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Hermeneutics

12. FAITH AND RATIONAL INTERPRETATION

Though reason cannot grasp the full significance of God's Reality on its own, it provides the indispensable support for understanding His Unity. When Ibn al-'Arabī criticizes the rational thinkers, for the most part he has in mind people who have faith in the prophetic message, not those who have rejected it completely. Reason is the tool of the theologians and philosophers who insist on interpreting the revealed texts in keeping with their own presuppositions. The outright unbelievers are hardly worth mentioning and can be dismissed with a wave of the hand, since no one can claim human status without faith in God. What then is faith?

Faith

The word "faith" (*īmān*) is derived from the root 'm.n., whose basic meaning is to be or to feel secure and safe, a sense also contained in the word *īmān*. To have faith is to feel secure concerning the knowledge one has received about God and to commit oneself to putting it

into practice. *Īmān* is often employed synonymously with *taṣdīq*, which means to attest, declare or acknowledge someone's truthfulness. The theologians normally define "faith" as believing (*i'tiqād*) or attesting (*taṣdīq*) in the heart and acknowledging with the tongue, though most of them add that this belief must also be put into practice (*'amal*) through following the Law. The fact that "heart" is mentioned should not lead us to think that belief is emotive, since the heart is the seat of reason and unveiling. The synonym *taṣdīq* brings this out clearly, since acknowledging someone's truthfulness means that one has recognized he is speaking the truth, and truth is understood through intelligence. Hence we see Ibn al-'Arabī defining faith as a kind of knowledge, though he also differentiates it from knowledge in many passages. In the following he shows the difference between faith and the knowledge which comes by way of evidence and proofs (*dalīl*).

There is no need for the messenger to provide proofs to those to whom he has been sent. . . . Hence, even when the proofs exist, we do not find everyone to

whom the message is sent having faith in it, only some of them. If the proof brought about the faith, everyone would have faith. Moreover, we see faith in those who have not been provided with proofs. This shows that faith is "a light which God throws into the heart of whomsoever He will of His servants."¹ Faith does not belong to the proof itself, so we do not make proofs its precondition.

Faith is a self-evident (*ḍarūrī*) knowledge which a person finds in his heart and is not able to repel. When someone gains faith through proofs, his faith cannot be relied upon, since he will be susceptible to obfuscations detracting from his faith, because it derives from rational consideration, not from self-evidence. (II 259.1)

It may happen that a messenger brings about a miracle (*mu'jiza*), that it is known that it is a miracle, and that the observers acquire knowledge of the truthfulness of the messenger, but that they are not given faith in him. "[When Our signs came to them visibly, they said, 'This is plain sorcery';] they denied them, though their souls acknowledged them, wrongfully and out of pride" (Koran 27:14). Hence you come to know that faith is not given by the furnishing of proofs. On the contrary, it is a divine "light which God throws into the heart of whomsoever He will of His servants." It may come after proofs, and it may come after no proof whatsoever, just as God says, "[You did not know what the Book was, nor faith;] but We made it a light, whereby We guide whom We will of Our servants" (42:52). (II 374.24)

"Belief" (*i'tiqād*) does not coincide with "faith" as defined here. Before the detailed discussion of belief in Chapter 19, it will be sufficient to say that belief is to accept something as true, while faith is not only to accept it, but also to acknowledge it verbally and put it into practice.

Faith is speech (*qawl*), practice (*ʿamal*), and belief (*i'tiqād*). Its reality is belief, according to both the Law and lexicography; it appears in speech and practice according to the Law, but not lexicography. The person of faith (*mu'min*) is he whose speech and act (*fi'l*) accord with what he

believes. That is why God says concerning the faithful, "[Upon the day when God will not degrade the Prophet and those who have faith with him,] their light running before them and on their right hands" (66:8). Here He means by "light" the righteous works with God which they had sent ahead. "[Men and women who have submitted, men and women who have faith . . .], for them God has prepared forgiveness and a mighty wage" (33:35). The Prophet said, "The person of faith is he before whom people feel secure (*amn*) with their possessions and themselves."² He also said, "The person of faith is he before whose calamities his neighbor feels secure."³ (II 26.35)

One of the differences between knowledge and faith is that faith demands that we ascribe a truth to God, whereas knowledge of the same truth does not demand its ascription to anyone.

Iblis came to Jesus in the form of an old man of outward beauty. . . . He said to Jesus, "O Jesus, say 'There is no god but God!'", being satisfied that Jesus would obey his command to this extent.

Jesus replied, "I will say it, but not on the basis of your words. 'There is no god but God'." So Iblis went away defeated.

From here you come to know the difference between knowing something and having faith in it, and you will know that felicity lies in faith. Faith is to say what you know or what you used to say from your first messenger—who is [for example] Moses—on the basis of the words of this second messenger, who is Muḥammad. You do not say it on the basis of your knowledge of your first saying of it. Then you will be seen to have faith, and felicity will come to you. But when you do not say it on the basis of his words, but you make it appear that you said it on the basis of his words, then you are a hypocrite (*munāfiq*).

God says, "O you who have faith," meaning either the People of the Book—since they were saying what they were saying on the basis of their prophets Jesus or Moses—or anyone who had faith on the basis of the previous scriptures; hence He said, "O you who have faith." Then

He says to them, "Have faith in God" (Koran 4:136). In other words: Say, "There is no god but God," on the basis of Muḥammad's words, not on the basis of your knowledge of that, nor on the basis of your faith in your first prophet. [In the second case] you will bring together two faiths, and you will have two rewards. (I 283.4)

According to a famous hadith, "Every child is born according to primordial nature (*fiṭra*); then his parents make him into a Jew, a Christian, or a Zoroastrian."⁴ This primordial nature first manifested itself at the Covenant made with God before the children of Adam entered into this world. It is woven out of faith.

Original faith (*al-īmān al-aṣlī*) is the primordial nature in accordance with which God created mankind. It is their witnessing to His Oneness (*waḥdāniyya*) at the taking of the Covenant. Hence every child is born in keeping with that Covenant. However, when he falls by means of the body into the confines of Nature—the place of forgetfulness—he becomes ignorant and forgets the state which he had had with his Lord. Hence, when he reaches the state which allows rational consideration, he needs to consider proofs concerning the oneness of his Creator. If he does not reach this state, his property is the same as that of his parents. If they had faith, he will take the declaration of God's Unity from them, as a following of authority. Whatever their religion might be, he joins with them.

He whose faith is a resolute following of authority is more protected and firm in his faith than he who takes it from proofs, because of the bewilderment, unsoundness, and obfuscations to which proofs are susceptible if he should be clever, astute, and strong in understanding. Hence he has no firm foot nor any leg upon which to stand. One must fear for him.

If the faith in the declaration of God's Unity which he gains should be preceded by an associating of others with Him (*shirk*) which he inherits from his parents, from his rational consideration, or from the community of which he is a member, then his [new-found] faith will be identical with his Covenant faith, nothing else.

The veil of associating comes between the servant and the Covenant faith like a cloud which comes between the eye and the sun. When the cloud passes by, the sun appears to the eye. Such is the appearance of faith to the servant when associating others with God is eliminated, if the one who associates admits the existence of God. (II 616.19)

One of the means whereby God tests the truthfulness of faith is prescription of the Law.

When God created this human configuration and ennobled him as He did through the all-comprehensiveness (*jam'iyya*) which He placed within him, He put within him claims (*da'wā*) in order to perfect the form of his configuration, for making claims is a divine attribute. God says, "Verily I am God, there is no god but I; so worship Me!" (Koran 20:14). Hence He claims that there is no god but He, and this is a truthful claim. No argument is directed against anyone who makes a truthful claim, and he has authority over everyone who rejects his claim. . . .

A claim is a report, and in respect of being a report both truthfulness and falsehood may equally be attributed to it and understood from it. Hence we come to know that there must be testing. The person of faith claims faith, which is attestation to the fact of God's existence and His Unity, the fact that there is no god but He, that "Everything is annihilated except His Face" (28:88), and that "To God belongs the affair, before and after" (30:4). When he claims with his tongue that this is what is enfolded within his breast and fastened in his heart, it is plausible that he may be truthful in his claim to possess this attribute, and it is plausible that he may be lying in claiming to possess it. So God tests him—to establish the argument for or against him—through the worship that He has prescribed for him in the Law. (III 248.18)

Like prescription of the Law, the sending of prophets itself is a means whereby God tests His servants. Ibn al-'Arabī makes this point while discussing the nature of envy (*ḥasad*).

Had God willed, He would have given each person knowledge of the causes of his felicity and explained to him the proper way for him to pursue. However, He only willed to send to each community a messenger of their own kind, not of another kind. He placed the messenger before them and commanded them to follow him and to obey him, as a trial from Him, in order to set up an argument against them because of His precedent knowledge concerning them. . . .

The vicegerent of the people
is a son of their own kind
since that is more annoying
to their souls;
Were he not one of them,
they would declare his truthfulness,
for they would have no envy
toward other than their own kind.

Man knows that the beasts and all animals are below himself in level. Suppose an animal were to speak—even a black beetle—and were to say, “I am a messenger from God to you. I warn you of such and such. Do such and such!” There would be many among the common people claiming to follow it and to seek blessing from it and venerate it. Kings would obey it and they would not seek from it any sign of its truthfulness. They would make its speech the very sign of its truthfulness, even were it not so. But since other than their own kind had reached this level, they do not envy it at all. Hence, the first trial with which God tries His creatures is His sending the messengers to them from among themselves, not from other than themselves. (III 83.12)

According to the Koran, “God is the Light of the heavens and the earth” (24:35), and for Ibn al-‘Arabī as for other Sufis, His light becomes manifest not only through existence itself but also through knowledge. Thus Ibn al-‘Arabī defines *tajallī* or God’s “self-disclosure,” in the broadest epistemological sense of the term, as “the lights of unseen things that are unveiled to hearts” (II 485.20). Among the many forms of light or divine self-disclosure which become manifest in the cosmos is the light of knowledge,

“which dispels the darkness of ignorance from the soul” (II 154.27). Likewise reason, which perceives knowledge, may also be called a light. But faith is brighter than knowledge or reason, since faith can perceive not only the knowledge of incomparability, which is accessible to the independent rational faculty, but also the knowledge of similarity perceived by imagination.

Reason possesses a light through which it perceives specific affairs, while faith possesses a light through which it perceives everything, as long as there is no obstruction. Through the light of reason, you reach the knowledge of the Divinity, what is necessary for it and impossible, and what is permitted for it and not impossible. Through the light of faith, reason perceives the knowledge of the Essence and the attributes which God ascribed to Himself. (I 44.32)

Though the created thing’s knowledge has a perfect excellence whose rank is not unknown, nothing bestows felicity through nearness to God except faith. Hence the light of faith in the created thing is more excellent than the light of knowledge not accompanied by faith. But when faith is actualized along with knowledge, the light of that knowledge, born from the light of faith, is higher. Through it the person of faith who has knowledge (*al-mu’min al-‘ālim*) surpasses the person of faith who does not have knowledge. For “God raises up . . . those” of the faithful “who have been given knowledge in degrees” (58:11) over those of the faithful who have not been given knowledge. He means here knowledge of God, for God’s Messenger said to his companions, “You are more knowledgeable [than I] in the best interests of this world of yours.”⁵ (I 144.27)

According to the tasting of our path, it is not possible to attest to a messenger through rational proofs (*dalāla*), only through a divine self-disclosure in respect of His name “Light.” When the person’s inward dimension (*bāṭin*) becomes colored by that light, then he attests to the messenger. This is the light of faith. Another person does not actualize in himself anything of that light, even though in respect of rational proofs he knows that the mes-

senger is speaking the truth. But he does not know this fact as a light thrown into the heart. Hence such people deny in spite of their knowledge. This is indicated by God's words, "They denied them, though their souls acknowledged them, wrongfully and out of pride" (27:14). Below them in this level is he about whom God says, "God has misguided him in spite of knowledge" (45:23). This knowledge is the light of knowledge of Him, not the light of faith. (II 305.35)

Ibn al-'Arabī does not claim that a person without faith cannot enter paradise, but he does claim that only knowledge of the declaration of God's Unity (*tawhīd*) can save without faith. The Koran declares that God can forgive any sin except *shirk* or "associating others with God," the opposite of *tawhīd* (4:48, 4:116).

God ordained felicity for His servants through faith and knowledge of the declaration of God's Unity specifically. There is no way to felicity other than these two. Faith's objects are the reports brought by the messengers from God. Faith is an unadulterated following of authority. We accept the reports whether or not we have knowledge of them. Knowledge is that which is given by rational consideration or divine unveiling. If this knowledge is not actualized as self-evident, such that no obfuscations can detract from it for the knower, then it is not knowledge. (III 78.12)

In discussing a long hadith about intercession (*shafa'a*) on the day of resurrection, Ibn al-'Arabī explains that the last part of the hadith, where God Himself, the "Most Merciful of the merciful," removes from the Fire a group "who had never done any good," refers to the deliverance of those who had knowledge of *tawhīd*, but not faith in it.⁶

Once intercession has taken place, no one who had faith in a Law will remain in the Fire, nor any person who did a work laid down by a Law in respect of its being laid down by the Law on the tongue of a

prophet, even if it is the weight of a mustard seed or less than that in size. All will be taken out by the intercession of the prophets and the faithful. There will remain the people of *tawhīd*, those who knew *tawhīd* through rational proofs and did not associate anything with God, though they had no faith in a Law and "had never done any good whatsoever" in respect of their following one of the prophets. They have not a dust mote of faith, or they have even less. They will be brought out by the "Most Merciful of the merciful," though "they had never done any good," that is, any act laid down in a Law in respect of its being laid down in a Law. There is no good greater than faith, but that is a good which they did not do.

The following is a hadith related by 'Uthmān quoted in Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ*: The Messenger of God said, "He who dies, knowing"—he did not say "having faith"—"that there is no god but God will enter the Garden." Nor did he say, "saying"; on the contrary, he mentioned only knowledge. God has precedent solicitude toward such as these in the Fire, since the Fire, by its very essence, cannot accept everlastingly in any respect one who declares God's Unity. The most complete mode of *tawhīd* is faith on the basis of knowledge, such that the two are brought together.

You may object, "Iblis knows that God is One." I reply: You are right, but he was the first to set down associating others with God as a custom (*awwal man sann al-shirk*). Therefore he must bear the punishment of those who associate,⁷ and their punishment is that they do not come out of the Fire. This holds if it is established that he died declaring God's Unity. But how do you know? Perhaps he died associating others with Him because of some obfuscation which came over him in his rational consideration (*nazar*). We have already spoken of this question in earlier chapters. So Iblis will never leave the Fire. (I 314.9)

Just as reflection and consideration can act as a nearly irremovable "talisman" upon man's reason, so also they can cause "intoxication." Many Sufis employed the terms intoxication (*sukr*) and sobriety (*ṣaḥw*) to indicate two

"states" which mark the two basic modes in which the travelers experience the divine self-disclosures. In discussing intoxication as a standard Sufi term of this sort, Ibn al-'Arabī shows that it can be applied on three basic levels, the same three levels that he perceives in many other realities. These are the "natural" (*ṭabī'ī*), the rational or intelligible (*'aqlī*), and the divine (*ilāhī*), corresponding to sense perception (including imagination), reason and spirit, and God."

God says, "Rivers of wine, a pleasure to the drinkers" (47:15). This is the science of states (*aḥwāl*), so intoxication belongs to him within whom there is delight and pleasure. The Sufis have defined it as "An absence (*ghayba*) brought about by a strong inrush (*wārid*)," but it is only an "absence" from everything that contradicts joy, delight, happiness, and the disclosure of wishes (*amānī*) as forms subsisting within the entity of the possessor of this state.

The Men of Allah are ranked in levels in intoxication, as we shall mention, God willing:

The first is "natural intoxication." It is the delight, pleasure, joy, and happiness found by souls through the inrush of wishes, when those wishes stand up before them in their imagination as forms subsisting within it which they govern and control. Their poet says,

When I become intoxicated,
I am lord of palace and throne.

He sees the fact that he owns these things as the utmost limit of his wish. When he is intoxicated, the form of palace and throne stand up before him as his possessions which he controls within the presence of his imagining and imagination. This is given to him by the state of intoxication, since it has a strong effect upon the imaginal faculty. Those of the Folk of Allah who halt with imagination possess this natural intoxication, since they never cease examining those affairs desired by them which can be actualized through imagination. Finally that becomes firm with them and rules over them, like the Prophet's words, "Worship God as if

you see Him" or like His words, "God is in the kibra of him who performs the prayer." . . . In the case of some of those who achieve this station, God causes the imaginalized form to remain with them in the state of their sobriety. He establishes it for them as a sensory object after it had been imaginal. This was the case with the garden which Iblis made to appear to Solomon at the level of discontinuous imagination (*al-khayāl al-munfaṣil*) in order to tempt him, while Solomon knew nothing of that. He prostrated himself to God in gratitude for His giving it to him, so God made it subsist for him as a garden to enjoy at the sensory level, and Iblis went away a loser. . . .

"Rational intoxication" is similar to natural intoxication in that it takes things back to that which its own reality requires, not to that which is required by the situation in itself. The divine report comes from God to the possessor of this station making attributes of temporally originated things the attributes of God. So he refuses to accept these things in this mode, since he is intoxicated by his proof and demonstration. Hence he rejects the report in accordance with what his own consideration requires, while he is ignorant of God's Essence and whether or not It accepts this description. Or rather, he imagines that It does not accept it. Hence, because of its intoxication, this rational faculty stretches out its legs on another's carpet. He falls on God because of his intoxication, and God excuses him in that, since the drunkard is not taken to task for what he says. For he disengages from God that which God has attributed to Himself.

When this man of reason, after having been intoxicated, becomes sober through faith, he no longer rejects the truthful report and the true word. He says: "God knows better about Himself and what He attributes to Himself than reason, for reason is a created thing, and the created thing cannot judge the Creator." Everything made is ignorant of its maker, for the garment is ignorant of the weaver; such also are the elements (*arkān*) in relation to the celestial spheres, and such also are the spheres in relation to the Soul, the Soul in relation to the Intellect, and the Intellect in relation to God. The most any of those who know can know is their

poverty toward their maker and their being supported by him in their existence. None of them can judge anything about its maker, especially when the maker gives reports about himself in certain affairs. The thing which is made can only accept the reports. If it rejects them, that is because it is intoxicated.

The wine which reason drinks is its proof and its demonstration. It is helped in that by the descriptions which it is given by certain divine reports which agree with its demonstration and proof. Such is an intoxication of reason. Natural intoxication is the intoxication of the faithful, while rational intoxication is the intoxication of the gnostics.

There remains the intoxication of the perfect among the Men. It is intoxication with God. The Messenger of God said concerning it, "O God, increase my bewilderment in Thee!",¹⁰ for the drunkard is bewildered. (II 544.16)

Interpretation

Faith demands unquestioning acceptance of the divine reports that have come through revelation, while reason interprets anything which it does not consider appropriate for the Divine Reality. The word Ibn al-'Arabī uses for this type of interpretation is *ta'wīl*, a Koranic term employed in seventeen verses, though not in a blameworthy sense. The literal meaning of the term is to return, to take back, and to take back to the origin. By extension it means to discover, explain, and interpret. Many Muslim authorities held that *ta'wīl* and *tafsīr* or "commentary" are basically synonymous when applied to the Koran, but most authorities drew various distinctions between the two terms, with *ta'wīl* normally designating a more mystical and esoteric sort of interpretation. The history of these two terms and their interrelationship is one of the many monographs on Islamic thought waiting to be

written. In the present context, we can only look at Ibn al-'Arabī's own use of the term *ta'wīl*.

Those who have been introduced to Ibn al-'Arabī through the writings of Henry Corbin have learned that *ta'wīl* is one of the cornerstones of his thought. One cannot object to Corbin for saying that Ibn al-'Arabī interprets the verses of the Koran, but one can object to his choosing the word *ta'wīl* to designate the process, since Ibn al-'Arabī does not use it in the positive sense in which Corbin understands it.¹¹ Without doubt, Corbin was led to employ the term because of *ta'wīl*'s primary importance in Shi'ite thought. As he remarks, "It is not possible to utter the word *ta'wīl* without suggesting Shi'ism."¹² Corbin means to imply that Ibn al-'Arabī leaned toward Shi'ite beliefs, but in fact Corbin is merely expressing his own conviction that anyone as important as Ibn al-'Arabī had to be influenced by Shi'ism.¹³ This is not to claim that Ibn al-'Arabī never employs the term *ta'wīl* in a positive sense corresponding roughly to what Corbin had in mind. But such rare passages—one is quoted below—invariably speak of *ta'wīl* in its Koranic context and do not contradict Ibn al-'Arabī's generally critical views of *ta'wīl*.

For the most part, Ibn al-'Arabī considers *ta'wīl* as interpretation of the Koran and the sayings of the Prophet in a way that will not compromise the principles of rational thought. Instead of having faith in the literal accuracy of the revelation and trying to understand it on God's terms (e.g., through the practice of the religion and "godfearing"), the interpreter accepts the supremacy of reason and its ability to judge all things. In effect, reason becomes the scale in which everything else must be weighed, including the Word of God. Practically all modern hermeneutics and scriptural exegesis fit neatly into the category of *ta'wīl* as Ibn al-'Arabī understands it.

Perhaps the most famous Koranic usage of the term *ta'wīl*, frequently cited in Shi'ite sources, is the following:

It is He who sent down upon thee the Book, wherein are verses which are the Mother of the Book, and others ambiguous. As for those in whose hearts is swerving, they follow the ambiguous part, desiring dissension, and desiring its interpretation; but none knows its interpretation, save only God and those firmly rooted in knowledge; they say, "We have faith in it; all is from our Lord" (3:7).

The above reading of the verse is followed by those who maintain that *ta'wil* is a valid mode of knowledge, such as most Shi'ites. But many authorities read the verse with a full stop separating "God" and "those firmly rooted in knowledge": "None knows its interpretation save only God. And those firmly rooted in knowledge say, 'We have faith in it.'" Ibn al-'Arabī accepts the first reading, but without ignoring the implications of the sentence "We have faith in it." In the following passage, he explains this verse while commenting upon another Koranic verse, "Had they performed the Torah and the Gospel, and what was sent down to them from their Lord, they would have eaten both what was above them, and what was beneath their feet. Some of them are a moderate people, but many of them—evil are the things they do!" (5:66).

Know, dear friend—God illuminate your insight and beautify your awareness—that the sciences are of two kinds: One kind is bestowed (*mawhūb*). It is referred to in God's words, "They would have eaten what was above them" (5:66). It is the result of godfearing, as God has said, "Be godfearing, and God will teach you" (2:282). He also said, "If you are godfearing, He will give you discrimination" (8:29). And He said, "The All-merciful: He taught the Koran" (55:1-2).

The second kind of sciences is earned (*muktasab*). God alludes to it in His words, "what was beneath their feet," alluding to their hard work (*kadd*) and their effort (*ijtihād*). These are the people of "moderation." . . .

[The ones upon whom the sciences are bestowed] are the ones who lift up the

Book of God and that which has been sent down to them from their Lord. They are the ones who "vie in good works, outracing to them" (23:61). Some of them outrace to good works, and others lift up the Book from its bed, since interpretation on the part of the learned (*'ulamā'*) has made the Book lie down after it had been standing. The person to whom God has given success comes and makes the Book stand up after it had been lying down. In other words, he declares it incomparable with his own interpretation and exerting effort through reflection. Hence he stands up in worship of his Lord and asks Him to give him success in understanding what He meant by the words included in the Book and revelation, that is, the meanings themselves, purified of substrata. Then God gives to such people untainted knowledge. God says, "None knows its interpretation, save only God and those firmly rooted in knowledge." God teaches them that to which the written, revealed word goes back (*mā ya'ūl ilayhi*), that is, the meanings He had deposited within it. They do not employ their reflection, since in itself reflection is not preserved from error for anyone. That is why God says, "And those firmly rooted in knowledge; they say, . . . 'Our Lord, make not our hearts to swerve,'" in other words, through reflecting upon what Thou hast sent down, "after Thou hast guided us" to take from Thee the knowledge which Thou hast sent down upon us. "And bestow upon us mercy from Thee; Thou art the Bestower" (3:8). Hence they asked Him in respect of bestowal, not in respect of earning. . . .

The verse continues, "Some of them are a moderate people." These are the people of earning, who interpret God's Book and do not make it stand up through the practice for the sake of which it was sent down. They do not observe courtesy (*adab*) in taking it. These people are of two types:

A few of them are the "moderate" in that. They are the ones who draw near to the truth, and they may achieve the truth in what they interpret, in virtue of compatibility, but not by virtue of certitude, for they do not know exactly what God meant in what He sent down, since that can only be known by way of bestowal,

which is a divine report-giving by which God addresses the heart of the servant within the mystery (*sirr*) which stands between them.

The second type are they who are not moderate but instead plunge deeply into interpretation such that no correspondence (*munāsaba*) remains between the revealed words and the meaning. Or else they establish the words by way of declaring similarity and do not refer the knowledge of it back to God. They are the ones concerning whom God says, in the same verse, "But many of them—evil are the things they do!" (II 594.28)

One of the first negative results of *ta'wil* is that it weakens faith.

The degrees of nearness to God are made known by the knowledge of the Lawgiver, who acts as God's spokesman. God commanded us to have faith in the Koran's clear (*muḥkam*) and ambiguous (*mutashābih*) verses. Let us accept everything that the Prophet has brought, for if we interpret any of it, saying, "In fact, this is what the Speaker meant by His words," then the degree of faith will disappear from us. Our proof will rule over the report, thereby rendering the ruling property of faith ineffectual.

When this happens, the person of faith comes forward with sound knowledge. He says to the person who has this proof: "Your certitude that your consideration has allowed you to understand the aim of the Clarifier in that which He has clearly spoken is ignorance itself and the lack of sound knowledge. Even if it happens to coincide with knowledge, your faith has left you, and felicity is tied to faith and to sound knowledge based upon doctrine. 'Sound knowledge' is that along with which faith remains." (II 660.7)

The person who interprets the revealed reports has faith in his own interpretation, not in the reports. Hence he is not able to escape from his own limitations.

The messengers and the divine knowledge-giving brought that which rational faculties declare impossible. Hence the ra-

tional faculties were forced to interpret some of it in order to accept it, and to submit and admit their incapacity in other affairs which accepted no interpretation whatsoever. The upshot was that a person had to say: "This affair has an aspect known only to God and inaccessible to our rational faculties." All of this is to make souls feel comfortable—it is not knowledge—in order that they will not reject anything brought by prophecy. And this is the state of the intelligent person of faith, while he who has no faith accepts none of this.

Many reports have been revealed which rational faculties declare impossible, some concerning the Highest Side, and others concerning realities and the overturning of entities. That which concerns the Highest Side includes everything requiring faith by which God described Himself in His Book and upon the tongue of His messengers and the outward significance (*ẓāhir*) of which reason cannot accept on the basis of its proofs, only by means of interpreting it with some far-fetched interpretation. Then reason's faith is in its own interpretation, not in the report. . . .

The views of the rational and reflective thinkers concerning God diverge in accordance with the measure of their consideration. The god worshiped by reason devoid of faith is as if he were—or rather, he is—a god put there in accordance with what has been given by that rational faculty's consideration. Hence the god's reality is diverse in respect to each rational faculty, and rational faculties conflict. Each group among the people of rational faculties declares that the others are ignorant of God. Even if they should be Muslim considerative thinkers all of whom interpret, each group declares the others unbelievers.

