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THE SPIRITUAL GUIDE IN LATE
ANTIQUITY AND THE MIDDLE AGES: A
COMPARATIVE STUDY

By

Sandra Annette Bates

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

M. Litt.

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ABSTRACT

THE SPIRITUAL GUIDE IN LATE ANTIQUITY
AND THE MIDDLE AGES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Sandra A. Bates

This thesis analyses the idea of the spiritual guide in the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The guides are found in both human/earthly and divine/celestial forms and are treated in the following sequence: living, deceased masters, angels, a higher self and a personified active intellect. The chapters thus follow a logical sequence from the concrete to the abstract. In terms of methodology, this comparative study identifies an exemplum or model present in the mystical traditions of these three religions within a specific historical and geographical context. I argue that the spiritual guide is experiential and, therefore, is manifest in different forms and through my analysis I prove how and why these forms are manifest in one tradition rather than in another. As all these guides, save the living spiritual guide, are both immanent and transcendent they can be contacted through various mental and physical practices. Therefore, comparisons with Hindu and Buddhist meditation and yoga have been included where relevant.

Examples from the lives and works of the Desert Fathers, Byzantine monastics, and the Franciscan St. Bonaventure illustrate the human spiritual guide in the Christian tradition. Sources from the various strands of Judaism – orthodox rabbinical, mystical, ethical and pietistic represent the Jewish spiritual guide. In Islam, the living guide is especially well documented in the lives and works of two mystics: ibn ‘Arabī and Rūmī.

For the deceased spiritual guide, I have compared and contrasted the imām of the Shī’a, the sheikh of the Naqshbandī Sufis, the Gnostic Christ and the ‘Rabbi from Beyond’ in the Kabbalah.

The significant angelic guides: - Meṭaṭron, the angel as Kavod and Shekinah, the angelic Christ and the angel Sophia - are drawn from diverse sources. These are the Enoch books, the Hekhalot literature, the Zohar and Hasidic literature, the Gnostic scriptures and Byzantine art; and the poetry/poetic prose of ibn ‘Arabī and Rūzbehān.

The Arabs were instrumental in introducing the idea of the spiritual guide as the higher self and the active intellect in their translations, such as al-Bīrūnī and al-Kindī, and their interpretations of Indian and Greek philosophy. In historical terms, the Muslim conquest of Indian and Central Asia, Spain and the Maghreb provided the crossroads for the interchange of ideas and the meeting place for Islamic and Jewish mysticism. Examples of the higher self, visualised in yoga, are, therefore, found in the works of Kubrā, ibn ‘Arabī and Abulafia.

The active intellect, arising from a misrepresentation of Aristotle’s *De Anima* 3 (5), appears as an external spiritual guide in Islamic and Jewish mysticism, through Avicenna and others, but was rejected by Christian Medieval Scholastics. One such was Thomas Aquinas, who insisted that the active intellect formed a unity with the other powers within the soul.

The spiritual guide is, therefore, an important theme in the study of mysticism, which I have traced in many sources extant in different languages and disciplines and, in its various forms, it both united and divided religious traditions.

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I am also indebted to the Bodleian Library collections, and those of the Oriental Institute, Oxford. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the help given by my father's personal library, which was left to me on his death.

GLOSSARY

Ahl al-sunnah: The majority group in Islam or the Sunnis.

‘Ālam al-ghayb: The unseen or spiritual world.

‘Ālam al-mithāl: mundus imaginalis -The imaginal world. This is where visionary guides are said to manifest. Also known as ‘ālam al-takhayyul. The imaginal world is said to stand between the physical and intelligible worlds.

Al-‘aql al-fa”āl: The active intellect was understood to be an intelligible entity by the Arabs. Also known as the angel Gabriel, he played the role of guide to salvation in some of the Sufi writings. He was the 10th in a series of emanating intellects, the first of which was known as ‘Aql al-awwal.

Baqā’ The highest mystical station in Sufism to which the soul can aspire.

Dhikr Allāh: The remembrance of God’s name. It can form part of meditation practices, and can be silent or spoken. It may be combined with bodily movement, dancing and music. It can bring about ecstatic states, or the experience of fanā, or annihilation of the self, leading to the soul resting in God.

Ḥadīth: The sayings of the Prophet.

Al-haqīqat al-muhammadiyah: The Muhammadan Reality, which may be called the Muhammadan Light. It concerns the pre-existence of the Prophet’s nature, and can be identified with the Greek term Logos. It is this Nur al-Muhammadi or the Light of the Prophet, which may illumine those on the Sufi path.

Imām: In Shī’ism the term has a different meaning than among Sunni Muslims. There are seven or twelve Imāms, depending on whether the Shī’a groups are “Seveners” or “Twelvers”. The Imāms were pre-existent spiritual guides, who have lived on earth, but the last has gone into occultation, or has been withdrawn by God. Like the prophets they live in a celestial world, and watch over their followers. They sometimes manifest in the visionary world. The hidden Imām will appear on the Last Day. Sometimes he is identified with the angelic entity, the active intellect.

Khānaqāh: Sufi meeting place.

Al-Khidr: Another pre-existent being, a prophet mentioned, though not by name, in the Koran, in connection with Moses. He is an esoteric spiritual guide who manifests himself to some visionaries, particularly the Uwaysi Sufis.

Al-Mahdī: The “rightly guided one” who will bring in the reign of peace during the Last Days. His role is often associated with that of the coming of the Imām, mentioned above.

Maqām: A Sufi station, or stage in the spiritual life.

Mithāl: Image.

Al-nafs al-ammarāh: The part of the soul, which incites the passions, and is associated with the evil inclination.

Al-nafs al-hayawāniyah: The fleshly soul.

Al-nafs al-lawwāmah: The blaming soul. When this part of the soul starts to predominate, it means some progress has been made on the Path. Then the disciple begins to recognise and rectify his/her faults.

Al-nafs al-muṭma’innah: The tranquil soul. To have this part of the soul predominate over the lower soul is the goal of the Sufi.

Shāhid: Witness. In Kubra’s writings this term means the alter ego or the higher self.

Sheikh: Spiritual Guide, also known as Pīr in Persian Sufi writings

Shuhūd: Vision and contemplation.

Silsilah: The initiatic chain, linking all Sufi masters to the Muhammadan Light and to God.

Taşawwuf: Sufi mysticism.

Walī Allāh: Literally Friend of God. Term used to describe a Sufi holy man

JEWISH TERMS

Ein-Sof: The Infinite. The unknowable aspect of the Divine, beyond all distinctions, found in Kabbalist writings. It has something in common with the Platonic 'One' and may be identified with Aristotle's First Cause.

Kavod: Divine Glory. Also it is an aspect of the Divine which may become manifest in visionary experience. It can be understood to be an angel and may be identified with the angelic guide Meṭatron. It can also be understood to be a form created by the mind of the mystic.

Haluk: Light surrounding God's Glory seen by Merkavah mystics.

Ḥashmal: Divine radiance. Usually seen during visionary experience.

Hekhalot: These are the heavenly palaces or celestial spheres.

Hekhalot Literature: A corpus of angelic mystical literature, dating from the early medieval period, devoted to the adoration of the Holy Names, and various magical/mystical practices involved with them. Throne mysticism or the mysticism of the celestial ascent also plays a part.

Hokmah ha-Tzeruf: Science of Hebrew letter permutations often associated with Abulafia. Similar practices are found in Arabic, an example of which is found in ibn Arabi.

Kabbalah: Jewish mysticism.

Ecstatic Kabbalah: A form of Kabbalah associated with the ecstatic Abraham Abulafia, born in 13th century Spain, and his followers. Its fundamentals concerned ecstatic states brought about by mystical practices involving the Divine Names.

Theosophical or Speculative Kabbalah: The Kabbalists belonging to this group, which originated in Provence and surrounding area, primarily concentrated on the contemplation of the Sefirot, which was a form of Kabbalistic prayer and meditation whereby illumination could be bestowed upon the worshipper.

Merkavah: Throne mysticism, also known as the mysticism of the chariot, based on descriptions from Ezekiel.

Metatron: An important angelic guide in Jewish mysticism, whose origins are found in the Talmud and Apocalyptic literature. Enoch the son of Jared, was a righteous man who ascended to heaven, and became the angel Metatron. He also figures in the Hekhalot literature. In the later Middle Ages he was at times, identified with the angelic entity, the active intellect. He is one of the most important angels because through the science of numerology, he is said to have "the same name as his Master" i.e. he and his Master's Name are numerically equal.

Sefer ha-Bahir: Book of Light. Earliest Kabbalist work, belonging to the 12th century. Here the Sefirot are Divine attributes, which contribute to the work of creation. They are known as the Tree of Life, which is in the form of Archetypal Man.

Sefer ha-Zohar: Book of Splendour. A "Compendium" of contemporary Kabbalah, which was compiled by Moses de Leon, towards the end of the 13th century CE. The author, however, has set many of the stories in the 2nd century CE, after the Bar Kochba rebellion, in the time of R. Simeon bar Yochai and his circle.

Sefer Yetzirah: Book of Creation. God created all existing things through the Hebrew letters. The work shows the beginnings of letter combinations and permutations, and as such, the Sefer Yetzirah was an important source for the German Hasidim, and the Spanish Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia. Likewise 'the ten Sefirot of nothingness' correspond to the basic numbers of the universe. Historically uncertain it has been dated by scholars variously from 100 BCE, 200-400CE {Scholem}, to 800-900CE.

Sefira/Sefirot: These are understood to be emanations from Ein-Sof, and indeed, are God's Attributes, which can be listed as follows: Keter=Crown, Hokmah=Wisdom, Binah=Understanding, Da'at=Knowledge, Hesed=Mercy, Geburah=Judgement, Tiferet=Beauty, Nezaḥ=Victory, Hod=Splendour, Yesod=Foundation, Malkut=Kingdom, or Shekinah.

Shekhinah: Female aspect of God, which also signifies His Presence.

Tetragrammaton: YHVH, the most sacred name of God.

INDIAN TERMS

Advaita: Non-dualism. As understood in the philosophy from some of the Upaniṣads which states that Ātman is Brahman.

Ātman: Self.

Arjuṇa: Epic hero who was taught yoga by Lord Kṛṣṇa in the BhagavadGītā.

Bhagavadgītā: The Song of the Lord, forming part of the epic Mahābhārata.

Brahman: Universal Self or Soul.

Buddhi: Intellect {Buddha, the enlightened one}

Chakras: Wheels or energy centres within the human body, which are activated during yoga and meditation.

Dvaita: Dualism.

Guru: A spiritual guide.

Īśvara: Lord.

Kapila: Reputed founder of Sāṃkhya philosophy.

Kṛṣṇa: Considered to be the incarnation of Viṣṇu who plays the role of the guru in the Bhagavadgītā.

Mokṣa: Liberation, deliverance or salvation.

Prāṇa vṛtti: Regulation of breath in yoga practice.

Prāṇāyāma: Restraint of breath in yoga practice.

Puruṣa: Archetypal Man, Consciousness or Person.

Yoga: Practice of contemplation, meditation, union with the Divine, and so forth.

INTRODUCTION

This comparative study of the spiritual guide attempts to account for the various forms of an exemplum or model within the predominantly esoteric traditions of monotheistic religions in Late Antiquity, for the most part in the Middle Ages in Moorish Spain, the Middle East and Central Asia. According to the methodological categories outlined in two works by J.Z. Smith (1978, 1982)¹ this comparative study of the spiritual guide is morphological. However, in emphasising the historical and the geographical context of the comparisons, my thesis answers the criticisms directed against this mode of enquiry. If there is a right wing-left wing continuum, as Karl Mannheim seems to suggest,² I have sought a balance between the two sides, the ahistorical and the historical.

Though I have visited the geographical area covering this thesis, obviously the ethnographic approach only applies to the modern expression of the religious practices I analyse, but ethnographical sources such as al-Bīrūnī³ prove useful in providing an eye-witness account, albeit subjective, and therefore, liable to error of understanding. Therefore, my comparisons are drawn from the ideas and practices introduced, developed and dispersed by peoples in direct contact with each other such as the Jews and Arabs in Spain, the Sufis of Central Asia and

¹ Jonathan Z. Smith: 'In Comparison a Magic Dwells' in *Imagining Religion from Babylon to Jonestown*, Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 1982, pp. 19-35: *and* 'Adde Parvum Parvo Magnus Acervus Erit' in *Map is not Territory*, Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 1993, pp. 240-264, © 1978.

² Jonathan Z. Smith: *Map is not Territory*: p. 254.

northern India, based on the evidence from the textual sources of those different traditions.

While considering the necessity of the spiritual guide, this work does not limit itself to the earthly guide. It also embraces the transcendent or celestial guide, the inner guide, who played as much part in the spiritual lives of many mystics as his earthly counterpart. The celestial guide was found mostly among the Sufis. There is some evidence, however, for such celestial guides among the Kabbalists, but virtually none among the medieval Christians, although it is true that the docetic Christ played the role of an angelic guide among the Christian gnostics of late Antiquity.

How did mystics understand this celestial guide? Did they see his manifestation as an angel, or a spiritual being, as a celestial self, or did they recognise the guide as part of themselves – as a figure visualised in meditation? I shall argue that both points of view were prevalent. Many mystics understood this visualised figure as an angel, but there were others who emphasised a “psychological” approach as in the practice of meditation, which plays a part in Hindu and Buddhist yoga from which, the Muslims of Central Asia, Iran and elsewhere, learned their techniques. Naturally the Muslims adapted the teaching of yoga to harmonise with their religious beliefs. The ecstatic Kabbalist, Abraham Abulafia who had a wealth of esoteric material from his own tradition, likewise made contact with Sufis and though he criticised them, he undoubtedly learned from them too.

The geographical area of this work for the East covers the area of the trade routes of Central Asia and the adjoining Middle Eastern countries. The Western part includes Spain where the three faiths lived side by side, not always amicably, but certainly aware of each other's ideas both intellectual and artistic. Moreover, it was in Western Europe that the battle against that entity known as the "active intellect" was fought and won by the Scholastics. That such features slipped into the byways of Occultism and Hermeticism in the West during the Renaissance is outside the scope of this thesis.

The main body of the work is set in the period of the early to later Middle Ages, [6th-14th centuries] with some digression into late Antiquity when warranted. The very nature of this work is such that to make sense of it, it cannot be confined to a narrow period of time, as the history of ideas needs time and space to evolve and grow. Moreover, I am well aware that terms like "Middle Ages" belong to Western scholarship, but I use them for ease of reference. I shall use the "Common Era" chronology, which again can be used for Islamic and Jewish dating without causing confusion.

A SYNOPSIS OF EACH CHAPTER

The first chapter considers the human spiritual guide: how he developed from the philosophic teacher and how his role merged into that common figure in late Antiquity, the holy man. During that time, the Rabbi adopted such a role, as did the Christian monk. I argue that the prerequisites of spiritual guidance, and the necessity for a teacher in the Christian milieu had much in common with the training in wisdom and correct behaviour as taught by the Stoics and adopted by Christian monks educated in the Classics. The beginnings of Christian spiritual guidance effectively began with the Desert Fathers, and John Climacus who spent some time in Scetis, and afterwards wrote the *Ladder of Divine Ascent* from his experience gained from the teachings of the Desert Fathers.

In the second part of chapter one, I shall give examples of spiritual guidance from the Christian and Islamic traditions. Symeon the New Theologian and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmi have been chosen because their relationship with their spiritual mentors was an unusual one and in that sense provided fruitful investigation. Indeed Symeon was possibly unique in the Christian tradition for his frankness concerning his spiritual development, with the result that his relationship with his spiritual guide, Symeon the Studite, is well documented.

This, however, is not the case with the Jewish tradition. There is often a lack of documentation because of the secrecy that surrounded Kabbalistic circles. Even in the case of Abraham Abulafia who was prepared to 'go public' much to

the annoyance of other Kabbalists, his students' manuscripts have remained anonymous and he, as their teacher, has not been mentioned by name. Similarly, we have been hampered by the 'self-censorship' of many Kabbalists. R.J. Zwi Werblowsky correctly said in his book on the 16th century mystic, Rabbi Joseph Karo,³ that biographies of rabbis are little more than a thin cloth of hazardous combinations and guesses. Moreover, in the Jewish tradition, it is the book or the teaching that takes precedence over the individual writer or teacher.

In the second chapter I analyse the "hidden guide" and the guide from the dead. The Sufis, who were initiated by hidden or deceased guides, were collectively known as Uwaysis. In Shī'ism, I understand the hidden Imām as a form of docetic guide who though he may have died, to all intents and purposes to those outside the faith, nevertheless, to his followers he was believed to be still alive. He was considered to be a "withdrawn" guide and like the prophets, Moses, Elijah, Jesus and so forth who were likewise withdrawn, he watched over the faithful. The mystics known as "Uwaysis" who had a celestial master, took their name from a saintly man called Uways, a contemporary of the Prophet, who was in contact with Muḥammad in the spiritual sense, though he never met him in the flesh on earth. In later centuries, Uways, like Khidr, was to be a celestial guide to those without an earthly master. The Naqshbandī Sufis who belonged to one of the Central Asian Orders were initiated by sheikhs who had died centuries previously. These deceased sheikhs had many traits in common with the hidden

³ Joseph Karo *Lawyer and Mystic*, Oxford University Press, 1962.

imāms. To the question why the guide from the dead was needed, I argue that the guide from beyond is a link with authority and tradition. When an earthly teacher died, it was important that his teaching did not die with him.

The link with tradition and the authority of the great teacher is a phenomenon found in the Talmud [Berakoth 18a, b] in the guidance given by the members of the “Academy in the Sky.” Here all the rabbis, in the presence of the angelic guide Meṭatron, teach and discuss as they did on earth. In other parts of the Talmud, and indeed in the Old Testament, communing with the dead was not encouraged. However, in the medieval *Zohar* the idea of the “Academy in the Sky” was further developed so there was a belief that deceased rabbis lived in the celestial world, though still aware of and interested in what was happening on earth. The guide from the dead in the *Zohar* known as the “Big Fish” had been an important rabbi in his time, who manifested himself on earth in the form of a mule driver, a very lowly person, like Uways in the Islamic tradition. Like him too, his spiritual importance was hidden from the profane by his mediocrity.

However, the theme of the guide from the dead was not so prevalent in the Kabbalah as it was among the Sufis. In the Christian tradition it was almost non-existent except for the motif of the post-resurrected Jesus who made Himself manifest to his followers in Gnostic Christianity. Here Jesus was understood to be a form of docetic guide from the celestial world. However, in medieval Christianity there was a belief, as there was in the other two faiths, in supernatural

happenings in connection with the tombs and shrines of the saints as is recorded, for example, in the writings of Gregory the Great and Gregory of Tours.

Chapter three is concerned with the angelic guide. The angel has always been associated with Judaism, which I discuss in relation to Meṭatron and his role in Apocalyptic and *Hekhalot* literature. I shall also look at the *Kavod* or Glory as angel in some of the writings of the medieval German Ḥasidim. The angel Sophia from the Old Testament *Proverbs* and the Wisdom literature was the angelic guide in feminine form. Amongst the Hellenised Jews she was the personification of Wisdom, created before all things. She was the feminine guide who inspired poetry among the Sufis, as will be seen in the writings of ibn 'Arabi and the Persian Rūzbehān. Furthermore, she inspired art in Byzantine Christian Churches.

Early Christian writers like Justin Martyr understood Jesus to be an angelic being. However, as Christianity developed its own doctrines in a more systematic way, this interpretation of Jesus was abandoned. The idea formed an important constituent of Gnostic writings as, for example, in *The Sophia of Jesus Christ*, and *The Gospel of Truth* from the Nag Hammadi collection and works like Mani's *Kephalaia* where Jesus was understood to be an angelic Nous. The Christ-angel reappears in Byzantine Christian murals in the Middle Ages. However, here the theology is taken from the Septuagint version of *Isaiah*.

Chapter four is concerned with the higher self or what Henry Corbin called the celestial counterpart. The idea of a self first appeared in the Upaniṣads and was further developed as part of the Patañjali yoga system composed about 3rd century CE.⁴ Though both Plato and Plotinus wrote of a higher Soul, certainly Plotinus' ideas on the subject came closer to Indian tradition.⁵ However we know from al-Bīrūnī, the Sanskrit-Arabic translator, that the Arabs were cognisant with Indian philosophy. It does appear, therefore, that the mysticism of the self that some Sufis developed coupled with their interest in yoga, came about through their contact with the East. Again, they would have been familiar with something similar in the *Philosophy of Aristotle* as Books 4-6 of Plotinus' *Enneads* was known to the Arabs.

The visionary self among the Sufis was a figure who became manifest in meditation. A similar motif has been noticed in respect of the Kabbalist, Abraham Abulafia who had a greater following in the Holy Land.⁶ It has been said⁷ that Abulafia acquired a "Sufic component" to his Kabbalistic methods, which had been the result of living for a short time in Israel.

Of course, there are twin souls and counterparts in Gnostic writings. Jesus was the counterpart of Thomas's soul in the "Thomas Tracts" in the Nag

⁴ The Self-Atmān in the Upaniṣads is called Puruṣa in Patañjali.

⁶ The foremost mystics of the Kabbalistic Renaissance in 16th century Safed showed a knowledge of his works.

⁷ Moshe Idel: 'Prophetic Kabbalah in the Land of Israel' in Richard I. Cohen, ed., *Vision and Conflict in the Holy Land*, St. Martin's Press, 1985, p.103.

Hammadi scriptures. Mani had a twin soul that he discussed on several occasions in the work known as the Cologne Mani Codex.⁸ Such motifs of twin souls or higher selves were “in the wind” in Late Antiquity, but after the Arab conquest of northern India, the Sufis further developed the idea after their exposure to Indian philosophy.

The fifth chapter concerns the entity, the active intellect as spiritual guide. The idea of the active intellect being a spiritual entity was developed from the Greek Commentators’ interpretation of Aristotle’s *De Anima* 3 (5). The argument centred round whether the active intellect was immanent or transcendent. For those who understood the intellect to be transcendent, this interpretation evolved from Alexander of Aphrodisias positing a transcendent intellect entering the soul from without. The Arab scholars and translators, al-Kindī and others, followed this interpretation and, therefore, the idea of an active intellect as a transcendent angelic being was introduced into Arabic philosophy. Finally, this angelic intellect became a spiritual guide bestowing illumination, as in the allegorical writings of philosophers like ibn Sinna [Avicenna] or the Persian philosopher/mystic, Suhrawardī.

⁸ Cologne Mani Codex, tr. Ron Cameron & Arthur J. Dewey. Early Christian Literature Series, Missoula Montana, 1979, pp.9, 15, 19, 29, 37. Mani’s twin was accurately described in the *Kitab al-Fihrist* by Al-Nadim the 10th century Arab historian. German translation is by G. Flügel, 1862 p.84. The twin motif relating to Mani is related to Iranian Manichaeism, where the twin is called *Vahman* or *Marvahnad* which is linguistically similar to the Vohu Manu in the Gathas: SPAW 13, 1933; TII D 178, tr. Walderschmidt & Lentz. The “twin” is Jesus in the Coptic Manichaean Psalm Book, which is similar to the Gnostic Thomas Material in the Nag Hammadi scriptures: Manichaean Mss in the Chester Beatty Collection, Vol. 2, Stuttgart 1938, Psalm CCXLI, p.43, line 20.

Some Jews became aware of the writings of the Islamic philosophers through ibn Tibbon's 12th century translations into Hebrew. Others, like the Jews who lived in Spain, had been able to read the original Arabic. Therefore, the idea of a transcendent active intellect that led the soul to salvation found its way into medieval Jewish philosophy. Often this angelic intellect was linked in their minds to the Jewish angelic guide Meṭatron as, for example, in Moses Narboni's Middle Commentary on Averroes, where the active intellect was called "Prince of the Presence" and such like titles usually bestowed on Meṭatron.

The accommodating of outside ideas as the transcendent angelic intellect to indigenous tradition did not occur in the Christian West. This concept was fought tooth and nail by St. Bonaventure for the Franciscans, and by Thomas Aquinas for the Dominicans. Others too, of course, joined in the fray and it can be judged by the amount of ink used to combat such ideas, what a vexed question it was to medieval Christianity. Finally, Thomas Aquinas, after studying Moerbeke's Latin translation of *De Anima* decided on an immanent active intellect which put an end to any possible role played by this angelic entity in orthodox Christianity.

Indeed, it must also be said that for both Islam and Judaism, the experience of an intermediary did not indicate necessarily, the acme of perfection. Speculative Kabbalah, which involved contemplation of the *Sefirot* without intermediary, was considered a higher stage than Practical Kabbalah with an intermediary. In meditative exercises used by the Sufis, the goal was to progress

beyond all intermediaries to a state of 'absorption' in God. Similarly, for the Jewish mystic, the goal was to follow Moses - to see Him Face to Face. However, for those who never gained the final step of the ladder, the intermediary or the transcendent spiritual guide in its different forms, played a crucial role in their spiritual life. Finally, the manifestation of the transcendent guide, the other self, in the lives of some of these mystics both Jewish and Muslim was of paramount importance. This was the divine self created in His image, made manifest by meditational practices, a vision of which plunged the mystic into ecstasy probably because they believed the divine self was not an intermediary but part of the mystic himself.

CHAPTER ONE: THE HUMAN SPIRITUAL GUIDE

Introduction

In this chapter I shall look at some of the principal examples of the human spiritual guide in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The core of the chapter will be concerned with the Middle Ages, but at the same time, to understand the nature of spiritual guidance it is necessary to look at the beginnings of this phenomenon in late Antiquity.

The figure of the holy man is a common motif in late Antiquity in Jewish, pagan and Christian traditions. The rabbi also fulfilled this function. Like his pagan counterpart he often played the role of arbitrator in political and legal disputes ¹ and was also considered to be a man of supernatural power. Therefore, he was able to heal physically and spiritually and like ² the charismatic Hanina ben Dosa, to cast out devils. Indeed the rabbi played several roles, that of philosopher, astrologer, magician and doctor.³ Finally the rabbi was, since Talmudic times, a teacher of the Bible and Talmud. He had a core of advanced or 'elite' students,⁴ yet his relationship with them was different to that of the Christian holy man or monk and his disciple.

¹ BT: Ta'an 20b-21a.

² Geza Vermes: *Jesus the Jew*. Fontana, Collins 1981, p.72f. BT:Ber. 34b.

³ Jacob Neusner: *History of the Jews in Babylonia*, Leiden, Brill, 1966, vol. 2 pp 147-50.

⁴ BT Hag.2.1.



In the Christian tradition we see the beginnings of spiritual guidance among the holy men in the Egyptian desert. In the *Apophthegmata Patrum* the spiritual guide was a “burden bearer” but he insisted on interior vigilance and confession of thoughts from his disciples.⁵ It is obvious that a close relationship must develop between the guide and the disciple for this to be effective. Indeed, there were parallels between Christian spiritual guidance and the training of a young man in the philosophical life, which shall be analysed in relation to the Greeks and the later Stoics. John Cassian’s work on spiritual guidance, *The Conferences*, was written in the 5th century inspired by the desert fathers. John Climacus wrote *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* in this tradition, which laid the foundation of what Christian spiritual guidance should be. We shall see that Symeon the New Theologian in the 11th century developed the meaning of spiritual guidance and added some unusual material, in his writings and hymns, but the basis for much of his teaching rests on what he had received from Christian tradition.

The Sufi sheikh, in agreement with the Christian spiritual guide, emphasised the need for the beginner to have a spiritual guide. Those who did not courted disaster. Ibn Arabī could not have made his recommendation more strongly than quoting the ḥadīth “He who has no master has Satan for a master.”⁶ Rūmī said that the person without a spiritual guide was like a blind man alone. But once he

⁵ Benedicta Ward: *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, London & Oxford, Moybray, 1981, pp 21, 71.

⁶ *Kitab al-Amr al-mukham*: Spanish tr. by Asin Palacios in *El Islam Christianizado*, Plutarco, Madrid, 1931, [83], p 303.

found himself a guide, then this Pīr became a 'ladder to heaven.'⁷ Again the Pīr was seen as a holy man with spiritual powers. He needed to prove his lineage, his descent from the Prophet's Light, to enable him to be a spiritual guide. Indeed, in Rūmī's case his own guide Shams al-Dīn was unable to prove such a lineage, or so it was said, which gave fuel to his enemies when they tried to destroy his influence on Rumī as shall be shown.

Finally, an important feature of spiritual guidance, apart from the necessary preparation and purification of the soul was the training of the disciple in contemplation, prayer and meditation. This theme will be developed at greater length in later chapters. This training enabled the disciple to participate in the process that led to higher states of consciousness, the realisation of the Divine within, which is the goal of mysticism in theistic religions. Though the means may be different, as also the theological background which gave it birth, the aspiration or goal remained similar.

SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE IN THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

The Role of Philosophy

⁷ The *Mathnawī* of Jalālu'ddīn Rūmī, tr. Reynold A. Nicholson, E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Series, London, Luzac & Co. Vol. VI, p.485, lines 4117 ff.

Before the role of the spiritual guide emerged among the Desert Fathers, the ministry of the spiritual father appears in the New Testament. Firstly we see this in respect of Jesus and his disciples, where He took on the role of a spiritual master asking that his disciples abandon all and follow him. Secondly, although Paul's relationship with his fellow Christians was different he, nonetheless, displayed some of the qualities of a spiritual guide, caring for his several communities of Christians.⁸

However, the idea of spiritual guidance took some inspiration from the classical tradition. According to the Greek philosophers, the fundamental quality for a spiritual master was the knowledge of himself, without which he would be unable to advise other people. Plato spoke of this in *Phaedrus* and of the necessity for a young man to have an older man to train him in the way of beauty and truth, so that the disciple might develop a god-like persona. In effect they worshipped the god-self within each other.⁹ Plato in the *Symposium* likewise wrote of the necessity for the youth to have a guide to wisdom and noble conduct, a guide to teach him about the love of the heavenly Aphrodite. It was fortunate if the guide or lover found his other 'half' for then a life-long partnership between guide and disciple could develop.¹⁰ Aristotle's discussion was more down-to-earth, but he spoke for the need for a teacher, when he said that knowledge of

⁸ 2 Cor 11:29 Gal 4:19.

⁹ Plato: *Phaedrus*: 230, 253: tr. Walter Hamilton: Penguin 1981. The worshipping of the immanent self is also found in yoga. It is in the part of the *BhagavadGītā* where Kṛṣṇa instructs Arjuna in the subject.

¹⁰ *Symposium*: 180e, 192e., tr. Walter Hamilton: Penguin 1981.

the self could only be achieved through another person or teacher who was also a friend. In the *Magna Moralia* he wrote of this guide as 'a second self.'¹¹

Likewise no Christian guide would find fault with the moral instruction given by the 1st century Stoic teacher Seneca in the Western Roman Empire. In the *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium* the Stoic philosopher took the role of teacher of wisdom and spiritual guide. Uppermost in Seneca's teaching was the concept of self-analysis - the recognition of one's faults with a view to correction - that was the cornerstone of Christian spiritual guidance.¹² Therefore, there was a need for openness with one's teacher that took the form of a confession.¹³ Without the guidance, authority and friendship of the philosophic teacher, the disciple would make little progress in his endeavour to live the life of a wise man.¹⁴ Seneca emphasised the necessity to have a teacher so that nobody should condemn anyone who gained salvation through the assistance of another.¹⁵

A similar teaching is found in Epictetus' Lectures, as told by Arrianus. Here again, there was the necessity of self-examination and the unquestioning obedience to the teacher.¹⁶ Epictetus also taught that in everything we do, we

¹¹ *Magna Moralia*, *Ethica Eudemia*, *De Virtutibus et vitiis* tr. by W.D.Ross, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1915, *Magna Moralia* 2.1213a, *Eudemia* 7.12 1245a.

¹² Lucius Annaeus Seneca: *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales* 28.10: tr. Richard M.Gummere, Loeb, Harvard University, W. Heinemann, 1953, p.202.

¹³ Paul Rabbow: *Seelenführung: Methodik der Exerzitien in der Antike*, Munich, Kosel-Verlag, 1954, pp 53f.

¹⁴ Ilsetraut Hadot: *Seneca und die griechisch-römische Tradition der Seelenleitung*, Berlin, de Gruyter, 1969, pp 164-176.

¹⁵ *Ibid*: *Ad Lucilium*: 52. 3:4: p.344.

¹⁶ Flavius Arrianus: *Lamp of Epictetus: Being Arrian's lectures of Epictetus*, tr. Edward Jacob, London, Methuen, 1938, Bk.II (xxi) p 97-8.

should take the greatest care never to fall short of the highest standard of our moral purpose.¹⁷

For those men like the 4th century Cappadocian Fathers who were heirs to both the classical and Christian traditions, it was natural for them to equate the study of philosophy, albeit Christianised, with the monastic life. Indeed, from the early years of Christianity, many of the Christians who had undergone a pagan education tried to equate the ideals of the compatible tenets of Greek philosophy to those of Christian teaching and the Christian way of life. Greek speaking Christians used Greek philosophical terms and vocabulary to explain Christian beliefs. Indeed, the beginnings of this can be seen in writers like Clement of Alexandria who believed that Greek philosophy could be a preparation for the greater philosophy, which he believed was Christianity.¹⁸ The Cappadocian Fathers continued in this vein. In fact, they and other 4th century Christians were left with the option of either living in the world in a virtuous manner, or withdrawing from it to live in a monastery. Gregory Nazianzus envisaged the possibility of leading a meritorious Christian life in the world, which he called δευτερος βιος¹⁹ but he reserved the term “philosophia” for the desire in a

¹⁷ Ibid: Bk 1 (ii) p. 2.

¹⁸ Stromata 1:5: Ante Nicene Fathers, Vol. 2, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1989, p 305. A similar situation occurred in respect of Christian Baptismal literature, for example that by Cyril of Jerusalem, where the language of the Greek mystery religions was used to explain the spiritual rebirth through baptism. Procatechesis 11 p 46, 16 p.50-1; Mystagogical Catechesis V, On the Eucharistic rite 20 p 78-9 in St.Cyril of Jerusalem. Lectures on the Christian Sacraments, Crestwood, New York, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986.

¹⁹ In laud. Caes. Fratr. IX, 7 [765c].

person for perfection beyond the average.²⁰ He understood this perfect life of living closely to God, to be epitomised in the life of the hermits and ascetics.²¹ Indeed he identified the life of the monk with that of the philosopher.²²

The Spiritual Guide in the Apophthegmata Patrum

In the *Apophthegmata Patrum* a body of literature that goes back to the 4th century CE, we see the development of the idea of the spiritual guide among the monks and hermits of the Egyptian desert. The spiritual father was not necessarily the *hegemon* of a monastic settlement, but well-defined qualities were required of him. The “Abba” had to belong to a historical tradition and religious group whose place could be clearly identified. Spiritual guides had to have been taught by holy men themselves. Thus both the authority and the religious experience was handed down. The master was well aware of the pitfalls and was in a position to guide his disciples.²³

One of the first known spiritual guides in the desert tradition was St. Anthony (221-356). Yet he too had a teacher. Athanasius informs us in his *Life of St. Anthony*²⁴ that St. Anthony had an unnamed hermit as his spiritual guide. The saint lived the life of a hermit for 20 years but then he decided to guide others in

²⁰ Anne-Marie Malingrey: 'Philosophia' Étude d'un groupe de mots dans la littérature grecque des Presocratiques au IV^e siècle après J.-C, Paris, 1961, p 256.

²¹ Ibid., p. 257.

²² Oratio VI: PG 34 p 721ff.

²³ Phillip Rousseau: *Ascetics, Authority and the Church in the age of Jerome and Cassian*, Oxford University Press, 1978, pp 22-26.

the way of salvation. This he did until his death. His disciples were free to ask his advice on any problem. He never pretended he was superior or beyond temptation. On the contrary, he taught that temptation should be expected “to the last breath” and that it was by overcoming temptation that made us worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven.²⁵

Anthony’s teaching, in a nutshell, emphasised obedience, abstinence and the fear of God ever before one’s eyes. Most important was to avoid the sin of spiritual pride which came about by putting trust in one’s own works, which meant not having a spiritual guide. Monks fall away, he says, when they do not take notice of the commandment “Ask your father and he will tell you.”²⁶

The spiritual guidance, therefore, given by the Desert Fathers involved interior vigilance or taking account of one’s thoughts²⁷ because it was often that the thought was master of the deed. The Desert Fathers believed that evil thoughts were the work of demons and the Devil and that it was only through self-discipline and prayer that the Devil could be overcome. Therefore, vigilance, self-knowledge and discernment were the guides of the soul, according to Abba Poemen.²⁸ It was fundamental for beginners in the spiritual life to submit to the

²⁴ Tr. Robert C. Gregg: *Classics of Western Spirituality*, Paulist Press, 1980.

²⁵ Benedicta Ward: *Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, London & Oxford, Mowbray, 1983, p 2.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.21 & 71.

²⁸ *Op. Cit.*: Benedicta Ward: *Sayings*: p 173.

training given by a master.²⁹ This point was also emphasised by Pachomius, the founder of the monastic settlement at Tabennesis near old Thebes, or present-day Luxor. Pachomius discouraged an over-emphasis on visions, which were rather prevalent in the desert, though he did believe God did reveal hidden mysteries.³⁰ However it was important to whom a novice confided these visionary accounts, and normally such matters were only confided to one's spiritual mentor.³¹

Essentially the spiritual father was there to give advice about problems relating to the spiritual life that he had already encountered himself. He had once been a novice so he knew what to say when a disciple complained of a feeling of boredom and aridity. He was there to help with all the problems a disciple was likely to meet. The problem of temptation seemed to be constant. Another common error found in a disciple was conceit about his progress, the illusion that he was a lot better than he was. This was why confession of thoughts was paramount. In fact, embarrassment about approaching one's spiritual father concerning one's thoughts was another wile of the devil. On the other hand, it was always imperative that the spiritual father should make himself approachable. This was not the place for false vanity. The example of Zeno was the correct

²⁹ Ibid., p. 69.

³⁰ Apostolos N. Athanassakis: *Bios tou Hagiou Pachomiou: Life of Pachomius 1:48: Texts and Translations Series 7: Scholars' Press for the Society of Biblical Literature, 1975.*

³¹ Ibid., 1.88.

attitude, because he encouraged novices to pour out their hearts, with the rejoinder to tell him all for "I too am a man."³²

The Spiritual Mother

It has been shown above that in the higher echelons of the philosophical circles women did not figure prominently. Christianity should not have had such a prejudice, because of their belief in the equality of the soul before God. However, there were few, in the early years of Christianity who, like Clement of Alexandria, said that the virtue of men and women were the same.³³ In Christian Gnostic texts, women like Mary Magdalene did play a large part as, for example, in *The Sophia of Jesus Christ* where she was on equal footing with Jesus' other male disciples, and her questions and opinions were taken seriously.

However, among the Desert Fathers, there were three Desert Mothers, Sarah, Synclitica and Theodora - not many - but it witnessed the beginnings of women playing a part in the Church, and in spiritual guidance. However, Sarah unfortunately spoke against herself in the remark "According to my nature I am a woman, but not according to my thoughts,"³⁴ which acknowledges male superiority over the female. Nevertheless, Synclitica evinced a strong character, and confirmed that it was dangerous to guide anyone, if you had not received

³² Graham Gould: *Desert Fathers on monastic community*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993, pp. 28-50. Quote from p. 32.

³³ Irenée Hausherr: *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*. Cistercian Studies 116, Michigan, Kalamazoo, 1990, p. 268.

³⁴ Op. Cit: *Benedicta Ward: Sayings...* p. 230.

training yourself, because it was likely you would injure them with your own shortcomings.³⁵ Theodora underlined the need for the guide to be perpetually aware of her own failings. To be an effective spiritual guide one had to be free of the will to dominate another, a stranger to pride and flattery.³⁶

Indeed, Palladius' *Lausiac History* stated that nuns could serve as spiritual directors, and that the title of 'Mother' was equal to that of 'Father'. Likewise St. Theodore the Studite understood the function of a Mother in a nunnery to be that of a Father in a monastery.³⁷ She must govern her flock by example, and there must be the same "openness of heart." The role of the spiritual mother, therefore, was virtually that of the spiritual father, except that she was unable to perform various priestly duties, such as the giving of absolution.

³⁵ Op. Cit. Benedicta Ward: *Sayings...* p. 233.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

³⁷ *Epist. Liber II* 118; 1389D; 1392B; Irénée Hausherr: *op cit.* p. 278.

The Byzantine Holy Man and his Pagan Counterpart

The life and conduct of the pagan holy man was associated with the life of the philosopher, but with the addition of divine possession associated with Pythagoras, and theurgy associated with the Neo-Platonic Iamblichus.³⁸ Indeed, with regards to the latter, a definite religious enthusiasm dominated his writings, marked by passages on divination, possession, divine madness, the ecstatic effects of music, divine intermediaries, the going out of the self and so forth.³⁹

The holy man's primary social function was that of a teacher of philosophy and all that entailed, and not surprisingly his students were divided into an élite group who obviously would benefit from advanced training, and the less able who came just to listen.⁴⁰ This division between the inner and outer circles seemed the usual state of affairs. There was also a link with and respect for previous authority and teaching, known as the golden chain, that we will find later in the other traditions. For instance, Proclus offered libations to the souls of dead philosophers, or invoked their souls when visiting their graves.⁴¹

³⁸ Garth Fowden: Pagan Holy Man in Late Antique Society in *Journal of Hellenic Studies* Vol 102-3, 1982-3, p. 36-8.

³⁹ Jamblique: *Les Mystères d'Égypte*. Greek/French text by Edouard des Places, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1966, Book III. The happiness arising through knowledge of and return to the self in divine union: IX:X.

⁴⁰ Garth Fowden: p. 39.

⁴¹ Garth Fowden: *Pagan Holy Man...* op cit. p 45.

The Hermetic Corpus of Late Antiquity and the alchemical collection of Greek manuscripts,⁴² together with the various magic collections⁴³ would suggest that on the fringes of philosophy there must have been numerous teachers in the lower ranks, who were considered holy men or women by their groups of followers. These groups were less elitist than the more accepted philosophical groups, an inference that can be drawn by the appearance of women in this type of literature, for example “Maria the Jewess” who figures to a large degree among the alchemical literature. Indeed we have few names, but the alchemist Zosimos seemed to have acted as a spiritual mentor to Theosebia, when he advised her to regenerate her soul by bathing in the Krater of Nous, which is a direct borrowing from Tract IV of the ⁴⁴Hermetica.

One of the powers the holy men enjoyed was the ability to control the weather which was a skill attributed to sages among ancient peoples, who were at the mercy of freak weather conditions even more so than we are today. The holy men could also obtain an audience with the highest of the land because of their supposed supernatural power. This is suggested in Philostratus’ account of Apollonius of Tyana. Even if the existence of Apollonius is doubted, this

⁴² Pierre Berthelot & C.E. Ruelle: *Collection des anciens alchimistes grecs*. Paris, 1887-8.

⁴³ Joseph Bidez & Frank Cumont, eds: *Les Mages Hellénisés*. Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1938.

⁴⁴ *Corpus Hermeticum*: A.D.Nock & A.-J. Festugière. Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1983, p. 51. *The Visions of Zosimos*, translated and commented on by C.G.Jung in *Alchemical Studies*, vol 13 of his *Collected Works*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967 p. 73.

account was based on the life of a typical pagan holy man. Apollonius was politically seditious and often critical of the Roman Emperors such as Nero.⁴⁵

Politically, therefore, Apollonius worked in the opposite way to the Christian monk, who likewise had the authority to approach Emperors. The Christian monk was also understood to be a man of power, both political and spiritual, because he was outside any hierarchical structures, which would have stayed the hand of an ecclesiastic who filled some high office or position. But the Christian monk tried to maintain the status quo and was, therefore, not openly critical of the establishment. Indeed, the arbitration of monks helped maintain peace in the Byzantine Empire, and assured loyalty from the Emperor's subjects.⁴⁶

Like his pagan counterpart, the Christian holy man was believed to be in contact with supernatural powers and was able to work miracles. Like him again, he also had his disciples and followers. Some monks who had taken on the role of spiritual guidance were connected with monasteries, but there were others who were hermits or anchorites who lived outside the monastic structures, who also had disciples, and these were, in effect, the independent holy men who operated with complete freedom. St. Anthony and St. Simeon Stylites were examples of such men who arbitrated between officials and emperors.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Philostratus: *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, Loeb, Harvard UP, William Heinemann, 1969: Book 5: xxvii-xxviii; VII: xi-xiv, xxxii.

⁴⁶ Peter Brown. Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity. *Journal of Roman Society* Vol 61 (1971): 87-8.

⁴⁷ Peter Brown. Rise and function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity. *Journal of Roman Society* Vol 61 (1971): 87-8.

Spiritual Guidance in the Writings of John Cassian, John Climacus

Following in the steps of the Desert Fathers, John Cassian and John Climacus were the founding fathers of spiritual guidance in the Christian tradition. In the late 4th century John Cassian (360-435) who had been a monk in Bethlehem left for Egypt to visit the monastic settlements, where he visited the holy men of Nitria and Scetis. Many years later, after he had founded monastic communities in Marseilles, he wrote *The Conferences* in which he set forth the rules for spiritual guidance. It can be seen that his writings have borne out the experience gained from the teachings of the Desert Fathers.

In the above work, John Cassian emphasised the necessity for the spiritual guide. He pointed out the disasters encountered by those monks lacking discernment. Such people lacked the training provided by an older and wiser man who had the knowledge of all possible pitfalls. Moreover the virtue of discernment was “the eye and lamp of the Body.” By this eye, one saw through the thoughts and actions of men and one was, therefore, less likely to be led into delusion and presumption.⁴⁸

The spiritual mentor encouraged his disciple to learn the virtue of discernment. Those aspirants without this quality and lacking a spiritual guide, who imparted the wisdom, just “fell like leaves.”⁴⁹ John Cassian gave the example of the old man Hero, who preferred to be guided by his own judgement,

⁴⁸ John Cassian: *Conferences*, tr. Colm Luibhead, *Classics of Western Spirituality*, New York, 1986. 2.2: p 62.

⁴⁹ John Cassianus: *op cit.* 2.4 p. 63.

and thereby fell into the hands of the Deceiver who posed as an angel of light.⁵⁰ Indeed, one must never presume to decide anything by one's own private judgement, and it was foolishness on the part of the novice to imagine he would not need a teacher.⁵¹

At the same time, it was imperative to use discernment in the choice of a spiritual guide. It was not white hair that made a wise teacher. John Cassian then gave an example of a young man who had not chosen wisely for his guide was a 'fraud.' When the young man confessed his thoughts, as he was supposed to do, the so-called spiritual guide attacked him fiercely, leaving the disciple confused and depressed. Fortunately later on, he was helped by a genuine spiritual father, and was made to see his foolishness.⁵²

In the small extracts given above, it can be seen that John Cassian learnt much from the wisdom of the Desert Fathers. Moreover, he considered that the life of solitude and contemplation was preferable to coenobitic monasticism, though he conceded that the latter was a preparation for the former. Thus in the monastic settlements that he founded in Marseilles, provision was made for both ways.

The fall of paganism in Rome encouraged bishops in the West in the late 4th century, to promote Christianity wherever they could. St. Ambrose worked

⁵⁰ Ibid., 2.5, p. 64.

⁵¹ Ibid., 2.11, p. 70.

⁵² Ibid., 2.13, p. 71-2.

energetically in northern Italy and St. Martin in northern Gaul. St. Martin, who was made Bishop of Tours in 370, worked tirelessly for the destruction of Romano-Celtic deities worshipped in the Loire and Seine valleys. Then in the following century, came the monastic settlements in the south of France. A couple of years previous to John Cassian's settlement in Marseilles, Honoratus established a monastery on the picturesque island of Lérins opposite Cannes, that produced many Gallic bishops who helped bring about the victory of Latin Christianity over the heretical Visigoths and Vandals.⁵³

John Climacus

John Climacus writing in the 7th century, like John Cassian, was well aware that only a minority could benefit from the life of a hermit. In *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* he emphasised that angelic strength was needed for the solitary life.⁵⁴ In this work John Climacus outlines the 'angelic strength' required to be a spiritual guide. The guide is, above all, the 'burden bearer' the one who took the guilt of his disciples upon his own neck.⁵⁵ Indeed, the spiritual father was not born perfect, but had to aspire to perfection. Often this great physician or doctor of the soul, as he was called, was one who had been humbled by his passions and, after restoration to health, was able to become a doctor to others.⁵⁶

⁵³ W.H.C. Frend: *The Rise of Christianity*. London, Darton, Longman & Tod, 1986, p 708-9, 791.

⁵⁴ St. John Climacus: *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, tr. Archimandrite Lazarus Moore, London, Faber & Faber, 1959, 27 p. 238.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 23:186.

⁵⁶ *Op. Cit.*: St. John Climacus: *Ladder*: 26:203.

