

The Symbolic Language of *Ĕikāya* as the “Interpretative Mi'rāj” of the Soul within its Existential Drama

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Abstract

This article is a consideration of the inner meanings and functions of the *Ĕikāyât*, or visionary treatises, written by such Islamic mystics as Jāmî, Suhrawardî, Niřâmî and Ibn Sinâ. The article focuses on the nature of symbolism and in particular on the mystical and interiorizing interpretation of symbolism which is demanded by these texts. As the author writes, "*Ĕikāya* does not take into account only the symbolic language of the Text, but also the concomitant *interiorization* of the Text, the semantic unburdening of which has to take place in the inner history and geography of the soul...these stories call for applied spirituality, a spirituality of which the metahistorical events are brought to completion only for God."

In the second part of the article the author focuses in particular on the '*Ta'wîl* or the spiritual exegesis of Love' which is " a pure act of mystical death and spiritual resurrection, the act of emerging from and entering into new cognitive levels, which is what constitutes the interpretative *mi'rāj* of every living soul." In this discussion he pays particular attention to the insights of 'Ayn al-Quġġat Hamadānî in this regard.

Key Terms: *Ĕikāya*, spiritual exegesis (*ta'wîl*), hermeneutics, mysticism, celestial ascent (*mi'rāj*).

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Symbolic language is the most powerful tool of the divine revelation through the sacred Text, and no less so in the hermeneutic process that has prompted every serious esoteric tradition, including the Sufi, *irfān* tradition of the Muslims, in the sense of spiritual exegesis - *ta'wīl* - in particular. It is a language that goes beyond the historical, literal level, beyond the level of the allegorical and the anagogic, and even transcends the linguistic level that uses pure metaphysical signs, for the fundamental symbolism within the eternal, unchanging Text of the Divine conceals the very substance of that which is the metalanguage of the Divine and language as the primordial, pre-existent “face” – the nature of each thing and all existents. The symbolic language of the divine Text resides symbolically in the dominion of metahistorical language as the elemental nature or face of all things and in the dominion of the sacrohistorical linguistic “embodiment” of the primordial meaning, nature or face of all things and every existent. The symbolic language of the eternal Text of the Divine is thus a “symbol” of the two faces of the Creator’s words *Kun!* – *Be!* – *Fiat lux!* – one the face that reveals what the divine Text is within the Divine Knowledge itself, as the Word of God, never uttered to the full but perpetually expressed, which, in its creative self-discovery, institutes the process of being and cognition and, in that process, leaves ineradicable traces of the innumerable aspects (*wujūh*) of the eternal divine substances – the *kibrīt aĕmar* (red sulphur); the other the face that serves, at the level of the sacrohistorical, sacrolinguistic and cosmological, as the unmediating veil that connects the uttered word (*Logos prophorikos*) and the Word latent in the Godhead (*Logos endiathetos*), but also acts as a barrier preventing the form of the “earthly face” of the Word of God (*musĕaf mithāli*) from being confused with the pure meaning of the “celestial image” of the Word of God (*Qur’ān khiyāli*),¹ or the universe of the apparent, imaginary (*wahmi*) and of contingent reality from contaminating the universe of the imaginal (*khiyāli*), the absolutely real, the more real than all that is seen and experienced in the world below (*dunyā*), as so clearly expressed in a saying of the Messenger of Islam (a.s.): “*Men are asleep, and when they die they wake.*” And when we awake from the “world below” as the “world of divine sleep,” as Ibn ‘Arabi would say,² we are able to contemplate only the “waking state” of *al-mathal al-a’lā*, the most subtle Symbol at God’s disposal. It is in the light of that very Symbol that the

celestial Adam introduced himself, in the most subtle language, to the beings of light of the higher, most sublime, great celestial plenum (*al-mala' al-a'lā*) as he taught them the names of things and creatures, showing them not their concrete forms but their ideal images, that which they are in their secret reality, their primordial meaning, their primordial nature as such.

The symbolic language of the sacred Text is thus both the face or “obverse” and the “reverse” of the Word of God as such, its true reality (*al-ĕaqiqa*) and its veil, its robe, its “form,” its receptacle (*al-qābil*). The symbols available to the sacred Text are not only an opaque veil inexorably concealing the very “face” of the Word of God, but also a subtle veil requiring the thinking human spirit to leave its sensate universe and enter another or other universes within which it is meet to contemplate the hidden “face” of the Word of God with the most profound hermeneutic yearning and refined spiritual organs (*al-jawārih al-rīĕiyya*). This is the hermeneutic *exodus/eisodus*, *mabda'/ma'ād* that is required by the concept of *ta'wil* or of serious spiritual exegesis, which is there, by definition, to lead us to the actual wellspring and ur-origin of everything, from the unfathomable semantic depths of which every form and every meaning wells forth.³

