

FROM MUNDUS IMAGINALIS TO NAKOJA-ABAD:
AN INQUIRY INTO THE IMAGINAL WORLD OF SOUL
THROUGH THE VISIONARY RECITALS OF
SHAHABEDDIN YAHYA SOHRAVARDI

A dissertation submitted

by

KIYANOOSH SHAMLOU

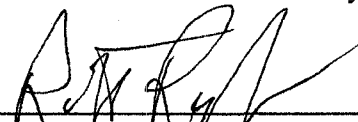
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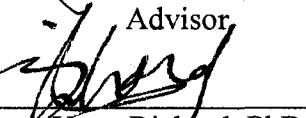
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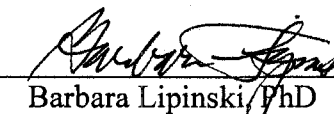
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ABSTRACT

From Mundus Imaginalis to Nakoja-Abad
An Inquiry into the Imaginal World of Soul through the Visionary Recitals of
Shahabeddin Yahya Sohrawardi

by

Kiyanoosh Shamlou

Jungian and archetypal psychology's theoretical basis is of working with images that emerge from the unconscious through the exploration of imagination. In this context, imagination is a tool utilized exclusively for bringing the world of the unconscious into consciousness. What has been neglected in this endeavor is the failure to appreciate the spiritual dimension of imagination, which provides awareness of spiritual experiences and access to more transpersonal levels of the psyche.

In this regard the Islamic Sufis utilized the spiritual function of the imagination for the purpose of developing a relationship with the Divine. In the process, they also developed a cosmology of the imaginal world as a spiritual world. As utilized in this tradition, the imagination has a mediating function, its activity serving the objective of allowing one to transcend into the imaginal world. The purpose of such a journey is to attain a direct personal experience, by way of theophanic revelations, of the many manifestations of the Divine.

The Iranian-Islamic Sufi Shahabeddin Yahya Sohravardi, through a series of short tales he wrote known as the recitals, depicts such an imaginal spiritual journey. This study investigates the spiritual dimension of the imaginal world as the world of soul, and imagination as the faculty of soul, utilizing the contributions of the Iranian Sufi scholar Sohravardi. In these visionary journeys the human soul transcends an exiled condition, moving from the material world into the imaginal world. In these tales Sohravardi utilizes the imagination as a vehicle for the soul to transition into the imaginal world, where imagination has a strictly spiritual function of mediating the journey.

The present study, through a depth psychological interpretation of the symbols used in a selection of three recitals, demonstrates how the imagination and the imaginal world are utilized in a spiritual context. Through a textual hermeneutics of the symbols, themes related to individuation, as defined by Jung, and the hero's journey as discussed by Joseph Campbell are explored. Lastly, through this study, Sohravardi's ideas about the spiritual function of the imagination and the imaginal world are introduced to depth psychology.

By exploring visionary experiences from a depth psychology perspective, these encounters are further understood and brought into depth psychology.

Recognitions

A long journey has led to this point, and this has truly become a hero's journey. Along the way, I have been challenged with and faced the many obstacles, trials, and tribulations of life, along with my own limitations, which at times seemed undefeatable. Yet, as I write this final page marking the conclusion of a long period of research, I am experiencing the contentment of having finally accomplished this rite of passage. Through this journey family members and co-workers have assisted me and offered their support and encouragement.

I am grateful and indebted to all of you.

I express my deepest gratitude to my wife and companion Samira, who has shown endless patience and given me the support to carry this work to completion. Through the many weekends that I attended classes at Pacifica, in those early years of our union, she made the ultimate sacrifice.

My dearest Samira, I am forever grateful to you for you have made it possible for me to finish this work. You are my Angel. Thank you for being who you are.

My most recent source of inspiration, although she may not realize it yet, is our daughter Kiana. Your presence in my life and watching you grow has taught me to grow and mature beyond my expectations. You have immeasurably enriched my life and made me a kinder person, and I am grateful to you for this experience.

I would like to thank my mother for her unconditional love, for always being there for me and accepting me as I am. I appreciate your kind heart, your energy, and your dedication, and I love you for showing it.

To my father, thank you for bringing the pursuit of academia into my life and sharing your enthusiasm for it with me. You are my first teacher.

I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Romanyshyn, Dr. Richard, and Dr. Lipinski, for their time, feedback, and guidance. Your efforts have made me a better scholar.

I dedicate this dissertation to all I have journeyed with so far; especially my family, the ones that are with me and the ones departed whose presence I miss every day. You are all a constant reminder that a life lived in the presence of loved ones is priceless. I gesture you with gratitude and appreciation: Samira, Kiana, Nassrin, Gholi, Kambiz, Seemin, Yassi, Mehranvar, Maman Jan, Baba Jan, Ann'na, Amou Hossein, Judy, Shahab, and Shaheen.

I love each and every one of you.

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The style used throughout this dissertation is in accordance with the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th Edition, 2001) and *Pacifica Graduate Institute's Dissertation Handbook* (2006-2007).

Chapter 1 Introduction and Reason for this study

The tradition of depth psychology surfaced in Western thought in the early part of the 20th century in an attempt to tap into unconscious motivations and transform consciousness through the removal of psychological symptoms. Depth psychology was first introduced in Europe as the science of the mind, and its endeavor became the exploration of the recesses of the mind that remained unconscious, yet influenced personality and psychological development. Throughout depth psychology's history, various psychological tools and methods have been utilized for the purpose of gaining access to the unconscious psyche.

Carl Jung was the first depth psychologist to use the imagination in the exploration of the unconscious psyche. In this undertaking Jung gave primacy to the imagination, basing his analytic method on the healing function of the imagination. Jung held that imagination provided the means of going beyond literal and reductive methods of interpretation, allowing a space for images that emerged from the unconscious to express themselves freely into consciousness. For Jung, the imagination became a *via regia* into the unconscious psyche.

Following Jung, James Hillman also emphasizes the importance of imagination in archetypal psychology. Hillman (1977) posits that imagination is the primary activity of the soul, while maintaining that images are its data. For Hillman, it is the soul's imaginative activity that lets one connect to the world in a meaningful way, paving the way for finding meaning in everyday activities that are

discernable to the senses. In archetypal psychology, the soul's meaning-making capacity, enlisted through images, provides a *via regia* into the material world, allowing this world to become the grounds for what Hillman calls soul making.

For these depth psychologists, the imagination is a tool utilized exclusively for bringing the world of the unconscious, as related to one's personal psyche, into consciousness. This process allows one to gain insight into one's unconscious motivations, to understand and integrate the unknown contents of the personal psyche into conscious awareness. The goal for this expansion of consciousness is to make one's life more authentic, more whole, and ultimately more meaningful.

Depth psychology's failure

However, through this mode of utilizing the imagination, its function has become limited to a practical and sensible ego-based technique, applied to the particular task of expanding consciousness where primacy is given to the development of the ego and its demands.

Concurrently, with this focus, depth psychology has failed to appreciate and apprehend the mystery of the spiritual aspect of the imagination, which is mostly inexpressible through the senses and beyond everyday ego consciousness. In a reductive attempt to objectify and cultivate self-understanding, with the goal of differentiating the known from the unknown, imagination has lost its primacy as a spiritual organ and become merely another psychological tool for the purpose of satisfying the fantasy of the ego and its expansion.

In this attempt to develop ego consciousness depth psychology has lost the opportunity to explore more transpersonal levels of the unconscious psyche via the imagination. More specifically, depth psychology has neglected to appreciate fully the spiritual dimension of the imagination, which provides recognition and awareness of transpersonal spiritual experiences.

Although Jung recognized that spiritual experiences were an important aspect of psychological development, in an attempt to stay within the confines of the empirical sciences and medical psychology, he removed the spiritual dimension of imagination from his method of active imagination. Hillman further removed this spiritual aspect and used imagination as a way of seeing through life events for the purpose of cultivating meaning specifically in the world of appearances, limited to experiences that are gained in the material world.

Hillman, and to some degree Jung, never completely ventured into exploring the spiritual aspect of the imagination. Even though Jung was interested in exploring religious experiences and wrote extensively about them from a psychological standpoint, he was less inclined to investigate the imagination's function as mediating these types of experiences. Consequently, in order to maintain its objectivity as a science, depth psychology has significantly failed to explore, recognize or value imagination's role as a vehicle for gaining access into the spiritual world.

In this regard, however, the Islamic Sufi tradition has fully explored and utilized the spiritual aspect of the imagination for the purpose of attaining spiritual illumination through fostering a relationship with the Divine. In the process, this tradition has also developed a cosmology of the imaginal world revolving around the spiritual function of the imagination.

As utilized in the Islamic Sufi tradition, the imagination has a mediating function, its activity serving the objective of moving one into the imaginal world of subtle spiritual presences. The purpose of the journey into the imaginal world is to attain a direct personal experience, by way of theophanic revelations, of the many manifestations of the Divine. From this perspective, the Divine is the invisible which exists beyond the realm of everyday intellectual consciousness (Cheetham, 2002). This is very much parallel to Jung's concept of the Self and how it is experienced through becoming embodied as inner figures in the course of dialogues with imaginal presences through active imagination (Raff, 2000).

The imaginal world is the world the French Islamic scholar Henri Corbin elaborated upon in his research on the Iranian-Islamic Sufi mystics like Shahabeddin Yahya Sohrevardi. This Iranian-Islamic scholar, through a series of short tales he wrote known as the recitals, depicts an imaginal spiritual journey based on a cosmology of descent and return. In these visionary journeys the human soul transcends an exiled condition in the material world to enter the imaginal world. In these tales Sohrevardi utilizes the imagination as a vehicle for the soul to

transition into the imaginal world, whereby the imagination has a strictly spiritual function of mediating the journey.

Relevance of topic to depth psychology

The present study, through a depth psychological interpretation of the symbols used in a selection of three recitals of Sohravardi, will demonstrate how the imagination and the imaginal world are utilized in a spiritual context. Additionally, through a textual hermeneutic study of these symbols, themes related to individuation, as defined by Jung, and the hero's journey, as discussed by Joseph Campbell, will be elaborated. Through this exploration, Sohravardi's ideas about the spiritual function of the imagination and the imaginal world will be introduced to depth psychology.

What necessitates this study is to introduce some of the less recognized sources of Jungian-archetypal psychology and to highlight their contributions as predecessors to these psychologies. By introducing Sohravardi as a contributor to the field of depth psychology and offering a depth psychological interpretation of an aspect of his writings pertaining to the spiritual use of the imagination, an attempt is made to affirm what has been neglected in the use of imagination within the tradition of depth psychology. Through the recovery of imagination from this perspective, its principal use as a spiritual organ may become integrated into depth psychology, paving the way for the field to recognize and deepen its appreciation of the spiritual function of both the imagination and the imaginal world

Chapter 2 Calling

Vocation into the work

Throughout my studies at Pacifica, I was intrigued by the idea of the imaginal world as I was first introduced to it by Romanyshyn (2002), who writes, “This imaginal world is an intermediate world, a hinge or pivot between the intellectual and the sensible worlds, a world which is neither that of fact nor reason” (p. 129).

In another place he writes:

Mystics, alchemists, and hysterics, are guides who return psychology to the poet, because poet, mystic, alchemist, and hysteric all dwell in one way or another within that same epistemological space of negative capability, that imaginal world of Soul. (p. 130)

These passages gained my interest, and my readings about the imaginal world raised the questions: What was the origin and purpose of the imaginal world? How could this in-between world be explored further, and what relevance did the imagination have to spiritual experiences? My research into the imaginal world led me to the work of the French scholar Henri Corbin, who is known for his translations and interpretations of various Islamic scholars. Corbin’s ideas about the imaginal world heightened my interest further, helping me to better grasp this topic.

Corbin (1960/1977) writes:

There is an intermediate world, the world of Idea-Images, of archetypal figures, of subtle substances, of immaterial matter. This world is as real and objective, as consistent as the intelligible and sensible worlds; it is an intermediate universe where the spiritual takes body and the body becomes spiritual. (p. 4)

I started looking in more detail at Corbin's perspective about the imaginal world and the sources he had studied. This, in turn, led me to the writings of the Iranian Islamic scholar Shahabeddin Yahya Sohrevardi, whom Corbin had studied extensively. Each new examination of these two authors improved my understanding of the imaginal world. In reading Corbin's account and comparing it to Sohrevardi's account, I gained a better understanding of what the imaginal world encompassed.

In this manner, and upon further reexamining and referencing their ideas from a psychological perspective, the topic developed a deeper meaning than it had from my original readings, since by this time the latter perspectives had further improved my understanding of the topic and related it to depth psychology.

My first attempt at reading Corbin's work was quite difficult, but by referring to other sources, his ideas became more lucid. One of these sources was James Hillman, specifically archetypal psychology. Hillman uses his psychology as a way of seeing, a way of imagining, and a way of re-visioning being human for the purpose of cultivating meaning or soul in one's life, calling this process soul making. In the same manner, Sohrevardi's ideas are also about gaining a

perspective towards and a way of revisioning being in relationship with soul.

Although Sohrevardi uses theophanic experiences or acts of Divine revelation to achieve this goal, Hillman relies on the deepening of everyday life experiences to achieve the same goal.

Through my readings, I noticed similarities between the ideas about the imagination, soul, and the imaginal world in both archetypal psychology and in Sohrevardi's writings. A central tenet that Sohrevardi utilizes in his recitals is imagination as the vehicle which provides access to the imaginal world from the material world. Sohrevardi, in these recitals, gives a highly symbolic account of the soul's journey from the material world towards its source in the imaginal world. Here Sohrevardi, similar to Hillman, was suggesting a medial quality to the imaginal world and emphasizing its relation with soul. Both authors utilize the imaginal as a threshold for entering a world beyond the world of appearances.

Along this line of thinking, archetypal psychology also recognizes imagination as the vehicle to gain access into the imaginal world of soul (Hillman, 2004). Archetypal psychology posits soul as the mediating factor between mind and body, imaginal and rational, consciousness and the unconscious. Through soul making, the relationship among these concepts is experienced, bringing meaning to material existence, by deepening events into meaningful experiences. For archetypal psychology, soul lies hidden behind everyday routines and beliefs, emerging in moments when one sees through events and deepens them.

Many of the concepts used in archetypal psychology have their roots in the classics. Hillman does for archetypal psychology what the Greek philosopher Plotinus did for Plato's ideas, and what the Iranian Islamic scholar Shahabeddin Yahya Sohrevardi did for Zoroastrian and Neo-Platonist ideas. Each of these authors retrieves what has been hidden in the original writing, and rewrites it so that a new understanding of the old material comes through.

Yet, according to Hillman (2004), archetypal psychology's foundation lies in a tradition that dates back to Heraclites, Plato, Plotinus, and Renaissance thinkers such as Ficino and Paracelsus. Admittedly, the bulk of the writings do cover the contributions of Western philosophers to this discipline, but less known are the contributions made to this discipline by Islamic scholars.

It seems that some of the ideas used in archetypal psychology also have roots in the writings of Islamic scholars like Sohrevardi, Ibn Arabi, Avicenna, and Mulla Sadra, yet their contributions are not recognized as contributing to Jungian or archetypal thought. The convergence becomes even more pronounced when Henri Corbin is considered by Hillman (2004) to be the second father of archetypal psychology after Carl Jung.

Corbin has done a tremendous task in bringing the writings of Islamic thinkers into Western thought. Corbin himself admits that many of his ideas are derived from forms of Islamic thought he encountered through his research in Iran, and from ideas initially set forth by the scholars in that tradition. Without a doubt,

through his exposure to Jung at the Eranos conferences, some of his ideas were integrated into Jungian psychology and later into archetypal psychology. At this point in my exploration it seemed logical that because Corbin was a major contributor to the discipline of archetypal psychology, the sources for his reflections and ideas should also be further explored.

Initially, I attributed my interest in Sohrevardi to the parallels that I had found between his writings and Hillman's writings about the imaginal world, which I wanted to elucidate further as a possible topic of dissertation. But it was Sohrevardi himself, our mutual cultural identity, and what he had tried to do with two different paths, linking pre-Islamic Zoroastrian with Islamic thought, that had drawn me to him. Sohrevardi had tried to bridge the gap between two cultures, two religions, and two modes of thought. In doing so, he had attempted to unify two very different traditions.

In the same manner, I was also trying to bridge a gap between two modes of thought showing the convergent and divergent points between an ancient Islamic tradition and a modern Western one and how imagination is utilized in each. Mine was also an attempt, through depth psychology, to put two cultures, two traditions, and modes of thought seemingly distant in dialogue with one another.

I concluded that it was this calling that I was responding to. But what was being asking of me? How could I possibly make a contribution? These questions occupied my mind throughout my studies at Pacifica Graduate Institute, as I wanted

to write my dissertation on some aspect of Sohravardi's work. I was searching for a way to relate his work to my studies at Pacifica and to a greater extent to depth psychology.

Three dreams visited me often after learning about the figure of Sohravardi. In one dream, an old man chased me in a very dark forest, and I always ran away from him. I often woke up in a state of panic, wondering who he was and what he wanted of me. In another dream, I was on top of a mountain with a book that had no writings in it. I would turn page after page, but the book was always blank. In the third dream, I saw myself riding the skies on the back of an enormous bird looking down on a landscape that was green in color. I could not make out any figures or objects in this landscape. This is the most I remembered of these recurring dreams, but at the time I could not make any sense of them. I shared these dreams with classmates and read about their symbolism, but I was still not sure why I was in these dreams. What was my role?

About this time, I had made up my mind to write my dissertation about Sohravardi, although I still had no concrete idea under what topic relevant to depth psychology I could categorize him. I was reading more of his works in order to get ideas about a possible topic. I started reading his recitals, which are a series of mystical and spiritual accounts. Three of these tales are specifically about the journey of descent and return of the human soul, which finds its origins in the imaginal world. It was in these tales that the figures in my dreams presented

themselves. Initially, I was stunned. I could not believe what I was reading. One story involved an old man as the angel guiding the soul on its journey. Another depicted a cosmic mountain, which marked leaving the material world and entering into the imaginal world, and a third was about the journey of birds in search of their home. As I read these tales, it dawned on me that indeed I was responding to my calling, and the subjects for my dissertation had presented themselves to me in a very personal way.

I also noticed that the recitals' general theme related a journey very similar to the hero's journey as described by Joseph Campbell (1949). Here the human soul was the heroic figure depicted in various situations, involved in a strenuous quest, where unexpected events happen. The soul's attempt is to recall its spiritual face by going through a series of stages set forth in the journey, leading to its rebirth in the imaginal world. I further recognized parallel themes in the recitals leading to Jung's description of the individuation process. Here I was reading about a scholar of the 12th century using themes related to depth psychology before any such psychology had been developed.

Bridging the gap

In reading the various accounts of the imaginal world in depth psychological literature, I recognized a noticeable lack of attention to Sohrevardi's work. What I further noticed in my readings pertaining to the use of imagination was its limited role as a psychological tool in service of ego development.

However, what seemed most significant was that in the writings of Sohrevardi, imagination had an exclusively spiritual function, which seemed to be mostly absent in the writings of Hillman, and to a lesser extent in Jung's work. Even though Jung was more astute in recognizing the spiritual role of the imagination in his work, it seemed this was an area which for the most part had remained unrecognized and unexplored, calling for the task of deepening and reflection. The present study is a venture on this path.

The imaginal world, imagination, and their relation to soul were partially introduced to Western thought through the French scholar Henri Corbin's studies of Islamic scholars and Sufi mystics. In depth psychology, these ideas were expounded upon in Jungian and later in archetypal psychology. These ideas are some of the central tenets that form these psychologies. However, in an endeavor to maintain the tradition of objectivity as a scientific discipline, Jungian and to a great degree archetypal psychology have limited their exploration of the spiritual function of these ideas.

The aforementioned have deep historical roots in the writings of the 12th - century Iranian Islamic scholar Shahabeddin Yahya Sohrevardi. However, Sohrevardi's works are largely unknown in the Western world, especially in the field of depth psychology. This study will investigate the spiritual dimension of the imaginal world as the world of soul, and imagination as the faculty of soul,

utilizing the contributions made by the Iranian Sufi scholar Shahabeddin Yahya Sohravardi in a series of gnostic tales known as the recitals.

Three of these recitals will be introduced in this work. This selection specifically focuses on the soul's imaginal journey from an exiled and captive condition in the material world to the imaginal world through the use of the imaginative faculty.

Through a depth psychological interpretation of the symbols in these recitals themes related to a transformation of consciousness leading to individuation as described by Jung will be explored. Finally, similarities between the stages of the visionary journey as related to Joseph Campbell's account of the hero's journey, an initiatory rite of passage towards individuation, will be discussed.

This is an endeavor to establish Sohravardi as a pioneer imaginal psychologist and to introduce his ideas pertaining to the spiritual nature of the imagination and the imaginal world to the Western reader. Concurrently, it is an attempt to re-introduce a lost spiritual function of the imagination to Western thinking and specifically to the field of depth psychology. It is the author's hope that through this undertaking, a cross-cultural dialogue for the exchange of academic ideas may be established between depth psychology and Iranian-Islamic thought.

By introducing Sohrevardi's ideas about the imagination and the imaginal world, I will attempt to re-member a lost aspect of depth psychology pertaining to the spiritual function of these ideas as recognized in the Islamic Sufi tradition. This lost aspect becomes even more prominent for exploration when Hillman (1977) states that his psychology "has the geographical, historical, and religious limits of our Western tradition" (p. xvi), finding the origins of his psychology south of the Equator in Greece. Yet, this is an exploration to the East of the Equator, towards an Eastern tradition, a journey from the Occident, where the sun sets, to the Orient, where the sun rises and illuminates the cosmos. This work is in response to an invitation issued by Hillman (1977) alluding to the fact that many branches of archetypal psychology have not been followed back to their origin.

This study is also a continuation, in the tradition of Carl Jung, of psychological reflection and interpretation of mystical themes and experiences that predate any form of psychology, yet guide us towards all forms of psychology.

Psychology, in its effort to pursue the scientific method and situate itself within the confines of empiricism, has overlooked how the imagination can open the psyche to certain possibilities of perceiving and understanding that are not always available through the senses. One of these ways is the rediscovery of the role of imagination as a tool for gaining access to the spiritual world of the soul. Hillman (1977) believes that the soul has lost its psychological vision in the literalism of the spirit, yet he is reluctant to recognize that imagination can once

again return soul to its spiritual roots by deliteralizing the spiritual. This is an important occurrence for psychology in general, and even more so, for depth psychology as it allows the study of more transpersonal levels of the psyche.

Admittedly, there are differences in Sohrevardi, Jung, and Hillman's mode of utilizing imagination and in how they define the imaginal world in their work. Whereas Sohrevardi focuses more on developing a spiritual perspective on these ideas, based on theophanic mystical experiences, Jung and Hillman develop a psychology, focusing on the ideas as psychological tools in service of expanding ego consciousness. This expansion, however, does not fully tap into more transcendent levels of the psyche where visionary experiences and apparitions are of particular importance and another aspect of the objective reality of the psyche.

Nevertheless, there are points of convergence where Sohrevardi's work extends, amplifies, and possibly might even help complete what has been left unfinished in depth psychology as related to the exploration of the transpersonal psyche. More specifically, this convergence would further suggest the possibility that all psychology may have an unacknowledged supra-sensory, metaphysical basis which cannot be disregarded or ignored.

Based on their speculative nature, metaphysics and spiritual experiences might be considered beyond the realm of study in psychology, although through engaging the imaginative faculty, studying these areas can further broaden the horizons of psychology and bring spirit back into the scope of psychology. Corbett

(1996) points out that “many people are influenced by speculative ideas, so that the psychologist cannot ignore their presence” (p. 165).

The words of Vico from *The New Science* might serve to guide and motivate us further in this endeavor:

As rational metaphysics teaches that man becomes all things by understanding them, imaginative metaphysics show that man becomes all things by not understanding them, for when he does not understand he becomes them by transforming himself into them. (quoted in Hillman, 1991, p. v)

Statement of the problem

This study is guided by the following questions:

1. What influences did Sohravardi’s work have, in relation to introducing the imagination and the imaginal world, to the theoretical foundations of Jungian psychology?
2. How does the visionary journey, as outlined by Sohravardi, depict and demonstrate the spiritual function of the imagination and the imaginal world?
3. How does the individuation process reveal itself through the recitals of Sohravardi?
4. How are the stages of the hero’s journey, as described by Joseph Campbell, depicted through the recitals?

The study of visionary experiences as depicted in the recitals carry us away from the Greek sources of Western psychology, calling upon Islamic scholars like

Sohravardi and his exploration of the imaginal world to recover a third space, hidden in the conflict between mind and matter. Through this move the soul is liberated from literalization, freed from religious confines, and once again is given an authentic voice in a place of grace.

Chapter 3 Literature Review

The literature review pertaining to imagination and the imaginal world is covered in a manner that is specifically focused on and limited to the topic of the present study. The first section covers the literature on Carl Jung's use of imagination, leading to his discovery of active imagination, his exposure to the Islamic world, and its influence on his ideas. The second section covers James Hillman's ideas about the imaginal world and imagination. The third section, which includes Henri Corbin's ideas about the *Mundus Imaginalis*, is relevant to but not based in depth psychology.

Jung's discovery of active imagination

Jung, one of the most prominent figures of 20th-century depth psychology, elaborated on the importance of the use of imagination in his analytic psychology. Jung (1923/1971) believed that imagination served to guide the innovative and creative activity of the psyche, stating: "Every good idea and all creative work are the offspring of the imagination. . . . The debt we owe to the play of imagination is incalculable" (p. 63).

Jung (1958/1966) realized and valued the use of imagination in his psychology as a means of facilitating self-understanding through exploring the psyche. In this regard he states: "All the works of man have their origin in creative imagination" (p. 45).

Jung's aim in his psychology was to uncover unconscious material and to bring that material into awareness as a means of exploring unresolved complexes to expand consciousness. He recognized the importance of using imagination to achieve this aim. According to Chodorow (1997), Jung's analytic psychology was founded upon the innate curative role of the imagination. Through first-hand personal experience, Jung realized the benefits of using the images produced through the imagination as a means to accomplish this goal.

An aspect of the psyche that Jung found important was its image-producing capacity, which pointed towards the contents of the unconscious. As Sells (2000) notes, "Every psychic process is an image and imagining" (p. 5). Jung believed that in order to come to terms with the contents of the unconscious psyche, it had to be understood through the images it produced in dreams and in wakeful states. Jung contended that these images possessed a symbolic value that, when activated through the imagination and explored deeply, would bring unconscious content to the forefront of consciousness.

Jung's interest in imagination started in the years 1913-1916, the period after his break up with Freud. In his autobiography, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Jung (1963/1989) recalls that this was a time of great confusion for him:

After the parting of the ways with Freud, a period of inner uncertainty began for me. It would be no exaggeration to call it a state of disorientation. I felt totally suspended in mid-air, for I had not yet found my own footing. (p. 170)

The break from his mentor had unsettled and disillusioned him, leading him to undermine and question his own professional work. He felt anxious, fearful, and overwhelmed about what the future held for him and his role in psychology. In his autobiography he writes, "I lived as if under constant inner pressure. At times this became so strong that I suspected there was some psychic disturbance in myself" (1963/1989, p. 173).

In seeking answers and not knowing what to do, he began to experiment with various ways of entering into his own unconscious mind (Chodorow, 1997). Jung notes, "Since I know nothing at all, I shall simply do whatever occurs to me. Thus, I consciously submitted myself to the impulses of the unconscious" (p. 173). Jung's autobiography provides an intimate view of his first-hand personal experience of entering into his own unconscious mind through the use of imagination (Jung, 1963/1989). Through the use of imagination, Jung entered into the world of his psyche, recalling and reliving previously overwhelming experiences of his childhood years in the company of past and imaginary companions.

Jung started to engage with unconscious material that seemed to be coming through to him from his past memories in the form of images. His initial memory was of being 10-11 years old, re-enacting the games of his childhood years. He recalled that these memories were accompanied by the same emotions he had originally felt in his childhood years.

Jung (1963/1989) writes: “To my astonishment, this memory was accompanied by a good deal of emotion. ‘Aha’, I said to myself, there is still life in these things. The small boy is still around, and possesses a creative life which I lack” (p. 174).

Through this experience he realized that within him that child was still living. Jung wanted to establish a relationship with this child figure: “I wanted to re-establish contact with that period; I had no choice but to return to it and take up once more that child’s life with his childish games” (p. 174). Once again Jung engaged himself in building villages with stones and rocks, as he had done in his childhood years. Through this experience he eventually came to solve one of the longstanding complexes of his life having to do with his religious convictions.

Through the use of imagination, and by using the images he perceived while involved in the act of imagining and dialoging with unconscious (imaginal) figures, he was able to find a way to re-live past experiences of his life and re-create them in the present. In this manner, he was able to approach his unconscious, expand his consciousness, and gain a greater insight and clarity into his life.

In the process, he also discovered the importance of imagination as the royal road by which he came to his own self-awareness and understanding. He attributed this self-understanding to uncovering the images that held his emotions: “Had I left those images hidden in the emotions, I might have been torn to pieces by them” (Jung, 1963/1989, p. 177).

By translating these emotions into images, he was able “to find the images which were concealed in the emotions” (p. 177), thereby giving these emotions a form of expression. Through this experience, Jung discovered a process of utilizing the imagination as a tool to become more attentive towards, and to further reveal, unconscious psychic processes related to feeling states. He called this method active imagination and wrote about it extensively in *The Collected Works*. Jung (1950/1976) used active imagination as a method to bestow upon images produced in wakefulness and dreams “a life of their own” (p. 171).

The potential such an organ uncovers is apparent in Jung’s words where he writes that active imagination “is the active evocation of inner images” (1944/1953c, p. 160). By giving images and the figures manifested through active imagination their own autonomy, they were freed from subjective and reductive interpretations that would otherwise limit their symbolic expression.

Jung’s use of active imagination was intended to differentiate and delineate unconscious contents that came into consciousness in the process of engaging the imagination. This method moved one into a dialogue between the ego and an image that was produced in the psyche; deepened by establishing a relationship with that image. All the while, the attempt was to establish an interaction between intra-psychic and interpsychic experiences.

Jung’s recognition of a mediating realm connecting both the conscious and the unconscious world is demonstrated in his utilization of active imagination. For

Jung, entering the unconscious world through the use of active imagination was entering into the imaginal realm. However, Jung referred to the imaginal realm as the *psychoid* and in his autobiography wrote:

I have, therefore, even hazarded the postulate that the phenomenon of archetypal configurations which are psychic events *par excellence* may be founded upon a *psychoid* base, that is, upon an only partially and possibly altogether different form of being. . . . Nevertheless, we have good reason to suppose that behind this veil there exists the uncomprehended absolute object which affects and influences us and to suppose it even, or particularly, in the case of psychic phenomena about which no verifiable statements can be made. (1963/1989, p. 352)

In the previous quote, Jung's description of the psychoid alludes to the presence of a transcendent reality. Spiegelman (1976), interpreting Jung's notion of the psychoid, states that Jung is describing that beyond

[t]he world of the psyche and its causal manifestations and relations in time and space, there exists a trans-psychic reality (the collective unconscious), where both time and space are relativized. . . . The archetypes are then conceived of as "psychoid", i.e., not exclusively psychic. Jung referred here to the archetype *per se*, not traditional archetypal images. This "psychoid archetype" is an unknowable factor which arranges both psychical and physical events in typical patterns. . . . The psychoid archetype lies behind both psyche and matter and expresses itself typically in synchronistic events. (p. 108)

Thus, according to Jung's description, one experiences the psychoid nature of the archetypes through entering a nonordinary realm, which can be described as relating to the imaginal world. Similarly, a significant development stemming from Sohravardi's teachings, as they relate to Jungian archetypal psychology, is the notion of the Orient of Lights and its symbolic visionary geography which lacks any type of topography in the material world. This Orient which will be discussed

further in chapter 6 is the psychoid in Jungian psychology and the imaginal world as referred to in archetypal psychological literature.

Jung wrote his first paper on active imagination in 1916, entitled *The Transcendent Function*. Jung (1919/1969) described the transcendent function as the arising of images from “the union of conscious and unconscious contents” (p. 69). In another description of the transcendent function, he describes it as follows:

The tendencies of the conscious and the unconscious are the two factors that together make up the transcendent function. It is called transcendent because it makes the transition from one attitude to another organically possible, without loss of the unconscious. (p. 73)

In this paper he introduces active imagination as his new psychotherapeutic method and alludes to the image-producing function of the psyche as being natural and instinctive. This image-producing transcendent function aims to keep an open dialogue between the conscious and the unconscious aspects of the psyche. In this paper he also describes the various forms of active imagination in play, dreams, visions, art, and poetry. Here, Jung’s emphasis is on the variety of ways of gaining access to the unconscious through the use of images and the faculty of imagination.

Jung further developed active imagination as a therapeutic method with his patients. He invited them to focus on a certain emotion until an image appeared to them. This image was allowed to form and express the feeling content of the person’s situation. He then would guide them to look at the images, describe them in detail, and dialogue with the figures that came through in the image.

