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. Pt. 2

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THE SPIRITUAL ASCENSION: IBN ʿARABĪ AND THE MĪʿRĀJ PART II

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The scriptural accounts of the Ascension (*mīʿrāj*) of Muhammad provided a comprehensive symbolic representation of man's spiritual development for later traditions of Islamic thought. The creative adaptation of those materials by the famous mystical thinker Ibn ʿArabī (1165–1240), reflecting the full range of his metaphysical-theological insights and practical spiritual concerns, influenced many subsequent Islamic literary and philosophic movements. This study of his major Mīʿraj narratives (focusing on a revealing autobiographical version of his own spiritual journey) should also interest students of comparative mysticism, philosophy and religion from other "Oriental" traditions.

Part I of this study appeared in *JAOS* 107.4. Part II concludes the article.

[IV-F. Aaron and the Fifth Heaven]¹³⁷

Next I alighted to stay with Aaron, and (there) I found Yahyā, who had already reached him before me. So I said to (Yahyā): "I didn't see you on my path: is there some other path there?"

And he replied: "Each person has a path that no one else but he travels."

I said: "Then where are they, these (different) paths?"

Then he answered: "They come to be through the traveling itself."

[After Aaron then greets Ibn ʿArabī as "the perfectly accomplished heir (of the Prophet)," ¹³⁸ he goes

on to explain how he became both a prophet (*nabī*) and also a lawgiving Messenger (*rasūl*) participating in the revelation (*waḥy*) appropriate to that rank, at the request of his brother Moses.]

... I said: "O Aaron, some people among the true Knowers have claimed that the existence (of the external world) disappeared with regard to them, so that they see nothing but God and so that nothing of the world remains with them that might distract them, in comparison with God. Nor is there any doubt that they (really) are in that (spiritual) rank," ¹³⁹ as opposed to those like you. Now God has informed us that you said to your brother (Moses) when he was angry (with you for having allowed the Israelites to worship the golden calf): '... so do not cause (our) enemies to

¹³⁷ III, p. 349.2–15. It is noteworthy that the topics discussed here are not mentioned at all in Ibn ʿArabī's parallel treatments of the Ascension. The brief corresponding sections of the Mīʿraj narratives in both the *K. al-Isrāʾ* (pp. 23–24) and the *R. al-Anwār* (*Sceau*, p. 205; *Journey*, p. 44) allude mainly to the "martial" qualities of anger, discord, etc. traditionally associated with Mars, the planet and "spiritual entity" (*rūḥānīya*) of this sphere. The account of this stage in chapter 167 of the *Futūḥāt* (*Alchimie*, pp. 78–79) is mainly devoted to Ibn ʿArabī's controversial interpretation of the "faith of Pharaoh" and the universality of the divine Mercy, topics which are discussed in greater detail in the chapters on Aaron and Moses in the *Fuṣūṣ* (pp. 191–213).

¹³⁸ *al-wārith al-mukammal*: i.e., the saint who has fully combined the prophetic "inheritances" of all the Messengers, which are integrally contained in the "Muhammadan Reality"; this is still another allusion to Ibn ʿArabī's unique status as the "Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood." (See the similar

greeting by Idrīs at the beginning of section IV-E, n. 111 above.)

¹³⁹ I.e., Ibn ʿArabī's question (and implicit criticism) concerns the relative evaluation of that spiritual state, not the reality of that experience of "annihilation in God" (*fanāʾ*) itself. See his remarks in the following section (IV-G) on the necessity of *fanāʾ* at a certain point on the path, in regard to Moses' initiatic "death" (*ṣaʿaqa*) on Mt. Sinai, and his use of a similar Arabic term (*afnāʾ*) to describe a decisive phase in his own spiritual development, in the passage from the *K. al-Isrāʾ* translated in the Appendix below (n. 207). More generally, the contrast between the lower, "immature" state of those "Knowers" (*ʿārifūn*) who deny the reality of this world, and the station of the *wārithūn* (the true "heirs" of the prophets) who are always aware of God's theophanic Presence throughout this world, is a recurrent subject in the *K. al-Isrāʾ*.

gloat over me!' (7:151).¹⁴⁰ Thus you posited their having a certain power (over you in the world), and this condition is different from the condition of those true Knowers (who experience the 'disappearance' of the external world)."

Then he replied: "They spoke sincerely (about their experience). However, they did not have any more than what was given them by their immediate experience (*dhawq*). But look and see—did what disappeared from them (in that state actually) disappear from the world?"

"No," I answered.

He said: "Then they were lacking in the knowledge of the way things are, to the extent of what they missed, since the (external) world was non-existent for them. So they were lacking the True Reality (*al-Haqq*) to the extent of that (aspect) of the world which was veiled from them. Because the whole world is precisely the Self-manifestation (*tajallī*) of the Truly Real, for whoever really knows the Truly Real. So where are you going? It is only a reminder to the worlds (81:26–27) of the way things are!"

Perfection is nothing but its (or 'His')¹⁴¹ existence,
So whoever misses it is not the perfect one. . . .¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ See the longer discussion of the inner meaning of this incident, from a very different standpoint, at the beginning of the chapter on Aaron in the *Fuṣūṣ* (pp. 191ff.; *Bezels*, pp. 243ff.).

¹⁴¹ *kawnuhu*: the term *kawn* usually refers to the engendered, created state of being (translated as "existence" here), so the most obvious reference in this context is to the external "world" or whole manifest "universe" (*al-ʿālam*). But as so frequently in Ibn ʿArabī, the ambiguous pronouns in this verse could also be taken, without any real contradiction, to refer either to God (i.e., *al-Haqq*, the Truly Real) or even to the human "observer"—i.e., to man in his ultimate reality as the "Perfect Man," which may well be what is indicated by "the perfect one" (*al-kāmil*) at the end.

¹⁴² The concluding, untranslated lines (349.13–14) allude to the well-known dangers and illusions involved in taking the ecstatic experience of "extinction" (*fanāʾ*) of the self in contemplation of God as the ultimate goal and highest stage of the spiritual path, at least in this world. This caution is amplified and repeated in Ibn ʿArabī's following encounter with Moses (section IV-G) and in the passage translated in the Appendix. Although the subject of Aaron's remark is a constantly repeated theme in Ibn ʿArabī's writing, it should be added that those dangers and the ultimate superiority of the saints' subsequent "enlightened abiding" (*baqāʾ*) in the

[IV-G. Moses and the Sixth Heaven]¹⁴³

[Ibn ʿArabī begins his discussion with Moses by thanking him for his having insisted that Muhammad—during the final, descending stage of his Miʿraj—return to ask God to reduce the number of daily prayers prescribed for his community.¹⁴⁴ Moses replies

world—as exemplified above all in the life of Muhammad—were also frequently stressed in earlier Sufi literature and practice.

¹⁴³ III, pp. 349.16–350.5 (translated in full with exception of summarized passages at lines 16–20 and 23–25). The corresponding section in chapter 167 (*Alchimie*, pp. 89–97) also deals with "theophanic" nature of the world, but from a very different standpoint. In keeping with the more abstract, cosmological focus of that chapter, Ibn ʿArabī uses the Koranic account of the transformations of Moses' staff (20:17–21) to illustrate some of the basic principles of his ontology, especially the relation between the unchanging noetic "realities" (*ḥaqāʾiq*) or permanent "individual entities" (*ʿayān*) and the constant transformations of the phenomenal world. In other words, it points to the objective "knowledge" underlying the focus on Moses' immediate experience of theophany in this chapter.

The traveler's encounter with Moses in the *K. al-Isrāʾ* (pp. 25–28), on the other hand, is devoted to entirely different subjects: Moses first stresses the differences between the *ʿarīf* (the "mystic" who publicly speaks of his spiritual discoveries), and the *wārith* (the Prophetic "heir" or true "Muhammadan" [*al-muḥammadī*]), who "conceals his secrets" and who "sees (God's) Essence in his essence, His Attributes in his (own) attributes, and His Names in his (own) acts"—i.e., whose inner Ascension corresponds to the particular type of "nocturnal" spiritual voyage (*isrāʾ*) Ibn ʿArabī described in section III in Part I, that which is outwardly indistinguishable from the life of "ordinary people." In the *K. al-Isrāʾ*, Moses goes on to summarize for the voyager the remaining stages to be encountered in his journey, with particular emphasis on the importance of the "descent," the "return" to outwardly normal life in this world, for the completion and perfection of that voyage.

¹⁴⁴ This famous story is included in the long *ḥadīth al-isrāʾ* (from Muslim: see n. 38 above) given by Ibn ʿArabī at the beginning of this chapter (at III, 342.20–27, an untranslated part of section II). It also appears, with minor variations, in many of the other canonical ḥadīth concerning the Miʿraj. According to this particular version, the prescription of "fifty prayers in each day and night" was "part of all that was divinely revealed" (by *wahy*) to the Prophet at the very summit of his Ascension, in his direct encounter with God.

that "this is a benefit of knowledge (reached through) direct experience (*dhawq*),¹⁴⁵ for there is a (spiritual) condition that can only be perceived through immediate contact."

