

Wisdom (Hikmah) as Perceived by Iranian Muslim Scholars: Reflections on Ibn Sina, Ghazali, and Suhrawardi

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Wisdom (Hikmah) as Perceived by Iranian Muslim Scholars: Reflections on Ibn Sina, Ghazali, and Suhrawardi

Abstract

The evolution of the concept of spiritual/religious wisdom (*ḥikmat*) by the Iranian Muslim philosophers from the 10th to 12th century, may be studied under three main trends namely *Mashāʿi* (Peripatetic), *Kalām* (theology), and *Ishrāq* (Illumination). Despite the correlation among these trends each of them grew independently. Among the three, the *Hikmat-i Ishrāq* (Illumination Wisdom) which is also known as *Ḥikmat-i Dhawqi* (Intuitive Wisdom) of Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi (1153-1191) found a special place as it tended to bring together the philosophical and theological aspects of wisdom. This survey would address the development of *ḥikmat* (wisdom) among Iranian philosophers (*ḥukamāʾ*). It will focus on three outstanding thinkers namely Ibn Sina (980-1037), Ghazali (1058-1111) and Suhrawardi. Ibn Sina represents the Islamized version of Aristotelian Peripatetic philosophy. Ghazali benefited from Ibn Sina's writing but took a different direction, distancing himself from philosophy by giving more weight to theology. Suhrawardi adopted 'light' – a strong symbolic expression used in both pre-Islamic and Islamic sources – and gave 'wisdom' a different edge that involved intuition as a reliable source of receiving guidance. In the study of the theoretical and philosophical aspects of the Illumination Wisdom (*Ḥikmat-i Ishrāq*) one can find traces of the evolution of the concept of wisdom as perceived by Ibn Sina and Ghazali.

Keywords

Iran, Peripatetic Philosophy (*Ḥikmat-i Mashāʿi*), Illumination Wisdom (*Ḥikmat-i Ishrāq*), Ibn Sina, Ghazali, Suhrawardi.

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Wisdom and *Falsafa* in Iran: An Introduction

“Wisdom” has been at the core of Iranian intellectual discourse and spiritual endeavor, both as a nation and as a people of faith – whether in their pre-Islamic or Islamic religious identities. The terms ‘philosophy’ (*falsafa*) and ‘wisdom’ (Arabic *ḥikmah* or Persian *khirad*) have often presented the same concept in classical Persian writings; they refer to a multidisciplinary process that is aimed at discovering the *reality and purpose of existence*, with the intention of guiding man to salvation. Philosophy, in its popular Western usage of the term, is founded solely on rationalism, skepticism, critical discussion, discursive argument and systematic presentation – a discipline independent from religion and spirituality. *Falsafa* and *ḥikmah* (*khirad*), on the other hand, had a different connotation among the pre-Islamic Persian sages, as well as the Muslim philosophers of Iran. Mulla Sadra (1572-1640), an outstanding figure in the area of Islamic philosophy – who inherited the ideas of great Muslim philosophers such as Ibn Sina, Ghazali, Suhrawardi and others – defines philosophy (*ḥikmah*) as “possessing the knowledge of the Divine essence, and of the states of His attributes and actions; also understanding the process of creation at its initial point, and the process by which the created (human) shall return to Him.”¹ In another place he defines *ḥikmah* as “the knowledge of the Reality of the creation or the Intellectual System by which the creation is governed.”² Unlike the popular understanding that regards Greece as the main fountain of philosophy, Muslim thinkers trace it all the way back to Adam, then to Hermes (Idrīs) and Noah.³ This view is founded on the belief that wisdom has a divine origin and that the Almighty will never deprive the world from a person equipped with wisdom. The founder of the Illumination Wisdom, Suhrawardi, elaborates on the Divine origins of wisdom,⁴ and provides a historical/geographical roadmap of the progress and spread of philosophical knowledge. The same trend is still alive and popular in the contemporary Iranian philosophical discourses.

