

Shihabuddin Yahya Suhrawardi

(1154 – 1191)

Expel empty melancholy from your head. Diminish your pride and increase in neediness. Your master is love: when you reach him, he himself will tell you in the tongue of ecstasy how to act.

Shihabuddin Yahya Suhrawardi
“On the Reality of Love” 1)

In the Iranian province of Zanzan, to the south of the province capital, lies Sohraward, the village where Shihabuddin Yahya ibn Habash ibn Amirak of Suhraward was born. The Internet-Encyclopedia Wikipedia tells us about the capital of Zanzan that it sits at the foot of the mountains that separate Azerbaijan from the central plateau, about halfway along the main road and railway from Teheran to Tabriz. The main ethnic groups there are the Azeris and Kurdish people. The territory is mountainous and hilly, with large agricultural areas. During the 7th century, the territory was conquered by the Muslims.

We have no records of Suhrawardi's early childhood and his parents. We only know that he lived from 1154 to 1191 Christian time (549 to 587 in the Islamic calendar). But not so much as these figures are sure. 2) He was a great ascetic, fond of solitude and long solitary retreats. And he loved nature, undertook long walking-tours through Iran, Anatolia (the part of Turkey which belongs to the Near East) and Syria. Overfor the establishment he could be an awkward customer, provoking people with his sharp intellect. Suhrawardi had many foes and was executed in the end, therefore he is also named Shaykh Maqtul. 3)

But his disciples called him Shaykh Shahid, meaning “the witness”, “the one who is completely present in the moment”.

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The earliest reports about him concern his education. He studied with the leading scholars of his time. At first he went to Maragheh in Eastern Azerbaijan, a city East of lake Orumiyeh, where he studied philosophy and theology with Majd al-Din al-Jili.

Afterwards Suhrawardi went to Isfahan, then a leading center of learning in Persia, and studied logic with Zahir al-Din al-Qari, who also introduced him to the works of Ibn Sahlan al-Sawi. The latter had written a Persian commentary to Avicenna's Risalat al-tayr, the famous “Treatise of the Birds”, which Suhrawardi later translated and restated into Persian.

One of his teachers and friends was Fakhr al-Din al-Mardini, who taught in Mardin in Southeastern Turkey at the border to Syria. Fakhr al-Din had great respect for Suhrawardi, his skills and intelligence, but he feared he would damage himself one day because of his direct manner: “*How clever this youth is! and how eloquent! In our time I have not found his equal, yet I fear that his excessive audacity and recklessness may*

prove his undoing.” 4)

After his studies Suhrawardi went on walking-trips through Persia, Anatolia and Northern Syria. During this time he joined the Sufi path and sought the companionship of learned men and Sufi sages. His contemporary and biographer Shahrazuri reports: 5)

“Having acquired the traits of independence of thought and solitude, he labored on his carnal soul through ascetic practice, solitary retreat, and meditation until he reached the final stages of the sages and revelations of the prophets. (...) He broke his fast but once a week, and his sustenance never exceeded fifty dirhems. If the ranks of philosophers be surveyed, a more ascetic or excellent person than him will scarcely be found.”

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Suhrawardi didn't pay much attention to his exterior. He went in simple clothes and showed his connection to the Kurdish people 6). Behaghi gives the following description of Suhrawardi in his book *Sawan al-Hekma*: *“His inner horse was wild and used to be alone, united with God. He wore a red hat like the Turkish and Kurdish people and the coat of the derwishes.” 7)*

And further on: *“Shihab al-Din was of moderate stature, wore a beard and had a ruddy complexion. His hair was as disorderly as his clothes. He paid little attention to his exterior and to his speech. But at his radiance one could immediately recognize the great Sufi master in him. Most of the scholars, theologians and jurists looked upon him as magician.”*

Shahrazuri too reports about Suhrawardi that he preferred an unpretentious appearance. The biographer quotes a certain Ibn Raqiqa who tells us: 8)

“I was walking with Shihabuddin in the mosque at Mayyafariqin, and he was wearing a short blue quilted tunic. On his head was wound a cloth and on his feet were slippers. A friend of mine saw me and, approaching, asked, “Why are you walking with this donkey-driver?” ‘Watch what you say’, I replied, ‘for this is the lord of the age, Shihabuddin of Suhraward!’ He expressed astonishment at this and walked away.”