Ibn 'Arabī then mentions that it was Moses' "striving for the sake of others"—which first led him to the burning bush—that eventually brought him "all the Good."¹⁴⁶ Moses responds that "Man's striving for the sake of others is only a striving for his self, in the truth of things"—i.e., when he discovers who he really is—and that the thankfulness which flows from this (on the part of all concerned) is one of the highest forms of "remembering" and praising God.]

... After that I said to him: "Surely God has chosen you over the people with His Message and His Word".¹⁴⁷ But you requested the vision (of God),¹⁴⁸

During Muhammad's descent back to earth, Moses—relying on his own immediate experience (*dhawq*) with his Community in this same matter—twice persuades the Prophet to return to God and plead for a lessening of this burden, so that the required number is reduced first to ten and then to five. On the second occasion the Lord says to Muhammad: "They are five and they are fifty: *with Me, the Word is not changed!*" (alluding to the Koran at 50:69).

¹⁴⁵ Moses goes on to conclude this section by again stressing the decisive role of *dhawq*, the inner "tasting" of spiritual states, in the realizations of the prophets and saints. (Cf. Joseph's similar insistence on the indispensable, irreducible character of direct personal experience, as opposed to what can be gained by mental reflection or purely imaginative participation, at n. 108 in Part I.) "Immediate contact" (*mubāshara*: literally "hands-on" experience) at the end of this sentence has essentially the same meaning as *dhawq*, since both refer to insights realizable only through a unique "spiritual state" (*ḥāl*).

¹⁴⁶ This interpretation of the Koranic verses (28:29ff.)—according to which Moses discovered the burning bush only "accidentally," while seeking fire to warm his family—is amplified in chapter 366 (III, p. 336.16–25), where Ibn 'Arabī takes this incident as a symbol of the rare virtue of disinterested service which characterizes "all the just leaders (Imams)."

¹⁴⁷ Paraphrasing the following Koranic verse: "God said: 'O Moses, surely I have chosen you over the people with My Message and My Word . . .'" (7:144).

¹⁴⁸ Referring to the Koranic verse 7:143, parts of which are quoted or paraphrased throughout the rest of this section: "And when Moses came to Our appointed time and His Lord spoke to him, he said: 'My Lord, make me see, that I may look at You.' He said: 'You will not see Me, but look at

while the Messenger of God said that 'not one of you will see His Lord until he dies'?"¹⁴⁹

So he said: "And it was just like that: when I asked Him for the vision (of God), He answered me, so that 'I fell down stunned' (7:143). Then I saw Him in my (state of) being stunned".¹⁵⁰

I said: "While (you were) dead?"

He replied: "While (I was) dead."

[. . .]¹⁵¹ He said: " . . . So I did not see God until I had died. It was then that I 'awakened', so that

the mountain: if it stays firmly in its place, then you will see Me.' So when His Lord manifested Himself to the mountain, He made it crushed flat, and Moses fell down stunned. Then when he awakened he said: 'I have returned to you, and I am the first of the men of true faith.'"

¹⁴⁹ A paraphrase of a famous hadith recorded by both Muslim (*K. al-fitan*, 95) and Tirmidhī (*fitan*, 56); several of the canonical hadith collections contain specific sections concerning the "vision of God" (*ru'yat Allāh*) in the next life. For Ibn 'Arabī's broader understanding of this question, both in the eschatological context and as prefigured in the inspired spiritual vision of the prophets and saints—which follows from their initiatic "death" to this world and concomitant "resurrection"—see, among others, chapter 302 (III, 12–13); ch. 351 (III, 223); ch. 369 (III, 388–99); and ch. 73, questions 62, 67, 71 (II, 82, 84, 86).

¹⁵⁰ Or "my (initiatic) 'death' (*ṣa'aqātī*)": in other Koranic verses referring to the Resurrection (see following note), the same root is used virtually as an equivalent of "death." Here, however, Ibn 'Arabī is evidently employing this term—which originally means literally being "thunderstruck," "struck dead by lightning" or "rendered senseless" by a loud noise—in a more technical sense, referring to the spiritual state of "extinction of the ego (*fanā*)" in the Self-manifestation (*tajallī*) of the divine Lordship." This definition is from his *K. Iṣṭilāḥāt al-Ṣūfīya* (item no. 131; p. 45 in the translation by R. T. Harris, *Journal of the Muhyiddīn Ibn 'Arabī Society* III, 1984); see also the more detailed discussion in *Mu'jam*, pp. 695–96.

¹⁵¹ In the untranslated lines here (III, 349.23–25), Ibn 'Arabī alludes to a saying of the Prophet expressing uncertainty as to whether Moses' mystical "death" or "stunning" (*ṣa'aqa*: explained in preceding note) exempted him from the similar fate which is promised more generally at the "blowing of the Trumpet" on the Day of Resurrection: " . . . then those who are in the heavens and on the earth are thunderstruck [*ṣa'īqa*], except for whoever God wishes . . ." (39:68); "So leave them until they meet their Day, in which they will be thunderstruck [*yus'aqūn*]" (52:45). Moses replies that he was indeed rewarded with the anticipatory experience of that

I knew *Who* I saw. And it was because of that that I said 'I have returned to you' (7:143), since I did not return¹⁵² to anyone but Him."

Then I said to him: "You are among the group of 'those who know God',¹⁵³ so what did you consider the vision of God (to be) when you asked Him for it?"

And he said: "(I considered it to be) necessary because of rational necessity."¹⁵⁴

I said: "But then what was it that distinguished you from others?"

He said: "I was seeing Him (all along), and yet I didn't used to *know* that it was Him! But when my 'dwelling'¹⁵⁵ was changed and I saw Him, then I knew

Who I saw. Therefore when I 'awoke' I was no longer veiled, and my vision (of God) went on accompanying me throughout all eternity. So this is the difference between us¹⁵⁶ and *those who are veiled* (83:15) from their knowledge (of God) by what they see.¹⁵⁷ Yet when they die they see the Truly Real,¹⁵⁸ since the 'dwelling' (of divine Vision)¹⁵⁹ distinguishes Him for them. Therefore if they were returned (to this world, as I was,) they would say the same thing as we did."

"death" (and the concomitant spiritual "resurrection") on Mt. Sinai.

¹⁵² The verb here (*raja'a*) is different from that in the immediately preceding Koranic verse (*tāba*: usually translated as "to repent," but with the root sense of "turning back" [to God]); the equation of these two terms—with its implicit stress on the common metaphysical ground of all "repentance"—is to be found throughout Ibn 'Arabī's writings. See, for example, the similar equivalence of these two expressions in Ibn 'Arabī's accounts of the beginnings of his own "conversion" to the spiritual path ("at the hand of Jesus") at n. 42 above.

¹⁵³ Or "those who know *through* God" (*al-ulamā' bi-llāh*), i.e., on the basis of what God teaches them (and not by their own reflection, *naẓar*), as Moses goes on to explain below. For Ibn 'Arabī, this expression usually refers to the very highest group of true spiritual "knowers"—i.e., the prophets and the saints, who alone are fully knowers of "God" (i.e., of "Allāh," the comprehensive divine reality), and not simply of the "Lord" (*rabb*) manifested by one or more of the particular divine Names.

¹⁵⁴ *wujūb 'aqlī*: i.e., "necessary" according to his own knowledge and the conclusions of the intellect (*'aql*) concerning the nature of the world—because, as he goes on to explain below, *all* "vision" is really vision of God—but without the crucial additional element of direct personal experience (*dhawq*) essential to this realization. This whole exchange therefore clarifies Ibn 'Arabī's earlier assertion (section II, at n. 44 in Part I) that Muhammad, at the culminating stage of his Ascension, "saw what he had *known* and nothing else; the form of his belief did not change."

¹⁵⁵ *Mawṭin*, a term that could be translated more literally as "home," "homeland" or even, in its Koranic context (9:25), as "(spiritual) battlefield": in Ibn 'Arabī's technical usage, it refers to the various "planes of being" in which man dwells and makes his home, all of which are present within the Perfect Man. In an important passage of the *R. al-Anwār* (Journey, pp. 27 and 72–77 [= commentary of 'Abd

al-Karīm Jīlī, mainly quoting the *Futūḥāt*]; *Sceau*, pp. 185–86), the Shaykh explains that although these *mawāṭin* are virtually infinite, "they are all derived from six": (1) the primordial state of man's Covenant (*mīthāq*) with God (7:172); (2) "the (physical) world we are now in"; (3) the *barzakh* or intermediate spiritual and imaginal world "through which we travel after the lesser and greater deaths"; (4) "the Resurrection on the Earth of Awakening" (79:14); (5) "the Garden and the Fire (of Hell)"; (6) and the "Dune of Vision (of God)." Evidently it is this latter "dwelling" that became present for Moses on Mt. Sinai.

¹⁵⁶ Moses' exceptional use of the first person *plural* here and in some of the following sentences—since he otherwise uses the singular in discussing his own personal experiences—seems to refer to *all* the "Knowers of [or through] God" (*al-ulamā' bi-Allāh*) mentioned at n. 153 and n. 161 below.

¹⁵⁷ The verse apparently alluded to here (83:15) is as follows: "But no, surely they are veiled from their Lord on that Day!" The allusion could also extend to the numerous *ḥadīth* concerning the "raising of veils" and "vision of God," including, among others, certain *ḥadīth qudsī* recorded in Ibn 'Arabī's *Mishkāt*, such as no. 18 and no. 66 (*Niche*, pp. 41–43, 92–93). It is noteworthy that among the spiritual realizations flowing from Ibn 'Arabī's culminating revelation enumerated at the end of this chapter (section IV-1) is his seeing "that God is what is worshipped in every object of worship, from behind the veil of (each particular) form." (See also *Mu'jam*, pp. 313–18.)