Ibn Sina

Ibn Ali Hussain ibn Abdullah Ibn Sina (370-428 A.H/980-1037A.D), widely known as Avicenna, is among the most significant thinkers of the Islamic history. Our knowledge about his life exceeds that of the other Muslim philosophers, mainly because he left behind a rather detailed memoir that covers the first part of his life

¹ Sadr al-Din Shirazi, Muhammad ibn Ibrahim, *Al-Maṣāḥir al-Ilāhiyyah fī Asrār al-‘Ulūm al-Kamāliyyah*, ed. Muhammad Khamenehei, Boniyad Hekmat Islami, Tehran, 1378 Sh. (2007), p.2.

² Ibid, *Asfār al-Arba‘ah*, tr. Muhammad Khajawi, Tehran, Moula Press, vol. 1, 1378 Sh. (2007), p. 220.

³ Ibid, *Risālah fī al-Ḥudūth*, ed. Muhammad Khamenehei, Boniyad Hekmat Islami, Tehran, 1378 Sh. (2007), p. 153.

⁴ Suhrawardi, *Ḥikmah al-Ishrāq*, Seyyed Jafar Sajjadi, Tehran, Tehran University Press, 1377 Sh. (1999), p. 11.

until age thirty five. The second part is recorded by his loyal disciple Abu Ubayd Jozjani (d. 438A.H/1046A.D).⁵ Ibn Sina was born near Bukhara, in the Iranian capital of Samanid dynasty (now in Uzbekistan). His genius became evident from a very young age; he mastered the religious sciences when he was only ten. At the age of sixteen he was already an established physician, and by the time he was eighteen he overcame all difficulties in understanding the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle by the help of Farabi's commentary.⁶ His devotion to scholarship, learning and teaching is exemplary. Living in an unstable social and political environment, he had to move constantly. Sometimes trapped in violent clashes of armies, he never gave up his love for knowledge, "he even wrote on horseback while going to a battle."⁷

Ibn Sina left behind some two hundred twenty works in Arabic and Persian. His vast knowledge of a wide variety of subjects – ranging from Islamic jurisprudence to theology and philosophy, to music, mathematics and physics, to geology, medicine and poetry – brought him the high title of *hakīm*. His remarkable work, *Kitāb al-Shifā'* (The Book of Healing) is the largest encyclopedia of knowledge ever written by one man.⁸ Well-versed in early Islamic, Pre-Islamic Persian, Greco-Roman and Oriental philosophy, Ibn Sina contributed significantly to the Islamic thought and is regarded by some as the "founder of scholastic philosophy in its systematic formulation."⁹

Aristotle's Peripatetic philosophy, which had a strong logical ground, and regarded philosophy and science as a single pool of knowledge, appealed to Ibn Sina. Being a scientist, logician and philosopher he would naturally appreciate the well-structured doctrine. Moreover the role of the Prime Mover or God in Aristotle's thought would satisfy his religious dimension.¹⁰ On the other hand Ibn Sina had a deep interest in the ancient Persian wisdom known as *Hikmat-i Khusravānī* (Majestic Wisdom).¹¹ His *Mantiq al-Mashriqīyyīn* (Logic of

⁵ See *Encyclopedia of The World of Islam (EWI)* (in Persian), ed. Gholam Ali Haddad 'Adel, Encyclopedia Islamica Foundation, Tehran, 2011, Under Ibn Sina.

⁶ See Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought*, Routledge, NY, 1981, p. 66.

⁷ Barkhah, Ensiyyeh, "Hikmat," in *Encyclopedia of The World of Islam (EWI)* (in Persian), ed. Gholam Ali Haddad 'Adel, Encyclopedia Islamica Foundation, Tehran, 2011, Vol. 13, pp. 756-757; also see Motahhari, Morteza, *Khadamāt-e Moteqābel-e Islām va Irān* (Mutual Contributions of Islam and Iran), Sadra Publishing, Tehran, 1362 Sh. (1983).

⁸ Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought*, p. 66.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ For a concise introduction to Aristotelian Peripatetic doctrine see *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, Vol. 1, Macmillan Publishing Company, New York, 1987; David Furley's "Peripatetic School", in Simon Homblower and Antony Spawforth, *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (3rd ed.), Oxford University Press, 2003.

