Sufi Cosmology

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Abbreviations

AS	*Asiatische Studien*
BSOAS	*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*
EI1	*The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. T. Houtsma et al., 5 vols., Leiden: Brill, 1913–34.
EI2	*The Encyclopaedia of Islam: New Edition*, ed. H. A. R. Gibb et al., 12 vols., Leiden: Brill, 1954-2004.
EI3	*The Encyclopaedia of Islam: THREE*, ed. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, and Everett Rowson, Leiden: Brill, 2007–, online publication.
EIr	*Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater et al., Bibliotheca Persica Press, 1985–, online publication.
EQ	*The Encyclopedia of the Qurʾān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe et al., 6 vols., Leiden: Brill, 2001–2006.
IOS	*Israel Oriental Studies*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JIS	*Journal of Islamic Studies*
JMIAS	*Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabi Society*
JRAS	*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*
JQS	*Journal of Qurʾanic Studies*
MW	*The Muslim World*
SEP	*The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta et al., Metaphysics Research Lab, Philosophy Department, Stanford University, 1999–, online publication.

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Introduction: What Is Sufi Cosmology?

Christian Lange and Alexander Knysh

1 Theoretical Frameworks for Studying Sufi Cosmology

This volume examines Sufi teachings about the origin, development, and final destination of the cosmos, the various realms that constitute it, and the fate of humankind in this cosmological order. Sufi cosmology is understood here to include notions of space as well as of time. In other words, Sufi cosmological thinking describes the major spatial dimensions of the cosmos, in particular, its division into the sublunar world of the here-and-now (*al-dunyā*) and the various imagined celestial and transcendent spheres of the otherworld (*al-ākhira*). It also reflects on the cosmos' origin in time, the meaning of the present, and the events of the end of time.

Sufi cosmological thought is rooted in the experience of Muslim mystical seekers, who map their spiritual and soteriological concerns onto the cosmic space-time continuum, often in striking, original ways. In this volume, cosmology is approached from the vantage point of ascetically and mystically minded individuals with a view to understanding how and why they create, maintain, and transmit to others their visions of the cosmos and its structural units. It is useful to relate this approach to the broader "spatial turn" in the humanities and to the spatial study of religion in particular (Knott). While much of the academic work inspired by this "spatial turn" has focused on concrete architectural and urban spaces, the imagined cosmologies of religious communities also fall within this category. As a popular textbook on the spatial study of religion puts it, "imagined spaces … represent a crucial part of adherents' worldviews in a cosmographic sense," because they signify, in spatial terms, the ultimate parameters of the individual's destiny in this world and the world to come (Stump, 345–6). It is precisely this ultimate character of religious cosmologies that makes their study so compelling.

In the spatial study of religion, one can discern two basic modes of inquiry. The first focuses on the meaning-making and orientational function of space; the second emphasizes that space is a function of cultural, social, and political capital, that is, of power. Concerning the former, meaning-making aspect, Charles Long has memorably declared that religion is "orientation in the ultimate sense, that is, how one comes to terms with one's place in the world" (Long, 7). In a similar vein, Marshall Hodgson, a colleague of Long's at the University of Chicago, described Islam as "a *life-orientational* experience …

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focused on the role of a *person in an environment felt as cosmos*" (Hodgson, 1:362 [italics in the original]). Cosmology is the intellectual conceptualization of this "environment felt as cosmos." As such, it fulfils a dual function: it provides a sense of personal and communal belonging in the world but also a possible direction for change. It affords an anchor-point in space as well as a spatial *telos* for human existence. It expresses a view of history, of how the present is positioned between the past and the future, while also furnishing a vision of how to transcend time.

These twin aspects of "dwelling" and "crossing" are at the core of Thomas Tweed's spatial theory of religion. Religious cosmologies, Tweed argues, help their adherents to find a home in the cosmos. However, they "are not only about being in place but also about moving across" (Tweed, 123). They offer "representations of the ultimate horizon and the means of crossing it," thereby promising to transport adherents to a different realm of existence, while also transforming them spiritually (Tweed, 151–2). Approaching our topic from Tweed's vantage point, we can identify examples of Sufi traditions of spiritual homemaking in this world, as well as excellent studies of this phenomenon. Thus, Samer Akkach eloquently describes how in the Akbarian tradition, derived from the Andalusian mystical thinker Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), everything in the cosmos is "carefully positioned" in a "holistic conception" of the universe, reflected in a meticulously conceived analogy between the human body, architecture, and the cosmos. This perception of the universe, according to Akkach, manifests itself in a specific "spatial sensibility" that he attributes to Sufi Islam in the pre-modern epoch (Akkach, xxi). As Hellmut Ritter has observed, "fully developed monism is to a certain extent static" (Ritter, 631). Indeed: if, as the Arabic axiom has it, "there is nothing in existence except God" (*laysa fī l-wujūd illā llāh*), there is no need to cross an "ultimate horizon" to find Him. In Ritter's formulations (that he, in his turn, derives from his Sufi sources), the world is variously conceived as "God's light," "the talisman by which He is known and experienced," "His changing robe," "His shadow and reflection," or "one drop from the ocean of Being" (Ritter, 625–7).

At the same time, the notion that the world of the here-and-now is distant from God, that it is ephemeral and something that should be discarded or left behind, also resonates strongly throughout the centuries of Sufi thought. For many Sufi thinkers, the idea is central that the pious wayfarers (Arab. *sālikūn*, sing. *sālik*) journey through space and time, upwards and inwards, towards a more advanced spiritual state and greater knowledge. Thus, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) declared that the world is but a bridge that one should cross, not a building site to construct one's house on. Likewise, in ʿAṭṭār's (d. 627/1230) opinion, the world is a caravanserai, into which one enters through one gate

and which one exits through another (Ritter, 47). In other words, while Sufis are anxious to emphasize God's immanence, they are, at the same time, heavily invested in the concept of "crossing." Sufi cosmology serves them as a spiritual-intellectual navigation map, or, to use Tweed's term, a teleography.

As we have noted above, the second mode of approaching the issue of religious space and time, real or imagined, stresses the factor of power, namely, how space and time are configured to reproduce asymmetric relationships of authority, influence, and control, regardless of whether these relationships obtain between or within religious communities. In line with this approach, the authors of the present volume describe and analyze the nexus between cosmological and this-worldly hierarchies, in particular, how the process of building a hierarchy of realms of existence often implies the parallel construction of a hierarchy of knowledge and of knowers here and now. Cosmology, in this view, is a discourse that not only enables but also coerces individuals and their communities to locate themselves in time and in space. As Jonathan Z. Smith and other scholars of religion have reminded us, cosmological spaces are human not divine work. It is people's ritual practices and meaning-making efforts that produce the sacred, thereby opening up a possibility for transition from quotidian to sacred space (Smith, 98, 101). Any religious identity, including Sufi, results not only from how one situates oneself in relation to the cosmos, but also from how one is situated in the cosmos by others. This being-situated is the work of Sufi institutions, broadly understood as "the setting[s] in which Sufis experience and consider their mystical life in relation to the societies in which they are embedded" (Papas, 13).

The present handbook of Sufi cosmology, which is part of Brill's *Handbooks of Sufi Studies*, is therefore a natural segue from its predecessor, the *Handbook of Sufi Institutions* edited by Alexandre Papas. Whereas the latter focuses on the quotidian aspects of Sufi life in Muslim and non-Muslim societies, the present volume explores the imaginative and theoretical underpinnings of the Sufi universe. Being accepted and occasionally revered by their societies, fed, housed, and clad, was not enough for the majority of Sufis. Their leaders have been hard at work infusing everyday existence of Sufi communities (as well as their own personal lives) with a higher or even transcendent significance—because human beings, especially spiritual and pious ones, such as Sufis, follow in the footsteps of Christian ascetics-mystics by not living "by bread alone" (Gospel of Matthew, 4:4), convinced as they are that "life is more than food, and the body more than clothes" (Gospel of Luke, 12:23). By severing themselves from the good things and comforts of this life, they seek a far greater spiritual reward in the higher reaches of existence adjacent to God's heavenly presence (Nicholson, 36–9).

The task of giving a loftier sense to human life and transposing it to a superior and transcendent plane implies the construction of a parallel universe filled with supernatural beings, allusive and elusive events, and symbols accessible to visitors through dreams and veridical visions. The constant interplay of this imaginary universe and its empirical counterpart reflects the Weltanschauung and self-perception of the mystically minded men and women of a given epoch in a given location.

2 Genealogical and Comparative Aspects

As the chapters of this book demonstrate, Sufis constructed their cosmologies not from scratch but with the building blocks that they had inherited from their civilizational and religious predecessors, especially ancient Greeks, Romans, and Persians, as well as their fellow "people of the book," the Jews and Christians of the Middle East. There are also important parallels between ancient Zoroastrian cosmology and Sufi cosmologies. According to the Pahlavi *Bundahishn*, a text from the Sassanian period with traces of older, Avestan teachings, in the first of three ages of the cosmos, the highest deity Ohrmazd dwelt on high, in the realm of pure light, whereas his nemesis Ahriman resided in the dark depths of the earth. Then Ahriman began to wage war on the luminous world, which led to an admixture of light and darkness, goodness and evil. This titanic struggle ushered in the age of human history in which we live. At the end of the period of trials caused by this admixture, however, the separation of evil from good will take place, and the renovation (Pahl. *frashegird*) of the cosmos will begin, while time will come to an end. In the *Bundahishn*, one also finds a motif that later proved central to Sufi cosmology, namely, the macrocosm/microcosm analogy. The earth, the *Bundahishn* states, was created "in the semblance of a man" (Kreyenbroek). It should be noted, however, that the idea of the universe as a giant replica of the human being is also present in Greek thought (e.g., Democritus of Abdera, d. c. 370 BCE), from where it may have reached Muslim authors such as the Brethren of Purity (writing around the fourth/tenth century). Zoroastrian eschatology also shows significant overlap with Muslim teachings, including the idea of the punishment of the grave, the interim state between death and resurrection (*barzakh*), the embodiment of good and bad deeds as personae in the afterlife, the bridge of judgment (*ṣirāṭ*), the scales of good and bad deeds (*mīzān*), and more (Akbar; Halevi; Lange).

In the Qurʾān, there are echoes of Zoroastrian notions, but Qurʾānic cosmology is rooted more clearly in ancient Near Eastern traditions and in the

biblical literature, while also introducing a novel stress on the entanglement of history and eternity, this world and the next (Lange, 67–70; Neuwirth). The Qurʾān pictures the cosmos as an enormous tent, built on the flat earth. The roof of this cosmic tent is the firmament, which rests on mountains, serving as pegs (*awtād*, Q 78:8). One ascends to the firmament by ladders (Q 70:3) or using sky-ropes (*asbāb al-samawāt*, Q 40:36) that hold the tent in place. God's Throne (*ʿarsh*, Q 9:129, 2:255) and His High Council (*al-malāʾ al-aʿlā*, Q 37:6–10) are located above the firmament, past the gates of heaven (Q 7:40). In general, however, the Qurʾān does not include cosmogonic or cosmological sections as detailed or coherent as the ones found in the two Genesis reports in the Bible. The Qurʾān, rather, expects its audience to be already familiar with the story of God's creation of the world in six days (mentioned in Q 7:54, 50:38), the division of the universe into the seven heavens (Q 41:11–12, 67:3) and the seven layers of the earth (Q 65:12), and the waters surrounding the world that are held back by a barrier (*barzakh*, Q 55:19–20). Far more important for Sufi cosmology is the cosmogonic myth of the primordial covenant between God and humankind, the moment of "Am I not?" (*a-last*, Q 7:172), discussed in several chapters of this volume.

In the formative period of Islam, cosmological thought developed along two axes, the first deriving from the Greek philosophical-scientific tradition, the other depending more directly on the biblical-Qurʾānic model. This dicephalic Muslim tradition of cosmology is mirrored in the history of Late Antique Christian thought. For example, Christian thinkers in the Alexandrian tradition, such as Jacob of Edessa (d. 708) and Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286), taught that before the creation of the sensible world, God created spiritual beings, that is, the angels—a theory of "double creation" that goes back to Origen of Alexandria (d. c. 253) and his notion of preexisting spiritual intelligences (Gr. ψυχαί). By contrast, thinkers of the Antiochean tradition, such as Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373) and Jacob of Sarug (d. 521), as well as Nestorian thinkers such as Narsai of Nisibis (d. 502), stressed that God's creation was physical, and they developed, especially in their commentaries on Genesis 1, a "phantastic-rational" cosmology that overlaps in significant ways with the cosmology found in later Muslim universal histories (Radtke, 167–8, 211–14; see also Fahd; Heinen).

Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy, especially its theory of the stepped emanation of the universe from a transcendent source of life and goodness, has proved to be a particularly suitable building block for Sufi cosmologies. This is not to say that Platonism and its Hellenistic interpretations were the only game in town, so to speak, but they have definitely fascinated the Sufi intellectual elites both in Sunnī and Shīʿī societies until today (Knysh, 124–36;

Sedgwick, 30–47). Using Platonic and Neoplatonic ideas, Sufi thinkers have created a multilayered universe that, on the one hand, features parallels between the structure of the cosmos and the composition of the human body (the macrocosm-microcosm analogy, see above), and, on the other, mirrors the Sufi hierarchy of possessors of the divinely revealed knowledge and insight accessible only to God's elect. Endowed with the superhumanly developed faculty of imagination, Sufi knowers (*ʿārifūn*) claim to be able to reach the highest levels of this multilevel universe or even undertake a spiritually enriching otherworldly journey similar to the one that Q 17:1 attributes to the Prophet Muḥammad. After an audience with the spirits of the prophets and saints, who inhabit these higher circles of existence, these spiritual travelers are said to return to their earthly life suffused with a new, divinely bestowed knowledge (*maʿrifa*) and wisdom (*ḥikma*) to share it piecemeal with their followers or to commit it to writing, thereby contributing to the growth and elaboration of Sufi cosmology, gnoseology, and soteriology.

3 Major Themes and Units of This Volume

The chapters of this volume discuss Sufi thinking about the cosmos under three rubrics: first, cosmogony and eschatology (i.e., asking and answering the questions "where do we come from?" and "where do we go?"); secondly, conceptualizations of the world of here-below (i.e., asking and answering the question "where are we now?"); and, thirdly, visualizations of various cosmological realms of being, their hierarchy and mutual relationships (i.e., asking and answering the question "where are we in relation to other times and places?").

Part 1 explores cosmogony, that is, theories about the coming-into-existence of the world, and of its human inhabitants. This section includes conceptualizations of the aforementioned "primordial covenant" between God and humankind (*mīthāq*, or the moment of *a-last*, Q 7:172). It also examines paradigmatic cosmogonic myths salient in the Sufi tradition, such as God's division of created beings into different classes (angels, jinn, humans, animals, plants) and the respective existential realms that they populate. In this context, the question of which entity God created first is particularly topical. In later Sufi thought, focused as it was on the figure of the Prophet as the exemplary worshipper, this primordial entity was often identified as the "Muḥammadan Reality" (*ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya*) or the "Muḥammadan Light" (*nūr Muḥammadī*). In this way, the popular veneration of the Prophet acquired a cosmogonic dimension.

The second section of Part 1 deals with Sufi views of history and general notions of time and space. In Ashʿarī-Māturīdī theology (*kalām*), the dominant stream of theological thought in the Sunnī world, time is conceived as a series of disparate instants, each brought into being by God, who has complete control over the universe (Böwering; Griffel, 124–7). This idea is also central to Sufi thought (Ritter, 616), and the notion that the eternal God creates, and is present in, every moment also undergirds Sufi conceptualizations of the present moment (*waqt*) as a never-ending now experienced differently by different mystics. However, God is also the master of the final, eschatological Hour (*al-sāʿa*, see Q 7:187). Sufi authors have developed several modes of conceptualizing the events of the grave, of the resurrection on Judgement Day, and of paradise and hell. As the chapters in the third and final section of Part 1 demonstrate, opinions were divided over more than one issue, including the question whether the true reality (*ḥaqīqa*) of the afterlife is corporeal, immaterial, imaginal, or all of these things combined, and whether the moment of "returning" to God happens before or after death. The ability to experience death before death is attributed to God's elect servants (*al-khāṣṣa*; *al-awliyāʾ*), in accordance with the widely cited Sufi injunction to "die before you die" (*mūtū qabla an tamūtū*). Their followers see them as the ones who have spiritually died in respect to this world, while physically remaining in it.

Part 2 focuses on Sufi understandings of the world of the here-and-now. It begins by asking how notions of world-renunciation in early Sufism are related to ascetic self-effacement and self-mortification, and how they evolved across the centuries. Early Islamic renunciation of the world (*al-zuhd fī l-dunyā*) implied not merely an ascetic practice of abstention from its comforts, but also an inward attitude that belittled or denigrated the world, while at the same time curtailing the renunciant's hope (*qiṣar al-amal*) for better things and, ultimately, even renouncing renunciation itself (*al-zuhd fī l-zuhd*). Next to the more extreme varieties of *zuhd*, however, there also emerged a "mild asceticism" (Hurvitz), which opened the door for less uncompromising but pious individuals to join the circle of Sufi fellowship.

Part 2 of the volume also addresses Sufi reflections on God's manifestations (*maẓāhir*) and self-disclosures (*tajalliyyāt*) in the spiritual and material realms of sensible existence, in accordance with the oft-cited divine saying (*ḥadīth qudsī*): "I was a hidden treasure, so I wanted to be known; therefore I created the world so that I might be known." Sufi thought taps into a rich Qurʾānic theology of divine "signs" (*āyāt*) that reveal themselves to human observers in the natural world (Abrahamov). In the most encompassing, monistic variant of this theme, Sufis claim to be able to see *all* of nature as being engaged

in constant praise of its creator—with obvious ecological consequences for modern environmental thought. These positive Sufi evaluations of the created world have facilitated the development of Sufi sacred topographies, usually with the sanctuary (*ḥaram*) of Mecca at the cosmological center of the world, and the myriad Sufi shrines in the Muslim world functioning as the *ḥaram*'s local instantiations.

However, it is also, and importantly, the presence of the saints, both alive and dead, that makes these shrines "places of manifestation" (*maẓāhir*) of divine grace (*baraka*). The world, in other words, is infused with divine grace by virtue of the corporeal presence in it of the Sufi friends of God (*awliyāʾ*). This idea is expressed in another variant of the "hidden treasure" tradition: "I was a hidden treasure, so I wanted to be known; therefore I created the human beings and the jinn so that they know Me." Thus, in certain strands of Sufi thought, the entire natural world incessantly bears witness to God's power and glory. However, certain places on the earth offer privileged access to God and His beneficial grace. In a similar vein, Sufi authors state that God's attributes can reveal themselves in any human being, thereby fulfilling his or her potential to be a "perfect human being" (*insān kāmil*)—a notion intimately related to the micro-macrocosm theory. Like the privileged sites of divine presence, such as Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem, certain divinely chosen individuals serve as embodiments, par excellence, of God's presence and conduits of His grace to His servants. Unlike physical shrines and temples, they are capable of moving, thereby spreading this presence and grace far and wide. In sum, the Sufi view of the world of the here-and-now is predicated not only on the belief in God's presence in sacred spaces, but also on the devotion shown to Sufi saints by ordinary believers who see in them God's human representatives.

Part 3 of this volume focuses more closely on the cosmological hierarchy of God's friends (saints) and spiritual beings. The chapters in the first section of Part 3 deal with Sufi traditions of dividing the cosmos into levels of different degrees of proximity to God. They discuss, among other things, the widely held and used division of the cosmos into the realm of dominion (*mulk*), angelic realm (*malakūt*), and realm of divine omnipotence (*jabarūt*). This section also includes less widespread versions of this division, such as those that include the realm of human nature (*nāsūt*) and the realm of divinity (*lāhūt*), brought to prominence by al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922) and a few other Sufis. With Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), whose name looms large throughout this volume, the original Sufi doctrine of various levels of existence (*marātib al-wujūd*) becomes increasingly complex. Later Sufi writers add more and more details to this classic multilayered model so that, in the end, its Neoplatonic origins grow increasingly obscure due to the creative use by later authors of Islamic

concepts and terminology. However, these origins are still visible to a perceptive and erudite observer.

The chapters in the second section of Part 3 shift the focus to how Sufi thought came to depict human beings as travelers through these various levels and realms of existence. Their journeys happen not only involuntarily, after their death, but also, as some Sufi authors insist, by the Sufi's deliberate effort in this life as well. The modalities and ultimate extent of such cosmic "crossings" have been hotly debated in Sufi and Islamic thought. The grand model of spiritual progress, for Sufis, is the Prophet's ascension to the presence of God, his *miʿrāj*. To what extent could his journey be emulated, Sufis wondered. In an effort to answer this delicate question, Sufis came to postulate the existence of a third, interstitial world between the material sublunar realm and the spiritual domain of divine presence. Commonly called the World of Image (*ʿālam al-mithāl*), Ibn al-ʿArabī and his followers (*al-akbariyya*) also used the Qurʾānic term "isthmus" (*al-barzakh*, Q 23:99–100, 25:53, 55:99) to designate this semi-material and semi-spiritual realm. Access to it, as many Sufi authors have maintained, is made possible by means of the human faculty of imagination (*khayāl*), which is a distinguishing feature of spiritually advanced Sufi visionaries. Because, according to Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Akbariyya, the material world is itself a product of God's "creative imagination," we have a beautiful image of the human imagination unfolding within the divine one. This meeting of the two imaginations constitutes a unique, and fascinating, feature of the Akbarian Weltanschauung (Chittick, 112–24).

Let us now return to our initial question as to what constitutes Sufi cosmology. Without much hesitation, we can define it as mystical metaphysics, because it explains how God relates to, and interacts with, the sublunar world inhabited by human beings. However, Sufi cosmology is also a religious anthropology of sorts, because it enables Sufis to position themselves in the divinely designed cosmo-eschatological scheme of things and, in so doing, to find a spiritual home therein. Access to this lofty space is limited to Sufi friends of God and, through their spiritual powers, also to their followers. Sufi cosmology is also strongly soteriological, because it invites crossings from this world (*al-dunyā*) to the otherworld (*al-ākhira*), from the World of Witnessing (*ʿālam al-shahāda*) to the World of the Unseen (*ʿālam al-ghayb*), and from the knowledge of externals (*ʿilm al-ẓāhir*) to the knowledge of the inner meaning of reality (*ʿilm al-bāṭin*), which eludes the uninitiated. Such crossings are conceived by Sufi cosmologists to be possible not only after death, but also voluntarily and imaginatively during a Sufi's earthly life. This perception of the world reveals Sufism's abiding tendency toward interiorization and spiritualization of reality. The outer cosmos is reflected and finds its most vivid and authentic realization

in the inner cosmos of the soul. Cosmic crossings, therefore, happen by preference on the inside of the human being. They are performed in this world wittingly or unwittingly by Sufi travelers. The terms and images by which these crossings are described by Sufi authors are derived from the Qurʾān but can also be traced back conceptually to earlier philosophical traditions, especially Neoplatonism, as well as to the cosmologies of Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, and other religious communities of the Near East and beyond. In Sufi cosmologies, the examples of the Prophet and God's elect friends (saints) encourage human beings to rise and attain to the higher and richer levels of existence and knowledge of God and His creation. Simultaneously, Sufi cosmologies assert the spiritual and worldly authority of the Prophet and the saints as guides of ordinary believers toward the coveted goal of salvation and eternal bliss.

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PART 1

Sufi Cosmogony and Eschatology

Chapter 1

Cosmo-Eschatology in Sufi Thought and Practice

Noah Gardiner

> By God, He blows the spirit's breath into my mind, into my thought—the breath of Isrāfīl's last trumpet!
>
> al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922) (trans. Carl Ernst, 110)

1 Introduction

Sufi thought is suffused with images of death and spiritual realities beyond the world of the living. A common way of describing the Sufi path is as "the voluntary return" to God (*al-rujūʿ al-ikhtiyārī*)—this in distinction to the "compulsory return" (*al-rujūʿ al-iḍṭirārī*) that everyone undergoes upon physical death, as in the utterance upon news of someone's passing: "We belong to God and to Him we return" (*innā li-Llāhi wa-innā ilayhi rājiʿūn*). Thus it is said that to embark on the Sufi path is to learn to "die before you die," a process that begins when you submit to the tutelage of a *shaykh*. To this master you must be absolutely obedient, "like a corpse in the hands of a corpse-washer" (Ernst, *Sufism*, 124). Dying before you die is often taken as a metaphor for subduing the bodily and egoistic appetites, slaying the lower self (*al-nafs*). Certainly, it is that, but the phrase further implies a journey beyond the mundane world of the living and into the world of the Unseen (*ʿālam al-ghayb*). The latter is understood as a realm beyond normal human perception that encompasses numerous cosmic planes or phases: the sempiternity of pre-existence (*al-azaliyya*), the interstice between death and judgment (*al-barzakh*), the angelic realm (*al-malakūt*), the hereafter (*al-ākhira*), paradise (*al-janna*), hell (*jahannam*), and others. At once in and out of the space-time of the manifest world (*ʿālam al-shahāda*, *ʿālam al-mulk*) or herebelow (*al-dunyā*), the planes of the Unseen are vividly and variously depicted across the great swathe of Sufi theoretical and poetic literature, and an awareness of interacting with them suffuses Sufi ritual and ethical practice—as well as Muslim popular culture(s) generally (Morris, Situating). It is thus proper to speak of a Sufi cosmo-eschatology, a dimension of Sufi

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thought and practice deeply concerned with death and judgment not only as individual trials, but as ultimate mysteries that illuminate the very structure of the cosmos, the whole of which spins ineluctably toward dissolution and return to God.

1.1 *Sufism and Apocalypticism*

One route to understanding the prominence of cosmo-eschatology in Sufism begins with looking back to earlier religious discourses. In the long arc of Near Eastern and Mediterranean religious thought, eschatology and cosmology are most durably intertwined in the genre known to modern scholarship as "apocalyptic." Although, in common English usage, the term "apocalypse" is associated almost entirely with "the end of the world," scholars of religion, particularly of the Abrahamic variety, utilize a broader definition of apocalyptic literature and associated social movements as those concerned with the communication of divine secrets to humanity, especially secrets concerning transformations of the human body and soul, the natural and social worlds, and even space and time as a whole. This is to say that, while considerations of the "end of the world" feature prominently in apocalyptic texts and movements, revelations about divinely wrought transformations on a non-global scale can also fall within its remit (Collins). Much Sufi thought can fruitfully be considered apocalyptic in this broader sense. It is deeply concerned with the revelation of divine secrets, as evidenced by the diverse terminology for the extraordinary acquisition of knowledge by Sufi adepts and saints: *kashf* (unveiling), *dhawq* (tasting), *ilhām* (inspiration), *ʿilm ladunnī* (imparted knowledge, i.e. by God), *al-tajallī al-ilāhī* (theophany), and so forth; by Sufi exegetes' frequent focus on the *bāṭin* of the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth*, that is, the esoteric meanings of scripture that are unavailable to ordinary textual comprehension; and by the important role of visionary accounts of the Unseen world in Sufi discourse. Moreover, such secrets are sought not for their own sake but rather as tools for the salvific transformation of the individual, the Muslim *umma*, and the world. The path or way (*ṭarīqa*) pursued by the Sufi aspirant, with its states (*aḥwāl*) and stations (*maqāmāt*), is a praxis for shrugging off one's worldly self and returning to God prior to one's physical demise, while communal expressions of Sufism invoke the presence and sacred power of saints (*awliyāʾ Allāh*), living and dead, as a means of transfiguring the face of the earth, redeeming it from the ills of history and human sin, and bringing it into closer contact with paradise.

Consideration of apocalyptic characteristics of Sufism can be useful in understanding its place in Islamic thought and, indeed, Near Eastern and Mediterranean religion more broadly. Much of the scholarship on apocalypticism notes the close relationship of apocalyptic texts and movements to

contemporary sociopolitical upheavals, and the relatively small body of scholarship on Islamic apocalypticism largely follows suit. Questions of whether or to what extent early Islam was an apocalyptic movement—that is, whether the expectation of an imminent eschaton guided the actions of the Prophet and the community that survived him—are still a matter of sharp debate (Arjomand, 239–48; Cook, introduction to al-Khuzāʾī, *Tribulations*, xix–xxiv; Donner, 78–82; Shoemaker, 116–79). Less controversial is the notion that eschatological expectations were an important element of the internecine conflicts of the late first/seventh through early third/ninth centuries. Saïd Amir Arjomand and David Cook, for example, both focus on the sociopolitical contexts of apocalyptic *ḥadīth*s (*malāḥim*, *fitan*) from this period, analyzing them as products of the bloody struggles that raged among pro-ʿAlid, pro-Umayyad, and pro-ʿAbbāsid factions as well as significant non-Muslim populations, while also recognizing their embeddedness in pre-Islamic traditions of apocalyptic literature (Arjomand, 248–65; Cook, *Studies*, 1–34; cf. Mir-Kasimov). They further posit that the period following the ʿAbbāsid civil war of 193/809–198/813, which brought some of those struggles to a decisive close, saw a process of "canonization" and "containment" of Islamic apocalypticism during which the materials and movements produced in the tumultuous early centuries were "winnowed out" and theologically domesticated as part of a process of "the institutionalization of religious authority" (Arjomand, 268–9; Cook, *Tribulations*, xxxvi, *Studies*, 23–9). Sufism, which emerges to historical view in that postwar period, arguably played a part in that domestication process, transforming the expectation of an imminent eschaton and demands for radical political reversals into a discourse on the interior transformation of individuals while nonetheless retaining claims of extraordinary access to divine secrets, knowledge of the hereafter, and visionary encounters with the world(s) of the Unseen (Cook, *Studies*, 207; Mir-Kasimov; consider also Karamustafa's notion of the "inward turn" among early ascetics, *Sufism*, 1–7). The retention of those latter elements sometimes had a subversive edge and contributed significantly to the controversies that have accompanied Sufism from the start.

The famous case of the "Sufi martyr" al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922) in the early fourth/tenth century is instructive in this regard, insofar as he translated his experiences of encountering the divine into fervent public calls for moral reform and social justice rather than confining them to the discretion-minded inner circle of practitioners fostered by al-Junayd (d. 298/910), thus becoming embroiled in various political movements and intrigues that eventually led to his death. The accusations of Qarmaṭism that accompanied his trial and brutal execution, however falsely manufactured by his opponents, reflect the ease with which public claims of visionary access to the divine could yet be linked

to the explicitly apocalyptic doctrines of revolutionary Ismāʿīlism in the period (Knysh, *Mysticism*, 72–80; Massignon, 1:297–337). While the authors of the great Sufi manuals of the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries often sought to sever such associations through their elisions, bowlderizations, or condemnations of al-Ḥallāj, the notion that Sufism was a subversive force in Muslim thought and society was never entirely ameliorated (Knysh, *Mysticism*, 80–2).

1.2 *Qurʾān and Apocalypse*

In his boldly visionary exegetical work *ʿArāʾis al-bayān fī ḥaqāʾiq al-Qurʾān* (The Brides of Explanation of the True Realities of the Qurʾān), the Persian Sufi author Ruzbihān al-Baqlī (d. 606/1209) asserts his complete internalization of holy writ by claiming to have "eaten" the Qurʾān, the Torah, and the Gospel (Ernst, *Ruzbihan*, 51). It is an echo, perhaps, of John of Patmos eating the scroll given him by the angel at the outset of the Book of Revelation (10:10), as well as a reminder that Sufism is as much or more an embodied and imaginative practice than an intellectual and textualist one. Contemplative and creative engagement with the Qurʾān is, of course, central to Sufi thought, though less as a source of legal or historical knowledge than as a trove of allusive hints to the secret structure of the cosmos and the human soul, a living instrument of transformation and return to God through immersion in the divine speech imparted to the Prophet through Gabriel (on Sufi exegesis, see Chittick, Quran and Sufism; Coppens; Knysh, *Sufism*, 62–123; Rustom; Sands; Sviri, *Perspectives*, 298–324).

Angelika Neuwirth has argued that a defining feature of the Qurʾān, at least in the Meccan chapters, is its imposition of the "eschatologically embedded, spiritualized world of the believers" (*eschatologisch eingebettete, spiritualisierte Welt der Gläubigen*) onto the empirical world (*empirischen Realwelt*) (Neuwirth, 11). Sufi thinkers are particularly alive to this fundamentally apocalyptic aspect of the text: its revelation of a truer, permanent reality understood as that from which the manifest world springs and to which it shall return.

Todd Lawson's exploration of the Qurʾān as an apocalyptic text, which draws extensively on Sufi (and Shīʿī) thought as well as modern scholarship on apocalypticism, offers another perspective on this juxtaposition of worlds. Much of Lawson's analysis is focused on two literary devices that the Qurʾān shares with many specimens of Abrahamic apocalyptic literature. The first is "the interplay of duality, opposition, and symmetry" in the Qurʾān, which he labels with the Jungian term enantiodromia. Paradise and hell, life and death, believers and disbelievers, the heavens and the earth, the invisible and visible worlds, the jinn and humanity (see especially Surat al-Raḥmān), and man and woman are just a handful of these dynamic pairings that run throughout the text. The second device is "typological figuration," the framing of people or events as pre- or

post-figurations of one another, most notably in the multiple narratives of prophets and their communities that prefigure the adventure of Muḥammad and his followers (Lawson, Paradise, 109–11, Duality, 35–41; see Goppelt for this device in Christian texts).

These two devices can be seen as formal axes of the Qurʾān, working together to produce the unity of the text, despite its "almost adamantly anti-narrative structure and contents" (Lawson, Duality, 31), and to establish it as a key to comprehending the cosmos, its origin, and its ultimate end. The enantiodromia of the text is, in effect, its spatial axis, the "twoness" of things emblemizing the multiplicity, conflict, and constant change of earthly existence while also pointing to its opposite, divine unicity (*tawḥīd*), as the transcendent unity from which all multiplicity descends and to which it shall return. Typological figuration forms its temporal axis, the interreferentiality of the prophet stories effecting a "collapse or erasure of historical time" into a single, melismatic note (Lawson, Paradise, 115), and time becoming a single motion of descent from, and return to, God. The termini of this motion are the event known as the Day of the Covenant (*yawm al-mīthāq*) (Q 7:172) and the multiple descriptions of paradise. The former, which is of fundamental importance to Sufi thought (see below), marks the initial creation of humanity in a moment of utmost propinquity to God, and the latter its reunion with the divine. Between the Covenant and paradise fall the tales of prophets and their trials and opponents, all of which can be read as pre- and post-figurations of one another as well as of Muḥammad and his community, and which thus form a single drama of communal descent from, and return to, the divine.

Lawson's arguments are highly original and certainly open to debate, but one need not accept them *in toto* to note that the two literary devices he highlights illuminate elements of Sufi engagement with the Qurʾān relevant to issues of cosmo-eschatology. As discussed in more detail below, an "enantiodromic" play of dynamically paired terms and concepts, many of them derived from Qurʾānic terminology, runs throughout Sufi discourse. Indeed, the notion of resolving binaries into a unity is central to Sufi thought, as in the statement attributed to Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz (d. 286/899 or earlier): "I know God by means of the bringing together of opposites" (Lawson, Duality, 33; cf. Sviri, *Perspectives*, 139–68). Typological figuration also features prominently in Sufism, particularly with regard to the ongoing implications of the Day of the Covenant, as well as with the master/saint and his followers commonly being framed as reflections of the Prophet and his Companions, such that the Sufis' lives and adventures become reinstantiations of the founding story of Islam. Taken together, these devices play an important role in constructing the special "temporality" of Sufi thought and practice, an experience of lived time

attuned to an awareness of the Unseen world in which the beginning and end of things are present and commingled (on Islamic temporalities, see Bashir).

For Neuwirth, the apocalyptic impulse of the Qurʾān's Meccan chapters is counteracted to some degree in the Medinan ones and in much of the later exegetical tradition (Neuwirth, 181–256), such that the otherworldly aspect of the text is submerged in more historicist and legalist understandings. On a related note, Lawson stresses that his reading of the Qurʾān as an apocalyptic text is in no way meant to discount or detract from more conventional understandings of it as the "prophetic scripture of an ethical monotheism," but rather is an attempt to apprehend literarily, and specifically within the context of apocalyptic literature, what lends the text its extraordinary force and unity (Paradise, 125). By a similar token, to recognize a relationship between Sufism and pre-/early Islamic apocalypticism is neither to imply that Sufism is some sort of doomsday cult at heart nor to detract from its ethical dimensions, but rather a heuristic device to help comprehend the central role of cosmo-eschatological thought in Sufism and its rootedness in both scripture and popular religious sentiment.

1.3 *Overview*

In what follows, this chapter is organized according to the some of the various phases or planes within *al-ghayb* mentioned above. It begins with *al-azaliyya* (pre-existence), the non-time prior to the creation of the cosmos. Particular attention is paid to Sufi commentary on the "Day of the Covenant" described in Q 7:172, an event of immense importance to Sufi thought on the beginning and end of things. Continuing with the theme of beginnings and ends, the following section shifts to the prophet and first man Adam, whose knowledge of the beautiful names of God causes many Sufi thinkers to regard him as a microcosm of the whole of creation, encompassing both its visible and invisible parts, such that the keys to a salvific return to the divine lie within every one of his descendants. From there we turn to the *barzakh*, the place-time between death and judgment that, in the hands of some Sufi thinkers, most notably Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) and his intellectual descendants, becomes the realm of the imagination as that which mediates between the divine and manifest worlds. Continuing on the tour of mesocosmic realms, we move next to *al-malakūt,* the angelic realm, with particular attention to the role of angels in Sufi thought pertaining to the Prophet's heavenly ascent (*al-miʿrāj*) and similar journeys attributed to Sufi masters. The fifth section briefly explores cosmo-eschatological elements of the Sufi "science on letters and names" (*ʿilm al-ḥurūf wa-l-asmāʾ*) that arose in the late-medieval period to become widely influential, with a focus on lettrist authors' use of elaborate diagrams to

literally visualize the Unseen. The sixth addresses the saints, living and dead, as mediators between the seen and Unseen worlds.

In addition, Chapter 12 of this volume explores certain ramifications of Sufi cosmo-eschatology in practice. The first part of it discusses the shrine culture that developed around the veneration of saints from roughly the sixth/twelfth century onward, remapping the lived space-time of much of the Muslim-majority world. The second explores the rise of numerous Sufi *mahdī*s in the mature period as renascent expressions of the apocalyptic dynamics of early Islam that Sufism first helped constrain.

2 *Al-Azaliyya*

In an essay on the Sufism-inflected verse of the great lyric poet Ḥāfiẓ-i Shīrāzī (d. 792/1390), the philosopher Daryush Shayegan (d. 2018) argues that Ḥāfiẓ masterfully exploits the structure of the Persian *ghazal* to evoke a temporality distinct from that of mundane perception. Within a given poem, Shayegan argues, "one distich is not joined chronologically to the next, but is synchronically consubstantial with it." Each couplet is thus a complete world or cosmos, one in which the poet qua mystic lover is engulfed in an ecstasy of connection or abyss of isolation, an event of presence or absence unconditioned by any linear progression, any history. The only coordinates of consequence in this distich-world, Shayegan continues, are God and the human being, the former standing as the pole from which the cosmos descends into existence and the latter as the pole from which it returns to God. The human being is thus essential to the structure of time and cosmos, creation and eschaton: "Without the creation of man, who took upon himself the destiny of his folly, there would have been neither initial nor final point … only the occult eternity of the Hidden Treasure," Shayegan concludes (Shayegan, 20). The latter is a reference to the famous *ḥadīth qudsī*, much beloved by Sufi thinkers, in which God says, "I was a hidden treasure and desired to be known, so I created the creation that I would be known" (*Kuntu kanzan makhfiyyan fa-aḥbabtu an uʿrafa fa-khalaqtu al-khalqa li-kay uʿraf*). This arresting image of the cosmos as a God-human dyad conjoined by arcs of creation and eschaton calls on traditions of Sufi exegesis and practice stretching back at least to the early Sufi thinker Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 293/896). In doing so, it illustrates a significant point about Sufi cosmo-eschatology, which is that Sufi thought about the end of time is inextricably bound up with that about the beginning, the creation of humanity, and the setting in motion of cosmos and time.

As explored by Gerhard Böwering, Sahl al-Tustarī is much concerned with sempiternity of "pre-existence" (*al-azaliyya*) and the emission from the Godhead of the "Muḥammadan Light" (*al-nūr al-Muḥammadī*) during this phase. Per Böwering, this initial creation of "Muḥammad in his light-nature … is the cosmic and corporate prototype of mankind as well as the mystic and prophetic archetype of religious man" (*Mystical*, 147). It is from this Muḥammadan Light that the lights of Adam and all the other prophets are drawn, the latter being the "sons of Adam" mentioned in Q 7:172 (see below), from whose loins the entirety of humanity is taken. A later commentator on Sahl's ideas, ʿAyn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadānī (d. 525/1131), contends that Sahl meant that this light is not only the source of the prophets and humanity but indeed a kind of *prima materia* from which all created things are formed (al-Hamadānī, 267; Böwering, *Mystical*, 150). Finally, Sahl further identifies the heart of Muḥammad as the condensed essence of his light and the source of all "divine revelation and mystical union for the believing and obedient creature" (Böwering, *Mystical*, 148).

Sahl's thinking on these matters, which was inherited in part from even earlier thinkers, including the Nubian mystic Dhū l-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 245/859 or 248/862), seems to stem largely from the famous Light Verse (Q 24:35), specifically the phrase "the likeness of His light" (*mathalu nūrihi*). He also devotes considerable attention to Q 7:172, as discussed below. It is obvious, however, that this astonishing account of pre-eternity cannot be ascribed to a plain reading of the Qurʾānic text but is rather a creative extrapolation from it that, in emic terms, represents an apprehension of the *bāṭin* of the Qurʾān, its hidden meanings. Indeed, ʿAyn al-Quḍāt asserts that these things were revealed to Sahl by al-Khiḍr, the mysterious quasi-angelic/quasi-human figure who appears frequently in Sufi discourse as a sort of walking embodiment of *walāya*, saintly power (Böwering, *Mystical*, 150). Al-Khiḍr is commonly identified as the unnamed figure who both confounds and teaches Moses in Surat al-Kahf (Q 18:59–81), and countless Sufi writers have claimed to have encountered him in meetings that typically contain some element of initiation into the secrets of the Unseen. He is regarded as a near-immortal, sometimes identified with the prophet Elias (Ilyās) and sometimes as having served as a vizier to Alexander the Great (Dhū l-Qarnayn). Some sources say that he will live until he is murdered by the Antichrist (al-Dajjāl) in the endtimes battle for Mecca (Franke; Sviri, *Taste*, 77–101). In ascribing Sahl's insights to such an extraordinary intermediary, ʿAyn al-Quḍāt marks the apocalyptic nature of Sahl's work, recognizing the exegesis itself as a visionary revelation delivered by a divine messenger and ripe with cosmo-eschatological implications, though obviously of a lower register of revelation than the Qurʾān.

A number of important points emerge from Sahl's insights and ʿAyn al-Quḍāt's gloss on them. First, that the entire course of humanity and the creation is contained in the emission of the Muḥammadan Light: the end of things is contained in the beginning. As the *pīr* of Herat Khwāja ʿAbd Allāh Anṣārī (d. 481/1089) puts it in one of his verses: "Oh God / Everybody fears the day of retribution / but ʿAbd Allāh fears the day of pre-eternity / because what You decreed in the beginning / will never be changed in the end" (Anṣārī, 195, trans. Thackston). Second, that the creation of humanity in pre-existence precedes and is the foundation of that of the cosmos itself—an idea that, as we will see, is further magnified in Sufi treatments of Adam. Third, that the Muḥammadan Light, which is the source of all creation, is also the vehicle through which people can return to God (at least those who devote themselves to that task during their earthly careers), such that the arc of return mirrors that of the world's descent into creation, as in Shayegan's formulation.

2.1 *The Day of the Covenant*

Q 7:172 describes an event known among commentators and poets as the Day of the Covenant (*yawm al-mīthāq*) or Day of Alast (*yawm alast*). The verse gnomically describes an episode in which humanity, "the seed of the sons of Adam," is summoned before God and called upon to recognize His sovereignty over them. The "Day of Alast" moniker comes from God's question to them: *a-lastu bi-rabbikum*, "Am I not your Lord?" They respond: *balā shahidnā*, "Yea, we bear witness." As the verse states, this act of acknowledgment ensures that on the Day of Resurrection (*yawm al-qiyāma*) they cannot claim to have been unaware of their fundamental relationship to God. As mentioned above, Sahl interprets the "sons of Adam" as the line of prophets that God would send forth, culminating with the earthly career of Muḥammad, and their "seed" (*dhurriyyatahum*) as the rest of humanity, who, in their pre-existent form, were present as "a conglomeration of light particles"—an interpretation of "seed" through the lens of his ideas on the Muḥammadan Light. God not only accepts humanity's statement of recognition, Sahl asserts, but also "apprise[s] them of the origin (*ibtidāʾ*) and final outcome (*intihāʾ*) He has in store for them," such that their recognition of God's lordship entails an acceptance of His determination and final judgment as well. Again, the beginning anticipates the end.

For Sahl, the scene marks the striking of a meta-covenant between God and humanity that prefigures all covenants to come in the manifest world (Böwering, Covenant; Ebstein, Covenant). Covenants and their consequences are regular themes in pre-Islamic apocalyptic literature and in the Qurʾān. Such compacts mark radical transformations of a community's relationship to God and have important eschatological implications, both about the salvation

of those humans entering the agreement and the dire penalties to be faced in the afterlife by those who fail to live up to it (for examples in Jewish and Christian apocalyptic, see Horsley). With regard to the difficulties humans face in their covenantal relationship(s) with the divine, Sahl detects a kind of pun in the assembly's response to God's challenge, noting that *balā* evokes the word *ibtilāʾ*, "putting to the test." Thus, human existence is a trial to which humanity has assented prior to their earthly instantiation.

2.2 *The Day of the Covenant and Sufi Anthropology*

Included among the small body of writings attributed to the famed Baghdad Sufi leader al-Junayd are the treatises *Kitāb al-mīthāq* and *Kitāb al-fanāʾ*, in which an anthropology—a theory of the human being—is derived from Q 7:172 that elucidates the author's conception of the nature of the Sufi path and its fundamental difficulties (on questions of the authenticity of these texts, see Reinert, 132). For al-Junayd, the Day of the Covenant is the moment at which humanity is brought into existence by God, who simultaneously poses His question—"Am I not your Lord?" Emphasizing that this is humanity in its most incipient state, al-Junayd relates this condition of existing purely within God's existence to the spiritual states of "subsistence" (*baqāʾ*) and "passing away" (*fanāʾ*), terms often used to mark "the apex of mystic experience and union with God" (Böwering, Baqāʾ). Humanity thus begins its existence in a state of subsistence, "encompassed by the attributes of [divine] lordship, the traces of pre-existence, and the signs of everlastingness," but in the very next moment passes away from it into createdness and temporality (al-Junayd, 43). The Sufi practitioner strives to return to that primordial state of subsistence, a goal that can only be accomplished through passing away again, this time away from the mundane self of earthly life and back into immediate proximity to the divine.

Various early Sufis are credited with similar formulations of the goal of the path. Dhū l-Nūn al-Miṣrī is believed to have said that the practitioner must strive to be "as he was, when he was before he was" (al-Kalābādhī, 105); or, as Farīd al-Dīn al-ʿAṭṭār has al-Junayd's disciple al-Shiblī (d. 334/935) put it in *Tadhkirat al-awliyāʾ* (*Memorial of the Saints*), "the way he was at the moment he was not as yet" (al-ʿAṭṭār, 2:175). This passing away from the created world is of a piece with the "voluntary return," as the great Andalusian mystic of a few centuries later, Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), makes explicit:

> Know that these bodies are coffins of the spirits and what beclouds them; they are what veils them so that they do not witness [the spiritual world] and are not witnessed. So the spirits do not see, nor are they seen, except through being parted from these [bodily] tombs by becoming oblivious

> (*fanāʾ*) to them … [W]hen they become oblivious to witnessing the bodies, then they witness the One who gives them Being in the very act of witnessing themselves.
>
> IBN AL-ʿARABĪ, *Futūḥāt*, 3:389; trans. MORRIS, LESSER, 110

For al-Junayd, this task of returning to God, which requires navigating "the hidden mysteries of the *malakūt*" (*ghawāmiḍ ghuyūb al-malakūt*), is one of resolving the contradictory nature of human being-ness. This is a significant challenge, in that God "has made their [viz. humans'] bodies earthly, their spirits luciform, their imaginations spiritual, their understandings thronal [i.e. linked to the divine throne], and their rational faculties veil-like" (*jaʿala ajsāmahum dunyawiyyatan wa-arwāḥahum nūrāniyyatan wa-awhāmahum rūḥāniyyatan wa-afhāmahum ʿarshiyyatan wa-ʿuqūlahum ḥajbiyyatan*), contrasting qualities that stem from the very transition from non-being into being to which God subjects humanity on the Day of the Covenant (al-Junayd, 42). For al-Junayd, then, the resolution of those internal contrasts and constraints is the essence of the trial that humanity consents to in saying *balā* on that day, and the Sufi path is the means of passing that trial.

The notion of contrasting qualities that must be resolved in progressing along the path pervades Sufi thought, such as in the various pairs of conceptual-experiential terms in the lexicon of al-Qushayrī's (d. 465/1072–3) famous *Risāla*: contraction (*qabḍ*) and expansion (*basṭ*), awe (*hayba*) and intimacy (*uns*), unification (*jamʿ*) and separation (*farq*), sobriety (*ṣaḥw*) and drunkeness (*sukr*), absence (*ghayba*) and presence (*ḥuḍūr*) (al-Qushayrī, passim). Sufi thought in this sense mirrors the "enantiodromia" that Lawson identifies as one of the classically apocalyptic qualities of the Qurʾān. As Lawson observes, "duality automatically elicits or evokes its aniconic 'other half,' *tawḥīd*: (*waḥda*—'oneness'), which in the case of the Qurʾan and Islam is always a transcendent (*munazzah*) oneness" (Lawson, Duality, 27). This well applies to the pairs in Sufi thought, which typically are not binarily opposed to one another, one to be preferred over the other, but rather are dynamically complementary, demarcating spectrums of experience through which the initiate passes in returning to God. The end goal is their resolution in an ultimate unity with God—that is, a restoration of the primordial unity of the Day of the Covenant. Much as the fluid dualities and symmetries of the Qurʾān help make the holy text such fertile ground for imaginative/inspired engagement and interpretation, the dynamically paired terms and images that circulate through Sufi thought are also subject to endless elaboration and elucidation at the hands of various thinkers and poets, and indeed are among the most important rhetorical and practical

devices through which Sufism retains its coherence as a body of thought and practice while also being almost infinitely variegated.

Sahl's notion of the Muḥammadan Light and reading of Q 7:172, as transmitted and further developed by al-Junayd and others, were massively influential on Sufi thought, helping invest it with a distinct temporality in which the conjoined moments of creation and eschaton are omnipresent beneath the surface of lived historical time. This was not a mere exegetical or philosophical stance but a defining element of the Sufi ethos, an apocalyptic gloss on everyday existence. "Apocalypse," Lawson argues, "is characterized by urgency and intensity," qualities that, in his view, course relentlessly through the Qurʾān and its reminders of the ultimate reality of the Unseen (Paradise, 112). In Sufism, this urgency manifests as the imperative of the voluntary return to God and the reordering of life and consciousness this entails. As Erik Ohlander describes the overarching importance of the Day of the Covenant in Sufism: "It is in realizing, recapturing, or otherwise actualizing, in the here and now, the existential implications of this Qur'anic *in illo tempore* to which the aspiring Sufi ultimately endeavors, a striving which, in its impatience, projects a wider, yet ultimately intimately individualized, mythic drama firmly unto the plane of lived human experience" (Ohlander, 57).

Just as theory and practice are often difficult to distinguish in Sufism, the intuitive "tasting" (*dhawq*) of its truths being constantly emphasized over rational argumentation, so too Sufi cosmology and eschatology must be apprehended as much or more as matters of lived experience than theological or philosophical speculation. This sense of urgency, of the pressing immanence of the Unseen world just beyond the coarse veils of this one, fundamentally informs the "long-lasting moods and motivations" of Sufism as expressed through various of its practices and social formations (Geertz, 94–8).

