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chapter 8 - sufi resurrection**Chapter 8 - Some Sufi Conceptions on Resurrection (Qiyama)**

by Michael McCarron

The Resurrection or Qiyama is an important principle not just generally within Islam but particularly for Sufis. The following chapter is an attempt at addressing Sufi conceptions of Qiyama. First a general overview of Resurrection is in order.

Qiyama (kiyama): the action of raising oneself, of rising, and of resurrection. In Islam it is believed in the following:

1. Prophetic Signs. Resurrection is preceded by Annihilation. Signs: "the earth will be shaken with its earthquake" and will "yield up its burdens (Kuran XLIX 1-2). The sky will crack, the planets will be dispersed, the seas "poured forth", the graves overturned (LXXXII: 1-4), the mountains will fly. (cf. pg. 235 Encyclopedia of Islam vol. 5 article "Kiyama")
2. The annihilation, "the Sound shall ring out, and a second shall follow it (Kuran XLIX: 6-7). This sound is the sound of a trumpet one announcing the annihilation the other sound announcing the resurrection. Only God shall remain all shall perish save his face (wajh)." (Kuran XXVIII, 88)
3. The resurrection, the second blast from the trumpet. The whole of humanity will be revived in body, soul and spirit. "The day when the crier shall cry out from a nearby place, the day when they shall all in truth hear the cry that will be the day of resurrection" (Kuran L, 41-2).
4. The gathering (hashr) God "shall gather" all for judgement.

Shi'a anomaly to traditional Islamic Resurrection, for those practicing Shi'a Irfan there is an important belief in the return of the 12th Imam which is also recognized in some Sunni Sufi circles:

"We may further note that the Shi'i beliefs refer to a first "return" which will precede the universal resurrection and gathering; only the virtuous will take part in it under the guidance of the Mahdi of the last times. This is the raj'a (return to life) of kind of millenarianism. The Rafidis, in the early centuries of Islam, insisted on this. It continues to be one of the perspectives of Imamism, linked to the "return" of the 12th Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, the 'vanished one' (al-Gha'ib), who with this 'first return', will be al-Qa'im, 'the riser'. The Isma'ili 'hidden sense' has more than once transposed the foretold parousia on a gnostic and extra-temporal basis. " pg. 236 EI Vol. 5, "Kiyama"

3 Quranic motifs of Resurrection:

1. comparing the creation to the resurrection, which then appears to be a "new creation" (Kuran XVII:49) or the "second creation" (LIII: 47)

2. A second "sign" of the resurrection is the analogy of the production of vegetables and of fruits, and the revivification of the soil by water (XLI, 39, LXIII, 11). "Thus we restore life to the earth after its death. Observe how resurrection (nushur) comes about (XXXV, 9).

3. The example of miracles with reference to a dead man raised by God, (Surah Baqara 72-3)

Baha' Allah writes regarding resurrection and life and the gathering:

"Know then that when Muhammad, the Point of the Qur'an and the Light of the All-Glorious, came with perspicuous verses and luminous proofs manifested in such signs as are beyond the proof of all existence to produce, He bade all men follow this lofty and outstretched Path in accordance with the precepts that He had brought from God. Whoso acknowledged Him, recognized the signs of God in His inmost Being, and saw in His beauty the changeless beauty of God, the decree of "resurrection", "ingathering", "life", and "paradise" was passed upon him. For he who had believed in God and in the Manifestation of His beauty was raised from the grave of heedlessness, gathered together in the sacred ground of the heart, quickened to the life of faith and certitude, and admitted into the paradise of the divine presence. What paradise can be loftier than this, what ingathering mightier, and what resurrection greater? Indeed, should a soul be acquainted with these mysteries, he would grasp that which none other hath fathomed. " (Baha' Allah, Para #57, Jawahir al-Asrar, <http://omv.op.het.net/gems/gemsofdivinemysteries.html>)

In Sufism we can see a different understanding of Resurrection than a literal reading of the Qur'an. There is a deeper level of meaning that the sufi sees in Resurrection:

"With inward and outward eyes he witnesseth the mysteries of resurrection in the realms of creation and the souls of men, and with a pure heart apprehendeth the divine wisdom in the endless Manifestations of Divinity. 'In the ocean he findeth a drop, in a drop he beholdeth the secrets of the sea.'(pg. 12, Baha' Allah, Haft Vadi)

In Sufism the term qiyamat has another connotation. In the teachings of Simnani we see these teachings laid out.

Simnani uses the term qiyamat in connection with fana which is to say after the annihilation of the individual he subsides (baqa) in the Love of al-Lah. For Simnani another stage developed that of the resurrection (qiyamat) of the individual, like that of a phoenix, from the Annihilation. Simanani has five resurrections of Inner Levels of Death and Resurrection, perhaps in relation to the five Lata'if:

Resurrection of the Mystery (al-azifa),

Resurrection of the Spirit (al-waqi'a, the stage of visionary experiences),

Resurrection of the Inmost Being (al-haqqa),

Resurrection of the Heart (as-sa'a) ,

Resurrection of the Bodily Substance (al-qiyama).

