

Tayyibi cosmological doctrine

According to the Tayyibi cosmological doctrine, the primordial pleroma or the intelligible world (*alam-al-ibda*) was created all at once, with innumerable spiritual forms (*suwar*) which were all equal to one another in terms of life, power and capacity. This was the state of the so called first perfection (*al-kam-al-al-awwal*). One of these forms of primordial beings, in contemplating itself, became the first to realize that it was originated, and thus it recognized and worshipped the originator (*al-mubdi*). As a result, this particular form was singled out for special distinction, meriting to be called the first originated being (*al-mubda-al-awwal*), or simply the first (*al-awwal*). He also became known as the first intellect (*al-aql-al-awwal*), identified with the Quranic term *al-qalam*, or the pen. The first intellect now invited, in what may be called the *dawa* in heaven, all the other primordial beings to follow his example by recognizing the originator and his unity or *tawhid*. Those responding positively to this call were ranked in descending order according to the swiftness of their response, occupying the *hudud* of the celestial world.

According to the mythical 'drama in heaven', introduced by Ibrahim al-Hamid the first two emanations from the first intellect, viz., the first emanation (*al-munbaith al-awwal*) and the second emanation (*al-munbaith al-thani*), respectively designated as the second intellect and third intellect, were rivals for the second rank (*hadd*) in the celestial hierarchy, after the first intellect. It was the second intellect who, by his superior efforts and swifter response, attained that position. But the third intellect, whilst acknowledging the originator, refused to recognize the superior rank of the second intellect, the universal soul, also identified with the Quranic term *al-lawh*, the tablet, since he considered himself to be his equal. Thus, the third intellect, the protagonist of the cosmic dramaturgy, fell into a state of negligence and stupor, and, by hesitating to accord due recognition to his preceding archangelical hypostasis, committed the first cosmic sin or error. As punishment for his insubordination, he fell from the third to the tenth rank in the archangelical hierarchy, coming after the other seven intellects who had meanwhile responded to the call of the first intellect. In other words, after awakening from his stupor, the third intellect discovered that he had descended by seven ranks, due to his immobilization that gave rise to a temporal gap or retard (*takhalluf*) in the pleroma, the so-called 'retarded eternity' which may be viewed as the prototype of cyclical time and history based on the number seven. The doubt or hesitation expressed by the third intellect may also be described as the exteriorization of the darkness which had remained hidden within him, a being of light, and which had to be overcome. After repenting, the third intellect became stabilized as the tenth intellect and demiurge (*mudabbir*) of the physical world, an inferior and opaque world. The tenth intellect is also called the celestial or spiritual Adam (*Adam al-ruhani*), the angel corresponding to Christos Angelos and showing certain traits of the Manichaean and Gnostic *anthropos*. As Corbin has explained, his role corresponds even more closely to that of the angel Zervan in Zervanite Zoroastrian myths.

There were other spiritual forms (*suwar*) that, like the third intellect, committed the error of failing to acknowledge the superior rank of the second intellect.

The physical world was produced out of these fallen forms, belonging to the circle (*daira*) of the tenth intellect, and out of the darkness generated by their sin. Through their movements, reflecting confusion and doubt, the fallen forms produced length, width, depth, the dimensions of space, matter (*hayula*), the spheres (*aflak*), the elements (*arkan*), etc. In this Tayyibi cosmology, characterized by the fall and repentance of one of the archangels in the pleroma, the tenth intellect or the spiritual Adam, who is charged with administering the affairs of the physical world, tries to regain his lost position by calling on other fallen spiritual forms to repent, like himself. This *dawa*, corresponding to the *dawa* of the first intellect, is indeed the outstanding

motif of the Tayyibi cosmogony. The primordial universe, which becomes the scene of combat between the posterities of Adam and Iblis, was created for this soteriological purpose, namely, the redemption of the spiritual Adam and the salvation of the fallen forms which had manifested themselves as darkness and matter. Some of the fallen spiritual forms respond to the appeal of the spiritual Adam. They are the celestial archetypes of the earthly proclaimers of the mystical *dawa*, becoming the posterity of the spiritual Adam. On the other hand, various categories of forms belonging to the circle of the tenth intellect persist in their negation and denial. The implacable adversaries constitute, throughout the cycles, the posterity of Iblis, the devil. The spiritual Adam, helped by his supporters, carries on a combat which finally, after innumerable cycles, will destroy darkness and the progeny of Iblis.

