

ON MAJESTY AND BEAUTY

*The Kitâb Al-Jalâl Wa-l Jamâl of
Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi*

translated by
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In the Name of Allah, Most Beneficent, Most Merciful
The power and strength are His.

Praise belongs to Allah the Great; His Majesty is part of the manifestation of His Beauty. In His proximity He is the Near, in His loftiness, the Observer. Power, splendour, grandeur, and magnificence are His whose essence is great beyond any resemblance to other essences. His essence is exalted above all motions and stillnesses, all bewilderment and mindfulness. It is too high to be overtaken by any explanation, express or implied, just as it is too great to be limited and described.

It is beyond any physical descent or ascent, any tangible enthronement upon any throne, any haste to seek an object, and – when an object is gained – any satisfaction at reuniting with something that had been missed.

Just so, it is too great to be described in detail or in summary, to be the basis for creeds, to alter with the differences among creeds, to find pleasure or pain in action, or to be qualified with anything but eternity.

It is too great:

- to draw together or be divided.
- for anything that refers to bodies to refer to it.
- for understanding to encompass the core of its reality.
- to be as imagination would describe it.
- to be as wakefulness or dream would seek to perceive it.

It is too great for times and places to hold it, for the permanence of its being to be measured with the passing of months and years, for above and below, right and left, behind and before.

It is too great for denial or confusion to hinder its majesty.

It is too great to be comprehended by intellectual reflection, by the spiritual practices of masters of illumination, by the Knowers' secrets, by the majestic range of leaders' vision – for it is too great to be confined behind veils and curtains, and so cannot be comprehended by anything but its own light.

It is too great:

- either to exist in the shape of a human being or to lose anything by the existence of particular essences.
- either to accept an alien condition belonging to the entities it has created, or to be defined by negative conditions (though it is confirmed by faith).
- either to be the place of manifestations, or to be known as past, present or future time.

It is too great for the senses to rest upon, for doubt and confusion to affect, for likeness and analogy to comprehend, for material classification, or for the intimacy of the man of knowledge.

It is too great to be the third of three in company.

It is great beyond spouse and parents, beyond there being 'a single thing like unto it' (*Ikhlas*)

4), beyond anything preceding its existence, beyond being attributed limbs, hands, fingers, feet, beyond anything else being with it in eternity.

It is great beyond the laughter and joy promised for the repentance of servants, beyond wrath, beyond habitual wonder, beyond alteration of state as it exists among humankind.

So glory be to Him, Mighty in His magnificence, Grand in His splendour. "There is nothing like unto Him, and He is the Hearing, the Seeing." (*Shûrâ* 11)

To proceed:

The matter of *jalal* and *jamal*, the Divine Majesty and the Divine Beauty, has attracted the attention of the witnesses of truth, the Knowers of Allah among the Sufis. Each of them has spoken of these two as was appropriate to his own state. Most, however, have connected the condition of intimacy with Beauty and the condition of awe with Majesty, and things are not as they have said.

Or rather, to a certain extent things are just as they have said – that is, Majesty and Beauty are indeed two attributes of Allah and awe and intimacy two attributes of human beings, and when the souls of the Knowers witness Majesty they feel awe and diminution, while when they witness Beauty they feel intimacy and elation. Because this is so, the Knowers have equated Majesty with Allah's overpowering force and Beauty with His mercy; they came to this decision because of what they experienced in themselves.

I wish, if Allah so wills, to clarify the realities of the two to the extent that Allah enables me to explain them.

I say, first, that Allah's Majesty is a relation that proceeds from Him to Him, and He has prevented us from true knowledge of it. Beauty, though, is a relation that proceeds from Him to us, and it is this which grants us any knowledge we may possess of Him, as well as all revelations, contemplations, and spiritual states. Among us, it has two modalities: awe and intimacy. That is because this Beauty has an exalted aspect and a related aspect. The exalted aspect is called the Majesty of Beauty, and it is this of which the Knowers speak and which appears to them, though they believe that they are speaking of the first Majesty we mentioned.

For us, this Majesty of Beauty has been linked to the state of intimacy, and the closer, related aspect of Beauty has been linked to the state of awe.

When the Majesty of Beauty manifests to us, we are drawn intimately close. Were it not for this, we would be destroyed, for nothing can continue to exist in the face of Majesty and awe together. Thus Majesty in Him is countered by intimacy in us so that we may keep our balance in contemplation and maintain a mental awareness of what we see, rather than falling into distracted terror.

When Beauty manifests to us here – and Beauty is the welcoming openness of the Truth towards us while Majesty is its unattainable exaltation over us – then His expansiveness in His Beauty is countered by our state of awe. For were one expansiveness to be met with another it would lead to unacceptable behaviour, and unacceptable behaviour in the Divine Presence is the cause of expulsion and alienation. On account of this, one of the witnesses of truth who knew its importance said, "Seat yourself upon the prayer-mat (*bisât*) and beware of presumption (*inbisât*)."

Allah's Majesty acting upon us prevents us from unacceptable behaviour in the Divine Presence, as likewise does our awe at His Beauty and expansiveness toward us.

Therefore, what has been spiritually disclosed to our colleagues is sound. It is their judgment – that Majesty in itself closes and diminishes them and that Beauty in itself opens and expands them – that is in error. So long as the divine disclosure is sound, the rest is inconsequential, but Majesty and Beauty, in their essences, are as we have described them.

Know that the Qur'an encompasses Beauty and the Majesty of Beauty. As for Absolute

Majesty, no created being possesses any means of entering into it or bearing witness to it. The Truth has singled it out for Himself. It is the presence in which the Truth sees Himself as He is. Were we to have a means of entering into this, we would possess a comprehensive knowledge of Allah and all that is with Him, and that is impossible.

And know, brother, that since Allah Most High possesses two realities and has described Himself with two Hands¹ and knows us as two "handfuls," the whole of existence has carried out this rule:

There is nothing in existence that does not contain its compensatory opposite.

Out of all this counterposition, we are here especially concerned with what pertains to the Divine Majesty and the Divine Beauty (and I mean by Majesty here the Majesty of Beauty, as mentioned above).

