major point of difference between the *Ishrāqīs* and the Muslim followers of Aristotle (*Mashā'īs*), also a central issue of Islamic philosophy, is that of the priority of Being or existence (*wujūd*) to essence (*māhiyyah*).³⁷ The *Mashā'īs* like the Sufis consider Being to be principal and *māhiyyah* or essence to be accidental with

respect to it. Suhrawardi objects to this view and writes that existence does not have any external reality outside the intellect which abstracts it from objects. For example, the existence of iron is precisely its essence and not a separate reality. The *Mashā'īs* consider existence to have an external reality and believe that the intellect abstracts the limitation of a being which then becomes its essence.³⁸ The argument of Suhrawardi against this view is that existence can be neither substance nor accident and, therefore, has no external reality. For if it is an accident, it needs something to which it is an accident. If this something is other than existence, it proves what we sought, i.e., this something is without existence. If existence is a substance, then it cannot be accident, although we say accidents "are." Therefore, existence is neither substance nor accident and consequently can exist only in the intellect.

The issue involved, which is essential to the understanding of all medieval and ancient philosophy, is the relation between Being and existence, on the one hand, and the archetypes and limitations on the other. The *Mashā'īs* and Sufis consider the universe to consist of degrees of Being and limitations which distinguish various beings from one another. The Sufis, particularly those of the school of ibn 'Arabi who are concerned essentially with metaphysical doctrines, transpose these limitations into the principal domain and consider them the same as the archetypes or the Platonic ideas. The traditional interpreters of *Shāikh al-Ishrāq* interpret his doctrine in a way which does not destroy the principality of Being,³⁹ but rather subordinates the existence of a thing which is temporary and "accidental" to its archetype which with respect to the terrestrial existence of the thing is principal. In other words, essence (*māhiyyah*) is subordinated to Being (*wujūd*), if we understand by this term Being *qua* Being; but as archetype, it is superior to particular existence which is an "exteriorization" of Being. The *Ishrāqīs* believe in fact that it is useless to discuss about the principality of *wujūd* and *māhiyyah*, of Being and essence, because the essence or *māhiyyah* is itself a degree of Being. The *Ishrāqīs* differ from the *Mashā'īs* in that the former considers the world to be actual in its being and potential in its qualities and attributes, and the latter believes, on the contrary, that the world is potential in its being and actual in its qualities and perfections.⁴⁰

³⁸ For a general discussion of this subject in the philosophy of the master of the *Mashā'īs*, ibn Sina, see A. M. Goichon, *La distinction d'essence et de l'existence d'après Ibn Sina (Avicenne)*, de Brouwer Desclès, Paris, 1937.

³⁹ In fact, as Mulla Ṣadra asserts, Suhrawardi substitutes light (*nūr*) for Being attributing the former with all the features which the latter term possesses in other schools. We are deeply indebted for the knowledge of this interpretation and many other essential elements of *ishrāqī* doctrines to one of the greatest masters of traditional wisdom in Persia, Sayyid Muḥammad Kāzīm 'Aṣṣār.

⁴⁰ Although in his *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, Suhrawardi does not speak of the necessary and possible beings, in many of his other treatises like the *Partau-Nāmeḥ*, *I'tiqād al-Hukamā* and *Yazdān Shīnākht*, he speaks of the *mashā'ī* categories of Necessary Being (*wājib al-wujūd*), possible being (*mumkin al-wujūd*), and impossible being (*mumtani' al-wujūd*).

³⁴ The inspiration for the book came to the author on an auspicious day when all the seven planets were in conjunction in the Sign of the Balance.

³⁵ Suhrawardi writes that he who wishes to understand the essence of this work should spend forty days in a retreat (*khalwah*) occupying himself only with invocation (*dhikr*) under the direction of the spiritual guide whom he calls in several places *qā'im bi al-Kitāb*.

³⁶ For his criticism, see Suhrawardi, *Opera*, Vol. II, pp. 46ff.

³⁷ The term *māhiyyah* in Arabic is composed of *mā* meaning "what" and *hiyyah* derived from the word *huwa* ("it"). It is the answer given to the question "What is it?" It is used to denote the essence of anything whether the existence of that thing is certain or doubtful, while the word *dhāt* is used to denote the essence of something which possesses some degree of being.

In Islamic philosophy reality is understood in terms of *wujūd* and *māhiyyah*, the latter meaning the limitation placed upon Being and identified with the Platonic ideas. See. S. H. Naṣr, "The Polarisation of Being" [*Proceedings of the Sixth Pakistan Philosophical Congress*, Lahore, 1959, pp. 50-55.