For Simnani these resurrections are due to the process of voluntary death (al-mawt al-ikhtiyari) which is the initiation of the mystical experience in this life as a living being and dieing to the material world of ego. As such the resurrections are those of al-qiyama as-sughra, the lesser resurrection.

In the broader teachings of Sufism it is related that qiyama is:

«Resurrection symbolizes the turning of the wayfarer's heart from the forms of illusory multiplicity to visions of the theophanies of Majesty at the different levels of manifestation of the divine beauty. At each level, of manifestation which is directed inwards, a resurrection takes place and the phenomenal realm is constantly full of these resurrections. It is in this context that the Prophet said, 'One who dies experiences resurrection,' beginning with the wayfarer's resurrection after voluntary death, and ending with the great resurrection which comes about after natural death." [Nurbakhsh, "Qiyama", Sufi Symbolism]

The Sufi Messiah is known as the Mahdi:

"Another variation on the Mahdi doctrine is the Sufi view, which stresses the mystical lineage of the Mahdi and his role as Sufi master. Overall, the Sufi view does not fundamentally differ from the views articulated by other Muslims, except in one very important respect. Whereas the Sunnis expect the return of a pious Muslim reformer, and Shi'a expect the return of a vanished imam, the Sufis generally expect the Mahdi to be the final link in a long chain of masters and disciples in the Sufi tradition. In that sense, this continuous chain or lineage begins with Muhammad and ends with the Mahdi. The Mahdi is therefore viewed as the final and most perfect Sufi master, who is able to guide Muslims to God. As the "divinely guided guide of humanity" he will occupy a place between the believers and God. This is not to say that the Mahdi will be divine in any way. Rather, it is to say that he will serve as the axis of human faith in God, or stated differently, he will serve as a doorway of sorts on the path to God." (Kamran Scot Aghaie (2005) Pg. 5982 "Messianism: Messianism in the Muslim Tradition" Encyclopedia of Religion (2nd Edition). Vol. 9 Macmillan Reference USA Detroit)

The Sufi messianic figure becomes transfigured in the Sufi understanding of Qiyama to one of a great teacher that shall come in the Spirit of Christ according to Ibn Arabi. Ibn Arabi wrote of a messianic figure known as the "Seal of the Saints", he used the figure of the simorgh or "Phoenix" to represent this messianic figure in his poetry. It is interesting to note that Ibn Arabi is instructed regarding the Seal by an intermediary identified with the Phoenix, which is itself identified with the title, "the courier of my Lord" (furaniq Rabb-i). The notion of the Seal of sainthood was first introduced by al-Hakim al- Tirmidhi (d. ca. 295/908) in his *Kitab Sirat al-Awliya'* (The book of the life conduct of the saints). However, Tirmidhi does not identify who the Seal of the Saints is whereas Ibn Arabi does:

Ibn Arabi further instructs us regarding who the Seal is:

But in the Jawab Ibn al-'Arabi wrote, "The one who is worthy [of being the Seal of sainthood] is a man who is like unto his father, who is non-Arab (a jami), well-proportioned in his physical make-up, and of medium height. The cycle of the kingdom will be sealed by him, and sainthood, likewise, shall be sealed by him. He has a minister (wazir) named John [the Baptist] (Yahya). The Seal is spiritual in origin, human in manifestation (ruhani al-mahtid, insi al-mashhad)." (pg. 417, The "Millennial" Motif in Book of the Fabulous Gryphon)

He is from a foreign people, not an Arab. His complexion is of a fair, ruddy hue, his hair reddish, and he is rather tall than short. He is like the radiant full-moon. His name is 'Abd Allah-that being the name of every Servant of God. As for the name by which he is particularly distinguished [i.e., 'Isa], no inflection (i'rab) occurs therein, as it "operates without restriction" (yatsarrafu) in the esoteric art of the grammar of Arabic: It begins with the eye/source of certitude ('ayn al-yaqin) and ends with the eternality of enablement (qayyamiyyat al-tamkin). (pg. 416, The "Millennial" Motif in Book of the Fabulous Gryphon)

It should be noted that in the Islamic eschatology Jesus ('Isa) is to return as the Mahdi, so there is here an identification of the Mahdi with the Seal of the Saints. Ibn Arabi as well identifies this figure with the rising of the Sun from the West, stating that:

"For the "Sun of the West" is the light of intellections arising in the world of your transcendence and that which manifests itself of the secrets of particularization and generalization to your heart, just as the "Seal of sainthood" is that by which your own situation is sealed (ma khatama bi-hi 'ala maqami-ka) in the furthest boundary of your station (muntaha maqami-ka)". (pg. 422, The "Millennial" Motif in the Book of the Fabulous Gryphon)

One more attribute to be noted about Ibn Arabi is his belief in cyclical manifestations of the re-emergence of the Phoenix ('anqa). He notes that Muhammad appeared in the year 622 C.E. thus every 622 years a new cycle would begin. It was this notion that became important to one Mahdist claimant in the Sudan, Imam Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi (d. 1302/1885) made claim to be the Mahdi since $622 \times 3 = 1866$. Which would put this claim also within the living ministry of Baha' Allah, founder of the Baha'i Tariqat or Faith.