No divine saying related through transmitters from Allah Most High contains anything indicative of Majesty without its being accompanied by something of Beauty to counter it. It is the same way in all revealed scriptures, and in everything.

For example, whenever there is a verse in the Qur'an that speaks of mercy, it has a sister that speaks of retribution to balance it. Thus His calling Himself "Forgiver of sins, Acceptor of repentance" is countered by His calling Himself "Terrible in retribution" (*Mu'min* 3). His saying "Inform My servants that I am All-Forgiving, Most Merciful..." is countered by "...and that My punishment is the painful punishment." (*Hijr* 49-50) His saying, "The Companions of the Right, how happy are the Companions of the Right! amid thornless lote-trees..." as the verses run (*Wâqi'ah* 27-28), is countered by "The Companions of the Left, how wretched are the Companions of the Left! In hot wind and boiling water..." and so forth (*Wâqi'ah* 41-42). "Faces that day will be radiant" (*Qiyâmah* 22) is balanced by "Faces that day will be gloomy" (*Qiyâmah* 24), "On the day when (some) faces will turn white" is balanced by "...and (some) faces will turn black" (*Al 'Imrân* 106). "(Some) faces that day will be downcast, labouring, toiling" (*Ghashiyah* 2-3) is balanced by "(Some) faces that day will be happy and well-pleased because of their striving" (*Ghashiyah* 8-9). "(Many) faces that day will bright, laughing, joyous" (*Abasa* 38-39) is balanced by "(Many) faces that day will have dust upon them, darkness will cover them" (*Abasa* 40-41).

If you follow this strand through the Qur'an you will find that all the verses of this type follow this pattern. And it is all for the sake of the two divine watchers [the recording angels of good and bad deeds²] mentioned in His sayings (*Banî Isrâ'îl* 20):

All do We aid, those [who seek this world]
as well as these [who seek the eternal]...

and (*Shams* 8):

He reveals to it its way of evil and its way of good

and his saying about the truthful giver (*Layl* 7):

We facilitate for him the way to ease

¹ *Sâd* 75: "What prevents thee [Satan] from prostrating to one [Adam] whom I have created with My Two Hands?" *Mâ'idah* 64: "...both His hands are spread out, He expends as He pleases The two Hands are often held to be mercy and wrath, or Majesty and Beauty.

² These watchers are mentioned explicitly in *Qâf* 17-18: "When the two receivers receive, sitting on the right and the left. He utters not a word but there is by him a watcher at hand."

which He balances with His saying about the lying miser (*Layl* 10):

We facilitate for him the way to distress
So know.

The verses on the Divine Majesty and Beauty are also arranged like this in the Book of Allah. I would like to mention a few of them and discuss them by means of *ishârât*, hints or indications of what the attentive understanding might grasp in pursuit of these meanings, hallowed as they are above human unclarity and animal lusts. May Allah aid us by protecting us from sin and error in word and action. By His Might. Amin.

We will use the word "hints" instead of "section" or "chapter" and begin with a verse of Majesty, following it with its corresponding verse of Beauty, and then proceed to another verse of Majesty and so on, God willing. It may be that one verse will have two aspects – an aspect of Majesty and an aspect of Beauty. If so, God willing we will cite both its sources, in Majesty and in Beauty, because it contains the whole counterposition.

HINTS OF MAJESTY

Allah Most High said (*Shûrâ* 11),

laysa ka-mithlilihi shay'un
Nothing is like unto Him...

This verse contains its compensatory opposite. It is also countered as a whole by His saying (*Shûrâ* 11):

wa huwa as-samî' ul-basîr
and He is the Hearing, the Seeing.

and by the Tradition of the Prophet (peace be upon him):

Allah created Adam according to His form.³

So know, you who are drowned in the sea of contemplation, that in the reading from Majesty, the likeness referred to in *laysa ka-mithlilihi shay'un* is literal likeness. In the reading from Beauty, it is figurative likeness.

[According to Majesty], this verse denies any equivalence [between Creator and created] based on a sharing of essential properties. There are grand oceans here. For instance, [if two things are equivalent,] the equivalence is not dictated by the perfection of both of them, or their [corresponding] virtues, or anything else: it is only as far as essential properties are concerned that they can be each other's equivalents. As far as other attributes are concerned, they may either resemble or contradict each other, [indifferently].

Thus, two men share in one essential property: though one of them is weak, incapable, ignorant, deaf, dumb and blind, while the other is strong, capable, knowledgeable, and able to hear, speak, and see, they are united by a single definition: for example, that they are mortal rational animals. (Since that is so, it is indicative, so understand.)

³ Hadith recorded in: Ibn Hanbâl, 11:244, 251, 310, 323, 434, 519; Bukharî, *Isti'dhân* 1; Muslim, Barr 115, Jannah 28.

Thus also, there may be a sharing and equivalence of [primary] attributes that does not result in "likeness." The reality of a thing indeed derives from its essential properties, but they are multiple. Another thing may share in some of them without the first thing being "like unto" the other thing in all respects. For instance, the definition "animal" is applied to human beings and brute beasts, but a person is not "the like of," a horse, because one of the conditions of likeness is the sharing of all essential properties, and that cannot occur except in two individuals of the same sort.

The kind of likeness here described is called literal or "intelligible" (*'aqliyyah*). Let us define it as perfect and total equivalence. There is also partial equivalence, which arises when there is sharing of some essential properties. Here likeness exists to the extent of sharing; after that point disjunction occurs.

The realities refuse to accept an equivalence based on secondary, incidental attributes: they do not belong to the reality of the essence to which they are attributed, but are like accidents, even if they are fixed and their nonexistence is inconceivable. In such a case the equivalence could only be drawn between two attributes, not between the two entities in which the two comparable attributes subsist. For instance, one could propose that two "knowers" are equivalent, conceptually or actually, but if they are [genuinely] equivalent it will be for some other reason [than "knowing"].

Secondary attributes take identity from the individuality of that in which they subsist. Their identity is dependent, just as [in philosophy] the place proper to a contingent event depends upon the space occupied by its substrate and is to the extent of its substrate, because the contingent event is sited [in the substrate].

