

# The Ishraqi Path: Toward Systematization of Suhrawardi's Sufism<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

In the Islamic world and in Western scholarly circles, Shihab al-Din Yahya b. Habash b. Amirak Suhrawardi (d. 587/1191) has been best known for his own brand of philosophy—namely, the Illuminationist (*Ishraqi*) tradition, which won him the epithet Shaykh-i Ishraq—whereas his Sufism has often been viewed as being secondary, supplementary, trivial, and even irrelevant. Hermann Landolt, for instance, believes that Sufism is not the proper medium to explain Suhrawardi's vision, and questions whether Suhrawardi was a practicing Sufi in the traditional form.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, Sayyid Yahya Yasribi argues that when it comes to philosophy, Suhrawardi stands

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<sup>2</sup>Hermann Landolt, "Suhrawardi's 'Tales of Initiation,'" review of *The Mystical and Visionary Treatises of Suhrawardi*, by Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, ed. and trans. Wheeler M. Thackston, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107 (1987): 475–86. Reference on pp. 475, 479–81.

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at the exact opposite point of Muslim rationalist philosophers such as Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198), and his general approach to philosophy is more in line with some of the purely anti-intellectual doctrines of Abu Hamid Muhammad Ghazali (d. 505/1111).<sup>3</sup> The late Henry Corbin tried to bring together Suhrawardi's philosophy and mysticism by proposing that his ideas must be viewed as "Oriental" theosophy.<sup>4</sup> Scholars like Seyyed Hossein Nasr, while stating that Suhrawardi had Sufi inclinations and used some of the Sufi lexicon in his writings, generally refrain from referring to him as a Sufi, and instead call him a Muslim sage.<sup>5</sup> In fact, Nasr believes that the kind of Sufism that was espoused in the time of Suhrawardi was anti-rational and hence anti-philosophy.<sup>6</sup> Others like John Walbridge and Hossein Ziai state that they view Suhrawardi's works as fundamentally philosophical, "albeit [a philosophy] with a place for the use of allegory and mystical experience," and thus conclude that his works must be judged and interpreted in philosophical terms.<sup>7</sup> Finally, while Ian Richard Netton attempts to bridge Suhrawardi's Sufism (*tasawwuf*) and philosophy, his main focus is on the *Hikmat al-ishraq* and not only fails to bring into account Suhrawardi's Persian mystical works, but also falls short of establishing any systematic approach to Suhrawardi's Sufism.<sup>8</sup>

These are only a few examples in which Suhrawardi's philosophical works, especially his magnum opus, *Hikmat al-ishraq*, have been rigorously and meticulously examined; many commentaries and

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<sup>3</sup>Sayyid Yahya Yasribi, *Hikmat-i ishraq-i Suhrawardi: Guzarish-i hikm-i ishraq ba tatbiq wa naqd hamrah ba matn-i "Hikmat al-ishraq,"* 3rd ed. (Qum: Bustan-i Kitab, 1385/2006), 24.

<sup>4</sup>Henry Corbin, *En islam iranien : Aspects spirituels et philosophiques*, vol. 2, *Sohrawardi et les Platoniciens de Perse* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 23–30.

<sup>5</sup>Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna, Suhrawardi, Ibn 'Arabi*, 3rd ed. (New York: Caravan Books, 1997), 53–54.

<sup>6</sup>Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, 53–54.

<sup>7</sup>John Walbridge and Hossein Ziai, introduction to *The Philosophy of Illumination: Hikmat al-ishraq*, by Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, ed. and trans. John Walbridge and Hossein Ziai (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1999), xix.

<sup>8</sup>Ian Richard Netton, "The Neoplatonic Substrate of Suhrawardi's Philosophy of Illumination: Falsafa as Tasawwuf," chap. 3 in *Seek Knowledge: Thought and Travel in the House of Islam* (London: Routledge, 1995).

criticisms have been written about them, while his ideas about Sufism have been largely neglected and rarely investigated systematically. At first glance, the main reason for this oversight seems to be the fact that unlike with his philosophy, Suhrawardi himself never systematized his theories of Sufism. Also, there is no concrete evidence that he belonged to any particular Sufi order. Another hurdle in an attempt to reconstruct a full picture of Suhrawardi's Sufism stems from the fact that not only are his few Sufi writings in Arabic scattered throughout his philosophical works, but also the bulk of them, which are in Persian, are written in a highly symbolical language.

The task of demonstrating a clear picture of Suhrawardi's Sufism is similar to putting together a million pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, which requires the assembly of numerous small, often oddly shaped, interlocking and tessellating pieces. This paper is an attempt to put together a clear enough picture to establish that despite the common scholarly view which portrays Suhrawardi as a Muslim philosopher and not a Sufi, he was first and foremost a practicing Sufi who deemed the tenants of Sufism to be the cornerstone of his world view. In my effort to demonstrate the Sufi side of the Shaykh-i Ishraq, I will try to organize Suhrawardi's references to Sufi beliefs and practices into a systematic, step-by-step framework, similar to what early Sufi theoreticians did. Although this systematization is somewhat preliminary, it is by no means speculative, imaginary, or unsubstantiated, as it is drawn from meticulous examination of a large body of Suhrawardi's works, both in Arabic and Persian.

### **Suhrawardi's Sufism**

The pieces of evidence which firmly situate Suhrawardi within the Sufi tradition are numerous, and include biographical works about him as well as his own works. The best and earliest biographical description of Suhrawardi is that of Shams al-Din Muhammad Shahrazuri (fl. seventh/thirteenth century) and its Persian translation by Maqsd 'Ali Tabrizi (fl. tenth/sixteenth century), who provided a brief but detailed account of his life. In it, Shahrazuri provides a colorful account of a Sufi sage

who was known by the epithet *creator of beings* (*khaliq al-baraya*), as it was rumored that he was able to make things appear, although apparently he protested such a lofty title.<sup>9</sup> According to Shahrazuri, in Suhrawardi's travels he met many great Sufis and benefited from their company until he became an independent practicing Sufi himself.<sup>10</sup> He is described as living a vagabond Sufi (*qalandar*) life, and in fact, in some of his Persian treatises, he indicates that the detached Sufi (*sufi-yi mujarrad*) is a *qalandar* and that the ultimate way of life for any seeker is to live as a *qalandar*.<sup>11</sup> These vagabond Sufis often did not pay much attention to official, orthodox theological dogma, because they rejected the official interpretations of shari'a as superficial, and they traveled from place to place in anonymity.

These characters fit the description of Suhrawardi's life and the way he himself hinted that a true Sufi ought to live. Shahrazuri provides an interesting account about Suhrawardi's life:

He lived in the appearance of vagabond Sufis (*bi ziy-i qalandaran*) and practiced such harsh ascetic exercises (*riyazat-i shaqq*) that his contemporaries were unable to endure the likes of it. He broke his fasting (*iftar*) once a week and his food was no more than fifty *diram*. If you study the lives of sages and study their lives and know their stage, you could not find anyone more pious or ascetic than him. He did not care about worldly affairs and shunned any desire for worldly things. He did not care about food or drink as he was content with whatever he could find [. . .] In times he wore a red kilim (*kisâ*) and put on a long red hat, in other times he wore

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<sup>9</sup>Seyyed Hossein Nasr, introduction to *Majmu'a musannafat-i Shaykh-i Ishraq*, by Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, vol. 3, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 4th ed. (Tehran: Pajuhishgah-i 'Ulum-i Insani wa Mutali'at-i Farhangi, 1388/2009), 10–73, reference on p. 25.

