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Author: James Winston Morris

Persistent link: <http://hdl.handle.net/2345/2391>

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Published in *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*, vol. 13, pp. 19-53, 1993

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# Listening for God: Prayer and the Heart in the *Futûhât*<sup>1</sup>

*James Winston Morris*

**Surely there is a Reminder in that for whoever has a heart, or listens attentively, while he is witnessing . . . (Qur'an 50:37)**

This Qur'anic verse beautifully summarizes a sort of recurrent paradox that has surely puzzled every student of Ibn 'Arabi from time to time. One need only recall, for example, his classic discussion of the "Wisdom of the Heart" of the true spiritual Knowers (the '*urafâ*') in the central chapter on Shu'ayb in his *Fusûs al-Hikam*, where this same verse figures so prominently. If, from the wider metaphysical point of view so well illustrated in that famous chapter, it may be true that *all* human perception, all experience is ultimately "theophany",<sup>2</sup> it is even more indisputably true – as his distinction in that chapter between those rare enlightened "Knowers" and the rest of humanity pointedly acknowledges – that we don't usually experience things that way, that for many of us there is a noticeable gulf in our lives between rare moments of true contemplative prayer and our ordinary states of perception. And that gulf often seems too much to bridge by our own efforts, whether of prayer or other forms of spiritual practice: if we have some intuition of what the inner life of the Shaykh's "Knowers" might be like, it is probably based on a few special moments of grace, on a memorable but ephemeral "state" (*hâl*), not a lasting, fully realized spiritual "station" (*maqâm*).

Put simply, then, what is it about the "heart" – or rather, *how* is it? – that can so miraculously transform perception into contemplation, everyday experience into theophany, the words and movements of ritual into the ineffable reality of prayer? As the Qur'an repeatedly insists, each of us surely has "had a heart" – but what is it that so rarely and unforgettably makes that heart "*shahîd*", actively and consciously contemplating the Truly Real, so that our transient awareness is transformed into true prayer and

remembrance of God? That transformation of everyday experience into realized theophany, whenever and however it occurs, is always a mysterious divine “opening” (*fath*) or illumination, so it is not surprising that Ibn ‘Arabi’s most detailed and effective discussions of that central question of spiritual practice are scattered throughout the record of his own “Meccan Openings” (*al-Futûhât al-Makkîya*). Before beginning to explore his unfolding discussion of the secrets of prayer and the heart in the opening chapters of the *Futûhât*, however, it is necessary to summarize a few essential features of the broader development of this problem in the Qur’an and the hadith, since that basic scriptural background, as always, is presumed throughout the Shaykh’s own teachings.

## I. The Heart in the Qur’an and Hadith

To begin with, it would be difficult to exaggerate either the centrality or the complexity of the references to the “heart” throughout the Qur’an in this extended metaphysical and epistemological sense, as the locus of our awareness – *and* even more frequently of our ignorance – of the divine Presence. The Arabic noun, *al-qalb*, appears some 132 times (only two or three of these possibly referring to the bodily organ), far more than such closely related terms as *fu’âd* or *lubb/albâb* (both occurring sixteen times). The contrast between the Qur’anic treatment of the heart and the discussion of any number of related terms or roots – such as *sadr* (“breast”), *‘aql* (“intellect”), *nafs* (in the sense of “soul”), *sarîra*, etc. – only serves to highlight the epistemological comprehensiveness and peculiarly divine focus of this particular Qur’anic expression. Typically enough, Ibn ‘Arabi’s own widely scattered discussions of the “heart”, when we look at them more closely, turn out to be dictated not so much by various earlier Islamic traditions (which had developed multiple technical meanings for each of these terms) as by his own profound reflection and meditation on the full complexities of the original Qur’anic usage. Here we can only mention a few central features of the Qur’anic discussions of the “heart” that are directly related to the problem with which we began, and which are usually assumed each time Ibn ‘Arabi brings up that term.

1. The Qur’an repeatedly emphasizes God’s extraordinary *closeness and proximity* to the human heart (e.g., at 8:24, “**He passes between the man and his heart**”), as well as the uniquely

*all-encompassing divine knowledge* of “**what is in their hearts**” (4:66, 33:51, etc.).

2. That divine awareness of what is in the heart extends in particular to people’s innermost *intentions* (especially in contrast to their words and ostensible actions). That is one important indicator, along with each of the following points, that considerably more than abstract “epistemology” is involved here: from the Qur’anic perspective a spiritually crucial dimension of the human heart is the integral involvement – together with God – of our own “will” and intimate intentions, which are portrayed as somehow inseparable from the degree and nature of our awareness of the divine. In consequence, the Qur’an can even speak of the heart (as more commonly of the soul, *al-nafs*) as the enduring “self” or ongoing seat of our moral and spiritual responsibility, as at 2:225: “**He will call you to account for what your hearts have earned**”.

3. Perhaps most obvious of all in the Qur’an is the consistent stress on the *divine “responsibility”*, indeed the ongoing divine Activity, expressed in all the different states of our hearts, including especially our recurrent failures to “remember” God. In this respect, as those familiar with the Qur’an will recognize, the larger metaphysical “paradox” with which we began this discussion is certainly not, to begin with, Ibn ‘Arabi’s own invention: almost half of the Qur’anic references to the heart directly mention *God’s* responsibility for its states, often without any explicit reference to the shared role of the human “actor”.

4. In several famous Qur’anic passages, repeated throughout Sufi literature and in popular piety, the enlightened or divinely supported heart (whether in this world or the next) is said to be the locus of true Remembrance of God (*dhikr Allâh*, at 13:28) and the grace of divinely bestowed Peace and Tranquility, as well as the receptacle for the sending down of the Spirit and Gabriel and other special acts of divine support.<sup>3</sup> But the Qur’anic references to these special states of enlightened hearts are limited to what in context usually seems like a very small and elect group: Muhammad and other prophets, certain of their disciples or saints, or some of the blessed in the Gardens of Paradise ...

5. With far greater frequency, the Qur’an refers instead to God’s sealing, veiling, hardening, locking, binding, closing, or frightening hearts – to hearts that as a result (of their own misdeeds or the divine reaction) are “*sick*” or “*blind*” and “*suffering*”. Typical of this disproportionate emphasis are the many references to hearts that “**fail to understand**” (*lâ yaḥqahûn*), far more frequently than those who do perceive the divine “Signs”, whose hearts are ‘*âqilûn*. In the



Qur'an, therefore, the starkly contrasting dimensions and potentialities of the human heart with which we began are, if anything, even more predominant and vividly drawn. The Qur'anic account of the heart and its situation is repeatedly cast in an intensely dramatic and unavoidably existential form. That intrinsic inner drama is certainly presupposed in each of Ibn 'Arabi's own discussions of the heart, whatever the particular language or context of each discussion.

6. Against that sharply drawn dramatic backdrop, the Qu'ranic verses that indicate the actual ways or conditions for us to *move* from these "negative" or perverse states of the human heart to full awareness of God and the corresponding divine Peace and understanding are relatively few, but certainly all the more worth noting: these practically decisive verses include references to the "softening" and "humbling" or "purification" and "strengthening" of hearts, to the necessity of a "sound" or "repentant" or "mindful" heart (*qalb salîm* or *munîb*), and so on.<sup>4</sup>

Unlike the case with many topics in the *Futûhât*, the Prophetic sayings or hadith favored by Ibn 'Arabi in his discussions of the heart are short and to the point. (This is partly because, as we shall see, the Shaykh's allusions to the "purification" of the heart frequently occur in connection with more concrete, practical aspects of Islamic law and ritual.) As readers of any of the Shaykh's works are well aware, each of these hadith typically serves as a highly condensed, pedagogically pointed summary of many related verses and concepts in the Qur'an. Almost all of these particular hadith were already widely used within earlier Sufi tradition, and several of them should already be familiar to readers of the *Fusûs* and other English translations of Ibn 'Arabi's writings. However, reflecting on the inner connections of those sayings when they are viewed together, in the following summary, helps to highlight not only their thematic density and mnemonic effectiveness, but also their relatively greater emphasis (compared with the above-mentioned Qur'anic verses about the heart) on the crucial dimensions of spiritual *practice* and realization.

- "*The heart of the person of faith is between two of God's Fingers.*" This canonical hadith is depicted as the response to Aisha's asking the Prophet whether he was ever afraid. This beautifully succinct image concretely pulls together dozens of the Qur'anic verses we have just mentioned, powerfully representing the constant ups-and-downs of our inner experience, the contrasting

roles of the different divine Names of Majesty and Beauty (*Jalâl* and *Jamâl*) expressed and realized through that experience, the “ever-renewed theophanies” of those Names, and the reality of God’s ultimate control of that panoply of ever-changing inner states.

- Perhaps the most frequently cited saying about the heart in all of the Shaykh’s works is the famous canonical *hadîth qudsî* (one in which the divine Voice speaks in the first person, as in the Qur’an): “*My earth and My heaven do not encompass Me, but the heart of My servant who has faith does encompass Me...*” (Often this was summarized by Sufis in the briefer formula “The heart of the person of faith is the Throne of the All-Merciful”: *Qalb al-mu’min ‘arsh al-Rahmân*.) Ibn ‘Arabi’s own understanding of either of these sayings is of course inseparably related to the famous hadith that figures so prominently in the opening chapter of the *Fusûs* and throughout the Shaykh’s writings, describing Adam’s being created “according to the form of the All-Merciful” (*‘alâ sûrat al-Rahmân*).
- “Hearts rust like iron,<sup>5</sup> and their polishing is through remembrance of God (*dhikr Allâh*) and recitation of the Qur’an.”
- “Were it not for the excess of your talking and the turmoil in your hearts, you would see what *I* see and hear what *I* hear!”
- “O Transformer of hearts (*yâ muqallib al-qulûb*), keep my heart firm in *Your Religion*.”
- “My eyes are sleeping, but my heart is awake.”
- “(True spiritual) Knowledge is a light that God projects into the heart of the Knower.”
- “Seek the guidance (*istafî*: ‘ask for the *fatwâ*’) of your heart, even if it guides you toward *al-maftûn* (what entralls or charms you).”