But Suhrawardi could also show contrary traits. He knew quite well how to behave at court. It is told that he changed his style as occasion demanded and appeared once in courtly outfit, the next day in simple garments.

Though Suhrawardi preferred to be in solitude, he loved the ecstatic dances and songs of the Sufis. Shahrazuri reports: *“He was unconcerned with cultivating people and rather maintained silence, occupied with himself. He loved sama' and music.” 8)*

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The Shaykh al-Ishraq was not only a mad derwish but also “knowledgable in fiqh (jurisprudence), hadith (dicta of the Prophet), and usul (legal principles)”, reports Shahrazuri. He was a brilliant logician and as well versed in the Peripatetic philosophy of his time as in the tradition of the Neoplatonists and the Zoroastrians. His alert spirit, bright intellect and precise tongue made him a veritable opponent in public disputes. Shahrazuri tells us about Suhrawardi's stay at the court of Malik al-Zahir in Aleppo:

“Being frank in his discourses defending the beliefs of the philosophers, he showed how silly his opponent's opinions were, disputed with them, and humiliated them in public.” 9)

This fits to a description which the Shaykh himself gives us. In the introduction to his treatise *“The Sound of Gabriel's Wing”* he tells us how he cut an ignorant person down to size: *“When his audacity reached such proportions, I set to work to bring him down a notch or two. Throwing the mantle of retaliation over my shoulders and rolling up the sleeves of forbearance, I sat back on the heels of shrewdness and took to cursing and using vulgar language.”* All right”, I said, *“I am going to set you straight on the sound of Gabriel's wing. If you are a man and know anything of manliness, you'd better understand.”* 10)

The Shaykh was well aware of his skills. Once, when he was asked: *“Which of you is more learned, you or Avicenna?”* He replied: *“We may be on a par, or I may be a little better than he is in the discursive, but I certainly surpass him in the revelatory and intuitive.”* 11)

From Shahrazuri we know that Suhrawardi had looked for a companion with spiritual insight equal to his, but failed to find one. Yet the 12th century was a blossom time of Sufism, after all. Ibn Arabi was a contemporary of Suhrawardi just as Rumi and his beloved teacher Shams-i Tabrizi. The latter seems to have met Suhrawardi personally, because in his autobiography, consisting of quotes gathered together by his disciples, a whole section is dedicated to the Shaykh Maqtul. But besides some rather neutral remarks about his execution we only come to know that Suhrawardi didn't like money: *“This Shihab ad-Din wanted to do away with dirhems and dinars, because they are the cause of disturbances and the cutting off of hands and heads. The people's transactions should be with something else.”* 12)

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A dark point in Suhrawardi's life is his relationship to women. In the biographical reports there are no hints to love affairs or a marriage, as far as I know. Fact is that Suhrawardi shows clear misogynical traits in his work. The most extreme passage of this kind I found in part two, fifth discourse of his *Philosophy of Illumination*: 13)

“The two faculties of love and dominance are stirred so that the male desires to dominate the female. From the world of light, a love mixed with dominance occurs in the male and a love mixed with abasement occurs in the female in the proportion of cause and effect, (...) each desires to be united with his mate so as to lift the veil of barriers.”

A look at the Arabic original shows that Suhrawardi here confronts the term “qahr” (dominance) with “dhull”, which means “abasement, subjugation”. The devaluation of the feminine is very clear. In other passages Suhrawardi equates the “female state” with weakness or lower spiritual development, for example when he writes in his *“The Book of Radiance”*: *“Women and children are specified here because their minds are weak.”* 14)

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Another facet of Suhrawardi's personality was his political engagement, which has been

analyzed by Hossein Ziai. 15) Despite Shams' remark about Suhrawardi's approach to money we don't have to imagine him as a sort of social anarchist. For him, the "polis" (city) was not a subject of inquiry, as it was for Plato. He didn't discuss the question of justice or social framework. But he was highly interested in the old Persian concept of "divine governance" that he developed further in his own specific manner.

