

IBN AL'ARABI

THE BEZELS OF WISDOM

TRANSLATION AND INTRODUCTION
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PREFACE
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CHAPTER I

THE WISDOM OF DIVINITY IN THE WORD OF ADAM

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

This chapter, as the title suggests, is largely concerned with the relationship between Adam, who here symbolizes the archetype of humankind, and God. More particularly it is concerned with Adam's function in the creative process, as the principle of agency, transmission, reflection, and, indeed, as the very reason for the creation of the Cosmos. The chapter also discusses the nature of angels and the relationship between pairs of concepts essential to the understanding of the creative process, such as universal-individual, necessary-contingent, first-last, outer-inner, light-darkness and approval-anger.

Ibn al-'Arabī opens the chapter, however, with the subject of the divine Names and their relationship with the divine Essence. By the term "Names," he means the Names of God, the Name *Allāh* being the supreme Name. These Names serve, essentially, to describe the infinite and complex modalities of the polarity God-Cosmos. The supreme Name itself, as being that of God Himself, clearly describes the overall and universal nature of that relationship, namely that it is God Who is the real, the Self-sufficient, while the Cosmos is, essentially, unreal and completely dependent. By the term "Essence" [*dhāt*], he means what the divine being is in Itself, beyond any polarity or relationship with a cosmos. This term should not be confused

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with "the Reality," which denotes rather that primordial Being and eternal Perception which unites both polarity and nonpolarity. Thus the Names, including the supreme Name, have relevance or meaning only within the context of the polarity Divinity-Cosmos, and Adam represents precisely that principle which at once mediates and resolves the whole experience of that polarity, being that vital link without which the whole occurrence of divine Self-consciousness would not be possible.

Ibn al-'Arabī goes on to illustrate this Adamic function with one of his favorite images, that of the mirror, by which he seeks to explain the mystery of "the reflection of reality in the mirror of illusion."²⁰ In this subtle image there are two elements, the mirror itself and the observing subject who sees his own image reflected in the mirror as object. Adam, being the linking factor in the process of reflection and recognition of the reflection, is representative of both the mirror and the observing subject, the mirror itself being a symbol of the receptivity and reflectivity of cosmic nature, and the observing subject being God Himself. Thus, Adam is described by Ibn al-'Arabī as "the very principle of reflection" and the "spirit of the [reflected] form." However, Ibn al-'Arabī was not thinking of the specially coated glass mirrors of our day, but rather of the highly polished metal mirror of his own time. Such mirrors served to illustrate better the metaphysical problems with which he was dealing. To begin with, such mirrors had to be kept polished in order to preserve their reflective qualities and, furthermore, it required great skill by the craftsman to make a perfectly flat surface. With such a mirror, therefore, there was always the possibility of surface deterioration and distortion. Thus, so long as the mirror was perfectly polished and flat, the observing subject might see his own form or image perfectly reflected on its surface, in which case the otherness of the mirror itself is reduced to a minimum in the observing consciousness, or even effaced completely. To the extent, however, that the mirror reflects a dulled or distorted image, it manifests its own otherness and detracts from the identity of image and subject. Indeed, the distorted and imperfect image presents something alien to the subject, who then may become involved in efforts to improve and perfect the mirror, so that he might achieve a more perfect self-consciousness. Thus, in the mirror we have a very apt symbol of the divine-cosmic polarity. At one extreme of the relationship cosmic Nature threatens to absorb and assimilate the subject in the infinity and complexity of his creative urge, while, at the other, the

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divine Subject seems to annihilate Nature in the reassertion of identity, each being, at once, another and non-other.

Adam, as the archetype of humankind, is therefore in his essential nature at once the medium of sight by which the observing Subject beholds His own cosmic image or reflection and the medium of reflection by which the cosmic "other" is restored to Itself. As medium, therefore, it is Adam who is the very principle of the polar relationship, and who, as such, knows the Names of God, which he is ordered in the Qur'an to teach to the angels.

The subjects of the angelic state has always been a problematic one for theology. For Ibn al-'Arabī the angels seem to have been particularizations of divine power, whether creative or recreative, beings who, while close to the divine presence, nevertheless had no share in the physical and formal actuality of cosmic creation. Thus, they are purely spiritual beings, quite unlike the bipolar and synthetic Adamic being who alone, of all creation, shares in the Self-consciousness of the Reality. Similarly, the animal creation, as particularization of purely cosmic life, lies outside the uniquely synthetic experience of the human state.

Another image Ibn al-'Arabī employs in this chapter, and which is particularly appropriate to this work, is that of the seal-ring. In this image, man is seen as the seal that seals and protects the cosmic treasure house of God and on which is stamped the signet of its Owner. Thus Adam, as man, is the receptive wax that bears the image of the all-embracing and supreme Name of God, the breaking of which seal means the end of all cosmic becoming.

However, as has been pointed out above, while in the main insisting on the eternal supremacy of the cognitive and volitive pole, Ibn al-'Arabī always returns, as in this chapter, to the underlying mutuality of the polar experience, in keeping with the fundamental concept of the Oneness of Being. Thus, as he points out here, the term "origin" is meaningless without assuming the existence of what is "originated," and so on with all polar concepts, including the terms "God" and "Lord," which are significant only if the corresponding terms "worshiper" and "slave" are implied.

In keeping with this basic premise of Ibn al-'Arabī's thought, it is not surprising to find that his notion of the Devil or Satan is somewhat different from that of ordinary theology. Indeed, he sees the diabolic principle in two ways. First, it is for him that principle which resists the Self-realizing urge to create the own-other object and in-

sists on the sole right of pure spirit and transcendence, this being the reason for Satan's refusal to obey God's command to prostrate himself to Adam, from jealousy for the integrity of pure spirit. Second, it is also that principle which insists on the separate reality of cosmic life and substance and which denies all primacy to the Spirit. In other words, it is that principle which would seek to insist on the separate reality of either pole, at the expense of the other, and thus to impair the original wholeness of the divine experience as the Reality by trying to sever the all-important link between "own" and "other" and consign each to mutually exclusive isolation in absurdity.

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The Reality wanted to see the essences of His Most Beautiful Names or, to put it another way, to see His own Essence, in an all-inclusive object encompassing the whole [divine] Command, which, qualified by existence, would reveal to Him His own mystery. For the seeing of a thing, itself by itself, is not the same as its seeing itself in another, as it were in a mirror; for it appears to itself in a form that is invested by the location of the vision by that which would only appear to it given the existence of the location and its [the location's] self-disclosure to it.

The Reality gave existence to the whole Cosmos [at first] as an undifferentiated thing without anything of the spirit in it, so that it was like an unpolished mirror. It is in the nature of the divine determination that He does not set out a location except to receive a divine spirit, which is also called [in the *Qur'an*] *the breathing into him*.¹ The latter is nothing other than the coming into operation of the undifferentiated form's [innate] disposition to receive the inexhaustible overflowing of Self-revelation, which has always been and will ever be. There is only that which is receptive and the receptive has been only from the most Holy Superabundance [of the Reality], for all power to act [all initiative] is from Him, in the beginning and at the end. All command derives from Him,² even as it begins with Him.

1. *Qur'an*, XXI:91.

2. Cf. *ibid*, II:210.

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Thus the [divine] Command required [by its very nature] the reflective characteristic of the mirror of the Cosmos, and Adam was the very principle of reflection for that mirror and the spirit of that form, while the angels were only certain faculties of that form which was the form of the Cosmos, called in the terminology of the Folk, the Great Man. In relation to it the angels are as the psychic and physical faculties in the human formation. Each of these [cosmic] faculties or powers is veiled [from knowing the whole] by its own self [being limited by its relative individuality], so that it cannot know anything that excels it. It also claims that it has the qualification for every high position and exalted abode with God by virtue of its participation in the divine Synthesis, deriving both from the Sphere of Divinity and the Reality of Realities and, finally, with respect to the formation assuming these characteristics, from the exigencies of the Universal Nature, which contains and comprises all the receptivities of the Cosmos, higher and lower.

This [knowledge] cannot be arrived at by the intellect by means of any rational thought process, for this kind of perception comes only by a divine disclosure from which is ascertained the origin of the forms of the Cosmos receiving the spirits. The [above-mentioned] formation is called Man and Vice-Regent [of God]. As for the first term, it stems from the universality of his formation and the fact that he embraces all the realities. For the Reality, he is as the pupil is for the eye through which the act of seeing takes place. Thus he is called *insān* [meaning both man and pupil], for it is by him that the Reality looks on His creation and bestows the Mercy [of existence] on them. He is Man, the transient [in his form], the eternal [in his essence]; he is the perpetual, the everlasting, the [at once] discriminating and unifying Word. It is by his existence that the Cosmos subsists and he is, in relation to the Cosmos, as the seal is to the ring, the seal being that place whereon is engraved the token with which the King seals his treasure. So he is called the Vice-Regent, for by him God preserves His creation, as the seal preserves the king's treasure. So long as the king's seal is on it no one dares to open it except by his permission, the seal being [as it were] a regent in charge of the kingdom. Even so is the Cosmos preserved so long as the Perfect Man remains in it. Do you not see that when he shall cease to be present in it and when the seal [on the treasury] of the lower world is broken, none of what the Reality preserved will endure and all of it will depart, each part

thereof becoming reunited with every other part, [after which] the whole will be transferred to the Final Abode where the Perfect Man will be the seal forever.

All the Names constituting the Divine Image are manifest in the human formation so that this information enjoys a degree by which it encompasses and integrates all existence. It is for this reason that God holds the conclusive argument against the angels [in their protest at His command to prostrate to Adam]. So take care, for God warns you by the example of another, and consider carefully from whence the arraigned one is charged. For the angels did not grasp the meaning of the formation of God's Regent nor did they understand the essential servitude demanded by the Plane of Reality. For none knows anything of the Reality save that which is itself implicit in the Essence [of the Reality].

The angels do not enjoy the comprehensiveness of Adam and comprehend only those Divine Names peculiar to them, by which they glorify and sanctify the Reality, nor are they aware that God has Names of which they know nothing and by which they cannot glorify Him, nor are they able to sanctify Him with the [complete] sanctification of Adam. Their condition and limitation being what it is, they said, concerning his formation, *Will You put in it one who will work mischief in it?*³ meaning [his] rebellion, which is precisely what they themselves evince, for what they say of Adam applies equally to their own attitude toward the Reality. But for the fact that their own formation imposes this [limitation of knowledge], they would not have said what they said concerning Adam; but they are not aware of this.

If they indeed knew their own [essential] selves they would know [their limitation], and if that were so, they would have been spared [their mistaken utterance]. Furthermore, they would not have persisted in their challenge by calling attention to their own [more restricted] glorification of God, as also their [limited] sanctification.

Adam enshrines divine Names the angels have no part in, nor are they able to glorify their Lord by them or by them to exalt His transcendence, as Adam does.

God expounds the whole affair to us so that we might bear it in mind and learn from it the proper attitude toward Him and lest we [ignorantly] flaunt what [little] individually restricted insight or un-

3. Ibid., II:30.

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derstanding we might have realized. Indeed, how can we make claims concerning something the reality of which we have not experienced and concerning which we have no knowledge, without exposing ourselves to ridicule? This divine instruction [concerning the angels] is one of the ways by which the Reality instructs His most trusted servants, His representatives.

Let us now return to this Wisdom. Know that the universals, even though they have no tangible individual existence in themselves, yet are conceived of and known in the mind; this is certain. They are always unmanifest as regards individual existence, while imposing their effects on all such existence; indeed individual existence is nothing other than [an outer manifestation] of them, that is to say, the universals. In themselves they are always intelligibles. They are manifest as being individual beings and they are unmanifest as being [purely] intelligible. Every individual existence is dependent on the universals, which can [never] be disassociated from the intellect, nor can they exist individually in such a way that they would cease to be intelligible. Whether the individual being is determined temporarily or not, its relationship, in both cases, is one and the same. However, the universal and the individual being may share a common determining principle according as the essential realities of the individual beings demand, as for example [in] the relationship between knowledge and the knower or life and the living. Life is an intelligible reality, as also knowledge, each being distinguished from the other.

Thus, concerning the Reality, we say that He has life and knowledge and also that He is Living and Knowing. This we also say of Man and the angels. The reality of knowledge is [always] one, as is the reality of life, and the relationship of each respectively to the knower and the living remains [always] the same.

Concerning the knowledge of the Reality we say that it is eternal, whereas of man's knowledge we say that it is contingent. Consider then how attachment to the determinant renders something in the intelligible reality contingent and consider the interdependence of the universals and individual existence. For, even as knowledge determines one who applies it as being a knower, so also does the one thus described determine knowledge as being contingent in the case of the contingent [knower], and eternal in the case of the Eternal One, both determining and determined.

Further, even though the universals are intelligible, they enjoy no real existence, existing only insofar as they determine [existent be-

ings], just as they themselves are determined in any relationship with individual existence. As manifest in individual existence, they may admit of being [in a sense] determined, but they admit of no particularization or division, this being impossible. They are essentially present in each thing they qualify, as humanity is present in every human being, while not being particularized or divided according to the number of individual beings [in which they are manifested], remaining [purely] intelligible.

If, therefore, it is established that there is an interrelationship between that which has individual existence and that which has not, the latter being nonexistent relations, the interconnection between one individual being and another is the more comprehensible because they have, at least, individual existence in common, whereas in the former instance there is no unifying element.

It is established that the originated is [completely] dependent on that which brings it about, for its possibility. Its existence is [entirely] derived from something other than itself, the connection in this case being one of dependence. It is therefore necessary that that which is the support [of originated existence] should be essentially and necessarily by itself, self-sufficient and independent of any other. This it is that bestows existence from its own essential Being on dependent existence, in this way becoming related to it.

Furthermore, since the former, because of its essence, requires the latter [the dependent], the latter has [in a certain sense] necessary being. Also, since its dependence on that from which it was manifested is [implicit in] its own essence, it follows that the originated should conform to all the Names and attributes of the cause [origin], except that of Self-sufficient Being, which does not belong to originated existence, since what necessary being it has derives [entirely] from other than itself.

Know that if what has been said concerning the manifestation [of the originated] in the form [of the originator] be true, it is clear that God draws our attention to what is originated as an aid to knowledge of Him and says [in the Qur'an] that He will show forth His signs in it.⁴ Thus He suggests that knowledge of Him is inferred in knowledge of ourselves. Whenever we ascribe any quality to Him, we are ourselves [representative of] that quality, except it be the quality of His Self-sufficient Being. Since we know Him through ourselves and

4. Ibid., XLI:53.

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from ourselves, we attribute to Him all we attribute to ourselves. It is for this reason that the divine revelations come to us through the mouths of the Interpreters [the prophets], for He describes Himself to us through us. If we witness Him we witness ourselves, and when He sees us He looks on Himself.

There is no doubt that we are, as individuals and types, many, and that, though representatives of a single reality, we know definitely that there is a factor distinguishing one individual from another, but for which, multiplicity would not be [implicit] in the One. In the same way, even if we describe ourselves as He describes Himself, in all possible aspects, there would still remain an inevitable factor of distinction [between Him and us]. This [factor] is our dependence on Him for existence, which, in our case, derives entirely from Him because we are originated while He is free of all dependence whatsoever. Thus is He rightly called the One without beginning, the Ancient of Days, contradicting all priority in the sense of existence starting from nonexistence. For, although He is the First, no temporal priority may be attributed of Him. Thus He is called also the Last. Even if He were the First in the sense of being the first-determined existence, He could not be called the Last in this sense, since contingent being has no end, being infinite. He is called the Last only in the sense that all reality, though reality be attributed to us, is His. His Finality is essentially [implicit] in His Priority as is His Priority essentially [implicit] in His Finality.

Know also that the Reality has described Himself as being the Outer and the Inner [Manifest and Unmanifest]. He brought the Cosmos into being as constituting an unseen realm and a sensory realm, so that we might perceive the Inner through our unseen and the Outer through our sensory aspect.

He has also attributed of Himself pleasure and wrath, having created the Cosmos as [expressing] both fear and hope, fear of His wrath and hope for His pleasure. He has also described Himself as being possessed of beauty and majesty, having created us as combining awe [of His majesty] and intimacy, and so on with all His attributes and Names. He has expressed this polarity of qualities [in the Qur'an] as being His Hands devoted to the creation of the Perfect Man who integrates in himself all Cosmic realities and their individual [manifestations].⁵

5. Ibid., XXXVIII:75.

The Cosmos is the sensory realm [both subtle and gross] and the Vicegerent is unseen. For this reason the Ruler [God] is veiled, since the Reality has described Himself as being hidden in veils of darkness, which are the natural forms, and by veils of light, which are the subtle spirits. The Cosmos consists of that which is gross and that which is subtle and is therefore, in both aspects, the veil [covering] its [own] true self [reality]. For the Cosmos does not perceive the Reality as He perceives Himself, nor can it ever not be veiled, knowing itself to be distinct from its Creator and dependent on Him. Indeed, it has no part in the [divine] Self-sufficiency [of being] of the Reality, nor will it ever attain to that. In this sense the Reality can never be known [by cosmic being] in any way, since originated being has no part in that [Self-sufficiency].

God unites the polarity of qualities only in Adam, to confer a distinction on him. Thus, He says to Lucifer, *What prevents you from prostrating to one whom I have created with my two hands?*⁶ What prevents Lucifer is the very fact that he [man] unites [in himself] the two modes, the [originated] Cosmos and the [originating and original] Reality, which are His two hands.

As for Lucifer, he is only a part of the Cosmos and has no share in this Synthesis, by virtue of which Adam is the Regent. Were he not manifest [in the Cosmos] in the form of Him Whom he represents, he would not be the Regent, and were he not to comprise all that his dependent charges require or were he unable to meet all their requirements, he would not be the Regent. In short, the Regency is fitting only for the Perfect Man.

His outer form He composed of the cosmic realities and forms, while his inner form He composed to match His Own form. Thus He says in the Sacred Tradition, "I am his hearing and his sight,"⁷ and not, "I am his eye and his ear," in order to show the distinction between the two forms [the imperceptible and the perceptible]. Likewise He is [implicit] in every cosmic being according as the essential reality [manifested] in that being requires it, providing it is understood that no other being enjoys the Synthesis [of divine realities] possessed by the Regent. It is only by virtue of this Synthesis that he is superior [to all other beings].

