



AḤSĀ'Ī, SHAIKH AḤMAD

AḤSĀ'Ī, SHAIKH AḤMAD B. ZAYN-AL-DĪN, 1166-1241/1753-1826, Shi'ite 'ālem and philosopher and unintended originator of the Šaykī school of Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq.

Life. He was born in Raġab, 1166/May, 1753 in the small Shi'ite village of al-Matayrafī in the oasis of al-Aḥsā (al-Ḥasā) near the east coast of the Arabian peninsula in the greater Baḥrayn region. His family, originally nomadic Sunnis, had converted to Shi'ism five generations before, at a time of widespread conversion in the area, and had settled in al-Aḥsā at the same period. They belonged to the dominant Mahāšer clan of the ruling Banī Kāled, but do not appear to have been active in the politics of the region, and there is no evidence of links between them and the 'olamā'. From two autobiographical accounts, it is clear that the young Shaikh Aḥmad was given little encouragement to study, but that, at his own insistence, he was able to complete his elementary studies under a shaikh in a nearby village. Later he found more advanced teachers and, by his twenties, seems to have made considerable progress in Shi'ite theology and philosophy. The identity of his teachers in this period is not known. He makes no mention of having traveled to Hofūf, al-Mobarraz, or any other large settlement in the region to find suitable teachers; in any case the obvious breadth and fundamental soundness of his learning by the time of his arrival in Iraq around 1205/1790 indicates that he must have had competent masters from an early stage. At the same time, it is possible that many of the original elements in his later doctrine owed much to his being in part self-taught. There is evidence of neo-Qarmaṭī



influence in the al-Aḥsā region after the 1760s, but the possibility of links with the shaikh remains purely speculative. He himself indicated that, from early childhood, he developed a predilection for introspection, seclusion, and asceticism. At an unspecified age—probably during adolescence—he experienced a series of dreams and visions, of the type familiar to Shi'ite piety, in which the Imams or the Prophet figured as transmitters of supernatural knowledge. In one dream recounted by him, he believed that he was granted *ejāza* or permission to transmit knowledge by each of the twelve Imams.

In 1186/1772-73, at the age of twenty, Shaikh Aḥmad left al-Aḥsā for the *'atabāt* or Shi'ite shrines in Arab Iraq, apparently with the aim of studying there under the *'olamā'* who had congregated in the region under

the general direction of Āqā-ye Behbahānī. Not long after his arrival, however, plague broke out in Iraq, and he was forced to return to al-Aḥsā. He married his first wife shortly after this and appears to have abandoned any plans to return to the *'atabāt*. The next twenty years or so were spent in al-Aḥsā and in Baḥrayn proper (where he spent four years), during which period he studied Shi'ite *feqh* and *kalām* and read works on “theosophy” or “divine wisdom” (*ḥekma elāhīya*), including texts by Mollā Ṣadrā and Moḥsen Fayz. He received what seems to have been his first formal *ejāza* in 1205/1790 from Shaikh Aḥmad b. Ḥasan Baḥrānī Damastānī, a pupil of Shaikh Yūsof Baḥrānī. His earliest known works also date from about this time, among them *Ṣerāṭ al-yaqīn* (a commentary on the *Tabṣera* of Ḥellī) and *al-Resālat al-qadrīya* (on the subject of *qadr*). Now in his late thirties, he had succeeded in attracting some attention in the region, but apparently more as a saint than as a scholar.

The Wahhabi threat to the Baḥrayn region impelled the shaikh to leave al-Aḥsā by the early 1790s, again in the direction of the shrines in Iraq. His stay was prolonged this time, and he studied under several Shi'ite *'olamā'*, mostly pupils of Āqā-ye Behbahānī, who had recently died. Before long he obtained comprehensive *ejāzāt* from at least five teachers: Sayyed Moḥammad-Mahdī Ṭabāṭabā'ī Baḥr-al- 'olūm (1209/1794-95), Shaikh Ja'far Naḡafī, Sayyed 'Alī Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Āqā Mīrzā Moḥammad-Mahdī b. Abi'l-Qāsem Mūsawī Ṣahrestānī (1209/1794-95), and Shaikh Ḥosayn b. Moḥammad Darāzī Baḥrānī, a nephew of Shaikh Yūsof Baḥrānī (1214/1799). After the receipt of this last *ejāza*, Aḥsā'ī began a period of shifting from place to place in southern Iraq, including three periods of residence in Baṣra.

