

## Ibn 'Arabi: Spiritual Practice and Other Translations

This volume includes a variety of shorter, partial translations of short treatises by Ibn 'Arabi or selections from his 'Meccan Illuminations', most of which should eventually appear in more complete form in two forthcoming volumes now in preparation: *Ibn 'Arabi's Divine Comedy: an Introduction to Islamic Eschatology*; and *Spiritual Practice and the Spiritual Path: Ibn 'Arabi's Advice for the Seeker*. The first two short excerpts are included because of their special 'autobiographical' nature and relevance to Ibn 'Arabī's own life. The original places of publication for these versions are indicated below.<sup>1</sup>

*Some Dreams of Ibn 'Arabī* (from his *Risālat al-Mubashshirāt*), pp. 1-3 in the Newsletter of the Muhyiddīn Ibn 'Arabī Society (Oxford), Autumn, 1993. [**HERE: pages 1-3**]

*Body of Light: Ibn 'Arabi's Account of His Father's Death*. In Newsletter of the M. Ibn 'Arabi Society, Oxford, Spring 1999, p. 4. [**HERE: pages 1-3**]

*Introducing Ibn 'Arabi's "Book of Spiritual Advice"*. In Journal of the Muhyiddīn Ibn 'Arabī Society, vol. XXVIII (2000), pp. 1-18. [**HERE: pages 1-17**]

Partial new translation (full one to be included in *Spiritual Practice...*) of Ibn 'Arabī's *Book of the Quintessence of What is Indispensable for the Spiritual Seeker*. [**HERE: pages 1-19**]

[= Chapter 63 of the *Futūhāt*] *Spiritual Imagination and the "Liminal" World: Ibn 'Arabi on the Barzakh*. In POSTDATA (Madrid), vol. 15, no. 2 (1995), pp. 42-49 and 104-109 [Spanish] [**HERE: pages 1-14**]

[= Chapter 367 of the *Futūhāt*] *The Spiritual Ascension: Ibn 'Arabi and the Mi'rāj*. In Journal of the American Oriental Society, vol. 107 (1987), pp. 629-652, and vol. 108 (1988), pp. 63-77. [**HERE: pages 1-58**]

[= Chapter 366 of the *Futūhāt*, on 'The Mahdi and His Helpers'] Included in section II, 'At the End of Time', in *Ibn 'Arabī: The Meccan Revelations* (co-author with W. Chittick). New York, Pir Press, 2002. [**HERE: pages 1-42**]

[= A commentary on the fundamental issues raised in Chapter 366 of the *Futūhāt*, with new translations from throughout the *Futūhāt*.] *Ibn 'Arabi's "Esotericism": The Problem of Spiritual Authority*. In Studia Islamica, LXXI (1990), pp. 37-64. [**HERE: pages 1-20**]

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<sup>1</sup> © James W. Morris. These files (except for the 'Book of the Quintessence...') are all *unrevised, pre-publication* versions of articles or translations which have subsequently been published, usually with substantial corrections. If citing or distributing in any format, please include a full reference to the actual corrected publication. Thank you.]

## Some Dreams of Ibn 'Arabi

The following dreams are among the eighteen recorded in the Shaykh's short "Epistle of Good Tidings" (Risâlat. al-Mubashshirât),<sup>1</sup> whose title alludes to a famous hadith where the Prophet explains that these "'good tidings...are the dream of the *muslim*, either what that person sees or what is shown to them, which is one of the parts of prophecy.' ...So I decided to mention in this section some of what I have seen in dreams that involves a benefit for others and points out for them the means for reaching the Good, since there is no need to mention what only concerns myself."

- (When I was young), before I had acquired any religious learning, a group of my companions were strongly urging me to study the 'books of opinions' [Ibn 'Arabi's disparaging term for the books of *fiqh* ('Islamic law'), as opposed to the collections of hadith], at a time when I had no knowledge of them or of hadith. Now in a dream I saw myself as though I were standing in a wide open space, with a group of people all around me with weapons in their hands who wanted to kill me; there was no place of refuge to which I could turn. Then I saw a hill just in front of me, and God's Messenger was standing on it. So I took refuge with him, and he put his own armor on me and hugged me with an extraordinary embrace, saying to me: "O my friend, stick with me, so you will be safely in peace!" Then I looked for those enemies, but I didn't see a single one of them on the face of the earth. So from that time on I've busied myself with studying hadith.

- I saw in a dream that I was at the Sacred Shrine in Mecca, and it was as though the Resurrection had already begun. It was as though I was standing immediately in front of my Lord, with my head bowed in silence and fear of His reproaching me because of my negligence (*tafrîr*). But He was saying to me: "O My servant, don't be afraid, for I am not asking you to do anything except to admonish My servants. So admonish My servants, and I will guide the people (*al-nâs*) to the straight path." Now when I had seen how rare it was for anyone to enter the Path

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<sup>1</sup>Translations based on the text of the *Epistle* included in Yusuf al-Nabhani's Sa'adat al-Darayn fi al-Salat 'ala Sayyid al-Kawnayn (Beirut, n.d.), pp. 472-478 (copy thanks to Prof. Denis Gril). The Epistle is No. 485 in O. Yahya's Histoire et Classification de l'oeuvre d'Ibn 'Arabi (Damascus, 1964), vol. II, p. 394, where it is noted that the work is mentioned in both Ibn 'Arabi's Fihris (no. 71) and his later Ijaza (no. 76). [Subject treated in more detail in chapter 188 of al-Futûhât al-Makkîya, II, 375-380 in Beirut edition.]

of God I had become spiritually lazy. And that night I had resolved only to concern myself with my own soul, to forget about all the other people and their condition. But then I had that dream, and the very next morning I sat down among the people and began to explain to them the clear Path and the various evils blocking the Path for each group of them, whether the learned jurists, the 'poor' (*al-fuqarâ'*) the Sufis or the common people. So every one of them began to oppose me and to try to destroy me, but God helped me to overcome them and protected me with a blessing and lovingmercy from Him. (The Prophet) said: "Religion is admonishment (or 'straight advice,' *al-nasîha*), for God, for the leaders of the Muslims, and for the common people among them," as is mentioned in Muslim's Sahîh.

- I saw (in a dream where) it was as though I was in Mecca with the Messenger of God, in the same dwelling. There was an extraordinary connection between him and me, almost as though I was him and as though he were me. And I saw that he had a little son, such that whenever anyone came to see (the Prophet), he would have that little boy go out with him so that the people might be blessed by him and come to know him. It was as though that little one had a very special standing with God. Now we were all sitting there when someone knocked at the door, and the Messenger of God went out to see them, taking the little one along with him. Then he came back to see me and said to me: "God has ordered me to go to Medina and pray the evening prayer there." And I [the Arabic here leaves it unclear whether this is still the Prophet, speaking of the little boy, or Ibn 'Arabi now speaking of the Prophet] never leave him and never take my eye off of him; it is as though I were his very essence, for I am not him, but I am not other than him.

Now while he was between Mecca and Medina, suddenly he saw a tremendous good descending from the sky, and he said: "O Gabriel, what is this tremendous good, whose like I have not seen?" Then he said: "It descended from the loftiest paradise upon those keeping the night-vigil [*al-mutahajjidûn*: see Qur'an 17:79]. And how is it that you are among them?!" Then Gabriel began praising these keepers of the night-vigil to God with such praises as I had never heard before, and (the Prophet) was among the loftiest and noblest of them. Then I realized that this was all in regard to me and that his saying "How is it that you are among them?" was addressed in reference to me, and I woke up.

- I entered Seville to see the scrupulous, righteous Shaykh Abu 'Imran b. Musa b. 'Imran al-Martuli,<sup>2</sup> and I informed him about a matter which made him happy and which he took as good tidings. So he said to me: "May God give you good tidings of the Garden (of Paradise), as you have given me good tidings!" Not many days had gone by when I saw in a dream one of our companions, among those who had died, and I said to him: "How are you doing?" So he mentioned something good (regarding his own state), in the course of saying a great deal and telling a long story. Then he said to me: "God has already given me the good news that you are my companion in the Garden!" So I said to him: "This is (all taking place) in a dream. Give me a sign of (the truth of) what you are saying!" Then he replied: "Yes, tomorrow at the noon prayer the Sultan will send someone to look for you in order to imprison you. So watch out for yourself!"

Then I woke up, and there was nothing at all to indicate anything like that (was about to happen). But when I was praying at noon, suddenly the request came from the Sultan. So I said (to myself): "The dream was right!," and I hid out for fifteen days, until that (royal) request was cancelled. Now this is (an example of) the spiritual blessing (*baraka*) of the petitionary prayers (*du'a*) of the righteous (the *salihin*).

- I saw while I was sleeping as though God was calling out to me, saying to me: "O My servant, if you want to be close to Me, honored and enjoying delight with Me, then constantly say '*My Lord, cause me to see, that I might look upon You!*'"<sup>3</sup> Repeat that for Me many times."

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<sup>2</sup>See the account of this shaykh in *Sufis of Andalusia* (trans. R. Austin), pp. 87-91 (including accounts from both *Ruh al-Quds* and *al-Durrat al-Fakhira*); the first account begins with more detail on the same incident alluded to at the beginning of this story.

<sup>3</sup>*Rabbî ârinî anzur ilayk*: this formula of *dhikr* is very close to a famous prayer of the Prophet recorded among the hadith: "O my God, cause us to see things as they really are!" (*allâhumma ârinâ al-ashyâ' kamâ hiya*).

## Body of Light: Ibn ‘Arabi’s Account of His Father’s Death

In chapter 35 of the Meccan Illuminations,<sup>1</sup> Ibn ‘Arabi gives a fascinating account of his father’s death—and at the same time, of his spiritual state and role in his life—which deserves closer attention, especially in light of the growing interest in the Shaykh’s own biography. This long and instructive chapter is entitled “Concerning the Inner Knowledge of the Person Who Has Realized the Waystation of the Breaths, and His/Its Secrets After His Death.” Since it is clear by the end of this chapter (where the anecdote of his father’s death is actually retold) that Ibn ‘Arabi considers his own father to have become one of these particularly accomplished “knowers,” it is helpful to start by quoting the opening poetic lines and introductory prose of this chapter:

*“The (true) servant is the person whose state already while living / is like his state after the death of the body and spirit.*

*The (true) servant is the person who, while still in a state of veiling (by the body) / was already a light, like the sun’s illuminating the earth.*

*For the state of death is not accompanied by any pretense, / just as life has its open pretensions (to “lordship” and divinity)”....*

“You must know—May God inspire you with the Holy Spirit!--that this person who has realized the waystation of the Breath, whoever that person may be, that their state after their death is different from the states of the others who die. So we will begin by mentioning the different ways that the people of God take their knowing from God..., and then we will mention their ultimate fate and the effects of what they take (from God) upon their essential realities.”

Near the end of this chapter, Ibn ‘Arabi goes on to develop a general principle regarding these “People of the Breaths” which has wide-ranging practical consequences with regard to the later “cult of the saints”—in Islam and other world religions--and the realities underlying the complex influences, guidance and mediation of those holy figures: “Therefore among their states after death is that they are living with that essential Life—that ‘Life of the divine Breath’ (*al-*

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<sup>1</sup> All passages quoted from Kit b Al-Futuh t al-Makk ya (O. Yahya ed.), vol. III, pp. 333 and 353-355.

*hay t al-nafs ya*) through which every creature is praising (God).” By way of illustration, he mentions several cases of the way the influences of the worship and devotion of a saint or prophet continue to be manifest in their places of worship (and at their tombs) long after their death. In one of those illustrations, someone who inadvertently profanes the shrine of Bayazid Bastami finds his clothes “burning” him without any visible fire. In the other case, Ibn ‘Arabi recalls how the Prophet, during his celebrated spiritual Ascension, saw Moses praying at his tomb, while at the same time they had their famous conversations in the heavens concerning the proper number of canonical prayers. Then he continues:

“So among the states of this person (who knows the divine Breaths) after their death are things like these: there is no difference in respect to such a person between their life and their death, for they were already in the form of a dead person during the time of their life in this world, in the state of death. So God made them, in the state of their death, like the person whose state is alive.”

A second remarkable sign of those who realize this “Station of the Breaths” is the apparent incorruptibility or agelessness of their physical body:

“And among the attributes of the master of this spiritual station (of the Breaths) after their death is that when someone looks at their face, once they are dead, he will say that person is surely alive--even though the lack of pulse indicates they are dead! So the person who sees them is bewildered.

Now I saw that (happen) with my father—God have mercy on him!--, so that we almost didn’t bury him, we were so unsure, because his face seemed so alive, even though his lack of pulse or breathing indicated he was dead. Some fifteen days before he died, he told me that he was dying and would die on a Thursday, and that is how it was. When the day of his death came—and he was terribly ill—he sat up without any support and said to me: ‘O my son, today is the journey and the meeting (with God)!’

So I said to him: ‘May God grant you a safe journey in this, and may He bless your meeting (with Him)!’

He rejoiced in that and said to me: ‘May God bestow good on you from me, o my son! Everything I used to hear you telling me and didn’t understand, and which I sometimes even denied: now I am (directly) witnessing it!’

Then there appeared on his forehead a glowing whiteness, different from his skin color or any scar, shimmering with light. My father felt that, and then that glowing luminescence spread over his face until it covered his whole body. Then I kissed him and said farewell and left him, telling him: ‘Now I’m going to the main mosque, until they come to announce your death.’

Then he said to me: ‘Go, and don’t let anybody come in to me,’ and the family and daughters were summoned. Now the announcement of his death came at noon, and I came to him and found him—or so someone seeing him would wonder—(still) between life and death, and that is the state in which we buried him. And he had an extraordinary tomb-shrine (*mashhad*).”

Then Ibn ‘Arabi concludes: “For the person who is in this spiritual station, his living and his dying are all the same. [I.e., he has already realized the Prophetic injunction to ‘die before you die!’] And everything we have mentioned in this chapter concerning the Knowing of the person in this station is from the Knowing of the (divine) Breaths.”

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The fully annotated translation of this and other shorter treatises (and chapters from the *Futūhāt*) of Ibn 'Arabî on practical spirituality is planned for a forthcoming short volume entitled *Spiritual Practice and the Spiritual Path: Ibn 'Arabî's Advice for the Spiritual Seeker*.

### Introducing Ibn 'Arabî's "*Book of Spiritual Advice*"

One of the misfortunes that can befall a true genius, perhaps most obviously in fields like music or poetry, is that the fame of their most celebrated masterpieces can easily obscure the extraordinary qualities of "lesser" works which—by any other hand—would surely be renowned in their own right. Certainly that has too often been the case with Ibn 'Arabî's Fusûs al-Hikam and his Futūhāt. Among the smaller treasures they have sometimes overshadowed is his remarkable book of spiritual aphorisms, the "Book of Spiritual Advice" (*Kitâb al-Nasâ'ih*),<sup>1</sup> a short treatise whose many extant manuscript copies and profusion of later titles reflects the great practical value placed on it by many generations of Sufi readers. Here we would like to offer a partial selection of some of the most accessible (and easily translateable) sayings from that work, which we hope to publish soon in a complete and more fully annotated version as part of a larger volume bringing together Ibn 'Arabî's shorter works of practical spiritual advice.<sup>2</sup>

Our own experience in working with earlier versions of those practical works, in the classroom and more intensive workshops, has amply confirmed those distinctive qualities which

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<sup>1</sup> See Osman Yahya, Histoire et Classification de l'oeuvre d'Ibn 'Arabî (Damascus, Institut français de Damas, 1964), vol. II, pp. 408-409 (= *Répertoire Général*, no. 532); Yahya notes that it is mentioned (by this title) in the Futūhāt and cited in both of Ibn 'Arabî's well-known lists of his own work. Titles found in other manuscripts include *al-Nasâ'ih al-Qudsîya wa-l-mawâ'iz al-'irfânîya* ("The Sacred Advices and Spiritual Admonitions"); *R. fî ahwâl taqa' li ahl tarîq Allâh* ("Treatise concerning the States Which Befall the People of the Path of God"); and the mnemonic *R. fî mâ lâ yu'awwal 'alayhi*, which is the title given in the (textually problematic) Hyderabad, 1948 edition of Ibn 'Arabî's Rasâ'il which was used in preparing this preliminary translation.

<sup>2</sup> *Spiritual Practice and the Path: Ibn 'Arabî's Advice for the Seeker*. (This volume will also include selected shorter chapters from the Futūhāt.)



no doubt accounted for the special place of these texts in earlier Islamic tradition: their richness, profundity, mysterious spiritual effectiveness, and their constantly transformed meanings each time one returns to them, whether alone or—far more effectively—in the kind of serious, intimate and probing discussion (*suhba*, in traditional Sufi language) which better reflects the practical context for which they were originally intended. A few words of caution and background explanation should be helpful in approaching these sayings in the proper spirit.

To begin with, the original title of this book is both significant and revealing. *Nasîha*, the “pointed advice” or “straight talk” in question, actually has resonances here—as in the famous canonical hadith Ibn ‘Arabî has in mind whenever he employs that term<sup>3</sup>--of unsolicited, provocative and dis-illusioning insight, the sort of pointed, properly timed revelation of unconscious “hypocrisy” and self-delusion which is surely one of the primary functions of true spiritual guides in Sufism or any authentic spiritual tradition. And in fact these short sayings are meant to function as a probing mirror of one’s spiritual conscience, examining the authenticity and proper integration of each user’s states and stations.

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<sup>3</sup> See the following key autobiographical passage from Ibn ‘Arabî’s *R. al-Mubashshirât*, translated in *Some Dreams of Ibn ‘Arabî*, pp. 1-3 in the *Newsletter of the Muhyiddîn Ibn ‘Arabî Society* (Oxford, Autumn, 1993):

“I saw in a dream that I was at the Sacred Shrine in Mecca, and it was as though the Resurrection had already begun. It was as though I was standing immediately in front of my Lord, with my head bowed in silence and fear of His reproaching me because of my negligence (*tafrît*). But He was saying to me: ‘*O My servant, don't be afraid, for I am not asking you to do anything except to admonish [root n-s-h] My servants. So admonish My servants, and I will guide the people (al-nâs) to the straight path.*’ Now when I had seen how rare it was for anyone to enter the Path of God I had become spiritually lazy. And that night I had resolved only to concern myself with my own soul, to forget about all the other people and their condition. But then I had that dream, and the very next morning I sat down among the people and began to explain to them the clear Path and the various evils blocking the Path for each group of them, whether the learned jurists, the ‘poor’ (*al-fuqarâ*) the Sufis or the common people. So every one of them began to oppose me and to try to destroy me, but God helped me to overcome them and protected me with a blessing and lovingmercy from Him. (The Prophet) said: ‘Religion (*al-Dîn*) is admonishment (or “straight advice,” *al-nasîha*), for God, for the leaders of the Muslims, and for the common people among them,’ as is mentioned in Muslim’s *Sahîh*.”

Secondly, brevity here is a sign of compression, not of a simple or elementary text. In fact, this work clearly presupposes a relatively advanced state of such active engagement with the inner, spiritual life that each significant “moment” of conscience (or of unconsciousness) is subject to its caustic scrutiny. In this respect, it is important to note that we should not normally speak of a “reader” of a text like this. For in the original Arabic these highly compressed sayings--like other famous *hikam*--are often made up of only a few short, readily memorable phrases, which would normally remain in the deeper memory rather easily after a single reading, only to be suddenly “illuminated” and recalled precisely at that moment when their actual spiritual counterpart is actually encountered (or recalled) in one’s own experience. It is noteworthy that, in practice, even the much more cumbersome English equivalents given here still manage to have something of that (often initially troubling!) practical efficacy.

More prosaically, on a practical linguistic level, Ibn ‘Arabî’s language here presupposes an intimate (and concrete, non-theoretical) acquaintance with the elaborate Sufi technical vocabulary and symbolism of the Path. Like the many other famous illustrations of the *hikam* genre—literally, “words of wisdom”—those technical allusions often require an extensive commentary for the uninitiated modern reader.<sup>4</sup> In order to avoid such an extensive apparatus of commentary and explanation, we have selected here those sayings (roughly half of the original number) which can be given relatively straightforward English equivalents.

Finally, it is necessary to stress that the significance of the recurrent ending to almost every phrase, “...*can’t be relied upon* [i.e., *totally* or without further scrutiny]” (*lâ yu’awwal ‘alayhi*) should be taken in a strictly “neutral” sense, and *not* primarily as some sort of sheer negation. That is, each of these sayings normally operates as—to adopt a fitting, if uncomfortable, image—a sort of comprehensive spiritual “dental examination.” If a particular

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<sup>4</sup> The most influential Sufi writing of this genre, written down by the Shâdhilî shaykh Ibn ‘Atâ’illâh only a generation after Ibn ‘Arabî’s death, gave rise to hundreds of commentaries: See Victor Danner (transl.), *Ibn ‘Atâ’illâh’s Sûfî Aphorisms* (Leiden, Brill, 1973), which is preferable for serious study of that book; or the more readily available popular version in Ibn ‘Ata Allah, *The Book of Wisdom* (tr. Victor Danner) pp. 1-161, (“Classics of Western Spirituality”, Paulist Press, 1978). In a broader sense, central earlier Arabic examples of this genre in Islamic spirituality would include many of the shorter hadith and *hadîth qudsî* (favored throughout the Sufi tradition), the popular latter parts of ‘Ali’s *Nahj al-Balâgha*, and the ecstatic

touches a raw nerve—and one’s immediate reactions are often the most telling in this regard—then it is simply indicating an area that deserves closer scrutiny. But in many cases, these same sayings will also help to reveal and verify the “real thing.” Indeed, one has really begun to appreciate the meaning and function of this deceptively brief text when, after “practicing” and frequenting it for some time, one begins to perceive with assurance the constantly ongoing, normally indispensable role of spiritual “mistakes” and illusions in the lifelong process of spiritual growth, learning and maturation.<sup>5</sup>

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*shatahât* of al-Hallâj, Bastâmî and other early Sufis. Others may be more familiar with such equivalent genres as *koans* and many Gospel sayings and parables.

<sup>5</sup> Hence its very apt description in certain manuscripts (see n. 1 above) as the “Treatise concerning the States Which Befall the People of the Path of God.”

Selections From: The Book of Spiritual Advice

*In the Name of God the All-Merciful, the Compassionate*

-- The state of ecstasy (*wajd*) which occurs as a result of *trying* to achieve ecstasy (*tawâjud*) can't be relied upon. And the "finding/experience" (*wujûd*) which comes from that sort of ecstasy can't be relied upon.

-- The passing thought (*al-khâtir al-thânî*) that comes back a second time, or more, can't be relied upon.

-- A theophany (*al-tajalli*)<sup>6</sup> in the form of a "controlling spirit" (*dhât rûh mudabbir*) can't be relied upon.

-- The "fresh inspiration" (*al-wârid*) that one has been anticipating can't be relied upon.

-- Being (spiritually) "informed" of what has its equivalent in the world can't be relied upon.

-- The state which leads to your being transparently aware of others within your carnal soul (*nafs*) can't be relied upon....

-- [2] The conversation of the person who experiences an "unveiling" (*al-mukâshif*) with spiritual beings (*rûhânîyât*) is false and not to be relied upon *if* there is no beneficial *exchange* of giving and receiving (of spiritual knowledge, wisdom, etc.).

-- The "unveiling" (experience) of all things recalling/mentioning (*dhikr*) God with the same *dhikr* that you yourself are (performing/experiencing) can't be relied upon.

-- The "fresh inspiration" (*al-wârid*) that results from a change in one's physical constitution (illness, etc.) can't be relied upon.

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<sup>1</sup> Printed text ([Cairo?], 1967, Muhammad 'Alî Sabîh and Sons), kindly provided by Michel Chodkiewicz. This 'Table of Contents' and corresponding numbered subdivisions in the translation are entirely the translator's additions, for ease of reference. For ease of reading, this translation omits the honorific Arabic phrases normally following each mention of God, the Prophet, the Companions, etc.

-- Every spiritual knowing—whether by way of “unveiling,” (divine) “casting” (of an illumination into one’s heart), direct encounter, or by allusion to a (spiritual) reality-- which is contrary to a solidly witnessed and transmitted Revelation (*sharī’a mutawâtira*) can’t be relied upon. *Except for the unveiling (experience) of a (particular) form (kashf sûrî): for that (form itself) is sound.* The mistake comes from the (erroneous) interpretation (*ta’wîl*) claimed by the person who is in that experience of unveiling, of the (true) knowing which was actually intended by that form which appeared to them in that unveiling.

-- Every spiritual knowing of a reality for which there is no opposing judgement in the Revelation is sound. But in the contrary case (i.e., if there *is* an opposing revealed judgment), then that “knowing” can’t be relied upon.

-- Performing miracles and experiencing an increase of bounties—while one is doing things contrary (to God’s Will)—can’t be relied upon.

-- Movement (i.e., dancing, trances, etc.) while listening to pleasing music—and the lack of movement when *that* sort of “listening” is lacking—can’t be relied upon.

-- The true spiritual Knower (*al-‘ârîf*) doesn’t rely on listening to God (*al-Haqq*) through the things (of this world).

-- Every work/craft/art (*fann*) that doesn’t bring about (spiritual) knowing can’t be relied upon.

-- Closeness to God in spiritual retreat (*khalwa*) can’t be relied upon, nor can feeling lonely and estranged (from God) out in society (*jalwa*).

-- The entanglement of the carnal soul (*shugl al-nafs*) with the limited beauty (of things) under the pretense of seeing [3] the Beauty of God (*jamâl al-Haqq*) in things can’t be relied upon.

-- [Perceiving] the glorification of God (*ta’zîm al-Haqq*) in (only) certain things can’t be relied upon.

-- Regarding the creatures (or: “people,” *al-khalq*) and everything other than God from a perspective of God’s having been unfair/imperfect/lacking (*naqs fî janâb Allâh*) can’t be relied upon.

-- Looking down upon the ‘ordinary people’ (*al-‘awâmm*) in relation to the (spiritual) ‘elite’, in the sense of comparing this particular individual with that individual—such as (comparing the famous mystic) Hasan al-Basrî with Hasan ibn Hâni’ (the scandalous poet Abû Nuwâs)—can’t be relied upon.

-- (Our) “confidence” (*i’timâd*) in God—which is totally entrusting oneself (to Him: *tawakkul*)—can’t be relied upon *except* in a time of need/distress (*hâja*).

-- Being tranquil in (a situation of) need/distress (supposedly) because of the power of (one’s) knowing can’t be relied upon, as long as it is accompanied by (any trace of) the human-animal condition (*al-basharîya*), because (such apparent tranquility) is a transient, quickly vanishing state.

-- The pretense of seeing God (*al-Haqq*) in the things (of this world)--while (at the same time) ascetically renouncing (*zuhd*) those things--can’t be relied upon. For ascetic renunciation (*zuhd*) is not part of the distinctive rank and condition of the person who has attained that spiritual station (of seeing God in all things).

-- That (delusive mystical) ‘knowing’ (*al-ma’rifa*) which breaks down the distinction between what is permissible for the morally responsible person (*al-mukallif*) to do, and what is *not* permissible, can’t be relied upon.

-- That (delusive mystical) ‘knowing of God’ (*al-ma’rifa bi-llâh*) which is devoid of (knowing of) the divine Names (Attributes) can’t be relied upon. For it is not (actually) knowing at all.

-- The increase in a (subjective emotional) state (*hâl*) [4] which doesn’t produce (spiritual) knowing can’t be relied upon.

-- Experiencing/‘finding’ God (*wujûd Allâh*) in the heart can’t be relied upon. God said: “*What is with you passes away, but what is with God remains* (forever)...” (16:96)

-- “Finding”/experiencing God (*wujûd al-Haqq*) during a compelling emergency (*idtirâr*) can’t be relied upon, because that (urgent situation) is a (passing emotional) state, and (such subjective) states (*al-hâl*) can’t be relied upon. But if one finds God in what is not a state of compelling urgency, then *that* is what one can rely upon. Simply not being in a state of

compelling urgency is not (in itself) satisfying, while finding/experiencing God does contain what is (truly) satisfying.

-- (Acting) without recourse to the (ordinary natural) “secondary causes” (*raf‘ al-asbâb*) [--solely by appealing to God, the ultimate Cause--] is not relied upon by the greatest of the accomplished ones. Indeed (one sign of) their distinctive rank and condition is their stopping at (i.e., not going beyond) the secondary causes. But the spiritual seeker (*al-murîd*) *can’t* rely upon stopping with the secondary causes, even if (religious) knowledge (*‘ilm*) supports him in depending on them.

-- Hunger (and any experiences resulting from it) can’t be relied upon.

-- The ‘fresh inspiration’ (*al-wârid*) that results from a disorder of the bodily constitution can’t be relied upon, even if it is sound, because its soundness is an accidental and exceedingly rare occurrence.

-- “Knowing” the aim of action without actually acting can’t be relied upon.

-- Acting [5] without totally pure devotion (to God) can’t be relied upon.

-- That “knowing” of God (*ma’rifat Allâh*) which is the result of thinking (*fikr*) can’t be relied upon.

-- That “spiritual trust-and-perseverance” (*sabr*) (in the face of affliction) which comes second (i.e., after the initial affliction) can’t be relied upon. For that *sabr* which *can* be relied upon is that which occurs at the first onslaught (of the affliction), since it is a sign of (your) being present with God.

-- Don’t rely on anything that comes to you and you don’t know its (spiritual) source.

-- Repenting of (only) certain sins (but not *all*) can’t be relied upon.

-- Entrusting (oneself to God: *tawakkul*) (only) in *certain* situations can’t be relied upon.

-- Every state—whether it be one of “unveiling” or of knowledge—which gives you (the misimpression) of being safe from God’s cunning ruse (*makr*) can’t be relied upon.

-- Every affection/love (*mahabba*) which doesn’t cause the lover to prefer the intention of the beloved over his own intention can’t be relied upon.

-- Every affection/love (*mahabba*) in which the lover doesn't *take pleasure* in being in conformity (*muwâfaqa*) with the beloved regarding what his carnal self naturally detests can't be relied upon.

-- Every (true) love (*hubb*) which doesn't give rise to *ihsân* toward the beloved in the heart of the lover can't be relied upon.

-- Every love whose proximate cause/occasion (*sabab*) is known and is among those things which may come to an end can't be relied upon.

-- Every love (*hubb*) that doesn't depend upon (God) Himself—which is what they call “being in love with love”—can't be relied [7] upon.

-- Every love that doesn't annihilate yourself from (any selfish concern for) yourself and which doesn't change with the changing of (God's ongoing) theophany (*taghayyur al-tajalli*) can't be relied upon.

-- Every (state of) “presence-with-God” (*hudûr*) that doesn't give rise to transforming love (*hubb*) from God and is not accompanied by reverent awe (*hayba*) in the heart of the person who is so “present” can't be relied upon.

-- Every “repentance” (*tawba*) which is not all-inclusive [i.e., including *all* of one's faults] is really only the abandonment (of certain misdeeds), so it can't be relied upon—and God doesn't accept it as real repentance.

-- Every act of spiritual scrupulousness (*wara'*) which is restricted to certain matters and not to others can't be relied upon.

-- Every act of (spiritual) intention (*irâda*) that has no real effect can't be relied upon.

-- Every (spiritual) “state” that causes you to notice the past and future can't be relied upon.

-- Every (state of) “perseverance/patience” (*sabr*) in the face of affliction which prevents you from calling on God to remove that (affliction) can't be relied upon.

-- Every “faith” in a revealed judgment/command (*hukm mashrû'*) in which you also find in your carnal soul a preference for its contrary can't be relied upon.



-- Every (state of outward) “surrender/submission” (*islâm*) in which is not accompanied by (deep inner) faith-and-confidence (*îmân*) can’t be relied upon.

-- Every (state of ) *ihsân* in which you view/see **yourself** “doing good” (*muhsin*)—even if you (felt you) were with your Lord--can’t be relied upon.

-- Every (state of) “relying (on God)” (*tawakkul*) in which you don’t apply (that) judgment to others just as you do with regard yourself can’t be relied upon.

-- Every (state of) “total surrender (to God)” (*taslîm*) into which there enters some fear on your part—even if only at a certain time--can’t be relied upon.

-- Every (state of) “entrusting everything (to God alone)” (*tafwîd*) into which there enters [9] a fear of illness can’t be relied upon.

-- Every special (ascetic) effort (*mujâhada*) which is not ordered by a master (*shaykh*) can’t be relied upon—and likewise with every sort of (supplementary) spiritual discipline (*riyâda*). For (such) disciplines entail harm for the soul, and (such ascetic) efforts entail harm for the body.

-- Every thankfulness (*shukr*) which doesn’t bring with it an increase (in spiritual blessings) can’t be relied upon.

-- Every “absolute certainty” (*yaqîn*) which also brings with it change (in one’s state) can’t be relied upon.

-- Every (state of) “being in accord (with God)” (*tawfîq*) that doesn’t bring with it the corresponding appropriate behavior and attitude (*ta’addub*) can’t be relied upon.

-- Every (state of) “serenity” in which the *heart* is not at peace can’t be relied upon.

-- Every “affliction/hardship” (*balâ’*) that is not a spiritual trial/test (*ibtîlâ’*) can’t be relied upon.

-- Every “nearness (to God)/sainthood” (*walâya*) that doesn’t come [from?] prophethood (*nubuwwa*) can’t be relied upon.

-- Every “spiritual knowing” (*ma’rifa*) that is not constantly varying in its forms can’t be relied upon.

- Every “act/state of pure sincerity” (*sidq*) that can be questioned can’t be relied upon.
- Every longing that is quieted by the meeting (with what was longed for) can’t be relied upon.
- Every shame (at wrongdoing) that doesn’t include abandoning (that wrongdoing) can’t be relied upon.
- Every (state of) zeal/fervor that is not inclusive and evenhanded (in its objects), so that your judgment about yourself in that matter is the same as your judgment of others, can’t be relied upon.
- Every (so-called) “zeal/fervor for God’s sake” can’t be relied upon. For (such pretensions) are sheer ignorance, devoid of any spiritual awareness, and not among the attributes of the spiritually accomplished ones: that (fanaticism) is the complete contrary of (truly) “calling (people) to God,” and it includes “bad behavior/attitude” (*sû’ al-adab*) toward God, in a way (such fanatics) are unaware of....
- [11] Every “intuitive perspicacity” (*firâsa*) that doesn’t come [in the words of a famous hadith] from “the light of true faith” can’t be relied upon.
- That scrupulousness (*al-wara’*) which is not inclusive of the inner spiritual states (as well as outward religio-legal actions and prohibitions) can’t be relied upon.
- Ascetic renunciation (*zuhd*) can’t be relied upon.
- The granting (by God of one’s wish) after *asking* (for it) can’t be relied upon.
- “Giving preference to others” (*al-îthâr*) can’t be relied upon, neither in regard to God—since that is not appropriate for Him—nor in regard to people, because it is (simply) fulfilling what has been entrusted (to us).
- (Spiritual) journeying (*safar*) which doesn’t also lead to obtaining something (*zafar*) can’t be relied upon.
- Every longing other than the longing of (true divine) love (*al-hubb*) can’t be relied upon.
- Being “absent” (from this world) in God can’t be relied upon.

-- Spiritual knowing (*ma'rifa*), if it doesn't take on different forms with each of the breaths/instants, can't be relied upon.

-- Intimate friendship (with God: *al-khilla*), if it isn't like Abraham's, can't be relied upon.

-- Loving affection (*al-mahabba*), if it isn't all-inclusive, can't be relied upon.

-- Respectfulness, without actual serving (*al-khidma*) (of the other), can't be relied upon. And serving (another) without (real) respectfulness can't be relied upon.

-- Listening (to God: *al-samâ'*), if it is limited (to specific circumstances or aims), can't be relied upon.

-- The (spiritual) traveler without any provisions shouldn't be followed/imitated.

-- The voyager towards a light from the manifest aspect/Face (of God) can't be relied upon and shouldn't be followed/imitated.

-- A spiritual "place" (*makân*) which is not also a (solid spiritual) station (*makâna*) can't be relied upon.

-- The ecstatic utterances (*shath*: of the "drunken" mystics like al-Hallâj) can't be relied upon.

-- The distinctive signs of proximity (to God), when they are joined with acts of opposition (to His commands: *mukhâlifât*) can't be relied upon, even if (those acts of opposition) are veiled/disguised.

-- The experience/finding of closeness along with the actual reality of distance (from God), and the experience of distance with the actual reality of closeness are deceptions (of Satan: *talbîs*) and can't be relied upon.

-- The good tidings of one's being secure/safe from God's cunning ruse (*makar*) that comes by way of "unveiling" can't be relied upon. For that (sort of informing) is one of those knowings of the (divine) Secret/mystery (*'ulûm al-sirr*) which are the special domain of God.

-- That "realization of unification" (*tawhîd*) which is perceived by intellectual argumentation can't be relied upon.

-- Every conversation/companionship of a disciple (*murîd*) with his shaykh, during which the disciple is in the end (really) conversing with his (own) carnal self for a while, can't be relied upon.

-- Every theophany that doesn't give you the knowledge of a (divine) reality can't be relied upon.

-- Every reality (*haqq*) that says "I am a real essence," but you don't find it to have any influence/effect upon you other than your witnessing it, can't be relied upon.

-- You shouldn't rely upon any "inner/hidden (spiritual reality)" (*bâtin*) which doesn't cause you to witness its outward manifestation (*zâhir*).

-- Every master of a "breath"/moment (with/from God) (*nafas*) who doesn't bring with him release/relief (*tanfîs*) can't be relied upon.

-- Every (spiritual) light which doesn't take away a darkness can't be relied upon.

-- Every "unveiling" that causes you to see the disappearance of things after their existence can't be relied upon.

-- Every spiritual station that doesn't cause you to see God (*al-Haqq*) *creating continuously* can't be relied upon.

-- Every truly divine love (*hubb ilâhî*) that is accompanied by constraint/limitation can't be relied upon.

-- You shouldn't rely upon the spiritual stopping-place (*al-manzil*), if it becomes an obstacle between you and your journeying, for there is no "resting" (*qirâr*) there on either part (either with God or the human being).

-- The state of *sabr* (perseverance in the face of affliction) in which you don't complain to God can't be relied upon.

-- The state of *sabr* in which you *don't* hear [15] God's complaining through His servants to Himself about what they are suffering can't be relied upon.

--- Absolute contentment (*ridâ*) with *everything* that God has decreed can't be relied upon.

-- That “total surrender (to God’s Will)” (*taslîm*) in which the person stops observing (God’s) limits/boundaries (*hudûd*) can’t be relied upon.

-- “Freedom of action” (*tasarruf*) which doesn’t (actually) include all the virtuous character traits (*makârim al-akhlâq*) can’t be relied upon.

-- Don’t rely upon (pretending you somehow know) the goal (of the Path): (for) if you missed out on (the process of) realization/verification (*tahqîq*) at the beginning of your Path, so that He traveled with you on a Path other than the revealed/prescribed one—in that case you won’t recognize the Face/aspect of God (*wajh al-Haqq*) which is in every thing.

-- True love (*hubb*), if it gives you the connection with the being/experience (*wujûd*) of the beloved—when the beloved is *not* present—that is the genuine article; but if it doesn’t (give you that connection), then it can’t be relied upon.

-- For the (true) spiritual knower (*al-‘ârif*), retreat (*khalwa*) isn’t sound/possible, so it can’t be relied upon.

-- Isolating oneself from people because you are seeking peace/security from them can’t be relied upon. What you should be seeking is withdrawing from them because you’re seeking their peace/security *from you!*

-- Temptation (or ‘trial’: *fitna*), if it doesn’t reveal what is rotten/malignant, isn’t really a trial, and it can’t be relied upon.

-- That sorrow (*al-huzn*) which doesn’t accompany the fully human being (*al-insân*) perpetually can’t be relied upon.

-- (Spiritual) traveling (*sulûk*) which does not take place based on real experience (*bi-l-hâl*) can’t be relied upon.

-- The state (*hâl*) which was sought by the servant can’t be relied upon.

-- **[18]** Every special spiritual discipline (*riyâda*) that doesn’t overcome a real difficulty can’t be relied upon, for that is only wearing down the soul.

-- Every “spiritual witnessing” (*shuhûd*) that you lose/can’t find in the future can’t be relied upon.

-- Zeal/fervor with regard to the (passing) states can't be relied upon—whereas it can be relied on where the spiritual *stations* are concerned.

-- Whoever accompanies you with his (moral) intelligence ('*aql*) or for the sake of *your* essence: *that* is the one you should rely upon.

-- Whoever accompanies you because of what they can gain from you can't be relied upon, because they are finished when they have acquired what they wanted from you—and they may even be ungrateful for that kindness when they want to leave, so watch out for them!

-- You *should* rely on whoever accompanies you “in God”, and the distinctive sign of such a person is their “right counsel” (*nasiha*: i.e., constructive criticism) in your regard and their acknowledging the truth of the matter when it is explained to them how they were wrong—so that there is always a benefit for them or for you.

-- [19] Companionship (with someone) lacking actual experience can't be relied upon, because (in that case) you don't know what the ultimate outcome will reveal to you. That takes a comprehensive, broad-based practical intelligence ('*aql wâfir*).

-- Every “state of mindfulness/piety” (*taqwâ*) which doesn't give you a way out of adversities/misfortunes can't be relied upon.

-- Every “state of mindfulness/piety” (*taqwâ*) which *doesn't* bestow on you (release/a way out) in a way you couldn't even imagine, so that you are deceived/disappointed (*makhdû'*), can't be relied upon.

-- If your remembering (God) doesn't result in *your* listening (*samâ'*) to *His* remembering/mentioning you (*dhikr al-Haqq laka*), then don't rely on it!

-- If you stand up for God/for what is right (*al-haqq*) and it doesn't result in God's standing up for you in matters that totally surprise you, then it can't be relied upon.

## Ibn 'Arabi's *Book of the Quintessence Concerning What Is Indispensable For the Spiritual Seeker*<sup>1</sup>

### Ibn 'Arabi on Our Discovery of 'Revelation' (*shar'*)

Ibn 'Arabi's *Book of the Quintessence* is so condensed that almost each line deserves further commentary. However, since he so often refers here—with intentional and very pointed ambiguity—to what is given or even 'said' to the seeker by 'revealed prescription' (*shar'*), it is very important to understand how broadly, but also very individually, he understands the actual reality/process to which that central term corresponds. The following famous passage is a particularly detailed and important expression of this understanding which is at the very foundation of all his writing:<sup>2</sup>

*Now you must know that if a human being (al-insān) renounces their (own personal) aims, takes a loathing to their animal self (nafs) and instead prefers their Sustainer/Teacher (rabb), then the Real will give (that human being) a form of divine guidance in exchange for the form of their carnal self... so that they walk in garments of Light. And (this form) is the Sharī'a of their prophet and the Message of their messenger. Thus that (human being) receives from their Lord what contains their happiness--and some people see (this divine guidance) in the form of their prophet, while some see it in the form of their (spiritual) state.*

In the former case, he continues,

‘that (form) is the inner reality of that prophet and his spirit, or the form of an angel like him, (who) knows his sharī'a from God... And we ourselves have often received in this way the form of many things among the divinely revealed judgments (ahkām shar'iyya) which we had not learned about from the learned or from books. For if the form is not that of (that person's) prophet, then it still necessarily refers to their spiritual state or to the stage of the shar' with regard to that moment and that (particular) situation in which (that person) saw that vision....’

And even in that instance, *‘apart from what is forbidden or enjoined (by the Sharia), there is no restriction on what (that person) accepts from (that vision), whether with regard to beliefs or other things--for God's Presence includes the totality of beliefs (jamī' al-'aqā'id).*

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<sup>2</sup>*Futūhāt*, chapter 318 (III, 70.21 ff.). The language used throughout this passage pointedly emphasizes the universality of this situation. The repeated use of 'his prophet' or 'the form of his messenger' also refers to Ibn 'Arabi's insistence, throughout the *Futūhāt*, that the Friends of God (and ultimately all human beings) are 'following in the footsteps' of a certain prophet or prophets with whom they have a special spiritual affinity. (This understanding is also reflected, e.g., in his association of certain spiritual stages with Moses, Jesus, or Muhammad, etc. and in his description of certain friends and other Sufis as *'isāwī*, *mūsawī*, etc.). For a more detailed discussion of Ibn 'Arabi's very personal—and highly controversial—attitude toward the foundations of the Islamic 'legal sciences' (*fiqh*), see the longer study of *Ibn 'Arabi's "Esotericism": The Problem of Spiritual Authority*, *Studia Islamica*, LXXI (1990), pp. 37-64.

Subject Outline of Ibn 'Arabi's *Book of the Quintessence Concerning What Is Indispensable For the Spiritual Seeker*<sup>3</sup>

1. God's Unicity and Transcendence
2. Faith in the messengers, companions, 'people of this Path' (Friends of God), and serving the poor
3. Silence, focus on *dhikr*/remembrance of God, and good deeds
4. Right companion on the spiritual Path
5. Sincere intention (*Sidq*) in seeking the right guide
6. Right livelihood
7. Eating little
8. Filling the day with prayer
9. Sleep, eat, and dress only as really needed
10. How to read the Qur'an
11. Keeping track of one's animal self (*muhāsaba*) and shame before God
12. Staying Conscious: being aware of demands of the 'Instant' and eliminating inner distractions
13. Purity (*tahāra*)
14. Striving for good moral character traits
15. Right attitude toward spiritual 'opponents'
16. Right Behavior (*adab*) toward animals, dependents and children
17. Avoiding the powerful and worldly, while practicing *insān* and *Sabr*
18. Being present with God at every instant
19. Generosity (and avoiding stinginess) [Incomplete]
20. Controlling anger and learning how to (not) react to 'negative' encounters
21. Practicing *ihsān*

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<sup>3</sup> Printed text ([Cairo?], 1967, Mu'ammad 'Alí Sabīh and Sons), kindly provided by Michel Chodkiewicz. This 'Table of Contents' and corresponding numbered subdivisions in the translation are entirely the translator's additions, for ease of reference. For ease of reading, this translation omits the honorific Arabic phrases normally following each mention of God, the Prophet, the Companions, etc.



22. Constantly practicing *Dhikr*/remembrance of God and asking His forgiveness
23. Repentance and untying the ‘knots’ of persistence (in opposition to God) [Incomplete]
24. *Taqwā*: Awareness of God and its practical consequences
25. Avoiding self-deception/Iblis [Incomplete]
26. Practicing spiritual conscientiousness (*wara‘*)
27. Practicing ‘non-attachment’ to this lower world (*zuhd*)

*The Book of the Quintessence, Concerning What Is Indispensable for the Spiritual Seeker*<sup>4</sup>

*In the Name of God the All-Compassionate the All-Merciful*

Praise be to God, Sustainer of the Worlds! And may God bless our master Muhammad and all his Family and Companions!

You asked, O seeker, about the quintessence of what the seeker must do, so I have answered you in these pages. And God is the One Who brings fulfillment, there is no *rabb*<sup>5</sup> but He!

Know, O seeker—may God bring you and us to the fulfillment of freely obeying Him, and may He cause us and you to know what pleases Him!—that (our) closeness to God is only known through His informing us of that<sup>6</sup>. Now He has already done that—all thanks and praise be to God!—through His sending the Messengers and sending down the Scriptures and making clear the Paths leading to the eternal happiness. So once we have faith and hold (all that) to be true, there only remains putting into practice in their proper place those (prescribed) actions set down by the revelation in which we have faith and which have become established in the souls of those who have faith.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Murīd* has been translated here in its broad sense of anyone who is ‘seeking’ God, but it is important to keep in mind as well its more technical, ‘sociological’ sense (in Ibn ‘Arabī’s time) of the person who is at a relatively early stage of spiritual ‘journeying’, normally under the close supervision of a spiritual guide (*shaykh*). Ibn ‘Arabī writes in very different ways for different readers, and the language and presuppositions of this work make it clear that he is writing neither for intellectuals nor for more ‘advanced’ companions. It is important to keep these broad qualifications in mind when considering a number of the points mentioned below. [These cautions will be considerably expanded in the Introduction to the forthcoming book which includes this translation.]

<sup>5</sup> *Rabb*: the ‘personal (individual) God’ and the Sustainer and spiritual ‘Teacher’ of each soul.

<sup>6</sup> Alluding, for example to many Qur’anic verses such as ‘**He is with you-all wherever you-all are,**’ or ‘**We are closer to him than his jugular vein,**’ etc.—and also possibly to more direct and individualized forms of God’s ‘causing us to know’ (see following note)

<sup>7</sup> In the original Arabic (as in the English), this sentence includes a very complex—and no doubt intentional—set of spiritual preconditions: they emphasize *three times* the necessity of one’s first having

[1.] Next it is incumbent on you, o seeker, to realize the Unicity (*taw<sup>o</sup>id*) of your Creator and His Transcendence and what is befitting of Him—may He be glorified and exalted!

As for realizing His Unicity, if there were a second god alongside God it would be impossible for any action to occur from those two gods, because of the difference between their acts of Will, both in being and actual determination. So the order (of all being) would be destroyed, as in His saying: *If there were among them (the heavens and earth) gods other than God, both of them would have been destroyed*' (21:22). And don't argue, o my brother, with anyone who associates (other creatures with God), nor do you need to establish any proof of (the divine) Oneness and Unicity. For the associator has already joined you in affirming the existence of the Truly Real, while he is the one who goes beyond you in adding an 'associate (god)': so he is the one who needs to give a proof for what he has added. This is enough for you concerning the realization of (His) Unicity, since time is scarce and the connection (you have with God) is sound—while there is really nothing underlying (the claims of) the (associator) who disagrees with you, thank God.

As for realizing His transcendence (of any likeness to creation), which is urgent for you because of the literalist (*zāhhirī*) anthropomorphists and 'corporealists' in this age, just hold to His saying: *There is no thing like Him/like His Likeness* (42:11), and that is sufficient for you: whatever description (of God) contradicts this verse is to be rejected, and do not add to or go beyond this 'homeland'. This is why it has come down in the tradition (of the Prophet, his saying): *God was, and there was no thing with Him*'—may God be far exalted above what the wrongdoers/darkeners say! So every (scriptural) verse or hadith which makes us imagine a likening (of God to the creatures), whether that expression has come in the language of the Arabs, or in the language of anyone else upon whom God has sent down some revelation or information, you must simply have faith in it to the extent of what *God* has taught and sent down through that—but not like those falsely imagine something (about God) and then ascribe their 'knowledge' of that (imagination) to God. Nothing is beyond *There is no thing like Him/His*

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certainty (*imān*, in the Qur'anic sense Ibn 'Arabī almost always intends) that the actions in question are indeed those given as part of the eternal, ongoing process of divine 'revelation' (*shar'*, again in the special sense that term usually has in Ibn 'Arabī).

*Likeness*, and there is no one can better affirm His Transcendence, since He Himself has already affirmed His own Transcendence, and that is the most fitting expression of His Transcendence!

[2.] Then after that, o seeker, you should have faith in the Messengers—God's blessings be upon them—and in what they have brought and what they have informed us about Him: that He is far greater and more exalted than anything you have either known or been unaware of!

Next, you should love absolutely *all* the Companions, may God be pleased with them. There is no way at all that they could be charged with any offense or criticized, and no one of them should be raised in excellence above the others, except as his Lord has established that excellence in His Noble Book or through the words of His Prophet—may God's blessings and peace be with him. And you should respect and esteem whoever God and His Messenger have respected and esteemed.

Next, you should accept and acknowledge the people of this Path, with regard to all the stories<sup>8</sup> that are recounted about them, and also with regard to everything you *see* from them which the (ordinary) mind and (worldly) knowledge cannot encompass.

In general, you should hold a good opinion of everyone, and your heart should be at peace with them. You should pray specially, in secret, to/for the people of faith.<sup>9</sup> And you should serve the poor, recognizing their excellence and nobility in that they are content with letting you serve them, and in their bearing patiently with their burdens, troubles and difficulties.<sup>10</sup>

[3.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is keeping silent (*ḥamt*), except for 'mentioning' God (*dhikr Allāh*), reciting the Noble Qur'an, guiding in the right way someone

<sup>8</sup> Of their spiritual qualities and accomplishments, the *karāmāt*: a good illustration of what Ibn 'Arabī has in mind can be found in his *Sufis of Andalusia* (tr. R. Austin)—and to a far greater extent throughout the *Futūhāt*.

<sup>9</sup> As indicated in n. 4 above, in Ibn 'Arabī ordinarily uses the expression *mu'minūn* in its specifically Qur'anic sense, to refer to the elite group of the prophets, saints and spiritually accomplished souls of the 'Friends of God', the *awliyā'*. Thus the *du'ā* prayers mentioned here are probably referring to *asking for their help and intercession*, not simply to blessings on them.

<sup>10</sup> The special place of caring for 'the poor' here—and Ibn 'Arabī seems to refer to those who are literally *fuqarā'*—is no doubt connected with one of his favorite 'divine sayings' (*hadīth qudsī*), the one which begins: '*I was sick, but you didn't visit Me (...feed Me; ... give Me to drink...)*'

who has gone astray, exhorting to do what is right and forbidding what is wrong, reconciling those who have broken up, and strongly encouraging acts of voluntary charity—indeed every form of good.

[4.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is searching for someone who is in harmony with your essential nature, in accord with what you are aiming for and the way leading there. For so much comes to the person of faith from his brother.<sup>11</sup> And watch out for the company of the person who is fundamentally opposed (to your quest).<sup>12</sup>

[5.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is an actively guiding spiritual master (*shaykh murshid*). (With regard to finding such a guide), pure inner sincerity of intention (*sidq*) is the essential watchword of the spiritual seeker, because if the seeker is truly sincere with God, He will turn every (outward) ‘devil’ for that person into an angel rightly guiding them to the Good, and He will inspire in that (sincere seeker the awareness of) what is good. For inner sincerity is the Greatest Elixir<sup>13</sup>(the ‘perfect cure’), which can only be applied to the heart of our essential being (*qalb al-‘ayn*).

[6.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is seeking out the (spiritually licit) source of support<sup>14</sup>, since the very foundation of this Path is the licit livelihood. The supporting Pillar of this Path rests on that foundation (of right livelihood): do not be a burden to anyone, and do not accept (inappropriately) from anyone. Always earn your own living and be spiritually conscientious<sup>15</sup> about what you acquire, and about what you say, look at, listen to—indeed in all

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<sup>11</sup> Alluding to the famous hadith: ‘the person of faith is the mirror of the person of faith[or ‘God’: *al-mu>min*].’ To avoid cumbersome and inaccurate English paraphrasing, we have kept in this translation the literal gender references of the original Arabic, which should of course always be understood in their intended universal sense.

<sup>12</sup> See further elaboration of this point at section 15 below.

<sup>13</sup> I.e., the ‘perfect (spiritual) Cure’ or the ‘Philosopher’s Stone’ that turns the lead of experience into the gold of spiritual wisdom.

<sup>14</sup> *Luqma*: literally, sustaining ‘morsel’ of food, identical to ‘our daily bread’ in the Lord’s Prayer; ‘licit’ refers to the notion of what is spiritually ‘permissible’ (*halāl*). Of course translating *luqma* as ‘livelihood’ or ‘source of support’ also falsifies Ibn ‘Arabī’s original emphasis on what God provides us at every instant, and it is essential not to ‘objectify’ the English concepts here: what is spiritually ‘licit’ and appropriate one day (for one person, etc.) may *not* be so on another occasion....

<sup>15</sup> The root is *wara*‘, explained further at section 26 below.

of your actions. Do not be excessive in your clothing or housing, or in what you eat, for what is spiritually appropriate (*halāl*) is very little, without allowing for any excess. Know that once human beings have planted (animal) desires in their carnal selves (*nafs*), it is very hard to uproot them after that. There is no need for wealth and abundance in any of this.

[7.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is eating little. For hunger brings about an increase in (spiritual) energy for obeying God, while it takes away (spiritual) laziness.

[8.]<sup>16</sup> You should properly cultivate and make fruitful<sup>17</sup> the moments of the night and the day:

As for those hours to which the revelation (*shar‘*) has called you, for standing before your Sustainer/Teacher,<sup>18</sup> those are the five moments (of ritual prayer) that are obligatory for you. As for the rest of the moments lying between those (five obligatory prayers), if you have a trade, then strive to work in that time (enough to earn your living) for several days, like the son of (the Abbasid caliph) Harún al-Rashíd—God's Mercy upon him! And do not leave your place of prayer after the pre-dawn prayer until the sun actually rises, nor between the afternoon prayer and sunset, (filling that special period) with remembrance of God (*dhikr*) and humility and submission.<sup>19</sup> Nor should you let pass the period between the noon and afternoon (prayers) and between the evening and final night (prayers) without standing in prayer for twenty (extra) prostrations. Remember to keep the four (supplementary cycles of) prostrations at the

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<sup>16</sup> Although we have divided up this and the following two sections (8-10) in our translation, in the original Arabic they are all presented as a single section on ‘filling’ the day with religious devotions, much like Christian monastic ‘rules’.

<sup>17</sup> *Ta‘mīr* is an interesting expression here: the underlying verb means to ‘fill with life’ (give long life), build or construct, repair and restore, and to fill up something (so that it will work properly). All those meanings are relevant to Ibn ‘Arabī’s intention here, where ‘time’ is considered as a sort of field (or ‘building site’) that must thoughtfully used for the best possible purposes. ‘Moment’ (*waqt*) here refers to the Ibn ‘Arabī’s characteristic understanding of each instant as a distinct ‘creation’ and (potentially realized) connection between each soul and its Source.

<sup>18</sup> For *rabb*, see n. 3 above; ‘before’ in English is not nearly as immediate as the literal Arabic (Qur’anic) expression: ‘between the two Hands...’.

<sup>19</sup> The Islamic prayer-terminology here—and our very recent collective exclusion from the ongoing rhythms of the wider natural world—may obscure Ibn ‘Arabī’s actual point concerning the special spiritual intensity and sensitivity of the two periods of twilight surrounding the sunset and sunrise. A single day’s observation of what happens around us at those time, at least in a rural area or other natural setting, will suffice to illustrate what he is indicating here.

beginning of the day, before noon, and before the afternoon (prayer). And make your concluding night prayer (*witr*) another thirteen prostrations, nor should you finish those until you are overcome (by sleep).<sup>20</sup>

[9.] And you shouldn't eat except when you really need to, nor should you wear anything but what you need to protect you from the heat and cold, or to cover your nakedness and avoid any discomfort that would keep you from worshipping your Sustainer/Teacher.

[10.] And if you are among those who are literate, then impose on yourself reading a section (*wird*) of the Qur'an from the written text. (While you are) in your place of retreat, pick up the Qur'anic text, placing your left hand under the book, while your right hand follows the letters as you are looking at them, raising your voice enough so you hear yourself while you are reciting the Qur'an.

Ask and inquire (of God), with regard to each Sura, what it is you ought to ask about regarding that. Try to figure out for every verse its special relevance and lesson for you.<sup>21</sup> Meditate and put into practice, for each verse, what is its relevance and connection (to your situation), and what those qualities and attributes<sup>22</sup> are indicating (that you should now learn or do). Reflect on those qualities and attributes you have and on those which you are missing. Then give Him thanks for those which you have and those which you haven't (yet) attained! And when you read a description of (the contrasting attributes of) the hypocrites and those who ungratefully reject (God), then reflect as to whether there is not also something of those attributes in you.

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<sup>20</sup> The supplementary prayers Ibn 'Arabí refers to here are established practices which Islamic tradition attests to as part of the Prophet's own practices (*sunna*), followed by many of his close followers, though they were not imposed as obligations on the wider community. The references to particular numbers or cycles of prostration (*rak'a*) are a familiar shorthand expression in such a context, and should not be taken as 'quantitative' or formal in their intention. Such personal prayers can be extended indefinitely in length, depending on the passages of the Qur'an recited and the actual internal content of the prayer, and that 'extension' through the waking day is of course Ibn 'Arabí's intention here.