Another important criticism of the Aristotelians by Suhrawardi is that of the doctrine of hylomorphism, of form and matter, which is the foundation of Aristotle's philosophy. As we shall see later, Suhrawardi considers bodies to be darkness and transforms the Aristotelian forms into the guardian lights or angels which govern each being. He defines a body as an external, simple substance (*jauhar basit*) which is capable of accepting conjunction and separation.⁴¹ This substance in itself, in its own essence, is called body (*jism*), but from the aspect of accepting the form of species (*ṣūrah nau'īyyah*) it is called the *materia prima* or *hyle* (*hayūla*). He also differs from the Aristotelians in defining the place (*makān*) of the body not as the internal surface of the body which contains it but as the abstract dimension (*bu'd mujarrad*) in which the body is placed. Suhrawardi follows Ibn Sina and other *Mashā'is* in rejecting the possibility of a void and an indivisible particle or atom, and in considering the body to be indefinitely divisible even if this division cannot be carried out physically.

Other elements of Peripatetic philosophy which Suhrawardi condemns include its doctrine of the soul and arguments for its subsistence which he believes to be weak and insufficient;⁴² its rejection of the Platonic ideas which are the cornerstone of *ishrāqī* wisdom and upon the reality of which Suhrawardi insists in nearly every doctrinal work; and its theory of vision.

This last criticism is of interest in that Suhrawardi rejects both of the theories of vision commonly held during the Middle Ages. Regarding the Aristotelian theory that forms of objects are imprinted upon the pupil of the eye and then reach the *sensus communis* and finally the soul, Suhrawardi asks how the imprinting of large objects like the sky upon this small pupil in the eye is possible. Since man does not reason at the time of vision which is an immediate act, even if large objects were imprinted in smaller proportions, one could not know of the size of the object from its image. The mathematicians and students of optics usually accepted another theory according to which a conic ray of light leaves the eye with the head of the cone in the eye and the base at the object to be seen. Suhrawardi attacks this view also by saying that this light is either an accident or a substance. If it is an accident it cannot be transmitted; therefore, it must be a substance. As a substance, its motion is dependent either on our will or it is natural. If dependent on our will, we

⁴¹ Suhrawardi defines a substance in *mashā'i* fashion as that possible being (*mumkin*) which has no place (*maḥall*), and accident as that possible being which does have a place. He also defines a body as that substance which has height, width, and depth. *Partau-Nāmah*, MS., Teheran National Library, 1257, pp. 190ff.

⁴² In his works Suhrawardi insists on the perishable nature of the body and its being a prison into which the soul has fallen. In the *Bustān al-Qulūb*, MS., Teheran Sipahsālār Library, 2911, he gives as argument for the permanence of the soul and its spiritual nature, the fact that the body of man changes its material every few years while man's identity remains unchanged. The *mashā'i* doctrine of the soul is essentially one of defining its faculties; the *ishrāqī* view is to find the way by which the soul can escape its bodily prison.

should be able to gaze at an object and not see it, which is contrary to experience; or if it has natural motion, it should move only in one direction like vapour which moves upward, or stone which moves downward, and we should be able to see only in one direction which is also contrary to experience. Therefore, he rejects both views.

According to Suhrawardi, vision can occur only of a lighted object. When man sees this object, his soul surrounds it and is illuminated by its light. This illumination (*ishrāq*) of the soul (*nafs*) in presence of the object is vision. Therefore, even sensible vision partakes of the illuminative character of all knowledge.

With this criticism of the Aristotelian (*mashā'i*) philosophy, Suhrawardi turns to the exposition of the essential elements of *ishrāqī* wisdom itself beginning with a chapter on light, or one might say the theophany of light, which is the most characteristic and essential element of the teachings of this school.⁴³ Light (*nūr*), the essence of which lies above comprehension, needs no definition because it is the most obvious of all things. Its nature is to manifest itself; it is being, as its absence, darkness (*ẓulmah*), is nothingness. All reality consists of degrees of light and darkness.⁴⁴ Suhrawardi calls it Absolute Reality the infinite and limitless divine essence, the Light of lights (*Nūr al-anwār*).⁴⁵ The whole universe, the 18,000 worlds of light and darkness which Suhrawardi mentions in his *Bustān al-Qulūb*, are degrees of irradiation and effusion of this Primordial Light which shines everywhere while remaining immutable and for ever the same.⁴⁶

Suhrawardi "divides" reality according to the types of light and darkness. If light is subsistent by itself, it is called substantial light (*nūr jauhari*) or incorporeal light (*nūr mujarrad*); if it depends for its subsistence on other than itself, it is called accidental light (*nūr 'arḍi*). Likewise, if darkness is subsistent by itself it is called obscurity (*ghasaq*) and if it depends on other than itself for its subsistence it is called form (*hai'ah*). This division is also based on the degrees of comprehension.⁴⁷ A being is either aware of itself

⁴³ Suhrawardi, *Opera*, Vol. II, pp. 106-21.