According to Iranian tradition the kings were illumined by a divine light (kharra-yi kiyani), that bestowed them with healing and occult powers and the skills they need to rule the country. But unlike his ancestors Suhrawardi held that not only kings can receive this divine light and the ability to rule, but every person who is open for the revelation of God. In the introduction to his Hikmat al-Ishraq (Philosophy of Illumination) he develops the idea of the divine philosopher who becomes God's vicegerent on earth and possibly also a wordly ruler: 16)

"Rather, the imam-philosopher may openly be in command or in occultation – he whom the multitude refer to as "the pole" - and he will have the leadership even if he is in utmost concealment. When earthly rule is in such a philosopher's hands, the age will be a luminous one; but if the age is without divine management, darkness will be triumphant."

But how does a young prince achieve the skills of a veritable ruler? According to Ziai Suhrawardi seems to have felt a real mission to give the rulers of his time an insight into the wisdom of illumination. "The Book of Radiance" for example is a Persian condensation of Suhrawardi's philosophical viewpoints, written for and dedicated to the Seljuk ruler Sulayman Shah, a great patron of philosophy. The shaykh also sought the patronage of other Seljuk rulers, namely prince 'Ala'al-Din Kay-Qubad, Malik 'Imad al-Din Urtuq, ruler of Kharput, and the Ayyubid King Saladin's young son al-Malik al-Zahir. 17)

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Unfortunately these political ambitions did not bring him any good. Ziai even holds that these very ambitions were the reason for Saladin's decision to enforce the shaykh's execution. But before I start to discuss this theory I'd like to report how the Sufi master came to death. 18)

The Shaykh al-Ishraq came to Aleppo in 1183, one year after sultan Salah ad-Din 19) had entrusted his young son Malik al-Zahir with the regency over the city. Suhrawardi was then 29 years old, the prince only twelve years (it is reported that he was born in Egypt in 1171). The shaykh attended the leading madrasas (schools) of the town – initially the Jalawiyah, and eventually the Nuriyyah – where he engaged Hanbalite jurists in debate. He soon got access to the court and won the friendship of the prince.

According to official reports Suhrawardi was accused of showing anti-Shari'ah sentiments and putting his own authority above the divine law. It is told that he claimed to be a prophet, capable of performing miracles. And Shahrazuri tells us: *"I have heard that some of his companions used to call him Abu'l-Futuh, and God knows best as to the veracity of this."* 20)

Thackston explains that the word Futuh means *"miraculous apparition or conjuring of something out of the 'other world'". 'Abu'l-Futuh means 'father', or 'possessor', of such*

apparitions.” 20) Ziai interprets this passage as proof that also the shaykh's own followers were convinced of his prophethood.

No matter how, it didn't last long until Suhrawardi was looked upon as infidel, ripe for execution. His opponents advised al-Malik to put the shaykh to death. And when he opposed, they addressed their request to his father Saladin in Damascus. But al-Malik also resisted the calls of his father to execute the friend. Not even the threat to lose the regency over Aleppo could change his mind. But then the sultan sent a letter demanding the execution written by one of his judges of the land, Qadi al-Fadil, and al-Zahir had to give in.

Vilayat Inayat Khan tells about Suhrawardis' execution (without source), that he was asked: *“Do you think that there can be a prophet after Mohammed?”* The shaykh said: *“Well God is free, if he wants, to bring another prophet.”* His head was taken off for having said that.” 21)

Shahrazuri reports about the circumstances of his death: *“Some claim that he was imprisoned and denied food; others say he starved himself until he died. Some say he was strangled with a cord, while others say he was put to death by the sword. It is said that (his body) was thrown down from the citadel and burned.”* 22)

And the historian Ibn Khallikan claims: *“One Friday after prayer at the end of Dhu'l Hijja 587, al-Shihab al-Suhrawardi was brought out dead from prison in Aleppo, and his disciples dispersed.”* 23)

The end of Dhu'l Hijja 587 would mean that Suhrawardi died in January 1192, presumably January 17th. Other sources claim that he died on 29 July 1191, at the age of 36 or 38. 24)

To illuminate the background of this execution, Mehdi Amin Razavi 25) explains that Suhrawardi lived during a turbulent period when Northern Syria was undergoing a major change from being a strong Shi'ite center to a Sunni dominated region. The shaykh came to Aleppo when this transformation took place and when Saladin, who had studied Sunni theology, was seen as the last hope for Muslims to conquer the Crusaders. In this situation the jurists couldn't tolerate that a young philosopher with Shi'ite tendencies seemingly corrupted the mind of Saladin's son.