But no disagreement has been related from the messengers, from Adam down to Muḥammad, concerning the descriptions they attribute to God. On the contrary, all of them speak with a single tongue. All the books they brought speak about God in a single tongue. No two of them disagree. Some of them attest to the truth of the others, in spite of the great lengths of time and the prophets' not having met. . . .

In the same way, those who have faith "upon insight"—the Muslims who have

surrendered (*taslim*) themselves and do not allow themselves to enter into interpretation—are either of two people. They are either a man who has faith and has surrendered and turned over the knowledge of all to God until he dies, thus being a follower of authority (*muqallid*), or a man who puts into practice the branches of the rulings (*furū' al-aḥkām*) which he knows and who has firm faith in that which the messengers and books have brought. Then God lifts the veil from his insight and makes him a possessor of insight in his own situation, just as He did with His Prophet and Messenger and the people toward whom He was solicitous. He gave them unveiling and insight, and they called to God “upon insight,” just as God said concerning His Prophet, giving news on his behalf: “I call to God upon insight, I and whoever follows after me” (12:108). Those who “follow after him” are the knowers through God, the gnostics. Though they are neither messengers nor prophets, they “stand upon a clear sign”¹⁴ from their Lord in their knowledge of Him and what has come from Him. (I 218.21)

Many of the learned have interpreted the Law in order to gain favor with those in power and thereby attain to high positions. Ibn al-‘Arabī frequently criticizes the worldly ‘*ulamā*’ for this shortcoming.

When the winds of caprice dominate over souls and the learned seek high degrees with kings, they leave the clear path and incline toward far-fetched interpretations. Thus they are able to walk with the personal desires of the kings in that within which their souls have a caprice, and the kings can support themselves by a Shari‘ite command. It may happen that the jurist (*faqīh*) does not himself believe the interpretation, but he gives pronouncements (*fatwā*) in accordance with it. We have seen a group of the judges and jurists who were like this.

Al-Malik al-Zāhir Ghāzī ibn al-Malik al-Nāṣir Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn ibn Ayyūb¹⁵ reported to me, after we had discussed such things, as follows: He called a slave and said, “Bring me the wallet.” I said to him, “What is the story of the wallet?” He replied, “You are ignorant of the ugly

things (*munkarāt*) and the wrongdoing (*ẓulm*) that go on in my country and kingdom. I, by God, believe as you do, that all of it is ugly. But, by God, my friend, not a single ugly thing happens without the legal pronouncement of a jurist. I have his own handwriting with me saying it is permissible. So God’s curse be upon them!

“A jurist named so and so,” and he specified for me the most excellent jurist of his country in religion and mortification (*taqashshuf*), “gave me a pronouncement that it is not necessary to fast during the month of Ramaḍān itself. On the contrary, what is obligatory for me is fasting during one month of the year, and I can choose it myself. So,” said the sultan, “I cursed him inwardly and did not show that to him. He is so and so,” and he named him for me. God have mercy on all of them!

You should know that God has given Satan power from the Presence of Imagination. He has given him an authority from it. Hence, when Satan sees a jurist inclining toward an act of caprice which will ruin him with God, he embellishes for him his evil action by means of a strange interpretation which will provide it with a good aspect in his rational consideration. (III 69.30)

The Rational Thinkers

Both Kalām and philosophy based their views of God on reflection and rational consideration. Ibn al-‘Arabī discusses their positions in all sorts of contexts and his remarks deserve detailed scholarly attention. He criticizes them mainly for their reliance upon reflection, which, in his view, undermines whatever they say. He makes this point while explaining how man should “take heed” (*i’tibār*) as is urged by the Koran.

Among the people who take heed are possessors of tasting. They take heed on the basis of tasting, not reflection. Taking heed may also be based on reflection. The stranger to these matters is confused by

the form, and concerning each he says, "This is one who takes heed." He does not know that taking heed may derive from reflection or from tasting and that taking heed in the people of tasting is the root, while in the people of reflection it is the branch. . . .

Is there anything which cannot be reached by way of unveiling and finding? We say that there is nothing, and we forbid reflection totally, since it makes its possessor heir to deceit and lack of sincerity. There is nothing whose knowledge cannot be attained through unveiling and finding. In contrast, occupying oneself with reflection is a veil. Others refuse to accept this, though not a single one of the Folk who follow Allah's path refuses it. Those who refuse belong to the people of consideration and reasoning among the exoteric scholars, those who have not tasted the states. If they had only tasted the states—like the divine Plato among the sages! But that is rare among these people. If they had only found their breath emerging from the place where the breath of the People of Unveiling and Finding emerges!

Those among the people of Islam who dislike Plato only dislike him because of his relationship to philosophy and because of their ignorance of the meaning of this word. In reality the "sages" are those who know God and all things and who also know the station of that which is known. And God, "He is the Sage, the All-knowing" (Koran 43:84). "He who has been given wisdom has been given much good" (2:269). Wisdom is the knowledge of prophecy, as God said about David: "God gave him the kingship and wisdom, and He taught him such as He willed" (2:251). The meaning of "philosopher" is lover of wisdom, since *sophia* in Greek is "wisdom," and *phil* is "love," so the word means "love of wisdom." Every man of intelligence loves wisdom.

However, the mistakes of the People of Reflection in the divine things (*ilāhiyyāt*) are more than their hitting the mark, whether they are philosophers, Mu'tazilites, Ash'arites or any other sort of the people of consideration. Hence philosophers are not blamed only because of this name. They are blamed because they make errors in the knowledge of God by opposing the reports brought by the

messengers. They did this by judging through consideration on the basis of their corrupt reflection concerning the root of prophecy and messengerhood and concerning that by which these two are supported. Hence the situation became confused for them.

If, while loving wisdom, they had sought it from God, not from reflection, they would have hit the mark in everything. As for the people of consideration among the Muslims other than the philosophers, such as the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites, Islam had already reached them and exercised its property over them. Then they began to defend it in accordance with what they understood from it. So they have hit the mark at the root and are mistaken in some of the branches, since they interpret Islam in accordance with what they are given by their reflection and rational proofs. They hold that if they were to apply to God some of the words of the Lawgiver in accordance with the outward significance of the words, while the proofs of reason hold this to be impossible, they would fall into unbelief. Hence they interpret these words. They do not know that God has a faculty in some of His servants which bestows a judgment different from what the rational faculty bestows in certain affairs, while it agrees with reason in others. This is a station which is outside the stage of reason, so reason cannot perceive it on its own. No one has faith in [what reason holds to be impossible] except him who has this faculty in his person. He knows reason's incapacity and the truth of what it denies.

Faculties are ranked in degrees, and they provide [knowledge] in keeping with the realities according to which God has brought them into existence. Thus, if the property of sight were presented to the faculty of hearing, it would declare it impossible, and so on with all the faculties. Reason is one of the faculties. Or rather, it acquires from all the faculties, while it gives nothing to any of them. . . .

Everyone who makes a mistake is mistaken only in the relationship. He attributes something where it does not belong. The Folk of Allah take the relationship and put it in its proper place, joining it to its object. This is the meaning of "wisdom," since the Folk of Allah—the mes-

sengers and the friends of God—are the sages in reality, and they are the people of “much good.” (II 523.2)

Certain of the Muʿtazilites came close to Ibn al-ʿArabī’s position on the question of the “nonexistence” of the entities. He often supports them on this and criticizes the Ashʿarites, though he also points out that the Muʿtazilites did not perceive the whole picture.

The Prophet related that God said, “I was a Treasure but was not known. So I loved to be known, and I created the creatures and made Myself known to them. Then they came to know Me.” In the words, “I was a Treasure,” one finds an affirmation of the immutable entities which were upheld by the Muʿtazilites. (II 232.11)

Know that there are three objects of knowledge, without a fourth. The first is Nondelimited Being, which does not become delimited. This is the Being of God, the Necessary Being through Himself. The second object of knowledge is nondelimited nothingness, which is nonexistence in itself. It never becomes delimited. It is the impossible (*al-muḥāl*). It stands opposite Nondelimited Being. . . .

Two contradictories never stand opposite each other without a separator (*fāṣil*) through which each is distinguished from the other and which prevents the one from being described by the attribute of the other. If a scale were to judge this reality which separates Nondelimited Being from nothingness, it would find its measure equal, without increase or decrease. This is the Supreme Barzakh, or the Barzakh of Barzakhs. It possesses a face toward Being and a face toward nothingness. It stands opposite each of these two known things in its very essence. It is the third known thing. Within it are all possible things. It is infinite, just as each of the other two known things is infinite.

The possible things have immutable entities within this Barzakh in the respect in which Nondelimited Being looks upon them. In this respect the possible things are called “things.” When God wants to bring a “thing” into existence, He says to it, “Be!”, and it is. In the respect in which nondelimited nothingness gazes upon the Barzakh, it has no existent entities. Hence

God says “Be!”, which is a word denoting existence (*ḥarf wujūdī*). If the thing had already come to be (*kāʾin*), He would not have said to it “Be!” . . . The possible things exist in respect of this Barzakh. Through them God has a vision of the things before they come to be. When any human being who possesses an imagination and the power to imagine imagines something, his gaze extends into this Barzakh, though he does not know that he is looking upon that thing in this presence.

In relation to the entities which are embraced by this Barzakh, the existent possible things which God brings into existence are like shadows in relation to corporeal bodies. Or rather, they are the true shadows. It is they which God described as prostrating themselves to Him along with the prostration of their entities,¹⁶ for those entities never cease prostrating themselves to Him before they come into existence. So when their shadows come into existence, they come into existence prostrating themselves to God, since their entities from which they come into existence have prostrated themselves to God. These shadows are heaven, earth, sun, moon, star, mountain, tree, crawling creature, and every existent thing. . . .

The Barzakh Presence is the shadow of Nondelimited Being in respect of the name “Light” (*al-nūr*), which is ascribed to God’s Being. That is why we call it a shadow. The existence of the entities [in the cosmos] is the shadow of that shadow. Sensory shadows are the shadows of these existent things within the sensory world. Since the property of a shadow is to disappear, not to remain immutable, and since the possible things—even if they exist—have the property of nonexistence, they are called “shadows” to separate them from Him who has nondelimited immutability in Being, that is, the Necessary Being, and from that which has nondelimited immutability in nothingness, that is, the impossible. Thus the levels are distinguished.

When the existent entities become manifest, they are within this Barzakh, for there is no presence into which they go in order to gain the state of existence. Within the existent entities, the existence that becomes actualized (*ḥuṣūl*) is finite, but bringing into existence (*ijād*) is infinite. So there is no existent form which is not identical to its own immutable

entity, while existence is like its clothing (*thawb*). . . .

If you have doubts about the situation of this Barzakh and are of the Folk of Allah, look at His words, "He let forth the two seas that meet together, between them a *barzakh* they do not overpass" (Koran 55:19). In other words, if not for that *barzakh*, the two would not be distinguished from each other and the situation would be confused, and this would lead to the overturning of the realities (*qalb al-haqā'iq*).

There are never two opposite things unless there is a *barzakh* between them "which they do not overpass." In other words, the one thing is not described by those attributes of the other through which the distinction between them is made. . . .

The Barzakh is like the dividing line between existence and nonexistence. It is neither existent nor nonexistent. If you attribute it to existence, you will find a whiff of existence within it, since it is immutable. But if you attribute it to nonexistence, you will speak the truth, since it has no existence. I wonder at the Ash'arites! How could they reject him who says that the nonexistent is a thing in the state of its nonexistence and that first it possesses an immutable entity, then existence is added to the entity? . . .

The reason that immutability is attributed to this Barzakh, which is the possible thing between Being and nothingness, is that it stands opposite the two things by its very essence. This is as follows: Nondelimited nothingness stands before Nondelimited Being like a mirror. Within the mirror, Being sees its own form. This form is the entity of the possible thing. That is why the possible thing has an immutable entity and a thingness in the state of its nonexistence, and that is why it comes out in the form of Nondelimited Being. That also is why it is qualified by infinity, and it is said concerning it that it is infinite. (III 46.27, 47.25)

Acts of God and Acts of Man

Nothing is as crucial to an understanding of the nature of our own existence as

the immutable entities—or call them the possible things, the existent/nonexistent things, the creatures, the objects of God's knowledge, the loci of manifestation. We have seen that Ibn al-'Arabī's own position on the things can be epitomized by the expression He/not He. The things pertain to "imagination," since they are neither existent nor nonexistent.

The nature of the things was constantly discussed and disputed in Kalām. Most commonly, however, the problem was posed in terms of human acts (*af'āl*) or works (*a'māl*). Clearly God created man, but to what extent or in what respect does He also create his acts? If we say in every respect, then our perception of free choice is false and the sending of the prophets becomes meaningless. But if we say that man is free, what happens to God's omnipotence? In short, this problem brings up the question of free will and predestination, surely the perennial theological stumbling block. Ibn al-'Arabī's allusions to the theologians most often occur within this context.

As is well known, the Ash'arites upheld the view that the acts belong to God, and thus they stressed predestination. In contrast, the Mu'tazilites attributed the acts to the servant, thus upholding free choice. In attributing the acts to one side or the other, each group took an extreme position, and Ibn al-'Arabī praises them for this, since they thereby avoided "associating" (*shirka*) God with the creatures or the creatures with God. Both upheld the declaration of unity (*tawhīd*), though here we see Ibn al-'Arabī employing this word in a sense not usually given to it.¹⁷ He is in the midst of discussing the nature of the "motion" (*ḥaraka*) which is found in the sensory realm:

People disagree as to the cause of this motion. Is its cause life, the world of the breaths (*'ālam al-anfās*),¹⁸ or nothing other than the divine command?

Know that the real situation is the existence of the divine command in the world of the breaths. The command turns to—

ward this engendered world and brings it into motion, while the cosmos accepts the motion through its nature. In the same way, wind turns toward the trees to bring them into motion through its blowing. The observer sees the motion of the branches because of the blowing of the wind. Knowledge sees that if the branches were not free to move in their places, they would not find the wind when it blows. So they have a governing property over the wind in one respect, and no property in another respect. The goal to be realized by the wind bringing the trees into motion is the elimination of the corrupt vapors of the trees, so that there may not be deposited within them that which causes illness and disease in the cosmos when animals feed upon the trees. . . . Hence the blowing of the winds is directed toward the best interest of the cosmos. . . . So the wind is a secondary cause which is desired and which leaves no effect upon what it causes, since here the effect belongs to Him who set up the secondary causes and made them a veil over Himself, in order that the creatures may be distinguished according to their excellence in recognizing God and in order that he who associates others with Him will be separated from him who declares His Unity.

He who associates others is absolutely ignorant, since association in this sort of affair is not correct in any respect, for the bringing of acts into existence does not take place through association. That is why the Mu'tazilites did not join up with those who associate, since they declared the unity of the acts of the servants in the servants. They did not give the servants any associates. They attributed the acts to the servants in accordance with reason, while the Law declares that they spoke the truth in that. The Ash'arites declared the unity of the acts of all possible things in God without any classification according to reason, while the Law supports them in that, though only through certain plausible senses (*muhtamalāt wujūh*) of its address. The arguments of the Mu'tazilites are stronger outwardly, while the position of the Ash'arites in this is stronger in the view of the people of unveiling among the Folk of Allah. But both groups are upholders of *tawhīd*. (II 629.33)

The Ash'arite position is strong in the view of unveiling because in the final analysis, everything returns to God, and this is seen most clearly through visionary experience.

I was not able to free myself to ascribe the creation of works to one of the two sides [that is, God or man]. It was difficult for me to distinguish between the "performance" (*kash*) upheld by one group [the Ash'arites] and the "creation" upheld by another group [the Mu'tazilites]. Then God acquainted me through a visual unveiling (*kashf ḥaṣarī*) with His creation of the first created thing, before which there was no created thing, since there was none but God. He said to me, "Is there anything here that gives rise to obscurity and bewilderment?"

I replied that there was nothing. He said, "So also is every temporally originated thing that you see. No one and no creature has any effect upon any of them. I create the things at (*'ind*) the secondary causes, not by means of the secondary causes, so they come to be at My command. . . ."

I said to Him, "What dost Thou say if I should address Thy words, 'Do!' and 'Do not do!'"

He replied, "If I should make something clear to you, observe courtesy, since the Presence does not put up with dispute (*muḥāqqa*)."

I said, "But that is exactly what we are doing. And who is the disputer, and who the observer of courtesy? For Thou art the Creator of courtesy and dispute. If Thou shouldst create dispute, there is no escape from its property, and if Thou shouldst create courtesy, there is no escape from it."

He said, "So it is. Therefore listen when the Koran is recited and give ear to it."

I said, "That belongs to Thee. Create listening so that I may listen and create giving ear so that I may give ear. And nothing addresses Thee now save that which Thou hast created."

He said, "I create only what I know, and I know only the object of knowledge as it actually is. 'To God belongs the conclusive argument' (6:149).¹⁹ I have already let you know this, so cling to it in witnessing, since there is nothing else.

Then your mind will be at ease. But do not be secure until the prescription of the Law is cut off, and it will not be cut off until you cross over the Narrow Bridge. Then people will worship by their own essences, not by the command or prohibition demanded by what is obligatory, recommended, forbidden, or reprehensible."²⁰ (II 204.8)

The Ash'arites avoided the contradiction involved in declaring that God creates the acts and then punishes His servants for evil deeds by their doctrine of *kash*, "acquisition," or more accurately, "performance."²¹ Man performs the acts but does not create them, while God creates the acts but does not perform them. Ibn al-'Arabī is not especially pleased with this idea and often criticizes it, as will be seen below.

The Mu'tazilite argument, like the Ash'arite position, is based upon certain select Koranic verses which clearly support what they want to say. The Koran is full of verses which indicate God's total control over His creation, yet it frequently attributes choice and responsibility to man. In effect, each group "interpreted" the verses cited by their opponents, but read the verses supporting their own position literally.

If you attribute the act to the power (*qudra*) of the servant, a support can be found for that in the divine report-giving, and if you attribute the act to God, a support can also be found for that in the divine report. As for rational proofs, they contradict each other among the rational thinkers, though not in actual fact. However, it is extremely difficult for rational thinkers to discern a proof from an obfuscation; and it is also difficult in respect to the divine report-giving and in respect of the reality of the servant. For the servant is commanded, and a command is only given to someone who possesses power to do what he is commanded and is able to refrain from what is prohibited to him. Hence it is difficult to negate the act from the person to whom the Law is addressed, that is, the servant, since then there would be no wisdom in addressing him.

Other divine reports and rational proofs show that the act attributed to the servant belongs only to God. Hence there is a contradiction both in the revealed reports and the view of reason. This results in bewilderment and causes the disagreement which has occurred in this question between the rational thinkers in their consideration of their proofs and the people of reports in their proofs. The truth of the matter is known only to the people of unveiling among the Folk of Allah.

The fact that man was created in the Form demands that the existence of the act belong to him, and this is confirmed by his being addressed by the Law. Sensory perception bears witness to this, so it is stronger in proof. The fact that at root all of this goes back to God does not detract from it, since the going back does not contradict this explanation. Hence the arguments of those who uphold "performance" are weak, not because they uphold performance—for their opponents also uphold it, since it is a report of the Law and a rational affair which man knows in himself. No, their arguments are weak because they negate the effect of the temporally originated power. (II 604.11)

One of the several types of "annihilation" (*fanā*) which the spiritual traveler may experience is the "annihilation of acts." Ibn al-'Arabī explains as follows:

The servant is annihilated from his acts through God's standing over them. This is indicated by His words, "What, He who stands over every soul for what it performs" (13:33). Hence the servants see the act as belonging to God from behind the veil of the engendered things, which are the locus wherein the acts become manifest. This is indicated by God's words, "Surely thy Lord is wide in concealment"²² (53:32), that is, His covering is wide. All engendered things are His covering, while He is the one who acts (*fā'il*) from behind this covering, "but they are unaware" (7:95).

Those of the theologians who affirm that the acts of the servants are a creation of God are aware, but they do not witness, because of the veil of "performance" through which God has blinded their in-

sight. In the same way, He has blinded the insight of him who saw that the acts belong to the creatures when He placed him with that which he witnesses with his eyes. So this one is "unaware," and he is the Mu'tazilite. The other one "does not witness," and he is the Ash'arite. Both have blinders over their eyes. (II 513.17)

Since all acts are ultimately God's, all of them are praiseworthy in themselves. But inasmuch as the acts become attached to the servant who is addressed by the Law, some of them are blameworthy. In the next world, once a person has left the arena of the Law, he will see that all his evil acts were in fact—in relation to God though not in relation to himself—good acts. This, in Ibn al-'Arabi's view, is one of the meanings of the Koranic statement, "God will change their evil deeds into good deeds" (25:70).

This verse means that he will see as good exactly what he had been seeing as evil. Before this, its goodness had been hidden from him by the rulings of the Law. When he reaches the place of the abolition of the Law's rulings, that is, the hereafter, and the covering is removed, he will see the good that was in all his works. It will be unveiled to him that the one who acted was God, no one else. So the acts were God's, and His acts are all perfect in goodness, without any imperfection or ugliness. The evil and ugliness which had been attributed to the acts were because of opposition to God's rulings, not because of the entities of the acts.

Anyone who has the covering removed from his insight and sight, whenever that might be, will see what we just mentioned. But the time of the removal varies. Some people see that in this world. They are the ones who say that all God's acts are good, that there is no one who acts except God, and that the servant has no act other than the performance which is attributed to him. This "performance" consists of the free choice (*ikhtiyār*) which he has in the work. As for temporally originated power, that has no effect upon anything according to their view, since it does not go beyond its own locus.

The gnostics among the Folk of Allah see that there is no temporally originated power whatsoever, so in their view it has no effect upon anything. What in fact takes place is that one divine name prescribes the Law for another divine name, addressing it within the locus of an engendered servant. The servant is then called "the one for whom the Law is prescribed" (*mukallaf*) and the address is called "prescribing the Law."

Then there are those who say that the acts which emerge from the creatures are the creation of the servants, like the Mu'tazilites. When the covering is removed from them, the actual situation will become clear to them, either to their benefit or to their loss. (III 403.21)

By Ibn al-'Arabi's own admission, his position on the acts wavers. Or rather, it depends on the point of view he has in mind. That which allows him to ascribe acts to man is the fact of man's being made upon the divine form and his ability to assume the traits of all God's names and attributes (*takhalluq*). Since God's attributes are within him, he manifests God's desire and power. Inasmuch as he is the form of God and not God Himself, his decisions and acts belong to himself.

Ibn al-'Arabi points out that the disagreement in this question goes back to an argument over the manner in which God discloses Himself. Some say He discloses Himself in the acts of the creatures, and some disagree. Those who are aware of His self-disclosure attribute the acts to God. Those who are not aware attribute them to the creatures. Hence the difference among the theologians goes back to the fact that one group says the acts are "He," the other says they are "not He."

Then there is "self-disclosure in the acts." It is the relationship which is the manifestation of the engendered things from the Essence from which they come to be and the manifestation of the loci of manifestation from the Essence from which they become manifest. It is alluded to in God's words, "I did not let them witness the creation of the heavens and the earth" (18:51). As for this self-disclo-

sure, God has fixed its occurrence in the beliefs of one group and has not allowed another group to accept it. God has established in one group the belief that it happens, and in another group the belief that it does not happen. And He has mentioned that He discloses Himself within the forms of beliefs.²³

Someone may recognize that his own acts and those of others are created by God. But he witnesses them deriving from his own power, even though he knows that they derive from the divine power. At the same time, he does not witness how His power or the power of another becomes connected to the object of power when the object is brought into existence and made to appear from non-existence. Such a person will refuse to accept that God discloses Himself in acts except to the extent that it occurs here. Hence he refuses to accept the self-disclosure in acts.

Someone else recognizes that his own acts are created by himself, not by the eternal power. However, he does not recognize them through witnessing except in the state of their existence, nor does he see—if he is fair—his power becoming connected to bringing them into existence. Rather, he only witnesses the bodily limb becoming connected to the motion that takes place. Such a person will uphold the occurrence of this self-disclosure.

There is a disagreement over this among the people of this affair which will not be lifted either in this world or the next. Each one of them has been established in his belief by God. In the next abode He will preserve the one in the imaginal perception (*wahm*) that He discloses Himself to him in his acts, and He will preserve the other in his knowledge that He does not disclose Himself in his acts. (II 606.33)

My dear son, the gnostic Shams al-Dīn Ismā'il ibn Sawdakīn al-Nūrī,²⁴ called my attention to something which had been verified for me, but in a different mode. . . . I mean self-disclosure in acts, that is, whether or not it is correct. Sometimes I would negate it in one respect, and sometimes I would affirm it in the respect in which the address of the Law required and demanded it, since man is addressed by the Law for the sake of works.

It is impossible that one who is Wise and All-knowing would say, "Do!" and "Act!" to him whom He knows will not do and will not act, since he has no power. But the divine command for the servant to do works has been established, like, "Perform the prayer, and pay the alms" (2:43 etc.), "Be patient, vie you in patience, and be steadfast" (3:200), "Struggle" (5:35) and so on. Hence, there has to be some connection between the servant and what he does in respect of the act, by means of which he comes to be called the one who acts and does. If this is so, then to the extent of that relationship, self-disclosure will occur within him.

In this way I was affirming self-disclosure within the acts. And this is an approved way, extremely clear, showing that temporally originated power has the relationship of connection to that work which is prescribed for it in the Law. I saw that the argument of the opponent was flimsy and extremely weak and defective. Then one day, when this son Ismā'il ibn Sawdakīn was conferring with me about this question, he said to me, "Which proof of the attribution and ascription of the act to the servant and of self-disclosure within him is stronger than the fact that his attribute is that God has created man upon His own form? Were the act to be disengaged from him, it would no longer be correct for him to be upon His form and he could not accept the assumption of the traits of the names. But it is established for you and for the People of the Path without any disagreement that man is created upon the form, and so also assumption of the traits of the names is established."

No one can know the joy that came to me through his calling my attention to this. Hence it is possible that the master (*ustādḥ*) gain something from the disciple (*tilmīdh*) which God has decreed he will attain only in this way. (II 681.24)

The proper human attitude toward the acts adds another dimension to the question. Though one group may ascribe all acts to God, in fact "courtesy" (*adab*) demands that only good and beautiful acts be ascribed to God, while evil and ugly acts must be ascribed to the servants. Man must see all good as belonging to

God and all evil as belonging to himself, thereby putting everything in its proper place and becoming qualified by justice, wisdom, and courtesy. In one passage where Ibn al-ʿArabī classifies the names of God into various categories, he provides a distinction between the “names of acts” and the “names of deputation” (*niyāba*) which helps clarify this point.

God says, “To God belong the most beautiful names, so call Him by them” (7:180). . . . Know that some of God’s names are features (*maʿārif*), such as the well-known names. These are the obvious names.

Some of the names are hidden things (*muḍmarāt*), like the [pronouns] *ka* and *tā* of address, the *tā* of the first person, the third person pronoun . . . , and the first person plural pronoun, as in “Surely We sent down.” . . .

Some of the names are denoted by acts, though no names are built from [the acts mentioned in such verses as] “God derides them” (9:79) or “God mocks them” (2:15).