<sup>10</sup>Nasr, introduction to *Majmu'a musannafat*, 3:19, 25.

<sup>11</sup>Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, *Fi haqiqat al-'ishq*, in *Majmu'a musannafat-i Shaykh-i Ishraq*, vol. 3, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 4th ed. (Tehran: Pajuhishgah-i 'Ulum-i Insani wa Mutali'at-i Farhangi, 1388/2009), 267–91, reference on p. 275; and Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, *Fi halat al-tufuliyya*, in *Majmu'a musannafat-i Shaykh-i Ishraq*, vol. 3, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 4th ed. (Tehran: Pajuhishgah-i 'Ulum-i Insani wa Mutali'at-i Farhangi, 1388/2009), 251–66, reference on p. 259.

a patched frock (*muraqqa*) and a cloak (*khirqa*) on top, and sometimes he dressed like Sufis.

His devotional activities (*ibatat*) mostly consisted of hunger (*gurusnagi*) and wakefulness (*bidari*) and contemplation (*ta'ammul*) about the divine realms (*'awalim-i ilahi*). He cared little about people's attention [to himself], was silent most of the times, and kept to himself. He loved spiritual audition (*sama*) and musical melodies. He performed thaumaturgical acts (*kiramat*) [. . .] He reached the outmost rank of "the Brethren of Detachedness" (*ikhwan al-tajrid*) [. . .] and Bayazid Bastami and Mansur ibn Hallaj and others are among these *ikhwan al-tajrid*.<sup>12</sup>

This short biography provides a clear picture of Suhrawardi as a practicing Sufi, one which is also complemented by Suhrawardi's own writings, especially his Persian works in which he depicts the way of *qalandar* Sufis as the only way to attain the freedom that is the prerequisite for spiritual illumination (*ishraq*). In all his Persian works, the references to ancient Persian or Greek sages are fewer than five. His real masters, whom he regarded as being worthy of emulation, were the great Sufis of the past whose names are mentioned more than forty times in his Persian writings. However, while it is much easier to establish Suhrawardi's philosophical debt to Greek and Islamic philosophers, the same cannot be said about his Sufism. The depth of his knowledge of Sufism can be observed throughout his works, especially in treatises such as *Safir-i Simurgh*, *Fi halat al-tufuliyya*, *Awaz-i par-i Jibra'il*, and most importantly, *Kalimat al-tasawwuf*, where he meticulously explains the theories and nomenclature of Sufism in his own esoteric language. His reverence for Sufis was so great that his entire *Awaz-i par-i Jibra'il*, for instance, is written in defence of the prominent Sufi Abu Ali Farmadi (d. 477/1084), who claimed that the sound of Gabriel's wings is audible to Sufis.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Nasr, introduction to *Majmu'a musannafat*, 3:25–26. All translations are mine.

<sup>13</sup>Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, *Awaz-i par-i Jibra'il*, in *Majmu'a musannafat-i Shaykh-i Ishraq*, vol. 3, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 4th ed. (Tehran: Pajuhishgah-i 'Ulum-i Insani wa Mutali'at-i Farhangi, 1388/2009), 207–23, reference on pp. 208–9.

Yet despite his profound mastery of the Sufi path, it is difficult to establish for which particular Sufi he had the most reverence. Many great Sufis are frequently mentioned in Suhrawardi's writings. They include Husayn ibn Mansur Hallaj (d. 309/922), Bayazid Bastami (d. ca. 261/875), Junayd Baghdadi (d. 298/910), and Abu al-Hasan Kharaqani (d. 425/1033), totaling twenty-two names. Among these, the first three are the most frequently mentioned, which indicates that perhaps he revered them the most. For instance, in *Fi halat al-Tufuliyya*, after mocking the worldly kings for quarreling and squabbling over ephemeral authority (*wilayat*), Suhrawardi states: "This fortune (*daulat*) [i.e., the real kingship] was found by Bayazid, so he left everything that he possessed and abandoned it all at once."<sup>14</sup> Another example is in *al-Talwihat*, where Suhrawardi, in a state of spiritual trance (*khalsa*), has an extended conversation with Aristotle in which he asks the Greek sage whether anyone among the Islamic philosophers experienced union with the Divine.<sup>15</sup> Aristotle responds negatively, but stresses that there are a group among Muslims whose path Suhrawardi must follow.<sup>16</sup> According to Aristotle, this group, which includes great Iranian Sufis such as Bayazid Bastami and Sahl b. 'Abd Allah Tustari (d. ca. 283/896), did not stop at exoteric knowledge (*al-'ilm al-rasmi*), but attained the visionary and esoteric knowledge (*al-'ilm al-huzuri al-itisali al-shuhudi*), and therefore, they are the real sages and philosophers.<sup>17</sup>

Despite his reverence, Suhrawardi also warns against the pseudo-Sufis who "do not appreciate the taste of hunger" (*zauq-i gurusnagi*) and only appear to be Sufis.<sup>18</sup> Calling them "donkey riders" (*khar sawaran*) who pretend to go to battle with the real warriors (i.e., true Sufis), Suhrawardi emphasizes that these "azure-cloaked" (*azraq pushan*) pretenders cannot be called Sufis.<sup>19</sup> It is perhaps because of these Sufi

<sup>14</sup>Suhrawardi, *Fi halat al-tufuliyya*, 3:259.

<sup>15</sup>Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, *al-Talwihat al-lauhiyya wa al-'arshiyya*, in *Majmu'at musannafat-i Shaykh-i Ishraq*, vol. 1, ed. Henry Corbin, 4th ed. (Tehran: Pajuhishgah-i 'Ulum-i Insani wa Mutali'at-i Farhangi, 1388/2009), 1–121, reference on p. 74.

<sup>16</sup>Suhrawardi, *al-Talwihat*, 1:74.

<sup>17</sup>Suhrawardi, *al-Talwihat*, 1:74.

<sup>18</sup>Suhrawardi, *Fi halat al-tufuliyya*, 3:266.

<sup>19</sup>Suhrawardi, *Fi halat al-tufuliyya*, 3:266.

pretenders that despite Suhrawardi's using some common terminology of Sufism when referring to Sufis, such as either *leaders of the Sufi path (a'imma-yi tariqat)*, *sages (mashayikh)*, and *those who wore blue (kabud pushan)*, the terms that Suhrawardi prefers the most are often unique and novel. His favorite term when referring to Sufis is the *Brethren of Detachedness (ikhwan-i tajrid/ikhwan al-tajrid)*, which is mentioned in several of his Arabic and Persian writings.<sup>20</sup> In *al-Talwihat*, for instance, Suhrawardi compares prophets to *ikhwan al-tajrid* and claims that the only difference between the two is the prophet's duty from God in relating the divine message to the masses, but in all other abilities, including performing miracles, they are equal.<sup>21</sup> In the same book, Suhrawardi refers to these *ikhwan al-tajrid* as the *masters of ascetic exercises (ashab al-riyazat)*, a term often used for Sufi ascetics.<sup>22</sup>

Some of Suhrawardi's views were immensely affected by his radical Sufism. Among Sufis, there were those few who held the view that the Sufi saints (*auliya'*) hold a higher rank than the prophets (*anbiya'*), and even though early Sufi theoreticians such as 'Ali ibn Usman Hujwiri (d. ca. 465/1072) and Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri (d. 465/1072) considered this view a deviation, Suhrawardi was a proponent of it.<sup>23</sup> Suhrawardi

