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Persia and the Destiny of Islamic Philosophy

by

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IT was in the destiny of Islam as the last religion of the present humanity to integrate into its intellectual and spiritual universe all the elements of the knowledge and wisdom of earlier traditions that were in accordance with its unitary perspective. Since Islam claims not to bring a new doctrine but to re-affirm and reveal in its fullness the doctrine of unity (*tawhid*) which lies at the heart of all the antecedent traditions, whether they be formal exotericisms or mystery religions, in Muslim eyes the light of the Muhammadan prophecy (*risâlah muhammadiyah*) absorbed unto itself the light of all the earlier manifestations of the spirit. According to Islamic esotericism, the inner reality of all the prophets is the same. Therefore, with the plenary manifestation of this reality in the Quranic revelation, Muslims also came to possess by right whatever form of wisdom that derived from the earlier epiphanies of this one and the same spiritual reality, which in the Islamic perspective is identified with the "Reality of Muhammad" (*al-haqiqat al-muhammadiyah*).¹

This particular characteristic of the Islamic revelation has made it possible on the religious plane for pre-Islamic prophets of the Abrahamic line to appear as stars in the firmament of Islam;² hence many Muslims pray not only to the Prophet of Islam but also to pre-Islamic prophets such as Christ and Abraham. Moreover the Virgin Mary plays an important role in daily Muslim piety as well as in certain dimensions of Islamic esotericism.³ As for the intellectual plane, this characteristic enabled Islam to integrate into its universe the sciences and learning of worlds as far apart as the Graeco-Roman complex and China. Elements drawn from sources as far removed from each other as Roman agriculture and Chinese alchemy found a home for themselves in the Islamic

¹ This doctrine is developed fully in the *Fusils al-hikam* of Ibn 'Arabi and *al-Insan al-kâmil* of 'Abd al-Karim al-Jili. See Ibn 'Arabi, *La Sagesse des prophètes*, trans. by T. Burckhardt, Paris, 1955; also al-Jili, *De l'homme universel*, trans. by T. Burckhardt, Lyon, 1953.

² See S. H. Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, London, 1972, chapter 8.

³ See F. Schuon, *Dimensions of Islam*, trans. by P. Townsend, London, 1970, chapter 7.

sciences from the 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th centuries. Likewise metaphysical and cosmological symbols and themes from India to Greece gained a new life in the light of Islamic gnosis and after becoming Islamicized were employed as elements in the intellectual edifice created by Islamic civilization.

The domain of traditional Islamic philosophy⁴ is no exception to what one observes in the field of the sciences in general. Islamic philosophy came into being as a result of meditation upon both the teaching of Islam and the heritage of the ancient world by men whose spirit was moulded by the Quran.⁵ But strangely enough, in this field, mostly because of the nearly exclusive occupation of Western scholars with the Peripatetic school, the Graeco-Alexandrian elements that played a formative role in Islamic philosophy have alone been emphasized, while the ancient Iranian elements have been neglected.

There is of course no doubt that the Graeco-Alexandrian heritage is the most important external source in the genesis of Islamic philosophy, but this should not mean that other factors be excluded. It must be remembered that Greek philosophy in its early stage had profound contacts with the East, including the Mazdean world, and that again in the Alexandrian school the Athenian heritage came under the influence of many currents of Oriental and more particularly Iranian traditions. *The Chaldean Oracles*,⁶ which represents the wisdom of a Mazdeo-Chaldean synthesis in Mesopotamia, influenced Neoplatonism deeply,⁷ and the so-called "Hellenized Magi"⁸ were an important element in certain intellectual currents of the Hellenistic world. If we examine carefully—and without the Renaissance prejudice which refused to see anything of value beyond a Greece viewed solely from the limited perspective of humanism—the totality of the Graeco-Alexandrian heritage including the Neo-pythagorean, Hermetic, Neoplatonic and Chaldean elements, we will discover even within this heritage elements of Oriental and more particularly Iranian traditions. It may therefore be said with certainty that Islamic philosophy inherited not only the knowledge of the Greeks but also that of the ancient Near East and the Persians, all of which it trans-formed through its own genius into a crystal that caused to radiate in new directions the luminosity that issued forth from the Quranic revelation.