All this indicates that there is no sharing of essential attributes between us and the Creator, whether total or partial. On account of this, from the perspective of the realities, "likeness" between us and Him is denied. Do not deceive yourself that He describes you as He describes Himself – as knowing, willing, and so forth. The brute beasts are described as hearing, seeing, and willing as well. So understand that.

Beauty. The selfsame verse, His saying:

laysa ka-mithlilihi shay'un
Nothing is like unto Him.

is [according to Beauty,] a figurative, "verbal" (*lughawiyyah*) likening, as when people say "Zayd is like a lion." Here the *ka* has the sense of a preposition [meaning "as," instead of being read as part of the compound word *ka-mithlilihi*. The verse then reads:

Nothing is like His likeness.

With this the Truth descends in the station of openness and the attribute of Beauty upon the hearts of the Knowers. In this reading Allah denies that He has made them resemble anything else in His whole creation – just as, in His Majesty, He denies that the creation resembles Him.

In this reading He gives word of the superiority of the human being over all creatures and all else in existence. So the reality of the human being is not bound to one estate. Allah has assured him of the attributes of completeness and perfection, made him overflow with His grace, and given into his possession the keys of the Divine Names. From this figurative likening [of the human and the divine] humanity derives its stewardship of the Creation. By it the two worlds are supported. By it the spirits are subdued; of it Allah spoke (*Jâthiyah* 13):

And He has made subservient to you whatsoever is in the heavens

and whatsoever is in the earth, altogether, from Himself.

This reading points to a divine expansiveness. At the moment in which this expansiveness manifests in the heart of the witness of truth, his state takes on the sense of the preceding reading from Majesty, just as when the Majesty of the verse manifests in his heart, his state immediately takes on the sense of the verse's Beauty. This is the way things are in every manifestation, as we have shown.

The reading from Majesty conforms to obligation and denies similitudes and equivalents [to Allah]; the reading from Beauty conforms to ecstasy and denies [only] equivalents. So Majesty affirms the holiness of the Truth, while Beauty affirms the exalted rank of the servant.

Again, when He says, concerning the realities of His Majesty,

Nothing is like unto Him.

a counterbalance is to be found in the realities of His Divinity. For after this statement its opposite arises: the descent of the Truth to the station of likening with:

[He is] the Hearing, the Seeing.

So understand this hint. The servant, with his own personal attributes, continues to exist only because Allah Himself continues to exist. Even when the servant is invested with attributes of perfection as fixed by divine lordship's appearance in human servanthood, and is preserved by Allah's active continuance of him, this remains the case.

Therefore the one who (through Allah's continuing in Himself) is a witness of truth, is bedazzled: he is engaged in unbroken contemplation, for he is present with the fundamental counterbalance (*taqâbul*). And the one who (through Allah's continuation of his personal being) is not a witness of truth, is also bedazzled: he is veiled by amazement, for he is with Allah, acting upon the universe, by way of His "likening" (*tamâthul*). This is the state of the people of Paradise, who, in Paradise, [with the divine prerogative] will say to a thing they wish "Be," and it will become.⁴

So the witness of truth sees that the coming into existence of the wished-for thing proceeds from the essence of the word uttered and not from the uttering itself. The one who is not a witness of truth sees the thing come to be from the uttering itself, because it happens through him. Both join in denying that the power comes from themselves – so understand.

HINTS OF MAJESTY

Allah Most High said (An'am 103):

lâ tudrikuhu al-absâr
Vision comprehends Him not.

This contains its own contrary.

⁴ 'Abdul-Karim al-Jili cited this report thus: ... it was reported that God sends to the people of the Garden a message with the following contents (and God knows best): "A letter from the Life Everlasting to the Life Everlasting. I say to a thing 'Be,' and it is, and I have made you to say to a thing 'Be,' and it is" – and they do not say to a thing "Be" except that it is. (Ibn 'Arabi, *Journey to the Lord of Power*, p.80). In the Qur'an (*Hâ Mîm Sajdah* 31): "...[In Paradise] you shall have whatever you ask for."

The Prophet (peace be upon him) was asked, "Did you see your Lord?" and replied, "He is a light. How should I see Him? The Veil of Power was still lowered; it is never raised. He is too great for the eyes to pronounce upon Him."⁵ Thus in their contemplation of Him the eyes are in the station of bewilderment and inability, and their vision is not their own. As the Truthful One [Hadrat Abu Bakr] has said, "The inability to attain perception is itself perception."⁶

Hint. The eyes do not perceive the air, because they are immersed in it. Whoever has something in his fist does not perceive that thing.

Hint. The eye wishes to perceive the colour of water, but the contents of the glass are overwhelmingly clear. The eye does not perceive this colour – for if it did, it would limit it – because water resembles vision in clarity. Perception does not perceive itself, for it is within itself while it perceives the water. This is vision envisioned.⁷

Hint. When the eye looks at an object with a polished surface and sees a form in it, its perception of the form is identical with its perception of the polished body. If it strove to discriminate what corresponds to the form in the mirror from the mirror, it would be unable to do so. The mirror cannot be grasped. If you inquire of the eye what it saw, it cannot reply "I saw the mirror," because the mirror is ungraspable and nothing can pronounce upon it. (If someone says this anyway, he is ignorant and has no real understanding in his observation. But if he says, "I saw..." and then gives a report of the form or forms that he saw, he has told the truth.)

These things are exempt from the eye's comprehension despite the fact that they are created so understand – but the eye may perceive them without grasping them. Their assimilation to the forms (reflected within them] is of the essence: the mirror may never be disjoined from the reflected form in the vision of any seer. Such is your own vision, so confirm for yourself what we have said.

Know that Allah Most High is not to be encompassed by any eye or any intellect. Yet stupid speculation measures and defines Him, and weak imagination assigns him form and likeness. Sometimes intelligent people, after having found Him to be free of whatever they imagined and speculated about Him, have afterwards fallen back under the power of imagination and have pronounced upon Him indirectly. It is as Allah has said (*A'raf* 200):

When a visitation from the Devil afflicts them,
they remember, then lo! they see.

That is, they return to the sound proof intellect has given them that Allah is beyond all this.

