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. Pt. 1

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THE SPIRITUAL ASCENSION:
IBN ‘ARABĪ AND THE MI‘RĀJ
PART I

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The scriptural accounts of the Ascension (mi‘rāj) of Muhammad provided a comprehensive symbolic representation of man's spiritual development for later traditions of Islamic thought. The creative adaptation of those materials by the famous mystical thinker Ibn ‘Arabī (1165-1240), reflecting the full range of his metaphysical-theological insights and practical spiritual concerns, influenced many subsequent Islamic literary and philosophic movements. This study of his major Mi‘rāj narratives (focusing on a revealing autobiographical version of his own spiritual journey) should also interest students of comparative mysticism, philosophy and religion from other “Oriental” traditions. Part II of this study will appear in the next issue.

STUDENTS OF ISLAMIC LITERATURE ARE WELL AWARE that the brief Koranic indications concerning Muhammad’s Ascension (mi‘rāj) or nocturnal voyage (isrā‘, at 17:1) and the decisive revelatory vision in which it culminated (53:1-18), together with the related discussions in the collections of hadith, subsequently gave rise to a vast body of interpretation among many later traditions of Islamic thought and spirituality. In Sufi writing, especially, the stages and events of the Prophet’s journey soon came to be understood as a comprehensive symbolic representation both of the inner, spiritual itinerary followed by the accomplished saints and of the various macrocosmic or metaphysical structures underlying their realizations.

The elaborate adaptation of those traditions and scriptural sources by the celebrated mystical thinker Ibn ‘Arabī (560/1165-638/1240) reflects both the typical features of his distinctive approach to the Koran and hadith and the full range of his metaphysical-theological teachings and practical spiritual concerns. Here, as in so many other areas, it would be difficult to exaggerate the influence of his interpretation on later Islamic literature throughout the eastern Islamic world. For Ibn ‘Arabī, the Prophet’s “nocturnal journey” (an expression he prefers both because it is that of the Koran and because it is more appropriate to the complete, circular nature of the movement in question) is above all an archetype of the highest, culminating stages in the inner, spiritual journey that must be followed by each of the saints or mystical “knowers” who would participate fully in the noetic heritage of Muhammad, even if the subjective phases

1 See, for example, the outline of the earlier sources (from a strictly historicist perspective) and extensive bibliography in the articles “Isrā‘” (B. Schreike) and “Mi‘rāj” (J. Horovitz) in the SEI and EI, as well as the wider range of hadith and legendary materials studied in the opening chapters of M. Asín Palacios’ La Escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia (Madrid, 1919) [abridged English translation as Islam and the Divine Comedy (London, 1926, repr. 1968)]. Ibn ‘Arabī’s own use of the related hadith is discussed in detail in the notes below.

2 See the historical overview of this process of transmission and assimilation in our article “Ibn ‘Arabī and His Interpreters,” JAOS, volumes 106.3, 106.4, and 107.1.

3 There are a number of shades of meaning in the Koranic expression isrā‘ (at 17:1 and in the related hadith) that help explain Ibn ‘Arabī’s preference for that expression; in addition to its being used to describe a complete spiritual journey involving both “ascent” and “return”—a fundamental dimension he emphasizes especially in the R. al-Anwār—the term refers more specifically to a “nocturnal voyage” with all the implications of a “hidden,” profoundly spiritual transformation that are so decisive for the inner journeys of the saints described in all these narratives. Finally, this particular verbal form clearly insists on God as the (ultimate) Agent and Source of this movement, pointing to the key factors of divine grace and individual predisposition that are central to his understanding of this voyage (whether for the Prophet or for the saints in general).

4 While acknowledging the unique “physical” nature of the Prophet’s Mi‘raj (in section II below), Ibn ‘Arabī stresses the primary importance of the spiritual isrā‘īl—even for Muhammad—in the proportions implied by the Prophet’s “thirty-three” other, purely spiritual journeys mentioned at the end of that section.
and experiences marking that route necessarily appear differently to each individual.  

Thus the theme of the Mi'raj provides Ibn 'Arabi with a single unifying symbolic framework for the full range of practical spiritual questions and theoretical issues (ontological, cosmological, theological, etc.) that are discussed in various contexts throughout the Futūḥāt and his other works. If each of his treatments of the Mi'raj approaches those issues from its own particular standpoint and purpose—and in addition, with very different literary styles and degrees of autobiographical openness—they all do share what is perhaps the most fundamental feature of all his writing: the continually alternating contrast between the metaphysical (universal and eternal) "divine" point of view and the "phenomenological" (personal and experiential) perspective of each individual voyager. The aim of this sort of dialectic, as he pointedly reminds his readers at the very beginning of chapter 367 of the Futūḥāt (the opening section of the translation below), is quite clear: if the journey in question necessarily appears to move through time and distance, that is not so that we can eventually "reach" God—since "He is with you wherever you are"—but rather "so that He can cause His Signs" (31:31) that are always there, "on the horizons" and "in the souls." The heavens of this journey, the prophets and angels who populate them, the Temple or the Throne where the final "unveiling" takes place—all of these, he insists, are so many places of the Heart.

Modern readers who want to understand these narratives on this ultimate and more intimate level, however, must first find their way through an extremely complex set of symbols and often only implicit references to what are now largely unfamiliar bodies of knowledge. The task of interpretation is therefore not unlike that facing students of Dante's Divine Comedy (especially the Paradiso). Hence our annotation to this translation of chapter 367 of the Futūḥāt (along with a short Appendix from the K. al-Iṣrā') attempts to provide that indispensable background in the following areas: (1) the actual Islamic source-materials, primarily in the Koran and hadith, which provide the basic structure and key symbols for all of Ibn 'Arabi's Mi'raj narratives; (2) the cosmological and astrological presuppositions which he generally shared with other intellectual traditions (more or less "scientific")

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The crucial notion of the saints' inner participation in the distinctive spiritual "heritage" (wirāidha) of each prophet is assumed throughout all of these Mi'raj narratives: for Ibn 'Arabi, its ultimate verification (and perhaps even its source) is to be found in the personal revelation of the all-encompassing "Muḥammadan Station" described in section IV-I and in the corresponding passage from the K. al-Iṣrā' given in the Appendix. For further references to this key notion in Ibn 'Arabi's religious thought, see the discussions in Sceau, ch. 5, and Mu'jam, pp. 1191-1201.

This fundamental point is openly stressed below in the reminder by Yahyā (= John the Baptist, at the beginning of IV-F, the sphere of Aaron) that "each person has a path (tariq) that no one else but he travels," which "... comes to be through the traveling itself."  

In addition to Ibn 'Arabi's own explicitly metaphysical technical terminology, that transcendent perspective is represented more dramatically in chapter 367 of the Futūḥāt (translated below) by the spirits of the different prophets, especially Adam, Idrīs and Aaron—all of whom tend to speak here (as is so often the case in the Koran) from a divine or "supra-temporal" perspective.

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3 Hence the central importance of the celebrated divine saying (ḥadīth qudsī) with which he concludes that opening section: "My earth does not encompass Me, nor does My heaven, but the heart of My servant, the man of true faith, does encompass Me." The key position of the Heart (qalb) is again brought out, in a more autobiographical and experiential context, in section IV-H (notes 168-72) in Part II. For further references to this fundamental concept in Ibn 'Arabi's thought, see Mu'jam, pp. 916-21, and the famous chapter on the "Wisdom of the Heart" in the Fisṭās, 119-26 (= Bezels, pp. 145-57).

4 These works provide a striking illustration of Ibn 'Arabi's typical approach to hadith. He scrupulously and literally follows the sayings and deeds of the Prophet as recounted in the canonical collections—in this chapter (367), relying especially on the Sahih of Muslim and, to a slightly lesser extent, on the Sahih of Bukhārī—and he most often develops his own spiritual interpretations from close attention to the slightest literal details of those narratives (thereby implicitly excluding the much wider body of legends that had become popularly associated with these events). Rather than focusing on the external differences or apparent contradictions among various hadith, Ibn 'Arabi typically—one might say "ecumenically"—concentrates on conveying the spiritual meaning and intentions implicit in each Prophetic saying, pointing to a level of understanding unifying what might otherwise be perceived as conflicting expressions. (This treatment of hadith mirrors his broader attitude to the various Islamic sects and schools of law, and ultimately toward the full diversity of human religions and individual beliefs.)
of his time; (3) his distinctive personal metaphysical theories or “doctrines,” which are basically those found throughout his other writings; and (4) his conception of the particular spiritual “heritages” and distinctive qualities of each of the prophets encountered during the Mi’raj, as they are developed in the Fusus al-hikam and throughout the Futuhat. Finally, since his four major Mi’raj narratives do share certain common features—and since several are now available (at least partially) in French or English translations—it may be helpful, for comparative purposes, to point out some of the more distinctive features of each.

