

Two Chapters from the *Futûhât al-Makkiyya*

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Ibn al-'Arabi's magnum opus, *al-Futûhât al-Makkiyya*, 'The Meccan Openings', is known at least by name to all students of Sufism. In spite of its importance for Islamic thought in general, and Ibn al-'Arabi in particular, few scholars have taken advantage of its enormous riches because of the numerous difficulties connected with reading and understanding the text. Some of those interested in the Greatest Master have made necessity into a virtue by suggesting that, in any case, everything important is contained in Ibn al-'Arabi's *Fusûs al-Hikam*. This statement has a grain of truth to it in the sense that the *mujmal* or 'undifferentiated' level contains within itself the *mufassal* or 'differentiated' level, much as a seed contains the tree.

One also hears the opinion that the *Fusûs* is more 'esoteric' than the *Futûhât*, and therefore, it seems, more valuable. But this opinion could hardly be expressed by anyone who has carefully studied both texts, since there is hardly an idea in the *Fusûs* not to be found expressed more clearly and in more detail somewhere in the *Futûhât*. Of course, by 'more esoteric' one may simply mean that the *Fusûs* is often more difficult to understand. To the extent this is true, the reason goes back to the point just made: the *Fusûs* is composed largely of brief allusions, while the same doctrines are exposed in full detail in the *Futûhât*. Moreover, there are certain sections of the *Futûhât* (one thinks in particular of the 128-page Chapter 559, which is several times as long as the *Fusûs*), which is more 'esoteric' in every sense of the word than anything found in the *Fusûs* itself.

The real problem facing the student of Ibn al-'Arabi is that the full significance of his undifferentiated teachings as found, for example, in the *Fusûs*, cannot be grasped without clarification from those works which express the same teachings in differentiated and explicit detail. Those who desire to gain a serious understanding of these teachings, even if they maintain that the esoteric marrow is found in the *Fusûs*, have no choice but to study the *Futûhât* and other works to grasp the *Fusûs* full implications.

Some of those unfamiliar with the text of the *Futûhât* and the development of the extensive commentary literature on the *Fusûs* might argue that this or that *Fusûs* commentator gives us all the elucidation that we need, but this is to ignore the fact that the commentary tradition of the *Fusûs* took on a life of its own, much more concerned with contemporary developments in Islamic thought than with the actual content of Ibn al-'Arabi's teachings. Then, as now, authors kept their audience in mind; the *Fusûs* commentaries tell us as much about contemporary intellectual concerns as about the text itself.

Careful study of this literature suggests that different aspects of the *Fusûs* are stressed in different periods and places, and that some of the central discussions of the work are often pushed into the background. It is only by going back to Ibn al-'Arabi's own works that we can bring out the significance of the *Fusûs* for Ibn al-'Arabi and his immediate disciples. Naturally, we are still faced with the problem that 'commentary' is determined as much by the contemporary intellectual situation as the content of the work; moreover, in English there is the added and indeed major problem of 'translation', which needs to be understood in the widest sense, as 'carrying over' a particular world view into an alien intellectual universe. By avoiding the intermediary links in the commentary literature and going directly to the source, we certainly

have something to gain.¹

Until recently only a small number of passages from the *Futûhât* were available in Western languages, mainly French.² This situation has now changed significantly by the publication, under the direction of Michel Chodkiewicz, of an anthology called *Les illuminations de La Mecque / The Meccan Illuminations: Textes choisis / Selected Texts*. In addition, my own recent work, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination*, consists mostly of passages translated from the *Futûhât*. But the task of presenting the *Futûhât* to Western readers has barely begun. The original text is enormously long and extraordinarily full of difficulties. My purpose here is to offer two short chapters as a minor contribution to this ongoing project.

The two chapters below deal with several themes. Among these, two of the central ideas of Ibn al-'Arabi's spiritual universe stand out: the 'Oneness of Being' (*wahdat al-wujûd*) and 'Perfect Man' (*al-insân al-kâmil*). I originally translated the chapters in 1985 during the preliminary stages of preparing my contribution to Chodkiewicz's anthology. Later we decided that the material they deal with was covered sufficiently by other chapters or was not as central to the concerns of that work as we had hoped. As a result I put the chapters aside for some other occasion, which has now presented itself. In what follows I have thoroughly revised the translations and added brief introductions along with minimal notes. Since many of the topics discussed are covered in some form in the two works mentioned above, I usually refer the reader to those works for clarification or elaboration. Most of the themes not explained in the introductions or notes are discussed in those works in some detail.

CHAPTER 317 CONCERNING THE TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF THE WAYSTATION OF TRIAL AND ITS BLESSINGS³

Introduction

Like many chapters in the *Futûhât*, Chapter 317 deals with a number of topics whose interrelationship is hardly clear at first glance. One might tie together the major subjects as follows: 'Trial' (*ibtîlâ'*) is the testing to which God puts human beings and *the jinn*. It results from 'prescription' (*taklîf*), i.e. the fact that God has made incumbent upon them worship (*'ibâda*) as set down in the Shari'a (the revealed Law). Prescription in turn depends upon life in the present world (*al-dunyâ*), which arises from the connection between the spirit (*rûh*) and the body (*jism*). However, there is another kind of life intrinsic to all things which also entails a kind of worship, since, in the words of the Qur'an (in one of many similar verses): 'There is nothing that

¹ We will also lose something, and I am the first to acknowledge this. Much of my earlier research was devoted to Ibn al-'Arabi's most influential disciple, Sadr al-Din Qunawi, as well as other commentators like 'Abd al-Rahman Jami. I still consider study of these figures to be of great importance for understanding the full significance of Ibn al-'Arabi's teachings - especially in their historical extension. The various commentators have much to teach us for many reasons, not the least of these being their involvement with the oral transmission of Ibn al-'Arabi's teachings, their 'verification' (*tahqîq*) of his teachings through the spiritual practices which accompanied the oral transmission, and the monumental intellectual effort they devoted to putting Ibn al-'Arabi's teachings into logical and coherent order.

² See M. Notcutt, 'Ibn 'Arabi: A Handlist of Printed Materials: Part I', *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* III, 1984, p.58

³ *Futûhât* III 65-8.

does not glorify Him in praise, but you do not understand their glorification' (17:44).⁴

The fact that the life which demands prescription derives from the spirit brings up the question of death, which occurs when the spirit leaves the body, and this in turn calls to mind the *barzakh* (the intermediary stage of existence between death and resurrection) and the 'next world' (*al-âkhira*) properly so-called, in both of which the spirit is once again attached to the body, though the body is manifest in an 'imaginal' rather than corporeal mode.

Ibn al-'Arabi then connects God's trial of mankind with human understanding of the afterlife, i.e. with the question of correct faith and true knowledge. For faith in 'God, the angels, the prophets, the books, and the Last Day' is incumbent upon all Muslims, and if this faith is to be sound, it must be based upon correct knowledge.

Finally Ibn al-'Arabi turns, as he usually does, to the 'divine root' (*al-asl al-ilâhî*) of the discussion at hand, i.e. the divine name or names which manifest their properties through the reality being discussed. In this section of the chapter his particular concern is to show that the spirit manifests the names Living (*al-hayy*) and Light (*al-nûr*) and that, in the last analysis, God Himself is the spirit of the cosmos, while the cosmos is His body. Hence he concludes the chapter by illustrating the nature of the Oneness of Being, although, of course, he does not use the expression *wahdat al-wujûd*, since it was coined by his followers.

Ibn al-'Arabi's not infrequent discussions of 'trial' (*ibtîlâ'*) in the *Futûhât* usually have in view those Quranic verses which discuss the trials and tests to which God puts His creatures, such as the following: 'We have made all that is on the earth an adornment for it, and that We may try which of them is fairest in works' (18:7); 'He has raised some of you in rank above others, that He may try you in what He has given you' (6:165), and 'We shall assuredly try you until We know those of you who struggle and are steadfast' (47:31).⁵

In the present chapter, Ibn al-'Arabi takes up specifically the relationship between the following two Quranic verses: 'Blessed be He in whose hand is the Kingdom, who is powerful over everything, who created death and life, that He might try you, which of you is fairest in works' (67:1-2); and 'His Throne is upon the water, that He might try you, which of you is fairest in works' (11:9). In both verses God is alluded to as 'King' (*al-malik*), in the first because He owns the Kingdom (*mulk*) and in the second because He sits upon the Throne (*'arsh*). What needs to be explained is why the King's Throne rests upon the 'water' and what His kingship has to do with trial.

God's argument against human beings depends upon the messages which He sends through the prophets, whereby He prescribes (*taklîf*) for them the commands and prohibitions of the Shari'a. The word *taklîf* means literally 'to impose a burden': God tries people by placing upon them the burden of the revealed Law. Human beings along with the *jinn* are unique among creatures in having this responsibility placed upon them. Even that which appears outwardly as a pure blessing (*ni'ma*) is in fact a trial, since the servant must react to blessings in accordance with prescription. As Ibn al-'Arabi writes:

The blessings with which God blesses His servants in this world are not free of trial, since thanksgiving (*shukr*) is prescribed for the servants, and this is the greatest of trials, since blessings are a greater veil over God than afflictions. (III 209.21)

⁴ Ibn al-'Arabi often formulates these two kinds of worship, known as intrinsic worship and accidental worship, in terms of the 'engendering command' and the 'prescriptive command' (cf. *Sufi Path* pp. 291-4, 311-12).

⁵ The last of these verses is especially interesting, since the words 'until We know' imply that God does not know until He tries us. Ibn al-'Arabi points out, however, that since God in His infinite knowledge knows all things in detail, what is really at issue here is His argument (*hujja*) against us on the Last Day.

We will not be able to make any claims of innocence, since we will recognize that we have failed in the fair trial through which He tested us (cf. the *Futûhât* III 134:21).

Thanksgiving, incidentally, is an important theme of the second chapter translated below.

The present chapter begins with a poem alluding to the human body as a vehicle for the spirit and a locus for the trials which the spirit undergoes. The spirit and the body are the two poles of macrocosmic and microcosmic existence. The spirit is 'of the Breath of God', so its essential attributes are delineated by God's own names. Since the first of the divine names - the 'leader of the leaders' (*imâm al-a'imma*) upon which all others depend - is the Living, the spirit is usually associated with the attribute of life, as we see in the chapter on Jesus in the *Fusûs*. All the other divine attributes follow in the wake of life. Hence the spirit also possesses knowledge and awareness, luminosity, desire, power, speech, generosity, justice, and so on.