Beauty. The Beauty corresponding to this Majesty is in His saying (*Qiyâmah* 22-23):

wujûhun yawmâ'idhin nâdiratun ilâ rabbiha nazirah
Faces that day will be radiant, looking upon their Lord.

Allah – glory to Him here opens Himself to us in His Beauty so that we might perceive Him with our eyes, looking upon Him. To this also points the tradition of the Prophet (peace be upon him):

⁵ This report is extremely similar to that in Muslim, Imân 341-2.

⁶ Cited in Abû Nasr al-Sarrâj, *Kitâb al-lumâ'*, ed. R.A. Nicholson, 1914, p.36 [Arabic text].

⁷ This Hint draws on Hadrat Junayd's saying on the relation of the knowledge of Allah to the Knower of Allah – "The colour of the water is the colour of the vessel." (Cited in 'Abdul-Karîm Qushayrî, *Risâlah*, "Ma'rifah.")

You will see your Lord, on the Resurrection Day, as you see the moon on the night when it is full, or as you see the sun at noon in a cloudless sky, and you will not be harmed by your vision of Him.⁸

And also what Allah Most High has said about the denizens of Hell (*Tatff* 15):

That day they will be veiled from their Lord.

Now in the Arabic language the verb *nazara*, to look, when accompanied by the preposition *ilâ* can only mean to look upon, with the eyes. It is when followed by *fi* that it means to look into, mentally and intellectually, and when followed by *li* that it means to look after, with compassion; other prepositions lead it to signify encounter, struggle, or delay. Also, the eyes are one of the attributes of the face, while the intellect is not. Consequently the looking mentioned in this verse must be the vision of the eyes.

Allah's saying (*A'raf* 143):

You cannot see Me.

to Moses (peace be upon him) was a decision relevant to a state that may be known from Moses's request [to see his Lord]. We shall not attempt to discuss that here. Yet Allah did make [His vision] lawful to the mountain, which shattered to atoms, while Moses fell into a swoon.⁹

Now, perception does not faint. A particular constitution is not one of its requirements (nor was it a requirement here) – its only requirement is something to subsist in, because it is an intangible. Fainting, though, exists by virtue of a heavy and dense constitution.

When Moses recovered, he glorified Allah. There would be no point to his giving praise when he arose from this state unless he had been granted some sort of contemplation. Next, realization led him to repentance for the conditions imposed by his constitution. Then he avowed that he was (*A'raf* 143):

the first of those who believe

in what he had seen in that swoon, for faith does not take shape without vision, in whatever realm it may be.¹⁰

⁸ Bukharî, *Bad' al-khalq* 7, *Anbiya'* 1; Muslim, *Imân* 380-383, *Jannah* 14-17; *Tirmidhi Qiyâmah* 60, *Jannah* 7; *Ibn Mâjah*, *Zuhd* 39; *Darîmî*, *Riqâq* 12; *Ibn Hanbal*, II:230, 232, 254, 257, 316, 359, 473, 502, 504, 507; III:16; VI:355.

⁹ The whole episode is told in *A'raf* 143: And when Moses came at Our appointed time and His Lord spoke to him, he said: "My Lord, make me see, that I may look upon You." He said: "You cannot see Me, but look at the mountain: if it stays firmly in its place, then you will see Me." So when His Lord manifested Himself to the mountain, it crumbled, and Moses fell down in a swoon. Then when he awakened he said, "Glory to You, I have returned to You, and I am the first of those who believe."

¹⁰ In Chapter 367 of the *Futûhât* (translated by James Morris, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 108:1) Hadrat Ibn 'Arabi reports a visionary conversation with Moses about this event. The Shaykh asks Moses (peace be upon him):

"[How is it that] you requested the vision of God, while the Messenger of God said that 'not one of you will see his Lord until he dies?'"

So he said: "And it was just like that: when I asked Him for the vision, He answered me, so that I fell down stunned. Then I saw Him in my (state of) being stunned."

Concerning this, the Prophet (peace be upon him) asked Harithah, "What is the reality of your faith?"

He replied, "It is as if I am looking upon the Throne of my Lord distinctly..." as the tradition goes.¹¹ He confirmed seeing, in whatever realm, and for that reason the reality of his faith was sound. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) allowed that in this case Harithah possessed true realization and something more: validated faith. For there is no point to faith in the unseen except its connection to vision. Of this there is no doubt.

[As the "first of those who believe"], Moses was, in some sense, the first to see Allah with his eyes. This degree may refer to either a state of experience or to a station of being. If he spoke from his station, Moses was indeed the first person to perceive Allah [continuously]. If he spoke from his state, it may be that others had seen Him, but the rank of "firstness" is reserved for the state of Moses by the perfection of the episode [rather than by historical precedence]. This usage is often found.

If, in contemplation, the Truth opens you to this verse, be content that:

Vision comprehends Him not.

If not, you are ruined, as I have told you. So beware of presumption: indeed, let awe be with you constantly, and it will protect you. So know – and Allah, glory to Him, is the Guide.

HINTS OF MAJESTY

Allah Most High said (*Jinn* 28):

wa ahsâ kulla shay'in 'adadan
And He counts the number of everything.

This is a hint of the comprehensive divine knowledge of all of the names of existing things, whether they existed in the past, exist at present, or will come to exist in the future. This verse applies particularly to actual being that is, was, or will be. It is a connection more specific than that given in His saying (*Talaq* 12):

ahâta bi-kulli shay'in 'ilman
He encompasses all things in knowledge.

I said: "While (you were) dead?"

He said: "While (I was) dead."

He said, "...So I did not see God until I had died. It was then that I awakened, so that I knew Whom I saw. And it was because of that that I said, I have returned to You, since I did not return to anyone but Him." ... He said, "I was seeing Him (all along), and yet I didn't used to know that it was Him! But when my 'dwelling' was changed and I saw Him, then I knew Whom I saw. Therefore when I 'awoke' I was no longer veiled, and my vision went on accompanying me throughout all eternity." (pp. 64-66)

¹¹ The text of this hadith is as follows: It is related from al-Hârith ibn Malik al-Ansâri that he passed by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), who asked him, "How are you, Hârithah?" "I am truly a believer," he replied. "I see what you say," the Prophet told him, "but for every saying there is a reality. What is the reality of your faith?"

