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Cosmology in Sheikh Ahmad Al-Alawi's Thought: Investigating the Intersections between Philosophical Perspective and Sufi Mysticism

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Abstract

This research addresses the epistemological methodology of Sheikh Ahmad bin Mustafa Al-Alawi Al-Mostaganemi, exploring the intersections between philosophical perspective and Sufi Mysticism in the field of cosmology. Al-Alawi emphasizes the importance of "correct philosophy" coupled with insight in understanding Monotheism, and focuses on cosmology to address issues of existence, eternity, and creation. The research delves into Al-Alawi's ideas on philosophical and cosmic matters such as the eternity of the world, the nature of the earth, and the creation of the heavens, highlighting his unique approach in linking thought and behavior, and reconciling spiritual taste with doctrinal vision. This work aims to analyze the overlap between philosophical contemplation and spiritual experience, contributing to a deeper understanding of Al-Alawi's contributions to Sufi and Islamic philosophical thought, and his pursuit of the wisdom that Ibn Arabi considered the law of the prophet Idris.

Keywords: Al-Alawi – cosmology – philosophy – mysticism – eternity and creation

Introduction:

In the context of the epistemological interaction between philosophy and Sufism in Islamic thought, numerous attempts have emerged to reconcile reason and spirit, logic and revelation. This has led to the development of three main trends: one that favors reason and logical proof, another that leans towards spiritual and Sufi experience, and a third that seeks to find points of convergence and integration between them. This diversity of approaches reflects the richness of Islamic intellectual heritage and its ability to accommodate multiple intellectual trends. It also highlights the ongoing efforts of Islamic scholars and thinkers to search for epistemological frameworks that combine various modes of perception and understanding. This pursuit aims to form a comprehensive vision of existence and knowledge that transcends traditional dualities, representing a fundamental axis in the development of Islamic thought and opening new horizons for understanding the relationship between philosophy and Sufism, as well as between theoretical knowledge and spiritual experience.

In this diverse intellectual scene, Sheikh Ahmad bin Mustafa Al-Alawi Al-Mostaghanemi emerged as a central figure, representing cosmology in his thought as a model of intersection between Sufi mysticism and rational thought. Through the analysis of his texts and writings, we aim to explore and analyze his cosmic vision, elucidate how he employed philosophical concepts to enrich the Sufi vision of the universe, and how, in turn, he infused spiritual depth into philosophical contemplations.

This research aims to provide a critical reading of Al-Alawi's contributions in the field of cosmology, focusing on the epistemological intersections between mysticism and reason in his thought. Additionally, it seeks to demonstrate the importance of this intellectual model in the context of contemporary efforts to renew Islamic thought and enhance dialogue between heritage and modernity.

The central problematic of this study revolves around how Al-Alawi achieved these intersections and the epistemological and methodological mechanisms he employed. To address it, multiple approaches will be employed, namely: analytical, to deconstruct the main texts and ideas in Al-Alawi's writings; comparative, to highlight the uniqueness of his method; critical, to evaluate his success; and inferential, to deduce his epistemological foundations. His views on eternity and creation of the world, the nature and movement of Earth, and the interpretation of the heavens and celestial bodies will be examined, focusing on his connection between rational thought and spiritual experience, and how he used "correct philosophy" to understand the truths of monotheism.

This paper aims to address these questions and multiple issues related to this topic through the following structure:

1. Introduction
2. Chapter One: Biography and Concepts
3. Chapter Two: The World between Transfiguration and Unity
4. Chapter Three: The World between Eternity and Creation
5. Chapter Four: Interpretation of the Heavens and Celestial Bodies
6. Conclusion

Chapter One: Biography and Concepts

1. Biography of Sheikh Ahmad Al-Alawi:

1.1 His upbringing:

Sheikh Abu Al-Abbas Ahmad bin Mustafa Al-Alawi bin Alioua, also known as Al-Alawi Al-Mostaghanemi, is a prominent Sufi figure. According to his official birth certificate, he was born in the city of Mostaganem, Algeria, on October 13th, 1874, corresponding to Ramadan 02nd, 1291H.

This date, documented in the civil status records of Mostaganem during the French colonial period, differs from the date mentioned by some contemporary historians such as Udda bin Tunis and others, who cited the year 1286H/1869¹.

Sheikh Ahmad Al-Alawi belonged to a family deeply rooted in knowledge and virtue. This family was distinguished by its rich scholarly heritage. Historical sources indicate that the position of judge was traditionally held by its members, with thirty individuals from Al-Alawi family assuming this role over the generations.²

In his early childhood, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Alawi was cared for by his father, who took it upon himself to teach him the basics of reading and writing, in addition to memorizing the Quran. This early education instilled in him a strong set of values. However, his life took a drastic turn with the death of his father while he was still young. This painful event placed him in front of significant material challenges, compelling him to take on the responsibility of contributing to his family's livelihood³.

Despite these difficult circumstances, he managed to balance his family duties with his pursuit of knowledge and learning. He said, "I never attended a formal school, not even for a day, and whatever I learned was from my father, may Allah have mercy on him. However, I was a constant reader, spending entire nights immersed in reading, and some of the Sheikhs who visited my home would criticize me for this, and we continued this way for several months."⁴

Based on his biography, it is evident that Sheikh Al-Alawi was a self-made individual who relied heavily on his own efforts in his scholarly and intellectual formation. His thought was characterized by a high regard for direct spiritual knowledge, or what is known as Divine Knowledge (*'ilm al-ladunni*), without neglecting the importance of knowledge acquired through study and learning.

Sheikh Al-Alawi possessed an exceptional ability for understanding and comprehension, a natural talent that significantly contributed to deepening his knowledge and broadening his intellectual horizons. These cognitive abilities were further enhanced and expanded through his engagement in the study of Sufi sciences and his association with prominent Sufi figures.

This blend of innate talent, self-driven academic effort, and openness to spiritual and mystical knowledge formed the solid foundation of his distinctive intellectual approach. His methodology uniquely combined theoretical depth and spiritual dimension in his vision of knowledge and understanding.

1.2 His Sufi Course

At the beginning of his Sufi course, Sheikh Al-Alawi joined the Aissawa method. Although he did not completely abandon its practices, he adjusted some of them after coming across a prophetic Hadith that led him to distance himself from the practice of supernatural feats. Despite this shift, Sheikh Al-Alawi remained attached to the essence of Sufism, focusing on the science of spiritual conduct and stations, and striving towards Divine Inspirations.

During his time working in trade, his interest in Sufism did not wane. He frequently engaged in discussions with his business partner, Muqaddam Al-Hajj bin Ouda Suleiman, about the states of the pious and the knowers. These conversations deepened his passion for spiritual knowledge and kept his heart anchored in Sufism.

The main turning point in his Sufi course came with his meeting with Sheikh Muhammad Al-Bouzidi Al-Mostaghanemi. From the beginning of their acquaintance, Sheikh Al-Alawi noticed repeated signs that drew him towards Al-Bouzidi, perceiving in him righteousness and guidance. This encounter, followed by drawing from his knowledge and experience, marked the beginning of a new journey in Sheikh Al-Alawi's life, where he began to reassess his previous beliefs, striving to transcend what he considered acquired illusory ideas, attempting to reach a deeper and more authentic understanding of Sufism.