<sup>21</sup> Its *i'tibār*: i.e., the essential personal 'lesson' (for you at that particular occasion), and the connection between that verse and your own situation at that instant.

<sup>22</sup> The word *sifāt* ('qualities') here can refer specifically to the divine Attributes (and clearly, in this context, to the 'positive' attributes of 'the Most Beautiful Names') or—since they are the archetypes of all existence—to the broader range of characters, situations and exhortations mentioned in the Qur'an which are their dramatic 'exemplifications'.

[11.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is that you should observe and take account of your animal self (*muhāsabat al-nafs*) and pay close attention to your inner thoughts and impulses (*khawātir*) at every moment. Then you will feel a shame in your heart that comes directly from God.<sup>23</sup> For if you are ashamed before God, then He will prevent your heart from experiencing any thought or impulse that is contrary to the revelation (*shar‘*) or keep you from carrying out an action that is not pleasing to the Real (*al-Haqq*). Indeed we once had a master who would record his actions (during the day) in a notebook, and then when night came he would set them out before him and take an account<sup>24</sup> of his animal self according to what was noted there. And I added to my master's practice by recording my inner thoughts and impulses as well.

[12.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is to constantly be aware of (the correspondence between your) inner thoughts and impulses and the (spiritual demands of) every moment. That is, you should reflect on the moment you are in and consider what it is that the revelation (*shar‘*) has said to you that you should do, and then you should do that. So if you are in the moment of a prescribed duty, then you should carry that out—or else regret (your having missed) it and then hurry to make it up. But if you are a time that is ‘open’,<sup>25</sup> then busy yourself with performing all the different kinds of good which the Real has assigned to you. But if you start to do a prescribed<sup>26</sup> action that bestows closeness (to God), don't tell yourself that you will be alive after that to do another action. Instead, make that your last action in this world, the one in which you will encounter your Sustainer/Teacher. For if you do that, you will be released (or ‘finished’: *khalast*), and with that release comes (God's) acceptance.

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<sup>23</sup> I.e., as opposed to all the other (often conflicting and confusing) social, familial and other sources of such feelings.

<sup>24</sup> The (originally Qur’anic) language here refers to taking note of one’s good and bad actions (or inclinations, as Ibn ‘Arabi pointedly adds) and responding accordingly.

<sup>25</sup> *Mubāh*: in the technical terminology of *fiqh*, this refers to all actions which are simply religiously ‘permissible’; Ibn ‘Arabi’s own understanding of that term is infinitely more extensive. See the additional explanations in the article cited in n. 1 above.

<sup>26</sup> Or ‘revealed’: *mashrū‘* (see the opening passage from the *Futūhāt* on this key concept).



[13.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is that you should always sit down in a state of Purity. So whenever you become impure, purify yourself;<sup>27</sup> and once you have completed your ablutions, pray two (cycles of) prostrations—unless it is one of those three disapproved moments when you are forbidden to do the ritual prayer: at sunrise until exactly at noon, except on Fridays, and after the evening prayer until sundown.

[14.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is striving for the noble virtues of character<sup>28</sup> and actually carrying them out in the specific situations calling for them—and likewise avoiding all the bad traits of character. For know that whoever abandons a noble virtue of character (already) possesses a vice of character through abandoning (that corresponding virtue). And know that the virtues of character are of different kinds, just as there are different sorts of creatures. So it is indispensable for you to know which virtuous trait you should employ (in each specific situation), and which virtue(s) extend to most of the other kinds, in order to bring relief (*rāḥa*) to the creatures and keep harm away from them.<sup>29</sup> But (all this must also be only) for the Contentment of God!

So know that the (human) creatures are (God's) servants, constrained and compelled in their actions and their destinies by the hand of the what/Who moves them. So the Prophet brought us all relief in respect to this condition, when he said: '*I have been sent to complete the noble virtues of character.*' For in every situation about which the revelation has said that if you want, you can carry it out, and if you want, you can leave it alone (not do it), choose *not* to do it. Or if (the revelation) has said to you that if you want, you can exact a compensating (punishment, fine, etc.), and if you want, you can pardon (the offense), then prefer the side of pardon and forgiveness, and your *reward is with God* (42:40). And beware of seeking revenge

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<sup>27</sup> The terms used here, in the technical terminology of *fiqh*, are those referring to the 'lesser' impurities and the corresponding partial ablutions (*wudū*).

<sup>28</sup> *Makārim al-akhlāq*: the expression is a pointed reminder of the famous hadith Ibn 'Arabī goes on to cite here, in which the Prophet explained: 'I have been sent to help perfect the *makārim al-akhlāq*.'

<sup>29</sup> Note the numerous illustrations of this difficulty for the specific 'social' virtues which Ibn 'Arabī goes on to discuss here—and the extreme relevance for each of them of his final point here about the essential role of our *intention* (being for *God's* sake).

for yourself<sup>30</sup> against whoever has done evil to you, for God has called all of that ‘evil’,<sup>31</sup> even including the evil done by the person exacting their revenge.

But in every situation where the revelation has told you to be angry, then if you fail to be angry, that is not a praiseworthy character trait, because anger for God’s sake is among the noble virtues of character, for God.<sup>32</sup> So blessed are those who proceed in that way and keep company with (those divine principles), for they hear God saying:<sup>33</sup> ‘*Certainly you have an extraordinary character!*’ (68:4)

[15.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is to stay away from those who are *opponents* (of God)<sup>34</sup> and those who are not of your (spiritual) kind—but without your believing them to be evil, or even ever having such a thought occur to you! Instead, (what is truly essential is) having your intention (*nīya*) on keeping company with the Truly Real and His people, and preferring Him to them (i.e., His opponents).

[16.] Likewise<sup>35</sup> you should treat these animals with tender sympathy and compassion (*rahma*) for them, because they are among those whom God has caused to be of service (or

<sup>30</sup> Or: for your animal, carnal self (*nafs*, in either case).

<sup>31</sup> Referring, among others, to 17:38: ‘*All of that is evil and detestable with your Lord.*’ Even closer to the discussion of the specific topic of revenge (*qisās*) here is the explicit saying at 42:40: ‘*The recompense of an evil (deed) is an evil like it. But whoever pardons and improves/corrects, their reward is incumbent on God. Verily He does not love the wrongdoers!*’

<sup>32</sup> One of the classic illustrations of this quality is of course the cleansing of the Temple.

<sup>33</sup> This famous verse from an early Sura (68:4) clearly refers directly to the Prophet. From Ibn ‘Arabī’s perspective, since that ‘nature’ is the very source of all revelation (the ‘Muhammadan Reality’), everyone who attains that state of spiritual perfection has likewise become or realized that same state of being.

<sup>34</sup> Literally ‘opposites,’ *addād*: the stress of this rare Qur’anic term (only used at 19:82) is on an absolute opposition of ends, not on outward relations or emotional states of mind (for which there are many more common Arabic expressions). Its distinctive spiritual meaning is becomes clear in that context (19:82-83), speaking of those who ungratefully and angrily attack God (*kufr*): *And they have chosen gods other than God so that those (gods) might be a support for them. But no, they will surely deny their worship of them and they will be absolute opponents to them!* The ‘kinds’ in question here become clear in that context.

<sup>35</sup> In the original text, the rest of this section (‘16’ here) clearly belongs with the preceding point as part of a long series of illustrations of ethical/spiritual ‘testing’ situations in which people commonly find themselves.

‘subjugated’: *taskhīr*) to you. So don't impose on them (work) that is beyond their capacity,<sup>36</sup> and do not heedlessly ride (or ‘load’) those of them you ride/load.

And act likewise with regard to whatever slaves your right hand possesses, because they are your brothers and God has only given you possession of their bodies so that He can see how you treat them.<sup>37</sup> For *you* are *His* servant, so whatever way you love for Him to act toward you, then you should act precisely like that with your own male and female servants. Indeed God is requiting you (accordingly). And whatever evil and ugly deeds you would love to have Him avert from you, then act precisely that same way with regard to them. For all (of those creatures) are *God's* family, and you are (a member) of that Family.

If you have a child, then teach them the Qur'an—but not for any purpose in this lower world! And oblige them to observe the appropriate behavior of the revealed Path (*ādāb al-sharī'a*) and the virtuous character traits of true Religion (*dīn*). Induce them to kindness and empathy, and non-attachment (to this world: *zuhd*, section 27 below) from infancy onward, so that they become habituated to those qualities. Don't encourage desires and cravings in their heart, but rather diminish the attractions of the life of this lower world. And (impress upon them) the lack of any share in the next life that is the ultimate outcome for the person who possesses this lower world, and the endless Bounty and Grace in the next life that is the outcome for the person who abandons (attachment to this lower world). But don't do any of that out of stinginess with your money or property!

[17.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is that you shouldn't even come near the gates of the powers-that-be (*al-sultān*), nor should you keep company with those who are competing for this lower world, since they will take your heart from God. But if something should oblige you to keep their company, then behave toward them with frank good counsel (*nasīha*), and don't try to fool them (by pretending to agree with them). For (in reality) you are

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<sup>36</sup> In addition to reflecting the gist of a number of well-known hadith, Ibn 'Arabī's language here explicitly echoes the repeated Qur'anic insistence (e.g., at 2:286) that God does not do this to human beings.

<sup>37</sup> Here Ibn 'Arabī simply echoes and applies a constant Qur'anic teaching about the nature of the essential human situation as God's 'stewards' or 'stand-ins' (*khalīfa*) on earth: '*...He will place you-all as His khulafā' on earth so that He will see how you-all act.*'

interacting with the Real, and whatever you do, they will be made to be of service to you through (their impact on) your wider spiritual situation. Therefore always keep your intention directed toward God (asking that) *He* deliver you from the situation you are in, through the means that are best for you with regard to your true Religion (*dīn*).

[18.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is always to be present with God, in all of your actions and all your states of rest.

[19.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is always to be giving, whether you have much or little, whether you are in straightened circumstances or at ease. For that is a sign of your heart's solid confidence in what is with God.

[...]

[20.] You must restrain your anger. For that is a sign of the openness of your heart (*sadr*). Now when you restrain your anger, you please the All-Compassionate (*al-Rahmān*). And (at the same time) you outrage the devil,<sup>38</sup> since you have tamed your animal self and subdued it, so that the devil cannot conquer it. You have also brought delight to the heart of the person from whom you have restrained your anger, by not requiting them in kind for their (offending) action. And that can be a cause of their returning to what the Real (*al-Haqq*) and His just action, and for their recognizing their own unjust and offensive treatment of you. Indeed they may even regret and repent for what happened because of their misconduct.

So you must know the right ways to receive (offense and hostility), and strive to take on that character trait. Then the greatest result and the highest merit, if you restrain your anger against the person who has given rise to that anger, is that God will reward you for your (good) action. And what result is more perfect than your pardoning your brother and bearing with his harming you, while restraining your anger? And what the Real wants you to do toward (another) servant, He also wants to do precisely that toward you! So struggle and strive (*ijtihād*) to take on these qualities (of Mercifulness and Compassion), since they give rise to love and affection in people's hearts. Thus the Prophet already ordered us to practice mutual affection and

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<sup>38</sup> An allusion to one a hadith Ibn 'Arabī often mentions: '*anger is the touch of Satan* (on the heart).'

to love one another. And this (restraining one's anger) is one of the highest causes that lead to mutual love.

[21.] You must practice *ihsān* (doing what is good and beautiful), for that is a sign of your shame (or ‘conscience’, *hayā*) before God, and of the glorification of God in the heart of the person who is *muhsin*. For Gabriel said:<sup>39</sup> ‘What is *ihsan*?’ And the Prophet—may God's blessings and peace be upon him—replied: ‘*It is that you should worship/serve God as though you see Him. For even if you don't see Him, He sees you!*’ And the Prophet said (in another hadith): ‘*Shame/conscience is part of true faith, and it is entirely Good.*’ So ultimately it is impossible for the person of true faith to do harm (*sharr*).

[22.] You must practice *dhikr* (remembering God) and asking His Forgiveness. For (asking His forgiveness) after you've sinned effaces and removes the sin, while doing so after you've been willingly obedient and have done good (*ihsān*) brings ‘*light upon light*’ and joy upon joy. As for *dhikr*, that unifies the (scattered) heart and purifies your inner thoughts and intentions. But if you should tire (of performing *dhikr*), then turn to reciting the book of God, reciting it deliberately and reflectively, glorifying and exalting God. (Recite the Qur'an) while asking and imploring (God), if it is a verse of imploring; or with awe and humility, if it is a verse (suggesting) fear and a threat and a warning and lesson. As for the Qur'an, the one who recites it never tires of it, because of the (constantly changing) diversity of meanings within it.

[23.] You must strive to loosen the knot of persistence and stubborn insistence<sup>40</sup> in your heart. [...]

[24.] You must remain cautiously conscious of God (*taqwā*), both with regard to your inner life and outwardly. For the meaning of *taqwā* is to take precautions to avoid His punishment. So the person who is afraid of His punishment will hasten to do what pleases God. As God says: *And God warns you all to be cautious regarding Himself* (3:27). And He said: *And know that God knows what is in all your souls, so be cautious regarding Him* (2:235). Thus (the word) *taqwā* is derived from *wiqāya* (‘taking protection’). So be cautiously aware of God

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<sup>39</sup> In the celebrated hadith about the three dimensions of true Religion (*dīn*), where *ihsān* follows true faith (*īmān*) and the basic ritual actions (*islām*) of Religion.

<sup>40</sup> On sinning: *isrār*.

regarding God's actions, as (the Prophet, in praying) said: *'I take refuge with You from You!'* Therefore whatever it is that you fear and dread, avoid the way leading to that. For sinful-disobedience (*ma'sīya*) is the way leading to misery and distress, while willing obedience (*tā'a*) is the way leading to (eternal) happiness.

[25.] You must avoid spiritual self-deception (*ightirār*), which is when your animal self deludes you concerning God's graciousness and forbearance, while you continue to persist in your sinful-disobedience. So Iblīs deludes you by saying to you: 'If it weren't for your sinning and your opposition (to God), how could His Grace and Compassion and Forgiveness even appear?' Now that is the ultimate form of (spiritual) ignorance in whoever says such a thing. [...]

[26.] You must practice spiritual conscientiousness (*wara'*), which is an intuitive avoiding (of something wrong, illicit, etc.) that comes to you in your heart (*sadr*). The Prophet said: *'Abandon what disturbs you for what does not disturb you.'* So even if you are in need of that (which disturbs you) and you can't find anything to replace it, then leave that (need) to God: He will provide you in exchange with what is better than that. So don't be hasty<sup>41</sup> (in rushing to do what you feel isn't right). For this conscientiousness (*wara'*) is the very foundation of true Religion (*asās al-dīn*). So as you begin to apply it in practice, your actions will become purified, your conditions (inner and outer) will become successful, your speaking will become perfected, blessings of divine grace (*karamāt*) will rush toward you, and you will be protected and preserved by a divine protection in everything you do, without a doubt. By God, by God, o my brother—(Practice) conscientiousness, conscientiousness!

[27.] And you must practice non-attachment (*zuhd*) regarding this lower world and reducing your desire for it—indeed removing that love for it from your heart completely. But if you can't help seeking (something from it), then restrict yourself to seeking from it your sustenance (acquired) in the (properly licit) way.

Nor should you compete with any of those who are devoted to it, for (this lower world) is spoiled *merchandise* (4:94, etc.) that does not remain. The person desiring this lower world will never attain their goal, since God only gives each person what He has apportioned to them. So the person desiring this lower world will be continually saddened by it, and disgusting in God's

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<sup>41</sup> Alluding to the famous Arabic proverb (or hadith): 'hastiness (*al-'ajala*) comes from the devil.'

sight. Indeed the likeness of the person seeking it is like the person who drinks sea water: the more they drink, the more thirsty they become! It should suffice you to take note of the Prophet's likening (this lower world) to a dead corpse and a dunghill: only dogs gather around those two things.

God said (in a 'divine saying'): *'O child of Adam, if you are content with what I have apportioned to you, then your heart and your body will be at peace; your daily bread will come to you and you will be worthy of (God's) praise. But if you are not content with what I have apportioned to you, your heart and body will both be wearied as you chase after (this world) like wild beasts racing in the desert. By My Glory and Majesty, you will only attain from it what I have assigned to you, and you will deserve blame!'*

For God said (2:195): *'Spend in the path of God, and do not throw yourselves into ruin with your own hands'*— which is their turning back to their possessions by worrying about them—'But do good/beauty, for surely God loves those who are doing what is good-and-beautiful' (*al-muhsinūn*) !

And Praise be to God, Sustainer of the Worlds!

And God's blessings and peace be upon our master Muhammad and on His Family  
and Companions!

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## Divine "Imagination" and the Intermediate World: Ibn 'Arabî on the **Barzakh**.

For centuries after the time of the Andalusian mystic Ibn 'Arabî, his remarkable discussions and conceptions of the "Imagination" (*al-khayâl*) were elaborated by Islamic philosophers, poets, artists and critics in order to explain, interpret and justify the full range of artistic and creative activities carried on within later Islamicate cultures, as far away as India and Indonesia.<sup>1</sup> Modern western students of Ibn 'Arabî writing on such themes have tended to focus on the development of those ideas in his celebrated Fusûs al-Hikam ("The Bezels of Wisdom") and its long line of traditional philosophic commentaries.<sup>2</sup> But another major source of those classical Islamic understandings of the Imagination was in the Shaykh's many discussions of the eschatological "Barzakh" or "intermediate world" of the divine Imagination--as well as his accounts of his own striking experiences and decisive spiritual encounters there--which are scattered throughout his magnum opus, al-Futûhât al-Makkîya ("The Meccan Illuminations").

One of his most extensive and widely influential discussions of the Imagination/Barzakh, in all its humanly relevant dimensions, was in the set of five eschatological chapters (61-65) within the long opening section of the Futûhât--chapters first brought to the attention of a wider Western audience in the famous studies by Asin-Palacios of Islamic themes in Dante's Divine

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<sup>1</sup>Thus the incomparable architectural accomplishments of the Tâj Mahâl turn out to have been inspired, from the overall plan down to sometimes minute details, by the elaborate eschatological discussions and diagrams of the Futûhât: see the detailed explanations in W. Begley, The Myth and Meaning of the Taj Mahal. Two of the most elaborate and influential later Islamic philosophic developments of Ibn 'Arabî's eschatological conceptions--including many of the key images mentioned here in chapter 63 of the Futûhât--are the theories of imagination of the Iranian Shiite thinker Mulla Sadra (d. 1640) and the South Asian author, Shah Walîullâh of Delhi (d. 1762). The literal inspiration of Ibn 'Arabi's thought (and indeed of this particular chapter) is clearly visible in such translated works as our The Wisdom of the Throne: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mulla Sadra (Princeton, 1981) and Shah Walîullâh's Lamahât, tr. G.N. Jalbani (Hyderabad, 1970).



Comedy. Those chapters, whose arrangement follows the traditional popular ordering of the symbolic "events" and "places" of the Resurrection mentioned in Islamic scriptures, begin with descriptions of Gehenna and the "Fires" and other torments of its residents (chapters 61-62) and conclude with the stages of redemption and eventual bliss of souls who have reached the Gardens of paradise (chapters 64-65).<sup>3</sup> The chapter translated here<sup>4</sup> is therefore the centerpiece of this broader eschatological section and focuses relatively more on the "theoretical" dimension of the Imagination, on the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the spiritual experiences and phenomena discussed in greater detail in many other sections of the Futûhât.

It is always a challenge, and often a near-impossibility, to attempt to outline the structure of any of Ibn 'Arabî's writings in a linear and straightforward fashion. (And serious attempts to convey something of their deeper inner structure inevitably require an involved commentary much longer than the mystic's own original text.) However, a few such indications have been added here for the benefit of those who may be encountering his distinctive style of writing for the first time. Like almost all chapters of the Futûhât, chapter 63 opens with a short and highly allusive metaphysical-didactic poem summarizing virtually all the themes treated in the rest of the chapter; the remainder of this eschatological chapter, quite typically, is an extended and (at first glance) apparently somewhat disordered commentary on the topics suggested by those opening verses. In this case, Ibn 'Arabî begins his exposition with [I.] an explanation--at once linguistic, symbolic and philosophic--of the basic notion of a *barzakh*, or "limit" between two metaphysical realms: here, the domains of purely physical and purely intelligible/noetic being, and the mysterious eschatological realm of Imagination that lies between them. The exposition then moves from the ontological-theological mode of discourse to [II.] an openly epistemological

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<sup>2</sup>The classic study from this perspective (including as well many important sections of the Futûhât) remains Henry Corbin's L'Imagination créatrice dans le Soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabî (Paris, 1958), translated (by R. Manheim) as Creative Imagination in the Sûfism of Ibn 'Arabî (Princeton, 1969).

<sup>3</sup>See our forthcoming study (with complete, fully annotated translations and annotations of these and other eschatological chapters), Ibn 'Arabî's Divine Comedy: an Introduction to Islamic Eschatology and Cosmology. A considerable range of representative translations on this subject are already included in our contributions to Ibn 'Arabî: Les Illuminations de la Mecque/The Meccan Illuminations, ed. M. Chodkiewicz (Paris, 1989) and in the article "Seeing Past the Shadows: Ibn 'Arabî's 'Divine Comedy,'" Journal of the Muhyiddîn Ibn 'Arabî Society XII (1992), pp. 50-69.

and experiential evocation of the kinds of experience (and scriptural allusions) which begin to reveal more clearly the central *existential* importance of this realm of being. Next, working through the rich symbolism of a famous Prophetic statement comparing this reality to the "Horn" that is blown to announce the Resurrection, Ibn 'Arabî begins to develop [III.] the mysterious correspondences between the universal, ontological dimensions of this plane of Imagination and the manifestations of its "Light" in the experiences of each individual. And finally, the Shaykh returns [IV.] to the more explicitly eschatological implications of his earlier discussions, developing the parallels between this universal reality of the Imagination and our more familiar experience of sleep and dreams--an approach to which he later returned in a number of famous passages in his Fusûs al-Hikam.

However, even the most cursory and uninformed reading of this chapter would make quickly make it evident that Ibn 'Arabî's intention was *not* to "clarify" in any sort of rational, conceptual and logical form the different ways in which we can speak of and understand the Imagination--however broadly or narrowly one might define that term--and all its manifestations. In this respect, chapter 63 is an excellent, highly typical introduction to Ibn 'Arabî's unique rhetoric and style, an inimitable form of writing which is always intimately linked to his larger spiritual and didactic intentions. As readers familiar with other texts of his may more quickly recognize, the recurrent mixture of--and sudden shifts between--a whole spectrum of contrasting approaches, images, perspectives and technical vocabularies is not accidental or the result of "bad writing" (or fuzzy thinking), but instead forms a complex, highly self-conscious rhetorical technique. The Shaykh's ultimate aim here, as so often throughout his writings, is not simply heightened intellectual understanding nor a more deeply grounded religious faith and practice--although both of those outcomes may also result from serious study of his writing. Rather, as one can see most clearly at those moments where he suddenly shifts to the singular imperative ("Know!", "Realize!", etc.) it is to bring about in the properly prepared and attentive reader a suddenly transformed state of immediate realization and awareness, in which each of the implicit dualities (or paradoxes) of our usual perception of things--the recurrent categorical suppositions of subject and object, divine and human, spiritual and material, earthly and heavenly--is directly

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<sup>4</sup>Vol. IV, pp. 406-425 in the new critical edition of al-Futûhât al-Makkîya, by Dr. O. Yahya (Cairo, 1975/1395); this corresponds to vol. I, pp. 304-307 of the lithographed (Cairo/Beirut) edition cited

transcended in an enlightened, revelatory moment of unitive vision. His ultimate aim in this chapter, as throughout his writings, is to bring his readers to *see*--not just to acknowledge intellectually or theologically--everything as ongoing theophany (*tajalliyât*) and "ever-renewed" divine creation.

In the case of this chapter, Ibn 'Arabî's efforts to break through his readers' ordinarily unquestioned separations between what is "divine" and "human," or "objective" and "subjective," or "this-worldly" and "other-worldly," are repeatedly sustained by certain basic features of the Arabic language that cannot easily be reproduced in a western tongue. For example, his most basic term and underlying subject here, the Arabic expression *al-khayâl*, refers most often, in ordinary contexts, to what we would ordinarily call an "image" or "*object* of imagination," and ultimately to the actual underlying reality of *all* the "imaginal" (*not* "imaginary") objects of our perception in virtually all forms and domains. Given this primacy of the *ontic*, "objective" dimension of the term *al-khayâl*--whether that is expressed in theological or cosmological terms--any translation referring to "imagination"<sup>5</sup> inevitably risks falling into the psychologizing or individualistic, subjectivist assumptions that are embedded in the usual usages of that concept in western languages, whether the term is being employed positively or pejoratively. In fact, precisely at those points where Ibn 'Arabî wants to refer explicitly to something like a psychological "faculty" or individual activity of "imagination"--or to the individual psychic "objects" of such an activity--he invariably uses separate and quite distinct Arabic terms to emphasize that partial, subjective aspect.

Finally, and again quite typically, a deeper appreciation of Ibn 'Arabî's meaning and intentions here often requires a degree of acquaintance with Islamic scriptures and classical forms of religious learning that can rarely be assumed among modern readers. Thus any effort to communicate fully that web of allusions and assumptions to a modern audience naturally requires a body of notes and commentary several times longer than Ibn 'Arabî's text itself. In this case, given the constraints of article length, we have chosen to translate as much of the chapter itself as possible (omitting only a few repetitive or highly technical sections), at the price of

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in most earlier studies of the *Futûhât*.

<sup>5</sup>Such as our frequent use in this case of capitalization ("Imagination") or a parenthetical qualification ("divine," etc.).

eliminating all such explanatory notes<sup>6</sup>--apart from the basic identification of Qur'anic quotations and allusions, which are so often indispensable for understanding the Shaykh's intentions.

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<sup>6</sup>Which will be found in great detail in our forthcoming book-length translation of these and other eschatological chapters and sections from the Futūhāt (n. 3 above). Omitted sections are indicated in the translated section below by points of suspension [...].

Chapter 63: Concerning Inner Understanding of (How) People Remain in the *Barzakh* Between This World and the Resurrection (at the Last Day)

Between this world and the Resurrection, for whoever reflects,  
there are intermediate (*barzakhîya*) levels, each with their limits:

What they hold is according to the influence of how their possessor is  
*right now*, before dying—***so consider deeply [O people of vision]*** (59:2)!

They have influences and authority over everything, making the wonders  
appear; ***they do not spare (anyone), nor leave (anyone) alone*** (74:28).

They have wide-open manifestations in being, without restriction,  
yet they are neither essential-realities, nor (mere) effects.

They (have only to) say to God (*al-Haqq*) "***Be!***" and God is (already) creating them--  
so how can a mortal-human (*bashar*) escape from their influence?!

Through them are the (forms of) knowing and every chastisement;  
through them are the signs (of God) and miracles and exemplary lessons.

Were it not for this (divine) Imagination, today we would be in nothingness:  
no goal or purpose would have been accomplished through us!

"*As though* (you saw God)" is Its realm of authority, if you've understood It:  
revelation has come through/with It, as have intellect and reflection.

Among the expressions alluding to It is the "***like...***" of the (divine) Attributes:  
so *you* are only detached from forms by your bringing (other) forms!

[I.] Our saying "*As though* is Its realm of authority" refers to the authority of the (divine) Imagination (*khayâl*), which is the essential reality of (this) "as though" and the inner meaning of (the Prophet's) saying "Worship God as though you see Him... ."

...Know that the word "*barzakh*" is an expression for what *separates* two things without ever becoming either of them, such as the line separating a shadow from the sunlight, or as in His Saying--may He be exalted!: "**He has loosened the two Seas. They meet:/ between them a *barzakh*, they do not go beyond**" (55: 19-20)--meaning that neither of them becomes mixed with the other. But even if our senses are unable to perceive what separates those two things, the intellect judges that there is indeed a divider separating them--and that divider grasped by the

intellect is precisely the *barzakh*. Because if something is perceived by the senses, it must be one of those two things, rather than the *barzakh*. So each of those two things, when they are adjacent to each other, have need of a *barzakh* which is not the same as each of them, but which has in itself the power of each of them.

Now since the Barzakh (of the creative divine Imagination) is something separating what is knowable and unknowable, existent and non-existent, intelligible and unintelligible, affirmed and negated, it has been given the name "Barzakh" as a technical term. It is intelligible in itself, yet it is nothing but the imagined-image (*al-khayâl*)! For when you perceive it--assuming you are in a rational state--you know that you have perceived something existent on which your gaze has fallen; indeed you most definitely know that there is absolutely something there. But what *is* this about which you affirm that it is an existent thing, while at the same time you are also denying that?! For this Imagination-Image (*al-khayâl*) is neither (entirely) existent nor nonexistent, neither (entirely) known nor unknowable, neither (entirely) affirmed nor denied.

This is like a human being perceiving their (reflected) form in the mirror. The person definitely knows that they have perceived their (own) form in a certain respect, while they know just as absolutely that they have not perceived their form in another respect, because of the smallness of the image they see in the mirror, assuming the body of the mirror is small--since they know that their own form is a great deal larger than the one they saw.... So what *is* that reflected form? And *where* is it actually located? And what is its (ontological) status? For it is both affirmed and denied, both existent and nonexistent, both known and unknown.

Now God--may He be praised!--has made this reality appear to His servants, by way of making a fitting image, so that they might know and come to realize that if they are bewildered and incapable of grasping the reality of this phenomenon, which is (only) part of this world, and cannot attain full knowledge of its reality--then how much more incapable and ignorant and bewildered they must be regarding the *Creator* of that reality! In this way God has pointed out to (His servants) that the divine Self-manifestations (*tajalliyât al-Haqq*) to them are even more subtle and delicate than this case in which their intellects are already so bewildered and incapable of perceiving the reality of things....

It is to something like this reality that each human being goes in their sleep and after their death (cf. 39:42). So that person sees (moral and spiritual) qualities and characteristics as self-

subsistent forms that speak to him and with which he converses, as being (human) bodies without any doubt. And the person of spiritual unveiling (*al-mukâshif*) already sees (here), while they are awake, what the sleeper sees in their dream state or the dead person sees after they have died. Likewise they will see the forms of their actions being weighed in the other world (according to the Qur'anic symbolism of the "Scales")--despite their being (apparently non-substantial) qualities and characteristics (in this world)--and they will see death (according to the description in a famous hadith) as "a spotted ram being sacrificed," even though death is (really only) a relation (between two states of being)... So praise to the One Who remains unknowable, so He is not known--and Who is known, so that He is not unknown! [***He is the One Who gives form to you-all in the Wombs, however He wishes:***] ***There is no god but Him, the Unapproachable, the All-Wise*** (3:6)!

[II.] Now there are some people who perceive this imaged-object (*al-mutakhayyal*) with the eye of the (physical) sensation, and there are others who perceive it with the eye of imagination. Of course I'm referring here to (our perceptions) in the waking state, since during sleep (everyone) definitely perceives with the eye of imagination. So if a person wishes to distinguish between (those two modes of perception) in their waking state, whether in this world or at the Day of Resurrection, they can determine (which sort of perception it is) by looking at the imaged-object. Thus if [a] the states of what one is looking at continue to change as it changes its shape and characteristics, even though you can't deny that it is still the same thing, and [b] the fact of observing it does not stop it from changing its shape and formation--as when a chameleon, when you observe it, stops changing its colors--then that is undoubtedly (being seen) with the eye of imagination, not with the eye of the senses. For you perceive what-is-imagined (*al-khayâl*) with the eye of imagination, not with the eye of (physical) sensation.

Indeed few of those who lay claim to the unveiled vision of spirits, whether of fire (i.e., jinn) or of light (angels), really understand how this is. When (those spirits) take on the image of perceptible forms, (most people) don't know whether they are perceiving them with the eye of the imagination or with the eye of (physical) sensation--since both sorts of perception involve the sensing activity of the eye. That (inner sensing activity) is what presents the perception through *both* the eye of imagination and the eye of (physical) sensation. So this is a subtle form of knowledge: I mean the knowledge of the distinction between the two "eyes," and between the sensing activity of the eye and the eye of (physical) sensation. One can know that (what one

perceives) is indeed sensible, not imaginal, and that one has perceived it with the eye of sensation, not the eye of imagination (by the following conditions): [a] when the eye perceives the imaged-object and, without being distracted, sees that its shape and characteristics don't change; [b] when it doesn't see that imaged-object in different places at the same time, assuming it is definitely a single reality; and [c] that imaged-object doesn't become changed or transformed into different states.

This is how you should understand how a human being can perceive their Lord--may He be exalted!--in a dream, even though He transcends any form or image, as well as how that perception of Him takes place and its limitations. And through this you may understand what has come down in the sound report (of the famous hadith) concerning the Creator's "manifesting Himself (to souls at the Resurrection) in the most unlikely of forms among those in which they saw Him," and concerning His "transformation into a form which they knew (before then)," after they had been denying Him and taking refuge from Him (in more agreeable forms of His manifestation).

So you should know with *which* eye you are seeing Him! For I have already let you know that (the divine) Imagination is perceived either through itself--I mean through the eye of imagination--or through the (physical) vision. And which of those two is the sound one on which we should rely?! Regarding that we (wrote these verses):

When my Beloved appears to me, with which eye do I see Him?

With *His* eye, not with mine: for none sees Him but Him!

(This is only) in accordance with the transcendence of His Station and confirming His Words, since He says: "***The gazes do not perceive Him, [but He perceives the gazes...***" (6:103), and He did not specify any particular Abode (of this world or the next), but sent it as an Verse unrestricted (in its applicability) and as a definite, confirmed matter. For none other than Him perceives Him, so it is with *His* eye--may He be praised!--that I see Him, as in (the famous divine saying in) the sound hadith-report: "...I (God) was his gaze through which he sees."

So *wake up*, you who are asleep and heedless of all this, and pay attention! I have opened up for you a door to forms of awareness and inner knowing that thoughts can never reach, though intellects can come to accept them, either through special divine Providence or by "polishing hearts with *dhikr* and recitation (of the Qur'an)." Then the intellect accepts what the divine Self-



manifestation (*tajalli*) gives it and knows that that (imaginal revelation) is beyond its own power with respect to its thinking, indeed that its thinking could never give it that. Therefore (that person) gives thanks to God--may He be exalted!--Who created their constitution (*nash'a*) so that it could receive things like that: this being the constitution of the (divine) Messengers and prophets and those among the saints who are the recipients of special divine Providence. This is so that (such a person) may know that their *receptivity* (to what is bestowed by God) is higher and more noble than their own thinking. So *realize*, o my brother, from now on Who it is that is manifesting Himself to you from behind this door (of the imagination)! For this is a prodigious matter, where even the innermost hearts become bewildered.

[III.] Then the prescriber (of Revelation), who is the truthful speaker, called this thing--which is the (divine) Presence of the Barzakh to which we are brought after death and in which we directly witness our souls--a "Horn" (*al-sûr*) and "Trumpet" (*al-nâqûr*). Here the word *al-sûr* is (also) the plural of the word *sûra*, "form." So (according to the Qur'anic accounts of the Resurrection) "***it is breathed into the Horn/forms***" (6:73, etc.) and "***it is blown upon the Trumpet***" (74:8). And the two of them (the "Horn" and "Trumpet") are exactly the same thing, differing only in the names because of the various states and attributes (of the underlying reality)....

Know that the Messenger of God, when he was asked what this "Horn" (*al-sûr*) was, replied: "It is a horn (*qarn*: an animal horn) of Light upon which (the angel) Isrâfîl blows." So he reported that its shape was the shape of (an animal's) horn, described as being broad (at the base) and narrow (at the tip).... Know, then, that the breadth of *this* "Horn" (of the Barzakh-Imagination) is as broad as possible, since none of the generated things are broader than It. That is because through Its reality It has sway over every thing, and (even) over what is not a thing. It gives form (alike) to absolute nothingness and to what is (ontologically) impossible, necessary and contingent, turning what is existent into nothingness and what is non-existent into being. Regarding this divine Presence (i.e., ontological realm of being) the Prophet says: "Worship God as though you see Him..." and "God is in the *qibla* of the person who is praying"--i.e., imagine Him in your direction of prayer and be attentive to Him, so that you are fully mindful of Him and humble before him. And always observe the appropriate courtesy (*adab*) with Him while you are praying, since if you don't do that you are being discourteous and inconsiderate.

Now had the prescriber (of Revelation) not known that there is within you a reality called "imagination" that has this (immense) sway, he would not have said to you "(Worship God) as though you see Him" with your (physical) vision. For the indications of the intellect rule out this "as though," and the intellect holds, with its arguments, that any "likeness" (between God and created things) is impossible: vision can perceive nothing but the wall (in front of the person praying)! Yet we have also learned that the prescriber (of Revelation) called upon you to imagine that you are facing God (*al-Haqq*) in your direction of prayer; indeed it has been prescribed for you to accept that. And God says: "***So wherever you may turn, then there is the Face of God!***" (2:115)--and the "face" (*wajh*) of something is its reality and its individual essence. So the Imagination *has* given form to the One Who, according to the arguments of the intellect, cannot possibly be conceived or given any form. That is why (the Imagination) is so all-encompassing.

But as for the "narrowness" and restrictiveness of the imagination, that is because it does not extend to receiving anything--whether sensible things, or spiritual ones, or relations and connections, or God's Majesty and His Essence--except through some form. If it were to try to perceive something without using a form, its reality would not allow it to do that, since it is precisely the (faculty of) imaginal representation (*wahm*), and nothing else.... So the imagination is the most extensive of all the objects of knowledge--yet despite the immense breadth of its sway, which extends to every thing, it is also incapable of receiving the purely immaterial (noetic) realities (without using some image or likeness). Hence the imagination (as indicated in many familiar hadith) sees knowledge in the form of milk, or honey and wine and pearls; and it sees Islâm in the form a dome and pillars; and it sees the Qur'an in the form of butter and honey; and it sees Religion in the form of a bond; and it sees God (*al-Haqq*) in the form a human being and in the form of light....

As for this "horn" (of the Barzakh/Imagination) being made of "light" (according to the hadith mentioned above), that is because light is the immediate cause for (things) becoming unveiled and clearly appearing, since without light, vision would perceive nothing at all. So God made this Imagination as a "light" through which could be perceived the Bringing-into-form (*taswîr*) of every thing, whatever that might be, as we've already mentioned. His Light passes through the absolute nothingness so that He might shape it into the forms of being. Hence the Imagination is more deserving of the (divine) Name "the Light" (*al-Nûr*) than all the created

things ordinarily described as "luminous," since Its Light does not resemble the (created) lights and through It the divine Self-manifestations are perceived.

And It (or 'He') *is* the Light of the eye of imagination, not the light of the eye of sensation. So understand this! For if you understand how (the divine) Imagination is Light, and you know in what way it is (always) correct, then you will have an advantage over those who don't know that--the sort of person who says: "that is only a false imagination!" That is because such people have failed to understand the perception of the light of imagination which has been given them by God. This is just like their saying that our senses are also "mistaken" in some of their perceptions, when in fact their sense-perceptions are sound, while the judgment (regarding the meaning of those perceptions) belongs to something else, not to the senses themselves. It is the judgment that is false, not the sensation. Likewise the imagination perceives with its light whatever it perceives, without passing judgment. The judgment only belongs to something else, which is the *intellect*, so the error can't be attributed to the imagination. Thus there never is any "false imagination" at all--indeed all of it is correct!

Now as for our companions, they were mistaken in their thinking about this "Horn" (of the Barzakh/Imagination), in that most of the intellectual thinkers represented its narrowest point as the center (of the earthly sphere) and its widest point as the highest, outermost celestial sphere, so that the "forms" which it contains would be the forms of the (physical) world. They considered the wide segment of this Horn its highest part and its narrow section the lowest part of the world--but things are not at all as they claimed! Instead, since the Imagination (even) gives form to God (*al-Haqq*), as well as everything in the world below Him, including even nothingness, its highest section is the narrow one and its lowest section is the wide one. That is just how God created It: for the first thing He created from It was "narrow," while what He created from It later widened out, like the part of a horn adjoining the animal's head.

For there is no doubt that the Presence (i.e., ontological domain) of the divine Actions and States is more extensive (than the higher divine "Presences"). That is why the true Knowers (of God) only find comprehensiveness of knowledge to the extent of what they come to know *from the world*. Then when they want to proceed to knowing the Unicity of God--may He be exalted!--they keep on ascending gradually from that breadth (of worldly objects of knowing) toward what is narrower (in extent). So their forms of knowing (lit.: "knowledges") keep on

becoming less numerous while they ascend in their knowledge of God's Essence, through spiritual unveiling, until they reach the point where they have no object of knowledge but God (*al-Haqq*) alone--which is the narrowest point in that "Horn." For in reality its narrowest part is its highest, which has the most perfect greatness and majesty.

(The reality of this universal creative process of divine "Imagination" resembles) the first part of (an animal's) horn that appears when God has planted it in the animal's head: it continues to grow upward, beginning with that narrow point, as its lower part widens out. So (this narrowest initial "Point") is the first thing created. Don't you see how (likewise) the first thing God--may He be praised!--created was the "Pen" (68:1; 96:4) or the (universal) "Intellect," as he said. So He only created *one* (reality). Then He brought forth the creatures from that one (cf. 6:98), and the world became fully expanded. This is just like the procession of numbers from the initial "one"....

[IV.] Next, now that we have established this, you should know that God--may He be praised!--when He takes the spirits from these physical, material bodies, wherever they may be (at death), deposits those spirits in imaginal-bodily forms within this Horn of Light (of the Barzakh). So all of those things that the human being perceives after death in the Barzakh are only perceived through the eye and with the light of the form in which that person exists in that Horn--and that is a true perception. Among the forms there are [a] some who are restricted in their freedom of activity, and [b] others who are unrestricted, such as the spirits of all the prophets and the spirits of the martyrs; among them are [c] those who are able to look at (what goes on in) this world here-below, even while they are in that Abode (of the Barzakh), and [d] those who manifest themselves to the sleeper in that Presence of the Imagination which is in the person dreaming.

This is why one's dreams are always "true," because every dream in itself is true and not in error. Because if (we say) a dream was "mistaken," it isn't really the dream itself that was mistaken, but rather the *person* who interpreted it incorrectly, in that they didn't recognize the intended meaning of the image in question. Don't you notice what (the Prophet) said to Abû Bakr, when he had interpreted the dream of the person mentioned (in the hadith): "You were right about some of it, and mistaken about some of it." And likewise with what (Muhammad) said to the man who had a dream in which he saw his head cut off and fall to the ground, and then begin to roll around and speak to him. The Messenger of God mentioned to him that Satan

was playing with him. He knew the form of what the man had seen, so he didn't say to him "your *imagination* is false"--because what the man saw was real, only he had been mistaken in his interpretation of it. Instead he informed him about the real meaning of what he had seen while dreaming.

Likewise the supporters of Pharaoh (against Moses) "***are exposed to the Fire***" in *those* forms "***morning and night***" (40:46), without entering Hell, because they are captive within that Horn (of the Barzakh) and in that (imaginal) form. But on the Day of the Rising they enter "***the most intense torment***" (40:46), which is the sensible torment--not the imaginal one--which was theirs in the state of their dying on earth.

Now (sometimes) the eye of imagination perceives *both* imaginal forms and sensible forms together. And sometimes the source of imagination, who is the human being, perceives the object of imagination with the eye of imagination, as in (the Prophet's) saying "The Garden (of Paradise) was portrayed for me on the side of this wall." But he (also) perceived that with the eye of (bodily) sensation. And we only referred to the eye of (bodily) sensation because (according to the hadith report) "he came forward when he saw the Garden, to take a fruit from it," and because (according to another hadith) "he backed up when he saw the Fire (of Hell)" once while he was praying. For we know that (the Prophet) had such power that if he had perceived those visions (only) with the eye of his imagination, and not (also) with the eye of his bodily senses, that would not have influenced his body to move forward and to back up (in those two cases.) Indeed we have also experienced (that bodily influence of imaginal forms and perceptions), and we have neither his power nor his rank.

Therefore every human being in the Barzakh is "***hostage to what they have acquired***" (52:21; 74:38), imprisoned in the forms of their deeds, until they are raised up from those forms, on the Day of the Rising, in "***the state of being of the other world***" (29:20, etc.). ***And God says the Truth and He shows the right Way*** (33:4).

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The Mi'rāj and Ibn 'Arabī's Own Spiritual Ascension: Chapter 367 of the *Futūhāt* and the *K. al-Isrā'*

Introduction

The initial indications in the Koran and hadith concerning the Prophet's Ascension (mi'rāj) or nocturnal voyage (isrā', at Kor. 17:1) and the revelatory vision in which it culminated (Kor. 53:1-18) subsequently gave rise to a vast body of interpretations among the many later traditions of Islamic thought and spirituality.<sup>1</sup> Ibn 'Arabī's personal adaptation of that material, in at least four separate longer narratives, reflects both the typical features of his distinctive approach to the Koran and hadith and the full range of his metaphysical-theological teachings and practical spiritual concerns. For him, the Prophet's "nocturnal journey"--an expression he prefers both because it is that of the Koran and because it is more appropriate to the complete, "circular" nature of the movement in question<sup>2</sup>--is above all an archetypal symbol of the highest,

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<sup>1</sup>In this Introduction we have usually employed the expression "Mi'rāj" ("Ascension") most commonly used in Islamic languages, although Ibn 'Arabī himself prefers to follow the Koran (for reasons detailed in the following note) in referring instead to the isrā' of the Prophet and the saints. In most of the hadith accounts of this Ascension the revelations alluded to in the Koranic verses 53:1-18 play an integral (even decisive) role, and they are understood in that context by Ibn 'Arabī in all of his Mi'rāj narratives. Ibn 'Arabī's own distinctive use of the canonical hadith materials is outlined in n. 9 below and followed in detail in the notes to the translation.

For further references, see the general indications (from a historicist perspective) and bibliography in the articles "Isrā'" (B. Schreike) and "Mi'rāj" (J. Horovitz) in the SEI and EI<sup>1</sup>; the full range of hadith and legendary materials studied in the opening chapters of M. Asin Palacios' La Escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia (Madrid, 1919) (abridged English tr.--eliminating many references to the Arabic sources--as Islam and the Divine Comedy, London, 1926; repr. 1968); and G. Widengren, The Ascension of the Apostle and the Heavenly Book, Uppsala, 1950. See also the striking pictorial representations of many stages of the Mi'rāj--incorporating, however, a wide range of legendary or popular materials not used by Ibn 'Arabī--by the 15th-century Timurid school of Herat in "The Miraculous Journey of Mahomet"/Miraj Nameh (London/Paris, 1977).

<sup>2</sup>There are a number of shades of meaning in the Koranic expression asrā (at 17:1 and in the related hadith) that help explain Ibn 'Arabī's preference for that term: in addition to its being used to describe a complete spiritual journey involving both "ascent" and "return" (ruju')--a fundamental dimension he emphasizes especially in the R. al-Anwar--the term refers more specifically to a "nocturnal

culminating stages in the inner, spiritual journey that must be followed by each of the saints or mystical "knowers" who would participate fully in the heritage of Muhammad,<sup>3</sup> even if the subjective phases and experiences marking that route necessarily appear differently to each individual.<sup>4</sup>

Thus the theme of the Mi'raj provides Ibn 'Arabi with a single unifying symbolic framework for the full range of practical spiritual questions and theoretical issues (ontological, cosmological, theological, etc.) that are discussed in other contexts throughout the Futuhat and his other works.<sup>5</sup> If each of his treatments of the Mi'raj approaches those issues from its own particular standpoint and purpose--and with, in addition, very different literary styles and degrees of autobiographical openness--they all do share what is perhaps the most fundamental feature of all of his writing: the continually alternating contrast between the metaphysical (universal and eternal) "divine" point of view<sup>6</sup> and the "phenomenological" (personal and experiential)

voyage," with all the implications of a "hidden," profoundly inner spiritual transformation that are so decisive for the "journeys" of the saints described in all these narratives. Finally, the verbal form clearly insists on God as the (ultimate) Agent and Source of this movement, pointing to the key factors of divine grace and individual "predisposition" that are also central to Ibn 'Arabi's consideration of this journey (whether for the Prophet or the saints), especially in the autobiographical context of the K. al-Isra'. (None of this is implied by the much broader and less specific Koranic usage of mi'raj--in the plural--at 43:33 and 70:3).

<sup>3</sup>While acknowledging the uniquely "physical" nature of the Prophet's Mi'raj (in section II below), Ibn 'Arabi stresses the primary importance of the spiritual isra'at--even for Muhammad--in the proportions implied by the Prophet's "thirty-three" other, purely spiritual journeys mentioned at the end of that section (n. 46 below).

The crucial importance of the notion of the saints' participation in the prophetic "heritage" (wiratha) is assumed throughout all of these Mi'raj narratives: for Ibn 'Arabi, its ultimate verification (and perhaps even its source) is to be found in the revelation of the "Muhammadan Station" in section IV-I and in the corresponding passage from the K. al-Isra' (pp. 12-14: see our translation and commentary in our article on "The Spiritual Ascension: Ibn 'Arabi and the Mi'raj, cited at n. 13 below.) For further references to this key notion in Ibn 'Arabi's religious thought, see Chodkiewicz, Sceau, chapter 5; and Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 1191-1201.

<sup>4</sup>A fundamental point that is openly stressed here in the reminder of Yahya (= John the Baptist, at the beginning of IV-F, the sphere of Aaron) that "each person has a path (tariq) that no one else but he travels," which "...comes to be through the traveling itself." The more specifically personal, "autobiographical" dimensions of Ibn 'Arabi's Mi'raj accounts are most evident in the K. al-Isra' (see the important passage translated in our JAOS article cited at n. 13 below) and in the concluding section (IV-I) of this chapter from the Futuhat.

<sup>5</sup>This is brought out more fully in the cross-references in the notes to this translation. In particular, it is clear that the spiritual phenomena underlying this particular schema provided by the Mi'raj are not essentially different from the realities Ibn 'Arabi discusses elsewhere in terms of other traditional Sufi categories, such as the metaphor of the spiritual "journeys in God" (asfar) or the complex distinctions of "stations" (maqamat), "stages" (manazil), etc. employed throughout the Futuhat itself: see, for example, his revealing remarks concerning Ansari's classic Manazil al-Sa'irin and his own Manahij al-Irtiqa' near the end of the Ascension outlined in chapter 167 (II, 280; Alchimie, pp. 112-113).

<sup>6</sup>In addition to Ibn 'Arabi's own explicitly metaphysical language, that perspective is more dramatically represented in chapter 367 of the Futuhat (translated below) by the spirits of the different

perspective of each individual voyager. The aim of this sort of dialectic, as he pointedly reminds his readers at the very beginning of chapter 367 (= section I of the translation below), is quite clear: if the journey in question necessarily appears to move through time and distance, that is not so that we can eventually "reach" God--since "**He is with you wherever you are**"--but rather "**so that He can cause [us] to see His Signs**" (Kor. 31:31) that are always there, "**on the horizons**" and "**in the souls**." The heavens of this journey, the prophets and angels who populate them, the Temple or the Throne where the final "unveiling" takes place--all of these, he insists, are so many places of the Heart.<sup>7</sup>

Modern readers who want to understand these narratives on this ultimate and most intimate level, however, must first find their way through an extremely complex set of symbols and often only implicit references to what are now largely unfamiliar bodies of knowledge: the task of interpretation is therefore not unlike that facing students of Dante's Divine Comedy (and more particularly the Paradiso). Therefore our annotation to this translation of chapter 367 of the Futuhāt concentrates on providing that indispensable background in the following areas: (1) the actual Islamic source-materials in the Koran and hadith which provide the basic structure and key symbols for all of Ibn 'Arabi's Mi'raj narratives;<sup>8</sup> (2) the cosmological and astrological presuppositions which he generally shared with other traditions (more or less "scientific") of his time;<sup>9</sup> (3) his own personal metaphysical and cosmogonical theories or "doctrines," which are

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prophets, especially Adam, Idris and Aaron--all of whom tend to speak here, as is often the case with God in the Koran, from a transcendent divine or "supra-temporal" perspective.

<sup>7</sup>Hence the central importance of the celebrated divine saying (hadith qudsi) with which he concludes the opening section (at n. 37): "My earth does not encompass Me, nor does My heaven, but the heart of My servant, the man of true faith, does encompass Me." He returns to stress the fundamental position of the Heart, in a more autobiographical and experiential context, in section IV-H (notes 168-172) below. For further references to this fundamental concept in Ibn 'Arabi's thought, see Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 916-921, and the famous chapter on the "wisdom of the Heart" (Shu'ayb) in the Fusus al-Hikam, I, 119-126; Bezels, pp. 145-157).

<sup>8</sup>These works provide a perfect illustration of Ibn 'Arabi's typical (and highly complex) approach to hadith. (See our more general discussion of this topic in our article on "Ibn 'Arabi's 'Esotericism': The Problem of Spiritual Authority," in Studia Islamica, ...[COMPLETE REFERENCE].) He scrupulously and literally follows the sayings and deeds of the Prophet as recounted in the canonical collections--in this chapter (367), relying especially on the Sahih of Muslim (who devotes a special section [iman, 254-294] to the events connected with the Mi'raj) and, to a slightly lesser extent, on the Sahih of Bukhari--and most often develops his own spiritual interpretations from close attention to the slightest literal details of those narratives (thereby implicitly excluding the vast body of non-hadith legends that had become popularly associated with these events). Rather than focusing on the external differences or apparent contradictions among various hadith (which are quite apparent, for example, concerning the number or order of stages in the Ascension), Ibn 'Arabi typically--one might say "ecumenically"--concentrates on conveying the spiritual meaning and intentions implicit in each Prophetic saying, pointing to a level of understanding unifying what might otherwise be seen as differing or conflicting expressions. (This approach mirrors his more general attitude to the various Islamic sects and schools of law, and ultimately to the observable diversity of religions and beliefs.)

<sup>9</sup>Fortunately, these elements are much less important here than in chapter 167 (see below), which assumes a far more detailed acquaintance with alchemy, Ptolemaic-Aristotelean astronomy (as transmitted, among others, by the Islamic philosophers), a wide body of traditional astrological lore concerning the particular influences of the stars, and additional "esoteric sciences." In any case, it is



basically those found throughout his other writings; and (4) his conception of the particular spiritual "heritages" and distinctive qualities of each of the prophets encountered during the Mi'raj, as they are developed in the Fusus al-Hikam and throughout the Futuhat.<sup>10</sup> Finally, since Ibn 'Arabi's four major Mi'raj narratives do share certain common features--and since several are available (at least partially) in French and English translations--it may be helpful, for comparative purposes, to point out some of the more distinctive features of each.

The Other Mi'raj Narratives:<sup>11</sup> Kitab al-Isra', Risalat al-Anwar, Chapter 167 of the Futuhat

The Kitab al-Isra',<sup>12</sup> at once the earliest, the longest and the most personally revealing of the works discussed here, was composed in Fez in the year 594, apparently only a relatively short

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important to note that virtually all those matters--which Ibn 'Arabi treats there as inherently knowable by man's natural observation and "reasoning" (nazar)--primarily concern the symbolic framework for the Mi'raj narrative and not its universal spiritual "content," which is usually expressed in much more immediately accessible form in this chapter (367).

<sup>10</sup>Allusions in both of these areas are clarified in the footnotes as they are mentioned, usually by cross-references to related passages in the Futuhat, Fusus and other writings. We should add that other prophets not explicitly mentioned in the hadith and these narratives concerning the Mi'raj are elsewhere frequently associated by Ibn 'Arabi with particular heavenly spheres: see, for example, Noah's connection with the sphere of the sun, mentioned at the end of chapter 3 of the Fusus (in reference to a longer account in Ibn 'Arabi's K. al-Tanazzulat al-Mawsiliya).

<sup>11</sup>There are also a number of other, shorter or less complete treatments of the Mi'raj theme in Ibn 'Arabi's extant writings, some of which are cited in notes below. The longest (and most accessible) is the passage on the Ascension of the Prophet--understood as the cosmic "Muhammadan Reality" or "Perfect Man"--in the Shajarat al-Kawn (R.G., no. 666), now available in translations by A. Jeffery, "Ibn 'Arabi's Shajarat al-Kawn," in Studia Islamica, vol. X, pp. 43-78, and vol. XI, pp. 113-160 (Mi'raj section at pp. 145-160); and by M. Gloton, L'Arbre du Monde, Paris, 1982 (Mi'raj section pp. 93-106). Although the French translation does give more useful references to the Koran and hadith background of this passage, neither version provides sufficient annotation to make intelligible most of this treatise's extremely complex metaphysical, theological and cosmological allusions, whose density is comparable to that of the K. al-Isra'.

Unlike the treatments of the Mi'raj discussed below, the protagonist of this Ascension (in Shajarat al-Kawn) is the Prophet himself--although often described in metaphysical terms clearly applicable to the "Perfect Man" in general--, and Ibn 'Arabi does not bother to mention here the various intermediate stages of his celestial encounters with the earlier prophets which are so prominent in the other accounts (and in the original hadith). Instead he here assumes, as throughout the Shajarat al-Kawn, the universal presence of this cosmic "Muhammadan Reality," and takes a relatively few elements from the Mi'raj narratives (especially those of the divine Throne and the Prophet's different "steeds") as symbols for celebrating that central metaphysical theme.

<sup>12</sup>See R.G., no. 313; this entry mentions several alternative titles and an extant commentary by Ibn 'Arabi's close disciple Isma'il b. Sawdakin, which is extremely useful in deciphering this difficult work. References here are to the text given in the Rasa'il, I, no. 13, pp. 1-92. The date and place of composition are mentioned in the author's own colophon (p. 92).

The recent article by Joanna Wronecka, "Le kitab al-isra' ila maqam al-asra' d'Ibn 'Arabi," pp. 15-27 in Annales Islamologiques, tome XX, Cairo, 1984, contains only brief first impressions of this book and the translations of a number of section headings (plus several verses from the concluding munajat), while announcing the author's plans to begin a dissertation on this subject at the University of Warsaw.

time after certain decisive personal inspirations concerning the ultimate unity of the prophets in the spiritual "station of Muhammad" and the inner meaning of the Qur'an in its full eternal reality that were soon to coalesce in Ibn 'Arabi's conception of his own unique role as "Seal of the Muhammadan Saints."<sup>13</sup> In an emotionally fluid and highly expressive Arabic style, drawing on an incredibly dense and allusive symbolic vocabulary<sup>14</sup> and combining long poetic interludes with rapidly moving rhymed prose--and culminating in a series of remarkable "intimate conversations" (munajat) with God (pp. 50-82)--, he constantly returns to celebrate and elaborate on the twin themes of the eternal Muhammadan Reality (encompassing all the prophets and their teachings) and the metaphysical universality of the Qur'an as they were inwardly realized and verified in his own mystical experience. Here the passage of this autobiographical "voyager"<sup>15</sup> through the heavenly spheres and the higher revelatory stages of the Mi'raj (pp. 11-49) is not so much a means for describing the successive steps of the spiritual path and "progress" of the saints more generally--as it is, to some extent, in all the other Mi'raj narratives--but instead primarily a framework for evoking and clarifying various aspects of the author's own spiritual achievement, as they mirror the even loftier rank of the Prophet (pp. 83-92). What is perhaps most noteworthy about this composition, in a way that reinforces Ibn 'Arabi's repeated assertions that he first received all of this only by divine inspiration (and not through an individual effort of reasoning), is the way the complex systematic metaphysical and ontological framework

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<sup>13</sup>See especially our translation and commentary of a crucial autobiographical passage (pp. 13-14)--perfectly complementing the culminating stage of Ibn 'Arabi's spiritual ascension here (section IV-I below)--in "The Spiritual Ascension: Ibn 'Arabi and the Mi'raj," Journal of the American Oriental Society, vol. (198X), no. , pp. [COMPLETE REFERENCES]. The K. al-Isra' as a whole conveys a mood of excitement and immediacy that must reflect the relative proximity of some decisive (and perhaps not yet fully assimilated) personal spiritual inspiration. More specifically, the K. al-Isra' does not yet seem to distinguish with complete clarity between what Ibn 'Arabi later calls the "maqam muhammadi" (the spiritual "station of Muhammad")--or that supreme part of it uniquely reserved for himself as the "Seal of Muhammadan Saints"--and what he then calls the "station of Proximity (to God)" (maqam al-qurba) attained more generally by the highest rank of the saints, the afraḍ or malamiya. In the K. al-Isra' he frequently alludes to his own attainment of a lofty "Muhammadan station," but still employing terms--as continued to be the case with many later Sufis--that also suggest he is speaking of a spiritual rank ultimately accessible to other Muslim saints as well.