## II. The “Opening” of the Heart in the *Meccan Illuminations*

Ibn ‘Arabi’s gradual unveiling of his own realization and understanding of the heart in the opening sections of the *Futûhât* is a beautiful illustration of his unique methods of spiritual pedagogy in that work – methods that are consciously based on his own understanding of the nature and divine underpinnings of that reality of the heart which literally makes us what we are, which, as he simply puts it, “*is insân*”, is the very inner reality of human being. His method of teaching there is not the elaboration of a single “theory” or system that could somehow be adequately summarized, but rather the intentionally poignant and revelatory “scattering” of allusions to that one Reality in a way that closely mirrors the actual

process of spiritual experience and growth in each of our lives.<sup>6</sup> The key to that process of discovery, in each succeeding chapter, is not so much the development of new “concepts” (since his underlying metaphysical perspectives are always present and constantly repeated), but rather the new meanings that each attentive reader constantly discovers through our mysteriously *activated awareness* of the ever-renewed reflections of what Ibn ‘Arabi (and the Qur’an and hadith) are talking about in the changing forms of our own experience, moment by moment.<sup>7</sup>

For that reason we shall follow the unfolding of that teaching very much in the order that references to the heart actually appear in the *Futûhât*, beginning – as Ibn ‘Arabi himself does – with his evocation of his own revelatory experiences of this reality that underlie this and all his writings, and with some of his more abstract references to that contemplative and divinely inspired dimension of spiritual experience. The language of those opening discussions may at first seem impossibly far removed from anything we could possibly encounter ourselves, but the Shaykh gradually moves on to deeper and deeper phenomenological “allusions” (*ishârât*) that begin to awaken our awareness of a kind of knowledge and understanding that in fact is constitutive of all that gives meaning to our lives in this world. As we shall see, those more phenomenological, even anecdotal, passages are often remarkably reminiscent of classical discussions of spiritual experience – whether in poetry, prose or scripture – from mystics and artists who were working within other religious traditions.

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The first mention of the heart in the *Futûhât* is in a key autobiographical poem at the very beginning of the book, part of Ibn ‘Arabi’s famous opening letter to his Tunisian Sufi friend, the shaykh ‘Aziz al-Mahdawi, explaining the spiritual circumstances and motives for composing this work. As this passage (at I, 71) makes clear, when the Shaykh speaks of the heart in this work, he is speaking from his own direct experience: *everything* in this immense book, he insists, comes from a single revelatory experience, when after

continually knocking at God’s gate (of the heart), closely attentive (*murâqib*: a key term throughout all his discussions of the heart), not being distracted... , there appeared to my eye (and “my essence” or “self”: *aynî*) the splendors of His Face, until nothing was there but that Essence, so that I encompassed a knowing of Being in which there was no knowing in our heart of anything but God.

Then follows a remarkable, almost outrageously boastful invitation for each reader to plunge into the rest of this book: "If those people, who are so strange (*al-khalq al-gharīb*), would follow my Way, the angels would not ask you about the Realities (of the divine Names), what they are!"<sup>8</sup>

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In the opening poetic lines of the very first chapter (I, 215), Ibn 'Arabi calls on his reader to "Look at that House (the Kaaba of the divine Presence, the 'Heart of Being', *qalb al-wujūd*), whose unveiled Light is resplendent to purified hearts, to those who see It/Him through/with God (*billāh*), without any veil." Returning to the openly autobiographical plane, that opening poem introduces Ibn 'Arabi's celebrated conversation at this inner "House" or Temple of the Heart between his earthly self and the image of his true Self, a mysterious divine "youth" (*fatâ*) who reveals to him all the spiritual secrets to be recorded in these very special "Openings". Having "turned the face of his heart toward his Lord", Ibn 'Arabi is told by this divine Person (at I, 226-7):

This Kaaba of Mine is the Heart of being, and My Throne (the whole universe) is a limited body for this Heart. Neither of them encompasses Me... but My House which does encompass Me is your heart,<sup>9</sup> which is the sought-for Goal (*al-maqsūd*), deposited in your visible body. So those circling around your heart are the mysteries/secrets (of the divine Names), who resemble your (human) bodies circumambulating these rocks (of the earthly Kaaba)....

So just as one who knows the Secrets – who are circling about the Heart which encompasses Me – is in the loftiest and most resplendent of stations, so you (human beings) have precedence over those (angels) circling the all-encompassing Throne. For you-all are circling the Heart of the Being of the world: you are in the station of the secrets of those who know.... For none but you (human beings) encompass Me, and I have not revealed Myself in the Form of Perfection to any but *your* inner Realities. So realize the full extent of what I have freely bestowed on you from the supernal Dignity....

You are the receptacle (*anta al-inâ'*) and I am I (*wa anâ anâ*). So do not seek Me in yourself, lest you suffer and toil; and do not seek Me outside yourself, or you will have no pleasure. Never stop seeking Me, or you will suffer torment. So do seek Me until you find Me, and then ascend! But follow the right *adab*<sup>10</sup> in your seeking, and be ever-present (with Me) as you set out on your way of going.

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In the following Chapter 2, which concerns the mysterious “science of letters”, Ibn ‘Arabi’s references to the “heart” almost always occur in the course of epistemological discussions where he is trying to explain the special nature of the divinely inspired knowing that is the source of this esoteric science. Here we can only quote a few key passages from those discussions (at I, 250–1), which necessarily appear somewhat abstract or mysterious at this early point and in this explicitly autobiographical context:

Now it is God (*al-Haqq*), from Whom we take this knowledge, by emptying our hearts of thinking and preparing them to receive the divine inspirations (*wâridât*). It is He who gives us this matter from its very Source, without any summarizing or confusion (as in poetic or intellectual inspiration), so that we know the Realities as they really are, whether they be individual Realities (of the divine Names), or ones that come into existence in combinations, or the divine Realities: and we do not have any doubt about anything concerning them. Our knowledge comes from There, and God (*al-Haqq*) is our teacher – through inheritance from the prophets, preserved and protected from error or generality or (confusion with) external form . . . . And our share of that is in proportion to the purity of the place (of our heart) and our receptivity and awareness of God.

A little later in the same chapter (I, 255–8), however, the Shaykh explains the relevance of this inspiration to all his readers:

Our aim in this book is to reveal the glimmers and allusions and intimations from the secrets of Being. For if we were to speak fully and openly about the inner secrets of these letters and what is demanded by their realities . . . (our work would never come to an end), since they are among those “Words of God” of which He has said: **“If the sea were ink for the Words of My Lord, the sea would be dried up before the words of My Lord would be exhausted.”** (18:109)

This kind of inspired knowing, he points out,

contains a secret mystery and a remarkable allusion for whoever reflects deeply on it and comes across these divine “Words”. Because if these kinds of knowing were the result of thinking and reflection, human-being (*insân*) could be circumscribed in a short period. But instead these acts of knowing arrive from God (*al-Haqq*), continually flowing into the heart of the (true) servant: they are His devoted spirits descending upon the servant from the world of His Unseen, through His Mercy . . . and **“from His Presence”** (18:65). For God is perpetually bestowing them and continually flowing forth with them, and the “place” (of the heart) is likewise continually receiving – either knowing or ignorance. So if

the servant (of God) is prepared and receptive, and has polished and purified the mirror of their heart, then they realize that divine Giving continually and receive in a single instant what could never be bounded within time.

In that sense as he explains a little later in the same section (I, 264–5), this entire book is very literally and uniquely “from the Heart”:

I have recorded these inspirations in accordance with the command of my Lord that I received. I do not speak about anything except by way of (reporting) what I have heard (from God) – just as I will stop (writing) whenever I am directed to do so. For our compositions – this book and all the others – are not like other books; we do not follow the procedure of (ordinary) writers... (who follow their own aims and desires, or what is required by a knowledge they want to communicate, at their own discretion). No, we are not like that in our writings. They are only hearts intent upon the Door of the divine Presence,<sup>11</sup> carefully attending to what is opened up to them through that Door, needy (*faqîra*) and empty of all knowledge (of their own)...

So sometimes there appears to them from behind that Curtain a particular matter that they hasten to obey in the way that was defined for them in that Command. And sometimes they receive things that are unlike anything ordinarily found by custom or thinking or reflection in outward knowledge... because of a hidden correspondence that is only perceived by the people of spiritual unveiling.

Indeed sometimes it is even stranger than that: for things are given to this heart that it is ordered to communicate, although the person doesn't understand them at this time, because of a divine Wisdom which is hidden from the people. Therefore every person who composes according to this “receiving” from God is not restricted to understanding that about which they are speaking.

