

The Appearance of the Lord in the Clouds in Shi'i and Şūfī Writings

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ABSTRACT: In various religions, a cloud symbolises the appearance of the Lord in the physical world, which is sometimes associated with apocalyptic and eschatological ideas. In the Qur'an, there are two symbols: the cloud and the shadow (or canopy) that have been analysed extensively both by Shi'i thinkers and Şūfī masters. These ideas have also been connected to doctrines such as the appearance of the Lord, leadership, the Ideal (Perfect) Man, and the coming of the saviour. Various Shi'i authors have discussed the above-mentioned ideas from different angles. Moreover, throughout Shi'i traditions, the phrase 'canopies' (*al-ghamām*) has been used as a reference to the Imams and in mystical writings 'the shadow of Allah' signifies the Ideal Man. In the following research, we will examine Qur'anic verses that mention clouds, Qur'anic commentaries, and Shi'i-Şūfī writings to offer a discussion on the Lord's appearance in the clouds in Islamic lore.

KEYWORDS: Lord, cloud, shadow, *al-ghamām*, leadership.

Introduction

In the Qur'an, the word *al-ghamām* (الْغَمَام) is used four times and it means 'clouds (2: 57, 210; 7: 160; 25: 25).¹ In spoken Arabic it refers to thin, white clouds. In the first verse, God sends manna and quails with clouds; in the second, He makes Himself known in the shadows of clouds; in the third verse He sends clouds to cast their shadows over the Israelites in the Sinai Desert, and finally, in the fourth, *al-ghamām* is mentioned in an eschatological context. Thus, in a Qur'anic context, clouds serve as a medium through which God intervenes in worldly affairs.

Additionally, both Shi'i authors and Ṣūfī masters have borrowed the Qur'anic concept of clouds, or shadows, to describe their ideals. In Islamic mysticism, the shadow of God (ظلاله) refers to the Ideal, or Perfect Man. In Shi'i traditions, God's canopies (أظله) indicate the Imams in their pre-existential state. Clouds play an important role in Shi'i mystical ontological and eschatological traditions. The main question runs as follows: what kind of relationship can be deduced between the Ideal Man as the Shadow of God, and the Imams as the Lord's canopies, on the one hand, and the coming down of the Lord in canopies of cloud, on the other? In the following pages, we will discuss God's manifestation by means of clouds as it appears in different religions, and then we will turn our attention to the Qur'anic understanding of it. Finally, by referring to specific mystical texts, we will explain the meaning of clouds and shadows that are mentioned throughout Shi'i works.

Background: clouds as a symbol of the Lord in non-Islamic religions

From ancient times, people have seen the clouds as God's dwelling place, house, or shelter. The most archaic symbolisation of a cloud can be found in Chinese culture in which it is referred to as 'the prototype of cloud and thunder' and as a 'meandering road'. It is described for the first time during the Han dynasty (202 BCE-220 CE) as a symbol of richness, fertility, abundance, and as a heavenly gift through which it rains. It is said that the dragon could send rain during the spring and people have described it as 'a monster among clouds' (*yun lung* [云龙]). In Chinese, the cloud (*yun* [云]) symbolises happiness.² According to ancient Chinese lore, white or colourful clouds cast a shadow over survivors of the

blazing monastery of Chao-lin, and lifted immortals' graves towards Heaven. In addition to this, red clouds have been considered as blessed signs. According to one legend, Emperor Huang Ti 'governed all things, thanks to the clouds'.³ In Chinese and Japanese cultures, clouds have been regarded as the throne, or wheel, of the gods, and as immortal heroes.⁴ The ancient Greeks saw the clouds as Apollo's bullets and for Indians, they were signs of abundance and fertility.⁵

On the other hand, in the Old Testament, the cloud symbolises the Lord's dwelling place, His theophany and sometimes appears in eschatological events; for example, the Son of Man, or Saviour, will come in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.⁶ Furthermore, God 'sets His rainbow in the cloud to make a token of the covenant between Himself and the earth'.⁷ In addition to this, God led His people through the pillar of the cloud.⁸ And 'the glory of God abode upon Mount Sinai and covered it for six days, and on the seventh day He called Moses from out of the cloud'.⁹

In another case, whenever Moses entered the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and the Lord talked with him.¹⁰ In an apocalyptic vision, Ezekiel sees clouds that filled the inner court of the temple.¹¹ Moreover, the Lord makes Himself known through a cloud: 'And the Lord said unto Moses, speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the veil before the mercy seat, which is upon the ark; that he dies not: for I will appear in a cloud upon the mercy seat'.¹² In Daniel, clouds have been characterised by their apocalyptic function:

I saw in the visions that I had at night, and behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.¹³

Such Biblical testimonies clarify the main fact that the transcendental God of Israel made Himself known through clouds and intervened in the cosmos. Some Biblical passages (e.g., Deut. 4: 12; Ex. 33: 20) recalling the invisibility of God, show that great prophets such as Moses do not see the face of God, but only hear his voice;¹⁴ however, the same invisible and omnipresent God makes Himself known through clouds, and, as we will show, such a theme can be determined in the Islamic tradition.

In the New Testament, clouds are used in relation to apocalyptic events and Jesus' Second Coming (Parousia [*Παρουσία*]): 'Then shall appear the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory'.¹⁵ 'The Son of Man, while sitting on the right hand of power, will come in the clouds of heaven.'¹⁶ In Acts, the Parousia is mentioned in detail:

And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, 'Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven'.¹⁷

He will come with clouds and 'all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him'.¹⁸ In another instance, his Second Coming with clouds is mentioned as follows: 'And I looked, and beheld a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of Man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle'.¹⁹ Consequently, even before the advent of Islam, clouds have played a theophanous role, and such symbolisation can also be seen in Islamic lore.

The literal interpretation of clouds in the Qur'an

It is worth noticing that several chapters in the Qur'an have been named after natural phenomena, e.g., al-Najm (the star), al-Qamar (the moon), al-Burūj (the astrological houses) and the like. All these natural signs are witnesses to God's creative power and His relation to humankind;²⁰ however, one natural element, i.e., the cloud, occupies an important position both in the Qur'an and in Islamic lore.

As we mentioned earlier, the term '*al-ghamām*' is mentioned four times in the Qur'an (2: 57, 210; 7: 160; 25: 25). Most Qur'an commentators have interpreted the clouds throughout the afore-mentioned verses as a 'sign of the Lord's wrath and grace'. Ibn al-'Arabī (638 /1240) interprets the clouds in verse 25: 25 ('a day when the heaven with the clouds will be split apart and the angels are sent down in majesty') as reward and punishment, for the angels are sometimes the agents of the Lord's wrath, acting as His wrathful forces.²¹ Sultan Mohammad Gonabadi (1327/1909), known as

Sultan 'Alī Shāh, considers verse 2: 210 ('Are these people waiting for God to come to them in the shadows of the clouds, together with the angels?') as a reference to hypocrites who are waiting either for the coming of the Lord, or for His punishments.²² Abū Faḍl al-Ṭabarsī (548/1153) considers the said verse as a reference to those who denied God's commands, as a result of which, He will send punishments upon them through the clouds. *Al-ghamām*, for him, means 'horror', in that just as a cloud casts its shadow over people so people will be afraid. Al-Ṭabarsī adds another point to the verse to the effect that deniers, indeed, do not expect the promised day in which horror, like clouds, will encompass everyone,²³ and Haqqī al-Barūsawī (1137/1725) interprets *al-ghamām* in verse 25: 25 as 'dark and heavy clouds' by which the sky will be split. He regards verse 2: 210 ('that Allah will come with the angels') as a reference to a day on which the angels will bring people's Books of Deeds.²⁴ Furthermore, he also sees *al-ghamām* in the said verses as the grief that will embrace human hearts, just as the clouds might cover the heavens.²⁵ Sharīf Lāhījī (1095/1684), an Imami exegete of the Qur'an, interprets the phrase 'are they waiting for?' (2: 210) as a rhetorical question, i.e., those who turned their back on Islam are not waiting for Allah and will not become faithful until He sends punishments upon them through cloudy canopies. For example, God sent a punishment through white clouds to the people of Shū'ayb (Qur'an 7: 85ff). At first, they thought the clouds were a sign of rain, but in fact they were proofs of His wrath and they destroyed all Shū'ayb's people. For Sharīf Lāhījī, *al-ghamām* in verse 25: 25 signifies the coming down of the angels and the Lord's retribution.²⁶

According to the literal interpretation, most Ṣūfī interpreters have considered the clouds in the verses under discussion as a means by which God sends His punishments to unbelievers. However, for Ṣūfī masters, the Qur'an in general, and these verses, have a deeper layer of meaning. Consequently, Ṣūfī masters have tried to interpret the verses from a mystical angle in order to extract the real and hidden connotation of the term 'clouds'.

