



The Occidental Exile Recital

In this Recital, Suhrawardi introduces in a magnificent way the theme of Exile, a subject presented by other sufi sheikhs works, philosophers and mystics. In the Christian and Essene traditions it's possible to find the same theme, mainly in The Soul Hymn text, in the Apocrypha texts.

Avicena (Ibn Sina) also introduces this metaphor in his Soul Exile. In a contemporary compilation of "Sufi Tales" one can find a shorter version in the history The Son of the King, supposedly written for Amir Sultan, Sheikh of Bokhara.

Basically, this text tells the history of a prince that went out of his kingdom in search of a pearl. In his journey he enchants himself with the world and, with passing time, finishes forgetting his original condition and dives into sadness and melancholy. Until a day he has a dream reminding him that he is the king' son, and that his true state is of nobility, contentment and peace. By means of efforts and stratagems, he then returns to the castle but changed and even the beauty, nobility and recognition of his former home is now fully developed.

In all elaborations about this theme it's possible to see the allegory of the human being's state. It describes the origin and the ideal state of completion, of union with the Creator, in a reality that expresses the inexistence of needs, anguish and suffering. This situation is modified when the human being comes to be part of creation. He forgets his legitimate origin, and instead of all the good things that are his there is the search, loneliness, confusion and despair. However, built-in in the own human condition, there is the possibility of man being recalled of his previous state and then return to its home, to reassume its former exalted position. As a constant characteristic, there is the fact that the hero left his original place in search of learning and wisdom, and always returns transformed.

In the Suhrawardi's Tale of Occidental Exile, we have the description of two brothers that travel to the Occidental lands to "hunt a flock of birds". But they are arrested in the city of Kairouan, where they are forced to live inside a well. They can go out of there just during night, when they are allowed to look through the castle's window where they are held prisoners. One day, a bird came bringing them their father's message, telling them that they must struggle to free themselves from captivity and return to their original place. There follows instructions how to proceed in order to gain success.

Following the instructions, they flee from the castle. The protagonist prepares himself for an hard journey where detachment and to surpassing of his own limits are due. Finally, in the end of the journey, he finds his father in the Mount Sinai: "a great sage, for whose shine of his light the skies and the lands were split". It follows the surprising final, where the father orders that the prince should return to the exile because he didn't had ridden himself completely of the handcuffs yet". To this order, it follows the promise that he could return back to the father's presence whenever he wished, and eventually he would remain there, "absolute and completely" leaving the Occidental lands".

Some common elements of the themes common to Suhrawardi reappear in the Occidental Exile Recital. Initially, it is important to refer to the first subject that sprouts



in the mind of those who study this Recital: why did the protagonists abandon their original condition to "hunt a birds gang"? This question is fundamental and can't be answered in a frivolous way. Suhrawardi itself offers a key for one possible answer in other Treaty, denominated 'Love Reality' in which, in a sublime form, he describes the moment when the divinity falls in love with matter and decides to live near it. The implications of this vision are introduced close to this Treaty ([link for it](#)).

In Suhrawardi's work there are constant references to the "Occident" and to the "Orient". Both mustn't be understand literally. The Occident should not be understood as a geographical direction, but as the Matter Kingdom that is separated for the Sublime World by a "darkness coverage". It is in this kingdom that the man who forgot himself lives and remains isolated of its original condition.

Kairouan itself is the representation of this world, the world where live the "oppressors". If the matter world is going to be considered as the tasks and responsibilities of life, the "oppressors" are the social structures as well the internal or psychological ones, that affirm consensual reality as the sole existing reality. These structures force us to accomplish our social schedules, and one can only escape "at night". The needs and responsibilities imposed upon man by the culture and society, those that people in general accept as being the only ones that counts in the end, keep conscience and other spiritual qualities captured, preventing the growth and the development of human capacities.