The spiritual guide was a mediator before God. The guide was seen as a “Moses... who standing between action and contemplation, will raise his hands of prayer for us to God.”⁵⁷ John succinctly underlined the role of spiritual guidance in his letter *Ad Pastorem* that served as a continuation to *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. The spiritual father was, above all, a teacher who healed by his advice.⁵⁸ If, for various reasons, face to face contact was not appropriate then the guidance should be written down. Furthermore the spiritual guide acted as a doctor who cared for sick wounds. His ‘penance’ should act as a compassionate ‘cauterisation’ that should aid repentance and not be seen as a punishment to humiliate the wrong doer.⁵⁹

Rather the spiritual mentor as an intermediary corrected and healed through prayer.⁶⁰ Above all, the genuine spiritual director was one who has a living experience of God Himself.⁶¹ Indeed, he could not function without this necessary ingredient.

The Ladder of Divine Ascent was also concerned with the qualities to which the disciple should aspire. First and foremost was the need for obedience to the spiritual guide, for without that, how could a disciple progress? The disciple

⁵⁷ Ibid 1.51.

⁵⁸ *Ad Pastorem* 1 (1165B) 2(1169AB): Kallistos Ware. *Spiritual Father in Saint John Climacus and Saint Symeon the New Theologian*. Foreward in *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, by Irénée Hausherr, tr. A.P. Gythiel, *Cistercian Studies* 116, Michigan, Kalamazoo, 1990, p. xiii.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 2 (1168D-1169C). Kallistos Ware: p. xii.

⁶⁰ Ibid., Kallistos Ware: p. xiv.

⁶¹ Ibid., *Ad Pastorem* 1 (1165B): Kallistos Ware: p. xvii.

should distrust himself in everything, however good it may seem to be.⁶² Another fundamental quality in the disciple, as we have seen, was that of discernment. For the beginners the virtue of discernment was based on knowledge of themselves, or knowledge of their weaknesses and strengths. For those of intermediate level it was the ability to distinguish what was truly good. For the perfect it was the knowledge they possessed through divine illumination.⁶³

It was in the capacity of divine illumination that discernment was paramount. It was necessary to know the difference in dreams, for example, when devils posed as angels of light.⁶⁴ This was especially true for those who contemplated becoming 'solitaries' which was a state certainly not approved for the sick in soul. It was said such a person would be as adrift as a man on a raft in a stormy sea.⁶⁵ It was only the advanced in spiritual development who should consider becoming 'solitaries' or practice *hesychia*. For those who were able to do so, however, it was the summit of their spiritual training. For those able to penetrate the mysteries it was the fulfilment of their spiritual training: the face of the Beloved was retained eternally in the imagination.⁶⁶

Symeon the New Theologian

⁶² Ladder of Divine Ascent: op cit. 3. 67.

⁶³ Ibid., 26. 201.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 3. 65.

⁶⁵ Ladder of Divine Ascent: 27. 238.

⁶⁶ Op. Cit.: Ladder of Divine Ascent: 27. 239: 30 263.

Though Symeon was idiosyncratic in many respects with regards to his own spiritual life, nevertheless, his ideas on spiritual guidance were greatly influenced by his predecessors, notably John Climacus and the Desert Fathers. Of paramount importance to Symeon was the idea that the spiritual guide should be an intercessor before God for his disciple, both during his life span and after death. His realisation of the importance of his own spiritual father, Symeon the Studite, was graphically portrayed when he saw his spiritual mentor in a vision standing beside the uncreated light.⁶⁷ In both John Climacus and Symeon, the spiritual guide was a 'burden bearer' a tradition which went back to the Desert Fathers, as we have seen. "Confess it to me and I will carry it," says Abba Lot.⁶⁸ The spiritual guide likewise, for Symeon, played the role of doctor to the soul in torment. But the disciple must submit to the spiritual father's teaching, which came from the mouth of God. Only then could the disciple progress along the spiritual way, so that his vigour increases and he becomes a "perfect man in Christ."⁶⁹ The moment disciples put themselves into the hands of the spiritual father, they became strangers to the cares of the outside world, but strict obedience to him in all matters was of paramount importance.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Cat: xxiii: Tr. Basil Krivocheine & Joseph Paramelle: Sources Chrétiennes 96: Paris, Cerf, 1963:105-6. Kallistos Ware: op cit., p. xv.

⁶⁸ Benedicta Ward. Sayings of the Desert Fathers: p. 122.

⁶⁹ Catéchèses: op. Cit. XTV: 5-23.

⁷⁰ Kephalaia Praktika kai Theologike: Chapitres Théologiques Gnostiques et Pratiques. 1. 36: Tr. J. Darrouzès, Paris, Editions du Cerf, 1957.

So, what is the ideal model of the spiritual father according to Symeon? He is not moved by negative passions like anger and hatred because he has received the Paraclete within himself.⁷¹ He is the true shepherd who must acquire all virtues of mind and body. He takes upon himself the welfare of his disciples' souls and the responsibility of their burdens.⁷² Moreover he must form part of the 'golden chain' of spiritual knowledge which is passed down from a line of holy men, illumined by angels.⁷³

Symeon the Studite and his Disciple

As more is known about Symeon and his spiritual father, so various aspects of their relationship are revealing. When Symeon⁷⁴ decided to devote his life to God, after an early life of frivolity and self-indulgence in Constantinople, he sought out "a man of holy life to guide and reconcile him."⁷⁵ This was Symeon the Pious from the Studite monastery.⁷⁶ The Studite gave him a book by Mark the Hermit which had a great effect on him, in particular the advice "If you desire a cure, look to your own conscience and search out the workings of the Holy Spirit."⁷⁷

⁷¹ Op. Cit: Catéchèses: 6. 262-264.

⁷² Ibid., 18.

⁷³ Chapitres Théologiques... op cit. 111.4.

⁷⁴ He was born in Galatea, Paphlagonia in Asia Minor in 949 CE

⁷⁵ Euch: 1. or Cat. 35.

⁷⁶ Ep. 3: 241-7 Tr. Basil Krivocheine in *Dans la Lumière du Christ*, Tr. by Anthony P. Gythiel as Saint Symeon the New Theologian: In the Light of Christ, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986.

⁷⁷ Cat: op cit. 22. 22-50.

When Symeon entered the monastery of Studios, quite late at the age of 27, his close relationship with Symeon the Pious was disliked by the *hegemon* which led to Symeon's expulsion.⁷⁸ However, in spite of the opposition the relationship continued when Symeon went to the nearby St. Mamas of Xerocarcos, where he became Abbot some years later. This incident may well illustrate that by the 10th century, the role of the holy man was being questioned by some, and that it was thought preferable to live within the monastic rules, rather than be involved in solitary periods of contemplation with one's spiritual mentor.

The Studite was a 'solitary' himself and, no doubt, saw the potential for a life of contemplation in his disciple. He obviously encouraged Symeon's visionary aptitude, whereas perhaps another spiritual director may have curbed it. For Symeon, the Studite was the link between himself and Christ. That Symeon had meditated on this is supported by the hymn he wrote at St. Marina's concerning a vision he had experienced of Christ and the Studite conversing.⁷⁹

Symeon described his own rebirth in Christ, through the help of his spiritual father in an alchemical allegory relating his search for a treasure. Then a man of holy life (Symeon the Pious) informed him of its location, so he dug among the

⁷⁸ *In the Light of Christ*: op cit. p.20.

⁷⁹ *Hymns of Divine Love*. Tr. by George A. Maloney, New Jersey, Dimension Books, 1975, xxxvii. 29-43.

dirt and rubble and found it. He wiped the dirt away, and there it was the treasure that was the Light of the World.⁸⁰

From his spiritual father Symeon had “heard of divine illumination sent from heaven... consisting of a flood of light, and conversation between God and man thereby”⁸¹ Symeon’s visions of Christ were accompanied by what he called Divine Light, which he understood as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. This and other phenomena Symeon describes, such as lightning flashes, water, or the appearance of little clouds are similar to phenomena recounted as being seen in meditation.⁸² Naturally, Symeon interpreted these phenomena in a Christian sense. He believed the Divine Light had transformed his spirit, resulting in a second baptism. This vision was accompanied by “lightning flashes”, and “rays from the face of Christ, merging with the waters.”⁸³ This second baptism was a form of initiation, a rebirth of the spirit. In fact, each time the Light appeared it continued the work of purification. Sometimes when the Holy Spirit appeared, the Light spoke to him and the Voice, Symeon believed, was that of Christ. It was, therefore, through the Light with the help of his spiritual father, that

⁸⁰ Op. Cit: Cat: 34. 281. It can be seen in this symbolism, the beginnings of the idea of Christ as the alchemical Philosopher’s Stone. Something that is discarded by the many is realised for what it really is, only by the few.

⁸¹ Symeon the New Theologian: The Discourses. Tr. C.J. de Catanzaro, London SPCK, 1980, Chapter xvi: p.198.

⁸² This will be analysed with relation to Islam and Judaism further on in this work.

⁸³ Euch: 2/Cat. 36: op cit. This type of visionary material does have something in common with other visions to be analysed in respect of the mystics belonging to Sufi and Kabbalistic brotherhoods. There is no means of proving any connection, only to say that judging from the “Methods of Prayer” (attributed wrongly to Symeon) which described a four rung ladder of ascent to contemplative prayer, producing ecstasy and various psychic phenomena was known in the Byzantine world. However though “Methods of Prayer” [Tr. E.Kadloubovsky & G.E.H. Palmer, London, Faber & Faber, 1992, p 152-161; Greek/French

Symeon was able to converse with Jesus.⁸⁴ The earthly spiritual father and the Holy Spirit, together with the Voice or the vision of Jesus, worked together to bring about the transformation of the disciple.⁸⁵

In hymn 18, for example, the image of Symeon's spiritual father was conflated with a celestial manifestation of the Holy Spirit, so that the Studite though a man, became for Symeon, an angelic supernatural power. His spiritual father had crossed over the boundary of being merely human, for in Symeon's mind he became identified with the Holy Spirit. In his visions of his spiritual father, the latter was seen always in close proximity to this Light, who though he was transfigured by the Light, yet he was still recognisable in his earthly appearance.⁸⁶

These visions must have occurred when Symeon visualised the form of his spiritual guide during meditation. It cannot be said that this was definitely the case, but we can only compare the phenomena with similar accounts given by Eastern or Islamic mystics in later chapters. In these accounts, the form of the guide was indeed a subject for meditation. Among the Sufis it was given the name *rabita*. It was used throughout the East, and may be still in use today. We know

text by I. Hausherr. *Méthode d'Oraison Hésychaste: Orientalia IX - 2, 1927, p 150f*] was written after Symeon had died, it could have been the case that such methods were known during his lifetime.

⁸⁴ Cat. 16. 1-12.

⁸⁵ Hymns 18 & 32.

⁸⁶ Cat. 22. 18-104: Cat 35/Euch. 1.103-110. This episode bears some resemblance to the Indian/Sufi vision of the spiritual guide in meditation, to be analysed in ch. 2 of this thesis.

that Richard Burton the Orientalist, spoke in the 19th century of the same practice, which he performed when he belonged to a Sufi Brotherhood.⁸⁷

In this same hymn 18, Symeon spoke of his initiation by fire through his spiritual father. Here the Studite penetrated to the centre of a large fire, quite unharmed where he beckoned to Symeon to join him. The fire was, of course, a symbol of regeneration. However there are elements that might suggest that the vision came about through meditation on fire which is practised in yoga.⁸⁸ If such influences had penetrated the Byzantine Christian community, and were taught by the Studite to his disciple, they may have come about through contact with sufis, for it is known they practised forms of yoga.⁸⁹ But such things could have evolved within the Christian community as a result of similar practices in meditation.

Because of the meditation and prayers of Symeon's spiritual father,⁹⁰ the Holy Spirit manifested itself in various forms to Symeon, as a ray or a flash of light, or a little cloud that settled upon Symeon's head. The Voice said that the Light purified his soul. It would seem that Symeon's transformation was a gradual process which continued throughout his life – a gradual burning away of all that

⁸⁷ Edward Rice: Captain Sir Richard Francis Burton. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990, p 157.

⁸⁸ Mircea Eliade: *Yoga Immortality and Freedom*. Tr. Willard R.Trask, Bollingdon Series LVI, Princeton University Press, 1970, p. 72.

⁸⁹ This was put forward by I. Hausherr. *La Méthode d'Oraison Hésychaste*. *Orientalia Christiana* IX (2) 1927, p 102-3, 109, 118-9, which I think still holds, and one does not have to rely on *Methods of Holy Prayer* that Symeon did not write.

⁹⁰ Op. Cit: Maloney: Hymn 55.

was not of the Spirit. Sometimes he relapsed into worldly affairs. On one occasion, he made the mistake of trusting his own powers with disastrous results. At least Symeon was honest about his errors and his achievements. If a permanent state of bliss was not possible, he nonetheless believed that he had had a foretaste of heaven on earth.

St. Bonaventure and the Six Wings of the Angel

So far, in the Byzantine Christian tradition, the qualities of the spiritual guide have been analysed, and it has been noted that the genuine spiritual guide needed to have an almost angelic disposition. Spiritual guidance in Western Christianity continued in a similar vein to the Eastern, and so it is not surprising to see that St. Bonaventure [1217-74] the Franciscan theologian used an allegory of the six wings of the seraph that had appeared to St. Francis. These six wings symbolised the virtues, which should be cultivated by the Christian spiritual guide. In effect his work *De sex alis seraphim* was written for religious superiors who were actively involved with spiritual guidance.

St. Bonaventure made some valid points in this respect, namely that a religious Superior, who has accepted the task of making others good, must have first acquired within himself, the discipline of this goodness through tireless practice.⁹¹ Beginners needed a master who could teach them those virtues

⁹¹ St. Bonaventure: *De Sex Alis Seraphim*: Opuscula vol III. Tr. José de Vinck, Louvain University, 1966, p. 135 f.

necessary for their salvation. Fundamental was the virtue of discernment, to enable them to discern the degrees of good and evil.

Each wing, which the spiritual mentor wrapped round himself, symbolised some quality or attribute, which he endeavoured to impart to his disciples. For example, the virtue of justice, or fairness in your dealings with others, was symbolised by the first wing.⁹² Kindness and compassion was symbolised by the second wing⁹³ and patience by the third.⁹⁴ The exemplary life was covered by the fourth wing, which in this case, meant living the common life.⁹⁵ St. Bonaventure said that living with others in a harmonious manner demanded the essential virtue of psychological maturity. Prudent discernment was the subject of the fifth wing,⁹⁶ which, on the spiritual mentor's part, was the knowledge of how to amend those who had fallen.⁹⁷ Any punishment administered by the physician of souls had to be tempered with mercy. Finally, and most importantly when helping others, the physician must not neglect himself.⁹⁸

The sixth wing, however, concerned the crowning attribute known as constant devotion or meditation on God. This constant devotion was described

⁹² De Sex Alis Seraphim: op cit: p. 141 f.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 151 f.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 159 f.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 165

⁹⁶ Ibid., p 171 f.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 176 f.

⁹⁸ Op. Cit: De sex alis Seraphim: p. 181.

as “always keeping God before the eyes of the heart”⁹⁹ and St. Bonaventure continues, “In every place and time, a man should endeavour to keep God in his mind, seeing God mentally, as if standing in His presence.” For a Christian to ‘see’ God, he should visualise Jesus from his own inner understanding. This visualising the Lord in meditation in this example from the Western tradition, comes near to the traditions of the East, notably yoga both Hindu and Buddhist, as shall be seen in later chapters.

For the Christians, Jesus was the prototype of the spiritual guide, and the spiritual mentor tried to encompass the attributes of Jesus in his guidance. Continuing with the wisdom of the ‘final wing,’ St. Bonaventure realised that many superiors could not spend all their time in contemplation. He advised them that if it was not possible to fix their thoughts on Him in deep meditation constantly, at least they should direct their heart’s attention towards His memory.

Finally Jesus was the name of power.¹⁰⁰ The three Kings who symbolised the three faculties of the soul namely the intellect, the emotions and the imagination, sought Him through meditation, says St. Bonaventure: -

“They seek Him as did the Kings of the earth in order to adore Him...for He is Creator, Redeemer...He is the most wise Teacher...He is the most beautiful Lord.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 194: Psalms 25.15 “My eyes are ever toward the Lord.”

¹⁰⁰ Op. Cit: De sex alis Seraphim p. 207.

SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE IN THE JUDAIC TRADITION

The Rabbi as Holy Man in Late Antiquity

Gershom Scholem affirmed in his studies of Jewish mysticism that some of the rabbis in the 1st and 2nd centuries CE were involved in various forms of mystical practices, like that of the *Merka'ub* and so forth. Though modern scholars have disagreed with such an early dating, some are now coming into line again with the former 19th century dating and giving this material a date as late as the early Islamic period or the 7th-8th centuries.¹⁰²

There is no doubt, however, that the rabbi played the role of the holy man in late antiquity, and certainly some were involved in various esoteric activities. He shared some of the qualities of the Christian and Pagan holy men of that period. Unfortunately, when working with the Jewish material, we do not have the biographical sketches of individual rabbis as in the Christian and Islamic sources, with reference to the spiritual mentor and disciple. This is because in Judaism, it

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 208-211. There is much in common with this work and St. Bernard of Clairvaux's Commentary on the Song of Songs, Ch 31. There is a major difference, however, and that in St. Bernard's approach, his concentration on the presence of Christ contains no hint of visualisation. It seems to be a form of mental quiet, where the Presence is felt but never seen.

¹⁰² Elliot R. Wolfson: *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and imagination in medieval Jewish Mysticism*, Princeton University Press, 1994, pp. 74 f.

was the teaching that was of importance, not the individual who tended to recede shyly into the background.

The qualities required of a Rabbi

According to Jacob Neusner's researches into the history of the Jews, drawing from the Babylonian Talmud, the special qualities required of being a rabbi were many and varied. Not only would he be a master of the wisdom of the Torah, the rabbi had to have knowledge of spells and of the banishing of demons. Furthermore, the position of the rabbi took over from that of the priests and scribes of the 1st century, and thereby, the responsibility for the codification of Jewish law. Rabbis acted as arbitrators in legal disputes or in practical affairs, like ensuring a fresh supply of vegetables and good drinking water.¹⁰³

Neusner envisaged similarities between the Persian magi and the rabbis of antiquity, not in their priestly role, but as philosophers, astrologers, magicians and doctors.¹⁰⁴ No doubt, the rabbi was a doctor in both the secular sense of the word, with his knowledge of folk medicine or herbal remedies and, of course, in the spiritual sense as a doctor to the 'sick' soul in distress.

¹⁰³ Babylonian Talmud: Ta'an: 20b-21a. Tr I. Epstein, Soncino Press, 1935-52.

¹⁰⁴ Jacob Neusner: History of the Jews in Babylonia. Vol 2, Leiden, Brill, 1966, pp. 147-150.

Indeed, the rabbi was above all a scholar, whose knowledge of the Torah gave him spiritual power. He was able to communicate with the dead,¹⁰⁵ and some rabbis took an interest in mysticism, commenting on *Merkavah* passages.¹⁰⁶ Jewish communities, therefore, invested their rabbis with supernatural power as did Christian and Pagan communities invest their holy men. There was a tradition of rabbis being linked with mysticism and magic in the Talmud. This was borne out by the *Pardes* episode, from which only R. Akiba emerged successfully.¹⁰⁷ The story is an allegory of mystical experimentation, and indeed the other rabbis came off rather badly. Of the four rabbis who entered the garden, one died of his experience, the other went mad, and the other was so mentally confused that he became a heretic. There is an obvious warning in this story which, no doubt, bears out what has been said previously in this chapter about spiritual guidance. We must presume that the rabbis who had come to grief were not ready for their experience. They were relying on their own powers, were not being rightly guided, and were, to use Symeon's expression when he made a similar mistake, "cast down into the pit."

Though there is a definite reserve concerning mystical experience in the Talmud on the one hand, there is also evidence on the other, that some rabbis were involved in what now would be considered magic. Neusner gives an example of R. Joshua b. Perahia who composed bills of divorce against

¹⁰⁵ B. Ber. 18b.

¹⁰⁶ B. Hag 13b: Neusner, Vol 2, p. 154.

¹⁰⁷ Hag. 14b.

demons.¹⁰⁸ Such proceedings were to aid those unfortunate men who wished to rid themselves of the interference of female demons like Lilith. Such spells have been found on magical bowls from Niphur.¹⁰⁹ Indeed it was believed that a rabbi had the power to control demons¹¹⁰ and to ward off the effects of¹¹¹ the evil eye.

There were, of course, rabbis who condemned magic and mysticism. Rab condemned the use of the divine name in magical practices, because he thought it dangerous,¹¹² and yet the mysticism of holy names remained, forming a large part of the Hekhalot literature and an important component of medieval Kabbalah, particularly in Abraham Abulafia's system.

Neusner suggested that there were two different schools among the Amoraim, and gave the example of Rav, as one who continued R. Akiba's exegetical traditions, and by whose students he had been educated in Palestine. R. Samuel, however, had been trained by R. Ishmael and had a more rational approach like his teacher.¹¹³ Indeed, there should be no reason why every rabbi should teach in the same way, and certainly as political figures, the rabbis adopted different stances, between passivity and open rebellion.

The Rabbi as a Political Figure

¹⁰⁸ Op. Cit: Neusner: History of the Jews: Vol. 5, pp. 220-223.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 224: No 16.

¹¹⁰ B.Ber 55b: 58b; B. Pes 110 a-b.

¹¹¹ Neusner: Vol 5, pp. 184-6

¹¹² B.Sanh., 101a.

¹¹³ Op. Cit: Neusner: Vol 2, pp. 180-1.

We have seen in the last section how the holy man, whether Christian or Pagan often intervened in politics, whereas the Christian holy man tried to preserve the status quo whereas Apollonius, for example, was aggrieved and rightly so, with the behaviour of the Emperors. Different rabbis were to adopt a position of rebellion or quietism in relation to the emperor.

Indeed, the rabbi in the period of late antiquity was active politically, whether he came out in support of rebellion like the Palestinian rabbis, as for example R. Akiba in the Bar Kochba rebellion, or whether he favoured political quietism like the Babylonian rabbis Rav and Samuel. Passivity was as much a political stance as open rebellion. Rav and Samuel were more cautious, not wishing to take the vengeance of the Persian Empire, as their former Palestinian counterparts had taken on the Roman with disastrous results.

Furthermore, relations with the Persian Empire had been more positive. Generally, the people lived peaceably enough under the Selucids and Achaemenids, whereas those Jews living under the Roman Empire had never fully come to terms with it. However R. Yohanan ben Zakkai had been forced to acquiesce for the right to pursue the religious policies of the Pharisees.¹¹⁴

In contrast, Rav and Samuel concentrated on messianic speculations, believing that these times of trouble were caused by the sins of the people. The Messianic Age, a new 'Golden Age' would be preceded by a time of suffering. In

¹¹⁴ Jacob Neusner: *Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism in Talmudic Babylonia*, New York, University Press of America, 1986, pp. 39-40.

both of these cases, the political stance was one of co-operation with the Persian Empire.¹¹⁵ Accordingly, Samuel instructed Jewish Courts to take notice of Persian law, and also showed a willingness to be pliable to the wishes of the Emperor Shapur.¹¹⁶ This policy of co-operation was still in force in the 5th century and beyond, when it was seen that the strength of Persian rule protected the Jewish communities from their common enemies.¹¹⁷

The Rabbi as Teacher

It has been shown that the rabbi had much in common with other holy men of the period in respect of practical and political issues, and he was likewise, a recipient of divine revelation who had supernatural powers that he could put to good use against evil. But how did he function as a teacher? Here there are parallels with the recommendations of Christian spiritual guidance.

One of the prescriptions for an effective teacher, was that of tolerance. A passionate man, who gave way to anger, could not be a teacher.¹¹⁸ This mirrors what was said by the Desert Fathers, in that if such a person gave way to anger, he was just satisfying his own passion.¹¹⁹ Indeed tolerance and forgiveness were the required attributes.¹²⁰ Furthermore, it was said that the honour of his disciple

¹¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 29-30.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 43.

¹¹⁷ Op. Cit: Jacob Neusner: *History of the Jews in Babylonia*: Vol 5, p. 18.

¹¹⁸ C.G. Montfiore & H. Loewe: *A Rabbinic Anthology*. London, Macmillan, 1938: Aboth. II. 6: p. 465.

¹¹⁹ Graham Gould: *Desert Fathers on monastic community*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993, p. 75.

¹²⁰ C.G. Montfiore... Ab.R.N. xli, 67a: p. 462.

should be as dear to the rabbi, as his own honour. A teacher with integrity should cultivate the three qualities of the disciples of Abraham, which were a good eye, a humble mind and a lowly spirit.¹²¹

Basically, the rabbi's teaching was about God, and how one should approach Him. It was said that the rabbis went beyond Psalm cxxxix¹²² affirming that God was both immanent and transcendent. His immanence was confirmed as in the verse "In every place where you find a trace of the feet of man, there am I before you."¹²³ The rabbis, therefore, confirmed that there was no need of the mediation of angels. If someone was in trouble it was not necessary call on Michael or Gabriel, but that person should direct their prayer to God.¹²⁴ God was among the righteous on earth. "If two sit together, and the words of the Torah are between them, then the *Shekinah* rests between them."¹²⁵

People should pray by following the words in *Chronicles*, where the Lord is asked to direct the hearts of His people towards Him. They should pray, therefore, with concentration and collectedness. The word used to describe this was *Kavannah* meaning to direct the heart, which was more than saying words but involved the whole person in contemplative prayer and meditation.¹²⁶ Prayer, therefore, needed concentration of mind directed towards God in a state of calm.

¹²¹ Aboth iv 15-17; Aboth v. 22; *ibid.*, p.490.

¹²² O Lord, thou hast a dwelling place to us in all generations.

¹²³ C.G. Montifiore, pp. 20-22.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-3.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23; Aboth III. 3.

¹²⁶ 1 Chronicles: 29. 18. *ibid* pp. 272-4.

People, whose minds were not quiet, should not attempt to pray.¹²⁷ They did not even have to be in the synagogue for all that was required was that they meditate in their heart, and be still.¹²⁸ Finally, the efficacy of prayer was that it cleansed the soul of evil, thereby ensuring the equality of all people before God.¹²⁹

Prayer and the Ladder of Ascent in the Hekhalot Literature

In the Christian tradition, we have seen that the title *The Ladder of Ascent* was given to a work on spiritual guidance. The symbol of the ladder appears previously in the Jewish tradition in the story of Jacob's ladder.¹³⁰ In his dream Jacob realised that the ladder was a gate to heaven. He then set up a pillar to mark the spot. The original Genesis version was supplemented to in later works, such as *The Ladder of Jacob* and *The Testament of Jacob* found in the Old Testament Apocrypha. Though details vary the number of steps, for example, the steps were seen as a mystical ascent or as stations on the mystical path to use Sufi terminology.

According to one Midrash the ladder had four steps standing for action, speech, thought and the level above thought in ascending order.¹³¹ The final stages concerned, therefore, meditation and contemplative prayer. *The Ladder of*

¹²⁷ Ber. V. 1: *ibid* pp. 346-7.

¹²⁸ Pes. K 158a: *ibid* p 343.

¹²⁹ Ber 179; Exod. R. Beshallah xxi,4; *ibid.*, p. 363, p. 346.

¹³⁰ Genesis 28.

¹³¹ Aryeh Kaplan: *Jewish Meditation*: New York, Schocken, 1985, p. 132.

Four Rungs in the Western Christian tradition is very similar.¹³² Likewise in the Christian version the four rungs of the ladder symbolised study, meditation, prayer and contemplation.

The ladder of ascent is a potent symbolism in Jewish mysticism, though it is somewhat disguised. The spiritual journey through the Palaces, as given in the *Hekhalot* writings, symbolises a ladder of ascent. Here the practitioners were involved in *Merkavah* mysticism. We have no idea of the names of any of the masters, because their teaching was considered to be secret, and they would have had no desire to publicise themselves. However there are written instructions for the *Merkavah* ascent.¹³³ The acolyte must learn a Mishnah on the Divine Names then fast for forty days. There must be no cutting down on the fasting time, because one would not be sufficiently pure to work with the Great Name of forty letters, and this would court disaster. When the disciple was prepared, he was advised to sit with his head on his knees and whisper to the ground in accordance with the position favoured for the *Merkavah* trance. The goal of the ascent was the vision of the Throne as described in *Ezekiel*.

The power of the Names was an important element of the *Hekhalot Zutarti*, which ensured the *Merkavah* mystic the power to enter meditative trances.¹³⁴ The initiate's master would have taught him the Names of Power together with the

¹³² By the 9th prior of the Grand Chartreuse Guigo II: tr. T. Timothy.

¹³³ Peter Schäfer. *Übersetzung der Hekhalot Literatur*, Tübingen, 1989, §424, 371; *Hidden & Manifest God: Some themes in Early Jewish Mysticism*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1992, p. 85.

¹³⁴ *Op. Cit.*: Peter Schäfer: *Übersetzung*; §347,357,363,365.

means of contacting an angelic messenger. Metatron was the angelic intermediary who helped the initiate, so it was paramount to know his name and how to address him. This is the meaning of the *Metatron Liturgy*.¹³⁵ It is said that R. Akiba the rabbi from the 2nd century Tannaitic period, who had successfully achieved the descent to the *Merkaub* in the story in the Talmud to which I have referred already, learned the mysticism of the names from a heavenly voice.¹³⁶ Be that as it may, he instructed his circle of disciples in the working with the Great Name, telling them to be careful and to keep it secret.¹³⁷ Though, of course, the *Hekhalot* material was written centuries after the rabbi in the Talmud, his name was used, first to give the message credence, and secondly and perhaps, most importantly, to obscure the name of the real teacher. For a teaching that was supposed to be secret, only taught to a small circle of initiates, the teacher preferred to remain anonymous. In the 13th century much of this was to change, as shall be seen in later chapters, where the Kabbalist R. Abraham Abulafia was to publicise and openly write on the mysticism of the divine Names, much of which had been inspired by the *Hekhalot* books. This was to cause great anger among his contemporaries.

The Sefirot, symbols of another Ladder of Ascent

¹³⁵ Ibid., §389.

¹³⁶ Ibid., §347,348.

¹³⁷ Peter Schäfer. *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism*, New York, State University Press of New York, 1992, pp. 68-71.

The ascending of the soul through the *Hekhalot* or palaces by the power of the Holy Names translated into the ascension of the 'rungs' of the *Sefirot*, in that the Kabbalist Tree was understood to be a ladder of ascension. Each *Sefirah* was allocated a divine name, as Elohim or Adonai, as in R. Joseph Gikatilla's work *Sha'are Orah* or *Gates of Light*.¹³⁸

A mysticism of the *Sefirot* had first been developed in Provence and Gerona at the turn of the 13th century, the leading figures being Isaac the Blind and Rabbi Azriel of Gerona. They used the *Sefer ha-Bahir* and the *Sefer Yetzirah*, though it was not really known from where these books originated. R. Isaac the Blind directed a Talmudic Academy that practised meditation on the *Sefirot*. He taught that the *Sefirot* were emanations of the Godhead, and the Kabbalist ascended them, as a ladder to unite with divine thought.¹³⁹ A similar form of Kabbalah was practised by the Gerona Kabbalists in Northern Spain, like Azriel of Gerona. According to Azriel, meditation on the *Sefirot* was a form of mystical prayer, using the *Sefirot* as a ladder upwards. The Kabbalist ascended the *Sefirot* through the power of the letters of the Great Name, where the only images were the flashing lights of the *Sefirot*. Furthermore, the mind sought to unify the attributes of the opposites on the cosmic tree.¹⁴⁰ The One above the *Sefirot* was *Ein-Sof*, the Infinite, outside but

¹³⁸ See diagram in Aryeh Kaplan. *Meditation and Kabbalah*, York Beach, Maine, Samuel Weiser, 1992, p. 126.

¹³⁹ Dan & Lavinia Cohn-Sherbok: *Jewish and Christian Mysticism*. New York, Continuum, 1994, p. 37.

¹⁴⁰ Marian Eisenfeld: *Azriel de Gerona: Cuatro textos Cabalisticos*. Barcelona, Riopedras Ediciones, 1994, *Libro del Formacion del Mundo* 1.6, p 97; p 24, 93 note 41. For example the *Sefirot* Judgement and Mercy – no true judgement can be devoid of mercy, so that a unification of these attributes must be sought, a middle way.

the hidden root of all.¹⁴¹ Kabbalistic prayer, therefore, sought to unify the world of the *Sefirot*. This lack was the result of the fall of Adam and Eve in *Genesis*. It was, therefore, the task of the one meditating, apart from whatever illumination he may have attained through prayer, to help restore the damage to the Sefirotic realm caused by evil.¹⁴²

The book the *Sefer Yetsirah* was also used for meditation by the early Kabbalists. The letters, especially those of the Tetragrammaton, were visualised in the mind's eye to steady the mind during meditation, with the goal of entering a higher state of consciousness. An example of a meditation on the letter *Aleph* was given by another early Kabbalist R. Jacob ben Jacob ha-Kohen.¹⁴³ The technique involved visualisation of the letter *Aleph* while banishing all extraneous thoughts. When the mind was quiet, contemplative prayer would begin. The mystical Kabbalist prayer by R. Jacob ben Sheshet of Gerona was based on the Jewish prayer the *Amidah* and like the *Amidah*, this prayer was recited standing. The instructions are given on how to perform it correctly¹⁴⁴ and the symbolism of the

¹⁴¹ Gabrielle Sed-Rajna: l'Influence de Jean Scot sur la doctrine du Kabbaliste Azriel de Géronne in *Jean Scot Érigène et l'histoire de la Philosophie: Colloques Internationaux de Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique 561*, Paris, 1977, pp 453-63, gives an analysis of John Erigena's Neo-Platonism on Azriel e.g. the apophatic God in *Periphyseon* 590 B: 6-8; the relation of Hokmah with Erigena's Wisdom: 529 B: 11-14; and the *Sefirot* and Erigena's 'predestinationes' in 615 D-616 A.

¹⁴² Moshe Idel: *Jewish Kabbalah and Platonism in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* in Lenn E. Goodman, ed., *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1992, p. 327.

¹⁴³ Tr. Joseph Dan: *The Early Kabbalah*, New York etc., Paulist Press, 1986, pp. 153 f.

¹⁴⁴ Op. Cit: Joseph Dan: p. 129.

two doors would suggest that it was a meditative prayer for the doors, in effect, were openings to the psyche.¹⁴⁵

As Moshe Idel states after making a study of manuscript fragments which contained techniques of Kabbalistic prayer,¹⁴⁶ this type of prayer also involved the visualisation of the colours of the Sefirotic ladder. By the ability to visualise these colours, or the divine Names within a coloured circle described by R. Joseph Ashkenazi,¹⁴⁷ the practitioner was able to open a door into his own mind to enable him to perceive the workings of the realm of the *Sefirot*. Further meaning was given, therefore, to the word *Kavanah*. I have said previously that the rabbis understood the word to mean contemplative or meditative prayer, but now this Kabbalistic contemplation spoke of a particular technique of visualising the colours of the *Sefirot*. Indeed, according to R. David ben Jehudah he-Hasid, a late 13th century Spanish Kabbalist, it was wrong to visualise the *Sefirot* themselves only their colours.¹⁴⁸ Meditation and prayer performed in this way elevated human thought to the Sefirotic realm, which was achieved without an intermediary.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 125, 128.

¹⁴⁶ Moshe Idel: *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*. New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 1988, pp. 103, 109. Idel suggested there was some Sufi-Hindu influence in the meditative methods of the Kabbalistic prayer, above p.108 and in his essay *Kabbalistic Prayer and Colour* in David R. Blumenthal, ed., *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, Atlanta Georgia, 1988, Vol 3, p. 23.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., *New Perspectives* p. 106.

¹⁴⁸ Op. Cit: Moshe Idel: *New Perspectives*: p. 104.

Each *Sefirah* had its own colour, which has been detailed in a work attributed to R. Azriel.¹⁴⁹ The colours ranged from concealed light for the first *Sefirah* to the light which contains all colours, then green, white, red, then varieties of white and scarlet, and finally a colour which was composed of all colours. However, the colours did vary as can be seen in the later *Pardes Rimorim* from Safed.¹⁵⁰ Indeed it seems that the colours were always changing, appearing and disappearing, which is suggested by the scarlet/white colours described above, where more scarlet or more white might appear and so forth.

Up until now I have concentrated on the symbolism of the ladder in Jewish mysticism, where the spiritual guide as an individual played little part as in the *Hekhalot* material, for indeed, the spiritual guide was a shadowy figure. There was no doubt that he was 'there' but he chose to remain anonymous or use a pseudonym. Again with respect to the fragments of manuscripts concerning the methods of Kabbalist prayer, it was certainly no accident that these scraps remained in manuscript only. This was the fate of much material that was deemed secret, and was only passed around by a master to a small circle of disciples. However, as we have seen, by the turn of the 13th century, various rabbis were putting their names to works concerning techniques, though again there was reluctance because of the danger involved if the texts fell into the wrong hands. For this reason, R. Jacob ben Sheshet did not divulge all the hidden secrets of the

¹⁴⁹ Op cit: Joseph Dan: Early Kabbalah. p. 94.

¹⁵⁰ Op. Cit: Aryeh Kaplan: Meditation and Kabbalah. p. 181.

Kabbalistic prayer.¹⁵¹ Also R. Isaac the Blind had sent an angry letter to Gerona reminding them that the teachings of the Kabbalah should remain secret.¹⁵²

Spiritual Guidance according to ibn Paquda

Another work on spiritual guidance though influenced by philosophy takes much from the Jewish spiritual heritage. *The Duties of the Heart* is an 11th century work by the Dayan [judge] ibn Paquda, a Sephardi Jew who wrote in Arabic, and known for his writing on ethics. The first part of the book was translated into Hebrew by Jehuda ibn Tibbon, at the request of R. Meshulam ben Jacob of Lunel, though the full translation did not appear until 1160. The book showed the influence of Greek/Arabic philosophy but it was interpreted in the author's way, so his work above all, maintained its own Jewish roots. During this period in Spain the educated Jews and Arabs shared a common culture so that Jews studied Arabic philosophy, as will be discussed further in the final chapter.

It would seem that there was a dearth of books on spiritual guidance in ibn Paquda's community, specifically dealing with esoteric knowledge, or knowledge of God. Indeed, that appeared to have been his main motivation for composing his work, as he says in his introduction to *The Duties of the Heart*.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Op. Cit: Joseph Dan: p 125. Idel states that the Kabbalist prayer combined with visualising colours appeared in texts dating from the early 14th century. *New Perspectives*: op cit: p. 104.

¹⁵² Joseph Dan: *The Early Kabbalah*, p. 34.

¹⁵³ Bahya Ben Joseph ibn Paquda. *Al-Hidāya ilā Fara'īd al-Qulūb*, tr by Menahem Mansoor et al as *The Book of Direction to the Duties of the Heart*. London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973, p. 88.

Nevertheless, ibn Paquda's book was more concerned with understanding God as immanent in creation, rather than grappling with the subtleties of the transcendent God of the Kabbalah, whose attributes were manifest by the *Sefirot*. He advised that people should try to understand God through the traces of His wisdom as manifested in creation, such as the wonder of the heavens, as was shown in the Old Testament.¹⁵⁴ In his chapter *On the Unity of God* the author endeavoured to explain how he understood God, following Aristotle's theory on the First Cause;¹⁵⁵ one should be careful about the attributes used to describe Him, because He is greater than any human conception of such attributes.¹⁵⁶ But nevertheless, the author's understanding of ethical behaviour was based on tradition.

How should one prepare oneself to receive knowledge of God? One of the virtues that must be acquired was that of obedience. This meant obedience to God and his Law, the Torah. Indeed, for ibn Paquda the Torah was the medicine for the sickness of the soul.¹⁵⁷ Though because of his intellect man belonged to the upper world, but because of his body he was plunged into the lower world of bodily pleasures. It was necessary to find a solution whereby a balance could be brought about between mind and body.¹⁵⁸ With respect to the virtue of obedience, the author emphasised that one should be obedient to one's elders so,

¹⁵⁴ Book of Direction to the Duties of the Heart, pp. 153 f.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 116 f.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 146.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 181.

¹⁵⁸ Op. Cit: p. 185.

for example, a youth was in need of education and guidance to help him overcome his desires, and his mind was strengthened thereby.¹⁵⁹ But obedience is for the sake of God alone, because only then can one strive to be free of various vices such as hypocrisy, affectation and so forth.¹⁶⁰

With obedience, one must cultivate the virtue of humility. Humility ensures submissiveness to God and His Law, and protects against an over-estimation of one's self esteem. At the same time because of one's nobler spirit one does not fall in with the evil ways of the world. With humility, finally, the aspirant is able to learn and be directed by those who rule over him. In this particular case, it would mean that he might find the 'prophet of his generation' and because of his willing to learn, the sage would be able to impart his learning. Paramount, of course, is one's humility towards God.¹⁶¹ If a person's heart is devoid of humility towards God, it is likely that he would have within his character, the vices of pride and arrogance and so would not be obedient. Therefore, humility, submission and meekness were the beginnings of repentance as was emphasised in 2 Chr. 7:14; 12:7.¹⁶² Though this does, indeed, fit in with the requirements of scripture, the essence of all this teaching has much in common with both Christian and Sufi doctrines on this subject.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 187. Guidance is also recommended for women and weak-minded men, but these need a more moderate rule.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 273.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 305, 306: The expression 'Prophet of his generation' seems similar to the 'Imām of the Time' among the Sufis.

¹⁶² Op. Cit: Book of Direction: p. 322.

The author is both for and against asceticism. In effect, he accepts that it is not a condition for everybody and indeed, if it were, the world would not exist. However, for those people who wish to live a life above the average, dedicated to God's purpose and to the love of God, which is the goal of asceticism, it is necessary that the passions be curbed. "The Law," he says, "is to give the mind mastery over the soul."¹⁶³ This is a crucial point and, in fact, herein lies the way to salvation. Ibn Paquda accepted implicitly the tripartite soul from Greek philosophy. It is the instinctive part of the soul, or the lower soul, which led a person into wrong. It was a weakness of character and a concomitant weakness of belief that beset a person who did not control his lower soul. Such a person was liable to hold heretical opinions, like doubting the eternity of the soul, doubting the existence of the Creator and finally had doubts concerning matters of Prophecy.¹⁶⁴ Indeed it was essential that a person learnt to curb this lower aspect of the soul, so that the higher part of the soul, the intellect which was akin to Mind, was in the ascendant, for it will encourage a Study of the Law.¹⁶⁵ In effect it is Mind or Nous acting on the human intellect that leads the soul to salvation, as is shown in the dialogue between soul and Mind.¹⁶⁶

The Mind envisaged in this text is also that of the Jewish God who speaks to the human intellect. However, there is no doubt that ibn Paquda has given his dialogue a Neo-Platonic interpretation. The noble part of the soul, the intellect is

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 405.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 279-280.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 282-283.

both celestial and immanent. It is the divine quality of the human intellect that enables it to be guided by the Mind of God. Thus he says "...the mind's persuasion is God's inspiration to man, through the medium of his mind, to know Him and to distinguish the marks of his Wisdom. This inspiration is given by God to him who follows his Law...when this knowledge is established in man's soul by way of his mind and his discrimination... When God then inspires him to follow the righteous path." ¹⁶⁷ Here the writer is speaking of an immanent intellect within the soul, which the Mind of God illumines. ¹⁶⁸

In this dialogue, therefore, man's reason, which is his most noble part, is that which leads him to God. The lower soul, unfortunately, may have many blameworthy traits ¹⁶⁹ and these must be atoned for. However if the lower soul purifies itself in devotion, obedience, submissiveness, it will be in a position for the intellectual part of the soul to reign, and so receive God's grace and this, in effect, constitutes a 'cure'. ¹⁷⁰ For it is through his reason that the human being comes to know God, and by purification is put in the position of receiving the love and grace of God, so that he may love Him too. The final stage has been reached when a person is willing to lose all for God, this highest stage of the love

¹⁶⁶ Book of Direction: op cit: pp. 198-220.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 198-199.

¹⁶⁸ In the final chapter of this thesis we shall see that the Christian Scholastics likewise considered that an external intellect could only mean the Mind of God.

¹⁶⁹ Book of Direction: op cit: p. 200.

¹⁷⁰ Book of Direction: op cit: pp. 207-8.

of God is not within the ability of everyone, but whenever it is found among this religious élite it has been inspired by God Himself. ¹⁷¹

Sefer Hasidim

The spiritual guidance found in the *Sefer Ḥasidim* written by R. Jehudah the Hasid about 1200 in Regensburg shows less influence of philosophy than *ibn Paquda*. This was a result, no doubt, of their living outside Spain and so cut off from the main philosophical heritage. Indeed little had been translated into Hebrew during that period. *The Sefer Ḥasidim*, therefore, is a collection of Jewish traditions and customs using Jewish sources.¹⁷² Furthermore, the book contained a particularly Jewish ethos, especially on its insistence that the one who aspires after spiritual life should not cut themselves off from the community. As we have seen, the Christian monk or holy man felt the family and the world to be an encumbrance.

The Sefer Ḥasidim, therefore, was a book of spiritual guidance, and an important work to have come from the Ashkenazi Ḥasidim, who were a Reformist group within Judaism. In that respect some comparison could be made between them, though not with their theology but their puritanism, and similar contemporary Christian Reform groups within Christianity in the Rhineland. The German Hasidic groups are more remembered perhaps for their

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 433.

¹⁷² Simon G. Kramer: *Judah the Hasid: God and Man in the Sefer Hasidim*. New York, Bloch, Hebrew Theological College, 1966, p. 225.

work with the Holy Names, their *Merka'ub* type of mysticism, which concentrated on the materialisation of God's Glory or *Kavod*, or the manifestation of the Holy Cherub, so by way of contrast, the *Sefer Ḥasidim*, is a practical guide.

The book was concerned with the education of young people living within the community, who should have been trained in good habits, not speaking evil and avoiding idleness.¹⁷³ Moreover, the young scholar or rabbi should attend to the needs of the community and not only those of scholarship, no matter how worthy. R. Jehudah based this argument on the Jerusalem Talmud¹⁷⁴ which says "He who occupies himself with the wants of the congregation, it is as if he studied the Torah."¹⁷⁵ In other words, it was not right for a religious teacher to cut himself off from people and the community. At the same time such a person should learn how to subdue the passions, and to understand the importance of prayer for divine guidance.¹⁷⁶

However, the fear of God is not innate, for it is not given as a gift but is only achieved through training. A young person should be presented to a wise and god-fearing teacher, in order to train him into the practices of the fear of God.¹⁷⁷ The qualities required of the teacher are a natural ability and desire to teach, coupled with honesty, integrity, and clarity of thought and language.¹⁷⁸ With

¹⁷³ Op cit: Sefer Ḥasidim 986, Kramer: p. 222.

¹⁷⁴ Berakhot V.1.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., Kramer: p. 225

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., Sefer Ḥasidim 815, Kramer: p. 205; Sefer Ḥasidim 13, p. 12, p. 73.

¹⁷⁷ Sefer Ḥasidim 2, p. 4; Kramer: p. 66.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., Kramer: p. 227.

regards to intellectual training, specialists in different branches were preferable meaning one for the Bible, one for Mishnah, and one for the Talmud.¹⁷⁹

In choosing a master for oneself or one's son, it was important not to be influenced by friendship or loyalty but by the ability and quality of the teacher on the one hand, and the ability of the student to learn from that particular teacher on the other.¹⁸⁰ Although there was not the demand for women to be so thoroughly educated, some seemed to have achieved a fair amount through their own efforts like R. Eleazar's daughters.¹⁸¹ However, in the *Sefer Ḥasidim*, R. Jehudah encouraged women to take an interest in learning from the Torah, and furthermore, encouraged them to listen to the discourses of the rabbis.¹⁸²

Finally, the spiritual guidance taught in the *Sefer Ḥasidim* certainly is not without asceticism and mysticism. R. Jehudah envisaged regular times of contemplation and periodic withdrawal. He maintained that "the pleasures of the soul should be dearer to you than the pleasures of the body, for the pleasures of the soul are eternal and certain, while the pleasures of the body are temporary and doubtful."¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., SH: 820, Kramer: p. 208, p. 228.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., Kramer: p. 229.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 238.

¹⁸² Op cit: Sefer Hasidim 835, Kramer: p. 211.

¹⁸³ Ibid: SH: 13, p.12; Kramer: p. 86.

THE SPIRITUAL GUIDE IN ISLAM

The spiritual guide or holy man developed among the Sufi orders, which were religious brotherhoods within Islam. The specific Sufi teaching was first defined in the 9th century by Ma'rūf al-Karkhī as "... seizing realities and renouncing that which is between the hands of created beings" ¹⁸⁴ demanding a way of life that emptied the heart of all things which are not concerned with God. The way of the Sufi was the way of the servant. He was the servant before his spiritual master, and fundamentally a servant before God. Only when he was able to show that he has overcome all vanity and pride, could he ask to be admitted into a Sufi order and undergo the ritual initiation. Sometimes this could be a handshake, in memory of that given by the Prophet to the companions, when they swore their commitment to serve God. Often the initiate was given a new name, or the Sheikh put the *khirqah* or cloak around his shoulders to symbolise his entry into a new life.¹⁸⁵

The Sheikh himself must be able to prove his pedigree, and be able to prove he had been initiated by a master. The sheikh was then connected to all other masters, who had likewise undergone the same initiation. Only then was he

¹⁸⁴ Jean-Louis Michon: *The Spiritual Practices of Sufism* in Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed., *Islamic Spirituality*, London, SCM Press, 1989, Vol. 1, p. 269.