Some of the names are names of deputation: They belong to God, but they act as His deputies, such as when we say, “[He has appointed for you] shirts to protect you from the heat” (16:81). Every name given to every act ascribed to every engendered thing among the possible things functions as God’s deputy, since all acts belong to God. Whether blame or praise becomes connected to the act, this connection exercises no effect upon what is given by sound knowledge. Hence every act attributed to a created thing acts as God’s deputy within that thing. If it occurs in a praiseworthy way, it is attributed to God in laudation, since God loves to be lauded—so has it been recorded in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* from the Messenger of God.²⁵ But if blame becomes connected to it, or a defect is joined to it, we do not attribute it to God.

An example of the praiseworthy is the words of Abraham, “He heals me” (26:80). But concerning illness he said, “Whenever I am sick” (26:80). He did not say, “Whenever He makes me sick,” even though nothing made him sick but God. God made him sick just as He healed him.

Another example is [the words of Kha-

dir], “I desired to damage it” (18:79). This courteous and just knower alluded to himself by desiring to damage. But he said concerning the praiseworthy act, “Thy Lord desired” (18:82) in the case of the two orphans. Then in the place of praise and blame he said, “We desired,” with the plural pronoun (18:81), because of the blame involved in killing the youth without any retaliation for a soul slain, and the praise involved in God’s protecting his parents by his being killed. Hence he said “We desired,” without specifying. Such is the state of the Courteous (*al-udabā*). Then he said, “I did not act”—that is, “He did not act”—“on my bidding” (18:82); on the contrary, the whole affair belongs to God. (IV 318.26)

The distinguishing marks of works which lead to felicity are that man performs the works in a state of presence (*ḥuḍūr*) with God in all his movements and rests and that he witnesses the attribution of the acts to God in respect of their coming into existence and their praiseworthy relationship. But if he should attribute their blameworthy relationship to God, he has been discourteous and displayed his ignorance of the knowledge of the prescription of the Law (*taklīf*), of the Law’s object, and of whom it addresses, that is, the person to whom it is said, “Act!”

If the one to whom the Law is addressed had no relation to the act whatsoever, he would not have been told to act, and the whole of the Shari’a would be a game, but it is true in itself. Hence the servant must have a sound relationship with the act, a relationship in respect of which he is told to perform the act. This relationship is not connected to his desire (*irāda*), as held by those who uphold performance. On the contrary, it is a subtle phenomenon of power included within the divine power and known through proofs, just as the light of the stars is included within the light of the sun. Through proofs you know that the stars possess a light which spreads over the earth, but you do not perceive it with your senses because of the overwhelming power of the light of the sun. In the same way, sense perception tells us that the acts of the servants belong to them in the sensory realm and according to the Law and that the divine power is included within

them. Reason perceives the divine power, but the senses do not, like the light of the stars included in the light of the sun. But in fact the light of the stars is identical with the light of the sun, and the stars are its loci of disclosure.²⁶ All the light belongs to the sun, but the senses attribute the light to the stars and then say that the light of the stars has been included within the light of the sun. But in reality, there is only the light of the sun whose light is included in itself, since there is no other light. (II 659.1)

The theological problem of the ascription of the acts to God or the servant can never have a simple solution, since it is one more version of the question, "What is a thing in relation to God?" The radical ambiguity of existence does not allow a straightforward answer. Those who see with penetrating vision will always affirm that the thing is He/not He, while those who cannot gain a complete knowledge of the situation will affirm one or the other. The rational thinkers are tied and bound by their own means of knowledge, while the people of heart fluctuate with the actual situation. The people of reason will say, "The acts are God's" (Ash'arites) or "The acts are man's" (Mu'tazilites), but the Folk of Allah will follow the Koranic path by saying, "You did not throw when you threw, but God threw" (8:17). Ibn al-'Arabī alludes to many of these points in discussing those whom the Koran calls the "strugglers" (*mujāhidūn*), that is, those who carry out the *jihād*, the struggle against their own limitations. In the following passage, Ibn al-'Arabī differentiates the strugglers in an absolute sense from those who struggle in a specific and delimited sense.

The "strugglers" are the people of effort, toil, and putting up with difficulties. They are four kinds: Those who struggle without being delimited by anything, as mentioned in God's words, "God has preferred the strugglers over those who sit at home" (4:95). The second kind are the strugglers delimited by the path of God,

as in His words, "The strugglers in the path of God" (4:95). The third kind are those who struggle in Him, as in His words, "Those who struggle in Us, surely We shall guide them on Our paths" (29:69). . . . The fourth kind are those who struggle in God "as is His due" (22:78); thereby He distinguishes them from those who struggle in Him without this delimitation. . . .

We now come to the strugglers whom God has not delimited by any specific attribute, not "in the path of God," nor "in Him," nor "as is His due." They are the strugglers through God, who does not possess the attribute of delimitation, so struggling through Him takes place in all things. It is the all-pervasive struggle. . . .

The "strugglers" among His servants are those who do not become delimited, just as God has made them nondelimited. They waver in the acts, the entities of which emerge within themselves. Should they attribute them to God? But there are those acts which courtesy does not allow us to attribute to Him and of which God has declared Himself quit, as in His words, "A declaration of being quit on God's part" (9:1), that is, "Let them attribute it to themselves." There are also acts which courtesy demands that we attribute to Him and which have a true relationship with Him.

The strugglers saw that God said, "You did not throw when you threw," so He negated and then affirmed exactly what He negated. Then He said, "But God threw" (8:17). Hence He placed the affirmation between two negations, so the negation is stronger than the affirmation, since it surrounds what is affirmed. Then He said in the same verse, "That He might test the faithful [with a good test]." Hence we come to know that God has bewildered the faithful, which is His testing of them through what He mentioned: the negating and the affirming of the throwing. And He made it "a good test." In other words, if the servant negates the throwing from Him, he will be correct, and if he affirms it in Him, he will be correct. There only remains which of the two correct views is better for the servant, though both are good. And this is a place of bewilderment (*hayra*). (II 145.29, 147.26)

13. KNOWING

GOD'S SELF-DISCLOSURE

God's self-disclosure appears in two modes—ontological and cognitive, or as existence and as knowledge—but Ibn al-ʿArabī usually does not distinguish between them. Sometimes he deals primarily with one mode, but more commonly he describes self-disclosure in terms which apply to both. We need to keep in mind that *wujūd* or Being/existence means also “finding.” It is a subjective experience as much as an objective occurrence. God's “Being” is identical with His knowledge, that is, His self-consciousness. The expression *wājib al-wujūd* has been consistently translated in Western sources as “Necessary Being” or “necessary existence,” but it can also be rendered as “necessary finding” or “necessary awareness.” God finds Himself and cannot not find Himself. The possible thing may or may not find itself and God, depending upon whether or not God gives preponderance to its finding over its not-finding (*ʿadam*). The Verifiers are the People of Unveiling and Finding (*ahl al-kashf waʿl-wujūd*), since the reality of things has been disclosed to them and they have found God in both the cosmos and themselves.

Finding Light

In Sufi terminology—as opposed to philosophical terminology—*wujūd* had long been used in the context of discussions of *samāʿ*, “listening” or “audition,” that is, the “spiritual concert” which the Sufis employed as a means of opening themselves up to the inrushes of knowledge and awareness. In this context, the term *wujūd* is contrasted with two other words from the same root, *wajd* and *tawājjud*. Briefly, *wajd* signifies “ecstasy.”

As Ibn al-ʿArabī puts it, quoting a classical definition, *wajd* is “the states (*aḥwāl*) that come upon the heart unexpectedly and annihilate it from witnessing itself and those present” (II 537.1).¹ *Tawājjud* signifies “inviting ecstasy, since it is self-exertion in order to experience ecstasy” (II 535.26). *Wujūd* then means “Finding (*wijḍān*) the Real (*al-ḥaqq*) in ecstasy” (II 538.1).

In the view of the Tribe *wujūd* is finding the Real in ecstasy. They say that if you are a possessor of ecstasy, but you do not witness the Real in that state—for it is witnessing Him which annihilates you from witnessing yourself and witnessing those present—then you are not a possessor of ecstasy, since you do not possess the finding of the Real in it.

Know that finding (*wujūd*) the Real in ecstasy is not known, since ecstasy is an unexpected occurrence (*muṣādaʿa*), and that through which the unexpected occurs is unknown, for it could have come through some other situation. Since its property is not connected to the audition, the Real is found therein in an unknown mode. . . .

The finding of the Real in ecstasy is diverse among the finders because of the property of the divine names and the engendered preparednesses. Each breath of engendered existence possesses a preparedness not possessed by any other breath. The “Possessor of the Breath” (*ṣāhib al-nafas*) is the one who is described by ecstasy. His ecstasy takes place in keeping with his preparedness, while the divine names watch and guard. The engendered thing has nothing of God but ascription to His names and His solicitude (*ināya*). Hence the finding of the Real in ecstasy takes place in keeping with the divine name which watches over him, and the divine names go back to the Self of the Real. . . .

For the gnostics, the term “ecstasy” loses its property of being a technical term. They apply it everywhere. In their

view, there is no possessor of sound ecstasy—whoever may experience it—unless God is found (*wujūd*) in that ecstasy in a mode known to those who are gnostics through God. Hence they take from every possessor of ecstasy the finding of Him that comes to him in ecstasy, even if the possessor of that ecstasy does not recognize it as the finding of the Real. But the gnostic recognizes this. Hence he takes from every possessor of ecstasy the finding of the Real which he brings. He recognizes that the Real discloses Himself in that ecstasy in the form in which this report-giver delimits Him—that is, the one who gives a report concerning the finding of what he finds in his ecstasy. (II 538.1,21)

Ibn al-ʿArabī knows full well that most people understand *wujūd* as discussed in the context of “listening” or *samāʿ* in a different sense from the *wujūd* which is discussed in the context of existence and nonexistence. Nevertheless, he sees the meanings as basically identical. In order to indicate the identity, I translate *wujūd* in the following as existence/finding.

God says, “[God is] Listening, Knowing” (Koran 9:98), and He says, “[God is] Listening, Seeing” (22:61). Hence He places listening before knowledge and sight. The first thing we knew from God and which became connected to us from Him was His speech (*qawf*) and our listening (*samāʿ*). Hence existence/finding derived from Him. In the same way, in this path we say that every *samāʿ* without an ecstasy possessing existence/finding is not truly a *samāʿ*. This is the level of *samāʿ* to which the Folk of Allah refer and to which they listen.

Thus, when the singer sings, the one worthy of *samāʿ* sees God's speech “Be!” to the thing before it comes to be. The readiness to come into existence possessed by the listener to whom it is said “Be!” corresponds (*bi manzila*) to ecstasy in *samāʿ*. Then its existence/finding in its entity by means of His speech “Be!”—as He says, “[We say to it] ‘Be!’ and it is” (16:40)—corresponds to the existence/finding found by the ones worthy of

samāʿ in their hearts and given to them by the *samāʿ* in the state of ecstasy. So he who has not listened to the *samāʿ* of existence/finding has not listened. Hence the Tribe has placed existence/finding after ecstasy.

The cosmos can have no existence without Speech on God's part and listening on the part of the cosmos. Hence the existence of the paths of felicity only becomes manifest, and the differences between them and the paths of wretchedness only become known, through the Divine Speech and the engendered listening. Therefore all the messengers came with Speech, such as the Koran, the Torah, the Gospels, the Psalms, and the Scriptures.² There is nothing but speech and listening. There can be nothing else. Were it not for Speech, we would not know what the Desirer desires from us. Were it not for hearing (*samʿ*), we would not reach the point of gaining what is said to us. Through Speech we move about, and as a result of Speech, we move about in listening. Hence Speech and listening are interrelated. Neither can be independent from the other, since they are two terms of a relationship. Through Speech and listening, we come to know what is in the Self of the Real, since we have no knowledge of Him except through the knowledge that He gives to us, and His giving of knowledge takes place through His Speech. (II 366.27)

In short, we come to find our own existence through listening to the Divine Speech, which is “Be!” By the same token, we come to find God through listening to His Speech in the form of revelation. Finding and existence are two aspects of the same reality, which at root is God's own Finding of Himself, His Necessary Being. All goes back to Him and His names.

God's Being is Light (*nūr*), as we have seen in an earlier chapter. The impossible thing or nothingness is darkness (*ẓulma*), and the existence of the cosmos is a domain of brightness or shadow between the two.

Light is perceived, and through it perception takes place. Darkness is per-

ceived, but through it no perception takes place. . . . God is sheer Light, while the impossible is sheer darkness. . . . Creation is the Barzakh between Light and darkness. . . .

God says, "And to whomsoever God assigns no light, no light has he" (24:40). The light "assigned" to the possible thing is nothing other than the *wujūd* of the Real. Just as He has described Himself as obligating Himself through mercy and help, in verses like, "Your Lord has written for Himself mercy" (6:54) and "It is ever a duty incumbent upon Us to help the faithful" (30:47), so also He has described Himself as "assigning" to the possible thing: Were there no light, the possible thing would find no entity for itself, and it would not be qualified by *wujūd*. That which becomes qualified by *wujūd* has become qualified by the Real, since there is nothing in *wujūd* but God. Though Being is One Entity, the entities of the possible things have made It many, so It is the One/Many (*al-wāḥid al-kathīr*). . . . Without Him, we would not be found, and without us, He would not become many through the many attributes and the names diverse in meaning which He ascribes to Himself. The whole situation depends upon us and upon Him, since through Him we are, and through us He is. But all of this pertains specifically to the fact that He is a god, since the Lord demands the vassal through an inherent demand, whether in existence or supposition. But "God is Independent of the worlds" (3:97). . . . The cosmos is not independent of Him in any sense, since it is a possible thing, and the possible thing is poor toward the Preponderator.

The dark and luminous veils through which the Real is veiled from the cosmos are the light and the darkness by which the possible thing becomes qualified in its reality because it is an intermediary (*wasat*). It only looks upon itself, so it only looks upon the veil. Were the veils to be removed from the possible thing, possibility would be removed, and the Necessary and the impossible would be removed through its removal. Hence the veils will be hung down forever, and nothing else is possible. (III 274.25, 276.9,18)

Through the Being of God, which is

Were it not for light, nothing whatsoever would be perceived, neither object of knowledge, nor sensory object, nor imaginal object. The names of light are diverse in keeping with the names set down for the faculties. The common people see these as names of the faculties, but the gnostics see them as names of the light through which perception takes place. When you perceive sounds, you call that light "hearing." When you perceive sights, you call that light "seeing." When you perceive objects of touch, you call that light "touch." So also is the case with objects of imagination. . . . The faculties of smell, taste, imagination, memory, reason, reflection, form-giving, and everything through which perception takes place are all light.

As for the objects of perception (*mudrakāt*), if they did not have the preparedness to accept the perception of the one who perceives them, they would not be perceived. Hence they first possess manifestation (*ẓuhūr*) to the perceiver, then they are perceived. And manifestation is light. Hence every perceived thing must have a relationship with light, through which it gains the preparedness to be perceived.

Hence every object of knowledge has a relationship to the Real, and the Real is Light. So every object of knowledge has a relationship to light. . . . So there is no object of knowledge but God. (III 276.32, 277.12)

Like *wujūd*, light is both ontological and epistemological. The word *idrāk* or "perception" in Arabic means primarily to reach, to attain, to overtake. It is sometimes translated by classical authors into Persian by *yāft*, that is, "finding," a word which is also employed to translate *wujūd*.³ So the "perception" which takes place through light is the "finding" that takes place through *wujūd*. The "perceived things" (*mudrakāt*) are the "found" or "existent things" (*maʾwjudāt*). Since light in itself is the Real, one stage of finding God has to do with the elimination of darkness from the heart, the darkness connected to engendered existence. Hence in *Iṣṭilāḥāt* Ibn al-ʿArabī offers the following definition of light: "Any divine inrush which dispels engendered

existence from the heart" (14; II 130.1). Likewise revelation is light:

The Koran is "light" because of its verses which dispel misleading doubts. . . . Every verse it brings acts as evidence (*dalāla*) because of the fact that it is light. For light dispels darknesses. (III 96.7)

Just as Being is the Manifest, so also light is manifestation, and all manifestation takes place through it.

There is nothing stronger than light, since it possesses manifestation, and through it manifestation takes place. Everything has need of manifestation, and there is no manifestation without light. (II 466.20)

Just as light is being, finding, and manifestation, so also it is knowledge, which, as we have seen, is a "light which God throws into the heart of whomsoever He will." Ibn al-ʿArabī makes this connection clear in discussing the vision (*ruʿya*) of God promised to the faithful. He mentions in passing that real knowledge of God derives from God's unveiling the mysteries and opening the door to direct knowledge of Him, a state known technically as the "opening of unveiling" (*futūḥ al-mukāshafa*).

There is not one of us who will not see his Lord and speak to Him face to face. All of this will be a giving of knowledge through the form in which He discloses Himself to us, which is the form in which He created us. We know for certain that the tasting of the messengers is far beyond the tasting of their followers. So do not suppose that when Moses asked to see his Lord (Koran 7:143), he was lacking the vision which was the state of Abū Bakr in his words, "I have never seen anything without seeing God before it." This is not the vision that Moses was seeking from his Lord, since he already possessed this vision through the elevation of his level. . . .

Tasting and tradition (*naql*) allow no doubt as to the fact that there will be vision of God. But reason doubts this, since vision of God is one of the things which throws rational faculties into bewilder-

ment and concerning which they come to no conclusions. . . .

The prophets and the friends among the Folk of Allah have no knowledge of God derived from reflection. God has purified them from that. Rather, they possess the "opening of unveiling" through the Real. Among those who see Him is he who sees Him without delimitation. Another sees Him through Him. Another sees Him through himself. Another does not see Him with himself, though he has seen Him and does not know that he has seen Him. This last group possesses no "mark" (*ʿalāma*)⁴ and does not know the form of His manifestation in existence.

Among them is he who does not see Him because he knows that His Entity becomes manifest here to the cosmos only in the forms of the properties of the entities of the cosmos, while He is their locus of disclosure. Hence the seer perceives only the form of the property, not the Entity. Hence he knows that he has not seen Him. "To God belongs the highest similitude, and He is the Inaccessible," who is not seen in respect of His Hennes, "and the Wise" (16:60) in His self-disclosure, lest it be said that He was seen.

Look at the form manifest to the eye in a polished surface and verify your vision. You will find that the form has come between you and your perception of the polished surface, which is its locus of disclosure. So you will never see the surface. The Real is the locus of disclosure for the forms of the possible things. Hence the cosmos sees only the cosmos in the Real. . . .

The object of vision (*marʿi*), which is the Real, is light, while that through which the perceiver perceives Him is light. Hence light becomes included in light. It is as if it returns to the root from which it became manifest. So nothing sees Him but He. You, in respect of your entity, are identical with shadow, not light. Light is that through which you perceive all things, and light is one of the things. So you perceive light only inasmuch as you carry light in your shadow itself. Shadow is ease, and darkness is a veil. When the star of the Real rises and enters into the servant's heart, the heart is illuminated and irradiated. Then bewilderment and fear disappear from the possessor of the heart, and he gives news of

his Lord explicitly, through hints, and by means of various modes of reporting. (III 116.18)

The Lights of Self-Disclosure

For the Sufi to give news of God, the light of God must first dawn in his heart. This dawning of light is called by many names, "self-disclosure" (*tajallī*) being one of the most common. As we have seen on several occasions, this term, like *wujūd* and light, has both ontological and epistemological dimensions. God discloses Himself through the cosmos and through all knowledge. The following passage is typical:

God brought the cosmos into existence as two sides and a center. He made one side like the point of a circle and the other side like its circumference, while He configured the cosmos between the two sides within levels and circles. He named the circumference the "Throne," the central point the "earth." Everything between the two is the circles of the elements and the celestial spheres. He made them all loci for the individuals of the species and genera which He created in the cosmos.⁵

Then God disclosed Himself in an all-inclusive, all-encompassing self-disclosure, and He disclosed Himself in a specific, individual self-disclosure. The all-inclusive self-disclosure is an all-merciful self-disclosure, as indicated in His words, "The All-merciful sat upon the Throne" (20:5). The specific self-disclosure is the knowledge of God that belongs to each and every individual. Through the second self-disclosure there is entrance and exit, descent and ascent, motion and stillness, joining and separation, infringement, and that which stays in its place. He distinguished parts of the cosmos from other parts through place, position, form, and accident. Hence no distinction takes place except through Him, for He is identical to what becomes distinguished and to that through which distinction takes place. He is with each existent thing wherever it is through the manifest form that is attrib-

uted to that existent thing. All of this is known by the knowers of God by way of witnessing and finding. (III 101.20)

We saw in the last chapter that one of the definitions of self-disclosure is "the lights of unseen things that are unveiled to hearts" (II 485.20). Self-disclosure is a light, so it is existence and knowledge. But the term self-disclosure places stress upon the dynamic nature of light and existence, the fact that the two are constantly moving from nonmanifestation into manifestation.

The divine loci of self-manifestation (*al-mazāhir al-ilāhiyya*) are called "self-disclosures." The fundamental Light is non-manifest within them and unseen by us, while the forms in which self-disclosure takes place are the locus within which the loci of manifestation become manifest. Hence our sight falls upon the loci of manifestation. (II 575.17)

Since knowledge is intrinsic to existence/light, the self-disclosure which brings about existence also brings about knowledge. All things know God to the extent that they share in existence and light, and to the extent of their knowledge they constantly glorify God. However, those creatures who possess rational speech (*nūṭq*) do not perceive God's self-disclosure immediately.

Life is intrinsic to all things, since it derives from the divine self-disclosure to each and every existent thing. He created the existent things to worship and know Him, and not one of His creatures would know Him unless He disclosed Himself to it. Then it comes to know Him through itself, since no created thing has the capacity to know the Creator. . . . Self-disclosure is forever constant, witnessed by and manifest to all existent things, except the angels, mankind, and the jinn, since this constant self-disclosure belongs only to that which has no rational speech, like all inanimate things and plants.

As for those things which have been given rational speech and the ability to express what is in themselves—that is,

the angels, mankind, and the jinn in respect of their governing spirits and their faculties⁶—for them self-disclosure occurs from behind the veil of the unseen. Hence the angels' knowledge derives from God's giving knowledge (*ta'rif*), while the knowledge of mankind and the jinn derives from consideration (*naẓar*) and reasoning (*istidlāl*). But the knowledge possessed by their bodies and by all created things below them derives from the divine self-disclosure. (III 67.15)

Everything perceived on any level of existence is a divine self-disclosure. Only God's Essence is never disclosed, which is to say that God does not disclose Himself as Essence, only as other than the Essence.

The self-disclosure of the Essence is unanimously declared impossible (*mamnū*) by the People of the Realities. They also agree unanimously that self-disclosure in loci of manifestation, that is, self-disclosure in the form of beliefs, takes place, as does self-disclosure in rational concepts (*ma'qūlāt*). These last two are the self-disclosure through which man "takes heed" (*i'tibār*), since these loci of manifestation—whether they be the forms of rational concepts or the forms of beliefs—are bridges over which one "crosses" (*'ubūr*) through knowledge. In other words, man knows that behind these forms there is Something which cannot be witnessed and cannot be known and that beyond that Object of knowledge which cannot be witnessed or known there is no reality whatsoever to be known. (II 606.30)

Ibn al-'Arabī divides self-disclosure into different kinds in a number of passages. One of these can suffice to illustrate the types of knowledge which the spiritual traveler is given when God illuminates his heart.⁷

Lights are of two kinds: a light having no rays and radiant light. If self-disclosure takes place through radiant light, it takes away sight. It was alluded to by the Messenger of God when it was said to him, "O Messenger of God, hast thou seen thy

Lord?" He replied, "He is a light. How should I see Him?"⁸ He means "radiant light," since the rays take away sight and prevent perception of Him from whom the rays derive. The Prophet also alluded to this with his words, "God has seventy veils of light and darkness; were they to be removed, the Glories of His Face would burn away everything perceived by the sight of His creatures."⁹ Here "glories" are the lights of His Reality, since the "face" of something is its reality.

As for the light which has no rays, it is the light within which self-disclosure takes place without rays. Then its brightness does not go outside of itself and the viewer perceives it with utmost clarity and lucidity without any doubt. At the same time, the presence in which he dwells remains in utmost clarity and utmost limpidness, such that nothing of it becomes absent from him. Concerning this self-disclosure the Prophet said, "You shall see your Lord just as you see the moon on the night when it is full."¹⁰ One of the things he meant by this declaration that vision of God is similar to seeing the moon is that the moon itself is perceived, since the moon's rays are too weak to prevent sight from perceiving it. . . .

Then the Prophet said in the same hadith, "or just as you see the sun at noon when there is no cloud before it." At this time its light is strongest, so all things become manifest through it and sight perceives everything it falls upon when this sun is unveiled to it. But when it desires to verify its vision of the sun itself in this state, it is not able to do so. This declaration of similarity shows that this self-disclosure does not prevent people from seeing one another. In other words, they will not be annihilated. That is why he declared similarity with both the vision of the full moon and the vision of the sun, and he did not restrict himself to one of the two. He emphasized that people will subsist in this locus of witnessing by his words in the rest of the hadith, "You will not be harmed and you will not be crowded."

When I entered into this waystation, the self-disclosure without rays fell upon me, so I saw it knowingly. I saw myself through it and I saw all things through myself and through the lights which

things carry in their essences and which are given to them by their realities, not through any extraneous light. I saw a tremendous place of witnessing, in sensory form—not in intelligible form—, a form of the Real, not a meaning. In this self-disclosure there became manifest to me the manner in which the small expands in order for the large to enter into it, while it remains small and the large remains large, like the camel which passes through the eye of the needle.¹¹ That is contemplated in sensory, not imaginal, form, and the small embraces the large; you do not know how, but you do not deny what you see. So glory be to Him who is exalted high beyond a perception that satisfies rational faculties and who preferred the eyes over rational faculties! "There is no god but He, the Inaccessible, the Wise" (Koran 3:6).

Through this self-disclosure—which makes the power of the eyes manifest and prefers them over rational faculties—God makes manifest the incapacity of rational faculties. And through His self-disclosure in radiant light He makes manifest the incapacity of the eyes and the power of the rational faculties, preferring them over the eyes. Thus everything is qualified by incapacity, and God alone possesses the perfection of the Essence. (II 632.29)

Since God alone is perfect in every respect, man is forever imperfect. Even "perfect man" is imperfect in relation to God's perfection, which explains why God commanded the most perfect of all perfect men, the Prophet Muḥammad, to pray, "My Lord, increase me in knowledge" (20:114). Ibn al-'Arabī analyzes this Koranic verse in relation to the divine self-disclosure in chapter 19 of the *Futūḥāt*, "On the cause of the decrease and increase of knowledge":

Every animal and everything described by perception receives a new knowledge at each instant in respect of that perception. However, the person who perceives may be among those who do not pay any attention to the fact that it is knowledge, even though, in fact, it is knowledge. So if a knower's knowledge should be described as decreasing, that is because per-

ception may separate him from many things which he would perceive if not for this obstruction. He is like the person who has been struck by blindness or deafness or something similar.

Since sciences are high and low in accordance with the object of knowledge, spiritual aspirations (*himma*) attach themselves to the noble and high sciences, those which, when man comes to know them, purify his soul and magnify his level. The science with the highest level is knowledge of God, and the highest way to knowledge of God is knowledge of self-disclosures. Below that is the knowledge of rational consideration. There is no knowledge of God below consideration. Most people have only beliefs, not sciences.

These sciences are those concerning which God commanded His Prophet to seek increase. . . . He meant the sciences of self-disclosure—for self-disclosure is the noblest way to gain sciences—and these are the sciences of tastings.

