



The Man of Light

IN IRANIAN SUFISM

HENRY CORBIN

صور الكواكب

URSA MINOR لابي الحسين السوني

وهذه صورة الدب الاصفر على ما ترى في الكثرة

الشرق

الشمال

الجنوب

المغرب

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Preface

The Turkish calligraphy on the cover reads *Bismillab ir-rabman ir-rabim*: In the name of God, the Generous and Merciful.
Cover design by Abi'l-Khayr and Barkat Curtin.

He brings them forth from the shadows into the light.

Qur'an II.258.

Anyone who has been moved by the supernal glory of the moment when the Sun emerges from the eastern horizon has an inkling of the spirituality of light. This inchoate experience of the community of the luminous and the numinous is the point of departure for the Wisdom of Illumination formulated by Shihaboddin Yahya Sohrevardi, the great reviver of Hermetic gnosis in Islam who suffered a martyr's death in 12th C Syria. At the heart of Sohrevardi's mystic science is the recognition that the "I" of every self-aware entity is a pure, immaterial light.

While Sohrevardi's works exercised a profound influence on spiritual and intellectual currents within Islamdom, they were never translated into Latin and thus remained virtually unknown in the West for centuries. Henry Corbin (1903-1978) deserves the lion's share of credit for the redressal of this state of affairs. As a young man Corbin was introduced to Sohrevardi by his teacher Louis Massignon, who presented him with a lithograph of the martyred shaykh's Arabic masterpiece **Hikmat al-Ishraq**. The penny dropped. In his correspondence with Massignon years later, Corbin spoke of Sohrevardi as "mon shaykh" (my spiritual guide). Far from merely serving as a research topic, Sohrevardi had

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become Corbin's initiator.

Thanks to Corbin's lifelong commitment to editing, translating, and (most importantly) interpreting the writings of Sohrevardi and his commentators, the Master of Illumination has increasingly become a source of fresh inspiration for philosophers, psychologists, artists, and mystics in the West. One might venture to compare Corbin's contemporary unveiling of the Wisdom of Illumination with Sohrevardi's high-spirited revival of the gnosis of ancient Iran in his own era. Like that of Sohrevardi, Corbin's work harmonizes critical reasoning and visionary intuition, modes of knowing now more than ever out of sync. In revalorizing imagination as an epistemological category Corbin coined the term "imaginal," an expression which has quickly gained wide interdisciplinary currency.

While the presence of Sohrevardi inspired and oriented Corbin's work, it by no means confined his interests. The Wisdom of Illumination has no use for ta'assub, "fanaticism". Steeped in alchemy, angelology, color symbolism, cosmology, geosophy, Grail lore, hiero-history, love theory, subtle physiology, sacred geometry, sophiology and theophanic phenomenology, Corbin's oeuvre of some two hundred critical text editions, books and articles constitutes a monumental contribution to the fields of Islamic philosophy, Sufism, and Shi'ite esotericism.

In the present volume, Corbin weaves the fiber of Sohrevardi's metaphysics into a tapestry resplendent with the colors of German romanticism, Mazdaism, Manicheism, Hermeticism, and the Sufism of Ruzbehan Baqli, Najmoddin Kobra, Najmoddin Razi, Shamsoddin Lahiji, and Alaoddawleh Semnani. The awakening of the body of light is the theme. The transformative experiences of illumination described in these pages amount to nothing less than the fulfillment of a supplication that resounds to this day in mosques from the Maghreb to Java:

O God, place light in my heart, and light in my soul, light upon my tongue, light in my eyes and light in my ears, place light at my right, light at my left, light behind me and light before me, light above me and light beneath me. Place light in my nerves, and light in my flesh, light in my blood, light in my hair and light in my skin! Give me light, increase my light, make me light!

Zia Inayat Khan

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. . . a lamp burning with the oil of an olive
tree which is neither of the East nor of
the West, bursting into flame even
though fire touch it not . . . And it is light
upon light.

—Qorān 24:35

I. ORIENTATION

1. *The Pole of Orientation*¹

Orientation is a primary phenomenon of our presence in the world. A human presence has the property of spatializing a world around it, and this phenomenon implies a certain relationship of man with the world, *his* world, this relationship being determined by the very mode of his presence in the world. The four cardinal points, east and west, north and south, are not *things* encountered by this presence, but directions which express its *sense*, man's acclimatization to his world, his familiarity with it. To have this sense is to orient oneself in the world. The ideal lines that run from east to west, from north to south form a system of *a priori* spatial evidences without which there would be neither geographic nor anthropological orientation. And indeed, the contrasts between Eastern man and Western man, between Nordic man and Southern man, regulate our ideological and characterological classifications.

The organization, the plan, of this network has depended since time immemorial on a single point: the point of orientation, the heavenly north, the pole star. Is it enough, therefore, to say that spatialization, developed horizontally toward the four cardinal points, is completed by the vertical dimension from beneath to above, from the nadir to the zenith? Or rather

are there not in fact different modes of perception of this same vertical dimension, so different in themselves that they modify the *orientation* of the human presence, not only in space but also in time? "Orientation in time" refers to the different ways in which man experiences his presence on earth, and the continuity of this presence within a kind of history, and the question as to whether this history has a *sense*, and if so, what sense? This in turn raises the question whether the perception of the heavenly pole, of the vertical dimension tending toward the cosmic north, is a uniform phenomenon, physiologically regulated by constant laws, or whether the phenomenon is not in fact regulated and diversified by the very mode of being of the human presence *orienting* itself? Hence therefore the primordial importance of the north and of the concept of the north: it is in accordance with the way in which man inwardly experiences the "vertical" dimension of his own presence that the horizontal dimensions acquire their *sense*.

Now one of the *leitmotive* of Iranian Sufi literature is the "Quest for the Orient," but this is a Quest for an Orient which, as we are forewarned (if we do not already realize), is not—and cannot be—situated on our geographical maps. This Orient is not comprised in any of the seven *climes* (*keshvar*); it is in fact the *eighth* clime. And the direction in which we must seek this "eighth clime" is not on the horizontal but on the vertical. This suprasensory, mystical Orient, the place of the Origin and of the Return, object of the eternal Quest, is at the heavenly pole; it is the Pole, at the extreme north, so far off that it is the threshold of the dimension "beyond." That is why it is only revealed to a definite mode of presence in the world, and can be revealed only through this mode of presence. There are other modes to which it will never be revealed. It is precisely this mode of presence that characterizes the mode of being of the Sufi, but also, through his person, the mode of being of the entire spiritual family to which Sufism—and especially Iranian Sufism—belongs. The *Orient* sought by the mystic, the Orient that cannot be located on our maps, is in the direction of the *north*, beyond the north. Only an ascensional progress can lead toward this cosmic north chosen as a point of orientation.²

A primary consequence already foreseen is, to be exact, a *dislocation* of the contrasts regulating the classifications of

exoteric geography and anthropology, which depend on outer appearances. Eastern men and Western men, Northern men and Southern men, will no longer be identified by the characteristics previously attributed to them; it will no longer be possible to locate them in relation to the usual coordinates. We are left wondering at what point the loss comes about in Western man of the individual dimension that is irreducible to classifications based on exoteric geographic direction alone. Then it may happen, just as we have learned to understand alchemy as signifying something quite different from a chapter in the history or prehistory of our sciences, that a geocentric cosmology will also be revealed to us in its true sense, having likewise no connection with the history of our sciences. Considering the perception of the world and the feeling of the universe on which it is based, it may be that geocentrism should be meditated upon and evaluated essentially after the manner of the construction of a *mandala*.

It is this *mandala* upon which we should meditate in order to find again the northern dimension with its symbolic power, capable of opening the threshold of the beyond. This is the North which was "lost" when, by a revolution of the human presence, a revolution of the mode of presence in the world, the Earth was "lost in the heavens." "To lose sight of the North" means no longer to be able to distinguish between heaven and hell, angel and devil, light and shadow, unconsciousness and transconsciousness. A presence lacking a vertical dimension is reduced to seeking the meaning of history by arbitrarily imposing the terms of reference, powerless to grasp forms in the upward direction, powerless to sense the motionless upward impulse of the pointed arch, but expert at superimposing absurd parallelepipeds. And so Western man remains baffled by Islamic spirituality, with its powerful call to recollection of the "pre-eternal covenant": and by the heavenly Assumption (*mi'rāj*) of the Prophet; he does not even suspect that his own obsession with the historical, his materialization of "events in Heaven," can be equally baffling to others. In the same way, the Sufi "Heavens of Light" will remain forever inaccessible to the most ambitious "astronautic" investigation, their very existence not even being suspected. "If those who lead you say, 'Lo! the Kingdom is in the sky!,' then the birds of heaven will be

there before you . . . But the Kingdom is within you and also outside of you."^{2a}

2. *The Symbols of the North*

And so, if we found ourselves writing the words *Ex Oriente lux* as an epigraph, we would be completely mistaken if we imagined we were saying the same thing as the Spiritual masters discussed in this work are saying, and if looking for the "Light of the Orient" we merely turned toward the geographical east. For, when we speak of the sun rising in the east, this refers to the light of the day as it succeeds the night. Day alternates with night, as two opposites alternate which by their very nature cannot coexist. Light rising in the east and light going down in the west are two premonitions of an existential option between the world of Day with its criteria and the world of Night with its deep and insatiable passions. At best, on the boundary between the two we have a twofold twilight: the *crepusculum vespertinum*, no longer day but not yet night; the *crepusculum matutinum*, no longer night but not yet day. This striking image, as we know, was used by Luther to define the being of man.

In our turn, let us pause to consider what a light can signify which is neither eastern nor western, the northern light: midnight sun, blaze of the aurora borealis. It is no longer a question of day succeeding night, nor night, day. Daylight breaks in the middle of the night and turns into day a night which is still there but which is a Night of light. *Et nox illuminatio mea in deliciis meis*. This already suggests the possibility of an innovation in philosophical anthropology: the need to situate and interpret in an entirely new way the opposition between East and West, Light and Darkness, in order finally to discover the full and unforeseen significance of the northern light, and consequently of Nordic man, the man who "is at the north," or who is going toward the north because he has come from the north.

But the north can only attain its full significance by a mode of perception which raises it to the power of a symbol, to being a symbolic direction, that is, to a "dimension beyond" which can be pointed to only by something that "symbolizes with" it. And so we are concerned with primordial Images preceding and

regulating every sensory perception, and not with images constructed *a posteriori* on an empirical basis. For the *sense* of the given phenomenon depends on the primordial Image: the heavenly pole situated on the vertical of human existence, the cosmic north. And even in geographic latitudes where we should hardly think it possible for the phenomenon to occur, its archetypal Image exists. The "midnight sun" appears in many rituals of mystery religions, just as it suddenly bursts forth, in Sohrevardi's work, in the midst of an ecstasy of which Hermes is the hero. Later Iranian Sufi masters refer to the Night of light, the dark Noontide, the black Light. And in the Manichean faith it is the flames of the aurora borealis that are visualized in the *Columna gloriae* as composed of all the particles of Light reascending from the *infernium* to the Earth of light, the *Terra lucida*, itself situated, like the paradise of Yima, in the north, that is, in the cosmic north.

Preceding all empirical data, the archetype-Images are the organs of meditation, of the active Imagination; they effect the transmutation of these data by giving them their *meaning*, and precisely in so doing make known the manner of being of a specific human presence and the fundamental *orientation* inherent in it. Taking its bearings by the heavenly pole as the threshold of the world beyond means that this presence then allows a world other than that of geographical, physical, astronomical space to open before it. Here "traveling the straight path" means straying neither to the east nor to the west; it means climbing the peak, that is, being drawn toward the *center*; it is the ascent out of cartographical dimensions, the discovery of the inner world which secretes its own light, which is the world of light; it is an innerness of light as opposed to the spatiality of the outer world which, by contrast, will appear as Darkness.

This innerness must in no way be confused with anything that our modern terms subjectivism or nominalism may be supposed to refer to; nor with anything imaginary in the sense of this word that has been contaminated for us by the idea of unreality. The inability to conceive of a concrete suprasensory reality results from giving too much importance to sensory reality; this view, generally speaking, leaves no alternative but to take the suprasensory universe as consisting of abstract con-

cepts. On the contrary, the universe which in Sohrevardī's neo-Zoroastrian Platonism is called the *mundus imaginalis* (*ālam al-mithāl*) or the "heavenly Earth of Hūrqulyā" is a concrete spiritual universe. It is most certainly not a world of concepts, paradigms, and universals. Our authors never cease to repeat that the archetype of a species has nothing to do with the universals established in logic, but is the Angel of that species. Rational abstraction, at best, deals only with the "mortal remains" of an Angel; the world of archetype-Images, the autonomous world of visionary Figures and Forms, is on the plane of angelology. To see beings and things "in the northern light" is to see them "in the Earth of Hūrqulyā," that is, to see them in the light of the Angel; it is described as reaching the Emerald Rock, the heavenly pole, coming upon the world of the Angel. And this presupposes that the individual person as such, irrespective of anything collective, virtually has a transcendent dimension at his disposal. Its growth is concomitant with a visionary apperception, giving shape to the suprasensory perceptions and constituting that totality of ways of knowing that can be grouped under the term *hierognosis*.

As a corollary, the terms of reference presupposed by the mystical symbols of the north here suggest something like a psycho-spiritual realm of three dimensions, which the ordinary two-dimensional view cannot account for, since it is restricted to contrasting *consciousness* and *unconsciousness*. To put it more precisely, it has to do with two Darknesses: there is one Darkness which is only Darkness; it can intercept light, conceal it, and hold it captive. When the light escapes from it (according to the Manichean conception or the Ishrāq of Sohrevardī), this Darkness is left to itself, falls back upon itself; it does not become light. But there is another Darkness, called by our mystics the Night of light, luminous Blackness, black Light.

Already in the mystical Recitals of Avicenna, an explicit distinction, dependent on the vertical orientation, is established between the "Darkness at the approaches to the Pole" (the divine Night of superbeing, of the unknowable, of the origin of origins) and the Darkness which is the extreme occident of Matter and of non-being, where the sun of pure Forms declines and disappears. The Orient in which the pure Forms rise, their *Orient-origin*, is the *pole*, the cosmic north. Here al-

ready the Avicennan recital explicitly shows us a twofold situation and meaning of the "midnight sun": on the one hand, it is the first Intelligence, the archangel Logos, rising as a revelation over the Darkness of the *Deus absconditus*, and which, in terms of the human soul, is the arising of *superconsciousness* on the horizon of consciousness. On the other hand, it is the human soul itself as the light of consciousness rising over the Darkness of the subconscious.³ We shall see how, in Najmoddīn Kobrā's work, the colored photisms (in particular "luminous black" and green light) proclaim and postulate an identical psycho-cosmic structure. That is why *orientation* requires here a threefold arrangement of planes: the day of *consciousness* is on a plane intermediate between the luminous Night of *superconsciousness* and the dark Night of *unconsciousness*. The divine Darkness, the Cloud of unknowing, the "Darkness at the approaches to the Pole," the "Night of symbols" through which the soul makes its way, is definitely not the Darkness in which the particles of light are held captive. The latter is the extreme occident, and is Hell, the demonic realm. Orientation by the Pole, the cosmic north, determines what is below and what is above; to confuse one with the other would merely indicate *disorientation* (cf. *infra* V, 1).

This orientation might well be what would enable us to validate what Michel Guiomar so admirably foresaw. Our classical oppositions expressed in the refusal of the hostile dawn or, on the contrary, in the distress of twilight, of the "refused evening," might well turn out to be nothing other than pairs become unrecognizable, that is to say the divergence, in Mediterranean and northern geographical areas, from one and the same great original myth. This would imply an explosion of this myth into two kinds of anguish, two refusals, two correlative kinds of powerlessness in the case of the man who has lost his "polar dimension," that is to say of man no longer oriented toward the heavenly pole and so faced with the dilemma of Day succeeding Night, or of Night succeeding Day.

To speak of the polar dimension as the transcendent dimension of the earthly individuality is to point out that it includes a counterpart, a heavenly "partner", and that its total structure is that of a bi-unity, a *unus-ambo*. This *unus-ambo* can be taken as an alternation of the first and second person, as

forming a dialogic unity thanks to the identity of their essence and yet without confusion of persons. This is why the polar dimension is heralded in the guise of a Figure whose recurrent manifestations correspond on each occasion to an absolutely personal experience of the spiritual seeker and to a realization of this bi-unity. So it is that in Iran in the twelfth century (sixth century of the hegira) this Figure reappears in contexts which differ but which in every case appertain to a metaphysics or a mystical experience of Light.

In northwestern Iran, Sohravardī (d. 1191) carried out the great project of reviving the wisdom or theosophy of ancient pre-Islamic Zoroastrian Iran; he set the seal on this achievement by dying as a martyr in Aleppo in the fullness of his youth, victim of the vindictiveness of the doctors of the Law. He called his theosophical system Ishrāq because he traced its source to an Orient and to the illumination of an Orient which is not the geographical east. Certainly the Sages of ancient Persia were above all others the representatives and guardians of this wisdom, but the fact that they are referred to as "Orientals" relates in the true sense to their orientation toward the Orient-origin of pure Light. Three centuries before the Byzantine philosopher Gemistus Pletho, Sohravardī's work made a link between Plato and Zarathustra, in a doctrine dominated by the name and wisdom of Hermes. And so the same figure which in Hermetism is that of the heavenly I, the *Alter Ego*, the eternal partner and companion, reappears in Sohravardī under the name of *Perfect Nature*.

A contemporary of Sohravardī in southwestern Iran, Rūzbehān of Shīrāz (d. 1209), the *imām* par excellence of the "*Fedeli d'amore*" in Iranian Sufism, declares in his *Diarium spirituale* that his decisive experience, his personal initiatic proof, was a series of visions referring to the heavenly Pole; it was by meditating on these that he finally understood how he was personally and secretly connected with the group of the masters of initiation symbolized by the stars stationed in the immediate vicinity of the Pole star.

Lastly, at the extreme east of the Iranian world, in Transoxiana, Najmoddīn Kobrā (d. 1220) guided the Sufism of Central Asia toward the practice of meditation with particular attention to the phenomena of light and *chromatic succession* that

will make clear to us the significance and pre-eminence of the *green Light*. And in this context we meet again the homologue of Perfect Nature, the Figure whom Najm Kobrā calls his "Witness in Heaven," his "suprasensory personal Guide," "Sun of the mystery," "Sun of the heart," "Sun of high knowledge," "Sun of the Spirit."

Concerning this Figure, Najmoddīn Kobrā teaches his disciple: "Thou art he"—and he illustrates his affirmation by adding the impassioned words of the lover to his beloved: "Thou art myself (*anta anā*).” However, settling for the ordinary terms "I" and "self" to describe the two "dimensions" of this *unus-ambo* might well lead to a misunderstanding of the real situation. More often than not, Self designates an impersonal or depersonalized absolute, a pure act of existing which obviously could not act as second person, the second term of a dialogic relationship. But the alternative, whether in experience or of necessity, is not the supreme deity as described in dogmatic definitions. *Deus est nomen relativum*: this essential and essentially individuated relationship is what is heralded in experience by the apparitional Figure we are attempting to recognize here under different names. One cannot understand this relationship except in the light of the fundamental Sufi saying: "He who knows *himself* knows *his Lord*." The identity of *himself* and *Lord* does not correspond to a relationship of $1 = 1$, but of 1×1 : the identity of an essence raised to its total power by being multiplied by itself and thus put in a condition to constitute a biunity, a dialogic whole whose members share alternately the roles of first and of second person. Or again the state described by our mystics: when, at the climax, the lover has become the very substance of love, he is then both the lover *and* the beloved. But *himself* will not be *that* without the second person, without the *thou*, that is to say without the Figure who makes him able to see himself, because it is through his very own eyes that the Figure looks at him.

It would therefore be as wrong to reduce the two-dimensionality of this dialogic unity to a solipsism as to divide it into two essences, each of which could be *itself* without the other. The seriousness of the misunderstanding would be as great as the inability to distinguish between the Darkness or demonic Shadow that holds the light captive, and the divine

Cloud of unknowing which gives birth to the light. For the same reason, recourse to any collective schema can only be valid if the schema is taken as a descriptive process for indicating the potentialities that are repeated in every individual case, and above all the potentiality of the *I* which is not *itself* without its other "I", its *Alter Ego*. But such a schema by itself would never explain the real event: the intervention "in the present" of the "Perfect Nature," the manifestation of the "Heavenly Witness," the reaching of the *pole*. For the real event exactly implies a break with the collective, a reunion with the transcendent "dimension" which puts each individual person on guard against the attractions of the collective, that is to say against every impulse to make what is spiritual a social matter.

It is because of the absence of this dimension that the individual person lowers himself and succumbs to such falsifications. On the other hand, accompanied by the *shaykh al-ghayb*, his "suprasensory personal Guide," he is led and *directed* toward his own center, and ambiguities cease. Or rather, to suggest a more exact image, his "suprasensory Guide" and his individual person come to be situated in relation to one another as the two foci of the ellipse.

The divine and the satanic remain ambiguous so long as consciousness is unable to distinguish between what is its Day and what is its Night. There is an exoteric Daylight: so long as its conditions prevail, the "midnight sun" which is the initiatic light cannot show itself. This Day and this Night are unaware of one another and nevertheless are accomplices; the soul lives in this Daylight only because the Night is in itself. The ending of this ambiguity is the harbinger of the "midnight sun" with its horizons upon horizons: it may be the divine Night of super-consciousness irradiating the field of light of consciousness, and it may be the light of consciousness overcoming the Darkness of the subconscious, of the unconsciousness which was hemming it in. In both cases a burst of light rends the tissue of ready-made answers: the fictions of causal relationships, of linear evolutions, of continuous currents, everything that bolsters up what people have agreed to call the "sense of history." The sense of another history rising from Earth to Heaven is revealed: the history of an invisible spiritual mankind whose cycles of earthly pilgrimages refer to "events in Heaven," not to

the evolutionary fatality of successive generations. This is the secret history of those who survive the "deluges" that overwhelm and suffocate the spiritual senses, and who rise again one after another, time after time, into the universes toward which the same Invisible Forces guide them. This then is the *orientation* that has to be made clear: *where* is it leading, and *what* makes it such that the being who takes on the effort of this upward movement is, at the same time, the "being beyond" whose growing manifestation itself guarantees this progress? Hidden in this reciprocity, this act of correlation, is the whole secret of the invisible Guide, the heavenly Partner, the "Holy-Spirit" of the itinerant mystic (*sālik*), who, needless to repeat, is neither the shadow nor the "Double"—as in some of our fantastic tales, but the Figure of light, the Image and the mirror in which the mystic contemplates—and without which he could not contemplate—the theophany (*tajallī*) in the form corresponding to his being.

These few remarks throw light on the way by which the present research must be pursued. The attempt must be made to establish the identity of this Figure under the various names that are given to its apparitions, for this very diversity supports us in the study of religious orientations which suggest the same type of individual initiation whose fruit is reunion with the Guide of light. The spiritual universe of Iran, before and after the advent of Islam, here becomes of the greatest importance. In its recurrent expressions (Zoroastrianism, Manicheism, Hermetism, and Sufism) this Figure points in one direction: to the light of the North as the threshold of the beyond, to the dwellings in the high North which are the inner abodes secreting their own Light. The mystic Orient, the Orient-origin is the *heavenly pole*, the point of orientation of the spiritual ascent, acting as a magnet to draw beings established in their eternal haecceity toward the palaces ablaze with immaterial matter. This is a region without any coordinates on our maps: the paradise of Yima, the Earth of light, *Terra lucida*, the heavenly Earth of *Hūrqalyā*. The ways of approach to it are pre-sensed in the splendor of a *visio smaragdina*, the outburst of green light characteristic, according to Najm Kobrā and his school, of a specific degree of visionary apperception. Its appearance may precede or succeed the "darkness at the approach to the pole,"

I. Orientation

the crossing of which is the supreme ordeal of individual initiation; in other words the theme comes either as a prelude or as a sequel to the theme of the "black Light," as we shall hear it described below by two masters of Iranian Sufism. Since the theme is as fertile as it is exemplary, we shall only point out here some of the connections that open up before us. To go into them in detail would call for other lines of research.