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<sup>20</sup>Suhrawardi, *al-Talwihat*, 1:73, 95, 103; Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, *al-Mashari' wa al-mutarahat*, in *Majmu'a musannafat-i Shaykh-i Ishraq*, vol. 1, ed. Henry Corbin, 4th ed. (Tehran: Pajuhishgah-i 'Ulum-i Insani wa Mutali'at-i Farhangi, 1388/2009), 193–506, reference on p. 506; Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, *Safir-i simurgh*, in *Majmu'a musannafat-i Shaykh-i Ishraq*, vol. 3, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 4th ed. (Tehran: Pajuhishgah-i 'Ulum-i Insani wa Mutali'at-i Farhangi, 1388/2009), 313–32, reference on pp. 314, 319, 330; Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, *Kalimat al-dhauqiyya aw Risalat al-abraj*, ed. Henry Corbin, in *Majmu'a musannafat-i Shaykh-i Ishraq*, vol. 3, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 4th ed. (Tehran: Pajuhishgah-i 'Ulum-i Insani wa Mutali'at-i Farhangi, 1388/2009), 461–71, reference on pp. 462–63; Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, *Kalimat al-tasawwuf*, in *Majmu'a musannafat-i Shaykh-i Ishraq*, vol. 4, ed. Najafquli Habibi, 4th ed. (Tehran: Pajuhishgah-i 'Ulum-i Insani wa Mutali'at-i Farhangi, 1388/2009), 99–139, reference on p. 121; and Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, *al-Lamahat*, in *Majmu'a musannafat-i Shaykh-i Ishraq*, vol. 4, ed. Najafquli Habibi, 4th ed. (Tehran: Pajuhishgah-i 'Ulum-i Insani wa Mutali'at-i Farhangi, 1388/2009), 141–241, reference on p. 239.

<sup>21</sup>Suhrawardi, *al-Talwihat*, 1:95.

<sup>22</sup>Suhrawardi, *al-Talwihat*, 1:103.

<sup>23</sup>Abu al-Hasan 'Ali ibn Usman b. 'Ali Jullabi Hujwiri Ghaznawi, *Kashf al-mahjub*, ed. Valentin Alekseevich Zhukovski (Leningrad: Muttba'a-yi Dar al-'ulum-i Ittihad-i Jamahir-i Shaurawi-i Susyalisti, 1304/1926), 303; and 'Abd al-Karim b. Hawazin Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri

did not deny the necessity of a lawgiving prophet (*shari'*) whose duty was to guide the people and enjoin them to worship God. Yet even a prophet must possess a superior soul, be knowledgeable of the Truth, and have been assisted by the divine light and might to succeed in his mission.<sup>24</sup> To Suhrawardi, the only difference between a prophet and a Sufi saint is that the former was appointed by God to convey the revelation. In all other abilities, such as performing miraculous deeds, possessing intuitive knowledge without a master, and having access to mystical secrets, prophets are exactly like the Sufi saints and the sages.<sup>25</sup> Suhrawardi even goes further by claiming that many Muslim sages, such as the Rashidun caliphs, and Sufis such as Bayazid Bastami, Ibrahim b. Adham (d. 161/777), Junayd Baghdadi, and Abu Bakr Shibli (d. 334/945), possessed more esoteric knowledge than the Israelite prophets.<sup>26</sup> Suhrawardi reminds the reader that the best example of such superiority is the story of Moses and how he lacked Khizr's esoteric knowledge. This is a clear attestation that a prophet (*payghambar*), even a lawgiving prophet (*shari'*) like Moses, was in need of an illuminated sage.<sup>27</sup> This shows that not only was Suhrawardi a Sufi, but he also believed in a radical form of Sufism, which even many formal orthodox Sufi theoreticians saw as a heterodox aberration.

The evidence that Suhrawardi was a practicing Sufi is overwhelming, and can be seen in all of his Persian writings, especially his mystical treatises. In two of them, *Ruzi ba jama'at-i sufiyan* and *Awaz-i par-i Jibra'il*, the story begins in a Sufi lodge (*khaniqah*), where the seeker meets the luminous sage; although in Suhrawardi's writing, the *khaniqah* represents the celestial realm rather than an actual Sufi lodge, the fact that he sets these tales in a Sufi lodge indicates his deep

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al-Nishaburi, *al-Risalat al-Qushayriyya*, ed. 'Abd al-Halim Mahmud and Mahmud b. al-Sharif (Cairo: Mu'assasa Dar al-Sha'b, 1409/1989), 565.

<sup>24</sup>Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, *Partau-nama*, in *Majmu'a Musannafat-i Shaykh-i Ishraq*, vol. 3, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 4th ed. (Tehran: Pajuhishgah-i 'Ulum-i Insani wa Mutali'at-i Farhangi, 1388/2009), 1–81, reference on p. 75.

<sup>25</sup>Suhrawardi, *Partau-nama*, 3:75.

<sup>26</sup>Suhrawardi, *Partau-nama*, 3:76.

<sup>27</sup>Suhrawardi, *Partau-nama*, 3:76.



connection to Sufis. In the *al-Talwihat*, he refers to Sufis as the people who reached the sources of illumination and who tread “on the path of sages.”<sup>28</sup> Not only does he extensively use many Sufi theoretical terms in explaining his ideas, but his mastery, reverence, and interpretation of Sufi practices—such as the forty days vigil (*chilla*), wearing of the Sufi cloak (*khirqā pushandan*), spiritual seclusion (*khalwat*), ascetic practices (*riyazāt*), dancing and listening to music (*samaʿ*), and his advice on many other day-to-day Sufi practices—demonstrate that he was a practicing Sufi.

### The Stages of the Sufi Path

Suhrawardi never wrote a theoretical work on Sufism in which he expounded the different stages of the Sufi path systematically the way Qushayri or Suhrawardi’s compatriot and namesake Shihab al-Din Abu Hafs ‘Umar Suhrawardi (d. 632/1234) did. Nonetheless, many of Suhrawardi’s writings have a persistent and recurring theme which closely resembles the Sufi stages a seeker (*salik*, *talib*) must go through to become an enlightened Sufi. Because this theme is repeated in an almost identical order in many of his writings, one can deduce that by following those steps, one is likely to recreate a system which is similar to the stages of the Sufi path. This repeating theme is altered very little from treatise to treatise.

A general glimpse of this theme can be seen in the *Partau-nama*. According to Suhrawardi, to achieve illumination a person first must think of the angelic world (*malakūt*) constantly (*daʿim*) and avoid sensual carnal pleasures (*lazzat-i hissi*) and food except in absolute necessity, pray all night long and be vigilant in staying up all night and reading the Qurʾan, refine (*taltif*) the mind with fine thoughts, and after all that, the illumination will come like dazzling lightning, and it will continue to come even after the ascetic practices are finished.<sup>29</sup> In the *Hayakil al-nur*, the sequence is slightly different: “When we clear ourselves from corporal hindrances and envision the celestial realm of

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<sup>28</sup>Suhrawardi, *al-Talwihat*, 1:114.