¹¹ See Ebrahimi Dinani, Gholamhossein, *Sukhan-e Ibn Sina va Bayān-e Bahmanyār* (Ibn Sina's Word and Bahmanyār's Expression), Research Institute of Hikmah and Philosophy, Iran, 1393 Sh. (2015).

Easterners) shows his fascination with what he refers to as Oriental Philosophy, where “the role of the intellectual intuition and illumination (*ishrāq*) becomes paramount.”¹² This philosophy allowed the vision of the philosopher to transcend the world dominated by the dry logical reasoning into a vision of a spiritual universe.¹³ As such Ibn Sina’s philosophy became closer to Islamic mysticism (*‘Irfān* or Sufism) as expounded by Suhrawardī, in his *Ishrāqī* Wisdom, over a century after Ibn Sina.¹⁴

Ibn Sina’s appreciation for rational western (mainly Aristotelian) philosophy on the one hand, and his fascination for the mystical experience that stands at the center of Oriental world-view, on the other hand, led to the formation of his interesting treatise, the *Kitāb al-Inṣāf* (The Book of Fairness). “I am contributing a book,” Ibn Sina declares, “which I named *Kitāb al-Inṣāf*. In it I have divided the philosophers into two main groups, Occidentals and Orientals; and I compared their arguments and evaluated them with fairness.”¹⁵ The same argument has also been expressed in a symbolic and creative manner in the tale of *Ḥayy ibn-i Yaqzān* (Alive son of the Awake).¹⁶ A study of these works makes it clear that his distinction of the West and the East is not a geographical one, but rather a division based on two fundamentally different philosophical orientations – rational and intuitive. In this allegorical tale and philosophical romance, he meets a wise sage by the name of Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān, and asks him for guidance. The sage puts forward two paths: one in the direction of west, and the other towards east. The western path led to darkness – as west is the place where sun sets and darkness immerses. The eastern path, on the other hand, directed him to light, where the sun rose. Here, Ibn Sina seeks the guidance of the sage as to which path he should follow. The sage did not make a decision for him, but said: “When the time comes that you are overwhelmed with joy for the (spiritual) journey I shall accompany you,” and by this statement he declared his willingness to take him as his disciple. Ibn Sina chose the path to the east, in the direction of the source of light.¹⁷ Light has therefore

¹² Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought*, p. 67.

¹³ For an elaboration of ‘Oriental Philosophy’ or ‘Oriental Wisdom’ in Ibn Sina’s thought see: Henri Corbin, tr. Willard R. Trask, *Avicenna And The Visionary Recital*, Pantheon Books, NY, 1960.

¹⁴ Passages of his mystical treatise/letter called *Al-Inṣāf* (The Fairness) are testimony to his original contributions.

¹⁵ Barkhah, Ensiyyeh, *Encyclopedia of The World of Islam (EWI)* (in Persian), ed. Gholam Ali Haddad ‘Adel, Encyclopedia Islamica Foundation, Tehran, 2011, Vol. 13, pp. 752-760.

¹⁶ See Fana, Fatemeh, “*Ḥayy ibn-i Yaqzān*” *Encyclopedia of The World of Islam (EWI)* (in Persian), ed. Gholam Ali Haddad ‘Adel, Encyclopedia Islamica Foundation, Tehran, 2011, Vol.14, pp. 489-492.