¹⁸⁵ *Spiritual Practices*: p. 271.

connected to the *silsilah*. This was the chain of tradition, which stretched back to the Light of the Prophet. The sincere spiritual guide or sheikh will have undergone the same training himself and will know all the pitfalls and be able to advise his disciples likewise. Like the Christian monk in training, the Sufi must be obedient to his master. He must repent of sinful behaviour. This often results in forms of confession, because as we have seen previously, if a person is unable to speak of his problems the situation can only deteriorate. The cure is brought about by complete openness with his spiritual mentor. ¹⁸⁶

In the Sufi brotherhood various invocatory practices were used such as the *dhikr* - *lā ilāha illa' llāh*, which can be silent or voiced, which can bring about a heightened state of consciousness and which will be analysed more fully in later chapters. There were different stages of *dhikr*, accompanied by meditation, the final stage of which would result in the Sufi being annihilated in God. ¹⁸⁷ Other methods used sometimes to induce ecstasy, were *samā'* – singing or dancing, as in the whirling dervishes.

The importance of the sheikh in the Sufi brotherhood can be seen right from the beginning of the development of the orders. The earliest stage was often an itinerant one, where the Sheikh and the disciples lived a common life. Fundamental was guidance by a master who taught meditation, contemplation, and methods to induce ecstasy. A later stage, which can be dated about 1100-

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 302.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 289.

1400 CE, continued on from here with the transmission of 'a doctrine, rule and method.'¹⁸⁸

The core of the Sufi doctrine was based on the Qur'ān. Nevertheless, the Arabs were aware of the philosophical and religious writings of the Greek world and the East. This aspect will be analysed more fully in later chapters, but suffice it is to say here that one of the key texts known to them was the so-called *Theology of Aristotle* which was in effect, Books IV - VI of the *Enneads* of Plotinus. Another work was the *Mahd al-Khayr - On the Good*, which was based on Proclus' *Elements of Theology* which was finally translated into Hebrew as the *Sefer ha-Sibbot - The Book of Causes* which, in turn, became the *Liber de Causis* in the medieval Latin edition. From the 8th century the Arab conquest of North India and Central Asia the Sufis were cognisant with the yoga practices of Patañjali, the Sāṃkhya philosophical system and the epic of the Mahābhārata. These works have been specifically mentioned by Sanskrit translators such as al-Bīrūnī, but the Sufi masters also knew of various spiritual techniques Hindu and Buddhist, which will be discussed in a later chapter.

On the Necessity of the Spiritual Guide, in the Writings of ibn 'Arabī

One of the foremost sheikhs of the Middle Ages was Muḥyī al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn al-'Arabī who was born in Murcia in Southern Spain in 1165. He himself had many teachers, both human and visionary. Although ibn 'Arabī

¹⁸⁸ J. Spencer Trimingham: *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 1978, p. 103.

did have teachers from the “unseen” he did not recommend such practices for a beginner, but always asserted the need for the human guide. I shall leave ibn ‘Arabī’s encounters with heavenly guides to another chapter and shall concentrate here on the qualities of the human guide. With respect to the latter ibn ‘Arabī’s recommendations followed quite closely the pre-requisites of Stoic philosophy and of Christian spiritual guidance.

Ibn ‘Arabī recommended a human spiritual guide for the beginner, believing that the disciple who was without one “has Satan for a master.”¹⁸⁹ The aspirant’s time was taken up, therefore, with the practices his master prescribed. On the other hand, those people who ignored this advice and followed their own way would certainly fail in their endeavours.¹⁹⁰

Obedience to the master was required at all times. The disciple was advised to “submit like a corpse in his hands.”¹⁹¹ The disciple was also warned not to be impatient for results, as the training was inevitably a protracted one. The role of the sheikh was to help the disciple to overcome all problems. Without the sheikh’s teaching and recommendations, how could the disciple acquire the necessary quality of discernment? Without this, how would he be able to know the difference between angels of light and demons?¹⁹² The requirements for this quality was illustrated by the Desert Fathers. Another virtue that the disciple had

¹⁸⁹ Kitāb al amr al-muhkām. Spanish tr. by Asin Palacios in *El Islam...* Madrid, Plutarco, 1931 [83] p. 303.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, *Tadbirāt ilayyiah*: [226-230] pp. 356-9.

¹⁹¹ *Op. Cit*: *Mawaqī al-nujum*: III p. 386 in *El Islam...*

to practise was the examination of his conscience. In what way might he have offended God? This procedure was always in conjunction with the disciple's sheikh. The disciple had to learn to overcome negative passions like anger and so forth.¹⁹³

Inevitably ibn 'Arabī discussed the propensity for evil in humanity. He interpreted this problem in a Neo-Platonic sense, as a lack in the soul of the individual that needed to be remedied. Moreover, it was evil not to aspire to one's better nature.¹⁹⁴ He also taught that the evil propensities of the soul should be converted into positive traits. Thus in respect of the vices, cowardice, envy and despair "the soul should be cowardly committing forbidden things, it should envy... [the one] who seeks knowledge... it should desire that which is good."¹⁹⁵ Finally, as there is no evil in God, a way of combating evil is to seek refuge in God¹⁹⁶ the same advice given by ibn Paquda.

Ibn 'Arabī wrote of the role of the Sheikh in Chapter 281 of the *Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* – *The Meccan Revelations*, as a doctor of the soul and physician, like the spiritual guide in the Desert Fathers and John Climacus. The sheikh, therefore, "knows the illnesses and the medicines."¹⁹⁷ Moreover, he knew all things relating

¹⁹² Ibid., Amr p 303.

¹⁹³ Ibid., Kitab cunh: [451] p 373-376.

¹⁹⁴ *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*: 1.47.2, Bulaq 1329. Tr. William C. Chittick: *Ibn al'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination: The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1989, p. 290.

¹⁹⁵ Op. Cit: Chittick: II. 687.12, p. 307.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., III. 389.21, p. 291.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 271.

to the spiritual life, including the validity of visions and divine manifestations, which were liable to occur during contemplation and the wiles of Satan and whatever a disciple's heart concealed from him. Furthermore, "To revere the sheikh is to show reverence for none but God."¹⁹⁸ Indeed the Sufi master provided everything the disciple would need for his training and unveiling, until the disciple himself becomes worthy to be a sheikh.¹⁹⁹

The Spiritual Guide as "Ladder to Heaven" in Jalālu'ddīn Rūmī

The Mathnawī was the largest work that Rūmī wrote who was born in Balkh in 1207 in present-day Afghanistan. His family travelled via Samarkand, in Russian Central Asia, and Aleppo until they settled in Konya in the Sultanate of Rum. *The Mathnawī* contained much on spiritual guidance, which the author wrote down at the behest of his disciple Husamu'ddīn. The first part of this section on Rūmī will concentrate on his ideas on spiritual guidance, to be followed by an analysis of his unusual relationship with his own spiritual guide Shams al-Dīn.

In the *Mathnawī* the *Pīrs*, or spiritual guides, were special people. They were pre-ordained to be spiritual mentors and had a special relationship with Divinity.²⁰⁰ The *Pīr* was linked, by inference, with the celestial guide Khidr who had initiated Moses in the Koran and possessed special powers. It was essential

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 271.

¹⁹⁹ Op. Cit: Chittick: p. 272.

²⁰⁰ *Mathnawī* of Jalālu'ddīn Rūmī Tr. Reynold A. Nicholson, London, Luzac & Co., 1926, Book 2, lines 172 f. p. 231.

to have a Pīr. “What you see plainly in the mirror, the Pīr sees more than that in a brick.”²⁰¹ Furthermore, it was the shadow of the Pīr that killed the fleshly soul²⁰² for as we have understood in ibn Paquda’s work, the lower part of the soul must be curbed to enable spiritual advancement to occur. Thus the wisdom and guidance of the Pīr was of paramount importance, so much so, that a person without a spiritual guide was like a blind man alone. The lover of darkness immediately saw the light as soon as he subjected himself to the Pīr of right guidance, for then the Pīr became as “a ladder to heaven.”²⁰³

As the Pīr was the “ladder to heaven” he was called the Beloved. All distinctions were removed between the disciple and the master. The love of the Beloved and the Lover was all that remained, so that psychically they formed a unity, and spiritually the Pīr was part of the Divine. Rumi said the Pīrs were in the sea of [divine] bounty before the world existed and that they had borne the pearls before the creations of the sea.²⁰⁴ Therefore, the disciple also fed from the divine bounty, through the intercession of the Pīr. In this respect the disciple’s soul was merged with that of the Pīr, in much the same way as the aspiring yogi and his guru. For Rūmī there could not be any division between himself and God or his spiritual guide. He illustrated this in an anecdote in the *Mathnawī*. It was only

²⁰¹ *Mathnawī*: Book II, line 167, p 230.

²⁰² *Ibid*: Book II, line 2529, p 352.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, Book VI lines 4125, p. 485.

²⁰⁴ *Mathnawī*: op cit., Book II, line 168, p 230.

when the disciple knocking at God's door answered that it was "Thou" and not "I" outside that he was admitted.²⁰⁵ Indeed the guide, the disciple and God formed a unity.

The Way of Knowledge, or the Way of Love?

Traditionally, it is said that mystics follow the way of knowledge, or the way of love. In effect, it is not always as clear cut as that, though in the case Rūmī there is no doubt that he followed the way of Love. The intellect he considered was a useful, but pedestrian guide with limitations whereas love knew no boundary.²⁰⁶ According to the *Mathnawī* following the Qur'ān, on the night of the Mi'raj, or the Prophet's ascent when he entered the Divine Presence, the accompanying angel Gabriel who personified the active intellect, had to stand back.²⁰⁷ The fact that Gabriel remained outside was symbolic that human reason must stop at a certain point, where love may continue further.

Rūmī's love for Shams al-Dīn

By the time Rūmī's family had reached Konya, he was already married with one son. His father, like himself, was a teacher of theology with an interest in mysticism. Shortly after his father's death in 1231, a Sufi friend became Rūmī's

²⁰⁵ Ibid: Book I, lines 3056 f. p.167.

²⁰⁶ Annemarie Schimmel: *I am Wind, you are Fire*, Boston and London, Shambhala, 1992, p. 109.

²⁰⁷ Op cit: *Mathnawī*. Book I, line 1067, p 60. The angelic intellect will be the subject of Chapter 5.

first spiritual guide. He stayed with him some years, until the guide left Konya in 1240.

However, Rūmī's spiritual master, par excellence, was Shams al-Dīn, whom he met in the street by chance. Though their relationship was not of long duration, it was to affect Rūmī for the rest of his life. Annemarie Schimmel gives an account of their meeting in her book called the *Triumphal Sun*²⁰⁸ and from that point, both disciple and master were inseparable. Through Shams' influence, his pupil's spiritual experience can be described as one of "spiritual intoxication."

However, Shams' link with the Sufi *silsilah* was difficult to ascertain.²⁰⁹ There may well have been a good reason why Shams was shown such animosity by some members of his disciple's family. Moreover, they certainly resented the fact that Shams al-Dīn virtually took over Rūmī's life. Of course, this state of affairs would not have happened had he been without domestic commitments. In fact, though Shams had left some writings, his *Maqalat* that contained some of his ideas on mysticism, music and dance which Rumi was to develop, no one knew his family name. In Rūmī's writings he was known by such epithets as the "Sun of Religion," the Sun of Tabriz," to which his disciple added many more sobriquets such as "the Beloved," "the Shepherd" and "the Cupbearer."

²⁰⁸ *Triumphal Sun: A Study of the Works of Jalāloddin Rumi*, London, Fine Books, 1978, p. 22.

²⁰⁹ Annemarie Schimmel: *I am Wind, you are Fire*, p. 20.

In the *Mathnawī*, as has been shown, Rūmī discussed the spiritual guide. We know by the poet's imagery that he had Shams in mind. Here the Prophet said to Alī that though he was a Lion of God he should not rely on himself, but seek out a sage, whom Rūmī described "as the Divine Sun who has veiled himself in man."²¹⁰ At the end of this poem, the poet described the work of the Pīr as one who slayed his disciple, so that he may live again in God.²¹¹ Here Rūmī confirmed that it was the spiritual guide who brought about the initiatic death and spiritual rebirth. Previously, in this chapter, it has been shown that Symeon's initiatic death was symbolised by the ordeal by fire, which was a fairly prevalent motif. On the other hand, Rūmī often used the terms of pregnancy and childbirth to describe the process of spiritual rebirth, which was brought about through the intercession of the spiritual guide. In one poem, he described his immanent rebirth as awaiting the child to be born,²¹² and in another he says, "Die now... and do not fear this death, for you will come forth from this earth and seize the heavens."²¹³

Rūmī celebrated Shams as the giver of ecstasy. The language describing this 'inebriation' is that of the tavern. "You [Shams] are the soul of the soul... open the door of grace... From the righteous shouts of the drunkards you cannot tell

²¹⁰ Rumi, *Poet and Mystic*, tr. R.A.Nicholson, London, Unwin, 1978, p. 79.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

²¹² A.J. Arberry: *Mystical poems of Rūmī*. Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 1979, no. 297, p. 75.

²¹³ A.J. Arberry. *First Selections 1-200*, Chicago, 1968, no. 80, p. 70.

wine from bowl... all have departed out of themselves.²¹⁴ The precedent for the imagery of the 'righteous drunkards' lolling around inebriated developed from descriptions of mystical experience in medieval Persian, Khārābātī poetry.²¹⁵

Though the 'drunkards' were said to be out of themselves, yet the Sufi journey was always an inward one. The pilgrimage to the Ka'ba was not only a journey across continents. It symbolised the inner journey to the centre of one's being.²¹⁶ It was also clear that the interior pilgrimage would not have taken place, without the spiritual guidance of Shams, for the disciple would never have tasted a 'date' [spiritual experience] without him.²¹⁷ Elsewhere, Rūmī wrote of those who had tried to go it alone without a Pīr. Such people were "on the road to the Ka'ba of Union" wounded and dying, "without a breath of fragrance of union, a token from the neighbourhood of the Friend." The poet urged fellow travellers on the way to seek a guide like Shams, "the sun who is the glory of Tabriz."²¹⁸

The experience of a guide like Shams worked like alchemy on the soul. He turned what was dross or inferior into gold. "All our copper turns to gold when you enter our mine,"²¹⁹ for Shams was the 'touchstone of God.' In another poem the poet called him "the life and salvation of men." Here, Shams caused stones to

²¹⁴ A.J.Arberry: *Mystical Poems of Rumi*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1968, No. 367, pp. 121-2.

²¹⁵ J.T.P. de Bruijn: *The Qalandariyyat in Mystical Poetry* in Leonard Lewisohn, ed., *Legacy of Medieval Persian Poetry*, London & New York, 1992, pp. 80-81.

²¹⁶ A. J. Arberry: *Mystical poems* No. 362, p. 118.

²¹⁷ Op. Cit: Arbery, No. 212.

²¹⁸ R. A. Nicholson: *Selected poems from the Divani Shamsi Tabriz*, Cambridge, 1898, No. 44, p. 175.

²¹⁹ A.J.Arberry: *Selected poems*. No. 364, p. 120.

become rubies. It was believed that the warmth of the sun turned stones into precious gems and, likewise, base metals into gold. Similarly, *Shams*, the Arabic for *Sun*, transformed human souls. Spiritual regeneration has been linked to the processes of alchemy since antiquity in the Middle East and the Mediterranean world and this kind of alchemical symbolism is found in Sufi literature and indeed, in some early Christian writing as St. Cyril's *Procataphesis*.²²⁰

Rūmī's poems bemoaning the disappearance of Shams were those written after the poet's final separation from him. Shams did leave on one previous occasion, but was found and brought back by Rūmī's second and more sympathetic son, Walad. But Shams did disappear finally and there is good reason to believe that his enemies murdered him, one of whom may have been Rūmī's eldest son, who deeply resented the influence of Shams on his father.²²¹

The agony of separation, therefore, pervades much of the poems written about Shams, but finally the poet realised that there was no need to go searching for Shams in this world when he lived already in Rūmī's heart.²²² What is more, because the master never died in the spirit, the relationship between Pīr and disciple never ended. "We went into hiding from the world of the flesh, we became more manifest in the world of love... Shams-I Tabriz... We come

²²⁰ St. Cyril of Jerusalem's *Lectures on the Christian Sacraments*: Ed. F.L. Cross, New York, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986, [9], pp 5, 45.

²²¹ Op. Cit: Annemarie Schimmel: *Triumphal Sun*: p. 22.

²²² Op. Cit: R.A. Nicholson: *Selected Poems*: No. 17, p. 73.

shoulder to shoulder in the house of eternity.”²²³ In life and death, master and disciple are together.

Conclusion to Chapter One

This chapter has shown the significance of the spiritual guide in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Though obviously the doctrines must differ, depending on the religion to which the guide belongs, I have argued that all the traditions stress the importance of a spiritual guide. It has been shown as well, that the idea of moral guidance was also an important concept among the Stoics. Greek philosophy too underlined the need for the young man to be educated and guided by an older man, in order they he reach his full potential.

In respect of spiritual guidance, it was fundamental that the guide had immediate experience of the spiritual life. Book learning did not count overmuch because there was an experiential side to spiritual guidance, which will be analysed in later chapters. This involved preparing oneself for a life of mysticism and prayer. I have shown in the case of Symeon and his spiritual father, for example, that they worked hand in hand in this respect. Simeon was a visionary, and his spiritual father encouraged this aspect. St. Bonaventure also spoke of visualisation in connection with religious exercises. We shall return to these phenomena later on in this thesis but when a disciple is involved in this form of contemplation it is, for obvious reasons, essential to have a guide.

²²³ A.J.Arberry: First Selections: op cit: No. 190, p. 158.

It was shown in the story in the Talmud of the four rabbis who entered the garden, but only one of them was successful, that there was a danger attached to these practices namely insanity and mental confusion. The spiritual guides knew that there was a real danger entering higher states of consciousness unsupervised, so they advocated very strongly the need for a teacher. What is a higher state of consciousness? It can only be described rather lamely as a 'new way of seeing.' It might occur, for example, when someone was gazing at a landscape, which suddenly became transfigured. These are involuntary states, which have been described by William James.²²⁴ Since his book was written, however, much research has been done in respect of drug-induced mystical states.²²⁵

I have also argued that in the esoteric side of Judaism, there was indeed a master, a subject to which I shall return in later chapters. However if one considers the *Hekhalot* and related material as evidence of mystical practice, it was found that the master was *there* as there is evidence for his instructions in the *Merkavah* trance and so forth. However, as we are now dealing with a hidden tradition, he is but a shadowy figure un-named and unrecognised. To be sure, names have been given to the rabbis who figured in this literature but, of course, they are fictitious.

The phenomena of mystical lights or photisms, ecstatic experience, trances and so forth, evidence of which can be found in accounts of religious experience

²²⁴ William James: *The Varieties of Religious Experience*: Glasgow, Collins, Fount Paperbacks, 1979, p. 82.

²²⁵ David M. Wulff: *Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Views*, New York, John Wiley, 1991, pp. 102 ff; 144 ff; 172 ff; 184 ff.

from the *Hekhalot* right up through the centuries, can now be simulated in the laboratory. It goes without saying that these effects are purely manufactured and so are considered artificial. Nevertheless, these states of mind were encouraged by some spiritual guides and as such could be dangerous for a novice to practise alone without having had any help. This was why we find such warnings throughout spiritual literature and I have argued that the Jews, Christians and Muslims knew of these dangers.

However, it does seem that there are layers of spiritual guidance as there are different pupils. Ibn Paquda, for example, was writing for people outside such a mystical fraternity. He concentrates on a form of ethical writing to be of help to ordinary people and as he said himself, there did not appear to be such works on spiritual guidance in his community. The same can be said for the advice given in the *Sefer Hasidim* in that much of it is focused on the average person living in the community. No doubt the author did know of other esoteric teachings, but in this case he was concerned in giving guidance of a more general nature.

In the religious community or brotherhood, it was helpful to have a guide to support a novice in the problems of the spiritual life as has been shown, but the relationship between mentor and pupil might involve more. In later chapters of this thesis, I shall be concentrating on the 'inner guide' who appeared as a figure in contemplation whose very existence was in the subject's psyche. This guide, therefore, was made manifest through practices in meditation and it can be readily appreciated that the human spiritual guide taught the procedure to enable

the disciple to 'see' this inner guide. Indeed the human guide was an intermediary, or a very necessary bridge, who stood between God and the spiritual world on the one hand, and the disciple on the other.

I have shown that for Rūmī, Shams was an important bridge to the divine. He not only inspired him in his spiritual life but was also a source of inspiration for his poetry. At first the poet was distracted without his guide, but then he realised the insoluble link between himself and Shams, a link that even in death could not be broken, for the guide dwelt in his disciple's heart. In the following chapter I shall demonstrate further that death does not separate the master from his disciples.

CHAPTER TWO

THE GUIDE FROM THE DEAD OR THE HIDDEN MASTER

Introduction

This chapter will analyse spiritual guidance 'beyond the grave'. In the Islamic world this will involve the 'withdrawn guide' which covers the hidden *imām* in Persian Shī'ism, or guidance from the prophets as Moses or Jesus as in the case of ibn 'Arabī. It was believed that neither the *imām* nor the Prophets had died, but had been withdrawn by God. Among the Central Asian Naqshbandī Order of Sufis, deceased sheikhs gave spiritual guidance from the celestial world. It was formally introduced by Bahā'ī-Dīn Naqshband in the 14th century, though it was said by his followers, that its roots lay further back because of the initiations given by sheikhs who had died centuries before.

The official birthplace of the Order was Bukhara in Russian Central Asia, though its influence spread along the Silk Route to India and China. There were links between these somewhat different forms of guidance from the dead, the 'withdrawn' guide and the Naqshbandīyyah, though with respect to the latter it is

known how the hidden master was contacted. This was a process whereby the physical form of the sheikh was visualised in meditation.

In Judaism there is less evidence for the guide from the dead, but there is some. The mule-driver in the *Zohar* appeared on earth to instruct the people in the Kabbalistic interpretations of scripture though, in fact, he had been an important rabbi who had died some years previously. He shared some qualities with the 'hidden saint' or Uwaysi guide in Islam, in that he was not recognised by people lacking in spiritual insight, only those who had, in this case, some affinity with Kabbalist wisdom.

In Gnostic Christianity, the post-resurrected Jesus played the part of the guide from the dead. It had not been possible to crucify him, because of his docetic nature, so He lived in the celestial realms and on occasions, manifested on earth to initiate or teach His followers. These ideas about Jesus the celestial teacher were abandoned in the early years of Christianity and the Gnostic scriptures which contained such material were either destroyed or hidden, many of which were not found until our own era. However, the motif of Jesus the heavenly teacher, re-emerged for a brief time among the Cathars, as one text -*The Secret Supper*- collected by Walter Wakefield indicates. In this case John went up to heaven to participate in what has been described as a heavenly archetype of the Last Supper. Certainly this text follows more nearly, the Gnostic accounts rather than the original Biblical ones, such as Jesus' appearance at the supper at Emmaus. In fact, all that really remained in medieval Christianity, from the

Carolingian times and beyond, was the belief that the saints' supernatural powers remained around their tombs. However, actual teaching by former saints who had lived on earth, or by Jesus in a spirit body, after the resurrection, did not play a part in orthodox Christianity.

THE HIDDEN IMĀM

A brief History

The Shī'a formed two main groups known as the *Twelvers* and the *Seveners*. The Twelvers' centre was and still is Iran while the Seveners, also known as the Ismā'īlīs, were a revolutionary movement founded in the 9th century. This last group split into two, some remaining in Iran, though another branch known as the Druzes were centred mostly in Syrian and Lebanon. The Persian Ismā'īlīs based at Alamut in the Elburz Mountains recognised the *Imām Nizir* as their leader.¹ In effect, both groups of Shī'a spread far along the trade routes, into North India and Chinese Central Asia, where pockets of them still exist especially in mountainous regions.

¹ Farhad Daftary: *The Isma'ilis: Their History and Doctrine*. Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 339 f.

The Ismāʿīlīs or Seveners believed that the 'awaited one' or the hidden *imām* was Ismāʿīl the son of the sixth *Imām*, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq. They accepted the first six *imāms* of the *Twelvers*. However, the *Twelvers* rejected this succession and recognised instead, Mūsā al-Kāzim as the *imām* after Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq. The eleventh *imām*, al Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī is reported to have died in 874, but the *Twelvers* believed that he had a son four years before he died. ² He, Muḥammad al-Mahdī, is the last or the twelfth *imām* who did not die but was withdrawn or occluded but he, nevertheless, continued to guide the faithful. He will return on the Day of Resurrection.³

When the last *imām* entered minor occultation he appointed "gateways" or representatives through whom he gave his teaching. When the greater occultation occurred, around the late 10th century, the gateway to the *imām* was closed. This concealment refers to the hidden state of the 12th *imām* without having died, he is none the less, absent from the visible world. The *imām* was invisible to most people but was still seen in visions, by his followers. ⁴

The Prophetic Mission of the *Imāms*

² The historians inform us that no son was born, meaning al-Mahdi was mythological. Heinz Halm: Shiʿism. Edinburgh University Press, 1991, p. 35.

³ Syed Husain M. Jafri: Twelve-Imām Shiʿism in Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed., Islamic Spirituality, London SCM Press, 1989 pp. 161f.

⁴ Shaykh al-Mufid: Kitab al-Irshad: The Book of Guidance into the lives of the Twelve Imāms. Tr. I.K.A.Howard, London, Muhammadi Trust, 1981, pp. 530f.

The *imāms*, whether of the *Twelveers* or the *Seveners*, had a prophetic mission. They were infallible so they could act as spiritual intermediaries for their followers. The Imamate derived from the Prophet so the *imām* had spiritual powers and though they may have begun life as mortals, were given supernatural qualities, so that they were able to guide their earthly followers. This belief in the supernatural nature of the Imamate was one of the foremost early doctrines. The specific role of the *imām* is found in the 10th century Shī'ite creed by ibn Bābawayh al-Qummi.⁵

In this book the *imāms* are supernatural figures responsible for the guidance of the souls of the faithful on earth, during the *imām's* occultation. They were described as the witnesses for the people and the gates of Allāh, the road to him and the guides thereto. They were repositories of God's knowledge and interpreters of His revelation. Immune from sin they possessed miraculous powers. They were, after the Prophet, proofs of Allah to the people because the earth cannot be "without proof [ḥujja] of Allāh to his creatures."⁶ Indeed they were the leaders of their followers and a repository of tradition. They communicated with God and former prophets and sages and in their spiritual guidance to their followers they acted as a bridge to the Divine. These themes are

⁵ Abu Ja'far, Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn al-Husayn, ibn Babawayh al-Qummi. *I'tiqādātū'l -Imāmiyyah* – the Beliefs of the Imāmiyyah, tr. as *A Shī'ite Creed* by Asaf A.A. Fyze, Tehran, World Organisation for Islamic Services, Revised edition, 1982, chapter 36.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 84-5.

further developed by al-Hillī in the 14th century, where he also affirms that the *imām* is the Lord of the Age, alive but hidden. ⁷

The *Imām*'s role in Initiation and Teaching

In the lesser occultation the *imām* had a representative on earth who acted as a missionary, guiding the disciple to gnosis imparted by the Hidden *imām*. Henry Corbin believed this to be the background behind the 10th century work, by Mansur al-Yaman, *The Book of the Sage and the Disciple*.⁸ When the young man in this text was finally initiated he was given a new name and received the gnosis, of which, however, no hint is given in the text. It does seem that a form of censorship operated in this case and may well have been because the Ishmā'īlīs were not regarded with favour and they usually kept their doctrinal secrets to themselves.

Some aspects of Shī'ī initiations, however, can be found in other texts. One was the practice of mixing bodily fluids, such as blood of the initiator and the initiated. Al Saffar al-Qummī informed us that Alī was initiated by the Prophet in that way.⁹ The power of the Holy Name seemed to be part of the gnosis imparted

⁷ Hasan b. Yusuf b. Ali ibn al-Mutahhar al-Hillī. *Al-Babu'l-hadi 'Ashar*: tr. as *Treatise on the Principles of Shi'ite Theology* by William Mc Elwee Miller, London. Royal Asiatic Society, London 1958, pp. 64, 65, 70, 78, 80.

⁸ *Kitab al'alim wa'l gholam: L'Initiation ismaélienne ou l'esoterisme et le Verbe* in Henry Corbin: *L'Homme et son Ange*, Paris, Fayard, 1983, pp. 81f.

⁹ *Basā'ir al-darajat* 7.1.1 in Mohammed Ali Amir Moezzi: *Le Guide Divine dans le Shi'isme originel aux sources de l'esotérisme*, Paris, Verdier [1990], p. 193.

by the imāms.¹⁰ This involved practices which would bring about ecstatic states in the disciple and, as such, were also used in Sunni Islam and Jewish mysticism. In another Ismāʿīlī book,¹¹ a section on the Science of the Letters contains an explication of the letters of the name 'Allāh,' which shall be discussed later on in this thesis in relation to other Islamic mystics. To summarize, therefore, it would seem that the role of the *imāms* was to teach the means of entering ecstatic states, or higher stages of consciousness, which indeed was taught by the earthly sheikh. Why not then attend the meetings of such a sheikh and why was it necessary to be initiated by the hidden *imām*?

Why the need for the Heavenly Sheikh?

As has been said, it was necessary to start with an earthly sheikh, for it was he who taught the disciple everything he should know. However in the case of the Ismāʿīlī sect, which in many respects was a mystical brotherhood, the hidden guide certainly had a place. However, both groups of Shīʿa Sufis had earthly sheikhs, but the centre of their religious experience was the hidden *imām* who had transcended time and place. Why should this be so? One important aspect was that the concept of a hidden guide maintained the teaching or the revelation as new. It also provided for a disciple's personal experience of that revelation. At the same time it enabled the seeker to appeal to tradition and authority. To maintain

¹⁰ Op. Cit: Basa'ir 4.12. pp. 208-11, pp. 230-2.

¹¹ Abu Ya'qub Sejestani. Kitab al-Yanabi: tr. in Le Livre des Sources: Trilogie Ismaélienne by Henry Corbin, Teheran, pp. 22-7, 49 f., 118.

the teaching as a young, vigorous plant was essential after the Prophet or the teacher was no longer with his followers. Revelation or teaching given by the hidden *imām* or the dead teacher in the celestial world, was a means of transmitting and keeping alive the tradition after his death or in the case of the hidden *imām*, after his occultation.

A similar situation had taken place in Pure Land Buddhism. In this case, after the death of Śākyamuni Buddha or Gautama the historical teacher, the concept evolved of docetic buddhas and bodhisattvas living in a celestial world. These celestial teachers are found in texts as the *Saddharma Puṇḍarīka*, known in English as the Lotus Sutrās.¹² These celestial buddhas and bodhisattvas naturally differed from the Imāms in that they had evolved from a different religious tradition. However, the similarity lay in that they were hidden guides who could be visualised in meditation and played a similar role of illumining or guiding their followers. Finally, common to many ancient cultures, which would have flourished alongside Buddhism and Islam, especially in such areas as Iran and Central Asia, was the old indigenous folk religion concerned with communicating with the dead, and various rituals associated with gaining 'powers'. These very prevalent religious beliefs have been called Shamanistic and in this case the earthly shamans believed they received their power from the souls of their

¹² Tr. by Bunno Kato et al. Revised by W.E.Soothill et al. *The Threefold Lotus Sutra*, New York, Weatherhill, 1975. Tathagata is a celestial teacher that means literally 'one who has thus gone'. p 74; for accounts of emanating Buddhas see p. 198, p. 255.

ancestral shamans.¹³ So behind this concept of the dead teacher as guide was the idea that the dead also possessed special powers that could be bestowed on the earthly follower.

The *Imām* alive but in a Spiritual Body

Indeed, a problem in discussing the *imām* as a hidden guide is that whereas some of the other guides discussed so far have already died, yet the *imām* and the Prophets are said to be still alive. If the *imām* is alive in his physical body, it must mean that he exists in a 'docetic' sense. His position must be similar to that of Moses, Idris or Enoch who were withdrawn by God. The *imāms*, therefore, like the prophets lived in a spiritual body but having access to both the celestial and terrestrial worlds. Like the prophets too, they appeared as intermediaries or spiritual guides, as is found in ibn 'Arabi's *Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya*¹⁴ The idea that the prophets were withdrawn and lived in a docetic body, is first seen in the Qur'ān which contains a 'docetic' account of the crucifixion of Jesus.¹⁵ In the first verse it only appeared that Jesus was crucified. In the second, moreover, it is said that God had raised him up unto himself meaning that he was 'withdrawn'.

The *Imām* and Graeco-Arabic Philosophy

¹³ Mircea Eliade: *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. Princeton, 1974, p. 107.

¹⁴ Bulaq edition: 1329, vol. 1, p 3, tr. Michel Chodkiewicz: *Seal of the Saints*, Cambridge, Islamic Texts Society, pp.130-131.

¹⁵ Sura 4, 157-8. Arabic/English text by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Leicester, Islamic Foundation, 1975.

In the final chapter of this thesis, the relation of Graeco-Arabic philosophy, in relation to Islamic mysticism will be analysed in more detail. In this chapter I shall consider the hidden *imām*, in relation to the active intellect. As the latter had a transcendent quality it is not surprising, that he had been amalgamated with what was understood in Arabic philosophy as the entity known as the active intellect. The Arabs had understood Aristotle to mean that the active intellect, was an entity outside the soul rather than an immanent intellect, which was one of the parts of the soul, wholly within the body. The active intellect was also considered to be of divine origin, and as such played a role in salvation. It can be understood, therefore, how the hidden *imām* who shared the qualities of immortality, transcendence, pre-existence and purity and who was the Māhdi who would return at the end of time, could be linked with the salvific role of the active intellect. Similarly, like the *imām*, this angelic intellect could be seen in a “vision of the heart,”¹⁶ which, in reality meant that he was a figure seen in meditation.

Messianism associated with the *Imām* and the Active Intellect

According to a book on cosmology and eschatology¹⁷ the *imāms* belonged to the angelic pleroma forming a hierarchial column, the 10th of which was the active intellect. The latter was equated with the angel Gabriel and with the hidden *imām*.

¹⁶ Ibn Babuay: Kitab al-Tawhid: 8. 13 in Guide Divine... op cit: pp. 125-8.

¹⁷ Sayyid-na al-Hosayn ibn ‘Ali ibn Muhammad ibn al-Walid. Risalat al-Mabda’ wa’l Ma’ad, tr. Henry Corbin in Trilogie Ismaelienne op cit: pp. 132-200.

In other works the role of the *Imām* of Resurrection (al-Qa'im] was merged with that of the active intellect who would return on Judgement Day. Shahrastanī quoted the Mutazilites in this respect, where the Prophet is reported to have said of the active intellect, that it was the first thing that God had created and that this intellect would appear on the Last Day.¹⁸

The same messianism associated with the *Imām* of the Resurrection was likewise bestowed on the intellect by al-Kulayni.¹⁹ Like the *Imām* of the Resurrection, the intellect was given an army on the Day of Judgement to fight the other army of ignorance. This messianic episode was similar to that found in the later *Kalāmī Pīr* attributed to Nāṣir-i Khusrau.²⁰ In this work the Māhdi or the *imām*, the 'awaited one' was also equated with the active intellect. This entity was sometimes hidden or manifest, and could change his form at will. Like the appearance of Christ in the Apocryphal *Acts of Peter* he could take the form of a child, a youth or an old man.²¹ It was fundamental that the believers knew the *Imām* of the Time, who taught them knowledge of God.²² It was he who returned in his revolutionary role at the end of time, to deliver the good and to fight evil.

¹⁸ Muhammad b. Abd al-Karim Shahrastani: *Kitab al-Milal wa'l-Nihal*, tr. by A.K.Kazi & J.G. Flynn as *Muslim Sects and Divisions*, London, Kegan Paul, 1984, p. 55.

¹⁹ Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ya'qub ibn Is'haq al-Kulayni ar-razi. *Usul al-Kafi - Basic Principles - Kitab al'aql wa'l-jahl - Book of Reason and Ignorance*, Teheran, WOFIS Muslim Brothers, 1978, pp. 50-51, 60.

²⁰ *Kalāmī Pīr*: Tr. Vladimir Imanov: *A Treatise in Ismā'īlī Doctrine*, Islamic Research Association, 1935.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 57, 65 [70]; pp. 68 [73].

These messianic accounts have similarities with the idea of the coming of the Messiah among the Jews. But they also have a direct link to the Christian second coming of Christ, in that the mother of al-Qa'im was said to have been a Christian.²³ Messianic ideas usually developed when people felt they were under threat as was, of course, the case with the Jews. A similar desire for a saviour who would play an eschatological role, such as the 12th *imām*, came into being under the Umayyid rule and through the persecution of the Shi'a by the Abbasid caliphate.²⁴

Finally, the hidden *imām* was also a religious symbol of the regeneration of the mystic's soul. There was the external *imām* al-Qa'im, to which I have referred above and the internal *imām*,²⁵ which came about when the gnosis of the other was internalised into the mystic's soul. Possibly the earliest mention of the internal *imām* as a giver of knowledge is in a work by Jābir ibn Ḥayyān,²⁶ a scientist and alchemist who lived in the 8th century and who was a contemporary of the *Imām* Ja'far as-Ṣādiq. Ja'far confirmed that if one was successful in the work [alchemy], one found the [inner] *imām*.

Uways al-Qarani and the Uwaysi Mystics

²³ Kamil Mustafa al-Shaibi: *Sufism and Shi'ism*: Surbiton, LAAM, p. 19.

²⁴ Abdulaziz A. Sachedina: *Islamic Messianism*. New York, State University of New York Press, pp. 68, 78.

²⁵ *Guide Divine* op cit: p. 24.

²⁶ *Le petit livre de la Clémence* par Djaber in Pierre E.M. Berthelot & O. Houdas, *Histoire des Sciences: la Chimie au Moyen Age*, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1893, Vol. 3, pp. 133, 137. The transforming of base metals into gold symbolised spiritual transformation.

In general, all Sufis who were guided by hidden masters were called Uwaysis, though in fact, Uways was one of many hidden guides that may have manifested. Some people say he never existed, others say he lived in Yemen and was a contemporary of the Prophet. Uways, though he had never met the Prophet on earth, had known him in the 'ālam al-mithāl or the world of images, and for that reasons had been converted to Islam. There are a few sources from Iran and Central Asia that mention Uways such as the oldest Persian treatise on Sufism *Kashf al-Mahjub* by al-Hujwiri²⁷ and also in a work by the 9th century Iranian mystic Tirmidhi, who was born in Central Asia.²⁸ All these sources establish the life and personality of Uways. He had once suffered from leprosy, but had been saved by divine intervention. He was very poor and unremarkable, and worked as a camel driver. However he was a pious man who had experienced direct visionary communication with the Prophet. There is also a tradition in Attar's *Memorial of the Friends* that after Uways' death other Sufis were in spiritual communication with him.²⁹ Such people were able to gain spiritual knowledge through the Prophet just as he had done. Others like 11th century Abu al-Qāsim Gurganī from Northern Iran could just recite the name of Uways and enter an ecstatic state.

²⁷ Ali b. Uthman al-Jullabi al-Hujwiri: tr. R.A.Nicholson, London, Luzac, 1911, pp. 83-4.

²⁸ Julian Baldick: *Imaginary Muslims: The Uwaysi Sufis of Central Asia*, London & New York, Tauris, 1994, p. 16.

²⁹ Tadkhiratu'l 'awliya: ed. R.A.Nicholson, London, 1907, Vol. 1 p 24, tr. A.S. Hussaini in *Muslim World* 57-8, 1967-8, pp. 103-112.

Although the 16th century *History of the Uwāyis*³⁰ is supposedly a fictional account nevertheless it contains all the elements of a type of Uwāysi mysticism, by introducing all the hidden masters. The first chapter mentions Uwāys himself and there are several examples of the manifestation of Khidr, Muhammad and the Prophets.³¹ There is also³² spiritual guidance from the dead, and a couple of shamanistic initiations, involving the cutting out of the heart – a symbolic ritual, of course, which meant spiritual regeneration. Most of the Uwāysi mystics in this document came from Iran, the Silk Route region, Northern India, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Others are from from Turkestan in Chinese Central Asia, with a few from Egypt and Syria. In fact, all these are the very places one would expect to find them.

Likewise the Naqshbandī Sufis who followed an Uwāysi style of mysticism, in their initiation by ancient masters who had died centuries previously, began in Bukhara in Central Asia and spread eastwards along the Silk Route into India and also westwards into Turkey. The Silk Road is a long and tortuous route³³ that stretches thousands of miles and branches off into several different directions.

The road started in present-day Xi'an and went north-west to Tun-huang an oasis in the Gobi desert, near the Buddhist caves of the Thousand Buddhas at

³⁰ Op cit: Julian Baldick: *Imaginary Muslims*.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 69, 85, 89, 99, 102, 118, 152, 159.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 63, 65, 159.

³³ It seems incredible that the 7th century, Buddhist monk/translator, Xuan Zang, who carried the Buddhist texts from India, did the whole journey on camel or horseback and through some of the most difficult parts probably on foot.

Magao, before dividing into two routes around the dreaded Taklamakan desert.³⁴ One route made for Turfan near more Buddhist caves at Bezeklik and on to Kashgar where the Muslim Uighur people still live. The more southern route skirted the edge of Tibet following the oases as far as Khotan and Yarkand, before turning to join the northern route to Kashgar. From Kashgar a route went west over the Pamirs to Samarkand and Bukhara, through Persia to the Mediterranean coast, while another went through the Karakoram passes some of the highest mountains in the world, into India.³⁵ It is not so much the silk merchants who went through these passes that are of interest, but the ideas that they brought with them. Indeed the many pilgrims were involved in forms of commerce themselves.

The Naqshbandī Sufis

However, two hundred years before the Manuscript called *The History of the Uwaysi* came into existence the traditions of the Uwaysi Sufis had been amalgamated into the Naqshbandī Sufis. The Shī'ī *imāms*, like the Naqshbandī Sufis, had the ability to communicate with the dead and with the Prophets. This was called "the visit of the dead."³⁶ Moreover the *imāms* were linked psychically with the family of Alī and the Prophet and, thereby, were linked to the fountainhead of revelation. Thus they were linked through the initiatic chain to

³⁴ The name of which is said to mean "You go in, but you will not come out"

³⁵ Peter Hopkirk. *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road*, Oxford University Press, 1984, pp. 17-18.

³⁶ Basa'ir: 6.5 in *Guide Divine...* op cit: pp. 183-4.

each other, but it was also said of the Ismā'īlī *imāms* that they could reincarnate into other bodies. Thus Ja'far al-Ṣādiq's soul migrated into Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb and after his 'disappearance' to Muhammad ibn Ishmā'īl.³⁷

The first link in the Naqshbandī *silsilah* after the Prophet, was to Abu Bakr al-Ṣādiq, known as "the way of the companion," though a secondary line of the Naqshbandī descent lead back to Alī by way of the *Imām* Ja'far al-Ṣādiq.³⁸ However, the Naqshbandī succession was more concerned with initiation from the ancient masters who had previously died than with living sheikhs. For example in the initiatic chain which links the different masters, Bāyāzid Bustāmī who had died towards the end of the 9th century CE, received spiritual guidance or initiation from Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, who had lived and died in the previous century. Likewise the Sufi Junayd who had died in the 10th century was initiated by Bāyāzid, who had died in the previous century and the Naqshbandī leader Bahā al-Dīn, who was born in 1318, was initiated by 'Abd al-Khāliq Ghujdwani who had died in 1221. However Abd al-Khāliq was initiated in the spirit by Khidr who taught him silent *dhikr*.³⁹ Moḥammad Pārsā's text, which contains similar

³⁷ Kamil M. Shaibi: *Sufism and Shi'ism*, Surbiton, LAAM, 1991, pp. 20-21

³⁸ Hamid Algar: *Brief History of the Naqshbandi Order* in Marc Gaborieau, ed., *Naqshbandie Cheminements et situation actuelle d'un ordre mystique musulman*, Istanbul & Paris, 1990, pp. 3-44.

³⁹ For Naqshbandī succession: John P. Brown: *The Dervishes*. Ed by H.A. Rose, London, 1968, [1st ed 1863] p 140 ff. J.G.J. ter Haar: *The Importance of the Spiritual Guide in the Naqshbandi Order* in Leonard Lewisohn, ed., *The Legacy...* London, Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publ. 1992, pp.311-321 for the Moḥammad Pārsā text. Hamid Algar: *Silent & Vocal Dhikr in the Naqshbandi Order* in *Actes des VII Kongresses für Arabistik und Islamwissenschaft* Göttingen, 1976, p. 42.

material as that outlined above, also included a passage on Abū'l Qāsim Gurganī. He had died in 1076 and had been in contact with Uways throughout his lifetime, and had repeated his name in order to enter an ecstatic state. This episode is also mentioned in Farīd al-Dīn 'Attār's *Memorial to the Friends*.⁴⁰

Silent Dhikr

The invocation - *There is no God but God* was usually voiced. Regular prayer together with the remembrance of God was recommended in the Qur'ān.⁴¹ The silent *dhikr* often was used as a contemplative prayer when it was linked with practices in meditation. Certainly the practices of meditation penetrated Sufi circles⁴² from yoga, an aspect I shall be analysing later in this section and in chapter four of this thesis. The Naqshbandī Sufis practised silent *dhikr*. As we have seen 'Abd al-Khāliq Ghujdwānī, who initiated the leader of the Naqshbandīyyah, Bahā al-Dīn, into silent *dhikr* was himself taught this by Khidr, thereby giving the teaching credence. Thus the founding of the Naqshbandī Sufi Order could be traced back to the 13th century [to the beginning taking Khidr into account] to this Uwaysi type of initiation given by Ghujdwānī.⁴³ Bahā-al-

⁴⁰ *Mémorial des Saints*. Tr. Abel J.B. Courteille: Paris, Editions du Seuil, p. 36.

⁴¹ Sura: XXIX. 45; XXXIII.41-43.

⁴² Mir Valiuddin: *Contemplative Disciplines in Sufism*, London, East West Publ., 1980, p. 104.

⁴³ This initiation is the subject of the Ms. Translated into French by M. Molé - *Autour de Dar-e Mansur* - Around the Gallows of Mansur [al Hallaj]. *Revue des Études Islamiques* 27, (1959) pp. 33f.

Dīn, therefore, was aligned to the great Central Asian *khwajas* or sheikhs and by the mediation of Ghujdwani to the Uwaysis and Khidr. ⁴⁴

The Meditation Practices of Tawajjuh, Rabita & Muraqaba and Yoga

These practices described more fully below involve a visionary form of meditation where the practitioner visualised the masters in their own mind until they 'saw' them projected in front of them. This is a form of meditation which was practised in the Patañjali yoga system ⁴⁵ and in Mahāyāna Buddhism. There is an early 16th century Naqshbandī manuscript which confirmed that silent *dhikr* was used in conjunction with these procedures, and that they were of some importance to the Order.⁴⁶

The practice called *tawajjuh* (from the Arabic for 'face') involved the visualising of the face of his sheikh in the disciple's mind during meditation. However, among the Naqshbandī, meditation concentrated on the spiritual presence of a former master who had died, rather than a contemporary earthly sheikh, and as such was termed a station or *maqam* by Bahā al-Dīn.⁴⁷

As-Sanusī described the practice of *rabita* as the interior imaging of the form of the disciple's sheikh. The disciple visualised his image as though on his right

⁴⁴Op.Cit: Stephane Ruspoli: Reflexions sur la voie spirituelles des Naqshbandi in Naqshbandie Cheminements... p. 99.

⁴⁵ To be discussed further in Chapter 4.

⁴⁶ Op. Cit: J. Ter Haar: Spiritual Guide... pp. 320-1.

shoulder. He then pictured a line from his right shoulder to his heart that symbolised the means whereby the spirit of the sheikh could take possession of his heart.⁴⁸ This would enable the disciple to receive knowledge or illumination from his sheikh, who acted as the intermediary between the disciple and God. Again this could come about with either an earthly or celestial sheikh.

The practice called *Muraqaba* produced a complete mystical union on the part of the disciple with his sheikh⁴⁹ and lead to annihilation in the sheikh that lead to the ultimate goal of annihilation in God.⁵⁰ Richard Burton described his initiation by an earthly sheikh in the 19th century using one of the above procedures. He was asked to visualise his sheikh in meditation. During the time of Burton's meditation, his sheikh entered the stage of annihilation. After a period of time the sheikh emerged from ecstasy. Then, raising his hands in prayer, the sheikh recited the *Fātihah*, the first chapter of the Qur'ān. Finally the sheikh whispered into Burton's ear the invocation *There is no God but God* and Burton was told to repeat this invocation several times a day.⁵¹ The ritual was essentially much the same in the 19th century as it had been centuries previously and, undoubtedly, is in use today.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 317.