Sheikh Al-Alawi recounts an important incident in his spiritual journey, saying: "On one occasion, Sheikh Al-Bouzidi addressed me saying: 'I heard that you handle snakes without fear of being bitten.' I confirmed this, so he asked me to bring a snake and handle it in front of him. I complied and brought a snake, then started dealing with it in my usual manner in front of the Sheikh. After observing my actions, he asked me: 'Can you control something greater and more dangerous than this snake? If you can do that, then you are truly wise.' I inquired what he meant, and he replied: 'It is your own self within you. Its poison is more lethal than the snake's venom. If you can control and master it, then you are the true wise.'"⁵

This interaction with Sheikh al-Bouzidi profoundly influenced Sheikh Al-Alawi, leading him to focus more intently on the inner struggle and self-mastery as the true path to wisdom and spiritual realization¹.

¹ Al-Zarkali Khair al-Din, *Al-Alam: A Dictionary of Biographies of the Most Famous Arab, Colonial, and Orientalist Men and Women* [Lebanon, 15th Edition, Dar Al-Ilm Lilmaalayin, 2002], part 1, p. 258; see also Ahmad bin Aliwa et al., *Algerian Al-Balagh Newspaper, Review of Abdulsalam Al-Kanouni*, part 1, p. 2.

² Udda bin Tunis, *Sunnit Garden in Alawiite Works* [Mostaganem, Al-Alawi Press, 2nd Edition, 1996], p. 17.

³ Ibid. p. 20

⁴ Ibid. p. 21

⁵ Obaidi Habibi, *Efforts of Ahmad bin Mustafa Al-Alawi*, Ahmed Ben Bella University Algeria, Oran, Faculty of Humanities and Islamic Sciences, 2021], p. 53

This narrative embodies a pivotal moment in Sheikh Al-Alawi's spiritual journey, where he directed his attention from outward skills to the greater challenge of disciplining the self and controlling its desires, considering this the essence of true wisdom in Sufism.

After the death of Sheikh Al-Bouzidi, Sheikh Al-Alawi succeeded him as the head of the method, carrying its torch and spreading its teachings. He then established his own method, known as Al-Alawite method. It is noteworthy that naming the method after its Sheikh is not a common practice; rather, it signifies the Sheikh's Divine Opening and Prophetic inspiration, which made his influence extend to both near and far contemporaries who had receptive hearts¹.

This development in Sheikh Al-Alawi's course reflects his spiritual growth and increasing influence in the Sufi community, leading to the establishment of his own method, which bore his name and embodied his vision of Sufism.

3.1 His Teachers and Disciples:

• His Teachers

Sheikh Ahmad Al-Alawi was diligent in seeking knowledge from the prominent scholars and Sheikhs of his time. Among his teachers from whom he learned Islamic jurisprudence and theology was Sheikh Muhammad bin Al-Hajj Alal, Mufti of Tlemcen. He learned the science of monotheism from him and studied the book "The Helping Guide in Religious Sciences" by Ibn Ashir, covering various aspects of Islamic jurisprudence and other Islamic law sciences.

In 1923, Sheikh Muhammad bin Al-Hajj Alal wrote a commendation letter for Sheikh Ahmad Al-Alawi, attesting to his knowledge, piety, and high morals. This letter serves as evidence of Sheikh Al-Alawi's scholarly and ethical stature, as well as the respect and esteem he held among the scholars of his era².

Among his Sufi teachers was Muhammad bin Al-Habib Al-Bouzidi Al-Chadhili Al-Darqawi, who trained him through various spiritual exercises in the Sufi way until he surpassed his peers in knowledge and etiquette.

• His Disciples:

Among his devoted disciples was Sheikh Udda bin Tunis, who was born in Mostaganem in 1898. He was raised and educated under the guidance of Sheikh Al-Alawi and also studied at Zaytuna Mosque. After Sheikh Al-Alawi's death in 1934, Sheikh Udda succeeded him, and established the second newspaper "Lisan al-Din" from 1937 to 1939 as well as the monthly magazine "Al-Murchid" from 1946 to 1952. He contributed significantly to the publication of Sheikh Al-Alawi's manuscript heritage, overseeing its editing and printing himself. He passed away in 1952, leaving behind thousands of followers and disciples, and entrusted the succession of the method to his son, Muhammad Al-Mahdi bin Tunis³.

1.4 His Writings:

Sheikh Al-Alawi was committed to spreading his knowledge and insights through writing numerous works that covered various aspects of Islamic Sufism, including beliefs, ethics, conduct, and invocations. Al-Alawi press, affiliated with his Zawiya (Sufi lodge), printed and published these books, contributing to the widespread dissemination of his teachings and views across the world.

Among the most famous works of Sheikh Al-Alawi are:

- Al-Alawi Research in Islamic Philosophy
- The Purest Springs in Answers and Letters
- Diwan of Lovers and Methodology of Seekers
- Accepted Statement on the Legitimacy of Remembrance with the Singular Name
- Key to Witnesses in the Manifestations of Existence
- Sacred Grants in the Explanation of Al-Murshid Al-Mu'in on the Sufi Method
- Beginner's Guide to Sunni Sufism
- Grove of Secrets in the Meaning of Prayers on the Chosen Prophet
- Accepted Statement on What the Minds Can Attain
- Essence of Knowledge in the Chapter of "Wa Al-Najm"
- Rising Sea in the Interpretation of Quran
- Lisan Al-Din Newspaper (1923-1926)
- Algerian Al-Balagh Newspaper (1926-1934)⁴

Sheikh Al-Alawi passed away in 1934 due to a heart attack.⁵

2. Mysticism and Philosophy in Al-Alawi Gnostic System:

The term "gnosis" (from the Greek word "Gnose" and Latin "Cnosis") refers to the spiritual knowledge of saints or spiritually enlightened individuals; that is, knowledge of the secrets of religious truths¹. A Gnostic is someone who is not

¹ Ibid. p. 20

² Udda bin Tunis, Beautiful Grain in Sources of the Alawite Method [Mostaganem, 1st Edition, Al-Alawi Press, 1987], p. 20.

³ Al-Buhaysi Awadallah bin Hassan Mustafa, One of the Leaders of Religious Reform, Sheikh Uda bin Tunis Al-Mostaghanemi [Mostaganem, Al-Alawi Press, 1st Edition, 1995], p. 715.

⁴ Latrouch Aisha, Features of Algerian Sufism, [Master's thesis, Abdelhamid bin Badis University, Mostaganem, Department of Social Sciences, Philosophy branch].

⁵ Ibid. p. 53

satisfied with the outward appearances of truth but seeks its inner essence. The term Gnosticism refers to the doctrine that spread in the second and third centuries AD, whose essence is that Gnostics believe in the human intellect's ability to perceive Divine Truths, considering them a single reality deriving from Divine Emanations.²

Al-Alawi Gnostic system asserts that their method of knowledge, based on mysticism and Gnosis, is the optimal course to certain knowledge, being the highest and most reliable method. This is because this approach relies on Divine gifts and emanations, where the duality of the knower and the known dissolves, and the knowing self is united with the known object through annihilation and being oblivious to all others; that is, everything that separates them.

Sheikh Ahmad Al-Alawi emphasizes that reaching the levels of Divine Knowledge requires transcending the material senses. For one who attains the station of knowledge and settles in the presence of the Noble Messenger, the senses must dissolve. Such a person sees nothing of shapes and colors, for the true knower annihilates himself in the Creator, seeing nothing but Him and turning away from the creation³.