The body stands at the opposite pole of cosmic existence; compared to the spirit it possesses hardly any trace of these attributes and can conveniently be referred to by their opposites, such as death, ignorance, darkness, and dumbness. The life and luminosity which we perceive in bodily things derive from the spirit's activity. Hence the cosmos - 'everything other than God' - has two extremes, both macrocosmically and microcosmically. On the luminous extreme, that of spirit, the divine attributes are present in relatively full splendour, while on the dark side, that of the body, they are absent for all practical purposes.⁶

However, nothing in the cosmos is absolute, even if certain things reflect the absolutely Real or Its qualities more directly than others. If in one respect life pertains only to the spirit, this is true when the spirit is envisaged in relationship to the body. Then we may fairly speak of contrasting sets of attributes, such as life and death, light and darkness. But if we look at bodily things inasmuch as they are self-disclosures (*tajallî*) of God, then, like the spirit, they manifest the attributes of God through their very existence, since *wujûd* ('Being' or 'existence' or 'finding') is the Real Himself. To exist is to manifest the divine attributes. As Ibn al-'Arabi's followers expressed this idea, '*Wujûd* descends with all its soldiers.' Even that which is dead or inanimate possesses a certain form of life. That is why the Qur'an says that everything in the universe, animate or inanimate, glorifies God.

Ibn al-'Arabi insists that such verses must not be interpreted in a figurative or symbolic sort of way, as a reference to the 'state' (*hâl*) of the thing - a plant, let us say, glorifying God by making manifest His life-giving power. On the contrary, this glorification is verbal and aware, the proof lying not only in explicit Quranic statements and *hadiths*, but also in the visionary experience of the gnostics, who witness this glorification with the heart's eyes and ears. Hence every existent thing is alive, knowing, desiring, and so on, because these attributes are intrinsic to existence. Ibn al-'Arabi discusses this point in some detail in the middle of the passage.

⁶ On these points, cf. *Sufi Path* pp. 15-17.

Translation of Chapter 317

This is the waystation of the Imam who stands at the left hand of the Pole.⁷

I wonder at the house He has built and shaped,
 placing therein a noble spirit, putting it to the trial.
 He destroyed it utterly, as if He had not built it.
 Who can put it together for me, who can make it last?
 He knew full well what He had set up -
 Would that I knew what He knew!

Why did He not from the first build that house
 as a lasting structure whose life does not disappear?
 It did nothing to make it deserve ruin,
 so why did He raise it up, and why did He lay it waste?
 The hand of trial toyed with us and it
 and after a time restored it and raised it high.
 Returned to the house, the spirit mounted upon its throne
 as a king, making its inhabitants immortal,
 Blessing it with an Eden and an everlasting Garden,
 causing it to dwell in paradise and shelter.

Know (God confirm you, O dear and noble friend!) that life belongs to the spirits - which govern all bodies, whether of fire, earth, or light⁸ just as brightness belongs to the sun. Life is an intrinsic attribute of the spirits, so spirits do not become manifest to anything unless that thing comes to life; the life of the spirit that becomes manifest to it permeates it. In the same way the brightness of the sun permeates the body of the air, the face of the earth, and every place in which the sun becomes manifest.

From here one comes to know who is the spirit of the cosmos, from whom it seeks the replenishment of its life, and what is the meaning of His words, 'God is the light of the heavens and the earth' (Qur'an 24:35). Then [in the rest of verse 24:35] He employs a likeness, for He says, 'The likeness of His light is like a niche wherein is a lamp,' which is the light - and so on to the end of the simile. He who understands this verse knows how God preserves the cosmos.

⁷ The Imam of the Left manifests the name King, a name which, as pointed out above, is alluded to in the two Quranic verses being commented upon in this chapter. The Imams of the Left and of the Right are the viziers of the Pole (*qutb*). As Ibn al-'Arabi points out in Chapter 270, the three stand at the apex of the hierarchy of the Men (*al-rijâl*), those human beings who have attained to high degrees of spiritual realization and have certain functions to play in maintaining the order of the cosmos (Ibn al-'Arabi describes this hierarchy in great detail in Chapter 73 of the *Futûhât*). A comprehensive and concise description of the relationship between the two Imams is found at the beginning of *Manzil al-qutb* (in *Rasâ'il Ibn 'Arabi*) (Hyderabad-Deccan: The *Da'iratu 'l-Ma'ârifu 'l - Osmania*, 1948), where the Imam of the Left is connected to the name Lord and the Imam of the Right to the King. But in the *Futûhât* (II 571.26) and *Mawâqî' al-nujûm* (Cairo: Muhammad 'Al Sabih, 1965, p.139), Ibn al-'Arabi reverses the names to which the two Imams are connected, making the Imam of the Left manifest the name King. This accords with the *Futûhât* II 573, where Ibn al-'Arabi connects the Imam of the Left with the divine names of majesty and severity, both of which are kingly attributes, demanding the sternness and strictness implied by testing and trial. The relationship between the two Imams can be summarized briefly as follows: the Imam of the Left stands in the station of majesty and intimacy, serves the name King, and keeps the visible cosmos in order, while being the 'sword' of the Pole. The Imam of the Right serves the name Lord and is concerned with the world of the disengaged spirits. The Imam of the Left is the higher of the two and will succeed the Pole at his death. For a discussion of the Imams in the broad context of the Men of God, cf. M. Chodkiewicz, *Le Sceau des saints* Gailimard, Paris; 1986, Chapter 6.

⁸ Bodies of fire belong to the *jinn*, those of earth to human beings and animals, and those of light to the angels.

Hence this verse is one of the mysteries of the true knowledge of God in the interrelationship between the God (*al-ilâh*) and the divine thrall (*al-ma'lûh*), or the Lord and the vassal.⁹ If God did not undertake to preserve the thrall and the vassal constantly, they would immediately be annihilated, since nothing would preserve them and keep them in subsistence. Were He to become veiled in the Unseen from the cosmos, the cosmos would become naught. Hence the name 'Manifest' (*al-zâhir*) exercises its properties forever in existence, while the name 'Nonmanifest' (*al-bâtin*) exercises its properties in knowledge and gnosis. Through the name Manifest He makes the cosmos subsist, through the name Nonmanifest we come to know Him, and through the name Light we witness Him.¹⁰

There is life in the human being, who is our object of attention in this chapter - for this chapter deals with trial, which encompasses the two weighty ones [jinn and mankind] for whom prescriptions are made. Nothing other than the two weighty ones is like us in the property of worship (*'ibada*) and prescription (*taklîf*). Hence my words about the human being alone in respect of his life concern everything other than God, while my words about his trial concern everyone for whom prescription is made, i.e. the two weighty ones.

God says, 'His Throne was upon the water' (Qur'an 11:9). Here 'upon' (*'alâ*) means 'in' (*fi*), that is, the Throne was in the water, just as man is 'in' water. In other words, man came to be from (*min*) water, for water is the root of all existent things. It is the throne of the divine life, since 'From water' God created 'every living thing' (Qur'an 21:31), and everything other than God is living, since everything other than God glorifies Him in praise, while glorification cannot take place except in a living thing. Reports have come concerning the life of everything: wet and dry, inanimate, plant, earth, and heaven.¹¹

Here there occurs a dispute between the people of unveiling (*ahl al-kashf*) and certain others who have no unveiling, and between the people of faith and those who do not acknowledge the revealed religions (*sharâ'i*) or who interpret (*ta'wîl*) them in ways in which they have not come, for they say that this glorification takes place 'through the state (*hâl*)'. As for a thing whose life is perceived by the senses, there is no dispute as to its life. The dispute occurs only concerning the cause of its life and that to which its glorifying its Lord in praise goes back, since no one can glorify but him who is alive and intelligent and who understands what he says. The opponent holds that living things other than mankind and jinn have no intelligence, in contrast to what is believed by us and the people of unveiling and sound faith. Here by 'intelligence' (*'aql*) I mean 'knowledge' (*'ilm*).¹²

⁹ Like al-Ghazali in *Mishkât al-anwâr* and many other Muslim thinkers, Ibn al-'Arabi frequently comments upon this famous 'light verse' (cf. indexes of Quranic verses in *Les illuminations* and *Sufi Path*). On Ibn al-'Arabi's teaching that the cosmos and 'the God' demand one another and are inconceivable apart from one another, cf. *Sufi Path* p.60 and passim. As is made clear in that work, Ibn al-'Arabi never suggests that this correlativity of the two sides compromises the independence of the Divine Essence (on which point, see the fourth paragraph of Chapter 339, translated below).

¹⁰ God is the 'Light of the heavens and earth.' According to one definition of light offered by Ibn al-'Arabi, it is 'any divine inrush which dispels engendered existence from the heart' (*Sufi Path* pp.214-15); the opposite of 'engendered existence' (*kawn*) is the Divine Being. Light indeed is identical with the Divine Reality; to perceive it is to perceive God. On light and the witnessing (*shuhûd*) of God, cf. *Sufi Path*, Chapter 13.

¹¹ For a similar passage, cf. *Les Illuminations* p.86. The 'reports' are various *hadîths* and Quranic verses which demand that the things in question be alive, unless one 'interprets' (*ta'wîl*) the verses away - in the manner constantly condemned by Ibn al-'Arabi - by making them metaphors or symbols. Among the reports Ibn al-'Arabi has in view are the words of God to the heavens and the earth, 'Come willingly or unwillingly.' They replied, the Qur'an tells us, by saying 'We come willingly' (41:11). On Ibn al-'Arabi's critical stance toward *ta'wîl*, to which he alludes in the next paragraph, cf. *Sufi Path*, Chapter 12 and passim.

¹² '*Aql* or intelligence is often used in the sense of knowledge, which in any case presupposes awareness and consciousness, but here Ibn al-'Arabi may be adding this proviso in order not to enter a discussion of '*aql* as that attribute which is the defining and specific characteristic of human beings.

In this verse the 'Throne' (*'arsh*) consists of the 'kingdom' (*mulk*).¹³ 'Was' (*kân*) is a word which denotes existence.¹⁴ Hence the meaning is: The kingdom exists in water, or water is the root of the manifestation of the kingdom's entity. Water is as it were the *hylê* of the kingdom; within it become manifest the forms of the cosmos, which is the kingdom of God. The cosmos is restricted to entities and relationships. The entities are existential, while the relationships are intelligible and non-existent.¹⁵ This is 'everything other than God'.¹⁶

Since water is the root of life and of every living thing, while the relationships are subordinate to water, He makes a connection between the Throne placed upon the water and His creation of death and life in trial. He says, 'His Throne is upon the water, that He might try you' (11:9), i.e. test you. The Throne, as I mentioned to you, consists of existent entities and non-existent relationships. He also says, '[Blessed be He . . .] who created death and life, that He might try you' (67:1-2). So life belongs to the entities, and death to the relationships.¹⁷

The spirit's manifestation to the body is the life of that body, just as the sun becomes manifest in order to illuminate those bodies to which it becomes manifest. The spirit's absence from the body is the disappearance of life from it, i.e. death. Hence coming together is life and separation death. Coming together and separation are intelligible relationships with manifest properties, even though they have no existence in entity.

You should know that all the faculties in man and every living thing, like the faculties of sensation, imagination, memory, form-giving, and all the other faculties attributed to all bodies, high and low, belong only to the spirit. They come to be when the spirit exists and bestows life upon the body. When one of the faculties ceases to be, this is because the spirit turns away from the body in the respect in which that specific faculty has come to be. So understand!