The Other Mi’raj Narratives: K. al-Isra’, R. al-Anwâr, Chapter 167

The Kitâb al-Isra’, at once the earliest, the longest and the most personally revealing of the works discussed here, was composed in Fez in the year 594, apparently only a relatively short time after certain decisive personal inspirations concerning the ultimate unity of the prophets and their message (in the spiritual “station of Muhammad”) and the inner meaning of the Qur’an in its full eternal reality—realizations that were soon to coalesce in Ibn ‘Arabî’s conception of his own unique spiritual role as “Seal of the Muhammadan Saints.” (His concise summary of one of the most important of these experiences has been translated as a separate Appendix in Part II.) In an emotionally fluid and highly expressive Arabic symbolic style, drawing on an extremely dense and allusive symbolic vocabulary and combining long poetic interludes with rapidly moving rhymed prose—and culminating in a series of remarkable “intimate conversations” (munâjât) with God (pp. 50–82)—he constantly returns to celebrate and elaborate on the twin themes of the eternal Muhammadan Reality (encompassing all the prophets and their teachings) and the metaphysical universality of the Qur’an as they were inwardly realized and verified in his own mystical experience. Here the passage of this autobiographical “voyage” through the heavenly spheres

Fortunately, these elements are much less important here (in ch. 367) than in chapter 167 (see below), which assumes a far more detailed acquaintance with alchemy, Ptolemaic-Aristotelian astronomy, a wide body of traditional astrological lore concerning the particular influences of the stars, and additional “esoteric sciences.”

We may add that other prophets not explicitly mentioned in the hadith or in these Mi’raj narratives are elsewhere symbolically associated by Ibn ‘Arabî with specific heavenly spheres: see, for example, Noah’s connection with the sphere of the sun, mentioned at the end of ch. 3 of the Fususîj (in reference to a longer account in Ibn ‘Arabî’s K. al-Tanazzulât al-mawsîliya).

There are also a number of other less complete treatments of the Mi’raj theme in Ibn ‘Arabî’s extant writings, some of which are cited in notes below. The most accessible of these is the passage on the Ascension of the Prophet—understood as the cosmic “Muhammadan Reality” or “Perfect Man”—in the possibly apocryphal Shajarat al-Kawn, now available in translations by A. Jeffery, “Ibn ‘Arabî’s Shajarat al-Kawn,” in Studia Islamica, vol. X, pp. 43–78, and vol. XI, pp. 113–60 [Mi’raj section at pp. 145–60]; and M. Gloton, L’Arbre du Monde, Paris, 1982 [Mi’raj section, pp. 93–106].

See R.G., no. 313; this entry mentions several alternative titles and an extant commentary by Ibn ‘Arabî’s close disciple Isma’il b. Sawdakîn. The date and place of composition are mentioned in the author’s own colophon (p. 92).
and the higher revelatory stages of the Mi'raj (pp. 11-49) is not so much a means for describing the successive steps of the spiritual path and “progress” of the saints more generally—as it is, to some extent, in all the other Mi'raj narratives—but instead primarily a framework for evoking and clarifying various aspects of the author’s own spiritual achievement, as they mirror the even loftier rank of the Prophet (pp. 83-92). What is perhaps most noteworthy about this composition, in a way that reinforces Ibn ‘Arabi’s repeated assertions that he first received all of this only by divine inspiration (and not through an individual effort of reasoning), is the way the complex systematic metaphysical and ontological framework developed in the Futu/hat is already entirely present, but for the most part only implicitly—expressed instead through an incredibly profuse array of symbols and allusions drawn from the Koran and hadith (and whose full explanation is to be sought, for the most part, only in later, more analytical prose works such as the Futu/hat).

Compared to the literary and doctrinal complexities of the preceding work, the Risâlat al-Anwâr, a relatively brief prose treatise composed at Konya in 602 A.H. (near the beginning of Ibn ‘Arabi’s long stay in the Muslim East), is stylistically far more accessible and its contents are more readily understandable—features which (along with the existence of an excellent modern translators. Written in response to a request by a Sufi friend and fellow master, this study, as its full title partly indicates, is above all practical in reference to himself as a “sâlik” in terms of his desire to emphasize the fact that “even now [i.e., after reaching the highest spiritual station] I am still voyaging”—in other words, as evidence that he is not claiming “union” in the sense of some absolute mutual identity with God.

16 For the date and place of composition, see R. G., no. 33 (the long list of manuscripts there may likewise reflect the relatively accessible character of this short work). To facilitate reference by non-Arabists, citations of this text in the notes below also mention the relevant sections from both the complete English translation (Journey, virtually unannotated but with useful selections from Jili’s commentary) and the partial French version included in the concluding chapter of Sceau (which is accompanied by an extensive commentary drawn from many of Ibn ‘Arabi’s other writings).

The Treatise of Lights, Concerning the Secrets Bestowed on the Person in Spiritual Retreat.” For the Sufi practice of spiritual retreat more generally, see the references in the intention and experiential (rather than primarily doctrinal or metaphysical) in its terms of reference and expression. It is aimed at the needs of a reader who, already necessarily possessing a considerable degree of personal spiritual accomplishment and experience, is intimately involved with the guidance of disciples at earlier stages of the Path. While the allusions to the Mi’raj proper (pp. 9-13; Journey, pp. 40-46) are very brief—mentioning for the most part only the cosmological powers or spiritual qualities traditionally associated with each of the heavenly spheres and the Koranic cosmography of the Gardens of Paradise, the divine “Throne,” “Pen,” etc.—it does provide an indispensable complement to the other Mi’raj narratives in two critical areas: (1) its relatively detailed discussion of the essential practical methods and preliminary stages preparing the way for the inner realization of these more advanced spiritual insights; and (2) Ibn ‘Arabi’s repeated emphasis on the fundamental importance of the concluding phase of the saints’ “return” to a transformed awareness of the physical and social world (in its immediate relation with God) and to the particular responsibilities and activities—whether teaching and spiritual guidance, or the other, less visible tasks of the representatives of the spiritual hierarchy—flowing from that realization.19

Finally, the long chapter 167 of the Futu/hat, “On the Inner Knowledge of the Alchemy of Happiness,”20

article “Khalwa” (by H. Landolt) in EJ. Chapters 78-79 (II, 150-52) of the Futu/hat, on the stations of khalwa and tark al-khalwa, involve a more metaphysical approach to the subject; see also the French translation of those sections by M. Vâlsan, in Etudes traditionnelles, Paris, 1969, pp. 77-86. These cosmological features are all far more elaborately developed in chapter 167 of the Futu/hat (described below). In particular, the R. al-Anwâr does not contain any of those personal encounters with the prophets associated with each heavenly sphere (or with each planet’s respective “spiritual entity” [råhât-nâya], such as Mercury, Mars, Venus, etc.) that make up the major part of the Mi’raj narrative in both chapters of the Futu/hat, as well as in the corresponding sections of the K. al-Isrâ’.

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

20 II, 270-84; also available in French translation (Alchimie) with some annotation. [An earlier partial French translation of this chapter, without notes or commentary, was
uses the framework of the Mi’raj to retrace, in ascending order, the many levels of Ibn ‘Arabi’s complex cosmology or cosmogony. Its primary focus (compared with the other works mentioned here) is on the “objective” metaphysical realities underlying the spiritual insights described in more experiential terms in the other narratives. In this respect it often resembles the Fusūs al-Hikam, and frequently the treatment of the various prophets encountered during this heavenly voyage (e.g., Jesus, Aaron or Moses) closely parallels that found in the corresponding chapters of the Fusūs. This feature is further underlined by Ibn ‘Arabi’s unique narrative technique of comparison, throughout this ascension, between the initiatic spiritual knowledge granted to the “follower of Muhammad” (representing the practice and approaches of the saints and Sufis more generally) and the limited cosmological and theological insights available to his companion, the archetypal “man of reason.” In general, the full elucidation of many of those complex allusions would require extensive reference to some of the most obscure and unfamiliar aspects of the Shaykh’s thought.

Ibn ‘Arabi’s Own Mi’raj: Chapter 367

Ibn ‘Arabi’s long treatment of the Mi’raj in chapter 367 of the Futūḥāt is marked by some distinctive


21 The best general survey of this difficult subject (although by no means complete) probably still remains the introduction (pp. 29–159) of H. S. Nyberg’s Kleine Schriften des Ibn al-’Arabi, based largely on Ibn ‘Arabi’s Kitāb Inshā’ al-Dawā’ir. Within the Futūḥāt, one of the most comprehensive treatments is in chapt. 360 (III, 416-48), while the same themes are also developed in the earlier chapters 4-12 (I, 98-149). (A much briefer and more accessible account can also be found in the translation and introduction, by D. Gril, of Ibn ‘Arabi’s short R. al-littihād al-Kawnī [R.G., no. 317], entitled Le Livre de l’Arbre et des Quatre Oiseaux, Paris, 1984.)