By invoking different inner voices to speak, the patient experienced an enormous release of energy. Active imagination became an imaginal conversation between the patient's conscious and the unconscious, a way of bringing unconscious thoughts, translated into images, into awareness.

For Jung, the great benefit of this experience was to use imagination as a way to "differentiate oneself from these unconscious contents by personifying them, and at the same time to bring them into relationship with consciousness" (Jung, 1963/1989, p. 187). Through the act of personifying the images of the unconscious, ego consciousness was put in dialogue with and integrated into another form of consciousness.

Jung realized that in order to enter into the imaginal realm, one had to develop a particular type of awareness, what Watkins (2003) refers to as a particular way of looking *at images*. Here Jung is alluding to the development of a consciousness that is different from that of ego consciousness, one that is imaginal and that looks at images produced in a dialogical and symbolic way.

Watkins (2003) notes, "In Jung's subjective method of analysis one seeks to see the symbolic contents not as references solely to memory and real things in the external world but to different elements or parts of the person himself" (p. 44).

In this manner, in an attempt to tap into the unconscious meaning of images, imagination gains a medial quality and becomes the threshold between

consciousness and the unconscious, used to activate an imaginal type of a consciousness in waking life and in dreams.

According to Ulanov and Ulanov (1999), “Properly understood and pursued, the imagination is perhaps our most reliable way of bringing the world of the unconscious into some degree of consciousness and our best means of corresponding with the graces offered us in the life of the spirit” (p. 3).

Ultimately, Jung used the imagination as a means of communication between the two realms of the unconscious and conscious. In this context, Jung gave imagination primacy as an important psychological tool. In the process, he also gave recognition to a third realm, between the conscious and unconscious mind, where imagination had a mediatory role.

Jung’s use of the imagination as a tool for entry into the unconscious psyche opened up a reality on par with that of the conscious world. This inner world perceived through the imagination helped Jung better differentiate various structures and functions of the psyche (Chodorow, 1997). This discovery further helped Jung gain insights into the many concepts he proposed in his psychology. Concepts like the Shadow, Self, and Anima were all discovered in the process of his own personal active imagination, manifested as imaginal figures like Philemon, with whom he often dialogued (Raff, 2000).

Jung's contributions created a novel world for the imagination. He created a space for unconscious contents to break through and manifest as personified figures that could be explored and deepened. Jung (1944/1953b) writes:

[T]o cause things in the shadows to appear; and to take away the shadow from them. . . . All these things happen and the eyes of the common man do not see them, but the eyes of understanding and of the imagination perceive them with the true and truest vision. (p. 239)

Jung's interest in imagination took him to various non-Western cultures in pursuit of gaining a non-Western perspective and gathering research to confirm the universality of some of the images he encountered himself and in his patients. Additionally, he was inspired to take on this task in order to seek the foundation for some of his ideas in non-Western traditions for the sake of gaining a sense of rootedness to his own work and culture. Jung (1963/1989) states:

In traveling to Africa to find a psychic observation post outside the sphere of the European, I unconsciously wanted to find that part of my personality which had become invisible under the influence and the pressure of being European. (p. 244)

During these travels, which he described in his autobiography, he met with clear evidence of the universality of the imagination as a mediator between the known and the unknown world. In a series of travels to Africa, Egypt, Kenya, Uganda, and India, he further developed his theory of active imagination through the influence these cultures had on him. It is in these travels that Jung also came into first-hand contact with Islamic culture and philosophy.

The most extensive exposure to Islam came from his travels to North Africa and Egypt. In his autobiography are references to and reflections on his experience of being exposed to Islamic culture. He reflects and comments on his contact with Islamic culture, the people, and how the experience affected his thinking:

These people live from their affects, are moved and have their being in emotions. Their consciousness takes care of their orientation in space and transmits impressions from outside, and it is also stirred by inner impulses and affects. (Jung, 1963/1989, p. 242)

Another example of contact with Islam is a dream Jung had about being in an Arab city:

I dreamt that I was in an Arab city; and as in most such cities there was a citadel, a Kasbah. The city was situated in a broad plain, and had a wall around it. The shape of the wall was square, and there were four gates. (Jung, 1963/1989, p. 242)

Throughout other parts of his autobiography, Jung mentions other interactions and exposures he had with Islamic culture. In the chapter entitled “Student Years”, Jung mentions that his father had studied Oriental languages “and had done his dissertation on the Arabic version of the Song of Songs” (p. 91). This exposure may have contributed to Jung’s later interest in Islam and alchemy, and to his knowledge about Islam and the Koran.

Jung wrote no specific essay on Islam; the few references noted in his autobiography were based on his travels and impressions. This in itself is rather surprising, since his writings have been greatly influenced by various world religions, with this interest starting as early as the age of 6.

In his autobiography he writes:

I remember a time when I could not yet read, but pestered my mother to read aloud to me out of the *Orbis Pictus*, an old, richly illustrated children's book, which contained an account of exotic religions, especially that of the Hindus. There were illustrations of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva which I found an inexhaustible source of interest. (p. 17)

The one exception in *The Collected Works* about writing from Islamic sources is in Volume 9, titled *Concerning Re-birth*, which includes the most substantive reference to Islam and the Koran. In the essay, Jung uses the figure of *Khidr* and the 18th Sura (chapter) of the Koran to demonstrate “an almost perfect picture of a psychic transformation or Rebirth which today, with our greater psychological insight, we would recognize as an individuation process” (Jung, 1938/1969c, p. 147). Jung was not versed in the Arabic language, but using interpretations by various Islamic scholars that were available to him, he wrote a psychological interpretation of that story using the symbolism presented.

In Jung's interpretation, *Khidr* represents an imaginal figure symbolizing the archetype of the Self. According to Jung, this passage is a description of the psychological process of transformation, illustrating the process of individuation, where the ego and the unconscious are brought together. The story of *Khidr* embraces this important concept in Jung's psychology.

Jung's ideas about the imagination, the imaginal world, and the use of active imagination were mostly centered on psychic development leading towards the goal of self understanding and individuation. Left unacknowledged by Jung was

that in this process of psychological development achieving the goal of individuation utilized an implicit religious attitude of transcendence of the person to higher levels of consciousness. Wehr notes, “[T]he process of individuation that must be undergone, is itself an esoteric event which changes people to the depth of their being, extends their consciousness, and brings their personality to the maturity of the whole person (Raff, 2000, p. 4). Furthermore, the foundational influences which are carried throughout the individuation process, lead primarily to religious themes that Jung was exposed to in his own life and work.

Even though Jung spoke of transpersonal and spiritual experiences through the development of the notion of the psychoid archetype he never fully explored these areas because of his scientific background. In his autobiography he notes, “For lack of empirical data I have neither knowledge nor understanding of such forms of being, which are commonly called spiritual. From the point of view of science, it is immaterial what I may believe on that score and I must accept my ignorance” (Jung 1963/1989, p. 352).

Jung’s ideas converge towards a metaphysics that he developed in his psychology, yet never fully acknowledged or developed. An incomplete metaphysics due to Jung’s determination to stay scientific and empirically grounded, and his hesitation to tread into nonfactual, transcendent realities, constrained his exploration of the spiritual depths of the imagination.

In depth psychology there is such a division between metaphysics and psychology. Jung (1944/1953a) states:

The process of fission which separated the *physika* from the *mystika* set in at the end of sixteenth century and provided a quite fantastic species of literature whose authors were, at least to some extent, conscious of the psychic nature of their 'alchemical' transmutations. (p. 218)

Jung associates this division with the alchemists of that era, yet Corbin sees it as "a result of the loss of the individual's direct connection with the transcendent world of symbols and symbolic knowledge that is *gnosis*" (Cheetham, 2002, p. 47). In this regard, a dialogue with Sohrevardi's work might extend and amplify what Jung left incomplete and unfinished in his work.

Hillman's Archetypal Psychology

Another Western scholar who emphasizes the role of imagination in depth psychology is James Hillman, the originator of archetypal psychology. Hillman (2004) explains that archetypal psychology "starts neither in the physiology of the brain, the structure of language, the organization of society, nor the analysis of behavior, but in the process of imagination" (p. 19).

With this definition, Hillman emphasizes the significance of imagination as a means whereby one can gain a deeper understanding of the world. Archetypal psychology is not a specific type of a psychology, but is used in conjunction with other disciplines to emphasize the role of imagination as the primary mode to gain access to the unconscious. Its fundamental theory lies in the idea that the unconscious cannot be accessed directly, but finds expression through images and

symbols. This is accomplished by being “able to see into, behind and below manifest behavior . . . without the idea of the unconscious we could not see through behavior into its hidden unknown” (Hillman, 1977, p. 141).

Following Jungian psychology, archetypal psychology has further opened up a space for imagination, the imaginal world and its content to have spatiality. In *Re-Visioning Psychology* Hillman (1977) notes that somewhere between mind and matter there exists a third place where imagination reigns which is the landscape of the soul. Hillman asserts:

We have lost the third, middle position which earlier in our tradition and in others too, was the place of soul: a world of imagination, passion, fantasy, reflection, that is neither physical nor material on the one hand, nor spiritual and abstract on the other, yet bound to them both. (p. 68)

In archetypal psychology, the middle ground of psychic realities where soul reveals itself is termed the imaginal world. The term *imaginal*, as used in archetypal psychology, is borrowed from Henri Corbin’s translation of *imaginalis*, which in turn Corbin translated from the Persian recitals of Sohrawardi (*Nakoja-Abad*) meaning a place of No-Where, yet having extant. According to Hillman (1977), the imaginal world, located between the world of the senses and the world of the intellect, is the soul’s province. Hillman (2004), borrowing from Corbin, writes:

The Mundus Imaginalis [imaginal world] offers an ontological mode of locating the archetypes of the psyche, as the fundamentally imaginative phenomena that are transcendent to the world of sense in their value if not their appearance. . . . The Mundus Imaginalis provides for archetypes a valuative and cosmic grounding, when this is needed. (p. 15)

The recognition of the existence of an imaginal world is necessary in order to situate soul in a place of appearance to be manifested and experienced. Hillman uses the imaginal world as a metaphor for the realm of the unconscious. By entering the imaginal world, one gains an understanding of what soul is calling out for, in a place of seeing through events and deepening them, as a way of communicating with soul. The meaning of the soul comes through in the act of “transposing meaning and releasing interior, buried significance” (Hillman, 1979, p. 102).

The idea of soul is fundamental to archetypal psychology, and its emphasis is on bringing soul back into the study of psychology through the process of soul making. According to Hillman (2004), archetypal psychology’s foremost concern and interest is the soul and how “to hear psyche [soul] speak through all things of the world, thereby recovering the world as a place of soul” (p. 28). Yet, as Bishop (1987) notes, “listening to soul is an activity to be shared among various disciplines [and] cannot be claimed solely by psychology” (p. 146).

Archetypal psychology holds, as its central concept, a new notion of soul and how it is revealed in human life, emphasizing that the soul has an “in-between” stance, holding matter in relation to spirit (Hillman, 2004).

Hillman (1977) defines soul as follows:

By soul I mean, first of all, a perspective rather than a substance, a viewpoint toward things rather than a thing itself. This perspective is reflective; it mediates events and makes differences between everything and ourselves that happen. Between events, between the doer and the deed, and us there is a reflective moment-and soul making means differentiating this middle ground. (p. x)

Hillman's definition is a movement from a material to a more subtle perspective that is difficult to detect or grasp by the mind. He writes that the "soul is constituted of images . . . [that are] the self generating activity of the soul itself" (p. 18). He further notes that "the soul is primarily an imagining activity" (p. 18), used for formation of images. For Hillman (2004), soul constitutes the imaginative possibilities in all humans, realized through images, in reflective moments, contemplation, and in dreams. Here, through an act of imagining, the archetypal patterns present in our psyche are revealed. Hillman proposes that the imagination "is an activity of the soul" (p. 19), providing for us, by the use of the image, the recognition and comprehension of the archetypes.

Hillman (1979) believes that the images of soul are non-reducible and that "we can't get at an image at all by sense-perception taken in the usual Aristotelian or empirical view of it" (p. 130). That is to say, the mode of consciousness associated with the world of senses is not sufficient to the images generated by soul. Here Hillman is alluding to the notion that images are not similar to visual pictures seen only through the eyes, but require a different mode for perceiving them.

In order to perceive these soul images, Hillman (1979) proposes a “derangement of the senses” (p. 131), stating that rather than “knowing about images,” we need to “sense images” in an act of retraining ourselves in imagining the image. Understanding this statement requires one to engage in a consciousness that is other than sensual, used solely to relate to the material world.

To accomplish this task and yield entrance into the imaginal world, Hillman proposes the development of an imaginal ego, which is an ego capable of imagining and dreaming. “The imaginal ego realizes that the images are not its own and that even its ego-body and ego feeling and ego-action in a dream belong to the dream image” (p. 102). Accordingly, cultivating this imaginal ego takes one out of learning what the image means by interpreting it, loosening our reliance on reductive definitions, and opens up the field for the image to express itself on its own terms. It is for this reason that Hillman (2004), following Jung, insists we should always “stick to the image” (p. 21), since it provides the principle information about the soul. This information, as perceived through images, symbols, and dreams, is revealed through an act of “personifying” which

[a]llows the multiplicity of psychic phenomena to be experienced as voices, faces, and names. Psychic phenomena can then be perceived with precision and particularity, rather than generalized in the manner of faculty psychology as feelings, ideas, sensations, and the like. (Hillman, 1977, p. 62)

According to Hillman (1977), the act of personifying allows “being in the world and experiencing the world as a psychological field . . . so that events are experiences that touch us, move us, appeal to us” (p. 13). Through personifying, images are deepened and returned to their original source in the imaginal world.

The imaginal world, imagination, and soul were introduced into depth psychology through the works of Jung and Hillman. Yet, the exploration of these ideas and their mode of utilization have been limited to the process of individual psychological growth through the uncovering of unconscious processes in the personal psyche. Although Hillman (1982) has stated that “a true depth psychology is obliged by the nature of the psyche to go below or beyond the psyche” (p. 216), the direction Hillman proposes for this exploration is always a downward descent into the underworld, refusing to give archetypal psychology ascent towards the spiritual world.

Hillman (1977) writes, “Look up, says spirit, gain distance, there is something beyond and above and what is above is always superior” (p. 122). Yet Hillman is hesitant to follow this direction, making a distinction between soul and spirit experiences by differentiating them from one another in two opposite poles. “The world of the spirit is different . . . its direction is vertical and ascending” (Hillman 1977, p. 68). It seems that in his work Hillman favors soul experiences and is biased against the spirit and spiritual experiences.

As Cheetham (2002) states, “in archetypal psychology spirit experiences are not recognized as such” (p. xiii).

According to Cheetham (2002):

Hillman himself has argued for many years now, we need to move beyond the inner-directed emphasis of much psychotherapy to the complex and difficult task of working in that intermediate realm of the alchemical, of subtle bodies, where the geographies of nature and the landscapes of the human soul interpenetrate. We have to learn to inhabit a world where the human and the more-than-human meet in mutual presence. (p. 93)

Hillman has argued that images serve to embody both the human and the Divine, connecting the two with one another. With this move, he has shifted his emphasis from concerns about the material world of existence to a focus on transcending that reality. But, this transcending requires going beyond the personal and towards the transpersonal, which Hillman tends to avoid in his approach. This move requires one to step out of merely developing a secular and profane consciousness, toward that of developing a sacred and spiritual consciousness.

According to Walsh and Vaughan (1993) psychology needs to broaden beyond the traditional theories of personal development, further than what is ordinarily understood as the individual ego and consciousness, encompassing wider aspects of humankind, life, psyche, and the cosmos. This move places the personal in a larger context, and recognizes that transcendence can be expressed through the personal.

Hillman utilizes the imaginal to develop a psychology of the imagination that is a work of seeing through, yet he fails to see through the limitations of his

own psychology concerning the recognition of the role that imagination plays in spiritual experience. Hillman states, “We are always in one or another fantasy, including the fantasy of the soul and the fantasy of the spirit” (p. 118), yet it seems that concerning the spirit he has forgotten that his own axiom is just one of the perspectives by which psyche is revisioned.

Hillman’s ideas about the imagination have been influenced by Jung and to a greater degree by Henri Corbin. From Jung he posits that “image is psyche” (p. 18), asserting that the soul is comprised of images (Hillman, 2004). For this reason, he insists that we must give images that arise from the unconscious our full attention in order to see and hear what the soul is communicating to us. Hillman points out that this *seeing* and *hearing* takes place through imagining and by way of active imagination. Here again, Hillman alludes to a world that is beyond the sensual material world, existing on a different plane, where one must cultivate an awareness by developing an imaginal ego.

From Corbin, Hillman extrapolates the idea of the reality of the imaginal world, the *Mundus Imaginalis*, as the station of the soul, yet for Corbin the *Mundus Imaginalis* was specifically the world of the spirit to which the soul transcends.

In both instances, Hillman does not acknowledge the influence that metaphysics has had on his psychology. More specifically, he fails to acknowledge the metaphysics of Henri Corbin which is derived from his encounters and studies of Iranian Sufi scholars. This metaphysics emphasizes a theophanic perspective

related to seeing visions and apparitions associated with experiencing and communicating with the Divine. What Hillman might refer to as imaginal figures from the unconscious may be seen from the theophanic perspective as images from the super conscious realm of the Divine (Cheetham, 2002) or images of God.

From the theophanic perspective these images, in their presentation, strictly symbolize themselves and reveal only themselves. That is to say, they do not point towards something other than what they are revealing. Here we are reminded of Hillman's (2004) emphasis that we must always "stick to the image" (p. 21) and its presentation, which is very similar to the theophanic perspective of forfeiting any kind of interpretation or analysis. Yet, from the theophanic perspective, where Hillman parts ways with Corbin, the images presented are the images of the Divine in all the various forms and manifestations they reveal themselves.

Del Nevo (1992) points out that this theophanic form of metaphysics has had a profound impact on archetypal psychology by situating the image in a position of autonomy. Yet Hillman, in keeping his psychology distanced from any form of literalistic or dogmatic interpretation, tends to avoid venturing into the world of theophanies, not because theophanies are a literalism or a dogmatism, but because of the notion that visionary and spiritual experiences do not take place in the world of the senses where he has situated his psychology. He exchanges Divine revelation through theophanic images with soul/psyche revelation in the material world. Along with this move he also limits the study of the imaginal in the sphere

of psychology, extrapolating spiritual experiences from his psychology (Cheetham, 2002).

Hillman and Jung point out that in their psychology they are not engaged in any form of metaphysics. They state that spiritual and mystical experiences belong to the study of metaphysics, which psychology does not engage. For them the imaginal is an extending out and an extension into a deeper level of the unconscious, and the imagination is the mode to access that unconscious. From this perspective, the imagination is an interworld connecting the unconscious to the conscious mind, the interior to the exterior or from the Sufi perspective, the esoteric to the exoteric.

If permitted and more importantly appreciated, exploration of spiritual experiences via the imagination can take depth psychology beyond its empirical foundations and into more subtle otherworldly reaches. This move can only further expand the reach of depth psychology as not only the discipline of the soul, but the spirit as well, thereby ceasing to exile spirit for the sake of the soul. This endeavor, however, requires another type of an orientation, one that is imaginal.

Henri Corbin and the Sufi tradition

In order to understand an orientation that is imaginal, we must venture beyond depth psychology and its emphasis on exploration of the personal and archetypal psyche, and move towards a spiritual orientation, where connections to the transpersonal psyche and the Divine intelligence are also considered acts of soul

making. Here we are orienting ourselves to a psycho-cosmology, transitioning from a physical to a spiritual realm, which extends the use of the imaginal world and imagination far beyond its use in depth psychology, limited to the task of healing the symptom. This is a vertical journey symbolized by the ascent of soul towards the imaginal world. A journey guided by the imagination from the Occident of material existence to the Orient of spiritual existence.

As the French Islamic scholar Henri Corbin (1971/1994) states,

This Quest for the Orient is the ascent out of cartographical dimensions, the discovery of the inner world which secretes its own light, which is the world of light; it is an innerness of light as opposed to the spatiality of the outer world which, by contrast, will appear as Darkness. (p. 5)

Corbin focused most of his non-Western studies on Iranian pre-Islamic and Islamic mysticism. He translated and offered personal reflections on some of the most creative Iranian-Islamic scholars, including Mulla Sadra, Ibn-Cina, and Sohrawardi.

Corbin's writings are immense, complicated, and at times difficult to interpret. His work must be approached in small doses, with patience, and a perspective open to navigate into other worldly realms without judgment. The present work cannot offer an extended study of Corbin's ideas, but can only glance into this scholar's ideas limited to the area under investigation. In this review, aspects of Corbin's work that relate to the topic will be highlighted. In chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8, Corbin will be revisited and a more through exploration of his work will be offered in the context of those chapters.

Henri Corbin's work is a precursor to depth psychology, which is associated with the work of Carl Jung and James Hillman. The bulk of Corbin's work was originally written in French, and although some of his work has been translated into English, the majority remains untranslated, awaiting thorough psychological reflection and interpretation. Corbin's endeavor, much like Sohrevardi's, was to re-establish a forgotten dialogue amongst Zoroastrian, Islamic, and Western philosophical thought which existed for a short time in the 12th century CE and to demonstrate the confluence among these traditions (Corbin, 1976/1998).

Corbin's concern was the esoteric nature of these religious and philosophical systems. Corbin's idea of esotericism involved "the transformative movement from the outer to the inner It is a movement of love that, occurring in, by, and through the soul, is none other than the soul's return to its true self or Lord" (Corbin, 1976/1998, p. xv). This passage from an exterior reality to a more subtle interior reality serves to unveil and reveal the spiritual nature of the soul to itself. As Corbin states, "I was a hidden Treasure and I yearned to be known" (1958/1997, p. 114). This encounter takes place in the imaginal world, which is the spiritual world.

According to Corbin (1976/1998), this is the realm "where theophany and hermeneutics coincide. . . . Here human and divine imaginations meet and the pure intelligible archetypes enter knowledge" (p. xx). In this context imagination serves

as an organ of cognition separate from sense perception and intellectual understanding, able to penetrate and perceive more subtle realities and presences.

Corbin's definition of imagination is different from the definition used in depth psychology. His idea about the use of imagination is not as a psychological tool; rather the imagination is a medium used to gain a more intimate knowledge of one's interior spiritual states, in order to develop an awareness of and to experience the Divine. In this context imagination serves to move one away from sense perception and into a spiritual space for the purpose of transformation of consciousness.

Corbin (1958/1997) proposes that the function of imagination is theogony, or a way of apprehending the Divine:

God can be known to us only in what we experience of Him . . . take Him as an object of our contemplation, not only in our innermost hearts but also before our eyes and in our imagination, as though we saw Him, or better still, so that we really see Him. (p. 146)

The comprehending that Corbin is referring to is achieved by directing the imagination to transform sense data into symbols that reveal the Divine to human understanding. This is an act of hermeneutics known in Islam as *ta'wil*.

Corbin (1954/1988) defines *ta'wil* as "to cause to return, to lead back, to restore to one's origin and to a place where one comes home" (p. 29). In this definition the act of *ta'wil* becomes a spiritual exegesis and provides "the means of going beyond all conformisms, all servitudes to the letter, all opinions accepted ready made" (p. 28). Corbin further points out that *ta'wil* indicates "an exegesis

which is at the same time an exodus, a going out of the soul toward the Soul” (p. 28).

Corbin (1954/1988) states:

When a thing manifested to the senses or the intellect calls for a hermeneutics (*ta'wil*) because it carries a meaning which transcends the simple datum and makes that thing a symbol, this symbolic truth implies a perception on the plane of the active imagination. (p. 190)

What Corbin is describing is the mapping of the human interior through the imagination by utilizing active imagination, which is “the organ that produces symbols and apprehends them; it [active imagination] presupposes the angelic world intermediate between the pure Cherubic intelligences and the universe of sensory, historical, and juridical facts”(p. 14). Active imagination is “essentially the organ of theophanies, because it is the organ of Creation and because Creation is essentially theophany” (p. 190). In this capacity, active imagination’s central function is to gain a spiritual hermeneutics, by way of making perception and imagination theophanic and unveiling the image of the Divine to Man.

Corbin (1958/1997) postulates that imagination has a cosmic quality and views it as being the creative power that creates the world of the senses. The act of imagining is a creative act which at the Divine level is a form of genesis where God draws out existence from Himself. God imagines the cosmos and brings it into being in an act of imagination. Corbin further differentiates from Jung and Hillman in how he defines imagination. He states, “Here we shall not be dealing with imagination in the usual sense of the word: neither with fantasy, profane or

otherwise, nor with the organ which produces imaginings identified with the unreal; nor shall we even be dealing exactly with what we look upon as the organ of ethic creation” (p. 3).

Corbin believes that the role of this “organ” is to dissolve concrete knowledge into visionary form, with the intention of separating the person from ego consciousness, and guiding him towards developing an imaginal consciousness. Imaginal consciousness, as defined very similarly by Hillman as an imaginal ego, is a type of perception or mode of being that is necessary to yield entrance into the imaginal world. The divergence appears when Hillman fails to recognize the use of the imaginal ego and the imaginal world as they were originally intended for perceiving and gaining an intimate experience with the Divine.

Corbin (1964/1995) introduces imagination as the faculty which allows access into the imaginal world of the spirit. He states, “This world of image [is] a world as ontologically as real as the world of the senses and that of the intellect” (p. 9). He further points out that the imaginal world entails an objective reality of its own, including its own mode of perception. For Corbin and the Iranian scholars he studied, the imaginal world is the metaphysical world of images, where archetypes take form. It is where spirit becomes material and material takes on a subtle form, in a place of union.

The imaginal world is the world that Corbin (1960/1977), in translating it from Persian, expanded upon, and called the *Mundus Imaginalis*. He defines *Mundus Imaginalis* as follows:

Between the intelligible world, which is the world of entirely immaterial pure Intelligences, and the sensory world, which is the world of purely material realities, there exists another universe. The beings of this intermediary universe possess shape and extent, even though they do not have material matter. (p. 144)

The *Mundus Imaginalis* is situated as an intermediary realm between the world of Intelligence and the material world. It is within this world that the archetypal images and forms come into existence. Corbin (1958/1997) asserts that the imaginal world “is the place of theophanic visions, the scene on which visionary events and symbolic histories appear in their true reality” (p. 4). Along with this definition Corbin asserts that the imaginal world provides the spatiality where Divine meets human, in an act of self revelation.

Corbin posits that Man, through the use of imagination, creates a manifestation of God by actual, but not always material appearances, which become part of the larger divine imagination. This view situates the imagination in a place of connecting to and dialoging with the Divine.

A major characteristic of the imaginal world that Corbin highlights in his writings is that it has no extension in space and exists beyond reality as we know it. In the imaginal world, invisible realities become visible and corporeal things are spiritualized. By entering into the imaginal world, the seeker leaves behind the

world of sensory perception and discovers a new way of relating to the cosmos by coming into contact and experiencing spiritual figures. Here, one is neither a part of the material world nor a part of the abstract intellectual world, but exists in a purely subtle form. Through this move, Corbin leaves behind ingrained, dogmatic, anthropomorphic ways of thinking and conceiving of the Divine, letting one awaken to a new understanding of it through first-hand experience.

Corbin was concerned that in Western thought the use of the imaginal has become popular, used whenever any sort of image is presented. On this he writes “the *mundus imaginalis* has nothing to do with what the fashion of our time calls the civilization of the image” (1958/1997, p. xvi). He emphasizes that its use must be limited to what it was intended to achieve, so that its meaning does not get misplaced or tainted. As such, we must follow his advice and honor his guidance: “If one transfers its usage outside [its intended use,] . . . one sets out on a false trail and strays far from the intention which our Iranian philosophers have induced us to restore in our use of this word” (p. xvi).

Corbin’s approach offers a way of understanding consciousness that contrasts with any depth psychology approach, taking the reader far beyond what depth psychology as yet has to offer about understanding our world, our consciousness, and more importantly our relationship with the Divine.

Cheetham (2003) states:

The message that he [Corbin] brings from Iran and from Islam is potentially of such psychological and cultural importance as to make the effort of familiarizing ourselves with his work and the traditions from which it springs more worthwhile. (p. vi)

Corbin's perspective is one of search and exploration, of finding soul and meaning not in the mundane world of appearances, but in the transcendent spiritual world. According to Cheetham (2003), Corbin's inspiration is for us to re-vision our means of preconceived understanding of the world, which currently

converge[s] upon a single unified vision of reality. History, sociology, psychology, biology, physics and engineering, all of the "human" and all of the "natural" sciences are versions of the same reductive program. All are based on laws of historical causality in a world composed wholly of matter in space. (p. 1)

Corbin's concern is that by situating ourselves in this type of a world and accepting a predetermined view of reality, we also accept a fate founded upon materialism, which limits any form of creativity, connectedness, or meaning beyond the material world. According to Cheetham (2003), Corbin proposes a particular mode of being in this world as a way to differentiate our destiny from this predetermined fate and limitation.

The modern world has fallen prey to a deadly agnosticism that can only end in nihilism and has nearly lost the capacity to achieve those modes of being which are oriented towards the eternal, towards that which is on the other side of death. (p. 10)

What Corbin is referring to by modes of being is the establishing of a particular type of a presence in the world, which one is required to be immersed in

to gain access into the imaginal world. In this context, presence is the psychological perceptiveness of being in a situation in which one is absorbed (Heeter, 1992).

Witmer and Singer (1998) define immersion as "a psychological state characterized by perceiving oneself to be enveloped by, included in, and interacting with an environment that provides a continuous stream of stimuli and experiences" (p. 227). The mode of being that Corbin is asserting requires this type of a presence and immersion as a prerequisite for accessing the imaginal world.

Some of the core ideas that are used in archetypal psychology, like the imaginal world and the imagination, have a foundation in Islamic thought. Jungian psychology as a predecessor to archetypal psychology also has some common roots with Iranian-Islamic thought. The writings in Jungian and archetypal psychology, to a greater extent, cover the contributions of Western thinkers to these disciplines, yet less known are the contributions made to these disciplines by Iranian thinkers. These thinkers spiritualized the function of the imagination as an organ of theophany.

This study will investigate the imaginal world as the spiritual world of soul, imagination as the spiritual faculty of soul, and soul itself as the archetype of transformation, utilizing the contributions made by Shahabeddin Yahya Sohrawardi in his visionary recitals. Through a psychological interpretation of various themes in the recitals, this work will demonstrate the spiritual aspect of these ideas and

show how they converge with the foundations of Jungian and archetypal psychology.

Carl Jung and James Hillman have emphasized the role imagination plays in their psychologies as a way to gain access into deeper realms of the unconscious. In their writings, they have also emphasized the presence of an imaginal world as the realm of the soul, thereby bringing soul back into the study of psychology. The variation in the use of imagination and the imaginal world in Sohrevardi's writings and in Jungian-archetypal psychology is revealed in their different approaches.

Whereas Sohrevardi prescribed a theophanic function to the imaginal, Jung and Hillman used it in a psychological sense. Corbin (1960/1977) warned against the misuse of the imaginal world, stating that, "If one transfers its usage [the imaginal's] outside its precisely defined schema one sets out on a false trail and strays from the intention which our Iranian philosophers have induced us to restore in our use of this word" (p. xviii). In his writings, Corbin took into account the psychological aspect of the *Mundus Imaginalis*. However, Hillman and to a lesser extent Jung failed to take into account the spiritual notion of the imaginal world.

The origins of the imaginal world, as defined by Sohrevardi, have a spiritual purpose that has not been subject of any depth psychological studies. The imaginal world has foundation not only in Jungian-archetypal psychology, but also in ancient Iranian thought and in less known Iranian figures like Sohrevardi, who has also explored the imaginal world and contributed to its present understanding. It is

in this respect that the present work attempts to situate the imaginal world in its original and proper context.

It is the author's intention that the present study may serve to bridge the cultural and scholarly gap between Jungian-archetypal thought and Iranian Islamic tradition as related to the use of these ideas in their respective disciplines.

Chapter 4 Methodology and Organization of the Study

Method

This work utilizes the hermeneutic research method to provide a depth psychological interpretation of the symbols used in three of Sohravardi's visionary recitals of the account of the soul's return to the imaginal world from its exile in the material world. The hermeneutic design is specifically chosen to focus on the interpretation of the meaning of the symbols used in the texts as they relate to the theme of self-transformation towards individuation described by Jung. In addition, specific attention is also given to the themes that relate to the stages of the hero's journey as illustrated by Joseph Campbell.

In this process, the use of imagination as a spiritual organ of theophany or divine revelation, which guides this journey, will also be explored. The intention behind this interpretation is to offer a new and alternative understanding of what initially might not be evident in Sohravardi's work. In this manner, the literal meaning of his writing becomes revealed through the new interpretation and new meanings and understandings, as related to depth psychology, will emerge from the original material.

Hermeneutics as a method of interpretation pertains to the analysis and exegesis of various sources, focusing on understanding the meaning of an experience, an event, or a text from an alternative perspective. Hermeneutics is concerned with how one interprets rather than with the actual historical and literal

interpretation itself. This method involves the re-examination of pre-established background contexts of understanding and expressing them in a new way (Palmer, 1969). By re-examining the visionary recitals of Sohrawardi and reinterpreting them from a depth psychological theoretical perspective, the researcher will attempt to uncover the psychological significance of these texts by offering a new understanding of them in terms of their spiritual significance.