¹⁵⁸ *al-Haqq*, which could equally be translated as "the Truth" or simply "God." This phrase is close in form to the celebrated Sufi saying, attributed sometimes to Muhammad and sometimes to the Imam 'Alī: "People are sleeping; when they die, they wake up." Like the rest of this section, it also clearly recalls the famous Prophetic injunction to "Die before you die!"

¹⁵⁹ See note 155 above on the meaning of *mawṭin*. Here Ibn 'Arabī is almost certainly referring to the "dwelling" in Paradise of the "Dune of Vision (of God)" (*kathīb al-ru'ya*) mentioned in a famous *ḥadīth qudsī* which he discusses at length in chapter 65 (II, 317–22) and elsewhere in the *Futūḥāt*.

I said: "Then if death were the 'dwelling' of the vision of God, every dead person would see him—but God has described him (at 83:15) as being 'veiled' from seeing Him!?"

He said: "Yes, those are 'the ones who are veiled' from the knowledge that what (they see) is God.¹⁶⁰ But what if you yourself had to meet a person with whom you were not personally acquainted, whom you were looking for (simply) by name and because you needed him? You could meet him and exchange greetings with him, along with the whole group of those you encountered, without discovering his identity: then you would have seen him and yet not have seen him, so you would continue looking for him while he was right where you could see him! Hence one cannot rely on anything but knowledge. That is why we (Knowers of God) have said that Knowledge is His very Essence, since if Knowledge were not His very Essence, what was relied on (i.e., our knowledge) would be other than God—for nothing can be relied on but knowledge."

I said: "Now God indicated the mountain to you (at 7:143) and mentioned about Himself that 'He manifested Himself to the Mountain' (7:143). [So how do these theophanies differ?]"

Then he replied: "Nothing resists His Self-manifestation; therefore the particular condition (*ḥāl*) necessarily changes [according to the 'locus' of each theophany]."

¹⁶⁰ Ibn 'Arabī's favorite scriptural reference to this reality—which for him is also clearly applicable to man's capacity (or incapacity) for "theophanic vision" already in this world—is a famous hadith, often known as the "hadith of the transformations," concerning the testing of mankind with regard to their objects of worship (*ma'būdāt*) on the Day of the Gathering. According to this account, God will present Himself to this (Muslim) community "in a form other than what they know, and will say to them: 'I am your Lord'; but the "hypocrites" among them will fail to recognize Him until He appears in the form they already knew (according to their beliefs in this world).

The most pertinent section of this hadith is included in the *Mishkāt* (no. 26; *Niche*, pp. 55–57). The full hadith, which deals with the Prophet's answers to several questions concerning the "vision of God," is recorded by both Muslim and Bukhārī; see *Word*, pp. 133–34. For representative discussions of this hadith in the *Futūḥāt*, see I, 112, 305, 328, 331, 353, 377; II, 40, 81, 277, 298, 311, 333, 495, 508, 590, 610; III, 25, 44, 48, 73, 101, 289, 301, 315, 485, 536; and IV, 245. (It is also presupposed in most of the passages of the *Fuṣūṣ* concerning the "god created in beliefs" cited in n. 123 in Part I.)

Hence for the mountain, being 'crushed flat' was like Moses' being 'stunned': God says 'Moses' (7:144), and (He) Who crushed it stunned me."

I said to him: "God has taken charge of teaching me, so I (only) know about Him to the extent of what He bestows on me."

Then he replied: "That is just how He acts with the Knowers of God, so take (your spiritual knowledge) from Him, not from the world.¹⁶¹ And indeed you will never take (such knowledge) except to the extent of your predisposition (*isti'dād*).¹⁶² So do not let yourself be veiled from Him by the likes of us (prophets)! For you will never come to know about Him by means of us anything but what we know about Him through His Self-manifestation.¹⁶³ Thus we too only give you (knowledge) about Him to the extent of your predisposition. Hence there is no difference [between learning from us and directly from God], so attach yourself to Him!¹⁶⁴ For He only sent us to call you all to Him, not to call you to us. (His Message) is a

¹⁶¹ *al-kawn*: the term can also refer by extension to "the people of this world" (which appears to be the main reference here), although Ibn 'Arabī may also be alluding more broadly to his familiar critiques of exclusive reliance on limited human "reasoning" (*naẓar*) about the manifest world. For the "Knowers of (or 'through') God," see the earlier passages at notes 153 and 156.

¹⁶² I.e., what Ibn 'Arabī has just claimed (concerning the "divine control" over his own spiritual progress) is ultimately true for everyone—without in any way removing the need for each individual's best efforts. What Moses goes on to explain about the different capacities of each person for understanding and assimilating the teachings of the prophets and Messengers is only one illustration of this crucial insight.

¹⁶³ The phrase "by means of us" in this sentence is an allusion to Ibn 'Arabī's assumption that the greatest part of the knowledge of the saints is gained "indirectly," through their spiritual participation in the manifold "heritages" of divine Knowledge received directly by each of the prophets and Messengers. See his careful explanation of this mediating relationship of the prophets and saints in chapter 14 of the *Futūḥāt* (I, 149–52; O.Y. II, 357–62) and the many additional references in *Sceau*, chapters IV and V.

¹⁶⁴ Here Ibn 'Arabī intentionally uses a verb (*intasaba*) usually employed to describe someone's "joining" or "belonging to" a particular religious (or legal, political, etc.) school, party or sect. The root sense of the verb—also quite appropriate here—refers to a person's kinship relation of ancestral allegiance and descent, his *nasab*. Thus the final phrase could also be translated as "join Him" or "take your lineage (directly) from Him."

Word (that is) the same between us and you: that we should worship none but God, and that we should not associate anything with Him, and that some of us should not take others as lords instead of God (3:64)."

I said: "That is how it came in the *Qurʾān*!"

He said: "And that is how He is."

I said: "With what did you hear 'God's Speech'?"¹⁶⁵

He said: "With my hearing."

I said: "And what is your 'hearing'?"

He said: "*He* (is)." ¹⁶⁶

I said: "Then by what were you distinguished (from other men)?"

He said: "By an immediate personal experience (*dhawq*) in that regard, which can only be known by the person who actually experiences it."

I said: "So those who possess such immediate experiences are like that?"

"Yes," he said, "and (their) experiences are according to (their spiritual) ranks."

[IV-H. The Seventh Heaven: Abraham and the Temple of the Heart]¹⁶⁷

[Most of Ibn ʿArabī's encounter with Abraham—as earlier with Joseph and John the Baptist—is devoted

¹⁶⁵ Alluding to 4:164—"... and God spoke to Moses with Speech." For Ibn ʿArabī's understanding of the possible apprehension of the divine revelation (*wahy*) through "hearing" and any of the other senses, see the beginning of chapter 14 (I, 149ff.; O.Y. III, pp. 357ff.), as well as the discussion of the various modalities of prophetic inspiration in chapter 366, III, 332. (See also the related hadith in the following note.)

¹⁶⁶ This whole passage is an allusion to the famous *ḥadīth al-nawāfil* (the "supererogatory acts" of devotion), which is the "divine saying" perhaps most frequently cited both by Ibn ʿArabī and by Sufi writers more generally: it is included in Ibn ʿArabī's *Mishkāt* (no. 91; *Niche*, pp. 118–21). (See also the full text, translation and references in *Word*, pp. 173–74.) The relevant section (and that most often alluded to by Sufi authors) is as follows: "... And My servant continues to draw near to Me through the supererogatory works (of devotion) until I love him. Then when I love him I am his hearing with which he hears, and his sight with which he sees, and his hand with which he grasps, and his foot with which he walks. And if he asks Me (for something), I surely give (it) to him; and if he seeks My aid, surely I help him. ..."

¹⁶⁷ III, 350.5–20 (only lines 18–20 are translated in full here).

to questions about certain Koranic passages concerning him. Here, for example, Abraham explains that his apparently polytheistic remarks reported at 6:74–80 were actually only meant to test the faith of his people, given their limited understanding.

What is of more universal importance for the spiritual journey, however, is Ibn ʿArabī's identification of the celestial Kaaba, the "House" of Abraham that marks the cosmological transition between the material world and the "paradisiac" realm of the highest spheres, as the Heart of the voyager. For the Heart—as he makes clear in the much longer discussions at this point in his *K. al-Isrāʾ*² and in chapter 167 of the *Futūḥāt*¹⁶⁸—is ultimately the "site" of the whole journey.]

¹⁶⁸ In the corresponding part of chapter 167 (*Alchimie*, pp. 97–107), Abraham advises the "follower" (of Muhammad) to "make your heart like this House, by being present with God (*al-Haqq*) at every moment." Ibn ʿArabī's understanding of the nature of the Heart (of the Perfect Man) as a mirror of the Truly Real in all of its states is emphasized in that chapter by his use of the famous Sufi parable—almost certainly borrowed here (but without acknowledgement) from Ghazālī's *Mizān al-Amal*, and most famous in the form of the tale of the "Greek and Chinese artists" at the beginning of Rūmī's *Masnavī*—of the royal "contest" between a marvelous artist (whose painting is the world) and a sage whose polished "mirror" (the soul of the true Knower) reflects both that painting and the "artists" and "king" (i.e., the metaphysical world and each individual's "particular relation" to God) as well.