The terminological and semantic field of the term "Gnosis" includes verbal vessels used by the Gnostics to denote the nature of their knowledge, which are:

- **Divine Knowledge (*Ilm Ladunni*):** This refers to knowledge acquired without effort or striving by the servant through the usual means that require the preparation of premises, which necessarily lead to their scientific results.
- **Experiential Knowledge (*Ilm Dhawqi*):** This is the knowledge that opposes the way of reports and the inferences of proofs and analogy, necessitating the dropping of the usual human faculties in dealing with the senses, both apparent and hidden.

Sheikh Al-Alawi, in one of his profound reflections on the nature of Sufi knowledge, views the relationship between the knower (the Gnostic) and the Truth (the Divine) as a unique one of mutual harmony and expansive interrelation. Just as the knower cannot fully encompass the Truth, the Truth also does not manifest in its fullness except to the knower. This relationship is akin to an expansion met by a corresponding expansion.

This concept transcends the boundaries of usual intellectual perception. It does not adhere to the constraints of conventional verbal expression and cannot be confined within the frameworks of traditional logic. This is because it is knowledge that surpasses what can be conveyed through words or comprehended by the mind alone. Here, we are faced with a reality that goes beyond what can be grasped by pure reason or the literal transmission of texts. It is a deep spiritual experience that transcends traditional understanding and opens new horizons for knowledge and perception⁴.

This indicates the inadequacy of language in conveying the meaning of Gnosis, due to its subtlety and spirituality that words cannot express. Gnosis is an experiential and personal insight that cannot be described but only pointed towards. This is because it is based on witnessing and direct perception, its subject is the Supreme Self and its deserved perfections, as well as what it must avoid in theology and philosophy.

Through this experience, the knower seeks to comprehend what Sheikh Al-Alawi calls "the realities of the Self that encompass all names and attributes." This is the comprehensive knowledge of those who know Allah and recognize Him in a manner befitting Him. This knowledge arises from unveiling and direct perception, not from inference and proof. Thus, scholars in this field are those who have grasped the known reality through direct insight⁵.

As for the relationship between gnosis and philosophy in Sheikh Al-Alawi's gnostic system, it can be said that the philosopher relies on inferring from the effect to the cause, while the gnostic assumes the existence of the cause directly, contemplating existence itself. Despite this divergence, Sheikh Al-Alawi successfully combined intellectual contemplation and spiritual practice, offering a distinctive vision of the Sufi intellect. He believes that the intellect of the gnostic transcends the limits of the common intellect, liberated from the constraints of appearances and habits. This intellect, illuminated by divine lights, sees the Creator in the creation, transcending traditional dualities.

In this way, Al-Alawi formulated a philosophy of the Gnostic intellect within the framework of Gnosis, without conflicting with traditional philosophy. In his view, Sufism becomes a philosophical phenomenon that deals with philosophical issues such as cosmology or the universe, linking them to experiential knowledge. He emphasizes that true philosophy does not contradict pure monotheism, distinguishing between a superficial understanding of philosophy and a deeper vision that transcends appearances to reach hidden subtleties⁶.

3. Limits of Reason in Al-Alawi's Gnostic System:

The reason is considered the first stage in the journey of Sufism, but within the limits of its capabilities. The true Sufi and sincere Gnostic are those who have mastered the outward sciences (Islamic law) based on reason, in addition to the inward sciences. As it is said, "Jurisprudence is the foundation of Sufism."

¹ Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, Edition, reprint, A&C Black, 2001, p. 2.

² Jamil Saliba, *Philosophical Lexicon*, [Beirut, n.e. International Book Company, 1414AH-1994], p. 72

³ Ahmad Jab Al-Khair, Ahmad bin Aliwa Al-Mostaganemi and his Sufi doctrine [PhD thesis, Prince Abdul Qader University, Faculty of Fundamentals of Religion, 1439 AH-2018], p. 187

⁴ Ahmad Al-Alawi, *Relief Materials Arising from Relief Wisdom* [Mostaganem, Al-Alawi Press, 2nd Edition, 1991], part 2, p. 158.

⁵ Ahmad Jab Al-Khair, Ahmad bin Aliwa Al-Mostaganemi and his Sufi doctrine [PhD thesis, Prince Abdul Qader University, Faculty of Fundamentals of Religion, 1439 AH-2018], p. 119.

⁶ Ahmad Al-Alawi, *Al-Alawi Research in Islamic Philosophy* [France, Ahabab Al-Islam, 1984], p. 25

In the view of Gnostics, the reason alone can only provide an absolute transcendence of Allah as it deals with the idea of Allah as mere existence. Therefore, the reason must open up to Divine Emanations to transcend the limits of logical thinking and approach the understanding of Allah's essence through spiritual exercises and retreats.

However, this does not mean that Al-Alawi completely rejects rational thinking. Rather, he assigns it a specific field from which to benefit. He acknowledges the validity of the rational evidence provided by scholars to prove the existence and attributes of Allah, indicating that the reason has a role in the way of knowledge, but it is not the only or ultimate means to it.¹

Despite the important status that the reason holds in Sheikh Al-Alawi's Gnostic system, this role is not without caveats and reservations. In Al-Alawi's view, the reason is not immune to whispers and illusions that may affect it. This indicates that there are areas of knowledge where the reason must stop and not overstep its bounds.

Al-Alawi believes that some issues fall under what is called "general faith", as in the verse of the Qur'an: **"say we believe in Allah and what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes, and what was given to Moses and Jesus and what was given to the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we are Muslims to Him."** (02:136). These are matters that must be believed in without delving into their details or attempting to subject them to excessive rational analysis. This stance reflects a delicate balance in Al-Alawi's thought between valuing the reason on one hand and recognizing its limits and limited capabilities on the other hand.

This balanced perspective emphasizes the necessity of integrating reason and faith in Sufi knowledge, while maintaining the boundaries of each and not overstepping their designated domains.

The doubts that should be considered when facing this type of faith are mentioned in the words of Allah Almighty: **"If they believe in the same as you believe in, then they are rightly guided"** (02:137), to prevent them from turning away from this comprehensive faith. Presenting proofs and arranging introductions will be ineffective, as this is the clear discord. Sheikh Al-Alawi responds to the latter, saying: "It is His special knowledge that molds you in His form, envelops you in His existence, and affirms you with His attributes, so He becomes your hearing, your hands, your feet, and all your powers. So how can doubts reach you? From which direction do thoughts arise if the heart is sincere?"²

Based on the above, it is concluded that the reason is always susceptible to doubts that cannot be dismissed by presenting arguments and proofs, as these do not lead to conclusive results but to successive suspicions. However, this does not undermine the role of the reason in doctrinal matters. On the contrary, the reason is a fundamental tool in both defense and affirmation. The reason is one of the most prominent tools of Ashari theologians, especially in the fields of theology and attributes. These scholars have worked to strengthen the connection between reason and Gnosis to uncover the truths of theology, which cannot be comprehended by reason or senses but originate from the heart. This is the same truth emphasized by Imam Al-Ghazali. Therefore, reason and Gnosis are complementary tools for a deep understanding of doctrinal matters. Reason is used to understand evidence and proofs, while Gnosis is used to uncover the true meaning of this evidence through contemplation and heartfelt witnessing.