3 Adam in the Garden

Qurʾānic accounts of the creation of Adam and his expulsion from the Garden comprise another story of beginnings with great implications for the end, another figure of descent, trial, and return. As the British Sufi thinker Abdal Hakim Murad (b. 1960) has put it, "life is a journey between two gardens," that is, between Eden and paradise (Friedlander). Various elements of the story of Adam have fascinated Sufi authors. Iblīs, for example, was notoriously lauded by Sufis such as al-Ḥallāj and Aḥmad al-Ghazālī (d. 520/1126) for championing *tawḥīd* by refusing to bow to Adam (on al-Ḥallāj, Reinert; Sells, 266–80;

on al-Ghazālī, Elmi; Lumbard). The main locus of Sufi fascination with Adam, however, lies in his endowment by God with "the names, all of them" (Q 2:31), a point that comes to be central to Sufi anthropology and cosmo-eschatology. While theologians debated the precise nature of the names with which Adam was endowed, Sufi thinkers arrived at an early consensus that they were the beautiful names of God (*al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā*) (Akkach, Beautiful). This datum was often understood in conjunction with *ḥadīth*s in which the Prophet reveals that God created Adam in His own *ṣūra*, His form or image (*khalaqa Ādam ʿalā ṣūratihi*). For some scholars of Islamic theology (*kalām*), this *ḥadīth* had disturbingly anthropomorphic connotations, in that it could imply that God's form was human-like. Sufi thinkers, however, read it as affirming that Adam's form (*ṣūra*) was comprised of the divine names, that is, that Adam and all his descendants embody the names of God in some sense, at least *in potentia*. It was further understood that this quality makes humans superior to the angels in their knowledge of God, as the angels know/embody only some of the names. Indeed, an important element of al-Ḥallāj's aforementioned defense of Iblīs is that it was the doomed spirit's constitutional inability to recognize the divine form within Adam, due to his limited knowledge of the names, that precipitated his tragic fall (Elmi, 4).

Adam's embodiment of the names is the basis of much Sufi ethical thought and ritual practice, particularly via the concept of *takhalluq bi-akhlāq Allāh*, "assuming God's character traits" through cultivation of the divine names within oneself, a process synonymous with killing the ego in that the lower self is effaced bit by bit as the divine qualities are activated (Casewit, al-Ghazālī; Chittick, *Sufi Path*, 21–2; Elmore, Shaykh). The idea of *takhalluq* informs the distinctive Sufi exercise of *dhikr*, which can be understood as a means of activating, namely, "remembering," the divine names. Other practices, such as the wearing of textual amulets inscribed with the names, or incorporating the names to one's body by drinking or inhaling them, were sometimes advocated as well (Akkach, Beautiful; Gardiner, Stars; Porter; Ruska). Some writers also closely associate the names with the concept of "stations" (*maqāmāt*) along the Sufi path, each name/station representing a plateau of attainment that is permanently transformative of the character of the sojourner (e.g. al-Būnī, *ʿĀlam*, f. 2b).

In the hands of certain Sufi theorists, the notion that Adam was instilled with all of the divine names is the basis for understanding him as the microcosm, the reflection of the cosmos in miniature; a move that also necessitates perceiving the cosmos, the macrocosm, as Adam writ large. Such ideas are at the heart of the most radical and influential Sufi cosmo-eschatological conceptualizations of Adam and the role of humanity in the cosmos. Notions of

the microcosm and macrocosm have a lengthy provenance in Near Eastern and Mediterranean thought, particularly in Platonist contexts. The earliest Islamic source for an explicit formulation of the idea of Adam as microcosm is perhaps the *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ* (Epistles of the Brethren of Purity), the philosophical encyclopedia produced by an anonymous community of pro-ʿAlid intellectuals in late third/ninth or early fourth/tenth-century Iraq (De Callataÿ, 22–4; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ; Netton, 15–17; Nokso-Koivisto). The concept later appeared in Sufi thought via a lineage of Andalusian mystical thinkers who engaged with the *Rasāʾil* beginning not long after they were penned (Casewit, *Mystics*, 171–205; Chittick, Microcosm; Ebstein, *Mysticism*, 157–88). Yousef Casewit argues that the most important representatives of this lineage, Ibn Masarra (d. 319/931) and Ibn Barrajān (d. 536/1141), were not Sufis per se, but rather representatives of an independent Andalusian "mysticophilosophical" tradition (Casewit, *Mystics*, 57–90). Their teachings nonetheless came to have a significant impact on Sufism via their adoption and adaptation by the massively influential Ibn al-ʿArabī and other of his Sufi contemporaries from the Islamicate West whose works and ideas spread far and wide across the Islamicate world during the mature period (seventh/thirteenth to thirteenth/nineteenth century).

For Ibn al-ʿArabī, Adam and each of his descendants—that is, every human being—is a microcosm in that both the human being and the cosmos comprehend all of the divine names within their very constitution. As Chittick discusses, Ibn al-ʿArabī considers the human being unique among creatures in this respect (including the angels, as above). This is why, in contrast to the relatively stereotyped behavior of most living creatures, humans display "an indefinite variety of divine aspects or 'faces' (*wajh*)," from love to wrath, subtle wisdom to utter debasement, and so on (Chittick, Microcosm, 2). Only the cosmos in its entirety (i.e. *mā siwā Allāh*, "everything other than God") displays an equally vast range and variety of expression of the names. A key distinction between the cosmos and the human being is that "the cosmos manifests the Divine Names in a differentiated mode (*tafṣīl*)," while the human being displays them "in a relatively nondifferentiated mode (*ijmāl*)," the names being "drawn together and concentrated within him." The human being is thus the spirit of the cosmos, "while the cosmos without man is like a proportioned and well-balanced body, ready and waiting for God to breathe His Spirit into it" (Chittick, Microcosm, 3). Crucially, "[t]hough the cosmos is not complete without man, man is complete without the cosmos" as a world unto himself. Thus, for Ibn al-ʿArabī, when a person dies, he or she is "released from the limitations of the spatio-temporal world and actualizes the full ontological expression demanded by the Divine Form … blossom[ing] into a limitless world, independent of this

world and dependent only upon God" (Chittick, Microcosm, 4). This holds true, too, for one who dies to this world in order to undertake the "voluntary return," underpinning the human capacity for apocalyptic-visionary feats of perceiving and visiting realms of existence beyond this one. It also vouchsafes the continuing existence of humanity, whether damned or saved, following the final destruction of the manifest world.

3.1 *Adam and Ibn al-ʿArabī's Concept of the "Perfect Man"*

Ibn al-ʿArabī's influential concept of the "perfect man," *al-insān al-kāmil*, is integrally related to earlier Sufi thought on Adam as microcosm, and has even further-reaching cosmo-eschatological implications. The perfect man is one in whom all of the divine names find their balanced expression. Muḥammad is the exemplar of the perfect man, the source of all such perfection being the Prophet's pre-existent form—what Ibn al-ʿArabī terms "the Muḥammadan Reality" (*al-ḥaqīqa al-Muḥammadiyya*), essentially a rephrasing of Sahl's Muḥammadan Light. Adam, having been drawn forth from the Muḥammadan Reality, was created perfect, though the mass of humanity has since fallen away into animality; that is, into a predominant pattern of imperfect, imbalanced, and otherwise limited expression of the names. Through this lens, the goal of Sufi practice is to re-attain to that perfection, a task to be accomplished through the aforementioned practice of *takhalluq* (Chittick, Microcosm, 4–8). This goal is shared by the cosmos itself, the perfect man being the *telos* of the Creation as well as its origin, its end and beginning. Ibn al-ʿArabī further asserts that, without the existence of the perfect man on earth at all times, the world would cease to exist. This tenet is central to his conception of sainthood and the hierarchy of saints, topics discussed in section 6 below.

4 *Al-Barzakh*

A crucial site in Islamic eschatology generally is the *barzakh* (lit. barrier, isthmus), which is typically conceived of as "an intermediate state of human existence between death and resurrection" or, more concretely, the period in the grave awaiting the Day of Judgment (Lange, Barzakh; Zaki). Views on the nature of the *barzakh* vary. For example, some have held that the deceased could simultaneously inhabit the grave and paradise or hell, the better to anticipate their ultimate fates, others that those in the *barzakh* would experience only pleasure or pain in accordance with their final destinations, and yet others that the dead are insensate, as if in a deep sleep, until the resurrection (Halevi, 202–7; Smith and Haddad, 31–61; Tesei). Communication and encounters with

the dead in the *barzakh* through the dreams or visions of the living, or even through physical encounters, have been widely accepted as a reality in some periods (Kinberg, Interaction; Smith). It has also been commonly understood that the actions of the living, such as visiting graves and praying for the dead, could improve the state and station of the deceased while they awaited judgment (Halevi, 226–33; Kinberg, Interaction, 307).

Some ideas about the *barzakh* were hotly debated. The Andalusian jurist and theologian Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064), for example, put forth the idea that it was not just a space for the dead, but also the reservoir where the spirits of all the humans created on the Day of the Covenant but not yet born await their appointment with incarnation (Smith and Haddad, 58). Many thinkers firmly rejected this view, though it arguably resonates with the expanded role for the *barzakh* that Ibn al-ʿArabī would later propose, as discussed below. Early Sufi views on the *barzakh* do not stand out much from those of their non-Sufi contemporaries, except insofar as Sufi authors sometimes stress the superior experiences that certain of their esteemed predecessors enjoy in the grave. Bishr al-Ḥāfī (d. 227/841 or 842), for example, is reported to have appeared to followers after his death to announce the special treatment received in paradise by himself and some other saints. Maʿrūf al-Karkhī (d. 200/815–16) and Sarī al-Saqaṭī (d. 253/867) are both described on the basis of dream visions as having been privileged to gaze upon God's face, Maʿrūf being specifically mentioned as having received this as a reward for having worshipped God purely out of love, rather than out of any hope for paradise or fear of hell (Kinberg, Interaction, 299; on Maʿrūf see Ibn Abī Yaʿlā, 1:231; on Sarī see al-Iṣbahānī, 1:191). The transcending of such motivations, *contemptus ultramundi*, is a common theme in Sufi thought, and it is interesting to find it linked thus to being exempt from the terrors of the grave (cf. Lange, *Paradise*, 225–31).

The ability to communicate with the deceased in the *barzakh* through dreams and visions was central to many Sufi narratives of initiation and sanctification. Dreams of the Prophet, which are always granted special importance in Islamic oneiromancy, frequently play a role in such accounts (Katz, Dreams, 190; Kinberg, Dreams). According to al-Hujwīrī's (d. between 465/1072 and 469/1077) *Kashf al-maḥjūb* (*Unveiling of the Concealed*), on the night Dhū l-Nūn al-Miṣrī died, seventy people dreamed of the Prophet, who said, "I have come to meet Dhū l-Nūn, the friend of God." In another report, al-Hujwīrī relates that al-Junayd refrained from lecturing to his disciples so long as his own master, Sarī al-Saqaṭī, still lived, until one night the Prophet appeared to him in a dream and commanded him to begin doing so, as "God hath made thy words the means of saving a multitude of mankind." The next morning, Sarī sent word that since the Prophet had commanded him to preach he must surely do so. When

al-Junayd later asked his master how he knew of his dream of the Prophet, Sarī replied, "I dreamed of God, who told me that He had sent the Apostle to bid you preach" (al-Hujwīrī, 128–9). Abū Ḥafs ʿUmar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234) includes a chapter on dreams—especially dreams of the Prophet—in his seminal work on Sufi etiquette (*adab*), *ʿAwārif al-maʿārif*, and his programmatic treatment of the topic is but one indication that dream encounters with the Prophet were so common within Sufism by that period as to be almost routine (Green, 294). Indeed, they remain common in modern Sufism, as Amira Mittermaier's research eloquently demonstrates (Mittermaier).

Deceased masters/saints and prophets other than Muḥammad also communicated with the living, and such interactions are often linked to the phenomenon of *uwaysī* initiations into Sufism; that is, scenarios in which deceased masters rather than living teachers have guided an individual to embark upon the Sufi path. The phenomenon is named for Uways al-Qaranī (d. 37/657), a contemporary of the Prophet said to have communicated with him telepathically and converted to Islam on that basis (Baldick, Uways al-Ḳaranī; Green, 299–301). Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Aḥmad al-Kharaqānī (d. 425/1033) is said to have prayed regularly at the tomb of Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 261/874 or 264/877–8) and to have been taught by the deceased saint. The founder of the Naqshbandiyya order, Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband (d. 791/1389), claimed to have been taught by the spirit of the dead saint ʿAbd al-Khāliq al-Ghijduwānī (sometimes given as al-Ghujduwānī) (d. 617/1220, though see Paul regarding this date), and similar claims were made by hagiographers for others in the Naqshbandī lineage or, as in the case of the great Naqshbandī *shaykh* Aḥmad Sirhindī, by the individuals themselves (Baldick, Uwaysiyya). As Claude Addas notes, Ibn al-ʿArabī, too, can be counted as an *uwaysī*, as he credits a visionary encounter with Jesus at the age of fifteen as having set him on the path (Addas, Andalusi, 910). For obvious reasons, such claims of visionary initiation by discarnate saints and prophets could endanger earthly hierarchies of socio-religious authority and thus were not always smiled upon by Sufi thinkers, much less other religious authorities. The great Syrian *shaykh* ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī, for example, felt it necessary to issue a *fatwā* to the effect that such assertions were "only acceptable so long as their content was not at variance with the *sharīʿah*" (Green, 300). Despite such concerns, ideas of the continuing power of the dead flourished in Sufi contexts as traditional tomb-visitation practices and notions of the ability of saints in the *barzakh* to communicate with and act upon the living grew together over time into the "cult of saints" and the shrine culture of the Sufi orders, giving rise to some of Sufism's most distinctive, and controversial, popular expressions (discussed in Chapter 12 of this volume).

4.1 *Ibn al-ʿArabī on the* Barzakh

Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings on the *barzakh* build on previous thought on the topic but transform it from merely a space in which the dead reside while awaiting judgment into a plane of existence mediating between the divine and manifest worlds. For him, the *barzakh* is identical to the imagination (*al-khayāl*), "an ontological and epistemological reality that plays a fundamental role in both the macrocosm and the microcosm" (Chittick, Death, 53; cf. Bashier).

As Chittick notes, this "imaginal" realm is that which embodies the disembodied spirits (*arwāḥ*) of the divine realm and spiritualizes the corporeal beings of the herebelow, such that "the angels appear to human beings in imaginal form, and revelation is first imaginalized before it takes the sensory form of a scripture" (Chittick, Death, 54). The *barzakh* is thus the site where "the visions of spiritual beings experienced by the saints take place," and also that of more ordinary persons' dream-encounters with the Prophet and other of the sanctified dead. Ibn al-ʿArabī thus affirms earlier permutations of the *barzakh* as medium for communication with the dead and other denizens of the Unseen while also granting it a central role in the structure of the cosmos. These assertions about the *barzakh* were not simply philosophical. His disciple and son-in-law Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274) asserted that his master could summon and consult with any spirit he chose, including the prophets, and his master's works are indeed peppered with accounts of his encounters with various discarnates (on al-Qūnawī, Chodkiewicz, 17–18; on Ibn al-ʿArabī's experiences, Addas, *Quest*, passim; Chittick, Meetings).

Chapter 302 of the *Futūḥāt* contains a discussion of the condition of the dead with important insights into the Greatest Shaykh's concept of the *barzakh* as a kind of membrane between the manifest world and the Unseen. He opens with a description of various schools of thought within Sufism as to the state of the dead: some hold that their spirits are indistinguishable, like water once held in jars but now returned to the river; some charge that embodied life permanently alters the spirit, such that the "water" takes on a distinct hue and odor; others assert that the dead inhabit subtle bodies—*ṣuwar*, forms—like those worn in dreams. Rather than taking a stance on the question, Ibn al-ʿArabī shifts to the related issue of the living person's capacity to perceive the *barzakh* and, indeed, to perceive paradise and hell. Taking a quite literal reading of *ḥadīth*s such as "Between my grave and this pulpit is one of the meadows of the Garden," he reveals that:

> [T]he Garden which is attained by those who are among its people in the other world is [already] visible to you today with respect to its place, though not its form. So you are in the Garden, transformed, in whatever

> state you happen to be, but you don't know you are in it, because you are veiled from it by the form in which it manifests itself to you! Now the people of unveiling, who perceive what is Unseen by ordinary men, do see that place: If it is the Garden [of paradise], then they see a green meadow; or if it is Gehenna, then they see it according to the traits of its bitter cold, burning winds, and the other things God has prepared in it. And most of the people of unveiling see this at the beginning of the path.
>
> IBN AL-ʿARABĪ, *Futūḥāt*, 3:13; trans. MORRIS, LESSER, 103

In short, paradise and hell are coterminous with the earth, or at least interpenetrate it at various points—a theme indeed scattered throughout various *ḥadīth*s and the writings of sundry Muslim thinkers, Sufi and non-Sufi, prior to Ibn al-ʿArabī (Lange, *Paradise*, 4–13). Here, however, the idea is fitted into a specifically Sufi framework of grades of spiritual attainment, distinguishing first and foremost initiates and non-initiates, but also suggesting that one's perceptions of paradise and hell on earth become sharper and more pervasive as one proceeds on the path. Thus, in chapter 351 of the *Futūḥāt*, in expounding on the topic of "the voluntary death," Ibn al-ʿArabī asserts that the highest initiates reach a state such that, upon their physical death, when "the veil of this body is removed from us," the transition is all but imperceptible: "[O]ur state will not change and our certainty [of ultimate punishment or reward] will not be any greater than what we already experience now." He then quotes ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, the foremost exemplar of the Sufi adept, as saying: "Even if the veil were removed, I would not be any more certain" (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 3:223; trans. Morris, Lesser, 106).

5 *Al-Malakūt*, Angels, and Heavenly Ascents

Sufi cosmological discourses utilize numerous terms for discussing planes of existence beyond the visible world. Among the most commonly used is *ʿālam al-malakūt* (the angelical world), a realm of angels and other spiritual entities adjacent and superior to the material world. In this context, the latter is often termed *ʿālam al-mulk* (the kingdom [of God]), *al-malakūt wa-l-mulk* being another dynamic pair of terms like those discussed in 2.2 above (*al-malakūt* is also commonly paired with *al-jabarūt*, divine omnipotence, another plane of existence either higher or lower in the cosmic hierarchy than *al-malakūt* depending on the theorist; see Carra de Vaux; Gardet). The notion of a normally invisible plane of existence or interworld populated by angels is central to pre/non-Islamic apocalyptic discourses too, angels being the classic

intermediaries between humans and God when it comes to delivering revelations and visions of the beyond. In a departure from earlier apocalyptic traditions, however, the revelatory role of angels in Sufi discourse—that is, angels revealing secrets to individual Sufis—is rather limited. This may be because the Prophet's relationship to Gabriel (Jibrīl) so dominates the notion of angel-human communication that Sufi actors could not claim direct inspiration from angels without overstepping their bounds, a perilous prospect given the long history of accusations that Sufis asserted the superiority of saints over prophets and/or pretended to prophecy (on such controversies, see Elmore, *Gryphon*, 131–62). Indeed, Sufi authors more often claim inspiration from the Prophet himself, other deceased authorities, or al-Khiḍr. Take, for example Ibn al-ʿArabī's assertion that his *Bezels of Wisdom* (*Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*) was directly dictated to him by Muḥammad (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 45–6).

This is not to say that interactions with angels are entirely absent from Sufi discourses. Various sources relate, for example, that, on the night of his death, the master Khayr al-Nassāj (d. 322/934), who is reputed to have lived to an age of 120 years, successfully ordered the angel of death to wait at the door until he could perform his ablutions for the evening prayer and utter the *shahāda* before being taken (al-Qushayrī, 60). Ibn al-ʿArabī, for his part, avers that most angels exist and function beyond human authority, though humans can petition God through prayer to have one of them sent down. However, he adds, there are angels who regularly frequent the earth, and they will flock to Sufis without being called, as "they are constantly traveling around seeking the sessions of *dhikr*." They do so because the remembrance of God "is their sustenance; through it they flourish and in it they have their life" (Morris, End, 79–80). Other Sufi writers remind us that the angels, while certainly powerful, are neither perfect nor all-powerful. Al-Qushayrī, for example, in his discussion of the fear of God (*khawf*), relates that when Iblīs was cast out for his refusal to bow to Adam, Gabriel and Michael "started to cry and wept for a long time." When God asked them why they wept so, they replied, "Our Lord, we do not feel safe from Your ruse!" God responded, "Be like this! You indeed are not safe from My ruse" (al-Qushayrī, 147, trans. Knysh). Indeed, it could be said that many Sufi accounts of angels stress their lack of comprehensive power and knowledge, particularly in relation to prophets and saints.

One site where these issues come to the fore is the Prophet Muḥammad's ascent to the heavens (*miʿrāj*), an event in which, according to various *ḥadīth*s and *sīra* texts as well as the Qurʾān, he was carried up through the seven heavens with the angel Gabriel as his guide, meeting various past prophets at each stage of his journey before encountering God Himself upon reaching "the lote tree of the utmost boundary" (*sidrat al-muntahā*) (Q 53:14; Lange, Lote Tree).

As a number of scholars have pointed out, the story has numerous precedents in earlier apocalyptic literature, particularly the Enoch texts, and indeed is one of the clearest examples of an Islamic discourse building on such literature (Sells, 242). The story is a key point of reference for Sufi thinkers (and others) concerned with the visible and invisible structure of the cosmos and the human capacity for glimpsing its upper reaches while still alive.

As recorded in Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī's (d. 412/1021) compilation of Sufi utterances on the Prophet's ascent, *Masʾalat bayān laṭāʾif al-miʿrāj* (The Issue of Clarifying the Subtleties of the Ascension), when it comes to the Prophet's interactions with angels during the *miʿrāj*, early Sufi commentators tended to focus on the issue of human superiority to angels. Al-Ḥallāj, for example, is recorded as saying, "Do you not see that when Muḥammad was surrounded by the divine manner of dress, Gabriel, despite the magnitude of his station, lacked the strength to look at him or accompany him at the final stage of his ascent." As Frederick Colby notes, "Ḥallāj suggests that Muḥammad is able to proceed to a higher level because his humanity has been surrounded or overcome by divinity, and Gabriel is unable to proceed because he remains a contingent being" (al-Sulamī, 53–4). In the same text, Fāris al-Baghdādī employs the aforementioned paired concepts of *baqāʾ* and *fanāʾ* to assert that God prevented Gabriel from making the final stage of ascent because the angel was capable only of "abiding in the Real" (*baqāʾ bi-l-ḥaqq*), while Muḥammad was granted the power of "passing away into the Real" (*fanāʾ bi-l-ḥaqq*) (al-Sulamī, 75).

Similar themes can be found in accounts of Sufis performing their own heavenly ascents in imitation of the Prophet. The narrative of the *miʿrāj* text attributed to the famous Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī, for example, largely revolves around Abū Yazīd's encounters with angels in each heavenly sphere. In each of the heavens, the angels present him with splendiferous visions of "dominion that would wear out the tongue to describe," but in each case a voice from within Abū Yazīd's heart urges him to continue onward and upward, such that he excuses himself to the angels with the refrain, "[m]y goal is other than what you are showing me" (Sells, 245). In Michael Sells' analysis, "[w]ith each refusal to stop at a heavenly station, Bistami affirms the inherent dynamism of Sufi thought, the refusal to stop at any given station of mystical attainment" (Sells, 243). In the end, Abū Yazīd finally comes before God, who greets him as "my chosen one, my beloved, the best of my creatures." Abū Yazīd notes that, upon hearing that, "it was as if I were melting like melting lead," and that God then "brought me to a state that I am unable to describe" (Sells, 249). The author's resort to the language of indescribability at the culmination of a text otherwise filled with vivid visions of angels and heavenly realities is worthy of

note, and could be read as an effort to transcend the apocalyptic genre even while utilizing it. This is to say that, while Sufi thinkers certainly drew on a repertoire of apocalyptic tropes about visionary encounters with angels and other inhabitants of the Unseen, the employment of "mystical" claims in the classic Jamesian sense—that is, assertions of ineffable, indescribable experiences of union with the divine—was also common, and the two rhetorical strategies are often intertwined (James, 294–6; cf. Katz, Mystical). Indeed, it could be argued that they exist in a relationship similar to that of the various dynamic pairs that pervade Sufi thought, a meta-play of tropes of visibility and invisibility, describability and indescribability, with regard to encounters with the divine.

5.1 *Sufi Lettrism and Visual Representations of* al-Malakūt

Another major development relating to visions of the interworlds of the Unseen is the emergence in the late medieval period of the "science of letters of names" (*ʿilm al-ḥurūf wa-l-asmāʾ*) (on the science, often shorthanded as "lettrism," see Binbaş; Coulon; Ebstein, *Mysticism*, passim; Gardiner, *Esotericism*, Lettrism, Occultist, Stars; Gril; Lory; Melvin-Koushki, Early Modern, Grammatology). This was a discourse on the cosmogonic powers of divine speech and the Arabic alphabet that grew out of the unique religio-intellectual environment of the Islamicate West, particularly the tradition of thought stemming from the Cordovan mystic Ibn Masarra. Beginning in the seventh/thirteenth century, it was promulgated in the east by Sufi émigrés such as Ibn al-ʿArabī and Aḥmad al-Būnī, and it would go on to be widely influential in Islamic thought and culture. The science was cosmological in that it was very much concerned with the worlds of the Unseen and their relationship to the manifest world, plotting an emanationist cosmos throughout which the powers of the names and letters radiated; and eschatological in the sense that cycles (*dawāʾir*) of divine/angelic/astral influence that shape the unfolding of events in the world, including its eventual dissolution, were central to it (Bellver; Casewit, *Mystics*, 266–306; Gardiner, Lettrism, Occultist).

The science of letters eventually came to be closely linked to *jafr*, a discourse on special eschatological knowledge held by the Shīʿī Imams which took shape in Imamic reports (*akhbār*) from the same period and milieux of internecine contestation that gave rise to apocalyptic *ḥadīth*s of the *malāḥim wa-fitan* tradition (Arjomand, 265; Cook, *Studies*, 141; Kohlberg). Over the course of the medieval period, *jafr* came to be associated with various occult prognosticative methods, such as determining the outcomes of battles by comparing the numerical values of the opposing rulers' names, giving rise to the notion of a "science of *jafr*" (*ʿilm al-jafr*) dedicated to political-eschatological

prognostication (de Block, 187–207; Fahd, 221–4). By the early modern period, *ʿilm al-ḥurūf* and *ʿilm al-jafr* were commonly discussed as one and the same (Gardiner, Jafr).

Visionary accounts of the worlds of the Unseen had an important place in lettrist thought, and both Ibn al-ʿArabī and al-Būnī included complex cosmological diagrams in their works intended to help readers attain to the realities they portrayed through meditation on the figures. Ibn al-ʿArabī's *Inshāʾ al-dawāʾir* (Description of the Encompassing), for example, includes a diagram of the "subtle rays" through which the divine names emanate throughout the cosmos (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Inshāʾ*, f. 137b–8a; Elmore, *Gryphon*, 369; cf. Akkach, *Cosmology*; Hussain). Al-Būnī's *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt fī l-ḥurūf al-ʿulwiyyāt* (Subtleties of the Allusions regarding the Higher Letters) is replete with diagrams representing the cosmogonic roles of the letters of the Arabic alphabet, with some figures that can also be worn as textual amulets (al-Būnī, *Laṭāʾif;* Gardiner, *Esotericism*, 218–24, Stars, 51–3). In terms of Sufi manuscript culture, this was a new development. In earlier periods, with the noteworthy exception of al-Ḥallāj's *Kitāb al-ṭawāsīn* (and some Ismāʿīlī texts), diagrammatic representations of cosmological concepts were mostly absent (Karamustafa, Cosmographical). This literal making-visible of the Unseen on the pages of manuscripts can itself be considered a form of apocalyptic in that it tangibly reveals divine secrets about the structure of the cosmos, disclosing knowledge that had previously been reserved for only the most spiritually adept. A similar development in the late medieval period was the rising popularity of diagrammatical representations of invisible aspects of the cosmos in Jewish Kabbalistic manuscripts, and it has been argued that such figures were important assertions of knowledge and power over the cosmos by groups of specialist spiritual practitioners (Segol). Kabbalah, too, had a strong eschatological component, the gradual disclosure of its secrets to public discourse marking "the emergence of the messianic era," and both it and the science of letters were part of a wider phenomenon of esotericism in late medieval thought—that is, a vogue for discourses in which secrecy and the disclosure of secrets were key elements (Elior, 52; Halbertal).

6 *ʿĀlam al-Shahāda*: The Hierarchy of Saints

Veneration of the saints—God's friends (*awliyāʾ Allāh*)—was an important element of Sufi piety from early on and was central to that of the Sufi orders (*ṭuruq*) in the mature period. That the saints are intimately involved in eschatological and cosmological matters is expressed in various theoretical writings on sainthood as well as in the shrine culture that grew up around

the tomb-shrines of the saints and was the locus of many of the most visible, "popular" elements of Sufism.

A central idea in Sufi discourses on sainthood in the mature period is that there exists a hierarchy of living saints present in the manifest world at all times, the function of which is to protect the world and its inhabitants. The notion is traceable to various *ḥadīth*s. The Egyptian polymath al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), for example, in his treatise on the topic, cites a tradition in which the Prophet identifies a disfigured Ethiopian man who sweeps and washes the mosque as "one of the seven men by means of whom God protects the inhabitants of the earth" (al-Suyūṭī, 428). The concept is more fully developed by such early thinkers as al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. probably 298/910), who asserts the perennial existence of a hierarchy of forty saints, with new individuals appointed to replace members as they expire (al-Tirmidhī, 109–10; cf. McGregor, 13–14). The mysterious al-Khiḍr, an emblem of sainthood, is often said to be charged by God with maintaining the hierarchy, as in al-Tādhifī's (d. 963/1556) hagiography of ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 561/1166), in which a disciple of al-Jīlānī follows his master one night to a meeting of the highest rank of saints at which a new member is inducted by al-Khiḍr in place of a saint who has died (al-Tādhifī, 31). The most important cosmo-eschatological function of the hierarchy of saints is its role in vouchsafing the created world against destruction until the appointed time. Al-Hujwīrī, for example, not only credits the saints with making rain fall and crops grow but also writes of their working in unison to "go round the whole universe" and remove imperfections that arise in its structure, thus ensuring its perdurance (al-Hujwīrī, 228). Ibn al-ʿArabī's aforementioned concept of the Perfect Man, without whose presence the cosmos would cease to exist, clearly resonates with the idea of the hierarchy's role in preserving the cosmos. Indeed, according to him, the *quṭb* of a given period is the Perfect Man of that time (Chittick, *Sufi Path*, 371). The saints are, in this sense, gatekeepers of the eschaton, a duty in keeping with their roles as intercessors with God and conduits of His mercy and wrath.

In the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī, the hierarchy of saints (and hagiology generally) finds its most extensive elaboration. Ibn al-ʿArabī discerns a system whereby every saint is an inheritor (*wārith*) of one of the prophets, with the inheritors of particular prophets consistently filling certain positions in the upper ranks of the hierarchy. This notion, whereby all prophets are present on the earth via their living inheritors, again attests to the apocalyptic temporality that pervades much Sufi thought, every saint being a typological figuration, an instantiation of the spirit of their patron prophet. One way in which the relationship of saints to prophets was discerned by followers and hagiographers was that the saint's marvels would reproduce, or at least echo, those of their

prophetic forebear. Thus a *mūsāwī* saint, an inheritor from Moses, might be possessed of a glowing white hand, like in the Qurʾānic account of that prophet (McGregor, 21–2). Most importantly, every saint and his followers were figurations of the Prophet Muḥammad and his Companions, their lives a reinstantiation of the theophanic period in history that was the setting for the revelation of the Qurʾān and Islam itself. This typological notion is already present well before the rise of the orders, and it contributes to the importance of the *silsila* (lit. "chain") in Sufi thought and practice, the line of spiritual transmission that links the living master back through time to various saints and ultimately the Prophet himself—almost always via al-Junayd at one point and ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib at another. Much as the *isnād* of a *ḥadīth* is meant to ensure the text's validity on the strength of an undying chain of human transmission, such that it is the Prophet's voice that is heard rather than the *muḥaddith*'s, the *silsila* both acknowledges and transcends the passage of historical time, establishing the authority of the living saint while largely dissolving their contingent identity in order to recast it in a hagiographical mold. The rigorous attention to *adab* in Sufi literature and practice—the prescribed refinement of manners and ethics, external behaviors and internal states, particularly in the presence of the *shaykh*—can be understood as part of a practical implementation of typological figuration, the uniformity of interactions aimed at ensuring that every gathering of saint and disciples mirrors interactions in generations past and ultimately the Prophetic ideal. As the Sufi orders took form and flourished in the mature period, such concepts and practices helped cultivate a popular imaginary in which the living saints, as local embodiments of the Prophet/prophets and saints past, were the tangible symbols of the ever-present power of the Unseen world and its inhabitants (Knysh, *Sufism*, 137–75).

7 Conclusion

> How can a little worm buried in shit know the end and the origin of the earth?
>
> JALĀL AL-DĪN RŪMĪ (RŪMĪ, 2:866, trans. DOOSTDAR)

Sufi cosmo-eschatology, as varied between thinkers and groups as any other major element of Sufism, does not comprise a unified cosmological "system" or body of knowledge. Its goals are not primarily epistemological, however, but rather transformational—aimed at rendering translucent and permeable the veils that separate the herebelow and hereafter, the beginning and end of things. Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273), the famed Persian poet and chief saint

of the Mevlevī order, offers above what might seem a grim assessment of the human capacity for such revelations. This invective, however, is placed in the mouth of an atheist philosopher arguing for the eternity of the world, whose argument is posed against that of a doctrinaire religious scholar. True knowledge, for Rūmī, comes from neither philosophy nor unquestioning adherence to scripture, but rather through the ego-death of submission to one's *pīr*, to the rigors of Sufi practice, *adab*, and ethics. Just as Rūmī's poetry often blends gross crudities with sublime illuminations, the initiate learns to glimpse beyond the appetites and indignities of this world to deeper realities in which long dead prophets and saints yet act on humanity's behalf, and through which living saints can shower blessings on their disciples.

In its pre-Islamic and early Islamic forms, the apocalyptic genre, however terrifying its predictions, is ultimately one of hope and inspiration, a vehicle for seeing the world through new eyes as replete with the promise of redemption through radical transformation. Sufis take over and adapt this power of re-envisioning through their engagements with apocalypticism, proclaiming the reality of the next world not only as promised for the future but as accessible in the present moment, and building on the apocalyptic rhythms and tension of the Qurʾān to recast the world as always already the Garden or the Fire, at least for those with eyes to see.

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CHAPTER 2

Cosmogonic Myths in Sufism

Stephen Hirtenstein

How and why the cosmos came into being is one of the major themes in Sufi thought, drawn from profound contemplations on the nature of the human being and the world as depicted in the Qurʾānic revelation, and notions of the primordiality of the Prophet Muḥammad. Myths and legends are sometimes regarded as antithetical to revelation, but in the Sufi contemplative context the scripture and even the cosmos itself becomes a revealed book that has to be re-imagined or "re-mythologised" by each human reader. In these contemplations the "object" or product of the divine creative activity varies: from the macrocosmic world to the microcosmic Perfect Human or Muḥammadan Reality and the creative realities that demand manifestation for their effects to be realised. Each of these aspects can be classified as a "cosmos," with its own cosmogonic story, based on explaining how the essential divine unity gives rise to and pervades the multiple forms that are witnessed in the world.

At the heart of all versions of Sufi cosmology lies the principle of *tawḥīd*, denoting the pre-existent and transcendent Unity behind all appearances. This means not simply the intellectual articulation that "there is no god but God," but the inner affirmation, vision, and realisation that the ultimate Reality is One and Absolute, and includes all forms of relativity. In Islam and Sufism, therefore, there is a direct and inalienable link between cosmology and spiritual psychology, between the origin and function of the cosmos and the origin and purpose of the human being, between cosmogony and eschatology. The relation between the pure singularity of the divine Essence and the plurality of worldly forms is framed in terms of the Qurʾānic notion of multiple divine Names and Attributes, which govern the world and which are all Names subsumed within the ultimate Name, the Name that designates the Essence insofar as It can be designated, *Allāh* (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Inshāʾ al-dawāʾir*, fol. 135a, ed. 37–8, English trans. 37). The principle of descent by which the ultimate Origin reveals itself in a "downward" manifestation (*nuzūl*, *tanzīl*) is also tied to the inevitable ascent or return to the Origin (*ʿawd*, *maʿād*) (see Q 2:28). The whole of existence can be conceived of as a great cycle or circle of Being (*dāʾirat al-wujūd*) at whose centre lies the unfathomable essential Reality, a cycle that begins and ends with the First Intellect, and is traversed by the true human being who descends and ascends to encompass all the degrees:

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the relationship between the Reality and every point on the circumference (degree or state of existence) is identical, each contemplating Him, each receiving whatever He gives by way of existence and blessing (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 1:125). Every aspect of this process of generation from a single source was explored, sometimes in terms of number theory, sometimes in terms of Neoplatonic traditions of hierarchical emanation, sometimes in mythological terms. In Sufi tradition, which emphasises the twin perspectives of separation and union between the Uncreated and the created, the various depictions of how and why the cosmos and the human being came into existence should be understood as meditations or elaborations on specific passages in the Qurʾān and Sunna. The historical spectrum of Sufi approaches to cosmogony naturally show a wide variety of perspectives and interpretations, even if there is common ground in the revealed texts, and what follows is an overview of major themes that recur in Sufi tradition.

1 The Genesis of the World

The Qurʾān itself provides diverse cosmogonic accounts in dispersed, non-sequential statements, re-envisaging motifs found in the Bible and ancient Near Eastern beliefs: for example, the divine work of creation in six days, after which God seated Himself upon His Throne under the aegis of His All-Compassionate Mercy (*raḥmān*) (7:54, 10:3, 25:59, 32:4); the creation of the heavens and the earth in two days by splitting them apart after they had been closed together, and the creation of all living things from water (41:9, 21:30); the creation of seven heavens out of smoke, in a series of layers, in two days (41:11–12, 67:3); the divine Throne established above the seven heavens and borne by glorifying angels (39:75, 40:7, 42:5).

The Qurʾānic "six days" of creation was taken as a general description of the genesis of the cosmos, but also points to the prime perfection of the number six: as the first mathematically "perfect number" (being the sum of its divisors), six was accepted as the most suitable numerical symbol of creation by early Jewish and Christian authors such as Philo, Origen, and St Augustine, and this idea was incorporated into Islamic mysticism. When describing the "voyage of origination" (*safar al-ibdāʿ*), which is "the voyage of creation and command" (see Q 7:54), the Andalusian master Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) interprets the Qurʾānic text (41:9–12) as specifying four "days" for the creation of the earth: two days in terms of its entity (*ʿayn*) and essence (*dhāt*), one for its exterior and one for its interior, and two days "when He deposited in the earth the unseen and seen kinds of sustenance"; and then two "days" for the

division and completion of the seven heavens (*K. al-Isfār*, 53–4). The Persian master Rūzbihān Baqlī (d. 606/1209) linked these days to six of God's essential attributes (*ṣifāt*: knowledge, power, hearing, sight, speech, and desire), akin to Adam's body prior to the divine spirit of the Essence, which is life, being blown into it (*ʿArāʾis*, 1:441, cited in Kazuyo Murata, 66–7; see also Elmore, Genesis, 7–12). The Persian poet Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273) contrasts the deliberation involved in God taking six days with the instantaneous nature of divine creativity in saying "Be" (*kun*, Q 36:82) (*Mathnawí*, 3:3500–1).

The two worlds of earth and heaven are often designated as the worlds of Creation (*khalq*) and Command (*amr*): the exterior "earth" of bodies, also known as the kingdom (*mulk*), and the interior "heavens" of the spirits, known as the dominion or the king's presence (*malakūt*) (Rāzī, 70–1; Rūmī, 4:3692, 6:78). The superiority of the creation of the heavens and earth over that of human beings (Q 40:57, "the creation of the Heavens and the Earth is greater than the creation of humankind, but most people do not know [that]") is taken to mean that humans are generated from them both, and they are like two parents, not the obvious fact that they are greater in bodily mass (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 1:125).

Great importance is given to the ruling power of Compassionate Mercy (*raḥma*) over everything and to the primacy of divine Generosity. Sufi authors sometimes depict the pre-creation state of Being as "the Cloud," in reference to the response given by Muḥammad when asked where the Lord was before creation: "He was in the Cloud, above which there was no air, and no air was below it" (al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmiʿ*, Tafsīr, sura 11:1). This Cloud (*ʿamāʾ*) is also described as the divine "Canopy" (*surādiq*, an image taken from Q 18:29) due to its enclosed impenetrability, or the primordial matter, "the dust-cloud" (*habāʾ*, Q 56:6) within which the forms of all things arise—the cosmos can therefore be regarded as a collection of imagined or "imaginalised" forms of dust taking shape within the Cloud (see Abrahamov, 56–7; Chittick, *Sufi Path*, 125–7; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *K. al-Isfār*, 50, *Futūḥāt*, 1:118, 3:443). The process of creation is then discussed in terms of its qualitative causation:

> God desired to bring things into existence, and existence is the fruit of the generosity of divine Being, necessarily. So All-Mercifulness is undoubtedly the Ruler with respect to this separation. Thus the Name All-Merciful (*al-Raḥmān*) sat upon [the Throne] in the Canopy of the Cloud … The voyage of Mercifulness from the Lord's Cloud to the sitting upon the Throne comes into existence out of generosity. Everything below the Throne becomes existent from the One sitting upon the Throne.
>
> IBN AL-ʿARABĪ, *K. al-Isfār*, 51

In other words, the initial movement of Being from the state of absolute non-manifestation is regarded as a matter of sheer generosity (*jūd*): this establishes God as the All-Merciful Lord, who is seated on the Throne (Q 2:255). It is from this Mercifulness that all existence (*wujūd*) flows—although these two Arabic words technically come from different roots, they are often associated in Sufi teaching since the letters of the former (*jūd* = *j-w-d*) are included as part of the latter (*wujūd* = *w-j-w-d*). The overflowing of this Generous Mercy existentiates all the possibilities inherent in the Essence, not only the universal and particular worlds and the things that come into external existence but also the states of being particular to human beings such as paradise and hell. A two-step process of creation was delineated by Ibn al-ʿArabī: "Through our manifestation within the Cloud, He gave us an existence belonging to the Cloud: after having an intelligible existence, it took on existence as an individuated eye-entity (*ʿayn*)" (*Futūḥāt*, 2:231). While Mercy is generally taken to mean that God nurtures all beings through continual blessing (through the name *al-Raḥmān*), as well as covering with forgiveness at the end (through the name *al-Raḥīm*, the Most Merciful), one school of Sufi thought takes it to be identical with existence itself: the fact that something exists is the same as its having been mercified, and the first "thing" to which Mercy is extended is Itself. One implication of this doctrine, according to some, is that whatever has come from Mercy must ultimately return, or the circle of Being would be incomplete: however, this does not suggest a simple understanding of universal salvation, since each person is said to return to their "known place" (*maqām maʿlūm*, referring to Q 37:164), which indicates their own reality (Chittick, *Divine Love*, 25–6; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 3:429–43, *Fuṣūṣ*, 166; Izutsu, 116–20; Maybudī, 1:29, 9:397; Suhrawardī, 96).

Such a cosmological perspective has had various doctrinal consequences. For example, when considering the world as the object of divine creativity, Sufis have emphasised that this world and all that is in it is the effect of the divine will, and is therefore complete and perfect. They have followed al-Ghazālī's famous and quite controversial dictum that "there is not in possibility anything whatever more excellent, more perfect and more complete than [this world]," arguing that if there were a better world and God had withheld it, that would signify a miserliness entirely incompatible with His infinite generosity (al-Ghazālī, 4:222–3; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Inshāʾ al-dawāʾir*, fols. 131b–132a, ed. 31–2, English trans. 32–3; for a detailed discussion of the controversy, see Ormsby, passim).

While the Qurʾānic cosmogonic passages have been described as "novel readings of a familiar narrative with the perspicuous tendency to de-mythicise it in some substantial traits, though not without introducing new mythic

elements" (Neuwirth, Negotiating Justice, 1:28), Muslim exegetes and Sufi authors can be said to have re-mythologised such accounts by reading the revealed text through a contemplative and imaginative lens, as part of the vertical relationship between the Sender of revelation and successive generations of human recipients. This often involved framing the discussion in theological and philosophical terms. For example, in one of his early works Ibn al-ʿArabī discusses the genesis of the cosmos in terms of how the evident causation of the world demonstrates its total dependence upon the incomparable divine Essence, which is dissociated from any need for the world, and how the Essence demonstrates its sovereign power within the world through the activity of the divine Names: these Names are not simply multiple but constitute a totality (*jamʿ*) by virtue of the One that they name (*Inshāʾ al-dawāʾir*, fol. 135a, ed. 37–8, English trans. 36–7, *Futūḥāt*, 1:122). He then goes on to discuss the particular Names that lead to the world's coming into being, in a way that was both clearly important in his thinking and highly controversial to some of his readers (see The Creative Self-fulfilment of the Names below).

The Neoplatonic schema of emanation from the One was also utilised to give an orderly structure to the overflowing of the Essence into the multiple forms of manifest existence, although Sufi authors were often at great pains to point out that this emanation (*fayḍ*) should not be understood in the sense of any actual separation from Reality. Qurʾānic images of the Pen and Tablet, as well as Greek concepts such as Universal Nature or the four elements, were employed in Islamic philosophy and Sufism from the time of the Brethren of Purity (*Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*, fourth/tenth century), to give shape to the hierarchical nature of existence (Nasr, 51–62, 76). The cosmological structure which was generally subscribed to in medieval times situated the earth at the centre of the cosmos, as a world of generation and corruption, above which the heavenly spheres of Ptolemaic astronomy constantly rotate; transcending both levels of physical change is a static hierarchy of Universals emanating from the Transcendent Unity, as elaborated by the Neoplatonists. This was broadly followed by medieval Sufi authors: while earlier figures had tended to emphasise a more ascetical perspective, viewing the world as petty and corrupt in comparison to the afterlife, later writers mainly promoted a harmonious vision of the world in accord with al-Ghazālī's principle of perfection through expression, with the added dynamic of the crucial importance of the human being: prophetic realities were incorporated as rulers for each of the heavenly spheres, and the perfect human being was made to be both the endpoint of the hierarchy and its raison d'être. Thus the ladder of existence begins from the divine Pen (*qalam*, Q 68:1) or First Intellect, and proceeds in a "descent" to the Preserved Tablet (*lawḥ*, Q 85:22) or Universal Soul, Nature (*ṭabīʿa*), the

Dust-Cloud (*habāʾ*, Q 56:6) or Prime Matter, Universal Body, the Lord's Throne (*ʿarsh*, Q 20:5), the Footstool or Pedestal that extends over the heavens and the earth (*kursī*, Q 2:255), the starless sphere or the constellations (*burūj*, Q 85:1), the sphere of fixed stars or lunar mansions (*manāzil*, Q 10:5), which includes paradises and hells, the seven planetary heavens, the four elements and the various inhabitants (both spiritual and physical beings such as plants and animals, angels and jinn), concluding with the human being. Basing themselves on numerical associations, some Sufi authors discuss 28 degrees of existence (the second "perfect" number, the number of lunar mansions and of Arabic letters), while others give 40 (the number of preparation, purification, dissolution, and death; see Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, ch. 198, 2:397ff.; for the framework of ascension, see also ch. 167, trans. *Alchemy*, 167–72; al-Būsnawī, fols. 474a–b; al-Jīlī, passim; see also Chittick, *Self-disclosure*, xxviii–xxxii; Schimmel, *Mystery*, 122–6, 245–53; Todd, 65–73).

In this cosmological hierarchy, according to Ibn al-ʿArabī and his school, "every active principle is a father, and every passive principle is a mother." Human imagery of fathers, mothers, conjugal union, and offspring is used to explain the interaction of different macrocosmic degrees in an explicit anthropopathy:

> The First Intellect or Sublime Pen was the first thing to be created, with no other originated thing besides it. Then it underwent the effect of God causing the Preserved Tablet to be brought forth from it, just as Eve was brought out from Adam in the world of bodies, so that the Tablet would be a place and receptacle for what the divine Sublime Pen would write upon it … Thus between the Pen and the Tablet there took place an intelligible, spiritual conjunction (*nikāḥ*), as well as a visible, sensory effect … The trace [of the Pen] that is deposited on the Tablet is like the sperm that flows into the woman's womb, and the meanings that appear from this Scripture are akin to the spirits of the children that are placed in their bodies.
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> IBN AL-ʿARABĪ, *Futūḥāt*, 1:139; for the development of the relationship of Pen and Tablet in the writings of AL-QŪNAWĪ and FARGHĀNĪ, see TODD, 66–8

2 The Genesis of the Human Being

The primary cosmogonic myth of the creation of the first human being, Adam, which is common to all three Abrahamic traditions, is dramatised in the Qurʾān through a direct encounter between God and the angels in the unseen world

of the spirit. When the angels object to the idea of this Adamic creature being placed on the earth as a divine representative (*khalīfa*) on the grounds that he "will wreak mischief in it and shed blood, while we glorify You with praise and declare You holy" (Q 2:30), they are rebuked by God for assuming that their glorification is superior and not recognising the divine wisdom in creating Adam. They are depicted as not seeing that the apparent incompatibility of the spiritual and physical worlds, the two worlds of command (*amr*) and creation (*khalq*), hides a deeper truth, a truth which will only be realised by the human being (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2:575). God then tells Adam to teach them their "names," of which they have no prior knowledge. This proof-text was taken to point both to the unparalleled dignity of the human being in perfection, inherently superior to the highest of created beings in terms of knowledge, and to the implicit divine warning that even His closest servants can err through being ignorant of the real meaning of being human (Baqlī, *ʿAbhar*, 32; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 29). This view of the true place of the human within the created order may be contrasted with the Old Testament myth which focuses on Adam's transgression and fall from grace, initiating a historical process of unpredictable human—divine interaction (see Neuwirth, Myths and Legends, 3:485, 490–1).

Sufi authors explain the story of Adam being taught all the names (Q 2:31) as meaning that the human being is first and foremost created in the divine image, and that this theomorphic "image," whose only quality is absolute dependence or servanthood (just as a mirror-image is nothing in itself but a reflection), contains or mirrors everything that is in the original, including above all the knowledge of all distinctions which is the mark of divine love (Samʿānī, 625–6). The main difference between the angels and Adam is that the angels are beings that perform works of adoration, while the truly human being is given pure knowledge. The divine "Names" are the prime distinctive qualities or aspects of God that are to be found through manifestation, and only the human being can recognise all of them by virtue of knowing that which they name. Thus, for example, the Forgiver (*al-ghafūr*) is a Name that lies beyond the knowledge of angels, since they do not recognise the existence of lack which such a Name requires in order to manifest its effects. These Names, which are in themselves innumerable, can be summarised as the 99 Most Beautiful Names (*al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā*), as articulated in the revelation of the Qurʾān and Sunna (see Chittick, *Divine Love*, 53–69, *Sufi Path*, 33–46; Izutsu, 99–107).

Other aspects of Adam's creation feature prominently in Sufi texts: the unique privilege of his being created in the form or image (*ṣūra*) of God by the two divine Hands (Q 38:75), which are variously interpreted to mean the attributes of divine beauty and majesty, the created exterior form of the universe

and the interior divine form of the Real (Baqlī, *ʿAbhar*, 38; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 31–3; Jāmī, 75); the 40 days needed for the kneading or fermenting of Adam's clay (*ḥadīth*), signifying the completion of all the perfections that are gradually included in his make-up, and corresponding to the achievement of human maturity at the age of 40 (Rūmī, 3:3502, 6:1216; Samʿānī, 173); and perhaps most importantly, the blowing of the divine Spirit into Adam after being shaped from clay (Q 15:29), which is taken to mean that he was given knowledge of all the divine Attributes, both those of the Essence, like life, and those of the divine Acts which manifest majesty and beauty (Baqlī, *Mashrab*, 176; Kazuyo Murata, 84–85, 102–7), or that he brought together the beauty of the spiritual world of Command and the "taint" of creation (Maybudī, 3:297–8), or that the full capacity to receive the constant effusion of Being was actualised (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 27; Jāmī, 53).

Adam's creation not only gives rise to dispute among the angels but leads to the appearance of Satan (al-Shayṭān or Iblīs), whose subsequent role as misleader (see Q 28:15) is not simply a manifestation of divine anger but more importantly, a hidden mercy (Chittick, *Divine Love*, 83–7; Maybudī, 3:589). On the other hand, Rūmī draws on another tradition that even the earth could not bear the prospect of Adam's arrival: the four archangels, Gabriel, Michael, Seraphiel, and Azrael, were each commanded by God to take a handful of clay from the earth for the creation of Adam's body, but the earth lamented so much that the first three could not bear to do so. Only Azrael had enough resolution and strength of purpose to fetch the clay, and as a consequence was rewarded by becoming the angel of death, who leads the human being "from a dungeon and prison into a garden" (Rūmī, 5:1556–714). However, in contrast to those who viewed the human being as an angelic light trapped in the prison of materiality, the idea that human embodiment is superior to the purely spiritual realm of the angels is one that became normative amongst Sufis: this superiority reflects the ontological status of the Manifest in relation to the Non-Manifest (see below for the discussion of the hidden treasure), and is realised through abasement and servanthood rather than through exaltation and power (for example, see Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 132–3; Izutsu, 230–2; al-Jīlānī, 83; Shaikh, 134–5).

