

CHAPTER

I

Ibn 'Arabī, His Sufi Thought and the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*

THE MAN

Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-'Arabī al-Ḥātimī al-Ṭā'ī, commonly known and referred to as Ibn 'Arabī, was a major figure of Islamic religious thought and of sufism, the mystical tradition of Islam. Ibn 'Arabī was born in Murcia in al-Andalus, Islamic Spain, on 27 July 1165 (17 Ramaḍān 560). He grew up in a privileged position, as a result of his father's various posts of political importance. Inclining in his later teen years toward a quest for intellectual, religious and spiritual truth, Ibn 'Arabī spent the rest of his life on this path. From his late twenties, he began his physical journeys outward from Spain, first to the Maghrib several times and, in following years, to various points in the East. In 1223, Ibn 'Arabī finally settled in Damascus where, now finished with his wanderings, he lived out his remaining years, working assiduously and producing a number of important works; among these was the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, which Ibn 'Arabī claimed to have received in a vision from the Prophet Muḥammad in that city.

The long period of travel was for Ibn 'Arabī the physical correlative and the context of his concomitant intellectual and religious journey. Learning from others, as well as himself teaching them during his wanderings, Ibn 'Arabī achieved an impressive literary productivity closely linked with his physical movements. Each place, it seems, provided the human and

creative resources which made possible the development and refinement of his outlook. The 'arc' of Ibn 'Arabī's life, as Henri Corbin called it, was in this sense truly integrative.¹ The result was an original perspective that in later Islam served to re-orientate religious thought, whether sufi or other, in most profound ways.

IBN 'ARABĪ'S SUFI THOUGHT

Ibn 'Arabī's sufi thought is highly complex and subtle. In both its method and content, Ibn 'Arabī's thought resists any simple and straightforward understanding; it yields itself only to the most strenuous interpretative efforts and then only partially, often leaving unresolved problems and some degree of ambiguity. This is particularly true in the case of the *Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam*, but it holds also for Ibn 'Arabī's other works which propound his characteristic sufi metaphysics.

The difficulties derive mainly from conceptual and linguistic ambiguity, and complex, overlapping and multilevelled ideas in an esoteric formulation. Additionally, there is a linguistic complexity borne out of literary richness and nuance, as well as the obfuscation generally associated with esoteric ideas. Then, as with much of the literature of medieval Islamic religious thought, there is here also an oral factor. The texts derived to some extent from an interweaving of discussion and writing. The discussion would be absorbed within the texts and the texts in their final forms would thus reflect and contain the discussion. As in most cases the history of this process obviously cannot be reconstructed, for this reason certain ambiguities will remain in the writings. These cannot easily (if at all) be resolved,

1. Henri Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī*, pp. 38–73, for Corbin's discussion of Ibn 'Arabī's life. The most important biographical study of Ibn 'Arabī thus far is Claude Addas's book *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn 'Arabī*. This work should be consulted for the detail of Ibn 'Arabī's life and for the historical development of his thought.

because they originally arose in discussion and they remain there. In Ibn 'Arabī's work, however, the complexity of his thought and the subtlety of his expression remain the greater problem.

Despite these barriers, modern scholarship, greatly aided by traditional sources, has achieved a certain comprehension of Ibn 'Arabī's outlook. However provisional and sometimes obviously uncertain, our present understanding does constitute a firm foundation for going forward. I should like now, however briefly, to provide some overview of Ibn 'Arabī's thought, in particular as this is relevant to his *Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam*. While the understanding and explication below are my own, they will inevitably reflect also some views of other modern scholars who have contributed to our common base of knowledge. As my purpose here is more general than specific, I may not in all instances cite them, but I remain grateful for their various contributions.²

SUFI METAPHYSICS

The main term I use to describe Ibn 'Arabī's mystical thought is that of sufi metaphysics. This term, in my view, incorporates the experiential, personal element and its profound intellectualisation with Ibn 'Arabī in his metaphysics. By metaphysics here I do not mean a full philosophical doctrine, as more narrowly and precisely formulated in the true philosophical traditions; this is rather a far-reaching intellectual expression of intertwined experience and ideas which addresses ultimate transcendent

2. In addition, some of the traditional commentaries on the *Fuṣūṣ* have in some respects aided my attempts to understand this work, as have Professor 'Aḥī's interpretative comments in his edition of the text. 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī's *Sharḥ 'alā Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam* has been particularly helpful. However, for the approach I have been trying to develop, as presented in this book, it was important and necessary to work mainly with the *Fuṣūṣ* itself, in an 'unmediated' way, and even without reference to other of Ibn 'Arabī's works or influences upon him. Translations from the *Fuṣūṣ* are my own.

issues of cosmogony and cosmology, God and man, this world and the next. There is here much that may be drawn from traditional Islamic philosophical and theological thought—especially the problem of the One and the many with its components of classical and post-classical ideas; there are also many elements of the other Islamic religious and secular, intellectual and scientific traditions. Ibn 'Arabī, like many other great medieval Muslim intellectuals, was very much a polymath who brought all he possessed to bear on the issues of his concern. Indeed, it is quite clear even that he saw in his sufi metaphysics a basis for the resolution of the major outstanding problems of Islamic religious thought in his time from a new perspective.

Though sometimes, then, redolent of aspects of philosophical metaphysics, Ibn 'Arabī's outlook goes beyond and differs from the other tradition in its formulations, expressions and content. It is also different in its very reason for being, as an intellectualisation of the earlier tradition of sufism—thus, again, the name 'sufi metaphysics'. For though it would be wrong to deny sufism prior to Ibn 'Arabī, whether 'Western' or 'Eastern', any intellectual attributes or systematisation, the core and focal point of the tradition usually remained decidedly on the side of personal religious experience and its expression. These basic 'mystical' features understandably still remain critical for Ibn 'Arabī and, by his own claim, they define and direct his sufi career; but his sufism must in great part be understood as an intellectualisation of that prior tradition, if it is to be understood at all, and if its significance is to be appreciated. Annemarie Schimmel has put it well:

But whatever the Spanish-born mystic who soon became known as *ash-shaikh al-akbar* (Magister Magnus) might have intended, there is a world of difference between his approach to religion and the dynamic, personal religion of Hallaj. With Ibn 'Arabī, Islamic mysticism comes close to the mysticism of infinity, and his approach is theosophical or gnostic rather than voluntaristic, for his goal is to lift the veils of ignorance which hide the basic

Ibn 'Arabī, His Sufi Thought and the Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam

identity of man and the Divine, while in early Sufism the element of personal love between man and God was predominant.³

Ibn 'Arabī's sufi metaphysics is vast and vastly complex. Its main ideas, style and method, as said above, render it difficult to penetrate. A focused survey of the main ideas, as these are formulated and appear especially in the *Fuṣūṣ*, will give more substance to this general characterisation of the metaphysics; it will also provide a necessary conceptual background for the Qur'ānic analyses of the *Fuṣūṣ* made in the following chapters. Preliminary to this survey, let us briefly consider Ibn 'Arabī's own view of the origin of the *Fuṣūṣ*.