¹⁷ Corbin, 290.

become a strong metaphor for wisdom in Ibn Sina's mystical writings, a symbol that was elaborated further by later philosophers, such as Ghazali and Suhrawardi.¹⁸

Ghazali

Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad Ghazali (450-505 A.H/1058-1111A.D) was born in Tus, in the Iranian province of Khorasan, and died in his home town. A theologian, philosopher and mystic, with over 70 books on Islamic sciences, early Islamic philosophy, Islamic psychology, Kalām and Sufism, Ghazali remains as one of the most celebrated scholars in the history of Islamic thought. At the age of thirty three he had become an influential professor of Shāfi'i jurisprudence at the Nizāmiyya School in Baghdad.¹⁹ After a few years he faced an intellectual crisis. From one side there was a strict devotion to faith; on the other side was the pure rational perspective that dominated the mind of many philosophers. In addition to these, he faced corruption in the government that extended to the academia as well. This is when "he made the vow never again to take money from the government, never again to serve a ruler, and never again to enter into scholastic disputations."²⁰ It was during this period of intellectual exile that Ghazali distanced himself from social life and chose life of a hermit "in great solitude and poverty, engaged in ascetical exercises and mystical prayer."²¹ And this is when he wrote his influential work, *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences). By this time his views towards academia had changed, and so he returned to teaching for eleven years, from 488/1095 until 499/1106, at the college of Neyshabur, a few years before his demise.²²

A jurist and theologian with a wide knowledge of philosophy, Ghazali did not consider himself a philosopher. At the beginning he affirmed that "no serious Muslim thinker could ignore the claim of philosophy as a way to the highest and most comprehensive knowledge available to man and as a way to the Truth,"²³ which led him to write *Maqāṣid al-Falāsifah* (The purpose of the Philosophers). The *Maqāṣid* is actually an almost word-for-word translation of Ibn Sina's *Dānish-nāmeḥ 'Alā'ī* from Persian into Arabic.²⁴ To Ghazali, who lived two generation

¹⁸ See PurHasan, Qasem & Mansuri, Mohsen, "Ibn Sina; Hikmat-i Mashā'i dar Jahānbīnī-e Ishrāqī: vākāvī-e Tafīr-e Tamthīlī-e Ibn Sinā" (Ibn Sina: Peripatetic Philosophy in Ishrāqī Perspective: Analyzing Ibn Sina's Allegorical Commentary) in *Tārīkh-i Falsafih* (History of Philosophy), Spring 1392 Sh. (2014), Year 3, No. 12, pp. 105-130.

¹⁹ E. Glassen, *Der Mittlere Weg*, Wiesbaden, 1981, pp. 131-75; cf.

<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/gazali-i-biography> (accessed on 16 August 2016)

²⁰ <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/gazali-i-biography> (accessed on 16 August 2016)

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/gazali-vi-and-theology> (Michael E. Marmura)

²⁴ Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, Caravan Books, NY, p.148.

after Ibn Sina, “philosophy for all practical purposes meant Ibn Sina’s philosophy.”²⁵ However, at a later stage of his life, his position towards philosophy underwent fundamental change. Puzzled by the orthodox Islamic views – which in certain areas contrasted the pure rationalistic philosophy – he decided to take the side of *kalām* (Ash’arite school to be more specific), and oppose philosophers. This is when he composed *Tahāfat al-Falāsifah* (Incoherence of the Philosophers), a significant work in which he harshly criticizes philosophers, which actually meant refutation of Ibn Sina’s doctrines.²⁶ This opposition, however, was not as fundamental as it seemed. He continued using reasoning, in the way most philosophers do, in his arguments against rationalistic Peripatetic philosophy. In fact “Ghazali’s writings on Islamic theology (*‘ilm-i kalām*) or his rational methodology was the Aristotelian syllogism and systematically applied it to theological thought.”²⁷ This created deeper doubts in his mind, even with respect to religious principles. Ghazali’s doubts, together with his thirst for wisdom, eventually led him to the mystical path of the Sufis “for the cure of his spiritual illness and therein had found certainty and ultimate salvation.”²⁸ It can be understood that Ghazali’s “attack upon rationalistic philosophy was more in his capacity as a Sufi than as Ash’ari theologian, because his writing as, for example, *al-Munqidh min al-Zilāl* (Our Deliverer from Error), although he considers the view of the theologians to be more in conformity with the tenets of Islam than that of the philosophers, it is Sufism which he believes to possess the only means to attain certainty and ultimate beatitude.”²⁹

Ghazali’s major work, *Ihyā’ al-‘Ulūm al-Dīn* (The Revival of Religious Sciences), is a very influential work in the Muslim world. It represents a moderate practice of Sufi discipline, one stressing upon the importance of complementing religious knowledge with righteous action.