22 sāhib naqṣ: the insights of this allegorical character (or psycho-spiritual “type”) reflect features of several different “rational sciences” of Ibn ‘Arabi’s day, including kalām (especially for its “negative theology” or tanzih concerning the highest insights into the divine nature), the popular mixture of astrology (concerning, e.g., the particular influences and qualities of various planets) and Aristotelian-features that make it considerably more accessible (at least for most modern readers) than either chapter 167 or the Kitāb al-Isra’. To begin with, it is written for the most part in relatively straightforward expository prose; the style does presuppose a profound acquaintance with Ibn ‘Arabi’s systematic terminology and symbolism (largely drawn from the Koran and hadith) as it is to be found throughout the Futūḥāt, but the role of literary and artistic effects is relatively less important than in the preceding works. Secondly, the focus of this chapter is almost exclusively on the universal spiritual dimensions of the Mi’raj, especially as expressed in the language of the Koran and hadith, in a way that should already be familiar to readers of the Fusūs al-Hikam; unlike chapter 167, it does not presuppose such extensive acquaintance with the vocabulary and symbolism of other relatively esoteric medieval Islamic sciences (alchemy, astrology, etc.). Similarly, the encounters with the individual prophets associated with each heavenly sphere can often be readily illuminated by comparison with corresponding

Ptolemaic astronomy, and even more “esoteric” sciences of the time, such as alchemy.

23 III, pp. 340-54. The enigmatic complete title of this chapter is “Concerning the Inner Knowledge of the Stage of the Fifth Tawakkul, Which None of the People of Realization (mushaqqiqīn) Has Discovered, Because of the Rarity of Those (Naturally) Apt to Receive It and the Inadequacy of (Men’s) Understandings to Grasp It.” (The term tawakkul, usually translated as “trust” or “inner confidence” in God, occurs many times in the Koran and gradually became a key term in Sufi spiritual psychology). Here this mysterious “fifth tawakkul” (mentioned again at the end of the chapter, III, 351.21–22) apparently reflects an advanced state of spiritual insight in which the saint’s absolute reliance on God—an inner attitude which in lower stages of tawakkul is usually thought to imply a sort of ascetic disdain and unconcern for the “secondary causes” (aswāb) of things of this world—is now seen as simultaneously “affirming the secondary causes” (a phrase from the opening poem of this chapter, at III, 340.15), which are finally perceived in their true metaphysical status as necessary and intrinsic manifestations of the ever-present divine Reality. This ultimate stage of trust in God would therefore closely correspond to Ibn ‘Arabi’s characteristic, constantly reiterated stress on the superiority of the state of “enlightened abiding” in the world (baqā‘) characterizing those saints who—like the Prophet—have “returned” (the rājī‘ūn) from the station of divine Proximity while retaining the ongoing realization of that insight in the world: see, for example, the insistence on this point in his conversation with Aaron in section IV-F in Part II.
passages elsewhere in Ibn 'Arabi's writings. And finally, as so often in the Futūhāt, the genuinely autobiographical passages, especially at the conclusion of Ibn 'Arabi's own spiritual ascent (section IV-I in Part II), add a powerful new dimension of clarity and persuasive force to what otherwise might appear to be simply a complex intellectual and symbolic "system."

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

If the autobiographical guise at first seems only a sort of didactic literary device, at the end (section IV-I) he does conclude with the description of a decisive personal revelation, a compelling spiritual experience that seems to have contained—or at least confirmed—virtually all the most distinctive features of his later thought and conviction, those forms of divine knowledge which he goes on to elaborate in a long enumeration of "what he saw" in that culminating "Muhammadan Station."

TRANSLATION OF CHAPTER 367

[I. Introduction: the Context and Purpose of the Spiritual Journey]

... God said "There is nothing like His likeness [and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing]" (42:11), so He described himself with a description that necessarily belongs only to Him, which is His saying: "And He is with you wherever you are" (57:4). Thus He is with us wherever we are, in the state of His "descend-
ing to the heaven of this world during the last third of the night, \(^{29}\) in the state of His being *mounted upon the Throne* (5:20; etc.), \(^{10}\) in the state of His being in the "Cloud," \(^{21}\) in the state of His being *upon the earth*

\(^{29}\) A reference to a famous "divine saying" (*hadith qudsi*) which Ibn `Arabi included in his own collection of such hadith, the *Mishkât al-An'âr* (no. 56 [cited from the *Saheeh* of Muslim], *Nichë*, pp. 86-87): "Our Lord descends every night to the heaven of this world when the last third of the night remains, and then He says: 'I am the King! Whoever calls on Me, I answer him. Whoever asks (something) of Me, I give to him. Whoever requests My forgiveness, I forgive him.'" (This same hadith is recorded, with a number of minor variations, in the canonical collections of Muslim, Mâlik, Bukhârî, Tirmidhi, Ibn Mâja and Aḥmad b. Hanbal; see detailed references and variants in *Word*, pp. 177-78.)

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

\(^{10}\) There are seven Koranic verses referring to God’s being "mounted [istiwâ'] on the Throne," often following "the creation of the heavens and the earth" (i.e., what lies "beneath" or constitutes the Throne in its cosmological sense). For Ibn `Arabi’s understanding of these verses see the extensive references to the *Fatîhah* in *Mu'jam*, pp. 791-803 (on the many meanings of the divine "Throne," *'arsh*) and pp. 622-29 (on istiwâ’).

An even more fundamental meaning of the "Throne," for Ibn `Arabi, is the "Heart of the man of true faith" (which is the "Throne of the Merciful," according to a famous hadith), i.e., the Perfect Man (see *Mu'jam*, pp. 916-21, on the *qalb*). The inner connection between these two concepts is brought out explicitly in the famous *hadith qudsi* discussed at n. 7 above and quoted at the end of this section (n. 37). Their metaphysical equivalence is a *fundamental assumption* throughout sections III and IV below, since the "Heart" is precisely the "theater" of the entire spiritual journey; see especially the sections IV-G and IV-I in Part II.

\(^{11}\) A reference to the following hadith, concerning the Prophet's response to the question "Where was our Lord before He created the creation?": "He was in a Cloud (anâ'), without air above it and without air below it, and He created His Throne upon the Water." (This famous hadith is found and in heaven (43:84; etc.),\(^{32}\) in the state of His being closer to man than his jugular vein (50:16)\(^{13}\)—and all of these are qualifications with which only He can be described.

Hence God does not move a servant from place to place in order that (the servant) might see Him, but rather "so that He might cause him to see of His Signs" (41:53; etc.)\(^{34}\) those that were unseen by him.

in the collections of Ibn Mâja, Tirmidhi and Aḥmad b. Hanbal.) Our translation here reflects Ibn `Arabi’s interpretation in chapter 34 of the *Fatîhah* (O.Y., III, 323ff.). For the broader meaning of the term *'anâ'"* ("the Cloud") in Ibn `Arabi, see the references in *Mu'jam*, pp. 820-826 and in the *Fatîhah* II, 310, as well as its treatment in the penultimate stage of the cosmological ascension described in chapter 167 (*Alchimie*, pp. 138-40).

\(^{12}\) This phrase is also contained (with minor variations) in a number of other Koranic verses (3:5, 10:61; 14:38; 22:70) all insisting on God’s intimate acquaintance with all things: see, for example, "Our Lord, surely You know what we say openly and what we hide: not a thing upon the earth and in heaven is hidden from God" (14:38), or even more appropriately, "He is God in the heavens and upon the earth; he knows your secret [sirr] and what you proclaim, and He knows what you acquire" (6:3).

Ibn `Arabi’s understanding of the divine "nearness" (cf. the related notion of "with-ness," *mu'sya*, at n. 28 above) expressed in this Koranic phrase is intimately bound up with the cosmic reality of "perpetual re-creation" (*khalq jadid*) expressed in the rest of this famous verse and its immediate context: "... yet they are in confusion about the (ever-)

\(^{13}\) This phrase is also contained (with minor variations) in a number of other Koranic verses (27:93; 31:31; etc.). Of these, certainly the most important and best known is the verse 41:53—to such an extent that it is clearly assumed whenever Ibn `Arabi mentions the divine "Signs" (âyât): "We shall

\(^{14}\) While Ibn `Arabi is alluding in particular to the "reason" for the Prophet's Ascension described in 17:1 (see following note), the same phrase (with only minor variations in the pronouns) is addressed to mankind more generally in a number of other Koranic verses (27:93; 31:31; etc.). Of these, certainly the most important and best known is the verse 41:53—such an extent that it is clearly assumed whenever Ibn `Arabi mentions the divine "Signs" (âyât): "We shall..."
He said: "Glory to Him Who made His servant journey one night from the Sacred Place of Worship to the Furthest Place of Worship, whose surroundings We have blessed, so that We might cause him to see of Our Signs!" (17:1). And similarly, when God causes them to see Our Signs on the horizons and in their souls, so that it becomes clear to them that He is the Truly Real [al-Haqq]—or is your Lord not enough, for surely He is witnessing every thing! What, are they in doubt about meeting their Lord? Does He not surely encompass all things?" Especially important, for Ibn 'Arabi as for many other Islamic thinkers, is the insistence in this verse on the coincidence of the Signs "on the horizons," i.e., in the external world [but note also Muhammad's decisive revelation at the "Loftiest Horizon" (53:7)] and those "in the souls," in the totality of awareness of the "Perfect Man" (al-insin al-kiimi).