This meaning is also conveyed by Imam Al-Charani in his statement: "When the voices of truth come, beware of using tangible evidence to prove the realities of the unseen and rejecting them, so you would be among the ignorant. And be cautious not to engage in such matters with reason"³. This is precisely what Sheikh Al-Alawi emphasizes, considering that philosophy is not to be relied upon in theological matters unless it is supported by evidence from Quran and Sunnah.⁴

Based on the above, it is clear that Sheikh Al-Alawi does not oppose reason and philosophy. Rather, he seeks to define the scopes and functions of each without ignoring the flaws of reason or denying its advantages in most matters. How could he, when he addresses, as previously mentioned, the issue of the attributes of Allah according to the Ashari method, using a deductive method? He mentions each attribute and provides evidence for its affirmation for Allah with precision and clarity.

Relying heavily on the verses of revelation that awaken the mind to contemplate the signs of truth that indicate the attributes of perfection and completeness of Allah Almighty, which illuminate the universe—especially the attribute of existence, which Sheikh Al-Alawi considers as the necessity of existence for the Essence of the Creator and His non-nullity. This is a psychological attribute in the sense that it is the very existence itself. He starts from the creation or the form to prove the Creator. This suffices the reason from seeking further evidence: "The rational person can infer every attribute that must be ascribed to the Essence of the Almighty with due measure and capacity, especially the proof of His existence, which is not hidden from anyone with the slightest sense, because the existence of the attribute necessitates the existence of the Creator... as its connotation, which is the Almighty Truth, encompasses all other attributes"⁵.

The text highlights Sheikh Al-Alawi's unique approach in bridging contemplation and experiment, or reason and mysticism. He diverges from the traditional Sufi method that entirely separates reason from Gnosis, addressing the reason in a simple language understandable to the general public. Therefore, readers of Sheikh Al-Alawi's works might find themselves puzzled by his stance on reason, as he sometimes appears to have absolute faith in the mind's ability to achieve monotheism and knowledge, while at other times, he relies solely on Gnosis as the only means to understand the mysteries of existence. Consequently, Sheikh Al-Alawi's genius lies in his ability to reconcile the beliefs of the general public with those of the elite

¹ Yahya Batich, *Studies in Sufi Discourse at the Poles of Al-Alawi Method*, [Setif, 1st Edition, Sheikh Al-Alawi Publications, 2009], p. 15.

² Ahmad Al-Alawi, *Rising Sea in Quran Interpretation with Mere Light* [Mostaganem, 1st Edition, Al-Alawi Press, 1995], part 2, p. 53

³ Al-Charani, *Great Classes Called the Zygotes of Lights in the Classes of the Good* [Lebanon, Dar Sader, 2003], part 2, p. 4.

⁴ Ahmad Al-Alawi, *Al-Alawi Research*, p. 22

⁵ Ahmad Al-Alawi, *The Acceptable Saying of Minds Reaching* [Mostaganem, 3rd Edition, Al-Alawi Press, 1991], p. 13.

without abandoning either. Thus, he discusses profound Sufi concepts such as the unity of witnessing and the unity of existence, as well as states and stations, in a manner that satisfies both the reason and the soul¹.

Chapter Two: The World Between Transfiguration and Unity

1. Nihilism and Existence:

The Gnosis approach in cosmological discussions or those related to the world as an ontological aspect of existence research relies on the non-existence of other entities and the existence of the universe or world as a phantom in the shadow realm. There is no existent other than the Truth transfigured in light. Sheikh Ahmed Al-Alawi states: "The Truth, Almighty and Exalted, is the essence of existence without a doubt, and if not for His transfiguration in the components, sight would not fall upon them; because things in themselves are pure non-existent... In essence, the Truth, Blessed and Exalted, is the essence of existence, as previously mentioned, due to the absence of any reality that matches His reality... There is no existence except for the existence of Allah"². For whenever existence is mentioned, the mind turns to the existent or to the essence of existence externally, which expresses an unknown reality that is unclear and cannot be comprehended, although it can be indicated by a reference that, in itself, is a return to the mind, because its realm is the page of the mind³.

Sheikh Al-Alawi believes that the concept of non-existence in the mind refers to the truths of the Divine Essence. In other words, everything our eyes perceive or our minds conceive is, essentially, an embodiment of a truth from the absolute existence. The structure of knowledge and experiment based on the principle of the unity of existence does not accept the existence of anything truly independent from the one absolute existence. Therefore, Prince Abdul Qadir describes other existences as "known in the present and the future"⁴, meaning that they are essentially non-existent, as there is no true existence except for the existence of Allah.

The implication is that all apparent manifestations of knowledge and their determinations have no true reality. Hence, in his interpretation of the verse: *"So have you considered al-Lat and al-'Uzza? And Manat, the third - the other one?"* (53:19-20), Sheikh Al-Alawi illustrates Allah's rebuke of the polytheists for treating these idols as if they had real existence. They believed that the world had an independent existence with its own causes and reasons, which contradicts the concept of the oneness of Allah's essence⁵.

Accordingly, the issue of the relationship between the world and causes and reasons has received significant attention in Islamic theological and philosophical thought. The Mutazila, for instance, addressed the principle of causality in the context of discussing "generated actions," which are actions that occur without intention or will. The discussion of generated actions by the Mutazila is a branch of their most important principle, "the freedom of actions." This principle is connected to other involuntary generated actions and is based on the law of causality within the framework of the relationships between cause and effect.

The Asharites, on the other hand, established a connection between causes and effects in the natural world, but this connection was neither necessary nor independent, as it is for philosophers. They relied on the Aristotelian concept of causality, where causes necessitate their effects by virtue of necessity and independence⁶.

Regarding the relationship between the world and letters in its forms and origin, Sheikh Al-Alawi establishes both an experiential and theoretical relationship. Just as letters cannot be conceived without the intended meaning they represent; the world cannot be conceived without the one absolute and unlimited existence. In this context, the dot represents this absolute existence, while the letters symbolize the entities in the world. Therefore, what is visible in the letters is the dot, the absolute existence, which is the source of all multiplicity before and after manifestation. Letters do not possess an independent existence externally, even after manifestation; their existence is contingent on the existence of the dot. Hence, the letters exist by the existence of the dot, not by their own independent existence⁷.

The discussion here refers us to a very important idea in both philosophical and mystical thought, as we find Abd al-Karim al-Jili in his book "Book of the Dot" talking about the secrets of monotheism and the meeting of all the levels of truth in the dot as it is a primary origin for every manifestation of the levels of existence. Likewise, bin Arabi did in his books, surrounding circles in the connection between the dot and the classes and levels of existence⁸. The dot is also represented in all its sacred symbolism in Islamic philosophical thought, represented by the group of Safa Brothers and Faithful Friends,

¹ Ahmad Jab Al-Khair, Ahmad bin Aliwa Al-Mostaganemi and his Sufi doctrine [PhD thesis, Prince Abdul Qader University, Faculty of Fundamentals of Religion, 1439 AH-2018], p. 128.

² Ahmad Al-Alawi, Relief Materials Arising from Relief Wisdom [Mostaganem, Al-Alawi Press, 2nd Edition, 1991], p.p. 21-22.

³ Rezki bin Omer, Mysticism for Sheikh Ahmed bin Mustafa bin Aliwa Al-Mostaganemi [Algeria, PhD thesis, University of Oran, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Philosophy. 2012], p. 205

⁴ Prince Abdul Qadir, Spiritual Attitudes and Spiritual Chains, [Beirut, 1st Edition, Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyyah, 2004], part 1, p. 97; see also Zerri Benomar, Cases in Algerian Sufism [Oran, 1st ed., Dar Lala Safia, Algeria, 2015], p. 55.