This wide basis from which Islamic philosophy drew the *materia* to which it gave a new *forma*, deriving from the teachings of Islam, was to have an important role to play in the future destiny of Islamic philosophy. The Greeks were never converted to Islam and Islamic Egypt was so deeply transformed ethnically as to have very little ethnic

⁴ Throughout this essay we use the term philosophy in its traditional sense and not in its current Western connotation, which is alien to Islam as to all other traditional civilizations.

⁵ In most studies in Western languages the importance of Islam and the Quran in particular in the genesis and development of Islamic philosophy is far under-estimated. See S. H. Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, Cambridge (U.S.A.), 1964, introduction; and H. Corbin (with the collaboration of S. H. Nasr and O. Yahya), *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, Paris, 1964, pp. 13ff.

⁶ See H. Levy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy*, Cairo, 1956.

⁷ See H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, Paris, 1971, vol. II, pp. 40ff.

⁸ See J. Bidez et F. Cumont, *Les mages hellénisés: Zoroaster, Ostanès et Hystaspe d'après la tradition grecque*, Paris, 1938.

relationship with Hellenistic Alexandria. But the Persians did adopt Islam and in fact, while preserving an ethnic and linguistic continuity with their past, became so profoundly Islamicized as to become one of the chief architects of Islamic civilization and the vehicle for the spread of Islam to lands farther east. The persistence of the tradition of Islamic philosophy in Persia until modern times could not be completely unrelated to this fact,⁹ especially since it was with the revival of the "wisdom of the ancient Persians" by Suhrawardi that Islamic philosophy gained a new lease upon life and was able to survive and in fact spread in the eastern lands of Islam.

To elucidate this matter it is necessary to turn to the pages of the history of Islamic philosophy. Its early development from the 3rd/9th to the 5th/11th centuries, a period in which the central arena for activity was first Baghdad and later Khurasan, was participated in more or less by all the different components of the Islamic community, namely the Arabs and Persians and even the minorities such as the Harraneans and Christians, who played such an important role in the movement of translation that took place from the 2nd/8th to the 4th/10th century. Moreover, the fruit of the effort of this period in both philosophy and theology (*Kalam*), works of such men as al-Kindi, al-Farabi, Ibn Sind, Muskûyah (Ibn Miskawayh), al-Birûni, the Ikhwan al-Safa' and the like, was read, studied and elaborated upon by scholars and students all the way from Persia itself to Andalusia. Throughout the length and breadth of the Islamic world of that time men of learning were familiar with these authors and taught and discussed their works in either *madrasahs* or private circles. This widespread familiarity holds true also of both Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite *Kalam* which, although developed again mostly in Baghdad as well as in Kufa, Basra and Khurasan, became rapidly disseminated throughout the Islamic world. As a result not only did the devastating attacks of al-Ghazzali against Peripatetic philosophy reach Andalusia almost immediately but also his own theological and Sufi teachings influenced an Ibn Tumart so deeply and powerfully as to change the history of North Africa. Until the 5th/11th century both philosophy and the *Kalam*—which reacted so strongly against it and in many ways influenced its direction of development—spread throughout the Islamic world, even if the seat of the main activity in these fields remained Persia and Iraq and also to a certain degree Egypt.

After the 5th/11th century, the situation of Islamic philosophy in the Islamic world underwent a radical change. Although the echo of the "refutation" of al-Ghazzali was heard throughout the Islamic world, the reaction to it was geographically speaking confined more locally. In the extreme West of the Islamic world a late flowering of Peripatetic philosophy culminated with the refutation of al-Ghazzali's "refutation" by Ibn Rushd. But as far as the future of Islamic philosophy was concerned the path followed by the great commentator of Aristotle was like a road that led to nowhere. Although respected by later generations of Muslim philosophers, Ibn Rushd and his particular interpretation of Peripatetic philosophy were rejected by nearly all of them in favour of the more intellectual and less rationalistic interpretation of Ibn Sina. In fact already in the debate between the "Western" and "Oriental" Muslim commentators of Aristotle whose

⁹ The inheriting of elements of ancient Persian wisdom both directly and through Greek sources combined with the "Persian identity" which continued to survive in a distinct cultural world within the total unity of Islamic civilization must certainly have been one factor among others which made Persia throughout Islamic history the main home of Islamic philosophy.

trace is to be found in the writings of Ibn Sina, it was the latter group that was destined to finally win the day.¹⁰ As for other figures who appeared in Andalusia after Ibn Rushd, the most important among them, Ibn ‘Arabi—who more than any other figure influenced the later intellectual life of Islam—migrated to Syria and left the deepest influence upon the Sufi schools of that region and also of Anatolia and Persia.¹¹ Ibn Sabin, the other noteworthy intellectual figure of Andalusia, was to follow the same route to the East and die in Mecca.