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Not surprisingly, for Ibn ‘Arabi the process of true spiritual understanding and interpretation of Scripture or other forms of revelation requires a very similar kind of preparedness and receptivity of the heart, even if that process is far more common and familiar. Thus, somewhat later in the same Chapter 2 (II, 73–5), in a discussion of how one should properly go about discovering the intended meanings of apparently “obscure” or anthropomorphic expressions in revealed Scripture, Ibn ‘Arabi again stresses the indispensable role of the heart in the practical methods adopted by the “people of unveiling and realization” for understanding such problematic or mysterious divine sayings:

We empty our hearts of reflective thinking, and we sit together with God (*al-Haqq*) on the carpet of *adab* and spiritual attentiveness (*murâqaba*) and presence and readiness to receive whatever comes to us from Him – so that it is God who takes care of teaching us by means of unveiling and spiritual realization. So when they have focused their hearts and their spiritual aspirations (*himam*) on God and have truly taken refuge with Him – giving up any reliance on the claims of reflection and investigation and intellectual results – then their hearts are purified and open. Once they have this inner receptivity, God manifests Himself to them, teaching them and informing them through the direct vision of the inner meanings of those (obscure scriptural) words and reports, in a single instant. This is one of the kinds of spiritual “unveiling” . . . .

(Through it) they limit (the meanings of these scriptural or prophetic expressions) to what (God) actually intended by them – even if that very same expression occurs in another report (with an entirely different intended meaning). For there (these identical words) have another meaning, among those sacred dimensions of meaning, which is specified in that specific act of witnessing.

However this relatively common and familiar type of “unveiling” of the spiritual meanings of scripture or revelation within the purified and receptive heart, Ibn ‘Arabi cautions, is quite distinct from the relatively rarer divine “Addressing” of *new* words or writing or other inspired messages intended for others (beyond the initial recipient), such as the divine “openings” Ibn ‘Arabi has set down in the *Futûhât* itself.

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If all this still seems distant indeed from our usual forms of knowledge and awareness, the failure to realize this kind of true communication and transforming proximity to God, Ibn ‘Arabi insists (at II, 82–5), is definitely not the fault of the heart itself:

You should know that the heart is a polished mirror, that all of it is a face, and that it never rusts. For if it has been said to “rust” (as in the famous hadith that “hearts rust like iron . . .”) . . . , that expression only refers to when the heart becomes connected and preoccupied with (seeking) knowledge of worldly matters (*asbâb*), and thereby distracted from its knowing of and through God. In that case its connection with what is other than God does obscure the face of the heart, because it prevents God’s Self-manifestations (or “theophanies”: *tajalliyât*) from reaching the heart. Because the divine Presence is continually manifesting Itself, and one could not imagine any “veil” for that Self-manifestation. But when this heart fails to receive that Manifestation in the prescribed and praiseworthy way, because it has received something other than

God instead, then that receiving of something else is what is referred to as the “rust” and “veils” and “lock” and “blindness” and the like (mentioned in the Qur’anic verses on the heart).

Here (at II, 84), Ibn ‘Arabi goes on to explain in very abstract and schematic terms, using his distinctive, theological-sounding technical terminology, some of the underlying grounds for the apparent paradox with which we began – that is, the obvious and undeniable “qualitative” differences between most of our ordinary experience and anything that we might even remotely call moments of “theophany”. His explanation is that although the heart in itself is by its very nature nothing but the timeless “place” of the divine Self-manifestation, those same experiences and phenomena can be subjectively perceived at four different levels of increasing “distance” from God. It is essential to keep in mind that the Shaykh’s technical distinctions in this passage are meant to describe the possible *ways* we can actually perceive or contextualize the “objects” of our experience – in their perceived connection (or lack thereof) with God – and not different kinds or classes of phenomena in themselves.

For the hearts are eternally and unceasingly, by their very primordial nature, polished and pure and resplendent (mirrors of God). Therefore every heart in which the Presence of God is manifest insofar as the Theophany of the divine *Essence* (*al-tajalli al-dhâtî*), or (what the mystics call) “the Red Ruby”: that is the heart of the perfected human being, the (true) Knower (of and with God), the (pure) contemplator (of God) – and there is no other theophany higher than that. Beneath that is the theophany of the divine *Attributes* (in which the heart immediately grasps and comes to know the various divine “Names” manifest in its experience). And beneath both of those (higher levels of theophany) is the theophany of the divine *Activities* – but (in which those actions are) still perceived as being the Presence of God. As for anyone who does not (perceive all the happenings of their experience) as Self-manifestations flowing from the Presence of God, that is the heart of a person who is heedless of God, banished from the proximity of God.

The unfolding discussions of the heart scattered throughout the rest of the *Futûhât* are essentially a vast *phenomenological* amplification of what Ibn ‘Arabi has summarized here, designed to bring out the essential connections or “correspondences” (*munâsabât*) between the underlying Realities of these divine “Names” and “Activities” and their actual exemplifications in each reader’s own experience – and thereby to initiate the transforming movement from “heedlessness” to the heart’s innate “knowing” and spiritual



perfection. While those more phenomenological sections are usually easier *reading*, the individual experiences they point to and presuppose are another matter.

### III. Unveiling the Heart (Chapters 3–54)

In Chapter 3 (II, 105–7), in his first discussion of the famous hadith of “God’s Two Fingers” and the related prayer of the Prophet for the “Transformer of hearts” to “fix my heart in Your Religion”, Ibn ‘Arabi takes up a kind of “inspiration” and awareness of the heart that, if much less spectacular, is also much closer to the actual reality of our moment-by-moment experience: namely, the universal human awareness of *moral* realities, and the resulting conflicts, judgments, and “tests” (to use the recurrent Qur’anic expression) that continually occupy the theater of the Heart.

God’s “turning over” (*taqlīb*) of the hearts (6:110) is His creating in them our concern with good and our concern with evil. So whenever the human being perceives the conflict of these opposing inclinations (*khawâtir*) in the heart, that is an expression of God’s “turning over” the heart – and this is a kind of knowing that the human being cannot keep from having.

Ibn ‘Arabi goes on to explain that the allusion to God’s “Two Fingers” holding the heart, in the well known hadith, refers “to the speed of its turning over between faith and ingratitude (to God), with all that implies”, and that the “duality” of the *two* Fingers likewise refers to the opposing “inclinations toward good and evil – although he hastens to add that an “unveiling” reveals (in ways he explains considerably later<sup>12</sup>) that these “Two Fingers” are related to the famous hadith concerning *both* of God’s Hands being “*Right Hands*”, both instruments of the all-encompassing divine Lovingmercy (*rahma*).

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In Chapter 4, in the context of praising the special spiritual blessings and influences of Mecca, Ibn ‘Arabi goes on to mention (at II, 120–4) a kind of “contemplation” and inspired knowledge of the heart that is a bit less mundane, but still a remarkably powerful and widespread experience for many individuals who today are often unaware of its deeper religious roots and significance: the question of our sensitivity to the spiritual power of sacred *places*:

One of the conditions for the person who knows through direct vision, who is master of the stages and modes of witnessing the Unseen spiritual realities (*mashâhid al-ghayb*), is that they are aware that places have an influence on sensitive hearts . . . [Only the individual entirely under the influence of their own perturbed inner state, the *sâhib al-hâl*, could fail to perceive this powerful difference in the spiritual intensity of being, the *wujûd*, of different places.] But as for the perfected person, the master of this spiritual stage (*sâhib al-maqâm*), they are able to discern this difference in the power of places, just as God differentiates between them . . . What a difference there is between a city most of whose buildings are the carnal passions (*shahawât*) and a city most of whose buildings are (divine) Signs and Miracles!

Here Ibn ‘Arabi is probably alluding more specifically to “cities” or spiritual communities of human hearts. He then goes on to address directly his friend in Tunis, the Shaykh Mahdawi (for whom the entire *Futûhât* was originally composed), and to remind him of his inexplicable preference for spiritual retreat at a particular place in a cemetery of Tunis, where he felt closer to the presence of al-Khadir (“Khezi”) – and eventually encountered that ageless initiatic figure:

Now my friend knows that this (power of spiritual places) is due to those who inhabit that place, either in the present, such as some of the noble angels or the pious spirits (*jinn*), or else through the spiritual intentions (*himma*) of those who used to inhabit them and have passed on, such as (. . . the house of Abu Yazid al-Bastami, the prayer-room of al-Junayd . . .) and the places of the Righteous (the *Sâlihîn*) who have left behind this abode, but whose influences have remained behind them, so that sensitive hearts are influenced by them. This is also the cause for the influences that different places of prayer have on the intensity of presence (*wujûd*) of the heart – not the number of their bricks! . . . And whoever doesn’t notice this difference in the spiritual presence of their heart between the marketplace and the place of prayer is under the influence of their passing *hâl*, not the master of this spiritual station. . . . Indeed your intensity of presence (*wujûd*) is according to your companions (*julasâ’*), for the spiritual aspirations (*himam*) of one’s companions have a tremendous influence on the heart of the one who is there with them – and their intentions are according to their spiritual ranks . . .

. . . So for us, the awareness of this matter, I mean the knowledge of the spiritual influence of places and the sensitivity to its greater or lesser presence, is part of the completion of the mastery of the Knower and the high dignity of that station, of the Knower’s responsibility for things and their faculty of spiritual discernment.

Of course this particular case is only one small part of the larger question of the spiritual presence or awareness of the heart, and in Chapter 12 (II, 346) Ibn ‘Arabi alludes to the example and exemplar which underlies so much of his work:

Now (Muhammad) alluded to something which the people of God have put into practice and found to be sound, and that is his saying: "If it were not for your speaking too much and the turmoil in your hearts, then you would have seen what I see and would have heard what I hear!" For he was singled out for the rank of perfection (*kamâl*) in all things, including perfection in servanthood, so that he was the absolute servant (of God).