THE ORIGIN OF THE *FUṢUṢ*

Like most of Ibn 'Arabī's works, the *Fuṣūṣ* on his claim is a product of transcendent inspiration; in this case, indeed, his inspiration seems clear and direct:

I saw the Messenger of God, peace be upon him, in a vision given me at the end of [the month of] Muḥarram, in the year 627, in Damascus. Thus, he said to me, 'This is the book, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*. Take it and reveal it to the people, who would benefit by it.' I then said, 'With fidelity and obedience to God, we shall do exactly as we have been commanded.' Thus did I actualise the demand, purifying intention and directing purpose and resolution toward disseminating this book, just as the Messenger of God, peace be upon him, delineated it for me, without addition or deletion....⁴

3. Annemarie Schimmel, *As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam*, 1982, p. 38. Again, I do not mean that sufism prior to Ibn 'Arabī did not possess a developing intellectual expression. It did. Ibn 'Arabī, however, constituted a watershed in that development.

4. *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 47. The word Ibn 'Arabī uses here for his 'vision' is *mubashshira*. For a brief discussion of this term as seen in Islamic religious literature, see Simeon Evstatiev, 'The Khātam al-Nabiyyīn Doctrine in Arabic Historical Thought', pp. 458-461.

All references to the *Fuṣūṣ* will be to the edition of Professor Abū al-ʿAlā 'Aḥīfī which includes his introduction and interpretative comments: *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam wa'l-Ta'liqāt 'alayhi*, Cairo, Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, n.d. For a full English translation, R. W. J. Austin's *The Bezels of Wisdom* is standard.

Ibn 'Arabī's claim here that he is merely transmitting in the *Fuṣūṣ* what the Prophet Muḥammad 'revealed' to him is also accompanied by the assertion that the people should therefore have no fear of any 'deception' (*talbīs*) in it. For, he says, he would not 'reveal' to others in 'this writing' (the *Fuṣūṣ*), anything other than what the Prophet had 'revealed' to him.⁵ Concerning his personal status in all of this, Ibn 'Arabī says, 'I am neither a prophet nor a messenger, but merely an heir (*wārith*), sowing the seed for my hereafter.'⁶ Though here, typically for him, making clear that a *walī* (sufi 'saint') such as himself, can make no pretence to true prophethood, Ibn 'Arabī is also making clear that his own book, the *Fuṣūṣ*, in being 'revealed' to him by the Prophet of Islam who sought its wide dissemination, provides an esoteric correlative to the original Qur'ānic revelation: thus Ibn 'Arabī's use of the Arabic root *n-z-l* in referring to the Prophet's 'revealing' of the *Fuṣūṣ* to him and his particular presentation of the whole 'revelatory' experience. This prophetic visionary origin of the *Fuṣūṣ* serves Ibn 'Arabī as the implicit, ultimate support in his 'Qur'ānic story-telling' in the book, thereby linking Qur'ān with sufi metaphysics in fully integrative fashion. This link is also clear in the very content and structure of the *Fuṣūṣ*, with its organisation in twenty-seven chapters devoted to Qur'ānic prophets.

SUFI METAPHYSICS IN THE *FUṢUṢ*

Ibn 'Arabī's sufi metaphysics in the *Fuṣūṣ* represents his general metaphysical thought as that is seen in so many of his works, appearing there in various formulations and presentations. The *Fuṣūṣ* presents this metaphysical thought in a particularly distilled fashion and with a sharply defined prophetic theme.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*

While making the *Fuṣūṣ* a 'dense' work (even for Ibn 'Arabī), these features also give it a useful focus for analysis. In my synopsis of some central ideas in Ibn 'Arabī's sufi metaphysics I shall be concise, the goal again being to provide proper background and foundation for the Qur'ānic analysis of the *Fuṣūṣ*, rather than an exhaustive exposition of this thought. Further and more detailed discussion of the metaphysics will figure prominently in the Qur'ānic analysis. Three categories of ideas, then, will be addressed here: the One and the many; the metaphysical and the ethical; the *Fuṣūṣ* and the Qur'ān.

THE ONE AND THE MANY

The issue of the One and the many, unity and diversity, may be seen as the bedrock of Ibn 'Arabī's sufi metaphysics. From here all else issues and to this all returns. Derived ultimately from a synthesis of the religious experience, the philosophical and theological reflection in various Islamic intellectual traditions and his own creative thought, Ibn 'Arabī's single-minded pursuit of a resolution to this issue constitutes a primary intellectual concern for him. The question is how a 'mystical', unitive presence and a correlative theoretical universal oneness may be aligned with an empirical multiplicity. Further, if the ultimate answer is on the side of unity—which it is for Ibn 'Arabī—then what of the Islamic monotheistic notion of God and His creation separated by an unbridgeable gulf? Indeed, how is the issue of the One and the many related to traditional ideas of God and His creation and God and His attributes for Ibn 'Arabī? Put simply, all these issues are for him as one, though sometimes expressed in 'different languages' requiring different formulations in different circumstances. Ibn 'Arabī's answer always emphasises the oneness and unity of things, known by way of multiplicity.

Eschewing standard philosophical, theological and traditional views positing God Himself as either the cause of multiplicity,

or as a causal intermediate influence, Ibn 'Arabī then chooses to affirm an *identification* of the One and the many, God and His creation. However, though in one sense the 'two' for him *are* as one, in another they are not—and cannot—be reduced to the oneness of total identification. Indeed, Ibn 'Arabī's complete fidelity to the conventional monotheistic pattern of unity (God) and multiplicity (His creation) again is patent *on one level*. But in the context of Ibn 'Arabī's sufi metaphysics, there *is* an identification. Is this not contradictory? I think not—certainly not for Ibn 'Arabī—though it has posed a significant barrier for some in understanding his thought. Ibn 'Arabī's most perceptive and vehement traditional critics within the Islamic world do indeed see the unitive theme in all its complexity; and they see it as the whole of Ibn 'Arabī's outlook, to the exclusion of the more usual Islamic notions of God and His creation. For these critics, Ibn 'Arabī clearly reduces God and man, God and His creation, to one and the same thing, thereby, apart from all else, deifying man and throwing law and ethics into confusion. In my view, these critics correctly identify *one dimension* of the sufi metaphysics, but they also neglect, or fail to see, Ibn 'Arabī's most subtle interweaving of this notion with the other, more usual, conception of the gulf between God and His creation. It is in this subtle interweaving, on different levels and from various perspectives, where Ibn 'Arabī's full meaning is situated and where a dialectical tension between both notions is achieved in a fluid synthesis. An analysis of Ibn 'Arabī's thought must take account of the complexity of this issue; it must not be based on the principle of 'excluded middle', an 'either/or' approach, which Ibn 'Arabī himself so thoroughly denies. We must, then, recognise that while the unitive principle for Ibn 'Arabī provides the most comprehensive meaning for religion, it does not thus negate the notion of God and His creation in strict separation and with creation's total dependency upon its Creator