The interpretation of the 'cloud verses' in a Shi'i context

In addition to a literal understanding of clouds mentioned in Qur'anic verses, some Shi'i-Ṣūfī interpreters have considered them to signify the Imams. Therefore, Sharīf Lāhījī quotes a tradition through Muḥammad

b. Mas'ūd al-'Ayyāshī (320/932), a Shi'ī exegete, to the effect that the fifth Imam, Muḥammad al-Bāqir (114/733), read 'to come to them in the shadows of the clouds' (Qur'an 2: 210) as a reference to the returning of the twelfth Imam in Kūfah or Najaf.²⁷ Al-Bāqir saw 'the heaven is split asunder with clouds' (Qur'an 25: 25) as an indication of the first Imam's coming down to the earth and twelfth Imam's return.²⁸

In his commentary on Qur'an 2: 210, Ismā'il al-Isfarāyīnī (1288/1871) cites the returning of the Imams and considers their coming as an essential part of faith. For him, following the last Imam's return, all beings will possess their total and absolute essence and will see the shining light of absolute Leadership across all levels - from higher to lower - of creation. All beings will realise the establishment of the divine-Muhammadan kingdom on the earth and will also see the coming down of Prophet Muhammad's Household.²⁹ Mīrẓā Abū al-Qāsīm Shīrāzī (1286/1869), a poet and mystic of the Dhahābī order, mentions a tradition through al-Bāqir to the effect that 'waiting for God to come to them in the shadows of the clouds' (Qur'an 2: 210) means the returning of the last Imam. And he mentions another narration through Prophet Muhammad that the said verse refers to the coming of the Last Imam who will enter with al-Fārūq (the separator) in Kūfa. For him, al-Fārūq refers to Imam 'Alī, who separates believers from unbelievers.³⁰

In the following pages we will note that both the first and last Imams are credited with supernatural power, i.e., coming down through clouds. Whether this theme is derived from the Biblical tradition requires further study and is beyond the scope of this article, but one cannot doubt that there is a recognisable similarity between the Biblical report of the Lord's theophany and coming down of the Son of Man in the clouds and the descending of the Imams through the clouds.

Shadows/canopies of the clouds in Shi'i and mystical writings

In verse 2:210 (*al-Baqarah*),³¹ we read 'in the shadows of the clouds' and the term 'clouds' is a central and ontological idea both in Shi'ism and Islamic mysticism. *Al-dill*/الظل (pl. *ḍulāl*) means 'shadow' and in Ṣūfī terminology it refers to the divine attributes.³² 'Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī (730/1329) regards the term الظل in verse 25:45 ('Do you not see how your Lord extends the shadow?')³³ as an additional being that casts a shadow over all contingent beings.³⁴ Elsewhere, he identifies the 'shadow' with the

First Intellect, which is the first objective being revealed by the Lord's light, and then opted for plurality and manifested itself in a plurality forms, which is the essential character of substantial Unity. For Kāshānī, the shadow of God (ظَلُّ الله) means the Ideal Man who came into existence in the exoteric realm (*zāt al-wāhidīyah*).³⁵ Ibn al-ʿArabī has also considered the Ideal Man as the mirror and the compassionate shadow of the Truth.³⁶ Sultan Mohammad Gonabadi has declared the verse under discussion as a reference to the realms of Thought (immaterial realms) in Ṣūfism. In one of these realms, the Ṣūfī practitioner sees his Incarnated mentor. For Gonabadi, such a vision, or thought, is like the wind of Paradise and has a face like a human face, and in fact is the Imam who has been revealed in the microcosm. Therefore, he considers verse 25:45 as a proof for the idea of seeing God's substitute in the microcosm.³⁷ As Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī (652 /1273), the greatest Ṣūfī mystic and poet in the Persian language, points out:

Lay hold of his skirt most quickly without any misgivings
that you may be saved in the skirt of the last days.
How He extended the shadow is the form of the saints
which guides to the light of the Divine Sun.
Do not go in this valley without this guide;
say, like Khalīl, 'I love not them that set'.³⁸

According to Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Qūnawī (673/1274), a Persian thinker and famous commentator of Ibn al-ʿArabī, one who passes all Ṣūfī exercises, attains perfection, desires and does everything on behalf of God, and is also called a Caliph and a Shadow. His providence will prevail the whole of creation.³⁹ Rūzbahān Baqlī (605/1209), a Persian poet and Ṣūfī master, says that creatures came into being by an extended shadow and a single light that are the shadow of the Lord and the light of Prophet Muhammad, respectively. In other words, this narration hints at a well-known divine tradition concerning Prophet Muhammad: 'Were it not for you, I would not have created creation'.⁴⁰

Similarly, the symbol of the shadow can be found in Shi'i works, and, interestingly, matches the doctrine of the shadow of the Lord and the Ideal Man. According to Shi'i writings, in the sphere of shadows the Imams were praising God even before the creation was created. For instance, it is narrated through Abū Hamzah al-Thūmālī (death date unknown), a close companion of the fourth Imam, that someone said

to the sixth Imam: 'Tell me how you had been in the realm of shadows' and he replied: 'We were lights at the hands of the Lord even before the creation, and as soon as He created the creatures, we praised Him and other creatures praised Him, too. We confessed His Unity, and other beings confessed His Unity, too.'⁴¹ The same Abū Hamzah narrates through the fifth Imam that,

God Almighty was alone in His Unity, then He spoke a word, and the word became light. He created the Prophet Muhammad, 'Alī, and his household through the same light. And then the Lord spoke another word, the word became a spirit, and He laid the spirit within the light and then laid it within our bodies. Thus, we are the light of the Lord and the word by which He is veiled from his creatures. In addition to this, we were in the green shadow and were praising and sanctifying His Majesty while there was neither sun nor moon.⁴²

In another Hadith, it is narrated that God created Prophet Muhammad, 'Alī, and the other Imams through the light of His Majesty and made them in the likeness of ghosts even before the creation was created.⁴³ And Imam 'Alī says, 'I am one whom God has credited with superiority in the realm of shadows and caused them to obey me. I am the carrier of the throne, the light of lights and the Door of God.'⁴⁴ Furthermore, the fourth Imam says: 'The Imam is the shadow which came into existence before creation.'⁴⁵

For Abū al-Qāsim al-Khoeī (1413/1992), a Shi'i jurist and commentator, the shadow means the Universal Self (or the 'General Self') (النفس الكلية) and the divine shadow that dominates the worlds. Qur'an 25: 45 testifies to this understanding. This General Self is, indeed, the form of all beings, and the sacred Self, which, according to some Ṣūfis, stands for a soft and shining form of things. For this reason, the Imams have called the General Self, 'green shadows' and 'canopies'.⁴⁶ The General Self is His sacred essence, Great Name, and His manifestation. The Great Name is generated from Divine Nature, and therefore it is called 'Self' because it arises from the Essence without any discrimination or differentiation.⁴⁷ Elsewhere, al-Khoeī points out that the Imams have understood 'canopies' to be the Lord's manifestation (التجلي) that mirrors His Unity. As a result, he adds, the sixth Imam explained that 'green canopies' (أضله خضراء) were unqualified matter; soft, light bodies, and shining mirrors, because in corrupt worlds only shadows are like the shining bodies.