... And Aisha said: "the Messenger of God used to remember God in all of his states," and we have had an abundant inheritance from that. Now this (constant presence with God) is a matter that specifically involves the inner dimension of the human being and our "speech" (*qawl*), although things (apparently) contradicting that may appear in our actions, as we have realized and verified with regard to this spiritual station – even if that appears puzzling to someone who has no knowledge of the spiritual states.

Fortunately, although many of the forms or degrees of prayer and contemplation evoked by Ibn 'Arabi might appear at first glance to lie beyond the usual range of our experience or, in some cases, even our most ambitious aspirations, he is also a master in evoking and suggesting the fundamental role of the divine activity and the providential divine "Caring" (*'inâya*) that constantly underlies *every* stage of this individual process of realization – not just in abstract, metaphysical terms, but often, especially in the *Futûhât*, in subtly practical ways whose relevance and meaning only become clear to readers who are willing to approach the work slowly and attentively in terms of its echoes and implications in their own experience. His language for describing the phenomena of "grace" and the human–divine interactions, in all their richness, is surely most fully developed in the hundreds of later chapters of the *Futûhât* on the various spiritual stations, but Chapter 24 (III, 178–9) marks one of his first allusions to this practically central dimension of the problem that concerns us here:

As for those hearts who are passionately in love (*muta'ashshiqâ*) with the (divine) "Breaths", since the treasuries of the animating spirits (of human souls) are in love with the Breaths of the All-Merciful – because of this inner connection and correspondence (between the divine Spirit and our souls) – the Messenger of God said: "The Breath of the All-Merciful is coming to me from the Yemen." Because the animating spirit (that gives life to our soul) is a (divine) "breath", and the Source of those breaths, for the hearts that are in love with them, is the Breath of the All-Merciful which is from the "Yemen",<sup>13</sup> for whoever has been taken from their true Homeland, separated from their home and resting place: therefore (that Breath) contains release from (the hearts') oppression and the removal of misfortunes. Which is why he also said:

“Surely God has fragrant breaths (or ‘breezes’, *nafahât*), so go toward the fragrant breaths of your Lord!”

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One of the Shaykh’s most powerfully moving evocations of the soul’s state of true prayer and awareness of God is in his Chapter 41, on the “People of the Night” – the “Night” in question (based on complex allusions to a number of hadith and Qur’anic verses, as well as classical Arabic love-poetry) being conceived here as the inner state of mutual intimacy and awareness between the human lover and the divine Beloved, however and whenever that contemplative state might occur. In this intimate, speechless dialogue within the heart, it is the divine “Voice” that is speaking at first here (IV, 41–3), describing the inner reality of these “nocturnal” prayers, the fully realized state of “recollection” (*dhikr*):

So I am the One reciting<sup>14</sup> My Book to the person praying, through his tongue – and he is the one who is listening, for that is My “night-time conversation” (*musâmiratî*). And that servant is the one who is taking pleasure in My Speaking – such that if he stopped (to ponder) the meanings (of what I am saying) he would be taken away from Me by his thinking and reflection.

*For what is essential for the servant here is to listen attentively to Me, to devote his hearing entirely to what I am saying, until the point where I am actually the One in that reciting – as though I were reciting it to him and making him listen to it – until I am the One explaining My words to him, translating its inner meaning to him. That is My nocturnal conversing with the servant, so that he takes his knowing directly from Me, not from his own thinking or considerations.*

For (the true Knower) is not distracted (from total attention to Me) by the mention (in those Qur’anic words) of the Garden or the Fire, of the Accounting and Reviewing (of our works at the Judgment), or of this world or the next. For that (accomplished divine Knower) does not reflect on each verse with his intellect or investigate it with his own thinking. Instead he only “**listens attentively**” (alluding to the key verse at 50:37 with which we began) to what I am saying to him, “**while he is witnessing**” (Me), present with Me, while I take upon Myself the responsibility for teaching him . . . . In that way the Knower realizes with complete certainty knowings which did not come from within himself, since It was from Me that he heard the Qur’an, from Me that he heard Its explanation and the commentary on Its meanings, what I meant by this or that particular verse or chapter.

*That is the Knower’s proper adab with me, his carefully listening and paying heed to Me. So if I seek them out for a nocturnal conversation concerning something, they answer Me immediately with their presence and readiness, and their immediate witnessing . . .*

Indeed if the Dawn comes along and I have ascended upon the Throne<sup>15</sup> . . . , My servant goes off to his livelihood and the company of his fellows. But I have already opened up a “Door” for him among My creatures, a Door between Myself and him through which My servant sees Me and through which I see him – although the others don’t notice that. So I converse with My servant through *his* tongue, without his being aware of that. And My servant receives (that spiritual instruction) from Me **“with clear Insight”** (12:108), although those people don’t know that and think that they are the ones who are talking to him, *even though (in reality) no one is speaking other than Me!* They imagine that My servant is answering them, when they are actually replying to no one but Me!”

The final paragraph here of course recalls some of the metaphysical teachings most commonly associated with Ibn ‘Arabi and his later interpreters, ideas which he most often develops in connection with the hadith of the divine “transformation through the forms (of the creatures)” and the celebrated hadith in which the spiritual virtue of *ihsân* (“right-and-beautiful-action”) and the ultimate goal of Religion is defined as “serving God as though you see Him”. But this divine speech from Chapter 41, with its open identification of the heart as the open “Door” linking God and the soul – and of the most “mundane” incidents of each person’s everyday life as priceless, entirely individual “private lessons” from God – throws a very different, less “mystical” and much more practical and instructive light on that same teaching.

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Ibn ‘Arabi’s next discussion of the enlightened “heart”, in Chapter 43 (IV, 78–82) on the “people of inner spiritual ‘scrupulousness’”, emphasizes even more strongly the importance of carrying out this spiritual practice of realizing the divine Presence within all the testing demands of social life in this world, but in complete secrecy, without leaving any opening for the multiple forms of inner hypocrisy and potential corruption that are usually tied up, in any culture, with any overt or distinctive personal focus on “spiritual” activities. And in fact the Prophetic advice regarding this state that Ibn ‘Arabi quotes here, if one puts it into practice, is likely to lead in directions somewhat different from *any* society’s public expectations of “religiosity”:

Now since this was the inner state of the people of *wara’*, they followed in their (daily) matters and activities the ways of the common people, not letting them know that this (inner scrupulousness and attentiveness)

distinguished them from them, concealing themselves behind the conventional arrangements in the world so that no special praise is accorded the person who takes on those ways.

Here the Shaykh goes on to explain that “the people of God carefully avoid anything like” what would cause them to be singled out for their piety or asceticism or good nature and the like. He then asks his reader to

Ponder what (the Prophet) said about this spiritual station, teaching his intimates how they should act in regard to it: “Stop doing whatever disturbs you, and turn to what does not disturb you!” And his saying: “Seek the guidance of your heart (*istaftî qalbaka*), even if it guides you toward what fascinates or tempts you (*al-maftûn*).”

These two hadith, which could certainly be interpreted (if taken in isolation) in order to justify some of the notorious ways of the *malâmîya* or the nonconformist attitudes associated with the ideal of the “*rend*” in Hafez’s poetry, in fact offer some of the most useful and straightforward – if also incredibly demanding and challenging – practical spiritual guidance one could find anywhere in the *Futûhât*:

Thus (the Prophet) pointed them in the direction of their own hearts, because of what he knew their hearts contained of the secret/mystery of God (*sirr Allâh*), what their hearts included (of that Secret) that is essential to realizing this spiritual station. For in the hearts there is a special divine Care and Protection<sup>16</sup> that is not perceived by any but the people of attentive awareness (*ahl al-murâqaba*), concealed for them there (in the heart).

The people of this “**Pure Religion**” (39:3), Ibn ‘Arabi admits, almost inevitably become recognized eventually as somehow peculiar – although most people do not at all suspect just *why* they are so mysteriously “special”. The particular example he chooses to give here, of the conscientiousness of an anonymous sister of the famous early Baghdadi Sufi Bishr al-Hafi, revealed in a question she brought to the learned jurist Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, is a telling illustration of the outwardly modest way of life the Shaykh has in mind. The key to this highest level of conscientious spiritual practice, he again insists, is simply to begin applying these two utterly straightforward sayings of the Prophet:

For he gave us the True Balance (*al-mîzân*) in our hearts, so that our station might be concealed from others, wholly devoted to God, in

complete purity and sincerity, not known by any but God and then His trusted companion: **"Is not the Pure Religion (wholly) God's?!"** (39:3) – since any other form of religion is inevitably corrupted either by the promptings of the egoistic self (the *nafs*) or its concern with social proprieties.

... So when the people of this spiritual station saw the Prophet's careful attention to what is realized within the heart of the servant, what he said about it and what he pointed out that the human being should do and should avoid by seeking to remain concealed: (when they saw all that,) they put it into practice in order to realize that (station), they followed that path, and they knew that the salvation we seek from the lawgiver is *only* possible through concealing our spiritual state. So he bestowed upon them (the duty) to act according to that and to actively realize it.

Therefore the people of this station realized that this (earthly) abode is an abode of concealment (for us as it is for God), and why God was not content in describing (His) religion until He had qualified it as the **"Pure and Sincere (Religion)"** (*al-dîn al-khâlis*). So they sought a way in which they would not be corrupted by any form of associating (any worldly motives with the pure service of God), so that they might apply themselves to this place (i.e., life in this world) with just what it deserves, from the point of view of proper *adab*, wisdom, and observing and following the law (*sharʿ*). Hence they veiled themselves from the ordinary people through the veils of scrupulous piety (*waraʿ*), which the people don't even notice, since (for them) that is the outward aspect of religion (*ẓâhir al-dîn*) and the received forms of knowledge. For if the people of this spiritual station followed outwardly anything other than the commonly received forms of religion they would stand out – and thereby end up accomplishing the opposite of what they were seeking.