Embarking on the path woven from seventy thousand veils of light and darkness, a step taken by leaving one universe of the Word of God and entering another, means quitting the path of the “*Khiār* of one’s being” and becoming a “disciple of *Khiār*.” No worthy disciple of *Khiār* can be satisfied with floating on the meniscus, on the sacrolinguistic foam of the luminous ocean of the Word of God, for the most insignificant straw can float on the surface; rather, they must make for the hidden depths of the uttered Ocean. Our departure for these depths marks our entry into our own hermeneutic *mi'rāj*, which cannot be realized without a powerful process of *interiorization* of the sacrolinguistic and sacrohistorical level of the sacred Text into the metalinguistic and metahistorical level of the meaning of the Text. It is a long, difficult and exhausting journey, but also regal, chivalric (*futīwwy*), and the spirit of every disciple of *Khiār* following that path must be provided with “two sandals:” one is love (*maĕabba*) and the other is hierowisdom (*ma'rifa ukhrawiyya*). This means that the journey along that path must be realized in line with the significance of the *mi'rāj*; it must follow a winding line (*'a-ra-ja*), for it is a journey that negotiates the vertical and horizontal, temporal and

spatial dimension of the Word of God, drawing on the power of *isomorphism* or simultaneous spatial and temporal contraction as it translates historical, quantitative cosmic space into the qualitative time of spiritual hierohistory, and quantitative, historical and cosmic, horizon-bound time into the qualitative, subtle, vertical “space” of the human soul, following the rhythmic order in which the Word of God realized its own descent from luminous ‘*Illiyiŷn* to us, creatures of the “lowest heaven.”⁴ It is in the same order and to the same rhythm, but now following an ascending, cognitive path, that the *disciple of Khiqr*, the *sālik* or *homo viator* follows his passage from one universe of the Word of God to another, for he is the chief knight of *ĕikāya* – the initiatory drama as personal existential drama of which the acts unfold as the dedicatory initiation of the *disciple of Khiqr* into the seven luminous depths of the Text, one by one, as witnessed by the Messenger of Islam (a.s.): “*unzila al-Qur’ān ‘alā sab’a aĕruf.*”

As already noted, *ĕikāya* does not take into account only the symbolic language of the Text, but also the concomitant *interiorization* of the Text, the semantic unburdening of which has to take place in the inner history and geography of the soul of the *disciple of Khiqr* himself. A proper *interiorization*, as a certain hermeneutic *taĕqīq*, depends on properly decoding, on deciphering the fundamental symbols of the Text and actualizing them beyond the soul itself. Initiatory dramas, spiritual romances – *ĕikāyāt* such as Ibn Sīnā’s and Suhrawardī’s *Ĕayy ibn Yaqīān*,⁵ Ibn Sīnā’s *Treatise of the Birds*,⁶ Suhrawardī’s *Vade Mecum of the Fedeli d’Amore* and *Occidental Exile*,⁷ Jāmī’s *Yīsuf and Zulaykhā*,⁸ Niĕāmī’s *Majnūn and Laylā*,⁹ and others of the same kind, all of them *ĕikāyāt* that clearly reveal the symbolic language on which the sacred Text in particular relies, especially through *al-mutashābihāt* or *amphibolous āyas* (*iltibās*), *āyas* of unfathomable semantic illusion – these stories call for applied spirituality, a spirituality of which the metahistorical events are brought to completion only for God, a *fait accompli*, given His eternal Knowledge, while for those who venture on a responsible interpretative *mi’rāj* they are events in the midst of an individual existential drama, events that must end in the human soul, beyond the soul itself, in the spiritual hierohistory that cannot advance without this kind of realization, while without advancing nor can the individual human soul grow in cognition and follow its own *scala perfectionis*. Just as the Qur’an unambiguously says: “*Do the people*

reckon that they will be left to say ‘We believe,’ and will not be tried?’ (XXIX:2) And the ultimate purpose of being tried is “*that He might try you, which one of you is fairer in works.*” (XI:7). In other words, which one of us will best translate the symbols of the Text into the living reality of the soul.

