Philosophy and the Abrahamic Religions
Philosophy and the Abrahamic Religions: Scriptural Hermeneutics and Epistemology

Edited by

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One cannot pretend to write the history of a given theme without being oneself caught in this history and, unavoidably, making this history ... by prolonging it or by bringing it to an end. It is impossible to evade responsibility.¹

Henry Corbin (1903-1978) was a French philosopher, theologian and scholar known mainly for his studies of Islamic mysticism and Persian philosophy. From his earliest writings to his mature works, the hermeneutics of Scripture was a central preoccupation for Corbin. Through his study of Protestant theology, Russian religious thought, German philosophy, and Islamic Neoplatonism, Corbin elaborated an original approach to the understanding and interpretation of Scripture.

Henry Corbin’s Itinerary

Born in Paris in 1903, Henry Corbin received his secondary education at the abbatial college of St-Maur, then at the Grand séminaire of Issy, before obtaining his License in scholastic philosophy at the Institut catholique de Paris.² In 1925, he followed Étienne Gilson’s courses on “Latin Avicennism in the Middle Ages” at the Fifth Section, Religious Studies, of the École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE). With Gilson’s encouragement, he

¹ Henry Corbin, *La philosophie iranienne islamique aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1981), 22. Unless otherwise indicated, all italics in quotations follow the original, as in this case.

subsequently went on to study Arabic at the École Nationale des Langues Orientales. In later life, Corbin evoked the “dazzling memory” of Gilson: Corbin “resolved to take him as a model,” seeking to apply to the texts of Islamic philosophy Gilson’s rigorous method of interpreting texts of scholastic philosophy.3

After graduating in 1928 from the École des Hautes Études, with a thesis on Stoicism and Augustinianism in the thought of the 16th-century Spanish poet Luis de León, and in 1929 from the École des Langues Orientales in Arabic, Persian and Turkish, Corbin became an adjunct at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. It was there he first met Louis Massignon, the eminent French scholar of Islamic mysticism, who had an indelible effect on Corbin’s approach to the study of Islamic spirituality.4 Corbin would later write about his mentor:

There was no escaping his influence. His soul of fire, his bold penetration into the arcana of mystical life in Islam, where no one had before penetrated in this way, the nobility of his indignations at the cowardice of this world, all of this inevitably made its imprint on the spirit of his young auditors.5

Such was Massignon’s influence that Corbin would later attempt to “[extend] ... the spirit of his method to ... neglected areas” of Islamic thought.6

Massignon also set Corbin on his career path by presenting him with the lithographed edition of Suhrawardi’s Hikmat al-Ishrāq. The encounter with Suhrawardi was the most influential event in Corbin’s intellectual life. Recalling this episode in an interview given in his later years, Corbin declared:

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5 Corbin, “Post-Scriptum biographique,” 40.

Massignon had an inspiration from Heaven. He had brought back from a trip to Iran a lithographed edition of Suhrawardi’s major work Hikmat al-Ishraq. “Take it,” he says, “I believe there is something for you in this book.” This “something” was the company of the young shaykh al-Ishraq which has not left me my whole life. The young Platonist that I was then could only take fire at contact with the one who was the “Imam of the Platonists of Persia” … through my meeting with Suhrawardi, my spiritual destiny for the passage through this world was sealed.7

Thereafter, Suhrawardi and his school of Ishrāq would become the centremost preoccupation of Corbin’s thought and work. Jean Moncelon aptly wrote: “Suhrawardi … [became] the prism through which Islam had to pass to reach … [Corbin’s] auditors and readers.”8

During this period, Corbin followed the courses of Jean Baruzi on Protestant theology at the Collège de France.9 Under the friendly tutelage of Baruzi, Corbin discovered the thought of the young Luther, and of such Protestant “Spirituals” as Sebastian Franck, Caspar Schwenkfeld, Valentin Weigel, Johann Arndt, Jacob Boehme, F. J. Oetinger. These revealed to Corbin the “phenomenon of the Sacred Book” and the hermeneutical approach.10

Between 1930 and 1936, Corbin made several trips to Germany, where he came into contact with many contemporary philosophers and theologians, notably Rudolf Otto, Karl Barth, Fritz Lieb, Abraham Heschel, Martin Heidegger, and Ernst Cassirer, the philosopher of symbolic forms.11 Through Cassirer, Corbin became acquainted with the Cambridge Platonists, which, he wrote, “broadened my path towards what I was ultimately searching for … and which was later to become all my philosophy of the mundus imaginalis, which name I owe to our Platonists of Persia.” In that same period, Corbin also discovered the writings of Swedenborg, which would help define his conception of the correspondence between the natural and the spiritual worlds.12

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7 Corbin, “Post-Scriptum biographique,” 40-41.
8 Jean Moncelon, “Louis Massignon et Henry Corbin,” 203.
10 Corbin, “Post-Scriptum biographique,” 41; Corbin, Iran and Philosophy, 98.
12 Corbin, “Post-Scriptum biographique,” 42-43.
In 1932, inspired by the dialectical theology of Karl Barth, as well as by Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky, Corbin founded *Hic et Nunc*, a short-lived journal for theological renewal, in collaboration with Denis de Rougemont, Roland de Pury, A.-M. Schmidt, and Roger Jezéquel.\(^{13}\) The four articles he published in that journal already emphasised the themes important in his later works, notably hermeneutics and the link between knowing and being.\(^{14}\)

Around that time, Corbin made the acquaintance of the émigré Russian Orthodox philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev (1874-1948). In Berdyaev, Corbin found a kindred spirit and a source of continuous inspiration. Indeed, of all the contemporary thinkers who influenced Corbin, Berdyaev had the most significant and lasting impact on his thought.\(^{15}\) Among the many important themes Corbin inherited from Berdyaev, one may briefly mention the rejection of historicism and of the socialisation of spiritual life, the theosophical understanding of *Sophia*, the idea of divine-human creativity (theandry), and an eschatological understanding of Christianity aimed toward the fulfilment of an *ecclesia spiritualis*. Corbin would later say of the Russian philosopher, that “if I have been able to confront freely as a philosopher the philosophical problems with which I have been faced, I believe I owe it to a large extent to Berdyaev.”\(^{16}\) One could argue that Berdyaev was one of the most nearly congenial contemporary philosophers to Corbin’s way of thinking.\(^{17}\)

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\(^{15}\) Berdyaev is the only contemporary philosopher in whom Corbin takes continuous and increasing interest, as is evident from the frequent references to him in Corbin’s works from 1953 right up through *En Islam Iranien*.