Palmer (1969) notes that this form of hermeneutics allows for the analysis and understanding of texts based on the specific horizon the researcher looks through in offering an alternative interpretation. In this process, the researcher is always attentive to taking into account deeper meanings that become apparent through the reinterpretation of meanings and symbols in the text from the particular horizon he has chosen. This methodology allows for expounding and elucidating a particular text, in this case Sohrawardi's recitals, as well as the expressions of a particular individual, in this case the researcher and the reader, combined, to gain a deeper understanding of the text and the individual.

The events that take place in the visionary recitals, as explored for their symbolic meaning from a depth psychological perspective, offer a psychological re-visioning and interpretation of these texts. Textual hermeneutics involves such a re-visioning. By looking from different perspectives, near to and far from the source or from mystical to a depth psychological perspective, new perspectives

may emerge from the same source. The method of textual hermeneutics lends itself to the exploration of a text from alternative perspectives.

According to Palmer (1969), through alternating perspectives from one source to another, the meaning of a text emerges. The starting point is the initial reading of the material under investigation, which forms the first grasp on the material one wants to study. A continuous shifting is involved which moves from one author's ideas of the same event to another author and then coming back to the first author until the ideas and the concepts become understandable or new meanings start to emerge. This circular exploration deepens the understanding of the material on each re-iteration, leading to the emergence of possible new understandings.

The purpose of reading a text is interpretation. The textual hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur offers theoretical tools for the interpretation of the meaning of a text in a systematic way. Ricoeur (1976) defines interpretation as

the process by which disclosure of new modes of being gives to the subject a new capacity for knowing himself. If the reference of the text is the project of a world, then it is not the reader who primarily projects himself. The reader rather is enlarged in his capacity of self-projection by receiving a new mode of being from the text itself. (p. 94)

In this quote Ricoeur is suggesting that through reading a new interpretation of a text a reader has an opportunity to be changed by that reading. In this regard Ricoeur (1981) notes, "What must be interpreted is a proposed world which [the reader] could inhabit and wherein I [the reader] could project one of [his] most

possibilities” (p. 142). This is what Ricoeur refers to by engaging the researcher in the “world of the text” (p. 142). But situating and understanding oneself within the “world of the text,” he notes, “is quite the contrary of projecting one’s self and one’s own beliefs and prejudices; it is to let the work and its world enlarge the horizon of the understanding which [the reader] has” (p. 178).

Ricoeur emphasizes that the understanding one has of a text is not the same as the intention the original author may have of that text. He notes that to understand “is not a question of imposing upon the text our finite capacity of understanding the author” (1981, p. 143). Through this move, Ricoeur opens the text to be understood and interpreted in various ways with the original intention of the author not affecting or guiding the new interpretation. Ricoeur states:

To interpret . . . is to appropriate here and now the intention of the text. . . . The intended meaning of the text is not essentially the presumed intention of the author, the lived experience of the writer, but rather what the text means for whoever complies with its injunction. (p. 16)

Ricoeur (1976) describes his method of textual hermeneutics as consisting of understanding, explanation, and appropriation. Interpretation begins with understanding and moves through explanation. Through this process various other interpretations are brought forth, whereby one gains a better grasp of the text. In describing this process Ricoeur notes:

For the sake of a didactic exposition of the dialectic of explanation and understanding, as phases of a unique process, I propose to describe this dialectic first as a move from understanding to explaining and then as a move from explanation to comprehension. The first time, understanding will be a naïve grasping of the meaning of the text as a whole. The second

time, comprehension will be a sophisticated mode of understanding, supported by explanatory procedures. In the beginning, understanding is a guess. At the end, it satisfies the concept of appropriation. (p. 74)

In this passage Ricoeur (1976) is inviting the researcher who is engaged in hermeneutics to “guess” at different meanings of a text, since the original author’s intention is subjective, at times unavailable, or situated in a different tradition. He states, “to construe the meaning as the verbal meaning of the text is to make a guess” (p. 76). The intent is to offer the most adequate interpretation, which is guided by the new perspective or theory that the researcher is trying to make the interpretation. Ricoeur suggests that the adequacy of an interpretation can be based on other theories or by people who are well-informed in the area of research and can support the interpretation.

Through the explanation process, the essential and inherent meaning in the text is uncovered. Ricoeur defines explanation as involving

bringing out the structure, that is the internal relations of dependence which constitute the statics of the text; to interpret is to follow the path of thought opened up by the text, to place oneself *en route* towards the *orient* of the text. (1981, p. 161)

Understanding involves reaching a meaning based on the overall explanations and the themes that have been uncovered in the text. Finally, appropriation is the reader becoming open to the meaning of the text, discovering what it means to him personally, and making “one’s own what was previously foreign” (Ricoeur, 1976, p. 91).

It is through appropriation that the world of the text is opened, leading to changing the readers mode of thought. As Ricoeur (1976) points out, “appropriation implies a moment of dispossession from the egoistic and narcissistic ego” (p. 94). As applied in the context of this research, the three factors that assist in the interpretation of Sohrevardi’s recitals include the following:

a. Understanding: The three recitals under study in this work are short narratives about the journey of the soul from its condition of captivity in the material world and its ascension to the divine source. In the course of this journey the soul must go through various steps, as a rite of initiation, in order to reach the imaginal world of the spirit. This is a journey from the external world to the internal world, whereby the imagination as a spiritual organ provides access to the imaginal world. The journey culminates once the soul locates its cosmic twin or its Angel and is transformed by this experience.

b. Explanation: The goal of the voyage is self-transformation and expansion of consciousness beyond the boundaries of sense perception. The theme of the recitals is one of descent and ascent, as it relates to the process of individuation described by Jung. Furthermore, the narratives depict a tale that is similar to Campbell’s account of the hero’s journey. Although the soul is put in different scenarios, in each recital the goal is always the same: to return itself to its spiritual roots as a way of coming into contact with the Divine.

c. Appropriation: What the visionary journey symbolizes is the struggle of Man in exile and the journey that must be undertaken for finding meaning and overcoming this exiled condition. This is a quest for reorienting oneself from the horizontal plane of existence (the material world of realities) towards a vertical plane (the world of spiritual realities), in an attempt to find meaning for one's life. The quest to orient oneself is one that situates Man in a place of existence whereby he discovers that he is a stranger in this world and longs to return to his homeland and his origins. This return, once accomplished, signifies a change in one's mode of existence, leading to a transformation in one's consciousness.

These factors help in organizing the interpretation of the recitals, allowing for new understandings of these texts from a depth psychological perspective. The main texts used as a source of data for this research include *The Philosophical Allegories and Mystical Treatises* by W. M. Thackston, who edited, translated, and provided a parallel English-Persian account of Sohrevardi's Recitals. In addition, the Persian text *A Descriptive Writing on Sohrevardi's' Rasael Farsi* by S. J. Sajjadi will be utilized to explore the recitals in their original language. Various other texts, especially those by Corbin, Jung, and Campbell, will be used to offer support and assist in the interpretation.

In this study the researcher will analyze the description of the events and address themes that relate to Jung's notion of individuation with the purpose of deepening the understanding of the events in the context of Jung's psychology.

Through this interpretation of the recitals, they are not constrained and limited specifically in the context of religion and philosophy, but understood as a psychological event and interpreted as such.

By applying the textual hermeneutic method to the recitals of Sohravardi and interpreting the texts from a depth psychological perspective, their relevance to depth psychology is demonstrated. This textual interpretation of two modes of thought, one metaphysical and the other psychological and over 800 years apart, attempts to demonstrate how depth psychology can use metaphysical ideas in its endeavor to expand consciousness. Furthermore, this methodical analysis can help situate these mystical accounts in the field of depth psychology.

Packer and Addison (1989) point out that choosing a method for research is dependent on what is being studied. They also point out that the research method must properly be in relation to the goals of the study. The current study is comparative, focusing on the hermeneutics of the symbols in the recitals of Sohravardi, and offering a psychological interpretation of these symbols. I use psychological interpretation to reinterpret Sohravardi's recitals in order to reveal their relevance to depth psychology. The goal is to introduce and to further illuminate Sohravardi's ideas for interested readers and to demonstrate the spiritual aspects of the imaginal world and the imagination. Through comparative textual hermeneutics, two separate worlds, one Eastern and the other Western, are brought into contact with one another.

Corbin's work on Sohrevardi's writings is also a hermeneutic account of that Islamic thinker's ideas. Even though Corbin does a magnificent job of bringing many of Sohrevardi's works to the Western reader, his writings are based in the philosophical tradition, not in depth psychology.

In addition, Corbin's Western cultural background and his philosophical worldview may have skewed his understanding and interpretations. In order to gain a deeper meaning and uncover a new understanding of Sohrevardi's writings, it would be preferable, as Schleiermacher suggests, to be immersed in the socio-cultural context in which the work was created (Palmer, 1969).

Palmer (1969) states the following:

When a text is in the reader's own language, the clash between the world of the text and that of its reader may escape notice. When a text is in a foreign language, however, the contrast in perspectives and horizons can no longer be ignored. (p. 26)

Corbin spent many years in Iran, learned the language, and was immersed in the socio-cultural system of Iran; nevertheless he was not a native of the same culture, and his horizons and perspectives were primarily those of a Westerner. Therefore, given that the author of this study is a native Iranian and shares the same language and culture as Sohrevardi, it is possible that the horizons and perspectives of Corbin and this researcher may differ. As a result, our hermeneutic understanding of Sohrevardi's writings may also differ.

Furthermore, this difference in horizons and the application of a different theory, in this case depth psychological theory, may produce a new understanding of Sohrevardi's work.

Through the hermeneutic process and with the author's foreknowledge and pre-understanding of Sohrevardi's socio-cultural world, the visionary recitals will be explored from a depth psychological perspective.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into eight chapters. This chapter and the three that preceded it have provided an introduction to and overview of the work, discussed the literature regarding imagination and the imaginal world, focusing on the works of Jung, Hillman, and Corbin, and introduced the methodology of the study.

Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 will focus on Shahabeddin Yahya Sohrevardi. Chapter 5 will introduce Sohrevardi and include a condensed biography of this scholar's life and the cultural context within which he wrote his work. This chapter will also introduce Sohrevardi's Oriental Illuminationist Wisdom and highlight areas that are relevant to the topic of this work. Chapter 6 will introduce how the imagination and the imaginal world were perceived by Sohrevardi, utilizing Corbin and other authors' accounts of Sohrevardi's work. Chapter 7 will introduce the three visionary recitals under study in this work and summarize their common themes as being the journey of soul from the material world to the imaginal world of the spirit. In this chapter emphasis will be given to how each recital puts the soul

in a different context as way of exploring this journey. This chapter will further explore the symbolism of the recitals and offer a psychological interpretation of the main themes addressed in them as associated with Jung's psychology of individuation.

In chapter 8, three of the main ideas that form Jung's psychology, including, the concepts of the collective unconscious, individuation, and archetypes will be explored from Sohravardi's perspective, as demonstrated in the recitals. Also in that chapter, the process of individuation, as explained by Jung, will be discussed, and convergent points associated with the individuation process as depicted in the recitals will be highlighted.

This will be followed by exploring the parallels in the recitals as they relate to the hero's journey, as described by Joseph Campbell. Points of convergence between the stages of the hero's quest as they relate to the stages of the soul's progress towards the imaginal world will be highlighted.

Chapter 5 Sohravardi's Life and Works

Sohravardi's Life

Sohravardi's writings are relatively unknown in depth psychology, although some scholars have introduced his work into Western scholarly circles. In the West, Sohravardi's writings have been under study and of interest to scholars of religion, philosophy, and theosophy.

More recently, in a move to bridge the gap between archetypal psychology and its non-Western roots, Hillman (2004) has mentioned Sohravardi as an indirect contributor to archetypal psychology. Hillman has stated, "Corbin's work on Avicenna, Ibn Arabi and Sohravardi also belong in this tradition [archetypal psychology]" (p. 16).

A search for published material about Sohravardi's work resulted in listings in philosophy and religious literature. His name and his work have also been referenced in a handful of depth psychological dissertations, offered as supporting material towards other topics. However, there are no published works or dissertations in depth psychological literature dedicated to this scholar or any aspect of his work as related to depth psychology. Due to this lack of literature in psychology, we can only follow this scholar through his influence and work in related fields of philosophy, religion, and Middle Eastern studies.

Sajjadi (1997) provides a comprehensive biography of Sohravardi's life. He points out that Shahabeddin Yahya ibn Habash ibn Amirak al-Sohravardi (1153-

1191 AD), was born in the village of Sohrevardi located in the northern part of Iran. Sohrevardi's interest in philosophy and Sufi thought led him to travel to various regions in Iran and the Middle East. He received his early education in Isfahan-Iran. After completing his formal education, he traveled to Maragah to study philosophy. As he grew older he journeyed to other Islamic countries to meet and learn from other masters the ways of the Sufis. This in turn led to his decision to enter the Sufi path himself, turning the focus of his studies towards meditations and mystical matters.

In one of his wanderings in search of wisdom he went to Aleppo-Syria, where he met Malik Zahir, the son of the infamous Egyptian Moslem leader and warrior Salah-adin. Malik Zahir was partial to the ways of the Sufis and invited select scholars to stay in his royal court. Malik Zahir found Sohrevardi's philosophy interesting and invited Sohrevardi to remain in Aleppo and become a part of his royal court, an offer which Sohrevardi accepted.

Nasr (1976) notes that Sohrevardi's knowledge in philosophy, his expression of mystical Sufi teachings, and his willingness to question dogmatic religious beliefs created certain enemies in Malik Zahir's court. The more orthodox scholars felt threatened by his knowledge and were offended by the explicit and freethinking way he presented his philosophical, political, and religious opinions and took it upon themselves to ask Malik Zahir for his execution as punishment for what they saw as religious profanities. However, Malik Zahir denied their request,

causing them to take their case to his father Salah-adin. This was the period when Salah-adin had conquered Syria from the Christian Crusaders, and in order to uphold his authority in the region, he wanted to maintain the support of the religious leaders. Hence, Salah-adin convinced his son to submit to the demands of the orthodoxy. Sohrevardi was accused of religious blasphemy and imprisoned. He died in prison in 1191 CE at the age of 38 and became known as *al-Maqtul* or the martyred one.

The details of Sohrevardi's death have been the subject of much speculation, but according to Nasr (1976), he was either suffocated or died from starvation. Nasr (2002) also believes that Sohrevardi's downfall was ultimately caused by his "entanglement in the religio-political struggles of Syria" (p. 170). Corbin (1958/1997) views Sohrevardi's death as the result of being "a victim of the rabid intolerance of the doctors of the Law and Salah-adin" (p. 19). Because this was a period when sectarian opposition and dogmatic intolerance were responsible for many lost lives, Nasr and Corbin's views are historically supported.

In order to understand Sohrevardi's life, his work, and even his death, one must understand the socio-political climate of his time. He lived in a time of great turmoil. This was the time of the Christian-Moslem wars. Salah-adin was seen by Moslems as a powerful leader who would bring victory to Islam by defeating the Christian forces. In such a state, there was little tolerance for a young philosopher

who talked about and taught mystical states associated with a wisdom tradition that was pre-Islamic and considered obsolete at the time.

In order to restore this forgotten wisdom tradition and to retrieve and resurrect the philosophy of ancient Iran, Sohrevardi's sought to link Islamic and pre-Islamic thought with Greek Neo-Platonism (Shayegan, 1996). In this attempt Sohrevardi was trying to bring together Zoroastrian, Greek, and Islamic thought, believing that the essence of all divine wisdom was in one single Truth that applied to all religions. His motivation toward such an attempt may have been directly linked with the turmoil of religions against one another, especially Christianity and Islam. In a time when the Christians and the Moslems were waging a bloody battle against one another in the name of God, Sohrevardi's attempt to call for unity may have been seen as a dangerous message that could weaken the Islamic political position and its cause.

Sohrevardi's Works

Through his life and death Sohrevardi inadvertently followed in the footsteps of other visionaries who had been silenced because of the message they carried. Although his life spanned less than 40 years, he produced a series of works which established him as the founder of a new philosophy in the Muslim world. This new philosophy became known as the school of Illuminationist Wisdom or *Hekmat-e Eshraq* in Persian. Sohrevardi himself became known as the Master of Illumination, or in Persian, *Hakim-e Eshraghi*. This philosophy is an integration of

religious and philosophical traditions of diverse cultures including ancient Persian Zoroastrian philosophy, as well as Pythagorean, Platonic, Neo-Platonic, and Hermetic philosophies (Haghighat, 1998).

In reading Sohrevardi's opus, *Hekmat-e Eshraq*, Sohrevardi repeatedly mentions the foundational influences of his philosophy. Sohrevardi notes that he is only an inheritor of a long line of sages and thinkers who have attempted to bring forth this ancient wisdom tradition.

In the introduction of this book he states:

In all that I have said about the science of lights. . . . I have been assisted by those who have traveled the path of God. This science is the very intuition of the inspired and illuminated Plato, the guide and master of philosophy, and of those who came before him from the time of Hermes.
(Sohrevardi, 1999a, p. 2)

In addition to Plato, Sohrevardi (1999a) also gives credit to other Western philosophers like Empedocles, Pythagoras, and Plotinus. From the Eastern Persian Zoroastrian tradition, he mentions philosophers like Jamasp, Frashostar, and Bozorgmehr. In regard to his own work he notes that *Hekmat-e Eshraq* is meant to give new life to the ancient wisdom traditions of India, Persia, Babylon, Egypt, and Greece by bringing them together under one philosophy: the philosophy of illumination.

The link between Sohrevardi and archetypal psychology is established through Sohrevardi's connection to Greek Neo-Platonist philosophy. Islamic Neo-Platonism was introduced to the Moslem world through the Arab army's invasion

of Alexandria in 642 CE (Shayegan, 1996). This was also where Plotinus, the founder of Neo-Platonism, had studied Greek philosophy (Hunt, 1993). Plotinus' (205-270 CE) work features a contemplative philosophy. In his writings, known as *The Enneads*, he writes about the ascent and union with God, which Plotinus refers to as The One or Supreme reality. According to Neo-Platonism God is the source of all things; everything descends from God and returns to God, and being in relation to and experiencing God is the purpose of existence.

In its time Neo-platonic mysticism provided a vehicle for communicating with and fostering a relationship with God. Netton notes, "The emanation process itself was compared by Plotinus to the way in which sunlight was continually generated by the sun. . . . Each hypostasis was moved or filled by a deep yearning for the principle immediately above it" (1990, p. 8). Plotinus' idea of emanation had a profound influence on Moslem thinkers in the Islamic world, especially among the mystic Moslems. It was during this period, and in the course of translating the philosophical texts of various Greek masters, that the Muslims became familiar with the writings of the Neo-Platonists and adopted some of their ideas in their own writings and philosophies (Shayegan, 1996).

Plotinus's ideas refer to soul as a divine presence captive in the body. This along with creation through emanation are two of the core Neo-Platonic ideas that made their way into Islamic thought. One of the Islamic mystic philosophers who

was intrigued by these ideas and found a connection between Neo-Platonism and the Zoroastrian tradition of ancient Iran was Sohrevardi.

While Sohrevardi discovered a link between an Eastern and a Western tradition, he also discerned an ageless wisdom centered on the principle of divine unity and emanation of light in various degrees. This principle had been hidden in Zoroastrian thought and other major wisdom traditions of the ancient Hellenic, Hermetic, Hindu, Egyptian, Arabic, and Persian traditions (Nasr, 2002).

Through this move, Sohrevardi linked philosophical thought (emanation) with mystical knowledge (divine unity) as a way to engage the physical with the metaphysical. According to Sohrevardi, this link known as *Hekmat-e laduniyeh* or Divine Wisdom, in conjunction with *Hekmat-e atiqah* or Ancient Wisdom, is ageless and has always existed amongst various traditions in different forms known most widely as intuitive wisdom (Nasr, 1976). Shirazi, one of Sohrevardi's commentators, alludes to this unique aspect of Sohrevardi's wisdom:

The philosophy based on illumination, which is visionary experience (*kashf*); or the philosophy of the Easterners-meaning the Persians [is] based on revelation and intuition. It is thus limited to the revelation of the lights of the intellects, their rays, and the outpouring upon the soul during its abstraction from the body. (Sohrevardi, 1999a, p. 169)

Sohrevardi viewed Hermes as the original source for the transmission of this wisdom. According to Sohrevardi, this wisdom passed directly from the Divine source to Egyptians represented by Hermes Trismegistus, who was believed to be the ancestor of the sages of Greece and Persia (Graham, 2002). It was through

Hermes that it made its way from Egypt to Persia and to Zoroaster dating back to the 7th century BCE. Graham notes that “the essence of Zoroaster’s teaching had been lost on the exoteric plane, being preserved solely on the esoteric, to emerge with Islam in the form of Sufism, the most perfect exteriorization of it yet attained” (p. 43).

The Egyptian branch eventually extended to Greece and from Greece to the early Sufis of Persia, where it illuminated the Islamic civilization (Nasr, 1976). Sohrevardi saw himself at the focus of a critical moment in history where two sacred streams, one Eastern and the other Western, whose source was one, came together in his teachings. He found his calling in the rediscovery and integration of these wisdom traditions that on the surface seem different, yet speak of the same thing. They tell the tale of the separation and reunion of man and Divine, material and spiritual, ego and Self. Sohrevardi sought to unify, in one grand doctrine, this hidden truth of every authentic tradition.

Sohrevardi’s Illuminationist Wisdom

Sohrevardi’s best known work is *Hekmat-e Eshraq*, translated into English: *Wisdom of Illumination*. A detailed study and discussion of Sohrevardi’s illuminationist philosophy is beyond the scope of this study. However, in order to familiarize the reader with Sohrevardi’s thoughts, a brief overview of this philosophy will be presented in this section.

Illuminationist philosophy is based on light and various luminosities of light. Sohrevardi (1999a) states, "Light is that which is evident or manifest in itself and makes other things evident" (p. xxvi). Nasr (2002) refers to Sohrevardi's philosophy as the Theosophy of the Orient of Light. Nasr defines this wisdom as being "both illumination and the light that shines from the Orient, which in the symbolic geography of Sohrevardi is not a geographical Orient, but the Orient or Origin of the world of existence" (p. 170).

According to Sohrevardi this symbolic orient is situated in the East, where the sun rises, signifying dawn as the symbol of illumination and spiritual enlightenment. The word *Eshraq* itself is defined as the pouring of light from the East, an Eastern light. By the definition Sohrevardi gives to *Eshraq* he is communicating that his philosophy is both Eastern and also has properties of light. What is apparent from Sohrevardi's writings is that the term Illumination or *Eshraq* is utilized as a metaphor to communicate the central theme of his philosophy, which is to uncover and reveal, to shine upon, to appear, and ultimately to enlighten.

The fundamental element of reality for Sohrevardi is pure, immaterial light, which unfolds from what he refers to as the Light of Lights or *Nur-al-anwar* in the form of an emanation through a descending order of lights of diminishing intensity (Sohrevardi, 1999).

Nasr (1976) writes:

Each of the transcendent Lights that emanate from the Light of Lights is a purgatory (*barzakh*), separating the two luminosities above and below it. Each light acts as a veil which simultaneously hides and reveals the light of the higher order-hiding it in that it is not transmitted in its full intensity and revealing it in that it allows a certain degree of effusion or irradiation to pass through to permit the next lower member of the hierarchy to come into being. (p. 71)

Through an intricate interaction, these lights in turn give rise to a horizontal arrangement of lights, similar in concept to the Platonic forms, which organize the species of the material world and encompass the celestial archetypes (Corbin, 1960/1977).

This “Orient of Light” involves a complex emanative hierarchy of lights, in which the Divine and quasi divine are seen in terms of emanations of light (Nasr, 1976). A Neo-Platonic concept of hierarchy and emanation are integrated in Sohrawardi’s illuminationist philosophy, where lights have a one-over-the-other priority in each of their particular universes. In this context, in an act of unveiling, emanation serves as a bridge between two realities, linking the spiritual world of divine realities with that of the human, through the outpouring of light.

Corbin (1960/1977) summarizes Sohrawardi’s philosophy as an Oriental theosophy stating:

From the first Light, the Light of Lights (God), there issues a pleroma of innumerable beings of light, pure intelligible Lights, quite independent of any material body; this is the world of Jabarut. From it emanates another pleroma of substances of light, some of which have to take upon themselves the guardianship of a material species, while the other have to fill the role of Souls, which for longer or shorter periods animate the material body. (p. 55)

Using the principle of emanation as a bridge between God and humanity, Sohrevardi was able to imagine and prescribe a novel way of perceiving the world of the archetypes. Sohrevardi's emanationist wisdom became the vehicle for light and darkness, conscious and unconscious, but more importantly, Man and Divine to encounter and experience one another. Netton notes, "Sohrevardian emanation eternally bridges the two worlds of Supreme Light and corporeal darkness" (Netton, 1990, p. 13).

What the emanation process, as utilized by Sohrevardi, describes is the human soul ascending various levels of consciousness, symbolized as various degrees of Light, towards the Light of Lights. As the soul departs from its captivity in the darkness of the material world, through various levels, it gains more light or more consciousness until it reaches the divine source whereby it attains full consciousness or illumination. Sohrevardi's undertaking is that of ascension from the barren material darkness of perception to another side; into the realm of light. This is a journey made without a mediary of any kind, in an attempt to gain knowledge and to experience the Divine unity. Sohrevardi views logic and reason as that mediary or obstacle that interrupted and cut off the intuitive wisdom traditions of the past and closed the road to ascension into the Orient of lights.

Corbin (1976/1998) explains that in Sohrevardi's writing the word Oriental is a symbolic East pointing towards where the divine light emanates. In this context, illuminationist philosophy is the path of a journey to the Orient and to the

world of light and spirit, away from the Occident or the symbolic West where light diminishes in intensity or where the sun sets. This Occident is equivalent to the world of appearances, where light does not fully penetrate. The purpose of this journey is to liberate the human soul from the body by moving it towards a higher state of being through an act of unveiling and illumination.

This task is accomplished through the cultivation of intuitive knowledge. Sohravardi regarded intuitive knowledge as an important factor in seeking truth and illumination by way of mystical experiences (Sajjadi, 1997). Sohravardi emphasized that his philosophy is first and foremost based on intuitive knowledge, which leads one to attain true knowledge and perfection of the spirit. His commentator, Shirazi, notes, “The Persians relied on intuition and revelation, as did the ancients” (Sohravardi, 1999a, p. 169). It is through an intuitive form of knowing and the cultivation of imagination that one becomes aware of the presence of subtle, nonmaterial imaginal beings, which Sohravardi referred to as “immaterial lights.” Through his philosophy, Sohravardi invites the seeker to enter into this new mode of knowing, which is referred to as knowing through presence.

In regards to knowing through presence Cheetham (2003) notes, “The mode of presence is what situates us, what determines the quality of the space in which we live, and the nature of our relationship to the objects in our world, to what we can know. The mode of presence determines what can be understood” (p. 48). In Sohravardi’s philosophy, this is the necessary part of transformation or

illumination, that of cultivating a mode of presence which frees one to move beyond the intellectual world and historicity.

This cultivation takes place by opening up one's horizons to the reality of another realm by becoming conscious and aware of that realm's existence. As Cheetham again reminds us, "the task is to become conscious, to reveal to ourselves our mode of being and our form of life. . . . We must bring that mode of being into light" (p. 48). Illuminationist philosophy lends itself to unveiling this intuitive mode of presence accompanied by revealing a world which it corresponds to and leads the soul to its spiritual origins. Sohrevardi's effort in his philosophy is to save soul from the snare of the body and liberate Man from the darkness of the material world. Sohrevardi's endeavor is to return soul to its origin and free it from captivity.

Cheetham (2003) states, "the hermeneutic of presence frees the soul from the narrow confines of the world into which it had found itself" (p. 53). It is through this awakening that the soul becomes aware of itself and gains self-knowledge. This is the whole message of Sohrevardi's project which culminates in "a progressive initiation into self-knowledge as knowledge which is neither the product of abstraction nor a re-presentation . . . but a knowledge which is identical to the Soul itself" (p. 54).

Many aspects of Sohrevardi's illuminationist philosophy can be interpreted psychologically, for his is truly a science of the Soul. For instance, the word

Eshraq, which by definition can be referred to as an Eastern Light, is a spiritual geography in Sohravardi's philosophy. *Eshraq* is the landscape of the imaginal world, which connects the spiritual with the material world.

From a psychological perspective, illumination or *Eshraq* can be related to the act of making the unconscious conscious, in a move to expand consciousness and reach levels beyond the personal psyche. From a psychological standpoint Sohravardi's ideas about light are equivalent to cultivating higher levels of consciousness. When Sohravardi speaks of transcending light in various degrees of intensity it can be interpreted as referring to increasing consciousness, until one attains Self consciousness, thereby reaching what Sohravardi identifies as the Light of Lights or God.

In the psychology of Jung the Light of Lights can be interpreted as the Self archetype. Emanation can be viewed as a journey from consciousness into the unconscious and beyond. Therefore, the cosmos and various planes of existence are levels of consciousness symbolized by various levels of luminosity. In this context, the material world and ego consciousness have the least luminosity, while the sublime reality of the imaginal world, the realm of the transpersonal Self, contains full luminosity.

From this perspective, every level of consciousness is an interworld between the level above it and the one below it. From a psychological standpoint, such a transition from one level to the next is necessary for the expansion of

consciousness beyond the boundaries of ego consciousness. By moving through the various levels of consciousness, a transformation in consciousness takes place, where one eventually gains illumination or individuation.

Whether in Sohrevardi's illuminationist philosophy or in depth psychology, through an act that can be called either illumination or individuation, one gains insight into a reality that transcends the darkness of material existence. For Sohrevardi, this is a move to enlighten and bring the human soul out of its exile from the secular world of material confinement and to reconnect it once again to its spiritual roots.

Sohrevardi's vehicle for this endeavor was the imagination and its infinite potential through images that it produced to take the soul on this journey of illumination. The imagination's role as a spiritual organ in the works of Sohrevardi will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 6 Sohravardi on Imagination and the Imaginal World

The development of the imagination's intermediary role is only one aspect in its history. The term *imagination*, broadly defined, refers to the capacity for making images. This image-making takes place in a variety of ways, through dreaming, fantasizing, artistic expressions, and poetry, or as a method of gnosis, for gaining access to a spiritual reality, for the purposes of attaining spiritual knowledge. This last function prescribes an active and spiritual role to imagination, employed to make contact with the divine in every human being. Raff (2000) notes, "The search for one's divine twin is the goal of mystic life, and union with one's twin is the means of spiritual fulfillment" (p. 144).

In the Islamic mystical tradition, the imaginal world is entered via the imagination as a way of going beyond the personal level of the psyche and into the transpersonal realm. It is on this transpersonal level of reality where the divine manifests itself and the union takes place. The imagination's image-making quality provides a way for coming into contact with, and experiencing, this divine self directly. In this context, imagination serves to link the world of human existence with the spiritual world for the purpose of providing a connection to a supra-sensory transpersonal level of the psyche, or as Jung would refer to it, a connection with the Self.

In this capacity imagination provides a spiritual manifestation of the Self, since the Self "manifests when opposites are unified to form a new state of

consciousness . . . [which is] at one moment psychic and the next physical in manifestation” (Raff, 2000, p. 62). In this context the Self, like the imaginal, is an intermediary that exists in a subtle form and unites the other two realms with one another.

In Islam, gaining knowledge of the divine presence is connected to the use of imagination, with imagination making awareness of an existence beyond the material world possible. From this perspective, the imagination’s image-forming capacity is central to its function as an organ of theophany, utilized for the specific purpose of visualizing the Divine presence. Such visualization aims to bring the spiritual and human worlds in contact with one another, providing the means of experiencing and manifesting the Divine in corporeal form. In this framework, imagination is the prerequisite for attaining such spiritual experiences, since it mediates and links the two worlds.

From the mystical Islamic perspective, the Divine has the ability to manifest itself to the human soul through the power of the imagination. It is through the images formed by the imagination that the experience of the Divine becomes more personal and intimate, thereby making the link between the transcendent and the corporeal worlds both possible and more meaningful. In this capacity imagination gains its primacy as a spiritual organ, in particular in mystical visionary journeys.

Sohravardi noted that God manifests through an act of theophany (Sajjadi, 1997). It is specifically for this purpose that Sohravardi utilized the power of

imagination over the rational or sense faculties for perceiving this other reality. Wolfson (1994) states, “the symbolic vision of the mystic, like that of the prophet, bridges the gap between what is invisible and what is visible, thereby giving appropriate expression to the incorporeal, transcendent world” (p. 66). According to Corbett (1996), through this mode of perceiving, distinctiveness from outside of ego awareness is developed whereby an embodied human being is capable of perceiving the unperceivable and expressing the inexpressible.

Sohravardi and Imagination

Sohravardi, through the tales he wrote about the soul’s visionary journey demonstrated how, for the purpose of enhancing one’s spiritual life, using the imagination served to reveal and gain a more intimate knowledge of this divine self. As Corbin (1964/1995) noted, “The activity of imaginative perception truly assumes the aspect of a *hierognosis*, a higher sacral knowledge” (p. 21).