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

The masjid al-haram ("Sacred Place of Worship") was a common name for the sanctuary of the Kaaba at Mecca, but there is some disagreement in the hadith concerning the identification of the masjid al-aqsa: sometimes, especially in later traditions, it was presented as the site of the Temple at Jerusalem (al-bayt al-maqdis, "the sacred House") where Muhammad stops to pray before his heavenly Ascension according to several hadith accounts (including that followed by Ibn 'Arabi below); but the earlier traditions agree that it refers to the "furthest point" (al-darah) or goal of the Mi'raj (i.e., where Muhammad received the culminating revelation described in Sura 53). In the latter case it is therefore closely identified with the "Inhabited House" or heavenly Temple of Abraham (al-bayt al-ma'mur), the symbol of the Heart of the Perfect Man discussed in section IV-H (notes 168-72). Here Ibn 'Arabi implicitly seems to follow the latter interpretation. (See also the articles from theSEL ET cited in n. 1 above.)

Throughout this chapter (and in the K. al-Isra', etc.) Ibn 'Arabi generally uses the Koranic expression isra to refer to the Prophet's Ascension and its spiritual analogues—possibly because the term mi'raj might appear limited only to the "ascending" portion, whereas Ibn 'Arabi always insists (as in moves (any) servant through his (inner spiritual) states in order also to cause him to see His Signs, He moves him through His states. . . . (I.e., God) says: "I only made him journey by night in order that he see the Signs, not (to bring him) to Me: because no place can hold Me and the relation of all places to Me is the same. For I am such that (only) 'the heart of My servant, the true man of faith, encompasses Me," so how could he be 'made to journey to Me' while I am 'with him wherever he is' (57:4)?"

[II. The Narrative Framework: the Mi'raj of Muhammad]

The long following section (III, 340.32-342.34) combines a virtually complete quotation of one long section III below, and at the end of his R. al-Anwri on the critical importance of the "descending" phrase of return which distinguishes the highest rank of the saints (and of course the prophets). Although we have consistently translated isra and its related verbal forms here as "journey," it should be kept in mind that the Arabic term refers specifically to a nocturnal journey: for Ibn 'Arabi, this corresponds to the fact that the spiritual isra, at least, is an inner, "secret" process largely hidden from outward observation, especially in those rare saints who have followed it through to the end. The complex inner significance of this and other grammatical and lexical nuances of this same Koranic verse (17:1) are discussed in detail in Ibn 'Arabi's Kitab al-Isfar 'an Natibiy al-Asfar (= Rasal II, no. 24), pp. 17-21; our translation here cannot convey most of those nuances or alternative meanings.

35 Here, as so often with Ibn 'Arabi (see especially section III below), the pronouns are rather ambiguous; in this case the intended meaning is clarified by the following lines (340.25-30, not translated here) citing several other hadith and Koranic passages where God shows some of His creations to certain prophetic messengers in order to teach them a particular lesson. Here Ibn 'Arabi implicitly contrasts this "spiritual" journey of the saints (and ultimately of all men) through their inner "states"—i.e., the "Signs in your souls" of verse 41:53 (see notes 34 and 72)—with the physical (or possibly "imaginal") journey through heavenly places which, as he explains below (end of section II), was the exclusive privilege of the Prophet on this single occasion.

36 An allusion to the celebrated hadith qudsi (not found in the canonical collections, but favored by many Sufi authors) already cited in n. 7 above. This divine saying is mentioned repeatedly by Ibn 'Arabi, who takes it as a classical reference to the role of the Heart (of the "Perfect Man," as realized by the accomplished saints) as the complete mirror of the divine Self-manifestations (tajaliyya). (See the references at notes 7, 30 and 33 above, and all of section IV-H.)
The second of these parenthetical remarks occurs in the lowest heaven (the one immediately surrounding this sublunar world), when Muhammad is brought face to face with all the blessed and the damned among the descendants of Adam.⁴⁰ “Then (Muhammad) saw himself among the different individuals belonging to the blessed, at Adam’s right hand, and he gave thanks to God. And through that he came to know how it is that man can be in two places (at the same time) while remaining precisely himself and not anyone else: this was for him like the visible (physical) form and the (reflected) forms visible in the mirror and (other) reflected images.”⁴¹

The third such passage is Ibn ‘ArabI’s statement, in connection with the Prophet’s visit to Jesus in the second heaven, that “He was our first master, through whose assistance we returned (to God); and he has a tremendous solicitude (‘indya) for us, so that he does not forget us for a single hour.”⁴²

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²⁴ Although Ibn ‘ArabI does not identify his hadith sources in this section or explicitly distinguish his “quotations” (or paraphrases) from his personal comments and explanations, the particular “hadith al-isrā’” (III, 340.30) which he follows for the basic order of events and the Prophet’s encounters up to the “Lotus-Tree of the Limit”—both here and in the other Mī‘raj narratives discussed in the introduction—is the first one given in the corresponding section of Muslim’s Sahih (imān, 259, from Anas b. Mālik). Here and in the other Mī‘raj narratives he adds many additional details (e.g., the four mystical “rivers” flowing from the Tree of Life, the sound of the divine “Pens,” the milk and other drinks offered the Prophet) which are drawn for the most part from the following related hadith in Muslim (imān, 260–94)—although most of those traditions are also to be found in the other canonical collections with minor variations in the order and description of the events.

²⁵ uthbā‘i al-āshāb: i.e., the affirmation of all the “realities” or phenomena other than God (the ultimate and Primary Cause). This assertion of the reality and importance of all phenomenal existence as perceived from the very highest spiritual perspective—a central leitmotif of Ibn ‘Arabi’s thought, and an attitude by no means shared by all Sufis—was already stressed in the title and opening line of the poem beginning this chapter, where he stresses that the true, ultimate state of “tawakkul (absolute trust and reliance on God) affirms the secondary causes” (see n. 23 above and section IV-F).

Footnotes:
⁴⁰ The existence of those two groups on either side of Adam is mentioned in the second long Mī‘raj hadith (from Abū Dharr) given by Muslim (imān, 264); however, that hadith does not mention Muhammad’s seeing himself, so this aspect may well be Ibn ‘Arabi’s own addition.
⁴¹ For the simultaneous presence of each soul—even if we are usually unaware of the fact—in its own Garden (or Hell) already during this life, see the illustrative passages in chapter 302 (III, 12–13) and chapter 73, question 62 (II, 82).
⁴² More generally, this experience of the simultaneous presence of one’s essential individual reality (‘ayn: translated as “precisely himself” in this passage) in different planes of being is only one illustration of Ibn ‘Arabi’s universal perception of the reality of all manifest being as theophanies (tajalliyāt, mazāhib, etc.) of the “Realities” or Names within the divine Essence and of the “eternal individual entities” (a‘yān šābīa) in the divine Knowledge—a conception for which he frequently uses this image of mirrors and reflections. See the famous metaphysical development of this image in the first two chapters of the Futūḥāt al-Ḥikam; in the Futūḥāt 1, 163 and IV, 2; and further references in Mu’jam, pp. 499–505, as well as the striking set of diagrammatic representations of these “mirrors” of God and man provided by Ḥaydar Āmulī in the introduction to his vast commentary on the Futūḥāt, Naṣṣ al-Nuṣūṣ (“Le texte des textes”), ed. H. Corbin and O. Yahya, Tehran/Paris, 1975, plates 3–30.
⁴³ The special role of Jesus in the beginning of Ibn ‘Arabi’s own spiritual path is alluded to repeatedly in the Futūḥāt: “He was looking after us when we entered upon this Path we are following today” (I, 15.26); “I returned [to God: tūbuṭ] at the hands of Jesus” (IV, 77.30); “Our return to this path was through good tidings (mubashshirah) at the hand of Jesus, Moses and Muhammad” (IV, 172.13); and “we found that
The final observation concerns the nature of the Prophet's vision (ru'ya) of God at the culminating stage of his Ascension, after God—in the words of the hadith—"had revealed to him what He revealed."43 "Then He ordered (Muhammad) to enter; so he entered (the divine Presence), and there he saw exactly what he had known and nothing else: the form of his belief did not change."44 This question of man's "divine vision" and knowledge is at the heart of Ibn 'Arabi's own long discussion with Moses later in this chapter (IV-F) and underlies his accounts of his own culminating revelatory vision in IV-I and the Appendix in Part II.