Hârithah said, "I have withdrawn myself from this world. My nights are vigils and my days are fasts, and it is as if I am looking upon the Throne of my Lord distinctly. It is as if I am looking upon the people of Paradise visiting each other in Paradise. It is as if I am looking upon the people of Hell spiting each other in Hell." the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "O Hârithah, you have realized, now persevere!"

This hadith is traced in Su'ad al-Hakim's *al-Mu'jam al-Sûfi* (Beirut: 1981, pp. 1264-5).

– which means all necessary, all possible, and all impossible things.

(While some theologians will not apply the term "thing" to anything but an actual entity, this need not concern us. Allah certainly encompasses all things in knowledge and He certainly knows the impossible, and if those who prefer such terminology restrict the "encompassing knowledge" of this verse to actually existing entities, they have no proof for it except their own usage.)

Here "all-encompassing knowledge" has a general meaning, while "counting the number" demands finiteness in the thing that is counted. "All-encompassing knowledge" is then particularly an expression for the connection between knowledge and its infinite objects.

While it may be that the significance of "to count" in this verse is largely identical with that of "to encompass," the meanings are not the same in the case of future events. These are infinite [and yet are "counted"] as we have said. For while the things Allah wills are infinite, He knows more than He wills, and what He knows is not the same as what He wills. [The larger infinity of knowledge] is not "counted" because it cannot be; the count would have to include counting itself. And the impossible is not quantified at all, so that "counting" might be applied to it. Only knowledge can comprehend it: that is, that it is a property of Allah's knowledge of things in all aspects.

Since the Truth "counts the number of everything," you are among the things that are counted, and His protection and observation of you follow. When a contemplation ascends from this verse to Him, it wanders lost in the majesty of the Truth, amazed with inspirations, glimpses, flashes, fragrances, and significances of the divine, and all that proceeds in it and from it.

So when this contemplation has become real for you, the Truth opens the verse I shall mention next, which concerns the Beauty of this Majesty. And then together with what intimacy you desire there, He manifests Himself in the Majesty of this verse, which amazes and overwhelms the contemplator. So understand.

Beauty. Allah Most High said (*Saffât* 147):

wa arsalnâhu ilâ mi'ati alfin aw yazîdûn
We have sent it to a hundred thousand or more.

This verse came with the word "or", which pertains to uncertainty, and that is impossible for Allah Most High.

When the Truth descended in His Beauty in this verse, it was in expansiveness toward us. Uncertainty is our characteristic, so [the use of "or"] establishes a type of relationship to the servant. If the servant is ignorant, he will assimilate his Lord to himself and qualify Him with uncertainty, and so fall into error. If he is a confirmer of truth, he will flee to the divine saying:

And He counts the number of everything.

and hold to that secret, and connect this uncertainty to the habitual human way of seeing things, according to the customary mode of expression among the Arabs for the general idea of "many." Uncertainty pertains to the creature, despite his wanting to count exact numbers and, from another perspective, his wanting to declare himself as free of limitation as he has declared his Maker.

So let the reader take this verse as intending the general idea of "many" and not as specifying a number. Although numbers are not absent from the verse, still the Speaker's

intention here is not to signify some particular number; the intention is to signify multitude. This sort of phraseology was in use among those to whom Allah sent His Message, and when they employed it they certainly did not intend that one should insist on some precise number.

And when the servant has borne witness to the intention of multitude here, he will discover the precise enumeration of all that he has known from the moment he came into existence until his present moment, and of what will come to be, without end!

(Actually, some theological scholars disagree with us about whether knowledge can attach to two or more [simultaneous] objects. Some of them hold that this is impossible. Those who allow it include Imam Abû 'Amr al-Silâfî [may Allah be pleased with him], who did not disagree with us on this question. As for the statement of al-Isfara'îni [Abû Ishâq] that the heart can bear no more than one knowledge at a time, it may be that he was hinting at our position. Within the framework of that statement are knowledge, the principles of action that take shape from knowledge, and its mastery, as well as an intimation of [what we have said].

As far as we are concerned, our discourse is only with the masters of realities and secrets among the people of Allah Most High. We have sought to make a connection to some of the sayings of formal scholars in order to set at ease hearts that are straying from this Way with regard to these realities. So know that. Allah speaks the truth and He it is that shows the way.)

HINTS OF MAJESTY

Allah Most High said (*Baqarah* 163; also *Kahf* 110, *Anbiyaâ* 108, *Hajj* 34, *Hâ Mîm Sajdah* 5):

ilâhukum ilâhun wâhidun
Your god is One God.

This also contains its own counterbalancing opposite. It is a statement applying to everything deified and worshipped.

Hint. This is a secret of Allah's Divinity. If it were not for what every worshipper finds in the object of his worship – that is, in his act of worshipping that object – he would not worship it. If [idol-worshippers] were to draw strength from the unequivocalness of this statement, they would say that when Allah the Misleader misleads, He leads astray the relations between Divinity and the one who has no god, while [the idol-worshipper] is merely the servant of a particular object of worship, the secret of whose divinity itself belongs to Allah Most High. That is the soul of His saying (*Baqarah* 163):

Your god is One God: there is no god but He.

So the statement affirms the essential form of a thing rejected in actual practice. People only adopt these [idols] because of the relationship with the divine that they establish by carving them, raising them up, installing them, and submitting their needs to them. So understand that: it is a remarkable secret.

Hint. The partner, which has no being, is denied: therefore nothing is denied. The partner is a postulate, not an existent; postulates are ascriptions, and ascriptions have no reality. The denial of partners to Allah is the affirmation of Divine Singularity (*al-wahdâniyyah*). Affirming Singularity finally comes down to existence, while denying partners finally comes down to nonexistence. So understand.

Hint. Allah's Singularity manifests in the Divine enthronement upon the human throne. This is in contrast to the Beneficent enthronement: The Divine enthronement is at the centre

of the circle, according to His saying:

My earth and My heavens do not contain me,
but the heart of My believing servant contains Me.¹²

while the Beneficent enthronement encompasses the circle, according to His saying (Tâ Hâ 5):

The Beneficent is established upon the Throne.