A rich expression of attaining spiritual fulfillment through the use of the imaginative faculty is found in Sohrovardi’s recitals. In these tales imagination is used to attain the possibility of gaining access and knowledge of an immaterial world beyond the senses. Central in his writings about visionary experiences, Sohrovardi saw the importance and the potential impact of the power of imagination as a transcendental tool whereby the soul utilizes the imagination to bridge a path between the material and the spiritual, departing from historical-

temporal consciousness. This formulation of the role of imagination in the acquisition of divine knowledge is clearly recognized in the recitals.

Imagination's central role in Sohrevardi's recitals enables the soul to access a reality beyond the level of ego consciousness. More specifically, imagination functions to connect the human with the spiritual world "by giving form to spirits and at the same time spiritualizing matter" (Corbin, 1960/1977, p. 84). By utilizing imagination, the soul is capable of perceiving and encountering imaginal figures that guide its journey towards spiritual fulfillment. This particular function of imagination is demonstrated and given primacy in the recitals.

Sohrevardi realized that imagination is capable of creating a field for the manifestation of images and imaginal figures to be perceived, encountered, and experienced. By means of the imaginative faculty and development of an imaginal perception, the goal of encountering the Light of Lights or the Divine Self, which is the culmination of the spiritual journey of the soul, is attained. Cheetham (2005) noted that through this mode of utilizing the imagination, "the presence of God in the Burning Bush, the apparitions of Gabriel to Mary and to Mohammed, all the events of sacred history are perceived" (p. 65). This imaginal consciousness serves as an organ of transmutation, permitting transcendence from the ego and the personal psyche to the perception of imaginal figures and landscapes in the transpersonal realm (Corbin, 1954/1988).

Raff (2000) states, "Spirits embody themselves through the power of imagination" (p. 64). According to Raff, "They do this by taking characteristics of the physical world in order to express themselves" (p. 64).

As an example he notes that "a spiritual being might appear in the imagination of a person as a beautiful creature with wings" (p. 64). Such manifestations of imaginal figures, noted by Raff, give structure to the presences that are visible throughout Sohravardi's recitals. In the recitals, these imaginal beings present themselves in various forms, serving to guide the soul in the imaginal world toward its encounter with the Divine. It is through this form-giving, image-making function of the imagination that the experience of a spiritual reality, the imaginal realm, is made possible.

For Sohravardi, the premise underlying this act is to be able to demonstrate that the two realms of material and spiritual are in actuality two parts of one whole universe. Sohravardi's effort was to dismantle a perceived separation between what is human and Divine, material and spiritual, inherited from a false division of the entities based on an erroneous historical conceptualization (Sajjadi, 1997). Through the use of imagination, by linking the two realms together, Sohravardi eliminated this false dichotomy.

Sohravardi overcame this misconception by utilizing imagination as a means of gnosis, demonstrating that there was a connection between the two worlds and other worlds beyond. In this manner, imagination served to dissolve the unreal

boundary between consciousness and the unconscious, paving the way for entry into the latter world and thereby including that world as being a part of human consciousness.

Sohravardi believed that all levels of reality are on a vertical continuum, or poles, and can be accessed through the act of emanation by increasing consciousness (Purnamdarian, 1995). The type of consciousness described by Sohravardi allows one to look behind or see through the apparent in order to reveal the hidden aspects of one's life or one's world. This, in turn, liberates one from the bondage and limitations of concrete material life. By seeing with the eye of the imagination, through the use of symbols and images beyond the senses, one finds a way to transcend sense and reason and discover deeper meanings relevant to one's existence. As a consequence of developing such consciousness, one can live in terms of possibility and develop a more spiritual existence. According to Corbett (1996), the development of a spiritual life is an important aspect of personal development, which offers one an awakening experience.

Cheetham (2005) has stated that "the focus of spiritual life is always to change one's being by means of ascent" (p. 48). This ascent requires one to overcome neurotic tendencies that limit the ability to attain a full spiritual life. One's choice to become apathetic and numb, seeking false securities in the mundane affairs of everyday living, may initially appear as a comfortable solution, though the decision likely hides a submerged despair that only reveals itself

through acknowledgment of the meaninglessness of material living. Cheetham again reminds us that, “ascension does involve increasing wholeness, since one does become more complete, more real, and closer to God” (p. 48).

May states, “It is by discovering and affirming the being in our selves that some inner certainty will become possible” (1983, p.10). In this quote, May negates the need for gaining inner certainty through various methods of psychology, and further affirms, “we must go below these theories and discover the person, the being to whom these things happen” (p. 10). This discovery of the person, of what lies beneath the appearances and events, is achieved through expansion of consciousness and by gaining knowledge of the divine spiritual self, which is what became Sohrevardi’s endeavor.

Function of imagination

As discussed, imagination is a central tenet in the philosophy and writings of Sohrevardi. For him, imagination was a tool to disband the confines of ego consciousness, causing an initial experience of separation and thereby enabling the soul to access the imaginal world and journey beyond to the spiritual world. The journey that is depicted in the recitals occurs outside the material world and can best be described as an inner journey of transformation within oneself, which will ultimately also cause a transformation in one’s outer world. The power of the imagination is what makes this inner and outer transformation possible. Here, imagination’s image-making capacity is utilized to develop an interior image of the

world using physical figures and images of the material world as aids in what Corbin (1954/1988) called an act of *interiorization*. The task set forth in this process aims at integrating the outer with the inner world and acknowledging the existence of both worlds. Through this move, one facilitates entering into the microcosm of the psyche and animating the presences both within and outside of the psyche.

Raff (2000) stated, “imagination is a star within the soul, or a concentrated extract of life forces which may alter not only the inner world of the unconscious but the outer world of physical reality as well” (p. 61). Sohrevardi’s use of imagination presupposes that individuals seeking transformation and spiritual wisdom could influence their outer reality by becoming intimately connected with the inner world, thereby changing their mode of presence in this world as well as their level of self knowledge. In this way, Sohrevardi cultivated a relationship between the micro- and the macrocosm, integrating the interior human and the divine realms into one universe (Thackston, 1999).

This dissociation and association of the inner and the outer requires ego consciousness to be replaced with an imaginal mode of consciousness, where the ego and its concerns dissolve from a concrete mode to a more subtle one. Following this dissolution, what is perceived as the apparent reality gives way to the hidden reality beyond it. Cheetham (2003) refers to this process as turning the world inside out and causing an “uprooting of the soul from the current of historical

causality and freeing it from its entrapment in a secular world in which it is swept along to an inevitable demise” (p. 13).

The intentional and active use of imagination as a tool to liberate the human soul from its captivity and expand consciousness beyond the confines of the ego facilitates gaining spiritual consciousness. This portrayal of the function of imagination reveals its important role in acquiring transcendental knowledge by dissolving ordinary conscious boundaries in favor of gaining more intimate knowledge of worlds beyond. Raff (2000) noted, “Wherever any transformation is sought, the individual seeking it must sooner or later acknowledge that ego knowledge is not sufficient” (p. 57). In order to gain this transformation it is necessary to imagine the path for another reality to be encountered. Corbin (1958/1997) noted, “The initial imaginative operation is to typify the immaterial and spiritual realities in external or sensual forms, which then become ciphers for what they manifest” (p. 208).

Sohravardi, through his own personal encounters with this other realm, knew that imagination held the place for this encounter, transmuting mundane images into divine images. In chapter 7, through an exploration of three of his recitals, examples of these personal encounters will be highlighted. The themes and figures Sohravardi utilized in the recitals illustrate his use of imagination to give autonomy and objectivity to the world of the imaginal. In Sohravardi’s tales, by means of the imagination, the human soul is able to journey through a world similar

to the material world with the intention of amplifying this world beyond its mundane appearances. In the recitals, Sohravardi's endeavor was to offer a deeper symbolic meaning to the events that occur, which can then be deciphered through contemplation and amplification of their symbols (Sajjadi, 1997).

In order to understand their deeper implication and significance, Sohravardi sought to render implicit meanings less ambiguous and to make the unconscious conscious in a realm other than the mundane. However, one should be clear that Sohravardi did not avail himself to these terms, since they did not exist in his time. In its place he used the body to signify consciousness and the imaginal world to signify the unconscious realm.

There is no doubt that imagination plays an important role in the writings of Sohravardi, and that he portrays image-making as leading the soul toward the attainment of self-knowledge and awareness of its own existence. Sohravardi utilized imagination to communicate with the forms and figures that the soul comes in contact with in attaining this self-knowledge. In the Islamic context, self-knowledge constitutes acquiring spiritual knowledge and experiencing the many forms of the Divine. Raff (2000) noted, "God has an infinite number of names, all of which are living entities that can personify themselves as imaginal figures" (p. 144). This comprehension of the divine forms is the function of the imagination in which common sensory data are transmuted into symbolic form. Through the interpretation of the symbols, perception becomes theophanic, appearing through

imagination as an image of God, which in turn makes it possible for one to comprehend this image and to come into direct contact with it.

This use of imagination to transmute everyday appearances into symbols functions to change perception into a theophanic organ capable of seeing the Divine. Concerning this important function of imagination within the Islamic tradition Corbin (1958/1997) noted, “We can. . . take God as an object of our contemplations, not only in our innermost hearts but also before our very eyes and in our imagination, as though we saw Him, or better still, so that we really see Him” (p. 146).

The consequence of this transformation places the material in relation to the spiritual, or the apparent in relation to the invisible. This transformation is necessary in order for the soul to ascent into the divine realm of the spirit. Through the creation of divine images, by way of imagination, the soul emanates higher and further from its captive state in the material world, entering into the imaginal world. In order to accomplish this task, the soul must imagine and bring the imaginal world into awareness. The world that the soul imagines is the universe of symbols. These symbols point toward what is hidden behind their apparent manifestation. The apparent manifestation of a symbol is in likeness or an example of its essence, which is the real form yet hidden.

The power of the imagination involves the capability to change and develop a mental vision that creates these symbols. Corbin (1964/1995) stated that the

function of imagination is to perceive symbols that lead to an encounter with an inner intelligence. Here the symbol allows access to the hidden meaning of an event, providing a departure from the world of the senses and toward an interior world.

In the recitals, the imagination guides sense perception and transmutes these data into symbols, utilizing the hermeneutics of *Ta'wil*, which functions to uncover the hidden meaning of every event. Corbin (1958/1997) stated:

Ta'wil is the preeminently the hermeneutics of symbols, the ex-egus, the bringing out of hidden spiritual meaning . . . there would be no possibility of ta'wil without the world of hurqalya [imaginal world], that is without the world of archetypal images where that imaginative perception functions and is able, by transmuting the material data of external history into symbols, to penetrate to the inner meaning. (p. 53)

Chittick (1994) noted, "*Ta'wil* [is] the transformation of the sensory world into symbols, into open-ended mysteries that shatter, engage, and transform the entire being" (p. 151). Corbin (1958/1997) also stated, "The Burning Bush is only a brushwood fire if it is merely perceived by the sensory organs. . . . In order that there may be a theophany an organ of trans-sensory perception is needed" (p. 80). Here Corbin is referring to imagination as such an organ.

For Sohrawardi, the manifestation of what is apparent in a form, place, or figure provides proof and reason for its existence, but this is not its essence, purpose, or intention (Purnamdariyan, 1995). The apparent is only intended to provide a direction and be a guide post towards the hidden, or what is beyond appearances (Corbin, 1954/1988). With this understanding in mind, it can be stated

that the body is an example of a likeness to its ideal form and essence, the soul. Therefore, what the soul experiences in the imaginal is also experienced by the body, and in the process, both are transformed. This mutual transformation is what takes place in the visionary journey.

While studying the writings of Sohrevardi, Corbin found it necessary to distinguish between what is considered imaginal and imaginary:

It was impossible for me, in what I have to translate or say, to be satisfied with the word imaginary. . . . I was obliged to find another term because for many years, I have been by vocation and profession an interpreter of Arabic and Persian texts, the purposes of which I would certainly have betrayed if I had been entirely and simply content-even with every possible precaution-with the term imaginary. (1964/1995, p. 2)

Corbin's discernment lends itself to understanding that the imaginal possesses a reality of its own, with its own faculty of perception that is as real as the senses and the intellect. With regard to the imaginative faculty, Corbin (1964/1995) offered this emphasis: "We must avoid confusing [it] with the imagination that modern man identifies with fantasy which only provides the imaginary" (p. 9). The distinction is necessary so that the contents of the imaginal are not contaminated by fantasy images or as Corbin (1976/1998) refers to it as modern civilization's notion of the image in media, television, or cinema.

For Sohrevardi, the imagination enables one to transcend the body and enter into a more subtle presence of the body. Here the soul is able to wander into the imaginal world through the surrendering of the body. Through the imagination, Sohrevardi accesses the imaginal world and in the recitals unveils to the human

soul this other-worldly immaterial place. The imagination makes it possible for the soul to perceive the incorporeal subtle entities that exist in this landscape.

Wolfson (1994) noted, “in the absence of imagination there is no form, and without form there is no vision and hence no knowledge” (p. 280). Wolfson’s statement echoes Corbin’s and Sohrevardi’s ideas that imagination embodies the imaginal world and without it the imaginal would cease to exist.

Chittick (1994) noted that “spirits embody themselves through imagination and to understand what this embodiment implies we need to have a clear understanding of imagination’s characteristics, the most outstanding of which is ambiguity, the fact that it escapes the logic of either/or” (p. 8). The imagination as the mediator between the intellect and the senses is beyond this either/or requirement by relating the two sides to one another. Here Corbin’s statement that through the imagination, spirits become embodied and bodies become spiritualized comes to mind.

Corbin (1954/1988) also noted, “What is called the body passes through a multitude of states from being a perishable body in this world to being a subtle or even divine body” (p. 11). What Sohrevardi is referring to, through Corbin’s understanding, is the disposal of the material body for the purpose of ascension to the world of Lights. Sohrevardi’s intention is to connect with the world of Lights in order to become spiritualized and divine-like. The process being described does not take place through intellectual knowledge or reasoning, but through an intuitive

type of knowing as knowing through witnessing and Sohrevardi (1999a) refers to as *Ilm-e shohudi*. Furthermore, spiritualizing the body is not possible in the world of appearances, but only in the intermediate world of the imaginal where the material body undergoes a transformation, becoming a more subtle presence. What transpires in the imaginal is a purely psychic event (Corbin, 1976/1998).

This metamorphosis of the body and spirit follows an ascending and descending trajectory, and the imagination is the key to this act of metamorphosis. Through the body ascending into the world of spirit and undergoing a cleansing of the ego in an act of annihilation, contact with the material world is severed. Here again, imagination provides access beyond the confines of ego consciousness. At the same time, as the spirit descends towards materiality, it manifests itself in corporeal form. Spirit and body meet, and the integration of the two occurs in the realm of the imaginal. Corbin (1964/1995) referred to this integration as a “migration that is the return *ab extra ad intra* (from the exterior to the interior) . . . through the active imagination” (p. 14).

On the function of the imagination, Corbin (1964/1995) continued, “It is the organ [imaginative] that permits the transmutation of internal spiritual states into external states, into vision-events symbolizing with those internal states” (p. 15). Along the way, imagination allows the soul to go through this transmutation and discover its nature through journeying in this imaginal landscape.

As discussed, imagination provides for the experience of a deeper reality and plays a central role in visionary experiences. The themes of Sohrawardi's visionary recitals are always the same: Descend and return, where the captive soul ascends to the spiritual world and is initiated into that world, is spiritualized, and then returns to the material world illuminated. According to Raff (2000), "imagination is the means by which the soul experiences God and shares in the creative expression of the divine" (p. 45). In this context, imagination is the key to experiencing higher wisdom. Sohrawardi described it as attaining illumination; Jung referred to it as individuation.

Sohrawardi and the Imaginal World

The term *imaginal* has gained a wide popularity in various areas of psychology, especially in areas of treatment. Some concepts include imaginal exposure, imaginal meditation, guided imagery, and dream work. The concept has become "mainstream," providing another tool in the service of alleviating the symptom. While these methods of treatment might be classified as imaginal, they do not define the concept in terms of its original context and usage.

In the Islamic tradition, Sohrawardi described the imaginal world as a place in which mystics and seekers of self-knowledge are able to enter into, and get a first-hand experience of the divine presence within. Sohrawardi's ideas illustrate that between the spiritual world and the material world of the senses there is another world, the world of images and archetypal forms, which he called *Alam-e*

mesal in Arabic, or *Nakoja-Abad* in Persian (Corbin, 1964/1995). *Nakoja* refers to nowhere and *Abad* means a locality or a place. Put together, the term announces the “place of no-where.” The term *imaginal*, itself, is a translation into English of the Latin word *imaginalis*, which Corbin coined from his understanding of the Arabic phrase, *Alam-e mesal*, and from Sohrevardi’s *Nakoja abad*.

This interworld is the world of subtle forms and archetypes and is revealed through the faculty of the imagination. In its Islamic context, the imaginal is the place of spiritual revelations and visionary experiences that transcend sense detection. In Corbin’s (1960/1977) view it is where apparitions and angels reveal themselves to the mystic and offer guidance for the purpose of reuniting the human soul with its source. The imaginal world is where all images, symbols, and dreams find a place of autonomy and manifestation. This is a world with its own reality on par with ego reality, which resonates with its own organ of perception, the imagination. Corbin (1971/1994) noted, “The universe which in Sohrevardi’s Neo-Zoroastrian Platonism is called *Mundus Imaginalis (Alam-e misal)* or the heavenly Earth of *Hurqulaya* is a concrete spiritual universe” (p. 5).

Sohrevardi believed that wisdom and illumination is attained only via spiritual realization of the Divine through mystical experiences in the imaginal world (Aminrazavi, 1993). This illumination involves the appearance of Light and its overflowing at the moment the soul is released from affairs of material and sensual existence. This illumination provides the soul with the awareness and

insight of its own existence toward itself. It is what Sajjadi (1997) referred to as “an inner experience of receiving without any outer means” (p. 11). This is a form of perceiving the presence of the Divine through a manifestation, which is also the initial step in receiving imaginal meanings.

Sohravardi elaborated on the idea of an immaterial, imaginal world in the recitals, situating it between the physical and the spiritual world. This world has both physical and spiritual attributes, and is intermediate between the other two. Corbin (1960/1977) noted, “between the intelligible world, which is the world of entirely immaterial pure intelligences, and the sensory world which is the world of purely material realities, there exists another universe” (p. 72). This is the intermediate world, referred to by Sohravardi, which possesses a medial quality that separates the two worlds from one another and at the same time joins them together (Nasr, 1976). Corbin (1960/1977) elaborated on the three worlds described by Sohravardi as follows:

Thus, we have a threefold universe: the earthly human world, which is the object of sensory perception; the world of the Soul or Malakut, which is, properly speaking, the world of imaginative perception; and the world of pure Cherubim Intelligences, the Jabarut, which is the object of intelligible knowledge. (p. 59)

Corbin (1960/1977) referred to Sohravardi’s commentator, Qutbuddin

Shirazi, who elaborated further on the imaginal world:

It is there that the various kinds of autonomous archetypal images are infinitely realized, forming a hierarchy of degrees varying according to their relative subtlety or density. On each of these levels species exist analogous to those in our world, but they are infinite. Some are peopled by Angels

and the human Elect. Others are peopled by Angels and genii, others by demons. God alone knows the number of these levels and what they contain. The pilgrim rising from one degree to another discovers on each higher level a subtler state, a more entrancing beauty, a more intense spirituality, a more overflowing delight. The highest of these degrees borders on the intelligible pure entities of Light and very closely resembles it. (p. 131)

In order not to confuse imaginary with the imaginal, Corbin made a distinction between the two in following Sohravardi. Imaginary relates more to a fantasy type of a perception created through ego consciousness, while the imaginal refers to a place outside of one's interior world which simultaneously encloses that world.

As discussed, in its original context, the imaginal world is entered into as a way to come into direct contact with realities that transcend sense perception. Through visions, a seeker is able to travel out of the material world and into this other world. By entering the imaginal world, the seeker leaves behind the world of sensory perception and discovers a way of being which is neither a part of the material world nor an aspect of the world of the intellect. By doing so, he or she leaves behind ingrained and dogmatic ways of thinking about the Divine and awakens to a new understanding of the source of creation. In this way, the imaginal world provides the spatiality for the Divine to present itself to the seeker, while the seeker undergoes a spiritual rebirth.

In essence, Sohravardi created what in modern psychology can be referred to as a liminal space between mind and matter for the purpose of liberating the Divine from its exile in anthropomorphic, literalistic forms of expression, giving it

its own place of sovereignty and grace. Sohrevardi had this in mind when he wrote about the mystical journey of the seeker in search of God. Sohrevardi was able to utilize the imaginal world in a manner where what is material and corporeal is transcended and what is divine and spiritual emanates toward the material world, spiritualizing it (Corbin, 1960/1977).

In the recitals Sohrevardi describes a level of reality called *Nakoja-abad* in which the physical senses function in terms of the spatial reality we are accustomed to in waking consciousness, yet this realm is not physically real. *Nakoja abad* or the imaginal world, with its medial existence between the senses and the intellect, provides for a direct experience of God for the person who encounters it, accessing a state of consciousness and a mode of presence in an alternate world.

The imaginal world as described by Sohrevardi has its own landscape, mountains, and figures that are sometimes similar to the landscape of the material world, yet are nonsensory. Sohrevardi provides various means of access to this reality, from fasting for 40 days to not eating meat, prayer, meditation, sleep deprivation, and active imagination.

What is perceived in the imaginal realm is what Jung referred to as archetypes. This is the *Mundus Archetypalis*, or the Platonic world of original forms. Through the imaginal world one gains access to the archetypes, giving them a manifestation by way of the images that represent them. In the absence of the imaginal world, a connection to the world of archetypes is limited if not impossible.

The journey into the imaginal world moves one away from identifying with a sense of self, based only on personal ego consciousness, and toward a realization of the existence of a greater self; what Jung referred to as the archetype of the Self. This will be elaborated on in chapter 7. This is a journey to seek the Truth in one's being, in whatever manifestation that truth might present itself. How that truth translates in the greater world facilitates awareness and brings about a transformation of the self and the world.

In developing the use of the imaginal world one must consciously acknowledge and experience first-hand encounters that are brought about as a result of entering this world. Whether these experiences are characterized as light or dark, they are a necessary part of the transformation of the soul. An important prerequisite in the initial stages of the spiritual journey occurs when the dark night of the soul manifests itself to the seeker. Proceeding through the darkness and managing the obstacles presented on the journey ensure the spiritual development of the seeker. Facilitating the soul's awareness of its own existence is the first step in its understanding its mode of being in this world.

The imaginal world Sohrawardi described is embedded with symbols which present themselves as images. These symbols decipher and make known sensory and imaginable data, hence transmuting them into images that can be perceived by the senses (Corbin, 1954/1988). This transformation is necessary for gaining entrance into the imaginal world, and through the imagination this transmutation of

image into symbol takes place, forming a connection between the human and the divine realm. As discussed previously, it is in the act of *ta'wil*, or hermeneutics, that the meaning of these images is reflected back to their original source instead of being reduced to the level of ordinary perception.

The events that occur in the imaginal world are geared toward the soul becoming conscious, where its presence spatializes the imaginal world. The imaginal world is not restricted to limitations of time and space and provides the soul a place of expression and unfolding. As in alchemy, a vessel is required for the transformation to take place. The imaginal world provides that vessel or space for the transformation of the human soul. Once entrance is gained into the imaginal world, one is liberated from the confines of literalization. By stepping out of the material and the literal and entering into the imaginal, one has an opportunity to change his mode of presence in this world.

The arrival into the imaginal world is marked by crossing the threshold of the material world where the soul faces the Angel. It is through this encounter with the Angel that the visionary voyage is initiated. In the recitals, at the beginning of the tales, the human soul is met by this Angel guide. It is the presence of the Angel, as an imaginal figure, that provides the conditions for the experience of transcendence (Sajjadi, 1997). Corbin (1954/1988) wrote, "At the moment when the soul discovers itself to be a stranger and alone in a world formerly familiar, a personal figure appears on its horizon, a figure that announces itself to the soul

personally because it symbolizes with the soul's most intimate depths" (p. 20). This movement from one mode of being to another always requires a mover. For Sohravardi, this mover is the Angel, or the Active Intellect, being personified as the angel Gabriel, often taking form as an Old Man. Corbin continues, "Whether it is the Active Intelligence as Holy Spirit and Archangel Gabriel, or as Holy Spirit and Angel of Humanity in the philosophy of *Ishraq*, the same figure never ceases to manifest itself to mental vision under the angelophany" (p. 67). Through this encounter with the Angel, in a continuous act of initiation, the soul gains self-understanding and is initiated into the spiritual world of *Nakoj abad*.

Landscape of the Imaginal World

An important aspect of Sohravardi's use of the term *illumination* in his wisdom tradition is its connection to the symbolism of pointing to a specific direction or geographic region identified as the imaginal world. It is a region that is not part of any earthly geography and cannot be found on any map.

Nevertheless, this region, without a locale, has its own landscape. Sohravardi's recitals partake of an imaginal landscape where Eastern and Western geographical latitudes are transmuted into vertical poles (Corbin, 1976/1998). In this topography, the imaginal East is the realm of the Absolute Light populated by angelic figures in subtle form, invisible to the senses. The imaginal West is the realm of material and corporeal beings where light can least penetrate.

Between the two poles, which form a vertical horizon from the Earth (West) to the heavens (East), there are the planets and the stars where light and darkness converge in various intensities. In this manner the extension from East to West finds a vertical direction; the direction of emanation.

Where Sohrevardi speaks of the East or the West, he is referring to a symbolic geography and landscape. It is in this landscape that the events of the recitals are initiated. The West or Occident is the world of matter and the prison of the captive soul. The East is the Orient or World of Lights, located above the visible cosmos, which is the origin of the soul and to which it yearns to return.

The landscape of the imaginal world includes cities, rivers, birds, cosmic mountains, is peopled with presences that appear human in form, and angels that can be perceived as real, but nonsensory, witnessed through an imaginal form of perception. The imaginal world is situated beyond the seven levels of the earth's geography, referred to by various names such as *Eran Vej* in Middle Persian (Pahlavi) Zoroastrian texts, *Hurqalya* in Arabic, Celestial Earth or the Imaginal world in English, and *Nakoja abad* in Persian. (Corbin, 1964/1995) This eighth climate or in Persian *Eghlim-e hashtom*, as Sohrevardi refers to it in his writings, represents a world that "possesses extension and dimensions, forms and colors . . . and signifies a climate *outside* of climates, a place *outside* of where: *Nakoja-abad* (Corbin, 1964/1995, p. 9).

In the description offered by Corbin, once the threshold of the material is crossed over the question of “where” no longer applies, since this is the region that the gesture of the index finger cannot point towards. From this eighth level a light identified by Sohrevardi as the Light of Lights shines through and permeates and engulfs everything below it, revealing the hidden and the esoteric. For an instance one will be “in the totality of the Heaven of his soul” (1964/1995, p. 23).

The threshold that signifies the separation of the material from the imaginal is the mystical mountain *Qaf*. What is on the West of this mountain is the landscape of the material, and to the East, is the imaginal world. In the recitals, Sohrevardi refers crossing over this great mountain, which signifies crossing the threshold of the physical universe. In one of the recitals the Angel guide announces that it has arrived from beyond the mountain *Qaf*, marking its origins in *Nakoja abad*.

What is important to recognize is that *Nakoja-abad* or the imaginal world is a place that has an objective and autonomous reality of its own, separate from the material world. *Nakoja-abad* establishes for soul a place it can return to, leaving behind the prison of the body. As Corbin (1964/1995) stated, *Nakoja abad* contains “all works accomplished, the forms of our thoughts and our desires, of our presentiments and our behavior” (p. 10). *Nakoja abad* serves to embody the divine and spiritual aspects we all possess within us, yet lie dormant, only waiting in potential for a source of expression. Sohrevardi, through his writings about the journey of the soul into the imaginal world, proclaimed a foundational role for soul

in his philosophy, laying the foundation for what has become archetypal psychology, a discipline in service to the soul.

Chapter 7 Visionary Recitals

Sohravardi's work encompasses a wide range of topics that routinely involve discussions leading from philosophical topics to stories that are deeply mystical. He composed a substantial amount of writings, both in Arabic and Persian. Sohravardi's most complex, highly symbolic, and intriguing works are his spiritual narratives or visionary recitals. These short tales depict the human soul's journey through a visible and invisible universe towards the goal of attaining illumination by returning to the imaginal world of the spirit. In these tales Sohravardi demonstrates the use of active imagination in leading him into this spiritual universe.

The visionary journey theme of departure and return has existed through all cultures and religions. However, due to the mystical nature of these accounts, they have been categorized under religious or spiritual experiences and not considered or read as psychological experiences. Various accounts of the journey write about the experience of transcendence and transformation of a seeker undergoing this type of a voyage. One of the most ancient accounts of the visionary journey is the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh* dating back to over 2000 years ago. In the Greek tradition, Hades' journey into the Underworld and Homer's *Odyssey* are also examples of the visionary journey. In *The Republic*, Plato writes about the rebirth of soul through a journey taken after death. Plotinus' account of the soul's journey is depicted as the quest to return to The One. More recent accounts of the visionary

journey are described in Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Goethe's *Faust*. Other accounts of visionary journeys are described in religious texts. For example, in the Bible and the Koran, the story of Jacob's ascent into the heavens by means of a ladder and Mohammed's Night journey on the wings of the Angel Gabriel are more noteworthy.

There are many other such accounts of the visionary journey in various literature of the world which are beyond the scope of the present study. The preceding was meant to demonstrate to the reader the attention given to these forms of journeys, illustrating their universality amongst cultures and their appeal in both Eastern and Western consciousness. The aim in the present chapter is to explore accounts of the visionary journey in the writings of the Islamic scholar Sohrevardi, more specifically, Sohrevardi's accounts of three such journeys that demonstrate the theme of the fall and ascent of the human soul back to the spiritual world in a quest to achieve wholeness and illumination.

These recitals explore the internal quest for meaning in every human being trying to return to his spiritual origins through connecting with the Divine. The recitals are spiritual events that are experienced in a suprasensory world and told in the form of a story in a symbolic manner. When first reading these narratives, what becomes apparent is the surreal reality of the places, events, and figures that entail a realism which is not on par with everyday mundane reality and attest to be anything

but ordinary. In most of the recitals the story is narrated from the vantage point of the main figure, the human soul.

Thackston (1999) states, "Sohravardi's treatises are concerned primarily with the initiation of a neophyte, or aspirant, into the spiritual realm. Each treatise, however, casts the initiatory symbol in a slightly different mold or develops the topic from a different vantage point" (p. xvi). Sohravardi wrote a total of nine short recitals in Persian with such titles as: *The Treatise of the Birds*, *The Sound of Gabriel's wing*, *The Red Intellect*, *A Day with a Group of Sufis*, *On the State of Childhood*, *On the Reality of Love*, *The Language of the Ants*, *The Simurgh's Shriill Cry*, and *A Tale of Occidental Exile*. Among this selection, three of the recitals focus directly on the journey of the soul from exile in the material world to its escape and return to the imaginal world.

These "Recitals of Initiations" (Corbin, 1958/1997, p. 21) include *The Treatise of the Birds*, *The Red Intellect*, and *A Tale of Occidental Exile* and are the subject of exploration in this chapter. These recitals tell the tale of the human soul as a heroic figure, depicted in various situations involving a treacherous and arduous quest, in which unexpected events take place. Zarrinkoub (1984) classifies the recitals as spiritual epics depicting:

The human soul's journey from the realm of the spirit into the material realm, where it becomes trapped in the prison of matter, then tries, however it is possible, and through various kinds of challenges and danger, to ascend back to its origin, in the transparent meta-sensorial realm of the spirit. (p. 121)

Thackston (1999) states:

In general, the message is similar throughout the treatises: what the neophyte must achieve is a release of the soul from the material world of the senses . . . into which the human soul has been cast and where our atemporal, spiritual nature is held captive . . . while in this state of forgetfulness, the soul cannot extricate itself if it is attached to any of the goods this world has to offer. (p. xvi)

The visionary journey, as depicted in Sohrevardi's recitals, is the account of this exploration. The journey of the soul to its source in the imaginal world is initiated as a rediscovery of a lost wholeness; of soul with spirit, which the soul yearns to achieve once again. It is a yearning that has become an indistinct memory since its exile in the material world. This quest maps the point of departure from the world of matter, the cage of the body, to arrival into the subtle reality of the imaginal world. A reality that transcends predictable ideas about space and time and is capable of tolerating and holding a personal, intimate relationship with the Divine.

According to Thackston (1999), "regardless of how far one travels in this pursuit, one will inevitably wind up back where one started" (p. xxx), because this is a voyage that takes place while one never leaves this world or the body. This journey lends itself to the reunion with the divine presence that is present in every human being, yet most often forgotten. Although the tales are a journey of gnosis from a mystical perspective, they also describe a psychological experience; that of becoming aware and insightful about realities that exist beyond ego consciousness,

leading to an encounter with the Self in a realm known in depth psychology as the unconscious.