The passing from the "black Light," from the "luminous Night: to the brilliance of the emerald vision will be a sign, according to Semnānī, of the completed growth of the subtle organism, the "resurrection body" hidden in the visible physical body. Exactly here the connection between the experience of colored photisms and the "physiology of the man of light" is unveiled: the seven subtle organs (*latīfa*), the seven centers typifying the Abodes of the seven great prophets in the man of light. The growth of the man of light thus recapitulates inwardly the whole cycle of Prophecy. The idea of this growth, which is the liberation of the man of light, can be read even in certain types of Iranian painting (from Manichean painting to the Persian miniature). Finally, the physiology of the man of light, whose growth is accompanied by colored photisms each having a precise mystical significance, is an integral part of a general doctrine of colors and of the very experience of color. We point this out briefly and at the end of this chapter because this is not the first time that a meeting takes place between the genius of Goethe and the Iranian genius.

. . . For thou art with me . . . all the days
of my life.

—Psalm 23 (22):4, 6

II. THE MAN OF LIGHT AND HIS GUIDE

1. *The Hermetic Idea of Perfect Nature*

Use of the word "syncretism" leads easily to abuse. It is used most often as a substitute for reasoned argument to avoid further consideration of some project nobly conceived to restore *in the present* doctrines generally accepted as belonging to a "bygone past." Yet nothing fluctuates more than the notion of "past"; it depends actually on a decision, or a pre-decision, which can always be *surpassed* by another decision which restores a future to that past. The whole history of gnosis throughout the centuries is rather like that. The restoration of an "oriental theosophy" (*hikmat al-Ishrāq*) by Sohrawardī in the twelfth century was not exempt from such sweeping and undeserved judgment on the part of those who were able only to acquaint themselves rapidly and superficially with his work. Certainly, as with any other personal systematization, one finds elements in Sohrawardī's system that are obviously identifiable—they belong to Hermetism, Zoroastrianism, Neoplatonism, the Sufism of Islam—but the organization of these materials into a new structure is directed by a central intuition, as original as it is consistent. This central intuition is made explicit in the form of a number of Figures, amongst which the role assumed by the Hermetic figure of the Perfect Nature (*al-tibā' al-tāmm*) is especially noteworthy. An essential

detail: the Arabic tradition of Hermetism is the only one that allows us to give this Figure its context. From it we learn that Perfect Nature is the heavenly *paredros*, the Sage's Guide of light. To understand its role and manifestation, it is necessary to picture to oneself the anthropology from which it is inseparable, an anthropology whose hero is the man of light, held captive by *Darkness* and struggling to free himself from *Darkness*. The entire ideology and experience centered on the manifestation of Perfect Nature thus presuppose the idea of the man of light and his living experience of the cosmic adventure. Only then can one understand how the couple comes to be joined in the *dialogic unity* of man of light and his Guide to which we find so many references in Arabic Hermetism down to the time of Sohrevardī.

We can follow the presence of the idea of the "man of light" even further in the Sufism of Najm Kobrā, where the Arabic expressions *shakhs min nūr* and *shakhs nūrānī* are the equivalent of the Greek expression *φωτεινός ἄνθρωπος*. The Greek term figures in the Hermetic documents transmitted to us by Zosimos of Panopolis (third century), the famous alchemist whose teaching is based on the meditation of physical metallurgical operations as models or symbols of invisible processes, of spiritual transmutations.⁴ This doctrine refers both to a Christian Gnosticism represented in this case by the "Books of the Hebrews," and to a Hermetic Platonism represented by the "Holy Books of Hermes." Common to both is an anthropology from which the following idea of the man of light emerges: there is the earthly *Adam*, the outer man of flesh (*σάρκινος ἄνθρωπος*) subject to the Elements, to planetary influences, and to Fate; the four letters comprising his name "encipher" the four cardinal points of the earthly horizon.⁵ And there is the man of light (*φωτεινός ἄνθρωπος*), the hidden spiritual man, the opposite pole to corporeal man: *phōs*. The homonyms *phōs*, light, and *phōs*, man, thus bear witness in language itself to the existence of the man of light, the individual par excellence (the spiritual hero corresponding in this sense to the Persian *javānmard*). *Adam* is the archetype of carnal men; *Phōs* (whose own personal name was known only to the mysterious Nicotheos) is the archetype, not of humans in general, but of men of light, the *φῶτες*.

Phōs, innocent and peaceful, pre-existed in paradise; the archons tricked him into clothing himself in the corporeal *Adam*. But the latter, explains Zosimos, was the man whom the Greeks called Epimetheus and who was advised by his brother Prometheus-*Phōs* not to accept the gifts of Zeus, namely, the bond which would enslave him to Fate, to the powers of this world. Prometheus is the man of light, oriented and orienting toward light because he follows his own guide of light. Those who have only physical hearing cannot hear him, for they are subject to the power of Fate, to the collective powers; only those who have spiritual hearing, that is, senses and organs of light, hear his summons and his advice. And this already, we notice, points to a physiology of the man of light and of his subtle organs.

As for more precise information about the Guide of Light, we gather it both from Zosimos and from the Gnostics to whom Zosimos himself referred. It is, in fact, the man of light who speaks through the mouth of Mary Magdalene when, in the course of the initiatic conversations between the Resurrected Christ and his disciples, she assumes the predominant role conferred on her in the book of the *Pistis Sophia*, the New Testament of the religion of the man of light: "The power which issued from the Savior and which is now the man of light within us. . . . My Lord! Not only does the man of light in me have ears but my soul has heard and understood all the words that thou hast spoken. . . . The man of light in me has guided me; he has rejoiced and bubbled up in me as if wishing to emerge from me and pass into thee."⁶ Just as Zosimos places on the one hand Prometheus-*Phōs* opposite his guide of light who is the "son of God," and on the other the earthly *Adam* opposite his guide, the *Antimimos*, the "counterfeiter," so in the book of the *Pistis Sophia*: "It is I, declares the Resurrected One, who brought thee the power which is in thee and which issued from the twelve saviors of the Treasury of Light."

By the same inversion and reciprocity which in Sufism makes the "heavenly Witness" simultaneously the one Contemplated and the Contemplator, the man of light appears both as the one guided and the guide; this *communicatio idiomatum* forewarns us that the bi-unity, the dialogic unity, cannot be taken as the association of *Phōs* and carnal *Adam*,

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who follows another guide. The Light cannot be compounded with the demonic Darkness; the latter is Phōs's prison, from which he struggles to separate himself and which will return to its primordial negativity. The syzygy of light is Prometheus-Phōs and his guide, the "son of God." This very fact also points clearly to a structure, which has nevertheless been subject to all kinds of misunderstandings. "The power which is in thee," in *each one* of you, cannot refer to a collective guide, to a manifestation and a relationship collectively identical for *each one* of the souls of light. Nor, *a fortiori*, can it be the macrocosm or universal Man (*Insān kollī*) which assumes the role of heavenly counter-part of *each* microcosm. The infinite price attached to spiritual individuality makes it inconceivable that salvation could consist in its absorption into a totality, even a mystical one. What is important is to see that it refers to an analogical relationship presupposing *four* terms, and this essentially is just what is so admirably expressed in the angelology of Valentinian Gnosis: Christ's Angels are Christ himself, because each Angel is Christ related to individual existence. What Christ is for the souls of Light as a whole, each Angel is for each soul. Every time one of these conjunctions of soul and Angel takes place, the relationship which constitutes the pleroma of Light is reproduced.⁷ The relationship is in fact so fundamental that it is found again in Manicheism, and is also what, in Sohrevardī's "oriental theosophy," makes it possible for us to conceive the relationship between the Perfect Nature of the mystic and the archetypal Angel of humanity (identified with the Holy Ghost; the Angel Gabriel of the Qorānic Revelation, the active Intelligence of the Avicennan philosophers). What this Figure represents in relation to the totality of the souls of light emanated from itself, each Perfect Nature represents respectively for each soul. The concept of this relationship is what we are guided toward by the Hermetic texts in Arabic concerning Perfect Nature.

The most important of these texts known today is a work attributed to Majrītī: the *Ghāyat al-Hakīm* (the "Goal of the Sage"), composed no doubt in the eleventh century, but from far more ancient material, since it informs us in detail about the religion and ritual of the Sabeans of Harran.⁸ There already Perfect Nature is described as "the philosopher's Angel," his

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initiator and tutor, and finally as the object and secret of all philosophy, the dominant figure in the Sage's personal religion. Again and again, the description sounds the fundamental note: his Perfect Nature can only reveal itself "in person" to one whose nature is perfect, that is, to the man of light; their relation is this *unus-ambo* in which each of the two simultaneously assumes the position of the *I* and the *self*—image and mirror: my image looks at me with my own look; I look at it with its own look.

The first thing you have to do in relation to yourself,⁹ is to meditate attentively on the spiritual entity (*rūhānīyato-ka*, "your angel") which rules you and which is associated with your star—namely your Perfect Nature—which the sage Hermes mentions in his book, saying: "When the microcosm which is man becomes perfect in nature, his soul is then the homologue of the sun stationed in Heaven, whose rays shed light on all horizons." Similarly, Perfect Nature rises in the soul; its rays strike and penetrate the faculties of the subtle organs of wisdom; they attract these faculties, cause them to rise in the soul, just as the rays of the sun attract the energies of the terrestrial world and cause them to rise in the atmosphere.

Thus it is suggested that between Perfect Nature and *its* soul, there will be a relationship—as formulated in the psalm composed by Sohrevardī to his own Perfect Nature—such that the Bearer of the Child is simultaneously the Child who is Born, and vice versa.

Wise Socrates declared that Perfect Nature is called the sun of the philosopher, the original *root* of his being and at the same time the *branch* springing from him. Hermes was asked: "How does one achieve knowledge of wisdom? How can one bring it down to this world below?" "Through Perfect Nature," he answered. "What is the root of wisdom?" "Perfect Nature." "What is the key to wisdom?" "Perfect Nature." "What then is perfect Nature?" he was asked. "It is the heavenly entity, the philosopher's Angel, conjoined with his star, which rules him and opens the doors of wisdom for him, teaches him what is difficult, reveals to him what is right, in sleeping as in waking."¹⁰

We have just heard Hermes speak of the philosopher's Sun, and in Najm Kobrā, the homologue of Perfect Nature, the "Witness in Heaven," the suprasensory personal master, is described as the Sun of mystery, the Sun of the heart, and so forth; and in one of his ecstatic recitals, Sohrevardī will tell us

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when and how this *sun* rises which is not the sun of the earthly east or west. Perfect Nature is so surely the ultimate secret that, as we read on, we are also told how it is the one part of mystical theosophy revealed by the Sages exclusively to their disciples and never mentioned, whether orally or in writing, outside their circle.

It follows that every account of the attainment of Perfect Nature represents an actual performance of the drama of initiation, whether enacted in the dream state or in the waking state. It is attained at the *center*, that is, in a place filled with Darkness which comes to be illuminated by a pure *inner Light*. One such account in the same work is Hermes' recital, where it is said:

When I wished to bring to light the science of the mystery and modality of Creation, I came upon a subterranean vault filled with darkness and winds. I saw nothing because of the darkness, nor could I keep alight because of the violence of the winds. Lo and behold, a person then appeared to me in my sleep in a form of the greatest beauty.¹¹ He said to me: "Take a lamp and place it under a glass to shield it from the winds; then it will give thee light in spite of them. Then go into the underground chamber; dig in its *center* and from there bring forth a certain God-made image, designed according to the rules of Art. As soon as you have drawn out this image, the winds will cease to blow through the underground chamber. Then dig in its four corners and you will bring to light the knowledge of the mysteries of Creation, the causes of Nature, the origins and modalities of things." At that I said, "Who then art thou?" He answered: "I am thy *Perfect Nature*. If thou wishest to see me, call me by my name."¹²

The same account also appears, word for word, in a text attributed to Appollonius of Tyana (Bālīnās in Arabic). Here the ordeal of personal initiation consists of the efforts of the man of light, *Phōs*, before whom the Darkness of the primordial secret is transformed into a Night of light. It is in this effort toward the center, the *pole*, and "the Darkness at the approach to the pole," that the Guide of light, Perfect Nature, suddenly shows itself to him and tells him what to do to bring light into this Night: to dig for the Image which is the primordial revelation of the *Absconditum*. Having put his lamp under a glass,¹³ as prescribed by Perfect Nature, the initiate enters the subterranean chamber; he sees a Shaykh, who is Hermes and who is *his own image*, sitting on a throne and holding an *emerald tablet*

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which bears an inscription in Arabic, the Latin equivalent of which is: *hoc est secretum mundi et scientia Artis naturae*.¹⁴ The identification of the man of light and his Guide of light is established by making *Phōs* into the light-bearer, *φωσφόρος*, for it is both to him and through him that Perfect Nature, his guide, reveals that it is in itself the secret: the secret of the light of the inaccessible divine Night.

Thenceforth they are so intimately united that one and the same role is played in turn, even simultaneously, by Hermes and his Perfect Nature. This is what is suggested in Sohrawardī's writings where Perfect Nature is described, particularly in the passionately lyrical psalm referred to above and in the "Sabeian" liturgies conveying knowledge of the same characteristic situation. Hermes is the prophet of Perfect Nature; by initiating him to wisdom, his Perfect Nature taught him how to worship itself, taught him the form of prayer by which to call for it and cause it to appear (a Hermetic *dhikr*); this personal worship is what Hermes transmitted to the Sages, instructing them to perform among themselves, at least twice a year, this personal liturgy of their Perfect Nature. Thus we find a Sabeian liturgy addressed to Hermes himself, invoking him in turn in the very same words in which he had been taught by his Perfect Nature to address it.¹⁵ Here we have an experiential testimony, far better than a theory, provided by the performance of a prayer, of the relationship suggested by Sohrawardī's own psalm, where he addresses Perfect Nature simultaneously as the one who gives birth and the one who is born. The same relationship, as we shall see, is implicit in the specifically Sufi notion of the *shāhid*, the witness-of-contemplation: the Sufi contemplates *himself* in contemplating the theophanic witness; the Contemplator becomes the Contemplated and vice versa, a mystical situation expressed by the wonderful Eckhartian formula: "The seeing through which I know him is the same seeing through which he knows me."

A particularly full and original development of the theme of Perfect Nature is found in a philosopher who lived a little before Sohrawardī, namely Abū'l-Barakāt Baghdādī, a subtle and very individual thinker of Jewish origin, converted late in life to Islam, who died about 560/1165 at the age of ninety. Since we have dealt with him at greater length elsewhere,¹⁶ we

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shall only recall here how the theme of Perfect Nature seeps into his work in regard to the problem, inherited from Avicenna and the Avicennans, of the Active Intelligence. When the Active Intelligence of the Avicennans is taken to be the same as the Holy Spirit, and the latter the same, in the Qorānic Revelation, as the Angel Gabriel—in other words, the Angel of Knowledge as being the same as the Angel of Revelation—far from leading to a rationalization of the Spirit, it raises again, on the contrary, the whole problem of noetics in terms of angelology. Thereupon a further question arises: why should there be only one Active Intelligence? To answer this question calls for a decision as to whether all human souls are identical in species and essence, whether each soul differs from another in kind, or again whether they are not perhaps grouped essentially in spiritual families composing many different species.

This is why the ancient Sages . . . initiated into things the sensory faculties do not perceive, maintained that for each individual soul, or perhaps for several together having the same nature and affinity, there is a being in the spiritual world which throughout their existence watches over this soul and group of souls with especial solicitude and tenderness, leads them to knowledge, protects, guides, defends, comforts them, leads them to victory; and this being is what they called *Perfect Nature*. This friend, defender and protector is what in religious terminology is called the *Angel*.

Although here the aspect of intimate union is not so explicitly stressed, the theme nevertheless faithfully echoes the Hermetic teachings; it defines the situation which will result, according to Sohrevardī, from the relationship to be established between the Holy Spirit, the Angel of Humanity, and the Perfect Nature of each man of light. Whether it is referred to as the divine Being or as the archetype-Angel, no sooner does its apparition reveal the transcendent dimension of spiritual individuality as such, than it must take on individualized features and establish an individuated relationship. From that very fact, a direct relationship is established between the divine world and this spiritual individuality, independently of the mediation of any earthly collectivity. "Some souls learn nothing except from human masters; others have learned everything from invisible guides known only to themselves."

In Sohrevardī's vast body of writings, there are three pas-

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sages in particular that throw light on the theme of Perfect Nature, not theoretically, but as a figure in a visionary experience or as one who speaks in answer to a prayer. The most explicit is in the *Book of Conversations*,¹⁷ where Sohrevardī undoubtedly alludes to the Hermetic text quoted a few pages back: a luminous form appears to Hermes; it projects or breathes into him the knowledge of gnosis. To Hermes' question, "Who then are you?" it answers, "I am your *Perfect Nature*." And in another passage¹⁸ we find the invocation addressed by Hermes to his Perfect Nature amidst the perils that come to try him in the course of a dramaturgy of ecstasy, an allusive dramatization of an initiatic ordeal experienced in a secret personal world (wherein Hermes may then perhaps be a pseudonym for Sohrevardī). Now the *hour* as well as the *place* of this visionary episode evoke the symbols of the North to indicate the passage to a world beyond the sensory world. This episode is the most striking illustration of the theme we are analyzing here: Perfect Nature, the guide of light of the spiritual individuality, "opens" its transcendent dimension by making possible the crossing of the threshold . . . (see also *infra* III). The "person" to whom the appeal is addressed in this initiatic ecstasy is the same Perfect Nature addressed in the psalm composed by Sohrevardī, which is perhaps the most beautiful prayer ever directed to the *Angel*. In this sense it is a personal liturgy, conforming to the instructions which, say the "Sabians," were a legacy from Hermes to the Sages:¹⁹

Thou, my lord and prince, my most holy angel, my precious spiritual being, Thou art the Spirit who gave birth to me, and Thou art the Child to whom my spirit gives birth . . . Thou who art clothed in the most brilliant of divine Lights . . . may Thou manifest Thyself to me in the most beautiful (or in the highest) of epiphanies, show me the light of Thy dazzling face, be for me the mediator . . . lift the veils of darkness from my heart . . .

This conjunction is what the spiritual seeker experiences when he reaches the *center*, the *pole*; the same relationship is found again in Jalāloddīn Rūmī's mysticism and in the whole Sohrevardian tradition in Iran, as we learn from the testimony of Mīr Dāmād, the great master of theology at Ispahan in the seventeenth century. It is a relationship in which the mystical soul, as Maryam, as Fātima, becomes the "mother of her

father," *omm abī-hā*. And this again is the meaning of the verse in Ibn 'Arabī: "I created perception in Thee only that therein I might become the object of my perception."²⁰

This relationship, inexpressible except in paradoxical terms, is the one toward which the same fundamental experience consistently tends, notwithstanding the diversity of its forms. Again, Sohravardī dramatizes the search for this experience and its attainment in a complete short work: a visionary recital, a spiritual autobiography entitled *Recital of the Occidental Exile*. This recital is related not only to the texts of the Hermetic tradition, but also to a text eminently representative both of gnosis and of Manichean piety, the famous *Song of the Pearl* in the book of the *Acts of Thomas*. Although it is true that such a book could not but be relegated by official Christianity to the shadowy realm of Apocrypha, it can nevertheless be said to express the *leitmotiv* of all Iranian spirituality still alive in Sufism.²¹ Some may see in the *Song of the Pearl* a prefiguration of Parsifal's quest; Mount Salvat, emerging from the waters of Lake Hāmūn (on the present-day frontier of Iran and Afghanistan) has been likened to the "Mountain of the Lord" (*Kūh-e Khwājeh*), where the Fravartīs watch over the Zarathustrian seed of the Savior, the *Saoshyant* to come; as the *Mons victorialis*, it was the point from which the Magi began their journey, bringing Iranian prophetology back to the Christian Revelation; it connects at last the memory of King Gondophares and of the preaching of the Apostle Thomas. What is certain is that on the one hand Sohravardī's *Recital of the Exile* begins where Avicenna's *Hayy ibn Yaqzān* ended, and that on the other hand the *Recital of the Exile* is so closely parallel to the *Song of the Pearl* that everything takes place as though Sohravardī himself had just been reading the story of the young Iranian prince sent by his parents from the Orient to Egypt to win the Pearl without price.

The young prince sheds the robe of light which his parents had lovingly woven for him; he arrives in the land of exile; he is the *Stranger*; he tries to go unnoticed yet he is recognized: they feed him the food of forgetfulness. And next comes the message carried by an eagle, signed by his father and by his mother, the queen of the Orient, and by all the nobles of

Parthia. Thereupon the prince remembers his origin and the Pearl for which he had been sent on his mission to Egypt. And then comes the "departure from Egypt," the exodus, the great Return to the Orient. His parents send two emissaries to meet him and bring him the robe he had left behind when he departed. He does not remember what it was like, having been a small child when he took it off:

And behold, I saw it altogether in me and I was altogether in it, for we were *two*, separated from one another but nevertheless *only one*, of similar form . . . I saw also that all the movements of gnosis were taking place in it and I saw further that it was about to speak . . . I saw that my stature had grown to fit the way it was made and in its regal movements it spread over me.²²

Without doubt the author thus expressed in the most direct way and with a happy simplicity the bi-unity of Perfect Nature (here represented by the robe of light) and of the man of light guided by it out of exile, a bi-unity which is in fact inexpressible in the categories of human language.

All these themes recur in Sohravardī's *Recital of the Occidental Exile*.²³ Here also the child of the Orient is sent into exile in the West, symbolized by the city of Qayrawān, which is the same as the city mentioned in the Qorān as the "city of the oppressors." Recognized by the oppressors' people, he is put in chains and thrown into a well from which he can only emerge at night for fleeting moments. He also experiences increasing powerlessness due to fatigue, forgetfulness, and disgust. Then comes his family's message from afar, carried by a hoopoe, inviting him to set out without delay. Thereupon, in the blazing light that awakens him, he departs in search of that Orient which is not the east on our maps but which lies in the cosmic north (just as the Iranian Sages, the guardians of the "oriental theosophy," derive their epithet "Oriental" from an Orient other than geographic east). To return to the East is to climb the Mountain Qāf, the cosmic (or psycho-cosmic) mountain, the mountain of the emerald cities, all the way up to the heavenly pole, the mystical Sinai, the Emerald Rock. Sohravardī's major works make this topology clearer to us (see *infra* III): this Orient is the mystical Earth of Hūrqulyā, *Terra lucida*, situated at the heavenly north. This is the very place where the

meeting occurs between the pilgrim and the one who gave birth to him (and to whom the psalm quoted above is addressed), his Perfect Nature, the personal Angel, who reveals to him the mystical hierarchy of all those who go before him in the suprasensory heights and at the same time, pointing to the one immediately before himself, declares: "He contains me just as I contain you."

The situation is similar: in both recitals the exile, the stranger, faces up to the powers of oppression which try to force him to forget and to conform to the demands of their collective mastery. The exile was at first a heretic; but when the criteria are secularized and become social criteria, he is no more than a madman, a misfit. From then on his situation is curable and the diagnosis is not hindered by such distinctions. And yet mystical consciousness has available a criterion of its own which makes it irreducible to these delusive assimilations: the prince of the Orient in the *Song of the Pearl* and the *Recital of the Exile* knows where he is and what has happened to him; he has even tried to "adapt," to disguise himself, but he has been recognized; he has been forced to swallow the food of forgetfulness; he has been chained in a well; in spite of all that, he will understand the *message* and knows that the light which guides him (the lamp in Hermes' underground chamber) is not the exoteric daylight of the "city of the oppressors."