Ibn 'Arabī's unitive principle—either a 'monism' or 'non-

duality', as some would refer to it⁷—is expressed and formulated in various ways, throughout his works. These formulations are usually among the most subtle and difficult passages. I shall discuss some examples here, mainly as they are germane to the thought of the *Fuṣūṣ* and, more narrowly, to our Qur'ānic analyses of the *Fuṣūṣ*.

The basic issue of the One and the many, unity and multiplicity, as Ibn 'Arabī interweaves it with traditional Islamic conceptions of God and the world, is prominent in a particular way in the sufi metaphysics of the *Fuṣūṣ*. Ibn 'Arabī's conceptual foundation is the notion of 'being', *wujūd* (sometimes rendered in English also as 'existence', depending on the context). *Wujūd* serves Ibn 'Arabī as the main concept in the expression and formulation of his metaphysics; in this role, *wujūd* has two faces, that of absolute being (*wujūd muṭlaq*) and that of conditional being (*wujūd muqayyad*). *Wujūd muṭlaq* is the unitive principle, the fundamental undifferentiated oneness of things; it alone represents true being. The differentiated world of multiplicity (*wujūd muqayyad*, conditional being) seems by contrast to indicate a 'less real' realm of being.⁸ Posited in this rigorously contrasted way, the formulation here seems one of stark difference between absolute and conditional being. But Ibn 'Arabī's usual aversion to sharp contrasts operates here as well—indeed, the contrast for him, while remaining constant on one level, is ultimately transcended on another. The 'contrast' for him, in fact, serves then

7. I shall not get involved in the difficult (and endless) debate on the proper term to be applied here. There are numerous ideas about this in the scholarly literature on Ibn 'Arabī which are useful. My own views will, I trust, emerge in the context of the analyses presented. In general, I prefer not to use one exclusive term, but to deal with the notion in different ways, as will be seen.

8. For *wujūd muṭlaq* and *wujūd muqayyad* see, e.g., *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 132. For extensive references to these and the related notions of *wahdat al-wujūd* and *wahdat al-shuhūd*, see Su'ād al-Ḥakīm, *al-Mu'jam al-Sūfī*, pp. 1130–1157. It must be noted that the idea expressed in the terms *wujūd muṭlaq* and *wujūd muqayyad* often appears in the *Fuṣūṣ* without the explicit use of this terminology. In these cases, the idea is usually clearly understood.

as the main vehicle of its own overcoming. This leaves absolute being dominant through an 'upgrading' of conditional being.

For Ibn 'Arabī, the issue of absolute being and conditional being is also formulated in a more conventional theological language, as the issue of God as remote and unknowable Essence (*dhāt*) and God in His manifest attributes (*ṣifāt*). The *dhāt* may be seen as representing the One, while the *ṣifāt* are the many. Then again, from a different angle, the contrast is simply between God (unity) and His creation (multiplicity). And sometimes Ibn 'Arabī speaks of multiplicity as the 'God created in the religious doctrines' (*al-Ḥaqq al-makhlūq fī al-i'tiqādāt*).⁹ 'God created' is God as we conceive Him in the religions ('conceived' being perhaps a more correct rendering of *makhlūq* than created). God here is, again, simply God as revealed in the realm of the many, conditional existence, in His attributes.

However, Ibn 'Arabī 'transcends' these distinctions through an ultimate linking and identification of the One with the many, unity with diversity, absolute being with conditional being, the remote God with the manifest God, God as essence and God as manifest ('created') in attributes and names. He effects this linking through a number of bridging concepts, all of which have one main point: the One and the many inevitably meet. This happens in several ways: the One may reveal itself in certain particular forms in the world of the many, thereby showing its omnipresence or 'immanence'. A prime example of this is Ibn 'Arabī's use of the notions of *majālin* and *tajalliyāt* ('manifestations' or 'appearances'), or *maẓāhir* ('sites of manifestation') which may be certain persons, places or things, to indicate the foci of the coalescence of the One/many in the manifestation of the One. Or the whole world of multiplicity may be seen as the shadow (*ẓill*) of the One; therefore, just as the physical body

9. E.g., *Fuṣūṣ* pp. 121 and 178 and in 'Aḥī's *Ta'liqāt*, p. 250. For discussions of this and related terms in Ibn 'Arabī's thought see: Su'ād al-Ḥakīm *al-Mu'jam al-Ṣūfī*, pp. 87–93, and Henri Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī*, pp. 124–125; 195–200; 265–267.

and the shadow it casts are inseparable, so too are the One and the many.¹⁰ Or, the world of multiplicity in conditional being may be the true God's outward form. Though multiplicity is real for Ibn 'Arabī in its seeming opposition to unity, the reality of this opposition is conceptual, while unity is the overriding ontological truth in its ultimate subsuming and absorbing of all diversity. But again, it is the presumed and felt tension between these two 'sides' which provides the rich intellectual core of Ibn 'Arabī's sufi metaphysics in its integration with traditional religion and in its fullest expression.