6. Ibid.

7. Bukhārī, LXXXI:38.

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Were it not that the Reality permeates all beings as form [in His qualitative form], and were it not for the intelligible realities, no [essential] determination would be manifest in individual beings. Thus, the dependence of the Cosmos on the Reality for its existence is an essential factor.

All is dependent [upon another], naught is independent,

This is the pure truth, we speak it out plainly.

If I mention One, Self-sufficient, Independent,

You will know to Whom I refer.

All is bound up with all, there is no escaping

This bond, so consider carefully what I say.

You are now acquainted with the Wisdom involved in the corporeal formation of Adam, his outer form, as you have become acquainted with the spiritual formation of Adam, his inner form, namely, that he is the Reality [as regards the latter] and that he is creature [as regards the former]. You have also learned to know his rank as the all-synthesizing [form] by which he merits the [divine] Regency.

Adam is that single soul, that single spiritual essence from which humankind was created, as He says, *O Men, fear your Lord Who created you from a single soul and created from it its mate, so that from them both there issued forth many men and women.*⁸ His saying *Fear your Lord* means "Make your outer [transient] selves a protection for your Lord [your inner essential reality], and make your inner [reality], which is your Lord, a protection for your outer selves."

All creation [*amr*] involves censure [negation] and praise [affirmation], so be His protection as regards censure [as being relative beings] and make Him your protection as regards praise [as being identified with the Adamic reality], so that you are of those who act properly and are possessed of knowledge.

Then He, Most High and Glorious, caused Adam to look on all He had deposited in him and held it in His Hands [Active and passive, Essential and formal], in the first Hand the Cosmos and in the other Adam and his seed, expounding their degrees.

When God revealed to me, in my innermost center, what He had deposited in our great progenitor, I recorded in this book only that

8. *Qur'an*, IV:1.

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which he dictated to me, not all I was given, since no book could contain all of it, nor yet the Cosmos as now existing.

Of what I witnessed [in the spirit] and, of that, what I recorded in this book as laid down by the Prophet, are the following chapters:

I	The Wisdom of Divinity in the Word of Adam
II	The Wisdom of Expiration in the Word of Seth
III	The Wisdom of Exaltation in the Word of Noah
IV	The Wisdom of Holiness in the Word of Enoch
V	The Wisdom of Rapturous Love in the Word of Abraham
VI	The Wisdom of Reality in the Word of Isaac
VII	The Wisdom of Sublimity in the Word of Ishmael
VIII	The Wisdom of Spirit in the Word of Jacob
IX	The Wisdom of Light in the Word of Joseph
X	The Wisdom of Unity in the Word of Hūd
XI	The Wisdom of Opening in the Word of Sālih
XII	The Wisdom of the Heart in the Word of Shu'aib
XIII	The Wisdom of Mastery in the Word of Lot
XIV	The Wisdom of Destiny in the Word of Ezra
XV	The Wisdom of Prophecy in the Word of Jesus
XVI	The Wisdom of Compassion in the Word of Solomon
XVII	The Wisdom of Being in the Word of David
XVIII	The Wisdom of Breath in the Word of Jonah
XIX	The Wisdom of the Unseen in the Word of Job
XX	The Wisdom of Majesty in the Word of John
XXI	The Wisdom of Dominion in the Word of Zakariah
XXII	The Wisdom of Intimacy in the Word of Elias
XXIII	The Wisdom of Virtue in the Word of Luqmān
XXIV	The Wisdom of Leadership in the Word of Aaron
XXV	The Wisdom of Eminence in the Word of Moses
XXVI	The Wisdom of Resource in the Word of Khālid.
XXVII	The Wisdom of Singularity in the Word of Muḥammad

The seal of each Wisdom is the Word assigned to it. I have restricted myself in what I have written concerning the [divine manifestations of] Wisdom in this book to what is confirmed in that

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respect in the Heavenly Book. I have transcribed faithfully according as was vouchsafed to me. Even had I wished to add to it I would not have been able to do so, since the plane [from which it came] would prevent anything of the kind. God it is Who grants success and He is Sole Lord.

CHAPTER VI

THE WISDOM OF REALITY IN THE WORD OF ISAAC

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Three very important aspects of Ibn al-'Arabī's thought are discussed in this relatively short chapter. The first of these is the subject of the Imagination, not so much in its macrocosmic and creative sense as an image of the divine Self-polarization, but rather in its microcosmic and recollective sense. The Imaginative faculty, whether macrocosmic or microcosmic, is seen as having two functions, the one creative and existential, the other recollective or recreational and spiritual. In the first case, the Imaginative process absorbs and involves consciousness, divine and human, in the creative urge of cosmic becoming in all its infinitely fascinating complexity. In the second case, by a process of interpretation and realization, consciousness rediscovers and reestablishes its ultimately inalienable and absolute integrity and unity. In the human individual sphere, the first is illustrated by the man whose consciousness is always being attracted outward to material objects, dissipated and absorbed by a multiplicity of "interests," while the second is illustrated by the person who abstracts the objects of sense around him to reinforce and confirm his own conscious identity.

The second process helps to illustrate the qur'anic view of the

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Cosmos as being an infinite display of *āyāt* or signs, the intelligent interpretation and contemplation of which leads one, inevitably, back toward the absolute and unitive truth of God. The point being made in the first part of this chapter is that cosmic forms have two aspects, the existential and creative aspect of cosmic actuality, which seems always to alienate and dissipate integral consciousness, and the spiritual and symbolic aspect, which assists in refocusing the intellect on the archetypal and ideal. In other words, what one perceives with one's worldly and cosmic perception is an image that on the one hand conceals its essential truth, but on the other reveals that truth to spiritual perception. This latter perception requires the ability to leap, so to speak, from the outflowing to the inflowing current of the Imagination, which currents meet in the microcosmic synthesis of the human state, so that man alone is able to make this transition. This means that, in addition to being of both earth and Heaven, man also occupies a vital and important middle ground, the '*ālam al-mithāl*' or world of likenesses in which archetypes mysteriously become translated into existent things, and through which cosmic forms are transformed into spiritual essences—a subtle, fluid realm in which the currents of cosmic becoming and spiritual reintegration meet and mingle. The leap, therefore, that man must make in order that he might use cosmic images as a means of realizing his eternal identity with God is precisely the act of *ta'wīl*, which means "going back to first principles," which means to perceive in cosmic forms that aspect which points, symbolically, to their creator, God. Thus, in short, cosmic forms are not what they seem, but rather what they mean, not what they have become, but what they are *in aeternis*. Although most cosmic forms are, potentially, diabolic in the sense that, in their existential aspect, they may encourage an apparent alienation and separation from the divine principle, that of Muḥammad, as a particular formal manifestation of the Perfect Man who unalterably symbolizes the wholeness of divine Reality, cannot be so.

The subject of the Perfect Man and his manifestation in the form of Muḥammad naturally leads on to the second of Ibn al-‘Arabī's subjects in this chapter, that of the Heart. According to a Holy Tradition, the only thing that can contain God is the Heart of the gnostic. This is because the essential Heart, as opposed to the physical heart, is precisely that synthetic organ which, within the microcosmic context, symbolizes the unimaginable synthesis of the Reality Itself in Its undifferentiated wholeness. While, in his intellect and spirit, man is

an aspect of God, in his body and life, an aspect of cosmic creation, and, in his soul, an aspect of the relationship between God and the Cosmos, it is in his Heart that man may fully realize his inexorable oneness with the Reality, which is the *coincidentia oppositorum*.

The third and last subject dealt with in this chapter is that of the *bimmah* or creative force of the gnostic, that faculty which enables him to link his own particular power of creative imagination to the divine creative Imagination. As has been indicated elsewhere, unless this linking goes together with total self-effacement in the Self, it may lead to the illusion of self-deification, because of the seemingly miraculous powers attendant on the development of such power, albeit that the human *bimmah* can never be anything but partial.

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The ransom of a prophet is a beast slaughtered as a sacrificial offering,
 But how can the bleating of a ram compare with the speech of Man?
 God the Mighty made mighty the ram for our sake or its sake, I know not by what measure.
 No doubt other sacrificial beasts fetch a higher price,
 But they all are less than a ram slaughtered as an offering.
 Would that I knew how a mere ram came to be a substitute for the Vice-Regent of the Merciful.
 Do you not perceive a certain logic in the matter,
 The realization of gains and the diminution of loss?
 No creation is higher than the stone, and after it the plant,
 In a certain sense and according to certain measures.
 After the plant comes sentient being, all know their Creator by a direct knowledge and on clear evidence.
 As for the one called Adam, he is bound by intelligence, thought, and the garland of faith.
 Concerning this said Sahl, a gnostic like ourselves,¹⁰⁴
 Because we and they are at the degree of spiritual vision,
 Whoso has contemplated what I have contemplated

104. Sahl al-Tustarī, d. A.H. 283. Cf. Hujwīrī, *Kashf*, pp. 139–140, 195–210.

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Will say the same as I, whether in secret or openly.

Do not consider words contrary to ours, nor sow seed in blind soil.

For they are the deaf, the dumb of whom the sinless one spoke in the text of the Qur'an.

Know, may God strengthen us and you, that Abraham the Intimate said to his son, *I saw in sleep that I was killing you for sacrifice.*¹⁰⁵ The state of sleep is the plane of the Imagination and Abraham did not interpret [what he saw], for it was a ram that appeared in the form of Abraham's son in the dream, while Abraham believed what he saw [at face value]. So his Lord rescued his son from Abraham's misapprehension by the Great Sacrifice [of the ram], which was the true expression of his vision with God, of which Abraham was unaware.

The formal Self-revelation [of the Reality] on the plane of the Imagination requires an additional knowledge by which to apprehend what God intends by a particular form. Have you not considered what the Apostle of God said to Abu Bakr concerning the interpretation of visions when he said, "I was right in some cases and mistaken in others"? Abu Bakr asked him to acquaint him in which of them he had been right and in which wrong, but he did not tell him.

God says to Abraham, calling him *O Abraham, you believed what you saw,*¹⁰⁶ and He does not say, "You were right concerning what you saw," namely [in seeing] your son, because he did not interpret what he saw, but took it at its face value, although visions require interpretation. Thus Joseph's master says, *If you will interpret the vision.*¹⁰⁷ Interpretation means to pass from the form of what one sees to something beyond it.

Thus were the cattle [symbols] for years of scarcity and plenty.¹⁰⁸ Had he been true to the vision he would have killed his son, for he believed that it was his son he saw, although with God it was nothing other than the Great Sacrifice in the form of his son. Because of this He saved him, because of the mistaken notion that had entered Abraham's mind. In reality it was not a ransom in God's sight [but

105. *Qur'an*, XXXVII:102.

106. *Ibid.*, XXXVII:105.

107. *Ibid.*, XII:43.

108. Cf. *ibid.*, XII:43.

the sacrifice itself]. The senses formulated the sacrifice and the Imagination produced the form of Abraham's son. Had it been a ram he saw in the Imagination he would have interpreted it as his son or as something else. Then God says, *This is indeed a clear test*,¹⁰⁹ that is, a test of his knowledge, whether he knew what interpretation was necessary in the context of vision or not. Abraham knew that the perspective of the Imagination required interpretation, but was heedless [on this occasion] and did not deal with the perspective in the proper way. Thus, he believed the vision as he saw it.

Taqī b. al-Mukhallad,¹¹⁰ the Imam and author of the *Musnad*, heard that the Apostle had said, "Whoever sees me in sleep has seen me in waking, for the Devil cannot take my form upon himself."¹¹¹ Accordingly Taqī b. Mukhallad saw him [in sleep] and the Prophet was giving him milk to drink. He believed the vision superficially, and made himself vomit [to prove its truth]. Had he penetrated to the meaning of his vision, the milk would have been [what it represented] knowledge, but God denied him much knowledge because he had drunk it as milk.

Have you not considered that when the Prophet was brought a bowl of milk in a dream he said [of it], "I drank of it until I was completely sated, and the rest I gave to 'Umar."¹¹² It was said to him, "What is your interpretation, O Apostle of God?" He said, "Knowledge," nor did he simply take it as milk according to the form he saw, because of his knowledge of the perspective of vision and the necessity to interpret [what is seen].

It is well known that the form of the Prophet perceived by the senses is buried in Madinah and that the spiritual form and subtle essence have never been seen by anyone of anyone, nor yet his own, as is the case with every spirit. The spirit of the Prophet appears to one in the form of his body when he died, albeit unaffected by decay; indeed, it is Muhammad appearing as spirit in a corporeal form resembling the buried body, which form Satan is unable to assume, as a protection from God for the recipient of the vision. Thus, whoever sees him in this way accepts from him all he commands or forbids and all he says, as he would accept his precepts in this world according to

109. Ibid., II:49.

110. An Andalusian Traditionist who died in A.H. 276. Cf. Hajji Khalīfah, *Kashf al-zunūn* [1943], II, 1679.

111. Muslim, XLII:12.

112. Hanbal II:83, 154.

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whether the sense of the words is explicit or implicit, or in whatever sense they are. If, on the other hand, he gives him something, its [form] is a matter for interpretation. If, however, that thing proves the same in the sensory world as in the imagination, the vision is one that does not require interpretation, which is how Abraham, the Intimate, and Taqī b. Mukhallad dealt with what they saw.

Since, then, the vision has these two aspects and since God has taught us by what he did with Abraham and what He said to him, which teaching is connected to the station of Prophecy, we know, in respect of any vision we may have of the Reality in a form unacceptable to the reason, that we must interpret that form in accordance with a doctrinal concept of the Reality, either from the standpoint of the recipient of the vision or the [cosmic] context [of the vision] or both. If, however, reason does not reject it, we accept it as we see it, even as we shall see the Reality in the Hereafter.

In every abode [of being, becoming] the Unique, the Merciful has forms, whether hidden or manifest.

If you say, "This is the Reality," you have spoken the truth, if "something other," you are interpreting.

His determination applies in every abode equally,

Indeed, He is [ever] unfolding His Reality to creation.

When He manifests Himself to the sight, reason rushes to bring proof against it [Him].

He is accepted as manifested on the intellectual plane as also in the imagination, but direct vision sees true.

Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī said with respect to this station, "If the Throne and all that surrounds it, multiplied a hundred million times, were to be in one of the many corners of the Heart of the gnostic, he would not be aware of it."¹¹³ This was the scope of Abū Yazīd in the realm of corporeal forms. I say, however, that, were limitless existence, if its limit could be imagined, together with the essence that brought it into existence, to be put into one of the corners of the Heart of the gnostic, he would have no consciousness of it. It is established that the Heart encompasses the Reality, but though it be filled,

113. Al-Bistāmī [d. A.D. 874] was a celebrated "ecstatic" mystic whose utterances often offended the religious establishment. Cf. R. C. Zaehner, *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism*, London, 1960, pp. 93–134, 198–218; also Huwjīrī, *Kashf*, pp. 106–108.

it thirsts on, as Abū Yazīd has said. We have alluded to this station as follows:

O He Who creates things in Himself, You comprise all You create.

Though You create beings without limit within Yourself,
You are both the Restricted and the All-Encompassing.

Were all the creation of God in my heart, its brilliant dawn
would not shine there.

Whoso embraces the Reality can contain all creatures,
What then is the true situation, O Hearing One?

Every man creates by his fancy in the Imaginative faculty that which has existence nowhere else, this being a common facility. The gnostic, however, by his Concentration, creates that which has existence beyond the origin of the Concentration, indeed, the Concentration continues to maintain its existence, which depletes it in no way at all. Should the attention of the gnostic be deflected from the maintenance of what he has created, it will cease to exist, unless the gnostic commands all planes [of existence], in which case such deflection does not arise, since [at all times] he is present on some plane or another. When the gnostic who has such a command creates something by his Concentration, it is manifest in his form on every plane. In this case the forms [each on a different plane] maintain each other, so that if the gnostic is absent on a certain plane or planes, while present on another or others, all the forms [on all the planes] are maintained by the form on the plane to which his attention is given; lack of attention is never total, either with the generality of men or the elite.

Thus, I have expounded here a mystery that the Folk have always guarded from exposition, because it would seem to contradict their claim to be one with the Reality. The Reality is never unattentive, while the servant is always inattentive to something or other. With respect to the maintenance of something he has created, the gnostic may say, "I am the Reality,"¹¹⁴ but his maintenance of that thing cannot be compared to the maintenance exercised by the Reality. The difference between the two we have already explained, since to the extent that he is inattentive to some form on its plane, he is a

114. This was perhaps the most famous utterance of al-Hallāj [d. A.D. 922], which brought about his execution. Cf. L. Massignon, *La Passion d'Al-Hallaj*, Paris, 1922.

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servant as distinct from the Reality. The distinction remains even when we take account of the fact that attention to a single form on a particular plane assures the maintenance of all the other forms, for this is maintenance by implication. The maintenance by the Reality of His creation is of this kind, since He maintains each form Himself [at all times].

This whole question, as I have been told, has never previously been committed to writing, either by me or any other, until now. It is indeed unique and without precedent. Take care lest you forget this, for that plane in which you remain present with the form may be compared to the Book of which God said, *We have missed nothing in the Book*,¹¹⁵ for it comprises all that has come to pass [into being] and all that has not come to pass. Only he will truly know what we have said whose essential self is a united totality [*qur'an*]. For one who fears God, *He will make a discrimination for him*,¹¹⁶ and he is as we have mentioned in discussing the distinction between servant and Lord. This discrimination is the loftiest discrimination.

At the time the servant is a Lord, without a doubt,
At the time the servant is a servant, most certainly.
If servant, he encompasses the Reality,
If Lord, he is in a lowly state.
As servant he perceives the essential self
And hopes range widely from him.
As Lord he sees all creation, both lower and higher,
Making demands on him.
In himself he is quite unable to answer their demands,
And for this reason you may see gnostics weeping.
So be the servant of a Lord, not Lord of a servant,
Lest you fall into Hell Fire.

115. *Qur'an*, VI:38.

116. *Ibid.*, VIII:29.

CHAPTER IX

THE WISDOM OF LIGHT IN THE WORD OF JOSEPH

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Although the chapter begins with a discussion of the subject of the Imagination, with special reference to the dreams and visions of Joseph, the main theme of the chapter is, as the title suggests, the divine Light and the cosmic shadow.