The three recitals under study in this chapter best exemplify the soul's attempt to break away from the world of appearances, where it is held captive, and break into the imaginal world. On this path the soul is faced with many obstacles and hurdles that it must overcome to reach its objective. The soul is the central figure or hero in these recitals. The symbolic landscapes the soul traverses through in its rites of passage must be crossed in order to return to its world. This return accomplishes an attempt to re-establish a misplaced wholeness that was once present, and heal a dualism within the psyche, that is present now. Once the soul becomes aware of its state of exile, it recognizes that the world of appearances cannot fulfill this demand for wholeness. Hence, the visionary journey facilitates attainment of this goal.

The task presented in this chapter is to understand these mystical accounts through a depth psychological lens, demonstrating their relevance as being an initiation into psychological transformation of the individual in an attempt to integrate consciousness with the unconscious psyche.

Aspects of the Recitals

The recitals are written in a highly symbolic language so that understanding their meaning requires deciphering the symbolism that is represented in various figures like animals, birds, imaginal forms, and places that are surreal and beyond

time and space. The recitals display two different layers of meaning. First is the outer exoteric and second is the inner esoteric layer, which contains the main ideas and the essential meaning of the work. In the esoteric component of the recitals, the theme of the fall of the soul from the realm of the spirit or the imaginal world, and into the darkness of matter or the body, is fully illustrated. The story relates the efforts of the soul to free itself from material bondage and return to its origin.

The recitals exemplify the *ta'wil* of the human soul by manifesting the hidden aspects of the soul to itself, while hiding its apparent form, and leading it back to its true origins (Corbin, 1954/1988). This transmutation of the soul presumes a new way of perceiving and reflecting on the world with soul in mind.

Sohravardi writes about this journey in different ways, putting the soul in various figures and situations in the telling of the story. The description of the journey carries with it the belief in a reality that is not material, but subtle and visionary. This subtle nature is brought to light by a special type of consciousness that is not a part of sense perception or the activity of the intellect, but that is imaginal and founded on images. In the vocabulary of Sohravardi, the mode of realization of this reality is through intuition or knowledge by witnessing. The encounters and events that take place in this other worldly realm, and the symbolic subject matter alluded to in them, are based on intuitive knowledge and an insightful knowing from the heart, which Sohravardi refers to as *Ilm-e Shohudi*.

Experiencing such intuitive knowledge requires a transformation in one's form of perception that is mindful of dreams, visions, intuition, and spiritual worlds.

While the subject of science is the objective observation of nature and what is palpable, using the senses and the intellect as the mode of perceiving, the subject of intuition is the transcendent world of nonsensual, nonpalpable ideas, and the mode for its perception is gaining insight and wisdom through experiential participation.

The prerequisite underlying scientific knowledge is objective data and information, but the prerequisite for understanding intuitive knowledge is the absence of such information; of not knowing, but being present. This is a mode of perception where being surrenders to becoming, and finds reality in mystical voyages, poetry, art, and myth, manifesting them into the material world through the imagination. Sohrevardi's ultimate goal is not to heighten one's state of intellectual knowledge and understanding. Rather, his goal is to demonstrate that for the properly prepared seeker, awareness of a connection between material and spiritual, divine and human, consciousness and unconscious, is directly related to the transformation of an individual and his or her world. With this aim, he also acknowledged the unity amongst them. The rich symbolism of the Pythagorean-Platonic, Hermetic, Zoroastrian, and Islamic traditions are so structured in these tales as to unveil to the intuitive eye the root of temporal existence and the reward for those who transcend it (Sajjadi, 1997).

In his book, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, Sohrevardi (1999a) writes that the recitals are a personal account of his own revelation and transformation. He states that his motive was “to write a book in which I would tell what I have obtained through my intuition during my retreats and vision” (p. 1).

According to Purnamdariyan (1995) the various configurations of the stories can be attributed to the fact that Sohrevardi narrated his own subjective mystical experiences and encounters in each stage of the journey. These are accounts of Sohrevardi’s own spiritual ascension, by use of active imagination and vision, in moments of transcendence where ego consciousness breaks through the imaginal world. It is a journey through the stages of ascension and into the imaginal world, moving towards the Orient of Lights, as revealed in the recitals. In these tales Sohrevardi is writing about events and experiences that are not a result of intellectual reflection, but intuition. He notes, “I did not first arrive at it through cogitation; rather, it was acquired through something else” (Sohrevardi, 1999a, p. 2).

Although the situations presented and events encountered vary from one recital to the other, the main theme always remains the same. They tell, in symbolic form, of Sohrevardi’s encounters of events and places in a journey from the material world of the senses to an imaginal world of subtle presences. The culmination of this quest is the redemption and eventual illumination of a soul that has reached and experienced divine presence.

Once the soul enters the imaginal world, ego limitations become less noticeable or not recognizable at all. As the soul involves itself in this transcendental reality, it situates itself in the world of archetypes. Put in a psychological framework, this experience can be associated with a journey from consciousness into deeper levels of the unconscious and beyond in an attempt, as has been carried out in depth psychology for over a century, to make the unconscious conscious and to acquire self-realization. In this mode of advancing self-knowledge, the ego no longer identifies only with the material world, but also with the imaginal world and the various levels of the unconscious. In depth psychology there is one level of the unconscious, in Sohrevardi's cosmology there are multilevel that the soul journey's through to encounter the Divine.

The phase of surrendering the ego is the stage of annihilation (*fana*), which marks the breaking away from the material for the spiritual. When the ego is annihilated, it is replaced by another form of consciousness which opens one to experience other realities that transcend the limits of materiality, allowing one to become a part of a larger experience. This is the stage when the soul becomes illuminated through direct intuitive knowing, unaffected by passive reflections of reason.

The recitals speak of the encounter of two forms of awareness, that of ego and imaginal, which convene through the faculty of imagination. This encounter is an experience that is nonsensual and nonintellectual, yet as real as Jung's

proclamation of the objectivity of the psyche. Sohravardi, before the advent of depth psychology, is referring to another form of perception that is not based on or a part of the senses or the intellect, but is imaginal, and possesses a subtle presence, providing access into the imaginal realm or the unconscious.

The Main Themes of the Recitals

In the selected recitals emphasis is given to a succession of five central themes. The themes that run through Sohravardi's three recitals and are the focus of this study include the following:

1. The human soul introduced as the figure of the hero, the struggles it faces, and obstacles it must overcome, in order to reach the spiritual world.
2. The soul forgetting its spiritual origins through falling into exile in the prison of the body, reawakening and remembering its source in the spiritual world.
3. The soul escaping captivity, crossing the threshold, and entering the imaginal world.
4. The encounter with the Angel as the imaginal figure that guides the soul through the visionary journey.
5. The path of the journey as the vehicle Sohravardi uses to demonstrate the soul's quest for reaching the imaginal world by going through the microcosm and the macrocosm.

Summary of the Three Recitals

The three recitals under study all suggest the same themes told in an assortment of ways using various story lines and figures. In order to familiarize the reader with the three tales, a short synopsis of each is provided in this section.

In *The Treatise of the Birds*, a group of hunters cast nets and capture the hero of the story, who is a bird amongst a group of birds. The bird, after becoming aware of its captive state, manages to escape its bonds with the help of other birds who have previously escaped their captivity and are taking flight towards a distant land. The captive bird is freed and takes flight in such a manner that signs of its captivity and the bonds that held it captive are still apparent on its feet.

The birds commence on a long and treacherous journey that is full of dangerous obstacles and feats that must be overcome in order to reach their destination. They pass a series of mountains, landing on the eighth mountain. The birds are welcomed here by other birds that show their hospitality and direct them to the governor of this land. The birds tell the governor of their tale of imprisonment, seeking to be freed of the remaining bonds. The governor sends the birds to the King who presides over this land. Due to the majestic presence of this figure, the birds lose consciousness and die to their intellect. The King leads them back to consciousness and tells them they must return to where they were imprisoned in order to have the remaining fetters removed.

In the process he appoints a messenger to accompany them on their journey back to the world of appearances. The last part of the tale is about the objection of the birds to having to return to the material world. The tale ends with Sohrevardi alluding to the disbelief of his friends in hearing this tale. Sohrevardi speaks of this experience as if he witnessed it himself in a dream or as a vision as a real occurrence. Because his friends have not experienced such a vision, they find him in a state of delusion, hallucinating about these events. However, this experience is so real for Sohrevardi that he dismisses his friends' comments and finds them ignorant.

The tale of *The Red Intellect* opens with the question posed to a Falcon about whether or not birds understand each other's language. In response to a confirmatory answer from the Falcon, the Falcon is further asked, "How does he know?" From this point the story is the answer to this question. The Falcon shares how it was captured and brought to this world from its nest and because of its prolonged captivity forgot its nest. As time passed, it was able to open its eyes and understand its condition of exile. In longing to return to its nest, when its captors were unaware, the Falcon escapes its prison and heads out for the wilderness with the remnants of its bonds around its neck.

In the wilderness, the Falcon is confronted by a figure whom it mistakes as a young man because of the red color of his complexion. In asking where this young man has come from, the Falcon finds out that that this figure is actually an

Old Man coming from the same place as the Falcon once had its nest. In addressing his red complexion, the Old Man shares that he too was trapped by hunters, and, because he was in a dark pit for numerous years, he inherited his red complexion; otherwise his features would be illuminated. The Falcon asks the Old Man's purpose in this world, and the Old Man shares that he is a traveler seeking to find the wonders in this world. The Old Man states that he has seen seven wonders and proceeds to describe them for the Falcon one at a time. While the Falcon asks about how to return to its nest the Old Man instructs it on the path it must take and the obstacles it must cross to reach the Spring of Life and attain immortality and wisdom. The story ends when the Falcon states that when it told this story to friends they asked also to be guided on this path.

The *Tale of Occidental Exile* depicts two brothers imprisoned in the city of *Gheyrovan* in a dark pit. The darkness in the pit is so intense that no light is able to shine upon it or to penetrate through it. The two brothers are the sons of Sheikh Hadi from Yemen. In Arabic Yemen refers to the right hand, which symbolically depicts the Orient or the east, whereas the left is connected to the Occident and the west. The two brothers are allowed to come to the top of the dark pit only at night and gaze at the landscape above the pit, which includes a castle with 12 towers. However, they must return to the bottom of the pit during the day. Occasionally birds from their homeland bring forth sounds that remind them of home, but because of their captive state, they can only lament their state of exile.

One night the mythical bird *Hoopoe* brings a message from their Father telling them to initiate an escape and journey back to their homeland. This message is given to them in the form of a revelation from the world of celestial beings. The two brothers embark on a ship and head for the homeland, identified as Mount Sinai. Throughout the journey they are faced with many obstacles. On the journey one of the brothers is killed, but the other reaches the homeland where the Father instructs him to once again return to the dark pit and share his journey and experience with others. The divine Father assures him that now that he has attained illumination by their encounter he can return to his court anytime he chooses.

In the three tales Sohravardi uses numerous symbols to speak about the experience of the soul as it journeys through the two worlds. In this study, the focus will be on a selection of these symbols, concentrating more on elaborating the selected themes that run through the recitals. In the following section each of the five themes previously mentioned will be illustrated by way of examples and excerpts from the three recitals. The English quotes referenced in this section are from the English translation of *The Philosophical Allegories and Mystical Treatises*, by W. M. Thackston (1999).

Soul as the Hero

Sohravardi's illustration of the trials and tribulations the soul endures while

questing to reach its source best exemplifies the soul manifested in the figure of the hero. The soul, far from its origins in the realm of the spirit, has descended into the confines of the material realm. Corbin refers to this as the *Cosmic Crypt*:

The structure of space reveals to phenomenological analysis a particular sense of the cosmos, which experiences this world as a crypt. Above the earth, heaven curves like a dome, enclosing it, giving it the safety of a habitation, but at the same time keeping it as it were in a prison. . . . The magnificent dome becomes a cage, a prison from which he [the soul] must escape. (Corbin, 1954/1988, p. 18)

The soul, after realizing its mode of captivity in the depths of this cosmic crypt, tries to escape its condition and return to its abode. This abode is a spiritual world that Sohrawardi refers to as *Nakoja abad* or the imaginal world. In these tales, the soul's task as the hero of the story becomes that of breaking free of the world of history and breaking into a reality that is atemporal and ahistorical. This is a world where angels and apparitions reveal themselves and welcome the soul back to its home.

In the recitals, the soul as the heroic figure is depicted in various symbolic forms. In the *Treatise of the Birds*, the soul is manifested as a bird held captive in a cage by bonds around its neck and body. The tale begins with the soul telling the story of how, while flying with other birds, it became captive as a result of being attracted to the calls of the hunter:

I was approaching amidst a flock of birds. When the Hunters saw us, they made such attractive calls that we were taken in. We looked and saw a nice, pleasant spot. There was no reason to suspect it; no shadow of doubt kept us from the field. We headed straight for the trap and were caught. We looked

and saw the loops of the net around our necks and the bonds of the snare about our legs. (Sohravardi, 1999d, p. 3)

The soul confined to the prison of the body attempts to escape, yet each time the bonds become more unyielding, “In hopes of escaping from the disaster, we all tried to move; but the more we struggled, the tighter the bonds grew” (Sohravardi, 1999d, p. 3). At this point the soul submits to its confinement: “Therefore we readied ourselves for death and succumbed to the agony. Each of us was so involved with his own suffering that none had a care for the others” (p. 3). However, the soul, in its resilience, tries to find a way to escape this involuntary separation from its flock:

Then we tried to think of a ruse by means of which we might save ourselves, but we remained as we were so long that eventually we grew accustomed to it and forgot how we had been before. We ceased to struggle against our fetters and resigned ourselves to the strictures of the cage. (Sohravardi, 1999d, p. 3)

The soul, discouraged and hopeless, yet “disgusted by that to which I had grown accustomed” (Sohravardi, 1999d, p. 3), sees a flock of birds that have escaped their prison and are flying towards their home. The soul beckons the liberated souls to help it escape and join them:

I cried out to them, pleading with them to come to me and guide me to find relief and to commiserate with me in my affliction, for I was at death’s door. . . . Once again I spoke of our past and demonstrated my helplessness. They approached me, and I asked how they had managed to escape and how they could put up with the fragments of the fetters. (p. 4)

Further into the tale the soul tells how it escaped its bondage with the heroic efforts of the other souls portrayed also as birds, “They helped to get my neck and

wings out of the snare and then opened the door of the cage” (Sohravardi, 1999d, p.

4). From this point forward, the soul escapes its captivity and prepares for the perilous path ahead:

So then I flew away with them. We have a long way ahead of us in terrible, frightful stages wherein no one can be secure. Actually, we may lose this state and be trapped once more in our former affliction. We must therefore bear up under terrible agony in order to escape once and for all the horrible pitfalls and thereafter keep to the right road. (p. 4)

The soul readied for its adventure soars towards the imaginal world, struggling and fighting to conquer the obstacles on its way. The barriers the soul must overcome through heroic feats include the hunter, signifying the seductions of the body and the temptations of the ego that keep the soul grounded to the material body; the snares, signifying the demands of the ego and entrapments of the material world; and the crossing of seven mountains, which signifies overcoming the seven bodily senses and their limitations (Purnamdariyan, 1995).

Once the soul manages to rise above these obstacles, it reaches the eighth mountain, which signifies overcoming the entrapments of the corporeal body and crossing into the imaginal world. The Governor of this realm tells the soul “there is a city atop this mountain where the King dwells. He will unburden anyone who has suffered injustice if he will but go to him and place his confidence in him” (Sohravardi, 1999d, p. 5). The soul’s reward is to meet and be greeted by the King and become liberated from the remains of its earthly attachments. However, the King does not fulfill this request to free the soul of its bonds, but sends the soul

back to the material world, with the accompaniment of an envoy, to relinquish those bonds itself:

We told him of our trials and tribulations and related our story. We requested him to remove the remains of the fetters from our legs so that we might serve at his court, but he replied: Only he who put them on you can remove the fetters from your legs. I will send a messenger with you to compel them to remove your bonds. (Sohravardi, 1999d, p. 6)

The story ends as the soul hero is returning to meet this challenge, “So we left the King and are now on our way with the King’s messenger” (p. 6).

In *The Red Intellect*, the same motif of the bird is continued. However, in this tale Sohravardi casts the soul in the form of a Falcon. The tale begins with the soul explaining its manifestation as a Falcon and how it was created:

In the beginning when the form giver wanted to bring me into actuality, he created me in the form of a Falcon. In the realm where I was were other Falcons, and we spoke together and understood each other’s words. (Sohravardi, 1999b, p. 20)

The Falcon goes on to explain how fate and destiny, symbolized as hunters, contributed to its captivity and citing how it descended, was put in shackles, and became attached to its exiled condition. In this tale fate and destiny can be interpreted as the inhibiting attachments of the human will to physical mortality (Purnamdariyan, 1995).

The tale begins:

One day the hunters, Fate and Destiny, laid the trap of Fore-ordination and filled it with the grain of Will, and in this manner they caught me. Then they took me from the realm where our nest was into another realm, where they stitched my eyes shut, put four different bonds on me and appointed ten wardens to watch over me. Five of them faced me with their backs

towards the outside, while the other five stood facing the outside with their backs to me. The five who faced me kept me in the world of perplexity so that I forgot my nest, my realm and everything I had known. I thought I had always been the way I was then. (Sohravardi, 1999b, p. 21)

What Sohravardi is referring to by the “ten wardens” are the five outer senses and five inner senses. The five outer senses include the sense of smell, sight, sound, touch, and taste. The five inner senses include *sensus communis*, retentive, compositive, and estimative imagination, and memory (Thackston, 1999). The captive soul is busied with the five outer senses which occupy it with the worldly affairs of material existence and the demands of the body. Through the five outer senses the soul communicates with the outer world. The five inner senses are depicted as facing away from the outer world. Their job is to process and reflect what the outer senses perceive, by deciphering their meaning through ego consciousness (Purnamdariyan, 1995). In this manner the human soul becomes occupied and obsessed with the events of the material world and forgets its origins or nest. Hence, the senses are the guardians that hold the soul captive.

The soul is imprisoned in the body until the time that a transformation in its conciseness takes place and it awakens to the reality of its present existence: “After a time had passed in this manner, my eyes were opened a bit” (Sohravardi, 1999b, p. 21). Gradually the soul’s eyes are opened further and it poses the question, “Will my wings ever be loosed so that I may fly for a moment in the air and be free of my bondage?” (p. 21).

After the Falcon recalls its past and becomes aware of its exiled status, it escapes from its captivity into the wilderness, signifying entering into the imaginal world or the unconscious. Here, the soul is welcomed by a mysterious figure with red features. This imaginal figure, appearing as an Old Man, prepares the soul for its adventure ahead, warning the soul that “the way is difficult” (Sohravardi, 1999b p. 23), and telling it about the seven obstacles it must cross, which correspond to the seven senses including: two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, and the mouth.

Through a series of questions posed to the guide, the soul gains knowledge about how to traverse the difficult journey and once again return to its source. The story ends as the Falcon soul narrates this tale to another as if it has already accomplished the journey and is now reflecting and describing the experience to another. “When I told this adventure to that dear friend, he said, you are that hawk that was caught and now hunts? Here bind me to your saddle ring, for I am not a bad catch” (Sohravardi, 1999b, p. 32). The symbolism of the Falcon as the soul attempting heroic acts in order to reach its prize is illustrated in this tale.

In the third recital, *A Tale of Occidental Exile*, the soul is depicted as the two sons of *Hadi-al Yamin*, who are on their way from the imaginal world to the material world in order to search for other souls and to bring them back to their land:

When I traveled with my brother Asim from the region of Transoxiana to the lands of the occident in order to hunt down a flock of birds on the shore of the Green Sea, we suddenly fell into a town whose inhabitants were wicked, that is the town of Kairouan. (Sohravardi, 1999c, p. 113)

The two brothers are taken prisoner and put away in a dark pit. The soul hero must climb out of the pit and find its orientation back to the Orient of Lights.

When the people perceived that we had come amongst them unexpectedly, we being sons of the elder known as al-Hadi ibn al-Khayr al-Yamani, they surrounded us and took us bound in shackles and fetters of iron and imprisoned us at the bottom of an infinitely deep pit. (p. 113)

In this recital the occident is the material universe and symbolized as a dark pit where the soul has fallen and must escape. The darkness of the pit signifies the darkness of matter and the body: "At the bottom of the pit was layer upon layer of darkness. When we put our hands we could scarcely see them" (Sohravardi, 1999c, p. 114). The imprisoned soul is told that it must stay in its prison during the day, but at nightfall it is able to come out: "Then we were told, you are permitted to ascend to the palace by yourselves when it is evening, but by morning you must sink back down to the bottom of the pit" (p. 114). This passage alludes to the idea that one is not able to transcend the material world or ego consciousness in a waking state, but only in dreams or mystical states where the ego has been suspended.

Above the prison is a castle with 12 towers. The symbolism of the towers refers to the 12 signs of the zodiac that include the map of astronomy (Purnamdariyan, 1995). The soul can only glimpse at this castle and its towers, yet at times it receives messages from Yemen, the original homeland, which saddens the soul and makes it nostalgic for the homeland:

At night we ascended to the palace and looked out over the void by peeking through a small window. Sometimes doves would come to us from the bedecked thrones of the Yemen to tell us of the condition of the beloved abode. (Sohravardi, 1999c, p. 114)

The longing to return motivates the soul to make an attempt to escape the bonds of material captivity, defeat its captives, and end its exile. The heroic adventure commences when the mythic bird, the Hoopoe, brings the soul a message from its heavenly Father:

We saw the hoopoe enter through the small window and bring us greetings on a moonlight night. In his beak was a letter sent from the right side of the valley in the blessed field. He said to us, I have brought your deliverance. I have come to you from Sheba with certain news, and it is explained in this letter from your father. (Sohravardi, 1999c, p. 115)

The letter orders the soul to initiate an escape from the dark pit and to return home, “If you desire to be delivered along with your brother, do not put off traveling” (Sohravardi, 1999c, p. 115). The soul escapes and embarks on a ship. “We embarked on the ship, and it sailed with us between waves like mountains, and we wanted to go up onto Mount Sinai in order to visit our father’s hermitage” (p. 116). Again, in this recital, the soul goes through a difficult journey from the cosmic crypt to reach its original home in what Sohravardi refers to as the Orient of Lights, in order to regain illumination and spiritual fulfillment.

The soul continues its adventure and passes a series of dangerous situations to reach its destiny. This involves fighting wild animals and destroying buildings, all symbolizing the treacherous path the soul must cross and conquer, to be

relinquished of the powers of the ego and the senses. The soul's journey to conquer and triumph over the ego and the obstacles of the senses portrays a heroic journey.

In the first two recitals the soul is manifested in the form of a bird having descended from the celestial world of Angels and spiritual beings, only to become captive in the prison of the body. In these tales the ascension of the soul from the terrestrial world back to the heavenly spheres is symbolized as the flight of the birds through a dangerous landscape and crossing the barriers on its path to reunite with its source. This reunion takes place in a trancelike state or a waking dream, where knowledge and insight is gained through discovery and intuition and not through the intellect.

Henderson (1964) notes:

The bird is the most fitting symbol of transcendence. It represents the peculiar nature of intuition working through a medium, that is, an individual who is capable of obtaining knowledge of distant events--or facts of which he consciously knows nothing--by going into a trancelike state. (p. 147)

Henderson (1964) describes the bird as a symbol of transcendence and writes, "What we call symbols of transcendence are the symbols that represent man's striving to attain a full realization of the potential of his individual Self" (p. 146). He goes on to note that these symbols "provide the means by which the contents of the unconscious can enter the conscious mind, and they also are themselves an active expression of those contents" (p. 147).

In the three recitals studied the theme of the hero is best exemplified in the figure of the soul escaping captivity and attempting to return to the imaginal world.

The soul, symbolized in various forms acts as the heroic figure once it becomes aware of its captive existence in the confines of the body. Soon after this realization it initiates a journey of return to the luminous realm of the Orient, leaving behind the dark Occidental world to reunite with the Divine symbolized as the Father or the King.

In these recitals, the soul as a mythic hero is involved in an archetypal adventure. What is apparent in these passages is the depiction of the heroic figure going through various events, battling obstacles, and conquering them in order to reach its destination. Thereafter, returning to the material world or the body, more illuminated, the soul shares its experience. The theme of the hero and the various stages, as depicted by Joseph Campbell, fully reveal themselves in these tales and will be further analyzed in the next chapter.

Un-forgetting and Remembrance

In the three recitals the soul is presented as becoming accustomed to its imprisoned condition in the body, while forgetting its origins in the spiritual world. The soul eventually comes face to face with the reality of its exiled status in the dark prison of the body, far from its original homeland, surrounded and confined by the seductions of the senses.

In *The Treatise of the Birds*, the bird describes how as time passed it became intimate and accepted its fate, forgetting its original state of being; “We remained as we were so long that eventually we grew accustomed to it and forgot

how we had been before. We ceased to struggle against our fetters and resigned ourselves to the strictures of the cage” (Sohravardi, 1999d, p. 3). Sohravardi’s reference to the cage is the prison of the body where the soul remains voiceless and trapped. As the bird “succumbs to the agony” (p. 3) of being defeated, it is faced with an image that inspires and rekindles its motivation to strive for its liberation.

One day we looked out from our bondage and saw that a group of our comrades had their heads and wings out of the net of the narrow cage and were about to take flight. On the leg of each of them was a remnant of the scarecrows and fetters, but it did not keep them from flying. In fact, they were quite happy in spite of the fetters. When I saw this I remembered how I had been before and how I had forgotten myself. (p. 3)

In this state of anguish the bird soul beckons and calls out to the free birds to come to its aid and release it from its misery. It is in the act of remembering its past that the soul recalls its previous mode of existence and realizes it does not belong to the body and its demands. In the grasp of suffering and sadness, the soul becomes nostalgic for its roots and laments its uprootedness. This tale portrays the deep grief and the extent of sorrow the soul endures in exile and captivity, existing in a world lacking in spirituality and meaning.

In *The Red Intellect*, as a result of being shut in and confused, the soul states, “I forgot my nest, my realm and everything I had known. I thought I had always been the way I was then” (Sohravardi, 1999b, p. 21). Again, in this tale, a period of forgetfulness is followed by one of recollection where the soul becomes fully aware of its captivity of being in a place that is not its place:

After a time had passed in this manner, my eyes were opened a bit. I looked with that much of my eyes and saw things I had never seen before. I was amazed. Every day my eyes were gradually opened a little more, and I saw things that made me wonder. Finally my eyes were completely opened and I was shown the world as it was. I looked at the bonds and fetters they had put on me and at the wardens. (Sohravardi, 1999b, p. 21)

When the Falcon becomes a prisoner to the senses of the body, its eyes are closed shut, yet as time passes its eyes are once again opened. This is symbolic of the time the soul is initially taken as prisoner and caged in the body. While its eyes are focused on the world of appearances it forgets its own origins. These are the eyes of the senses and the stitching of these eyes is meant to block the soul from seeing through the eyes of intuition.

The eyes of intuition allow the soul to see through the world of matter. Their opening is the awakening of the soul from the sleep of neglect and ignorance, understanding its state in the world as a captive being. It is at this point that the soul acknowledges its state of exile and longs to be freed: “Will these wardens ever be discharged from me? Will my wings ever be loosed so that I may fly for a moment in the air and be free of my bondage?” (Sohravardi, 1999b, p. 21).

According to Sohravardi, reaching such a state and remembering the past requires the shutting out of the senses through self-discipline, knowledge, and wisdom. It requires the soul to die to this world in order to awaken to the real world. It is only then that the soul can once again take flight and be freed of its fetters. Once the soul accomplishes this feat and enters the imaginal world, it is reminded of its origins by the Angel guide: “When you are delivered of your

bondage you will go there, you have been brought from there, and eventually everything that exists returns to its initial form” (Sohravardi, 1999b, p. 23).

Turning away from the senses and ego consciousness, it becomes possible for the soul to once again utilize its intuitive eye. After the soul’s remembrance and the realization of its state of captivity and homelessness, it initiates its escape from the fetters and the guardians that held it captive.

In *The Tale of Occidental Exile*, the soul imprisoned in a dark pit tells of its homesickness in this manner:

Sometimes doves would come to tell us of the condition of the beloved’s abode. Sometimes Yemenite lightning-flashes would visit us, winking from the eastern, right side, and inform us of the highways of Najd; and the *arak*-scented breezes made us more and more ecstatic, so we pined and yearned for our homeland. (Sohravardi, 1999c, p. 114)

In this tale the soul is reminded of its origins through dove messengers that visit and bring news of its homeland. But the soul, although it remembers and longs to return to its homeland, finds itself powerless until it is inspired through the words of its Father, brought to it by the mystical bird, the Hoopoe. In its message the Father issues forth a declaration and an invitation for soul to escape its captivity. The story commences:

The hoopoe entered through the small window and brought us greetings on a moonlit night. In his beak was a letter sent from the right side of the valley in the blessed field, from the tree. He said to us, “I have brought your deliverance. I have come to you from the Sheba with certain news, and it is explained in this letter from your father.” We read the letter, which said: “From al-Hadi your father and it is in the name of God the Compassionate, the Merciful. We have tried to make you yearn for us, but you have not longed. We have summoned you, but you have not set forth. We have

shown you the way, but you have not understood.” And he indicated me in the letter, saying, “If you desire to be delivered along with your brother, do not put off traveling. Cling to our rope, which is the dragon’s tail the holy sphere that dominates the regions of lunar eclipse. (Sohravardi, 1999c, p. 115)

This passage is occupied with various symbols; however what is important to note is that the soul in its state of helplessness is inspired to take flight by an invocation issued by the Father. This call, coming through the mystical bird *Hoopoe* and represents inspiration, makes the soul aware of its forgotten nature and motivates it to return once again to its essence.

These recitals depict the moment the soul awakens and recognizes its condition of exile. At the moment of awakening and becoming sentient, the soul perceives an imaginal presence as a guiding figure and in a moment of nostalgia recalls a memory.

Through the soul’s nostalgic recollection of a memory of a past existence, lived elsewhere, an *un-forgetting* is initiated. This experience happens in the moment the soul becomes aware of its captivity and its condition of exile; how it *un-forgets*, and comes to understand this condition. This moment of *un-forgetting* is the realization of an absence, issuing from the longing for the experience of a lost authentic identity, purged of its I-hood.

Goethe’s words from *The Mysteries* invoke some possible images of this un-forgetting. “In this intense storm and outward tide we hear a promise, hard to understand from the compulsion that all creatures bind, he who overcome himself,

freedom finds” (quoted in Chessick, 1974, p. 1). The un-forgetting brings about a storm in consciousness; a crisis of meaning and identity that brings with it an awareness of the separation from the source and the longing for a return.

Overcoming this storm requires a journey and a passage from sleep to wakefulness and from the unconscious to consciousness.

The account of the *un-forgetting* of the soul is also the description of our awakening and the realization of our separateness and alienation from our source and essence. This state of separateness involves aspects of ourselves we have cut off and let fall into an abyss. An abyss that tightly holds the tension of the rational mind on one side and matter and factuality on the other, leaving no space for any other form of existence. What is left behind in the abyss is what we have shut out, repressed, and resisted. This includes our brokenness, failings, and wounds, which we have muted until they finally have a chance to cry out for expression.

At the moment of awakening, when the ground we stand on gives way beneath our feet, we fall into the abyss where we face our suffering. This is a journey into a place of vulnerability and humility. It is in becoming humble and intimate with our suffering that we gain awareness of our deep uprootedness and of being lost. What is present in the abyss helps us to see what is absent in our exiled material existence. What is concealed reveals itself and what we are not, gives way to what we are. This journey is a heroic endeavor but not to conquer demons, rather

to be present and intimate with them, realizing and accepting them as also being a part of us.

Through our fall into the abyss we face the unsettling reality of an anxiety induced longing which resurfaces, bringing with it the separateness that has always marked our destiny and reality. It is in such moments that our mundane, mediocre subsistence becomes fragmented and our lives no longer make any sense or hold any meaning. To a certain extent, at one time or another, every human being is subject to such moods of futility and despair. These moods come about as a result of being under the command of a self that is not authentic or whole, but is ruled by the demands of a narcissistic ego abiding by the orders of a narcissistic society.

In this state of meaninglessness and breakdown, the soul calls out from the abyss, crying out in its moment of awakening. In this moment of breakdown there is breakthrough. From the dark abyss comes the call for freedom, for liberation, and a cry for reunion, a reunion of imagination with memory, of soul with spirit, but ultimately a union with what is divine within us and presents itself as such.

From the abyss and in the soul's exile, one hears the lament of the soul. This resonance, at the moment of un-forgetting, is the cry of the soul filled with divine inspiration. This sound is an invocation, and once heard and heeded, can lead us away from our exile and separation and into our re-union. In Sohrawardi's recitals we are all spiritual beings, left behind in material form, waiting to return.