When the spirit turns away from the body entirely, all the faculties and life disappear along with the spirit's disappearance. This is called 'death'. It is like night through the absence of the sun. As for sleep, it is not a complete turning away.¹⁸ Rather, it is vaporous veils which come between the faculties and the sensory objects of their perception, while life remains in the sleeper. This is like the sun when clouds come between it and a specific location on the earth. The brightness - like life [in the sleeper] - continues to exist, but the sun cannot be perceived

¹³ The term 'kingdom' is often used together with 'dominion' (*malakût*), in which case the two words refer to the two basic worlds which make up the cosmos: the visible and invisible, or spiritual and corporeal. Here the term is clearly used to refer to everything owned by God, who is, in Quranic terms, both King (*al-malik*, 59:23) and Owner of the Kingdom (*malik al-mulk*, 3:26).

¹⁴ Cf. *Sufi Path* p.393, note 13.

¹⁵ 'Relationship' (*nisba*) is one of Ibn al-'Arabi's key terms, often, as here, juxtaposed with 'entity' (*'ayn*). Every divine attribute (*sifa*) or name (*ism*) specifies a relationship between God and something else, and hence Ibn al-'Arabi uses the expression as a synonym for these two terms. As soon as we discuss anything, we are discussing its entity or essence (*dhât*), which cannot be perceived in itself - since ultimately that is none other than the Divine Essence, the Unknowable - and the qualities or characteristics which it displays. These invariably set up relationships with other things. In the last analysis, all relationships - like all entities - go back to God. In all cases, the entities in themselves are identical with *wujûd* or Being/existence, while the relationships merely describe the relative situation of various entities and do not exist in themselves; hence they are 'nonexistent' (*'adam*). In the specific example which Ibn al-'Arabi is discussing in the next paragraph, human beings exist as entities (whether they be alive or dead), but 'life' and 'death' are two different relationships which are attributed to them according to various situations.

¹⁶ 'Everything other than God' is the standard definition of cosmos.

¹⁷ Apparently this sentence is parenthetical, describing life and death not as relationships (as they are discussed earlier and in the next paragraph) but as intrinsic attributes of entities and relationships, since that which (truly) exists is alive, while that which does not exist has no life.

¹⁸ The connection between sleep and death is immediate in Islamic thought. The Prophet said, 'Sleep is the brother of death,' while the Quranic basis for this connection is the verse, 'God takes the souls at the time of their death, and that which has not died, in its sleep . . .' (39:42).

because of the thickness of the intervening clouds.

When the light of the sun leaves this location on the earth and night comes to its end, the light becomes manifest in another location, illuminating it so that day comes there just as it had come in the first location. In the same way, once the spirit leaves the body that had possessed life through it, it discloses itself to a form in the 'Trumpet' (*sûr*), which is known as the *barzakh* and which is the plural of *sûra* ('form').¹⁹ Then the *barzakh* form comes to life. Similarly the Prophet said that the life-breath (*nasama*) of the person of faith is a green bird [after death]²⁰ That bird is like the body here. It is a form that has come to life through the spirit which had been giving life to the body. Just as the sun will rise up over us again tomorrow, illuminating the existent things by its light, so also the spirit will rise up over the dead bodies on the 'day' of the next world, bringing them to life. This is the Unfolding (*nashr*) and the Uprising (*ba'th*).

You should know that God brought the Trumpet into existence in the form of a horn. It was named the 'Trumpet' in the way that things are named by the name of what is near to them or causes them to be. Since this horn is a locus for all the *barzakh* forms into which the spirits pass after death and in sleep, it was called *sûr*, the plural of 'form'. Its shape is that of a horn: its high end is wide and its low end is narrow, like the shape of the cosmos. How can the wideness of the Throne be compared to the narrowness of the earth?²¹ The faculties pass with the spirit into that *barzakh* form in sleep and death. That is why the spirit perceives [in both of these states] by means of all its faculties without distinction. Thus have I given you knowledge of the actual situation.

It is here that those who uphold transmigration (*tanâsukh*) have slipped. When they saw or heard that the prophets gave news of the passage of the spirits into these *barzakh* forms, within which they come to be in the form of their character traits, and when they saw those character traits in animals, they imagined that the words of the prophets, messengers, and men of

¹⁹ Most Qur'an commentators read the word *sûr* as 'trumpet', and explain that it will be blown by the angel Seraphiel. But a minority have suggested that the word should be read as 'forms'. Although the usual plural of 'form' is *suwar*, some authorities maintain that *sûr* can also be its plural, or a collective noun (cf. Fakhr al-Din Razi, *al-Tafsîr al-kabîr*, commentary on Qur'an 6:73; Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, under *sûr*). Ten Quranic verses mention the 'trumpet' (or the 'forms') always in connection with the verb *nafkh*, which means to blow. For example, 'Upon that day . . . the Trumpet shall be blown,' which, according to the minority interpretation, would be read '. . . the forms shall be blown into' (18:99). The Qur'an employs the term *nafkh* in three other connections, two of which are highly significant for the present discussion: The Qur'an refers to Jesus as God's spirit, 'blown into' the Virgin Mary (21:91, 66:12), while Jesus brings to life a bird by 'blowing' into it (3:49, 5:110). (As pointed out above, Ibn al-'Arabi discusses Jesus in connection with the spirit in the *Fusûs*). The Qur'an also refers to God's 'blowing' of His spirit into Adam after He had moulded his body out of clay (15:29, 32:9, 38:72). In addition, the Qur'an calls God the 'form-giver' (*al-musawwir*) and, addressing man, tells him that God 'created you, proportioned you, balanced you, and composed you after whatever form He would' (82:7-8). Hence Ibn al-'Arabi has a strong traditional basis for making a connection between *sûr* and 'forms'. Nevertheless, he takes this reading as an 'allusion' (*ishâra*) rather than a definitive interpretation. Hence, for example, he uses the masculine single pronoun to refer to *sur* in this passage, thereby showing that he is reading it to mean 'Trumpet'. He was perfectly aware of the prophetic *hadiths* which explain *sûr* as a 'horn' (*qarn*), as the remainder of the discussion shows. In the present context, the *barzakh* is the World of Imagination inasmuch as it is experienced after death and before the Resurrection, when human beings assume new forms in keeping with their character traits. For a discussion of the 'Trumpet', cf. *Sufi Path*, pp.122-3. On the *barzakh* after death, cf. Chittick, 'Death and the World of Imagination: Ibn al-'Arabi's Eschatology', *The Muslim World* 78 (1988), pp.51-82; *Sufi Path*, passim; *Les Illuminations*, passim.

²⁰ One sound *hadîth* tells us as follows: 'The life-breath of the person of faith will be a bird perching on the trees of the Garden until it returns to his body on the Day of Resurrection' (Ibn Maja, *Zuhd* 32; Nasa'i, *Jana'iz* 117, etc.). 'Green' birds are mentioned in another sound *hadîth*, referring to the situation of martyrs after death: 'Their spirits are inside green birds . . .' (Muslim, *Imara* 122, etc.).

²¹ Note that, in rather typical fashion, Ibn al-'Arabi rejects this interpretation of the horn-attributing it to 'our companions' - in an earlier passage in the *Futûhât*, where he says that the low end is wide and the high end narrow. Cf. *Sufi Path* p.123.

knowledge referred to the animals of this world and that the spirit would be returned for purification, and they mentioned what they had come to know of the prophets' position. Hence they were mistaken in their view and in their interpretation (*ta'wîl*) of the words of the messengers and what the revealed books have said about that. They saw that a dreamer is near to this affair into which they had entered, so they were happy with the position they took. Hence their position only came to them from a bad interpretation of sound words.²²

This is the meaning of His words, 'To try you': to test your rational faculties through death and life. 'Which of you is fairest in works', through pondering and considering the two. Then He will see which of you is correct, and which is mistaken, like those who uphold transmigration.

He made all this a clear proof and set it up as a conclusive demonstration of His name Living, His name Light, and His names Manifest, Non-manifest, First, and Last. Thereby a person may know the relationship between the cosmos and Him who brought it into existence. A person will know that the cosmos is not independent in itself, that its poverty toward God is an intrinsic poverty, not separate from it for the blink of an eye, and that the relationships are constant in property because of the subsistence of the existence of the entities.²³ He is the Inaccessible, Unapproachable, and Unreachable lest His creatures perceive Him and lest 'anything of His knowledge' be comprehended 'save such as He wills' (Qur'an 2:254). He is the All-concealing (*al-ghafûr*)²⁴ who curtains rational faculties from the perception of His own inmost centre or the inmost centre of His majesty.

Know O friend (God give light to your insight!) that it has now been established for you that the life of all bodies derives from the life of the spirits which govern them and that death takes place through the separation of the spirits from them. At this point the order (*nizâm*) of the two disappears, since the faculties which hold fast to the bodies disappear with the disappearance of the spirit which God appointed to govern them.

You should also know that life in all things is two lives: life derived from a secondary cause, i.e. the life which we have mentioned and attributed to the spirits; and another life, which is intrinsic to all bodies just as life is intrinsic to the spirits. However, an effect of the life of the spirits becomes manifest in the governed bodies through the diffusion of the spirits' brightness within them and through the manifestation of the spirits' faculties, which we mentioned. But the life intrinsic to the bodies is not like that, since the bodies were not created to govern. Hence, through their intrinsic life - which cannot disappear from them, since it is an attribute of their own selves (*nafsî*) - they glorify their Lord constantly, whether or not their spirits are within them. Their spirits give them nothing of glorification except a second, accidental, specific condition. When the spirit departs from them, so also does this specific remembrance (*dhikr*), which is the speech (*kalâm*) usual among us, whether it reaches the senses as glorification or something else.

The possessor of unveiling perceives the intrinsic life which is found in all bodies. When something happens to any bodily thing which removes it from its own order, such as the breaking of a dish, the breaking of a stone, or the cutting of a tree, this is like the amputation of a person's hand or leg, whereby the life of the governing spirit disappears from it while its intrinsic life remains. Every form in the cosmos possesses a governing spirit and an intrinsic life. The spirit disappears with the disappearance of the form, like a person who is slain. Likewise the

²² In a similar way Avicenna suggests that those who attribute belief in transmigration to the Greek philosophers are mistaken; the latter were in fact referring through imagery to the base character traits which come to dominate over people in the next life when they fail to perfect their intellects in this life (cf. *Tarjama-yi risâla-yi adhawiyya*, ed. H. Khadiw-jam, Bunyâd-i Farhang, Tehran, (1350/ 1971), pp. 13, 51).

²³ The 'poverty' of the cosmos is what the philosophers and often Ibn al-'Arabi himself refer, to as its 'possibility' (*imkân*). Cf. *Sufi Path* pp. 81-3 and passim.

²⁴ For *al-ghafûr* and similar names in this meaning, cf. *Sufi Path*, index under *maghfira*.

form disappears with the disappearance of the spirit, like a person who dies in his bed without having been struck by a sword. But the intrinsic life that belongs to every indivisible substance (*jawhar fard*) does not disappear.