As for the other result of al-Ghazzali's and other Ash‘arite theologian's attack against Peripatetic philosophy, namely the appearance and spread of the *Ishraqi* school of Suhrawardi, it too remained relatively localized within Persia and its neighbouring areas. It did not spread to any appreciable extent to the Western lands of Islam, in the same way that the Andalusian school did not spread to the East. But this new intellectual path opened by Suhrawardi in the 6th/12th century, far from leading to a dead end, as was the case of the school of Ibn Rushd, was to have a long life which continues to this day and which was to guarantee the continuation of the life of Islamic philosophy at least in Persia.

The arresting figure of Suhrawardi is perhaps the most crucial link binding the later destiny of Islamic philosophy with Persia and the Muslim lands influenced by Persian culture such as parts of the Indian subcontinent. The discussion of the short life span of this sage and the content of his writings do not concern us here.¹² It is the significance for the future destiny of Islamic philosophy of his "Oriental theosophy of light" (*hikmat al-ishraq*), a theosophy that is illuminationist and Oriental at the same time, which occupies for the moment the centre of our interest.

Suppose such a figure as Suhrawardi had not appeared; then the distinct school of Islamic philosophy (*Falsafah* or *Hikmah*) might have died after Ibn Rushd in both the eastern and western lands of Islam and the waters of the stream of intellectual activity would have flowed into the two main river beds of Sufism and *Kalam*. This phenomenon is in fact observable in certain parts of the Islamic world, such as most of the Arab world after the 7th/13th century, when Sufism and *Kalam* themselves become more "philosophical" in their expression and exclusively responsible for providing for the needs of men for an explanation of causality and of the nexus and laws that relate objects and events together.

But in as much as Islamic philosophy was destined to survive, the school of *Ishraq* did come into being and with it there appeared a form of Islamic philosophy more closely wed to intellectual intuition and illumination and less imprisoned by the limitations

¹⁰ For the views of various scholars on this question see S. H. Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, Cambridge (U.S.A.), 1964, pp. 189-190.

¹¹ See S. H. Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, chapter III. The migration of Ibn ‘Arabi to the East, however did not in any way prevent his influence from colouring profoundly Sufism in the Maghrib as well, to the extent that until modern times the Sufi masters of the Maghrib, especially those of the Shâdhiliyyah order, have been among the most outstanding expositors of Ibn ‘Arabi's doctrines.

¹² Many studies have been devoted to him by H. Corbin including the extensive study of Suhrawardi which fills all of vol: II of his *En Islam iranien*. See also Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, chapter 2 ; and Nasr, "Suhrawardi", in M. M. Shariff (ed.), *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, Vol. I, 1963, pp. 372-397.

inherent in Aristotelian rationalism, a philosophy or more precisely theosophy that was destined to become a bridge or isthmus (*barzakh*) between the formal religious sciences and pure Sufism. But it must also be remembered that the *Ishraqi* theosophy sought to resurrect the wisdom of the Persians or what Suhrawardi calls Khusrawian wisdom (*hikmat khusrawaniyyah*) along with the sapiential aspect of the Graeco-Alexandrian heritage contained in the Hermetic and Platonic teachings. It was, therefore, only natural that this school should spread most of all in Persia itself where already other elements of the pre-Islamic civilization of the land had also been integrated into the civilization of the Islamic period, as seen in architectural and artistic motifs, music and literature, whose foremost example is the *Shahnamah* of Firdawsi.