In 1221/1806, he performed a pilgrimage to Mašhad. Returning through Yazd,



he was persuaded by the populace to remain there; thus began a stay of almost twenty years in Iran, during which the shaikh's reputation spread throughout the country and beyond. By 1223/1808, Faṭḥ-'Alī Shah began to correspond with him, probably at the suggestion of Ebrāhīm Khan Zāhīr-al-dawla, the governor of Kermān, who had become one of the shaikh's most devoted admirers. Aḥsā'ī spent the winter of 1808-09 as a guest of the king in Tehran, but could not be persuaded to transfer his residence there permanently. Returning to Yazd, he settled down more seriously to write the letters and commentaries on which his growing fame was to be built.

By 1229/1814 tension seems to have developed between Aḥsā'ī and some of the notables of Yazd, probably because of his growing influence in the region. Leaving Yazd, he made for Kermānšāh, probably on the invitation of Moḥammad-'Alī Mīrzā, under whose patronage he remained, with occasional absences, until about one year after the prince's death in 1237/1821. Several of the shaikh's most important works belong to this period, including the *Šarḥ al-zīārat al-ĵāme'at al-kabīra* (1230/1815; Tehran, 1267/1850-51), regarded as his magnum opus; a commentary on the *Resālat al-'elmīya* of Moḥsen Fayẓ (1230/1815); the *Šarḥ al-fawā'ed* (1233/1818; Tabrīz[?], 1272/1856), a commentary on his earlier *Fawā'ed*; *al-Resālat al-solṭānīya* (1234/1818), in reply to questions from Faṭḥ-'Alī Shah; the lengthy *Šarḥ al-mašā'er* (1234/1818; Tabrīz, 1278/1861-62), a commentary on the *Mašā'er* of Mollā Ṣadrā; and the even lengthier *Šarḥ al-'aršīya* (1236/1821; Tabrīz, 1278/1861-62), on Ṣadrā's *'Aršīya*. In 1232/1817 he performed what seems to have been his first pilgrimage to Mecca, following which he stayed for eight months in Najaf and Karbalā.

With the death of Moḥammad-'Alī Mīrzā in 1821, Kermānšāh and the surrounding region fell into a rapid decline. In 1238/1822, Shaikh Aḥmad left for Mašhad, traveling via Qom and Qazvīn. In Qazvīn he was called a heretic for the first time, by Mollā Moḥammad-Taqī Baraġānī, who condemned certain passages of the shaikh's writings as contrary to orthodox teachings on resurrection (*ma'ād*). Leaving the matter unresolved, Aḥsā'ī continued his pilgrimage, after which he visited Yazd and Isfahan. Here he stayed as the guest of 'Abdallāh Khan Amīn-al-dawla and was treated by both 'olamā' and civic dignitaries as a visitor of considerable importance. Although several months had elapsed since the pronouncement of *takfīr* or condemnation by Baraġānī, it is clear from this reception in Isfahan that its effect had not yet made itself felt outside Qazvīn.



Returning to Kermānšāh in June 1823, Aḥsā'ī left after a year to settle in Karbalā. Now aged seventy, he probably planned to remain at the *'atabāt* for the remainder of his life. But Baraḡānī had by this time gained a number of supporters at the shrines in Iraq, including Āqā Sayyed Moḥammad-Mahdī Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Shaikh Moḥammad-Ḥasan Najafī, and Āqā Sayyed Ebrāhīm Qazvīnī. Although many eminent *'olamā'* in Iran and Iraq continued to express open admiration and support for Aḥsā'ī, his opponents mounted a successful campaign against him at the *'atabāt*. Threatened by these efforts, the shaikh was compelled to leave Karbalā for Mecca, traveling via Baghdad and Syria. Some two or three stages from Medina, he died on 21 Ḍu'l-qa'da 1241/27 June 1826, aged seventy-three. His grave is in the Baqī' cemetery in Medina.