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

[III. The Spiritual Journeys of the Saints]47

As for the saints, they have spiritual journeys in the intermediate world48 during which they directly witness spiritual realities (ma'āni) embodied in forms that have become sensible for the imagination; these (sensible images) convey knowledge of the spiritual realities contained within those forms. And so they have a (spiritual) journey on the earth and in the air, without their ever having set a sensible foot in the heavens. For what distinguished God's Messenger from all the others (among the saints) was that his body was made to journey, so that he passed through the heavens and spheres in a way perceptible by the senses and traversed real, sensible distances. But all of that from the heavens (also belongs) to his heirs,49 Ascension with his earlier statement (at III, 340.34) that "Buraq is a mount from the barzakh" (i.e., from the intermediate, imaginal world). However, for Ibn 'Arabi, the events and perceptions taking place in the barzakh are also "bodily" and "sensible" in a certain respect. See also, in this regard, his pointed advice to his fellow spiritual voyagers (in section III below) not to mention the "way" in which one travels—which is likely to lead to controversy—but only what one has actually seen, which in itself cannot be disputed.46 We have not been able to locate a hadith source for this assertion. In any case, the relative proportions this statement implies do suggest the primary importance of the spiritual journey of each soul, which is the essential subject of the rest of this chapter (and of Ibn 'Arabi's other major treatments of Mi'raj theme).

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

44 For Ibn 'Arabi's complementary treatment of this decisive question of man's "vision" (ru'ya) or contemplation of God—as differing only "qualitatively," but not in its "form," from the contents of his innermost "beliefs"—in an eschatological perspective, see the illustrative passages in chapter 73, questions 67 and 71 (11, 85–86).

45 It is not entirely clear how Ibn 'Arabi means for the reader to reconcile this insistence (repeated at the beginning of section III below) on the "bodily" nature of this particular station [of immediate spiritual 'feeding'] within ourselves and had the immediate experience (dhāwq) of it at the beginning of our journeying, with the spiritual reality (rūhānîya) of Jesus" (III, 43.20–21). This may be connected to the vision of one night:55

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

47 III, 342.34–345.25.

48 isrâ‘i rūhānîya barzakhîya: as mentioned in n. 35, the forms of asrâ‘ (isrâ‘, etc.) are translated throughout simply as "journey" without the adjective "nocturnal," which might be misleading (if taken literally) in English; Ibn 'Arabi's usage in this context refers to the inward, "invisible" nature of these spiritual voyages (i.e., from the perspective of an external observer), not to the time they may occur.

49 I.e., the saints: for the central importance of Ibn 'Arabi's conception of the saints as "heirs" of the different prophets (and all of them ultimately as heirs of the "Muhammadan Reality" which encompasses all the prophets), see Mu'jam, pp. 1191–1201, Sceau, chapters III and V, and of course the whole of the Fusûs al-Hikam.
(only) in its spiritual reality (ma'na), not its sensible form.

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

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

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

path." Elsewhere Ibn 'Arabi, often following earlier Sufi writers, offers a variety of typologies for the soul's spiritual voyage: e.g., the fivefold division of sulūk in chapter 189 (II, 380-82); the classical "four journeys" (asfār); or the more elaborate division into dozens of "stations," "stages," etc., underlying the structure of the Futūḥāt.

31 K. al-Isrā: see the discussion of the autobiographical nature of this work in the introduction above, the key passage translated in the Appendix, and further cross-references at each stage in section IV. This paragraph is followed by a short poem (343.6-17), not translated here, recapitulating the "order of the journey," i.e., the various symbolic stages (seven heavens, Lotus-tree of the Limit, divine Throne, etc.) found in virtually all of Ibn 'Arabi's versions of the Ascension.

31 "Modalities of their journey" = masrahum, which could also refer to their "point of departure," the "place" or "time" of the journey, the particular "route," etc. Cf. section IV-F, where Yahyā (John the Baptist) explains to Ibn 'Arabi that each journey is different and "each traveler creates his own
alone remains (without any of those other attachments to the world), then God removes from him the barrier of the veil and he remains with God, just as everything else in him remained with (the world) corresponding to it.

Hence throughout this journey the servant remains God and not-God. And since he remains God and not-God, He makes (the servant) travel—with respect to Him, not with respect to (what is) not-Him—in Him, in a subtle spiritual (ma'navī) journey.

Ibn 'Arabī goes on (pp. 343.24–344.4) to recall the fundamental metaphysical underpinnings of these distinctions in the peculiar nature of the inner correspondence between man and the world (i.e., “not-God”), since both are created “according to the form” of God. Ordinarily, however, people think of themselves as simply “parts” of the world, as “things” within it, and it is only at the end of this purifying journey that the saints can realize man’s true dignity and spiritual potential as the “Perfect Man” (al-insān al-kāmil) whose heart fully mirrors the divine Reality (al-Haqq), thereby accomplishing that perfection for which the world itself was created.

So when the servant has become aware of what we have just explained, so that he knows that he is not (created) according to the form of the world, but only according to the form of God (al-Haqq), then God makes him journey through His Names, in order to cause him to see His Signs (17:1) within him. Thus (the servant) comes to know that He is what is designated by every divine Name—whether or not that Name is one of those described as “beautiful.”

56 Or “in him” (i.e., in the servant). The ambiguity is again probably intentional: as Ibn 'Arabī goes on to explain, this voyage is “in God” (i.e., consciously, not simply “ontology”), but it is also “in the servant” insofar as he can only know the divine Names through their manifestation within himself, in his own states and experiences. The description of this second stage of the spiritual journey of the saints resumes at III, 344.4.
It is through those Names that God appears in His servants, and it is through Them that the servant takes on the different “colorings” of his states: for they are Names in God, but “colorings” (of the soul) in us. And they are precisely the “affairs” with which God is “occupied” so it is in us and through us that He acts, just as we (only) appear in Him and through Him.

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

Now when (the spiritual traveler) has completed his share of the journey through the Names and has come to know the Signs which the Names of God gave him during that journey, then he returns and “reintegrates” his self with a composition different from that initial composite nature, because of the knowledge he has gained which he did not have when he was “dissolved” (in the ascending phase of that journey). Thus he

(d. 546/1151), Khatū al-Na’ilayn. (For Ibn ‘Arabi’s own long commentary on that work, see R. G. no. 68.) The inner spiritual “verification” of that reality is likewise a key feature of the culminating realization described in the Appendix (from the K. al-Iṣrāʾ) in Part II.

“Colorings” translates tāwūnāt, a traditional Sufi expression for all the constantly changing psychic states and conditions of every individual, equivalent to the incessant inner “transformations” (taqallubāt) of the soul discussed in the following paragraph. As Ibn ‘Arabi indicates here, the manifestations of the divine Names ultimately constitute all our experience and reality.

An allusion to the verse 55:29: “. . . Every Day He is (occupied) in an affair.” Ibn ‘Arabi typically takes the term sha’n (“affair,” “concern,” etc.) in this verse to refer to the infinite particular aspects of the divine “Activity” at each instant in time: see, e.g., II, 77, 82, 218, 499; III, 198, 224; and the further references in Muṣjam, pp. 639–42.

The translation here omits a brief poem (III, 344.8–11) illustrating this central theme of Ibn ‘Arabi’s thought and foreshadowing his own inner realization of this truth in the revelatory vision described in section IV–I below.

“I Transformations” = taqallubāt—a meaning which, for Ibn ‘Arabi, underlies the Arabic term for the Heart (qalb), since these constantly renewed transformations of being ultimately constitute all our experience: see his classic exposition in the Futūḥ, chapt. 12 (on Shu’ayb and “the Wisdom of the Heart”), and further references in Muṣjam, pp. 916–21. His mention here of the “states of the world” is an important reminder that these “transformations” and the corresponding divine activity of “ever-renewed creation” encompass all the forms of experience and perception—not just what we ordinarily consider “inner” or “spiritual” phenomena—and all the forms of manifest being.

For the complex term wali (usually translated here as “saint”), see n. 79 below.
continues to pass through the different sorts of worlds, taking from each world (aspect of himself) which he had left there and reintegrating it in his self, and he continues to appear in each successive stage (of being) until he arrives back on earth.

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

And the jurist (faqih) among them says: "This fellow is laying claim to prophethood (nabuwwa), or his intellect has become deranged: so either he is a heretic—in which case he ought to be executed—or else he is insane, in which case we have no business talking with him." Hence "a group of people make fun of him" (49:11), others "draw a lesson from him" (59:2); 71 while others have faith in what he says, and thus it becomes a subject of dispute in the world. But the faqih was unaware of (the true meaning of) His saying: "We shall show them Our Signs on the horizons and in their souls . . . "? (41:53), since (God) does not specify one group rather than (any) other.