For a careful discussion and extensive references concerning the broader context of this important question for our understanding of Ibn 'Arabi's own spiritual autobiography, see Chodkiewicz, Sceau, chapter IX, as well as the famous opening passage of the Futuhat recounting Ibn 'Arabi's subsequent experience (or complete recognition) of his "investiture" as the "Seal of the Muhammadan Saints": this event is described in the Khutbat al-Kitab (I, pp. 2 ff.; O.Y. ed., I, 43-55), and is also accessible in a French translation by M. Valsan, Etudes traditionnelles, Paris, 1953, pp. 300-311.

<sup>14</sup>bayn al-marmuz wa-l-mafhum (Rasa'il I, no. 13, p. 3): most of this labyrinth of symbols and allusions to the Koran and hadith (usually through only a single word or brief phrase) could potentially be elucidated by extensive reference to the Futuhat and other works. However, such a commentary would often require page-long notes of explanation for virtually every other word--an approach which could not hope to convey the poetic, immediately expressive emotional quality that is the essential trait of this work.

<sup>15</sup>The autobiographical nature of the K. al-Isra' is not even thinly disguised. At p. 66, Ibn 'Arabi explains his continued reference to himself as a "salik" in terms of his desire to emphasize the fact that "even now (i.e., after reaching the highest spiritual station) I am still voyaging"--in other words, as evidence that he is not claiming "union" in the sense of some absolute mutual identity with God.

developed in the Futuhāt is already entirely present, but for the most part only implicitly--expressed instead through an incredibly profuse array of symbols and allusions drawn from the Koran and hadith (and whose full explanation is to be sought, for the most part, only in later, more analytical prose works such as the Futuhāt).

Compared to the literary and doctrinal complexities of the preceding work, the Risalat al-Anwar, a relatively brief prose treatise composed at Konya in 602 A.H. (near the beginning of Ibn 'Arabi's long stay in the Muslim East), is stylistically far more accessible and its contents are more readily understandable--features which (along with the existence of an excellent commentary by 'Abd al-Karim Jili) no doubt help account for its popularity with modern translators.<sup>16</sup> Written in response to a request by a Sufi friend and fellow master, this study, as its full title partly indicates,<sup>17</sup> is above all practical in intention and experiential (rather than primarily doctrinal or metaphysical) in its terms of reference and expression; it is aimed at the needs of a reader who, already necessarily possessing a considerable degree of personal accomplishment and experience, is intimately involved with the spiritual direction of disciples at earlier stages of the Path. While the allusions to the Mi'raj proper (pp. 9-13; = English tr., pp. 40-46) are very brief--mentioning for the most part only the cosmological powers or spiritual qualities traditionally associated with each of the heavenly spheres and the Koranic "cosmography" of the Gardens of Paradise, the divine "Throne," "Pen," etc.<sup>18</sup>--, it does provide an indispensable complement to the other Mi'raj narratives in two critical areas: (1) its relatively detailed discussion of the essential practical methods and preliminary stages preparing the way

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<sup>16</sup>For the date and place of composition, see R.G., no. 33; the long list of manuscripts there may likewise reflect the relatively accessible character of this short work. Page references are to the Arabic text in the Rasa'il I, no. 12, pp. 1-19. To facilitate reference by non-Arabists, citations of this text in the notes below also mention the relevant sections from both of the following French and English translations. The complete English translation by R. T. Harris, Journey to the Lord of Power (London/N.Y., 1981), although without any annotation, does have the advantage of being accompanied by long and useful selections from Jili's commentary, which itself consists largely of citations (mostly unidentified in the translation) from related sections of the Futuhāt. The concluding chapter of Chodkiewicz, Sceau, pp. 181-221, consists of a translation of most of the R. al-Anwar accompanied by an extensive set of explanations and complementary developments drawn from many of Ibn 'Arabi's writings, including more particularly selections from the two Mi'raj-narratives (chapters 167 and 367 of the Futuhāt) discussed below.

The first European translation of this text, by M. Asin Palacios, in El Islam Cristianizado (Madrid, 1931), was neither complete nor annotated. Asin's work is now also available in French translation, L'Islam christianise, (Paris, 1982), with the translation of R. al-Anwar on pp. 321-332.

<sup>17</sup>"The Treatise of Lights, Concerning the Secrets Bestowed on the Person in Spiritual Retreat (sahib khalwa)." (Other titles are mentioned in R.G., no. 33.) For the Sufi practice of spiritual retreat more generally, see the references in the article "khalwa" (by H. Landolt) in EI<sup>2</sup>. Chapters 78-79 of the Futuhāt (II, 150-152), on the stations of khalwa and tark al-khalwa, involve a more metaphysical approach to the subject; see also French tr. by M. Valsan, in Etudes traditionnelles, Paris, 1969, pp. 77-86.

<sup>18</sup>These cosmological features are all most elaborately developed in chapter 167 of the Futuhāt (described below). In particular, the R. al-Anwar does not contain any of those personal encounters with the prophets symbolically associated with each sphere (or with each planet's respective "spiritual entity" [ruhaniya], such as Mercury, Mars, Venus, etc.) that make up the major part of the Mi'raj-narrative in both chapters of the Futuhāt, as well as in the corresponding section of the K. al-Isra'.

for the inner realization of these more advanced spiritual insights; and (2) Ibn 'Arabi's repeated emphasis on the fundamental importance of the concluding phase of the saints'"return" to a transformed awareness of the physical and social world (in its immediate relation with God) and to the particular responsibilities and activities--whether teaching and spiritual guidance, or the less visible tasks of the representatives of the spiritual hierarchy--flowing from that realization.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, the long chapter 167 of the Futuhāt, "On the Inner Knowledge of the Alchemy of Happiness,"<sup>20</sup> uses the framework of the Mi'raj to retrace, in ascending order, the many levels of Ibn 'Arabi's complex cosmology or cosmogony.<sup>21</sup> Its primary focus (compared with the other works mentioned here) is on the "objective" metaphysical realities underlying the spiritual insights described in more experiential terms in the other narratives: in this respect it often resembles the Fusus al-Hikam, and the treatment of the various prophets encountered during this heavenly voyage (e.g., Jesus, Aaron or Moses) often closely parallels that found in the corresponding chapters of the Fusus. This feature is further underlined by Ibn 'Arabi's narrative technique of comparison, throughout this ascension, between the initiatic spiritual knowledge granted to the "follower of Muhammad" (representing the methods of the saints and Sufis more generally) and the limited cosmological and theological insights available to his companion, the archetypal "man of reason."<sup>22</sup> In general, the elucidation of many of those complex allusions

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<sup>19</sup>The extensive commentary by M. Chodkiewicz (Sceau, chapter X) provides important references to many other works of Ibn 'Arabi (especially sections of the Futuhāt) further illustrating both of these key themes. (The latter point, in particular, is also stressed in a number of important sections of chapter 367 translated below.)

<sup>20</sup>II, 270-284; also available in French translation by S. Ruspoli, l'alchimie du bonheur parfait, Paris, 1981. (The translator promises (p.26) a more complete commentary in the future.) An earlier partial French translation of this chapter, without notes or commentary, was also published by G. Anawati, in the Revue de l'Institut Dominicain d'Etudes orientales du Caire, Melanges 6 (1959-1961), pp. 353-386.

<sup>21</sup>The best general survey of this difficult subject (although by no means complete) probably still remains the introduction (pp. 29-159) of H.S. Nyberg's Kleinere Schriften des Ibn al-'Arabi, based largely on Ibn 'Arabi's K. Insha' al-Dawa'ir. Within the Futuhāt, one of the most comprehensive treatments can be found in chapt. 360, (III, 416-448), while the same themes are also developed in the earlier chapters 4-12 (I, 98-149). A much briefer and more accessible account can also be found in the translation and introduction, by D. Gril, of Ibn 'Arabi's short R. al-Ittihad al-Kawni (R.G., no. 317), entitled Le Livre de l'Arbre et des Quatre Oiseaux, Paris, 1984. See also the related cosmological chapters from the Futuhāt translated by Wm. Chittick in this anthology.

This cosmological perspective accounts, in particular, for the many additional "levels" or "sites" marking the final phases of this Ascension in chapter 167--especially the third, purely "noetic" (ma'nawī) stage (II, 282-284; Alchimie, pp. 130-141)--which are not explicitly mentioned in the hadith concerning the isra'. These distinctions correspond to the initial, most abstract stages of Ibn 'Arabi's cosmological system, and in fact he even stresses there that the "rationalist" thinker accompanying the saint also participates to a considerable extent in the awareness of the universal metaphysical-cosmological principles perceived at that stage. In terms of their spiritual content, therefore, these stages do not constitute a "higher" or more "advanced" station than the culminating revelation described in the final section of chapter 367 (= IV-I below).

<sup>22</sup>sahib nazar: the insights of this allegorical character (or psycho-spiritual "type") reflect features of several different "rational sciences" of Ibn 'Arabi's day, including kalam (especially for its "negative theology" or tanzih concerning the highest insights into the divine nature), the popular mixture of

would require extensive reference to some of the most obscure and unfamiliar aspects of the Shaykh's thought.

Ibn 'Arabi's Own Mi'raj: Chapter 367

Ibn 'Arabi's long treatment of the Mi'raj in chapter 367 of the Futuhat is marked by some distinctive features that make it considerably more accessible (at least for most modern readers) than either chapter 167 or the Kitab al-Isra'. To begin with, it is written for the most part in relatively straightforward expository prose; the style does presuppose a profound acquaintance with Ibn 'Arabi's systematic terminology and symbolism (largely drawn from the Koran and hadith) as it is to be found throughout the Futuhat, but the role of unfamiliar Arabic literary and artistic effects is relatively less important. Secondly, the focus of this chapter is almost exclusively on the universal spiritual dimensions of the Mi'raj, especially as expressed in the language of the Koran and hadith, in a way that should already be familiar to readers of the Fusus al-Hikam; unlike chapter 167, it does not presuppose such extensive acquaintance with the vocabulary and symbolism of other relatively esoteric medieval Islamic sciences (alchemy, astrology, etc.). Similarly, the encounters with the individual prophets associated with each heavenly sphere can often be readily illuminated by comparison with corresponding passages elsewhere in Ibn 'Arabi's writings.<sup>23</sup> And finally, as so often in the Futuhat, the genuinely autobiographical passages,<sup>24</sup> especially at the conclusion of Ibn 'Arabi's own spiritual ascent (section IV-I below), add a powerful new dimension of clarity and persuasive force to what otherwise might appear to be simply a complex intellectual and symbolic "system."

The overall structure of this chapter is quite clear, consisting of four successively broader and more detailed elaborations of the central theme of the inner spiritual meaning of the "nocturnal journey," a theme whose ultimate premises and metaphysical-theological context are briefly evoked in the opening lines (section I), already summarized at the beginning of this introduction. In section II, Ibn 'Arabi takes up the hadith accounts of Muhammad's Mi'raj--which provide the formal framework for the rest of the narrative--and adds his own allusions to many of the key themes developed at greater length in the following sections. In section III, he provides a condensed, still highly abstract schematic outline of the "spiritual journeys of the saints" (awliya'), expressed in his own distinctive metaphysical-theological terminology (i.e., "in His Names in their names"). Finally, the greater part of the chapter (= section IV) is taken up

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astrology (concerning, e.g., the particular influences and qualities of various planets) and Aristotelean-Ptolemaic astronomy, and even more "esoteric" sciences of the time, such as alchemy. (However, it should be stressed that the alchemical vocabulary used in this particular chapter is not at all mysterious; it is used here in a clearly spiritual, symbolic sense whose meanings--corresponding to familiar Sufi technical terminology--are copiously illustrated and explained elsewhere in Ibn 'Arabi's work.)

<sup>23</sup>Such cross-references in the notes are concentrated on other chapters of the Futuhat and corresponding sections of the Fusus al-Hikam, especially given the relatively greater accessibility of translations and commentaries of the latter.

<sup>24</sup>Although all of section IV, the greater part of this chapter, is narrated in the "first person," that is often clearly a literary device, in those cases where the prophets are explaining what readers can readily recognize as Ibn 'Arabi's own characteristic insights and perceptions. However, section IV-I clearly summarizes his own direct personal experiences of what were evidently--judging by his ensuing account of what was "seen" there--some of the most important stages on his own spiritual path.

with Ibn 'Arabi's account, narrated in the first person and closely following the path of the Prophet, of the climactic stages of his own personal spiritual journey.<sup>25</sup> If the autobiographical guise at first seems only a sort of didactic literary device, at the end (section IV-I) he does conclude with the description of a decisive personal "revelation," a compelling spiritual experience that seems to have contained--or at least confirmed--virtually all the most distinctive points of his later thought and conviction, the forms of divine knowledge which he goes on to elaborate in a long enumeration of "what he saw" in that culminating "Muhammadan Station."

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<sup>25</sup>Which, as he reminds us at the beginning of Section IV, closely parallels his earlier autobiographical descriptions of the same personal spiritual itinerary in the Kitab al-Isra'; see our translation and commentary of a key corresponding passage from that work in the article cited at n. 13 above.

**Chapter 367: Concerning the Inner Knowledge of the Stage (manzil) of the Fifth Tawakkul, Which None of the People of Realization (muhaqqiqin) Has Discovered, Because of the Rarity of Those Apt to Receive It and the Inadequacy of (Men's) Understandings to Grasp It<sup>26</sup>**

**I. Introduction: the Context and Purpose of the Spiritual Journey**

...God said "**There is nothing like His likeness [and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing]**" (Kor. 42:11),<sup>27</sup> so He described Himself with a description that necessarily belongs

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<sup>26</sup>III, pp. 340-354; sections omitted from our translation are clearly indicated in the accompanying notes or summarized (within brackets) in the body of the text.

The enigmatic title of this chapter is partially illuminated by a brief passage near the end (III, 351.21-22), where this mysterious "fifth tawakkul" is again briefly mentioned as one of the distinctive forms of spiritual knowledge Ibn 'Arabi saw in his culminating vision of the "Muhammadan Station": "...And I saw in it the knowledge of the person who acts deliberately and (at the same time) relies on God, and this is the fifth tawakkul, and it is (expressed in) God's saying in Sura 73: '[...**There is no god but Him,] so take Him as your Trustee (wakil)!**' (73:9)."

Elsewhere (chapter 198, II, p. 420, 36th tawhid), Ibn 'Arabi explains this same Koranic verse as a reference to man's inherent ontological status as a pure "servant," with no possessions of his own, a description resembling the inner state of "pure servanthood" Ibn 'Arabi also realized in his culminating revelation (IV-I below). Similarly, a key phrase in this description, "to act deliberately" (itta'ada), is applied in Ibn 'Arabi's cautionary advice earlier in chapter 367 (at n. 143 below; = III, 349.13) to those Sufis who would mistakenly take the ecstatic state of "annihilation in God" (fana', implying a heedlessness of the external world) to be the end and goal of the spiritual Path. All of these hints seem to point to this highest form of "trust in God" as reflecting an advanced inner state of spiritual insight in which the saint's absolute reliance on God--an attitude that in lower stages of tawakkul is usually conceived of as implying a sort of ascetic disdain and unconcern for the "secondary causes" (asbab) or things of this world--is now seen as simultaneously "affirming the secondary causes" (a phrase from opening poem of this chapter, at III, 340.15), which are finally perceived in their true metaphysical status, as necessary and intrinsic manifestations of the ever-present divine Reality. This form of tawakkul would thus closely correspond to Ibn 'Arabi's characteristic emphasis on the superiority of the state of "enlightened abiding" in the world (baqa') characterizing those saints who--like the Prophet--have "returned" (the raji'un) from the station of divine Proximity while retaining the ongoing realization of that insight in the world.

The term tawakkul, "trust" or "inner confidence" in God, occurs many times in the Koran and gradually became a key term in Sufi spiritual psychology; see, for example, chapter 118 of the Futuh (II, 199-201), on the maqam al-tawakkul, where Ibn 'Arabi mentions at the end that "the levels of tawakkul, for the true Knowers, are 487...." Near the beginning of the R. al-Anwar (Chodkiewicz, Sceau, p. 189; Journey, p. 30) he also discusses tawakkul as the last of the preparatory stages before the spiritual Mi'raj, marked by four distinctive "charismatic powers" (karamat).

<sup>27</sup>This famous Koranic verse, with its paradoxical "double negations" (corresponding to the shahada) of God's "resemblance" to created things, is usually treated by Ibn 'Arabi as a classic reference to the mystery of the simultaneous immanence (tashbih) and transcendence (tanzih) of the Divine Reality reflected in the Perfect Man which is the central intuition of all his work. Often he even interprets the expression "**His Likeness**" in this verse as a direct reference to the Perfect Man, alluding to Adam's

only to Him, which is His saying: "**And He is with you wherever you are**" (Kor. 57:4).<sup>28</sup> Thus He is with us wherever we are, in the state of His "descending to the heaven of this world during the last third of the night,"<sup>29</sup> in the state of His being mounted upon the Throne (Kor. 5:20; etc.),<sup>30</sup> in the state of His being in the "Cloud,"<sup>31</sup> in the state of His being upon the earth and in

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creation (according to a famous hadith) "in the image of the Merciful": see the famous discussions of this verse in the chapters on Noah (ch. 3) and Hud (ch. 10) in the Fusus al-Hikam, and further references in the Futuhāt I, 62, 97, 111, 220; II, 129, 510, 516-17, 541, 563; III, 109, 165, 266, 282, 340, 412, 492; IV, 135, 141, 306, 311, 431. In addition to the ambiguity of the expression kamithlihi (which can also be read simply as "like Him"--i.e., like God), Ibn 'Arabi likewise stresses the apparently paradoxical contrast between the absolute insistence on divine transcendence at the beginning of this verse and the apparent anthropomorphism of its conclusion.

Thus, according to either reading, the absolute universality of the divine Presence implied by this verse includes all the particular, "restricted" modalities of the divine "descent" (nuzul) and Self-manifestation indicated in the following verses and hadith--each of which is likewise the subject of numerous discussions throughout the Futuhāt.

<sup>28</sup>For Ibn 'Arabi, this verse is simply a direct implication of the broader truth implied in the opening verse: this inner correspondence between the different manifestations of God and the Perfect Man (al-Insan al-Kamil), at all the levels of being (or "worlds") is assumed throughout the rest of this chapter. More generally, the reality of the divine "compresence" (ma'iya, "with-ness") with all things expressed in this verse is discussed in many parts of the Futuhāt, including a number of the shorter metaphysical or cosmological excerpts included in this anthology.

<sup>29</sup>A reference to a famous "divine saying" (hadith qudsi) which Ibn 'Arabi included in his own collection of such hadith, the Mishkat al-Anwar (no. 56 [cited from the Sahih of Muslim]; Niche, pp. 86-87): "Our Lord descends every night to the heaven of this world when the last third of the night remains, and then He says: 'I am the King! Whoever calls on Me, I answer him. Whoever asks (something) of Me, I give to him. Whoever requests My forgiveness, I forgive him.'" (This hadith is recorded, with a number of minor variations, by Muslim, Malik, Bukhari, Tirmidhi, Ibn Maja, and Ahmad b. Hanbal: see detailed references and variants in Graham, Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam, Paris/the Hague, 1977, [subsequently abbreviated as "Graham, Word"], pp. 177-178.)

As Ibn 'Arabi explains in detail in the latter part of chapter 34 of the Futuhāt (O.Y. ed., III, 320-332), the "night," in this hadith, "is the place of the descent in time of God and His Attribute" (of Mercy), and this "last third of the night"--which, Ibn 'Arabi insists, lasts forever--is none other than the Perfect Man (the first two "thirds" being "the heavens and the earth," man's "two parents"). The following verses and hadith (at notes 30-32 here) are interpreted in chapter 34 as references to different ontological degrees or "moments" of that universal divine Self-manifestation.

<sup>30</sup>There are seven Koranic verses referring to God's being "mounted (istawa') on the Throne," often following "the creation of the heavens and the earth" (i.e., what lies "beneath" or constitutes the Throne in its cosmological sense). For Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of these verses, see the extensive references to the Futuhāt in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 791-803 (on the many meanings of the divine "Throne," 'arsh) and pp. 622-629 (on istiwa').

For Ibn 'Arabi, however, an even more fundamental meaning of the "Throne" is "the Heart of the man of true faith" (which is "the Throne of the Merciful," according to a famous hadith), i.e., the Perfect Man (see Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 916-921, on the qalb). The inner connection between these two senses is brought out explicitly in the famous hadith qudsi discussed at n. 7 above and quoted at n. 37 below, and is a basic assumption throughout sections III and IV below, since the "Heart" is precisely the "theater" of the entire journey: that point is made most forcefully in sections IV-G and IV-I below. Elsewhere, (e.g., in



heaven (Kor. 43:84; etc.),<sup>32</sup> in the state of His being closer to man than his jugular vein (Kor. 50:16)<sup>33</sup>--and all of these are qualifications with which only He can be described.

Hence God does not move a servant from place to place in order that (the servant) might see Him, but rather "so that He might cause him to see of His Signs" (Kor. 41:53; etc.)<sup>34</sup> those

chapter 34, O.Y. ed., III, 320 ff.), Ibn 'Arabi frequently stresses the particular importance of the Koranic specification (at 5:20) that it is "the Merciful" (al-Rahman), the Source of all being, Who is "mounted" or "seated" there.

<sup>31</sup>A reference to the following hadith, concerning the Prophet's response to the question "Where was our Lord before He created the creation?": "He was in a Cloud ('ama'), without air above it and without air below it, and He created His Throne upon the Water." (This famous hadith is found in the collections of Ibn Maja, Tirmidhi and Ahmad b. Hanbal.) Our translation here reflects Ibn 'Arabi's interpretation in chapter 34 of the Futuhat (O.Y. ed., III, 323 ff.), where he also stresses the fact that this particular ontological reality concerns the divine Name "Lord" (rabb)--and not "the Merciful" (see n. 29).

For the broader meaning of the term 'ama' ("the Cloud") in Ibn 'Arabi, see the references in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 820-826 and in the Futuhat II, 310, as well as its treatment in the penultimate stage of the cosmological mi'raj in chapter 167 (Alchimie, pp. 138-140).

<sup>32</sup>This phrase is contained (with minor variations) in a number of other Koranic verses (3:5; 10:61; 14:38; 22:70) all insisting on God's intimate acquaintance with all things: see, for example, "**Our Lord, surely You know what we say openly and what we hide: not a thing upon the earth and in heaven is hidden from God**" (Kor. 14:38); or even more appropriately, "**He is God in the heavens and upon the earth; he knows your secret [sirr] and what you proclaim, and He knows what you gain**" (Kor. 6:3).

<sup>33</sup>Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of the divine "nearness" (see the related notion of "with-ness," ma'iya, at n. 28 above) expressed in this Koranic phrase is intimately bound up with the reality of "perpetual creation" (khalq jadid) expressed in the rest of the verse and its immediate context: "...**yet they are in confusion about the (ever-) renewed creation; but surely We created man [al-insan] and We know what his soul insinuates to him and We are closer to man than his jugular vein**" (Kor. 50:15-16). As indicated in the Introduction, for Ibn 'Arabi the spiritual "station of Proximity" (maqam al-qurba), in which one actually realizes the full extent of this intimate relation with God, is the ultimate goal of the Ascension of the saints outlined in this chapter: that relation is outlined schematically, in the theological language of 'ilm al-kalam, in section III and discussed in more experiential terms in the final two parts of section IV. (See the extensive references in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 936-940 and Chodkiewicz, Sceau, index s.v. [maqam al-qurba].)

<sup>34</sup>While Ibn 'Arabi is alluding in particular to the "reason" for the Prophet's Ascension described at Kor. 17:1 (see following note), the same phrase (with only minor variations in the pronouns) is addressed to mankind more generally in a number of other Koranic verses (27:93; 31:31; etc.). Of these, certainly the most important and best known is the verse 41:53--to such an extent that it is clearly assumed whenever Ibn 'Arabi mentions the divine "Signs" (ayat): "**We shall cause them to see Our Signs on the horizons and in their souls, so that it becomes clear to them that He is the Truly Real [al-Haqq]--or is your Lord not enough, for surely He is witnessing every thing! What, are they in doubt about meeting their Lord? Does He not surely encompass all things?**" Especially important, for Ibn 'Arabi as for so many other Islamic thinkers, is the insistence in this verse on the coincidence of the Signs "on the horizons," i.e., in the external world (but note also Muhammad's decisive revelation at the "Loftiest Horizon," Kor. 53:7) and those "in the souls," in the totality of awareness of the "Perfect Man" (al-insan al-kamil).

that were unseen by him. He said: "**Glory to Him Who made His servant journey one night from the Sacred Place of Worship to the Furthest Place of Worship, whose surroundings We have blessed, so that We might cause him to see of Our Signs!**" (Kor. 17:1)<sup>35</sup> And similarly, when God moves (any) servant through his (inner spiritual) states in order also to cause him to see His Signs, He moves him through His states.<sup>36</sup> ... (I.e., God) says: "I only made him journey by night in order that he see the Signs, not (to bring him) to Me: because no place

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Secondly, Ibn 'Arabi always emphasizes the causative, active meaning of the verb form 'Ara as "to make someone see," not just "to show": for him, God's "Signs" are already there, in the totality of our experience, but usually "unseen" (ghaba)--i.e., not perceived as such. Thus the whole purpose of the spiritual journey is simply to open our (spiritual) eyes to the reality of "things" as Signs, or as Ibn 'Arabi goes on to explain immediately below (and in more detail in section III), to recognize the divine Names "in our states." All this is implicit in the famous prayer of the Prophet likewise assumed throughout this chapter: "O my God, cause us to see things as they really are!"

<sup>35</sup>The masjid al-haram ("Sacred Place of Worship") was a common name for the sanctuary of the Kaaba at Mecca, but there is some disagreement in the hadith surrounding the identification of the masjid al-aqsa: it was sometimes, especially in later traditions, identified with the site of the Temple at Jerusalem (al-bayt al-maqdis, "the sacred House") where Muhammad stops to pray before his heavenly ascension according to several hadith accounts (including that followed by Ibn 'Arabi below); but the earlier traditions agree that it refers to the "furthest point" (al-darah) or goal of the Mi'raj (i.e., where Muhammad received the culminating revelation described in Sura 53), and is therefore more or less identical with the "Inhabited House" or heavenly Temple of Abraham (al-bayt al-ma'mur), the symbol of the Heart discussed in section IV-H (notes 168-172) below. Ibn 'Arabi implicitly seems to follow the latter interpretation. See also the articles from the SEI/EI<sup>1</sup> cited in n. 1 above.

Throughout this chapter (and in the K. al-Isra', etc.) Ibn 'Arabi generally uses the Koranic expression isra' to refer to the Prophet's ascension and its spiritual analogues--possibly because the term mi'raj might appear limited only to the "ascending" portion, whereas Ibn 'Arabi always is at pains (as in sections III and IV-F below, and at the end of his R. al-Anwar) to emphasize the critical importance of the "descending" phase of return (ruju'), which distinguishes the highest rank of the saints (and of course the prophets). We have consistently translated isra' and its related verbal forms here as "journey," but it must be kept in mind that the Arabic term refers specifically to a nocturnal journey: for Ibn 'Arabi, especially, this nuance no doubt corresponds to the fact that the spiritual isra', at least, is an inner, "secret" process largely hidden from outward observation, especially in those saints (the afrad or malamiya) who have followed it through to the end.

In the K. al-Isfar 'an Nata'ij al-Asfar (Rasa'il, II, no. 24), pp. 17-21, Ibn 'Arabi offers an elaborate interpretation of this same Koranic verse (17:1) focusing--as is typically the case in his reading of the Koran--on the complex inner significance of the grammatical and lexical details of its particular Arabic expressions, such as the apparent duplication of "at night" (laylan) and asra (meaning "to cause to journey at night"), etc. Our translation cannot convey most of those nuances or alternative meanings.

<sup>36</sup>Here, as so often with Ibn 'Arabi (see especially section III below), the pronouns are rather ambiguous; in this case the intended meaning is clarified by the following untranslated lines (III, 340.25-30) which cite several other hadith and Koranic passages where God shows some of "His" creations to certain prophetic messengers in order to teach them a particular lesson. Here Ibn 'Arabi implicitly contrasts this spiritual journey of the saints (and ultimately of all men) through their inner "states"--i.e., the "Signs in your souls" of verse 41:53 (see notes 34 and 72)--with the physical (or possibly "imaginal") journey through places which, as he explains below (end of section II), was the exclusive privilege of the Prophet on this single occasion.

can hold Me and the relation of all places to Me is the same. For I am such that (only) 'the heart of My servant, the man of true faith, encompasses Me,'<sup>37</sup> so how could he be 'made to journey to Me' while I am 'with him wherever he is' (Kor. 57:4)?!"

## II. The Narrative Framework: the Mi'raj of Muhammad and His Many Spiritual Journeys

The long following section (III, 340.32-342.34) combines a virtually complete quotation of one long hadith account of the Prophet's Mi'raj<sup>38</sup>--whose sequence of events and heavenly encounters with the spirits of earlier prophets provides the narrative framework for all of Ibn 'Arabi's different versions of that voyage--with a number of the Shaykh's personal observations. These brief remarks either foreshadow themes developed at greater length in the rest of the chapter (and in his other treatments of the Mi'raj theme) or else allude to interpretations (e.g., of the drinks offered the Prophet at the beginning of his journey, or of the rivers of Paradise) that he discusses more fully in the other contexts and chapters of the Futuhāt. However, four of those asides are significant enough to deserve special mention here.

The first of these is Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of the statement in this hadith that Muhammad "descended from Buraq (his celestial steed) and tied him up with the same halter the (other) prophets had used to tie him." For the Shaykh, "all of that was only so as to affirm (the importance and reality of) the secondary causes"<sup>39</sup>..., although he knew that Buraq was

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<sup>37</sup>An allusion to the celebrated hadith qudsi already mentioned at n. 7 above: "My earth does not encompass Me, nor does My heaven, but the heart of My servant, the man of true faith, does encompass Me." This famous divine saying (not found in the canonical collections, but favored by many Sufi authors) is cited repeatedly by Ibn 'Arabi, who takes it as a classical reference to the role of the "Heart" (of the "Perfect Man," as realized by the accomplished saints) as the complete mirror of the divine tajalliyat. See the references at notes 30 and 33 above, and all of section IV-H (notes 167-173) below.

<sup>38</sup>Although Ibn 'Arabi does not identify his hadith sources in this section or explicitly distinguish his "quotations" (or paraphrases) from his own more personal comments and explanations, the particular "hadith al-isra" (III, 340.30) which he follows for the basic order of events and encounters up to the "Lotus-Tree of the Limit"--both here and in the other Mi'raj narratives discussed in the introduction--is the first one given in the corresponding section of Muslim's Sahih (iman, 259, from Anas b. Malik). Here and in his other Mi'raj narratives he adds many additional details (e.g., the four mystical "rivers" flowing from the Tree of Life, the sound of the divine "Pens," the milk and other drinks offered the Prophet) which are taken for the most part from the following related traditions in Muslim (iman, 260-294)--although most of these hadith are also to be found in the other canonical collections with minor variations in the order and description of the events. Here, for example (at III, 341.12-14), Ibn 'Arabi explicitly mentions the fact (i.e., as an exception) when he refers to a particular hadith taken from Bukhari. Relevant details concerning these particular hadith and Ibn 'Arabi's interpretation of them underlying individual events or locations during the Mi'raj are discussed in the notes to the corresponding parts of section IV below.

<sup>39</sup>ithbat al-asbab: i.e., the affirmation of all the "realities" or phenomena other than God (the ultimate and Primary Cause). This assertion of the reality and importance of all phenomenal existence as perceived from the highest and most comprehensive spiritual perspective--a central leitmotif of Ibn 'Arabi's thought, and an attitude by no means shared by all Sufis--was already stressed in the title and opening line of the poem beginning this chapter, where he stresses that the true, ultimate state of

commanded (by God) and would have stayed there even if he had left him without tying the halter."

The second of these parenthetical remarks occurs in the lowest heaven (the one immediately surrounding this sublunar world), when Muhammad is brought face-to-face with all the blessed and the damned among the descendants of Adam.<sup>40</sup> "Then (Muhammad) saw himself among the different individuals belonging to the blessed, at Adam's right hand, and he gave thanks to God. And through that he came to know how it is that man can be in two places (at the same time) while remaining precisely himself and not anyone else: this was for him like the visible (physical) form and the (reflected) forms visible in the mirror and (other) reflected images."<sup>41</sup>

The third such passage is Ibn 'Arabi's statement, in connection with the Prophet's visit to Jesus in the second heaven, that "He was our first master, through whose assistance we returned (to God); and he has a tremendous solicitude ('inaya) for us, so that he does not forget us for a single hour."<sup>42</sup>

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"tawakkul (absolute trust and reliance on God) affirms the secondary causes." See the discussion of this point, in connection with the mysterious "fifth tawakkul" mentioned in the title of this chapter, at n. 27 above.

<sup>40</sup>The existence of those two groups on either side of Adam is mentioned in the second long Mi'raj hadith (from Abu Dharr) given by Muslim (iman, 264); however, that hadith does not mention Muhammad's seeing himself there, so that this aspect may possibly be Ibn 'Arabi's own addition.

<sup>41</sup>For the simultaneous presence of each soul--even if we are usually unaware of the fact--in its own Garden (or Hell) already during "this life," see the illustrative passages in this anthology (eschatology section) taken from chapter 302 (III, 12-13) and chapter 73, question 62 (II, 82).

More generally, this experience of the simultaneous presence of one's essential individual reality ('ayn: translated as "precisely himself" in this passage) in different planes of being is only one illustration of Ibn 'Arabi's universal perception of the reality of all manifest being as theophanies (tajalliyat, mazahir, etc.) of the "Realities" or Names within the divine Essence and of the "eternal individual entities" ('ayan thabita) in the divine Knowledge--a conception for which he frequently uses this image of mirrors and reflections. See the famous metaphysical development of this image in the first two chapters of the Fusus al-Hikam; in the Futuhāt I, 163 and IV, 2; and further references in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 499-505, as well as the striking set of diagrammatic representations of these "mirrors" of God and man provided by Haydar Amuli in the introduction to his vast commentary on the Fusus al-Hikam, Nass al-Nusus ("Le texte des textes"), ed. H. Corbin and O. Yahya, Tehran/Paris, 1975, plates 3-30.

<sup>42</sup>The special role of Jesus in the beginning of Ibn 'Arabi's own spiritual path is alluded to repeatedly in the Futuhāt: "He was looking after us when we entered upon this Path we are following today" (I, 15.26); "I returned (to God: tubtu) at the hands of Jesus" (IV, 77.30); "Our return to this path was through good tidings (mubashshira) at the hand of Jesus, Moses and Muhammad" (IV, 172.13); and "we found that station (of immediate spiritual 'feeding') within ourselves and had the immediate experience (dhawq) of it at the beginning of our journeying, with the spiritual reality (ruhaniya) of Jesus" (III, 43.20-21). This may be connected with Ibn 'Arabi's mention that his own first Sufi shaykh, Abu al-'Abbas 'Uraybi, was distinguished by his special spiritual relationship with Jesus (isawi): see references in the Futuhāt at I, 223; II, 365; and III, 539.

In addition to the chapters of the Futuhāt (ch. 20, 35-36, 195, etc.) and the Fusus (ch. 15) specifically devoted to Jesus, see more particularly the sections concerning Ibn 'Arabi's conception of Jesus' perennial spiritual function as the "Seal of Universal Sainthood," mirroring the Shaykh's own role

The final observation concerns the nature of the Prophet's vision (ru'ya) of God at the culminating stage of his Ascension, after God--in the words of the hadith--"had revealed to him what He revealed."<sup>43</sup> "Then He ordered (Muhammad) to enter; so he entered (the divine Presence), and there he saw exactly what he had known and nothing else: the form of his belief did not change."<sup>44</sup> This question of man's "divine vision" and knowledge is at the heart of Ibn 'Arabi's own long discussion with Moses later in this chapter (IV-F below) and underlies his accounts of his own personal vision at the all-encompassing "Muhammadan Station" (in IV-I below).

At the end of this section, after pointing out that it was only the Prophet's insistence on the actual bodily--rather than ecstatic or visionary--nature of this ascension that aroused the scepticism and hostility of his contemporaries,<sup>45</sup> Ibn 'Arabi concludes: "Now (Muhammad) had thirty-four times<sup>46</sup> in which (God) made him journey at night, and only one of them was a nocturnal journey in his (physical) body, while the others were with his spirit, through a vision which he saw."

### III. The Spiritual Journeys of the Saints<sup>47</sup>

As for the saints, they have spiritual journeys in the intermediate world<sup>48</sup> during which they directly witness spiritual realities (ma'ani) embodied in forms that have become sensible for

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as "the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood." Those references are summarized in Chodkiewicz, Sceau, chapters V-IX.

<sup>43</sup>This succinct phrase, whose implications Ibn 'Arabi expands in thousands of words here and in his other treatments of the Mi'raj, is all that is actually stated by the various hadith in regard to this ultimate stage of the Ascension; here they clearly echo the Koranic verse 53:10 (awha...ma awha) concerning Muhammad's vision of one of "the Greatest Signs" at 53:18. "Revealed" here translates wahy, the highest form of divine "inspiration" distinguishing the prophetic messengers (rusul).

<sup>44</sup>For Ibn 'Arabi's complementary treatment of this decisive question of man's "vision" (ru'ya) or contemplation of God--as differing only "qualitatively," but not in its "form," from the contents of his innermost "beliefs"--in an eschatological perspective, see the illustrative passages in chapter 73, questions 67 and 71 (II, 85-86).

<sup>45</sup>It is not clear how Ibn 'Arabi means for the reader to reconcile this insistence (repeated at the beginning of section III below) on the "bodily" nature of this particular journey of the prophet with his earlier statement in this chapter (at III, 340.34) that "Buraq is a mount from the barzakh" (i.e., from the intermediate, imaginal world), as well his own frequent interpretation of the Prophet's visions as taking place on that plane of being. However, for Ibn 'Arabi, the events and perceptions taking place in the barzakh are also "bodily" and "sensible" in a certain respect. See also, in this regard, Ibn 'Arabi's pointed advice to his fellow spiritual voyagers (in section III below) not to mention the "way" in which one travels--which is likely to lead to controversy--but only what one has actually seen, which in itself remains beyond dispute.

<sup>46</sup>We have not been able to locate a hadith source for this assertion. In any case, the relative proportions this implies do suggest the primary importance of the spiritual journey of each soul, which is the essential subject of the rest of this chapter (and of Ibn 'Arabi's other major treatments of Mi'raj theme).

<sup>47</sup>III, 342.34-345.25; passages omitted from the translation are indicated and summarized as they occur.

the imagination; these (sensible images) convey knowledge of the spiritual realities contained within those forms. And so they have a (spiritual) journey on the earth and in the air, without their ever having set a sensible foot in the heavens. For what distinguished God's Messenger from all the others (among the saints) was that his body was made to journey, so that he passed through the heavens and spheres in a way perceptible by the senses and traversed real, sensible distances. But all of that from the heavens (also belongs) to his heirs,<sup>49</sup> (only) in its spiritual reality (ma'na), not its sensible form.

So as for what is above the heavens,<sup>50</sup> let us mention what God made me directly witness in particular of the journey of the People of God. For their journeys are different (in form) because they are embodied spiritual realities, unlike the sensible journey (of the Prophet). Thus the ascensions (ma'arij) of the saints are the ascensions of (their) spirits and the vision of (their) hearts, (the vision) of forms in the intermediate world and of embodied spiritual realities. And we have already mentioned what we directly witnessed of that in our book called "The Nocturnal Journey,"<sup>51</sup> along with the order of (the stages of) the voyage....

<sup>48</sup>isra'at ruhaniya barzakhia: in the rest of this chapter the forms of asra (isra', etc.) are translated simply as "journey," without the adjective "nocturnal," which would be misleading (if taken literally) in English. As already noted above, Ibn 'Arabi's own usage in this context refers to the inward, "invisible" nature of these spiritual voyages (i.e., from the perspective of an external observer), not to the time they may occur.

<sup>49</sup>i.e., the saints: for the central importance of Ibn 'Arabi's conception of the saints as "heirs" of the different prophets (and all of them ultimately as heirs of the "Muhammadan Reality," whose heritage encompasses all the earlier prophets), see Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 1191-1201, Chodkiewicz, Sceau, chapters III and V, and of course the massive illustration of this theme throughout the Fusus al-Hikam.

<sup>50</sup>This phrase has two possible meanings: if it refers to the purely spiritual or noetic (ma'nawi) phases of the mystical journey symbolically surpassing even the outermost celestial sphere, then this would roughly correspond to Ibn 'Arabi's enumeration of the forms of knowledge gained in his culminating vision, at the end of this chapter (IV-I), a stage which is described in more detail in Chapter 167 of the Futuhāt (Alchimie, pp. 131-141) and in the Kitab al-Isra' (Rasa'il I, no. 13, pp. 45 ff.). Or if--as appears more likely here--it refers to what is spiritually "above" the physical spheres and planets (and therefore the intellectual sciences that can be deduced from their observation, as outlined in chapter 167), then Ibn 'Arabi is pointing to the entire "autobiographical" spiritual narrative in the K. al-Isra' and the rest of this chapter (= section IV below).

<sup>51</sup>Kitab al-Isra': see the discussion of the autobiographical nature of this work in the introduction to this chapter (notes 12-15), the key passage describing Ibn 'Arabi's own culminating revelation translated in our JAOS article cited at n. 13 above, and further cross-references at each stage of section IV below. This paragraph is followed by a short poem (III, 343.6-17), not translated here, recapitulating the "order of the journey," i.e., the various symbolic stages (seven heavens, Lotus-tree of the Limit, divine Throne, etc.) found in virtually all of Ibn 'Arabi's versions of the Ascension.

Therefore whenever God wishes to journey with the spirits of whomever He wishes among the heirs of His messengers and His saints, **so that He might cause** them **to see His Signs** (Kor. 17:1)--for this is a journey to increase (their) knowledge and open the eye of (their) understanding--the modalities of their journey are different (for different individuals):<sup>52</sup> and among them are those whom He causes to journey in Him.

Now this journey (in God) involves the "dissolving" of their composite nature.<sup>53</sup> Through this journey God (first of all) acquaints them with what corresponds to them in each world (of being), by passing with them through the different sorts of worlds, both composite and simple.<sup>54</sup> Then (the spiritual traveler) leaves behind in each world that part of himself which corresponds to it: the form of his leaving it behind is that God sends a barrier between that person and that part of himself he left behind in that sort of world, so that he is not aware of it. But he still has the awareness of what remains with him, until eventually he remains (alone) with the divine Mystery which is the "specific aspect"<sup>55</sup> extending from God to him. So when he

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<sup>52</sup>"modalities of their journey" = masrahum, which could also refer to their "point of departure," the "place" or "time" of the journey, the particular "route," etc. See section IV-F below, where Yahya (John the Baptist) explains to Ibn 'Arabi that each journey is different and "each traveler creates his own path."

Elsewhere Ibn 'Arabi, often following earlier Sufi writers, offers a variety of typologies for the soul's spiritual voyage: e.g., the fivefold division of suluk in chapter 189 (II, 380-382); the classical "four journeys" (asfar); or the more elaborate division into dozens of "stations," "stages," "meeting-places," etc. underlying the chapter divisions of the Futuhat as a whole. The key distinctions in such cases differ according to the particular focus and intentions of each section, and such categories therefore do not necessarily overlap in a systematic fashion. (Thus, for example, the three essential aspects of the saints' voyage "in God" described in this section seem to be treated as separate journeys in other contexts.)

<sup>53</sup>hall tarkibihim: i.e., the process of "dissolution" or "disassembly" into its constituent elements (organic, mental, psychic and spiritual) of the original "composition" (tarkib) constituting the psycho-social "self" (dhat) in the broadest sense--as opposed to the sirr (n. 55), the "innermost reality" or "secret" that is the true essence of each individual. The terms "dissolving" (tahlil) and "reintegration" (tarkib) are drawn from a larger body of alchemical vocabulary which Ibn 'Arabi uses in this spiritual sense throughout the Futuhat, most notably in chapter 167 (see introduction above), on the "Alchemy of Happiness."

<sup>54</sup>The term "world" (alam) refers here to the different "levels of being" or ontological "planes" (nash'at, hadarat, etc.) of divine manifestation; the "simple" ones being the purely noetic ('aqli) or spiritual Realities, while most phenomena are a "composite" (murakkab) involving some degree of materiality or manifest form in either the physical or intermediate, imaginal worlds.

<sup>55</sup>al-wajh al-khass: this key technical term of Ibn 'Arabi designates each creature's unique and unchanging inner "existentiating" relationship with God, prior to whatever knowledge or other transformations that may be acquired through its actions and "mediated" relationships in the course of life. (See the extensive references from the Futuhat in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 1139-1142.)

alone remains (without any of those other attachments to the world), then God removes from him the barrier of the veil<sup>56</sup> and he remains with God, just as everything else in him remained with (the world) corresponding to it.

Hence throughout this journey the servant remains God and not-God.<sup>57</sup> And since he remains God and not-God, He makes (the servant) travel--with respect to Him, not with respect to (what is) not-Him--in Him,<sup>58</sup> in a subtle spiritual (ma'nawi) journey....

Ibn 'Arabi goes on (III, 343.24-344.4) to recall the fundamental metaphysical underpinnings of these distinctions in the peculiar nature of the inner correspondence between man and the world (i.e., "not-God"), since both are created--in the words of a famous hadith--"according to the form" of God. Ordinarily, however, people think of themselves as simply "parts" of the world, as "things" within it, and it is only at the end of this purifying journey that the saints can realize man's true dignity and spiritual function as the "Perfect Man" (al-insan al-kamil) whose Heart fully mirrors the divine Reality (al-Haqq), thereby accomplishing that perfection for which the world itself was created.<sup>59</sup>

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The paradoxical relationship (of simultaneous identity and non-identity) between this "divine Mystery" or "secret" (al-sirr al-ilahi) and the voyager's own innermost reality (sirr) is brought out more openly in the culminating stages of Ibn 'Arabi's own mi'raj recounted in section IV-I and in his description (from the K. al-Isra') of a similar culminating experience of "unveiling" translated in our article cited at n. 13 above.

<sup>56</sup>hijab al-sitr: the "veil" (sitr) in this case seems to refer not to a further particular obstacle, but rather to all the forms of attachment and implicit idolatry (shirk) "dissolved" in the course of the traveler's ascension, which together blocked him from the realizing his inner relation to God (the "divine Mystery," sirr, mentioned in the preceding note). For further discussion of these central concepts in Ibn 'Arabi's thought, see Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 561-662 ("sitr") and 313-318 ("hijab").

<sup>57</sup>huwa la huwa: literally, "He (and) not-He"--a formula whose meaning is clarified in the following lines (summarized here).

For Ibn 'Arabi, the term "servant" (abd) frequently has the special technical meaning--closely corresponding to its usage in certain Koranic passages--of those rare individuals among the saints (and prophets) who have fully realized their inner relation to their Creator, to the Reality encompassing all the divine Names, and who are therefore not unconsciously subject to the "lordship" of any other creatures. See especially the references to his decisive discovery of his own true nature as "pure servant" (abd mahd) at the culmination of his own spiritual ascension, in section IV-I (n. 198) below, and the detailed discussion and further references in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 765-778.

<sup>58</sup>or "in him" (i.e., in the servant). The ambiguity is again probably intentional: as Ibn 'Arabi goes on to explain, this voyage is "in God" (i.e., consciously, not simply "ontologically"), but it is also "in the servant" insofar as he can only know the divine Names in their manifestation within himself, in his own states and experience. The description of this second stage of the spiritual journey of the saints resumes at III, 344.4.

<sup>59</sup>The classic summary of this inner "correspondence" of man, God and creation in Ibn 'Arabi (and including many of the hadith and Koranic verses he commonly cites to illustrate it), is to be found in the opening chapter (on Adam) of the Fusus al-Hikam (I, 48-58; Bezels, pp. 50-59); for readers without



So when the servant has become aware of what we have just explained, so that he knows that he is not (created) according to the form of the world, but only according to the form of God (al-Haqq), then God makes him journey through His Names, in order to cause him to see His Signs (Kor. 17:1) within him.<sup>60</sup> Thus (the servant) comes to know that He is what is designated by every divine Name--whether or not that Name is one of those described as "beautiful."<sup>61</sup> It is through those Names that God appears in His servants, and it is through Them that the servant takes on the different "colorings" of his states: for They are Names in God, but "colorings" (of the soul) in us.<sup>62</sup> And they are precisely the "affairs" with which God is "occupied":<sup>63</sup> so it is in us and through us that He acts, just as we (only) appear in Him and through Him. [...<sup>64</sup>]

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Arabic the version of T. Burckhardt (La Sagesse des prophetes, Paris, 1955), because of its helpful annotation, is probably still the most understandable translation of this extremely complex section.

<sup>60</sup> or "within Him": the pronoun here--in an essential ambiguity to be found throughout Ibn 'Arabi's writings--could equally be read as referring to God (al-Haqq) as well as to the "servant," given the profound connection (although not simple identity) between the two that becomes apparent at this advanced stage of spiritual realization (see notes 55, 58-59). "God," throughout this paragraph, translates al-Haqq ("the Truth"), i.e., the ultimate or absolute divine Reality encompassing--and at the same time transcending--all the particular "Names" through which It becomes known and manifest.

The mention of man's being created "according to the form" ('ala sura) or "in the image" of God is an allusion to the well-known hadith (with evident Biblical parallels): "God created Adam in His image..." (The hadith is recorded by Bukhari, Muslim and Ahmad b. Hanbal; see also Graham, Word, pp. 151-152.)

<sup>61</sup> An allusion to the famous Koranic verse 7:180: "**For God's are the most beautiful Names, so call Him by them; and leave those who go astray with regard to His Names....**" Here Ibn 'Arabi evidently refers to the natural human tendency to become attached to the Names of divine Beauty (jamal) while failing to come to terms with the manifestations of what the Sufis traditionally called the Names of divine "Majesty" or "Severity" (jalal).

At the very end of this chapter (III, 354.15-16), Ibn 'Arabi mentions that this insight into the ultimate Unity of the divine Reality "named" (ahadiyat al-musamma) by each of the divine Names constitutes one of the many kinds of knowledge he realized in the culminating stage of his own spiritual ascension. There (as also, e.g., in the Fusus, chapters 4 and 21) he acknowledges the earlier development of this thesis in a work by the famous Andalusian Sufi Ibn Qasi (d. 546/1151), Khal' al-Na'layn. For Ibn 'Arabi's own long commentary on that work, see R.G. no. 681 (II, pp. 463-464). The inner spiritual "verification" of that reality is one of the key features of the culminating realization described in section IV-I and in the corresponding passage from the K. al-Isra' translated and commented in our JAOS article cited at n. 13 above.

<sup>62</sup> "Colorings" translates talwinat, a traditional Sufi expression for all the constantly changing psychic states and conditions of every individual, equivalent to the incessant inner "transformations" (taqallubat) of the soul discussed in the following paragraph (n. 65). As Ibn 'Arabi indicates here, the manifestations of the divine Names ultimately constitute all our experience and reality; hopefully this theological terminology, unfamiliar as it may be for most modern readers, will not obscure the universality of his metaphysical perspective.

Thus when God makes the saint (al-wali) travel through His most beautiful Names to the other Names and (ultimately) all the divine Names, he comes to know the transformations of his states and the states of the whole world.<sup>65</sup> And (he knows) that that transformation is what brings those very Names to be in us,<sup>66</sup> just as we know that the transformations of (our) states (manifest) the specific influences (ahkam) of those Names.... So there is no Name that God has applied to Himself that He has not also applied to us: through (His Names) we undergo the transformations in our states, and with them we are transformed (by God)....<sup>67</sup>

Now when (the spiritual traveler) has completed his share of the journey through the Names and has come to know the Signs which the Names of God gave him during that journey, then he returns and "reintegrates" his self with a composition different from that initial composite nature,<sup>68</sup> because of the knowledge he has gained which he did not have when he was

<sup>63</sup>An allusion to the famous Koranic verse 55:29: ".**Every Day He is (occupied) in an affair.**" Ibn 'Arabi typically takes the term sha'n ("affair," "concern," etc.) in this verse to refer to the infinite particular aspects of the divine "Activity" at each instant in time: see, e.g., Futuhat II, 77, 82, 218, 499; III, 198, 224; and the further references in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 639-642.

<sup>64</sup>The translation here omits a brief poem (III, 344.8-11) illustrating this central theme of Ibn 'Arabi's thought and foreshadowing his own inner realization of this truth in the culminating vision described in section IV-I below.

<sup>65</sup>"Transformations" = taqallubat--a meaning which, for Ibn 'Arabi, underlies the Arabic term for the Heart (qalb), since these constantly renewed transformations of being ultimately constitute all our experience: see his classic exposition of this realization in the Fusus, chapt. 12 (on Shu'ayb and "the Wisdom of the Heart"), and further references in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 916-921. His mention here of the "states of the world" is an important reminder that these "transformations" and the divine activity of "ever-renewed creation" encompass all the forms of experience and perception--not just what we ordinarily consider "inner" or "spiritual" phenomena--and all the forms of manifest being. For the multiple meanings of the complex term wali (translated as "saint" here), see n. 79 below.

<sup>66</sup>This opening phrase could likewise be translated so as to "invert" this relationship (although that meaning is also implied, in any case, in the second half of the sentence): "And that transformation is what is brought about in us by the essence of those Names." In either case, this sentence aptly summarizes the relation of inherent "reciprocity" between God and the creatures (or the Names and their manifestations) which underlies Ibn 'Arabi's frequent and apparently paradoxical statements that God (and the Names) "need man" (in order to be manifest and known), or that the caused thing "causes its Cause."

<sup>67</sup>The translation is uncertain. We have again omitted some further illustrations (III, 344.20-24) of this metaphysical relationship between certain divine Names and their manifestations in our experience.

<sup>68</sup>See n. 53 and the accompanying text above for the meaning of the "self" (dhat) in question here and the preliminary process of its "dissolving" (tahlil) into the various components of its "composite nature" (tarkib) in each level ("world") of being.

"dissolved" (in the ascending phase of that journey).<sup>69</sup> Thus he continues to pass through the different sorts of worlds, taking from each world that (aspect of himself) which he had left there and reintegrating it in his self, and he continues to appear in each successive stage (of being) until he arrives back on earth.

So "he awakens among his people" (like the Prophet), and no one knows what happened to occur to him in his innermost being (sirr) until he speaks (of his journey). But then they hear him speaking a language different from the one they are used to recognizing as his; and if one of them says to him "What is this?," he replies that "God made me journey by night and then caused me to see whatever Signs of His He wanted (me to see)." So those who are listening say to him: "You were not gone from us, so you were lying in what you claimed about that."<sup>70</sup>

And the jurist (faqih) among them says: "This fellow is laying claim to prophethood (nubuwwa), or his intellect has become deranged: so either he is a heretic--in which case he ought to be executed--or else he is insane, in which case we have no business talking with him." Thus "a group of people make fun of him" (Kor. 49:11), others "draw a lesson from him" (Kor. 59:2),<sup>71</sup> while others have faith in what he says, and thus it becomes a subject of dispute in the

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For further details on Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of this key category of al-raji'un--"those who have returned" to complete the full process of enlightenment by reintegrating all the descending levels of being in their true, divine context and reality--see chapter 45 of the Futuhat (I, 250-253) [also available in the French translation by M. Valsan, Etudes traditionnelles, no.307 (1953), pp. 120-139] and the detailed references in Chodkiewicz, Sceau, chapter VII.

<sup>69</sup>That is, he is now fully aware of the divine Ground and the Names underlying each of those "things" in the world (or in his "self") which he had originally seen as a reality independent of God, and which had been temporarily "veiled" from his attention during the spiritual ascension; or in other words, he has become profoundly aware of all things as God's "Signs" (as indicated in Ibn 'Arabi's allusions to the famous Koranic verse 41:53, at notes 34 and 72).

<sup>70</sup>This paragraph, opening with a phrase from the hadith al-isra' (section II above), alludes to Ibn 'Arabi's reminder earlier in this chapter (III, 342.27-33) of the sceptical, even hostile reaction of many Meccans to the Prophet's insistence on the physical, bodily nature of his nocturnal journey. (Those events are vividly recounted in Ibn Ishaq's Sira: see pp. 182-184 in The Life of Muhammad, tr. A. Guillaume, Oxford, 1955.) It is also another allusion to Ibn 'Arabi's understanding (see notes 2 and 35 above) of the "hidden," spiritual character of this voyage of realization for the saints. In the R. al-Anwar (Rasa'il, p. 17; Journey, p. 59), Ibn 'Arabi explains that the fact that Muhammad--unlike, for example, Moses after his return from Mt. Sinai--showed no outward signs of his Ascension and revelatory encounter with God is an indication of his superior spiritual state of "perfect realization," corresponding to the equivalent "invisibility" of the afrad and malamiya among the saints "who return," the raji'un.

<sup>71</sup>The first phrase is clearly an allusion to the following verse (Kor. 49:11): "**O you who have true faith, do not (let) a group make fun of a group who may well be better than them....**"; the second probably refers to the well-known words (from verse 59:2): "**..so draw a lesson, you who have**

world. But the faqih was unaware of (the true meaning of) His saying: "**We shall show them Our Signs on the horizons and in their souls...**" (Kor. 41:53),<sup>72</sup> since (God) does not specify one group rather than (any) other.

Therefore whoever God may cause to see something of these Signs in the way we have just mentioned should mention (only) what he has seen, but he should not mention the way. For then people will have credence in him and will look into what he says, since they will only deny what he says if he makes a claim about the way (he acquired that knowledge).

Now you should know that (in reality) there is no difference with regard to this journey between ordinary people<sup>73</sup> and the person (distinguished by) this way and this characteristic. That is because (this spiritual journey) is in order to see the (divine) Signs, and the transformations of the states of ordinary people are (likewise) all Signs: they are in those Signs, but "they do not notice" (Kor. 23:56; etc.).<sup>74</sup> Hence this sort (of traveler) is only distinguished from the rest of (his fellow) creatures, those who are veiled (Kor. 83:15), by what God has inspired in his innermost being<sup>75</sup> either through his thinking and inquiry with his intellect, or through his preparation, by polishing the mirror of his soul, for the unveiling of these Signs to

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**(true) vision**--the latter group (ulu' al-absar), for Ibn 'Arabi, clearly being the saints or people of true spiritual vision.