⁴⁴ As the quotations we have already cited demonstrate, Suhrawardi insists that he is not dealing with the dualism of the Zoroastrians. Rather, he is explaining the mysterious polarization of reality in this symbolism. The *Ishrāqīs* usually interpret light as Being and darkness as determination by ideas (*māhiyyah*). They say that all ancient sages taught this same truth but in different languages. Hermes spoke of Osiris and Isis; Osiris or the sun symbolizes Being and Isis or the moon, *māhiyyah*. They interpret the pre-Socratic Greek philosophers in the same fashion.

⁴⁵ Actually this term means both the divine essence and its first determination which is the archangel or the universal intellect.

⁴⁶ "The immense panorama of diversity which we call the Universe is, therefore, a vast shadow of the infinite variety in intensity of direct or indirect illuminations of rays of the Primary Light." Iqbāl, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, Luzac & Co., London, 1908, p. 135.

⁴⁷ In his *Risālah Yazdān Shīnākht*, Maṭba'-i 'Ilmi, Teheran, 1316 Solar, pp. 13ff., Suhrawardi divides comprehension (*idrāk*) into four categories: —

or ignorant of it. If it is aware of itself and subsists by itself, it is incorporeal light, God, the angels, archetypes, and the human soul. If a thing has need of a being other than itself to become aware of itself, it is accidental light like the stars and fire. If it is ignorant of itself but subsists by itself, it is obscurity like all natural bodies, and if it is ignorant by itself and subsists by other than itself, it is form like colours and smells.

All beings are the illumination (*ishrāq*) of the Supreme Light which leaves its vicegerent in each domain, the sun in the heavens, fire among the elements, and the lordly light (*nūr isphād*) in the human soul. The soul of man is essentially composed of light; that is why man becomes joyous at the sight of the light of the sun or fire and fears darkness. All the causes of the universe return ultimately to light; all motion in the world, whether it be of the heavens or of the elements, is caused by various regent lights (*nūr mudabbir*) which are ultimately nothing but illuminations of the Light of lights.

Between the Supreme Light and the obscurity of bodies there must be various stages in which the Supreme Light weakens gradually to reach the darkness of this world. These stages are the orders of angels, personal and universal at the same time, who govern all things.⁴⁸ In enumerating these angelic orders Suhrawardi relies largely upon Zoroastrian angelology and departs completely from the Aristotelian and Avicennian schemes which limit the intelligences or angels to ten to correspond to the celestial spheres of Ptolemaic astronomy. Moreover, in the Avicennian scheme, the angels or intellects are limited to three intelligible "dimensions" which constitute their being, namely, the intellection of their principle, of the necessity of their existence, and of the contingency of their essence (*māhiyyah*).⁴⁹ Suhrawardi begins with this scheme as a point of departure but adds many other "dimensions" such as domination (*qahr*) and love (*maḥabbah*), independence and dependence, illumination (*ishrāq*) and contemplation (*shuhūd*) which open a new horizon beyond the Aristotelian universe of the medieval philosophers.

Suhrawardi calls the first effusion of the Light of lights (*nūr al-anwār* or *nūr al-a'zam*) the archangel *Bahman* or the nearest light (*nūr al-aqrab*). This light contemplates the Light of lights and, since no veil exists in between, receives direct illumination from it. Through this illumination, a new triumphal

(i) Sense of sight which perceives external forms like colours, etc.

(ii) Imagination (*khayāl*) which perceives images not depending upon external objects.

(iii) Apprehension (*wahm*) which is stronger than the other two and which perceives the meaning of sensible things, but, like the other two, cannot be separated from the matter of bodies.

(iv) Intellectual apprehension (*'aql*) the seat of which is the heart, the instrument which is a bridge between the human being and the intellectual world, and perceives intellectual realities, the world of angels, and the spirit of prophets and sages.

⁴⁸ Suhrawardi, *Opera*, Vol. II, pp. 131-32.

⁴⁹ Ibn Sina, *Najāt*, MS. al-Kurdi, Cairo, 1938, pp. 256-57.

light (*nūr al-qāhir*) comes into being which receives two illuminations, one directly from the Supreme Light and the other from the first light. The process of effusion continues in the same manner with the third light receiving illumination four times, twice from the light preceding it, once from the first light and once from the Supreme Light; and the fourth light eight times, four times from the light preceding it, twice from the second light, once from the first light, and once from the Light of lights or Supreme Light.⁵⁰ In this manner the order of archangels, which Suhrawardi calls the longitudinal order (*ṭabaqāt al-ṭūl*) or "world of mothers" (*al-ummahāt*) and in which the number of archangels far exceeds the number of intelligences in Aristotelian cosmology, comes into being.⁵¹ Each higher light has domination (*qahr*) over the lower and each lower light, love (*maḥabbah*) for the higher. Moreover, each light is a purgatory or veil (*barzakh*) between the light above and the light below. In this manner the supreme order of angels is illuminated from the Light of lights which has love only for Itself because the beauty and perfection of Its essence are evident to Itself.