⁵ Ahmad Al-Alawi, Spring of Mysticism in the Interpretation of Basmala and Suras of Quran [Mostaganem, Al-Alawi Press, 5th Edition 1997], p. 67.

⁶ Abu Hamed Al-Ghazali, Incoherence of Philosophers, Review and Presentation: Suleiman Dunia [Cairo: Dar Al-Maaref, 2nd Edition, n.d.], 239

⁷ Ahmad Al-Alawi, Spring of Mysticism in the Interpretation of Basmala and Suras of Quran [Mostaganem, Al-Alawi Press, 5th Edition 1997], p. 24.

⁸ Brahim Said Mohand Ameziane Ait Ziane, Research Paper on Dot, Line, Circle and Surface [World Islamic Science University, Faculty of Islamic Arts and Architecture.], p. 21.

who established an esoteric philosophical system through which the correspondence between the dot and Allah Almighty takes place. Just as the lines emerge from the dot, so do beings flow from One, the origin of all multiplicity¹.

Sheikh Al-Alawi's expression of the world as imagination or imaginary existence does not imply that it is merely an example separate from reality, like a shadow in relation to an object. Rather, the world, in his view, neither completely separates from the absolute existence nor entirely connects with it. This is the only way the world can be considered additional to the Truth, much like the relationship between the dot and the ink. The dot, symbolizing absolute existence, precedes and forms the ink, which symbolizes the world and its formation.

Al-Alawi indicates that the understanding of the meanings of letters among the Sufis is a gifted knowledge received directly from Allah without the need for mental effort or the use of senses. These meanings are preserved in their hearts, bestowed by Allah. In this regard, Sheikh Al-Alawi says: "I have written these lines as my understanding and motivation allowed, due to my interest in this great art and my concern for what has been transmitted in the grand tradition that everything in the earlier scriptures is encompassed in the dot of 'In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.'"² This is so that the letters may serve as a ladder to the vastness of both absolute and restricted existence"³.

Understanding the relationship between the world, transfiguration, and pantheism in the thought of Sheikh Al-Alawi is essential. Transfiguration, or emergence, is an act that shows light, as a reality in itself, and shows with it another existence, which is the one true existence.

Based on this theory, Sheikh Al-Alawi believes that the multitude has come from unity through the process of transfiguration. The theory of pantheism helps to lift and overcome the conflict between the occasional existential appointments, and the testimony of the existence of one who went through all the ranks and appointments of existence. However, it is necessary to achieve uniformity experientially in order for the knower to be able to witness the appearance of absolute existence, which is evident in all ranks and appointments. Allah is the Truth, and "nothing is with Him". If He appears to the knower Himself and His attributes in general, then His appearance necessitates the decay and disappearance of the knower. According to the Sheikh, only Allah Almighty remains after that ⁽⁴⁾.

For this reason, pantheism expressed a philosophical vision of monotheism that Sheikh Al-Alawi adhered to, and his spiritual Sheikh bin Arabi continued with it in his use of the time to refer to the Divine Self and pantheism. The Sufi discourse, related to the world or universe, of Sheikh Al-Alawi is characterized by that link between experiment and mental consideration in philosophical research among which is existence as a model in this research. He focuses on the strong distinction between truth and metaphor, as altruism is a metaphorical existence while the existence of the Divine Self is a real one that leads that world to nihilism. This is the same meaning found in the interpretation of Prince Abdul Qadir of the Quranic verse: **"He is the First and the Last, the Ascendant and the Intimate"** (57:03), where he attracts our attention to the fact that the Truth is the only one who can create and cause existence, and everything else is a creature subject to Him. Therefore, believing in a veiled existence - that is not recognized by the senses - independent of the Truth, has characteristics other than the Truth, and actions issued by it, is a polytheism that renders the man a non-Muslim ⁽⁵⁾.

It is the result that Sheikh Al-Alawi refutes when he discusses philosophers in the chapter "What is the reason for some modern philosophers to deny the mastermind" the idea of denying the existence of God Creator of the universe, and refutes it using his approach that combines mysticism and mental vision. He presents two main arguments: **First:** Denying the existence of God contradicts the teachings of Islamic law and the sound nature of man, as a healthy human mind is easily aware of the existence of a great power behind this carefully organized universe. **Second:** Denying the existence of God contradicts modern scientific discoveries. According to astronomy, the universe is a huge void filled with celestial bodies that move according to specific laws, which indicates the existence of an orchestrated force behind this complex system.

He adds that some philosophers rely heavily on scientific theories without taking into account the possibility of other explanations for these phenomena. Although some of these philosophers recognize the existence of a superpower behind the universe, they deny that it is Creator God, and see it as just a natural force. He claims that this belief is the result of their inability to realize the truth of God, translated in the idea of denying the existence of God Creator of the universe, and provides strong evidence to support His existence ⁽⁶⁾. The real consideration of the cosmogony and the science that occurs by way of transfiguration is included in the Quranic verse: **"The Day when We will fold the heaven like the folding of a [written] sheet for the records. As We began the first creation, We will repeat it. [That is] a promise binding upon Us. Indeed, We will do it."** (21:104).

Likewise, Allah Almighty said: **"Your creation and your resurrection will not be but as that of a single soul."** (31:28), where Sheikh Al-Alawi describes the soul as the one essence that flows in absolute existence. According to his vision, this soul emerges from the Divine Sanctification, and then forms through times and places, constituting the basis of the first creation, then, he resembles it with a light jewel, called the "light fist". In his perception, Allah Almighty looked at this jewel with a look full of prestige and beauty, and manifested Himself greatly on it to the point that He almost led to its decay. The fire of the Majesty of Allah also permeated this jewel from the intensity of its fear, so it breathed smoke from His prestige,

¹ Ahmad Zaki and Taha Hussein, Letters of Safa Brothers [Egypt, n.d. Arab Press, 1347AH/ 1928], p. 2020.

² Ahmed Al-Alawi, Spring of Mysticism, p. 64

³ Rezki ben Omer, Issues in Algerian Mysticism, p. 104

⁴ Ahmad Al-Alawi, Relief Materials Arising from Relief Wisdom [Mostaganem, Al-Alawi Press, 2nd Edition, 1991], p. 117.

⁵ Abdelwaheb Belgrass, The Historical Event in the Sufi Moment through the Experience of Prince Abdelkader [Algeria, Humanities Journal, December 2011], p. 11 See also: Larouch Aisha, op. Cit., p. 81.

⁶ Ahmed Al-Alawi, Al-Alawi Research in Islamic Philosophy, p. 16. see also Bin Jalati Muhammad, Concept of Time and Human Essence, A Reading in the Interpretation of Surat Al-Asr by the scholar Ahmed Al-Alawi [Biskra, Series of Lights, Volume 8, Number 2, December, 2018], p. 212.

and from this smoke, with the power and transfiguration of Allah, the heaven was formed: **"and made them seven heavens"** (02:29), from it the beings came gradually and from Divine Wisdom until the order of the worlds was completed according to the desire of Allah Almighty ⁽¹⁾.

This profound mystical vision reflects Al-Alawi's understanding of the relationship between the Creator and the creature, and how the universe arose from the Divine Transfiguration. It is a mixture of deep mystical concepts with cosmic perceptions, providing a unique insight into the origin of existence and cosmogony.