One further example will be given here to support the fact that this is the *leitmotiv* of Iranian spirituality (the image of the *well* appears again constantly in Najm Kobrā). We have just referred to the parallel between the *Acts of Thomas* and Sohravardī's *Recital*. This same parallelism reappears elsewhere. A compilation which in its present form cannot have been made earlier than the seventh/thirteenth century, and which is presented as an Arabic elaboration of a Sanskrit text, the *Amrtakunda*, includes a short spiritual romance which in fact is none other than the text of a recital elsewhere wrongly attributed to Avicenna, entitled *Risālat al-Mabdā wa'l-Ma'ād*, "The Epistle of the Origin and the Return,"²⁴ a title borne by many philosophical works in Arabic and Persian and which from a gnostic point of view, can also be translated "Genesis and Exodus," that is, the descent to the earthly world, into occi-

dental exile, and the *departure* from Egypt, the return *home*.

Here the stranger is sent on a mission by the lord of his country of origin (the Orient) and before his departure receives instructions from his lord's wise minister. The place of exile is the city where the people of the outer and inner senses and of the physiological energies appear to him as a crowd of active and agitated people. At last, in the heart of the city, he finds himself one day before the throne of the shaykh who rules the country. He comes near and speaks to him; the same gestures and words respond to his own gestures and words. He realizes that the shaykh is himself (see above, the initiate recognizing his own image in the image of Hermes). Then suddenly the promise made before his departure into exile is remembered. In his bewilderment, he encounters the minister who had given him his instructions and who now takes him by the hand: "Plunge into this water for it is the Water of Life!" On emerging from the mystical bath he has understood all symbols, deciphered all codes and finds himself once more before his prince. "Be welcome!" says the prince, "Henceforth you are one of us." And having cut in two the thread spun by a spider, the prince puts it together again, saying: 1×1 .

This is also the *formula* that we suggested above, because he who deciphers it holds the key to the secret that preserves him both from pseudomystical monism (whose formula is $1 = 1$) and from abstract monotheism which is content to superimpose an *Ens supremum* on the multitude of beings ($n + 1$). It is the cipher of the union of Perfect Nature and the man of light, which the *Song of the Pearl* so excellently typifies: "We were *two*, separated from one another, and yet *only one*, of similar form."²⁵ Even without having to consider Avicenna as the author of this spiritual romance, it nonetheless confirms the meaning of his *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzān*. Although it has been so weakly interpreted as to make it impossible to discern in this Recital anything beyond an inoffensive philosophical allegory on the interpreter's level, it nevertheless has a deeper sense which shines through page after page, because, as in the other Recitals of the Avicennan trilogy, Hayy ibn Yaqzān points a finger to the same *Orient* to which Sohravardī's recitals redirect us.

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The archetypal Figure exemplified by the apparition of Perfect Nature assumes therefore in respect to the man of light, *Phōs*, throughout the entire ordeal of his exile, a role best defined by the word *ποιμήν*, the "shepherd," the watcher, the guide. This is precisely a word which calls to mind both the prologue of the most famous of the Hermetic texts and that of a Christian text which is perhaps its echo. In each case the sequence of episodes is the same: first the visionary's meditation, his withdrawal to the *center* of himself, the moment of dream or ecstasy intermediate between waking and sleep; then the apparition and the interrogation; then the recognition. In the same way the *Noūs* appears before Hermes while "his bodily senses were held in bondage" during a deep sleep. It seems to him that a being of enormous size approaches, calls him by name and asks:

"What dost thou wish to hear and see, and to learn and know through thought?" "But thou, who art thou?" "I am *Poimander*, the *Noūs* with absolute sovereignty. I know what thou wishest and I am with thee everywhere . . ." Suddenly everything opened before me in an instant, and I saw a boundless vision, everything having become serene and joyous light, and having seen this light, behold I was filled with love for it.²⁶

Referring to the Coptic term from which the name *Poimander* is derived, it can be understood as the heavenly *Noūs*, as the shepherd or as the witness, but it is surely the same vision witnessed by those of the Iranian Spirituals who speak sometimes of Perfect Nature, as in Sohrevardī's *Hermes*, sometimes of the witness in Heaven, of the suprasensory personal Guide, as in the works of Najm Kobrā and his school.

At one time the *Canon* of Christian Scriptures included a charming little book, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, especially rich in symbolic visions; today this little book, exiled like *Phōs* in person, finds a place only in the *Canon* of ideas of personal religion where it appropriately belongs beside the *Acts of Thomas*. *Hermas* is at home, seated on his bed in a state of deep meditation. Suddenly a strange-looking personage enters, sits down at his side and announces: "I have been sent by the Most Holy Angel to live beside thee all the days of thy life." *Hermas* thinks that the apparition is trying to tempt him:

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"Who art thou then? For I know to whom I have been entrusted." Then he said to me: "Dost thou not recognize me?" "No." "I am the Shepherd to whose care thou hast been entrusted." And while he spoke, *his aspect changed*, and behold I recognized the one to whom I had been entrusted.²⁷

Whether or not one is willing to see in the prologue of *Hermas* a Christian replica to the Hermetic *Poimander*, the fact remains that Christology was not originally quite what it later became. It is not at all by chance that in the little book of *Hermas* the expressions "Son of God," "Archangel Michael," "Most Holy Angel," and "Magnificent Angel" are interchangeable. The vision of *Hermas* goes back to the conceptions dominated by the figure of *Christos-Angelos*, and the situation thus defined offers the following analogy of relationships: the shepherd of *Hermas* is related to the Magnificent Angel as, in Sohrevardī, the Perfect Nature of *Hermes* is related to the Angel Gabriel, the Angel of Humanity, the Holy Spirit.

The theme of *Christos-Angelos* is also the theme of *Christus-pastor*, so well illustrated in primitive Christian art, where Christ is represented by the figure of *Hermes Creophoros* (with a lamb on his shoulders, his head haloed by the seven planets, the sun and the moon at his sides), or as *Attis*, with a shepherd's staff and a flute, viewed both in meditation and mystical experience (Psalm 23 and John 10:11-16) as a true *daīmōn pare-dros*, a personal protector, everywhere accompanying and leading the one in his care, as *Poimander* says: "I am with thee everywhere."²⁸ *Hermas*' exclamation on recognizing "the one to whom he has been entrusted" seems to allude to a spiritual pact concluded at the time of an initiation. Then also we are reminded of the specifically Manichean expression of the twofold theme: of Christ as the "Heavenly Twin" of Mani and of the "form of light" which each of the Elect receives on the day when he renounces the powers of this world. The conjunction of these two themes introduces us to the heart of the pre-Islamic Iranian representations; their later recurrences are evidence of the persistence of the archetype whose exemplifications always reproduce the same situation: the conjoining of guide of light with man of light effected in terms of *orientation* toward a primordial Orient which is not simply the geographic east.

3. *Fravarti and Walkyrie*

The Zoroastrian religion of ancient Iran offers us the homologue or rather the perfect, classic exemplification of what the Hermetic figure of *Perfect Nature* or of the *shepherd* heralds and represents. However, in analyzing it, one must beware of the difficulties of a twofold task. In the first place Perfect Nature as guide and heavenly partner of the man of light has heretofore appeared to us as essentially immune to any contamination by the Darkness. Is there not however a joint responsibility? As soon as it is clearly stated, a second question follows: what if the man of light fails to maintain his effort and falls victim to the Darkness, what if *Phōs* is finally captured and overcome by the earthly, carnal Adam? This question finds an answer first in the sequence of events in Zoroastrian individual eschatology and again in the interpretation of the colored photisms by Najm Kobrā and his school, according to whether the colors unveil or on the contrary conceal the suprasensory personal Guide. To guard against any possible misunderstanding, let us say immediately that what these answers show is that the act of seeing changes according to whether it is the act of the man of light, *Phōs*, or on the contrary the act of the carnal and maleficent Adam who, by projecting his own shadow on the heavenly Figure and by interposing thus this shadow, is himself the one that makes this Figure invisible to himself, that dis-figures it. It is within man's power to betray the pact, to cast a darkened look on the whiteness of the world of light, thereby hiding it from his own gaze, but this is the limit of his power, and this holds true in the case of the *shāhid* in Sufism as well as of the eschatological figure of *Daēnā* in Zoroastrianism.

In the second place, we shall have to define the relationship between two figures that are of equal value as archetypes, those which are designated respectively as *Fravarti* and *Daēnā*. We cannot go deeply into this theme here, but must confine ourselves to indicate how the problem arises and how certain texts allow us to foresee a solution in accordance with the schema verified up to now.

The *Fravartis*²⁹ are, in Mazdean cosmogony, feminine entities, heavenly archetypes of all the beings composing the Creation of light. Each being having passed from the heavenly or

subtle (*mēnōk*) state to the material and visible state (*gētīk*, a material state which in the Mazdean conception implies by itself neither evil nor darkness, the latter being proper to the Ahrimanian counter-powers, which are themselves a spiritual order)—each being has his *fravarti* in the heavenly world which assumes the role of his guardian angel. What is more, all the Celestial beings, gods, angels and archangels, even Ohrmazd himself, have their respective *fravarti*. Syzygies of light, "light upon light." Ohrmazd reveals to his prophet Zarathustra that without the concurrence and assistance of the Fravartis he would not have been able to protect his Creation of light against the assault of the counter-creation of Ahriman. Now, the very idea of this warfare is dramatically unfolded when we come to the Fravartis of human beings. In the prelude to the millenniums of the period of *mixture*, Ohrmazd offered them the choice from which their entire destiny originates: they could either live in the celestial world sheltered from the ravages of Ahriman, or else descend to earth there to be incarnated in material bodies and struggle against the counter-powers of Ahriman in the material world.³⁰ Their answer to this proposal was the *yes* which gives their name its full meaning, most significantly for our purpose: *those who have chosen*. In practice the *fravarti* incarnated in the terrestrial world finally became identified in religious representations purely and simply with the soul.

But then the question inevitably arises: how to conceive of the bi-dimensional structure characteristic of the beings of light, if the Fravartis "in person," the heavenly archetypes, by descending to earth, are identified with the earthly "dimension"? In other words, if, in the case of humans, the archetype or angel, on leaving the high ramparts of heaven, is the terrestrial person himself, does he not in his turn need some guardian angel, a celestial reduplication of his being? It seems that Mazdean philosophy has in fact entertained this question. One solution might be in some way to conceive of the earthly union of Fravarti and soul as one in which the former remains immune from all Ahrimanian contamination.³¹ However, when we consider the fundamental situation that is the basis for the entire meaning of human life as it is experienced once the Fravarti and the soul are actually identified, the question is

much too complex for a solution to be found in a mere philological inventory of existing texts.

A philosophical approach is itself called for by the eschatological intervention of *Daēnā* (an Avestan name, whose form in middle Iranian or Pehlevi is *Dēn*). Etymologically she represents the visionary organ of the soul; ontologically, the light that makes seeing possible and the light which is seen. She is the pre-terrestrial vision of the celestial world and is thus *religion* and *faith* avowed, the very faith which was “chosen” by the Fravarti; she is also the essential individuality, the “celestial” transcendent “I,” the Figure which, at the dawn of its eternity, sets the believer face to face with the soul of his soul, because *realization* unfailingly corresponds to *faith*. All the other interpretations of the personage of *Daēnā* culminate in this and thereafter cease to conflict with each other. Accordingly, there is the posthumous episode at the entrance to the Chinvat Bridge, the apparition of the “heavenly maiden,” a primordial Figure, who is at the same time witness, judge, and retribution: “Then who art thou, whose beauty outshines all other beauty ever contemplated in the terrestrial world?” “I am thine own *Daēnā*. I was loved, thou hast made me more loved still. I was beautiful, thou hast made me still more beautiful,” and embracing her devotee, she leads him into the Abode-of-Hymns (*Garotman*). This *post mortem* dialogue again reminds us of the reciprocity of the Giving-Birth/Being-Born relationship analyzed above. In contrast, he who has betrayed the pact concluded prior to existence in this world sees himself in the presence of an atrocious figure, his own negativity, a caricature of his celestial humanity which he has himself mutilated, exterminated: a human abortion cut off from its *fravarti*, which is to say a man without a *Daēnā*. The *Daēnā* remains what she is in the world of Ohrmazd; what the man sees who has cut himself off from her, who has made her invisible to himself, is fittingly his own *shadow*, his own Ahrimanic darkness, instead of his celestial mirror of light. This is the dramatic meaning of Mazdean anthropology.

A Mazdean text giving the best solution of the complex situation regarding the physiology of the man of light suggests to us a trilogy of the soul, that is, of the spiritual or subtle organism of man (his *mēnōkīh*), independent of his material physi-

cal organism.³² Firstly is the “Soul on the way” (*ruvān-i rās*), that is, the one that is met on the *way* to the Chinvat Bridge, which, eschatologically and ecstatically, is the threshold of the beyond, linking the *center* of the world with the cosmic or psycho-cosmic mountain. There can be no doubt, therefore, that this indeed refers to *Daēnā* guiding the soul in the ascent leading to the northernmost of heights, the “Abode-of-Hymns,” the region of the infinite Lights.³³ And then there is the soul referred to in the text as “the soul outside of the body” (*ruvān-i bērōn tan*), and finally the soul which is “the soul in the body” (*ruvān-i tan*). These latter two descriptions correspond to two aspects of the same soul, that is of the Fravarti incarnated in a terrestrial organism, ruling the latter like an army commander (the *Es-pahbad* of the *Ishrāqīyūn*, the *hegemonikon* of the Stoics), and sometimes escaping from the body in dream or in ecstatic anticipation to meet, during this fleeting exodus, the “Soul on the way,” that is, the *Daēnā* who guides it, inspires it, and comforts it.

The totality represented by their bi-unity is therefore “light upon light”; it can never be a composite of Ohrmazdian light and Ahrimanic darkness, or in psychological terms, of consciousness and its *shadow*. It can be said that the Fravarti identified with the terrestrial soul is related to the angel *Daēnā* in the same way as Hermes is related to Perfect Nature, Phōs to his guide of light, Hermas to his “shepherd,” the exiled prince to the Robe of light. There is additional confirmation in that the Iranian theme is highly reminiscent of Tobias and the Angel. The theme is inexhaustibly fruitful, for it expresses a fundamental human experience; wherever it is experienced the same symptom reappears, telling of the feeling of individual transcendence prevailing against all the coercion and collectivization of the person. Therefore it has homologues both in the religious universes related to that of the ancient Iranian religion, and in those of its successors, reactivating and transvaluating the fundamental concepts.

In Mazdean terms, *Daēnā*-Fravarti, as the pre-existential fate of man, represents and is the holder of his *xvarnah*; in order to convey very briefly the full significance of this specifically Mazdean notion, it is best to recall the twofold Greek equivalent which it was given: light of *glory* (δόξα) and *fate*

(τύχη). Now here precisely we have a representation that brings the Iranian and the Nordic theogony into accord. In both there are similar visions of celestial feminine entities bearing and keeping the power and destiny of a man: *Fravartis* and *Walkyries*. Perhaps these figures will finally give the lie to the austere critics who consider that to associate feminine features with the Angel makes the latter “effeminate.” Such criticism in fact presupposes complete incapacity to conceive of the power in question; having lost the meaning of the Angel, man without a *fravarti* (which may be the state of mankind throughout an entire epoch) can no longer imagine anything but a caricature of this figure. In any case the theme of comparative research consociating Fravartis and Walkyries, would reveal all its potentialities only on condition of searching, even of calling, for its reflowering in the course of time. We recall here a conversation with the late Gerhard van der Leeuw, who himself, as a good phenomenologist, could do justice to Richard Wagner on this point. As he pointed out, and as we wholly agreed, though Wagner treated the ancient Sagas in a very personal manner, he at least had a penetrating and subtle comprehension of the ancient Germanic beliefs. In the figure of Brünnhilde he created a beautiful and moving figure of an Angel, “Wotan’s thought,” a soul sent forth by God; vis-à-vis the hero she is certainly the authentic *Fylgja*, holding his power and fate in her hand, her apparition always signifying the imminence of the beyond: “Who sees me bids farewell to the daylight of this life. Thous hast seen the fiery gaze of the Walkyrie; now thou must depart with her.”³⁴ In the same way the Iranian ecstatic meets Daēnā only on the road to the Chinvat Bridge, on the threshold of the beyond; Hermes meets his Perfect Nature only in a moment leading up to the supreme ecstasy.

Any rationalist interpretation would go astray here in reducing this Figure to an allegory, on the grounds that it “personifies” the act and action of man. By no means is it an allegorical construct, but a primordial Image thanks to which the seeker perceives a world of realities which is neither the world of the senses nor the world of abstract concepts. This power from the depths necessarily recurs not only, as we have seen, in the “oriental theosophy” of Sohrawardī, but even in the works of certain commentators on the Qorān (in Tabarī’s great *Tafsīr*

on *sūra* 10:9 there is to be found word for word the Avestan episode of the *post mortem* meeting with Daēnā), and more systematically still in Ismaelian Shī’ite gnosis. Ismaelian anthropology represents the earthly human condition as a boundary state between two things: potential angel or potential demon. At the climactic point, Ismaelian anthropology spontaneously links up again with the Zoroastrian representations. And indeed, it is the classical Mazdean trilogy that Nasīroddīn Tūsī reproduces in speaking of what becomes of the faithful adept after death: “His *thought* becomes an *Angel* proceeding from the archetypal world, his *speech* becomes a *spirit* proceeding from this Angel, his *action* becomes a *body* proceeding from this spirit.” Once again in the same way, the vision of Daēnā at the Chinvat Bridge can be recognized feature for feature, this time in “the Angel in loveable and beautiful form who becomes the companion of the soul for all eternity.”³⁵ And thus the gnosis of Islamic Iran³⁶ only serves to reactivate the features of a Figure who is likewise the pre-eminent figure in Mandeism and in Manicheism.

4. The Heavenly Twin (Mandeism and Manicheism)

In Mandeian gnosis, every being in the physical universe has its counterpart in the heavenly Earth of Mshunia Kushta, inhabited by the descendants of a mystical Adam and Eve (*Adam kasia*, *Eva kasia*). Every being has his archetypal Figure (*mabda’* = *dmutha*) there, and the latter sometimes communicates with its earthly counterpart (as for example in the episode of the girl awakened and warned by “her sister in Mshunia Kushta”). After the *exitus* at death, the earthly person abandons his body and takes on the subtle body of his heavenly *Alter Ego*, while the latter, rising to a higher plane, assumes a body of pure light. When the human soul has completed its cycle of purifications and when the scales of Abathur Muzania bear witness to its perfect purity, it enters the world of Light and is reunited with its eternal Partner: “I go towards my likeness/And my likeness goes toward me;/He embraces me and holds me close/As if I had come out of prison.”³⁷

Similarly, the heavenly Partner (*qarīn*) or Twin (*taw’am*) is the dominant figure in the prophethology and soteriology of

Manicheism. It is the angel who appears to Mānī when he is twenty-four years old and announces that it is time for him to manifest himself and bid men hear his doctrine.³⁸ “Greetings to you, Mānī, from myself and from the lord who sent me to you.” The last words of the dying Mānī alluded to this: “I contemplated my Double with my *eyes of light*.” Later, in their psalms, his community sing: “We bless your partner-Companion of light, Christ, the source of our good.”³⁹ Mānī, like Thomas in those same *Acts* which include the *Song of the Pearl*, has *Christos Angelos* as his heavenly Twin, who informs him of his vocation, just as the prophet Mohammed was to receive the revelation from the Angel Gabriel (and the identification *Christos-Gabriel* is by no means unknown in gnosis.) Now, *Christos Angelos* is the same in relation to Mānī (in eastern Manicheism the Virgin of light is substituted for *Christos Angelos*), as is the *taw'am*, the “Heavenly Twin,” in relation to each of the Elect respectively and individually. It is the Form of light which the Elect receive when they enter the Manichean community through the act of solemn renunciation of the powers of this world. At the passing away of one of the Elect, a psalm is sung in praise of “thy heavenly Partner who faileth not.” In Catharism it is he who is called the *Spiritus sanctus* or *angelicus* of the particular soul, as carefully distinguished from the *Spiritus principalis*, the Holy Spirit referred to in invoking the three persons named in the Trinity.

That is why, since *Manvahmed* (the archangel Vohu Manah of Zoroastrianism, the *Noūs*) is without doubt according to the Eastern texts the element of light, and as such both outside and inside the soul, the situation can be correctly defined only by preserving the four terms required by the analogy pointed out above. The great *Manvahmed* is to the totality of the souls of light (the *Columna gloriae*) what *each* *Manvahmed* (not the collectivity) is to its terrestrial “I.” Here again it can be said that each *Manvahmed* (or *Spiritus principalis*) as in Sohrevardī Perfect Nature is related to Gabriel, the Holy Ghost and Angel of humanity. This Form of light thus fulfills the same function as Perfect Nature. Each one of the Elect is guided by it throughout life and beyond; it is the supreme theophany. It is the “guide who initiates him by causing conversion (*μετάνοια*) to penetrate his heart; it is the *Noūs*-light coming from above, the

ray of the sacrosanct *φωστήρ* which comes to illuminate, purify, and guide the soul toward the Earth of light (*Terra lucida*) from which it came at the beginning of time, and to which it will return, reassuming its original form.”⁴⁰ This wise guide is the Form of light which is manifested *in extremis* to the Elect, “the image of light in the semblance of the soul,” the Angel bearing the “diadem and crown”; it is, for each of the Elect, the heavenly Sophia or Virgin of light (the dominant figure also in the book of the *Pistis Sophia*). And Manicheism explicitly gives this figure its Zoroastrian name, thus confirming the Zoroastrian vision where the *Daēnā* of a being of light comes to meet him after death in the form of a “maiden who guides him.”⁴¹

All we have just tried to bring together here—too rapidly, too allusively—should be completed by reference to still other texts, more accessible no doubt than those alluded to above, as for instance the passages in the *Phaedo* and *Timaeus* of Plato and the commentary on these in the fourth chapter of the third *Ennead*, in which Plotinus speaks of the *daīmōn paredros* into whose care we are given, and who is the guide of the soul throughout life and beyond death. Mention should also be made of the beautiful development of the same theme in Apuleius (*De Deo Socratis*, 16), dealing with the higher group of *daīmōns* to each of whom the care of one human individual is entrusted and who serves as its witness (*testis*) and guardian (*custos*). No less essential for our purpose are the texts in which Philo of Alexandria calls the *Noūs* the true man, the man within man. We experience this *homo verus* who dwells in the soul of each of us, now as an archon and king, now as a judge awarding the crown after life’s battles; on occasion he plays the part of a witness (*μάρτυς*), sometimes even of a prosecutor.⁴² Finally, mention must be made of the notion of *sakshin* in two Upanishads.⁴³ “The man in man” is also the eyewitness, looking on at, but not involved in, not sullied by the actions and inner states of the man, whether in the waking state or the dream state, in deep sleep or in ecstasy. “Two friends with beautiful wings, closely entwined, embracing one and the same tree; one eats its sweet fruits; the other does not eat, but looks on.” The *sakshin* is the guide; the human being contemplates it and is united with it to the degree that all his defects are ef-

faced in it; it is the homologue of Perfect Nature, of the *shāhid* as the form of light.

The word “witness” (μάρτυς, *testis*, *shāhid*) has been mentioned several times, which already suggests what all these recurrences of the same Figure have in common—from the Zoroastrian vision of Daēnā to the contemplation of the *shāhid* in Sufism. Where this witness of contemplation becomes, as in Najm Kobrā, the theophanic witness of what is seen in vision, the function its name implies is made even clearer: according to whether the soul in vision sees it as light, or on the contrary “sees” only darkness, the soul itself testifies, by its vision, *for* or *against* its own spiritual realization. Thus the “witness in Heaven” is called the “scales of the suprasensory” (*mīzān al-ghayb*); the beauty of the being who is the witness of contemplation is likewise a means of weighing, since it proves the capacity or incapacity of the soul to perceive beauty as theophany par excellence.

