CHAPTER 31

Just a Step away from Paradise: *Barzakh* in the Ahl-i Ḥaqq Teachings

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To an independent scholar

And beyond them is a barzakh,
until the day they are raised

Q 23:100

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Literally, *barzakh* means a (hidden) isthmus or barrier between two things, and etymologically it seems to be derived from the Persian *pardah* (“a veil”). In Islamic eschatology, the term is traditionally understood as the intermediate state or world (between this world and paradise) in which every human soul has to live after its death until the arrival of the day of resurrection. Since medieval times and later on, the term has additionally been provided with such definitions as ‘ālam al-ṣuwar (“the world of images”), or ʿālam al-amthāl (“the world of similitudes/likenesses”), and explained as *hawarqaliyā/hūrqaliyā*, which is said to be of unclear origin descending either from the Hebrew *habal qarna ʾyīm* (“vapor flashing”), or it may be an Arabic corruption of the Biblical Hebrew *ha-raqīʿa*, which is “the firmament standing between heaven and earth.” At any rate, to clarify the state of the human soul in that world, some Persian authors interpreted the expression as *qālib-i mithālī* (“a similar form”), or *badan-i hūrqaliyāyī* (“a vapor flashing body”), or they took a definition from theosophy, that is, the astral body.3

1 The translation is based on the English translation of the holy Quran with Commentary by Maulana Muhammad Ali, however, slightly altered by the author of the present study. Some popular translations give “behind them” or “before them” instead of “beyond them.”

2 For different views and interpretations see Bashier, *Ibn al-ʿArabī’s barzakh*.

3 Muʿīn, *Farhang* iv, 5221; vi, 2310; Dīkhudā, *Lughatnāma*; both authors refer to the first scholar who introduced this term into usage, namely, Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardi.
The problem under discussion in the present paper concerns the future destiny of this body as it is pictured in the teachings of the Ahl-i Ḥaqq (or “Followers of the True/Real”): whether or not it is possible for a soul or, strictly speaking, for a human spirit, to return from the world of barzakh to the material one. The Quranic citation given above seems to state that no one who has passed into the barzakh state is allowed to return to his previous state but has to wait there until the day of resurrection.

Before speaking about the barzakh world in the Ahl-i Ḥaqq teachings, it seems necessary to briefly identify the Ahl-i Ḥaqq and to say a few words about their teachings in general. In the middle of the twentieth century, V.F. Minorsky (1877–1966) attempted to examine the Ahl-i Ḥaqq teachings by editing and studying their texts; following him W.A. Ivanow (1886–1970) wrote:

As we are still very far from knowing the AH [i.e., Ahl-i Ḥaqq] tradition in its entirety, it is impossible to offer any suggestion about the sequence of religious strata, whether or not it was really Christianity-Sunnism-Ismailism, in its darwishized form, and ultimately the ‘reformed’ beliefs of the AH. A point which is beyond doubt, however, is that the general basis of the AH religion, despite various heterogeneous relics of antiquity and Christianity found in it, is Islamic, more precisely – Shi‘ite.

With many suppositions and much conjecture, the origins of the Ahl-i Ḥaqq beliefs remain unclear; this is largely because of the lack of primary sources (written mostly in Kurdish and partly in Persian and Turkish) available to scholars. Recently, the situation has changed substantially; however, our knowledge of the Ahl-i Ḥaqq tradition is still meager.

1 A Short Prehistory

The Ahl-i Ḥaqq trace their history to the thirteenth century, to their founder Sultan Ishāq, who is considered to have been a direct descendant of the Shi‘i imām Mūsā al-Kāẓim, a manifestation of the Divine Essence (mażhariyyat),

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4 Minorsky, Notes.
5 Ivanow (ed. and trans.), The truth-worshippers 70.
6 This is, above all, due to publications and research made by the late master of an Ahl-i Ḥaqq branch, and, in fact, the founder of an independent esoteric school, Nūr ‘Alī Ilāhī/Ostād Elāhī (1895–1974).