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

Now you should know that (in reality) there is no difference with regard to this journey between ordinary people 72 and the person (distinguished by) this way and this characteristic. That is because (this spiritual journey) is in order to see the (divine) Signs, and the transformations of the states of ordinary people are (likewise) all Signs: they are in those Signs, but "they do not notice" (23:56; etc.). 74 Hence this sort (of traveler) is only distinguished from the rest of (his fellow) creatures, those who are veiled (83:15), by what God has inspired in his innermost being 75 either through his thinking and inquiry with his intellect, or through his preparation, by polishing the mirror of his soul, for the unveiling of these Signs to him by way of inner unveiling and immediate witnessing.

70 This paragraph, opening with a phrase from the hadith al-′isrā′ (section II above), alludes to Ibn ʿArabi’s reminder earlier in this chapter (III, 342.27-33) of the sceptical, even hostile reaction of many Meccans to the Prophet’s insistence on the physical nature of his nocturnal journey. (Those events are vividly recounted in Ibn Ishāq’s Sīra; see pp. 182-84 in The Life of Muhammad, tr. A. Guillaume, Oxford, 1955.) It is also another allusion to Ibn ʿArabi’s understanding (see notes 2 and 35 above) of the “hidden,” spiritual character of this voyage of realization for the saints. In the R. al-Anwār (p. 17; Journey, p. 59), Ibn ʿArabi explains that the fact that Muhammad—unlike, for example, Moses after his return from Mt. Sinai—showed no outward signs of his Ascension and revelatory encounter with God is an indication of his superior spiritual state of “perfect realization,” corresponding to the equivalent “invisibility” of the spiritual state of the afrād and malāmiyya among the saints “who return,” the rājiʿūn.

71 The first phrase is clearly an allusion to the following verse (49:11): “O you who have true faith, do not (let) a group make fun of a group who may well be better than them . . . “; the second probably refers to the well-known words (from verse 59:2): “. . . so draw a lesson, you who have (true) vision”—the latter group (išū al-ḥabūr), for Ibn ʿArabi, evidently being the saints or people of true spiritual vision.

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

73 al-ʿālam: literally, “(the people of) the world”; “(spiritual) journey” here, as throughout this section, translates isrāʾ, the term applied in the Koran to the Prophet’s “nocturnal journey” (see n. 35 above).

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

75 “Innermost being” = sirr (see n. 55 above). “Inspired” here translates the verb alhama, a term that is much broader in meaning than the special divine “revelation” (waḥy) characterizing the prophetic messengers, since here it evidently extends to the results of thinking (fiḵr) and “rational inquiry” (nazar bi-ʾiql), as well as the fruits of spiritual practice and mystical experience (the “polishing of the soul”) which are Ibn ʿArabi’s primary focus.
direct experience and ecstatic "finding." 76

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

But as for the friends of God 79 (10:64–66), they do
not make up likenesses for God. For God is the one
Who makes up likenesses for the people (14:25; 24:35),
because of His knowledge of the underlying intentions
(of those symbols), since God knows, but we do not
know 80 (see 16:74; 3:66; 2:216). Thus the saint (i.e., the
"friend of God," the one truly close to Him) observes
the likenesses God has made, and in that immediate
witnessing he actually sees precisely what connects the
likeness and that which it symbolizes: for the likeness
is precisely what is symbolized, with respect to that
which connects them, but it is different insofar as it is a
likeness. So the saint "does not make up likenesses
for God"; instead, he truly knows what God symbol­
ized with those likenesses. . . . 81

[IV. Ibn 'Arabi's Own Mi`rāj]

[IV-A. The Departure From the Elemental World] 82

So when God wished to "journey with me to cause
me to see (some) of His Signs" in His Names among
my names 83—and that was the portion of our inheri­
tance from the (Prophet's) nocturnal journey—He
removed me from my place and ascended with me on

76 kashf, shuhudan dhawqan wujudan: see the extensive references to Ibn 'Arabi's usage of each of these key terms in Muqarn, pp. 971–72 (kashf), 654–67 (shuhad and related forms), and 492–95 (dhawq), as well as his further discussions concerning the necessary spiritual role of this "direct experience" (dhawq) in his encounters with Joseph and Moses in section IV (notes 108 and 145) below. 77 I.e., instead of grasping the inner reality of God's symbols, those that already exist (and which ultimately constitute all reality). "(Ordinary) people" here translates al-nās, a term with much the same meaning as al-ālam (n. 73) in the preceding sentences—i.e., everyone but the accomplished saints, the "friends of God" discussed in the following paragraph.

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

80 Although the phrase " . . . God knows, but you do not know" completes the Koranic verse (16:74) already quoted in the preceding paragraph, its more illuminating use in the other two verses evidently forms the background for this particular allusion: in 3:66 it is applied to those who "dispute concerning that of which they have no knowledge," and in 2:216 it follows the reminder that "Perhaps you abhor something although it is good for you, and perhaps you love something and it is bad for you."

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

83 fi asmā'īhi min asmi: a dense formula that summarizes Ibn 'Arabi's complex metaphysical understanding of the divine Names in their relation to the world and each individual's experience, as outlined in the immediately preceding section.
the Buraq of my contingency. Then He penetrated with me into my (natural) elements.

[At this point Ibn 'Arabi allegorically encounters each of the elements constituting the physical, sub-lunar world, according to the accepted physical theories of his time—i.e., earth, water, air and fire—and leaves behind with each of them the corresponding part of his bodily nature.]

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

[IV-B. Adam and the First Heaven]

As Ibn 'Arabi explains in this section, it was during this encounter with his "father" that he was first given the immediate spiritual awareness of two key themes of his thought: the universality of the divine Mercy which, like the Being that is inseparable from it, "encompasses all things"; and, flowing from this first principle, the temporal, limited nature of the punishments of "Hell" (and the sufferings of the world as a whole), which manifest certain of those Names.

abodes of "Paradise" (al-janna) that together constitute what we ordinarily call "heaven" (as opposed to "hell").

97 nash'āt al-badanf: nash'a, literally "arising" or "appearing (in existence)," is one of Ibn 'Arabi's most common expressions (following the Koran, 56.62, etc.) for the different planes or realms of being. In chapter 167 of the Futuḥāt (Alchimie, pp. 57–58) this "departure" from the physical world is explicitly explained as the voyager's inner liberation from "domination by the carnal desires" (hukm al-shahawāt).

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

Ibn 'Arabi's important account of his revelatory experience at this stage in the K. al-Isrā' (pp. 12–14) is translated and summarized in the Appendix in Part II.

99 Both of these points are also listed among the different kinds of spiritual knowledge which Ibn 'Arabi "saw" during the culminating "revelation" described at the end of this
The discovery and awareness of these principles presupposes man's ultimate reality as the "Perfect Man" (insâni kâmil), the (potentially) complete reflection of the divine Reality at all its levels of manifestation—i.e., the very foundation of his metaphysical vision which is developed at much greater length in the famous opening chapter on Adam in the Fusiṣā.

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

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

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

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

90 See the corresponding passage of the hadith al-īsrâ' in section II (at notes 39-40) above. According to the original hadith (only partially translated here), Muhammad first sees all the descendants of Adam divided among the blessed (literally, "the happy": su'adâ) at his right hand and the "wretched" or "suffering ones" (ashqiyâ) on his left.

91 This phrase is quoted from a longer "divine saying," presupposed throughout this section, which Ibn 'Arabi included in the Mâshkhât (no. 24; Niche, pp. 50-53). According to that hadith, God—having created Adam and sent him to greet the angels—shows Adam His two closed Hands, saying: "Choose whichever one of them you want," and Adam replies: "I choose the Right Hand of My Lord, although both Hands of my Lord are right and blessed." Then He opened (His Hand), and in It were Adam and his descendants..."
Anger disappeared. (This is) because the sending down of the (divine) Message (tanzil al-risāla) actually is precisely the establishment (and application) of (God's) limits for those with whom He is angry (1:7), and nothing remains (after that) but (His) Good Will and Mercy which encompasses every thing (7:156). So when these 'limits' (and the punishments flowing from them) have come to an end, then the (divine) authority comes back to the universal Mercy with regard to everything.96

Thus my father Adam granted me the benefit of this knowledge when I was unaware of it, and that was divine good tidings for me in the life of this world, in anticipation (of its full realization in the hereafter). Therefore the Resurrection comes to an end with time,97 as God said: 

"[The angels and the Spirit ascend to Him in a Day whose extent is] of fifty thousand years"98 (70:4), and this is the period of the establishment (and application) of the (divine) limits.

Inseparable and indeed "simultaneous" from the comprehensive, divine perspective represented by Adam here.

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

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

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

However, if the reference here is understood as applying to the "Lesser Resurrection" of each individual soul (see n. 93), then the final phrase could be translated as "in time," with the period of fifty thousand years being that allotted for the perfection and purification (including punishment) of each particular soul.