Ghazali is mostly known for his Arabic writings. Many are unaware that he has written some significant works in Persian, during his period of maturity and towards the end of his life. “He thought in Persian and used it to examine some of the most profound questions of mysticism and theology. He must, indeed, be accounted one of the earliest and most important writers of religious works in Persian.”³⁰ Among his Persian works, that are relevant to our discussion, *Kīmīyā-ye Sa’ādāt* (Alchemy of Happiness), *Naṣīḥat al-Molūk* (Counsel for Kings), and *Ay*

²⁵ <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/gazali-vi-and-theology> (Michael E. Marmura)

²⁶ *Tahāfat al-Falāsifah*, according to Nasr, “broke the back of rationalistic philosophy and in fact brought the career of philosophy... to an end in the Arabic part of Islamic world.” See, *Islamic Life and Thought*, p. 72.

²⁷ <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/gazali-i-biography> (accessed on 16 August 2016)

²⁸ Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, p. 53.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/gazali-iv-minor-persian-works> (Pourjavady, Nasrollah) (accessed on 17 August 2016)

farzand (O son!) may be noted. *Kīmīyā-ye Sa'ādat* (Alchemy of Happiness) “is a well-organized religious ethics, enriched by mystical reflections on the heart (*qalb*) that is “alchemically” purified and empowered to reach God.”³¹

Naṣīhat al-Mulūk (Counsel for Kings) is a compilation of words of wisdom to help rulers “pursue eternal felicity (*sa'ādat-e jāvidān*), which he likens to a tree growing from the seed of faith (*tokhm-e īmān*) planted in the chest and the heart.”³² This ‘seed of faith’ must be watered with loyal devotion and nurtured by pure actions so that it will grow into a strong tree. The root of the tree is the deep faith of heart, while its branches are the bodily conduct.³³ The book also refers to the Persian pre-Islamic concept of *Farr-e Izadī* (Divine glory) that must be possessed by kings, and provides an account of the pre-Islamic Kings of Iran, such as Anūshīravān, whose justice is renowned.

Ay farzand (O son!) is the title of a book composed by Ghazali, for one of his disciples who asked him for a book that would guide him to eternal salvation. Passages of the book often begin with “O son!” which became a common name for it. In the book he advises that seeking of knowledge is praiseworthy if it leads to the purification of the self (*tahzīb-e nafs*), and that all the efforts for learning will be futile if the intention behind it is earning worldly positions and material gaining. He elaborates on “the duties of a spiritual wayfarer the nature of Sufism, servanthood (*‘ubūdīyyat*), trust in God (*tawakkul*), and sincerity of devotion. Queries on aspects of direct mystical experience (*dhawq*) he declines to answer, on the grounds that such topics cannot be expounded verbally.”³⁴

Ghazali often argues on the aspect of “taste” or direct experience of truth. He claims that “truth” couldn’t be reached by intellectual methods, however, rigorously applied, nor could it be acquired through books.³⁵ What he advocates is that one must acquire ‘taste’ through mystical means, and complement them with ‘knowledge’ and ‘action.’ This way only the ‘truth’ will manifest.

Suhrawardi

Shihab al-din Yahya ibn Habash ibn Amirak Suhrawardi, was born in 549 A.H/ 1153, in the village of Suhraward near the city of Zanjan, Iran.³⁶ He is widely known as *Sheykh-e Ishrāq* (the master of illumination) due to the Illumination School that he established. He is also known as *Al-Maqtūl* (the one who was killed), referring to his mysterious death in prison. After completing his formal studies in

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ghazali, *Naṣīhat al-Mulūk*, ed. Homaei, Babak Publishing, Tehran, 1361 Sh. (1983), p.3

³⁴ <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/gazali-iv-minor-persian-works> (Pourjavady, Nasrollah) (accessed on 17 August 2016)

³⁵ Ormsby, Eric, *Ghazali*, Oneworld publication, Oxford, 2007, p.1.

