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Author: James Winston Morris

Persistent link: <http://hdl.handle.net/2345/2527>

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Post-print version of an article published in Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society 50.

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Ibn 'Arabi's 'Short Course' on Love

James Winston Morris

The centrality of the theme of love, in all of its dimensions, within the thought and writings of Ibn 'Arabi, is no surprise to those familiar with his work. In particular, it helps to explain why so many of the most influential Persian love-poets (still-popular figures such as 'Iraqi, Shabistari and Jami) – whose lyric and devotional poetry helped to shape the wider Islamic humanities and Muslim religious and cultural life, in many different languages, throughout much of Asia in subsequent centuries – were themselves also careful students and highly creative exponents of the Shaykh's central spiritual insights and teachings. Likewise, some of the earliest and most influential Western translations and studies of Ibn 'Arabi were devoted to his Arabic love-poetry (especially the *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq*) and to his long discussion of divine and human love in Chapter 178 of the *Futūhāt* (II, pp.320–62), which provided the core of Henry Corbin's classic *l'Imagination créatrice dans le soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabi*.¹

However, since we still await a full English translation of Chapter 178, the following selections from Chapter 73 of the *Futūhāt* (the concluding chapter in the opening *Faṣl al-Ma'ārif* of that work) – comprising Ibn 'Arabi's brief response to four successive items in Tirmidhi's famous 'mystical questionnaire' related to the theme of divine Love² – provide a concise introduction to virtually all of the ideas and perspectives

1. The English translation of Corbin's work (Princeton Univ. Press, tr. Ralph Mannheim, 1969) is now distributed under the title *Alone With the Alone*. Considerable portions of Chapter 178 were earlier translated in Asin-Palacios, *El Islam cristianizado* (1931). Maurice Gloton's complete French translation (Ibn 'Arabi: *Traité de l'Amour*, Albin Michel) appeared in 1986.

2. For Tirmidhi (ca. 820–905), see Bernd Radtke's 'A Forerunner of Ibn al-'Arabī: Ḥakīm Tirmidhī on Sainthood', *JMIAS*, 8 (1989) and Prof. Radtke's other studies of this key early Sufi writer.

concerning love that are developed at much greater length in Chapter 178. Moreover, near the very end of the *Futūhāt* (in the penultimate Chapter 559, largely devoted to revealing the 'inner meanings' of each of the preceding chapters of that monumental work), Ibn 'Arabi returns to this theme in a short, but highly challenging and evocative description of the central role in human and divine existence of Love as the all-encompassing force of cosmic 'desire' (*hawā*). His concluding remarks on love there are expressed in ways that will recall both Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, as well as some of the most humanly revealing – and often memorably provocative – stories and teachings about the indispensable motivating and revelatory power of love and desire that are scattered throughout Rumi's *Spiritual Masnavī*.

As a final caution, we must point out a few fundamental problems arising from certain inherent limits of English translation in these passages, where the reader must very consciously and actively 're-translate' back from the English approximation toward the wider, often intentionally challenging and thought-provoking intended meanings of the original Arabic:

- Most importantly, the unavoidable use of key words like 'spiritual', 'natural' or 'divine' in English inevitably tends to suggest semantic (or even deeper metaphysical) oppositions or dualistic separations that are profoundly opposed to what Ibn 'Arabi is trying to convey here – and indeed to the entire non-dualistic metaphysics of divine 'Self-manifestation' (*tajalliyāt*) underlying all of his teaching. All of the dimensions of love that we can live or imagine, so briefly evoked in these discussions, are from his perspective at the same time divine, spiritual and natural – and no hierarchical notions of 'rank' or 'progression' are implied or intended, at least from the inclusive divine perspective that is his constant point of reference.
- Likewise, throughout these passages, the personal pronoun or verbal person-marker translated as 'his' always refers inclusively to all imaginable genders and relationships. No particularization or exclusion should be read into that grammatically given usage – just as in the corresponding forms of

Persian love-poetry, where gender distinctions are normally entirely absent (or rather, are for the most part systematically ambiguous).

- In addition, as suggested in the previous point, everything Ibn 'Arabi says about love here is meant to be read *reciprocally*: the reader must fill in these succinct expressions from the perspective of both lover and beloved, and of both God (or all the other spiritual, less material objects of our love) and the human being. Throughout these discussions, as in so many of his other works, Ibn 'Arabi intentionally and repeatedly uses pronouns (as well as verbal markers of person and number, and often other technical terms as well) in ways that can usually be read to apply to *both* the divine and to human or creaturely referents. Occasionally we have used English capitalization to suggest useful distinctions, or to indicate what may be the most 'immediate' meaning in such ambiguous passages; but those handy typographical options (always absent in the Arabic) should not be taken to exclude other readings with alternative pronoun references and meanings.
- Finally, the Arabic of Ibn 'Arabi's day, both in religious and more poetic contexts, benefited from an extremely rich vocabulary for different phenomenological dimensions of 'love' that cannot be readily conveyed, even with additional adverbial qualifiers, by the single current English term. Here we have provided a few brief footnote reminders of the particular emphases of some of the different Arabic terms for love that Ibn 'Arabi employs in this discussion, but in many cases a more detailed explanation would be desirable.