As mystic Suhrawardi tried to demonstrate that there is only one universal truth at the heart of all divinely revealed traditions. At a time when Christians and Muslims were fighting a bloody war, this message of unity was perceived to be a dangerous and even heretical message. To that came Suhrawardi's ideas of the philosopher king and his supposed claim to be a prophet. Ziai says: *“Only if he is the initiator of a new and radical “branch” in philosophy or mysticism, a view ardently held by many of his contemporaries, does his execution make sense.”* 26)

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These evidences could suggest that Suhrawardi had a polarizing character. Of course, he did polarize – because of his for that time rather radical viewpoints. But at the same time he had an amazing ability to unite opposites, to see the common and to deal with contradictions. In his philosophy Suhrawardi combined elements from Zoroastrism,

Pythagoreanism, Platonism, Hermeticism and Islam. According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr the shaykh believed, like many authors of the middle ages, that God revealed himself first to the prophet Idris or Hermes. This wisdom then divided into two branches. One of them came to Persia, the other to Egypt and Greece and there from to the Islamic world. Nasr: *“The Master of Ishraq therefore considered himself as the focal point at which the two traditions of wisdom that had at one time issued forth from the same source were once again unified.”* 27)

Suhrawardi promoted the idea of universal wisdom, the 'philosophia perennis et universalis', *“a Universe in which was revealed the transcendent unity underlying the different revelations of the truth”* (Nasr). 28)

The Shaykh al-Ishraq was a brilliant thinker. His philosophy of Illumination and his insights concerning “knowledge by presence” have great influence on Islamic philosophy up to our time. One of his best known followers is the Iranian philosopher Mulla Sadra. Some of the shaykh's works even reached India. The central figure in this branch of tradition is Azar Kayvan, who left Iran for India during the reign of the Moghul emperor Akbar and founded an Ishraqi Illuminationist School with Hindu, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist and Zoroastrian disciples. 29) There existed translations of Suhrawardi's works into Hebrew. Only in the Western world Suhrawardi stayed quite unknown because of the lack of a Latin translation.

Knowledge by presence

There is a lot of authors who discussed Suhrawardi's works and made summaries of his most important ideas and principles. Recommended readings are Zia Inayat Khan's article “Illuminative presence” and Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi's book “The principles of Epistemology in Islamic Philosophy”. Henry Corbin examines the Zoroastrian heritage in Suhrawardi's works, John Walbridge emphasizes Suhrawardi's connection with the Hermetic and Neoplatonic tradition (see references).

One of the central insights of Suhrawardi, perhaps the very basis of his philosophy and epistemology, was his exploration of the question of knowledge and especially self-knowledge. The initial inspiration was a dream he had during a long and deep retreat. He dreamt of Aristotle (it is likely that he dreamt of the author of “The Enneads”, a book that at this time was ascribed to Aristotle, but in fact was written by Plotinus) and shared with him his problem of knowledge: 30)

“Q.: How can we as human beings ever have knowledge at all?

A.: Think introvertively of yourself. If you do so, you will certainly find out what truly answers your question.

Q.: But how?

A.: If I introvertively consider myself, I will find in all certainty that I am truly aware of myself in such a way that I can never miss myself. This state of self-certainty convinces me that my awareness of myself does not mean anything but the awareness of “myself”, “by” myself, not by anyone or anything else. If I were aware of myself “by” anyone or anything else, it would obviously mean that the awareness of myself belonged to another active power which is not myself. In this case there would be a knowing subject operating in myself in knowing myself. Thus it would not be myself that knows myself. But it has been assumed that it is the very performative 'I' as the subject reality of myself who knows myself.”

This dream became the seed for a whole new philosophical vision, the philosophy of knowledge by presence or 'ilm al-huduri". Suhrawardi distinguished between knowledge by correspondence and knowledge by presence. Most of our knowledge conventionally belongs to the category of knowledge by correspondence which means that one creates in the mind an image that corresponds to an outer object. We know the outer object by knowledge of the inner object. But how do we know this inner object?

