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Inspired Knowledge and Divine Governance: The Mahdi's "Helpers"

INTRODUCTION

The primary focus of Chapter 366 of the *Futuhāt* 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,"¹ 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 Sharia² shared by many of the 'ulama' in the popular sense of

¹Wuzara' (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.

²In 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.³

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.

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.)

³See 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....⁴

[I. THE RELATION BETWEEN THE MAHDI AND HIS HELPERS:]⁵

...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.⁶ ...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

⁴III, 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."

⁵Here 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.

⁶This 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 EI², 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-tax⁷ 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,⁸ and his enemies will be those who follow blindly the 'ulama', the people of ijtihād,⁹ 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.

⁷The 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 EI², pp. 559 ff.

⁸For 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 madhahib; 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.

⁹muqallidat 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.

[...¹⁰] 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.¹¹

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),¹² for they follow in the footsteps of those men among

¹⁰The 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).

¹¹The 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.)

¹²The 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;¹³ 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 prayer¹⁴ (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)¹⁵ knows this (i.e., the victorious divine support flowing from the sincerity of perfect faith), he acts accordingly and is the most

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.

¹³The 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.

¹⁴hijjir: 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 "hijjirs"--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).

¹⁵al-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).¹⁶ For he and the Qur'an are brothers,¹⁷ just as the Mahdi and the sword are brothers.

[...¹⁸] 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

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.

¹⁶For 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.)

¹⁷See 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.)

¹⁸After 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 EI¹ (A.J. Wensinck) and EI² (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.¹⁹ 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 sort²⁰ 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":]²¹

¹⁹Imam 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.

²⁰The 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).

²¹III, 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."²² 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 praying²³ 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)²⁴ 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.²⁵

²²See 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.

²³Or "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.)

²⁴Ibn '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.

²⁵ilhah, 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,²⁶ 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,²⁷ 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."²⁸ 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.²⁹

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)....

²⁶I.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.

²⁷Ibn '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").

²⁸This 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).

²⁹See 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 Unseen³⁰ 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).³¹

[2.] Now as for "understanding the divine address when it is delivered,"³² this is (summarized) in His saying: "*And it was not for any mortal man that God should speak*

³⁰Rijal 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).

³¹Ibn '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.)

³²Ibn '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),³³ that is what He delivers to their hearts as something newly reported (to them),³⁴ 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 knowledge³⁵ among people in general. That is genuine knowledge, but it is not obtained from a (particular divine)

³³Ibn '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).

³⁴ala 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.

³⁵The "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)....³⁶

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.³⁷

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)....³⁸ But if either sort of messenger

³⁶Ibn '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.

³⁷ayn 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 kufi, 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.).

³⁸This "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.³⁹

[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.⁴⁰ But if someone "translates" (into words) from (their

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.)

³⁹It 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).

⁴⁰Perhaps 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,⁴¹ if it is translated from divine Speaking. So understand that.

[4.] As for "**appointing the (various) ranks of the holders of authority**,"⁴² 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.

⁴¹mutarjim: 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."

⁴²"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),⁴³ 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."⁴⁴ 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....⁴⁵

⁴³'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.

⁴⁴A 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).

⁴⁵I.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,⁴⁶ 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)....⁴⁷

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 limits⁴⁸ 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.

⁴⁶I.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.

⁴⁷This 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.)

⁴⁸hudud 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 man⁴⁹

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,⁵⁰ whenever he is carrying out the

⁴⁹I.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.

⁵⁰al-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:⁵¹

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)⁵² 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).

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.

⁵¹Ibn '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."

⁵²An 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.⁵³ 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.⁵⁴

[6-a.] As for "**the forms of (spiritual) sustenance (arzaq) needed by the ruler,**"⁵⁵ this (requires) that he know the kinds of worlds, which are only two--i.e., by "world" I mean

⁵³a'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.

⁵⁴The "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.

⁵⁵The 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 souls⁵⁶ 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.⁵⁷

But as for the luminous world (of the angelic spirits),⁵⁸ 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.⁵⁹ 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).

⁵⁶Here 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.

⁵⁷Or 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.

⁵⁸I.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."

⁵⁹This 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'an⁶⁰--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 Signs⁶¹ 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.⁶² 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,⁶³ 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.⁶⁴ I was given the

⁶⁰I.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.

⁶¹Ayat: i.e., the verses of the Koran.

⁶²We 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."

⁶³bathth 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).

⁶⁴See 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.⁶⁵

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 away⁶⁶--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

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.