Yet if "the common people only notice these (anonymous saints) according to the usual motives they have concerning them", he concludes, those who have realized this spiritual station are already "being praised by God, by the holy divine Names, by the angels, by the prophets and messengers, and by the animals and plants and minerals and everything that sings God's praises. It is only the jinn and human beings (*al-thaqalayn*) who are entirely unaware of them, except for those individuals to whom God may reveal their identity." This emphatic allusion to the necessary anonymity of the "Friends of God" (the *awliyâ*) is of course a central theme in Ibn 'Arabi's spiritual teaching, and one that is marvelously illustrated by his anecdotes about his own personal encounters with such hidden saints throughout the Islamic world, whether scattered in the *Futûhât* or, more accessibly in English, in the stories translated in *Sufis of Andalusia*. However, from the practical point of view, it

might be even more revealing to connect what Ibn ‘Arabi has said about such hidden saints, whether in those collected stories or here in Chapter 43, with his lesson on God’s instruction of the heart (and His mundane instruments of that teaching) in the immediately preceding excerpts from Chapter 41. The special effectiveness, and the deeper fascination, of this strange book – mirroring life itself – lies in just such juxtapositions and hidden connections.

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Since the external, visible path of these true “people of the heart”, for Ibn ‘Arabi, ordinarily comprises above all the “outward aspect of Religion” (*ẓāhir al-Dîn*), it is not surprising if much of the rest of this opening section of the *Futûhât*<sup>17</sup> is devoted to the inner secrets or mysteries (*asrâr*), the “heart-dimension”, of the “Five Pillars”, and especially of the ritual prayer (*salât*). As the Shaykh points out in his next discussion of the heart, in Chapter 47 (IV, 134–7):

Now there is no act of worship or devotion (*‘ibâda*) that God has prescribed for His servants that does not have a special connection with a divine Name, or a divine Reality implicit in that Name, which gives to (the person carrying out) that devotion what it gives to the heart in this world... and in the other world. ... [In this world, those corresponding “gifts” of each Name to the heart include its specific] stations and forms of knowing and awareness, and the divine Signs and manifestations of Grace (*karamât*) included in its specific spiritual states. ...

Now God says that He converses intimately with the person praying [alluding to Chapter 41 above], and He is **Light** (24:35), so He confides (in His servant in prayer) through His Name “The Light” (*al-Nûr*) and no other. And just as Light drives away all darkness, so the ritual prayer cuts off every other preoccupation, unlike the other acts (of devotion), which do not involve letting go of *everything* other than God, as the ritual prayer does. This is why prayer is called “a light” [in the hadith “Prayer is a light”], because in that way God gives (the servant) the Good News that if he confides in God and entrusts himself to Him through His Name “The Light”, then He is alone with the servant and removes every transient thing (*kawn*) in the servant’s act of witnessing Him during their intimate conversation. ...

Therefore every servant who is (outwardly) praying, but whose act of prayer does not remove them from *everything* (other than God), is not truly praying, and that act of prayer is not a Light for them. And anyone who is reciting (the verses of the Qur’an) inwardly, within their soul, but who does not directly witness *God’s remembering them within Himself*, has not ... really remembered God within their soul, because of



the lack of the right inner correspondence (between God and the receptive soul), due to what is present there of things of this world, such as family and children and friends, or of the other world, such as the presence of the angels in his thoughts. . . . The inward state (of presence and receptivity) of the servant praying must be such that *none but their Lord is intimately addressing them* in their prayer and recitation, in their praises and petitions (to God).

And Ibn 'Arabi goes on here to multiply at length the inner conditions for experiencing the true reality of *salât*. For as he points out, "Among the acts of devotion and worship (*'ibâdat*) there is none that brings the servant closer to the angelic spiritual stations of 'those drawn near to God' (the *muqarrabûn*), which is the highest station of the Friends of God – whether of angel or Messenger or prophet or saint or person of faith – than the act of prayer." Lest one despair of ever realizing – at least as something more than a memorable *hâl* – such a true inner state of prayer, the Shaykh immediately follows this description with another imagined speech of God to his angels, a speech which underlines the extraordinary dignity and rarity of any human achievement in this realm of prayer:

For I have placed between this servant of Mine and the "station of Proximity (to Me)" (*maqâm al-qurba*) many veils and immense obstacles, including the goals of the carnal soul; sensual desires and passions; taking care of other people, property, family, servants and friends; and terrible fears. Yet (My servant) has cut through all that and continued to strive until he prostrated himself [clearly more than bodily motions are involved in this sense of *sujûd*] and drew near (to Me) and became one of the *muqarrabûn*. So look, O My angels, at how specially favored you are and at the superiority of your rank, although I did not test you with these obstacles nor obligate you to undergo their pains. And realize the rank of this servant, and give him all that he is due for everything that he has undergone and suffered on his path (toward Me), for My sake!

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In Chapter 50, on the "people of *Hayra* (spiritual 'bewilderment')" – one of the highest spiritual stations for Ibn 'Arabi, as we know – he returns to an even closer phenomenological description of this state of the truly open and purified heart, in an account whose conclusion recalls certain celebrated poems of John of the Cross. The first part of that description (IV, 218–25), though, simply summarizes the process by which any of the "people of spiritual unveiling" – as opposed to the followers of intellectual reflection or

of mere formal obedience (*taqlîd*) – set out to discover the right *divine* answer to their religious questions, arising from the recurrent fundamental problem of applying or interpreting scriptural tradition:

So this group apply themselves vigorously to acquiring (the reality concerning) something that has come down in the divine reports from the side of God (*al-Haqq*), and they begin by “polishing their hearts through acts of *dhikr* and the recitation of the Qur’an” (as specified in the famous hadith), by emptying the receptacle (of their hearts) from all inquiry about contingent things, and through the presence of careful attentiveness (to the inner state of their hearts, *murâqaba*) – along with observing the purity of their outward action through following the limits set by revelation. . . . (Such a person seeking inspiration) turns their thoughts completely from their self (*nafs*), since that (turning away) disperses their worries, and remains alone carefully attending to their heart, at the Door of their Lord. Then when God opens up this Door for the possessor of such a heart, they realize a divine Self-manifestation (or “theophany”: *tajallî*) that is in accordance with their inner condition. And through that (inspiration they realize) the relation of something to God that they would never have dared to risk relating to God before and would never have even attributed to God . . . [unless that were already reported by the divine prophets, in which case they still could only have accepted it on faith]. But now that person applies that (newly revealed aspect of the divine) to God as verified and realized knowing, because of what was revealed to them through that divine Self-manifestation.

But this sort of “extra-ordinary” experience of divine illumination is only the first step toward the spiritual station of “Bewilderment”:

For after the first such Self-manifestation (the person experiencing such an unexpected revelation of God’s nature or activity in the world) imagines that they have reached their goal and accomplished the matter, and that there is nothing to be sought beyond that except for that (revelatory state) to continue. But then another Self-manifestation occurs to them, with still another quality and implication (*hukm*) unlike that of the first – even though the (divine Reality) manifesting Itself is undoubtedly the same, in the same position as in the first case. After that still other Self-manifestations follow one another for that person, with their different implications, so that through this (ongoing revelation) the person comes to know that this matter has no end at which it might stop. Only then do they realize that they have *not* perceived (or “attained”) the divine Ipseity (*innîya*), and that the divine Essence (*huwîya*) cannot be made manifest to them, *in that it is the Spirit* (the *rûh*) *of every theophany*. So that person’s “bewilderment” increases, but there

is great pleasure in it... [which, Ibn 'Arabi hastens to add, is totally unlike the different and quite frustrating "perplexity" of our intellect that is called by the same name]. People like this have been raised above the contingent things (*akwân*), so that they witness nothing but (God), and He is the object of their witnessing. ... Their state of "bewilderment" only grows more intense, and (because of the intensity of the satisfaction associated with it) they only seek to continue experiencing those successive Self-manifestations.

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Perhaps such a description, as is not infrequently the case with Ibn 'Arabi, may seem to apply to a state of the contemplating heart almost unimaginably beyond anything we might consider possible in our own experience. But as always, the Shaykh returns to this subject from another perspective which may suggest that the fruits of such inspiration are in fact not so far removed from things we have already realized, if we can only make the essential connection (the mysterious "correspondence") between his concepts here and the corresponding spiritual phenomena. His next extended discussion of the heart, in Chapter 54 (IV, 268–77) on the "Allusions" (*ishârât*) and technical vocabulary of the Sufis, is a striking illustration of that kind of unexpected connection – and of the fundamental role of individual "preparedness" and (humanly) inexplicable spiritual "aptitudes" in the realization of everything discussed in the *Futûhât*:

One of the most astonishing things about this Path (of the people of God), and something that is only found here, is the fact that there is no other group bearing a kind of knowledge – whether the logicians, grammarians, mathematicians, geometricians, theologians or philosophers – who do not also have a technical vocabulary that the novice among them does not know except by frequenting a master or another one of them: that is necessarily the case. Except for the unique case of the people of this Path, when a sincere seeker (*murîd*) enters among them who does not know anything at all about their technical terminology: indeed this phenomenon is precisely what allows them to know that person's spiritual sincerity (*sidq*). For if God has already opened the eye of that seeker's understanding and that person has (truly) taken the beginning of their spiritual "tasting" from God, then that person will sit down among them and speak with them using their terminology in the special way that no one else knows but them – even though that person knew nothing before about the special expressions of the people of God! For that sincere spiritual seeker understands everything that they are talking about, just as though that person were actually the one who had decided upon those technical expressions; and that seeker

(immediately) joins them in using that language, without feeling any strangeness about doing so – indeed that person feels that the knowledge of these expressions is immediately self-evident and unavoidable. *It is as though they had always known that language, without knowing how they ever came to acquire it.*

Ibn ‘Arabi’s allusion here to the vast extent of the “unconscious” or ordinarily unarticulated spiritual knowing and awareness of the heart that is often taken for granted precisely by those who most obviously possess it is a phenomenon that everyone has probably encountered at one time or another, and not only in the history of religions.

