*Chapter* ***8***

**Beyond Philosophy: Suhrawardi's**

**Illuminationist Path to Wisdom**

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Is there a dimension in the religious tradition of Islam related to "Myth, Philosophy, and Practice" confined neither to the prevalent juridical nor to the historians' interpretation?\* As a participant in the Colloquium I began to probe this question in earnest. I looked beyond the Muslim jurists' and theologians' views of religious life, including thought and practice, shaped purely on the basis of God's revelation to Muhammad codified as a complete set of laws- *the shari'a.1* In examining the intellectual traditions of Islam I concentrated on a school of philosophy known as the philosophy of illumination, *hikmat al-ishraq.* This philosophical way, while including the impact of Hellenic philosophy on Islamic intellectual traditions, a s does the Islamic Peripateticism, attempts further to incorporate a special initial and intuitive grasp of the whole of reality. In its attempt at a total formulation of reality the philosophy of illumination aims to construct a consistent system based on a prior innate knowledge. This prior knowledge is claimed to be based on an *experience* of reality not confined to cogitation and simple sense perception. The language of the philosophy of illumination in its attempt to combine philosophical construction and poetic perceptions is beyond ordinary language and ultimately mytho-poetic. As I examined, with a comparative eye, the varied texts in this tradition of philosophy in Islam, comparing its discursive language to its metalanguage of the experienced and the imagined, a set of issues presented themselves. These comprise questions relating to a type of experienced knowledge which in practice continues to inform and shape the world view not only of individual philosophers and thinkers, but also of a larger group of poets as it relates to their conception of God, man, and nature. Through a conscious use of poetic language employing metaphor and using symbols of widely known myths and legends, the illuminationist, *ishraqi,* tradition was able to go beyond the formal Peripatetic philosophical teachings and in so doing influence a much wider audience. This is evidenced in the

widespread use of illuminationist terminology, symbols, and metaphors in mystical poetry and in allegorical mystical and philosophical tales. In this tradition, poetic wisdom came to be considered

the final means by which man was to learn his position in the world. The illuminationist dimension in the civilization of Islam may be thought of as mystical indeed, but should not be identified purely with Sufism and with the history of Sufi orders. Here the language of myth, legend, and allegory is used to narrate stories that convey an experience of life not confined to the recitation of a singular revelation. Ordinary language is replaced by metaphor, and poetic wisdom comes to be the recognized end of philosophy.

In order to show the interconnection among myth, philosophy, and poetic wisdom I shall concentrate on the allegorical formulation of the philosophy of illumination, whose main proponent is the twelfth century Persian sage Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi the Divine Master as he is referred to in the texts-who in the year 1191 was executed by order of the Ayyubid Sultan Saladin in Aleppo, on charges of proclaiming prophethood.2 His major writings have been published by the late Henry Corbin whose contribution to our understanding of Suhrawardi's thought and its impact on the development of "Iranian Islam" cannot be overestimated.3 The philosophy of illumination is heir to an ancient