In another Hadith narrated through the fifth Imam, we read in response to a question from one of his disciples, that: '...in the beginning, God created Prophet Muhammad and his household, and they were ghosts of light in front of His Majesty.' And he meant by ghosts, shadows of shining bodies that have never possessed souls.⁴⁸ Although the Imams have been referred to as 'canopies', there is, in fact, only one shadow. All sacred bodies, including their twelve venerated bodies, issue from one great Light. In other words, canopies are various manifestations of the same and single shadow. Thus, Prophet Muhammad has reported: 'in the beginning, God created pure and sacred souls', and such a theme has been referred to in several supplications.⁴⁹

'Abd al-Karīm Gīlī (826/1423) also believes that the truth of the Ideal Man is the Muhammadan Truth and is, indeed, one and single, but has various manifestations and prototypes, revealing himself in different forms at different times. He explains Abū Bakr al-Shīblī's (334/946) paradoxical saying: 'I confess that I am the messenger of God' in this context. In other words, the Muhammadan Truth revealed itself to al-Shīblī in the form of God's messenger.⁵⁰ The idea of Leadership (*wilāyah*) here emerges as a link between Shi'ism and Ṣūfism. In this regard, it is reported through 'Alī, the first Imam, that 'the truth of Light shone through the eternal sunrise and its particles illuminated the bodies of Unity,'⁵¹ and Muḥammad Bāqir Sabzawārī (1090/1679) identifies the said 'body of Unity' with the Ideal Man.⁵² Al-Isfarāyanī has also interpreted the Light mentioned in the Hadith as a reference to the Light of Leadership and considered the Mahdi as its perfect manifestation.⁵³ Consequently, the shadow indicates on one hand the primordial being of Prophet Muhammad and the Imams, and on the other, their position as God's substitutes.

Clouds as a divine sign and miracle

The word 'clouds' has been mentioned throughout various Islamic works using different terms, such as *al-ṣaḥāb*, *al-'amā'*, and *al-ghamām*. All these words show different aspects of the meaning of clouds, which are witnesses to the divine being from whom all creatures are created.⁵⁴ Thus, *سحاب* (pl. *سحاب، سُحُب*) means 'cloud/clouds' or 'a collection of clouds',⁵⁵ and *'amā'* (*عَمَاء*) means 'clouds', 'thin clouds', or 'black or white clouds'. *عَمَامٌ* (sing. *عَمَامَةٌ*) means 'clouds', or 'white clouds', as mentioned before, and they are so called because they veil the sky, or they veil the light of the sun.⁵⁶

Regardless of their etymologies and meanings, clouds have played an important role in Sufism and Ṣūfī masters have used them to describe the revelation of God. Traditions referring to clouds as a divine sign and proof, indeed, introduce them as kerygmatic, and as agents of the Lord's epiphany. As the following narrations and stories will show, sometimes God manifests Himself to faithful servants and speaks to them via the clouds. For this reason, Ṣūfī masters have considered the appearance of the clouds in the heavens as a manifestation (التجلي) of God. For example, the Lord revealed His sign to Job, a Biblical figure, in the cloud and thus spoke to him. Job asked the Lord to bestow upon him a sign and He sent a cloud to guide Job. In other words, the Lord guided Job by means of a cloud. In another Hadith, it is said that Job endured all kinds of sufferings and yet praised his Lord, and the Lord spoke to Job in the clouds, reminded him that He had led Job to obey his Lord and told him not to have any more regrets.⁵⁷ By referring to Moses in the Sinai desert and the Lord's appearance in the cloud, Al-Qaḍī Naṣīr al-Dīn 'Abdallāh al-Bayḍāwī (685/1286), a jurist and exegete, also mentions clouds as the agents of the Lord's manifestation.⁵⁸ Ṣāfī 'Alī Shāh (1052/1642), a Persian Ṣūfī gives this interpretation of this aspect of the cloud in the following verse:

As soon as they arrived at the meeting place,
A cloud appeared and covered Moses.
His people could not see Moses,
The Truth (the Lord) spoke to Moses
As Moses came out of the cloud,
He told his people that they heard the Lord's word (قول حق).⁵⁹

Such a theme is narrated about another Biblical figure i.e., Joseph the Patriarch. Rashīd al-Dīn al-Maybudī (530/1136), a Ṣūfī exegete, narrates a tradition concerning Prophet Joseph and his piety, which was so great that angels praised him every day and a white cloud (سحابة بيضاء) cast its shadow over him.⁶⁰ In other words, since Joseph was a faithful servant, God sent the cloud (سحاب) to cast its shadow over him, and for Ṣūfīs this is a sign of God's love and mercy. Ibn al-'Arabī has quoted through Prophet Muhammad that one of his companions saw a white cloud coming down while he was reading the Qur'an, and Prophet Muhammad told him: 'That white cloud is a sign of peace (or 'mercy'). God has sent it to you because you read the Qur'an'. As the narration shows, Ibn al-'Arabī considers the appearance of the white cloud as a sign of His

mercy. In fact, God has revealed Himself to the faithful servant by means of the white cloud. In addition to this, Ibn al-ʿArabī has recorded the following divine tradition: ‘One who reads My Word will see My white cloud (غمامة) by which My angels descend to him’.⁶¹ In another tradition, we read that Prophet Muhammad said that Chapters al-Baqarah and Āl-i-ʿImrān are two clouds that will intercede for people on the Day of Judgement.⁶² This narration shows that even the Word of God will reveal itself in a cloud.

All these narrations testify to the main fact that in Islamic Ṣūfism clouds not only show the manifestation of the Lord but also serve as a sign of Lord’s mercy and grace. In other words, God bestows His grace upon his faithful servants, and even His Words (verses of the Qur’an) as the clouds will miraculously intercede on the day of Judgement. Ṣūfī masters including Ibn al-ʿArabī⁶³ have interpreted the white cloud (غمامة) in these narrations as the revelation of various qualities of God.

The status of the cloud in mystical ontology

In mystical ontology, the beginning of creation is referred to as *al-ʿamāʾ* (the lofty, thin cloud).⁶⁴ In Ṣūfī terminology, it sometimes means the essence of hidden being—or the esoteric dimension (*aḥadiyah*) of existence—and sometimes the substance of the exoteric dimension (*wāḥidiyah*).⁶⁵ In this section, we will concentrate on interpretations of *al-ʿamāʾ* (عماء) given by various Ṣūfī masters. We are told that the Prophet was asked by someone:⁶⁶ “‘Where was our Lord before creation?’ And he replied, ‘He was in clouds (or ‘lofty clouds’), beneath which was air (or ‘a vacuum’) and above which was air’”.⁶⁷ This lofty cloud (عماء) is both active and passive, receptive and instantiating; it is *nafas al-rahmān* (the divine breath); the theophanic Imagination.⁶⁸ In his discussion on ontology, Najm al-Dīn Kūbrā (618/1221), the founder of the Kūbrawī order, argues that being, in the beginning, is intense darkness (*al-ghaym al-aswad* (الغيم الأسود)), and as soon as it softens, it becomes like a moon, or a black cloud, and when it becomes lighter, it is like a white cloud.⁶⁹

In his *Mashrab al-Arwāb*, Rūzbahān Baqlī mentions the station of *al-ghamām* in which the practitioner, after receiving the first veil of the unseen (حجاب غيب الغيب), visits the cloud of the occult (الغمام الغيب). About the above-mentioned Hadith ‘He was in the lofty cloud (عماء),’⁷⁰ Rūzbahān calls the station of *al-ghamām* (the white cloud) ‘the station of visiting

the beginnings of Majesty'.⁷¹ As a cloud remains between heaven and earth, likewise *al-'amā'* (the lofty cloud) is seen by al-Qūnawī as the veil of the realm between absolute and contingent being, lordship, and servitude. Apart from the Ideal Man and some rare perfect mentors no one can visit it.⁷² Elsewhere, he gives *al-'amā'* the title of '*jam' al-jam*' (unification) and '*ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqā'iq*' (the reality of realities) in which all divine names and qualities disappear.⁷³