#### IV. The “Secrets of Purification” (Chapter 68)

The next discussions of the Heart in the *Futûhât* are in the lengthy Chapter 68 on the “Secrets of Purity” (*asrâr al-tahâra*), where dimensions of spiritual “purification” are raised more than twenty times, usually in implicit or explicit connection with prayer (the subject of the even longer following chapter). Many of Ibn ‘Arabi’s points there about realizing the contemplative potential of the heart are both brief and exceedingly practical even for the uninitiated reader, while others are astonishingly subtle and far-reaching in their implications. Within this article we can highlight or summarize only a few of the most important of those passages.

To begin with, Ibn ‘Arabi points out (V, 148–9) that

the divine knowledge received directly from God’s Presence through revelation (*‘ilm ladunnî ilâhî mashrû‘*) has a single taste – even if the places where it is drunk<sup>18</sup> may differ, they do not differ in being good: and whether it is good or better, it is all pure, without any corruption... For the prophets and saints and everyone who informs us from God all say the same thing of God... not differing among themselves, and confirming one another – just as the pure rain from the sky is not different when it falls.

So let the foundation of your purification of your heart be with water like this – with nothing but knowledge known through divine revelation (*shar‘*), which has been likened to rainwater. ... then your own essence and your purification (of it) will be like that spring from which water flows forth. And if you should differentiate sweetness or saltiness (in what is claimed to all be “revealed” rainwater), then know that your perceptions are sound! This is a topic to which I have not found anyone alluding. And yet the person who eats sugar knows its sweetness like that, and knows that there is something wrong with the bitterness of aloes: they don’t need a “rational proof” (*dalîl ‘aqlî*) (to recognize the

difference)! Now I have definitely pointed this out to you, so take my indication to heart – and watch out!

Now that that is established, my friend, start employing the forms of knowledge given by the revelation (*sharʿ*) in (purifying) your own essence, and use the knowings of the saints and the true Knowers who took them from God in your own spiritual exercises and spiritual efforts and exertions, refraining from the excesses (i.e., the desires) of the bodily members and the promptings of the egoistic self (the *nafs*). For if you cannot distinguish between those waters (i.e., which are truly pure and divinely revealed, and which polluted by human interference), then know that something is wrong with your nature, that it has somehow been corrupted. In that case we can do nothing for you, except that God may help you, through His Lovingmercy.

It should not be necessary to underline the continued practical relevance of his remarks here, or the way they apply equally to every religious tradition. This innate human awareness of the right course of spiritual action, Ibn ʿArabi continues (V, 165–71), is a “purification” that is religiously obligatory

for every responsible–rational person (every *ʿâqil*, in the legal sense of that term). For that person is the one who understands *from God* (*ʿan Allâh*) what they are ordered and prohibited, and what God gives to them in their innermost being; they are the person who is able to distinguish, among the inner promptings of their heart, what comes from God and what from their egoistic self (*nafs*), what from the touch of an angel or the touch of a devil: *and that is the fully human being (al-insân)*! So if someone reaches that degree in their spiritual awareness (*maʿrifa*) and their discernment, and understands from God what He wants from them, and truly hears God’s saying that “the heart of My servant encompasses Me”: then it is obligatory for that person in this situation to use this (awareness) in purifying their heart and every other member connected with it, in the way God intends.

Therefore, the Shaykh concludes (V, 166), this inner purification and discernment are an obligation for every single responsible human being, whether or not they’ve even heard of the historical forms of religion:

Our own way of proceeding (our *madhhab*) is that *all people in general* – whether they are among the people of faith, or *kufʿ*, or inner hypocrites – are “addressed” (*mukhâtabûn*: spoken to directly by God in their hearts) regarding the Sources of the divine Way (the *sharʿ*, in its root sense) and its branches, and that they are all held responsible at the Day of the Rising.

“For us,” he explains further on (V, 320–2), “*purification itself is an independent act of devotion*.” Indeed for Ibn ‘Arabi, as we have already seen, it is in a way the ultimate root and aim of every act of worship. From the traditional legal point of view, of course, “it may also be the condition for properly performing another act of worship and devotion, either an essential condition or one necessary for its proper performance, while for another act of devotion it may be only ‘preferable’ or part of the Prophet’s personal example (*mustahabb* or *sunna*).”

“The inner spiritual ground (*hukm al-bâtin*) for that”, the Shaykh continues, “is that the purification of the heart is a *precondition* for our intimate converse (*munâjat*) with God or for our contemplating Him – a condition that is at once both obligatory (or ‘essential’) and necessary for the proper realization (of that spiritual intimacy and true contemplation).” Sometimes, he adds,

spiritual knowing may be an essential condition for the soundness of our faith in a matter. And sometimes faith in turn may be an essential condition as well as a necessary condition for assuring the soundness of our knowing through experiential “unveiling”. However in faith there is the purification of the heart from being veiled (from God’s presence), while (spiritual) knowing purifies the heart from ignorance and doubt and pretension. So *purify your heart with both of those purifications* (of faith and of knowledge): you will rise high, through that, in both the worlds, and through it you will attain the knowledge of the “Two Handfuls” (of human souls destined to suffering or bliss).

And he concludes: “As for the inner spiritual judgment (*hukm al-bâtin*) concerning all of this, we say that every prescribed religious action that is not preceded by this purification through faith is unsound because of this lack of faith. Therefore faith is necessary for every religious action”.

In his ensuing discussion (V, 341–4) of the purifications appropriate to the pilgrim visiting the Kaaba – whether that “pilgrimage” be inward or outward – Ibn ‘Arabi makes two points that are very simple, but practically of the utmost importance. The first concerns the proper inner attitude to have in our relations with all the other creatures, which is the full realization of the virtue of *ihsân* – of “seeing God” and the divine Presence through and with all things:

Now spiritual purification (*tahârat al-bâtin*) – which is (purification of) the heart is through liberating ourselves (from all attachments other than God), in order to seek (His) friendship. And there is no (true) friendship and closeness with God except through freeing yourself from

the creatures, insofar as you used to consider them (only) in light of their relation to yourself (to your ego or *nafs*) and not through God (and the realization of *His* aims in their regard).

The Shaykh's second point is made in regard to the spiritual experience of the pilgrim with regard to the "treasure" and blessing and guidance that the Prophet has mentioned as being reserved for those visiting the "House (or Temple: *al-bayt*) of God":

So consider the one who comes to circumambulate (the Kaaba), when he has turned to his heart after going around (the House). If he finds an "increase" in his awareness of his Lord and a "clear indication" (from God) that he did not have before, then he knows from that that he has properly carried out his purification for entering Mecca. But if he finds none of that (in his heart), then he knows that he has failed to purify himself, did not come to his Lord, and so did not (truly) go around His House. For it is impossible that anyone should come to stay with a noble and wealthy host, entering into his house, and yet not experience his hospitality! . . . If such a person "came close" (to God's House), they only came close to the rocks, not to the Essence (or the Source: *al-'ayn*) – May God place us among the possessors of hearts, the people of God and those close to Him!

This process of inner purification obligatory for all worship and devotion, Ibn 'Arabi constantly reiterates, is always changing and always essential (V, 349):

The purification of the heart (is obligatory) so that it may be joined with its Lord, and so that its spiritual aspiration may be joined in intimate converse (*munâjât*) with Him through the raising of the veil from (the servant's heart). . . . So it is necessary for anyone who is seeking this state (of the heart's intrinsic intimacy with God) to purify themselves with a special purification. Indeed I say that *every* state of the servant with God requires its own special purification.

At this point (V, 346–7) Ibn 'Arabi adds a special warning, but one which also highlights his typical reliance on the actual consequences of spiritual effort – and the sensitivity of each individual's heart – in overcoming these recurrent dangers of the Path:

Now the guardians (the *bawwâbs* of the heart) may sometimes be sleeping or distracted, so that the secret promptings (*khawâtir*) of the carnal souls and the devils find nothing to keep them from entering that person's heart. In that case, when that person says "*Labbayk!*" ["Here I am, Lord!"], the traditional pilgrim's call] with their tongue, imagining that they are coming in response to the call of their Lord, they are only responding to

the prompting of their own *nafs* or of a devil calling to them in their heart.

And Ibn 'Arabi goes on to describe the glee of that ever-present impostor in thus fooling the deluded seeker... "So **'If it were not for the Generosity of God and His Lovingmercy'** – through the tongue of our inner spiritual state (*lisân al-bâtin wa-l-hâl*) and the spiritual intention (*nîya*) preceding that event," such a person who was imperfectly purified would surely encounter the "**dire suffering**" mentioned in that same verse (24:14). But in reality, as he insists in another extraordinary passage of this same chapter, it is necessary to take a much more comprehensive view of the providential divine "Caring" (*inâya*) and "Outwitting" (*makar*) with regard to Iblis and the devils, a proof of God's Mercy and Grace that is ultimately manifested precisely through the multitude of such memorable spiritual "mishaps" and delusions that each person inevitably experiences over time.