The *Ishraqi* school, although first expounded in Aleppo where Suhrawardi died, spread most rapidly in Persia, and through the writings of the Persian philosophers such as Qutb al-Din Shirazi, Jalal al-Din Dawani and Ghiyath al-Din Mansûr Dashtaki it also reached India.¹³ This fact itself assured the continuation of the life of Islamic philosophy and made of Persia the final home for the development of its later phases. Of course two other fundamental events must also be taken into consideration: the revival of the school of Ibn Sina by Khwajah Nasir al-Din Tûsi and the spread of the teachings of Ibn ‘Arabi. But both of these would have left a very different effect had it not been for the presence of the teachings of the *Ishraqi* school. As far as Ibn Sina is concerned, it must be remembered that even his most faithful revivifier, Nasir al-Din, was deeply impregnated by Suhrawardi's doctrines and probably taught the *Hikmat al-ishraq* in Maraghah. Without the *Ishraqi* interpretation given more and more to Ibn Sina's philosophy, it is unlikely that Peripatetic (*Mashsha'i*) philosophy could have continued to survive as a living philosophical school in Islam. As for Ibn ‘Arabi, if there had not been the metaphysical doctrines of the *Ishraqi* school, which are in essence very close to the gnosis (*‘irfan*) taught by Ibn ‘Arabi and his students, this school would have left the same effect in Persia as it did in Morocco, Egypt or Malaysia. It would have influenced pure Sufis such as ‘Abd al-Wahhab al-Sharani or Hamzah Fansûri or even in Persia itself ‘Abd al-Razzaq Kashani but could not have helped in bringing into being the doctrines of such a figure as Mulla Sadra or those of any of the other later Muslim theosophers of Persia.

The particular situation which developed in Persia from the 6th/12th century onward, when a revived Islamic philosophy flourished until it reached a peak of activity in the Safavid period, is therefore due mostly to the spread of *Ishraqi* theosophy in Persia and its taking root rapidly in a soil which for reasons already mentioned was fully prepared to accept it. While in the Western lands of Islam intellectual life became concentrated in the schools of Sufism and *Kalam*, in Persia and the neighbouring areas including Muslim India, Islamic philosophy continued to flourish as a distinct discipline fulfilling an important function in the hierarchy of knowledge leading from the Shari‘ite sciences to pure gnosis. Henceforth the destiny of Islamic philosophy was indissolubly wed to Persia, and the philosophers and theosophers of this land became such recognized authorities that whenever Muslims from other lands wanted to master this particular branch of the

¹³ On the spread of the school of *Ishraq* see S. H. Nasr, "The Spread of the Illuminationist School of Suhrawardi," *The Islamic Quarterly*, vol, XIV, no. 3, pp. 11- 112.

Islamic intellectual sciences (*al-'ulûm al-'aqliyyah*) they would travel to Persia. As late as the last century the great Qajar sage, Hajji Mulla Hadi Sabziwari, had students from as far away as the Muslim community of Tibet studying under him in Sabziwar.

The discussion of the destiny of Islamic philosophy in Persia would be incomplete without mentioning the remarkable renaissance of the traditional sciences and especially *Hikmah* during the Safavid period. For many reasons, including the political unification of Persia and the resulting period of peace and tranquility during which the pursuit of the religious sciences was encouraged, and the establishment of Shi'ism as the state religion—Shi'ism being in general more sympathetic to the study of *Hikmah* and in fact possessing in its structure profound relations with the metaphysical principles of Islamic philosophy especially the school of *Ishrâq*¹⁴—there was a veritable renaissance of *Hikmah* during the Safavid period. The father of this school, which has now come to be known as the "School of Ispahan", is Mir Damad, who has received as yet little attention in the West.¹⁵ But the most outstanding figure of the period is his student, Sadr al-Din Shirazi, whom many Persians consider as the greatest of the Islamic philosophers in the realm of metaphysics (*ilâhiyyat*).¹⁶

The writings of Sadr al-Din in *Hikmah* are in many ways like the Shah mosque of Ispahan in architecture—the peak and apogee of a long tradition which suddenly produces its great and definitive master-piece. Sadr al-Din, who was a man of the greatest piety and asceticism, possessed a high spiritual station (*maqam*) and was at the same time gifted with the most remarkable power of logical analysis, marks the summit of the development of Islamic philosophy in Persia. He is the peak of a millenium of Islamic intellectual life and at the same time the source from which has flowed numerous tributaries that have nourished the intellectual life of Persia and Muslim India during the past three and a half centuries.