THE METAPHYSICAL AND THE ETHICAL

One major area of intersection, and integration, of metaphysics and tradition here is in the realm of ethics and the law. From the perspective of an all-embracing unity of the kind mooted by Ibn 'Arabī, the ethical and legal distinctions, both theoretical and practical, are part of the world of multiplicity; as such, they too may be seen in their ontological absorption in the One. But the inevitable effacing of such distinctions would wreak havoc with the traditional ethical codes and legal systems which, in theory and practice, were the very foundation of Islamic tradition and society. For, it might seem, in the all-encompassing unity, the ethical would be assimilated into oblivion. As we shall see in the following chapters, Ibn 'Arabī does indeed subsume the ethical within metaphysical unity, thereby detaching the ethical from its erstwhile moorings and rendering it 'defunct' in a new world of ethical as well as metaphysical oneness. He does this in several ways. One main way is his paradoxical inversion of conventional ethical principles into their opposites, thereby

10. The chapter on Hārūn contains examples of such derivatives of the *j-l-y* root, as does p. 120 of the *Fuṣūṣ*, while for references to and discussion of *zill* see Su'ād al-Hakīm, *al-Mu'jam al-Sūfī*, pp. 747-750. Finally, another bridging concept, though somewhat different than those mentioned here, is that of the 'fixed essences', *al-a'yān al-thābita*; this will be discussed below in the ethical context.

emptying conventional judgements, commands and prohibitions of their usual meanings and contents. Thus, for example, in the story of the worship of the golden calf in the chapter of Hārūn, Ibn 'Arabī claims this act paradoxically to have been true worship of God who resides in everything, including such images and idols. God, as ontological unity, has here absorbed the particularity of the idol into a realm of oneness, in which good and evil, themselves distinctions of diversity, can no longer be meaningful. It would seem that for Ibn 'Arabī here ethics would actually require this transcendent position in order fully to realise God in His identity as ontological unity.

Another way in which Ibn 'Arabī treats ethics within his metaphysics is through the metaphysical notion of the 'fixed essences' (*al-a'yān al-thābita*),¹¹ prefigured patterns of all that will exist in the realm of conditional being, the world of diversity. Human nature and behaviour, like everything else, are thus determined according to their fixed essences, even to the exclusion of God's own ability to affect events and things in the world, including human actions. These actions are thus 'pre-determined', but *not directly* by God. God's 'inability' in this respect is in no sense a defect in Him. On the contrary. For fundamental to Ibn 'Arabī's methods in dealing with ethics is the underlying assumption that this world of diversity is in fact an expression of God's very essence, as that essence has become manifest. *God's essence* as absolute being is thus transformed into *God's manifestation* as conditional being or diversity, as mentioned above. The whole realm of ethics thus becomes 'relativised', as part of the phenomenal flux behind which lies the ethical stillness of true reality, undifferentiated oneness. In addition to these most prominent approaches to ethics in Ibn 'Arabī's metaphysics, others are also employed as variations on these themes.

11. Discussed often in the following chapters, this notion is basic to Ibn 'Arabī's sufi metaphysics and also provides a mechanism for ethics with the metaphysics. For reference to and discussion of this notion in Ibn 'Arabī's works, see Su'ād al-Ḥakīm, *al-Mu'jam al-Sūfī*, pp. 831-839.

Here, then, good and evil have truly been inverted and transcended in the essence of God as ultimate unity. However, lest one think Ibn 'Arabī was thus a true antinomian, on the evidence of his thinking about ethics within his metaphysics, that would not be true. For though a casual reading of the *Fuṣūṣ* might sometimes give cause for such an assessment, more careful consideration reveals there an absolute fidelity to traditional ethics and law. It is here, as with so much else in Ibn 'Arabī, that his *understanding* and *interpretation* of religion are so dramatically original and challenging, while his adherence to traditional conceptions and upholding of punctilious practice of religion remain constant, if within the context of his original views.

Ibn 'Arabī's adherence to tradition may in one aspect be seen in the Qur'ān-centredness of the *Fuṣūṣ* and of other works. One might even argue that the Qur'ān and, secondarily, other traditional elements of Islam constitute for Ibn 'Arabī the core and foundation of religion through which his sufi metaphysics takes form and achieves its significance. Indeed, on the basis of the origin of the *Fuṣūṣ* as reported by Ibn 'Arabī, it would seem, as I said earlier, that for him the *Fuṣūṣ* represented the truth of the Qur'ān in esoteric, metaphysical form. In the same way, Ibn 'Arabī believed that he was the final and most complete manifestation of the esoteric and metaphysical nature of the Prophet.¹²

THE *FUṢUṢ* AND THE QUR'ĀN

My basic approach to Ibn 'Arabī's thought in the *Fuṣūṣ* is, then, from a Qur'ānic and traditional Islamic perspective.¹³ Such a

12. See M. Chodkiewicz's *The Seal of the Saints: Prophecy and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn 'Arabī* for an excellent discussion of this issue. Particularly relevant to my concerns in the following chapters are the related epistemic issues and the notion of specific prophecy and general spiritual inspiration.

13. Renderings of Qur'ānic passages are my own, but A. Yusuf Ali *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān* is an English rendering that is always suggestive and has been helpful to me.

perspective reveals Qur'ānic (and, sometimes, also *ḥadīth*) framework stories as the core round which Ibn 'Arabī builds and explicates his sufi metaphysics. This is effected in the text in different ways, the better to fulfil Ibn 'Arabī's purpose in the various chapters of the *Fuṣūṣ*. He might, for example, take certain elements directly from a Qur'ānic narrative(s) concerning the prophet to whom a particular chapter is dedicated and construct his framework story in this way. Other Qur'ānic passages and selected *ḥadīth* which are not directly related to that prophet might also be incorporated here. Or, he might construct a Qur'ānic 'story' composed of elements which have no overt relation in the Qur'ān to the prophet involved, but which for Ibn 'Arabī exemplify important aspects of that prophet's life and character. Or, again, in yet another, less typical, formulation, Ibn 'Arabī might use a framework story based on a *ḥadīth* narrative not overtly related to the designated prophet and employing some Qur'ānic components. Finally, Ibn 'Arabī might use any or all of these, alone or in combination.

Whichever method Ibn 'Arabī employs, Qur'ānic and traditional elements, in direct citation or in paraphrase, most often serve in the *Fuṣūṣ* as foundation and framework for explicating his metaphysics. Indeed, for him the metaphysics clearly *is* the meaning of the Qur'ān and of some later religious textual traditions. The *Fuṣūṣ* thus combines an earthy narrative literature of scripture and prophetic story with an extremely abstruse 'sufi metaphysics', the latter for him presumably reflecting the inner, essential, truth of the former. This *genre* may be called a form of 'sufi metaphysical story-telling'. It may be considered an Islamic religious literary *genre* in its own right, introduced and refined by Ibn 'Arabī in the *Fuṣūṣ* and perpetuated by later disciples. It is a *genre* in which Islamic 'popular' and 'high culture' come together, thereby providing a base of appeal also for a wide audience, despite the obvious 'high culture' bias of the *Fuṣūṣ* in its abstruse metaphysical message for an esoterically-orientated elite. The 'popular scriptural' part of that base also reflects a

continuity of religious culture, from Biblical and post-Biblical, canonical and non-canonical narrative in its many oral and written forms in various times and places, to the Qur'ān and its subsequent interpretations in different Islamic contexts. The figures designated as 'prophets' and 'messengers' in the Qur'ān of course take pride of place here, as most are central in that continuity of religious culture. The *Fuṣūṣ*, with its great prophetic theme, is an important Qur'ānic context of that sort and thereby situates Ibn 'Arabī's thought in an even more comprehensive background.¹⁴