It should be noted that Ibn Arabi's successor in the initiatic chain of transmission, Qunawi, ended the initiatic chain until the time of the Mahdi's return when as Seal of the Saints all guidance is referenced to the mahdi:

"I enjoin my companions not to take up after me the problematic questions (*mujmalât*) in the intricacies of the intuitive sciences (*al-ma'ârif al-dhawqiyyah*). Rather they should limit themselves to pondering that which is unambiguous (*sarîh*) and clearly determined (*mansûs*) without trying to interpret what is not plain and unambiguous, whether in my words or the words of the Shaykh. For after me these are closed passages (*âyât masdûdah*). Let none of them accept a single word from the intuition (*dhawq*) of anyone, unless he should come upon the Imam, the Mahdi. Then he should extend to him my greetings in order that he may take from him the sciences which flow from him.^[38] But no one else." ("The last will and testament of

Ibn 'Arabi's foremost disciple, Sadr al-Din Qunawi", <http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/sadraldinwill.html>, 10/25/2008)

The following prophecies are from Ibn Arabi's Futuhat 366 regarding the function of the Mahdi:

...Know--may God support us!--that God has a viceregent (khalifa) who will come forth when the earth has become filled with injustice and oppression, and will then fill it with justice and equity. Even if there were only one day left for this world, God would lengthen it so that he (i.e., the Mahdi) could rule. ...He will wipe out injustice and its people and uphold Religion (al-Din), and he will breathe the spirit back into Islam. He will reinvigorate Islam after its degradation and bring it back to life after its death. He will levy the poll-tax and call (mankind) to God with the sword, so that whoever refuses will be killed, and whoever opposes him will be forsaken.

He will manifest Religion as it (really) is in Itself, the Religion by which the Messenger of God would judge and rule if he were there. He will eliminate the different schools (of religious law) so that only the Pure Religion (Kor. 39:3) remains, and his enemies will be those who follow blindly the 'ulama', the people of ijtihad, because they will see the Mahdi judging differently from the way followed by their imams (i.e., the historical founders of the schools of Islamic law). So they will only accept the Mahdi's authority grudgingly and against their will, because of their fear of his sword and his strength and because they covet (the power and wealth) that he possesses. But the common people of the Muslims and the greater part of the elite among them will rejoice in him, while the true Knowers of God among the People of the (spiritual) Realities will pledge allegiance to him because of God's directly informing them (of the Mahdi's true nature and mission), through (inner) unveiling and immediate witnessing.

the Companions (of the Prophet) who sincerely fulfilled what they had pledged to God. These Helpers are from the non-Arab peoples; none of them is Arab, although they speak only Arabic. And they have a guardian, not of their kind, who never disobeys God at all; he is the most elect of the Helpers and the most excellent of (the Mahdi's) Trusted Ones.

Now in this verse (30:47)--which the Helpers take as their constant prayer (by day) and their inseparable companion at night--God has given them the most excellent knowledge of true sincerity (sidq), as their inner state and direct experience. So they know that true sincerity is God's sword on earth: God always gives His victorious support (nasr) to whoever stands up for someone (in the divine cause) while being distinguished by this true sincerity.... pg. 3-6

So if there is only one Helper, then everything he needs is united in that one person, and if they are more than one, then there are not more than nine of them, since that was the limit of the uncertainty the Messenger of God expressed in his saying concerning the rule of the Mahdi, that it was "for five, seven or nine years." And the totality of what he needs to have performed for him by his Helpers are nine things; there is not a tenth, nor can they be any fewer.... pg. 9

From the preceding Ibn Arabi prophecies concerning the Mahdi there are some interesting parallels to the Madhist movement of the Baha'i Faith. It is worth pondering whether the Baha'is based their structure on some of Ibn Arabi's teachings although it is just as likely to be an independent formation. One can see interesting parallels in the Baha'i Faith to the prophecy for instance:

1. Baha' Allah came as a reinvigorator of Islam.
2. Baha' Allahs enemies were the mujahids of Islam.
3. Baha' Allah was Persian, not Arab, Baha'is came from Iran and speak arabic on a daily basis in prayer.
4. The Baha'i Faith has a Guardian as part of it's structure which oversees the Awliya as defined in the Kitab-i Aqdas, the term for members of the Universal House of Justice is Awliya or Helper.
5. The Awliya number 9 in total and can not be more or less then this number.
6. Prayer is the central act of worship in the Baha'i Faith along with Dhikr, the central gathering place is known as a Mashriq'l-Adhkar or Dawining Point of Invocation

In Conclusion, we can see how Sufis envision the Mahdi and the Qiyama. The Mahdi will not simply be a ruler but a mystic teacher that will show people the Path within themselves and outside of themselves, the Mahdi will not simply be a ruler with a sword, but armed with the sword of spiritual insight and guidance. The Mahdi will be helped by a group of spiritually enlightened beings known as the Helpers (Awliya). All sufi orders culminate in the Seal of the Saints or Mahdi.

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