NATURAL, SPIRITUAL AND DIVINE LOVE
(FROM *AL-FUTŪHĀT AL-MAKKIYYA*, CHAPTER 73)

Question 116: What is the 'Drink of Love' (*sharāb al-hubb*)?³

... Now the first thing I'll start with regarding this question is the inner understanding (*ma'rifa*) of Love. Then one can understand its 'drink' and the 'cup' that are related to it (in the following questions).

So know that Love has three levels:

1. Natural love, which is the love of ordinary people (*al-awāmm*). Its aim is the unification of the animal spirit,⁴ so that the spirit of each one of them becomes a spirit for the other one by way of taking pleasure and the influence of passionate desire. Its culmination in act is sexual union (*nikāh*), when the passion of love flows inwardly through the entire (bodily) constitution like water absorbed in a piece of wool, or rather like flowing of dye through something that is dyed.
2. Spiritual, psychic love (*rūhānī nafsī*), whose aim is to come to resemble the beloved, while upholding what is due the beloved and really understanding the beloved's true worth.
3. Divine love, which is God's love for the servant and the servant's love for his Lord, as He said: 'He loves them, and they love Him' (Q. 5:54).⁵ Its culmination from both sides is that the servant directly witnesses his being a manifestation of the Real/God (*mazhar li-l-Haqq*), while he is for that Real

3. *Fut.* I.111–113.

4. In the Galenic physiology of Ibn 'Arabi's time, this phrase refers to the human body's vital powers, not to the divine angelic Spirit or *rūh*.

5. The special spiritual group (*qawm*) described in this famous verse (5:54) are traditionally identified – quite widely, and not simply by Ibn 'Arabi or other Sufi writers – with the 'Friends of God' (*awliyā' Allāh*) mentioned in several other Qur'anic verses. And part of their description in this verse – as '*not fearing the blame of any blamer*' – is the source of Ibn 'Arabi's common reference to them as the 'people of (worldly) Blame' (*malāmiyya*), a group he identifies with the 'Solitary Ones' (*afṛād*) or the highest rank of the realized Knowers and Friends.

appearing (through him) just as the spirit is for the body: hidden in it and never (directly) perceived. For no one witnesses Him but a lover. And (its culmination from the other side) is that it is the Real who is a manifestation for that servant, so that the Real is qualified by the same definitions, proportions and accidental qualities as that servant.⁶ He directly witnesses this servant, and at that moment the servant becomes the beloved of the Real (*mahbūb al-Haqq*).

Now if the matter is as we have just said, there is no essential definition for love by which it can really be known, although it can be defined by descriptive verbal definitions, and nothing more. So whoever 'defines' love doesn't really know it; whoever has not tasted it by direct 'drinking' doesn't really know it; and whoever says 'I have drunk my fill of it' doesn't know it at all, for love is a drinking without ever being satiated! ...

Natural Love

Know that love may be natural, even when the beloved is not from the world of nature. But love cannot be natural except if the *lover* is from the world of nature: that is unavoidable. That is because the proximate cause (*sabab*) of natural love is either seeing or hearing (of the beloved), since it occurs in the imagination of the person looking, from what he sees – if the beloved is someone perceptible by vision – and in the imagination of the person hearing (about the beloved), from what he hears. So (the lover) transfers that (beloved perceived) to

6. This phrase alludes to the concluding part of the famous divine saying known as the 'hadith of the Wali' or 'hadith *al-nawāfil*', which is one of the most commonly cited hadith in all of Ibn 'Arabi's writings. It begins by insisting on God's special reciprocal and intense love (*hubb*, the same term discussed here) for his 'Friend' (the *wali*), and prescribed duties of spiritual devotion, and then concludes: '... My servant continues to come nearer Me through the supererogatory acts of piety, until I love him. And when I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his tongue with which he speaks, his hand with which he grasps, and his foot on which he walks.'

his own plane of existence and forms an image of (the beloved) in his imagination through his power of forming images. Now the beloved may possess a natural form corresponding to the image formed in the (lover's) imagination, or to an image beneath or above that (in his imagination). Or the beloved may not have a form or may not be able to receive forms. But this lover will still form images (of the beloved) from their listening, which cannot be conceived...⁷

Now the souls have been constitutionally endowed with a love of domination, and the lover is a slave enslaved to this (particular) beloved by his love, while the beloved only has domination through the existence of this lover. So (the lover) is coupled by passion – to the extent of his passionate love – to (the beloved's) domination, and he only boasts of that because of the trusting confidence that occurs in the soul of the beloved because the lover is seeking and not renouncing the beloved. Thus the lover is overtaken by pride – either outwardly, or he is seeking it inwardly – because he doesn't see in existence anyone like him in being the possession of the beloved.

Nor does the lover seek to justify the actions of the beloved, because such justification is one of the attributes of the (prudent) intellect⁸ – but the lover has no intellect! As they say (proverbially): 'There is no good in a love that the intellect manages'. ... So all of this is love's doing: its effects in the beloved that we have mentioned, and its effects in the lover that we have mentioned.