<sup>29</sup>Suhrawardi, *Partau-nama*, 3:80.

the Almighty and the lights that constantly come from the heaven, then we can become illuminated and enjoy spiritual pleasure.”<sup>30</sup> This sequence is once more repeated at the end of *Hayakil al-nur* in this order: “When the self (*nafs*) becomes strong by the means of spiritual virtues (*faza’il-i rauhani*) and the dominion of bodily forces becomes weak due to constant hunger and wakefulness, it is possible that the *nafs* becomes liberated and joins the realm of sanctity (*quds*) and attains gnosis (*ma’rifat*) through the sanctified souls (*arwah-i qudsi*) [. . .] and then it becomes like a mirror which reflects the celestial world.”<sup>31</sup> The same order mentioned in *Hayakil al-nur* is repeated twice in *Alwah-i ‘imadi*.<sup>32</sup> In *Kalimat al-tasawwuf*’s chapter entitled “On Mentioning of the Conditions for the Occurrence of Trances (*al-khalsat*),” Suhrawardi explains: “Whoever continues thinking about Heaven remembers and invokes God’s name in a humble invocation, contemplates the Sanctus Mundus (*al-‘alam al-qudsi*), lessens his food and lust, stays up all night praying and supplicating humbly to God, then it will not take long before pleasurable trances will be bestowed upon him like lightning.”<sup>33</sup> Finally, the most complete sequence of these stages is related in *al-Tabwihat*, in which Suhrawardi enumerates what a Sufi novice (*murid*) must do to become spiritually illuminated.<sup>34</sup> Hence, according to Suhrawardi, it is clear that there are certain steps to be taken for the soul to be released from its material bondage and fly toward illumination. While in the Arabic and Persian philosophical treatises, these stages are briefly mentioned, as will be shown, it is in the Persian mystical treatises where they are explained more amply.

### 1. The Awakening (*Yaqza*)

According to Suhrawardi, the first step on the Sufi path is awakening (*yaqza* or *intibah*), and without it, the person will not be transformed

<sup>30</sup>Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, *Hayakil al-nur*, in *Majmu‘a Musannafat-i Shaykh-i Ishraq*, vol. 3, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 4th ed. (Tehran: Pajuhishgah-i ‘Ulum-i Insani wa Mutali‘at-i Farhangi, 1388/2009), 83–108, quote on p. 99.

<sup>31</sup>Suhrawardi, *Hayakil al-nur*, 3:107.

<sup>32</sup>Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, *Alwah-i ‘imadi*, in *Majmu‘a Musannafat-i Shaykh-i Ishraq*, vol. 3, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 4th ed. (Tehran: Pajuhishgah-i ‘Ulum-i Insani wa Mutali‘at-i Farhangi, 1388/2009), 109–95, reference on pp. 152, 172.

<sup>33</sup>Suhrawardi, *Kalimat al-tasawwuf*, 4:128–29.

<sup>34</sup>Suhrawardi, *al-Tabwihat*, 1:113.

into a *salik*. The Sufi journey for Suhrawardi begins from the lowest possible point, and that is the state of bewilderment. This is the starting point for the trapped soul (*ruh-i dar dam*) in many of his mystical as well as philosophical treatises. Many Sufis also stressed this stage as the most significant part of the Sufi path. It is noteworthy that in Sufi lexicon, this stage is often called by somewhat different names; while some call it the *mystical occurrence* (*waqi'a*), most of the early Sufi theoreticians agree that the first stage on the Sufi path is *repentance* (*tauba*). That being said, there are a few exceptions, such as Abu Najib 'Abd al-Qadir Suhrawardi (d. 563/1168), another namesake of the Shaykh-i Ishraq, who used a similar term for awakening (*intibah*) when referring to the first stage of Sufism.<sup>35</sup> For Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, repentance could not be considered the first stage, because the true atonement could come only after the trapped soul recognized the true complexity of its conundrum and was awakened from the slumber of oblivion (*ghiflat*).

Awakening consists of several stages, and its central element is knowledge of the self (*shinakht-i nafs*). This aspect of the path is so imperative in Suhrawardi's view that he dedicated the majority of his philosophical and rational works to revealing the secret of the *nafs*. He also recognized that based on the famous maxim frequently cited by the Sufis "Whoever knows himself, knows his God" (*man 'arafa nafsahu, 'arafa rabbahu*), the knowledge of *nafs* is the most significant element in attaining gnosis. In fact, Suhrawardi himself cites this Sufi maxim several times in his writings to remind the reader that divine gnosis can be attained only through the knowledge of the self and the realization that one is in darkness and bondage, and only through this realization can one break loose of the tethers and start the upward journey toward light.<sup>36</sup> It is also worth mentioning that the maxim uses the term *gnosis*

<sup>35</sup>Ziyya' al-Din Abu Najib 'Abd al-Qahir al-Suhrawardi, *Adab al-muridin*, ed. Menahem Milson (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press, 1977), 30.

<sup>36</sup>Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, *Bustan al-qulub ya Rauzat al-qulub*, in *Majmu'a musannafat-i Shaykh-i Ishraq*, vol. 3, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 4th ed. (Tehran: Pajuhishgah-i 'Ulum-i Insani wa Mutali'at-i Farhangi, 1388/2009), 333–401, reference on p. 374. While *Bustan al-qulub* is included in the section of the works attributed to Suhrawardi, Nasr himself believes it is very likely that this work is indeed written by Suhrawardi, a view that was established first by Shahrzuri and later by Helmut Ritter. See also Suhrawardi, *Awah-i 'imadi*, 3:140.

(*'arafa*) instead of *knowledge* (*'alama*), thereby reiterating the superiority of the former over the latter. In doing so, the stress is on the gnosis (*'irfan*), which, as an esoteric knowledge, is aimed ultimately at transforming the novice into a gnostic (*'arif*), rather than a scholar (*'alim*).

In another work attributed to Suhrawardi called *Bustan al-qulub*, the author states:

Know that you have lost yourself, sometimes referring to your own body and assume you are this physical form (*badan*), and at other times whenever some pure thought comes to your mind, you think you doubt whether you are *badan* or something else [. . .] Know that you are none of these things and you are beyond all of these. This is all because you have forgotten your God and hence you have forgotten yourself. If you remember God and remind yourself that you were non-existent and then you were created in such a form by a great God, then you are bound to ask yourself ‘For what purpose did God create me? Where did I come from and where am I going?’ By doing so, there appears a seeking sense (*talab*) in you and due to the blessing acquired by the remembrance of God, you will come to know yourself. After all, is it not strange that you have lost yourself and are looking for yourself in such a far place, much like the man who was looking for his donkey whilst he was riding it.<sup>37</sup>

Suhrawardi describes this awareness and awakening not as an involuntary incident, which in Sufism is usually associated with divine favor, but as a conscious effort of the trapped soul. Although the concept of innate potential (*isti'dad*) plays a key role in the receptiveness of the trapped soul to its self-realization, Suhrawardi appears to claim that anyone can achieve at least the awakening through deep contemplation. Suhrawardi also believed that only people who belong (*ahl*) are able to receive the truth (*haqiqat*). In *Fi halat al-tufuliyya*, the shaykh advises Suhrawardi: “The lexicon (*sukhan*) [of Sufism and Truth] should not be

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<sup>37</sup>Suhrawardi, *Bustan al-qulub*, 3:368–69.

kept hidden from the people who are devoted and worthy (*ahl*), because for those who are unworthy (*na-ahl*), the words of Sufis are boring [ . . . ] The parable of the heart of the *na-ahl* and the person who is a stranger to *haqiqat* is like a wick (*fitila*), which instead of oil has absorbed water and it cannot be lighted with fire.”<sup>38</sup> Although the concept of being worthy (*ahliyat*) is closely associated with the concept of *isti'dad*, the shaykh informs Suhrawardi that as long as outsiders (*bigana*) to Sufi ways recognize that they are blind to the *haqiqat*, there is hope for them to regain their inner sight.<sup>39</sup> In *al-Talwihat*, Suhrawardi indicates that all of these spiritual sciences constitute a call from the messenger (*safiru safirin*), which is supposed to wake the person up from the slumber of ignorance.<sup>40</sup> Hence, as also mentioned in the *'Aql-i surkh*, the realization of the inner darkness and spiritual blindness and the awakening of the soul from them is the first stage of the Sufi path.<sup>41</sup>