Much of what he says here regarding symbols and the necessity for their interpretation is similar to material on the same subject in the chapter on Isaac [Chapter 6]. Ibn al-'Arabī does, however, introduce us here to another aspect of the subject of the Imagination, namely its twofold character in the human state. In other words, man, as the microcosmic image of the macrocosm, experiences the Imaginative process both as being part of the greater creative process and also as having within himself an imaginative faculty. Thus, as our author says, man experiences "an imagination within an Imagination," his own microcosmic "dream" being part of the greater macrocosmic "dream." Here we are introduced to Ibn al-'Arabī's view of the creative situation as a state of sleep in which the created Cosmos is seen as the divine dream, of which human experience is the microcosmic image. The whole creative situation, therefore, which requires the device of "the other" to effect its purpose, may be viewed as a kind of divine dreaming in which the illusion of something that is "not I" is presented to the divine consciousness as the reflection of

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His own possibility. The waking state in this context is the inalienable state of the Oneness of Being.

The major theme of this chapter is that of the divine Light and the corresponding image of the cosmic shadow. Light is seen here as being yet another agency of creation, similar to the Breath of the Merciful, the Imagination, or the mirror. It is that power which illuminates or makes apparent the nonexistent and latent archetypes of God's knowledge, as created Cosmos. In a certain sense, however, it is also a symbol for the divinity Itself as Creator. The image of the cosmic shadow is rather more complicated, since Ibn al-'Arabī views its significance in two ways.

First, the shadow is seen as an image of the Cosmos itself, as being in a certain sense detached and apparently separate from God, while being ultimately an absurdity without His Light. Second, it is seen as an image of the unmanifested state of the latent essences of the Cosmos *in divinis*. In other words, he views the shadow's quality of darkness and obscurity both as an indication of the apparent distance of the Cosmos from God, as also its obscuring, by its formal complexity, of divine reality, and as a symbol of the occultation and nonexistence of the uncreated and unmanifested essences of the Cosmos in God. Thus, the shadow, whether as image of the created or, as yet, uncreated Cosmos is, in different ways, nothing other than God, either as reflecting image or as inherent content of knowledge. Another way in which he tries to explain the relationship in this chapter is to use the interaction of light and color, whether as potential and latent in its unillumined state or as illumined in all its variety of shades, so illustrating the mutual dependence of light and color, of light for its differentiation and of color for its manifestation.

Ibn al-'Arabī concludes the chapter with further discussion regarding the difference between the Reality as God in His relationship with created beings through His Names, and the Reality as Essence that transcends the whole creative process.

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The light of this luminous Wisdom extends over the plane of the Imagination, which is the first principle of revelation according to the people of Providence.

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'Āishah [God be pleased with her] said, "Revelation began with the Apostle of God as the Verdicial Vision, which was [as clear] as the breaking of dawn every time he saw it, there being no obscurity."¹⁴⁵ 'Āishah's knowledge went no further than this. She added that he had been in this state for a period of six months after which the Angel [Gabriel] came to him. What she did not know was that the Apostle of God had said, "Men sleep and when they died they shall awake,"¹⁴⁶ all that is seen in sleep being of a similar nature, although the conditions are different. She stated a period of six months, whereas [in truth] his whole earthly life was after this fashion, [earthly existence] being a dream within a dream.

All things of this kind come within the realm of the Imagination, because of which they are interpreted. That means that something that of itself has a certain form appears in another form, so that the interpreter proceeds from the form seen by the dreamer to the form of the thing in itself, if he is successful, as for example the appearance of knowledge in the form of milk. Thus, he [the Apostle] proceeded in his interpretation from the form of milk to the form of knowledge, thus transposing [the real meaning of both] from one plane to another, the proper transposition of the milk form being to the form of knowledge.

When the Apostle used to receive a revelation he was withdrawn from all usual sensations, covered with a cloak, and [in all but his body] absent from all present. When the revelation ceased he was restored [to the sensory world]. What he perceived [in this state] he perceived only in the plane of the Imagination, except that he was not considered to be sleeping. In the same way the appearance of the Angel to him as a man was also from the plane of the Imagination, since he [Gabriel] is not a man but an angel who took on himself human form. This [form] was transposed by the beholder with gnosis to its own true form. He said, "It is Gabriel who has come to teach you your religion"; he had also said, "Return the man's greeting," calling him a man because of the form in which he appeared to them. Then he said, "This is Gabriel,"¹⁴⁷ [this time] taking into account the original form of the imaginative human form. He was right in both cases,

145. Bukhārī, I:3.

146. I have not been able to trace the source of this tradition, although it is frequently quoted by Sufi authors.

147. Muslim, I:1.

right from the viewpoint of the physical eye and right also in that it was, without doubt, Gabriel.

Joseph said, *I saw eleven stars and the sun and moon prostrating before me.*¹⁴⁸ He saw his brothers in the form of stars and saw his father and aunt as the sun and the moon. This is the viewpoint of Joseph. However, had it been so from the standpoint of those seen, the manifestation of his brothers as stars and his father and aunt as the sun and the moon would have been according to their wishes. Thus, since they had no knowledge of what Joseph saw, Joseph's perception [of what he saw] took place through his own imaginative faculty. When Joseph told Jacob of his vision, Jacob knew the situation and said, *My son, do not relate your vision to your brothers, lest they conspire against you.*¹⁴⁹ Then he goes on to absolve his sons of conspiracy and to lay it at Satan's door, who is the very essence of conspiracy, saying, *Surely Satan is Man's certain foe,*¹⁵⁰ which is outwardly so.

Much later on Joseph said, *This is the original meaning of my vision, which my Lord has made true,*¹⁵¹ that is, He has made it manifest to the senses, being previously in a form from the Imagination. Concerning this, the Prophet Muhammad said, "Men sleep," while Joseph said, *My Lord has made it true,*¹⁵² since he [in relation to what the Prophet said] is in the position of one who dreams that he has waked from a dream and proceeds to interpret it. Such a one does not know that he is still asleep and dreaming, but when he does wake, he says, "I saw such and such, which, dreaming that I had waked, I interpreted." Joseph's situation is similar to this.

Consider then the difference between the perception of Muhammad and that of Joseph when he said, *This is the real meaning of my vision, which my Lord has made true,*¹⁵³ by which he means sensible. It could not be other than sensible, since the Imagination deals only in what is sensible. Consider also how lofty is the knowledge of Muhammad's heirs! We will elaborate further on this plane, if God will, through Joseph's words conceived in the spirit of Muhammad's insight.

148. *Qur'an*, XII:4.

149. *Ibid.*, XII:5.

150. *Ibid.*

151. *Ibid.*, XII:100.

152. *Ibid.*

153. *Ibid.*

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Know that what is “other than the Reality,” which is called the Cosmos, is, in relation to the Reality, as a shadow is to that which casts the shadow, for it is the shadow of God, this being the same as the relation between Being and the Cosmos, since the shadow is, without doubt, something sensible. What is provided there is that on which the shadow may appear, since if it were possible that that whereon it appears should cease to be, the shadow would be an intelligible and not something sensible, and would exist potentially in the very thing that casts the shadow.

The thing on which this divine shadow, called the Cosmos, appears is the [eternally latent] essences of contingent beings. The shadow is spread out over them, and the [identity of] the shadow is known to the extent that the Being of the [original] Essence is extended upon it. It is by His Name, the Light that it is perceived. This shadow extends over the essences of contingent beings in the form of the unknown Unseen. Have you not observed that shadows tend to be black, which indicates their imperceptibility [as regards content] by reason of the remote relationship between them and their origins? If the source of the shadow is white, the shadow itself is still so [i.e., black].

Do you not also observe that mountains distant from the observer appear to be black, while being in themselves other than the color seen? The cause is only the distance. The same is the case with the blueness of the sky, which is also the effect of distance on the senses with respect to nonluminous bodies. In the same way the essences of contingent beings are not luminous, being nonexistent, albeit latent. They may not be described as existing because existence is light. Furthermore, even luminous bodies are rendered, by distance, small to the senses, which is another effect of distance. Such bodies are perceived by the senses as small, while being in themselves large. For example, the evidence is that the sun is 160 times the size of the Earth, while, to the eye, it is no larger than a shield. This is also the effect of distance.

No more is known of the Cosmos than is known from a shadow, and ~~no~~ more is known of the Reality than one knows of the origin of a shadow. Insofar as He has a shadow, He is known, but insofar as the form of the one casting the shadow is not perceived in the shadow, the Reality is not known. For this reason we say that the Reality is known to us in one sense and unknown in another.

Have you not seen how your Lord extends the shade; if He so willed He would make it stay,¹⁵⁴ that is, it would be in Him potentially, which is to say that the Reality does not reveal Himself to the contingent beings before He manifests His shadow, the shadow being [as yet] as those beings that have not been manifested in existence. Then We made the sun as an indication of it,¹⁵⁵ which is His Name, the Light of which we have already spoken and by which the senses perceive; for shadows have no [separate] existence without light.

Then We take it back to Ourselves easily,¹⁵⁶ only because it is His shadow, since from Him it is manifest and to Him the whole manifestation returns, for the shadow is none other than He. All we perceive is nothing other than the being of the Reality in the essences of contingent beings. With reference to the Identity of the Reality, it is Its Being, whereas, with reference to the variety of its forms, it is the essences of contingent beings. Just as it is always called a shadow by reason of the variety of forms, so is it always called the Cosmos and "other than the Reality." In respect of its unity as the shadow [of God], it is the Reality, being the One, the Unique, but in respect of the multiplicity of its forms it is the Cosmos; therefore understand and realize what I have elucidated for you.

If what we say is true, the Cosmos is but a fantasy without any real existence, which is another meaning of the Imagination. That is to say, you imagine that it [the Cosmos] is something separate and self-sufficient, outside the Reality, while in truth it is not so. Have you not observed [in the case of the shadow] that it is connected to the one who casts it, and would not its becoming disconnected be absurd, since nothing can be disconnected from itself? Therefore know [truly] your own self [essence], who you are, what is your identity and what your relationship with the Reality. Consider well in what way you are real and in what way [part of] the Cosmos, as being separate, other, and so on. It is in this respect that the sages are better than one another; so heed and learn!

The Reality is, in relation to a particular shadow, small or large, pure or purer, as light in relation to the glass that separates it from the beholder to whom the light has the color of the glass, while the

154. Ibid., XXV:45.

155. Ibid.

156. Ibid., XXV:46.

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light itself has no [particular] color. This is the relationship between your reality and your Lord; for, if you were to say the light is green because of the green glass, you would be right as viewing the situation through your senses, and if you were to say that it is not green, indeed it is colorless, by deduction, you would also be right as viewing the situation through sound intellectual reasoning. That which is seen may be said to be a light projected from a shadow, which is the glass, or a luminous shadow, according to its purity. Thus, he of us who has realized in himself the Reality manifests the form of the Reality to a greater extent than he who has not. There are those of us in whom the Reality has become their hearing, sight, and all their faculties and limbs, according to signs taught us by revealed Law that tells us of God.¹⁵⁷

Despite this, the shadow [the individual] still exists essentially, for the pronoun used [in the words of the Tradition] "his hearing," refers to him [as shadow] particularly, since other servants are not of this attainment. Such a servant is more closely attached to the being of the Reality than others.

If things are as we have decided, know that you are an imagination, as is all that you regard as other than yourself an imagination. All [relative] existence is an imagination within an imagination, the only Reality being God, as Self and the Essence, not in respect of His Names. This is because the Names have two connotations: The first connotation is God Himself Who is what is named, the second that by which one Name is distinguished from another. Thus the Forgiving is not [in this sense] the Manifest or the Unmanifest, nor is the First the Last. You are already aware in what sense each Name is essentially every other Name and in what sense it is not any other Name. As being essentially the other, the Name is the Reality, while as being not the other, it is the imagined Reality with which we are here concerned.

Glory be to Him Who Alone is evidence of Himself Alone, and Who is Self-subsisting. There is naught in Being but is implicit in the divine Unity, and there is naught in the Imagination but is implicit in [Cosmic] multiplicity. Whoever holds to multiplicity is [involved] with the Cosmos, the divine Names [in their distinctions], and the

157. Bukhārī, LXXXI:38.

cosmic names. Whoever holds to the Unity is with the Reality in His Essence as Self-sufficient beyond all worlds. Being Self-sufficient beyond all worlds, He is independent of and beyond all nominal relationships, since the Names, while implying Him [as the Essence], also imply the realities named, whose effects they manifest.

*Say: He God is One,*¹⁵⁸ in His [Unique] Self; *God the Eternal Refuge*, in respect of our dependence on Him; *He begets not*, in His Identity or in relation to us; *nor is He begotten*, as for the preceding verse; *He has no equal*, as for the preceding verse. Thus does He describe Himself and isolates His Essence in the words *God is One*, although the multiplicity manifest through His Attributes is well known among us. We, for our part, beget and are begotten, we depend on Him and we compete one with another. However, the Unique One transcends all these attributes, having no need of them or of us. Indeed, the Reality has no [true] description better than this chapter, *al-Ikhlās*,¹⁵⁹ which was revealed precisely for this reason.

God's Unity, in respect of the divine Names that require our existence, is a unity of many, while in respect of His complete independence of the Names and us, it is unity of Essence, for both of which the Name the One is used, so take note.

God created shadows lying prostrate to right and left only as clues for you in knowing yourself and Him, that you might know who you are, your relationship with Him, and His with you, and so that you might understand how or according to which divine truth all that is other than God is described as being completely dependent on Him, as being [also] mutually interdependent. Also that you might know how and by what truth God is described as utterly independent of men and all worlds, and how the Cosmos is described as both mutually independent with respect to its parts and mutually dependent.

Without any doubt, the Cosmos is fundamentally dependent on causes, the greatest of which enjoys the causality of the Reality. The divine causality on which the Cosmos depends is the Divine Names, which are every Name on which the Cosmos depends, whether on [a Name manifested in] a cosmos or the divine Essence. Whichever it be, it is [essentially] God, no other. Thus, He says, *O Men, your need of God*

158. This and the subsequent verses quoted here make up Chapter CXII of the *Qur'an*.

159. *Qur'an*, CXII.

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*is total, while He is the Self-sufficient, the Praised.*¹⁶⁰ Besides this it is well known that we are also mutually dependent. Therefore, our [true] names are God's Names, since all depends on Him. At the same time our essential selves are His shadow. He is at once our identity and not our identity. We have paved the way for you, so consider!

160. Ibid., XXXV:15.

CHAPTER X

THE WISDOM OF UNITY IN THE WORD OF HŪD

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Although the main subject of the chapter on *Hūd* is the concept, qur'anic in origin, of the Straight Path, the underlying theme is, as the title suggests, the original and ultimate mutuality in oneness that is the essential nature of reality.

Ibn al-'Arabī uses the subject of the Straight Path to introduce this principal theme. Although the most obvious meaning of the words Straight Path in the Qur'an is as the path to salvation, he characteristically uses this idea to support his own mystical thesis of the Oneness of Being. This Path is, for him, nothing other than the way of inexorable return to the original and undifferentiated state of Oneness that is the Reality Itself. It is in fact Ibn al-'Arabī's explanation of another qur'anic quotation, "And to Him is the eventual becoming," which means that all the infinite possibility of becoming unavoidably returns to its source in pure, unitary Being, and that the whole creative device of polarity and otherness must inevitably melt away to reveal the unaltered and unalterable face of the Reality. As Ibn al-'Arabī says, at the very beginning of the chapter, all things are, without exception, on this Path toward the ultimate realization, not only because all things are inescapably of the Reality, but also because the factor of the divine Wrath, which would seem always to be con-

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demning created beings to perdition and exile, is subordinate and accidental to the all-prevailing Mercy, which ultimately guarantees their essential reality *in aeternis*. Thus, the dazzling and fascinating panorama of cosmic forms in all their contradictions and multiplicity, which at once manifest and obscure the Truth, is always within the embrace of the divine Mercy, however negative and therefore wrathful the secondary and accidental effects may seem.

Perhaps in this chapter more than in any other, Ibn al-'Arabī drives home, over and over again, using various analogies, the relentless logic of his fundamental thesis of the Oneness of Being, that nothing can ever be other than It. Consequently, in other places, he is swift to point out that the concept of the Straight Path itself is deceptive insofar as it suggests the possibility of distance and separation, which is itself no more than a device the purpose of which is to create the polarity by which alone the divine might "enjoy Himself." Indeed, the whole exercise is, as Rūmī suggests, "like flying birds looking for air." In a letter to the celebrated theologian al-Rāzī [Hyderabad, 1948] Ibn al-'Arabī goes so far as to say that the very differentiation between God and creation, so necessary to exoteric faith, is, in fact, infidelity, since it posits two entities, Him and us. This underlying Oneness is succinctly expressed in this chapter when he says that God is our outer form [the Outer] and also the inner spirit of that form [the Inner], so that nothing remains of us as something other than He. Although he has a great deal to say on this subject, both here and elsewhere, Ibn al-'Arabī would have been the first to admit that it is a subject that is, essentially, inexpressible, since human language, being human and formal, cannot by its very nature adequately describe what transcends form, nor can human reason be expected to cope properly with experiences and realities that pertain to realms beyond the human. Much of what he says on this particular subject is therefore necessarily approximate and inadequate to the reality and experience he is trying to describe.

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The Straight Path of God is not hidden,
But manifest universally.

He is essentially in all things great or small,
 Ignorant of truth or aware.
 Thus does His Mercy embrace all things,
 Be they mean or mighty.

*No living being is there but He will seize it by its forelock. Surely my Lord is on a straight path.*¹⁶¹ All things walk on the Straight Path of their Lord and, in this sense, they do not incur the divine Wrath nor are they astray. This is because the divine Wrath, like error, is an accidental [nonessential], all things stemming ultimately from the Mercy, which embraces all things and which has precedence. All that is other than the Reality is a being walking [*dābbah*] [on the Path], since each has a spirit and none proceeds [on the Path] by itself but by another [God]. It proceeds [along the path] following, according to a [certain] determination, Him Who is on the Path [the Lord]. It would not be a path but for the procession along it.

If the creature submits to you,
 It is [in truth] the Reality Who submits.
 And if the Reality submits to you,
 The created may not follow Him in that.
 Therefore realize what we say,
 For all I say is true.
 There is no created being
 But is endowed with speech [expression].
 Nor is there aught created, seen by the eye,
 But is essentially the Reality.
 Indeed, He is hidden therein,
 Its forms being merely containers.

