



On Perpetual Manifestation

Tarîq Ashfaq

*Were we then worn out by the first creation?
Yet they are in doubt about a new creation*
Koran, Qaf : 15.

This is an English translation of a short chapter of an Urdu work entitled *uyun al maarif* (The Fountain Head of wisdom) by a great Sufi of Ibn Arabi's School, Shah Wahhaj al-Din Qalandar of India. Qalandar lived during the second half of the nineteenth century in the town of Kakori near the famous city of Lucknow, situated in the Northern part of India.

The discussion revolves around the doctrine of Perpetual Creation which is called *tajaddud amthal* in Arabic. The Sufis of the school of Ibn Arabi have given a special attention to this doctrine as it is considered integral to the perspective of *wahdat al-wujud* (Unicity of Existence) characteristic of Ibn Arabi's version of Islamic esoterism. The doctrine of perpetual creation particularly focuses on the dynamic aspect of Reality thus paving the way for the appreciation of Multiplicity in all its bewildering variety without disregarding the static and immutable aspect of the One and Only Reality.

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All the beings and things whether they appear to be in motion or at rest are continually reverting back to the realm of non-manifestation as their point of Origin (*asl*), which is beyond all feelings and sentiments (*bekayf*)¹ of the individual order. In this process of movement of return the existents are perpetually being renewed as they receive a new garb of existence (*libas wujud*), at every moment, from the one and only Being (*wujud*).

¹ A Persian-Arabic term.

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Due to this constant process of generation (*baqa*) and corruption (*fana*) in the domain of universal manifestation, all the beings and things (*maujudat*) undergo the state of Resurrection in a perpetual manner. The reason for the imperceptible modifications in the physical constitution of man and the structure of things lies in the fact of ‘perpetual creation’ (*tajaddud amthal* or *tajdid khalq*) as an underlying reality. To trace the matter further, it can be said that the modalities of immutable archetypes (*ayan thabita*) never remains unchanged at the plane of Divine Knowledge (*ilm haq*) and they, however, keep undergoing modifications which further lead to their continual reflections at the level of corporeal manifestation (*suvar kharji*). Moreover, every previous mode (‘first creation’ in Koranic terms) of a particular archetype is recurrently replaced by another one which is ever new and fresh in its form. In this way the modalities cannot help being bound to the continuous chain of annihilation (*fana*) and rejuvenation (*baqa*) which occur successively and ceaselessly. Unlike the existents, the archetypes are eternal by nature but the Divine Names and Attributes (*asma wa sifat*), devoid of individual feelings and sentiments (*bekayf*), stand annihilated in the face of the Divine Essence (*dhat*).

Now this state of *bekayfi* (absence of feeling and sentiments) manifests itself in a new mode through the womb of the Real (*haq*). The change which occurs is so subtle and imperceptible that it cannot almost be perceived. What is more, the extremely instant character of generation and corruption does not allow the perceiver to perceive the continual flux of existence. “One cannot step twice into the same water”, says Heraclitus. Every moment a thing, uninterruptedly, dons a new garment of existence which makes it difficult to perceive the hidden growth of things living and non-living. At this juncture, we are reminded of the story of Asif Bin Barkhiya, the vizier of Solomon, who took the throne of Bilqis from the city of Sheba to Solomon’s residence in a blink of eye without the least difficulty. In view of the never-ending process of perpetual creation (*tajaddud amthal*), all one needs is nothing but the attainment of a state of annihilation (*fana*) of such a stature in the Divine Essence (*dhat*) that his will (*iradah*) becomes equivalent to the Divine Will and this privilege was greatly enjoyed by Asif Bin Barkhiya. As soon as the throne went out of being in the city of Sheba, it immediately came into being in the place where Solomon resided, in accordance with the will of Asif, instead of receiving a new lease of life in the former city.

In the end we would say that all the existents are perpetually placed in the midst of being (*wujud*) and non-being (*adam*)² by virtue of the doctrine of perpetual creation which bestows upon them a perishable nature and this is the definition of a contingent being (*mumkin*).

² Also existence and non-existence, *vyakta* and *avyakta* of the Hindu tradition.