<sup>72</sup>The continuation of this famous verse--underlining its universal metaphysical (or eschatological) dimension--is also assumed here: ". . . **until it becomes clear to them that He is the Truly Real (al-Haqq)--or is your Lord not enough, that He is Witness of every thing? Are they still in doubt about meeting their Lord? Is He not surrounding every thing?**" (See also the earlier allusions to this verse in section I above, at notes 34 and 36.)

<sup>73</sup>al-'alam: literally, "(the people of) the world"; "(spiritual) journey" here, as throughout this section, translates isra', the term applied in the Koran to the Prophet's "nocturnal journey" (see n. 35 above).

<sup>74</sup>The Koran applies the same formula to man's usual lack of spiritual awareness in a number of different contexts (especially with regard to the eschatological realities), but this particular verse (Kor. 23:56) seems to be most relevant here: "**We hurry to them with the good things, but no, they do not notice!**"

<sup>75</sup>"innermost being" = sirr (see n. 55 above). "Inspired" here translates the verb al-hama, a term that is much broader in meaning than the special divine "revelation" (wahy) characterizing the prophetic messengers, since here it evidently extends to the results of thinking (fikr) and "rational inquiry" (nazar bi-l-'aql), as well as the fruits of spiritual practice and mystical experience (the "polishing of the soul") which are Ibn 'Arabi's primary focus here (see following note).

him by way of inner unveiling and immediate witnessing, direct experience and ecstatic "finding."<sup>76</sup>

Thus ordinary people (when they object to those who speak of this spiritual voyage) are denying precisely That within Which they are and through Which they subsist. So if (the traveler) did not mention the way in which he obtained the inner knowledge of these things, no one would deny or dispute him. For all of the (ordinary) people--and I do not exclude a single one of them--are "making up likenesses for God";<sup>77</sup> they have always agreed and cooperated in that, so not one of them criticizes another for doing it. God says: "**Do not make up likenesses for God**..." (Kor. 16:74)--yet they remain blind to that Sign.<sup>78</sup>

But as for the friends of God (Kor. 10:64-66),<sup>79</sup> they do not make up likenesses for God. For God is the One Who makes up likenesses for the people (Kor. 14:25; 24:35), because of His knowledge of the underlying intentions (of those symbols), since God knows, but we do not know<sup>80</sup> (see Kor. 16:74; 3:66; 2:216). Thus the saint (the one truly "close to God") observes the

<sup>76</sup>kashfan shuhudan dhawqan wujudan: see the extensive references to Ibn 'Arabi's usage of each of these key terms in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 971-972 (kashf), 654-667 (shuhud and related forms), and 492-495 (dhawq), as well as his discussions concerning the necessary role of this "direct experience" (dhawq) in his encounters with Joseph and Moses in section IV (notes 108 and 145) below.

<sup>77</sup>I.e., instead of grasping the inner reality of God's symbols, those that already exist (and which ultimately constitute all reality). "(Ordinary) people" here translates al-nass, a Koranic expression with much the same meaning here as al-'alam (n. 73) in the preceding sentences--i.e., everyone but the accomplished saints, the "Friends of God" discussed in the following paragraph.

The phrase in quotation marks here (and in the various Koranic verses discussed below) could also be translated as "making up likenesses (or symbols) of God"--and that activity certainly accounts for an important part of Ibn 'Arabi's criticism. However, it gradually emerges from the subsequent discussion that the main focus of his critique here is man's natural (and more universal) tendency not to grasp and assimilate the "likenesses" (or "symbols," amthal) contained in the divine revelation (in all its infinite forms and "Signs"), but rather to impose his own limiting conceptions and standards on God and the world.

<sup>78</sup>Or "to (the meaning of) that verse": the individual verses of the Koran are traditionally referred to as the divine "Signs" (ayat) par excellence.

<sup>79</sup>or "those close to God," awliya' Allah: the term wali (pl. awliya) has usually been translated here as "saint," but in this case Ibn 'Arabi is more clearly stressing the root sense of their special closeness or proximity to God--a meaning which is also brought out in the Koranic verses concerning these rare individuals "**who have no fear and are not sad**," who have reached "**the ultimate Achievement**" (al-fawz al-'azim). (See also the more comprehensive discussion in Chodkiewicz, Sceau, chapters I and III.)

<sup>80</sup>Although the phrase **"God knows, but you do not know"** completes the Koranic verse (16:74) already quoted in the preceding paragraph, its more illuminating use in the other two verses evidently forms the background for this particular allusion: in Kor. 3:66 it is applied to those who

likenesses God has made, and in that immediate witnessing he actually sees precisely what connects the likeness and That Which it symbolizes: for the likeness is precisely what is symbolized, with respect to that which connects them, but it is different insofar as it is a likeness. So the saint "does not make up likenesses for God"; instead, he truly knows what God symbolized with those likenesses....<sup>81</sup>

#### IV. IBN 'ARABI'S PERSONAL MI'RAJ

[IV-A. The Departure From the Elemental World]<sup>82</sup>

So when God wished to "journey with me to cause me to see (some) of His Signs" in His Names among my names<sup>83</sup>--and that was the portion of our inheritance from the (Prophet's) nocturnal journey--He removed me from my place and ascended with me on the Buraq of my contingency.<sup>84</sup> Then He penetrated with me into my (natural) elements....

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**"dispute concerning that of which they have no knowledge,"** and in verse 2:216 it follows the reminder that **"Perhaps you abhor something although it is good for you, and perhaps you love something and it is bad for you."**

<sup>81</sup>In the remainder of this section (III, 340.6-25), Ibn 'Arabi first insists on the decisive importance of considering every single detail of expression in the revealed divine "likenesses" or symbols (which he illustrates here with reference to the famous Light-verse of the Koran, 24:35). This point, in his opinion, was rarely respected by those interpreters (mutakallimun, philosophers, etc.) who relied on their own reasoning (nazar) to decipher the meaning of those symbols. He then goes on to stress the decisive differences between such "rationalist" approaches and the methods of the saints, who rely solely on inspired "unveiling" (kasht) and direct "witnessing" (shuhud) of the divine intentions in those cases (see n. 76 above).

<sup>82</sup>III, 435.26-35.

<sup>83</sup>fi asma'ihī min asma'i: a dense formula that summarizes Ibn 'Arabi's complex metaphysical understanding of the divine Names in their relation to each individual's experience, as outlined in the immediately preceding section. This relatively abstract formulation is made more explicit in his discussion of the Heart--of the Knower, but ultimately of each individual--as the true Temple or "House of God," in section IV-H (notes 168-172) below, and finds its ultimate confirmation in the revelatory personal experiences described in section IV-I.

<sup>84</sup>imkani, referring to each creature's inner dependency on God (and the particular "lords" constituted by certain divine Names) for its very being and manifestation. In Ibn 'Arabi's description of the culminating revelation of his own universal, "Muhammadan Station" (III, 350 = section IV-I below), he says that God "took away (his) contingency," so that he could "realize the inner realities of all the divine Names."

"Buraq" is the name of the Prophet's mysterious steed described in the hadith accounts of the Mi'raj and Isra': see the translation at n. 39 above and Ibn 'Arabi's longer discussion of the "Buraq" of

At this point Ibn 'Arabi allegorically encounters each of the elements constituting the physical, sublunar world, according to the accepted physical theories of his time--i.e., earth, water, air and fire--and leaves behind with each of them the corresponding part of his bodily nature.<sup>85</sup>

So I passed through into the first heaven:<sup>86</sup> nothing remained with me of my bodily nature<sup>87</sup> that I (needed to) depend on or to which I (had to) pay attention.

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each of the prophetic Messengers in section II at III, 341.2-4 (passage not translated here), as well as the article "Burak" (by R. Paret) in EI<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>85</sup>This brief passage (III, 345.27-35) therefore symbolizes all the relevant dimensions both of the individual's natural "predisposition" (isti'dad) and of his voluntary spiritual "work" that are actually necessary to overcome and escape the animal tendencies and attachments ordinarily flowing from his bodily/psychic nature.

The experiential dimensions and practical presuppositions of this task of "purification" or "dissolution" of those attachments (tahlil: see above at notes 52 and 67) are brought out much more explicitly in the longer opening passages of the R. al-Anwar (see introduction above, notes 16-19). In particular, Ibn 'Arabi describes there (Chodkiewicz, Sceau, pp. 193-194; Journey, pp. 36-39) the voyager's necessary passage through the mineral, vegetal and animal realms before he can begin the properly "human" (insani) stage of this spiritual journey. The indispensable role of these "lower" dimensions of being in man's complete perfection--through which he surpasses even the angels (who lack this experience of the full range of existence)--is underlined in the vivid and partially autobiographical descriptions at the end of the chapter on Elias (no. 22) in the Fusus al-Hikam (I, 186-187; Bezels, p. 185).

<sup>86</sup>"Heaven," throughout these sections, translates sama', a term referring both to the various concentric heavenly spheres universally assumed by the astronomical theories of the time (as well as the Koran and the hadith accounts of the Ascension) and--more importantly, for Ibn 'Arabi--to the spiritual or noetic realities (i.e., the ruhaniyat or asrar of the various prophets named in the hadith) symbolically associated with each of those spheres. This meaning is therefore quite different from the "gardens" (jannat) and other abodes of "Paradise" (al-janna) that together constitute what we ordinarily call "heaven" (as opposed to "hell").

<sup>87</sup>nash'ati al-badaniya: nash'a, literally "arising" or "appearing (in existence)," is one of Ibn 'Arabi's most common expressions (following the Koran 56:62, etc.) for the different "planes" or realms of being. As already mentioned in the Introduction, the purely spiritual (and non-physical) nature of these "passages" (at least for the saints, unlike the special case of the Prophet; see text at notes 46 and 49 above)--which depend only symbolically on the astronomical theories of Ibn 'Arabi's time--is brought out quite explicitly in the other Mi'raj narrative in chapter 167 of the Futuhāt. There (Alchimie, pp. 57-58), for example, this "departure" from the physical world is explicitly explained as the inner liberation from "domination by the carnal desires" (hukm al-shahawat).

[IV-B. Adam and the First Heaven]<sup>88</sup>

As Ibn 'Arabi explains in this section, it was during this encounter with his "father" that he was first given the immediate spiritual awareness of two key themes of his thought: the universality of the divine Mercy which, like the Being that is inseparable from it, "encompasses all things"; and, flowing from this first principle, the temporal, limited nature of the punishments of "Hell" (and the sufferings of the world as a whole), which manifest certain of those Names.<sup>89</sup> The discovery and awareness of these principles presupposes man's ultimate reality as the "Perfect Man" (*insan kamil*), the (potentially) complete reflection of the divine Reality at all Its levels of manifestation--i.e., the very foundation of the Shaykh's metaphysical vision which is developed at much greater length in the famous opening chapter on Adam in the *Fusus*.

At the beginning of this encounter Ibn 'Arabi--like Muhammad before him<sup>90</sup>--suddenly sees his "essential reality" (*'ayn*) among the souls of the blessed on Adam's right, while at the same time he himself remains standing in front of Adam. Then Adam goes on to inform him that the Koranic expressions "**the people of the left hand**" and "**the people of the right**" (Kor. 56:27, 38, 41, 90; etc.) refer in reality to Adam's hands, since all of mankind are in God's "Right Hand"--"the one which destines (them) to happiness"--"because both of my Lord's Hands are Right and blessed."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup>III, 345.1-20; the sections translated in full here correspond to lines 9-20 (omitting part of lines 14-15). While the *R. al-Anwar* does not refer at all to Adam and his sphere, chapter 167 of the *Futuhat* (= *Alchimie*, pp. 57-63) primarily deals with the cosmological functions of this sphere in the sub-lunar realm, matters which are also partially accessible to the "rationalist" thinker who accompanies the Prophet's "heir" in that voyage. However Ibn 'Arabi does allude there to fundamental spiritual points which are greatly elaborated in the *K. al-Isra'* and later on in this chapter (367): (1) the fact that "Adam" teaches each person only those divine Names (and the spiritual knowledge flowing from them) that can be accepted by that individual's particular constitution or predisposition; and (2) the fundamental importance of the "particular divine aspect" (*al-wajh al-khass*; see n. 55 above), the divine "mystery" (*sirr*) uniting each creature directly to God, which Ibn 'Arabi calls the "Elixir of the true Knowers" (*Iksir al-'Arifin*), the secret of their inner knowledge of God (and of its particular limits for each individual).

Ibn 'Arabi's important account of his revelatory experience at this stage in the *K. al-Isra'* (*Rasa'il*, pp. 12-14)--which closely corresponds to the culminating section (IV-I) of this chapter 367 in the *Futuhat*--is translated and commented in our article cited at n. 13 above.

<sup>89</sup>Both of these points are listed among the different kinds of knowledge which Ibn 'Arabi "saw" during the culminating "revelation" described at the end of this chapter; see the translation of those particular points at the end of section IV-I below. (See also the related discussions of these issues and further references in our translated selections from chapters 73, 302, 351 and 369 in the eschatological section of this anthology.)

<sup>90</sup>See the corresponding passage of the *hadith al-isra'* in section II (at notes 39-40) above; according to the original hadith (only partially translated here), Muhammad first sees all the descendants of Adam divided among the blessed (literally, "the happy": *su'ada'*) at his right hand and the "wretched" or "suffering ones" (*ashqiya'*) on his left.

<sup>91</sup>This phrase is quoted from a longer "divine saying", presupposed throughout this section, which Ibn 'Arabi included in his personal collection of *hadith qudsi*, the *Mishkat al-Anwar* (no. 24, where it is attributed to Tirmidhi; *Niche*, pp. 50-53). There God--having created Adam and sent him to greet the angels--shows Adam His two closed Hands, saying: "Choose whichever one of them you want," and



..Therefore I and and my children are (all) in the Right Hand of the Truly Real (al-Haqq), while everything in the world other than us is in the other divine Hand."

I said: "Then we shall not be made to suffer (in Hell)?"

And (Adam) replied: "If (God's) Anger were to continue (forever), then the suffering (of the damned) would continue. But it is felicity that continues forever, although the dwellings are different, because God places in each abode (of Paradise and Gehenna) that which comprises the enjoyment of the people of that abode, which is why both abodes must necessarily be 'filled up' (see Kor. 11:119; etc.).<sup>92</sup> For the (divine) Anger has already come to an end with the 'Greater Reviewing':<sup>93</sup> (God) ordered that (His) limits be established;<sup>94</sup> so they were established, and

Adam replies: "I choose the Right Hand of My Lord, although both Hands of my Lord are right and blessed." "Then He opened (His Hand), and in It were Adam and his descendants...."

<sup>92</sup>Ibn 'Arabi alludes here to his controversial conception, developed at length in the Fusus (e.g., at the end of ch. 7 on Ismail) and in the eschatological sections of the Futuhāt, that it is precisely the exclusive choice of certain limited "enjoyments" (whether bodily or imaginal), varying according to each person's predispositions and inner tendencies, that--by veiling him from the full awareness of God--ultimately constitutes each particular "dwelling" (maskan) among the many levels of Hell. Thus it is only with the lifting of that veil of (spiritual) ignorance that the person becomes fully aware that what he considered "happiness" at the same time is both his suffering and his (potentially purifying) punishment. But Ibn 'Arabi also suggests (Fusus I, 94; Bezels, p. 110) that even for the "people of Gehenna who remain there eternally" (i.e., who are not ultimately redeemed through the intercession of their prophets), their "torment" (adhab) will ultimately be made "sweet" ('idhab). For the development of similar conceptions in the Futuhāt, see, e.g., I, 656; III, 673; IV, 248, 408; and further references in the eschatological section of this anthology.

<sup>93</sup>al-'ard al-akbar: the "Reviewing" or "Presentation" ('ard) of souls and their actions mentioned in the Koran (11:18; 18:48; etc.) and elaborated in certain hadith was popularly understood as one of the "events" occurring when all souls are gathered together on the "Day" of Resurrection; see Ibn 'Arabi's brief summary of this particular stage of the Resurrection--formulated in relatively exoteric, popular terms--in chapter 64 of the Futuhāt (I, 307-317), on the "stages of the Resurrection" (= O.Y. ed. IV, p. 466).

Here--following Ibn 'Arabi's usual distinction between the "greater" (universal) and "lesser" (individual) Resurrection [see, e.g., ch. 369 (III, 388-390) and Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 945-946]--the "Greater Reviewing" evidently refers to the total, comprehensive process of all human actions and spiritual destinies (or at least those within one cosmic cycle) as viewed from the all-encompassing, metahistorical divine standpoint. That is why it can be perceived here, by the universal "Adam" who stands beyond time, as "already finished." The "lesser Reviewing" would then apparently be the same reality as perceived from the standpoint of an individual soul. The same distinction between the "lesser" (i.e., microcosmic) and "greater" (macrocosmic) "Hour," "Visit," "Gathering," etc. is developed in many of the eschatological readings (from chapters 73, 302, 351, etc.) in this anthology; see especially our general Introduction to those selections.

<sup>94</sup>or "that (His) sanctions be applied" (iqamat al-hudud): the Koranic conception of the divine hudud has two related senses--both equally important here--that cannot be adequately conveyed by a single English expression: they are both the divine "laws" or "limits" and the "sanctions" or "penalties"

when they were established (His) Anger disappeared. (This is) because the sending down of the (divine) Message (tanzil al-risala) actually is precisely the establishment (and application) of (God's) limits for those with whom He is angry (Kor. 1:7), and nothing remains (after that) but (His) Good Will and Mercy which encompasses every thing (Kor. 7:156). So when these 'limits' (and the punishments flowing from them) have come to an end, then the (divine) authority<sup>95</sup> comes back to the universal Mercy with regard to everything."<sup>96</sup>

Thus my father Adam granted me the benefit of this knowledge when I was unaware of it, and that was divine good tidings for me in the life of this world, in anticipation (of its full realization in the hereafter). Therefore the Resurrection comes to an end with time,<sup>97</sup> as God said: "**[The angels and the Spirit ascend to Him in a Day whose extent is] of fifty thousand years**"<sup>98</sup> (Kor. 70:4), and this is the period of the establishment (and application) of the (divine) limits.

Ibn 'Arabi goes on to explain that "after this period"--however it is to be understood--only the divine Names "the Merciful" (which encompasses all the "Most Beautiful Names") and "the

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(primarily corporeal in this world, but in another form in the next) prescribed for their infringement. Although the two senses are apparently separated--for us--by the passage of time and other contingencies, they are in reality inseparable and indeed "simultaneous" from the comprehensive, divine perspective represented by Adam here.

<sup>95</sup>hukm: with regard to the divine Names, this term usually refers to their power or authority to become manifest in the various realms of being, and thus, by extension, to all their specific "influences" or "manifestations." (It is therefore translated as "influence" in the rest of this section.)

<sup>96</sup>We have left this entire paragraph in quotes--even though much of it is clearly Ibn 'Arabi's own paraphrase, using his typical technical vocabulary--because the Arabic text does not clearly indicate where the direct quotation of Adam's words might end.

<sup>97</sup>Or simply "in time" (bi-l-zaman): Zaman--in its ordinary, popular usage (see the following note for references to Ibn 'Arabi's more complex personal understanding)--usually refers specifically to the "physical time" marked out by the motions of the cosmos and the heavenly spheres. Judging from the context here--which apparently refers to the "Greater Resurrection" (al-qiyamat al-kubra) encompassing all the souls of the universe--he may be alluding to a sort of cyclical reversion of the whole universe to its Source, thereby marking a cosmic "end of time."

However, if the reference here is understood as applying to the "Lesser Resurrection" of each individual soul (see references at n. 93), then the final phrase could be translated as "in time," with the period of fifty thousand years being that allotted for the perfection and purification (including punishment) of each particular soul. See the further discussion of these problems in our Introduction and notes to the eschatological selections in this anthology.

<sup>98</sup>For some representative aspects of Ibn 'Arabi's complex understanding of "time" (zaman), see ch. 12 on the cycles of esoteric and exoteric time, I, 143-147 (O.Y. ed., II, 342-345); ch. 59 on the time of the cosmos, I, 290-292 (O.Y. ed., IV, 330-340); ch. 390 on the inner meaning of time, III, 546-550; and the further references in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 1253-1254 (entry for "Day," yawm).

Compassionate" will have authority and influence (hukm) in the world, although the intrinsic, logically necessary "opposition" of the other Names necessarily will remain:

...Hence the creatures are entirely submerged in (God's) Mercy, and the authority of the (other divine) Names (only) continues in their intrinsic opposition, but not in us. So you should know that, for it is a rare and subtle knowledge that (most people) do not realize. Instead, ordinary people are blind to it: there is no one among them who, if you were to ask him "Are you content to have applied to yourself (the influence) of those Names that give you pain?," would not reply "No!" and have the influence of that painful Name applied to someone else in his stead.<sup>99</sup> But such a person is among the most ignorant of people concerning the creatures--and he is even more ignorant of the Truly Real!

So this (experience of) immediate witnessing informed (us) concerning the continuation of the authority (hukm) of the Names (i.e., other than those of Mercy) with regard to those Names (in themselves), but not in us. For those Names are relations whose realities are intrinsically opposed, so that they (can) never become united (in a way that would erase their inherent relational distinctions).<sup>100</sup> But God extends His Mercy to (all) His servants wherever they are, since Being in its entirety is Mercy.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>The "ignorance" involved in this almost universal attitude--an "ignorance" which, Ibn 'Arabi repeatedly stresses, is profoundly rooted in us and can only be overcome by an inner transformation involving both divine Grace and the spiritual efforts of the individual--is grounded in the implicit assumption that God (or the divine "Mercy," Being, etc.) is manifest only in certain specific phenomena or forms of experience.

<sup>100</sup>For a brief but clear explanation of Ibn 'Arabi's central metaphysical conception of the divine Names as "relations" (nisab) whose reality only becomes manifest through the being of the created "individual entities" (a'yan), see ch. 222 (II, 516-518). See also the many further references in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 591-618 (on the divine "Names") and 506-513 (on the related concepts of each Name as "lord," rabb and marbub).

<sup>101</sup>This theme of the universality of the divine "Mercy" as the source and ground of all Being--and therefore on a very different level from the other divine Names--is developed in more detail (along with most of the other topics of this section) in chapter 21 of the Fusus (concerning Zachariah), and throughout the Futuhāt: see the extensive references in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 521-528.

[IV-C. Jesus and Yahya (John the Baptist) in the Second Heaven]<sup>102</sup>

Ibn 'Arabi next encounters Jesus and his cousin Yahya (= John the Baptist) in the third heaven--the two figures being linked here by their association in the Koran with "Life," both "animal" and spiritual. The Shaykh first asks Jesus about his life-giving powers, and is told that they ultimately come from Gabriel (as the Universal Spirit, al-ruh al-kull):

"No one who revives the dead revives them except to the extent of what he has inherited from me;<sup>103</sup> so such a person does not occupy my station in regard to that (life-giving power), just as I do not have the station of the one (i.e., Gabriel) who granted me (the power of) reviving the dead."

Ibn 'Arabi then turns to Yahya/John, who clarifies a long series of questions involving the references to him (and his relations with Jesus) in the Koran and hadith.<sup>104</sup> Finally, after a brief

<sup>102</sup>III, 346.20-347.20 (summarized here). See also the references to discussions of Jesus in the Futuhat (including his key role in Ibn 'Arabi's own entry into the spiritual path) at n. 42 above.

In the hadith concerning the Mi'raj (section II above), Muhammad encounters Yahya only in the fifth heaven, along with Aaron; that is where he also reappears later in this chapter (at the beginning of section IV-F). (He explains his special ability to travel through the intervening spheres in an untranslated passage at the end of this section.) Jesus and John are likewise mentioned together in this second heaven in chapter 167 of the Futuhat. However, there is no further discussion of John in that section (= Alchimie, pp. 63-72), which focuses instead on the miracles of Jesus and the life-giving powers of the divine Spirit more generally.

The corresponding section of the K. al-Isra' (pp. 15-18) does not mention Yahya/John at all, but focuses instead on Jesus' role as the "Seal of (universal) Sainthood" and his descent with the Mahdi at the end of time (see explanations in Chodkiewicz, Sceau, chapter VII and index s.v.), as those are explained to the "voyager" by Mercury (al-Katib). That section also evokes (at p. 18) Ibn 'Arabi's own exceptional preparedness for the "Station of Perfection" (maqam al-kamal).

<sup>103</sup>An allusion to Ibn 'Arabi's typical conception of the knowledge and powers of the saints as being "inherited" from the spiritual reality of one or more of the prophets (who are all encompassed by the "Muhammadan Reality"): see the extensive references in Chodkiewicz, Sceau, chapters IV and V, and Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 1191-1202. The association between Jesus (and the second heaven) and the power of Life--in the sense both of spiritual knowledge and of physical or "animal" (hayawani) animation--is equally fundamental in the corresponding passages of chapter 167 and, in extremely allusive form, in the K. al-Isra' and the R. al-Anwar. A more complete discussion of these questions, bringing out more clearly the primary importance, for Ibn 'Arabi, of the revivifying spiritual knowledge brought by the prophets, is to be found in the long chapter on Jesus (no. 15) in the Fusus (I, pp. 138-150; Bezels, pp. 174-186) together with chapter 20, on Yahya/John the Baptist.

<sup>104</sup>The first of these is a famous hadith qudsi (found in Bukhari, Muslim, Ibn Maja, Darimi, and Ahmad b. Hanbal; see the analysis and translation in Graham, Word, pp. 202-203) concerning the "sacrifice of death," in the form of a spotted ram, on the Day of Resurrection. The Koranic verses explained here include 19:7, referring to the inner significance of Yahya's name (= "he lives," in Arabic), **"..We did not give the name to anyone before him"**; 19:12-15, on the special divine blessings granted him; and 3:39, concerning his spiritual purity or "chastity" (hasur: the subject of an excursus on the unique condition of Mary) and the special condition of "righteousness" (salah) he shares with Jesus and other prophets.

excursus on the nature of spiritual procreation and marriage in Paradise,<sup>105</sup> Yahya explains why it is that he moves back and forth between the heaven of Jesus and the sphere of Aaron (where Muhammad met him, and where Ibn 'Arabi will encounter him later [section IV-F]) and sometimes dwells with Joseph and Idris as well.

Most of the themes (such as the interrelations of life, spiritual knowledge, and the divine inspiration of the prophets) mentioned only allusively in this section are treated in greater detail in the chapters of the Fusus on Jesus<sup>106</sup> and Yahya.

[IV-D. Joseph and the Third Heaven]<sup>107</sup>

This encounter takes the form of a monologue in which Joseph explains to Ibn 'Arabi the true intentions of one of the Prophet's references to him, as well as the meaning of certain verses in the Sura of Joseph (ch. 12) in the Koran. These discussions are the occasion for the following spiritual advice:

This is a lesson for you that your soul does not follow the same course in something where it has no direct experience (dhawq) as the person who undergoes that experience.<sup>108</sup> So do not say "If I were in the place of that person when such-and-such was said to him and he said such-and-such, I would not have said that." No, by God, if what happened to him happened to you, you would say what he said, because the stronger state (of direct experience) controls the weaker one (i.e., of whatever you might imagine).<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup>A subject to which Ibn 'Arabi alludes on a number of other occasions (e.g., in ch. 390, III, 548, where he remarks that "God showed us a likeness of this" in the cases of Mary and Jesus, or Adam and Eve).

<sup>106</sup>Chapter 15 (I, pp. 138-150; Bezels, pp. 174-186): this chapter is almost exactly the same length as the concluding one on Muhammad, and the two are considerably longer than any other chapters of the Fusus. See also the related chapters of the Futuhat cited at n. 42 above.

<sup>107</sup>III, 347.20-348.11 (only lines 347.29-31 are fully translated here).

<sup>108</sup>This insistence on the indispensable role of personal "direct experience" (dhawq) in a fully adequate appreciation of spiritual matters is also one of leitmotifs of Ibn 'Arabi's encounter with Moses (IV-G below).

<sup>109</sup>This particular section lacks the references to the metaphysical principles of beauty, harmony and artistic inspiration (traditionally associated with both Joseph and Venus, the planet of this sphere) found in chapter 167 of the Futuhat (= Alchimie, pp. 72-76), and it does not deal at all with the profound questions of the nature of "Imagination" (both cosmic and human) and the Joseph's special powers of spiritual interpretation (ta'wil) that are the focus of the famous chapter 9 of the Fusus. The corresponding section of the K. al-Isra' (pp. 18-21) also includes a brief dialogue with the allegorical figure of Venus (al-zahra').

[IV-E. Idris and the Fourth Heaven]<sup>110</sup>

Upon his arrival in the fourth and central, pivotal heaven, that of the Sun (and the symbolic "Heart" of the cosmos), Ibn 'Arabi is immediately greeted by Idris, who calls him "the Muhammadan inheritor" (al-warith al-Muhammadi)--an allusion to the Shaykh's conception of his own unique role as the "Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood."<sup>111</sup> Ibn 'Arabi then asks him a series of brief questions which relate to the traditional accounts concerning Idris (in one or another of his manifestations) or to his special spiritual function as the perennial "Pole" (qutb) and summit of the spiritual hierarchy:<sup>112</sup>

...I said to him: "It has reached me concerning you that you are a proponent of miracles."<sup>113</sup>

Then he said: "Were it not for miracles, I would not have been 'raised up to a lofty place' (Kor. 19:57)."<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup>III, 348.11-349.2; the sections translated below correspond to 348.14-21 and 24-35, with minor omissions.

In Islamic tradition, especially in the popular "tales of the prophets" (qisas al-anbiya'), the figure of the prophet Idris, who is mentioned only briefly in the Koran (19:57-58 and 21:85-86), is closely associated (and often simply identified) with a number of prophetic or quasi-prophetic figures who are generally distinguished by the traits of supernatural longevity (or at least frequent historical "reappearances" in different forms). These different "facets" of Idris include: Enoch and Elias (the Koranic Ilyas), each of whom is the subject of a chapter in the Fusus (see notes 114-115 below); the threefold persona of "Hermes," father of many esoteric arts and sciences according to Hellenistic traditions that were widely integrated in Islamic culture; and even the mysterious initiatic figure of al-Khadir. (For the historical background and sources concerning each of these personages, see the respective articles in EI<sup>2</sup>, vol. III and IV.)

<sup>111</sup>In the corresponding encounter with Idris in the Kitab al-Isra' (Rasa'il, p. 21), Ibn 'Arabi is likewise greeted as "Master of the Saints" (sayyid al-awliya').

<sup>112</sup>For Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of Idris' position as the heavenly "Pole" (qutb) and summit of the perennial spiritual hierarchy--whose two "Imams" at that eternal level are Jesus and Ilyas--see the references to the Futuh and other works and the explanations (including the relation of these figures to their successive terrestrial "deputies") in Chodkiewicz, Sceau, chapter VI, and in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 909-915 and 101-114. The R. al-Anwar, at this point in the mystical ascension (see Chodkiewicz, Sceau, pp. 201-213; Journey, p. 43 at bottom), adds that all the preceding spheres belonged to the realm of the "Imam of the Left Hand," while "this is the place of the Heart," where "you will discover the degrees of the Pole."

<sup>113</sup>al-kharq: i.e., more strictly speaking, of any phenomena that appear to "break" the "accustomed order" ('ada) of events in the world. The term is more general than the probative miracles (mu'jizat) performed for the prophetic messengers, and likewise distinct from the "wonders" or "blessings" (karamat) that are among the charismatic powers attributable to the spiritual force or himma of certain saints. (See the additional references to these distinctions in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 961-971.)

<sup>114</sup>Alluding to the Koranic description of Idris' miraculous preservation from death (and its traditional elaborations, mentioned in the preceding notes): "**And mention Idris in the Book: he was a man of truth [siddiq], a prophet [nabi], and We raised him up to a lofty place**" (Kor. 19:56-57). See

So I said to him: "Where is your (spiritual) rank in relation to your place (at the center of the universe)?"

And he said: "The outer is a sign of the inner."<sup>115</sup>

I said: "I have heard it said that you only asked tawhid<sup>116</sup> of your people, and nothing else (i.e., no separate revealed Law)."

He said: "And they did not (even) do (that). Now I was a prophet (nabi: see Kor. 19:56) calling them to the word (i.e., the outward profession) of tawhid, not to tawhid (itself)--for no one has ever denied tawhid!"<sup>117</sup>

also Ibn 'Arabi's considerably more detailed discussions of these verses in chapters 4 and 22 of the Fusus (I, 75-80 and 181-187; Bezels, pp. 82-89 and 230-234).

<sup>115</sup>The meaning of this exchange, and of the outward, cosmic symbolism of Idris' supreme spiritual rank and function, is brought out in much greater detail in the long chapter 4 of the Fusus al-Hikam concerning "Enoch" (who is there explicitly identified with Idris). Chapter 22 of the Fusus likewise concerns "Elias who is Idris..." (opening sentence). There Ibn 'Arabi explains that Idris "who was a prophet before Noah," was first **raised to a lofty place** (Kor. 19:57), but was then sent down again to earth--in the form of the prophet Elias--to experience fully the divine "intimacy" with even the lowest (animal, mineral and vegetal) degrees of creation. The contrast between these two chapters of the Fusus suggests that "Enoch" is associated in particular with the divine transcendence (tanzih) and "Elias" with the equally essential aspect of divine immanence (tashbih)--symbolizing the two indispensable aspects of Idris' comprehensive perfection in his spiritual function as Pole and his reality as "Heart" of the Perfect Man.

<sup>116</sup>This term is ordinarily understood to refer to the outward "profession of divine Unity" ("there is no god but God...") contained in the shahada (= the "word of tawhid" in the following sentence), but Idris understands it here in the far more profound sense of the reality of divine Unity--at once both transcendent and immanent--which is at the heart of Ibn 'Arabi's conception of the "Unity of Being" (see additional references in the following note).

In the larger body of Islamic tradition the prophet Idris (like the figure of "Hermes" with whom he was often identified: see note 109 above) was known not for bringing a particular revealed divine Law (shari'a), but rather for his institution of the whole range of rational or "philosophic" arts and sciences (by no means simply the "hermetic" ones). Thus Ibn 'Arabi goes on to address him (in a sentence not translated here) as "founder of the (arts and sciences) of wisdom" (wadi' al-hikam).

<sup>117</sup>i.e., the reality of tawhid which--since it constitutes the very nature of Being and the primordial core of man's nature--is necessarily expressed in all the planes of manifestation and the corresponding degrees of spiritual realization. Ibn 'Arabi often refers (e.g., at I, 405) to the Koranic statement "**Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but him...**" (Kor. 17:23), taken as an expression of this universal metaphysical reality (as well as a command). See likewise his discussion of the underlying meaning of the traditional formula of tawhid in the profession of faith (= the "word" or "saying," kalima, of tawhid in this sentence), in chapter 67 of the Futuhat (I, 325-329), and especially his subtle treatment of the 36 different Koranic expressions of tawhid--in both their ontological and "subjective" spiritual dimensions--in chapter 198, fasl 9 (II, 405-420; French tr. by C.-A. Gilis, Le Coran et la fonction d'Hermes, Paris, 1984). Further references can be found in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 1172-1180.

I said: "This is strange!"

...(Then) I said: "But the differences (of opinion) concerning the Truly Real and the things said concerning Him<sup>118</sup> have become quite numerous."

He said: "It (can) only be like that, since the matter is (perceived differently) according to the constitution (of each individual).<sup>119</sup>

I said: "But I thought<sup>120</sup> that all of you prophets, the whole group of you, did not differ concerning Him?"

So he replied: "That is because we did not say (what we taught concerning God) on the basis of reasoning (nazar); we only said it on the basis of a common direct relationship (with God).<sup>121</sup> So whoever knows the realities knows that (the fact that) all of the prophets agree in saying the same thing about God is equivalent to those who follow reasoning (all) saying the same thing.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>118</sup>or "It": "Truly Real" = al-Haqq, which could also be translated here simply as "the Truth" or "God"--since in this context the "ontological" and "theological" perspectives are virtually inseparable for Ibn 'Arabi. Similarly, "things said" (maqalat) could also be translated here as (theological) "schools" or (religious) "denominations."

<sup>119</sup>"Constitution" (mizaj: strictly speaking, the mixture of physical "temperaments" distinguishing each person) must be understood very broadly here to include all the factors--spiritual, social, psychic, etc. as well as physical--ultimately helping determine the distinctive outlook and understanding of each individual with regard to every aspect of reality (not just "theological" matters). Idris returns to elaborate this point in the latter half of this section.

<sup>120</sup>Or "I saw" (ra'aytu), if this is taken as an allusion to Ibn 'Arabi's visionary revelation of the unity of the prophets and their teachings within the "Reality of Muhammad" or the "Qur'an," which he describes in section IV-I below (and in the key passage from the K. al-Isra' translated in our article cited at n. 13 above.)

<sup>121</sup>"direct relationship" translates 'ill, a term that can refer either to a blood-relationship or to a pact or covenant (as in the Koran 9:8-10). In either case, the term here refers to the relation of immediate divine inspiration--in itself implying both "kinship" and covenant--that, for Ibn 'Arabi, distinguishes the spiritual state of the prophets and saints, as opposed to the fallible and often quite divergent results of man's ordinary "reasoning" or "inquiry" (nazar).

<sup>122</sup>I.e., such unanimous agreement--unlike the usual and expected state of disagreement among the "people of nazar" or individual reasoning (see preceding note)--points to the truth of their conclusion on that particular point. See the excellent summary discussion of the various kinds of inspired knowledge attained by the prophets and saints "beyond the stage of the intellect" (wara' tawr al-'aql) in ch. 73, question 118 (II, 114.14-28). There Ibn 'Arabi distinguishes between those realities that are rationally "impossible" (see following paragraph here)--but whose truth is nonetheless revealed by a "visionary



I said: "And is the matter (i.e., the reality of things) in itself really as it was said to you (by God)?" For the signs (followed by) the intellects (of those who rely exclusively on their reasoning) indicate the impossibility of (certain) things you (prophets) brought concerning that."

Then he said: "The matter is as we (prophets) were told--and (at the same time) it is as whatever is said by whoever says (his own inner belief) concerning Him, since 'God is in accordance with the saying of everyone who speaks (of Him).'<sup>123</sup> So that is why we only called the common people to the word (i.e., the verbal profession) of tawhid, not to (the reality of) tawhid."

...I said: "Once, in a visionary experience (waqi'a) I had, I saw an individual circumambulating (the Kaaba), who told me that he was among my ancestors and gave me his name.<sup>124</sup> Then I asked him about the time of his death, and he told me it was 40,000 years (earlier). So I proceeded to ask him about Adam, because of what had been established in our chronology concerning his period (namely, that it was much more recent). Then he said to me: 'Which Adam are you asking about? About the most recent Adam?'"

(Idris) said: "He told the truth. I am a prophet of God (cf. Kor. 19:56), and I do not know any period at the close of which the universe as a whole stops. However, (I do know) that He never ceases creating (the universe) in its entirety; that (the whole of reality) never ceases to be

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incident" (waqi'a)--and the far more extensive domain of knowledge "which cannot be (verbally) expressed" or spoken about, which is the realm of the "sciences of direct experience" ('ulum al-adhwaq).

<sup>123</sup>This last phrase is a paraphrase of a well-known hadith qudsi (cited a number of times, with minor variations, by Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi, Ibn Maja, Ahmad b. Hanbal, etc.; see Graham, Word, pp. 127-130), of which Ibn 'Arabi quotes two versions in his Mishkat al-Anwar (no. 13 and 27; Niche, pp. 36-37, 56-57): "I am in accordance with what My servant supposes concerning Me, and I am present with him when He remembers (root dh-k-r) Me...." For the broader metaphysical underpinnings of this saying in Ibn 'Arabi's thought, see the references scattered throughout the Fusus al-Hikam, including his discussion of this hadith in the closing lines of that work (I, 226; Bezels, pp. 283-284) and his development of the key notion of the "god created in beliefs," in the chapters on Shu'ayb (I, 119-124; Bezels, pp. 148-153), on Elias/Idris (I, 182-186; Bezels, pp. 230-234), on Zachariah (I, 178; Bezels, pp. 224-225), and Aaron (I, 194-196; Bezels, pp. 246-248).

<sup>124</sup>This encounter is described in greater detail in chapter 390 of the Futuhat (devoted to the inner meaning of "time," al-zaman), in a passage (III, 549.8-14) which clearly brings out the "visionary," dreamlike character of this particular experience: "Now God caused me to see, in the way that the sleeper sees (in his dreams)--while I was going around the Kaaba...." There this mysterious "ancestor" also reminds Ibn 'Arabi of a hadith of the Prophet stating that "God created 100,000 Adams."

'nearer' and 'further';<sup>125</sup> and that the 'appointed times'<sup>126</sup> apply to the (particular) created things--through the completion of (their) periods (of existence)--and not to the (process of) creation (as a whole), since creation is continually renewed 'with the breaths' (at every instant).<sup>127</sup> Thus we know (only) what He has caused us to know--**And they do not comprehend anything of His Knowledge except for what He wishes** (Kor. 2:255)."

So I said to him: "Then what remains until the appearance of the 'Hour'?"<sup>128</sup>

And he replied: "**Their reckoning has drawn near to people, but they are in (a state of) heedlessness, turning away**" (Kor. 21:1)<sup>129</sup>.

I said: "Then inform me about one of the conditions of Its 'drawing near'."

And he replied: "The existence of Adam is among the conditions for the Hour."

I said: "Then was there another abode before this world (al-dunya), other than it?"

<sup>125</sup>i.e., dunya ("this world") and akhira (the "next world"): their etymology alludes both to the full ontological range of levels of Self-manifestation and to the reality--as Idris mentions explicitly later in this discussion--that their "closeness" (or the contrary) is relative to the perspective of each observer, since all are equally present with God.

<sup>126</sup>ajal: this term is used many times in the Koran--often in close association with "the Hour" (see note 128 below)--to refer to the ultimate fate of men in general (e.g., in verses 6:2, 60; etc.), of "every community" (umma, a term which for Ibn 'Arabi encompasses every type of created being: at Kor. 7:34; 10:49; etc.), or the motion of the sun and the moon (at Kor. 31:29; etc.), etc.

<sup>127</sup>ma'a al-anfas: this is one of Ibn 'Arabi's most common expressions for the ever-renewed creation of the whole universe at every instant (khalq jadid/tajaddud al-khalq), a metaphysical reality which is only directly visible to the true Knowers and accomplished saints, as he explains in a famous section of the chapter on Shu'ayb in the Fusus al-Hikam (I, 124-126; Bezels, pp. 153-155). For some representative discussions of this recurrent theme in the Futuhat, see II, 46, 208, 372, 384, 432, 471, 500, 554, 639, 653; III, 127; and further references in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 429-433.

<sup>128</sup>There are some 48 Koranic references to the "Hour" (al-sa'a) and the many questions surrounding it (e.g., at 33:63; 79:42), as well as a vast body of hadith, especially concerning Its "conditions" or "signs" (shurut, a term mentioned in Ibn 'Arabi's following question here). Ibn 'Arabi frequently discusses these matters along lines already followed by many earlier Sufis, so the apparent naivete of his questioning here is almost certainly a literary device. See especially our translation of his discussion in response to Tirmidhi's question (72) concerning the "Hour" in chapter 73 (II, 82), in the eschatological part of this anthology.

<sup>129</sup>"People" here translates al-nass, a Koranic term which Ibn 'Arabi generally understands (e.g., at n. 77 in section III above) as referring more particularly to the condition of "most people" or "ordinary people" (i.e., al-'amma) as opposed to the enlightened state of the saints ("people of God," "true men," "true servants," etc.). On this specific point, see the translation of his remarks concerning the saints'

He replied: "The abode of Being is one: the abode does not become 'nearer' (dunya) except through you,<sup>130</sup> and the 'other world' (al-akhira) is not distinguished from it except through you! But with regard to bodies (i.e., as opposed to the man's inherent spiritual finality and progressive movement of 'return' to his Source), the matter<sup>131</sup> is only engendered states (akwan), transformations and coming and going (of endless material forms); it has not ceased, and it never will."

I said: "What is there?"<sup>132</sup>

He replied: "What we know, and what we do not know."

I said: "Then where is error in relation to what is right?"<sup>133</sup>

He said: "Error is a relative matter, while what is right is the (unchanging) principle. So whoever truly knows God and the world knows that what is right is the ever-present Principle, which never ceases (to be), and he knows that error (occurs) through the opposition of the two points of view.<sup>134</sup> But since the opposition (of the two perspectives) is inevitable, then error is

visionary awareness of the contemporary presence of the "Hour," in chapter 73 (I, 81-82) in the eschatological part of this anthology.

<sup>130</sup>(Cf. the related treatment of dunya and akhira at n. 125 above.) "You" throughout this sentence is given in the plural, since Idris is referring to all of mankind (see "Adam" in Idris' previous explanation), and ultimately to the "Perfect Man": see the famous opening chapter on Adam (and the Perfect Man) in the Fusus al-Hikam, as well as the extensive references to "Adam" (in this broader metaphysical sense) in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 53-60.

Idris' essential message in this phrase, that man "carries this world (al-dunya) with him into the next," is among the many kinds of knowledge Ibn 'Arabi says he "saw" in his culminating revelation; that reference is translated at the end of section IV-I below.

<sup>131</sup>or possibly the (divine) "Command" (al-amr)--in which case Ibn 'Arabi (through Idris) would be referring to the universal "existentiating Command" manifested in the ever-renewed creation of all beings: see the discussion of the technical meanings of this Koranic term in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 93-101.

<sup>132</sup>ma thamma: i.e., in the manifest world or the world of bodies subject to these perpetual transformations? (The exact reference is unclear.)

<sup>133</sup>The two Koranic expressions translated here as "what is right" (sawab) and "error" (khat'a) originally refer respectively to hitting one's target or "getting it right" and to "missing" it: thus the usage of both terms here implies a focus on the subject, the person who is judging rightly or wrongly--not simply on an abstract logical question of the relations of truth and falsehood. In addition, khat'a (in its Koranic context) has strong overtones of moral error--i.e., "sin" or "trespass" (against the divine limits: see n. 94)--so that the "ethical" (or religious) and "ontological" dimensions of Ibn 'Arabi's argument here are, as so often, intentionally intermingled.

<sup>134</sup>i.e., of God (or the Truth and True Reality, al-Haqq) and of each individual creature. As Idris goes on to remind us, in reality there can only be what really is (al-wujud), the True Reality (al-Haqq): in

also inevitable. So whoever maintains (the real existence of) error (also) maintains (the prior existence and reality of) what is right; and whoever maintains the (ultimate) non-existence of error speaks what is right (Kor. 78:38)<sup>135</sup> and posits error (as deriving) from what is right."  
[...<sup>136</sup>]

[IV-F. Aaron and the Fifth Heaven]<sup>137</sup>

Next I alighted to stay with Aaron, and (there) I found Yahya, who had already reached him before me. So I said to (Yahya): "I didn't see you on my path: is there some other path there?"

And he replied: "Each person has a path, that no one else but he travels."

I said: "Then where are they, these (different) paths?"

Then he answered: "They come to be through the traveling itself."

After Aaron then greets Ibn 'Arabi as "the perfectly accomplished heir (of the Prophet),"<sup>138</sup> he goes on to explain how he became both a prophet (nabi) and also a lawgiving

relation to that ontological Principle (asl), "error" is necessarily "relative" and "accidental" (idafi)--i.e., a necessarily subjective and partial perspective which is therefore close to "non-existence" (adam).

<sup>135</sup>The larger context of this verse, however, suggests the extreme rarity of this awareness, as well as the "divine perspective" it assumes: "**On the Day when the Spirit and the angels stand in rows, they do not speak, except for whoever the Merciful permits, and he speaks what is right--that is the True Day (al-yawm al-haqq)....**"

<sup>136</sup>In the final lines of this section, Idris reiterates some of the more familiar principles of Ibn 'Arabi's thought: that the world is created from the divine attribute of "Bounty" (jud); that the world and man all "return" to that divine Mercy which "encompasses all things" and gives them being; and that the knower (i.e., the Perfect Man) is even "more prodigious" (a'zam) than whatever in the world may be known--a point that was already stressed in section III above (at n. 59).

<sup>137</sup>III, 349.2-15 (the few minor omissions in this translation are indicated in the accompanying notes).

It is noteworthy that the topics discussed here are not mentioned at all in Ibn 'Arabi's parallel versions of the mystical Ascension. The brief corresponding sections of the Mi'raj narratives in both the K. al-Isra' (pp. 23-24) and the R. al-Anwar (see Chodkiewicz, Sceau, p. 205; Journey, p. 44) allude mainly to the "martial" qualities of anger, discord, etc. traditionally associated with Mars, the planet and "spiritual entity" (ruhaniya) of this sphere.

The account of this stage in chapter 167 of the Futuh (= Alchimie, pp. 78-79) is mainly devoted to Ibn 'Arabi's controversial interpretation of the "faith of Pharaoh" and the universality of the divine Mercy, topics which are discussed in even more detail in the chapters on Aaron and Moses in the Fusus al-Hikam (I, 191-213; Bezels, pp. 241-266).

<sup>138</sup>al-warith al-mukammal--i.e., the saint who has fully combined the prophetic "inheritances" of all the Messengers, which are integrally contained in the "Muhammadan Reality"--still another allusion to

Messenger (rasul) participating in the revelation (wahy) appropriate to that rank, at the request of his brother Moses.

...I said: "O Aaron, some people among the true Knowers have claimed that the existence (of the external world) disappeared with regard to them, so that they see nothing but God, and so that nothing of the world remains with them that might distract them, in comparison with God. Nor is there any doubt that they (really) are in that (spiritual) rank,<sup>139</sup> as opposed to those like you. Now God has informed us that you said to your brother (Moses) when he was angry (with you for having allowed the Israelites to worship the golden calf): '...so do not cause (our) enemies to gloat over me!' (Kor. 7:151).<sup>140</sup> Thus you posited their having a certain power (over you in the external world), and this condition is different from the condition of those true Knowers (who experience the 'disappearance' of the external world)."

Then he replied: "They spoke sincerely (about their experience). However, they did not have any more than what was given them by their immediate experience (dhawq). But look and see--did what disappeared from them (in that state actually) disappear from the world?"

"No," I answered.

He said: "Then they were lacking in the knowledge of the way things are, to the extent of what they missed, since the world was non-existent for them. So they were lacking the True Reality (al-Haqq) to the extent of that (aspect) of the world which was veiled from them. Because the whole world is precisely the Self-manifestation (tajalli) of the Truly Real, for

Ibn 'Arabi's unique status as the "Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood." (See the similar greeting by Idris at the beginning of section IV-E, n. 111 above). For the central notion of the saints as "heirs" of the different prophets (and all ultimately as heirs of the "Muhammadan Reality"), see the references given in n. 49 above.

<sup>139</sup>I.e., Ibn 'Arabi's question (and implicit criticism) concerns the relative evaluation of that spiritual state, not the reality and importance of the experience itself. See his remarks in the following section (IV-G) on the necessity of fana' at a certain point on the path, in regard to Moses' initiatic "death" (sa'aga) on Mt. Sinai, and his use of a similar Arabic term (afna) in describing a decisive phase in his own spiritual development in the key passage from the K. al-Isra' (pp. 13-14) translated in our article cited at n. 13 above. More generally, the contrast between the lower, "immature" state of those "Knowers" (arifun) who deny the reality of this world, and the station of the warithun (the true "heirs" of the prophets) who are always aware of God's theophanic Presence throughout this world, is a recurrent subject in the K. al-Isra'.

<sup>140</sup>See the longer discussion of the inner meaning of this incident, from a very different standpoint (i.e., Moses' and Aaron's differing awareness of the divine Mercy) at the beginning of the chapter on Aaron (no. 24) in the Fusus (I, 191 ff.; Bezels, pp. 243 ff.).

whoever really knows the Truly Real. **So where are you going? It is only a reminder to the worlds** (Kor. 81:26-27) of the way things are!"

Perfection is nothing but its (or 'His')<sup>141</sup> existence,  
So whoever misses it is not the perfect one....<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup>kawnuhu: the term kawn usually refers to the engendered, manifest state of being (translated as "existence" here), so the most obvious reference, given the preceding context, is to the external "world" or whole manifest "universe" (al-'alam). But as so frequently in Ibn 'Arabi, the pronouns in this verse could also be taken, without any ultimate contradiction, to refer either to God (al-haqq, the Truly Real) or even to the human "observer"--i.e., man in his ultimate reality as the "Perfect Man," which may well be what is indicated by "the perfect one" (al-kamil) at the end.

<sup>142</sup>The concluding, untranslated lines allude to the well-known dangers and illusions involved in taking the ecstatic experience of "extinction" (fana') of the self in contemplation of God as the ultimate goal and highest stage of the spiritual path, at least in this world. This caution, which is probably connected with the title of this chapter (see notes 27 and 39 above), is amplified and repeated in the following encounter with Moses (section IV-G), and it is also an important theme in the passage from the K. al-Isra' translated in our article cited at n. 13 above. Although the subject of Aaron's remark is a constantly repeated theme in Ibn 'Arabi's writing, it should be stressed that those dangers and the ultimate superiority of the saints' subsequent "enlightened abiding" (baqa') in the world, as exemplified above all in the life of Muhammad, were likewise stressed almost unanimously in earlier Sufi literature and practice.

The intensity and centrality of Ibn 'Arabi's insistence on the realization of the nature and importance of this "world" as an essential aspect of human perfection (kamal)--and indeed as the essential grounds of man's superiority to the angels and purely spiritual beings--can best be measured by comparing his writings to the familiar currents of "monistic" mysticism, such as the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi's Andalusian contemporary, Ibn Sab'in. See, among others, the careful comparison of these two perspectives--which have their parallels in many other mystical traditions--in the translation and study of the Epitre sur l'Unicite Absolue (R. al-Ahadiya) of Awhad al-Din Balyani (a 13th-century Persian Sufi in the school of Ibn Sab'in) by M. Chodkiewicz, Paris, 1982.

[IV-G. Moses and the Sixth Heaven]<sup>143</sup>

Ibn 'Arabi begins his discussion with Moses by thanking him for his having insisted that Muhammad--during the final, descending stage of his Mi'raj--return to ask God to reduce the number of daily prayers prescribed for his community.<sup>144</sup> Moses replies that "this is a benefit of knowledge (reached through) direct experience (dhawq),<sup>145</sup> for there is a (spiritual) condition that can only be perceived through immediate contact."

Ibn 'Arabi then mentions that it was Moses' "striving for the sake of others"--which first led him to the burning bush--that eventually brought him "all the Good."<sup>146</sup> Moses responds that

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<sup>143</sup>III, 349.16-350.5 (translated in full with exception of summarized passages at lines 16-20 and 23-25). The corresponding section in chapter 167 (Alchimie, pp. 89-97) also deals with "theophanic" nature of the world, but from a very different standpoint. In keeping with the more abstract, cosmological focus of that chapter, Ibn 'Arabi uses the Koranic account of the transformations of Moses' staff (Kor. 20:17-21) to illustrate some of the basic principles of his ontology, especially the relation between the unchanging noetic "realities" (haqa'iq) or "individual entities" (a'yan) and the constant transformations of the phenomenal world. In other words, it points to the objective "knowledge" underlying the focus on Moses' immediate experience of theophany in this chapter.

The traveler's encounter with Moses in the K. al-Isra' (Rasa'il, pp. 25-28), on the other hand, is devoted to entirely different subjects: Moses first stresses the differences between the 'arif (the "mystic" who publicly parades his spiritual discoveries, and the warith (the Prophetic "heir" or true "Muhammadan," al-muhammadi), who "conceals his secrets" and who "sees (God's) Essence in his essence, His Attributes in his (own) attributes, and His Names in his (own) acts"--i.e., whose inner Ascension corresponds to the particular type of "nocturnal" spiritual voyage (isra') Ibn 'Arabi described in section III above, that which is outwardly indistinguishable from the life of "ordinary people." In the K. al-Isra', Moses goes on to summarize for the "voyager" the remaining stages to be encountered in his journey, with particular emphasis on the importance of the "descent," the "return" to life in this world, for the completion and perfection of that journey.

<sup>144</sup>This story is included in the long hadith al-isra' (from Muslim: see n. 38 above) given by Ibn 'Arabi at the beginning of this chapter (III, 342.20-27, an untranslated part of section II); it also appears, with minor variations, in many of the other canonical hadith concerning the Mi'raj. According to this particular version, the prescription of "fifty prayers in each day and night" was "part of all that was divinely revealed" (by wahy) to the Prophet at the very summit of his Ascension, in his direct encounter with God. During Muhammad's descent back to earth, Moses--relying on his own immediate experience (dhawq) with his Community in this same matter--twice persuades the Prophet to return to God and plead for a lessening of this burden, so that the required number is reduced to ten and then five. On the second occasion the Lord says to Muhammad: "They are five and they are fifty: **with Me, the Word is not changed!**" (alluding to the Koran at 50:69).

<sup>145</sup>Moses goes on to conclude this section by again stressing the decisive role of dhawq, the inner "tasting" of spiritual states, in the realizations of the prophets and saints. See Joseph's similar insistence on the indispensable, irreducible character of direct personal experience (as opposed to what can be gained by mental reflection or purely imaginative participation), at n. 108 above. "Immediate contact" (mubashara: literally "hands-on" experience) at the end of this sentence has essentially the same meaning as dhawq, since both refer to insights realizable only through a unique "spiritual state" (hal).

<sup>146</sup>This interpretation of the Koranic verses (Kor. 28:29 ff.)--according to which Moses discovered the burning bush (and his theophany there) only "accidentally," while seeking fire to warm his family--is amplified in chapter 366 (III, 336.16-25), where Ibn 'Arabi takes this incident as a symbol of the rare virtue of disinterested service which characterizes "all the just leaders (Imams)." There he also

"Man's striving for the sake of others is only a striving for his self, in the truth of things"--i.e., when he discovers who he really is--and that the thankfulness which flows from this (on the part of all concerned) is one of the highest forms of "remembering" and praising God.

...After that I said to him: "Surely God has chosen you over the people with His Message and His Word."<sup>147</sup> But you requested the vision (of God),<sup>148</sup> while the Messenger of God said that 'not one of you will see His Lord until he dies?'"<sup>149</sup>

So he said: "And it was just like that: when I asked Him for the vision (of God), He answered me, so that 'I fell down stunned' (Kor. 7:143). Then I saw Him in my '(state of) being stunned'."<sup>150</sup>

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

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

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explains that this was exactly how Khadir first discovered the Source of eternal Life, while seeking water for his fellow soldiers.

<sup>147</sup>Paraphrasing the following Koranic verse: "**God said: 'O Moses, surely I have chosen you over the people with My Message and My Word...'**" (Kor. 7:144).

<sup>148</sup>Referring to the Koranic verse 7:143, parts of which are quoted or paraphrased throughout the rest of this section: "**And when Moses came to Our appointed time and His Lord spoke to him, he said: 'My Lord, make me see, that I may look at You.' He said: 'You will not 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, He made it crushed flat, and Moses fell down stunned. Then when he awakened he said: 'I have returned to you, and I am the first of the men of true faith.'**"

<sup>149</sup>A paraphrase of a well-known hadith recorded by both Muslim (K. al-fitan, no. 95) and Tirmidhi (fitan, no. 56); several of the canonical hadith collections contain specific sections concerning the "vision of God" (ru'yat Allah) in the next life. For Ibn 'Arabi's broader understanding of this question, both in the eschatological context and as prefigured in the divine vision of the prophets and saints--which follows from their initiatic "death" to this world and concomitant "resurrection" in the awareness of their eternal spiritual self--see, among others, the selections from chapter 302 (III, 12-13), ch. 351 (III, 223), ch. 369 (III, 388-399), and ch. 73, questions 62, 67, 71 (II, 82, 84, 86) translated in the eschatological section of this anthology.