On the other hand, the symbolic language of *ĕikāya* in the Muslim interpretative tradition, imbued with the symbolic language of the sacred Text, demands of the author of *ĕikāya* to develop his own symbolic language, as is true of every science, and particularly of the spiritual science that feeds on the wellsprings of the living faith and eternal substance of the Text. The language of the great authors of *ĕikāya* has always been seductive, since it displays itself to us in outward form like any love story or other romance told in the language of everyday human experience, yet that same language draws us into the true meaning of the text, into the genuine drama of the human soul that is perpetually contending against the “Iblis of its being” and striving to *orient* itself by the metalinguistic and metahistorical horizons of the “Muĕammad of its being.” This is why a serious *ĕikāya*, as initiatory personal drama, is not read but listened to, lived and actualized in every detail as an event *par excellence* of the human soul. Every *ĕikāya* is in some sense the spiritual biography of its author, the realized destiny of the individual soul and the individual narrative, be it Sufi or philosophical, which its author narrates to his soul so as to restore to it the memory of its true, ur-ancestral abode and to keep it awake on its journey of return to that same abode. This return to the ur-ancestral home follows the same rhythm, though now as an ascent, rising through the same vertical by which the Word of God was sent down and clad in the sacrolinguistic garments of the Text of which the first earthly abode is the *musĕaf*, the plenitude of the revelation beneath whose sacrolinguistic foam flow the living waters of the metalinguistic “Face of God,” and behind whose sacrohistorical drama reverberate the living metahistorical events that range from the *mithāq* to Adam’s teaching the “great celestial plenum” (*al-mala’ al-a’lā*) the primordial nature of all creation, the semantic face itself of the divine metalanguage; finally, behind its sacrogeographical abode are concealed the metageographical emerald cities of *Jabarsa*, *Jabalqa* and *Hīrqalyā* on the far side of Mount *Qāf*. For each of these symbolic sacrolinguistic, sacrohistorical and sacrogeographical paradigms of the Text, the

responsible author of a *ĕikāya* was bound, in his own personal response to the Text, to decipher hermeneutically his own symbolic paradigms, usually personified as recognized sacrohistorical figures and set at the centre of their own existential drama as the realized destiny of their soul. The sacred Text locates its symbolic paradigms at the historical level, the level of historicist consciousness, for it is from that level that the spiritual traveller within us (*Photheinos anthropos, insān nīrānī*) sets off, emerging from the cosmic crypt by translating the exegesis of the Text into the exegesis of our own soul. We leaves the universe of historicist awareness and enter into the *imaginal*, gnostic universe of the soul, finding there a spiritual fortress in which the “Jibrīl of our being” has taken up abode; in the language of Simnānī, that symbol of the ideal, paradisaic nature of man, that “angel of humanity, (*rabb al-naw’ al-insānī*)” the “angel of Revelation and Cognition,” as Suhrawardī would put it, or “its personal angel, perfect human nature,” as Ibn Sīnā liked to express it in his three famous initiatory dramas. Every author of a *ĕikāya* locates his narrative in a historical context, associating it with concrete sacrohistorical figures or events, and placing it in recognizable sacrogeographical *topoi*. Every author of a *ĕikāya* also cautions us in the strictest terms not to allow our attention to remain captive to or confined reductively within cosmic time and space, but rather to reach into the *imaginal* world, into the hierohistory of our soul, for the theatrical narration of the *ĕikāya* is concerned not with this world, but with the personal spiritual drama that the soul must perform to the very last act, so as to return to the immediate proximity of the Divine, to its original homeland, to a state of perfect *taĕqīq*. This admonition is perhaps best illustrated by Suhrawardī’s “woe unto thee, if by thy country thou meanest Damascus, Baghdad, or any other city of this world.”¹⁰

In the way it is shaped linguistically, *ĕikāya* follows the idea of history and that of imitation, which is its fundamental meaning, given that history, as it records external events, facts and data, is quite simply *imitating*, *re-citing*, narrating anew an interior history, the history of the soul and the history of the world of the soul which is not the imaginary, transient world of illusion (*wahmī*), but the subtle, real, solid, *imaginal* (*khiyālī*) world, the world of the microcosmic *barzakh* located between *'aql* and *wahm*, between Intellect and Imagination. But that which merely imitates, in the sense of metahistorical events