⁴⁸ Op. Cit: J. Spencer Trimmingham: Sufi Orders p. 212.

⁴⁹ Ibid: Spencer Trimmingham: p. 212.

⁵⁰ Op. Cit: J. Ter Haar p. 320.

⁵¹ Edward Rice. Captain Sir Richard Francis Burton: New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990, p. 157.

This visualising of the celestial master in meditation was a particularly Uwaysi or Naqshbandī phenomenon. Though visualising the master or a god was part of the Hīndu yoga system, (later the Naqshbandī became prominent in India), the fact that this form of visionary meditation developed first in Central Asia may suggest a Buddhist connection as well. The Muslims and the Buddhists co-habited in Central Asia over a long period. Pluralism was an accepted fact or way of life in many areas along the Silk Road. For example, Gilgit was Buddhist before it became Hīndu in the 10th century and then in the 11th century Shi'ite Muslim, which it is today as are several towns in the mountainous areas of Pakistan. Similarly Tibet controlled Tun-huang and the Buddhist caves at Magao from the 7th-9th centuries, until finally the Muslim Turkic Uighurs took control in the 10th century.⁵² That the Buddhists and Muslims did not always agree is shown by the destruction of many of the images and murals in the Buddhist caves along the Silk Road, for example at Magao and Bezeklik. These caves began their life as meditation caves, but their decoration came about through the influence of Graeco-Buddhist Art from the Gandhāran region, producing the first Buddha images. These caves, therefore, were an offence to the Muslim iconoclasts.⁵³

Likewise the foremost Buddhist centre in 848 CE was Khotan in East Turkistan which was also infiltrated by Islam. The Khotanese language was an

⁵² Oskar von Hinüber: *Expansion to the North: Afghanistan and Central Asia* in Heinz Bechert & Richard Gombrich, *World of Buddhism*, London, Thames & Hudson, pp. 99-107; Herman Kulke & Dietmar Rothermund. *History of India*: London & New York, Routledge, 1995, pp. 64-83.

Iranian one as a result of the Sassanian Empire of the 3rd century CE. The Uighur Turks adopted Sogdian for communication, which was in a middle-Iranian script. In fact, it was primarily the Buddhist Sogdian speakers who were responsible for the diffusion of Buddhism throughout Central Asia as they also translated from the Sanskrit and the Chinese.⁵⁴ Their petroglyphs dating from the 3rd-7th Centuries CE can be seen on some of the rocks, which line the Silk Route such as in Chilas and Shatial Bridge and are quite visible today.⁵⁵ Mention must also be made of the early Buddhist translators into Chinese. The most renowned was Kumarajiva [3rd century] who was born in Central Asia of Khotanese-Indian parents, which emphasised how early the Silk Route was in use. The second was the revered Buddhist monk Xuan Zang who lived in the 7th century CE who carried the Sanskrit Buddhist scriptures from India and translated thousands of texts into Chinese on retiring to a monastery near Xi'an. In all he spent about 15 years travelling to India and studying at the monastic universities at Taxila and Nalanda. He was away from home during the years 629-645.⁵⁶ One can not underestimate the danger of his journey through desert and mountains along the Silk Route.

⁵³ More destruction occurred in the 19th century, when teams of archaeologists cut away some of the murals to take them to Europe. Aurel Stein led the British, and von le Coq, the Germans.

⁵⁴ Mircea Eliade Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Religion* vol. 2, pp. 412-3.

⁵⁵ *German-Pakistani Expeditions 1979-1984: Between Gandhara and the Silk Roads: Rock carvings along the Karakorum Highway*. Mainz am Rhein, Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1987, Plates 16 f.

⁵⁶ Dieter Kuhn: *Chinas Goldenes Zeitalter*, Heidelberg, Edition Braus, 1993, p. 58.

Sometimes he said he had only the bones of those who had travelled before him as a guide.⁵⁷

Though, as has been said above, the Muslims were intolerant of Buddhist images, they were receptive to yoga both Buddhist and Hindu. In this respect there may be a connection with their visionary forms of meditation. In *deity yoga* performed in Buddhist Tantra, the practitioner used mantras and meditation to invoke a mental image of a celestial Buddha or Bodhisattva, the appearance of which indicated possible enlightenment.⁵⁸ Again there is evidence from some Tibetan Buddhist Tantric texts that illusory bodies were formed in the mind's eye, which manifested as the meditator's personal deity.⁵⁹ Although not identical the experiences in meditation and yoga do bear some resemblance to the *rabita* and other Sufi practices mentioned earlier on in this chapter, and others to be analysed in chapter four.

The Importance of the Hidden Master for ibn 'Arabi

For those Sufis who were not among the Shi'a, nor of the Central Asian Orders, the line of authority was maintained by the belief in the pre-existence of Muḥammad and the Friends of God. The *Light of Muhammad* was transmitted by such figures as the *Pole of the Time*, a doctrine promulgated by ibn 'Arabi. It is

⁵⁷ Richard H. Robinson: *The Buddhist Religion*: Belmont, California, Wadsworth, 1982, p. 103, pp. 168-9. Thomas Watters: *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India 629-645*: London, 1904-5. The spelling of his name varies.

⁵⁸ Daniel Cozort: *Highest Yoga Tantra*, Ithaca New York, Snow Lion Publ, 1986, pp. 27, 56, 80.

possible that he considered himself to be the Pole.⁶⁰ In this case the *Light* which was a part of all genuine spiritual guides would be transferred from master to disciple, to enable him to be likewise illumined. When ibn 'Arabī speaks of a *Pole* – *Qutb* or *Pillars* – *Awṭad* he envisaged them as both earthly and heavenly. On this earth they were the important sheikhs of the Sufi Orders, many of whom would have been initiated by Khiḍr, as 'ibn Arabī had been himself. Some of these people, however, such as the *Substitutes* may have been very unremarkable, and were only known to be of spiritual importance, 'to those in the know,' whereas in everyday life, they might seem ordinary to the average onlooker. Indeed, saintliness was often hidden by an exterior mediocrity.

However there was also a celestial assembly of *Pillars* who were the Prophets and Khiḍr, who in the usual manner of the hidden *imāms*, were withdrawn and yet still living in a human body. There were two *Pillars* on earth like Khiḍr and Elijah, and the others resided in the heavenly spheres. In fact, ibn 'Arabī used the same Shī'ī terminology as the *Imām* and the *Substitute* to explain his hidden guides in the *Futūḥāt*,⁶¹ and also introduced the same messianic ideas.⁶² Accordingly, the Prophets, Jesus, Elijah, Idris, Khiḍr were the celestial *Awṭad*⁶³

⁵⁹ Guhyasamaja Tantra: Clear Light of Bliss, tr. Tenzin Norbu: ed Jonathan Landaw, London, Wisdom Publ., 1982., pp. 190, 196, 198, 200, 202.

⁶⁰ Op. Cit: J. Spencer-Trimingham, pp. 161-3.

⁶¹ Claude Addas: Quest for the Red Sulphur. Cambridge, Islamic Texts Society, p. 65.

⁶² Michel Chodkiewicz: Les Illuminations de la Mecque. Paris, Sinbad, 1988, pp. 121, 124.

⁶³ Michel Chodkiewicz: Seal of the Saints: Cambridge, Islamic Texts society, 1993, p. 93. The author sees a contradiction in ibn 'Arabī's accounts of who is the *Pole*[p 94].

sustained by the Muhammadan Light. These 'Pillars' have their representatives or substitutes on earth and the work of the heavenly and earthly hierarchy strove to improve the spiritual life for those aspiring disciples.⁶⁴ Ibn 'Arabi's ideas on the pre-existence of Muḥammad and the other prophets was the subject of the *Tadkirat al-Hawāṣṣ*⁶⁵ It was the Light of Muḥammad which illumined the sheikh and linked him to the Prophet and God. This was why the sheikh was a source of illumination, whereas the Prophet himself was one of the Lights of the All Powerful.⁶⁶ In this work also, we are told that the Prophet's name was a divine name of power.⁶⁷ This was through the science of the letters called the *ḥurūf al-asmā'* which has some similarity to the idea behind the mystical practices concerning letters and divine names in Jewish mysticism.

Just as Uways and Muḥammad, ibn 'Arabī enjoyed a similar relationship with one of his most influential teachers Abu Madyan, whom he never met on the physical plane, only on the spiritual.⁶⁸ He had several visions of the Prophets in the different heavens recorded in the *Epistle of Lights* a work that will be analysed in greater detail in chapter four. Ibn 'Arabī communicated with the Prophets in the 'alām al-ghayb. Though previously he was initiated in Seville by an earthly

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 96, 97.

⁶⁵ *Tadkirat al-Hawāṣṣ wa 'aqīdat ahl al-intiṣāṣ* tr. by Roger Deladriere as La Profession de foi d'ibn 'Arabi: Texte, Traduction et Commentaire de la Tadkira. Thèse présentée devant l'Université de Paris, 26 Janvier 1974, Service de Reproduction des Thèses, Univ. de Lille III, 1975.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 243.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 226 f.

⁶⁸ *Ruh al-Quds*: tr. as *Sufis of Andalusia*, by R.W.J. Austin, Sherborne, Beshara Publ. 1988, p 121; Claude Addas, *Quest....* ibid p.4.

sheikh for the first time in the late 12th century when he was 30 years of age⁶⁹ and on other occasions in Morocco and Tunis he wrote in the *Futūḥāt* that Jesus was his first teacher.⁷⁰ He meant by this his first *hidden guide*.

THE RISEN CHRIST AS TEACHER IN Gnostic CHRISTIANITY

The Nag Hammadi and Apocryphal Literature

To find the motif of the post-resurrected Jesus as a spiritual guide in Christianity, it is necessary to go back to the time of Gnosticism in the early Christian centuries. The desire to keep the beloved teacher with them must surely lie behind this type of Gnostic scripture in the Nag Hammadi Corpus and the Apocryphal literature of those times. In the *Acts of John* there is a description of the docetic crucifixion.⁷¹ The meaning behind this was the idea that Jesus was indestructible. It was impossible to destroy the Logos, as it was also impossible for the Logos to suffer.⁷² Jesus himself had always had a docetic body, which appeared in human form, but the form was not constant. He appeared in various forms to different people.⁷³

⁶⁹ Op cit: Claude Addas, p. 146.

⁷⁰ Futuhat: Bulaq 1329: Vol. 3, p. 43; Op cit: Michel Chodkiewicz, p. 77.

⁷¹ Apocryphal New Testament: Tr. M.R. James, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989, p. 255.

⁷² Ibid., p. 256.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 251.

During the supposed crucifixion in the *Acts of John*, before Jesus finally disappeared from the eyes of most people, he chose that time to reveal the gnosis to his disciples. The song and the round dance have been described as an initiation ceremony where Jesus imparted a secret doctrine,⁷⁴ without dwelling on the meaning of the revelation,⁷⁵ there is supporting evidence in the *Pistis Sophia* of Jesus teaching his disciples for a further eleven years after the crucifixion and resurrection.⁷⁶

In the above work Jesus descended clothed in light, in his robe of glory. He initiated Mary and the other disciples into the mysteries, performing the Gnostic baptism. The whole meaning behind Jesus' rituals of initiation and teaching was to enable the disciples to purify themselves, thereby becoming perfect souls. Only then would they be able to enter the Gates of Light before they were closed forever.⁷⁷

In the Nag Hammadi Corpus the earlier tract, *The Sophia of Jesus Christ*,⁷⁸ the resurrected Jesus plays a similar role. However, Jesus did not appear in his 'first form' meaning the docetic body which the disciples recognised, but in the form of an angel of light.⁷⁹ He imparted his revelation to twelve disciples and seven

⁷⁴ Max Pulver. *Jesus' Round Dance and Crucifixion in The Mysteries: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks*, New York, Bollingen Foundation XXX.2, Pantheon Books, 1955, p. 175.

⁷⁵ The song has been analysed by Max Pulver, *ibid* pp. 183f.

⁷⁶ *Pistis Sophia: Askew Codex*, tr. G.R.S. Mead in *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten*, London, 1931, 3rd ed. pp. 459 ff.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 502.

⁷⁸ James M. Robinson: *Nag Hammadi Library in English*. Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1977, pp. 207-228.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

women. The revelation was about Gnostic theology, concerning the Archetypal Man, also known as Mind, and his consort Sophia⁸⁰ who is also called *Silence*. Sophia unfortunately brought forth, through error, Yaldabaoth.⁸¹ We know from other Gnostic sources that he was the demiurge, the second God, the one who thought he was all-powerful, but in his ignorance did not understand the Great Father. The latter was the apophatic God to whom all Gnostics should direct their attention and was part of the new Gnostic revelation to be revealed by Jesus. Therefore, in order for this teaching to be fully authoritative, it must be seen to come from Jesus himself and not a third party.⁸² This is exactly the same position I have outlined above in respect of the other guides from the dead, or 'docetic' teachers who reveal knowledge or initiate followers.

Thus the concept of Jesus never having died, but ever appearing to his disciples is a fairly common motif through Gnostic and Apocryphal literature. In *The Secret Book of John* Jesus becomes manifest to soothe John and to help him get over the loss of his teacher. In the beginning of this tract the Pharisee makes fun of John, taunting him how he had been lead astray by the Nazarene.⁸³ It is then, when John is troubled and confused, that Jesus appears to him. This tract, therefore, is trying to achieve two things. The first is to assure the followers that Jesus has not left them in death, as unbelievers say, but that he is with them all

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 216.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 225.

⁸² Douglas M. Parrott: *Gnostic and Orthodox Disciples in the Second and Third Centuries* in Charles W. Hedrick et al., eds., *Nag Hammadi Gnosticism and Early Christianity*, Massachusetts, Hendrickson, 1986, p. 200.

⁸³ Bentley Layton: *The Gnostic Scriptures: A New Translation...* London, SCM Press Ltd, 1987, p. 28.

the time, ready to help and instruct them. The second is to put forward the teaching of Barbelo, an androgynous being of light, giving it credibility by association with Jesus.

Jesus plays the same role of the hidden teacher in another Nag Hammadi tract, *The Book of Thomas the Contender Writing to the Perfect*. The 'Perfect' were considered the élite among the followers, who received initiation i.e. the Gnostic Christians. Before Jesus ascended or became 'hidden' he imparted another Gnostic theme to Thomas, that of counterpart souls and the knowledge of the self. As in the case of Mani who wrote in the *Cologne Mani Codex*⁸⁴ that he had a twin angelic higher soul so in this tract, which must be its near contemporary, Thomas is informed that he and Jesus are double souls.⁸⁵ The message of the tract is that knowledge of the self is knowledge of the Saviour. Such knowledge can be brought about only through chastity and purity. Those who live in the flesh do not stand a chance of illumination. Salvation is for those who can free themselves from the body. This tract evinces the typically Gnostic body-spirit dualism. However it is a form of asceticism not unique to the Gnostics, in that in varying degrees, it has been found in several quite disparate religious traditions.

All these stories could be said to be additions to the Biblical account in Luke 24 where Jesus appeared after death to the disciples, at the supper at Emmaus. However, they go far beyond the New Testament version, and though there are

⁸⁴ *Cologne Mani Codex*: tr. Ron Cameron & Arthur J. Dewey. Missoula, Montana, 1979, pp.9, 15, 19, 29, 37.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 403.

instances in the Bible where Jesus appeared after his death, the actual motif of Jesus teaching beyond the grave is only found in the Gnostic or pseudepigraphical tradition. However, there is a final question which must be asked and that is how was Jesus contacted by the Gnostic followers? I have shown previously in this chapter, that the hidden teacher was visualised in many forms. He was made to manifest himself in the mind of the seeker. It seemed in many of these tracts quoted above, that he just appeared spontaneously and indeed, that does fulfil one criterion of the hidden guide. In effect, the guide appeared when the disciple needed him.

However, was Jesus 'made to appear' before his followers? There is one text where something like this seems to happen though again, the nature of the material may suggest a story or an actual experience. The basis for the visualisation of Jesus is also found in the New Testament, where it says that Jesus will manifest Himself to those that love him.⁸⁶ However, the Gnostic text in question is the *Acts of Peter* that was written in the 2nd century CE probably in Asia Minor.

In the above Gnostic text the author put forward the theory of the docetic Christ, the one who can take different forms. Peter had taken on the role of the preacher, and in some respects the spiritual mentor. Indeed he seemed to be in contact psychically with Jesus throughout as his different visions testify⁸⁷ until his

⁸⁶ John 14: 21.

⁸⁷ Apocryphal New Testament, tr. M. R. James: Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989, pp. 317, 333, 335.

own crucifixion. He instructed a group of people to perceive in their minds what they did not see with their eyes i.e. to visualise the form of Jesus. Then Peter prayed for them, and suddenly the hall was filled with a glorious light. In this light Jesus appeared, but he took on different forms. Some saw an old man, some a young man, and others a boy.⁸⁸ The reason for this may mean that each person received illumination, in their own way, according to their own gifts. This Gnostic motif could have something in common with the woman in the vision in the *Shepherd of Hermas* where she reappeared at different ages in her life. Here the different appearances seem to say something about the spiritual state of the seer. For example, his spirits were renewed when she appeared young and beautiful.⁸⁹

Due to the condemnation of Gnosticism, by the decisions of the 4th century Councils, the concept of the docetic Christ and post-resurrection teaching was abandoned. Perhaps a faint memory remains in a Cathar tract of the late 12th century, the *Secret Supper*. Here there is a dialogue between Jesus and John, concerning a Gnostic interpretation of Satan, Adam and Eve and the Fall, followed by the need for the new Baptism of Jesus for the elect, rather than that of John the Baptist. The Baptism of John was inferior and was really for people trapped in the flesh, not those aspiring to the spirit. However, Jesus does not come down to earth to teach as he did in the other texts. In fact the meeting took place in the heavenly spheres, where John ascended to attend a heavenly Last

⁸⁸ Apocryphal New Testament: pp. 322-323.

⁸⁹ Pastor of Hermas. The Ante-Nicene Fathers. T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1989, Vol. 2, pp. 16-17.

Supper, which was the archetype of that one which took place on earth.⁹⁰ This text has more in common with the ascension literature of Late Antiquity, and indeed the other Bogomil text in Wakefield's collection, the *Ascension of Isaiah*.

However, though there are not Latin Christian texts⁹¹ from the Middle Ages, showing the post-resurrected Jesus teaching his disciples beyond the grave, I do not mean to suggest that there are no visionary accounts of Jesus. This would be far from the truth, but such material is of a different genre, and in the main falls into the category of devotional literature. An example is St. Elizabeth of Schönau, who saw the Apostles, Peter and Paul in a vision, and the Virgin Mary, and finally was given a vision of Jesus.⁹² In the case of Blessed Angela of Foligno, it would seem that she meditated with great intensity on the Cross and the Passion of Christ, so such episodes in the life of Christ materialised in her mind.⁹³ The same could be said about the visions of Julian of Norwich, the account of which is given in her *Revelations of Divine Love*.⁹⁴ Indeed, Angela of Foligno had stated, by drawing attention to the Gospel of John,⁹⁵ that she believed this verse gave credibility to her visionary life. However, it is above all, love and not gnosis or teaching, which is at the centre of these visions. The intense craving of the

⁹⁰ Walter L. Wakefield & Austin P. Evans: *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*. New York & London, Columbia University Press, 1969, p 458, 461-2. From Western Syriac Christianity there is *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, [Ed. & tr. J.Rendel Harris, Cambridge 1900, p14, 31f, 33f, 34] which dates from 8th century, where Christ manifests in light for 3 hours in the Upper Room and apocalyptic revelations are given by angels:

⁹¹ C.D.G. Müller suggests this possibility in the 9th century Coptic Church in his book *Engellehre der Koptischen Kirche*, Wiesbaden, 1959: pp. 223-235.

⁹² Tr. by Thalia A. Pandiri in Elizabeth A. Petroff, ed., *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, New York & Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986, pp. 163, 169.

⁹³ *Liber de Vere Fidelium Experientia*, in Elizabeth A. Petroff op cit.: pp. 257, 262.

⁹⁴ Tr. Clifton Walters: *Revelations of Divine Love*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Classics, 1985, pp. 65 f.

mystic for her Lord brings about the vision, but the Lord does not teach. He is loved.⁹⁶

The Saints' powers beyond Death

Though teaching beyond the grave did not play a significant part in orthodox Christianity, there still remained the concept of the saint still powerful beyond death. This was especially so among the Carolingian saints in the West. Numerous legends tell of miracles and strange happenings around the martyrs' or saints' tombs. Typical were those stories of oil in the lamp boiling over, or oil continually burning or mysterious lights appearing to surround their tombs.⁹⁷ Dust from such places was thought to have healing properties.⁹⁸ In another account the saint manifested himself. This was St. Benignus whose appearance brought about many miracles. In another account a woman received her sight and so forth.⁹⁹ These happenings signified a belief in the power of the dead to affect the living. They also gave comfort, in that they were 'proof' that the saint was still there and he had not abandoned his people. Indeed, it was the same anxieties which brought these stories into vogue as those concerning the teacher beyond the grave.

⁹⁵ Op cit: Opening lines to Liber de Vere: John: 14. 21.

⁹⁶ Annick Waegeman writes of female ecstasies in her essay *Medieval Sibyl* in L.J.R.Milis, ed., *Pagan Middle Ages*, Woodbridge, Suffolk, Boydell Press, 1998, pp. 83-107.

⁹⁷ Gregory of Tours: *Glory of the Martyrs*. Tr. Raymond van Dam: *Texts for Historians*, Latin Series III, Liverpool University Press, p. 23, p. 51; *Glory of the Confessors*. Tr. Raymond van Dam, Series IV, Liverpool UP, 1988: Chapter 21: p. 36.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*: *Glory of the Martyrs*: p. 73, p. 99.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 75, p. 95.

Similarly, there were numerous miracles associated with both the life and the death of St. Benedict.¹⁰⁰ Through his powers he was able to make the monk Maurus walk on water, in order to save a drowning boy.¹⁰¹ In respect of death, throughout the *Dialogues*, the belief persisted that some people who had special abilities could see the souls leaving the bodies or could, likewise, see the ghosts of monks who had died.¹⁰² It is said elsewhere, in Book 4, that one was able to see the dead, or the departing souls, through having purified the eye of the spirit by faith and prayer.¹⁰³ Gregory further informs us that St. Benedict enjoyed ecstatic states brought about by contemplation.¹⁰⁴

There are a couple of occasions that involved some form of knowledge being given from beyond the grave, but not an actual spiritual teaching as such. One of these cases involved a mysterious stranger, who “filled in” the unknown life of the martyr Patroculus. He handed over a book to the monk whose duty it was to look after the tomb in question. Those in authority damned the book as a forgery. However, at a later date, it was realised that the mysterious book about which nobody knew anything was, indeed, genuine.¹⁰⁵ The other incident

¹⁰⁰ Gregoire le Grand: *Dialogues*. Paris, TEQUI[1980], Chapters 1, 3, 5, 26, 27.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, Chapter 7.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, *Dialogues*. Book 4, Chapters 8 & 9.

¹⁰³ *Dialogues*: Chapter 7.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, Book 2, Chapter 4.

¹⁰⁵ Gregory of Tours: *Glory of the Martyrs*: Chapter 63, p. 87.

involved medical knowledge being given by a stranger in a vision. He advocated the cure of various illnesses through pointing out relevant passages in the Bible.¹⁰⁶

However, concerning any other teaching one might receive from beyond, we are only left with silence, and perhaps a warning from Bishop Trojanus. This Bishop was given to walking about the shrines or tombs after dark that was, indeed, a common practice among some of the Sufis in the East. However on a particular night when the Bishop went walking around the graves he saw a ball of light, with which he conversed. Some others who had witnessed the event asked him about this occurrence. He replied that the light was the spirit of St. Martin of Tours who said to him, "Take care lest you dare to reveal the secrets of God to anyone."¹⁰⁷ This last suggests a certain reserve on the subject and, moreover, that such communication with the dead was generally not encouraged.

THE HIDDEN GUIDE IN JEWISH MYSTICISM

Communication with the Dead in the Old Testament and the Talmud

Certainly, making contact with the dead was condemned in the Bible. Necromancy in general, or going to mediums and asking the dead to predict the future was forbidden.¹⁰⁸ Likewise Saul received a hostile reception from Samuel, when he went to a medium and asked her to conjure up the spirit of Samuel from

¹⁰⁶ Gregory of Tours: *Glory of the Confessors*: Chapter 39, p. 51.

¹⁰⁷ *Glory of the Confessors*: Chapter 58, p. 64.

¹⁰⁸ Leviticus: XIX. 31.

the grave, so that he might ask Samuel advice about the coming war with the Philistines, as God had deserted him.¹⁰⁹

On the whole, such activities were frowned on in the Talmud.¹¹⁰ However, throughout this same work, it is taken for granted that the living can communicate with the dead. In *Shabbat* it was believed that the soul hovered round the body in the grave for twelve months and it could ascend and descend through the spheres, and so forth. In other parts of the Talmud, there was not a yearly time limit, so the souls of the dead could be contacted by the living at any time. One case involved a father asking about the rightful heir to an inheritance.¹¹¹ In another, a man heard spirits speaking among themselves when he spent a night in the cemetery.¹¹²

However the above examples are rather domesticated and not in the spirit of gnosis or initiation given by a teacher. Nevertheless, “the Academy in the sky” was mentioned in the last account¹¹³ which was a celestial meeting place for the souls of the righteous dead who followed with interest the lives of the worthy on earth. There was, moreover, the suggestion that the dead might intercede for mercy on behalf of the living.¹¹⁴ From these few sources in the Talmud, it does seem that though contact with the dead was not actively encouraged, it was

¹⁰⁹ 1 Samuel 28: 3-19.

¹¹⁰ BT Shabbath 152 a f. Tr. Rabbi Epstein, London, Soncino Press, 1938, p. 780.

¹¹¹ BT Baba Bathra: 58a, p. 234.

¹¹² BT Berakoth: 18a,b pp. 108-110.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 112.

¹¹⁴ BT Ta'anith 16a, p. 74.



believed that such contact could take place. Furthermore the “Academy in the Sky” was to be very much enlarged upon elsewhere, for example in the *Zohar*.

The Celestial Academy

In this Kabbalist work, written by Moses de Laon in the 13th century, the beginnings of the celestial academy that started in the Talmud was developed to a greater extent in the *Zohar*. This was because the leading rabbis of the 2nd century were supposed to give credibility to a relatively new mystical philosophy, the Kabbalah. The celestial academy was run by R. Simeon ben Yohai, an important rabbi of the Tannaitic period.¹¹⁵ Again there is the same idea of the revered teacher who continued his teaching after death. All such pious souls met in his celestial academy because they were concerned with teaching those people still on earth. Furthermore, R. Jose said that “the day R. Simeon left the cave, matters were not hidden from the companions, and the celestial mysteries were radiated and revealed among them, as if they had been promulgated... on Mount Sinai.¹¹⁶ This would suggest that Rabbi Simeon was not going to leave his followers alone, despite the cry from R. Judah that wisdom had gone out of the world with his death.¹¹⁷ This indeed, was emphasised by R. Hiyya’s words when he kissed his grave and said of R. Simeon “you have wasted away in the dust, but you survive and guide the world.”¹¹⁸ Later on in this section R. Hiyya and R. Jose decided to

¹¹⁵ Fischel Lachower & Isaiah Tishby: *The Wisdom of the Zohar; An Anthology of Texts*, tr.by David Goldstein, Oxford, Oxford University Press, Littman Library, 1989, Vol. 1: 4a-4b, pp. 166 f.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Zohar I, 216b-217a, Vol. 1, p. 165.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Zohar I, 4a-4b, Vol. 1, pp. 166-167.

contact R. Simeon in the celestial world, by fasting for 40 days, the period of fasting prescribed in the Hekhalot for the *Merka'ub* ascent.¹¹⁹ However this time it did not work, and they had to fast another 40 days. Finally, they did see R. Simeon in the spirit, teaching his son R. Eleazar. They were discussing a problem that had perplexed R. Jose previously, so he was able to find an answer. In the end, the two dead rabbis ascended on wings to the Academy in the sky.

R. Hiyya joined the gathering of the righteous dead called "Pillars."¹²⁰ There were souls ascending and descending together with the angelic guide Meṭatron who always attended the Celestial Academy. All went well, until the dead souls realised that somebody 'alive' was among them. Fortunately, R. Symeon was able to vouch for R. Hiyya, who introduced the earthling as "the light of the lamp of the Torah."¹²¹

Before the rabbi died, he revealed mysteries to his followers. In his teaching it is the righteous who remain alive, and the Holy One dwells among those who are "living", but not among the "dead" meaning, no doubt, the spiritually dead, irrespective of whether they had bodily life on this earth or not.¹²² While R. Simeon is preparing to die, he seems to inhabit the celestial world at the same time, in that he is able to see the righteous dead. It was then that he spoke of Rav

¹¹⁹ Peter Schäfer: *Hidden and Manifest God*, tr. A. Pomerance, New York, State University of New York Press, 1992, p. 154.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 167-168. There is a similarity to the language used by ibn 'Arabi, who likewise described the righteous in the celestial world as pillars.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p 169.

¹²² Tishby: *Zohar III*, 287b-288a. *Ibra Zuta*: Vol. 1, p. 163.

Hamnuna Sava as being surrounded by seventy righteous men, all crowned and reflecting the light from the shining countenance of the Holy One.

The Rabbi from Beyond in the Zohar

Rav Hamnuna was the hidden guide in the *Zohar* who had been an important rabbi when he was alive on earth. Then he became a guide from the dead to teach others on earth, who would benefit from learning Kabbalist interpretations of the Scriptures. He manifested himself spontaneously to such people which is an important characteristic of the hidden guide, and as such is similar to the sage in the Avicennan Recital *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, which will be the subject of chapter five. However, this episode in the *Zohar* looks on the face of it to be just a fable. But is it a story hiding the reality of a Kabbalist 'hidden guide'? Naturally, this cannot be proved, but as there is often fact behind fable, I think it does suggest the existence of the Kabbalist hidden guide. However, the text tells us that when the rabbi manifested himself on earth, he took the form of a lowly mule driver, so his very mediocrity hid his wisdom. He certainly fulfilled the criteria for a type of hidden guide among the Sufis.

When the "mule driver" first met R. Isaac and R. Judah, he introduced himself as coming from an "exalted tower, flying in the air, great and beautiful" meaning the heavenly spheres or the celestial world but "exiled here" but the rabbis did not understand him.¹²³ Similarly the Avicennan sage introduced

¹²³ Op. Cit: Zohar I, 5a-7a, Vol. 1, p. 173.

himself in a similarly vague way, saying he was from “the most holy dwelling” meaning the heavenly world.¹²⁴ But there the resemblance between the two guides ends because, obviously, they are imparting a different gnosis. But another difference in the Avicennan story was that the sage immediately attracted the young man or the would-be initiate, whereas in the *Zohar* the rabbis were not impressed with the “mule driver.” Indeed, he irritated them but they were won over when they heard him speak of the mysteries in the Kabbalah.

The Rabbi's Teaching

This “mule driver” or the Kabbalist guide from beyond also fell in with some rabbis who were on a journey to visit the father-in-law of one of them. While they were travelling they discussed the Torah among themselves. The journey, which on the face of it seemed ordinary enough, may have been symbolic for the “mystical journey,” for the two rabbis were about to be introduced to the heterodox opinions of the “mule driver” which they were to find fascinating. He gave them a completely different meaning for “fear my sanctuary.” In fact it was a Kabbalist allegorical interpretation which they found strange. It is then they start to ask questions about their guide. He described himself, in rather Gnostic terminology, as exiled from the heavenly abode and a stranger to this world. The other rabbis came to the conclusion that he must be the son of the deceased Rav Hamnuna Sava, the *Great fish* who swam in the seas of the Torah, but in fact, their guide was Rav Hamnuna himself who then suddenly disappeared from their

¹²⁴ Henry Corbin: *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*. Tr. W.R. Trask, Texas, Spring Publications, 1980, p.

sight.¹²⁵ It was at that point, that they all understood that the “mule driver” had come as a teacher from the other world.

The Descent of the Soul into the body

This rabbi from beyond made another appearance when he began to give the assembled earthly rabbis an unusual interpretation of Leviticus 22.12 - “If a priest’s daughter be married to a foreign man.”¹²⁶ This, he explained alluded to the descent of the pure soul into the body to which it was subjugated, and could be tormented by the foreign man, which symbolised the evil inclination. This was why, no doubt, later on the “mule driver” spoke of the reluctance of the soul to descend into a body.¹²⁷ His interpretation came very close to Gnosticism. In fact, elsewhere in the *Zohar*, the descent of the soul is given in greater detail. It has to pass through the halls of the Upper Garden of Eden, and wait in the first hall before it can descend into the physical world, via the Lower Garden of Eden, where the King crowns it with seven crowns. Before it enters the human body it swears it will keep the precepts of the Torah and help bring about the mystical

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¹²⁵ Op. Cit: Zohar I, 5a-7a, Vol. 1, pp. 174, 177.

¹²⁶ Zohar II, 94b, Vol. 1, pp.177 f.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 180, p. 186.

marriage within the *Sefirot*.¹²⁸ Other teaching in the Zohar suggests that the righteous man in the world had a heavenly soul or counterpart above.¹²⁹

The Soul and its parts

The rabbi from beyond taught that the righteous man was adorned with an image. This was the *Neshamah*, the highest part of the soul, which dwelt in the celestial Garden of Eden.¹³⁰ The belief in the tripartite soul is found in the *Zohar* so that the *Nefesh* was the lowest part, the fleshly soul and the *Neshamah* was the highest, with the *Ruah* in between. In spiritual people, the higher soul predominated or “it came to rest on the *Ruah*.” The *Neshamah* purified the other two lower parts of the soul. The *Nefesh* or the lowest part of the soul, attached to the body was considered a lower light, symbolised by the colour black, or the nearest part of the flame to the wick. The *Ruah* was a white light and the *Neshamah* was a hidden light.¹³¹

We will find a similar teaching about the tripartite soul,¹³² likewise symbolised by colours, given by the Central Asian Sufi, Najm al-Dīn Kubrā in Chapter 4.

¹²⁸ Op. Cit: Zohar III, 13a-13b; Zohar I, 242a.

¹²⁹ Zohar II, 129a; Zohar I, Tosefta 59b-60a.

¹³⁰ Zohar II, 94b-99b, p.188.

¹³¹ Zohar 1, 83a-83b, Vol. 2, pp.731-732.

¹³² The fleshly soul, the blaming soul and the tranquil soul.

However, in the *Zohar*, both the *Ruah* and the *Neshamah* were 'acquired' through leading a good life, and the study of the Torah.¹³³

The Problem of Evil

The rabbi from beyond was also concerned with the problem of evil. When people did not strive to curb their lower soul, this would inevitably be the result. However, he seemed to be in favour of a collective judgement rather than an individual one. In this respect, society can be deemed guilty for the evil perpetrated by the individual. The balance between good and evil in the world was symbolised by two pairs of scales for weighing souls positioned at the door of the *Shekinah*.¹³⁴ When the inhabitants of the world behaved themselves, the scales tipped towards the good side, and if the majority of people behaved badly, the scales tipped towards the other, the evil side. This seemed to allow more evil into the world so that the good souls too were persecuted.¹³⁵ The reason why this was the case, was that humanity's behaviour in the world effected the state of the *Shekinah*, for if Her condition were defective, all souls emerging from Her at that

¹³³ Op cit: I. Tishby: *Zohar*: Vol. 2, p 762 The concept of the 'acquired' may have been suggested by Al Kindi's interpretation of the acquired intellect in Aristotle's *De Anima* III (5) but the influence of Arabic philosophy on Jewish mysticism will be the subject of Chapter 5.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, pp. 755-757.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, *Zohar* II, 94b-99b, pp. 180-181.

time, would be in some way defective, even souls who under different circumstances, would have been noble. ¹³⁶

The *Shekinah* is placed at the bottom of the Kabbalist Tree, and as has been shown in the previous chapter, in connection with the Provençal and Gerona Kabbalah, one of the tasks of the mystic in contemplation was to aim to bring about a balance within the *Sefirot*. This was symbolised by the mystical marriage. Not only was the mystic ensuring his own illumination, but he was also trying to rectify the imbalance in the Sefirotic realm. It would seem that if there were some imbalance here, there would be even more of an imbalance in the world below, making it more subject to the machinations of the “evil inclination.” The fact that the Kabbalist was able to do this was because he was in the image of the Archetypal Adam also symbolised by the Tree, and through Adam the mystic’s soul was in the image of God.

The Divine Prototype

Finally, another motif in the rabbi’s teaching was that of the divine prototype, which we have seen above in connection with the image of the higher soul which was in the heavenly Garden of Eden, which was the prototype for the earthly Garden. In the *Zohar* all things had a “Neo-Platonic” divine prototype. ¹³⁷ There

¹³⁶ Op. cit: Tishby: Vol. 3, p. 1421.

¹³⁷ Though they are interpreted in a Kabbalistic way, in that the celestial counterpart relates to its own *Sefira*.
Zohar II: op cit: 159a, Vol. 2, p. 645.

was also an upper and lower chariot and an upper and lower *Shekinah*. The lower *Shekinah* separated the *Sefirot* from the world of the chariot, so was in both worlds. The upper chariot was the realm of *Ein-Sof* whereas the angelic guide Meṭaṭron ruled the area of the lower chariot which corresponded to the *Sefira Binah*.¹³⁸ However Meṭaṭron and the *Sefirot* influenced each other. In *Raya Maherna*¹³⁹ the ten *Sefirot* were clothed with him, and as Lord of the Chariot, he was known as the Lesser Adam.¹⁴⁰ As Lesser Adam, he was in the image of *Tiferet*, which symbolised Greater Adam.¹⁴¹ In fact, the adage “as above, so below” typified the *Zohar*. When Moses set up a tabernacle in the wilderness, another one was raised in the heavenly spheres i.e. that of Meṭaṭron. There is a further tabernacle beyond that, a hidden one that is never revealed, that is the divine prototype.¹⁴²

The Rabbi's Son

Finally, R. Isaac and R. Judah met up with the earthly son of Rav Hamnuna Sava, the hidden guide.¹⁴³ The young boy was quite unusual, in that he was wise and gifted beyond his years because the soul of his deceased father shone upon the son.¹⁴⁴ The boy was critical of the rabbis because he thought they were lax in

¹³⁸ Op. Cit: Zohar II, 159a Section 10.

¹³⁹ Ibid Zohar III, 226b-228b.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid 223 b, 228a.

¹⁴¹ Tikkun ha-Zohar 67.

¹⁴² Zohar: V.IV. Terumah, Sperling & Simon, 143a-143b.

¹⁴³ Tishby: Zohar III: 189a-192a; Vol. 1, p. 199.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 205.

performing a blessing without washing the hands, and so forth.¹⁴⁵ After a time the boy confirmed that his father was indeed dead, and later on that he was the son of “the great and noble fish.”¹⁴⁶ Also he assented that whenever holy, pious men embarked upon a journey, he appeared driving the mules behind them. However, he added, “since you are not worthy enough for my father to be your mule-driver, I shall not tell you who he is.”¹⁴⁷

Conclusion to Chapter Two

This chapter analysed and traced the incidence of the guide from the dead in the three monotheistic religions. It can readily be appreciated that most of the evidence came from Islam, largely because as has been shown, guidance from the dead was an important feature in some Sufi Orders, whereas in respect of Judaism and Christianity it did not form a great part. For Judaism, the most fruitful source from the medieval period was Moses de Leon’s *Zohar*, and for Christianity the Christian Gnostic scriptures and the Apocryphal writings of late antiquity. The docetic teacher is found both in Gnosticism and among the Shī’a. The teacher had not really died but was hidden, yet alive in a docetic body. The term ‘docetism’ was given by Henry Corbin to describe the *imām* and the visionary world. He mentioned Mahāyāna Buddhist docetism as evidence that

¹⁴⁵ Op. Cit: Tishby: p. 198.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 202.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 199.

this idea was prevalent throughout the East but did not enlarge on the subject to any great extent.¹⁴⁸

Questions were asked, as why was there a need for the guide from the dead in the first place. It was suggested that when the teacher or guide was no longer with his followers, there seemed to be a need for the disciples to recreate him in the heavenly world. This had happened in respect of Islam and similarly, the idea was also found in Pure Land Buddhism. Likewise, it was the *raison d'être* behind Jesus' post-resurrection teaching in the Gnostic scriptures. How was the guide to be contacted? I have argued that in Islam the guide was a figure in meditation, an image formed by the mind. We know that the Sufis had used practices like visualising the form of the sheikh similar to those in Hindu yoga, which will be discussed more fully in chapter four. In respect of the Central Asian Sufis the fact that they were living in areas where there were still Buddhists, or where there had been Buddhists, might suggest a Buddhist connection. In Tibetan Deity Yoga the god is visualised by the mind and made manifest and though, of course, the religious inspiration behind this is completely different to visualising a dead sheikh in a Sufi Order, the actual method of creating a figure by the power of the mind is compatible.

Finally, the appeal to authority and tradition was an important factor that is true both for the deceased and the living guide. In sufism, for example, as in yoga, an initiate must be able to name his teacher so that finally the chain of tradition

¹⁴⁸ Henry Corbin: *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth...* London, I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 1990, p. 89-90.

can be traced back to the teacher par excellence, to Khidr or the Prophet in Islam, or perhaps Kṛṣṇa in yoga. Therefore, authority and tradition give credence to a specific teaching like, for example, the performance of silent *dhikr*, if a former and well-respected sheikh or Khidr had taught it. In that sense, the story of the guide from the dead in the *Zohar* fits into the same category, namely the promulgating of a new teaching, in this case Kabbalist doctrines, through a guide from beyond who had been a revered rabbi. The author, in fact, used this device throughout the *Zohar*, by making many of the episodes appear to be set in the time of the ancient rabbis in late antiquity. Indeed, it is the conception of 'antiquity' as a former golden age, much superior to modern times which is prevalent in many societies, making them revere that which is old like, for example, the guide from beyond.

CHAPTER THREE: THE ANGELIC GUIDE

This chapter will concentrate on the angelic guide as experienced in Judaism, Islam and Christianity. In Judaism, I shall concentrate on the angel Metatron in the *Enoch* books, the *Hekhalot* literature and the *Zohar*. The *Kavod* or “Glory” was not originally conceived as an angel and indeed, it was considered greater than an angel in Saadia’s writings. However, his successors while retaining the idea of the *Kavod*, returned to the concept of angelic intermediaries,¹ so that a 10th century paraphrase of Saadia’s *Book of Philosophic Doctrines and Religious Beliefs* written in Iraq, came to the notice of the German Ḥasidim. This book emphasised a “hypostasised” *Kavod* that resulted in an understanding of a “separate” angelic being.² It was no accident that this paraphrase was written in an Islamic environment, where the so-called Aristotelian “separated intellect” of Islamic philosophy may have had some part to play. Saadia lived in the same place where al-Hallaj was tried for blasphemy and was well aware of Sufi doctrines, but it was not he who published the idea of the angelic *Kavod*.³

¹ Colette Sirat: *Les Théories des visions surnaturelles dans la pensée juive...* Leiden, Brill, 1969, p. 33.

² Gershom Scholem: *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*. New York, Schocken Books, 1991, p. 156.

³ Israel Efros, Saadia’s General Ethical Theory and its relation to Sufism in 75th Anniversary Volume of the Jewish Quarterly Review Philadelphia, 1967, pp. 174-5.

Of all the angels of Manichaeism and Gnosticism I shall concentrate on the Angelic Christ in the Nag Hammadi and related Gnostic scriptures. In the Second Chapter I used this collection for the analysis of the spiritual guide from beyond the grave. Within this corpus, which is extremely diverse, there is also the concept of the angelic Christ, a typically Gnostic feature. In the early centuries of Christianity, the concept of an angelic Christ was quite prevalent among Christians in general and not only Gnostics. Though after the various debates on the nature of Christ,⁴ this type of theology was superseded. However the angelic Christ inspired by the Septuagint version of *Isaiah* survived in artistic form in the Byzantine Art of the Middle Ages.

In respect of Islam, I am concentrating on the angelic guide, the “Aql al-fa”āl” or the Angel Gabriel in the fifth chapter of this thesis. Here I shall concentrate on the angel “Sophia” in the poetic works of ibn ‘Arabī and Rūzbehān.

THE ANGEL GUIDE IN JUDAISM

Angels played the role of the intermediary between man and God. They also played a large part in the revelation of spiritual knowledge as is shown in the *Hekhalot Zutarti*. Here it is said that God revealed His Wisdom first to an angel who, in turn, shared this knowledge with the *Yored Merkabah*, the descender to the

⁴ J.N.D. Kelly: *Early Christian Doctrines*. London, Adam & Charles Black, 1977, Chapters ix-xii.

Merka'ah or the initiate.⁵ Previous to the *Hekhalot* material, a form of mysticism had already developed in Palestine centred on the Chariot in the book of *Ezekiel* and the vision of the Throne in *Daniel* and *Isaiah*. As David Halperin has pointed out,⁶ by the end of the second century CE there were two responses, one of enthusiasm and one of reserve. There was nothing unusual in this. A similar antagonism would arise between the scholars of the Law and the Sufis within Islam. Indeed the cautious view expressed in the Talmud,⁷ concerning the rabbis who entered the garden, was not out of place. Such ecstatic practices that were there implied, but later became evident in the *Hekhalot* material, were not for everybody.⁸ Indeed the child who expounded the mysteries of *Hashmal* also came to a bad end.⁹ It was essential that one was fully prepared, had a competent teacher and was mature, beyond the level of "the child" in the spiritual life.

The Angel Guide and the Apocalyptic Genre

In late antiquity the celestial ascent, accompanied by an angel guide, was common to the apocalyptic genre. Such works were Jewish, Christian or Christian Gnostic in bias. In the New Testament there is an ascent in *Revelations* (chapters 4-5) that contains the usual motif of the author ascending in the spirit before the throne to witness the angels praising the Lord. In the 4th century *Apocalypse of Abraham* there is the ascent into heaven, the angelic guide and the period of 40

⁵ Peter Schäfer: *Übersetzung der Hekhalot Literatur*, Tübingen, 1989, Vol. 3, \$489, p. 188; \$569, p. 291.

⁶ *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision*, Tübingen, 1988, pp. 25f.

⁷ *Tosefta Meg.* 3 (4) 28; *BT Hag.* 14b; 15a,b; *PT Hagigah* 2.1.

⁸ *Op cit*: Peter Schäfer: *Übersetzung: Hekhalot Zutarti*: Vol. 3, \$424, p. 182.

days fasting as a precursor to the ecstatic ascent,¹⁰ as is found in the *Merkavah* text, which was mentioned earlier. According to this apocalyptic text Abraham, it was said, had no need of food; to gaze at the angel was enough for him. *The Ascension of Isaiah*, which has been dated two centuries previously, contains the motif of the heavenly tour by the angelic guide. To attain this ascension into the heavens, Isaiah was said to have gone into a spontaneous trance state, describing him as suddenly falling silent, with his spirit caught up to heaven.¹¹ He was later sawn in half - a common phenomenon found in descriptions of ecstatic states - as we know from the followers of Dionysos in the Greek world and from Mircea Eliade's studies of Shamanism. This work, in common with *Merkavah* literature, flies in the face of orthodoxy. For though it is written in the Old Testament that no man shall see God and live, Isaiah claimed to have seen God and was still alive.¹²

⁹ BT Hag. 13a.

¹⁰ H.F.D. Sparks: *The Apocryphal Old Testament*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989, p. 377.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Sparks: p. 795.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 789.

The Enoch Books

However, the earliest ascent to the heavens in Jewish apocalyptic literature is thought to be the Ethiopian Book of Enoch or *1 Enoch*.¹³ Fragments of *1 Enoch* have been found in Qumran; some may go back to the 3rd century BCE. This may date the celestial ascent in *1 Enoch* as early as the 3rd century BCE.¹⁴ In this text Enoch finally ascends in a mist and white lightning flashes and entered the celestial temple without an angel escort and was called by the Lord to approach the throne.¹⁵ Enoch's task was to reprove the "Watchers," after which he was accompanied by different angels Raphael or Uriel to explain to him the mysteries of the heavens and earth as, for example, the mountain on which the Holy One will sit when he comes down to earth.¹⁶ The angels showed him the mysteries of heavens that included astronomy but also the weighing of the righteous souls by the Chosen One. Finally the angel Michael took Enoch by the hand and he entered the highest heaven where Enoch was greeted by an angel, who called him the "Son of Man" who was born to righteousness.¹⁷ *1 Enoch* is not a unity and is composed of five different books¹⁸ but the brief synopsis above is typical of an angelic guided tour of the heavenly realms. Here Enoch was praised as a

¹³ Ibid., pp. 184 f.

¹⁴ David Halperin: *Faces of the Chariot*, p 79. The author accepts the dating of the Qumran fragments by Milik, so that the oldest part of the Book of the Watches dates from 2nd century BCE.