3 Adam and Eve

Great cosmological and ontological importance is given to the figure of Eve, as the mate that made the singular human being, "the first father" of humankind, Adam, into one of a pair. The proof-text of Q 4:1 ("Fear your Lord, who created you all from a single soul, and who created from it its spouse, and who spread

many men and women from the two of them") is taken as describing not simply the origination of the human microcosm from Adam (the single soul) and Eve (its spouse or mate), but also that of the whole macrocosmos itself, as deriving from the One Being that divides Its singular Self into the realms of heaven (spirit, male) and earth (matter, female) and all that lies within them in terms of degrees and inhabitants. The creation of the cosmos is manifested in the synergy between the sky or heaven and the earth: when rain falls upon the earth, all existent beings are brought out and nourished, "just as the man casts his semen through sexual union into the woman" (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 1:131). In this perspective the whole of creation is female in relation to God, who is the sole active principle, and the divine creative act is conceived of as an unceasing sexual union between the Real and the essential reality (*ʿayn*) of the possible thing: the "offspring" of the nuptial act is the actualisation or existentiation of the possibility (Shaikh, 120–31).

Another proof-text, Q 49:13 ("O humankind, We have created you, from a male and from a female, and We have made you [all] as peoples and tribes"), is taken by Ibn al-ʿArabī to explain what he calls the four kinds of human body, that of Adam (created directly by the two Hands of God from clay), of Eve (born from a male only, Adam, from a rib), of Jesus (born from a female only, Mary, from an inbreathed spirit), and of the children of Adam (born from a male and female combined, from "lowly fluid," Q 32:8) (*Futūḥāt*, 1:124, 131). Adam represents both the prototype of the human being and the "first father," from whose short rib (*quṣayrā*) Eve was created according to tradition. Eve is described as not simply the mother of humankind but as a "second father," in the sense that she participates fully in the active creative process (paralleling the Neoplatonic tradition propounded by the fourth/tenth-century philosopher al-Fārābī that the First Intellect gives rise to secondary levels of Intellect, which are in turn "active" in relation to levels below them). In this respect

> a woman in relation to a man is like Nature in relation to the divine Command … those who recognise the degree of Nature know the level of woman, while those who recognise the degree of the divine Command know the level of man and the fact that the existence of all existent things other than God depends upon these two realities, although this truth is too hidden and subtle to be known by their children among the intelligences.
>
> *Futūḥāt*, 3:90

Eve represents the part that is contained within the whole, the created cosmos in relation to the Real, the divine form that is the perfect human in relation to God. The curvature of the rib bone is explained by Ibn al-ʿArabī as indicating

the inclination of love in relativity, reflecting ultimately the love of God to be recognised. Likewise, Adam can be regarded as "mother" insofar as he gave birth to Eve from inside himself, just as women give birth to babies from inside themselves, and the "hole" left by the birth of Eve was filled with passion for her. This mirrors the ontological picture of the divine Being "giving birth" to the "contents" or possibilities of His own nature and being filled with love for whatever He creates (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 207–8, *Futūḥāt*, 1:124, 136, 2:466, 3:87, 3:314, 516; Sachiko Murata, 177–81, 200).

4 The Fall of Adam

While the Qur'ānic account of Adam's expulsion from paradise is brief, stating simply that "Adam disobeyed" (20:21) and was told to "go down" (2:38), Sufi authors commented at some length on the necessity for his descent into this world, not as a function of Adam's wrongdoing or disobedience but in terms of the requirements of certain Names which are included in the divine Essence. Thus the Names of majesty and severity have no application in a paradisiacal domain ruled by mercy and gentleness. Adam symbolises the complete representative (*khalīfa*) of God in this world, so all the Names have to find fulfilment in him. The pain of suffering in this world is like putting salt into a stew, producing the full ripe taste of love. The Persian author Samʿānī (d. 534/1140) interprets the divine command of Q 2:38 as saying: "come into this world, which is the workshop of seeking. The teacher, who is poverty, will write out for you the alphabet of love" (Samʿānī, 296–7, 420; see Chittick, *Divine Love*, 69–74, *Sufism*, 141–77; Lange, 207). The eponymous founder of the Qādiriyya *ṭarīqa* ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 561/1166) also sees this descent as progress, describing the human being brought down to "the lowest degree" (referring to Q 95:5) as "being increased in intimacy and closeness" to the divine (al-Jīlānī, 83).

5 The Primordial Covenant

Following the story of the creation of Adam and Eve, the Qur'ān speaks of a special eternal covenant which all human beings have made with their Lord prior to being individuated in the manifest world: "When your Lord took from the children of Adam, from their loins, their seed, and made them testify concerning themselves, [saying]: 'Am I not your Lord?' They said: 'Yes indeed, we testify [to that]'" (7:172). This passage attracted the attention of generations of Sufi commentators, who refer to this primordial event as the "Day of the

Covenant" (*yawm al-mīthāq*) or the "Day of Alast" (*rūz-i alast*, from *a-lastu bi-rabbikum*, "Am I not your Lord?"), when every human being recognised their essential nature as servant, and affirmed God's lordship and glorified Him (for example, Ibn Barrajān, 112, 393). Sufis believe it is possible, even necessary, for the human being to re-experience the Day of Alast and recover the state in which "the soul flew in the world of divine love with the wings of human love" (Baqlī, *ʿAbhar*, 4; Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 24, 143, 299). The Egyptian poet Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 632/1235) memorably evokes the covenant in the famous opening stanza of his Wine Ode (*khamriyya*): "in memory of the beloved, we drank a wine; we were drunk with it before the creation of the vine" (Ibn al-Fāriḍ, 47; see Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 351). Baqlī also viewed the covenant as a matter of passionate love in the face of divine beauty and majesty, in which human spirits heard the divine address and fell in love with God: "the Real unveiled His beauty (*jamāl*) to the spirits of the passionate lovers in His first appearance after introducing Himself to them by saying: 'Am I not your Lord?'" (*Mashrab*, 10). However, it is noteworthy that he presents the emphatic response to this address as only being made by certain human spirits, those of the prophets and saints, that is, the elect who hear and recognise the beauty of His essential majesty, rather than a universal "Yes indeed" (*ʿAbhar*, 129–30, *Mashrab*, 307; Kazuyo Murata, 80–3). The Persian exegete Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī (d. post-520/1126) also distinguishes two groups among those who hear the divine address: those who only accept the attributes of divine exaltedness and dominance, on the one hand, and those who also receive His gentleness and generosity, on the other (3:793–96, cited in Chittick, *Divine Love*, 43–5; cf. ʿAṭṭār, 235–6, who distinguishes three groups according to the spirits' love for the world, paradise, or God alone). In the account of creation by al-Jīlānī, the only obstacle is forgetfulness (*nisyān*), a word often treated as cognate with *insān*, human being, suggesting that the human is both the most intimate with God (*anīs*, from *uns*, intimacy or familiarity) and the most prone to forget (see Q 20:115). The human spirits descend in successive clothings of light from the divine realm (*lāhūt*) to the world of divine omnipotence (*jabarūt*), where they are arraigned as rulers (*sulṭān*), to the angelic realm (*malakūṭ*), where they become spiritual travellers, and finally the physical world of the kingdom (*mulk*), where they become embodied but due to their connection with corporeality forget the agreement they had made on the Day of Alast (al-Jīlānī, 69–70, 83).

The "seed" (*dhurriyya*) of the children of Adam gave rise to the doctrine of minute luminous particles (*dharr*) propounded by the early Sufi Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896), according to which this original eternal existence, prior to manifestation in the body, was in forms of light. For his contemporary, the Baghdad

master al-Junayd (d. 298/910), the human being's existence at this covenant is a purely spiritual matter and a timeless state prior to the condition of individuality:

> He addressed them when they had no existence apart from His existence as them, when they were existent in the Real (*al-ḥaqq*) without having any existence in themselves. So the Real was with the Real therein, existent in the meaning that is known and experienced by none other than Him.
>
> AL-JUNAYD, 41

Rūmī makes the same point in a more poetic vein: "the whole night until dawn, that exalted King is Himself uttering an *Alast* and a *balā* (Yes indeed)" (6:2300), describing this as "night" because the whole event takes place in the invisible realm prior to manifestation. Elsewhere Rūmī also stresses the intrinsic tension between the eternal world of the covenant and the physical world of daily life: "From the Day of Alast there is a hereditary enmity of that heart to the Sabzawār [fortress] of the carnal nature" (5:895), as well as the provisional and often erroneous nature of human judgement: "Here the name of ʿUmar was idolater, but in *Alast* his name was believer" (1:1241; see also 2:3137, 3:4543, 5:895, 5:2126).

A comparison is often made between this general covenant of all human beings and the one said to have been made expressly with the prophets (Q 33:7), whose primary task is to remind people of what has already been agreed to in the eternal divine presence (see, for example, Böwering, 154–7; Ibn Barrajān, 83, 112, 249; al-Jīlānī, 70; al-Tustarī, 40).

6 The Muḥammadan Reality

It is clear from the Qur'ānic story of Adam that the cosmos, in the sense of the unseen spiritual world, the heavens and the earth, was already in existence prior to the creation of the Adamic human being, and that various stages of "descent" from the Absolute state of Unknowableness had already taken place. This cosmogonic "gap" was bridged by the doctrine of the Muḥammadan Reality (*al-ḥaqīqa al-Muḥammadiyya*), which is equivalent to the Reality of all realities (*ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqā'iq*) that precedes all creation. The principle is based on two sayings (*ḥadīth*) of the Prophet Muḥammad: "Before [creating] anything else, God created the light of your Prophet from His light" (as related by Jābir b. ʿAbdallāh, cited in al-Zurqānī, 1:54); and "I was a prophet while Adam was still

between water and clay" (alternatively, "between spirit and body"; al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmiʿ*, Manāqib, 1; see Chittick, *Sufi Path*, 405 n. 3; Chodkiewicz, 60–1).

The first to develop a theory around the light of Muḥammad (*nūr Muḥammad*) as the origin of the cosmos and of humankind seems to have been al-Tustarī, who speaks of creation in terms of three stages of minute luminous "particles" or "seeds" (*dharr*): firstly, Muḥammad, the beloved (*ḥabīb*) who is described as a light, from whose prostration God created a column of light, and within this light Muḥammad stood in worship and pure servanthood "before the Lord of the worlds a thousand thousand years with the primordial faith, being in the invisible's revelation of the invisible a thousand thousand years before the beginning of creation"; secondly, the luminous particle of Adam, who was created of clay from the light of Muḥammad; and thirdly, Adam's descendants (al-Tustarī, 95; al-Daylamī, 54–5). This primordial eternal identification of the light of Muḥammad with the absolute Light of Being leads al-Tustarī to make a further distinction between those human beings created from the light of Adam ("the children of Adam"), whom he calls "those who desire [God]" (*murīdūn*), and those created directly from the light of Muḥammad himself, meaning the prophets and saints, whom he calls "those who are desired [by God]" (*murādūn*) (al-Tustarī, 41; cf. Böwering, 149–57, 192–3; al-Daylamī, 54). Some later authors went even further in describing the whole world as nothing but the manifestation of the divine light or "the rays of God's light" (al-Qūnawī, *Iʿjāz*, 50, cited in Todd, 59).

Other traditions such as "I have created Muḥammad from the light of My Face" and "If not for you, I would not have created the universe" (both divine sayings, *ḥadīth qudsī*), as well as the Prophetic tradition that "the first thing God created was my spirit (*rūḥ*)" (equated in different versions with Light, Intellect, and the Pen), were equally invoked as proof-texts for the primordiality of Muḥammad over all other created beings. "O Muḥammad, O unique pearl! ... I created all for your sake, and I created you for My sake ... O Muḥammad ... I lifted up the curtain between Myself and you, and I showed Myself to your spirit" (Maybudī, 7:174; see also 7:525, 9:375, cited in Chittick, *Divine Love*, 35–8). According to al-Jīlānī, "God first created the spirit of Muḥammad from the light of His Beauty (*jamāl*)," and this Muḥammadan Reality

> is named a light because it is completely purified from the darkness [associated with] Majesty (*jalāl*) ... The Muḥammadan spirit is the quintessence of all created things, the first of them and their origin ... from [his spirit] were created all the spirits in the realm of divine nature, in the true "best of forms" (*aḥsan al-taqwīm*, Q 95:4). It is the name for the bridal chamber of intimacy in that [primordial] world, and the original

> homeland. After four thousand years had elapsed, God created the Throne from the light of the essence of Muḥammad, and from it the rest of creation; then the spirits were sent down to the lowest level of creation, i.e. the corporeal bodies.
>
> AL-JĪLĀNĪ, 69; see also ANQARAWĪ, 47:7

Some authors explained darkness as the necessary condition of the created state and associated it with the attribute of divine anger or severity (Rāzī, 67), while others emphasised that the appearance of light necessitated the appearance of its relative opposite in the form of shadow, describing creation as an isthmus (*barzakh*, using the terminology of Q 55:19–20) lying between the pure light of Being and the sheer darkness of non-Being (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2:304, 3:274).

According to another *ḥadīth* (transmitted by Ibn ʿAbbās, cited in Abū l-Shaykh, 1:492), the first thing created was "the white pearl" (*al-durra al-bayḍāʾ*), which is taken to mean an image of the First Intellect or Muḥammadan Light. The pearl began to "perspire" under the direct gaze of God in a state of awe and trepidation. From the bounteous water of this primordial "sweat" all the spirits came into being, followed by the divine Throne and the whole cosmos (Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood*, 389–91; for the notion that this perspiring was due to "shame" rather than "rain," see Rāzī, 60–1).

To explain the dynamic between divine Incomparability and cosmic existence, Ibn al-ʿArabī resorted not only to imagery but sometimes also to philosophical conceptions: Absolute Being (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*), which is unknowable in Itself, is the first of three known things (*maʿlūmāt*). The second is Absolute non-Being (*al-ʿadam al-muṭlaq*), which can never exist and is the polar opposite of Being, entirely theoretical since it can never be said to exist or participate in Being. The third is that which divides these two, the supreme isthmus (*al-barzakh al-aʿlā*) between Being and non-Being, between the Unknowable and the known: it is called by many names such as the universal Reality of Muḥammad, the Reality of realities and the Truth by which all things are created (*al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi*)—it is neither qualified by the side of existence nor non-existence; it simultaneously keeps the two apart and unites them. This isthmus (*barzakh*) is the means through which all manifestation comes about. The world, both macrocosmos and Adamic microcosmos, is thus the "child" or product of the primary fruitful marriage of Absolute Being and non-Being, coming about through the agency of the isthmus of isthmuses (*barzakh al-barāzikh*). This tri-partite structure, inherent in the nature of Being Itself, is reflected within the worlds of created existence, the higher world of spirits and the lower world of bodies coming together to produce the

intermediary *barzakhī* world of images (*Futūḥāt*, 3:46–7; Akkach, 41–3; for a similar discussion in terms of light and darkness, see Suhrawardī, 91ff.; also Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 184). In yet another version of this principial creation, Ibn al-ʿArabī delineates three degrees of Being: firstly, absolute Being which is existent in Itself, God in Himself; secondly, limited being, which designates anything in relativity, which he depicts as "the [divine] Throne, the Footstool, the Supreme Heavens and the beings they contain, the Sky, the Earth and all it contains of animals, insects, plants, and other beings"; and thirdly, the Reality of all realities, "a universal and intelligible reality subsisting [only] in the mind, which manifests in eternity as eternal and in temporality as temporal" (*Inshāʾ al-dawāʾir*, fols. 125a–126b, ed. 17–20, English trans. 24–5).

Other authors developed this idea of the Muḥammadan Reality preceding all creation by describing it as "the first individuation (*al-taʿayyun al-awwal*)," in which God manifested Himself to Himself in a total self-manifestation beyond any specific attribute (*maẓhar al-dhāt*), and interpreted the idea of Muḥammad's prophethood "while Adam was still between water and clay" as his being the annunciation of truth to everything in the spiritual realm prior to any creation of a human being. "I had drunk the wine of the end when Adam had not yet finished drinking the draft of the beginning" (Samʿānī, 542–3, cited in Chittick, *Divine Love*, 38–40; Anqarawī, 47:7; al-Būsnawī, fol. 23b; al-Jazāʾirī, 194; al-Qūnawī, *al-Fukūk*, 27:3).

7 The Dynamic of the Hidden Treasure

If the identity of the Muḥammadan Reality as the singular image of God's Absoluteness underlies the philosophical and imaginative structure of Sufi conceptions of the origin of the world, it does not in itself explain the dynamic of the creative process and the motive behind the creation of the world. This is most commonly referred to through an oft-quoted divine saying: "I was a hidden [or in Ibn al-ʿArabī's formulation: *lam uʿraf*, unknown/unrecognised] treasure and I loved to be known/recognised; so I created the creatures that I might be known [or: that they might recognise Me]" (for references, see Chittick, *Sufi Path*, 391 n. 14). The "hidden treasure" is taken to refer to the unknowable Reality in Its state of Absoluteness, hidden and unknown in Its own divine isolation, which desired or loved to be known through "another" (see Izutsu, 28, 32). The loving to be known implies the recognition that within the eternal receptive substance of the divine Cloud there is already the possibility of "another" who can know God fully. While the creation of the heavens and earth demonstrates divine omnipotence, the creation of Adam and his children is for showing the

secrets of the hidden treasure and for the full reciprocation of love (Maybudī, 8:387). Combining this *ḥadīth* with the Qurʾānic injunction "I created the jinn and humankind only that they might worship Me" (Q 51:56), al-Jīlānī emphasises that direct knowledge or recognition (*maʿrifa*) of God, in His Attributes and in His Essence, is the very purpose of human creation, and takes place in the original realm of divine nature (71–2). Creation may be understood as successive stages or presences (*ḥaḍarāt*) of individuation and self-determination (*taʿayyun*) or of divine Self-revelation and disclosure (*tajallī*). The various ontological levels can also be described as different degrees of participation in the divine Presence, unfolding the hidden treasury of Being through the manifestation of the Most Beautiful Names (see Akkach, 60–82; al-Būsnawī, fols. 17a–b; Chittick, *Sufi Path*, 13–14; Farghānī, 22, 34, 49, et passim; Izutsu, 11, 20, 152–7; Kazuyo Murata, 68–73).

The creative process itself takes place through what is called the "Breath of the Compassionate" (*nafas al-raḥmān*, an expression based on two Prophetic *ḥadīth*s; see Chittick, *Sufi Path*, 127): this designates an exhalation that alleviates the "distress" (*karb*) of non-existence experienced by all the realities that lie buried within the Cloud of the hidden treasure and seek their fulfilment by being manifested in existence. This parallels the process of human articulation, where the letters are "places" of potential sound hidden between the throat and the lips, which produce words and meanings when the breath that arises from the chest passes over them. In other words, the first object of God's Compassionate Mercy is Himself, or rather, the possibilities inherent and latent within His own Being, the first of which is the individuated Muḥammadan Reality in the first degree of existence as active principle or Universal Spirit—it is this Spirit that is "breathed" into Adam, the first human being created of the elements (referring to Q 15:29, in which God tells the angels that "I shall create a human out of dried clay, from shaped mud; and when I have formed him and breathed into him of My Spirit, fall down before him in prostration"; see Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood*, 386–7; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 203). The eleventh/seventeenth-century commentator on Ibn al-ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ*, ʿAbdallāh al-Būsnawī (d. 1054/1644), poetically describes this divine Breath as

> streaming out from the constraint of annihilation, the all-conquering authority of Uniqueness (*aḥadiyya*) and the distress of non-being, within the global synthesis of the Cloud of the Essence … the Reality of Muḥammad first had effect in the Compassionate Breath by his seeking It and his own individuation by It, as well as all the realities which were in potential within him.
>
> fol. 473b

8 The Creative Self-Fulfilment of the Names

Ultimately the immutable realities that lie latent within the divine Being are nothing other than His Most Beautiful Names. These Names are portrayed as yearning to express themselves: hence God's desire to create stems from His Name the Desirer or Willer (*murīd*), and in order for the meaning of this Name to be fulfilled, the created world, which is the object of the Name, is required. The Name Creator (*khāliq*) needs the existence of created beings (*makhlūq*) to manifest its effects. The Names are therefore described as God's "immediate household," in contrast to created beings which are "His extended family": "The [manifest] cosmos asks from Him because of its possibility, while the Names ask from Him in order for their effects to be manifest" (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 3:316–17; Chittick, *Sufi Path*, 40–1).

With this in mind, Ibn al-ʿArabī developed an innovative and daring cosmogonic myth in terms of the divine Names, which he expounded in at least four different texts, produced at different times during his life (for a translation of these texts and analysis, see Elmore, Four Texts). He notes that most people, even "some of those people of unveiling and realities who know God," end their inquiry into the cause of the genesis of the cosmos by simply stating that "He caused to exist that which He knew would be made to exist" (*Futūḥāt*, 1:99). Ibn al-ʿArabī presents his own version of cosmogony as a further analysis of the process of creation, in the form of a psycho-dramatic dialogue occurring prior to creation between particular Names. These are personified in a way somewhat reminiscent of the Greek gods on Mount Olympus, although he is at pains to point out that one should not imagine the Names as actually meeting together since they have no substantial being: "they are multiple with regard to relationships, not with respect to any individuated existence, for the Essence of the Real is One inasmuch as it is [pure] Essence" (*Futūḥāt*, 1:322). While the Names that he chooses to focus on vary somewhat in the different accounts, the main anthropopathic storyline does not: the Names, which he calls "the Mothers who are necessary for the creation of the cosmos," gather together in the Presence of the Named One and contemplate their own realities and meanings. Falling in love with their own particular reality but finding no "theatre" in which to display their ruling properties, no treasury to open with their "keys," they ask for help from the greatest actualising Name, the Able/Powerful (*qādir*). He tells them that He is incapable of doing anything on His own as He is subject to the authority of the Desirer/Purposer (*murīd*)—the capacity to act is determined by a desire and will to act. The Desirer, however, admits to being under the authority of the All-Knower (*ʿalīm*), because His knowledge precedes creation—the capacity and desire to act imply a prior knowledge of

what to do. The Knower refers them all to the all-inclusive Name *Allāh*, who listens to their plea and in turn calls upon "the One Named" (*al-musammā*), the Transcendent Holy Essence beyond the level of the Names. Eventually permission is granted for the Names to manifest their effects through the agency of the Divinity (*Allāh*) and the Speaker (*mutakallim*) and the Names that establish the link to creation. In the earliest version of the story, the Names have no idea about anything beyond their own realities, as this is only known to *Allāh* and the Name the Knower—when the latter utters an impromptu blessing upon the Prophet Muḥammad, the Names are surprised to know there is a being they have never heard of, and the Knower then explains that the Muḥammadan Reality or Perfect Man is their epitome, summing up in microcosm all that they contain (Elmore, Four Texts, 6–9, *Islamic Sainthood*, 353–71). Unsurprisingly this doctrine has led to great controversy among Islamic scholars down the ages, including in recent times when in 1975 Kamāl Aḥmad ʿAwn sent an open letter to the Egyptian Ministry of Culture accusing Ibn al-ʿArabī of polytheism on the basis of this passage in the *Futūḥāt*: this was one of the factors that led to the People's Assembly deciding in 1979 to temporarily ban the publication of Dr Osman Yahia's edition of the *Futūḥāt* (see Homerin, 466ff.). Its decidedly anthropomorphic features may explain why it was not taken up by later Sufi writers.

The object or end-product of the divine creative activity varies in each of these accounts: from the Muḥammadan Reality or microcosmic Perfect Man to the macrocosmic perfect World, to the World in its archetypal form as the essential realities of the Names, to the contingent imperfect world which requires to be set in order by the Lord (*rabb*) (Elmore, Four Texts, 3–4). Ultimately, these "*cosmoi*" are portrayed in mythical terms, as the creative Self-revelations of the unnameable and unfathomable Holy Essence, albeit without the imagery and narrative normally associated with traditional cosmogonic myths.

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CHAPTER 3

Classes of Beings in Sufism

Saeko Yazaki

1 Introduction

The creation and division of created beings are a fundamental aspect of Sufi thought, which is based on the awareness of divine presence and understanding of the position of humanity in the order of the universe. Creation accounts reveal the unique ontological status of humankind among created beings, and this Qurʾānic worldview has led Sufis to recognise the importance of remembrance of God, as well as human morality and responsibility in this world.

The Qurʾān contains a significant number of stories regarding the creation (*khalq*) and division of created beings into angels (*malāʾika*), Satan (Iblīs, al-Shayṭān) and devils (*shayāṭīn*), jinn, humankind (*insān*), animals (*dawābb*, *anʿām*), and plants (*nabāt al-arḍ*). What was the intention of God in classifying His creatures? Why was it deemed important for human beings to know about the other beings through revelation, and what is the Sufi approach to this knowledge? Among the five classes of beings, the three invisible species (though they can occasionally make themselves visible) which appear in the Qurʾān are angels, devils, and jinn. They are given different roles in the divinely created and ordered universe, and their status, including that of angels, is not necessarily higher than that of humans. Animals and plants were created as a sign of divine omnipotence as well as compassion towards humankind. The creation accounts reveal the unique human ontological position compared to that of other beings and the Sufis have found numerous Qurʾānic verses that emphasise the lofty rank of humans (e.g. 2:30–1, 33:72), their closeness to God (e.g. 2:115, 50:16), and mutual love between Him and His human creatures (e.g. 3:31, 5:93). The understanding of nature and functions of different beings and their place in the universe is a fundamental aspect of Sufi thought, cosmology, and morality. This chapter first discusses the Qurʾānic narratives of each class of beings followed by their understanding by major Sufi thinkers. One should point out that Sufi thought on this subject, like many other topics, derives from interpretations of the Qurʾān. In the concluding remarks, Sufi worldview is briefly compared with a few non-monotheistic traditions in order to place Sufism in a wider context.

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2 Angels

Faith in the existence of angels is obligatory in Islam, as they appear in the six articles of faith in Islam, namely, belief in God, His angels, His books, His prophets, the Last Day, and the divine decree (as in the Prophetic saying, *ḥadīth*; e.g. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, *k. musnad ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb*). Angels are usually considered to have been created from light; however, the Qur'ān does not specifically speak of their creation (as opposed to the *ḥadīth*; see, e.g., Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, k. al-zuhd wa-l-raqāʾiq, bāb 10: fī aḥādīth mutafarriqa*), unlike the creation accounts of jinn and humans (see below). As celestial beings, angels can travel between heaven and earth, and perform various tasks for God. For example, the passage in Q 19:17–21 narrates a story that the archangel Gabriel (Jibrīl) who, as in the Bible (Luke 1:26–38), visited Mary (Maryam) to announce the gift of a son. Angels thus play an indispensable role in Islamic cosmology as mediators through whom God actively controls and communicates with the universe while being absolutely transcendent (Burge, 75; see his work for Islamic angelology in general). As they intervene in all aspects of human life and history, angelology is an essential part of Islamic and Sufi cosmology.

Unlike the popular image of heavenly beings, angels are not always bringers of good tidings. For example, the Qur'ān talks about the joint curse directed at wrongdoers by God, angels, and humankind (2:161, 3:87; cf. Psalm 78:49). Some angels are tasked to be scribes. The Qur'ān mentions "two receivers" (*mutalaqqiyān*, 50:17), that is, the two recording angels sitting on the right and left shoulders of human beings who observe and write down all of their deeds (cf. 43:80, 82:10–12). This comprehensive record of life will be presented on the Day of Judgement, and the Qur'ān warns the reader repeatedly that no act, small or large, will be omitted from the book (17:13–14, 71, 18:49, 69:19–29, 84:7–12). Many angels appear in eschatological accounts, as well as in the Qur'ānic narratives of hell. For example, God has appointed only angels as "masters of the Fire" (*aṣḥāb al-nār*) (Q 74:31), and 19 gatekeepers of hell are also angels (Q 39:71, 74:30–1). Those guardian angels of hell (*khazana*) are in charge of punishing its denizens under the angel Mālik who is its keeper (Q 43:77; for hell's angels, see Lange, Hell's Angels). Some angels are involved in punishment. However, those punishing angels are still on the side of God, since the penalties they mete out are in accordance with His justice, and the angels are in general considered to be sinless and fully obedient to God's commands.

Based on numerous Qur'ānic passages which provide insights into the nature of angels, many scholars have attempted to classify them, and a hierarchy of

angelic roles is analysed especially by philosophers and Sufis. For example, in his cosmology, Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, d. 428/1037), one of the great polymaths of medieval Islam, identifies ten Intellects, each of which corresponds to an angel without whom nothing can be known. Adopting this framework and inspired by Zoroastrian angelology, Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā al-Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191), a famous mystic and philosopher called the Master of illumination (*shaykh al-ishrāq*), explains that the three tiers of angels are a crucial part of the universe which is based on a complicated hierarchy of lights, the product of an eternal emanation. According to al-Suhrawardī, all things derive from God ultimately, but are mediated by angels (Murata, Angels, 328–30; Netton, 260–8).

Despite this conception of angels, the Qurʾān's creation stories place human beings above the angels. In Q 2:30, God appoints Adam as His vicegerent (*khalīfa*) on earth, and all human beings are held responsible by God as inheritors of the earth (see further Q 6:165). When God asked the angels and Adam to tell Him the names of things, only Adam, not the angels, could do this. God then ordered the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam, and they did, except for Iblīs (Q 2:31–4; cf. 7:11, 15:28–31, 17:61, 18:50; on Iblīs, see below). This Qurʾānic demonstration of knowledge and capability, which only humans possess, affirms the unique ontological level of human beings vis-à-vis the angels, and has been discussed at length by prominent Sufi thinkers. For example, according to the great Sufi thinker Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) human beings are potentially a mirror which reflects divine qualities and names, as Adam/humankind was singled out to be God's vicegerent at the time of creation (48–58). One of the greatest Sufi poets, Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273), also announces in his celebrated couplet poem *Mathnawī* that it was Adam who explained divine mysteries to the angels (bk. 2, vv. 3268–9 [1:391]; cf. bk. 1, vv. 1012–3 [1:57], 1234–62 [1:69–70], bk. 2, v. 3330 [1:394]).

Notwithstanding this great human quality and inheritance, the angels, being completely obedient to God by their very nature, in certain respects became models for Sufis. For example, Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896), an early influential mystic who is frequently cited by many Sufi authors, treats the devotional lifestyle of angels as the ideal Sufi path in his *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, one of the earliest esoteric interpretations of the Qurʾān. According to his exegesis, the livelihood of angels is obedience (34, commentary on Q 2:197 [henceforth 2:197c]), and so is remembrance of God (*dhikr*), which is essential for Sufi contemplative life (128, 185 [34:39c, 78:11c]). Like other Sufis, al-Tustarī emphasises the importance of the heart (*qalb*) as the seat of faith, and states that it is the heart of the true believers to which the angels perform pilgrimage, since it is the "House of the Realisation of God's Oneness" (*bayt al-tawḥīd*) (155 [52:4c]; quote is from al-Tustarī, trans. Keeler, 210).

Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996), whose main teacher was a disciple of al-Tustarī, seems to place more importance on the role of the heart in the life of devotees and indicates that even the angels do not know what God reveals to the heart of those who have reached the stage of "spiritual vision of *tawḥīd*" (1:341). His encyclopaedic work on Islamic piety entitled *The Nourishment of Hearts* (*Qūt al-qulūb*) includes a story according to which the religious knowledge of the heart of God's human devotees surpasses that of the recording angels (1:340–1, 347; cf. Yazaki, *al-Makkī*, 70–1, 78). At the same time, al-Makkī emphasises a stark contrast between the praiseworthy angel-soul (*rūḥ*) dyad, which is with truth and knowledge, and the blameworthy pairing, which appears through desire and ignorance, namely the enemy (*ʿadūw*) of God or the devil (*shayṭān*), and the lower self (*nafs*), against which Sufis struggle incessantly (1:324; cf. 343). Like al-Tustarī, al-Makkī also believes the angels' role is to guide humans and be obedient to God (1:347). One of the greatest Muslim thinkers, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), follows this teaching in his famous *magnum opus*, *Revival of the Sciences of Religion* (*Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*), in which he heavily relies on al-Makkī's *Qūt*. Al-Ghazālī refers to the angels frequently as a model for devotion; for example, he likens the circumambulation of the Kaʿba, the earthly counterpart of God's house in the unseen realm, during the pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) to Mecca, to the heavenly circumambulation of the angels around the throne of God. Through the remembrance of the lord of the house, al-Ghazālī emphasizes that it is the heart which circumambulates, not only the body (book 7, 1:361–2).

The role of the angels in major Sufi texts closely follows the Qurʾānic order of the universe, and angels are treated as a model for obedience, although their status is not as privileged as that of humans. What seems to be distinctive in Sufi literature is not the interpretation of angelology per se, but its practical application to the life of the believer, emphasising the importance of constant remembrance of God and the connection between physical and spiritual acts.

3 Iblīs and Devils

In Islam it is not clear whether Iblīs, or Satan, is a fallen angel or *jinnī*. In any case, Iblīs and the devils deserve special treatment due to their significance in Sufi thought, and in Islam in general. Iblīs, a proper name, appears in the accounts of Adam. Only Iblīs did not bow down to Adam at the time of his creation, whereas the angels prostrated themselves before Adam upon the order of God (Q 2:34, 7:11, 15:30–1, 17:61, 18:50, 20:116, 38:73–4). The Qurʾān reports as the reason for his disobedience that Iblīs was proud of being made of fire and

believed that he was better than Adam who was created from clay and mud (7:12, 38:76; cf. 15:33, 17:61). God then called him "accursed" (*rajīm*, lit. "stoned") and expelled him from heaven. Unlike Adam and Eve, who took responsibility for their action after eating from a forbidden tree and asked for forgiveness from God (7:23; see below), Iblīs averred that God Himself actually led him astray (as God, on the face of it, seems to mislead whomever He wills; e.g. 2:26, 40:74, 74:31), did not ask for His pardon, managed to negotiate a deferral of the punishment until the Day of Resurrection, and was given the power to lead astray God's human creatures on earth, except the "sincere servants" of God upon whom Iblīs's machinations have no effect (15:34–40; cf. 7:13–16, 38:77–83). Humans, therefore, have a choice to follow either God's guidance or Satan's temptations. During the final judgement, Iblīs will say to the human race, "I called you and you listened to me. So do not blame me, but blame yourselves" (Q 14:22).

The name al-Shayṭān is applied to Iblīs after his (first) work of temptation when he "whispered" to Adam (Q 20:120), or to both Adam and Eve (7:20), to eat from the forbidden tree in the Garden. The two names, Iblīs and al-Shayṭān, appear in the same narratives in this order (2:30–9, 7:11–25, 20:116–24). Exegetes associate the former with pride and disobedience and the latter with temptation. This is usually interpreted to mean that through arrogant defiance, the name and characteristics of al-Shayṭān were added to Iblīs, and the two names are now used interchangeably. The role of al-Shayṭān in human life accords with what the devil is traditionally considered to do: inciting humans to sins, specific or general, as well as any action which causes people to deviate from God's straight path (Q 4:60) by tempting and seducing them (7:27, 47:25). Al-Shayṭān is the sower of hatred (5:91), who causes people to forget (6:68, 12:42, 58:19), and makes their evil deeds seem fair to them (6:43, 8:48, 16:63, 27:24, 29:38); he is a companion of disbelievers (4:38) and a manifest enemy of humankind (2:168, 208, 6:142, 7:22, 12:5). His tactic is rather simple: he whispers (7:20, 20:120, 114:4), makes false promises (4:120, 14:22, 17:64), or simply speaks (59:16). Al-Shayṭān is persistent and insistent. Through those simple methods, he comes back to humans again and again "from their front and their back, from their right and their left" (7:17), and those who listen to him gradually go astray from God's straight path, following in the "footsteps of al-Shayṭān" (2:168, 208, 6:142, 24:21).

The classification of Iblīs as either an angel or *jinnī* has been a subject of exegetical debates. From the account of the creation of Adam, it appears that Iblīs was among the angels. Otherwise the story of the disobedience of Iblīs would not make sense, if he did not have to bow to Adam in the first place because God ordered only the angels to do so. This, however, contradicts the idea that

angels are always unquestioningly obedient. The Qur'ān also seems to refer to the offspring of Iblīs (18:50), which again contradicts the common Middle Eastern belief that the angels do not procreate (cf. Matthew 22:30, Mark 12:25). The Qur'ān also narrates a story that Iblīs believes himself to be superior to Adam because he was made of fire, from which the jinn are created (15:27, 55:15; see below for more details); this is supported by another verse which clearly states that Iblīs "was of the jinn" (18:50). In order to solve this seemingly double provenance of Iblīs, Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), an influential exegete and historian, holds that before creating Adam as the vicegerent, God sent a group of angels called al-Jinn led by Iblīs to defeat the jinn (as a genus) who shed blood and spread corruption as the first inhabitants of the earth (*Tafsīr*, 1:449–53 [2:30c]). According to al-Ṭabarī, Iblīs is of the angels who can be made of anything God wills, including fire (*Tafsīr*, 1:502–8 [2:34c]). Despite the hermeneutic efforts of al-Ṭabarī and other Muslim scholars, the question of the original nature of Iblīs cannot be said to have been resolved. What these debates make clear is that Satan in Islam is not consistently and unequivocally seen as a fallen angel, as he is in Christianity. His role is to increase the power of evil tendencies in humans, rendering them forgetful of God.

Using the Qur'ānic notion of Satan as their starting point, Sufis view al-Shayṭān as the source of evil, often associated with the human ego (*nafs*). In Sufi psychology, *nafs* is the lower self, the carnal or appetitive soul. According to an oft-quoted tradition, it is the *nafs* against which Sufis, or any devout believers, are urged to wage the greater jihad (*al-jihād al-akbar*), while the lesser jihad (*al-jihād al-aṣghar*) refers to a physical war (e.g. Hujwīrī, 200).

For many Sufis, al-Shayṭān exists both internally and externally. Al-Makkī, for example, narrates stories about a black spot that appears on the hearts of believers whenever they make a mistake. If they repent (repentance, *tawba*, is an important step of the Sufi path), the dot will disappear. If they do not repent and keep making mistakes, the entire heart eventually turns black and al-Shayṭān can approach it. At the same time, he cannot see it if it is polished as a spotless, shining mirror. Al-Shayṭān also exists internally, as in *ḥadīth*: "Truly al-Shayṭān flows in humankind like blood" (al-Makkī, 1:322–3; for the tradition, cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, 1:533 [2:36c]). Each individual has a devil inside, even the Prophet Muḥammad did, although Sufis often emphasise that the internal Shayṭān of Muḥammad converted to Islam and prompted him to do good deeds (Awn, 48, 60). As evidenced by al-Ghazālī's discussion of how to discipline the *nafs* (see book 22 of his *Iḥyā'*), Sufis devote much attention to Satan's attempts to influence it (cf. Sviri; al-Tustarī, trans. Keeler, xxxviii–xlii).

At the same time, Iblīs, being a reflection of human complexity, is not always treated unequivocally as evil. The famous mystic from Baghdad al-Ḥusayn b.

Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922) even claimed that Iblīs was a pure monotheist who could not worship anyone or anything but God, even though his sincere and emphatic devotion to God would lead to his eventual destruction (41–55; cf. Massignon, 3:306–8; Sells, 266–80). Inspired by Iblīs's tragedy, a number of poets have expressed their sympathies for him in their work, for example, Abū l-Majd Sanāʾī (d. ca. 525/1131) and Aḥmad al-Ghazālī (d. 520/1126), a brother of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (Schimmel, 194–6; for the image of Iblīs in Sufi tradition in general, see Awn, esp. ch. 3; Reinert). Apart from Iblīs, following the Qurʾān, Sufis usually regard the devils as the counterparts of the angels, urging believers to remain vigilant against satanic temptations at all times.

4 Jinn

The other generally invisible creatures in Islam are the jinn (coll.; sing. *jinnī*). They are usually considered to be made of fire, although the Qurʾānic references suggest that they are created from "the fire of hot wind" (*nār al-samūm*) (15:27) or "flame mixed with the black substance of fire, or fire without smoke" (*mārij min nār*) (55:15; cf. Lane, 7:232), rather than fire as such. The Qurʾānic cosmology reflects the beliefs of Arabia during the pre-Islamic era, when the jinn were considered to be mostly harmless demons or spirits capable of imparting supernatural knowledge or power to human beings. The Qurʾān reports that the Prophet Muḥammad was accused of being possessed by jinn (or mad, *majnūn*, lit. "jinned"), as were the previous messengers (15:6, 51:52, 52:29, et passim). Having "ethereal (*hawāʾiyya*) bodies" (al-Damīrī [1867–8], 1:253), the jinn used to eavesdrop on conversations of the angels and the secrets of heaven, and then pass them on to clairvoyants or magicians. This stolen information was only partly truthful, so they often misled their human interlocutors. It is said that God denied this ability to the jinn after the Prophet Muḥammad had received his revelations (cf. Q 15:16–18, 37:6–10, 72:8–9). During the pre-Islamic "time of ignorance" (*al-jāhiliyya*) and in popular imagination and literature, the jinn have various powers. The belief that the jinn, moving between the terrestrial and celestial realms, could somehow intervene in human lives was further elaborated by Persians, Jews, and other local peoples after the Arab conquests (El-Zein, 75).

Like human beings, the jinn can be good or evil. Like humans, they were commanded to worship God alone (Q 51:56) and will be judged on the final day (37:158) accordingly. Sinful jinn, along with sinful humans, are destined to go to hell (11:119, 32:13). The Prophet Muḥammad was a messenger not only to all humans (e.g. 34:28) but also to the jinn, and a story in the Qurʾān tells

that when a group of jinn heard the Qurʾān during a morning prayer led by the Prophet, they accepted both the latest revelation and Muḥammad as their prophet (46:29–31; cf. Q 72). On the other hand, God made demonic humans and the unbelieving jinn as enemies of every prophet (6:112). Evil jinn (and their human counterparts) are described as satans or demons (*shayāṭīn*) in the Qurʾān, reflecting ideas that were current in pre-Islamic Arabia (a degree of identification between satans or demons and jinn can be seen, e.g., in the story of Solomon: 21:82, 38:37; cf. 27:17, 34:12–14).

According to some reports, the jinn used to be the vicegerents of God on earth. For example, in a famous *ḥadīth qudsī* (the extra-Qurʾānic words ascribed to God, often quoted by Sufis), God says: "I was a hidden treasure, and I wanted to be known. I created human beings and the jinn so that they know Me." Although the jinn are given different abilities and are not bound to the physical and material world like human beings, they are often treated as their counterparts to the extent that many books have been written about love stories between humans and jinn (e.g. a list of 16 titles in Ibn al-Nadīm, 2:723). The theologian and Sufi of Cairo Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Damīrī (d. 808/1405) included a section on the jinn in his zoological encyclopaedia *The Life of Animals* (*Ḥayāt al-ḥayawān*), where he discussed disagreement over the permissibility of jinn—human marriage ([1867–8], 265–6).

The jinn appear in Sufi literature from time to time. For example, al-Tustarī, in his interpretation of Q 72, "the Jinn," states that heaven has a place for the jinn (based on 55:56). He also reports a conversation with a *jinnī* who claimed to have met Jesus and Muḥammad and was performing a prayer in a 900-year-old but still fresh garment (al-Tustarī, 179 [72:1c]). Al-Tustarī seems to treat the jinn and human beings alike as can be seen in his warning against the "evil-inciting self" that whispers into the breasts of both the jinn and humans, rather than the jinn, like Satan, whispering to humankind (211–12 [114:4–6c]). Ibn al-ʿArabī, on the other hand, seems to have considered the spirits of jinn to be of a low status, as opposed to the heavenly spirits of angels (El-Zein, 50), while Dāʾūd al-Qayṣarī (d. 751/1350) from Anatolia sometimes places the jinn next to Satan in his commentary on Ibn al-ʿArabī's famous mystical treatise *The Bezels of Wisdom* (*Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*) as both of them occupy the lower spiritual realm (al-Qayṣarī, 300, 306; cf. 144–59). According to al-Damīrī, the jinn possess "reason, understanding, and ability to work hard" ([1867–8], 253), indicating that they can and should be dutiful to God (as stated in the Qurʾān), and those believing jinn will be rewarded in paradise like believing humans, as some jinn are Muslim while others are not (254–5). Al-Damīrī includes disagreement among scholars on this issue; however, he also cites an anecdote of Sarī al-Saqaṭī (d. 253/867), an early ascetic-mystic, on the authority of Abū

l-Qāsim al-Junayd (d. 298/910), a well-known "sober" type of Sufi, that al-Saqaṭī was greatly inspired by the voices of jinn who were longing for intimacy with God (266). A range of jinn's characteristics from devil-like nature to mystical trait in the *Ḥayāt* correspond to those of humans, and al-Damīrī, although not clearly stated, seems to have believed that the jinn have a place in paradise.

The jinn are also associated with poetic inspiration (especially in pre-Islamic Arabia), madness (*majnūn* = possessed by the jinn), and love. This theme is prominent in ʿUdhrī poetry as well as in Sufi literature. ʿUdhrī love poems feature dramatic relations between the poet and his unattainable beloved. They reach a point when the lover's sanity and eventually his body wither away because of the unrequited love. This motif can be found in Sufi descriptions of the mystic's longing for the divine beloved who becomes the sole object in life, leading to his eventual self-annihilation (*fanāʾ*) in a mystical union with God. In his interpretation of the ecstatic utterances of Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. ca. 261/875), a Persian Sufi and one of the first "spiritually intoxicated" mystics, Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988), author of an early Sufi guidebook, quotes the most famous ʿUdhrī poem "Mad for Layla" (*Majnūn Layla*) to explain al-Bisṭāmī's seemingly blasphemous sayings, such as "Glory to me." According to al-Sarrāj, such statements were typical of ecstatic lovers like Majnūn who could not think of anything but Layla and responded "Layla" upon being asked his name (386). Another "intoxicated" Sufi, al-Ḥallāj, draws an analogy between devotees and moths who are drawn to the flame and ultimately plunge into it in their love-madness (16–20; Massignon, 3:289–91).

Apart from such poetic expressions, the jinn do not seem to play a major role in Sufi cosmology probably because among the five classes of beings, they are the most similar to humans, albeit possessed of supernatural powers. Their existence is never doubted and they appear in Sufi hagiographies from time to time (e.g. Renard, 86, 141–2), not always as a model to follow (like angels) or the tester of the lower self (like Iblīs). As in the Qurʾānic worldview, the jinn are humankind's fellow genus, who will be judged on the Last Day alongside humans. Despite this common fate, the ontological position of human beings is unique in Islamic and Sufi understanding, as we will see below.

5 Human Beings

The main characters of the Qurʾān, apart from God, are human beings, from Adam and Eve, the past prophets and messengers to Muḥammad, and his contemporaries. Among the numerous descriptions of human beings in the Qurʾān, this section first focuses on the stories of creation, Adam and Eve, eschatology,

and human nature, as their understanding is a fundamental aspect of Sufi cosmology and morality, followed by the way in which Sufis approach this knowledge of human status in the universe, touching upon key Sufi concepts; for example, repentance, trust, intimacy, and love.

Human beings were created from a clot (*ʿalaq*; Q 96:2), dust (*turāb*; e.g. 30:20), dry clay (*ṣalṣāl*; e.g. 15:26), an essence of clay (*sulāla min ṭīn*; 23:12), or simply clay (*ṭīn*; e.g. 6:2), which are commonly understood as various states of the same material. God proportioned humans (95:4; cf. 64:3) and breathed into them of His spirit (*rūḥ*; 15:29, 32:9, 38:72). He also gave humans the senses of hearing and seeing, a heart (32:9), as well as life and death (40:68; cf. 6:2). Unlike the first three species, the angels, devils, and jinn, humans are bound to the earth like animals and plants. However, those verses are usually understood to imply that despite the humble origin of human beings, the Qurʾān affirms their exalted status which angels were ordered to acknowledge by bowing.

As told in the Bible, Adam (Ādam) is the first human being, and the Qurʾān sometimes calls humankind the "descendants of Adam" (*banū Ādam*) (e.g. 7:26–7). The Qurʾān reports God's announcement to the angels that He was placing Adam (and his descendants) as the vicegerent (*khalīfa*) of the earthly world (2:30). According to al-Ṭabarī, Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 68/687), a well-known early Qurʾānic commentator, interpreted the *khalīfa* as a successor to the jinn who used to rule the earthly realm. Other exegetes read this verse to imply that Adam and his progeny were appointed to be a vicegerent of God on earth with the mission to obey Him and exercise justice among His creatures (*Tafsīr*, 1:449–53 [2:30c]; cf. 38:26). The unique position of human beings is repeatedly affirmed by the Qurʾān, illustrating again and again that the status of humans is higher than that of the angels, at least before their expulsion from paradise.

Most of the stories where Adam appears in the Qurʾān relate to his creation, his relationship to the angels, and the expulsion from paradise with his wife Eve (Ḥawwāʾ, her name in Arabic that is not mentioned in the Qurʾān). Unlike the story of the fall in Genesis 3:1–7 where it was Eve whom Satan tempted to consume from the tree in the Garden, the Qurʾān narrates two slightly different versions of this drama of disobedience and eventual banishment from paradise: 20:117–24, where it was Adam to whom Satan whispered, while according to 7:20–5, Satan lured both Adam and Eve. Despite these verses, Qurʾānic commentators have typically downplayed Adam's responsibility and made Eve the main character in this narrative who was tempted to taste the fruit first and beguiled Adam into eating it as well (al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, 1:524–41 [2:36c]; cf. *Taʾrīkh*, 1:103–10). Whoever was responsible for this disobedience, as in the Bible, Adam and Eve were both cast out of paradise to the earth, which has since become the dwelling place for them as mortals (2:36, 7:24–5; cf. 40:64).

However, Islam does not accept the Christian doctrine of original sin, humanity's state of sin resulting from the fall of man. (In interpreting the story of Adam and his wife, as al-Ṭabarī acknowledges, Muslim scholars "learned from the people of the Torah" [Stowasser, 28], and a great influence of Jewish and Christian theological discussion on Islamic tradition has repeatedly been pointed out by modern-day scholars [e.g. Ahmed, 4; Kister, 113–15].)

Eschatology is also an important element of the Qurʾānic world. The Qurʾān provides a number of graphic descriptions of resurrection and judgement in the afterlife, and repeatedly stresses God's omnipotence, stating how easily He can resurrect humans on the Day of Judgement (22:5–6, 75:3–4). Life in this world (*al-dunyā*) is treated as an inseparable part of the universal order announced in the Qurʾān (e.g. 23:115, 28:84, 39:69–70, 56:47, Q 75 "The Resurrection" (*al-qiyāma*), 95:8, et passim). The Muslim holy book clearly promises reward (paradise) and punishment (hell) for all deeds humans perform in this world. Therefore, in undertaking any action, humans simply listen to the voice of their conscience that was created as an "innate permanent judge within themselves" (Abdel Haleem, 86; cf. Q 75:1–2), and to follow the straight path as clearly set out in the revelation (e.g. 5:48).

However, on a number of occasions, the Qurʾān emphasises that humans have a dual nature: they can be ungrateful (80:17) and rebellious (96:6), while they can also show mercy (12:92) and repentance after a wrongdoing (4:17). The short-sightedness of humans perhaps led them to take up the obligatory duties imposed upon them by God which "the heavens and the earth and the mountains" had refused to bear due to their gravity and the attendant risk of falling into error (33:72). As such, in the cosmic framework of the Qurʾān, the creation of human beings and the divine deal with Iblīs appear as a constant challenge in choosing the right option for divine guidance over satanic temptation. Therefore, although God has made male and female, and divided humans into peoples and tribes, the most honourable people before God are simply the most pious one, namely, those who make right choices. Furthermore, God punishes and rewards humans regardless of their gender or ethnicity (33:73, 49:13; cf. 33:35). The mission of Muḥammad as a warner and bearer of glad tidings is not confined to any single tribe or ethnic group, but rather encompasses the entirety of humankind (34:28), and beyond.

5.1 *Sufi Approach*

As this Qurʾānic cosmic view demonstrates, this world is God's test for humans who have to practise piety and fulfil their obligations towards God. It is,

therefore, unsurprising that moral-ethical literature describing virtuous behaviour (*ādāb*) started to flourish from the early centuries onwards in various fields, especially Sufism. In Sufism emphasis is placed on the combination of physicality and spirituality, as internal morality is the guarantee for proper social behaviour. Authors of classical Sufi guidebooks explore this theme as they conceive it as the essential components of faith. The theme of *ādāb* is prominent in the classical Sufi writings of al-Sarrāj, Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhī (d. 380s/990s), al-Makkī, ʿAlī b. ʿUthmān Hujwīrī (d. 465–9/1073–7), Abū l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), al-Ghazālī, and, most notably, Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), who composed two treatises on the subject, *A Collection of Sufi Rules of Conduct* (*Jawāmiʿ ādāb al-ṣūfiyya*) and *The Book of Rules of Companionship and the Beauty of Association* (*Kitāb ādāb al-ṣuḥba wa-ḥusn al-ʿishra*) (Yazaki, Morality).