The exile is a necessary condition for re-union. It is in exile that the soul becomes conscious of its existence, in an act of self revelation. Until the moment of awakening, there is only darkness, an absence of any self-reflection. The soul needs to reveal itself and become conscious in order to gain awareness of its existence and condition of exile. Through *un-forgetting* and remembrance, a transformation of consciousness takes place and self-reflection is initiated, and through the longing of the soul for a past lived elsewhere, the call to freedom from the darkness of material bondage is heard. It is also through awakening to our longing that we awaken to our exiled condition in the body and have an opportunity to transform ourselves, yet the way is difficult.

Soul Escaping Captivity and Crossing the Threshold

When the soul realizes its state of exile and the extent of its homelessness, it also becomes aware that it cannot continue to exist in such a condition. The cage and darkness are not its destiny and inheritance, and it must once again ascend to its true homeland amongst other souls. After escaping from the cosmic crypt, the soul finds itself in a place not connected to any place previously identifiable. It recognizes that it is not somewhere in this world, but in the land of the rising sun, the Orient.

Here the soul is met by an imaginal figure, alerting it to the fact it has now crossed the threshold from the material world and arrived into a world where nothing is as it seems: *Nakoja abad* or the realm of the imaginal. It is here that

physical reality is transformed and sensory data are raised to a higher level.

Through crossing the threshold and entering the imaginal realm, the eyes of the soul are unstitched and its perception opened wider, becoming more receptive to other orders of reality, including spiritual presences.

Examples of this escape and the crossing of the threshold in *The Treatise of the Birds* involve the other birds who have already escaped their bonds freeing the soul from its cage:

When I emerged they said, Make the most of this escape! So I flew away with them. . . . We took a path between two roads, through a valley with water and vegetation. We flew fast until we were past the snares. We did not look back for any hunter's call. (Sohravardi, 1999d, p. 4)

The soul tells of the landscape and the obstacles it crosses in reaching the threshold: "Then we went to the eighth mountain. It was so high its top reached the sky" (p. 5). It is at this point that the soul meets the guide referring to him as "the Governor of that realm." The significance of the eighth mountain is that it lies beyond the seventh mountain, signifying escaping the seven senses, going beyond sense perception.

In *The Red Intellect*, after the soul comes to the realization of its mode of captivity, it plans its escape:

One day, after a while, I perceived that the wardens were not paying attention to me. I said to myself that I would never find a better opportunity, so I crept into a corner and, fettered as I was, escaped limping into the wilderness. (Sohravardi, 1999b, p. 21)

In this passage the soul, through the use of imagination and without leaving the place of its imprisonment, escapes into the wilderness which symbolizes crossing and leaving the material realm and entering into the imaginal world heralded by meeting of the Angel.

In *The Tale of Occidental Exile* the soul escapes a dark pit on a ship, “We embarked on the ship, and it sailed with us between waves like mountains, and we wanted to go up unto Mount Sinai in order to visit our father’s hermitage” (Sohravardi, 1999c, p. 116). The soul shares how it overcame various obstacles until it saw “the sublime bodies” (p. 119). These awe-inspiring presences mark the crossing into the imaginal world, where the soul says, “I encountered God’s path and realized that this is my right way” (p. 118).

In the recitals, at the crossing from material to the spiritual world, the soul stands at the threshold, which symbolizes going beyond the limits of the physical senses. This is the boundary where ego and material existence are lost in transcendence and the soul becomes disengaged from the body. This is marked as a passing at the interface of material and imaginal, symbolizing passage from ego consciousness to a form of consciousness disengaged from temporal life. By crossing the threshold, the soul figuratively dies to this world and is awakened to the imaginal world. This passing away signifies the soul dying to the ego and its authority; although it is the ego’s power over soul that really dies. Crossing the

threshold and entering into the imaginal landscape is essential to the soul's reawakening and identifying itself with the divine source and meeting the Angel.

Encounter with the Angel

One of the significant events in the recitals of Sohravardi is the meeting of the soul with an imaginal figure which marks the crossing of the threshold from the material to the imaginal world. This encounter comprises the initial condition for the appearance of the Angel. This celestial guide crosses the soul's path when the soul has withdrawn itself from the material world, appearing on its horizon to provide the soul inspiration, preparation, and direction for its departure from terrestrial exile and usher it into the spiritual world.

According to Thackston (1999), for Sohravardi the figure that reveals itself to the soul as an embodied presence is none other than the Angel or the active intellect. The moment the soul becomes aware of its state of exile and awakens to its homelessness it attempts to reunite with the Angel. The Angel provides a way of perceiving that is more than just seeing through the eyes of the body. Corbin notes,

This is because here the human intellect is not a mere disposition to intelligible knowledge; it is a partner of the Angel, the traveling companion who is guided by the Angel and whom, on his side, the Angel needs in order to solemnize his divine service. (Corbin, 1954/1988, p. 72)

The Angel as an imaginal figure has a subtle yet real presence and is personified in various forms in the recitals. These various manifestations are in order for it to be experienced by the soul. Corbin (1958/1997) culminates the theme

of the recitals as being, “a quest and an encounter with, the Angel who is the Holy Spirit and the Active Intelligence, the Angel of Knowledge and revelation” (p. 22).

The imaginal guide as an Angel is a manifestation of the divine presence, providing the link between man and divine (Corbin, 1954/1988). Corbin notes, “[The soul] awakened to its consciousness of being a stranger, becomes free from this world and knows that it forms one with its celestial counterpart, the person of the Angel from whom it originates” (p. 44). It is the presence of the Angel which provides the possibility for this encounter to take place, with the encounter happening at the threshold of the material and the imaginal realms, “at the pure spiritual space beyond the Ninth Sphere” (p. 24).

In this respect Corbin continues:

At the moment when the soul discovers itself to be a stranger and alone in a world formerly familiar, a *personal* figure appears on its horizon, a figure that announces itself to the soul *personally* because it symbolizes *with* the soul’s most intimate depths. In other words, the soul discovers itself to be the earthly counterpart of another being with which it forms a totality that is dual in structure. (Corbin, 1954/1988, p. 20)

Corbin goes on to describe this dual form:

The two elements of this dualitude may be called the ego and the Self, or the transcendent celestial Self and the earthly Self. . . . This [celestial] Self had become a stranger to it while the soul slumbered in the world of ordinary consciousness; but it ceases to be strange to it at the moment when the soul in turn feels itself a stranger in this world. (p. 20)

The meeting of the Angel is the commencement of the passage from the material to the imaginal, marking a move from ego consciousness into the realm of unconsciousness. The Angel guide signifies the joining together of the two realms

of consciousness and unconsciousness where the rational mind is conjoined with the spirit, resulting in cognition being elevated to a stage that comprehension of otherworldly truths becomes possible.

In the three recitals, the journey into the imaginal world begins with the soul meeting the Angel, who welcomes the soul into the imaginal world. In *The Treatise of the Birds*, the soul meets this figure as embodied in a form not identified by Sohrawardi who guides the soul on its journey:

When the Governor of that realm made us at home and we opened up to him and made him aware of our suffering and told him all that had befallen us, he was greatly pained and showed that he sympathized heartily with us. Then he said, "There is a city atop this mountain where the King dwells. He will unburden anyone who has suffered injustice if he will but go to him and place his confidence in him. Whatever I may say of him would fall short of what he is." We were relieved by these words and, following his directions, set out for the royal palace. (Sohrawardi, 1999d, p. 6)

In the end of this tale the guide, by the orders of the King, accompanies the bird on its return to the material world to have the remnant bonds, which previously held it captive, removed.

We told the King of our trials and tribulations and related our story. We requested him to remove the remains of the fetters from our legs so that we might serve at his court, but he replied; only he who put them on you can remove the fetters from your legs. I will send a messenger with you to compel them to remove your bonds. (Sohrawardi, 1999d, p. 6)

In *The Red Intellect* the figure of the Angel is first mentioned when the soul awakens and meets the Angel at the threshold of the material world after escaping captivity and upon entering the imaginal world symbolized as the wilderness. The wilderness as the realm of the unconscious is also a symbol of the celestial world of

Angels, and it is where the soul encounters this Angel. The liberation of the soul and its arrival into the imaginal world requires the departure from the senses, as happens when one sleeps. Through dreams and visions, sense perception is raised to the horizon of symbolic perception.

In this tale the soul meets a figure in the form of one who seems to appear as a young man:

There I saw someone approaching. I went forward and greeted him. He replied as politely as possible. As I looked at that person I saw that his countenance and color were red. Thinking him young, I said, Young man, where do you come from! My son, he replied, you have addressed me mistakenly. I am the first child of creation. You call me young?! (Sohravardi, 1999b, p. 21).

The guide identifies itself as a “luminous elder” or *Pir-e nurani* in Persian and as “the first child of creation,” alluding to its archetypal status. The soul goes on to inquire about the features of the Angel, because of its red-colored complexion:

Why are your features not white? I asked. My features are white, he said. I am a luminous elder. But that person who captured you in the snare and placed these disagreeable fetters on you and appointed the wardens over you threw me long ago into a black pit. This color of mine, which appears red to you, is because of that. Otherwise I am white and luminous. Every white thing that is connected to light appears red when admixed with black, like the sunset at the beginning of evening or the end of dawn, which is white where it is connected to the sun’s light. One side of it is towards the light, which is white, while the other side is toward the night, which is black. Therefore it appears red. (Sohravardi, 1999b, p. 22)

The black pit referred to in this passage is symbolic of matter, the world of darkness, and the corporeal bodies in it. The soul further inquires about the place

the elder has come from and the Angel responds, "From beyond Mount Qaf, where my residence is. Your nest too was there, but you have forgotten it" (Sohravardi, 1999b, p. 22), reminding the soul of its origins. The Angel enlightens the soul, "When you are delivered of your bondage you will go there [Mount Qaf] for you have been brought from there" (p. 23). The soul then inquires as to why the elder has appeared: "What are you doing here? I asked. I am a traveler, he said. I continually wander about the world and look at marvelous things" (p. 22).

This elder is the Angel who guides the soul on its journey. The Old Man is an archetypal figure that appears to the soul and points the way to the spiritual world, providing a preview of what is awaiting the soul on this journey. As the soul inquires further and prepares itself for the journey, the Angel informs the soul that "the way is difficult."

The tale continues as the Angel shares with the soul what it has observed in its travels and answers a series of questions posed by the soul about the nature of his journey. The Angel explains the path and the obstacles the soul will face and how it must overcome them to reach its realm.

In *The Tale of Occidental Exile*, once again the imaginal figure that guides the soul is a bird called the *Hoopoe*, a symbol of inspiration, who travels from the other side of Mount Sinai to give the imprisoned soul a message from the heavens, inviting the soul back to its home. "We saw the hoopoe enter through a small window and bring us greetings on a moonlit night. In his beak was a letter"

(Sohravardi, 1999c, p. 114). In this tale the Angel, symbolized as a bird, functions to inspire the soul to take up the journey and return home.

The encounter with the Angel is a central tenet in all of Sohravardi's recitals. In examining the three recitals, the theme of the Angel as the guide of the soul is fully demonstrated. In these tales the Angel signifies that the soul has entered into the imaginal world and escaped its exile from the material world. This also marks the stage of the journey where soul encounters its heavenly twin and relinquishes ego consciousness, replacing it with an imaginal type of a consciousness, in order to proceed into the imaginal world and be able to perceive that world. Furthermore, this Angel of revelation serves to provide the soul with inspiration to return to its spiritual roots.

The Path to the Orient through the Macrocosm and the Microcosm

The Orient is the last stage on the path of illumination and the way the soul experiences a union with the divine. In the recitals, the image of the divine is manifested and symbolized in the figure of either the Father or the King. In all the tales, the soul is successful and finds the King or Father, but must still return to the world of matter and relinquish the remaining bonds. The recitals commence with the soul becoming aware of its captivity in the material world in a state of exile. The soul also remembers its previous state of existence and longs to return once again to that mode of being. In all the tales the journey is initiated by the soul in this state of longing, which provides the inspiration that drives the soul to escape

from the cosmic crypt and head for the homeland, to once again unite with its heavenly counterpart.

The question asked by the soul when it encounters the Angel is: What is the way? It is a gesture that indicates: Show me the path. It is from this point that the soul is given, by the Angel, an orientation to the Orient. Corbin (1954/1988) notes: “To reveal the Orient in the true sense is to orient the mystical pilgrim [the soul] toward that orient” (p. 151). The path of the visionary journey orients the soul towards its destination, The Orient of Lights. The path is another common theme in all of the recitals. The path provides for the soul a map for this mental exploration of the imaginal world in the company of the Angel.

The stages set forth on the path are described in a symbolic manner and refer to the stages of attaining wisdom and penetrating into the spiritual world. The encounter with the Angel is initiation into the path. In the encounter of the Angel with the awakened soul, the Angel functions to teach the soul the way it can free itself from its exile in the body and to rejoin its essence through traversing a path that marks the journey.

The soul is imprisoned in the body and various inner and outer obstacles keep it captive in this materiality. The prison of the body is a smaller version of the larger prison of the outer world of matter and sensual perceptions that extend from the terrestrial universe to the last sphere in the heavens. The soul, for its return to

its original standing as a spiritual being, must pass through the prisons of the body and the outer universe.

In the three recitals, Sohrawardi provides different paths for the journey, referring to them as the macrocosm and the microcosm. Sohrawardi refers to the macrocosm as *Alam-e kabir*, and the microcosm as *Alam-e saghir*. The soul must pass through the macrocosm and the microcosm in order to reach the imaginal world. These paths are marked by a series of stages extending from the material world, the human faculties, to the sublime realm of the imaginal, where the Angel welcomes the soul and guides it further on its journey. The obstacles involved on these paths include the demands of the body, and the ego and its needs, which keep the soul confined and in exile. Beyond the body, the world of matter, and the senses, which Sohrawardi refers to as the world of the Occident, commences the spiritual East or the Orient. The Orient is where the soul ascends after relinquishing the bonds of the inner and outer realms.

Thackston (1999) states:

The process of detaching oneself from the material, a common theme in mystical literature in general is often expressed as a journey or pilgrimage-quest, which can take the form either of an external journey out of the material world or of an internal journey into the self and thence out of this world. The external journey leads the pilgrim [soul] up through the celestial spheres that encompass the totality of temporal and spatial creation. Everything that is subject to human sensorial perception is contained within the concavity of the celestial spheres. (p. xvi)

The journey through the macrocosm involves a quest through the material universe. The symbolism of the celestial spheres is readily apparent in the tales and

depicted in various ways. The description of this external universe includes the nine planetary spheres from the uppermost being: The Sphere of Spheres (Falak-al-Aflak), The Sphere of the stars (Setaregan), Saturn (Zahl), Jupiter (Moshtari), Mars (Merikh), Sun (Shams), Venus (Zohreh), Mercury (Attarod), Moon (Ghamar) (Sohravardi, 1999a). The closest sphere to the world of matter (earth) is the moon and the most distant, The Sphere of Spheres, which Sohravardi claims is responsible for the movement of all other spheres below it.

The Sphere of Spheres is the intermediary between material spatial existence and immaterial nonspatial existence. This sphere is symbolically represented as the great Mountain of Qaf. This mythic mountain range surrounds the earth, and beyond it is the imaginal world where the soul's journey concludes. Hence, Mount Qaf serves as an intermediary between material and immaterial. The realm of matter or the earth is made up of the four elements of fire, air, water, and soil. It is these four elements that serve to imprison the soul and confine it to its fetters.

The direction of the journey through the macrocosm has a vertical orientation. The material world is identified by Sohravardi as the Occident (*Gharb*), which translated into English means west. Etymologically, *Gharb* is the root for *ghorbat*, meaning exile. The word also points to the direction where the sun sets, hiding its illumination from the universe. Hence, *ghorbat Gharb* can be defined as exile in the west.

Opposite the material world of the Occident in the west is the imaginal world or the Orient located in the east (*sharq*), the direction where the sun rises and illuminates the cosmos. The east or the Orient, the place of the rising sun, is where illumination takes place in the world of lights. Thackston (1999) notes, “The sun and its rays are equivalent to the grace of illumination, i.e. the outpouring of the source of light and luminosity or the east toward which the vertical orientation draws the aware soul” (p. xxx).

In the cosmology of Sohrawardi the journey from the west to the east takes on an ascending, vertical expression through the sphere of matter or earth, up through the various other spheres or planets, towards the Sphere of Spheres and beyond. Thackston (1999) notes, “when the soul is warmed by illumination--an intuitive and experiential receptivity to the gravitational pull of its origin--the soul can pass easily out of the strictures of matter, time and space” (p. xxx).

Everything that is encountered in the macrocosm has an equivalent form of symbolic appearance in the body, the microcosm. It is for this reason that Sohrawardi requires the journey to continue from the external to the internal world of the body, prior to the soul being freed from the restrictions of matter.

In *The Treatise of the Birds*, after the soul becomes aware of its mode of existence in captivity and realizes its imprisonment and exile, it attempts its escape. Once the escape is initiated, the landscape that the soul enters is depicted as a mountain range where the eighth mountain marks the threshold between the

material and the imaginal world. The eight mountain tops represent the eight planetary spheres beyond Earth which the soul must pass through. As the bird soul arrives atop the seventh mountain, it finds itself being seduced to stay in its mode of existence by worldly temptations:

Therefore we alighted on the seventh mountain, where we saw beautifully decorated gardens with pleasant edifices, pavilions, trees laden with fruit, and flowing water. It was so beautiful that it bewitched the eye and seduced the mind from the body. We ate and drank our fill of fruit and water and settled in as though to stay forever, but just then a voice arose saying that we must prepare to leave, for there is no security without precaution and no fortress stronger than skepticism. To delay longer would be to waste our lives, and our enemies were on our trail and pursuing us relentlessly.”
(Sohravardi, 1999d, p. 5)

Once again the birds take flight, and upon arriving at a bifurcation on the road, “we took a path between two roads through a valley with waters and vegetation”
(Sohravardi, 1999d, p. 4).

This intersection symbolizes the medial position of the imaginal realm, with the material world on one side and the world of the intellect on the other. The birds do not take any of the two recognizable roads, but venture on a path between them. This path takes the soul to the eighth mountain, referring to the realm beyond the seven heavens of the material universe and the threshold into the imaginal world. From this point they are directed to ascend to the ninth mountain, or the Sphere of Spheres. With the guidance of the Angel, the path continues to a “city atop this mountain where the King dwells” (p. 5). When the King hears the story and plight of the soul, he tells it that it must return to where it came from to relinquish the

bonds. The King sends a messenger with the soul to assist it in the task. The end of the recital marks a new journey of return to the world of appearances.

Another depiction of the macrocosm and the path of the mystical journey are presented in *The Red Intellect*. Here the landscape of the imaginal is symbolized as the wilderness, where the soul meets the Angel in the form of an Old Man. The Angel guide suggests how the soul can overcome the tribulations on the path in order to reach “the Spring of Life” where it can be released of its bonds. The guide describes the obstacles that the soul must overcome to reach this destination. In this tale the Falcon must also fly over mountains in order to reach the mythical Mount Qaf, marking the entrance into the imaginal world. In this tale Sohrevardi utilizes the motif of twelve workshops to symbolize the constellation of stars and the twelve signs of the zodiac.

Upon the mentioning of each of the obstacles by the Angel, the soul inquires how they must be overcome. The traps of the material world are spoken of as David’s Chain Mail. The soul asks the Angel to describe this symbol and the Angel replies, “These various fetters that have been placed on you are David’s chain mail. . . . They catch a Falcon like you and put the chain mail over its neck in order to finish it” (Sohrevardi, 1999b, p. 30). As explained in this passage, David’s chain mail refers to the traps that hold the human soul captive in this world.

This symbol, as used by Sohrevardi, reflects the firmness and solidity of a chain link. David is specifically used since in Islam this is the prophet who was

also a blacksmith and was famous for this trait (Sajjadi, 1997). The captive soul comes to understand what has kept it a prisoner of matter and becomes aware that in order to free itself of this captivity it must relinquish this chain mail and asks the Angel how the chain mail can be broken. The Angel states that the chain mail can be broken by emerging from the darkness and using “Balarak’s Sword” (Sohravardi, 1999b, p. 30). The soul inquires, “Where can one find the sword Balarak?” The Angel explains that “in our realm there is an executioner. That sword is in his hand. When each coat of chain mail has served its time, the executioner strikes it with the sword so that all the rings fall to pieces” (p. 30).

According to Purnamdariyan (1995), the sword is a symbol of death by which the soul is freed from the fortress of the body by cutting through the rings that hold it captive. The one appointed to carry out this liberation is the Angel of Death, known in Islam as Ezraeel. It is for this reason that the Angel refers to the executioner residing in their world, meaning the imaginal world where Angels dwell. This death is the demise of ego consciousness and the rebirth of the soul in the company of the spirit. With death the sword is lowered and the chain mail broken. When the sword is lowered and the rings of egotistic needs severed, death will be difficult for the one who is heavily invested and chained to the attachments of this world and who follows faithfully the needs of the ego.

This death of ego consciousness will be difficult and painful, if not impossible for such individuals. However, for others who have moved beyond such

demands, who have either turned away or transcended from identifying themselves strictly with the ego and its reality, the deconstruction of this reality and dying to it will be much easier. The Angel tells the soul:

Some are hurt so much that if anyone were to live for a hundred years and during his whole lifetime do nothing but think of the worst pain he could, he would never be able to imagine the pain inflicted by the sword Balarak. For others it is easier. (Sohravardi, 1999b, p. 30)

Abandoning the attachments of the world of matter and shutting the eyes of the senses is the initiation into this death and the beginning of the journey to the celestial world. A journey taken for the purpose of comprehending the superior truths of one's being through closing the outer eyes and opening the inner eye.

Hereafter the Angel instructs the soul to find the Spring of Life in order for the pain of the word to be ineffective on it.

Find the spring of life and pour water from it over your head so that this chain mail may slip from your body and you may be safe from the sword's blow, for its water makes the chain mail loose. When it is loosened, the blow of the sword is easy. (Sohravardi, 1999b, p. 31)

When the soul asks how to find the Spring of Life, it is suggested that it has to enter the Darkness:

Where is the Spring of Life? I asked. In the Darkness, he said. If you would seek it, lace your shoes like Khizr and take the road of trust that you may reach the Darkness. What is the sign of the Darkness? I asked. Blackness, he said. And you yourself are in the Darkness, but you don't know it. (p. 31)

Corbin states;

This Darkness is ignorance or, more precisely, unconsciousness of ignorance-that is to say, the natural man is in state of ignorance and cannot even be conscious of that state. To free himself from it, he must pass

through the Darkness; this is a terrifying and painful experience, for it ruins and destroys all the patencies and norms on which the natural man lived and depended—a true “descent into hell”, the hell of unconscious. (1954/1988, p. 159)

In this recital ignorance is symbolized as the Darkness of matter whereby the soul is confined and restrained. It is suggested that the soul has to go through the darkness and, if worthy, it will emerge illuminated and transformed.

In *The Tale of Occidental Exile*, the soul passes from the world of matter (Occident), to the imaginal world (Orient). Everything visible in the world, including the planets and the stars are part of the Occident. The Orient, however, lies beyond this visible world, a place without localization in space or coordinates in time, bordering the stars and planets. The city of *Gheyrovan*, where the soul is imprisoned, is situated in present-day Tunisia and is symbolically considered the most Western geographic location of the Islamic world or the most western region of the material world in Islamic cosmology. In this tale, the dark pit symbolizes the darkness of matter. The 12 towers above the pit are also representative of the astrological signs of the zodiac.

The journey through the microcosm is symbolic of the quest for the self. Sohrawardi depicts this journey as an exploration of man’s internal cosmos. The microcosm takes form in the body in the same manner as the planetary spheres take form in the macrocosm, both simultaneously causing an internal and external transformation of the soul. The journey of soul through the microcosm consists of overcoming the obstacles of the human faculties.

The four elements that were previously discussed as trapping the soul to matter become the four humors that form the body. The humors include blood, bile, choler, and phlegm and correspond to hot, cold, wet, and dry, which make up the physical organs of the body (Purnamdariyan, 1995).

According to Thackston (1999), the internal journey through the microcosm “progresses from the highest faculties of sensorial perception to the lowest faculties of basic alimentation common to all organisms. . . . The seeker [soul] progressively gains conscious control over the faculties by retrogressing, so to speak, back to the most elementary of the life functions” (p. xxvi). Sohrevardi (1999a) describes the faculties from the lowest to the highest as the vegetal, reproductive, and the sensory faculties.

In *The Red Intellect*, Sohrevardi distinguishes five outer senses consisting of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, and five internal senses, including the *sensus communis*, which is the recipient of the external senses, the retentive imagination, compositive imagination, estimative imagination, and memory. These ten internal and external senses are referred to in this tale as “the ten wardens” which keep the soul’s eyes stitched shut and are an obstacle the soul must overcome to escape the fortress of the body. These are the human faculties that confine and limit the soul. Once the soul becomes aware of the senses and their limitations that have kept it captive in the body, its inner senses are opened and it initiates its escape.

In *The Treatise of the Birds*, “the hunters” represent the various senses that trap the bird soul: “When the hunters saw us, they made such attractive calls that we were taken in” (Sohravardi, 1999b, p. 2). These attractive calls are the pleasures of the body that seduce and trap the soul. “We looked and saw the loops of the net around our necks and the bonds of the snare about our legs” (p. 3). However, it is in the act of seeing through the senses that the soul becomes conscious of its entrapment in the material world and attempts to escape. Finally, the soul is freed from the senses: “looking out from our bondage we saw that a group of our comrades had their heads and wings out of the net of the narrow cage and were about to take flight” (p. 3).

The geography of the Orient of Lights and the Occident of Darkness is described in *A Tale of Occidental Exile*. The path of the journey is from a dark pit where the soul has been imprisoned, towards the heavenly Mount Sinai. In this tale the stages of the path set forth towards illumination include being captured by the people in the city of *Gheyrovan*, being put in shackles and imprisoned in a dark pit representing the traps of the senses and the confines of ego consciousness, escaping and finding the Spring of Life, and meeting the Father. In this tale a passage describes the faculties as 14 coffins: “I was rescued from the fourteen coffins . . . from which God’s shadow emerges to contact me to holiness” (p. 118). According to Thackston (1999), the 14 coffins, as the human faculties, include the “attractive, retentive, digestive, expulsive, nutritive, generative, formative,

augmentative, irascible and concupiscible, and the four humors” (p. 118) of the body.

In the microcosm, the soul is released of the bondage of the human faculties by regressing from the highest faculty, the senses, to the lowest, the vegetal faculty. Through this move the soul gains mastery over the faculties so they can no longer occupy the soul with the mundane affairs of the body or the ego. This, in effect, opens up the inner faculties so that the soul can experience the world through its intuitive eye. By turning away from the external senses and becoming aware of its exile, the soul is once again awakened.

In the recitals, Sohrevardi highlights the senses in order to remind the soul of their constant influence on the functioning of the soul. The more conscious the soul becomes of the workings of the faculties upon it, the better it can evade them and escape from them. As the soul gains conscious control over the various faculties, or as Thackston (1999) refers to it, as it “retrogress[es] back to the most elementary of the life functions” (p. xxi), it is freed from their bondage.

As described, the path to the Orient of Lights demonstrates that the way to illumination takes on many forms and is marked by stages which the soul must first conquer in order to reach the next stage of the spiritual journey. The soul as the traveler of the celestial worlds must conquer the obstacles of the microcosm, which is the inner human faculties, and the macrocosm, which are the outer material cosmos in order to reunite with its heavenly counterpart. Ascension through the

obstacles projects the soul out of the limits of place and time and into a space where such things do not exist. This is the state of perfection the soul seeks to find, resulting in its union with the divine self.

Psychological Implications of the Journey

The Occident and the Orient can psychologically be associated with the two realms of consciousness and the unconscious. The Occident is symbolic of ego consciousness as manifested in the body relenting to the commands, cravings, and indulgences of the senses and material living. The Orient symbolizes the unconscious, the origins of wisdom, which once tapped into can liberate one from the confines of material bondage and the restrictions of the ego.

The recitals describe the state of soul separated from its divine source and its attempt to once again reunite with that source and to re-experience wholeness. From a Jungian perspective, the soul's journey from the Occident to the Orient might be described as the journey of the ego from consciousness to reunite with the Self. Looking at the recitals psychologically, the common theme described is the act of separation and later integration of the ego with the Self.

The recitals open with the soul in a state of alienation in the realm of the ego. The experience of alienation is essential for developing an awareness of the Self. The exile of the soul to the material world is a symbol of the separation of the ego from the Self. Edinger (1992) refers to this as damage to the ego-Self axis and notes that this injury "impairs or destroys the connection between conscious and

unconscious, leading to alienation of the ego from its origin and foundation” (p. 38).

According to Neumann (1954), the ego and self are one in the uroboric state, which signifies “the original psychic state prior to the birth of ego consciousness” (p. 17). As one develops psychologically, there is a separation between the ego and the self which creates the ego-self axis, serving to connect the ego with the self. Prior to the creation of ego consciousness out of the self, the psyche is organized and structured by the archetype of the self which promotes wholeness. As a result of this separation, consciousness is created and the ego might enter a state of inflation.

Edinger (1992) uses the term *inflation* to describe the identification of the ego with the self after their separation. He notes, “It is a state in which something small (the ego) has arrogated to itself the qualities of something larger (the self) and hence is blown up beyond the limits of its proper size. . . . Since the self is the center of totality of being, the ego totally identified with the self experiences itself as a deity” (p. 7).

The inflated ego functions to alienate the soul in the material realm and restrains it from finding any meaning or wholeness in this realm. As a result, attainment of a lost wholeness becomes a yearning for the soul. Edinger (1992) states, “This explains the tremendous nostalgia for the original unconscious state. In that state one is freed from all the suffering that consciousness inevitably brings”

(p. 25). In its inflated state the ego can become separated and alienated from its original wholeness. Therefore, for the ego once again to become whole, it must become inflated, recognize this state, and become conscious of it.

The consequence of this realization is the assimilation of ego consciousness with the unconscious or the soul with the Divine. Edinger (1992) explains that “integrating the consciousness with the unconscious is a necessary stage of psychic development which initially requires a polarization of the opposites” (p. 20). This division takes place between the conscious and the unconscious or ego and the self, or soul and spirit.

In the recitals the exile of the soul and its imprisonment in the body represent a rupture in the original state of unconscious wholeness and a separation from the divine union or the Self. Yet this rupture is necessary, just as the inflation of the ego is necessary, in order to achieve a new level of consciousness for both the soul and the ego. Consequently the fall of soul from its original state of unconscious wholeness and the separation of the ego from the self are inevitable for their return to their previous state of wholeness, yet fully conscious this time.

The return to the source and the origin describes what Jung refers to as the return to the wholeness of the psyche. The archetype of wholeness is a core idea in Jung’s psychology which he calls the Self, with the aim of therapy being the realization of the Self. Although Jung used dreams and active imagination to gain

knowledge of the Self, Sohrevardi gained understanding of the Self through mystical and visionary experiences.

One of the main points in these tales that relates the experience of soul as being a psychological occurrence is the need for the human soul to become whole once again by encountering and integrating its heavenly counterpart. From a psychological stand point, this is also the yearning of the ego, once again to become conscious of its origins from the unconscious and to integrate that unconscious. The goal in the recitals is for the fallen soul to become liberated from matter and return to its transcended stature. From a psychological point of view this is a progression from ego consciousness to the ego's rediscovery of the unconscious and its integration.

This progression from the material world to the illumination of the soul in the imaginal world, its reunion with its divine counterpart, and its return to the body is marked in the recitals by the path the soul takes through the body or the microcosm and the cosmos or the macrocosm. This journey is an inner quest for the transformation of the soul, and within man, between ego and the unconscious. In the recitals this inner journey is projected onto events that seem to take place in an outer world, but Sohrevardi's narration of a seemingly outer journey is in fact an inner psychological one. The reunion of the soul with the divine, or ego consciousness with the unconscious, is a process of attaining wholeness to satisfy the soul's longing, with it, recovering the loss of the sense of belonging.

In the recitals of Sohravardi, the initiate, through an imaginal journey, attempts to recapture his spiritual side by going through a progression of stages set forth in the journeys. Sohravardi's endeavor is meant to elucidate what stations the initiate must go through and what experiences he must face to complete this journey. These experiences are gained in a timeless space that transcends the rational realm of experience, marking the spiritual meaning of one's existence and inner life in the imaginal world.

Henderson (1964) notes:

This type of release through transcendence is the theme of the lonely journey or pilgrimage, which somehow seems to be a spiritual pilgrimage on which the initiate becomes acquainted with the nature of death. But this is not death as a last judgment or other initiatory trial of strength: it is a journey of release, renunciation, and atonement, presided over and fostered by some spirit of compassion. (p. 150)

As demonstrated in this chapter, Sohravardi's recitals are accounts of the longing of the alienated soul, mournful over its fragmented condition, and yearning to return to wholeness in the world of subtle realities. Hence, issuing forth a call of lament as a constant reminder, the soul is never content existing in material form. The theme running through the recitals is that of separation. The separation of soul, personified in various forms, cut off from its source and exiled in the material world, is a metaphor for the separation of body from spirit or the ego from the unconscious.