¹⁵ *1 Enoch*: in *Apocryphal Old Testament*, chapter xiv.

¹⁶ Op. Cit: *Enoch 1*, chapter xxv.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 242, 253, 256.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 173.

righteous man, but a man he remained. However, in 2 *Enoch* and 3 *Enoch* the man Enoch was transfigured into an angel himself.

Enoch as Angel -The Angel Metatron

Enoch 2, also called *The Slavonic Enoch*,¹⁹ contains the beginning of the deification of the man Enoch into the angel Metatron. It is considered that this work may have had a Greek original and that on linguistic analysis, the author used the Septuagint rather than the Hebrew Old Testament.²⁰ This might well suggest that this work was a product of the Diaspora, though it is not certain whether the author was a Jew or Christian, though a person of a mixed background is possible – a Christian who had previously come from a Jewish milieu. R.H. Charles²¹ considered it to have been written by an Alexandrian Jew.

According to the short prologue to this book, it is said that Enoch had been chosen to be an eyewitness to the celestial world. He was lying down when during a waking vision two angels visited him. This visionary dream was of a sort common to late antiquity. Finally the two angelic beings, in the form of men, lifted him up to the heavens. When he reached the seventh heaven he witnessed the Lord on His throne. At this point the other angels left him, and his entry before the throne was in the company of the angel Gabriel.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 328 f.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 324.

²¹ Op. Cit: Apocryphal Old Testament; p. 323.

Before the throne Enoch was initiated by the Archangel Michael, who took off his worldly garments, anointed him with oil, and redressed him in glorious robes. When he looked down he found himself to be transfigured.²² In chapter 18, Enoch was taken by God to reside in the celestial heavens, but there was no mention of him dying as in the Old Testament²³ account “Enoch walked with God; and he was not for God took him.” Likewise in the Qur’ān,²⁴ Idris or Enoch “was raised to a lofty station,” meaning God “withdrew” Idris/Enoch and the Prophets as was discussed previously in chapter two. In the *Slavonic Enoch*, therefore, Enoch was finally given an angelic body, whereas in *3 Enoch* he became the angel Meṭaṭron.

*3 Enoch*²⁵ is sometimes called *The Book of the Hekhalot* and *The Jewish Enoch*. There is no doubt that this book had a Jewish author. The vocabulary used to describe the events in the story, fits more neatly into a Jewish framework. Enoch who became the angel Meṭaṭron²⁶ acted as a spiritual guide to R. Ishmael who had ascended the palaces, or the heavens to receive a vision of the *Merkabah*.²⁷ Therefore, from Meṭaṭron’s beginnings in the Talmud, where he was a teacher of those souls who died in childhood and head of the Celestial Academy, in *3 Enoch*

²² Ibid., chapter 9, p. 337.

²³ Genesis 5:24.

²⁴ Sura XIX: 57.

²⁵ Tr. Hugo Odeberg: *3 Enoch or the Hebrew Book of Enoch*, Cambridge University Press, 1927.

²⁶ Ibid., chapter 8 onwards.

²⁷ Ibid., chapter 41 onwards.

he became an angelic guide and revealer of gnosis.²⁸ Furthermore, this book bears some direct relation to the *Hekhalot Zutarti*, which is, of course, suggested by one of the names given to it.²⁹

A Later Date for the Hekhalot Literature

Some modern scholars have given a new date to the *Hekhalot* literature favouring the Islamic period, as we shall see below. Previously Scholem had preferred the 2nd – 3rd centuries and David Halperin, somewhat later in the 4th century CE.³⁰ Scholem sought to emphasise the aspect of the heavenly journey and, therefore, the link between the earlier apocalyptic literature. It is true that the apocalyptic literature dealt with a similar subject matter, the heavenly journey accompanied by angels but the *Hekhalot* are different from the original apocalyptic heavenly journey.³¹ There is the adjuration of angels and so forth, which is quite as predominant as the heavenly journey, if not more so. Finally, whatever date is given, the whole basis for the *Merka'ub* tradition is Biblical, for

²⁸ BT Aboda Zara 3b; Hagigah 15a.

²⁹ Eliot R. Wolfson: *Through a Speculum that Shines*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1992, pp. 74 f.

³⁰ David Halperin: *Faces of the Chariot*, Tübingen, C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1988, p. 362. Previous dating of the *Hekhalot* books is given by Barbara A. Holdrege: *Veda and Torah*: State University of New York, 1996, pp. 258 f.

³¹ Gershom Scholem: *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York, Schocken Books, 1961: p. 41. Here it is said that the centre of the movement was based in Palestine, around the leader Johann ben Zakkai. That such ideas spread to Babylonia by mid 3rd century is witnessed by magical incantations inscribed on bowls. Scholem: *Kabbalah*, Jerusalem, Keter Publ.1977: p. 20. David Halperin: *Faces of the Chariot*., p. 362, considered a later date, placing the centre of the movement in 4th century Amoraic Babylonia.

example the vision of the chariot from *Ezekiel 1* and the Mount Sinai revelation in *Exodus 19.1f.*, with its sense of the numinous the experience conveyed.

There is also a strong element of visualisation of the sacred. E.R. Wolfson has suggested, in discussing the Geonic interpretation of the *Hekhalot* material, that the spiritual descent into the inner self, the seven palaces or heavens which the *Hekhalot* symbolise, corresponded to the stations of the Sufi path, thereby seeing a connection with Islamic mysticism. Furthermore the vision of the throne was, likewise, an internal image.³²

Visualising the Sacred in the Hekhalot, with other Parallels in Jewish and Sufi Mysticism

The same Sufi practices may lay behind the Geonic texts, which featured the “visualising of the Glory.”³³ It is also thought that Saadia’s conception of the created “Glory”³⁴ where the mystic saw a heavenly light, known as the “Glory” which symbolised God’s Presence was the result of Sufi practices developing in Jewish mysticism.³⁵ In other chapters I have discussed visualisation in Islamic mysticism and for the influence of Indian yoga on the latter. In all these cases, meditation practices involved the visualising of the spiritual guide and/ or the god

³² Eliot R. Wolfson: op cit: pp. 169-170.

³³ Op. Cit: Wolfson: pp. 149 f.

³⁴ Op. Cit: Beliefs and Opinions 11.11.

³⁵ Israel Efros: Saadia’s General Ethical Theory... p 175.

in the case of yoga. But of course, in relation to the *Hekhalot*, it would have its own symbols, as the throne, the angel and so forth. Scholem emphasised the “heavenly ascent” as the most important feature in the *Hekhalot* books. Schäfer, on the other hand, emphasised the adjuration of angels.³⁶ However, in fact, both of them would work together and so were equally important. The adjuration of angels and the mysticism of the divine names brought about the ecstatic experience which resulted in the ascent into the heavens or the descent into the self and to the revelation of knowledge both mystical and magical.

This same phenomenon occurred in both Sufi mysticism and yoga. It is through repeating the Holy Name, the *dhikr*, or the syllable *Om* in yoga induces the ecstatic experience. Finally, in the *Hekhalot* literature, the *raison d’être* for the angelic guide Metatron was that spiritual knowledge was bestowed on Moses at Sinai, through the intermediary of an angel and that angel was Metatron.³⁷

The Visualised Image in the Hekhalot

Given that the format and style of the *Hekhalot Zutarti* and the *Hekhalot* literature in general is different from the earlier apocalyptic literature, in that they contain poems, prayers, abjurations and so forth; the *Hekhalot Zutarti*, especially has a much more visual sense. Following on from what was said previously concerning the visionary aspects of Jewish mysticism, being a result of Sufi

³⁶ Wolfson: p. 115.

³⁷ Op. Cit: *Hekhalot Zutarti*: Schäfer: Vol. 3, §396, p. 119.

influence, it could also be said that some of these *Hekhalot* passages may have been used for a form of visual meditation. The most “visual” account of the throne in the Old Testament is in *Ezekiel 1: 26-27*, which gave a description of the throne with a human form upon it. All around was the brightness of fire. In the *Hekhalot Zutarti* the image of the throne is greatly expanded.³⁸ Here the throne and the four creatures gleamed in the heavens, which were like a sea of purple blue sapphire. After the description of the throne bathed in a heavenly light the *Hashmal's* appearance like fire makes the ecstatic vision.

The Beautiful Countenance

Another important difference in the *Hekhalot Rabbati*, for example, from the Old Testament accounts and the earlier apocalyptic material, is the appearance of the Lord and the mystic quality of the Beautiful Countenance. In the Ezekiel text mentioned above, we are just told that a figure of a man appeared who in *Daniel 7:9*, was called “The Ancient of Days”. In *Enoch 2* the face was mighty, most glorious and terrible,³⁹ and finally in *Psalms 11:7* we are told that the “upright shall see his face.” None of these descriptions is very explicit. One gives the mental image of an old man and the other in *2 Enoch* is rather terrifying. In comparison the beauty of the divine countenance in the *Hekhalot* is described in a lyrical fashion, like an icon that could be formed in the mind. What is more the sight

³⁸ Op. Cit.: Schäfer: Übersetzung: §371, p. 67.

³⁹ Op. Cit.: Apocryphal Old Testament: p. 337.

can be so overwhelming, that the observer is “poured out like a jug.”⁴⁰ In other words, he was plunged into ecstasy or “annihilated,” as the Sufis would say. If the appearance of the Lord had been visualised in an imaginary form, as I suggest is the case here, this would account for the hymns of praise throughout the text, which would serve as an additional form of worship.

The “seeing of the Lord” which is sometimes found in mystical writings, again is not orthodox.⁴¹ Even in the *Hekhalot Zutati*, R. Akiba teaches that He looked like us, but was concealed from us.⁴² There is a similar paradox in Islam, where on one level one cannot see God, but in the Qur’ān there are many allusions to the beauty of His Face.⁴³ “I have seen my Lord in the form of the greatest beauty,” the words the Prophet had uttered in ecstasy became a popular hadīth in Sufi circles in the 8th century and indeed, remained so.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Op. Cit: Schäfer: Hidden and Manifest God: p.16.

⁴¹ This problem was in a sense, resolved, when the mystics confirmed that it was only His Glory that was seen.

⁴² Schäfer: Übersetzung: \$352, p. 58.

⁴³ Sura ii 112, 272: vi: 52.

Metatron both Great and Small

Like the “visual” accounts of the Lord, there are “iconic” representations of Metatron.⁴⁵ Here he stands before the throne of glory, dressed in a robe resplendent with the spiritual light of *Hashmal*, opening the door of deliverance. This image has captured the role of Metatron as an intermediary between God and the *Merkavah* mystics. At the same time, there was also the warning that he was only an intermediary. Though he has been said to have the “same name as his master” – his name is numerically equal to *el-Shaddai* – he is the servant and messenger. Though he is an important messenger, he is still the “lesser Yahweh” and so one should not make the mistake of worshipping him and forgetting God, or to fall into the error of dualism and imagine there are two gods. This warning was put into the mouth of R. Elisha who had experienced a celestial ascent to the *Merkavah* where he had seen Metatron humiliated with sixty lashes like a naughty schoolboy.⁴⁶ This episode also appears in chapter 16 of *3 Enoch* and the warning about making too much of Metatron at the expense of God appears elsewhere in the *Hekhalot*. Here the angel Ozhayah gave the warning when instructing R. Ishmael on the correct ascent to the *Merkavah*.⁴⁷

The Names of Power

⁴⁴ Henry Corbin: *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi*, tr. Ralph Manheim, Princeton University Press, 1980, pp. 272, 376: note 1.

⁴⁵ Op. Cit: Schäfer Übersetzung: Vol. 3, §420.

⁴⁶ Schäfer: Übersetzung: Vol. 3, §345, p. 14.

The power of the Holy Names was considered to be of importance in bringing about states of ecstasy. This was an important factor in the later Kabbalah, as we shall see in respect of Abraham Abulafia in the next chapter. In my view they must have had a similar function in the *Hekhalot*.⁴⁸ There is the Great Name of God revealed to R. Akiba and there are numerous angelic names of power, including that of Meṭaṭron that is one of the most important. So important is his name, that he has a string of epithets – The Prince of the Countenance, the Angel Prince of the Torah, the Prince of Wisdom, Discernment, and so forth, forming the passage called the *Meṭaṭron Liturgy*.⁴⁹ This part also confirmed the pre-existence of Meṭaṭron when God created him from the beginning through the power of the Hebrew Letters. This again emphasised his importance as an angelic guide, even if at other times he was “cut down to size.”

Metatron in the Zohar

Meṭaṭron has similar characteristics in the *Zohar* as those found in the Talmud and the *Hekhalot*, but with some added Kabbalist features. He is again replete with epithets such as “Light of the *Shekinah*” and “the Servant,” the latter name, being in no way derogatory. He is also called “the boy” a name which alludes to his “renewal” through the mediation of the *Sefirot*. He grows old and is constantly

⁴⁷ Schäfer: Vol. 1, §107-111, 198-240; English translation by David Halperin: *Faces of the Chariot*, p. 240.

⁴⁸ Schäfer: *Übersetzung*: Vol. 3 §337, 393, 420-424; Schäfer: *Hidden and Manifest God, Hekhalot Zuṭarti* p. 56; *Merkavah Rabbah* §657, §663, pp. 109, 111.

rejuvenated, through the intercession of the *Sefirah Binah*, the supernal mother, and he is again reborn.⁵⁰ He was the force that emanated from the light of the *Shekinah*, and was also known as the “Lesser Adam” which the Holy One had made in the celestial image.

According to this account, the celestial radiance of Adam’s soul was taken from him because of the *Fall* but entered the man Enoch so that it could perfect itself within the human body. Enoch, in his life on earth, achieved the perfection of soul that should have been humanity’s destiny. When Enoch entered the Garden of Eden, angels revealed secret mysteries to him, by giving him a book of wisdom that was concealed within the Tree of Life. After a careful study of this book, he learned the paths of the Holy One until the light within him became perfect. When this came about he ascended to the heavens and became the angel Metatron.⁵¹ According to another part of the *Zohar*,⁵² when God ‘took him’ He showed him the supernal mysteries and the source of the *Book of Enoch* is given as the “mystery book.” Later in the same section [55a] the contents of this book of wisdom are divided into seventy-two branches of sacred wisdom, the formation of 670 inscriptions of higher mysteries, and 1,500 secret keys, which were not usually revealed to other angels. Adam’s own personal copy was given to his son Seth, but Enoch had been given a similar copy,⁵³ so that when “God took him”

⁴⁹ Op. Cit. Übersetzung: §389, p. 103.

⁵⁰ Zohar: III: 217a-217b; Fischel Lachower & Isaiah Tishby, OUP, 1989, p. 628.

⁵¹ Op. Cit: Zohar Hadash: Terumah 42d, Tishby p. 627.

⁵² Op. Cit: Zohar I: 37b Bereshith. Harry Sperling & Maurice Simon: London, Soncino Press, 1949.

⁵³ Zohar: Sperling & Simon: pp. 176-177.

he understood the forty-five mystical key-combinations of letters used by the highest ranks of angels.⁵⁴

Armed with this Kabbalistic knowledge involving key letter combinations, and the mysteries of the Holy Names, Meṭaṭron had the required qualities for an angelic guide. In the *Zohar*, R. Simeon reports to R. Jose and R. Hiyya that he had seen them “with the eyes of the spirit” dwelling two days and two nights in the Tabernacle of the Youth who had taught them all the higher mysteries of the Torah.⁵⁵ Indeed, in the next chapter we shall see that Abulafia used such techniques as letter combinations to promote ecstasy. Furthermore, according to him, Meṭaṭron’s role was amalgamated to that of the entity the active intellect, which Abulafia learned from his own guide Baruch Togarmi, in the latter’s *Commentary on the Sefer Yetsirah*.⁵⁶

The Celestial Ascent

Sifting the fact from the fiction in the *Zohar*, like the *Hekhalot* books under the guise of fable, it contains various themes such as visualisation, letter combinations, the mystery and power of the divine Names and the heavenly ascent associated with, and used by later Kabbalists. Finally, what was the meaning of the celestial ascent in Jewish mysticism? Did people really think in the Middle Ages that there was an actual physical ascent involved? It seemed when

⁵⁴ *Zohar I: Bereshith* 56b Sperling & Simon.

⁵⁵ *Zohar Terumah* 196b, Vol IV, Sperling and Simon.

they wrote of sages in the past, they believed a physical ascent had occurred. An example of this is R. Solomon ben Isaac of Troyes, when writing his commentary on the experiences of the four rabbis in the Talmud.⁵⁷ He believed that an actual physical ascent had taken place. Commentators would interpret it today as an ascent into a higher consciousness – a psychological experience, which was also the opinion of Hai Gaon.⁵⁸ The heavenly journey took place in the mind.

A similar phenomenon occurred in the Islamic world. The Prophet experienced a bodily ascent. However when ibn 'Arabī spoke of his own experience it seemed otherwise. Though his description of the journey into the self was expressed in the language of apocalyptic genre, in the *Risālat al-Arwār* the “ascent” was a psychological journey into his own consciousness. A discussion of this work, however, belongs to the following chapter. Nevertheless, it would seem that, whereas “tradition” spoke of a physical ascent, in both Jewish and Islamic mysticism, the people who practised this form of contemplation, or who were cognisant of it, understood it as a psychological phenomenon. Finally, there seems no doubt, that the Kabbalists experienced a visionary life, not unlike that of the Sufis. As Moshe Idel has suggested, they shared the same “Mundus Imaginalis.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Ms Paris BN 770. Moshe Idel: *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, Albany State University of New York, 1988, p. 76.

⁵⁷ BT Hagigah 14b.

⁵⁸ Eliot R. Wolfson: *Through a Speculum...* pp. 110-111. There are modern meditation exercises that begin with one envisaging oneself as a star in the heavens etc.

⁵⁹ *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*: op cit: pp. 74-5.

The Glory and the Shekinah as Angels “separated” from God

The Glory understood to be a separate being⁶⁰ came about in the Middle Ages. Previously, in earlier times, neither the *Kavod* nor the *Shekinah* for that matter, were understood to be separate from God. Gershom Scholem discovered the *Midrash Mishlei* on *Proverbs 22:29*⁶¹ in which God and the *Shekinah* were understood to be separate. Generally, it could be said that this concept of “separated entities” came into Jewish thought by the 13th century onwards through Arabic philosophy, as shall be seen in the final chapter. Certainly by that time the *Shekinah* in the *Zohar* was understood to be “separate.”

The Development of the Angelic Kavod from a Paraphrase of Saadia’s Writings

The angelic *Kavod* was a feature of the 12th century mysticism of the Ashkenazi Ḥasidim. The German Ḥasidim were familiar with a work they thought was written by Saadia Goan – *Book of Philosophic Doctrines and Religious Beliefs* that had been written in the 10th century in Iraq. However, it was the paraphrase of Saadia’s work that they had to hand. The paraphrase distorted Saadia’s intention, for he had not maintained that the *Kavod* was an angel that the paraphrase suggested. Saadia understood the *Kavod* as light and the *Kavod*, therefore, as the manifestation of God as light. The *Kavod Nibra* was neither an

⁶⁰ Its role was similar to that of the separated active intellect, in an anonymous work by a Jew writing in Arabic. *Kitabma’ani al Nafs* Quaestiones de Anima. Ed. I. Goldziher, Göttingen, 1907.

⁶¹ Ed. by S. Buber, F 47a: On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead, New York, Schocken Books, 1991: p. 152, 156. He quoted from Mid. Prov. 47a in Kabbalah, Jerusalem, Keter Publishing, 1977: p. 31 – “The Shekinah stood before the Holy One... and said to Him...”

angel nor an emanation.⁶² In fact, Saadia understood the *Kavod* to be of a higher status than any angel.⁶³ The *Kavod* that was composed of formless light could take human form. But this human form had nothing to do with an angelic body, because Saadia rejected the intervention of angels in mysticism.⁶⁴ Indeed, according to Saadia, the Light of the *Kavod* was a special light that God created, and made manifest to his prophets, so that they would know that it was a prophetic communication emanating from God.⁶⁵

However, the Hasidim received Saadia's ideas through this paraphrase and considering him to "be learned in the mysteries," they understood the *Kavod* to be an angel.⁶⁶ An interest in *Merkavah* mysticism had come about in the Rhineland in the 11th century with the arrival of the Kalonymide family from Italy. Their descendants in the 12th and 13th centuries, Samuel the Hasid, Jehudah the Hasid and R. Eleazar of Worms maintained that such ideas were given to their ancestor R. Moses ben Kalonymus in Lucca, by Abu Aharon the son of R. Samuel ha-Nasi of Baghdad.⁶⁷ The Hasidim amalgamated their understanding of *Merkavah* mysticism with what they understood from the paraphrase of Saadia, namely that the *Kavod* was an angel.

⁶² It has been suggested that Saadia's concept of the Glory as light, may reflect Sufi ideas on the pre-existent light that functioned as a medium of prophecy. E.R. Wolfson: *Through a Speculum*: op cit: p. 126.

⁶³ Saadia ben Joseph: *Sefer Ha'emunot ve ha-De'ot.*, tr. as *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, by Samuel Rosenblatt, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1948, *Treatise II*, pp. 121-2.

⁶⁴ Alexander Altmann: *Saadya's Theory of Revelation* in Erwin J. Rosenthal, ed., *Saadya Studies*, Manchester University Press, pp. 17-21.

⁶⁵ Op. Cit: Saadia ben Joseph: *Book of Beliefs*: p. 130.

⁶⁶ Op. Cit: Gershom Scholem: *Major Trends*: p. 87.

⁶⁷Op. Cit: Scholem: *Kabbalah*: p. 33.

The Double Glory – The Second was the Angel

Accordingly, the Ḥasidim developed the idea of an inner Glory the *Kavod Penimi* without form, and a second visible Glory which appeared on the throne in the form of a man, related to the *Shi'ur Qomah* in the *Hekhalot*. They interpreted the Cherub mentioned in *Ezekiel 10:4* as identical with Saadia's visible Glory.⁶⁸ There is now a separated *Kavod* understood to be an angel, as for example, in the *Sefer ha-Hayyim* written by R. Eleazar of Worms.⁶⁹ However, the role of the angel *Kavod* was not quite the same as the angelic guide Meṭaṭron. The Glory's appearance in human shape was the zenith of religious aspiration. Crucially, the *Kavod* was centred round the concept of the divine image, in whose image humanity was formed. The relationship between the mystic and the *Kavod* was well documented by Moses Isserles of Cracov.⁷⁰ Here Isserles discussed the experience of Moses at Sinai who saw nothing but the brilliant light itself without a reflected image. This was the finest of visions without an intermediary. However, most people could only work through the intermediary, and hence the appearance of the *Kavod*, which had taken the *same form* as themselves.⁷¹ Was the *Kavod* in human form like the great, majestic figure in the *Shi'ur Qomah* text, or did it resemble exactly the form of the mystic who viewed it? Was the culmination of the mystic's vision a vision of his self? In the case of Abulafia and his followers

⁶⁸ Op. Cit: Scholem: Major Trends p. 113; "Then the Glory of the Lord went up from the Cherub."

⁶⁹ Tr. in *Les Théories des Visions Surnaturelles dans la Pensée Juive du Moyen-âge* by Colette Sirat, Leiden, Brill, 1969, pp.111-119.

⁷⁰ Scholem: *Mystical Shape of the Godhead*: op cit: pp. 251f.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

the latter was indeed true, for they were given a vision of the higher self in His image.

Both Gershom Scholem and Moshe Idel understood there to be a “foreign influence” on Abraham Abulafia beyond Neo-Platonic and Islamic mysticism. In the next chapter, I shall analyse the possible influence of yoga in respect of Abulafia. Nevertheless, irrespective of what foreign influence lay beyond, Abulafia’s mysticism of the visionary self was originally based on his own tradition and in this case the starting point would have been the German Ḥasidim’s understanding of the vision of the *Kavod*.

The Zohar and the Angel *Shekinah*

The boy prodigy, the son of the rabbi from beyond, in the previous chapter, supplied the explanation concerning the *Shekinah*’s angelic status.⁷² He said that the *Shekinah* was called angel when she was a messenger from above, who received light from the heavenly mirror or *Tiferet*. Likewise, when she appeared to Moses and Jacob she was an angel. The *Shekinah* was always a feminine angel because she personified the feminine aspect of God. Therefore, she played the role of the feminine Wisdom from *Proverbs* her Consort being the King and her divine marriage brought about the balance within the *Sefirot*. She also played a part in redemption. Her dwelling on earth had been the Temple, so that when it was

⁷² Zohar III: op cit: 186a-192a; Vol. 1: Tishby, p. 202.

destroyed, she went into exile.⁷³ Nevertheless, she remained Israel's guardian angel, and moreover, she shared the people's exile.⁷⁴

In the *Zohar* prayers are raised on high through the help of angels. Here too the *Shekinah* also played her part in this for she was raised to heaven by the prayers of the righteous, and at the same time she helped transport the prayers to the realms of the *Sefirot*.⁷⁵ She also ascended and descended through the power of the Holy Names, Elohim and YHVH, respectively. It was fortunate when prayer aided the mystical marriage within the *Sefirot* in this way. In the rest of this section, the *Shekinah* tends to take on another personality, being identified with the *Sefirah* rather than purely the angelic messenger. As the son of the "Big Fish" said, she was called by many names.⁷⁶

But in other parts of the *Zohar*, in respect of prayer and devotion, the worshipper personified the *Shekinah*. Once again she took on her angelic quality, in some respects like the personified being in the Old Testament and the Wisdom Literature. Through the worshipper's prayer, she was raised up as a consort and bound to the Holy One. When the worshipper's soul reaches the other world, it is rewarded in that the three parts, the *Nefesh*, *Ruah* and *Neshamah*, will be bound as a unity. Normally when the soul is on the earth, they are not a unity. The *Nefesh* emanated from the *Shekinah*, the *Ruah* from *Tiferet*, and the highest part of the

⁷³ Zohar II: 50b-51a, Vol. 1, p. 398.

⁷⁴ Zohar I: 159b-160a, Vol. 1, p. 413.

⁷⁵ Op. Cit: Tishby: Tikkunei ha-Zohar: Tikkun 21, 44b-45b, Vol. 3, pp. 1053f.

⁷⁶ Ibid: Zohar III: 186a-192a, Vol. 1: p. 202.

soul, the *Neshamah*, emanated from *Binah* and *Hokmah*, so that while the soul was in the body they were three separate operations.⁷⁷ As we have seen previously, the righteous person needed to ensure that the *Neshamah* took precedence over the lower soul so that the vices associated with the fleshly soul were annihilated.

The Angel: a Created Being or Psychic Form?

Previously I asked the question about the celestial ascent, whether those concerned thought it was a physical ascent or a descent into the psyche and whether, in fact, it took place in the mind? The answer was “yes” to both questions. Exactly the same position applied to how people viewed the apparition of the Glory. E.R. Wolfson devoted a chapter to this in his work.⁷⁸ Certainly Hai Gaon believed such visions to be mental images. Eleazar of Worms believed so too, although he understood the vision of the angel to have been sent by God. Eleazar understood that the vision of the Angel or Glory was the prophet’s interior vision, sent by God and “seen by the heart.” He thought that the Glory could take different forms, like a youth or an old man. God manifested his Glory according to His will and, no doubt, according to the understanding of the mystic concerned.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Ibid: Zohar Hadash: Tikkunim, 96a-97a, Vol 3, pp. 1058 f. Notes 377, 378.

Meditation and the *Merkavah*

It does seem that R. Eleazar and his group of followers practised forms of meditation connected with the vision of the *Merkavah*. He explained that four circles corresponded to four shells of the nut, which in turn corresponded to four concentric circles around the Throne of Glory.⁸⁰ The symbolism inferred in the four circles is that of the four steps of the ladder of meditation.⁸¹ Similarly with the nut, peeling the three outer levels away, or again using the ladder image, surmounting the three lower steps, “nothing” is left. The level above thought, or the fourth step in meditation as described in a midrash⁸² is experienced as nothingness which the author describes as an “ineffable experience of the Divine.” R. Eleazar emphasised this when he said that those who understood the science of the nut would know the depth of the *Merkavah* and likewise, those who did not understand the meaning of the nut would not know anything of the *Merkavah*.⁸³

The symbolism of the peeling away of the outer shells of the nut to find the Divine essence is a powerful symbol used to describe the mystic’s ascent that is found in more than one religious system, as for example in the *Katha Upaniṣad*, in

⁷⁸ Op. Cit: Through a Speculum... Chapter 4: Specifically, pp. 144-148.

⁷⁹ Hikkhot ha-Kavod, tr. in Visions Surnaturelles... op cit: p. 118.

⁸⁰ Alexander Altmann: Eleazar of Worms’ Symbol of the *Merkavah* in *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism*: London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969, pp. 161-171.

⁸¹ Aryeh Kaplan: *Jewish Meditation*, New York, Schocken Books, 1985, pp. 132f.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁸³ Op cit: Altmann: Eleazar of Worms... p 164, 167.

the Indian tradition. It seems to have been similarly interpreted in connection with meditation by ibn 'Arabī in a tract that a 17th century commentator called *The Kernel of the Kernel* in relation to ibn 'Arabī's original intention.⁸⁴

Therefore, the angel in Jewish mysticism was considered a created being from the celestial world, but in some interpretations of the appearance of the Glory, it was a figure manifested by the mystic's psyche, associated with mystical experience, through the Will of God. In the following sections we shall see the angel in other guises.

THE ANGELIC CHRIST: The Importance of the Hellenistic Milieu: Philo of Alexandria

We shall now turn to the condemned Gnostic literature from Egypt, which supports the evidence for an Angelic Christ who played the role of a spiritual guide.⁸⁵ However, it has to be borne in mind that the concept of the angelic Christ was not unusual in Christianity, which flourished in a Hellenistic milieu. The rise of the angel logos has been attributed to Philo Judaeus. He endeavoured to incorporate his Greek education into his Jewish faith in the concept of the

⁸⁴ Ismail Hakki Bursevi's tr. of *The Kernel of the Kernel* by Muhyiddin ibn 'Arabī; Sherborne, Beshara Publ., [n.d.].

⁸⁵ Angelic intermediaries as Michael and Gabriel played a role in Coptic Christianity as in the *Difnar* or *Antiphonarium*: Ed. De Lacy O'Leary: Coptic Text of MS John Rylands Coptic 21 & 22, 1928-30. Book 1 pp. 59, 92-3, Book 2: pp. 88-9, Book 3 p 23; C.Detlef G. Müller: *Engellehre der koptischen Kirche*: Wiesbaden, Harrossowitz, 1959, pp. 189-208, 223-235 for the investiture of the archangels and Jesus coming down to earth to teach 40 days after Easter. The texts date from 9th century CE.

angel logos.⁸⁶ Moreover, to those who were still in the body on earth, God appeared to them in the form of an angel.⁸⁷

As the Christians after him, Philo incorporated the language of the Greek mystery religions into his own writing. Furthermore, he absorbed their sense of a visionary world in which epiphanies took place. It was the “mundus imaginalis” which belonged to the world of mysticism as has been shown on several occasions previously. This sense of the visionary lay behind his interpretation of *Exodus 33:18* where Moses was not shown the Face of God but the Back. Moses had a direct experience of God, when he asked to see His Glory. Other aspirants would be given a vision of the Logos.⁸⁸ Indeed, one can see now how this interpretation could have had some bearing on the theology of the angel Kavod, in the last section. How might one be granted such a vision? It would seem that such experiences occurred in an ecstatic state. Philo called them *Bacchic Frenzies* but then interpreted the experience more within a Jewish framework – as the transportation by prophetic inspiration.⁸⁹ It was then, on occasions such as these, that a vision of the Logos might be given.

To prepare for such a vision, Philo informs us in the above passage, the initiate must abandon the world of the everyday, the world of work and of family. In fact, it was the same prescription which later contemporary visionary ascetics

⁸⁶ Philo: Leg. All: 3:177-8.

⁸⁷ Somn: 1:232.

⁸⁸ Conf: 95-7.

⁸⁹ Her: 68-70.

had given, like the Neo-Platonists, the Gnostics and the pagan Hermeticists. Then it was to the solitary that the divine Logos might manifest itself unexpectedly as a spontaneous experience of sudden joy.⁹⁰ This was made possible by the fact that the human mind was related to the Logos.⁹¹ Therefore, the Logos played the role of an intermediary between God and humanity, and as chief archangel the Logos was a petitioner.⁹² The Logos was also seen to possess salvific qualities.⁹³

Early Christian Logos Theology

Early Christianity which evolved in the Hellenistic world,⁹⁴ as noted in the first chapter, took on the philosophical language of Middle Platonism and the religious language of the Greek mystery religions. In this respect the influence of Philo was important and of his sources, the Stoics. But before the Prologue to *St. John's Gospel* was written the concept of Jesus as Logos was first intimated by the Apostle Paul⁹⁵ who declared Jesus to be the image of the invisible God the first-born of all creation.

⁹⁰ De Somn. 1.71: E.R. Goodenough concentrates on the mystical side of Philo as in his book, *By Light, Light*, Yale & London, 1935: pp. 246, 239 f, and that the Jews according to Philo, had the 'true mystery' of all the mystery religions: p. 282.

⁹¹ De Op. Mund. 145.

⁹² Quis Rerum: 205-6.

⁹³ Spec. Leg. IV. 188.

⁹⁴ Syriac Christianity was untouched by Hellenism to any great extent, and lacks much of the Greek philosophical language, or that of the mystery religions.

⁹⁵ Colossians 1.15-20

Justin Martyr was a converted pagan who lived in Ephesus and Rome in the 2nd century CE. Following both Paul and St. John, he understood Jesus to be the Logos born in the flesh and the sacrament of baptism to be the new initiatory rite.⁹⁶ He believed the Christian religion to be superior to Greek philosophy because the Logos, or the rational principle, had become Christ.⁹⁷ However, it was the Alexandrine Fathers who developed a theology of Christ as Logos. Clement, for example, wrote of Jesus as Logos in connection with the mysteries of baptism and it was this baptism of the Logos, or the Word that conferred illumination and salvation.⁹⁸ Generally, throughout Clement's writings, Jesus was understood as Logos or Word, but also as teacher of spiritual matters and as healer of the soul.⁹⁹

It was Origen who devised a fuller theological system concerning the relationship of Jesus and the Logos. Though in the *De Principiis* he understood God to be a unity, he believed the Son to be God's Wisdom – a separate divine hypostasis.¹⁰⁰ In the Wisdom Literature, Wisdom was feminine, but Philo regarded it as masculine.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, according to Origen's debate with Celsus, he understood Christ as not merely any angel, but the "Angel of the Great

⁹⁶ *Apologia* 1.5, 1.46, 1.61. Oxford, Library of the Fathers: Vol. 40, 1861.

⁹⁷ J.N.D. Kelly: *Early Christian Doctrine*, London, Adam & Charles Black, 1977, 5th ed. p. 146.

⁹⁸ *Paedagogus*: Book 1:6 *Ante-Nicene Fathers* Vol. 2, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1989, p. 215-6.

⁹⁹ *Exhortation to the Heathen*: *Ante Nicene Fathers*: Chapter 1: p. 173; *Paedagogus*: Chapter 1, p. 209.

¹⁰⁰ Origen on *First Principles*: being Koetschau's text of the *De Principiis*, tr. G.W. Butterworth, New York, Harper & Row, 1966, Book 1:1, p 13- "the image of the invisible God, first born of all creation," from Col. 1.15; Book 1:2, p. 15f.

¹⁰¹ *De Fug*: 52

Counsel” from *Isaiah*.¹⁰² People who knew Origen said that he considered the “Angel of the Great Counsel” as a “spiritual confrère.”¹⁰³ Likewise, in his *First Homily on the Song of Songs* he affirmed that he had seen the Bridegroom [Christ], but for only an instant, as He always vanished as soon as he noticed Him. This resulted in Origen being called a “Mystic manqué.”¹⁰⁴ What it does show is how early Christianity was very much a product of its time.

The Angel Christ in Gnostic Scripture

From the fact that Origen identified Christ as the Logos, or the second hypostasis of Platonism, it followed that some people might understand Him to be an angel. It was not until the 5th century, after the Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon, that the nature of Christ was settled, though not to everybody’s satisfaction. Around that era the theology of the angelic Christ was abandoned in orthodox Christianity, together with the complete suppression of Gnostic tracts.

Certainly not all the writers of Gnostic literature had worked out their ideas of the angelic Christ in such a way as Origen, though some may have read his works.

¹⁰² Origen: *Contra Celsum* Book 5:53; Tr. Henry Chadwick, Cambridge University Press, 1980; *Isaiah* IX.5: LXX.

¹⁰³ Joseph Wilson Trigg: *Origen*: London, SCM Press Ltd., 1983, p. 171.

¹⁰⁴ Origen: *Hom. in Cant. 1.7*: Tr. R.P.Lawson as *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, London, Longman, Green & Co., 1957; E.R.Dodds: *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, New York & London, W.W.Norton & Co., 1970, p. 98.

In the Apocalypse known as the *Bruce Codex*, the author has moulded the person of Christ around his understanding of Middle Platonism. Here Jesus was described as Logos, a light form that dwelt with the Monad, the Father.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, in *The Book of the Great Logos* Jesus was understood to be the Logos and saviour, sent from the world of light. In this fragment, Jesus was understood to be a teacher and initiator who taught his disciples the arts of purification, and then initiated them into the mysteries of the Logos.¹⁰⁶

In the *Second Book of Ieou* again, the angelic Jesus initiated the disciples into further mysteries, and received them into an initiatory baptism.¹⁰⁷ An important part of the gnosis given was the knowledge of the Names of Power, specifically the Great Name,¹⁰⁸ which may show some Jewish influence. Though these baptismal initiations are Gnostic in spirit, they were, nevertheless, envisaged as baptisms of regeneration performed by Jesus the angel from the world of light which enabled the followers to reach their spiritual potential. The baptism, however, in the *Gospel of Philip*, though this Gospel does, of course, have a Gnostic interpretation, the actual baptismal ceremony with the cup of wine and water and so forth, came close to that of the early Church. In this text, Christ was

¹⁰⁵ Bruce Codex, tr. by G.R.S. Mead in *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten*, London, 1931, 3rd ed., p 555. The Bruce Codex was brought to England in the 18th century, and so belongs to the earlier Gnostic "finds."

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 518 f. *Fragments of a Faith...*

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp, 526-7.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 542.

understood as man and angel who revealed himself to men as a man and to angels as an angel.¹⁰⁹

In the same Nag Hammadi collection *The Sophia of Jesus Christ* embraces the concept that after Jesus died he went back to the Father, shedding the form he was known by on earth to be a Logos once more. When he returned to earth to teach his disciples, he was not in his “first form” but appeared like a “great angel of light.” In fact, the author could not describe Christ’s appearance.¹¹⁰ The gnosis this angelic Jesus gave concerned the fall of Sophia who had desired to create life without her consort Immortal Man. This is a variant of the ubiquitous Sophia myth, which is in several of the Nag Hammadi tracts. As Sophia brought forth without her consort, the result was the demiurge or second god called Yaldaboath.¹¹¹ This ignorant miscreant who imagined himself to be the God of gods, created an imperfect world and, therefore, was responsible for all the suffering in it. The true God above all, unsullied, whom Gnostics should worship, remained outside and not responsible for creation.

The Angel Christ in Byzantine Art

To trace the antecedents of the Byzantine Christ angel, it is necessary to look again at Origen and *Isaiah*. The idea of the Christ angel developed from the

¹⁰⁹ Gospel of Philip, tr. by W.W. Isenberg in James M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library*, Leiden, E.J.Brill, 1977, pp. 134-5, 144-5.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, *Sophia of Jesus Christ*: p. 207-8.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 224-5.

“Angel of great Counsel”¹¹² understood to be Christ, which has already been discussed in connection with Origen’s Logos theology. Here in the Byzantine murals of the Middle Ages the Logos took the form of an angel often with a cruciform nimbus. An example is the church of St. Clement of Ohrid, Macedonia, where there is an eleventh century mural of an angel with a cruciform halo that is the Christ angel.¹¹³ In the same church is a thirteenth century mural of “Wisdom” as the personification of Sophia, also with a cruciform nimbus.¹¹⁴ In this last iconic representation, the Logos and Sophia are united in one female personification. In the background of the picture is the temple with seven columns taken from *Proverbs 9:5*, which symbolised the Virgin as the temple of the Logos.

Sirapie der Nersessian also contributed to the theme of the Christ angel in this church,¹¹⁵ pointing out another Christ angel in the narthex, beneath which is written - “Today is the salvation of the world,”¹¹⁶ - which is carried by four angels, between the prophets Ezekiel and Habbukuk. A similar Christ angel can also be seen in the Ms. collection where Habbukuk is depicted contemplating the Christ angel.¹¹⁷ In the Monastery of Studenica there is a 13th century mural of

¹¹² Isaiah IX.5 - LXX

¹¹³ Jean Meyendorff: L’Iconographie de la sagesse Divine dans la Tradition Byzantine in Cahiers Archéologiques X, 1959, p. 270.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., illustr. p. 271.

¹¹⁵ Notes sur quelques images se rattachantes au theme de Christ-Ange in Cahiers Archéologiques XIII, 1962, pp. 206-16.

¹¹⁶ From the Fourth Ode of the Easter Canon of John of Damascus.

¹¹⁷ Mt. Sinai: Cod.Grec. 339.

Christ as “the Angel of the Great Counsel.”¹¹⁸ For our purposes, the most significant is the picture of the Christ angel with wings and cruciform halo.¹¹⁹ All these paintings have retained the motif of Christ as the angelic messenger and teacher. In the following section of this chapter, the angel Sophia who inspired both wisdom and poetry will be analysed.

ANGELIC WISDOM – THE FEMININE GUIDE

The Linguistic Origin and evidence from other Traditions

This part of the chapter is concerned with the feminine personification of Wisdom, the angel Sophia. How did this personification come about? In recent years, there has been much argument concerning the predominance of the masculine in both Christianity and Judaism. In fact this is something that can be said for all major religions, in greater or lesser degree. However, Ursula King suggested that rather than argue whether God is male or female, it would be more useful to explore the feminine dimensions or aspects of God.

In Hebrew, therefore, such words as *Torah*, *Hokmah* or *Shekinah* are all feminine, and likewise *Prajña*, the Sanskrit for Wisdom is also feminine in the Buddhist tradition, as in the *Prajñāparāmitā* the Buddhist Wisdom Texts, and in the Hindu tradition, *Śakti* the Consort of *Śiva*.¹²⁰ The fact, therefore, that *Hokmah*

¹¹⁸ Sirapie der Nersessian: Notes sur quelques images... op cit: p. 268.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 269; illus: p. 267.

¹²⁰ Ursula King: *Women and Spirituality: Voices of Protest and Promise*, London. Macmillan, 1993, 2nd Ed., p. 50, 52.

is feminine has undoubtedly lead to the personification of Wisdom as a woman. Indeed in the *Zohar*, the *Torah* takes on a feminine personification, as when she reveals herself only to her lover, meaning that she gives her wisdom to those who are worthy of her.¹²¹ Also the *Shekinah* is, at times, understood as a feminine angel as has already been noted.

Indeed there are some similarities between the Jewish personification of wisdom and the Buddhist Wisdom texts. The same female personification occurs in the Sanskrit word for wisdom *Prajñā* and she shares many of the qualities associated with the feminine Wisdom in *Proverbs*. Indeed in this Buddhist text the perfection of wisdom is equivalent to liberation or enlightenment.¹²²

However, the tradition closest to Judaism, in respect of the personification of wisdom was the Iranian. In the Pahlavi *Dadestan I Menog I Khrad* [Judgement of the Spirit of Wisdom], for example, Ahura Mazda created the world through a feminine personification of wisdom.¹²³ It is quite possible that the Jews when living under the Persian Empire were influenced by these ideas. For example, evidence of Persian dualism has been found in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

¹²¹ Op. Cit: Tishby: *Zohar* II: 94b-99b: Vol. 1, p. 196.

¹²² Edward Conze: *Perfection of Wisdom in 8000 Lines*. Delhi, Sri Satguru Publ., 1994, Chapter 7, p. 135: *The Verse Form*, Chapter IV:4, p. 17: Chapter VII.1, p. 23. The Verse form is the oldest, which may date to 100 BCE.

¹²³ LVII: 4-5, *Book of the Mainyo-I-Khard*, tr. E.W.West, Stuttgart & London, 1871; Mary Boyce: *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*: London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979, pp. 136-7.

Wisdom as a Hypostasis

However the hypostatisation of Wisdom in Hebrew literature is usually attributed to the influence of Hellenism. It is found in the Wisdom Literature, a body of teaching concerning wise and correct behaviour of the righteous. In *Ecclesiasticus* ¹²⁴ a father advised his son on how to live the virtuous life. Most important of all he should love Wisdom, “for he that loveth her, loveth life.” In the *Wisdom of Solomon*, Wisdom is a female personification. Though she belongs to her Consort she is separate from Him, which suggests she is a divine hypostasis as in *Proverbs 1 & 8*. As a personification of Wisdom she roams around the world looking for the lovers of Wisdom. The author admits he had long loved her and sought her from his youth. She is initiated into the knowledge of God, and because of his love for her, he will gain immortality leaving behind him an eternal memory to those that follow him. ¹²⁵ Likewise it is she who cries out at the city gates in *Proverbs 1:20-4 & 8*. In the latter chapter, she explained her origin as part Wisdom goddess, the consort of Jahweh, and divine hypostasis. ¹²⁶

In the Greek world of the 1st century CE, there was a tendency to the ‘masculinisation’ of Wisdom, as has been mentioned above in connection with Philo, where the Logos began to amalgamate, or take over the work of the feminine angel Sophia. In the *De Opificio Mundi 16:20* Sophia’s role in creation is

¹²⁴ Jesus ben Sirach in *The Apocrypha in the Revised Version*, Oxford University Press, Humphrey Milford, 1898, chapter 4, p 295f. Dated c 200 BCE.

¹²⁵ *The Wisdom of Solomon*, *ibid.*, chapter 8, p. 175. Dated c. 100 BCE

taken over by the Logos. However, in other writers, the role of the Logos and Sophia were identical, and certainly she lived on as an inspiration in medieval Arabic poetry, and indeed in the works of Dante in the Western Renaissance, but that is another theme which cannot be covered here.

¹²⁶ Bernard Lang: *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs*, New York, Pilgrim Press, 1986, p. 6. The author traced her pedigree from the ancient Israelite Goddess, El's consort, and was later redefined as a hypostasis to preserve the Divine unity.

Arabic Wisdom Texts

Arabic Wisdom texts came about partly as a result of Greek influence and that of the Old Testament. However they differ in some respects from the Jewish ones. Though "Wisdom" in Arabic is also a feminine noun, Allāh and His Wisdom remained one, and no feminine hypostatisation occurred. No doubt, this was because it was emphasised in the Qur'ān in several places, but especially in *Sura vi: 100-1*, that God had neither consort, nor sons nor daughters. Apart from the story of the wise Luqman in the Qur'ān,¹²⁷ who advised his son in the correct manner of worship, and a life of virtue, most of the Arabic wisdom sayings were maxims inspired by the Greek gnomologia. To these they added their own sayings and proverbs and Jewish ones as well. For example, the Arabic sayings from Pythagoras contained wisdom sayings from the *Book of Proverbs*, probably taken from the Septuagint.¹²⁸ In the sayings of Plato there is a feminine personification called "divine fortune" based on the Gnostic *Hymn of the Pearl*,¹²⁹ who like Sophia can manifest herself in bodily form. Her role was to illuminate the intellect and guide it to reality.¹³⁰

Sophia in ibn 'Arabi's Mystical Poetry

¹²⁷ Sura 31: 12 f.

¹²⁸ Dimitri Gutas: *Greek Wisdom Literature in Arabic Translation: A Study of the Graeco-Arabic Gnomologia*. New Haven, Connecticut, 1975, Chapters 25-27; 29-30: pp. 76-79.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

It would be fair to surmise that Jewish Wisdom Literature that had introduced the idea of the female personification of Wisdom into Christianity may have played a similar role in respect of Islam. However, Corbin suggested that the role of Fāṭima among the Shī'a, likewise shared many of the qualities of Sophia.¹³¹ Corbin draws on a text the *Irshad al-'awāmm* by Kīrmāni, wherein the first *imām* and Fāṭima are related to each other as the first two hypostases the 'Aql and Nafs or the Logos and Sophia. However, in respect of ibn 'Arabī, his conception of Sophia may well have originated from his multi-cultural heritage in Spain. In fact he called the angel Sophia the Wisdom of Jesus.¹³²

Nizam and Sophia: Woman and Divine Manifestation

There is a conflation between Nizam, the Persian girl whom ibn 'Arabī loved, and the vision of Sophia.¹³³ He addressed his poetry both to Nizam and the angel Wisdom. He believed God in His essence could not be seen, but He could manifest Himself in human form because both men and women were created in His image.¹³⁴ That Divinity disclosed itself in many forms is also discussed in the *Futūḥāt*.¹³⁵ Moreover God could also manifest in the mystic's own form as he

¹³⁰ Ibid, pp. 122-5.

¹³¹ Henry Corbin: *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth* op cit: pp. 64-9.