This is why, Ibn 'Arabi explains (V, 354–6), "it is necessary to purify the heart from the 'touch of Satan'" – which he has elsewhere identified with the passion of blind anger, *sakht* – "when it descends on the heart and touches the inner being of a person." And that purification of the heart is through the "touch of the angel", which is the manifestation of God's providential Caring for the heart at that point. As he goes on to explain:

And if the hadith of God's "Two Fingers" alluded to that (mysterious working of Grace and divine Providence), then *both* of those Fingers are Lovingmercy (*rahma*)... since if it were not for God's Lovingmercy for His servant through that touch of the devil, the servant would never receive their reward for countering that prompting (of the devil) and turning away from it to the work of the angel's touch (i.e., the experience of repentance and divine Grace), so that the servant acquires two rewards (for the inner struggle, and for the eventual repentance and right action). And that is why we say that God attributed both (of those "Two Fingers") to the Divine Name "the All-Merciful" (*al-Rahmân*).

This point, which has so often been treated as paradoxical or even heretical by later Islamic critics of the Shaykh, in fact could not be more central to Ibn 'Arabi's comprehensive awareness of the processes of spiritual growth and transformation, on both the individual and larger cosmic levels. For in a passage so long that it can only be summarized here, Ibn 'Arabi carefully points out how the devil always ends up accomplishing the exact opposite of what he intended, as the results of his deception eventually push the servant to regret – "the greatest of the pillars of repentance and return to



God”, as the Shaykh calls it – and then to true re-turning to God (*tawba*). Thus the “victim” of Satan

has the reward of the *shahîd* [here not only “martyr”, but also the literal “witness” of God’s Love and Mercy] because of the occurrence of that act (of turning to God) in him. And the *shahîd* (as confirmed by Qur’an and hadith alike) is *alive*, not dead – for what life could be greater than the Life of hearts together with God, in whatever activity that may be?! For the presence (of the heart) with faith, in the face of the opposition (of Satan), renders that action alive with the Life of the (divine) Presence.

So this, Ibn ‘Arabi concludes (V, 356), is again why both divine “Fingers” – although they appear to us, in terms of our own dualistic feelings and judgments of our experience, as diametrically opposed – are in fact equally instruments of God’s Love and Mercy:

If (the devil) knew that God was blessing the servant, through the devil’s touch, with a special sort of happiness, then he wouldn’t have done any of that. But this is the divine Cunning (*makar Allâh*) through which He fools Iblis, and I have not seen anyone else allude to that. And indeed were it not for my knowing Iblis and being aware of his ignorance and his compulsion that drives him to counter (God), I too would not have alluded to this... But this is what encouraged me to mention this, because the devil can never stop at those occasions (for temptation) because of his veil, through his compulsion to make the servant suffer and his ignorance that God is (always) turning (to forgive) the servant. For God always cunningly deceives someone in such a way that they themselves fail to notice it, even if others are able to see what is really happening!

The preceding discussion highlights one of the active principles of spiritual life underlying one of Ibn ‘Arabi’s most straightforward and illuminating pieces of practical advice (V, 359–60) regarding this ongoing purification of the heart and the way it transforms every single event of our life, inner or outer, into a further occasion for discovering the secrets of our relationship with God:

Now the Knower finds in one of his spiritual states a contraction or expansion (*qabd aw bast*) whose immediate cause (*sabab*) he does not know. And for the people of the Path this is (always) a significant matter. For he knows that this (uncertainty as to the meaning of this experience) is due to his unconsciousness or heedlessness (*ghafla*) with regard to carefully observing his heart and his spiritual intention – and

to his lack of spiritual insight (*basîra*) in grasping the inner correspondence of that state with the (spiritual) matter which that (divine) Attribute caused him to experience. In that case what is incumbent on (the Knower) is to *surrender* (*taslîm*) to the eventual effects of the (divine) Decree, until he sees what that gives rise to in the future.

But if the Knower recognizes (the inner reason for that particular experience), then he should purify himself through being completely present with God in his knowledge of those correspondences, so that he does not become unaware of what has come to him from God through these “sanctifying spiritual experiences” (*wâridât al-taqdîs*) – so that he is not unaware of which (divine) Name became (real) to him through that experience, and which Name came to be through him, and which Name is actually influencing him at that instant, causing him to call out for that experience. So these (spiritually “educational” dimensions of our experience realized by the Knower, sooner or later) are *three*: the name that is calling (to the Knower), the name that is called (into being) through him, and the name that is (at this instant) coming over him. Of course there is no possible correspondence (of this sort) through which God, in His Essence, might be (ultimately) circumscribed to us or through us... But through His Names we are connected (with Him), through those Names we take on His qualities,<sup>19</sup> and through them we become realized (or “become transformed toward what is Real”: *natahaqqaq*) – and God makes this possible!

The next set of allusions to the heart’s “purification” in this chapter (V, 363–6) stands out in every possible way from the discussions that surround it. The passage itself is almost certainly an illustration of that quintessential spiritual teaching destined for the “elite of the elite” which Ibn ‘Arabi, in a key passage of his Introduction,<sup>20</sup> claims to have intentionally “scattered” throughout the *Futûhât*. An adequate translation and commentary would require a separate article, but the real difficulty, as one might expect of such a lesson, has nothing at all to do with its language. The essential point clearly has something to do with overcoming spiritual “dualism” – but at a fundamental level of depth and subtlety, and of necessarily personal and nearly ineffable intensity, considerably more profound than in the passages we have just discussed. The section begins with a discussion of distinctly spiritual qualities that, according to Ibn ‘Arabi, require a complete bodily ablution (*ghusl*) – an act of purification that Islamic law typically requires for very different types and circumstances of “impurity”. Ibn ‘Arabi’s movement here beyond the received forms of Islamic law, which serve as at least the ostensible point of departure for all of his other discussions of spiritual purification in the rest of Chapter 68, is already a dramatic sign of the unique character of this section. The largest part of the passage, however,

is a strange and in some ways metaphysically “comprehensive” catalogue of spiritual or ontological states and qualities.

The chapter (or “Door”: *bâb* has both meanings)<sup>21</sup> opens as follows:

Now we have already established that *janâba* (the technical legal term for a major ritual impurity requiring the total bodily ablution) is *ghurba* (a state of “exile”, “estrangement”, or “removal” from one’s rightful place). And here that is the exile of the servant from his rightful homeland which he deserves – and that is nothing but the state of pure servanthood (*‘ubûdiyya*). Or that (impurity) is the estrangement of an attribute of “Lordship” from its rightful homeland (in God), so that someone (wrongfully) ascribes it to themselves or uses it to describe some contingent creature or another. Now there is no disputing that one must be purified from this question.

So you must know that this *single* total ablution mentioned here in this chapter branches into 150 spiritual states, and that the servant, in his heart, must be completely purified from every single one of those states. So we will mention to you the essence (*‘ayn*) of each one of them, if God wills, in ten sections, each section containing fifteen states, so that you will recognize how you (should?) meet them when they occur to the heart of the servant. Because they must inevitably occur to every heart, both of ordinary people and of the (spiritual) elite<sup>22</sup> – and God gives support and inspiration, there is no power but through Him!

While the adequate translation of this strange catalogue of spiritual states would be very long, we can at least note that it includes a number of what would ordinarily be viewed as “opposite” or contrary states (at least partially reminiscent of the lists of divine Names in the hadith and elsewhere): e.g., this world and the other world, life and death, mercy and anger, and so on, although the vast majority are of what would ordinarily be taken as positive and even rarely achieved spiritual virtues. The catalogue, with no other explanation or amplification, is followed by the following remarks:

You must know – may God support us and You with a Spirit from Him! – that according to the school (*madhhab*) of the people of God and His elite among the people of spiritual unveiling, it is obligatory for every human being to completely purify their heart and their inner being from everything that we have mentioned in these (ten) sections, as well as everything else each of these spiritual states includes which we did not mention, for fear of being too long. There is no dispute among the people of immediate spiritual experience (“tastings”) concerning that. But those who seek to purify themselves from most of them will need an abundance of difficult knowledge<sup>23</sup> concerning the proper ways to become purified from what we have mentioned; and some of these states may serve as purifications from others!

Later in the same chapter, Ibn ‘Arabi’s explanation of the proper “times” for purification also begins to move more openly beyond the ritual or legal contexts that are the usual occasion for such discussions in this chapter, as in the following passage (V, 374):

Now the purification of all things is with and through God (*bi-l-Haqq*). So if someone becomes heedless of the (heart’s primordial) witnessing (of God) and instead sees their self (or “ego”, the *nafs*) taking the different kinds of knowing that God is (always) causing to descend on the heart, they must be purified because of their seeing their own ego-self (rather than God).

In the same way, if we should happen to encounter another person in a matter in such a way that we teach them, either through our state or our words, and if that teaching flows from our presence (with God), then no purification is necessary, for we have not left our state of purity (with God). But if we should notice our own self (our *nafs*) in the process of teaching another person through our words or our state, then purification is absolutely obligatory for us, because of our noticing our self. For the people of God in this Path do everything that they do with and through God, out of their witnessing and unveiling of and from Him.

Of course the very awareness of this hidden “corruption” or unconscious hypocrisy, and our corresponding need for purification, is itself a kind of gift of divine Grace, as Ibn ‘Arabi recalls in this phenomenologically precise summary (V, 435):

Therefore the “time” or “moment” of purification in the spiritual sense (*fi-l-bâtin*), for us, is whenever one has specifically realized the (eternally unfolding) connection between the divine “Address” to the person obligated by it (the *mukallaf*) regarding what is incumbent on them both inwardly and outwardly. In spiritual terms, that is a divine Self-manifestation that suddenly comes over their heart, which is called in the Path a “surprise attack” (*hujûm*).