Sohravardi's recitals also explore a particular condition of human life in relation to the world. The condition Sohravardi describes in the recitals is our

longing for redeveloping and recapturing the meaning of our lives, which contributes to experiencing wholeness. An experience that once existed but was lost by the separation of spirit from matter or self from ego, becoming only a vague memory. This condition presents itself as an absence of meaning that is developed through being rooted too much in a material form of existence. It is a condition that is concealed beneath daily routines of life and in relationships, yet determines our true motivations behind our actions and behaviors, the reasons behind our judgments, and how we imagine our world.

Historically, we can track this separation from when Descartes, through his famous statement *Cogito ergo sum*, isolated the ego and exiled the soul and its spiritual images from consciousness. The verdict for the soul's exile was issued from the time religious dogmatic practices were initiated and the dualism of mind and matter became a fact of our existence. No longer was meaning ascribed from the interior; now it was found in books, theories, and philosophies, all telling us to follow their wisdom. Soul as a mediator between man and the divine was no longer exalted, but exiled. Yet even in exile, soul managed to re-appear, through the image, in the esoteric, within the mystic, in the vision, and by the visionary.

Cartesian dualism, however, was not the prime reason for this separation. This separation is an archetypal break and can also be situated in the myth of the fall of Man from the heavens. The instant Man ate of the fruit of knowledge and became conscious of himself is the commencement of this dualism and separation.

According to Edinger (1992), as a result of our fall into consciousness, we have lived in a state of inflation and become separated and alienated from our original wholeness. This is precisely what Sohrevardi's recitals symbolize; the fall into consciousness and becoming separated from our original state of wholeness and the efforts to recover that wholeness through a personally lived spiritual journey.

The longing to return to our source and essence is an archetypal longing, reminding us of the nature of our homelessness. In a topographical sense and in our present discontentedness, we no longer have a recollection of where this essence is to be found. Through myth and stories we are told that there was a time when we lived elsewhere, but for reasons far too long forgotten or repressed, we were ousted, taking refuge in a world of substance. Here, we have lived, cultivated, and become cultured.

In our present form of existence, we have also become mechanistic creatures living in a world that only values what is concrete and objective. This is a world where factual meanings are developed in terms of cause and effect, action and reaction, all extrinsic relationships. We have learned to look for meaning in our possessions and consumptions, ignoring the fact that we are also spiritual creatures, and at one time sought meaning from within.

For the most part we have been successful in "adjusting" to our material existence and in leading a "normal" life. As a result, we have acquired an I-hood

individuality and identity and managed to build a reality around it. Yet, through it all, we have always felt a nostalgic sense of belonging elsewhere. We have felt the absence of a presence in any and many of our experiences in life. It is an absence with a quality that haunts the present moments of our lives and that rekindles memories of a place we once called Home; our original dwelling place.

In our material subsistence world, we have authenticated the mundane affairs of our daily life as being life's absolute reality and its only necessity. And in our mediocrity, we have managed to exteriorize what was previously a visceral experience. But the price of this existence has been high, involving a turning away from our core, spiraling further and further away from our essence, which once had authenticity. We have lost our inwardness and depth, turned our selves inside out, fragmented into pieces. In the process we have forgotten our essence, that which we call soul.

To uncover this awakening in exile, and experience an *un-forgetting*, we must journey into the imaginal world. We must let go of materiality with its notions of factual logic and final certainty, and journey into more subtle forms of reality. We must surrender our ego consciousness and experience with an imaginal consciousness, learning to listen metaphorically at all times, retaining a mode of presence that is receptive to subtle realities. What we experience on this journey is the discovery of the account of our separation and the quest for returning to wholeness, so that once again we can return to our source in the imaginal.

We all live in exile, and to return to the source we must ask ourselves, when will I heed the call of un-forgetting and take the journey of re-mem-bering? The present work is an acknowledgment of this call and an endeavor towards un-forgetting, re-mem-bering, and finally re-turning. Through a selection of the writings of the Iranian-Islamic scholar Sohrevardi, we have encountered the soul in exile and tracked its adventure from the moment of its un-forgetting, through a heroic journey of re-mem-bering, and re-turning to its source in the imaginal world, in an act of transformation and for the purpose of achieving an experience.

In the visionary journey, the ultimate goal of the soul is to become enlightened by drinking from the Spring of Life and coming to rest in the heavens in the presence of the Divine. Yet, since without the soul, the body and the world of appearances become meaningless, the soul, after attaining this enlightenment, is obliged to return to the suffering world of the body and share its attained wisdom and wholeness. The task becomes one of awakening the human form to a new mode of consciousness and perception centered on a life lived in the presence of soul, a mode of presence in the world freed from the repression of the ego, where one is unrestricted to live as an individual in relation with soul and spirit. This is what the recitals of Sohrevardi offer to those who are ready to be initiated into the journey and he forewarns us that “the way is difficult.”

In the next and final chapter of this work, three of the main ideas that form Jung’s psychology, including the concepts of the collective unconscious,

individuation, and archetypes will be explored from Sohrevardi's perspective and as they are manifested in the recitals. Also in that chapter, similarities in the thoughts of these two great thinkers, separated by seven centuries of history, will be highlighted. This will be followed by exploring the parallels between the recitals main theme of journey of the soul, and the hero's journey, as described by Joseph Campbell.

Chapter 8 Jung and Sohrevardi

The history of human thought is filled with ideas, concepts, and philosophies of thinkers finding their counterparts in thinkers of another era or culture. Exploring these similarities, shared by multiple thinkers, reminds us that fusion of thought can serve to bring us closer. By recognizing related patterns in our thinking, deepening them, and viewing them from a different perspective, we can highlight our commonalities as a species. Our yearning for finding higher meaning in our mundane existence, in a world absent of intrinsic meaning, is a commonality which has served to guide us to seek this meaning in various places and sources. Two such thinkers, one living in the 12th century CE, and the other in the 20th century, developed a philosophy and a psychology which aimed to satisfy this search for meaning.

In order to demonstrate the parallels in the thoughts of these two great thinkers separated by seven centuries of history, selected themes that form the visionary recitals will be explored in this chapter utilizing some of Jung's psychological concepts. This will be followed by a more in-depth section describing the parallels between the recitals' main theme of journey of the soul, and the hero's journey, as described by Joseph Campbell.

The endeavor is to stimulate and initiate a dialogue amongst these great thinkers. At the same time, acknowledging the limitations of Jung's psychology in dealing with spiritual and visionary experiences. This restriction is apparent in

psychology's focus on exploring the workings of the personal psyche or rather universal ideas that relate back to the personal psyche. For Sohrawardi, the aim was to transcend what we call the personal and even the collective psyche, to reach a state of differentiation where the ego is no more, a state referred to by Sohrawardi as *fana*. In this regard he writes:

The mightiest state is the state of death, by which the managing light sheds the darkness. If it has no remnant of attachment to the body, it will emerge into the world of light and be attached to the dominating lights. (Sohrawardi, 1999a, p. 160)

This corresponds to what Jung (1950/1976) referred to as the *unio mystic*:

That absolute reality where one is nothing but psychic reality, yet confronted with the psychic reality that one is not. . . . The ego disappears completely. The psychical is no longer a content in us, but we become contents of it . . . this condition is almost unimaginable. (p. 17)

Jung's psychology has foundations in Hermetic and Gnostic wisdom traditions, the philosophy of Plato, and neo-Platonists like Plotinus. Furthermore, Jung also studied and utilized religious and mystical ideas in the traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism.

In his autobiography Jung writes:

Between 1918 and 1926 I had seriously studied Gnostic writers, for they too had been confronted with the primal world of the unconscious and had dealt with its contents, with images that were obviously contaminated with the world of instinct. Just how they understood these images remains difficult to say, in view of the paucity of the account which, moreover, mostly stem from their opponents, the Church Fathers. It seems to me highly unlikely that they had a psychological conception of them. But the Gnostics were too remote for me to establish any link with them in regards to the questions confronting me. As far as I could see, the tradition that might have connected Gnosis with the present seemed to have been severed,

and for a long time it proved impossible to find any bridge that led from Gnosticism-or neo-Platonism-to the contemporary world. (1963/1989, pp. 200-201)

In this important passage it is demonstrated that Jung was not familiar with Sohrevardi and his philosophy; otherwise he would have realized that such a bridge did indeed exist. Jung assumed that there was no connection to link neo-Platonic and Gnostic ideas to the West, yet ideas set forth by thinkers like Sohrevardi prove otherwise.

In his philosophy Sohrevardi was also familiar with and utilized many of the same sources as Jung. On this influence Sohrevardi (1999a) notes the foundational influences of his philosophy, indicating that he is only an inheritor of a long line of sages and thinkers who have attempted to bring fourth this ancient wisdom tradition:

In all that I have said about the science of lights and that which is and is not based upon it, I have been assisted by those who have traveled the path of God. This science is the very intuition of the inspired and illuminated Plato, the guide and master of philosophy, and of those who came before him from the time of Hermes. (p. 2)

From Western philosophy, he gives credit to Empedocles, Pythagoras, and Plotinus. From Eastern philosophy he mentions the Persian Zoroastrian tradition and philosophers like Jamasp, Frashostar, and Bozorgmehr (Sohrevardi, 1999a). Sohrevardi further notes that his philosophy, The Illuminative Wisdom, is meant to give new life to the ancient wisdom traditions of India, Persia, Babylon, Egypt, and Greece, by bringing them together under one philosophy.

Sohravardi restored and incorporated these traditions into his philosophy. As Corbin (1958/1997) states, Sohravardi carried out a “great design in reviving the wisdom . . . of the doctrine of Light and Darkness” (p. 19). By accomplishing this undertaking, Sohravardi established an Oriental Wisdom, in which knowledge of it even reached Roger Bacon in the 13th century (Corbin, 1958/1997). Sohravardi’s intent was to link all major wisdom traditions and religious insights of various beliefs into one spiritual philosophy.

In the same manner, Jung, through his interest in wisdom traditions like Gnosticism, the Hermetic tradition, alchemy, religious traditions, and exposure to non-Western traditions through his travels, also attempted to bring together Gnostic knowledge, mythology, religion, philosophy, and science under one psychology.

Jung and Sohravardi attempted to synthesize knowledge from many of the same sources including from as far East as India to the Greek West. They similarly revived hermetic, Gnostic, Zoroastrian, and Islamic sources, which resulted in a profound effect in furthering knowledge in their respective fields.

Similar to Jung’s aim in his psychology, the task in the recitals of Sohravardi is one of deepening awareness and expanding consciousness by an act of integration of all aspects of the Person. In the recitals, Sohravardi utilizes the human soul to demonstrate this goal, leading soul from a state of forgetfulness to remembrance, in an act of achieving illumination. Along the same lines, Jung utilizes the ego, demonstrating its state of separateness in the material world from

the Self, but having the potential to integrate through a process he called individuation.

Through this progression, both Jung and Sohrevardi had the same goal in mind, that of creating a transformation in consciousness. Sohrevardi attempted this through unveiling and revealing an intimate connection with the divine presence that is initially veiled within every human being and which leads to gnosis. Jung attempted it through the ego's fostering of a relationship with the Self to gain its totality, leading to its Wholeness. For them, both processes led to the same goal of recapturing a lost unity. For Sohrevardi, this led to a unity of being or *vhadat-e vojud* in Persian, and for Jung, to wholeness.

The quest for attaining unity of being or wholeness is motivated by one finding his or her purpose and meaning in life, whether spiritual or psychological, and through it, embracing a more meaningful and spiritual existence. For Jung and Sohrevardi, this was achieved through connecting to a higher level of consciousness and incorporating that consciousness into one's mode of being in the world or personality, thereby changing one's mode of presence in the world or restructuring one's personality.

The Collective Unconscious and the Imaginal World

Jung's concept of the collective unconscious and the archetypes recalls Sohravardi's ideas about the imaginal world and the imaginal bodies that exist in that world. Both the collective unconscious and the imaginal world exist beyond the material world of appearances.

Jung and Sohravardi both believed there was a reality other than the reality of ego consciousness. They found access to this reality beyond the material world of the senses through the use of active imagination and in the images produced through the imagination. Jung further used fantasy and dreams, whereas Sohravardi utilized the waking dream as a "conscious experiencing of images" (Watkins, 2003, p. 14), to gain access into this reality.

They similarly concluded that the images produced by the soul (Sohravardi) and the psyche (Jung), in the form of symbols, point to a realm beyond this world. Jung referred to this realm as the collective unconscious which he described as being inhabited by archetypes and Sohravardi called it *Nakoja abad*, populated with *Suwar mu'allaga* or imaginal forms.

Jung (1938/1969b) defined the collective unconscious as follows:

The collective unconscious is a part of the psyche which can be negatively distinguished from a personal unconscious by the fact that it does not, like the latter, owe its existence to personal experience and consequently is not a personal acquisition. . . . The contents of the collective unconscious have never been in consciousness, and therefore have never been individually acquired, but owe their existence to heredity. Where as the personal unconscious consists for the most part of *complexes*, the content of the collective unconscious is made up essentially of *archetypes*. (p. 42)

Jung situated the archetypes in the collective unconscious and talked about an archetypal reality beyond the physical world.

He defined the archetypes as follows:

The concept of the archetype, which is an indispensable correlate of the idea of the collective unconscious, indicates the existence of definite forms in the psyche which seem to be present always and everywhere. . . . The archetypes are the unconscious images of the instincts themselves, in other words, they are *patterns of instinctual behavior*. (Jung, 1938/1969b, p. 42)

Jung (1938/1969a) further elaborated on the timeless quality of the archetypes:

Ultimately they are all founded on primordial archetypal forms whose concreteness dates from a time when consciousness did not think but only perceived . . . we also have a pre-existent thinking, of which we are not aware. (p. 33)

Jung's ideas about the collective unconscious and the archetypes are influenced by his studies of Gnostic, hermetic, and religious texts, including both Eastern and Western sources. Many of these same sources also influenced Sohrevardi's ideas about the archetypal or imaginal world (*Nakoja abad*) and the archetypes that reveal themselves in that world known as suspended figures (*Suwar mu'allaqa*) or imaginal forms.

Sohrevardi (1999a) referred to the archetypal world as "the world of incorporeal figures" and stated:

The resurrection of images, the lordly forms, and all the promises of prophecies find their reality through this world. Certain intermediate souls possess illuminated suspended figures whose loci are the spheres. (p. 150)

On the subtle nature of the archetypes Sohrevardi notes:

You know that forms cannot be imprinted in the eye and that, for similar reasons, they cannot be imprinted somewhere in the brain. The truth is that the forms in the mirrors and the imaginative forms are not imprinted. Instead, they are suspended fortresses—fortress not in a locus at all. Though they may have loci in which they are made evident, they are not in them. These forms are suspended and are in neither a place nor a locus. (p. 138)

On the same topic Corbin (1971/1994) states:

Preceding all empirical data, the archetype images are the organs of meditation of the active imagination: they effect the transmutation of these data by giving them their meaning . . . and precisely by so doing make known the manner of being of a specific human presence and the fundamental orientation inherent in it. (p. 5)

Corbin (1960/1977) further elaborates:

Since these images [archetypal] in one's imagination carry the hallmark of the angels who projected them, and since one's soul is an angel and reflects the archetypal images of the archangels of light and splendor, these forms in the mind will concur with images that one carries in one's soul. (p. 4)

Sohrevardi (1999a) believed that every being in the material world had a counterpart in the archetypal world.

Each of the faculties in the body is a shadow of what is in the commanding light, and the temple is only its talisman. . . . The origin of each of these talismans is a dominating light that is the archetype of the talisman and the luminous self-subsistent species. (p. 101)

This is similar to Jung's notion about the objectivity of the psyche, where reality has two components, an interior and an exterior, where one is the reflection of the other. Jung (1938/1969a) states:

The symbolic process is an experience in images and of images; and its goal is broadly speaking illumination of higher consciousness by means of which the initial situation is overcome on a higher level. (pp. 38-39)

Both Sohrevardi and Jung place the archetypes in the images that present themselves in the form of symbols. For Jung a symbol serves as an expression of the archetype manifested at the conscious level. In this capacity the symbol symbolizes that which cannot be directly apprehended. For Jung, the symbol functions to interpret the unconscious for the conscious mind, serving as a mediator and deciphering the symbols, so that one is able to see their deeper meaning. Jung believed that in locating the archetypes of the collective unconscious one is faced with a plethora of images and figures that are available to all humans. It may be said that Jung's aim in this endeavor is the expansion of consciousness through bringing forth contents of the unconscious into consciousness by way of images.

Sohrevardi believed that the soul belongs to the world of *Nakoja abad*, the realm where imagination transforms the archetypes into forms that are visualized in the macrocosm, "The imaginative faculty is the locus in which the forms of the imagination are made evident and are suspended" (p. 138). For Sohrevardi the imaginal world served to bring the soul to its personal and individual counterpart in the realm of the spirit. Corbin (1971/1994) states:

The power that is in thee, in *each one* of you, cannot refer to a collective guide, to a manifestation and a relationship collectively identical for *each one* of the souls of light. Nor, *a fortiori*, can it be the macrocosm or universal Man (*ensan-e kolli*) which assumes the role of heavenly counterpart of *each* microcosm. (p. 16)

Along the same lines he continues:

Whether it is referred to as the divine Being or as the archetypal angel, no sooner does its apparition reveal the transcendent dimension of spiritual

individuality as such that it must take on individualized features and establish an individuated relationship. (p. 20)

By entering into the imaginal world one is in the realm of the spirit and subsequently dealing with the consequence of this experience on human consciousness.

The distinction between Jung's collective unconscious and Sohrevardi's imaginal world becomes apparent when Jung situates the archetypes of the collective unconscious in the history of the human species as inheritances passed down through time from culture to culture, rather than beyond historical and temporal life. Sohrevardi, however, stations the imaginal world in a suprasensory sphere, transcending both time and space, in the realm of the spirit.

The imaginal (archetypal) world that Sohrevardi describes is a reality that transcends the collective unconscious. Corbin (1971/1994) notes:

The inability to conceive of a concrete supra-sensory reality results from giving too much importance to sensory reality; this view, generally speaking, leaves no alternative but to take the supra-sensory universe as consisting of abstract concepts. On the contrary, the universe which Sohrevardi's neo-Zoroastrian Platonism called the *Mundus Imaginalis* (*alam-al-mithal*) or the heavenly Earth of Hurqalya is a concrete spiritual universe. (p. 5)

What we sense in the material world is but a reflection of what is in the imaginal world. Here the senses are "the vehicle, or rather the epiphanic place for the forms produced by the activity of the soul" (Corbin, 1960/1977, p. 81).

On the nature of the archetypes Corbin (1971/1994) notes, "By no means is it an allegorical construct, but a primordial image thanks to which the seeker

perceives a world of realities which is neither the world of the senses nor the world of abstract concepts” (p. 32) The key term in Corbin’s definition is “primordial,” which situates the archetypes above time, space, and cultural specifications. Sohrevardi’s view of the imaginal world is not as an evolutionary, developmental idea, but as a representative of something that is independent of the evolution of man’s cultural development and cultural inheritance.

Although based on his research and studies Jung had an insight into what might constitute the archetypes, nevertheless, in a move to stay within the confines of science, he reduced them as existing in the collective unconscious of Man as inheritances gained through the history of mankind, containing the individual and collective psyche of all humanity. Jung’s collective unconscious alludes to a biological aspect of the unconscious, manifested through a psycho-cultural analysis, whereas this world in Sohrevardi’s cosmology exists in a transpsychic, cosmic level of the unconscious, alluding to its psycho-spiritual nature.

What Jung called archetypes are for Sohrevardi luminous Angels that radiate a light so brilliant that it can transform the soul or fracture it and in either case, cause a transmutation to take place in the psyche. In Sohrevardi’s cosmology the archetype of the Angel functions as the agent of theophany and revelation. From Sohrevardi’s perspective, what the archetypes symbolize is beyond the reach of conscious comprehension through the senses. Consciousness also has to be transformed in order to comprehend the Angel. By shifting consciousness into the

realm of the imaginal, the message in the symbols becomes discernable, and through it one is able to enlarge one's reality.

From Sohrevardi's perspective it can be said that the archetype, manifested as the Angel, carries its message in the form of a symbolic journey from the realm of the spirit. By means of the Angel, spirit confronts and engages consciousness and carries it to its realm. Sohrevardi's move is from consciousness into the unconscious as a way of expanding both.

Jung's focus is for the individual to communicate with the unconscious by bringing the unconscious into the realm of consciousness, in a move to conquer the unconscious and unite the opposites. Jung's direction in this endeavor is downward, a descent into the unconscious in search of better understanding the archetype's representation at the conscious level.

By contrast Sohrevardi's attempt is letting the conscious mind enter into the unconscious and further into a supra-conscious realm. This supra-conscious realm exists above the realm of the collective unconscious. "The supra-conscious arises on the horizon of consciousness; while the human soul rises over the darkness of the unconscious" (Corbin, 1954/1988, p. 325). Sohrevardi moves the soul in an upward direction, ascending towards the heights of the spirit. By this move Sohrevardi expanded, deepened, and ultimately spiritualized the meaning of the archetypes of the imaginal world.

Individuation and Illumination

In their writing Jung and Sohrevardi explore a reality that exists beyond consciousness, seeking to find meaning and understanding beyond material life and the conditioning that takes place as a result of living a material life. There is a quest that for Jung results in individuation of the individual, and for Sohrevardi, in the illumination of the human soul. Both individuation and illumination describe a process of understanding and integration of all aspects of the person. Individuation brings about an experience of the Self through the integration of the ego with the unconscious, whereas illumination leads to the revelation of the divine by integration of the soul with its cosmic twin.

Sohrevardi's endeavor was to produce a transpersonal experience that would encompass the interior world of an individual by revealing that world to the individual through a journey into spiritual reality. In the recitals, Sohrevardi focused on a particular human condition that has always been, and still is rampant in man's existence; that of living in a meaningless state, where material existence takes precedence over cultivation of a spiritual life.

Sohrevardi depicted this condition in the form of a journey of the human soul falling into matter, where it finds this form of existence meaningless and attempts to return to the spiritual world to once again regain meaning and spirituality. This condition presents itself in the form of a hero's journey which will be explored in the next section of this chapter.

As it was described in chapter 7, in the process of the human soul meeting its heavenly counterpart in the form of an Angel, the soul integrates this spiritual being, becomes spiritualized and gains illumination. The consequence of this quest and the triumph of the soul is that it once again gains its lost spirituality and returns to the body to share this spirituality. Sohrevardi called this process attaining illumination.

A Psychological Frame of Reference for Sohrevardi

The visionary journeys are accounts of the process of individuation of the fragmented soul. Sohrevardi views man as having an active imagination or creative vision. This creative vision invokes one to partake a psychic journey emphasizing experiences and insights interiorized through the fostering of intuitive knowledge. From a psychological perspective, the result of utilizing intuitive knowledge is a shifting of ego's identity from its I-ness to an experience of One-ness. The recitals, exemplified as a psychic journey of transformation, draw a path towards the individuation of the ego at an experiential level which requires the use of the intuitive faculty to analyze events and experiences of transformation, resulting in becoming aware of a One-ness as the end state of that journey.

Knowing through experience differentiates gaining experience as a result of utilizing one's ego consciousness, and coming to an insight, using creative vision to re-collect an inner memory of a past lived in union with the divine and attempting to reunite with that past.

Sohravardi (1999a) notes:

A man may sometimes forget and find great difficulty in remembering it. Try though he might, he is unable to remember it. Then, it sometimes happens that he remembers that very same thing easily. That which he remembers is not itself present in one of the faculties of his body, since it would not then have been hidden from the managing light after its diligent search. . . . Thus that which is remembered is only in the world of memory, one of the places belonging to the lord of celestial commanding lights. These forget nothing. (p. 136)

This One-ness is where the human soul once existed in an unconscious state in harmony with the divine. As a result of the separation from the divine and the fall into the body, the soul experienced suffering by being confined to space and time. Ever since, it has sought to once again return to its state of One-ness. To achieve this aim the human soul travels through various stages of consciousness, each related to the one preceding it and the one following it. By way of assimilating these various lower and higher stages of consciousness, the human soul develops a new form of consciousness, getting closer to its goal of recovering its One-ness.

Sohravardi's division of lights emulates this process. Illuminative wisdom is based on the degrees of light. Light is the symbol of understanding, discernment, and intuition, with each level of light either increasing or decreasing consciousness. The use of light is a metaphor for the journey of the soul from the darkness of the material world which does not have any luminosity to gradations of Absolute Light, where the soul encounters divinity.

Initially the soul exists as one with the Light of Lights (*Nur-al Anwar*), but it descends into matter, where no light penetrates. The further one is from the Light

of Lights, representing divine knowledge, the more one is engulfed in the darkness of ignorance or unconscious existence, and less consciously one lives life. In order to escape the darkness of matter, the soul must transcend the lower levels of light and leave behind intelligence, reason, and the inflated ego.

The journey of the soul as a path towards individuation involves two stages: *fana* (annihilation) and *baqa* (continuation in being). *Fana* can be understood as disintegration from the material world and the intellect and *baqa* is the reintegration or unifying of material intellect with knowledge of the divine, after illumination has taken place.

When the soul awakens to its condition of exile it must either accept or reject its condition. In psychological terms this is when the ego can either maintain its inflated state or go beyond it. In this state there is a tension between reason and intuition, where the ego may resist the call and retreat into its inflated state or attend to it, becoming conscious of its state of being. Through this dichotomy a third state is created. Intuition as the third state helps the ego imagine and perceive a more integrated presence and recognize that it cannot achieve this state in its present condition. This is an inner awakening that every individual ego responds to independently. Responding to this call is falling into the quest, with the object of this search being the reunion with the greater Self.

The stages set forth in the recitals as obstacles are the inabilities of the ego to be able to perceive such a state, brought forth as a result of cultural and sensual

limitations and social conditioning. The obstacles serve to make the ego aware, to face them, and by transcending them create more distance between the darkness of unconscious existence and the illumination of elevating consciousness. This is the cycle of *fana* and *baqa*, or death and rebirth that Sohrawardi describes as the stages of the path to illumination.

Attaining illumination marks further insight into life, both material and spiritual, and all that living this life entails. It is in this state that nothingness prevails and perception is transformed. Knowledge, culture, intellect, and reason disappear, as one enters a state of emptiness. This is individuation received through knowledge by presence and witnessing, taking place in a moment that leaves no room for the analysis of the experience or its interpretation; only revelation. Following this event both the macrocosm and the microcosm are changed as a result of an inner experience from I-ness to One-ness. At this point, after gaining One-ness, the ego or the soul returns to the world of matter and corporeality, and one becomes aware of a unity that transforms both the outer and the inner worlds. In this state, one is in relation to the true Self and a master of direct experience of life.

Seven centuries later, in the realm of depth psychology, Jung tackled this same condition through his psychology. Jung referred to this as the process of individuation, whereby the person once again becomes whole, through the integration of the ego with the Self. Jung's journey of individuation is a quest from

ego consciousness into the unconscious world, for the ego once again to integrate itself with the unconscious. The hero of Jung's journey is an ego that is willing to undergo such a journey and the challenges it must face traveling through the world of the unconscious.

Jung's understanding of the ego was that it was an aspect of a greater reality which included the ego and the Self. As it was discussed in the previous chapter, the ego-self axis described the relationship of these two realities which form the functioning of the psyche. This journey, similar to Sohrevardi's visionary accounts, culminates in bringing forth a reunion of the ego with the unconscious in the process of individuation.

Jung (1938/1969d) defined individuation as "the process by which a person becomes a psychological 'in-dividual,' that is, a separate, indivisible unity or whole" (p. 275). Jung (1943/1966b) further elaborates on his definition of individuation as a "means [of] becoming an in-dividual, and, in so far as individuality embraces our innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness, it also implies becoming one's own self. We could therefore translate individuation as coming to selfhood or self-realization" (p.173).

As can be gathered from Jung's definition of individuation, the goal is for the ego to integrate all aspects of the personality, conscious and unconscious. Doing so, the personality and one's self-identity become whole, although when Jung (1938/1969d) writes about achieving wholeness, he limits it to aspects of

individual development. He notes, “If unconscious processes exist at all, they must surely belong to the totality of the individual, even though they are not components of the conscious ego” (p. 275). However, Sohrevardi utilizes the concept not only for the development of the seeker, but also for the expansion of a relationship with the Divine.

For Jung, the process of individuation is a psychological pursuit taking place within an individual, through the encounter of ego consciousness with the unconscious, and their integration by the ego. From this perspective it can be said that it is the mind or consciousness that becomes individuated, with the ego receiving its individuation by returning to the body, thereby individuating matter.

In Jung’s model, individuation as a psychological process, takes place at the level of ego consciousness. However, to some extent and more than other depth psychologist, Jung also viewed religious experiences in an experiential sense, as an essential aspect to the individuation process. Jung (1938/1958) notes:

I want to make clear that by the term ‘religion’ I do not mean a creed. It is, however, true that every creed is originally based on the one hand upon the experience of the numinosum and on the other hand upon trust or loyalty, faith and confidence in a certain experience of a numinous nature and in a change of consciousness that ensues. . . . Religion designates the attitude peculiar to a consciousness which has been changed by the experience of the numinosum. (p. 8)

In this quote Jung incorporates religious experiences or “experience of the numinosum” as a part of the individuation process, with it bringing such experiences into the realm of his psychology. Jung’s aim, although limited due to

his objective stance, was to illustrate the significance of religious experiences in the realm of psychology.

For Sohrevardi, however, individuation transcends the realm of psychology and is the result of illumination from above, through an encounter with the Angel. The individuation of the soul and the regaining of its spiritual nature depend on its reunion and connection with the Angel and the intensification of that encounter as the soul progresses through the levels of the imaginal world. Sohrevardi's ideas on illumination can be viewed as another aspect of the Jungian individuation process applied not only on a psychological level, but on a deeper, more spiritual level.

Stages of Self-realization

The encounter with the Angel and the resulting self realization can be divided into four stages. After the soul enters the imaginal world the Angel reminds the soul of its previous form of existence prior to its captivity in the body, helping the soul recognize that its mode of existence is not corporeal but subtle. The soul, having remembered its spiritual origins and subtle form of existence, disconnects and disassociates with identifying itself with the body and its mortality and now identifies with its eternal nature.

This shift in consciousness and self-awareness is a move from the material to spiritual realm. This marks the ascent of the soul towards its homeland, having recognized its true identity. This is the stage where the soul relinquishes all of its material bonds and entanglements in matter, and returns to its Angel and

experiences God. Finally by returning to the body, in order to integrate and re-create the body with the newly gained conscious, awareness is attained as a result of the visionary experience. Through this return to the body, the body is spiritualized and the personality recreated.

A Jungian parallel to this process for personality development includes the initial awareness of a passing identity built on the ego's association with the external world and the demands of this world. As a result of this awareness, an anxiety is developed based on the separation of the old identity and the development of a new identity, which will eventually give birth to an emerging ego.

The next stage commences as a liminal phase when the old identity has been put to rest, yet a richer, more whole self, has not developed yet. There is a tension in this stage between the conscious and the unconscious where the boundaries between these realms become vague. The old rigid personality is dissolving in the unconscious, with unconscious material pouring into the consciousness of the individual. This is a period of vulnerability and if not attended to properly could lead to psychosis. During this period one must pay attention to the pain and suffering that are experienced and view them as the opportunity to experience an awareness of the greater Self.

Finally, as a consequence of union of the opposites, reintegration results and there is awareness of the Self within ego consciousness, resulting in restructuring the new identity in harmony with the ego.

On both levels this journey is aided by the archetypes which act in the role of guide, by giving expression to the images of the emerging self. The transformation of the ego leads to psychological and spiritual integration.

The Archetypes Represented in the Recitals

The three recitals explored in chapter 7 demonstrate multiple examples of collective unconscious archetypes that have been identified by Jung in his work. Some of the more significant archetypes that reveal themselves in the recitals and are explored in this chapter include: The archetype of Transformation, the archetype of the Spiritual Father, the archetype of the Angel, and the archetype of the Hero.

The Archetype of Transformation

Jung (1938/1969a) defined this archetype as not being specific “personalities, but typical situations, places, ways and means, that symbolize the kind of transformation in question” (p. 38). Edinger (1968) adds to this definition:

The archetype of transformation pertains to a psychic process of growth, change and transition. It can express itself in many different images with the same underlying core meaning. Perilous journeys to unknown destinations, exploration of dark places, purposeful descent to the underworld or under the sea or in the belly of a monster to find a hidden treasure are expressions of this archetype. The theme of death and rebirth as well as the symbolism of initiation rites in all of their various forms; the crossing of rivers or water chasms and the climbing of mountains; the theme of redemption, salvation

or recovering what has been lost or degraded, wherever it appears in mythology or unconscious symbolism. (p. 6)

As related to the recitals, Sohrawardi's tales allude to this journey of transformation taking place from the material world into the imaginal world where the transformation of the soul is achieved. The visionary journey involves the stages where the soul experiences various rites of passage along the way. Through the recitals, Sohrawardi expounds upon the stages of the mystical path which leads to intimate knowledge and union with God. The soul experiences a type of rebirth as it dies to the world of appearances by awakening and remembering its condition of exile in this world.