of a pre-existent, celestial history enacted in the Event of the pre-existent Covenant (*Alast*, Qur'an, *A'rāf*, 172) in outward history, is imaginalized in the story or hierohistory of the human soul, is fulfilled and realized as a true and ultimately real event. That which discloses itself at the sacrohistorical level of the Text as the fundamental meaning conceived by means of the senses is realized, at the level of the inner history or gnostic consciousness of the soul, as a fait accompli, as a real event, as the transpired exegesis of the Text conceived by virtue of the transcendent organ of cognition. *Ta'wil*, the exegesis of the Text, embodied in its plenitude in the language of the *ĕikāya*, merely interprets the polyvalent sense or meaning of the Text at the level of the sacrohistorical consciousness, constantly pointing to their definitive occurrence in another world and at the level of an entirely different consciousness, the *imaginal* consciousness the events of which are ultimately fulfilled, attained not by means of the outward senses that prevail in the sacrohistorical view, but by the transcendent organ of cognition, the spiritual heart or the creative imagination, as the organ of transcendent cognition, which does not supply the spiritual traveller with abstract concepts, but with vivid images and real events that take place before his intuitive contemplation, at the very centre of the soul and beyond the soul itself. Unlike the historical view, which shackles every fact, every event within the world of cosmic time and space, and subjects them to the relentless erosion that results from the merciless action of transience, the gnostic or *imaginal* consciousness of the *hikaya*, which itself symbolizes applied hermeneutics or spiritual exegesis in action, by virtue of spiritual exegesis or *ta'wil*, preserves the truth of the Text and transmutes it to the level of the Event of which the “time” and “space” are the time and space of metahistory, the imaginal history of the human soul that beats in time with the subtle, Malakutian “time” (*zamān malakūtī*, *zamān lahīf*) that is never-ending. This “time” is “imaginal time” of which the imagined “past” and “present” are not a matter of something irretrievable, an event that has occurred for all time, but “time” of which the events, which wholly coincide with the “events” of the Text, remain open to a constantly occurring, sempiternal future that will continue to be the infinitely open potential and prospect of the act of spiritual hermeneutics or *ĕikāya* as applied hermeneutics, spiritual hermeneutics in action. Whether taken from the contents of the constituent source of faith or from the Muslim

interpretative tradition, be it philosophical or Sufi, *ĕikāya* merely hallows for us the idea of the historicization or imitation (*mimesis*) of a metahistorical event that must prevail over the level of the historical view and must irrevocably be consummated, take place or be fulfilled, as existential drama, in the story of our soul or beyond the soul as such.¹¹

Ėikāya is not there to elucidate or *re*-interpret a spiritual fact or event of metahistory by simply applying a methodological or technical procedure merely by narrating or restoring our awareness of the immortal, “eternally green,” Khiᄁrian source of cognition, but to induce us, as the leading protagonists, knights or pilgrims on our own interpretative *mi'rāj*, in unmediated fashion to find ourselves, to awaken at the very heart of the “imaginal event” of the soul that, as a result of this operation, changes and is transformed into the living reality of its celestial prototype, into its “Aĕmadian celestial nature” (*anthropos caelestes, insān samawī*) worthy of receiving and bearing the first theophany of the attributes of Beauty and Love, which are none other than the pure, essential attributes of the Beauty and Love of the Divine. This “Aĕmadian” celestial nature of all creation in its celestial, metahistorical and, later, “Muĕammadan”, sacrohistorical identity, became the most trustworthy witness of divine Beauty, a witness whose prophetic life and spiritual heritage attests to the end of days with the words “*God is Beautiful and He loves Beauty.*” His paradigmatic, exemplary nature, as the first theophany of divine Beauty revealed in its Adamic form, becomes a *maīhar*, *topos* or place of interpretation, of manifestation, or of the *anthropomorphosis* of the essential attribute of divine Beauty. The *maīhar*-place of the paradigmatic *anthropomorphosis* of the essential attribute of divine Beauty simultaneously becomes a place in which the attribute of divine Love clicks in an immediate, unrepeatably manner. This is why one of the many spiritual names of the Messenger of Islam (a.s.) is “Beloved of God” (*Ėabīb Allāh*), and why, in the view of Ruzbihān Baqlī Shīrāzī, he represented himself to the world as the “Messenger of the divine Eros,”¹² as one whose paradigmatic nature was not merely the reason for the divine creative process, but also the perfectly burnished mirror in which the theophany of divine Love and Beauty was reflected. Only the “Apostle of the divine Eros,” the Messenger of Islam (a.s.), could see with his inner vision this theophany, in the sense of the celestial, first *anthropomorphosis* of the essential