Through this intrinsic life - toward which God blinds the eyes of some creatures - skin, tongues, arms, and legs will testify against the people on the Day of Resurrection.²⁵ Through it a man's thigh will speak at the end of time, giving news to him of the acts of his wife.²⁶ Through it trees will speak at the end of time when Jews hide behind them and Muslims are seeking them to slay them. A tree will say to a Muslim, when it sees him hunting for the Jew, 'O Muslim, there is a Jew behind me, so slay him,' so he will slay him. But the thornbush (*gharqad*) will conceal the Jew when he comes to it, which is why the Messenger of God cursed it.²⁷ Nor can it be said that the tree only felt pity toward him who relied upon it, like people of noble character, since you should know that God's right has more claim to be observed and that it is more necessary for a person of faith to employ a noble character for God. Do you not see that He says, 'In the matter of God's religion, let no pity for them seize you' (Qur'an 24:2)?

This life is intrinsic to all things only because it derives from the divine self-disclosure (*al-tajallî al-ilâhî*) to each and every existent thing. He created the existent things to worship and know Him.²⁸ But not one of His creatures would know Him unless He disclosed Himself to it, and then it comes to know Him through itself. For no created thing has the capacity to know the Creator, as God said, 'We taught him knowledge from Us' (Qur'an 18:64).²⁹ Self-disclosure continues forever, witnessed by and manifest to all existent things, except the angels, mankind, and the *jinn*, since this constant self-disclosure belongs only to that which has no rational speech (*nutq*), like all inanimate things and plants.³⁰

As for those things which have been given rational speech and the ability to express what is in themselves - that is, the angels, mankind, and the *jinn* in respect of their governing spirits and their faculties - for them self-disclosure occurs from behind the veil of the unseen. Hence the angels' knowledge derives from God's giving knowledge (*ta'rif*), not from self-disclosure, while the knowledge of mankind and the *jinn* derives from consideration (*nazar*) and reasoning (*istidlâl*). But the knowledge possessed by their bodies and by all other created things derives from the divine self-disclosure.

²⁵ Several Quranic verses refer to this, such as 24:24, 36:65.

²⁶ Ibn al-'Arabi probably has in mind the following *hadîth*: 'By Him in whose hand is my soul, the Hour will not come before wild animals speak to human beings, the tip of a man's whip and the strap of his sandal speak to him, and his thigh gives him news of what his wife will do after him' (Tirmidhi, Fitan 19).

²⁷ One of the *hadîths* Ibn al-'Arabi has in mind is the following: 'The Hour will not come until the Muslims fight the Jews. The Muslims will slay them, until the Jew conceals himself behind rocks and trees. The rock or the tree will say, "O Muslim, O servant of God, there is a Jew behind me, so come and slay him" - except for the thornbush, since it is a tree of the Jews' (Muslim, Fitan 84). A longer version of the same *hadîth* tells us that this event will take place when al-Dajjal (the Antichrist) is in charge of Jerusalem, with 70,000 armed Jews standing behind him. Jesus will look at al-Dajjal, 'and he will melt like salt in water,' and then Jesus will slay him. God will then put the Jews to flight. 'Nothing will remain of what God created behind which a Jew conceals himself without God making it speak, neither stone, nor tree, nor wall, nor crawling creature - except the thorn bush, for it is one of their trees and will not speak . . .' (Ibn Maja, Fitan 33).

²⁸ Allusion to Qur'an 51:56, 'I created *jinn* and mankind only to worship Me,' which Ibn 'Abbas - as Ibn al-'Arabi tells us (*Futûhât* II 214.16) - interpreted to mean 'to know Me'.

²⁹ Here Ibn al-'Arabi is interpreting this verse to mean that knowledge comes only from God and that no creature has the power to know Him by itself. Creatures only know Him when He gives them knowledge, as is stated in Qur'an 2:255: 'They encompass nothing of His knowledge save as He wills.' More commonly, Ibn al-'Arabi refers to this verse in reference to the special 'God-given' (*ladunni*) knowledge which God bestowed upon Khadir. Cf. *Sufi Path* pp. 235-6. On the fact that no one knows God directly, only through himself, cf. *ibid* 341ff.

³⁰ From another point of view, all things possess *nutq*, as Ibn al-'Arabi points out below and towards the end of Chapter 339.

This is because other creatures have an innate disposition to concealment, since they were not given verbal expression to convey knowledge. God desired to conceal this station [of self-disclosure to all things] as a mercy to those for whom religion is prescribed, since He knew from the first that it would be prescribed for them, while He had ordained for them acts of disobedience. And for some of them He had ordained protest in that which was not seemly for them, like the angels, when they said, 'What, wilt Thou set therein one who will do corruption there?' (Qur'an 2:3).³¹ Then there happened to them what happened in the story of Adam. That is why things were concealed from them. If they had disobeyed God by [His] decree and ordainment in spite of self-disclosure and witnessing, this would have been a tremendous lack of reverence and shame, so the retribution would have been tremendous and mercy would never have reached them. But since they disobeyed Him while affairs were concealed, they gained an argument with which to excuse themselves. Hence heedlessness and forgetfulness derive from the mercy which God appointed for His servants so that they might find through it an argument, should objections be made against them. Through it they find an excuse. Hence God did not make prescriptions for any of His creatures save the angels, mankind, and the *jinn*.³²

As for other than these three, the continuity of self-disclosure bestows upon them intrinsic, continuous life. In their glorification they are like us in our breaths, constant and incessant without any hardship felt in breathing. On the contrary, our breaths are identical with ease. Or rather, if it were not for our breaths, we would die. Do you not see the person who is choked? When he is prevented from exhaling his breath, he dies and experiences pain. In such measure is the glorification of all things - if you have understood.

In reality, it is the Real who governs the cosmos, as God says, 'He governs the affair, He differentiates the signs' (13:2). The 'signs' are the proofs of the profession of His Unity: Each created thing gives a proof, specific to itself, of the Unity of Him who brought it into existence.

In each thing He has a sign
proving that He is One.

These are the 'signs' which He 'differentiates', thereby dividing them among His creatures according to the innate dispositions which God has given to them.

So He is the spirit of the cosmos, its hearing, its sight, and its hand. Through Him the cosmos hears, through Him it sees, through Him it speaks, through Him it grasps, through Him it runs, since: 'There is no power and no strength save in God, the All-high, the Tremendous.'³³

This is known only by those who draw near to God through supererogatory good works, just as has been mentioned in the *Sahîh* in the divine prophetic reports: When the servant draws near to Him through supererogatory works, He loves him, and when He loves him He says, 'I am his hearing, his sight, and his hand.' Another version has, 'for him I am hearing, sight, hand, and confirmer.'³⁴

God's words 'I am' show that this was already the situation, but the servant was not aware. Hence the generous gift which this nearness gives to him is the unveiling and knowledge that God is his hearing and his sight. He had been imagining that he hears through his own hearing,

³¹ This protest of the angels to Adam's creation forms the subject of an extended commentary toward the beginning of the first chapter of the *Fusûs*. See also *Sufi Path* pp. 68, 142.

³² Ibn al-'Arabi seems to contradict what he said earlier in the chapter concerning who is given prescription. But in the earlier passage he said that 'nothing other than the two weighty ones is like us in the property of worship and prescription,' and elsewhere he makes clear that the angels are indeed given prescriptions, but they are not 'like us' in this since they receive only commandments, not prohibitions (*Futûhât* III 118.35).

³³ This well-known invocatory formula is found in many *hadîths*.

³⁴ On this *hadîth* and Ibn al-'Arabi's interpretation of it, cf. *Sufi Path* pp. 325-31.

but he was hearing through his Lord. In the same way, during his life, man supposes that he hears through his spirit, because of his ignorance, but in actual fact he hears only through his Lord.

Do you not see what the veracious Prophet said concerning the People of the Well? 'You did not hear better than they.' This was when he addressed them with the words, 'Have you found as true what your Lord promised you?', even though they were corpses.³⁵ So there are no creatures that do not hear, but they are given innate dispositions which prevent them from conveying what they know and what they hear. This is the life that becomes manifest to the eyes of the creatures during the miraculous breaking of habits when the dead are brought to life, such as the cow of Moses and other things.³⁶

The name Manifest - if you verify it - is the cosmos, since the cosmos is to the Real as the body is to the governing spirit. And the name Non-manifest belongs to everything that is hidden from the existent things in the relationship of life to themselves. The human being exists through the whole, since he is defined as a 'rational animal'. His animality is his manifest form, since 'animality' denotes the same thing as 'a feeding and sensate body', though more briefly. The word 'animal' (*hayawân*) was preferred in the realm of verbal expression because of its abbreviated form, since it is equivalent in denotation. Man is 'rational' (*nâtiq*) in respect of his supra-sensory reality (*ma'nâ*), and this reality is nothing other than what we mentioned. Hence in our view the whole cosmos, which consists of everything other than God, is a 'rational animal', though its bodies, its feeding, and its sensations are diverse. It is manifest through its animal form and non-manifest through its intrinsic life which comes to exist through the divine self-disclosure, which exists continuously. Hence there is nothing in *wujûd*³⁷ save God, His names, and His acts. He is the First in respect to the name Manifest, and He is the Last in respect to the name Non-manifest. So *wujûd* is all Real (*haqq*). There is nothing of the unreal within it, since what is understood from applying the word 'unreal' (*bâtil*) is some sort of non-existence in that which someone claims is an existence. So understand!

If this were not the case, the creatures alone would perform acts, and the divine power would not pervade all the possible things, or rather, the possibilities would vanish from the divine power. So glory be to the Manifest who is not hidden, and glory be to the Hidden who is not manifest! Through Him the creatures are veiled from knowing Him, and He made them blind through the intensity of His self-manifestation. Hence they are deniers, acknowledgers, waverers, bewildered, correct, mistaken. And praise belongs to God, who favoured us with such

³⁵ The reference is to a *hadîth* found in Muslim (Janna 77) and other sources, the text of which is as follows: 'The Messenger of God abandoned those slain at Badr for three days. Then he came to them, stood over them, and called to them, saying: "O Abu JahI ibn Hisham, O Umayya ibn Khalaf, O 'Utba ibn Rabi'ah, O Shayba ibn Rabi'ah, have you not found what your Lord promised you to be true? For verily, I have what my Lord promised me to be true!" 'Umar heard the words of the Prophet and said, "O Messenger of God! How can they hear and how can they answer? For they are corpses." He replied, "By Him whose hand holds my soul, you do not hear what I am saying better than they, but they are unable to answer." Then he told them to drag them away and throw them into the well of Badr.'

³⁶ On 'miraculous breaking of habits', cf. *Sufi Path* index, s.v. habit. The expression 'Moses' cow' normally refers to the cow mentioned in Qur'an 2:67-71, after which the chapter takes its name, but that cow has nothing especially miraculous about it. Perhaps Ibn al-'Arabi has the golden 'calf' in mind, since he mentions, e.g. at the beginning of the chapter on Jesus in the *Fusûs*, that it manifested the signs of life in a somewhat miraculous way because of the influence of the spirit. See also *Futûhât* III 43.5, 378.18.