According to the Qurʾān, after Iblīs was banished from God's presence for his refusal to prostrate himself before Adam, he declared that he would lead people astray, except for God's sincere servants over whom he had no authority (15:40, 38:83; cf. 17:65). Al-Tustarī indicates that they are those who not only possess religious knowledge but also act on it (88 [15:40c]; cf. trans. Keeler, 104 and n. 4). Al-Sarrāj, for his part, insists that believers should have God as the sole goal of their life, knowledge, and action (6). All this suggests that, on the one hand, God's omnipotence and providence are emphasised throughout the Qurʾān and Sufi thought, but, on the other, humans have a choice in their actions and bear responsibility for them (on the antithetical issue of free will versus divine predestination, see Watt). Humans understand the meanings of the *āyāt* (divine signs, Qurʾānic verses) in various ways and respond to them differently: some show gratitude (*shukr*) and God-fearingness (*taqwā*), which lead to faith (*īmān*), while others respond with disbelief (*kufr*) (Izutsu, *God and Man*, 142–50). In his commentary of the Qurʾān, al-Tustarī emphasises that God created good and evil, but that He has clearly shown humans the straight path, the revealed laws of Islam that unmistakably distinguish "the path of goodness," which humans are commanded to follow, from "the path of evil," which they are prohibited to embark on. It is up to each individual to respond to the Qurʾānic commands properly by doing good and showing gratitude to God, or listen to the lower self and the temptation of Iblīs, thereby committing sins and, hopefully, asking for divine mercy (al-Tustarī, 36, 65, 121 [2:214c, 7:16c, 30:40c]; cf. trans. Keeler, xxxiv). Al-Qushayrī also refers to human responsibility and the difficulties of choosing the right path all the time as God protected the way to heaven with challenges (*Laṭāʾif*, 1:102 [2:214c]).

People indeed make mistakes, like Adam and Eve. To this fundamental problem, the Qurʾān offers a pragmatic solution. One of the important messages of

the story of Adam and Eve in Islam is that, unlike Iblīs who did not repent and sought to defer the divine punishment until the end of time, Adam and Eve accepted their wrongdoing and sought forgiveness, which God granted (2:37; cf. 7:23). The Qurʾān emphasises the importance of repentance (*tawba*) in various places (e.g. 4:17–18, 6:54, 16:119), and the humble attitudes of Adam and Eve in accepting blame sincerely and seeking divine forgiveness became a model of the appropriate behaviour after sinning (cf. 4:64). In Sufism, repentance is usually one of the religious stations (*maqāmāt*) on the Sufi path, and many famous authors dwell in great detail on repentance in their writings (e.g. al-Ghazālī, 4:3–80; Hujwīrī, 294–9; al-Makkī, 2:499–537; al-Muḥāsibī, 60–4; al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 55–8).

Following the straight path, or climbing the spiritual ladder through the greater jihad, Sufis aim to be in a special category of true worshippers who are rewarded with divine affection: most notably "those who do good" (*muḥsinūn*) (Q 2:195, 3:134, 148, 5:13, 93), "the God-fearing" (*muttaqūn*) (3:76, 9:4, 7), "the just" (*muqsiṭūn*) (5:42, 60:8), and "those who trust [in God]" (*mutawakkilūn*) (3:159). The idea of trust (*tawakkul*), which appears repeatedly in the Qurʾān (e.g. 4:81, 5:23), is the basis of Islamic spirituality. For example, al-Ghazālī in his *magnum opus* describes divine unity and trust in God (*Iḥyāʾ*, book 35), followed by love (*maḥabba*), yearning, intimacy (*uns*), and contentment (book 36). Like the Muslim tradition as a whole, Sufism emphasises the privileged position of the human race into whom God breathed His spirit (*rūḥ*) at the time of creation. The idea of humans as the microcosm, an epitome of the whole world, comes to the fore in the thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī and his followers (see, e.g., Chittick, *Knowledge*; Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*).

Other Qurʾānic verses often quoted by Sufis indicate the immanence of God (e.g. 2:115, 50:16; cf. 2:186, 57:4) and mutual love between God and His servants (e.g. 3:31, 5:54), highlighting the intimacy between God and humankind, which is further affirmed by the establishment of the primordial covenant (*mīthāq*) or pact (*ʿahd*) prior to the creation of the physical world and its inhabitants (7:172). The covenant leads to the recognition of God's absolute lordship by humankind, which grants it moral if oft-forgotten responsibility. The aim of all Sufis is to return to the status of the humble self-surrender of human souls to their lord and creator (e.g. al-Tustarī, 68–9 [7:172c]; al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif*, 1:366–7). Sufi exegetes interpret this fateful encounter as the human beings' falling in love with their eternal beloved. Quoting Q 5:54, Sufis emphasise the possibility of a mutual love between humans and God (Lewisohn, esp. 150–1). Given the special status of human beings and the proximity to their lord, Sufis believe that true servants are allowed to come close and achieve (re)encounter with God—a model of this mystical journey has been already set by the

Prophet Muḥammad in his night journey (*isrāʾ*) and ascension (*miʿrāj*) when he travelled from Mecca to Jerusalem, and eventually into the divine presence through seven heavens (Q 17:1, 53:1–18; cf. Sells 47–56).

According to the Sufi cosmology based on the Qurʾān, human beings encompass "a hierarchy of all things within existence, from the most luminous to the darkest," as they were created from the clay of this world with the spirit of God (Chittick, *Knowledge*, 17). Given their special position, and provided they are making correct choices and leading a highly pious and moral-ethical life, all humans have the potential to ascend the spiritual ladder of existence and enjoy intimacy with God—the reciprocal love of their divine beloved.

6 Animals and Plants

Apart from humankind, the other earthly creatures are animals and plants. The Qurʾān frequently refers to animals, agriculture, vegetation, and fauna and flora, although they are not a major theme in the Muslim holy book. Animals appear as the titles of six chapters (Q 2, 6, 16, 27, 29, and 105); however, the Qurʾān does not offer any in-depth zoological or botanical knowledge. Animals and plants are mentioned in relation to humankind, as well as testimony to the unlimited powers of the Maker and the character of His relationship with His creatures (cf. 29:60). As far as the animals are concerned, the Qurʾān reports that after the creation of the earth, God made it a dwelling place (*qarār*; 27:61), by installing mountains, streams, and fruits that serve as sustenance for all of His creatures (13:3, 41:10; cf. 15:19, 16:15). As God created every living thing (21:31), animals (*dawābb*) were created from water: some of them creep on their bellies, while others walk on two or four legs (24:45). In addition to animals that live on land, the sea was created to supply humankind not just with food (fish), but also ornaments (probably corals and pearls; 16:14). A few Qurʾānic verses seem to imply that animals will be resurrected (6:38, 81:5), although it is not clear whether they will face judgement like humans. According to one report from the Prophet Muḥammad, animals will settle scores among themselves on the Day of Resurrection (Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, k. al-birr wa-l-ṣila wa-l-ādāb, bāb 15: taḥrīm al-ẓulm*).

In the Qurʾānic world, the rank of animals is lower than that of humans, and, for example, to denigrate disbelievers and sinners the Qurʾān often compares them to animals (e.g. 2:65, 5:60, 7:166). Sufi literature also, in general, treats them lower than humans in the hierarchy of creatures. For example, al-Tustarī discusses four negative dispositions inherent in the human nature that every Sufi is required to combat; one of them is "animal nature" (*ṭabʿ al-bahāʾim*)

(trans. Keeler, xxxviii–xxxix). Al-Qushayrī draws comparisons between animals to the lower human self; the same applies to unbelievers who, like animals, lack comprehension and acceptance of the truth (*Laṭāʾif*, 1:52, 84 [2:73, 171c]). Al-Ghazālī pursues the same line of thought, claiming that humans are better than animals due to the capacity of the human heart which can acquire knowledge of God, and urges believers to discipline their soul, because even an animal, beastly character can be improved through obedience to God (3:85, 76). Following his predecessors and based on a famous *ḥadīth*, Rūmī summarises the place of humans among the created beings as follows: God created intellect in the angels, sensuality in the beasts, and both intellect and sensuality in human beings. Therefore, humans can rise higher than the angels or stoop to the state of the beast, depending on whether their intellect gains an upper hand over their sensuality or vice versa (Chittick, *Love*, 85–7; Murata, Angels, 340; cf. Rūmī, bk. 2, vv. 3326–7 [1:394]).

Plants frequently appear in the Qurʾān, and like animals are treated as a powerful proof of God's omnipotence. God sends down water from the sky onto earth, thereby bringing forth lavish vegetation. Q 6:99 contains references to both water and the main crops of the Qurʾānic agriculture: grain, dates, grapes, olives, and pomegranates. Naturally all plants are at God's disposal and the revival of dead earth by sending down rain to grow crops and ease the thirst of His creatures is a sign of divine omnipotence and wisdom (25:48–9, 36:33–4; cf. 10:24). "All that are in the heavens and on the earth" prostrate themselves before the all-mighty God (13:15); the submission of trees (as well as animals) is specifically mentioned in Q 22:18. This reference should be considered only as another proof of God's power, rather than a personification of plants, as the Qurʾān does not mention flora as being resurrected on the Day of Judgement. It does, however, mention plants in the heavens and hell (e.g. in paradise: 30:15, 37:40–3, 42:22, 55:64; in hell: 44:43–4; cf. 37:62–8, 56:51–3).

The Qurʾān contains very few stories where animals and plants are the main characters, unlike *Kalīla wa-Dimna*, a popular book of fables where different animals offer moral lessons to humankind. In the Qurʾān animals and plants are discussed only in the context of their relationship with human beings in a pragmatic and anthropocentric worldview, as a demonstration of divine omnipotence and wisdom (e.g. 2:164, 31:10), His interaction with humans, and His mercy towards them. Inevitably, all creatures belong to God alone (24:64); however, as a gift, God subjected everything in the heavens and on the earth to humankind (22:65, 31:20, 45:13), and nature was created for the benefit of humans.

Approach to food therefore becomes important in Sufi morality, as animals and plants were created as sustenance for humankind. To a certain extent the

Qur'ān restricts food consumption, for example prohibition of carrion, the flesh of the swine (5:3), and intoxicating drinks (5:90); however, it encourages eating itself as long as it is done in moderation (7:31). Like any other daily activity, eating is part of Sufi *ādāb*, disciplining body and mind; for example, the Ḥanbalī Sufi al-Anṣārī al-Harawī (d. 481/1089) left detailed rules of conduct for eating (Böwering, 81–3). Al-Ghazālī's book on the *ādāb* for eating (book 11, *Iḥyā'*) is more substantial, since "eating is part of belief" as he quotes at the beginning, emphasising the necessity of having a healthy body in order to carry out good deeds with proper knowledge (2:3; cf. Q 23:51). When consuming food or abstaining from it, if it is done legally with correct manners, rather than letting oneself eat like animals, it will strengthen one's piety (2:3). Al-Ghazālī states that "eating with intent to support belief is worship (*'ibāda*)" which should be approached like prayer (2:4). Abū l-Najīb al-Suhrawardī (d. 563/1168) cited a saying of the prominent ascetic and preacher al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) in his book for Sufi novices that "the temptation of Adam was in eating, and this is also your temptation until the day of resurrection" (59). God created every being and thing in this world for use by humans; however, they should not be distracted by this life with its amenities. The Prophet is reported to have said that "those of you who are the most sated in this world will be the most hungry on the day of resurrection" (al-Suhrawardī, 59). Food is to be appreciated as a God's gift (e.g. Q 23:19), and believers are to see His face behind any food and live for Him alone, not for themselves or appetite. Eating is thus another form of test from God to examine the display of spiritual maturity or "animal nature" (Reynolds, 206).

God appointed Adam (Q 2:30) and his descendants as His vicegerents upon the earth (6:165, 35:39), and also has "honoured the Children of Adam" and "favoured them above many of those We have created" (17:70). Humankind was thus granted authority to rule over other created beings. However, their role as God's vicegerents requires them to remember that all benefits come from God, and remain thankful to Him and serve Him faithfully (cf. 36:71–3), rather than exploiting the natural world. The Prophet Muḥammad therefore encourages humane treatment of animals even during slaughter in order to spare them from suffering (e.g. al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan, k. al-ḍaḥāyā, bāb 27: ḥusn al-dhabḥ*). Al-Tustarī also speaks of the importance of generosity towards animals (77 [10:62c]; cf. 142 [45:13c]), Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d. 334/946) was said to have received divine forgiveness because of the kindness he showed a helpless kitten (al-Damīrī [1937], 2:383), and al-Qushayrī also condemns the mistreatment of chickens in a section on moral character (*khuluq*) (*al-Risāla*, 132–3).

Thus, Sufism reproduces the basics of the Qur'ānic anthropocentric worldview: neither animals nor plants are primary actors in major Sufi texts. However,

their existence is an important part of Sufi morality, since as the vicegerent on this earth, the human race is obliged to show responsibility and generosity, being mindful of divine mercy. Sufi teachers urge their followers to always remember the true Master and Maker of anything in the universe (including food) and the importance of gratitude (*shukr*) due to Him. These requirements are fundamental to the Sufi path to God (e.g. al-Ghazālī, book 32 [on patience and gratitude]; al-Kalābādhī, 100; al-Makkī, 2:563–85).

7 Conclusion

The Qurʾānic cosmology has led Sufis to devise various theories and practices throughout history, and many of them revolve around morality. Sufi cosmology and morality are based on the awareness of divine presence in this world and understanding of the position of humanity in the order of the universe from the beginning to the end. The Qurʾān contains a significant number of stories regarding the creation, nature, and functions of different beings and their place in the cosmos. God designed the universe not only to provide human beings with everything they need to survive, but also to satisfy their aesthetic senses. The human race was given a privileged status compared to the other creatures, as God made humans His vicegerents on the earth (the jinn may have been the vicegerents before), so animals and plants are at the disposal of human beings. Even the angels do not enjoy the privileged status granted to humans, although the angelic nature of complete obedience to God is regarded as a model for human worshippers. Thus the Qurʾān is decidedly anthropocentric in creation accounts, and the Sufi cosmology generally follows this Qurʾānic worldview.

At the same time, the creation of the universe is not merely a means of securing comfort and pleasure for humanity. Apart from the oneness of God, the earliest and most important message in the Qurʾān is human accountability for their earthly deeds on the Day of Judgement. God designed the world as a test and trial for humans, so that they be rewarded or punished according to what they have earned in this life. The role of Satan and devils has a paramount importance as a tester of morality for each individual. Here again, both Islamic and Sufi ethical teachings are based on Qurʾānic precepts, despite the presence of specific emphases and nuances in Sufi thought. The stories of the creation of different classes of beings appear in Islamic and Sufi tradition in order to explain the nature of God and humanity, as well as the necessity of ethical conduct for humans, since this world must be fully accepted in appreciation and be lived correctly with proper knowledge and manners. A famous Sufi practice

of *dhikr* is not necessarily about chanting or dancing, but a constant reminder that every action, every moment in life, should be directed towards God.

7.1 *Comparison beyond Monotheism*

Lastly, in order to place Sufi thought in a wider context one should compare the Qurʾānic and Sufi classifications of created beings described above with those found in other religions. Due to their shared Abrahamic heritage, the Islamic creation account is usually compared to the equivalent stories in the Judeo-Christian scriptures, as has been done in the present chapter. Although there is a good historical and theological reason for this, the position of humanity and its role in religious thought can also be compared with traditions outside Near Eastern monotheism. For example, Izutsu in his work *Sufism and Taoism* compares key philosophical concepts of Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Taoists Lao-Tzu (d. unknown) and Chuang-Tzu (d. ca. 286 BCE). He argues for the comparability of their views of creation and the role of human beings in the universe. Sufi and Zen approaches to food also invite interesting comparisons, since every single action, including partaking of a meal, is of great importance in both traditions. As al-Ghazālī left a book on eating, Dōgen (d. 1253), the founder of Sōtō Zen in Japan, composed two books with detailed instructions on cooking and eating (*Tenzo-kyōkun* and *Fushuku-hanpō*; cooking has a paramount importance in Zen, although I have not found any Sufi instructions on cooking). These similarities also lead to fundamental differences between Sufism and Zen, and their respective anthropocentric worldviews. While in Sufism/Islam, this view is reflected in creation accounts and the unique status of humans among creatures, creation is of little momentum in Zen which starts asking "Who am I?" rather than "What is humankind?" (Izutsu, *Zen*; for a comparison between Islam and non-monotheistic traditions, see also Murata, *Tao*; Shah Kazemi).

Sufi views of human relationship with animals and plants, while ecologically pertinent, are different from those of Shinto, the Japanese indigenous faith. Unlike the central place occupied by humans in the Qurʾān and Sufism, nature plays a major role in Shinto, which discerns the presence of divinity and sanctity in trees, rocks, and animals. While the cosmology and the position of humans in the two religious systems are different, there seems to be an interesting resemblance in the ethical teachings of Sufism and Shinto, both of which emphasise the purification of the heart (either through remembrance of God and/or rituals), as well as a demand for the expression of gratitude.

Parallels between Sufi approach to creation and morality and that of non-monotheistic traditions require more academic attention. While differences

tend to be emphasised when comparison is made with Judaism and Christianity due to the very existence of common lineage and historical interactions, this is not necessarily the case with other religions. Juxtaposing Sufi views of the classes of beings with those of other traditions in which such classes are either different or even non-existent allows us to put various traditions into a wider historical and theological context, as well as in conversation with one another.

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CHAPTER 4

Sufi Views on Time and History

Jean-Jacques Thibon

1 Introduction

The notion of time in the Muslim world[1] has oscillated between an Aristotelian vision that contemplates time as a number of movements and the Plotinian concept which criticises Aristotle and proposes a purely psychological definition of time as life of the soul. In the end, however, it was an atomistic concept inspired by Democritus that prevailed among the theologians: the world is thus composed of a series of instants and each of them requires divine intervention. In other words, God recreates the world constantly and at every second. The creative process is not limited to a primal impulse which, through the *fiat* of the divine Word (*kun*), would bring about the existence of things and beings, then endowed with a certain autonomy to follow their life cycle before returning to nothingness. On the contrary, the divine almighty power is applied every second on the totality of creation, with no need to resort to secondary causes. There is no place for choice or the unexpected; everything is set in divine knowledge. Even if creation seems continuous in the eyes of men, it is in its essential reality discontinuous. This vision is consistent with the notion of time prevalent among the Arabs before Islam, marked by fatality, with time-destiny (*dahr*) being the source of all events, good or bad (Böwering, Concept of Time). This was the position of the the Ashʿarī school of theology in the third to fifth centuries of Islam (ninth to eleventh centuries CE), which can be descibed as "occasinalist." It should be pointed out, however, that not every member of this school adhered to it unquestiongly. Thus, the great theologian, jurist and Sufi al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) was not opposed to Ibn Sīnā's philosophical view of the importance of cause—effect relations among created things as long as the role of God as the ultimate actor and mover was properly acknowledged. The issue of secondary causes and causation in general was a hotly debated one not only among Muslim theologians, but also philosophers (Griffel, 147–73, 236–53). With the expansion of Islam, the notions of time and history developed across a rich cultural substrate combining contradictory concepts that would

1 See Böwering, Concept of Time; for the different terms employed in Arabic to evoke the notion of time, see 58–9. See also Massignon, Le temps dans la pensée islamique.

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partly live on and be inherited by the Sufis. They are, however, also grounded in the sources because the terminology linked to time is very much present in the Qurʾān.[2] The term *dahr* has two occurrences in the Qurʾān, 45:24 and 76:1. It also appears in several *ḥadīth*s, one of which forbids cursing it because it is one of God's names (al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-tawḥīd, 35). Several verses of the Qurʾān mention time in relation to God, such as the one that states that God is "every day occupied with something" (55:29). Much later, a Moroccan Sufi, Ibn ʿAjība (d. 1224/1809), commenting on this verse, reports that Sufyān b. ʿUyayna (d. 107/725) linked it to the *dahr* and asserted that *dahr* consisted only of two days: one corresponding to the duration of this world, the other to the Day of Judgement (Ibn ʿAjība, 7:274). Ibn ʿAjība then proceeds to summarise divine activity on the first day as commanding (right) and forbidding (wrong), while also enabling some to live and others to die, to give or deprive. The second is devoted to rewarding and punishing of God's servants.

There are many terms in the Qurʾān that refer to time (Böwering, Time). The most solemn one is undoubtedly the one designating an event that the Sufis, as all Muslims, are waiting for or fear but which is inescapable and expressed in various ways, the simplest of which is "the Hour." Such time, which is not quantifiable through our usual measurements, is that of the Last Judgement,[3] also called the Last Day (*al-yawm al-ākhir*),[4] or the Day of Resurrection (*yawm al-qiyāma*) as that which clinches the accounts of humanity.[5] They face this question in the Qurʾān: "What can make you understand? Perhaps the Hour is near" (42:17). This awareness of the imminence of the Hour is shared by all Muslims, but as we shall see, the Sufis drew special consequences from it.

2 Decline and Corruption of Time

In the history of humanity, the period of Qurʾānic revelation and who transmitted it represents for Muslims a peak that could only be followed by an irreversible decline continuing until the coming of the Mahdī, that character who must re-establish a period of prosperity before the end of the world. The Prophet had announced it: "The best men are those of my century, then

2 For an analysis of the rich terminology related to time in the Qurʾān and its implications, applied to the case of Sodom, see Gobillot, § 50–66. On time in the Qurʾān, see also the detailed study of Tamer, 187–214.

3 Mentioned in the Qurʾān under many different names, e.g. 2:85, 3:106, 5:109, 6:22, 93, 17:71, 19:39.

4 More than twenty occurrences in the Qurʾān, e.g. 2:8; see Günther.

5 Other expressions in the Qurʾān are used to designate it. On this matter, see Lory.

those who follow them, then those who follow them" (al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb faḍā'il aṣḥāb al-nabī, 1). In his own way, Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) expressed this reality when he stated that: "The entire universe fell asleep when Allah's Messenger died" (Ibn al-ʿArabī, 3:188; Chodkiewicz, *Emir Abd el-Kader*, 38) and will remain so until the Day of Resurrection. However, he also points out that his era is the last third of this night of the universe, the most favourable one, because it is the time in which God manifests Himself to men.[6] Also, the science of this community is all the more perfect as it approaches its end. Pre-empting the objection to a contradiction with the previously cited *ḥadīth*, Ibn al-ʿArabī asserts that the first century was more perfect for its actions, and that of his contemporaries for its science. A position that is undoubtedly isolated but shows how the apprehension of time can be softened under the pen of a Sufi master.

Sufis have also made their own contribution to the conceptualisation of time and space. Very early on, they sought to convey their acute perception of the decline and corruption of their times, and, around the mid-fifth/eleventh century, al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), author of one of the first Sufi manuals, wrote in the very first pages of his famous *Epistle*: "This [Sufi] path has been overcome by weakness, nay the path has in fact completely disappeared" (al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 22, trans. Knysh, 2). This assessment, which surely seemed excessive to later generations, in part explains the breadth of activities of collecting, publishing, and transmitting the words of the first spiritual masters in the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries. It was driven by the awareness of an urgency to safeguard for posterity a valuable spiritual heritage threatened with extinction.

3 The Notion of *Waqt* among the Sufis

The root *w-q-t* is one of those that make it possible to express time in Arabic, and particularly the noun *waqt*, to indicate a particular period of time, as equivalent to the Greek *kairos*. With the Sufis, this term acquired an original meaning, or rather a plurality of meanings, that in a first approach we could translate as "moment," "present moment," or "moment of the spiritual experience," but also indirectly as "eternity," as we shall see (Kukkonen, 4. Ṣūfī Input). It thus combines two main aspects: a temporal dimension associated

6 In accordance with many *ḥadīth*s indicating that God descends until the sky of this world on the last third of the night; see e.g. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-ṣalāt, 23.

with a spiritual experience.[7] Having from very early on aspired to that status of full-fledged science, Sufism, like all Islamic sciences, forged its own vocabulary, even though the many terms that made up this terminology would see their meaning evolve with the masters and the times, refining and enriching themselves in the course of time. The term *waqt* did not escape this general movement. So the first manuals on Sufism in the period of the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries attempted to gather the different meanings of this word as they did with the entire vocabulary used by the Sufis. Only al-Kalābādhī (d. 380/990 or 385/995), author of one of the oldest Sufi manuals, seems to have ignored the term *waqt*.[8] His contemporary al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988), in his *Lumaʿ fī l-taṣawwuf*, had included it in the list of Sufi technical terms, without defining it precisely but rather by highlighting its linguistic dimension: "The *waqt* is what lies between the past and the future" (al-Sarrāj, 342) and by underlining its irreversible character.[9]

How important this concept became for the Sufi masters is evidenced in the appearance of a specific section devoted to this term in the Sufi manuals starting with al-Qushayrī, appearing even in his famous *Risāla* as one of the main concepts that its author would endeavour to explain by quoting the masters that had used it. He presents the various meanings, starting with this general one: the *waqt* is the inscription of a virtual event in the scale of time, which is itself quite real. It is also what occupies an individual or the dominant state within him, for example, sadness or joy, and so one may then say: "Your present state (*waqtuka*) is sadness."[10] Hence the famous expression al-Qushayrī mentions: "The Sufi is the son of the 'moment' (*ibn al-waqt*)," which means that he is entirely occupied by what the spiritual state he is in requires of him, forgetting past and present. It is already an allusion to an "eternal present." Another

7 This is clearly evident in this sentence from Abū Bakr al-Wāsiṭī (d. after 320/932): "the moment of the spiritual experience lasts less than an hour (*al-waqt aqall min sāʿa*)" or less than a moment, as the term *sāʿa* can designate a lapse of time that does not correspond exactly to sixty minutes; see Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, n° 15, 305.

8 As also Louis Massignon in his *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane*, followed by Nwyia, who, however, notes the originality of Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Niffarī (d. second half of the fourth/tenth century) in the treatment of this term; see Nwyia, 402, n. 2.

9 Inspired by al-Sarrāj, al-Kharkūshī (d. 406/1015), in his manual *Tahdhīb al-asrār*, only devotes three sentences to defining the term *waqt* which appears at the top of his list of technical terms; see al-Kharkūshī, 398. See also a short section in Böwering and Orfali, 24–5, as well as al-Suhrawardī, 528.

10 Ibn al-ʿArabī reworked these definitions proposed by al-Qushayrī, one of which is reformulated this way: "The *waqt* is that where you are, with no consideration of a past or a future," but is linked, he notes, to your predispositions (al-Ḥakīm, *al-Muʿjam al-ṣūfī*, 1226).

expression that was similarly successful is: "So-and-so is in the hold/under the authority of the present moment (*bi-ḥukm al-waqt*)," which means that he is subject to what comes to him from the invisible world, independently of his own choice, and apart from the legal obligations that everyone is subject to. Finally, al-Qushayrī concludes by noting that, like the sword, time is sharp-edged, with all things coming from God necessarily imposing themselves, rendering any attempt to oppose or avoid them useless (al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 201–3, trans. Knysh, 75–7).

Those different meanings are taken up in a recently published manual, *Kitāb al-bayāḍ wa-l-sawād*, by an author from Kirmān, Abū l-Ḥasan al-Sirjānī (d. ca. 470/1077), who devotes a chapter to them, illustrating the different meanings of the term through many Sufi expressions (Orfali and Saab, 143–6). This work, in order to base the usage of the term on the sources, recalls the *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet declares: "I have a moment (*waqt*) in which there is room only for God"[11] (Orfali and Saab, § 304). As for al-Hujwīrī (d. 465/1073 or 469/1077), in his *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, one of the first manuals on Sufism in Persian, he mainly links *waqt* to another term that is essential in the Sufi lexicon, that of the "spiritual state" (*ḥāl*), because *waqt* is embellished by *ḥāl* like the body is by the mind, and needs it to live on. *Waqt* depends on the level of the disciple whereas *ḥāl* is an attribute of those who have renounced their will. For al-Hujwīrī, *waqt* is what makes man independent of the past and of the future by holding him in an eternal present (al-Hujwīrī, 367–9).

Having identified the significance given to this term in the manuals on Sufism, let us now specify in more detail its content and the evolution it underwent. Sufis see the use of this polysemous concept as going back to the emergence of Sufism and attribute to al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820) a statement in which he asserts that after frequenting the Sufis for ten years, he only learned two things from them, one of them being the *waqt*, which is a sword (al-Sulamī, *Kitāb kalām al-Shāfiʿī fī l-taṣawwuf*, n° 26, 184), an expression that is continuously re-utilised in Sufism as we have seen with al-Qushayrī, who, however, does not attribute it to al-Shāfiʿī. The symbol of the sword suggests that man is engaged in a combat against time, a fight that is a constituent part of the spiritual discipline (*mujāhada*) aiming to dominate the passions of the soul, at the very basis of Sufism. Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī (d. 215/830), one of the first Syrian masters, stated: "When hope outweighs fear, *waqt* is corrupted" (al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, n° 2, 76). Here, the term could be rendered as "the spiritual moment," because it is linked to the spiritual states associated

11 For the references to this *ḥadīth*, which cannot be found in the canonical collections, see Böwering, Concept of Time, n. 119.

with fear and hope. Al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857), master to the majority of the Baghdadis, pointed out the importance of this concept,[12] without specifying its content.

Summarising these discussions, the grand master of Baghdad al-Junayd (d. 298/911) established definitively the crucial role of this concept for the Sufis by asserting: "Sufism is the preservation of the *awqāt*" (al-Kalābādhī, 91). The words of the tutelary figure of Baghdadi Sufism make it possible to understand that the term *waqt* does not designate any particular time, nor a quantifiable unit, but rather the spiritual experience of the divine proximity, which needs to be prolonged by wresting it away from time. Al-Junayd, however, was not followed by al-Qushayrī, who established a progression that begins with those who experience the mystic moment (*ṣāḥib al-waqt*), is followed by those who experience the spiritual states (*ṣāḥib al-aḥwāl*), and ends with those who experience the breaths (*ṣāḥib al-anfās*).[13] Likewise, the best act of worship is to count the breaths with God[14] (al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 262, trans. Knysh, 105–6).

Waqt, understood as an intimate experience of the divine presence, is the most precious thing in the world for the Sufi. Many sentences express this dimension: "Whosoever squanders his *waqt*, squanders his life," or according to Abū Bakr al-Wāsiṭī (d. after 320/932), "The best act of worship is to preserve the *awqāt*" (Orfali and Saab, § 307). It is therefore a matter of occupying one's soul in the best possible manner, at each moment or in each spiritual experience, because often enough the term maintains this ambiguity, designating at once the experience and the privileged time in which it unfolds (al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, n° 3, 100).

Consequently one of the basic concerns of the Sufis would be to preserve this privileged state of the experience of divine proximity. Hence al-Junayd's warning to the great master in Rayy at the time, Yūsuf b. al-Ḥusayn al-Rāzī (d. 304/916–17), urging him to never turn back to a past state, because that detracts from what is most important, meaning the present state (al-Dhahabī, 14, 250).

12 "The main concern that should be imposed on the wise man is the present moment (*waqt*) and what in that moment is most appropriate for him." See al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 8, 59.

13 Al-Qushayrī defines breath as: "The perfuming of hearts by the subtle entities emanating from the Unseen" (al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 262, trans. Knysh, 105–6).

14 Ibn ʿAjība mentions a different version which he says was reported by al-Qushayrī: "The best devotion is the preservation of breaths"; see Michon, 256–7. According to this master, who took up al-Qushayrī's hierarchy, preserving the moments is the deed of the devotees and renouncers, preserving the states is the deed of aspirants, and preserving the breaths is the deed of the gnostics. For the section on the *waqt* in the lexicon of this author, see Michon, 216–17.

Al-Junayd was perhaps the one who was most acutely aware of the irreversible character of time and how the battle that man wages against it is lost in advance. At least he is attributed with many sentences focusing on that topic, such as this one: "The moment (*waqt*), once it has escaped you, cannot be recaptured and there is nothing more precious than the moment" (al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, n° 21, 161). Or also: "If a sincere man turned to God for a million years and then turned away from Him for a single moment, what he has lost is more important than anything he might have gained" (al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, n° 23, 161). More than a fight against the soul, this vision of the path presents itself to us as an almost desperate attempt to struggle against time and its irreversibility.

The *waqt* extends into ecstasy (*wajd*), which is its paroxysmal form. This term derives from the root *w-j-d*, which denotes existence from the philosophical and theological point of view (*wujūd*).[15] However, the Sufis, especially from al-Junayd on, used it with a different meaning based on the fundamental idea of this root which is "to find," a primal meaning on which an emotional and intensive value is grafted. *Wajd* then becomes the intense emotion experienced during the sessions of spiritual audition (*samāʿ*) and *wujūd*, the discovery in the inner conscience of a presence or of a spiritual reality. This value of "finding within oneself" evolved with subsequent philosophical contributions (Deladrière, *Junayd*, 33–6).

Waqt as an elusive time is a paradoxical concept. It moreover generated paradoxical formulations, especially those theophanic phrases (*shaṭḥ*) that escape from the mouths of the Sufis in those moments of loss of consciousness or ecstacy to which the term *wajd* refers, which is also a kind of abolition of the temporal dimension within the human being. Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 234/848–9 or 261/875) was one of the first to seek to extract spiritual experience from temporality in order to access eternity, which he expressed through phrases in which he described himself as without beginning or end, without morning or night (Böwering, Ideas, 81). Subsequently, al-Shiblī (d. 334/946), a leading figure of Baghdadi Sufism, renowned for his paradoxical statements (*shaṭaḥāt*), wove a special connection between the term *waqt* and what it designates. For him, there are only two possible states (*waqt*), corresponding here to two levels of conscience: drunkenness (*sukr*) and sobriety (*ṣaḥw*) (Orfali and Saab, § 306). According to al-Shiblī, the former is predominant, so in one of his ecstatic utterances he says: "You, your times come to an end, but my time has no bounds" or "my time is eternal and my ocean without shores" (Orfali and Saab, § 309, 310). Radically expressing this loss of awareness of the world

15 On this question, see Adamson.

that surrounded him, this independence from the human condition, he proclaimed: "I am time" or "There is in time no one but me." According to al-Sarrāj, who reports these words, *waqt* refers to the breath between two other breaths, or the thought that lies between two other thoughts: if they are by God (*bi-llāh*) and for God (*li-llāh*), then they are *waqt*. If we lose but one of those breaths, we cannot recover or recapture it. "A thousand years gone by and a thousand years to come, that is time (*waqt*), do not let yourselves be deluded by phantoms" (al-Sarrāj, 404–5) insisted al-Shiblī, for whom everything is illusory, past as well as future, except for *waqt* which makes it possible to capture eternity. While philosophers wish to explain time, Sufis seek to conquer and master it (Böwering, Ideas, 81).

The lack of mastery over *waqt* is the cause of the succession of states the aspirant (*murīd*) must traverse during his spiritual journey. Sufi vocabulary is rich in antithetical pairs that describe the vicissitudes of the changing spiritual states (*talwīn al-aḥwāl*). A response by al-Junayd, questioned as to the regrets he might have had regarding his past spiritual moments (*awqāt*), illustrates this: "A time of expansion (*basṭ*) is followed by contraction (*qabḍ*) or a time of intimacy (*uns*) that produces a time of solitude (*waḥsha*)" (Orfali and Saab, § 490). The stages of the spiritual journey have the aspirant constantly confronting time, until he achieves the spiritual stability (*tamkīn*) that marks the end of these suffered and changing states of consciousness.

While the term *waqt* does not refer only to time for the Sufis, to define it they have used temporal references, as in this anonymous response to the question "What is *waqt*?: That you pay no attention to what has been granted you in the pre-eternity, nor to what you are headed toward in the post-eternity, and that you safeguard the divine will toward you between two breaths" (Orfali and Saab, § 306). Human experience is a bridge made up of a succession of breaths between two eternities.

The term *waqt* is also useful to refer to the Pole (*quṭb*), the supreme spiritual authority, he who has authority over all the saints, especially for Ibn al-ʿArabī, who in referring to it used expressions such as: the master of the moment (*ṣāḥib al-waqt*), or the eye of time (*ʿayn al-zamān*), or the mystery of fate (*sirr al-qadar*) (Böwering, Ibn al-ʿArabī; Böwering, Ideas, 225). Mastery of time is indeed one of the characteristics of the highest degrees of holiness.

Finally, for the Sufis of the classical era, the use of the term *waqt* and the importance attributed to it show that the Sufis were acutely aware of how spiritual experience belonged to a temporal space and that they fought to try to escape from this constraint that deprived them of eternity.[16] A sort of

16 Here we were not interested in the very extensive theses developed by Henry Corbin on the links between Mazdaism and homologies with Ismāʿīlism: "a conception of cyclical

impotence is sometimes expressed, summarised by ʿAbdallāh b. Munāzil (d. 331/942), who belonged to the *Malāmatiyya*, a distinctive school of ascetic-mystical piety based in Nishapur: "How can man look to his future or his past when his spiritual station and his present spiritual moment (*waqt*) are hidden from him?" (al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, n° 16, 368).

4 Invocation (*Dhikr*) and Eternity

For Sufis such as al-Tustarī (d. 283/896), time is part of an arc whose "terminals" are two "events" that belong to eternity, beyond the temporality of humans, although they are particularly concerned with it. A dual eternity, present and past, because the Arabic language has two different terms distinguishing past eternity (*azal*) from future eternity (*abad*) (Böwering, Ideas, 82).

These two atemporal events are mentioned in the same Qurʾānic verse (7:172), which is worthwhile reproducing here in full:

> And when your Lord drew descendants from the reins of Adam and had them testify against themselves:—Am I not your Lord?—Certainly (*balā*), they affirmed, we can testify to that. [We required this testimony] so that you may not say on the Day of Resurrection:—We were distracted by all that.

The pre-existential pact mentioned here was generally referred to by the term covenant or Day of the Timeless Pact (*yawm al-mīthāq*), which the Persian authors call "Day of *Alast*," a well-known theme in Sufi literature. The metaphysical scope of this verse is considerable and it is therefore not surprising that the Sufis gave remarkable breadth to the commentaries they made about it.[17] The covenant, the acknowledgement of His Lordship by all of humanity and its corollary, the acceptance of the status of servant (ʿ*abd*), includes the acceptance by each man of the destiny that is sealed in this first and ephemeral

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time, time which is not the time of an eternal return but the time of a return to an eternal origin"; see Corbin, 12.

17 On the numerous glosses engendered by this verse see e.g. al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt*, 1:584–6; al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqāʾiq al-tafsīr*, 1:247–50; al-Tustarī, 68–9. In the latter, God has drawn the prophets from the reins of Adam, then, from each of them their descendants "in the form of tiny ants, possessing intellection." Subsequently He obtained from the prophets the commitment (*mīthāq*) to transmit His message, His order, and His defence, and then He invited all, the entire posterity of Adam including the prophets, to witness His Lordship (al-Tustarī, 68). On al-Junayd's treatise titled *Kitāb al-mīthāq*, see al-Ḥakīm, *Tāj al-ʿārifīn*, 229–31, and its French translation by Deladrière, *Junayd*, 155–60.

proto-existence. The election of some and the damnation of others are already decreed by the divine Almighty power even before men appeared on earth.[18] Al-Qushayrī quotes an anonymous report according to which when God cast light on His creatures, it did not reach some of them, so they would not be able to enjoy union with Him (al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt*, 1:586). However, such things will not be revealed until the Day of Judgement, which is the ultimate horizon of all believers and the inescapable test for all, except a few chosen ones who will not be held accountable (Ibn Ḥanbal, 5:194, 198, 6:444). We can glimpse the theological problems resulting from this notion in relation to divine justice, to human responsibility, and more generally to the question of human freedom of action.

This is not, however, the terrain where the Sufis will position themselves. One of their practices is in direct relation to the *mīthāq*, namely the *dhikr*, invocation and remembrance of God.[19] There are many ways to practise *dhikr*, collectively or individually, in silence or aloud, standing or sitting, and at various levels of being: with the tongue, the heart, or even the most intimate part of the heart (*sirr*). In any case, the techniques are as numerous as the formulas supporting it. Thus the practice of *dhikr*[20] is an anamnesis allowing anyone to remember the commitment one has made on the Day of the Covenant and enabling the aspirant to renew the divine presence in his heart. It is a cognitive act, aiming at once to experience the divine presence and to provide a reminiscence so as to lead the being into the eternal past. For al-Tustarī, according to Böwering, "Time is memory of the eternal past and the certitude of the eternal future drawn into the present moment" (Böwering, Ideas, 82).

It is through the practice of *dhikr* that the Sufi seeks to attain the annihilation (*fanāʾ*) that will bring him to this divine presence and this total acknowledgement of his status of *ʿabd* in the pact (*mīthāq*) which is also anticipation of the promised encounter with the Face of God, on the Day of Judgement. An anonymous commentator on the mentioned verse expressed this tension regarding the purpose of the quest: "The *tawḥīd* of the elite is attained when the servant is standing with the intimacy of his being before his Lord … so well that he will be like he was before he was [created]" (al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqāʾiq al-tafsīr*, 1:248). The true realisation of *tawḥīd* is the abrogation or re-absorbtion of time

18 Al-Jurayrī points out that God makes Himself known to each of the groups (*ṭāʾifa*) that make up humanity by what He has granted them; even if the acknowledgement seems unanimous through the term *balā*, it is commensurate to what each one has received; see al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqāʾiq al-tafsīr*, 1:248.

19 On the *dhikr*, see Böwering, *Mystical Vision*, 201–7; Brodersen; Gardet.

20 Al-Tustarī was the first to have a theoretical discussion of *dhikr*; see Böwering, *Mystical Vision*, 153–7.

into an eternal present. This idea come to the fore in the response Dhū l-Nūn gave an interlocutor who had asked him about the ultimate state of the knower (*ʿārif*): "Let him be as he was before he existed" (al-Kalābādhī, 137).[21] In other words, let him return to his real existence which is, in fact, non-existence (*ʿadam*). By renewing the primordial Pact the act of *dhikr* makes it possible to combine the two terms of eternity, to elide the recognition of the ontological servitude with its reward in an exalted vision.

A statement reported by al-Qushayrī explains how external manifestations of their mystical states, exhibited by some Sufis during the spiritual audition (*samāʿ*)—for example, cries, trances, dancing, tears, and so on—are caused by hearing once again the divine words uttered in pre-eternity. Deeply buried in their hearts, they resurface in their conscience (al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt*, 1:586).

5 Space and Cosmology

Islam understands space in terms of a double rupture: horizontally with the Prophet Muḥammad's emigration, or *Hijra*, from Mecca to Medina, and vertically with the change in the ritual orientation of prayer which, initially facing Jerusalem, redirected toward Mecca. A new spatio-temporal framework emerged with the foundation of Islam and these two events marked later developments in Muslim thought and especially in that of the Sufis. The Prophet's *Hijra* did not just mark the beginning of the new calendar adopted by the Muslims, it created a temporary rupture between two distinctive periods, Meccan and Medinan. The Sufis seized on this rupture: for them, it corresponded to the first stage marking the commitment to the spiritual path, a moment marked by repentance (*tawba*) and conversion, in its etymological meaning of return to God (*ināba*) (al-Suhrawardī, 531). It is also the time of exile[22] and of journeys[23] at the heart of their conscience of the human condition. Because the spiritual experience of the path that leads the aspirant to clear the stages and successive stations (*aḥwāl wa-maqāmāt*) is a journey

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21 This expression was later reiterated by al-Junayd with some minor modifications: "That he be as he was before he existed" (al-Sarrāj, 29), then by al-Shiblī in connection with putting one's trust in God (*tawakkul*): "That you be for God as if you had never been and that God be for your as He has never ceased to be" (al-Sarrāj, 52).

22 See the *ḥadīth*: "Islam began as a stranger and will return as a stranger" (Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-īmān, 65).

23 A little-known Sufi Abū l-Ḥasan al-Fārisī (d. 370/980) includes itineracy in the ten defining principles of Sufism; see al-Kalābādhī, 89.

which, taken to its conclusion, leads him to the position of proximity (*maqām al-qurba*).[24] This inner journey was often coupled with physical peregrinations, in search of knowledge from the masters and their *baraka*, mixing educational visits with pilgrimages (*ziyārāt*),[25] or for the purpose of spiritual companionship (*ṣuḥba*)—a major means of training Sufi disciples (*murīd*s).

As for the orientation of prayer, for the Sufis, it, too, has an ontological-cosmic concern, that is, the orientation of the mystic in his quest for God. This is because the mystic's heart and the Kaʿba are just two distinct modes of the sanctuary in which the divine presence manifests itself. Also, the orientation of the bodies toward Mecca during the canonical prayer finds its fulfilment only with the spiritual orientation of human hearts toward God. Geography then becomes symbolic and sacred and the Qurʾānic injunction of "turn your face toward the Holy Mosque and wherever you may be, turn your faces in that direction"[26] (2:144) denotes not only the geographical place but an invitation for the Sufi to contemplate God in every action or thought, not merely during the ritual practice, as the emir ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jazāʾirī (d. 1883) points out in his commentary on the above-mentioned verse (Chodkiewicz, *Emir Abd el-Kader*, 109–12).

The Sufis furnished symbolic interpretations of many Qurʾānic verses, while also creatively using symbols and allegories to present their metaphysical, cosmological, or initiatory doctrines. In this respect, Ibn al-ʿArabī succeeded better than anyone else.[27] For example, he made several references to the terms "East" and "West," which appear several times in the Qurʾānic text. From among his many comments, noteworthy is the one that describe the East as a cosmogonic source of light that brings phenomena and things out of darkness. On the other hand, the West, a symbol of the disappearing sun, is the place of secrets hidden from human sights. The first, thus, corresponds to the exit of existents from nothingness and their arrival into the world, whereas the second corresponds to their departure from material existence and entrance into the world of mystery (*ʿālam al-ghayb*) where everything will be revealed in its true reality and where everyone will know their exact place, either blessed or damned, in an inverse and complementary relationship to the way things and phenomena are in this world (Ibn al-ʿArabī, 2:121).

24 On this position, as described by Ibn al-ʿArabī, see *Futūḥāt* 2:241, 260–2, and the French translation and the presentation of those two chapters in Gril, Le terme du voyage.

25 For the various categories of visits and their functions, see Thibon, 300.

26 See also Q 2:149 and 150.

27 See e.g. the interpretation by Ibn al-ʿArabī of the "Light Verse"; Gril, Le commentaire du verset de la Lumière d'après Ibn ʿArabî, and the commentary on the same verse by al-Ghazālī, translated by Deladrière, *Ghazâlî*.

Other Sufis also commented on the verses that mention the East and the West, especially Q 55:18, in which the use of the dual raises questions: "The Lord of the two Easts and the two Wests." For al-Qushayrī, these verses unveil a sacred geography, because the East is the symbol of the mind and of the heart, whereas the West, the place where light disappears, is tied to the soul and the passions (Ibn ʿAjība, 7:272). In this dialectic of light and darkness, of the heart and the soul, the Sufis found a symbolic material of an inexhaustible richness to represent their spiritual journey, but also a perfect coincidence between the physical and spiritual geography. According to ʿAlāʾ al-Dawla al-Simnānī (d. 736/1335–6), in the physical world it is the rising of the sun of prophecy and the moon of holiness, and in the spiritual world the setting of the sun of prophecy and the moon of holiness (al-Simnānī, 6:67). Reference is made at this point to the cycle of prophecy and the ages of humanity, with each comprising a complete cycle in which holiness accompanies prophecy.

Thus, in commenting on the verse "Lord of the heavens and the earth and of what separates them, and Lord of the Easts" (Q 37:5), the Moroccan Sufi Ibn ʿAjība justifies the use of the plural form of the "East" by explaining that there are 360 sunrises as there are 360 sunsets, as many as days in the year; therefore the world is renewing itself daily because the light illuminating it is always changing imperceptively with the sun rising and setting every day at a different point. The Sufis, who were acutely interested in attaining the divine light, consistently emphasised the underlying continuity between the empirical world and the world of the spirit. According to the Baghdadi Sufi Ibn ʿAṭāʾ (d. 309/922), a disciple of al-Junayd and friend of al-Ḥallāj, "the light which is neither from the East nor from the West" (Q 24:35) means a negation of any distance between God and His creatures, or, rather, neither proximity nor distance (al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqāʾiq al-tafsīr*, 2:45). Another way of approaching time and its place within space is to focus on the alternation of days and nights which represents one of the many signs of the creation of the universe by the Almighty.[28] To reverse the course of the sun is thus the supreme challenge[29] proposed by Moses to the Pharaoh to challenge his haughty claim to divinity, which he asserts by saying: "I am your most exalted Lord" (Q 79:24).

28 The Qurʾān specifies one of its purposes: "So that you may know the number of years and the calculation" (17:12).

29 See Q 2:258.

6 Ritual Times and Hierohistory

This theocentric vision of time should not have us forget that Islam also has a strong sense of the law and rituals, taking place at specific times. The Sufis who observe them do not follow a different calendar from that of all other Muslims. They sometimes pay more attention to the different times of the year and to their particular practices (holidays, Friday, supplementary fasts, nocturnal vigils, etc.), adding different pilgrimages to honour the memory of this or that saint at specific times of the year (*mawlid*). However, it is in their interpretation of these times that the uniqueness of their sense of time is most vividly pronounced. Indeed, each of those times carries the memory of a hierohistory. In his work *al-Ghunya li-ṭālib ṭarīq al-Ḥaqq*, ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 561/1166), the Ḥanbalī theologian and preacher of Baghdad and eponymous founder of the Qādiriyya, the first Sufi brotherhood, portrays the highlights of the liturgical calendar, which are the months of Rajab, Shaʿbān, and Ramaḍān, Night of Destiny, Day of ʿArafāt, ʿĀshūrāʾ, Friday, the days of the week, and so on. For each of these dates he specifies the virtues or merits and mentions the corresponding hierohistorical events as well as recommended practices (al-Jīlānī, 1:173–92, 2:3–75).

7 History and Cycles

Sufism relies in part on the same processes of transmission as the other Islamic sciences, namely, an oral transmission from master to disciples. It is therefore essential to identify the former as well as the latter. This is one of the goals of prosopographic literature, which in the Islamic sciences takes on especially the form of works of *ṭabaqāt* (classes of scholars or successive generations): the numerous prosopographic works compiled over the centuries by the Sufis, formed at the foundation of Sufism's historiography and showing the importance spiritual genealogies had. From Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021) to ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī (d. 973/1565) these often voluminous collections enabled subsequent generations to identify the masters, to add them to spiritual lineages, while also indicating the main characteristics of their spirituality. The various Sufi manuals, of which we have cited some essential titles from the classical period, established their lexicon, their doctrine, and practice. They belong to the general history of Islam and we owe this group of texts our knowledge of Sufi theory and practice.

The initiatory chains (*silsila*) represent another form of inscribing Sufism in history. They indicate the successive masters that transmitted to each other

esoteric teachings and specific educational methods. They connect the aspirant to a spiritual lineage or a specific path (*ṭarīqa*), designated from the sixth/twelfth century onward by the name of the master whom the followers recognised as the eponymous founder of their lineage. These *silsila*s indicate a continuous transmission not only of teaching but also of a spiritual influence whose importance al-Sulamī pointed out as early as the fourth/tenth century (al-Sulamī, *Manāhij al-ʿārifīn*, 29). Through the traditionists' chains of transmission (*isnād*), as through the *silsila*s, the image and presence of the Prophet is conveyed from generation to generation. In a way, the transmission of knowledge and experience in Sufism subtly replicates the Prophet's encounter with God during his celestial ascension (*miʿrāj*) and the spiritual benefits and knowledge he derived from it. It is a trace of eternity that is thus conveyed through the *isnād* and the *silsila*s, securing the continuation of spiritual impulse and blessing (*baraka*).

The notion of cycles is another element of historiography to which Sufis have made an original contribution. The notion of a prophetic cycle is inscribed in the Qurʾān, which designates Muḥammad as the "Seal of the Prophets" (33:40). However, for the Sufis, Muḥammad has not just terminated the historical succession of prophets. He is also the one who has realised in himself the synthesis of all the aspects of the prophecy thereby perfecting and completing the revelation to which the previous prophets were contributing piecemeal. This concept gave rise to important doctrinal developments and many debates that continued until modern times within the framework of the reform of Islam (Sangaré, 251–375).

One of the major contributions of Ibn al-ʿArabī lies in his formulation of the doctrine of the primordial Muḥammadan Reality (*al-ḥaqīqa al-Muḥammadiyya*),[30] which is an essential element of his prophetology and his hagiography. It is based in particular on the concept of the luminous nature of the Prophet (*nūr Muḥammadī*) sketched by al-Tustarī and on the traditions that evoke the pre-existence of Muḥammad and the migration of his primordial entity into the loins of the successive prophets,[31] or the *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet himself declares, with some variants: "I was a prophet when Adam was between spirit and body."[32] Based on such statements, the first Sufis deduced from the pre-existence of the Prophet his ontological primordiality and his role in the creation of the human race as a whole. However, it is only with Ibn

30 On this matter, see Chodkiewicz, *Le Sceau des saints*, 79–94.

31 See Rubin, Pre-existence and light, and Rubin, More light, 307.

32 Or "was still between water and clay"; on the other variants of this *ḥadīth* and its role in Ibn al-ʿArabī's teaching, see Addas, 47–66.

al-ʿArabī that this idea unfolded its full hermeneutical potential. Beside the transhistorical role of the Prophet, Ibn al-ʿArabī asserted the primordiality of his spiritual status and his superiority to all the previous prophets whom Ibn al-ʿArabī considered representatives or manifestations of Muḥammad's spirit at a given moment in the history of humankind. Ibn al-ʿArabī's interpretation thus led him to affirm the all-embracing, universal dimension of Muḥammad's prophethood. According to this conception, each prophet since Adam represents only a partial refraction of the Muḥammadan Reality at some historical epoch. This reality is also the source of the general holiness that nourishes all the saints who, whatever their religious affiliation might be, are vectors of the Prophet's primordial legacy. Ibn al-ʿArabī linked the cycle of universal prophecy with the cycle of universal sainthood, presenting it as an inherent corollary of prophethood. He then proposed a triple seal of universal sainthood in which he assumed the role of the third element, that is, the seal of Muḥammadan sainthood (Chodkiewicz, *Le Sceau des saints*, 145–58, 161).[33]

Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 320/910) was the first to lay the foundations of a doctrine of sainthood as a corollary of prophethood. His major work devoted to this issue, *Khatm al-awliyāʾ* (*The Seal of Sainthood*),[34] evokes in its title a different concept, equally important but addressed only occasionally, that of the perfect exemplification of sainthood, the esoteric side of the seal of prophethood. It was not until Ibn al-ʿArabī that the relationships between prophethood and sainthood and between their respective seals would witness major developments and became the subject of theological debates and criticisms. Summarising this large body of literature, we can say the following: prophethood enters into human history at a given moment and is, therefore, limited in time, whereas sainthood (*walāya*) not only endures but is even timeless insofar as it extends into the other world.[35] In Ibn al-ʿArabī's doctrine, the cycle of prophethood, is completed with Muḥammad. However, that which Ibn al-ʿArabī refers to as "general prophethood" is endless and inherently correlated with what we call sainthood (*walāya*). Sainthood is eternal, because it is associated with the sphere that encompasses all the other spiritual sphers, including that of prophethood.