Relationship to Shaikhism. Aḥsā'ī is generally regarded today as the founder of the Šaykī school of Shi'ism, an essentially orthodox movement which is, nevertheless, still viewed with suspicion by the mass of Shi'ite *'olamā'*. In many ways this view is incorrect. There is no reason to believe that the shaikh sought to bring into existence a separate body, an ecclesiola as it were, within the system of Twelver Shi'ism. To the end of his life he stressed the orthodoxy of his views and saw his own function as essentially that of an *'ālem* insisting on the revival of the primitive virtues of Shi'ite belief, particularly as expressed in personal devotion to the Imams. Granted that, as we shall note, some of his theories were unusual, there is no reason why they could not, like many of the concepts developed by the Ešrāqī school and the school of Isfahan, have been assimilated by the mainstream of Shi'ite thought. This possibility is put forward most strongly by Corbin, who stresses the continuity of Šaykī metaphysical teaching with the theosophical tradition of Iranian Shi'ism and sees in Shaikhism a great resurgence of Shi'ite gnosis. It should not be forgotten, however, that the continuity is equally strong in less philosophical and metaphysical areas of belief. Shaikh Aḥmad's *Ḥayāt al-naḥs*, for example, is a systematic outline of Shi'ite doctrine entirely consistent with the major tradition.

At the time of Aḥsā'ī's death in 1241/1826, there was no hint of an attempt to set up a separate school within Shi'ism, to create a division based either on doctrinal differences or on conflicting claims to authority. Despite the *takfīr* campaign originated by Baraḡānī, the shaikh's position was still essentially that of one of the most respected and influential of the Shi'ite *'olamā'*, a *mojtahed* and *marja' al-taqlīd* to whom a sizeable body of *ṭollāb* and older clergy gave allegiance. By no means all of his pupils and admirers later



became identified as “Šaykīs” in the technical sense. Many, such as Mollā ‘Alī Nūrī and Ḥājj Ebrāhīm Kalbāsī, continued in later years as perfectly respectable ‘*olamā*’ with no overt connections with the “Šaykī school.”

Given time and the support of prominent *mojtaheds* such as Mollā Moḥammad-Bāqer Šaftī, who refused to countenance the *takfīr*, it is probable that the heresy campaign would have faded away on the shaikh’s death; once it was forgotten, his reputation as a Shi’ite ‘*ālem*’ would have been assured. But the removal of Aḥsā’ī was, in fact, the trigger for the emergence of a coherent group of ‘*olamā*’ who sought to defend his teachings against the *takfīr*. Before leaving Karbalā, the shaikh had given his leading pupil, Sayyed Kāẓem Raštī, authority to teach there on his behalf. Remaining permanently in Karbalā, Raštī and other pupils of the shaikh set out to demonstrate the orthodoxy of his views, thus providing a focus for continuing attacks by Sayyed Moḥammad-Mahdī Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Shaikh ‘Alī Naḡafī, and Sayyed Ebrāhīm Qazvīnī. Inevitably, in the course of the polemics which ensued between the two parties, the few relatively minor topics on which the *takfīr* had first been based were multiplied on the slightest pretext until the real issue was lost. Before long political rivalry increased the division between Raštī and his supporters, popularly known as the Šaykīya, and their opponents, who termed themselves Bālāsariya (because they prayed above the head [*sar*] of Imam Ḥosayn, whereas the followers of Raštī prayed at the foot of the tomb). Nevertheless, as late as 1258/1842, Raštī persisted in denying the charge that he had established a new *maḏhab* within Islam; he constantly represented himself as simply the expounder and defender of the views and person of his shaikh. The meaning of the term Šaykīya, used to refer to what he calls *in ferqa* (this sect), is simply “people who are adherents of (*mansūband bar*) this shaikh” (*Dalīl al-motaḥayyerīn*, p. 11).