³⁷ Up until this point I have been translating *wujûd* as 'existence', but in this case the ambiguity of the term *wujûd*, which refers basically to the underlying substance of the Real, or 'Being', comes to the fore. In *Sufi Path*, I frequently resorted to the expression Being/existence in such a context. Here I will leave the term untranslated. On *wujûd* see *Sufi Path*, especially Chapter 5; also Chittick, 'Ibn al-'Arabi's Doctrine of the Oneness of Being', *Sufi* 4 (1989-90), pp. 6-14.

loci of witnessing and disclosed to our eyes these realities. Our eyes fall only upon Him, and we support ourselves only through Him. 'There is no god but He, the Inaccessible, the Wise' (3:18).

He who desires to know the reality of that to which we have been alluding in this problem should consider the images and forms on the screen (*sitâra*) [of the shadow play].³⁸ In the eyes of the small children far from the veil of the screen set up between them and the person who manipulates the figures and speaks through them, who speaks within these forms? The situation is similar with the forms of the cosmos. The majority of people are these small children whom we have supposed, and you know from whence things come to them. The children in the gathering are happy and delighted. The heedless take it for a sport and diversion. The men of knowledge take heed and know that God has set this up only as a likeness (*mathal*). That is why, at the beginning, a figure comes out known as the narrator (*wassâf*). He delivers an address in which he magnifies and praises God. Then he talks about each kind of form which will come out after him from behind the screen. The gathering comes to know that God has set this up as a likeness for His servants, in order that they might take heed and come to know that the cosmos is related to God just as these forms are related to their mover and that the screen is the veil of the mystery of destiny. In spite of all this, the heedless take it as a sport and a diversion, as God says: 'Those who take their religion for a sport and a diversion' (Qur'an 6:69). Then the narrator goes away. He is like the first person existent among us, i.e. Adam. When he went away, he went away from us to his Lord, behind the screen of the Unseen. 'And God speaks the truth, and He guides on the way' (Qur'an 33:4).

³⁸ Clearly with a few changes the analogy could be extended to the television screen or the cinema. Probably the most famous use of this analogy in Sufi literature is found in Ibn al-Farid's *Nazm al-sulûk*. Cf. R.A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1921, pp. 189-91, 260-2; A.J. Arberry, *The Poem of the Way* Emery Walker, London, 1952, lines 2130-237.

CHAPTER 339
CONCERNING THE TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF A
WAYSTATION IN WHICH THE SHARI'A KNEELS
BEFORE THE REALITY, SEEKING REPLENISHMENT³⁹

Introduction

The chapter begins with a poem that refers to the demands which are made upon human beings by the nature of their ontological situation; their vicegerency (*khilâfa*) makes their burden a heavy one - *noblesse oblige*.

The chapter then refers to the intimate relationship between the Shari'a and the Reality (*haqîqa*), which in this context denotes God inasmuch as He determines the Shari'a. In certain respects the Shari'a and the Reality are identical, as Ibn al-'Arabi has told us in an earlier chapter.⁴⁰ In another respect, the Shari'a follows the Reality, as this chapter points out. But to understand the way in which the Shari'a follows the Reality, we need the knowledge possessed by perfect man. The station of 'animal man' (*al-insân al-hayawân*) - i.e. all human beings except the prophets and the very highest of the friends of God (*awliyâ Allâh*) - does not allow insight into this mystery. This may explain why Ibn al-'Arabi turns immediately to discussing the station of perfect man, devoting the rest of the chapter to three of his characteristics: the divine form, the subjection of all things in the cosmos to him, and the 'openings' which are given to him inasmuch as he is an inheritor (*wârith*) of the Prophet.

Discussion of these characteristics in turn amounts to commentary on several Quranic verses: 2:30-31, concerning Adam's vicegerency; 31:20, concerning the subjection of all things to man, God's lavishing him with blessings, and those people who dispute about God without knowledge; and 48:1-2, concerning the 'opening' and 'inaccessible help' given to the Prophet. Note that the term 'opening' (*fath* or *futûh*) plays a major role in Ibn al-'Arabi's teachings and is present in its plural form in the word *Futûhât* itself.⁴¹

At the outset, Ibn al-'Arabi tells us that this chapter describes a waystation (*manzil*) in which the second of the 'banners of praise' (*alwiyat al-hamd*) is revealed to the spiritual traveller. This expression derives from a sound *hadîth* in which the Prophet says that he will carry the banner of praise on the Day of Resurrection, and behind him will come Adam and all the other prophets and their followers. Ibn al-'Arabi defines the banner of praise as the most complete praise of God, around which all other praises gather, just as soldiers gather around the standard of the king.⁴² This banner clearly alludes to the fact that, as Ibn al-'Arabi and his followers put it, the Prophet is the most perfect of perfect men, the most complete locus of manifestation for the names of God. Ibn al-'Arabi connects the banner of praise with the 'praiseworthy station' (*maqâm mahmûd*) mentioned in the Qur'an (17:79), a station which, the Prophet tells us in a sound *hadîth*, will be given to him on the Day of Resurrection.⁴³ Insight into this chapter's connection to the 'second' of the seven banners of praise can be gleaned from the beginning of the previous chapter of the *Futûhât* (Chapter 338), where Ibn al-'Arabi writes as follows:

In the Praiseworthy Station within which the Messenger of God will stand on the Day of Resurrection, God has seven banners through His name Praiseworthy, and these are called the 'banners of praise'. The Messenger of

³⁹ *Futûhât* III 150-54.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Sufi Path* p.260.

⁴¹ On this term, cf. *Sufi Path* pp. xii-xiii, 222-3.

⁴² II 88.5 (quoted in *Sufi Path* p.240).

⁴³ Cf. *Sufi Path* p.405, note 4.

God and his inheritors, the Muhammadans,⁴⁴ will be given, within these banners, the names of God by which the Messenger will laud his Lord when he stands in the Praiseworthy Station on the Day of Resurrection. This is referred to by his words, when asked about intercession, 'I will praise God with words of praise which I do not know now.'⁴⁵ This praise is his laudation of God with the names required by that dwelling place.

God is lauded only through His Most Beautiful Names. His names cannot be encompassed in knowledge, for we know that in the Garden there is 'What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what has never passed into the heart of any mortal;'⁴⁶ and we know that none of us knows 'what comfort is laid up' for us 'secretly' (Qur'an 32:17). All this is supported by that divine name through which it all becomes manifest when the name makes it manifest.⁴⁷ When He favours us by making a divine name manifest to us, we necessarily know it and laud God through it and praise Him, whether this be a laudation of glorification or a laudation of affirmation.⁴⁸

When I came to know this, I asked about the time appointed for the names through which God will be praised on the Day of Resurrection in the Praiseworthy Station. For I knew that I do not know those names now and that God will not teach them to me, since they are words of praise which pertain exclusively to the Prophet on the Day of Resurrection. But when we hear him praising Him with them on the Day of Resurrection in the Praiseworthy Station and when the banners are spread while the names are written upon them, then in that dwelling place we will come to know them. It was said to me as follows:

'The number of those names is 1,664. Each banner will have ninety-nine names written upon it - he who counts them there will enter the Garden.'⁴⁹ However, one of the banners will have 770 of these names written upon it. The Prophet will praise God with all these words of praise, and each of them comprises the seeking of intercession with God.'

When someone takes up residence in this waystation [i.e. the subject of the present chapter], among the things that he will be given is the witnessing of each of these banners and knowledge of all the names within them; then this inheritor may laud God with them there [in that world]. And here [in this world] each of the banners has a waystation which the Prophet reached, and which is reached by his inheritors, the perfect among his followers.⁵⁰

The beginning of Chapter 339 seems to suggest that it is the second in a series of chapters, but the above passage states rather explicitly that Chapter 338 deals with all seven banners (though little more is said about them), while none of the other banners is mentioned in the several chapters immediately following 339.

⁴⁴ On the station of the Muhammadans, cf. *Sufi Path*, chapter 20.

⁴⁵ This is a sound *hadîth* (cf. *Sufi Path* p.399, note 14).

⁴⁶ This *hadîth* is not found in the usual sources, but it is 'sound' according to Ibn al-'Arabi (cf. *Sufi Path* p.412, note 5).

⁴⁷ On the divine names as 'supports' (*mustanad*), cf. *Sufi Path* pp. 37-8.

⁴⁸ Glorification is connected to God's incomparability (*tanzîh*), and affirmation (*ithbât*) to His similarity (*tashbîh*). These are the two basic modes in which God is known. Cf. *Sufi Path* p.71.

⁴⁹ Reference to the *hadîth*, 'God has ninety-nine names, one hundred less one. He who counts them will enter the Garden,' recorded in Bukhari and other standard sources.

⁵⁰ *Futûhât* III 146-24.

Translation of Chapter 339

[This waystation derives] from the Muhammadan Presence. This is the waystation within which becomes manifest the second of the Banners of Praise, comprising ninety-nine divine names.

Prohibition arises from the stain of temporal origination –
 Say not, 'My vicegerency releases me.'
 Beware! Your vicegerency limits you!
 Where is release when the door of your engendered existence is open?
 The heart lies behind the locks of your innate disposition.
 The keys are lost and the locks cannot be undone.
 Do not rejoice in the expansion of your breast!
 It was expanded for you to know that limitations rule.⁵¹

Know (God confirm you, dear friend!) that people talk about the Shari'a and the Reality. God says to His Prophet, commanding him, 'Say, "My Lord, increase me in knowledge!"' (Qur'an 20:113). He means knowledge of Him in respect of the fact that He possesses faces (*wujûh*) in every creature and every originated thing, and this is the knowledge of the Reality.⁵² The Prophet did not seek increase in knowledge of the Shari'a. On the contrary, he used to say, 'Leave aside what I have left aside for you,'⁵³ The knowledge of the Shari'a is the knowledge of a way and a path. It demands a traveller (*sâlik*), and travelling is a hardship, but he wanted a reduction of that.

The ultimate end of the Shari'a's path is sensory felicity.⁵⁴ Its ultimate end is not the Reality in all cases, since some people reach the Reality in the first step they take in the Shari'a's path, for the face of the Real is found in every step. But the face of the Real in every step is not unveiled to every person.

The Shari'a is that on the basis of which rulings (*hukm*) are made for those for whom it has

⁵¹ For a discussion of some of the implications of this poem, cf. Chapter 141 on the station of abandoning freedom (translated into English in *Les Illuminations* 260-64).