On the other hand, there is a reference to 'Yemen' as a place from where comes the "lights" and the "perfumed breezes", that is on the "right side" or on East, the sun birthplace. In Ishraq terminology, it is the awakening of the visionary soul or the imaginal world. The Orient in Suhrawardi's tradition, remits to the humanity angel-guide Gabriel, that is also referred in his terminology as the Holy Ghost or as the Forms Donator ([link text Symbol of Faith](#)). It is this guide that, whispering continually a call in the human heart, finally awakens it and turns it thirsty for undertaking the journey towards its own development. This guide is also referred at the beginning of the Recital as being the father of whose remain in exile- Al-Hadi, the Iman, also the same Angel Gabriel.

Captured in the well, they remain blind for the realities that are their natural inheritance. However, at night, they can go up to the castle's window and there they sit down "emotionally touched and longing for the homeland". The 'night' can be seen here as being the moment where life tasks cease to cause so much distraction, and then there arises the possibility to do some internal work. It is at this moment that the mind can be quieted and the mundane preoccupations can be put away. In this silence, it becomes possible to hear the voice of the soul or heart and in this voice there lives the main element that enables to the man be recalled back to his natural condition. It is also in the keeping and retracing of this memory that we can find the key for transformation and posterior liberation. This work, once directed in a correct form first enables the arising of man's longing for his original state and later an actual possibility for him to carry it out.

In this contact we find the instructions as how we must proceed for liberate ourselves from this "exile" in distant lands. However, each step implies in an arduous work within ourselves. Considering that in terms of mind there always will be models and



attenuations that confuse and mask human being's state, in terms of heart's desire and in front of "father longing blazing fire", there cannot be any confusion or accommodation. There is just action in search of a constant and continuous improvement, even if implies the final abandon of all the attachments and lies that arise and keep the illusory state of separation.

Through the journey there happen symbols and powerful metaphors that show how arduous can be the way to perfection. Every time our attachments are questioned and it becomes necessary to recognize and to abandon our mediocrity and internal hypocrisy. In front of each one of tribulations one must find the strength in one's own passion and desire for the return, in the certainty and power of the heart call.

Finally there appears the first ecstatic and delightful experiences, but even this must be abandoned, as no matter how much they are pleasant, nevertheless the journey's initial goal keeps urging us further on.

When after all events the princes reach their father's habitation, there is "perplexity and fright". As with the text of Faradudin Attar, 'Conference of Birds', the contact with the father's presence is described as accompanied by an uncommon state of being. Here the luminous and numinous experiences are joined: on one side one feels light and ecstasy, on the other, power and submission. In both there is little space for the searcher "self" that, in a kind of absorption, plunges in the presence so desired of the father.

Here the searcher prostrates himself in front of the father, and it is "almost blinded by a brilliant light". He cries and tells about his prison and sufferings. He then listens to the most painful words, the order: "you must come back". Amid the supplications and moans the protagonist is directed to look for himself once again, and to verify his last needs for perfection and transformation. That can't be done in the overwhelming presence of the father. Before him one can only feel the overpowering presence, and very little can be done in this condition. The work with himself must be done in a state of separation, inside the exile.

However, at the same time that he is ordered to come back, there is the promise that the return to the father's presence can occur always and at the end there will not be more exiles or separations. In this point, the state of separation is seen as an option, because the searcher already owns the basic capacities to be no more involved in the sleep and distraction of ordinary life. Besides, there is the confirmation that there aren't impediments to the union state: this state is the human being's inheritance and the unique elements that impede the realization of this inheritance are the imperfection and rejection of the human being itself.

In the last paragraphs of the 'Occidental Exile Recital', the father reminds the son once again of his noble lineage. He says that above himself there is another man that is the "grandfather" and above of him there is a series of ancestral "until the line reaches the king that is the big progenitor, who doesn't have father or grandfather, and we all are his servants and take our light of his light." In this point it is important to realize that the searcher must necessarily pass through several spiritual experiences. He must be able to abandon the "matter world" and to enter in the "superior worlds" with certain frequency. Only in this way he will be put in contact with all the hierarchies of these worlds and learn to discern between experiences.



Only in a state of total perfection and completion one can reach the final destiny. The spiritual experiences that precede this moment are all preparatory. They have their importance and meaning, but nevertheless mustn't represent a reason for attachment or pride, other forms of imprisonment. The final goal points ahead and, just when it is reached, the whole previous process of learning and transformation becomes justified.