The supreme hierarchy of being or the "longitudinal" order gives rise to a new polarization of Being. Its positive or masculine aspect such as dominance, contemplation, and independence gives rise to a new order of angels called the latitudinal order (*ṭabaqāt al-'arḍ*) the members of which are no longer generators of one another; rather, each is integral in itself and is, therefore, called *mutakāfiyyah*. Suhrawardi identifies these angels with the Platonic ideas and refers to them as the lords of the species (*arbāb al-anwā'*) or the species of light (*anwā' nūriyyah*). Each species in the world has as its archetype one of these angels, or to express it in another manner, each being in this world is the theurgy (*ṭilism*) of one of these angels which are, therefore, called the lords of the theurgy (*arbāb al-ṭilism*). Water is the theurgy of its angel *khurdād*, minerals of *shahrwār*, vegetables of *murdād*, fire of *urdbihisht*, etc.⁵² Suhrawardi uses the names of the *Amshāspands* (*Amesha Spentās*), the separate powers of Ahura Mazdāh in Zoroastrianism, to designate these archetypes, and in this way unites Zoroastrian angelology with the Platonic ideas. These longitudinal angels are not, however, in any way abstract or mental objects, as sometimes the Platonic ideas are interpreted to be. They are, on the contrary, concrete as angelic hypostases and appear abstract only from man's point of view who, because of his imprisonment in the cage of his senses,

⁵⁰ Suhrawardi, *Opera*, Vol. II, pp. 133ff. Also *Prolegomène*, II, pp. 42ff. In *ishrāqī* wisdom all of the cosmic hierarchies are understood in terms of a series of illuminations (*ishrāqāt*) and contemplation (*shuhūd*), the first being a descent and the second an ascent.

⁵¹ Usually in medieval cosmology the elements, the acceptors of form, are called the "mothers" and the celestial orbits, the givers of form, the "fathers." The term "mothers" used by Suhrawardi to designate the archangelic world should not, therefore, be confused with the elements.

⁵² Suhrawardi, *Opera*, Vol. II, pp. 157ff. Also H. Corbin, *Les motifs Zoroastriens dans la philosophie de Suhrawardi*, Editions du Courier, Teheran, 1325 Solar, Chap. I.

considers only the object of the senses to be concrete. These angels are the real governors of this world who guide all of its movements and direct all of its changes. They are at once the intelligences and principles of the being of things.

From the negative and feminine aspect of the longitudinal order of arch-angels, that is, love, dependence, and reception of illumination, there comes into being the heaven of fixed stars which these angels share in common. The stars are the crystallization into subtle matter of that aspect of the archangels which is "Non-Being" or removal from the Light of lights. This "materialization" marks the boundary between the Orient of pure lights or the archangelic world which lies beyond the visible heavens and the Occident which is comprised of increasing condensations of matter from the luminous heavens to the dense earthly bodies.

The latitudinal order of angels or the archetypes gives rise to another order of angels through which they govern the species. Suhrawardī calls this intermediary order the regent lights (*anwār al-mudabbirah*) or sometimes *anwār ispahbad* using a term from ancient Persian chivalry. It is this intermediary order which moves the heavenly spheres the motion of which is by love rather than by nature,⁵³ and which governs the species as the agent of the archetypes for which the species are theurgies (*ṭilismāt*) or "icons" (*aṣnām*). The *ispahbad* lights are also the centres of men's souls, each light being the angel of some individual person.⁵⁴ As for mankind itself, its angel is Gabriel. Humanity is an image of this archangel who is the mediator between man and the angelic world and the focus in which the lights of the Orient are concentrated. It is also the instrument of all knowledge inasmuch as it is the means by which man's soul is illuminated.⁵⁵

This archangel as the Holy Spirit is also the first and supreme intelligence and the first as well as the last prophet, Muḥammad (upon whom be peace),

⁵³ The governing light of the heavens moves each heaven by means of the planet attached to it, which is like the organ of the light. Suhrawardī calls this mover *hūrakhsā* which is the Pahlawi name for the sun, the greatest of the heavenly lights. Suhrawardī, *Opera*, Vol. II, p. 149.

Regarding the motion of each heaven, Suhrawardī writes, "Its illumination is the cause of its motion, and its motion is the cause of another illumination; the persistence of the illuminations is the cause of the persistence of motion, and the persistence of both the cause of the persistence of the events in this world." *Hayākil al-Nūr*, MS. Istanbul, Fātiḥ, 5426, Part 5.

⁵⁴ Each being in this world, including man, is connected to the Supreme Light not only through the intermediary angels but also directly. This light which connects each being directly to the Divine Light and places that being in the hierarchy of beings at a place proper to it is called *khurrah*. In ancient Persia it was believed that when a new king was to be chosen, the royal *khurrah* would descend upon him and distinguish him from the other pretenders to the throne.