2. The Throne and the Existence:

Al-Alawi deals with the concept of the Throne as one of the ranks of existence in a separate chapter within his study of cosmology. In his analysis, he divides existence into what is directly perceivable by the senses, such as nearby objects, and what is indirectly perceivable, such as the heaven and the stars. He also indicates the difficulty of accurately determining and defining the concept of existence, describing it as "unknown" and unclear. Despite this difficulty, he sees the possibility of mentally referring to existence, but warns that expressing it as a concept refers to mind; as the concept belongs to the mental sphere and not external existence. Al-Alawi stresses the impossibility of transforming external reality into a mere mental idea, highlighting the philosophical challenge in understanding the nature of existence. This analysis reflects the depth of Al-Alawi's thinking on the issue of existence, trying to combine sensory perception and mental conception, while acknowledging the limits of man's ability to understand the full truth of existence.

In this context, Al-Alawi deals with the concept of the Throne within the framework of dealing with the planets, referring to their abundance that exceeds the limit, and then links this abundance to the idea of "the soldiers of Allah" mentioned in the verse: **"And none knows the soldiers of your Lord except Him"** (74:31), he cites as well the verse: **"And you [i.e., mankind] have not been given of knowledge except a little."** (17:85), to confirm the limitation of human knowledge compared to the capacity of the Kingdom of Allah.

He believes that this limited amount of knowledge enables man to reflect on the greatness of creation, and to watch the manifestations of the attributes of Allah in the tangible world, while acknowledging the inability of man to understand what is beyond this world. He offers a philosophical and experiential approach, imagining that if human sight could penetrate the blockage of the universe, he would have seen the whole heaven as a continuous light due to the accumulation of planets. Hence, he describes this cosmic vision, saying: "Behind that is unthinkable in terms of its abundance."

On the other hand, Al-Alawi explains the spaces we see in the sky in the vast distance between the planets, suggesting that each planet is surrounded by a vacuum similar to that surrounding the Earth, and imagines that if man moves to any other planet, he will find himself surrounded by a similar vacuum, reflecting his perception of the expansion and organization of the universe. ⁽²⁾

This analysis combines the religious vision, philosophical reflection, and scientific perception available in the Age of Al-Alawi, providing a holistic and integrated view of the universe.

Al-Alawi explains the huge abundance of planets and their accumulation with the width of the Throne, and this interpretation is based on astronomical philosophical evidence. A hypothetical scenario is assumed to illustrate his idea, where he imagines the separation of these bodies and planets from their positions at the same speed as the usual bodies. In such scenario, it is confirmed that these bodies will continue to descend at the same moment until Allah inherits the Earth with those dwelling on it, due to the width of the Throne, which has reached a level of rhythm that cannot be increased. He points out that any increase in the width of the Throne will be considered a decrease, which is impossible. He demonstrates the validity of his theory by the fact that Allah called His Throne "glorious" to indicate that it has reached the ultimate perfection that cannot be increased. He also supported his opinion with the words of Imam Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali: "It is not possible to be more creative than possible" ⁽³⁾. With this argument, Sheikh Al-Alawi provides an astronomical philosophical explanation for the abundance of planets and their accumulation with the width of the Throne.

The Sheikh then goes on providing evidence of the width of the glorious Throne, based on a combination of religious interpretation, philosophical contemplation, and the astronomical knowledge available in his time. He describes a complex cosmic system involving suns, planets, and moons, explaining the hierarchical relations between them. He distinguishes between visible and hidden stars, explained by factors of size and distance. He cites Quranic verses to support the idea that the Throne accommodates more than the heavens and earths mentioned in Quran, such as: **"Is not He who created the heavens and the earth Able to create the likes of them? Yes, [it is so]; and He is the Knowing Creator."** (36:81), presenting a stunning perception of the size of the universe where the seven heavens and earths appear very small compared to the greatness of Allah's Kingdom. ⁽⁴⁾

One of the striking paradoxes in his astronomical vision is his belief that each celestial body has its own eternal home (heaven and hellfire), similar to what was prepared for the dwellers of Earth ⁽⁵⁾. This perception reflects his bold attempt to link cosmic concepts to religious doctrines, offering a holistic view of existence that transcends the traditional boundaries between science and religion.

This vision of Al-Alawi highlights the depth of his thinking and the breadth of his imagination, as he tries to provide an integrated explanation of the universe that combines faith, science and philosophy. Although some of his ideas may seem

¹Ahmed Al-Alawi, *The Key to Witnesses in the Manifestations of Existence* [Mostaganem, Al-Alawi Press, 3rd ed. 1994], p. 23. See also Latrouch Aisha, *Features of Algerian Sufism*, p. 113.

²Ahmed Al-Alawi, *The Key to Witnesses*, p. 88.

³Ahmed Al-Alawi, *The Key of Witnesses*, p. 93; see also Ahmed Jan Al-Khair, Ahmed bin Aliwa Al-Mostaghanemi...p. 207.

⁴Ahmed Al-Alawi, *The Key to Witnesses*, p. 93.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 95.

strange or incompatible with modern scientific knowledge, they reflect an important intellectual effort in its historical context, and represent a serious attempt to understand the universe and its relationship to the Creator from an Islamic philosophical perspective.

Chapter Three: The World between Eternity and Creation

The question of age and occurrence of the world has always preoccupied the minds of philosophers and speakers alike, given its close connection to the Self of Allah Almighty and His attributes, as well as its relationship to the concepts of time and space.

Opinions on this issue vary. In the forefront is the theory of "inseparability", which adopts the doctrine of pure materialism, where its followers believe in the eternity of the world, considering that its own laws are sufficient for it to exist forever, without the need for a creator or someone causing its existence.

According to this theory, nothing arises from nothing, and nothing disappears into nothingness, but all what exists is a continuous transformation and change. "Democritus" (470 BC) is one of the most famous pioneers of this thought, while in Islamic thought it is called "eternity"; in terms of emphasizing the eternity of the world as it is, and denying the existence of a creator or maker of it ⁽¹⁾.

There are those who considered the world to be ancient in time without the self, which is the view attributed to philosophers who follow Aristotle. This was mentioned by Al-Ghazali and Al-Shahrastani saying that the world is ancient in time but not in itself. According to this view, the world exists always with Allah, as His reason and companion, without temporal delay. This likens the relationship of light to the sun, as there was no time when the world was non-existent. Allah's advancing over the world is only advancing in itself, not in time ⁽²⁾.

The other view, which is most common among the theologians of the three monotheistic religions, emphasizes the occurrence of the world. Those who hold this view believe that the world did not exist and then existed, and that Allah is ahead of both the world and time. ⁽³⁾

These two views represent divergent views on Allah's relationship to the world in terms of time and existence, reflecting a fundamental difference in understanding the nature of creation and the relationship between creator and creature.

In this context, Al-Alawi provides a unique interpretation of the verse: **"He who created the heavens and the earth and what is between them in six days"** (25:59). According to him, the concepts of eternity and creation of the world are distinctively combined.

Al-Alawi explains that "the heavens" in the verse refer to the upper worlds, and include the world of spirits and souls, while "the earth" represents the physical world limited in time and space. According to his interpretation, these worlds -all upper and lower- are merely enablers and symptoms before Divine Action.

Al-Alawi distinguishes between two stages of this action:

- Before emergence: where the action and Actor (Allah) are one, indicating the eternity of the world in the knowledge of Allah.
- After emergence: where the action becomes a description of the Actor, and here is the concept of the existence of the world ⁽⁴⁾.