Raštī not only defended the orthodoxy of Aḥsā’ī’s views, but also sought to emphasize the positive role of his teacher as an ‘*ālem*’ endowed with more than usual authority. Significantly, the original *takfīr* made no mention of the role assigned to Aḥsā’ī either by himself or by his students, but it is here, rather than in any specific doctrinal issue or the interpretation of such issues, that the Šaykī school found its true *raison d’être*. Aḥsā’ī’s early dreams and visions have been noted above. On another occasion he dreamt that he was taught verses by Imam Ḥasan, to enable him to call on the Imams whenever he required an answer to any problem. On two occasions, once with Imam Ḥasan and once with Moḥammad, he claimed to have undergone what appears to



have been a form of initiatory ritual, involving the drinking of saliva from the mouth of the Imam or Prophet.

This belief that his knowledge was directly granted him by the Prophet and the Imams distinguishes Aḥsā'ī from contemporary religious leaders. The role of the Imams as spiritual guides is familiar in Shi'ism, but Aḥsā'ī seems to have taken this concept to an extreme degree. He claimed that since he derived his knowledge directly from the Prophet and the Imams in dreams, error could not find its way into his words and that he could easily answer any criticism leveled against him (*Šarḥ al-fawā'id*, p. 4; *Sīra Šayḫ Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī*, pp. 19-20). In one place he describes these dreams as *elhām*, but more usually he speaks of *kašf* or *mokāšafa*; this last concept was given sufficient prominence to give rise to the use of the term *kašfiya* for the school.

As Aḥsā'ī's successor, Raštī saw his shaikh as a possessor of knowledge from the Imams and as the revealer of the inward (*bāṭen*) truth of Islam. In his *Šarḥ al-qašīda*, Raštī refers to two ages of the dispensation of Moḥammad—an age of outward observances (*ẓawāher*) and an age of inward realities (*bawāṭen*). The former age came to end after twelve centuries, and the second age then commenced. In every century of the first age, there appeared a promulgator (*morawweġ*) of the outward laws; at the commencement of the first century of the second age, the first *morawweġ* of the inward truth, i.e., Shaikh Aḥmad, appeared (quoted in Mīrzā Abu'l-Faẓl Golpāyagānī, *Ketāb al-farā'id*, Cairo, 1315/1897-98, pp. 575-77). This conception of the role of Aḥsā'ī was, clearly, current among Raštī's followers, as appears from an anonymous *resāla* written some time after 1261/1845; the author speaks of the beginning of the revelation (of inner truth) in the person of Aḥsā'ī at the end of 1,200 years, and refers to him as the *morawweġ* of the first century of the second age and, indeed, of the 12th century of the first age of outward truth (ms. in Tehran Baha'i Archives, 6003. C, pp. 399, 407). The later Šayḫī school in Kermān has tended to play down this view of Aḥsā'ī, who is depicted as little more than an inspired reviver of Shi'ism.

Doctrine. As has been stated above, Shaikh Aḥmad did not seek to introduce any innovations within the fundamental doctrinal structure of Twelver Shi'ism. His position on the essential Shi'ite doctrines can not be said to differ radically from that of other 'olamā', as is particularly clear from his treatise on the *oṣūl* of the faith, the *Ḥayāt al-naḥs*. Aḥsā'ī deals with *tawḥīd*, 'adl, *nobūwa*, *emāma*, and *ma'ād* in conventional terms, his position being essentially Mu'tazilite on the nature of God, the Qur'ān, the justice of God, and so on.



Since God has not brought creation into existence for nothing, and since He Himself is not in need of anything, the benefit of creation must return to His creatures. This benefit depends on God's imposing religious obligations (*taklīf*) on men in order to make them worthy of eternal bliss. To show gratitude for God's benefits is impossible without knowing the one Who bestows them. The first duty of the *mokallaḥ* is to become detached from creation; the second is to observe it and meditate on it. This will lead to the recognition of God. The meaning of knowledge of God is belief in the existence of an uncreated Creator, recognition of His attributes (both those of the divine essence and those of the divine actions), recognition of God's justice, recognition of the *nobūwa* of Moḥammad and all the prophets, who are the intermediaries between God and man, recognition of the coming to life of the *mokallaḥ* on the Day of Judgment.