Inner knowledge or self-knowledge, Suhrawardi argues, can never take place through a corresponding image, a representation: 31)

"A thing that exists in itself (al-qa'im bi'l-dhat) and is conscious of itself does not know itself through a representation (al-mithal) of itself appearing in itself.

This is because, if, in knowing one's self, one were to make a representation of oneself, since this representation of his 'I-ness' (ana'iyah) could never be the reality of that 'I-ness'. It would be then such that, that representation is 'it' in relation to the 'I-ness', and not 'I'. Therefore, the thing apprehended is the representation. It thus follows that the apprehension of 'I-ness' would be exactly what is the apprehension of 'it-ness' (huwa huwa), and that the apprehension of the reality of 'I-ness' would be therefore exactly the apprehension of what is not 'I-ness'.

This is an absurdity.

On the other hand, this absurdity does not follow in the case of apprehension of external objects, for the representation and to which that representation belongs are both 'it's'."

A further argument, that Suhrawardi stresses, is the one that also occurs in one of the Nasruddin tales (a sort of Arabic 'Münchhausen') – if I knew myself through a representation, how could I know that this representation is myself? Or as Nasruddin asks the shopkeeper, how he could state that he had seen Nasruddin coming in, if he never had seen him before. In Suhrawardi's words: 32)

"Again, assuming that it (i.e., self-knowledge) is by representation, then if one does not know that that representation is one's own, one thus never knows that one has ever known oneself. But if one supposedly knows that the representation belongs to himself, one must then already have known himself with no representation. However, it is inconceivable that one apprehends himself by means of something superadded to himself, since this superaddition would serve as an attribute to one's self. If this is so, then, one decides that every attribute associated with one's reality, no matter whether it is knowledge or another attribute, belongs to one's own reality, and it then implies that one has known himself before knowing these attributes and even without them.

The conclusion is that one does not know one's self through one's superadded attributes among which is one's representation of one's self."

Thus Suhrawardi concludes that Being and Knowing are ultimately indistinguishable: 33)

"Since you are not absent from your own reality (dhatuk) and from your awareness of that reality, and it is not possible that this awareness be by a representation or any superaddition, it thus follows that in this awareness of your reality you need not have anything besides the very reality of yourself, which is apparent to yourself or, if you wish, not absent from yourself.

Consequently, it is necessary that the apprehension of the reality of the self itself, is

only by itself, according to what that self 'is' in its being, just as it is necessary that you are never absent from your reality, and from whatever your reality may consist on. On the other hand, whatever your reality is absent from, like those organs, viz. heart, lungs, brain and all intermediate forms and modes, no matter whether they are modes of darkness or of light, it is not implied in that constant awareness of your reality. Your constant conscious reality is therefore not a material organ, neither is it an intermediary transcendent one. Had your reality consisted of any of these things, you, as the constant and unfading consciousness of yourself, would never become absent from it.”

According to Suhrawardi self-knowledge, the self-knowing subject and the self-known object are all the same. This is a rather intuitive form of knowledge. But ultimately all knowledge is grounded in knowledge by presence. Zia Inayat Khan: 34)

“In the case of conceptual knowledge, an external object is conceived by correspondence to an internal representation. While the external object remains absent, the internal representation is known by its presence within the mind (Suhrawardi, 1993a, p.72). Otherwise, to know a representation conceptually would require another representation, which would in turn require another, ad infinitum. Thus even when something is known by correspondence, the representation by which it is known is known by presence.”

Philosophy of Lights

The theory of knowledge by presence is closely interwoven with Suhrawardi's illuminative philosophy or science of lights. As in his theory of knowledge by presence the Shaykh here too made visible the shortcomings of the methods of the Peripatetics and transcended them. He first discussed the question of definition and stated that definition ultimately depends on the identification of a self-evident reality. This self-evident reality he found in light (Arabic: 'nur'): *“Anything in existence that requires no definition or explanation is evident. Since there is nothing more evident than light, there is nothing less in need of definition.”* 35)

As Zia Inayat Khan emphasizes in his article 36), this does not automatically mean physical light. By apparency is meant the “knowability” of things, and this is not restricted to visible things. Quite the contrary, physical light according to Suhrawardi is only light in a derivative sense. Its apparency is dependent on a substratum and thus a matter of accident.