⁵² Ibn al-'Arabi finds allusion to this 'face in all things' in Qur'an 28:88, which may be read 'Everything is annihilated except His face,' or 'Everything is annihilated except its face.' In the first case, one can read the verse as referring to the face of God in the thing, and in the second to the face of the thing in God, and of course these two faces are the same face, identical with the thing's reality or immutable entity. Ibn al-'Arabi often refers to face in this sense as the 'specific face' (*al-wajh al-khâss*) possessed by each and every existent thing, i.e. the face of God turned specifically toward that thing to the exclusion of every other thing, thereby bestowing upon it its own uniqueness. On the interpretation of the above Quranic verse in this sense, cf. *Sufi Path* pp. 102, 118; *Les Illuminations* p.95; Chittick and P.L. Wilson (trans.), *Fakhruddin 'Iraqi: Divine Flashes*, Paulist Press, New York, 1981, pp. 126, 165.

⁵³ In another passage, Ibn al-'Arabi explains why the Prophet said this as follows:

'Much of the Shari'a came down because of the asking of the Community. Had they not asked, it would not have been sent down' (*Futûhât* II 562:16; cf. II 685:12). In Bukhari (I'tisâm 2), the text of the hadîth reads as follows: 'Let alone what I have left aside for you. Those who went before you were destroyed only because of their asking from and their divergence over their prophets. If I have forbidden something to you, avoid it, and if I have commanded you to do something, do of it what you can.'

⁵⁴ Sensory 'felicity' (*sa'âda*) is that which is found in paradise, the Garden. Felicity is the result of 'guidance', which is a divine attribute manifested by the prophets, just as wretchedness (*shiqâ*) is the result of misguidance, a divine attribute manifested by Satan. Both the prophets and Satan follow the divine engendering command (*al-amr al-takwîni*), but only the prophets guide according to the prescriptive command (*al-amr al-taklîfi*), which leads to felicity (cf. *Sufi Path* pp. 291-4). Both felicity and wretchedness are 'sensory' because they are perceived by the five senses, as are all imaginal phenomena. But this does not preclude the existence of suprasensory felicity, and Ibn al-'Arabi along with others interprets the 'two gardens' mentioned in Qur'an 55:46 to refer to the simultaneous experience of sensory and suprasensory delights, much as we can experience physical as well as mental pleasure at the same time in this world.

been prescribed. But the Reality is the ruling concerning that through which rulings are made. The Shari'a comes to an end, while the Reality continues, since it subsists through the divine subsistence, while the Shari'a subsists through the divine bestowal of subsistence. Bestowal of subsistence will be abolished, but subsistence will not be abolished.

This waystation will show you the eminence of man over everyone in the heaven and the earth and that he is the Real's sought-after goal among the existent things, since it is he whom God has taken as a locus of self-disclosure (*tajallî*). I mean by 'man' perfect man, since he is perfect only through the form of the Real. In the same way a mirror, though complete (*tâmm*) in creation, is only perfect (*kâmil*) through the disclosure within it of the form of the looker. That is the 'level' of the mirror, and the level is the ultimate end. In the same way the Divinity is complete through the names which it demands from the divine thralls, so It lacks nothing, while Its perfection - I mean the level of which It is worthy - is independence from the worlds. Hence It possesses non-delimited perfection through independence from the worlds.⁵⁵

God willed to give His perfection its due (*haqq*), and He wills this always. He created the cosmos to glorify Him in praise, not for anything else. The glorification (*tasbîh*) is God's, while the glorifier does not possess the state of witnessing (*shuhûd*), since it is annihilated (*fanâ'*) from witnessing. But the cosmos does not lag in glorification for the blink of an eye, since its glorification is inherent (*dhâtî*), like the breathing of a breather. This shows that the cosmos never ceases being veiled and it seeks witnessing through that glorification.

[Since God willed to give perfection its due,] He created perfect man upon His own form and gave news to the angels about his level. He told them that he is the vicegerent in the cosmos and that his home is the earth.⁵⁶ He appointed the earth his abode, since He created him from it. He made the Higher Plenum busy with him in heaven and earth, since 'He subjected' to him 'what is in the heavens and what is in the earth, all together, for him' (Qur'an 45:12), that is, for his sake. Then God veiled Himself, for the deputy (*nâ'ib*) has no property when He who has made him vicegerent is manifest. So 'He is veiled from insights, just as He is veiled from sight'. The Messenger of God, addressing people who resembled man in sensory form but who stood below the level of perfection, said, 'God is veiled from insights just as He is veiled from sight; the Higher Plenum seeks Him just as you yourselves seek Him.'⁵⁷ 'Sight perceives Him not' (Qur'an 6:103), and, in the same way, insights perceive Him not. 'Insights' are rational faculties, which perceive Him not with their reflections, so they are incapable of reaching and winning the object they seek.

'And He taught Adam the names, all of them' (2:31). He commanded him to teach the Higher Plenum. He commanded everything in the heavens and the earth to look after that which was appropriate for this deputy, since He subjected to him everything in the heavens and the earth, even that which is called 'man' in respect of his completeness, not in respect of his perfection.⁵⁸ As long as this kind which shares the name 'man' with perfect man does not attain to perfection, he is one of those who are subjected to the perfect one who, through his perfection, is joined to Him who is Independent of the worlds. He alone - I mean perfect man - worships his Lord who is Independent of him. Perfect man's perfection is that his Lord is not without need for him, since there is no one who worships Him outside the mode of glorification but perfect man, since he receives self-disclosure constantly, and the property of witnessing never leaves him. Hence he is the most perfect of existent things in knowledge of God and the most constant of them in witnessing.

⁵⁵ On the Level of the Divinity as contrasted with the Divine Essence, cf. *Sufi Path* pp. 49-50.

⁵⁶ Reference to Qur'an 2:30, 'And when thy Lord said to the angels, "I am setting in the earth a vicegerent".'

⁵⁷ Ibn al-'Arabi sometimes cites this saying as a *hadîth*.

⁵⁸ On the difference between human 'completion' and 'perfection', cf. *Sufi Path* pp.296-7.

Perfect man has two visions (*nazar*) of the Real, which is why He appointed for him two eyes. With one eye he looks upon Him in respect to the fact that He is Independent of the worlds. So he sees Him neither in any thing nor in himself. Through the other eye he looks upon Him in respect of His name All-merciful, which seeks the cosmos and is sought by the cosmos. He sees His Being permeating all things. Through the vision of this eye he is poor toward everything in respect to the fact that the things are the names of God, not in respect of their own entities. Hence, none is poorer toward the cosmos than perfect man, since he witnesses it subjected to himself.⁵⁹ He knows that if he did not need the cosmos, those things that are subjected to him would not have been subjected to him. He knows in himself that he is more in need of the cosmos than the cosmos is in need of him. His all-inclusive poverty stands in the station of the all-inclusive divine Independence. In respect of poverty, he takes up a position in the cosmos like the position of the Real in respect to the divine names, which demand the displaying of effects in the cosmos. He only becomes manifest in his poverty by the manifestation of the names of the Real.

Perfect man is the Real in his independence from the cosmos, since the cosmos has been subjected for his sake by the divine names that display their effects within it. Nothing is subjected to him except that which possesses the display of effects, without respect to the entity of the cosmos. So he is poor only toward God.

Perfect man is also the Real in his poverty toward the cosmos. He knows that God subjected the cosmos to man only to distract the things, through the subjection imposed upon them, from seeking knowledge in respect to witnessing, for that does not belong to them, since they stand below the level of perfection. Therefore perfect man manifests need for that in which the cosmos has been subjected. Thereby subjection in the cosmos grows stronger, that they may not neglect that of it which the Real commanded them to perform; for 'They disobey not God in what He commands them' (66:6).⁶⁰ By making manifest this poverty, perfect man conforms to the Real in keeping the cosmos distracted.

Hence perfect man is the Real in his poverty, like the names, and the Real in his independence, since he does not see that which is subjected to him, only that which possesses effects. In other words, he sees the divine names, not the entities of the cosmos. Hence he is poor toward God only within the entities of the cosmos, while the cosmos knows nothing of that.

'Heaven moans', because of its inhabitants. The Prophet said, 'It has a right to moan. There is not a span of it without an angel prostrating itself to God.'⁶¹ He said 'prostrating itself to God' to indicate that the vision of every angel in the heaven is toward the earth, since prostration is to make oneself low. The angels know that the earth is the location of the vicegerent and that they were commanded to prostrate themselves [before him]. So they lowered themselves at God's command, gazing toward the place of this vicegerent, so that the prostration would be before him, since God commanded them to prostrate themselves before him. The property of prostration toward Adam and perfect man continues within them forever without cease.

You may object: Things like this prostration will disappear in the next world. We answer: It will not disappear, since the prostration takes place toward the outward form of perfect man, a form which God configures from elemental nature both at the beginning and at the return. At the beginning He made it 'grow up from the earth'; then through death He 'returns it to it'; then He

⁵⁹ Cf. II 469, translated in *Sufi Path* p.46.

⁶⁰ Ibn al-'Arabi usually quotes this verse in connection with angels, as in the Quranic context.

⁶¹ The *hadîth* is found with slight differences in Ibn Maja, Zuhd 19; Tirmidhi, Zuhd 9. The whole text reads as follows: 'I see what you do not see, and I hear what you do not hear. Heaven moans, and it has a right to moan. Within it is not the place of four fingers without an angel placing its forehead in prostration to God. By God, if you knew what I knew, you would laugh little and weep much. You would not take enjoyment with women in bed. You would go out in the roads praying fervently to God. By God, you would wish that you were a felled tree.'

'brings it forth' from the earth at the Uprising (Qur'an 71:16-17). This form has lowness (*sufi*) in level. Through this reality it seeks God, about whom the Prophet said, 'If you let down a rope, it will fall upon God.'⁶² And such must be the situation in itself. So the angels must be constantly in prostration to the Imam in this world and the next.⁶³

Perfect man possesses the form of the cosmos and the form of the Real, and through the whole he gains his superiority. The prostrater and that to which the prostration takes place are in him and from him. Were the situation not like this, he would not be all-comprehensive (*jâmi'*).⁶⁴ Hence within the Higher Plenum there is a crowding to see perfect man, just as people crowd at the vision of an angel when it comes upon them suddenly. Hence heaven moans because of their crowding.

He who knows God through this knowledge knows both the outward and the inward blessings which God has showered down upon him.⁶⁵ Hence he declares himself quit of disputing about God 'without knowledge', i.e. that which is given by considerative proof, and 'without an illuminating book', i.e. those attributes of the Real concerning which communication has come. Hence God says, 'Among men are those that dispute about God without knowledge,' given to him by a proof of his reflection, 'or guidance', i.e. without clarification received through his unveiling, 'or an illuminating book' (Qur'an 22:8). This is knowledge of God communicated through signs sent down in His revealed books, which are described as light, so that through them that with which they are sent down can be unveiled - since through 'light' unveiling takes place. Hence from these people He negated following the authority of the Real, self-disclosure and unveiling, and rational consideration. There is no level of ignorance lower than this.⁶⁶ Hence this level has come from God as the object of blame, whereby He blames everyone who possesses such an attribute.