God exists; He is pre-existent (*qadīm*), eternal, alive, and knowing. His knowledge is of two kinds—eternal (*ʿelm qadīm*) and created (*ʿelm ḥādet*). He is all-powerful (*qāder*) and a free agent (*moktār*); He is single in His essence, attributes, acts, and worship. His will (*erāda*) is one of the attributes of his actions (*ṣefāt al-afāl*), not of His essence (*ṣefāt al-dāt*); similarly, His speech is one of His actions and does not belong to the essence; it is, therefore, created (*ḥādet*). He is not a body, an accident, or an essence, and is neither compound, various, or situated in any place or direction, nor does He incarnate Himself. The vision of God is not possible with physical eyes, whether in this world or the next.

Divine justice (*ʿadl*) is the opposite of tyranny; God does not impose obligation (*taklīf*) beyond what man can endure, while reward exceeds the degree of *taklīf* in acts of obedience, and punishment exceeds it in acts of disobedience. Man is possessed of free will (*ektiār*) and is the performer of his own actions, but God preserves and provides assistance for these. Whoever says that God is the performer of men's acts, good or bad, attributes injustice to Him in compelling man to do wrong and punishing them for it. But to say (as do the Mu'tazilites) that man has absolute independence is to depose God from His dominion. Both *efrāṭ* and *tafrīṭ* are false; the true position is the medial one (i.e., *lā ḡabr wa lā tafwīz bal amr bayn al-amrayn*). Thus, man performs his actions freely and without compulsion, but the power to do so (*taqdīr*) comes from God.

Since God can not be comprehended and men can not derive the teachings of religion directly from Him, He must choose a mediator who knows Him



through revelation (*wahy*) and conveys to men those matters which conduce to their welfare. It is necessary to send a *rasūl* to each nation, according to their differing needs; this process ended, however, with Moḥammad, the seal of the prophets. The prophet ought to be possessed of perfections both physical and moral, he must be free (*ma'ṣūm*) of great and small sins before and after his calling and to the end of his life, and he must be free of all other defects. The prophet of this people is Moḥammad b. 'Abdallāh; after him there will be no prophet, so he must be the *rasūl* for all mankind. He has performed miracles, among which is the Qur'ān, which is inimitable and will never be abrogated.

The condition of men is subject to change. Thus, in the absence of the Prophet, there must be a successor who will stand in his place to execute his laws and preserve his *ṣarī'a*. This successor should have all the qualities of the Prophet. The word of the *waṣī* is that of God, his decree that of God and the Prophet, and obedience to him obligatory. No one can be appointed by men to this station; it can only be succeeded to by the decree of God. The Imams were appointed because they possessed the qualities of the Prophet. The Qā'em is Moḥammad b. Ḥasan 'Askarī; he is at present alive and will appear and fill the earth with justice. It is false to say that he is not in existence and will come into being later, or that he is Jesus.

There must be another world to which all return to receive their reward and punishment. When they leave this world, souls are of three kinds: 1. those of pure belief; 2. those of pure unbelief; 3. those who are weak, neither purely believing nor purely unbelieving. At the resurrection (*ma'ād*) the souls of men will return to their bodies, as in this world. All things will be resurrected, even animals, trees, and stones. It is obligatory to believe in: the speaking of limbs to bear witness to their owners' acts; the book in which each man's deeds are recorded (called 'Ilīyūn); the balance; *ṣerāṭ* (although it is not necessary to know how it is, the meaning of ascent and descent on it, or its purpose); the pool of Kawṭar; the intercession of Moḥammad, the Imams, other prophets, and the Šī'a; the eightfold paradise; the fourteen degrees of hell; the eternity of paradise and hell; the return (*raġ'a*) of the Prophet and the Imams. The events which will occur during the *raġ'a* are discussed in detail; the belief that the resurrection is only the return of the authority of the Qā'em and not the return of individuals after their death is rejected as false (*Ḥayāt al-naḥs*, tr. Sayyed Kāẓem Raštī, 2nd ed., Kermān, 1353 Š./1974, *passim*).