⁵⁵ Suhrawardī describes Gabriel as one of the supreme archangels who is the archetype of the "rational species" (*nau' nāṭiq*), the giver of life, knowledge, and virtue. He is also called the giver of the spirit (*rawān bakhsh*) and the Holy Spirit (*ruh al-qudus*). Suhrawardī, *Opera*, Vol. II, p. 201.

the archetype of man (*rabb al-nau' al-insān*) and the supreme revealer of divine knowledge.

The physics and psychology of *Hikmat al-Ishrāq* treat of the world of bodies and the world of souls which, along with the world of the intelligences or angels, comprise the totality of this universe.⁵⁶ As already mentioned, Suhrawardī does not divide bodies into form and matter. Rather, his division of bodies is based on the degree in which they accept light. All physical bodies are either simple or compound; the simple bodies are divided into three classes: those that prevent light from entering (*hājiz*), those which permit the entrance of light (*laṭīf*), and those which permit light to enter in various degrees (*muṭaṣṣid*) and which are themselves divided into several stages.⁵⁷ The heavens are made of the first category in the luminous state. As for the elements below the heavens, they consist of earth belonging to the first category, water to the second, and air to the third.⁵⁸ Compound bodies belong likewise to one of the above categories, depending on which element predominates in them. All bodies are essentially purgatories or isthmus (*barzakḥ*) between various degrees of light by which they are illuminated and which they in turn reflect.

Suhrawardī rejects the view that the change of bodies is due to particles of one element entering into those of another. As a reason against this view he cites the example of a jug full of water that has been heated, i.e., according to this view particles of fire have entered into it. The volume of the water, however, does not change since it does not spill over; therefore, particles of fire cannot have entered into it. Qualitative change is due rather to the coming into being of a quality which is intermediate between the qualities of the original bodies and which is shared by all the particles of the new compound. For example, when water is heated a new quality between the cold of the water and the heat of the fire is brought into being by the light governing the change.

In the explanation of meteorological phenomena, Suhrawardī follows closely the teachings of ibn Sina and Aristotle in accepting the exhalation and vapour theory. He differs, however, from them in the importance he attaches to light as the cause of all these changes. For example, the heat which is responsible for evaporation is nothing but one of the effects of reflected light. All changes in fact which one observes in the world are caused by various hierarchies of light.⁵⁹ The elements are powerless before the heavens, the heavens are

⁵⁶ In the *I'tiqād al-Hukamā'* and the *Partau-Nāmeḥ*, Suhrawardī divides the universe into the world of intelligences (*'ālam al-'uqūl* or *'ālam al-jabarūt*), the world of souls (*'ālam al-nufūs* or *'ālam al-malakūt*), and the world of bodies (*'ālam al-ajsām* or *'ālam al-mulūk*). Also *ibid.*, p. 270.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

⁵⁸ Suhrawardī considers fire, the fourth of the traditional elements, to be a form of light and the theurgy of *urdbihisht*, and not one of the terrestrial elements.

⁵⁹ Suhrawardī gives a different meaning to causality than the Aristotelians' whose four causes which he does not accept. For Suhrawardī all these causes are really nothing but light, i.e., everything is made of light and by light, and is given a form by the archangelic light whom he calls the "giver of forms" (*wāḥib al-ṣuwar*) and seeks the Light of lights as its goal and end.

dominated by the souls, the souls by the intelligences, the intelligences by the universal intellect, and the universal intellect by the Light of lights.

The elements or simple bodies combine to form compounds which comprise the mineral, plant, and animal kingdoms, each of which is dominated by a particular light or angel. All that exists in the mineral kingdom is "lighted body" (*barzakh nūriyyah*) the permanence of which is like that of the heavens.⁶⁰ Gold and various jewels like rubies make man happy because of the light within them which is akin to the soul of man. This light within the minerals is governed by *isfandārmudh* which is the master of theurgy for earthy substances.

With greater refinement of the mixture of the elements, plants and animals come into being having their own faculties and powers which are so many "organs" of the light governing them. In higher animals and in man who is the most complete terrestrial being these faculties appear in their perfection. Man as the microcosm contains in himself the complete image of the universe, and his body is the gate of life of all elemental bodies. This body in turn is the theurgy for the *isphad* light which governs each man. All the faculties of the soul are aspects of the light which shines upon all elements of the body and illuminates the powers of imagination and memory for which it is the source. This light is connected with the body by means of the animal soul (*rūḥ ḥayawāniyyah*) the seat of which is in the liver and leaves the body for its original home in the angelic world as soon as death destroys the equilibrium of the bodily elements. It is the love (*maḥabbah*) of the light which creates the power of desire as it is its domination (*qahr*) which brings about anger.⁶¹

Suhrawardi draws heavily upon the psychology of ibn Sīna for the enumeration of the faculties of the various souls.⁶² It may be said in fact that with a few changes his classification is the same as that of his famous predecessor, despite the different role which the intellect or light plays in governing and illuminating the various faculties in each case. The classification of the various faculties of the soul by Suhrawardi may be outlined as follows:⁶³

Vegetative soul (<i>al-naḥs al-nabāṭiyyah</i>)	{	attraction (<i>jādhībah</i>)
		retention (<i>māṣikah</i>)
		digestion (<i>ḥāḍimah</i>)
		repulsion (<i>dāfi'ah</i>)
	{	feeding (<i>ghāḍiyyah</i>)
		growth (<i>nāmiyyah</i>)
		reproduction (<i>muwailidah</i>)

⁶⁰ Suhrawardi, *Opera*, Vol. II, pp. 199–200.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 204–09.