According to Sayyid Bahā' al-Dīn Haydar 'Amūlī (787/1385), a Shi'i mystic and Ṣūfī master, *al-'amā'* is the essence of the exoteric dimension which serves to mediate between hidden being and His lordship. Additionally, he turns his attention to the understandings of other scholars of *al-'amā'* as the substance of the 'hidden treasure' (كَنْزًا مَخْفِيًا), which is referred to as an absolute being.⁷⁴ 'Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī has also regarded *al-'amā'* as an essence that exists prior to the revelation of the esoteric dimension in the form of [divine] names.⁷⁵ Accordingly, he conceives of *al-'amā'* as the esoteric dimension and criticises those who see it as the exoteric dimension and as a veil between oneness and multiplicity. For him, the above-mentioned Hadith, i.e., that 'before creation God was in a cloud', contradicts their interpretation. In other words, 'Abd al-Razzāq believes that *al-'amā'* here refers to the state of oneness in which there are neither qualities nor names. Furthermore, the exoteric dimension is the place of divine archetypes, qualities, and names.⁷⁶

As Henry Corbin clarifies, the fact that God is a Hidden Treasure indicates a deeper aspect of the hiddenness (الغَيْب), this hidden dimension desires to reveal itself. As soon as such desire takes place, divine names appear out of their state of hiddenness and potentiality, and all-compassionate love brings them forth. Corbin here refers to a well-known Hadith in the Ṣūfī tradition, called 'Hidden Treasure' (كَنْزًا مَخْفِيًا):⁷⁷ 'I was a hidden treasure and I yearned to be known. Then I created creatures to be known by them.'⁷⁸ By borrowing Ibn al-'Arabī's terminology, Corbin believes this Hadith in the Ṣūfī tradition shows that 'the Godhead reveals the secret of His passion', and out of ardent love (الْحَرَكَةُ الشَّوْقِيَّة) spring the divine names and result in creation. All divine names and theophanies (*tajalliyāt*) are 'within the originally undifferentiated God'. The creation is the revelation of the 'Divine Being'. From it all being is created. According to Corbin, ardent love is expressed as *tanaffūs* (to breath) or, as Ibn al-'Arabī calls it, *naḥās al-raḥmān* (divine breath), and this sigh

'gives rise to the entire subtle mass of a primordial existentiatio (ījād (ایجاد) termed *al-'amā'* (cloud)'. In other words, the cloud is Divine Being exhaled and in which He 'as He originally was, receives all forms and at the same time gives beings their forms'.⁷⁹

Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad Shīrāzī, also known as Mullā Ṣadrā (1049/1640), calls this love 'the Muhammadan light', which serves as a great veil of the Truth.⁸⁰ This love plays a role in the creation of the ethereal mass, which is the first creature, and Ibn al-'Arabī calls it *al-'amā'* (the lofty, thin cloud).

The lofty cloud (عماء), which issues from Divine substance, contains all forms and shapes of all beings. Paradoxically, it is both active and passive, receptive and progressive. This dual aspect can be found in all stages of existence; divine names are active because they shape their receptive quality. On the other hand, they are passive because their substance has its determinant form. In other words, the form clarifies the substance. Therefore, the created lofty cloud (its creation took place at the beginning), grace of creation, active Self, or absolute imagination all owe their existence to the Truth [Divine]. This is the same creator-created, hidden-revealed, alpha-omega. All forms of existence from archangels, jinns, and all individuals to all stages of inanimate natural beings are contained within the lofty cloud. According to Ibn al-'Arabī, the Lord has nurtured all forms of beings, except His substance. It was in *al-'amā'* that all creatures appeared and again *al-'amā'* determines the face of the Lord because He is the beginning and the end; first and last; hidden and revealed.⁸¹

Therefore, the lofty cloud which contains all creatures is the created being of Truth (Divine), which has been referred to as 'the Muhammadan Light' by Mullā Ṣadrā and as the Lord of creation by Ibn al-'Arabī. A prophetic Hadith confirms such understanding: 'in the beginning, God created my light, and Imam 'Alī issued from that light and then He [God] created the heaven and all other beings'.⁸² The relationship between cloud and shadow reminds us again of the sixth Imam's tradition in which he describes the Imams as light at the hands of the Lord before creation, and that they stayed in green shadow.⁸³

In addition to this, in the Hadith that we mentioned earlier,⁸⁴ the phrase 'Lord' has been used: 'Where was our *Lord* (لربُّنا) before creation?' As a result, we must turn our attention to explaining this word. In the Qur'an we read: 'The earth will shine with the Light of its Lord' (39: 69)⁸⁵

and in this regard a tradition has been quoted through the fourth Imam that says, 'The Lord of the earth is the leader (Imam) of the earth'.⁸⁶

Sultan Mohammad Gonabadi, while discussing the incarnation of a Ṣūfī master, referring to this Qur'anic verse, refers to the Imam as a being who appeared in the form of the microcosm.⁸⁷ In another Qur'anic verse (20: 124) it is said: 'And whosoever turns away from My (Lord's) Remembrance' and al-Bursī identifies the 'Lord' in this verse with Imam 'Alī. Mīrẓā 'Abū al-Qāsim Shīrāzī (1293/1876), a Shi'ī mystic, has also regarded the lofty cloud (عماء) as the Divine first manifestation which is the Muhammadan and 'Alī's sacred light. For him, *al-'amā'* is the truth of the Lord's substitute and the secret of the Prophet, and 'Alī describes himself as the owner of the Prophet's secret.⁸⁸ Additionally, a Prophetic Hadith says that: 'I was a Prophet while Adam was between water and clay, and while there was neither water nor clay 'Alī was His substitute'.⁸⁹ There is another tradition which has been quoted through 'Alī: 'I am the originator of the cloud' (سحاب), to which Mīrẓā 'Abū al-Qāsim attaches his interpretation to the effect that 'Alī is both the originator of cloud (سحاب) and the lofty cloud (*al-'amā'*) itself, and he is the beginning of the infinite worlds.⁹⁰ As a result, the lofty cloud at this stage contains the Muhammadan Truth and primordial being of the Lord's substitute.

Additionally, there are references to masses or groups of clouds. In this sense the clouds bear a somewhat different connotation. The appearance of a mass of clouds in heaven was regarded as the sign of an important event among some pre-Islamic religions.⁹¹ Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the Son of Man will come in the clouds and his kingdom shall not be destroyed (Dan, 7: 14-15; Mt, 24: 30; Luke, 21: 27; Mark, 13: 26; Rev, 1: 7, 14: 14). It is worth noting that the Son of Man is characterised by supernatural faculties. He is a heavenly being whom God has created before the creation and has a shining face just like the angels. He possesses miraculous powers which, like thunder, will come in a cloud at the end of time.⁹²

In Islamic lore, the lofty cloud (عماء) is a sign of the Lord's substitute by which God reveals Himself.⁹³ Some *ahādīth* declare that the last Imam will descend from the sky among seven canopies of light on the Day of Judgement to separate believers from disbelievers.⁹⁴ The cloud in this context is referred to as *al-ghamām*, although some scholars have identified *al-ghamām* with the primordial and ethereal being of the Ideal Man. *Al-gham* literally means 'concealing something', and it is called

al-ghamām as it conceals the rays of the sun.⁹⁵ In his discussion on Qur'an 2: 57: 'We caused the clouds (الْغَمَامُ) to cast their shadow over you', Ibn al-'Arabī interprets *al-ghamām* as the means through which the Lord reveals His attributes.⁹⁶ Ṣāfi 'Alī Shāh also expresses the same idea:

Al-ghamām came to manifest attributes,
And the attributes are the veils of His substantial sun.
Manna and quails are states and stations,
that the Lord of creatures has sent to practitioners.⁹⁷

