



COSMOGONY AND COSMOLOGY VII. IN SHAIKHISM

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vii. In Shaikhism

It is in some respects redundant to speak of a “Shaikhi cosmology” distinct from that of Imami Shi‘ism as a whole (see v, above). Shaikhi ideas never developed independently of ordinary Shi‘ite thought but were either part of it (during the lifetime of [Shaikh Aḥmad Aḥsā‘ī](#); 1166-1241/1753-1826) or in dialogue or conflict with it (during the periods of his successors, from Sayyed Kāẓem Raštī to the present leadership of the school). For this reason, it is extremely difficult to form a picture of Shaikhi doctrine free of apologetic or obfuscation.

Shaikhi cosmology and cosmogony are rooted in the numerous Imami *aḳbār* (reports) in which the origins and structure of the universe are set forth in detail. The distinctiveness of the Shaikhi worldview lies in a metaphysical interpretation of the standard Imami cosmological doctrines, a heavy emphasis on the role of the imams as creators and sustainers of the universe, and several innovative anthropogenic concepts having a direct bearing on individual eschatology.



Among the earliest charges laid against Aḥsā'ī was *tafwīz*, imputation of God's creative activity to the imams as demiurges (for the orthodox criticisms, see Hamadānī, pp. 23ff.; for Aḥsā'ī's defense against the charge of *ḡolūw*, exceeding proper boundaries, see 1355-56 Š./1976-77, IV, pp. 59ff.). Using standard Aristotelian terminology, Aḥsā'ī described the imams as the four causes of the universe: the active cause (*al-'ella al-fā'eliya*), in that the world was brought into being through them as the loci of God's will (or of His actions); the material cause (*al-'ella al-māddīya*), in that the universe is constructed from the residue of the rays of their light; the formal cause (*al-'ella al-ṣūrīya*), in that God created the forms of all creatures from the lights of their bodies (*hayākel*); and the final cause (*al-'ella al-ḡā'īya*), in that God created all things for them and will return all to them (Aḥsā'ī, 1355-56 Š./1976-77, I, pp. 196-97, II, p. 193, IV, p. 47).

More technically, the material of the world (*māddat jamī' boldān al-donyā*) is composed of all the elements from the residue (*fāzel*) of the rays emanating from their physical bodies (*ajsād*). This residue is itself understood to take the form of additional rays, and the *ajsād* are themselves rays from their spiritual bodies (*ajsām*). Similarly, the forms of worldly things are created from the residue of the rays emanating from their phantom images (*ašbāḥ*); these phantom images are shadows or illuminated corporealities (*abdān nūrānīya*) without spirits. The souls (*nofūs*) of worldly things are created from the residue of the rays of the souls of their humanity (*nofūs bašarīyātehem*; Aḥsā'ī, 1355-56 Š./1976-77, I, p. 76). Elsewhere Aḥsā'ī wrote in more conventional terms, describing the material substances (*mawādd*) of things as having been brought into existence from the light of Moḥammad and their forms from that of 'Alī (Aḥsā'ī, 1355-56 Š./1976-77, I, pp. 39-40). He stressed, however, that the imams were not actually creators, the causes of men's actions, or sustainers of the world, such epithets being reserved for God (Aḥsā'ī, 1355-56 Š./1976-77, IV, p. 57).

According to Aḥsā'ī, existence is entirely good (*enna'l-wojūd kayr kolloh*; Aḥsā'ī, 1355-56 Š./1976-77, II, p. 185). Nevertheless, a sharp, almost Manichean division between good and evil, truth and falsehood exists. When God created universal reason (*al-'aql al-kollī*), the first of the spiritual existences, He immediately brought its opposite, universal ignorance (*al-jahl al-kollī*), into being. Aḥsā'ī rejected the view that darkness is merely the absence of light and in itself nonexistence, on the grounds that God had created it (Aḥsā'ī, 1355-56 Š./1976-77, II, p. 181; cf. III, p. 9, on negation, *al-nafy*, as a created thing).