33 Ibn al-ʿArabī evokes the existence of several Adamic cycles, all beginning with an Adam, and followed by the creation of 100,000 Adams; see al-Ḥakīm, *al-Muʿjam al-ṣūfī*, 57.

34 See Radtke and O'Kane, and Radtke.

35 According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, the term *walī*, which is usually translated into English as "saint," is one of God's names and, therefore, as an attribute of God, is timeless. This, however, is not the case with the terms "messenger" (*rasūl*) and "prophet" (*nabī*) that are applied only to human beings; see Chodkiewicz, *Le Sceau des saints*, 69–70.

8 Conclusion

The Sufis have an ambiguous relationship with time. By removing themselves from its constraints they hope to achieve eternity already in this life, whereas ordinary believers see it as a horizon that they will attain only after death. However, they also strive to master each moment and each breath of their earthly life. This raises the question of the perception Sufis have of their own history: does *taṣawwuf* belong to the realm of human history? From a certain point of view, al-Sulamī replies in the negative. He asserts in the *Manāhij al-ʿārifīn* that "*taṣawwuf* is a true reality (*ḥaqīqa*) which existed before there was language or speech" (al-Sulamī, *Manāhij al-ʿārifīn*, 29). In the same work he reports a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet, questioned about the characteristics of the elite of believers, replies: "Abandon the realm of illusion and return to that of eternity."[36] This conception of the world establishes a continuity between life in this world and that of the the next and is found in all Muslim societies. The Sufis have regarded everything temporal as a fleeting and deceptive appearance. In doing so, they are following another piece of advice from the Prophet, which he gave to the son of the second caliph Ibn ʿUmar (d. 73/693): "Consider yourself [in this life] as one of the inhabitants of cemeteries" (al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-zuhd, 25). The first ascetics made the reduction of hope for life in this world (*qiṣar al-amal*) one of the founding principles of their practice and self-discipline (al-Sulamī, *Darajāt al-muʿāmalāt*, 480). Sufi reflections on the vicissitudes of time, rooted in the Qurʾān and the Prophet's teachings, were aimed at instilling in their hearts the realisation of the fundamental unity of all being (*tawḥīd*). This notion is captured by al-Junayd when he was asked about the *tawḥīd* of Islam's spiritual elite: "It is like throwing off the shackles of temporal forms to enter the vast expanse of eternity" (al-Sarrāj, 29). In other words, to achieve the true *tawḥīd* the mystic must erase all traces of temporal consciousness from his or her self so as to access eternity already in this life.

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36 A Prophetic commentary on the meaning of Q 39:22; see al-Suyūṭī, 3:355.

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CHAPTER 5

Sufi Views of Life in the Grave

Leah Kinberg

The Qurʾān abounds with graphic descriptions of the infernal punishments that are meted out to people who did not follow the right path. These disturbing illustrations are often contrasted with the comforting verses that refer to the rewards awaiting the righteous in paradise. The juxtaposition of the two, the hellish torments and the paradisial pleasures, underlines basic Islamic moral standards, according to which good and evil deeds are recompensed proportionally: "Every man shall be pledged for what he earned …," says the Qurʾān (52:21; cf. 74:38), and more specifically, "He who has done an atom's weight of good shall see it, and he who has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it" (99:7–8). We may assume that this straightforward perception of justice, along with the vivid descriptions of the realms of paradise and hell, fostered strong curiosity among the believers and stimulated the compilation of post-Qurʾānic treatises of ethics, especially those that fall under the genre of "exhortation and admonition" (*al-targhīb wa-l-tarhīb*), which practically frame morality in the context of reward and punishment.[1]

As early as the end of the second/eighth century and the beginning of the third/ninth century, ethical observations were collected into compilations.[2] A little later special works began to be dedicated to the examination of life after death. Each treatise that was dedicated to this posthumous journey relied on the assumption that death is not final. Although not of the same realm, the afterlife was taken to mean some kind of continuation of life on earth, closely connected and most relevant to the deeds performed in the present world. Various works elaborated on the ongoing process of life after death and demonstrated an uninterrupted interaction between the two worlds. Careful

1 Two of the most known treatises dedicated to this topic are those of Abū l-Qāsim al-Iṣfahānī, Qawwām al-Sunna (d. 535/1141), and Abū Muḥammad al-Mundhirī (d. 656/1258), both entitled *al-Targhīb wa-l-tarhīb*.

2 See, for example, the compilations entitled *Kitāb al-zuhd* by scholars of the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries, such as ʿAbdallāh b. al-Mubārak (d. 181/797) (for his biography, see Robson, Ibn al-Mubārak); Wakīʿ b. al-Jarrāḥ (d. 197/813), jurist of the Ḥanafī school and traditionalist; Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād (d. 228/843) (for his biography, see Pellat); Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) (for his biography, see Laoust); Hannād b. al-Sarī (d. 243/857), traditionalist; Aḥmad b. ʿAmrū b. Abī ʿĀṣim (d. 283/893), judge and traditionalist.

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attention was drawn to the capability of the dead to come back to the present world, to guide the living and prevent them from acting impiously. It so happened that these early, sometimes unripe and oversimplified eschatological essays became the core of the vast body of ethical narrations.

One of the early scholars who examined the kingdom of the afterlife is Ibn Abī l-Dunyā (d. 281/894), a prolific Baghdadi author of the third/ninth century, whose works meticulously describe the experiences of the dead from the moment of death to the resurrection. By introducing accounts of the tortures and rewards that the dead encounter, always in direct proportion to their behavior while alive, Ibn Abī l-Dunyā's works not only contain distinctive edifying material, but also help to elucidate the inscrutability of divine providence. The short statements and narratives adduced lavishly in his works are preceded by chains of transmitters that go back either to the Prophet and his Companions or to the second and third generations of Muslims. This material was widely studied in later times by influential thinkers such as al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d.751/1350), and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), and even by later mystics such as the Persian author Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār (d. 627/1230). Ibn Abī l-Dunyā's distinctive influence on later generations makes his literary contribution an essential start for any investigation of life after death. The present chapter owes much to his legacy.

Ibn Abī l-Dunyā's treatises may be defined as sources for eschatological details presented in an edifying, popular form. His works are popular in the sense that they do not treat theological, judicial, or philosophical issues, but rather examine accounts of daily matters that convey notions about the relationship between the two worlds. Addressed to the average Muslim believer, Ibn Abī l-Dunyā's texts use simple language and accessible terms to describe the occurrences in the hereafter. No reference is made to the Qurʾānic term *barzakh* (Q 23:100, 25:53, 55:20) that later on developed to indicate the intermediate state of the dead from the moment of death until the Day of Resurrection,[3] and hence, aspects of space and time remain outside his narratives. Another issue missing from these popular eschatological treatises is the distinction between body and soul. Ibn Abī l-Dunyā considers the dead as simply "dead" figures (*amwāt*) that reside in graves, located in an abode known as the afterworld (*al-ākhira*). Dead persons of the kind discussed in these treatises retain their senses. They are fully aware of the process of purification

3 For the development of the idea of *barzakh* from its narrow sense in the Qurʾān to wider meanings in later sources, see Eklund; Halevi, 201–7, 215–18, et passim; Lange, *Paradise and hell*, 122–8; Smith, Concourse, 226; Smith, Reflections; Smith and Haddad, 7–8, 183, 193; Tesei, 31–55, and the bibliography there; de Vaux.

that all deceased have to undergo immediately after their death, and they are able to notice the people who come to escort them at their funeral. When in their graves, or whenever they leave them to pay a visit to one of their living relatives, they function as conscious figures that possess knowledge, interests, desires, and first and foremost vitality. The physical existence of the deceased enables them to keep close contact with their previous abode and its dwellers, and facilitates a steady flow of communication between their new realm, the afterworld, and the place to which they once belonged, the present world.

Interaction between the living and the dead in Ibn Abī l-Dunyā's works may happen in several ways: (1) Individuals who went through what we know today as a clinical death describe the kind of death that they felt.[4] (2) People who died reveal themselves in graveyards. They may emerge from their tombs to describe their death experience, or else may be seen inside their graves in forms that indicate the nature of their own death.[5] (3) The dead may communicate with the living via dreams. Believed to hold and deliver the truth, dreams were considered a reliable source of information about the afterworld, and hence the dead who appeared in them could be accepted as the vehicles to deliver the genuine truth. Abundant information about the afterworld was fitted into frameworks of short dreams that gradually became a perfect means to decipher the mysterious interaction between the inhabitants of the two worlds. Each one of Ibn Abī l-Dunyā's treatises, and especially his *Book of Dreams* (*Kitāb al-manām*), adduces dream narrations that depict continuous contacts between the living and the dead. We may assume that Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, like other traditionalists of his kind, often found recourse in dreams to mitigate the crucial Qur'ānic message about the finality of human existence.

In Q 23:99–100 we find a clear indication of the finality of death: "When death comes to one of them, he says, 'My Lord, send me back that I may do right in the world that I have left behind.' Nay, it is only a word he is saying; behind them is a barrier (*barzakh*) until the Day they are resurrected." By attesting to the opposite, to actual life after death, dreams were used to suggest a different understanding of death. The following dream, for example, illustrates a natural process of interaction between the two worlds, as well as a palpable existence that dead people can maintain after their death (Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Manām*, #39):

Jamīl and Muwarraq were close friends. Jamīl suggested one day that the one who dies first should return to tell his friend about his experience. Muwarraq

4 For this, see Ibn Abī l-Dunyā's *Man ʿāsha baʿd al-mawt* (*Those Who Lived after Death*) as well as his *Man takallama baʿda al-mawt* (*Those Who Spoke after Death*).

5 For this, see Ibn Abī l-Dunyā's *Kitāb al-qubūr* (*The Book of Graves*).

dies, and after a while Jamīl's wife has a dream. She sees the deceased arriving as he used to do while alive, knocking on the door as he used to knock. She opens the door as she used to do, and after greeting him, invites him in, reassuring him about Jamīl's prompt arrival. To that Muwarraq responds: "How can I enter after having passed away?" He then adds: "I just came to tell Jamīl what God has done to me. Tell him that He put me among the *muqarrabūn*." The *muqarrabūn*, in the explanation given by al-Qurṭubī (d. 621/1273), are those who are so close to God that they can see and hear Him (al-Qurṭubī, 17:232, on Q 56:88–9).

The sentiment of substantial continuity is presented here in its entirety: not only is the deceased's appearance unaffected by his death, but even his manners and customs have remained the same. However, when invited into a worldly house he declines on the grounds that he no longer belongs among the living. This thin line between the dead and the living often causes confusion: although Jamīl's wife talks to the deceased, she cannot have him enter her house. The deceased, for his part, comes to pay a visit as he used to do, but cannot complete it, and departs leaving a message.

Similar narrations are repeated in a variety of versions. For instance, a living person greets his deceased friend in a dream but receives no answer. To his dismay, the deceased explains: "I am dead, how am I going to answer your greeting?" Nevertheless, when asked about his death experience, the deceased gives a full answer (Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Manām*, #30). Small talk in this case is not the reason for the deceased's return to the present world. Rather, he comes to enlighten his friend about his own experience and the nature of his death. Similarly, Muwarraq of the above narration did not come to pay a visit. He appears only to report his good fortune in the next world, and in so doing, to allude to the kind of death that awaits his friend Jamīl, who is as righteous as he was.

This is not the only case in which two friends promise each other that whoever dies first will come back to tell the other about his experience. As a matter of fact, we may assume that such agreements were regarded as part of the norm, a "conventional saying" (*kalima maqbūla*), as expressed in one narration (Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Manām*, #30; see also Kinberg, Individual). The yearning of the living for the deceased and the confidence in his physical return to the present world, along with basic human curiosity about the next world and the deep fear of death, all these sentiments created a perfect setting for intimate stories featuring very private details that hold general edifying messages applicable to the whole community.

Although described as part of reality, the return of the dead in general and the fulfillment of agreements held between friends in particular can only take

place in dreams. The Qurʾān (39:42) mentions a possible meeting between the dead and the living during sleep, when the living go beyond their bodies to meet the dead: "God takes the souls at the time of their death, and those that do not die [He takes] during their sleep. He withholds those upon whom He has ordained death, and releases the others for a stated term." The verse implies that unlike the living souls who return to life after sleep, those who have died will not return. Despite this notion, exegetical literature (*tafsīr*) tries to relieve the human mind of such a frightening closure and suggests a concrete gathering of the dead and the living: "The spirits of the living and the dead meet together during sleep, and get acquainted with one another, in as much as God allows ..." (al-Ṭabarī, 11:7; see also Tesei, 40–1).

While the latter statement refers to the ascension of the living to meet the dead during their sleep, dream narrations focus mostly on a reverse journey in which the dead descend into the present world to meet the living. As demonstrated above, the return of the dead to their previous abode is regarded not only as natural and common, but also essential. Upon their death, the dead are bestowed with special qualities that help them appreciate the value of the duties imposed on the believers in the present world. It is this consciousness that qualifies the dead to advise and even to instruct the living on how to lead their lives while they are alive, and how to prepare for death in due course. A plethora of narrations, mainly those containing dreams, assume a high correlation between the physical appearance of the dead after death and their past earthly conduct. Narrations of this kind are likely to include short dialogues between the dreamer and the deceased, who may be a famous and influential figure or anonymous, a close friend or just an acquaintance. The dreamer may ask the deceased what God has done with him, and the deceased, in his turn, may describe the position he has attained and the way he reached it. While wicked people may appear with black faces and bruises (see note 8 below), pious believers appear after their death in a glorious manner: clean, scented, with a shining face, smiling, content and cheerful, wearing a white gown and walking proudly.

Certain pious people may enjoy exceptional benefits. For example, the prominent jurist, traditionist, and exegete Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778) is seen flying from one tree to another in paradise (al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, 9: 173–4; Abū Nuʿaym, 6:384; for his biography, see Raddatz); the tradionist and dream interpreter Ibn Sīrīn (d. 110/728) sees one of his friends with golden legs, given to him to enable him to reach any place in paradise (Abū Nuʿaym, 2:273; for his biography, see Fahd); the theologian, jurist, and traditionist Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) is seen in a garden wearing two green garments and a crown of light on his head, walking in the manner of the "servants of paradise" (Ibn al-Jawzī,

4:37). In other cases, we come across accounts about dead figures whose faces are adorned with sparkling stars to replace scars that had been carved into their faces while alive: the renunciant Murra al-Hamadānī (d. 76/695) prostrated himself in prayer so often during his lifetime that the earth devoured his forehead. After his death he appears in a dream with a shining star on his forehead (Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Manām*, #67). The prominent early theologian, ascetic, and exegete Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) spent long days weeping out of fear of hell. His tears carved two deep lines into his cheeks. After his death these lines disappeared and his face became glowing white (Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Manām*, #49; for his biography, see Ritter, Haṣan al-Baṣrī).

Virtuous conduct that protects the believers after death and eventually ensures their admission to paradise also underlies narrations that portray the journey over the *ṣirāṭ*, the long and dangerously narrow bridge to paradise that stretches above the fires of hell (see Monnot). One such narration presents various stages of the hazardous crossing, and associates them with some of the basic precepts of Islam: while trying to cross the *ṣirāṭ*, a man almost dies of thirst but the fast of Ramaḍān he kept during his life comes to the rescue to quench his thirst; darkness encompasses another man, but the pilgrimage he completed while alive arises to lead him; a man who tries to protect his face from the flames is lucky to have the alms he used to give in the present world cover his head and shelter his face. Another man falls into hell fire, but the tears he shed during his lifetime lift him out of the flames. Yet another person has difficulties crossing the thin bridge, but, fortunately, the prayers he used to pray for the Prophet take him by the hand and lead him along the *ṣirāṭ* until he enters paradise (Ibn Ḥajar al-Haythamī, 7:179–80; for a longer and more detailed version, see Ibn Shāhīn, 404–5).

With the understanding that generous heavenly remunerations are fruits of worldly activities, we hear about a person who wandered in the desert and, unable to find a mosque to perform his prayer, prepared his own *qibla* (direction of prayer; see Kimber; Wensinck and King) by piling up seven stones. After his death, the man appears in a dream and recounts that he was sentenced to hell, but one of the stones that he had used for the *qibla* grew in size and blocked the gate of hell. He was then taken to another gate of hell, and the second *qibla*-stone blocked it. The same sequence was repeated seven times with each one of the seven stones he used for the *qibla*. After all seven gates of hell had been blocked, he was sent to paradise (Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Manām*, #243).

Ultimate bliss is reserved for those who were killed for the sake of God (*shuhadā'*; see Raven, Martyrs). The Qur'ān (3:169; cf. 2:154) says: "Think not of those who are slain in God's way as dead. Nay, they are alive and find their sustenance in the presence of their Lord." The motif of actual life after death,

stated here so well, seems to contradict other Qurʾānic statements that insist on the finality of death (see Q 23:99–100, mentioned above; for other verses that express the same idea, see 6:27, 7:53, 14:44, 23:107, 32:12–15, 35:36–7, 39:58, 42:44, 63:10). Qurʾānic commentators, however, try to smooth over the discrepancy and designate the fortune of life after death to those who were killed in God's way. While elaborating on the occasion of the revelation of this verse (part of Qurʾānic hermeneutics known as *asbāb al-nuzūl*; see Rippin), the commentaries adduce a Prophetic *ḥadīth* that tells that it was after the defeat of the Muslims in the battle of Uḥud (during the year 3/625; see Robinson) that the verse was revealed. To illuminate the bliss bestowed on the *shuhadāʾ* implied in the verse, the commentators avail themselves of a variety of graphic Prophetic descriptions. The souls of the *shuhadāʾ*, as stated in one narration, reside inside the bodies of green birds. The nests of the birds are located in chandeliers that hang from the divine throne. The *shuhadāʾ* are nourished by the fruits of paradise and enjoy every delight they desire. When God addresses them and asks what else they wish, they answer that they are surrounded with pleasures that no one has ever had, and reassure the Lord that there is nothing left for them to desire. God nevertheless repeats the question until they answer: "We wish to return to life in order to fight again for the sake of God and be killed, again, for Him" (see, among other commentators, Ibn Kathīr, 1:427, on Q 3:169).[6]

The fact that this verse has always been used to promote *jihād* is beyond the scope of the issues discussed here. However, the description of the martyrs' actions and the declaration that they are not dead have everything to do with the Islamic eschatological discourse. Due to the divine benevolence, the righteous dwellers of paradise do not taste death again after their "first death" (Q 44:56). Having merely one death (instead of two) is considered the supreme triumph after which everyone should strive. As the inhabitants of paradise state: "What, do we then not die except for our first death … this is indeed the mighty triumph …" (Q 37:58–60). Commentators of these verses are not equivocal about the meaning of the term "first death." If there is a first death, then there is also a second one. Some commentators take the first death to mean the state before birth, and understand the second death as the departure of the individual from this world. Others perceive the first death as the departure from the world, and place the second death before Resurrection Day, or rather

6 Special attention should be drawn to the fact that classical and modern Shīʿī literature often quotes the following words, ascribed to the first Imam, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib: "Those who die among us [the Imams, or the *shuhadāʾ*] are not in fact dead …" (*yamūtu man māta minnā wa-laysa bi-mayyit*). See al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, 1:154.

as a cessation of heavenly bliss (see Smith and Haddad, 31, 56). In any case, the Qurʾānic promise of no death after the first death ensures the *shuhadāʾ* everlasting happiness and delight, frequently enhanced with the remuneration of beautiful women in magnificent palaces.

The theme of luxurious palaces as rewards in paradise is evident among the sights revealed to the Prophet on his ascension to heaven (*miʿrāj*; see Schrieke et al.; Sells). When the Prophet reaches the fourth heaven, an apple falls into his lap. Out of the apple rises a woman with large black eyes and eyelashes like the feathers of an eagle. The Prophet asks her to whom she belongs, and she answers: "To the one who was killed as a *shahīd*, to ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān" (the third caliph, r. 23–35/644–56, who was killed while fasting and reading the Qurʾān) (al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, 5:297). More graphic is the following dream that takes us through the splendid lands of paradise. It tells about a warrior who came to Anas b. Mālik (d. ca. 91–3/709–11), the servant of the Prophet Muḥammad, and told him about another warrior who had taken an oath not to marry, but rather die as a *shahīd* and have God wed him to one of the virgins of paradise (for his biography, see Robson, Anas b. Mālik). However, after a few battles, he decides that, if he stays alive after one more battle, he will marry a woman of this world. While in the battlefield, so the story goes, the warrior falls asleep. In his dream he hears a voice saying: "Are you the one who declared 'If I come back alive I will get married'? You have to know that God has already granted you marriage to a beautiful woman" (the term used here is *ʿaynāʾ*, which means a woman with big beautiful eyes. The Qurʾān (44:54) refers to the beautiful women of paradise as *ḥūr ʿīn*; see Jarrar; Wensinck and Pellat). Still in his dream, the warrior finds himself in a green field, where he notices ten women, whose beauty surpasses anything he has ever seen before. He asks them whether the promised *ʿaynāʾ* is among them, and finds out that these ten are her servants. He goes on and this time he meets a group of twenty girls, whose beauty is beyond any imagination, and again finds out that they are the servants of the *ʿaynāʾ*. So, he follows the road and meets a group of forty women, even more beautiful. These, he finds out, also serve as maids of the *ʿaynāʾ*. When he keeps going he sees a hollowed pearl. Inside the pearl he sees a bed, and on the bed he sees a woman sitting with her hips spilling over the bedsides. The warrior then asks: "Are you the *ʿaynāʾ*?" "Yes," she says, "I am the one, welcome." The warrior tries to reach the *ʿaynāʾ* but she stops him and says: "Right now you are still alive, we will meet tonight." This is the end of the dream, and the narrator explains that the dreamer woke up and joined the warriors, "and I am not sure", he says, "which fell off first, his head or the sun" (Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Manām*, #198).

As magnificent as it may sound, this is not necessarily the most glorious way to reward a righteous believer. Especially remarkable devotees are rewarded in unique ways. After their death they are allowed to look at the face of God.[7] This exquisite and exceptional remuneration is depicted in dreams that grade the righteous according to the celestial grace bestowed upon them. Through testimonies of pious figures that appear in dreams after their death, an evaluation of the dwellers of paradise is made, and various degrees of closeness to the Lord are revealed. Bishr al-Ḥāfī (d. 226/840), one of the early ascetics of Bagdad (see his biography in Meier), appears after his death and describes the grace that God has bestowed upon his contemporaries Abū Naṣr al-Tammār and ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Warrāq. He tells how God Himself feeds these two in heaven. As for Bishr al-Ḥāfī himself, God knows of his abstention from food and therefore rewards him differently; He allows him to behold His face (al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, 4:310; Ibn Abī Yaʿlā, 1:212; al-Zabīdī, 9:575). In another case, ʿAlī b. al-Muwaffaq appears in a dream and describes some wonderful visions of paradise, among which he mentions that he saw the celebrated mystic of Bagdad Maʿrūf al-Karkhī (d. 200/815; see his biography in Nicholson and Austin) looking at the face of God. Maʿrūf reached this high position, he explains, due to the fact that during his lifetime he did not worship God out of fear of hell or out of a desire for paradise, but rather due to his pure love for God (Ibn Abī Yaʿlā, 1:231).

The edifying nature of the accounts described above, in addition to others that follow the same lines, conveys the purpose of these fantastic stories. They all are designed to lead the believers safely onto the righteous path and keep them away from deviance. At the same time these narrations illuminate the essence of the divine providence. Delivered on a personal level and illustrated with descriptions of concrete meetings with the dead, these anecdotes create a special corpus of popular edifying eschatology. Despite their personal nature, these texts offer general guidance addressed to the whole community, and can, therefore, be considered part of the broader literature of Islamic ethics. Through hundreds of inspiring accounts this genre renders activities that take place in the afterlife, delights bestowed on the righteous and agonies inflicted upon the wicked (to be discussed below), always in full correlation with the conduct and the level of piety kept by individuals in the present world. We may

7 In Q 10:26 we find: "For those who have done good is the best [commentaries suggest this refers to 'paradise'] and even more [commentaries suggest this referes to 'having the honor of contemplating the countenance of God']." Q 75:22–3 asserts: "Faces that Day will be radiant, looking at their Lord." Looking at the face of God has always raised serious, often insoluble, theological questions. See the discussion in Abrahamov, 18. See also Ibn Bāz's *fatwā* available at https://binbaz.org.sa/old/29675.

assume that narrations of this kind were adduced to encourage the believers to improve their ways and elevate their level of piety during their earthly life. This goal is achieved by providing the dead with the ability to guide the living on how to prepare for the next world, and allow the latter, often as a last resource, to benefit from the experience of those who are no longer alive.

It may seem sometimes that the Islamic ethical-eschatological discourse prefers to examine the fortune of pious believers who have passed away and to emphasize their blessed impact on the deeds of the living. However, attention should be also drawn to chastisements prepared for the wicked, either those who were trapped in minor misdeeds from which they were likely to be relieved with the help of the living, or those who sinned severely and consequently were exposed to permanent afflictions. Detailed graphics of graveyards often expose the reader to the agonies and the harsh sepulchral conditions of the sinners. At the same time, these awe-inspiring descriptions suggest that earthly gestures may mitigate the torments of the afterworld and have a significant impact on the well-being of the dead.

One of the major differences between the living and the dead is the latter's failure to transform their knowledge into actions. As already mentioned, upon dying, the dead gain special insights that enable them to understand the value and purpose of the duties imposed on the believers. Unfortunately, the dead cannot act according to their new awareness, since the ability to act is lost with death. Not being able to fulfil duties that remained unaccomplished in the present world, the dead appear in their relatives' dreams and plea for help. Their appearance in most cases indicates misery: black faces,[8] bruises, and deep sadness. Indeed, the dead usually mention their encounter with a compassionate God, but at the same time they tell how they were punished for their blunders. Desperately they appear before the living and beg for earthly help that might alleviate their agonies. A typical case in point relates to debts left unpaid after the death of the debtor.

Ṣaʿb b. Juthāma and ʿAwf b. Mālik, both from the first/seventh century, were close friends. They made an agreement that the one who dies first will appear in his living friend's dream. Ṣaʿb is the first to die and, as promised, appears in ʿAwf's dream. Both friends hold a conversation. ʿAwf asks about Ṣaʿb's experience of death, and while listening to the description of the hardship that Ṣaʿb experienced, he notices a black sign on his (Ṣaʿb's) neck. This black sign, probably a burn from the fire of hell (see Lange, On That Day, 431 n. 12), was caused

8 Q 39:60 says: "And on the Day of Resurrection you will see those who lied about God [with] their faces blackened. Is there not in hell a residence for the arrogant?" See the discussion in Lange, On That Day.

by a debt of ten *dīnār*s. Ṣaʿb confides to ʿAwf about not having had a chance to pay his debt, and directs him to the location where the money may be found. In the morning, ʿAwf goes to Ṣaʿb's house, finds the money, and pays off the debt (Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Manām*, #25).

The obligation to pay debts of deceased relatives is mentioned in a series of Prophetic statements asserting that a person in debt will not enter paradise (Zaghlūl, 3:342), and that the soul of the believer is suspended as long as his debt is not paid (Zaghlūl, 10:85). It is most reasonable to assume that the accounts of the dreadful effects of unpaid debts were formed to make the admonition of the *ḥadīth* more persuasive. Striking portrayals of corporal tortures, as reflected by the black spot on Ṣaʿb's neck, could naturally motivate people to pay the debts left behind by their deceased relatives, believing that by so doing they will help to lessen the miseries inflicted upon their beloved.

Asking for the living's assistance in the accomplishment of duties is presented as one of the most significant parts of the dead's routine. It is nevertheless only one aspect of the comfort and support that the dead expect to receive from the living. While staying in their graves, the dead are in constant need for their living relatives' visits and prayers.

ʿUthmān b. Sawda used to visit his mother's grave every Friday, pray for her, and ask God's forgiveness for her and for her neighbors in the adjacent graves. One day he saw his mother in a dream. She described her pleasant condition and mentioned the elevated status she had gained, but nevertheless she brought up her total dependence on the visits made to her grave. In her words, her son's visits brought her a kind of joy that extended to reach the surrounding graves (Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Qubūr*, #33; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, 6). This motif underlies statements that perceive the living's prayers for the dead as gifts (al-Suyūṭī, *Sharḥ al-ṣudūr*, 128; al-Zabīdī, 10:367,372). The dead become accustomed to these gifts, and when they note their absence, they do not hesitate to rise from their graves and demand their return (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, 6–7; al-Suyūṭī, *Sharḥ al-ṣudūr*, 94). Prayers for the dead encompass the graves with light (al-Suyūṭī, *Sharḥ al-ṣudūr*, 128) and mitigate the sepulchral tortures (al-Zabīdī, 10:367). Their ability to lift the spirit of the dead and reduce their loneliness makes the prayers a basic sustenance for the dead, similar to food and water for the living (al-Suyūṭī, *Sharḥ al-ṣudūr*, 127; al-Zabīdī, 10:367).

The consolatory power of prayers for the dead is beautifully illustrated in the following narration. In a dream, the early traditionist Abū Qilāba ʿAbdallāh b. Zayd al-Jurmī (d. 107/725) sees a cemetery with dead figures sitting on the edge of their open graves, each, except one, with a beam of light. He then notices that the deceased sitting in the dark is no other than one of his former neighbors. He asks him why he is sitting in the dark, and the deceased tells him that,

unlike the other dead, he has a sinful son who does not pray for him nor gives alms on his behalf. Thus, while the prayers of the righteous relatives of the other dead illuminate their graves, his grave remains dark. Overwhelmed, Abū Qilāba shares his dream with the deceased's son who, upon hearing the details, heeds the message. He repents and promises never to return to his old habits. Keeping his promise, the son begins to pray for his father and to give alms. After a while, Abū Qilāba has another dream where he sees the same grave, this time shining with light more radiant than the lights of the other graves. In the dream, the deceased addresses the dreamer (Abū Qilāba) and blesses him for sharing the previous dream with his son. He also declares that he no longer feels embarrassed in the company of his graveyard neighbors (al-Qāḍī, 21–2; cf. Macdonald, Twilight, 64).[9]

The significant role of the living in the life of the dead serves well the edifying purpose of these accounts. A certain Sulaymān al-Jaʿdī appears in his son's dream and explains that the latter's deeds are known to him: while his good deeds make him happy, the evil ones humiliate and offend him before his dead neighbors (Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Manām*, #17). Every Friday, as stated, the dead meet together to discuss the deeds of the living (Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Manām*, #59). Being presented to the dead, some of the living's deeds may delight the dead, whereas others cause their dismay (Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Manām*, #4).[10] Such statements leave the living with an unequivocal message: in order to assure the dead's serenity in their abode, it is imperative to be cautious about each and every action they perform while in this world.

Endeavors to keep the dead satisfied, together with the notion that interaction between the two worlds is not only possible but is actually repeated on a

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9 A similar motif is noticed in the following Jewish tradition: Rabbi Akiba, while walking along his way, sees a man blackened with coal, carrying a big load of wood on his shoulder and galloping like a horse. The man mentions that he sinned heavily and tells Rabbi Akiba that every day since passing away he has to cut a big load of wood, which is used to burn his body three times a day. Rabbi Akiba wants to help the man and asks whether he has sired a son. Rabbi Akiba then finds out that at the time of this man's death, his wife was pregnant. Hence, he goes to the place where the deceased spent his life and finds an uncircumcised boy, living a sinful life. He takes the boy with him and begins to teach him the Jewish prayers, and orders him to read the Bible on the Sabbath. Consequently, the father is moved from hell to paradise. On the same night, the formerly tortured man appears in Rabbi Akiba's dream to thank him for saving him from the fires of hell. See Bialik and Ravnitzky, 4:447–8 (in Hebrew). For Jewish influence on Islamic oneiromancy, see Kister, 99–101.

10 This motif is discussed by Ibn Kathīr in his commentary on Q 30:52. See Ibn Kathīr, 3:437–9. For similar statements, see Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Mawt*, ##75, 76, 77.

regular basis, underline a series of narrations that tell about people who did not hesitate to send gifts to the dead.

When Bishr b. al-Barāʾ b. Maʿrūr died (around the year 7/628), his mother suffered deeply.[11] Upon addressing the Prophet about her grief, she understood that the dead know one another. From then on, she meticulously visited every single dying member of her tribe and asked him or her to deliver regards to her son (Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Manām*, #14).

The notion of spiritual synergy between the dead and the living sometimes receives palpable proportions. With the help of individuals who are about to die, so we are told, material items can be transported from the present world to the next one. In one story, after a woman passes away, her husband has a dream. He sees a group of women, but does not see his own wife among them. He then discovers that his wife is embarrassed to be seen with the shrouds in which she was buried. Upon realizing the disgrace, the husband sends her two new robes with a man who is on his death bed. On the same night he sees his wife wrapped in the new garments (Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Manām*, #164).

Similar in nature is a much later tale presented by the Persian mystical poet of the seventh/thirteenth century Farīd al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-ʿAṭṭār (for his biography, see Ritter, ʿAṭṭār), about a woman who decides to increase her donation following a dream: "A woman brings a casket with gold and jewelry. The casket is put aside to see whether the donor may perhaps regret her donation. But three days later the woman brings her arm-bracelets as well, which are a memento from her mother" (Ritter, *Ocean*, 191). Her decision, so we are told, came as the result of a dream she had. She saw herself in paradise surrounded by everything she had given away, and learnt from the maidens of paradise that she could find only the items she had donated. She could not find the bracelets because she did not donate them. To rectify the situation in which she found herself in the dream, she decided to add the bracelets to her donation (Ritter, *Ocean*, 191).

A similar message, albeit with a different twist, can be found in the following story by ʿAṭṭār:

> A fire-worshipper named Shamʿūn (Simeon), who is a neighbor of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, is fatally ill. Ḥasan considers it his neighborly duty to visit the sick man, and uses the opportunity to point out to the unbeliever the foolishness of his false belief. To prove that fire can neither help nor do harm, he places his hand in a fire, and behold, his hand suffers no damage! Because of this the fire-worshipper is convinced and declares he is ready to accept

11 For Bishr's biography, see ʿArafat.

> the true faith if Ḥasan gives him a witnessed document attesting that God will forgive him and accept him into Paradise. Ḥasan acquiesces to his request and when the fire-worshipper dies, the document is placed in his hand in the grave. Ḥasan later has doubts as to whether he was really authorized to issue such a document. Then the former fire-worshipper appears to him in a dream walking about in Paradise dressed in an honorary robe and wearing a crown on his head. He says to Ḥasan that God has given him a home in Paradise and he has no further need of that written document. He gives it back to Ḥasan, and when Ḥasan wakes up in the morning he finds the document in his hand.
>
> RITTER, *Ocean*, 271

The impact of earthly gestures on the well-being of the dead, discussed so seriously and delivered so convincingly, raises major doctrinal questions. If pious actions of the living are powerful enough to alleviate the tortures of hell, where does it leave the belief that divine chastisements are always meted out in direct proportion to the deeds of each individual? If humans can indeed intercede on behalf of the dead, what is the scope of their influence? Is it possible for a human being like Ḥasan al-Baṣrī to write a document to enable an unbeliever, who reluctantly accepted Islam on his deathbed, to be admitted to paradise? And, if so, how should one understand the awe-inspiring visions abundantly and vividly depicted in the *ʿadhāb al-qabr* ("torments of the grave") literature (see Raven, Reward; Wensinck and Tritton)? Are the tribulations described in this genre inevitable and conclusive, or can they be softened?

Like the other popular eschatological accounts, the descriptions of the "torments of the grave" are also edifying, and accordingly, pay much attention to the effect of the living's merits on their deceased relatives. At the same time, however, the "torments of the grave" are presented as an integral and unavoidable part of the divine order and the Islamic creed. A canonical *ḥadīth* defines the "torments of the grave" as the [indisputable] truth (*ʿadhāb al-qabr ḥaqq*) (Zaghlūl, 5:438). Those who refute their validity are regarded as innovators,[12] who will be deprived of the light of the Qurʾān and will never enjoy the divine light (al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ*, 4:174).

The Qurʾān (3:131) leaves no doubt as to the existence of hell: "Hell has been prepared for the unbelievers," and a fair part of the narrations that treat Muḥammad's ascension (*miʿrāj*) describe the punishments and agonies of

12 Innovators are those who introduce into Islam ideas and practices that did not exist during the life of the Prophet, and in so doing go against his Sunna and deviate from the right path. For further information about the term "innovation," see Robson, Bidʿa.

Muslim sinners in hell so graphically that no doubt is left as to their veracity (see Colby; Zadeh Mohammad et al.). Immediately after their burial the deceased go through an interrogation by two angels, Munkar and Nakīr (see Webb; Wensinck, Munkar wa-Nakīr). "Their voices are like roaring thunder and their glance is like a flash of lighting; they walk on their hair and they dig with their fangs; the two of them have a rod of iron" (Burge, 191 #307; cf. Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Qubūr*, ##103, 104). These unpleasant figures put the deceased to the test by asking them about their God and His messenger. If the deceased fail to declare that Allah is their God and that Muḥammad is His messenger, a harsh punishment is inflicted upon them.

Given that the encounter with Munkar and Nakīr is inevitable, getting prepared for it is highly advisable. This may explain why, paying visits to those who are dying, visitors utter the *shahāda* (the two-part declaration that there is no god but Allah and that Muḥammad is the messenger of Allah) in their ears over and over again. An exhortation to the dead of this kind follows the words of the Prophet, "Instruct your dead [about the formula] *lā ilāha illā Allāh* (*laqqinū mawtākum lā ilāha illā Allāh*)," and is known as *talqīn* (cf. Zaghlūl, 6:636). To confirm the feasibility of the interrogating angels, descriptions of personal experiences are related: a person relates that when his brother was placed into the grave, he put his ear to the ground and heard a voice asking, "Who is your God and who is your prophet?" He could then recognize the voice of his brother answering, "Allah is my God, Muḥammad is my prophet" (Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Qubūr*, ##105, 106).

Other events recorded among the "torments of the grave" tell about certain necessities to re-open a grave. On such occasions, the conditions of the inner parts of the grave may be indicative of the moral level of its dweller. In one story, upon opening the grave of his sister, a man notices fire blazing inside the grave. To try to understand the reason for such torture he talks to his mother and realizes that, while alive, his sister did not come to prayer on time, that she prayed with no ablution, while also being prone to gossip (Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Qubūr*, #65).

Grave diggers may find inside the graves people whose faces have turned away from the *qibla* (Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Qubūr*, ##62, 63), heads filled with iron, bodies attached to the ground with nails (Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Qubūr*, ##59, 72, 73), and, most often, bodies wrapped with snakes. Snakes are perceived as a perfect torture device. A Prophetic *ḥadīth* states that he who leaves some property in the present world will be confronted by a hairless snake with two red spots above its eyes. The snake will either follow him or coil itself around him to prevent his escape (cf. Wensinck and Mensing, *Concordance*, 2:326; and see the discussion in Kinberg, Compromise). Several versions of this *ḥadīth* are addressed

to those who hoarded wealth in general and did not perform the duty of *zakāt* (alms giving) in particular (Ibn Kathīr, 1:432–3, on Q 3:180; see the dicussion in Kinberg, Interaction). Another *ḥadīth* states that those who steal or commit adultery will be bitten in their graves by two snakes (Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Qubūr*, #66), and yet another text mentions seventy or ninety-nine snakes that keep stinging the unbeliever in his grave (see Kinberg, Interaction, 294 n. 37).

Specific narrations portray snakes as a perfect means of sepulchral torture meted out for various sins. According to one such narration, a person dies on his way to Mecca. His pilgrim companions try to bury him, but every time they dig a grave for him, a big snake fills it up. Having no other choice, they bury him with the snake. Later on, they discover that during his lifetime the deceased was a foodseller who usually removed a portion for his own family and replaced the missing part with husks (Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Qubūr*, #69). Another case in point tells of a corpse-washer who is summoned to wash a person who just died. When the washer takes off the cloth that covers the deceased's face, he sees a snake coiling itself around his neck. The washer panicks and leaves the place without washing the corpse. He then finds out that the deceased used to insult the Companions of the Prophet (Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Qubūr*, #26).[13]

While snakes serve as a means of punishment, other animals are also mentioned in similar contexts. The accounts about the "torments of the grave" tell about people that were transformed into animals after their death. A man who wanders in a graveyard sees the head of a donkey attached to a human body coming out of a grave. He hears him braying three times and then sees him getting back into the grave. Astounded with the sight, the man asks about the dweller of that grave and finds out that he used to drink wine, and whenever his mother told him to fear God his answer was: "You are merely braying as a donkey." After his death, he became a donkey (Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Qubūr*, #61).

The tragic massacre of Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī and his family and retinue in Karbalāʾ (61/680) (see Honigmann) is widely surveyed in dreams. One of them is presented here to further illustrate the process of transformation into animals that might occur after death. In a dream, a thirsty black dog is seen panting with its tongue hanging out. The dreamer wants to give the dog some water, hoping to gain paradise for himself by way of this gesture.[14] At that point he

13 According to a Prophetic *ḥadīth*, insulting the Companions of the Prophet (the *ṣaḥāba*) is forbidden. The curse of God, the angels, and human beings will be upon those who insult them. See Zaghlūl, 8:298. Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 825/1449) and Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), among others, dedicated special treatises to the topic. For the development of this theological doctrine, see Osman.

14 Gaining heaven for quenching a dog's thirst is mentioned by Ritter among several stories related by ʿAṭṭār that demonstrate "rewards in the hereafter for completely trivial

hears a voice that forbids him from taking care of the dog and explains that it is no other than a transformation of Ḥusayn's killer, who was ordained to be tortured by thirst until the resurrection (Ibn Manẓūr, 7:157).

After death, says ʿAṭṭār, people will appear in a variety of transformed shapes, depending on their character and behavior. Thus, a person who was dominated by desire and passion will be seen in the form of a pig, and one dominated by rage will appear in the form of a dog or a wolf (Ritter, *Ocean*, 192). Violent and arrogant people will be transformed into ants and lower-level government officials into dogs (Ritter, *Ocean*, 193). ʿAṭṭār also tells of a certain man who treasured a pot of gold. After his death he appears in his son's dream in the shape of a mouse and attributes his appalling condition to his love for gold. He addresses his son in the following words: "Whoever's heart was attached to gold has this shape. Let yourself be warned by my example and throw the gold away, my son" (Ritter, *Ocean*, 99). The father's words are permeated by a deep regret. His caring paternal advice indicates that he has finally become aware of his plight and understood that he missed the chance to secure comfort in the hereafter. The only thing he can do at this stage is to warn his own son not to follow in his footsteps.

The despair exhibited by these words conveys a popular theme of Islamic eschatology. Equipped with new insights gained upon arriving in the world of the dead, that is, the ability to appreciate the value of the duties imposed on the believer and consequently to comprehend the workings of divine justice, the deceased return to the present abode to guide the living on how to handle their forthcoming encounters with the agonies of the afterlife. Whether the message is encouraging and cheerful or disturbing and distressing, it always imparts concrete practical guidelines to the believer.

While satisfying natural human curiosity concerning the afterworld, the information transmitted from the world of the dead denies any possible thought about the finality of death and eliminates the notion of the extinction of the human self in the hereafter. Each piece of evidence from the afterlife that reaches the present world assures the living of a posthumous survival of human beings and of their full-fledged life after death. The quality of the afterlife is determined by the actions the deceased performed in this world. "The gate of acts of obedience is closed for us," says a certain shaykh after his death,

works" (Ritter, *Ocean*, 285). The Prophet is remembered by ʿAṭṭār to have said that "a great female sinner came across a dog in the desert that was dying of thirst by a well with its tongue hanging out. The woman took pity on the dog, lowered her shoe into the well and brought up some water for the dog ... On my Ascension I saw her in Paradise." See Ritter, *Ocean*, 286.

"had I still been in the earthly world, I would not have stopped performing acts of obedience" (Ritter, *Ocean*, 190). This notion makes one's earthly conduct extremely important. "God created the present world (*al-dunyā*) as a provision (*zād*) for the next world (*al-ākhira*)", says al-Ghazālī (al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā*ʾ, 1:17), or, according to a more popular version of this statement: "The present world is the sowing field for the next world" (Ritter, *Ocean*, 190).

Such statements seek to strike a delicate balance between the present world and the world to come. While building an argument about the futility of the former and the high value of the latter, the present world is apparently stripped of any independent validity and is defined as a simple passage that leads to the more significant abode, the afterworld. Islamic eschatology follows this line, but adds an important ethical aspect: Life in the present world would have been superfluous had it not been for its decisive influence on the afterworld. The purpose of life on earth is to enable the believer to accumulate good deeds that, in the hereafter, will intercede on behalf of their performers.

The exact correlation between the two worlds nevertheless remains abstract and obscure. However, the contribution of the popular layer of Islamic edifying eschatological literature may help to clarify the picture. The graphic descriptions of this genre help to bridge the gap created by the notion of the transiency and futility of the present world, on the one hand, and the mundane activities and duties performed by its dwellers, on the other. These accounts turn the theoretical notion of interaction between the two worlds into a tangible and relatable reality. Demonstrating deep emotions of the dead, sometimes with graphic and embarrassing detail, these fantastic narrations, addressed to the common people, successfully assure them of the inevitability of life in the grave.

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CHAPTER 6

Paradise in Sufi Thought

Christian Lange

There is a remarkable historical diversity of Sufi attitudes toward paradise. Sufi authors who wrote about the topic oscillated between expressing a longing for paradise and dismissing it as irrelevant. Some wrote about the possibility of experiencing a paradise that is present in the world or in the human soul, others conceived of it as a transcendent space, that is, as part of the otherworld (*al-ākhira*); still others located it in an interstitial realm, or *barzakh*. This chapter discusses the historical development and the various permutations of these basic types of Sufi attitudes towards paradise.

1 Cultivating the Hope for Paradise in Early Sufism

The point of departure for the renunciants (*zuhhād*) and mystics of the early centuries of Islam was the Qurʾānic idea that the hereafter is unspeakably better than this life, and that therefore pious believers should focus all their attention on the otherworld, *al-ākhira*. "This lower life (*al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*)," the Qurʾān proclaims, "is but sport and play, but the distant abode (*al-dār al-ākhira*): that is truly life" (29:64). As Bāyazīd Basṭāmī (d. 234/848 or 261/875) put it, after thinking a lot he had come to the realization that the present world (*al-dunyā*) is a cadaver, over which it is appropriate to say four times *Allāhu akbar*, as one does when someone is buried (Massignon, *Essai*, 276).

Among the *zuhhād* this somber mood of *contemptus mundi* often went hand in hand with the fear of hell (see Chapter 7 in this volume). However, there were also those, like the Syrian al-Dārānī (d. 215/830), who reasoned that too much fear moves people toward despairing of God. This, he held to be a grave sin (al-Hujwīrī, 112–13; al-Qushayrī, 128 [tr. 145]). Indeed, "to despair of God" (*al-iyās min Allāh*) is frequently included in lists of grave sins in the theological literature (e.g. al-Dhahabī, 122 [#69]). And what is more, the Prophet Muḥammad had actively encouraged the joyful expectation of paradise. "Does nobody long for paradise?" he was reported to have wondered, then proceeding to praise the beauty of the heavenly garden (Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, 184). The Khurasanian devotee Shaqīq al-Balkhī (d. 195/810), one of the first theorists

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of spiritual wayfaring through stages, describes three successive stations (*manāzil*, sing. *manzil*) on the path toward God: renunciation; the fear of hell; and the longing for paradise (al-Balkhī, 17–21). Thus, for Shaqīq, the longing for paradise represents an advanced level of spiritual practice and insight. Such notions made room in the thought of the early renunciants and mystics for cultivating the desire (*shawq*) for paradise.

For example, the Basran ʿAbd al-Wāḥid b. Zayd (d. ca. 150/767), a student of the famous renunciant al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, dreamed of the virgins of paradise, the houris, and claimed that they had cured him from a disease (Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilya*, 6:161; cf. 6:165). He is also reported to have approved of dream visions of houris among his followers—that is, as long as these visions motivated them to fight in the *jihād* against the Byzantines (al-Yāfiʿī, 282–3). There is a clear nexus of paradise and *jihād* in the piety of the second/eighth- and third/ninth-century renunciants. Ibn al-Mubārak (d. 181/797), a contemporary of Shaqīq, taught that those about to be killed "in God's way," that is, on the battlefield, "smell the scent of the Garden, even though they are not yet in it" (Ibn al-Mubārak, 90 [#59]).

2 Enjoying the Pleasures of Paradise on Earth

However, we should not hold Shaqīq responsible for simply encouraging death on the battlefield in the hope of immediate reward in paradise. In fact, he explicitly recommended that higher goals than paradise should be aspired to (al-Balkhī, 17–21; cf. Nwyia, 215). The dangers of an excessive preoccupation with paradise were dawning on pious men and women around the turn of the second/eighth to the third/ninth centuries. One sees this concern already in the case of the aforementioned ʿAbd al-Wāḥid. When some of his students put it to him that during nightly séances in the desert they had encountered the heavenly maidens, ʿAbd al-Wāḥid acidly responded that the houris his students had embraced had hooves as their feet (al-Sarrāj, 429 [tr. 593–4]). In the third/ninth century, we hear of other religious enthusiasts who claimed to have enjoyed the physical pleasure of paradise already on earth. One of the most prominent examples is Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896). In his Qurʾānic commentary, Sahl reports the experience of tasting the wine of paradise while reciting Q 76:21 ("The Lord will give them a pure drink"). Elsewhere, he relates the story of how a certain "friend of God"—by whom he appears to mean himself—eats a pomegranate from heaven (Tustarī, 15–16 [on Q 2:25], 260 [on Q 76:21]; see Coppens, 90–1). Stories about the Prophet Muḥammad were apt to lend

support to such ideas. According to various *ḥadīth*s, the Prophet saw paradise on earth on multiple occasions, ate the heavenly grapes, and encountered the houris (Wensinck et al., 1:376b).

A third/ninth-century heresiographer, Khushaysh b. Aṣram (d. 253/867), recorded the existence of certain "spirituals" (*rūḥiyyūn*), possibly in eastern Iran or in Basra, who taught that if they focused their minds on paradise, they were able to see God in this world and sleep with the houris (al-Malaṭī, 73). As has been suggested, when these "spirituals" practiced such acts of devotion, this "[p]resumably … required real women to play the part of their heavenly counterparts" (Crone, 266). It is perhaps to these enthusiasts that al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/935–6) referred when noting that "a group among the Sufis thought it possible that … the fruits of the Garden come to them in this world so that they can eat them, and that they could have sexual intercourse with the houris in this world" (al-Ashʿarī, 438).

Such outré behavior may have precipitated the exclusion of reports about Sufis experiencing paradise on earth from the emerging body of Sufi literature: The seminal Sufi Qurʾānic commentator al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), although quoting Sahl al-Tustarī in other contexts, passes in silence over Sahl's stories about the Sufis who enjoyed paradisiacal drink and food on earth (Coppens, 92). Authors elevating hope for salvation over fear of damnation seem to have come under increased criticism. Yaḥyā b. Muʿādh (d. 258/872) is known to have celebrated hope and dismissed the importance of fear; he even developed his own particular "science of hope" (*ʿilm al-rajāʾ*). This, however, earned him the rebuke of his contemporaries as well as of later authors (Meier, 167–77). In consequence, in later times, unambiguous statements in Sufi literature stressing hope rather than fear "do not seem to be easily available" (Rosenthal, 144). The position most Sufi thinkers settled on consisted in saying that, as al-Makkī (d. 386/996) put it, "hope and fear are two qualities supporting faith, like the two wings that carry the bird" (al-Makkī, 1:483). In a similar vein, al-Maybudī (fl. around 500/1106) stated that fear is fire, hope is oil, belief is a wick, and together they light the lamp of the faithful heart (al-Maybudī, 9:346–7; cf. Coppens, 101).

Nonetheless, also in later sources one occasionally encounters statements in which the hope for paradise is something entirely positive, with the potential to help Sufis overcome the fear of hell, or even taste some of the pleasures of paradise before death. Toward the end of his life, Abū Saʿīd b. Abī l-Khayr (d. 440/1049) decided he would only read verses of the Qurʾān that spoke of God's mercy and the rewards meted out in paradise, but not the so-called verses of threat (*āyāt al-waʿīd*, see Chapter 6 in this volume). Criticized by a

fellow dervish for his selective reading, he replied in a verse that "today I shall drink wine, for it is the time of joy!" (Meier, 198).