'Alī's appearance in the cloud

Dāwūd al-Qaysarī (751/1350), Ibn al-'Arabī's commentator, notes that the Truth revealed itself in a cloud to the people of Prophet Hūd.⁹⁸ The majority of Shi'i writings have identified the revealed Truth with 'Alī. According to a tradition known as *ḥadīth al-ghamām* 'Alī rode on a cloud, entered among the people of Hūd and asked them to have faith in God. However, they refused his calling and he, in turn, called out loudly and the earth moved, and the mountains turned upside-down. Finally, a thunderbolt shot out of his mouth and took Hūd's people into the fire of the hell.⁹⁹

Perhaps such traditions clarify the main fact that an Imam can ascend and reach the celestial spheres and enter a pure state. He is freed from restrictions and achieves a comprehensive knowledge of the earthly world and finite beings.¹⁰⁰ It is quoted through the fourth Imam that the light that appeared to Moses in the Sinai desert was a particle of 'Alī's light.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, by quoting through the fourth Imam, Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī (1241/1826), the founder of the influential Shaykhī school, has interpreted the Qur'anic verse 'the heaven is split asunder with clouds (الْغَمَامُ)' (Qur'an 25: 25) as a hint towards 'Alī. In other words, he has identified the phrase '*al-ghamām*' with 'Alī.¹⁰² 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (553/1158), a Muslim heresiographer, says that the Kaysāniyyah believed that the verse 'Do they not expect anything except for Allah to come to them in the shadows of the clouds?' (Qur'an 2: 210) refers to 'Alī, i.e., he came down in the white cloud (الْغَمَامُ).¹⁰³ Abū Maṣṣūr al-Hillī (726/1326), a Shi'i jurist and scholar, has regarded Qur'an 25: 25 as a clear reference to 'Alī.¹⁰⁴ We are told that Prophet Muhammad named his turban 'the cloud' (*al-Saḥāb*) and, he gave it to 'Alī as a gift. Whenever 'Alī wore the turban, the Prophet said: 'Alī came in the cloud (سحاب).¹⁰⁵ In *Bihār*

al-Anwār, we read that ‘Alī also describes himself as one who will come in the shadows of white clouds (الغمام) (Qur’an 2: 210),¹⁰⁶ and Rūmī mentions ‘Alī as a cloud:

In bravery you are the Lion of the Lord:
 In generosity who indeed knows who you are?
 In generosity, you are Moses’ cloud in the desert,
 From which came the dishes of food and bread incomparable.¹⁰⁷

Bahā’ al-Dīn al-Irbilī (692/1292), a Shi’i Hadith scholar, quotes a Hadith from Prophet Muhammad: ‘The Mahdī will come, and a white cloud will remain over his head, and a voice out of the cloud will be heard, saying, “He is the Mahdī, God’s substitute. O people follow him!”’¹⁰⁸ Sharīf Lāhijī transmits a tradition on behalf of the fifth Imam, who sees Qur’an 2: 210 as an indication of the eschatological coming of the twelfth Imam in Kūfah.¹⁰⁹ In his exegesis of Qur’an 2: 210, Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad Raghīb al-Isfahānī (502/1108) also focuses on the eschatological return of the Imam as a central belief. According to him, there is no doubt that the Mahdī will return, and, on that day, all creatures will attain their ideal and final perfection, and will realise the establishment of his absolute leadership and kingdom. On the day of his arrival, everyone will recognise Muhammad and his household’s true victorious leadership.¹¹⁰

Ḥadīth al-ghamāmah and its interpretation in a mystical context

It is worth noting that many of the Shi’a have attributed supernatural powers to the Imams, such as the ability to bring the dead to life; to communicate with the spirit of Prophet Muhammad, to communicate across space and to walk on the clouds. The power to ride the clouds and to ascend through the heavens is attributed both to the first and the last (or hidden) of the Imams.¹¹¹ Among Shi’i works there is a Hadith that is known as *ḥadīth al-ghamāmah* or *ḥadīth al-basāṭ* (the Hadith of the Flying Carpet). It has been transmitted through Salmān the Persian, a companion of the Prophet.

In brief, it is as follows: One day Ḥasan, ‘Alī’s elder son, who was accompanied by some other associates such as Salmān, Miqdād, and his brother Ḥusayn, asked ‘Alī a question: ‘Solomon, the king of Israel, ascended to a throne of unprecedented greatness. Do you possess such a glorious power?’ ‘Alī replied, ‘I swear by God that He has bestowed me

such a kingdom the like of which nobody either before me or after me has possessed.' Ḥasan asked 'Alī to show a part of this kingdom to them to confirm their faith, so 'Alī prayed two *raka'as* (portions of prayer), raised his hand towards the West and caught a fragrant, white cloud as it was being followed by another cloud. Then he ordered the fragrant cloud to come down, and the cloud testified to his leadership and, at his command, came down. 'Alī asked his associates to sit on the cloud, which was like a carpet. Meanwhile, he made the cloud rise, and they suddenly realised that he was sitting on a shining throne. They saw that he was wearing two yellow garments and a ruby crown on his head, ruby shoes on his feet, and a diamond ring on his finger.

Ḥasan then said to his father: 'Solomon has amazed the whole cosmos with his seal, so how have you made people obey you?' He replied: 'I am the face of the Lord, I am His eye, His tongue, and His substitute. I am His light and His treasure on earth, I am paradise and hell.' Then he took out Solomon's seal on which his name was written, and while they were riding on the white cloud (الْعَمَام), he brought them and showed them the dam of Gog and Magog, Mount Qāf (the farthest part of the earth in Islamic lore), King Solomon, and the people of Hūd. During their heavenly journey on the cloud, they saw divine angels and parched trees that only spoke to 'Alī. Because of the distance between 'Alī and the trees they had become parched, and as soon as he prayed under them, they became green once again. Finally, at 'Alī's command, the clouds returned to their original place.¹¹² As tradition shows, there were two clouds, and for some commentators the first was reserved for Dhū'l-Qarnayn, the ancient double-horned hero, and the second for 'Alī and the last Imam. In other words, the last Imam is also able to share with 'Alī the capacity to ride clouds and ascend to the heavens.¹¹³

Qāḍī Sa'īd Qummī (1103/1692) has interpreted the *ḥadīth al-ghamāmah* according to his mystical doctrines and tried both to add some details, and to explain seemingly complicated phrases. As far as mystical writings show, a divinely appointed king can intervene in worldly affairs. This king has been called the Lord of lords, the Logos, and the Divine Name. For Qāḍī Sa'īd Qummī, the clouds in 'Alī's hand symbolise a divine kingdom; time and space; the inward king, and the outward king. Because Dhū'l-Qarnayn (Qur'an 18: 83ff) was a just king, the whole cosmos obeyed his commands, and 'Alī was the Dhū'l-Qarnayn of his people. For this reason, he ruled the whole cosmos. He travelled both into the

past and into the future because he was the king of both heavenly and earthly kingdoms. By an earthly Word, he travelled the earthly kingdom, and by a heavenly Word, he journeyed through the heavenly kingdom. Thus, the white cloud that 'Alī caught was a divine Word, and the white cloud that followed it was an earthly Word.

Divine affairs frequently take place in the world by means of clouds. As Ibn 'Abbās (67/687), a famous Hadith transmitter and companion of Prophet, says: 'One day the Prophet, who was accompanied by his companions, pointed towards the sky.' Ibn 'Abbās adds, 'We saw a cloud (سحاب) and the Prophet said to it, "Come closer." The Prophet repeated his order, and the cloud came closer. Then he got up and laid his hand in the cloud and we realised his armpit became brighter, and he brought a shining cup full of palm. Thus, he ate the palm while the cup praised him and then he gave the palm to 'Alī. A companion asked him why he gave palm only to 'Alī, and the cup itself replied: "There is no god but God who is the creator of darkness and light. O people! Know that I am a good gift to His prophet, and no one should take it from me except His prophet and the successor to the prophet."⁴' This tradition is in accordance with Qur'an 2: 210.