\(^{17}\) Despite this influence and importance, Berdyaev has until now been largely neglected in secondary literature on Corbin. A close comparative analysis of Corbin and Berdyaev would yield illuminating results. We intend to undertake this effort in the near future. Meanwhile, the interested reader will find a partial thematic comparison in Klaus Bambauer, “Aspekte der Theoandrie bei Nikolai
Another important Russian acquaintance of Corbin in that period was Alexandre Koyré, then author of a monumental study on the philosophy of Jacob Boehme. In 1937, Corbin replaced Koyré at the EPHE, teaching courses on the Lutheran theologian Johann Georg Hamann (1730-88) and on Lutheran hermeneutics. The result of this activity was a book on Hamann (published posthumously) containing the major features of Corbin’s hermeneutics.18

In the 1930s, along with Koyré, Alexandre Kojève, Bernard Groethuysen, Emmanuel Levinas, and several other notable intellectuals, Corbin played an important role in importing German philosophy and phenomenology to France. The “phenomenological turn” of French philosophy was characterized by a general dissatisfaction with the positivism and rationalism of institutionalized philosophy (represented by the Sorbonne Professor Léon Brunschvicg), and a recourse to the “concrete,” “existence,” “life experience,” which appeared as irreducible to abstract and generic concepts. Breaking with the presuppositions of the dominant philosophical culture of their time, the new generation of French intellectuals, to which Corbin belonged, turned for inspiration to such German philosophers as Dilthey, Heidegger, Hegel, Husserl, Jaspers, Nietzsche, and Scheler, among others.19

In fact, Corbin became known as the first French translator of Heidegger, notably for his publication of essays by Heidegger titled Qu’est ce que la métaphysique? in 1938.20 The chief merit of Heidegger for Corbin was in having “focused the very act of philosophising on hermeneutics.”21 In a lengthy interview titled “From Heidegger to Suhrawardi” conducted shortly before his death, Corbin declared that it was Heidegger who gave him the clavis hermeneutica—the hermeneutical key—to understand the Islamic philosophers. He writes: “[w]hat I was looking for in Heidegger and that which I understood thanks to Heidegger,

is precisely that which I was looking for and found in the metaphysics of Islamic Iran.”

Revealing in this regard is the fact that his copy of Being and Time was marked throughout by glosses in Arabic. From Corbin’s perspective, Heidegger’s Being and Time was “a moment in a cross-cultural conversation that includes that central concept of Shi’ite hermeneutics, ta’wil.” He later noted: “Is not then phenomenological research what our old mystical treatises designate as kashf al-mahjûb, the unveiling or revealing of that which is hidden? Is it not also what is designated by the term ta’wil, so fundamental in the spiritual hermeneutic of the Qur’în?”

But if Heidegger gave Corbin the clavis hermeneutica to understand the Islamic philosophers, these, in turn, would reveal to Corbin hermeneutical levels that Heidegger “had not foreseen.” These levels were “the divine hierarchies of Proclus, the great Neoplatonist, as well as those of Jewish gnosis, of Valentinian gnosis, of Islamic gnosis.” Corbin resolutely rejected the human finitude expressed in Heidegger’s conceptions of “being-toward-death” and “freedom-toward-death,” affirming instead the possibility of a “freedom-toward-beyond-death,” notably exemplified for him in the philosophy of the 16th-century Iranian theosopher Mullâ Sadrâ Shirâzî.

One may situate Corbin’s engagement with Heidegger within the broader context of what Wayne Hankey has described as the French retrieval of Neoplatonism in the twentieth century. According to Hankey, Heidegger’s criticism of Western metaphysics “became the stimulus and the presupposition of the French retrieval of Neoplatonism.” However, “ironically, as a result of the Heideggerian impulse, we have discovered that Neoplatonism, better studied and understood, escaped in a number of

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26 Corbin, “De Heidegger à Sohravardi,” 32.
In many ways, Corbin anticipated and accomplished this reversal. In 1939, Corbin went to Turkey to obtain microfilms of the manuscripts of Suhrawardī held in the Istanbul libraries. He was stranded there for the remainder of the war, during which period he immersed himself in the study of Suhrawardī and worked on the first critical edition of Suhrawardī’s writings. At the end of those years, he later wrote, “I had become an Ishrāqī.” Parallel to his work on Suhrawardī, Corbin translated the Russian Orthodox émigré theologian Fr. Sergius Bulgakov (1871-1944), the “harbinger of Sophia and sophianic thought.” Several aspects of Corbin’s interpretation of Suhrawardī would bear the influence of Russian sophiological thought. Corbin consequently declared that “an Ishrāqī is spontaneously a sophiologist.”

In 1945, Corbin moved directly from Istanbul to Tehran, whereupon he became the director of the Département d’Iranologie of the newly founded Franco-Iranian Institute, and began the series of publications entitled Bibliothèque Iranienne, which made available many major texts of Sufism and Islamic philosophy, the enterprise carried out by Corbin with

30 Corbin, “Post-Scriptum biographique,” 46.
32 We hope to address the connection between Corbin and Russian sophiology on a future occasion.
33 Corbin, “Post-Scriptum biographique,” 46.
the collaboration of many prominent Iranian scholars. From 1954 until his death, Corbin spent almost every fall semester in Tehran teaching in the faculty of letters at the University of Tehran and, following his retirement, lecturing at the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy. Beside his teaching and research activities, Corbin became acquainted with many leading traditional authorities of the country, notably Javād Nurbakhsh, the master of the Ni’matallahī Sufi order, Shaykh Sarkār Aghā, the leader of the Shaykhi community, and the eminent scholar and gnostic, Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabātabā’ī, with whom Corbin regularly conducted philosophical discussions. The most important result of Corbin’s Iranian sojourn was his monumental, four-volume work En Islam iranien.