Know that increase and decrease has another chapter which we shall also mention, God willing. It is as follows: God placed within each thing—and the soul of man is one of the things—a manifest dimension (*zāhir*) and a nonmanifest dimension (*bāṭin*). Through the manifest dimension, man perceives things which are called "entities," and through the nonmanifest dimension, he perceives things which are called "knowledge." God is the Manifest and the Nonmanifest, so through Him perception takes place. For it is not in the power of anything other than God to perceive something through itself; it can only perceive through that which God places within it.

God's self-disclosure to whomsoever He discloses Himself in whatsoever world it may be, whether unseen or visible, takes place from His name the Manifest. As for His name "Nonmanifest," the reality of this relationship demands that self-disclosure never occur within it, neither in this world nor in the next, since "self-disclosure" consists of His manifestation to the one to whom He discloses Himself in that particular locus of disclosure, so it belongs to the name "Manifest." The signification of the relationships does not change. . . .

When God discloses Himself, either out

of gratuitous kindness or in answering a request, He discloses Himself to the manifest dimension of the soul, and perception takes place through sensation in a form within the *barzakh* of imaginalization (*tamaththul*). Then if the person who perceives the self-disclosure is one of those who have knowledge of the Shari'a, increase will take place in the sciences related to the rulings of the Law. If he is a logician, it takes place within the sciences of the scales of meanings. If he is a grammarian, it will take place in the sciences of the scale of speech. So it is in the case of anyone who is proficient in any of the sciences of the engendered things and the non-engendered things: Increase occurs within his soul in that knowledge with which he concerns himself.

The people of this path know that the increase occurs because of the divine self-disclosure to these classes of people, for they cannot deny what has been unveiled to them. But those other than the gnostics sense the increase and attribute it to their own reflective processes. Other than these two groups find the increase but do not know that they had sought increase in anything. Their likeness is as God said: "[The likeness of those who have been loaded with the Torah, then they have not carried it,] is as the likeness of an ass carrying books. Evil is the likeness of the people who have cried lies to God's signs" (62:5), the "signs" being these increases and their root. . . .

Self-disclosure also occurs through the name Manifest to the nonmanifest dimension of the soul. Then perception takes place through "insight" (*baṣīra*) in the world of realities and meanings disengaged from substrata. These are called "plain texts" (*naṣṣ*), since the "plain text" has no confusion within it, nor any sort of equivocality. This only takes place within the meanings. Hence the possessor of meanings is at rest from the toil of reflection. When self-disclosure takes place in his case, he is increased in the divine sciences, the sciences of the mysteries, the sciences of the nonmanifest, and everything connected to the next world. This pertains exclusively to the people of our path. . . .

When I say that decrease of sciences in man is a fault, I only mean the divine sciences, since the reality demands that there

is no decrease whatsoever and that man constantly and forever undergoes increase in knowledge in respect of that which he is given by his senses and the fluctuations of his states in himself and his thoughts. Hence he increases in sciences, but there is no profit in them. . . .

From the time man begins to climb the ladder of ascent (*mi'rāj*), he receives divine self-disclosure in accordance with the ladder of his ascent. Each individual among the Folk of Allah has a ladder specific to him which no one else climbs. Were one person to climb another's ladder, then prophecy could be earned (*iktisāb*), since each ladder by its essence gives a specified level to each person who climbs it. The men of knowledge would then climb the ladder of the prophets, and they would attain to prophecy through their climbing. But that is not the situation. If it were, the Divine Vastness would disappear through repetition of the affair. But it has been established for us that there is no repetition in that Side.

However, all the steps of the meanings for the prophets, the friends, the faithful, and the messengers are the same. No ladder has a single step more than any other. The first step is *islām*, which is submission (*inqiyād*). The last step is annihilation (*fanā*) in going up (*'urūj*) and subsistence (*baqā*) in coming out (*khurūj*). Between the two steps are the other steps: faith, virtue (*ihsān*), knowledge, declaring holy, declaring incomparable, independence, poverty, abasement, exaltation, variegation, and stability in variegation. Then comes annihilation if you are leaving [the ladder], or subsistence if you are entering it [from the top].

When you leave each step, the sciences of self-disclosure decrease in your nonmanifest dimension to the measure in which they increase in your manifest dimension, until you reach the last step. If you are leaving the ladder and you have attained to the last step, God becomes manifest through His Essence in your manifest dimension in keeping with your measure. Then you make Him manifest in His creation, and nothing of Him whatsoever remains in your nonmanifest dimension. The self-disclosures of the nonmanifest dimension disappear from you completely.

When He calls you to enter in upon 219

Him, this is the first step; He discloses Himself to you in your nonmanifest dimension to the measure that the self-disclosure decreases in your manifest dimension. When you reach the last step, He manifests Himself in His Essence to your nonmanifest dimension, and there remains no self-disclosure whatsoever in your manifest dimension. All this takes place because the servant and the Lord always remain together in the perfection of the existence of each in himself. The servant always remains servant and the Lord Lord throughout this increase and decrease. (I 166.4)

Naming the Perception of Light

As we have already seen, Ibn al-ʿArabī employs a number of terms to refer to the perception of God's self-disclosure. Probably the most often used and the most general in meaning is "unveiling" (*kashf*). If that which is perceived by the heart is looked upon primarily in relation to the source, it is usually called "self-disclosure." If it is looked upon primarily in relation to him who perceives, it is more likely to be called "unveiling." For the most part unveiling takes a visionary form. The person who experiences unveiling "sees" the lights as "loci of manifestation" (*maẓhar*) within the imaginal world.

One of the several terms that is often employed as a virtual synonym for unveiling is "tasting" (*dhawq*). Just as Ibn al-ʿArabī can say that "He who has no unveiling has no knowledge" (I 218.21), he can also say that "Any knowledge not derived from tasting is not the knowledge of the Folk of Allah" (II 574.27).

When the possessor of knowledge is assailed by obfuscations, that is not knowledge. Knowledge comes only through tastings. That is what we call "knowledge." (II 473.29)

It could be imagined that when man possesses the knowledge of something, he possesses the "tasting" of it, but such is

not the case. Tasting derives only from a self-disclosure. Knowledge may be gained through the transmission of a true, sound report. (II 546.5)

Often Ibn al-ʿArabī speaks of tasting as a knowledge connected more to spiritual and psychological "states" (*aḥwāl*) than to entities. In other words, unveiling alludes to an experience that may be conveyed through describing the imaginal forms in which it occurs, while tasting—like tasting an apple in the sensory realm—cannot be described but must be experienced.

The knowledge of tasting given by each existent thing cannot be given by any other existent thing. Man may find in himself a distinct taste in each bite of an apple he eats, a taste not found in any other bite. The apple is one, yet he finds a sensory distinction in each bite, even if he is not able to explain it. (II 671.29)

When Ibn al-ʿArabī defines tasting as a standard technical term of Sufism, he makes it one of the stages of unveiling, contrasting it with "drinking" (*shurb*) and "quenching" (*ri*).

"Tasting" is the first beginnings of self-disclosure, which give rise to drinking. . . . "Drinking" is the middle of self-disclosure within a station (*maqām*) that calls for quenching, though it may be in a station that does not call for quenching, and it may be that the constitution of the drinker does not accept quenching. . . . "Quenching" is the final stages of drinking in every station. (II 133.2)¹²

In the view of the Tribe tasting is "the first beginnings of self-disclosure." It is a state which comes upon the servant suddenly in his heart. If it should stay for two instants or more, it is "drinking" . . .

The saying, "the first beginnings of self-disclosure" lets us know that every self-disclosure has a beginning, that is, a tasting that belongs to the self-disclosure. This only takes place if the self-disclosure should be within (1) forms or (2) the divine or engendered names, nothing else. If the self-disclosure should take place within (3) meaning, then its beginning is

itself, since it has no property after the beginning which man can gain gradually, [in contrast to the first two kinds, within which] he gains gradually the meanings of those (1) forms within which self-disclosure takes place, or the meanings of each and every (2) name. Hence he sees at the beginning what he does not see from that name afterwards.

But for the possessor of (3) meaning, the beginning of each thing is identical with its entity. He gains nothing after this all-inclusive giving of knowledge. Then he differentiates when he expresses this one reality. This is what is meant by our words at the beginning of this book:

[When I kept knocking on God's door
I waited mindfully, not distracted,]
Until there appeared to the eye the glory
of His Face
and a call to me, nothing else.
[I encompassed Being in knowledge—
nothing is in my heart but God.]¹³

For its beginning was itself, and everything we have mentioned after that in all our speech is only the differentiation of that all-inclusive reality which was contained in that look at the One Entity. Most people work contrary to this tasting. That is why their speech is not tied together. He who considers their speech looks for a root to which all their words go back, but he does not find it. But each part of our speech is interrelated with the other parts, since it is one entity, while this is its differentiation. A person will know what I am saying if he knows the interconnection of the verses of the Koran in the way that some of them are arranged next to others. Then he will know the factor that brings together (*al-jāmi'*) two verses, even if there is an obvious distance between them; yet the factor is correct. There must be some interrelating factor which brings the two verses together, and that is what gives the interrelationship with the neighboring verses, for this is a divine arrangement. I have seen no one who attempted to investigate this except Rummānī, the grammarian.¹⁴ He has a commentary on the Koran, and someone who has seen it reported to me that he walks on this road, but I have not seen it myself. (II 548.4)

In one passage Ibn al-'Arabī distinguishes between unveiling and tasting by saying that the first is something that one sees outside oneself, while the second is one's own, inward experience. He is describing the mysteries which the traveler comes to perceive upon entering into the waystation (*manzil*) of familiarity (*ulfa*).

When you enter into this waystation, you join with a group of the messengers and you receive sciences from their specific tasting which you did not possess. For you these will be an unveiling, just as for them these had been a tasting. You gain from them the science of proofs and marks, so nothing is hidden from you in earth or in heaven when He discloses Himself to you. On the contrary, you distinguish and recognize each thing, while others, who have not reached this station, are ignorant of it. This is a knowledge of unveiling, since you witness it through the mark (*'alāma*). You do not see it from yourself, since it is not your own tasting. (II 605.20)

In the following passage Ibn al-'Arabī employs the term tasting in a broad sense to refer to all knowledge given by God to His messengers, His prophets, and His friends. At the same time, he clarifies the distinction which he commonly draws among these three highest types of human being.

The speech of the folk of God's path derives from tasting, and no one has any tasting of the share that a messenger receives from God, since the tastings of the messengers are specific to the messengers, the tastings of the prophets are specific to the prophets, and the tastings of the friends are specific to the friends. A messenger may have all three tastings, since he is a friend, a prophet, and a messenger [all at once]. Khadīr said to Moses, "What thou hast never encompassed in knowledge" (18:68). He says: I have a knowledge taught to me by God and unknown to you, and you have a knowledge taught to you by God and unknown to me. This is "tasting."

I was in a gathering within which there was a group of gnostics. One of them

asked another, "From which station did Moses ask for vision of God?" The other said, "From the station of yearning (*shawq*)." I said, "Be not heedless of this principle of the way: 'The final stages of the friends are the first states of the prophets.' Hence the friend has no tasting of the state of the Law-bringing prophets, so he cannot taste it. One of our principles is that we only speak on the basis of tasting, but we are neither messengers nor Law-bringing prophets. So how can we know from which station Moses asked to see his Lord? True, if a friend of God had asked that, you might be able to answer, for it is within the realm of possibility that you would also have that tasting. But we have come to know by way of tasting that the tasting of the station of the messengers is impossible for any one other than a messenger." (II 51.23)

The Sufis distinguish between various "states" (*aḥwāl*) which one may experience upon the path to God and the "stations" (*maqāmāt*) which one must pass through in order to reach Him. In general the states are fleeting and may or may not come, while the stations are the necessary foundation for actualizing human perfection. More will be said about the former in Chapter 15 and the latter in Chapter 17. For the moment it is enough to recall that one of the standard ways of distinguishing between states and stations is to say that states are divine "bestowals" (*mawāhib*), while the stations are "earnings" (*makāsib*). In a similar way, knowledge acquired through tasting is a bestowal. Nevertheless, this does not mean that God may give tasting to just anyone. The servant must first have exerted himself and made himself worthy of it. The Shaykh uses the term "opening" (*fath*) in the following as a near synonym for unveiling.

"Opening through tastings" is a knowledge gained by him who knows it through exerting himself to acquire it. . . . This knowledge belongs exclusively to the people of the path, that is, the Folk and Elect of Allah. It is the science of states. Though states are "bestowals," they are only bestowed upon those who have a

specific attribute. If that attribute does not produce states in this world for everyone, yet it will necessarily produce them in the next world. But since there is no condition that this producing should take place in this world, it is said concerning the knowledge of the states that the states are "bestowals." This knowledge of them is to gain them through tasting. By "through tasting" is meant at the beginning of self-disclosure.

Take for example, "trust" (*tawakkul*), which is reliance upon God in what He does or promises. The tasting of trust which is added to knowledge of trust is that the person does not become agitated when he lacks that upon which the soul relies. Instead, the soul relies upon God, not upon the specific secondary cause. Hence he finds in himself a confidence in God greater than the confidence found by someone else who has the secondary cause which would lead to it. For example, someone is hungry, and he does not have the secondary cause—the food—which will eliminate his hunger. Another person is hungry, and he has the means to eliminate his hunger. The person who has the secondary cause is strong through the existence of the food which will eliminate the hunger, but the other person, who does not have it, equals him in calm and lack of agitation, since he knows that his provision—if he is to receive any more provision—must reach him. This lack of agitation in a person who has such an attribute while he does not possess the secondary causes is called "tasting."

Every competent person feels the difference between these two individuals. The person who has the knowledge but not the tasting is agitated by not having that which will eliminate his hunger, even though he knows that his provision—if any provision remains for him—must reach him. Nevertheless, he finds no calm with God in his soul. The possessor of tasting is the one who finds the calm, just as the one who possesses the appropriate secondary cause finds it. There is no difference between them in calm; or rather, the possessor of tasting may be stronger. (IV 221.2)

Unveiling takes place when God illuminates the heart, enabling it to see into the unscen world. "Opening" (*fath*,

futūḥ), as discussed in the introduction, is for God to "open the door" to the unseen world through disclosing Himself to the heart, or to "open up" the heart to direct knowledge of Him. The term also signifies the beginning of something, and hence it is often used to refer to that stage of the spiritual ascent when a person enters into the realm of unveiling. The door is opened for him, and he no longer has to follow an authority outside himself.

If the seeker desires divine loci of witnessing and lordly sciences, he should multiply his nightly vigils and continually multiply within them his concentration (*jam'iyya*). If scattered lights should appear to him such that between each light darkness is interspersed, and if those lights have no subsistence but disappear quickly, this is one of the first marks of acceptance and opening. Those noble lights will never cease becoming manifest to him through his acts of spiritual struggle (*mujāhada*) and his striving until a greatest light is unveiled for him. Then the obstructions which prevent people from reaching these knowledges will be removed and mysteries of which he had nothing in himself and by which he was not described will be unveiled for him in their stations. (II 626.3)

There are two basic worlds, the "unseen" and the "visible." The outward eye or "sight" (*baṣar*) perceives the visible world, while the inward eye or "insight" (*baṣīra*) perceives the unseen world.

The cosmos is two worlds . . . , the Unseen . . . and the Visible. The second world is perceived by sight, while the world of the Unseen is perceived by insight. (III 42.5)

God says, "Sight perceives Him not" (Koran 6:103), that is, the sight of any eyes, whether the eyes of faces or the eyes of hearts. For hearts perceive only through sight, and the eyes of faces perceive only through sight. Wherever there is sight, perception occurs. Sight in the rational faculty is called the "eye of insight," while sight in the outside world (*al-ẓāhir*) is called the "sight of the eye." The eye in the outside world is the locus

for sight, while insight in the inside world (*al-bāṭin*) is the locus for that eye which is sight in the eye of the face. Sight's names are diverse, but it is not diverse in itself.

Just as eyes do not see Him through their sight, so also insights do not see Him with their eyes. The Messenger of God said, "God is veiled from intellects just as He is veiled from sight; the Higher Plenum seeks Him just as you yourselves seek Him."¹⁵ (IV 30.5)

The World of the Unseen is perceived through the eye of insight, just as the World of the Visible is perceived through the eye of sight. Sight perceives nothing of the World of the Visible except darkness, so long as the veil of darknesses or similar impediments are not lifted. Once the impediments are lifted and lights spread out upon the sensory objects, and once the light of sight meets the light of the locus of manifestation, then the seer sees objects with sight.

In the same way, the eye of insight is veiled by such things as rust (*rayn*), passion (*shahwa*), and gazing upon "others" (*aghyār*) within the dense natural world.¹⁶ These things come between it and the vision of the World of Dominion, that is, the World of the Unseen. But when man applies himself to the mirror of his heart and polishes it with invocation and the recitation of the Koran, he thereby gains some light. And God possesses a light called the "light of existence" which is deployed over all existent things. When these two lights come together, unseen things are unveiled as they are in themselves and as they occur in existence.

However, there is a subtle meaning that separates the two lights: Sense perception is veiled by impediments, excessive distance, or excessive nearness. But the eye of insight is not like that, since nothing veils it except the rust, covering,¹⁷ and the like which we just mentioned. However, there is also a subtle veil which I shall mention:

The light which becomes deployed from the Presence of Munificence upon the World of the Unseen within the ontological presences does not pervade all of them and does not become deployed from Him over all of them in respect to this person who experiences unveiling. This only takes place in the measure desired by God. It is the station of "revelation."¹⁸

For ourselves our proof for this is that 223

we taste it. For others, the proof is His words to the Prophet, "Say: . . . 'I know not what shall be done with me or with you. I only follow what is revealed to me'" (46:9), and this in spite of the extreme Muhammadan lucidity. This is also indicated by God's words "[It belongs not to any human being that God should speak to him, except by revelation,] or from behind a veil" (42:51). (II 241.1)

Unveiling takes place through light, but the light that comes from God must coincide with the light inside the heart. Sometimes a person may perceive an excess of radiance in self-disclosure so that he does not gain in knowledge. This is because his own light is not equal to the task of matching the outside light. In explaining this, Ibn al-'Arabī reminds us of the definition of darkness: "That which is perceived but through which no perception takes place."

When the darkness of ignorance takes up residence in the heart, it makes it blind. Then the heart is not able to perceive those realities in respect of perceiving which it is called a "knower" (*'ālim*). God says, "Why, is he who was dead, and We gave him life, and appointed for him a light to walk by among the people as one whose likeness is in the darknesses?" (6:122). Here [by light and darkness] He means knowledge and ignorance.

But it is not true that everything which is "perceived, and through which perception does not take place" is darkness, since when light is stronger than the light of sight, man perceives it, but he does not perceive through it. That is why the Messenger of God said concerning God, "His veil is light." Hence unveiling only takes place through a light which is equivalent to the light of sight. Do you not see that bats only come out in light which is equivalent to the light of their sight? (III 369.31)

Ibn al-'Arabī employs the term *mukāshafa*, from the same root as *kashf* or unveiling, in basically the same meaning as *kashf*. In his chapter on opening (*futūḥ*), he discerns three kinds of opening:

opening of expression (*'ibāra*) in the outward dimension, opening of sweetness (*ḥalāwa*) in the inward dimension, and opening of unveiling (*mukāshafa*) through God.

What brings all of this together is that whatever comes to you without self-exertion, or raising up your gaze, or seeking, is "opening," whether outward or inward. Opening has a mark in him who tastes it, which is that he does not take from the opening of anyone else, or from the conclusions of reflection. One of the conditions of opening is that it not be accompanied by reflection or be acquired through reflection.

Our shaykh, Abū Madyan, used to say concerning opening, "Feed us with 'fresh flesh' as God said; feed us not with dried meat."¹⁹ In other words: Do not tell us concerning opening anything but what has been opened up to you in your hearts. Do not tell us about the opening of others. By this he wanted to raise the aspiration of his disciples (*aṣṣāb*), so that they would strive to take from God. (II 505.17)

When the shaykhs ask their disciples questions in order to teach them how to take from God, they do not allow them to reflect upon the answer, lest their answer be the result of reflection. They say, "Answer only with that which comes to your mind immediately when I ask you the question. Look at what is cast into your heart when the question enters it. Mention it at the outset of the idea." If the disciples do not follow this instruction, the shaykh does not accept their answers. (II 558.14)

In this path, it is not proper for the shaykh to apprise the disciple (*murīd*) of what will take place when he gains a knowledge in himself through opening. . . . Otherwise, the disciple may make that form manifest, while his inward self is devoid of that which would demand that form.

You may object, "But it is not proper for the shaykh to conceal that from the disciple." I will reply: On the contrary, it is proper for him to conceal it and even incumbent. He knows that when the meaning which necessitates the manifestation of that form takes up residence in the

disciple, the disciple will have to manifest that form. Then the shaykh will know that God has given the disciple the aptitude to become one of the People of the Real. But if the shaykh were to give him knowledge of the meaning which necessitates that form, while the ego (*nafs*) is disposed to treachery and untruthfulness, then he might make that form manifest without the meaning, and there could be a misunderstanding. Thus, for example, the hypocrite manifests the form of the man of faith in outward practice, while his inward dimension is devoid of that which would necessitate that practice. (III 272.32)

Ibn al-'Arabī explains the "opening of unveiling" as follows:

The third kind of opening is the opening of unveiling, which brings about knowledge of the Real. The Real is greater and more exalted than that He should be known in Himself, but He is known through the things. Hence unveiling is the cause of knowledge of the Real in the things. The things are like curtains over the Real. When they are raised, unveiling takes place. . . .

The Real is not known in the things without the manifestation of the things and the lifting of their properties. The eyes of the common people fall only upon the properties of the things, but the eyes of those who have the opening of unveiling fall only upon the Real in the things. Among them is he who sees the Real in the things, and among them is he who sees the things while the Real is within them. Between these two there is a difference. When opening takes place, the eye of the first falls upon the Real and he sees Him in the things, but the eye of the second falls upon the things, and then he sees the Real within them because of the existence of the opening. (II 507.30)

Engendered existence is darkness, while light is the Evident Real. Light and darkness never come together, just as night and day never come together. On the contrary, each of them conceals its companion and makes itself manifest. He who sees the day does not see the night, and he who sees the night does not see the day. The actual situation is manifest and

nonmanifest, since He is the Manifest and the Nonmanifest. So there is a Real and a creation. If you witness creation, you will not see the Real, and if you witness the Real, you will not see creation. So you will never see both creation and the Real. On the contrary, you will witness this in that and that in this—a witnessing through knowledge—since one is a wrapper and the other enwrapped. (II 496.11)

Witnessing and Vision

Another important synonym for unveiling is "witnessing" (*shuhūd, mushāhada*). This term has a wider sense than unveiling since it is commonly used for sight as well as insight. It is employed in typical fashion as a synonym for unveiling in the first passage below, where Ibn al-'Arabī is discussing one of the many kinds of lights which may be seen by the heart during self-disclosure. In the process, he touches upon one of his favorite eschatological themes, the fact that mercy and light will overcome in the end, so the "final end" (*ma'āl*) for everyone will be felicity. In the second passage, he tells us that witnessing, like unveiling, can be divided into several kinds.

The first self-disclosure [being discussed here] is the lights of meanings disengaged from substrata. Such a light is any knowledge which is unconnected to a body, a corporeal thing, an imaginal thing, or a form, and which we do not know in respect of our giving form to it (*taṣawwur*). On the contrary, we come to understand it as it is in itself—though in accordance with what we are. This cannot happen until I become a light. As long as I am not a light, I will not perceive anything of this knowledge. This is indicated by the words of the Prophet in his prayer, "Make me into a light!"²⁰ God says, "God is the light of the heavens and the earth" (24:35), so He only gives him light from Himself. In the same way He says, "And the earth" of the Resurrection "will shine with the light of its Lord" (39:69).

In other words, there will be no sun there, and the lack of light is darkness, but there must be witnessing, so there must be light, for that is the day when God comes to judge and decree. Hence He only comes within his name Light, so "the earth will shine with the light of its Lord." Then each "soul will know" through that light "what it has sent before and left behind" (82:5), since it will see it all made present, unveiled for it by that light.

Were it not for the light that belongs to the souls, there could be no witnessing (*mushāhada*), since witnessing (*shuhūd*) only takes place when two lights come together. When a person has a share of light, how can he be wretched forever? For light does not come from the world of wretchedness. And there is no soul which does not have a light, through which its works will be unveiled to it. It will become happy through everything good, and as for the evil, "It will wish if there were only a far space between it and that day" (3:30). That is why God finishes this verse with the words, "God is Clement to the servants," for He has appointed for them lights whereby they perceive, and they have come to know that light has no share in wretchedness. Hence the final end must be the agreeable and attaining the individual desire (*gharad*), and this is what is called "felicity." For in this verse He said, "[The day] every soul," not just some specific souls rather than others, "[shall find what it has done of good brought forward, and what it has done of evil]." He mentions good and evil. Existence is light, while nonexistence is darkness, so evil is nonexistence, while we are in existence, so we are in good. If we become ill, yet we will become well, since the root is the Restorer, and He is Light. (II 485.29)

God has let His servants know that He has presences (*ḥaḍarāt*) designated for specific affairs and that He has called His servants to enter into them and gain from them. Thus He has made the servants poor and needy in respect to these presences. Some people accept these presences and some reject them out of ignorance. Among these presences is the presence of witnessing (*mushāhada*), which possesses diverse waystations (*manzil*), even though a single presence embraces them

all. Among the people in this presence, some witness Him in the things, some witness Him before the things, some after them, some with them, and some witness Him Himself, in accordance with the diversity of many stations (*maqām*), which are known by the folk of God's path, the possessors of tasting and drinking. (II 601.18)

The term *shuhūd* is of special interest, since certain Sufis in India—especially Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1624)—undertook to criticize the idea of *wahdat al-wujūd* or the "Oneness of Being" in the name of *wahdat al-shuhūd* or the "Oneness of Witnessing," and the controversy between the supporters of the two positions has reverberated down to recent times. But we have already seen that Ibn al-ʿArabī never employs the term *wahdat al-wujūd*, and that *wujūd* in his usage signifies not only Being/existence but also the "finding" of God by God Himself or by the servant; as such it is a synonym for *kashf*, and the great Sufis are the "People of *kashf* and *wujūd*." We saw above that the knowers of God recognize His self-disclosure "by way of *shuhūd* and *wujūd*" (III 101.31). These few indications are enough to show that when Ibn al-ʿArabī was designated as the great expositor of *wahdat al-wujūd* and criticized in terms of *wahdat al-shuhūd*, Ibn al-ʿArabī's own position was not the real issue.²¹ By the seventeenth century there was a received wisdom concerning what he had said, and it was this that became the object of debate. In the present context, we can only point to the wide range of meanings covered by both *wujūd* and *shuhūd*.

When Ibn al-ʿArabī distinguishes between *wujūd* and *shuhūd*, he usually considers *wujūd* as belonging to God and *shuhūd* as belonging to the servant. God is present and finds Himself in all things, and man witnesses this presence and finding to the extent of his capacity. *Wujūd* as such belongs to the Nonmanifest, though its reverberations fill the cosmos. In contrast, *shuhūd* is the vision of self-

disclosure and belongs to the manifest realm.