Therefore, according to Qāḍī Sa'īd Qummī, the cloud symbolises a divinely ordained kingdom and the Agent of the Lord in the world. As 'Alī rides on the cloud he enters the divinely ordained kingdom and departs from earthly affairs. To rule over the world, the Imam should ascend to the divine throne, and the throne is the archetype of the divine kingdom. As he sits on this throne, he should wear royal robes, shoes, and a crown. His ring is a symbol of the divinely ordained kingdom.

Qāḍī Sa'īd Qummī adds other details: 'In response to his elder son's question about the secret of such a rulership and kingdom, 'Alī replied: "I am the face of Allah." Behold! He is the face of Allah as He has revealed Himself through 'Alī and created everything, whether divine or worldly, through him. Human beings can realise God through 'Alī, as he is with Truth and the Truth is with him, and above all, the esoteric dimension is veiled by him. The Prophet during his Ascension recognised a being who looked like 'Alī. This being entered the divine court and the Lord talked to him. Because he is the Face of Allah, he serves as the mediation between God and human beings, brings His grace to human beings, and rules over the cosmos with His permission. In addition to this, 'Alī is the eye of Allah because He sees the cosmos through 'Alī.

Furthermore, both the Prophet and 'Alī are Ideal men, and God reveals His Majesty through them. 'Alī describes himself as the tongue of Allah because he explains His revelations to the prophets. He spoke to Moses in the white cloud (الْعَمَام) and spoke on behalf of Jesus in the cradle (Qur'an 5: 110), as he is the ruler of all kingdoms. His leadership is the inward aspect of the prophets' prophecy and since his prophecy is higher than that of all other prophets, so 'Alī's leadership encompasses all rulership. That he called himself the light of Allah shows he is the first flame of hidden being, and as the Prophet said: "In the beginning, God created my light", both have the same light'.¹¹⁵

In addition to this, Qāḍī Sa'īd Qummī explains the representation of the deputy of Allah, and the king of the inward and the outward by the symbolism of the white cloud. According to him, the king, just like the white cloud, has two aspects: on the one hand, he is from the sacred world and receives its grace; on the other, he turns his consideration to the material world, dispenses the grace that he has received to it and serves as a mediator between the two worlds. As a token of renewal, the white cloud shows its mercy to the inferior world; likewise, the king treats his subjects kindly. The king, just like the white cloud, rules over his kingdom.¹¹⁶ Qur'an 2: 57 refers to the mediatory role of Imam by whom He sent down manna and quails and caused the white clouds (الْعَمَام) to cast their shadows over the people of Moses.

As a result, *al-ghamām* means the Imam's role as the Lord's substitute, his inward and outward rulership, and his leadership. The coming of Lord in the shadows of the clouds (2: 210) refers to 'Alī,¹¹⁷ as he was God's deputy. It is worth noting that the Truth has two dimensions: divinity and lordship. His divinity is absolutely hidden and unknowable and belongs only to Himself. No one can participate in it; however, his lordship is accessible, and for this reason, He shares it. Qur'an 75: 22-23 ('On that Day there shall be radiant faces, gazing at their Lord') and 89: 22 ('and your Lord comes with the angels, rank upon rank') describe Him as a visible and revealed being, but are referring to His lordship. The word رَبُّ (*rabb*) in these verses means 'lord', and both Muhammad and 'Alī are the lords of God's servants and the rulers of all the worlds.¹¹⁸ As a result, He manifests only His lordship; His Divinity is invisible and unknown. His Divinity will also be invisible on the Day of Judgement, and only His lordship will be known on that Day. Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mas'ūd (33/653), a well-known companion of the Prophet, has quoted

a Hadith through Prophet Muhammad that says: 'On the Day of Resurrection God will gather all people together and will come down in the white clouds.'¹¹⁹

Conclusion

Throughout different religions and religious denominations, the cloud symbolises the appearance of the Lord in the physical world. We have argued that the symbolism of the cloud is important both in pre-Islamic religions and in the Qur'an. Additionally, as we have mentioned throughout this article, according to both the Old and New Testaments the Lord and the Son of Man (Jesus Christ) will come in the clouds of heaven. Such a theme can be seen in Islam, since in the Qur'an the Lord is described as one who dwells in the white clouds (الغمام). In Shi'i lore, both the first and the last of the Imams, and in Şūfism, the Ideal Man (or 'the Perfect Man') are symbolised by the cloud (سحاب، غمامة، عماء).

In the Qur'an (2: 57, 210; 7: 160; 25: 25) we read that God came down in the shadows, or canopies of white clouds (الغمام). According to Shi'i exegetes, such verses refer to the return of Imams, and similar concepts can be found in the Holy Bible concerning Jesus Christ. The shadow (ظل) in some verses followed by the word lofty cloud (غمام) refers to the Ideal Man in the Şūfi tradition, while the term 'canopies' (اظله) has been regarded as an epithet of the Imams in Shi'i writings. Both epithets (i.e., 'lofty clouds' and 'canopies') share a common aspect: they refer to the Lord's substitute and to leadership. In other words, the Ideal Man in Şūfi writings, and the Imams in the Shi'i worldview are described as 'the lofty cloud' or as 'canopies of the Lord' because they share a common form of leadership.

Based on exegetical works and Shi'i traditions, one can say that *al-ghamām* refers to the leadership and rulership of the Lord's deputy. In this position he can intervene in the world's affairs on behalf of God. Additionally, he serves as a mediator to bring Divine grace to the inhabitants of the world. 'Alī is considered the most perfect prototype of such leadership. The statement 'He comes down in the canopies' by extension is a reference to all Imams, and for this reason, the words 'shadow', or 'canopy', have been used in the plural form. Because all the Imams share the same light and, as Şūfīs put it, they represent various manifestations of a single truth, i.e., the Muhammadan Truth, they have been referred to as the shadows of 'one' cloud.

Finally, we have mentioned statements from various Ṣūfī sources and have analysed them to show the different connotations and aspects of the clouds (سحاب غمامة، عماء) in Ṣūfī writings. For example, most non-Ṣūfī commentators have understood the white cloud in Qur'anic verses to be a symbol of God's wrath and punishment, whereas the Ṣūfīs see it as a symbol of the Ideal Man; however, they have used different ways to express this and for this reason we have provided various theories from the Ṣūfī tradition to clarify both their understanding and our own interpretation. Consequently, whether these theories, particularly those of Ibn al-'Arabī, should be regarded as Isrā'īliyyāt requires further study.

Notes

1 'We caused the clouds to cast their shadow over you and sent down for you, manna and quails' (2: 57); 'Are they waiting for Allah to come to them in the shadows of the clouds with the angels?' (2: 210); 'We caused the clouds to cast their shadow over them and sent down for them manna and quails' (7: 160); 'On that Day, the heaven is split asunder with clouds and the angels are sent down in majesty' (25: 25).

2 James Hall, *Illustrated Dictionary of Symbols in Eastern and Western Art* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1996), 5, 50.

3 Jean Chevalier, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 207.

4 Hall, *Illustrated Dictionary of Symbols in Eastern and Western Art*, 22.

5 Jean Cooper, *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 15, 53.

6 Daniel 7: 13; Matthew, 24: 30.

7 Genesis 9: 13.

8 Exodus 13: 22.

9 Exodus 24: 16.

10 Exodus 33: 9.

11 Ezekiel 10: 3.

12 Leviticus 16: 2. The mercy seat is the gold lid placed upon the Ark of the Covenant.

13 Daniel 7: 13-14.

14 W. Wesley Williams, *Tajallī wa-Rū'ya: A Study of Anthropomorphic Theophany and Visio Dei in the Hebrew Bible, the Qur'an and Early Sunnī Islam* (Michigan: University of Michigan, 2008), 23.