¹³² Henry Corbin: *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of ibn Arabi*, Princeton University Press, 1969, pp. 139-141.

¹³³ Ralph Austin: *The Lady Nizam: An image of Love and Knowledge* in Journal of the Muhyiddin ibn Arabi Society VII, 1988, pp. 35-48 for the relationship between Nizam and ibn 'Arabi.

¹³⁴ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam, tr. as *Wisdom of the Prophets*, by Titus Burchardt, Beshara, Aldsworth, 1975, p. 118.

¹³⁵ William C. Chittick: *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, State University of New York Press, 1989, IV.208.33, p. 61.

explained in *The Word of Seth*.¹³⁶ I have already discussed a similar phenomenon in relation to the manifestation of the *Kawod*. In the next chapter I shall analyse a further development of this idea among the Sufis through their understanding of Indian philosophy that led to a further development of the mysticism of the higher self. As humanity has been created in His image, the love of the human form was not a barrier, but a bridge to divine love. Ibn ‘Arabī understood that the most perfect way to contemplate God was in the form of a woman, which he believed was taught by the Prophet. Therefore, he writes in the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* “The contemplation of God in women is the most intense and most perfect.”¹³⁷ Ibn ‘Arabī condemned the man who could only love in a voluptuous way as being unconscious of the spiritual side of love he was, therefore, ignorant.¹³⁸ No doubt, this was his reply to his detractors who criticised the Nizam/Sophia poetry, considering it sensual rather than spiritual. Furthermore, for Ibn ‘Arabī, Nizam the earthly Sophia was a link with the angelic divine Wisdom.

Sophia in the Tarjumān al-Ashwaq

It was when circumambulating the Ka’ba that Ibn ‘Arabī first encountered the angel Sophia, whom he considered a divine form, mental in origin, but sent

¹³⁶ Ibid., *Fuṣūṣ*: p. 23.

¹³⁷ Op. Cit: *Fuṣūṣ*: p. 120. Attitudes to women vary in the Qur’ān. Reverence for women in general is found in Sura IV.1: Fallen women can be treated with contempt; the unchaste might be imprisoned as in Sura IV.15, or flogged Sura XXIV.2 but along with their partners.

¹³⁸ Ibid., *Fuṣūṣ* ... pp. 121-2.

through His divine Will.¹³⁹ The selection of poems known as the *Tarjumān al-Ashwaq* is addressed to the divine Sophia whose “earthly incarnation” was Nizām. A common motif, therefore, and indeed in mystical poetry of this nature, was the agony of separation and the joy of finding the Beloved again.¹⁴⁰ One night she manifested herself again amidst lightning flashes, and the poet could not see which of the two rent the dark night¹⁴¹ Fire, lightning, circles of light and so forth are common phenomena related to visionary experience.

Sometimes, the gnosis was hidden,¹⁴² symbolised by the large-eyed maidens in the black tents, but when it was revealed the poet died to himself “through their murderous glances.” However, it was inevitable that the vision must fade and with it the spiritual joy, leaving the mystic bereft. This was symbolised by the departure of the bedouin camp, when the mystic felt the pangs of death as the camels were being prepared for departure, expressed in “the smouldering remains of al-Uthaly.”¹⁴³ In this poem Nizām again was unified with the angel Sophia in the poet’s mind. The longing was for the woman who was no longer with him and the angel who has left him.

¹³⁹ Henry Corbin: *Creative imagination...* p. 140.

¹⁴⁰ Ibn al 'Arabi: *Tarjumān al-Ashwaq: A Collection of Mystical Odes: Edited from three Mss. with literal version of the text and an abridged translation of the author's commentary.* Tr. Reynold A. Nicholson: London, Theosophical Publishing House, 1978, IV p. 57.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, Poem XIII, pp. 72-3.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, XX.

However, ibn ‘Arabī affirmed ¹⁴⁴ that there was nothing ordinary or earthly in his love, for it was a divine love. Here the divine Sophia as guide operated on more than one level. She was the symbol of revelation and wisdom. She was also his muse, the inspiration of his poetry. She was the loved object and the symbol of mystical love. In fact, in psychological terms, she symbolised the feminine side of the poet’s psyche. Also it has been shown ¹⁴⁵ in selected passages that for ibn ‘Arabī, knowledge was more excellent than love, though I doubt whether he meant that this was true for every occasion. Visions of the divine Sophia and other related experiences, which will be analysed in the next chapter, came about through ecstasy. Indeed, he might have agreed, at times, with Rūmī, that knowledge took the mystic but half way there.

Rūzbehān’s Kitāb-e ‘Abhar al’Ashiqin

Ibn ‘Arabi’s contemporary in Persia, encountered the divine Sophia after a visionary experience. She asked him to make her an object of his contemplation, and likewise inspired in him a love of the divine in human form. ¹⁴⁶ She described herself as “ a masterpiece of the divine hand... .. the key and guide to destiny.” It

¹⁴⁴ Op. Cit: Tarjuman: XXIII.

¹⁴⁵ William Chittick: Sufi Path of Knowledge op cit: pp. 380-1.

¹⁴⁶ Kitāb-e ‘Abhar al’Ashiqin: tr. by Henry Corbin as Le Jasmin des Fidèles d’Amour, Paris, Verdier, 1991, 8:46, 10:47, 13:4: my English translation throughout.

is through her that God contemplates creation,¹⁴⁷ so she shares some of the usual attributes associated with Sophia.

Sophia as an Object of Contemplation

Rūzbehān responded to the epiphany of Sophia in the words of a lover. But as in the case of ibn ‘Arabī and ultimately Plato, the love is to be understood as spiritual. She is both Wisdom and Beauty, so there is many a paean of praise to her physical beauty, to the fall of her flowing hair and so forth. Like alchemy, her beauty worked on the soul of the poet and transformed it.¹⁴⁸ Likewise, as in ibn ‘Arabī’s writings, she was one of the forms of manifestation of the Divine. That she is made an object of contemplation, a practice used by some of the Sufis, links her to the yoga of Patañjali that the Sufis studied, as shall be developed at greater length in the next chapter. On contemplating her form in the mirror, Rūzbehān understood what the Prophet meant when he said, “I have contemplated my God in the most beautiful of forms.”¹⁴⁹ Who was the form in the mirror? If it was Sophia, it must also have been Rūzbehān, because of the nature of the divine image in which we are created. As we have seen, this is a phenomenon in both Islamic and Jewish mysticism. Here Sophia plays the role of the angelic self of the mystic. The practice among the Sufis and yogis, where the psyche of the celestial or the earthly guide becomes a unity, has been discussed

¹⁴⁷ Op. Cit: Jasmin 14:48.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., Jasmin: 149:147.

¹⁴⁹ Op. Cit: Jasmin: 153:154 – the quotation is one of the Hadith.

previously. In this text, Rūzbehān has written of a similar experience in relation to the angel Sophia.

Earthly and Divine Love

The teaching behind Rūzbehān's book is that of Plato's *Symposium* for it is through the love of physical beauty, that the mystic is led to divine love, and a similar teaching was given by the Prophet according to 'ibn Arabī. Human love, therefore, is a "stepping-stone" on the way to the love of the divine. One cannot reject the former and imagine one can gain the latter.¹⁵⁰ Rūzbehān says of Sophia "In the labyrinths of thy curls I recollect the God of Wisdom."¹⁵¹ She was his intermediary before the Divine in the form of the feminine angel, which is what makes her his only love. Now they can journey together on the way of love and there can be no separation from her or from God, for all others are as nought beside. "When can I pass my hand through thy curls? When can I plant a hundred kisses on thy cheek the colour of a rose? All other loves I have corked in a bottle which I break before thee, oh my Well-Beloved!"¹⁵²

Conclusion

¹⁵⁰ A theme of a poignant story by André Gide – *La Porte Étroite*

¹⁵¹ Ibid., Jasmin 234:22

¹⁵² Ibid., 272:256.

This chapter has concentrated on the various interpretations of the angel as a spiritual guide from antiquity, concentrating on their appearances in the Middle Ages. From the angel Metatron, the *Kavod* as angel, the Christ angel and the angel Sophia, it was found that there were different interpretations of the nature and role of the angel. Some commentators understood it as an entity created by God, others influenced by Greek philosophy, interpreted it as a hypostasis. The Gnostics viewed an angelic being as a messenger from the Light World and in some of their texts Jesus was seen in that capacity. Yet others considered it a heaven-sent image during contemplation a divine messenger from God.

The final section of the chapter analysed the feminine angel Sophia, and her role in art and literature. It was seen how she was an inspiration in poetry and mysticism in the Islamic world and in the writers discussed, she could be described in psychological terms as the feminine part of the mystic's psyche. The ultimate experience of the Divine was an emotional feminine one, not purely a masculine, rational one, for it is primarily through love rather than knowledge that the mystic finds the God he seeks. This is not to say that knowledge does not play a part, for a balance must be found between the two, just as the Kabbalist strove to bring about harmony in the world of the *Sefirot*, the two must work together, not against each other.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE HIGHER SELF IN ISLAMIC AND JEWISH MYSTICISM

Introduction

In some Sufi and Kabbalist texts there appears a phenomenon, namely that of the mirror image of the mystic's self appearing before him in ecstasy. Its appearance is seen as a measure of spiritual attainment. It is found, for example, in the writings of the 12th century Central Asian mystic, Najm al-Dīn Kubra, where it is called *Shāhid*, meaning Witness. An ecstatic vision of the self is also found in the writings of ibn 'Arabī. This phenomenon also plays a part in the mysticism of the Ecstatic Kabbalist, Abraham Abulafia who was born in Saragossa in 1240.

In this chapter I shall demonstrate that the Arab understanding of Indian philosophy and yoga practices, which they understood in relation to their own religious beliefs, helped develop this theme. However, celestial counterparts to the soul were not unknown to the religious world of late antiquity. The most obvious example is that of Gnosticism and particularly Mani who wrote about his twin soul in respect of spiritual guidance in the *Cologne Mani Codex*. However, I believe that the Gnostic celestial counterpart is not exactly the same phenomenon

as the vision of the self in ecstasy, which as I believe, developed through Islamic contact with India.

If I emphasise the Indian contact in respect of the self seen in ecstasy which came about through meditation and yoga, then Mani's twin soul and Gnostic counterpart souls in general, which have already been mentioned in this thesis, were predominately Persian in origin. An example is in the *Gathas* where *Vohu Manah* was considered as the "pair-companion" of man. Similarly *Manuakmed* was a form of external *Nous*, or divine messenger to the soul in Manichaean texts.¹ There is some connection, for the Arabs were cognisant of Mani's writings on his "twin," as it is described accurately by the 10th century historian al-Nadim.² However, what can loosely be termed "Persian" has developed in a somewhat different way, so I shall not include the Gnostic celestial counterparts in this chapter.

The nearest image of the higher self in late antiquity is actually Plotinus. He may well have developed the idea from Socrates' *daimon* though this again is not exactly the same. The double soul that is found in *Phaedrus* is developed further in the *Enneads*. Here Plotinus recommended that the philosopher should be in contact with his higher soul.³ However in his account of the self experienced in ecstasy when a god possessed him, meaning an experience of the divine within,

¹ Geo Widengren: Great Vohu Manah the Apostle of God: SPAW 5 (1945) pp. 10-83.

² Op. Cit: Kitab al-Fihrist, 1862, p. 84: tr. G. Flügel.

³ Plato: Phaedrus 113; Timaeus 90A, Apology 32; Plotinus Enneads 4.3.32.

he saw an image of his self, but “lifted to a better beauty.”⁴ There is a form of mysticism of the self in Plotinus,⁵ which the Arabs would have known through the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*. This was reinforced by Indian philosophy and yoga practices, to bring about the visionary self which will be the subject of this chapter.

ISLAM IN INDIA

The Historical Perspective

This cross-cultural fertilisation primarily took place through the progress of Islam.⁶ This began in the early 8th century CE around the time when the Arabs were beginning their conquest of Spain and the Central Asian City of Bukhara had already fallen. Arab domination over Sind, or Northern India, began with the Governor of Iraq’s reprisals of a raja who refused to punish Indian pirates who had captured some Muslim orphans on their way to Sri Lanka. After this episode, later Caliphs of Baghdad pursued a policy of expansion, so that by 725 they had extended their power into Gujarat and Rajasthan.

In the early years of conquest Sind and the Punjab came under direct control of the Caliph of Baghdad. However, by 871 individual Muslim princes set up independent dynasties, so that Mansura [Sind] and Multan [Punjab] were

⁴ Enneads V.8.11: Tr. Stephen Mc Kenna, London, Penguin Classics, 1991, p. 422.

⁵ The same idea of the soul and the chariot is common to both Plato [Phaedrus] and the Katha Upaniṣad.

⁶ This historical summary has been based on Hermann Kulke & Dietmar Rothermund: *A History of India*, London etc., Routledge, 1990, pp. 113 f.

independent, autonomous areas. When one dynasty weakened it was taken over by another. Multan and Sind were ruled by an Ismā'īlī Fatimid dynasty from the 10th century CE, though later the Turkish Ghurids took over Sind from the Ismā'īlīs.

Some of the most destructive campaigns in the North Indian region, which would now comprise parts of present-day Afghanistan and Pakistan, took place between the years 1000-1025. These were led by Mahmud of Ghazni, whose father was Central Asian. Mahmud's father took advantage of the decline of the Saminides and took over large areas of central Persia to its eastern boundary at the Indus. As a result his son was in a strong position when he succeeded his father in 998. Another factor in Mahmud's favour was that India was not a united whole, but consisted of separate kingdoms with different ruling dynasties, often at war with each other.

Mahmud's successful campaigns in India gave him the means to embellish his capital Ghazni. His court was famous for scholars and poets, among whom were two Persians, Firdausi, the author of the *Shahnama* and al-Bīrūnī the Greek and Sanskrit scholar, about whom I shall say more below. However, in 1151 Ghazni and its magnificent buildings were destroyed when the Ghurids, who had ruled western Afghanistan, became the new rulers of the Punjab. Muhammad of Ghur, after an initial setback against the Chaluka ruler of Gujarat, won two decisive battles at Tarain in 1191-1192. On his death, his successor Quṭb al-Dīn declared himself independent from the Ghurids. His son-in-law, who succeeded him in

1210, became the Sultan of Delhi in 1229. From this point Islam was firmly rooted in India.⁷

Right from the beginning as Islam progressed eastwards, the Muslims set up a network of trade routes to India through Ghazni and Multan and beyond. As in the case of the Silk Road through China and Central Asia to India mentioned in the last chapter, where from the 3rd century Buddhists and merchants used the same route, likewise both merchants and Sufis travelled along the eastern roads into India. Therefore, it was primarily conquest and trade that initially brought about the exchange of ideas. Neither was the cross-fertilisation of ideas all one-way. In spite of fundamental disagreement between the Hindus and Muslims, there were Hindu ascetics who were interested in Sufi teaching, an example being the medieval Bauls of Bengal who developed a form of teaching taken from the Upaniṣads and Sufi mysticism.⁸

INDIAN PHILOSOPHY AND THE ARABS: The Testimony of al-Bīrūnī

Al-Bīrūnī's book about India written in the 10th century CE affirmed that the Muslims were cognisant of the Upaniṣads, classical Sāṃkhya and the yoga system of Patañjali. Extracts from these philosophies, together with the *Bhagavad gītā* appear throughout al-Bīrūnī's work, as we shall see later on. The monistic

⁷ Kulke: op cit., pp. 162-8.

⁸ Shashibhusan Dasgupta: *Obscure Religious Cults*: Calcutta, Firma KLM, 1976, 3rd ed. Chapter 7, particularly pp. 174-185. Another group were the later Hindi Sants from Northern India, the most famous being the mystic Kabir, whose writings were permeated by Sufi teaching; Charlotte Vaudeville: *Kabir*: Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1974, pp. 94 f.

philosophy found in some of the Upaniṣads, i.e. that the self or *Ātman* is identical with *Brahman* or the Absolute, caught the attention of the Muslims who had been translating philosophical and astronomical Sanskrit texts at the Abbasid Court at Baghdad since the 8th century.⁹ The Upaniṣadic expressions such as “That thou art” inspired those Sufi utterances which were thought as heretical, examples being Bāyazīd Bistāmī’s “Glory be to me” and al-Hallāj’s “I am the Truth,” for which he was tried for blasphemy. However, after al-Hallāj’s death, forms of monism were interpreted differently within the Islamic context. Therefore, the state of *ittihād* was a stage in which the mystic was so absorbed in the contemplation of the Beloved, that he was unaware of any barrier, so that al-Hallaj could exclaim,¹⁰ “I am He whom I love, and He whom I love is I.” As shall be discussed in great detail later on in this chapter, these tenets would be imbibed by the Sufis along with yoga techniques as breath control, or *prānāyāma* which had become an important part of Sufism in Iran and Ghaznī from the 10th century.¹¹ Al-Bīrūnī demonstrated the confluence of the two ideas, that of Indian monism and Arab monotheism. The first extract concerned meditation upon Truth, and the second affirmed the realisation of the self as He. “As long as you point to something,” he wrote, “you are not a monist, but when the Truth seizes upon the object of your pointing and annihilates it...”¹² This passage explained

⁹ S.A.A. Rizvi: *India and the Medieval Islamic World* in A.L. Basham, ed., *A Cultural History of India*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975, Chapter xxxiii, pp. 467-8.

¹⁰ Mir Valiuddin: *Contemplative Disciplines in Sufism*, London etc., East West Publ., 1980, p. 160.

¹¹ Rizvi: *Indian and the Medieval Islamic World*: p. 468.

¹² Al-Bīrūnī’s *India*, tr. Edward C. Sachau, London, Trench & Trubner, 1910, Vol. 1, p. 87.

that no barrier existed between the servant and his Lord, yet in fact, in Islam it is believed there is one.

Al-Bīrūnī then quotes from a Sufi he calls Abu Yazid Albistami who when asked how he had reached such a high station, replied “I cast off my own self, as a serpent casts off his skin. Then I considered my own self, and I found that I was He.”¹³ The author confirmed the Sufis’ belief in two souls - “the eternal... by which he knows what is hidden, and the human soul.” Then he discussed the mystical formula for what Patañjali called *mokṣa* or liberation, the unity of Knowledge, Knower and Known which is also found in the *Theology of Aristotle*. Furthermore, al-Bīrūnī’s parable that the task of the soul [self] to learn the actions of matter like a spectator, resembling a traveller who sits down in a village to rest.¹⁴ This is drawn from a similar story of the two birds in the Upaniṣads, where one bird was busy eating, but the other looked on, symbolising the “self as witness.” It was necessary to acquire yogic powers for a soul to recognise its self, but these powers in themselves were not the goal. The goal was liberation that was the union of the soul with the object of meditation, which in Patañjali is the self as Īśvara [Lord].¹⁵ The self is likewise the object of meditation in one of the

¹³ Op. Cit: Al-Bīrūnī: Vol. 1: pp. 68-70, 88. S.A.A. Rizvi: Islamic Spirituality: Vol. 2 SCM Press, 1991: p. 240 emphasises that Lahore was then a Sufi centre aware of Hindu spiritual traditions.

¹⁴ Al-Bīrūnī: p. 48; Upaniṣads: Muṇḍaka 3:1 f. Śvetāśvakara: 4:6 f. The bird that looks on is the “self as witness”.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 133.

minor Upaniṣads,¹⁶ but the object of meditation can be a spiritual guide, as has been discussed previously in relation to Islam or, in the Hindu tradition, a god.

Some Indian Texts concerning a Vision of the Self

In India there is a vast amount written on the *Ātman* or self, so I shall endeavour to give a concise account outlining the main features. In the Upaniṣads a monistic philosophy developed which said that the *Ātman* was identical with *Brahman*. A vision of the *Ātman* or self was achieved by the practice of yoga. Then the immanent shining self was seen through the self as in the *Maitrī Upaniṣad*,¹⁷ and by subtle seers in *Katha Upaniṣad*¹⁸ that suggests it is an intellectual vision, a form seen in meditation. It is both immanent and transcendent.¹⁹ This philosophy was developed as *Advaita Vedānta*, or non-dualism, which was introduced again in the 8th century CE by Śāṅkara in his Commentary on the Brahma Sūtra. By contrast, the *Sāṅkhya* system, traditionally attributed to *Kapila* was dualist in that the conflict was between *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* – matter and spirit, as in Gnosticism. Dualist systems regarding the self or *puruṣa* are found in the *Sāṅkhyakārikā* of Īśvarakṛṣṇa, which is dated

¹⁶ *Maitrāyaṇīya* 6-9; Tr. J.A.B. van Buitenan, Gravenhage, Mouton & Co., 1962, pp 137-8. This is of later date, considered Medieval and is based on the earlier *Maitrī* and contains elements of *Sāṅkhya*.

¹⁷ 6:20: Radakrishnan's Translation: London, George Allen & Unwin, 1953.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:3:12: p 627. Patrick Olivelle's new translation in *World Classics*, Oxford, 1996, of verse 12 reads "Hidden in all beings, this self is not visibly displayed, yet people of keen vision see him..."

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, *Katha* 1:3:12: p. 627.

at about 300-600 CE.²⁰ Another dualist system was the yoga system of Patañjali that dates from about the 4th century CE. The goal of the practitioner was to free *puruṣa* or the self from matter. The yoga system was theistic and introduced Īṣvara or Lord, which was also known as *puruṣa viśeṣa* or the differentiated self. The Yoga Sūtras, therefore, taught meditation on and devotion to the Lord or self.²¹ Through the mastery of the required practices, the repeating of the syllable Om̐, the practitioner “comes to a sight of his own real self,”²² or realises the self within. Likewise the seer or the self [the *Śakṣin* or “self as witness” in 1:4] ‘is made to stand before us.’²³ Śaṅkara’s commentary on Patañjali affirmed that the result of meditation was the uniting of the soul with the Lord as self. By the meditation on the supreme Lord, the supreme self stood in the highest place, and shone forth for the yogis.²⁴ Similar material concerning the vision of the self in ecstasy, brought about by controlled breathing, meditation and repetition of the syllable Om̐ is also found in a 6th century Tantric text the *Rṅvidhāna*²⁵

²⁰ Gerald James Larson: Tr. in *Classical Sāṅkhyā: An Interpretation of its History and Meaning*. Santa Barbara, Ross/Erikson, 1979, 2nd revised ed., XVIII, p. 261.

²¹ Yoga Sūtras 1:23; 1:24: J.H. Woods, tr. *The Yoga System of Patañjali*: Delhi, Motilal Barnarsidass: pp. 48 f. Sanskrit/English tr. by B.K.S. Iyengar: *Light on the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, London, Thorsons, 1993; Mircea Eliade: *Patañjali and Yoga*, p. 86.

²² Ibid., Woods: Yoga Sūtras 1:28; 1:29.

²³ Ibid., Woods: IV:23 p. 335.

²⁴ Śaṅkara’s Commentary on the Yoga Sutras, tr. Trevor Leggett: London & New York, KP Int. 1990, 1:28, pp. 134-5.

²⁵ *Rṅvidhāna* of Saunaka. 39:4. Tr. Jan Gonda, Utrecht, N.V.A. Oosthoek’s Uitgevers MIJ, 1951, p. 97. Further discussion of this text in Mircea Eliade. *Yoga, Immortality and Freedom*, Princeton University Press, 1970, 2nd ed. pp. 136-7.

Traditionally classical Sāṃkhya and classical yoga are related as theory and practice. However, though yoga used the terms belonging to Sāṃkhya, the latter is atheistic while Patañjali's yoga is theistic and centres round the meditation on Īṣvara or Lord, which can be understood to be the self.²⁶ However, it must be said that the translation of the Patañjali yoga sūtras by al-Bīrūnī, which he gave the name of *Kitāb Batanjāl* is not the same as the accepted text of the yoga sutras. Nevertheless, the aims are the same, i.e the union of the soul with the object of meditation with the main difference being God as the object of meditation.²⁷ Though this particular poorly preserved and corrupt edition of the yoga sutras was made to harmonise with the religious tenets of Islam nevertheless a mysticism of the self developed among the Sufis, as I shall demonstrate later. Suffice it is to say here that there is another text the *AmṛtaKuṇḍa* which was known to the Muslims and was translated from the Sanskrit into Arabic and Persian in the early 13th century by Rukn al-Dīn Samarqandī.²⁸ There are discrepancies in this text, but chapter 4 of this work deals with yoga, the mental pronouncement of divine names leading to ecstasy and mystic flight, chapter 5 with breathing, which gives a vision of the invisible world, chapter 7 with

²⁶ J.H. Woods tr. of Patañjali Sūtras 1:24, Delhi, Motilal Barnasidass, 1992; Trevor Leggett tr. of Śaṅkara's Commentary on Patañjali. 1:24, London & New York, 1990.

²⁷ Surendranath Dasgupta: History of Indian Philosophy. Delhi, Motilal Barnasidass, 1975, Vol. 1, pp. 233-5; H. Ritter: Al-Biruni's Übersetzung des Yoga-Sutras des Patanjali in *Oriens* IX (1956), pp.165-200. This is a corrupt text with several torn pages, as Ritter says in his introduction. There are also numerous scribal errors.

²⁸ Yusuf Husain: *Ḥauḍ al-Ḥayāt: la Version Arabe de l'Amratkund* in *Journal Asiatique* CCXIII (1928) pp. 291-344.

visualising the forms of sacred words and letters. Finally chapter 8 is concerned with the contemplation of the practitioner's shadow. After concentrating on his shadow he transferred his eyes to the horizon, whereupon a white form appeared in front of the aspirant which was his shining double.²⁹

The Self as an Image in Meditation

It follows on from what has been said above that the self was an image that manifested itself during meditation. Various methods mentioned above, like controlled breathing, the chanting of *mantras* and meditation practices were used to awaken the mind to higher states of consciousness, such practices as these the Sufis learned from the Hindu ascetics.³⁰ The *Shahada* - There is no God but God - is used in a similar way. The *Dhikr*, therefore, was practised with breath control, with the restraining or stopping of the breath like the yogis.³¹

Similarly, the Sufi envisaged drawing the energies up from the navel to his shoulder and to his brain while saying the *Shahada*,³² or practised the silent recollection of the Essence of Allāh. The Sufi, while saying *God is the Hearer* with the heart, visualised an ascent from his navel to the chest, or saying *God is the Seer*, an ascent from the chest to the brain, or saying *God is the Knower*, an ascent to the throne after which followed the descent.³³ These practices are doubly significant.

²⁹ Op. Cit: Husain: p 299, 300, 302. It seemed a similar effect could be achieved with the use of a mirror.

³⁰ Mir Valiuddin: *Contemplative Disciplines in Sufism*. London, East West Publications, 1980, p 84.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p 83.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 52

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

Firstly they resemble yoga practices for releasing the energies through the *chakras*. Of course, the practices of the Sufi would differ in that they would use verses from the Qur'ān for contemplation and so forth. Secondly, these practices demonstrate that the heavenly ascent, which has been discussed in a previous chapter, was an internal ascent in the mind and as such was linked with meditation.

Mircea Eliade discussed similar phenomena in connection with a 12th century text. In this case controlled breathing and the saying of the *Shahada* attempted to raise the energies through the navel which finally resided in the heart. The word *lā* was exhaled from the navel then *ilāha* was spoken on the right shoulder and *illā* at the navel. Finally *Allāh* was strongly articulated in the empty heart. In another text 'dhikr of the heart' brought about visual phenomena, as lights and colours, often seen in meditation and spoken *dhikr* brought about auditory phenomena.³⁴ This latter comes from a modern text the *Tanwīr al-qulub* on the subject by Sheikh Muḥammad Amīn al-Kurdī, mentioned in the same section by Mircea Eliade. Again the goal is the "awakening of the centres of the subtle body" using the words of the *dhikr*. This is not to say that the Sufi experience is exactly the same as that of the yogi. Nevertheless, these particular practices used to induce the state of *fanā* were derived ultimately from yoga.

³⁴ Mircea Eliade: *Yoga, Immortality and Freedom*. Princeton University Press, 1970, pp. 217-8.

The self which appeared before the yogi or Sufi was a “meditation body” formed by the mind. In Buddhist Tantric Deity Yoga a similar process was followed. The figure which appeared was an “illusory body” also known as a mental appearance or a reflection in a mirror. This was a manifestation created through the mind in meditation, using sacred *mantras* that caused the energies to rise through the *chakras*.³⁵ Perhaps this also sheds light on one of the Kabbalist texts, which will be discussed below. For the practitioner says “that which is within will manifest itself without, and *through the power of sheer imagination* [my italics] will take on the form of a polished mirror...[so that] one sees that his inmost being is something outside of himself.”³⁶

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE SELF IN NAJM AL-DIN'S FAWĀ'IH AL-JAMAL WA-FAWĀ'TIH AL-JALAL

This visionary Self was a form of spiritual guide. Its appearance demonstrated to the practitioner that a stage of spiritual attainment had been reached. This was especially true in the case of Najm al-Dīn Kubrā as he delineated specific stages in the appearance of the *Shāhid* or “Witness,” the name he called the Self, as we shall see below. Of course, the appearance of the “Witness” was a stage on the Way. Indeed knowledge of the self was the prerequisite for all spiritual travellers.

³⁵ Daniel Cozort: *Highest Yoga Tantra*, New York, Snow Lion Publ., 1986, pp. 27, 98.

³⁶ Op cit: Gershom Scholem: *Major Trends*: p. 155.

This was recommended by the Delphic Oracle, the *Theology of Aristotle*, and by the Prophet's *ḥadīth* "He who knows himself knows his Lord." Finally it was the practices of yoga that allowed the self to manifest itself.³⁷

Kubrā's Position in the Sufi Orders

Najm al-dīn Kubrā founded the Kubrawiyyah Order of the Central Asian Sufis. As we have already seen, Central Asia was an important trading region, with a mixed population of Buddhists, Manichees, Nestorian Christians and Zoroastrians. Later the entire region became part of the Islamic Empire. Kubrā was born in 1145 in Khwarazm near Urgench, Uzbekistan in present-day Russian Central Asia and died in 1221, a victim of the Mongol devastation.³⁸

His first master was Ismā'īl al Qaṣrī from Dizful in Western Persia, but finally his Sufi training and initiation took place in Egypt. He was, therefore, a Sufi master in his own right when he returned to Central Asia.³⁹ Kubrā's teaching centred on ritual and spiritual purity, the practices of "*rabīta*" and "*dhikr*" of the

³⁷ Henry Corbin: *Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, New York, Omega Publ., 1994, pp. 89 f. had linked Kubra's higher self or heavenly witness to the figure of Daena in Zoroastrian Mazdeism. Though the Daena is a celestial counterpart to the soul, I have chosen the Indian tradition as I believe there is more of a connection as I have demonstrated above, and will further elucidate below.

³⁸ After their initial rampage the Mongols proved tolerant to Buddhism, Islam & Nestorian Christianity. Peter Brent: *Mongol Empire*: London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1976, p. 47, pp. 60-61.

³⁹ Muhammad Isa Waley: *Najm al-Din Kubra and the Central Asian School of Sufism in Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed., Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations II*, London, SCM Press, 1991, p. 81.

heart” as he delineated in the *Al-Usul al-Ashara* -The Ten Principles.⁴⁰ This latter practice, as we have seen, enabled the practitioner to see fire, coloured lights, red, white, green and black, to feel himself raised from the ground and to experience various stages of ecstasy.⁴¹ It was no doubt, during such practices that Kubrā was given a vision of his *shāhid* - self or “witness” though the manifestation could be quite spontaneous too. He gives an account of one occasion when he was filled with love and ecstasy at the sight of an Egyptian woman he loved on the banks of the Nile.⁴² In his mind there was no dichotomy between human and spiritual love, in that one could be a bridge to the other, as we have seen in Rūzbehān, and indeed, Plato.

Meditation and the Appearance of the “Witness”

Kubrā recounts several incidences in his *Fawā’ih al-Jamal* – Scents of Beauty and Perfumes of Majesty – where the “witness” or *shāhid* appeared to him.⁴³ It was often the result of meditation and the practice of the “*dhikr* of the heart” which brought about visionary phenomena such as lights and circles of colours. For example the Chishti Sufis in India in the 12th century began a meditation by

⁴⁰ M Molé: Traités mineurs de Nagm al-Din Kubra in *Annales Islamologiques* 10, 1963, p 35.

⁴¹ Najm al-Dīn-Kubrā: *Fawā’ih al-Jamal wa-fawātih al-Jalal* des Nagm ad-dīn al-Kubrā. Eine Darstellung mystischer Erfahrungen im Islam aus der Zeit um 1200 N. Chr. Ed. Fritz Meier, Wiesbaden, Franz Steiner, 1957, Paragraphs 12, 13.

⁴² Ibid: Kubrā: Para: 83.

⁴³ Ibid Paragraphs 55, 56, 66, 83. The “witness” or *shāhid* means the higher self in Kubrā. The self as witness is found in the Upaniṣads as seen. The Arabic word “shohud” or “mushada” means contemplative vision, so using the same consonants one can make a word play around the word “witness”. For “witness” as *alter ego* see Henry Corbin: *Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, New Lebanon, New York, Omega, 1994, pp. 91 ff.

contemplating the divine name Allāh. In place of the letter A, a large circle appeared which was retained in the mind.⁴⁴ The Naqshbandiyya Order also used a method of contemplation involving circles, called the Contemplation of the Closeness of God. This also concerned the transformation through meditation of the tripartite soul, as did Kubrā's methods, when the aspirant had mastered the contemplation of the third circle.⁴⁵

Kubrā undoubtedly taught meditation involving circles of colour.⁴⁶ In this case the colours, green, yellow red and blue would have been visualised on the horizon.⁴⁷ This process has been described in more detail by the 13th century 'Alā' al-Dawlah Simnānī a Persian Sufi who had been in contact with Buddhists though he did not believe they would reach their final goal because they did not belong to the Islamic faith. Nevertheless, Simnānī had worked out within an Islamic framework, that there were seven subtle centres of light, which signified the seven stages of the purification of the soul. The lowest of which was *latīfah qālibīyyah*, which was represented by the colour black/grey. The seventh and highest was the *latīfah haqqīyyah* which seemed to be the level when the aspirant's divine self was manifested.⁴⁸ The colours themselves, likewise in Kubrā's system,

⁴⁴ Mir Valiuddin: *Contemplative Disciplines*: op cit: p. 104.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 116-118.

⁴⁶ Op. Cit: Kubrā: Para 13.

⁴⁷ Colours are part of Buddhist Meditation practices. Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa: *The Path of Purification*, tr. Bhikkhu Nāṇamoli, Kandy, Sri Lanka, Buddhist Publication Society, 5th ed. 1991, pp.168f.

⁴⁸ Muhammad Isa Waley: *Najm al-Dīn Kubrā: in Islamic Spirituality I*: op cit: pp. 98-100.

were an indication of the disciples' spiritual progress. For example blue was supposed to be lower spiritually than green which, of course, was the finest. Also the colour of the "Witness" himself was important, as I shall discuss below.

It was only when the *nafs-I-muṭma'irna*, the tranquil soul was in the ascendant over the lower parts of the soul, according to Kubrā, that the divine self be seen in its true glory. Spiritual development was gauged according to what part of the soul manifested in meditation, which was symbolised by the colour of the circle. The *nafs al-ammārah* was the fleshly soul, the lowest part, and was recognised on the visionary plain as a black circle.⁴⁹ If one's "Witness" appeared when the fleshly soul was in evidence, he would be black too. The black colour was due to the covering of dross, resulting in the lack of complete spiritual purity on behalf of the aspirant⁵⁰ and there would be a need for more spiritual purification. This would be finally brought about by the cleansing of the heart, emptying it of all thoughts other than those of God.

The appearance of the *nafs al-lawwāmah*, or the accusing or blaming soul was altogether more positive. Now the aspirant was aware of his failings and had gone some way in correcting them. The symbol of the "blaming soul" was like a rising sun warming the right cheek, whereas the sign of the "tranquil soul" was like a circular fountain of overflowing lights. "If you look within," according to

⁴⁹ Op cit. Kubrā: Fawā'ih... Paragraph 55. English tr. in M.I. Waley: op cit: p. 86.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Kubrā: Paragraph 66.

Kubrā “you see in the depth a circle which is like your face, but of pure light, polished like a mirror.”⁵¹

Only when the “tranquil soul” manifested, could the aspirant see the “Witness” which was a white figure full of light. “In front of you is a face of light... [which] is your own face. Then your whole body is flooded in purity, and in front of you is the “figure of light” while your own body generates light likewise.”⁵² The visionary self appeared through a combination of meditation and the practise of *dhikr*. In paragraph 50, Kubrā wrote of an opening at the top of the head that was produced by the practice of *dhikr*. This does suggest some knowledge of the *chakras* in yoga and in this case he would have meant the seventh *chakra*, the *sahasra* or the thousand-petalled lotus which in the Hindu yoga tradition is located at the top of the head. The same *chakra* in Buddhist yoga is called the “lotus of the head.”⁵³ As has been shown previously, the *chakras* were bodily centres from where the energies were drawn up. In Hindu yoga this was at the base of the spine, though in the Sufi tradition it seemed to have been the navel, from where they were drawn to the brain or heart. The seat of the brain was often identified as the heart, in a spiritual sense. This concept we have

⁵¹ Op. Cit: Kubra: Paragraph 56.

⁵² Ibid, Paragraph 66.

⁵³ There are variations in the number of chakras. In the Hindu system there is traditionally six or seven, whereas in the Buddhist, there are four. Op. Cit: Mircea Eliade: Yoga, Immortality: pp. 243-4.

seen previously, that the mystic achieves his goal through not only intellect but perhaps, more importantly, through love.⁵⁴

IBN 'ARABĪ – CELESTIAL ASCENSION, THE SELF, REVELATION.

Ibn 'Arabī's mysticism of the self developed first of all from the *ḥadīth* "He who knows himself knows his Lord." Similar themes occur in the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*, which was read by the Arabs, and in Plotinus, "Every knower ... that does not know itself is not a true Knower."⁵⁵ Furthermore, Plotinus implies that the mind knows the Sublime, which is itself alone. If we consider the above work as containing the Neo-Platonic strain, "knowing the self" was also an important tenet of Arabic Aristotelian philosophy. This will be the subject of the next chapter, but I shall briefly mention this in connection with the "knowing of the self." Philosophers like Avicenna believed that when a person's intellect had become the "actual intellect" and he no longer needed to work with the sensitive and imaginative faculties, he had reached the stage of Acquired Intellect – *'aql mustafad*, he was then able to contract the active intelligence. The mind would then be able to know itself, being both intellect and intelligible,⁵⁶ as in "like must know like."

Previously I have already mentioned mystics like al-Hallaj who lived in the 10th century and developed a form of mysticism that may have been inspired by

⁵⁴ There is also the *ḥadīth* "... yet the heart of my truly-believing servant containeth Me."

⁵⁵ *Epistola de Scientia Divina* in Paul Henry & Hans-Rudolf Schwyzer, eds., *Plotini Opera: Enneades iv-v*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, Vol. II, p 299, p. 321.

⁵⁶ F. Rahman: *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1958: pp. 14-15.

Graeco-Arabic philosophy but he may equally have been in touch with Indian philosophy.⁵⁷ He was himself a traveller who had visited some of the towns on the Silk Route like Turfan, and had also journeyed to Kashmir in India.⁵⁸ As we have seen he developed a monist philosophy for which he was condemned.⁵⁹ Ibn ‘Arabi’s own philosophic monism was not unlike al-Hallaj’s. He began with the Prophet’s injunction from the *ḥadīth* “to know oneself,” and quoted his supposed saying “I know my Lord by my Lord.” This was then followed by an analysis of the divine self as being identical with Him. In reasoning which followed closely *That thou Art* in the Upaniṣads, ibn ‘Arabī emphasised the same phenomenon saying *Thou art He*, but following the traditional *ḥadīth* of the Prophet.⁶⁰ Therefore, according to ibn ‘Arabī none attains to union except “he sees his own attributes to be the attributes of God.” It is then permitted him who is united to Reality to say “I am the Truth” and “Praise be to me.”⁶¹

The goal for ibn ‘Arabī was to enter the presence of Truth without intermediary.⁶² This he achieved by preparing for a retreat, through spiritual

⁵⁷ S.A.A. Rizvi: *India and the Medieval Islamic World* in A. L. Basham, ed., *A Cultural History of India*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975, pp. 467-468.

⁵⁸ Louis Massignon: *The Passion of al-Hallaj, Mystic and Martyr of Islam*. Transl. Herbert Mason, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1994, pp. 14, 95.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 208 f.

⁶⁰ *Risale-t-ul-wujudiyyah: Treatise on Being*, tr. by T.H. Weir as *Whoso Knoweth Himself*, Abingdon, Oxon., Beshara Publ., 1988, p. 5.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁶² *Risālat-al-Anwār*, tr. by Rabia T. Harris as *Journey to the Lord of Power*, London and The Hague, East West Publications, 1981: p 29. Extracts from this work – the *Epistle of Lights* – have been translated in *The Seal of the Saints* by Michel Chodkiewicz, Cambridge, Islamic Texts Society, 1995, chapter 10.

discipline, under the watchful eye of the Sheikh. ⁶³ Then he practised *dhikr* together with contemplation on the great Name Allāh. It was necessary to use discernment and for each form that manifests saying “I am God,” the reply must be “Far exalted be God above that!” ⁶⁴ Finally, ibn ‘Arabī writes that if you progress successfully through all the earlier stages, you come to a point when a light is revealed and you see nothing but *yourself*. ⁶⁵ Again, at the peak of ecstasy, the mystic is shown “the figure of Light” in a great rapture. Then a love seizes him and in it he finds joy with God that he had not experienced before. This experience is through the blessing of the Prophet who has given all mystics their stations. ⁶⁶

In ibn ‘Arabī’s writing, the vision of the self may be accompanied by a celestial ascension. This can take two forms. The first is an actual bodily journey, as when the Prophet travelled by night from Mecca to Medina. The other is not a physical ascension but a journey within the mind leading to the unveiling of the supersensory world. ⁶⁷ Ibn ‘Arabī’s description of the celestial journey is couched in the language of the apocryphal ascensions both Jewish and Christian. The practitioner is, therefore, pictured as travelling from one heaven to the other. In fact these are the stages which will bring about the spiritual progress culminating

⁶³ Op. Cit: Risālat: Harris p. 30.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 32. Op. Cit: Chodkiewicz: p. 153.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p 47. Chodkiewicz: p 166.

⁶⁶ Ibid: Risālat: Harris p. 59.

⁶⁷ Futūḥāt., chapter 167: [1st Version] tr. by Stephane Ruspoli as *l’Alchimie du Bonheur Parfait*, Paris, l’Isle Vert, Berg Internat. 1981, p. 151.

in the vision of the self. The prerequisites for the journey were the mastering of the *ilm al-sinijya* - the science of the letters, and the permutation of Divine Names.⁶⁸ The Kabbalists used these skills, as we shall see, which helped still the mind in preparation for ascending to a higher state of consciousness. In ibn 'Arabī's text they were taught in the different heavens by the Prophets Jesus and John the Baptist. Finally at the end of his celestial journey, ibn 'Arabī reached the curtain of paradise, behind which he saw the celestial Selves of Adam and his spiritual sons, among whom he saw his own self.⁶⁹

Among the *awliyā Allah* or the Friends of God there was the belief on the one level that the servant and his Lord were separate. On another level, however, that of the ecstatic, when the mystic felt his own attributes to be those of God the barrier dissolved, though again some may say it was not lifted. The position of the ecstatic was either that of the feeling of an immanent God within, or of a God self by which the mystic was redeemed. There is a fusion between the "I" and "Thou" in Rumi's poetry, as there is in ibn 'Arabī - "My essence is His Essence... and since I know myself... I attained to union with my Beloved."⁷⁰

It was the appearance of the shining self that was a prelude to unity with the Beloved. That is why in his tract on the *Unity of Existence*⁷¹ ibn 'Arabī exclaimed

⁶⁸ Op. Cit: Fuṭūḥāt: pp. 64 f. 77-78.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.113-4.

⁷⁰ Risale-t-ul-wujudiyah: tr. T.H. Weir, p. 25.

⁷¹ Risālat al-itihād al-kawmi tr. by Denis Gril as *Le Livre de l'Arbre et des Quatre Oiseaux*, Paris, Les Deux Océans, 1984, p. 42.

that he was “in love with himself.” By this he meant his higher self which shared the attributes of its Creator, indeed the self that was created in His image, not the ego which was subject to vices and passions. It is only when, as Kubrā has said, the vices of the fleshly soul have been destroyed, that the self will appear in its glory. So in the *Unity of Existence* the self finally manifested so that the mystic cried “Disclose, unveil me to myself, so that I may know myself.”⁷² Here the love of self means love of Him and the conviction that the self is He.

THE VISION OF THE SELF – ABRAHAM ABULAFIA

Speculative Kabbalah which was developed in Provence and Gerona, as we have seen, concentrated on meditation on the *Sefirot* which revealed *Ein Sof*. The Kabbalist prayer or *Kavvanah* was an ascent of the *Sefirot* through the power of the letters of the Great Name. The only images were the flashing lights of the *Sefirot* coming and going.⁷³ The *Sefirot* themselves were the guide to the Kabbalist and, by inference, there was no need for an intermediary. Abraham Abulafia aimed to promote his own understanding of Kabbalah which concentrated on letter permutations and meditation on divine Names to promote ecstatic states. These techniques were originally taught in the *Sefer Yeşirah* which has been dated from 100 BCE – 800 CE. However, letter combination was mentioned in the Talmud,

⁷² Op. Cit: *Risālat: Gril*: p. 49: my translation.

⁷³ Azriel of Gerona: *Commentario de Azriel al Libro de la Formación del Mundo [Sefer Yeşirah]* tr. Marian Eisenfeld in *Azriel de Girona: Cuatro Textos Cabalísticos*, Barcelona, Riopiedras Ediciones, 1994, 1:6, p. 97.

where it is said that Bezalel knew how to combine letters.⁷⁴ As we have seen already in this chapter, ibn 'Arabī mentioned letter combinations and it is understood that the Arabs learned of it from the Jews.⁷⁵

Before Abulafia left Spain, where he was born in 1240⁷⁶ he made a study of the work of the German Ḥasidim. Eleazar of Worms had spent some time in Northern Spain. Both he and Judah the Hasid had made a study of the *Sefer Yeširah*. This book was made to be purposely obscure, so that people who did not understand it would not be able to do anything with it. In that way it kept out the curious, and only those who were supposed to learn would benefit from it. Certainly it would need a teacher to unravel the mysteries it contained. However in this book, Abulafia, with the help of his spiritual guide R. Baruch Torgami, a citizen from present-day Turkey, and R. Eleazar of Worms, learned of letter permutations and meditation on the divine Names.⁷⁷ According to the *Sefer Yeširah* or the *Book of Creation* each letter must be permuted with the Tetragrammaton YHVH, and the particular technique outlined by R. Eleazar was

⁷⁴ Aryeh Kaplan: *Jewish Meditation*, New York, Schocken Books, 1985, p 75. Abulafia had also a way of interpreting the Old Testament – Isaiah 41:23; 44:7; 45:11 - [Otzar Eden ha-Genuz - Meditation and Kabbalah pp 84-5] so as to make it appear that the Science of the Letters was the subject. *Letters* can also mean *Things [to come]*.

⁷⁵ Letters and syllables like *Om̐* [a *mantra*] have power in Sanskrit, which goes back to the Vedas. In Patanjali 1:29; 2:44 its repetition can lead to an understanding of the self, and make it or the desired deity visible. On *mantras* see: Harver P. Alper Ed. *Understanding Mantras*, Delhi, Motilal Banaesidass Publ., 1991, Intr. Chapters 6 & 8.

⁷⁶ He was another traveller who spent many years in Italy and Greece, and also lived for a short time in the Holy Land. He married a Greek woman in the 1260's.

⁷⁷ For example letter permutations are discussed in 2:2 and 2:5, particularly the Great Name and how one might permute it. Aryeh Kapkan discusses the letter *Mem* and its associated humming sound used in meditation 2:1 p. 97 in his *Sefer Yetzirah [with Commentary]*, York Beach, Maine, Samuel Weiser Inc. 1990.

used in meditation, bringing about powerful results.⁷⁸ The *Hekhalot* books were another important source for work with divine Names, according to Abulafia in his *Ozar 'Eden ha-Ganuz* – Treasures of the Hidden Eden,⁷⁹ collaborating what I have said in chapter three about the *Hekhalot* being a source for visionary meditation. Furthermore Abulafia's own use of the *Hekhalot* introduced similar techniques into his interpretation of Kabbalah.

Abulafia's methods are called Ecstatic Kabbalah because ecstatic states predominate that resulted from his contact with Muslims, and although he was not particularly complimentary about them, believing his own Kabbalist methods to be superior, he was cognisant of their methods. In fact he described their use of *dhikr* with contemplation on the name Allāh a technique previously discussed.⁸⁰ Abulafia's criticism of the "others" is similar to the relationship of al-Samnanī with Buddhists for, in both these cases, the critic learned from those he criticised. Moshe Idel maintained that Sufi techniques for obtaining ecstasy were incorporated into Ecstatic Kabbalah.⁸¹ Moreover, in the *Sefer Yešimuh* the diagram of the *Sefirot* can be placed over the human body because it is a microcosm of Archetypal Adam.⁸² According to Abulafia's teaching the *Sefirot* were in the

⁷⁸ Op. Cit: *Sefer Yezirah*: Kaplan: 2:5 p 125; The text is the 221 Gates of R. Eliezar Rokeach of Worms, Kaplan pp. 303f.