Everyone in *wujūd* is the Real,
and everyone in *shuhūd* is creature.
(III 306.8)

The Folk of Allah follow Him whose folk they are, so His property flows over them. And His property is the lack of delimitation. Hence He possesses the all-inclusiveness of *wujūd*, while they possess the all-inclusiveness of *shuhūd*. That person who delimits His *wujūd* has delimited his own *shuhūd*. He is not one of the Folk of Allah. (III 161.15)

The cosmos has nothing of the cosmos except a *wujūd* and a *shuhūd* in this world and the next, without end and without being cut off, for the entities become manifest and are seen. (IV 324.30)

The gnostics are . . . the people of *shuhūd* within *wujūd*. I only ascribe *wujūd* to them because of the temporal origination of the properties, which do not become manifest except within an existent/sound thing (*maujūd*). (II 529.22)

If *shuhūd* can be distinguished from *mushāhada*, it may be in the sense that *shuhūd* is used more generally, as a synonym for seeing and vision on any level of existence, whereas *mushāhada* is more often used as a synonym for unveiling. In his *Iṣṭilāḥāt al-sūfiyya* Ibn al-ʿArabī gives three meanings to *mushāhada* as a technical Sufi term. I quote from the longer version of *Iṣṭilāḥāt* with additions in brackets from chapter 209, where he provides an expanded definition in connection with unveiling (*mu-kāshafa*).

"Witnessing" is [the witnessing of creation in the Real, which is] to see the things by the proofs of declaring His Unity (*tawhīd*). It is also [the witnessing of the Real in creation, which is] to see the Real within the things. It is also [the witnessing of the Real without creation, which is] the reality of certainty (*yaqīn*) without any doubt. Witnessing follows unveiling, or it may be said that it is followed by unveiling. (II 132.4, 495.23)

Ibn al-ʿArabī often distinguishes witnessing from vision (*ruʾya*) by referring to another well-known term of the Sufi vocabulary, *shāhid* or "witness," that is, that which gives information or testimony about what has been seen. In *Iṣṭilāḥāt* 7, Ibn al-ʿArabī defines "witness" as "The trace which witnessing (*mushāhada*) leaves in the heart of the witnesser (*mushāhid*). This is the witness, and in reality, it is what the heart retains from the form of the witnessed (*mashhūd*)." The longer version of *Iṣṭilāḥāt* has "vision of the witnessed" in place of "form of the witnessed" (II 132.25). In other words, the divine self-disclosure leaves a trace in the heart, which gives testimony and "witnesses to" what has been seen.

In chapter 266 of the *Futūḥāt* on the "witness," the Shaykh provides a slightly different definition: "The witness is the subsistence of the forms of the loci of witnessing (*mashāhid*) in the soul of the witnesser. So the form of the witnessed in the heart is identical to the witness, and through it the witnesser experiences bliss (*naʿīm*)" (II 567.5). Then he explains the difference between witnessing and vision:

The witness is the actualization of the form of the witnessed in the soul during witnessing. Hence the witness gives something different from what is given by vision, since vision is not preceded by knowledge of the object of vision (*al-marʾī*), while witnessing is preceded by knowledge of the witnessed, a knowledge which is named "belief" (*ʾaqīda*). Hence in witnessing there occurs admission and denial, but there is nothing in vision but admission, never any denial. The witness is called by that name because it gives witness to the viewer of the correctness of his belief. Hence every witnessing is a vision, but not every vision is a witnessing, "but they do not know" (Koran 2:13). (II 567.10)

When the Sufis define witnessing as the "reality of certainty without doubt and hesitation," this refers to a witnessing that takes place outside the Presence of Imagination. An example of the [witnessing

within the Presence of Imagination] is the divine self-disclosure in the hereafter which will be denied. Then, when He transmutes Himself into the mark (*'alāma*) by which they recognize Him, they admit to Him and recognize Him.²² He is identical to the one denied at first and to the one recognized at last. They do not admit except to the mark, not to Him. Hence they only recognize Him as limited (*maḥ-ṣūr*), so they do not recognize the Real.

This explains why we make a distinction between vision and witnessing. We say concerning witnessing that it is the witnessing of the witness which comes into the heart from the Real. It is this witnessing which is delimited by a mark. But vision is not like that. That is why Moses said, "Give me vision that I may gaze upon Thee" (7:143). He did not say, "Let me witness," since He was witnessed by him, never unseen (*ghayb*) by him. How should He be unseen for the prophets when He is never unseen by the friends, the gnostics? (II 495.27)

Despite the distinctions Ibn al-'Arabī sometimes draws between vision and witnessing, in practice it is often difficult to say why he has chosen one term over the other. Like the other terms employed to refer to the perception of self-disclosure, vision seems to have both a general meaning, according to which it is more or less synonymous with unveiling, tasting, and witnessing, and a specific meaning, where it signifies a special kind of unveiling in certain contexts. In the following passage, where Ibn al-'Arabī is discussing the station of "sobriety" (*ṣaḥw*), he tells us how the gnostic "sees" (*ru'ya*), that is, has a vision of, his Lord. This vision does not differ significantly from the "witnessing" mentioned above.

Some of the sober are sober through their Lord, and others through themselves. He who is sober through his Lord never addresses any but his Lord in his sobriety, nor does he hear any but Him. His eye falls only upon his Lord in all the existent things. He will have one of two stations:

He may see the Real from "behind" the

veil of the things inasmuch as He has encompassed them, as indicated in His words, "Allah is behind them, encompassing" (85:20).

Or he may see the Real as identical with the things. Here the Men of Allah are divided into two kinds. One kind sees the Real as identical with the things in the properties and the forms. Another kind sees the Real identical with the things in respect to the fact that He is the receptacle for the properties and characteristics of the forms, not in respect of the forms themselves, since the forms are some of the properties of the immutable entities.

As for the person who is sober through himself, he only sees his own likeness and similitudes. He says only "Nothing is like Him." His station and state do not allow him to complete the verse through tasting, even if he recites it. That is His words, "He is the Hearing, the Seeing" (42:11).

The possessor of the first tasting says, "He is the Hearing, the Seeing," through both tasting and recitation. Hence the possessor of the sobriety of self sees that the Real is far removed from himself, like him who places Him in his kibra when he prays. He does not see that it is He who performs the prayer. (II 547.24)

Whatever term Ibn al-'Arabī applies to the acquisition of knowledge of God, one must always remember that the knower acquires knowledge through God's self-disclosure, not His Essence. Vision may be higher than witnessing, and witnessing higher or lower than unveiling, but these are modes of knowledge which are acquired by other than the Essence of God, and hence the Essence Itself is never known. None knows the Essence but the Essence.

In respect to His Essence and His Being, nothing stands up to the Real; He cannot be desired or sought in His Essence. The seeker seeks and the desirer desires only knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of Him, witnessing of Him, or vision of Him, and all of these are *from* Him; they are not *He* Himself. (II 663.9)

Perceiving the Veil

That which comes from God is always colored by the receptacle which receives it. As Junayd said, "The water takes on the color of its cup." This principle—to which Chapter 19 is devoted—is of fundamental importance in Ibn al-ʿArabī's teachings, since, from the creaturely point of view at least, it explains all diversity and all multiplicity. It explains why religions must be different, and why the beliefs of the followers of the same religion diverge. It is the principle of continual creation and of "Self-disclosure never repeats itself" viewed from the side of the receptacle. It also has important applications to the question of "states" and "stations" on the spiritual path. Why is it that practically every book written on the stations provides an original description? Is it that Sufis cannot agree whether there are seven, ten, forty, 100, or 1000 stations on the path? Not at all. There is no question of agreement, since there is no argument. It is simply that each person who has traveled the path to God speaks from his own viewpoint and recounts his own experience. And "Self-disclosure never repeats itself." Ibn al-ʿArabī applies the principle of non-repetition to a question he was asked about witnessing:

When two gnostics come together in a single presence of witnessing (*ḥaḍra shuḥūdiyya*) with God, what is their property? I was asked this question by our shaykh, Yūsuf ibn Yakhlaḥ al-Kūmī²³ in the year 586 [1190]. I said to him as follows:

Master, this is a question which is supposed but which does not occur, unless the self-disclosure happens to take place in the Presence of Images (*ḥaḍrat al-muthul*), like the dream of the dreamer or the state of an Incident.²⁴ But in the Reality, no, since the Presence does not embrace two such that something else might be witnessed along with It. On the contrary, the witnesser does not even witness himself

in that Presence, much less another, extraneous entity.

However, one can conceive of this situation in the self-disclosure of images (*mithāl*). Once the two gnostics come together, then one of two things is true: Either (A) they have been brought together with each other in a single station, higher [than their own stations], or lower, or in between; or (B) they have not come together.

(A) If they have been brought together in a single station, the station must require the declaration of (a) incomparability, or (b) similarity, or (c) both at once. In any case, the property of the self-disclosure in respect of manifestation is one, but in respect to what the recipients of self-disclosure find, it is diverse in tasting, because of their diversity in entities: The one gnostic is not the other, neither in natural or spiritual form, nor in location. Though the one is *like* the other, he is not identical with him.

The most that can happen is one of the following: (1) Each of them fully realizes (*tahāqquq*) the knowledge of himself. But the self of the one is different from the self of the other. Hence the one acquires knowledge which is not acquired by the other. Hence we know that they have come together while remaining apart.

(2) One of them fully realizes the knowledge of himself, while the other is annihilated from the witnessing of himself. Then they have remained apart while coming together, or one of them gives what is given by the object of desire (*mu-rād*) and the other gives what is given by him who desires (*murīd*). In any case, they are different in existence (*wujūd*), while coinciding (*muttaḥṣiq*) in state and witnessing (*shuhūd*).

(a) If the station requires the declaration of incomparability for each of them, the utmost that each can do is to declare Him incomparable with the form that belongs to himself, so the two are different, without doubt, even if they be alike (*mithl*).

(b) If the station requires the declaration of similarity, its state is like the first. So also (c) if it requires bringing together both incomparability and similarity. For bringing the two together is to combine them in a middle presence. So the one state is like the other.

Hence the two gnostics never come together in existence, even if they come together in witnessing.

(B) They may not be brought together by a single station. Rather, each of them stands in a station which is different from the station belonging to the other while he becomes manifest in the form which belongs to the other. Then, although they come together in form, each will be given a power whereby he will witness the presence of the other upon the carpet of the object of his witnessing, since the object of witnessing is a self-disclosure in an imaginal form. It is this self-disclosure and object of witnessing within which the two will come together in what is addressed to them and what they witness, if the Object so desires. But in any other presence, neither witnessing, addressing, nor vision allows for any "other."

Should this be their situation, then their property is that of two people who have been brought together by a single station in the knowledge of self, or the annihilation of one of them, or one of them stands in the station of the object of desire and the other in that of him who desires—such that he who desires gives news of severity and strength while the object of desire gives news of softness and tenderness.²⁵ There is no other possibility. Neither of them will give news of what was acquired by his companion. Each will be instructed (*ilqā'*) according to the affinity (*munāsib*) required by the specific constitution which brought about the diversity of the forms of their spirits at their original configuration.

When each of them returns to his companions, he will say—even if one of them is in the West and the other in the East—"In this hour I witnessed so-and-so. I saw him face to face and came to know his form. Among his qualities is such and such," and he will describe his attributes as they actually are. He among them who does not have knowledge of the realities will then say, "The Real gave to him the like of what He gave to me." But that is not the situation. Neither of them heard what the other heard, and that is because they differ in affinity, as we said. But if he is one of the people of realities and complete knowledge and he is asked what the other gained, he will reply, "I know only what is required by my own form

and I am not he, for the Real does not repeat a form." (II 475.32)

The forms in which the Real shows Himself are not the Real Himself, but the veils which hide the Essence. The gnostic never sees God directly, since he never sees anything but His self-disclosure. And that is precisely His veil.

God says, "Those are they whom God has guided," i.e., to the good and the better, "and those—they are the possessors of the kernels" (39:18). In other words, they bring out the kernel (*lubb*) of the affairs hidden by the shell (*qishr*). The eye falls only upon the veil, while that which is veiled belongs to the possessors of the kernels. This alerts us to the form of the veil within which the Real discloses Himself. Then He transmutes Himself from it into another veil. In reality, there is nothing but passage from veil to veil, since no divine self-disclosure ever repeats itself. Hence the forms must be diverse, while the Real is behind all of that. We possess nothing of Him but the name Manifest, whether in vision or veil. As for the name Nonmanifest, it remains forever nonmanifest. It is the intelligible kernel perceived by the possessors of the kernels. In other words, they know that there is a kernel and it is over Him that a veil has become manifest. . . . Hence, he who maintains that there is vision speaks the truth, and he who holds that there is no vision speaks the truth. (IV 105.3)

He who sees the Real plainly and openly sees Him only from behind a veil.

He does not recognize it, yet it exists through Him—

this is indeed a marvelous affair!

No seer sees anything

but his own bliss or chastisement.

The form of the Seer has disclosed itself to him

while he is the Seer—no, he is the veil.

It has been mentioned in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* that the Real discloses Himself within forms and undergoes transmutation within them. This is what we mean by "veil." It has been established by reason, the Law, and unveiling—and unveiling yields exactly the same as the Law—that the Real

accepts no change. As for reason, the proofs of that are well known, and this book is not their place, since this book is based upon the Law and the results of unveiling and witnessing. . . .

As for the Law, that is His words, "Nothing is like Him" (42:11). If He underwent changes in His Essence, this property would not be true. But it is true, so it is impossible for Him to undergo change in His Essence. . . .

The forms seen by sight and perceived by rational faculties, and the forms imagined by the faculty of imagination are all veils, behind which the Real is seen. . . . Hence the Real remains forever Unseen behind the forms which become manifest within existence. The entities of the possible things in the thingness of their immutability and with all the variations in their states witnessed by the Real also remain unseen. The entities of these forms manifest within Being, which is the Entity of the Real, are the properties of the entities of the possible things in respect of the states, variation, change, and alteration which they have in their immutability. These become manifest within the Entity of Real Being. But the Real does not change from what He is in Himself. . . .

Hence the veils are forever let down,

that is, the entities of these forms. He is not seen except from behind a veil, just as He does not speak except from behind a veil. . . .

He never manifests Himself to His creatures except within a form, and His forms are diverse in each self-disclosure, since "He never discloses Himself in a single form twice or in a single form to two individuals."²⁶ Since He is so, the actual situation cannot be apprehended by reason or the eye. Reason cannot delimit Him by one of those forms, since He destroys that delimitation by the next self-disclosure. But in all that He is God. . . .

All of this—praise belongs to God—is in actual fact imagination, since it never has any fixity in a single state. But "People are asleep," and the sleeper may recognize everything he sees and the presence in which he sees it, "and when they die, they awake" from this dream within a dream.²⁷ They will never cease being sleepers, so they will never cease being dreamers. Hence they will never cease undergoing constant variation within themselves. Nor will that which they perceive with their eyes ever cease its constant variation. The situation has always been such, and it will always be such in this life and the hereafter. (IV 18.32, 19.22,34)

14. UNDERSTANDING THE KORAN

The knowledge acquired by reason through reflection is confined and constricted by the instrument of knowledge. The light thrown into the heart by God also has certain limitations, since it is a created light deposited within a created receptacle, but the fact that God has taken the initiative and "bestowed" (*wahb*) the knowledge makes it radically different from the knowledge "earned" (*iktisāb*) through personal efforts. Reason is limited by its inability to perceive God's self-disclosure in all things, so it denies His similarity and explains away

the revelatory reports which refer to it. In contrast, unveiling perceives the self-revelation in the forms of the cosmos, so it knows for certain the literal truth of the Koranic statements.

According to Ibn al-'Arabī, one can never doubt the accuracy of the revealed text in its literal form. To suggest that God's "real meaning" lies below the surface or has to be found through interpretation is to cast aspersions upon God and amounts to blatant ill manners and discourtesy (*sū' al-adab*). The literal sense of the text must always be honored. If, after

that, God "opens" up one's understanding to perceive other meanings which preserve the literal sense while adding new knowledge, one accepts the new understanding and thanks God. However, one cannot interpret the text on the basis of "common sense" or "scientific fact" or any other product of reason. One does not go charging into the text without preparation. If a person has not fulfilled the requirements of the Law upon himself and has not searched for the interpretation from God through faith, practice, and godfearing (*taqwā*), he has no basis upon which to understand the text.

The preconditions for understanding preclude the possibility of a "novel" or "original" interpretation. The required piety, godfearing, strict adherence to the Shari'a and the Sunna, deep respect for those who have gone before in the way of the Prophet, and the acknowledgment of one's own nothingness in the face of the Divine Teacher all work against any attempts at innovation. A new interpretation must first take into account those interpretations that have been made by one's spiritual forebears and not contradict them. If it adds another dimension to the tradition and harmonizes with previous interpretations, while the interpreter possesses all the requisite personal qualities, then it might be valid.

The Goal of Rational Inquiry

Ibn al-'Arabī frequently claims that the knowledge acquired by means of unveiling is superior to that which is earned through the efforts of intellectual investigation and rational inquiry. Nevertheless, he does not denigrate rational knowledge. He merely points out its limitations. Certain subjects lie "beyond the stage of reason," so man can gain no knowledge of them without the help of revelation. In the first passage below, he has just mentioned the great divergence of views among the rational thinkers

concerning God's Essence, attributes, and acts.

This book is not a place for that which is given by the proofs of the reflective powers, only for that which is given by divine unveiling. So we will not list these proofs systematically as their supporters have established them in their books.

Then these rational thinkers turned their consideration toward transmitted knowledge (*al-sam'iyyāt*), which is our knowledge. We rely upon it in the outward rulings of the Law and we take it through divine unveiling while exerting ourself through godfearing. Then God undertakes to teach us through self-disclosure. We witness that which rational faculties cannot perceive through their reflective powers, but concerning which transmitted knowledge has come. Reason has declared it impossible, the reason of the man of faith has interpreted it, and the simple man of faith has simply assented to it.

The lights of unveiling have come with the news that it is forbidden to reflect upon the Essence. We saw that the Essence is contrary to that which rational faculties prove through their reflective powers, since the possessors of unveiling witness the right hand of God, His hand, His two hands, the eye and the eyes attributed to Him, the foot, and the face. They witness such attributes as rejoicing, wonder, laughter, and self-transmutation from form to form—all of this.

Hence the God who is worshiped by the faithful and the people of witnessing among the Folk of Allah is not the same as that worshiped by the people who reflect upon God's Essence. They are deprived of knowledge of Him, since they have disobeyed God and His Messenger by reflecting upon the Essence of God. They have transgressed the level of speech (*kalām*) and rational consideration—the fact that He is one God—and gone on to that for which they have no need. Some have done that who wished for God, like Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī and others, but this is a place where feet slip, even if Abū Ḥamid made this a covering for himself, since in some places he called attention to the opposite of that. But in short, he was discourteous. (II 389.6)

The word *kalām*, translated as "speech" in the above passage, is also the name of the discipline of the theologians, and this, in fact, may be what Ibn al-'Arabī has in mind, since he makes it synonymous with rational consideration (*naẓar*), the specific mental activity through which the theologians reach their conclusions. He is saying that the proper domain of theological reflection is the existence and Unity of God, nothing else. This point needs to be emphasized, since there is just as much danger in ignoring reason as there is in ignoring imagination. Those who fail to utilize the full possibilities of reason run the risk of falling into *shirk*, associating other gods with God, the opposite of *tawhīd*. And *tawhīd* alone is a knowledge sufficient for salvation. If someone ignores the proper perceptions of reason, he will perceive the manyness of God's self-disclosures, but like contemporary contextualists, he will claim that there is no supreme Reality lying behind the myriad forms of imaginal "experience." The Shaykh, a true representative of the "perennial philosophy," would agree that "The water takes on the color of the cup." But the innate resources of the healthy rational faculty—the "intellect"—pierce the veils of self-disclosure and perceive the One.

The gnostic never ceases understanding God's Oneness, even if he sees God's self-disclosures in all things. He declares God incomparable because he perceives through his rational faculty that "Nothing is like Him," and he declares Him similar because he perceives His presence in all things through imagination and the senses. Though Ibn al-'Arabī sometimes says that unveiling can perceive all knowledge, he says that this is only partly true in the case of *tawhīd*, and he repeatedly affirms the positive role of reason in perceiving God's Unity.

God has commanded us to gain knowledge of the declaration of His Unity, but He has not commanded us to know His Essence. On the contrary, He forbade that with His words, "God warns you

about His Self" (3:28). So also the Messenger of God forbade us to reflect on the Essence of God. "Nothing is like Him" (42:11), so how can one reach the knowledge of His Essence? But He said, commanding us to declare His Unity, "Know that there is no god but God" (47:19). Hence there is no knowledge of Him except in respect of the fact that He is a god. This is the knowledge of God's appropriate attributes, through which He becomes distinguished from that which is not a god and from the divine thrall. This is the knowledge commanded by the Law, [but one cannot know His Essence,] since "None knows God but God."

In the view of both the people of consideration and the people of unveiling, unequivocal rational proofs have been established that He is One God, since there is no god but He. Then, after rational proof of His *tawhīd* and the self-evident rational knowledge of His existence, we see that the people of the path of God—the messengers, prophets, and friends—have brought other modes of knowledge, various attributes of God which rational proofs consider impossible. (I 271.7)

You say concerning the Real that He is Hearing and Seeing. He has a hand, two hands, hands, hands, eyes, leg, and everything He has ascribed to Himself. None of these can be ascribed to Him by the rational faculty, since it knows that they can only be ascribed to temporally originated things. Were it not for what has been brought by the Law and the divine prophetic reports, we could not ascribe these things to Him rationally. However, we negate the declaration of similarity and do not discuss anything specific, since we are ignorant of His Essence. We negate similarity only because of His words, "Nothing is like Him" (42:11), not because of what has been given by rational proofs. Thereby nothing judges Him except His own Speech. This is how we want to meet Him when we meet Him and He unveils from our insight and our sight the covering of blindness. . . .

But there can be no unveiling in the knowledge of *tawhīd*. . . . *Tawhīd* is not something ontological (*amr wujūdī*). It is merely a relationship, and relationships cannot be seen through unveiling. They can only be known by way of proofs. For unveiling is a vision. Vision only becomes

connected to its object through the qualities (*kayfiyya*) which the object possesses. But does the Divine Side have any qualities? Rational proof negates that He should have any. . . . But if God should embody these meanings in the Presence of Imaginalization—like knowledge in the form of milk—then this knowledge can be attained through unveiling. (II 291.30)

When the misbelievers were invited to the profession of the Unity of God, they replied, “‘What, has he made the gods One God?’ This is indeed a marvelous thing” (38:5). People understand the sentence, “This is indeed a marvelous thing,” as the words of the misbelievers, since the Prophet had invited them to profess the Unity of God, but they believed that the gods were many. But in our view, this sentence represents the words of the Real or the words of the Messenger. . . .

Man knows that God does not come to be through the making of a maker, since He is a god in Himself. That is why God chides them with His words, “Do you worship what you yourself carve?” (37:95), since it is self-evident (*ḍarūra*) to reason that “God” cannot be receptive toward effects. But here was a block of wood which they played with, or a stone which they used to throw around. Then they took it and made it a god, abasing themselves before it and displaying need for it, calling upon it in fear and craving. It is this which is marvelous, given the fact that they have rational faculties. (II 590.31)

Ibn al-ʿArabī discusses the necessity of the rational faculty for understanding *tawḥīd* while speaking of the meaning of “death,” which already in the Koran is a clear synonym for ignorance, as in the verse, “Why, is he who was dead, and We gave him life, and appointed for him a light to walk by among the people as one whose likeness is in the darknesses, and he comes not forth from them?” (6:122). Part of the discussion is based upon the Shaykh’s often repeated assertion that there is no real need to prove the existence of God, since a sound rational faculty perceives it innately. “The affirma-

tion of His existence is self-evident to reason, because of the fact that preponderance has been given to one of the two properties of the possible thing” (II 289.9).

When the spirit, through which the body experiences life in the sensory world, departs from the body, this is called “death.” It occurs for spirit and body after they had been described as being joined, a joining which is the cause of life.

In the same way, “death” occurs for the soul through lack of knowledge. You may object: “Knowledge of God, which is the life of the souls, is an added factor, while ignorance is fixed within them before the existence of knowledge. So how can you describe the ignorant person as dead?”

We reply: Knowledge of God is the precedent property of the soul of every human being because of the “taking at the Covenant,” when He made them testify against themselves. Then, when the souls came to inhabit the natural bodies in this world, knowledge of the profession of God’s Unity left them. Then, after that, God brought some souls to life through knowledge of the profession of His Unity, and He brought them all to life through knowledge of God’s existence, since knowledge of God’s existence is self-evident to the rational faculty. That is why we called the ignorant person “dead.”

God says, “Why, is he who was dead,” that is, because God has taken away from him the spirit, which is knowledge of God, “and We gave him life and appointed for him a light to walk by among the people.” In other words, God returned his knowledge to him and he came to life through it, just as He will return the spirits to their bodies in the next world on the Day of Resurrection. As for God’s words in the rest of the verse, “as one whose likeness is in the darknesses” (6:122), here He means to contrast this with the light by which man walks among the people.

But this light is not life itself. “Life” is the admission of the existence of God, while the “light which is given” is knowledge of the declaration of God’s Unity.

The "darknesses" are the ignorance of the declaration of His Unity, while "death" is ignorance of His existence. That is why, in the verse of the taking at the Covenant, God mentioned only that we admitted His existence, not that we declared His Unity. He did not address Himself to *tawhīd* in that verse. He says, "Am I not your Lord?" They answer, "Yes" (7:172), thereby admitting Lordship, that is, the fact that He is their master. But a slave may be owned by two people in a partnership. Then, when one of these two masters says to him, "Am I not your lord?", the slave must answer "yes" and attest to him. That is why we say that in this verse man admits only that God exists as his Lord, i.e., his owner and master.

This explains why, in the above verse, after saying "And We gave him life," God added something else. He was not satisfied until He said, "and We appointed for him a light to walk by among the people." He means by "light" the knowledge of the declaration of God's Unity, nothing else. For it is this knowledge which establishes eminence and felicity. Any other knowledge does not stand in the same station. . . .

In this way station man comes to understand that when the one knows the many, the one becomes ignorant of itself, because of its witnessing manyness. This can be explained as follows:

The spirit cannot rationally understand (*ʿaql*) itself without the body, which is the locus of "how many" and manyness. It never witnesses itself alone in the respect that it is undivided in itself. It does not know its humanness without the existence of the body along with it. That is why, when it is asked about its own definition and reality, it replies, "a feeding, sensory, rational body." This is man's reality, the definition of his essence and self. Hence, when man is asked about his definition in respect of being human, he always takes into account this manyness in his definition. He does not rationally understand his unity (*ahadiyya*) in his essence. He only perceives the unity of the genus, not the unity of his own reality. When man learns through acquired knowledge that he is one in his entity, this is the knowledge of reflective proofs, not the knowledge of tasting, witnessing, and unveiling.