³⁶ During that time Zanjan was a modern city in Iran which produced great figures to Islamic world.

the cities of Maragheh and Isfahan, he embarked on a long journey to other cities of Iran where he met several Sufi masters, and became strongly attracted to them. In this period of spiritual retreat he spent quality time in self-realization through invocation and meditations. “His journeys gradually expanded to include Anatolia and Syria ... On one of these journeys he went from Damascus to Aleppo and there met Malik Zahir, the son of Salah al-din Ayyubi.”³⁷ Malik Zahir invited the young sage to stay at his court in Aleppo. Suhrawardi accepted this offer but “his outspoken manner, his lack of prudence in exposing esoteric doctrines before all kinds of audiences, the keen intelligence which enabled him to overcome all opponents in debate, his mastery in both discursive philosophy and Sufism – all these factors combined to make many enemies for him, especially among some of the doctors of law (*‘ulamā’*). Finally, they asked for his execution on the grounds of propagating doctrines against the tenets of the faith.”³⁸ Eventually Suhrawardi was imprisoned and died in 587/1191 at the age of thirty eight.

Suhrawardi wrote nearly fifty works in his short lifetime and left behind a doctrine that brought together wisdom, reasoning and intuition. As such he transformed, or even elevated, the works of his predecessors to a new level. He wrote both in Arabic and Persian.

Suhrawardi’s large and doctrinal works was a tetralogy, all in Arabic. In the first three books he interpreted and modified Peripatetic philosophy; the fourth and the most important work is *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*.³⁹ Illumination Wisdom is at the core of Suhrawardi’s doctrine. This is reflected in the title of a few smaller books that he wrote in simpler language to elaborate his views; *Hayākil al-Nūr* (The Temples of Light), *Partaw Nāmeḥ* (Treatise on Illumination), *Fi I’tiqād al-Ḥukamā’* (Symbol of Faith of the Philosophers), *al-Lamaḥāt* (The Flashes of Light), *Yazdān Shinākht* (The knowledge of God) are just to name a few. These treatises were also compiled in Persian and Arabic.

Comparing his Arabic and Persian works shows that in his Persian writings Suhrawardi adopts a more symbolic language in “depicting the journey of the soul across the cosmos to its ultimate deliverance and illumination.” ‘*Aql-e Sorkh* (The Red Intellect), *Āwāz-e par-e Jibra’il* (The Chant of the Wing of Gabriel), *Ghurbat-e Gharbīyah* (The Occidental Exile), *Lughat-e Mūrān* (The Language of the Ants) are representatives of this genre.

³⁷ Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, p. 58.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Three of the works present modified version of Aristotelian philosophy; these are the *Talwīḥāt* (The Book of Intimations), *Muqāwamāt* (The Book of Oppositions), and *Muṭārahāt* (The Book of Conversations). The fourth one, which deals with the notion of light and esoteric wisdom, and is also his masterpiece, is called *Hikmat al-Ishrāq* (Illuminative Wisdom). See Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, p. 58.

Suhrawardi, like Ibn Sina, believed that wisdom was transferred through the prophets of God, first to the master sages of Persia – known as *Moghān* (from the singular *Mogh*) – who formed the ancient Persian system of knowledge or wisdom, namely the “*Hikmat-i Khusravānī*” or Majestic Wisdom.⁴⁰ This wisdom was monotheistic in its core, and became popular among Zoroastrians. It is believed that the Persian Prophet, Zoroaster, taught the wisdom to Pythagoras, and this way it transferred from Iran to Greece.⁴¹ Symbolism of light and darkness is central to the *Ishrāqi* Wisdom of Suhrawardi.⁴² “His allegorical language to express esoteric realities, is in fact an elaboration of *Khusravānī* Wisdom.”⁴³