Between 1949 and 1978, Corbin was also an active participant in the Eranos Circle, a multidisciplinary research centre of international scholars who met annually in Switzerland. Corbin delivered many lectures at the Eranos meetings, almost all of which eventually developed into publications. There he also met and befriended many renowned scholars, notably C. G. Jung, Mircea Eliade, Gershom Scholem, Gerhard van der Leeuw, James Hillman, Victor Zuckerkandl, D. T. Suzuki, Ernst Benz, among others. Describing the particular atmosphere of Eranos, Corbin wrote: “what we should wish to call the meaning of Eranos, which is also the entire secret of Eranos, is this: it is our present being, the time that we act personally, our way of being.” It was a “meeting of … autonomous individualities, each in complete freedom revealing and expressing an original and personal way of thinking and being, outside of all dogmatism and all academicism.”

35 On Corbin and Iran, see Matthijs van den Bos, “Transnational Orientalism: Henry Corbin in Iran,” Anthropos 100.1 (2005): 113-125.
Finally, one must mention the Université Saint-Jean de Jerusalem (USJJ), founded by Corbin and a group of colleagues in 1974 as an “international centre for comparative spiritual research.”38 Corbin saw in this project “the spiritual blossoming of all [his] scientific work, as well as the ultimate accomplishment of a life-long dream.”39 His vision was “to organise, in the spiritual city of Jerusalem, a common hearth—which has never yet existed—for the study and the spiritual fructification of the gnosis [gnose] common to the three great Abrahamic religions … the idea of an Abrahamic ecumenism founded upon the bringing together of the hidden treasures of their esotericism.”40 From 1974 until 1986, the USJJ held yearly colloquia at the Abbey of Vaucelles in Cambrai. These meetings were regularly attended by such scholars and philosophers as Jean-François Marquet, Jean-Louis Vieillard-Baron, Antoine Faivre, Pierre Deghaye, Jean Brun, and Gilbert Durand. There were also many noteworthy guests, including the French Orthodox theologian Olivier Clément, Marie-Madeleine Davy, Constantin Andronikof (prolific French translator of Sergius Bulgakov), and Xavier Tilliette.

Corbin died in 1978, leaving behind some 300 critical editions, translations, books and articles, in which he mainly dealt with Twelver Shi’ism, Ismailism, Sufism, pre-Islamic Iranian religions, and Judæo-Christian prophetology.41 Corbin approached these traditions as a philosopher rather than as a historian; he actively internalised and endorsed the teachings of those whom he studied.42 He stated:

39 Corbin, “Post-Scriptum biographique,” 52.
40 Corbin, “Post-Scriptum biographique,” 53.
42 In a letter to the Russian scholar of Ismailism, Vladimir Ivanow, Corbin wrote: “Voyez-vous, je ne suis pas un banquier qui aurais pris pour tâche de payer son dû à l’homme Nasir-e Khosraw. Je me défends même pour cela d’être un historien. La personne historique de Nasir-e Khosraw est largement dépassée par l’intérêt philosophique en cause. Pour moi, le philosophe doit prendre en charge le stock d’idées de son auteur et le porter à son maximum de signification. C’est l’Ismailisme dans son ensemble que j’avais en vue et j’en ai commenté et amplifié les philosophèmes, comme si j’étais moi-même Ismaélien. Cela n’est possible que par une sympathie congénitale. Faute de cette sympathie, le philosophe égaré risque au contraire de porter l’auteur ou son école au maximum de platitude” (Sabine Schmidtke, ed. Correspondance Corbin-Ivanow: Lettres échangées entre Henry Corbin et Vladimir Ivanow de 1947 à 1966 [Paris: Peeters, 1999], 126).
Nothing is past to a philosopher: the metaphysical object, the spiritual reality, are never ‘in the past’ .... Neither life nor death; neither future nor past, are the attributes of things. These are attributes of the soul. It is the soul that confers these attributes to things which it declares present or which it declares past .... It is a matter of understanding that there are questions that have never ceased, nor will ever cease, to be posed to humanity. It is a matter of being their indomitable witness; and by this witnessing in the present to be their future.43

For this reason, it was Corbin’s ardent wish to see Islamic philosophy taken out of what he called the “ghetto of Orientalism,” and he laboured throughout his career to achieve that goal.44 It is largely thanks to his efforts that such philosophers as Suhrawardī, Mullā Sadrā, and many others, are no longer completely unknown to European philosophy.

Corbin advocated his ideas through a passionate ecumenical vision transcending all geographical, historical and religious barriers. He believed that “a philosopher’s campaign must be led simultaneously on many fronts .... The philosopher’s investigation should encompass a field wide enough to hold the visionary philosophy of a Jacob Boehme, of an Ibn ‘Arabī, of a Swedenborg, etc. .... Otherwise philosophia no longer has anything to do with Sophia.”45 Accordingly, he rejected all academic compartmentalisation and proclaimed himself to be above all “a philosopher pursuing his Quest wherever the Spirit leads him. If it has led me to Freiburg, to Tehran, to Isfahan, they remain for me essentially ‘emblematic cities,’ the symbols of a never-ending voyage.”46 Consequently, to read Corbin’s studies and translations of Islamic philosophers is not only to learn about Islamic thought, but primarily to discover Corbin’s own personal philosophy: that is, a chapter in the history of contemporary French philosophy.47

43 Corbin, Philosophie iranienne et Philosophie comparée, 61 and 79.
46 Corbin, “De Heidegger à Sohravardī,” 24.
47 Cf. “Henry Corbin s’est engagé dans sa ‘quête orientale’ à partir des questions héritées de l’ontologie occidentale. La question de l’être, celle de l’Un et du multiple, celle du rapport entre la révélation religieuse et la spéculation métaphysique, la question, enfin, de la gnose et de la vérité.... [Q]u’il soit d’emblée très clair que traduire ces œuvres ismaéliennes était un exercice métaphysique inscrit dans la philosophie personnelle d’Henry Corbin, c’est-à-dire dans la philosophie moderne française” (Christian Jambet, “Présentation,” in Trilogie
therefore necessary to extract Corbin himself from the “ghetto of Orientalism,” and to value him not only for his scientific achievements, but as a philosopher in his own right.

Corbin’s Hermeneutics of Scripture

Corbin’s hermeneutics postulates the occurrence of Revelation, namely the “epiphanic descent” of the Divine Word into Creation. In the course of its manifestation, the Word undergoes a progressive objectification—what Corbin describes as a "corporalisation of the spiritual." The "condensation" of the Word progresses along a plurality of universes in descending order in a sort of dialectic of manifestation and occultation, such that "the exoteric of each degree becomes the esoteric at the lower degree." This results in a fundamental structure of hierarchical “correspondences,” where to everything that is apparent, literal, external, exoteric (zâhir) there corresponds something hidden, spiritual, internal, esoteric (bâtin).