The Throne of the Universe in the Beneficent enthronement has the dignity of the Truth for the human enthronement, while the human heart in the Divine enthronement has the dignity of the Truth for the Beneficent enthronement.

When the Singularity manifests, the contemplator beholds nothing except himself. Whether he has developed to the stage of his own singularity or is at some other stage, it is the same. If he is at the stage of his own singularity, he is in the position of multiplying unity by unity, which can only produce unity. Thus in arithmetic (by way of metaphor and approximation), if you multiply one by one, the result will be one. And if the contemplator is in a stage other than that of singularity, he is in the position of someone who multiplies one by two: he produces nothing but two. This is the case with all numbers similarly treated: If you multiply one by fifteen, the result is fifteen; if you multiply one by 155, your result will be that by which you multiplied the unity, namely 155. So know that.

Beauty. As for the Beauty corresponding to this Majesty, the Most High said (*Banî Isrâ'îl* 110):

*qul id'û Llâha aw id'ûr-Rahmâna
ayyamâ tad'u fa-lahul-asmâ' ul-husnâ.*

Say: Call upon Allah or call upon the Beneficent:
whichever you call upon, His are the Most Beautiful Names.

The Truth here descends in His Beauty, in expansiveness toward us, with His Beneficence. It is in this name, the Beneficent, that He is established upon the Throne of the Universe. This is the general divine knowledge to which the Knowers of Allah ultimately attain and in which the witnesses of truth are opened and expanded, while the corresponding Majesty closes and contracts them – that is:

Your god is One God.

Where the name "Allah" gathers together all things whatsoever, the name "The Beneficent" gathers together all the realities of the universe and what it contains. From this derives the expression *rahmân ad-dunyâ wal-âkhirah*, "Most Beneficent of this world and the Next," and because of this people are told:

Say: Call upon Allah or call upon the Beneficent:
whichever you call upon, His are the Most Beautiful Names.

People's supplication is only that which connects them to what benefits them, according to

¹² Hadith cited in Ghazali's *Ihya' 'ulum al-dîn*, 15:3 (Hakim 1265-6).

the extent of their knowledge of God. If a prayer is in the name of the Beneficent, that name includes all of the Beautiful Names except "Allah." His are the Most Beautiful Names, The Beneficent, and all that the name "Allah" contains. When you call upon Allah, you are only calling out of Him the Beneficent in particular, while you are calling out of the Beneficent that Name from which you seek the real object of your prayer. Thus the drowning man calls, "O Saviour!" the hungry man, "O Provider!" the sinner, "O All-Forgiving! O Most-Forgiving!" So it is for all of the Names. So understand what we have pointed out to you: It is a great and profitable door.

HINTS OF MAJESTY

Allah Most High said (*Anbiyâ' 23*):

lâ yus'alu 'an ma yaf'alu

He cannot be questioned about what He does...

This verse is connected to irresistible force, the plane of Allah's transcendent power, and the establishment of divine sovereignty over the world. When these attributes become fixed in the servant's heart, it is impossible for him to seek the reason for an occurrence or to raise any objection to it.

Hint. Someone who knows what is within himself does not question himself unless a questioner is appointed for him who undertakes to ask, and so the question arises. Since that is the case,

He cannot be questioned about what He does

because [the questioner, the questioned, and the point of the question are] none other than Allah, His attributes, and His actions. This significance is answered in the reminder of the verse, where He says (*Anbiya' 23*):

wa hum yus 'alûn

...but they will be questioned.

The reality here is single and of a piece. Allah is the one who questions them about His action upon them and what has manifested through them, and they cannot answer except by His action in them. So understand: I have intended to be brief for the sake of people who understand hints.

Beauty. The Beauty corresponding to this verse is His saying (*Nisâ' 77*):

limâ katabta alaynal-qitâl

Why did you ordain fighting for us?

He here descends in His Beauty in expansiveness towards us, so we are enabled to voice a question. The Beauty of this verse is our boldness in our absence of knowledge of the Majesty at that moment.

When such a question arises, the servant must join it with His saying:

He cannot be questioned about what He does.

Hint. For this construction to follow upon the other presents difficulties only for someone who must labour and struggle to fulfil [the questioned order]. By contrast, both [a thing's] creation and its nonexistence are the same to someone who accepts a divine order spontaneously. If a person has done this, he cannot be called other than wise.

Hint. Part of wisdom is to put things in their proper places, and one of its aspects is to restore forms to what the realm they occupy requires. The realm of this world is not like the realm of the Next. It is not necessary that the way things take shape in this world should be the way they take shape in the next. Indeed, the Prophet of Allah (peace be upon him) has spoken of the joy, graciousness, beauty and harmony of the blessed, and of the opposite situation of the damned, while this world is a turbid and mutable confusion, and its mode of life sick, meagre, and gloomy. Of necessity, one must leave it, and so of necessity the level of things must change. Since [the people who asked the question here discussed] realized this, they said what is in the remainder of the verse (*Nisâ' 77*):

lawlâ akhartanâ ilâ ajalîn qarib
Why did You not put it off for us for a little while?

because a change in the level of things was inevitable [and the order to fight would adopt some other aspect in the Next World].

Hint.

Why did you ordain fighting for us?

To fight means to search for knowledge of Allah by means of reflection and the rejection of obscuring imaginations, and to search for contemplative vision through struggle and suffering. All of this was part of the expansiveness of the Truth towards these people. They were sentenced to presumption, and so they behaved badly, and not as witnesses of truth.

HINTS OF MAJESTY

Allah Most High said (*Nisâ' 48*, 116):

inna Llâhu la yaghfiru 'an yushraka bihi
Allah does not forgive that partners be ascribed to Him.