Many of the themes outlined by Edinger in the quote above are exemplified in the three recitals. As an example, in the *Treatise of the Birds*, the expression of this archetype is manifested by the bird-soul flying over the mountains until it reaches the mystical Mount Qaf, marking the crossing into the imaginal world. In the *Tale of Occidental Exile*, the soul is depicted as crossing oceans and rivers which also mark the expression of the archetype of transformation. In these tales, through a cycle of death and rebirth, the transformation of the soul to a higher level of consciousness is achieved.

These and other images of the archetype of transformation are manifested in the recitals and make up a major portion of their content. These symbols illustrate the various experiences that entail this rite of passage.

From a psychological perspective, Jung (1943/1966c) discusses such journeys of transformation in the following way:

The dissolution of the persona in the collective psyche positively invites one to plunge into that ocean of divinity and blot out all memory in its embrace. This piece of mysticism is innate in all better men as the longing for the mother, the nostalgia for the source from which we came. (p. 287)

Archetype of the Spiritual Father

Another archetype that is fully represented in these tales is the archetype of the Spiritual Father. Edinger (1968) describes this archetype as follows:

The great father archetype pertains to the realm of light and spirit. It is the personification of the masculine principle of consciousness symbolized by the upper solar region of heaven. From this region comes wind, pneuma, nous, rauch, which has always been symbol of spirit as opposed to matter. Feathers, birds, airplanes and all that refers to flying or height are particularly complex symbols which emphasizes the upper heavenly realm. In addition all images involving light or illumination pertain to the masculine principle as opposed to the dark earthiness of the great mother. (p. 6)

This archetype fully expresses itself in the recitals. The flight of the birds, the wise old man as the Angel, the image of the divine as the great father, and the symbolism of light are all manifestations of this archetype depicted in the recitals.

Archetype of the Angel

The path of individuation, as it was explored in the recitals, takes place through the encounter with the Angel as a prerequisite “to make ourselves capable of God” (Corbin, 1958/1997, p. 290). For Sohrevardi, the struggle for individuation is an effort to meet one’s Angel and “secure a foundation for the radical autonomy of the individual” (p. 12). This meeting of the Angel is an initiation into a new form

of consciousness, where the soul commences to liberate itself from the bonds of ignorance.

One of the main archetypes manifested in the recitals is the Angel. The Angel, as described by Sohrawardi, is an imaginal being and the celestial counterpart of the terrestrial soul. Every human soul has a counterpart in the imaginal world that is personified as a celestial Angel and is exclusive to each soul.

Corbin (1976/1998) notes:

The soul discovers itself to be the earthly counterpart of another being with which it forms a totality. . . . It is from this transcendent Self that the soul originates in the past of metahistory; this Self had become strange to it while the soul slumbered in the world of ordinary consciousness; but it ceases to be strange to it at the moment when the soul in turn feels itself a stranger in this world. This is why the soul requires an absolutely individual expression of this Self. (p. 20)

In the recitals, the soul's journey represents a process where the human soul leaves behind its state of disconnection to integrate with its heavenly twin. This is given clear representation in the three recitals discussed in the previous chapter. The soul represents a "terrestrial angel, who governs earthly human bodies" (Corbin, 1954/1988, p. 46). Corbin identifies the human soul as the *anima humana* and its counterpart in heaven as the *anima coelestis*. With the help of the *anima coelestis* an archetypal encounter takes place. The fragmented *anima humana* becomes aware of its archetype and attempts to integrate it. Corbin further notes, "It is in imitation of the *anima coelestis* that the terrestrial angel or *anima humana* will realize its angelicity" (p. 46).

It is the archetypes that carry out the task of remembering for the soul or the ego and commence to heal their separation from the source. By the engagement of the soul/ego with the archetypes differentiation is initiated, and an expansion of the consciences is achieved. This is where the soul/ego claims its individuation, repairing its alienation, and becoming whole once again.

In order to achieve a sense of wholeness the soul or ego must integrate with their greater counterparts. For the soul that is the Angel, which exists in the imaginal world and for the ego, the Self which is a part of the Jung's collective unconscious. The Angel has explored the imaginal landscape and is familiar with the challenges of the path, therefore it functions to awaken and to guide the soul through this divine, spiritual landscape. The meeting of the human soul with the Angel is an archetypal encounter. Similarly, from Jung's perspective, this meeting can be compared to the encounter of the ego with the archetype of the Self, which is the archetype responsible for providing meaning and growth for the personality.

The ego separated from the Self archetype becomes aware of its disconnectedness from its source and attempt's to reconnect. This is a psychological state of dismemberment, and in order for soul to once again reconnect and make it whole requires the work of remembering. Jung (1951/1969) notes that the ego exists in a separated state from the self:

The ego by definition, subordinate to the self and is related to it like a part to the whole. . . . The ego not only can do nothing against the self, but is sometimes actually assimilated by unconscious components of the

personality that are in the process of development and is greatly altered by them. (p. 5)

By integrating the ego and the unconscious aspects of the psyche, one attains a congruent all encompassing personality. As Jung has stated, the archetypes cannot be known by themselves and manifest in the form of an image. In this case the Angel personifies the archetypal encounter with the Self.

For Sohrevardi the purpose of the encounter is to attain the reflection and a realization of the divine. In Jung's vocabulary this divinity can be interpreted as the Self. For Jung, the Self may be called "the God within us . . . and all our highest and ultimate purposes seem to be striving towards it" (Jung, 1943/1966b, p. 238). He further notes that the Self is also "a point of departure, the fertile soil from which all future life will spring. This premonition of futurity is as clearly impressed upon our innermost feelings as is the historical aspect" (1943/1966a, p. 192).

The self-realization of the soul, initiated through its encounter with the Angel, leads to an encounter with the divine. When the soul crosses the threshold and enters into the imaginal world, it meets the Angel. Since the Angel functions on the archetypal and material realms, it serves as a link whereby the soul can access the imaginal world. Upon this encounter the archetype of the Self is constellated through the presence of the Angel, enabling the soul to gain self-awareness and identifying itself as a spiritual being. The Angel offers a new way to see the manifestation of the archetype of the Self. The archetype of the Angel is the

Angel of Individuation (Cheetham, 2003). The Angel is the catalyst for change in one's perceptions and one's psyche.

Archetype of the Hero

Encountering the Hero archetype accomplishes the main task of entering into the quest that is the key element in establishing integration and wholeness. The hero archetype once constellated in life leads to a new model of existence, self-knowledge, and meaning. The hero accomplishes acts of bravery and refers to a figure that possesses both inner and outer strength and courage.

A part of Jung's contribution to depth psychology comes from his emphasis that myths and stories such as the recitals contribute to an understanding of unconscious processes and symbolize particular psychological experiences that can be meaningful and shared by the human species. Jung (1938/1969a) notes that "Myths are first and foremost psychic phenomena that reveal the nature of the soul and refer to something psychic" (p. 6). This emphasis on the part of Jung is due to the fact that he himself formed many of the concepts in his psychology through studying myths and various other literatures, including fairytales that were outside the realm of psychological sciences. As an example, he found that the "expression of archetypes is myth and fairytale" (p. 5).

The Hero myth is one of the main archetypes of the collective unconscious. Jung (1943/1966c) states:

If a man is a hero, he is a hero because, in the final reckoning, he did not let the monster devour him, but subdued it, not once but many times. Victory over the collective psyche alone yields the true value: the capture of the hoard, the invincible weapon, the magic talisman, or whatever it be that the myth deems most desirable. Anyone who identifies with the collective psyche or, in mythological terms, lets himself be devoured by the monster and vanishes in it, attains the treasure that the dragon guards, but he does so in spite of himself and to his own greatest harm. (p. 170)

Hero's Journey

Campbell (1949) in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* expanded on Jung's ideas about the hero and found common features in the hero myths of various cultures. In this book Campbell described the hero's journey as follows:

The mythological hero, setting forth from his common day hut or castle, is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds, to the threshold of adventure. There he encounters a shadow presence that guards the passage. The hero may defeat or conciliate this power and go alive into the kingdom of the dark or be slain by the opponents and descend in death. Beyond the threshold, then, the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar, yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests), some of which give magical aid (helpers). When he arrives at the nadir of the mythological round, he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward. The triumph may be presented as the hero's sexual union with the goddess-mother of the world (sacred marriage), his recognition by the father-creator (father atonement), his own divinization (apotheosis), or again-if the powers have remained unfriendly to him-his theft of the boon he came to gain; intrinsically it is an expansion of consciousness and therewith of being (illumination, transfiguration, freedom). The final world is that of the return. If the powers have blessed the hero, he now sets forth under their protection; if not, he flees and is pursued. At the return threshold the transcendental powers must remain behind; the hero re-emerges from the kingdom of dread. The boon that he brings restores the world (elixir). (p. 245)

The hero's journey is a process of transformation and expansion in one's consciousness. Campbell (1949) states, "The adventure is always and everywhere a passage beyond the veil of the known into the unknown" (p. 82). Campbell pronounced that we all go through a hero's journey sometime in our lives.

Stages of the Hero's Journey

Campbell identified three phases involved in the journey: Departure, Initiation, and Return. The first phase, Campbell says involves five stages: The Call to Adventure, Refusal of the Call, Supernatural Aid, The Crossing of the Threshold, The Belly of the Whale. The second phase, Initiation, includes six stages: The Road of Trials, The Meeting with the Goddess, Woman as the Temptress, Atonement with the Father, Apotheosis, and The Ultimate Boon. The third phase of Return involves four stages: Refusal of the Return, The Magic Flight, Master of the Two Worlds, Freedom to Live.

The hero's journey has parallels in the recitals. The hero, much like the human soul, crosses into another landscape, faces obstacles, and returns. Due to the main focus of the recitals on the Hero's journey, this section will be expanded to offer the reader a more thorough understanding of the stages of the hero's journey as depicted in the recitals. Sohravardi's three recitals support the formulation of the three phases of the hero's journey. Although the events in the recitals are illustrated as outer events, they are actually an exploration of the human psyche. Sohravardi depicts the hero as the soul journeying into the unfamiliar land of the imaginal

while encountering the obstacles of the macrocosm and the microcosm. In the visionary recitals the hero's journey allows the soul to move from a state of exile to a state of unity by passing through a series of initiatory stages set forth on the path to its individuation. Each stage of the initiation involves tasks that are difficult and grueling but required to prepare the soul for the next phase. Although Campbell outlined the stages, their sequence may vary widely. The purpose in this section is to identify the stages of the journey and demonstrate their manifestation in the three recitals introduced in this study.

In what follows sections in the visionary recitals related to certain stages of the hero's journey will be highlighted. The following quotes are taken from Campbell's book.

Departure Phase

The journey of the hero begins when the soul receives the "call to adventure" initiating a move from the world of matter to the imaginal world. In the recitals the quest begins when the soul recalls its original mode of existence and attempts to escape its captivity and separating itself from the bonds of the body.

The stages include:

Call to adventure. The hero begins the journey in the mundane world, but there comes a time when it must leave this world behind since "his flowering world becomes a wasteland of dry stones and his life feels meaningless (Campbell (1949, p. 59). Faced with this condition, a messenger announces to the hero the call to

adventure, and the hero must decide whether to submit to the call and commence to enter into another world or continue to live in its present state. Campbell notes:

The call to adventure-signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown . . . it is always a place of strangely fluid and polymorphous beings, unimaginable torments, superhuman deeds, and impossible delight. (1949, p. 58)

In the recitals, examples of this stage include the soul sensing a nostalgia for the homeland and the longing to return to the spiritual world it descended from. In this state, responding to an inspiration (*Ilham*), the soul is called to adventure. This inspiration presents itself when the soul recalls its previous state of existence, yearning to once again be freed from the confines of the body. In the *Treatise of the Birds*, the bird soul finds its inspiration by watching other birds escape their captivity: "When I saw this I remembered how I had been before and how I had forgotten myself. I was disgusted by that which I had grown accustomed to" (Sohravardi, 1999d, p. 3).

In *The Red Intellect*, the call presents itself in the form of a felt yearning to return home, brought forth after the soul gains awareness: "Finally my eyes were completely opened and I was shown the world as it was" (Sohravardi, 1999b, p. 21). In *The Tale of Occidental Exile* this inspiration is manifested in the figure of the messenger bird, *the Hoopoe*, which Sohravardi names the faculty of inspiration. *The Hoopoe* announces to the soul, "I have brought your deliverance" (Sohravardi, 1999c, p. 115).

Sohravardi (1999a) notes:

How very strange that a man hears a sound in a certain incorporeality and attends to it, finding at that moment that his imagination also listens to it, though that sound is from a suspended image. (p. 155)

Refusal of the call. The second stage of departure is the refusal of the call whereby the hero may altogether decline the call out of fear of the unknown or being absorbed in the seductions of material living. Campbell notes:

Refusal of the summons converts the adventurer into its negative. Walled in boredom, hard work, or 'culture', the subject loses the power of significant affirmative action and becomes a victim to be saved. (1949, p. 59)

The condition of forgetfulness or being unconscious, until an awakening has taken place, is the initial reason for the refusal of the call. In the recitals, due to its prolonged captivity in the body, the soul becomes forgetful of its past state of existence and succumbs to the agony of defeat. In *The Treatise of the Birds* the soul announces: "We ceased to struggle against our fetter and resigned ourselves to the strictures of the cage" (Sohravardi, 1999d, p. 3). In *The Red Intellect*, the Falcon states: "I forgot my nest, my realm and everything I had known. I thought I had always been the way I was then" (Sohravardi, 1999b, p. 21). Finally, in *A Tale of Occidental Exile*, the soul's helpless imprisonment in the dark pit of matter diminishes its desire to return to the homeland. It is the call of inspiration and the promise of reconnecting with a past existence that motivate the soul to go forward in the journey.

Sohravardi (1999a) notes:

A man may sometimes forget something and find great difficulty in remembering it. . . . At the moment of his forgetfulness, the man would be unaware of something that is perceived in his essence and in his fortress. Thus, that which is remembered is only in the world of memory, one of the places belonging to the lord of celestial commanding lights. These forget nothing. (p. 136)

Supernatural aid. After differentiation of the soul is achieved by calling upon the hero archetype, the soul is initiated into the quest. The ritual for this initiation into the journey is accomplished by the soul's remembrance of its prior state of existence and the longing it experiences to return once again to that state.

After the hero heeds the call to adventure and is initiated into the quest, a supernatural aid visits the hero. This aid serves to prepare, guide, and inspire the hero on its quest. This guide may have already traversed the path of the adventure and it passes that experience to the hero.

Campbell notes:

For those who have not refused the call, the first encounter of the hero-journey is with a protective figure (often a little old crone or old man) who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass. (1949, p. 69)

In the recitals, as explored extensively in the previous chapter, this guide presents itself in the figure of the Angel, the cosmic counterpart of the human soul, which guides the soul through its adventure.

Crossing the threshold. The crossing of the threshold marks the hero's entrance into the unknown world, leaving behind the familiar world, and undertaking the journey into an unfamiliar realm.

Campbell notes that "the hero goes forward in his adventure until he comes to the threshold guardian at the entrance to the zone of magnified power" (1949, p. 77). Examples of this stage in the recitals involve the soul's first encounter with the Angel at the threshold of the material and imaginal worlds, with the Angel announcing the arrival into the imaginal world. In this stage, Campbell also refers to the encounter of "threshold guardians," noting that "such guardians bound the world in four directions, standing for the limits of the hero's present sphere, or life horizon" (1949, p. 77).

In the recitals, the soul must pass through the obstacles of matter which include the elements of fire, water, air, and earth. These are considered physical substances symbolizing the physical world and the grasp this world has on the soul. These elements, which Sohrevardi refers to as the obstacles of matter, can be considered the guardians of the threshold the soul must cross.

The belly of the whale. This is the last stage of separation from the familiar world where the hero is in an intermediary space symbolizing the willingness to go forth in the adventure. By entering this stage, the hero experiences a death and a rebirth.

Campbell notes:

The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown and would appear to have died. . . . This popular motif gives emphasis to the lesson that the passage of the threshold is a form of self-annihilation. . . . Instead of passing outward, beyond the confines of the visible world, the hero goes inward, to be born again. (1949, pp. 90-91)

This is depicted in the three recitals as the moment the soul reaches the top of the eighth mountain in *The Treatise of the Birds*, crosses the ocean in *A Tale of Occidental Exile*, and enters into the wilderness in *The Red Intellect*. These symbols mark a crossing or a dying to a previous mode of existence and being born into a new mode.

According to Sohrevardi (1999a):

The stage of giving up freedom of choice and action is the stage of annihilation, while the second stage where the mystic freely acts, because his will follows the will of God, and is the state of abiding in God. It is the shedding of the mortal self for the eternal, material for the spiritual, human for the divine. (p. 81)

Here Sohrevardi is noting the experience of separation or a liberation from an old state of being and the emergence of a new, more illuminated state, where the human soul is free to act by the will of God.

Initiation Phase

Once the departure phase has been completed, the hero enters the initiation phase. In this phase the soul has entered into the imaginal world and must overcome a series of obstacles with the aid of the Angel. The stages include Road

of Trials, Meeting with the Goddess, Woman as the Temptress, Atonement with the Father, Apotheosis, and The Ultimate Boon.

Road of trials. The road of trials involves a set of tests and obstacles that the soul must endure in order for its transformation to occur. Campbell notes:

Once having traversed the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trial. . . . The hero is covertly aided by the advice, amulets, and secret agents of the supernatural helper whom he met before his entrance into this region. (1949, p. 97)

Examples of this stage, as covered in the previous chapter, include the crossing of the soul through the macrocosm of the visible world, followed by passing through the microcosm of the inner world symbolizing the senses. The soul's successful passage through the macrocosm and the microcosm represents its triumph over the obstacles of the world of appearances.

Meeting with the goddess. This stage marks the successful passing through the obstacles and the transformation of the hero. Although Campbell marks this stage as meeting a goddess, this unification is not represented or personified in the recitals by a female figure. Campbell notes. "The ultimate adventure, when all the barriers and ogres have been overcome, is commonly represented as a mystical marriage" (1949, p. 109).

The meeting with the goddess represents the soul's union with the divine and the unconditional love it feels for the Divine. This stage is marked by the soul's re-awakening, which symbolizes an expansion in consciousness by its coming into

contact with the Divine. Now the soul begins to see itself in a nondualistic way, as one with the Divine, and a form of a sacred marriage takes place where the lover is joined with the beloved. Campbell notes: “The meeting with the goddess is the final test of the talent of the hero to win the boon of love, which is life itself enjoyed as the encasement of eternity” (1949, p. 118).

In *The Treatise of the Birds*, this experience leads to the soul falling unconsciousness as a result of the encounter: “We came to a chamber and, as we set foot inside, the resplendence of the king could be seen from afar. In that brilliance our eyes were dazzled, our heads spun, and we lost consciousness” (Sohravardi, 1999d, p. 6). Similarly, in *A Tale of Occidental Exile*, the soul shares its experience:

I ascended the mountain and saw our father, an old man from the brilliance of whose light the heavens and earth were nearly split open. I walked toward him. He greeted me, and I prostrated myself before him and was almost obliterated by his radiating light. (Sohravardi, 1999c, p. 120)

Woman as the temptress. This stage represents the attachments of the hero to the material world and its projection on the figure of the woman. In this context woman is a symbol of material temptations which distract the soul on its journey.

Campbell notes:

The innocent delight of Oedipus in his first possession of the queen turns to an agony of spirit when he learns who the woman is. Like Hamlet, he is beset by the moral image of the father. Like Hamlet, he turns from the fair features of the world to search the darkness for a higher kingdom than this of the incest and adultery ridden, luxurious and incorrigible mother. The seeker of the life beyond life must press beyond her, surpass the temptations of her call, and soar to the immaculate ether beyond. (1949, p. 122)

In the recitals this stage is presented as how the senses keep the soul occupied to the matters of the body.

Atonement with the father. After the soul passes through the obstacles, encounters the Angel, and forms a union with its celestial counterpart, it is transformed and illuminated. In a manner it is reborn in a spiritual universe and its longing satisfied. The soul, through its actions, is initiated into a new realm of understanding and knowledge. Here the soul is confronted with the Divine presence which is represented as the Father who holds divine power. This is the point in the journey where all other stages have led to. Campbell notes, “The hero transcends life with its peculiar blind spot and for a moment rises to a glimpse of the source. He beholds, the face of the father, understands-and the two are atoned” (1949, p. 147).

In the *Treatise of the Birds*, the bird soul explains, “If you can imagine a beauty that can never be touched by ugliness and a perfection that can never be approached by imperfection, you will find it there, inasmuch as all beauty belongs to him in reality” (Sohravardi, 1999d, p. 6). In *The Red Intellect* this stage is symbolized by drinking from the Spring of Life. “Find the Spring of life and pour water from it over your head. . . . Whoever bathes in that spring will never be polluted. Whoever finds the meaning of reality will have reached the spring” (Sohravardi, 1999b, p. 32).

In *The Tale of Occidental Exile* the hero soul notes, “His is the greatest splendor, his the highest glory and the most forceful light. He is above, the light of light, above light ever and eternally. It is he who is manifested to everything, and everything perishes except his face” (Sohravardi, 1999c, p. 121). In all the tales, the moment the soul meets the divine manifestation it is bewildered and transformed as a result of the encounter.

Apotheosis. Having attained divine knowledge, the hero is in a state of bliss.

Campbell notes:

Those who know, not only that the Everlasting lies in them, but that what they, and all things, really are is the Everlasting, dwell in the groves of the wish-fulfilling trees, drink the brew of immortality, and listen everywhere to the unheard music of eternal concord. (1949, p. 167)

The soul, having found its home in the imaginal world is now at peace. This is the state the soul has longed to reach throughout the journey.

The Ultimate boon. This stage marks the achievement of the goal of the journey and satisfying the quest. This is where the hero attains the Holy Grail or the prize it has worked so hard to conquer. Campbell notes:

This is the miraculous energy of the thunderbolts of Zeus, Yahweh, and the Supreme Buddha, the fertility of the rain of Viracocha, the virtue announced by the bell rung in the Mass at the consecration, and the light of the ultimate illumination of the saint and sage. Its guardians dare release it only to the duly proven. (1949, p. 182)

In the recitals the boon is represented as reaching the Spring of Life and drinking from this spring in order to gain eternal life. This is where the soul is in the company of the Divine and basks in its triumph over the prison of the body.

Return Phase

The soul, having passed the initiatory obstacles and survived them, must once again return to the material world to integrate its experiences. Campbell (1949) notes that the task in the return phase is precisely to integrate the new found consciousness with the body, linking together the spiritual and the human realms. The stages include Refusal of the Return, The Magic Flight, Master of Two Worlds, and Freedom to Live.

Refusal of the return. The final phase of the hero's journey is marked by the return where the hero, having gained his or her prize, must once again return to where he or she initiated the journey. Campbell notes: "When the hero-quest has been accomplished, through penetration to the source . . . the adventurer still must return with his life-transmuting trophy. . . But the responsibility has been frequently refused" (1949, p. 193).

In *The Treatise of the Birds* this stage is marked by the birds complaining of having to return to captivity:

Only he who put them on you can remove the fetters from your legs. I will send a messenger with you to compel them to remove your bonds. My comrades cried out that we must return, and so we left the king and are now on our way with the king's messenger. (Sohrevardi, 1999d, p. 6)

In *The Tale of Occidental Exile* after encountering of the Divine the soul is told,

You must return to the Occidental imprisonment, for you have not removed your bonds completely. When I heard him say this I lost my reason and wailed and moaned like one who sees his destruction imminent. I pleaded

with him, but he said it is necessary for you to return now, but I will give you glad tidings of two things: first when you return to prison you will be able to come to us and ascend to our paradise easily whenever you wish; secondly, in the end you will be delivered to our presence by leaving the Occidental lands absolutely and completely. (Sohrevardi, 1999c, p.121)

Difficult as it may be, the soul must return to the material world and the body in order to complete the journey and spiritualize the body.

The Magic flight. This stage marks the return of the hero with the boon. The journey of return can be just as dangerous as the departure. Campbell notes:

If the hero in its triumph wins the blessing of the goddess or the god and is then explicitly commissioned to return to the world with some elixir for the restoration of society, the final stage of his adventure is supported by all the powers of his supernatural patron. (1949, pp. 196-197)

In *The Treatise of the Birds* the stage is marked by the return of the bird with an appointed messenger. In all three of the recitals the magic flight takes place by narrator, Sohrevardi, awakening from a dream.

Master of two worlds. The soul, as a result of its quest, has integrated the material world with the spiritual and attained an inner balance amongst the macrocosm and the microcosm and is now in harmony in both worlds.

Campbell states:

Freedom to pass back and forth across the world division, from the perspective of the apparitions of time to that of the causal deep and Back-not contaminating the principles of the one with those of the other, yet permitting the mind to know the one by virtue of the other-is the talent of the master. . . .The meaning is very clear; it is the meaning of all religious practice. The individual, through prolonged psychological disciplines, gives up completely all attachments to his personal limitations, idiosyncrasies, hopes and fears, no longer resist the self-annihilation that is prerequisite to rebirth in the realization of truth. (1949, pp. 229, 236)

Freedom to live. Mastery of life results in freedom from the bonds of the matter and freedom to form a more meaningful existence. Once the soul is liberated from its cage it can now choose to return to it as pleased, neither regretting a lost past nor anticipating what is to come in the future. Campbell notes, “The hero is the champion of things becoming, not of things become, because he is. . . . He does not mistake apparent changelessness in time for the permanence of Being, nor is he fearful of the next moment” (1949, p. 243).

The hero’s journey marks a path of death and rebirth and the discovery of a new identity. Jung (1964) notes:

The ritual takes the man back to the deepest levels of original mother child identity or ego self identity, thus providing him to experience a symbolic death. . . . From this state he is then rescued by the rite of a new birth. The sequence of death and rebirth. (p. 123)

Moving in an upward spiral, the hero ascends to higher levels of being by completing the stages of the journey. The hero’s journey represents a Gnostic journey of becoming conscious leading to an inner spiritual transformation. This is a journey of revelation where dramatic changes in one’s mode of presence in the world happen.

As illustrated, from Sohrevardi’s perspective, this transformation takes place through a heroic journey of the human soul in the accompaniment of the Angel of individuation. The path is from the body to the spirit and from the material to the imaginal, as a rite of passage towards realization and attainment of a personal encounter with the Divine within all persons. The similarity in the recitals

and Campbell's hero's journey transpire because this journey is symbolic of the journey into the unconscious, where the recitals can also be viewed as such a journey into the deeper levels of the unconscious psyche.

Conclusion

This work has been a report of an ancient theme of separation and reunion. It is a tale that has been told numerous times, in many forms, and in different languages. It is also first and foremost a search for an identity that has been lost in the world of history. These tales are a narrative that tell the tale of the descent of Man and re-cite the lament of his exile, in remembering its source and calling for liberation from its repressive mode of presence in the body. Man laments his separation and suffering in the dark prison of existence, where the prison bars constantly apply an unbearable pressure on the prisoner. A prisoner alone in exile longs for freedom and to return home once again. What Sohrevardi writes about in these tales of exile is a condition we can all relate to in the deepest recesses of our being and are therefore worthy of re-citing.

The recitals of exile are told from the perspective of one who has personally journeyed and experienced the exile firsthand and returned to share the experience. The soul is a foreigner in the fortress of material existence. It is a beautiful and expansive structure, which however holds no meaning, and the human soul finds itself lost and hopeless in it. This fortress is the prison which holds within its walls our essence. This fortress is a symbol of our modern day existence. In a world that

resembles a fortress we aimlessly look for our lost essence. In a pit of obscurity where we have alienated ourselves we search in the dark and descend lower into deep darkness.

Sohravardi's thesis in the recitals is that of finding meaning in the presence of the Divine. The Divine awaits us all and constantly searches for us. The Divine provides a mirror to look within ourselves and to see the sacred within us. The subdued prisoner in his or her condition of captivity in material existence has turned against or forgotten the divine light. There is no luminosity from the exterior. Illumination is only possible from the interior, from behind the veils of the senses. The prisoner must search for this light from within. In this search distance is an illusion that fools the prisoner into searching the exterior, since the inner intuitive eyes are stitched shut.

The exile and descent of Man is an interior condition. The walls of separation are fragile and easily breakable. The exile starts from descent into the occidental West, yet when the walls are broken down and movement initiated, the East makes its appearance. East is ascent. East is illumination. We are from the celestial cosmos and must once again ascend. The East that Sohravardi describes cannot be found on any map, no compass will point to it, and its direction cannot be pointed at by a gesture of the index finger. This Occident and Orient have no topography or boundary, but extend to limitless borders.

The Orient that Sohrevardi tries to illuminate is within. He sees the human soul searching for this Orient and constantly attempting to find its place of sympathy and renew its companionship with the Divine. This is a task the soul has taken upon itself since we in the material world have forgotten.

We have severed the link to the Divine, choosing to maintain our exile in the orientation of the Occident. Occidental exile is our daily existence and our everyday demise in the darkness of this existence. The recitals of Sohrevardi tell of Man's existence in this darkness of matter and, in the darkness, finding a path to once again return home.

As Sohrevardi prescribes, if one enlists in the act of contemplation and intuition, stepping out of the sphere of earthly fate and viewing existence as a mirror of what is on the other side; existence can experience a different fate. Stepping out of the boundaries of materiality, and stepping into the center, where one drinks from the Spring of Life and experiences the soul's rejuvenating force, material and spiritual, body and spirit, apparent and hidden, Man and the Divine, are all revealed to the person as a unity.

The history of humanity is a history of exile. Our age is an era of captivity. The Gods have indeed abandoned us, and no other God has come forward. We are lost, without a home. We have come from another place, a place that has no dimensions, from *Nakojabad*, the imaginal world, the *mundus imaginalis*, and are

desperately searching to return to it. It is only by encountering the Angel that we can once again regain our direction and find our destination.

These recitals, which illustrate the themes of exile and homecoming, are tales of our separation from our essence, our essential Self. They are a search for a lost horizon which lies dormant in our inner core, awaiting illumination. They illustrate the tragic story of the descent of man, a being that can be something other by turning himself inside out and once again returning to the other side of Mount *Qaf*, to *Nakoja abad*.

As the Angel in *The Red Intellect* informs the soul, this return is possible only when one has achieved

the ability of balsam-oil, which, if you hold your hand up to the sun and put a drop of it on your palm, will come out on the back of your hand. If you become Khizr you can easily cross Mount Qaf. (Sohrevardi, 1999b, p. 32)

Our existence depends on making this crossing.

This work has attempted to illustrate a process in the transformation of consciousness through the use of imagination from a selection of material written by the Iranian-Islamic Sufi Shahabeddin Yahya Sohrevardi, utilizing a depth psychological perspective.

In Jung's psychology and Sohrevardi's philosophy imagination provides the means for transitioning between two modes of consciousness, one material and the other imaginal. Through the images that are created by the imaginative faculty, archetypal and spiritual realities become manifest to the human psyche. For Jung,

imagination provides access to the unconscious content of the psyche by bringing this content into consciousness. However, imagination, as used by Sohrevardi and demonstrated in the recitals, becomes the faculty for revealing theophanic forms, for the purpose of manifesting divine realities to the seeker of such realities.

In this context, imagination has a spiritual purpose which has been disregarded and understudied in depth psychology's attempt to stay within the confines of the empirical sciences. The failure of depth psychology to explore more transpersonal levels of the psyche has resulted in neglecting to appreciate the spiritual dimension of imagination, which provides recognition of spiritual experiences.

As demonstrated in this work, this spiritual function of imagination for attaining spiritual illumination by developing a relationship with the Divine fully reveals itself in the recitals of Sohrevardi. As explored in these tales, Sohrevardi utilized the imagination as a vehicle for the human soul to transition into the imaginal world, where imagination makes possible and mediates the spiritual journey.

By means of utilizing three of Sohrevardi's recitals, the present study demonstrated how the imagination and the imaginal world are used in a spiritual context. Through the rediscovery of this lost aspect of imagination with this move, imagination's principal use and function as a spiritual organ may become integrated

into depth psychology, offering the field to recognize the spiritual aspects and functions of both the imagination and the imaginal world.

It is evident that Sohrevardi's ideas are far too vast and complex to attempt to cover in any single work. Even by exploring only one aspect of his work, pertaining to the use of imagination, it can be surmised that Sohrevardi's ideas are far reaching and awaiting further exploration. The aim in this study was not a full exploration of Sohrevardi's philosophy, for that would take numerous volumes and possibly a life time. The endeavor has been to introduce Sohrevardi as an indirect contributor to the field of depth psychology, highlighting some of the similarities between his and Jung's ideas. By situating an aspect of his work in the field of depth psychology, an attempt was made to affirm his contributions to the field. Perhaps Sohrevardi's greatest contribution is his integration of various traditions in which the principle of illumination or individuation is allied with the imagination.

It has been the author's intention that the present study may serve to introduce Sohrevardi to Western readers and bridge the cultural and scholarly gap between Jungian-archetypal thought and the Iranian Islamic tradition, initiating a dialogue between East and West in the interest of linking the two modes of thought with one another. Bridging this gap, between an ancient Eastern tradition and a modern Western one, serves to demonstrate convergences between the two modes of thought. Such points of convergence suggest that the two modes of thought are not exclusive or isolated from one another.

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