Corbin likens the manner in which the exoteric relates to the esoteric to that of a mirror in which an image is suspended: “the mirror shows the image, and in showing it, shows its presence ‘elsewhere’ in another dimension.” In this perspective, the exoteric is the “apparitional form,” the “epiphanic place” (mazhar), of the esoteric. The exterior is not something different from the interior, but rather is the interior itself transposed to a different level of being.
The contrast and correspondence between exoteric and esoteric, visible and invisible, characterises what Corbin describes as “the phenomenon of the Sacred Book.” He writes:

The drama common to all the “religions of the Book” … can be designated as the drama of the “Lost Speech.” And this is because all the meaning of their life revolves around the phenomenon of the Sacred Book, around the real meaning of this Book. If the true meaning of this Book is the inner meaning, hidden under the literal appearance, then from the moment people fail to recognise or refuse this inner meaning, from that instant, they mutilate the integrality of the Verb, of the Logos, and begin the drama of the “Lost Speech”.

At the term of its manifestation, the Word has become Book: it is made of a text, of words, of narratives. As such, the Book appears as a historical document, written at a particular time and place, in a particular language, for a particular group of people; it can constitute the object of philological and historical examinations, which seek to document and reconstruct the historical meaning of the Book. Such interpretations determine the meaning of the Book from the historical, social, and political circumstances in which the text appeared. The characters and events of which Scripture speaks are accordingly treated as actual historical realities, empirically verifiable and registered in historical archives. As a result, what can be empirically determined and dated in time is deemed as “true” and “real,” whereas what seems to exceed the limits of historical and empirical verifiability is relegated to the realm of myth or fiction.

According to Corbin, however, the events of Scripture are neither myth nor history. The events recorded in the Sacred Book are not “events of this world,” perceptible to the senses and registered in historical archives. Rather, they are “events of the soul” that have been objectified or

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Corbin, En Islam iranien, I, 208. “The ‘eternal Qur’ân’ descends from world to world, going through the metamorphoses that lead it from the state of ‘archetypal Book,’ in its pure intelligible essence, to the state of material book which, in our world, contains the secrets of the worlds whence it descended.” Corbin, En Islam iranien, I, 188.

Corbin, Philosophie iranienne et Philosophie comparée, 29-30; see also, Corbin, En Islam iranien, I, xvi.

Corbin, En Islam iranien, I, 159-176.

Corbin, Philosophie iranienne et Philosophie comparée, 31.
“historicised” in the form of external history. The historical meaning of Scripture is fixed in the past and is in a certain sense dead. Nonetheless under the external, historical meaning, there is a hidden, inner meaning which “does not cease to happen for the living until the Final Day, a meaning that aims at very real events, but which are not accomplished on the physical plane of existence. This is the esoteric meaning.” Consequently, the events of Scripture, “far from having [their] meaning in themselves, [are] but the imitation … of events accomplished or being accomplished at superior universes which give them their meaning.” To describe this type of events, Corbin uses the Arabic word hikâyat, a term which connotes simultaneously the idea of narrative, account, history, and that of imitation (mimesis), repetition, re-creation, a recital. He writes:

[The hikâyat] is a re-cited history [histoire re-citée], but whose Reciter therefore is the ‘mime,’ the actor in the actual [actuel] and active sense of the word. This is because the event is never closed [clos], and only becomes a history insofar as it is a comprehended event [événement compris]. The act of comprehending—technically designated by the word hermeneutic—is the work of each one of us, from generation to generation, and it engages our responsibility without any possible alibi.

60 Corbin In Islam iranien, I, 26.
61 Corbin, En Islam iranien, I, 208.
62 Corbin, Face de Dieu, face de l’homme: Herméneutique et soufisme (Paris: Flammarion, 1983), 177 (henceforth quoted as Face de Dieu, face de l’homme). Elsewhere, Corbin defines his use of the French word “actuality” [actualité in the original French] I did not have in mind, needless to say, the meaning attached to the word actualité in the daily press and the cinema. I meant precisely what is meant by the Greek Energeia of which the Latin actualitas was a not altogether happy translation. It is the idea of a force, whether latent or in action, which has the inherent power to produce certain effects, just as action is inherent in the transitive verb, which in Greek is called energetic” (“L’actualité de la philosophie traditionnelle en Iran,” Acta Iranica 1 (1968): 1). Still elsewhere, Corbin defines the word “comprendre,” rendered here as “comprehending”: “Let us take the Latin word comprendere in its exemplary acceptation here: to contain, to implicate [impliquer]. To comprehend a meaning is to implicate it in oneself, one way or another, in one’s own mode of being…. The act of comprehending is accomplished in the present; the meaning of the sign is implicated in him who comprehends it, because he is the one to whom it is addressed.” En Islam iranien, I, 138.
In contrast to “historicist” interpretations which, “by making the significance of the Sacred Book captive to the date of its material composition, [stifle] any potential for a significance that goes beyond that past,” Corbin’s hermeneutics instead consists in “comprehending and constantly reactivating ‘in the present’ the true meaning [of the Sacred Book].” This is “to act such that through us history remains still to come [par nous l’histoire reste encore à venir], that through us the past continues to be accomplished, because we are the mimes who actualise the meaning of exemplary models.”63 In this way, the events of Scripture are actively made present in the soul of the exegete; they are “ravished” from the past and given new life. This is possible because “life and death are attributes of the soul, not of present or past things. The question is ... to understand what once made this past possible, caused its advent, was its future.”64 Without this re-enactment in the present, we are left with an historical faith (fides historica), which confines the figures and events of Scripture to the past.65

How does the hermeneutical re-enactment of Scripture work? In addressing this question, Corbin draws on the pair of Islamic theological notions: tanzil and taˈwil. Used in reference to the revelation of the Sacred Book, tanzil means “to cause the descent of this Revelation from the higher world.” In this sense, it designates “positive religion,” or the letter of Revelation. In contrast, taˈwil is “to cause to return, to lead back to the origin, and thus to return to the true and original meaning of a written text.”66 The operation of taˈwil accordingly leads the revealed text from its letter, or externality, to its inner spiritual significance—from its appearance to the esoteric truth with which it symbolises.67 This is not a matter of substituting the literal text with a theoretical explanation or an allegorical

65 Cf. “The pure fides historica ...measures the degree of reality of its object to the documents which attest to its physical existence in the ‘past’... Such a faith is that of the external man. It is the fides historica denounced by all mystics as a fides mortua.” Corbin, En Islam Iranien, I, 26.
67 Corbin, Iran and Philosophy, 76; Corbin, Avicenna and the Visionary Recital, 30.
meaning. If this were the case, Corbin claims, then the literal, apparent meaning of the text would lose its justification and become superfluous, with the resulting tendency to relegate it to the realm of “myth,” in the sense of something “untrue.”