⁶² Ibn Sīna, *Psychologie v Jehe dīle aš-Šifa*, ed. J. Bakos, Editions de l'Académie tchécoslovaque des Sciences, Prague, 1956, Vol. I, pp. 53ff.

⁶³ Suhrawardi, *Partau-Nāmeḥ*, pp. 190ff.

Animal soul (<i>al-naḥs al-ḥayawāniyyah</i>)	{	power of motion (<i>muḥarrikah</i>)	{	power of lust (<i>shahwah</i>)
		power of desire (<i>nuzū'iyyah</i>)		power of anger (<i>ghaḍb</i>)

Man, besides the above faculties and the five external senses, possesses five internal senses which serve as a bridge between the physical and the intelligible worlds and have their counterpart in the macrocosmic order. These senses consist of:

<i>Sensus communis</i> (<i>ḥiss mushtarak</i>)	— The centre in which all the data of the external senses are collected. It is located in the front of the frontal cavity of the brain.
Fantasy (<i>khayāl</i>)	— The place of storage for the <i>sensus communis</i> . It is located in the back of the frontal cavity.
Apprehension (<i>wahm</i>)	— Governs sensible things by what does not belong to the senses. It is located in the middle cavity.
Imagination (<i>mutakhayyilah</i>)	— Analyses, synthesizes, and governs forms and is sometimes identified with apprehension. It is located in the middle cavity.
Memory (<i>ḥāfiẓah</i>)	— The place of storage for apprehension. It is located in the back of the middle cavity.

These faculties are crowned by the intellectual soul (*naḥs nāṭiqah*) which belongs to the spiritual world and which, through the network of these faculties, becomes for a period attached to the body and imprisoned in the fortress of nature. Often it is so lost in this new and temporary habitat that it forgets its original home and can be re-awakened only by death or ascetic practices.⁶⁴

The last section of the *Hikmat al-Ishrāq* concerning eschatology and spiritual union outlines precisely the way by which the spirit returns to its original abode, the way by which the *catharsis* of the intellect is achieved. Every soul, in whatever degree of perfection it might be, seeks the Light of lights, and its joy is in being illuminated by it. Suhrawardi goes so far as to say that he who has not tasted the joy of the illumination of the victorial lights has tasted no joy at all.⁶⁵ Every joy in the world is a reflection of the joy of gnosis, and the ultimate felicity of the soul is to reach toward the angelic lights by purification and ascetic practices. After death the soul of those who have reached some measure of purity departs to the world of archetypes above the visible heavens and participates in the sounds, sights, and tastes of that world which are the

⁶⁴ Suhrawardi, *Hayakūl al-Nūr*, Sections 6 and 7. In certain other writings Suhrawardi avers that the light of each man is created with his body but survives after it. By creation, however, Suhrawardi means essentially "individualization" and "actualization" rather than creation in the ordinary sense. There is no doubt that his basic teaching is that the spirit or soul comes from the world of light and ultimately returns to it.

⁶⁵ Suhrawardi, *Opera*, Vol. II, p. 225.

principles of terrestrial forms. On the contrary, those whose soul has been tarnished by the darkness of evil and ignorance (*aṣḥāb al-ṣḥaqāwah*) depart for the world of inverted forms (*suwar mu'allāqah*) which lies in the labyrinth of fantasy, the dark world of the devils and the *jinn*.⁶⁶ As for the gnostics or the *theosophos* (*mula'allihin*) who have already reached the degree of sanctity in this life, their soul departs to a world above the angels.

After leaving the body, the soul may be in several states which Suhrawardi outlines as follows:⁶⁷ Either the soul is simple and pure like that of children and fools who are attracted neither to this world nor to the next. Or it is simple but impure and as such is attracted more to this world, so that upon death it suffers greatly by being separated from the object of its desire; gradually, however, it forgets its worldly love and becomes simple as in the first case. Or it is not simple but perfect and pure and upon death joins the intelligible world to which it is similar and has an undescrivable joy in the contemplation of God. Or it is complete but impure, so that upon death it suffers greatly both for separation from the body and from the First Source; gradually, however, the pains caused by alienation from this world cease and the soul enjoys spiritual delights. Or the soul is incomplete but pure, i.e., it has a love for perfection but has not yet realized it; upon death, therefore, it suffers ceaselessly, although the love of this world gradually dies away. Finally, the soul is incomplete and impure, so that it suffers the greatest pain. Man should, therefore, spend the few days he has here on earth to transform the precious jewel of his soul into the image of an angel and not into that of an animal. The highest station to be reached by the soul is that of the prophets (*naṣṣ qudsīyyah*) who perceive the forms of the universals or archetypes naturally. They know all things without the assistance of teachers or books. They hear the sounds of the heavens, i.e., the archetypes of earthly sounds, and not just vibrations of the air, and see the intelligible forms. Their souls and those of great saints also reach such degree of purity that they can influence the world of the elements as the ordinary soul influences the body.⁶⁸ They can even make the archetypes subsist by will, that is, give them existence.