In the same way, the object of man's knowledge of God is the declaration of the Unity of the Divinity (*tawhīd al-ulūhiya*), that which is named "Allah," not the *tawhīd* of the Essence, since the Essence cannot be known at all. Hence the knowledge of Allah's *tawhīd* is a knowledge of reflective proofs, not a knowledge of unveiled witnessing, since knowledge of *tawhīd* can never be acquired through tasting. It becomes connected to the levels. (II 618.15)

Reason versus Unveiling

Ibn al-ʿArabī usually mentions the great al-Ghazālī with praise, calling him one of "our companions." Sometimes, however, as in the first passage quoted above, he criticizes him for entering into the arena of theological and philosophical reflection.¹ In another passage, he points out that occupying oneself with such concerns is an obstruction on the path to God. He is discussing the station of "unlettered knowledge" (*al-ʿilm al-ummi*). In employing the term *ummi*, he has in mind the sobriquet of Muḥammad, the "unlettered Prophet" (Koran 7:158). Like many other authorities, Ibn al-ʿArabī understands this to mean that the Prophet's knowledge came only from God, not from reflection and consideration. To employ another term derived from the Koran, his knowledge was "from God" or "God-given" (*ladunni*): "We had taught [Khadrī] knowledge from Us" (18:65).

For us, being "unlettered" does not contradict memorizing the Koran or the prophetic hadiths. In our view, that person is "unlettered" who does not employ his reflective consideration and his rational judgment to bring out the meaning and mysteries which the Koran embraces. He does not use rational proofs to attain to the knowledge of divine things. And he does not employ the juridical proofs, analogies, and assigning of causes that oc-

cupy the legal authorities (*al-mujtahidūn*) in order to grasp the rulings of the Law.

When the heart is safe from reflective consideration, then, according to both the Law and reason, it is "unlettered" and receptive toward the divine opening in the most perfect manner and without delay. It is provided with God-given (*ladunni*) knowledge in all things to an extent unknown except to a prophet or one of His friends whom He has given of it through tasting. Through this knowledge the degree and plane of faith are perfected. Through it the one who receives it becomes aware of the correctness and the mistakes of reflective powers and in what respect soundness and disorder are attributed to them. All of this comes from God.

The person also comes to know, while judging the unreal (*bāṭil*), that there is nothing unreal in existence, since everything that enters into existence, whether entity or property, belongs to God, not to other than Him. Hence there is nothing useless or unreal in any entity or property, since there is no act that does not belong to God, there is no agent but God, there is no property that does not belong to God, and there is no property-giver except God.

It is unlikely that he who already has knowledge of these things will gain from the divine, God-given knowledge the same thing which the unlettered one among us will gain, he who beforehand had no knowledge of what we mentioned. This is because the scales of rational thought and the outward aspects of the scales of legal investigation among the jurists reject much of what we have mentioned, since the greater part of this affair lies beyond the stage of reason and its scale, which cannot be used here, and beyond the scale of the legal authorities among the jurists, though not beyond "jurisprudence" (*fiqh*), since what we mentioned is identical with sound jurisprudence and genuine knowledge. In the story of Moses and Khāḍir there is a strong proof of what we have mentioned. So [if this is the case with Moses, a prophet, then] what is the state of the jurist? Where do the locatedness (*ayniyya*) and similar things which both the Law-giver and unveiling attribute to God stand in relation to those things which reason

and the ruling of the legal authority hold to be the scales of speculative consideration and the demonstrations of the rational faculty?

God gives His servant mercy by coming between him and his considerate knowledge and legal ruling in respect of Himself. Then He assists him in that through divine opening and a knowledge which He gives him "from Himself." Concerning His servant Khāḍir God said, "[Then they found] one of Our servants"—thereby relating him to the pronoun which denotes the plural (*jam'* [=bringing together, gathering])—"whom We had given mercy from Us"—employing the plural pronoun—"and whom We had taught knowledge from Us" (18:65), again with the plural pronoun. In other words: God had brought together (*jam'*) for him in this unveiling knowledge of the manifest and the nonmanifest, knowledge of the secret and the open, knowledge of judgment and wisdom, knowledge of reason and convention (*waḍ'*), knowledge of proofs and obfuscations.

He who is given all-inclusive knowledge and is commanded to employ it, like the prophets and those whom God wills among His friends, is denied (*inkār*), but this individual denies the sciences given to no one. Even if he makes a ruling different from someone else, he knows the place of that person's knowledge and in what respect he makes rulings. He gives to sight and to all the other senses their due in their ruling, and he gives to reason and to all the other spiritual faculties their rulings. He gives to the divine relationships and the divine opening their rulings. Thus it is that the divine knower (*al-ʿālim al-ilāhī*) excels everyone else. This is the "insight" which the Koran mentions in His words, "Say [O Muhammad!]: This is my way. I call to God upon insight, I and whoever follows after me" (12:108). This complements His words, "It is He who has raised up from among the unlettered people a Messenger from among them" (62:2). The "unlettered prophet" is he who calls upon insight while being unlettered, while the "unlettered people" are those who call to God upon insight along with him. They are his "followers" in the ruling, since he is the head of the group.

The legal authority and the reflective thinker will never be "upon insight" in

their rulings. The legal authority may make a ruling today concerning a Shari'ite case and tomorrow something may happen that will make clear to him that he was mistaken in yesterday's ruling. . . . Were he upon insight, he would not rule mistakenly in his first consideration. . . .

The situation of the rational thinker is the same. This happens when a group of rational thinkers exercise consideration and consider the proofs exhaustively. They discover the purport of the proofs, and this gives them knowledge of what has been proven. Then another time you see that an adversary has stood up against them from another group—like a Mu'tazilite, an Ash'arite, a Brahmin (*barhami*), or a philosopher—offering something else which contradicts the proof about which the first person was certain. This detracts from his proof, so he considers it and sees that his first position was a mistake and that he had not treated the pillars of his proof exhaustively and had upset the scale in that without being aware. How can this be compared with insight?

Since this does not happen in that which is self-evident (*ḍarūriyyāt*) to reason, the property of insight in people of this station is like that which is self-evident to rational faculties. A person must rejoice in knowledge like this.

Some of what the "unlettered" realize has been related from Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī, the spokesman for the people of this path. He said, "When I desired to join their way, to take from whence they were taking, and to ladle from the ocean from which they were ladling, I retreated into myself and withdrew from my rational consideration and my reflection. I occupied myself with invocation, and a knowledge was kindled in me which I had not had. I rejoiced in that and I said to myself, 'I have gained what the Tribe has gained.' I studied it and I found therein a juridical faculty like what I had had before. Hence I came to know that that knowledge was not pure for me. I returned to my retreat and put into practice what the Tribe practices, and I found the like of what I had found the first time, but clearer and higher. I became happy and studied it, but I found therein the juridical faculty which I had had. The knowledge had not become pure for me. I

repeated all that many times, and the state stayed the same.

"Thus I was distinguished from other considerative thinkers and the possessors of reflective powers through this measure, but I did not reach the degree of the Tribe in that. I came to know that writing upon what has been erased (*maḥw*) is not the same as writing upon that which has not been erased. Do you not see the trees? In some of them, the fruit precedes the flower; that is like the level of the learned men of consideration when they enter into the path of God, such as the jurist and the theologian. In other trees, the flower is not preceded by any fruit. That is the unlettered person whose God-given knowledge is not preceded by any reflective, outward knowledge. Hence that God-given knowledge comes to him most easily."

This can be explained as follows: Since there is no agent but God, while this jurist and theologian comes to the Divine Presence with his scale to weigh God, not recognizing that God gave him those scales only to weigh with them *for* God, not to weigh God Himself, he is deprived of courtesy. And he who lacks courtesy is punished by ignorance of the God-given knowledge of opening. Hence he will not be upon insight in his affair.

If he should have an ample rational faculty, he will know from whence he is stricken. Among them are those who enter in and leave their scale at the door. Once they come back out, they take it along to weigh with it for God's sake. This is the best state of those who enter upon God with the rational faculty. However, the heart of such a person is attached to what he left behind, since in his soul he will return to it. Hence he is deprived of the sought-for Truth to the extent that his mind is attached to what he has left behind, because of the regard he pays to it.

Even better than this person is the state of him who smashes his scale. If it is made of wood, he burns it, and if it is something that melts, he melts it. Or he freezes it, so that it ceases being a scale. If its substance remains, he does not care. But this is exceedingly rare. I have not heard that anyone has done it, though we can suppose it, and it is not impossible that God should strengthen one of His

servants until he does something like this. (II 644.17)

The ideal rational faculty is that which accepts from God the knowledge of Him that He gives to it and does not try to go beyond its own limitations by reflecting upon Him. Hence the virtue of reason is to accept or receive (*qabūl*) unveiling and revelation.

I have opened for you a door to gnostic sciences which are not attained by reflection, though rational faculties can attain to their acceptance, either through divine solicitude, or through the polishing of the heart by invocation and recitation of the Koran. Then the rational faculty will accept what is given to it by the self-disclosure and it will know that what has come is outside its own power in respect of its reflection and that its reflection can never give that to it. It will thank God for configuring it within a configuration that accepts the like of this—the configuration of the messengers, the prophets, and the people of solicitude among the friends. That takes place so that it will know that its acceptance is nobler than its reflection. (I 305.21)

The Shaykh makes the same point while reminding us of the limitations of reason, the fact that it constricts and binds reality by its very nature. In fact, he points out, “reason” is merely a name given to the cognitive act of distinguishing between ourselves and God. True love of God will never be actualized until the spell of reason is broken and separation is overcome.

Love for God exercises its property over the lover to the extent of his rational faculty, since his reason delimits him, so it is his shackle. God addressed only those who have rational faculties (*al-ʿuqalāʾ*). They are the ones who are delimited by their own attributes and who distinguish them from the attributes of their Creator. When dissimilarity occurs, delimitation takes place, and the rational faculty comes to be. Hence the proofs of the rational faculties distinguish between the Real and

the servant and the Creator and the creature.

He who stands with his reason in the state of his love will not be able to accept anything from the ruling authority of love except what is required by his considerative proof. But if a person stands with his reason's acceptance, not its consideration, accepting from God that whereby He describes Himself, then the ruling power of love will dominate over him in accordance with what his reason has accepted. Hence reason stands between consideration and acceptance, and the property of love within the considering reason is not the same as its property within the accepting reason. Understand this, for here there are mysteries!

God is the Lover. The relationship between us and our rational faculty is the relationship between Him and His knowledge. Nothing comes to be except that about which He has precedent knowledge. In the same way, nothing occurs from us except what is required by our rational faculty. Hence the property of His love among His creatures does not go beyond His knowledge, and the property of our love for Him does not go beyond our reason, whether its consideration or its acceptance. So understand! (II 358.22)

The people of witnessing and finding surpass others. Though the attribute may be the same, he who knows his station with God is not like him who does not know it. “Say: ‘Are they equal—those who know and those who know not?’ Only those who possess the kernels remember” (39:9). This verse tells us that they knew, then forgetfulness overcame some of them. Some of them continue to be ruled by the property of forgetfulness. “They forgot God, so He forgot them” (9:67). Others are reminded and remember. These are the “possessors of the kernels.”

The “kernel” (*lubb*) of the rational faculty is that which becomes the food of the rational thinkers. So the “possessors of the kernels” are those who employ reason as it should be employed, in contrast to the “men of rational faculties,” who are the people of the shell (*qishr*). They have missed the kernel, while the possessors of kernels have seized it. The men of rational faculties have not employed what they

should have employed, since reason must be employed as a shell upon a kernel. Reason is properly employed through its attribute of accepting everything that comes from God. But reason without a kernel does not accept that in respect of its reflection. That is why the Folk of Allah are the people of the kernels. The kernel is their food, so they employ that within which is their sustenance. (III 120.32)

The Character of Muḥammad

What is the nature of this divine book whose truths cannot be grasped through rational interpretation? As is well known, the word Koran, Arabic *qurʾān*, derives from the root *q.r.ʾ*, and is generally said to mean "recitation." But the primary significance of the root is "gathering" and "collecting together," and some of the early authorities maintained that this is the significance of the name. From this point of view, the two primary names of the holy book, al-Qurʾān and al-Furqān (the latter of which means "separation" or "discrimination") together mean that the Koran gathers everything together and at the same time separates everything out into clear and distinct domains. Ibn al-ʿArabī often employs the term Koran strictly in accordance with this literal meaning, which is particularly significant to him because it is synonymous with the word *jamʿ*, "bringing together," "gathering," or "all-comprehensiveness." The name Allah is the "all-comprehensive name" (*al-ism al-jāmī*) of God, since it gathers together in itself all other names. Perfect man is the "all-comprehensive engendered thing" (*al-kawn al-jāmī*), because he gathers within himself everything in the Divine Reality and everything in the cosmos. The Koran is "al-Qurʾān," because it gathers together all the revealed scriptures that were sent down before it and thereby all knowledge of God.

The Koran is one book among others except that, to the exclusion of all other books, it alone possesses all-comprehensiveness (*jamʿiyya*). (III 160.34)

Ibn al-ʿArabī comments upon the all-comprehensive nature of the Koran in many contexts, most commonly in conjunction with the perfect and all-comprehensive character of the Prophet, which made him the only possible receptacle for the Koran.

The Koran unveils all the knowledges sent down in the scriptures and contains that which is not contained by them. He who has been given the Koran has been given the perfect luminosity (*diyāʾ*) which comprises every knowledge. . . . Because of the Koran it is true to say that Muḥammad was given the "all-comprehensive words" (*jawāmiʿ al-kalim*). So the sciences of the prophets, the angels, and every known tongue are comprised in the Koran and elucidated by it to the "Folk of the Koran." (II 107.20)

The "Folk of the Koran" are those whom we have met elsewhere as the "Folk of Allah," since, according to a hadith, "The Folk of the Koran are the Folk of Allah and His elect."² In Ibn al-ʿArabī's view, "The most felicitous people with God are the Folk of the Koran" (II 443.4).

Ibn al-ʿArabī provides long and frequent commentaries on various sayings of the Prophet to show his superiority over all other messengers, prophets, and friends of God. Thus the Prophet said that on the Day of Resurrection he will be singled out for the "banner of praise"³ and the "praiseworthy station."⁴ He was given "the knowledge of those of old and the later folk."⁵ He said, "I will be the master of mankind on the Day of Resurrection."⁶ He "was given the all-comprehensive words (*jawāmiʿ al-kalim*)"⁷ and "was a prophet when Adam was between water and clay."⁸ Only a few brief comments on some of these sayings can be quoted here.⁹

When God taught Adam the names (Koran 2:30), he was in the station second to the station of Muḥammad, since Muḥammad had already come to know the all-comprehensive words, and all the names are words. (II 88.15)

Muḥammad was the greatest locus of divine self-disclosure, and thereby he came to know "the knowledge of the ancients and the later folk." Among those of old was Adam, who had knowledge of the names. Muḥammad was given the all-comprehensive words, and the words of God are never exhausted.¹⁰ (II 171.1)

The Messenger of God said, "I will be the master of mankind on the Day of Resurrection." The reason for this is his perfection. He said, "Were Moses alive, he would find it impossible not to follow me,"¹¹ because of the all-inclusiveness of the Prophet's messengerhood and the all-embracingness of his Law; for he was singled out for things never given to any prophet before him, and no prophet was ever singled out for anything that Muḥammad did not possess, since he was given the all-comprehensive words. He said, "I was a prophet when Adam was between clay and water," while every other prophet was only a prophet during the state of his prophethood and the time of his messengerhood. (III 141.7)

In his answers to al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, Ibn al-ʿArabī defines the "banner of praise" (*liwāʾ al-ḥamd*) which will belong to the Prophet on the Day of Resurrection and explains why the Prophet deserves that banner.

The "banner of praise" is the praise of praises, the most complete praise, the highest and most elevated praise in level. People gather around a banner, since it is the mark of the level and existence of the king. In the same way, all praises gather around the praise of praises, since it is the correct praise which has nothing equivocal about it, nor any doubt or suspicion that it is a praise, since it denotes by its very essence, since it itself is a banner.

You might say concerning a person, "He is generous," or that person might say about himself that he is generous. This laudation may be true and it may not. But when it is found that he bestows

by way of disinterested kindness and beneficence, this very bestowal gives witness to the generosity of the bestower. Hence no equivocality enters into it. This is the meaning of the praise of praises called the "banner of praise." It is named a "banner" because it brings together all praises. . . .

In order to merit the banner of praise, the Prophet will praise his Lord by the Koran, which brings together all praises. That is why it is called *qurʾān*, that is, "bringing together" (*jāmiʿ*). . . . The Koran did not descend upon anyone before him and it is not proper for it to descend except upon someone who possesses this station. For He should not be praised except by the praises which He has set down in the Law, in respect of the fact that He has set them down in the Law, not in respect of the fact that His Perfection demands attributes of praise. That is the divine laudation. But if He were praised in accordance with what is demanded by His attributes, that would be the praise of common usage (*ʿurf*) and reason. But such a praise is not worthy of His majesty. (II 88.5,21)

The Koran employs the expression "mother of the Book" (*umm al-kitāb*) in three verses, and the term has been explained in various ways. One of the most common interpretations is that it refers to the Fātiḥa, the first chapter of the Koran. One of al-Tirmidhī's questions is, "What is the interpretation of 'Mother of the Book'?" Parts of Ibn al-ʿArabī's answer throw light on his understanding of the relationship between the Prophet and the Koran:

A "mother" is that which brings together (*jāmiʿ*). Hence we have "mother of the cities" [that is, Mecca, the place of coming together for the pilgrimage]. The head is the "mother of the body." It is said [in reference to the brain], "the mother of the head," since it brings together all the sensory and supra-sensory (*maʿnawī*) faculties that belong to man. The Fātiḥa is the "mother" of all revealed books, which are the Tremendous Koran, that is, the tremendous totality that has been brought together (*majmūʿ*) comprising all things.

Muhammad was given the "all-comprehensive words." Hence his Law comprises all revealed religions (*sharā'ī*). He was a prophet when Adam had not yet been created. Hence from him branch out the Laws to all the prophets. They were sent by him to be his deputies in the earth in the absence of his body. If his body had existed, none of them would have a Law. Hence he said, "Were Moses alive, he would find it impossible not to follow me."

God says, "We sent down the Torah, wherein is light and guidance; thereby the prophets, those who are Muslims, judge for those who are Jews" (5:44). We are the Muslims, and the learned masters among us are prophets.¹² We judge the people of each Shari'a by their Shari'a, since the Shari'a of our Prophet has established it. His Law is its root, and he was sent "to all people" (34:28), while this belonged to no other prophet. "People" extend from Adam to the last human being, and among them there have been Laws, so they are the Laws of Muhammad in the hands of his deputies. For he is sent out "to all people," so all the messengers are his deputies, without doubt.

When the Prophet himself became manifest, there remained no ruling that did not belong to him and no ruling authority which did not go back to him. But his level demanded that when he became manifest in his own entity in this world, he should be singled out for something that was not given to any of his deputies. That something had to be so great that it comprised everything which was scattered among his deputies and something in addition. Hence God gave him the Mother of the Book, which comprised all the scriptures and books. It became manifest among us as an epitome, seven verses which comprise all verses. (II 134.21)

According to a famous hadith, the Prophet's wife 'Ā'isha was asked to describe the character (*khuluq*) of God's Messenger. She replied, "Have you not read the Koran?" The questioner said that he had. She said, "Surely the character of the Prophet was the Koran."¹³ The Prophet is the most perfect of the perfect men, the locus of manifestation

par excellence for the divine name Allah. Hence the Prophet synthesizes everything and possesses all knowledge. "He encompasses the knowledge of all knowers who know God, whether those who had gone before or those who would come after" (III 142.27). To say that his character is the Koran means, according to the literal sense of the term, that he brings together in himself all noble character traits, just as the revealed Koran brings together all knowledge. In other words, it is the Prophet who has assumed as his character traits all the names of God, since he "brings together all things" by being the *qur'ān*, "that which brings together." "The character of the messenger of God was the Koran and the assumption of the divine names as his own traits" (III 61.2). Coming to know the Koran is to come to know the Prophet, God, and all things.

God says, "Surely thou art upon a tremendous character (*khuluq 'azīm*)" (68:4). . . . When 'Ā'isha was asked about the character of the Messenger of God, she answered, "His character was the Koran." She said that because he was unique in character, and that unique character had to bring together all noble character traits (*makārim al-akhlāq*). God described that character as being "tremendous," just as He described the Koran in His words, "the tremendous Koran" (15:87). So the Koran is his character. If a person in the community of the Messenger who has not met the Messenger of God desires to see him, let him look upon the Koran. When he looks upon it, there is no difference between looking upon it and looking upon God's Messenger. It is as if the Koran takes the configuration of a corporeal form which is named Muhammad ibn 'Abdallāh ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib. The Koran is God's Speech and His attribute, so Muhammad in his entirety is the attribute of God. "So he who obeys the Messenger has obeyed God" (Koran 4:80), since "He does not speak out of caprice" (53:3), for he is the tongue of God. (IV 60.33)

The lovers of God are called the "carriers of the Koran" (*ḥamalat al-Qur'ān*). Their Beloved brings together (*jāmi*) all

attributes, so they are identical with the Koran. When asked about the Prophet's character, 'Ā'isha said, "His character was the Koran." She did not answer with anything but this. (II 346.12)

The Context of the Koran

It is not uncommon for contemporary scholars to criticize Ibn al-'Arabī or other Koran interpreters for reading the Koran out of context. But the context of a text is defined by one's own understanding of the text's limitations and horizons. Ibn al-'Arabī had many good reasons for claiming that "Every existent thing finds in the Koran what it desires" (III 94.2). Modern scholars find historical and literary contexts, and traditional Muslims find the Speech of God, escaping all human attempts to delimit and define it.

If we accept the primacy of historical and literary considerations in the text of the Koran, then perhaps Ibn al-'Arabī read it out of context. But Ibn al-'Arabī himself does not accept the primacy of such considerations, since, at best, they are the products of the reflective power of reason and as such are constricted and confined within limited, created horizons. Moreover, contemporary rational faculties can certainly not be described as wholesome and "sound" (*salīm*), since they are governed by the prejudices and presuppositions of a scientistic and materialistic age. A sound rational faculty would at least have faith in the divine origin of the Koran. Once its divine origin is accepted, then there is room for discussion about what God means and what He does not mean in a text. But as long as that is not accepted, there is not much room for exchange between the modern interpreter and the traditional hermeneut.

It has already been said that *ta'wīl* is not an appropriate term to indicate Ibn al-'Arabī's method of interpretation, since he himself almost invariably uses the term to refer to a mental process per-

taining to reflective thought whereby every verse which does not coincide with a preconceived idea of God's incomparability is explained away. More generally, *ta'wīl* is to take one's understanding of God as the standard or "scale" by which to weigh the revelation. Everything which corresponds to that understanding is accepted, while everything else is interpreted to bring it into line with that understanding. Man becomes the standard for judging the revelation, and the Koran is no longer the standard for judging man. Ibn al-'Arabī rejects this approach entirely, insisting instead that man must allow himself to be judged, shaped, and formed by the Divine Speech. Man must devote himself to worship and godfearing, to recitation of the Koran, and to all the spiritual disciplines set down by the Law and the Way. He must constantly pray to God to enlighten him as to the meaning of the Holy Book and to increase him in knowledge. When and if God unveils to him the meaning of a verse or a portion of the Book, he must weigh his unveiling in the scales of the Law and the tradition. Only if it harmonizes with these can it be taken seriously. In any case, there is no guarantee that man will be given such understanding. The Koran is much too sacred to be taken by storm. It must give of itself when and if it wants.

To come back to the question of "context," for Ibn al-'Arabī, the Koranic context is the divine knowledge, from which nothing is hidden. Once we come to know that the text is God's own Speech, historical considerations are of no account—at least not for understanding what God meant by the text, since there is no denying that the Koran can throw light on any number of phenomena connected to the historical situation at the time of Muḥammad. But for the most part these phenomena are of no interest to Ibn al-'Arabī, since they pertain to "useless knowledge," that is, knowledge which has no bearing on ultimate human felicity.

As we will see below, Ibn al-'Arabī's basic answer to anyone who would criticize his Koran commentary is that any interpretation supported by the literal text is valid. He might say something like this: I do not object to your interpretations, though I consider them bound and constricted by your limited perspective. And you should not object to my interpretations, since they are supported by the literal text, usually much more so than yours. If you say that my interpretation is wrong, you are saying that God could not have meant that in this verse, and you reach this conclusion through your constricting rational faculty, which would tie God down to your idea of what He is. But God cannot fit into your constrictions. Or rather, though He discloses Himself within them, He also stands infinitely beyond them. I base my interpretation upon a meaning which God has unveiled to me, so it is His meaning. Your interpretation at best is based upon your own understanding of the text. Unveiling allows me to see that your interpretation is also correct in a certain limited way. It is unfortunate that you cannot make the same concession to me. Instead, you prefer to squeeze God into your own mold.

As Ibn al-'Arabī well knows, denial is one of the characteristic traits of reason and the Law, nor does he himself refrain from denying wrong views on these levels. Both affirmation and denial have positive roles to play.

In this waystation, a person comes to know the coming together of opposites, which is the existence of the opposite within its own opposite. This is the strongest knowledge by which one can know oneness (*wahdāniyya*), since the witness witnesses a state in which it is impossible for him not to know that the entity of the opposite is itself identical with its opposite. Hence he perceives Unity in manyness, though not in the manner of the arithmeticians (*aṣḥāb al-'adaḍ*), since that way is illusory, while this is a witnessed, verified knowledge.

One of those who excelled in this

blessed station among the early generations was Abū Sa'īd al-Kharrāz.¹⁴ I had taken this vision on his authority until I myself entered the station, and I gained what I gained. I came to know that it is the truth, and that the people who deny (*inkār*) it are correct, since they deny it on the basis of reason. The rational faculty can do nothing else in respect of its consideration. He who gives to the extent of his own capacity in respect of what the point of view demands has fulfilled the right of the situation. This is where our feet are established and fixed. So we do not deny the claims of anyone who makes claims, except as we are commanded to deny, so we deny according to the Law. This denial is also a reality; we only witness a condition that demands denial. In the same way we deny it on the basis of reason.

The Law has a power (*quwwa*) whose reality will not allow it to be overstepped, just as reason also has such a power. Tasting also has a power by which we put it into practice, just as we put into practice everything else which has a power in accordance with its power. We live with the present moment (*waqt*). With reason we deny what reason denies, since then our present moment is reason, but we do not deny it by unveiling or the Law. With the Law we deny what the Law denies, since our present moment is the Law, but we do not deny it by unveiling or by reason. As for unveiling, it denies nothing. On the contrary, it establishes each thing in its proper level. He whose present moment is unveiling will be denied, but he will deny no one. He whose present moment is reason will deny and be denied, and he whose present moment is the Law will deny and be denied. So know that! (II 605.14)

Since the Koran is God's Speech, and since God's knowledge embraces all things, God knows every possible meaning that can be understood from the text. He also *intends* every one of those meanings, though not necessarily for everyone. Other scriptures also, by being the Speech of God, share in this attribute. In the following passage, Ibn al-'Arabī uses the verbs *ta'awwul* and *ta'wil*, "to interpret," in a neutral sense.