The unbridled enthusiasm, perhaps also the Tantric excesses, of certain third/ninth-century figures survived in antinomian strands of Sufism of the later centuries. The proclivity of antinomian Sufis of the post-Mongol period to live close to, or in, graveyards is well known, and may indicate a lifestyle based on the conviction that the otherworld is physically attainable in this life already, at least in certain liminal spaces and practices. Graves, as a *ḥadīth* puts it, are "the first way-station (*manzil*) of the otherworld" (al-Qurṭubī, 1:110), or even "a garden of paradise" (al-Suyūṭī, 168). However, texts detailing Sufi excesses of realized eschatology should be read with caution, as they were usually written by authors who were critical of Sufi transgressiveness. An example of this is al-Shirbīnī, who in the eleventh/seventeenth century reports that a group of Egyptian Sufis known as Khawāmīs were known for music sessions in which "the fakirs enter a trance and are considered dead and to have entered paradise and hence [are] offered either handsome youths or beautiful women, as the Quran promises paradisiacal youth and beautiful houris to male believers in the Hereafter" (El-Rouayheb, 376).

3 Decentering Paradise

Next to the infatuation with paradise and its active conquest on earth, Sufis of the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries developed an alternative way of thinking about paradise. This alternative vision decentered paradise, which now came to be thought of not as something to be desired, but as a meaningless distraction, or worse, as a loathsome obstacle on the seeker's path to God.

As we noted above, we find the first stirrings of this sentiment in the sayings of pious men and women operating around the turn of the second/eighth to the third/ninth centuries, such as Rābiʿa of Basra (d. 185/801). On the one hand, Rābiʿa is reported to have had visions of paradise, not unlike her fellow Basran ʿAbd al-Wāḥid b. Zayd (al-Sarrāj, 121). On the other hand, there are many stories crediting her with a passionate desire to pass *beyond* paradise. One of her famous maxims is *al-jār thumma al-dār*, "the neighbor first, then the house!" (al-Ghazālī, 4:45, 453). For Rābiʿa, the "house" (that is, the afterworld) is a barrier set up in front of its owner, the "neighbor," that is, God. In one of her prayers she says, "O Lord, if I worship You in the hope of paradise, forbid it to me. However, if I worship You for Your own sake, do not deprive me of Your eternal beauty!" (ʿAṭṭār, tr. Sells, 169). "I would be ashamed before God,"

a sage (*ḥakīm*) is quoted in a third/ninth-century collection of pious sayings, "if I served Him in the hope of paradise, for then I'd be like a worker who only works for a wage and does not work when he does not receive it" (al-Khuttalī, 91–2 [#88]).

In the course of the third/ninth century, these misgivings in regard to paradise turned into something more visceral: an outspoken disregard for the eternal garden. This disregard was at times expressed in ecstatic utterances (*shaṭḥ*, pl. *shaṭaḥāt*). For example, Basṭāmī, more radical in this respect than Rābiʿa, calls paradise the "supreme veil," and he loudly declares that "those who are in paradise are not in God—let them be fooled, these simpletons!" (al-Badawī, 22). According to Basṭāmī, when the truly pious see paradise "and its adornment," they will cry out in horror, like the sinners in hell cry out from the pain they suffer (Ritter, Aussprüche, 237). Yaḥyā b. Muʿādh al-Rāzī (d. 258/871) quipped that "paradise is the prison of the gnostics (*sijn al-ʿārifīn*), just like the world is the prison of the believers" (Massignon, *Recueil*, 17). Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d. 334/946) is reported to have stated that "in my eyes paradise is not worth the wing of a fly," praying that if only God bestowed His love on him, He might as well "give paradise to whomever else You please" (Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilya*, 8:35). According to a famous story, al-Shiblī was once met in the streets of Baghdad with two torches in his hand. When asked what he intended to do with them, he responded that he had set out to burn paradise and hell (ʿAṭṭār, 2:163). A later, amended version of this story features Rābiʿa as the heroine, carrying a bucket of water to extinguish hell and a torch to put fire to paradise (see Massignon, *Recueil*, 8). ʿAṭṭār (d. 627/1230) wrote that some pious men, when resurrected, have to be dragged into paradise with chains (Ritter, *Ocean*, 540).

Next to firebrands like Basṭāmī and al-Shiblī, there were also those who saw paradise first and foremost as an intellectual distraction, as something to be dismissed calmly rather than to be rejected with vehement disdain. This was the position adopted by those Sufis who later came to be considered the founding fathers of "sober" Sufism, including figures such as al-Junayd (d. 298/910) and Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996). It is worth noting that, despite that fact that paradise was viewed as a hindrance rather than an opportunity, its physical existence and sensuality was never doubted by these thinkers. Al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857) in his *Kitāb al-tawahhum* (*The Book of Envisioning*) and al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) in the fortieth chapter of his *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* (*The Revivification of the Religious Sciences*), to name two famous examples, write at length about paradise and its physical delights, the fountains of pure water, fabulous buildings, delicious food and perfumes, as well as the maidens of paradise, the houris. However, both al-Muḥāsibī and al-Ghazālī end their discussions with the assertion that the highest, indeed the only true pleasure in paradise is the company and the vision of God. All believers who conform to the revealed law

are in paradise, but the spiritually advanced receive a special reward (*ziyāda*), as is inferred from the Qurʾānic verse that proclaims that "those who do good will have a fair reward, and [there will be] more" (10:26) (al-Rāzī, 338). The vision of God, al-Ghazālī states, "is the greatest of all delights and shall cause one to be quite oblivious of the [other] pleasures of the people of paradise … Man's other joys in paradise are no more than those of a beast let loose in a pasture" (al-Ghazālī, tr. Winter, 250–1; see Knysh, 80). The idea that the vision of God is central to paradise is dominant in early Sufi Qurʾānic commentaries, as recent scholarship has abundantly documented (Coppens, 83–134). Al-Ghazālī enshrined this view in his version of a moderate, law-abiding mystical outlook on life.

4 The Inner Paradise

Next to the tendency to dismiss or at the very least, to decenter paradise, Sufis of the third/ninth and the following centuries also embarked on forays into the inner paradise, a movement *ab intra* that coincides with a more general "inward turn" of Muslim mystics in the second half of the third/ninth century, particularly in the city of Baghdad (Karamustafa, 1–7, 20–1). For example, according to Abū l-Ḥasan al-Nūrī (d. 295/907–8) of Baghdad, from the "inner Kaʿba" of the Sufi's heart, God opens a door "to the garden of His mercy and sows there many kinds of fragrant herbs of praise, glorification, exaltation and commemoration … making waters of the ocean of guidance flow to these plants through the river of kindness" (Nwyia, 325–30). Paradise, in this vision, is accessed through the human heart. The Persian mystic al-Hujwīrī (d. 465/1073 or 469/1077) writes that man's lower soul (*nafs*), the seat of carnal appetites, corresponds to hell, while man's spirit or higher soul (*jān*) corresponds to paradise, "of which it is a type in this world" (al-Hujwīrī, tr. Nicholson, 199). Thus, the otherworldly paradise is mapped onto the human psyche and thereby located in the here and now, or rather, it exists simultaneously in both worlds. "All people will enjoy paradise in the otherworld," writes Aḥmad-i Jām (d. 536/1141), "but the paradise of the spiritually content exists both in this world and in the otherworld; their untroubled heart (*dil-i fārigh*) is their paradise" (Aḥmad-i Jām, 95).

Particularly thorough and systematic reflections along these lines are offered by Rūzbihān al-Baqlī (d. 606/1209) (Coppens, 114–20) and also by the Khurasani ʿAzīz-i Nasafī (fl. mid-seventh/thirteenth century), in the chapter on the otherworld in his treatise on *The Perfect Man* (*al-Insān al-kāmil*). Nasafī develops a three-tiered model, successively discussing an ethical, noetic, and spiritual paradise within, each comprised of eight gardens. As for the ethical

paradise, Nasafī states that "all the approved words and deeds and all the praiseworthy manners are the gates of paradise ... Every moment of ease and happiness that a man encounters results from approved words and deeds and from praisworthy manners" (Nasafī, 295). Paradise, in other words, consists in the joy resulting from living one's life to the highest moral standards, that is, from embodying a set of cardinal virtues. On the subject of the noetic paradise, Nasafī explains that the gardens of paradise correspond to the human faculties of perception and cognition, that is, the five external senses, imagination (*khayāl*), and estimation (*wahm*), when *and only when* they are coupled with reason (*ʿaql*). "When reason is manifest and becomes the master (*ḥākim*) over these seven [faculties], and when these seven [faculties] submit to the command of reason, all together become the gates of paradise" (Nasafī, 295).

This brings Nasafī to his description of the spiritual paradise, which he corelates with various stages of mystical practice and insight. Nasafī describes a gradual ascension of the Sufi through the paradises of praiseworthy character and manners (*khuluq*, *akhlāq-i nīk*), ordinary knowledge (*ʿilm*), and inspired knowledge (*maʿrifat*). This is a journey that culminates in the "paradise of light" and the "paradise of direct encounter (*liqā*)" with God. In a different reiteration of this theme, Nasafī (302) writes that

> at the entrance of each paradise there is a tree, and every tree has a name. They call each paradise by its tree. The name of the first tree is "potential" (*imkān*). The name of the second tree is "existence" (*wujūd*). The name of the third tree is "natural composition" (*mizāj*). The name of the fourth tree is "reason" (*ʿaql*). The name of the fifth tree is "character" (*khuluq*). The name of the sixth tree is "knowledge" (*ʿilm*). The name of the seventh tree is "light" (*nūr*). The name of the eighth tree is "encounter" (*liqā*).

When Sufis reach the eighth paradise, they have achieved the "true paradise" (*bihisht-i ḥaqīqī*), a state of perfect comprehension in which "nothing in the worlds of *mulk*, *malakūt*, and *jabarūt* remains veiled" from them (Nasafī, 304).

Enigmatically, Nasafī continues by saying that "some say that in addition to these eight paradises, there is another paradise, that in this paradise there is a tree, and that the name of this tree is 'power' (*qudrat*)" (Nasafī, 305). In this ninth paradise, Nasafī states, wayfarers have achieved perfect "spiritual resolve" (*himmat*). As a consequence, Nasafī (306–7) continues,

> they obtain all that they desire and everything is as they want it to be. This is because they have died a voluntary death before the natural death. They have left this world and entered the otherworld. For example, when

> this group of people want it to rain, in the moment when it occurs to them in their mind, clouds appear and it begins to rain … If they want people to fall ill, immediately they do. If they want a sick person to recover, this person recovers immediately. It is like this with all things.

Nasafī, in describing a paradise of *himmat*, shows himself to be a disciple of his master Ibn al-ʿArabī, who had taught that *himmat* (Arab. *himma*) is the power (*qudra*) of certain saints to create effects, by sheer force of the mind, in the world of sense perception (*mulk*), by virtue of having become similar (*tashabbuh*) to the Creator (Ibn al-ʿArabī, 2:385.12).

While such high-flying conceptualizations of a ninth paradise—inhabited by an elite group of saints who claim the status of "Perfect Man"—seem to be a relatively rare occurrence, moralizing and interiorizing models of paradise are also encountered in the thought of other, later Sufi authors, such as Shāh Niʿmatullāh (d. 834/1431). Shāh Niʿmatullāh distinguishes between a sensual, form-bound (*ṣūrī*) paradise and an immaterial, spiritual (*maʿnawī*) paradise. The latter is the "spirit" (*rūḥ*) of the former. Within this spiritual paradise, there are eight layers. The first seven correspond to the unveiling, or realization, of the seven divine attributes of life, knowledge, power, will, hearing, seeing, and talking. The eighth layer is the paradise of mystical apprehension of God's essence (Gramlich, 63 n. 284).

Models such as the ones proposed by Nasafī and Shāh Niʿmatullāh served to reinsert paradise into Sufi discourse, from which it had been previously purged, by sublimating it into ethics and mystical theories of the human soul. This parallels and complements two other prominent late medieval Sufi modes of conceiving paradise, the one that sees reflections of paradise in creation, and the one that locates paradise in an "imaginal" or "interstitial" world.

5 Reflections of Paradise on Earth

Next to their efforts to moralize and interiorize paradise, Sufi authors of the time of Nasafī and of later periods sought out reminders of paradise in creation. As we saw, notions of directly experiencing paradise on earth were generally rejected by those Sufi authors of the middle and late ʿAbbāsid period who aimed to align Sufism with mainstream theological positions. When paradise is mentioned in al-Qushayrī's (d. 465/1072) *Risāla*, for example, it is overwhelmingly identified as a far-removed, transcendent sphere, to be entered in the eschatological future, not as a phenomenon that can be experienced during one's lifetime, let alone by way of physical pleasures on earth. The

Mongol and post-Mongol periods, however, saw a return to a more directly sensual and less abstract mode of encountering paradise. This overlapped but did not coincide fully with the kind of ecstatic, antinomian enactment of paradise on earth mentioned above. Sufis operating in this tradition were careful not to claim the actual presence of paradise on earth. Rather, they spoke about the traces and reflections, often subtle and faint, of paradise in the sensible world.

There were forerunners to this way of thinking in the early centuries, and in this sense there is a rediscovery of the hidden earthly paradise, not a completely new departure. The Egyptian Dhū l-Nūn (d. 245/859 or 248/862), for example, was remembered for praising "the voices of the beasts or the rustle of the trees, the splashing of the waters and the song of the birds" as "witnesses" to God's power (Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilya*, 9:342). However, although he may not be the first one, Rūmī of Anatolia (d. 672/1273) is certainly the most famous Sufi author to devote sustained attention to the idea that the vestiges of paradise can be sensorily experienced in the external world. According to Rūmī, creation, albeit imperfectly, mirrors God's beauty and gentleness (as well as His awe-inspiring, severe side). Among Rūmī's favorite imagery is the paradisiacal garden. Thus, when the first green leaves appear in spring, he says, this reminds one of the *sabzpūsh*, "those dressed in green," that is, the angels and houris in paradise (Rūmī, bk. 2, vv. 2959–60 [tr. 2:375]). "Spring and the garden," he states, "are messengers from the paradise of the unseen." Thus, "the earthly garden is at least a tiny reflection of this uncreated garden" (Schimmel, 83).

The sense of an interfusion between the world and the eternal garden extends further, to the arena of human interaction: A kiss between lovers, says Rūmī, is paradisiacal bliss: "He makes the spittle of your mouth as honey, so that you say: 'This is paradise and [heaven's] adornment'" (Rūmī, bk. 4, vv. 2811–13 [tr. 4:427]). Also in this context belongs the controversial practice of gazing at young, beardless boys (*al-naẓar ilā l-murd*). This practice carried overtones of witnessing, in this world, the beauties of paradise. It was related that the Prophet Muḥammad had said that, during his Ascension, he had seen God "in his most beautiful form," variously specifying that what he saw was "a youth with abundant hair," "a beardless youth with curly hair," or "a youth with a crown," among other descriptions (Ritter, *Ocean*, 459–60). Already Yaḥyā b. Muʿādh al-Rāzī (d. 258/872) described a Sufi séance in which the vision of God in paradise as a beautiful youth was theatrically enacted with the help of an actual young boy (quoted in van Ess, 3:1694). Despite the condemnation by virtually all major Sufi systematizers of the classical period (from al-Kalābādhī to al-Sarrāj, al-Qushayrī, al-Ghazālī, and ʿUmar al-Suhrawardī), who saw in such practices nothing but the heretical affirmation of God's indwelling (*ḥulūl*) in nature, later Sufi poetry knows many allusions to beautiful youths as "witnesses"

(*shuhadāʾ*) of paradise (Ritter, *Ocean*, 481–4). Awḥad al-Dīn Ḥāmid al-Kirmānī (d. 635/1237–8), one of the main theorists and defenders of gazing at youths, argued that "there is a trace of [supernatural] meaning in [earthly] form. This world is a visible form, and we are within visible forms. One can only behold [supernatural] meaning in earthly form" (Ritter, *Ocean*, 488). In the words of ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. ca. 832/1428), "had God not created a bit of paradise and hell in this world, intellects would not be able to reach knowledge about them, because nothing could be appropriately related to them (*li-ʿadam al-munāsib*); in consequence, belief in them would not be obligatory" (al-Jīlī, 246).

It is uncertain whether Rūmī actually approved of "love-play with witnesses" (*shāhid-bāzī*), as the practice of gazing at beautiful youth was commonly called. In various stories (see Ritter, *Ocean*, 462, 487, 489, 491) it is related that his teacher Shams-i Tabrīzī practiced *shāhid-bāzī* with both boys and women, but also, that Shams-i Tabrīzī as well as Rūmī were critical of those who defended *shāhid-bāzī*, and of Awḥad al-Dīn al-Kirmānī in particular. Be that as it may, there can be no doubt that Rūmī regularly sensed the traces of paradise and of God's beauty in his earthly surroundings, and that he celebrated these experiences. He also knew, however, that not everybody is able to perceive paradise in the created world. Once, upon enjoying a concert, Rūmī proffered that "the sound of the rebec (*rubāb*) is the squeaking of the door of paradise." A person in the audience remarked that "we hear it, too, but why is it that we do not feel as warm (*garm*) because of it as our Mawlā?" Rūmī answered: "We hear the door as it opens, while he hears it being closed" (Jāmī, 462). According to Rūmī, too much learning, the snares of philosophy, can block the perception of paradise. In fact, as Rūmī states, "most of the people of the Garden are simpletons (*ablah*)"—a saying that resonates with Basṭāmī (see above) and that enjoyed great popularity in Sufi eschatology, as will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

6 The Imaginal Paradise

A history of Sufi conceptualizations of paradise needs to acknowledge the fact that Sufi scholars also participated in the transmission of traditionist, that is *ḥadīth*-based, knowledge about paradise as the post-resurrection home of the believers. In fact, we owe several important late-medieval *ḥadīth* collections about paradise to authors who were Sufis, or affiliated closely with Sufism, such as the Egyptian Shādhilī al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), compiler of the encyclopedic *Shining Full Moons of Eschatology* (*al-Budūr al-sāfira fī ʿulūm al-ākhira*), or the Syrian Qādirī-Naqshbandī ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731), who

composed a short work containing *ḥadīth*s that speak of the simultaneous existence of certain animals, plants, and objects in paradise and on earth.

Summaries of the Sunnī and Shīʿī traditionalist picture of paradise, which is replete with details about its location, size, topography, flora, fauna, material culture, and numerical properties, are available elsewhere in the scholarly literature (e.g. Lange, 71–162) and need not be repeated here. It is worth noting, however, that the idea that paradise is composed of eight gardens (instead of seven, which would appear to chime more naturally with the Qurʾānic notion that there are seven heavens, see Q 67:3) owed much of its plausibility to Sufi thought. Al-Ghazālī, for example, explained that there are eight gates to paradise because there are eight cardinal virtues (al-Ghazālī, tr. Winter, 235), an idea reprised by later writers like Nasafī in their elaborations of an "ethical paradise" (see above). Sufi authors also thought of the eight gates of paradise as an illustration of the famous *ḥadīth qudsī* that "My mercy outweighs my wrath" (Wensinck et al., 4:526). Paradise, the abode of God's mercy, surpasses hell, which has only seven gates (Abū Nuʿaym, *Ṣifat al-janna*, 2:18). The idea is picked up, among others, by Rūmī (Furūzānfar, #64), and reverberates over the centuries well into contemporary times, as is attested by the example of Ahmet Kayhan (d. 1998), a Turkish Naqshbandī shaykh (Kayhan, 86–8).

A highly original, and complex, vision of paradise was developed by Ibn al-ʿArabī, whose large oeuvre treats the cosmological, or macrocosmic, dimensions of paradise as well as the individual's experiential realization of paradise, both before death (e.g. through visions) and after death. As has been observed, almost every chapter of Ibn al-ʿArabī's massive magnum opus, *The Meccan Openings* (*al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*), "contains numerous allusions to the 'eschatological' realities and dimensions of existence" (Chittick and Morris, 96). However, it is in chapters 61 through 65, as well as in chapters 198 and 371, that one encounters the most focused discussions, a summary of which, in as much as paradise is concerned, is attempted in the following paragraphs.

Ibn al-ʿArabī's cosmology, as it is laid out in the long 198th chapter of *The Meccan Openings*, reckons with a great multitude of heavenly spheres, descending from the levels of God and His attributes through various layers, all the way down to the sublunar sphere, that is, the world we inhabit. Ibn al-ʿArabī locates paradise in the upper half of the twentieth sphere, the sphere of the fixed stars. (Hell is located in the lower half of this sphere.) Above it is the nineteenth sphere, the sphere of the zodiac, the "roof of paradise." The sphere of the zodiac, in turn, is situated right below the sphere of the Footstool (*kursī*), on which rest the two feet (*qadamān*) of God, sitting on His Throne. The two feet symbolize the moment in which divine unity is divided in two aspects, command (*amr*) and prohibition (*nahy*) (Ibn al-ʿArabī, tr. Gloton, 39, 64; cf. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 111–12).

This carefully constructed model tells us several things. First of all, paradise (and hell) are not earthly locales in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought; nor are they realities that come into existence only at the end of time. They occupy an exalted position in a cosmological model that is based on the principle that all existence emanates from God top-down, trough many layers all the way to the world of the here and now. Secondly, the two eschatological realms, paradise and hell, appear to form the first dyad brought into existence by God, that is, they are the first manifestations of God's ordering of the universe into binaries. The varieties of phenomena in this world, as it were, all have their beginning in paradise and hell. Building on this, thirdly, the proximity of paradise and hell to God (or rather, to His feet) indicates the centrality of eschatology in the thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī.

Further on in chapter 198, but also in chapter 65, Ibn al-ʿArabī specifies that paradise is divided in three gardens: a Garden of Divine Election (*jannat ikhtiṣāṣ ilāhī*), a Garden of Inheritance (*jannat mīrāth*), and a Garden of Actions (*jannat al-aʿmāl*). The first is given to children, fools devoid of reason, "the people of unitary knowledge" (*ahl al-ʿilm al-tawḥīdī*), and those who were not visited by a messenger from God; the second to the ordinary believers; the third to those who enter paradise on account of their good actions. This division is a reiteration of various other Sufi stratifications of paradise, all of which tend to suggest a spiritual hierarchy featuring the Sufi initiates on top, with the merely learned and law-practicing members of the Muslim *umma* relegated to lower ranks. It is striking that in Ibn al-ʿArabī's model, the highest paradise is filled with fools and mystics alike. Also Nasafī (see above) describes a "paradise of simpletons (*bulh*)." The idea refers back to the Prophetic *ḥadīth* according to which "most of the people of paradise are fools" (*akthar ahl al-janna al-bulh*) (al-Bayhaqī, 2:57). This is a tradition which may have arisen in the milieu of those who, like Basṭāmī, were full of contempt for paradise and thought it fit only for uncouth commoners; in fact, it is still used in this way by fifth/eleventh- and sixth/twelfth-century Sufi masters like ʿAbdallāh al-Anṣārī (Coppens, 101) and ʿAṭṭār (Ritter, *Ocean*, 24). However, in Ibn al-ʿArabī, as well as after him, in Nasafī and Rūmī (see above), the saying's dismissive gist is turned around: the *bulh* now refer to those who have an immediate, unfiltered contact with the divine, unencumbered as they are by learning.

Further, Ibn al-ʿArabī suggests that these gardens are accessible not just after death, but also during dreams and in states of mystical "unveiling" (*mukāshafa*), such as Ibn al-ʿArabī claimed for himself and attributed to other Sufis he knew (Ibn al-ʿArabī, 1:297.24–5). Such states are conceived of by Ibn al-ʿArabī as a kind of death: he refers to them as "the voluntary return" (*al-rujūʿ al-ikhtiyārī*), which parallels and precedes "the compulsory return" (*al-rujūʿ al-iḍṭirārī*), that is, physical death. This is an idea that also other Sufis, echoing Ibn al-ʿArabī's

example, explored eagerly. For example, Najm al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 618/1221) speaks of a technique of "spiritual unveiling" by which the Sufi sees "paths of ascent, the expanse of paradise and hell, and the sight of the angels ..." (al-Rāzī, 306).

However, Ibn al-ʿArabī maintains that the visits to, and visions of, paradise during the "voluntary return" are not mere figures of fancy. Rather, they refer to a separate "interstitial" (*barzakhī*) reality. Developing an idea foreshadowed by Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) and al-Ghazālī and consequently pursued by thinkers writing in the illuminationist (*ishrāqī*) tradition, Ibn al-ʿArabī posits that the phenomena in the *barzakhī* realm are neither material nor immaterial. Rather, they possess a third kind of reality, a reality he refers to, next to using the concept of "interstitial" (*barzakhī*), as "imaginal" (*khayālī*).

In the imaginal world, those who experience either a "compulsory" or "voluntary return" perceive formerly inward, intellectual, and spiritual qualities in corresponding outward forms. For example, mystical knowledge is imbibed in the form of milk, honey, or wine by the inhabitants of paradise (Ibn al-ʿArabī, 1:306.13, 2:311.14, 4:418.3). The human soul thus "becomes embodied in an imaginal form appropriate to its own attributes; likewise, all its works, character traits, knowledge, and aspirations appear to it in appropriate forms" (Chittick, Death, 63). The imaginal paradise is populated by other transformed entities as well. The Qurʾān is presented to the inhabitants of paradise as butter and honey, and God Himself is manifest in an imaginal body that the blessed see in paradise, where He appears to them as a beautiful young man (Ibn al-ʿArabī, 1:306.13, 4:418.3). Such speculations about an interstitial ontological realm between the sensible and the intelligible arguably opened the door for Sufi authors to reappropriate traditional, *ḥadīth*-based notions of an embodied afterlife. All the minute details of traditional eschatology could now be reinterpreted in the light of Ibn al-ʿArabī's concept of an "imaginal world." It is perhaps no coincidence that in the centuries after Ibn al-ʿArabī, as we noted above, one finds several examples of Sufi authors who compiled eschatological works of the traditionist kind.

7 Conclusion

Soubhi El-Saleh, in a classic and still useful study, stated that "the question of the pleasures and torments of the hereafter is very important for the mystics, while the ephemeral life of the here-and-now is vacuous (Fr. 'vaine') and without any value for them" (El-Saleh, 91). As the foregoing discussion has demonstrated, the ways in which Sufis spoke and wrote about how this world and the otherworld relate to one another suggest a far more complex and dynamic

understanding. For one, the notion of a continuum stretching from paradise to earth was cultivated, often in playful terms, by many Sufi writers. Sufi thinkers throughout the centuries usually accepted the corporeality of the afterlife as a given, but they interpreted this corporeality in ways that were original and starkly different from what the traditionists, theologians, and philosophers taught. In the late ʿAbbāsid and the post-ʿAbbāsid periods, the focus of Sufi eschatology shifted to an interiorization of paradise. This shift occurred next to, but not to the exclusion of, discussions of the external paradise. In this arena of eschatological thought, Sufi thought increasingly came to interact with discussions about the human imagination as the true *locus* of paradise. Particularly in the thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī and his followers, paradise took on characteristics of an imaginal world, thus claiming a distinct reality of its own.

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CHAPTER 7

Hell in Sufi Thought

Christian Lange

Just like Sufis throughout history who wrote about paradise drew from many different psychological, soteriological, and cosmological registers, so their thinking about hell was rich and variegated. However, while a number of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Western scholars have written about Sufi representations of paradise (see the bibliography in Chapter 6 in this volume), there are virtually no in-depth studies of the Sufi view of hell. What reasons account for this? It is undoubtedly true that Sufi teleographies, to use a term popularized by Thomas Tweed (Tweed, 122), usually point upwards, towards heaven (in addition to pointing inwards, towards the soul). They do not gesture downwards, towards the realms of darkness, ignorance, and moral and spiritual decrepitude. It seems safe, therefore, to assume that Sufi thinkers were more interested in paradise than hell.

However, more is to be said. First of all, it deserves to be pointed out that there is a dearth of scholarly literature on hell not only in regard to Sufism, but in regard to the Islamic tradition as a whole. This state of affairs ought to raise our suspicion, as it suggests a one-sided perception of Islam as a religion of mercy, a religion in which hell has no place. Such generalizations seem no longer tenable, and recent scholarship on (non-Sufi) Islamic theology and cosmology has gone some way in putting hell back on the map of Islamic studies (see, e.g., the essays collected in Lange, *Locating Hell*). The Sufi vision of hell, however, remains a strikingly understudied subject.

Secondly, the failure of researchers of Sufism to address the topic may also be due to the simple fact that hell is not a particularly comfortable space to inhabit, whether for sinners or for modern-day scholars. Paradise, as an object of study, carries a certain esthetic and sensual appeal, as well as the lofty promise of spiritual ascent—none of which holds true for hell. In consequence, the temptation to focus academic inquiry on Islam's scheme of uplift towards paradise, and to dismiss hell as unworthy of the academy's quest for truth and beauty, is real. There is not only a celestial bias in Sufi thought and literature, but in the academic study of Sufism as well (see further on this issue, Lange, Introducing Hell).

These biases should not blind us to the fact that Sufi engagements with hell, as this chapter demonstrates, are significant, both in terms of quantity and

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originality. The following pages provide an overview, in rough chronological order, of the various paradigms of Sufi infernology. After reviewing the *zuhd* mode of cultivating fear of hell, four further paradigms are rehearsed: the decentering of hell from Sufi eschatology; speculations about hell's limited power and duration; the internalization of hell in emotional, psychological, and intellectual terms; and conceptions of hell as belonging to the imaginal, interstitial world.

1 Fear of Hell in the Muslim Renunciant Tradition (*Zuhd*)

The fear of hell is integral to renunciant and ascetic strands of Muslim religiosity from the earliest times of Islamic religious history. The Qur'ān, despite affirmations to the contrary (e.g. Neuwirth, 439), cannot be said to allocate more space to paradise than to hell (Lange, *Paradise and Hell*, 39). Rather, the Qur'ān constantly and emphatically exhorts the believers to bear hell in mind: "Have you not considered the fire that you light? We have made it a reminder (*tadhkira*)!" (Q 56:71–3). In the circles of early believers whose piety was fear-driven, the so-called verses of threat (*āyāt al-waʿīd*) commanded great popularity. Qur'ān 4:37, 23:104, 39:46, 54:46, as well as suras 67 and 102, were and continue to be particularly well-known (see Kermani, 378–9; Meier, 196–7). Al-Thaʿlabī's (d. 427/1035) collection of biographies, *Those Who Were Killed by the Qur'ān* (*Qatlā l-Qur'ān*), features several examples of pious renunciants (*zuhhād*) of the first three centuries who passed away upon hearing the *āyāt al-waʿīd* recited to them.

Next to the Qur'ān, the growing body of *ḥadīth* literature included many traditions that were apt to inspire anxiety about hell among those who strove to model their lives on the revealed scripture and the teachings of the Prophet. The pious exemplar of the early second/eighth century al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) once learned of the Prophetic prediction that after a thousand years of punishment, only Muslim sinners who are "esteemed in the eyes of God" are let out of hell. Al-Ḥasan, in a demonstration of his humility, reportedly exclaimed: "O, that I might be among these men!" (al-Makkī, 3:221).

In a study entitled "Locating hell in early renunciant literature" (2016), Christopher Melchert has collected many stories showing the *zuhhād*'s preoccupation with hell (Melchert, 105–14), several of which are worth relating here. A man approaches Abū ʿUbayda b. Ḥudhayfa (fl. first/seventh century) with a petition, presumably trying to get him to accept a nomination to become a judge—a state-sponsored position abhorred by the pious. Abū ʿUbayda suggests the man put his finger in a burning fire. When the man refuses, Abū

ʿUbayda tells him: "You withhold from me one of your fingers, yet you ask me to put my whole body into the fire of Jahannam" (Melchert, 105–6). Ibn Masʿūd (d. 32/652–3?) falls unconscious on seeing a smith blowing the bellows, which reminds him of the fire of hell (Melchert, 107). The Yemeni Ṭāwūs (d. 106/724–5?) cannot sleep at night after walking through the market and seeing (sheep?) heads being roasted there (Melchert, 103). Some *zuhhād* are remembered for actively seeking out such salutary reminders of hell. For example, several of the Prophet's Companions are reported to have recommended visits to the bathhouse (*ḥammām*) because it reminds one of the heat of hell (Melchert, 109). Abū l-Dardāʾ (d. 32/652–3?) would blow on the fire under the kitchen-pot until his tears flowed (Melchert, 109).

Next to interpreting worldly fire and heat as a reminder of hell, the *zuhhād* inwardly contemplated hell. Examples of pious sayings admonishing people not to neglect the thought of hell are legion. The Basran Bakr b. ʿAbdallāh al-Muzanī (d. 106/725?) warned, "Who sins laughing will enter the Fire weeping" (Melchert, 110). Dāwūd al-Ṭāʾī from Kufa (d. 165/781–2?) was known to recite an *āyat al-waʿīd* every night; in the end, he fell ill and died (Melchert, 112). Several renunciants are on record for inviting their brethren to "weep over cold water"—for cold water is what they will ask for, in vain (cf. Q 7:50), when tortured in hell (Melchert, 111–12).

As shown in Chapter 6 of this volume, several pious exemplars around the turn of the third/ninth century were known for foregrounding the hope for paradise in their piety, for example the Basran ʿAbd al-Wāḥid b. Zayd (d. ca. 150/767), or the Syrian al-Dārānī (d. 215/830). Their pessimistic counterpart (van Ess, 1:153; cf. Melchert, 112–13) was al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857) from Basra, a pious moralist and the author of *Kitāb al-tawahhum* (*The Book of Envisioning*). *The Book of Envisioning* is a complex and highly personal narrative of a journey into the otherworld that culminates in the beatific vision in paradise. However, throughout the journey, the sense of impending disaster, of eternal damnation of sinners, is pervasive (Lange, *Paradise and Hell*, 95). Al-Muḥāsibī paints a vivid and frightening picture of the perils believers will encounter on the Day of Resurrection, especially when passing over the Bridge (*ṣirāṭ*) hung over the gigantic hell-funnel, which the resurrected have to cross before they arrive at the gates of paradise. "Conjure up a vision of yourself (*tawahham nafsaka*) falling off the Bridge!" (al-Muḥāsibī, § 97), al-Muḥāsibī admonishes his readers, and having listed the many gruesome punishments of the inhabitants of hell, he asks: "Now, what if you were looking at *yourself*? What if you were one of them, all hope having vanished from your heart, and only desperation having remained?" (al-Muḥāsibī, § 106).

It is true that "many renunciant sayings stress terror at the prospect … of standing before God at the Last Judgement rather than hell" (Melchert, 112), and that the contemplation of death, not of hell, occupies center stage in their piety (Melchert, 113). This applies to al-Muḥāsibī as much as it does to the earlier *zuhhād*. Yet the recollection of hell and its horrors did claim a non-negligible place in the thought of these *zuhhād*, and it remained relevant to the pious imagination of Sufi figures of later centuries as well. Al-Shiblī (d. 334/945–6) was once criticized for gazing at a succulent lamb in an oven. He responded by saying that "I was merely thinking that all other living beings enter the fire only after they have died, whereas we enter it alive" (Ibn al-Qāriḥ, 60 [tr. 61]). Al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) read and appreciated the writing of al-Muḥāsibī, and his *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* (*The Revivification of the Religious Sciences*) demonstrates that he took the need to recollect and envision hell seriously. "Bring your finger near to a flame and draw a comparison from that, [but] know that your comparison is mistaken, for there is no correspondence between the fire of this world and that of hell; it is only because the pain produced by fire is the greatest in this world that the pain of hell is described in terms thereof" (al-Ghazālī, 5:158 [tr. 223]).

2 Hell Dismissed

However, a significant shift away from hell occurs in the piety of Sufi authors of the later ʿAbbāsid centuries. Al-Ghazālī is in fact typical of this trend, in that he holds that fear-driven piety is only for the masses, not the spiritually advanced. From the third/ninth century onwards, parallel to their increasing disdain for paradise, Sufis began to consider hell a distraction from the only valid object of their devotion: God Himself. The old *zuhd* preoccupation with hell is greatly relativized, or even silenced, by figures such as al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), who, in his large Sufi *tafsīr*, makes close to no mention of the many sayings of the early *zuhhād* expressing fear of the afterlife (Coppens, 97). Already before al-Ghazālī, al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) states that the fear of hell is only for the commoners (*ʿawāmm*); uncouth as they are, their piety focuses on God's acts (*afʿāl*). On the spiritually more advanced level achieved by the elect (*khawāṣṣ*), the object of fear shifts to God's attributes (*ṣifāt*), such as His knowledge and His wrath. Finally, the elect of the elect (*khawāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ*) fear God directly *qua* Himself (al-Qushayrī, 1:88–9; cf. Coppens, 99).

Therefore, when al-Ghazālī thunders that believers should "fill up your heart with the dread of that destination [i.e. hell]" (al-Ghāzālī, 5:156 [tr. Winter,

220]), it is difficult not to think that this is a warning leveled at the others, not at al-Ghāzālī's closest friends and followers. Overall, al-Ghazālī is a representative of Sunnī salvific optimism. In fact, this is what earned him the opprobrium of many later, *zuhd*-inspired authors, such as Ibn al-Kharrāṭ of Seville (d. 581/1185) as well as the famous Baghdad preacher Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201). Ibn al-Jawzī complained that when audiences hear paradise stories like those transmitted by al-Ghazālī, "they go away without having been censored for their sins ... instead the popular preachers comfort [them] by telling them that God's mercy is encompassing, while they fail to mention that He punishes harshly" (Ibn al-Jawzī, 29).

Other Sufi figures took a different approach, by explicitly belittling hell. Bāyazīd Basṭāmī (d 234/848 or 261/875) allegedly claimed that he would be able to smother hell with the tip of his frock, thereby saving the rest of humankind from punishment (see Ritter, Aussprüche, 237). He also asserted that God's fire of love burns a thousand times more intensely than the fire of hell, which inspired later Sufis to compare the fire of their love for God with the fire burning in hell—usually in order to conclude that their own fire burns more strongly. Basṭāmī also predicted that at the end of time, God will take the foot of the hell-monster and dip it into the fire of His love, which will obliterate it (al-Sarrāj, 529–30), an idea that was likewise picked up by later Sufi writers and gradually transformed into a theory of universal salvation (see below).

Following Basṭāmī, also al-Shiblī (d. 334/946) from Baghdad is known for his dismissal of hell. Al-Shiblī was once met in the streets of the city with two torches in his hands. When asked about his intentions, he explained that he had set out to burn paradise and hell (ʿAṭṭār, *Tadhkira*, 2:163). "What am I to do with flame and hell?" al-Shiblī quipped. "In my opinion, flame and hell are but sugar in comparison with being separated [from God]" (al-Sarrāj, 547–8). Al-Shiblī also commented that he could extinguish hellfire if he spat on it (al-Sarrāj, 548).

In the thought of al-Niffarī (d. 350/961 or ca. 366/977), we encounter a seemingly paradoxical union of paradise and hell. The visionary, in al-Niffarī's account, "takes a place in hell and sees how God punishes with the Fire; at the same time, he sees that the Fire is paradise. He sees that the thing with which God brings about the delights of paradise is the same with which He punishes in the Fire" (al-Niffarī, 41 [#21]). Both paradise and hell, al-Niffarī stresses, are aspects of God, who is one. Paradise is an aspect of God's generosity and mercy; hell, of His sovereignty and majesty (al-Niffarī, 41 [#21]). There is nothing about hell, in consequence, that can throw the Sufi off course. God encourages the Sufis, states al-Niffarī, to "enter the Fire, because then the Fire will be extinguished" (al-Niffarī, 81 [#50]). This realization, in fact, elevates the

accomplished Sufi over the rest of humankind. Here, in fact, is where al-Niffarī goes one step further than Basṭāmī and al-Shiblī before him. The truly free, he affirms, are in hell; paradise, by contrast, is for slaves (al-Niffarī, 76 [#47]).

In this process of radically reinterpreting hell, it is not the human being but hell itself that becomes afraid. As al-Maybudī (fl. around 500/1106) states, when the Sufi enters into a state of true, loving devotion (*tabattul*), "hellfire with all its shackles and chains trembles in fear because of the burning in the breasts of the [spiritual] wayfarers" (al-Maybudī, 10:274; cf. Coppens, 102). The fire of the Sufis' love for God trumps the fire of hell, or at least it makes the Sufi completely impervious to it. As an anonymous Sufi, quoted by al-Kalābādhī (d. ca. 384/994), muses: "He who *is* fire—how shall he burn?" (al-Kalābādhī, 89).

Several of the themes we have surveyed so far appear in summary fashion in the *Book of Affliction* (*Muṣībatnāmah*) of Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār (d. 617/1220). In the eleventh chapter (*maqāla*) of this work (ʿAṭṭār, *Muṣībatnāmah*, 141), ʿAṭṭār describes how the wayfarer's mind (*sālik-i fikrat*), as it traverses the cosmos in contemplation, encounters hell, with which it holds a discussion. As Hellmut Ritter suggested, at least parts of ʿAṭṭār's work were inspired by Basṭāmī's earlier "psychic journeys" (Ritter, *Ocean*, 18), and ʿAṭṭār's picture of hell is no doubt indebted to Basṭāmī. His text, nonetheless, remains a striking and original example of Sufi infernology, and therefore deserves to be paraphrased and quoted here at some length.

The wayfarer, who has "fled the world to educate his soul," addresses hell as "the poetic conceit of the lively imagination of the [holy] fools (*dāgh-i jān-i khayl-i mahjūrān*)." ʿAṭṭār, as we noted above, knew of al-Shiblī's utterances about hell, and in what follows, he also appears to echo Basṭāmī and al-Niffarī. Hell is praised for the intensity of its fire: "All the time you burn, thirstier [than before]" (cf. Q 50:30). Hell's fire, the wayfarer suggests, is something the Sufis should aspire to emulate: "The fire of your passion is a torch, given to the fools [in God] (*dīwānigān*) as a spiritual genealogy (*silsila*)." It is only appropriate, the wayfarer continues, that the chains and shackles of hell be placed on the necks of the God-lovers. He wonders out aloud what would happen if he were to partake in hell's fire, under what circumstances hell might be swayed to share its fire with him, finally imploring hell to "make me burn, too!"

Hell, however, is taken aback by this speech, its flames abating, "falling back into the hell-funnel." Hell timidly ventures that its heat is not so impressive after all. "I only burn out of anxiety," it states, "with nothing to cool my sadness" except the bitter and burning food of the hell-tree, Zaqqūm, and the boiling water of hell called Ḥamīm. Its anxiety, hell continues, results from the knowledge that "all things perish" (*kull shayʾ hālik*), as the Qurʾānic phrase has it (28:88). Also hell, in other words, is afraid of being annihilated at the end

of time. When on earth a Sufi lover "emits a sigh," expressing his love for God, hell admits to being greatly agitated—presumably because it knows it does not have a share in this love. Hell realizes that all that it can do is pray for God's forgiveness. However, "this thread [of hope] … is like wax: how can it endure in the fire?" In the end, hell concedes that the wayfarer is more spiritually advanced than itself. "Go away, this is not the proper place for you! You are on a higher level than the fire of hell!"

The wayfarer now returns to his master (*pīr*), his heart "full of delight" at having discovered his superiority over hell. The master, however, introduces another layer of meaning. "Without a doubt," he says, "hell is anchored in this world, albeit a little." This is because those who are "pure" tend to suffer infernal pain in the world. Besides, think of the many afflictions that befall people, diseases as well as painful medication, the great cold in certain places, and the heat in other places. What is the world, then? It is "the abode of those who do not have an abode" (*al-dunyā dār man lā dār lahu*), a despicable, worthless hell, in which the Sufis will not hunt for pleasure and comfort, "not even for a dead mouse."

ʿAṭṭār's story, then, takes us through earlier Sufi modes of infatuation with hell, but corrects al-Niffarī's extreme position that the "truly free" are in hell. It affirms, with Basṭāmī and others, that the Sufis are superior to hell, but also stresses that hell is no more than a miserable, powerless creature of God. Finally, returning to a *zuhd* mode, the world is likened to hell, and the Sufi is encouraged to leave both, the world and within it, hell, behind.

3 Universal Salvation?

The dismissal of hell's spiritual relevance in certain areas of Sufism never displaced hell completely from Sufi thought and literature. Authors who self-identified as Sufis continued to be interested in the moral topography of hell, sometimes also in its cosmological particulars. Just like Sufi authors distinguished between different layers, or gardens, of paradise, reserved for different groups of believers, so they developed models of hell in which they mapped hell's various compartments onto specific classes of sinners. For example, Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), in his *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiya* (*The Meccan Openings*), includes a diagram showing the seven layers of hell as concentric circles, correlating each circle with a particular body part (feet, genitals, belly, hands, tongue, ears, eyes), and further subdividing the overall structure into four quadrants comprising polytheists (*mushrikūn*), hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*), deniers of

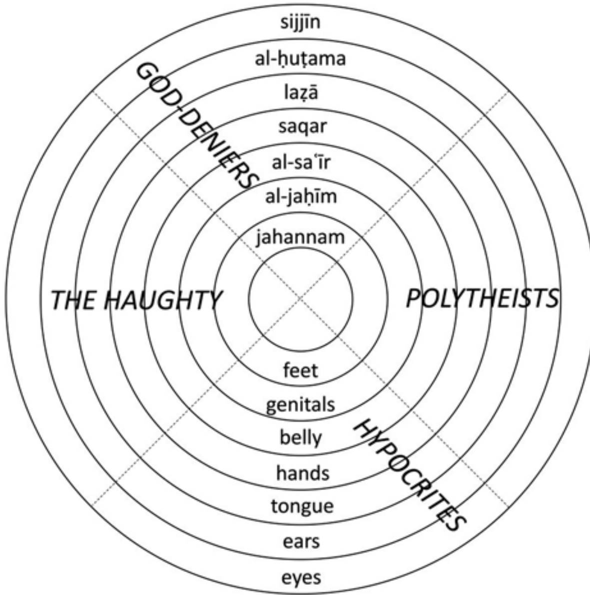

FIGURE 7.1
Layers of hell according to Ibn al-ʿArabī

God's attributes (*muʿaṭṭila*, lit. "those who strip [God of His attributes]"), and the haughty (*mutakabbirūn*) (see fig. 7.1) (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 3:557).

The names of the seven layers correspond to the traditional nomenclature of Muslim eschatology, except that many eschatologists prefer to use the name *al-hāwiya* instead of *sijjīn* to indicate the lowest level of hell (see Lange, *Paradise and Hell*, 38–9, 131–2). This lowest level, Ibn al-ʿArabī associates with the sins of the eyes, that is, looking at forbidden objects, while the lightest punishment, in the highest layer (*jahannam*), is reserved for those who sin with their feet, for example, by failing to walk to prayer in the mosque. Also noteworthy is that Ibn al-ʿArabī makes a further distinction between sins committed with external organs or internal organs, that is, by the outer or the inner eye, the outer and the inner ear, and so forth (cf. Gloton, 96, 128).

In the centuries after Ibn al-ʿArabī, there are several Sufi writers who reproduce the traditional moral topography of hell (as well as of paradise) in large-scale compilations of eschatological sayings and *ḥadīth*. The Algerian Sufi-scholar ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Thaʿālibī (d. 875/1471), in his work *al-ʿUlūm al-fākhira* (*The Precious Knowledge*), incorporates traditions and sayings reported from such authorities as al-Muḥāsibī, al-Ghazālī, Ibn al-Kharrāṭ, and Ibn al-ʿArabī. Also the well-known Egyptian Shāfiʿī scholar and mystic ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī (d. 973/1565) produced an eschatological *ḥadīth*-compendium (a *mukhtaṣar* of al-Qurṭubī's [d. 621/1273] *Tadhkirat aḥwāl al-mawtā wa-umūr al-ākhira*),

as did the Shāfiʿī-Shādhilī Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505). Like al-Shaʿrānī, al-Suyūṭī builds his work, *al-Budūr al-sāfira* (*The Shining Full Moons*), on the earlier compilation of al-Qurṭubī, but gives it a moralist spin, by taking care to note which classes of blessed and sinners are consigned to which layers of paradise or hell, explaining in each case on account of which virtue or sin this happens (Lange, *Paradise and Hell*, 88–9). Al-Suyūṭī's *al-Budūr al-sāfira* became a standard text of reference for later Muslim eschatologists, both of the Sufi and the non-Sufi kind. By contrast, the chapters on paradise and hell in the Moroccan Sufi-scholar al-Lamaṭī's (d. 1156/1743) *al-Dhahab al-ibrīz* (*The Pure Gold*), though overlapping to some extent with the *ḥadīth*s adduced by al-Suyūṭī (al-Lamaṭī, 896), represent a more personal view of hell, namely that of al-Lamaṭī's unschooled, charismatic teacher, al-Dabbāgh (d. 1132/1719–20).

Al-Dabbāgh and al-Lamaṭī appear to have been familiar with the eschatological thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī. For example, al-Lamaṭī reports Ibn al-ʿArabī's view that Satan and the jinn are punished with freezing cold in hell, rather than with fire (al-Lamaṭī, 922). However, there is no trace in al-Lamaṭī's text of the idea that the punishment of hell's inhabitants will come to an end, as Ibn al-ʿArabī held (see below). The notion, in fact, is much older than Ibn al-ʿArabī. Already in Basṭāmī and ʿAṭṭār we noted some inklings of this, Basṭāmī exalting the power of God's love to obliterate hellfire, ʿAṭṭār predicting that hell will perish like everything else on earth. "My mercy outweighs my wrath," ran a famous divine saying (*ḥadīth qudsī*) (Wensinck et al., 4:526), and certain Sufi thinkers thought deeply about whether this implied that hell and its punishments would at some point be discontinued, while paradise would continue to exist onto eternity.

The first Sufi Qurʾānic commentary in which we find "a genuine interest in the topic of Hell" (Coppens, 109) is that of the Persian visionary Rūzbihān al-Baqlī (d. 606/1209). The thrust of Rūzbihān's argument is that God's mercy is dominant over his wrath, to the extent of making punishment in hell more lenient, and even hinting at eventual salvation of unbelievers. Rūzbihān stresses that the Qurʾān speaks of hell being "prepared for the unbelievers"; believers do not need to fear hell, therefore, or only in order to remind themselves of God's coercive power (*qahr*), thereby fueling their awe of Him. As for the unbelievers, these are allowed to look into paradise—an idea Rūzbihān deduces from Q 7:50, a verse according to which "the companions of the Fire call out to the companions of paradise, 'Pour some water on us!'" Rūzbihān reasons that this vision of paradise, which equals a vision of (an aspect of) God, makes the damned quite oblivious to their pain, in the same way in which the female servants of Potiphar's wife forgot all about the pain of cutting their hands while peeling pomegranates, transfixed as they were by Joseph's beauty

(Coppens, 110). Thus, hell is at first "a place of sighing and sobbing," but as God manifests Himself to it, it gradually turns into "a watering place and sweet-smelling plant" (Rūzbihān, 3:336).

If pushed to an extreme, Rūzbihān's idea that God manifests Himself to the inhabitants of hell implies that the damned partake of the highest of all the pleasures in paradise, that is, the vision of God (*ru'ya*). This struck most as too radical. Ibn al-ʿArabī, for example, insisted that an eternal, nontransparent veil separates hell from paradise (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2:335). In Ibn al-ʿArabī's theory of hell, which has been the object of several substantial studies (Khalil; Pagani), God's mercy reaches the inhabitants of hell in different ways. On the one hand, Ibn al-ʿArabī talks about hell as the manifestation of God's attribute of "majesty" (*jalāl*), which complements His "kindness" (*jamāl*). On the other hand, Ibn al-ʿArabī predicts that punishment in hell will eventually come to an end. Not only will the Muslim sinners be lifted up into heaven—a position that was widely shared by Muslim theologians—but also the unbelievers will experience relief from their punishment. However, instead of moving on to paradise, or being granted a vision of it, they will remain in hell. Their relief consists in the fact that they lose their sensitivity to pain. In this condition, they will experience a separate kind of bliss (*naʿīm mustaqill*) in hell (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 1:114); their punishment (*ʿadhāb*) will turn into a kind of sweetness (*ʿudhūba*) (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2:207). In sum, the damned will enjoy being in hell, like natives prospering in their homeland (*mawṭin*), albeit in a state considered abject by all others.

As Mohammad Hassan Khalil has noted (Khalil, 70), the "quasi-universalism" of Ibn al-ʿArabī was picked up and developed, among others, by figures such as the Ottoman *shaykh al-Islām* Muḥammad b. Ḥamza al-Fanārī (d. 834/1431) and the Yemeni ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 832/1428). Al-Jīlī constructed "a phantasmal cosmology which differs widely from orthodox views," a cosmology in which "for the people in Hell God creates a natural pleasure of which their bodies become enamoured; Hell at last will be extinguished and replaced by a tree named D̲jird̲jīr; Iblīs will return to the presence and grace of God; all infidels worship God according to the necessity of their essential natures and all will be saved, etc." (Ritter, al-D̲jīlī, 71b). Also in the east, in the Persianate world, the idea that hell turns into a place of relative pleasure was entertained, by such figures as the two Persian philosophers ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. 736/1335) and Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640). Ṣadrā "affirms that Hell will become an abode of bliss [and he] adopts the punishment-to-sweetness (*ʿadhāb*-to-*ʿudhūba*) argument ... Thus all harm is in fact beneficial; divine wrath is itself a manifestation of divine mercy" (Khalil, 70).