attributes of Beauty and Love; the Messenger whose spirit, at the acme of his own existential drama in the form of the transcendent man (*insān muhlaq*), the celestial Adam (*ādam samawī*, *ādam malakīti*), could only cry out, “*I saw my Lord in the fairest form,*” in the form of the essential (*dhāti*) aspect and not in any sense the individual aspect (*ġifati*) of the revealed attributes of Beauty and Love in the mirror of the heart, which, as a result of the action of the amphiboly (*iltibās*) of every symbol, including those of Love and Beauty, is a veil, an “unburnished mirror” for those who reside in the dominion of the twilight of illusion (*crepusculum vespertinum*, *wahm*), or a “burnished mirror” in which the paradigmatically individualized theophany of Beauty is reflected for those who, thanks to their cognitive state, reside in the dominion of the dawn of symbols (*crepusculum matutinum*, *khiyāl*), a dawn that breaks in the pure, dependable hierognosis of the Real, in the dominion and presence of that which is the Qur’anic term for *al-mathal al-a’lā*. The fairest form of the Lord is glimpsed by those to whom it shows itself in its essential Attributes as *al-mathal al-a’lā*, those who contemplate Beauty and Love with the face of the “Muhammad of their being,” for contemplation of this kind reaches to the primordial nature or face of things in which quiver the living traces of the essential Attributes of God.¹³ This potential for contemplation is the spiritual legacy of the one who is the Messenger of divine Beauty and Love – *Ēabīb Allāh* – for a spark from the light of his the first created spirit or intellect has remained in the soul of every human being. Only those whose soul is transformed by that spark into a “burning bush,” into the theophanic “bush” that burns but is not consumed, are capable of the plenitude of spiritual contemplation, for the “burning bush” is the very substance of the concentrated “Muċammadan soul,” the *kibrīt aċmar* or red sulphur, the symbol of the face of the Aċmadian-Muċammadan soul in the state of perfect existential *taċqīq* (*maqām maċmīd*) in which its substance coincides with the theophany of the essential attributes of Beauty and Love. It is the soul within us that is in love with Beauty and Love, which has escaped the looming shadow of the ego and the baneful influence of amphiboly (*iltibās*), an influence that reveals itself demonically, illusorily to the maturing soul as angelic, as real, and vice versa. Such a soul is the knight himself, the knightly soul personified in the figure of the *javānmard*, the “apostle of Love,” who has learned to read on the parchment of human love the laws of

eternal divine Love and to discern in that same text the exegesis of the text as the exegesis of the soul, giving thanks to its own initiation and complete mastery of the *ta'wîl* of Love. *Ta'wîl* or the spiritual exegesis of Love is a pure act of mystical death and spiritual resurrection, the act of emerging from and entering into new cognitive levels, which is what constitutes the interpretative *mi'râj* of every living soul. The symbolic death and resurrection that takes place in the process of spiritual exegesis, as the exegesis or *ta'wîl* of Love, is no mere technical procedure or physical transition from one state to another, but a state of genuine transformation (*tashakkulât*, *metanoia*), a transmutation of human love into divine Love, of the physical body into the true *caro spiritualis*, of historical facts into pure symbols, until at last the soul, as a Muĕammadan *maïhar* or *topos* of the theophanization of the essential attributes of divine Beauty and Love, becomes the very mirror of God within us, the “*Majnĕn* or *Yĕsuf* of our being,” as attested not only by the symbolic narratives of the Qur’an, but also by paradigmatic *ĕikâya*t such as Suhrawardĕ’s *Vade Mecum of the Fedeli d’Amore*, Jâmĕ’s *Yĕsuf and Zulaykhâ*, Niĕâmĕ’s *Laylâ and Majnĕn*, or Ibn Sinâ’s *Ĕayy ibn Yaqĕn*, *Treatise of the Birds* or *Salamân and Absâl*, to name only a few. This is the ultimate outcome of the *ta'wîl* of Love of which every *ĕikâya* speaks, and whose symbolic language makes possible the initiation and transmutation of every dedicated human love into divine Love.¹⁴

'Ayn al-Quĕât Hamadĕnĕ, for example, gives a certain definition of love but deals less, perhaps, with the actual notion of love and more with the world of love and the forms, states and dimensions in which it may manifest itself. For a “disciple of Khiĕr”, following the path of Love is a strictly prescribed obligation, like prayer, fasting, the pilgrimage and so on. Everyone, in Hamadĕnĕ’s view, should experience love; if not love for the Creator, which one is not always in a state to attain and experience, then at least love for a creature, in order to understand all the tribulations on the path of love. These tribulations are essentially reflected in the process of incessant self-liberation from our ego and the gradual, persistent surrender to love/Love, which is almost exactly analogous to the act of individual actualization of personal faith, the acme of which is recognized in the greater *jihâd*, as defined by the Prophet of Islam himself. Since love leads to God as does the act of personal faith, there can be no doubt that fostering sincere love for God and His creatures, like