## 2. The Struggles (*Mujahada*)

### • Ascetic Exercise (*Riyazat*)

After the initial awakening, ascetic Sufi exercise (*riyazat*) was in Suhrawardi's view an essential step in preparing the *salik* for detaching the self from corporeality. Mortification of the flesh was so pivotal in Suhrawardi's view that without it he believed there would be no ascension for the awakened soul. His conviction in this idea was so strong that in *Alwah-i 'imadi*, for instance, he claims that the Ascension of the Prophet (*mi'raj*) was possible only after he mitigated his bodily desires (*khiffat-i 'alaqa-yi badan*).<sup>42</sup>

One particular form of *riyazat* is repeated again and again in Suhrawardi's writing, showing that for him, this was more essential than the others. This form of *riyazat*, which was also unanimously accept-

<sup>38</sup>Suhrawardi, *Fi halat al-tufuliyya*, 3:255.

<sup>39</sup>Suhrawardi, *Fi halat al-tufuliyya*, 3:255.

<sup>40</sup>Suhrawardi, *al-Talwihat*, 1:105.

<sup>41</sup>Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, *'Aql-i surkh*, in *Majmu'a musannafat-i Shaykh-i Ishraq*, vol. 3, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 4th ed. (Tehran: Pajuhishgah-i 'Ulum-i Insani wa Mutali'at-i Farhangi, 1388/2009), 225–39, reference on p. 237; and Suhrawardi, *Awaz-i par-i Jibra'il*, 3:209.

<sup>42</sup>Suhrawardi, *Alwah-i 'imadi*, 3:129.

ed among Sufis as one of the most effective, is a prolonged period of hunger (*jau`*). According to Suhrawardi, the Sufis who eat after spiritual audition and dancing (*sama`*) are not true Sufis and do not know the joy that is associated with hunger.<sup>43</sup> In fact, he names *sama`* as one of the practices which empties the stomach.<sup>44</sup> In *Bustan al-qulub*, Suhrawardi clearly demonstrates that the foundation of *riyazat* is hunger, and nothing will come of the struggle (*mujahada*) without hunger.<sup>45</sup> He even goes as far as to interpret the Sufi maxim “adopt God’s ethos” in an esoteric way by claiming that because God never eats, a Sufi will become more God-like by eating less.<sup>46</sup> The second form of *riyazat* is sleep deprivation (*sahw*), which again makes the Sufi God-like because God never sleeps.<sup>47</sup>

After hunger and sleep deprivation, seclusion (*khalwat*), prolonged contemplation (*tafakkur*), and remembrance of God (*zikr*) are all part of *riyazat*. Solitude from people is necessary, first for taming of the soul, which is used to company, and second for avoiding any distraction which might be a hindrance to contemplation (*fikr*) and *zikr*. To achieve solitude, the novice (*murid*) needs a master (*pir*) who initiates the novice by bestowing the Sufi *khirqa*, teaches the mantra for remembrance (*talqin-i zikr*), which at first is repeated on the tongue and as time passes in the heart, and sends the *murid* into seclusion for no less than one forty-day session; if one session does not work, the *murid* is to repeat several sessions of forty days in solitude.<sup>48</sup> The *murid* must constantly read the Qur’an and always be observant over prayers, especially at night.<sup>49</sup> The seeker must never tell a lie; the *murid* must humiliate the *nafs* constantly and be humble, and if a secluded place cannot be found, the seeker must stay up all night and make supplication.<sup>50</sup> The *murid* must not discuss any of

<sup>43</sup>Suhrawardi, *Fi halat al-tufuliyya*, 3:266.

<sup>44</sup>Suhrawardi, *Fi halat al-tufuliyya*, 3:266.

<sup>45</sup>Suhrawardi, *Bustan al-qulub*, 3:396.

<sup>46</sup>Suhrawardi, *Bustan al-qulub*, 3:396.

<sup>47</sup>Suhrawardi, *Bustan al-qulub*, 3:396.

<sup>48</sup>Suhrawardi, *Bustan al-qulub*, 3:399–400.

<sup>49</sup>Suhrawardi, *al-Talwihat*, 1:113.

<sup>50</sup>Suhrawardi, *Bustan al-qulub*, 3:401.

the revelations that arise during solitude with anyone except the *pir* or other Sufis. From time to time, the seeker should sing some melodies or repeat some poems recited by other Sufis.<sup>51</sup> It is obvious that in this regard, Suhrawardi, like many Sufis, was adamant that a non-extreme but rigorous regime of *riyazat* was key to releasing the soul from bodily senses, and easing the transition from corporeality to divine illumination.<sup>52</sup>

#### • Renunciation (*Zuhd*)

To Suhrawardi, the concept of renunciation and abandonment of all worldly attachments also played a vital role in preparing the soul for its ascension and illumination. Like other Sufis, Suhrawardi believed that any sort of worldly benefit (*ni'mat*), status (*jah*), or wealth (*mal*) was a veil on the Sufi's path, and as long as the heart was busy and content with these ephemeral concepts, the person would not be able to tread the path.<sup>53</sup> As he affirms, "Purity (*safa*) is only attainable to those who like a vagabond Sufi (*qalandar-war*) are free from the bondage of adornment (*zinat*)."<sup>54</sup> To Suhrawardi, the only real Sufi is the one who abandons all material possessions, and in response to those who might ask how a person is supposed to live without anything, he responds: "The person who thinks in such a way [i.e., asks this question] would not abandon anything, but the person who abandons everything will not think of such things. The realm of trust in God (*'alam-i tawakkul*) is a pleasant realm, where ecstasy and spiritual taste (*zauq*) would not reach everyone."<sup>55</sup>

According to a strange and symbolic recipe mentioned in *Ruzi ba jama'at-i sufiyan*, the *salik* who is on the quest for a vision (*nazar*) is advised to keep vigil for forty days, eat little, and then make a laxative

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<sup>51</sup>Suhrawardi, *Bustan al-qulub*, 3:401.

<sup>52</sup>Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, *Risala fi i'tiqad al-hukama'*, in *Majmu'a musannafat-i Shaykh-i Ishraq*, vol. 2, ed. Henry Corbin, 4th ed. (Tehran: Pajuhishgah-i 'Ulum-i Insani wa Mutali'at-i Farhangi, 1388/2009), 261–72, reference on p. 271.

<sup>53</sup>Suhrawardi, *Fi halat al-tufuliyya*, 3:259.

<sup>54</sup>Suhrawardi, *Fi halat al-tufuliyya*, 3:259.

<sup>55</sup>Suhrawardi, *Fi halat al-tufuliyya*, 3:259.