Ibn 'Arabī's metaphysics, so imposing in its presence and so insistent in its demands on the interpreter, is created and given meaning in the *Fuṣūṣ* through its integration with that scriptural and traditional narrative. The narrative for Ibn 'Arabī is both a religious literary link with the broader tradition of Islamic (and other) prophetic monotheism as well being his ultimate source in pursuing the insights of his sufi metaphysical theory. Ibn 'Arabī's role in Islamic history as the great intellectual theoretician of sufism must here be seen from this broader narrative perspective. The great genius of his sufi worldview, as expressed so impressively in the *Fuṣūṣ*, lies precisely in this integration of religious story and abstract thought.

The present book explicates ten chapters of the *Fuṣūṣ*, informed by this view of the text. Through close and detailed analysis of the chosen sections, Ibn 'Arabī's ideas and methods are delineated and his unique literary *genre* identified. Ibn 'Arabī's achievement in the intellectualisation of sufism may then be seen in its fullness.

Apart from the present one, each chapter of the book is a commentary on and analysis of a chapter of the *Fuṣūṣ*. I have chosen these particular ten chapters of the *Fuṣūṣ* as, in my view, they especially exemplify its ideas, methods and outlook. The

14. In a number of chapters I have discussed some Biblical, Jewish and Christian themes as suggestive commentary on this background. This is not meant to be exhaustive but, again, suggestive.

Fuṣūṣ is, in any case, a work which reiterates its main themes throughout, from different angles in the stories of the different prophets. Though any of its chapters would, therefore, convey these themes, the chapters treated here do this particularly well for my purpose. The book is thus conceived as a concise presentation of the worldview of the entire *Fuṣūṣ* and thereby of Ibn 'Arabī's sufi metaphysics. One hopes the book will serve the needs of newcomers to Ibn 'Arabī as well as those of advanced students and specialists. The Qur'ānic analysis is presented for consideration as a method and interpretation to help us look again at the texts from yet another angle.

CHAPTER

3

The Wisdom of Exaltedness in the Word of Mūsā

MOSES AND MŪSĀ: BIBLICAL AND QUR'ĀNIC

Moses is a focal figure in the Biblical tradition, in Judaism, in Christianity¹ and in Islam. The great lawgiver, communal guide and liberator of his people in his most prominent visage, Moses has a variegated body of stories attached to him, within each of the traditions as well as more universally across their borders.

Both Christianity and Islam also saw him as precursor and exemplar for their own founding figures and thereby use him in a way which draws an integrated web among the traditions. In the Qur'ān, Mūsā occupies a prime position among the body of prophets, with his life, personality and religion being related at great length and in much detail. Some of the main Qur'ānic stories are: Mūsā as the model for, and as prophesying the coming of, Muḥammad (7: 157); Mūsā's killing of the Egyptian, in defending a threatened Israelite (18:1–28); Mūsā's various encounters with the burning bush (20:9–48); Mūsā's tense relationship with Pharaoh in its many manifestations (7:109–126; 10:75–78; 28:4–13; 7:127; 18:60–82); Mūsā's meeting with al-Khiḍr whom he asks to be his guide (18:60–62); Mūsā's spending forty nights with God (7:142); and Mūsā and Hārūn's involvement in the incident of the golden calf (7:148;

1. For a good general survey, see *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, entry 'Moses', Volume 10, pp. 115–121.

20:77–98).² All of the Mūsā stories in the Qur'ān are, of course, elaborated in the post-Qur'ānic Islamic literatures, with new (and sometimes somewhat different) stories being added. Because of Mūsā's status in Islam, the corpus of material on him is very extensive, as it was, for the same reasons, in Judaism, Christianity and associated popular Near Eastern traditions.

IBN 'ARABĪ'S DISCUSSION

Ibn 'Arabī's overall discussion of Mūsā in the *Fuṣūṣ* hangs on a series of Qur'ānic vignettes of encounters between Mūsā and Pharaoh and Mūsā and al-Khiḍr. These vignettes comprise most of the main Qur'ānic stories about Mūsā as these were mentioned above. As is his wont, Ibn 'Arabī recounts these stories by way of effecting a Qur'ānic–metaphysical synthesis. I shall be concerned solely with Ibn 'Arabī's rendering of the story of Pharaoh's edict, calling for the killing of all Israelite sons in order to be sure to eliminate the infant Mūsā, and its implementation.³ This story distils Ibn 'Arabī's main conception of Mūsā's identity as prophet and the particular spiritual wisdom—*ḥikma 'uluwiyya*, the wisdom of exaltedness—which Ibn 'Arabī associates with him. My discussion of this story is organised in four parts, following what I believe to be Ibn 'Arabī's own order and organisation.⁴

'THE WISDOM OF KILLING THE SONS'

In an obvious allusion to the title of the chapter and Mūsā's 'wisdom of exaltedness', Ibn 'Arabī opens this chapter with the

2. These Qur'ānic references are examples and are not meant to be exhaustive.

3. Qur'ān, 28:4–13, 40:25, 7:127, 2:49, 14:6.

4. I realise that the division of any text into parts, as I have done here, is inevitably somewhat arbitrary and that other divisions might also be proposed. However, I believe careful and close reading of the text does support the division suggested here. The entire discussion of Mūsā is on pp. 197–213.

The Wisdom of Exaltedness in the Word of Mūsā

words, 'the wisdom of killing the sons'—*ḥikma qatl al-abnā'*.⁵ Here 'wisdom', *ḥikma*, so laden in Ibn 'Arabī's usage in the *Fuṣūṣ* with his own esoteric metaphysical associations as well as with other, earlier, philosophical connotations, now is identified with Pharaoh's notorious practice of killing all the Israelite sons. *Ḥikma* is in most other contexts something positive. How can it here be part of such an objectionable action? What sort of 'exaltedness' may be found here? Surely, in the Qur'ān Pharaoh's edict is not connected with anything so positive. Nor is the contrast here only between the positive sense of *ḥikma* and Pharaoh's negative edict; for it is, more deeply, again the essential contrast between outer and inner, *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*. Thus in Ibn 'Arabī's view, 'the *ḥikma* of killing the sons' is indeed the deeper, esoteric meaning of this execrable act; and this meaning relates to Mūsā in a most uncommon way. Ibn 'Arabī continues in explication of this wisdom: 'The wisdom of the killing of the sons because of Mūsā was in order that the life of each one of those killed because of him should revert to Mūsā, as each [of the others] was killed on the supposition that he might be Mūsā.'⁶

The killing of the sons has, then, a deeper meaning than is indicated on the surface. But this meaning is not yet very clear. Ibn 'Arabī elaborates further, first by saying that each of these sons' lives is 'pure, in its nature, which is not sullied by the desires of the [worldly] soul'.⁷ This, he says, is 'according to the nature of "Yes, certainly"',⁸ alluding, it appears, to Qur'ān 7:172, where God produces the human race—Ādam's descendants—from the loins of Ādam's children. In answer to God's question to them, 'Am I not your Lord', they respond, 'Yes, certainly, we do witness.' This Qur'ānic notion of the universal human covenant with God through the assent of the pure

5. *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 197; Qur'ān, 28:4–13, 40:25, 7:127, 2:49, 14:6.