But Suhrawardi concludes that this physical light has a distinct and sufficient cause for its existence which must be pure light or immaterial light (see his comparison with a picture in a mirror, quoted below). This light does not only make things apparent, but is also apparent to itself. Light in its immaculate state is thus identical with consciousness.

All immaterial lights vary only in degree of intensity, but are from the same luminous reality. Within this hierarchy of lights the most intense light is the “Light of Lights” (nur al-anwar), the necessary being that is the ultimate sufficient cause. Each light is illuminated in proportion to its ontological proximity to this Light of Lights.

And here the theory of knowledge by presence and the science of lights come together, because the very self that knows itself is explained by Suhrawardi as immaterial light,

as luminous entity that is able to know itself and others.

Hurqalya or the World of the Image

The theory of knowledge by presence also opens the possibility to comprehend and explain mystic experiences. One of the most important examples is the doctrine of “the World of the Image” ('alam al-mithal), which Pir Zia calls “one of the most distinctive contributions of the illuminative philosophy”. 37)

In most of his works Suhrawardi, although sometimes only indirectly, alludes to a sort of spiritual interworld. In his mystical treatises he calls it “na-koja-abad” or “the land of nowhere”, a world of the image that is neither identifiable with the world of abstract ideas nor the sensible world of physical forms. It is a sort of barzakh, an interworld, that intervenes and mediates between the two. In this world spirits become corporealized and bodies spiritualized.

To explain the phenomena of this world, Suhrawardi uses in his “Philosophy of Illumination” the comparison with a picture in a mirror: 38)

“The truth is that forms seen in mirrors, just like imaginative forms, are not imprinted materially, either on the mirror or on the imagination. No, they are “bodies in suspension”, not depending on a substratum (...). They certainly have places where they appear, epiphanic places (mazahir), but they are not materially contained in them. Certainly the mirror is the place of the apparition of forms seen in it, but the forms themselves are “in suspension” there; there they are neither like material things in a place in a space, nor like an accident in its substratum. Certainly the active imagination is the place of apparition of imaginative forms, but the forms themselves are “in suspense”; they are neither in this place, nor in the substratum. Now if in the case of mirrors we accept the existence of an autonomous image, even though it is only on the surface, without depth or anything back of it, and even though that of which it is the image is an accident (for example, the accidental form of Zayd, immanent in his matter), then one will admit a fortiori the existence of a substantial quiddity, that of the archetype (substantial, in fact, since independent of any substratum) having an accidental image (the form of Zayd immanent in his matter). Thus imperfect light is analogous to perfect light. Understand.”

Suhrawardi's commentator Qutbuddin Shirazi (13th century) adds to this passage: 38)

“(...) 'Understand', the author says to us. Here, indeed, we have a magnificent secret, something of supreme importance. It means that the totality of the things which exist in the higher world have their nadir and their analogue in the lower world. All these things are known by their nadir and their analogue. Then, when you have learned to know, as is necessary, the reality of ephemeral lights, your knowledge helps you to know the immaterial, substantial Lights. The purpose of all this is that you should know that the imperfect, accidental light which is that of the sun of the sensory world is the image of the perfect substantial light, which is the sun of the world of the Intelligence, the Light of Lights. In the same way, the light of each ephemeral state is the image of an immaterial substantial light. This is an immense subject, offering many mystical experiences. Hence the author's imperative: 'Understand!'"

For every thing in our world exists a counterpart in this world of Hurqalya. These

images, or angels, are also palpable to the inner senses of active imagination, and interaction with them is possible. This is the world of dreams, especially of lucid dreaming, of myths and poetry. Amongst the figures of Hurqalya Suhrawardi ascribes special importance to Hurakhsh, angel of the sun, who – as Qutbuddin Shirazi explained – is seen as direct correspondence to the Light of Lights. But Suhrawardi also mentions contacts to “souls of the past”: 39)

“The experience of authentic raptures in the world of Hurqalya depends on the magnificent prince, Hurakhsh, the most sublime of those who have assumed a body, the greatly venerated one who, in the terminology of the Oriental theosophy, is the Supreme Face of God. It is he who sustains the meditation of the soul by lavishing light upon it, and he is witness of its contemplation. There are also visitations and communications from other celestial princes. Sometimes the visitation consists of the manifestation of certain of these celestial princes in epiphanic forms or places appropriate to the moment when they show themselves to the perfected recluse. Sometimes it is the souls of the past which induce an awakening or an inner call.”