The lengthy corresponding section of the *K. al-Isrāʾ*² (pp. 28–34) is far too rich and complex even to summarize here. There, after evoking the highest stages of the nocturnal journey of Muhammad and the true Knowers (pp. 29–30), Ibn ʿArabī makes entry into this "House" dependent on attainment of the highest spiritual station, the "Station of Yathrib" (see 32:13 and *Futūḥāt*, III, 177, 216, 500, etc.) or the "Station of no Station," in which the Heart is perfectly open to every form of theophany, in a state of selfless "bewilderment" (*hayra*). Since for Ibn ʿArabī this is precisely the "Muhammadan Station" (discussed in section IV-I below), the rest of this passage in the *K. al-Isrāʾ*² (pp. 30–31) alternates between the voyager's own moving poetic descriptions of that decisive spiritual realization—whose attainment is assumed throughout that work—and Abraham's praises of Muhammad and reminders of the manifold superiority of those who have been granted that supreme attainment. These comparisons of other prophets or saints with Muhammad

... Then I saw the *Inhabited House*¹⁶⁹ (52:4), and suddenly there was my Heart—and there were the angels who “enter It every day”!¹⁷⁰ The Truly Real manifests Himself to (the Heart), which (alone) en-

(e.g., at p. 33) also highlight the essential contrast between the usual condition of those who must “work” their way gradually toward spiritual perfection, drawn by divine love (*maḥabba*) and the far rarer state of those who—like Ibn 'Arabī himself—benefit from the unique grace of divine “preference” (*īthār*), who are suddenly “pulled” (*majdhūb*) by God into the highest stages of realization.

¹⁶⁹ *al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr*: the “inhabitants” of this mysterious celestial site—often identified with the “Furthest Place of Worship” (*al-masjid al-aqṣā*) mentioned in the Koran as the culmination of the Prophet's nocturnal voyage (17:1)—are apparently the angels mentioned in various hadith describing it (see following note). Its location “with Abraham,” mentioned in several hadith outlining the *Mi'rāj* (including the *ḥadīth al-isrā'* cited earlier by Ibn 'Arabī, at III, 341.29–34), seems connected with his role as first builder of the Kaaba, the earthly Temple (*al-bayt*). For Ibn 'Arabī's identification—following earlier Sufis—of this heavenly “House” (and several others mentioned in the Koran) with the Heart (of the Knower, and ultimately of the Perfect Man), see ch. 6 of *Futūḥāt* (I, 120) and the further references in *Mu'jam*, pp. 222–28. The hadith on this subject (see Wensinck IV, pp. 353–54) are for the most part the same as those concerning the *Mi'rāj* in general (see n. 38 above).

¹⁷⁰ The hadith of Anas b. Mālik (Muslim, *Īmān*, 259/ = *bāb al-isrā'*, I) followed by Ibn 'Arabī in section II in Part I (III, 341.29–34) states that: “70,000 angels enter It each day, and they do not return there.” The corresponding hadith in Bukhārī (*bad' al-khalq*, 6, also from Anas, but with slightly different *isnād*), has Gabriel add that the 70,000 angels “pray there every day” and that “when they leave they do not return.”

Here—where the sense of this House as the “Heart” is his primary concern—Ibn 'Arabī clearly implies an inner connection between these “70,000 angels” and the “70,000 veils” mentioned in another, even more famous hadith (see following notes), where both numbers are symbolic of the infinite, *never-repeated* divine theophanies, whether they are considered in the world or in their “reflections” in the Heart of the Perfect Man. In his earlier discussion of the *Mi'rāj* hadith (III, 341; an untranslated part of section II), however, he interprets the same saying cosmologically: the angels’ “entry is through the door of the rising of the stars, and (their) departure is through the door of the setting of the stars.”

compasses Him,¹⁷¹ in “seventy thousand veils of light and darkness.”¹⁷² Thus He manifests Himself to “the Heart of His servant” through those (veils)—for “if He were” to manifest Himself without them, “the radiant splendors of His Face would burn up” the creaturely part¹⁷³ of that servant.

[IV-I. The “Lotus of the Limit” and the Culminating Revelation]¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ (As usual, *al-Ḥaqq* and the corresponding pronouns could also be translated as “the Truth,” “It,” etc.) This translation assumes the inner connection between God and the Heart (*qalb*) that is expressed for Ibn 'Arabī in the famous *ḥadīth qudsī* concerning “the Heart of My servant” already mentioned at notes 7, 30, 37, etc. in Part I.

¹⁷² The rest of this paragraph partially cites a celebrated hadith [one of the main subjects of Ghazālī's famous *Mishkāt al-Anwār*; see the recent translation by R. Deladrière, *Le Tabernacle des Lumières*, Paris, 1981], usually given according to the version recorded in Ibn Māja, I, 44: “God has seventy [or 700, or 70,000] veils of light and darkness: if He were to remove them, the radiant splendors of His Face would burn up whoever was reached by His Gaze.” (Muslim, *īmān*, 291 cites a similar hadith which however mentions only a “veil of Light,” without any specific number.) Ibn 'Arabī interprets this hadith in greater detail in chapter 426 (IV, 38–39), focusing on the question of how “light” can be a “veil”; in ch. 73, question 115 (II, 110), on the meaning of “God's Face”; and in his *Kitāb al-Taḥalliyāt* (ed. O. Yahya, Beirut, 1967), VI, 728. (Other discussions, usually mentioning the different versions of this hadith, can be found in the *Futūḥāt* at II, 80, 460, 488, 542, 554; III, 212, 216, 289; and IV, 72.) Here, by choosing to mention the specific number 70,000—although the canonical hadith, as he himself mentions elsewhere, include several possible figures (or none at all)—Ibn 'Arabī clearly implies an intimate connection with the “angels” of the “Inhabited House” mentioned at the beginning of this section (see preceding notes), such that both the 70,000 “veils” and “angels” are understood as symbolizing the infinite range of theophanies (*taḥalliyāt*).

¹⁷³ Literally, “the world of creation” (*'ālam al-khalq*): i.e., the realm of existence constituted by those “veils” or the divine Self-manifestation in all created being—as opposed to the primordial, “internal” Self-manifestation or noetic differentiation of the Names and Realities within the divine Essence, the *ḥaqd al-aqdas* and the “world of the Command,” *'ālam al-amr* (which is the site of the final, purely noetic stages of the spiritual journey described in chapter 167).

¹⁷⁴ III, 350.22–32 (translated in full). Although Ibn 'Arabī's earlier recounting of the Prophet's Ascension (in section II,

So when I had left (the Temple), I came to the *Lotus-Tree of the Limit*¹⁷⁵ (53:14), and I halted amongst its lowest and its loftiest branches.¹⁷⁶ Now "it was enveloped" (53:16) in the lights of (good) actions, and in the shelter of its branches were singing the birds of the spirits of those who perform (those)

341.3–342.20), goes on at this point to mention a number of additional details and "stages" drawn from various hadith, his association here in the autobiographical portion of this chapter between the "Lotus of the Limit" (see following note) and the final, culminating revelation—expressed in several hadith by the formula: "God inspired [awḥā] in me what He inspired" (alluding to the Koranic verse 53:10)—exactly corresponds to the first hadith on the *isrāʾ* recorded by Muslim (*īmān*, 259). It also coincides with the other hadith elaborating on the symbolic allusions to Muhammad's revelatory vision in that Sura (*al-Najm*), whose opening verses are usually assumed to refer to the culminating stages of the Miʿraj.

¹⁷⁵ This *sidrat al-muntahā* (where Muhammad "saw Him in another descent") is part of a longer Koranic description (53:2–18) of two extraordinary occasions of revelation (*wahy*)—in the form of direct vision (53:10–13 and 17–18) by the "heart" (*fuʾād*, at 53:11) which are integrated into the hadith of the *miʿrāj/ isrāʾ* quoted earlier (in section II), but whose details are also the subject of many separate shorter hadith. (See, for example, the separate section on the *sidra* in Muslim, *īmān*, 280ff.) While some of these hadith attempt to explain this vision as being of Gabriel's true angelic form (as opposed to his usual manifestation in human guise), Ibn ʿArabī's understanding here and in the *K. al-Isrāʾ* clearly relies on those hadith which stress that (1) this vision was in the Prophet's Heart (*qalb* or *fuʾād* [53:11], as in the hadith of Ibn ʿAbbās at Muslim, *īmān*, 285–86) and (2) that it was of the "Lord," (3) in a form of "Light" (or "veils of Light": see the famous hadith just cited at n. 172), as at Muslim, *īmān*, 292–94. This latter hadith, in which Muhammad is asked how he saw his Lord (i.e., in the vision mentioned in Sura 53) and responds that he saw God "as Light," is discussed in more detail in chapter 426 of the *Futūḥāt* (IV, 38–39).