Know that the divine and gnostic sciences possessed by the Folk vary according to the variety of spiritual capacities, although they all stem [ultimately] from one source. God, Most High, says, "I am his hearing by which he hears and his sight by which he perceives, his hand with which he takes and his foot by which he moves along."¹⁶² He states that He is, in His Identity, the limbs themselves that are the servant himself, even though the Identity is One and the limbs many.

161. *Qur'an*, XI:56.

162. *Bukhārī*, LXXXI:38.

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For each limb or organ there is a particular kind of spiritual knowledge stemming from the one source, which is manifold in respect of the many limbs and organs, even as water, although a single reality, varies in taste according to its location, some being sweet and pleasant, some being salty and brackish. In spite of this it remains unalterably water in all conditions, with all the varieties of taste.

This wisdom is concerned with the knowledge related to the "feet" referred to in what the Most High says concerning the spiritual nourishment bestowed on those who properly uphold the Scriptures: *[And if they had observed the Torah and the Gospel and that which is revealed to them from their Lord, they would certainly have eaten from above them] and from beneath their feet.*¹⁶³ For the way, which is the [Straight] Path, is there to be traveled along and walked on, which is not accomplished except by the feet. It is only this particular kind of esoteric knowledge that results in this particular insight into the leading by Him Who is on the Path by the forelocks with His Hand.

And He drives the wrongdoers,¹⁶⁴ who merit the station to which He drives them, by means of the westerly wind by which He purges them of their [separatist] selves. He draws them along by their forelocks, while the wind drives them [from behind] to Hell, [the driver] being none other than their own desires and inclinations, and Hell the distance they imagined [to be between them and the Reality].

Since it is He [their Lord] Who drives them to this abode, they [in truth] attain nearness [to Him], all distance and notion of Hell ceasing for them. Thus they attain [in reality] the blessing of nearness [to Him] in respect of what they have merited [in their eternal essences], being [eternally] wrongdoers; nor does He grant them this pleasurable station as a freely given gift, since it is they themselves who adopt it according as their essential realities have merited eternally by their deeds [thus determined]. Indeed, in performing their deeds they are, nevertheless, on the Path of their Lord, their forelocks being in the hand of the One thus qualified; thus, they do not walk [on their Path] by themselves, but under compulsion till they reach [their] nearness [to Him].

*And We are nearer to him [the dying] than you, but you do not see [Us],*¹⁶⁵ the dying man having sight because the covering has been

163. *Qur'an*, V:66.

164. Cf. ibid., XIX:86.

165. Ibid., LVI:85.

drawn back, and his sight is sharp.¹⁶⁶ In this verse He does not specify a particular kind of person, one who is blessed rather than one who is damned. Again, *We are nearer to him than his jugular vein*,¹⁶⁷ where no particular man is specified. The divine proximity is clearly stated in His Revelation. No proximity is closer than that His Identity should be the very limbs and faculties of the servant, which are the servant himself. For the servant is an attested reality in an illusory creation.

For the believers and men of spiritual vision it is the creation that is surmised and the Reality that is seen and perceived, while in the case of those not in these two categories, it is the Reality Who is surmised and the creation that is seen and perceived by the senses. The latter are as the salty, bitter water, while the former are as the sweet, pleasant water, fit to drink.

Men may be divided into two groups. The first travel a way they know and whose destination they know, which is their Straight Path. The second group travel a way they do not know and of whose destination they are unaware, which is equally the Straight Path. The gnostic calls on God with spiritual perception, while he who is not a gnostic calls on Him in ignorance and bound by a tradition.

Such a knowledge is a special one stemming from *the lowest of the low*,¹⁶⁸ since the feet are the lowest part of the person, what is lower than that being the way beneath them. He who knows that the Reality is the way knows the truth, for it is none other than He that you progress and travel, since there is naught to be known save He, since He is Being Itself and therefore also the traveler himself. Further, there is no Knower save He; so who are you? Therefore, know your true reality and your way, for the truth has been made clear to you on the tongue of the Interpreter [Muhammad], if you will only understand. His is a true word that none understands, save that his understanding be true; the Reality has many relations and many aspects.

Have you not considered 'Ād, the people of Hūd, how they said, *This is a cloud come to rain upon us*,¹⁶⁹ thinking well of God Who is present in what His servant thinks of Him. But God detached Himself from what they said and told them of that which is more com-

166. Cf. ibid., L:22.

167. Ibid., L:16.

168. Ibid., XCV:5.

169. Ibid., XLVI:24.

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plete and lofty in proximity. For, when He caused the rain to fall on them it proved a boon to the earth and a draught for the seed, while they enjoyed the fruits of that rain only from afar [beyond the grave]; He said to them, *This is what you have sought to hasten on, a wind in which is a painful punishment,*¹⁷⁰ making the wind [*rīb*] an indication of what it contained by way of respite [*rāhab*], since by it He delivered them from the darkness of their bodies, the roughness of their paths, and their [spiritual] blackness. In this wind there was an '*adbāb* [punishment or sweetness], that is something they would delight in when they experienced it, even though it caused them pain by separating them from what was [previously] familiar to them.

He brought them the punishment [inherent in their own eternal essences] and it was nearer to them [their realities] than they imagined. All was destroyed by the command of its Lord; *and they were not to be seen in the morning, except their dwellings,*¹⁷¹ that is, their bodies in which their essential spirits had dwelt. In other words the particular relationship of spirit with body ceased and the bodies continued living [the spiritless life of material being] the life accorded them by the Reality, that life of which the skin, the hands, the feet give evidence, as also the tips of the lashes and the thighs. All this is contained in Holy Writ.

God, Most High, has described Himself as Jealous [that ought should exist but Himself], and it is because of this that He "forbade excesses,"¹⁷² which means that which is manifest and apparent. As for that which is unmanifest, it is [excessive] for him to whom it is apparent [in himself]. Thus, He forbade excesses [relative existence], that is, He prevented the real secret from being known, namely that He is the essential Self of things. He conceals it by otherness, which is you [as being not He]. Otherness asserts that the hearing [referred to in the Tradition] is Zaid's hearing, while the gnostic [who sees beyond that to the Oneness of Being] asserts that it is the Reality Himself, and similarly with the other organs and faculties. Not every one knows the Reality, some men excelling others according to [known] spiritual ranks, so that it is plain who is superior [in this respect] and who is not.

Know that when the Reality revealed to me and caused me to

170. Ibid.

171. Ibid., XLVI:25.

172. Cf. ibid., VII:33.

witness the essential realities of His apostles [on whom be peace] and prophets of humanity from Adam to Muhammad [peace and blessings be on all of them] at an assembly in Cordova in the year 586,¹⁷³ none addressed me from among them save Hūd, who informed me of the reason for their gathering together. I saw him as a stout man, fair of form, subtle of converse, a gnostic, a discloser of the realities. What proved this to me was the verse, *There is no walking being but He draws it by its forelock. Surely my Lord is on the Straight Path.*¹⁷⁴ What greater tidings could there be for creation? Indeed, God reminds us of His favor on us in bringing this [verse] to us in the Qur'ān. Then Muhammad, who integrates the whole, completes the tidings in transmitting to us the Tradition in which it is said that the Reality is [essentially] the hearing [of the servant, the gnostic], the sight, the hand, the foot and the tongue, indeed, all the senses.¹⁷⁵ Further, although the spiritual faculties are nearer than the [outer] senses, He contented Himself with what was more distant but known, instead of what was closer but unknown.

God interprets as tidings for us the words of His Prophet Hūd to his people, and the Apostle of God interprets for us God's words [in the Tradition].

Thus, knowledge is perfected in the hearts of those who have been granted knowledge, *and none deny Our signs save the concealers [kāfirūna].*¹⁷⁶ For there are those who would conceal them [God's signs], even though they themselves possess knowledge of them, out of envy, rivalry, and injustice. For our part, whenever God has revealed or informed us [through Holy Traditions] concerning Himself, whether it assert His transcendence or comparability, we always see it in terms of limitation.

The first limitation [to which He subjects Himself] is "The Dark Cloud having no air above or beneath it."¹⁷⁷ The Reality was in it before He created His creation. Then He says, *He established Himself on the Throne,*¹⁷⁸ which also represents a Self-limitation. He then says that He descended to the lower heaven, also a limitation. He says further that he is in the Heaven and on the Earth, that He is with us

173. Cf. *Sufis of Andalusia*, p. 124.

174. *Qur'an*, XI:56.

175. Bukhārī, LXXXI:38.

176. *Qur'an*, XXIX:47.

177. Cf. *Futūbāt*, II, p. 310, Hanbal, IV:11, 12.

178. *Qur'an*, VII:54.

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wherever we are, and finally that He is, in essence, us. We are limited beings, and thus He describes Himself always by ways that represent a limitation on Himself. Even the verse *There is none like unto Him*¹⁷⁹ constitutes a limitation if we regard the *kāf* as simply emphatic, since one who is distinguished from what is limited is himself limited because he is not that thing; to deny all [possibility of] limitation is itself a limitation, the Absolute being [in a sense] limited by His Own Absoluteness.

If we regard the *kāf* as a second qualification, we limit Him. If we take the verse *There is none like unto Him*¹⁸⁰ as denying similarity, we have realized the true sense and the intended meaning, that He is essentially all things. Created things are limited, even though their limitations are various. Thus, He is limited by the limitation of every limited thing, each limitation being a limitation of the Reality. He permeates through all beings called created and originated, and were it not the case, [relative] existence would not have any meaning.

He is Being Itself, the Essence of Being, *He is the Preserver of all*¹⁸¹ by His Essence, nor does this preservation weary Him.¹⁸² In preserving all things, He is preserving His Form, lest aught assume a form other than His Form, which is not possible. He is the observer in the observer and the observed in the observed; the Cosmos is His Form and He is the governing Spirit of the Cosmos, which is the Great Man [Macrocosm].

He is all Becoming and He is the One by Whose
Becoming I become, therefore I say He feeds
On my being, so we are modeled in His Image.
As also, from a certain aspect, I seek refuge in Him from Him.

It was because of the bursting fullness [of the essential realities in the undifferentiated Essence] that He breathed forth [the primordial creative Word *kun*]. He relates the Breath to the Merciful, because by it He had mercy [assented] on the demand of the divine Modes for the creation of the forms of the Cosmos, which are the manifest Reality, He being the Manifest. He is also their inner Essence, being also the Unmanifest. He is the First, since He was when they were not, and

179. Ibid., XLII:11.

180. Ibid.

181. Ibid., XI:57.

182. Ibid., II:255.

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also the Last, since in their manifestation He is their Essence; the Last is the Manifest and the First is the Unmanifest. Thus, *He knows all things*,¹⁸³ as knowing Himself.

Since He created the forms in the Breath, and there became manifest the dominion of the relations, called the Names, the divine connection with the Cosmos is established, all beings deriving from Him. He says, "This day have I reduced your relationship and raised My connection," that is, I have taken away your relationship to yourselves and have returned you to your [proper] relationship with Me.

Where are the righteous? They are those who take God as their protection, He being their manifest form, as being the inner reality of their manifested forms. Such a one is the mightiest and strongest of men in the eyes of all men. The righteous one is also he who makes himself a protection for God, as being His form, since the Identity of God is, in essence, the faculties of the servant. He makes what is termed the servant a protection for what is called the Reality, though perceiving [the truth, namely that both are one], so that the knower is clearly distinguished from the ignorant.

Say: *Are those who know the same as those who do not know, only those with true insight reflect*,¹⁸⁴ that is, those who look on the inner reality of a thing, which is the real object of knowledge regarding a thing. For one who is negligent is not superior to one who is diligent, nor is a hireling to be compared with the servant. If, then, God is a protection for the servant, from one aspect, and the servant for God in another, you may say of Being what you will; either that it is the creation or that it is the Reality, or that it is at once the creation and the Reality. It might also be said that there is neither creation nor the Reality, as one might admit to perplexity in the matter, since by assigning degrees the difficulties appear. But for the [principle of] limitation [in defining the Reality], the apostles would not have taught that the Reality transforms Himself in cosmic forms nor would they have described Him [at the same time] as abstracting Himself from all forms.

The eye perceives naught but Him
Only He is determined [by Himself].

183. Ibid., VI:101.

184. Ibid., XXXIX:9.

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We are His, by Him we exist and by Him we are governed,
And we are in His Presence at all times, in all states.

Because of this [inevitable limitation by definition] He is both denied and known, called incomparable and compared. He who sees the Reality from His standpoint, in Him by Him is a gnostic. He who sees the Reality from His standpoint, in Him, but with himself as the seer, is not a gnostic. He who does not see the Reality in this way, but expects to see Him by himself, is ignorant.

In general, most men have, perforce, an individual concept [belief] of their Lord, which they ascribe to Him and in which they seek Him. So long as the Reality is presented to them according to it they recognize Him and affirm Him, whereas if presented in any other form, they deny Him, flee from Him and treat Him improperly, while at the same time imagining that they are acting toward Him fittingly. One who believes [in the ordinary way] believes only in a deity he has created in himself, since a deity in "beliefs" is a [mental] construction. They see [in what they believe] only themselves [as relative beings] and their own constructions within themselves.

Consider this matter, for, as men know God [in this world], so will they see Him on the Day of Resurrection, the reason for which I have informed you of. So, beware lest you restrict yourself to a particular tenet [concerning the Reality] and so deny any other tenet [equally reflecting Him], for you would forfeit much good, indeed you would forfeit the true knowledge of what is [the Reality]. Therefore, be completely and utterly receptive to all doctrinal forms, for God, Most High, is too All-embracing and Great to be confined within one creed rather than another, for He has said, *Wheresoever you turn, there is the face of God*,¹⁸⁵ without mentioning any particular direction. He states that there is the face of God, the face of a thing being its reality.

By this He [intends] to keep alert [spiritually] the Hearts of the gnosis, lest the transient things of this world deflect them from [constant] reflection on this [truth]; for no servant knows in which breath he will be taken [from this life], and it may be that he be taken in a moment of heedlessness, so that he will not be equal [in the Hereafter] to one taken in a moment of attentiveness. The perfect servant,

185. Ibid., II:115.

despite his knowledge of this [truth concerning God's omnipresence], nevertheless maintains himself, in his outer and limited form, in [constant] prayer, his face turned toward the Sacred Mosque, believing God to be in that direction when he prays; the Sacred Mosque is, in truth, representative of a facet of the Reality, as in the verse, *Wheresoever you turn, there is the face of God*,¹⁸⁶ and [in facing it] one is face to face with God in it. However, do not tell yourself that He is in that direction only, but rather maintain both your [particular] attitude [of worship] in facing the Sacred Mosque and your [more universal] attitude [of knowledge] to the impossibility of confining His face to that particular direction, it being merely one of many points toward which men turn.

God has made it clear that He is in every direction turned to, each of which represents a particular doctrinal perspective regarding Him. All are [in some sense] right [in their approach]; everyone who is right receives his reward, everyone who receives his reward is blessed, and everyone who is blessed is well pleasing [to his Lord], even though he may be damned for a time in the Final Abode. For [even] the people of Providence are sick and suffer pain in this world, though we know them to be blessed among the Folk of God. Thus, there are those servants of God who are afflicted with sufferings in the afterlife in a place called Hell. Despite this, those who possess knowledge and have spiritual insight into what really is do not deny that they will enjoy their own delight in that place, whether by a relief from the pain they suffer, which will be their delight, or [perhaps] a separate delight similar to that enjoyed by the people of Paradise; but God knows best.

186. Ibid.

CHAPTER XI

THE WISDOM OF OPENING IN THE WORD OF ḪALĪH

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Two subjects are dealt with in this rather short chapter. The first is the concept of triplicity, which Ibn al-‘Arabī sees as the basis of the creative process. The second concerns certain symbols associated with salvation and damnation on the Last Day.

In this chapter Ibn al-‘Arabī returns to the subject of number, being here concerned not with the relationship between unity and multiplicity but rather with the process by which singular unity projects itself into the many, so that the many may exist as the infinite diversification of the One. Unity alone is not creative, but sufficient to itself, not requiring anything beyond itself to preserve its absolute integrity. The One simply is, there being in it no implication of becoming or development. Similarly with duality, unless there is a working relationship between the two entities, there are merely two singulārs in sterile and contradictory isolation from each other. If there is a relationship, it is the connecting principle that relates the two entities, bringing their separate qualities together to form a third entity, born, so to speak, of their union. Put another way, this is the familiar triplicity of knower-knowledge-known in which the term “knowledge” as relationship brings together the receptive objectivity of the known and the active subjectivity of the knower to produce the principle of knowledge itself. Although not specifically stated here, it is man him-

self who is precisely the third and relating entity in the duality God-Cosmos, being at once the meeting point of Heaven and Earth and also that entity which symbolizes their union, potentially.

In this chapter, Ibn al-'Arabī describes the concept of triplicity somewhat differently. Indeed, as one might expect, he describes a double or bipolar triplicity that, on the side of the divine pole, consists of the singular Essence Itself, the Will or the urge to Self-alteration, and the verbal creative command "Become!" On the side of the cosmic pole the triplicity consists of the latent essence, the "hearing" or readiness to be created, and the coming into existence in obedience to the creative command. Here the former triplicity is mirrored by the latter, together forming the complete triplicity of the Reality Itself, which consists of Essential Oneness, the urge to polarity, and the actual experience of bipolarity, which itself is eternally being resolved back into the Essence. Once again he is describing in terms of triplicity the process *in divinis* that he has elsewhere described in terms of the Breath of the Merciful, the Creative Imagination, the Mirror, and the Light-shadow relationship. In all of this the difficulty of adequate expression conceals what is really an attempt to describe a bipolarity within a greater bipolarity. That is to say, the creative bipolarity that creates the "otherness" necessary for the Self-realization of infinite possibility eternally inherent in absolute unity is itself, so to speak, one pole of the polarity Essential Unity-bipolarity, both elements of which relate and unite to constitute the Reality in Itself. Ibn al-'Arabī returns to this theme in the last chapter of this work.