<sup>150</sup>Or "my (initiatic) 'death' (sa'aqati)": in other Koranic verses referring to the Resurrection (see following note), the same root is used virtually as an equivalent of "death." Here, however, Ibn 'Arabi is evidently using this term--which in its root sense means literally being "thunderstruck," "struck dead by lightning" or "rendered senseless" by a loud noise--in a more technical sense, referring to the spiritual state of "extinction of the ego (fana') in the Self-manifestation (tajalli) of the divine Lordship." This definition is from his K. Istilahat al-Sufiya (item no. 131; p. 45 in the English translation by R. T. Harris, Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society, III, 1984); see also the more detailed discussion of his technical usage of this term in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 695-696.



[...<sup>151</sup>] He said: "...So I did not see God until I had died. It was then that I 'awakened', so that I knew Who I saw. And it was because of that that I said 'I have returned to you' (Kor. 7:143), since I did not return<sup>152</sup> to anyone but Him."

Then I said to him: "You are among the group of 'those who know God,'<sup>153</sup> so what did you consider the vision of God (to be) when you asked Him for it?"

And he said: "(I considered it to be) necessary because of rational necessity."<sup>154</sup>

I said: "But then what was it that distinguished you from others?"

He said: "I was seeing Him (all along), and yet I didn't used to know that it was Him! But when my 'dwelling'<sup>155</sup> was changed and I saw Him, then I knew Who I saw. Therefore when

<sup>151</sup>In the untranslated lines (III, 349.23-25), Ibn 'Arabi alludes to a saying of the Prophet expressing uncertainty as to whether Moses' mystical "death" or "stunning" (sa'aga: explained in preceding note) exempted him from the similar fate which is promised more generally at the "blowing of the Trumpet" on the the Day of Resurrection: "...**then those who are in the heavens and on the earth are thunderstruck** [sa'iqā], **except for whoever God wishes...**" (Kor. 39:68); "**So leave them until they meet their Day, in which they will be thunderstruck** [yus'aqun]" (Kor. 52:45). Moses replies that he was indeed rewarded with the anticipatory experience of that "death" (and the concomitant "resurrection") on Mt. Sinai. That event, for Ibn 'Arabi, clearly represents a more general stage and type of theophanic experience: Moses is cited as a symbol of this sort of spiritual realization throughout the Shaykh's many works.

<sup>152</sup>The verb here (raja'a) is different from that in the immediately preceding Koranic verse (taba: usually translated as "to repent," but with the root sense of "turning back" [to God]); the equation of these two terms--with its implicit stress on the metaphysical ground of all "repentance"--is to be found throughout Ibn 'Arabi's writings. See, for example, the similar equivalence of these two expressions in Ibn 'Arabi's accounts of the beginnings of his own "conversion" to the spiritual path ("at the hand of Jesus") at n. 42 above.

<sup>153</sup>Or "those who know through God" (al-'ulama' bi-llah), i.e., on the basis of what God teaches them (and not by their own reflection, nazar), as Moses goes on to explain below. For Ibn 'Arabi, this expression usually refers to the very highest group of true spiritual "knowers"--i.e., the prophets and the saints, who alone are knowers of "God" (i.e., of "Allah," the comprehensive divine reality), and not simply of the "Lord" (rabb) manifested by one or more of the particular divine Names.

<sup>154</sup>wujub 'aqli: i.e., "necessary" according to his own knowledge and the conclusions of the intellect ('aql) concerning the nature of the world--because, as he goes on to explain below, all "vision" is really vision of God--, but without the crucial additional element of direct, first-hand experience (dhawq) essential to this realization. This whole exchange therefore clarifies Ibn 'Arabi's earlier assertion (section II, at n. 44 above) that Muhammad, at the culminating stage of his Ascension, "saw what he had known and nothing else; the form of his belief did not change."

<sup>155</sup>Mawtin, a term that could be translated more literally as "home," "homeland" or even, in its Koranic context (Kor. 9:25) as "(spiritual) battlefield": in Ibn 'Arabi's technical usage, it refers to the various "planes of being" in which man dwells and makes his home, all of which are present for the

I 'awoke' I was no longer veiled, and my vision (of God) went on accompanying me throughout all eternity. So this is the difference between us<sup>156</sup> and those who are veiled (Kor. 83:15) from their knowledge (of God) by what they see.<sup>157</sup> Yet when they die they see the Truly Real,<sup>158</sup> since the 'dwelling' (of divine Vision)<sup>159</sup> distinguishes Him for them. Therefore if they were returned (to this world as I was), they would say the same thing as we did."

I said: "Then if death were the 'dwelling' of the vision of God, every dead person would see him--but God has described them (at Kor. 83:15) as being 'veiled' from seeing Him!?"

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Perfect Man. In an important passage of the R. al-Anwar (Journey, pp. 27 and 72-77 [= commentary of 'Abd al-Karim Jili, mainly quoting the Futuhāt]; Chodkiewicz, Sceau, pp. 185-186), the Shaykh explains that although these mawatin are virtually infinite, "they are all derived from six": (1) the primordial state of man's covenant (mithaq) with God (Kor. 7:172); (2) "the (physical) world we are now in"; (3) the barzakh or "intermediate" spiritual world "through which we travel after the lesser and greater deaths"; (4) "the Resurrection on the earth of Awakening" (Kor. 79:14); (5) "the Garden and the Fire (of Hell)"; (6) and the "Dune of Vision (of God)," which is evidently the "dwelling" that became present for Moses on Sinai. See our translation of many passages from the Futuhāt dealing with the divine "Vision" in the eschatological section of this anthology.

<sup>156</sup>Moses' exceptional use of the first person plural here and in some of the following sentences--since he otherwise uses the singular in discussing his own personal experiences--seems to refer to all the "Knowers of (or through) God" (al-'ulama' bi-Allah) mentioned at n. 153 above and the text at n. 161 below.

<sup>157</sup>The full Koranic verse apparently alluded to here (Kor. 83:15) is as follows: "**But no, surely they are veiled from their Lord on that Day!**" The allusion could also extend to the numerous hadith concerning the "raising of veils" and "vision of God," including, among others, certain hadith qudsi recorded in Ibn 'Arabi's Mishkat al-Anwar, such as no. 18 (from the Sahih of Muslim) and no. 66 (Niche, pp. 41-43, 92-93).

The metaphysical concept of "veil," for Ibn 'Arabi, almost always reflects an inherent ambiguity between the two simultaneous aspects of "concealment" and "revelation" (since the "veil" is in reality a theophany or manifestation of the divine): for him, the difference between the two aspects ultimately resides in the viewer, not in the "phenomenon" or form itself. In this regard it is noteworthy that among the spiritual realizations flowing from Ibn 'Arabi's culminating revelation enumerated at the end of this chapter is his seeing "that God is what is worshipped in every object of worship, from behind the veil of (each particular) form" (III, 303.7-7; translated at the end of section IV-I below). See also at n. 123 above the references (from the Fusus al-Hikam) to the related question of "the god created in beliefs," and further passages cited in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 313-318 ("hijab").

<sup>158</sup>al-haqq, which could equally be translated as "the Truth" or simply "God." This phrase is close in form to the celebrated Sufi saying, sometimes considered a hadith of the Prophet and sometimes attributed to the Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib: "People are sleeping; when they die, they wake up." Like the rest of this section, it also clearly recalls the famous Prophetic injunction to "Die before you die!"

<sup>159</sup>See note 155 above on the meaning of mawtin. Here Ibn 'Arabi is almost certainly referring to the "dwelling" in Paradise of the "Dune of Vision (of God)" (kathib al-ru'ya) mentioned in a famous hadith qudsi, which he discusses at length in chapter 65 (II, 317-322) and elsewhere in the Futuhāt. (See our translations of many of those passages concerning the "Day of the Visit" in the eschatological section of this anthology.)

He said: "Yes, those are **'the ones who are veiled'** from the knowledge that what (they see) is God.<sup>160</sup> But what if you yourself had to meet a person with whom you were not personally acquainted, whom you were looking for (simply) by name and because you needed him? You could meet him and exchange greetings with him, along with the whole group of those you encountered, without discovering his identity: then you would have seen him and yet not have seen him, so you would continue looking for him while he was right where you could see him! Hence one cannot rely on anything but knowledge. That is why we (Knowers of God) have said that Knowledge is His very Essence, since if Knowledge were not His very Essence, what was relied on (i.e., our knowledge) would be other than God--for nothing can be relied on but knowledge."

I said: "Now God indicated the mountain to you (at Kor. 7:143) and mentioned about Himself that **'He manifested Himself to the Mountain'** (Kor. 7:143). [So how do these theophanies differ?]"

Then he replied: "Nothing resists His Self-manifestation; therefore the particular condition (hal) necessarily changes [according to the 'locus' of each theophany]. Hence for the mountain being 'crushed flat' was like Moses' being 'stunned': God says **'Moses'** (Kor. 7:144), and (He) Who crushed it stunned me."

I said to him: "God has taken charge of teaching me, so I (only) know about Him to the extent of what He bestows on me."

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<sup>160</sup>Ibn 'Arabi's favorite scriptural reference to this reality--which for him is also clearly applicable to man's capacity (or incapacity) for "theophanic vision" already in this world--is a famous hadith concerning the testing of mankind with regard to their forms of belief (ma'budat) on the Day of the Gathering, often known as the "hadith of the transformations." According to this account, God will present Himself to this (Muslim) community "in a form other than what they know, and will say to them: 'I am your Lord'; but the "hypocrites" among them will fail to recognize Him until He appears in the form they already knew (according to their beliefs in this world).

The most pertinent section of this hadith is recorded in the Mishkat al-Anwar (no. 26; Niche, pp. 55-57), where Ibn 'Arabi gives the isnad from the Sahih of Muslim. The full hadith, which deals with the Prophet's answers to several questions concerning the "vision of God," is also recorded twice by Bukhari; see further references in Graham, Word, pp. 133-134. For some of Ibn 'Arabi's representative discussions of this hadith in the Futuhat, see I, 112, 305, 328, 331, 353, 377; II, 40, 81, 277, 298, 311, 333, 495, 508, 590, 610; III, 25, 44, 48, 73, 101, 289, 301, 315, 485, 536; and IV, 245. (It is also presupposed in most of the sections of the Fusus al-Hikam concerning the "god created in beliefs" cited in n. 123 above.)

Then he replied: "That is just how He acts with the Knowers of God, so take (your spiritual knowledge) from Him, not from the world.<sup>161</sup> And indeed you will never take (such knowledge) except to the extent of your predisposition (isti'dad).<sup>162</sup> So do not let yourself be veiled from Him by the likes of us (prophets)! For you will never come to know about Him by means of us anything but what we know about Him through His Self-manifestation.<sup>163</sup> Thus we too only give you (knowledge) about Him to the extent of your predisposition. Hence there is no difference [between learning from us and directly from God], so attach yourself to Him!<sup>164</sup> For He only sent us to call you all to Him, not to call you to us. (His Message) is **a Word (that is) the same between us and you: that we should worship none but God, and that we should not associate anything with Him, and that some of us should not take others as lords instead of God** (Kor. 3:64)."

I said: "That is how it came in the Qur'an!"

He said: "And that is how He is."

I said: "With what did you hear 'God's Speech'?"<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>161</sup>al-kawn: the term can also refer by extension to "the people of this world" (which appears to be the main reference here), although Ibn 'Arabi may also be referring more broadly to his familiar critiques of exclusive reliance on limited human "reasoning" (nazar) about the manifest world. For the "Knowers of (or 'through') God," see notes 153 and 156 above.

<sup>162</sup>I.e., what Ibn 'Arabi has just claimed (concerning the "divine control" over his own spiritual progress) is ultimately true for everyone--without in any way removing the need for each individual's best efforts. What Moses goes on to explain about the different capacities of each person for understanding and assimilating the teachings of the prophets and Messengers is only one illustration of this crucial insight.

<sup>163</sup>The phrase "by means of us" in this sentence is an allusion to Ibn 'Arabi's assumption that the greatest part of the knowledge of the saints is gained "indirectly," through their spiritual participation in the manifold "heritages" of divine Knowledge received directly by each of the prophets and Messengers. See his careful explanation of this mediating relationship of the prophets and saints in chapter 14 of the Futuhāt (I, 149-152; O.Y. ed., II, 357-362) and the many additional references in Chodkiewicz, Sceau, chapters IV and V.

<sup>164</sup>Here Ibn 'Arabi intentionally uses a verb (intasaba) usually employed to describe someone's "joining" or "belonging to" a particular religious (or legal, political, etc.) school, party or sect. The root sense of the verb--also quite appropriate here--refers to a person's kinship relation of ancestral allegiance and descent, his nasab. Thus the final phrase could also be translated as "join Him" or "take your lineage (directly) from Him."

<sup>165</sup>Alluding to Kor. 4:164--".**and God spoke to Moses with Speech.**" For Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of the possible apprehension of the divine revelation (wahy) through "hearing" and any of

He said: "With my hearing."

I said: "And what is your 'hearing'?"

He said: "He (is)."<sup>166</sup>

I said: "Then by what were you distinguished (from other men)?"

He said: "By an immediate personal experience (dhawq) in that regard, which can only be known by the person who actually experiences it."

I said: "So those who possess such immediate experiences are like that?"

"Yes," he said, "and (their) experiences are according to (their spiritual) ranks."

[IV-H. The Seventh Heaven: Abraham and the Temple of the Heart]<sup>167</sup>

Most of Ibn 'Arabi's encounter with Abraham--as earlier with Joseph and John the Baptist--is devoted to questions about certain Koranic passages concerning him. Here, for example, Abraham explains that his apparently polytheistic remarks reported at Kor. 6:74-80 were actually only meant to test the faith of his people, given their limited understanding.

What is of more universal importance for the spiritual journey, however, is Ibn 'Arabi's identification of the celestial Kaaba, the "House" of Abraham that marks the cosmological transition between the material world and the "paradisic" realm of the highest spheres, as none other than the Heart of the voyager. For the Heart--as he makes clear in the much longer

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the other senses, see the beginning of chapter 14 (I, 149 ff.; O.Y. ed., III, pp. 357 ff.), as well as the discussion of the various modalities of prophetic inspiration in chapter 366, III, 332. (See also the related hadith discussed in the following note.)

<sup>166</sup>This whole passage is an allusion to the famous hadith al-nawafil (the "supererogatory acts" of devotion), which is perhaps the "divine saying" most frequently cited both by Ibn 'Arabi and by Sufi writers more generally: it is recorded in the canonical collection of Bukhari (Riqaq, 38) and included in Ibn 'Arabi's own collection of hadith qudsi, the Mishkat al-Anwar (no. 91; Niche, pp. 118-121). (See also the full text and translation and further references in Graham, Word, pp. 173-174.)

The relevant section (and that most often alluded to by Sufi authors) is as follows: "...And My servant continues to draw near to Me through the supererogatory works (of devotion) until I love him. Then when I love him I am his hearing with which he hears, and his sight with which he sees, and his hand with which he grasps, and his foot with which he walks. And if he asks Me (for something), I surely give (it) to him; and if he seeks My aid, surely I help him...." For some of Ibn 'Arabi's discussions of this hadith in the Futuhat, which usually bring out his understanding of it as alluding to the individual realization of an underlying universal condition, see I, 203, 406; II, 65, 124, 126, 298, 326, 381, 487, 502, 513, 559, 563, 614; III, 63, 67, 143, 189, 298; and IV, 20, 24, 30, 312, 321, 449.

<sup>167</sup>III, 350.5-20 (only lines 18-20 are translated in full here).

discussions at this point in his K. al-Isra' and in chapter 167 of the Futuhāt<sup>168</sup>--is ultimately the "site" of the whole journey:

...Then I saw the Inhabited House (Kor. 52:4),<sup>169</sup> and suddenly there was my Heart--and there were the angels who "enter It every day!"<sup>170</sup> The Truly Real manifests Himself to (the

<sup>168</sup>In the corresponding part of chapter 167 (Alchimie, pp. 97-107), Abraham advises the "follower" (of Muhammad) to "make your heart like this House, by being present with God (al-Haqq) at every moment." Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of the nature of the Heart as a mirror of the Truly Real in all of its states is emphasized in that chapter by his use of the famous Sufi parable--almost certainly borrowed here (but without acknowledgement) from Ghazali's Mizan al-'Amal, and most famous in the form of the tale of the "Greek and Chinese artists" at the beginning of Rumi's Masnavi--of the royal "contest" between a marvelous artist (whose painting is the world) and a sage whose polished "mirror" (the soul of true Knower) reflects both that painting and the "artists" and "king" (i.e., the metaphysical world and each individual's "particular relation" to God) as well.

The lengthy corresponding section of the K. al-Isra' (pp. 28-34) is far too rich and complex to be summarized here. There, after evoking the highest stages of the nocturnal journey of Muhammad and the true Knowers (pp. 29-30), Ibn 'Arabi makes the entry into this celestial "House" dependent on attainment of the highest spiritual station, the "Station of Yathrib" (see Kor. 32:13 and Futuhāt, III, 177, 216, 500, etc.) or the "Station of no Station," in which the Heart is perfectly open to every form of theophany, in a state of selfless "bewilderment" (hayra). [See chapter 50 on the "men of hayra" (I, 270-272) and the further extensive references in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 1245 ("Yathribi") and 357-363 (hayra).]

Since for Ibn 'Arabi this is precisely the "Muhammadan Station" (discussed here in section IV-I below), the rest of this passage in the K. al-Isra' (pp. 30-31) alternates between the voyager's own moving poetic descriptions of that decisive spiritual realization--whose attainment is assumed throughout that work--and Abraham's praises of Muhammad and reminders of the many forms of superiority of those who have been granted that supreme attainment. These comparisons of other prophets or saints with Muhammad (for example at p. 33) could also highlight the essential contrast between the conditions of those who must "work" their way gradually toward spiritual perfection, drawn by divine love (mahabba) and the much rarer state of those who--like Ibn 'Arabi himself--benefit from the unique grace of divine "preference" (ithar), who are suddenly "pulled" (majdhub) by God into the highest stages of realization.

<sup>169</sup>al-Bayt al-Ma'mur: the "inhabitants" of this mysterious celestial site--often identified with the "Furthest Place of Worship" (al-masjid al-aqsa) mentioned in the Koran as the culmination of the Prophet's nocturnal voyage (Kor. 17:1), although the indications in the hadith themselves are very limited--are apparently the angels mentioned in the various hadith (see following note). Its location "with Abraham," mentioned in several hadith outlining the Mi'raj (including the hadith al-isra' from Muslim cited here by Ibn 'Arabi, at III, 341.29-34), seems connected with his role as builder of the Kaaba, the earthly Temple (al-bayt). For Ibn 'Arabi's identification--following earlier Sufis--of this heavenly "House" (and several others mentioned in the Koran) with the Heart (of the Knower, and ultimately of the Perfect Man), see ch. 6 of Futuhāt (I, 120) and the further references in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 222-228. The hadith on this subject (see Wensinck, Concordance, IV, pp. 353-354) are for the most part the same ones concerning the Mi'raj in general discussed at n. 38 above.

<sup>170</sup>The hadith of Anas b. Malik (Muslim, Iman, 259/= bab al-isra', 1) followed by Ibn 'Arabi in section II (n. 38) at the beginning of this chapter (III, 341.29-34) states that: "70,000 angels enter It each day, and they do not return there"; the other hadith concerning this subject in Muslim (Iman, 264) differs only slightly, while the corresponding hadith in Bukhari (bad' al-khalq, 6, also from Anas, with slightly different isnad), has Gabriel add that the 70,000 angels "pray there every day" and that "when they leave they do not return."

Heart), which (alone) encompasses Him,<sup>171</sup> in "seventy thousand veils of light and darkness."<sup>172</sup> Thus He manifests Himself to the Heart of His servant through those (veils)--for "if He were" to manifest Himself without them, "the radiant splendors of His Face would burn up" the creaturely part<sup>173</sup> of that servant.

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Here--where the meaning of this House as the "Heart" is his primary concern--Ibn 'Arabi clearly implies a connection between these "70,000 angels" and the "70,000 veils" mentioned in another famous hadith (see following notes), where both numbers can be seen as symbols of the infinite, never-repeated divine theophanies, whether they are considered in the world or in their "reflections" in the Heart of the Perfect Man. In his earlier discussion of the Mi'raj hadith (III, 341; an untranslated part of section II), however, he interprets the saying cosmologically: the angels' "entry is through the door of the rising of the stars, and (their) departure is through the door of the setting of the stars." (This latter interpretation is also apparently assumed in his remarks at this point in chapter 167 of the Futuhāt.)

<sup>171</sup>(As usual, al-Haqq could also be translated as "the Truth," "It," etc.) This translation assumes the inner connection between God and the Heart (qalb) that is expressed for Ibn 'Arabi in the famous hadith qudsi--in this case, one not recorded in the canonical collections--to which he alludes throughout his writings: "My earth and My heaven do not encompass Me, but the heart of My servant, the man of true faith, does encompass Me"; see his citation of this saying in a key opening passage of this chapter, at n. 37 above. Concerning Ibn 'Arabi's conception of the "Heart" more generally, see the key chapter on the "Wisdom of the Heart" (Shu'ayb) in the Fusus al-Hikam (I, 119-126; Bezels, pp. 147-155) and the extensive references in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp.916-921.

For the Shaykh, following a number of Koranic indications, the phrase "My servant"--i.e., the "servant" (abd) of the divine "I"--is understood as a reference to the very highest spiritual state, in which the saint perfectly mirrors the divine Will: see n. 198 below on Ibn 'Arabi's own self-realization as a "pure servant" and Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 773-776.

<sup>172</sup>The rest of this paragraph partially cites a celebrated hadith (one of the main subjects of Ghazali's famous Mishkat al-Anwar; see the excellent translation by R. Deladriere, Le Tabernacle des Lumieres, Paris, 1981), usually given according to the version recorded in Ibn Maja, I, 44: "God has seventy [or 700, or 70,000] veils of light and darkness: if He were to remove them, the radiant splendors of His Face would burn up whoever was reached by His Gaze." (Muslim, iman, 291 cites a similar hadith which mentions simply a "veil of Light," without any specific number.) Ibn 'Arabi interprets this hadith in greater detail in chapter 426 (IV, 38-39), focusing on the question of how "light" can be a "veil"; ch. 73, question 115 (II,110), on the meaning of "God's Face"; and in his K. al-Tajalliyat (ed. O. Yahya, Beirut, 1967), VI, 728. Other discussions, usually mentioning the different versions of this hadith, can be found in the Futuhāt at II, 80, 460, 488, 542, 554; III, 212, 216, 289; and IV, 72.

Here, by choosing to mention the number 70,000--although the canonical hadith, as just noted, include several possible numbers (or none at all)--, Ibn 'Arabi clearly implies an intimate connection with the "angels" of the "Inhabited House" mentioned at the beginning of this section (see preceding notes), so that both the 70,000 "veils" and "angels" are understood as symbolizing the infinite range of theophanies (tajalliyat). For Ibn 'Arabi's typical understanding of the divine "veils" as an expression for those theophanies (in this and many other contexts), see the references in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 313-318.

<sup>173</sup>literally, "the world of creation" (alam al-khalq): i.e., the realm of existence constituted by those "veils" or the divine Self-manifestation in all created being--as opposed to the primordial, "internal" Self-Manifestation or noetic differentiation of the Names and Realities within the divine Essence, the fayd al-aqdas and the "world of the Command," alam al-'amr (which is the site of the final, purely noetic stages of the Ascension described in chapter 167).

[IV-I. The "Lotus of the Limit" and the Culminating Revelation]<sup>174</sup>

So when I had left (the Temple), I came to the Lotus-Tree of the Limit (Kor. 53:14),<sup>175</sup> and I halted amongst its lowest and its loftiest branches.<sup>176</sup> Now "it was enveloped" (Kor. 53:16) in the lights of (good) actions, and in the shelter of its branches were singing the birds of the

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<sup>174</sup>III, 350.20-32 (translated in full). As explained in the Introduction, this brief section summarizes an experience (or series of realizations) that is elaborated at much greater length in the other Mi'raj narratives. (See especially the key passage from the K. al-Isra', pp. 13-14, translated in our article cited at n. 13 above.)

Although Ibn 'Arabi's recounting of the Prophet's Ascension early in the chapter (section II, at III, 341.3-342.20) goes on at this point to mention a number of additional details and "stages" drawn from a variety of hadith, his association here in the autobiographical portion of this chapter between the "Lotus of the Limit" (see following note) and the final, culminating revelation--expressed in several hadith by the formula: "God inspired [awha] in me what He inspired" (alluding to the Koranic verse 53:10)--exactly corresponds to the first hadith on the isra' given by Muslim (Iman, 259) and coincides with the other hadith elaborating on the symbolic allusions to Muhammad's vision in that sura (al-Najm, whose opening verses are usually considered to recount the culminating stages of the Prophet's Ascension). (The further details given in other hadith and not utilized here are, however, integrated and greatly elaborated in Ibn 'Arabi's other treatments of the Mi'raj theme.)

<sup>175</sup>This sidrat al-muntaha (where Muhammad "saw Him in another descent") is part of a longer Koranic description (53:2-18) of two extraordinary occasions of revelation (wahy)--in the form of direct vision (Kor. 53:10-13 and 17-18) by the "heart" (fu'ad: Kor. 53:11) which are integrated into the hadith of the mi'raj/isra' quoted earlier (in section II, see notes 8 and 38), but whose details are also the subject of many separate hadith. (See for example, the separate section on the sidra in Muslim, iman, 280 ff.) While some of these hadith attempt to explain this vision as being of Gabriel's true angelic form (as opposed to his usual manifestation in human guise), Ibn 'Arabi's understanding here and in the K. al-Isra' clearly relies on those hadith which stress that (1) this vision was in the Prophet's Heart (qalb or fu'ad [see Kor. 53:11], as in the hadith of Ibn 'Abbas at Muslim, iman, 285-286) and (2) that it was of the "Lord," (3) in a form of "Light" (or "veils of Light": see the famous hadith just cited at n. 172), as at Muslim, iman, 292-295. This latter hadith, in which Muhammad is asked how he saw his Lord (at verse 53) and responds that he saw God "as Light," is discussed in more detail in chapter 426 (IV, 38-39).

In his earlier elaboration of the hadith descriptions of the "sidra" at this point (341.33-343.8) Ibn 'Arabi, in addition to stressing the ineffable Light surrounding it ("no one among God's creatures would be able to describe its beauty," says one hadith [Muslim, iman, 259]) and discussing the particular points described here (see following notes), also adds a cosmological explanation of the word "limit," paraphrasing a hadith (Muslim, iman, 280): "It is the end of what descends to it from above and the end of what ascends to it from below." (In chapter 167, the Lotus-tree is therefore presented as the threshold of the lowest gardens of Paradise.)

<sup>176</sup>The branches and fruit of this cosmic tree are described in several of the hadith of the mi'raj drawn on in Ibn 'Arabi's earlier account (section II: see preceding note). Given that he interprets this tree below as the "form of Man" (i.e., the Perfect Man)--and therefore a symbolic "Tree of the World"--its "lowest (dunya) and highest branches" would refer to the totality of existence, encompassing every realm of being. (See n. 178 below and the translations of Ibn 'Arabi's own cosmological treatise, the "Tree of Existence" [Shajarat al-Kawn] mentioned in n. 11 above; the same cosmological symbolism is developed in more detail in his R. al-Ittihad al-Kawni, tr. by D. Gril as Le Livre de l'Arbre et des Quatre Oiseaux, Paris, 1984.)



spirits of those who perform (those) actions,<sup>177</sup> since it is in the form of Man.<sup>178</sup> As for the four rivers (flowing from its roots, as described in the hadith),<sup>179</sup> they are the four kinds of divine knowledge "granted as a gift" (to man), which we mentioned in a part (juz') we called "the levels of the forms of knowledge given freely (by God)."<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup>arwah al-'amilun: this feature (referring to all men's actions, not just to their good deeds or to the souls in Paradise) is also implied in certain hadith and mentioned explicitly in Ibn 'Arabi's synthesis of those materials in section II above (see references in preceding notes); it may be connected with the mention in the same Koranic passage (53:15), that "**with It is the Garden of Refuge**" (i.e., one of the Gardens of Paradise), or it could be interpreted as referring to the intermediate world (barzakh, which is also a muntaha or "limit" between the sensible and spiritual realms) more generally. In cosmological terms--e.g., in his discussion in chapter 167 of the Futuhāt--Ibn 'Arabi takes this "limit" to constitute the boundary between Paradise (located in the sphere above it) and Gehenna (constituted by all the lower spheres of the material world).

<sup>178</sup>ala nash'at al-insan: i.e., comprising all the same planes of being (nash'a) contained within the Perfect Man, both spiritual and bodily or material. The metaphysical and spiritual equivalencies that this implies, especially the essential correspondence between the Perfect Man and the Reality of Muhammad, are elaborated in Ibn 'Arabi's own Shajarat al-Kawn ("The Tree of Existence"; Yahya, R.G., no. 666), also available in the English and French translations by A. Jeffery and M. Gloton discussed at n. 11 above; see also the additional cosmological references cited at n. 21.

<sup>179</sup>Earlier in this chapter (Section II; III, 341.35-342.5) Ibn 'Arabi mentions the following hadith description (taken from Muslim, iman, 264, where these rivers precede the "Inhabited House"; there is a parallel version, in same order as here, in Bukhari, bad' al-khalq, 6): "He saw four rivers flowing forth from its roots, two outward rivers and two inner (spiritual) ones (batinan)..." and Gabriel points out that "the two inner ones are in the Garden (of Paradise), while the two external ones are the Nile and Euphrates." Ibn 'Arabi then goes on to explain that the two "outer" ones also become rivers of Paradise after the Resurrection, thereby constituting the four rivers (of milk, honey, water and wine) promised to the blessed in parts of the Koran and hadith. (For Ibn 'Arabi's interpretations of those and related symbols, primarily as different kinds or modalities of spiritual wisdom, see Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 1071-1077).

In the corresponding section of chapter 167 (Alchimie, pp. 109-111), however, he interprets these symbols more freely as referring to a single great River (understood as the Qur'an, in the universal sense of the Reality of Muhammad and the Umm al-Kitab)--i.e., the River of Life--and three smaller rivers (= the Torah, Psalms and Gospels) emerging from It, along with the smaller streams of the other revealed Books (suhuf) mentioned in the Koran.

<sup>180</sup>maratib 'ulum al-wahb: this is the title of a separate extant treatise (also known under many other names) described in the R.G., no. 423 (II, pp. 366-367). According to Osman Yahya (in the same entry), the end of this treatise mentions that it is also included in the Futuhāt, and its contents correspond to the following sections: I, 157-172 (chapters 16-21), III, 501-505 (ch. 380), and IV, 37-38 (ch. 425).

Next I saw before me the "cushions of the Litters" (Kor. 55:77) of the (true) Knowers.<sup>181</sup> Then I "was enveloped by the (divine) lights" until all of me became Light, and a robe of honor was bestowed upon me<sup>182</sup> the likes of which I had never seen.

So I said: "O my God, the Signs (ayat) are scattered!" But then 'He sent down upon me'<sup>183</sup> at this moment (His) Saying: "**Say: 'we have faith in God and in what He sent down upon Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes (of Israel), and in what was brought to Moses and Jesus and the prophets from their Lord; we do not separate any one among them, and we are surrendered to Him!'**" (Kor. 3:84). Thus He gave me all the Signs in

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<sup>181</sup>muttaka'at rafarif al-'arifin: the obscure Koranic term rafrac, used at Kor. 55:77 to describe the "green couches" (or "meadows") of the dwellers of Paradise, was used by Ibn 'Arabi (in his summary of the Prophet's Mi'raj in section II, at III, 432.7) to symbolize the angelic "vehicle" employed by Muhammad for the highest stages of his Ascension, after--as described in several other hadith--he was forced to leave Gabriel and Buraq at the "Lotus-Tree of the Limit." There he also adds that "it is like a litter or sedan-chair among us." Its use in reference to the Mi'raj no doubt comes from a hadith explaining Muhammad's vision of "one of the greatest Signs of his Lord" (Kor. 53:13), stating that "he saw a green rafrac that had covered the horizon" (Bukhari, tafsir surat al-najm, from 'Abdallah ibn 'Abbas).

The K. al-Isra', which contains a long poetic section on "al-rafarif al-'ula" (Rasa'il, pp. 45-49, immediately preceding the culminating "intimate dialogues" with God) gives a much clearer idea of the meaning of this symbol for Ibn 'Arabi. There their role in the passage beyond the "Lotus of the Limit" is connected with the voyager's realization of "the secret of divine theophany in his heart" (p. 48): on them "he passed through 300 divine Presences (hadarat)" (p. 53), until he reached the station "where 'how' and 'where' disappear, and the secrets...(of the Union of God and the traveler) become clear" (p. 49).

In the Shajarat al-Kawn (n. 11 above), the rafrac--which is treated there as the fifth in a series of seven mounts used by the Prophet--is more clearly described as a sort of flying carpet "of green light, blocking up everything from East to West" (a description reflecting the above-mentioned hadith), and Ibn 'Arabi associates it with the divine Compassion (raf'a). (See Jeffery tr., pp. 152-153; Gloton tr., pp. 100 and 173 [citing another, more detailed hadith also attributed to Ibn 'Abbas].)

<sup>182</sup>The beginning of this sentence echoes the description of the Prophet's revelation and vision of God as "Light" at the Lotus-tree of the Limit, in the Koranic verses 53:16-18 and in the hadith discussed just above (n. 175)--except that here Ibn 'Arabi himself has become that Tree "which is according to the state of Man" (n. 178). The "robe of honor" (khil'a) here recalls the ceremony of Sufi "initiation" (the bestowal of the khirqa), except that here this royal garment symbolizes the spiritual station of the Prophet himself, the maqam muhammadi Ibn 'Arabi attains below (at n. 186).

<sup>183</sup>This is a Koranic expression (anzala 'ala) usually referring to the "descent" of divine Revelation to the prophetic Messengers (rusul). For other passages where Ibn 'Arabi applies it to divine inspirations received by the awliya', see the Futuhat II, 506; III, 94, 181; IV, 178. Judging from the context, the "dispersion" or "diversity" of the divine "Signs" mentioned here seems to refer in particular to their division among the various prophets and messengers (and their revealed Books, etc.)--or even to the very multiplicity of the theophanies (God's "Signs in the souls and on the horizons," at Kor. 41:53) that ordinarily distract us from a full awareness of the divine Unity. See also the similar allusions to the (ultimately illusory) "multiplicity" of the prophets and their teachings at the beginning of the key passage from the K. al-Isra' translated in our article cited at n. 13 above.

this Sign,<sup>184</sup> clarified the matter (i.e., of the eternal Reality of the "Qur'an") for me,<sup>185</sup> and made this Sign for me the key to all knowledge. Henceforth I knew that I am the totality of those (prophets) who were mentioned to me (in this verse).

Through this (inspiration) I received the good tidings that I had (been granted) the "Muhammadan station,"<sup>186</sup> that I was among the heirs of Muhammad's comprehensiveness. For he was the last (prophet) to be sent as a messenger, the last to have (the direct Revelation) descend upon him (Kor. 97:4):<sup>187</sup> God "gave him the all-comprehensive Words,"<sup>188</sup> and he was

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<sup>184</sup>Or 'verse', 'aya: since what was revealed to Ibn 'Arabi in this experience was no less than the inner meaning of the true eternal Qur'an--which is also the "Reality of Muhammad"--encompassing all knowledge (including the spiritual sources/realities of all the revealed Books), the phrase could also be read as "all the verses in that one verse." Much of the latter part of the K. al-Isra' (especially pp. 83-92) is particularly devoted to Ibn 'Arabi's detailed explanations of his new, perfect understanding of the spiritual meaning of many different Koranic verses, as that revealed insight is "tested" and verified by Muhammad and several other major prophets.

<sup>185</sup>qarraba 'alayya al-amr: this translation (taking amr in its most general sense) assumes Ibn 'Arabi is referring to his experience of the full eternal reality of the Qur'an (the umm al-Kitab) which is detailed in much of the K. al-Isra' (see our Introduction and the article cited at n. 13). However the phrase could also be construed as referring to his special "proximity" to the (divine) "Command" (al-'amr) or simply to God--since this experience has many of the features of what Ibn 'Arabi describes elsewhere in the Futuhat as the "Station of Proximity" (maqam al-qurba) characterizing the highest group of saints, the "solitary ones" (afrad): see Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 936-938, Ibn 'Arabi's K. al-Qurba (Rasa'il, I, no. 6), Futuhat, chapter 161 (II, 260-262) and further detailed references in Chodkiewicz, Sceau (index s.v.).

<sup>186</sup>literally, that I was "Muhammad-like in (my spiritual) station" (Muhammadi al-maqam), i.e., marked by Muhammad's primordial spiritual condition of "all-comprehensiveness" (jam'iya), encompassing the eternal Realities of all the prophets (the majmu', "totality") mentioned in the preceding sentence. The similar experience of the unity of all the prophets (and their spiritual knowledge and revelations) in Muhammad (and in Ibn 'Arabi himself) is summarized in the passage from the K. al-Isra', pp. 12-14, translated in our article cited at n. 13, and is of course carefully elaborated throughout the Fusus al-Hikam.

For details on Ibn 'Arabi's conception of the maqam muhammadi, see Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 1191-1201 and especially Chodkiewicz, Sceau, chapters IV (on the "Muhammadan Reality"), V (on the concept of the saints as "heirs" of certain prophets) and IX, discussing the many passages of the Futuhat and other works concerning Ibn 'Arabi's self-conception as the "Seal of Muhammadan Prophecy." See also the references on the "Station of Proximity" in the previous note: as indicated in the Introduction, n. 13, the two stations are certainly very close, and the explicit distinction between them--which depends on Ibn 'Arabi's own role as "Seal"--seems to have developed only gradually in the Shaykh's thought.

<sup>187</sup>The verb form here alludes to the celebrated verses (at sura 97) describing the descent of "**the angels and the Spirit**" that marked the beginning of Muhammad's revelation; it is thus an apparent reference to the type of direct divine inspiration (wahy) uniquely limited to the line of divine lawgiving messengers (rusul/mursalun). For Ibn 'Arabi's conception of the spiritual insight of the saints as "mediated" or "inherited" through one or more of the earlier messengers, see chapter 14 of the Futuhat (I,

specially favored by six things with which the messenger of no (other) community<sup>189</sup> was specially favored. Therefore (Muhammad's) Mission is universal, because of the general nature of his six aspects:<sup>190</sup> from whatever direction you come, you will find only the Light of Muhammad<sup>191</sup> overflowing upon you; no one takes (spiritual knowledge) except from It, and no (divine) messenger has informed (man) except for (what he has taken) from It.<sup>192</sup>

Now when that happened to me I exclaimed: "Enough, enough!"<sup>193</sup> My (bodily) elements are filled up, and my place cannot contain me!," and through that (inspiration) God removed

149-152/O.Y. ed., III, 357-362), plus detailed references in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 1191-1201 and Chodkiewicz, Sceau, ch. V and IX.

<sup>188</sup>Jawami' al-kilam: the famous hadith paraphrased in this sentence (see Bukhari, ta'bir, 11; Muslim, masajid, 5-8; Tirmidhi, siyar, 5; etc.) is cited repeatedly by Ibn 'Arabi to summarize the totality of spiritual knowledge or divine "forms of wisdom" (hikam) making up the "Muhammadan Reality": that conception is illustrated at length in his treatment of the other prophets (in relation to Muhammad) in the Fusus al-Hikam, and is likewise assumed in his description of a similar revelatory experience in the K. al-Isra', translated in our article cited at n. 13 above. (See the related discussions at II, 72, 88; III, 142; and further references in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 269-276, entry on "jam'." ) The rest of the hadith (translating here from al-Bukhari) is also important in this context (i.e., regarding the "treasuries" of knowledge enumerated below): "I was sent with the all-comprehensive Words...and while I was sleeping, I was brought the keys of the treasuries... and they were placed in my hand...."

<sup>189</sup>The text here reads literally "of no community (umma) among the communities"--a formulation apparently reflecting Ibn 'Arabi's focus here on the universality of Muhammad's spiritual reality (i.e., as ultimately sent to all the religious communities). It is not clear in this context whether this last phrase refers to six attributes which were not combined in one earlier messenger--in which case it might refer back to the revelations of the six prophets who were mentioned by name in the verse 3:84 quoted in the preceding paragraph--or rather to six characteristics which were each completely unique to Muhammad. The concluding pages of the K. al-Isra' (pp.91-92), for example, discuss several unique qualities of Muhammad that were not shared by Moses, Noah, Zachariah and Yahya (John), etc.

<sup>190</sup>Or "directions": this sentence involves a play on the word jiha, which can mean both "aspect" (in the sense of trait or characteristic) and "direction"--in which sense the traditional "six directions" (i.e., the 4 cardinal points, plus the vertical axis) implicitly contain all the possible spatial orientations, and thereby again alluding to the universality of the Prophet's Reality and divine mission.

<sup>191</sup>Nur Muhammad: for the historical background of this term (including early references in hadith and the Sira literature), see Chodkiewicz, Sceau, pp. 80-87. For Ibn 'Arabi, the term is often roughly equivalent--from other points of view--to the "Muhammadan Reality," universal "Intellect," divine "Pen" or "Spirit," "Mother of the Book," etc.: see the references in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 347-352, and the long list of his synonyms for the "Perfect Man" at p. 158.

<sup>192</sup>or "Him": the pronouns at the end of this sentence, translated here as "It," could also refer simply to "Muhammad" (although in any case the two terms would be essentially identical in this context).

<sup>193</sup>We have taken the most literal and obvious meaning. However, this phrase (hasbi) is also contained in two Koranic verses (39:38; 9:129): "...Say: 'God is enough for me' (hasbi Allah)...", and

from me my contingent dimension.<sup>194</sup> Thus I attained in this nocturnal journey the inner realities (ma'ani) of all the Names, and I saw them all returning to One Subject<sup>195</sup> and One Entity.<sup>196</sup> that Subject was what I witnessed,<sup>197</sup> and that Entity was my Being. For my voyage was only in myself and only pointed to myself, and through this I came to know that I was a pure "servant,"<sup>198</sup> without a trace of lordship in me at all.

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both verses go on to stress the importance of "absolute trust" in God (tawakkul), the ostensible subject of this chapter (see notes 27 and 39 on the meaning of the title).

<sup>194</sup>imkani: i.e., everything (including the spatiality and corporality mentioned in Ibn 'Arabi's exclamation here) which had "separated" him from God (the unique "Necessary," non-contingent Being) and thereby offered the possibility of (relative) sin, opposition or conflict with the divine Commands; or in other words, everything that had been an impediment to his new state (or realization) of "pure servanthood," as an unimpeded expression of the divine Will (n. 198 below). We may also recall that it was this very "possibility" that made the spiritual journey possible in the first place: see Ibn 'Arabi's mention of his "Buraq of imkan" at IV-A, n. 84 above.

<sup>195</sup>and "Object": Musamma wahid--the same formula was already mentioned in the schematic discussion of the spiritual journey in section III (at n. 61) above. As indicated there, the "transcendent Unity of the Named (divine Reality)" (ahadiyat al-musamma) is mentioned at the end of this section(III, 354.15-16) in the long list of the kinds of knowledge Ibn 'Arabi "saw" within this experience. There, as throughout his works, he mentions the association of this point (i.e., as an explicit thesis or "doctrine") with the famous Andalusian Sufi Ibn al-Qasi and his book Khal' al-Na'layn.

<sup>196</sup>or "One Eye" (ayn wahida): the pun (involving the subject/object of this "vision" or "witnessing": see following note) is certainly intentional here, and is further enriched by some of the other dimensions of meaning of ayn, which is also Source, Essence, etc.

<sup>197</sup>Mashhudi: this phrase and the following one together carefully sum up the ineffable paradox of this experiential realization of divine Unicity--the very core of Ibn 'Arabi's work--which led to so much subsequent theological and philosophical controversy in the Islamic world (and wherever attempts have been made to treat this realization conceptually as a logical "system"). The first phrase, taken in separation, states the thesis of wahdat al-shuhud, and the second the position of wahdat al-wujud--while the combination alone expresses the experience and fundamental reality the Shaykh attempts to convey here (and in the above-mentioned key passage from the K. al-Isra' translated in our article cited at n. 13). Note the similar caution in the K. al-Isra', p. 65-66: "So beware and don't imagine that my conjunction (ittisal) with (the highest divine Presence) was one of identity of essence (inniya)..." etc.

<sup>198</sup>abd mahd: this formulation (or the related one of abd khalis), used fairly frequently by Ibn 'Arabi, refers to those rare Knowers who have become wholly devoted (mukhlisin) to the divine "I"--i.e., who are among "My servants," 'ibadi (alluding especially to Kor. 15:42 and 17:65)--and not to the totality of creatures, who are all "servants of God" in a metaphysical (but still unrealized) sense.

As Ibn 'Arabi explains in chapter 29 (O.Y. ed. III, pp. 228-229): "Thus every servant of God pays attention to one [or more] of the creatures who has a right (haqq, i.e., a claim) against him, and his servanthood (to God) is deficient to the extent of that right, because that creature seeks the (fulfillment) of that right from him and thereby has a power (sultan: like Satan at Kor. 15:42, etc.) over him, so that he cannot be a pure servant, wholly devoted to God." In a revealing autobiographical aside, Ibn 'Arabi adds that "I encountered a great many of this group (i.e., of those "seeking freedom from all engendered things") in the days of my wandering," and that "from the day I attained this station I have not possessed

Then the treasures of this station were opened up (for me), and among the kinds of knowledge I saw there were:....<sup>199</sup>

The list of some 69 kinds of knowledge associated with this particular station differs from the similar listings in each of the other chapters on the manazil in that it contains a number of Ibn 'Arabi's most fundamental metaphysical theses. The following items may be taken as representative:<sup>200</sup>

...I saw in it the knowledge of the Return...and that (man) carries this world with him when he is transferred (to the next world)...

I saw in it the knowledge of the interpenetration and (indissoluble) "circularity" (dawr: of God and Man), which is that God (al-Haqq) can only be in (external) reality (fi al-fi'l) through the form of the creature (al-khalq), and that the creature can only be there (in reality) through the form of God. So this circularity...is what actually exists (al-waqi') and is the way things are...

...each community (umma) has a messenger...and there is nothing among what exists that is not (part of) a certain community.... So the divine message (risala) extends to absolutely all communities, both great and small!...

I saw in it the universality of the divine Gift (of Mercy and Pardon)...., (as) He said concerning the prodigal sinners: ".**do not despair of God's Mercy; surely God forgives the**

any living thing, indeed not even the clothing I wear.... And the moment I come into possession of something I dispose of it at that very instant, either by giving it away or setting it free, if that is possible."

At the beginning of chapter 311 (III, 26-27), Ibn 'Arabi even more openly "boasts" (to use his expression) of this unique realization: "Today I do not know of anyone who has realized the station of servanthood to a greater extent than I--and if there is someone (else), then he is like me. For I have attained the ultimate limit of servanthood, so that I am the pure, absolute servant who does not know (even the slightest) taste of Lordship (rububiya)."

See also Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 765-778 ('abd, 'ubudiya, and related concepts).

<sup>199</sup>Ibn 'Arabi strongly emphasizes the direct experiential "vision" of the forms of knowledge he realized in this particular revelation by repeating "I saw in it..." before each of the 69 kinds of understanding enumerated in this chapter (III, 351-354). (This procedure is apparently unique among the many otherwise similar listings that conclude each of the remaining chapters on the spiritual stations, the "fasl al-manazil.")

The "opening of the treasures" here is an allusion to the famous hadith concerning the special universality of the Prophet's revealed knowledge discussed in n. 188 above.

<sup>200</sup>These "kinds of knowledge" are respectively numbers 12, 15, 22, 25, 28, 45 and 53 in this list. Ibn 'Arabi's descriptions are given here without further annotation, since these principles should be familiar to readers of any of his works and most of them have been discussed in earlier passages of this chapter.

**sins altogether, surely He is the All-Forgiving, the All-Merciful.**" So nothing could be clearer than this explicit divine declaration concerning the return of (all) the servants to (His) Mercy!...

I saw in it the knowledge that it is God who is worshipped in every object of worship, behind the veil of (the particular) form.

I saw in it the knowledge of the conditions of mankind in the intermediate world (barzakh)....

I saw in it the knowledge that this world is a token ('unwan) of the other world and a symbolization (darb mithal) of it, and that the status (hukm) of what is in this world is more complete and more perfect in the other world.

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## Inspired Knowledge and Divine Governance: The Mahdi's "Helpers"

### INTRODUCTION

The primary focus of Chapter 366 of the *Futuhat* is the distinctive set of spiritual qualities and capacities marking this particular spiritual stage (manzil)--characteristics which Ibn 'Arabi finds symbolized in the various hadith concerning the eschatological role of the Mahdi and his "Helpers" or "Ministers,"<sup>1</sup> but which he insists are already realized by those saints (awliya') who have attained this degree of spiritual realization, who have already reached the "end of time." In a broader metaphysical perspective, as he indicates allusively in the poem introducing this chapter, all those characteristics are in fact essential aspects of the ongoing divine governance of this world in its microcosmic, individual human dimensions, especially in the spiritual judgment or authority (walaya) of the saints as it is realized inwardly or, more rarely, manifested outwardly and officially in the functions of religious judges or in the case of the Prophet (who preeminently combined the roles of the Mahdi and his Helpers).

The two principal, complementary aspects of Ibn 'Arabi's treatment of this stage and its associated functions are clearly relevant to the spiritual life of every individual. The first is the question of divine "communication" (in all its manifestations, but with special attention to the central role of the Koran and the "heritage" of the Prophet Muhammad) and the decisive role of each person's unique and radically varying receptivity or sensitivity to that deeper dimension of reality. The second is the "application" of that communication--which, for Ibn 'Arabi, obviously includes, but is by no means limited to, the familiar external forms of Islamic law and tradition--in guiding our spiritual and communal life. Especially striking, in regard to this latter point, are the Shaykh's recurrent, sometimes pointed allusions to the distance separating the historical, limited conception of the Sharia<sup>2</sup> shared by many of the 'ulama' in the popular sense of

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<sup>1</sup>Wuzara' (sing. wazir): the term is more often translated as "minister", but that implies (at least in English) a sort of subordination incompatible with Ibn 'Arabi's insistence that "the wuzara' are the guides (al-hudat) and He is the 'guided one' (al-Mahdi)" (III, p. 329.27-28). Instead, the relationship described at the beginning of this chapter often seems to reflect the type of polity in which the ruler was seen as enforcing or applying policies prescribed by his "vizier." On a more profound level, which Ibn 'Arabi brings out only gradually in the course the middle section (II, 1-9 below), all of the accomplished saints may be seen as at least partial "representatives" or "helpers" of the Mahdi (or "Imam": see notes 11, 14-15, 18, 67), insofar as they realize these (and other) essential spiritual functions.

<sup>2</sup>In this chapter, as in much of Ibn 'Arabi's work, it would be quite misleading to translate this term (or the related expression al-shar': see notes 75 and 105 below) simply as religious or revealed "Law" without some further explanation or qualification. The shari'a, as Ibn 'Arabi uses the term here, is distinguished from what we ordinarily conceive of as "law" by (a) its breadth of reference to all the divine norms or precepts (ahkam) for human behavior, but especially those having to do with divine worship (ibada) and the infinite variety of man's inner, spiritual or psychic "actions", which are often without any



that term (i.e., the Islamic jurists and theologians) and the deeper, more challenging perennial reality of its demands and presuppositions as understood by the awliya', whom Ibn 'Arabi consistently regards as the true "knowers" and "authorities" (wulat) of the Community.

The treatment of these questions in this chapter is often subtle and highly allusive, no doubt partly because of the potentially controversial nature of Ibn 'Arabi's broader understanding--largely only implicit in this chapter--of the relations between the inspiration and spiritual authority underlying the "judgments" of the Prophet, saints, and the mass of jurists and theologians "learned in the external forms" ('ulama' al-rusum). As a result, it provides a remarkable illustration of his typical methods of esoteric writing, in which each reader's perceptions of the apparent content, aims and unifying structure of the work will necessarily differ radically according to his own particular intentions and sensitivities. At the same time, it constitutes an excellent introduction to the principles underlying Ibn 'Arabi's complex understanding of the practical interrelations between spiritual realization and the historical forms of Islamic tradition--a perspective which clearly transcends the usual stereotyped (and often polemic or apologetic) conceptions of those questions.<sup>3</sup>

There should be no need to stress the wider significance of each of these issues throughout Ibn 'Arabi's writings. But what lends this chapter its special impact and dramatic interest are its primary focus on the experiential sources of Ibn 'Arabi's key insights, his frequent autobiographical remarks (including a number of references to his own self-conception of his role as the unique "Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood") and colorful anecdotes based on his encounters with other Sufis--illustrative materials that provide an essential phenomenological complement to the better-known metaphysical and doctrinal aspects of his teaching, while at the same time pointing to some of its indispensable practical presuppositions.

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immediately visible, outward manifestations (which is why one can speak, for example, of the "Sharia" of Jesus); (b) its unconcern (or at least lack of apparent specification) concerning the majority of the worldly matters which are ordinarily (and necessarily) covered by civil laws and/or social customs; and (c) the intrinsic distance between the eternal reality and divine Source of the Sharia (which is the constant focus of Ibn 'Arabi's concern) and the multitude of its various historical, popularly accepted images or applications. (This latter contrast is closely paralleled in his treatment of such Koranic expressions as "the Pure Religion" and "the Religion of God", at notes 8 and 97 below.) Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of these questions is further clarified in C. Chodkiewicz' translations of chapters XX and XX of the Futuhāt in this anthology.

Now Ibn 'Arabi's understanding, on each of these points, differs substantially from the typical perspective of the later historical disciplines of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh, usul al-fiqh, etc.), and much of the central part of this chapter (section II, 1-9) is particularly devoted to bringing out the differences between the conceptions of the Sufis ("People of Unveiling", etc.) and the jurists of his day (fuqaha' al-zaman). However his approach to questions of fiqh in other connections is frequently more irenic: for a more balanced and comprehensive discussion of his treatment of Islamic law, see the excellent summary by M. Chodkiewicz, "Ibn 'Arabi, la lettre et la loi", pp. 27-40 in Actes du colloque 'Mystique, culture et société', ed. M. Meslin, Paris, 1983. (A number of the references below to related legal discussions in other chapters of the Futuhāt are drawn from that survey.)

<sup>3</sup>See our much more detailed discussion of all these questions, with reference both to chapter 367 and to many other related sections of the Futuhāt, in our article "Ibn 'Arabi's 'Esotericism': The Problem of Spiritual Authority," to appear in an abridged version in Studia Islamica [...complete references], and in its full length in our forthcoming Introduction to Islamic Esotericism.

## Chapter 366: Concerning Inner Knowledge of the Stage of the Helpers of the Mahdi (Who is to) Appear at the End of Time....<sup>4</sup>

[I. THE RELATION BETWEEN THE MAHDI AND HIS HELPERS:]<sup>5</sup>

...Know--may God support us!--that God has a viceregent (khalifa) who will come forth when the earth has become filled with injustice and oppression, and will then fill it with justice and equity. Even if there were only one day left for this world, God would lengthen it so that he (i.e., the Mahdi) could rule.<sup>6</sup> ...He will wipe out injustice and its people and uphold Religion (al-Din), and he will breathe the spirit back into Islam. He will reinvigorate Islam after its degradation and bring it back to life after its death. He

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<sup>4</sup>III, pp. 327.10-340.12; the contents of the untranslated passages are summarized in the body of the translation (between square brackets) or indicated in footnotes. The title in Ibn 'Arabi's original "Table of Contents" (fihrist: O.Y. ed., I, 107) adds that "this is from the Muhammadan Presence"--i.e., pertaining to the universal Source of all Revelation (the haqiqa muhammadiya), which encompasses the spiritual "realities" of all the other prophets and their revelations; see the detailed illustration of this in the Fusus al-Hikam. The special universal significance of this "Muhammadan" stage is further illuminated in the following chapter 367 (see the translation and commentary in this anthology), which contains the key autobiographical account of Ibn 'Arabi's own spiritual Ascension (mi'raj) leading to his culminating realization of the "Muhammadan Station" and of the inner spiritual meaning of the (universal noetic "Qur'an."

<sup>5</sup>Here we have included only the following brief passages dealing with this subject, which are essential for understanding the rest of this chapter: III, 327.16-17, 26-32; 328.11-18; 329.26-28; 331.7-12. In fact, most of this long opening section (III, 327.10-331.33, or more than a third of the entire chapter) is devoted to the quotation of hadith and related eschatological material concerning the Mahdi and the Dajjal--traditional materials which would give the casual reader no reason to suspect the controversial subjects that are to follow (in section II below). (For further discussion of the structure and rhetorical methods and intentions underlying this sort of construction, see our article on "Ibn 'Arabi's 'Esotericism'..." cited in n. 3 above.

<sup>6</sup>This description and the many additional characteristics given in the passage omitted here are taken literally from the numerous hadith concerning the Mahdi (see Wensinck, Concordance, s.v., and article "al-Mahdi" by W. Madelung in EI<sup>2</sup>, V, pp. 1230-1238. Most relevant to the following discussion is the fact that the hadith selected by Ibn 'Arabi all emphasize the Mahdi's close resemblance to the Prophet especially in his intrinsic character and nature (khuluq), so that "he walks in the footsteps of the Messenger of God, and makes no mistake, and he is guided by an unseen angel"--a description that Ibn 'Arabi mentions repeatedly in the course of this chapter as proof of the Mahdi's divine "protection from error" ('isma). Clearly Ibn 'Arabi sees Muhammad as the exemplary illustration of all the characteristics (both of the Mahdi and of his Helpers) discussed here--a point that takes on added importance in light of the brief allusion (at n. 17 below) to Ibn 'Arabi's own unique complementary role as the "Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood."

will levy the poll-tax<sup>7</sup> and call (mankind) to God with the sword, so that whoever refuses will be killed, and whoever opposes him will be forsaken.

He will manifest Religion as it (really) is in Itself, the Religion by which the Messenger of God would judge and rule if he were there. He will eliminate the different schools (of religious law) so that only the Pure Religion (Kor. 39:3) remains,<sup>8</sup> and his enemies will be those who follow blindly the 'ulama', the people of ijtihād,<sup>9</sup> because they will see the Mahdi judging differently from the way followed by their imams (i.e., the historical founders of the schools of Islamic law). So they will only accept the Mahdi's authority grudgingly and against their will, because of their fear of his sword and his strength and because they covet (the power and wealth) that he possesses. But the common people of the Muslims and the greater part of the elite among them will rejoice in him, while the true Knowers of God among the People of the (spiritual) Realities will pledge allegiance to him because of God's directly informing them (of the Mahdi's true nature and mission), through (inner) unveiling and immediate witnessing.

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<sup>7</sup>The jizya--literally, "compensation" (for remaining non-Muslim)--required of each individual from the peoples of the protected religions under the various systems of Islamic law; see the long article "Djizya" in EI<sup>2</sup>, pp. 559 ff.

<sup>8</sup>For the full significance of Ibn 'Arabi's use of the Koranic expression "the Pure Religion" (al-Din al-khalis), see the references at n. 98 below; sections II-7 and II-9 are an extended commentary on the situation to which he briefly alludes here.

"Schools" here translates the Arabic madhāhib; Ibn 'Arabi sometimes applies this term more broadly to all the "ways" or individual forms of religious belief and/or practice, but here, judging from what follows (especially sections II-7 and II-9 below), he clearly seems to be referring more specifically to the widely accepted "schools of law" (Hanafi, Maliki, etc.) in Islam.