The circle of *lâ ilâha illâ Llâh* – "there is no god but Allah" – encompasses all who testify to the Unity, and none of them shall remain eternally in Hellfire. The real authority of this testimony, however, manifests only in those people who possess no other virtue. Nothing but the Most Merciful of the Merciful in particular will intercede for them. The intercession of that which is other than Allah is only for people who possess *an atom's weight* of good (*zuzal 7*) other than the Testimony of Unity.¹³

¹³ The long hadith in Muslim, *Iman* 352, describes a series of intercessions removing from Hellfire a series of groups of people whose hearts possess smaller and smaller quantities of good. The section concludes: Then Allah Exalted and Great will say: "The angels have interceded, the apostles have interceded, and the believers have interceded, and no one remains (to grant pardon) but the Most Merciful of the Merciful." He will then take a handful of fire and bring out from it people who never did any good and who had been turned into charcoal, and will cast them into a river called the river of life, on the outskirts of Paradise. They will come out as a seed comes out from the silt carried by flood....

The inhabitants of Paradise will recognize them: "These are they who have been set free by the Compassionate One, Who has admitted them into Paradise without any deed that they did or any good that they

Our object, God willing, is to be recorded solely and especially as belonging to *lâ ilâha illâ Llâh* and its people. But the majesty of *lâ ilâha illâ Llâh* is difficult to approach, for it requires that a person rely upon nothing other than this principle, and that is difficult. This greatest of majesties, [the majesty of Unity], opens people to the play of the mystery of divinity as it acts universally in all entities – from the lowest to the highest – that may be served or worshipped. But if people stop at this, they expand into presumption in the matter of intermediate causes, [holding them to be divine]. They then discover what they have created for Him and what He has created for them. So understand that.

Beauty.

inna Llâha yaghfir udh-dhunûba jamî'an
Allah forgives the sins altogether. (*Zumar* 53)

but the ascription of partners to Him is one of the sins, and it is not forgiven. The Truth descends in His Beauty in openness toward us and causes us to see the play of the mystery of divinity in all objects of worship. Consequently, people presume to the extent of attributing partners to Him. Then the Majesty of His saying:

Allah does not forgive that partners be ascribed to Him

chastens them and draws them back.

When they conceal this within themselves so that they show forth the opposite response, Allah conceals the opposition to Him that may arise from them, as a reward for their concealing this in their hearts.

In concealing [their sins] He divides them into two groups. One group He hides from others. Another group He hides from themselves, since He hides them from the origin of the suffering. If you observe, when they enter Hellfire because Allah makes them die in it, that testimony of Unity which they concealed in their hearts itself protectively hides the heart, the site of suffering – or if you will, the origin of suffering.

This is a prodigious hint whose Beauty expands hearts, and whose gentleness and graciousness bequeath boldness.

Hint. When they do not conceal Him, He does not conceal them in any realm, but exposes them for all to see.

Hint. The name "Allah," in the verse we are examining, takes on the sense of *al-Ghaffâr*, the Coverer, the Forgiver, but only because it has come together with the Name *al-Jâmi'*, the Gatherer, present in His saying ["Allah forgives the sins.."] "altogether," *jamî'an*. The

Name *al-Ghaffâr* does not possess in itself the station of synthesis, *jam'*, and so "Allah" was used.

sent in advance."

Then He will say: "Enter My Paradise; whatever you see is yours."

They will say: "O Lord, You have bestowed upon us what You did not bestow upon anyone else in the world...."

In *Iman* 377 the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) speaks of his own repeated intercession for the faithful, down to those with the tiniest particle of good works. Finally, he says:

"O my Lord, permit me regarding him who professed "There is no god but Allah."

The Lord will say, "That does not lie with you, but by My Honour, Glory, Greatness and Might, I will certainly take out the one who professed "There is no god but Allah.""

The Shaykh includes with these people – saved not for their works, but for the Testimony of Unity alone – those who have surrendered to Unity any self to which works could be attributed.

HINTS OF MAJESTY

Allah Most High has said (*Zumar 67*; also *An'âm 91*, *Hajj 74*):

wa mâ qadarû Llâha haqqa qadrahu
They do not value Allah at His true value.

Despite all the possible objects of knowledge, divine realization is solely concerned with two things. One of these matters is the truth (*haqq*); the other is reality (*haqîqah*). Truth is known with the intellectual powers as a guide, and reality with the powers of direct perception and contemplative vision. There is certainly no third capacity after these two.

Thus when Harithah said, "I am truly (*haqqan*) a believer," his statement arose from the first capacity. His state was supported by the second capacity, but he remained silent about it. So the Prophet (peace be upon him) asked him, "What is the reality (*haqîqah*) of your faith?" because he saw that Harithah possessed that second capacity. When Harithah responded with high perspective, intimate awareness, and direct perception, the Prophet (peace be upon him) told him, "You have realized; now persevere!" To apply the term "realization," *ma'rifah*, to a thing is not entirely appropriate unless it embraces these two realities: *haqq* and *haqîqah*.

Now Allah Most High has informed us that we are incapable of attaining the truth of His value (*haqqa qadrihi*). How then should we reach the reality of His value? "Value" here is nothing other than realization of the glorification proper to the station of divinity. If we are incapable of that, how much more incapable must we be of the realization of His Essence, magnified and exalted as it is to the greatest and highest?

When the witnesses of truth behold this Majesty and are convinced that they cannot value Him at His value despite all the glorification within them, and have blamed themselves for insufficiency, they realize that it is not within the range of temporal creatures to take the measure of the eternal. For that would be dependent upon some sort of real relationship, and there is no relationship in the deserts of bewilderment of this Majesty.

Beauty. The Beauty corresponding to this Majesty is His saying (*Dhâriyât 56*):

wa mâ khalqatûl-jinni wal-insi illâ li-ya'buduni
I have not created jinn and men except to worship Me.

With this the souls of the witnesses of truth are drawn to intimacy, and they aver that Allah would not have assigned them to anything that they were not well able to perform, by His leave. So when they have confirmed that through the expansiveness of this station, the Majesty of:

They do not value Allah at His true value

contracts them and draws them back.

Hint. If you wish to know the limits of the realization sought from you in this verse, then look at what He has created for you and placed under your authority, and find within yourself in what way you want what has been created for your sake to know you. That is exactly the way in which the Truth wants you to know Him, without any addition or subtraction. And if you are not able to do this through your lack of grace, take it from what Allah Most High has revealed in the Torah:

O son of Adam, I have created all things for your sake, and you for My sake. So do not subjugate that which I have created for Me to that which I have created for you!