wholehearted surrender to love, is a lifelong commandment and duty. The ultimate achievement of following the path of Love, or *ta’wil* of Love, is the acquisition and inculcation of the talent and ability that Hamadānī calls the “*majnīnian* spiritual preparation” within us, the spiritual power that enables us to equate our innermost self with the object of our love and to match the mirror of our heart with the sun’s disc of love at its zenith, the light of which, by virtue of total reflection, will shine into every corner of our personality. Then we are not only capable of looking without being dazzled at the sun’s disc of love reflected in the mirror of our heart, but also able to see its beauty in a way that is not bestowed on the world as a whole, but only on the “majnīns”, who have paid with their lives for the privilege of seeing the wondrous beauty of *Laylā’s face*.¹⁵ Those who are deprived of love die the death of the wholly unaware, as is the case too with the act of faith and cognition, while those who live for love and even give their lives for it gain both life and love, both wisdom and faith. Just as Aĕmad al-Ghazālī used to say of love that it was not good either to censure or to extol it, so Hamadānī stresses that he is not sure whether one should say of love that it is the creator or the created, for it is a spiritual reality that inspires every atom of the universe and exemplifies its face in every possible form of manifest being. He thus categorizes love as greater, ordinary and lesser. He says of lesser love that it is the love of the created for the Creator, while the greater love is the immense love that the Creator incessantly sheds over His creation, like a gratuitous, undeserved gift. He does not dare speak of ordinary love, for it is in fact the arena of our daily life in which we wage the battles of our greater *jihād* and witness the bloody combat within us between the *Jibrīl of our being*, the angel of light discernible through the seventy thousand veils of light within us, and the creature of the night, the *Iblīs of our being*, whom we sense through the seventy thousand veils of darkness in our heart. The sign of the *Jibrīl of our being* is the Divine Light within us, or God as the particular Light that illuminates the heavens and earth, not only on the pages of the *Liber mundi* (*Qur’ān al-āfāq*) and the *Liber revelatus* (*Qur’ān al-anfās*), but also in the heavenly and earthly spheres of our being in which is the quintessence of all the numbers, quantities and proportions of the universe (*kitāb marqīm*). All the signs and symbols of the world of Manifestation come to rest in the *malakīt* of the human soul, which is the earthly image and reflection of the heavenly *tabula*

secreta (al-lawĕ al-maĕfĭ). And the human heart, that burnished mirror of the human person that receives the vertical reflection of the Divine Light, is located at the very centre of the inner, microcosmic geography of the human person, between the east and west of the human soul on the one hand and the polar north of the human spirit on the other. Coming to rest in the nodal space of the human heart, the Divine Light reaches its zenithal eclipse, perfectly coinciding with the heart as the mirror of the entire inner self, thence to expand into the horizontal and the vertical of the human soul under total illuminary reflection. This spiritual state in the spiritual traveller or pilgrim of love is not merely meridional knowledge, but also meridional love and spiritual yearning, for seen in the mirror of the pilgrim's heart, directly confronting the reflection of the Muĕammadan beauty within it, the spiritual traveller is simultaneously faced with the place at which the focal points of the rays of light emanating from the impersonal Divine Countenance meet, reflected on the burnished surface of the mirror of the heart and dispersing into a rainbow on the tender, transparent walls of the human soul. The spiritual traveller's encounter with the hidden Divine Countenance is there so close that it is separated only by the veil of light of glory and transcendence, the same veil that will conceal the Divine Countenance from the gaze of the blessed inhabitants of *Jannah*, as the Prophet of Islam related. This veil will not be removed, but will remain in place to encourage and justify the incessant yearning and repeated waves of love intended to hold the *homo viator* in the immediate proximity of the Creator throughout his life, not to kill or crush him. The Prophet of Islam spoke of this veil on another occasion, too, as Abĭ Bakr related: he, Muĕammad, had been so close to the Lord God that they were separated only by a diamond veil (*yāqĭt bayqā*) in a green garden – the light-giving, crystalline veil that even Jibrĭl never reached. Indeed, Jibrĭl himself said that the distance between him and the Lord was measured by seventy thousand veils of light, and that to pass through even one of them would cause him to be consumed by fire.¹⁶ This is a spiritual state in which the *sālik* can neither die nor live, a state that is neither total separation nor union, in which the fire of love can no longer be endured, but it would be even worse to be the moth that is irresistibly attracted to the flame. The Prophet of Islam went where even Jibrĭl could not, through all the veils of light but the last, the veil of glory and transcendence. He was able to do so for the simple reason that

light is his spirit, created by God before all things in the universe, the quintessence of those veils of light except the last which, it would seem, consists of absolutely black, wholly opaque light. Since the light of the prophetic *Aĕmad* is but a grain of the light and beauty of the Divine *Aĕad*, it is clear that even the spirit of Muĕammad, a.s., as the spirit of the creature dearest to God (*Ēabīb Allāh*), must be stopped by that last veil of black light that is none other than the symbol of divine ineffability and unattainability itself, of absolute Essence. By analogy with the alternating sequence of denial of any divinity (*lā ilāha*) and the testimony to the one and only God (*illā'LLāh*), Hamadāni and certain other Sufi writers, among them Ibn Dawīd, Aĕmad Ghazālī, ‘Alā al-Dawla Simnāni, Najm al-Dīn Kubrā and Najm al-Dīn Razī, see the alternating black and white light as not only all these and other symbols, but also as underlining the importance of what they ultimately seek to stress as the ultimate truth: that is, God as the only Reality and sole Source of true being. In this instance, the black light would be the symbol of the infinite and eternal divine omniscience, the repository of all the concealed realities (*al-a'yān al-thābita*) of each thing and form, and the white light is the all-encompassing vessel of universal being in which everything God wishes to reveal is made manifest as a sign (*āyah*) or trace (*athar*) which in one way or another is designed to testify to His unseen presence everywhere and at every moment.