(*mushil*) from the dearest of personal possessions, including wealth and carnal pleasures, and crush them willingly and eat the concoction at once, so that the *salik* can go to the bathroom and excrete everything.<sup>56</sup> If the eye of the heart (*chashm-i dil*) is not open after doing this, the *salik* is to keep another forty-day vigil, repeat the procedure, and keep repeating it until it works. However, Suhrawardi warns that if a person, like a dog, eats their own excrement, they will suffer tremendously and no physician will ever be able to cure this suffering.<sup>57</sup> This metaphoric prescription is another indication that persistence in *zuhd* is an important part of gaining visionary power for Sufis. Suhrawardi realizes that this is not an easy process, because abandonment of worldly affairs (*tark-i dunya*) is difficult for the person who is *na-ahl*.<sup>58</sup> He compares such a person to a drunkard who every morning, after experiencing a hangover (*khumar*), repents and promises to quit drinking, but when night comes, forgets this promise and becomes drunk again. To Suhrawardi, worldly people are like such a drunkard, intoxicated by the wine of illusion (*sharab-i ghurur*), and their negligence (*ghiflat*) prevents them from treading the right path.<sup>59</sup>

Suhrawardi continues by confirming that if a person knows the pleasure of *khalwat*, transforms the worldly existence (*hasti*) into non-existence (*nisti*) (from the world), and gets on the steed of contemplation and rides in the field of esoteric knowledge (*'ilm-i ghayb*), they will receive such a pleasure which cannot be described to others, and will go beyond the human state.<sup>60</sup> In that magnificent state, even the crazies (*diwanagan*) will call this person mad, and whatever that person does becomes unpleasant in the eye of the beholder, but in that state (*hal*), the person experiencing this pleasure cannot care less about what others think.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>56</sup>Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, *Ruzi ba jama'at-i sufiyan*, in *Majmu'a musannafat-i Shaykh-i Ishraq*, vol. 3, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 4th ed. (Tehran: Pajuhishgah-i 'Ulum-i Insani wa Mutali'at-i Farhangi, 1388/2009), 240–50, reference on p. 248.

<sup>57</sup>Suhrawardi, *Ruzi ba jama'at-i sufiyan*, 3:249.

<sup>58</sup>Suhrawardi, *Ruzi ba jama'at-i sufiyan*, 3:249.

<sup>59</sup>Suhrawardi, *Ruzi ba jama'at-i sufiyan*, 3:250.

<sup>60</sup>Suhrawardi, *Ruzi ba jama'at-i sufiyan*, 3:250.

<sup>61</sup>Suhrawardi, *Ruzi ba jama'at-i sufiyan*, 3:250.



In other writings such as *Awaz-i par-i Jibra'il*, Suhrawardi begins the story by indicating that to reach the Sufi lodge (*khanagah*), which is the symbol of the celestial realm, a Sufi must abandon his women and children, which are symbols of worldly attachment.<sup>62</sup> As Suhrawardi indicates in *Kalimat al-dhauqiyya*, both *riyazat* and *zuhd* are part of the process of *tajrid*, the purpose of which is to speed the return of the soul to its original Homeland (*watan*), and like many Sufis, he believes that the Hadith which states “Love of the homeland is part of the faith” refers to the original homeland of the soul, not to any particular city, such as Damascus or Baghdad.<sup>63</sup> Hence, Suhrawardi stresses that to reach illumination, it is absolutely incumbent upon the seeker to do ascetic exercises and detach from the world (*al-riyazat wa al-inqita'*).<sup>64</sup>

• **Spiritual Audition and Dance (*Sama'*)**

*Sama'* was a very contentious and divisive topic for Sufis. There were those who viewed it as permissible albeit with certain conditions, and there were others who deemed it illicit. Suhrawardi, like some of the pre-Mongol Sufis, not only deemed *sama'* permissible, but also encouraged it as a part of Sufi exercise to purify the soul and prepare it for the spiritual journey. He viewed the concept of *sama'* as something natural and universal, belonging not only to humans but also to celestial spheres. He believed that since God was the ultimate and common Beloved for everyone and everything, He was the source of all ecstasy in the universe, and that all celestial bodies were doing *sama'* out of their love and ecstasy for God. In explaining the reason for the orbiting of celestial spheres, Suhrawardi draws an analogy between celestial bodies and the human body: “When your *nafs* is influenced by the bright radiance of the divine, your body is moved [. . .] so much so that it starts to dance and clap [. . .] The same goes for the *nafs* of the celestial bodies.”<sup>65</sup> The best description of this, however, comes at the end of *Fi halat al-tufuliyya*, in which *sama'* is described both as a means

<sup>62</sup>Suhrawardi, *Awaz-i par-i Jibra'il*, 3:209.

<sup>63</sup>Suhrawardi, *Kalimat al-dhauqiyya*, 3:462.

<sup>64</sup>Suhrawardi, *al-Tawihat*, 1:112.

<sup>65</sup>Suhrawardi, *Alwah-i 'imadi*, 3:153.

of attaining illumination and the ecstasy which is the result of being illuminated. He describes the state (*halat*) that befalls a Sufi when listening to the music as a reminder of the spiritual occurrences (*waqi'a*) that the Sufi has experienced and of longing for the original homeland, allegorized by the parable of the yearning elephant and India.<sup>66</sup> The Sufi's dancing is also allegorized by the parable of the caged bird in which the bird (soul), in its attempt to fly upward, moves the cage (body) as well.<sup>67</sup> The shaking of the hands (*dast bar-afshandan*) in the dance is interpreted as abandonment of all materiality and becoming detached (*mujarrad*).<sup>68</sup> After providing interpretations of several other *sama'* movements, Suhrawardi indicates that a Sufi has to have the *hal* in order to appreciate *sama'*.<sup>69</sup> To Suhrawardi, praying and supplicating loudly, which also prepares the soul for its heavenly ascension, is considered a form of *sama'*.<sup>70</sup>

### 3. Witnessing (*Mushahada*)

#### • Direct Vision (*Mu'ayana*) and Illumination (*Ishraq*)

After the first two stages, the soul of the seeker becomes like a mirror which can reflect the image (*naqsh*) of the celestial souls (*nufus-i falaki*).<sup>71</sup> It is possible for the *salik* to see the beautiful faces or the souls of the magnificently illuminated ones. Suhrawardi distinguished this illumination not as knowledge (*'ilm*) or exoteric intellect (*surat-i 'aqli*), but as divine radiance (*shu'a'-i qudsi*).<sup>72</sup> It is at this stage that the soul is able to see its angelic counterpart or celestial self, which in Suhrawardi's work is frequently represented by the sage (*pir* or *shaykh*). Suhrawardi often describes this *pir* as a youthful elder, luminous and magnificent, with a beautiful countenance and often smiling, who greets the seeker after the latter has been released from

<sup>66</sup>Suhrawardi, *Fi halat al-tufuliyya*, 3:264.

<sup>67</sup>Suhrawardi, *Fi halat al-tufuliyya*, 3:264.

<sup>68</sup>Suhrawardi, *Fi halat al-tufuliyya*, 3:264–65.

<sup>69</sup>Suhrawardi, *Fi halat al-tufuliyya*, 3:265.

<sup>70</sup>Suhrawardi, *Partau-nama*, 3:80.

<sup>71</sup>Suhrawardi, *Partau-nama*, 3:78.

<sup>72</sup>Suhrawardi, *Partau-nama*, 3:81.

material bondage. After the initial greeting, the seeker asks the *pir* all sorts of questions, from astrology and wonders (*'aja'ib*) to the meaning of Sufi mysteries. This encounter between the *pir* and the seeker is the standard initiatic topos in most of Suhrawardi's mystical Persian treatises, in which the *pir* introduces the seeker to the celestial world and its secrets (*asrar*) and *'aja'ib*. By extension and through recounting these initiatic stories, Suhrawardi himself assumes the role of the *pir* to the reader and tries to transform the reader and provide motivation for the spiritual journey.