All these texts converge toward the epiphany of the same Figure whose very diverse names reveal rather than conceal its identity: the philosopher’s Angel or Sun, Daēnā, Perfect Nature, personal master and suprasensory guide, Sun of the heart, etc. All these signs of convergence provide the indispensable context for a study of the phenomenology of the visionary experience in Iranian Sufism, where perceptions of colored lights are the manifestation of the personal spiritual guide (*shaykh al-ghayb* in Najm Kobrā, *ostād ghaybī* in Semnānī). It was important to show that the examples of this experience are linked with one and the same type of essentially individual, personal spiritual initiation. Further, as the reunion of the man of light and his guide, his heavenly counterpart and the transcendent “dimension” of his person, this experience has seemed to us *oriented* and *orienting* in a definite direction, toward those “Earths” whose direction can be suggested only by symbols—the symbols of the North.

In effect we have tried to show the structure and premises on which the liberation of the man of light, Prometheus-*Phōs*, depends. The liberation as an event will now make clearer to us the *orientation* on which it depends. We shall need to recognize to what region the suprasensory guide forming a pair with its terrestrial “double” belongs, and in what direction it is re-

vealed, namely the region and direction from which *Phōs* originates and back to which his guide has to lead him. In the writings of Najm Kobrā, we find again the image of the *well* into which the exile of the Sohravardian recital is cast. The *effective* emergence from the well begins when a supernatural *green light* shines at its mouth. Earlier we learned in Sohravardī both the *hour* when the event takes place and the *direction* indicated by this experience of radical individuation, experienced as a reunion with the personal Form of Light. Midnight Sun and heavenly pole: the symbols of the *North* taken together will show us the direction of the mystic *Orient*, that is, the Orient-origin, which has to be looked for not on the earthly planispheres, but at the summit of the cosmic mountain.

III. MIDNIGHT SUN AND CELESTIAL POLE

1. The Cosmic North and the “Oriental Theosophy” of Sohravardī (1191)

The Avestan term *Airyanem Vaejah* (Pehlevi *Ērān-Vēj*) designates the cradle and origin of the Aryan-Iranians in the center of the central *keshvar* (*orbis*, zone). Those who have attempted to determine its position on geographic maps have run into great difficulties; no convincing solution has been obtained in this way, for the first and good reason that the problem of locating it lies in the realm of visionary geography.⁴⁴ The data presented here relate to a primordial and archetypal Image, that is, to the primary phenomenon of *orientation* we referred to at the outset (*supra* I, 1). It is this Image that dominates and coordinates the perception of empirical data; it is not the other way round, that acquired data, geographical and cultural, produce the Image. The Image gives physical events their meaning; it precedes them, it is not they that give rise to it. This in no way implies that it is a question of mere “subjectivity” in today’s loose usage of this word. It indeed refers to an organ of perception to which a definite plane or region of being corresponds as its *object*, a region which is represented in a later elaboration of Iranian philosophy as the heavenly Earth of *Hūrqalyā*. To *orient* ourselves personally, it will be best to inquire

first of all into the events that take place in Ērān-Vēj, of which the pertinent ones are as follows:

Ērān-Vēj is the place of the memorable liturgies celebrated by Ohrmazd himself, by the heavenly beings, by the legendary heroes. It was in Ērān-Vēj that Yima the beautiful, Yima the dazzlingly beautiful, the best of mortals, received the command to construct an enclosure, the *var*, where the elite of all beings, the most beautiful, the most gracious, would gather to be saved from the deadly winter unleashed by the demonic powers so that they might one day repeople a transfigured world. (*Vendidad* 2:21 ff.) This *var* or paradise of Yima is like a walled city, with houses, storerooms, and ramparts. It has a gate and luminous windows *which themselves secrete an inner light* within, for it is illuminated both by uncreated and created lights. Its inhabitants see the stars, moon, and sun rise and set only once a year, and that is why a year seems to them only a day. Every forty years, from each pair of humans, another couple is born, consisting of a male and a female. "And all of these beings live the most beautiful of lives in the unchanging *var* of Yima."

Certainly we might be tempted to hear an echo in this description of a primaeval sojourn of the Iranians in a geographic far north, the memory of a dawn of thirty days preceding an annual sunrise. However, the indications are stronger that it in fact refers to the threshold of a supranatural beyond: there are uncreated lights; a world that secretes its own light, as in Byzantine mosaics the gold illuminates the enclosed space because the glass cubes are reinforced with gold leaf; a shadowless country peopled with beings of light who have reached spiritual heights inaccessible to earthly beings. They are truly beings of the beyond; where the shadow which holds the light captive ends, there the beyond begins, and the very same mystery is enciphered in the symbol of the *North*. In the same way the *Hyperboreans* symbolize men whose soul has reached such completeness and harmony that it is devoid of negativity and shadow; it is neither of the east nor of the west. Just as in Indian mythology also we hear of the people of the *Uttara-kurus*, the people of the northern sun, who have fully and ideally individualized features; a people composed of twins linked together, typifying a state of completeness expressed also by the form and the dimensions of their country: an earthly paradise

in the Far North whose shape, like the *var* of Yima, like the emerald cities Jābalqā and Jābarsā, like the Heavenly Jerusalem, is a perfect square.

Other events in Ērān-Vēj: Zarathustra (Zoroaster), having reached the age of thirty, yearns for Ērān-Vēj and sets out with a number of male and female companions. The nature of the spaces they traverse, the date of the migration (homologous, in the annual cycle of the calendar, with the dawn of a millenium)⁴⁵ show us something more and better than a positivist history: what we have here is a series of hierophanies. To long for Ērān-Vēj is to long for the Earth of visions *in medio mundi*; it is to reach the center, the heavenly Earth, where the meeting takes place with the Holy Immortals, the divine heptad of Ohrmazd and his archangels. The mountain of visions is the psycho-cosmic mountain, the cosmic mountain seen as homologous to the human microcosm. It is the "Mountain of dawns" from whose summit the Chinvat Bridge springs forth to span the passage to the beyond, at the very spot where the auroral meeting of the angel Daēnā and her earthly ego takes place. Here, therefore, the Archangel Vohu-Manah (Persian, *Bahman*, "Excellent Thought," εὐνοία) enjoins the visionary-prophet to cast off his robe, that is, his material body and organs of sensory perception, because in Ērān-Vēj it is the subtle body of light that is the seat and organ of events. And it is there, *in medio mundi* and at the summit of the soul, that the Zarathustrian seed of light is preserved, which is the *Xvarnah* of the three *Saoshyants*, the future Saviors who by a cosmic liturgical act will bring about the transfiguration of the world.

These same categories of the transcendental active Imagination give form to the perceptions through which something in the nature of a "physiology of the man of light" is revealed. By making psycho-cosmic homologation possible, this imagination has served as the basis of symbolic constructions, designated by the term *mandala*, which serve to support the mental realizations achieved through meditation. Some of these constructions were gigantic, as we know. The famous *ziggūrāt* of Babylonia typified the cosmic mountain with seven stories whose colors corresponded respectively to those of the seven Heavens; thus allowing the pilgrim, ritually, to climb to the summit, that is, to the culminating point which is the cosmic

north, the pole round which the earth revolves. In each case, the local zenith could be identified with the heavenly pole. *Stupas* (as in Borobudur) are constructions of the same kind; their symbolic architecture typified the outer covering of the universe and the secret, inner world whose summit is the center of the cosmos. Lastly, involving the same homologies, there is the microcosmic temple, called by the *Ishrāqiyūn* the “temple of light” (*haykal al-nūr*), the human organism with its *seven* centers or subtle organs: the seven *latifa* (*infra* VI, 1), or inner Heavens, resting one upon another, each with its own color, each identified as the microcosmic seat of one of the great prophets. Man and the world are thus wholly represented as evolving around a vertical axis; from this viewpoint, the idea of a horizontal linear evolution would appear totally devoid of meaning and direction—*unoriented*. The Abode-of-Hymns, the Earth of Hūrqulyā, the Heavenly Jerusalem, *descend* progressively in direct relation to the *ascent* of the man of light. The space enclosed in the 360-degree sphere is the homologue which on the cosmic scale materializes a secret, supernatural *corpus mysticum* of beings and organs of light.

Ērān-Vēj, the paradise of Yima, the spiritual realm of subtle bodies, has been a constant and absorbing theme of Iranian meditation for the adepts of Zarathustra in the distant past, the adepts of the Sohravardian theosophy of Light, and thinkers of the Shaykhi school in Shī'ite Iran. The idea of the center of the world, the legendary theme of the central *keshvar* determining the orientation of the other six *keshvars* arranged around it and later separated from one another by the cosmic ocean, has had a continuous philosophic development. The most important phase of this development is perhaps the moment when, in Sohravardī's “oriental theosophy”, the Platonic Ideas are interpreted in terms of Zoroastrian angelology.

Between the world of pure spiritual Lights (*Luces victorales*, the world of the “Mothers” in the terminology of *Ishrāq*) and the sensory universe, at the boundary of the ninth Sphere (the Sphere of Spheres) there opens a *mundus imaginalis* which is a concrete spiritual world of archetype-Figures, apparitional Forms, Angels of species and of individuals; by philosophical dialectics its necessity is deduced and its plane situated; vision of it in actuality is vouchsafed to the visionary apperception of

the active Imagination. The essential connection in Sohravardī which leads from philosophical speculation to a metaphysics of ecstasy also establishes the connection between the angelology of this neo-Zoroastrian Platonism and the idea of the *mundus imaginalis*. This, Sohravardī declares, is the world to which the ancient Sages alluded when they affirmed that beyond the sensory world there exists another universe with a contour and dimensions and extension in a space, although these are not comparable with the shape and spatiality as we perceive them in the world of physical bodies. It is the “eighth” *keshvar*, the mystical Earth of Hūrqulyā with emerald cities; it is situated on the summit of the cosmic mountain, which the traditions handed down in Islam call the mountain of Qāf.⁴⁶

There is ample supporting evidence that this was indeed the mountain formerly called Alborz (*Elburz*, in Avestan *Haraiti Bareza*), geographically, the name today designates the chain of mountains in northern Iran. But this orographical fact is irrelevant to the visionary geography of the ancient legends which tell us of the marvelous race inhabiting the mountain's cities: a race as ignorant of the earthly Adam as of Iblīs-Ahriman, a race similar to the Angels, androgynous perhaps, since without sexual differentiation (see the twins of the paradise of Yima and of the Uttara-kurus), and hence untroubled even by desire for posterity. The minerals in their soil and the walls of their cities secrete their own light (like the *var* of Yima); they have no need of any outer light, whether from the sun, the moon, the stars, or the physical Heavens. These concordant signs establish the heavenly topography of this supernatural Earth on the boundary of the Sphere above the planetary Heavens and the Heaven of the innumerable Fixed Stars, which encompasses the entire sensory universe. The mountain of Qāf is this Sphere of Spheres surrounding the totality of the visible cosmos; an *emerald rock*, casting its reflection over the whole of the mountain of Qāf, is the keystone of this celestial vault, the pole.

Now, in the *Recital of the Occidental Exile*, whose very title points to the fundamental meaning of the “oriental theosophy,” this is precisely the mountain which the exile must climb when he is summoned at last to return *home*, to return *to himself*. He has to reach the summit, the *Emerald Rock* that rises up before him like the translucent wall of a mystical Sināi;

there, as we have already seen (*supra* II, 1), on the threshold of the pleroma of Light, the pilgrim meets his Perfect Nature, his Holy Ghost, in an ecstasy of anticipation corresponding, in the Mazdean dramaturgy, to the meeting in the dawn with the celestial Person, at the entrance to the Chinvat Bridge. This threshold opens onto the “climate of the Soul,” a world made wholly of a subtle “matter” of light, intermediate between the world of the Cherubinic pure Lights and the world of *physis*, which includes corruptible sublunar matter as well as the astral matter of the incorruptible Heavens. This universe of *physis* in its entirety forms the cosmic *Occident*; the other universe is the *Orient*, which begins at the climate of the Soul, the “eighth” climate.

Thus the paradisaal Earth of Light, the world of Hūrqulyā, is an Orient intermediate between the “lesser Orient,” which is the soul’s rising to the highest point of its desire and consciousness, and the “greater Orient,” which is the further spiritual Orient, the pleroma of pure Intelligences, the soul’s rising to *supra-consciousness*. The twofold symbolic meaning of the midnight sun (*supra* I, 2) corresponds to this structure of Orient rising upon Orient. Indeed, since the eighth climate, the celestial Earth of Hūrqulyā, is said to be in the *Orient*, and since the direction indicated to us is that of the cosmic north, the “summit of the world,” it certainly does not refer to the East as we are accustomed to locate it on the terrestrial map. Here the Orient is *oriented* toward the center which is the topmost point of the cosmic dome, the *pole*: it is the Emerald Rock at the summit of the mountain of Qāf. To reach it one has to succeed in climbing the mountain just as the pilgrim reaches it in the *Recital of the Exile*, by obeying a summons identical to the summons received by the exiled prince in the *Song of the Pearl* in the *Acts of Thomas* (*supra* II, 1). This orientation pertains to a visionary geography oriented to the “climate of the Soul,” the place of the emerald cities, illuminated by the brilliance of the inner light that they themselves secrete. This *Suprasensory Orient* governs the primary phenomenon of the Gnostic’s orientation toward his country of origin. The *Orient-origin* identified with the center, with the heavenly north pole, heralds access to the beyond, where vision becomes real history, the history of the soul, and where every visionary event symbolizes a spiritual

state; or, as the *Ishrāqīyūn* say, it is the climate “where what is bodily becomes spirit and what is spiritual acquires a body.”⁴⁷

Northern Light, original light, pure inner light coming neither from the east nor the west: the symbols of the north open spontaneously around that central intuition which is the intuition of the center. The exodus from the *well*, the ascent that leads to the Emerald Rock and toward the angel, Perfect Nature, begins in the darkness of night. The journey is marked by the vicissitudes which typify the states and the perils of the soul undergoing this initiatic test. The *midnight sun* bursts into flame at the approach to the summit—the primordial Image of inner light that figured so prominently in the ritual of the mystery religions (see *supra* II, 1: the light carried by Hermes into the heart of the underground chamber). This is how it comes to pass for Hermes, the hero of the eschatological ecstasy described by Sohrevardī, from which we have already gathered evidence (*supra* II, 1) in support of the hermetic tradition, and which relates the vision wherein Hermes recognized his Perfect Nature in the beautiful and mysterious spiritual entity which manifested itself to him.

Sohrevardī gives more particulars concerning this vision in one of his major works.⁴⁸ In this case, Hermes kept vigil all night long, meditating in the “temple of light” (*haykal al-nūr*, his own microcosm), but a sun shone in this night. When the “pillar of dawn” burst forth, that is to say, when the being of light broke down the walls of the “temple” that enclosed him (here we are reminded of the *columna Glorise* of Manicheism in which reascent of the elements of light coincides with the descent of the Cross of Light), Hermes saw an Earth being swallowed up and with it the “cities of the oppressors” drowning in the divine wrath. This downfall of the sensory, material world, of the *Occident* of corruptible matter and its laws, recalls the scene described in the *Recital of the occidental exile*: here, the arrival at the *cosmic north*, at the Emerald Rock, threshold of the beyond, is heralded by the outburst of light of the “midnight sun” (as in Apuleius: *media nocte vidi solem coruscantem*). The midnight sun is the *illuminatio matutina*, the brilliance of dawn rising in the Orient-origin of the soul, that is, at the *pole*, while the cities of the oppressors are being swallowed up. Here the *aurora con-surgens* rising at the Emerald Rock, at the keystone of the

heavenly dome, is the *aurora borealis* in the Heaven of the soul. Before this unknown horizon Hermes was full of fear and cried out: "Save me, you who have given birth to me!" (In Sohravardī's psalm, as we recall, he appeals to his Perfect Nature in the very same way.) And Hermes hears this answer: "Seize hold of the cable of the ray of light and rise to the battlements of the Throne." He climbs up, and lo! under his feet were an Earth and a Heaven. A Heaven and an Earth where, with Sohravardī's commentators (Shahrazōrī and Ibn Kam-mūna), we recognize the *mundus imaginalis*, the autonomous world of the archetype-Figures, the Earth of Hūrqalyā sheltered by the battlements of the Throne which is the Sphere of Spheres, the climate of the Soul revolving around the heavenly pole. In the Sabeian texts of the pseudo-Majrūtī we also read a description of the Perfect Nature as the philosopher's Sun; and Najm Kobrā will refer to the "witness in Heaven" as the sup-rasensory Sun, the Sun of the heart, the Sun of the spirit.

In regard to this Orient-origin, oriented vertically toward the pole as the threshold of the beyond, where the inner, the esoteric light shines in the divine Night, the "literal," geographic East would then typify the *daylight* of exoteric consciousness, as powerless in opposition to the divine Night of the Ineffable as against the nocturnal depths of the dark Psyche; hence the confusion between these two nights, since by its very nature this Day cannot co-exist with Night; it can exist only in the inevitable alternation of days and nights, of rise and decline. But here we have another light, that of the Emerald Rock. (In Isma'ilian Shī'ite gnosis, another symbolism will allude to the "sun rising in the west," from the side of night, but there it will refer specifically to the Imām who is the *pole*, the keystone and axis of the esoteric hierarchy.) The "midnight sun" typifies the inner light, that which is secreted by the abode itself (as by the *var* of Yima), in its own secret way. That is why, as we said, this suggests a new way of evaluating the Orient-Occident contrast: here "Nordic" man is no longer the nordic man of ethnology, but is the "Oriental" in the *polar* sense of the word, that is, the exiled Gnostic, the stranger who refuses the yoke of the "oppressors" because he has been sent to this world for a purpose which they cannot recognize. And that is why we have already had a premonition of the significance of this fun-

damental *orientation*, guiding vision and actualization in the direction of an ascent which conflicts with our habitual notions of dimensions of time, of evolution, of historical actuality.

Is not the sense of all myths of *reintegration* henceforth affected by this orientation? For the totality of man's being, the transcendent personal dimension he discerns in the northern light, in the "midnight sun," is not merely the sum total of orient and occident, of left and right, of conscious and unconscious. The man of light's ascent causes the shades of the *well* where he was held captive to fall back into themselves. Hermes does not carry his *shadow* with him; he discards it; for he rises up, and correspondingly the "cities of the oppressors" sink down into the abyss. And it is difficult, we must confess, to read with equanimity certain interpretations of the *coincidentia oppositorum* where complementaries and contradictories are apparently indiscriminately lumped together under the head of *opposita*. To deplore that Christianity is centered on a figure of goodness and light and entirely overlooks the dark side of the soul would be no less valid an evaluation if applied to Zoroastrianism. But how could reintegration consist in a complicity between, a "totalization" of Christ and Satan, Ohrmazd and Ahriman? Even to suggest such a possibility is to overlook the fact that even under the reign of a figure of light the satanic forces remain in operation—those for example who tried to prevent Hermes' escape from the depths of the well and his ascent to the battlements of the Throne. And it is exactly for this reason that one has to affirm that the relationship of Christ to Satan, Ohrmazd to Ahriman, is not complementary but contradictory. Complementary elements can be integrated, but not contradictory ones.

It would seem that the misunderstanding in the first place concerns the nature of the *Day* whose constraints are deplored, and consequently the remedies called for. From this point of view the distinction made clear to us by certain Iranian Sufi masters between luminous Night, or black Light, and unqualified black, blackness without light (*infra* V and VI), is essential to prevent us from going astray and to keep us *oriented* toward the pole. The Day whose constraints are deplored, and whose ambiguity is obvious because it obeys the demonic law of constraint, is the exoteric Day where ready-made notions are ac-

cepted and taken for granted. Deliverance from it lies in the esoteric Night of hidden meanings, which is the night of super-consciousness, not of unconsciousness; for it is not the Ahrimanic Night, but the Night Ineffable, the Night of symbols, which alone can pacify the dogmatic madnnesses of Day. Rational dogmatic excitement and irrational lunacy cannot compensate for one another. The totality symbolized by the "midnight sun" is the *Deus absconditus* and the Angel Logos, or, in terms of Shī'ite gnosis, the *pole*, the Imām, which brings light into the night of the inner world. Nothing short of total disorientation could result in confusing the night of the *Deus absconditus* with the Ahrimanic night, the Angel Logos with a revelation of Ahriman or a revelation complementary to Ahriman. That is why the old Iranian *Zervānism* which has been so complacently admired on the pretext that it implies a philosophy of unity transcending dualism, could only appear absurd and grotesque in the eyes of the Zoroastrians. The word *esoterism*, so often misused, refers to the unavoidable necessity of expressing the reintegration of the human being in symbols: luminous night and midnight sun; twins of the paradise of Yima; the man of light and his guide; the theme of androgyny, the reunion of Adam and the celestial Sophia, to whom he was "betrothed in his youth." But one essential fact has to be remembered: Faust, *renovatus in novam infantiam*, is reborn "in Heaven," where the *Sophia aeterna* appears; the redemption of Faust is not a "sum total" of Faust and Mephistopheles. The counterfeiter, the *Antimimon*, is not *Phōs's* guide of light; it brings contradiction; it is not complementary.

If the diversity of these expressions is stressed here, all too briefly, it is because of the impression that the orientation required in this search by the very nature of its theme and sources, encounters at every step the same difficulties deriving from the same confusion or disorientation. This can but prolong and strengthen the laws of the exoteric Day against which the Sohrevardian Hermes exerts his effort to be free, by breaking with the pre-established and generally accepted view. One cannot concoct "history" out of Hermes' visions. Nor can Hermes and the prince of the *Song of the Pearl* be adapted to a social context. To attempt to do so is, as it were, to prevent them from *orienting* themselves, and from understanding *where*

they are, and to make them forget the well into which they have been thrown. The Daylight turned on them in this way is not the light of the Emerald Rock, and that is why this Day cannot enter into combination with the Night of Symbols. The bi-unity is Hermes *and* his Perfect Nature, it is not Hermes *and* the "City of the oppressors," nor Hermes *and* the well into which the oppressors have thrown him. He does not emerge alone from this well; still less does he emerge in a crowd and *en masse*; he emerges from it as a pair, that is to say, in the company of the guide of light, by whatever name, among his many names, he makes himself recognized.

That is why the possibility of reaching the cosmic north, the Emerald Rock, is essentially linked to the bi-unitary structure of human individuality, potentially including a transcendent dimension of light (Hermes and his Perfect Nature, the Manichean adept and his Form of light, etc.). The powers of doubt and forgetfulness, under the different names that cover them up through the ages, the powers of the exoteric Day and the powers of the Night without light, do all they can to stifle and annihilate this potentiality. This is why one may no longer even glimpse the nature of the luminous Night, the black Light spoken of by certain Sufis, and which is in no way a mixture of divine Light and demonic shadow. To say that what is below is an imitation of what is above is not to say that what is below *is* what is above. The *night* of rejected demonic depths, or on the contrary the horror of the *day* inspired by the fascination of these depths—these perhaps are the two impotences to which occidental man succumbs. It is not by compounding them that one finds the luminous Night of the "Oriental," that is to say, of the "northern man," nor the night of the intra-divine heights (*infra* V and VI).