¹⁷⁶ The branches and fruit of this cosmic tree are described in several of the hadith drawn on in Ibn ʿArabī's earlier account (section II). Given that he interprets this tree below as the "form of Man" (i.e., of the Perfect Man)—and therefore a symbolic "Tree of the World"—its "lowest (*dunyā*) and highest branches" would refer to the totality of existence, encompassing every realm of manifest being. (See n. 178 below and the translations of Ibn ʿArabī's own cosmological treatise on the "Tree of Existence" [*Shajarat al-Kawn*] mentioned in n. 11 above.)

actions,¹⁷⁷ since it is in the form of Man.¹⁷⁸ As for the four rivers (flowing from its roots, as described in the hadith),¹⁷⁹ they are the four kinds of divine knowledge "granted as a gift" (to man), which we mentioned in a

¹⁷⁷ *arwāḥ al-ʿāmilūn*: this feature (referring to all men's actions, not just to their good deeds or to the souls in Paradise) is also implied in certain hadith and mentioned explicitly in Ibn ʿArabī's synthesis of those materials in section II above; it may be connected with the mention in the same Koranic passage (53:15), that "with It is the Garden of Refuge" (i.e., one of the Gardens of Paradise), or it could be interpreted as referring to the intermediate world (*barzakh*, which is also a *muntahā* or "limit" between the sensible and spiritual realms) more generally. In cosmological terms—e.g., in his discussion in chapter 167—Ibn ʿArabī takes this "limit" to constitute the boundary between Paradise (located in the sphere above it) and Gehenna (constituted by all the lower spheres of the material world).

¹⁷⁸ *ʿalā nashʾat al-insān*: i.e., comprising all the same planes of being (*nashʾa*) contained within the Perfect Man, both spiritual and bodily or material. The comprehensive metaphysical and spiritual equivalencies that this implies, especially the essential correspondence between the Perfect Man and the "Reality of Muhammad," are elaborated in Ibn ʿArabī's own *Shajarat al-Kawn* ("The Tree of Existence"; R.G., no. 666), also available in the translations mentioned at n. 11 above. See also the general cosmological references cited at n. 21.

¹⁷⁹ Earlier in this chapter (Section II, at III, 341.35–342.5) Ibn ʿArabī mentions the following hadith description (taken from Muslim, *īmān*, 264): "He saw four rivers flowing forth from its roots, two manifest rivers and two inner (spiritual) ones (*bāṭinān*) . . .," and Gabriel points out that "the two inner ones are in the Garden (of Paradise), while the two manifest ones are the Nile and Euphrates." Ibn ʿArabī then goes on to explain that the two "external" (*zāhir*) ones also become rivers of Paradise after the Resurrection, thereby constituting the four rivers (of milk, honey, water and wine) promised to the blessed in parts of the Koran and hadith. (For Ibn ʿArabī's usual interpretations of those and related symbols as different kinds or modalities of spiritual wisdom, see *Muʿjam*, pp. 1071–77). In the corresponding section of chapter 167 (*Alchimie*, pp. 109–11), however, he interprets these symbols more freely as referring to a single great River (understood as the *Qurʾān*, in the universal sense of the noetic Reality of Muhammad and the *Umm al-Kitāb*)—i.e., the River of Life—and three smaller rivers (i.e., the Torah, Psalms and Gospels) emerging from It, along with the smaller streams of the other revealed Books (*ṣuḥuf*) mentioned in the Koran.

part (*juzʿ*) we called "the levels of the forms of knowledge given freely (by God)."¹⁸⁰

Next I saw before me the "cushions of the Litters" (55:77) of the (true) Knowers.¹⁸¹ Then I "was enveloped by the (divine) lights" until all of me became Light, and a robe of honor was bestowed upon me¹⁸² the likes of which I had never seen.

¹⁸⁰ *marātib 'ulūm al-wahb*: this is the title of a separate extant treatise (also known under many other names) described in the *R.G.*, no. 423. According to O. Yahya (in the same entry), the end of this treatise mentions that it is also included in the *Futūḥāt*, and its contents correspond to the following sections: I, 157–72 (chapters 16–21), III, 501–5 (ch. 380), and IV, 37–38 (ch. 425).

¹⁸¹ *muttaka'āt rafārif al-'arīfīn*: the obscure Koranic term *rafraf*, used at 55:77 to describe the "green couches" (or "meadows") of the dwellers of Paradise, is taken by Ibn 'Arabī (in his summary of the Prophet's Mi'raj in section II, at III, 432.7) to symbolize the angelic "vehicle" employed by Muhammad for the highest stages of his Ascension, after—as described in several other hadith—he was forced to leave Gabriel and Buraq at the "Lotus-Tree of the Limit." There he also adds that "it is like a litter or sedan-chair among us." Its use in reference to the Mi'raj no doubt comes from a hadith explaining Muhammad's vision of "one of the greatest Signs of his Lord" (53:13), stating that "he saw a green *rafraf* that had covered the horizon" (in Bukhārī, *tafsīr sūrat al-najm*, from 'Abdallāh ibn 'Abbās).

The *K. al-Isrā'*, which contains a long poetic section on "al-*rafārif al-'ulā*" (pp. 45–49, immediately preceding the culminating "intimate dialogues" with God) gives a much clearer idea of the meaning of this symbol for Ibn 'Arabī. There their role in the passage beyond the "Lotus of the Limit" is connected with the voyager's realization of "the secret of divine theophany in his heart" (p. 48): on them "he passed through 300 divine Presences (*ḥaḍarāt*)" (p. 53), until he reached the station "where 'how' and 'where' disappear, and the secrets . . . [of the Union of God and the traveler] become clear" (p. 49).

¹⁸² The beginning of this sentence echoes the description of the Prophet's revelation and vision of God as "Light" at the Lotus-tree of the Limit, in the Koranic verses 53:16–18 and in the hadith discussed just above (n. 175)—except that here Ibn 'Arabī himself has *become* that Tree "which is according to the state of Man" (n. 178). The "robe of honor" (*khil'a*) here recalls the ceremony of Sufi "initiation" (the bestowal of the *khirqā*), except that here this royal garment symbolizes the spiritual station of the Prophet himself, the *maqām muḥammadī* Ibn 'Arabī attains below (at n. 186).

So I said: "O my God, the Signs (*āyāt*) are scattered!" But then 'He sent down upon me'¹⁸³ at this moment (His) Saying: "Say: 'We have faith in God and in what He sent down upon Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes (of Israel), and in what was brought to Moses and Jesus and the prophets from their Lord; we do not separate any one among them, and we are surrendered to Him!'" (3:84). Thus He gave me *all* the Signs in this Sign,¹⁸⁴ clarified the matter (i.e., of the eternal Reality of the "*Qur'ān*") for me,¹⁸⁵ and made this Sign for me the key to *all* knowledge. Henceforth I knew that I *am* the totality of those (prophets) who were mentioned to me (in this verse).

¹⁸³ This is a Koranic term (*anzala 'alā*) usually referring to "descent" of divine Revelation to the prophetic Messengers (*rusul*). For other passages where Ibn 'Arabī applies it more generally to divine inspirations received by the *awliyā'*, see *Futūḥāt* II, 506; III, 94, 181; IV, 178. Judging from the context, the "scattering" or "diversity" of the divine "Signs" mentioned here seems to refer in particular to their division among the various prophets and messengers (and their revealed Books, etc.)—or even to the very multiplicity of the theophanies (i.e., God's "Signs in the souls and on the horizons," 41:53) that ordinarily distract us from a full awareness of the divine Unity. See the similar allusions to the "unity-in-multiplicity" of the prophets and their teachings at the beginning of the key passage from the *K. al-Isrā'* in the Appendix below.

¹⁸⁴ Or 'verse', *āya*: since what was revealed to Ibn 'Arabī in this experience was no less than the inner meaning of the true eternal *Qur'ān*—which is also the "Reality of Muhammad"—encompassing all knowledge (including the sources/realities of all the revealed Books), this phrase could also be read as "all the verses in that one verse." Much of the latter part of the *K. al-Isrā'* (especially pp. 83–92) is particularly devoted to Ibn 'Arabī's detailed explanations of his new, perfect understanding of the spiritual meaning of many different Koranic verses, as that revealed insight is "tested" and verified by Muhammad and several other major prophets.

¹⁸⁵ *qarraba 'alayya al-amr*: this translation (taking *amr* in its most general sense) assumes Ibn 'Arabī is referring to his experience of the full eternal reality of the *Qur'ān* (the *Umm al-Kiṭāb*) which is detailed in much of the *K. al-Isrā'*. However the phrase could also be construed as referring to his special "proximity" to the (divine) "Command" (*al-amr*) or simply to God—since this experience has many of the features of what Ibn 'Arabī describes elsewhere in the *Futūḥāt* as the "Station of Proximity" (*maqām al-qurba*)

Through this (inspiration) I received the good tidings that I had (been granted) the "Muhammadan station,"¹⁸⁶ that I was among the heirs of Muhammad's comprehensiveness. For he was the last (prophet) to be sent as a messenger, the last to have (the direct Revelation) *descend upon him* (97:4).¹⁸⁷ God "gave him the all-comprehensive Words,"¹⁸⁸ and he was

characterizing the highest group of saints, the "solitary ones" (*afrād*): see *Mu'jam*, pp. 936–38; Ibn 'Arabī's *K. al-Qurba* (*Rasā'il* I, no. 6); *Futūḥāt*, chapter 161 (II, 260–62); and further detailed references in *Sceau* (index s.v.).