The knowledge of the prophets is the archetype of all knowledge. In his nocturnal Ascension (*mi'rāj*) the Prophet Muhammad—upon whom be peace—

⁶⁶ This is, properly speaking, the world of the unconscious which has become the subject of study for modern psychologists. It should be clearly distinguished from the world of archetypes which, rather than the "collective unconscious," is the source of symbols.

⁶⁷ Suhrawardi, *Risālah Yazdān Shīnākht*, pp. 53–63.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 66ff. Since human souls are brought into being by the celestial souls they are able to acquire the knowledge which these heavenly souls possess when they are put before them as a mirror. In the dreams of ordinary men this effect occurs occasionally since the external and internal senses which are the veils of the soul are partially lifted. In the case of prophets and saints such effects occur in awakening, i.e., they always reflect the intelligible world in the mirror of their souls so that they have knowledge of the unmanifested world even when awake.

journeyed through all the states of being beyond the universe to the Divine Presence or microcosmically through his soul and intellect to the Divine Self.⁶⁹ This journey through the hierarchy of Being symbolizes the degrees of knowledge which the initiate gains as he travels on the Path in imitation of the bringer of revelation who has opened the way for him. A prophet is absolutely necessary as a guide for the gnostic and as a bringer of Law for society. Man needs a society in order to survive and society needs law and order and, therefore, prophets to bring news of the other world and to establish harmony among men. The best man is he who knows, and the best of those who know are the prophets, and the best prophets are those who have brought a revelation (*mursilīn*), and the best of them are the prophets whose revelation has spread over the face of the earth, and the completion and perfection of the prophetic cycle is the Prophet Muḥammad—upon whom be peace—who is the seal of prophethood.⁷⁰

The Initiatory Narratives

In a series of treatises written in beautiful Persian prose, Suhrawardi expounds another aspect of *ishrāqī* wisdom which is the complement of the metaphysical doctrine. These works which we have called initiatory narratives are symbolic stories depicting the journey of the soul to God much like certain medieval European romances and poems such as *Parsifal* and the *Divine Comedy* although of shorter length. Unfortunately, in this limited space we cannot deal with all of these narratives each of which treats of a different aspect of the spiritual journey using various traditional symbols such as the cosmic mountain, the griffin, the fountain of life, and the lover and the beloved. Some of the more important of these narratives are the *Risālah fi al-Mi'rāj* (The Treatise on the Nocturnal Journey), *Risālah fi Ḥālāt al-Tufūlīyyah* (Treatise on the State of Childhood), *Rūzi ba Jam'at-i Šūfiyān* (A Day with the Community of Sufis), *Āwāz-i Par-i Jibra'īl* (The Chant of the Wing of Gabriel), *'Aql-i Surkh* (The Red Intellect), *Safir-i Simurgh* (The Song of the Griffin), *Lughat-i Mūrān* (The Language of Termites), *Risālat al-Ṭair* (The Treatise on the Birds), and *Risālah fi Haqiqat al-'Ishq* (Treatise on the Reality of Love). The titles alone indicate some of the rich symbolism which Suhrawardi uses to describe the spiritual journey. Each narrative depicts a certain aspect of the spiritual life as lived and practised by sages and saints. Sometimes theory and spiritual experience are combined as in the *Āwāz-i Par-i*

⁶⁹ The journey to the spring of life which lies at the boundary of the visible heavens symbolizes the journey through the soul (*naṣṣ*), while the journey to the cosmic mountain *Qāf* from which the spring flows and the ascent of this mountain which lies above the visible heavens symbolize the inner journey to the centre of one's being. In his *Mi'rāj-Nāmah*, Suhrawardi describes the symbolic meaning of the nocturnal Ascension of the Prophet which is the model that all Sufis seem to imitate.

⁷⁰ Suhrawardi, *Risālah Yazdān Shīnākht*, pp. 81–82.

*Jibra'il*⁷¹ where in the first part of the vision the disciple meets the active intellect, the sage who symbolizes the "prophet" within himself who comes from the "land of nowhere" (*nā-kujā-ābād*), and asks certain questions about various aspects of the doctrine. In the second part, however, the tone changes; the hero asks to be taught the Word of God and after being instructed in the esoteric meaning of letters and words, i.e., *jafr*, he learns that God has certain major words like the angels, as well as the supreme Word which is to other words as the sun is to the stars. He learns furthermore that man is himself a Word of God, and it is through His Word that man returns to the Creator. He, like other creatures of this world, is a chant of the wing of Gabriel which spreads from the world of light to that of darkness. This world is a shadow of his left wing as the world of light is a reflection of his right wing. It is by the Word, by the sound of the wing of Gabriel, that man has come into existence, and it is by the Word that he can return to the principal state, the divine origin, from which he issued forth.