The stress laid on the symbol of the *pole*, on the double constellation of the *Bear* and the *Pole star* in the hierognosis of Sufism, succeeds in convincing us of this. We find here the same homologation as in the cosmic mountain whose *pole* is the culminating point. The same law of psycho-cosmic structure makes the mental circumambulations around the heart, for example, homologous to those made around the Temple, and to the rotation of the heavenly dome about its axis. Projected on the zenith, the primordial Image of the *center* that the mystic

experiences in himself, around which he inwardly revolves, then allows him to perceive the Pole star as a cosmic symbol of the reality of inner life. Inner sanctuary and Emerald Rock are then simultaneously the threshold and place of theophanies, the pole of orientation, the direction from which the guide of light appears. We shall see him appear in this way in the visions of a great Sufi master of Shīrāz, and it could likewise be analyzed by a phenomenology of prayer linked to the fact that the Mandeans, the Sabaeans of Harran, the Manicheans, the Buddhists of Central Asia take the north as the *Qibla* (the axis of orientation) of their prayer.

But here again our phenomenology of the north, of the *pole*, should preclude any danger of the disorientation which, as we have just stressed, can manifest as the temptation to confuse the northern sun, the midnight sun, with a *coincidentia oppositorum*, as an artificial isolation of contradictions instead of complementaries. Since this fictitious conciliation remains in fact on the exoteric level, the "break away" demanded by the vertical dimension oriented toward the north is not consummated. Hermes departs from the "Occident," but it is not by carrying his *shadow* along with him that he rises to the battlements of the Throne. Because the north, the pole, is "above," it allows the recognition of *where* the shadow is, be it the individual shadow of the lower functions of the *psyche*, or the collective shadow of the "city of the oppressors." But how could this justify saying that *what makes* the shadow *visible* and shows in what direction it lies could also be the very same *shadow*? Far from it, what indicates *where* the shadow is, is characterized as being itself *shadowless*. If the cosmic north is the threshold of the beyond, if it is the paradise of Yima, how could it be the place of Hell? Hermes rises; he leaves the *Infernum* in its place, below him, in the world which he has left. There is neither ambivalence nor ambiguity; the opposition between Zoroastrianism and Zervānism has been recalled above, and if something of the latter survived and bore fruit in the gnosis of Islam, it was thanks to a shifting of level, a radical alteration of its dramaturgy, freeing the field precisely for the orientation here envisioned.

Certainly there are mythological data in which the *north*

takes on a meaning contrary to that which we are analyzing here. But there could then be no question of ambivalence unless the *subject* remained identical. One should therefore have started by constructing, more or less fictitiously, and by substantializing, a collective Psyche, in order to affirm its permanence and identity in the alternation of its contrary tendencies. The ambivalence of the symbol of the *north* would depend on this one subject, signifying now the threshold of the paradise of life, now the threshold of darkness and hostile powers. Unfortunately, would one not thereby fall into the trap of this invented and complacently accepted picture of the situation? For what exists in fact, really, concretely and substantially, is not a collectivity but individual souls, that is, persons each of whom can help another to find his own way out of the well; but as soon as there is a wish by some to impose their way on others, the situation becomes once more that of the "city of the oppressors" in the Sohrevardian tale. This notion of a collective Psyche, involving the disorientation of symbols, is again only a result of the forgetting and consequent loss of the ascending vertical dimension, for which an evolutionary horizontal extension is substituted. The vertical dimension is individuation and sacralization; the other is collectivization and secularization. The first is a deliverance both from the individual and from the collective shadow. If Hermes had accepted to remain at the bottom of the well, he also, we must conclude, would have taken the cosmic north, the pole, for Hell. But this is by no means to say that Heaven is Hell; what he would have perceived would have been nothing but the collective shadow projected on the pole and preventing him from seeing it, that is, from seeing his own person of light (as the unbeliever in the Chinvat Bridge sees only his own caricature instead of seeing Daēnā; as the Sufi novice sees only darkness until the green light shines at the mouth of the well). If the region of the pole is what it foretells to the Sufi, it can foretell the contrary only if a shadow darkens it, the shadow precisely of those who refuse to make the ascent to which Sufism invites them. To cast off the shadow is not to return toward the shadow; orientation cannot be disorientation.

2. *Visions of the Pole in Rūzbehān of Shīrāz (1209)*

Some of the visions described by Rūzbehān of Shīrāz in his *Diarium spirituale* illustrate the symbolism of the *pole* in a particularly explicit way.⁴⁹ In a dream, or rather in a state intermediate between waking and sleeping, the totality of creatures is revealed to him as though they were assembled within a house; there are many lamps which give off a bright light, but a wall prevents him from reaching them. Then he mounts to the terrace of the house which is his own dwelling place; there he finds two very beautiful personages who appear to be Sufi shaykhs and in whom he recognizes *his own image*—a very significant detail. Together the three partake of a kind of mystical repast, consisting of pure wheat bread and oil so subtle that it was like a pure spiritual substance. Subsequently, one of the two shaykhs asks Rūzbehān if he knows what this substance was. As he does not know, the shaykh informs him that it was “oil from the *constellation of the Bear*⁵⁰ which we gathered for you.” After emerging from his dream Rūzbehān continues to meditate upon it, but it took him some time, he confesses, to understand that there had been in it an allusion to the *seven poles* (*aqtāb*, more generally the seven *abdāl*) in the heavenly pleroma, and that God had dispensed to him the pure substance of their mystical station, that is to say, had admitted him to the rank of the *seven* masters of initiation and intercessors who are invisibly apportioned to our world.

Then [he writes], I concentrated my attention on the constellation of the Bear and I observed that it formed *seven* apertures through which God was showing himself to me. My God! I cried, what is this? He said to me: these are the *seven* apertures of the Throne.

Just as Hermes in Sohrevardī's recital is invited to climb to the battlements of the Throne, so here Rūzbehān, being admitted to the number of the seven *Abdāl* surrounding the *Pole* (in Shī'ite terms the “hidden Imām”), is introduced to the summit of the mysterious and invisible spiritual hierarchy, without which life on earth could not continue to exist. The Idea and the structure of this mystical hierarchy which dominates Sufi theosophy and especially, in Shī'ism, Shaykhi theosophy, correspond to the idea and structure of an esoteric astronomy; the one and the other exemplify the same archetypal Image of the

world. Rūzbehān adds these further details which confirm that what he perceives in his vision of the *pole*, of the cosmic north, is indeed the threshold of the beyond and the place of theophanies:

Every night [he writes], I continued afterwards to observe these apertures in Heaven, as my love and ardent desire impelled me to do. And lo! one night, I saw that they were open, and I saw the divine Being manifesting to me through these apertures. He said to me, “I manifest to you through these openings; they form seven thousand thresholds (corresponding to the seven principal stars of the constellation) leading to the threshold of the angelic pleroma (*malakūt*). And behold I show myself to you through all of them at once.”

Thus the visions of Rūzbehān illustrate a twofold theme: that of the *pole* and that of the *walāyat*, the “initiation” whose keystone is the *pole*, grouping and graduating around him the members of a pure *Ecclesia spiritualis*, who remain unknown to ordinary men and invisible to their eyes. The use of the Arabic term *qotb*, “axis” (*najmat al-Qotb*: the pole Star), here evokes the image of the mill pivot fixed into the lower stationary millstone, and passing through a central opening in the higher mobile millstone, whose rotation it governs. The heavenly dome is the homologue of this mobile element, while the pole Star represents the aperture through which an ideal axis passes. The stars closest to the pole Star participate in its pre-eminence and are invested with special energy and significance (the invocations to the constellation of the Bear in certain Gnostic or magical documents testify to it). These seven stars have their homologues in the spiritual Heaven. We have just seen Rūzbehān describe them as the “seven poles,” whereas these seven mysterious personages are usually designated as the seven *Abdāl* who, from cycle to cycle, are substituted in succession for one another. Just as the constellation of the Bear dominates and “sees” the totality of the cosmos, they are themselves the *eyes* through which the Beyond looks at the world.⁵¹

It is at this point that this twofold theme and the spiritual doctrine of Rūzbehān conjoin. In the latter we find the theme common to the entire speculative mysticism of Sufism, especially stressed in Ibn 'Arabī, of the *Deus absconditus*, the “hidden Treasure,” aspiring to reveal himself, to be known. However, this very revelation gives rise to a dramatic situation in which

the divine Being and the being in which and through which he reveals himself are simultaneously implicated, for God cannot look at an *other* than himself, nor be seen by an *other* than himself. The *Awliyā*, the “initiates,” graduated in the different spiritual degrees, are precisely the *eyes* at which God looks, because they are the eyes through which He looks. Through them our world remains a world at which God “looks,” and this is the meaning of the mysterious affirmation that if they were not, if there ceased to be the *pole* (the hidden Imām) who is the keystone of the invisible Heavens which they all combine to form, our world would collapse in final catastrophe. It is rather difficult certainly to find in our languages two terms that faithfully render the meanings of the words *walāyat* and *Awliyā*.⁵² The idea of “initiation,” that of a sodality of “initiates,” invisible and permanent from cycle to cycle of prophecy, by substitution of one for another individuality, seems best fitted to awaken their resonances. The theme is especially important in Shī’ite imāmology; and it is also Shī’ite Sufism that offers the best possibility of a study in depth. And these terms suggest another connection. Literally the word *Awliyā* means “Friends”: the Persian expression *Awliya-e Khodā* means the “Friends of God.” The very same term was applied to themselves in the fourteenth century by an entire family of Spirituals in the West. All inhabit the same heights inaccessible to those who are unaware of their *orientation*, like the “Friend of God” in *Oberland*, the “high country,” where Goethe’s inner vision will nevertheless know how to find these heights, in a great poem which remained unfinished: *die Geheimnisse* (the Secrets).

There are many traditions referring to this people of “initiates” unknown to the very men whom they exist to protect. Rūzbehān developed these traditions in the prologue to his great work on “the Paradoxes of the mystics.” They are generally said to be 360 in number, corresponding to the 360 divine Names, the 360 days and nights of the year, the 360 degrees of the Sphere measuring the day-night cycle. All the variations of this number have symbolic meanings. To pick one of the simplest forms, we will quote the following:

God [writes Rūzbehān], possesses on earth *three hundred eyes* or persons whose heart is consonant with the heart of *Adam*; *forty* whose heart is consonant with the heart of *Moses*; *seven* whose

heart is consonant with the heart of *Abraham*; *five* whose heart is consonant with the heart of *Gabriel*; *three* whose heart is consonant with the heart of *Michael*; *one* (the *pole*) whose heart is consonant with the heart of *Seraphiel*.⁵³

The sum of 356 persons is raised to the total of 360 by four figures of prophets who, according to Islamic esotericism meditating on the Qorānic revelation, have the common characteristic of having been carried off *alive* from death: Enoch (that is to say Idrīs, identified with Hermes), Khezr, Elijah, and Christ.

3. The Pole as the Abode of the Angel Sraosha

A few years ago, a learned Zoroastrian carefully investigated this symbolism of the *pole* and its spiritual constellation. The extreme interest of his study lies in the fact that it opened a new path leading from the Zoroastrian religion to the Sufism of the Islamized Iran.⁵⁴ In fact, the work of Sohravardī has already shown us the path, which he himself and in person opened intentionally and historically. Here the dominant figure, the very one which shows the way in question, is that of a *Yazata* or “Angel” of the Avesta,⁵⁵ who, although not belonging to the supreme heptad of the Amahraspands (the Immortal Saints, the “Archangels”), occupies a particularly outstanding rank, namely the angel *Sraosha* (Pehlevi *Srōsh*, Persian *Sorūsh*), who has become identified in Islamized Iran with the angel Gabriel. He is represented as a priest-angel, with the youthful features common to all Celestials, and our learned Parsee identifies him as the Angel of initiation (*walāyat*), the angel Sraosha’s prerogatives, the *situs* of his abode, the specificity of his function, are all features that would seem to imply the existence in Zoroastrianism itself of an esoteric doctrine professed by the representatives of a cult in which he was the central figure.

The Avesta (*Yasht* 57) has him dwelling in triumph on the summit of the highest of mountains (*Haraiti Bareza*, the *Alborz*). We have already learned that this very abode is “self-illuminated within, and adorned on the outside with stars”; and it is the cosmic mountain described in an Avestan hymn (*Yasht* 12:25) as the mountain around which the sun, the moon, and the stars revolve. Neryoseng, who translated the hymn into Sanskrit, identifies it with Mount Meru. The Avesta and tra-

ditions here enrich this theme of the cosmic mountain with a new detail: the fact that there at its summit, at the pole, at the pole star, is the abode of the Angel Sraosha. From that point on, the development of our research allows us to understand the following for ourselves: since hierocosmology places the dwelling of the angel of Initiation in the cosmic north, and since hierognosis perceives in his person the *pole*, it goes without saying that the arrival at the summit of mystic initiation has to be experienced, visualized and described as arrival at the pole, at the cosmic north. And here exactly is where we can glimpse a link of continuity between Zoroastrian spirituality centered on the angel Sraosha and the spiritual universe of Sufism centered around the pole. We in fact quoted above, while pointing out the existence of variants in regard to the number and naming of the persons, the traditions which bring out the esoteric hierarchies, the invisible supports of our world centered around the *pole*. On the one hand, the pole is therefore the *situs* of the angel Sraosha (who thus would correspond to the angel Seraphiel); on the other hand this is the qualification given in Sufism to the great shaykh of a period (even the shaykh of a Sufi community, a *tarīqat*, insofar as the latter is taken as the homologue of a microcosm), and for this reason the pole is considered in Shī'ite Sufism as representing the hidden Imām.

Another point of interest in the Zoroastrian scholar's research was that he drew attention to a parallelism between Sufi hierocosmology and certain Taoist concepts; and it is also in Central Asian Sufism that the idea of the *walāyat* is the most firmly rooted and amplified (notably after Hākīm Termezī, d. 898, in whose writings the number of the forty *Abdāl* is particularly significant). The Taoist traditions refer to *seven* spiritual rulers "localized" in the constellation of the Bear. The "Classic of the Pivot of Jade" gives a spiritual doctrine told in its very title, which refers to the North Star, "the pivot of Heaven revolving on itself and carrying all the heavenly bodies along with it in its round dance." And it never ceases to suggest remarkable correspondences with Sufi esoteric concepts. On both sides we note in fact that the spiritual hierocosmos exemplifies the same schema as the cosmos of astronomy: the world is arranged like a tent resting on a central axis and four lateral pil-

lars (*awtād*). The function of the personages who exemplify the latter is to revolve around the world every night and to inform the *Qotb* what situations require his help. Better still, symbolic numerology shows a truly striking concordance between the numerical configuration of the mystical palace of Ming-Tang (the hall of light which is at once a temple and an astronomical observatory) and the arrangement of the figures in the mystical hierarchy already enumerated here.⁵⁶

Thus, on the one hand, the angel Sraosha watches over the sleeping world; he is the guardian angel and the head of a brotherhood of migrants who "keep watch" on the world and for the world; they are described by a term referring to their holy poverty, the Avestan term *drigu* (Pehlevi *drigōsh*, Pāzend *daryōsh*), the equivalent of which in modern Persian is *darwīsh*, "dervish," the name by which all Iranian Sufis are still referred to today: the "poor in spirit." On the other hand, this brotherhood represents a group which is invisible to ordinary men and which exemplifies the very image of the cosmos unfolded, resting like a tent on its axis and at its peak Sraosha's own abode, the cosmic north "secreting its own light." The symbols of Taoism, Zoroastrianism, and Sufism are all in accord with this same representation.

And so the "heavenly Earths" from which we have already (*supra* II) seen Forms of light appear and descend toward their earthly Doubles are all, like Hūrquyā, the "eighth" climate, regions of the cosmic north, which means thresholds of the beyond. In Manicheism there is the Earth of Light, *Terra lucida*, situated in the kingdom of light. It is governed by a divinity of eternal light, surrounded by twelve Splendors. Like Hūrquyā, like the Paradise of Yima, all the beauties of our terrestrial Earth are included in it, but in the subtle state, as pure light without an Ahrimanic shadow. And just as, when the Manicheans take as their *Qibla* the sun and the moon, it does not mean that they are worshipping the sun and the moon but that they look upon them as the pre-eminent visible representatives of the world of light, so when they take the north as *Qibla* it means that they are turning toward the *Terra lucida*, the dwelling of the king of Light. We have already mentioned the ideal world of the Mandeans, *Mshunia Kushta*, a world intermediate between our world and the universe of light; this is a world

peopled by a divine race of superhumans, beings with a subtle body invisible to us, descendants of the hidden Adam (*Adam kasia*), and we learned that among them each earthly being has his Twin of light. This *mundus imaginalis* also has its guardian spirit (its *dmutha*), its king of light, Shishlam Rba, just as Hibil Ziwa is the guardian spirit of the Earth (and there are striking analogies between the *actions* of Hibil Ziwa and those of the young prince in the *Song of the Pearl*). Now, the Mandeans also believe that this Earth of light is in the north, separated from our world by a high mountain of ice; while they make it clear that it is “between Heaven and Earth,” this belief points out precisely that what is in question is not the earthly north, but the cosmic north.⁵⁷ The theme of the Green Island (*al-Jazīrat al-khodrā*) should also be recalled here, the Green Island being the dwelling of the “hidden Imām.”

No doubt it would take a whole book to bring together all the evidence showing the significance of the Orient as supra-sensory Orient, Orient-origin, Orient that consequently has to be looked for in the heights, on the vertical axis because it is identified with the pole, the cosmic north, as being a threshold of the worlds beyond. This *orientation* was already given to the Orphic *mystēs*. We find it in the poem of Parmenides where the poet undertakes a journey toward the Orient. The sense of two directions, right and left, the Orient and Occident of the Cosmos, is fundamental in Valentinian Gnosis. *But to make one's way to the right, toward the Orient, still means to go upward*, that is to say in the direction of the pole, because in fact the Occident typifies the world below, the world of sensory matter, whereas the Orient typifies the spiritual world. Ibn 'Arabī (1240) symbolically glorifies his own departure for the East; the journey which took him from Andalusia toward Mecca and Jerusalem, he saw as his *Isrā*, comparing it to an *ekstasis* which repeats the Prophet's ascent from Heaven to Heaven, up to the “Lotus of the boundary.”⁵⁸ Here the geographic, “literal” East becomes the symbol of the “real” Orient which is the heavenly pole described in Sohrawardī's recital of the Exile as the ascent of the mountain of *Qāf* to the Emerald Rock.

Another very great Iranian Sufi master, 'Alī-e Hamadānī (d. 786/1385), in a treatise on dreams, speaks of the *Orient* which is the very ipseity (*bowīyat*) of the world of Mystery, that is

to say of the supra-sensory world, of that Orient where the Perfect Ones rise. Elsewhere he speaks of this same Orient as the ipseity of the invisible world which is the source of the emanation of being, *descending* to the *Occident* of the world of bodies, by the eight degrees or Abodes of the worlds of the *Jabarūt* and of the *Malakūt*.⁵⁹ In the same way, when Avicenna asks Hayy ibn Yaqzān (who plays in respect to him the part played by Perfect Nature in respect to Hermes) what his country is, the answer refers to the Heavenly Jerusalem, Hayy ibn Yaqzān, the personification of the Active Intelligence, is an “Oriental”; he belongs to that “Orient” the steps to which he shows to the philosopher, his disciple, mounting one above the other from the world of earthly matter.⁶⁰ This idea of the Orient in the Avicennan Recitals is thus perfectly in accord with Sohrawardī's idea expressed in his own “oriental theosophy”; the “Orientals” are those who, coming from above, return there after passing through the inner initiation described in the Recital of the “occidental” exile.

They arrive at this “oriental knowledge” (*'ilm ishrāqī*) which is not a re-presentative knowledge, but an immediate Presence of the known, in the way that he who knows himself is present to himself. The Latin equivalent would be the expression *cognitio matutina*, used in Renaissance Hermetism and which already figures in St. Augustine's terminology. Whereas the evening knowledge, “occidental,” *cognitio vespertina*, is the outer man's knowledge—knowledge of the outside of things—the morning knowledge, “oriental,” *cognitio matutina*, is the knowledge of the man of light, having attained the “abode which secretes its own light,” that is to say the Emerald Rock, this being the knowledge which is self-consciousness. This *cognitio matutina* is in a sense *cognitio polaris*, the aurora borealis in the Heaven of the soul. There exactly is discovered the way of access to the deepest sense of the Sufi saying recalled here from the beginning: “he who knows himself knows his Lord,” that is: knows his heavenly *pole*.

There is indeed a correlation between the discovery of the ego, the ego in the second person, the *Alter Ego*, *thou*, and the upward vertical direction—between internalization (the discovery of the Heavens of the soul) and orientation toward the heavenly pole. If Sohrawardī's “oriental theosophy” explodes

III. Midnight Sun and Celestial Pole

the schema of Ptolemaic astronomy and the Peripatetic theory of the Intelligences, it is because the universe of spiritual beings postulated by both of them is not on the scale of the multitudes of the Heaven of the Fixed Stars, the "infinite Lights" on which Sohrawardī's meditation was fixed. But by visionary apperception he assimilates the visions of Zarathustra and of the blessed king Kay Khosraw (one of the legendary kings of ancient Iran, born in Ērān-Vēj), and goes beyond the schema of the astronomy of his own time through the vision of the suprasensory Heavens, or what in Sufism is called the "esoteric of each Heaven" (*bātin al-falak*), the very Heavens which mark the stages of the Prophet's heavenly ascent or the ascent of the mountain of Qāf. The identification of the "esoteric" Orient, that is to say of the suprasensory Orient, cosmic north, heavenly pole, is conditioned by the effective passing to the inner world, that is to say to the eighth climate, the Climate of the Soul, the Earth of Light, Hūrqalyā.

In the same way, Najmoddīn Kobrā emphasizes this by developing the theme that like can only be known by like.

Do not believe that the Heaven you contemplate in the suprasensory is the visible outer Sky. No, in the suprasensory (i.e., in the spiritual world) there are other Skies, more subtle, bluer, purer, brighter, innumerable and limitless. The purer you become within, the purer and more beautiful is the Sky that appears to you, until finally you are walking in divine purity. But divine purity is also limitless. So never believe that beyond what you have reached there is nothing more, nothing higher still." (§ 60)

And here is a still more radical statement of the principle of innerness, making every spiritual reality something as inherent in the mystic as his own life and his own death:

Know that the soul, the devil, the angel are not realities outside of you; you *are* they. Likewise, Heaven, Earth, and the Throne are not outside of you, nor paradise nor hell, nor death nor life. They exist in you; when you have accomplished the mystical journey and have become pure you will become conscious of that. (§ 67)

Now, to accomplish this mystical journey, is exactly what *internalize* is, that is, to "come out toward oneself"; that is what the *exodus* is, the journey toward the Orient-origin which is the heavenly *pole*, ascent of the soul out of the "well," when at the mouth of the well arises the *visio smaragdina*.

"And there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald"

Book of Revelation: 4:3

IV. VISIO SMARAGDINA

1. Najmoddīn Kobrā (1220)

It seems that Najmoddīn Kobrā was the first of the Sufi masters to focus his attention on the phenomena of colors, the colored photisms that the mystic can perceive in the course of his spiritual states. He took great pains to describe these colored lights and to interpret them as signs revealing the mystic's state and degree of spiritual progress. Some of the greatest masters of the Iranian Sufism issuing from this Central Asian school, notably Najm Dāyeh Rāzī, Najm Kobrā's direct disciple, and Alāoddawleh Semnānī who followed his *tariqat*, have in their turn illustrated this experimental method of spiritual control which implies at the same time an appreciation of the symbolism of colors and their mutations.