6. *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 197.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

human lives in their inception provides Ibn 'Arabī with a further link between Mūsā and the doomed Israelite sons. In their purity with unsullied souls, all the sons, then, affirm God in covenant as their only Lord on behalf of all humanity. And Mūsā, continues Ibn 'Arabī, is 'the collective life of those sons, who were killed because he was he'.⁹ Mūsā was himself among these sons, but he represents them all in being the one who 'caused' them, as it were, to be killed. This extends to the particular essential identities and propensities (*isti'dād rūḥihi lahu*) of those killed—for, says Ibn 'Arabī, all this 'was in Mūsā, peace be upon him'.¹⁰ This is 'a special divine trait in Mūsā which nobody before him has possessed'¹¹ and its implications are great. It means that 'the wisdoms of Mūsā are manifold',¹² incorporating all the inner characteristics of all the other sons and that 'Mūsā was born only to be the collectivity of many spirits, who concentrates [within himself] active powers'.¹³

Ibn 'Arabī's full meaning here will emerge only later, through a series of additional transformations of Qur'ānic and traditional concepts. The foundation, however, is clear: Mūsā's relation to the other Israelite male infants is as a repository of all their essential qualities and their (philosophical/mystical) wisdom (*ḥikma*). This, for Mūsā, is the *ḥikma* of the killing of the sons which is unique to him. Thus all the sons will die in order that Mūsā might live, while the sons' lives 'revert' to Mūsā. In the further and broader context of Qur'ān 7:172, these particular sons are for Ibn 'Arabī part of the collectivity of Ādam's emerging descendants who universally make the covenant with God for humanity. The connection—or parallel—between Mūsā and Ādam will become clearer later, but it is mooted here: in all of the discussion of Mūsā thus far, in his role as repository of the

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*

spirits and wisdom of the killed sons he already appears, much as the *insān kāmil* (in its various manifestations), as the mystical locus of all Godly attributes. Ādam for Ibn ‘Arabī is similarly described.¹⁴

The Qur’ān’s stories of the infant Mūsā, and Pharaoh’s edict and its image of Ādam’s progeny accepting the covenant with God, have generated some special meanings through Ibn ‘Arabī’s method here. That method has thus far been quite straightforward: Ibn ‘Arabī has simply viewed the Qur’ānic story of Mūsā and the killing of the sons—not cited by him literally, but in basic framework and conception—as having the meaning he ascribes to it. The Qur’ānic story is for Ibn ‘Arabī most definitely *not a metaphor* for his truth. On the contrary. For him, as always, it simply is the truth which he claims for it, as in all his Qur’ānic interpretations. Ibn ‘Arabī’s *method* here (and elsewhere), then, is to proceed on the basis of a *certain knowledge* of the Qur’ān’s meaning. There is a link here between method and knowledge, method being based on knowledge. Other types of Qur’ānic exegesis, as we know, found their sources of knowledge in historiographical accounts, *ḥadīth* or in other parts of the Qur’ān itself. This knowledge—‘public’ by its nature—presumably gave legitimation to the particular exegesis. As we know, Ibn ‘Arabī’s particular knowledge is generally very different from these more ‘conventional’ and ‘public’ sources of knowledge. He tells us this again here, after saying that ‘the wisdoms of Mūsā are manifold’: ‘I shall, God willing, expand on them in this chapter, to whatever extent the divine command takes hold of my thought.’¹⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī’s claimed epistemic source, here as elsewhere, is divine inspiration. The knowledge underpinning his method is dictated by God himself. This inspiration is his muse. The method using this knowledge presumably assures absolute certainty in interpretation and a

14. See Ibn ‘Arabī’s chapter on Ādam in the *Fuṣūṣ* and our discussion of it in this book.

15. *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 197.

perfect correspondence between the Qur'ān and one's understanding of it.

MŪSĀ'S POWERS AND WATER

Ibn 'Arabī goes on to explain why Mūsā's role as repository of the spirits of the killed sons also makes him a centre of 'active forces':

Because the younger controls the older. Do you not see the child controlling the adult in a special way, where the adult descends from his supervisory role towards the child, playing with him, clucking at him and approaching him with his reason? The adult here is dominated by the child without realising it. Then the child occupies the adult through the adult's raising him, protecting him, looking after his interests and making him comfortable, lest he suffer any unease. All this is by way of the younger controlling the older and is because of the power [residing] in the position [of the younger].¹⁶

Himself an infant, and incorporating the spirit of all the killed sons, Mūsā's possession of such active forces, *quwā fa'āla*, is now understandable: a certain extraordinary *active* power resides in the seemingly *passive* nature of the very young. Their very 'passivity' compels others who are 'more powerful' to serve and to care for them, thereby inverting the apparent power relationship between the two parties. The spirits of these young, innocent souls, unsullied by the worldly desires, are extraordinarily powerful. Mūsā is the repository of these souls, for reasons stated above, so he is, consequently, the seat of the 'active forces', *i.e.*, power. So strong is this power of the 'weak' against the strong that Pharaoh himself, head of a great empire, is overcome by it, his plans for Mūsā thwarted by the simple evasive measures of those who cared for the infant: putting Mūsā in the basket in

16. *Ibid.*

The Wisdom of Exaltedness in the Word of Mūsā

the water and all the associated ensuing events. Ibn 'Arabī further elaborates on this power of the very young, ascribing it to their closeness to their origins in divine creation:

The young have most recently been with their lord, as this is the newness of creation, while the elders are more distant. And those who are closer to God may subjugate those who are farther, as the king's close associates exercise power over those who are more distant, because of their closeness to him.¹⁷