But, when they know the blessings of God - as we said - this knowledge makes thanksgiving incumbent upon them. Hence they occupy themselves with giving thanks, as did the Messenger of God when it was revealed to him, '... that God may forgive thee thy sins, the former and the latter, and complete His blessing upon thee, and guide thee on a straight path, and that God may help thee with inaccessible help' (Qur'an 48:1-2). He stayed on his feet giving thanks for this blessing until his feet became swollen. Such did he report when something was said to him about this, for he said, 'Should I not be a truly thankful (*shakûr*) servant?'⁶⁷ He employed the form *fa'ûl* [in *shakûr*], which indicates going to great lengths. So his acts of thanksgiving were many, because the blessings were many. Each blessing demanded from him that he give thanks to God for it.

It does not occur to the possessor of this station to seek increase in his thanksgiving, since thanksgiving is an act which demands the past and the actual. Hence, the thanksgiver's reception of increase in blessings is a bounty from God. That is why He named it an increase demanded by the thanksgiving, not by the thanksgiver, though its fruit is eaten by the thanksgiver. It is a

⁶² This sentence is found in a slightly different form in a long *hadîth* commenting on Qur'an 57:4. The relevant sentence reads, 'If you let a man with a rope down to the lowest earth, he would fall upon God' (Tirmidhi, *Tafsîr sûrah 57*).

⁶³ Here Imam refers to perfect man in general, not specifically to one of viziers of the Pole.

⁶⁴ Perfect man is the 'all-comprehensive engendered thing' (*al-kawn al-jâmi'*), as mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 1 of the *Fusûs*. Thereby he is the locus in which the 'all-comprehensive name' (*al-ism al-jâmi'*), i.e. Allah, manifests all its properties.

⁶⁵ Allusion to Qur'an 31:20, quoted in the introduction to this chapter. Ibn al-'Arabi has already discussed the nature of the 'subjection' mentioned in the verse, and now he turns to the other qualities.

⁶⁶ Since these are the three possible modes of knowledge. Cf. *Sufi Path* p.188.

⁶⁷ This *hadîth* is found in Bukhari (*Tafsîr sûrah 48, 2*) and several more of the standard sources. Cf. Chittick, 'Ibn 'Arabi's own Summary of the *Fusûs*', *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 1(1982), pp. 74-5.

recompense from the thanksgiving to the thanksgiver, for he has brought the entity of thanksgiving into existence and made its configuration an embodied form, glorifying and mentioning God. Hence this form asks God to add blessings to the blessings of this thanksgiver, since he was the cause for the bringing of the entity of thanksgiving into existence. God listens to it and complies with its request. So the thanksgiving asks God to let the thanksgivers know about that, so that they will know that the thanksgiving will fulfil with God the right which the thanksgiver has upon it.⁶⁸ Hence God says to His servants, 'If you are thankful, surely I will increase you' (Qur'an 14:7), thereby telling us about the increase.

The knower of God thanks God in order to create the form of thanksgiving constantly; thereby he makes the glorifiers of God, those who perform His worship, more numerous. When God knows this from him, He increases him in outward and inward blessings, so that he may possess the attribute of creating thanksgiving without cease. This situation belongs to him constantly in this world and the next.

The greatest plane through which thanksgiving becomes manifest within existence is the plane of thanksgiving for the blessing of the Form of Perfection and the plane of thanksgiving for the blessing of subjection. Increase from God to the thanksgiver accords with the measure of the form of the thanksgiving. So know how you give thanks and occupy yourself with the most important of it, then the next most important!

When through his thanksgiving the thanksgiver seeks increase because of what God has promised, God gives him nothing of the blessing of increase except in the measure and form of his seeking, i.e. whether it is mixed or flawless. His increase will be a forgiveness, a pardon, and a passing over, nothing else. In short, such a person is lower in degree than the first - who was given [increase] as a result of thanksgiving's asking [God to give it to him] - because in itself the plane of thanksgiving is free of mixture. If the thanksgiver mixes, his mixing will have no effect upon the form of the thanksgiving. But it has an effect upon the increase, if he gives thanks to acquire increase. So ranking in degrees is established among the thanksgivers as we have described: those who seek increase and those who do not seek it, those who occupy themselves with the most important, and those who do not occupy themselves with it. These are diverse paths to God, as He said: 'To every one of you We have appointed a right way and an open road' (Qur'an 5:52), i.e. the paths. The Reality is One Entity which is the ultimate aim of these paths, as indicated by His words, 'To Him the whole affair will be returned' (Qur'an 11:123).

Let us now turn to His words to His prophet Muhammad in the chapter of 'Opening' (*fath*)

⁶⁸ Ibn al-'Arabi is not speaking in a figurative sense here. Elsewhere he writes, 'The servant speaks no word from which God does not create an angel. If the word is good, it is an angel of mercy, and if it is evil, it is an angel of vengeance' (II 639:25). Ibn al-'Arabi calls these the 'angels created from the works (or the breaths) of human beings.' 'God creates from works angelic, spiritual, coporeal, *barzakh* forms' (II 377.33). We will content ourselves here with quoting one more of many possible passages:

When the servant reaches this waystation of knowledge, 'He will see the works of the wretched embodied and the works of the felicitous embodied in the same way, as subsistent forms aware of the existence of their creator. God places in the souls of these forms a search for the secondary causes which brought them into existence, i.e. the workers, and they are serious in their search. As for the works of the felicitous, these works see on their right hands a path which they follow. It takes them to the witnessing of their possessors, i.e. the felicitous. One of them will choose out the other. They inquire about each other, and then the workers will take them as mounts of triumph and deliverance which carry them to the resting place of mercy. As for the works of the wretched, to them appear many branching and intersecting paths, and they do not know which path they should follow to reach their possessors. They are bewildered and find no guidance, and this derives from God's mercy toward the wretched. Since the works are bewildered, they return to God in worship and remembrance (*dhikr*). (III 141:14) The passage goes on to tell us that some of the works eventually reach their owners and help them attain to felicity. For other passages on this kind of angel, cf. II 109:14, 626:7, 632:9, 635:7, 656:27; III 126:12, 361:10. See also C. Addas, *Ibn 'Arabi*, Gallimard, Paris, 1989 p.127.

(Qur'an 48). This is the opening of unveiling through the Real, the opening of sweetness in the inward dimension, and the opening of expression.⁶⁹ Through this last opening the Qur'an was an inimitable miracle (*mu'jiza*). No one was given the opening of expression in the perfection that it was given to the Messenger of God, for He says, 'If men and *jinn* banded together to produce the like of this Qur'an, they would never produce its like, not though they backed,' [i.e. helped] 'one another' (Qur'an 17:90).

He says to the Prophet, 'Surely We have opened for thee a clear opening' (Qur'an 48:1), through the three kinds of opening. He says, 'opening', using the verbal noun for emphasis. And 'clear', i.e. manifest: Whoever sees it will recognize it through that which discloses itself and that which it comprises. The opening of expression is established for the Arabs because no one is capable of protesting [against the Qur'an's linguistic perfection]. The opening of unveiling is established through the signs that were shown to him on the night of his ascension.

'That God may forgive thee thy sins, the former,' and thus conceal thee from the blame and the taking to task for which the possessor of sins is worthy, 'and the latter' (48:2), thereby concealing thee from sin itself so that it may not find thee and stand up through thee. He let us know through the forgiveness of the latter sins that the Prophet is inerrant (*ma'sûm*), without doubt. What confirms his inerrancy is that God made him an example to be emulated. If God had not placed him in the station of inerrancy, it would be necessary for us to emulate the sins that he committed if there were no text concerning them, like the text He provided concerning 'marriage by gift' (*al-nikâh bi'l-hiba*). This belongs exclusively to him according to the revealed Law, while it is unlawful for us.⁷⁰

'And complete His blessing upon thee' (48:2), by giving His blessing its creation, since He has told us about the 'fully created' and the 'not fully created' kinds, and He gives news through this verse that the blessing He gave Muhammad was 'fully created', i.e. complete in its creation.⁷¹

'And guide thee upon a straight path' (48:2). This is the path upon which is his Lord, as Hud says, 'Verily my Lord is upon a straight path' (Qur'an 11:59). All the revealed laws are lights, but among those lights the revealed law of Muhammad is like the light of the sun among the light of the stars. When the sun is manifest, the lights of the stars are hidden within the sun's light. Their hiddenness is equivalent to that of the revealed laws which is abrogated through his revealed law, even though their entities continue to exist, just as the existence of the lights of the stars is verified. That is why we are obligated in our all-inclusive Law to have faith in all messengers and all revealed laws. They are true, so they do not become false through abrogation - that is the

⁶⁹ Ibn al-'Arabi frequently mentions one or more of these three kinds of opening (cf. *Sufi Path* p.224).

⁷⁰ The reference is to Qur'an 33:50, which deals with the Prophet's wives beyond the four allowed to the believers, and the fact that a believing woman can 'give' herself to the Prophet: 'O Prophet, We have made lawful for thee thy wives. . .; and any woman believer, if she give herself to the Prophet and if the Prophet desire to take her in marriage - for thee exclusively, apart from the believers. We know what We have imposed upon them teaching their wives and what their right hands own. Hence there may be no fault in thee.'

⁷¹ The term 'fully created' (*mukhallaq*) is mentioned in Qur'an 22:5 in a passage describing the formation of the child in the womb: 'Surely We created you of dust then a lump of flesh, fully created and not fully created, that We may make clear to you.' The commentators suggest that the lump of flesh that is not fully created does not receive a spirit, or is aborted, or is born with deformities. Ibn al-'Arabi usually applies the terms to the works that are born as a result of human activity, works which take on an independent existence of their own in the World of Imagination, as we saw above. Fully created works lead to felicity, while works which are not fully created may contribute to wretchedness. He writes:

'The divine spirit gains mastery over this corporeal mount. When it comes to it, the mount becomes pregnant, and works are born, either righteous (*sâlih*), i.e. the fully created, or corrupt (*fâsid*), i.e. the not fully created. These works then become manifest in the form of mounts [i.e. in imaginal forms resembling corporeal mounts]. If they are righteous, they ascend to the high heaven (*'illiyîn*). God says, "To Him good words ascend" (35:10), i.e. the wholesome spirits, for they are the purified words of God . . . and He says, "The righteous work - He lifts it up" (35:10). In the same way, if the work is corrupt, it falls to the lowest of the low' (III 33:11). Cf. II 489:16.

opinion of those who are ignorant.⁷² But all the paths go back to looking toward the path of the Prophet. For if the messengers had lived in his time, they would have followed him, as their revealed laws would follow his revealed law, since he was given the all-comprehensive words.⁷³

'And that God may help thee with inaccessible help' (48:2). The 'inaccessible' is something desired that cannot be reached. Since the messengers are those who seek to reach him, his inaccessibility does not allow them to grasp him, because of his all-inclusive mission, God's bestowing the all-comprehensive words upon him, his lordship through the Praiseworthy Station in the next abode,⁷⁴ and God's making his community 'the best community ever brought forth to mankind' (Qur'an 3:106) - for the community of every prophet is in the measure of the station of its prophet. So know that!