The result of the encounter with the angelic self is represented in the form of illumination (*ishraq*) of the soul. The immediate effect of *ishraq* for Suhrawardi is the ecstatic and spiritual taste (*zauq*) and the pleasure (*lazzat*) associated with the gnosis gained from illumination. According to *Safir-i simurgh*, the first light is the radiance which illuminates the soul of the seeker from the realm of sanctity, and at first, it is similar to a bolt of lightning (*barq*), which is powerful but short lived.<sup>73</sup> Suhrawardi states, "This [bolt] is what Sufis allude to as the eternal nows (*auqat*) of the Companions of Detachment (*ashab-i tajrid*)."<sup>74</sup> According to Suhrawardi, these bolts of illumination do not come to the seeker all the time, and it is possible that they will stop, but as the seeker continues *riyazat*, more of these *barq* of illumination will be received up to a point that the seeker will be able to remember the state of the other world.<sup>75</sup> Sometimes, this *ishraq* is portrayed as a vision (*nazar*) in which the divine light shines upon the noble souls, and by this, they will receive felicity and pleasure.<sup>76</sup> In *Ruzi ba jama'at-i sufiyan*, attainment of this *nazar* is also key to understanding the secret (*sirr*) of the heavens.<sup>77</sup> Suhrawardi claims that if someone has a pure heart even without *riyazat*, it is possible for that person to have a glimpse of heaven and experience immense spiritual pleasure in times such as during great religious celebrations or on the battlefields, when the time is ripe for

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<sup>73</sup>Suhrawardi, *Safir-i simurgh*, 3:319.

<sup>74</sup>Suhrawardi, *Safir-i simurgh*, 3:319.

<sup>75</sup>Suhrawardi, *Safir-i simurgh*, 3:320.

<sup>76</sup>Suhrawardi, *Alwah-i 'imadi*, 3:172.

<sup>77</sup>Suhrawardi, *Ruzi ba jama'at-i sufiyan*, 3:249.

an out-of-body experience.<sup>78</sup> According to Suhrawardi, at this stage the seeker is still at the beginning of the illumination.<sup>79</sup>

It seems that the soul at this point enjoys a great pleasure, and although this pleasure differs from earthly gratifications, the best way Suhrawardi can describe its feeling is often by comparing it to sexual pleasure. In *Hayakil al-nur*, he compares a worldly person who denies the existence of divine pleasures to a sexually impotent person (‘*anin*’) who refutes the existence of any pleasure in sexual intercourse.<sup>80</sup> This example of comparing a person who does not enjoy the pleasure of illumination to an ‘*anin*’ is repeated in *Alwah-i ‘imadi* and also in the Arabic treatises *al-Lamahat* and *Kalimat al-tasawwuf*.<sup>81</sup> Yet the best example of such comparison comes in *Fi halat al-tufuliyya*, in which Suhrawardi provides a detailed description of sexual pleasure and compares its ecstasy to the ecstasy of divine illumination.<sup>82</sup>

• **Revelation of Secrets (*Kashf-i Asrar*)**

After the initial illumination, revelation (*kashf*) is the next stage in which the lights of secrets (*anwar-i sirr*) are no longer intermittent, but continue to stay on for a long period. Suhrawardi calls this stage “serenity” (*sakina*).<sup>83</sup> Explained clearly in *Kalimat al-tasawwuf*, this *sakina* is a pleasurable, trance-like state which stays with the Sufi for a prolonged period of time and is one of the noblest of states.<sup>84</sup> The pleasure of this stage is more than that of any other stage, and the Sufi laments the departure from this stage.<sup>85</sup> The person with *sakina* is able to read people’s minds, have knowledge of or reveal their secrets, and

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<sup>78</sup>Suhrawardi, *Safir-i simurgh*, 3:321.

<sup>79</sup>Suhrawardi, *Safir-i simurgh*, 3:321.

<sup>80</sup>Suhrawardi, *Hayakil al-nur*, 3:106.

<sup>81</sup>Suhrawardi, *Alwah-i ‘imadi*, 3:171–72; Suhrawardi, *al-Lamahat*, 4:236; and Suhrawardi, *Kalimat al-tasawwuf*, 4:120.

<sup>82</sup>Suhrawardi, *Fi halat al-tufuliyya*, 3:263.

<sup>83</sup>Suhrawardi, *Safir-i simurgh*, 3:321–2.

<sup>84</sup>Suhrawardi, *Kalimat al-tasawwuf*, 4:135.

<sup>85</sup>Suhrawardi, *Safir-i simurgh*, 3:322.

perfect the sense of discernment (*farasat*).<sup>86</sup> The possessor of *sakina* is able to hear magnificent voices from the highest Heavens and see heavenly faces, and no longer carries any doubt in the heart.<sup>87</sup> According to Suhrawardi, this is the middle stage (*maqam*) of the people of love (*ahl-i muhabbat*), and it is sometimes attained in a state between sleep and wakefulness in which the Sufi is able to hear strange voices and wondrous callings, and it is possible that the Sufi becomes feeble and immobile due to the great pleasure.<sup>88</sup> Suhrawardi explains that the man of vision (*mard-i sahib nazar*) must constantly be in search of other worldly singularities (*ghara'ib*) and find a way to perfect his love (*muhabbat*) for God, because as love becomes perfected, according to Hallaj, no secret will remain between the lover and the Beloved, and all the secrets of occult sciences (*asrar-i 'ulum-i khafaya*) will become revealed.<sup>89</sup>

This is when the veil (*hijab*) is lifted and the roadblocks (*mawani*) are removed from the path.<sup>90</sup> In yet another esoteric interpretation, Suhrawardi, in the *Alwah-i 'imadi*, states that the Qur'anic term *Mother of the Book* (*umm al-kitab*) is nothing but the angelic self (*nafs-i malakuti*) upon which all of the macrocosm has been already reflected before it appears in this world.<sup>91</sup> He states that the "Book of God is not made of paper and parchment but of something worthy of his greatness and that is nothing except the spiritual essences (*zawat-i ruhani*) [i.e., Sufis]."<sup>92</sup> These pure essences, such as prophets and sages, can access the secrets of hidden realms, and they are able to reflect the images of the divine universe because "their souls are burnished like a mirror."<sup>93</sup> The concept of secrets and revelations looms more prominently in Suhrawardi's Persian mystical treatises, in which the

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<sup>86</sup>Suhrawardi, *Safir-i simurgh*, 3:322.

<sup>87</sup>Suhrawardi, *Safir-i simurgh*, 3:322.

<sup>88</sup>Suhrawardi, *Safir-i simurgh*, 3:323.

<sup>89</sup>Suhrawardi, *Safir-i simurgh*, 3:328.

<sup>90</sup>Suhrawardi, *Alwah-i 'imadi*, 3:172.

<sup>91</sup>Suhrawardi, *Alwah-i 'imadi*, 3:177.

<sup>92</sup>Suhrawardi, *Alwah-i 'imadi*, 3:177.