Ibn al-'Arabī concludes this chapter with a discussion of the manifestation of the inner in the outer, illustrating this from the qur'anic description of the effects on the righteous and the sinners of the promise of Paradise and the threat of Hell. He seeks to link this section to the first by pointing out that these effects take place in three stages. At the end of the chapter he reminds the reader, yet again, that the outer manifestation of man's cosmic existence derives only from his own inner and essential predisposed determination.

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Among His signs are the riding beasts,
Because of the variety of the paths.

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Some follow the true course,
While others traverse trackless wastes.
The former are possessed of true vision,
The latter have missed the way.
To both there come from God
Revelations of inner realities from every side.

Know, may God prosper you, that the [Creative] Command is essentially based on unevenness in which triplicity is implicit, since three is the first of the uneven numbers. It is from this divine plane that the Cosmos is created; He says, *When We wish a thing, We only say to it, "Be," and it is*,¹⁸⁷ there being the Essence, the Will, and the Word. Were it not for the Essence, the Will, which denotes the particular tendency to bring something into being, and the Word *Be* accompanying that tendency, that thing would not be. Furthermore, the triple unevenness is manifest in that thing by which its being brought into being and its being said to exist may be said to be true. This [principle] of unevenness constitutes its thingness, its "hearing," and its obeying of its Creator's command to come into being. These three [aspects of the creature] correspond to three [in the Creator]. Its latent essence in its state of nonexistence corresponds to the Essence of its Creator, its "hearing" [receptivity] to the Will of its Creator, and its compliance with the Creative Command to His saying [Word] *Be*. It is He, and [as obeying the Command] the becoming is attributed to it. Indeed, were it not able to come into being of itself, on receiving the Command [Word], it would not come to be. In truth, it was none other than the thing itself that brought itself into being from nonexistence when the Command was given.

Thus, the Reality establishes that the coming into being stems from the thing itself and not from the Reality Who is the origin of the Command. Thus He says of Himself, *When We wish a thing [to be], Our Command is only that We say "Be" and it is*.¹⁸⁸ Here He attributes the becoming of the thing itself, at the Command of God, and God speaks true, this being understood in the Command, just as when one who is feared and obeyed commands his servant to stand, the servant stands obediently. With respect to the standing of the servant, only the com-

187. *Qur'an*, XVI:40.

188. *Ibid.*

mand to do so belongs to the master, the standing being the servant's action and not that of the master.

Thus, bringing or coming into being is based on a triplicity, or rather a bipolar triplicity, one being of the Reality, the other of the creature. This [principle of triplicity] pervades to the existence of ideas arrived at by logical proofs. Thus, a proof arrived at by syllogism is made up of three parts in a particular way that inevitably yields a result. First of all the person establishes two premises, both of which include two terms so that there are four terms. However, one of the terms is present in both premises, to link the two together, so that there are [really] three parts because of the repetition of one term in both premises. The proof comes into being when this particular arrangement occurs, which is the binding of the two premises together by the repetition of one term, producing a triplicity. The special condition attendant on this is that the major should be more general than the middle term, or at least similar, if the result is to be true, otherwise it will be untrue. This kind of thing occurs in creation, as when acts are attributed solely to the servant without reference to God, or when coming into being, with which we are concerned, is ascribed solely to God, while the Reality ascribes it to that to which *Be* is addressed.

For example, if we wished to prove that the Cosmos is caused, we would say, "Every originated thing has a cause," in which we have the two terms "originated" and "cause." In the second premise we would say, "The Cosmos is originated," the term "originated" being repeated in both premises. The third term is therefore "Cosmos," the conclusion being that the Cosmos has a cause. The same term, namely "cause," appears both in the first premise and in the conclusion. The special point is the repetition of the word "originated." The special condition is the generality of the [occasioning] principle, which is, in the case of the existence of the originated [being], the cause that, as the major term, is general with respect to the originating of the Cosmos from God. We have decided that every originated being has a cause, whether the middle term is similar to the major term or whether the latter is more general than it and coming within its provenance; and the conclusion is true. The principle of triplicity is thus apparent also in the creation of concepts arrived at by [syllogistic] proofs.

The origin of all becoming is thus triplicity. For this reason the Wisdom of Sāliḥ, which God manifested in delaying the destruction

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of his people for three days, was no vain promise since it came true in the cry by which God destroyed them, so that *they became stricken down in their tents*.¹⁸⁹ On the first of the three days the faces of the people changed color to yellow, on the second to red, and on the third to black. On the completion of the third day, [their essential] natures were ready to receive the manifestation of wickedness within them, which manifestation is called destruction.

The yellowing of the faces of the damned corresponds to the shining of the faces of the blessed, as in His saying, *Faces on that day will be shining*,¹⁹⁰ [stemming] from [the word] unveiled, which means manifested. In this way the yellowness of their faces on the first day signals the manifestation of damnation in the people of Sālih. Corresponding to the redness is what He says concerning the blessed, *laughing*,¹⁹¹ since laughter is a cause of redness in the face, being, in the case of the blessed, a rosiness of the cheeks. Corresponding to the blackening of the skins of the damned is what He says [of the blessed] that they are *joyful*,¹⁹² being the effect of joy on their complexions, as the blackness in the case of the damned. Thus He uses the term *tidings* [*bushrā*]¹⁹³ for both parties [the blessed and the damned]; that is, He tells them things that affect their complexions, causing them to change to a color other than the one they had before. In the case of the blessed, He says, *Their Lord brings them glad tidings of mercy from Him and His good pleasure*,¹⁹⁴ while in the case of the damned, *Bring them tidings of a painful punishment*,¹⁹⁵ each party showing outwardly the effects of this address on their souls. This is because what is outwardly manifest only accords with the inner effect of the sense [of these words].

In truth, they themselves affect themselves even as they themselves come into being of themselves [in obedience to the divine Command]. *God's is the final argument*.¹⁹⁶

Whoever [truly] understands this Wisdom and establishes it in

189. Ibid., XI:57.

190. Ibid., LXXX:38.

191. Ibid., LXXX:39.

192. Ibid.

193. Here he is using both meanings of the root *bashara*, "to give tidings" and "skin."

194. *Qur'an*, IX:21.

195. Ibid., III:21.

196. Ibid., VI:149.

himself and realizes it releases himself from dependence on others and knows that good and evil come to him only from himself. By good I mean what is in consonance with his aim, in harmony with his nature and disposition, and by evil what is contrary to his aim and in conflict with his nature and disposition. He who has such a knowledge [vision] excuses all creatures regarding what they manifest, even though they themselves make no excuse, knowing as he does that all he undergoes is from himself, as we have mentioned previously to the effect that knowledge depends on what is known. Thus, he says to himself when something contrary to his aim befalls him, "Your two hands cast the dye and your own mouth breathed the breath [of your life]." God speaks true and guides aright.

CHAPTER XV

THE WISDOM OF PROPHECY IN THE WORD OF JESUS

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The greater part of this chapter is concerned with the various modes and manifestations of the Spirit [*rūb*] and the way it is imparted to matter and form. In particular, it is concerned with the role of the Spirit in the creation of Jesus and also his powers of revival.

So far, in this work, Ibn al-'Arabī has spoken in terms of the Breath of the Merciful when discussing the creative act, described as a movement of relief from inner pressure within the Reality, the expression of which brings about the existence of the created Cosmos. However, in discussing the nature and activity of the Spirit here, he is concerned with more particular aspects of that spontaneous act of creative expiration. The two most important words he uses in this context are *rūb* [spirit] and *nafakha* [to blow]. In relation to the primordial Breath [*nafas*], the former is its content, while the latter describes a mode of its operation. The Spirit, the root meaning of which, in Arabic, is closely related in meaning to the root *nafasa*, clearly denotes the living reality of God, His living consciousness, which as the active pole inflates, inseminates, irradiates, and informs the dark passivity of primal substance, of original Nature. Thus, it is also clear from Ibn al-'Arabī's treatment of the subject that the concepts of breath-blowing, seed-impregnation, light-radiation, and

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word-enunciation are very closely related in his mind, as they are in the spiritual lore of most religious traditions. It is probably the last of these related concepts, word-inform, that provides a clue to the title of this chapter, since the word for Prophecy in Arabic [*nubuwah*] comes from the root *naba'a*, which means "to inform," a prophet [*nabī*] being a particular and special receptacle for the divine Word, just as, in a more universal sense, the whole Cosmos [*ālam*] is "informed" [created] by the divine Spirit, its multiple forms constituting clues [*a'lām*] from which the "intelligent ones" might learn [*'ilm*] the truth.

The concept of Spirit—like its other complement, the soul, which is its passive and experiential pole—is complicated by the fact that its manifestation differs according to the existential level at which it is being considered. Thus, the Spirit, at its source, is thought of as pure light, while at the physical level it is manifest as the fire and heat of cosmic life, representing, as it does, the pulse of life-reality, the expression of Being, at every level of the divine creation—Self-manifestation. At source, it is pure Identity-consciousness, but as it reaches out further and further it is experienced as commanding Word and impregnating seed.

As elsewhere in this work, Ibn al-'Arabī speaks of the relationship between the Spirit and Nature as being, so to speak, a parental relationship on a macrocosmic scale in which the Spirit is the Father and Nature the Mother. While the former is viewed as active, luminous, and commanding, the latter is thought of as passive, dark, and receptive, that primordial matrix which is ever ready to receive the determining impress of the Spirit. Sometimes this relationship is expressed in terms of the Universal Intellect and the Universal Soul or, in more qur'anic terms, the Pen and the Tablet. Perhaps the best way to explain the difference between Nature and the Soul on the one hand and between Spirit and the Intellect on the other is that the first term in both cases is ontological, while the second term is experiential. Thus, while Nature may be said to be the reality of passive receptivity, the Soul denotes rather the experience of that reality; similarly, while the Spirit denotes the reality of active truth, the Intellect may be seen as the consciousness of being that reality. Thus, within the context of creation and Self-manifestation, we have yet another expression of the polarity subject-object, and their mutual dependence.

In the human or microcosmic context, Ibn al-'Arabī illustrates a

particular and special instance of this relationship in the case of Jesus, who is the product of both Mary, who personifies the "water" of Nature, and Gabriel, who represents by his blowing the seed-word of the Spirit. The creation of Jesus is a special case in that, unlike most men, the Spirit impregnated Mary not through the loins of a mortal man but directly by the angelic instrument, as in the case of revelation to Jesus himself as a prophet of God. His Prophecy, however, or "being informed" by the divine Word, was not only verbal but also vital, in that the spiritual "blowing" of which he was a channel transmits the divine Command in all its modes. Thus, by virtue of the direct means of his being begotten, Jesus was able to communicate the divine Spirit not only verbally, but also vitally, since the Spirit enlivens at every level.

Thus, Jesus was, in a special way, what every man is potentially, that is to say, a spirit enshrined within natural form, which is nothing other than the Spirit enshrined within His Nature. Throughout the chapter, Ibn al-'Arabī is concerned, as always, to explain the paradox of "He" and "other than He," to try to make clear in what sense Jesus, or for that matter anything, is himself rather than Himself, or to what extent it is Jesus himself or God Himself who speaks and revives. This, of course, is the question of the underlying and constantly recurring theme of the Oneness of Being, the essence of which the author finds himself unable to explain satisfactorily because of the inherent polarization of language.

THE WISDOM OF PROPHECY IN THE WORD OF JESUS

From the water of Mary or from the breath of Gabriel,
 In the form of a mortal fashioned of clay,
 The Spirit came into existence in an essence
 Purged of Nature's taint, which is called *Sijjin*.²⁷²
 Because of this, his sojourn was prolonged,
 Enduring, by decree, more than a thousand years.
 A spirit from none other than God,
 So that he might raise the dead and bring forth birds from
 clay.

272. Another name for Hell; cf. *Qur'an*, LXXXIII:7.

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And became worthy to be associated with his Lord,
By which he exerted great influence, both high and low.
God purified him in body and made him transcendent
In the Spirit, making him like Himself in creating.

Know that it is a particular characteristic of the spirits that everything on which they descend becomes alive, and life begins to pervade it. Thus did al-Sāmīrī arrogate [to himself] some of the influence of the messenger Gabriel, who is a spirit.²⁷³ When he realized that it was Gabriel, and knowing that all he touched would come alive, al-Sāmīrī snatched some of it (his power), either with his hand or with his fingertips. Then he transferred it to the [golden] calf, so that it bellowed, which is the sound cattle make. Had he fashioned it in some other form, it would have made the appropriate sound, such as the grumbling of the camel, the bleating of lambs and sheep, or the articulate speech of man.

Now the measure of life that pervades a creature is called divine, humanity being [preeminently] the locus in which the Spirit inheres. Thus humanity is called a spirit by virtue of that which inheres in it.

When the trusty spirit, which was Gabriel, presented itself to Mary as a perfectly formed human, she imagined that he was some ordinary man who desired to lie with her. Accordingly, she sought refuge from him in God, totally, so that He might rid her of his attentions, knowing that to be forbidden.²⁷⁴ Thus she attained to perfect presence with God, which is the [pervasion of] the unseen spirit. Had he blown [his spirit] into her at that moment, Jesus would have turned out too surly for any to bear, because of his mother's state. When he said to her, *I am only a messenger of your Lord, come to give you a pure boy*,²⁷⁵ her anxiety subsided and she relaxed. It was at that moment that he blew Jesus into her.

Gabriel was, in fact, transmitting God's word to Mary, just as an apostle transmits His word to his community. God says, *He is His word deposited with Mary, and a spirit from Himself*.²⁷⁶

Thus did desire pervade Mary. The body of Jesus was created

273. Cf. ibid., XX:86–89.

274. Cf. ibid., XIX:17–21.

275. Ibid., XIX:19.

276. Ibid., IV:171.

from the actual water of Mary and the notional water [seed] of Gabriel inherent in the moisture of that blowing, since breath from the vital body is moist owing to the element of water in it. In this way the body of Jesus was brought into being from a notional and an actual water, appearing in mortal form because of his mother's [being human] and the appearance of Gabriel in human form, since all creation in this human species occurs in the usual way.

Jesus came forth raising the dead because he was a divine spirit. In this the quickening was of God, while the blowing itself came from Jesus, just as the blowing was from Gabriel, while the Word was of God. As regards what was made apparent by his blowing, Jesus' raising of the dead was an actual bringing to life, just as he himself became manifest from the form of his mother. His raising of the dead, however, was also notional, as coming from him, since, in truth, it came from God. Thus he combines both [the notional and the actual] by the reality according to which he was created, seeing, as we have said, that he was created of notional and actual water. Thus, bringing the dead to life was attributed to him both actually and notionally. Concerning the former, it is said of him, *And He revives the dead*,²⁷⁷ while of the latter, *You will breathe into it [the clay] and it will become a bird by God's leave*.²⁷⁸ Now that which relates to the words by God's leave is *it will become* and not *you will breathe*. The words *you will blow* may be considered to relate to them [by God's leave] if it means that it will become a bird in a sensible, corporeal form. The same is the case with His saying, *You will cure the blind and the leprous*, and everything else attributed to him and to God's permission, as also by allusion, such as His saying *By My permission*,²⁷⁹ and *By God's permission*.²⁸⁰ If the word *permission* is connected with *You will blow into*,²⁸¹ then the one who blows is permitted to blow, so that the bird comes into being through the one blowing, but by God's permission. If the one blowing does so without permission, then the coming into being of the bird is by His permission, in which case the word *per-*

277. Ibid., XLII:9.

278. Ibid., V:110. Ibn al-'Arabī has here misquoted the verse, which should read *by My permission*. The words *by God's leave* appear in III:49 where Jesus relates the same event in the first person.

279. Ibid., V:110.

280. Ibid., III:49.

281. Ibid., V:110.

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mission is related to the words *it will become*.²⁸² Were it not for the fact that actuality and hypothesis are both present in the matter, the [resulting] form would not possess these two aspects, which it has because the makeup of Jesus effects it.

The humility of Jesus was such that his community was commanded that *they should pay the poll-tax completely, bumbling themselves*,²⁸³ that if any one of them were struck on one cheek, he should offer also the other, and that he should not hit back or seek retribution. This aspect [of his teaching] derives from his mother, since woman is lowly and humble, being under the man, both theoretically and physically. His powers of revival, on the other hand, derive from the blowing of Gabriel in human form, since Jesus revived the dead in human form. Had Gabriel not come in human form, but in some other, whether animal, plant or mineral, Jesus would have been able to quicken the dead only by taking that form to himself and appearing in it. Similarly, had Gabriel appeared in a luminous, incorporeal form, not going beyond his nature, Jesus would not have been able to revive the dead without first appearing in that luminous natural form, and not in the elemental human form deriving from his mother.

It used to be said of him, when he revived the dead, "It is he and yet not he." Both the sight of the observer and the mind of the intelligent man were confused at seeing a mortal man bring the dead to life, rationally as well as physically, which is a divine prerogative. The spectator would be utterly bewildered to see a mortal man performing divine acts.

This matter has led certain people to speak of incarnation and to say that, in reviving the dead, he is God. Therefore, they are called unbelievers [concealers], being a form of concealment, since they conceal God, Who in reality revives the dead, in the human form of Jesus. He has said, *They are concealers [unbelievers] who say that God is the Messiah, son of Mary*. The real error and unbelief in the full sense of the word is not in their saying "He is God" nor "the son of Mary," but in their having turned aside from God by including [God in human form] in the matter of reviving the dead, in favor of a merely mortal form in their saying [He is] *the son of Mary*, albeit that he is the son

282. Ibid.

283. Ibid., IX:29.

of Mary without doubt. Hearing them, one might think that they attributed divinity to the form, making it the form itself, but that is not the case, having in fact asserted that the divine Identity is the subject in the human form, which was the son of Mary. Thus they distinguished between the form and its determination, but did not make the form the same as the determining principle. In the same way, Gabriel was in mortal form [at first] without blowing [into Mary]; then he blew [into her]. Thus the blowing is distinguished from the form, since, although it derives from the form, it is not of its essence. So do the various sects quarrel concerning the nature of Jesus.

Considered in his [particular] mortal form, one might say that he is the son of Mary. Considered in his form of humanity, one might say that he is of Gabriel, while considered with respect to the revival of the dead, one might say that he is of God as Spirit. Thus one might call him the Spirit of God, which is to say that life is manifest into whomsoever he blows. Sometimes it might be imagined, using the passive participle, that God is in him, sometimes that an angel is in him, and at other times mortality and humanity. He is indeed according to that aspect [of his reality] which predominates in the one who considers him.