98 For some representative aspects of Ibn 'Arabi's complex understanding of "time" (zamān), see ch. 12 on the cycles of esoteric and exoteric time, l, 143–147 (O.Y., II, 342–45); ch. 59 on the time of the cosmos, I, 290–292 (O.Y., IV, 330–40); ch. 390 on the inner meaning of time, III, 546–50;

[Ibn 'Arabī goes on to explain that "after this period"—however it is to be understood—only the divine Names "the Merciful" (which encompasses all the "Most Beautiful Names") and "the Compassionate" will have authority and influence (hukm) in the world, although the intrinsic, logically necessary "opposition" of the other Names necessarily will remain.]

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

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

and further references in Mu'jam, pp. 1253–54.

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

100 For a brief but clear explanation of Ibn 'Arabi's central metaphysical conception of the divine Names as "relations" (nisab) whose reality only becomes manifest through the being of the created "individual entities" (a'yān), see ch. 222 (II, 516–18). See also the many further references in Mu'jam, pp. 591–618 (on the divine "Names") and pp. 506–13 (on the related concepts of each Name as "lord," rabb and marbhā).

101 This theme of the universality of the divine "Mercy" as the source and ground of all Being—and therefore on a very different level from the other more particular divine Names—is developed in more detail (along with most of the
[IV-C. Jesus and Yahyā (John the Baptist) in the Second Heaven]

Ibn 'Arabī next encounters Jesus and his cousin Yahyā in the third heaven—the two figures being linked here by their association in the Koran with “Life,” both “animal” and spiritual. The Shaykh first asks Jesus about his life-giving powers, and is told that they ultimately come from Gabriel (as the Universal Spirit, al-rūḥ al-kull): “No one who revives the dead revives them except to the extent of what he has inherited from me; so such a person does not occupy my station in regard to that (life-giving power), just as I do not have the station of the one (i.e., Gabriel) who granted me (the power of) reviving the dead.”

Ibn 'Arabī then turns to Yahyā/John, who clarifies a long series of questions involving the references to him (and his relations with Jesus) in the Koran and hadith. Finally, after a brief excursus on the nature of spiritual procreation and marriage in Paradise, Yahyā explains why it is that he moves back and forth between the heaven of Jesus and the sphere of Aaron (where Muhammad met him, and where Ibn 'Arabī will encounter him later) and sometimes dwells with Joseph and Idrīs as well.

Most of the themes (such as the interrelations of life, spiritual knowledge, and the divine inspiration of the prophets) mentioned only allusively in this section are treated in greater detail in the chapters of the Futūḥāt on Jesus and Yahyā.

[IV-D. Joseph and the Third Heaven]

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

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

[IV-E. Idris and the Fourth Heaven]^{110}

[Upon his arrival in the fourth and central, pivotal
heaven, that of the Sun (and the symbolic "Heart"
of the cosmos), Ibn `Arabi is immediately greeted
by Idris, who calls him "the Muhammadan inheri-
tor" (al-wáriith al-Muhammadi)—an allusion to the
Shaykh's conception of his own unique role as the
"Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood." Ibn `Arabi
then asks him a series of brief questions which relate
to the traditional accounts concerning Idris (in one
or another of his manifestations) or to his special spir-
tual function as the perennial "Pole" (qu‘b) and
summit of the spiritual hierarchy.]

. . . I said to him: "It has reached me concerning
you that you are a proponent of miracles,"^{111}

Then he said: "Were it not for miracles, I would not
have been raised up to a lofty place" (19:57).^{114}

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

And he said: "The outer is a sign of the inner."^{115}

^{110} This insistence on the indispensable role of personal
"direct experience" (dhawq) in a fully adequate appreciation
of spiritual matters is also one of the leitmotifs of Ibn
`Arabi's encounter with Moses (IV-G in Part II).

^{111} In the corresponding encounter with Idris in the
K. al-Isrâ' (p. 21), Ibn `Arabi is likewise greeted as "Master
of the Saints" (nuyyid al-awiyyat).

^{112} For Ibn `Arabi's understanding of Idris' position as the
heavenly "Pole" (qu‘b) of the perennial spiritual hierarchy—
whose two "Imams" at that eternal level are Jesus and
Ilyas—see the references to the Futuhat and other works
and the explanations (including the relation of these figures
to their successive terrestrial "deputies") in Steau, chapter VI,
and in Mu‘jam, pp. 909·15 and 101-14. The R. al-Anwar, at
this point in the mystical ascension (Steau, pp. 201-13;
Journey, p. 43 at bottom), adds that all the preceding
spheres belonged to the realm of the "Imam of the Left
Hand," while "this is the place of the Heart," where "you will
discover the degrees of the Pole."

al-kharq: i.e., more strictly speaking, of any phenomena
that appear to "break" the "acustomed order" (‘adad) of
events in the world. The term is more general than the
divine probative miracles (mu‘jizat) performed for the prophets,
and likewise distinct from the "wonders" or "blessings"
(karâma) that are among the charismatic powers attributable
to the spiritual force or himma of certain saints. (See the
additional references to these distinctions in Mu‘jam,
pp. 961-71.)

^{114} Alluding to the Koranic description of Idris' miraculous
preservation from death: "And mention Idris in the Book: he
was a man of truth [siddiq], a prophet [nabi], and We raised
him up to a lofty place" (19:56-57). See especially Ibn
`Arabi's more detailed discussions of these verses in chapters
4 and 22 of the Futuhat (pp. 75-80 and 181-87).

^{115} The meaning of this exchange, and of the outward,
cosmic symbolism of Idris' supreme spiritual rank and func-
tion, is brought out in much greater detail in the long
chapter 4 of the Futuhat concerning "Enoch" (who is explicitly
I said: “I have heard it said that you only asked tawhīd116 of your people, and nothing else (i.e., no separate revealed Law).”

He said: “And they did not (even) do (that). Now I was a prophet (nabī: see 19:56) calling them to the word (i.e., the outward profession) of tawhīd, not to tawhīd (itself)—for no one has ever denied tawhīd.”117

identified there with Idrīs). Chapter 22 of the Fustās likewise concerns “Elias who is Idrīs . . .” (opening sentence). There Ibn ‘Arabi explains that Idrīs “who was a prophet before Noah,” was first raised to a lofty place (19:57), but was then sent down again to earth—in the form of the prophet Elias—to experience fully the divine “intimacy” with even the lowest (animal, mineral and vegetal) degrees of creation. The contrast between these two chapters of the Fustās suggests that “Enoch” is associated in particular with the divine transcendence (tanzih) and “Elias” with the equally essential aspect of divine immanence (iashbīh) together symbolizing the two indispensable aspects of Idrīs’ comprehensive perfection in his spiritual function as Pole and his position as “Heart” of the cosmos.

116 This term is ordinarily understood to refer to the outward profession of divine Unity (“there is no god but God . . .”) contained in the shahāda (= the “word of tawhīd” in the following sentence), but Idrīs understands it here in the far more profound sense of the reality of divine Unity—at once both transcendent and immanent—which is at the heart of Ibn ‘Arabi’s conception of the Unity of Being (see additional references in the following note).

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

117 I.e., the reality of tawhīd which—since it constitutes the very nature of Being and the primordial core of man’s nature—is necessarily expressed in all the planes of manifestation and the corresponding degrees of spiritual realization. Ibn ‘Arabi often refers (e.g., at I, 405) to the Koranic statement “Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him . . .” (17:23), which he typically understands as an expression of this universal metaphysical reality (as well as a command). See likewise his discussion of the underlying meaning of the traditional formula of tawhīd in the profession of faith (i.e., the “word” or “saying [kalima] of tawhīd” in this sentence) in chapter 67 of the Fustūḥāt (I, 325–29), and especially his subtle treatment of the 36 different Koranic

I said: “This is strange!”

. . . (Then) I said: “But the differences (of opinion) concerning the Truly Real and the things said concerning Him118 have become quite numerous.”

He said: “It (can) only be like that, since the matter is (perceived differently) according to the constitution (of each individual).”119

I said: “But I thought120 that all of you prophets, the whole group of you, did not differ concerning Him?”

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


118 Or “It”. “Truly Real” = al-Haqq, which could also be translated here simply as “the Truth” or “God”—since in this context the “ontological” and “theological” perspectives are virtually inseparable for Ibn ‘Arabi. Similarly, “things said” (maqālāt) could also be translated here as (theological) “schools” or (religious) “denominations.”

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

120 Or “I saw” (ra‘yatu), if this expression is taken as an allusion to Ibn ‘Arabi’s visionary revelation of the unity of the prophets and their teachings within the “Reality of Muhammad” or the “Qur‘ān,” which he describes in section IV-I and the Appendix (from the K. al-Isrā’) in Part II.