¹⁸⁶ Literally, that I was "Muhammad-like in (my spiritual) station" (*Muḥammadī al-maqām*), i.e., marked by Muhammad's primordial spiritual condition of "all-comprehensiveness" (*jam'īya*), encompassing the eternal Realities of all the prophets (the *majmū'* or "totality") mentioned in the preceding sentence. See the similar experiences of the unity of all the prophets (and their spiritual knowledge and revelations) in Muhammad (and in Ibn 'Arabī himself) summarized in the passage from the *K. al-Isrā'* translated in the Appendix, and carefully elaborated throughout the *Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam*.

For details on Ibn 'Arabī's conception of the *maqām muḥammadī*, see *Mu'jam*, pp. 1191–1201 and especially *Sceau*, chapters IV (on the "Muhammadan Reality"), V (on the concept of the saints as "heirs" of certain prophets) and IX, discussing the many passages of the *Futūḥāt* and other works concerning Ibn 'Arabī's self-conception as "Seal of Muhammadan Prophecy."

¹⁸⁷ The verb form here alludes to the celebrated verses (at sura 97) describing the descent of "the angels and the Spirit" that marked the beginning of Muhammad's revelation; it is thus an apparent reference to the type of *direct* divine inspiration (*wahy*) limited to the line of lawgiving divine messengers (*rusul/mursalūn*). For Ibn 'Arabī's conception of the spiritual insight of the saints as "mediated" or "inherited" through one or more of the earlier prophetic messengers, see chapter 14 of the *Futūḥāt* (I, 149–51/O.Y. III, 357–62), plus detailed references in *Mu'jam*, pp. 1191–1201 and *Sceau*, ch. V and IX.

¹⁸⁸ *Jawāmi' al-kilām*: the famous hadith paraphrased in this sentence (see Bukhari, *ta'bīr*, 11; Muslim, *masājīd*, 5–8; Tirmidhi, *siyar*, 5; etc.) is cited repeatedly by Ibn 'Arabī to summarize the totality of spiritual knowledge or divine "forms of wisdom" (*hikam*) making up the "Muhammadan Reality." That conception is illustrated at length in his treatment of the other prophets (in relation to Muhammad) in the *Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam*, and it is likewise assumed in his description of a similar revelatory experience in the Appendix below. The rest of the hadith (translated here from al-Bukhārī) is also important here in relation to the "treasuries"

specially favored by six things with which the messenger of no (other) community¹⁸⁹ was specially favored. Therefore (Muhammad's) Mission is universal, because of the general nature of his six aspects:¹⁹⁰ from whatever direction you come, you will find only the Light of Muhammad¹⁹¹ overflowing upon you; no one takes (spiritual knowledge) except from It, and no (divine) messenger has informed (man) except for (what he has taken) from It.¹⁹²

Now when that happened to me I exclaimed: "Enough, enough!"¹⁹³ My (bodily) elements are filled up, and my place cannot contain me!, and through that (inspiration) God removed from me my contingent dimension.¹⁹⁴ Thus I attained in this nocturnal

of divine knowledge enumerated at the end of this section: "I was sent with the all-comprehensive Words . . . and while I was sleeping, I was brought the *keys of the treasures* . . . and they were placed in my hand. . . ."

¹⁸⁹ The text here reads literally "of no community (*umma*) among the communities"—a formulation apparently reflecting Ibn 'Arabī's focus here on the universality of Muhammad's spiritual reality (i.e., as ultimately sent to *all* the religious communities).

¹⁹⁰ Or "directions": this sentence involves a play on the word *jihā*, which can mean both "aspect" (in the sense of trait or characteristic) and "direction"—in which sense the traditional "six directions" (i.e., the four cardinal points, plus the vertical axis) implicitly contain all possible spatial orientations, and thereby again allude to the universality of the Prophet's Reality and divine mission.

¹⁹¹ *Nūr Muḥammad*: for the historical background of this term (including early references in hadith and the *Sīra* literature), see *Sceau*, pp. 80–87. For Ibn 'Arabī, the term is often roughly equivalent—from other points of view—to the "Muhammadan Reality," universal "Intellect," divine "Pen" or "Spirit," "Mother of the Book," etc.: see the references in *Mu'jam*, pp. 347–52, and the long list of his synonyms for the "Perfect Man" at p. 158.

¹⁹² Or "Him": the pronouns at the end of this sentence, translated here as "It," could also refer simply to "Muhammad" (although in any case the two terms would be essentially identical in this context).

¹⁹³ We have taken the most literal and obvious meaning. However, this phrase (*hasbī*) is also contained in two Koranic verses (39:38; 9:129): ". . . Say: 'God is enough for me' (*hasbī Allāh*) . . .," and both verses go on to stress the importance of "absolute trust" in God (*tawakkul*), the ostensible subject of this chapter (n. 23 above).

¹⁹⁴ *imkān*: i.e., everything (including the spatiality and corporality explicitly mentioned in Ibn 'Arabī's exclamation here) which had previously "separated" him from God (the

journey the inner realities (*ma'ānī*) of all the Names, and I saw them all returning to One Subject¹⁹⁵ and One Entity:¹⁹⁶ that Subject was what I witnessed,¹⁹⁷ and that Entity was my Being. For my voyage was only in myself and only pointed to myself, and through this I came to know that I was a pure "servant,"¹⁹⁸ without a trace of lordship in me at all.

unique "Necessary," non-contingent Being) and thereby offered the possibility of sin, opposition or conflict with the divine Commands—or in other words, everything that had been an impediment to his new state (or realization) of "pure servanthood," as an unimpeded expression of the divine Will (n. 198 below). However, it was also this very "contingency" that made the spiritual journey possible in the first place: see Ibn 'Arabī's "Burāq of *imkān*" mentioned at IV-A, n. 84.

¹⁹⁵ And "Object": *Musammā wāḥid*—the same theological formula was already mentioned in the schematic discussion of the spiritual journey in section III (at n. 61). As indicated there, the "transcendent Unity of the Named (divine Reality)" (*aḥadiyat al-musammā*) is again mentioned at the end of this section (354.15–16), in the long list of the kinds of spiritual knowledge Ibn 'Arabī "saw" within this experience. There, as throughout his works, he mentions the association of this point (as an explicit thesis or "doctrine") with the famous Andalusian Sufi Ibn al-Qasī and his book *Khal' al-Na'layn*.

¹⁹⁶ Or "One Eye" (*'ayn wāḥida*): the pun (involving the subject/object of this "vision" or "witnessing": see following note) is certainly intentional here, and is further enriched by some of the other dimensions of meaning of *'ayn*, which is also Source, Essence, etc.

¹⁹⁷ *mashhūd*: this phrase and the following one taken together carefully sum up the ineffable paradox of this experiential realization of divine Unicity—the very core insight of Ibn 'Arabī's work—which led to so much subsequent theological and philosophical controversy in the Islamic world (and wherever attempts have been made to treat this realization in purely conceptual terms as a logical "system"). The first phrase, taken in separation, states the thesis commonly known as *waḥdat al-shuhūd* ("unity of witnessing"), and the second the position of *waḥdat al-wujūd* ("unity of being")—while their combination alone expresses the experience and fundamental reality Ibn 'Arabī attempts to convey here (and in the passage translated in the Appendix below). Note the similar caution in the *K. al-Isrā'*, pp. 65–66: "So beware and don't imagine that my conjunction (*ittiṣāl*) with [the highest divine Presence] was one of identity of essence (*innīya*) . . ." etc.

¹⁹⁸ *'abd maḥd*: this formulation (or the related one of *'abd khālīṣ*), used fairly frequently by Ibn 'Arabī, refers to those rare Knowers who have become "wholly devoted" (*mukhlīṣin*)

Then the treasures of this station were opened up (for me), and among the kinds of knowledge I saw there were: . . .¹⁹⁹

[The list of some 69 kinds of knowledge associated with this particular spiritual stage differs from the similar listings in each of the other chapters on the *manāzil* in that it contains a number of Ibn 'Arabī's most fundamental metaphysical theses. The following items may be taken as representative.]²⁰⁰

to the divine "I"—i.e., who are among "My servants," *'ibādī* (alluding especially to 15:42 and 17:65)—and not to the totality of creatures, who are all "servants of God" in a metaphysical (but still unrealized) sense.

As Ibn 'Arabī explains in chapter 29 (O.Y. III, pp. 228–29): "Thus every servant of God pays attention to one [or more] of the creatures who has a right (*ḥaqq*, i.e., a claim) against him, and his servanthood (to God) is deficient to the extent of that right, because that creature seeks the (fulfillment) of that right from him and thereby has a power (*sultān*: like Satan at 15:42, etc.) over him, so that he cannot be a pure servant, wholly devoted to God." In a revealing autobiographical aside, he adds that "I encountered a great many of this group [i.e., of those "seeking freedom from all engendered things"] in the days of my wandering," and that "from the day I attained this station I have not possessed any living thing, indeed not even the clothing I wear. . . . And the moment I come into possession of something I dispose of it at that very instant, either by giving it away or setting it free, if that is possible."