This is certainly not to say that their predecessors were unfamiliar with visionary experiences. Far from it. But the anonymous short work of a shaykh (which must have been written later than Semnānī, since it refers to him by name) bears witness to an "orthodox" teacher's alarm at what seemed to him an innovation.⁶¹ Sohrawardī himself, at the end of his most important work, wherein his aim is to restore the "oriental theosophy," gives a detailed description of the experiences of light, of *photisms*, that a mystic can have; however, colors and their symbolism are not yet referred to.⁶²

The descriptions do not refer to physical perceptions; Najm Kobrā alludes several times to these colored lights as something seen “with the eyes closed.” They have to do with something related to the perception of an *aura*. There is indeed affinity and correspondence between physical colors and auric (or *aural*, “auroral”) colors, in the sense that physical colors themselves have a moral and spiritual quality and that what the *aura*⁶³ expresses corresponds to it, “symbolizes with it.” This correspondence, this symbolism, is precisely what makes it possible for a spiritual master to establish a method of control by which to discriminate between suprasensory perceptions and what we would call today “hallucinations.” Technically, one should speak of it as visionary apperception. The phenomenon corresponding to it is primary and primordial, irreducible, just as the perception of a physical sound or color is irreducible to anything else. As for the organ of this visionary apperception and the mode of being in which it can function, these questions relate precisely to the “physiology of the man of light,” whose growth is marked by the opening of what Najm Kobrā calls the “senses suprasensory.” To the extent that the latter are the *activity* of the subject himself, of the soul, we shall conclude this study by briefly outlining an interconnection with Goethe’s theory of “physiological colors.”

It has to be understood, of course, that in the schema of the world presupposed and verified here by mystical experience, the terms light and darkness, clarity and obscurity, are neither metaphors nor comparisons. The mystic really and actually *sees* light and darkness, by a kind of vision that depends on an organ other than the physical organ of sight. He experiences and perceives the state from which he aspires to free himself as shadow and darkness, as powers which attract him downward; he perceives as light all the signs and premonitions heralding his liberation, the direction from which it comes, all the apparitions that attract him upward. There is nothing questionable about the *orientation* of the world experienced in the vertical dimension: at the summit the heavenly pole, at the nadir the well of darkness where the element of light is held captive (just as, in the Mazdean schema, the light is in the north, the shadow and darkness are in the south). That the entire schematization is in perfect consonance with the Manichean cosmogony and at

the same time with the Sohrevardian recital of the *Exile*, and with the *Song of the Pearl* in the *Acts of Thomas*, is what the first paragraph of Najm Kobrā’s great book tells us: “Learn, O my friend, that the *object* of the search (*morād*) is God, and that the *subject* who seeks (the subject who makes effort, *morīd*) is a light that comes from him (or a particle of his light).” (§1)⁶⁴ In other words the “seeker,” the hero of the Quest, is none other than the captive light itself, the man of light, φωτεινός ἄνθρωπος.

This is the first *leitmotiv* of Najm Kobrā’s great work. This particle of light aspires to free itself, to rise again to its origin. What is depicted in those of the Persian miniatures where the Manichean influence can be detected (*infra* VI, 1) is thus exactly the same as what Najm Kobrā perceives through visionary apperception. A flame comes down from the Heavens to meet the flame leaping up from the Earth, and at their fiery meeting-point Najm discerns or foresees the presence of the “heavenly Witness,” the “suprasensory Guide,” who is revealed in this climax as the homologue of Perfect Nature, the *Noūs*, the ποιμήν, the guide of light of Prometheus-Phōs. There is a correlation between the escape of the man of light, the colored photisms, and the manifestation of the heavenly guide. This correlation itself intimates the condition which must precede all such experience: men must separate themselves from the veil that blinds them.

Now, this veil is not outside themselves; it is a part of them, and is the darkness of their creatural nature. (§1)

My friend, shut your eyelids and look at what you see. If you tell me: I see nothing—you are mistaken. You can see very well, but unfortunately the darkness of your nature is so close to you that it obstructs your inner sight, to the point that you do not discern what is to be seen. If you want to discern it and to see it in front of you even with your eyes closed, begin by diminishing or by putting away from you something of your nature. But the path leading to that end is spiritual warfare. And the meaning of spiritual warfare is putting everything to work so as to repel the enemies or to kill them. The enemies in this case are nature, the lower soul, and the devil. (§2)

To reach the goal, one must first *orient oneself*: discern the shadow and where the shadow is. This shadow is composed of the three antagonists that have just been named. Spiritual warfare trains one to recognize the enemies, to know them by

name, to distinguish the forms in which they appear, and to effect their transmutation. Actually these various works are carried out synchronically rather than successively; progress and results are correlative: separation from the shadow and the fall of the shadow, manifestation of the lights and of the Guide of light. This exactly will serve as a final warning not to abuse the idea and the word *shadow*: the guide of light is no more the shadow than he is a “positive” aspect of the shadow. This figure requires us henceforth to recognize *another* dimension of the person, not a negativity but a transcendence. Since Najm Kobrā’s book is a spiritual journal rather than a didactic treatise, a *diarium spirituale* not unlike that of Rūzbehān, the best we can do is to single out certain of its leading themes; their lines converge. The three adversaries can only be destroyed at the price of an effort that attacks the discordant trilogy of the soul. The motive power to fuel this effort is the light itself, that is, the particle of light, the “man of light,” effecting the conversion of like to like. The *dhikr*, as a spiritual technique, plays an essential role. The spiritual energy given off by the *dhikr* makes possible the emergence and ascent from the well; this theme recurs with an emphasis we have already pointed out. The stages of ascent are accompanied by the colored photisms that herald the growth of the subtle organs or centers of the man of light, attracted to and by the supernatural *green* light that shines at the mouth of the well. At the end of this ascent, the phenomena of light multiply, heralding the rejoining with the heavenly Witness, at the *pole*. Najm Kobrā’s entire doctrine perfectly exemplifies the archetype of individual initiation peculiar to Sufism.

2. Light and Spiritual Warfare

To recognize the three adversaries means actually to catch sight of them, to *experience* the forms in which they appear. Far from merely constructing a theory, Najm Kobrā describes real events which take place in the inner world, on the “plane of visionary apperception” (*maqām al-moshāhada*), in an order of reality corresponding specifically to the organ of perception which is the *imaginative* faculty (*Imaginatrix*).⁶⁵ This exactly is where creatural nature, natural existence (*wojūd*), “is at first sight complete darkness; when it begins to be purified, you will see it

take on before your eyes the appearance of a *black* cloud. So long as it is the seat of the Devil (*shaytān*) it has a *reddish* appearance. When its excrescences are corrected and annihilated and legitimate aspirations are implanted in their stead, you will see that its appearance gradually whitens and it becomes a *white* cloud (a *cumulus*). As for the lower soul⁶⁶, at its first appearance, its color is deep *blue*; it seems to be an upsurge, like that of water from a spring. If the soul is the seat of the Devil, it looks like a twofold upsurge of *darkness* and of *fire*, without the power to show anything else, for there is no good in devilry. Now, what pours forth from the soul overflows and spreads over the whole of a man’s nature; this is why all spiritual teaching depends on the soul. When the soul is healthy and pure, what flows from it is Good, and Goodness germinates from natural existence; if what flows from it is Evil, Evil will germinate. The Devil is an impure fire mixed with the darkness of impiety in monstrous form. Sometimes he takes the shape before your eyes of a gigantic Negro, terrible to look upon. He makes every effort to enter into you. If you want to make him give up, recite in your heart: ‘O Thou, the help of those who ask, help me (§7).’” For, as another great Sufi says: “Satan laughs at all your threats. What frightens him is to see a *light in your heart*,”⁶⁷ that is to say, when you become aware of what he is. Now as we have read (*supra* §67 quoted in *fine* III, p. 100-101), he, like any other spiritual reality, is not outside of you; his attempts to “enter into you” are but one phase of the fight which is being waged within you.

What this means precisely is that the shadow is in you: to separate yourself from the shadow is to bring about your own metamorphosis, and by this metamorphosis to make possible the conjunction of the two currents of fire rising and falling to meet one another.

Natural existence is made up of four elements superimposed on one another, all of which are *darkness*: Earth, Water, Fire, Air; and you yourself are buried beneath them all. The only way to separate yourself from them is to act in such a way that every rightful part in you comes together with that to which it rightfully belongs, that is, by acting in such a way that each part comes together with its counter-part: Earth receives the earthy part, Water the watery part, Air the etheric part, Fire the fiery part. When each has received its share, you will finally be delivered of these

burdens. The three adversaries disturb the innate knowledge of the divine; they form an obstacle between the *heart* and the divine *Throne*; they prevent the conjunction of the *two rays of light*. Because of them, a man finds himself at first in a state of total spiritual blindness (§11).

What is at stake in metamorphosis is therefore wholly this: either, the soul having succeeded in separating itself, the man of light effects conjunction with his guide of light, his "witness in Heaven" (*shāhid fi'l-samā*); or else the soul succumbs to its darkness, remains in the embrace of its Iblīs, its demonic shadow. "To convert *one's own* Iblīs to Islam," as Abū'l-Ma'ārī and 'Attār expresses it, means to effect the destruction of the lower soul. The individual has no power to destroy Iblīs in the world, but he can separate his soul from Iblīs by destroying the shadow in his soul, for Iblīs can weld himself to the soul only in shadow. Everything depends therefore on the effort directed to the central adversary: the soul, with its Iblīs on one side, and natural existence on the other. The stages of metamorphosis are detected by means of the three different words used in the Qorān to qualify the soul; when the third of these qualities flowers, it can be taken that the *heart* (*qalb*) exists in actuality; the heart is the subtle center of light, the Throne in the microcosm, and by that very fact the organ and place of conjunction with the light of the Throne.

3. The Trilogy of the Soul

Three characteristics situate and constitute the trilogy of the drama of the soul. There is the extravagant lower soul: *nafs ammāra* (12:53), literally, the imperative soul, "the one which commands" evil, the passionate, sensual lower *ego*. There is the "blaming" soul: *nafs lawwāma* (75:2), "the one which censures," criticizes; this is self-consciousness, and is likened to the intellect (*'aql*) of the philosophers. Finally there is the "pacified soul": *nafs motma'yanna* (89:87); the soul which in the true sense is the heart (*qalb*), to which the Qorān addresses the words: "O pacified soul, return to your Lord, accepting and accepted."⁶⁸ This return, which is the reunion of the two fiery currents, is exactly what is described in one of Najm Kobrā's most significant visions.

The extravagant lower soul, the *ego* of the common run of

men, remains such as it is so long as the effects of spiritual warfare have not made themselves felt. When the effect of continuous prayer, the *dhikr*, penetrates it, it is as though a lamp were lighted in a darkened dwelling. Then the soul attains the degree of "blaming soul"; it perceives that the dwelling is cluttered with filth and wild beasts; it exerts itself to drive them out so that the dwelling may be ready to welcome the light of the *dhikr* as its sovereign; this welcome will be the prelude to the opening of the pacified soul (§54).

And there are signs which make it possible to recognize respectively by visionary apperception each moment in this trilogy, each phase of metamorphosis. Thanks to these signs the Spiritual retains perfect awareness of himself.

Know that the lower soul presents a sign that makes it recognizable by visionary apperception: it is a great circle that rises in front of you, entirely *black*, as it were of tar. Then it disappears, only to arise before you again later in the aspect of a black cloud. But lo and behold! gradually, at its arising, something is revealed at its edges resembling the crescent of the *new moon* when one of its horns appears in the sky through the clouds. Little by little, it becomes a complete crescent. When the soul has become conscious of itself to the point of self-judgment, behold it rises to the side of the right cheek in the aspect of a *glowing sun* whose heat may even be felt on one's cheek. Sometimes it is visualized by the ear, sometimes before the forehead, sometimes above the head. And this *blaming soul* is the intelligence (*'aql* referred to by the philosophers) (§55).

As for the *pacified soul*, it also presents a sign which makes it identifiable by visionary apperception: sometimes it rises in front of you forming as it were the orb of a great fountain giving forth lights; sometimes you visualize it in the suprasensory realm as corresponding to the circle of your countenance, an orb of light, a limpid disk, similar to a perfectly polished mirror. At times this circle may seem to rise toward your face and the latter to vanish into it. Your face is then itself the pacified soul.⁶⁹ Sometimes, on the contrary, you visualize the circle at a distance, as though far removed from you in the suprasensory realm. There are then between you and the circle of the pacified soul a thousand stages; if you were to draw near to one of them, you would be set on fire (§56).

From here on the end is in sight. The path will be long and perilous; it is difficult to describe, that is, it is not easy to connect descriptions of the path in a logical and rational order in

which no moment would overlap another. Najm Kobrā's *Diarium* offers us rather the possibility of developing the theme of each phase alternately, considering them successively from several points of view, amongst which priority is given to that which applies to the force that moves the mystical pilgrim along the Way. From another point of view, to perceive the effects of this spiritual energy in him will be a way of following the stages of the ascent and the concomitant growth of the "organs of light," which multiplies *eo ipso* the possibilities of visionary apprehension, leading to the vision that proclaims the integration of bi-unity.

4. Like with Like

So far we have been given the names of three organs or centers: the soul (*nafs*), the intellect (*'aql*), the heart (*qalb*). Two other centers, the spirit (*rūh*) and the transconsciousness (*sirr*, the "secret") take their place in a whole where their meaning and function will be made clear to us later in the writings of Najm Kobrā's disciples (*infra* V, 2 and VI, 1). These are the centers of a subtle physiology, recognizable by the colored lights which symbolize them. These are the organs which allow the supreme principle to operate, in hierocosmology as in hierognosis: like seeks to unite with like. A substance sees and knows only its like; it can itself be seen and known only by its like (§70). This is the principle which, according to Najm Kobrā, governs the fundamental intuition and sets it in operation: what is sought is the divine Being; the seeker is himself a light coming from the divine Being, a particle of its light. The statement and application of the principle certainly awaken many consonances. We already hear it in Empedocles: "Fire can be seen only by fire." In the *Corpus Hermeticum* (11/20) where the *Noūs* declares to Hermes: "If you do not make yourself like God, you cannot understand God." In Plotinus (*Enneads* VI, 9, 11): "The Principle can be seen only by the Principle." In the West it leads us from Meister Eckhart to Goethe (*infra* VI, 2).

'Alī-e Hamadānī, the great shaykh responsible for the spread of Sufism in India, formulates it briefly in a way that is particularly striking:⁷⁰ The human being, he says, is a copy

transcribed from the great Qorān which is the cosmos. Everything that constitutes this cosmic Qorān—suras, verses, words, letters, vowel signs—has an esoteric and an exoteric aspect.

In each part of a man which has been purified, its counterpart of the same nature is reflected, for nothing can be seen except by its like. Therefore, when the esoteric nature indicated by a man's inclinations and faculties has become pure, he contemplates therein whatever is of the same nature in the macrocosm. The same applies to the soul, the heart, the spirit, the transconsciousness, up to the arcanum (*khafī*), the innermost place where the divine Attributes which intoxicate are unveiled, and where it can be said *I am His hearing, I am His sight* . . .

The parts constituting the human being can even be regarded as fragments of their cosmic counterparts; each belongs to a whole from which it derives. Najm Kobrā thus establishes a real connection between the fire of passion and the infernal fire: the fire of voluptuousness, of hunger and thirst, of wickedness and sensuality are parts of the infernal fire. By feeding these fires a man increases his hell, for hell is not outside of him; man is his own hell (§130). Particles of different natures are mutually repellent; the particles imprisoned in man are attracted to their like. The attraction, in its physical aspect, is magnetism, in its psychic aspect, the yearning of like for like. Actually the first aspect is only the exoteric aspect of the second; Najm Kobrā is thinking of the second aspect when he has recourse to his favorite image of the precious stone longing for the world from which it was originally extracted.

For this attraction is *oriented*: toward the Heaven of the soul, the suprasensory Heaven, the inner Heaven, or perhaps it is better to say the "esoteric" Heaven, in case the word "inner" should give rise to the idea of a subjective "heaven" lacking any substantial reality. Orientation toward the Heaven of the soul, toward the *pole*, presupposes and brings about this inward movement which is the return to the vast world of the soul, the passage to the "esoteric." The subtle organ which envelops the heart and which Najm Kobrā calls the Holy Ghost in man is identified with this Heaven. The subtle organ designated as Spirit is the Heaven of the heart. The movement inward brings about the passage from this world to the world beyond, from the outer man to the man of light. As we have noted, the idea

of the spiritual Heavens had already led Sohrevardī to explode the schema of Ptolemaic astronomy, and the same idea opened the way to the Emerald Rock for Hermes and the expatriate in the Recital of the Exile. This passage, this *exodus*, is what authenticates and what is foreseen in the visions received by visionary apperception, in which there are an above and a below, Heavens and Earths: because oriented toward the pole, all this no longer has to do with the world of objects of sensory experience. The reascent of like towards its like (the ascent of the “column of Light”) traversing the entire cosmos, the return of light to light, of precious stones to their origin: the anthropology which is its organ is the science that concerns the man of light and is oriented toward the *pole*. If this were not so, the *mi'rāj* of the prophet and the ascent out of the well are unintelligible and devoid of reality. If this is so, then mystical experience fills a function of cosmic salvation. Several essential passages in Najm Kobrā's treatises make this abundantly clear.

The Holy Ghost in man is a heavenly subtle organ. When the concentrated power of spiritual energy⁷¹ is lavished on him, he is reunited with the Heavens and the Heavens are merged with him. Or rather, Heavens and Spirit are one and the same thing. And this Spirit does not cease to soar, to increase, and to grow until it has acquired a nobility higher than the nobility of Heaven. Or again we could say: in the human being there are precious stones from every kind of mine, and everything that aspires to rediscover its own original mine is of the same nature as the latter (§59).

But Najm makes it clear that will and effort are necessary to set free this attractive energy.

I have never contemplated Heaven *below* me nor *within* me, unless beforehand there had arisen in me an effort and this complaint: why am I not now in Heaven or greater than Heaven? For then the noble precious stones in exile were experiencing a consuming nostalgia for their original home and found it again at last (§59).⁷²

It is therefore the terminal point of this reunion that guarantees the orientation: Earths and Heavens of the suprasensory realm, of the beyond whose threshold is the *pole*.

Know that visionary apperception is twofold: there is perception of what is below and perception of what is above. Below is the vision of all that the Earth (and by Earth I mean here the su-

prasensory Earth *Terra lucida*, not the Earth which is in the physically visible world)—of all, I repeat, that the Earth contains by way of colors, oceans, luminaries, deserts, landscapes, cities, wells, fortresses, etc. Above, there is the vision of all that the Heavens contain: sun, moon, stars, constellations of the Zodiac, houses of the moon. Now, you see and discern nothing whatsoever except by means of something that is its like (or which is a part of it): the precious stone sees only the mine from which it originated, it yearns and is homesick for that alone. Therefore when you envision a heaven, an earth, a sun, or stars, or a moon, know that this is because the particle in you which comes from that mine has become pure (§60).

There follows the warning we have already read (*supra* III, 3 *in fine*) and which conditions all suprasensory experience: whatever the heavens you are contemplating, there are always other heavens beyond; there is no limit.

Mutual attraction and recognition of like by like: this law is exemplified in multiple variations throughout Najm Kobrā's doctrine and mystical experience. It is the basis of a *communicatio idiomatum* between the divine and the human, a reciprocity of states which is very characteristically projected and expressed in terms of spatialization and localization. Pure spiritual space arises from the state experienced, and the state experienced is a visitation of the divine Attributes. Here we may recall the Coptic Gnostic books of Ieu (third century),⁷³ in which the Emanations of the true God Ieu surrounding a Treasury, the *place* of the true God, are themselves the places or abodes of the *τόποι*; the soul of the mystic is welcomed there by the collectors of the Treasury of Light; under their guidance it leaps from one *place* to another, until it reaches the Treasury of Light. The *mahādir*, in Najm Kobrā's terminology, correspond exactly to those places or abodes known to the gnostics. “The divine Being has different places or abodes and they are the *places* of the Attributes. You distinguish them from one another by your own mystical experience, for when you rise to this or that place, your tongue involuntarily utters the name of that place and of its attribute.”

Here again, therefore, there are signs and indications which make verification possible, as previously in the case of each of the places of the soul, and as there will be also for each of the colored photisms.

The heart participates in every divine Attribute, and therefore in the divine Essence. This participation does not cease to grow, and the mystics differ from each other according to the extent of their participation. Since each Attribute has its seat in one of the places or abodes in question, and since the heart participates in each of the divine Attributes, they are epiphanized in the heart to the extent that the heart participates in these Attributes. Thus Attributes are revealed to Attributes, Essence to Essence (or the Self to the Self). On the one hand, the Attributes (or places) contemplate the heart (cause it to be present to them). On the other hand, the heart contemplates the places of the Attributes (makes itself present to them). Theophany is brought about first by theoretical knowledge, later by visionary apperception, whether the Attributes make themselves witnesses present to the heart, or whether the heart makes itself a witness and present to the *places* of the Attributes (§61).

This is a subtle passage and hard to follow at first, but extremely important, because it is the preliminary outline of and introduction to the subsequent account of the relationship of the mystic with his "heavenly Witness" which will develop at the summit of his inner ascent. In this relationship the Contemplator (*shāhid*) is simultaneously the one who is Contemplated (*mashhūd*), the one who witnesses is simultaneously the one who is witnessed, and this already indicates that the idea of the "heavenly Witness" in Najm Kobrā is no different, in essence, from the idea of the Witness of contemplation which orients the spiritual view of other contemporary Sufi masters.

Furthermore, this relationship results from the idea that the seeker is himself a particle of the divine light that is being sought; it illustrates the principle of the Quest and of the recognition of "like by like," which is amplified with extraordinary power in other passages, calling us to witness this *reunion* which is the culminating moment of personal initiation.

There are lights which ascend and lights which descend. The ascending lights are the lights of the heart; the descending lights are those of the Throne. Creatural being is the veil between the Throne and the heart. When this veil is rent and a door to the Throne opens in the heart, like springs toward like. Light rises toward light and light comes down upon light, "*and it is light upon light*" (Qorān 24:35) (§62).

Everything that we are analyzing may well be condensed in

those few lines: a totality which is "light upon light," not light and shadow, in the perspective of the threefold psychic dimension, as we have again to emphasize in conclusion (*infra* IV, 10).

Here are further invaluable quotations:

Each time the heart sighs for the Throne, the Throne sighs for the heart, so that they come to meet . . . Each precious stone (that is, each of the elements of the man of light) which is in you brings you a mystical state or vision in the Heaven corresponding to it, whether it be the fire of ardent desire, of delight or of love (see §83 quoted *infra* IV, 9). Each time a *light rises up from you*, a *light comes down toward you*, and each time a flame rises from you, a corresponding flame comes down toward you (see further §83) . . . If their energies are equal, they meet half-way (between Heaven and Earth) . . . But when the substance of light has grown in you, then this becomes a Whole in relation to what is of the same nature in Heaven: then it is the substance of light in Heaven which yearns for you and is attracted by your light, and it descends toward you. This is the secret of the mystical approach (*sirr al-sayr*, §63-64).

A truly fascinating description; but how does the Sufi reach this aim? The most effective means of realization offered to him is the *dhikr* (= *zehr*), continuous prayer. This is what can bring about the opening and then the growth of this substance of light which is in you, to such a degree that by attracting the heavenly Witness, its suprasensory Guide, the reunion will take place. The stages of growth of this organism of light will then be marked by the colored photisms, until the particle of divine light, the man of light within you, your *φωτεινός άνθρωπος*, suddenly bursts forth.

5. The Function of the Dhikr

Of all spiritual practices: meditation on the sayings of the Prophet and on the traditions of Sufism, meditated recitation of the Qorān, ritual Prayer, and so forth, the *dhikr* (*zehr*) is the practice most apt to free spiritual energy, that is, to allow the particle of divine light which is in the mystic to rejoin its like. The advantage of the *dhikr* is that it is not restricted to any ritual hour; its only limitation is the personal capacity of the mystic. It is impossible to study the question of colored photisms without knowing the spiritual exercise which is their source. Everything takes place, needless to say, in the *ghayba*,

the suprasensory world; what is in question here is solely the physiology of the man of light. Najm Kobrā set himself the task of describing the cases and circumstances in which the fire of the *dhikr* itself becomes the object of mystical apperception. As opposed to the fire of the Devil, which is a dark fire, the vision of which is accompanied by distress and a feeling of overwhelming oppression, the fire of the *dhikr* is visualized as a pure and ardent blaze, animated by a rapid upward movement (§8). On seeing it, the mystic experiences a feeling of inner lightness, expansion, and intimate relief. This fire enters into the dwelling place like a sovereign prince, announcing: "I alone, and none other than I." It sets fire to all that is there to be consumed, and sheds light on any darkness it may encounter. If light is there already, the two lights associate with each other and there is *light upon light* (§§9-10).