Against “demythologising” interpretations, Corbin affirms “the necessity of maintaining the simultaneity of the spiritual sense and the literal appearance, of the exoteric (zāhir) and the esoteric (bātin).” The literal appearance forms “the covering, the basis, and the protection of the [Divine Word].” The appearance is indispensable to the spirit, because “in its appearance [it] shows forth something which can reveal itself therein only by remaining beneath its appearance.” At the same time, isolated from its spiritual truth, the body of the Word is nothing but a “dead nature, an absurd husk.”

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According to Corbin, the way hermeneutics “saves the appearance” of the text is by “drawing or unveiling the hidden which shows itself beneath this appearance.” To put it differently, the appearance of the text is preserved only by showing the inner significance which “justifies” the literal meaning, and of which the text is but the “imitation” in the visible world. This is not a matter of replacing one meaning with another, but rather of perceiving the apparent and the hidden, literal and spiritual, material and psychic, simultaneously, in a single act of perception. This constitutes a “symbolic perception” which operates a transmutation of the immediate data (the sensible and literal data), and renders them transparent. The text is thereby “raised to incandescence and the hidden significance shines through the covering, which becomes transparent.”

This can be compared to “the manner of the light which becomes visible

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68 Cf. “Adam’s transgression consisted in yielding to the suggestion of Iblīs to attain to the esoteric in its pure state.” Corbin, Swedenborg and Esoteric Islam, 124.
69 Corbin, Swedenborg and Esoteric Islam, 61.
70 Corbin, Philosophie iranienne et Philosophie comparée, 23.
71 Corbin, En Islam iranien, I, 128.
72 Cf. “The bātin [esoteric] cannot subsist without the zāhir [exoteric] which is its support; the symbolised (mamthûl) can only be manifested in the symbol that symbolises it (mathal).” Corbin, En Islam iranien, I, 75.
73 Corbin, En Islam iranien, II, 199.
74 Corbin, Philosophie iranienne et Philosophie comparée, 23.
75 Corbin, Hist. of Islamic Philosophy, 13.
76 Corbin, Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth, 21.
only as it takes form and shines through the figure of a stained-glass window.”

The text is perceived as symbol to the extent that the exegete is able to raise his consciousness to its hidden significance. As Corbin writes:

The symbol is both key and silence; it speaks and it does not speak. It can never be explained once and for all. It expands to the degree that each consciousness is progressively summoned by it to unfold— that is to say, to the degree that each consciousness makes the symbol the key to its own transmutation.

In other words, the ta’wil of the text is correlative to a transformation in the soul of the exegete; it depends on whether or not one succeeds in leading the text back to the “internal event” which it symbolises. The text is spiritually understood to the degree that it is internalised. Therefore, the “hidden meaning” concealed beneath the appearance of the text is not something superimposed on, or “read into,” the literal text, but is the “event of the soul” that corresponds with and justifies the literal meaning.

The spiritual hermeneutics therefore aims at reproducing, in the soul of the exegete, the “event of justification” at the origin of the revealed text: that is, the spiritual event in the absence of which the Revelation could not have taken place. The exegete understands the revealed text (modus intelligendi) to the extent that the event of Revelation is reproduced in him (modus essendi). The ta’wil of the text therefore supposes the ta’wil of the soul: in restoring the text to its truth, the spiritual exegesis restores, in a simultaneous movement, the soul of the exegete to its truth.

The event is transmuted by the mode of perception that leads it back … to the higher plane on which, spiritually understood—that is, transmuted into symbol—the Event then “occurs” spiritually. And if in this sense it can

77 Corbin, Creative Imagination, 275. Cf. “Idolatry consists in immobilizing oneself before an idol because one sees it as opaque, because one is incapable of discerning in it the hidden invitation that it offers to go beyond it. Hence, the opposite of idolatry would not consist in breaking idols, in practicing a fierce iconoclasm aimed against every inner or external Image; it would rather consist in rendering the idol transparent to the light invested in it. In short, it means transmuting the idol into an icon.” Corbin, “Theophanies and Mirrors: Idols or Icons?,” trans. Jane A. Pratt and A. K. Donohue, in Spring [1983]: 2.
78 Corbin, Hist. of Islamic Philosophy, 173.
80 Corbin, Avicenna and the Visionary Recital, 31.
always “occur” again in the future, this means that it is in truth not an ordinary external event, but the Event of the soul, which, by comprehending it, lives it, and makes it its own …. This is not to preserve history, but to accomplish it.\textsuperscript{81}

In this sense, hermeneutics, for Corbin, involves “a lived situation … in which the true meaning dawns on the believer and confers reality on his existence.”\textsuperscript{82} Understanding the text is not a matter of theoretical or philological inspection “but a passion lived and shared with the understood object, a com-passion, a sympathy.”\textsuperscript{83} To understand the text is to experience its literal meaning in its \textit{significatio passiva}: we discover the true meaning of the text as it occurs within us, according to what it makes of us, insofar as it is our passion.\textsuperscript{84} The being of the exegete becomes that in which the eternal imperative of the Word is accomplished, the point where the divine action, in being fulfilled, is no longer distinguished from the \textit{passio}, since the \textit{passio} is the very event of its accomplishment.\textsuperscript{85} The exegete’s \textit{understanding} of the Word is the \textit{action} of the Word in him.