Among the strangest things (associated with love) is that its spiritual reality (*ma'nā*) imposes its influence upon someone in whom it does not (initially) inhere, which is the beloved. For the lover's love influences the beloved, just as it has its influence on the lover. ... This is contrary to what we ordinarily understand

7. A large section (23 lines) elided here – and developed at greater length in Chapter 178 – is largely devoted to describing the ways the lover's image of the beloved created in his imagination can overwhelm or outlast the actual physical form of the beloved, as in the famous early Arab love-story of Majnun (Qays) and Layla.

8. '*ʿaql*: here used in its everyday sense of prudent judgment or socially approved 'common sense'.

about the spiritual realities imposing their influences on those in whom they subsist. Likewise love is not conjoined with prudent intelligence ('*aql*) in a single place, since the influence of love is necessarily contrary to the influence of the intellect. Because the intellect is for intelligent speech, while love's rapturous perplexity is for mute silence!

Furthermore, among the distinctive properties of natural love is that the form (of the beloved) which occurs in the imagination of the lover is exactly proportionate to the capacity of the place in which it occurs, so that nothing else is left over there and it can't receive anything else at all. And if it isn't like that, then this isn't the form of love. For by this the form of Love is different from all the other forms: just as the form of the world ('*ālam*) is according to the divine Presence of (all) the Names, so every divine Name in the divine Presence is in proportion to its influence in the constitution of the world, without any excess or deficiency. So because of this (it is clear) that the world was brought into existence through Love. And in support of this there has been handed down in the tradition (*sunna*) His saying: 'I was a Treasure, (but) I was not known. Yet *I loved to be known*: so I created the creation/(human) creatures (*al-khalq*) and I let myself be known to them, so that they came to know Me.'

Thus He informed (us) that Love was the cause of bringing the world into being, so (the world) is in complete congruence with the divine Names. For if the soul were not deeply enamored with the body, it wouldn't be pained when it was separated from the body – even despite being its opposite! So (Love) conjoined the (different) dimensions and states in order to bring into existence the relations (of the Names) and the forms. For those relations (of the divine Names) are the foundation for bringing into existence the relationships (of the actual creatures). And although the spirits are different from their (bodily) figures, and the meanings (spiritual realities) are different from words and letters (expressing them), yet the words indicate the meanings in accordance with their correspondence – such that if each meaning were to take a bodily form, it wouldn't differ from the (corresponding) word. And the like of this (harmonious congruity of outer form and inner reality) is called Love.

Spiritual Love

As for spiritual love, it is distinct from this level and removed from (physical) proportions and form. That is because the spiritual faculties have (certain) relational affinities.⁹ So whenever the relations of those affinities between the lover and beloved prevail – whether from seeing or hearing or knowing – then that (spiritual) love exists. And if those relations are lacking or incomplete, then there isn't any love.

Now the reality/meaning (*ma'nā*) of those relations (of spiritual affinity) is that those spirits whose nature and task (*sha'n*) is to freely give and bestow are always looking for those spirits whose nature and task is to receive and to take. The first group are pained by any lack of receptivity (of what they are striving to give), and the second are pained by any lack of generous giving (*fayz*). ... So each one of the two spirits is seeking to fulfill its special capability through loving the other.

So when this sort of love is well established in the two lovers, then the lover doesn't have any misgivings about being separated from his beloved, because (their love) is not from the world of (material) bodies or even imaginal ones, so that the two persons could be separated or might be affected by excessive closeness, such as happens with natural love. For the spiritual realities (*ma'ānī*) are not restricted and confined (by form, space or time). Only someone who is deficient in his basic human endowment (*nāqis al-fitra*) would try to imagine those spiritual realities, by trying to give a form to what is not a form.

This is the love of the true Knowers (*hubb al-ʿārifīn*), by which they are distinguished from ordinary people, the people of (physical) 'union'. For that (spiritually knowing) lover more resembles his beloved in his *needfulness*, not in his momentary state and measure (*hāl/miqdār*). Therefore this (spiritual) lover

9. *Ilṭifāt nisabī*: the harmonious affinities between the human manifestations of certain spiritual relations of meaning and intention (cf. Goethe's *Wahlverwandschaften*), marked by special caring, attention and solicitude – and corresponding to the 'relations' (*nisab*) between the divine 'Names' and Attributes which for Ibn 'Arabi actually constitute all of creation.

knows the real value (*qadr*) of the beloved, with respect to which they are beloved.

Divine Love

As for divine love, that is from His Names 'the Beautiful'¹⁰ and 'the Light'. For the Light approaches the individual-essences¹¹ of the possible things and drives away from them the darkness/shadow (*zulma*) of their contemplating themselves and their contingent state. For (God/the Light) brings forth in them a power of vision (*basar*) which is His vision, since there is no seeing without It/Him. Then He manifests Himself to that individual-essence through the Name 'the Beautiful', so that this (individual-essence) becomes passionately in love¹² with Him. So the individual-essence of that possible thing becomes a place-of-manifestation for Him (the Beautiful), such that the individual-essence of that possible thing becomes entirely within Him¹³ and oblivious to itself. Hence (that individual-essence) isn't aware that he is in love with Him – may He be

10. *Al-Jamīl*: this Name is taken from the famous hadith: 'He is Beautiful (*Jamīl*), and He loves beauty (*al-jamāl*),' which Ibn 'Arabi cites fully in his response to Question 118 below.