Of course, a king's closest associates may normally be considered to be powerful, as opposed to the very young. It is the principle of *closeness* to the source of power which is meaningful in Ibn 'Arabī's use of this analogy here. His main principle—the apparent weakness of those who are in fact most strong—seems for the moment to have receded in order to emphasise the principle of closeness. But Ibn 'Arabī then returns to this point with an illustrative story about the Prophet Muḥammad. The prophet, says Ibn 'Arabī:

...would expose himself to the falling rain and uncover his head to it so that the rain would strike it, saying that the rain was fresh from its Lord. Look at the knowledge of God possessed by this prophet—how brilliant, elevated and clear it is. But the rain overcame this most superior human being, because of its closeness to its Lord...¹⁸

And from the rain, says Ibn 'Arabī, the prophet gained '...what the rain brought from its Lord'.¹⁹ There is a 'message' in all this: 'This is the message of water from which God made every living thing. So understand!'²⁰

Let us look at Ibn 'Arabī's logic here: those who seem weak

17. *Fuṣūṣ*, pp. 197–198.

18. *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 198.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*

control and overcome those who seem strong. This, in the examples so far given by Ibn 'Arabī, is explained as being the result of these 'weak' parties—the young sons—being closer to their origins in God. In the story of the rain and the Prophet an additional factor seems to be involved: Water itself here represents *the basic element of life*, in addition to its having come fresh from its Lord and being 'weak' and 'passive'. This meaning of water becomes the transition through which Ibn 'Arabī passes over to the next theme.

MŪSĀ'S TABŪT

Ibn 'Arabī now returns to a particular aspect of the Mūsā narrative in the Qur'ān, referring to the placing of Mūsā in a box and throwing the box in the water:

As for the wisdom associated with placing Mūsā in the box and throwing it in the water: The box is his humanity and the water the knowledge he obtains through the body and which is provided by the ratiocinative and sensual faculties. These and similar faculties of the human soul exist only through the existence of the physical body.²¹

The box (*tābūt*) that Mūsā is put in, then, is his humanity (*nāsūt*) and this would seem to be related to (or represent) the body (*jism*). The mental and sensual faculties mentioned are related to the soul and distinguished from the body though, it appears, they are also dependent on the body.²² Knowledge which is derived from those faculties, though presumably transcending the body, is thus bound to it. Ibn 'Arabī explains this more precisely, relating it to Mūsā and the box:

Thus when the soul is joined to the body and is commanded to act in it and to organise it, God makes these faculties for the soul as tools through which one may attain what God wishes in organ-

21. *Ibid.* and Qur'ān, 20:39.

22. Again, for Ibn 'Arabī the spiritual is manifest only through the physical.

The Wisdom of Exaltedness in the Word of Mūsā

ising this box in which the Lord's presence resides. Thus was Mūsā cast into the river, in order to obtain—through these faculties—all sorts of knowledge.²³

The exoteric (*ẓāhir*), the humanity, the physical represented by the box, is the locus of the esoteric (*bāṭin*) spiritual knowledge represented symbolically for Ibn 'Arabī by the water. The nexus between outer and inner, box and water, physical and spiritual, body and soul, is the Lord's presence which resides in the box.

This image of the pure esoteric truth and God Himself being made manifest in the phenomenal world and its various parts is, as we know, a basic principle for Ibn 'Arabī. He will shortly use the present example as an avenue for making the point in expanded contexts. The nexus between 'physical' and 'spiritual' posited here by Ibn 'Arabī as 'the Lord's presence' in the box is itself a Qur'ānic example, found in Qur'ān 2:248 where 'the presence of your Lord' (*sakīna min rabbikum*) is mentioned. This presence is within the ark or box (*tābūt*) which was promised to the Israelites. Also in the box would be 'things left by the families of Mūsā and Hārūn'.²⁴ This *tābūt* is not the one from the Qur'ānic story of the infant Mūsā, but because it is another story connected with Mūsā and another *tābūt*, Ibn 'Arabī uses the *sakīna* in this narrative, applying it to the *tābūt* in the other story. He thus, it seems, 'conflates' the two narratives, but for him here, as elsewhere, the Qur'ān is in any case one integral fabric. And the *sakīna* of the Lord in the new context provides Ibn 'Arabī with a divine presence that serves as the channel

23. *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 198.

24. Qur'ān, 2:248. What I have translated as 'the Lord's presence' from Ibn 'Arabī's *sakīnat al-rabb* is quite clearly 'presence' for him. I have also translated the Qur'ānic *sakīna min rabbikum* (2:248), to which Ibn 'Arabī seems to refer, as 'presence'. In a narrower Qur'ānic sense it might better be rendered as 'your Lord's tranquillity'. See 'Aḥfi, pp. 293–294, in his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ*, for a discussion of *sakīna* with interesting comments on the Jewish mystical and philosophical *shekhina* as a possible model for Ibn 'Arabī here.

through which spiritual knowledge comes to Mūsā in his physical form. Thus: 'So Mūsā was thrown into the river in order to attain—through these [bodily] faculties—all kinds of knowledge.'²⁵ But Ibn 'Arabī is, again, keen not to relinquish the bodily side once the 'higher' knowledge has been attained. And from this we see an extrapolation of the idea culminating in a metaphysical point derived from this story of the infant Mūsā.

THE METAPHYSICS OF THE INFANT MŪSĀ

Ibn 'Arabī begins on this path by further clarifying the relationship between body and spirit in Mūsā's acquisition of knowledge. The issue is not simply the necessity of the body-based faculties in the acquisition of the higher spiritual knowledge, as we have thus far understood. For in this process one feature is most important: the seeming 'complementarity' of 'lower' and 'higher', body and knowledge, and so on, is actually much more; it is, in essence, an organising, controlling and directing force (*tadbīr*) which derives from the 'lower' party's control of the process. Again, there is an inversion of sorts, with a purpose we shall soon see. Continuing from his statement that Mūsā was put in the water in order to acquire knowledge, Ibn 'Arabī says:

God thereby informs Mūsā that though the controlling spirit was sovereign over him [in his body], it could direct him only through himself. Indeed, God delegated to him those faculties which exist in this [his] humanity, which is understood as 'the box', by way of [esoteric Qur'ānic] allusion and philosophical insight.²⁶

The very nature of the subject of a 'higher' force, then, actually directs the manner in which that force may work—much as, in a different context, the infant controls the adult (in

25. *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 198.