4 The Inner Hell

In conclusion to this chapter, let us look at yet another Sufi mode of approaching hell: the internalization of hell, that is, its sublimation into emotional, psychological, and intellectual categories. As was noted in Chapter 6 of this volume, from the second half of the third/ninth century, there occurred an "inward turn" in Sufi eschatology, whereby Sufis began to conceive of an inner paradise—and hell. Several masters, including al-Muḥāsibī and al-Ghazālī, spoke of "the worst punishment in hell" consisting in "being far away from God," and it was natural to think that one could be removed from God, and therefore in hell, not only in the next life, but already in this life. As ʿAyn al-Quḍāt (d. 525/1131) bluntly stated, "[the feeling of] being estranged from God: *that* is hell" (ʿAyn al-Quḍāt, 291). Likewise, Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh (d. 709/1309) asserted that the torment of hell, which can take on many external forms, is a result of being banished from God (al-Rundī, 2:60). In this line of thought, which stretches through the centuries, the emotional stress of failing to achieve proper devotion is equated with hell.

However, the phenomenon of an internalized hell comes into focus only gradually. Whereas al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021) and al-Qushayrī (d. 456/1072) report nothing that is reminiscent of an inner hell, al-Qushayrī's contemporary, the Persian mystic al-Hujwīrī (d. 465/1073 or 469/1077), writes that man's lower soul (*nafs*), the seat of carnal appetites, corresponds to hell, "of which it is a type in this world" (al-Hujwīrī, 199). In a similar vein, Najm al-Dīn al-Rāzī asserts that the soul has "two essential attributes," namely passion and anger, and that these two "are also the substance of which hellfire is made, and from them are derived the degrees of hell" (al-Rāzī, 194). Next to the hell-is-exclusion-from-God theory, this hell-is-human-vice theory is the second variety of the Sufi emotional-psychological internalization of hell.

In the meantime, a thorough internalization of hell occurred elsewhere, in Islamic philosophy, in particular among Ismāʿīlī thinkers. Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) paved the way, by distinguishing between two kinds of afterworlds. According to Ibn Sīnā, one of these two afterworlds is a figment in the imagination of the minds of the deceased "simple-minded people" (*bulh*), those dead who lack the ability to see things as they really are. (This idea of an "imaginal" otherworld is later picked up by thinkers like al-Suhrawardī [d. 587/1191] and Ibn al-ʿArabī and given—at least in the case of the latter—a positive twist.) The other afterworld Ibn Sīnā describes is purely intellectual, an afterworld in which minds, finally freed from their earthly bodies, can do one of two things: either they enter into conjunction with the heavenly intellects, and thus experience true paradise, or they suffer an immense "pain of frustrated intellectual desire" (Ibn

Sīnā, 111), and thus are in hell. While for Ibn Sīnā, this afterworld comes about only after death, the Brethren of Purity, an anonymous group of philosophers from Basra (fl. probably second half of the fourth/tenth century), as well as a number of Ismāʿīlī thinkers, reckon with an intellectual paradise and hell on earth. Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī (d. after 361/971), for example, regards paradise and hell as purely spiritual phenomena, and he states that impure and dark souls, that is, all those who are not enlightened by Ismāʿīlī teachings, suffer the torments of hell already during their earthly lives (al-Sijistānī, 45, 48–9). As De Smet has observed, the Ismāʿīlī doctrine of hell is difficult to pin down, but a theme that unites many Ismāʿīlī authors is that "[h]ell starts here on earth for the masses of the common people who blindly follow established religions and laws whose real, hidden sense they ignore" (De Smet, 264).

In Sufi authors of later centuries, the emotional-psychological internalization and the philosophical-intellectual internalization of hell enter into a synthesis. The Khurasani ʿAzīz-i Nasafī (fl. mid-seventh/thirteenth century), a follower and interpreter of Ibn al-ʿArabī, may serve as an example of this fusion of traditions. In the chapter entitled *Mabdaʾ wa-maʿād* ("The beginning and the end") of his most well-known work, *Insān-i kāmil* (*The Perfect Man*), Nasafī first outlines a hell of "disapproved words and deeds, and blameworthy manners." Every affliction and misery that people suffer, whether in this life or the next, result from these (Nasafī, 295). Next, Nasafī reprises the philosophers' idea that hell is tantamount to a human failure to think properly. According to Nasafī, next to the hell of evil character traits, there is an intellectual, or noetic hell: this comes about when the human faculties of perception and understanding (the outer and inner senses) are, as it were, out of balance. If reason (*ʿaql*) controls the five outer senses, as well as the two inner senses of imagination (*khayāl*) and estimation (*wahm*), together they are the eight gates of paradise. If, however, reason is absent, the remaining seven faculties equal the seven gates of hell (Nasafī, 295–6). Shortly after Nasafī's text was written, the Ismāʿīlī philosopher Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274), in his *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, voiced strikingly similar ideas (Ṭūsī, 77–8 [§§ 65–6]).

This Sufi-philosophical eschatological amalgam survives into modern times, particularly in the Persianate world. As Gramlich reported in 1976 from a shaykh of the Khāksār whom he had interviewed: "Paradise and hell are not locales in which one enters after death. The human being is in them already before death. Being close to God is paradise; being far away from God is hell." Another shaykh of the Khāksār is quoted by Gramlich as telling him: "Paradise and hell are in this world, not in another world. Psychological and somatic pain are hell …" (Gramlich, 62). From a shaykh of the Niʿmatullāhiyya, Gramlich reports the following statement: "Hell are the evil character traits in

man and its consequences from which we suffer, for example envy and stinginess." Another Niʿmatullāhī shaykh says: "As long as we remain in the darkness of our carnal soul, we are in hell" (Gramlich, 63). Also the Pakistani philosopher Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) echoes this line of thinking. For him, hell is primarily a metaphor for people's failure to achieve inner psychic and intellectual progress. Paradise and hell, in Iqbal's phrase, are "states, not localities" (Iqbal, 98).

5 Conclusion

In the course of Islamic history, few Sufi authors openly challenged the traditional corporeal and future-oriented imagery of the afterlife of mainstream Islamic eschatology. The normative theological consensus was that one should accept the reality (*ḥaqq*) of the phenomena in paradise and hell without inquiring into what kind of reality, exactly, these phenomena possessed (see the various creeds translated in Watt, 44, 52, 60, 66, 71, 77–8, 82, 88). Besides, powerful *zuhd* motives of fearing hell and its terrors left a strong imprint on the Sufi tradition. Still, over the course of the centuries, Sufi thinkers developed various models of questioning, decentering, and internalizing the traditional picture of hell. This chapter has outlined three of their most common strategies.

Firstly, starting around the turn of the second/eighth to the third/ninth century, hell was dismissed as an irrelevant distraction for the truly pious, who were encouraged to focus their attention exclusively on God. Secondly, Sufi authors came to emphasize hell's powerlessness in the face of God's love and mercy, predicting that it would eventually be overcome and thereby opening up prospects of universal salvation, including for the unbelievers and even Satan. Thirdly, there were those Sufi authors who interpreted hell in inward terms, by equating hell with negative emotions, the evil traits of the *nafs*, and finally, the intellectual shortcomings of the philosophically and mystically uneducated. This internalization of hell, which becomes fully tangible no earlier than the late ʿAbbāsid period, has proven attractive well into the modern period.

Finally, in conclusion, mention should be made of thinkers operating in the tradition of Ibn Sīnā and later, al-Suhrawardī and Ibn al-ʿArabī, who speculated about hell manifesting itself in an interstitial world between the sensible and intelligible worlds, variously referred to as the "world of image" (*ʿālam al-mithāl*), "world of imagination" (*ʿālam al-khayāl*), or the "interstice" (*barzakh*). In Chapter 6, notions of an imaginal paradise were already discussed, and it will therefore not come as a surprise that Sufi authors also posited the

existence of an imaginal hell. In Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought, hell is in fact the interstitial manifestation of God's anger at humankind's failure to pay Him proper devotion. He also relates that the Andalusian mystic Ibn Barrajān (d. 536/1141) saw hell in the form of a buffalo (*jāmūs*) in a state of mystical unveiling (*kashf*), while his contemporary Ibn Qasī (d. 546/1151) saw it as a snake (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 1:297.24–5). For a fuller discussion of the "world of image" and the "world of imagination," however, the reader is directed to the various other chapters of this volume.

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PART 2

Sufi Views of the World

CHAPTER 8

Zuhd in Islamic Mysticism

Sara Sviri

1 Introduction

"Because it is a universal phenomenon, in evidence in ancient as well as modern societies, and because it is often a dramatic, even controversial, part of religions and cultures, asceticism has long been the subject of popular and intellectual interest." This is how Wimbush and Valantasis open their monumental collection of papers titled simply *Asceticism* (Wimbush and Valantasis, xix). In this huge volume—the proceedings of an international conference at Union Theological Seminary in New York in April 1993—nearly fifty contributions and responses were collated, among them a response focusing on "the place of sensuality in Sufism" (Wimbush and Valantasis, 369–71). In view of the wealth of narrative material furnished therein and the thought-provoking variety of opinions displayed by eminent authorities, two things become apparent immediately: firstly, that the interest in the subject matter extends beyond the scope of a sheer historical and textual presentation—it demands an awareness of the place asceticism has taken in our present-day cultural and academic discourse; and, secondly, that there are many vantage points from which to view and evaluate such a broad and complex phenomenon—within any tradition in itself and, in the framework of the volume at hand, within Islamic mysticism.

With these sobering considerations, it is perhaps useful to go back to the roots and start this chapter by pondering the Arabic term for "asceticism" and its semantics. *Zuhd* (also, in some early works, *zahāda*)—and the derivative "ascetic" (sing. *zāhid*, pl. *zuhhād*, *zāhidūn*)—are the consensual equivalents for "asceticism." However, the full Arabic term for asceticism is not merely *al-zuhd* but *al-zuhd fī l-dunyā*, which, in fact, implies "setting small store by this world," devaluing or belittling it. This understanding stems from the only Qur'ānic verse in which the verbal root *z-h-d* appears. Describing the paltry sum with which Joseph's brothers had sold him to the Ishmaelites, Q 12:20 reads: "Then they sold him for a paltry price, a handful of counted dirhams; for they set small store by him" (tr. Arberry, 227) (*wa-sharawhu bi-thaman*^{in} *bakhs*^{in} *darāhim*^{a} *maʿdūdat*^{in} *wa-kānū fīhi min al-zāhidīn*). This proof-text suggests that *zāhid* originally means "one who thinks little of" and it suggests that

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al-zuhd fī l-dunyā means "to think little of this world" and, by the same token, to think highly of "the other world," *al-ākhira*, the world-to-come.

Many proof-texts in this vein can be culled from the early *zuhdī* literature and its parallels in the *ḥadīth* literature; here is one such tradition: "A group of horsemen riding with the Prophet passed by a dead lamb. The Prophet said: 'Do you see this? It had such little value for its owners that they threw it away … The world has even less value for God than this one for its owners (*fa-l-dunyā ahwan*[u] *ʿalā llāh*[i] *min hādhihi ʿalā ahlihā*)'" (Ibn al-Mubārak, 177 §508). Another example may be cited from *Kitāb al-zuhd al-kabīr*, a large compilation of traditions on *zuhd* compiled by Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī, a fifth/eleventh-century scholar from Nishapur. Most of the traditions compiled in this book are attributed to figures identified as Sufis. Here, for example, is a tradition attributed to al-Fuḍayl b. ʿIyāḍ (d. 188/803): "All that is evil was placed in one house, whose key is the love for this world (*wa-juʿila miftāḥuhu ḥubb al-dunyā*); and all that is good was placed in a house, whose key is the rejection of the world (*wa-juʿila miftāḥuhu l-zuhd fī l-dunyā*)" (al-Bayhaqī, 133, 245).

Customarily, *al-zuhd fī l-dunyā* may be translated as "abstention from the world" or "renouncing the world" and those who "denigrate it" may be referred to as "ascetics" or "renunciants" (Melchert, 407). However, in an attempt to determine the semantics of asceticism in Islamic mysticism by means of the Arabic terminology, the aspect of "denigration," "giving little value to the world," should not be overlooked. This aspect, rather than promoting an *extraneous* behavior that can be characterized as "world denying," implies an *inner* attitude towards the world.

From such semantic discernment stems the following general observation: Islamic asceticism, especially within the Sufi lore, focuses on "attitudes" and "states of mind" rather than on "activity" and external behavior. This insistence on inner attitude is suggested by the notion of *qiṣar al-amal*, the curtailing of hopes for the future (see below). To this one may add such notions as *ḥusn al-ẓann*, thinking well (in particular of God's decree), and hence cultivating an attitude of acceptance (*riḍā*), reliance (*tawakkul*), gratitude (*shukr*), perseverance (*ṣabr*), and submission (*islām*, *istislām*). In Sufi parlance this amounts to the preeminence of "the duties of the hearts" (*aʿmāl al-qulūb*) over "the duties of the bodily organs" (*aʿmāl al-jawāriḥ*)—namely, of mental and psychological positions—eventually termed *maqāmāt wa-aḥwāl*—designed to become established in one's self by means of following certain training regimes (*riyāḍa*) (e.g. al-Sarrāj, 43–4: *wa-ammā al-aʿmāl al-bāṭina fa-ka-aʿmāl al-qulūb wa-hiya al-maqāmāt wa-l-aḥwāl*). These programs, if fruitful, may lead to the transformation of the self and to a radical shift in the value system of the practitioner.

In this shift, what one is truly after vis-à-vis what one must give up in order to attain it becomes clarified and illumined (see Shaqīq's *nūr al-zuhd* below). The demands set up by these regimes might be excruciating, but they revolve around one's inner fight with one's own self rather than extroverted ascetical feats. In these programs, worthy modes of behavior are by no means overlooked. They are achieved through the imitation of chosen role models; first and foremost, of course, the Prophet. Worthy of imitation are also the "friends of God" (*awliyāʾ Allāh*), the spiritual teachers, who, by enforcing a set of rules (*ādāb*), inculcate within their disciples the propensity for correct actions in all of life's circumstances. As we shall see, in all these programs, the main effort is directed to the transformation of the self, the *nafs*. Hence, the training of the self, *riyāḍat al-nafs*, becomes the main effort (*mujāhada*) of Muslim mystics, early and late, in their particular line of "asceticism."

Finally, a general comment on the typology of *zuhd* in early Islam is in order. Unlike the conventional account of a gradual, linear development from "asceticism" to "mysticism," it is my understanding that three different types of *zuhd* were *simultaneously* at play: extreme ascetic behavior, which, among other practices, included wearing rough woolen garments (hence: *ṣūfī*, to begin with, denoted a radical ascetic) (Sviri, Terms, 22–4), and "mild" asceticism, which advocated an inward rejection of worldly things out of religious piety (see Hurvitz; Kinberg, 39–44) and, lastly, *zuhd* as a station (*maqām*, *manzila*) in a process of inner transformation leading towards an intimate, luminous, mystical nearness to God and a behavioral "synergy" with Him. This latter type of *zuhd* preoccupied Muslim mystics from the outset.

It should be noted, however, that, when consulting literary sources that focus on the lives of individuals, an overlap of terms and descriptions might cause confusion. Such overlap is particularly prominent in the hagiographies of early mystics and pietists, as well as in Sufi compilations, where the lines between the different types of *zuhhād* tend to be blurred, perhaps intentionally.

2 Late Antique *Zeitgeist*: Alienation from This World

ʿAbdallāh b. ʿUmar (d. 73/693), the son of the second caliph and one of the Prophet's close Companions, tells how the Prophet, touching him, proclaimed: "O ʿAbdallāh, be in this world as if you were a stranger (*gharīb*) or a passing wayfarer (*ʿābir sabīl*), and reckon yourself among the denizens of graves (*wa-ʿudda nafsaka min ahl al-qubūr*)" (Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, 25; Ibn Ḥanbal, 41; Ibn al-Mubārak, 5 §13). To "be in the world like a stranger" implies that the believer should adopt an attitude of alienation towards worldly matters; "reckon yourself among the

denizens of graves" implies that he should be aware of death's imminence and life's transient nature and, therefore, should not be attached to anything. Such a call to "alienation" from the world echoes the ascetic, other-worldly disposition prevalent in Late Antiquity among monks, renunciants, and certain philosophical schools. Thus, for example, the fifth-century St. John Climacus (579–606 CE), in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, describes the merit of "exile" (in Greek *xaniteia*, which means both exile and being a stranger) and writes: "Exile means that we leave forever everything in our own country that prevents us from reaching the goal of the religious life … For exile is separation from everything in order to keep from every attachment to … people and to strangers" (Climacus, sections 3, 6, 8, 21, 29; Bondi; Brown, 88, 126; Caner, 25, 36, et passim; Sizgorich). Gnostic sources, too, reflect the ideal of "alienation" or "exile" from "the world" as the wish of the soul to return to its original state and abode (Pagels, 138–41; Pearson; Wright, 200, 209, 280, et passim). Such ideas occur also in dualistic Iranian religions such as Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and Mazdakism.[1] Philosophers, especially those associated with Stoicism, practiced *apatheia*, namely, to regard the world and the suffering of the earthly life with equanimity, without emotional attachment, and to contemplate death. Marcus Aurelius, for example, writes:

> Human life: duration: momentary; nature: changeable; perception: dim; condition of body: decaying; soul: spinning around; fortune: unpredictable; lasting fame: uncertain. Sum up: The body and its parts are a river, the soul a dream and mist, life is warfare and a journey far from home, lasting reputation is oblivion.
>
> MARCUS AURELIUS, book II, 17

The above-quoted *ḥadīth* reflects, no doubt, a similar disregard for this-worldly life; a call to live in it "as a stranger." This bend of mind, widely familiar in Late Antiquity, seems to have been taken up by individuals or groups in early Islam. It was later integrated, with modifications, into the Sufi ethos, on which this chapter focuses.

From among the various currents that could have infused this worldview into early Islam, Christian monasticism seems the most likely candidate. The theme of Christian monks roaming the desert or living in mountain caves remote from inhabited centers occurs profusely in early Islamic sources as

1 For Manichean ascetic practices, see, e.g., Vööbus, 1:115–24; for abundant material on the Iranian religious landscape in early Islam, see Crone.

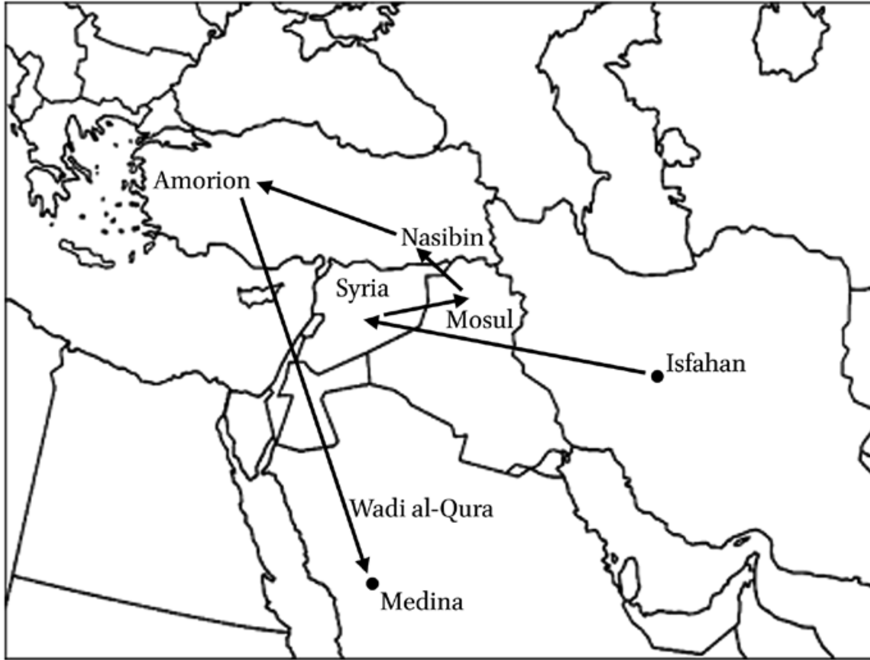

FIGURE 8.1 Salmān's journey for the truth

well as in Christian ones. The research material is vast and its details and conclusions are beyond the boundaries of this chapter (e.g. Andræ, passim;[2] Caner, passim; Griffith, *Arabic Christianity*, passim; Szilagyi). The well-known story of the monk Baḥīrā is a case in point: looking down from his solitary cell over a caravan of traders from the Ḥijāz, he recognized the "sign of prophecy" between the shoulders of the young Muḥammad. He could thus ascertain that this young man was the long-awaited "messenger" named Aḥmad, whose appearance was prophesized by Jesus (according to Q 61:6) (Griffith, Prophet Muhammad; Roggema, 58ff.; Szilagyi). But there are also other stories that emphasize the role played by monks in proclaiming the validity of the Prophet and in inspiring an ascetical mode of living in nascent Islam. Notably, the story about Salmān al-Fārisī, who, after the idea of a Creator God had stirred in his heart, left his Zoroastrian (?) kinsmen and home in Jayy, in the province of Iṣfahān, and set out in search of the true religion which upholds

2 In Andræ, note the rich material pertaining to instructions given by Christian monks to Islamic "seekers" after truth, often referred to as *ḥunafāʾ* (sing. *ḥanīf*); see also al-Shaybānī, 1:186.

this idea. On his long journey, which took him from Jayy to Mosul, then to the Jazīra, al-ʿAmmūriyya (in Asia Minor), and finally to Medina, Christian monks directed him from one to another and from place to place till finally he reached his goal in Medina. With each monk he stayed for several years practicing ascetic devotions, such as fasting during the day and praying during the night. But only after meeting Muḥammad in Medina he became convinced that his goal had been reached: he found the true prophet and the true religion and embraced the new faith of Islam on the spot (see fig. 8.1) (al-Iṣfahānī, 1:250–2).

Besides being an account of an initiatory passage into the religion of Islam, what seems relevant in the context of early Islamic asceticism is the tradition that Salmān's initiation took place along late antique routes inhabited by Christian monks, who facilitated it. Needless to say: it is neither the historicity of this and similar accounts, nor its polemical undertones, that we are trying to trace; rather, it is the notion that a model of a devotional and ascetical life in early Islam was inspired by monasticism. It is also worth highlighting that Muslim sources, regardless of their polemical agendas, did not shy away from acknowledging the contribution of Christian monasticism to the build-up of ascetical features and values in early Islam.

3 The Build-Up of a "Moderate" Ascetical Model

The ascetical model, Christian as well as Manichean, which was witnessed by early devout Muslims, contained practices such as wandering in deserts or dwelling in remote mountainous cells (Caner, 23; 26, 32, et passim); wearing ragged clothes that denote poverty or no clothes at all; fasting extensively; praying incessantly in the night; and observing celibacy (Brock; Chitty, 123–42; Clark, 14–42; Vööbus, 1:115–24). That some early pious Muslims wished to adopt these practices and perhaps even to surpass them is evident, for example, from the early commentary of Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. ca. 150/767) on Q 5:87: "Do not ban the good things which God made permissible to you" (*lā tuḥarrimū ṭayyibātⁱ mā aḥalla llāhᵘ lakum*). According to Muqātil, this verse came down (*nazalat*) in response to the actions of ten of the Prophet's closest Companions who had convened in the house of ʿUthmān b. Maẓʿūn, and together resolved to deny themselves food, clothes, and women. They even undertook to emasculate themselves, put on a garb of hair, erect solitary cells (*ṣawāmiʿ*), and withdraw to them to practice a monastic way of life (*fa-yatarahhabū fīhā*) (Muqātil, 1:317–18). Upon learning this from the angel Gabriel, the Prophet's response was immediate and unequivocal: "He who does not adhere to my *sunna* and does not follow my fashion, does not belong

to me … Our *sunna* is [wearing] clothes, [eating] food, and [wedding] women" (Muqātil, 1:318; Sviri, *Wa-rahbāniyyatan*, 198).[3]

Other extreme practices were also criticized as being at odds with the more lenient direction that the nascent *sharīʿā* was taking and with the model set up by the Prophet Muḥammad. Many references to and commentaries on the well-known tradition "There is no monasticism in Islam" (*lā rahbāniyyat[a] fī l-islām*) (Karamustafa, 36; Sahner, 161, 166, 169) suggest that the strict monastic model was seen as defying the religious prescriptions of early Islam. Extreme and continuous fasting is a case in point. When the Companion ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ wished to practice continuous fasting (*ṣawm al-dahr*), above and beyond the fasting required by the *sharīʿa*, the Prophet prohibited him from doing so. ʿAbdallāh pleaded and bargained with the Prophet, claiming that he could endure long periods of fasting. Finally, the Prophet conceded and allowed him a routine known as "the fasting of Dāwūd" (*ṣawm/ṣiyām Dāwūd*), namely, fasting on alternate days (*kāna yaṣūmu yawm[an] wa-yufṭiru yawm[an]*) (Ibn al-Jawzī, 144–5; al-Iṣfahānī, 1:354 [no. 43]; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *bāb al-nahy ʿan ṣawm al-dahr*). Apparently, this fasting routine became the limit of Muslim ascetical endeavor concerning abstention from food.

These accounts suggest that in early Islam there was no tolerance towards excesses in the fashion of monks and anchorites, such as continuous fasting, praying during the night, total or partial celibacy dictated by continuous night praying, wandering away from home, and the like. Such ascetical practices were often referred to by the terms *taqashshuf*, *nusk*, *taʿabbud*, *tarahhub*. Instead, a moderate version had developed as a prescription for pious believers, one that could be upheld not only by ascetical "virtuosi," but by the general community of believers at large. It is noteworthy that this call for moderation is illustrated in various anecdotes relating to Salmān al-Fārisī; anecdotes that suggest that, having found the "true religion," he relinquished the extreme ascetical practices which he had adopted during his sojourns with Christian monks. For example, when he saw a gloomy Umm al-Dardāʾ, upset that her husband was avoiding intercourse with her, he reproached Abū l-Dardāʾ saying: "You owe your wife her right—pray and sleep, fast and eat." When the Prophet heard of Salmān's call for moderation in piety, he exclaimed: "Salmān was given [right] knowledge!" (al-Iṣfahānī, 1:244–5 [nos. 603–4]). It may not be superfluous to

3 Cf. a milder version in al-Iṣfahānī, 1:151 (338), according to which Ibn Maẓʿūn's wife complained that her husband neglected his duties to her as "he prays during the night and fasts during the day (*ammā l-layl fa-qāʾim wa-ammā l-nahār fa-ṣāʾim*)." The Prophet scolded him, saying: "Do you not take me as your model (*a-mā laka bī uswa*)?" See also Ibn al-Jawzī, *Talbīs Iblīs*, *al-bāb al-ʿāshir, faṣl fī dhikr aḥādīth tubayyinu khaṭaʾahum fī afʿālihim*, 223.

reiterate that we are not dealing here with the historicity of the biographies of Salmān, Umm and Abū al-Dardāʾ, and of other early personalities; rather, we are tracing the pious tendencies, projected into literary sources since the second/eighth century, that contributed to the construction of the ideal of ascetical behavior in moderation, also referred to as "mild asceticism."[4] Such moderation enabled, no doubt, the construction of a pious ideal, which could be practically applied by the Islamic public at large and not only by "specialists" belonging to an ascetical elite (Kinberg; Sviri, Terms, 24). An important aspect of this ideal had to do with the attitude to the "world," to "this world" (*al-dunyā*), and, *ipso facto*, to the "world-to-come" (*al-ākhira*).

4 The Ascetical Model in Islamic Mysticism

The equivalent term for "asceticism"/"renunciation" used in Islamic literature is *al-zuhd fī l-dunyā*, literally: ascribing little value to the world. What is valued over and beyond "this world" is "the world-to-come" (*al-ākhira*) and in it the abode of reward, *al-janna*, paradise, which every sincere believer hopes to attain. The opposite side of *al-janna* is *al-nār,* hellfire, where sinners and reprobates will be punished for their sins and misdeeds. The believers are thus thrown between "hope" (*rajāʾ*) for *al-janna* and "fear" (*khawf*) of *al-nār*. Among sincere believers, these polar religious emotions often resulted in committing themselves to practices that, in relation to the prescribed religious law, demanded extra effort, often referred to as "combat" (*mujāhada*). Such practices are often referred to as "supererogatory acts of piety" (*nawāfil*). Thus, *al-zuhd fī l-dunyā* suggests an approach that, on the one hand, implies extra effort and, on the other, demands caution to not exceed the prescribed moderation, as seen above. This caution produced an approach that can be represented by a saying attributed to Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 162/778), one of the renowned pietists of the second/eighth century. Sufyān said: "Abstention from this world [rests on] the curtailing of one's hope [for the future]; [it does] not [rest on] eating rough food and wearing a [coarse woolen] cloak" (Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, 42 §32). It clearly portrays the insistence of some early *zuhhād* that to cultivate an attitude of inward renunciation toward the world is better than to practice excessive acts of denial of it. Such an attitude is often characterized by the notion of *qiṣar al-amal*, the curtailing of hopes, namely, a mindset devoid of anticipation for the future.

4 For the coinage of this term and a detailed presentation of its features, especially in the Ḥanbalī school as regards food, see Hurvitz.

The sources that deal with themes and traditions relating to *al-zuhd fī l-dunyā* come, firstly, from the *zuhdī* literature, namely, from works specifically devoted to this topic to the point of choosing it for their titles. Works, bearing such titles as *Kitāb al-zuhd* or *Bāb fī l-zuhd*, mushroomed in the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries—as stand-alone books, in special sections of *ḥadīth* collections, as well as in *adab* compilations.[5] However, themes concerning *zuhd* concurrently appear also in a literary class that can be described as mystical. Thus, alongside the classical sources of the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries (*ḥadīth*, *adab*, commentaries, biographies), from which we derive most of our material and notions concerning *zuhd*, there appeared also works by "mystics," authors who subsequently became associated with Islamic mysticism, that is, Sufism (*taṣawwuf*). Since the development of *zuhdī* literature took place prior to the appearance of the first Sufi compilations in the late fourth/tenth century, I describe it as belonging to "the pre-compilatory phase" (Sviri, Mysticism, 244). Although *al-zuhd fī l-dunyā* occupied an important position in these mystical works, it took on a different direction to that presented in the non-mystical literature. As a consequence of this insistence—expressed by Sufyān and other early pietists—on one's inner attitude rather than external practices, the mystical teachers went on to devise a psycho-physical regime, designed to assist disciples and seekers to cultivate a "personality" that, in dealing with "this world," could resist the natural human inclination (in Arabic: *al-hawā*) towards it. What they devised could be named "a ladder of ascension," a regime that marks out stages and stations (*manāzil, maqāmāt*) of the progress to God. Rather than extraneous self-denial and world-denying practices, such regimes, built upon the aspiration to reach God's vicinity (*qurb*) *in the present lifetime* rather than in the life to come, combined ascetical practices (*riyāḍāt*) with astute and relentless self-observation (*muḥāsaba*, *murāqaba*). Among the early authors who contributed to this tendency and whose works inspired subsequent mystical teachings, the following should be mentioned: Shaqīq al-Balkhī (d. 195/810), al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857), Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896), al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. ca. 313/910), Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz (d. 286/899), and Abū l-Qāsim al-Junayd (d. 298/910). Although all became part and parcel of the later Sufi lore, at this early phase some of them were not identified as Sufis.

Let me now examine the direction that *al-zuhd fī l-dunyā* took in the works of three early mystics: Shaqīq al-Balkhī, al-Muḥāsibī, and al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī.

Shaqīq al-Balkhī is an early second/eighth-century author who hailed, according to his *nisba* and later hagiographies, from Balkh in Central Asia

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5 Gobillot lists 37 titles "dating from the 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th centuries" containing the term *zuhd* (and *raqā'iq*) dealing with various aspects of world-renunciation (*al-zuhd fī l-dunyā*).

(modern-day Afghanistan) (Nwyia, 213–31; al-Sulamī, 54–9). Bearing in mind his early lifetime, he is particularly important in charting the history of the mystical movement in Islam. His extant writing helps us in reassessing the co-existence of the ascetical and mystical movements in Islam, and thus in modifying the consensual—and by now obsolete—paradigm of "first there was asceticism, then came mysticism" (Sviri, Terms).

In a short treatise titled *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt* (*Rules of Conduct for Acts of Worship*), *zuhd* is the first of four "stages" (in his terminology: *manāzil*, sing. *manzila*), culminating in the lofty stage of the "love of God" (*al-maḥabba li-llāh*). The four stages that Shaqīq proposes are designed to transform the *nafs*, the lower self, from a self-absorbed, self-loving, earth-bound entity, manipulated by "desires" for this-worldly comforts, to an enlightened entity that can experience God's nearness and intimacy during this life. These stages start with *zuhd*—the most appropriate translation here, contextually, is "abstention," particularly abstention from excessive eating and drinking. This training of the lower self Shaqīq and other authors find necessary in order to curtail her[6] desires (*adab al-nafs bi-qaṭʿ al-shahawāt*). By avoiding eating in excess, the *nafs* becomes gradually accustomed to sustaining hunger (*jūʿ*), to being aware of other superfluous desires, and to eliminating them altogether (*fa-yaṭlaʿu fī tilka l-ḥāl ilā fuḍūl al-shahawāt*). Hence, this training develops a disregard for the world and its values (*fa-huwa yawmaʾidh*[in] *fī l-dunyā lā yaṭlubuhā maʿa l-ṭālibīn ... qad hānat ʿalayhi*). Superficially, such a process may appear as any ascetical regime, but it is primarily focused on transforming inner tendencies lying behind the external manifestation. The second stage in Shaqīq's "ladder" is "fear" (*khawf*). Shaqīq describes fear as inherently connected with *zuhd*, "for there is no *zuhd* without the fear of God ... He who adheres to *zuhd* necessarily adheres to fear (*fa-lā yalzamu l-ʿabd*[u] *al-zuhd*[a] *... ḥattā yalzama l-khawf*[a])." Psychologically, self- and world-denial stem from the fear of God and from the dreadful prospect of the retribution in hellfire. However, these intertwined stages, according to Shaqīq, must not remain perpetual; rather, when they reach their zenith—Shaqīq advises a time frame of forty days—they are followed by a loftier and gentler stage, the third and penultimate one: longing for paradise (*al-shawq ilā l-janna*). Here is how Shaqīq describes the signs of the change that takes place at this stage:

6 I choose to maintain the grammatical gender of *nafs* in Arabic by referring to this entity in the feminine. Sufi understanding of the different types of "self" should not to be confused with the philosophical classification of the "anima," a classification that derives from Plato and Aristotle—see more on this in Sviri, The Self.

> He (i.e. the practitioner) then becomes one who yearns (*al-mushtāq*), who loves ardently (*al-shadīd al-ḥubb*), a knower and a stranger (*al-ʿālim al-gharīb*), constantly behaving kindly (*al-dāʾim al-iḥsān*), one who does not hasten to acquire possessions (*alladhī lā yarūḥu li-kasb al-māl*).... When you see him, he is always smiling, pleased with what he possesses.... He is the one continuously fasting, the one continuously praying (*al-ṣawwām al-qawwām*).
>
> SHAQĪQ AL-BALKHĪ, 20

Obviously, these signs signify a transformation that occurs in this life, not what might or might not come about in the afterlife; it highlights a state of *being in the world*. Though Shaqīq's program contains "ascetical" elements, they are not its main characteristics. *Al-ṣawwām al-qawwām* may even be understood as an ironical reference to those who are immersed in fasting and praying at the expense of proceeding towards higher states. The fourth, last, and most elevated stage in Shaqīq's program is the love of God (*al-maḥabba li-llāh*). "Not everyone reaches this stage," he writes,

> for it is the loftiest and most splendid of all stages ... When God makes him [the seeker] reach this stage, the light of love is in his heart. It overpowers him without eliminating the lights of the previous stages of *zuhd*, fear, and longing for paradise ... His heart is filled with love and longing for Him; these, due to God's kindness, mercy, light, and generosity to him, make him forget the former stages of fear and longing to paradise.
>
> SHAQĪQ AL-BALKHĪ, 21

In other words, when immersed in the love of God—which is not simply a "concept" but a real state of being—the impact of the lower stages fades.

A pattern can thus be established: On the "ascending ladder," an advanced "stage" overshadows the lower stages. When one reaches the uppermost stage of the love of God, the lesser stages of abstention, fear, and longing for paradise dim out. To describe this phenomenon, which bears the marks of the psychological and mystical states of the illumined heart, Shaqīq uses the analogy of the sky lights:

> The light of abstention and fear in the heart resembles the light of a glittering star ... When the moon rises, the light of the star dims out, though the star remains as it was. Similarly, the light of longing overshadows the light of fear and abstention without reducing their original light. As for the light of longing in relation to the light of love, it is like the rising moon

> in relation to the sun. When the sun rises, it turns off the moon's light though the moon does not move from its place and its original light is not reduced at all. Thus, in worship, the light of the love of God is the strongest and loftiest.
>
> SHAQĪQ AL-BALKHĪ, 21

In Shaqīq's quadruple program, abstention (*zuhd*) and fear (*khawf*), though indispensable, are the lowest and weakest stages in the transformative progress of the heart. Above them rank longing (*shawq*) and love (*maḥabba*). All stages relate to lights which reside in the heart; namely, to psychological capacities that grow in intensity along a transformative passage. This passage takes place not in the afterlife but in the interiority of the believer during his/her worldly existence. More than projecting the religious aspiration toward an afterlife with its rewards and retributions, the transformative progress takes place during the earthly life. Sufis, early and late, have reiterated this point both by stressing the value of "curtailing the hopes for the future" (*qiṣar al-amal*) as well as in the maxim: "the Sufi is the son of the 'moment' (*al-ṣūfī ibn*^{u} *waqtihi*)."

Whether directly related to Shaqīq or not, similar programs are replicated in the Sufi system at large, in which *zuhd* is counted as an elementary and necessary stage on the ascending transformative ladder of the mystical progress. Thus, in *Kitāb al-lumaʿ* of Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988), for example, *zuhd* is the third station (*maqām*) in a sevenfold ladder; al-Kalābādhī (d. 380/990) counts *zuhd* as the second *maqām* between "repentance" (*tawba*) and "perseverance" (*ṣabr*); al-Anṣārī al-Harawī (d. 481/1089), in *Manāzil al-sāʾirīn*, prescribes a much more detailed program consisting of a hundred stations (*manāzil*), in which *zuhd* occupies the sixth position; al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234), in *ʿAwārif al-maʿārif*, discusses *zuhd* as a stage that follows "repentance" (*tawba*) and piety (*waraʿ*) and precedes perseverance (*ṣabr*) and poverty (*faqr*) (al-Suhrawardī, ch. 60, 283–9).

Regardless of the differences among these and other works, earlier and later, they are but a few examples, culled from a very rich library of Sufi works, that deal with the stages and states—often referred to as *maqāmāt wa-aḥwāl*—on the mystical ladder, and which count *zuhd* among the earlier and thus lesser stages on it (Massignon, 211; Nwyia, 171).

5 *Zuhd* as *Riyāḍat al-Nafs*

In Sufi literature, the main protagonist of the ascetical program is not the "world" (*al-dunyā*), but the self, the "lower self" (also the "carnal self")—*al-nafs*. The

Qurʾān speaks of three different "selves" (or "souls"): the tempting self (*al-nafs al-ammāra bi-l-sūʾ*—Q 12:53); the blaming self (*al-nafs al-lawwāma*—Q 75:2); and the contented, serene self (*al-nafs al-muṭmaʾinna*—Q 89:27). These verses inspired Sufi authors to view the *nafs* as an interior entity, which, because of her ties to the "inclination" (*al-hawā*) and to the "Adversary" (*Iblīs*, *al-ʿaduww*), starts off laden with negative characteristics, but may transform to become enlightened and serene. Such transformation can only come about through effort and a special "training"—*adab*, *riyāḍa*. In fact, *riyāḍa* is the Arabic equivalent of the Greek *askesis*, from which the term "asceticism" derives. The training is perceived of as "combat" (*mujāhada*, *jihād*), a view which is supported by various traditions attributed to the Prophet, for example: "Your worst enemy is the *nafs* that lies between your flanks (*aʿdā ʿaduwwika al-nafs bayna janbayka*)" (al-Bayhaqī 157, 343; Sviri, The Self, 196–7).[7]

It is easy to see in "combat" a reference to severe ascetic activities, which emulate the monastic paradigm mentioned above. However, the line taken by the early mystical authors, and subsequently in the later Sufi system at large, is often mistrustful—and therefore even contentious—of external practices: rather than eliminate the *nafs*, they argue, they strengthen her, for in her cunning manipulation, the *nafs* turns the tables on the ascetical seeker. In directing the "combat" inwardly rather than outwardly, Sufis insist on a "psychological" paradigm that demands constant watchfulness over the *nafs* and relentless reckoning with her. Such "watchful observation" is often referred to as *iʿtibār*, *taʾammul*, *tafakkur*, *naẓar*; the established term for "reckoning" with the *nafs* is *muḥāsabat al-nafs*.

In the Islamic mystical tradition, therefore, *al-zuhd fī l-dunyā* refers, above and beyond any other aspect of it, to a psychological effort to cut off any attachment to worldly matters—such as possessions, self-regard, social status—that please the *nafs*. Sufis refer to such an act as *qaṭʿ al-ʿalāʾiq*. Thus, for example, al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1074) cites a fourth/tenth-century Sufi of the Baghdadi school: "The worshipper does not find pleasure in his conduct with God as long as the pleasure of the *nafs* remains. For the people of truths (*ahl al-ḥaqāʾiq*) have cut off the attachments (*qaṭaʿū l-ʿalāʾiq*) that separate them from the Truth (*al-Ḥaqq*) before the attachments cut them off [from Him]" (al-Qushayrī, 79). And al-Sarrāj, in a chapter devoted to the station of *zuhd*, cites the following definitions by al-Junayd (d. 298/910) and by his teacher and maternal uncle Sarī al-Saqaṭī (d. ca. 253/867). Al-Junayd said: "*Zuhd* means that the hands are empty of possessions (*amlāk*) and the hearts are empty of greed

7 See also al-Bayhaqī, 163: "The combatant is he who fights his self (*al-mujāhid man jāhada nafsahu*)."

(*ṭamaʿ*)"; and Sarī said: "*Zuhd* means that the heart is empty of that which the hands have become empty of" (al-Sarrāj, 72).

One of the earliest authors in the line of "interiorizing" the combat with the *nafs*—in fact, the one who laid down the literary foundation for the inward-looking principle—and who emphasized the need to constantly watch over the *nafs*, is fittingly nicknamed al-Muḥāsibī, that is, "the one who holds oneself accountable." He was "an early mystic of Baghdad" (d. 243/857), to allude to one of the earliest studies on him by Margaret Smith, who inspired several lengthy studies.[8] Here is a telling citation from his epistle *Sharḥ al-maʿrifa wa-badhl al-naṣīḥa* (*Explaining Knowledge and Extending Advice*): "It is incumbent upon you, my brother, to reckon with your self (*muḥāsaba*), to know her (*maʿrifa*), and to oppose (*mukhālafa*) whatever she entices you to; for, more than by anything else, the self is characterized by what is despicable (*radhāʾil*)" (al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-maʿrifa*, 37–8).

Knowing and observing the self, for al-Muḥāsibī, entail paying special attention to her cunning propensity to deceive and delude the ascetics despite—or rather due to—their external acts of self- and world-denial. He writes: "Do not be deluded by your lengthy night vigils or by your prolonged fasting or by other external supererogatory acts of devotion (*nawāfil*) without knowing your self, your power (*bi-qudratika*—or should one read *bi-qudratihā*, 'by her power'?), and your Lord"(al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-maʿrifa*, 30).[9]

Al-Muḥāsibī even notes, disparagingly, that the ulterior motive for most ascetics, sometimes he names them *qurrāʾ* and *ahl al-taqashshuf*, is to feign poverty and exhibit piety in order to gain public praise and favor. In his *al-Masāʾil fī aʿmāl al-qulūb wa-l-jawāriḥ*, he writes: "there are many a renunciant (*muqill*) whose asceticism (*zuhd*) is apparent on the exterior of their body, while their hearts are possessed by desire." Then he cites a certain sage who finds the following in the "wisdom of Jesus":[10] "We have seen that some of the renunciants are full of love for this world, whereas others, wealthy ones, are devoid of love for this world; for example, the chosen ones Abraham, Jacob, David, and Solomon. Then, when God willed it, they abstained even from a grain of sand" (al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masāʾil*, 10).

In this line he also writes:

8 For a detailed list of studies concerning al-Muḥāsibī, see Picken, 2–13; for a detailed list of his works, see Picken, 67–122.

9 Cf. the ironical tone in Shaqīq's allusion to *al-ṣawwām al-qawwām*—see above.

10 The reference is probably to one of the Gospels; on Christian references in al-Muḥāsibī, see Picken, 2, 5; Sviri, Countless Faces, 65; van Ess, 27–8.

> I fear that most of the worshippers among our contemporaries are deceived and deluded (*makhdūʿīn mughtarrīn*); how many self-denying ones are there, wearing [ragged] clothes (*mutaqashshif fī libāsihi*), belittling themselves (*mutadhallil fī nafsihi*), eating trifle food from the rubble of the world; how many praying and fasting ones are there; warriors, pilgrims, weepers, preachers, and those who feign abstention from the world (*wa-muẓhir lil-zahāda fī l-dunyā*)—with no sincerity of conscience (*ʿalā ghayr ṣidq min al-ḍamīr*) to the Lord of the worlds.
>
> AL-MUḤĀSIBĪ, *Kitāb al-riʿāya*, 41

In the same vein, al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, a third/ninth-century prolific author from Tirmidh in Transoxiana—another early mystic who was given retrospectively a prestigious place in the Sufi tradition—draws a comparison between false and genuine Christian monasticism, on the one hand, and false and genuine asceticism of his time, on the other. He writes:

> The so-called ascetics of our time (*mutazahhidat zamāninā*), like [the pretentious monks] behave in this manner: they take up wearing wool and shabby clothes, eating leftovers and stale bread. Their wish is to exhibit asceticism (*iẓhār al-zuhd*) while their hearts are full of worldly desires, making their religion a means for their worldly drives.
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> AL-TIRMIDHĪ, *Nawādir*, ch. 5, 40; SVIRI, *Wa-rahbāniyyatan*

6 Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī's Physiology and Cosmology of the *Nafs*

Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī's views of the "lower self" (*nafs*) and the need to beware of her manipulations stem from his overall understanding of her physiological characteristics and cosmological origin. His analysis of the dynamics of the *nafs* and her association with pleasure, desire, and the base inclination is consistent, though hardly systematic or formal. Here is a condensed extract from a detailed, lengthy, and somewhat long-winded description:

> When the clay became alive, the *nafs* emerged, established herself within the interior of the body, and exhaled.… The *nafs* resides in the lungs and from here she breathes (*tatanaffasu*) due to the life force inherent in her.… Between the heart and the lung God placed a subtle vessel from where a whizzing wind flows through the blood vessels. The origin of this wind is the fire [of hell], it is created from this fire.… In this fire, joy and loveliness are located. He called [this wind] desire (*shahwa*).… When,

> due to an incidental memory, this wind stirs up in its vessel, the *nafs* senses it and her [own] fire is kindled.… The *nafs* is a turbid wind whose origin is earthy; she spreads within the blood vessels and fills them up in less than an eye-blink.… The origin of the base inclination (*hawā*) is the breath (*nafas*) of fire. When this breath emerges from the fire [of hell], it carries with it desires with which hellfire is surrounded,[11] joy (*faraḥ*) and attractive loveliness (*zīna*), and these it delivers to the *nafs*. Joy and loveliness arouse the *nafs*, due to the hot wind [i.e. desire] that is placed by her side in that subtle vessel; in less than an eye-blink, she spreads within the blood vessels that pervade the whole body, from head to foot. From her movement within the body the *nafs* derives pleasure (*ladhdha*) and is cheered up. Hence her desire and pleasure.
>
> AL-TIRMIDHĪ, *Riyāḍa*, 29–39[12]

To recap al-Tirmidhī's views, here is a short summary: The *nafs* is the life force that, on the day of creation, enlivened the clay (*ṭīna*) from which Adam was created. In the primordial act of creation, the *nafs* attached herself to the hollow interior (*jawf*) of Adam's body, and ever since she resides within the bodies of all human beings. Though Adam came to life by the breath of God, his body became vital and energized by means of the *nafs* which brought with her the earthly life force inherent in the clay, or soil, itself. The *nafs* is not an abstract concept; she is an entity located in the lungs. With the breath (*nafas*) and via the blood vessels, she moves through the entire body. She spreads in the body with immense speed and interacts with other organic energies akin to herself. One such energy is "desire" (*shahwa*), which is seen by al-Tirmidhī as an organic substance with a capacity for growth, movement, and fermentation. All these entities and energies have a cosmological origin: "desire" comes from the fire of hell;[13] it retains a kinship with joy (*faraḥ*), attractive loveliness (*zīna*), and the base inclination (*hawā*). All three take residence in the body and have an impact on the human being's psychological drives which manifest in his physical conduct. Desire is located in the vicinity of the *nafs*, within a subtle organ near the lungs. Both *nafs* and desire are characterized as hot, fiery winds that, when mobilized, awaken and kindle one another. The fast movement of the *nafs* in the bloodstream produces pleasure (*ladhdha*), another animated energy on which the *nafs* feeds. Pleasure interacts with the

11 According to the *ḥadīth: ḥuffat al-nār bi-l-shahawāt*. See Muslim, *Bāb al-janna*, 1; for more references, see *Kitāb al-riyāḍa*, 37.

12 For a detailed discussion concerning the process of self-transformation, see Sviri, The Self.

13 See the *ḥadīth* "*inna al-nār ḥuffat bi-l-shahawāt*" mentioned above.

inclination (*hawā*), and this cluster of impulses, filled with vital, organic, and cosmic energy, reaches the bodily organs by means of the fast movement of the *nafs* through the bloodstream. One example of such a meeting of energies is the gushing forth of the seminal fluid (*māʾ al-ṣulb*) in the pleasurable act of copulation (al-Tirmidhī, *Riyāḍa*, 32).

This complex structure stands at the root of al-Tirmidhī's suspicion not only of the *nafs*, but also of the ascetic behavior. According to him, all behavior and every ambition, be it for a good or a bad cause, stems from the *nafs*. The deep entanglement of the person with the *nafs* is reflected, linguistically, in the reflexive pronoun *bi-nafsī*, "by myself." Personhood, by definition, is associated with the *nafs*; the *nafs* is the person, the "ego." In his *Sīrat al-awliyāʾ*, al-Tirmidhī offers a detailed description, at times painful in its honest self-analysis, of the path a seeker must take in order to purify his heart in his wish (*irāda*) to reach God's vicinity. On his path, he oscillates between periods of extreme ascetic effort (*jahd*, *mujāhada*, *riyāḍa*), on the one hand, and, on the other, of desolate, sober realization of the futility of this effort. In *Sīrat al-awliyāʾ* he offers a detailed description of the seeker's ascetic struggle at the beginning of his quest (*irāda*): it consists of abstaining from food, drink, clothes; forcing abstention on all parts of his body: his hearing, seeing, talking, handling, and walking; seclusion (*ʿuzla*)—in fact, any of the ascetic practices that can be culled from the familiar monastic inventory (al-Tirmidhī, *Sīrat al-awliyāʾ*, 5 §10). But to no avail. The *nafs* takes control and ascribes to herself all his achievements. She is, writes al-Tirmidhī, like a tree whose branches keep shooting up anew even when the seeker exerts all his effort to uproot it altogether. The awareness of this hopeless situation comes about by means of "self-observation." Al-Tirmidhī uses the verb *naẓara* (to observe, investigate) rather than *ḥāsaba* (from which *muḥāsaba* derives). By means of self-observation (*naẓar*), the seeker finds that his attempts at harnessing his bodily limbs (*jawāriḥ*) to steer away from desirable objects may result, indeed, in physical abstention, yet his *nafs* remains full of desire. "He says: it is all but one desire" (al-Tirmidhī, *Sīrat al-awliyāʾ*, §6). In other words: he finds that external abstention does not eliminate the inner, psychological, desire. If one sincerely wishes to achieve purification on the path to God, one should withdraw inwardly from any desire. This calls for an even more unwavering observation, for how can one get rid of the fundamental, original desire to attain God's nearness and to receive the spiritual gifts that are associated with it? Paradoxically, this, too, is an expression of desire. When the seeker finds that even behind this lofty desire the *nafs* is at work, and that no willful act on his part is devoid of the *nafs*'s machination, he becomes powerless and perplexed (*muḍtarr ḥayrān*). At the point of helplessness and despair the seeker relinquishes all his aspirations and delusions of self-power

and places himself entirely in God's hands. "Then divine mercy reaches him, and he is granted mercy" (*fa-adrakathu l-raḥma fa-ruḥima*) (al-Tirmidhī, *Sīrat al-awliyāʾ*, 15 §29). To this al-Tirmidhī finds an appropriate reference in Q 27:62: "He who answers the constrained when he calls unto Him, and removes the evil and appoints you to be successors in the earth. Is there a god with God?" (tr. Arberry, 388).