Even after Sadr al-Din the life of Islamic philosophy in Persia has been unbelievably rich. Only research carried out very recently has begun to make known major works and new names which now stand along with those of better known men, such famous figures as 'Abd al-Razzaq Lahiji, Mulla Muhsin Fayd Kashani, Qadi Said Qumi, Mulla 'Ali Nuri and Hajji Mulla Hadi Sabziwari.¹⁷ As more manuscripts are unearthed and studied, it becomes clear that in the words of a leading Persian *hakim* of the present day, "the past four centuries must be considered as one of the richest periods in the history of Islamic philosophy".¹⁸ And so, down to our own period, when masters still exist in Persia who

¹⁴ This relationship has been examined in the many writings of Coi bin including both vols. I and II of *En Islam iranien*.

¹⁵ See H. Corbin, "Confessions éxtatiques de Mir Dâmâd," in *Melanges Louis Massignon*, Damascus, 1956, pp. 331ff; also S. H. Nasr, "The School of Ispahan", in Shariff (ed.), *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, vol. II, Wiesbaden, 1966, pp. 904-931.

¹⁶ On Sadr al-Din Shirâzi known also as Mulla Sadra see S. H. Nasr, *Islamic Studies*, Beirut, 1967, chapters 10 and 11; also introduction of H. Corbin to Sadr al-Din's, *Le livre des pénétrations métaphysiques*, Tehran-Paris, 1964.

¹⁷ Most of these figures have been introduced to the West for the first time by H. Corbin. See also S. H. Nasr, "Philosophy and Spiritual Movements", in *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. VI, (in press).

¹⁸ This is the opinion of Sayyid Jalâl al-Din Ashtiyâni, who has been preparing a monumental anthology of the writings of the Islamic philosophers of Persia since Mir Dâmâd with the collaboration of H. Corbin. This five volume work, of

are related through the chain of teacher and disciple to the earliest periods of Islamic philosophy and who can still instruct students in the oral tradition which accompanies the written text, the life of Islamic philosophy continues to pulsate in Persia, which was destined to become its central abode during the later centuries of Islamic history.

* * *

In conclusion it might be asked why the later life of Islamic philosophy is so closely tied to Persia. The ethnic continuity of Persia from the pre-Islamic to the Islamic period, added to the elements of ancient Persian wisdom which were integrated into Islamic philosophy, is a main factor, as already mentioned. But there are some other factors of major importance that must be taken into consideration. The first concerns Shi'ism, which has played an important role in the cultivation of the "intellectual sciences" throughout Islamic history'.¹⁹ Without wanting to be in anyway exclusive, we can say that in general during Islamic history whenever the central caliphate was powerful the "transmitted sciences" (*al-'ulum al-naqliyyah*), and especially *Kalam* were encouraged while, when the power was transferred to local Shi'ite rulers, Arab and Persian alike, the "intellectual sciences" received greater official support. The history of the 4th/10th to the 6th/12th centuries from the Buyids to the Seljuqs displays fully this tendency. This is to be seen especially in the case of philosophy, which was more easily integrated into the structure of Shi'ite religious sciences than the Sunni thanks mostly to the practice of *ta'wil* or spiritual hermeneutics in Shi'ism, which enabled *Hikmah* to become absorbed into the inner dimensions of the religion. The position of *Hikmah* in Shi'ite *madrasahs* and its banishment from for example the Nizamiyyah *madrasah* system during the Seljuq period attest to this fact.

Of course this tendency did not mean a complete support of *Hikmah* in Shi'ite circles, as is shown by the opposition shown against it by many of the Shi'ite *'ulama'* throughout history. Nor did it mean a complete opposition to *Hikmah* in Sunni circles, as can be seen in the official espousal of its cause by the early Abbasid caliphs and also its flourishing in the Maghrib during the 5th/11th and 6th/12th centuries. What marked the opposition to *Hikmah* in Sunni circles was not so much the intrinsic religious structure of Sunnism as the adoption of Ash'arite *Kalam*, which after the 4th/10th century became the official theology of the Sunni world, and the opposition of this particular school of *Kalam* to *Falsafah* and *Hikmah*. But of course even within the Sunni world this *Kalam* itself became more "philosophical" from al-Ghazzali onward. Also, later schools of Sufism following Ibn 'Arabi integrated elements of some of the sapiential doctrines of *Hikmah* such as Hermetic cosmology into their perspective.