Based on this interpretation, Al-Alawi tries to combine the idea of the eternity of the world in the knowledge of Allah, and its existence in the witnessed reality.

All these worlds and creatures existed gradually in six days, say six attributes according to the verse: **"And remind them of the days of Allah"** (14:05). Accordingly, interpreters see that the meaning of mentioning the days of creation by Allah in the Holy Quran is to remind His servants of His attributes. Each of these days represents a great Divine Attribute. The first day refers to the attribute of knowledge, as things existed in the presence of Divine Knowledge before their creation. These things were described as eternal because they were present in the knowledge of Allah Almighty before time and place. This standing (scientific presence) is not nothingness, but rather it is a moral existence that only Allah Almighty knows. As for the second day, it refers to the attribute of the will, where Allah Almighty singled out the existing and nonexistent creatures (fixed objects) by His will. These beings were limited to the desire of Allah Almighty, so His ability was responsible for causing their existence. The Divine Will played an important role in the selection of these beings, and Allah Almighty was the true Actor of everything in the universe ⁽⁵⁾. Allah said: **"Have they not seen that We set upon the land, reducing it from its borders? And Allah decides; there is no adjuster of His decision."** (13:41), then the characteristic of speech was related to the objects: **"His command is only when He intends a thing that He says to it, "Be," and it is."** (36:82), which is the third day where the saying was a component of the beings themselves, then the ability followed by the introduction of the beings on the fourth day. Moreover, causing the existence of such creatures is related to hearing and sight, which refer to the fifth and sixth days.

¹ Irfan Abdul Hamid, Islamic Philosophy [Beirut, Al-Resala Foundation, 2nd Edition, 1424H-1984], p. 78; and Abu Hamed Al-Ghazali, Incoherence of Philosophers, Review and Presentation: Suleiman Dunia [Cairo: Dar Al-Maaref, 2nd Edition, n.d.], p. 155.

² Al-Shahrastani, Sectes and Creeds [Beirut, n.e., Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyyah, n.d.], part 2, p. 456.

³ Reda Saada, The Problem of Conflict between Philosophy and Religion [Beirut, 1st Edition, Dar Al-Fikr Al-Labanin, 1990], p. 46.

⁴ Ahmed Al-Alawi, The Key to Witnesses in the Manifestations of Existence, p. 23.

⁵ Ahmed Al-Alawi, Accepted Statement on what the Minds Can Attain [Mostaganem, 3rd Edition, Al-Alawi Press, 1991], p. 11.

Then Allah Almighty said: **"and said to it and to the earth, 'Come [into being], willingly or by compulsion.' They said, 'We have come willingly.'"** (41:11). He said as well: **"And We certainly sent Moses with Our signs, [saying], 'Bring out your people from darknesses into the light and remind them of the days of Allah.' Indeed, in that are signs for everyone patient and grateful."** (14:05). The evidence here or the meaning is to use the day to refer to the attribute, which is mentioned in His words ⁽¹⁾.

Based on the above, we can understand the position of Sheikh Al-Alawi on the issue of the eternity and creation of the world. The latter is ancient from the perspective of its inclusion in the eternal Divine Attribute. All beings are included in the eternal Divine Knowledge, which gives them a kind of antiquity. In terms of tangible physical existence, Al-Alawi considers the world existent. Its appearance in the witnessed reality is a temporal existence, and then rejects the absolute statement of the eternity of the world, considering that such statement denies the existence of Orchestrator of the universe. He holds that this view stems from a false conception of God, and not of the true God; for it is external force that is difficult to comprehend fully, and which is quite different from matter. However, man can feel its existence, whether directly or indirectly. He indicates the possibility of man sensing this Divine Power, whether closely or afar, which indicates the existence of a spiritual link between man and the Creator ⁽²⁾.

Based on this interpretation, Al-Alawi tries to reconcile philosophical concepts with religious doctrines, offering a balanced vision that combines the idea of the eternity of Divine Knowledge with the creation of material world.

The follower of Islamic philosophical thought clearly notes the compatibility of Al-Alawi's opinion with the opinion of Safa Brothers on the issue of the nature of the world, as both see that the world is eternal and existent at the same time. Al-Alawi and Safa Brothers' opinion is based on this verse: **"Indeed, your Lord is Allah, who created the heavens and earth in six days"** (07:54). Safa Brothers interpret this verse saying that spiritual matters existed at once in a gradual and orderly manner, without time, place, or entity. They rely on the words of Allah Almighty: **"Be, and it is"** (02:117). They classify the Divine Spiritual Matters within the effective mind, full self, initial body, and abstract images, stressing that all these things have no time or place, but rather existed at once according to the words of Allah Almighty: **"And Our command is but one, like a glance of the eye."** (54:50). As for the physical objects, Safa Brothers see that they existed gradually. This means that spiritual existence is eternal, while other beings are existent ⁽³⁾.

Both Sheikh Al-Alawi and Safa Brothers agree on creation in the blinding moment, expressing the tendency to reconcile wisdom and Islamic law adopted by the philosophers of Islam. They seek to combine the two Quranic ideas about creation in six days and creation in the flash moment. The latter was described by Safa Brothers as creativity, while represented eternity for Sheikh Al-Alawi. This moment is matched by the word "be", which is implemented by the will of Allah Almighty in a blink of an eye ⁽⁴⁾.

In this regard, we mention the opinion of one of the contemporary Algerian Sufis who participated with Sheikh Al-Alawi in dealing with philosophical issues and the mixture of experiment and theory, namely Prince Abdul Qadir. He prefers concrete sensory evidence to abstract philosophical branches, using the example of the pitcher to illustrate his idea. He explains how the design of the pitcher with its various parts indicates the intention and wisdom in making it, which makes it impossible to say that it was formed by chance. He concludes that the Creator of the world is chosen Actor, able to cause existence or leave the world, and that the existence of the world is not necessary for the self of the Creator. With this simple and concrete inference, the Prince proves the existence of the Creator and His attributes through contemplation in His creatures ⁽⁵⁾.

Chapter Four: Interpreting the Creation of the Heavens and Celestial Bodies

Sheikh Al-Alawi offers a cosmic vision that blends Quranic interpretation with the astronomical knowledge available in his time. He sees that the heavens and the spheres were created from pure smoke: **"Then He directed Himself to the heaven while it was smoke and said to it and to the earth, 'Come [into being], willingly or by compulsion.' They said, 'We have come willingly.'"** (41:11), in compliance with Allah's command, and that they are transparent overlapping bodies. He also explains the phenomenon of the succession of night and day and the change of seasons with the movement of Earth, and he links understanding the movement of planets with knowing the location and movement of Earth ⁽⁶⁾. Then he describes the sun as a massive fiery object in a state of continuous vibration, placing it in the fourth sky, which he describes as serene and gentle ⁽⁷⁾.

This comprehensive vision seeks to provide an integrated interpretation of the universe that combines the Quranic text with the contemporary scientific understanding of Sheikh Al-Alawi, reflecting his attempt to reconcile religious concepts with the scientific observations available in his time.