11. *A'yān*, singular '*ayn*': throughout this section, this term has the metaphysical meaning of the mysterious 'individual-essence' ('*ayn thābita*) or divine 'source-thought' constituting the ultimate reality of each human being, together with the same word's ordinary meaning as the 'eye'. The following paragraphs play constantly with both those meanings of the same term.

12. The verb *ta'ashshaqa* here (from '*ishq*', the term that becomes commonly used for the divine throughout later mystical poetry in both Persian and other Asian Islamic languages) refers to love so extreme and passionately 'intoxicating' that the lover loses all prudent awareness of his or her own self. That state of loss of self-identification (*fanā*) in inner union with the Beloved is presumed in what follows.

13. The Qur'anic term for 'the Inward' or 'Spiritual' (*al-Bātin*) here (one of the most central of the divine Names mentioned in the Qur'an), and its correlate of 'the Outward' or 'Manifest', introduced at the end of this paragraph, is presumed throughout the rest of Ibn 'Arabi's account of divine creative Love.

exalted – or that he is oblivious to his self through his being in this condition (of being passionately lost in his Beloved). So he isn't aware that he is a manifestation for Him, and he finds within himself that he loves himself. For every thing is constitutionally endowed with loving itself, and there is (as yet) no 'outward' (aspect of God)¹⁴ there, except for Him in the individual-essence of the possible thing.

Therefore (at this stage) God only loves God, and the servant¹⁵ cannot be described as loving, since he has no influence (*hukm*) in the matter. ...

So the distinctive sign of divine love is the love for all existent things in every (level of God's) Presence, be it spiritual, sensible, intermediate/imaginal, or 'imaginary'.¹⁶ And for every Presence¹⁷ there is an 'eye'¹⁸ from His Name 'The Light', through which it gazes upon His Name 'The Beautiful'. Then that Light clothes that individual/eye in the vestments of Being (*wujūd*).

14. The divine name *al-Zāhir*: the term underlies Ibn 'Arabi's standard reference to all created things, throughout all the remaining discussions of Love here, as *mazāhir*: 'manifestations' or 'places of manifestation' of the divine Real (*al-Haqq*) – a technical term synonymous with the Qur'anic expression *tajallī* (Q. 7:143) or 'unveiled revealing' of the divine Bride/Beauty/Beloved.

15. Apparently identified with the 'ayn or 'individual-essence' of the preceding paragraph.

16. Here and throughout his works, Ibn 'Arabi draws a fundamental distinction between all of creation/manifestation as a kind of divine 'Imaging-forth' (*khayāl*) of the Names and Attributes, and the more fallible and problematic human faculty of 'imagination' (*mutakhayyila*), summarized here in the very last words of his answer to this Question 116: 'So know that the (divine) Imaging-forth (*khayāl*) is real-and-true (*haqq*). But as for human imagining (*takhayyul*), some of that is true and some is false.'

17. This expression for the divine 'Presence' (*Hadra*) becomes a key technical term referring to ontological (and cosmological/cosmogonic) levels of being and divine manifestation in later systematic accounts of Ibn 'Arabi's thought, based on the teachings of his disciple and stepson, Sadr al-Din Qunawi.

18. Or 'individual reality': see the double meaning of 'ayn here, explained at n.11 above.

So every lover does not love anything other than His self. And this is why the Real described His self (in the famous divine saying of the 'hidden Treasure')¹⁹ by saying that He 'loves' His manifestations. (This is so) even though in their essence (i.e., without God's Light/Being) those places of manifestation are non-existence ('*adam*'), while the (real underlying) connection of love is with What/Who appears, since He is the One Appearing (*al-zāhir*) in those manifestations. Therefore that relationship between the One Appearing and the manifestations is love. ...

Now God says, in more than one place of His Book/Writing,²⁰ out of gracious affection for His servants: 'O My servants, I have ardently longed for you all, and I am longing for you all more intensely (than you can imagine)!' – addressing them by sending down (His) hidden Grace and Affection. And none of this entire Address (i.e., both the words and the hidden realities of His Grace) could be firmly established about Him without His being a lover. And the like of this also proceeds from those who are loving Him. For the (true) lover is under the influence/rule (*hukm*) of Love, not that of the beloved. Because for someone whose particular attribute is (also) his essential reality, then it is his essence that rules him, not anything added to that.²¹

... Next, it is from His Generosity that He made this reality (of Love) to flow secretly through every possible individual-existent with the attribute of being – and He paired with that (reality of Love) a sweet joy (*ladhdha*) which has no other joy above it. Then He caused some (beings) of the world to love others with a restricted love (rooted in) the reality of absolute, unrestricted Love.

19. Ibn 'Arabi's paraphrase of this fundamental and celebrated *hadīth qudsī* has already been given in the penultimate paragraph of the earlier section on 'natural love'.