The *Ishrāqī* Tradition

The influence of Suhrawardī has been as great in the Islamic world, particularly in *Shī'ism*, as it has been small in the West. His works were not translated into Latin so that his name hardly ever appears along with those of ibn Sina and ibn Rushd as masters of philosophy. But in the East from the moment of his death, his genius in establishing a new school of traditional wisdom was recognized and he was to exercise the greatest influence in *Shī'ism*. With the weakening of Aristotelianism in the sixth/twelfth century the element that came to replace it and to dominate Islamic intellectual life was a combination of the intellectual Sufism of ibn 'Arabi and the *ishrāqī* wisdom of Suhrawardī. These two masters who lived within a generation of each other came from the two ends of the Islamic world to Syria, one to die in Damascus and the other in Aleppo, and it was from this central province of Islam that their doctrines were to spread throughout the Muslim East, particularly in Persia. The main link between these two great masters of gnosis was Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī who was, on the one hand, the disciple of Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, himself a disciple and the main expositor of the teachings of ibn 'Arabi in the East, and, on the other, the commentator of *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*.⁷²

Throughout the last seven centuries the tradition of *Ishrāq* has continued especially in Persia where it played a major role in the survival of *Shī'ism* during the Ṣafawid period. Among the most important commentaries written

⁷¹ For the translation into French and analysis of this work, see H. Corbin and P. Kraus, "Le bruissement de l'aile de Gabriel," *Journal Asiatique*, July-Sept. 1935, pp. 1-82.

⁷² This commentary, finished in 694/1295, appears on the margin of the standard edition of *Hikmat al-Ishrāq* which is studied in all the theological schools in present-day Persia. It has been the means by which the doctrines of Suhrawardī have been interpreted through the centuries.

on Suhrawardī's works are those of Shams al-Dīn Shahrāzūrī and Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī in the seventh/thirteenth century, Wudūd Tabrizī in the tenth/sixteenth century, and Mulla Ṣadra in the eleventh/seventeenth century on the *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, the commentaries of Shahrāzūrī, ibn Kammūnah, and 'Allāmah Hillī in the seventh and eighth/thirteenth and fourteenth centuries on the *Tahwīhāt*, and the commentaries of Jalāl al-Dīn Dawwānī in the ninth/fifteenth century and Maula 'Abd al-Razzāq Lāhijī in the eleventh/seventeenth century on the *Hayākil al-Nūr*. These commentaries and many others which we have not been able to mention here present a veritable treasure of *ishrāqī* wisdom which has influenced so many philosophers, theologians, and gnostics from Khwājah Naṣir al-Dīn Ṭūsī and Dawwānī to Mir Dāmād, Mulla Ṣadra, Shaikh Aḥmad Aḥsā'i, and Hājī Mulla Hādī Sabziwārī. Some of the works of Suhrawardī were also to influence the sages and philosophers in the Mughul Court in India where parts of his writings were even translated into Sanskrit,⁷³ as they were translated into Hebrew some time earlier. *Ishrāqī* wisdom has, therefore, been one of the universal elements of Eastern intellectuality during the past centuries and, as it is a version of the perennial philosophy, it is touched by the breath of eternity which, as in the case of all expressions of truth, gives it a freshness and actuality that make this wisdom as essential today as it has been through the ages.

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⁷³ Corbin and certain other European scholars have also emphasized the role of *ishrāqī* wisdom in the tenth/sixteenth-century Zoroastrianism and the movement connected with the name of Āzar Kaiwān. This curious eclectic movement in which elements of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Zoroastrianism are combined but which differs greatly from original Zoroastrian doctrines has left behind several works like the *Dabistān al-Madhāhib* and the *Dasātīr* some passages of which seem to be forged. Such a leading scholar of Zoroastrianism as I. Poure-Davoud considers the whole work to be purposeful falsification. See his article "Dasātīr", *Irān-i Imrūz*, second year, No. II.

Whatever importance this syncretic movement which is so similar to the religious movements at the Court of Akbar may have had, its followers paid great attention to the writings of *Shaikh al-Ishrāq*. In fact, one of the disciples of Āzar Kaiwān by the name of Farzānīh Bahrām ibn Farḡhād translated several works of Suhrawardī into Persian. For a discussion of the school of Āzar Kaiwān, see M. Mu'in, "Āzar Kaiwān wa Pairuwān-i ū," *Revue de la Faculté des Lettres*, Teheran University, Vol. IV, No. 3, 1336/1917, pp. 25-42.

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