When those who maintain that prophethood can be earned sought to reach him, he was inaccessible to them.⁷⁵ The only thing that can be earned is travelling and reaching the door. As for what lies beyond the door, those who reach the door have no knowledge of him for whom it has been opened. Among mankind are those for whom it is opened because of an all-inclusive faith - which is the clear vision of the Reality - like Abu Bakr, since he never saw anything without seeing God before it. Among them are those for whom it is opened through an all-inclusive news-giving within which there is no Law. These two openings will remain in this community until the Day of Resurrection. Among those who reach the door are those who have it opened for them through a prophecy of Law-giving (*tashrî'*) restricted to themselves, while others have it opened through a messengerhood that gives a revealed Law [for others as well]. But God has forbidden anyone from reaching these two doors - or openings - or having them opened for him except the people of independent effort (*ijtihâd*), since God has caused something of that to remain for them, as affirmed by the revealed Law.⁷⁶ Hence its property belongs to the Law-giver, not to themselves.

Nothing that comes out from behind the door after it is opened has been earned. Prophethood is not earned. Hence 'God' helped him 'with inaccessible help', so he who maintains that prophethood is earned cannot reach him. For, when someone is described as inaccessible, this 'inaccessibility' can only have an entity along with the existence of someone seeking the attribute of him in whom it dwells. So his station and presence are guarded against a seeker reaching it.

The Laws (*sharâ'i'*) based on wisdom (*hikamî*) and government policy (*siyâsî*) that become manifest in the form of divine Laws (*al-sharâ'i' al-ilâhiyya*) do not possess this inaccessible help.⁷⁷ It belongs exclusively to the possessor of the divine revealed Law. Reality embraces both

⁷² As is well known, the 'abrogation' of the previous religions by the Qur'an is one of the basic arguments of exoteric Muslims who want to prove the superiority of Islam.

⁷³ Here allusion is made to two *hadîths*. The first, 'Were Moses alive, he would find it impossible not to follow me,' is not found in the standard sources; while the second, in which the Prophet says he was given the 'all-comprehensive words', is considered sound. Cf. *Sufi Path* pp. 239ff.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Sufi Path* p.239.

⁷⁵ In keeping with Muslim belief in general, Ibn al-'Arabi frequently rejects the suggestion, put forth by some of the Muslim philosophers, that one can become a prophet through one's own works. Cf. *Sufi Path* pp. 219, 261.

⁷⁶ Ibn al-'Arabi alludes to a sound *hadîth*, which he often quotes in the context of the legitimacy of *ijtihâd* (cf. *Sufi Path* p.401, note 8). For some of Ibn al-'Arabi's views on *ijtihâd*, cf. *Les Illuminations* pp. 210-11 and passim.

⁷⁷ Ibn al-'Arabi usually refers to these laws established by wise men but not directly revealed by God as *nomos* (*nâmûs*). The basic difference between the two kinds of laws is that a *nomos* takes care of the best interests (*masâlih*) of people in this world, whereas a shari'a takes into account the best interests of people in both this world and the next. 'The shari'as came only to give knowledge of the situation of the next world. If they were limited to the best interests of this world, the wise law-establishing *nomoi* which God inspired in those of His servants whom He desired would have been sufficient' (II 248:4). Cf. 11117.30; also *Futûhât* Chapter 66, translated by Chittick, 'From the *Meccan Openings: The Myth of the Origin of Religion and the Law*,' *The World and I* 3/1 (January 1988), pp. 655-65.

Laws, the divine Law and that based on wisdom and government policy. Hence he who possesses the Shari'a - i.e. the person of faith - kneels only before the Verifier, who possesses the Reality, that the latter may explain to him the source of every Law within the Divine Presence.⁷⁸ None knows this but the Possessor of the Reality. That is why this waystation is called 'the Shari'a's Kneeling Before the Reality', since every Law seeks the Reality, since it is the inward dimension of every Law, while the Laws are its outward forms in the visible world. Hence there has been no community without a warner who established its government policy for the sake of the subsistence of its best interest. Whether the Law is divine or based on government policy, the best interest is achieved through it in the generation within which it becomes manifest.

Now that you have come to distinguish the waystation of the Shari'a from that of the Reality - and to this is devoted one of the earlier chapters of this book⁷⁹ - let us mention the sciences comprised within this waystation:⁸⁰

Among these is the science of one specific banner of praise and its names, and the science of the property of this banner's mercy upon the world under it.

Among them is the science of the interrelationships (*munâsabât*) which put formal things into order among themselves so that the entities of certain forms may be established which would not become manifest without this order (*intizâm*). These are the forms which give to the observer the knowledge of their very essence.

Within this waystation is the science of giving knowledge through the waymarks (*a'lâm*) set upon the path for the travellers upon it so that they will not go astray from their goal, which is the ultimate end of their path.

Within it is the science of the kinds of provisions (*rizq*), since these are diverse in keeping with the diversity of those who are provided.

Within it is the science of the profit of the reports (*akhbâr*) through expressions which are given by the contexts of the situations. Is knowledge through that report acquired from the report, from the contexts (*qarâ'in*) of the situations, or from the totality? Or, is the knowledge given by the context of the situation different from the knowledge given by the report? Or, are the two brought together in one place and not brought together in another?

Within it is the science of the difference between the taking enjoyment (*istimtâ'*) which occurs through understanding and [that which occurs through] something else; and the difference between him who is 'he is he' and him who is 'as if he were he' (Qur'an 27:42).

Within it is the science of the recompense (*jazâ'*) specific to each one who is recompensed.

Within it is the science of the general science whose ultimate end (*ghâya*) is works, and another whose ultimate end is not works.

Within it is the science of the relationship of the cosmos to the Real in a specific way.

Within it is the science of the sciences which are produced by reflective thoughts (*afkâr*) within the hearts of the reflective thinkers.

Within it is the science of the stipulation of blessings (*taqrîr al-ni'am*).

Within it is the science of that for which the cosmos was created and of the cause for that which has come between it and that for which it was created, even while that for which it was

⁷⁸ On the high station of the Verifier (*muhaqqiq*) in Ibn al-'Arabi's views, cf. *Sufi Path*, index. Note that *muhaqqiq* derives from the same root as *haqiqâ* and hence the Verifier is he who has established the Reality within himself.

⁷⁹ Ibn al-'Arabi probably has in mind Chapter 263, 'On the true knowledge of the Reality,' much of which is translated in *Sufi Path* (see index of sources).

⁸⁰ Lists of sciences such as the following are provided at the end of many of the chapters of the *Futûhât*. I retain this list in order to provide the full flavour of the chapter, but I make no attempt to clarify the references and discussions, since some are too allusive to grasp while those which can be deciphered would require several more pages of notes for full clarification. For the significance of these lists and the reason why this chapter corresponds to *Sûrah* 45 of the Qur'an, see M. Chodkiewicz, *Un Ocean sans Rivage*, Seuil, Paris, 1992 pp. 87ff.

created is known, and there is nothing stronger than knowledge, since it possesses all-encompassing-ness. Hence the resistance of the cosmos lies within the compass of knowledge. So from whence does it come?

Within it is the science distinguishing between him who is one of the people of the command (*amr*) and him who is not.

Within it is the science of the ontological, all-pervading friendship (*walâya*) through which the wrongdoers are friends of one another, the people of faith are friends of one another, and God is the friend of the people of faith (*mu'minîn*), since He is the Faithful (*mu'min*). So from whence is He the friend of the self-protectively pious (*muttaqîn*), since He is not described by self-protective piety (*taqwâ*)? Or, is He described by self-protective piety in the respect that He takes the *jinn* and mankind as a protection (*wiqâya*) through which He protects Himself from the ascription to Him of blameworthy attributes, both in common usage and according to the Law? Hence these attributes are ascribed to the *jinn* and mankind, who are the protection through which He protects Himself against this ascription. So He is the friend of the self-protectively pious in respect of His being self-protectively pious. Since He is their friend, there is none but the self-protectively pious. This is good news from God to everyone concerning the all-inclusiveness of mercy and help against wrath, for God is the Friend, the Helper. So understand!

Within it is the science of the levels (*marâtib*) in relation to the Law specifically, not the levels required by existence.

Within it is the science of the Greatest God (*al-ilâh al-a'zam*) who laid down as law taking gods (*âliha*) other than God (Allah).

Within it is the science of bewilderment (*hayrah*) over that concerning which you have certain knowledge. Knowledge is the opposite of bewilderment in an object of knowledge, so what can have caused your bewilderment, given your knowledge?

Within it is the science of the negation of guidance (*hidâya*) from the cosmos, in spite of His words, '[He created man,] He taught him the explication' (Qur'an 55:4), and that is guidance itself.

Within it is the science that distinguishes Time (*al-dahr*) from time (*al-zamân*).

Within it is the science of the middlemost bringing together (*jam'*). For bringing together becomes manifest in three locations: in the taking at the Covenant (*akhdh al-mîthâq*), in the *barzakh* between this world and the next, and in the bringing together in the Uprising after death. There is no all-inclusive bringing together after this, since after the Resurrection each abode is independent along with its inhabitants. Hence the worlds of mankind and the *jinn* never again come together after this bringing together.

Within it is the science of the sects (*nihal*) and the creeds (*umam*) and the science of the all-inclusiveness of the rational speech (*nutq*) pervading the whole cosmos. Rational speech is not the specific characteristic of man as imagined by those who make his constituting differentia the fact that he is a rational animal. Unveiling does not allow that man possess this definition exclusively. Man is defined specifically by the Divine Form. He who does not possess this definition is not a man. Rather he is an animal whose form resembles the outward appearance of man. So seek a definition for the one who has this description, just as you seek it for the other animals!

Within it is the science of the reality of abrogation (*naskh*). Does it or does it not happen among entities - so that it is then called metamorphosis (*maskh*) - just as it happens among [religious] rulings (*ahkâm*)?

Within it is the science of the levels of triumph (*fawz*) - for there is a non-delimited triumph, a triumph delimited by I-ness [?](*anâna*), and one delimited by tremendousness (*'azama*) - as well as [the science] of what is the definition of each of them.

Within it is the science of rightful claims (*istihqâq*).

Within it is the science of certainty, knowledge, conjecture, ignorance, doubt, and consideration.

Within it is the science distinguishing between the property of witnessing (*shuhûd*) and the property of knowledge.

Within it is the science of the one with whom God is not pleased - if He has mercy upon him, He does not have mercy upon him out of good pleasure (*ridâ*) - and of the difference between the object of mercy along with good pleasure and the object of mercy without good pleasure; and of where the stations of each of the two are located within the two abodes.

Within it is the science of magnificence (*kibriyâ'*) and invincibility (*jabarût*). When will their all-pervadingness in the cosmos become manifest such that it will be recognized exactly? Right now it is manifest, but only a few people know it. 'And God speaks the truth, and He guides on the way' (Qur'an 33:4).

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