⁷⁹ Op. Cit: Moshe Idel: *New Perspectives in Kabbalah*: p. 99.

⁸⁰ He wrote of his experience of Sufi methods of contemplation, which has been translated by Gershom Scholem in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 1961, p. 147.

⁸¹ Moshe Idel: *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, Albany State University of New York Press, 1988, p. 79.

⁸² Aryeh Kaplan's translation: 3:6: pp. 150-151.

body and soul of the mystic, and just as the *chakras* in yoga, he envisaged the them as energy centres.⁸³

Whatever methods Abulafia may have used to bring about ecstatic states, these were grafted on to his own interpretation of Judaism. Hidden wisdom was attained through exegetical methods in studying the Torah, through combining letters and *gematria* a form of numerology. These practices were for the spiritually advanced. Those people of a lower calibre studied the literal meaning, or simple interpretation at a lower level.⁸⁴ Abulafia's method in understanding the mystery of the Torah was to take a line of script from the Torah and combine the letters in different forms. Not only hidden meaning could be found, but also divine Names that related to the Tetragrammaton.⁸⁵ In this case, Abulafia combined letters from scripture of divine Names to promote a higher state of consciousness. Texts such as *The Thirty-two Paths of Wisdom*,⁸⁶ which were understood to be different states of consciousness, were related to the 32 times where God's name appeared in *Genesis 1*. Ibn 'Arabī worked with the Qur'ān to produce a similar change in consciousness by using phonemes as a form of *mantra*. By what he says, through the pronouncing of letters, or taking a word or

⁸³ Moshe Idel: *New Perspectives in Kabbalah*: op cit: p. 149.

⁸⁴ Moshe Idel: *Language, Torah and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*: State University of New York Press, 1989, pp. 83-109.

⁸⁵ Moshe Idel: *Mystical Experience of Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 102 f.

⁸⁶ Op. Cit: tr. Aryeh Kaplan in *Sefer Yetzirah*, Appendix II, pp. 297f.

a divine Name, any of these could be used to produce a particular effect on the practitioner's psyche.⁸⁷

In Abulafia's work *Or ha-Sekhel* - The Light of the Intellect - he describes a meditation technique combining the letters of the Tetragrammaton with the letter *Alef*. This together with specific breathing exercises, like the stopping of the breath and so forth, and various head movements, could lead to the sensation of the soul being separated from the body. It might also result in the practitioner hearing a voice or seeing an image manifesting itself before him.⁸⁸ The way of permutations is the way to know God. Instructions for permutating divine Names and letters were given in *Otzar Eden ha-Genuz*.⁸⁹ Basically, the practitioner must manipulate the letters, seeking out words or phonemes with the same numerical value, and must utter them in his heart [silently] and out loud. He must meditate in a state of rapture so as to receive an inrush of the divine, after which various physical side effects occur like one's hair standing up on end, fits of trembling, shuddering and terror. Finally, the feeling of an additional spirit within one passes through the whole body giving great joy and pleasure.

Similar ideas are expressed in the *Chayay Olam ha-Ba* - Life of the Future World - where the Name of the Seventy -Two was used. Again the soul left the body and images appeared as the *Na'ar* the boy who is Meṭatron, or an old man

⁸⁷ Kitāb al-fana' fi'l Mushahadah: tr. Stephen Hirtenstein & Layla Shamash in *Journal of the Muhyiddin ibn Arabi Society* IX, 1991, p. 11.

⁸⁸ *Or ha-Sekhel* tr. Aryeh Kaplan in *Meditation and Kabbalah*, York Beach, Maine, 1992, pp. 88-92.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, *Meditation and Kabbalah*: pp. 94 f.

or Sheikh, because numerically these words added up to 320.⁹⁰ Later on in this book are examples of using sounds as *mantras*, for example “When you pronounce it with one of the ten associated letters, chant the letter, and move your head from left to right in a straight line, as if to trace the top of this vowel point. Then bring your head back so that... you are facing toward the east, since you are facing this direction when you pronounce the Name.”⁹¹ This practice along with others resulted in the reception of the divine influx or some visible form in the shape of a man. Who is this form? Is it the *Kavod* in the shape of a man or the active intellect which, according to Abulafia, brought about the prophetic faculty in the first place?⁹² For an answer it is necessary to look at the writings of one of Abulafia’s pupils, as for him it was a vision of the divine self.

Shem Tov of Burgos⁹³ who moved to Palestine, wrote of his experiences with combining the letters of divine Names as his teacher had taught him, [Abulafia is not mentioned by name in the text] in his work *Sha’arei Tsedek*. This experience began when the disciple was aware of light issuing from his own body, after again combining holy Names, meaning that he entered a trance state by using this method as part of his meditation practice. The disciple was then made aware “that his innermost being is something outside of himself.”⁹⁴ As in

⁹⁰ Op cit: Meditation and Kabbalah: pp. 96-100.

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 104 ff.

⁹² Gershom Scholem: Major Trends: op cit: pp. 145-155

⁹³ It is ironic that we turn to Abulafia’s disciple for a more adequate description, when Abulafia said he wasn’t very good! In *Otzar Eden ha-Genuz* [Meditation and Kabbalah p. 67] Abulafia described him as a nice boy, but because of his youth he was unable to learn much. Perhaps he was an exacting teacher.

⁹⁴ Tr. Gershom Scholem: Major Trends: pp. 145-155, specifically 155.

Kubrā's experience the author of *Sha'arei Tsedek* had seen "the figure of light" in front of him, or in Judaic terms the higher soul or self created in His image, or in "our image" as the text actually states meaning God and his Wisdom.

The author developed his ideas concerning the appearance of the self in another work *Shoshan Sodot* – The Rose of Mysteries – in which he mentions the *Sha'arei Tsedek*.⁹⁵ When a person enters the mystery of prophecy, he suddenly sees his own image standing in front of him. It is in respect of this that the sages say, "Great is the power of the Prophets, since they liken a form to its Creator."⁹⁶ On another occasion the author says "he was writing mysteries in the manner of truth" – probably combining the letters of divine Names - when suddenly it was as if he ceased to exist, "I then saw my own image standing in front of me."⁹⁷ Again, as has been noticed on previous occasions in respect of ibn 'Arabī and Kubrā, the image of the *shāhid* or self appeared as a result of an ecstatic experience. The "figure of light" was the self made known to the seeker after he had progressed along the spiritual path purifying his soul through the discipline of meditation and acquiring a higher state of consciousness.

This "figure of light" appeared to Abulafia according to the *Sefer ha-Ot* – The Book of the Sign, his prophetic book written in the late 13th century, probably

⁹⁵ Tr. by Aryeh Kaplan in *Meditation and Kabbalah*, pp. 109-110.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 109. Scholem's translation in *Major Trends...* p. 142, "...who compares the form to Him who formed it."

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, *Meditation and Kabbalah*: p.109.

between the years 1279-91 in Italy.⁹⁸ After writing the book under the name of Zecharyahu, against those who asked of what profit there was in permuting God's name, he was exiled on Comino the small island almost uninhabited between Malta and Gozo, such was his popularity with the Jewish people in his community, even fellow Kabbalists.

Thus, the book contains such practices as the combination of the letters of the Tetragrammaton, which Abulafia had outlined in other books as the *Or ha-Sekhel* mentioned above. In Part IV, which is obscure, he combined the letters of Holy Names, using a wheel of letters or at least visualising one in his mind. In the *Sefer ha-Ot*, however, he amalgamated the letters of Names to the *Sefirot*, and he says that the breath or vapours go up and down the heart's ladder. This is the meditation on the ladder of the *Sefirot* using divine Names, as found in Joseph Gikatilla's *Sha'arei Orah* – Gates of Light.⁹⁹ Gikatilla was a disciple of Abulafia when he was a young man, and in the *Gates of Light* he described the meditation on the ladder of the *Sefirot* in a simpler way, though it was Abulafia who taught him the method. The vapours or breaths that “go up and down the ladder” signify controlled breathing techniques.

All in all, it seems that some of Abulafia's procedures in the *Sefer ha-Ot* were much the same as he had laid down in greater detail and more clarity in other works. If, as Moshe Idel maintained, Abulafia considered the *Sefirot* which are a

⁹⁸ Op. Cit: Gershom Scholem: Major Trends... p. 128.

⁹⁹ Op. Cit: Kaplan: Meditation and Kabbalah: pp. 127 f.

“ladder” to heaven and revelation, to be in the body like the *chakras* or the energy centres taught by yoga, then they could be linked with controlled breathing. Finally, after the usual preparation in meditation, the awaited form appeared to Abulafia in the *Sefer ha-Ot* as a fountain of seventy tongues [of fire/light] flowing from the image’s forehead. Who was this “figure of light?” Abulafia leaves us in the dark, but judging by Shem Tov’s comments on the matter, this “figure of light” was the mystic’s higher self.¹⁰⁰

Abulafia’s methods were not, on the whole, respected in the West. One of his 14th century followers, Schamariah of Néropont was called an utter fool. Schamariah, according to Moses de Roquemaure’s sarcastic account, imagined he could contact “sundry intellects” when in a prophetic state.¹⁰¹ Abulafia’s form of Kabbalah never managed to supplant Speculative Kabbalah of the school of Provence or Gerona in Europe. However, it made much more of an impact in Palestine, notably in 15th–16th century Safed.¹⁰² An interest in the divine Names, if not the mysticism of the higher self seen in ecstasy was to strongly influence

¹⁰⁰ *Sefer ha-Ot*: in A. Jellinek, ed., *Jubelschrift zum 70. Geburtstage des Prof. H. Graetz*, 1887, p. 82. Partial English translation by Moshe Idel: *Mystical Experience of Abraham Abulafia* p. 97 and Jack Hirschman: *The Book of the Letter: Tree* 1.[Winter]1970.

¹⁰¹ A. Neubauer: *Documents Inédits*, Section II, Paris, Durlacher, Document 84, p. 281; Steven B. Bowman: *Jews of Byzantium 1204-53*, University of Alabama Press, 1985: pp. 88, 91-2.

¹⁰² Rabbi Joseph Karo wrote that when a man was purified, his own self appeared to him. R.J. Zwi Werblowsky: *Joseph Karo, Lawyer and Mystic*, Oxford University Press, 1962 p. 67.

Christian Kabbalah during the Renaissance,¹⁰³ but both of these themes are out of the scope of this thesis.

Conclusion to Chapter Four

In this chapter I have shown that the vision of the self experienced by some of the Sufis and Ecstatic Kabbalists was related to the practice of meditation with controlled breathing, and the combination of divine Names and permutation of letters. These practices appear in yoga that the Sufis learned from Indian traditions. That the Sufis had learned the practices from Patañjali's yoga is confirmed by al-Bīrūnī who had translated one of the manuscripts of the yoga sutras, from Sanskrit, while he was attached to Mahmoud's Court at Ghazni in northern India in the 11th century CE. In Patañjali's system I have shown that on reciting a sacred mantra, the figure of the Lord or self was made manifest to the practitioner [1.28 – 1.29]. Similarly, we are informed in a 6th century Tantric text the *Rgvidhāna* that a vision of the self comes about through meditation, controlled breathing and repetition of the syllable *Oṃ*. [39.4]. The text *AmṛtaKuṇḍa* which was translated from the Sanskrit in the early 13th century, contained the spiritual preparations which are associated with yoga and with Islamic and Jewish mysticism, namely the promotion of ecstasy through the visualising of forms, and pronouncement of sacred words, letters and divine Names. Finally this text

¹⁰³ Pico della Mirandola: *Opera Omnia*. Ed. J. Heroldt: Basil, 1557: *Conclusiones Cabalisticæ*, pp. 107-113; Nos. 6,7,15: Johann Reuchlin: *De Arte Cabalisticæ*, tr. M. & S. Goodman: Lincoln & London, University of Nebraska Press, 1993 - *Divine Names* pp. 260-3; transposition of letters pp. 294-5, mentions both Abulafia and Gikatilla pp. 92-3; 84-5.

contains an exercise on making manifest the “figure of light” which involved the concentrating on one’s shadow and then transferring one’s eyes to the horizon. This would be one way of making the “figure of light” appear though, of course, not the only method. Basically, this practice involved strong powers of concentration and visualisation.

I have also shown that the ecstatic vision of the higher self among the Sufis and the Ecstatic Kabbalists was an image seen in meditation. This image was a form of “meditation body” not so different from that found in Buddhist Deity Yoga, where the form is recognised by the practitioner to be a creation of his own mind. However, the Islamic and Jewish mystics would add that this form only manifested through God’s Will.

Through similar spiritual practices as meditation and so forth, the Central Asian Sheikh Kubrā was given a vision of his *Shāhid* or “Witness,” or his *alter ego* according to Henry Corbin in his *Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*. I have further argued that the experience of the *shāhid* shares a strong resemblance with the *self as witness* from the Upaniṣads and Patañjali’s yoga. Among other Sufis, such as al-Hallaj and ibn ‘Arabī, a form of monistic thought developed round the theme of the self as He. Al-Hallaj lost his life for such blasphemy, but not so ibn ‘Arabī who claimed, as has been shown, that the appearance of the “shining self” was a prelude to unity with the Beloved.

Similarly in the case of Abulafia and his followers, they were granted a vision of the “shining self” through such practices as the combining of the letters of the Tetragrammaton or working with divine Names. For the Ecstatic Kabbalists as for the Sufis, this self-image was the divine self made in His Image. This divine archetype, it was believed, enabled humanity to seek the world of the spirit, to aspire to seeing Him Face to Face, without intermediary.

It has been shown that Abulafia was also in contact with Sufis, and that he ‘borrowed’ some techniques from them. Entirely different religious traditions can learn from each other by amalgamating various practices, such as those for bringing about ecstasy, ignoring theological points with which they were not in agreement. Sometimes, however, when people encounter an aspect in another tradition, which has some similarities with their own, that will be taken up because they have some affinity with the idea. Thus, from the Greek world there is the injunction to “know thyself”. Both in the *Theology of Aristotle* and the Upaniṣads, to know this self is to know the Divine. As has been said above, both in Islamic and Jewish mysticism there is the concept of the higher soul or self that is born in His Image. Although this idea is known to Christianity through the Book of Genesis, Christianity did not develop a mysticism of the self seen in ecstasy because, for one reason, they had little contact with the Jewish and Islamic mystics who had developed these practices.

In the following chapter I shall discuss how and why Christianity rejected these intermediaries, concentrating on their rejection of the angelic intellect.

Suffice it is to say here that Kabbalah reached the West late, and when it arrived it was divested of much of its Jewish or rather Eastern background, especially in relation to Ecstatic Kabbalah. I am certainly not saying that there was not “ecstasy” in Christian mysticism but that it took another form.

Moreover, the vision of the self in ecstasy did not cross over to the West as it did in Safed, Palestine where it found a congenial home. Finally, the mysticism of the *Sefirot*, the Divine Anthropos known as Adam Kadmon formed the basis of Christian Kabbalah, i.e. Speculative Kabbalah rather than Ecstatic. Pico de la Mirandola tried to permutate letters in the manner of the “Ars Raimundi” [Raymond Lull]. However this was not the method used by Abulafia, which they appeared not to understand.¹⁰⁴ Finally, though we see echoes of Eleazar of Worms’ methods of creating a golem, mental or otherwise, in Paracelsus’ homunculi, none of these ideas were ever accepted as belonging to mainline Christian mysticism. Though individual Kabbalists or Hermeticists, in the Renaissance, may have considered themselves as Christian, to their more orthodox contemporaries they were “beyond the pale.”

¹⁰⁴ Moshe Idel’s study in Journal of the Warburg & Courtauld Institute 51 (1988) pp. 170-4.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ACTIVE INTELLECT AS SPIRITUAL GUIDE

This chapter examines the concept of the active intellect as a transcendent being and its role in bringing about human salvation. This idea arose through the Greek commentators' misinterpretation of Aristotle's discussion of the supposed external intellect in *De Anima* III (5). The argument centred on whether the intellect was immanent, in that case considered as part of the soul, or whether it was transcendent and external to the soul. The conviction that the intellect was external and, in some cases, the belief that it was a celestial entity, was introduced into Arabic philosophy and thence into Jewish thought. The result of this was that both Islam and Judaism contained some reference to the soteriological role of the angelic active intellect.

This "external, transcendent intellect," did not reach the Latin West until the 12th century. The idea was rejected by the Scholastics, both the Franciscans and Dominicans. Thomas Aquinas denied that Aristotle ever meant that there was an external intellect and it was finally agreed that all the powers of the soul were united within each individual. The active intellect was, therefore, a part of the soul and like other parts it was considered immanent. There was not any being, external to the soul, known as the active intellect and neither did such a being

play any part in the role of redemption. If the active intellect had functioned as a bridge between the mystic and his God, the role was considered redundant in Christianity because they believed that Jesus fulfilled this role.

A Brief Historical Background

Before I discuss the interpretations of Aristotle's *De Anima* something should be said of the historical background of Aristotelian studies in late antiquity. I shall give a brief introduction below on the Greek commentators and the Arabic translators.

After the death of Aristotle, the Lyceum continued under the direction of various followers, the most important of whom was Theophrastus [371 – 286 BCE]. After the latter died, the school declined, but Aristotle's writings were re-edited under Andronicus of Rhodes in Rome in about 30BCE. A couple of centuries later a group known as the Aristotelian commentators took up the work or re-editing. This group was involved in the philosophical interpretation of the Aristotelian texts, notably the *De Anima* and *Metaphysics*. The first of these was Alexander of Aphrodisias, who was born at the end of the 2nd century CE, while another important one was Themistius, who came from Constantinople, who lived in the 4th century. Themistius' interpretation was not exactly the same as Alexander's, but both adhered to a similar concept of a separated external

intellect, which could operate on the human intellect, in such a way as to guide it to perfection. ¹

Various Interpretations of Aristotle's *De Anima*

According to Aristotle "There is an intellect characterised by the capacity to become all things and an intellect characterised by that to bring all things about...now this latter intellect is separate, unaffected and unmixed, being in substance activity." ² Further on in the same passage, Aristotle speaks of this higher intellect as being immortal and eternal. His description of what was to be called the active intellect was found by many readers to be ambiguous, with the result that they disagreed among themselves about what he actually meant. For those who considered that Aristotle described the function of an external Intellect, one of these earliest commentators was Alexander of Aphrodisias. In *Περὶ Νοῦ* he opted for the concept of an external intellect "coming from without." ³ This was often translated into Arabic texts as "intellect acquired from without." ⁴

On looking at *De Anima III (5)* it is not surprising that Aristotle was interpreted to mean that there was a separated intellect. The "intellect

¹ Themistius: *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca: Themistii Analyticorum Posteriorum Paraphrasis - De Anima*. Ed. Richard Heinze, Berlin, 1899, 5th ed. 5.3: 98-99.

² Aristotle: *De Anima*. Tr. Hugh Lawson-Tancred, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1986, pp. 204-5.

³ *Alexandrii Aphrodisiensis: De Anima & De Intellectu: Scripta Minora*: Ed. Ivo Bruns, Berlin, Reimer, 1887, 2.1: 108.

⁴ J. Finnegan (Ed.) *Texte arabe du "Peri Nou" d'Alexandre d'Aphrodise*: Beirut 1956; quoted in Herbert A. Davidson: *Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes on the Intellect: Their cosmologies, theories of the Active Intellect, and theories of the Human Intellect*, Oxford University Press: 1992, p. 11.

characterised by the capacity to become all things” had a potential to develop in such a way, but which may or may not be realised. Then a second intellect “which brings all things about” which was said to be separate, immortal and eternal, was the intellect described as coming from without, according to Alexander of Aphrodisias. Moreover, this separated intellect was linked to the Aristotelian First Mover in *Metaphysics Lambda*.⁵ The term active intellect does not appear in Aristotle’s original text, but the name “nous poietikos” was given by Alexander to the supposed external intellect “which brings all things about.” Furthermore according to Aristotle in *The Generation of Animals* the intellect was divine, it entered from outside and was not part of our physical make-up. “That intellect alone enters in, as an additional factor from outside, and that alone is divine.”⁶ Aristotle is now usually understood to mean that the divine part of the human intellect is divine because it came from without, meaning the First Cause. It is this divine part of the soul that is eternal, whereas at death the body disintegrates and nothing remains. However, not all the commentators, or the Islamic philosophers, followed Alexander’s interpretation of linking the external intellect to the First Cause. They rather interpreted the intellect as an emanation below the First Cause or God. This is quite evident in the writings of al-Fārābī or the Persian mystical philosopher Suhrawardi, as shall be shown.

⁵ Aristotle: *Metaphysics*: tr. Richard Hope, Ann Arbor Paperbacks, University of Michigan Press, 1960, 12 [Lambda]: 6-7; 8: 1071b-1072a, 1073a.

⁶ Aristotle: *Generation of Animals*, tr. A.L. Peck, London, Heinemann, 1943: II: II 736b, pp. 170-1; Aristotle: *De Animalibus*: Michael Scot’s Arabic-Latin Translation, ed. by Aafke M.I. van Oppenraaij. London etc, E.J. Brill, 1992, II: 2-3; 736b, p. 74.

However, Neo-Platonic influences made their way into these interpretations of the intellect, before al-Fārābī. In fact it was the Neo-Platonic strain which made way for the idea of the active intellect as an angel. This became apparent in the Byzantine Christian commentators, such as John Philoponus [6th century], who discussed the views of Marinos. He wrote that Marinos envisaged the separated intellect as a daimon or an angel.⁷ It seems that Marinos had Socrates' daimon in mind. However, from this point, the active intellect developed into an angelic being in the writings of al-Kindī and others, when the Greek commentators and Philoponus were translated into Arabic.⁸ The Byzantine Christians, however, other than record the doctrine of the angelic intellect, did not take the matter up, largely because they had their own intermediary in Christ the Logos.⁹

The Arabic Translations of Greek Philosophy

On account of their Arab expansion throughout vast tracts of the ancient world, the Arabs became the inheritors of much of the ancient learning. The transmission of texts from the Greek speaking world began with the Syriac-speaking Christians. These people had once lived in the Byzantine Empire, but many settled in the lands of the Persian Empire under Khusraw I.¹⁰ Syriac Christians translated Aristotle from the Greek into Syriac, and from Syriac the

⁷ *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*: Vol. XV, Haydruck, Berlin, 1987, p. 535 line 5.

⁸ Etienne Gilson: *Unity of Philosophical Experience*, New York, C. Scribner, 1937, p. 39.

⁹ J.N.D. Kelly: *Early Christian Doctrines* op cit: p. 95.

Aristotelian tradition made its way into Arabic.¹¹ These Christians formed part of an important group of translators in Baghdad, some of whom had once been part of the School of Philosophy at Alexandria, which had fallen into Arab hands in their conquest of the Middle East. The earliest translators formed the circle of ibn al-Muqaffā, from a Zoroastrian family, who worked with the 9th century Arabic philosopher al-Kindī. A second group centred around Hunayn ibn Ishaq who endeavoured to achieve a more polished translation, whereas a third group worked on linguistic and philosophical revisions of earlier texts.¹²

The Islamic Philosophers

One of the first philosophers al-Kindī was also a theologian of the *Muʿtazilites*, a movement which began in Iraq in the 9th century CE, and lasted until the Mongol invasion in the 13th. Al-Kindī was born during the period of the ‘Abbāsid empire which was at the height of its political and intellectual power. At this time Greek philosophy and science, which had been preserved in Syriac before the coming of Islam, was being studied and translated into Arabic. Al-Kindī was educated in Basra and knew both the Greek and Syriac languages, as well as Greek, Persian and Indian literature. Al-Maʿmūn, who spearheaded a movement

¹⁰ F.E. Peters: *Aristotle and the Arabs: The Aristotelian Tradition in Islam*, New York & London, New York University Press, 1968, pp. 59-61.

¹¹ Aramaic Syriac was one of many Aramaic dialects spoken from the eastern Mediterranean area to Mesopotamia, to southern borders of Egypt and Arabia. Arabic was adopted after the Arab conquest, though the Syriac Christians, Nestorian or Jacobite retained Syriac for liturgical purposes. John Joseph: *Nestorians and their Muslim neighbours*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1961, ch. 1, p. 17.

¹² F.E. Peters: pp. 59-61.

for translating the main points of Greek and Persian philosophical thought into Arabic, invited him to join a circle of scholars who were collecting Greek philosophical and scientific texts and translating them into Arabic.¹³ He also made the first glossary of philosophic terms in Arabic, a work that was fundamental for the accommodation of the Arabic language to philosophical enquiry.¹⁴ His religious interests involved delving into the power of the Names of God and angels. He believed that by the “word” [sound] animal life could be generated and images could be made appear in mirrors.¹⁵

The Arabic Philosophers’ Interpretation of De Anima

Al-Kindī may not have known *De Anima* at first hand.¹⁶ At any rate, it seemed that there were now four intellects, the first of which was separate and had taken on the form of the active intellect. This intellect existed outside the soul and was divine and immortal, always in actuality.¹⁷ It was, furthermore, an intelligence or a spiritual being, distinct from the soul and superior to it. Its role was the transformation of the soul in potentiality.¹⁸ The other three intellects belonged to the human intellect and were not separate from the soul. The second intellect was called the Potential Intellect, a form of *tabula rasa*, which had the potential to

¹³ George N. Atiyeh: *Al-Kindi: The philosopher of the Arabs*: Islamic Research Institute No. 6, Islamabad, Pakistan [1985], pp. 1-7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

¹⁵ Lynn Thorndike: *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, Columbia University Press, 1923, Vol. 1, pp. 643-645.

¹⁶ Atiyeh: *Al-Kindi*... p.100.

¹⁷ Jean Jolivet: *L’Intellect selon Kindi: Arabic/French Text*. Leiden, Brill, p 9; George N. Atiyeh: *Al-Kindi*: p. 113.

receive sensible and intelligible forms. The third intellect was the acquired intellect, when the human mind having passed from potentiality into actuality, united with the intelligible forms and the intelligent and the intelligible had become one.¹⁹ As we have seen in the previous chapter, this was what enabled the philosopher/mystic to know his self. The fourth intellect seemed to have been a manifestation of the soul when it was in contact with the active intellect and was described as that which “upon being brought out by the soul is made present to others in actuality.”²⁰

Finally, al-Kindī also understood the faculties of the soul to be tripartite, namely intellectual, passionate and concupiscent. The most important of the middle faculties, was the imaginative faculty that was an intermediary between the senses and the intellect, and played a part in the seeing of visions. Furthermore, the philosopher or Prophet had this faculty well developed. Each would use their imaginative faculty differently: the philosopher sought salvation through the medium of knowledge, the prophet by Divine revelation.²¹ In fact, the Jewish Aristotelian philosopher Maimonides in *The Guide For The Perplexed* used a similar argument for the importance of the imaginative faculty in prophecy.²²

¹⁸ Etienne Gilson: *History of Christian Philosophy*: London, Sheed & Ward, 1980, p. 184.

¹⁹ Op. Cit: *Atiyeh: Al Kindi*: pp. 113-118.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, *Atiyeh*: pp. 117-118.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 105-112.

²² Moses Maimonides: *The Guide to the Perplexed*, tr. M. Friedländer, New York, Dover Publications, 1956, 2nd edition, Chapter xxxvi, p. 227, but throughout the part *On Prophecy*.

Another important Arabic philosopher al-Fārābī [870-950 CE], likewise envisaged the intellect outside and separate from the soul, for he maintained like al-Kindī, and in contradistinction to Alexander's thesis, that the intellect was not the same as the First Cause.²³

In *Medīna al-Fādila*, an Arabic style Plato's Republic, al-Fārābī described a universe of emanating intelligences, culminating in a tenth intelligence which he said was the active intellect in Aristotle's *De Anima III*.²⁴ This active intellect took the form of an angel and bestowed spiritual knowledge through revelation. Precedence for the deification of the intellect is also found in the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*, the Arabic version of Plotinus. The First Agent was understood as He and the intellect was formed in His image "as a noble and potent being," which contained all knowledge, which had emanated from the First Cause.²⁵ The role of the active intellect, according to al-Fārābī, is to bring about a state of perfection in the human mind or the stage of acquired intellect or *'aql mustafīd*, when it becomes similar to the active intellect and gives rise to a perfect philosopher or prophet.²⁶

²³ Al-Farabi: *Risalat fi 'Aql: Epistola sull' Intelletto*: Traduzione, introduzione e note a cura di Francesca Lucchetta: Padua, Editrice Antenore, 1974, p. 105.

²⁴ Abu Nasr Al-Farabi: *Mabādi' Ārā' ahl al-Madīna al-fādila*, tr. Richard Walzer as *Al Farabi on the Perfect State*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1985, p. 53.

²⁵ Plotini *Opera Vol. 2; Plotiniana Arabica-Plotini Enneades IV-V*, Paul Henry et al. Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1959, *Sapientis Graeca I*, p. 275.

²⁶ Op. Cit: F. Rahman; *Prophesy in Islam*: pp. 12-14.

Avicenna, born in Bukhara in the 10th century, differed in details from al-Fārābī, but in general held to the same opinion as to the salvific role of the active intellect. Like the former, his thought was tinged by Neo-Platonism and the theory of emanation and, therefore, conceived of a world of emanating intelligences that flowed from the First Cause. This way of thinking harmonised with the conception of a universe made up of concentric spheres or nine celestial heavens with each celestial body having a soul and a separate intelligence moving though being governed by an intellect that desired perfection. Each celestial body was drawn to the beauty of its own separate intelligence, and each intelligence was linked to its own planet while the 10th intelligence or the active intellect was linked to the moon.²⁷ Here is the so-called doctrine of sympathy, where what happened in the heavens was mirrored on earth, as in the sense that the perfection of the human mind followed that of the celestial spheres above it. Thus, according to Avicenna, the most perfect, were those men whose intellects had been transformed by the active intellect and who, therefore, were granted visions of the angels.²⁸ It was necessary that the interior man won over the exterior man, for only then could he draw the active intellect to him. As the physical senses became weaker, the spiritual became stronger.²⁹ According to Avicenna's *Book of Scientific Knowledge*, as long as a person was trapped by the senses he could never hope to

²⁷ Op. Cit: Etienne Gilson: History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages: pp. 196-204.

²⁸ La Métaphysique du Shifā, tr. George C. Anwati, Paris, J.Vrin, 1985, Book 10, Vol. 2, pp. 168-170.

²⁹ Avicenna: Kitab al 'Isārāt wa-l'tanbīhāt, tr. A.M. Goichon as Livre des Directives et Remarques, Paris, Collection d'oeuvres Arabes de l'UNESCO, 1951, p. 509.

be guided by the active intellect.³⁰ However, up until then the active intellect has been understood to be an entity or spiritual being which had arisen from philosophical abstraction with the potential of being made manifest, and indeed in other writings of Avicenna the active intellect took on a “physical” form.

Active Intellect as Spiritual Guide in Islamic Mysticism

The Recital of Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān can be viewed in more than one way. It may have been an allegory, explaining in fictional form how salvation was brought about by the personified active intellect. However, in view of the climate in which the “active intellect” was raised, the story of the personified intellect in the form of a sage was a teaching in itself and certainly was not a piece of fiction. In Islam, saints in the hidden world could appear at any time, as can readily be seen in accounts given by ibn ‘Arabi.³¹ The Sufis themselves, as was seen in the last chapter had supernatural powers and by their powers, during meditation, could cause forms from the celestial world to appear. In the present chapter, we have seen in relation to al-Kindī and Avicenna that the élite had an extra developed imaginative faculty to enable them to see visions of angelic beings, or generally psychic phenomena which they reproduced out of their own mental powers. Finally, Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān who symbolised the active intellect was a prototype of the supernatural guide from the celestial world that the Sufis encountered. He was also thought to symbolise the better self of the mystic.

³⁰ Danesh Nama-I ‘ala’i. London, 1979, Chapter 51, p. 96.

³¹ Claude Addas: *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn ‘Arabi*: Cambridge, Islamic Texts, 1993, pp. 120-122.

In this text the celestial sage, like the Sufi master, travelled around looking for suitable young converts. Though he has taken the form of a man, we are alerted to his celestial nature by his introduction. He described himself as coming from the “most holy dwelling.”³² The elderly sage, but of robust, youthful appearance was to become a paradigm for the personified active intellect when he again appears in Suhrawardi’s writings. An earlier prototype of the sage appeared to the alchemist in an Arabic alchemical work.³³

Henry Corbin alluded in *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*³⁴ to the concept of docetic buddhas, but without going into much detail. It is true that Avicenna spent the first part of his life in Central Asia where some of the tenets of Mahayana Buddhism relating to this subject may have been known. Of course, some may argue that it is a case of parallel development. However there is a body of literature in Buddhism such as *Saddharma-Piṇḍarīka* – [Lotus Sutra] and the *Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtras* – [Land of Bliss] where apart from Śakyamuni Buddha the earthly teacher, there are numerous celestial buddhas and bodhisatvas who act as guides to their followers. An example from the Lotus Sutra recommends that the initiate go to a solitary place, read and recite this sutra “Then I will appear to him with a pure and luminous body. Should he forget sentences or words, I shall tell

³² Henry Corbin: *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*: University of Dallas, Texas, Spring Publ.,1980, p. 137.

³³ Joseph Bidez & Franz Cumont: *Les Mages Hellénisés: Zoroastre, Ostanes et Hystaspe d’après la Tradition grecque*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1938, pp. 347f.

³⁴ Corbin: *ibid* p. 256.

him...”³⁵ Further on, the celestial buddha confirmed that he was always in the world using his spiritual powers. He was always near though people failed to see him.³⁶ The Land of Bliss was a paradise that contained buddha fields of precious stones. If one was fortunate it was possible to have a vision of this heavenly land and the various buddhas and bodhisattvas therein.³⁷ Again there is the same theme of the buddha materialising in the world because his compassion is never exhausted.³⁸

However, in the Avicennan allegory it can be seen that the personified active intellect played a similar role to a celestial bodhisattva. Ḥayy, the sage informed the would-be initiate that he travelled around the universe so that he may know all its conditions. At the same time his face was always turned to his father called Watchful or Awakened from whom he learned all sciences.³⁹ As an emanation from his father the First Cause, his origin can be interpreted in a form of Neo-Platonic/Aristotelian metaphysics. Finally, the role of the sage is to prepare the initiate to meet the great King. The initiate must free himself from the senses for if he cannot, the spiritual guide will depart from him. Conversely, if he destroys the vices of human frailty, root and branch, the sage draws nearer to him.⁴⁰ This

³⁵ The Threefold Lotus Sutra, tr. by Bunno Kato et al: Revisions by W.E. Soothill et al: New York etc. Weatherhill, 1975, p. 194.

³⁶ Ibid., p 254.

³⁷ Land of Bliss: The Paradise of the Buddha of Measureless Light: Sanskrit & Chinese Versions of the Sukhavativyūha Sūtras, tr. Luis O. Gomez, Honolulu & Kyoto, University of Hawai'i Press, 1996, pp. 176, 216.

³⁸ Ibid., p 160.

³⁹ Recital of Ḥayy ibn Yaqzan in Henry Corbin: Avicenna and the Visionary Recital: [4] p 137-8.

⁴⁰ Ibid., Visionary Recital: [9] p 140-141.

we have already seen in Avicenna's philosophical writings – a person cannot be guided by the active intellect if he is tied to the world of the senses.

The journey that the initiate is about to embark on with the sage involves climbing a holy mountain Mt. Qāf and crossing several lands or ascending several heavens. The physical journey is symbolic for the journey into the self which like the journey described in the text is always arduous. But it is possible to acquire the strength [of body and of character] to complete the journey successfully, by immersing oneself into the permanent spring of Life. This is similar to the incident in the Qur'ān where Moses meets a celestial being thought to be Khiḍr. Should the seeker bathe in this spring he becomes so light he can walk on water or climb the highest peak without difficulty.⁴¹ Indeed, these appear like the supernatural powers the “travellers” acquired on the Sufi path, or acquired by those practising yoga.

The initiate is told of those solitaries who finally reach the King's highest palace and are bound to His service. Though they live in the desert yet He is withdrawn even further into solitude. Nevertheless, the last lap of the journey is worth it, for if ever they perceive His beauty they would see a Beauty that “obliterates the vestiges of all other beauty.” Finally, with this teaching the initiate has been awakened and he follows the sage to the King's dwelling place.⁴²

⁴¹ Op. Cit. [11, 12] pp. 141-2.

⁴² Op. Cit: Visionary Recital: [22, 23, 24] pp. 149-150.

The active intellect as “celestial sage” appeared in other writings of Avicenna, such as the *Recital of the Bird* where he played the same role as the King’s Messenger.⁴³ A related work to Avicenna’s *Recital of the Bird* is the *Conference of the Birds* by Attār. Similar ideas were used by Suhrawardī, who incorporated other motifs from Persian mythology so that the Simurgh, who first appeared in Ferdowsi’s *Shah Namah* became a symbol of the active intellect.⁴⁴

Suhrawardī, who had read Avicenna,⁴⁵ developed his own system of emanating intellects that differed from the latter in that he amalgamated Mazdean angelology into his system. Apart from the longitudinal order that was also in Avicenna, there was also an unlimited number of latitudinal angels which corresponded to the Platonic Forms and the Mazdaean spiritual beings, the Amesha Spentas. At the head of the longitudinal angels that emanated from the God of Light was the first intellect called Bahman, who was equated with the Mazdaean Vohu Manah – the Good Mind. This archangel emanated the angel below and so forth until the 10th and lowest angel, the Angel Gabriel also known as the active intellect ‘Aql-fa”āl.⁴⁶

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 186f.

⁴⁴ Epic of the Kings, tr. Reuben Levy: London, Arkana, 1990, pp. 35f., where the giant bird reared the white haired boy that was cast away by his father.

⁴⁵ Henry Corbin: En Islam Iranien: Vol. 2, pp. 288f. Suhrawardī’s comments on Avicenna’s Hay ibn Yaqzan, in his own story The Oriental Exile.

⁴⁶ Shihaboddin Yahya Sohravardi: Kitab Kalimat al-tasawwof: Le Livre du Verbe du Soufisme in l’Archange Empourprée: Quinze traitées recits mystiques traduits du persan et l’arabe, tr. Henry Corbin [Paris], Fayard, 1976, Chapter 9, p 166; Henry Corbin’s study of Mazdaen philosophy in Suhrawardi in Corbin’s Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth... Princeton University Press, 1990, Chapters 1 & 2.

Suhrawardī's *Story of the Oriental Exile* ⁴⁷ carried on from where Avicenna's Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān allegory left off. Again the initiate comes through an arduous journey and finally reached the old sage, from whose light there came such an astonishing brilliance that nearly split heaven and earth. This is the active intellect whose description makes him appear very much like an image seen in meditation, as we have come to associate figures of light in this thesis. However, the initiate's ecstasy cannot last. He has to "go back to earth" symbolised by the "bonds that fettered him" in the land of Kairouan. The initiate though distressed, at the same time is relieved to know that he would be able to ascend to paradise again whenever he wished.⁴⁸ Furthermore, we know from another tract that the sage was a giver of revelation who taught the "science of the letters" which, as we have seen previously, can produce ecstasy.⁴⁹

That Suhrawardī perceived human forms during meditation is evident in the description in the *Kitab al-Takwīn* ⁵⁰ where he had a vision of the "Helper of Souls or the *imām* of Wisdom, Primus Magister," who advised him to "return to himself."⁵¹ Also according to Suhrawardī's *Awaze Parr-e Jabrā'yêl*, angelic intelligences were encountered during meditation.⁵² One evening a disciple

⁴⁷ Tr. by Henry Corbin in *Archange Empourrée...*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 201-213.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 'Aql-e Sorkh – *Archange Empourré*: p. 233.

⁵⁰ Para 55: Tr. by Henry Corbin as *Book of Elucidations in Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth...* op cit: p. 118; fuller translation by M.Y. Hairi: *Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism*, pp. 177f.

⁵¹ The Primus Magister was Aristotle. Henry Corbin: *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth...* p 84.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp 227f.

hurried past the Zenana or the women's quarters ⁵³ and made for the Khangah, where the Sufi brotherhood met. The Khangah had two doors, one that opened onto the town and the other onto a garden which, in turn, lead to a great plain. This second door symbolised visionary experience so that was the one chosen. On entering this door, he found the ten celestial sages who were the hierarchy of angelic intellects that have previously been mentioned. The tenth was the active intellect also known as the Angel Gabriel.

Gabriel or the active intellect had both a light ⁵⁴ and darkened wing. He stood between the human and spiritual worlds as an intermediary and the mystic's other self. The true gnosis, therefore, was to realise that the active intellect was the self. This theme was further developed in another 12th century Persian writer, Hakim Sanai. According to his work *Sayr al-Ibad ila'l Maad* ⁵⁵ the seeker met with an old sage, gentle and serene, that is the active intellect. ⁵⁶ Finally, after their journey together the initiate "ceased to be," realising that "my guide became my "I."

THE ACTIVE INTELLECT AND JUDAISM

The Importance of Spain – Jewish Scholars in Islamic Courts

From the 10th-12th centuries, Jewish courtier officials served the Courts of Islamic Spain. They were learned in Arabic language and literature and shared the

⁵³ This symbolised the noise and distraction of the world.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p 236.

⁵⁵ Tr. David Pendlebury in Idries Shah, ed., *Four Sufi Classics*, London, Octagon Press, 1980, pp. 163f.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p 167.

same culture. This was especially true of the period of the reign of al-Rahman III 912-961 CE, to the collapse of Almoravid rule over Spain in 1145. Unfortunately, after this period with the coming of the fanatical Almohads, a less tolerant era began not only for the Jews. For one thing King Alfonso VIII, after the expiry of the peace treaty, resumed battle against this new wave of Arab invaders in 1194, laying waste the region of Seville.

Of course, it would have been the upper class Jews who were courtiers and, therefore, more closely subjected to Arabic culture. Such 'officials' came in for a certain amount of criticism from the Jewish community at large. According to Yitzhak Baer, the reforming zeal found in parts of the Zohar was addressed to these scholar/courtiers. Furthermore, Baer made a comparison between these eschatological and messianic passages with contemporary apocalyptic prophecies that appeared in the writings of the Franciscan Spirituals.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, even on a lower level in society, there was still room for mutual contact. Jews spoke the same vernacular Arabic and Romance, a type of dialect, as the Muslims.

However it was in the world of literature and philosophy where close contact was encountered. In the 12th century Abraham ibn Hasdai translated *The Balance of Religious Practice* of Hamid Al-Ghazzali, substituting Qur'anic quotations for those from the Old Testament. Poets like Jehudah ha-Levi adapted themes from Arabic love poetry for Hebrew poetry, such as passion intensified by separation, in

⁵⁷ Yitzhak Baer: *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*: New York, Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961, Vol. 1, pp. 261, 269, 271f.

secular and religious themes, symbolised by the “desert camp.”⁵⁸ However, one must take into account that their situation was never an easy one, and it has been said that the Hebrew poets “both struggled to assert their position within Hebrew literary tradition and to compensate their consciousness about imitating Arabic culture.”⁵⁹ Arabic philosophy penetrated Jewish thought through translations by Jews such as ibn Tibbon in the 12th century. Obviously a certain class of Jew in Muslim Spain read Arabic authors, such as Avicenna who was read in the original and only al-Ghazali’s summary of the *Kitab al Najat* was translated into Hebrew.

The Influence of Arabic Philosophy

The Hebrew philosophers tended to be either Platonic or Aristotelian in sympathy, although both strains at times merged together which was not an uncommon phenomenon. This can be seen for example, in the writings of the 10th century Spaniard Isaac Israeli. In the *Book of Definitions*,⁶⁰ he discussed the actualisation of the potential intellect and so forth, which suggested he was cognisant with al-Kindī’s interpretation of Aristotle’s *De Anima*. However, Israeli’s interpretation of the intellect was the Neo-Platonic first substance created

⁵⁸ Raymond P. Scheindlin: *The Gazelle: Medieval Hebrew Poems on God, Israel and the Soul*: New York etc., Jewish Publication Society of Philadelphia, 1991, pp 5, 9, 33, 37-8, 165; Idem: *Wine, Women and Death*, 1986, pp. 65 note, p 66.

⁵⁹ Ross Brann: *Andalusian Hebrew Poetry and the Hebrew Bible: Cultural Nationalism or Cultural Ambiguity?* in David K. Blumenthal, ed., *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, Brown Judaic Studies 134, Atlanta, Scholars Press, 1988, Vol. III, pp. 101-131, specif. p. 104.

⁶⁰ Alexander Altmann & S.M. Stern: *Isaac Israeli, a Neo-Platonic Philosopher of the 10th Century*; his works translated with comments and an outline of his philosophy. *Scripta Judaica I*, Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 37.

from the power of the Creator.⁶¹ This would suggest it was a second hypostasis after the One, just as the Arabs had done previously.⁶² Israeli made a point of saying that the intellect had been created so as not to destroy the unity of God, and to emphasise that there were none other entities co-existent with the Creator. He stressed the necessity for knowing the intellect that contained perfect wisdom and also, after Plotinus, the intelligible forms.⁶³ To know the intellect was made possible by the fact that the rational part of the soul belonged to the spiritual world, and being of a similar substance to the intellect, a meeting between the rational soul and the intellect could take place. This, however, could only come about “when the light of the rational soul was inclined towards the highest excellence.”⁶⁴ When the Creator wished to reveal knowledge to the soul, therefore, he made the intellect the intermediary between Himself and the rational soul.⁶⁵

Similarly, a century later ibn Paquda, an author discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, followed the Neo-Platonic schema in his *Book of Definitions to the Duties of the Heart*. In this work ibn Paquda envisaged a dialogue between the Nous, which in this text the author interprets as the Mind of God, and the soul from which the latter received spiritual guidance. In ibn Paquda’s work there is a more obvious connection between the Neo-Platonic Nous and the Divine mind in that

⁶¹ Op cit: *Book of Definitions*: p. 27.

⁶² Al-Kulayni: *Usul al-Kafi: Kitab al ‘Aql wa al Jahl*, Teheran, WOFIS Muslim Brothers, p. 50-51.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

he has tried to incorporate Neo-Platonism into his understanding of Judaism - a similar feature occurs among Christian writers.⁶⁶

Another Neo-Platonist, ibn Gabirol wrote in the *Meqor Hayim* of the necessity of raising the earthly intelligence to the supreme intelligible. Then, after the necessary purification it was possible to receive the mightiest knowledge of the intelligence.⁶⁷ The concept of “raising the earthly intelligence” was based on the assumption that the more a substance descended, the more it became multiple. On the other hand, the more it ascended the more unified it became.⁶⁸ This was the exact opposite to the way magic was supposed to work, which involved bringing “the forces” downward. This was why practices such as invocation and so forth were considered by some to be inferior. Again though in his poetry ibn Gabirol wrote of the soul being fashioned by the flames of fire of the intelligence, it was necessary that great though it might have been it needed to be cut down to size. The intelligence must not be made to appear too powerful so that in the poetry on throne mysticism the Throne of Glory was placed⁶⁹ above the intelligence, thereby emphasising the fact that the intelligence was secondary. Among some of the Jewish Neo-Platonic philosophers there was a definite dislike of the Aristotelian view of the active intellect, though in fact, both sides believed

⁶⁶ *Al-Hidāya ilā Fara'īd al-Qulūb*, tr. Menahem Mansoor et al. London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973, pp. 209f. and tr. into Hebrew by ibn Tibbon in the following century.

⁶⁷ Hebrew original is now lost. Only the Latin version is extant, known as *Fons Vitae* by Avicbron. This was translated into Latin from Hebrew in 1150 by a converted Jew renamed John of Seville, with Domingo Gundisalvi. English tr. H.E. Wedeck, London, Peter Owen, 1963, p 128.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, *Fons Vitae*: p. 123.

⁶⁹ *The Kingly Crown*: tr. Bernard Lewis, London, Valentine Mitchell, 1961, Poems xxvi, xxvii, xxix pp. 47-50.

in revelation granted by an external angelic intellect. Jehudah ha-Levi was a case in point and in the *Sefer ha-Kuzari* he made this clear. This book contained a dialogue between a philosopher and a rabbi where the former eulogised the transforming power of the active intellect. The philosopher's argument followed the concepts of Averroes, which the rabbi disliked, because he could not accept the idea of monopsychism that is implied in Averroes. The philosopher, on the other hand, thought it very fine that we might all share the same intellect with the great minds of the world – Plato, Aristotle or Hermes.⁷⁰

However, the rabbi condemned monopsychism for the same reason as the Christian Scholastics. Such a view did not allow for the diversity of human nature, neither for the salvation of the individual soul. Though the rabbi rejected much of Aristotelian philosophy his answers, on the other hand, showed him to be more in favour of an intellect that behaved more in keeping with the Neo-Platonic Nous.⁷¹ The rabbi also denied any part played by the active intellect in relation to Moses whose experience was direct from God and, therefore, without an intermediary.⁷²

The 12th century Provençal Rabbi, Levi ben Gershom or in Latin Gersonides, though in many respects an Aristotelian nevertheless incorporated Neo-Platonic

⁷⁰ David Cassell: *Das Buch Kusari des Jehuda ha-Levi nach dem hebräischen Texte des Jehuda ibn-Tibbon*: Berlin, Louis Lamm, 1909, 3rd Edition, 1:1.