20. The following phrase is not literally from the Qur'an, although it may paraphrase verses such as 43:68 and 39:10 and 17, as well as a number of divine sayings, psalms or other scriptures. The Qur'anic phrase 'the Book/Writing' (*al-kitāb*) used here has many other possible meanings, including the 'Book' of all creation.

21. This is an allusion to the key concluding section of the central divine saying of the *hadīth al-nawāfil* or 'hadith of the Wali' cited at n.6 above.

So when it is said that 'so-and-so loves so-and-so', or that 'so-and-so loves some particular thing', that only means: what is appearing of the Real in this individual (*'ayn*) loves what appears of the Real in another individual, whatever that (manifest divine quality) may be. Thus the true lover of God (*muhibb Allāh*)²² does not deny or criticize regarding any lover his loving whoever he loves. For he does not see any lover but God, in whatever place of manifestation (that divine existentiating Love appears). But whoever does not have this divine Love does deny/criticize whoever is loving (whatever they themselves can't yet understand or experience). ...

... So all creation is beloved by God, forever and always. And inasmuch as love cannot be conceived together with the (self-subsistent) being of what is created, since what is created does not ever exist (without God), this reality means that what is created is (only) a place of manifestation for the Real, not What is manifest. Therefore whoever loves a person with this divine Love, their love for that person must be of this sort. It cannot be restricted by the imagination or by any (particular) sort of beauty (unlike the 'natural love' discussed above): for since all those things do exist for (the 'natural' beloved), this (divine) Love is not dependent on them.

Thus the fundamental Distinction (*furqān*) has become clear between the three levels with regard to love. So know that the (divine) Imaging-forth (*khayāl*) is real-and-true (*haqq*). But as for human imagining (*takhayyul*), some of that is true and some is false.

22. This expression is alluding to the famous 'Group' (*qawm*) of the 'Friends of God' discussed at n.5 above, who are distinguished by their 'not fearing the blame of any blamer' (and by extension, of not 'blaming' or criticizing any of God's creation. Thus they alone are truly lovers/knowers of *all* the divine Names/qualities in creation, without any restriction: i.e., lovers of the 'All-Inclusive Name' (*ism al-jāmi'*, Allāh), rather than being lovers of only the 'Names of Beauty' or of only those Names which happen to correspond to the momentary aims of their particular carnal self (*nafs*).

Question 117: What is the 'Cup of Love'?²³

It is the heart²⁴ of the lover, not his intellect nor his senses. For the heart is constantly turning over from one state to another, just as God – Who is the Beloved – is 'every Day in a (new) affair' (Q. 55:29). So the lover is constantly transforming in the connection²⁵ of his love, according to the transformations of the beloved in his actions – just like the clear, pure glass cup which is transformed along with the transformations of the liquid residing in it. So the 'color' (state) of the lover is the color of his beloved – and only the heart is like this! For the (limited human) intellect is from the world of restriction, which is why it is called (in Arabic) '*aql*', from '*iqāl*' ('hobbling'). And sensation, as we all know directly, is also from the world of restriction, unlike the heart.

That is because Love has a great many different and opposing qualities and influences (*ahkām*), so they can only be received by whoever has the power to be transformed along with Love, through those different qualities. And only the heart has that power.

So if you connect this (constant transformation of the heart by its 'contents') to God, then that (is evident) in His saying: 'I respond to the calling of the one who calls whenever he calls on Me' (Q. 2:186); and (the reference in the famous divine saying) that God does not come running until *you* do (walk toward Him); and (in another famous divine saying) 'Whoever remembers Me in himself/his soul, I remember Him in Myself'. Indeed all of the revelation (*al-shar'*), or most of it, is related to this!

Thus the (lover's divine) 'drink' is whatever is actually there in the 'cup' (of the heart). For we have just shown (in the preceding

23. *Fut.* II.113–114.

24. For the comprehensive nature and infinite transformations (*taqallub*) of the Qur'anic 'Heart' (*qalb*) as the locus of all forms and levels of human awareness and perception, see the discussion at the beginning of Chapter 2 of *The Reflective Heart* (Louisville, KY, 2005).

25. *Ta'alluq*: i.e., what that love is (for the most part unconsciously) attached to or conditioned by.

Question) that the cup is precisely the place-of-manifestation ('*ayn al-mazhar*'), while the drink is precisely Who-is-manifest ('*ayn al-zāhir*') in it. And the drink is what is actually occurring from the Self-manifesting One to that (person) in whom He is manifest. So know that, in this summary expression!

**Question 118: Where does (that Drink of Love)
Come From?²⁶**

The answer is that it comes from His Self-manifestation (*tajallīhi*) in His Name 'The Beautiful'. (The Prophet) said: 'Surely God is Beautiful, and He loves beauty.' And this is an established hadith.

So He described Himself as loving beauty and He loves the world,²⁷ for there is nothing more beautiful than the world: it is beautiful, and beauty is beloved by its very essence. So the whole world is loving God, and the beauty of what He has made is flowing inwardly throughout His creation, and the world *is* His manifestations. Therefore the love of some (parts) of the world for others proceeds from God's Love of Himself. For Love is an attribute of being,²⁸ and there is nothing in being but God.