<sup>93</sup>Suhrawardi, *Alwah-i 'imadi*, 3:178.

language is more esoteric and less philosophical. In *Awaz-i par-i Jibra'il*, for instance, after learning the strange alphabet (*hija'i bas 'ajib*) from the *pir*, Suhrawardi claims that all the secrets became revealed to him.<sup>94</sup> He also indicates that the same alphabet is the key to understanding the secrets of God's words and the mysteries of the universe.<sup>95</sup>

Although the revelation of secrets is a great part of Suhrawardi's Sufism, he warns against revealing the secrets to the people who are alien to the way of Sufis (i.e., *na-ahl*). In *Ruzi ba jama'at-i sufiyan*, the treatise ends by mentioning the hardship and pain associated with revealing the secret.<sup>96</sup> In *Fi halat al-tufuliyya*, the seeker is mocked, called crazy, and slapped by a *na-ahl* after the seeker reveals the secrets that he learned from the *pir*.<sup>97</sup> As a result, the seeker loses the ecstasy that he attained as a result of learning the secret, and the *pir* abandons him for exposing such a great secret which makes the great souls of heaven dance out of ecstasy.<sup>98</sup> The revelation of secrets to *na-ahl* and the pain that befalls the revealer are also amply explained in *Lughat-i muran*, in the story of the bats and the chameleon as well as the story of the owls and the hoopoe, stories in which both the chameleon and hoopoe suffer at the hand of their enemy by revealing the Truth.<sup>99</sup> In *Safir-i simurgh*, Suhrawardi states that revealing the secret is forbidden (*haram*) and a heresy (*kufir*).<sup>100</sup> Perhaps, this was also the reason for Suhrawardi to mention the Sufi martyr Hallaj more than any other person in his works, as Hallaj became the symbol of the Sufi who revealed the secret to *na-ahl*. How ironic then that despite all of his warnings, Suhrawardi ultimately chose to follow the path of Hallaj.

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<sup>94</sup>Suhrawardi, *Awaz-i par-i Jibra'il*, 3:216.

<sup>95</sup>Suhrawardi, *Awaz-i par-i Jibra'il*, 3:216–17.

<sup>96</sup>Suhrawardi, *Ruzi ba jama'at-i sufiyan*, 3:249.

<sup>97</sup>Suhrawardi, *Fi halat al-tufuliyya*, 3:253.

<sup>98</sup>Suhrawardi, *Fi halat al-tufuliyya*, 3:253–54.

<sup>99</sup>Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, *Lughat-i muran*, in *Majmu'a musannafat-i Shaykh-i Ishraq*, vol. 3, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 4th ed. (Tehran: Pajuhishgah-i 'Ulum-i Insani wa Mutali'at-i Farhangi, 1388/2009), 293–311, reference on pp. 301–5.

<sup>100</sup>Suhrawardi, *Safir-i simurgh*, 3:327.

#### 4. Annihilation (*Fana*) and Beyond

After attaining *sakina*, the soul is able to experience the eternal now (*waqt*), the Sufi state (*hal*), and heavenly ascension (*'uruji*), whenever it desires. Here, Suhrawardi claims that by reaching a certain rank, the Sufi no longer should wait for the *hal* or *waqt* to come involuntarily; through *sakina*, the Sufi is able to leave their physical form (*qalib*) and go on a heavenly journey (*mi'raj*) at will.<sup>101</sup> In this stage, the Sufi rejoices to see the rays of divine lights shining upon the Sufi's own essence (*zat*).<sup>102</sup> This, according to Suhrawardi, is still a deficiency, because if the Sufi has patience and passes this stage, they will reach a stage in which they no longer look at their own *zat* and will lose consciousness, and this is called "the great annihilation" (*fana-yi akbar*).<sup>103</sup> When the Sufi completely forgets the self and even forgets the forgetfulness, this is called *annihilation within annihilation* (*fana-yi dar fana*), and according to Suhrawardi, this stage is said to be the experience closest to the state of death (*al-halat ila al-maut*).<sup>104</sup> In explaining such categorization, Suhrawardi states that as long as a person becomes content with their own gnosis (*ma'rifat*), they are still imperfect, and they reach perfection only upon losing their *ma'rifat* in "the source of gnosis" (*ma'ruf*), and it is only then that the Sufi becomes utterly *mujarrad*.<sup>105</sup> Suhrawardi believes that the true Sufi never stops at anything, even in gnosis, and always asks for more, because Sufism "began with God but has no end."<sup>106</sup> If the *nafs* becomes content with the current stage, that stage will be the Sufi's downfall.<sup>107</sup>

Although *fana* is the ultimate and final stage of Sufism, for many Sufis complete liberation comes only after death, when the final tethers of the soul break and the Sufi no longer has to face the bitter reality of

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<sup>101</sup>Suhrawardi, *Safir-i simurgh*, 3:323.

<sup>102</sup>Suhrawardi, *Safir-i simurgh*, 3:324.

<sup>103</sup>Suhrawardi, *Safir-i simurgh*, 3:324.

<sup>104</sup>Suhrawardi, *al-Talwihat*, 1:114.

<sup>105</sup>Suhrawardi, *Safir-i simurgh*, 3:324.

<sup>106</sup>Suhrawardi, *Safir-i simurgh*, 3:326.

<sup>107</sup>Suhrawardi, *Lughat-i muran*, 3:310.

material entrapment after returning from *fana*. Suhrawardi also believed that “*nafs* would never attain the true spirit of life (*ruh-i zindagi*) except after separation from the darkness of body and the everlasting abode (*sara-yi akhirat*) is the spring of life [. . .] and from it, one can drink the life-giving water of gnosis (*ab-i hayat-i ma‘rifat*).”<sup>108</sup>

## Conclusion

The references to Sufi ideas and practices in Suhrawardi’s works are simply too many to ignore his Sufism as one of the key elements in portraying a complete picture of his works. As a rudimentary attempt to reconstruct Suhrawardi’s view on the stages of the Sufi path in a more systematic framework, this study only scratches the surface, and further studies are required to map a more compressive schema of Suhrawardi’s Sufism and its possible influences on later mystics. A clear indication of Suhrawardi’s influence can be seen in Shams-i Tabrizi’s (d. ca. 645/1247) *Maqalat*, in which he praises Suhrawardi with the utmost reverence as worthy of a true Sufi master, even placing him above his namesake and a great Sufi, Shihab al-Din Abu Hafsa ‘Umar Suhrawardi.<sup>109</sup> To fully appreciate Suhrawardi’s unique brand of philosophy, one needs to have a full grasp of his Sufism. Suhrawardi himself tells the reader: “It is enough for you to learn only some acquired knowledge (*al‘ilm al-ta‘limi*), but it is incumbent upon you to learn the incorporeal (*al-tajarrudi*), conjunctive [to the Divine] (*al-itisali*), and visionary (*al-shuhudi*) knowledge from the sages.”<sup>110</sup> He even finishes his magnum opus, *Hikmat al-ishraq*, by reminding the reader that without going through some of the stages of the Sufi path, which have been enumerated in this study, a person cannot hope to attain *ishraq*.<sup>111</sup> For Suhrawardi, neither philosophy nor Sufism was

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<sup>108</sup>Suhrawardi, *Alwah-i ‘imadi*, 3:173.

<sup>109</sup>Shams al-Din Muhammad Tabrizi, *Maqalat-i Shams-i Tabrizi*, ed. Muhammad ‘Ali Muwahhid, 2 vols. (Tehran: Khwarazmi, 1377/1998), 1:275, 296–97.

<sup>110</sup>Suhrawardi, *al-Talwihat*, 1:121.

<sup>111</sup>Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, *Hikmat al-ishraq*, in *Majmu‘a musannafat-i Shaykh-i Ishraq*, vol. 2, ed. Henry Corbin, 4th ed. (Tehran: Pajuhishgah-i ‘Ulum-i Insani wa Mutali‘at-i Farhangi, 1388/2009), 1–260, reference on pp. 256–57.



the ultimate goal—they were simply the two wings by which the novice could become free of bondage and take spiritual flight. Philosophy made it possible for the seeker to recognize the state of material entrapment, and treading the Sufi path prepared the seeker to attain *ishraq*, which to Suhrawardi was the ultimate goal.

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