Al-Alawi provides a linguistic and astronomical interpretation of the concept of the heavens and the spheres, so he sees that the word "heaven" is derived from highness, and everything above man is considered a heaven for him. The sphere is defined as the body settled in the heaven, and the seven heavens according to him are the pathways of the seven planets known in his era. He refers to his influence on Ptolemy's astronomical theory in this interpretation ⁽⁸⁾, knowing that this

¹Ahmed Al-Alawi, *The Key to Witnesses in the Manifestations of Existence*, p. 21.

²Ahmed Al-Alawi, *Al-Alawi Research in Islamic Philosophy*, p. 17.

³Letters of Safa Brothers, part 4, p.p. 111-112.

⁴Abdelkader Al-Jazairi, *The Sharp Lender to Cut out the Atheist and Falsifying Tongue of the Religion of Islam* [Algeria, n.e. Dar Tassili for Publishing and Distribution, 1989], p. 116; see also Latroch Aisha, *Features of the Algerian Sufism*, p. 116.

⁵Turki Ibrahim, *Theories of the Universe in Islamic Thought* [Alexandria, n.e. Dar Al-Wafa, n.d.], p.p. 97, 166.

⁶Ahmed Al-Alawi, *The Key to Witnesses in the Manifestations of Existence*, p. 45.

⁷Latroch Aisha, *Features of Algerian Sufism*, p. 116.

⁸Ahmed Al-Alawi, *The Key to Witnesses in the Manifestations of Existence*, p. 68; see also Latroch Aisha, *Features of Algerian Sufism*, p. 116.

theory has been proven scientifically incorrect later. Al-Alawi cites the Quranic verse: **"And We have created above you seven ways (layered heavens)"** (23:17) to support his interpretation, and embodies his attempt to combine the Quranic concepts and astronomical theories known in his era.

An agreement or convergence of views between Sheikh Al-Alawi and Prince Abdul Qadir can be recorded, regarding the classification of beings. This similarity is manifested in their division of natural bodies into simple ones, which are bodies that are not divided into components of different natures, including basic elements such as heat and cold. They are divided into two types, those which are incapable to be and to corrupt (that is, to change and demise), and those which are susceptible to be and to corrupt. As for the composed objects, they consist of different elements. The seven planets (known in their time) are classified into simple, incapable to be and uncorruptible objects.⁽¹⁾

This classification reflects the Sheikhs' attempt to understand the nature of the universe and arrangement of its components according to a vision that combines religious concepts with the scientific knowledge available in their era. It also shows their influence on ancient natural philosophy and the prevailing astronomical theories of their time.

As for the creation of Earth, the Sheikh believes that it has gone ahead of the creation of humans in a way that is incalculable, as it forms with higher bodies, heavenly layers and astronomical aspects honoring man by Allah Almighty, and the greatness of the creation of Earth. Allah Almighty said: **"[He] who made for you the earth a bed [spread out]"** (02:22), that is, He made it a bed for us in honor of man, and this is as if He hosted a human being, so it is convenient to furnish the most beautiful bed for him.

After the Sheikh's presentation of the description of the heaven and Earth, he tackles the issue of join and split from which the aspects of the universe arose. He says, "It is no secret to the sane that the heavens and Earth were joined together, that is, combined essence, kindness and density in one thing, then split up as rosy like red hide, so consider this o' mindful!"⁽²⁾

Al-Alawi adds an important commentary on the issue of the unity of the world's bodies noting that science has proven, by means of transfer, that all the bodies of the world, including Earth, stars, sun and moon, were combined in the past. This result is based on the participation of all these bodies in the nature of the formation, and the existence of an occasion and unity in their inception, as evidenced by the verse: **"Have those who disbelieved not considered that the heavens and the earth were a joined entity, and then We separated them and made from water every living thing?"** (21:30).

As for the reality of Earth, Ahmed Al-Alawi states that Earth is fire, because before it was on this trait, it was attached to the sun before split, and remained so after its separation from the sun, because if the branch separates from the original, it does not change except in a long period. As for its shape, the Sheikh sees that it is spherical and gives as evidence the verse: **"so walk among its slopes"** (67:15), as walking in the sides of the body comes only if it is spherical. Thus, the slopes indicate its sphericity, and if it is not, it is not possible to walk in a spread slope. Therefore, the sphericity of Earth is not impossible for those who have the slightest knowledge of its conditions."⁽³⁾

Al-Alawi also provides a comprehensive vision of the shape of Earth and its movement, blending the religious and scientific thoughts available in his time. He infers the sphericity of Earth, citing the opinions of theologians such as Al-Juwaini and Al-Razi, and provides evidence such as the difference in the times of sunrise and sunset and the possibility of traveling around Earth. He indicates the difficulty of traveling from the far south to the far north due to natural conditions. As for the movement of Earth, he emphasizes its inevitability, inferring the succession of seasons and the difference of night and day, linking these changes to the change in the position of Earth in relation to the sun. He mentions two movements of Earth: daily (rotation) responsible for the succession of night and day, and annual (transition) responsible for the change of seasons, as Allah Almighty said: **"He wraps the night over the day and wraps the day over the night"** (39:5), and said as well: **"It is not allowable [i.e., possible] for the sun to reach the moon, nor does the night overtake the day, but each, in an orbit, is swimming."** (36:40) in twenty-four hours, and need the existence of all times at once on Earth; because the sun is still apparent and Earth turns before it⁽⁴⁾.

Conclusion:

To conclude, Al-Alawi offers a unique cosmic vision that combines reason and mysticism, theory and experiment, philosophy and Sufism. This vision is characterized by its integration and comprehensiveness, as it blends theoretical knowledge and spiritual experience to form an integrated perception of existence.

In his treatment of the issues of existence and the universe, Al-Alawi distinguishes between an eternal ancient realm and an existent sensory one, offering an approach that combines philosophy and theology with an epistemological depth. The originality of his thought is manifested in his treatment of such matters as the eternity and creation of the world, the shape and movement of Earth, and the concept of splitting the heavens and Earth.

Al-Alawi's methodology relies on combining mental proofs and logical evidence with mystical revelation, stressing the importance of reason while noting its limitations in realizing the full Divine Truths. He also stresses the role of experiential knowledge (direct spiritual experience) in understanding the realities of existence, seeking to achieve a true knowledge of Allah and the universe that goes beyond superficial understanding, and embodies a serious attempt to achieve a balance between the various types of knowledge: mental, transmittal, and experiential, thus providing a comprehensive and integrated vision of existence and the universe.

¹ Abdelkader Al-Jazairi, *The Sharp Lender*, p. 51.

² Ahmed Al-Alawi, *The Key to Witnesses in the Manifestations of Existence*, p. 31.

³ Ahmed Al-Alawi, *The Key to Witnesses in the Manifestations of Existence*, p. 110.

⁴ Saad Khamis et al., *Philosophical Features in Algerian Sufism*, [Algeria, n.e. Dar al-Huda for Printing and Publishing, 2015], p. 157.

His cosmological visions also reflect a distinctive intellectual effort in its historical context, as he also sought to reconcile religious and scientific knowledge. This approach highlights the cognitive integration in Islamic thought and its openness to modern science, while preserving the continuity of heritage. Although some of its interpretations have been surpassed by modern science, it reminds us of the importance of understanding ideas in their historical context and the need for continuous renewal in religious thought. Al-Alawi offers a model for constructive dialogue between religion and science, which invites us to reflect on how to continue this effort in our current era, while balancing religious authenticity and openness to renewed scientific knowledge. This vision represents an important milestone in the history of Islamic thought, worthy of study and appreciation in the context of renewal efforts and interaction with modern science.

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