<sup>9</sup>muqallidat al-'ulama' ahl al-ijtihād: the 'ulama' in this case clearly refer to the jurists following the respective founders (the "imams" al-Malik, al-Shafi'i, etc.) of the established Islamic legal schools, all of which, for Ibn 'Arabi, were originally grounded in the effort of independent legal judgment (ijtihād) of the early Muslim jurists, based on their use of personal opinion (ra'y) or rational analogy and inference (qiyas) concerning the supposed grounds of the particular divine commandments or prescriptions (hukm/ahkam). In several of the following sections, Ibn 'Arabi goes on to contrast their approach (whether or not they still admit the possibility of ijtihād) with the immediate--and necessarily individual and specific--divine inspiration characterizing the judgments of the Mahdi, the Prophet and the awliya'. The roots of his criticism of the 'ulama' and their ijtihād (in this legalist sense) are brought out in much greater detail in sections II-7 and 9 below.

Ibn 'Arabi's own very different conception of the individual spiritual obligation of ijtihād (and his contrasting sharp criticisms of any claims to an obligation of taqlid on the part of others) are explained in much greater detail, along with their bases in the Koran and hadith, in our article cited at n. 3 above.

He will have divine men upholding his call (to the true Religion) and aiding him in his victory; they are the Helpers (wuzara'). They will bear the burdens of (his) government and help him to carry out all the details of (the duty) God has imposed on him.

[...<sup>10</sup>] God will appoint as his ministers a group (of spiritual men) whom He has kept hidden for him in the secret recesses of His Unseen (i.e., the spiritual world). God has acquainted (these Helpers), through unveiling and immediate witnessing, with the (divine) realities and the contents of God's Command concerning His servants. So the Mahdi makes his decisions and judgments on the basis of consultation with them, since they are the true Knowers who really know what is There (in the divine Reality). As for the Mahdi himself, he has a sword (in the service of the) Truth and a (divinely inspired) political policy (siyasa), (since) he knows from God the exact extent of what is required by his rank and station; for he is a rightly guided Viceregent (of God), one who understands the language of animals, whose justice extends to both men and jinn.<sup>11</sup>

Among the secrets of the knowledge of the Mahdi's Helpers whom God has appointed as ministers for him is His saying: "**The victorious support of the men of faith is obligatory for Us**" (Kor. 30:47),<sup>12</sup> for they follow in the footsteps of those men among

<sup>10</sup>The long intervening passage (to III, p. 328.11) continues with some of the traditional hadith materials concerning the battles of the Mahdi and the descent of Jesus at the end of time, concluding with Ibn 'Arabi's own enigmatic statement that "(the Mahdi's) age has already come to you, and his time overshadows you." (Rather than reflecting any particular Messianic hopes or assumptions, this aside seems to foreshadow Ibn 'Arabi's subsequent allusions to the perennial manifestation of the Mahdi's spiritual functions through the accomplished saints (awliya') and the "Imam" or "Imam of the Age"--terms which Ibn 'Arabi actually employs much more frequently than "al-Mahdi" throughout the long middle section (II, 1-9) of this chapter).

<sup>11</sup>The latter part of this phrase (rhyming in the original) apparently alludes to the Koranic mention (Kor. 27:16-17) of Solomon's power over the armies of the jinn and his inspired knowledge of the "language of the birds" (mantiq al-tayr)--Solomon being another prototype of this divinely inspired earthly ruler. (Ibn 'Arabi himself constantly reiterates--referring both to Koranic allusions and to his own mystical experience--that all created beings, even minerals or letters, for example, are "alive" and "speaking.")

On the metaphysical plane, at least, this description of the Mahdi seems to correspond to certain of Ibn 'Arabi's remarks concerning the lofty station of the "Imam of the Left" in the spiritual hierarchy, the "sword of the Pole," who is responsible for the order and maintenance of this world: see Chodkiewicz, Sceau, ch. VI, and Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 109-110. (See also notes 15-16 below.)

<sup>12</sup>The nature of this "victorious support" (nasr, a term combining the notions of divine assistance and the "victory" resulting from that support), as Ibn 'Arabi understands it, is explained in his long discussion of the spiritual virtue of sidq (truthfulness and inner sincerity of intention) in the immediately following section (III, 238.18-239.25), summarized here. See also chapter 152 of the Futuhāt (II, 246 ff.), where nasr is treated as one of the distinctive characteristics of walaya (i.e., the saints' inner "proximity"

the the Companions (of the Prophet) who sincerely fulfilled what they had pledged to God. These Helpers are from the non-Arab peoples; none of them is Arab, although they speak only Arabic. And they have a guardian, not of their kind, who never disobeys God at all;<sup>13</sup> he is the most elect of the Helpers and the most excellent of (the Mahdi's) Trusted Ones.

Now in this verse (30:47)--which the Helpers take as their constant prayer<sup>14</sup> (by day) and their inseparable companion at night--God has given them the most excellent knowledge of true sincerity (sidq), as their inner state and direct experience. So they know that true sincerity is God's sword on earth: God always gives His victorious support (nasr) to whoever stands up for someone (in the divine cause) while being distinguished by this true sincerity....

The long following passage (III, 328.18-329.25) is devoted to a detailed analysis, at once psychological and metaphysical, of this inner condition of sidq or pure spiritual intention (himma), which Ibn 'Arabi sees as one of the distinguishing signs of the highest forms of true faith in God, and to its natural effect of divine "victorious support" (nasr). Thus "the truly faithful person whose faith is perfect is forever divinely supported (mansur), which is why no prophet or saint is ever defeated" (III, 329.9). To be sure, for Ibn 'Arabi this divine support and triumph flows from the saint's inner realization of pure and unquestioning identification with what is required by the divine Will and purpose, not necessarily with what might be considered a worldly "victory" from external, less enlightened points of view:

...Now since the rightly-guided Imam (Mahdi)<sup>15</sup> knows this (i.e., the victorious divine support flowing from the sincerity of perfect faith), he acts accordingly and is the most

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to God) and of their spiritual "authority" (wilaya) in general. Throughout this section regarding the conjunction of faith, true inner sincerity, and divine support (as in this chapter more generally), Ibn 'Arabi clearly has in mind the paradigmatic example of the Prophet and his Companions.

<sup>13</sup>The description of this hafiz cannot but recall Ibn 'Arabi's repeated insistence on his own spiritual realization--which he apparently viewed as unique in his own time--of the rare condition of "pure servanthood" ('abd mahd khalis) or absolute "spiritual sincerity" (ikhlas), without any trace of inner opposition to the divine Lordship. See his revealing autobiographical remarks about this in chapters 311 (III, 26-27), 367 (III, 350; section IV-I in our translation here), and 29 (O.Y. ed. III, 228-229) of the Futuhat, along with additional references in Hakim, Mul'jam, pp. 765-778.

<sup>14</sup>hijir: i.e., their constantly repeated formula of divine invocation (dhikr), or simply their spiritually representative "motto" from the Koran. See Ibn 'Arabi's detailed discussions of the "hijirs"--which are all symbolically significant verses from the Koran--of the seven abdal, in chapter 15 of the Futuhat (O. Yahya edition, II, 381-384), and especially of a long series of different spiritual "Poles" (aqtab), in chapters 464-556 (Cairo ed., IV, 88-195). In addition, there also is an apparent pun here on another possible reading of the same Arabic written form as "midday sun" (hajir).

<sup>15</sup>al-Imam al-Mahdi: in the rest of this chapter Ibn 'Arabi more often refers to this figure simply as "the Imam" (i.e., the "guide" or leader) or "the Imam of the Age" (see n. 19), without any specific

truly sincere of the people of his time. So his Helpers are the guides (al-hudat), while he is the rightly-guided one (al-mahdi). And this is the extent of what the Mahdi attains of the knowledge of God, with the aid of his Helpers.

But as for the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood, of all the creatures he is the one who knows God best: there is no one in his own time nor after his time who better knows God and the details of His Judgment (mawaqi' al-hukm minhu).<sup>16</sup> For he and the Qur'an are brothers,<sup>17</sup> just as the Mahdi and the sword are brothers.

[...<sup>18</sup>] You should know that I am uncertain about the length of this Mahdi's rule, because as far as this world is concerned I have not sought God's verification of that, nor have I asked Him to specify that or any other temporal happening among the engendered

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reference to the "Mahdi"; in doing so he seems to be alluding--as likewise in the poem opening the chapter, and in the following reference to the "Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood" (n. 16)--to the broader spiritual reality or function symbolized by the Mahdi as the "Greatest Imam" (al-Imam al-Akbar) or rather as a particular manifestation or "deputy" (na'ib) of the Pole (Qutb): as such, the term subsumes, among other things, the various spiritual virtues of the awliya' and the "people of unveiling" described throughout this chapter. For a more detailed account of the Shaykh's complex understanding of the "Imamate" in this broader spiritual sense, see the references in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 101-114 and 1103-1107 (especially pp. 104-105 and 111), and Chodkiewicz, Sceau, ch. VI-VII.

<sup>16</sup>For a detailed exposition of Ibn 'Arabi's self-conception of his unique role as Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood, see the discussions and extensive references in Chodkiewicz, Sceau, ch. VII-IX, as well as the related entries in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 373-383. (For the many relevant senses of the key term hukm, usually translated here as "judgment," see n. 96 below.)

<sup>17</sup>See also Ibn 'Arabi's further remarks on the special role of the Koran in his spiritual life in section II-7 below. Here, as throughout the Shaykh's writings, the expression "Qur'an" refers not simply to the sacred Book revealed through Muhammad, but more broadly to its underlying spiritual Reality, which for Ibn 'Arabi is ultimately inseparable from the universal Logos or "Muhammadan Reality" and "Perfect Man": see the references in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 903-909.

More specifically, he often stresses the etymological root sense of "al-Qur'an" (in implicit contrast to the parallel Koranic expression al-Furqan, the "Division" or "Separation") as a reference to the comprehensive, universal aspect of the divine Reality, which for him is also symbolically expressed in the divine Name "God" (Allah). This distinction underlies his repeated insistence in the following paragraphs (see n. 20 below) on his own superlative knowledge of "Allah" in particular--i.e., the comprehensive divine Reality--rather than of any of the specific divine Names and their manifestations. (See the further discussions of these key distinctions in Wm. Chittick's translation from chapter 558 [IV, 196-198] elsewhere in this anthology.)

<sup>18</sup>After briefly alluding to the Prophet's doubts concerning the exact number of years of the Mahdi's reign ("5, 7, or 9 years," according to a hadith included in the Musnad of Ahmad b. Hanbal, III, p. 21; see n. 20 below), and the corresponding uncertainty concerning the exact number of the Mahdi's Helpers, Ibn 'Arabi returns to a lengthy quotation (III, 329.31-331.6) of the hadith and traditional accounts concerning the Mahdi's encounters with the Antichrist (al-Dajjal): see the summary of these materials in the corresponding article in EI<sup>1</sup> (A.J. Wensinck) and EI<sup>2</sup> (A. Abel).

realities (of this world)--except for whatever God happens to teach me spontaneously, without my seeking it. For I am afraid that during the time when I am asking God to inform me about some engendered or temporal thing I will miss out on some portion of my awareness of Him. So instead I have surrendered my affair to God in His kingdom (mulk, i.e., in this world), letting Him do with me as He pleases. And indeed I have seen a number of the people of God (i.e., the Sufis) seeking to obtain from Him the knowledge of temporal, engendered happenings, and especially trying to become acquainted with the Imam of (this) time.<sup>19</sup> But I was ashamed to do that, and afraid that (my lower, bodily) nature would rob me (of my knowledge of God) if I were to associate with them while they were in that state.

So I asked God only that He grant me stability in a single sort<sup>20</sup> of knowledge of Him, even though I be constantly transformed in my (inner) states. And He did not refuse me....

Ibn 'Arabi concludes this section by recapitulating, in a beautiful poetic "dialogue with God" too long to translate in its entirety here, his discovery of one of the central spiritual insights of his work: the paradoxical fact that this continual transformation of the Heart (fully perceived only by the true Knowers) is itself the perpetually renewed theophany of the noetic "Realities," in no way contradicting the transcendent Unity of the divine Essence:

So when I asked (God) that question (about the apparent conflict between the divine Unity and the multiplicity of theophanies in our experience), He showed me my ignorance and said to me: "Are you not content that you are like Me?!"

[II. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SPIRITUAL STATION OF THE "HELPERS":]<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Imam al-Waqt: i.e., the "Pole" (Qutb) or "Lord of the Age," etc.: for the different meanings of this term (and at least eight common synonyms in Ibn 'Arabi's technical vocabulary), see Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 678-683, plus the entries for the related terms. For Ibn 'Arabi's conception of the role of the Pole (and his Imams) in the spiritual hierarchy, in both its temporal and universal dimensions, see the extensive references in Chodkiewicz, Sceau, ch. VI. In the rest of this chapter (e.g., section II-6, at n. 66) he frequently uses this same expression ("Imam of the Age") in an apparently more general reference to other figures fulfilling some of the "Mahdi's" broader spiritual functions in every historical period.

<sup>20</sup>The Arabic expression here (literally "a single foot") more clearly implies the alternative between two possible kinds of spiritual knowledge--either of God (i.e., the universal, comprehensive divine reality: "Allah") or of particular divine Names and their manifestations in the events of this world--that underlies Ibn 'Arabi's discussion here (as already at notes 16-17 above).

<sup>21</sup>III, 331.34-338.2; the short passages not translated are identified within the summaries or notes below.

Now I do know what (spiritual qualities) are needed by the Mahdi's Helper. So if there is only one Helper, then everything he needs is united in that one person, and if they are more than one, then there are not more than nine of them, since that was the limit of the uncertainty the Messenger of God expressed in his saying concerning the rule of the Mahdi, that it was "for five, seven or nine years."<sup>22</sup> And the totality of what he needs to have performed for him by his Helpers are nine things; there is not a tenth, nor can they be any fewer....

Ibn 'Arabi then briefly enumerates the nine characteristics described in detail in the rest of this chapter (using the phrases given in quotation marks at the beginning of each section), and again insists that all nine of these qualities are required by the Helpers, no matter what their exact number may be. However, the Helpers themselves are not mentioned in the rest of the chapter, where these spiritual attributes are instead attributed directly to the "Imam," "Imam of the Age," "Rightly-guided Imam," etc.--or else to the saints or accomplished Sufis more generally.

[1.] As for "**penetrating vision**," that is so that his praying<sup>23</sup> to God may be with (clear) inward vision (Kor. 12:108) concerning what he requests in his prayer, not Him to whom the prayer is addressed. So he regards the inner essence ('ayn) of each (divine Reality or Name)<sup>24</sup> to Whom he is praying and sees what is possible for Him to do in response to his prayer, and then he prays to Him for that, even if it be by way of special pleading.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>See the earlier reference to this hadith at n. 18 above; Ibn 'Arabi assumes that the number of Helpers agrees with the number of years of the Mahdi's mission, and mentions (III, 331.33) the case of a young Sufi friend who was informed in an inspired vision that the number of the Mahdi's Wuzara' would be nine--a figure corresponding to the number of their distinctive spiritual qualities described in the rest of the chapter.

<sup>23</sup>Or "calling" or "requesting": the Arabic root d-'-w, translated here by forms of "pray," refers not to the obligatory, ritual divine service (salat), but to the individual's personal prayers to God, often--as is clearly the case here--with the added sense of a specific call or request for some particular divine action or response. (We have also kept the subject indefinite, as in the original Arabic, since this condition ultimately applies not only to the Mahdi or his Helpers, but to each wali participating in this spiritual state, as Ibn 'Arabi states explicitly at n. 29 below.)

<sup>24</sup>Ibn 'Arabi's expression here apparently refers to his characteristic understanding that each being's inner strivings or petitions to God (i.e., "prayer" in the broadest possible sense, whether or not consciously and appropriately formulated) necessarily are directed toward one or another specific aspects of the overall divine Reality, expressed in Koranic terms by the many divine Names ("Lord," "King," etc.), that constitute the ontological "lords" of that individual.

<sup>25</sup>ilhah, a term that implies not only urgency and insistence, but also a sort of specific, determined pleading, close to an open demand. Ibn 'Arabi goes on to explain that this sort of attitude--evidently inappropriate in man's ordinary relationship with God--is apparently permitted the Mahdi as part of the proof of his special, quasi-prophetic function.



As for those things where he sees that (God) will not (ordinarily) respond to his prayer, he prays to Him, without any special pleading, to carry out (for him) the divine Argument (hujja) in this special case,<sup>26</sup> since the Mahdi is God's Argument for the people of his time, and that (i.e., his function as hujja) is part of the rank of the prophets and participates in that rank. God said: "**[Say: 'This is my path:] I pray to God with inward vision, I and whoever follows me**" (Kor. 12:108). (God) reported that (to us) through His Prophet, and the Mahdi is among "**those who follow him**," because the Prophet does not err in his praying to God, nor does the person who follows him,<sup>27</sup> since he follows the trace of (the Prophet's) footsteps. And that is what appears in the (hadith) report describing the Mahdi, that the prophet said: "He follows in the trace of my footsteps, and he does not err."<sup>28</sup> This is the (inner state of) immunity from error ('isma) in praying to God, and it is attained by many of the saints, or indeed by all of them.<sup>29</sup>

Among the attributes of this "penetrating vision" are that the person possessing it sees the luminous and fiery spirits (i.e., the angels and the jinn) without those spirits themselves wanting to appear or take on a form (for that person)....

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<sup>26</sup>I.e., to realize this otherwise "impossible" request as one of the unique miracles (mu'jizat) performed by the prophetic messengers that constitute part of the decisive divine "Argument" or "Proof" (hujja) of their special mission.

<sup>27</sup>Ibn 'Arabi is alluding here more broadly to his own status as the preeminent "follower of Muhammad" (see references at n. 16-17 above), and by extension to the similar position of all the (fully accomplished) "Muhammadan saints," which he brings out explicitly at the end of this section and in the rest of this chapter (especially II-7 and 9 below). For the deeper grounds of this special status of the saints in relation to the "heritage" of Muhammad (which ultimately encompasses the realities of all the other prophets and messengers), see the extended references in Chodkiewicz, Sceau, ch. IV-V and Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 1191-1201 (entries on "irth"/"warith").

<sup>28</sup>This hadith was quoted in full among the many traditions concerning the characteristics of the Mahdi cited at the beginning of this chapter (see n. 7 above), and Ibn 'Arabi repeats this phrase whenever the question of 'isma (see following note) arises in the following sections (especially II-7 and 9 below).

<sup>29</sup>See the excellent, more complete discussion of Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of 'isma--which is far more profound and universal, in its metaphysical and spiritual dimensions, than the more familiar treatments of this subject in kalam theology (where it is primarily limited to discussion of the prophets and Imams)--in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 806-810. Sections II-7 (n. 78) and II-9 below have a more detailed discussion of this characteristic divine inspiration of the Mahdi/Imam (and the other saints participating in this spiritual condition), in contrast with the fallible personal judgments (ra'y/qiyas) of those who approach the outward forms and traces of revelation without that inner guidance. See also the more detailed discussion of this typical contrast between the saints (as the true 'ulama') and the fuqaha' in the article cited at n. 3 above.

Ibn 'Arabi illustrates this ability with a story about Ibn 'Abbas and Aisha, who both saw a stranger conversing with the Prophet and subsequently learned that they had actually seen the angel Gabriel:

Likewise (as a result of this special vision) they perceive the men of the Unseen<sup>30</sup> even when they want to be veiled and not to appear to (ordinary human) vision. And it is also (characteristic) of this penetrating vision that if the spiritual meanings (ma'ani) take on bodily form, then they recognize (the underlying realities) in those very forms, and they know without any hesitation which spiritual meaning it is that became embodied (in that particular form).<sup>31</sup>

[2.] Now as for "understanding the divine address when it is delivered,"<sup>32</sup> this is (summarized) in His saying: "*And it was not for any mortal man that God should speak*

<sup>30</sup>Rijal al-ghayb: this Sufi expression refers to saints of high spiritual rank (especially the abdal) or other spiritual beings (angels, etc.) who may receive a divine mission to become invisible or take on human form in another place. As an illustration of this phenomenon, see Ibn 'Arabi's own firsthand account of two personal experiences with such "mysterious strangers," including an unnamed Iranian Sufi master, at the end of this same chapter (summarized in section III, notes 118-120 below).

<sup>31</sup>Ibn 'Arabi frequently interprets in this light the many symbols mentioned in the visions of the Prophet (e.g., during his Mi'raj, as explained in chapter 367 [III, 340-354], section II of our translation here); one of his favorite illustrations of the phenomena referred to here is the Prophet's recognition of the "milk" offered him by an angel (according to a famous hadith) as a symbol of spiritual knowledge.

Chapter 311 of the Futuhāt (III, 41-44; "On the Station of the 'Arising by Special Designation' [nawashi' ikhtisasiya] from the Unseen") is entirely devoted to these phenomena of "manifestations" or "projections"--both by Sufi saints and by angels, etc.--in various sensible and imaginal forms. Ibn 'Arabi gives a number of fascinating anecdotes concerning such incidents, analyzes their metaphysical underpinnings (in the "Presence" of Imagination, khayal) and discusses the special unerring ability of the Prophet to perceive the spiritual realities (ma'ani) underlying such phenomena. (See the translation by Wm. Chittick elsewhere in this anthology.)

<sup>32</sup>Ibn 'Arabi's technical vocabulary for describing the many facets of divine "communication" and its human "reception," which combines a profound concern for the subtleties of Koranic expression with close attention to the diverse phenomena of spiritual experience and their complex metaphysical foundations, is so extraordinarily rich that any English equivalents of the key terms can only be very approximate.

Here the divine "address" (al-khitab al-ilahi) or "discourse" is the divine "Speech" (kalam/hadith) specifically as it is directed toward (and received by) a particular person. Its "delivery" or transmission (ilqa': literally "projection") into the heart (or hearing or any other senses) of the person thus addressed may take any of the forms described below--since ultimately (for Ibn 'Arabi, but relying on many passages of the Koran) all Being is nothing but divine "Speech," an insight that is amplified in the immediately following section (II-3, n. 41 below).

For an excellent presentation of these and related technical terms in their broader context in the Shaykh's writings (as well as a helpful reminder of the complexities of their actual Koranic usage), see Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 400-405 ("al-Khitab al-Ilahi") and 1182-1191 ("al-Wahy al-Ilahi").

*to him except through inspiration or from behind a veil or He sends a messenger" (Kor. 42:51).*

So as for the divine address "through inspiration" (wahy),<sup>33</sup> that is what He delivers to their hearts as something newly reported (to them),<sup>34</sup> so that through this they gain knowledge of some particular matter, i.e., of what is contained in that new report. But if it does not happen in that way (i.e., as something received from outside oneself), then it is not a (divine) inspiration or address. For instance, some people (may) find in their hearts the knowledge of something of the necessary forms of knowledge<sup>35</sup> among people in general. That is genuine knowledge, but it is not obtained from a (particular divine)

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<sup>33</sup>Ibn 'Arabi understands and employs this key expression (and related forms of the same root) to convey an extremely wide range of meanings, which--as shown by S. al-Hakim in the long study (pp. 1182-1191) cited in the preceding note--closely reflect the broader dimensions and subtleties of Koranic usage. In particular, readers familiar with the usual discussions of wahy (as the uniquely prophetic form of "revelation") in Islamic theological and philosophical literature (as well as in more apologetically oriented Sufi texts) should take note of the very different parameters and intentions of Ibn 'Arabi's complex usage of this term here and elsewhere in his writings. The critical problem of the relation of the wahy of each prophet to that of the saints who are his true "inheritors" (see notes 14 and 25) is clarified in Chapter 14 (On "the Secrets of the Prophets among the Saints..."), O.Y. II, 357-362 (= Cairo ed., I, 149-152).

<sup>34</sup>ala jihat al-hadith: here the emphasis implied by this term is on both the (relative) novelty of information conveyed and the fact that it is perceived as a message coming from outside the person to whom it is delivered--not so much on the usual meaning of verbal "speaking," since this inspiration is perceived by the heart and not the sense of hearing (again, see detailed explanation in Chapter 14, O.Y. II, 357-360). Here and in the other examples described in this section Ibn 'Arabi wants to emphasize the specific kind of divine "address" or inspiration in which there is a conscious awareness of this particular message as something clearly "received" or "projected" into the person's awareness from a higher, divine source, not as the product or expression of his personal thinking (nazar) or previous knowledge. This fundamental aspect of genuine "inspiration" is also brought out in the continuation of the Koranic verse opening this section: "**And likewise We inspired in you a spirit from Our Command. You did not know what was the Book nor the Faith....**"(Kor. 42:52). The decisive importance of the Heart (qalb: the locus of all spiritual perception; see Hakim, Mu'jam, pp.916-921) as the instrument of this direct inspiration (following the Koranic usage of wahy: see references at n. 30), and thus of its immediate spiritual apprehension without any sensible "veil," becomes clearer only in contrast to the immediately following discussion of the auditory and other "veiled" forms of the divine Speech addressed to particular individuals.

<sup>35</sup>The "necessary sciences" or forms of knowledge ('ulum daruriya), used here in the accepted sense of that term in Islamic philosophy and theology, are the abstract universal premises (prior to sense-perception) of all thought (including logic, mathematics, etc.), which therefore underlie all communication and ordinary, non-revealed knowledge; they are innately shared by all human beings and cannot be doubted or questioned, although because of their universality they are not always (or even usually) consciously formulated. For Ibn 'Arabi's own distinctive conception of the "necessary" forms of knowledge, in the broader context of his spiritual epistemology, see chapter 19 (O.Y. ed. III, 78-87).

address (khitab), and our discussion is only concerned with that form of divine address which is called "inspiration" (wahy)....<sup>36</sup>

And as for His saying "**or from behind a veil**," that is a divine address delivered to the (person's) hearing and not to the heart, so that the person to whom it is delivered perceives it and then understands from that what was intended by the One Who caused him to hear it. Sometimes that happens through the forms of theophany, in which case that (particular) divine form addresses the person, and that form itself is the veil. Then (the person having this condition of spiritual insight) understands from that divine address the knowledge of what it indicates, and he knows that (this theophanic form) is a veil and that the Speaker (i.e., God) is behind that veil.

Of course not everyone who perceives a form of the divine theophany realizes that that form is God. For the person possessing this state (of spiritual insight) is only distinguished from other men by the fact that he recognizes that that form, although it is a "veil," is itself precisely God's theophany for him.<sup>37</sup>

And as for His saying "**or He sends a messenger**," that is (the divine address) He sends down with an angel or that is brought to us by the mortal human messenger when either sort of messenger conveys "God's Speech" in this particular way (i.e., perceived as an individual "address" coming directly from God)....<sup>38</sup> But if either sort of messenger

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<sup>36</sup>Ibn 'Arabi goes on to reiterate that although our awareness of various forms of knowledge within ourselves may often strike us as a new discovery, it does not ordinarily share the other essential characteristics of this particular form of divine inspiration--i.e., it is not perceived by the heart as a divine "speech" "delivered" to us from a higher source outside ourselves.

<sup>37</sup>ayn tajalli al-Haqq: i.e., the theophany or Self-manifestation of the ultimate divine Reality or absolutely Real (al-Haqq). This ambiguous status of all phenomena, which can be either "veils" or "theophanies" depending on the inner state of the person experiencing them, is one of the central themes of all of Ibn 'Arabi's writing: it is frequently expressed, for example, in his typical ontological (and etymological) understanding of kufri, kafara, etc.--usually translated as "unbelief"--as "covering up" or "veiling" the infinite Signs of God's presence. It is also strikingly illustrated in his famous remarks concerning the differences in men's "vision" of Paradise, e.g. at the end of the chapter on Ismail (I, 94; 109-110 in Austen tr.) in the Fusus: "...for the matter is one, but in the [same] theophany there is an opposition between the two of them [i.e., the awareness of the man of faith and that of the unbeliever]." For further references, see Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 265-269 ("theophany," etc.) and 313-318 ("veil," etc.).

<sup>38</sup>This "particular," individual modality of the divine Speech (Kalam Allah) here is illustrated by Ibn 'Arabi with the citation of three Koranic verses (9:6, 19:52, 27:8) among those where God is referred to as speaking directly and openly to particular individuals (especially to Moses, "Kalim Allah"). Again (as at notes 30-34 above) he is stressing the essential phenomenological distinction between this kind of

(simply) conveys or gives expression to knowledge that he found (already) in his soul (and not as a distinct message given him by God), then that is not divine Speech (in this particular sense).

Now it may happen that the messenger and the form (of the message) occur together, as in the very act of writing (the revealed Book). For the Book is a messenger, and it is also the veil over the Speaker (i.e., God), so that it causes you to understand what It brought. But that (i.e., the divinely revealed nature of the Book) would not be so if the messenger wrote on the basis of his own knowledge: it is only the case if the messenger wrote on the basis of a (divine) report (hadith) addressed to him in those very words he writes down, and when it is not like that then it is not (divine) speech. This is the general rule....

So all of this (i.e., all three forms of theophanic perception) is part of the divine address directed to the person who possesses this (spiritual) station.<sup>39</sup>

[3.] As for "**the knowledge of how to translate from God**," that belongs to every person to whom God speaks through inspiration (wahy) or the delivery (of a particular divine address, ilqa'), since (in such cases) the translator is the one who creates the forms of the spoken or written letters he brings into existence, while the spirit of those forms is God's Speech and nothing else.<sup>40</sup> But if someone "translates" (into words) from (their

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specific, individual divine "address" and the more universal manifestations of the divine Speech. (See the detailed references in Hakim, Mu'jam, at notes 32-33 above.)

<sup>39</sup>It is important to note that Ibn 'Arabi clearly sees all of these forms of revelation or inspiration as applying to the case of the Prophet and the Mahdi's "Helpers," and by extension to all those saints or inspired "knowers" who share in this particular spiritual station (maqam), and that he is not using these distinctions to justify a particular theological "ranking" of prophets (or of prophets and saints). Instead, this concluding allusion points the discerning reader toward the more essential problem of developing his own awareness and understanding of that "divine address" (in all its dimensions) that is "delivered" personally to him. See again the more detailed treatment of these questions in Chapter 14 of the Futuhat, O.Y. ed. II, 357-362 (= Cairo ed. I, 150).

<sup>40</sup>Perhaps the most pertinent illustration in Ibn 'Arabi's own writing of this sort of "translation" (tarjama) of a divine inspiration--in this case received from the hand of the Prophet--into human language is his famous book Fusus al-Hikam, where, in his Prologue, he explicitly sets forth his claim (or wish) to be the Prophet's faithful "translator" (mutarjim). Note that this form of divine inspiration is clearly differentiated here from the direct angelic "dictation" of the actual words of the revealed Book described in the immediately preceding passage, which evidently constitutes one of the unique attributes of the Koran.

Ultimately, for Ibn 'Arabi, every form of knowledge is based on divine "inspirations" and individual "theophanies," although most often those relying on their own reasoning and inquiry (nazar) are unaware of this or take it for granted: see, e.g., Futuhat, chapter 19, O.Y. ed. III, 81-82.

own, non-inspired) knowledge, then they are inevitably not a "translator" (in this inspired sense)....

Ibn 'Arabi goes on (333.1-10) to distinguish carefully between this state of inspired vision which is typical of the perception of the saints and "people of inner unveiling" (ahl al-kashf), on the one hand, and the purely theoretical references by "those who are learned in the outward appearances" (ulama al-rusum) to the "language of states" (lisan al-hal) in their interpretations of Koranic references to the "speech" of what we ordinarily call inanimate objects, such as minerals. The former group, who directly experience the living, theophanic nature of all beings, are able to see for themselves that "everything other than God really is alive and speaking, in the very nature of things," while the latter group "are veiled by the thickest of veils":

...Thus there is nothing in the world but translator,<sup>41</sup> if it is translated from divine Speaking. So understand that.

[4.] As for "**appointing the (various) ranks of the holders of authority**,"<sup>42</sup> that is the knowledge of what each rank (of judge or administrator of the religious Law) rightfully requires (in order to assure the) kinds of welfare for which it was created. The person possessing this knowledge looks at the soul of the person whom he wants to place in a position of authority and weighs the appropriateness of that person for that rank. If he sees that there is the right equilibrium between the person and the post, without any excess or deficiency, then he gives him that authority, and if the person is over-qualified there is no harm in that. But if the person is inadequate to the position he does not entrust him with that authority, because he lacks the knowledge that would qualify him for that rank, so that he would inevitably commit injustice.

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<sup>41</sup>mutarjim: though the phrase may sound strange in English (and even in the original Arabic), since we would more naturally expect to see the world referred to as a "translation" of the divine Speech, it expresses in a simple formula the very essence of Ibn 'Arabi's central insight into the theophanic, continually recreated nature of all Being and the transcendent, paradoxical unity of the "subject" and "object" of that Whole as it unfolds in the realized vision of the "people of unveiling" (ahl al-kashf), the Heart of the "Perfect Man."

<sup>42</sup>"Holders of authority" translates ulu' al-'amr, an allusion to the famous Koranic command (4:59) **"..Obey God and obey the Messenger and the holders of authority among you...."**, which has been the source of endless controversy over who are actually the true "authorities" of the Community since the time of the Prophet. However in this section Ibn 'Arabi uses the term as a relatively uncontroversial reference to the various types of judges required to apply the provisions of the divine Law. The "ranks" here, as explained in an untranslated part of this passage, refer to three basic fields of jurisdiction of the religious Law (offenses or disputes involving physical harm, honor or property), and not to specific governmental or administrative posts.

For this (inner ignorance of the true reality of the Sharia) is the root of all injustice in the holders of authority, since we hold it to be impossible that someone could (truly) know (a particular divine command) and then deviate from the judgment (required by) his knowledge all at once. This is something that is considered possible by those learned in the external forms (of the Law),<sup>43</sup> although we ourselves consider that this "possible" thing never actually occurs in reality; it is indeed a difficult question.

Now it is because of this (inner knowledge of men's souls and the true divine commands) that the Mahdi "fills the world with justice and equity," just as "it was filled with injustice and oppression."<sup>44</sup> Because in our view (true spiritual) knowledge necessarily and inevitably implies action (in accordance with it), and if it does not do so, then it is not really knowledge, even if it appears in the (outward) form of knowledge....<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>'ulama' al-rusum: here this term (used more broadly in the previous section) refers to the formal "knowledge" of the external "traces" of the Prophetic heritage typical of the mass of legal scholars (fuqaha) popularly known as the "learned" ('ulama'). The roots of Ibn 'Arabi's radically differing point of view--which at first seems to contradict his own discussion here of individuals whose formal legal "knowledge" is overcome by their passions--are explained more openly throughout sections II-7 (e.g., at n. 43) and II-9 below.

It should be stressed that this term, for Ibn 'Arabi, is primarily used in a "descriptive" and not necessarily pejorative sense, since many of the saints and Sufis (including, for example, the pious judge described in section II-5 below) were also notable representatives of this category of 'ulama'. See his discussion of the complementary functions of "those who preserve (the outward literal) forms of the divine judgment" as expressed by the prophet (hafazat al-ahkam) and "those who preserve (the Prophet's spiritual) states and secrets" (hafazat al-ahwal wa-l-asrar) in Chapter 14, O.Y. II, 361-362 (= Cairo ed., I, 151), and the more detailed discussions and references in our article cited at n. 3 above.

<sup>44</sup>A quotation from the classical hadith account of the characteristics of the Mahdi given at the opening of this chapter (section I, at n. 7 above).

<sup>45</sup>I.e, Ibn 'Arabi is not specifically pointing to some outwardly "reformable" defect in the teaching and transmission of the Law in his time, nor to the fraudulent pretensions or moral defects of particular individuals (although that latter subject does come up in section II-7 below). Rather he is primarily alluding here (and more clearly in the following sections) to the fundamental--and in our present circumstances, humanly inescapable--problem that the just, appropriate application and interpretation of the traditional sources concerning the divine commands and their historical application by the Prophet usually require a far deeper understanding of both their ultimate contexts and intentions and the relevant factors in each particular case than can be expected of any but the rarest individuals, those whose every action is divinely inspired and protected from error (ma'sum: see the discussion at n. 27 above). As he remarks more openly in section II-7 below, those truly qualified "authorities" (the true wulat) in any age, whether or not they outwardly rule, are none other than the divinely guided "saints"--i.e., the awliya' (a term drawn from the same Arabic root as the words translated as "authority" in these passages, and having explicit connotations of spiritual authority [wilaya] that are not readily conveyed by the term "saint" in Western languages).

Ibn 'Arabi goes on to discuss at some length the importance for the Mahdi--as for any wise ruler--to appoint judges and authorities who not only have the right (formal) knowledge of the appropriate provisions of the religious Law, but in whom that knowledge also fully controls their own personal prejudices,<sup>46</sup> so that they will always act according to their knowledge.

[5.] As for "**mercy in anger**," that is only in the divinely prescribed penalties (al-hudud al-mashru'a) and punishment, since in everything else (i.e., in merely human affairs) there is anger without any mercy at all.... For if a human being gets angry of his own accord, his anger does not contain mercy in any respect; but if he becomes angry for God's sake (i.e., in fulfilling the divine commandments), then his anger is God's Anger--and God's Anger is never free from being mixed with divine Mercy. ...Because (God's) Mercy, since it preceded (His) Anger, entirely covers all engendered being and extends to every thing (Kor. 7:156)....<sup>47</sup>

Therefore this Mahdi does not become angry except for God's sake, so that his anger does not go beyond (what is required in) upholding God's limits<sup>48</sup> that He has prescribed; this is just the opposite of the (ordinary) person who becomes angry because of his own desires or (something happening) contrary to his own personal aims. And likewise the person who becomes angry (only) for God's sake can only be just and equitable, not tyrannical and unjust.

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<sup>46</sup>I.e., what Ibn 'Arabi calls their "passion" (shahwa), referring to all the various ways in which their personal emotions may run contrary to their knowledge of the legally correct judgment (see the illustrations in the following section). The person exhibiting this moral capacity of rational self-control is called "judicious" (aqil), an expression which Ibn 'Arabi derives from the root sense of "binding" or "hindering" (one's personal emotions, in this case); see the application of this term to the prophets in particular at n. 53 below.

<sup>47</sup>This Koranic verse and the equally famous "divine saying" (hadith qudsi) quoted here ("My Mercy preceded My Anger") are of course among the key leitmotifs of Ibn 'Arabi's thought: see references in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 521-529 and many other citations in this anthology. The brief passages not translated here are simply elaborations and reminders of this fundamental principle that "God's Anger (eventually) ends for those with whom He is angry (Kor. 1:7, etc.), while God's Mercy is never ending." (For the sake of consistency, we have followed the customary translation of the Koranic term ghadab as "anger," although that rendering implies all sorts of anthropomorphic associations considerably removed from the deeper meaning of that expression in the thought of Ibn 'Arabi--and probably in the Koran itself. Similarly, the English word "love"--especially given its connotations in the Bible--probably comes much closer than "mercy" or "compassion" to expressing the full range of realities implied in Ibn 'Arabi's notion of rahma.)

<sup>48</sup>hudud Allah, a Koranic concept which originally includes both the divine "statutes" and prescriptions (ahkam: see n. 94)--which can of course be understood in a more spiritual and universal as well as a more exoteric and legalistic sense--and the earthly punishments and penalties applied for offenses against them in the various historical systems of Islamic Law. (The same term [al-hadd] is translated as "penalty" when used in that explicitly legal context in the following paragraph.)



Now a sign of whoever (rightfully) lays claim to this spiritual station is that if he becomes angry for God's sake while acting in judgment and upholding the (divinely prescribed) penalty against the person with whom he is angry, then his anger disappears once he has finished fulfilling (that religious duty)--(to the extent that) sometimes he may even go up to the (condemned) person and embrace him and be friendly with him, saying to him "Praise be to God Who has purified you!" and openly showing his happiness and pleasure with him. And sometimes (the condemned man) also becomes friendly with (his judge) after that, for this (inner fulfillment and realization of the divine commands) is God's Scale (of Justice), and all of (God's) Mercy comes back to that condemned man<sup>49</sup> ....

Ibn 'Arabi proceeds to illustrate this phenomenon with the story (III, 334.2-8) of a personal acquaintance who frequented the same masters of hadith in the city of Ceuta, a highly respected and unusually modest religious judge (qadi) who was famous for his rare charismatic ability (baraka) to establish peace among feuding parties or tribes--an ability Ibn 'Arabi attributes to his extreme conscientiousness and concern for maintaining only a disinterested, "divine point of view" in his inner relation to his legal duties. This leads him to take up the broader divine standards of judgment (ahkam) regarding all of our actions, especially their inner spiritual aspect:

This (necessary attention to the spiritual sources and repercussions of all our actions) is also (expressed) in God's saying: "**..and then We test your records** (of your actions)" (Kor. 47:31). For first of all He tests (mankind) with regard to the obligations He has imposed on them (i.e., according to the first half of the same verse: "**And surely we test you until we know those of you who make every effort and are patient....**"); and if they have acted (in accordance with the divine commands), then their actions are tested as to whether they have acted for the sake of the Truth (al-Haqq) or instead for some other end. Likewise it is this (inner spiritual judgment that is expressed) in God's saying: "**On the Day when the innermost selves are tested**" (Kor. 86:9). For the people of inner unveiling hold this (i.e., the judgment of each soul's innermost being, the sarira) to be God's Scale (of Justice). Therefore the judge,<sup>50</sup> whenever he is carrying out the

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<sup>49</sup>I.e., to the one who has realized within himself the fundamental justice of the divine Command and has carried out the process of inner repentance and recourse to God's Mercy that has spiritually "purified" him and enabled him to avoid the further consequences of his sin (in this world or the next). Ibn 'Arabi goes on to make clear that his point here actually applies to the inner spiritual situation of every individual with regard to the infinite range of the divine "commands" or "limits" more generally understood (see preceding note), not just those infractions that happen to involve "criminal" actions and the external forms of the law.

<sup>50</sup>al-hakim: although translated throughout as "judge" (in the more familiar legal sense), this term can also be understood in an extended (and more exact) sense as anyone who seeks to ascertain and apply the divine "judgment" or "commandment" (hukm) appropriate to a given action or situation--a grave and almost impossible responsibility if viewed from the broader spiritual perspective that Ibn 'Arabi gradually

(divine) penalties, must not forget to examine his own soul in order to guard against the feelings of vengeance and aggression that happen to souls (in such situations)....

Here Ibn 'Arabi continues to explain how the above-mentioned qadi in Ceuta was always careful to examine his conscience in this way, even when his emotions of anger or vengeance did not derive directly from the case actually before him. In fact, he concludes, the moral and spiritual factors involved in each case are so complex that the responsibility of judgment--in the ultimate, all-inclusive sense of that term--can only belong to God or those rare individuals divinely "appointed" for this role:<sup>51</sup>

So you must know that God has not appointed anyone but the judge to carry out the penalty against (the guilty person). Therefore no one (else) should be angry with the person who transgresses God's limits, since that (i.e., the responsibility of anger in imposing the divine penalties) only belongs to the judges in particular, and to God's Messenger insofar as he is a judge. For if (the Messenger) were only communicating (the divine Message)<sup>52</sup> and not judging, then he would not carry out the (divine) Anger against those who reject his call. That matter (i.e., their response, insofar as he is simply a Messenger) does not involve him at all, and he **is not responsible for their being rightly guided** (Kor. 2:272).

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unfolds here and in the following sections. See also n. 94 before for the multiple meanings of hukm ("judgment," "command," etc.) and its verbal forms throughout this chapter.

<sup>51</sup>Ibn 'Arabi's conception of the unique qualifications of the accomplished saints (awliya') in this regard is developed in greater detail in sections 7 and 9 below; but at the very end of this chapter (section III, notes 119-122 below) he places severe restrictions on the situations in which they should even attempt to argue with others on the basis of their revealed insights--i.e., only when they actually receive a divine order to do so. These and many other essential qualifications involved in Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of the "spiritual authority" (wilaya) of the saints are discussed in much greater detail in our article "Ibn 'Arabi's 'Esotericism': the Problem of Spiritual Authority," cited at n. 3 above.

A revealing illustration of the complex responsibilities involved in the position of human, worldly judgeship is Ibn 'Arabi's remark at this point (III, 334.13) that "In my opinion none of the questions concerning the religiously prescribed legal judgments is more difficult than zina' (i.e., adultery and other forbidden sexual relations) in particular; even if the punishment is carried out, after that there still remain other claims (against those responsible) on the part of the persons injured."

<sup>52</sup>An allusion to the many Koranic verses insisting that "**the Messenger is only responsible for the clear communication [balagh]**" (Kor. 24:54; 29:18; etc.) of God's Word, not for the particular reactions of his listeners--which are discussed in the many other verses alluded to here stressing God's role (and their individual responsibilities) in those reactions. The related and practically crucial question of the limited degree to which the inspired saint should attempt to convince others (by argument) of the insights he has realized at this stage is discussed in the final section translated from this chapter (notes 121-122 below).

Thus God says to the Messenger concerning this matter: "**You are only responsible for communicating** (the divine Message)" (Kor. 42:48; etc.). So (the Prophet) communicated, and God caused whomever He wished to listen (cf. Kor. 8:23; etc.) and caused whomever He wished to be deaf (cf. Kor. 47:23), and they--that is, the prophets--are the most self-restrained of men.<sup>53</sup> For (even) if the (prophetic) caller were (fully) revealed to the person whom God has made deaf to his call, that person would still not hear the call and would not be changed because of that. And if the (prophet who is) calling out brought together those thus deafened, so that they knew that they did not hear his cry, that would still not help him (to convince them), and he would acknowledge their excuse.

Therefore if the Messenger acted as judge (hakim), that was (only because) he was made specifically responsible for the judgment that God had specified for him in that case. And this is a sublime knowledge required by everyone on earth who has authority over (this) world.<sup>54</sup>

[6-a.] As for "**the forms of (spiritual) sustenance (arzaq) needed by the ruler,**"<sup>55</sup> this (requires) that he know the kinds of worlds, which are only two--i.e., by "world" I mean

<sup>53</sup>a'qal al-nass (which could also be "the most intelligent of men"), translated here in accordance with Ibn 'Arabi's earlier discussion (n. 46 above) of the 'aqil, in this ethical and juridical context, as the person whose (spiritual) knowledge is in full control of his passions. Clearly the degree of that virtue ideally required here--to the extent of refraining from judging others (even inwardly), based on a full recognition of the inner necessity of their actions--could be expected only of the prophets and the most accomplished saints.

For Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of the "prophets" (anbiya') in general as a group far larger than the small number of "messengers" specifically charged with communicating a specific divine legislation (i.e., a rasul or shari')--and his related understanding of the saints (awliya') as the anbiya' of the Muslim Community--, see the many references in Chodkiewicz, Sceau, ch. III; Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 1058-1053; and chapter 14 of the Futuhat, O.Y. II, pp. 356 ff.

<sup>54</sup>The "sublime knowledge" referred to here appears to be the divine inspiration of the appropriate "judgment" (hukm) that, as Ibn 'Arabi goes on to explain (in section 7 below), is shared with the prophets by the "people of unveiling" or awliyâ'; but it may also refer more specifically here to the prophet's awareness of the inner states of those whom God has made insensitive to the prophetic message, as discussed in the immediately preceding paragraphs. As noted above (n. 45) the term used for "having authority" here (wâlî) is etymologically very close to the Arabic expression usually translated as "saint" (wâlî), no doubt alluding to Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of the truly inspired "authorities" developed more openly in sections 7 and 9 below.

<sup>55</sup>The notion of rizq, for Ibn 'Arabi (closely following the Koran), ultimately extends to all the physical and metaphysical forms of divine "sustenance" or "nourishment" by which the world and its creatures are given life and being: see the discussion of his usage of this and related terms in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 531-534. Thus--as in his initial enumeration of the qualities of the Helpers earlier in this

the worlds in which this Imam's influence (hukm) is effective, which are the world of (physical) forms and the world of the souls<sup>56</sup> governing those forms with regard to their physical movements and activities. As for what is beyond those two kinds (i.e., the worlds of the angelic spirits and the jinn), he has no influence over them except for those, such as (individuals in) the world of the jinn, who wish for him to have influence over their souls.<sup>57</sup>

But as for the luminous world (of the angelic spirits),<sup>58</sup> they are beyond this mortal human world's having any authority over them, for each individual among them has a known station (Kor. 37:163) determined for him by his Lord, so that he does not descend (to this earth) except with the permission of his Lord (cf. Kor. 97:4). Thus whoever wants one of them to be sent down to him must turn to his Lord (in praying) for that, and his Lord (may) order (that angel) and give him permission to do that, in compliance with that person's request--or He may send down an angel of His own accord.

As for the "travelers" among the angels, their station is known (Kor. 37:163), since they are constantly traveling around seeking the sessions of dhikr.<sup>59</sup> So "when they find the people of dhikr"--who are the people of the Qur'an, those who are (truly) recalling the

chapter--he commonly distinguishes between the spiritual or noetic (ma'nawiya/ma'qula) forms of this sustenance, which are discussed at the beginning of this section, and the material blessings that are discussed in the second half (6-b below).

<sup>56</sup>Here Ibn 'Arabi is emphasizing the considerable limits on the realm directly "subject" to the temporal functions of the Mahdi. The Arabic term nufus (translated here as "souls") refers specifically in this context only to that very limited aspect of the individual's "soul" which controls his physical body in this "mortal human" (bashari) world, not to the infinitely wider dimensions of the "spirit" (ruh) which ultimately constitutes man as insan.

<sup>57</sup>Or simply "themselves" (anfusihi). This final qualification alludes to the insistence throughout Islamic tradition (including the schools of law) on the existence of both disbelieving and believing individuals among the jinn, the latter being followers of one or another of the human prophetic Messengers: see the references to Ibn 'Arabi's discussions of the "jinn"--a term he uses elsewhere in several other, different senses--in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 279-281.

<sup>58</sup>I.e., the spiritual beings who were created from "light," just as the jinn (according to Islamic tradition) were created from the physical element of "fire."

<sup>59</sup>This group of angels (al-sa'ihun), who "travel around the roads (turuq) seeking out the people of dhikr," are mentioned in a long hadith--cited in the Sahih of both Bukhari and Muslim, as well as in the Musnad of Ahmad ibn Hanbal--that Ibn 'Arabi included as number 84 in his personal collection of hadith qudsi, the Mishkat al-Anwar (= p. 110 in the French translation, with facing Arabic text, by M. Valsan, La Niche des Lumieres, Paris, 1983.) The passages included in quotation marks here are an approximate quotation from that hadith. These "travelers" are mentioned again at the end of this chapter in a strange story concerning the "men of the Unseen" (rijal al-ghayb: see n. 30 above), summarized at n. 120 below.

Qur'an<sup>60</sup>--they do not give precedence to anyone from the sessions of dhikr of those who are recalling (something) other than the Qur'an. But if they do not find people recalling the Qur'an and they do find people recalling God--not just reciting--then they come to sit with them and "they call out to each other: 'Come quickly to what you all desire!'" because that (remembrance of God) is their sustenance; through it they flourish and in it they have their life.

Now since the Imam knows that, he always keeps a group of people reciting the Signs<sup>61</sup> of God throughout the night (Kor. 3:113) and the day. And we ourselves, when we were in Fez in the lands of the Maghreb, used to follow this practice, thanks to the agreement of companions favored by God, who listened to us and readily followed our counsel.<sup>62</sup> But when we no longer had them (with us) we thereby lost this pure (spiritual) work, which is the noblest and most sublime of the forms of (spiritual) sustenance.

So when we no longer had (companions) like those men, we began to take up the diffusion of knowledge,<sup>63</sup> because of those (angelic) spirits whose food is (spiritual) knowledge. And we saw that there was not a single thing we set forth that did not spring from this Source that is sought by this spiritual kind (of angels), which is the Qur'an. Hence everything about which we speak, both in my (teaching) sessions and in my writings, comes only from the presence of the Qur'an and Its treasures.<sup>64</sup> I was given the

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<sup>60</sup>I.e., as he explains later in this sentence, the dhakirun (who "recall" its true spiritual reality: see n. 17 above), not necessarily all those who are merely reciting the words (talin). The reference here to "sessions" (majalis) of dhikr seems to imply specifically Sufi gatherings; this is clearly the case with in his reference to these "travelers" in the anecdote summarized at the end of this chapter (n. 120 below). For Ibn 'Arabi's own personal preference, in that practical spiritual context, for dhikr of the Koran as opposed to the other (primarily musical) forms of dhikr popular in Sufi circles, see chapter 182 of the Futuhat, "Concerning Knowledge of the Station of Sama' and Its Secrets," II, 366-368.

<sup>61</sup>Ayat: i.e., the verses of the Koran.

<sup>62</sup>We have not been able to locate any further biographical details concerning this particular group of disciples and Ibn 'Arabi's role as shaykh during this period, or the reasons for their "loss."

<sup>63</sup>bathth al-'ilm: the term implies the unfolding or opening up of what was concealed--apparently in reference to Ibn 'Arabi's increasing literary production (and his provision of many of his works with an ijaza 'amma, a "general permission" for their reading and propagation), pedagogical activities which may have coincided with his growing realization of his unique personal role as "Seal of the Muhammadan Saints" (see n. 16 above).

<sup>64</sup>See Ibn 'Arabi's earlier statement (section I, at n. 17) that "he (i.e., as the 'Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood') and the Qur'an are brothers," along with the references there concerning his distinctive personal understanding of what is meant by that term ("al-Qur'an"). Ibn 'Arabi's decisive personal realization of the inner Reality of the Qur'an and the comprehensive spiritual "Station of Muhammad" is

keys of Its understanding and divine support (imdad) from It--all of this so that we might not swerve from It.<sup>65</sup>

For this is the loftiest (spiritual knowledge) that can be bestowed on one, and no one can know its full worth except for the person who has actually tasted it in experience and directly witnessed its rank as a (spiritual) state within himself, the person to whom the True One (al-Haqq) has spoken it in his innermost being (sirr). For when it is the True One Who speaks to His servant in his innermost being--after all the intermediaries have been lifted away<sup>66</sup>--then the understanding is immediate and inseparable from His speaking to you, so that the (divine) speaking itself is identical with your understanding of it. The understanding does not follow after it--and if it does come after it, then that is not God's speaking.

Thus whoever does not find this (immediate spiritual understanding within himself) does not have (true) knowledge of God's speaking to His servants. And if God should speak to him through the veil of a form--whether with the tongue of a prophet or whoever else in the world He may wish--then the understanding of that (divine) speech may accompany it

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described in detail in his Kitab al-Isra' (= Rasa'il Ibn 'Arabi, ed. Hyderabad, 1948, I, no. 13, pp. 1-92), written in Fez in 594, i.e., roughly the period alluded to here. See the translation and commentary of a key passage from the K. al-Isra' in our two-part article on "The Spiritual Ascension: Ibn 'Arabi and the Mi'raj" in the Journal of the American Oriental Society, vol. 10., no.....[COMPLETE REFERENCE] The same experiential realization is more briefly described as the culminating stage of his own spiritual Ascension in chapter 367 of the Futuhat (III, 340-354), section IV-I in the translation here.

<sup>65</sup>The usage of the first person plural here--unlike the case with the preceding sentences, where it may be only a polite form of "I"--appears to be a clear allusion to Ibn 'Arabi's self-conception of his particular role, within the Muslim Community, as the "Seal of the Muhammadan saints" (see n. 16 above) responsible for the ongoing spiritual guidance of the entire Community. Likewise, just as the Seal reflects the total Reality of Muhammad (who at that cosmic level is the "Qur'an," for Ibn 'Arabi), so the expression "I was given the keys of Its understanding" echoes a fundamental hadith of the Prophet cited repeatedly throughout the Shaykh's writings: "I was given the totality of the (divine) Words" (jawami' al-kilam).

<sup>66</sup>The "intermediaries" (wasait), in this immediate context (and judging from the earlier analysis of the divine "discourse," in section II-2 above), appear to be all the "veils" of the particular "forms" (whether angelic or human prophetic messengers, or perhaps the infinite variety of theophanies in general), through which the divine "inspiration" is more often perceived. (But elsewhere in the Futuhat Ibn 'Arabi applies this term more specifically to all the learned transmitters of the the external forms and traces of the prophetic heritage; see chapter 14, O.Y. II, 358: ".the intermediaries--I mean the fugaha' and the 'ulama' al-rusum.")

or it may come later.<sup>67</sup> So this is the difference between the two (i.e., between direct divine inspiration and its mediated transmission).

[6-b] The role of the Mahdi--or rather of the "Imam of the Time"<sup>68</sup>--with regard to "**the sensible forms of divine sustenance**" concerns his unique, divinely inspired ability (resembling that of the Prophet) to decide what material goods of this world should rightfully "belong" to each believer, since individuals can only be at best the temporary "owners" (or more properly speaking, "custodians") of those earthly goods:

Since everything in the world is divine sustenance and part of 'What God has left,'<sup>69</sup> the Imam judges with regard to (allocating) it in accordance with the judgment (hukm) God sends down to him concerning it.

In the meanwhile, Ibn 'Arabi advises, we should act "according to the divine commandment which the divinely prescribed law (shar') has conveyed to us," while abstaining from judgment in all other cases.

[7.] As for the "**knowledge of the interpenetration of things**"<sup>70</sup>..., that (reality) inwardly penetrates and informs all the practical and intellectual crafts.<sup>71</sup> Therefore if the

<sup>67</sup>An important reminder--underlying Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of the proper relations between the "guardians of the (divine) commandments" and the "guardians of the (spiritual) states" (see n. 43 above)--of the fundamental fact that mere access to the external forms of a prophet's speech and activity, no matter how perfect and exact, is not the decisive (or sufficient) factor in understanding their meaning and intentions. See the further extensive discussions of this question in the article cited at n. 3 above.

<sup>68</sup>Imam al-Waqt: i.e., the "Pole" (qutb) or "Lord of the Age," etc. For the different meanings of this term (and at least eight other common synonyms in Ibn 'Arabi's technical vocabulary), see Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 678-7=683 and Chodkiewicz, Sceau, chapter VI. It is significant that instead of referring to the "Mahdi" here, Ibn 'Arabi uses this ambiguous expression three times (and other forms of "Imam" four additional times) in the space of this relatively short section (III, 335.2-17), clearly implying that this responsibility for the just apportionment of the world's material goods is in some sense a perennial spiritual function. The potential political sensitivity of this expression in his own historical context is suggested by the fate of several prominent Andalusian and Maghrebi Sufis (see n.108 below) who were at least accused of claiming the "Imamate" in a more overtly political sense.

Ibn 'Arabi does not otherwise suggest that this sort of divine inspiration is different in kind from that discussed in the preceding and following sections, where he is clearly referring to the awliya' more generally. He thereby seems to imply that the proper, fully adequate approach to this world's material goods--at least from a comprehensive, spiritual point of view--ultimately requires the same kind of inspired guidance, even if once again that can only be practically realized by a few rare individuals.

<sup>69</sup>baqiyat Allah: a reference to the verse 11:86, "**What God has left is better for you all, if you are among the faithful....**" Much of this section stresses the extreme relativity of our judgments concerning the individual "possession" (mulk) of what is actually God's and for which we are at best only temporary stewards or custodians in this world.

<sup>70</sup>tadakhul al-umur: i.e., the interweaving of the spiritual and noetic (ma'nawi) realities and intentions that pervade all things, especially as they are manifested in the events and actions involving particular individuals. Ibn 'Arabi alludes here only briefly to this vast theme--or rather, integral

Imam knows this, he will not be bothered by doubt and uncertainty in his judgments. For this (precise inner awareness of the interpenetration of spiritual and manifest reality) is the Scale (of divine justice) in the world, both in sensible things and in the inner spiritual meanings (ma'ani). So the rational, responsible person<sup>72</sup> behaves according to that Scale in both worlds--and indeed in every matter where he has control over his actions.