If one were to seek the supreme degree of love and the subtlest spiritual state which the pilgrim of Love may attain, it would be the state that Hamadāni refers to in this saying of the Prophet of Islam: “*I shared with God a moment from which even the angels nearest to God and all the messengers previously sent by God were excluded.*” This could have been the Prophet’s state of metaphysical liberation from everything superfluous (*faqr*), when *Aĕmad* and *Aĕad* are spiritually less than two bows-lengths’ apart (Qur’ān, LIII: 9). This is a state clearly associated with the Prophet’s *mi’rāj*, when he spoke of his community’s needs and God “listened,” and when he presented the spiritual face of his personality, and God “looked on.”¹⁷ When the black light (the symbol of infinite divine essential Love) of the Face of the *Aĕad*, the One and Only, falls on the mirror of the heart of *Aĕmad* (the Most Praised), it is fully dispersed into the entire spectrum of the rainbow, and no heart is so pliant to the challenges of this glorious dispersion of the black light as is *Aĕmad*’s, for only he, with the heart

that God personally shaped for him, is a perfectly polished gem among the ordinary stones of humankind. The scattering of the light takes place in the mirror of the Prophet's heart because it shines with the Muĉammadan light, the beauty of the Jibrīlan intelligence or white light (*aurora consurgens, crepusculum matutinum*), and the *nīr Muĉammadī*, the light of Muĉammad, in Hamadānī's view, is the light that first emerged in the primordial horizons of the coming manifesting being, whereas the black light, that descended from eternity onto the mirror of Aĉmad's heart, making it the reason for the entire divine creation (*causa exemplaris*), is the light of the universal eschatological twilight in whose perspectives the *peacock's tail* of pancosmic manifestation is furled and all the colours of the rainbow recombine to return to the black light (*crepusculum vespertinum*).¹⁸ From the eschatological perspective of the black light, the world attains the existential midnight of luminously black night, for everything and every form returns to its prototype, merging with it by virtue of the vision that is none other than the fruit of love, that pancosmic spiritual energy that attracts every creature to the Beloved, an energy sparked by the very sense of beatitude with which every creature comes as with its inevitable pledge. And the pledge, in turn, is reflected only in the Prophet of Islam as the sign of mercy to all beings (Qur'ān, XXI: 107), the mercy that Merciful God, who loves greatly (*al-Wadīd*), regards as His only chosen one and beloved (*Muġĥafā, Ēabīb*). Those who love God, Who must always be the ultimately Beloved, love the Prophet of Islam as His favourite; and those who love God's Favoured One, as the paragon cause of all of divine creation, must love the whole world and all that God has placed on the pages of Nature (*Qur'ān al-āfāq*) and the pages of History (*Qur'ān al-anfās*).¹⁹

When our soul becomes the mirror of God within us, it is then the true organ of spiritual contemplation, the mysterious eye, the organ of transcendent contemplation with which God sees the face or essence of things in the macro and the microcosmos, seeing the inner glory of His own Names and Attributes; its primordial nature then eludes our cognition, growing into a true mystery, into the "*reality (amr) of our Lord about which we are given so little knowledge*" (Qur'an, *al-Isra*, 85). It becomes the "gaze of God" that is beyond the reach of human eyes, while every human gaze is concentrated in its absolute supremacy. It is the state of the soul in which it has encountered itself

in its own stronghold (*shahrestān-e jān*), in its own *Malakītian* nature, in its ur-ancestral abode of *Nā-kojā-ābād*, to which it has been led by the royal road of the “Muĕammad of our being,” the path of Love and Knowledge, the path of the revealed wisdom of the “Jibrīl of our being” and the concealed, initiatory wisdom of the “Khiṛ of our being,” the path of exegesis of the Text and of exegesis of the interpretatively self-resurrected soul. As noted, the soul realizes and perfects its own exegesis beyond itself, using it as a potential that allows it no longer to be subordinate to the outside, alien world constructed by the historicist mindset by virtue of *mimesis* or the imitation of metahistorical events, but to incorporate that world into itself, already wholly accustomed to transcend it and, by bestowing upon it a habitation within itself, simultaneously liberates both itself and that world.²⁰

In the final event of its own *ta'wīl*, as the *ta'wīl* of Eros transfigured, the soul discloses itself to itself as the “rising Sun,” as a vision that still subsists only as a symbol, the symbol of the metahistorical Event (*alast*) in which the soul reaches only itself, and all the glory of that Event is already resounding within it.