The more actively the self is able to direct these imaginations, the clearer these visions and dreams become. As Zia Inayat Khan states: 40)

“The authority of the self over its faculties of perception and cognition is ultimately a function of its presence to itself, since they are known by their presence to it. By disidentifying with matter, and in this way intensifying and deepening its apprehension of itself, the self stands to enhance all of its direct perceptions, which are in fact effusions of itself.”

In Suhrawardi's own words: *“For the seeker, this way consists first of all in investigating his knowledge of himself, and then in raising himself to the knowledge of that which is above him.”* 41)

Thus the world of image can be entered through knowledge by presence, and this ability increases with the degree to which the self apprehends itself and accordingly partakes of the illumination of the Light of Lights. Zia Inayat Khan: 42)

“Mystical perception, or witnessing-illumination (mushahada-ishraq) takes place in this context, when a luminous subject comes into direct contact with a luminous object, and both subject and object are bathed in the light of the Light of lights (Ziai, 1990, pp. 155-161). The subject makes its object known in the light of its own self-consciousness, which is purely an epiphany of the presence of the Light of Lights, within which the object is immersed. Knowledge in this presential mode utterly transcends the subject-object dichotomy that characterizes representational knowledge.”

Ingrid Dengg, Vienna 2007

Notes:

1. Thackston 1999, p. 71.
2. Razavi 1997, p. 1.
3. Corbin 1975, p. 20.
4. Thackston 1999, p. xii.

5. Thackston 1999, p. x.
6. I don't know if he really was of Kurdish origin. Certain is that he was born in the Kurdish part of Iran and enjoyed living in Kurdish areas like Diyarbakir, Southeastern Anatolia.
7. Kaveh 2003, p. 6f., translation mine.
8. Thackston 1999, p. x.
9. Thackston 1999, p. xi.
10. Thackston 1999, p. 9.
11. Thackston 1999, p. xiii.
12. Chittick 2004, p. 65; Kaveh quotes in his introduction to "Der Trost der Liebenden" also more friendly statements of Shams, but these are clearly addressed to another Shihab, namely Shihab Hariwa or Nishabury.
13. Philosophy of Illumination 1999 (part II, fifth discourse), p. 147
14. Book of Radiance, chapt. 10, p. 82
15. Ziai 1992, ibl., s.a. Walbridge 2001, p. 63 f.
16. Ziai 1992, p. 323
17. Book of Radiance, p. xiv f.
18. A survey over the reports concerning Suhraward's death see Ziai 1992 p. 336ff.
19. Salah ad-Din Yusuf bin Ayyub (1137/38 – 1193), ruler over Egypt, Yemen and Syria, of Kurdish origin; after he had defeated the Crusaders in the battle of Hattin on 4 July 1187, he conquered Jerusalem on 2 October, same year.
20. Thackston 1999, p. xii;
21. Vilayat Inayat Khan, p. 33.
22. Thackston 1999, p. xii.
23. Walbridge 2000, p. 211.
24. Corbin 1975, p. 20.
25. Razavi 1997, p.3
26. Ziai 1992, p. 340
27. Nasr 1976, p. 62
28. Nasr 1976, p. 82
29. In this surrounding the "Dabistan" was written, probably the first ever encyclopedia of religions that really tried to understand different religions. The author was Azar Kayvan's son who wrote under a pseudonym.
30. Yazdi, p. 52
31. Yazdi, p. 74 f.
32. Yazdi, p. 83 f.
33. Yazdi, p. 87
34. Zia Inayat Khan 2000, p. 152
35. Philosophy of Illumination 1999, p. 76
36. Zia Inayat Khan 2000, p. 149
37. Zia Inayat Khan 2000, p. 153
38. In this quote (Philosophy of Illumination, par. 225) I follow the translation of Corbin 1989, p. 127 f., which also includes the commentary of Qutbuiddin Shirazi.
39. Book of Conversations, quoted by Corbin 1989, p. 123
40. Zia Inayat Khan 2000, p. 154 f.
41. Book of Elucidations, quoted by Corbin 1989, p. 119 f.
42. Zia Inayat Khan 2000, p. 155

Works:

Suhrawardi's works consist of three groups or types:

1. The philosophical works:

Most of these works are written in the scientific language of his time, i.e. Arabic; two of the shorter one's, which are addressed to Seljuk rulers, are in Persian – these are "The Book of Radiance" and "Imadin Tablets".