This means that the Word is at once interpreter and interpreted: “it is the divine Subject which is … the active Subject of all knowledge of God; it is God himself who is thinking himself through the thought which the enlightened human intellect has of him.”\textsuperscript{86} This state might be called \textit{speculative}, insofar as the exegete becomes a mirror in which the \textit{gesta divina} are reflected:

\textsuperscript{81} Corbin, \textit{Avicenna and the Visionary Recital}, 261.
\textsuperscript{82} Corbin, \textit{Hist. of Islamic Philosophy}, 1.
\textsuperscript{83} Corbin, \textit{Creative Imagination}, 116.
\textsuperscript{84} Corbin, \textit{Creative Imagination}, 116. Corbin draws the notion of \textit{significatio passiva} from the theology of the young Luther. Cf. “In the presence of the Psalm verse \textit{In justitia tua libera me}, [the young theologian Martin Luther] experienced a movement of revolt and despair: what can there be in common between this attribute of justice and \textit{my} deliverance? And such was his state of mind until [he] perceived in a sudden flash (and his entire personal theology was to result from this experience) that this attribute must be understood in its \textit{significatio passiva}, that is to say, \textit{thy} justice whereby we are made into just men, \textit{thy} holiness whereby we are hallowed, etc.” Corbin, \textit{Creative Imagination}, 300 n. 25. See also, Corbin, “De Heidegger à Sohravardī,” 25.
\textsuperscript{85} Corbin, \textit{Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis}, 34. Corbin cites and translates the 11th-century Ismaili philosopher Nasir-e Khosraw as follows: “The \textit{significatio passiva} of the \textit{nomen patientis} (ma\'\'īl-e ma\'\'īl) consists in the very action of the agent, which is accomplished in him.” \textit{Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis}, 34-35.
\textsuperscript{86} Corbin, \textit{Iran and Philosophy}, 140-141.
The mirror is the inner human being, to whom, by whom, and for whom the theophany is produced, and who is the place and form which it takes … However, because this mirror is the place of the soul contemplating itself in contemplation, it is also true to say that the mirror is itself the divine Being.87

We are confronted here with what Corbin describes as a coincidentia oppositorum—the conjunction between action and passion, divine nature and human nature, Deus Absconditus and Deus Revelatus, hidden and revealed: “in revealing Himself to man, the personalised God of the personal theophany reveals man to himself, and in revealing man to himself, He reveals man to Himself and reveals Himself to Himself.”88 The Revelation of God to man allows, in turn, for the Revelation of man to God to occur. This theandric operation, or co-operation between man and God, accomplishes the spiritual meaning of Revelation.89 To the same degree to which the exegete succeeds in leading the letter of Scripture to its inner meaning—that is, to the same degree that the events of Scripture are made into events of the exegete’s own soul—to that same degree “the Word … fulfils its function fully, which is to express the Sacred, in other words to operate the reunion of the plurality of this world with the divine Unity.”90

One might well ask, on what plane of reality does this Divino-human encounter occur? Where does the reunion of the plurality of the world with the divine Unity take place? In what space does the exegete’s experience unfold? With a quantitative conception of space, it is impossible to apprehend any of these things. In fact, spiritual visions and events imply the existence of different kinds of spaces. These are spiritual or qualitative spaces, where the events of the soul take place. “Such space,” Corbin writes, “is existential space, whose relationship to physico-mathematical space is analogous to the relationship of existential time to the historical time of chronology.”91 The proper measure of that space is the state of the

87 Corbin, Iran and Philosophy, 141-142. “The authentic meaning of ‘speculative’ is lost unless we bear in mind its etymological origin: speculum = mirror. The intelligence of speculative theology is in its functioning as a mirror which reflects God, a mirror in which God is revealed. In the words of Franz von Baader, ‘Spekulieren heisst spiegeln’ (‘To speculate is to reflect’).”
88 Corbin, “De Heidegger à Sohravardī,” 35.
89 On the concept of theandry, see Corbin, “Face de Dieu et face de l’homme,” in Face de Dieu, face de l’homme, 300-313.
91 Corbin, Swedenborg and Esoteric Islam, 37.
soul. It is indeed a place “where time becomes reversible and where space is a function of desire, because it is only the external aspect of an internal state.”

To designate this “existential space,” which is the location of visionary events, Corbin coined the term *mundus imaginalis*. As a “median and mediating” world, the imaginal world shares aspects of both the world of sensation and the world of intellectual forms. It is a world “where the spiritual takes a body and the body becomes spiritual,” a world consisting of real matter and real extension, though by comparison to sensible, corruptible matter these are subtile and immaterial. The function of the *mundus imaginalis* is defined by its ability to symbolise with the worlds it mediates:

On the one hand [the *mundus imaginalis*] immaterialises the Sensible Forms, on the other it “imaginalises” the Intellectual Forms to which it gives shape and dimension. The Imaginal world creates symbols on the one hand from the Sensible Forms, on the other from the Intellectual Forms.

Accordingly, the *mundus imaginalis* requires a faculty of perception that is proper to it. This faculty is the active Imagination, which Corbin sharply distinguishes from the imaginary or “fantasy.” The latter secretes nothing but the imaginary, the unreal, whereas the active Imagination has a cognitive function just as fundamental and objective as sensation or intellection. The active Imagination is the organ that allows the exegete to penetrate the *mundus imaginalis*, where the reality of symbols is verified.

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92 Corbin, *Swedenborg and Esoteric Islam*, 16.
93 On the notion of the *mundus imaginalis*, see particularly Corbin, “Towards a Chart of the Imaginal,” in *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, vii-xvi; see also Corbin, “Mundus Imaginalis, or The Imaginary and the Imaginal,” in *Swedenborg and Esoteric Islam*, 1-33.
95 Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, 4.
96 Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, ix.
97 “Here there is the same total difference already recognised and clearly remarked by Paracelsus between the imaginatio vera (Imagination in the true sense) and ‘Phantasy.’” *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, ix.
In the absence of a functional imaginative faculty, all the phenomena of religious experience would lose their meaning. The active Imagination is indeed “the place of theophanic visions, the scene on which visionary events and symbolic histories appear in their true reality.” The realities of this world, according to Corbin, are like “images seen in mirrors, which [are] neither objects nor abstract ideas—these are intermediary realities. And because they are intermediary, they culminate in the notion of the symbol.” Consequently, the active Imagination allows the transmutation of intellectual forms and sensory data into symbolic forms; it allows the transmutation of internal spiritual states into external states, into vision-events symbolising with those internal states. Corbin writes:

The Burning Bush is only a brushwood fire if it is merely perceived by the sensory organs. In order that Moses may perceive the Burning Bush and hear the Voice calling him “from the right side of the valley”—in short, in order that there may be a theophany—an organ of trans-sensory perception is needed. The function of the active Imagination consists “in purifying and liberating one’s inner being so that the intelligible realities perceived on the imaginal level may be reflected in the mirror of the sensorium and be translated into visionary perception.” In other words, the function of the active Imagination is the same as that of ta’wil: to unveil the hidden reality of things, to manifest the hidden. The world of the Imagination guarantees the reality of ta’wil; it is the place where the hermeneutics of Scripture is accomplished: “raised to the level of that interworld, the literal data of the Sacred Books take on their spiritual truth; … their spiritual sense … is then the literal sense, and there no longer is a literal sense other than that spiritual sense.”