The fact that Shi'ism provided a more favourable climate for the development of *Hikmah* is connected with a complex set of factors related to the structure of Shi'ism itself including not only *ta'wil* but also the ever living role of the Imams, the universality of the Shi'ite notion of *walayah*, the early encounter between the Shi'ite Imams and

which vol. I is already printed, should make known for the first time to the world at large the immense richness of metaphysical and cosmological doctrines of this later period of Islamic philosophy.

¹⁹ See S. H. Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, prologue.

members of other religious communities who were masters of the ancient traditional sciences, etc. Both Hermeticism and later *Ishraqi* theosophy readily found a congenial home for themselves within the world of Shi'ism. Moreover, the sayings of the Shi'ite Imams as contained in the traditional collections such as the *Usul al-kafi* of Kulayni became, after the Holy Quran and *Hadith*, themselves a major source for metaphysical and theosophical knowledge and provided the most fecund themes for metaphysical meditation. The monumental theosophical work of Sadr al-Din Shirazi, *Sharh usul al-kafi*, proves the significance of this traditional source for the later development of Islamic philosophy.

The gradual domination of Shi'ism in Persia may therefore be considered as one of the important factors which enabled Islamic philosophy to survive and in fact flourish in Persia after the 6th/12th century. But despite its importance this could not have been the only factor because first of all there were Shi'ite communities in the Arab lands and elsewhere in the Islamic world where there is to be observed nothing resembling the kind of development that occurred in Persia in the field of *Hikmah*. Secondly we do find many Persian philosophers and theosophers after the 6th/12th century who were, according to all recorded documents and historical indications, Sunnis. The same phenomenon is to be observed also in Muslim India where the interest in the doctrines of such men as Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra was not by any means confined to Shi'ite circles.

Other factors must therefore have also played a role, of which one seems to us of special significance. Islam is a Semitic religion universalized to embrace non-Semitic elements. Within the early Islamic community two peoples were instrumental most of all in the creation of classical Islamic culture, the Arabs and the Persians. Ethnic groups that embraced Islam later, such as the Black Africans and the Turks, became integrated culturally mostly into either the Arabic or the Persian zones of Islamic culture and only later added their own local colour and variation to the classical Arabic or Persian forms of Islamic culture that they had inherited. Now, although the religion of the Arabs and the Persians was the same, ethnically one of these peoples was Semitic and the other Aryan, each race possessing its own particular genius. The spiritual type of the Semites tends to what has been so justly called "Semitic voluntarism" and that of the Aryans to "Aryan intellectualism". The tendency in the one case is toward inspiration and the other toward intellection.²⁰ Both seek the Divine and on the highest level reach Him, but one, the Aryan, through a "continuity" made possible through intellection, and the other, the Semitic, through discontinuous leaps resulting from flashes of inspiration. Of course this tendency is not absolute and exclusive and does not eliminate the possibility of exceptions on both sides. Islam, being of a Semitic origin, contains something of this "discontinuous" mode of expression in its teachings in general as is seen in both Ash'arite *Kalam* and the purest esotericism of an Ibn 'Arabi, not to speak of certain parts of the Quran which are like so many flashes of light cast in the direction of the human world by

²⁰ "Il nous semble permis d'affirmer que chez l'Aryen, c'est la tendance à l'intellection qui prédomine—le rationalisme en est la caricature—tandis que c'est la tendance à l'inspiration qui caractérise l'esprit du Sémite : la sagesse hindoue se présente avant tout comme une intellection. même—et déjà—dans les *Upanishads*, qui pourtant relavent incontestablement de l'inspiration ; la sagesse sémitique, au contraire, prend volontiers l'allure de l'inspiration, et c'est ce dont il faut se souvenir quand on se heurte au caractère souvent discontinue et excessif de la dialectique spirituelle des Musulmans." F. Schuon, *Logique et transcendance*, Paris, 1970, p. 168.

God. But within the world of Islam, with its distinct and yet universal mode of spirituality, the mental and ethnic traits of the Persians as well as the Muslims of the sub-continent manifest themselves in comparison with the Arab mentality through greater attention to a more systematic metaphysical exposition, somewhat more akin to the sapiential and metaphysical doctrines of India although of course possessing an Islamic character. If one were to compare the writings of an 'Arabi and a Mulla Sadra, who was deeply influenced by him, one would discover the same basic truths but expressed in a more continuous and systematic fashion by Mulla Sadra and as so many flashes of light breaking abruptly upon the horizon of human consciousness by Ibn 'Arabi. As a result, in reading Mulla Sadra one must depend more upon not only intellection but also its mental reflection, which is ratiocination, and in Ibn 'Arabi more upon intuition, which enables one to make the leap from one flash of truth to the next.²¹ Again of course this is only a question of tendency and is not meant to be exclusive.