The earliest representative of the spiritual Adam's *dawa* on earth was the first, universal Adam (*Adam al-awwal al-kullī*), the terrestrial homologue of the first intellect and the epiphanic form or *maz. har* of the spiritual Adam. He appeared, together with his twenty-seven loyal companions, on the island of Sarandīb (Ceylon), a region of the earth having the best climatic and astronomical conditions. The primordial universal Adam made his appearance at the dawn of the Tayyibi mytho history, at the beginning of the cycle of cycles, and inaugurated the first cycle of epiphany or manifestation (*dawr-al-kashf*). He was the first repository of the imamate, the primordial imam, who as such was *masum*, being immunized against all impurity and sin. He instituted the terrestrial *dawa* hierarchy, corresponding to the celestial order, and divided the earth into twelve regions (*jazair*), each one placed under the charge of one of his companions who, themselves, had responded to the *dawa* of the spiritual Adam. This original cycle lasted for 50,000 years and constituted a period of knowledge (*ilm*) and not of action (*amal*), an era of true gnosis in which no laws were required. It endured until the approach of the first cycle of concealment (*dawr-al-satr*), when the form of Iblis reappeared, disturbing the preceding state of harmony. The Tayyibi mytho history allows for a great number of such cycles, the original one having been a cycle of manifestation rather than concealment, because the spiritual Adam, the Tayyibi figure of the saved-saviour, had defeated his Iblis. The universal Adam of this doctrine must be distinguished from the 'historical' Adam described in the Bible and the Quran. The latter, who opened the present cycle of concealment, was only a partial Adam (*Adam-al-juzi*), like so many others preceding and following him in the partial cycles of history.

At the end of the first cycle, the universal Adam, along with his supporters, rose to the horizon of the tenth intellect and took his place, while the tenth intellect rose by one rank towards his original *hadd* in the pleroma. Similarly, the *qaim* of every following cycle, which is closed by a resurrection or *qiyama*, after his passing, rises and takes the place of the tenth. In this manner, the ascension of each *qaim-al-qiyama* at the end of every cycle marks the progressive elevation of the spiritual Adam towards the primordial archangelical dyad in the celestial hierarchy in which he originated, and which he lost due to the crisis that befell him in heaven. This process continues throughout the cycles and from *qaim* to *qaim*, and the spiritual Adam gradually rises in rank and annuls the form of Iblis which he tears out of himself, until he actually joins the second intellect. This conjunction is the central idea of the Tayyibi gnosis. The universal Adam, as noted, in initiating the first cycle also initiated the imamate and he was the first imam to accomplish the task which henceforth became the work of each imam and *qaim* in a partial cycle, and particularly of the final Qaim. Just as the universal Adam is the first terrestrial manifestation of the spiritual Adam, exemplified in the partial Adams, so the Qaim (exemplified in the partial *qaims*) will be his final manifestation. The *imam-qaim* of each partial cycle is, thus, the manifestation of an eternal imam who, in the person of the seal of the series, will consummate the aeon, consisting of a vast number of cycles. All the partial *qaims* are, in a sense, 'recapitulated' in the last one amongst them, the Qaim of the Great Resurrection (*qiyamat al qiyamat*), which consummates the grand cycle (*al-kawr al-azam*), restoring the Angel Adam to his original position and redeeming humanity.

The original cycle of manifestation was followed by a cycle of concealment, initiated by a partial Adam and closed by a partial *qaim*, and then by another cycle of manifestation, and so on. An

unknown number of successive cycles of *kashf* and *satr*, each one composed of seven periods or eras, occurred until the present cycle of *satr*, which was initiated by the 'historical' Adam of the Quran, the first *natiq* of the present age. When this cycle is closed by the seventh *natiq* and the expected *qaim* of the current cycle, there will begin again another cycle of manifestation, inaugurated by an *Adam aljuzi*, and so on. The countless alternations of these cycles will continue until the parousia of the final Qaim, proclaiming the final *qiyama*, the Resurrection of the Resurrections (*qiyamat al qiyamat*), at the end of the grand cycle. According to some Tayyibi calculations, the duration of the grand cycle (*al-kawr al-azam*) is estimated at 360,000 times 360,000 years, amounting to almost 130 billion years. The consummation of the grand cycle will also mark the end of the Tayyibi mytho history. The final Qaim is not merely a final legitimate leader of mankind from amongst the descendants of Ali and Fatima, he is the Lord of the Resurrection and the summit of the eternal imamate in which the Ismaili vision of the aeon finds its culmination. As Corbin has remarked, this imam, resembling the perfect child (*al-walad al-tamm*) of the Gnostics, engenders himself in the secret of the cycles of the aeon, and in his eschatological epiphany is expected to be the ultimate 'exegete' of mankind. He is the final manifestation of the spiritual Adam, and a member of his true posterity, which he will lead back to its original celestial archetype.