15 Matthew 24: 30; Mark 13: 26; Luke 21: 27.

16 Matthew 26: 64.

- 17 Acts 1: 9-11.
- 18 Revelation 1: 7.
- 19 Revelation 14:14.
- 20 Ian Richard Netton, 'Nature as Signs', *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 3: 529-535.
- 21 Ibn al-'Arabī, *Tafsīr Ibn al-'Arabī* (Bayrūt: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 2001), 2: 84.
- 22 Sultan Mohammad Gonabadi, *Bayān al-Sa'adah fī Maqāmāt al-'Ibādah*, translated into Persian by Heshmat Allah Reyazi (Tehran: Payam-e Noor University, 1993), 2: 432.
- 23 Al-Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1997), 1: 303-304.
- 24 Ismā'īl Haqqī al-Barūsāwī (İsmail Hakki Bursevi), *Tafsīr Rāḥ al-Bayān* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Fikr, 2009), 6: 204.
- 25 Ibid., 1: 142. Etymologically, غَمَام and غَمَم (*ghamām* and *ghamm*) have the same root, and one of their meanings is 'concealing'. For example, غَمَمَ الْقَمَرَ النُّجُوم means: the moon clouded over the stars, i.e, it concealed or veiled the stars, and أَعْمَتِ السَّمَاءُ means: the sky became clouded; i.e., the cloud covered the sky. See William Edward Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (Bayrut-Lebanon: Librairie du Liban, 1968), 6: 2289.
- 26 Qūṭb al-Dīn Sharī Lāhījī, *Tafsīr-i Sharīf Lāhījī* (Tehran: Dād Publication, 1994), 3: 194 and 331.
- 27 Ibid., 1: 194.
- 28 Ibid., 3: 331.
- 29 Ismā'īl al-Isfarāyīnī, *Anwār al-'Irfān*, ed. Sa'īd Naḍarī (Qum: Islamic Propagation Office (Daftar-e Tablighat-e Eslami), 2008), 318.
- 30 Mīrzā Abū al-Qāsīm Shīrāzī, *Āyat al-Wilāyah* (Tehran: Parliament Library, 1905), folio, 86-87.
- 31 ان يَأْتِيَهُمُ اللَّهُ فِي ظُلَلٍ مِنَ الْغَمَامِ
- 32 Sadegh Goharin, *Sharḥ-i Istilāhāt-i Taṣawwuf* (Tehran: Zuwwar, 2003), 7: 227.
- 33 أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى رَبِّكَ كَيْفَ مَدَّ الظَّلْ
- 34 'Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī, *Istilāhāt al-Suḥfīyah* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 2005), 42; 'Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī, *Istilāhāt al-Suḥfīyah*, translation and introduction in Persian by Muḥammad 'Alī Mawdūd Lārī (Tehran: Tablighat-e Islami, 1988), 339.
- 35 Ibid. (2005), 43; Al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, *Kitāb al-Ta'rifāt* (Tehran: Naser Khosrow, 1992), 60.
- 36 Muḥyi al-Dīn ibn al-'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyah*, ed. Aḥmad Shams al-Dīn (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1999), 286.
- 37 Gonabadi, *Bayān al-Sa'adah fī Maqāmāt al-'Ibādah*, 485-486.
- 38 Maulāna Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *Masnavī-i Ma'navī*, ed. R. Nicholson (Tehran: Ṭolou', 2005), 1: 428-429.

39 Şadr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Qūnawī, *Al-Nafabat al-Ilābiyyah*, translated into Persian by Muhammad Khajawi (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mūla, 1996), 7-8.

40 Rūzbahān Baqlī, *Manṭiq al-Asrār bi-Bayān al-Anwār*, ed. by Ali Asghar Mir Bagherifard and Zohreh Nadjafi (Tehran: Sokhan Publications, 2014), 124, 130.

41 Rajab al-Ḥafīd al-Bursī, *Mashāriq al-Anwār al-Yaqīn fī Haqā'iq Asrār Amīr al-Mu'minīn*, translated into Persian by Laṭīf Rashīdī and Sa'īd Rashīdī (Qum: Zawī al-qurba, 2011), 115.

42 Ibid., 122; Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī, *Kitāb al-Kāfi*, translated into Persian by Muhammad Bagher Kamarei (Qum: Uswa Publications, 1996), 263.

43 Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār* (Bayrūt: Mu'assasat al-wafā', 1984), 25: 25, 45.

44 Rajab al-Ḥafīd al-Bursī, *Mashāriq al-Anwār al-Yaqīn fī Haqā'iq Asrār Amīr al-Mu'minīn*, ed. 'Alī Ashūrī (Bayrūt: Mu'assasat al-A'lami, 2001), 269; Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Kalimāt al-Maknūnah*, ed. 'Azīz Allāh 'Aṭarudī (In Persian and Arabic) (Tehran: Elmi wa Farhangi Publishing Institute, 1981), 197.

45 Al-Kulaynī, *Kitāb al-Kāfi*, 1: 204; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, 25: 152; Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Mahajjat al-Bayḍā'*, ed. 'Alī Akbar Ghaffārī (Qum: Daftar-i Intishārāt-i Islāmī, 1997), 4: 181.

46 Abū al-Qāsim al-Khoeī, *Mizān al-Sawāb dar Sharḥ-i-Faṣl al-Khatāb Sayyid Quṭb al-Dīn Neyrizī*, ed. Muhammad Khajawi (In Persian) (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mūla, 2004), 451.

47 Ibid., 457.

48 Ibid., 340.

49 Ibid., 451.

50 'Abd al-Karīm Gīlī, *Al-Insān al-Kāmil*, ed. Muḥammad Khalīl (Bayrūt: Mu'assasah Tārīkh al-'Arabī, 1999), 206.

51 These words are attributed to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib in Ḥadīth al-Ḥaqīqah ('the Hadith on reality'), whose authenticity is contested.

52 Muḥammad Bāqir Sabzawāri, *Sharḥ Asmā' Allāh al-Husnā*, ed. Najafgholi Habibi (Tehran: Tehran University Publications, 1993), 661.

53 Al-Isfarāyanī, *Anwār al-'Irfān*, 288.

54 Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn 'Arabī* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), 210-211.

55 The phrase "مَطَرْتَهُمُ السَّحَابَةُ" means 'the cloud rained upon them'. See Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 4: 1314.

56 See ibid., 6: 2289-2290; 5: 2116.

57 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, ed. Ṭayyib al-Mūsawī al-Jazā'irī (Qum: Dār al-Kitāb, 1988), 2: 241; Muḥammad Qummī Mashhadī, *Kanz al-Daqā'iq wa Baḥr al-Gharā'ib*, ed. Husayn Dargahī (Qum: Dār al-Ghadīr, 1989), 11: 251; Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1996), 11: 68.