⁶⁵The 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).

⁶⁶The "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.⁶⁷ 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"⁶⁸--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,'⁶⁹ 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**"⁷⁰..., that (reality) inwardly penetrates and informs all the practical and intellectual crafts.⁷¹ Therefore if the

⁶⁷An 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.

⁶⁸Imam 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.

⁶⁹baqiyat 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.

⁷⁰tadakhul 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 person⁷² 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')⁷³ 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";⁷⁴ this (essential spiritual inspiration underlying the judgment) is not in the textual indications

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).

⁷¹al-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.

⁷²al-'aqil: i.e., the person whose reason and knowledge restrain the demands of his passions, as explained at nn. 46 and 53 above.

⁷³See 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.

⁷⁴nikah 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).⁷⁵ 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'⁷⁶--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 indications⁷⁷ 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

⁷⁵"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.)

⁷⁶al-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.")

⁷⁷al-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)⁷⁸-- 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 faqir⁷⁹ 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)⁸⁰ 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

⁷⁸Ibn '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.

⁷⁹al-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.

⁸⁰ashab '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 servants⁸¹ and (insuring that) the common people need them. Hence they do not prosper (Kor. 16:116) with regard to their souls,⁸² 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,⁸³ 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).⁸⁴ This

⁸¹The 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 EI², vol. III.

⁸²Although 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.

⁸³"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).

⁸⁴Again 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":⁸⁵ (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.⁸⁶

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

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.

⁸⁵The 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.'"

⁸⁶The 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.⁸⁷

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 ijtihad⁸⁸ 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.

⁸⁷The 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).

⁸⁸I.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 stages⁸⁹--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."⁹⁰

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)....⁹¹

⁸⁹I.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).

⁹⁰Ibn '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.

⁹¹Ibn '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 Khadir⁹²...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...,⁹³ 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 rank⁹⁴ 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.

⁹²Here 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.

⁹³Here 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.

⁹⁴It 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"⁹⁵ 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.⁹⁶

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.⁹⁷

⁹⁵sha'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").

⁹⁶See already section II-1 (at notes 23-29) above on the special efficacy of the Mahdi's prayers, corresponding to his quasi-prophetic function.

⁹⁷nazila, 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,⁹⁸ 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.)⁹⁹ 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."

⁹⁸mubah: 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.

⁹⁹Din-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).¹⁰⁰ But what makes you know?--perhaps (Kor. 80:3)¹⁰¹ 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

translation here) and in his K. al-Isra' (see the translation and commentary in our article cited at n. 98 above.).

¹⁰⁰The 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.

¹⁰¹The 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 unaware¹⁰² (Kor. 52:21)!

So this is what prevents the Mahdi from speaking on the basis of (this sort of factitious) analogy¹⁰³ 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.¹⁰⁴ 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,"¹⁰⁵ and why he used to be dislike being questioned about religion, out of fear of (unnecessarily) increasing the (divine) commandments (ahkam).

¹⁰²The 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 fuhaha' 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."

¹⁰³I.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.

¹⁰⁴Hence 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 fuhaha'. 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.

¹⁰⁵This 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.¹⁰⁶ 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'¹⁰⁷ 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)....¹⁰⁸

[III. THE FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE TYPIFYING THIS SPIRITUAL STAGE]¹⁰⁹

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

¹⁰⁶hukm 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).

¹⁰⁷See 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.

¹⁰⁸Ibn '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.

¹⁰⁹III, 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.¹¹⁰ 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 himself¹¹¹ 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,¹¹² 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 courtesy¹¹³ (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

¹¹⁰"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).

¹¹¹This 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.

¹¹²See, 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.

¹¹³adab, 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,¹¹⁴ when he does see it, so that he responds to it spontaneously with beautiful actions.¹¹⁵ 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."¹¹⁶ 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.¹¹⁷

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).¹¹⁸ But for those who comprehend things from the divine

¹¹⁴An 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.

¹¹⁵Or "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."

¹¹⁶Here, 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.

¹¹⁷The 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.

¹¹⁸kharq 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 Unseen¹¹⁹ 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)¹²⁰ 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'."¹²¹ 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.

¹¹⁹rijal 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.

¹²⁰Here (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 Futuhat); 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.

¹²¹See 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.¹²² Someone who has (truly) surrendered (to God) among those who depend on God¹²³ 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)¹²⁴--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

¹²²Given 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....

¹²³I.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.

¹²⁴This 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.¹²⁵

¹²⁵I.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).