That is why one form of the *dhikr* above all other, leading in actuality to the acquisition of this pure and ardent flame, consists in repeating the first part of the *shahāda*, the profession of faith: *lā ilāha illā'llāh* (*Nullus deus nisi Deus*), and meditating upon it according to the rules of Sufism.⁷⁴ In Ismaelian Shī'ite gnosis, theosophical dialectic was already practiced with extreme subtlety by alternating the negative and affirmative phases composing the first part of the *shahāda*, in order to open up a path between the two abysses, the *ta'tīl* and the *tashbīh*, that is to say, between rationalist agnosticism and the literal realism of naive faith. By following this way, the idea of mediating theophanies is established, the hierarchy of the pleroma of light. While the transcendence of the Principle beyond being and non-being is preserved in Ismaelian gnosis, orthodoxy is blamed inasmuch as it falls into the most pernicious kind of metaphysical idolatry, the very one it was so anxious to avoid. In the Sufism of Najm Kobrā, the reiteration of the negative part of the *shahāda* (*nullus Deus*) is designed to be a weapon against all the powers of the *nafs ammāra* (the lower ego); it consists in denying and rejecting all pretensions to divine prerogatives, all claims inspired in the soul by the instincts of possessiveness and domination. In the positive part of the *shahāda* (*nisi Deus*) on the other hand the exclusive nature and powers of the One and Only One are affirmed.

Then there comes about the state alluded to in a saying

tirelessly repeated by the Sufis, and familiar to us because we have read it in St. Paul (*I Cor.* 2:9), where in fact it harks back to the *Revelation of Elijah*.⁷⁵ The mystic "sees what the eye has not seen, hears what no ear has heard, while thoughts arise in his mind which had never arisen in the heart of man," that is to say, of man who remains buried in the depths of natural existence. For the effect of the *fire-light* of the *dhikr* is to make a man clairvoyant in Darkness; and this clairvoyance foretells that the heart is being freed, is emerging from the *well* of nature; but (let us remember the Sohravardian *Recital of the Exile*) "only a heart that holds fast to the cable of the Qorān and to the train of the robe of the *dhikr*"⁷⁶ escapes from the well of nature."

No doubt the practice of the *dhikr* in Najm Kobrā's school includes also a whole system of techniques: movements of the head, control of breathing, certain postures (in Semnānī for example, the seated position with crossed legs, right hand placed on left hand, the latter holding the right leg which is placed on the left thigh) possibly revealing Taoist influence.⁷⁷ By uninterrupted polarization of the attention on an object, the object finally imposes itself with such force, is imbued with such life, that the mystic is attracted and is, as it were, absorbed into it. This is the phenomenon Rudolf Otto found so striking when he had already discerned a clear parallel between the Sufi *dhikr* and the *μνήμη τοῦ Θεοῦ* or *Ἰησοῦ* practiced by the monks of Athos and in early Christian monasticism.⁷⁸

The preponderant role of the Sufi *dhikr* is justified in that it establishes experientially the connection between the theme of the ascent from the well, the polar orientation of the spiritual seeker and the growth of his body of light. The polar orientation in this case signifies also and essentially an inward movement as the way of passing to the world beyond. Najm Kobrā describes by meticulous analyses and reference to his personal experience this process of internalization: it is a gradual deepening of the *dhikr* in three stages. As it was recalled above, the phenomena described relate not to the physical organism but to the physiology of the subtle body and its organs.

A first and still incomplete phase of penetration is marked by acoustic phenomena which may be painful and even dangerous: in such a case (as Najm was strictly advised by his shaykh), it is absolutely necessary to interrupt the *dhikr* until

everything returns to normal (§§45 ff.) The two other phases are described as the fall or absorption of the *dhikr* first into the *heart*, then into the *sirr*, or “secret,” the transconsciousness. “When the *dhikr* is immersed in the heart, the heart is then sensed as though it were itself a well and the *dhikr* a pail lowered into it to draw up water,” or, according to another image of the same experience: the heart is ‘Īsā ibn Maryam, and the *dhikr* is the milk that nourishes him. Thus we find again the theme of the birth of the spiritual Child (*supra* II, 1), a theme whose equivalent is reiterated by so many mystics and which led the Sufis to regard Maryam as the typification of the mystic soul (§49). Other descriptions given by Najm Kobrā speak of an opening produced by the *dhikr* on the top of the head, through which “descend on you first a darkness (of natural existence), then a fiery light, then the *green light* of the heart” (*ibid.*); or again, of a wound in the side through which the heart and its Holy Ghost escape like a horseman with his mount and make their way up to the divine places, (*mahādir al-Haqq*, the *τόποι* of the Gnostics, *supra*) (§50). Let us not necessarily infer that this indicates some outer stigmatization. None of this takes place in the outer sensory world, nor in the “imaginary” world, but only in the *mundus imaginalis* (*‘alam al-mithāl*), the *imaginative* world to which belong organs of the same nature in the human being, namely the centers of subtle physiology (the *latīfa*). In a final phase, the *dhikr* is intermingled so intimately with the fundamental being of the mystic that were the latter to abandon the *dhikr*, the *dhikr* would not abandon him. “Its fire does not cease to blaze, its lights no longer disappear. Without interruption you see lights rising and lights descending. The flames of the fire are all around you—very pure, very ardent, and very strong (§51).”

6. The Green Light

Lights ascending, lights descending: the *dhikr* sinks down into the well of the heart and at the same time lifts the mystic up out of the darkness of the well. The simultaneity of these concentric movements foretells the birth and growth of the subtle organism of light. The descriptions become more complicated and interwoven until they are resolved, as Najm Kobrā tells us, in the *visio smaragdina* to which these movements are the pre-

lude. “Ours is the method of alchemy,” declares the shaykh. “It involves extracting the subtle organism of light from beneath the mountains under which it lies imprisoned” (§12). “It may happen that you visualize yourself as lying at the bottom of a well and the well seemingly in lively downward movement. In reality it is you who are moving upward” (*ibid.*). This ascent (reminding of the vision of Hermes in Sohrawardī, his ascent to the battlements of the Throne), is the gradual emergence from the mountains which, as we have already been told (*supra* IV, 2), are the four elementary natures constituting the physical organism. The inner states accompanying this emergence are translated into visions of deserts, even “cities, countries, houses, which come down from above toward you and later disappear below you, as though you were seeing a dike on the shore crumble and disappear into the sea” (§12).

This correspondence is precisely what provides the mystic with a decisive method by which to verify the reality of his visions; it is a guarantee against illusions, for it demands the maintenance of a rigorous *balance*.

You come to gaze with your own eyes on what you had until then only known theoretically, through the intellect. When you envision yourself as submerged in a sea, and yet making your way across it, know that this is the elimination of superfluous fetal requirements originating from the element Water. If the sea is clear and if suns or lights or flames are drowned in it, know that it is the sea of mystic gnosis. When you envision rain descending, know that it is a dew which falls from the *places* of Divine Mercy to vivify the earths of hearts slumbering in death. When you visualize a flame in which you are first entirely engulfed and from which you then free yourself, know that this is the destruction of the elements surrounding the fetus that originate in the element Fire. Finally, when you see before you a great wide space, an immensity opening onto the far distance, while above you there is clear pure Air and you perceive on the far horizon the colors *green, red, yellow, blue*, know that you are about to pass, borne aloft through this air, to the field of these colors. The colors are those of the spiritual states experienced inwardly. The color *green* is the sign of the life of the heart; the color of ardent pure *fire* is the sign of the vitality of spiritual energy,⁷⁹ signifying the power to actualize. If this fire is dim, it denotes in the mystic a state of fatigue and affliction following the battle with the lower ego and the Devil. *Blue* is the color of this lower ego. *Yellow* indicates a lessening of activity. All these are suprasensory realities in dialogue with the one who experiences them in the twofold language of inner feel-

ing (*dhawq*) and visionary apperception. These are two complementary witnesses, for you experience inwardly in yourself what you visualize with your inner sight, and reciprocally you visualize with your inner sight precisely what you experience in yourself (§ 13).

The shaykh formulates in this way the very law of *balance* which makes it possible to authenticate these visions of colored lights, and is all the more necessary since it is a matter, not of optical perceptions, but of phenomena perceived by the organ of inner sight; *balance* makes it possible to discriminate and distinguish them from "hallucinations." Discrimination is in fact established to the extent that the inner state experienced in reality is verified by its correspondence with the state which would be brought about by the outer perception of such and such a color. To that extent, what is in question is certainly no illusion but a real visualization and a sign, that is to say, the coloration of *real* objects and events whose reality, of course, is not physical but suprasensory, psycho-spiritual. This is why these colored photisms are in the full sense of the word *witnesses*—witnesses of what you *are*, of what your vision is worth, and prefigure the vision of the personal "heavenly Witness." The importance of the color *green* (the color of the *pole*) derives from this whole context, since it is the color of the heart and of the vitality of the heart (§14). Now, the heart is the homologue of the Throne, of the *pole* which is the threshold of the beyond. And so we recognize here more than one feature already figuring in Sohrawardī's *Recital of the Exile*.

"*Green* is the color that outlasts the others.⁸⁰ From this color emanate flashing, sparkling rays. This green may be absolutely pure or it may become tarnished. Its purity proclaims the dominant note of the divine light; its dullness results from a return of the darkness of nature" (§15). Just as the mountain of Qāf (the psycho-cosmic mountain, *supra* III, 1) wholly takes on the coloration of the Emerald Rock which is its summit (the pole, the cosmic north), so "is the heart a subtle organ which reflects suprasensory things and realities that revolve around it. The color of the thing is reproduced in the subtle organ (*latīfa*) it faces, just as forms are reflected in mirrors or in pure water . . . the heart is a light in the depths of the *well* of nature, like Joseph's light in the well into which he was thrown" (§16).

And so from then on, in this light, the vicissitudes of the

ascent out of the well begin to take shape. The first time that the *well* is revealed to you it shows you a depth to which no depth perceived physically can be compared. Whereas in the waking state you are on the way to becoming familiar with it, when you visualize it in a state where the outer senses are under restraint (or "missing," that is, in the suprasensory *ghayba*), you are shaken by such terror that you think you are about to die. And then, suddenly at the mouth of the well the extraordinary *green light* begins to shine. From then on, unforgettable marvels show themselves to you, those of the *Malakūt* (the world of the *Animae coelestes*, the esoteric aspect of the visible heavens), those of the *Jabarūt* (the world of the Cherubim, of the divine Names). You experience the most contradictory feelings: exultation, terror, attraction. At the end of the mystic way, you will see the well below you. In the course of the ascent, the whole of the well is changed into a well of light or of green color. "Dark at the beginning, because it was the dwelling-place of devils, it is now luminous with *green light*, because it has become the place to which descend the Angels and the divine Compassion" (§17). Here Najm Kobrā testifies to the angelophanies which were granted to him: the emergence from the well under the guidance of four Angels surrounding him; the descent of the *sakīna* (the *shekhina*), a group of Angels who descend into the heart; or else the vision of a single Angel bearing him up as the prophet was borne up (§§19-21).⁸¹

And then all the spiritual Heavens, the inner Heavens of the soul, the seven planes of being which have their counterparts in the man of light shine multicolored in the rainbow of the *visio smaragdina*.

Know that to exist is not limited to a single act. There is no act of being such that above it one does not discover an act of being even more definite and more beautiful than the one preceding it, until finally one reaches the divine Being. On the mystic journey there is a *well* corresponding to each act of being. The categories of being are limited to seven; it is to this that the number of the Earths and the Heavens alludes.⁸² Therefore, when you have risen up through the seven wells in the different categories of existence, lo and behold, the Heaven of the sovereign condition (*robūbiyya*) and its power are revealed to you. Its atmosphere is a *green light* whose greenness is that of a vital light through which flow waves eternally in movement towards one another. This

green color is so intense that human spirits are not strong enough to bear it, though it does not prevent them from falling into mystic love with it. And on the surface of this heaven are to be seen points more intensely *red* than fire, ruby or cornelian, which appear lined up in groups of five. On seeing them, the mystic experiences nostalgia and a burning desire; he aspires to unite with them (§18).

7. *The Senses of the Suprasensory World*

We shall understand the meaning of these glowing constellations after hearing a description where the theme of the ascent out of the well is repeated from the point of view of the inner states or events visualized in this way. What you visualize, according to the shaykh's teaching, are the stages of your inner ascent, that is, the very facts of your inner experience. Now, what is the content of this experience? It is the growth of the man of light, the transmutation of his senses into organs of light, into "suprasensory senses." Here the physiology of the man of light, involving a whole doctrine of symbolic forms, recapitulates the *itinerarium ad visionem smaragdina* from another aspect. In other words, the colors characterizing the colored photisms of visionary apperception signify, to put it briefly, the transmutation of the sensory by a transmutation of the senses into "suprasensory senses."

The process is minutely described by Najm Kobrā. It can be no more than summarized here. We already know that there is a strict interconnection between the feeling of a mystic state and visionary apperception, the latter being the visualization of the former.

But there is a difference in that the visionary apperception presupposes the opening of the inner eye by the removal of the veil which darkened it, whereas the feeling of mystic experience (*dhawq*) is caused by a transmutation of the being and of the spirit. The mystical experience is the intimate feeling that an event is taking place within you. This transmutation includes a transmutation of the faculties of sensory perception. The five senses are changed into *other senses* (§41).

And what is essential here can no doubt be expressed as follows: an inversion which brings about a suprasensory perception of the sensory, that is, perception of the sensory in the *mundus imaginalis* which Sohrawardī calls the heavenly Earth of

Hürqalyā (the *Terra lucida*, in the cosmic north), familiar to all visionary mystics such as, for example, Ibn 'Arabī,⁸³ for whom it is the place of transfigurations, the place where the *imaginative power* (*Imaginatrix*) operates to produce scenes in which there is no tinge of demonic, twilight "fantasy."

Looking back briefly, we can see the distance that has been covered along the mystic Way. At the beginning visionary apperception is directed to the figures and images originating in the sensory world; later it directly perceives persons, essences (*dhawāt*), and it is then (and the concomitance must be stressed) that the colored photisms come about. More explicitly: the intellect, like a hunter, begins by being on the lookout for suprasensory realities (the *ma'ānī*, the hidden, "esoteric" contents). It has a twofold net for catching them: the imaginative and the representative faculties. The visual faculty is as it were his dog, his pointer. The imagination clothes the *ma'ānī* in appropriate attire; for example, it gives a contemptible enemy the form of a dog, a noble and generous enemy the form of a lion, etc. The science of the *ta'bīr* of dreams⁸⁴ is founded on this, the interpretation of symbols, that is to say of indirect perceptions. (§42)

However, should one say the events *directly* perceived in Hürqalyā are *only* symbols? If it is more fitting to say "nothing less" than symbols, thereby referring to the quality that causes a thing to "symbolize with" another, does this not mean to say that this synchronism already postulates precisely what follows from the inversion described above? *New senses* perceive *directly* the order of reality corresponding to them. At this stage, in fact, the intellect realizes how deceptive are the senses which previously suggested to it that nothing is real except what is physically seen, tasted and touched. Now it has discovered "another mode of sensory perception" (*ihsās ākhar*), "suprasensory senses" (*hiss ghaybī*—all of this precise terminology must be noted), and consequently an active Imagination, other than the imagination that is forced to adhere to the data of the physical senses. The intellect now refuses to believe in the data from the previous way of sensing things.⁸⁵ It is no longer interested in "hunting," since it perceives directly. "Henceforth, spiritual realities are displayed to it in *colors*, because the synchronism of colors and inner vision is now established."

In still other words, a decisive event has taken place: the colors are evidence of perfect internalization, perfect concordance between the state experienced and the event visualized, and this is what constitutes the transmutation of the physical senses into "suprasensory senses" or into the "senses of the suprasensory world," into organs of light. The perception of the colored photisms coincides with the moment when these suprasensory senses come into action as the organs of the man of light, of the "particle of the divine light." "All the *ma'ānī* return to their source in the heart; everything becomes fixed in a single color, the *green* which is the color of the vitality of the heart" (§43). Here again, in the inner Heavens of resplendent emerald green, a star emerges, *reddish purple*, the color that, according to Najm Kobrā, heralds the Intelligence in its twofold form:⁸⁶ that of the macrocosm (*Insān Kabīr*, *Homo maximus*), namely the Angel-Logos, the theophany of the Inaccessible, and that of the microcosm, another name for the *nafs lawwāma*, which, as we have seen, being the light-consciousness casting off the *shadow*, thus makes the state of "pacified soul" accessible to the heart whose vitality is proclaimed by the green light. The visionary coherence of the figures and images is striking.

8. The Orbs of Light

And so the event experienced (the ascent from the well) and the visualizations (the colored photisms) are synchronic and mutually verify each other, because they take place at the same time as the opening of the man of light, that is, of the organs of light (the suprasensory senses) of his subtle physiology. Other photisms described by Najm Kobrā now tell us of his growth, which will continue until the visualization of the "Invisible Guide," the "heavenly Witness," is reached. This growth is proclaimed by the vision of orbs of light forming the antithesis to the circle of darkness perceived by the mystic in the beginning, when his lower ego (*nafs ammāra*) was still projecting a shadow. Each of the senses transmuted into "suprasensory senses," or rather each of the subtle organs of light corresponding to the physical senses, is heralded by a light which is proper to it. Thus there is a light of speech, a light of hearing, etc.

(§57).⁸⁷ However, these latter are not yet experienced in the aspect of the geometrical figures so characteristic of some of Najm Kobrā's visualizations, such as circles which manifest the face in the final stage of the mystic pilgrimage. Amongst other circles, there is the double circle of the eyes, two orbs of light which appear wherever one turns, to the right or to the left. There is the circle of the divine Light which is manifested as equidistant from the two eyes. There is the circle of the vital *pneuma* (*dā'irat al-rūh*), etc. (§57).

The double circle of the two eyes comes to be seen as of predominant significance, for, to the degree that the "Inner Heavens" are purified, it becomes bigger until it shows the circle of the complete face and finally the *aura* of the whole "person of light." The phases of the appearance of this orb of light allow us to make various preliminary comparisons. It passes, in fact, through stages of growth corresponding to the phases of the Moon, starting from the new moon. Because this growth is simultaneously the passage to the "Inner Heavens" (Spirit and Heaven are one and the same thing, we have been told), the mystic thus inwardly experiences the twenty-eight lunar stations which correspond to the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet, since the latter, interpreted as letters of the "philosophical alphabet," are engendered by the heaven of the Moon (§111).⁸⁸

The double circle of the light of the eyes (or eyes of light) grows as the mystic journey progresses. Allusion was made above (IV, 6 *in fine*) to the seven categories of being, to the seven heavens which have their counterparts in the mystic's inner world. The growth of the orbs of light refers to the inner ascent through seven strata, from each of which proceed the "letters" of each Heaven and which, according to Semnānī (*infra* VI), are the *latīfa*, the subtle organs of the physiology of the man of light. Furthermore, whatever their differences, there is something in common between the circles of which Najm Kobrā speaks and every other vision or diagram in the form of a circle made known to us from other sources (Hallāj, the Druses), just as there is homology of function between the *latīfa* of Semnānī and the *chakras* which are the centers of consciousness and the organs of suprasensory perception in Mahayana Buddhism.

“When such and such a part of the inner Heaven gradually becomes pure, the color of that Sky and its magnitude in relation to the preceding Heaven become visible to the mystic, until finally the circle coincides with the entire face (§115).” It may even happen, for example, when a state of happiness succeeds distress, or when fear changes to familiarity, or when torpor is succeeded by ardent desire, that all the circles of light of the face are manifested at the same time. It then seems to the mystic that the August Face itself is revealed to him, irradiated by flaming circles which surround it with hymns of praise: “Involuntarily he utters: ‘Glory be to me! Glory be to me! How sublime my state!’⁸⁹—when he finds himself wholly immersed in this light. Or else, retaining a sense of himself, he will utter in the third person: ‘Glory be to him! Glory be to him! How sublime is his state!’ (§115).”

9. The “Heavenly Witness”

And so now we come to the innermost secret of the mystical experience, to the decisive event already pre-sensed in the splendors of the “emerald vision.” The alternation between the first and the third person, the substitution of the one for the other, are only another way of stating the same paradox—procreated-procreator, Contemplated-Contemplator—which the theme of Perfect Nature had already allowed us to grasp as being the supreme expression of individual spiritual initiation. In this realization of reciprocity alone can the features of the August Face be fleetingly glimpsed: a face of light which is your own face because you are yourself a particle of Its light. What the mystic, by virtue of his ardent desire, pursues and experiences is not a collective relationship shared by all alike in respect to a singular object, is not a relationship identical for all to which everyone has an equal claim in respect to one and the same object. No, this relationship is unique, individual, unshareable, because it is a relationship of love. It is not a filial relationship, but rather a *marital* one. An individual, unshared relationship of this nature can only be manifested, represented, and expressed by a figure which *attests* to the real presence of one alone to one alone and for one alone, in a dialogue *unus-ambo*. The figure of the “Heavenly Witness,” of the su-

prasensory personal Guide, thus guarantees with such certainty a theophany perceived by love alone, corresponding to a feeling of *marital relationship*, that its most characteristic manifestations—the flaming of photisms bearing witness to the reunion of “like with like”—come about at the moment of a state of love carried to its climax. The mystical experience described by Najm Kobrā thus comes to accord with the forms and experience of celestial love in Iranian Sufism.

When the circle of the face has become pure [writes the shaykh], “it effuses lights as a spring pours forth its water, so that the mystic has a sensory perception (i.e., through the suprasensory senses) that these lights are gushing forth to irradiate his face. This outpouring takes place between the two eyes and between the eyebrows. Finally it spreads to cover the whole face. At that moment, before you, before your face, there is another Face also of light, irradiating lights; while behind its diaphanous veil a *sun* becomes visible, seemingly animated by a movement to and fro. In reality this Face is your own face and this sun is the sun of the Spirit (*shams al-rūh*) that goes to and fro in your body. Next, the whole of your person is immersed in purity, and suddenly you are gazing at a person of light (*shakhmin nūr*) who is also irradiating lights. The mystic has the sensory perception of this irradiation of lights proceeding from the whole of his person. Often the veil falls and the total reality of the person is revealed, and then with the whole of your body you perceive the whole. The opening of the inner sight (*basīra*, the visual organ of light) begins in the eyes, then in the face, then in the chest, then in the entire body. This person of light (*shakhs nūrānī*) before you is called in Sufi terminology the suprasensory *Guide* (*mooaddam al-ghayb*). It is also called the suprasensory *personal Master* (*shaykh al-ghayb*), or again the suprasensory spiritual *Scales* (*mīzām al-ghayb*) (§66).⁹⁰

It has been given many other names, all reminiscent of the “midnight sun,” the witness in the vision of Hermes described by Sohrawardī (*supra* II, 1 and III, 1). Najm Kobrā refers to the Guide of light as the Sun of the heart, the Sun of certainty, the Sun of faith, the Sun of knowledge, the spiritual Sun of the Spirit.⁹¹ And more explicitly still he says: “Know that the mystic has a Witness (*shāhid*). He it is who is called the personal Master in the suprasensory world. He carries the mystic up toward the Heavens; thus it is in the Heavens that he appears (§69).”