Every sense (*waḡh*) which is supported (*iḥtimāl*) by any verse in God's Speech (*kalām*)—whether it is the Koran, the Torah, the Psalms, the Gospel, or the Scripture—in the view of anyone who knows that language (*lisān*) is intended (*maqṣūd*) by God in the case of that interpreter (*muta'awwil*). For His knowledge encompasses all senses. . . . Hence, every interpreter correctly grasps the intention of God in that word (*kalima*). This is the Truth, "[a Mighty Book:] to which falsehood comes not from before it nor from behind it; a sending down from One Wise, Praiseworthy" (41:42) upon the heart of him whom He chooses from among His servants. Hence no man of knowledge can declare wrong an interpretation which is supported by the words (*lafẓ*). He who does so is extremely deficient in knowledge. However, it is not necessary to uphold the interpretation nor to put it into practice, except in the case of the interpreter himself and those who follow his authority. (II 119.21)

We say concerning the senses of a verse that all are intended by God. No one forces anything upon God. On the contrary, it is an affair verified by God. The reason for this is as follows: The verse of God's Speech, of whatever sort it may be—Koran, revealed book, scripture, divine report—is a sign or a mark signifying what the words (*lafẓ*) support in all senses and intended by the One who sent down His Speech in those words, which comprise, in that language, those senses. For He who sent it down knows all those senses without exception. He knows that His servants are disparate in their consideration of those words and that He has only prescribed His address as Law for them to the extent that they understand it.¹⁵ Hence, when someone understands a sense from the verse, that sense is intended by God in this verse in the case of the person who finds it.

This situation is not found outside God's Speech. Even though the words might support a sense, it may be that it was not intended by the speaker; for we know that he is incapable of encompassing all the senses of the words. . . .

Hence, everyone who comments (*tafsīr*) the Koran and does not go outside of what the words support is a true commentator. However, "He who comments

according to his own opinion (*ra'y*) becomes an unbeliever"—so it has been recorded in the *Ḥadīth* of al-Tirmidhī.¹⁶ But the commentary will not be "according to his own opinion" until the speakers of that language do not recognize that sense in that word. (II 567.19)

The Commentary of the Folk of Allah

Ibn al-'Arabī usually remarks on Koran commentary in the context of his own interpretations of a verse. In the following he is discussing the profession of God's Unity, *tawḥīd*. He points out the difference between the terms *aḥad* and *wāḥid*, both of which mean "one," and explains one of the senses of the word *aḥadiyya* or "unity," which derives from *aḥad*.

The word *aḥad* is applied in the Koran to other than God. God says, "Let him not associate one"¹⁷ with his Lord's worship" (18:119). In respect to the commentary on meaning practiced by the Folk of Allah, what is understood from this verse is that He is not worshiped in respect of His Unity, since Unity contradicts the existence of the worshiper. It is as if He is saying, "What is worshiped is only the 'Lord' in respect of His Lordship, since the Lord brought you into existence. So connect yourself to Him and make yourself lowly before Him, and do not associate Unity with Lordship in worship. Do not make yourself lowly before Unity as you make yourself lowly before Lordship. For Unity does not know you and will not accept you. Hence you would be worshiping Him who is not worshiped, desiring Him who cannot be desired, and practicing without object. That is the worship of the ignorant." Hence God negates the worship of the worshipers from having a connection to Unity, since Unity is established strictly and only for Allah. As for everything other than Allah, it has no Unity whatsoever. This then is what we understand from this verse in respect of our way of Koranic commentary.

The exoterics (*ahl al-rusūm*) also take

their share from this verse, commentating upon its meaning. They ascribe the mentioned "one" to the associates which people take. This also is a sound commentary. For the Koran is the shoreless ocean, since He to whom it is ascribed intends all the meanings demanded by speech—in contrast to the speech of created things.

When you know this, you will know what God meant when He said to His Prophet, "Say: 'He is God, One'" (112:1), that is, He has no associate in this attribute.

As for the term *wāḥid*: We considered the Koran. Does God ascribe it to other than Himself, as He ascribes unity? I did not find it. But here I am not certain. If He does not ascribe it, then it is more specific than unity. It is a name of the Essence, a proper name (*'alam*), but it is not an attribute like unity, since attributes are a place of sharing (*iṣhtirāk*). That explains why unity is ascribed to everything other than God in the Koran.

The speech (*kalām*) of people and their technical terminology (*iṣṭilāḥ*) are of no account. Instead, what has come in the Koran—which is the Speech of God—must be considered. If the word *wāḥid* is found [applied to other than God] in the Speech of God, then its property is that of *aḥad*, because of what it shares in common verbally. But if the word *wāḥid* is not applied to other than God in the Speech of God, then it has to be given the characteristics which pertain to the Essence. It will be like the name Allah, by which no one else is named. (II 581.4)

Ibn al-ʿArabī sees a profound difference between the *taʾwīl* of the men of reason and the *tafsīr* performed by the Folk of Allah. Since the philosophers and theologians have neither unveiling nor firm faith that God means what He says, they try to pass from the outward or "exoteric" sense (*ẓāhir*) of the verse to the inward or "esoteric" sense (*bāṭin*). The process of interpretation is a crossing over (*'ubūr*), as we have already seen in speaking of the "interpretation" (*taʾbīr*) of dreams. Once crossing over is made, one "gives expression" (*'ibāra*) to the inward sense through outward forms. But in making this crossover, the rational

thinkers let go of the outward sense, while the Folk of Allah, who make a similar crossover, never let go of it. Thus, the rational thinkers cannot accept that a verse such as, "Everything in the heavens and the earth glorifies God" (57:1) can be taken literally, so they try to "give expression" to its meaning through various interpretations.

Know—God confirm you, O you who seek knowledge of the things as they are in themselves—that you will never gain this knowledge unless God acquaints you with it from yourself and lets you witness it in your own essence. Then you will gain what you seek through tasting, while you become acquainted with it through unveiling. But there is no way to gain this except through a beginningless solicitude which gives you a complete preparedness to accept it; [and this preparedness will show itself] by means of ascetic discipline in the soul, bodily struggles, the assumption of the traits of the divine names, the realization of pure and angelic spirits, purification by a purity designated and detailed by the Law and not by reason, nonattachment to any engendered things, and freeing the locus [of self-disclosure] from all "others" (*aḡhyār*). The Real has chosen out for Himself from you only your heart, since He illumined it with faith, and it encompasses the majesty of the Real.

When someone gains this description, he sees the possible things with the eye of the Real, so he witnesses them. Even if they are not found in themselves [through existence in the cosmos], he does not lose them. When the light of faith spreads over the entities of the possible things, it may unveil to his insight—or rather, to his insight and his sight—the fact that, in the state of their nonexistence, the entities both see and are seen, hear and are heard, through an immutable sight and an immutable hearing which have no existence. The Real designates whichever of those entities which He wills. He turns toward it, but not toward others like it, through His speech which in the Arabic language is expressed as "Be!" The entity hears His command, and hurries to what is commanded. It comes to be from the word (*kalima*), or rather, it itself is the word.

In the state of their beginningless non-existence (*al-'adam al-azālī*) the possible things never cease knowing Him who is the Being Necessary through His Essence. They glorify and magnify Him with a beginningless glorification and an eternal and inherent magnification. They have no existent entity, while they lose not a single property. Since the state of all the possible things is to have these attributes, which are accompanied by no ignorance, what then is their state in their existence and their becoming manifest to themselves? Is there an inanimate object which does not possess rational speech (*nutq*), a plant which has not realized the magnification of its Creator, an animal which does not attest through its state, or a human being not connected to his Lord? That would be impossible. Hence every possible thing in existence must glorify God with a tongue that is not understood and a dialect that not everyone comprehends. But the people of unveiling hear it, and the faithful accept it in faith and worship, for God says, "There is nothing that does not glorify Him in praise, but you do not understand their glorification. Surely He is Clement, Concealing" (17:44).

In this verse He brings the name of the veil and the curtain, that is, "Concealing."¹⁸ He also brings the name which requires a delay in calling to account until the future and prevents calling to account in the present, that is, "Clement." For He knew that among His servants are those deprived of unveiling and faith, that is, the rational thinkers (*al-'uqalā'*), the slaves of their powers of reflection, those who halt with crossing over (*i'tibār*). They pass from the outward sense (*zāhir*) to the inward sense (*bāṭin*) and separate themselves from the outward sense. Hence they "give expression" (*'ibāra*) to it, since they are people neither of unveiling nor of faith, God having veiled their eyes from witnessing the true situation of the existent things. Nor have they been provided in their hearts with a faith to be "a light, running before them" (66:8).

As for the faithful, the truthful, the possessors of steadfastness among the friends of God, they cross over, taking the outward sense along with them. They do not cross *from* the outward sense *to* the inward sense, but they take the letter itself

to the meaning, without "giving expression" to it. Hence they see things with "two eyes" and, through the light of their faith, witness "the two highways."¹⁹ They are not able to deny what they witness, nor do they reject that about which they have certainty. For God has let them hear the rational speech of the existent things, or rather, the rational speech of the possible things before they come into existence. (III 257.16)

Commentary by Allusion

Ibn al-'Arabī devotes Chapter 54 of the *Futūḥāt* to the "True knowledge of allusions," explaining therein why the Sufis do not always express their teachings in the clearest of languages. The word translated here as "allusion" (*ishāra*) means literally to point to or to give a sign, as for example, to nod the head in agreement. It is used in a single instance in the Koran. When Mary brought the infant Jesus to her folk, they said, "Mary, thou hast surely committed a monstrous thing! . . . Then Mary 'pointed to' the child" (19:29), that is, she made an allusion which he understood, and then he spoke in her defense. In the following passage, Ibn al-'Arabī refers to the fact that the word *āya* or "sign" in the Koran is employed both for the verses of the Book and for the outward and inward phenomena of the cosmos. In mentioning Sufi commentaries which are called "allusions" rather than commentaries, he has in mind such works as *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* ("Subtle Allusions") of Abu'l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072-73).²⁰

When God created the creatures, He created man in various stages (*taur*). Among us are the knower and the ignorant, the just and the stubborn, the overpowering and the overpowered, the ruler and the ruled, the dominating and the dominated, the leader and the follower, the commander and the commanded, the

king and the subjects, and the envier and the envied. God created no one more onerous and troublesome for the Folk of Allah than the exoteric scholars (*'ulamā' al-rusūm*). Yet the Folk of Allah are those who have been singled out for His service. They are the gnostics by way of divine bestowal (*wahb*), those whom He has given His mysteries among His creatures, letting them understand the meanings of His Book and the allusions of His address. In relation to the Folk of Allah the exoteric scholars are like the pharaohs in relation to God's messengers.

Since, in accordance with God's eternal knowledge, the situation in existence occurs as we have mentioned, our companions have turned to "allusions"—just as Mary turned to allusion—because of the people of lies and deviation. The speech of our companions in explaining (*sharḥ*) His Mighty Book, "to which falsehood comes not from before it nor from behind it" (41:42), is allusions, even if it is a reality and a commentary upon its beneficial meanings. They refer it all back to their own souls, even though they discourse about it in general and discuss the mode in which it has been sent down, as known by the people of the language in which the Book was revealed. Hence God combines the two modes in them, as He said, "We shall show them our signs on the horizons and themselves" (41:53), that is, We shall show them the verses which are sent down concerning both the horizons and themselves.

Every revealed verse has two senses (*wajh*): A sense which they see within themselves and a sense which they see outside of themselves. That which they see inside themselves they call an "allusion" in order that the jurist (*faqīh*)—the exoteric scholar—will be comfortable with it. They do not say that it is a "commentary." Thereby they defend themselves against the evil of the jurists and their vile accusations of unbelief. The jurists do that because they are ignorant of the modes in which the address of the Real descends. But in this they follow the road of guidance, for God had the power to state explicitly the interpretations (*ta'awwul*) of the Folk of Allah in His Book, yet He did not do that. On the contrary, He inserted into those divine words which descend in the language of

the common people the sciences of the meanings of election which He allows His servants to understand when He opens up the eye of understanding which He has provided for them.

Were the exoteric scholars to be fair, they would take into account their own souls when they consider the verse with the outward eye which is acknowledged amongst them. Then they would see that they are ranked in degrees (*tafāḍul*) in that. Some of them are better than others in speaking (*kalām*) about the meaning of that verse. Then the one who fell short would admit to the superiority of the one who did not fall short. Yet all of them walk in the same path.

Then, in spite of this superiority which they witness in what they have among themselves, they denounce the Folk of Allah when they bring something which is hidden from their perception. They do this because they believe the Folk of Allah are not men of knowledge and that knowledge can only be gained through the ordinary learning (*ta'allum*) that is well known. And they are right in that, since our companions only gain that knowledge through learning, that is, through a giving of knowledge by the All-merciful Lord. God says, "Recite: In the name of thy Lord, who created, created man of a blood-clot. Recite: And thy Lord is the Most Generous, who taught by the Pen, taught man what he knew not" (96:1-5). For it is He who says, "He brought you forth from your mothers' wombs, not knowing anything" (16:78). And He says, "He created man, He taught him the explication" (55:3-4). So God is man's teacher.

We do not doubt that the Folk of Allah are the inheritors of the messengers. God says to the Messenger, "He has taught thee what thou knewest not" (4:113). He says concerning Jesus, "He will teach him the Book, the Wisdom, the Torah, and the Gospel" (3:38). He says concerning Khadīr, Moses' companion, "Whom We had taught knowledge from Us" (18:65).

So the exoteric scholars are right in what they say—that knowledge comes only through learning. But they are wrong in their belief that God does not teach him who is not a messenger or a prophet. God says, "He gives wisdom to whomsoever He will" (2:269), and wisdom is knowl-

edge. He says, "whomsoever," which means anyone.

But the exoteric scholars have preferred this world to the next and the side of creation to the side of the Real. They have become accustomed to taking knowledge from books and from the mouths of men of their own kind. They think they are of the Folk of Allah because of that which they know and by which they surpass the common people. All of this has veiled them from knowing that God has servants whom He has undertaken to teach, in their inmost mystery, what He has sent down in His Books and upon the tongues of His messengers. This is sound knowledge from the Knower—Him who teaches and concerning whose knowledge no man of faith has any doubt, nor any man without faith.

Those [without faith] who say, "God does not have knowledge of the particulars (*juz'ıyyât*)," did not mean to negate His knowledge of them.²¹ They only intended that His knowledge of a thing does not come to Him newly. On the contrary, He knows the particular things as inserted within His knowledge of the universals. Hence they affirmed that He has knowledge, though they are not among the faithful. They intended thereby to declare His incomparability, but they were mistaken in their way of expressing that.

God undertook, because of His solicitude toward some of His servants, to teach them about Himself through inspiration and giving them understanding of Him. After saying, "By the soul and Him who proportioned it," He says, "and inspired it as to its lewdness and godfearing" (91:8). Hence He made its lewdness distinct from its godfearing, as an inspiration from God to the soul, in order that it would avoid lewdness and practice godfearing.

Just as, at root, God sent down the Book upon His prophets, so He sends down understanding upon the hearts of some of the faithful. The prophets never said anything about God which He had not said to their hearts. They did not extract what they said from their own souls, nor from their powers of reflection, nor did they exert themselves in that. On the contrary, it came to them from God. God says, "A sending down from One Wise, Praiseworthy," and He has just said, "to

which falsehood comes not from before it nor from behind it" (41:42). The root which is spoken about [i.e., the Koran] comes from God, not from man's reflection and deliberation, and the exoteric scholars know that. Hence it is only proper that the Folk of Allah, those who put the Book into practice, be more deserving of explaining the Book and explicating what God has sent down in it than the exoteric scholars. Therefore its explanation will also be a sending down from God, as was the root, upon the hearts of the Folk of Allah.

'Alı ibn Abı Tālib said in this respect, "This is nothing but an understanding of the Koran which God gives to whomsoever He will of His servants." He made this a "gift" from God, and He expressed this gift as an "understanding" from God. So the Folk of Allah are more worthy of that than others.

The Folk of Allah saw that God had given the turn of fortune in the life of this world to the people who deal in outward significance, the exoteric scholars. He gave them domination over the creatures through the pronouncements they make and He joined them to those "who know an outward significance of the present life, but of the next world they are heedless" (30:7). In their denial of the Folk of Allah, "they think they are working good deeds" (18:104). Hence, the Folk of Allah let them have their states, since they knew on what basis they are speaking. Then they protected themselves from these scholars by naming the realities "allusions," since the exoteric scholars do not deny "allusions." However, when tomorrow, the Day of Resurrection comes, the situation in all things will be as the poet said:

When the dust clears
you will see
if you sit on a mare
or an ass.

In the same way, the Verifier from among the Folk of Allah will be distinguished from him who claims to be worthy on the Day of Resurrection. . . .

How can the exoteric scholar be compared with the state indicated by 'Alı ibn Abı Tālib, when he said of himself that were he to speak of the Fātiḥa of the

Koran, he would make it carry seventy loads? Does this come from any place other than the understanding which God gave to him concerning the Koran?

Hence the name *faqīh*²² is much more appropriate for the Tribe than for the exoteric scholar, for God says about the *faqīhs*, "[Why should not a party of every section of the faithful go forth] to gain understanding (*tafaquuh*) in religion, and to warn their people when they return to them, that haply they may be aware" (9:122). Hence God places them in the station of the Messenger in the gaining of understanding of the religion and in warning. It is he who calls to God "upon insight," just as the Messenger of God calls upon insight. He does not call on the basis of the "predominance of surmise" (*ghalabat al-zann*),²³ as does the exoteric scholar. When a person is upon insight from God and "upon a clear sign from his Lord" (11:17) when he calls to Him, his giving pronouncements and speaking are totally different from those of the one who gives pronouncements in the religion of God by the predominance of his surmise.

One of the characteristics of the exoteric scholar in defending himself is that he is ignorant of him who says, "My Lord has given me to understand." He considers himself superior to the one who says this and to the true possessor of knowledge. But he who is of the Folk of Allah says, "God has cast into my inmost consciousness what He meant by this ruling in this verse." Or he says, "I saw the Messenger of God in an Incident, and he gave me news of the soundness of this report which has been related from him and what it signifies for him."

Concerning this station and its soundness, Abū Yazīd addressed the exoteric scholars with his words, "You take your knowledge dead from the dead, but we take our knowledge from the Alive who does not die!"²⁴

The likes of ourselves say, "My heart told me of my Lord." You say, "So and so told me." Where is he? "Dead." "And he had it from so and so." Where is he? "Dead." When someone said to Shaykh Abū Madyan, "It is related from so and so, from so and so, from so and so," he used to say, "We don't want to eat dried meat. Come on, bring me 'fresh flesh'!"

Thereby he would lift up the aspirations of his companions. He meant: This is the words of so and so. What do you yourself say? What God-given knowledge has God singled out for you? Speak from your Lord, and forget about, "so and so related from so and so." They ate fresh meat, and the Giver has not died. He is "nearer" to you "than the jugular vein" (50:16).

The divine effusion is perpetual, the door to heralding visions (*mubashshirāt*) has not been shut, and "these are one of the parts of prophecy."²⁵ The way is clear, the door is open, the practice is set down in the Law. God rushes to meet him who comes to Him running.²⁶ "Three men whisper not together, but He is the fourth of them" (58:7). He is with them wherever they are.²⁷ If He is with you through this kind of nearness, while you claim to have knowledge of that and faith in it, why do you fail to take from Him and speak with Him? Instead you take from others, and you do not take from Him. Why do you not become "newly acquainted" with your Lord? Even rain is higher in level than you, for the Messenger of God exposed himself to the rain when it fell and uncovered his head so that the rain would strike it. When asked about that, he said, "It is newly acquainted with my Lord."²⁸ He said that to teach and alert us.

Our companions have chosen the term "allusion" rather than other terms for their explanations of the Book of God because of a divine teaching of which the exoteric scholars have no knowledge. This is the fact that an "allusion" only takes place through the intention of the one who alludes, not in respect of that to which the allusion is made. When an exoteric scholar asks them to explain what they mean by the allusion, they compare the allusion to a good omen. For example: A person is in a situation in which his breast becomes constricted. He is reflecting upon his situation, and one man calls out to another, whose name is Faraj ["relief"], "O Faraj!" The person whose breast is constricted hears this. He takes it as good news and says, "God's relief has come, God willing." In other words, he will be relieved from this constriction and his breast will be expanded. The Messenger of God did just this when making peace with the polytheists. They had

blocked him from reaching God's House. Then a man came from among the polytheists who was called Suhayl. The Messenger of God said, "The situation has become 'easy' (*sahala*)," since he took the man's name as a good omen.²⁹ And the situation turned out just as the Messenger had augured. Thus everything was put in order at the hand of Suhayl. But his father did not intend that when he named him Suhayl. He gave him the name as a proper name, to distinguish him from others, though he only meant to give him a beautiful name for the sake of good.

Since the Folk of Allah saw that the Prophet took "allusions" into account, they employed them in their affairs. But they clarified their meaning, their place, and their time. They do not employ allusions in their affairs and among themselves, only when someone sits with them who is not one of them, or when the situation rises up spontaneously within themselves.

The Folk of Allah set down technical terms (*iṣṭilāḥ*) unknown to others unless learned from them. They followed a path in these terms unknown to others. In the same way the Arabs employ in their speech analogies and metaphors so that some of them may understand others. Then, when they are together with their own kind, they speak about the situation clearly and explicitly, but when someone who is not one of them is present with them, they employ the words which they have established as special terms. Then the stranger who sits with them does not know what they are doing or saying.

One of the most marvelous things in this path—it is not found in any other—is the following: Every group which has a science—logicians, grammarians, geometers, arithmeticians, astronomers, theologians, philosophers—has technical terms not known to him who comes from outside unless a master or someone familiar with it acquaints him with it. The only exception is this path [of Sufism].

The sincere seeker—and by this they know his sincerity—enters in among them and has no news of their technical terms. Then God opens up the eye of his understanding and he takes from his Lord at the beginning of his tasting, even though he had no news of the terminology they were using. He did not know

that there was a people among the Folk of Allah who employed special technical terminology and that they speak using those terms which only those who have taken from them know. Then this sincere seeker understands everything they are talking about, as if he himself had established the technical terms. He shares with them in the conversation and does not find that strange from himself. On the contrary, he finds it all a self-evident knowledge which he is unable to repel. He does not know how he gained it. But the one who comes from outside, in all the other groups, never finds this unless someone has first acquainted him with the terms.

This then is what is meant by "allusion" in the view of the Tribe. They only employ allusions when outsiders are present, or in their writings and compositions, but no place else. (I 279.7)

Knowledge of Hadith

Ibn al-'Arabī quotes sayings of the Prophet nearly as often as he quotes the Koran. In most cases, these are taken from the standard sources and would be accepted as "sound" (*ṣaḥīḥ*) by the learned masters of the science of Hadith. However, he often quotes other sayings which are not found in the standard collections and which, on occasion, have been condemned as forgeries by some of the learned. Such, for example, is the case of the famous hadiths, "He who knows himself knows his Lord," or "The first thing God created was the intellect." The Shaykh's justification for employing such hadiths is summed up by a remark he makes in passing concerning the famous saying, "I was a Treasure but was not known . . .": It is "sound on the basis of unveiling, but not established (*thābit*) by way of transmission (*naql*)" (II 399.28). Unveiling provides the means whereby the authenticity of such hadiths has been tested.

Ibn al-'Arabī sometimes refers to the great friends of God as the "prophets

among the friends," thereby meaning that they also, like the prophets, receive reports (*khavar*) from God. At the same time he frequently remarks that even reports given directly by God cannot have any effect upon the rulings (*hukm*) of the Law, since only the prophets in the proper sense possess the function of "Law-giving" (*tashrī*). In one of the passages describing the station of the "prophets among the friends," he points to the method in which God gives them knowledge of the hadiths.

The prophets among the friends in this community are those individuals whom God places within one of His self-disclosures. Then He makes the loci of manifestation³⁰ of Muhammad and Gabriel stand before him. Then the spiritual locus of manifestation [Gabriel] allows him to hear as he addresses Muhammad's locus of manifestation with the rulings of the Law. Once the addressing is finished and the heart of the friend who possesses this locus of witnessing is delivered from fright, he perceives through his rational faculty all the rulings of the Law comprised in that address and appearing within the Muhammadan community. This friend takes those rulings just as the Muhammadan locus of manifestation took them. . . . Then the friend is returned to himself, and he has retained in his memory everything by which the Spirit has addressed the locus of manifestation of Muhammad. He has come to know the soundness of that address through the knowledge of certainty, or rather, the eye of certainty (*'ayn al-yaqīn*). He takes the ruling of the Prophet, and he puts it into practice "upon a clear sign from his Lord" (11:17).

There is many a weak hadith which is not put into practice because of the weakness of its line of transmission—because certain forgers (*wāḍi'*) transmitted it—yet which is sound in fact, since in this particular case the forger told the truth and did not forge it. The scholar of Hadith (*muḥaddith*) rejects it only because he cannot rely on that person's transmission. But that is only when this forger is the only person to transmit it, or the hadith goes back only to him. But if a reliable

transmitter shares in having heard the hadith, then the hadith will be accepted by way of the reliable transmitter. But this friend may have heard the Spirit casting this very hadith upon the reality of Muhammad, just as the Companions heard along with Muhammad in the hadith of Gabriel concerning submission, faith, and virtue, when Gabriel confirmed the truth of what the Prophet said." When the friend hears it from the Spirit who casts it, he is like the Companion who heard it from the mouth of God's Messenger, since he gains a knowledge about which he does not doubt. He is different from the Follower—who accepts it only on the basis of the "predominance of surmise"—since there is no suspicion which might impair its truthfulness.

There is also many a hadith which is sound by way of its transmitters and which has been learned by this possessor of unveiling who sees this locus of manifestation. Then he asks the Prophet about this sound hadith, and he denies it and says, "I did not say it or judge by it." Thereby the friend comes to know of its weakness, so he ceases putting it into practice "upon a clear sign from his Lord," even if the people of transmission put it into practice because of the soundness of its line, though in fact it is not sound. The like of this has been mentioned by Muslim at the beginning of his book, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*.³² This possessor of unveiling may even come to know who forged this hadith, the line of transmission of which is supposed to be sound. Either the name of the forger would have been mentioned to him, or the form of the person would have been set up before him.

These are the prophets among the friends. In no way have they their own Law, nor are they addressed with a Law. They are given only knowledge (*ta'rīf*) that this is the Law of Muhammad, or they witness the Spirit descending upon him with a ruling in the Presence of Imaginalization, which is both outside and inside their own essence. In the case of the dreamer, this is called "heralding visions." But the friend shares with the prophet in that he perceives during wakefulness what the common people perceive during sleep. The folk of our path have affirmed that this is the station of the friends—along with other things, such as

acting by Resolve, and coming to know without any created teacher, only God; this is the knowledge of Khadir. If God gives the friend knowledge of this Shari'a by which he worships according to the tongue of the Messenger of God, and He does so by removing all intermediaries—I mean the jurists and the exoteric scholars—then this is God-given knowledge, but he is not one of the “prophets” of this community. Only that one among the friends is a “prophet” who is the inheritor of a prophet in this specific fashion, that is, the witnessing of the angel when he casts to the Messenger.

These then are the “prophets among the friends.” All of them are equal in that they call to God “upon insight,” as God commanded His prophet to do. . . . The like of these preserve the sound Law in which there is no doubt both for themselves and for those in this community who follow them. Among the people they have the greatest knowledge of the Law, although the jurists do not concede that to them. (I 150.13)³³

When man renounces his own individual desire, shrinks from his own ego, and prefers his Lord over all else, then God sets up before him in place of the form of his own soul the form of a divine guidance, a real form from the Real, so that he may walk proudly in diaphanous capes of light. This form is the Law of his prophet and the messengerhood of his messenger. It casts to him from his Lord that within which lies his felicity.

Some people see this in the form of their prophet, while others see it in the form of their own state. When it discloses itself to a person in the form of his prophet, he should let the eye of his understanding

gaze only at what that form casts to him, nothing else, since Satan will never imaginalize himself in the form of any prophet.³⁴ This is the reality and spirit of that prophet, or the form of an angel in his likeness, one who knows his Law from God. Whatever the form says is correct.