26. *Ibid.*

the example given above). In short, the nature of the box, as Mūsā's humanity and mental and sensual faculties, determines the nature and extent of the higher knowledge given to him. God's organisation of things is thus—even in His own relationship with the world He created. And here begins Ibn 'Arabī's extrapolation from Mūsā's situation to the 'larger universe'. He says:

Likewise is God's organisation of the world. [For] God's organisation of the world is effected only through the world itself or through its form. This is like the dependence of the child on the generative power of the father, of effects on their causes, of the conditioned on their conditions... All of that is from the world and it is God's organisation in it. Consequently, He does not organise the world but through the world itself.²⁷

Ibn 'Arabī's commitment to this principle is obviously thoroughgoing. He proceeds to develop it further, addressing in particular the seeming structural inversion in God's relationship with the world.

This he does by an explication of a phrase in his statement quoted above concerning God's direction of the world as being determined through the world itself, '*or through its form*':

As for our saying, '*or through its form*'—that is, the form of the world—I mean the beautiful names and the highest attributes by which God is named and described. Thus no name of God reaches us unless we have found the meaning of that name and its spirit in the world. God does not organise the world, then, except through the form of the world.²⁸

This explanation, focusing on the phrase '*in its form*', makes clear that it is not just the world in general that is meant here, but the whole variegation of phenomenal reality which consti-

27. *Fuṣūṣ*, pp. 198–199.

28. *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 199.

tutes God's names and attributes. The *form* of the world is God, in this sense: He is 'constrained' and 'directed' by this form, in creating and ordering the world and He is immanent in the world, its form being *His own*. And in microcosm, man in spiritual perfection represents it all:

Thus did God say about the creation of Ādam, who is the exemplar comprising the characteristics of the divine presence which is [God's] essence, attributes and actions: 'God created Ādam in His form.'²⁹ And God's form is nothing other than the divine presence. God created in this noble microcosm, who is the Perfect Man, all of the divine names and the realities which emerge from this man into the external macrocosm. And God made him the spirit of the world, rendering the high and the low submissive to him, because of the perfection of form [in him].³⁰

Now to bring everything together: Mūsā's form, his *tābūt*, his *nāsūt*, his body, determines his highest spiritual knowledge, through the 'presence of the Lord' within the *tābūt*. The *tābūt/nāsūt* are an expression and manifestation of this knowledge. God and the world are similarly related: the form of the world expresses and manifests God's characteristics; the form of the world is the divine presence (*al-ḥaḍra al-ilāhiyya*). The Perfect Man, as Ādam, is the world in microcosm, manifesting God's names and attributes and the Perfect Man is symbol for all humanity, to whom all of creation is made subservient. In all of these formulations the basic structure is the same: the transcendent and esoteric are made manifest and have a presence in the phenomenal and the exoteric. From this angle, God and His creation are as one, the multiplicity and diversity in creation expressing God's individual names. Mūsā, as the locus of the spirits of the sons killed by Pharaoh, exemplifying their freshly God-given virtues—the theme with which Ibn 'Arabī began—may now be seen also in this present framework as the tran-

29. al-Bukhārī, *Sahīh*, LXXXIX:1.

30. *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 199, Qur'ān: 31:20.

The Wisdom of Exaltedness in the Word of Mūsā

scendent manifest in the phenomenal. In this sense, Mūsā is on the model of Ādam.³¹ For Ibn ‘Arabī, the *esoteric knowledge* is the core of the divine presence manifested in these phenomenal realities. ‘Therefore, *the form* of putting Mūsā in the box and casting it into the river is, on the face of it destruction, while *in essence* it is his salvation from being killed. Thus is he spared..., *by knowledge*, from the death of ignorance. As God, Most High, said: “Or one who was dead”,³² that is, by ignorance’.³³

Not only was Mūsā spared from physical death by being cast upon the water in the box when to all outward appearances he was doomed, but he also attained a deeper salvation that from ignorance to spiritual knowledge. For death is ignorance and salvation knowledge in Ibn ‘Arabī’s terms. And Qur’ān 6:122—‘Or one who was dead’—continues, saying that God gave life and a ‘light’ (*nūr*) to this person ‘with which he can walk among men’. ‘Light’ for Ibn ‘Arabī, as spiritual knowledge, was precisely what Mūsā received from God’s presence in the box in the water.

It ought now to be clear, I think, that Ibn ‘Arabī, in these passages from the chapter on Mūsā in the *Fuṣūṣ*, interweaves the Qur’ān and his own thought in a running commentary on the sacred text. Using aspects of the Mūsā narratives and other passages in the Qur’ān as well, Ibn ‘Arabī here relates his particular view of Mūsā’s prophetic nature and the spiritual wisdom (‘the wisdom of exaltedness’) associated with the Word of this eminent prophet. ✓

31. As again are all the Prophets for Ibn ‘Arabī, in their different ways.

32. Qur’ān, 6:122.

33. *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 199.

Sufi Metaphysics and Qur'ānic Prophets

IBN 'ARABĪ'S THOUGHT AND METHOD
IN THE *FUṢŪṢ AL-ḤIKAM*

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THE ISLAMIC TEXTS SOCIETY

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This edition published 2003 by
The Islamic Texts Society
22a Brooklands Avenue
Cambridge, CB2 2DQ, UK

ISBN 1903682 05 3 *cloth*

ISBN 1903682 06 1 *paper*

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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Earlier versions of some of the chapters in *Sufi Metaphysics and Qur'anic Prophets* have
appeared in the following publications:

'Ibn 'Arabi as a Qur'anic Thinker: Reflections on Adam in the *Fusus al-Hikam*', in
The Scottish Journal of Religious Studies, Vol. XIII, no. 2, Autumn 1992.

'Prophecy, Qur'an and Metaphysics in Ibn 'Arabi's Discussion of 'Uzayr (Ezra)', in
Studies in Muslim-Jewish Relations, Vol. I, ed. R. L. Nettler, Harwood Academic
Publishers, Reading, 1993.

'The Wisdom of Divine Unity: Qur'anic Paradoxes and Inversions in Ibn 'Arabi's
Gloss on Hud in the *Fusus al-Hikam*', in *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*,
Vol. 16, 1994.

'Ibn 'Arabi and the Qur'an: Some Passages Concerning Musa in the *Fusus al-Hikam*,
in *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*, Vol. 20, 1996.

'Ibn 'Arabi's Conception of God's Universal Mercy: The Chapter on Zakariyya in
the *Fusus al-Hikam*', in *Consciousness and Reality: Studies in Memory of Toshihiko
Izutsu*, Tokyo, Iwanami Shoten Publishers, 1998.

'The Figure and Truth of Abraham in Ibn 'Arabi's *Fusus al-Hikam*: A Scriptural
Story Told in Metaphysical Form', in *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*,
Vol. 24, 1998.

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