This particular characteristic and bent of mind must also be considered as one of the most important factors that enabled *Hikmah* to develop in Persia and adjacent lands especially among the Muslims of the sub-continent. *Hikmah* itself came to fill a gap between the official and formal religious sciences and Sufism, to provide a continuous and smooth transition from the purely exoteric to the purely esoteric sciences. Moreover, within the tradition of *Hikmah* there appeared the most systematic and orderly expositions of metaphysical, cosmological and eschatological doctrines to be found anywhere in the Islamic world. For men who were Muslims, contemplatives and of a logical bent of mind at the same time, Islamic philosophy and theosophy was a way provided providentially to satisfy the deepest needs of their minds and souls and to prepare them for that final theosis and spiritual union which lies altogether above the level of the mind, beyond all philosophy and all verbal expressions of the truth.

* * *

For these and other complex reasons Persia has been and continues to be the main abode of Islamic philosophy during the past eight centuries. Today, as a result of the impact of the modern West, Muslims of all lands are in dire need of an Islamic response to all the follies that parade in our times as the most current and fashionable form of thought, as the latest "ism", which changes these days with almost the same rapidity as dress fashions. To provide for this need the Muslims intelligentsia must seek within its own traditional sources, in the teachings of Sufism, theology and the other religious sciences. But because the challenge thrown before it is often in the form of a philosophy or ideology, it must also acquaint itself fully with the tradition of Islamic philosophy and theosophy, which contains keys to the solution of the so-called problems of the modern world, problems which are for the most part the result of the forgetting of perennial truths. To realize this knowledge, there must be created a profound dialogue between the real, and not the so-called, intellectuals, of the different Muslim lands and those of Persia where this precious form of wisdom still survives. This dialogue could be of great benefit for all Muslim peoples including the Persians themselves.

²¹ Again we do not imply that understanding Ibn 'Arabi requires no logical thinking or Mullâ Sadrâ no intuition. There is only a question of emphasis and pre-dominance of one element over the other.

As for the Western world, it need hardly be mentioned how crucial and basic the message of all traditional wisdom is for a civilization which is suffering acutely most of all because of being cut off from its own traditional roots. The tradition of *Hikmah* is particularly precious for those in the West who are genuinely seeking the truth, first of all because this *Hikmah* belongs to a tradition, namely Islam, which is close to Christianity in many ways. Moreover, the school of *Hikmah* is the development and continuation of a tradition which influenced deeply medieval Europe. Finally, it is a tradition in which the most rigorous demands of the mind are satisfied along with the deepest yearning of the soul for illumination and grace.²² Because it was the destiny of Islamic philosophy to have the final phase of its development in Persia, the schools of *Hikmah* that continue to survive to this day in that land represent a most precious spiritual repository for whose preservation the Persians themselves are most responsible but whose message is meant to reach beyond the borderlands of Persia to the rest of the Islamic world and even beyond *dar al-islam* to the world at large, to true lovers of wisdom wherever they might be.

(Original editorial inclusion that followed the essay:)

"The thing needed," said Kung-ni, "is abstinence of the heart."

"And what is that ?" ask Yen-hui.

"It is this," said Kung-ni : to concentrate all one's intellectual energy as into a mass. Not to listen with the ears, or with the heart, but with the spirit alone. To intercept the way of the senses, to keep the mirror of the heart pure, to let the spirit occupy itself, in the inner void, with abstract objects alone. The vision of principle demands the void. To keep oneself void, that is abstinence of the heart . . . One must stay closed, simple, in a natural purity without artificial admixture. Thus one can manage to remain without emotion, while it is difficult to become calm again after having let oneself be moved, just as it is easier not to walk, than to efface one's tracks after having walked."

Chuang-tse.

²² See S. H. Nasr, *Islamic Studies*, chap. 8 ; and Nasr, "The Spread of the School of Illumination," *op. cit.*