Now Majesty and Beauty, for God, are descriptive of His Essence in Itself and of what He has made (in creation).²⁹ So the awe (*hayba*) which is an effect of (His) Majesty and the intimate

26. *Fut.* II.114.

27. *Al-‘ālam*: here (as throughout Ibn 'Arabi's works) this word normally refers to *all* the knowable dimensions of creation and existence, not just the material or sensible realms.

28. *Wujūd*: as always in Ibn 'Arabi's own writings, *wujūd* also has more existential, human resonances of its related meanings of 'ecstasy' and 'finding': i.e., of the 'ecstatic finding' or realization of one's own true being and Source.

29. *Jalāl* and *Jamāl*: from an early period these two terms were used in Islamic theology to refer broadly to the contrast, among the endless divine Names (both of the Essence and of God's 'Actions' manifest in all of creation), between those Names and Attributes which appear to human beings as either intrinsically beautiful and likeable or on the contrary as awesome and fearful.

affection (*uns*) which is an effect of Beauty are both qualities of what is created, not of the Creator, and He is not described by them. For only what is existent (*mawjūd*) can experience awe and intimate affection – yet nothing is existent but God! So the effect is (ultimately) identical to the (divine) Attribute, and the Attribute is not separable from whatever is described by it, at the moment it is described by it. Indeed the Attribute is identical to whatever is described (by it) – so if you think about it more deeply, there is no Lover and no Beloved other than God. So there is nothing in being but the divine Presence,³⁰ which is His Essence, His Attributes and His Actions. ...

So part of His knowing His Essence is (that) the Knowers of God³¹ know of/from God what the intellects cannot know through (even) their soundly reasoned thinking. This knowing is what they say is 'beyond the level of the intellect'. God said of His servant Khidr: 'and We caused him to know a knowing from Our Presence' (Q. 18:65). And He said: '[He created the human being (*insān*).] He caused him to know the (divine) Communication (*al-bayān*)' (Q. 5:44) – so He referred His causing (human beings) to know to *His* (inspiration of them), not to (their) thinking.

Thus He caused us to know that there is another station (*maqām*) above thinking that gives to the servant a knowing of various things. Among these things are what may (also) be perceived by means of thinking. And among them are things

30. *Al-hadra al-ilāhiyya*: the Arabic expression might be more precisely translated as 'the Presence of the (All-Inclusive) Name *Allāh*' – since Ibn 'Arabi usually understands that particular Name to refer to the ensemble of *all* the particular divine Names and Attributes, an expression which therefore includes (as he explicitly points out here) those that are dimensions of the divine Essence as well as all God's qualities and expressions manifested in all the realms of creation.

31. *Al-'ulamā' bi'llāh*: this distinctive technical term of Ibn 'Arabi's – roughly equivalent to his more common expression of the '*urafā*' (sing. '*ārif*'), or true spiritual 'Knowers' – refers to those perfected souls and Friends of God (*awliyā'*) who know 'God', or the divine Presence in all its levels and manifestations, together *with* and *through* God, as described in the famous hadith of the supererogatory works (n. 6 above).

that thinking declares as conceivable, even though that intellect cannot acquire them through thinking. And also other things that thinking declares as conceivable, even though thinking cannot define or specify them. And among them are things that are impossible according to thinking, so that the intellect receives them from (our) thinking as impossible to exist, such that they cannot be included in what is shown to be possible. Yet this intellect comes to know them *from God* as actually and truly existing and not impossible at all – even though (that person) doesn't stop calling them 'impossible' and considering them to be impossible according to the intellect!

(The Prophet) said that among (our kinds of) knowing is what is like the form of something hidden, which is only known by the Knowers of/with/through God. So when those (Knowers) express that, no one denies that but the people who are heedless of God.³² In addition to this, there is knowing which is beneath (i.e., incapable of) verbal articulation. So 'what makes you suspect'³³ the knowing that those (Knowers) possess (given them by God), which is beyond what can be included among what can be verbally articulated? For not every kind of knowing can be verbally articulated or formulated – such as everything that is known by experiential 'tasting'.³⁴

So there is nothing more knowing than the intellect, and nothing more ignorant than the intellect. For the intellect is always something 'acquired' (yet unaware that it is not itself the source of all it knows): so it is the knower who does not know what it (actually) knows, and the ignorant one whose ignorance has no end.

32. We have been unable to locate the particular hadith that is paraphrased here.

33. Alluding to Q. 37:87, where this phrase begins Abraham's pointed questioning of the unexamined polytheistic beliefs of his father.

34. '*Ulūm al-adhwāq*: see the translation of Ibn 'Arabi's key opening discussion of these different levels and kinds of 'knowing' in 'How to Study the *Futūhāt*: Ibn 'Arabi's Own Advice', pp.73–89 in *Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi: A Commemorative Volume*, ed. S. Hirtenstein and M. Tiernan (Shaftesbury/Rockport, Element Books, 1993).