121 “Direct relationship” translates ‘ill, a term that can refer either to a blood-relationship or to a pact or covenant (as in the Koran, 9:8–10). In either case, it refers here to the relation of immediate divine inspiration—in itself implying both “kinship” and covenant—that, for Ibn ‘Arabi, distinguishes the spiritual state of the prophets and saints, as opposed to the fallible and often quite divergent results of man’s ordinary “reasoning” or “inquiry” (naẓar).

122 I.e., such unanimous agreement—unlike the usual and expected state of disagreement among the “people of naẓar”
I said: "And is the matter (i.e., the reality of things) in itself really as it was said to you (by God)? For the signs (followed by) the intellects (of those who rely exclusively on their reasoning) indicate the impossibility of (certain) things you (prophets) brought concerning that."

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

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

(Idris) said: "He told the truth. I am a prophet of God (19:56), and I do not know any period at the close of which the universe as a whole stops. However, (I do know) that He never ceases creating (the universe) in its entirety; that it (i.e., the whole of reality) never ceases to be 'nearer' and 'further'; and that the 'appointed times' apply to the (particular) created things—through the completion of (their) periods (of existence)—and not to the (process of) creation (as a whole), since creation is continually renewed 'with the breaths' (at every instant). Thus we know (only) what He has caused us to know—And they do not comprehend anything of His Knowledge except for what He wishes (2:255)."

So I said to him: "Then what remains until the appearance of the 'Hour'?

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123 This last phrase alludes to a well-known hadith qudsi (mentioned a number of times, with minor variations, by Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi, Ibn Maja, Ahmad b. Hanbal, etc.; see Word, pp. 127–30), which is quoted twice in Ibn 'Arabi's Mishkat (no. 13 and 27; Niche, pp. 36–37, 56–57): "I am in accordance with what My servant supposes concerning Me, and I am present with him when he remembers [root dh-k-r] Me..." For the broader metaphysical underpinnings of this saying in Ibn 'Arabi's thought, see the many references throughout the Fusus, including his discussion of this hadith in the closing lines (p. 226; Bezels, pp. 283–84) and his development of the related notion of the "god created in beliefs," in the chapters on Shu'ayb (I, 119–124; Bezels, 148–53), on Elias/Idris (I, 182–86; Bezels, 230–34), on Zachariah (I, 178; Bezels, 224–25), and on Aaron (I, 194–96; Bezels, 246–48).

124 This encounter is described in greater detail in chapter 390 of the Fusus (devoted to the inner meaning of "time," al-zamān), in a passage (III, p. 549.8–140 which clearly brings out the "visionary," dreamlike character of this particular experience: "Now God caused me to see, in the way that the sleeper sees (in his dreams)—while I was going around the Kaaba..." There this mysterious "ancestor" also reminds Ibn 'Arabi of a hadith of the Prophet stating that "God created 100,000 Adams."

125 I.e., duniya ("this world") and akhira (the "next world"): their etymology alludes both to the full ontological range of levels of Self-manifestation and to the reality—which Idris mentions explicitly later in this discussion (at n. 130 below)—that their "closeness" (or the contrary) is relative to the perspective of each observer, since all are equally with God.

126 ajāḥ: this term is used dozens of times in the Koran—often in close association with "the Hour" (n. 128 below)—to refer to the ultimate fate of men in general (e.g., in verses 6.2, 60; etc.), of "every community" [umma: a term which for Ibn 'Arabi encompasses every type of created being] (at 7:34; 10:49; etc.), or of the motions of the sun and the moon (at 31:29; etc.), etc.

127 ma'as al-anfās: this is one of Ibn 'Arabi's most common expressions for the ever-renewed creation of the universe at every instant (khaliq jadid/rajaddud al-khalq), a metaphysical reality which is only directly visible to the true Knowers and accomplished saints, as he explains in the famous chapter on Shu'ayb in the Fusus al-Hikam (pp. 124–26; Bezels, pp. 153–55). For some representative discussions of this recurrent theme in the Fusus, see II, 46, 208, 372, 384, 432, 471, 500, 554, 639, 653; III, 127; and further references in Mu'jam, pp. 429–33.

128 There are some 48 Koranic references to the "Hour" (al-sāʾa) and the many questions surrounding it (e.g., at 33:63; 79:42), as well as a considerable body of hadith, especially concerning Its "conditions" or "signs" (shurūṭ, a term mentioned in Ibn 'Arabi's ensuing question here). Ibn 'Arabi frequently discusses these matters along lines already followed by many earlier Sufis (e.g., in his response to Tirmidhi's question [ch. 73, no. 72; 11, p. 82] concerning the "Hour"), so the apparent naivete of his questioning here is almost certainly a literary device.
And he replied: "Their reckoning has drawn near to people, but they are in (a state of) heedlessness, turning away" (21:1).129

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

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

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

He replied: "The abode of Being is one: the abode does not become 'nearer' (dunyā) except through you,130 and the other world' (al-akhirah) is not distinguished from it except through you! But with regard to bodies [i.e., as opposed to the man's inherent spiritual finality and progressive movement of 'return' to his Source], the matter131 is only engendered states (akwān), transformations and coming and going (of endless material forms); it has not ceased, and it never will."

I said: "What is there?"132

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

I said: "Then where is error in relation to what is right?"

He said: "Error is a relative matter, while what is right is the (unchanging) principle. So whoever truly knows God and the world knows that what is right is the ever-present Principle, which never ceases (to be), and he knows that error (occurs) through the opposition of the two points of view.134 But since the opposition (of the two perspectives) is inevitable, then error is also inevitable. So whoever maintains (the real existence of) error (also) maintains (the prior existence and reality of) what is right; and whoever maintains (the ultimate) non-existence of error speaks what is right (78:38)135 and posits error (as deriving) from what is right." [. . . 136]

129 "People" here translates al-nās, a Koranic expression which Ibn 'Arabi generally understands and uses (e.g., at n. 77 in section III above) in reference to the condition of inner ignorance or "veiling" characterizing "most people" or "ordinary people," as opposed to the enlightened spiritual state of the saints ("people of God," "true men," "true servants," etc.). On this specific point, see his remarks concerning the saints' visionary awareness of the contemporary presence of the "Hour," in his reply to the eschatological questions in chapter 73 (I, 81-82).

130 (See the related treatment of dunyā and akhīrah at n. 125 above.) "You" throughout this sentence is given in the plural, since Idris is referring to all of mankind (cf. "Adam" in his earlier explanation), and ultimately to the "Perfect Man": see the famous opening chapter on Adam (and the Perfect Man) in the Faṣūs al-Hikam, as well as the extensive references to "Adam" (in this metaphysical sense) in Muṣjam, pp. 53-60. Idris' essential insight in this phrase, that man "carries this world (al-dunyā) with him into the next," is among the many kinds of spiritual knowledge Ibn 'Arabi says he saw in his culminating revelation (at the end of section IV-I below).

131 Or possibly the (divine) "Command" (al-amr)—in which case Ibn 'Arabi (through Idris) would be referring to the universal "existentiating Command" manifested in the ever-renewed creation of all beings: see the discussion of the technical meanings of this Koranic expression in Muṣjam, pp. 93-101.

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

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

134 I.e., of God (or the Truth and True Reality, al-Haqq) and of each individual creature. As Idris goes on to remind us, in reality there can only be what really is (al-wujūd), the True Reality (al-Haqq): in relation to that ontological Principle (asl), "error" is necessarily "relative" and "accidental" (idāfī)—i.e., a necessarily subjective and partial perspective which is therefore close to "non-existence" (‘adam).

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

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


EI¹/². The Encyclopaedia of Islam (1st and 2nd edition).

Fusūṣ. Ibn 'Arabi. Fusūṣ al-Ḥikam, ed. A. Affifi. Cairo, 1346/1946. (All references to Part I.) [See also English tr., Bezels.]

Futūḥāt. Ibn 'Arabi. al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiya. Cairo (Bulaq), 1329 a.h., 4 volumes. (References are to volume number [I-IV], page and line number.) The ongoing critical edition by Osman Yahya is listed as “O.Y.” below. [See also French tr. of chapter 167, Alchimie.]


Mishkāt. Ibn 'Arabi. Kitāb Mishkāt al-Anwār fi mā Ruwiya 'an Allāh min al-Akhbār. Aleppo, 1349/1927. (Hadith are indicated by numerical order.) [See also French tr., Niche.]


O.Y. Ibn 'Arabi. al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiya, ed. Osman Yahya. Cairo, 1392/1972-present (9 volumes to date, corresponding to most of vol. I of Futūḥāt above). (References are to volume number [I-IX] and pages.)


Rasā'il. Ibn 'Arabi. Rasā'il Ibn 'Arabi. Hyderabad, 1948. (References are to title, volume number [I-II], selection number and pages; page numbers only are given for R. al-Anwār and K. al-Isrā'.)

R.G. Yahya, O. Histoire et classification de l'oeuvre d'Ibn 'Arabi. Damascus, 1964. (References are to the number of each work in Dr. Yahya's "Répertoire Général.")