According to Tonokābonī, the reasons for the declaration of *takfīr* were three:



Aḥsā'ī's views on *ma'ād*, *me'rāḥ*, and the nature of the Imams (*Qeṣaṣ al-'olamā'*, pp. 44-48). Although Baraḡānī seems not to have referred to it, the shaikh had already been involved in discussions on the nature of the divine knowledge in Isfahan as early as 1228/1813 (*Šarḥ al-resālat al-'elmīya*, tr. Nicolas, *Essai sur le Chéikhisme* IV, p. iv). As the *takfīr* was taken up by other 'olamā', the charges came to include further points. Raštī mentions some of these in his *Dalīl al-motaḥayyerīn*: It was claimed that Aḥsā'ī had said all the 'olamā' from Shaikh Mofīd to his own contemporaries were in error and that the Mojtahedī (Oṣūlī) school was false; that he regarded 'Alī as the Creator; that he held all Koranic phrases referring to God as really being references to 'Alī; that he spoke of God as uninformed of particulars and maintained that He had two forms of knowledge, one created and one eternal; and that he did not believe the Imam Ḥosayn to have been killed (p. 40). Raštī refers to these charges as absurdities and cites a sermon attributed to the shaikh in which they are severally refuted. He also mentions as elements of the *takfīr* Aḥsā'ī's supposed denial of physical resurrection and the physical ascension of Moḥammad and states that the four main points of disagreement concerned *me'rāḥ*, *ma'ād*, 'elm, and the belief in the Imams as the causes of creation (ibid., pp. 57-58). The accusation of *tafwīz* is the principal argument of an orthodox attack on Aḥsā'ī, *al-Bāreqat al-Ḥaydarīya* by Ḥaydar b. Ebrāhīm b. Moḥammad Ḥosaynī. After the death of Aḥsā'ī, however, an even greater number of heretical and quasi-heretical views were attributed to him. Moḥammad Ḥosayn Šahrestānī's *Teryāq-e fārūq* contains no fewer than forty points of disagreement, many of them extremely factitious.

It is not easy to summarize Aḥsā'ī's views on these and other topics, particularly where the question is one involving complex philosophical argument and where much depends on individual interpretation. Some of the major points should be briefly presented, however. We have noted that, in the *Ḥayāt al-naḥs*, Shaikh Aḥmad discusses *ma'ād* in traditional terms, without any heterodox elements. Elsewhere, however—notably in the *Šarḥ al-zīāra*—he presents an original doctrine of resurrection based on the theory that man is possessed of four bodies, two *ḡasad* and two *ḡesm*. The first *ḡasad* (*al-ḡasad al-'onṣorī*) is the body of flesh, made up of terrestrial elements subject to the ravages of time. It resembles a garment put on and later cast off, and in itself it knows neither enjoyment nor suffering, fidelity nor rebellion. It is not, in reality, part of man at all. After death it returns to the elements from which it is composed and will not be recombined. The second *ḡasad* (*al-ḡasad al-bāqī*) is a spiritual body and is the reality of man; it is composed of the elements of



Hūrḡalyā, the interworld or *barzak* between the material world and the realm of *malakūt*, and survives the dissolution of the body of flesh and the separation from it of all accidental matter. It can not be seen by men because of the opacity of their physical eyes. In this body men are returned to life in the resurrection and enter paradise or hell. When Esrāfil blows the trumpet at the resurrection, the spirits of men will return to the second *ḡasad*, which will then rise from the tomb.