Tayyibi gnosis is indeed rich in eschatological doctrines, which draw extensively on Manichaeism ideas. The eschatology of the Tayyibis, closely related to their cosmogony, is expounded in terms of a cosmic process which includes the eschatological fate or *maad* of individuals. Naturally, different posthumous fates await believers and unbelievers. A person is categorized as a believer (*mumin*) if he affirms the unity of God, recognizes and obeys the true imam of his time, and acknowledges the *hudud* of the *dawa* hierarchy. These are, in fact, the conditions for man's salvation, although other groups of human beings may also ultimately receive an opportunity for redemption.

At the moment of initiation into the *dawa*, the soul of each neophyte (*mustajib*) is joined by a point of light, which is his spiritual soul. This point stays with the initiate and grows as its possessor advances in knowledge and virtue. On his passing from this world, the point of light, which by then has grown into a form of light (*al-sura al-nuraniyya*), becomes completely integrated with the believer's soul. The resulting luminous soul leaves the body and rises to join the soul of the holder of the next higher rank (*hadd*) in the hierarchy. This ascension towards the superior *hadd* is caused by the magnetism of a column of light (*amud minnur*, or *al amud al nurani*), the summit of which reaches into the pleroma of the archangels and towards which the souls of the believers are drawn. This column of light, which in Tayyibi gnosis assumes a two-fold function in eschatology and imamology, is one of the characteristic motifs of Manichaeism, where it has an essential, salvational function. The elevation of the soul of each believer from *hadd* to *hadd* does not, it may be emphasized, imply transmigration (*tanasukh*), or the reincarnation of human souls in the bodies of other persons or animals, a doctrine rejected by the Tayyibis. Here, the Tayyibi authors are in fact referring to the conjunction of souls, and more precisely, the souls of the holders of different ranks in the hierarchy. Each *hadd* is the superior spiritual limit of the *hadd* immediately below it, viz., its *mahdud*. And the relationship between *hadd* and *mahdud* acquires a particular significance in this eschatological context. Each *hadd* becomes an imam for its *mahdud*. And the 'quest for the imam' raises each adept, metamorphosing and elevating him from rank to rank, throughout the hierarchy.

The soul of each believer continues to ascend in the hierarchy until it is gathered together with the luminous souls of all other believers. Their collectivity constitutes the temple of light (*haykal nurani*), which has the shape of a human being but is purely spiritual. Without any confusion, each individual soul subsists as a member in the coalescence of the souls. This temple of light is the imamate, representing the *lahut* or divinity of the imam, as distinct from his *nasut* or humanity. Each imam has his own temple of light or *corpus mysticum*, and as the epiphanic form of the celestial Adam, he is also the terrestrial support of the column of light. On the passing of each

imam, he and his temple of light rise into the pleroma. This holds true also for the imams of the era of Muhammad who are recognized by the Tayyibī Ismailīs, including the concealed imams succeeding al-Tayyib. The *qaim* of each partial cycle, the last imam of that cycle, has his own *corpus mysticum*, or sublime temple of light (*haykal nurani azim*), composed of all the temples of light belonging to that cycle and constituting the form of the *qaim* (*al-sura al-qaimiyya*), again having a human shape. At the end of each partial cycle, when a resurrection is proclaimed, the *qaim* of that cycle rises into the pleroma with his sublime temple of light and takes the place of the tenth intellect. The latter, as noted, ascends by *oneh. add* in the celestial hierarchy, drawing the entire universe of beings one degree closer to reconquering the 'retarded eternity' and bringing the repentant beings of the cosmos a step closer to redemption and salvation. This celestial ascension, representing the denouement of the 'drama in heaven' that befell the spiritual Adam, and reflecting a symmetrical relationship between the cosmogony and the eschatology of the Tayyibīs, is aimed towards the second intellect whose circle is designated as the *hazirat al-quds*, the paradise. The process will continue, from cycle to cycle, until the consummation of the grand cycle. At the time of the Great Resurrection, the final Qaim will rise and take his own sublime temple of light, the coalescence or *majma* of all the luminous souls located at the horizon of the tenth intellect, to the second intellect, the universal soul. The error of the third intellect is now completely atoned for. The spiritual Adam, the saved-saviour angel of humanity, and his supporters in both the celestial and terrestrial worlds are thus ultimately redeemed. Once more, there is only the harmonious world of the *ibda*.