The personal Guide in the suprasensory world is thus expressly designated as the *shāhid*. It is a characteristic term in the vocabulary of those spiritual seekers who, in Sufism, should

rightly be called the "faithful lovers," because of the "divine service" they render to beauty by contemplating it as the greatest of all theophanies.⁹² When Najm Kobrā refers more precisely to the "Witness in the Heavens" (*shāhid fī'l samā*), the heavenly Witness, this epithet further accentuates the essential aspect of the *shāhid*, of the "witness of contemplation," meditated similarly by mystics such as Rūzbehān or Ibn 'Arabī, and it immediately places the original expression of the shaykh's visionary apperception in the context of Iranian Sufism; lastly, this designation should make it impossible to distort the idea of the *Shāhid* by an erroneous psychological interpretation and bring it down to the notion of the "Double" as being the *shadow*.

For a "faithful lover" like Rūzbehān of Shīrāz, every beautiful face is a theophanic witness because it is a mirror without which the divine Being would remain a *Deus absconditus*. It is likewise significant that in Najm Kobrā the "Witness in the Heavens" should be pre-sensed in the aspect of an outburst of flame visualized in the Heavens, and accompanied by a state of intense love. Between the heavenly person of the Guide of light and the object—that is to say, the earthly person loved with a celestial love—the relationship is an epiphany, since it even gives rise to the symptom visible to the eyes of the suprasensory senses of the presence of the "witness in the Heavens." Since the latter is visible to the "eyes of light" only to the degree that the man of light frees himself from the crude ore of darkness, there is evidence that celestial love is the teacher initiating this liberation. This is why the idea of the *shāhid* finds its place in a complete doctrine of mystical love, bringing together the earthly loved one and the "witness in the heavens" manifested as the Guide of light. Needless to say the phenomena here again have to do with the physiology of the "suprasensory senses."

Lo and behold! [writes Najm Kobrā] while sojourning in Egypt, in a small town on the banks of the Nile, I fell passionately in love with a young girl. For many days, I remained practically without food and without drink, and in this way the flame of love within me became extraordinarily intense. My breath exhaled flames of fire. And each time I breathed out fire, lo and behold, from the height of heaven *someone* was also breathing out fire which came to meet my own breath. The two shafts of flame blended between the Heavens and me. For a long time I did not

know *who* it was who was there at the place where the two flames came together. But at last I understood that it was my *witness in Heaven* (§83).

Nothing could illustrate better than this experiential verification what we have been given to understand by the theme of the coming together of "like with like" (*supra* IV, 4): "every time a flame arises from you, behold a flame comes down from the heavens toward you."⁹³

Another of Najm Kobrā's confessions suggests to us in a manner no less specific the connection constituting celestial love, by introducing the theme of the *soror spiritualis*.

I departed⁹⁴ [he writes], and behold, there appeared to me a Heaven that resembled the book of the Qorān. Four-sided figures were inscribed therein, outlined by dotted lines. The dots formed some verses from the *sūra Ta-ha* (20:39-41): "I shed thee love from Me; that thou mightest be before my eyes when thy sister came to pass by."⁹⁵ Having understood these verses, I began to recite them. And it came to me by inspiration that their meaning related to a woman I knew who bore the name of *Banafsha*,⁹⁶ while her name in the suprasensory realm was *Istafīm* (§160).

Do not look for the meaning of this last name in some Arabic or Persian dictionary; only Najm Kobrā can explain it to us. Returning to the theme of the esoteric Names borne by certain beings in the suprasensory realm (§176), he interprets the name in question as signifying the "Ayesha of her time." The very fact that the earthly woman bears an "esoteric" name, that is to say, has a *name in Heaven* (a name in the suprasensory world which is the world of the Guide and of the personal master), indicates, in a manner that is as discreet as it is eloquent, what celestial love essentially implies: the perception of a beautiful being in her heavenly dimension, through senses which have become organs of light; precisely, the organs of the "person of light."

And that is why Najm Kobrā's doctrine of love connects essentially with the doctrine of those for whom, like Rūzbehān, human and divine love are by no means opposed to one another as a dilemma demanding that the mystic make a choice. They are two forms of the same love; passages in one and the same book which one must learn to read (with "eyes of light"). To pass from one to another does not consist in the

transfer of love from one *object* to another, for God is not an *object*; God is the absolute *Subject*. To pass from one form of love to another implies the *metamorphosis of the subject*, of the *'āshiq*. This is what the entire doctrine of Rūzbehān⁹⁷ and that of Najm Kobrā are intended to indicate, so that we should not be surprised if, for the same reason, Najm does not make the same distinction as do some devotees and pious ascetics between divine and human love. For the metamorphosis of the subject resolves the apparent dissonances in the paradoxes, the “pious blasphemies,” of ecstasies in love. It may be that the lover, addressing the earthly beauty, the object of his love, cries out: “You are my Lord: I have no Lord but you!” Perhaps those are blasphemous words; however, they arise from an emotional state, from an inner compulsion, which is neither conscious nor voluntary. These words are not uttered by the lover, but by the living flame of love, for the fire of love is fed by the beloved and the lover can but speak in the inspired language of the moment: “For you, I am lost to the religious and profane worlds; you are my impiety *and* you are my faith; you are what I was yearning for *and* you are the end and fulfillment of my desire; *you are myself* (*anta anā*).” The vehemence of this lyricism is finally appeased in a long quotation from Hallāj: “I am filled with wonder about you and me, that through yourself you make me as nothing to myself, that you are so close to me that I come to think that you are me.” (§81)⁹⁸

Still further (§101), Najm Kobrā quotes another couplet attributed to Hallāj: “I am he (or she) whom I love; he (or she) whom I love is me.” The anonymous Iranian commentator on Rūzbehān introduces this same couplet to accompany the theme of Majnūn when he has become the “mirror of God”⁹⁹ (the state of Majnūn to which the commentator relates the same Qorānic verses as those read by Najm Kobrā in the constellations of the inner Heaven as relating to his *soror spiritualis*, because he knew her heavenly name). The shaykh expresses this further by saying: “It may be that the lover is entirely consumed by love, then he is himself love” (§82). That is exactly the doctrine of Ahmad Ghazālī.¹⁰⁰ When the lover has become the very substance of love, there is no longer any opposition between subject and object, between the lover and the beloved. That is the metamorphosis of the subject expressed by the

Neoplatonic identity of love, lover and beloved, and that is the divine form of love. When Najm Kobrā describes the four ascending degrees of love, he is concerned with this metamorphosis. To wonder why he makes no distinction between human love and divine love would be quite beside the point, would indicate the failure to perceive the meaning of the concomitance experienced in the reunion of the two flames between Heaven and Earth, of the synchronism between the manifestation of the Witness in Heaven, the suprasensory Guide, the Sun of the heart, and the knowledge of the “esoteric” name, of the “name in Heaven,” of the earthly beloved. Individual initiation ends here in this inner revelation; these are the steps proclaimed by the colored photisms, from the circle of darkness and the blue light of the lower ego, still given over entirely to sensory and sensual perceptions, up to the *visio smaragdina* of the Throne iridescent in orbs of light. In this way one can foresee what is common to the profoundly original spirituality of Najm Kobrā and that of his great contemporaries, Sohrevardī, Rūzbehān, Ibn 'Arabī.

10. The Scales and the Angel

Among the expressions qualifying the heavenly Guide in relation to the colored photisms, there is one, “the suprasensory Scales” (*mizān al-ghayb*), that shows more particularly the homology between Najm Kobrā's heavenly Witness and the other manifestations of the same archetype analyzed above (*supra* II), especially the manifestation which exemplifies it best of all, namely, the figure of Daēnā-Fravartī in Zoroastrian Mazdeism. Furthermore the theme of the *scales* allows us to recognize for certain *what* the shadow is and *where* the shadow is; it forces us to accept that three-dimensionality of the inner world without which, as previously indicated, orientation toward the *pole* would remain ambivalent and ambiguous, or rather would not in fact guarantee any *sense of direction*.

Najm Kobrā stresses this symbolic qualification several times. The entire question for us is to interpret correctly what the *scales* indicate. What in fact happens in the case where it is said that the suprasensory Guide shows himself, or rather hides himself under blackness, darkness? “The suprasensory Wit-

ness, the suprasensory Guide, the suprasensory Scales: this is what you are shown when you close your eyelids. According to whether what appears to you is light or darkness, your witness (*shāhid*) is light or darkness.” Or, to put it more exactly, in the latter case it means that you have no witness, no heavenly partner: he is not there at all. This is exactly why “he is called the *scales*, because by him the states of the soul (or your ego) are weighed as to their purity or disfigurement.”¹⁰¹ As a balance, its role is therefore to indicate whether there is excess or deficiency in the spiritual state, that is, whether light prevails over darkness or *vice versa* (§69). If it so happens that at the midpoint of the mystical journey, the two circles of light of the eyes appear, it is the sign of an excellent spiritual state. If they remain hidden, this concealment indicates a lack, a preponderance of the dark nature. Furthermore, they may appear bigger or smaller; more frequently or less: all these variations correspond to an excess or a deficit on the scales (§70).

The phases corresponding to the transmutations of the soul can be recapitulated thus: At the beginning there may be darkness (the man still without light, without a witness, “without a *fravarti*”). At the midpoint, two circles of light, increasing or diminishing; at the last, complete visibility of the person of light.

It may happen that this person (the Witness) appears to you at the beginning of the mystical journey; but then you only see a black color, a black figure. Then it disappears. But the other (that is, the person of the Witness revealed to the person of light) will no longer leave you; or, more accurately, you are that person, for it enters into you; it is conjoined to you. If, at the beginning, it appeared to you as black in color, it was because the veil of your own dark existence was hiding it. But when you make this dark existence disappear from before it, and when the flame of the *dhikr* and of ardent desire have consumed this barrier with fire, then the pure jewel is freed from its ore. Then it becomes a person wholly of light (§66).

The text is highly condensed. It echoes in a way the theme of the robe of light, of the *Song of the Pearl* in the *Acts of Thomas*, at least as the Song is rendered in a symbolic recital in the Encyclopedia of the “Brethren of the pure heart” and by Nasīroddīn Tūsī.^{101a} Here, once the garment of darkness has been burned and consumed, the person of light becomes

visible. There, the garment of wretchedness and dirt having been shed at the moment of the return to the “orient”, the mystery of the robe of light is explained in terms that overcome the difficulty of expressing the *unus-ambo*: *two*, distinct from one another, yet but *one* in similar form. Here also there is a distinction: the heavenly Witness can disappear, be absent, while you remain there, without it. The celestial Witness is a person of light and is visible only for and by your person of light (like can be seen only by like). The disc of darkness, the Black figure sometimes visualized by the Spiritual at the beginning of his mystical journey, is *not* the celestial Guide, the Witness in Heaven. The blackness, or darkness, is precisely the absence of the Witness of light; the black color is not the Witness, but the *shadow*; not its shadow, but the Ahrimanic shadow (active negativity) which prevents him from being seen. This shadow is not he, but you, for it is the shadow projected by your *nafs ammāra*, the sensual soul, your lower ego. Seeing only this shadow, you cannot see your heavenly Witness. And if he is not present to you, how would he see you, how would you be present to him? When he is your Witness, it is because you are present to him; he is the Witness who contemplates you, you are what *he* contemplates. But for that very reason he is simultaneously present to you, he is what *you* contemplate. For he contemplates you with the same look with which you contemplate him. Every mystic has attempted to formulate this subtle reciprocity of roles. Here the twofold nuance of the word *shāhid*, the “eye-witness” who attests, and “the one who is present,” helps to express the dialogical situation.¹⁰² The Witness can only respond for you in the correspondence of a co-response. This is why one cannot speak of a *shāhid* who is not there; that would be an “absent presence.” If he is absent, if only the Black figure is there, it is because you are without a *shāhid*, without a co-respondent, or personal Guide. As a corollary, his appearance and degree of visibility are the *scales* measuring what you truly are: light or darkness, or still a mixture of the two. Thereby (and this is important for understanding the structure of Iranian Sufism) the idea of the *shāhid* in Najm Kobrā unites, as emphasized above, with the idea of theophanic witness, a witness of contemplation, for the mystical “Faithful lovers.”

At that very point, in fact, the *shāhid* denotes the being whose beauty bears witness to the divine beauty, by being the divine revelation itself, the theophany par excellence. As the place and form of the theophany, he bears witness to this beauty to the divine Subject Himself; because he is present to the divine Subject as His witness, it means that God is contemplating Himself in him, is contemplating the evidence of Himself. So, when the mystic takes this theophanic witness as witness to his contemplation, the former is the witness of divine Beauty, present to the divine Beauty contemplating itself in him; it is God contemplating Himself in this contemplation of the mystic directed toward His Witness.¹⁰³ Najm Kobrā's idea of a "Witness in Heaven" and Rūzbehān's idea of a "theophanic witness" meet in the same testimony. In both cases the apparitional form changes according to the state of the contemplator. Either the man has no *shāhid*: he sees nothing but shadow, darkness, the Black; the form of his love is confined to the sensual form because of his incapacity to perceive the theophany. (Just as in our day certain loud assertions that art no longer has to refer to beauty finally crush their authors under the whole weight of the testimony that they are offering against themselves.) Or else the man of light, the "precious gem" having been freed from its ore, "perceives his likeness": the orb of light, the flames rising to the Heavens of the soul. As you look upon the *shāhid*, so does he look upon you, and such you yourself are. Your contemplation is worth whatever your being is worth; your God is the god you deserve; He bears witness to your being of light or to your darkness.

So finally we hear again what was already pre-sensed in the Zoroastrian notion of Daēnā-Fravarti: another dimension of the soul, the dimension of a soul which has a personal Witness "in Heaven," which is vouched for by this Witness to the extent that his own being bears witness to him and for him. It would be impossible to realize what this means if one were limited to the one-dimensional perspective offered by current psychology. The bi-unitary structure, whose symbol, as we have seen, is not $1 + 1$ but 1×1 , is the structure that postulates a dimension of individual personal transcendence, and as an idea quite different, certainly, from the idea of a transpersonal evolution. An Initiation that is typically individual, with degrees and a figura-

tion such as we have just been brought to recognize, is specifically what opens up this other dimension; it does not relate the essential individuality either to collective mediation or to any socialized or socializable religious form. All depends upon whether our *ability to comprehend*, our *hermeneutics*, has or has not sufficient dimensions at its disposal. Accordingly, a spirituality as original as that of Najm Kobrā, attentive to the perception of signs of this essential individuation in suprasensory colored photisms, may either orient our search toward a new horizon or possibly cripple it because of a misinterpretation resulting in disorientation.

Let us try to construct the diagram suggested to us from the outset by the threefold structure of the soul (*supra* IV, 3). On the lower plane: *nafs ammāra*, the lower ego, the imperative *psyche*, apparent in the disk of shadow, the Black figure, the black cloud turning to dark blue. On the upper plane: *nafs motma'yanna*, the pacified soul, the green color, emerald splendor and orbs of light. Between the two: the soul-consciousness (*nafs eawwāma*) perceived in vision as a great red sun; this is the intellect (*'aql*), consciousness proper. In terms of the *scales*: the "witness in Heaven" becomes manifest to the extent that the soul-consciousness, placed in the center, empties the "pan" of the scales containing the lower soul, and gives greater weight to the "pan" of the pacified soul which is the *heart*, that is to say, the subtle organ so named by the Sufis. And this is why it was possible, from that point on, to give an unambiguous answer to a first question: to whom did the shadow, the black color visualized at the beginning, belong? In other words, could the "heavenly witness" ever have *been* darkness? No, this darkness was the darkness of your own nature, whose opacity was opposed to the transparency that conditions the reciprocal presence of the man of light to the guide of light and ultimately the penetration of the Image of the Guide into you to the point where it may be possible to say "you are he" (1×1). And so it was your own shadow, your Iblīs or *nafs ammāra* which was projecting and interposing a veil that the flame of the *dhikr* finally set on fire and consumed; this was the only thing that was making the *shaykh al-ghayb*, your partner and heavenly counterpart, invisible.

But the transmutation that is effected by no means signifies

that the old Iblīs, your “Iblīs converted to Islam” has become your *shaykh al-ghayb*, your “witness in Heaven.” Conversion of your Iblīs (your *nafs ammāra*) to Islam is the *condition on which* the *shaykh al-ghayb* can become visible; which is not at all to say that Iblīs becomes the “witness in Heaven.” Such a notion is untenable because of the fundamental orientation, the polar orientation analyzed here at the beginning: either the soul-consciousness is not freed from its shadow, the *nafs ammāra*, but looks at it and through it, thus seeing nothing but shadow, *its* shadow; or else the shadow has subsided and the soul has risen to the degree of *nafs motma’yanna* and sees its own dimension of light.

If this is stressed to avoid confusion, it is because a question will inevitably arise. It would be very tempting indeed to interpret the triadic diagram of the soul recalled above in terms of consciousness and the unconscious and leave it at that. However, can the phenomena of shadow and light, the inner process of which has been so minutely analyzed by Najm Kobrā and the Sufis of his school, really be translated simply by speaking of consciousness as the region of light and the unconscious as the region of shadow? The soul-consciousness (*nafs law-wāma*) is placed between the two: between the lower soul and the higher soul, to which and by which the “witness in Heaven,” the suprasensory Guide, is made manifest. How could one possibly say that the “two souls” between which the soul-consciousness is placed both belonged equally to the same region of *shadow*? The first is the shadow that has to be overcome in order for the bi-unitary structure to be restored. Is it not then this two-dimensionality of the soul (a syzygy of lights) which itself postulates the three-dimensionality of psycho-spiritual spatiality? In other words: does not the *trilogy* of the soul (*supra* IV, 3) force us to admit at least orientation, distinct levels within the unconscious, in order to determine its structure? But how can one introduce positive differentiations into what is negative and negativity? A more serious decision has to be made, namely, to accept all that follows from our diagram, if we wish to avoid the mistake, already pointed out, of confusing complementary elements with contradictory elements, which would lead to interpreting the Fravarti, or the “witness in Heaven,” and Iblīs-Ahriman as complementary manifestations of the same Shadow.

Foreseeing these difficulties, we have avoided here two things in particular. In the first place we have avoided relating the idea of the “witness in Heaven” to what is connoted by the German term *Doppelgänger*, precisely because of the ambiguity, the shadow, attached to this term. In fact what we are speaking of is a counterpart, a celestial, transcendent counterpart, rather than a “double”; the idea of this heavenly partner is antithetic to the Double whose role is suggested in a number of fantastic tales, and there could be no question of bringing these antitheses together to form one Whole. And indeed psychological analysis shows this Double to be the manifestation of the personal unconscious, hence belonging to the functions of the lower psyche, that is, the *nafs ammāra*, the dark envelope, the shadow, exactly what the *dhikr* has to destroy by fire so that the Guide of light may become visible. What prevents the reunion of twin lights cannot be one of its constitutive elements.

In the second place, in the few phenomenological indications outlined here and there, we have avoided any suggestion of a “collective unconscious.” One notices in fact a certain tendency to accentuate in this expression the adjective “collective,” to the point of giving it the substantiality and virtues of an hypothesis: in so doing, it is simply forgotten that the purpose of psychoanalysis, as therapy for the soul, tends essentially to foster what it calls the process of individuation. For the same reason it would be absurd to explain the kind of individual initiation proper to Sufism by relating it to some collective norm, whereas its whole purpose is to free the inner man from such authority. The predisposition to something like Sufism can exist in a multitude of individuals, but it is not for that reason a collective disposition. The obsessions of the present day will end by obscuring every spiritual or cultural phenomenon that does not fit their case.

As for the construction of the diagram, urgently required, as we foresaw a little earlier, so that our hermeneutics might have the requisite dimensions, we should now amplify it as follows: an anthropogony in which antithetic forces (murderer and victim, for example) objectively represent one divine primordial reality is one thing; an anthropogony situating man between two worlds is quite a different thing. Man according to Ismaelian gnosis is an intermediary—potential angel or potential demon; his complete eschatological reality is not the sum of

these two antithetical virtualities. Man in Ibn 'Arabī's anthropology is likewise intermediate: situated between being and non-being, between Light and Darkness, at the same time responsible and respondent to both sides; he is responsible for the Darkness to the extent that he intercepts the Light, but he is responsible for the Light to the extent that he prevents the Darkness from invading and governing it.¹⁰⁴

In Najm Kobrā, the soul-consciousness is also placed between the two. This being so, we need a diagram superimposing the planes; it is impossible to suppose that there could be one single invisible area, inevitably and unilaterally situated *below* the visible area, that is, the area of unconsciousness. A number of manifestations surpassing and going beyond the bounds of the conscious activity of the soul have to be placed not below but *above* consciousness. There is a *subconsciousness* or *infraconsciousness*, corresponding to the level of the *nafs ammāra*; and there is a *superconsciousness* or *supraconsciousness*, corresponding to the level of the *nafs motma'yanna*. In the physical order, the invisibility of an object may be due to a lack of light; it may also be due to an excess of light, to the dazzling effect of being too close to it. In the "suprasensory" order, that of the "suprasensory senses" or physiology of the man of light, the same applies. On the one hand invisibility (absence of the *shāhid*), which is the shadow, the Ahrimanic darkness, the negation or captivity of the light; opposed to this the invisibility that the disciples of Najm Kobrā call the "black light," the pre-origin of all that is visible, that is to say, of all light (*infra*, V). For this very reason, the "black light" is the antithesis of the Ahrimanic darkness. In both cases there is something that is beyond the limits of consciousness. But in the first case the invisibility, the absence of light, is a fact pertaining to *subconsciousness*; in the second case, invisibility due to an excess of brilliance, to being too close to the light, is a fact pertaining to *superconsciousness* or *transconsciousness*. And the facts of superconsciousness are individual facts; individually, each soul has to overcome, as well as its own shadow, the collective shadow.

As an "exemplary fact" among the facts of superconsciousness, it is necessary to recall—though the word is generally misused—the fact referred to by the idea of *vocation* with all its mysterious, imperative, irrational and inexorable connotations.

The idea of vocation serves perhaps better than any other for recapitulating all that is suggested by the idea of the Angel, conveyed to us in the theme of *Daēnā* as glory (δόξα) and destiny (τύχη), in the theme of the Perfect Nature of the Sohrevardian Hermes, and finally in the theme of the "Witness in Heaven," of the "Scales of the suprasensory world"¹⁰⁵ by Najm Kobrā. In such a recapitulation, the essential, undeniable idea of individuality is seen in fact as inseparable from angelology because it provides a basis for the idea of the Angel just as the idea of the Angel is its own foundation.

On this basis, the idea of individuality stands firm in face of the attempts to justify "collectivization" and nominalist concepts. It saves us from the illusion of believing that it is enough to escape from the individual sphere and, by reaching the "social" sphere, simultaneously to reach the divine, for it is the reverse of the mystic's view of the gradations of being as he scales the mountain of *Qāf* to the Emerald Rock at its summit, and emerges step by step above and beyond the natural realms—the vegetable world, the animal world and the human species. Step by step, a species is revealed which does not yet include individuals; then the individual coexisting with the species that dominates him; then the individual coexisting with the species he dominates. Finally, from ascent to ascent, the return of the man of light to his original pleroma postulates the idea of a non-specific individual, of archetypal individuality whose soaring flight and power, by assuming all the virtualities of a species, itself becomes a unique example. The idea of an individual who is himself his species is the idea of the Angel.¹⁰⁶ Leibnitz transposed it into the monadic concept of the soul and this is what truly makes it possible to understand the idea of vocation as relationship with the archetype. Here exactly this specificity of an individuality being born at the end of a personal mystical initiation is made manifest as a state of "dualitude," a *unus-ambo* structure. This bi-unity is not a union of two contradictory elements, Ohrmazdean light and Ahrimanic darkness, but a union of Ohrmazd and his own Fravarti, of twins of light, of the "pacified soul" and its "witness in Heaven," of Hermes and his Perfect Nature, of *Phōs* and his guide of light, consciousness and *superconsciousness*. "And it is light upon light."