Question 119: What is the Drink of Love for you, such that it intoxicates you (into unawareness) of your love for Him?³⁵

... The answer is that the drink of His Love for you is His loving for you that you (should) love Him. So if you love Him, then you know – when you have drunk the drink of His love for you – that your love for Him is precisely His love for you! Then (realizing His love for you) has intoxicated you into unawareness of your love for Him, despite your feeling that you do love Him, so you don't distinguish (between the two aspects of this love).

This (overwhelming awareness of His love) is the (divine) Self-manifestation of inner knowing (of God: *tajallī al-ma'rifa*), since the lover is not ever a knower.³⁶ Nor is the knower ever a lover. That is how the lover is distinguished from the knower, and knowing is distinguished from loving. So His love for you (when it is fully experienced) intoxicates you from your loving Him: that is the drink of 'wine' (offered to Muhammad, along with drinks of milk or water) which – if the Messenger of God had drunk it on the night of his heavenly journey – would have led astray the common people of (this) community.

But your love for Him does *not* intoxicate you from (experiencing) His love for you: that (combination of both) is the drink of 'milk' which the Messenger of God drank on the night of his heavenly journey. Through that God bestowed upon him 'the primordial balance (*al-fitra*) with which God endowed all the creatures/creation' (Q. 30:30), so that his community might be rightly guided through tasting it and drinking it; for (that balance) is a divine protection and safeguard. (Through that choice) it knew what was its part and what was His part, in the (conjoined) states of sobriety and intoxication.

35. *Fut.* II.114–115.

36. That is, to clarify the Shaykh's intentionally paradoxical formulation here, the lover is 'intoxicated' and lost in his or her love for the Beloved – while the knower is submerged and lost in their awareness of the Beloved's love for them. But the following discussion makes clear that both these conditions must ideally be brought back into a balance of awareness and actively expressed and responsible love, which is the true human condition and potential (*fitra*).

Now the drink of His love for you is the knowledge that your love for Him is from His love for you.³⁷ So when you are unaware of your love for Him (because you are 'drunk' with His love for you), then you are a lover who is not (aware that he is) a lover...!

* * *

SOME FINAL WORDS ON LOVE AS COSMIC DESIRE (*HAWĀ*)

In his remarkable concluding summary (in Chapter 559) of the inner meanings or 'divine mysteries' (*asrār*) of Chapters 262 and 263 in the *Futūhāt*,³⁸ Ibn 'Arabi turns to the absolute centrality in the Path of the divine creative Compassion of human love, passion and desire – all of which are subsumed here (Ch. 559) in the complex Qur'anic term *hawā* (*erōs*), which was often understood, in his own cultural setting, as in itself a moral defect or fault in human beings that must somehow be eliminated or overcome in order for the human intellect to exercise its proper control. That dualistic, often ascetically conceived assumption regarding human love and desire – particularly visible in both popular religious ethics and various idealistic philosophical schools of thought – is heatedly and sometimes paradoxically called into question here, in dramatic passages that clearly foreshadow the similarly paradoxical portrayal of God as '*ishq* – as passionate, overwhelming Love (an even more powerful expression than *hawā*) – in the later generations of celebrated mystical poets in Persian, Turkish, Urdu, Malay and many other traditions of the Islamic humanities.

* * *

37. I.e., the balanced state lies in sober awareness of our love for God, and of all the duties and obligations that entails – an awareness which is, however, itself inseparable from the 'drunken' state of intimate knowing of God's love for us and all His creation.

38. Chapter 262: On the Inner Knowing of the *Sharī'a*; Chapter 263: On the Inner Knowing of the Ultimate Reality (*al-Haqīqa*).

Love as Cosmic Desire
(from *al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*, Chapter 559)³⁹

... And from that is the veiling of the (divine) Unique⁴⁰ in Chapter 262.

The intellect is hobbled⁴¹ by the One who hobbled it, and so it is a veil – because it is not able to roam and move freely, even by an inch! It is a bridle/restraint tied to created existence (*al-kawn*).

But Love (*hawā*)⁴² is unfettered and roaming freely, as we clearly witness. Love leads whoever follows it astray from the pathway of God, but *not* from God. Since it pervades the whole entirety of God's 'Dominion' (*Malakūt*), it 'is in God's Hand' (Q. 23:88; 36:83).⁴³ If the matter (*al-amr*: the intrinsic 'Order'

39. *Fut.* IV.382.

40. Literally, 'the Odd-numbered' (One), *al-Witr*, referring to universal 'veiling' of God's intimate presence beneath the multiplicity of the creatures, just as the multiplicity of the souls' paths (Ch. 262) veils their dependence on the divine Reality (Ch. 263).

41. Throughout his writings, Ibn 'Arabi repeatedly discusses the inherent limitations of the partial, unilluminated intellect ('*aqī*; also often symbolized by the dangerously limited reasoning of Iblīs) in terms of its original Arabic root meaning of 'hobbling' or tying down and delimiting.