The unbelievers, designated as the adversaries (*mukhalifun*) of the people of truth (*ahl al-haqq*), cannot emancipate themselves from matter so as to gain salvation. Their souls, representing the form of darkness (*al-sura al-zulmaniyya*) and being inseparable from their bodies, stay with their corpses when they die. In time, the bodies of the unbelievers decompose in the earth and join the elements. After several mutations, they are transformed into various substances and creatures in descending order. Depending on the nature and seriousness of their sins, they may eventually rise again through the ascending forms of life, culminating in the human form. As human beings, they may either accept the *dawa* and become believers or reject it. Those belonging to the latter category end up in *sijjin*, a place for the supreme torment (*al-hab al-akbar*) located in the depths of the earth, where they stay throughout the entire duration of the grand cycle.

The Yamani Tayyibīs also inherited the *dawa* hierarchy of the Fatimid Ismailīs, especially as described by the *dai* al-Kirmani. However, since the Tayyibī *dawa* had to operate under changed realities, some modifications to the earlier structure were necessary. The organization of the Tayyibī *dawa*, first explained in Hatim b. Ibrahim al-Hamidi's *Tuhfat al-qulub*, came to be much simpler, with fewer ranks (*hudud*) than those under the Fatimids. The imam had now gone into concealment, along with his *bab* and *hujjas*, a situation continuing from generation to generation after al-Tayyib, the twenty-first imam. Similarly, no longer was there any person occupying the position of *dai al-balagh*, who in earlier times evidently acted as an intermediary between the central headquarters of the Ismailī *dawa* and the local headquarters of a *jazira*. In Yaman, Lamak b. Malik was the only chief dignitary to have borne the designation of *dai al-balagh*, when al-Malika al-Sayyida Arwa was accorded the rank of *hujja*. In the absence of these higher ranks of the hierarchy, the administrative head of the Tayyibī *dawa*, starting with al-Dhuwayb b. Musa, was designated as *dai*, or more precisely as *al-dai al-mutlaq*. As al-Kirmani had argued, the holder of every *hadd* in the *dawa* hierarchy was potentially entitled to the position of the next higher *hadd* and as such, a *dai* was potentially in possession of the authority reserved for higher *hadd* and as such, a *dai* was potentially in possession of the authority reserved for higher *hadd*. At any rate, the *dai mutlaq*, as the leader of the *dawa*, enjoyed supreme authority in the community. Obedience to the imam, required of all the believers, now meant submission to the *dai mutlaq*, the concealed imam's highest representative in the Tayyibī community. As in the case of the imams, every *dai mutlaq* also nominated his successor by the rule of *nass*.

The *dai mutlaq* was assisted in the affairs of the *dawa* by several subordinate *dais*, designated as *madhun* and *mukasir*. These lower ranks are mentioned for the first time in the *Tuhfat al-qulub* as

having fixed status in the hierarchy. One or two chief assistants to the *dai mutlaq* received the designation of *madhun*. Normally, the *dai* chose the *madhun* as his successor. The *mukasir*, who had more limited authority, was now identical with *al-madhun al-mahsur* and *al madhun al-mahdud* of the Fatimid hierarchy. At the bottom of the hierarchy were the ranks of *mumin*, the ordinary initiated member of the community, and *mustajib*, the neophyte or candidate for initiation. The Tayyibis maintained the concern of the Fatimid period in the training of the *dais* and the education of the adepts, though on a much more limited scale. The Yaman *dais* were amongst the most learned members of the Tayyibi community, and many of them, as scholars and authors, produced elaborate treatises synthesizing different Islamic and non-Islamic traditions.

In principle, the Tayyibi *dawa* in Yaman seems to have functioned similarly to the Fatimid Ismaili *dawa* in terms of its initiation procedures, secrecy, teaching, as well as the gradual training of the adepts and the members of the hierarchy, though few specific details are available. There is no evidence showing that the Tayyibi *dawa* was active in any region outside Yaman and India. The Indian *dawa* continued to be under the strict supervision of the Tayyibi *dais* and headquarters in Yaman until the middle of the 10th/16th century, when the headquarters were transferred to Gujarat. Until then, the head of the Indian *dawa*, locally known as the *wali*, was regularly selected by the *dai mutlaq* residing in Yaman. The *wali* had a hierarchy of assistants of his own, about which few details are available until more recent times, but which essentially seems to have been the replica of the pattern adopted in Yaman. The Tayyibi *dawa* operated with such an organization until the Tayyibis of Yaman and India became split into Daudis and Sulaymanis, with their separate *dais*, headquarters and organizations.