At the beginning of chapter 311 (III, 26–27), Ibn 'Arabī even more openly "boasts" (to use his expression) of this unique realization: "Today I do not know of anyone who has realized the station of servanthood to a greater extent than I—and if there is someone (else), then he is like me. For I have attained the ultimate limit of servanthood, so that I am the pure, absolute servant who does not know (any) taste of Lordship (*rubūbiya*)." See also *Mu'jam*, pp. 775–68 (*'abd, 'ubūdīya*, and related concepts).

¹⁹⁹ Ibn 'Arabī strongly emphasizes the direct experiential "vision" of the forms of knowledge he realized in this particular revelation by repeating "I saw in it . . ." before each of the 69 insights enumerated in this chapter (III, 351–54). (This procedure is apparently unique among the many otherwise similar listings that conclude each of the other chapters in the section on the spiritual stations, the "*faṣl al-manāzil*." The "opening of the treasures" here is a direct allusion to the conclusion of the famous hadith concerning the special universality of the Prophet's revealed knowledge discussed in n. 188 above.

²⁰⁰ These "kinds of knowledge" are respectively numbers 12, 15, 22, 25, 28, 45 and 53 in this list. Ibn 'Arabī's

... I saw in it the knowledge of the Return ... and that (man) carries this world with him when he is transferred (to the next world). ...

I saw in it the knowledge of the interpenetration and (indissoluble) "circularity" (*dawr*: of God and Man), which is that God (*al-Haqq*) can only be in (external) reality (*fī al-fī'l*) through the form of the creature (*al-khalq*), and that the creature can only be there (in reality) through the form of God. So this circularity ... is what actually exists (*al-wāqī'*) and is the way things are. ...

... each community (*umma*) has a messenger ... and there is nothing among what exists that is not (part of) a certain community. ... So the divine message (*risāla*) extends to absolutely all communities, both great and small! ...

I saw in it the universality of the divine Gift (of Mercy and Pardon) ... , (as) He said concerning the prodigal sinners: "... do not despair of God's Mercy; surely God forgives the sins altogether, surely He is the All-Forgiving, the All-Merciful." So nothing could be clearer than this explicit divine declaration concerning the return of (all) the servants to (His) Mercy! ...

I saw in it the knowledge that it is God who is worshipped in every object of worship, behind the veil of (the particular) form.

I saw in it the knowledge of the conditions of mankind in the intermediate world (*barzakh*). ...

I saw in it the knowledge that this world is a token (*ʿunwān*) of the other world and a symbolization (*ḍarb mithāl*) of it, and that the status (*ḥukm*) of what is in this world is more complete and more perfect in the other world.

[Appendix: A Corresponding Passage
in the *Kitāb al-Isrāʾ*]²⁰¹

[As mentioned in the introduction, this relatively early work—composed in Fez in the year 594, according to Ibn ʿArabī's colophon (p. 92)—contains a fascinating summary of what is almost certainly the same experience of the culminating revelation of the

"Muhammadan Station" described in the immediately preceding passage from chapter 367. The rest of the *K. al-Isrāʾ* is essentially a detailed poetic amplification and illustration of the comprehensive spiritual insight flowing from this decisive realization.

In fact, this succinct account near the beginning of that book emphasizes all the essential features of this "revelation," key themes which can subsequently be traced throughout Ibn ʿArabī's writings: (1) the inner realization of the fundamental unity of the prophetic messengers and their Message; (2) his initial experience of this inspiration as flowing from a providential divine "attraction" (*jadhba*) involving the temporary "annihilation" (*fanā*) of his own ego and his "submersion" in God; (3) the divine "gift" (*wahb*) of the totality of spiritual wisdom and "secrets" brought by the different prophets; (4) the realization of this wisdom in a unique state of "union" with God; (5) a subsequent, lasting stage of ontological and spiritual "discrimination" in which he is aware of the apparent "separation" between himself and God, but now perceived as a transformed recognition of the Whole within which those two, equally indispensable aspects of Being coexist; and (6) his "return" to the world, involving the obligation to teach and convey the transforming insight he has obtained to those rare individuals capable of assimilating it.

In this work the incident in question is recounted in the lowest heaven, at the very beginning of the heavenly ascension, after Ibn ʿArabī—or rather the spiritual "voyager" (*sālik*) who is the autobiographical protagonist of this Ascension—has first encountered the "innermost being of the spiritual reality" (*sirr rūḥānīya*) of Adam. The voyager's "dearest friend" then introduces him to a masterly "Teacher" and "Shaykh"—a thinly disguised symbol of Muhammad²⁰²—who greets him warmly and with great respect, "explaining to his companions" (i.e., the other

descriptions are given here without further annotation, since these principles should be familiar to readers of any of his works and since most of them have been mentioned in earlier passages of this chapter.

²⁰¹ Pp. 12–14: the section translated here corresponds specifically to 13.14–14.10 (with omissions indicated below).

²⁰² The same two epithets (*mudarris* and *shaykh*) are used to describe the Prophet throughout the Miʿraj narrative in chapter 167 of the *Futūḥāt*. Although this mentor is initially described here in terms outwardly referring to Adam—i.e., as the "father of humanity" (*abū bashar*), teaching at "the mosque of the moon" (i.e., the sphere closest to earth)—he is clearly distinct from the spiritual form of the prophet Adam the voyager has already encountered at the beginning of this section, and his description and the comprehensive scope of his wisdom (encompassing all the prophets and saints) in fact are those befitting "Adam" in the universal sense of the "Perfect Man" (see the similar equivalence in the famous

prophets and messengers) that "this man is from my people."²⁰³ As a result, "they accepted me among the group of their brothers and supporters." This sets the stage for the traveler's dialogue with this Master . . .]

... He said: "What was it made you consider us as many?"²⁰⁴

I said: "Precisely (the different scriptures and teachings) we took (from you)."

[Then the voyager asks the Shaykh for some further wisdom or benefit. . . .]

He replied: "Take for yourself 'May God open your breast',²⁰⁵ illumine your soul and increase your charity and your right action!"²⁰⁶

opening chapter of the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*), who for Ibn 'Arabī is ultimately none other than the all-encompassing "Reality of Muhammad."

²⁰³ *min ahlī*: the statement can be understood on several levels at once, as a reference to Ibn 'Arabī's name (which is partially identical with the Prophet's); to his belonging to the historical Muslim community; to his status as "Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood" (although this self-conception may not have been fully developed at this time); and to his being among the "people of the (Prophet's) House" (*ahl al-bayt*), who are the Prophet's true spiritual heirs. For his distinctive understanding of the inner meaning of "*ahl al-bayt*" (as alluded to in the Koran 33:33, and in several important hadith), see chapter 29 of the *Futūḥāt* (O.Y. III, 227–42), entirely devoted to this subject and the related spiritual "secrets" of Salmān.

²⁰⁴ I.e., what caused you to divide the prophets and consider them as separate (and potentially conflicting) realities?

²⁰⁵ An allusion to several Koranic verses—including the following: "So whoever God wishes to guide rightly, He opens his breast to surrender [*islam*] . . ." (6:125), and "Now is he whose breast God has opened to surrender, so that he is (following) a Light from his Lord . . ." (39:22)—which Ibn 'Arabī consistently understands as references to the mysterious elements of divine grace and natural "predisposition" underlying each individual's inner capacity and degree of spiritual realization. The classic instance of this preferential divine "election" (*īthār*) or "compelling attraction" (*jadhb*), as Abraham points out later in this book (pp. 32–33), is of course Muhammad—alluding to the verses "Did We not open for you your breast . . . ?" (94:1ff.).

²⁰⁶ I.e., your *iḥsān*—defined in the famous hadith "... to worship God as though you see Him; and even if you do not see Him, He sees you." (See Bukhārī, *ṣawm* 20, 49, 50, *ḥudūd* 42, *i'tiṣām* 5, *ṣamannā* 9; additional references in Wensinck III, 547.)

(So) God (*al-Haqq*) seized me and He annihilated my (awareness) of myself.²⁰⁷ Then after that He bestowed everything upon me, in order to make me bear everything.²⁰⁸ So when he had entrusted me with (all) His Wisdom²⁰⁹ and made me aware of every inner secret and (particular) wisdom, He returned me to myself. And (thus) He made what had been (imposed) upon me (to be) *from* me²¹⁰ and right there with me: He took me to be His intimate friend

²⁰⁷ The verb translated here as "seized," *jadhaba*, is a technical Sufi term referring to those rare ecstatic natures which are naturally "captivated" or "attracted" by God with relatively little (outwardly apparent) effort or need to pass through the many stages of the Path.

As a Sufi technical term, the notion of *fanā'* (translated here as "annihilation") refers in fact to an inner *shift in awareness* away from something (in this case, the ego) caused by a concomitant "absorption" or "immersion" in something else (in this case, God). (See Ibn 'Arabī's own more detailed technical explanation of this transformation throughout section III above, and the clarification of some common illusions and misunderstandings concerning it in his conversations with Aaron and Moses, in section IV-F and IV-G.)

²⁰⁸ "Everything" here translates *al-kull*—i.e., the "Whole," all of reality, and not a great many "things."