The imams are created from light, their enemies from darkness, and all others from a mixture of the two (Aḥsā'ī, 1355-56 Š./1976-77, II, p. 68). Man is formed of reason and ignorance, having two “mirrors” within him, one facing reason, the other ignorance (Aḥsā'ī, 1355-56 Š./1976-77, II, p. 18). As representations of good, the imams are in a state of perpetual confrontation with their counterparts, the “imams of error” (*a'emmaṭ al-żalāla*; Aḥsā'ī, 1355-56 Š./1976-77, II, pp. 258, 260, 292). Heaven was created from love of the imams, hell from hatred of them (Aḥsā'ī, 1355-56 Š./1976-77, II, p. 273; cf. IV, p. 157). This division of the world between the forces of affirmation and denial came to play a major role in the cosmological system of the Bāb (see [babism](#)).

Aḥsā'ī divided the universe in conventional fashion into three principal parts: *al-donyā* or *al-molk* (the present world), *al-ākera* or *al-malakūt* (the transcendent world), and an interworld (*barzaḳ*) between them (Aḥsā'ī, 1355-56 Š./1976-77, III, p. 41; idem, n.d., p. 308; in a more elaborate division he added a temporally prior *al-ālam al-awwal* “first world”; Aḥsā'ī, 1355-56 Š./1976-77, IV, p. 201).

Similarly, the periods of the world are three: *al-donyā* (the present period), *al-raj'a* (the time of the return of Moḥammad and the imams), and *al-qīāma* (the age of universal resurrection; Aḥsā'ī, 1355-56 Š./1976-77, III, p. 183). This periodization corresponds to the parts of the universe, the age of *al-donyā* being equivalent to the physical realm of *al-donyā*, the time of the *raj'a* to a *barzaḳ* between *al-donyā* and *al-qīāma*, and the age of *al-qīāma* to *al-ākera* (*al-raj'a* is sometimes said to correspond to *al-ākera*, which is then considered to follow *al-donyā* immediately, without an interworld; Aḥsā'ī, 1273/1856, “*Eṣma wa raj'a*,” p. 102). Within these three periods time (*zamān*) itself is altered, growing more subtle as it moves from a worldly to an otherworldly state (Aḥsā'ī, 1355-56 Š./1976-77, III, pp. 305, 357-58; Hamadānī, p. 340).

The *barzaḳ* between the spiritual and physical realms is generally referred to in Shaikhi literature as *hūrqalyā*. The term played an important role in the works of Aḥsā'ī, who claimed to have borrowed it from a Syriac word used by the Sabeans (Mandeans) of Iraq (Aḥsā'ī, n.d., p. 309). Moḥammad Mo'in, however, has suggested (p. 84) that it was derived from the Hebrew phrase *habal qarna'im* (doppelgänger) and that its correct pronunciation is *hawarqalyā*. Henry Corbin proposed an origin for the concept in the Mandaean world of “celestial images” (*mšunia kušta*), though he admitted some difficulty in finding an etymological connection between the two terms (1971-72, II, p. 310 and n. 440). Aḥsā'ī was not the first Muslim author to use the term. Its



earliest occurrence in an Islamic context seems to have been in the writings of Šehāb-al-Dīn Yaḥyā Sohrawardī, who used it as an analogue for the celestial realm of similitudes (*‘ālam aflāk al-moṭol*; Sohrawardī, *Ketāb al-mašārī‘ wa’l-moṭārahāt*, cited in Corbin, 1960, p. 195; Mo‘īn, pp. 84-85). According to Aḥsā’ī, *hūrqalyā* is a *barzak* between the realms of *molk* (*al-donyā*) and *malakūt*; he described it in one place as “another *molk*” (Aḥsā’ī, n.d., p. 308). Its lowest extension touches the “prime mover,” the outermost of the celestial spheres, “in rank but not in direction.” Images appearing in physical mirrors belong to this level of *hūrqalyā* (Aḥsā’ī, n.d., p. 309). In temporal terms it stands between the highest point of earthly time (*a’lā al-zamān*) and the lowest level of eternity (*asfal al-dahr*; 1856, I/2, p. 136). *Hūrqalyā* is situated in the “eighth clime” (*al-eqlīm al-tāmen*), of which it forms the highest part, with the cities of Jābalqā and Jābarsā forming the lower. The earthly paradise (*jannat al-donyā*) is located in the western part of *hūrqalyā* and the earthly hell (*nār al-donyā*) to the east (for an extended account of the Shaikhi concept of *hūrqalyā* and its antecedents, see Corbin, 1960).