Thus he is [at once] the Word of God, the Spirit of God, and the slave of God, and such a [triple] manifestation in sensible form belongs to no other. Every other man is attributed to his formal father, not to the one who blows His Spirit into human form. God, when He perfected the human body, as He says, *When I perfected him*,²⁸⁴ blew into him of His spirit, attributing all spirit in man's being and essence to Himself. The case of Jesus is otherwise, since the perfection of his body and human form was included in the blowing of the spirit [by Gabriel into Mary], which is not so of other men. All creatures are indeed words of God, which are inexhaustible, stemming as they do from [the command] *Be*, which is the Word of God.²⁸⁵ Now, can the Word be attributed to God as He is in Himself, so that its nature may never be known, or can God descend to the form of him who says *Be*, so that the word *Be* may be said to be the reality of the form to which He descends and in which He is manifest? Some gnostics support the former, some the latter, while others are confused and do not know what is the truth of the matter.

284. Ibid., XV:29.

285. Ibid., II:117.

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This matter is one that can be known only by direct experience, as with Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī when he blew on an ant he had killed and it came alive again.²⁸⁶ At that very moment he knew Who it was that blew, so he blew [into it]. In that respect he was like Jesus.

As for revival by knowledge from spiritual death, it is that eternal, sublime, and luminous divine life of which God says, *Who was dead and We made him alive again, and for whom We made a light whereby with to walk among men.*²⁸⁷ Anyone who revives a dead soul with the life of knowledge relating to some truth about God has thereby brought him to life, so that he has a light by which to walk among men; that is to say those that are formed like him.

But for Him and but for us,
That which has become would not be.
We are servants in very truth,
And it is God Who is our master.
But we are of His very essence, so understand,
When I say "man"
And do not be deceived by (the term) "man,"
For He has given you a proof.
Be divine (in essence) and be a creature (in form),
And you will be, by God, a compassionate one.
We have given Him what is manifest in us through Him,
As He has given to us also.
The whole affair is shared, divided,
Between Him and us.
He Who knows by my heart
Revived it when He gave us life.
In Him we were existences, essences,
And instances of time.
In us it is not permanent,
But only intermittent. (But it gives us life).

A corroboration of what we have said regarding the coming together of the spiritual blowing with the elemental mortal form is that the Reality describes Himself as the Merciful Breath, and that all that attaches to an attribute, in the case of something described, should ad-

286. Cf. n. 113.

287. *Qur'an*, VI:122.

here to that attribute. You know that the breath in one breathing is all that it needs to be. Therefore, the Divine Breath is receptive to cosmic forms, in relation to which it is like the Primordial Substance, being very Nature Herself.

The elements are a form of Nature, just as that which is above them and what they generate, which is the sublime spirits that are above the seven heavens.

As for the spirits of the seven heavens and their essences, deriving as they do from the *smoke*²⁸⁸ they [the elements] generate, they, as also the angels, which come into being from each heaven, are elemental. These angels are elemental, while the ones above them are of Nature. It is for this reason that God has described them, that is the heavenly host, as being in conflict, Nature itself being self-contradictory. Indeed it is the Breath that has brought about the mutual conflict among the divine Names, which are relationships. Consider, however, how the divine Essence, which is beyond this regime [of conflict], is characterized by [utter] Self-sufficiency, beyond all need of the Cosmos. Because of this the Cosmos has been set forth in the form of its Creator, which is nothing other than the divine Breath. To the extent that it is hot, it is high, while to the extent that it is cold and moist, it is low. According as it is dry, it is fixed and does not move, since precipitation relates to cold and moisture. Consider how the physician, when he wishes to prescribe a potion for a patient, looks first at the sedentation of the urine. When he sees that it is precipitating he knows maturation is complete and prescribes the medicine to accelerate the cure. It only precipitates because of its natural moisture and coldness.

God kneads this human clay in His two hands, which, although both are right hands, are nevertheless in opposition. There is no concealing the difference between them, even if it be only that they are two [separate] hands, since naught influences Nature except what conforms to her, and she is polarized; so He came forth with two hands. When He created him [Adam] with two hands He called him *bashar* [mortal, human] because of the direct connection [*mubāsharab*] suggested by the two hands ascribed to Him.²⁸⁹ This He did out of concern for this humankind, saying to the one who refused to prostrate himself before him, *What restrains you from prostrating before him*

288. Cf. ibid., XLIV:10.

289. Cf. ibid., V:18.

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*whom I have created with My two hands; are you too proud [to do so]—that is, before one who is elemental like yourself, or are you one of the sublime ones?*²⁹⁰ By the epithet sublime He means one who, in his luminous makeup, is beyond the elements, although he is natural. Man's only superiority over other creatures is in his being a *bashar* [mortal, human], for [in this respect] he is superior to all things created without that direct connection [*mubāsharab*] [with the Divine Presence]. Thus man ranks above the terrestrial and celestial angels, while God has stipulated that the sublime (higher) angels are superior to mankind.

Whoever wishes to know the divine Breath, then let him [first] know the Cosmos, for “Who knows himself, knows his Lord,” Who is manifest in him. In other words, the Cosmos is manifested in the divine Breath by which God relieved the divine Names from the distress they experienced by the nonmanifestation of their effects. Thus He bestows favor on Himself by what He creates in His breath. Indeed, the first effect of the Breath is experienced only in the divine Presence, after which it continues its descent by a universal [process of] release, down to the last thing to be created.

All is essentially in the Breath,
As light is, in essence, in the dark before dawn.
Knowledge [of this] by [intellectual] proof
Is like the emergence of daylight to one half asleep.
He perceives what we speak of,
In a way that gives him a clue to the Breath.
What I say relieves him of anxiety,
As he recites the chapter, *He Frowned*.²⁹¹
It manifests itself to him who
Comes seeking a coal [from its fire].
He sees it as fire, but it is
A light to kings and nightfarers.
When you understand what I am saying,
You will know that you are indigent.
Had he [Moses] sought other than that [a fire],
He would have seen it in it, and not inversely.

290. Ibid., XXXVIII:75.

291. Ibid., LXXX.

When the Reality addressed Himself to this Word of Jesus in the station of *until We know*,²⁹² although He knows [well], He asked him whether it was true or not that certain things had been attributed to Him, knowing full well what had transpired, saying, *Did you say to the people, "Take me and my mother as gods rather than God?"*²⁹³ Now courtesy requires that the questioner be given an answer, since when He reveals Himself to him in this station and this form, wisdom dictates that the answer be given from the standpoint of distinction [between speaker and the one spoken to], but with the reality of synthesis clearly in view. Jesus replied, emphasizing the divine transcendence, *May You be exalted*,²⁹⁴ stressing the *You*, a word that implies encounter and dialogue. *It is not for me*, that is, for me rather than You, *to say what I have no right to say*, that is, what my identity [might] require, but not my [latent] essence. *If, indeed, I said such a thing, You know of it*, because You are the [true] speaker, and one who utters a statement knows what he is saying. You, therefore, are the tongue by which I speak; as the Apostle has told us of his Lord, with respect to divine communication, "I am his tongue by which he speaks."²⁹⁵ Thus does He make His Identity the same as the tongue of the speaker, attributing the speech to the servant. Then His devoted servant completes the reply, saying, *You know what is in my soul*,²⁹⁶ the speaker being [in essence] God, *but I do not know what is in it [as form]*.²⁹⁷ He denies knowledge to Jesus in his own identity, but not as speaker or as possessor of [creative] effect. Then he says *Surely You*,²⁹⁸ using a reinforcing pronoun to emphasize and confirm the following declaration, seeing that none knows the Unseen except God.

Thus [in his reply] he distinguishes and synthesizes, singularizes and pluralizes, broadens and narrows. Then he says, completing the answer, *I told them only what You commanded me to say*,²⁹⁹ so indicating by denial that it was he [who said it]. The uttering [of the reply] requires a certain courtesy toward the enquirer. Had he not answered

292. Ibid., XLVII:31.

293. Ibid., V:116.

294. Ibid., as also the following quotations.

295. Bukhārī, LXXXI:38.

296. *Qur'an*, V:116.

297. Ibid.

298. Ibid.

299. Ibid., V:117.

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at all, he would have been considered devoid of all knowledge of the realities, which is, of course, quite untrue of him. His saying *only what You commanded me to say*³⁰⁰ is as if to say, "You are the speaker on my tongue, and you are [in truth] my very tongue." Consider then how precise and subtle is this divine and spiritual intimation.

[So I said], *Worship God*.³⁰¹ He uses the name *Allāh* because of the variety of worshipers in their acts of worship and the different religious traditions. He does not use one of the particular names, but rather that Name which includes them all. Then he goes on to say, *My Lord and your Lord*,³⁰² since it is certain that His relationship with one creature, as Lord, is not the same as with another. For that reason he makes the distinction between *My Lord and your Lord*, referring separately to the speaker and the one spoken to.

When he says, *only what You commanded me to say*,³⁰³ he lays the stress on himself as being commanded, which is his servanthood, since a command is only given to one who, it is supposed, will comply, whether he does so or not. Since the command descends according to the regime of ranks, everything manifested in a particular rank is affected by what is afforded it by the reality of that rank. The rank of the "ordered" has a regimen that is apparent in everything ordered, just as the rank of commanding has a regimen apparent in everyone who commands. When God says, *Establish prayer*,³⁰⁴ He is [at once] the Commander, the one who obliges, and the commanded. When the servant prays, *O my Lord, forgive me*,³⁰⁵ he is the commander, while the Reality is the commanded, for what God requires of His servant by His command is the same as that which the servant requires of the Reality by his command. For this reason [one might say] that every supplication is inevitably responded to, even if it be delayed. For instance, certain people under obligation, when commanded to pray, might not pray at that time, but postpone compliance by praying at another time, although they are quite capable of praying at the time. Thus, response is inevitable, even if only by intention. Then he says, *I am, concerning them*,³⁰⁶ not concerning myself together

300. Ibid.

301. Ibid.

302. Ibid.

303. Ibid.

304. Ibid., II:43.

305. Ibid., XXIII:118.

306. Ibid., V:117, as also the following quotations.

with them, as when he said, *My Lord and your Lord, a witness so long as I remain with them.* This is because the prophets bear witness concerning their communities while they are with them.

He continued, *And when You caused me to die*, that is, when You raised me to Yourself, hiding them from me and me from them, *You were the watcher over them*, not in my material substance, but in theirs, since You were their sight, which required supervision. Man's consciousness of himself is indeed God's consciousness of him, but he [Jesus] has attributed this consciousness to the name, the Watcher, referring the consciousness to Him. He wishes thereby to distinguish between himself and his Lord, so that he may know that he is himself a servant, and that God is Himself as his Lord, considering himself as witness and God as the Watcher. Thus, in relation to himself, Jesus puts his people first, saying, *concerning them a witness, while I am with them*,³⁰⁷ preferring them out of courtesy. He places them last, however, when speaking of God in saying, *the Watcher over them*, since the Lord is deserving of precedence.

Then he shows that God, the Watcher, bears also the name that he used of himself when he said *concerning them a witness*. He says, *You are the Witness of every thing*, the word "every" denoting generality and the word "thing" being the most unspecific of words. That is because He is the witness of everything that is witnessed, according as the reality of that thing dictates, so showing that it is, in fact, God Who is the witness concerning the people of Jesus in his saying, *I was a witness concerning them while I was with them*. This is the witnessing of God in the substance of Jesus, having confirmed that He was his tongue, hearing, and sight.³⁰⁸

God speaks of a word of Jesus and a word of Muhammad. As for it being of Jesus, it is because it is the utterance by Jesus of God's communication concerning him in His Book. As for its being of Muhammad, it is because it happened to Muhammad in a particular place. He spent a whole night repeating it and nothing else, until the breaking of dawn.

*If You chastise them, then they are Your servants, but if You forgive them, then You are the Mighty, the Wise.*³⁰⁹ The word "them," as also the

307. Ibid., V:117, as also the following quotations.

308. Bukhārī, LXXXI:38.

309. *Qur'an*, V:118.

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word “he,” is a pronoun of absence. He also says, *It is they who disbelieve*,³¹⁰ using the third person pronoun, the absence veiling them from what is meant [by the gnostics] by “the witnessed One Who is present.” He says, *If You chastise them*,³¹¹ with the pronoun of absence, which is naught but the veil that hides them from God. He therefore reminds them of God before their presence [on the Last Day], so that when they are present, the leaven may gain control in the dough and make it like Itself. *For they are Your servants*,³¹² using the singular pronoun because of the unity by which they exist.

There is no abasement greater than that of slaves, seeing they have no freedom of action with respect to themselves. Their lot is determined by what their Master wants with them, and He has no associate in what concerns them; as He says, *Your servants*, with the singular pronoun. By chastisement is meant their abasement, and there is none more abased than they because they are slaves. That they are abased is determined by their essences.

He means “You do not abase them any more than their state of servitude requires.” *If You forgive them*,³¹³ that is, if you shield them from the befalling of punishment they deserve by their contention, or make a covering for them to shield them from it and avert it from them, *You are the Mighty*,³¹⁴ the Averter, the Protector. When God bestows this name on one of His servants, He Himself is called the Strengthener [*al-mu’izz*], while the recipient is called the mighty [*al-azīz*]. Thus God, as Protector, guards against the wishes of God the Avenger, the Chastiser. Here also He uses a reinforcing pronoun to make things clear, the verse being of the same kind as His saying, *Surely You are the knower of the unseen things*,³¹⁵ and *Surely You were the Watcher over them*.³¹⁶ He also says, *Surely You are the Mighty, the Wise*.³¹⁷

The words [*if You chastise them . . . if You forgive them*] became an urgent question for the Prophet Muhammad, which he repeated all

310. Ibid., XLVIII:25.

311. Ibid., V:118.

312. Ibid.

313. Ibid.

314. Ibid.

315. Ibid., V:109.

316. Ibid., V:117.

317. Ibid., V:118.

night until daybreak, seeking an answer. Had he received the answer immediately, he would not have gone on repeating the question. God, for His part, set out for him, in detail, all the reasons for their being punished, and at each one he would say to God, *If You chastise them, then they are Your servants, but if You forgive them, then surely You are the Mighty, the Wise.*³¹⁸ Had he perceived, in what was set forth to him, any reason to take God's side, he would have pleaded against them rather than for them. God set forth to him what they deserved, to emphasize the submission to God and the exposure to His forgiveness set out in this verse.

It is said that when God likes the voice of His servant in his supplication to Him, He postpones the response, so that he might repeat it, not out of any aversion, but out of love for him. So He is called the Wise, and the Wise One is He Who apportions things to their proper places and does not deviate, concerning them, from what their realities, through their attributes, dictate and require. Thus the phrase, *the Wise, the Knowing,*³¹⁹ is in the proper order, which the Prophet reiterates in accordance with a profound knowledge from God, Most High. Whoever recites it should do so in this manner, or remain appropriately silent.

When God befits a servant to give expression to some matter, He does so only that He might respond to him and fulfill his need. Therefore let no one think that what he has been made fit for is late in coming. Let him rather emulate the zeal of God's Apostle, in respect of this verse, in all his states, so that he may hear with his inner or outer hearing, or in whatever way God may cause him to hear His response. If God blesses you with a physically expressed request, He will cause you to hear His response with the physical ear, but if He blesses you with an inner request, then He will cause you to hear His response inwardly.

318. Ibid., V:118.

319. Ibid.

CHAPTER XIX

THE WISDOM OF THE UNSEEN IN THE WORD OF JOB

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The chapter opens with an explanation of the all-embracing nature of the Reality. It is pointed out that God is to be found not only in what is “high,” “above,” and “lofty,” but also in what is traditionally thought of as profane, “low,” “below,” and “beneath,” so that *wherever you turn, there is the face of God* [II:115]. Thus, although the “blowing” breath and radiating light of the Spirit enlivens, it cannot do so without the receptive matrix of the “water” of Nature, which underlies and supports the living structure of the Cosmos [Throne]. Although the Spirit is the spark of the life of Reality, lowly and passive Nature is, correspondingly, the primordial stuff of that life without which no formal life is possible. Indeed, according to the logic of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teaching, there is nothing in existence that is not alive in some way or another, since that which is nothing other than He cannot be dead. As he says later in the chapter, we, as Cosmos and creatures, as ephemeral, lowly beings, are in reality His form, while He is, through His all-pervading Spirit, our identity, so that there is nothing at all of which it can be said truly that it is not He.

Before going on to consider the plight of Job and its lesson for us, Ibn al-‘Arabī briefly touches on the question of equilibrium and

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harmony as between the two great currents of cosmic creation and divine reintegration, between His Wrath and His Compassion. He suggests that the question may be resolved only in the ineffable Oneness of Being Itself, but not in our human state, oscillating as it does between the imperative of the divine Wish and the creative impulsion of the creative Will, and in which overemphasis on what is considered "good" inevitably causes imbalance with respect to what is considered "bad," albeit that it exists, by the Will of God.

In discussing Job's plight, our author suggests that true patience is not simply the stubborn refusal to voice a complaint, but rather that it is the intelligent refusal to be tempted by the illusion that any other but God is able to bring relief of suffering. Indeed, supplication to God is, for him, not a sign of impatience, but rather an indication of the essential reciprocity between himself and God, God in him and he in God. Furthermore, suffering is a test and a stimulus from God to awaken His servant to the reality of this relationship, so that failure to respond with supplication is tantamount to heedlessness of His Reality.

THE WISDOM OF THE UNSEEN IN THE WORD OF JOB

Know that the secret of life permeates water, which is itself the origin of the elements and the four supports. Thus did God make of water every living thing.³⁸⁷ There is nothing, indeed, that is not living, just as there is nothing that does not sing God's praises, even if we do not understand its praises, except by divine disclosure. Only the living can offer praise. Therefore, everything is living and everything has its origin in water.

Have you not considered the Throne, how it rests on the water and derives from it? It floats on the water, which supports it from beneath. In the same way, after God had created man as a servant, he became arrogant and aspired to be above Him. In spite of this God supports this servant's "loftiness" from beneath, ignorant as he is of himself, alluded to in his [the Prophet's] saying, "Even if you let down a rope it will fall upon God."³⁸⁸ This shows that God may be

387. *Qur'an*, XXI:30.