⁷¹ Op. Cit: *Buch Kusari*: 2:14, 4:19, 5:10; Israel Efros: *Some aspects of Jehudah HaLevi's Mysticism in Studies in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, New York & London, Columbia University Press, 1974, p. 146, defines mystical union as a union with the *amr ilahi* which can translate as Logos or Nous. It is in effect the divine essence as Efros says.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 1:87, 1:91.

themes into his concept of illumination and revelation. Like an Aristotelian philosopher he accepted an empiricist view of human knowledge.⁷³ Following Alexander of Aphrodisias, he posited an external and transcendent intellect.⁷⁴ However, especially in Gersonides' religious writings, this intellect took on a more dominant role in the process of human intellection. The intellect not only brought about thought but also, like the Plotinian *Nous*, it contained within itself the Plotinian Forms. Furthermore, the intellect bestowed illumination and played a part in prophecy.⁷⁵

Gersonides disagreed with Averroes' concept of the shared intellect, as did Jehudah ha-Levi.⁷⁶ Moreover, Gersonides was not entirely satisfied with the idea of the active intellect as a foremost means of revelation because he thought it "too minor." Many of the Jewish philosophers endeavoured to incorporate the tenets of philosophy with those of religious beliefs as has been shown. Such mystics, for example, as Abulafia equated the angel *Meṭaṭron* with the spiritual being the active intellect. Gersonides did not think this could be possible, for the active intellect was lower in status than the angel. For if "*Meṭaṭron* had the same

⁷³ Seymour Feldman: *Platonic Themes in Gersonides' Doctrine of the Active Intellect* in Lenn E. Goodman ed., *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, International Society for Neo-Platonic Studies: State University of New York Press, 1992, p. 261.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

⁷⁵ Seymour Feldman: *Wars of the Lord*: Jewish publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1982, Book 5 (3).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, Book 1, p. 147.

name as his Master” how could he be equated with a tenth or lesser intellect, as was the case in the so-called Aristotelian system?⁷⁷

However, not all realised the supposed inadequacy of the active intellect. One such person was Moshe ben Maimon, known as Maimonides, the foremost Jewish Aristotelian in the 12th century who understood what the philosophers called intelligences to be angels.⁷⁸ According to Maimonides, Aristotle had said that God had created the first intelligence and so on until the lowest known as the active intellect, and this intellect was nearest the earth.⁷⁹ In his *Mishne Torah* Maimonides discussed the gradation of angelic beings in greater detail. Of the angelic messengers the lowest or those of the 10th degree were called *ishim* who by their name presumably took human form. Because of their low rank they were nearer to humanity than those at the top of the hierarchy and were, therefore, more likely to be seen in prophetic visions.⁸⁰

Furthermore, God created through angels and all forms were a result of the influence of the active intellect which itself was an angel or the “Prince of this World” – or Metatron.⁸¹ In many respects, Maimonides’ concept of the angelic active intellect was close to Suhrawardī’s. The latter believed that the active

⁷⁷ Op. Cit.: Wars of the Lord: V (3) Chapter 13; Seymour Feldman: Platonic Themes... p. 272.

⁷⁸ Moses Maimonides: The Guide for the Perplexed: Tr. from Arabic by M. Friedlander: New York, Dover Publications, 1956, 2nd ed. Part II: Chapter 4, p. 160.

⁷⁹ Ibid: Part II: Chapter 5, p. 158.

⁸⁰ Tr. H.M. Russell & Rabbi J. Weinburg: Book of Knowledge from the Mishneh Torah: Edinburgh, 1981, Chapter 3.

⁸¹ Op cit: Maimonides: Guide: Chapter VI: p. 161.

intellect was the lowest angelic being nearest to the earth. This last intellect Suhrawardī equated with the angel Gabriel whose low rank within the hierarchy of intellects was represented by a darkened wing. This lowliness made it all the more accessible to humanity.

Maimonides devoted several chapters to the subject of prophecy in the *Guide*. Here the active intellect as an incorporeal being played the role of an intermediary used by God to bestow a form of super-consciousness or mystical experience, known as the state of prophecy.⁸² The spiritually advanced who acquired these states of prophecy with other requirements such as purity and so forth, invariably had a highly developed imaginative faculty. This was because part of the functions of the imaginative faculty was to retain impressions by the senses, to combine them and chiefly to form images.⁸³

The imagination was seen to be on a higher or more spiritual level than the level of sense. In an appropriate person, therefore, the active intellect was able to bring about a state of prophecy. Nevertheless, people varied in their capacity to take advantage of this condition. Some may have been given a fine imaginative faculty, but they lacked training, or their logical faculties were weak.⁸⁴ The human intellect was directly influenced by the active intellect that caused it to pass from

⁸² Ibid., Chapter xviii, p. 181; Maimonides quotes Abu Nasr's Treatise on the intellect as a source.

⁸³ Op cit: *Guide*: II Chapter xxxvi p. 225.

⁸⁴ Ibid., Chapter xxxvii, p. 228.

potentiality to actuality. It was through the human intellect that the influence from the active intellect reached the imaginative faculty.⁸⁵

The prophet had to be in the right state of mind to achieve this prophetic power. It did not occur when one was angry, worried or depressed.⁸⁶ There were, moreover, different stages of prophecy because of people's individual aptitudes. Maimonides gave eleven stages,⁸⁷ of which the lowest stage was the dream or unripe fruit, also mentioned in the Talmud.⁸⁸ The highest stage was that reached by Moses who had had a direct experience of God, without intermediary, and without the medium of the imaginative faculty. Moses spoke to Him "Face to Face," a state bestowed on none other, but to which all must aspire.

The Retreat of the Active Intellect

It has been shown that Jewish philosophers amalgamated the separated intellect into their own religious beliefs. The 12th century writer ibn Daud believed the soul reached perfection through being actualised by this separated intellect that he called "the Breath of el-Shaddai."⁸⁹ However, it has been shown that not

⁸⁵ Ibid., Chapter xxxviii, p. 230; Maimonides above gives an account of the importance of the imagination faculty in respect of visualisation and concomitant mystical experience. He also discussed the Science of the Letters in Chapter xliii, p. 239. Abulafia was an assiduous student of the *Guide*. In his Commentary on this work, he followed the prominent position given to the active intellect as a guide and redeemer to the soul.

⁸⁶ Ibid., Chapter xxxvi, p. 227.

⁸⁷ Ibid., Chapter xlv, pp. 241-245.

⁸⁸ Ibid., Chapter xxxvi, p. 225.

⁸⁹ Abraham ibn Daud: *HaEmunah Ramah*, tr. as *Exalted Faith* by Norbert M. Samuelson: London etc., London Assoc. Univ. Press, 1986, 64b: 13, 141b: 4-8; written in Arabic in 1160 CE. Original is now lost.

everyone was, by any means, in favour of the active intellect as spiritual guide. Some were hostile while others tended to opt for a Neo-Platonic interpretation rather than the so-called Aristotelian one. So why did the angelic active intellect begin to retreat when dominant figures like Maimonides supported the idea?

Given that there were two camps the Aristotelians and the Platonists, it would seem that many of the latter were drawn into that form of Jewish mysticism, the Theosophical Kabbalah, which was growing from strength to strength. The rise of this form of Kabbalah has already been discussed previously. Suffice it is to say here, that with the development of a mystical form of contemplation based on the ten *Sefirot* that had developed in Provence at the beginning of the 13th century, an alternative was offered. The Jewish mystic perhaps preferred to concentrate on this aspect of spiritual illumination, rather than mysticism relating to intelligences.

Indeed, both Moses de Leon the author of the *Zohar* and Abulafia's student, Joseph Gikatilla, understood the *Sefirot* to be of greater importance than the Maimonidean Intelligences.⁹⁰ Seeing that a means of reaching illumination had been devised by using the methods of ascending the *Sefirot*, as taught by Azriel of Gerona and Joseph Gikatilla and others, it seemed that the benefits bestowed by the active intellect was on the wane. But it was from the world of philosophy that had given life to the angelic intellect in the first place, that a second and equally effective blow rained on the angelic active intellect.

⁹⁰ Moshe Idel: *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*: State University of New York Press, 1988, p. 2.

The final section of this chapter will document the Scholastic condemnation of illumination by such means as the active intellect. We shall see that it was Thomas Aquinas' re-interpretation of Aristotle's *De Anima* that settled the argument for many. It was, therefore, finally decided that Aristotle had been misrepresented, and had not envisaged the active intellect as separate and transcendent but rather immanent and within the soul. The active intellect as guide could only have been further undermined when an Italian Jew, Jehudah ben Moseh ben Daniello Romano translated the works of Thomas Aquinas from the Latin, notably Thomas' *Commentarium in Libros de Anima*.⁹¹ Once the separated and transcendent element was taken from the active intellect and it became an immanent part within the human soul, the *raison d'être* for the angelic active intellect had disappeared.

THE IMPACT OF ARISTOTLE IN THE WEST: The Importance of the concept of Immanence

Aristotle's works entered the Christian west in the 12th century. James of Venice, Henry Anstippus and Gerald of Cremona together with the School of Translators at Toledo under Dominic Gundisalvo had made much of the Aristotelian corpus available in Latin translation. Up until that time Platonism had been in the ascendant, reliable parts of which had been assimilated into Christianity. Notable among the latter concepts was the idea of the divine illumination of the human intellect that had been taken from St. Augustine. The

⁹¹ Giuseppe Sermoneta: Jehudah ben Moseh - Tradacteur de Saint Thomas in Gerald Nahon ed., *Hommages*

divine ideas or forms were conceived to be in the mind of God, and images of these were immanent in human reason or the immortal soul. This concept of immanence was strongly entrenched in Christian mysticism. If there was an intermediary it was Christ Himself. In the *Prologue of St. John* Jesus had been conceived as Logos, an assimilation from Middle Platonism, but in medieval orthodox Christianity He was always understood to be immanent in the soul. Indeed, in the previous century the Cistercian St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who died in 1153, had demonstrated how Jesus the Logos played the role of the inner guide in meditation. "I have ascended to the highest point in myself... and the Word was towering far above it. My curiosity has led me to explore my lowest depths... only to find that He went deeper yet... if I looked within, He was more inward still." ⁹²

The writings of Avicenna were studied in Paris and Oxford by 1200 and those of Averroes 30 years later, until finally the West condemned Avicenna's external active intellect by an argument similar to the following. In the Platonic sense, if the human intellect was similar to the divine Mind and could, therefore, produce in its own mind philosophical and religious truths, why was there the need for an external intellect to convey thought or bestow illumination? Also the active intellect was not understood to be transcendent and separate, but immanent and a part of the soul.

à Georges Vajda: *Études d'histoire et de pensée juives*, Éditions Peeters. Louvain, 1980, pp. 231-262.

⁹² Sermones in *Cantica Canticorum*, tr. & ed. by a Religious of CSMV, London, A. R. Mowbray, 1952, Chapter 31, pp. 229-230.

The problem with Averroes was somewhat different. His thesis on the active intellect involved a conjunction between the latter and the human intellect that took place after death. No angelic intellects were envisaged as descending to the human plane with the result that no supernatural guides could arise. Averroes' monopsychism was condemned whole-heartedly, for it implied that if one person was saved then all could be saved. This state of affairs could hardly have appealed where such factors as grace, individual piety and worthiness played so large a part in the concept of Christian redemption. Furthermore, monopsychism precluded individual immortality after death. However this was the situation among the medieval Scholastics. In the secular world, specifically at the University of Padua, this Averroistic stance remained strong until the 16th century.⁹³

The Dominican and Franciscan Reaction to the Active Intellect

A common thread through the following protestations was the belief that if there was a separated intellect it was God himself. If the soul was tripartite then these parts formed a unity that remained in the body during life. After death the immortal part or the rational soul was not destroyed with the body, but being immortal remained in the spiritual realm.

i. Albertus Magnus

⁹³ Peter Pompanazzi in his *Immortalitate Animae*, 1534, adopts an Averroistic interpretation of Aristotle as did the 14th century philosopher, Marsilius of Padua. Renaissance philosophers like Pico de la Mirandola supported the concept of monopsychism [p. 230]. However modern philosophy begins with Descartes who was a pupil of the Jesuits so Averroism gradually retreated into the background. Etienne Gilson: *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, London, 1955, p. 527.

Albert the Great who was born in 1206 entered the Dominican Order while a student in the University of Padua in 1223.⁹⁴ He then went to Cologne where he studied and taught, finally pursuing higher theological studies at the University of Paris. He was a man of many interests whose scientific studies included magic and alchemy, although very few of the alchemical texts attributed to Albert were actually written by him.⁹⁵ He was a diligent student of philosophy who realised the implications of Aristotle and Avicenna could not be ignored.

When Albert returned to Cologne in the 1240's he ran lectures in Aristotelian philosophy. One of his students was Thomas Aquinas who was to be one of the foremost Scholastics to condemn the external active intellect. Albert was Provincial of Germany in the 1250's and during that period he wrote a paraphrase of Aristotle's *De Anima*. His work came to the attention of Pope Alexander IV because he was asked to refute Averroestic teachings on monopsychism and so forth. This he did in his work *De Unitate Intellectus contra Averroistas* in about 1256.⁹⁶ When he resigned as Bishop of Regensburg in 1262, he left for Wurzburg, where he worked on a paraphrase of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. He returned to Cologne in 1269 where he died eleven years later.

Albert was the first to start the tide of condemnation against the angelic intellect because he finally decided that the possible and active intellects were

⁹⁴ Etienne Gilson: *History of Christian Philosophy*: op cit: p. 277.

⁹⁵ His one alchemical treatise: Albertus Magnus: *Opera*: R. Jamy, Lyons, 1651: III: 2; but there is both magic and alchemy in his treatise on minerals: II: I.

⁹⁶ Alfonsus Hufnagel Ed: *De Unitate Intellectus contra Averroistas*: Monasterii Westfalorum in Aedibus, Aschendorff, 1975, pp. 23-30; Fernand von Steenberghen: *Aristotle and the West*, Louvain, 1955, p. 171.

powers within the soul. Having come down on the side of “immanence” an external intellect could not be involved, as he wrote in *De Intellectu et Intelligibili* where he twisted the “philosophical” argument to suit his own ends. In his view, therefore, the first intelligence was God from which the soul was derived. But the soul though tripartite was a unity, meaning that the possible and active intellects were powers within the soul, which during life remained in the body.⁹⁷ The active intellect within the soul understood the intelligible world, so why was there a need for an external agent intellect?⁹⁸

ii. St. Bonaventure

St. Bonaventure studied for a Master of Arts at the University of Paris in 1235, after which he entered the Franciscan Order. He then studied theology under such masters as Alexander of Hales. Finally he was made a Minister General of his Order and it was during those years that he completed many of his writings, notably his mystical work *Journey of the Mind to God* in which he emphasised that the only mediator between God and man was Jesus. His thought was more influenced by Plato than Aristotle. He understood that the forms or the divine ideas illumined the human intellect.⁹⁹ Jesus the Logos was the divine exemplar and the Christian way was to realise that Form within the soul, which was a divine image. Indeed, His image was reflected within our own mind.¹⁰⁰ St. Bonaventure,

⁹⁷ Op. Cit: Albertus Magnus: Opera: De Intellectu II: 2 9, III: 3 6-11.

⁹⁸ Op. Cit: Etienne Gilson: History of Christian philosophy: pp. 283-286

⁹⁹ St. Bonaventura: Opera: Florence, Quaracchi, 1938, Vol. 5, p 23.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., St. Bonaventure: Opera: Vol. 8, pp. 242-3; St. Bernard had put forward a similar argument in chapter 33 of the *Song of Songs* mentioned above.

therefore, condemned the role of emanating intelligences and the Averroistic conception of monopsychism in a series of lectures known as *De Donis Spiritus Sancti*.¹⁰¹ However, he strove to harmonise his understanding of Aristotelian concepts with his knowledge of Platonism received through St. Augustine. He confirmed that if there were such a thing as a separate intellect it could only be the Mind of God. Moreover each person was created with an individual soul, with its different faculties forming a unity from which, through Grace, the soul came to know God. In that respect each person had potential and active intellects within the soul. Illumination came about, as St. Augustine had believed, through the Light of Christ and certainly not by an external active intellect as had been taught by philosophers [like Avicenna].¹⁰²

The concept of Christ as the centre of all knowledge and mediator with the Divine was central to St. Bonaventure's thought, but specifically in the *Collations of the Six days*.¹⁰³ As was often the case in Christian mysticism, it was love above knowledge that held the key to redemption, which was why Christ was found in the heart because one could not behold His Wisdom through the intellect alone.¹⁰⁴ Philosophical learning was incomplete and the "door of understanding" was closed to philosophers.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Ibid., Opera: Vol. 8, 15-16.

¹⁰² Ibid., St. Bonaventure: Sententiarum: Vol. 2, xxiv: I. II. IV p. 587.

¹⁰³ St. Bonaventure: Works: Opuscula 2nd Series: Tr. José de Vinck, Louvain University, 1970, Volume 5, 1.9: p 5.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., Works: p. 39.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 3.4, p. 42.

By what has been said so far it can be seen that the essence of St. Bonaventure's mysticism was centred on the living Christ as an intermediary within the soul. When Christ entered the soul it was transformed so that there was an inner, more spiritual person or perfected soul in which Christ dwelled. Bonaventure added a soliloquy between the human soul and the Christ soul. The Christ soul said " They search for God in the outside world, but forget their inner being where God abides..."¹⁰⁶ Indeed, the enjoyment of eternal beatitude was in the partaking of His Intellect for no one could enter the mind except God who created it.¹⁰⁷ According to St. Bonaventure He is the one who is closer to you than you are to yourself, so return to the inner man to Christ.¹⁰⁸ How was one to do this? It will be remembered that in the first chapter St. Bonaventure's work on spiritual guidance was referred to. In that work *The Six Wings of the Seraph* he recommended that one should keep God, in the form of Jesus, constantly in the mind and seeing Him mentally as if one was standing in his presence.¹⁰⁹

iii. St. Thomas Aquinas

St. Thomas entered the Dominican Order in 1244. A year later he went to the University of Paris to study under Albert the Great, returning with him three years later to Cologne. Most of Thomas' works were written in Paris and Italy in

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., Vol. 3, 1966, p. 41.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 69.

the 1250's – 1270's. With respect to the condemnation of the external active intellect and its role in salvation, he developed the argument of his master Albert the Great. In several of his major works he condemned Averroes' monopsychism and the Avicennan doctrine of the external active intellect. His argument was centred on the concept of immanence of all parts of the soul including the rational part, thereby condemning the external intellect.¹¹⁰ Moreover, he argued that Aristotle himself had not envisaged an external intellect.

Aquinas made a study of *De Anima* using the new Moerbeke Latin translation. Even if he accepted the possible role of the active intellect on the potential intellect, by making that which was potential actual, he nevertheless, considered the parts of the soul as potencies that formed a unity within the soul, within the body. However the rational part of the soul he considered immortal, which separated from the body at death. Such was Aquinas understanding of Aristotle's teaching on the active intellect.¹¹¹

Furthermore, in the *Quaestiones de Anima* he set about taking away the power that had previously been bestowed on the active intellect and transferred it to God. He argued that the active intellect was inadequate to actuate the possible intellect in the way previous philosophers had understood, because the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., St. Bonaventure: Works: The Six Wings: Vol. III, p. 194.

¹¹⁰ Saint Thomas d'Aquin: Summa Contra Gentiles: French/Latin text by M. Corvez & L.J. Moreau, Lyon, 1954, Vol. 2: Chapter 76, p. 291f; Chapter 78: p. 303f; Summa Theologiae, ed. Paul T. Durbin, London, Blackfriars/Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1968, Vol. 12: 1a: 84-89.

¹¹¹ Aristotle's *De Anima* in the version of William of Moerbeke and the Commentary of St. Thomas Aquinas: Tr. Kenelm Foster & Silvester Humphries with an introduction by Ivo Thomas: London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951, § 734, 736-7, 742- 3: pp. 428-431.

“determinate principles of all things did not exist in it.” It would be better then if the possible intellect were united to an Agent in whom existed the principles of all things i.e. God.¹¹²

However, Thomas conceded that the active intellect was more separate than the possible because it was less like matter, and he accepted the immortality of the rational soul. However, he maintained that it was not so far removed from matter that it could be considered as a separate substance.¹¹³ In Question 4¹¹⁴ he again emphasised that the active intellect was a power within the soul and quoted Aristotle to prove it.¹¹⁵ He understood that Aristotle had said that in the whole of nature there was an agent and that which was potential. It was, therefore, necessary that both of these elements should be in the soul.

The Reason for the Misinterpretation of the Active Intellect

Why did this misunderstanding come about? According to Aquinas it was because Aristotle rejected Plato's theory that “the essences of sensible things existed apart from matter, in a state of actual intelligibility.” For Plato there was no need for an agent intellect. But Aristotle, who regarded the essences of sensible things as existing in matter with only a potential intelligibility, had to

¹¹² St. Thomas Aquinas: *Quaestiones de Anima*: Transl. James H. Robb as Questions on the Soul: Milwaukee Wisconsin, Marquette University Press, 1984: Q. 5[9]; Questions 2 – 7 pp. 53- 110.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, Q. 5 [10]

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹¹⁵ *De Anima* III [5]; 430a 10-14.

posit some “abstractive principle in the mind itself to render these essences actually intelligible.”¹¹⁶

In essence, Thomas maintained that knowledge of God was acquired, not through some separate intellect but through creatures, as Paul had written in *Romans 1. 20*.¹¹⁷ Therefore, he considered the agent intellect and its workings as entirely fictitious and unnecessary.¹¹⁸ According to Thomas, the image of God was within the mind. Furthermore, he quoted St. Augustine that nothing entered the soul except God alone.¹¹⁹ Again, according to St. Augustine the mind could gather knowledge of incorporeal things by itself by knowing itself.¹²⁰ Moreover, true happiness was given to us by His grace and not through communion with immaterial substances or separated intellects.¹²¹

One Possible Acceptance of the Avicennan doctrine of the Intellect

Much ink was spilt in the Christian West over this problem and I have only chosen a few examples to illustrate the argument.¹²² Etienne Gilson names the

¹¹⁶ Aquinas' Commentary on *De Anima*: Lectio 10; §731, p. 428.

¹¹⁷ Ever since the creation of the world... His eternal power and deity has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.

¹¹⁸ *Summa Theologiae*: Ed. Paul Durbin: Vol. 12: Q. 88: pp. 124-129.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Q. 89 p. 143.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

¹²² Giles of Rome: *Errores Philosophorum*: Joseph Koch & John O'Riedl, Milwaukee Wisconsin, Marquette University Press, 1944; This work covers the errors of Aristotle, Averroes, Avicenna, al Kindi & Maimonides. Roger Bacon: *Opus Majus*: Transl. R.B. Burke: Vol. III pp 48-9. Bacon quotes Al Farabi's *De Intellectu* on the separate substance, but then follows Augustine arguing that God illumines the rational soul. He accepts that angels may purify the mind, but it is God who illumines, so that the active intellect if separate could only be God. Dietrich von Freiburg: *De Intellectu* II:2 147-8; II:13 155, envisaged the agent

exception to the rule as Peter of Spain who was actually born in Lisbon.¹²³ Peter accepted the Avicennan concept of the role of the active intellect and took on board the *mundus imaginalis* of the Sufis that allowed it to operate. In his text *The Science of the Soul*¹²⁴ Peter maintained that the soul existed on the borderline of two worlds which enabled it to receive impressions from the intelligible world, through an external active intellect that was an intelligence of the lowest order. It was this external intellect that illumined the soul.¹²⁵

For our purposes the concept of the part played by the active intellect among mainstream theologians in the Christian West disappeared in the 13th century. Nevertheless the idea did not entirely die out, in that it re-emerged among the Christian Kabbalists and Hermeticists in the Renaissance. Pico de la Mirandola supported monopsychism, an offshoot of the Italian Averroist tradition. Carolus Bovillus went over the old ground for in his theories of “mystical diagrams” the angelic intellect likened to the sun, resurfaced.¹²⁶ Similarly Agrippa accepted that, according to the Arabians the human mind was joined to the intelligences. Furthermore, he assimilated these ideas with Christian doctrine saying that the

intellect as a faculty of the soul. *Opera Omnia*: Ed. Kurt Flasch & Burkhard Mojsisch: Hamburg, FelixMeiner Verlag.

¹²³ Etienne Gilson: *History of Christian Philosophy*: op cit: pp. 319-323; p. 681 note 44.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, Paraphrase: pp. 319f.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 321-2.

¹²⁶ Carolus Bovillus/Charles Bouelles: *De Intellectu*: Fol 2v, 15r, 18v: *De Sensu*: Fol. 22r, 25v, 39rv, 40r: Lynn Thorndike: *History of Magic*.. Vol. VI: pp. 442-3.

active intellect was the image of the Word and the human soul was the image of the active intellect.¹²⁷

Conclusion to Chapter Five

This chapter has shown that the origins of the “active intellect” as spiritual guide arose from an error in understanding Aristotle’s *De Anima*. From its beginnings as an “idea” the active intellect developed into an angelic entity. The Sufis of Islam made more of the guiding intellect than the other two religions, although it did play some part in Jewish philosophy and mysticism, but very little in Christianity.

Judaism had taken an intermediate position. The Jews assimilated some of the philosophical teachings concerning the separated intellect and further tried to “harmonise” Arabic philosophy into their own religious understanding. This assimilation took place due to their closeness to the Arab world, as for example, when they lived under the Arab Empire in Spain. However the “active intellect” was not wholly acceptable as we have seen, and after the development of Kabbalah which came to the fore in the 13th century, many Jewish mystics preferred the mysticism of the *Sefirot* than seeking redemption by supposed external intellects. Perhaps in the world of mysticism, it could be said that the demise of the active intellect was the victory of one form of Greek philosophy over another, if one accepts the Neo-Platonic component present in the

¹²⁷ Henry Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim: *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, tr. J.F. London, printed by R.W. for Gregory Moule, 1651: Vol. 1: p 149; Vol.2: p. 340.

Kabbalah. Finally, coupled with the development of their own form of mysticism which was obviously more meaningful to Jewish mystics, and the new translations of Thomas Aquinas' criticisms that were translated from Latin to Hebrew, the role of the angelic active intellect as a mystical redeemer retreated.

Throughout its history Christianity had been ever watchful for erroneous doctrines or heresies. I am not saying that such a thing did not exist in the other two faiths - it certainly did - but heresy hunting was a more "patchy" affair. Abulafia who was most unpopular in certain quarters was banished for some time. His works were banned by R. ibn Adret, with the result that many of his writings were destroyed and what remained was never printed but was left in manuscript form until the 19th and 20th centuries. An effort was made to silence him but not to put him to death. Al-Hallaj was put to death for alleged blasphemy: ibn 'Arabī who gave support to the latter's views as we have seen, was not. Ibn 'Arabī left Spain for the East for a number of reasons. Firstly, Mecca the cradle of Islam attracted pilgrims, secondly the Reconquista prompted many western Muslims to leave and thirdly Moorish Spain was becoming less liberal. In the Arab world one could move elsewhere to live under a less strict regime and so escape persecution. Such a luxury was not usually the lot of the Christian heretic who needed to move out of a Christian milieu.

When the concept of the Avicennan intellect reached the Christian West it was roundly condemned as erroneous doctrine. The Christians understood the powers of the soul to form a unity within the body. If a person had lived a good

life, after death the rational, immortal part of the soul resided in the heavenly realms. If all parts were in the soul, where was the external active intellect? It did not exist. What is more, the Scholastics had little need of such a doctrine. The angelic intellect as an intermediary between humanity and God that served as a bridge between the worshipper on earth and a transcendent God was not necessary.

In respect of Islam, ibn Arabī had demonstrated throughout his writings that such a bridge was not actually needed. God constantly unveiled Himself to those who loved Him. Moreover, as we have seen in Hakim Sanai's work the true gnosis was the realisation that the active intellect was "I". This was the crux of ibn 'Arabi's teaching, in that it is through one's higher self that one understood the Divine and when the mystic at last realises this, there is no need to speak of an intermediary. The Christians took a similar view in respect of the need of an intermediary, in maintaining that God had revealed Himself through Jesus. It was Jesus who played the part of the intermediary before God, as we have seen in St. Bernard's mysticism and in St. Bonaventure. They rejected the idea of the active intellect as intermediary as put forward by Arabic philosophy. However, they had not read ibn 'Arabī and the other Sufis who had a somewhat different understanding of the argument; whose interpretation affirmed that one knew God by one's own self and that the so-called angelic intellect was none other than a symbol of the higher self. Indeed, Avicenna accepted this interpretation in his allegorical writings. Experiencing God without intermediary is the seeing of Him

Face to Face, for as many of these mystics would agree, the knowledge of God is never external, but an internal experience that totally involves the knower.

CHAPTER SIX

This chapter serves as a conclusion to the thesis. In the first chapter it was found that the human spiritual guide needed to be an almost “superhuman” person. Not only did the guide have a store of theological knowledge appertaining to the particular religious group to which he belonged but he also needed to have had an inner experience of the Divine and of the spiritual life. Book learning was not enough, for it was practice that made perfect. As we have seen in the writings of the Desert Fathers and St. Bonaventure’s *Six Wings of the Seraph* the genuine spiritual guide needed to have a character verging on the angelic. He or she needed patience, kindness, discernment and compassion and furthermore, should be devoid of all false pride.

Similarly, we have seen that the genuine Sufi sheikh was a person of integrity, who had already been initiated into a Sufi brotherhood by a former sheikh. It was this link with former teachers that ultimately bound them to the Light of the Prophet and this gave a sheikh his credibility and the right to pass on his teaching and knowledge. If, for any reason, a master could not produce his pedigree, then he was looked on with suspicion because there were charlatans in the spiritual life and this was one way of finding them out.

The Stoic teachers and the rabbis needed to have similar qualities expected of the above two groups, but in many respects, the relationship here between the

teacher and disciple was of a different calibre. Both the Christian guide and the Sufi sheikh commanded complete, unquestioning obedience, though the rabbi did not. Primarily, the rabbi was a teacher of Torah, but in the Middle Ages with the rise of Kabbalah, a rabbi who taught Kabbalah would treat his students differently, because such a group would be exclusive and reserved for the select few.

There is a hint of this exclusiveness in Abraham Abulafia who taught that wisdom was attained by exegetical methods in studying the Torah, through combining letters and so forth. However it seemed that only “advanced students” i.e those who were specifically studying Abulafia’s form of Kabbalah, would be able to apprehend the science of the letters in respect of lines of scripture. It was quite clear that those people “of a lower calibre” just studied the literal meaning of the Biblical text.¹

Similarly, in the Islamic world there were public recitations of *dhikr*, often accompanied by music and dance that reached a wider audience. However, the way of the Sufi was that of a brotherhood, so that the master’s more advanced teaching was always given to his own group of élite disciples that remained separate from the general worshippers, according to the belief that too much

¹Moshe Idel: *Language, Torah and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*: State University of New York Press, 1989, pp. 83-109.

knowledge for an inexperienced pupil was harmful. This latter, no doubt, was true but there was an obvious desire for those studying Kabbalah to be exclusive.

One of the foremost conclusions brought out in the first chapter, was the *need* for the spiritual guide. This was strongly emphasised by the Desert Fathers, the sayings from the *ḥadīth* developed by Ibn 'Arabī, and also among the Kabbalists.² All the sources agreed that it was utter foolishness to dispense with the teacher. The guide was indispensable because he had taken the journey before and the student could rely on his experience. Furthermore, the master taught the techniques of meditation, contemplation and methods to induce ecstasy. Though the methods varied and some forms of mystical practices were more “exuberant” than others, the goal was similar. The master taught ways to free the mind from obstructions and thereby enabling the student to attain a higher state of consciousness that was so necessary for progress in the spiritual life.

The relationship between the master and the disciple was a close one, though again this varied in intensity. In the Sufi tradition the guide was a bridge to God, with the result that a strong spiritual empathy existed between the two, as in the case of Rūmī and Shams al-Dīn. Similarly in the Orthodox tradition a close relationship developed between Symeon and his spiritual mentor. In this

² Graham Gould: *Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1993, p. 32 where in the Christian tradition the pupil was recommended to “pour out their heart” to their spiritual guide. Similarly, Judah's *Sefer Hasidim* emphasised the need for a god-fearing teacher in religious matters for the young: Simon G. Kramer: *Judah the Hasid...* New York, Bloch, 1966, 2:4, p. 66. An example in respect of the Kabbalah, it is clear that a teacher was required for instruction according to several tracts by Abraham Abulafia: tr. by Aryeh Kaplan in *Meditation and Kabbalah*, York Beach, Maine, Weiser, 1992. Finally, the *ḥadīth* which warns that the disciple without a master has Satan for a master is quoted by Ibn 'Arabī in *Kutāb al-amm.* [83] tr. Asin Palacios in *El Islam Christianizado*, Madrid, Plutarco, 1931, p. 303.

unusually frank account, because the Christians like the Kabbalists imposed on themselves a form of self-censorship, both master and disciple shared spiritual and visionary experiences. The guide was so revered in all traditions because he opened up the way to the life of the spirit.

Though there were women who took on the role of spiritual guidance they were given less prominence. However, in the Christian tradition there is evidence for their existence. Their status was considered to be exactly the same as their male counterparts and their role in looking after their flock was, of course, similar. Nevertheless, they were deemed unworthy to administer the sacraments. Individually, a holy woman or spiritual guide was as much the subject of veneration and respect as a holy man. In the 5th century, Palladius gave accounts of holy women whose roles were not unlike those of holy men. One was Piamoun who was gifted with prophecy who interceded in quarrels between village elders, while Melania founded a monastery for fifty virgins.³ There is also an unusual account by a 6th century East Syrian monastic writer who was grateful for the guidance given by a holy woman. This case is unusual as it shows that the holy woman in question was a spiritual adviser to both monks and nuns.⁴

Finally, in late antiquity the holy man also played a political role. We have seen that the rabbi may have been in open rebellion to the secular power as in the case of Palestine, but others favoured a quietist stance. The Christian monk

³ The Lausiac History, Westminster, Maryland, 1965.

⁴ Sebastian Brock: Holy Women of the Syrian Orient: Berkeley, University of California Press, 1987: pp. 177-8.

strove to foster a sense of obedience in the Byzantine Emperor's subjects, whereas according to Philostratus' account, the pagan holy man Apollonios was highly critical of the Roman Authorities.⁵ Such people like holy men or women, whether pagan or Christian stood outside the religious hierarchy and could afford to be outspoken in political or religious matters. Of course, in Islam as in Judaism, there is no hierarchy but the doctors of the Law censored Sufis for their unconventional opinions and, likewise, Kabbalists were criticised by their more orthodox brethren. From the medieval period some religious leaders as Hasan-i Sabbah who was leader of the Assassins [Hashishiyun] and the Grand Master of Alamut the major Ishmā'īlī stronghold in Persia in the Middle Ages before it was destroyed by the Mongols,⁶ played a political role. However, this larger subject I have not included as it leads me away from my main concern. Similarly the marabouts of North Africa were prominent in their resistance against colonialism but that is within the modern period.

The guide from the dead or the celestial sheikh, discussed in the second chapter, was an unusual phenomenon that was not widespread among all Sufis in general. However, it was a prominent feature of the Naqshbandī Order that began and predominated in Central Asia and finally spread to India. The guide from the dead was a feature of an Uwaysi type of mysticism that shared some

⁵ Philostratus: *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, Loeb 1969, Book V: xxvii-viii; Book VII: xi-xiv; xxxii.

⁶ This is covered by Farhad Daftary in his book called *Ishmā'īlīs: Their history and doctrine*: chapter 6, and in fictional form by Amin Maalouf: *Samarkand*: London, Abacus, 1992; The Assassins were a religious sect affiliated to the Ishmā'īlī Shī'a who were regarded as heretics by the Sunni Muslims with whom they were frequently at war: Robert Marshall: *Storm from the East*: Penguin, 1994, pp. 110, 150-151; Steven Runciman: *History of the Crusades*: Vol. 2: Penguin, 1985 pp. 119 f.

characteristics with the hidden *imām*. However, the fact that in these areas, many of the Muslims had lived in close proximity to Buddhism, may have had some bearing on the development.

In Mahāyānā Buddhism celestial buddhas and bodhisattvas were visualised in meditation. Similarly the Naqshbandī Sufis visualised their celestial sheikhs who initiated their followers on earth. Of course, Islam and Buddhism are contrasting, in that one believes in a creator God and the other does not. Nevertheless, they were both faced with the same problem, namely how to keep their own particular religious tradition alive and relevant, when the founder and/or great teacher had died.

This same feature is found in the Gnostic scriptures, in those tracts where the post-resurrected Christ appeared on earth to teach his disciples. As Jesus had been conceived as an angel by the early Christians and as a docetic being among the Gnostics, this aspect had always been a possibility. After the condemnation of Gnosticism and theories like Docetism put to rest, Jesus was not envisaged in that way but was understood to be an inner guide of the heart in Christian mysticism. Only in Gnostic literature as in the Nag Hammadi corpus, did Jesus manifest himself on earth to teach his followers. This theme can be found in the Syriac Apocalypse, for example, *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*⁷ where He manifests himself before the disciples in light in the Upper Room, though this is not of the same genre as the Nag Hammadi scriptures.

Spiritual guidance from the dead in the Kabbalah was not so prevalent, except in the episodes from the *Zohar*, of the celestial academy in the sky that also appears in the Talmud. The original story was much enlarged, developing the idea that the dead rabbis from the past, especially the famous ones, the Tannaim and the Amoraim were “living” and teaching in the celestial realms. This is a similar phenomenon as the Sufi masters of the Naqshbandī Order and the bodhisattvas of the Buddhist paradise of Central Asia. Likewise in the *Zohar* one of the rabbis manifested himself in the form of a mule driver in order to teach the Kabbalah to worthy people on earth. Though this account in the *Zohar* is in the form of fiction, it might suggest that some Kabbalists thought they were in contact with celestial rabbis.

Chapters three and five both cover forms of the angelic guide. From the traditional heavenly journey as recounted in *1 & 2 Enoch*, *3 Enoch* is different in that the man Enoch is transfigured into the angel Meṭaṭron. In the *Hekhalot* literature the role of Meṭaṭron changed again from his association with the heavenly journey, for his human past was almost forgotten and he developed into a powerful being, taking on a more magical persona. As such the image of the angelic guide was visualised in the mind so as to be made manifest before the practitioner. Meṭaṭron was called by many names, by which the initiate invoked his presence and received his power. Indeed the Ecstatic Kabbalist Abulafia studied the divine names in the *Hekhalot* for a basis of his mystical practices.

⁷ Ed. & Tr. J. Rendel Harris: Cambridge University Press, 1900 p. 14: A Jacobite text of the 8th century CE.

Meṭatron was the guide to the initiate in the *Merkaub* trance according to the instructions given in the *Hekhalot*. This trance is a similar phenomenon to that found in Islamic mysticism, particularly in the writings of ibn 'Arabī. According to tradition Enoch and Muḥammad achieved a bodily ascension into the heavens, whereas for others the celestial journey through the palaces or the spheres was a symbolic journey into their innermost being. This journey was conducted by practices taught by the earthly spiritual guide before advancing to the teaching of a celestial guide. During the journey the initiate travelled anywhere, such as to the stars in the heavens, for the journey in essence was visualised in the mind.

Similarly some mystics understood God's Glory as an angel but others like Saadia understood this being as a form created out of the mystic's mind. Likewise the practitioners of Buddhist Deity Yoga understood these forms to be products of Universal Mind. Moreover, these were not just obscure rites that existed in the Middle Ages and perished soon after, for in Russian Central Asia and Mongolia, Deity Yoga was still practised up until the 19th century,⁸ though the advent of Communism curtailed it.

Finally, the angel Sophia who started life as a hypostasis became an inspiration for art and poetry. Ibn 'Arabī called her manifestation the Princess of the Greeks, according to an account by Henry Corbin in the chapter on *The Sophianic*

⁸ John Snelling: *Buddhism in Russia*: Dorset, Element, 1993, p. 27.

Poem.⁹ Also she figured in church murals along with the Angelic Christ, the latter inspired by the Old Testament. However if Jesus were a Logos might He not be a hypostasis or an angel? However, for the Christians the true mystery was that the Logos had become flesh and it was this that made Jesus unique.

In chapter 5 the angelic active intellect that appears in the writings of Avicenna and Suhrawardī has been studied by Henry Corbin, who translated many of the relevant texts but not in comparison with Jewish thought. During the 11th – 12th centuries most of these Jewish mystics and philosophers who featured the concept of an active intellect that bestowed illumination, lived at some time in Spain, where the communities were close in a cultural sense, in that the educated classes shared a flowering Arabic culture.

With respect to salvation given by an external intellect, the Jews had two choices, namely assimilation of the concept into the Jewish faith, or rejection. In effect, they did both for some rejected the so-called Aristotelian intellect in favour of a Platonic one. Gersonides however, was one who rejected wholeheartedly the idea of salvation by an active intellect. He argued that the Angel Metatron, who had the same name as his Master, could not be equated with the active intellect [as Abulafia had insisted] if the active intellect was a lowly intellect at the bottom of the angelic hierarchy. However, with the rise and development of the

⁹ *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, tr. Ralph Manheim; Princeton University Press, 1981, p. 140.

Kabbalah, many mystics favoured this form of mysticism rather than the concept of salvation by an angelic being known as the active intellect.

In the Christian West, the teaching concerning the active intellect was roundly condemned by the Scholastics. Many of the Dominicans and Franciscans who had set out to study this philosophy from the Arabic world, finally decided that if there were a separate intellect it could only be God as the bestower of salvation. If any intermediary were needed, such an intermediary before God was Jesus, both human and divine. Thus Jesus filled the role occupied by the angelic active intellect. Furthermore, Christians believed that the angelic intellect was fictitious and unnecessary, for the intellect was a power immanent in the soul and never external to it.

Though Averroism was still supported in the Renaissance and beyond, for example in the University of Padua, it remained the subject of philosophical enquiry where the concept of monopsychism was popular. However, in university circles in a more secular environment the Avicennan active intellect divorced from the mysticism, ecstasy and piety that had previously nourished it in the East, did not find a place which inevitably led to its demise.

The other hidden guide was the celestial self, examples of which were found in chapter 4 of this thesis, in the works of Najm al-din Kubrā and ibn ‘Arabī. Here there was a link with Indian thought. In the 10th century al-Bīrūnī translated the Patañjali yoga sūtras and introduced the knowledge of the Upaniṣads, the

Bhagavadgītā and so forth into the Islamic world, though indeed, such knowledge was probably already available. The self also was a figure seen in meditation, for both Gershom Scholem and Moshe Idel argued that there was something “foreign” behind Islam’s influence on Kabbalists like Abulafia. I agree with their suggestion that the influence was yoga both Hindu and Buddhist, which played a part in the ideas and practices of many Sufis.

However, with respect to the manifestation of the self in ecstasy, it is important to remember that mystics such as Abulafia and ibn ‘Arabī interpreted these experiences in terms of their own religious understanding. It was not just a borrowing from one to the other, but more the recognising of some feature with which they were in harmony from their own religious background and experience. It was like a seed falling on fertile ground, to use the Biblical analogy. Thus for Abulafia as for ibn ‘Arabī, the self which manifested itself in ecstasy was the divine self, the image of Him who created it. Although the visionary self is also found in Plotinus, he does not give instructions on the visualisation of images (as in yoga).

The philosophies of Greece and India are disparate but there are some coincidences and analogies. One is the teaching of Plotinus on the self which is found in *The Theology of Aristotle*, another is Plato’s myth of the charioteer in *Phaedrus* that is in the Upaniṣads and another is the unity of Knowledge, the

Knower and the Known in Plato's *Cratylus*.¹⁰ The unity of the mystic's soul with the Divine without an agent underlines the necessity of knowing the self – i.e. the knowledge that the divine self is one with God or the *One* or *Brahman*. This allows for either theism or non-theism as in the teaching of some of the Upaniṣads, Patañjali and *The Theology of Aristotle*.

Finally, in terms of ibn Arabī's monistic philosophy, the mystic knows the Lord through his own divine self for "He knows the Lord by the lord"¹¹ [by the self] and so ibn 'Arabī continues:-

"My Essence is His essence, in truth, without defect or flaw. There is no becoming between these two, and my soul it is which manifests that secret. And since I know myself without blending or mixture, I have attained to union with my Beloved."¹²

Accordingly, the spiritual guide both human and transcendent is the means to spiritual experience, a state or condition of transformation, realization or union.

¹⁰ Plato: *Cratylus* 440B.

¹¹ In Patañjali the self is Lord or *Īśvara*.

¹² *Treatise on Being: Whoso Knoweth Himself* tr. T.H. Weir: Abingdon, Oxon, Beshara Publications, 1976, p. 25.

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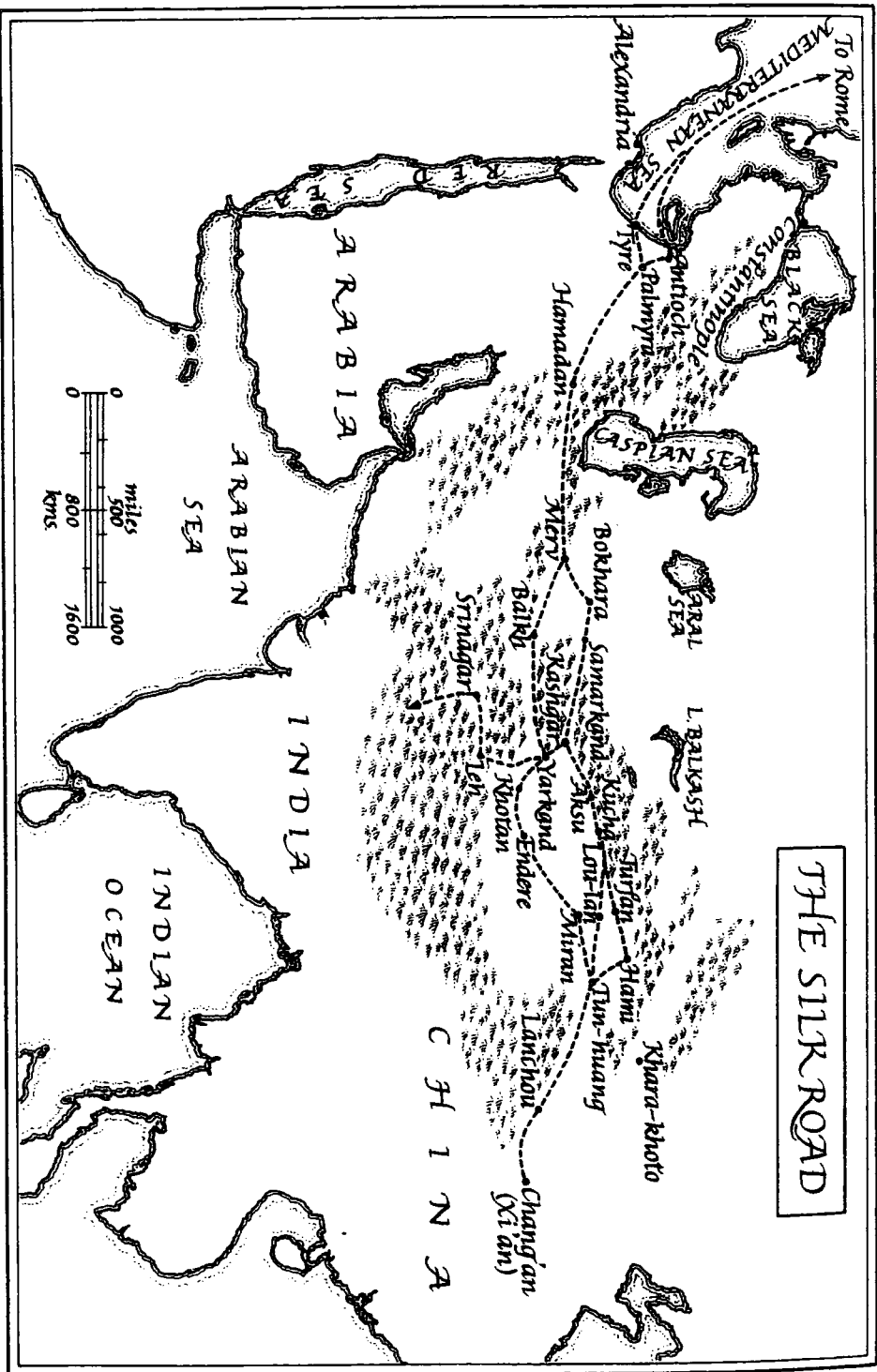
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