- 58 Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Tā'wīl*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mar'ashī (Bayrūt: Dār 'Iḥyā' al-Tūrāth al-'Arabī, 1998), 3: 36.
- 59 Ṣāfi 'Alī Shāh, *Tafsīr-i Ṣāfi* (Tehran: Entesharat-e Manouchehri, 1999), 266.
- 60 Rashīd al-Dīn al-Maybudī, *Kashf al-Asrār wa 'Iddat al-'Abrār*, ed. Ali Asghar Hekmat (In Persian) (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1992), 5: 33.
- 61 Ibn al-'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyah*, 4: 50.
- 62 Imām al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī, *Tafsīr al-Imām al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī* (In Persian) (Tehran: Islamic Encyclopedia Publications, 1989), 60; Nizām al-Dīn Ḥasan Nishapūrī, *Tafsīr al-Gharā'ib al-Qur'ān*, ed. Zakariyyah Amirat (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1996), 1: 653; Jalāl al-Dīn al-Sūyūtī, *Al-Durr al-Manthūr fī Tafsīr bi-l-Ma'thūr* (Qum: Āyatullāh Mar'ashī Najafī Library, 1984), 1: 18.
- 63 Ibn al-'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyah*, 4: 50.
- 64 Kāshānī, *Istīlāḥāt al-Ṣufīyah*, 277.
- 65 Al-Jurjānī, *Kitāb al-Ta'rifāt*, 68.
- 66 این کان رُبْنَا قَبْلَ ان یَخْلُق خَلْقَهُ؟ کَانَ فِی عَمَاءِ، تَحْتَهُ هَوَاءٌ وَ فَوْقَهُ هَوَاءٌ
- Abū 'Abd Allāh ibn Mājah, *Al-Sunan*, ed. Muḥammad 'Ibād 'Abd al-Bāqī (Cairo: Dār 'Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, 1998), 1: 64, n.o. 182.
- 67 'Alī b. Mūsā ibn Ṭāwūs, *Al-Ṭarā'if fī ma'rifat madbāhib al-tawā'if*, ed. Ali Ashūr (Qum: Āyatullāh Mar'ashī Najafī Library, 2021), 2: 354; Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyah*, 2: 150.
- 68 Corbin, *Alone with the Alone, Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn 'Arabī* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969).
- 69 Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawā'ih al-Jamāl wa Fawātiḥ al-Jalāl*, ed. Yosef Zaydan (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 2005), 125.
- 70 کان فی عماء
- 71 Rūzbahān Baqlī, *Masrab al-Arwāb*, ed. Naḍif Muḥarram Khwājah (Istanbul: Kulliyat al-Ādāb, 1973), 308.
- 72 Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī, *Miftāḥ al-Ghayb*, edited and translated into Persian by Muhammad Khajawī (Tīhrān: Intishārāt-i Mūla, 1995), 120.
- 73 Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī, *Kitāb al-Fukūk*, translated into Persian by Muhammad Khajawī (Tīhrān: Intishārāt-i Mūla, 1992), 58.
- 74 Haydar Āmulī, *Al-Muqaddimāt min Nass al-Nusūs*, translated into Persian by Muhammad Reza Juzi (Tehran: Rozaneh Publication, 1997), 461.
- 75 'Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī, *Sharḥ-i Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam* (Qum: Bidar, 1991), 38.
- 76 Ibid., 38-40.
- 77 كُنْتُ كُنَّا مَخْفِيًا فَاحْتَبَيْتُ أَنْ أُعْرِفَ فَخَلَقْتُ الْخَلْقَ لِأَعْرِفَ
- Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn al-Taymiyyah, *Al-Fatāwā al-Kubrā* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1987), 5: 88. Also see Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, 84: 198-199 and Ibn al-'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyah*, 2: 399.

- 78 Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2008), 136.
- 79 Ibid., 136, 219-220.
- 80 Şadr al-Dīn Muḥammad Shīrāzī, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfī* (Tihirān: Mu'assisih-yi Muṭāla'āt wa Taḥqīqāt-i Farhangī (Cultural Studies and Research Office), 1987), 3: 423.
- 81 Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, 220; Ibn al-'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyah*, 2: 310.
- 82 ... وَأَوَّلُ مَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ نُورِي فَفَتَقَ مِنْهُ نُورَ عَلِيٍّ ثُمَّ خَلَقَ الْعَرْشَ وَ... Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, 54: 170, no. 252402.
- 83 Al-Bursī, *Mashāriq al-Anwār al-Yaqīn fī Haqā'iq Asrār Amīr al-Mu'minīn*, 115.
- 84 اين كان ربنا قبل ان يخلق خلقه . Also see Note 67.
- 85 وَأَشْرَقَتِ الْأَرْضُ بِنُورِ رَبِّهَا...
- 86 Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, 253. رب الأرض امام الأرض
- 87 Gonabadi, *Bayān al-Sa'adab fī Maqāmāt al-'Ibādah*, 3: 486.
- 88 Mirzā 'Abū al-Qāsim Shīrāzī, *Majmū'ib-yi (Musammā bih) Anḥār-i Jāryih* (Shīrāz, Ahmadi publisher 1994), 114.
- 89 Al-Bursī, *Mashāriq al-Anwār*, 377; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, 16: 402, no. 1.
- 90 Shīrāzī, *Majmū'ib-yi (Musammā bih) Anḥār-i Jāryih*, 114; Chevalier, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, 207, 238ff.
- 91 Chevalier, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, 207, 238ff.
- 92 Humphrey Carpenter, *Jesus* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 5, 33, 59, 62-63.
- 93 Chevalier, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, 207.
- 94 Omid Ghaemmaghami, 'And the earth will shine with the Light of its Lord (Q 39: 69): Qā'im and qiyāma in Shi'i Islam', *Roads to Paradise: Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam*, eds Sebastian Günther and Todd Lawson (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 621.
- 95 Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Fanārī, *Miṣbāḥ al-Uns*, ed. Muhammad Khajawi (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mūla, 1995), 677; Şadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī, *Tarjamah-yi I'jāz al-Bayān*, ed. Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī (In Persian) (Qum: Mūla Publication 2002), 43; al-Isfahānī, *al-Mūfradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, 564.
- 96 Muḥyi al-Dīn ibn al-'Arabī, , *Tafsīr Ibn al-'Arabī*, ed. Sāmīr Muṣṭafā (Bayrūt: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 2001), 1: 35.
- 97 Şāfi 'Alī Shāh, *Tafsīr-i Sāfi*, 26.
- 98 Dāwūd al-Qaysarī, *Sharḥ-i Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, ed. Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī (In Arabic) (Tehran: Elmi wa Farahangi Publishing Institute, 1996), 724.
- 99 Muḥammad Ḥāshim Shīrāzī et al., *Sharḥ va Tarjumih-yi Manzūm Ḥadīth Ghamāmah*, edited and translated into Persian by Muhammad Khajawi (Shiraz: Darya-ye Noor, 2005), 49-50.
- 100 Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran*, trans. Nancy Pearson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 237-238.

- 101 Al-Khoeī, *Mizān al-Sawāb dar Sharḥ-i Faṣl al-Khatāb*, 200.
- 102 Aḥmad Aḥsāʾī, *Sharḥ al-Ziyārat al-Jāmiʿat al-Kabīrah* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Mughayr, 2003), 43; Qaḍī Saʿīd Qummī, *Sharḥ-i Ḥadīth-i Basaʿ (Ghamāmāh)* (Tehran: National Library, 2002), 2: 113.
- 103 ʿAbd al-Karīm Shahrastānī, *Al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* (Cairo: Manshurāt al-Razī, 1988), 136.
- 104 Abū Maṣṣūr al-Ḥillī, *Alfayn*, trans. Jaʿfar b. Ḥasan Wajdānī (In Persian) (Qum: Hijrat, 2002), 801; Sharīf Lāhījī, *Tafsīr-i Sharīf Lāhījī*, 3: 332.
- 105 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, 7: 135; Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabātabāʾī, *Al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, translated into Persian by Mohammad Bagher Mousavi Hamedani (Qum: Publications Office, 1995), 6: 459.
- 106 Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, 39: 350, no. 23; Rūmī, *Masnavī-i Maʿnavī*, 1: 3809-3810.
- 107 Rūmī, *ibid.*
- 108 Bahāʾ al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan al-Irbīlī, *Kashf al-Ghummaḥ fī Maʿrifat al-Āʾimmaḥ* (Tabriz: Bānī Ḥāshimī, 2002), 2: 470; Fayḍ Kāshānī, *ʿIlm al-Yaqīn*, ed. Mohsen Bidar Far (Qum: Bidar Publications, 1998), 2: 996.
- 109 Sharīf Lāhījī, *Tafsīr-i Sharīf Lāhījī*, 1: 194; 3: 331.
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- 111 Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 16, 94-95, 122.
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- 113 Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shiʿi Islam: Beliefs and Practices* (London: IB Tauris, 2011), 179-180.
- 114 Qummī, *Sharḥ-i Ḥadīth-i Basaʿ (Ghamāmāh)*, 104-130.
- 115 *Ibid.*
- 116 *Ibid.*, 104.
- 117 Al-Bursī, *Mashāriq al-Anwār*, 612.
- 118 *Ibid.*
- 119 Imām Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Durr al-Manthūr fī Tafsīr bi-l-Maʿthūr* (Qum: Āyatullah Marʾashī Najafī Library, 1984), 6: 256.

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