The first *ḡesm* is the body in which the human spirit leaves the physical body (the first *ḡasad*). The spirit remains with this astral body after death, being separated from the second *ḡasad*. The first *ḡesm* and the spirit remain in Hūrḡalyā, in the earthly paradise (*ḡannat al-donyā*) or the earthly hell until the first blast of the trumpet, at which the spirits themselves are annihilated. At this blast the first *ḡesm* loses all opacity and is abandoned (since it, like the first *ḡasad*, is accidental, not essential). On the second blast, the spirits are resuscitated in their second *ḡesm* (*al-ḡesm al-aṣḡlī, al-ḡaḡiqī*), a celestial and archetypal body, in which they descend to the tomb, penetrate into the second *ḡasad*, and are resurrected (*Šarḡ al-zīāra*, pp. 364-66; “al-Resālat al-kāḡāniya” in *Jawāme‘ al-kalem* I/1, pp. 122-24; *Šarḡ al-‘aršīya*, pp. 179-80; see also Corbin, *Terre céleste*, pp. 146-74).

According to Aḡsā'ī, the term Hūrḡalyā, which he uses for the interworld between earth and *malakūt*, is a Syriac term in use among the Sabians of Iraq. Hūrḡalyā is situated in the eighth clime; its lower regions are the cities of Jābalḡā and Jābarsā, and it is, in its entirety, the world of images and forms. The Qā'em dwells in Hūrḡalyā and will return from there (“Resāla Mollā Moḡammad-Ḥosayn An ṣ āri” in *Jawāme‘ al-kalem* I/3, pp. 8-10 [153-54]; “Resāla-ye Raštīya,” *ibid.*, I/2, pp. 68-114, question 28).

With regard to the *me'raḡ* of the Prophet, Aḡsā'ī argued that, although this occurred in his physical body, in each sphere his body abandoned the accidental elements (*a'rāz*) of that sphere. As a result, tearing and repairing (*ḡarq wa eltīām*) of the spheres was not necessary. On his return, Moḡammad reassumed the elements he had left behind. He stresses that this is not to be taken as meaning that the Prophet ascended in the spirit alone, since this would involve his physical death; it is simply that he cast aside his purely elemental body and ascended in his subtle form (“al-Resāla al-Qaḡīfiya” in *Jawāme‘ al-kalem* I/2, pp. 144-66, question 26).

The concept of non-elementary bodies and its application to *ma'ād* and *me'raḡ*



is probably the most original contribution made by Aḥsā'ī to Shi'ite metaphysics, and it is clear from both Tonokābonī and the Shaikh himself that it was precisely this doctrine which caused the original break with Baraḡānī.

Much attention has been drawn to the shaikh's view of the Imams, which has been somewhat unfairly criticized as resembling that of the *ḡolāt* (extremist Shi'ites). There is no doubt that the Imams are of singular importance for Aḥsā'ī, but his arguments regarding their station and attributes are generally based on Hadith and the type of Imamology which Corbin has discussed in several places. He himself explicitly rejects the position of the *ḡolāt* (*Šarḥ al-zīāra*, pp. 11, 76). For Aḥsā'ī, the Imams are the four causes of creation: active (*fā'elīya*), in that they are the locations (*maḥāll*) of the divine will (*al-mašīya*); material (*māddīya*), in that all things have been created from the rays of their lights; formal (*šūrīya*), in that God created the forms of all creatures from the lights of their forms; and final (*ḡā'īya*), in that God created all things for them (*Šarḥ al-zīāra*, p. 64).

Objections were also raised, as we have noted, to the shaikh's views on the knowledge of God. Quite simply, he argued that God possesses two kinds of knowledge: eternal (*qadīm*) knowledge, which is the divine essence, and which could not be separate from it, since that would mean the existence of more than one eternal entity; and created (*ḥādet*) knowledge, which comes into being when its object (*al-ma'lūm*) comes into existence. If this knowledge existed before its object, it would not be knowledge, since created knowledge depends on its being in conformity with its object, which could not be the case if the object were non-existent. This created knowledge is an act of God and may be regarded as one of His creatures named "knowledge" (*Ḥayāt al-nafs*, pp. 27-28).

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Manuscript copies of the works of Aḥsā'ī, widely scattered in Iran and Iraq, with a small number in Europe, have not yet been catalogued.