99 “Upon [the mundus imaginalis] depends…both the validity of visionary accounts that perceive and relate ‘events in Heaven’ and the validity of dreams, symbolic rituals, the reality of places formed by intense meditation, the reality of inspired imaginative visions, cosmogonies, and theogonies, and thus, in the first place, the truth of the spiritual sense perceived in the imaginative data of prophetic revelations.” Corbin, Swedenborg and Esoteric Islam, 11.

100 Corbin, Creative Imagination, 4.

101 Corbin, Creative Imagination, 217.

102 Corbin, Swedenborg and Esoteric Islam, 16.

103 Corbin, Creative Imagination, 80.


105 Corbin, Philosophie iranienne et Philosophie comparée, 124. Cf. “Since the hidden meaning is nothing other than the letter raised or transmuted into symbol,
The symbolic and spiritual exegesis described so far is illustrated, for Corbin, in a series of short “symbolic recitals” authored by the 12th-century Iranian Shihâboddîn Suhrawardî, the martyred chief of the spiritual family Corbin labels “Platonists of Persia.”

Suhrawardî’s recitals are “spiritual romances” which narrate the story of the soul’s initiatory journey from exile in the material world (the “Occident”) to the intelligible and spiritual world (the “Orient”), which is the original abode of the soul. According to Corbin, these recitals are records of Suhrawardî’s own mystical experiences. They literally describe what occurs or can occur in the soul of the philosopher when Suhrawardî’s philosophical teachings become lived experience; the mystical voyage indeed begins precisely at the point when the theoretical teaching becomes an event, a “personally lived adventure” of the soul. In other words, the recitals describe Suhrawardî’s “Oriental” philosophy “in dramatic action.”

and perceived henceforth on the level of the imaginal world, the symbol itself is no longer something behind which hides the thing symbolized. It is, quite simply, the form assumed on this level by the transcendent reality, and this form is this reality. Thus instead of allegory, one could perhaps speak of tautegory.” Corbin, Temple and Contemplation, 304-305.

Corbin’s interpretation of Suhrawardî continues to be the subject of heated—and often ill-informed—debate. As Sabine Schmidtke remarks: “although much progress has been made in recent decades in the study of Suhrawardî and his later followers...contemporary scholars seem to spend much of their energy either rejecting or defending Corbin’s views on the nature of Suhrawardîn thought in one way or another” (Review of The Leaven of the Ancients and The Wisdom of the Mystic East, by John Walbridge, in Die Welt des Islams 43.1 [2003]: 119). These issues are complex and impossible to address here. The present purpose is not to examine the faithfulness of Corbin’s interpretation, but simply to illustrate Corbin’s personal hermeneutics through his own interpretation of Suhrawardîn recitals. In other words, our concern here is more with Corbin as a philosopher than with Corbin as a scholar. It is, nonetheless, important to bear in mind that Corbin considered himself as belonging to the tradition derived from Suhrawardî, and he approached his subject accordingly. One might, on historical grounds, contest Corbin’s claim of belonging to Suhrawardîn’s lineage, but only at the risk of missing the intentionality of his claim and therefore misinterpreting him.

Corbin, Avicenna and the Visionary Recital, 4.

Corbin, En Islam iranien, II, 217. Suhrawardî’s “Orient,” for Corbin, essentially designates “the world of the beings of Light, from which the dawn of knowledge and ecstasy rises in the pilgrim of the spirit” (Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth, 110). Accordingly, by “Oriental” philosophy or theosophy, Corbin understands “a doctrine founded on the Presence of the philosopher at the matutinal appearance of the intelligible Lights, at the outpouring of their dawn on the souls who are in a state of estrangement from their bodies.” Hist. of Islamic Philosophy, 209. The
The recital in which this transformation is most clearly expressed is entitled The Recital of the Occidental Exile. This story begins with the fall into captivity. The hero has fallen in the “Occidental” city of Qarawayn. On a night of the full moon, the Exile escapes and finally reaches the mystical Sinai, at the foot of the Source of Life. The stages of the journey progress through a mystical navigation from prophet to prophet, whose gestes are presented in Qur’anic verses. As Corbin points out, these are not the historical prophets, but “the prophets of one’s being.” The pilgrim is, in turn, Noah, Lot, Moses, Solomon, Alexander, etc. This series of identifications reveals a “psychodramatic initiation” in which the mystical pilgrim himself becomes the hero who acts out all of these Qur’anic verses. This implies a “personal hermeneutic” of the Qur’anic verses, which “resuscitates [them] in the present of the first person.”

The narrator becomes the patiens, the “place,” in which the recited deed comes to be accomplished, because he has “leveled [aboli] in himself the mountain of closed egotism [la montagne de l’égoïté close].” The soul of the mystical pilgrim becomes a mirror in which the gesta divina are accomplished; these gestes constitute a “metahistory” the history of the pilgrim’s own soul. This is not a chronological history, but can rather be conceived as a history in “gothic style,” that is, “a history which, while progressing, is by itself reversion to the origin.” The mystic is the “patient” of this spiritual history because he is the one in whom it happens, and this is why he is simultaneously its agent, actor, and active subject. This state indicates “the moment where the object to be known becomes itself the knowing Subject [Sujet connaisant].” What we have here is an example of a hikâyat: “[i]t is a mystical recital in which narrator, narrated knowledge obtained at this illuminative “Orient” is not a theoretical, re-presentational knowledge (‘ilm sūrī), but a knowledge that is immediate, presential (‘ilm hizūrī), that is, “a Knowledge through which rises to himself, to his Orient, the subject of this Knowledge.” En Islam iranien, II, 48. “Oriental knowledge,” therefore, entails “a metamorphosis of being.” En Islam iranien, II, 61.