But as for those who judge in accordance with the divine inspiration (wahy) that (God) has sent down, those to whom (that inspiration) has been delivered (ahl al-ilqa')<sup>73</sup> among the (prophetic) Messengers and those like them (i.e., the saints), they did not depart from (their inner awareness of) this interpenetration (of spiritual and material being). Thus God made them the receptacle (of revelation) for that part of His judgment concerning His servants which he delivered to them, (as) He said: "**The Faithful Spirit brought down** (the revelation) **upon your heart**" (Kor. 26:193-194), and "**He sends down the angels with the Spirit from His Command upon whomever He wishes among His servants**" (Kor. 16:2).

Therefore every judgment (or command: hukm) concerning the world that is made manifest through a (divine) Messenger is the outcome of a "spiritual marriage";<sup>74</sup> this (essential spiritual inspiration underlying the judgment) is not in the textual indications

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perspective on the nature of all reality--that can be illustrated in virtually every area of his thought: see, e.g., the references to nikah ma'nawi in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 1069-1071.

Although his discussions of this notion elsewhere often concern its more abstract metaphysical dimensions (e.g., the various noetic and spiritual principles involved in his schemas of cosmology and cosmogony), here it is focused on the concrete, practical recognition of those spiritual realities underlying the specific "judgments" rendered by the Mahdi (and the awliya' who possess the same inspired insight), a recognition made possible by their infallible "penetrating vision" (the spiritual quality discussed at II-1 above). This point was already clearly illustrated in Ibn 'Arabi's earlier discussion of the difficulties of realizing and applying the divine norms while simultaneously taking into account their mundane and ultimate spiritual dimensions (section II-5 above).

<sup>71</sup>al-sana'i' al-'amaliya wa-l-'ilmiya: this formula--which appears to have been adopted (directly or indirectly) from the Rasa'il of the Ikhwan al-Safa'--apparently includes all human creative activities in this world, including the all-encompassing role of the divinely inspired ruler, symbolized here by the Mahdi/Imam.

<sup>72</sup>al-'aqil: i.e., the person whose reason and knowledge restrain the demands of his passions, as explained at nn. 46 and 53 above.

<sup>73</sup>See Ibn 'Arabi's discussion of the various modalities of this delivery or "projection" (ilqa') of the divine Speech "addressed" to the prophets and saints in sections II-2 and 3 (nn. 33-41) above.

<sup>74</sup>nikah ma'nawi: i.e., of the divine Source and its human receptacle, and more broadly, of all the spiritual, noetic realities and principles manifested in each "material" event: see the references to this vast theme in n. 70.



and not in those who judge on the basis of analogy (qiyas).<sup>75</sup> Hence it is incumbent on the Imam that he know what is (learned) through being sent down by God (through divine inspiration) and what is (ordinarily supposed) through analogy. However the Mahdi does not know this--I mean the knowledge acquired by analogy--in order to pass judgment according to it, but only so that he can avoid it! For the Mahdi only judges according to what the angel delivers to him from what is with God (Kor. 2:89; etc.), (the inspiration) God has sent him in order to guide him rightly.

So that is the true Muhammadan Shar'<sup>76</sup>--the one such that Muhammad, if he were alive (on earth) and that particular case were presented to him, would pass judgment on it in exactly the same way as this Imam. For God will teach him (by inspiration) that this is the Muhammadan Shar' and will therefore forbid him (to follow judgments arrived at by) analogical reasoning, despite the existence of the textual indications<sup>77</sup> God has bestowed on him. And this is why God's Messenger said, in describing the Mahdi, that "He follows in the trace of my footsteps, and he makes no mistake." Through this he informed us that (the Mahdi) is a follower (of the Prophet), not one who is followed (i.e., not a Messenger

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<sup>75</sup>"textual indications" = nusus, a term which evidently refers in this context to the outward, literal form of the scriptures and hadith collections--or rather to the specific divine "stipulations" which they are usually understood to contain. Together, such materials form the ostensible basis for the system of analogies or inferences--in fact based on certain influential jurists' reasoned suppositions concerning the presumed purposes underlying the various indications in those records--that constitute the various schools of Islamic law (fiqh). The roots of Ibn 'Arabi's fundamental criticism of the common practice of qiyas (legal inference based on "analogy" or "analogical reasoning")--as opposed to the infallible divine inspiration characterizing the Mahdi and saints having reached this spiritual station--are detailed in section II-9 (nn. 96-105) below.

The key issues of the conditions for a true understanding of the original intentions and meaning of hadith--which are the sine qua non of any truly "living" transmission of knowledge--raised in the rest of this section and in II-9 below are beautifully summarized in the conclusion of chapter 29 (I, 198; O.Y. ed. III, 240-242), concerning the true "Ahl al-Bayt." (See also the full-scale study of Ibn 'Arabi's own understanding of these questions in the article cited at n. 3 above.)

<sup>76</sup>al-shar' al-haqiqi al-muhammadi: the key term shar'--which we have generally left in transliterated form in the following pages--is ordinarily understood simply as the religious "Law" (the Sharia) or what was "prescribed" by the Prophet (and ultimately by God) as guidance for human action. Here Ibn 'Arabi, as is often his practice, alludes to the original meaning of that Arabic root as the "opening" or establishment of the authentic "path to water" (i.e., the water of Life)--a sense which does not necessarily contradict the popular usage, but does set it in a larger, potentially transforming perspective. (See also n. 106 below, and especially the references at notes 2 and 3 above on the related term "Shari'a.")

<sup>77</sup>al-nusus, as at n. 75 above; Ibn 'Arabi again (as at n. 45 above) stresses that he is not questioning the validity and necessity of the traditionally transmitted forms of earlier revelation as such, but rather the spirit and methods that are frequently applied (by no means only in "legal" situations) to rediscover and realize their more profound truth and actual perennial intentions.

with a new revealed Law), and that he is (divinely) protected from error (ma'sum)<sup>78</sup>-- since the only (possible) meaning of someone's being protected from error is that they do not make mistakes. Thus if the Messenger (i.e., Muhammad) pronounced a judgment (in some matter), no mistake is ascribed to him, since "**he does not speak from passion, but it is only an inspiration (wahy) inspired in him**" (Kor. 53:3-4); and likewise analogical reasoning is not permissible in a place where the Messenger is to be found.

Now the Prophet does exist and is to be found (here and now) with the People of Unveiling, and therefore they only take their (inspired understanding of the appropriate divine) judgment from him. This is the reason why the truthful and sincere faqir<sup>79</sup> doesn't depend on any (legal) school: he is with the Messenger (i.e., Muhammad) alone, whom he directly witnesses, just as the Messenger is with the divine inspiration (wahy) that is sent down to him. Thus the notification of the (appropriate divine) judgment concerning the particular events and cases is sent down from God to the hearts of the truthful and sincere true knowers, (informing them) that this is the judgment of the Shar' that was sent with the Messenger of God.

But those adhering to knowledge of the external forms (of religious tradition)<sup>80</sup> do not have this (spiritual) rank, because of their having devoted themselves to their love for (prominent social) position, the domination of others, (furthering) their precedence over

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<sup>78</sup>Ibn 'Arabi's conception of 'isma, divinely assured "immunity from error" (in one's spiritual judgment and perception), as an essential concomitant of the divine inspiration of the saints as well as of the prophetic Messengers was already developed in section II-1 above (see references at n. 29). The Mahdi's inspired condition of 'isma--in contrast with the very fallible ra'y and qiyas of the ordinary jurists--is again repeatedly emphasized in section II-9 below.

<sup>79</sup>al-faqir al-sadiq: although the term faqir (literally, one who is "poor" in relation to God, i.e., the perfect "servant") has often been a vague (and sometimes pejorative) popular synonym for "Sufi" in the broadest sense, here it is used quite specifically to indicate the rare spiritual state of pure openness and receptivity allowing the saint who is inwardly "sincere" to receive the inspiration transmitted originally to the prophet-Messenger he faithfully "follows" (see the essential references at n. 27 above). A clearer sense of the deep-rooted psychic obstacles to this state may be gathered from Ibn 'Arabi's enumeration of the inner motives of those "learned in the outward forms (of religion)" in the following paragraph.

For the "Helpers" (and saints') related condition of sidq--"truth-telling" in the rare spiritual sense of absolute inner "sincerity" regarding one's inner relation to God--and its "divinely supported" consequences (nasr), see the opening section at nn. 11-13 above.

<sup>80</sup>ashab 'ilm al-rusum: see the further discussions of these ulama al-rusum in sections II-3, II-4 (n. 43) and II-9 below.

God's servants<sup>81</sup> and (insuring that) the common people need them. Hence they do not prosper (Kor. 16:116) with regard to their souls,<sup>82</sup> nor shall one prosper through (following) them. This is the (inner) condition of the jurists (fuqaha') of (our) time, those who desire to be appointed to posts as judges, notaries, inspectors or professors.

As for those of them who cunningly hide themselves in (the guise of) Religion (al-din)--those who hunch their shoulders and look at people furtively, with a pretense of humility; who move their lips as though in dhikr,<sup>83</sup> so that the person looking at them will know they are performing dhikr; who speak obscurely and in an affected manner--they are dominated by the weaknesses of the carnal soul and "their hearts are the hearts of wolves," (so that) God does not [speak to them nor] look at them (Kor. 3:77-78).<sup>84</sup> This

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<sup>81</sup>The term could refer simply to Muslims in general, but more commonly in Ibn 'Arabi and other Sufi writers (following indications in the Koran and hadith) it refers quite specifically to the accomplished awliya' and prophets. The impassioned tone of this passage--combined with what we know of the martyrdom or persecution of many prominent Andalusian and Maghrebi Sufis of the time (Ibn Qasi, Ibn Barrajan and Ibn al-'Arif)--strongly suggest that the latter sense is indeed intended here. The cases of these famous saints who were intimately involved with certain political events of their time (and some of whom may well have claimed the role of "Imam" in a more openly political sense), also indicate that Ibn 'Arabi's discussions of divine governance in this chapter are probably not purely academic: see the historical references concerning the three above-mentioned Andalusian Sufis in the corresponding articles (by A. Faure) in the EI<sup>2</sup>, vol. III.

<sup>82</sup>Although they may well outwardly succeed, Ibn 'Arabi implies, with regard to the things they prize in this world. The full Koranic verses alluded to in this sentence are especially important in understanding the critique of the fuqaha' that follows: "**And do not say, regarding what your tongues describe (as divinely forbidden or commanded) the lie (that) 'This is licit, and that is illicit', so that you make up lies against God. Surely those who make up lies against God do not prosper**" (the last phrase is repeated at verse 10:69). Ibn 'Arabi may also be alluding to verses 6:20-21, with their implicit contrast of the two approaches in question here: "**Those to whom we have brought the Book recognize it as they recognize their own sons, (but) those who have lost their souls do not have faith. And who does more wrong than than whoever makes up a lie about God and calls His Signs a lie? Surely those who do do wrong shall not prosper.**" Again, see the full discussion of these critiques in the article cited at n. 3 above.

<sup>83</sup>"Recollection" or remembrance (of God): the continuous invocation (whether silent or virtually inaudible) of certain prayer formulae or divine Names throughout the day's activities, often with the accompaniment of the tasbih (prayer beads), a practice frequently--though by no means exclusively--associated with adherence to a particular Sufi order; see the allusions in n. 59 above. Ibn 'Arabi's criticism of this group's hypocritical pretense of Sufism already foreshadows the following Koranic allusion (to verses 3:77-78, in n. 84).

<sup>84</sup>Again the full Koranic verse is directly applicable to this psycho-spiritual "type" in a sense which clearly brings out Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of the immediate "contemporary" dimensions of the "Last Day": "**Surely those who buy a thing of little value with God's covenant and their faith, those people have no share in the next world, and God does not speak to them nor does He look at them on the Day of the Rising, and He does not purify them** [or: 'cause them to increase'], **and theirs is an**

is the condition of those among them who make a show of religion--not those who are the companions of Satan (cf. Kor. 4:38; 43:36). These (outwardly pious hypocrites) "dressed up for the people in the skins of gentle sheep":<sup>85</sup> (they are) brothers outwardly and enemies inwardly and secretly. But God will examine them and take them by their forelocks (cf. Kor. 55:41; 96:15-16) to that (level of Hell) which contains their happiness.<sup>86</sup>

Thus when the Mahdi comes forth (to establish justice in the world) he has no open enemy (Kor. 2:188; etc.) except for the jurists in particular. For then they will no longer have any power of domination and will not be distinguished from the mass of common people, and they will only keep a slight knowledge of (the divine) commandment, since the differences concerning the commandments will be eliminated in this world because of the existence of this Imam.

However, if the Mahdi did not have the sword (of worldly authority) in his hand, then the jurists would all deliver legal opinions (demanding) that he be killed. But instead (as stated in the hadith) "God will bring him forth with the sword and noble character," and they will be greedy (for his support) and fearful, so that they will (outwardly) accept his judgment without having any faith in it; indeed they will grudgingly conceal their disagreement, just as do (the two legal schools of) the Hanafites and Shafites concerning those matters where they disagree. For in fact it has been reported to us that the followers of these two schools in the lands of the non-Arabs (i.e., Iran and Transoxiana) are

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**excruciating torment. And there is a group of them who twist the Book with their tongues, so that you might consider that (what they say) is from the Book, although it is not from the Book. And they say that (what they say) is from God, although it is not from God--and they say lies against God while they know (what they are doing).**" See the following note for the full hadith to which Ibn 'Arabi alludes at the beginning of this sentence.

<sup>85</sup>The phrases in quotes here and in the sentence preceding the previous note are taken from the following saying of the Prophet recorded by Tirmidhi (from Abu Hurayra) and selected by Ibn 'Arabi in his personal collection of hadith qudsi, the Mishkat al-Anwar (no. 35; pp. 64-65 in the translation by M. Valsan): "At the end of time men will appear who will dupe the world with (the pretense of) religion: they will dress up for the people in the skins of gentle sheep and their tongues will be sweeter than honey, but their hearts are the hearts of wolves. God will say: 'Are they completely deluded about me, or do they openly dare (to affront) me?! I swear by Myself that I shall surely send those men a trial (or torment: fitna) that will leave even the calmest of them completely dismayed.'"

<sup>86</sup>The last phrase, evoking the Koranic references to the fate of the "wrongdoers" (mujrimun), is an allusion to Ibn 'Arabi's assumption that the people of Gehenna nonetheless do take a certain pleasure in precisely those things which--in distracting them from God--ultimately help constitute their punishment; see, for example, the famous verses at the end of the chapter on Ismail in the Fusus al-Hikam (I, 94; Bezels, pp. 109-110), and the longer discussions in the eschatological section of this anthology.

constantly fighting one another and that a great many people of both groups have died--that (they go to such extremes that) they even break the fast during the month of Ramadan in order to be stronger for their battles.<sup>87</sup>

So people like this, if the Imam-Mahdi did not conquer with the sword, would not pay any attention to him and would not obey him (even) in their outward actions, just as they do not obey him in their hearts. In fact what they (really) believe about him if he makes a judgment involving them that is contrary to their school is that he has gone astray with regard to that judgment, because they believe that the period of the people of ijtihad<sup>88</sup> has ended (long ago), that there remains no mujtahid in the world and that after the death of their (founding) imams God has not brought anyone into existence in the world with the rank of ijtihad.

And as for the person who claims to be divinely informed about the judgments prescribed by the Shar', for (these jurists) such a person is a madman whose imagination has gone wild, and they would pay no attention to him. But if such a person happens to possess wealth and worldly power (sultan), then they will submit to him outwardly because of their coveting his wealth and their fear of his power, although inwardly they have no faith in him at all.

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<sup>87</sup>The vast extent of these bloody internecine conflicts between these and other legal and theological schools serving as rallying points for a wide variety of ethnic and social loyalties--and fueling civil wars, riots and repeated massacres which over more than a century effectively destroyed, even before the Mongol conquests, important parts of the major Persian cities of Nishapur, Rayy and Isfahan--are surveyed in W. Madelung's (too modestly titled) article "The Spread of Maturidism and the Turks," pp. 109-169 in his Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam (London, 1985); Madelung also traces the spread of these violent "legal" conflicts to the Ayyubid realms where Ibn 'Arabi spent much of the latter part of his life. The particularly dramatic role of this Hanafi-Shafi'i conflict (frequently cited by al-Ghazali) in the century-long self-destruction of Nishapur--strikingly similar to that of modern-day Beirut--is detailed in R. Bulliet's The Patricians of Nishapur, (Cambridge, 1972).

<sup>88</sup>I.e., the "imams" or founders of their particular legal schools (Shafi'i, Malik, etc.), as already at n. 9 above. In the long chapter 69 of the Futuhat on ritual prayer (I, 386-546), Ibn 'Arabi, stressing the diversity of the evidence of hadith on particular details of religious practice, repeatedly criticizes the fuqaha' of his day for hypocritically and arrogantly denying ijtihad while simultaneously insisting that everyone else follow only their own legal school. See, e.g., his ironic remark at I, 494: "So the first (person) to deny them on the Day of Resurrection will be their (own) Imam! For Ibn 'Arabi, in contrast (at I, 392), the perennial obligation of ijtihad for all believers (with the necessary qualifications to interpret the Koran and hadith) follows from the divine injunction: "And strive (jahidu) for God with the striving due to Him. He picked you out and did not place any constriction (haraj) upon you in Religion...." (Kor. 22:73).

See especially the more complete explanation of these questions and Ibn 'Arabi's distinctive understanding of these religio-legal problems in our article cited at n. 3 above.

[8.] Now as for "**striving to one's utmost and going to any length to satisfy the needs of mankind**," that is especially incumbent upon the Imam in particular, even more than (it is) for the rest of the people. For God only gave him precedence over His (other) creatures and appointed him as their Imam so that he could strive to achieve what is beneficial for them. This striving and what results from it are both prodigious...

In the intervening passage (III, 336.16-25) Ibn 'Arabi illustrates the essential theme of this section--that it is above all by striving for the welfare of others, in the midst of the responsibilities of "ordinary" life, and not in seeking to obtain what one imagines to be special powers or experiences for oneself, that the individual is most likely to reach the highest spiritual stages<sup>89</sup>--with the Koranic account (28:29 ff.) of Moses' having unintentionally discovered God, without consciously looking for Him, precisely in the theophanic form of the burning bush he was seeking in order to warm his family. For Ibn 'Arabi, who repeatedly insists on the fact that Moses was only seeking to fulfill the needs of his family, "this verse constitutes an admonition from God (tanbih min al-Haqq) concerning the value of this (spiritual virtue) for God."<sup>90</sup>

Now the activities of all of the just Imams are only for the sake of others, not for their own sake. Hence if you see a ruler busying himself with something other than his subjects and their needs, then you should know that his (high) rank has cut him off from this activity (of true leadership), so that there is no (real) difference between him and the mass of common people (al-'amma)....<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>I.e., the state of "pure servanthood" ('ubudiya) characterizing Ibn 'Arabi's typical conception of spiritual superiority of the afraad (also termed al-malamiya, the "people of blame," etc.)--whose spiritual rank is often "invisible" to the outside world and whose lives frequently exhibit this same characteristic of extraordinary devotion to their "ordinary" responsibilities--as embodying the very summit of the spiritual path. The repeated references in this chapter to Khadir (one of the archetypal representatives of the afraad, for Ibn 'Arabi) point in the same direction. See the references from other chapters of the Futuhāt to this "ultimate stage of walaya," which is one of the recurrent themes of his religious thought, in Chodkiewicz, Sceau, ch. VII (pp. 133-143).

<sup>90</sup>Ibn 'Arabi emphasizes the broader metaphysical significance of this story, that God becomes manifest (whether or not we are aware of it) in the form of man's desire, virtually every time he deals with the figure of Moses: see, e.g., the end of the chapter on Moses (no. 25) in the Fusus al-Hikam (= Affifi ed., I, 212-213), the beginning of the concluding chapter on Muhammad, and especially Ibn 'Arabi's own encounter with Moses during his autobiographical spiritual Ascension in chapter 367 of the Futuhāt (III, 439-440), section IV-G of our translation and commentary here.

<sup>91</sup>Ibn 'Arabi illustrates this point (concerning the "external Imams," those with a visible, public role in this world) with a brief story about the extreme conscientiousness of the 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz in regard to his public responsibilities.

And Khadir<sup>92</sup>...was also like this. He was in an army, and the commander of the army sent him to explore for water for them, since they were in need of water. That was how he fell into the Fountain of Life and drank from it, so that he has remained living up until now, for he was not aware (before setting out on his search) of that Life through which God distinguishes the person who drinks of that Water...,<sup>93</sup> since this Fountain of Life (is) Water through which God distinguishes with (spiritual) Life the person who drinks that Water. Then he returned to his companions and told them about the water, and all the people rushed off toward that place in order to drink from it. But God turned their sight away from it so that they were not capable of (attaining) it. And this is what resulted for him from his striving for the sake of others.

...Thus no one knows what is their rank<sup>94</sup> with God, because absolutely all of their actions are for the sake of God, not for their own sake, since they prefer God to what their (bodily and psychic) nature demands.

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<sup>92</sup>Here Ibn 'Arabi mentions Khadir's "original," genealogical name (going back to Noah), as given by Islamic tradition: see the article "al-Khadir" by Wensinck, summarizing the historical sources, in EI2, vol. IV. The story of Khadir's discovery of the fountain of Life is apparently taken from the popular literature of the "Tales of the Prophets" (qisas al-anbiya'), rather than from the hadith.

For the broader role of Khadir in Ibn 'Arabi's thought (building on an extensive pre-existing body of Sufi tradition), see his description of his personal encounters with Khadir on three separate occasions in chapter 25 (I, 186-188; O.Y. ed. III, pp. 180-185); the numerous references in Chodkiewicz, Sceau, Index s.v.; and the chapter focusing more specifically on Khadir's initiatic function in H. Corbin, L'imagination creatrice..., pp. 43-54.

<sup>93</sup>Here Ibn 'Arabi interrupts this story with a long aside (III, 336.32-337.5) describing his first personal encounter with Khadir, in the person of a stranger (during his youth in Seville) "who taught me to surrender to the spiritual masters and not to dispute with them (even when they are wrong)"; it was Ibn 'Arabi's master at the time (one Abu al-'Abbas al-'Uraybi) who subsequently identified that mysterious individual as being Khadir. This anecdote itself (summarized in H. Corbin, L'imagination creatrice..., p. 51) is translated in the biographical study at the beginning of Asin Palacios' L'Islam christianise (French translation, Paris, 1983), p.36. Another longer version of the same story--along with descriptions of Ibn 'Arabi's subsequent meetings with Khadir--is given in chapter 25 (I, 186-188; O.Y. ed. III, pp. 180-182), where it is also implied that the subject of this dispute was the identity or name of the Mahdi (and that Khadir confirmed the validity of Ibn 'Arabi's own vision in that regard).

For "water" as one of Ibn 'Arabi's primary symbols--based on passages in the Koran and several key hadith--for the "throne of divine Life" flowing through all things, see chapter 317 (III, 65-66) and further extensive references in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 1071-1077.

<sup>94</sup>It is not entirely clear whether the pronoun here refers to the "Imams" discussed earlier in the chapter; to "those who have faith in God and the Last Day" (from the immediately preceding Koranic verse [58:22] not translated here); or--what is most probable, and could include the previous two categories--to the accomplished saints (awliya') in general. This description again seems to allude to Ibn 'Arabi's conception of the afraad or malamiya, the largely unrecognized "true servants of God" who represent the highest stage of sainthood (see references at note 89 above).

[9.] As for "possessing the knowledge of the Unseen ('ilm al-ghayb) that he requires for (rightly governing) this engendered world in particular during a particular period of time," this is the ninth matter which the Imam requires for his leadership, and there are no (others) besides these.

This is because God informed (us) concerning Himself that "**every Day He is in an affair**" (Kor. 55:29), and that "affair"<sup>95</sup> is whatever the state of the world is that day.

Now obviously when that "affair" becomes manifest in (external) existence (everyone) recognizes that it is known by whoever witnesses it. But this Imam, because of this matter (i.e., his inspired foreknowledge of events), is well-informed by God (al-Haqq) concerning those affairs which He wishes to bring into temporal being before they actually occur in (external) existence. For he is informed about that affair on the "day" before it occurs. So if that affair contains something beneficial for his subjects he thanks God and remains silent about it. But if it contains a punishment (in the form of) the sending down of some widespread affliction or one aimed at certain specific persons, then he implores God on their behalf, intercedes (with Him) and begs (Him). So God, in His Mercy and Bounty, averts that affliction from them (before it actually happens) and answers (the Mahdi's) prayer and petition.<sup>96</sup>

This is why God (first of all) informs him about (each event) before it occurs to his fellows in actual existence. Then after that God informs him, with regard to those "affairs," about the (particular) events that will occur to (specific) individuals and specifies for him those individuals with all their outward particularities, so that if he should see those individuals (in the material world) he would not doubt that they were exactly the ones he saw (in this inspired vision). And finally God informs him about the divinely-prescribed judgment appropriate for that event, the (same standard of) judgment which God prescribed for His Prophet Muhammad to apply in judging that event.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>sha'n suggests an activity or occupation as well as a general state or condition. For Ibn 'Arabi, this verse is usually taken in reference to the universal process of "theophany" (tajalliyat) through which the world (i.e., the "other-than-God") is continuously re-created and made manifest: see the references in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 639-643 ("al-sha'n al-'ilahi").

<sup>96</sup>See already section II-1 (at notes 23-29) above on the special efficacy of the Mahdi's prayers, corresponding to his quasi-prophetic function.

<sup>97</sup>nazila, usually translated here as "event," could equally be translated, in this legal context, as "case"--i.e., in the broad sense of a unique "event" subject to a particular judgment, not necessarily as a generalizable legal type or precedent (= qadiya, also translated as "case" below).



Hence he only judges according to that (divinely inspired) judgment, so that (in the words of the hadith) "he never makes a mistake."

Thus if God does not show (the Mahdi) the judgment regarding certain events and he does not experience any inner unveiling (of that divine judgment), then God's aim was to include those events (or "cases") in the judgment of what is (religiously) permissible,<sup>98</sup> so that he knows from the absence of any (divine) specification (of a particular judgment) that this is the judgment of the divinely prescribed Law (shar') concerning that event. Thus he is divinely protected (ma'sum) from personal opinion (ra'y) and analogy (qiyas) in Religion.

For (the use of) analogy (to extend the Law beyond God's explicit commandments) by whoever is not a prophet amounts to passing judgment on God concerning the Religion of God (Kor. 3:83; etc.)<sup>99</sup> on the basis of something that person does not (really) know. This

As in earlier sections, hukm is usually translated here as "judgment" (and its verbal forms accordingly), although the actual meaning tends to vary in emphasis, according to the context, between the following: (a) the timeless divine "commandment" or "standard"; (b) the particular inner aspect of the "case" or circumstance to which that standard actually applies; (c) the human religio-legal "statute," "rule" or precept (supposedly corresponding to the first two meanings); (d) the actual act of applying these standards to particular circumstances (whether or not in an explicitly legal context); and (e) the resulting "verdict" or conclusion. In other, earlier contexts (corresponding partially to meanings "d" or "e" here), hukm has instead been translated as "influence."

<sup>98</sup>mubah: i.e., what is "permitted" in the sense of what is neither explicitly illicit (haram) nor positively prescribed by the divine Law (shar'/shari'a: see notes 2-3, 76 and 106). The usual translation of this term as "indifferent," while appropriate for its traditional legal usage as a category in Islamic law, fails to convey the positive and much wider "ontological" perception Ibn 'Arabi is pointing to here. Historically speaking--and this is the ground of Ibn 'Arabi's vehement protests in this chapter (see notes 8-9, 80-87 and the rest of this section) and in many other places--virtually all the schools of Islamic law (both Sunni and Shiite) used some schema of "analogies" (in the sense described here) to set up complex systems of graded categories of "preference" or "prohibition" (or "purity" and "impurity") extending, at least in theory, to virtually every imaginable human action. The extremely limited meaning of "mubah" in that legalistic context--where it at best implies at best a "neutral" value and implicitly a rather dubious religious status in relation to the extensive "positive" categories--is therefore substantially different from what Ibn 'Arabi actually intends by that term here. For his own distinctively positive and more comprehensive usage, see notes 99-102 below and especially the translations at the beginning of section III below, as well as the more complete discussion and references in our article cited at n. 3 above.

<sup>99</sup>Din-Allah: this is only one of several related Koranic expressions--e.g., al-Din and al-Din al-Khalis (Kor. 39:3), "the Pure Religion," both used in a similar sense in the opening sentences of this chapter (n. 8 above)--referring to the eternal, divine Reality that is the Source of the prophets' message, in contrast to the many religions of men. In a certain sense, all of Ibn 'Arabi's works constitute a sort of extended commentary on this distinction: see the extensive references and careful analysis of these key terms in Hakim, Mu'jam, pp. 475-483, and especially Ibn 'Arabi's moving description of his own decisive realization of this fundamental insight in the following chapter 367 (III, 350; section IV-I of our

is because analogy (involves) extending a (hypothetical) "reason" (underlying a particular judgment to all other "analogous" cases).<sup>100</sup> But what makes you know?--perhaps (Kor. 80:3)<sup>101</sup> God does not want to extend that reason; for if He had wanted to do that He would have clearly stated it through the voice of His Messenger and would have ordered this extension, if indeed the (underlying) "reason" were among what was specifically ordained by the divinely prescribed Law (Shar') in a particular (legal) case. So what do you suppose (is the validity) of the "reason" that the jurist extracts (from an action or saying of the Prophet) all by himself and through his own reasoning, without its having been mention by the prescribed Law in any specific textual stipulation concerning that? (Or about the jurist who) then, having deduced this "reason," extends it generally (to what he arbitrarily assumes to be the "analogous" cases)? Indeed this is one arbitrary judgment

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translation here) and in his K. al-Isra' (see the translation and commentary in our article cited at n. 98 above.).

<sup>100</sup>The technical terms here are taken from the traditional discipline of usul al-fiqh ("principles of jurisprudence": see the articles "usul" in SEI and "fiqh" in EI2) which, from the third century (A.H) onward, gradually elaborated the theoretical rationales underlying the practice of the earlier Islamic jurists (fuqaha'). In the practice of qiyas--upon which most of the influential historical forms of Islamic law were largely dependent--the hypothetical "reason" ('illa) seen as underlying a particular commandment or decision (hukm) derived from the Koran or more commonly from the many reported actions and sayings of the Prophet was "extracted" or "deduced" from that particular precedent and then "extended" to a wider range of supposedly analogous cases.

Ibn 'Arabi's personal criticisms of qiyas, here and elsewhere, specifically presuppose the continued presence of the Prophet (i.e., of His spiritual Reality) as realized among the accomplished Sufis (the ahl al-kashf or "People of Unveiling"), as he explained in section II-7 above (= III, 335). His conception of the proper modalities and conditions of a "living" and truly authoritative understanding and transmission of hadith (by the saints), based on the same types of spiritual insight discussed here with regard to the Mahdi, is more fully summarized in chapter 29 (O.Y. III, 240-241), on the "Ahl al-Bayt" and Salman. As stressed by M. Chodkiewicz, "Ibn 'Arabi, la lettre et la loi," pp. 29-30 (in Actes du colloque 'Mystique, culture et societe', ed. M. Meslin, Paris, 1983), Ibn 'Arabi--while rejecting qiyas (and taqlid, for reasons detailed at II, 165) for himself--does not necessarily reject the usage of qiyas by those who do not fulfill these (admittedly rather rare) conditions; thus his position should not be confused with the universal (if problematic) condemnation of qiyas typical of the Zahiri legal school. See the more complete discussion of these problems in our article cited at n. 3 above.

<sup>101</sup>The Koranic passage (Kor. 80:1-10) alluded to here is a particularly striking illustration of Ibn 'Arabi's argument that man--at least in his ordinary, "uninspired" state--should not pretend to decipher the essential "reasons" underlying God's specifically stated commands and prohibitions, much less attempt to extend those principles beyond their explicitly prescribed areas of application. In these verses the Prophet is reproached for having distractedly turned away a poor blind man who came asking about faith while he was talking with an important notable--i.e., for judging on the basis of outward appearances--and reminded that "perhaps (the blind man) will grow in purity or come to remember (God)...."

on top of another judgment concerning a "divine law" (shar') of which God is unaware<sup>102</sup> (Kor. 52:21)!

So this is what prevents the Mahdi from speaking on the basis of (this sort of factitious) analogy<sup>103</sup> concerning the Religion of God--all the more so because he also knows that the intention of the Prophet was to lighten the burden of (religious) obligation (taklif) on this community.<sup>104</sup> That was why the Prophet used to say "Leave me alone (i.e., without requesting any further religious precepts) so long as I leave you alone,"<sup>105</sup> and why he used to be dislike being questioned about religion, out of fear of (unnecessarily) increasing the (divine) commandments (ahkam).

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<sup>102</sup>The full verse is again assumed in this powerful allusion: "Or do they they have partners who prescribe as law for them concerning Religion that about which God is unaware [or 'does not permit']?" This paragraph therefore explains in detail the basic principles underlying Ibn 'Arabi's remarks (in section II-7 and at the very beginning of this chapter) concerning the hatred of the fuqaha' for the Mahdi, as well as his impassioned assertions (at notes 82-87 and 97 above) that in fact even the most well-meaning of them unconsciously "make up lies about God."

<sup>103</sup>I.e., qiyas, in the legalistic sense--and above all with reference to its intrinsic suppositions about the very nature of religion--described in the preceding paragraphs. For the Mahdi's refusal to act on the basis of both qiyas and even explicit scriptural stipulations (nass), where he has not been directly inspired by God, see also section II-7 (at notes 75-77) above.

<sup>104</sup>Hence the more profound justification of Ibn 'Arabi's earlier insistence (at n. 95 above) that all that is not most explicitly commanded or forbidden is "permitted" (mubah), in an unrestricted, essentially positive sense very different from its usage in the legal categories of the fuqaha'. This is brought out more powerfully in the further allusions at the end of this chapter (= translations at the beginning of section III, notes 109-117) to the saints' theophanic perception of the religiously unrestricted--indeed intrinsically "paradisiac" and "marvelous"--nature of everything in the world not bound by the rare explicit divine indications to the contrary. See the many further references to this key dimension of Ibn 'Arabi's religious thought in our article cited at n. 3 above.

<sup>105</sup>This hadith is mentioned by both Bukhari (I'tisam, 2) and Muslim (Hajj, 411). As Ibn 'Arabi explains in his brief chapter 262 "On the Inner Knowledge of the Sharia" (II, 561-562), the Sharia includes both "the precepts (ahkam) God prescribed of His own accord (ibtida'an)" and "what was prescribed at the request of the community," so that "if they had not requested it, then that (precept or commandment) would not have been sent down." The Prophet's saying was therefore intended to avoid the unnecessary proliferation of this latter category of religious prescriptions and the resulting burden of obligation on His community. Elsewhere (II, 162-166; ch. 88 "On the Inner Knowledge of the Secrets of the Principles of the Precepts of the Shar'"), Ibn 'Arabi points out the parallel between this hadith and the following Koranic injunction: "O those who have faith, do not ask about things which, if they were revealed to you, would harm you. And if you ask about them when the Qur'an is being sent down, they will be revealed to you.... For a people before you did ask (such) things, and after that they began to disbelieve in them." (Kor. 5:101-102). In the same section (II, 165) he explains in detail his conviction "that the Lawgiver only wanted to reduce (the burden of religious prescriptions) of this Community." (See also following note.)

Therefore in everything about which nothing is said to him (by God) and concerning which he is not informed (by God) about a specific, definite judgment, he establishes the (divine) judgment concerning it, in natural consequence, (to be) the primordial judgment.<sup>106</sup> And every (judgment) of which God informs him through inner unveiling and (an inspired) "notification" (ta'rif) is the judgment of the (eternal) Muhammadan Shar'<sup>107</sup> concerning that matter.

...Therefore the Mahdi is a mercy, just as God's Messenger was a mercy, (as) God said: **"And We only sent you as a mercy to the worlds"** (Kor. 21:107).

...Now these nine things are not combined all together for any Imam among the leaders of Religion and the viceregents of God and His Prophet until the Day of the Rising, except for this Rightly-guided Imam (al-Imam al-Mahdi)....<sup>108</sup>

### [III. THE FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE TYPIFYING THIS SPIRITUAL STAGE]<sup>109</sup>

Each of the chapters concerning the spiritual "stages" (fasl al-manazil, ch. 270-383) concludes with a long list of the forms of spiritual knowledge or awareness "belonging" to that stage, usually described in only a few cryptic expressions. Although in most cases the exact inner connection between those descriptions and the rest of the chapter is not readily apparent (at

<sup>106</sup>hukm al-asl: In chapter 88 (II, 165; see preceding note), Ibn 'Arabi clearly states that this primordial state of affairs is "that there is no taklif (i.e., divinely imposed religious obligation) and that God created for us the totality of everything on earth...." In other words, as far as the Sharia is concerned, everything God has not expressly forbidden or made obligatory is implicitly permitted (mubah) for man's delight in His creation--as Ibn 'Arabi had already indicated at notes 97 and 103 above.

The grammatical subject of these sentences could also be the Prophet, but appears more likely to be the Mahdi, judging from the context of the following sentences (which are not all translated here).

<sup>107</sup>See the longer discussion of this eternal reality underlying the actions and prescriptions of each of the prophets (anbiya', a category which for Ibn 'Arabi also includes the accomplished saints, the awliya') and lawgiving messengers at n. 76 and in the opening description of the Mahdi (at n. 8) above. The few phrases omitted here (337.28-30) simply reiterate what was said at the beginning of this section concerning the Mahdi's inspired foreknowledge of what will happen to his subjects.

<sup>108</sup>Ibn 'Arabi does not even mention the Mahdi's "Helpers" here, or how this statement is to be reconciled with his earlier remarks (see notes 1 and 15) concerning their essential collective role in providing the Mahdi's "right guidance" with regard to these matters. For some of the possible reasons for this omission, see our study of "Ibn 'Arabi's 'Esotericism'..." cited at n. 3 above.

The few untranslated lines of this concluding section (337.31-338.2) stress points already mentioned repeatedly in this chapter: the inner identity of the Mahdi with the spirit of Muhammad, from whom he "inherits" his spiritual knowledge through divine inspiration, and his special status as a "perfect follower" of Muhammad, likewise divinely protected from error (ma'sum) in all his judgments.

<sup>109</sup>III, 338.3-340.12. The complete list here includes some fifty-four kinds of spiritual knowledge, and the descriptions translated in this section make up items 8-10, 23 and 24 in that enumeration.

least to the uninitiated), a few of the longer descriptions in this chapter clearly do illuminate some of the preceding discussions. And quite apart from those internal connections, the immediacy of the first three descriptions in particular--whose poignant contrast between our ordinary ways of perceiving the world and the touchstone of certain rarer moments of epiphany may find an echo in each reader's experience--should suggest something of the deeper practical relevance of Ibn 'Arabi's spiritual insights here:

...In this (spiritual stage) there is a knowledge which removes the burden of anguish from the soul of the person who knows it.<sup>110</sup> For when one looks at what is ordinarily the case with (men's) souls, the way that all the things happening to them cause them such anguish and distress, (it is enough) to make a person want to kill himself<sup>111</sup> because of what he sees. This knowledge is called the "knowledge of blissful repose" ('ilm al-raha), because it is the knowledge of the People of the Garden (of Paradise) in particular. So whenever God reveals this knowledge to one of the people of this world (already) in this world,<sup>112</sup> that person has received in advance the blissful repose of eternity--although the person with this quality (in this world) still continues to respect the appropriate courtesy<sup>113</sup> (towards God) concerning the commandment of what is right and the prohibition of what is wrong, according to his rank.

And in this stage is the knowledge that what God made manifest to (men's) vision in the bodies (of all things in this world) is an adornment for those bodies; (the knowledge) of why it is that some of what is manifest seems ugly to a particular person when he regards

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<sup>110</sup>"Burden of anguish" = haraj, referring here to the inner state of constraint, oppression, anxiety, distress, etc. that usually accompanies and underlies (whether consciously or not) much of our everyday psychic and outward activity. In connection with the subject of this chapter and the special divine inspiration characterizing the Mahdi (or his "Helpers"), a number of Koranic verses stress that there is "no haraj for you in Religion" (al-Din; see Kor. 22:78; etc.) or in the "Book sent down" from God (Kor. 7:2), and that this state of inner distress is a sign of those "wandering astray," while it is removed from those whom God "guides rightly" and who inwardly surrender to Him (Kor. 6:125).

<sup>111</sup>This phrase could also be translated as "to kill his nafs" (i.e., in Sufi psychology, the "carnal soul," al-nafs al-'ammara, directly responsible for this sense of oppression and anxiety), in the hope of eliminating this torment.

<sup>112</sup>See, among others, the longer discussions of this immediate experience of Paradise (by the Prophet and other saints) as a reality already present in this world in the translations from chapters 302 (III, 12-13) and 351 (III, 12-13) in the section on Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of eschatology.

<sup>113</sup>adab, the proper respect or "principles of conduct" regarding God in every aspect of one's spiritual life, whose expression, as Ibn 'Arabi indicates here, obviously varies greatly according to one's inner state or "rank." For example one of the later "kinds of knowledge" in this section (the 25th in the list, p. 339.23-25; not translated here) concerns the kind of adab the person in this (very high) station should follow with God in order to avoid "taking for granted" the gift of true faith he is enjoying.

it as ugly; and (the knowledge) of which eye it is that a person sees with when he sees the whole world as beautiful,<sup>114</sup> when he does see it, so that he responds to it spontaneously with beautiful actions.<sup>115</sup> Now this knowledge is one of the most beautiful (or "best") and most beneficial forms of knowledge about the world, and it (corresponds to) what some of the theologians say about this, that "there is no Actor but God, and all of His Acts are beautiful."<sup>116</sup> Therefore these people (i.e., those who "see things as they really are") do not consider ugly any of God's Acts except for what God (calls or makes) ugly--and that is up to Him (to decide), not to them, since if they did not consider ugly what God has called so they would be disputing with God.<sup>117</sup>

This stage also includes knowledge of what God has placed in the world as (an object for) marvel--and the "marvelous" (as men usually understand it) is only what breaks with the habitual (course of things).<sup>118</sup> But for those who comprehend things from the divine

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<sup>114</sup>An allusion to the central, recurrent theme in Ibn 'Arabi of the beatific "divine vision" of the true Knowers (urafa, muhaqqiqun, etc.) who fully experience the theophanic nature of all Being and therefore realize that they are seeing, in a sense, with "God's" eye, i.e., the "eye of the Heart." See all the translations in the eschatology section here. The next phrase in this sentence is a reminder that the regard of such individuals is not always, or even primarily, turned toward the visible world.

<sup>115</sup>Or "good" or "virtuous" actions: the Arabic root hasan (translated with forms of "beautiful" throughout this paragraph) covers much the same semantic range as the Greek kalos. (Likewise the term translated as "ugly" could also be understood as "vile" or "displeasing" in a more strictly moral sense.)

This final phrase--as so often in Ibn 'Arabi--could equally be understood with God as the subject: ". . .for He comes to meet (the true seer), by His very Essence, with beautiful Actions."

<sup>116</sup>Here, as so often, Ibn 'Arabi (following al-Ghazali), adapts for his own Sufi purposes a formula of the mutakallimun which, as he was well aware, derives from an intellectual context having little to do directly with the profound spiritual "unveiling" he is pointing to here.

<sup>117</sup>The latter phrase no doubt alludes to the fact that the verbal root translated here as "ugly" (q-b-h) appears only once in the entire Koran (at 28:42, applied to the fate of Pharaoh and his army on the Day of Resurrection). The fundamental object of Ibn 'Arabi's remarks here and in the following section--as in his earlier criticisms of those jurists who "make up lies about God" (at notes 80, 82, 95-104, etc. above)--is the way the endless (and for the most part unconscious) likes, dislikes and particular "judgments" of each individual soul tend to obscure man's primordial, innate perception of the intrinsic perfection and beauty of God's creation.

<sup>118</sup>kharq al-'ada: this expression (again borrowed from kalam and used in a radically different, quite concrete spiritual context) is used throughout this section as a sort of pun corresponding to two very different conceptions of the divine "habit" or "custom" ('ada). Ordinarily this term refers to the unenlightened perception of the usual course of affairs in the world, which the "people of habits" (ashab al-'awa'id) heedlessly take for granted: hence the usual understanding of kharq al-'ada as some exceptional "miracle," "prodigy" or "supernatural" event departing from that unconscious norm. But the true Knowers--those who, as in the preceding paragraph, actually "see things as they really are"--are profoundly aware of the genuinely "miraculous" re-creation of the world at every instant, of the "marvelous," never-repeated theophany of Being in all Its infinite self-manifestations.

perspective, every thing in this "habitual" course is itself an object of marvel, whereas the "people of habits" only wonder at what departs from that habitual course.

...And in this stage there is a kind of knowledge among the things known (only) by inner unveiling. This is that the person experiencing this "unveiling" knows that every person or group, however large or small, inevitably has with them one of the men of the Unseen<sup>119</sup> whenever they are speaking. Then that individual (among the men of the Unseen) spreads reports about those persons in the rest of the world so that people discover those things in their own souls, (for example) when a group is gathered together in (spiritual) retreat or when a man says something to himself that (presumably) only God knows. Then that man or that group (who have discovered these reports in this mysterious fashion) go out and tell people about it so that (soon) people are all talking about it.

Ibn 'Arabi goes on, in a long excursus (338.35-339.19) to cite two personal experiences illustrating this phenomenon. The first (in the year 590)<sup>120</sup> was when he ran into a man in Seville who recited to him several verses that Ibn 'Arabī himself had composed, but never committed to writing, at a particular place in Tunis one night several months before. Not knowing Ibn 'Arabi's identity, the man went on to explain that he had learned the poem in a Sufi gathering outside Seville, on the very night Ibn 'Arabi had composed them, from a mysterious stranger "whom we did not know, as though he were one of the 'Travelers'."<sup>121</sup> After teaching his companions those verses, the mysterious stranger went on to tell them the full name of the author and even to give them the name and exact location of the particular quarter in Tunis where he had heard them--which was precisely where Ibn 'Arabi had been staying that same night.

On the second occasion, also in Seville, Ibn 'Arabi was listening to a Sufi friend praising "one of the greatest of the people of the (Sufi) Path, whom he had met in Khorasan" (in Persia), when he noticed a stranger nearby who remained invisible to the rest of the group and who said to him: "I *am* that very person whom this man who met with us in Khorasan is describing to you." Then Ibn 'Arabi began describing this otherwise invisible stranger--who continued to sit there beside them--to his friend, who confirmed the exactitude of his description of the Persian master.

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<sup>119</sup>rijal al-ghayb: the ability to see these mysterious spiritual beings even when they do not wish to be seen was earlier described as one of the basic signs of the "penetrating (spiritual) vision" characterizing this particular mystical state in section II-1 (n. 30) above.

<sup>120</sup>Here (III, 339.21) Ibn 'Arabi also mentions that he is writing down this story in the year 635 (i.e., only three years before his death and shortly before the completion of this final recension of the Futuhāt); lacking a critical edition of this section, we do not know how much of this present chapter may have been added to the first version.

<sup>121</sup>See the earlier discussion of this special group of angels who seek out the gatherings of those who are remembering or invoking God (or the Koran) at section II-6, notes 59-60 above.

And this stage includes the knowledge of what sort of arguing (concerning the practice and principles of religion) is praiseworthy and what sort is to be condemned.<sup>122</sup> Someone who has (truly) surrendered (to God) among those who depend on God<sup>123</sup> should not argue except concerning what he has had confirmed and realized (through God) by way of inner unveiling (kashf), not on the basis of (his own) thinking and inquiry. So if he has actually witnessed (as an direct inspiration from God) that about which they are arguing, then in that event it is incumbent on him to argue about it using that which is better (Kor. 29:46)<sup>124</sup>--provided that he has been specifically ordered to do so by a divine command. But if he does not have a divine command to do so, then the choice is up to him.

Thus if the task of helping the other person (by convincing him of) that (revealed insight) has been assigned to him (by God), then he has been entrusted with that mission for him. But if he despairs of his listeners' ever accepting what he has to say, then he should

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<sup>122</sup>Given Ibn 'Arabi's repeated claims, throughout the main body of this chapter, for the superior insight and spiritual authority of the accomplished saints--as opposed to the so-called 'ulama'--as the only fully qualified "interpreters" (see section II-3, notes 38-39) of the truly divine Law and as the genuine "heirs" of the larger body of religious tradition, this section provides some extremely important guidelines for determining the degree to which the wali should directly attempt to communicate his "revealed" spiritual inspirations beyond himself and those who voluntarily seek out his guidance. Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of this practically crucial problem is discussed in detail in our article mentioned at n. 3 above. It also underlines another essential difference separating the lawgiving "messenger" (rasul/shari') ordered to fulfill a universal mission from the rest of the "prophets" (anbiya'), including the awliya'.

Perhaps even more important in this context are what these criteria imply about the even more limited spiritual utility of any sort of "disputing" about religion for those who would not pretend to have reached this rare and lofty station....

<sup>123</sup>I.e., the "saints" (awliya') or accomplished Sufis, such as those having realized this high spiritual station. Again there is a typical ambiguity in the expression (intama ila) translated here as "depend on," which can also mean, especially in everyday speech, "belong to" in the sense of joining or adhering to a particular group; Ibn 'Arabi used the same verb in that sense earlier in this chapter to allude to the followers of the different "schools" of Islamic law and kalam (and their founders). Here he clearly implies that there is no point in even raising this question with regard to such groups, since arguing or "disputing" (jidal)--along with the underlying aim of converting others or otherwise imposing their own opinions--is inherent in their very methods and presuppositions. For the same reasons, the expression "one who has truly surrendered to God" (muslim) would of course be understood rather differently by those groups.

<sup>124</sup>This is a literal translation of the Koranic expression, which colloquially means simply "in a friendly or polite manner"--i.e., not, for example, using the methods followed by (among others) the supporters of the juridical and theological schools involved in the bloody sectarian disputes Ibn 'Arabi alludes to at n. 87 above.



shut up and not argue. For if he should argue (with no real hope of affecting his listeners), then he is (really) striving to bring about their perdition with God.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>125</sup>I.e., he is really trying to establish his own self-righteousness and satisfy the cravings of his own nafs rather than actually carrying out the divine Will (as expressed in their current state of unreceptiveness). This section echoes Ibn 'Arabi's earlier remarks (see section II-5, and notes 51-53 for the Koranic background) stressing the essential distinction between the general prophetic task of "communicating" the divine Message and the even more difficult responsibility of acting as a divinely-appointed "judge" (hakim).

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### **Ibn 'Arabi's "Esotericism": The Problem of Spiritual Authority**

If there is a paradox (though not an ultimate contradiction) in the very notion of mystical *writing*, nowhere is that more evident than in Islam, where the paradigmatic spiritual figures of the early centuries--whether in Sufism or Shiite esotericism--are known not for their books, but rather through oral sayings and teachings handed down through many generations of disciples. And even the much later (and often apologetic) compilations of the classical Sufi literature (Makki, Kalabadhi, Qushayri, Sulami, etc.) are unanimous in their insistence that the "knowledge" underlying the mystical path is a science of experiential states, of forms of awareness that can only be attained through the combination of divine grace, individual practice and intention, and *suhba*, the companionship and guidance of a true master--not through their reflection in words, concepts and formal teachings. Hence in the case of Ibn 'Arabi the contrast is all the more striking between his monumental, virtually superhuman literary production<sup>1</sup> (with the vast culture and learning it presupposes) and the lives of many of his own masters and Sufi contemporaries, who were not infrequently poor, uncultured and relatively marginal with respect to the elites of his own society.<sup>2</sup> That problem is posed in its most extreme form in the case of his magnum opus, *al-Futuh al-Makkiya*, which encompasses virtually every "science" or form of knowledge available to Islamic culture in that time, with particular emphasis on the traditional (and often far from "mystical") religious sciences (kalam, hadith, fiqh, etc.). In the case of the *Futuh*, however, that apparent paradox--along with many related and equally puzzling features of Ibn 'Arabi's writing more generally--is largely resolved once we recognize the full ambitions of that work and the remarkable range of its intended audience, matters that are no doubt intimately connected with Ibn 'Arabi's own self-conception of his special providential role as "Seal of the Muhammadan Saints."<sup>3</sup> (The historical reasons for the omission

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<sup>1</sup>Osman Yahia's *Histoire et classification de l'oeuvre d'Ibn 'Arabi*, Damascus, 1964 (2 vol.), the standard bibliographical reference, gives 846 works (although a number of these are apocryphal or duplications under different titles), and Ibn 'Arabi's own lists of his writings include almost 300 titles. References in this article to his *K. al-Futuh al-Makkiya*--which includes many of his shorter treatises either as chapters or parts of chapters--are to the four-volume edition of Cairo, 1329 A.H., giving volume, page and in some cases line numbers. Reference has also been given, when available, to the ongoing critical edition of Prof. Yahia, Cairo, 1972-present [abbreviated as "O.Y. ed."].

<sup>2</sup>The most accessible illustration of this is in the biographical sections of his *Ruh al-Quds* and *al-Durrat al-Fakhira* included in the translation by R.W.J. Austin, *Sufis of Andalusia*, London, 1971 (French tr., Paris, 1979). See also the case of his close and lifelong disciple in "Le *Kitab al-inbah 'ala tariq Allah* de 'Abdallah Badr al-Habasi: un témoignage spirituel de Muhyi l-din Ibn 'Arabi," ed. and tr. by Prof. D. Gril in *Annales Islamologiques* XV (1979), pp. 97-164. For Ibn 'Arabi, such relative "invisibility" is--barring a divine command to the contrary--one of the usual signs of the *malamiya*, the highest spiritual rank among the saints: see the extensive references from the *Futuh* in Chodkiewicz, *Le Sceau des saints: Prophetie et saintete dans la doctrine d'Ibn Arabi*, Paris, 1986 [subsequently abbreviated as Chodkiewicz, *Sceau*], index s.v.

<sup>3</sup>See Chodkiewicz, *Sceau*, chapters VIII-X.

of these wider perspectives by most subsequent commentators, whether Islamic or Western, have been discussed in a separate article.)<sup>4</sup> In short, the *Futuhat*, unlike most Sufi writing, is addressed not simply to a vast range of "practicing" Sufis,<sup>5</sup> from novices to the most experienced masters--although that is no doubt its primary audience--but also to those potentially open to that spiritual perspective among a much wider literate public composed mainly of religious scholars, the '*ulama*' and *fuqaha*' of his day. Unlike many of his predecessors, Ibn 'Arabi's aim in addressing this broader learned audience is not primarily an apologetic one of defending or explaining Sufism, but rather the far more ambitious and far-reaching one of "converting" practitioners of those ostensibly religious sciences to a deeper awareness of their true spiritual grounds and intentions.<sup>6</sup>

At this more public and "exoteric" level, then, the very act of writing on such questions, with the many risks that entails, is a self-consciously *political* gesture: for what is at stake is in fact nothing less than the very grounds and conception of spiritual authority in Islam--and the centuries of ongoing polemics surrounding Ibn 'Arabi's work, in many different Islamic societies, are sufficient testimony to the wider, if often inchoate, awareness of that fundamental issue.<sup>7</sup> As we shall see, for Ibn 'Arabi this essential "conversion" primarily involves neither a substitution nor a particular outward change in the accepted procedures of each of those traditional religious sciences, but rather a profound inner transformation in the perspective through which they are ordinarily viewed and applied. But what is entailed (and presupposed) by that inner shift in awareness and intention can easily be misunderstood, and nowhere were those real dangers and confusions more immediately evident than in the chiliastic and antinomian excesses so often historically associated with the recurrent "Mahdist" and messianic movements in Islam.<sup>8</sup> For this reason, Ibn 'Arabi's discussion of the Mahdi and his "Helpers" in chapter 366 of the *Futuhat* brings out those sensitive issues of spiritual (and ultimately temporal) authority in the clearest possible fashion, while at the same time offering an ideal illustration of his usual

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<sup>4</sup>"Ibn 'Arabi and His Interpreters," in three issues of the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 106 (1986), no. 3 and 4 and vol. 107 (1987), no. 1.

<sup>5</sup>"Sufi" is used here as a convenient but inadequate shorthand expression (corresponding to a profusion of more technical terms in Ibn 'Arabi's own writing) for all those readers conscious of their being on a spiritual path--a condition which, as Ibn 'Arabi repeatedly emphasizes, cannot be judged by any outwardly visible social and historical categories.

<sup>6</sup>This relative orientation of Ibn 'Arabi's work is especially clear if one compares it with the later Sufi writings of Ghazali--who demonstrates an outwardly similar concern for the "exoteric," formal teachings of Islam--and with the subsequent historical reactions to the two writers: see further references in notes 4 and 7.

<sup>7</sup>See the preliminary references in O. Yahia, *Histoire...*, I, pp. 114-135; E. Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought*, Princeton, 1984, ch. 2; and our study cited in n. 4 above.

<sup>8</sup>See the article "*al-Mahdi*," by W. Madelung, in *EI<sup>2</sup>* (V, 1230-1238). While the issues and principles evoked by Ibn 'Arabi are humanly universal (and are clearly understood by him as such), for the sake of convenience this article remains within the historical and symbolic framework of Islam.

procedures of esoteric, multi-faceted writing.<sup>9</sup> This article, based on a number of related chapters in the *Futuhāt*, is intended to provide a concise introduction to (I.) the distinctive features and principles underlying Ibn 'Arabi's esoteric writing throughout that work; (II.) the particular expression of those principles in the subject and structure of chapter 366; and (III.) the complex, interrelated questions of religio-legal authority and interpretation (*qiyas*, *ijtihād*, *taqlid*, etc.) that are developed at greater length here and in many other sections of the *Futuhāt*.

#### I. Foundations of "Esoteric"<sup>10</sup> Writing in the *Futuhāt*:

The initial reaction of readers of the *Futuhāt*, no matter what their training and where they begin, is likely to include a certain confusion or even bewilderment in the face of the profusion and apparent disorder of the subjects treated, the immense literary and cultural background that is assumed, the frequent lack of any visible connection between the contents of a chapter and its title or opening verses, the allusive (indeed often completely enigmatic) and fragmentary nature of many discussions, and the constantly shifting perspectives from which Ibn 'Arabi tends to approach a given issue. These forbidding intrinsic obstacles, together with the sheer magnitude of the book itself and the lack of any comprehensive commentaries such as are available for the *Fusus*, no doubt help account for the relative lack of complete, representative translations and the often partial or misleading character of secondary accounts based on a few selected passages.<sup>11</sup> Such distinctive structural features have often been explained--whether admiringly or critically--in terms of Ibn 'Arabi's own repeated insistence on the "inspired" nature of his order and treatment of many subjects in the *Futuhāt* (as well as in several of his other works). However, quite apart from that problematic dimension of inspiration, relatively little attention has been paid to the fact that Ibn 'Arabi actually outlines in considerable detail a systematic and relatively coherent explanation for many of these characteristic stylistic and rhetorical procedures (as well as their deeper philosophic and spiritual presuppositions) at the very beginning of the *Futuhāt*: that account is to be found in his long Introduction (*muqaddima*), a

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<sup>9</sup>A complete English translation and commentary of the relevant sections of chapter 366 (III, 327-340) is included in the forthcoming *Anthology* of representative chapters from the *Futuhāt* (Paris, Sindbad, 1989; general editor, M. Chodkiewicz), and part of that text will appear, together with a longer version of this article, in our planned sourcebook, *An Introduction to Islamic Esotericism*. In the notes here, references to ch. 366 are given both for the Arabic text of the *Futuhāt* (see n. 1) and the corresponding section number of our translation.