We had taken many Shari'ite rulings from a form such as this which we had not learned from the learned masters, nor from books. When I presented the Shari'ite rulings which that form had addressed to me to one of the learned masters of our country, one who knew both Hadith and the schools of Law (*madhāhib*), he reported to me that everything I reported to him had been related from the Prophet in the *Ṣaḥīḥ*. Not a single word was missing. . . .

If the form becomes manifest in other than the form of his messenger, then it goes back to his state, without doubt, or to the specific waystation of the Law at that time and place in which he saw the image of the vision. However, this person sees this in wakefulness, while the common people see that while asleep. He should not take any rulings of the Law from this form when it discloses itself to him in this manner. However, he is not prohibited from taking whatever sciences and mysteries it brings—anything other than declaring lawful or unlawful—whether in beliefs or anything else. For the Divine Presence accepts all beliefs other than associating others with God (*shirk*). It does not accept that, since the associate is sheer nonexistence, and Non-delimited Being does not accept nonexistence. (III 70.23)

18. On the divine jealousy, cf. Chapter 2, note 27.

19. Allusion to the “hadith of the veils”: “God has seventy”—or “seventy thousand”—“veils of light and darkness; were they to be removed, the Glories of His Face would burn away everything perceived by the sight of His creatures.” Ibn al-‘Arabī frequently quotes it in this form (e.g., II 80.34, 110.31, 460.7, 488.10, 542.3, 554.9). The *Concordance* gives a text which states “His veil is light” in place of “God has . . . darkness” (Muslim, *Īmān* 293; Ibn Māja, *Muqaddima* 13).

20. The hadith is found in Muslim (*Īmān* 164) and other standard sources.

21. Allusion to Koran 6:97: “He appointed for you the stars, that by them you might be guided in the darknesses of land and sea.” Cf. 27:63.

22. Ibn al-‘Arabī adds the phrase “in this station” since, from the point of view of another “station” (*maqām*), there is a certain similarity between God and man.

23. Part of the long version of the hadith of the Hidden Treasure, quoted in Chapter 8.

24. Here Ibn al-‘Arabī alludes to the famous definition of *al-iḥsān*: “Worship God as if you see Him.” Cf. Chapter 7, note 13.

25. Reference to several hadiths (cf. Chapter 4, notes 33 and 35) and the Koranic verse, “He is with you wherever you are” (57:4).

26. Another reference to the hadith mentioned above; cf. footnote 16.

27. Here the term one entity refers to the Barzakh, the “entity of the cosmos,” whereas a few lines down it refers to Being, as is more normally the case.

28. For this analogy, cf. II 519.17; III 127.26.

29. I employ the term “corporeous” to distinguish the term *jasadī* from the term *jismī* (or *jismānī*), “corporeal.” Ibn al-‘Arabī often uses the first to refer to imaginal objects witnessed in the World of Imagination and the second to refer to corporeal things of the world of everyday experience. Cf. *Cosmology*.

Chapter 12. Faith and Rational Interpretation

1. As pointed out earlier, this sentence, cited by some authors as a hadith, is frequently given as a definition of knowledge.

2. In a slightly different form the hadith is found in Tirmidhī (*Īmān* 12), Nasā’ī (*Īmān* 8), Ibn Māja (*Fitan* 2), etc.

3. Tirmidhī, *Qiyāma* 60. The hadith is found in several sources in the form, “A person has no faith if his neighbor does not feel secure from his calamity” (Bukhārī, *Adab* 29; Muslim, *Īmān* 73; etc.).

4. Bukhārī, *Janā’iz* 80, 92, *Tafsīr* 30:1; Muslim, *Qadar* 22–24, etc.

5. The hadith is well-known in the form, “You are more knowledgeable in the affair (*amr*) of this world of yours” (Muslim, *Faḍā’il* 143; Ibn Māja, *Ruhūn* 15; Aḥmad V 5, 16, 298; VI 128).

6. On the hadith, cf. Chapter 6, note 24.

7. Muslim, *Īmān* 43.

8. Allusion to the hadith, “If a person sets down in Islam a good custom (*sunna ḥasana*) which is put into practice, he will have written for him the wage of those who put it into practice, while nothing will be diminished from their wages; and if a person sets down in Islam a bad custom which is put into practice, he will have written for him the load of those who put it into practice, while nothing will be diminished from their loads” (Muslim, *Īmān* 15, *Zakāt* 69; Nasā’ī, *Zakāt* 64; etc.).

9. Nature, in the more limited sense of the term (cf. Chapter 8), is the domain of both imagination and sense perception, that is, everything below the spiritual world. The “natural” includes everything which takes bodily form, whether in the corporeal or the imaginal worlds. The corporeal world, in addition to being natural, is also “elemental” (*‘unsurī*), that is, composed of the four elements; but the imaginal domains are natural without being elemental. Cf. *Cosmology*; also Chittick, “Death and the World of Imagination,” pp. 73–77.

10. Though Ibn al-‘Arabī frequently cites the saying, it is not found in the standard sources. Al-Ghazālī among others considers it a hadith. Cf. *Mu’jam* 1263.

11. Corbin has been so successful in getting across the idea that *ta’wīl* is central to Ibn al-‘Arabī that an Arab scholar has written a book on him called the “philosophy of *ta’wīl*” (N. H. Abū Zayd, *Falsafat al-ta’wīl* [Beirut: Dār al-Tanwīr, 1983]). Cf. Chodkiewicz’s review (*Studia Islamica* 60 [1984]: 177–80), which points out that Ibn al-‘Arabī rarely uses the term in a favorable sense.

12. *Creative Imagination*, p. 50.

13. Corbin goes on to say that any mention of *ta'wīl* during Ibn al-'Arabī's era "sufficed to alarm the authorities, jealous of the legalitarian religion and the literal truth." By now the reader will have realized that few of the authorities could have been more jealous "of the legalitarian religion and the literal truth" than Ibn al-'Arabī himself, though this did not prevent him from seeing inward meanings in addition to outward forms. On the question of "Shi'ite leanings" in Ibn al-'Arabī, cf. Chodkiewicz's remarks in *Sceau*, pp. 15, 34, 67–68, 174. The present author agrees with Chodkiewicz that there is no basis in Ibn al-'Arabī's works for suggesting a kinship with Shi'ism on the formal level. Whenever Ibn al-'Arabī mentions Shi'ism, he does so with a certain amount of hostility (cf., e.g., I 282.4 [Y 4,280.8]; II 8.19; III 36.15, 138.9). The fact that the Shaykh expresses a view of certain things similar to what is found among some Shi'ites merely proves that neither he nor they were prevented by literal-mindedness from seeing God manifesting Himself in the cosmos, the Unseen entering into the visible, the spiritual present in the corporeal, or mercy preceding wrath.

14. Allusion to a number of Koranic verses, including 6:57: "Say: 'I stand upon a clear sign from my Lord'."

15. The third son of Saladin, he ruled over Aleppo from 582/1186 to 615/1218.

16. Reference to Koran 13:15: "To God prostrate themselves all who are in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly, as do their shadows in the mornings and the evenings."

17. In employing the more normal sense of the word *tawhīd*, Ibn al-'Arabī claims that none of the groups is able to escape from a certain "association" or sharing (*ishtirāk*) in the question of the acts (III 211–12).

18. In the present context this term seems to refer to the spiritual realities which govern the corporeal world, or to the Breath of the All-merciful itself (cf. *Dhakḥā'ir* 141, 143, 208). Elsewhere Ibn al-'Arabī identifies the world of the breaths with the world which is unveiled during God's self-disclosure (*Dhakḥā'ir* 149, 166, 194) and he defines breaths as the "assaults (*ṣaṭawāt*) of the awe of self-disclosure" (ibid., 68). He also defines "breaths" as the "fragrances of nearness to God" and adds, "When the gnostics smell the perfume of these breaths . . . , they come to know a divine person who has the mystery

which they are seeking and the knowledge which they want to acquire. God sets up within themselves a pole around which their spheres begin to turn" (I 152.14). Ibn al-'Arabī often identifies the "world of the breaths" with the Men of Allah (*rijāl Allāh*), that is, the great friends of God (II 6.21; cf. II 11.9, 425.23).

19. On the determining property of God's knowledge and its relationship to this Koranic verse, see Chapter 17, section on "God's Conclusive Argument."

20. As pointed out earlier, *taklīf*, or the prescription of the Law, comes to an end at death. *Al-Širāt* is usually interpreted to mean the bridge over hell leading to paradise on the Day of Resurrection. On the "inherent worship" of all things, cf. Chapter 18, first section.

21. Cf. M. Schwartz, "'Acquisition' (*kash*) in Early Islam," in S.M. Stern and A. Hourani, *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), pp. 355–87; R.M. Frank, "Moral Obligation in Classical Muslim Theology," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 11 (1983): 204–23, esp. 218–19; *Encyclopedia of Islam* IV 692–94; Wolfson, *Philosophy*, pp. 663–719.

22. In this verse Ibn al-'Arabī reads *maghfira* in its primary, literal sense. The term is usually translated as "forgiveness."

23. Allusion to the hadith of "self-transmutation" (*taḥawwul*) at the resurrection.

24. One of Ibn al-'Arabī's foremost disciples (cf. the mention of him in the introduction).

25. Cf. Bukhārī, *Tafsīr* 6,7; 7,1; Nikāḥ 107; *Tawḥīd* 15, 20; Muslim, *Li'ān* 17; *Tawba* 32–35.

26. Here, of course, Ibn al-'Arabī's analogy is weakened by the picture of the cosmos drawn by modern astronomy.

Chapter 13. Knowing God's Self-Disclosure

1. The definitions of *wayd* given in *Istīlāḥāt* 5 and *Futūḥāt* II 133.13 lack the last phrase and have copyist errors; in place of *muḥniya* the first reads *mughayyiba* and the second *mughniya*.

2. The term *ṣuḥuf* (plural of *ṣaḥīfa*) is employed generically for scriptures. Here Ibn al-

‘Arabī probably has the scriptures of Abraham in mind, since the Koran attributes the term specifically only to Moses and Abraham (87:19), and he has already mentioned the Torah.

3. Farghānī translates *wujūd* as *yāft wa yā-bandagī* (*Mashāriq al-darārī*, p. 18).

4. This is the sign by which each group will recognize its Lord on the Day of Resurrection. Cf. Chapter 19.

5. For details on this cosmology, see *Cosmology*.

6. In respect of their bodies, which are inanimate, these creatures glorify God like other inanimate things, as is pointed out at the end of the paragraph. The “bodies” of angels and jinn are imaginal or “corporeous,” not corporeal. Cf. *Cosmology*.

7. See also II 485–89 (fifteen kinds), 550 (four kinds), 666–69 (four kinds), and III 56.19 (two kinds).

8. Muslim, *Īmān* 291; Tirmidhī, *Tafsīr Sūra* 53.7.

9. Cf. Chapter 11, note 19.

10. The hadith is found in many versions. The closest to that mentioned here is Muslim, *Īmān* 302, *Zuhd* 16; Bukhārī, *Tafsīr Sūra* 4, 8; Ibn Māja, *Muqaddima* 13. Cf. Muslim, *Īmān* 299; Bukhārī, *Mawāqit al-Ṣalāt* 16, 26; *Tafsīr Sūra* 50, 2; Bukhārī, *Adhān* 129; *Riqaq* 52; etc.

11. Allusion to Koran 7:40: “Nor shall they enter the Garden until the camel passes through the eye of the needle.”

12. Cf. *Iṣṭilāḥāt* 6, and the detailed discussion of these three stages in *Futūḥāt*, Chapters 248–50 (II 547–52).

13. The verses are from *Futūḥāt* I 10.26 (Y 1,73.10).

14. Abu’l-‘Abbās ‘Alī ibn ‘Īsā (d. 386/996), a well-known grammarian and Mu’tazilite rhetorician.

15. The hadith is not indexed in the *Concordance*, though Ibn al-‘Arabī often cites it (e.g., I 95.15 [Y 2,102.18]; III 151.1).

16. The term “rust” is derived from Koran 83:14: “No indeed, but what they were earning has rusted upon their hearts.”

17. Allusion to the words, “We lay coverings upon their hearts lest they understand” (Koran 6:25, 17:46, 18:57).

18. The “revelation” (*wahy*) mentioned here is one kind of unveiling. It is not identical with the revelation given to prophets in the form of scriptures. Following Koranic usage, Ibn al-‘Arabī divides revelation into a number of kinds. “Revelation may be given

to every kind of creature, including angel, jinn, man, animal, plant, and inanimate object (*jamād*). Among animals God mentioned the bee (Koran 16:68), and among inanimate objects He mentioned the heaven (41:12) and the earth (99:5)—even if, in our view, everything is alive, for here we follow customary usage according to ordinary sense perception” (II 631.35). In the most specific sense, revelation is the descent of the angel upon the hearing and heart of the messenger or prophet, and it no longer takes place, since there is no prophet after Muḥammad (II 253.3). “In this respect, that which pertains specifically to the prophet and not to the friend is ‘Law-giving revelation’” (II 376.6; cf. *Cosmology*). In a more general sense, revelation is “that which God casts into the hearts of His servants without intermediary. He makes them hear a speech (*ḥadīth*) in their hearts, but hearing does not grasp how it takes place, limits do not define it, and imagination does not give it form. Nevertheless, he understands it, but he does not know how it has come, from whence it has come, nor what is its cause” (II 375.19). In this last sense, revelation is experienced by the friends of God, and it is identified with unveiling or “heralding visions” (*mubashshira*), a term derived from the hadith literature (Chapter 2, note 15). “The revelation of heralding visions is the most inclusive kind of revelation. It reaches the servant from the Real without intermediary, though it may also come through an intermediary. One of the characteristics of prophecy is that it comes through an intermediary, since there must be an angel involved. But heralding visions are not like that. Hence the gnostic servant does not care about the prophecy which has escaped him, since heralding visions remain for him” (III 86.14). But Ibn al-‘Arabī warns his reader to be wary of private “revelations”: “O friend, if you suppose that God has given you revelation, look into yourself for wavering or opposition [to the Law]. If you find any trace of that—through governing (*tadbīr*), differentiation (*tafṣīl*), or reflection (*tafakkur*)—you are not a possessor of revelation. If He exercises governing control over you, makes you blind and deaf, and comes between you and your reflection and governing, while putting His command into effect through you, then that is revelation, and at that point you are the possessor of revelation. Then you will know that He has raised you and elevated your position so that you have reached those animals, plants, and inanimate objects about

whom you say, 'They are below me.' For everything other than mankind and the jinn—in respect of their totality—has an inborn knowledge of God. Mankind and jinn have an inborn knowledge of God only in respect of the differentiation of their parts, like everything other than they—angels, plants, animals, and inanimate objects. There is nothing in man—whether hair, skin, flesh, veins, blood, spirit, soul, nails, and teeth—which does not have an inborn knowledge of God through revelation, through which God discloses Himself to it. But, in respect of man's totality and the properties of the coming together of all his parts, he is ignorant of God. . . . If God were to allow him to hear the speech of his skin, his hand, his tongue, or his foot, he would hear it speaking through knowledge of its Lord, glorifying His majesty and calling Him holy. 'On the day when their tongues, their hands, and their feet shall testify against them for what they were doing' (Koran 24:24). 'They will say to their skins, "Why did you testify against us?"' (41:21). So in respect of his differentiated parts, man is a knower of God, but in respect of his totality, he is ignorant of God, until he learns—that is, he comes to know what lies in his differentiated parts. So he is the knower while ignorant. 'No soul knows what comfort is laid up for them secretly' (32:17). Hence man, in respect of his differentiation, is the possessor of revelation. But in respect of his totality, he does not possess revelation all the time" (II 78.20).

19. Allusion to Koran 35:12: "Not equal are the two seas; this is sweet . . . and that is salt . . . , yet of both you eat fresh flesh." Abū Madyan (d. 594/1197) was born near Seville and went to Fez and then to the East in search of knowledge. He returned to al-Andalus and settled in Bijāya (Bugia), becoming famous for his piety and exemplary life. Summoned to the court at Marrākush because of his fame, he died en route and was buried in Tlemcen. Ibn al-'Arabī frequently cites his words or tells anecdotes about him heard from his disciples, though he himself does not appear to have met him. Nevertheless, he often refers to him as "our shaykh," which would indicate a spiritual if not personal contact (I 251.14; II 11.31, 22.24, 261.16, 505.19, 520.7, 551.29; III 117.19; IV 141.25; other references to him include II 201.21, 222.6, 648.24, 683.3; III 94.2, 130.12, 136.11). Cf. *Sufis of Andalusia*, index; *Encyclopedia of Islam* I 137–38.

20. *Aj'āl nūran*. The Prophet's supplication from which this phrase is taken is found in several versions, usually without this particular phrase. In Muslim, *Musāfirīn* 187, the text reads as follows: "He used to say in his prayer or in the prostration, 'O God, place in my heart a light, in my hearing a light, in my sight a light, on my right hand a light, on my left hand a light, before me a light, behind me a light, above me a light, below me a light, and appoint for me a light' or 'make me into a light'." This last phrase is found as an integral part of the text of the supplication in Aḥmad I 284.

21. Cf. Chittick, "Rumi and *Wahdat al-Wujūd*," which provides a history of the early usage of the term *wahdat al-wujūd* and explains the different meanings which have been given to it.

22. On the hadith of God's self-transmutation, see Chapter 2, note 9.

23. A disciple of Abū Madyan, he was one of Ibn al-'Arabī's important spiritual teachers. Cf. *Sufis of Andalusia*, pp. 69–73 et passim; II 682.33; III 45.16.

24. An "incident" (*wāqī'a*) is a true dream or vision. The name is taken from that of sura 56 of the Koran, which begins, "When the Incident falls—and none denies its falling—abasing, exalting." In the Koranic context the verse refers to the Last Day, when God comes, and all doubt disappears, since things are seen in their proper places. Ibn al-'Arabī says that "Incidents come from inside, since they derive from the essence of man. Some people see them in the state of sleep, some in the state of annihilation (*fanā'*), and others in the state of wakefulness. They do not veil man from the objects of his sense perception at the time" (II 491.6). He identifies Incidents with "heralding visions" (*mubashshirāt*) and the "beginnings of divine revelation." The first of these terms is found in hadiths mentioned in Chapter 2, note 15, while the second derives from a hadith related from 'Ā'isha: "The first thing through which revelation began for the Messenger of God was veridical [or sound] dreams (*al-ru'yā al-ṣādiqa* or *al-ṣāliha*) during sleep. He never saw a dream without it coming [true] like the breaking of dawn" (Bukhārī, Ta'bīr 1, Tafsīr Sūra 96, 1–3; Muslim, Imān 252). Cf. II 58.7.

25. Desiring an object but not attaining to it means that one perceives the object as distant and inaccessible, cold and unkind. Being oneself the object of desire means that one perceives the desirer as loving and warm.

26. A saying of Abū Ṭālib Makkī (cf. Chapter 6, note 13).
 27. On this saying, cf. Chapter 7, note 7.

Chapter 14. Understanding the Koran

1. Passages in which Ibn al-ʿArabī refers to al-Ghazālī in a positive light include II 289.6, 290.30, 496.29; IV 12.18. Passages which may be read as criticisms of one sort or another include II 19.16, 262.10, 622.19; *Dhakhṛir* 181.
 2. The hadith is found in Aḥmad III 128, 242. Ibn al-ʿArabī quotes or alludes to it frequently. Cf. II 299.18, 352.27, 372.14, 510.10; III 103.34, 121.35.
 3. Tirmidhī, *Manāqib* 1; Ibn Māja, *Zuhd* 37; Dārimī, *Muqaddima* 8; Aḥmad I 281, 295; III 144.
 4. The station is mentioned in the Koran: "It may be that thy Lord will raise thee up to a praiseworthy station" (17:79). The Prophet says that he will indeed be given this station in Aḥmad I 398, III 456 (cf. Dārimī, *Riḡāq* 80: "I will stand at the right hand of God in a station for which the ancients and the later folk will envy me").
 5. Cf. Chapter 6, note 17.
 6. Bukhārī, *Anbiyāʾ* 3; Muslim, *Īmān* 327, 328; etc. Some versions add, "without boasting" (Tirmidhī, *Tafsīr Sūra* 17, 18; Aḥmad I 281, 295, etc.).
 7. Cf. Chapter 6, note 17.
 8. Ibn al-ʿArabī and others frequently cite the hadith in this form, but the *Concordance* lists only the following: The Prophet was asked, "When did prophecy become your obligation [or: When did you become a prophet]?" He replied, "When Adam was between spirit and body" (Tirmidhī, *Manāqib* 1; Aḥmad IV 66, V 59, 379).
 9. Ibn al-ʿArabī summarizes the excellencies and superiorities of the Prophet primarily on the basis of Hadith in Chapter 337, "On the True Knowledge of the Station of Muḥammad" (III 140–146).
 10. Allusion to Koran 18:109, 31:27.
 11. The hadith is not indexed in the *Concordance*. Ibn al-ʿArabī cites it again in III 141.7.
 12. Reference to the hadith, often quoted by Ibn al-ʿArabī, "The learned masters of this community are the prophets of the Children of Israel." It is not found in the *Concordance*.
 13. Muslim, *Musāfirīn* 139.

14. Allusion to al-Kharraz's previously quoted saying concerning God's bringing opposites together.

15. Allusion to the Koranic principle, "God charges a soul only to its capacity" (2:286).

16. In al-Tirmidhī, the book on *Tafsīr* begins with a chapter entitled, "Concerning that which has come about the one who comments on the Koran according to his own opinion." Of the three hadiths, the closest to what is mentioned here reads, "He who speaks (*qawl*) about the Koran according to his own opinion has taken up his place in the Fire."

17. The verse is normally translated, "Let him not associate anyone with . . .".

18. The primary sense of the term *ghafīr* is "He who covers and conceals," though in the religious vocabulary it has the technical sense of "Forgiving."

19. Allusion to Koran 90:10. The "possessors of two eyes" are discussed in detail in Chapter 20.

20. Ibn al-ʿArabī was well acquainted with the work of al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072–73) and often refers to his famous *Risāla* (cf. II 117.8, 143.20, 245.17, 537.27, 569.15, 649.30, 679.1; III 213.20, 372.22).

21. The reference is to a position taken by the Peripatetic philosophers; they are "without faith," since they "interpret" instead of accepting the Koran on face value.

22. The term came to be employed in the Islamic sciences to mean "jurist," that is, specialist in the Shari'a, but in the Koranic sense it means "one who understands."

23. The term is employed in the "principles of jurisprudence" to indicate how the jurist reaches "certainty" (*yaqīn*) concerning the rulings of the Shari'a.

24. For more references to this saying, cf. II 253.34; III 140.35, 413.35.

25. For the hadith, cf. Chapter 2, note 15.

26. Reference to the sound hadith, "When someone comes to Me running, I come to him rushing" (cf. Chapter 6, note 29).

27. A slight modification of the verse, "He is with you wherever you are" (57:4).

28. Muslim, *Istiqsaʾ* 13; Abū Dāwūd, *Adab* 105.

29. The hadith is found in Bukhārī (*Shurūṭ* 15) and Aḥmad (IV 330).

30. In this sense "locus of manifestation" (*maẓhar*) refers to the appearance of a corporeal body (*jasad*) in the World of Imagination.

31. On this hadith, cf. Chapter 7, note 13.
32. Pp. 21ff.
33. For a similar passage on the friend's knowledge of Hadith, cf. II 376.11.
34. Allusion to the hadith, "Satan does not become imaginalized in my form." Cf. Chapter 7, note 5.

Chapter 15. Weighing Self-Disclosure

1. See *Cosmology*.
2. For Koranic mentions of God's deception and guile, cf. Chapter 4, note 43. Leading on step by step is mentioned in 7:182: "And those who cry lies to Our signs—We will lead them on step by step from whence they know not."
3. For other references to this saying, cf. II 162.16 and III 8.13 (quoted below).
4. The source of this sound hadith is given in Chapter 12, note 8.
5. Allusion to the hadith, "In the days of your time, your Lord has fragrant blasts of mercy. Address yourselves to them, so that you may be struck by one of them, never afterwards to be wretched" (Süyûṭī, *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḡhīr* II 505).
6. *Raqā'iq*, sing. *raqīqa*. Literally, the term designates something thin, delicate, or flimsy. Ibn al-'Arabī employs it to describe subtle forms or relationships which tie together different levels of existence. He often employs it with verbs from the root *m.d.d.*, meaning to extend or to stretch. "God created rank (*makāna*) before He created place (*makān*). Then He stretched tenuities from rank to specific places within the seven heavens and the earth. Then He brought into existence the spatially confined things in their places to the measure of their rank" (II 582.26). "There are tenuities which extend from the Universal Soul to the Throne. . . . These are like ladders for the angels, while the meanings which descend in these tenuities are like angels" (III 28.32). "Know that there is no form in the lower world without a likeness (*mithl*) in the higher world. The forms of the higher world preserve the existence of their likenesses in the lower world. . . . Between the two worlds there are tenuities which extend from each form to its likeness, such that they are connected and not disconnected. Ascent and descent take place upon those tenuities, so they are ascending and descending ladders.

Sometimes they are called 'affinities' (*munāsaba*)" (III 260.6). Cf. II 80.24, 81.15, 446.12, 680.2; III 14.31, 61.27; *Dhakha'ir* 194).

7. These are four of the five *ḥukms* or "rulings" of the Shari'a. The first two categories mentioned are synonymous.

8. Tirmidhī, *Ru'yā* 2; Aḥmad III 267.

9. Allusion to the already cited hadith, "The veridical dream is one-forty-sixth part of prophecy" (Chapter 7, note 11).

10. On the four natures—heat, cold, wetness, and dryness—cf. Chapter 8.

11. On the hadith from which the term "inblowing" or "blowing" is derived, cf. Chapter 10, note 11.

12. These two prophets have not died but still live among us. "After the Messenger of God, God has left three messengers alive in their bodies within the abode of this world: Idrīs, who was left alive in his body and whom God made to dwell in the fourth heaven—for the seven heavens belong to this world and they remain as long as it subsists, while their form disappears when it disappears, so they are a part of the abode of this world. . . . God also left upon the earth Elias and Jesus, both of whom are messengers. They practice the primordial religion brought by Muhammad. Everyone agrees that these three are messengers. As for Khaḍir—who is the fourth—there is disagreement concerning him among others, but not in our view. All of them subsist in their bodies in the abode of this world" (II 5.25). Cf. Chodkiewicz, *Le Sceau*, pp. 118–19.

13. Ibn Māja, *Zuhd* 3. Later on in the same passage, Ibn al-'Arabī adds a sentence to the hadith which he seems to consider part of it: "They have been ground down by afflictions and encompassed by misfortunes, but they do not waver and they resort to none but God" (II 385.22).

14. Cf. II 566–67.

15. Ibn al-'Arabī explains: "By 'rational madmen', the Sufis mean to say that their madness is not caused by a corruption of their constitution through some engendered affair, such as food, or hunger, or something else. Their madness derives only from a divine self-disclosure to their hearts. The Real comes to them suddenly and takes away their rational faculties. Their rational faculties remain imprisoned with Him, enjoying the bliss of witnessing Him, completely occupied by His Presence, purified by His beauty. They are possessors of rational faculties without ratio-

Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination

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