Corbin, En Islam iranien, II, 258-294.
Corbin, L’Archange empourpré: quinze traités et récits mystiques (Paris: Fayard, 1976), 270 (henceforth quoted as L’Archange empourpré); Corbin, Iran and Philosophy, 160.
Corbin, Face de Dieu, face de l’homme, 197, 206 and 214.
Corbin, Iran and Philosophy, 142; Corbin, En Islam iranien, II, 212.
Corbin, En Islam iranien, IV, 288.
Corbin, Face de Dieu, face de l’homme, 227.
Corbin, Face de Dieu, face de l’homme, 212.
deed, and hero of the narrative are all one.” It is I who am the hero of this tale,” declares the author at the end of the Recital.

In the Recital of the Crimson-hued Archangel, an Angel appears at the beginning and invites the pilgrim to return to his original abode. The Angel teaches him how to make his way across the valleys and ranges of the cosmic mountain (Mount Qaf). This is not a journey in outside space, but a psychic event whose scene and action are set in the intermediate world of the Imaginable, which Suhrawardī here designates as Nā-Kojā-Abād, literally, “the land of no-where,” meaning a “place outside of place.” Once one has crossed into the limit of that world, one no longer finds oneself “in the place, but is himself the place.” According to Corbin, “this is the imaginal space, the space where the active Imagination freely manifests its visions and its epics.” Just as, in the previous Recital, Suhrawardī resuscitated the deeds of Qur’ānic prophets through the experience of the narrator, here the deeds of the heroes of the ancient Iranian epic, the Shāh-Nāmeh, are “re-cited” as personally lived events by the pilgrim. Suhrawardī “absolves” the deeds of the ancient Iranian heroes from the past and resuscitates them as his personal history: “in the person of Suhrawardī, in the mystical Recital, the records of the heroes of ancient Iran are accomplished in the present.” The “heroic epic” is thus transmuted into a “mystical epic”: this is a “history that breaks history,” an eschatological history which, in leading the figures of the Shāh-Nāmeh to their true, inner meaning, simultaneously leads the mystical pilgrim “to his real being, to his origin, to his ‘Orient.’”

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117 Corbin, Iran and Philosophy, 164-165. On the notion of hikāyat, see particularly “De l’épopée héroïque à l’épopée mystique,” in Face de Dieu, face de l’homme, 175-243.
118 Corbin, L’Archange empourprè, 279.
119 Corbin, En Islam iranien, II, 211-257.
120 Corbin, Swedenborg and Esoteric Islam, 4-6.
121 Corbin, Iran and Philosophy, 168.
122 Corbin, Face de Dieu, face de l’homme, 214. Cf. “One may conceive that Suhrawardī had read the Shāh-Nāmeh in the same manner that we ourselves read the Bible or that he himself read the Qur’ān, that is, as if it had only been composed ‘for his own case’….the Shāh-Nāmeh could therefore become the history or meta-history of the soul….it is the entire history of the soul and of the world of the soul that Suhrawardī could see even in the framework of the Shāh-Nāmeh, by reading it….in the manner the eminent Proclus could read the history of the mysterious Atlantis as a real history and simultaneously as ‘an image of a certain reality existing in the Whole.’” Corbin, En Islam iranien, II, 212-213.
123 Corbin, Face de Dieu, face de l’homme, 191.
According to Corbin, the text of these recitals can be assimilated to the “phenomenon of the Sacred Book.”\textsuperscript{124} The exegete is confronted with the same hermeneutical situation: understanding the “true meaning” of the text implies a “new birth” in the soul. The success of the exegesis depends on whether or not one succeeds in leading the text or letter of the recital back to the “psychic Event” with which it symbolises. The \textit{ta’wil} of the text will therefore reproduce, will itself also “re-cite,” the \textit{ta’wil} of the soul.\textsuperscript{125} By re-acting, “re-citing,” the events of the narrative, the hermeneutic of the recital becomes itself a voyage of the soul; the exegesis of the text is itself the \textit{exodus} of the soul from the world of exile.\textsuperscript{126} Given this understanding of hermeneutics, the recital can never be “explained” or “deciphered” once and for all. It is truly understood only \textit{each time} the exegete undertakes the spiritual exegesis of the text for oneself.\textsuperscript{127} The exegesis “leads” the text of the recital back to its “literal spiritual truth,” that is, to the consciousness of the recital as of something happening to oneself, for the first time.\textsuperscript{128} This “literal spiritual” meaning is not perceived in the world of common evidence and sensible perception, but in the imaginal world (\textit{sensus litteralis in mundo imaginali}).\textsuperscript{129} As Corbin writes:

The hermeneutic of the mystical recital does not consist in “redescending”—in “bringing back” the events of the recital to the level of [theoretical] evidence. On the contrary, it is the latter that the \textit{ta’wil}, the hermeneutics, “leads” back to the level of the \textit{Malakāt} [or \textit{mundus imaginalis}] where the events of the recital take place.\textsuperscript{130}

The literal meaning is saved on the condition that it is \textit{actualised} in the soul of the exegete. “Recite the Qur’ān as if it had been revealed for your own case,” Suhrawardī instructs.\textsuperscript{131} That is, one must read Scripture—or, in this case, the recital—as if it were addressing and inviting each person to experience its meaning in one’s own soul. The recital engages as much

\textsuperscript{124} Corbin, \textit{Face de Dieu, face de l’homme}, 177.
\textsuperscript{125} Corbin, \textit{Avicenna and the Visionary Recital}, 34.
\textsuperscript{126} Corbin, \textit{Iran and Philosophy}, 160.
\textsuperscript{127} Corbin, \textit{En Islam iranien}, II, 239. Cf. “A symbol is never ‘explained’ once and for all, but must be deciphered over and over again, just as a musical score is never deciphered once and for all, but calls for ever new execution.” Corbin, \textit{Creative Imagination}, 14.
\textsuperscript{128} Corbin, “Traditional Knowledge and Spiritual Renaissance,” 35.
\textsuperscript{129} Corbin, \textit{En Islam iranien}, II, 194.
\textsuperscript{130} Corbin, \textit{En Islam iranien}, II, 191.
\textsuperscript{131} Corbin, \textit{En Islam iranien}, II, 212.
the responsibility of the reader as that of the narrator—understanding the meaning of the text “depends upon how the soul understands itself, upon its refusal or acceptance of a new birth.”¹³² In other words, to understand the recital, one must act it out, experience its events as events of one’s own soul: “no one will understand the Event which the recital wants to say, save the one in whom the Event begins, at least, to happen.”¹³³