The realm of *hūrqalyā* plays an important role in Shaikhi **eschatology**. Although accounts of eschatological events in the works of Aḥsā’ī and later Shaikhi writers are structured on a traditional basis (see Aḥsā’ī, 1355-56 Š./1976-77, III, pp. 54-121; idem, 1856, I/1, pp. 9-14, 38-111), a barrage of orthodox criticism has been leveled at their explanation of physical resurrection. For Aḥsā’ī, personal eschatology was rooted in a concept of man as a being possessed of four distinct “bodies”: two *jasad* and two *jesm*. The former denotes “body” as an animate, organic substance, the latter “body” in the sense of something possessing mass and volume. According to Aḥsā’ī, man originally entered the physical realm from the unseen world (*‘ālam al-ḡayb*). In his essence he consists of a “real self” (*al-ensān al-ḥaqīqī*, *al-jesm al-ḥaqīqī*, *al-jesm al-aṣlī*, referred to here as *al-jesm al-tānī*, or *jesm* II) made up of five constituent elements: intellect (*‘aql*), soul (*nafs*), essential nature (*ṭabī‘a*), primal matter (*hayūlā*), and archetype (*metāl*; Aḥsā’ī, n.d., pp. 109-10; but cf. p. 112; spirit, *rūḥ*, is added to these five in Aḥsā’ī, 1355-56 Š./1976-77, IV, p. 332). In his descent to *al-donyā*, this essential self acquired accidental blemishes (*a’rāž*). Thus, in the world of similitudes (*hūrqalyā*), it acquired an accidental counterpart (*jesm* I), made up of the elements of *hūrqalyā*; this stage also appears to be the one at which the essential *jasad* (*al-jasad al-bāqī*, *jasad* II) attached itself. At the final level of descent the latter acquired its nonessential counterpart (*al-jasad al-onṣorī*, *jasad* I), composed of the elements of *al-donyā* (Aḥsā’ī, n.d., p. 310).



This process becomes clearer when viewed in reverse. *Jasad* I is a wholly physical entity composed of the dense elements of this world. It is compared to the garment put on by the real man or to the density that renders silica and potash opaque in their natural state (in contrast to their transparent state when heated and transformed into glass). At death its constituent parts return to their origin in the grave, from which they will not be resurrected. *Jasad* II, however, is a subtle body composed of the elements of *hūrqalyā*. It represents the real man, with neither addition (e.g., from food) or depletion (e.g., through loss of limbs), and it will remain intact in the grave after the decomposition of its gross counterpart. It is, of course, invisible to the fleshly eye. At the time of the resurrection a water will fill the earth, causing the limbs of *jasad* II to be reassembled. Thereupon a trumpet will blow, the spirits of men will rejoin their subtle bodies, and the latter will rise from the grave.

Of the two *jesms* the grosser, *jesm* I, provides a vehicle for the spirit on its departure from the physical body. Unlike *jasad* II (which remains in the grave), *jesm* I remains with the spirit, accompanying it and the supracelestial body, *jesm* II, to the earthly paradise (*jannat al-donyā*) or hell (*nār al-donyā*), situated, as noted, in the realm of *hūrqalyā* (from which *jesm* I originated). Here they will all remain until the first blast of the trumpet of resurrection. At that point the relatively dense form of *jesm* I will be destroyed, leaving only the original *jesm* (*jesm* II), purified of all opacity. At the second blast of the trumpet the spirit and *jesm* II will descend together into the tomb, where they will penetrate into *jasad* II as a vehicle for their entry to paradise or hell. Man's "resurrected body" will therefore consist of a combination of the original *jesm* and original *jasad*.

Although this system of four bodies was not retained in either Babism or the [Bahai faith](#) (see viii, below), its influence may still be discerned in the allegorized eschatology and spiritual survival detailed in the writings of both groups.

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