In the light of all this, the conclusion is that the symbolic language of *ĕikāya* is the best possible mediator between the historicist and the *imaginal* or gnostic consciousness, between *historical fact*, as evidence of a sacrohistorical event, and symbol, which prefigures the metahistorical Event that now, in a wholly spiritual manner, takes place at the centre of the soul; for, however figurative, vivid and existential it may be, a symbol is *sublime silence*, it speaks and does not speak, and thereby *evokes* that which only it can express. And as it evokes this, stimulating our imagination, which orients us to the Khiṛian source of eternal, life-bestowing Knowledge, “*see, we are already on the way, walking in the company of the King's Messenger,*” as Ibn Sina would say in his *ĕikāya* ‘of Birds’.

Notes

1. Charles-André Gilis, *Qāf et les mystères du Coran Glorieux*, Albouraq, Beyrouth-Liban, 2006, pp. 83-88; cf. Ibn 'Arabi, *Le Dévoilement des effets du voyage*, bilingual Arabic and French text, trans. Denis Gril, Éditions de l'éclat, Paris, 1994, pp. 21-25.
2. See: Abdulah-efendija Bošnjak, 'Commentary on Fusus al-Hikam', III, chapter on Yusuf, Ibn Sina Institute, Sarajevo, 2010; cf. Michel Valsân, *L'Islam et la*

- fonction de René Guénon*, ch. *L'Investiture du Cheikh al-Akbar au Centre Suprême*, Paris, 1987.
3. Henry Corbin, *Avicenne et le récit visionnaire*, Verdier, Paris, 1999, pp. 41-50.
 4. Henry Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, referring to the Bosnian translation, Bemust, Sarajevo, 2000, p. 144-163; cf. Henry Corbin, *L'Homme de lumière dans le soufisme iranien*, referring to the Bosnian edition, Ibn Sina Institute, Sarajevo, 2004, pp. 125-133.
 5. For systematic commentaries on both versions of this *ĕikāya* see Henry Corbin. *Avicenne et le récit visionnaire*, pp. 157-253
 6. Ibid.
 7. For a French translation of both these *ĕikāyât* and a detailed commentary see Henry Corbin, *L'Archange empourpré – Quinze traités et récits mystiques*, Fayard, Paris, 1975, pp. 265-339.
 8. For a full English translation of the text see S. Robinson, *Persian Poetry for English Readers*, Wilmslow, 1882, pp. 515-635.
 9. Ibid, pp. 133-151
 10. Suhrawardi, *Qiĕĕga ĕhurbat al-ĕharbiyya (A Tale of Occidental Exile)*, in Henry Corbin, *Avicenne et le récit visionnaire*, p 27
 11. Henry Corbin, *En Islam iranien, I*, pp. 163-190 of the Bosnian text
 12. Henry Corbin, *En Islam iranien, III*, pp. 94-97 of the Bosnian text
 13. Because of this the Messenger of Islam has so often cited the following supplication: *Allāhumma arina'l-ashyā' kamā hiya! (Oh Lord, show us the things as they are!)*
 14. Daryush Shayegan, *Henry Corbin – la topographie spirituelle de l'Islam iranien*, 'Edition de la différence', Paris, 1980, pp. 239-247.
 15. 'Ayn al-Quāĕt al-Hamadāni, *Kitab al-Tamhidat*, Cultural Center of Islamic Republic of Iran, Sarajevo, 2007, VI, 136-138 of Bosnian text; cf. French translation of 'Ayn al-Quāĕt al-Hamadāni *Les Tentations métaphysiques (Tamhidât)*, 'Les Deux Océans', Paris, 1992; cf. J.C. Vadet, *L'Esprit courtois en Orient dans les premiers siècles de l'Hegire*, Paris, 1968, pp. 386-378.
 16. *Kitab al-Tamhidat*, VI, pp. 145-146 of Bosnian text.
 17. *Kitab al-Tamhidat*, VI, 185, pp. 107-108 of Bosnian text.
 18. *Kitab al-Tamhidat*, VI, 171-175, pp. 100-102 of Bosnian text.
 19. *Kitab al-Tamhidat*, VI, 189,191, pp. 110-112 of Bosnian text.
 20. H. Corbin, *Avicenne et le récit visionnaire*, p. 318.

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