- Intimations (al-Talwihat)
- Apposites (al-Muqawamat)
- Paths and Havens (al-Mashari' wa al-Mutarahat)
- Philosophy of Illumination (Hikmat al-Ishraq)
- 'Imadin Tablets (al-Alwah al-'Imadiyyah)
- Temples of Light (Hayakil al-Nur)
- The Book of Radiance (Partaw-nama)
- On Knowledge of God (Yazdan Shinakht)

2. The allegorical treatises:

Language: Persian or Arabic.

- A Tale of the Occidental Exile (Qissat al-Ghurbat al-Gharbiyyah)
- The Treatise of the Birds (Risalat al-Tayr)
- The Sound of Gabriel's Wing (Avaz-i Par-i Jibra'il)
- The Red Intellect ('Aql-i Surkh)
- A Day with a Group of Sufis (Ruzi ba Jama'at-i Sufiyan)
- On the State of Childhood (Fi Halat al-Tufuliyyah)
- On the Reality of Love (Fi Haqiqat al-'Ishq)
- The Language of the Ants (Lughat-i Muran)
- The Simurgh's Shriill Cry (Safir-i Simurgh)

In these treatises Suhrawardi presents different aspects of the mystic journey; he uses a very symbolic language which seems to be not only due to tradition but also an attempt to make himself less vulnerable overfor narrowminded contemporaries.

3. Prayers and invocations:

Language: Arabic; some of the prayers were sist translated by Jamal Atalla and published in the esoteric magazine "Elixir" (see references).

Editions and Translations of Suhrawardi's Works:

Sohrabi, Jila, Kaveh Dalir Azar und Axel Monte: Der Trost der Liebenden. Fünf mystische Traktate von Schahab ad-Din Sohrawardi, Verlag Kaveh Dalir Azar, Köln 2003

al-Suhrawardi, Shihab al-Din Yahya: A Celestial Prayer-Book: Selected Orisons from the Waridat wa Taqdisat, translated by Jamal Atalla. In: Elixir, Issue Four, New Lebanon, Spring 2007, p. 72 - 78.

Sohrawardi: *The Book of Radiance. A Parallel English-Persian Text*, edited and translated with an introduction by Hossein Ziai; Costa Mesa, California 1998.

Sohrawardi: *The Philosophy of Illumination. A new critical edition of the text of Hikmat al-ishraq with English translation, notes, commentary and introduction* by John Walbridge & Hossein Ziai. Provo, Utah 1999.

Sohrawardi, Shihabuddin Yahya: *The Philosophical Allegories and Mystical Treatises. A Parallel Persian-English Text*, edited and translated with an Introduction by Wheeler M. Thackston Jr.; Mazda Publishers, California 1999

Sohrawardi: *The Shape of Light. Haykal al-Nur. Interpreted* by Shaykh Tosun Bayrak al-Jerrahi al-Halveti. Louisville, Kentucky 1998.

Other references:

Chittick, William C.: *Me & Rumi. The Autobiography of Shams-i Tabrizi*. Louisville, Kentucky 2004.

Corbin, Henry: *Sohrawardi d'Alep. Collection Hermes. Fata Morgana* 1975.

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Walbridge, John: *The Leaven of the Ancients. Sohrawardi and the Heritage of the Greeks*. Albany: State University of New York Press 2000.

Walbridge, John: *The Wisdom of the Mystic East. Sohrawardi and Platonic Orientalism*. Albany: State University of New York Press 2001.

Yazdi, Mehdi Ha'iri: *The Principles of Epistemology in Islamic Philosophy. Knowledge by Presence*. Albany, State University of New York Press 1992.

Ziai, Hossein: The Source and Nature of Authority. In: The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy. Essays in Honor of Nuhsin S. Mahdi, edited by Charles E. Butterworth. Cambridge, Massachusetts 1992, p. 304 – 344.