Our translation of the last half of this sentence assumes that it is an allusion to the famous verse concerning the divine "Trust" (*amāna*)—which for Ibn 'Arabī (and many earlier Sufis) is a reference to man's true inner nature as the "Perfect Man" potentially mirroring and realizing all the realms of being and divine Names (i.e., "everything"), a situation which is not shared by any of the other creatures, whether higher or lower. "Verily we offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, yet they declined to bear it and were afraid of it—but man (*al-insān*) bore it . . ." (33:72). (The verb "entrusted" (*awda'a*) in the following sentence conveys the same idea of something handed over for stewardship and safekeeping.)

²⁰⁹ Literally, His "Wisdoms" (*ḥikam*), the divine "Words" which for Ibn 'Arabī are embodied above all in the "inner secrets" or "innermost being" (*sirr*) of each of the prophets; cf. the elaborate illustration of this insight in the titles and schematic conception underlying his *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*.

²¹⁰ The complex metaphysical conception underlying this formulation is elaborated in much greater detail in the introductory part of chapter 367 (III, p. 344; = section III above) schematically outlining (in ontological terms) the "nocturnal (spiritual) voyages" of the saints. Ordinarily we tend to view our experience (and its sources, to use Ibn

and chose me specially to be His nocturnal companion²¹¹—He made *His Throne* to be a couch for me, *the Kingdom* a servant for me, and *the King* to be a prince (subordinate) to me.²¹²

ʿArabī's language, in the divine Names) as something "outside" and separate, imposed "upon" (ʿalā) us rather than flowing "from" within (*min*) us. It is only at this moment of enlightenment that the voyager can actually realize that "his" names are the "divine Names" and their "shadows" (at the same time).

²¹¹ "Chose me specially" translates the verb *iṣṭafā*, which is applied in a number of verses of the Koran primarily to the various prophets (and also Mary), and in popular usage especially to the Prophet (*al-Muṣṭafā*).

The word *samīr* ("nocturnal companion") has several important nuances that cannot be conveyed in a single English expression: it specifically implies a companion in conversation or dialogue—as movingly portrayed in Ibn ʿArabī's "intimate dialogues" with God (*munājāt*) later in the *K. al-Isrāʾ* (pp. 50–82)—and the specification of this companionship "at night" (like the "nocturnal journey," *isrāʾ*, itself) suggests both its particular intimacy and the fact that it is "hidden" from the perception of the outside world.

²¹² The allusions here are exceptionally complex, even for Ibn ʿArabī. That the divine "Throne" (ʿarsh) can become the Knower's "couch" (*sarīr*) reflects the verses and hadith connecting It with the Heart (*qalb*) which is the inner reality of Man: see notes 7, 30, 37 in Part I and 168–72 above, as well as the extensive references in *Muʿjam*, pp. 791–803 and 916–21. Here the intimacy of the nuptial *sarīr*—which is mentioned (in the plural) in several descriptions of Paradise in the Koran—most likely refers specifically to 56:10–16, where it characterizes the highest state of spiritual perfection realized by "those drawn close to God" (*al-muqarrabūn*) and "those who arrive in advance" (*al-sābiqūn*). "And those who arrive first, those who arrive first, they are the ones drawn near, in the Gardens of bliss: a group of the first ones and a few of the later ones, on couches . . ." (Ibn ʿArabī also uses *sarīr* itself as a synonym for the Throne: see *Muʿjam*, pp. 579–80.)

The concluding phrases do not refer to the acquisition of any new, "godlike" powers; rather—following the rhetorical example of much earlier Sufi literature—they are simply an expression here of the inner identity of the Knower with the totality of the divine Names (i.e., "God," *Allāh*) in this state of mystical union: that comprehensive dimension of the Divinity necessarily remains superior both to the "Kingdom" (*mulk*, the manifest world) and to the limited divine aspects represented by the Name "the King" (*al-Mālik*).

Thus I remained in that (state) for a period of time, unaware of anything comparable to myself among the (eternal individual) entities.²¹³ Then next He divided me into two halves, and He made the (whole) thing into two things (i.e., "Lord" and "servant," or "Name" and "named").²¹⁴ And then He brought me (back) to Life and made me see,²¹⁵ (so that) nothing veiled me from Him or distracted me (from Him). So I said: "This is I and not other-than-me!"²¹⁶

Thus the half was filled with love and longing for the (other) half,²¹⁷ so I said: "O my God, why this shadow?"

²¹³ *al-aʿyān*: here—since the voyager is speaking, as it were, from within the Divine nature—the particular realities or essences of each individual "thing" (person, etc.) that are timelessly present within the divine Knowledge; see the discussion of this problematic technical term and further references in *Muʿjam*, pp. 831–39.

²¹⁴ "Thing" here translates the expression "*al-amr*," which in this context refers to the complex reality subjectively experienced in this state first as "one" and then as "two-in-One" (and not as the absolute duality at the beginning of the journey). The paradoxical "non-dualistic" (and equally "non-monistic") inner nature of Man and divine Reality evoked here is perhaps the single most recurrent theme in all of Ibn ʿArabī's writings. (See, e.g., his longer explanations in section III of chapter 367 above.)

²¹⁵ The expression "made me see" (*ārānī*) recalls Ibn ʿArabī's insistence at the very beginning of chapter 367 (section I in Part I amplified in section III) that the purpose of the spiritual journey—alluding to the Koranic expression at 17:1—is to "make us see" (n. 34) that to which we are ordinarily blind. The verb translated as "bring (back) to life" (*aḥyā*) is also used repeatedly in the Koran in reference to the Resurrection: Ibn ʿArabī (again following many earlier Sufis) therefore implies that this realization is a prefiguration of the sharpened divine vision (*ruʾya*) to be gained on the Day of Resurrection. For the dimension of this culminating realization as a sort of "death" (and concomitant resurrection), see Moses' explanation of his theophanic "death" (*ṣaʿaqa*) in chapter 367 (section IV-G above).

²¹⁶ *hādhā anā wa laysa ghayrī*: a classic formulation of the (logically paradoxical) realization of "non-duality" at the heart of all the Shaykh's writing; see the comparable formulation of his culminating spiritual revelation at n. 197 (section IV-I) above.

²¹⁷ "Filled with love and longing" can only approximate the many senses of the verb *ḥanna* here: love, longing, nostalgic sadness, 'homesickness', compassion—terms which, for Ibn ʿArabī, are ultimately equally applicable to both "halves" of

[His answer briefly evokes the mystery of the divine "Pen" and the particular conditions that finally gave (external) being—at the level of a temporal, material "shadow" of the Truly Real—to Ibn 'Arabī's eternal "individual entity" ('*ayn*).]

the divine-human unity. The same reality is expressed, from a cosmic, ontological perspective, in his famous conception of the "Breath of the Compassionate" (*nafas al-Rahmān*: see *Mu'jam*, pp. 1063–67) and his equally frequent image, based on a celebrated *ḥadīth qudsī*, of God as the "hidden Treasure" that "loves to be known" (see *Mu'jam*, pp. 983–87).

So now I am teaching what I learned and transmitting to these (disciples and readers) what I came to know. . . .²¹⁸

²¹⁸ An allusion to Ibn 'Arabī's nascent conception of his particular personal mission—since he stresses elsewhere that by no means all "those who return" from this journey are called to teach openly—with regard to this legacy, even if that awareness was not yet fully expressed in terms of his role as "Seal of the Muhammadan saints." (See detailed references at n. 13 in Part I.)

ABBREVIATIONS

- Alchimie*. Ibn 'Arabī. *L'alchimie du bonheur parfait* [ch. 167 of the *Futūḥāt*], tr. S. Ruspoli. Paris, 1981.
- Bezels*. Ibn 'Arabī. *The Bezels of Wisdom* [*Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*], tr. R. W. J. Austin. N.Y., 1980.
- El¹/El²*. *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (1st and 2nd edition).
- Fuṣūṣ*. Ibn 'Arabī. *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, ed. A. Affifi. Cairo, 1346/1946. (All references to Part I.) [See also English tr., *Bezels*.]
- Futūḥāt*. Ibn 'Arabī. *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīya*. Cairo (Bulaq), 1329 A.H., 4 volumes. (References are to volume number [I–IV], page and line number.) The ongoing critical edition by Osman Yahya is listed as "O.Y." below. [See also French tr. of chapter 167, *Alchimie*.]
- Journey*. Ibn 'Arabī. *Journey to the Lord of Power* [*R. al-Anwār*], tr. R. T. Harris. N.Y., 1981.
- K. al-Isrā'*. Ibn 'Arabī. *Kitāb al-Isrā' ilā al-Maqām al-Asrā'* [*Rasā'il* I, no. 13, pp. 1–92]. Hyderabad, 1948.
- Mishkāt*. Ibn 'Arabī. *Kitāb Mishkāt al-Anwār fī mā Ruwiya 'an Allāh min al-Akhbār*. Aleppo, 1349/1927. (Hadith are indicated by numerical order.) [See also French tr., *Niche*.]
- Mu'jam*. al-Hakīm, S. *al-Mu'jam al-Ṣūfī: al-Ḥikma fī Hudūd al-Kalima*. Beirut, 1401/1981.

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- R. al-Anwār*. Ibn 'Arabī. *Risālat al-Anwār fī mā Yumnaḥ Ṣāhib al-Khalwa min al-Asrār* [*Rasā'il* I, no. 12, pp. 1–19]. Hyderabad, 1948.
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