In Suhrawardi’s view a true wisdom/*hikmah* brings together intuition (*shuhūd*) and intellect. While reasoning constitutes an inseparable part of his doctrine, his ideas, it appears, are predominantly driven by *dhawq* – intuitive experience of truth. In the beginning of the *Hikmat al- Ishrāq* he says: “I was exposed to the issues of intuitive wisdom (*hikmat-e dhawqī*) initially via esoteric illuminative experience; thereafter only I went on exploring in the realm of reasoning.”⁴⁴ He further emphasizes that though discursive reasoning is a requirement for gaining knowledge of the truth, it is by no means enough. To reach at the state of true knowledge one needs to have intuitive connection to the incorporeal world; this is what transforms a man to a sage (*hakīm*).⁴⁵

Suhrawardi drew elements from Sufi writings and synthesized them into the *Ishrāqī* Wisdom. Writings of Hallaj, and Ghazali’s *Mishkāt al-Anwār* had an important role in forming his thought, especially with respect to the symbolism of light. Ibn Sina’s Peripatetic philosophy also influenced him; he criticized aspects of it, but also considered it necessary for proper understanding of *Ishraqi* doctrine. “As for pre-Islamic sources, he relied heavily upon Pythagoreanism and Platonism, as well as upon Noeticism⁴⁶ as it had existed in Alexandria and had been later

⁴⁰ Khamenehei, Muhammad, *Seyr-e Hekmat dar Irān va Jahān* (The Development of Hikmah in Iran and the World), Boniyad-e Hekmat-e Islami-e Sadra, Tehran, 1380 Sh. (2002), p. 58.

⁴¹ Poordavood, *Mazd-Yasnā va Adab-e Fārsi*, Vol. 1, p. 98; Also see Diakonof, A. M., *Tārīkh-e Mād* (History of Media), Translated by Karim Keshavarz, Tehran, Sherkat Entesharat-e Elmi va Farhangi, 1345 Sh. (1967), p. 346 ; See also Mohammad Moien, *Mazde-Yasnā va Adab-e Pārsi*, Tehran University Press, 1326 Sh.(1948) , Vol. 1, p. 146.

⁴² The idea of salvation through overcoming darkness and becoming an embodiment of light is remarkable in understanding this philosophy, where an enlightened soul is referred to as “temple of light” (*haykal al-nūr*). See: Henry Corbin, *The man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, tr. Nancy Pearson, Omega Publications, NY, 1994, p. 42.

⁴³ Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, p. 63.

⁴⁴ Suhrawardi, *Majmū‘ah Muṣannafāt Suhrawardī*, Corbin (ed.), 1380 Sh. (2002), vol. 2, p. 10

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 1380, vol. 1, pp. 110-114

⁴⁶ Hermeticism also called Hermetism is a religious, philosophical, and esoteric tradition based primarily upon writings attributed to Hermes.

preserved and propagated in the Near East by the Sabaeans of Harran, who considered the Hermetic corpus as their sacred scripture.”⁴⁷

Shuhrawardi claims that his sayings “have not come by means of rational demonstration but by inner vision and contemplation,” and therefore “they cannot be destroyed by the doubts and temptations of the skeptics”⁴⁸... He further clarifies that the sages of the past were aware of the danger of ignorance that had affected masses and therefore resorted to “secret symbols” to unveil to true seekers their real intentions. Light and darkness, that are the two fundamental symbols of *Isrāqī* wisdom, were initially adopted by the 6th cent sages of Persia – people such as Būzarjumhir (also Bozorgmehr), Jāmāsp and Farshādshūr (also Farshāvashtar).⁴⁹

It becomes clear then that *Isrāqī* wisdom gives value to the training of the mind, in terms of discursive reasoning, and the purification of the soul. The seekers of wisdom may therefore be divided to three main categories; a) those excelled in intuitive/inner vision, but without sufficient ability in discursive reasoning, b) those excelled in discursive reasoning, but lack the intuitive/inner vision, and c) those who are blessed with intuitive/inner vision and possess discursive reasoning abilities.⁵⁰ He believes that only the last category are qualified to be God’s vicegerents on earth (*Khalīfah Allah*).⁵¹