388. Tirmidhī, V:58.

thought of as "below," as also "above" in His saying, *They fear their Lord above them*,³⁸⁹ and His saying, *He overcomes His servants*.³⁹⁰ All below and above belong to Him. Thus, the six directions are manifest only through man, who is in the image of the Merciful.

There is no source of sustenance but God. He said, concerning a group of people, *If they had only abided by the Torah and the Gospel*, going on to be less definite and more general, saying, *and what was revealed to them from their Lord*, which includes all judgments revealed through the apostles and inspired ones. He went on to say, . . . *they would have eaten from above them*, referring to the sustenance from above attributed to Him, *and from below their feet*,³⁹¹ which is the sustenance from below that He attributes to Himself on the lips of His Apostle, who transmits His word by His authority.

Were the Throne not on the water, its existence could not be maintained, since the living can be kept in being only by life. Consider how, when someone living dies a normal death, the various parts of his composition break down and his powers are extinguished.

God said to Job, *Urge with your foot, for this is a washing place*,³⁹² in other words "cool" water, because of the extreme heat of his pain, which God soothed with the coolness of the water. Thus, it is for medicine to lessen that which has increased and to increase that which has grown less, in order to achieve an equilibrium that, however, can be achieved only approximately. We say approximately because evidence of the realities indicates that the act of creation, which occurs with the breaths eternally, constitutes an imbalance in Nature that might be called a deviation or alteration. Similarly, in God there is a desire that is an inclination toward the particular object of desire to the exclusion of any other. Harmony and equilibrium are everywhere sought, but never [truly] achieved. We are thus denied the rule of equilibrium.

In the divine knowledge brought by the prophets, God is described as pleased, angry, and by other attributes. Now pleasure causes anger to cease, while anger brings pleasure to an end. Equilibrium might be said to be the mutual balance of pleasure and anger. However, one who is pleased with someone else is not also angry

389. *Qur'an*, XVI:50.

390. *Ibid.*, VI:61.

391. *Ibid.*, V:66.

392. *Ibid.*, XXXVIII:42.

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with him, being thought of as one or the other, which indicates a preference. It is the same the other way round. We point this out for the benefit of anyone who might think that the people of the Fire suffer God's Wrath eternally and never enjoy His pleasure, which shows the validity of what we have said. If, on the other hand, as we have also said, the dwellers in the Fire, while remaining in the Fire, are eventually relieved of their tortures, then that is pleasure. Now wrath comes to an end with the alleviation of their pain, since the reality underlying pain is the same as the reality of anger, the angry one being a sufferer who is only trying to avenge himself on the object of his anger by hurting him, so that he might gain relief by passing the suffering he experiences on to the object of his anger.

When one considers the Reality in His transcendence from the Cosmos, then He is far removed from such notions thus limited [by human experience]. If, however, the Reality is the Identity of the Cosmos, then all determinations are manifest from Him and in Him, as in His saying, *The whole matter reverts to Him*,³⁹³ in reality and through spiritual disclosure, and *Worship Him and trust in Him*,³⁹⁴ from the standpoint of veiled consciousness. Indeed, there is naught in the realm of possibility more wonderful than this Cosmos, which is in the image of the Merciful and which God created in order that His being might become manifest through its appearance. Likewise, man became manifest through the coming into being of the form of Nature.

We are His outer form, while Identity is the directing spirit of that form. That direction can be only in Him and of Him, for He is the First, essentially, and the Last, formally. He is the Outer with respect to the changing of determination and states, the Inner with respect to directing, and *He knows everything*.³⁹⁵ He is aware of everything and knows by direct perception, not by any deductive thought process, just as spiritual awareness is not achieved by thought. Such is true knowing, all else being guesswork and conjecture, and not knowledge in its true sense.

Job, therefore, was given that water to drink to relieve the anguish of his thirst, which stemmed from the fatigue and distress with which Satan had afflicted him. In other words, he was too far re-

393. Ibid., XI:123.

394. Ibid.

395. Ibid., VI:101.

moved from the realities to see them as they are, the perception of which would have put him into a situation of proximity. Everything perceived is close to the eye, even if it be physically remote, for the sight makes contact with it by perception, or else does not perceive it at all. Either that or the object itself makes contact with the sight. There is therefore a certain proximity between the perception and the perceived. Job, however, attributed his affliction to Satan, although it was close to him, saying, "That which is far from me is close to me by reason of its power within me." You know, of course, that distance and proximity are relative notions, having no existence in themselves, despite their quite definite effects on that which is distant and near.

Know that there is a mystery of God in Job, whom He has made a lesson for us and recorded as a story that this Community of Muhammad reads, that it might learn what is in it and become ennobled by contact with its subject, Job.³⁹⁶ God commands Job for his patience, in spite of his supplication to Him to remove the hurt from him. Now, the supplication of a servant in no way detracts from his patience or his being a good servant, as He says, *Surely he was repentant*,³⁹⁶ meaning that he turned back to God and not to causes. Although the Reality works through a cause, and although the causes contributing to the cessation of the hurt may be many, the Causer is single. The resorting of the servant to the One Who alleviates the hurt by causes is better than having resort to some particular cause that might not be in accord with God's knowledge concerning the hurt. He might say, "God does not answer me," while he has not called on Him, having merely resorted to a particular cause that is not ordained for that period or moment.

Job, being a prophet, acted according to the wisdom of God, knowing as he did that patience, which most men regard as the restraining of the soul from complaint, is not limited, as we also know, to that, but is rather the restraining of the soul from complaint to what is other than God, not to God Himself. Most people are misled in their view that the one who complains detracts from his acceptance of destiny thereby. That is not the case, since it is not one's acceptance of destiny that is impaired by complaint to God or any other so much as one's acceptance of the thing predestined. What we have been told, however, does not concern the acceptance of what is des-

396. Ibid., XXXVIII:41–44.

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tined, since the hurt itself is that which is predestined and not destiny itself. Now Job knew that what was implicit in the restraining of the soul from complaint to God, that He might relieve the affliction, was a resistance to divine compulsion. [Such resistance] reveals an ignorance in the person, when God tests him, as to the real nature of what is afflicting the soul, so that he refrains from calling on God to end his pain. In the view of one who is truly aware, one ought to humble oneself and beg God to raise such a thing from one, since, for the inspired one, that alleviation is an alleviation also for God.

God has, indeed, described Himself in terms of hurt when He says, *those who would hurt God and His Apostle*.³⁹⁷ What greater hurt is there for Him than that He should try you with some affliction or station unknown to you, so that you might beg Him to relieve it, when you are heedless of Him? It is better that you approach Him with the sense of indigence, which is your true condition, since, by your asking Him to relieve you, the Reality Himself is relieved, you being His outer form.

A certain gnostic was hungry and wept because of it, at which someone who had no insight into such matters upbraided him, to which he replied, "He made me hungry only that I might weep." He means that God tried him with an affliction only so that he might ask Him to relieve it, which in no way detracts from his patience, which is the restraining of the soul from complaint to what is other than God. By other than God is meant some particular aspect of God, since He has specified a particular aspect, the aspect of Identity, by which you should call on Him to relieve your distress, and not by other aspects that are called "causes." The latter are nothing other than He as constituting the [principle of creative] particularization in Himself. In asking the Identity of God [God Himself] to lift the affliction from him, the gnostic is well aware that all causes are in Him in particular ways.

This way [of knowing] may be the privilege of only the discreet among God's servants, those worthy to be entrusted with the mysteries of God, for He has trusty servants whom only He knows and who know each other. Thus we have counseled you; so act and ask of Him, may He be exalted.

397. Ibid., XXXIII:57.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE WISDOM OF SINGULARITY IN THE WORD OF MUHAMMAD

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The last chapter, named after the Prophet Muḥammad, is, in the main, an extended commentary on the reported saying of the Prophet, "Three things have been made beloved to me in this world of yours: women, perfume, and prayer," which, for Ibn al-‘Arabī, serves to illustrate the underlying theme of triplicity in singularity, a subject already touched on in Chapter 11. As has been pointed out, this triplicity in singularity is, in simple terms, the two fundamental poles of the God-Cosmos polarity, the third factor of the relationship between the two, all three elements being united in the Oneness of Being. In the course of his commentary on the saying of the Prophet, which contains three symbolic elements, Ibn al-‘Arabī makes some very remarkable and daring statements, the various implications of which he does not fully develop, probably from fear of going too far, conscious as he was of the limits imposed on him by the nature of the Dispensation to which time and place had committed him.

For our author, the three elements used in the saying of the Prophet are perfectly suited to the kind of interpretation and commentary he intended, since each element is associated with a whole constellation of symbolic meanings, each of which helps to illustrate some aspect or mode of triplicity and polarity.

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The word "women" very well represents the various aspects and nature of the cosmic pole, suggesting as it does multiplicity, nature, form, body, receptivity, fecundity, becoming, beauty, fascination. In short, the feminine symbolizes, microcosmically and therefore in a very succinct way, the very principle of the projected and multifaceted mirror of the cosmic image that reflects to the divine Subject the panoramic beauty of His Own infinite possibility to become, which is nothing other than His Own essential Self, which He cannot but love and desire and into which He pours and "blows" the Breath of His Mercy and Spirit, but which, in absorbing the energies of the divine Will, always threatens the reintegrative imperative of the divine Wish. Similarly, in the human context, the male, as representative of the initiating Spirit, is constantly being attracted by the microcosmic feminine to pour his life and energy into her world of cosmic becoming and natural life experience, threatening always to divert him from the remembrance of the Spirit in Whose Name he acts and of the vicegerency that is his particular function. As Ibn al-'Arabī points out, this total involvement in the complex and multiple demands of cosmic life, symbolized by absorption in sexual union, can be corrected and purged only by the purification of remembering and reintegration into the world of the Spirit, symbolized by the major ablution after such union.

However, just as the Cosmos is nothing other than He, originating in Him, so also woman is nothing other than man and deriving from him, symbolizing for him, therefore, his own servanthood and receptivity vis à vis God. It is for this reason that he says that a man may most perfectly contemplate God in woman, since, in her, he contemplates at once his own servanthood and dominion and in union with her may experience, in microcosmic mode, that fusion of polar experience which is the Reality. According to this view of things, the attracting beauty of woman, far from being a snare to delude man, should rather become for him that perfect reflection, as formal beauty, of his own spiritual truth, being, as she is, that quintessential sign or clue [*āyah*] from which he might best learn to know his own true self, which is, in turn, to know his Lord.

The second element in the saying is "perfume," which, representing as it does the relating factor in the triplexity, is a very subtle and flexible symbol that lends itself to association with either of the two polar elements. Thus, perfume, aroma, or fragrance is that which at once soothes and incites, drugs and stimulates, may remind one of

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the delight of woman or the serenity of the sanctuary, and may either sharpen or dull spiritual awareness. In short, it is that not entirely physical nor yet entirely spiritual element that symbolizes at once both the current of the creative Mercy and also the spiritual nostalgia that draws the human spirit back to its source in God. The word used in the Arabic is *tib*, which also carries the idea of goodness, in the sense that in God all is good, whether it be the goodness of what the Will effects, which may seem from the standpoint of the Wish as reprehensible, or whether it be the spiritual goodness of what the Wish demands, which may seem from the standpoint of existential experience hard and painful.

The last element, symbolizing the Spirit and its reflection in man, is "prayer," which seeks to divert man from the world of cosmic concerns and to make him as totally aware as possible of Him from Whom he is and to Whom he is inexorably returning. As with women, it has its own perfume to remind and console the world-weary soul.

As part of his commentary on this saying of the Prophet, Ibn al-'Arabī, true to his usual form, seeks to interpret the linguistic features of the saying in his own special way and to make suggestions of a daring kind. He observes that the word for "three" is, unusually, in the feminine form, and also that the masculine noun "perfume" is placed between two feminine nouns, "women" and "prayer," thus suggesting, although not pursuing, the notion of a certain feminine predominance and all-containing nature. He goes on further to observe that many of the words in Arabic that denote cause, origin, and essence are feminine nouns. This would seem to be an odd suggestion in view of his otherwise firm commitment to a masculine bias, as encouraged by the patriarchal nature of the Islamic tradition. One suspects, however, that this untypical suggestion is yet another way of expressing the idea that the creative Mercy overrides and embraces the obligating Mercy of reintegration and that the positive and essential function of the Cosmic experience overrides its negative and ephemeral nature. Thus the creative Mercy, the word for which in Arabic is feminine and has a close association with the word for "womb," in its complete concern with cosmic becoming and the actualization of infinite possibility, may be thought of as feminine in the same way that the Hindu notion of *māyā*, the world-creating power, is thought of as feminine. In other words, the object of knowledge, whether cosmic or essential, may be thought of as feminine, just as the subject or

knower, whether creative or Self-reaffirming, may be thought of as masculine. Thus we are known as a "feminine" aspect of the Reality, whether outer or inner, and we know as a "masculine" aspect of the Reality, whether outwardly or inwardly.

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His is the wisdom of singularity because he is the most perfect creation of this humankind, for which reason the whole affair [of creation] begins and ends with him. He was a prophet when Adam was still between the water and the clay⁵¹² and he is, by his elemental makeup, the Seal of the Prophets, first of the three singular ones, since all other singulars derive from it.⁵¹³

He was the clearest of evidence for his Lord, having been given the totality of the divine words, which are those things named by Adam, so that he was the closest of clues to his own triplexity, he being himself a clue to himself.⁵¹⁴ Since, then, his reality was marked by primal singularity and his makeup by triplexity, he said concerning love, which is the origin of all existent being, "Three things have been made beloved to me in this world of yours," because of the triplexity inherent in him. Then he mentioned women and perfume, and added that he found solace in prayer.⁵¹⁵

He begins by mentioning women and leaves prayer until last, because, in the manifestation of her essence, woman is a part of man. Now, man's knowledge of himself comes before his knowledge of his Lord, the latter being the result of the former, according to his saying, "Whoso knows himself, knows his Lord." From this one may understand either that one is not able to know and attain, which is one meaning, or that gnosis is possible. According to the first [interpretation] one cannot know oneself and cannot, therefore, know one's Lord, while, according to the second, one may know oneself and therefore one's Lord. Although Muhammad was the most obvious ev-

512. *Bukhārī*, LXXVIII:119.

513. Cf. above p. 141.

514. *Ibid.*

515. *Nasā'ī*, XXXVI:1.

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idence of his Lord, every part of the Cosmos is a clue to its origin, which is its Lord, so understand.

Women were made beloved to him and he had great affection for them because the whole always is drawn toward its part. This he explains as coming from the Reality, in His saying regarding the elemental human makeup, *And I breathed into him of My spirit!*⁵¹⁶ God describes Himself as having a deep longing for contact with man when He says to those who long [for Him], "O David, I long for them even more."⁵¹⁷ That is a special meeting. He says further, in a saying on the Antichrist, "None of you will see his Lord until he dies."⁵¹⁸ Indeed, it is hardly surprising that one [God] so described should be longed for. Thus, God longs for those favored ones, seeing them and wishing that they could see Him, although their state does not permit that. It is like His saying, *[We will test them] until We know,*⁵¹⁹ although He knows [them] well. Thus, He longs [for them] because of this special quality, which cannot be realized except after death, while their longing for Him is kept fresh by it, as He says, in the Saying of Hesitation, "I do not hesitate in what I do as much as in taking the soul of My faithful servant. He hates death as much as I hate to hurt him; but he must meet Me."⁵²⁰ He gives him glad tidings instead of telling him that he must die, lest he become distressed at the mention of death, although he may not meet God until after death, as he said, "None of you will see his Lord until he dies." He says, "He must meet Me," the longing of God being because of this attribution.

The Beloved longs to see me,
And I long even more to see Him,
The hearts beat fast, but destiny bars the way,
I groan in complaint and so does He.

Since He has explained that He breathed into man of His spirit, He is yearning [in reality] for Himself. Consider, then, how, because of His spirit, His creation is in His own image.

Since man's makeup is composed of the four elements or humors

516. *Qur'an*, XV:29.

517. I have not been able to trace this saying.

518. Muslim, LII:95.

519. XLVII:31.

520. *Bukhārī*, LXXXI:38.

in the body, His breathing produces a burning, because of the moisture in the body. Thus, by his makeup man's spirit is a fire, because of which God spoke to Moses in the form of fire, in which He put what he wished for. Were his makeup [purely] natural, his spirit would be of light. It is called "blowing" because it comes from the Breath of the Merciful, and it is by this Breath, which is the blowing, that his essence is manifest. It is according to the eternal predisposition of the one blown into that the flaring up is fire and not light, the Breath of the Merciful being deeply implicit in that by which man is man.

Then God drew forth from him a being in his own image, called woman, and because she appears in his own image, the man feels a deep longing for her, as something yearns for itself, while she feels longing for him as one longs for that place to which one belongs. Thus, women were made beloved to him, for God loves that which He has created in His own image and to which He made His angels prostrate, in spite of their great power, rank and lofty nature. From that stemmed the affinity [between God and man], and the [divine] image is the greatest, most glorious and perfect [example of] affinity. That is because it is a syzygy that polarizes the being of the Reality, just as woman, by her coming into being, polarizes humanity, making of it a syzygy. Thus we have a ternary, God, man, and woman, the man yearning for his Lord Who is his origin, as woman yearns for man. His Lord made women dear to him, just as God loves that which is in His own image. Love arises only for that from which one has one's being, so that man loves that from which he has his being, which is the Reality, which is why he says, "were made beloved to me,"⁵²¹ and not "I love," directly from himself. His love is for his Lord in Whose image he is, this being so even as regards his love for his wife, since he loves her through God's love for him, after the divine manner. When a man loves a woman, he seeks union with her, that is to say the most complete union possible in love, and there is in the elemental sphere no greater union than that between the sexes. It is [precisely] because such desire pervades all his parts that man is commanded to perform the major ablution. Thus the purification is total, just as his annihilation in her was total at the moment of consummation. God is jealous of his servant that he should find pleasure in any but Him, so He purifies him by the ablution, so that he might once again behold Him in the one in whom he was annihilated, since it is none other than He Whom he sees in her.