42. *Hawā*, the central subject of both these chapters, is translated here as 'Love' or longing – as in its common poetic usage – although here that familiar poetic term is understood far more broadly as the fundamental, *primordial* desire that characterizes and keeps in motion all the creatures – much like the divine '*ishq* celebrated by all the Persian and other mystical poets of later Islamic civilization, or *erōs* in Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*. Moreover, in its Qur'anic usage the unruliness and wild, unbounded influences of human *hawā* – often leading people 'to make it a god' for them – are often contrasted negatively with the proper bounds of divine knowing and right guidance. Ibn 'Arabi's treatment in both these chapter summaries is clearly meant to be somewhat paradoxical and counter-intuitive for those of his religious and more ascetic readers who would normally think of *hawā* as something intrinsically negative and to be strictly avoided (or indeed to be somehow avoidable!). This centrality of *hawā* in both divine creation and human love is more briefly developed in Chapter 24 of the *Fusūs al-Hikam*, on the wisdom of Aaron.

43. Both these famous verses emphasize that God's 'Kingly Possession' or royal 'Dominion' includes '*every thing*', including all the creatures and

governing all creation) were not thus, God would have harmed it. For if the Ruler were not seeking that by veiling (His omnipresence with all of creation), then it would not be connected with the Unique/'Odd'. But (instead), He is in Being the actual-essence of every existent thing. ...

Now Love has unfettered freedom and open permission, and It has a key for every Door. And He is the One who rules over Its opening (*fath*), which is why He is called 'The Opener' (*al-Fattāh*, Q. 34:26).⁴⁴ Its ruling power (*sultān*) is in both this world and the next – though It becomes (fully) manifest in the 'resurrected-state' (*al-hāfira*, Q. 79:10). For that Love, for the people of blessedness, is not 'a losing turn' (Q. 79:12), nor is it a fruitless trade, since 'There [in the life of this world and the next] for you all is whatever your souls desire' (Q. 41:31).⁴⁵ And 'desire' (*shahwa*) here is nothing other than that Love.

So 'whoever loves has already fallen' (*man hawā faqad hawiya*) – which is why they say of the madly passionate lover ('*āshiq*) that 'there is no way to (reach) him, even if he has gone astray from the way!'

events of both the material realm and all the higher spiritual realms, especially that of the creative divine Imagination (*khayāl*) – a world-view that is extensively developed in the actual Chapter 262, as throughout the many cosmological discussions elsewhere in the *Futūhāt*. Verse 23:88 continues: '... and He is protecting, while there is no protection against Him, if you only knew!'; while 36:83 concludes: '... and to Him you all are being returned'.

44. The key Arabic terms here – including 'Door' and *fath* (singular of the *Futūhāt* in the title of this work) – have a far-reaching metaphysical resonance and symbolic breadth that is not at all conveyed by the bare English translation. The cosmological context (as recalled in Chapter 262) is that of an immense universe populated with countless angelic and other spiritual beings and emissaries all moved by this same passionate Love (*hawā*) to open all of the cosmic 'Doors' and arrangements necessary for the primordial divine goal of supporting and sustaining the growth and eventual perfection of the fully human being (Adam/*insān*).

45. The context here (Q. 41:30–32) is the angels descending upon those who have faith and are upright and explaining to them (at the beginning of this same verse): 'We are your protecting friends (*awliyā*)' in the life of this world and the next...'

So from that (comes) the most manifest station of Self-Revealing at the moment of unveiling, in Chapter 263 (on the true understanding of the divine Reality).⁴⁶ At the moment of unveiling the minds and intellects go away – so that (unveiling) is for God's Friends (*awliyā'*) and Knowers and Lovers.

The right of Love is that Love be the cause of love;
for if Love were not in the heart, the heart would not
worship/serve Love.⁴⁷

For there is nothing there (in existence) other than Love. So the (divine) Order is *Its* Order. The intellect is in need of It, and (the intellect is only) a servant standing before It. Love has full freedom and authority and uprightness – and (the capacity for) turning away from what (the intellect) enjoins. When the intellect overestimates its knowledge, it favors its own discursive thinking over Love. But as for (religious) tradition (*naql*), only the *name* (*hawā*) has veiled It from the hearts.⁴⁸ So there is nothing there but Love's decree and Its ruling influence.

The intellect ('*aql*) is only named so because of its
hobbling constraint (*ta'aqqul*);
and Love (*hawā*) is only so called because of its
ever-triumphing power.

For Love is a (divine) attribute, and God knows It:
It leads off from the highway of divine-prescription,
swerving aside.

46. Chapter 263 discusses the movement – or rather, the culminating moment of transformation and realization – when the divine 'Path' reveals the Reality (*haqīqa*) of its underlying nature, source and goal, symbolized by the culminating moment of full 'unveiling' of the divine Bride.

47. And: ..., Love would not worship/serve.

48. I.e., the many Qur'anic verses criticizing people for following the inclinations of their *hawā*, against their own better knowledge or divine strictures, have given *hawā* a 'bad name' – for those who have not examined more closely its true nature and wider role and implications.

Love is the (divine) Will – I speak directly – yet you are
unaware of that!

Were it not for Love, Satan [dominated by intellect alone]
would not be assailed with envy.

For the intellect must forego this station (of Love),
since it has no entry there. So regard it closely,
o my support!

Love has influences that no one even knows:
It rules and governs over the Spirits and the body.

The minds fear Love's authority:
It is the trusted guardian to whom the country
has been assigned.