Conclusion: The Fluid Nature of Wisdom

The development of wisdom-oriented philosophical discourse in Iranian history – from the time of Zoroaster in the 5th century BCE to Mulla Sadra in the 17th century – has been a long process of assimilation and adaptation. Studying the thought process of the three great wisdom seekers, through their writings and biographies, one realizes three main ingredients that form their definition of wisdom. The three ingredients include *discursive reasoning*, *theological argument*, and *intuitive experience*. In other words knowledge, faith, and love form the intangible body of wisdom. Each thinker struggled to discover the golden ratio, the perfect combination that would lead a wayfarer to the Truth. And each one, based on his personal, social and historical conditions, came up with a certain combination of the three, and advised accordingly.

⁴⁷ Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, p. 60.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 63.

⁴⁹ Suhrawardi, *Hikmah al-Isrāq*, Seyyed Jafar Sajjadi, Tehran, Tehran University Press, 1377 Sh. (1999), pp. 17-18.

⁵⁰ Suhrawardi, Yahya ibn Habsh, *Majmū‘a Muṣannafāt-e Shaykh Isrāq*, Tehran, 1380 Sh. (2002), vol. 2, p. 11-12

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 10-13; Mohammad ibn Mahmood Shahrazuri, *Sharḥ-i Hikmah al-Isrāq*, printed Hossein Ziyaei Torbati, Tehran, 1380 Sh. (2002), p. 3-6; Ebrahimi Dinani, Gholamhossein *Shu‘ā‘-i Andīsheh va Shuhūd Dar Falsafa-e Suhrawardi* (The Ray of Contemplation and Intuition in Suhrawardi’s Philosophy), Tehran, 1386 Sh. (2008), p. 30, 91.

Ibn Sina transformed the Aristotelian Peripatetic Philosophy and introduced his well-known *Mashā'ī* School, which can be described as an Islamized version of an initially Greek concept. His school of thought – which was itself an extension of the efforts by great scholars before him (such as Farabi) – formed the corner stone of an intellectual tradition, upon which other thinkers after him developed their own ways.

Ghazali, who lived some two generations after Ibn Sina, followed his predecessor for a while, but eventually developed his own views on how a path to salvation should be followed. Ghazali's thought, though rational and philosophical in the manner of argument, had a much stronger flavor of theology. At a certain time he attacked the philosophers, which actually meant an attack on Ibn Sina – for Ghazali's understanding of philosophy had actually come from Ibn Sina. Ghazali's inclination towards spirituality on the one hand, and his understanding of the importance and value of intellectual discourse, on the other, presented a pattern of thought based on the interdependence of knowledge and action. This approach appealed to both the theologians and the Sufis. His contribution is best reflected in the title of his renowned book *The Revival of Religious Sciences*.

Suhrawardi lived two generations after Ghazali. He inherited a rich intellectual, religious and spiritual tradition. He was exposed to the Greek philosophy through the works of Ibn Sina and stood on the shoulders of Ghazali in understanding the importance of direct experience of truth. Suhrawardi even looked deeply into the ancient Persian Majestic Wisdom (*Hikmat-i Khusravānī*), and found valuable references that were echoed by the Qur'an. In other words his thought was enriched by both pre-Islamic and Islamic wisdom, which he found perfectly harmonious. Symbolism of 'light', for instance, which stands at the core of Zoroastrianism and *Hikmat-i Khusravānī* (Majestic Wisdom) linked and matched so well with the Qur'anic notion of *Nur* (light) that left no doubts that they had come from a single Divine source. Suhrawardi went deeper in valuing intuitive experience and stated that reasoning, though necessary, can never expose the truth; and that the illuminated heart is the place where the light of wisdom shines. His school of thought is known as "Illumination Wisdom" (*Hikmat-i Ishrāq*).

The three wise men discussed above belong to a long tradition of a "fluid wisdom". Each of them represent an independent school of thought, yet in reality each complements the other. Studying their teachings and the process of their evolvment shows that wisdom is not a station in which one stands; it is rather a continuous process of becoming.