And finally, near the very end of this chapter (at V, 499), Ibn ‘Arabi restates everything as simply as possible:

For God sees nothing of the human being (*al-insân*) but the heart. So it is incumbent on the servant that their heart should always and continually be pure, because it is the place God sees in them.

## V. Conclusion

At this point we have followed Ibn ‘Arabi’s lessons on the heart and contemplation as far as his long chapter on the secrets of

prayer (Chapter 69), which would require several lengthy volumes to translate into English. So it is fitting to conclude with what he says there (VI, 217–19) about the puzzling Qur’anic verse (50:37) with which we began, in his discussion of the moments of *silence* during the ritual prayer:

So it is obligatory for the servant, when he has finished reciting the verse (in prayer), to “**listen attentively, while he is witnessing**” (50:37). Therefore (the person praying) becomes silent, so that he can see what God is saying to him concerning that, as is only appropriate behavior (*adab*) with God. For we must not interrupt someone who is speaking to us, since that is only proper etiquette even in ordinary conversations – and God is far more deserving that we should be that way with Him!

... That is how this matter remains between the listener and the One speaking to him, so that the listener might gain benefit (from that silent pure receiving in prayer). Know that kings do not take a person without proper *adab* to sit with them, nor to converse with them at night, nor to be their intimate companion.

## Notes

1. To minimize the number and extent of notes, references to the Arabic passages from the *Futûhât* translated here are usually given within the text of the article and have been limited to the chapter number and, in parentheses, the volume and page numbers of the translated passage in the new O. Yahya Cairo edition (extending to vol. XIII, Chapter 106). Certain recurrent key Arabic terms (*adab*, *hâl*, *nafs*, etc.) without any ready English equivalent have been explained in a note at their first occurrence and are then used (in italics) without any further explanation. The English word “God” has usually been used to translate *al-Haqq* (“The Truly Real”, “The Ultimate Reality”, etc.) – which Ibn ‘Arabi typically uses more often than “*Allâh*” when speaking phenomenologically or of actual spiritual experience – because of the awkwardness and unfamiliarity of any more exact English translations.
2. To cite only two of the most explicit statements of this perspective in the *Futûhât*: “Now the Truly Real (*al-Haqq*) is the Vision (*basar*) of the world, and He is the Seer (*al-Râ’î*) (in the ‘mirror’ of all created things) ... and everything that appears is a sign pointing to the Seer, Who is the Truly Real: so reflect – and know who you really are!” (Chapter 371/vol. III [Beirut edn], p. 443). “*Therefore the gaze of (every) person who looks never leaves God, nor is it even possible for it to do so.*” (Chapter 73, question 67).

3. For other verses (besides 50:37) connecting the Heart with *dhikr* or Remembrance of God, see 8:2, 13:28, 18:28, 39:22–3; for divine strengthening and support or harmonization of Hearts, see verses 2:97, 3:103, 8:11, 8:63, 18:14, 28:10, 57:27, 64:11; for the beatific “tranquility” (*itmi’nân al-qalb*) of the Hearts of those with faith, see verses 3:126, 5:113, 8:10, 13:28–9, 16:106, and 48:4 (the *sakîna*).
4. Among the verses on purification of the Heart (either by God or by the individual), see 5:41, 8:11, 26:89, 33:53, 37:84; for “humbling” or “softening” of the “sound” and “mindful” heart, verses 8:2, 22:32, 22:35, 22:54, 50:33, 57:16.
5. The image of “rusting” in this connection is also found in the Qur’an: **“and what they were acquiring has rusted on their Hearts”** (83:14).
6. See the translation of his own explanation of his intentions, audiences and corresponding rhetorical and compositional procedures, from his Introduction to the *Futûhât*, in our article “How to Study the *Futûhât*: Ibn ‘Arabi’s Own Advice”, in *Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi, A Commemorative Volume* (ed. S. Hirtenstein and M. Tiernan), Shaftesbury, Element Books, 1993, pp. 73–89.
7. Not surprisingly, given the author’s repeatedly avowed inspiration and intentions, the experience of studying the *Futûhât* – despite the more obvious outward differences in structure and rhetoric – is remarkably similar to the ongoing process of reading the Qur’an. Most obviously, no one can ever seriously claim to be “finished” reading any part of the *Futûhât*: in light of the reader’s own changing experiences, each chapter continually reveals new facets and new thematic connections and complexities at each encounter. Likewise it is certainly not surprising, for anyone who has spent much time studying this book, that no one (to the best of our knowledge) has ever attempted either a stylistic “imitation” of its unique rhetoric and structure or a *comprehensive* “commentary” of the kind so frequently attached to the *Fusûs al-Hikam*.
8. This alludes to the various “questionings” regarding our earthly stewardship of God’s “Blessings”, *al-Na’im*, mentioned in the Qur’an and hadith accounts of the Resurrection.
9. Directly alluding to the famous *hadûth qudsî* discussed in Section I above.
10. I.e., the appropriate inner spiritual attitude and its expression in right action at each moment. (The transliterated Arabic term is often used alone in subsequent occurrences.)
11. This passage explicitly recalls the specific imagery of Ibn ‘Arabi’s opening autobiographical poem quoted above. See also the longer discussion of the heart as the “Door” (or “Gate”, *bâb*) between God and the soul in the translated selections on prayer from Chapter 41 below.
12. This very important passage of Chapter 68 (vol. V, pp. 354–6), regarding God’s ultimate “duping” (*makar*) of Iblis, is discussed and partially translated in Section IV below. The crucial passage of the

same chapter on the “non-dualism” ultimately required by true monotheism (at V, 363–7) is also an important explanation of the profound significance of the Shaykh’s allusion to the “two Right Hands” here.

13. I.e., from the “auspicious” or “fortunate” Source: there is an intentional pun here on the root meaning of the Arabic term *al-yaman*. While the centrality of the image of the “Breath of the All-Merciful” is familiar to all readers of Ibn ‘Arabi’s *Fusus*, it is worth mentioning that these particular hadith (and their related metaphysical implications) also underlie the complex imagery of the “morning breezes” and other winds that are one of the recurrent sets of symbols throughout later Islamicate mystical poetry, in Persian, Turkish, Urdu, etc.
14. The words for “reciting” in this passage are all drawn from the Arabic term (*talāwa*) usually limited to the recitation of the Qur’an itself (the divine “Book” and “Speech” mentioned below), which is a central element in the traditional form of Islamic ritual prayer (*salāt*): that standard recitation of Qur’anic verses during the prayer is assumed as the background for this section’s divine “reversal” of the usual visible roles in prayer.
15. The imagery here alludes to the famous “Divine Saying” that forms the background for the entire preceding passage: “Our Lord descends every night to the heaven of this world when the last third of the night remains, and then He says: ‘*I am the King! Whoever calls on Me, I answer them. Whoever asks (something) of Me, I give to them. Whoever requests My forgiveness, I forgive them.*’” The saying is included in Ibn ‘Arabi’s own collection of such hadith, the *Mishkāt al-Anwār* (no. 56, pp. 86–7 in the French translation), and is recorded in almost all the canonical Sunni hadith collections.

It may help to recall that in Chapter 34 (III, 320–32), the Shaykh had already explained that the “Night”, in this hadith, “*is the place of the descent in time of God and His Attribute*” (of creative Lovingmercy, *rahma*), and this “last third of the night” – which, he insists there, lasts forever – is therefore the “Complete Human Being” (*al-insân al-kâmil*), with the first two “thirds” being respectively the Qur’anic “**the heavens and the earth**”, the human being’s ontological “two parents”.

16. The term Ibn ‘Arabi employs here (*‘isma*) was more commonly reserved for heated theological debates about the purported “sinlessness” or infallibility of the prophets (and for Shiites, the Imams). The Shaykh’s usage of it here (and elsewhere in the *Futûhât*) is distinctively personal and meant to be intentionally troubling, “de-constructing” the current mental categories and assumptions that presupposed radical, even humanly incomprehensible, distances between the conditions of the prophets and those of ordinary human souls.
17. The *Fasl al-Ma‘ârif*, or “First Section, Concerning the (fundamental) Forms of Knowledge” (I, 75–83 in the Fihrist or “Table of Contents”), comprising Chapters 1–73 (of 560 in all). This section is the first of a total of six such major divisions, but covers considerably more than a quarter of the total length of the book.

18. Literally, the divine “restaurants” (*matâ‘im*) or “places for tasting” this inspired spiritual knowing.
19. An allusion to the well-known hadith: “take on as your qualities of character the moral characteristics of God (*takhallaqû bi-akhlâq Allâh*)”.
20. See our translation and analysis of that key section of the Introduction to the *Futûhât* in the article cited in n. 6 above.
21. Ibn ‘Arabi uses a multitude of other terms to describe and set apart the various subsections (often quite numerous) of the individual chapters of the *Futûhât*. It is therefore very striking that he uses the identical term (*bâb*) to describe this short – but very unusual – section of Chapter 68.
22. This quality of being equally “true” and applicable to the elite and unenlightened alike is also one of the distinctive characteristics of the special wisdom of the “elite of the elite” identified in the key passage of Ibn ‘Arabi’s Introduction cited in n. 20.
23. Following the Yahya edition’s readings, although the adjective here might also be construed (with the shift of a single dot) as “innate” or “inherent”, “instinctive” knowledge, a reading that may better fit the sense of the passage.