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When man contemplates the Reality in woman he beholds [Him] in a passive aspect, while when he contemplates Him in himself, as being that from which woman is manifest, he beholds Him in an active aspect. When, however, he contemplates Him in himself, without any regard to what has come from him, he beholds Him as passive to Himself directly. However, his contemplation of the Reality in woman is the most complete and perfect, because in this way he contemplates the Reality in both active and passive mode, while by contemplating the Reality only in himself, he beholds Him in a passive mode particularly.

Because of this the Apostle loved women by reason of [the possibility of] perfect contemplation of the Reality in them. Contemplation of the Reality without formal support is not possible, since God, in His Essence, is far beyond all need of the Cosmos. Since, therefore, some form of support is necessary, the best and most perfect kind is the contemplation of God in women. The greatest union is that between man and woman, corresponding as it does to the turning of God toward the one He has created in His own image, to make him His vicegerent, so that He might behold Himself in him. Accordingly, He shaped him, balanced him, and breathed His spirit into him, which is His Breath, so that his outer aspect is creaturely, while his inner aspect is divine. Because of this He describes it [the spirit] as being the disposer of this human structure by which God *disposes of things from the heaven*, which is elevation, *to the earth*,⁵²² which is the lowest of the low, being the lowest of the elements.

He calls them women [*nisā'*], a word that has no singular form. The Apostle therefore said, "Three things have been made beloved to me in this world, women . . .",⁵²³ and not "woman," having regard to the fact that they came into being after him [man]. Indeed, the word *nus'ab* means "coming after." He says, *The postponed month* [*nasī'*] is an increase in unbelief,⁵²⁴ as also selling by *nasī'ah*, that is, "by postponement." Thus he says "women." He loves them only because of their [lower] rank and their being the repository of passivity. In relation to him they are as the Universal Nature is to God in which He revealed the forms of the Cosmos by directing toward it the divine

521. Nasā'i, XXXVI:1.

522. *Qur'an*, XXXII:5.

523. Nasā'i, XXXVI:1.

524. *Qur'an*, IX:37.

Will and Command, which, at the level of elemental forms, is symbolized by conjugal union, [spiritual] concentration in the realm of luminous spirits, and the ordering of premises toward a conclusion [in the realm of thought], all of which correspond to the consummation of the Primordial Singularity in all these aspects.

Whoever loves women in this way loves with a divine love, while he whose love for them is limited to natural lust lacks all [true] knowledge of that desire. For such a one she is mere form, devoid of spirit, and even though that form be indeed imbued with spirit, it is absent for one who approaches his wife or some other woman solely to have his pleasure of her, without realizing Whose the pleasure [really] is. Thus, he does not know himself [truly], just as a stranger does not know him until he reveals his identity to him. As they say,

They are right in supposing that I am in love,
Only they know not with whom I am in love.⁵²⁵

Such a man is [really] in love with pleasure itself and, in consequence, loves its repository, which is woman, the real truth and meaning of the act being lost on him. If he knew the truth, he would know Whom it is he is enjoying and Who it is Who is the enjoyer; then he would be perfected.

Just as woman [ontologically] is of a lower rank than man, according to His saying, *Men enjoy a rank above them*,⁵²⁶ so also is the creature inferior in rank to the One Who fashioned him in his image, despite his being made in His image. By virtue of the superiority by which He is distinguished from him, He is above all need of the Cosmos and is the primary agent, the form or image being an agent only in a secondary sense, since the image [man] does not have the primacy, which belongs to God. The eternal essences are similarly distinguished according to their ranks, and the gnostic allotus to everything its proper due. Thus it is that Muhammad's love for women derives from the divine love and because God *Gives to everything He has created*⁵²⁷ what is its due, essentially. He gives to them according to a merit fixed in the [eternally predisposed] essence of that which is deserving.

525. I have not been able to trace this quotation.

526. *Qur'an*, II:228.

527. *Ibid.*, XX:50.

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He places women first because they are the repository of passivity, just as the Universal Nature, by its form, comes before those things that derive their being from her. In reality, Nature is the Breath of the Merciful in which are unfolded the forms of the higher and lower Cosmos, because of the pervasion of the expressed Breath in the primordial Substance, particularly in the realm of the celestial bodies, its flow being different in respect of the existence of the luminous spirits and accidents.

Then the Apostle goes on to give precedence to the feminine over the masculine, intending to convey thereby a special concern with and experience of women. Thus he says *thalāth* [three] and not *thalāthah*, which is used for numbering masculine nouns. This is remarkable, in that he also mentions perfume, which is a masculine noun, and the Arabs usually make the masculine gender prevail. Thus one would say, "The Fatimahs and Zaid went out [using the third person masculine plural]," and not the third person feminine plural. In this way they give preference to the masculine noun, even if there is only one such noun together with several feminine nouns. Now, although the Apostle was an Arab, he is here giving special attention to the significance of the love enjoined on him, seeing that he himself did not choose that love. It was God Who taught him what he knew not, and God's bounty on him was abundant. He therefore gave precedence to the feminine over the masculine by saying *thalāth*. How knowledgeable was the Apostle concerning [spiritual] realities and how great was his concern for proper precedence.

Furthermore, he made the final term [prayer] correspond to the first [women] in its femininity, placing the masculine term [perfume] between them. He begins with "women" and ends with "prayer," both of which are feminine nouns, [the masculine noun] perfume coming in between them, as is the case with its existential being, since man is placed between the Essence [a feminine noun] from which he is manifested, and woman who is manifested from him. Thus he is between two feminine entities, the one substantively feminine, the other feminine in reality, women being feminine in reality, while prayer is not. Perfume is placed between them as Adam is situated between the Essence, which is the source of all existence, and Eve, whose existence stems from him. [Other terms] such as *sifah* [attribute] and *qudrab* [capability] are feminine. Indeed, whatever school of thought you adhere to, you will find feminine terms prominent. Even the Causalists say that God is the "Cause" ['*illab*] of the Cosmos, and '*illab*

is feminine. As for the wisdom of perfume and his putting it after "women," it is because of the aromas of generation in women, the most delightful of perfumes being [experienced] within the embrace of the beloved, as they say in the well-known saying.

When Muḥammad was created a pure servant, he had no ambition for leadership, but continued prostrating and standing [before his Lord], a passive creation, until God effected [His purpose] in him, when He conferred on him an active role in the realm of the Breaths, which are the excellent perfumes [of existence]. Thus, He made perfume beloved to him, placing it after women. He pays respect to the ranks of God in His saying, *Lofty of rank, the Possessor of the Throne*,⁵²⁸ seeing that He is established on it by His name the Merciful, so that everything encompassed by the Throne is affected by the divine Mercy, as He says, *my Mercy encompasses all things*.⁵²⁹ It is the Throne that encompasses all things, while the Merciful is its occupant, by Whose reality Mercy permeates the Cosmos, as we have explained many times, both in this work and also in *The Meccan Revelations [Al-Futūhāt al-makkiyyah]*.⁵³⁰ God Himself has put perfume [*tīb*, also goodness] in the context of conjugal union with reference to the innocence of 'A'ishah when He says, *Evil [malodorous] women are for evil men and evil men are for evil women, just as good [sweet-smelling] women are for good men and good men for good women, who are innocent of what they allege*.⁵³¹ Thus, He speaks of them as sweet smelling, since speaking implies breath, which is of the essence of aroma, coming forth [from the mouth] sweetly or offensively, according to its expression. However, being at source divine, it is all sweet smelling and good, but according as it is approved of [by separative attitudes] or disapproved of, it may be considered good or bad. Of Garlic, Muḥammad said, "It is a bush whose odor I detest";⁵³² he did not say "I detest it." Thus, it is not the thing itself that is to be detested, but only that which issues from it. Such an aversion may be a question of custom, natural antipathy, law, deficiency, or something else. If then the distinction between good and bad is to be made, then Muḥammad was made to love the good and not the bad. Now it is said that the angels are offended by

528. Ibid., XL:15.

529. Ibid., VII:156.

530. Cf. II, pp. 390 and 310.

531. *Qur'an*, XXIV:26.

532. Muslim, V:76.

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the bad odors arising from the putrefaction associated with this elemental makeup [of man], since he is made of *clay and putrid slime*,⁵³³ that is to say of varying odors, so that the angels find him repugnant by his nature. In a similar way, by its very nature, the dung beetle is offended by the odor of the rose, which, although it has [for us] a fine aroma, is malodorous to the dung beetle. Thus anyone of such a nature, essentially and formally, is repulsed by the truth when he hears it and rejoices in falsehood, as He says, *Those who believe in falsehood and not in God, describing them as losers, are the losers who have lost themselves.*⁵³⁴ Anyone who cannot tell the good from the bad has no perception.

The Apostle of God was made to love only the good in everything, which is [in reality] everything that is. [We might ask] whether there can be anything in the Cosmos that sees only the good in everything and knows no bad. We would say that there is not, since in the very source from which the Cosmos is manifested, which is the Real, we find aversion and love, the bad being that which is loathed, while the good is that which is loved. Now the Cosmos is [created] in God's image [macrocosm] and man has been made in both images [microcosm], so that there cannot be anything that sees only one aspect of things. There are certainly those who can distinguish the good from the bad, that a thing is bad by [sense] experience and good by nonsensual experience, but in whom perception of the good predominates over perception of the bad. As for the idea that one might remove the bad from the Cosmos of created being, such a thing is not possible, since the Mercy of God inheres in both the good and the bad. From its own standpoint the bad is good and the good bad. Indeed, there is nothing good, but seems, in some way, bad to some bad thing, and vice versa.

As for the third element by which the singularity is made complete, it is prayer. He said, "and my solace is in prayer,"⁵³⁵ because it is [a state of] contemplation, being an intimate discourse between God and His servant. He says, *Remember Me, and I will remember you,*⁵³⁶ since it is an act of worship equally divided between God and His servant, half for God and half for His servant, as in the authori-

533. *Qur'an*, XV:26.

534. *Ibid.*, XXIX:52.

535. *Nasā'ī*, XXXVI:1.

536. *Qur'an*, II:152.

tative tradition, "I have divided the prayer equally between Me and My servant, a half for Me and a half for My servant who may also have whatever he asks."⁵³⁷ Thus when the servant says [in reciting *Al-Fātīhab*], *In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful*,⁵³⁸ God is saying, "My servant is remembering Me." When the servant says, *Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds*, God says, "My servant is praising Me." When the servant says, *The Compassionate, the Merciful*, God says, "My servant is lauding Me." When the servant says, *King on the Day of Judgment*, God says, "My servant is glorifying Me and has yielded all to Me." Thus the whole of the first half [of *Al-Fātīhab*] belongs to God. Then the servant says, *Thee do we worship and Thee do we ask for help*, and God says, "This is shared between Me and My servant; and for him is whatever he asks," thus introducing an element of participation into this verse. When the servant says, *Guide us on the right path, the path of those whom you have favored, and not the path of those who have incurred Your wrath, nor of those who have gone astray*, God says, "These [verses] are reserved to my servant who may have whatever he asks." Thus these last verses are for the servant alone, just as the first ones belong only to God. From this one may realize the necessity of reciting [the verse], *Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds*, since whoever omits it has not performed the prayer [properly], which is shared between God and His servant.

Being a discourse, it is also a remembrance, since whoever remembers God sits with God and God with him, as mentioned in the tradition, "I am the companion of him who remembers Me."⁵³⁹ Now whoever, being perceptive, is in the presence of the one he is remembering, he sees his companion. In such a case there is contemplation and vision, otherwise he does not see Him. From this the one praying will be able to ascertain his degree [of gnosis], that is to say whether he is able to see, in the prayer, in this way or not. If he cannot see Him, then let him worship Him as if he saw Him, imagining Him to be in the *quiblah* during his discourse, and let him listen most carefully to what God might say to him in response [to his prayer]. If he is an *imām* [leader] for his own world [of family or community] and the angels praying with him, he has, in the prayer, the [same] rank as the Apostle, which is to represent God. Indeed, every one who

537. Muslim, IV:38.

538. This and the following verses form part of the opening chapter of the *Qur'an*.

539. Cf. Muslim, XLVIII:2.

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prays is an *imām*, since the angels pray behind one who prays alone, as is stated by the tradition.⁵⁴⁰ When he say, "God hears him who praises Him,"⁵⁴¹ he is letting the people behind him know that God has heard him, to which the angels and others present answer, "O our Lord, yours is the praise," for it is God Himself Who is saying, on the tongue of His servant, "God hears him who praises Him."

Consider, then, the sublimity of the rank of prayer and to what degree of dignity it brings the one who performs it. However, the one who does not attain to contemplative vision in his prayer has not reached its summit and cannot find [true] solace in it, since he cannot see Him with Whom he has discourse. If also he cannot hear the Reality's response, he cannot be listening carefully enough. Indeed, he who is not present with His Lord in prayer, neither hearing nor seeing Him, is not really praying at all, since he does not listen and watch [for God]. While it lasts, there is nothing like the prayer rite to prevent preoccupation with other things.

In the prayer, the most effective element is the remembrance of God, by virtue of the words and actions it comprises. We have, however, described the state of the Perfect Man in prayer, in *The Meccan Revelations* [*Al-Futūhāt al-makkiyyah*].⁵⁴² God has said, *Surely, the prayer prevents much evil and sin*,⁵⁴³ seeing that the one praying is forbidden to occupy himself with anything else while he is engaged in it. *But the remembrance of God is greater*,⁵⁴⁴ that is to say that, within the context of prayer, God's remembering of His servant when He responds to his request is greater. Furthermore, in the prayer, the servant's praising of God is greater than his remembering Him, since all majesty belongs to God. Thus, He says, *And God knows what you fashion*,⁵⁴⁵ and, *or who listens and watches*.⁵⁴⁶ The listening derives from God's remembering of His servant in prayer.

Thus, of the intelligible movement by which the Cosmos is transformed from nonexistence into existence, the prayer has all three phases, a vertical movement in which the one praying stands erect, a horizontal movement in which the praying one bows and a down-

540. *Bukhārī*, IX:16.

541. These words are part of the prayer rite.

542. Cf. II, p. 468, and III, pp. 296-297.

543. *Qur'an*, XXIX:45.

544. *Ibid.*

545. *Ibid.*

546. *Ibid.*, L: 37.

wards movement, which is the prostration. The movement of man is vertically, that of the animals is horizontally, that of the plants downward, while inanimate things have no real motion, since a stone moves only if some other thing moves it.

In his saying, "and my solace was made to be in prayer,"⁵⁴⁷ he does not attribute this to himself, since the Self-revelation of God to one praying comes from God and not the one who is praying. Indeed, had he not mentioned this by himself, God would have ordered him to pray without the [solace of] His Self-revelation to him. Since that came to him as a favor, the contemplative vision is also a favor. He said, "and my solace was made to be in prayer," which means seeing the Beloved, which brings solace to the eye of the lover. This is because the word *qurrah* [solace] comes from the word *istiqrār* [fixing], so that the lover's eye might be fixed [on the Beloved] to the exclusion of all else. It is for this reason that looking around is not permitted in prayer, because in this way Satan seeks to steal something from the prayer of the servant, to deny to him the vision of his Beloved. If God were indeed the Beloved of the one who is [always] looking around him, he would look, in his prayer, only toward the *qiblah*. Every man knows in himself whether his worship is of this kind or not, for *Man sees himself well enough, however many excuses he may give.*⁵⁴⁸ Indeed, each man knows the false in himself from the true, since no one is (truly) ignorant of his own state, it being a matter of self-experience.

That which is called prayer has also another aspect in that He has commanded us to pray to Him and has told us that He prays for us, the prayer being both from us and from Him. When it is God Who prays, He does so in His name the Last, as coming after the creation of the servant, being, indeed, the God the servant creates in himself (in his Heart), whether by his reason or through traditional learning. This is the "God of belief," which is various according to the predisposition inherent in that particular person; as al-Junaid said, when asked about the gnosis of God and the gnostic, "The color of the water is the same as that of its container,"⁵⁴⁹ which is a most precise answer, showing the matter as it is. This then is the God Who

547. *Nasā'i*, XXXVI:1.

548. *Qur'an*, LXXV:14.

549. Qushairī, *Al-Risālah*, Cairo, A.H. 1346, pp. 127, 142.

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prays for us. Also, when we pray, we bear the name the last, being in the same position as He Who properly has that name. That is because, to Him, we are only as our state dictates, and He sees us only in the form with which we provide Him, since the praying one always lags behind the leader on the race track.

God says, *Everyone of them knows its own way of prayer and exaltation*,⁵⁵⁰ which is to say its degree of tardiness in worshiping its Lord, as also its mode of exaltation by which it affirms God's transcendence according to its eternal predisposition. Indeed, there is nothing that does not express its praise of its good and forgiving Lord. This why the worship of the Cosmos in detail, in each of its parts, is not understood (by man). In another way, the pronoun (in the phrase, *His praise*)⁵⁵¹ may also refer to the exalting servant in His saying (by changing the way it is read), *There is nothing, but He exalts its praise*, meaning the praise of that thing. Thus, the pronoun in *His praise* returns to that thing by virtue of the praise uttered on Him in what is believed, since he is only praising the God of his belief whom he has bound to himself. Thus, whatever deeds he performs return to himself. Indeed, he is only [in reality] praising himself since, without doubt, in praising the product, one is praising its producer, its satisfactoriness, or otherwise rebounding upon the one who made it. Similarly, the God of belief is made for the one who has regard for it, being his own production, so that his praise for that which he believes in is self-praise. That is why he rejects the [different] beliefs of someone else, although he would not do so if he were impartial. The owner of this private object of worship, however, is usually ignorant, in that he is wont to object to what someone else believes concerning God. If he were to understand truly what Al-Junaid said regarding the color of the water being that of its container, he would allow to every believer his belief and would recognize God in every form and in every belief. His attitude, however, is merely a matter of opinion and not knowledge. Thus, He has said, "I am in my servant's notion of Me,"⁵⁵² that is to say that He is manifest to him only in the form of his belief, whether it be universal or particular in nature. The God

550. *Qur'an*, XXIV:41.

551. *Ibid.*, XVII:44, which reads *There is nothing but exalts His praise*.

552. *Bukhārī*, XCVII:15.

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of beliefs is subject to certain limitations, and it is this God Who is contained in His servant's Heart, since the Absolute God cannot be contained by anything, being the very Essence of everything and of Itself. Indeed, one cannot say either that it encompasses Itself or that it does not do so; so understand! God speaks the truth and He is the [sole] Guide along the Way.