<sup>10</sup>The quotation marks here and in the title of this article indicate the technical use of this term to describe a common set of rhetorical methods and assumptions frequently shared by writers from the diverse intellectual traditions of Islamic philosophy, Sufism and esoteric Shiism which are amply illustrated in this article. To avoid some common misunderstandings, it should be stressed that (1) the essential feature of this sort of writing is not simply its focus on an "esoteric" reality or intention (whether spiritual or other), but rather the complex *interplay* (in writing, interpretation and reception) between that level of meaning and the relatively "exoteric" or public modes of understanding; (2) it is not opposed to a genuine "literalism," since for Ibn 'Arabi the spiritual meaning *is* precisely the literal one (and what are usually considered to be the "literal" meanings are themselves revealed to be "interpretations"); and (3) the level of "esoteric" understanding or intention does *not* involve "concealment" of something that could otherwise be plainly or unambiguously stated.

<sup>11</sup>See the detailed discussion of this point in Part I of our *JAOS* article cited in n. 4 above.

key section which he substantially expanded in his final recension of that work. While a detailed study of that Introduction must be reserved for a separate article, its implications for the structure (and intended reading) of the rest of the *Futuhat* are summarized in two key passages at its conclusion:<sup>12</sup>

"As for the credo of the 'quintessence of the elite' (*khulasat al-khawass*) concerning God--may He be exalted!--that is a matter beyond this,<sup>13</sup> which we have dispersed throughout this book, because most (people's) intellects are veiled by their thoughts and fall short of perceiving this, because of their lack of (spiritual) purification (*tajrid*)."

"And as for explicitly stating the credo of the 'quintessence (of the spiritual elite)', we did not separate it out in particular, because of its profundity and difficulty. Instead we have placed it dispersed throughout the chapters of this book, in full detail and clearly explained--but, as we have mentioned,<sup>14</sup> separated and scattered: so whoever God grants its understanding will recognize it and distinguish it from the rest. For that is the True Knowledge and Veracious Saying, and there is no aim beyond it. 'The blind man and the seeing are alike' in it,<sup>15</sup> (for) it joins the furthest things with the nearest, and brings together the lowest and the most high."

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<sup>12</sup>The entire *muqaddima*, following the long *khutba* and *fihrist*, corresponds to I, 31-47 (representing final recension) and O.Y. ed., I, 138-214. (For the earlier and later versions of the *Futuhat*, see Dr. Yahia's introduction to his critical edition, vol. I, pp. 23 ff.) A detailed study (including translation and commentary of relevant sections) of this Introduction, whose importance for the interpretation of the *Futuhat* could hardly be exaggerated, is in preparation. The first passage quoted here appears at the very end of the Introduction (I, 47; O.Y. ed., I, 213), while the second passage (I, 38; O.Y. ed., I, 173) precedes an intervening section (see following note) added in the second recension. Although not included in the earliest version of the *Futuhat*, both passages summarize points explained in detail in the earlier core section discussed below (n. 18).

<sup>13</sup>I.e., beyond the "credo of the elite (*'aqidat al-khawass*) of the people of God," based on methods "between *nazar* and *kashf*" (O.Y. ed., I, 187) outlined in the preceding section; this highest "credo" therefore apparently corresponds to that comprehensive spiritual "knowledge of the secrets" (*'ilm al-asrar*), discussed earlier in the Introduction (cf. n. 17), which is only realizable through inner "unveiling" (*kashf*).

<sup>14</sup>This phrase apparently refers to the much earlier statement (O.Y. ed., I, 74; also added in the second recension) describing the Introduction as "the preliminary presentation of the divine, secret (forms of) knowledge (*'ulum ilahiya asrariya*) comprised within this book (as a whole)."

<sup>15</sup>Judging from the conclusion of this sentence, this phrase is apparently an intentionally paradoxical echo of the many Koranic assertions (using the same Arabic words) that "the blind man and the seeing are *not* alike" in their *perception* or awareness of God: as such, it would point to the relative or

These statements clearly bring out three essential features, underlying the composition of the *Futuhat* as a whole, that are particularly relevant to Ibn 'Arabi's treatment of the central problem of spiritual authority, both in chapter 366 and elsewhere.

1. The first and most obvious point is the dispersion or scattering of the particular essential meanings intended for the "elite(s)" among his readers. Even on a purely intellectual level, without regard to the more profound questions of spiritual comprehension and preparedness also involved here, every serious student of Ibn 'Arabi quickly comes to realize to what extent his works (and more especially the *Futuhat*) constitute an immense and endlessly fascinating puzzle in which the intended meaning of an initially obscure symbolic detail or allusion is often to be found in the most remote and unexpected context--and in which some apparently familiar scriptural expression just as frequently receives a new and freshly illuminating spiritual interpretation.<sup>16</sup> On a deeper level, these statements are a further reminder both of the difficult practical conditions posed for those individuals who would claim to belong in some way to that "elite," and of the fundamental fact that a text like the *Futuhat*--as with virtually all the Islamic esoteric traditions--was always meant to be read primarily in the company of a master, with the guidance of his *oral* commentary and taking into account the specific capacities of each student.

2. The second point, and the principle underlying the elaborate use of "dispersed," esoteric writing by Ibn 'Arabi (and by many other pre-modern Muslim authors), is his constant recognition of the natural diversity and hierarchy of abilities to understand and realize the matters at issue here--and his corresponding awareness of the dangers and inevitable illusions and misunderstandings that arise whenever such questions are approached without that necessary preparation. In the *Futuhat*, this principle is explained in detail in the core of the Introduction, where he carefully distinguishes between three primary types of knowledge and the methods or sources appropriate to each: "intellectual" (*aqli*) knowledge, based on reasoning (*nazar*); the knowledge of "states" (*ahwal*), known only by each individual's immediate experiencing (*dhawq*); and divinely bestowed knowledge of the (spiritual) "secrets" (*asrar*), "specific to the prophets and saints," which reaches "beyond the stage of intellect" and "encompasses and subsumes all the (other forms of) knowledge."<sup>17</sup>

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"illusory" nature of such distinctions from the comprehensive metaphysical perspective of the Truly Real (*al-Haqq*) and the Perfect Man. At the same time Ibn 'Arabi seems to be alluding to another fundamental point he first made in introducing the "credo of the common people" (*'aqidat al-'awamm*) earlier in this Introduction (O.Y. ed., I, 154-162): namely, that the formal credo of the mystics and "men of God" is outwardly identical with that of the unreflective believer--given their common basis the words of the Koran--while they differ only in the degree of inward spiritual realization (*tahqiq*) of what is actually intended by those expressions.

<sup>16</sup>The study of the *Futuhat* (or a wider range of Ibn 'Arabi's writings in general) quickly brings out the limitations and partial perspectives of that learned tradition of philosophic commentaries on the *Fusus al-Hikam* which has usually been taken to represent "Ibn 'Arabi" both in Islam and in the modern West: see our review article cited in n. 4 above.

<sup>17</sup>I, 31-33.11; O.Y. ed. I, 138-147 (already part of the earlier recension). (See also our forthcoming study of the *muqaddima* mentioned in n. 13 above.) Many of these same essential points, especially concerning the necessity to veil the *'ilm al-asrar*, are developed in more accessible summary form, using similar scriptural references, in his *K. al-Fana' fi al-Mushahada (Rasa'il Ibn 'Arabi*, Hyderabad, 1948, vol. I, no. 1), pp. 2-5 (tr. M. Valsan, *Le livre de l'extinction dans la contemplation*, Paris, 1984, pp. 30-35).

Now the obvious problem in writing (or publicly speaking) of this last type of purely spiritual knowledge, as he goes on to explain at some length, is that the majority who do not share it naturally tend to respond in one of two ways: either they completely reject such statements, treating them as lies or the fantasies of a madman or heretic--in which case the speaker himself is endangered; or else they try to "understand" and apply them by unwittingly reducing them to the level of their more familiar rational and experiential knowledge--in which case the listeners are actually turned away from those truths and can easily become a danger to themselves or society. One possible (and historically popular) response to this situation was not to write at all, to speak only to a few chosen disciples with the appropriate "preparedness"--or else to write in such a way that only such rare individuals could grasp one's deeper intentions; that course may have guaranteed a certain security, but at the cost of relatively limited influence.

A far more difficult challenge, reflecting the much wider ambitions and achievements of the prophets,<sup>18</sup> was to write (or speak) in a way that could also simultaneously reach--and potentially touch and transform--the full range of guiding intellectual elites (i.e., the *'ulama'*), while avoiding the recurrent pitfalls we have just mentioned. In fact, Ibn 'Arabi's subsequent reputation (and the concomitant historical focus on his *Fusus al-Hikam*) have tended to obscure the full ambitions and scope of the *Futuhat* in this regard. For the characteristic rhetorical style of that work flows from a distinctive combination of dialectical "reasoning" (*nazar*) and allusions to the fruits of spiritual practice and "unveiling" (*kashf*)--as both are mirrored in the archetypes of the Koran and hadith--designed to awaken the spiritual sensibilities of readers versed in each of the traditional religious sciences, to lead them to question (and eventually transcend) the limited "reasoning" and presuppositions of those traditional disciplines.<sup>19</sup> Since the desired transformation or spiritual "alchemy" is necessarily different for every individual, given the unique interplay of these different forms of knowledge in the actual process of spiritual realization (*tahqiq*), Ibn 'Arabi's language is often intentionally open and dialectic, puzzling (or outright provocative), and capable of multiple (and usually complementary) interpretations.<sup>20</sup> But at the same time such passages are often artfully interwoven, as in chapter 366, with more

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<sup>18</sup>See the references at n. 3 above on the specific functions and responsibility implied by Ibn 'Arabi's self-conception as "seal of Muhammadan saints," to which he alludes in several important passages of chapter 366 (sections I and II-6 of our translation).

<sup>19</sup>Cf. his mention of the spiritual obstacle posed by the "veils of thoughts" in the statement quoted at n. 12 above.

An additional problem, accounting for the extreme difficulty of translating Ibn 'Arabi for modern audiences now unfamiliar with those sciences, is that this rhetorical procedure presupposes considerable acquaintance with the vocabulary and broader assumptions of each particular discipline (as illustrated in the case of *fiqh* below); the background explanation required for contemporary readers inevitably tends to obscure the play of allusions and ironic shifts in meaning that are a recurrent feature of Ibn 'Arabi's dialectical use of those disciplines.

<sup>20</sup>If the commentator ignores these essential rhetorical and dialectical intentions and their presuppositions (as outlined in the Introduction to the *Futuhat*), it is easy to present an endless variety of apparently mutually contradictory pictures of "Ibn 'Arabi." Hence the two extreme--and, one would think, otherwise quite incompatible--historically recurrent portrayals of Ibn 'Arabi either as a "rationalizing" theosopher intent on reducing the mysteries of faith to an all-encompassing conceptual system, or as a sort of inspired "shaman" defying rational understanding and established socio-religious norms.

"exoteric" discussions that could have been taken almost verbatim from works on fiqh, kalam, etc., employing the vocabulary and types of reasoning ordinarily used in each of those religious disciplines.

3. The third distinctive feature mentioned above, and one of the most pervasive characteristics of Ibn 'Arabi's work more generally, is his special attitude of what we might call "spiritual literalism": i.e., his constant insistence on the ultimate coincidence (not simply in outward formulation) between the precise, revealed literal formulations of the Koran or hadith and their essential spiritual truth and intentions as realized and verified by the saints.<sup>21</sup> Reflecting this perspective is his usual favorable view of the unquestioning, implicit faith of the common believer, and his corresponding distrust of all contrived intellectualist "interpretations" (*ta'wil*)--a judgment which he extends to some of the basic presuppositions and procedures of the historical Islamic religious sciences (see section III below). This outlook is also expressed in the structure of many chapters in the *Futuhat*, which typically take their point of departure from a Koranic verse or hadith whose true spiritual meaning is then unfolded at great length--and often in initially unexpected directions.

## II. The Case of the Mahdi's "Helpers"

Chapter 366 of the *Futuhat* provides a particularly striking illustration of all these typical features of Ibn 'Arabi's esoteric writing, since each reader is forced to provide the essential--and inherently problematic--connection between the initial, apparent subject (i.e., the traditional accounts of the Mahdi and his earthly accomplishment of justice and the divine commandments at the "end of time") and the profound reality of the corresponding spiritual stage which underlies the *perennial* spiritual authority of the accomplished saints, based on their uniquely inspired realization of the Source and intended meanings expressed in the literal forms of the Koran and hadith.<sup>22</sup> Now the dangers of any open, written discussion of this subject are rather

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<sup>21</sup>An excellent short survey of the many manifestations of this principle, both in issues of Islamic law and spiritual interpretation of scripture more generally, is the article of M. Chodkiewicz, "Ibn 'Arabi: la lettre et la Loi," pp. 27-42 in the *Actes du colloque Mystique, culture et société* (ed. M. Meslin), Paris, 1983. (We are indebted to Mr. Chodkiewicz for first drawing our attention to the importance of chapter 366 and other chapters of the *Futuhat* discussed below.) To avoid a common misunderstanding, it should be stressed that Ibn 'Arabi repeatedly brings out the ways in which what are ordinarily taken to be the "literal" (i.e., apparently non-symbolic) meanings of Scripture inevitably assume their own--ultimately incoherent and self-contradictory--frameworks of interpretation.

<sup>22</sup>The particular importance of the spiritual stage (*manzil*) discussed in this chapter is further underlined by its qualification in the title (according to Ibn 'Arabi's *fihrist*, O.Y. ed., I, 107) as "Muhammadan"--i.e., pertaining to the universal Source of all Revelation (the *haqiqa muhammadiyah*) which encompasses the spiritual "realities" of all the other prophets and their revelations (cf. the illustration of this in the *Fusus al-Hikam*).

That special universal dimension of this subject is further illuminated in the following chapter 367 of the *Futuhat*, which contains the key autobiographical account of Ibn 'Arabi's own spiritual Ascension (*mi'raj*) leading to his culminating realization of the "Muhammadan Station" and the inner meaning of the (universal, noetic) "*Qur'an*." See our comparative study of chapter 367 and related works, including the *K. al-Isra'*, in "The Spiritual Ascension: Ibn 'Arabi and the Mi'raj," in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 107 (1987) and vol. 108 (1988), and the more complete translation and commentary of ch. 367 to appear in the forthcoming *Anthology* of



evident: on the individual, psychological level, unprepared readers could easily be tempted to "short-circuit" the implicit challenge to realize for themselves something of the spiritual stage in question (with the long and difficult efforts that would require) and instead focus--whether admiringly or with hostility--either on the more visible criticisms of the *fuqaha'* (and associated ruling authorities) or on the author's own apparent claims to some sort of superior inspired wisdom. And in the outward, social realm those temptations were reflected in a number of potential excesses, often historically associated with claims concerning the "Mahdi" or "Imam" (understood in a temporal, political sense) that were familiar to all of Ibn 'Arabi's contemporaries. The most obvious of these dangers were (1) the illusion of a millenarian transformation "transcending" all spiritual and temporal norms, whether that be expressed in a revolutionary messianism or in more private antinomian tendencies; and (2) the confusion of spiritual authority with mere worldly domination (*riyasa*), and the resulting use of Mahdist (or related Sufi) rhetoric as an ideology by persons in fact seeking personal power for various worldly ends.

Given the delicacy of this subject and the notoriety of these dangers, Ibn 'Arabi artfully arranged the structure of this chapter and the order of its topics so as ward off potentially hostile exotericist critics (and inapt Sufi readers) while only gradually unfolding his deeper insights for those genuinely prepared to share that spiritual realization. Thus the chapter begins (III, 327-331) with extremely long and literal citations of hadith concerning the Mahdi and his encounters with the Antichrist (*Dajjal*), interspersed with only a few hints about the subject indicated in the title. Similarly the long concluding section (III, 338-340), just as in the other chapters from this division of the *Futuhat*, consists of a list of dozens of spiritual insights associated with this particular station, but usually mentioned in terms so enigmatic as to be virtually meaningless for someone without a profound acquaintance with Ibn 'Arabi's thought and writing, as well as the realities in question. Moreover, if we add to these features the location of this chapter far within the *Futuhat* itself (not to mention the difficulties of access to such a work in the pre-modern period), it is clear that under ordinary circumstances only serious, qualified and highly motivated readers would ever be likely to reach the more controversial middle section.

In that central section (III, 332-337), on the other hand, Ibn 'Arabi speaks much more openly and directly, clearly underlining the perennial nature and importance of his deeper subject.<sup>23</sup> But in explaining his own understanding of this issue he again begins by recalling the rare and exceedingly difficult *preconditions* for the divine inspiration of the saints--matters developed much more fully in preceding chapters of the *Futuhat*--before turning to the problems raised by the "application" of that inspiration in judgment of more worldly matters. And even in the latter sections, his undisguised criticisms of the majority of jurists and their methodological presuppositions are formulated in such a way that the attentive reader is still constantly faced with the difficult practical and spiritual conditions for realizing that alternative perspective. As can be seen below (and throughout the *Futuhat*), those conditions are such that the reader who takes them seriously no doubt finds the focus of his attention turning from the possible shortcomings of others to more urgent and intimate concerns.

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representative selections from the *Futuhat* (Paris, Sindbad, 1989; general ed. M. Chodkiewicz) cited in n. 9 above.

<sup>23</sup>Thus, for example, he begins to refer to the "Imam of the Age," rather than simply to the Mahdi, and to the saints (*awliya'*) and the "people of unveiling" (*ahl al-kashf*), rather than to the Mahdi's Helpers, who are not even mentioned as such in this section.

### III. Problems of "Law" and Authority

Even the casual reader of chapter 366 is likely to be struck by Ibn 'Arabi's repeated critical contrast between the "true Muhammadan *Shar'*"--whether as that is applied by the Mahdi or realized by the saints and "people of (spiritual) unveiling"--and the historically developed systems of Islamic law maintained by the professional jurists (the *fuqaha'*) of his day. However the positive principles underlying that critique and the conclusions to be drawn from it are not nearly so clearly stated; indeed, if one looks only at the individual points of criticism, they could easily be mistaken as minor corrections of the existing legal schools on mere items of detail. In fact, the full scale of Ibn 'Arabi's disagreement and the very different paradigm governing his conception of the Sharia only emerge when one compares the many related discussions of these and related "legal" questions throughout the *Futuhat*. In this section, therefore, by reversing Ibn 'Arabi's usual procedure of dispersed writing discussed above and reassembling a few of his many scattered allusions to this subject, we shall attempt to present--albeit in highly simplified form--something of the inner coherence of his own understanding of the Sharia underlying his scattered criticisms of the *fuqaha'*.

To begin with, while the common translation of *shari'a* (or *shar'*) as (divine or revealed) "Law" does correspond to many of the assumptions of the Islamic jurists Ibn 'Arabi is addressing, it fails to convey the primary concerns and guiding insights in his own conception of the Sharia, both here and in other chapters: the term "law," as usually understood, both leaves out too much that is essential--especially the questions of worship, prayer, belief, and ethical and spiritual states and norms that are his central focus--and inevitably suggests a great many unavoidable worldly matters (e.g., questions of taxation, state organization and legislation, regulation of social and economic life) about which he has relatively little to say in the *Futuhat*.<sup>24</sup> (Ibn 'Arabi's relative silence about the more practically indispensable legal functions of fiqh, as we shall see, could therefore be interpreted in a number of ways.) In any case, his criticisms of the *fuqaha'* almost all turn on their relative neglect of the *spiritual* grounds and finality of revelation: hence his immediate aim in these critiques is primarily rhetorical--i.e., to turn the individual reader's attention toward that deeper spiritual reality and its demands--and not the practical possibility of some fundamental reform or replacement of the existing schools of law. Just as in his treatment of other Islamic sciences (especially *'ilm al-kalam*), Ibn 'Arabi's use of technical terms from fiqh or *usul* in this wider spiritual context typically involves a radical transformation of their usual meaning that is designed to bring out their "original" (or at least potential) spiritual intention. His guiding principles in these discussions can be summed up in the following five points:

1. The keystone of Ibn 'Arabi's criticism of the *fuqaha'* and his own understanding of the true spiritual "authorities" is of course the *presence of Muhammad*--in the sense of the universal "Muhammadan Reality" (*haqiqa muhammadiya*)--and of the *Qur'an* (again as the noetic Reality underlying the Koran and all other revelations). For it is this possibility of direct access to the Source of revelation, however rare and difficult that may be, that underlies his claims concerning the greater clarity and certainty of the saints' direct insight into the meaning and intention of the

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<sup>24</sup>The primary focus of Ibn 'Arabi's concerns on the spiritual reality (*haqiqa*) underlying each "divine," revealed Sharia (cf. chapters 262-263, II, 562-3) is especially evident in his choice and treatment of subjects (prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, etc.) in the long earlier "legal" chapters of the *Futuhat* (ch. 68-72: I, 329-763).

Sharia. Of course these same principles also form part of the very foundation of Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysical and cosmological system. But what is crucial here is that these are not just metaphysical concepts or indeterminate symbols, but a living spiritual reality whose contact and presence is repeatedly affirmed in chapter 366, both for Ibn 'Arabi himself (e.g., in his remarks on his special relation with the *Qur'an*)<sup>25</sup> and for the saints and "people of unveiling" more generally (at III, 335).

The true spiritual "authorities" are therefore those with immediate, living access to that reality, those who are "following a clear Proof."<sup>26</sup> Hence Ibn 'Arabi's repeated vehement assertions that "for us the only permissible *taqlid* in the Religion of God is the *taqlid* of the *living*"--i.e., of the saints who, as the true "heirs" of the Prophet, are the "people of remembrance" (21:7) and the true "people of the Koran and hadith," those who actually realize and safeguard (on earth) the universal Reality of the Muhammad and the eternal *Qur'an*.<sup>27</sup> As he was well aware, claims to such authority (even if these principles are accepted) are not easy to verify or to arbitrate, and could easily give rise to any number of irresponsible and misleading pretensions.<sup>28</sup> We have already indicated the extreme care he took, in composing the *Futuhat*, to discourage those who might have been misled by such abuses--along with hostile critics who could use the threat of such dangers to discredit the methods and intentions of the "people of unveiling" more generally. But for the properly motivated and qualified reader, his scattered allusions to this reality and its implications are together more than sufficient to indicate the difficult practical steps required to realize this spiritual "stage" or at least to find a guide who has done so. The remaining points all

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<sup>25</sup>See III, 334.29 ff. (section II-6 of our translation) and III, 329 (section I of our translation). In this regard, see also the important autobiographical accounts of Ibn 'Arabi's culminating realization of the "Station of Muhammad" and the comprehensive Reality of the *Qur'an* both in the following chapter (367) and in his earlier *K. al-Isra'* (both passages included in our forthcoming article in the *JAOS* cited at n. 22) and further references in Chodkiewicz, *Sceau*, chapters IV, VII and IX.

<sup>26</sup>*'ala bayyina* (47:14; etc.): see S. al-Hakim, *al-Mu'jam al-Sufi* (an excellent comprehensive study of Ibn 'Arabi's technical terminology), Beirut, 1981, pp. 229-230 for further references to the key role of this conception. [Abbreviated hereafter as Hakim, *Mu'jam*.] The conditions of this special spiritual guidance are briefly explained in Parts II-1 to II-3 and II-6 of our translation of chapter 366 (III, 332-334).

<sup>27</sup>The first quotation here is from ch. 88 (II, 165); the contrast of the "living" (saints) and the spiritually "dead" jurists is an allusion to one of Ibn 'Arabi's favorite sayings from the famous Sufi Bastami (cf. ch. 29, O.Y. ed. III, 241). For the saints as the *ahl al-dhikr* (Koran 21:7), who are also the true "people of hadith and the *Qur'an*," see ch. 88, II, 165 and ch. 69, I, 494--on both occasions in explicit contrast to the groundless claims of the *fuqaha' al-zaman*. Moreover, Ibn 'Arabi goes on to insist that "*taqlid*" of the saints (besides being subject to each person's choice and responsibility: see point III-4 below) is not really submission to those individuals themselves, but rather to *God's* commandment (*hukm*) as known through their inspired spiritual knowledge. See also the further attacks on *taqlid* as understood by the jurists elsewhere in ch. 69 (I, 392: noting the irony of the claims of the *fuqaha'* to impose their *taqlid* on others, which is the worst kind of "*ijtihad*" on the part of those who deny being mujtahids!); and in ch. 318 (III, 70: the "Imams" of the legal schools would be the first to deny this sort of *taqlid*).

<sup>28</sup>In fact, those obvious problems would be limited to a considerable extent by the severe *restrictions* (cf. point III-4 below), some of them mentioned explicitly in ch. 366, which Ibn 'Arabi places even on the saint's right to discuss (much less impose on others) what is revealed to him in this state of inspiration.

flow from this central assumption of the living presence of the Prophet, but together they afford a clearer idea of the particular contours of this vision.

2. The second key point underlying Ibn 'Arabi's critique of the *fuqaha'*, as we have already mentioned, is his consistent focus on the ultimate *spiritual finality of the Sharia*--a point which again is only a particular expression of his more comprehensive understanding of man's destiny and role in creation. While not denying the obvious this-worldly functions shared by divine and political laws alike,<sup>29</sup> his own constant attention is on the universal spiritual *intentions* characterizing the Sharia of Muhammad, which ultimately underlie the revelations of all the other prophets as well. This fundamental distinction, assumed throughout chapter 366, is brought out most clearly in several key chapters where Ibn 'Arabi stresses the primordial aim of every revealed Sharia as a "Path" towards the Truth.<sup>30</sup> For him, that relationship is summed up in the Prophet's saying "I was sent to perfect the *makarim al-akhlaq*" (a phrase that he interprets in reference to man's obligation to take on the divine attributes, as enjoined in another famous hadith): "For the Sharia is like that, if you didn't understand--or else you do not understand the Sharia." Indeed ultimately "there is nothing in the world but Sharia (i.e., the 'Path' to God)!"<sup>31</sup> Thus the common concern underlying Ibn 'Arabi's many particular criticisms of the categories and methods of fiqh, when they are confused with the revealed "Path" of the Sharia, is the way that the legal preoccupations expressed in those guiding assumptions--which may in fact be necessary and inherent parts of any system of *laws* as such--inevitably tend to obscure the primary spiritual intentions of the original revelation. The best illustration of this tendency, to which he returns repeatedly in chapter 366 and throughout the *Futuhat*, is the misguided use of *qiyas* ("analogy") by the *fuqaha'* to create what for them is in effect another, purely human and arbitrary source of revelation (*shar'*) and spiritual authority alongside the Koran and hadith.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Cf. his statement at the beginning of chapter 339 (III, 151) that "the (general) aim of the path of the *shari'a* is the sensible happiness, and the *Haqiqa* is not its aim *fi al-'umum*," and his mention later in that chapter (III, 153) of the "general welfare" (*maslaha*) assured by every Sharia, both the "divine" ones brought by the prophetic messengers and "politico-philosophic" (*hikami siyasi*) laws established in all (other) societies by those he calls "warners" (*nudhara'*). But the principles and procedures required to ensure that sort of "sensible happiness" are clearly not his primary concern in the *Futuhat*.

<sup>30</sup>See especially chapter 339 (on "...the Kneeling of the Sharia before the *Haqiqa*..."), III, 150-154; ch. 66 ("True Knowledge of the Inner Secret of the Sharia...," introducing the long chapters on the prescribed forms of worship), I, 222-225; ch. 88 (on "...the Inner Secrets of the Principles of the Judgments of the *Shar'*"), II, 162-166; and chapters 262-263 (on "true understanding" of the Sharia and *Haqiqa* and their inner relations), II, 561-563.

<sup>31</sup>Ch. 262 (II, 563.7-14); for the sources of the first hadith (on *makarim al-akhlaq*) and related sayings, see Wensinck, *Concordance*, II, 75. For Ibn 'Arabi's complex treatment in the *Futuhat* of the famous hadith enjoining "*takhalluq bi-akhlaq Allah*," which he calls "the basis of this Path" (II, 42, 267), see, e.g., I, 124, 216; II, 42, 54, 93-94, 126, 128, 153, 166, 232, etc.

<sup>32</sup>The essential object of this criticism is not reasoning in general, but (a) its use to *extend* the realm of the Sharia far beyond what was actually revealed (cf. the following point III-3); and (b) the claim of *religious* authority for arbitrary "personal opinion" (*ra'y*) that underlies the abuse of *qiyas* by the jurists--and which he repeatedly contrasts with the inspired spiritual insight and certainty of the saints (cf. point III-1 above).

Ibn 'Arabi's vehement criticisms in ch. 366 and elsewhere (e.g., ch. 318, III, 68-71) of the jurists' effective consideration of *qiyas* as a religious equivalent of the Koran and hadith must be

3. An equally fundamental principle separating Ibn 'Arabi from the *fuqaha'* is his insistence that "the primordial (divine) judgment (*hukm al-asl*)"--i.e., prior to the explicit indications (*nass*) revealed in the Koran and hadith (or in the teachings of earlier prophets)--"is that there is *no* divinely imposed obligation (*taklif*), and that God created everything on earth for us." In other words, "there is no (divine) judgment concerning everything about which (the Koran and hadith) are silent except for this primordial *ibaha*."<sup>33</sup> For Ibn 'Arabi, there are really two sides to this principle of "*ibaha asliya*": quite apart from its sweeping negative consequences for the common legalistic conceptions of revelation, it reflects above all a comprehensively *positive*, "ontological" awareness of the divine Bounty and Mercy revealed in all of Being, a reality which is only fully perceived in the enlightened vision of the saints.<sup>34</sup> More particularly, in the context of arguments against the sharply opposed conceptions of the *fuqaha'*, Ibn 'Arabi repeatedly develops three favorite scriptural references to this principle: "***He did not place any undue restriction (haraj) upon you in Religion***" (22:78); "***We only sent you as a mercy for the worlds***" (21:107), a sign that Muhammad "wanted to *reduce* the difficulty of traveling on the Path"; and a long hadith in which the Prophet urges the faithful to "leave me alone (i.e., don't ask for any more divine commandments) as long as I leave you alone."<sup>35</sup>

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understood in the light of some essential qualifications concerning "our *madhhab* in this matter" that he provides at the beginning of ch. 88 (II, 163.1-16). There (1) he vigorously affirms the necessity and importance of *qiyas* (in the wider sense of "intellectual inquiry" or reflection, *nazar 'aqli*) for arriving at the basic principles of faith (Attributes of God, etc.) underlying the divine revelations (*shara'i*); (2) he admits its legal use in rare "cases of necessity where no explicit scriptural indication (*nass*) can be found;" and (3) he states that "although I do not profess *qiyas* for myself, I do allow someone to judge according to it whose *ijtihad* has led him to affirm it--whether he be wrong or right in doing so." However, he again insists (III, 165.7) that this latter usage must be exclusively personal: "I do not profess *qiyas*, and I absolutely do not accept *taqlid* following it at all."

<sup>33</sup>Both quotations are from chapter 88: II, 165.6 and 165.21-22; the terminology suggests an ironic allusion to the recurrent criticisms of Sufis (by the '*ulama'*') as "antinomians," *ibahiya*.

<sup>34</sup>See the illustrations of this key insight in key passages at the end of ch. 366 (III, 338-340; Part III of our translation); this is only one manifestation of the pervasive role of the divine "Mercy" (*rahma*) in every aspect of Ibn 'Arabi's thought (religious, cosmological, ontological, etc.).

<sup>35</sup>The first citation is from ch. 88, II, 165 and II, 163, where this verse is cited as a principle (i.e., opposing *tahjir*) for deciding between two apparently opposed scriptural indications. The second verse is commented in ch. 69 (I, 392.21), with regard to Ibn 'Arabi's denial of *taqlid* and corresponding stress on the existence of differences in interpretation of scripture as a divine "mercy" (allowing each person to judge for himself); the quotation concerning the Prophet's intentions is from ch. 339 (III, 151). This particular hadith--cited in chapter 366 at III, 337 (section II-9 of our translation)--is mentioned by both Bukhari (*I'tisam*, 2) and Muslim (*Hajj*, 411), in response to a question as to whether the Hajj should be considered an annual obligation. As Ibn 'Arabi explains in chapter 262 "On the Inner Knowledge of the Sharia" (II, 561-562), the Sharia includes both "the precepts (*ahkam*) God prescribed of His own accord (*ibtida'an*)" and "what was prescribed at the request of the community," so that "if they had not requested it, then that (precept or commandment) would not have been sent down." Elsewhere (II, 162-166; ch. 88, "On the Inner Knowledge of the Secrets of the Principles of the Precepts of the *Shar'*"), Ibn 'Arabi points out the parallel between this hadith and the following Koranic injunction: "***O those who have faith, do not ask about things which, if they were revealed to you, would harm you. And if you ask about them when the Qur'an is being sent down, they will be revealed to you.... For a people before you***

The other side of this principle, and the crux of Ibn 'Arabi's disagreement with the *fuqaha'*, is obviously a severe limitation on the realm of divine *taklif* and--what is practically of greater importance--on the religious value of the accepted methods for pragmatically developing the literal materials of revelation (*shar'*) into the more comprehensive historical systems of Islamic law.<sup>36</sup> To begin with, the "*sunna*" of the Prophet, as Ibn 'Arabi understands it, does not extend to all his reported actions--since "that would be the ultimate extreme of *haraj*" (contrary to verses 22:78 and 21:107)--but only includes those which he *explicitly* proclaimed to be obligatory, i.e., "only the action through which he showed us something with which we (should) worship," such as the steps of the ritual prayer.<sup>37</sup> Ibn 'Arabi's conception of the validity of "consensus" (*ijma'*) with regard to the Sharia is even more radically restrictive: by pointedly limiting it to the *unanimous* and *explicit* agreement of the Prophet's immediate Companions<sup>38</sup> (without even mentioning the pretensions of subsequent '*ulama'*) he again undermines the claims to exclusive spiritual authority of *any* particular sect or group, while establishing the bases for his own distinctively spiritual and irenic (because essentially individual) conception of *ijtihad* based on the Koran and hadith.

Finally, as already mentioned in the preceding section, Ibn 'Arabi's repeated denial of any intrinsic validity for *qiyas* and *ra'y* as means of individual insight into the intentions of revelation turns to bitter irony whenever he considers their further abuse in the jurists' vast and unwarranted extension of the revealed texts to comprise a multitude of "interpretations" which "God never intended"--an act of hybris which finds its ultimate expression in the their claims concerning *taqlid*.<sup>39</sup> Instead, for Ibn 'Arabi, the differing individual interpretations of scripture (and

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***did ask (such) things, and after that they began to disbelieve in them***" (5:101-102). Cf. also the related discussion in ch. 339 (III, 151).

<sup>36</sup>Again it is important to stress that Ibn 'Arabi's criticisms are of the assumptions that the "laws" thereby derived are themselves part of the truly divine "revelation" (*shar'/shari'a*) and share its essential *spiritual* intentions; that does not necessarily imply any particular judgment as to the practical necessity or appropriateness of such methods with regard to the aims of temporal laws and government. (See Conclusion below.)

<sup>37</sup>Chapter 88 (II, 165.7-8); see also the related references in n. 34. The mention of "worship" or "devotion to God" (*ta'abbud*) as the (spiritual) object of these prescriptions and the concrete example of *salat* are not fortuitous: see the detailed illustration of Ibn 'Arabi's understanding and "application" of this spiritual method in the immense chapters 68-69 on ritual prayer and ablutions.

<sup>38</sup>Chapter 88, II, 164.31 ff. Ibn 'Arabi forcefully and explicitly points out that the reported *silence* of even a *single* Companion on a given point is enough to invalidate any claim to authoritative consensus--a restriction that effectively, and no doubt intentionally, limits the material or literal sources of revelation to the Koran and (certain) hadith.

<sup>39</sup>See Ibn 'Arabi's repeated criticisms of the *fuqaha'* for actually (albeit unconsciously) claiming the authoritative power to "make up" revelation throughout chapter 366 (especially in the impassioned remarks in sections II-7 and II-9 of our translation). Note also his bitter attacks on the unwarranted liberties of the jurists in ch. 231, II, 530-531: "There is nothing more harmful for the servant (of God) than *ta'wil*" (i.e., the *ra'y* or *qiyas* of the jurists), and "the most hidden (manifestation) of God's 'Ruse' and its densest veil is among the *muta'awwilun*, and especially if they are among the people of *ijtihad*" (i.e., in the sense claimed by the jurists). *Ta'wil*, in such contexts, is usually opposed to the divine "clear guidance" (*bayyina*: see n. 26 above) provided by the immediate spiritual inspiration of the saints, and the *muta'awwilun* in the broadest sense refer to all those who seek to "interpret" the divine word (Koran or

ultimately, the full variety of intimate beliefs more generally) are a natural, positive result of the profound divine intentions:

"God made this difference (of legal judgment and its sources) a mercy for His servants and an accommodation (*ittisa'*) for them regarding the obligation of worship He imposed on them. But the *fuqaha'* of our time unduly restricted (*haraju*) and narrowly limited the common people who blindly follow the '*ulama'*...and this is one of the greatest calamities in Religion!"<sup>40</sup>

The positive alternative underlying this criticism leads us to the question of Ibn 'Arabi's distinctively individualistic conception of spiritual "*ijtihad*" and to the key role of the study of hadith which is one of its main practical presuppositions.

4. The essential motivation of Ibn 'Arabi's criticism of the assumptions underlying the religious paradigm of the *fuqaha'*, however, is not any sort of "liberation" from religious (or legal) constraints, but rather his consistent stress on the *individual's inalienable responsibility* in realizing the spiritual intentions of revelation, along with the *freedom* which is the prerequisite of that responsibility and the *diversity and openness* that are its inevitable consequences. All of these aspects are summed up in his characteristic understanding of the obligation of *ijtihad* as the ongoing "individual effort," in every area of each person's life, required to grasp and realize the deeper intentions of revelation. If this distinctive conception of "*ijtihad*" is only distantly related to the usual technical meaning of that term, it is--once again not surprisingly--intimately rooted in the usage of that verbal root in the Koran (22:78; etc.) and hadith.<sup>41</sup> For "the *ijtihad* the Prophet mentioned" (i.e., as opposed to that claimed by the *fuqaha'*), Ibn 'Arabi insists, "is *only* the (individual effort of) seeking the sign indicating the particular applicability of the (divine) judgment (as expressed in the Koran or hadith) to the actual question (one faces)--and *not* the

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hadith) in rationalizing ways that inevitably tend to be governed by their interests or limited preconceptions. (On the conscious, theoretical level, therefore, Ibn 'Arabi is usually referring to the Islamic jurists, theologians and philosophers.) An extreme illustration of this abusive "ta'wil" of the jurists, recounted in ch. 318 (III, 69-70), is the case of the complaisant faqih who assured the ruler of Aleppo, al-Malik al-Zahir, that he could perform the fast of Ramadan in whatever month he liked.

<sup>40</sup>Chapter 69, I, 392.14-21. Ibn 'Arabi also notes here the practical objection of the *fuqaha'* that his proposed tolerance of and openness to a variety of schools and interpretations "would lead to making a mockery of Religion," and remarks that, given the very different conceptions of "religion" (*al-din*) involved here, "this is the ultimate extreme of their ignorance!"

<sup>41</sup>In the Koranic verse (22:78) which Ibn 'Arabi takes (ch. 318, III, 69) as an expression of the individual obligation of *ijtihad*, that divine commandment is immediately followed by God's denial of any unnecessary burden (*haraj*) in (true) Religion (see n. 35 above): for Ibn 'Arabi, the relation of these two notions is clearly anything but coincidental.

For the numerous hadith on this subject, see Wensinck, *Concordance*, I, p. 390. Ibn 'Arabi's discussions of *ijtihad* refer with special frequency to the famous hadith insisting that the person who practices *ijtihad* will receive "two rewards if he hits the mark," but will *still* be rewarded even if he is mistaken: the relevance of this Prophetic saying to his tolerance of the inevitable mistakes and differences of opinion implied in his own conception of *ijtihad* should be clear. This particular hadith is cited, in varying forms, by both Bukhari (*i'tisam*, 13, 20, 21) and Muslim (*aqdiya*, 15), as well as by Nisa'i, Darimi, Ibn Maja, and Ahmad b. Hanbal.

prescription (*tashri'*) of a (new, merely human) judgment with regard to the case: for that is '*prescribing what is not with God's permission*' (42:21)!"<sup>42</sup>

Given Ibn 'Arabi's fundamental assumptions concerning the spiritual source and aims of revelation--and the fact that their specific domain is the intimate realm of the individual's spiritual consciousness (infinitely more complex than limited set of outward, "legal" matters ordinarily dealt with by the *fuqaha'*)--, this obligation to seek the intended inner meaning of the revealed scriptures is necessarily both universal and intrinsically individual in nature. Hence the requirements for its exercise are quite open: "If we know the language (of the Koran and hadith) and what (their) judgment requires, then we and the (so-called) 'imam' (of the legal schools) are on the same footing."<sup>43</sup> To be sure, this individual effort of understanding will often be incomplete or in error--since only the divine guidance (*bayyina*, etc.) afforded the accomplished saints can offer the assurance of absolute certainty<sup>44</sup>--but Ibn 'Arabi, relying on a famous hadith, repeatedly emphasizes the salutary role of this sort of *ijtihad* indicated by the Prophet's assurance of a divine recompense even in those cases where the person is mistaken and led astray by his carnal soul.<sup>45</sup>

This essentially individual spiritual responsibility--and the openness it presupposes--are further accentuated by the severe restrictions Ibn 'Arabi places on any attempts to "generalize" from the results of this effort of understanding or to impose its results on others, even on the part of the accomplished saints.<sup>46</sup> (The obviously radical "impracticality" of these restrictions, from the

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<sup>42</sup>Chapter 318, III, 69.14-15. These remarks are repeated, in virtually identical terms, in ch. 88, II, 165; ch. 69, I, 392; and ch. 231 (II, 530-531), where Ibn 'Arabi reiterates that the proper role of *ijtihad* is in "seeking the sign (in a particular case) indicating the (applicability of) the judgment (from the Koran or hadith)," and "not in (artificially) extracting a (further extended) judgment from the (scriptural) report through *ta'wil*." In the rest of this passage (III, 69.15 ff.), the crucial "sign" (*dalil*) mentioned here is understood to be the "goal" or "end" contained in the literal form of the revealed judgment, and the saints' true perception of this (spiritual) goal is forcefully contrasted with the artificial "interpretations" (*ta'wil gharib*: cf. n. 39 above) and "arbitrary opinion" (*ra'y*: cf. n. 31) of the *fuqaha'*. See also the similar vehement criticisms throughout Parts II-7 and II-9 of our translation of chapter 366.

<sup>43</sup>Chapter 69, I, 494.26 ff.; note also Ibn 'Arabi's fascinating set of practical guidelines for deciding between apparently conflicting indications in the Koran and hadith, in ch. 88, II, 162-164. Here again (as in our earlier qualifying remarks concerning Ibn 'Arabi's critique of *qiyas* and *taqlid*, nn. 32, 35, etc.), it is clear that he is not criticizing the efforts of particular jurists *per se*, but rather their wider claims of spiritual validity and religious authority over *others* in general.

<sup>44</sup>See point III-1 above (especially n. 26), as well as all of Parts II-1 through II-5 of our translation of chapter 366 (III, 332-334). Cf. also the extensive related cross-references in Hakim, *Mu'jam*, pp. 1247-1252 (entry for *yaqin*).

<sup>45</sup>For the particular hadith in question, see references at n. 41 above. This hadith is the basis for an extraordinarily detailed spiritual analysis of such cases--applied primarily to the pretensions of the *fuqaha'*--in chapter 318 (III, 68-71: aptly entitled "The Station of the (Arbitrary) Abrogation of the Sharia, Both Muhammadan and Non-Muhammadan, By the Goals of the Carnal Soul") and in ch. 231 (II, 529-531), concerning the divine "Ruse," *makar*, exemplified in the case of the jurists' assumptions.

<sup>46</sup>It should be noted that the criteria contained in these restrictions--which constitute an interesting test for claims of "sainthood" more generally-- would, if taken seriously, eliminate the vast majority of the



standpoint of the establishment and functioning of any worldly system of law, again serve to emphasize that Ibn 'Arabi's primary concern is to awaken his readers to the full reality of *spiritual* authority and responsibility, not to support some particular practical alternative to existing legal arrangements.) One of the most striking of these restrictions, at the end of chapter 366, is the extraordinary limitation on right of the saints even to *dispute* (much less to use force!) with someone about religion, "unless specifically ordered to do so by a divine command (*ma'mûr*)."<sup>47</sup>

Equally important in this regard is his insistence (at III, 334) that the only *spiritually* authoritative "judge" (*hâkim*) or ruler (*wâli*) is the one who has received the explicit divine command to do so, as well as the "sublime knowledge" implied by that rare and weighty responsibility. In stressing that those difficult conditions have only been fully fulfilled on earth (at least most recently) by Muhammad, and by the Mahdi yet to come--or on a spiritual plane, by those saints (*awliya'*) who are the Prophet's true "heirs" and the Mahdi's true guides and "helpers"--, Ibn 'Arabi points to the more fundamental and pervasive (albeit unconscious) ignorance "that is the root of all injustice in the holders of (temporal) authority." At the same time he suggests to the interested reader the very different nature (and potential source) of that *genuine*, spiritual knowledge "which necessarily and inevitably implies (the corresponding) action," a knowledge which is the ultimate subject of the *Futuhat* as a whole.<sup>48</sup>

A further manifestation of this same distinctive spiritual perspective is Ibn 'Arabi's famous (or in some quarters notorious) openness and sensitivity to *all* forms of "belief" (*'aqa'id*), a characteristic aspect of his religious and metaphysical thinking so central that it has been mentioned in virtually every general account of his thought.<sup>49</sup> However, commentators have--for fairly obvious reasons--less frequently drawn attention to a statement at the beginning of his chapter "on the inner knowledge of the Sharia" which is a natural consequence of these same principles, but whose implications, in practical terms, are perhaps even more radical:

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more notorious "messianic" or "Mahdist" pretenders to divine inspiration, whether in Islam or elsewhere. (Cf. also the discussions of Ibn 'Arabi's wide-ranging criticism of *taqlid* in the preceding sections.)

<sup>47</sup>III, 340 (Part III of our translation); similar remarks can be found in ch. 339, III, 152.14 ff. And even if the saint receives such an order, Ibn 'Arabi adds, "the choice (of whether to argue) is up to him."

<sup>48</sup>Both quotations from chapter 366, III, 333 (Part II-4 of our translation). Cf. the similar point made in chapter 69, I, 494, where he notes that "the *fuqaha'* of our time" are actually completely "ignorant of the *Qur'an* and Sunna--*even if they have memorized them* (i.e., their outward forms)!" The specifically *spiritual* concepts of "knowledge" and "ignorance" implied by such statements, again based on many indications in the Koran and hadith, are developed throughout Ibn 'Arabi's writing.

<sup>49</sup>To avoid misunderstanding, it should perhaps be added that the distinctive use of "belief" in this context, throughout Ibn 'Arabi's writing, refers to the total range of human forms of perception and comprehension of Being, in every age, not just the limited set of notions discussed by the '*ulama'* of certain religions. In addition to the passages from the *Fusus al-Hikam* and his poetry that are the primary basis for most of the standard secondary accounts (references in our review article in the *JAOS* cited at n. 4 above), see especially his illuminating description of the lofty station in Paradise reserved for the "knowers of God" (i.e., of the "comprehensive Name" *Allah*) among the prophets and saints--those who remain receptive to and absolute "servants" of *all* beliefs and all manifestations of the divine, rather than only to certain more restricted divine Names--in ch. 73, question 67 (II, 80-81).

"The Sharia is the outward practice (*sunna*) brought by the (prophetic) messengers according to God's command and the practices (*sunan*) devised according to Path of proximity to God, as...in the saying of the Messenger: 'he who establishes a good practice (...)', in which he allowed us to devise (practices) that are good and mentioned the reward for the person who devises it and those who practice it."<sup>50</sup>

Quite apart from the wider practical perspectives suggested by the second half of this definition (where Ibn 'Arabi may be referring mainly to certain practices of the Sufis), nothing could indicate more clearly the profound philosophic differences separating this conception of the "Sharia" from the corresponding assumptions of the *fuqaha*'.

5. Finally, a crucial practical presupposition of Ibn 'Arabi's own understanding of the Sharia (within Islam) is his continual emphasis on the role of ongoing *individual study of hadith*--along with the Koran, of course--in providing the literal materials for the effort of "*ijtihad*" just described. Thus he repeatedly contrasts those "who truly know God's *shar'* among the *muhaddithun*" with "those *fuqaha*' who blindly follow the people of *ijtihad* (i.e., their "imams"), like the *fuqaha*' of our time, who do not know either the *Qur'an* or the *sunna*." For the "people of Remembrance," the true spiritual authorities mentioned in the Koran (21:7), are precisely "the people of the *Qur'an* and of hadith."<sup>51</sup> This advice was not just theoretical: Ibn 'Arabi's own

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<sup>50</sup>Chapter 262 (II, 562); the plurals reflect the subject of that chapter, which is all of the *shara'i* in general. This statement must be understood in the context of Ibn 'Arabi's explanation, in the same passage, that the "Sharia" prescribes the appropriate means (*masarif*) for realizing the *makarim al-akhlaq* that are its ultimate aim (as explained in section 2, notes 29-30 above). The Koranic term (57:27) translated here as "devised" (*ubtudi'at*) strongly implies novelty and creative invention; as in the case of Ibn 'Arabi's use of *ibaha* (n. 33 above), it is no doubt intended as an ironic reproach of those '*ulama*', who habitually denounced many of the basic practices of Sufism as *bid'a* or what they considered to be "unlawful" innovation. Thus in chapter 69 (I, 194), Ibn 'Arabi insists that it is really the unfounded religious claims of the *fuqaha*' (concerning *taqlid*, *qiyas*, etc.) that are the truly reprehensible *bid'a*--i.e., the *sunna sayyi'a* also mentioned in the hadith discussed here--a pretension "for which they have no excuse with God!"

For the hadith that begins *man sanna sunna hasana...*, and whose conclusion is briefly paraphrased here, see Wensinck, *Concordance*, II, 552. That hadith is recorded, with many variants, in Muslim (*'ilm*, 15, etc.; *zakat*, 59), Tirmidhi, Ibn Maja, Darimi and Ahmad b. Hanbal.

<sup>51</sup>The first quotation is from chapter 69, I, 494; the second from ch. 88, II, 165. (For Ibn 'Arabi's distinctive understanding of the spiritual meaning of "knowledge" assumed here, see n. 48 above.) Chapter 318 (III, 68-71), almost entirely devoted to this theme of the fundamental importance of hadith (and their neglect by the *fuqaha*'), describes Ibn 'Arabi's personal encounters "both in the East and the West (of the Islamic world)" with a long series of jurists who--despite the contrary advice of Abu Hanifa and Shafi'i, whose "school was hadith"--always refused to deny the opinions (*ra'y*) of their "imams" even when confronted with explicit hadith to the contrary; thus "the Sharia was abrogated by (their) desires, although the reports (concerning the Prophet) are to be found recorded in the sound books (of hadith)!" See also his recounting in the same chapter (III, 69) of two fascinating dream-visions likewise stressing the abandonment by the Community of the "pure and easy Path" provided by hadith for the "books of *ra'y*" of the jurists. (For a suggestive study of some of the wider historical and sociological background

massive reliance on hadith (and the Koran), although not adequately suggested in most available translations and secondary accounts of his work, is amply illustrated throughout the *Futuhat* and all his other writings. Of course this recommended reliance on hadith certainly does not imply any exclusive and unquestioning acceptance of the usual assumptions of *'ilm al-hadith* (e.g., as a sufficient method for determining the "truth" of a particular report), nor is it based on any naive illusion of a single "obvious" literal meaning that would somehow preclude all differences of interpretation and understanding. Instead it assumes the application of all those characteristic features of Ibn 'Arabi's spiritual outlook and method outlined under the preceding headings.<sup>52</sup> Those distinctive traits are summed up in a key passage where, after reiterating that "my own school (*madhhab*) is hadith," Ibn 'Arabi goes on to suggest what one should do in case that still does not provide sufficient guidance:

"Now you must know that if a human being (*al-insan*) renounces his (own personal) aims, takes a loathing to his carnal soul (*nafs*) and instead prefers his Lord, then God (*al-Haqq*) will give him a form of divine guidance in exchange for the form of his *nafs*...so that he walks in garments of Light; and (this form) is the Sharia of his prophet and the Message of his (prophetic) Messenger. Thus he receives from his Lord what contains his happiness--and

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of these disputes in Andalusia prior to Ibn 'Arabi, see D. Urvoy, *Le monde des ulemas andalous du v/xie au vii/xiiiie siecle*, Paris, 1978.)

<sup>52</sup>See especially the discussion of Ibn 'Arabi's distinctive "spiritual literalism" in section II above; it should be added that his strong reliance on hadith does involve a notable *selectivity* in the choice and citation of sayings that also deserves further study. Ibn 'Arabi refers in a number of places to the special ability of the saints to recognize, with the aid of divine inspiration, the falsity of certain hadith with a sound *isnad* and the authenticity of other hadith judged to have a "weak" chain of transmission: see, e.g., chapter 29 (O.Y. ed., III, 240-241) of the *Futuhat* and his *K. al-Fana' fi al-Mushahada (Rasa'il Ibn 'Arabi*, Hyderabad, 1948, vol. I, no. 1), p. 4 (tr. M. Valsan, *Le livre de l'extinction dans la contemplation*, Paris, 1984, pp. 32-33). For a brief summary of Ibn 'Arabi's lifelong studies of hadith and his numerous books in that field (now mostly lost), see the Introduction to the translation of his famous selection of *hadith qudsi*, the *Mishkat al-Anwar*, by M. Valsan, *La niche des lumieres*, Paris, 1983.

The fundamental differences separating Ibn 'Arabi's perspective from that of the *Zahiri* legal school (as well as the other schools of Islamic law) are amply indicated above. However, Ibn 'Arabi was sometimes obliged to explain the essential difference of his outlook, given the practical or verbal coincidences sometimes resulting from his emphasis on hadith and outwardly similar criticisms of certain methods of *fiqh* (*qiyas*, etc.): see further references in the article of M. Chodkiewicz cited at n. 20 above. Goldziher's influential description of Ibn 'Arabi, in *The Zahiris: Their Doctrine and Their History* (tr. W. Behn, Leiden, 1971), pp. 169-171, as an "exponent of the *Zahiri* school" rests on such superficial resemblances. That passage does give a fascinating account of a dream-vision in which Ibn 'Arabi was informed of Ibn Hazm's great rank and authority as a *muhaddith*, although "I had never heard of Ibn Hazm's name before." See a similar illustration of his apparent ignorance of a basic *Zahiri* tenet (and of his characteristic reliance on hadith and direct inspiration) at n. 54 below.

some people see (this divine guidance) in the form of their prophet, while some see it in the form of their (spiritual) state."<sup>53</sup>

In the former case, he continues, "that (form) is the inner reality of that prophet and his spirit, or the form of an angel like him, (who) knows his Sharia from God.... And we ourselves have often received in this way the form of many things among the divinely revealed judgments (*ahkam shar'iya*) which we had not learned about from the '*ulama*' or from books."<sup>54</sup> But "if the form is not that of his prophet," he concludes, "then it still necessarily refers to his (spiritual) state or to the stage (i.e., the appropriate spiritual intention) of the *shar'* with regard to that moment and that (particular) situation in which he saw that vision...." And even in that instance, "apart from what is forbidden or enjoined (by the Sharia), there is no restriction (*tahjir*) on what he accepts from (that vision), whether with regard to beliefs or other things--for God's Presence includes the totality of beliefs (*jami' al-'aqa'id*)."

#### IV. Conclusion

There should be no need to expand on the practical and intellectual dangers and distortions that would result if virtually any of the points discussed in the preceding section were taken in isolation or separated from their original context--especially if they were misrepresented as "alternative" theories of Islamic *law*, or taken as allusions to the recurrent temporal claims to be "Mahdi" (or "Imam," etc.). We have already pointed out (in sections I and II above) the complex practical measures that Ibn 'Arabi, following earlier Islamic writers, took to make sure that only the most determined and capable readers would piece together these scattered allusions and--what is far more important--the unifying intention and realization that connects them all. For the primary aim of each of these remarks, as we have seen, was certainly not an "attack" on "the Sharia" or even a "critique" of certain principles of *fiqh* (intended as a practical legal alternative

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<sup>53</sup>Chapter 318, III, 70.21 ff; the language used throughout this passage pointedly emphasizes the universality of this situation. The repeated use of "*his* prophet" or "the form of *his* messenger" also refers to Ibn 'Arabi's insistence, throughout the *Futuhat*, that the saints (and ultimately all individuals) are "following in the footsteps" of a certain prophet or prophets with whom they have a special spiritual affinity. (This understanding is also reflected, e.g., in his association of certain spiritual stages with Moses, Jesus, or Muhammad, etc. and in his description of certain Sufis as "*'isawi*," "*musawi*," etc.) See further references and explanations in Chodkiewicz, *Sceau*, chapters 3-5 and Hakim, *Mu'jam*, pp. 1191-1201.

<sup>54</sup>The following personal illustration (III, 70.28-34) of this sort of knowledge revealed directly by the form of the Prophet that Ibn 'Arabi provides here is especially interesting because it concerns the "raising of the hands" (*raf' al-yadayn*) during the ritual prayer, something "which is not professed by a single person in our country" (i.e., Andalusia), and which he only later found described in several of the canonical hadith collections (Muslim, Malik, Tirmidhi, etc.). This is another indication, incidentally, that Ibn 'Arabi was quite unaware of this Zahiri tenet discussed by Goldziher, *op. cit.*, p. 177, in an anecdote that also well illustrates the general ambiance of intolerance in at least part of Andalusia at this time.

or a new set of substitute beliefs), but rather an *inner* transformation in the reader's deepest assumptions and awareness as to what is meant by such terms.

That intended shift in insight, which is the constant aim of Ibn 'Arabi's elaborate rhetoric, is not really a change in "beliefs," but rather a *transformed awareness* of what the vast majority of his readers no doubt already believed. As he indicated in his Introduction to the *Futuhat* (section I above), the reality of the spiritual world (corresponding to the *'ilm al-asrar*) cannot be "explained" except to those who are already aware of it--and who can therefore already grasp it, without further explanation, as expressed in the simplest and most familiar religious symbols. Thus it is surely far from accidental that the very center of Ibn 'Arabi's revealing--and highly sensitive--description of the characteristics of the Mahdi's "Helpers" in chapter 366 (III, 334) is largely devoted to his description of a personal acquaintance, a *qadi* from Ceuta who so responsibly (and quite practically) exemplified these traits precisely in his own application and realization of the truly divine Law.

Finally, it should be evident by now that the transformation to which Ibn 'Arabi points, and which underlies his repeated criticisms of the majority of "unenlightened" *fuqaha'*, involves, among other things, a clearer recognition of the essential distinction between the spiritual and mundane aspects of man's being, between truth and belief, and between the corresponding aims of "laws" (in the broadest sense) and of true revelation--a distinction which in itself was subject to popular suspicion and misunderstanding in his (and perhaps in every) society. The fact that his characteristic style of esoteric writing enabled him to develop and communicate those insights in a responsible and effective manner, despite those apparently hostile historical circumstances, is a reminder of the potential contemporary relevance of this neglected form of writing so carefully illustrated in his discussion of the Mahdi's "Helpers."