Hint. When someone who has been created for your sake causes you difficulties, do not blame him. The blame is yours, because it only seeks out the doer of the action which does not please you, and that is none other than Allah, who cannot fitly be blamed: You have observed ignorance and bad behaviour in yourself.

Allah's welcoming openness has ramifications. One of them is that our awe should be brought to bear in the presence of Beauty. For if we do not have this at the time of His expansiveness, then:

They do not value Allah...

at the corresponding Majesty – and if not, we are destroyed.

Advice. When something created for your sake causes you difficulties, look at what you would have wanted from it. Then turn to yourself and examine the relationship between this wish of yours and what your Lord has asked of you. You will find that He has sought that same thing from you, while you have caused difficulty and refused: Thus this related matter has caused you trouble. For when Allah Most High burdens you with any desire concerning that which has been created for you – it is all the same whether it be the likes of you or not – then certainly He has sought that from you, while you have been unaware. If you have obeyed Him in regard to that thing, then it will obey you, and if otherwise, then otherwise. Know that Allah has created humankind for the sake of the true human being. Allah Most High said (*Zukhruf* 32):

And We have exalted some of them over others by degrees, so that
some of them may take others in subjection.

So understand this hint and you will be guided, God willing.

HINTS OF MAJESTY

Allah Most High said (*Taghâbun* 16):

fattaqû Llâha ma istata'tum
So fear Allah as much as you can.

There is no verse in the Book of Allah Most High, or any word in existence, that does not possess three perspectives: Majesty, Beauty, and Perfection. Its Perfection is the knowledge of its essence, of the cause of its existence, and of the object of its station. Its Majesty and Beauty are the knowledge of how it confronts those who confront it with awe, intimacy, contraction, expansion, fear, and hope. Each class has its own proper experience. (In this treatise we have turned to mentioning Majesty in one verse and Beauty in a different one only in order to acquaint the Sufi student with the forms of correlation between dissimilars.) No word possesses a fourth station. In theology, the secret of this appears in the knowledge of the Truth Himself and of His two Hands and "handfuls." So know that.

The witnesses of truth are frightened by the Majesty of this verse. When Allah demands that of which they ought to be capable, He casts them into the sea of distance from Him and appears in His Grandeur. For it is not within the scope of any obligated being to live up to his capacity to fear Allah. Thus the majesty of this inaccessible plain destroys them. But when they are nearly destroyed by the intensity of this Majesty, the Truth opens and expands them and brings them close to Him, and shows them:

Fear Allah with His due fear.

Beauty. Allah Most High said (*Al 'Imrân* 102):

Attaqû Llâha haqqa tuqâtahu

Fear Allah with His due fear...

and He descends upon them in His Beauty, in welcoming openness, when He orders them to fulfil the true requirements of religion (*haqq*), so that they draw close and become serene, and fear for themselves the dangers of elation.¹⁴ So they apply their lower and higher selves to:

So fear Allah as much as you can.

and that verse enables them to preserve the behaviour proper to the Presence.

Hint. Fear Allah through Allah: This is the Prophet's saying (peace be upon him), "I take refuge with You from You."¹⁵ Allah Most High said (*Dukhan* 59):

Taste; you, [the sinner in hellfire] indeed, are the mighty,
the generous!¹⁶

and He said (*Mu'min* 37):

Allah seals every proud, commanding heart.

Hint. "Fear Allah" – His being displeased – "through Allah" – His being pleased.

A general universal hint. Fear Allah the Punisher (*al-Mu'âqib*) by means of Allah the Forgiver (*al-Mu'âfi*).

Whoever is acquainted with the realities of the Divine Names has been given the keys of the sciences, and this amount suffices. The object of my recalling these verses in detail has been to teach the means of entry into this art and the understanding of its approach, for it is a powerful method. May Allah protect us and you from pretence.

Advice. Know, brother, that in the Mighty Qur'an the Truth addresses us in two ways. In some verses He speaks to us to acquaint us with the states of other people and what happened to them, with where we have come from, and with where we are going. That is the first way. Other verses He addresses to us so that we may address them to Him. These are again of two types. Some verses call for us to address Him with actions, as for instance (*Hajj* 78; also *Baqarah* 43, 83, 110; *Nisâ'* 77, *Nur* 56, *Muzammil* 20):

Establish prayer and pay the poor-rate...

¹⁴ The remainder of *Al 'Imrân* 102 runs: "...and do not die unless you are Muslims."

¹⁵ The hadith runs: "O Lord, I take refuge in Your good pleasure from Your wrath and in Your pardons from Your punishments. I take refuge in You from You. I cannot count the praises due You. You are as You praise Yourself." It is related by Muslim, Abû Dawûd, Tirmidhî, Nasâ'i, and Ibn Mâjah. [Hakim 1264]

¹⁶ In these verses divine attributes – *'Azîz*, *Karîm*, *Mutakabbir*, *Jabbâr* – have been arrogated by the servant.

and (*Baqarah* 196):

Accomplish the Pilgrimage and the Visitation...

and so forth. Others call for us to address Him with words, as for instance

Guide us in the straight path... (*Fâtiḥah* 6)

Our Lord, we believe, so forgive us...(Al 'Imrân 16)

Our Lord, do not punish us if we forget or make mistakes... (*Baqarah* 286)

There are many such verses. The Qur'an does not contain any other sort of address than these. It is necessary for you to be mindful of the distinctions in the Word of Allah Most High when you read it. For instance, they recite:

When they meet those who believe

then a pause, then:

they say "We believe"

then a pause, then say:

and when they are alone with their devils they say

pause; then say:

"We are with you; we were only mocking"

pause; then say:

Allah shall mock. (*Baqarah* 14-15)

If you read it in this fashion you will become acquainted with its secrets and distinguish the circumstances of the addresses and the stories of states, sayings, and deeds, and the harmony of things. So know that.

We have made our object clear, so let us draw back upon the reins. May Allah benefit us and you with knowledge and make us His own. And praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.

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