Accordingly, the ultimate ascetical act is to renounce all desires and ambitions, including the desire for abstention. This is sometimes called *tark al-zuhd*.

7 Relinquishing Abstention (*Tark al-Zuhd, al-Zuhd fī l-Zuhd*)

In one of the earliest Sufi compilations, in the chapter on *zuhd* in *Kitāb al-taʿarruf li-madhhab ahl al-taṣawwuf* by al-Kalābādhī (d. 380/990), the following saying by al-Shiblī (d. 334/945)—a Baghdadi Sufi associated with al-Junayd—is cited:

> In reality, *zuhd* does not exist: one either abstains from what does not belong to him—this does not count as abstention; or one abstains from what belongs to him—what kind of abstention is this, if the object [of abstention] is with him? There is nothing but harnessing the *nafs*, generosity, and comforting the other.
>
> AL-KALĀBĀDHĪ, 94

The compiler, al-Kalābādhī, adds an explanation: "He, al-Shiblī, seems to define *zuhd* as the relinquishing of something (*tark al-shayʾ*) that [in the first place] does not belong to him; for what does not belong to him cannot be relinquished, as it is already relinquished (*li-annahu matrūk*); and what belongs to him, he [also] cannot relinquish." The notion of *zuhd* here seems to revolve round holding on to, or letting go of, possessions. However, it suggests that "abstention," just like "possession," is in and of itself a delusion: as long as one associates anything with oneself, it belongs to oneself, even if one is intent on relinquishing it. Since nothing really belongs to a person—whence abstention? Paradoxically, the low esteem with which the world and its possessions—material or otherwise—are regarded, leads to a devaluation of abstention itself. A variation on al-Shiblī's saying, cited in al-Suhrawardī's *ʿAwārif al-maʿārif*, is more succinct and more explicit: "*Zuhd* is heedlessness (*ghafla*), for this world is nothing, and *zuhd* in nothing is heedlessness (*al-zuhd fī lā shayʾ ghafla*)" (al-Suhrawardī, 283).

Al-Shiblī's radical assertions do not reveal an unusual approach in Sufi teaching. On the contrary, Sufi compilations contain many sayings and anecdotes in

a similar vein. One of the best-known illustrations of the suspicion with which Sufis regard *zuhd* is found in al-Qushayrī's *Epistle*. When Abū Yazīd al-Basṭāmī (d. mid-third/ninth century) was asked what his experience of *zuhd* was at the beginning of his path, he answered: "*Zuhd* has no stage (*manzila*)" and then elaborated: "For three days I was [in the stage of] *zuhd* and on the fourth day I came out of it. On the first day I abstained from the world and everything in it; on the second day I abstained from the hereafter; on the third day I abstained from everything but God. On the fourth day I remained with nothing but God" (al-Qushayrī, 38). And Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), in a chapter on *zuhd* in his *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, retells Abū Yazīd's story, but modifies its conclusion with a punch line that has become proverbial: After the third day, God asks Abū Yazīd: "What do you want, Abū Yazīd?" and the latter answers: "I want not to want (*urīdu an lā urīda*), for I am the wanted (*al-murād*) and you are the wanting (*al-murīd*)" (Ibn al-ʿArabī, 3:319).

The above-mentioned anecdote about Abū Yazīd is not merely an extraordinary story. Thus, Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Ḥafṣ al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1235), in his authoritative compilation *ʿAwārif al-maʿārif*, likewise describes the relinquishing of the individual will and choice (*tark al-irāda wa-l-ikhtiyār*) as a hallmark of Sufism at large. He writes:

> The people of al-Shām do not know the difference between Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) and poverty (*faqr*). They base themselves on Q 2:273 and on the Prophetic tradition according to which the poor will enter paradise before the wealthy.... The Sufi, however, does not relinquish things in expectation of a promised compensation [in the future], but in order to experience immediate mystical states (*aḥwāl mawjūda*), for he is "the son of the moment" (*fa-innahu bn^u waqtihi*). The Sufi finds blemish in [having] choice and will, for in every state he stands according to the will of God, not according to his own will. Hence, he does not see any merit in poverty per se nor in wealth per se. Wherever God places him, therein lies the merit, since he looks to the permission (*idhn*) which God has given him to stand where he stands.
>
> AL-SUHRAWARDĪ, 38

In the last resort, al-Suhrawardī emphasizes the significance of the act of total "relinquishing" (*tark*) by introducing the paradox *al-zuhd fī l-zuhd*. He writes:

> Abstention from abstention means to step out of making choices as regards abstention; for the one who abstains (*al-zāhid*) chooses abstention and wills it; ... however, when he is placed in the station of relinquishing his will (*maqām tark al-irāda*) and is stripped off of his choice

> (*wa-nsalakha min ikhtiyārihi*), God reveals to him what his will [of him] is, and then he relinquishes this world by what God wills, not by what his *nafs* wills; his abstention then becomes by God (*fa-yakūna zuhduhu bi-llāh taʿālā ḥīnaʾidh*[in]).
>
> AL-SUHRAWARDĪ, 283

8 Conclusion

Documentary evidence from as early as the eighth century CE reveals Muslim men and women who were stirred by a longing to seek, while still in their earthly lives, God's love (*ḥubb*), intimacy (*uns*), and nearness (*qurb*). Stemming from this longing, they also aspired to gain a direct "knowledge of God" (*al-ʿilm bi-llāh*, *maʿrifa*). The elements of nearness to God, love of God, and a direct knowledge of Him became the defining features of the mystical life in Islam since these early beginnings. Aspirants were seeking to become "men of sincerity" (*ahl al-ṣidq*), men of certitude (*ahl al-yaqīn*), and God's friends (*awliyāʾ Allāh*)—a spiritual elite (*al-khāṣṣa*) distinguished from ordinary worshippers (*al-ʿāmma*) and even from pietists (*ahl al-taqwā*). They believed that as a prerequisite for attaining the longed-for mystical states, their interiorities, their "selves," must become purified of all attachments and appetites. Thus, they focused their effort on "cutting off their worldly attachments" (*qaṭʿ al-ʿalāʾiq*) and on "curtailing the selfish appetites" (*qaṭʿ al-shahawāt*). This preliminary stage of the transformative process they often named "abstention" or "renunciation" (*zuhd*). Rather than an extroverted social or religious phenomenon, *zuhd* (also *zahāda*), in the sense of abstention from worldly interests, denoted, therefore, a stage in the process of self-transformation. In this transformative process, the aspirants exerted themselves voluntarily to effortful acts and practices that extended beyond the prescriptions of the religious law. Such efforts they sometimes named "strenuous battling" (*mujāhada*) or "battling with the lower-self" (*jihād al-nafs*) or "the training of the lower-self" (*riyāḍat al-nafs*). According to Shaqīq al-Balkhī, one of the earliest authors whose work is extant, the objective of such efforts was to allow the dark forces governing human nature to transform into luminous energies; this luminosity heralded the desired mystical existence. Shaqīq names the light that emanates from such efforts "the light of abstention" (*nūr al-zuhd*); to him, as well as to most early mystics, this term signified an inner state rather than any outer manifestations. Intimate nearness to God, resulting from passionate search and voluntary efforts, was anchored in a divine saying (*ḥadīth qudsī*) known as *ḥadīth al-nawāfil* ("the tradition concerning supererogatory acts of worship"). This

divine saying points to no less than a "synergy" between man and God. In it God says:

> My servant does not come near to Me by performing [anything but] My Commandments, but then he comes ever nearer to Me by performing voluntary acts of worship (*nawāfil*), so that I love him. And when I love him, I become his ear by which he hears, his sight by which he sees, his tongue by which he speaks, his hand by which he wards off, his foot by which he walks, and his heart by which he understands. By Me he performs these things.
>
> AL-TIRMIDHĪ, *Nawādir*, ch. 260, 458

The human-divine synergy became the subtext and explanation of the marvelous, often referred to as "miraculous," deeds attributed to the "friends of God" (*karāmāt al-awliyā'*). This, ultimately, is the path taken by those whose final ambition, paradoxically, is to relinquish not only their self-based will but also their choice of "abstention." Thus, by becoming empty of both, they seek to reveal, and live by, God's choice for them.

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CHAPTER 9

Sufi Views of Nature

Munjed M. Murad

1 Introduction

What most Western people understand by "nature" in various contemporary discourses does not correspond exactly to the conceptual categories used in the Sufi tradition. In Sufi cosmologies, the corporeal universe is part of a much broader cosmos and is presented often as contingent ontologically upon a chain of cosmic levels that are part of the "realm of creation" (*ʿālam al-khalq*). Altogether, the universe encompasses "everything other than God" (*mā siwā Llāh*), and includes planes of reality that are beyond the vision of most people's sight and that are populated with an indefinite number of beings. This study, however, expounds Sufi views of the collectivity of that which is within the specifically corporeal environment and that is not made by human beings, or that which is within the borders of the modern definition of the natural world. This is not to say that the term "the natural world" has not been used in Sufi literature. For example, the Andalusian metaphysician Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) makes reference to *al-ʿālam al-ṭabīʿī,* which translates literally to "the natural world" (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2:88).

Before proceeding further, I am obliged to mention that while this chapter surveys several Sufi views of nature, each must be understood within its own framework, even if mentions of doctrines follow each other. In fact, I myself have heard *khalṭ-i mabḥath kardan* (Per. "the mixing of intellectual discourses") described as a sin, and surely it would be an error of scholarship. That the following doctrines have been taught by Sufis does not mean necessarily that they explain each other, in a similar way to how various factors of philosophical frameworks function in tandem with other factors of their respective framework but not necessarily well with those of other frameworks, notwithstanding the legitimacy of a number of generalizations, such as the general observation that Islamic scripture has been taken as a central criterion for Sufis. Moreover, not all Sufi paths have incorporated the contemplation of nature into their spiritual practice. Nonetheless, numerous Sufis over the centuries have expounded teachings concerning the cosmos. The following discusses but a few of them.

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For Sufis, as well as other Muslims in general, the Qurʾān, *Ḥadīth*, and Sunnah have had a central formative role in the doctrinal bases of their worldviews and prescribed actions, including doctrines that concern the natural environment. Moreover, nature has a prominent place in the Qurʾānic landscape (see Bakar; Nasr, Islamic View). As a result, Sufis draw on an abundance of scriptural material for contemplating the role of nature in their spiritual journeys, notwithstanding the use of extra-scriptural materials, such as the Greek Neoplatonic, which are themselves read through a Qurʾānic lens.

One central function of Islamic cosmology is to provide a sacralized view of the cosmos in light of revelation (see Chittick, Islamic Cosmology; Nasr, Cosmos and the Natural Order; Nasr, *Introduction*). It also helps to facilitate the contemplation of nature, which the Qurʾān calls for regularly and the Sufi path can involve (Nasr, Contemplation; Nasr, Cosmos and the Natural Order, 354; Nasr, *Introduction*, 2). Moreover, Islamic cosmology provides a map for the gnostic (*ʿārif*) to journey through and transcend both the world and one's own self. The central function of Islamic cosmology can be described also as the exposition of the unicity of a created order that reflects the Unity of God (*al-tawḥīd*) (Nasr, *Introduction*, 35).

Numerous cosmological frameworks have been formulated or influenced by the Akbarian school, which begins formally with the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī (Chittick, Ibn al-ʿArabî). Doctrines such as those of the Five Divine Presences (*al-ḥaḍarāt al-ilāhiyya al-khams*) and the Oneness of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) show how each entity is cosmologically and metaphysically an emanation of the Divine, without negating Divine Transcendence (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 55 [tr. 40–1]). According to Akbarian metaphysics, as well as other metaphysical frameworks, this world consists of so many manifestations (sing. *tajallī*, pl. *tajalliyyāt*) of God, which are shadows of immutable entities (*aʿyān thābita*) within God's Knowledge (Chittick, *Self-Disclosure*, xix–xxi, 20–2; Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 83–8). The substance of all that exists is the Breath of the Infinitely Merciful (and Compassionate) (*nafas al-Raḥmān*) that is breathed upon the immutable entities, ultimately connecting each creature of this world to its principle in God (Nasr, Cosmos and the Natural Order, 346–7). Moreover, given that God is Omnipresent, this world itself can be said to be a Divine Presence (Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 4–6; Nasr, Cosmos and the Natural Order, 353).

2 The Wisdom Underlying Creation

The early Sufi writer Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996) teaches that one's attitude towards created phenomena is tied to one's relationship with God. Criticizing

the artisanry of the world (*ṣunʿ*) is to criticize the Artisan (*ṣāniʿ*), which is antithetical to the ways of the folk of contentment (*ahl al-riḍā*). Even the criticism of a day of extreme temperature, for example, is a mark of ingratitude (*kufr*) and bad character (*sūʾ al-khuluq*). This is not to say that one cannot speak of one's difficulties to another person, so long as the instrument of difficulty is itself seen as a blessing and there is no intention of criticizing what God has designed or decreed, which al-Makkī would consider tantamount to backbiting about God (*al-ghība li-ṣāniʿihā*). Those that follow the proper courtesy (*adab*) towards God refrain from an attitude of fault-finding towards creation, composed as it is of the many gifts from God, but rather extol the Divine in their experiences of the world (Khalil, 378–9). As the renowned Persian Sufi and theologian Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111) and others have argued, there is nothing in the realm of possibility that is more wondrous than what actually is (*laysa fī l-imkān abdaʿ mimmā kān*) (al-Ghazzālī, *Iḥyāʾ*, 8:244–6; Griffel, 225–31).

Every product says something of its producer. Every book bears the signature of its author and its scribe in the ideas it conveys and in its form, the arrangement of its content, the handwriting in which it is written, the choice of format, and numerous other details. Al-Ghazzālī uses the parable of creation as a skillfully handwritten text that points to the great skills of its Author and Scribe (*Iḥyāʾ*, 8:226). Every natural phenomenon necessarily says something of its Author and Scribe, or rather of God. For al-Ghazzālī everything speaks of Divine Wisdom and is a result of Divine Mercy. In *al-Ḥikma fī makhlūqāt Allāh*, al-Ghazzālī mentions that the hotness of fire, the beauty of trees, the movement of clouds, a dog's sense of protectiveness, the fact that a fly has six legs, and innumerable other aspects of countless other natural phenomena are what they are for good reason, and each can be an impetus for gratitude to God. In this treatise and in the *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, al-Ghazzālī promotes the contemplation of nature in religious life and galvanizes his Muslim readers towards a sense of awe of and gratefulness to the Creator for the innumerable benefits of and wonders in Creation (*Iḥyāʾ*, 9:227–305).

3 Nature and Mystical Contemplation

The Qurʾān's reference to natural phenomena as *āyāt Allāh*, or as God's signs or verses, implies that the cosmos parallels the verses of the Qurʾān (also *āyāt*) and that it too can be read. In juxtaposition with each other, the Qurʾān has been described as the written Qurʾān (*al-Qurʾān al-tadwīnī*) and the natural world as the cosmic Qurʾān (*al-Qurʾān al-takwīnī*). Expositors of Akbarian and Persian Sufi traditions have written much on this issue. Ibn al-ʿArabī makes

reference to the world as the great text (*al-muṣḥaf al-kabīr*) (Nasr, *Man and Nature*, 94–5). The Qur'ān and the cosmos have also been termed in Islamic literature *al-kitāb al-masṭūr* and *al-kitāb al-manẓūr*, or the lined/written book and the observed/visual book, respectively (Brown, 7). The Transoxanian Sufi ʿAzīz al-Dīn Nasafī (d. ca. 661/1263) writes that the cosmos is one of God's Books and that each day the passage of time and destiny set forth its chapters, verses, lines, and letters for human beings to read and from which to learn (Nasafī, 306–8 [tr. 202–3]). The Persian Sufi Maḥmūd Shabistarī (d. after 737/1337) also refers to the universe as a book of revelation, with substances as consonants, accidents as vowels, different creatures as verses, one entity a parallel to the Qur'ānic chapter *al-Fātiḥa*, another to *al-Ikhlāṣ*, and so on (Shabistarī, vss. 201–11).[1]

As mentioned above, many Sufis, including Ibn al-ʿArabī, see the cosmos as also the many loci of the manifestations of God (Chittick, *Self-Disclosure*, passim; Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 89–104; Izutsu, 152–8; Nasr, Cosmos as Theophany; Nasr, God, 3–11). But the synthesis of all Divine Names lies within human beings alone, who at heart are manifestations of the Name *Allāh*. The human being who conforms fully to the Divine rises through the cosmic hierarchy and becomes a central theophany within creation (Murad).

One central image in Sufi discourses on the world is the image of the veil (*ḥijāb*) (see Mesbahi). Although the world, seen positively, is a theophany, seen in its negative aspect, it veils the Divine—even though a veil not only covers but also reveals something of the form it is covering. Concerning the famed statement that the "Beloved hid His Face with seventy thousand veils of light and darkness," the Persian Sufi metaphysician Fakhr al-Dīn ʿIrāqī (d. 688/1289) explains that were these veils other than the Divine the intensity of "the Splendor of His Face" would have instantaneously incinerated them. The luminous veils are "manifestation, benevolence, and Beauty," while the tenebrous veils are "nonmanifestation, all-subjugation, and Majesty." Therefore, although the world and all of existence are so many veils, ultimately "He Himself is His own veil" (ʿIrāqī, 96–7).

The contemplative is in need of particular means to read the signs of God that are "upon the horizons" (Qur'ān 41:53).[2] Aside from the cosmic reality of the Universal Man, the sight of the sacred in nature is not a projection of the human onto nature, but something objective—to project a doctrine onto reality would be incongruous with the spirit and even goal of Sufism, which is to conform to the Real (*al-Ḥaqq*). Albeit in a different context, the European Sufi and

1 While the translations are my own, all citations here of the *Gulshan-i rāz* follow the numbering of verses in Robert Abdul Hayy Darr's 2007 translation. See also the forthcoming translation and commentary of an authority on the topic of Islam and the environment, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, on this treatise.

2 Qur'ānic translations are taken from Nasr et al.

traditionalist Frithjof Schuon (d. 1419/1998), whose Muslim name was Shaykh ʿĪsā Nūr al-Dīn, writes (Schuon, 56):

> It is not a question of projecting a supersaturated and disillusioned individualism into a desecrated nature—this would be a piece of worldliness like any other—but, on the contrary, of finding again in nature, on the basis of a traditional outlook, the divine substance which is inherent in it; in other words, to "see God everywhere," and to see nothing apart from His mysterious presence.

Like many others, the Andalusian mystic of the *Muʿtabirūn* tradition Ibn Barrajān (d. 536/1141) explains that a key to deciphering the signs of God in the created world is the close study of revealed scripture, since the cosmos and the Qurʾān parallel and explain each other (Casewit, 200). The Qurʾān points to an Islamic cosmic ambience, and is the foundation for perceiving nature's spiritual significance, its primordial revelatory message, and even theophanic character (Nasr, Cosmos and the Natural Order, 345–6).

The popular Sufi epithet *ʿārif bi-Llāh*, or "gnostic through God," echoes the need for the Intellect (*al-ʿaql*) in order to read existentially the spiritual messages of the cosmos. Intellect here is not to be confused with reason, but rather is to be seen as a divine power and faculty within a human being. Similar to other Arabic terms that have several meanings with vastly different or even opposite connotations in Sufi literature, the term *ʿaql* has been used to refer both to reason and to the Intellect. As a term, in the former sense *ʿaql* is largely utilized pejoratively while in the latter it is used positively. Rūmī highlights this phenomenon in the verse: "Partial intellect (*ʿaql-i juzʾī*) has given Intellect (*ʿaql*) a bad name; worldly desire has deprived man of Desire" (Rūmī, 5:463, see also 4:1240–62, 5:459–76; Aavani, 165–92; Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 35–7, 65–8). It is the eye of the heart that is divine and alone can see God (Aavani, 80–1). The highest degree of knowledge is knowledge of God, but it can be attained only through God. It is the *divine* quality of this means that allows the contemplative to penetrate through the multivalence of creation and to traverse ultimately from the symbol of God to God Himself. Ibn al-ʿArabī explains this matter as a necessary condition for true sight in the theophanic event: "When my Beloved manifests, with what eye do I see Him? With His Eye, not mine. For none sees Him but He" (*Futūḥāt*, 2:63.160). While most people see only worldly objects when encountering quotidian phenomena, the Sufi whose ego has disappeared and who has attained mystical union with the Divine, sees the Beloved everywhere (Rūmī, 6:3640–5). The Sufi goal, moreover, is not described usually as seeing the spiritual in the quotidian, but rather as knowing or loving God, to which the sight of the spiritual in quotidian experiences is secondary.

Concerning the relationship between God and the world, Ibn al-ʿArabī expounds a doctrine of incomparability (*tanzīh*) and similarity (*tashbīh*), with which he explains that everything is similar to God by virtue of its qualities, but incomparable by virtue of its imperfections (*Fuṣūṣ*, 53–60 [tr. 37–50]). He also writes of phenomena as participating simultaneously in God and not, or to use his famed formula *Huwa lā Huwa* (He/not He) (Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 7). Every seeing creature participates in a quality of God, but no creature is God the All-Seeing. Ibn al-ʿArabī likens this relationship between the world and God to the relationship between a shadow and the person to whom the shadow belongs (*Fuṣūṣ*, 87 [tr. 95–104]; see also Izutsu, 87–98). Insofar as a shadow has the qualities of the person casting it, the world participates in Divine Qualities, but similar to how a shadow does not have the qualities of the person casting it, the world is imperfect and is not God.

Explaining theophany, Shabistarī teaches that God *is* and the world is not, and any positive quality or entity in the world is such inasmuch as it is a reflection of the Divine. The world as a mirror of non-being reflects Being or God's Names and Qualities (vss. 130–64). Similar to the way in which any number is a multiple of one, the many creatures are the many reflections of the One in the world of multiplicity (vss. 9, 136, 309–11, 484–6, 704–16). A widely known Arabic verse asserts: "And in everything He has a symbol, serving as proof that He is One" (Gīlānī, 198).

The Persian Akbarian expositor Nūr al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 898/1492) shares in his reflections on his study of the book of creation that he saw and read nothing but "the Real's Essence and the Real's essential tasks" (Murata et al., 166). The Chinese Muslim Liu Chih (d. 1142/1730) comments in his translation of Jāmī's *Lawāʾiḥ* that "the Lord delimits Himself through the ten thousand things" (Murata et al., 167). The tenth/sixteenth-century Malay Sufi Ḥamza Fanṣūrī considers the being that people attribute to the universe as really belonging to God (see al-Attas, 74). Often spoken of as *waḥdat al-wujūd*, this topic has been elaborated upon widely in Sufi discourses (see Chittick and Wilson).

With knowledge of the Qurʾānic proclamation (16:3) that the whole of the cosmos is created by the Truth (*bi-l-ḥaqq*), gnostics have read its cosmic pages for their spiritual mysteries and the Truth of the Divine that they symbolize (Nasr, Cosmos and Natural Order, 346–7). Rūmī exclaims: "If only the world of existence had tongues, so that it might lift veils off of divine mysteries" (3:4725).[3] At one point, the contemplative sees everything as a symbol and

3 With the exception of this verse, of which I use a famed oral version, all references here to the *Mathnawī* follow the version edited by Reynold A. Nicholson. The following online resource

theophany, and so Shabistarī writes: "Contemplation is going from the unreal to the Real, and seeing the Absolute in the relative" (vs. 72).

According to this doctrine, expounded in Akbarian and Persian Sufi traditions, Being is only God's and the world is a realm of non-being in which the play of Divine Names and Qualities takes place through continuous manifestations. Many Sufis have commented on this continuity of manifestation. According to Rūmī, everything in the world appears anew in the sight of the spiritually perceptive (4:2381–3). Shabistarī explains that although the world seems to be in uninterrupted existence, the experience of it is like the fast circling of a fiery substance that appears deceptively as an uninterrupted full circle (vss. 10–15, 706–13). According to this Sufi doctrine, every phenomenon that one sees or senses is always new and unique, since God continuously renews creation in a constant process of contraction (*qabḍ*) and expansion (*basṭ*) (Nasr, *Knowledge*, 233); Jāmī writes: "To the world's reality at every instant, one Name gives annihilation, another subsistence" (Jāmī, 190; see also ʿIrāqī, 81–3; Izutsu, 205–17). Rūmī mentions that one image for such continuity is the reflection of the moon on running water. He explains that while the water changes continuously, the moon remains the same, and that such is the parable of God's Reality and Its reflections in the world (6:3172–83; Aavani, 85–6, 120–1).

4 The Natural World Praising God

The Qur'ān proclaims: "The seven heavens, and the earth, and whosoever is in them glorify Him. And there is no thing, save that it hymns His praise, though you do not understand their praise …" (17:44). Many Sufis have read verses like this literally and understood that *all* beings glorify Him. This includes the apparently animate and the apparently inanimate, including creatures that do not appear to exhibit intelligence. The cosmos is alive and all its many members conscious, and so it is a congregation of worshippers that includes angels, lightning, mountains, dogs, grains of sand, stars, rivers, spiders, stones, seaweed, birds, clouds, and countless others, all of which/whom praise God, regardless of human perception of their worship (Aavani, 69–81). As for nature not appearing to glorify God, Rūmī remarks that if a human being cannot perceive the glorification in another human being's prayers—different sects denying the legitimacy of the other's genuine prayers—then not perceiving that of apparently inanimate creatures should not mean that the latter do

has also been of significant help in the process of researching the *Mathnawī:* www.masnavi.net.

not participate in glorification too (Aavani, 69–70). Rūmī says the same of the experience of love in animals (5:2008–11). Ibn al-ʿArabī also speaks of God as unveiling mercifully the worshipful speech of natural phenomena to certain Sufis who retreat into the wilderness (*Futūḥāt*, 2:51.87).

According to Rūmī, those shackled inwardly to their desires for the material world cannot hear the spiritual voices of nature (1:1019–22). But those who use the spiritual ear (*gūsh-i jān*) and the spiritual eye (*cheshm-i jān*) are capable of perceiving the prayers of earth and mud (Rūmī, 1:1459–62, 3:1008–22; Aavani, 76–81). While the uninitiated perceive all inanimate objects as being void of life, the Prophet, who signifies the peak of human spiritual capability, hears the subtle discourses of clod and clay, and perceives the world as being filled with love and bounty, as well as plunged in the glorification of God (Rūmī, 4:3532–5).

Through different means, Ibn al-ʿArabī (quoted in Rustom, Great Chain, 56) reaches the same verdict on the life of the apparently inanimate:

> The name Alive (*al-Ḥayy*) is an essential name of God—glory be to Him! Therefore, nothing can emerge from Him but living things. Hence, all of the cosmos is alive, for indeed the nonexistence of life, or the existence in the cosmos of an existent thing that is not alive, has no divine support, whereas every contingent thing must have a support. So, what you consider to be inanimate is in fact alive.

For Rūmī, given that human praise is voluntary and that saints occupy the highest rung of the ladder of existence, being the consummation of the chain of being, of all the kinds of praise from the members of creation, that of a realized human being is the greatest (Aavani, 73–5). At the apex of cosmic praise stands the Prophet, whose most popular traditional names each involve a different relationship with praise (Muḥammad and Aḥmad, as well as Maḥmūd and Ḥāmid) and whose hands will hold the Banner of Praise (*liwāʾ al-ḥamd*) on the Day of Resurrection (Chodkiewicz). The praise of the Universal Man is equivalent to that of the whole of the cosmos (Aavani, 74). However, the praise of all, including the saint, is in need of Divine Succor in order to come about. There is no praise of God uttered without God first inspiring the heart of the one praising to do so. Both prayer and its answer come from God (Aavani, 74–5). Moreover, as the Persian Islamic philosopher and synthesizer of Akbarian metaphysics and Peripatetic philosophy Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640) explains, it is the very being of creatures that praises God, and so the cosmogonic act of God saying “Be!” is God’s own Praise (Rustom, *Triumph*, 66–70).

The praise of all of creation is really God's own Praise of Himself. He is ultimately the one praising and the one praised (Aavani, 74–5; Chodkiewicz, 45–7).

5 The Cosmos in Love

One of the dominant realities that Sufis have considered in the relationship between creation and Creator, with implications for intra-creation relationship, is love. Rūmī, the famed troubadour of Divine Love, expounds a view of the universe in which the force behind all motion and life is love (*ʿishq*), without which the world would be inanimate and frozen. The cycles of the cosmos are each a symbol of true love, as in the night and day that chase after each other, each always catching the foot of the other in a cosmic dance. The thirst that creatures have for water is the effect of an attraction that the two have for each other. The sky and earth love each other as mates and taste continuously the delights of each other. Every particle of the cosmos has its mate and is attracted to it. In summary, the cosmos is the coming together of an indefinite number of lovers (Rūmī, 3:4397–4420, 6:2675–8; Aavani, 132–3; see also Clarke, 48–9).

Love is what animates the cosmos. Moreover, according to the Punjabi Sufi Sulṭān Bāhū (d. 1102/1691), and as mentioned above concerning Divine Self-Praise, in the ultimate sense the single protagonist in this cosmic story of love is none other than God. He is Lover, Beloved, and Love itself. As Sulṭān Bāhū writes (16, translation modified):

> He plays the game of love by Himself. He is Himself sight, Himself seer, and Himself seen; He is Himself love, Himself lover, and Himself beloved. If you remove the veil from yourself, you will find One Essence. All of the duality that you see is due to the conditions of your eyes.

6 Metacosm, Microcosm, and Macrocosm

That God's signs (*āyāt*) are found in the horizons and in the souls of human beings implies a trifold relationship between God, humanity, and the universe, or the Metacosm, microcosm, and macrocosm, respectively. The premise that *āyāt* are present in the horizons and in the souls of human beings is taken from Q 41:53, and is explained in many commentaries (see e.g. Ridgeon, 179–80; see further Aavani, 54–5; Chittick, *Me & Rumi*, 136–7; Chittick, *Sufi Doctrine of*

Rumi, 51–4). While the Akbarian tradition explains that both the cosmos and the human being reflect God in the theophanic sense, it claims that the former does so in a dispersed manner and the latter in a focused manner. Humanity alone has the potential to reflect God's Totality in one single "space" (Chittick, *Sufi Doctrine of Rumi*, 49; Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 17; Murad, 306–7; see also Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 35–43 [tr. 3–17]). Within the heart of the Universal Man is the Throne of God and no occupant other than the Divine Himself. For this reason, Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya (d. 185/801) of Baṣra declines the invitation of others to behold in awe the signs of God in the world, claiming that God is already within her heart (ʿAṭṭār, 47; see further Murata, 314–16).

For Rūmī, moreover, the human heart is substance and all of the worlds are its accidents. He considers the world as a jar of water and the human heart as a river, the world a house and the human heart a city, and so on. According to Jāmī's commentary on these particular analogies, whatever exists in the world also exists in the human heart, and not everything within the human heart exists in any other one entity in the world (see Rūmī, 4:809–11, 5:3575–82; Aavani, 86–8). The Universal Man contains all universal attributes as a total image of the Divine, while creatures of the world each have only particular attributes and, thus, are partial images of not only the Divine, but of the perfected human heart too. In a saying that can be found also in the work of Rūmī's companion, Shams-i Tabrīzī (see Chittick, *Me & Rumi*, 137), Rūmī says, "O man of vanity, His traces are within the heart; that which is outside is only the traces of the traces" (Aavani, 106–7).

7 The Protection of Nature

Sufi teachings have always maintained the importance of compassion for and charity towards other creatures. Once a chick fell from its nest as the West African Sufi Tierno Bokar (d. 1359/1940) was teaching his students an esoteric doctrine related to Sufi practice. Bokar's diligent students, apparently spellbound by the lesson, ignored the chick chirping in distress and continued to focus on the class, which saddened their teacher. Calling the bird, "this other one's son," Bokar returned it with his cupped hands and strengthened its nest with thread and needle while the students waited impatiently for the rest of the lesson; however, and after a moment of silence, Bokar instead spoke to his students about charity, without which all theological doctrines of all religions are worthless baggage, the encounter with the Divine is devoid of joy, the five prayers are insignificant gestures, and the pilgrimage is a worthless vacation (Bâ, 138–9). If recourse to profound metaphysical doctrines and arduous

worship do not accompany compassion in one's heart for other creatures, then they have not done much at all.

The aforementioned doctrines inform a great sense of value for nature in Sufi perspectives, providing much doctrinal material for the protection of nature. For example, the doctrine of *tajallī* tells us that each natural phenomenon is a unique manifestation of God. Moreover, as *khalīfat Allāh fī l-arḍ* ("the vicegerent of God upon the earth"), humanity is the central link between God and the world as a whole, as well as a channel of heavenly grace for the environment. Two British Sufis who belong to the traditionalist school, Martin Lings (d. 1426/2005), known as Shaykh Abū Bakr Sirāj ad-Dīn, and Charles Hasan le Gai Eaton (d. 1431/2010), emphasize this point in describing humanity (Abū Bakr Sirāj ad-Dīn, 18–19; Eaton). Notwithstanding the fact that each creature has its own connection to God, human nature has a central link to the Divine that maintains the world. While each creature is a partial reflection of God, the vicegerent, according to Ibn al-ʿArabī, is a manifestation of the Name *Allāh*, which is a synthesis of all the Divine Names. Without the presence of the Universal Man, the universe would cease to exist (Murad; see also Chittick, *Search*, 149–52).

In a famed *ḥadīth qudsī* God addresses the Prophet, saying: "Were it not for thee, I would not have created the heavens." The Persian Sufi metaphysician ʿAyn al-Quḍāt Ḥamadānī (d. 525/1131) states that "all of the existents have been created on account of Muḥammad" (see Rustom, Everything, 35). This highlights further the spiritual value of nature, since the Prophet is valued and revered, and he undoubtedly is.

Ibrāhīm Niasse (d. 1395/1975), a famed West African Sufi shaykh of the Tījāniyya Sufi Order, shares an anecdote in which he witnessed the Divine Presence in a moment that lasted for millions of years of the otherworldly kind. He relates that towards the end of this experience, he was made father of humanity and the spiritual support (*madad*) to the entirety of existent beings (Niasse, 191–3). This report is an example of how supreme transcendental experiences in the Sufi context often connote or directly involve a positive relationship with the natural environment, as encapsulated in the term *khalīfa*, or vicegerent, which involves both the human representativeness of God and the consequential human lordship over and stewardship of creation.

Contemporary Sufi thought has pioneered much of the religious dimension of the environmental movement since its inception in the 1960's in the writings of the contemporary traditionalist writer, Sufi, and Iranian Islamic philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr (b. 1351/1933), who brings the Islamic tradition, as well as insight into other religions, in discourse with the history of science, concluding that the environmental crisis is rooted in a spiritual crisis (see e.g.

Nasr, Ecological Problem; Nasr, *Man and Nature*; Nasr, *Religion*; Nasr, Spiritual and Religious Dimensions; for a summary of Nasr's perspective, see Quadir, *Environmentalism*). According to Nasr, in the turn away from Heaven in the Renaissance and the Scientific Revolution, as well as in the world's embrace of scientism and secularist or pseudo-religious modernist philosophies, humanity lost a sense of the sacred, cut off a channel of heavenly grace to itself and to the world, and developed worldviews that were no longer informed by revelation or the sacred. The cosmos that was perceived previously as bearing the imprint of the Face of God in its every aspect and studied for both its corporeal and metaphysical significances is now limited to its corporeality and is devoid of sacred meaning. Perceptions of the world changed radically from seeing it as the many loci of sacred realities and as both veiling and unveiling divine mysteries to considering it beneficial only inasmuch as its material resources contributed to human needs and convenience, changing the character of the sciences of nature from sacred to profane. The repercussions have manifested in the eclipse of the sanctity of both humanity and its environment, as well as in the modern ability to pillage nature to the degree of bringing about an environmental crisis.

Relatedly, it is worth noting that Lord Northbourne (d. 1982), who coined the term "organic farming," was an English Sufi who wrote in the defense of nature. Although he did not write openly as a Sufi or Muslim thinker, he belonged to a Sufi order himself and his works were inspired by Sufi thought. He was a traditionalist author and espoused the perennial philosophy of which Nasr is a representative (see Paull).

Nasr and others, moreover, have formulated responses to the environmental crisis while drawing on Qurʾānic teachings against the corruption of the earth, such as Q 29:36 and 30:41 (Dakake; Nasr, *Religion*, 290–1 n. 13; Shah-Kazemi, Sacrilege; Shah-Kazemi, Seeing God; Umar). Their perspective on the need for a spiritual response to the environmental crisis complements the Akbarian notion that the Universal Man existentially protects nature. In effect, only with an inner turn to God can human beings truly and effectively protect the environment. The ramifications of this involve the revival of a sacred science of nature, in which human beings may once again observe and approach the natural world with a sense of the sacred. There are also Sufi ways of protecting nature other than spiritual realization, under which they are all subsumed. They include fidelity to the Islamic *Sharīʿa*, which prohibits generally the degradation of the natural environment, and the intention to live in the wont of the Prophet, which is, for example, characterized by a sense of compassion towards nature's creatures. Sufi life is itself, so to speak, eco-friendly. Given that modern ecological problems are spearheaded by insatiable desires that

motivate an unending consumerism and the wasteful use of natural resources, the Sufi's continuous taming of the self and effort towards the annihilation of the lower ego seems to offer lessons and a practical example of a way of life as a powerful response to the ecological crisis (see Quadir, Islam and Sustainability, 125).

In summary, Sufism's most salient contribution to the environmental movement has manifested itself, on the one hand, in an intellectual worldview that explains the roots of the environmental crisis and offers a solution to it and, on the other hand, in the Sufi path itself which seeks to manage the soul's desires and annihilate the lower ego. The latter contribution brings about Sufism's greatest fruit of all, which is the fulfillment of the human purpose in the form of saints, whose very existence safeguards nature. The former contribution can also help other religious traditions, as well as human beings in general, to develop a conclusive solution to the ecological crisis. It involves a call for a sacred science and offers a view of nature as, among many descriptions, a conscious living entity that praises God, a love story that includes each of its phenomena in a protagonist couple of lover and beloved, a galvanizer towards the worship of God, an entity to protect, a mirror to the human soul, a revelatory book, and a theater for countless theophanies.

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CHAPTER 10

Mecca and Other Cosmological Centres in the Sufi Universe

Simon O'Meara

Cosmological centres are places where different levels of cosmic reality are said to converge and become accessible to the human being. In the Sufi universe, Mecca is the principal place of convergence, but others exist, too, including Medina and Jerusalem. This chapter demonstrates that such places have been ritually replicated in this universe, most especially Mecca.

When it comes to cosmological centres, any given culture can have a number of them without that fact presenting a contradiction or paradox. As explained by Mircea Eliade and Lawrence Sullivan in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, "[t]he center of the world is a locus in mythic geography, a symbolic portrayal of the real, known, and essential aspects of the world, rather than a detached and objective reckoning of abstract space" (Eliade and Sullivan, 1501).[1] Islamic culture is no exception to this phenomenon, with the appellation "navel of the world" (*surrat al-arḍ*) most commonly applied to Baghdad, Jerusalem, and Mecca, and occasionally Isfahan, in medieval geographical literature.[2] In the same literature, a cognate appellation, "the mother of towns" (*umm al-qurā*), was additionally applied to cities such as Merv and Damascus, and "the mother of the world" (*umm al-dunyā*) was applied to Cairo (Livne-Kafri, Jerusalem, 50).[3]

Notwithstanding this relative abundance of cities honorifically ascribed a cosmically progenitive function in Islamic culture, an ascription hardly free of ideological motivation (Lassner, 180–1),[4] three cities reign soteriologically and cosmologically supreme in the Sunnī oecumene: Mecca, Medina, and

1 Cf. Eliade, Symbolism, 39.
2 For Baghdad, Isfahan, and Jerusalem, see Antrim, 157 n. 36; Cooperson, 100–1; Livne-Kafri, Jerusalem, 47; and Olsson, 492–5. For Mecca, see Wensinck, 36. Damascus (or perhaps just its mosque) is called "navel of the world" by the Umayyad poet al-Nābigha al-Shaybānī (d. ca. 126/744). See Rabbat, Dialogic, 90.
3 With reference to Merv and Damascus, note Livne-Kafri's sensibly restrictive interpretation of the appellation (which is Qurʾānic—see below), in Livne-Kafri, Jerusalem, 50 n. 25.
4 Cf. Van Gelder, passim.

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Jerusalem.[5] Not only does the Qurʾān exalt them, either directly by way of honorific titles or indirectly by linking them to the life of the Prophet or an act of divine intervention,[6] but additionally a Prophetic *ḥadīth* permits pilgrimage to them alone.[7] The *ḥadīth* reads: "You shall only set out for three mosques: The Sacred Mosque (in Mecca), my mosque (in Medina) and al-Aqṣā mosque (in Jerusalem)" (Kister, Three Mosques, 173).

Of the three pilgrimage destinations given in this *ḥadīth*, one might have supposed that Mecca would be ranked first in importance, given the location of the Kaʿba there. However, evidence shows that Medina was occasionally valued above it (Kister, Sanctity, 40).[8] Equally, one might have supposed that Jerusalem would be third in importance, given that the Prophet's tomb lies in Medina; but again evidence refutes this, showing instead Medina and Jerusalem regularly vying for second place (Kister, Sanctity, 60–2; Kister, Three Mosques, 180–6). In Sufism, however, the question of primacy regarding these three destinations is a bit different; in fact, as this chapter will argue, in Sufism the question is moot. Without disputing the fact that all three sites are prime centres of Sufism, a topic well covered by others (Renard, 187–212),[9] the chapter will argue that the de facto cosmological centre of the Sufi universe is Mecca. This is because what originally made Mecca this cosmological centre means that it has the potential to be replicated elsewhere and thus to predominate numerically over the other two centres.

The argument I am proposing in this chapter is not that in Sufism there is no ranking of cities and sites according to their perceived spiritual degree. Well known, for example, is the following passage from Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), in which we find the mystic doing exactly that:

5 In the Shīʿī oecumene, a fourth city belongs: Kufa. See Friedman, Kūfa, esp. 215–17. Here is not the place to question and investigate von Grunebaum's statement that "cosmological holiness [is] possessed by Mecca and Jerusalem, but … Medina is entirely devoid [of it]" (von Grunebaum, 31). To this assertion, one might add that Medina is not, to my knowledge, accorded the status of "world navel" in the aforementioned geographical literature. See below for further discussion of von Grunebaum's statement.

6 Mecca, e.g., is called *umm al-qurā*, "the mother of towns" (Q 6:92, 42:7); Medina is linked to the Prophet's life (e.g. Q 9:101, 120); and as the capital of the Holy Land (*al-arḍ al-muqaddasa*) (Q 5:21), Jerusalem is linked to an act of divine intervention, namely, "the land *blessed* by Us" (*al-arḍ allāti bāraknā fīhā*) (Q 21:71) (my emphasis).

7 The fact that Islamic pilgrimage comprises much more than these three destinations is well treated in Arjana, passim.

8 Cf. Lazarus-Yafeh, 294–5. On the societal drive to rank cities in terms of their spiritual virtues, see von Grunebaum, 31.

9 Because Renard covers Jerusalem less fully than Mecca and Medina, the following is also recommended: Goitein, Sanctity, esp. 142ff.

> One of the conditions for the person who knows through direct vision, who is master of the stages and modes of witnessing the unseen spiritual realities, is that he is aware that places (*amkina*) have an influence on sensitive hearts. If the heart finds itself in any place (*ayy mawḍiʿ*), its intensity of spiritual presence (*wujūd*) is the most general (*al-aʿamm*); but its intensity of spiritual presence in Mecca is more radiant and perfect (*asnā wa-atamm*).... What a difference there is between a city (*madīna*), most of whose buildings are the carnal passions (*shahawāt*), and a city most of whose buildings are [divine] signs and clear proofs (*al-āyāt wa-l-bayyināt*)!
>
> IBN AL-ʿARABĪ, 2:120–1; trans. MORRIS, 31 [modified][10]

The argument, rather, is that in Sufism the cosmological importance of Mecca extensively renders the Sufi universe a patchwork of cosmological centres that ritually replicate Mecca and the cosmogony, originating in the Kaʿba, that is said to have occurred there. Because of these replicas, Mecca predominates in the Sufi universe.

As just noted, the argument is not intended to be exclusive. For example, given the signal importance of the Prophet to Sufism, one might have expected to find his person and tomb (*ḥujra*) in Medina playing an analogous role to the Kaʿba in the Sufi universe.[11] In such a scenario, the cosmological centre would be Medina, specifically the tomb, and other centres would be replicas of it; these replicas would compete or overlap with those of Mecca. As will be adduced below, there is some evidence for this.

The argument will proceed as follows: first, an account of the Kaʿba-based cosmogony as recorded in traditions (*akhbār*) contained in early, predominantly second/ninth-century Islamic sources; second, an account of the ritual replicability of Mecca in the Sufi universe; third, an account of Medina and Jerusalem as replicable cosmological centres competing or overlapping with the replicability of Mecca; and fourth, an account of the Kaʿba as the structural basis of certain cosmological ideas in Sufism.

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10 As the paragraph that follows immediately after this passage explains, Ibn al-ʿArabī is neither arguing that buildings confer upon a place its spiritual degree nor that there is something inherent to places that makes them more or less virtuous. Rather, he is arguing that the spiritual intentions (*himam*) of the saints, or friends of God (*awliyāʾ*), living or buried in these buildings and places are what matter. That other people did, however, argue for a place's inherent virtue is indicated by a *fatwā* from Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) rejecting the argument. On this *fatwā*, see Katz, 162.

11 For an overview of the importance of the Prophet (and Medina) to Sufism, see Schimmel, *Muhammad*, 176–215; Schimmel, *Mystical*, 213–27; and Schöller.

The argument draws on Eliade's understanding of the ritual replicability of cosmological centres. According to Eliade, the cosmogonic actions perceived by a culture to have occurred at its centre provide the model for the centre's replication elsewhere (Eliade, World, 24–7).[12] By way of this replication, he says, life can be lived "always and without effort in the Centre of the World, at the heart of reality" (Eliade, Symbolism, 55).

My argument does not, however, depend on Eliade's problematic distinction between sacred space, which he avers is oriented and meaningful, and profane space, which he avers is disoriented and meaningless (Eliade, World, 21–2).[13] Rather, following Angelika Neuwirth, I take the view that the Qur'ān re-codified the space inherited from the pre-Islamic world, making all space meaningful space. My reasoning follows below.

Using pre-Islamic poetry as her source for pre-Islamic space, Neuwirth states:

> As against the heroic attitude of man towards space as displayed in [pre-Islamic] poetry, the early qurānic revelations present earthly space as particularly inspiring of confidence. They present it as a locus of pleasure and enjoyment, as a venue for the reception of divine bounty and as a site of ethically charged social interaction.... Be it the image of the firm land or the image of the sea, humankind is taught to rejoice in a divinely adorned cosmos.... Haphazard fate and all-consuming time have ceded their power to a just divine agent. Space has regained a meaningful historical dimension.
>
> NEUWIRTH, 302–8

In contrast to Eliade's polarised typology of space, this Qur'ānically re-codified space means, for example, that the boundaries of Mecca's *ḥaram*, or inviolable precincts, do not separate two typologically different spaces: meaningful and meaningless, or sacred and profane. Rather, the boundaries indicate the commencement of a space that is *more* meaningful than the space outside them. Certain laws and rituals must be observed in order to access, penetrate, and take reward (*ajr*) from this inviolable (*ḥarām*), more meaningful space;[14] but it

12 See also Eliade, Symbolism, 51–2; and Eliade and Sullivan, 1504.

13 On this distinction see, e.g., Shiner. On the problems of the distinction with specific regard to the Islamic world, see Akkach, Wholly. Key aspects of this latter article are reproduced in Akkach, *Cosmology*, 162–8.

14 Similarly, the inviolable *ḥarām* space that *ḥadīth*s allege a domestic house provides depends on the observation of laws for it to be enjoyed. See, e.g., this article regarding kin and non-kin visitors and members of the household: Alshech, 276–86. The establishment of inviolability (*ḥurma*), be it of a precinct like Mecca, a mosque, a house, or a wife (also

is not qualitatively different to the space surrounding it. It is just more divinely intense. The difference is one of degree, not kind. As noted by Samer Akkach:

> The most significant challenge the Islamic tradition poses to … Eliade's polarised [typology of space] is the lack of polarity.… Medieval Arabic sources do not speak of "sacred" sites, landscapes, and cities as distinct from other types that are "profane," nor do they interpret spatiality in a dualistic frame of real and unreal, structured and amorphous, significant and insignificant.
>
> AKKACH, *Cosmology*, 164–5[15]

In a sound *ḥadīth*, the Prophet is alleged to have said: "The earth has been made a mosque and means of purification for me, so wherever a man of my community is when the time for prayer comes, let him pray" (al-Bukhārī, kitāb al-tayammum, bāb 1 [#335]).[16] Neuwirth's insights into the Qurʾānic re-coding of pre-Islamic space help us to make sense of this *ḥadīth*; not Eliade's typology and subsequent invocations of it, be they explicit or implicit.

1 Cosmogony at the Kaʿba

Recorded in some of the earliest Islamic sources are a number of traditions concerning God's creation of the world. In these traditions, the Kaʿba, sometimes called the House (*al-bayt*), is portrayed as Creation's hub. Examples include: "He created the House two thousand years before the earth (*al-arḍ*), and from it the earth was spread out (*duḥiyat minhu*)" (Ibn Isḥāq, 73);[17] "Two

ḥurma), results from the execution of power. The enjoyment of the inviolability that is thereby established results from the observance of laws and rituals. Cf. Noorani, 53.

15 Cf. Ahmed, 208–9. Akkach argues that instead of Eliade's polarised typology, medieval Muslims classified space in terms of its virtues (*faḍāʾil*): "The notion of the *virtuous* accounts for both the sacred and the profane, in that all sites and places have virtues. The intensity and significance of the virtuous, however, varies from one place to another. The variations are hierarchically ordered and are charted through a unique form of conceptual mapping of holiness that is traced by Muslims on the territories they inhabit" (Akkach, *Cosmology*, 165–6, italics in the original).

16 Cf. Lange, 246. Were one to gloss this *ḥadīth* with reference to the foregoing discussion of Qurʾānically re-codified space, the following wording would result: "When the time for prayer comes, let a man of my community observe the ritual obligations for prayer. These obligations will allow him to penetrate the inviolable, *ḥarām* space of this earth-as-mosque and take the reward.".

17 Cf. Q 79:30. For additional references, see Wensinck, 18.

thousand years before He created the world (*al-dunyā*), the House was placed upon the water on four pillars. The earth was then spread out from under it (*min taḥtihi*)" (al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 217 [modified]);[18] "Forty years before God created the heavens and the earth, the Kaʿba was spume (*ghuthāʾ*) upon the water. From it, the earth was spread out" (al-Azraqī, 1:66);[19] and "Before the creation of the heavens and the earth, when the Throne (*al-ʿarsh*) was on the water, God sent a beating wind which drove the water back and exposed on the [future] site of the House a stony mound in the form of a dome (*qubba*). From under it, God spread out the lands (*daḥā Allāh al-araḍīn min taḥtihi*). They stretched and they strained, so God staked them with mountains.[20] … The first mountain He placed on them was Abū Qubays [that overlooks Mecca]. For that reason, Mecca is called the mother of towns (*umm al-qurā*)" (al-Azraqī, 1:67).[21]

With reference to the stony domical mound that is mentioned in the last of these traditions and from where the earth allegedly spread and where the Kaʿba would eventually stand, reproduced below is an undated and unsourced late medieval or pre-modern Persianate *mappa mundi* (fig. 10.1).[22] Represented at the *mappa mundi*'s epicentre is this mound, labelled "dome of the earth" (*qubbat al-arḍ*): the place equidistant from the four cardinal directions, the zero degree of longitude and latitude (Pellat, 297). The Kaʿba is shown next to it.

This connection between the Kaʿba and the dome of the earth, which in the medieval and pre-modern periods was also called the Dome of Arīn (most probably after the ancient city of Ujjayinī in India), is underlined by the aforementioned Ibn al-ʿArabī.[23] In an early work, *The Night Journey*, he says he met the source of his spiritual inspiration, the mysterious youth (*fatā*), at Arīn (Chodkiewicz, Toward, 20).[24] In a later work, his magnum opus *The Meccan Revelations*, he says he met him at the Kaʿba (Ibn al-ʿArabī, 1:216; trans. Addas, 201).

With reference to the Qurʾānic epithet for Mecca, *umm al-qurā*, "the mother of towns," which is also mentioned in the last of the foregoing Islamic

18 Cf. Wensinck, 42.

19 Cf. Wensinck, 18.

20 Cf. Q 73:7.

21 Cf. Wensinck, 39. As noted in n. 6 above, the designation *umm al-qurā* is Qurʾānic.

22 Karen Pinto thinks this map might be Ilkhanid in origin. She additionally compares it to an almost identical map in a ninth/fifteenth-century Timurid manuscript held at Heidelberg University Library: Cod. Heid. Orient. 118, ff. 258v–259r (available online at http://tinyurl.com/jqc7ntj). Personal communication, 27 November 2016.

23 On the connection between the dome of the earth and Arīn, see Miquel, 273; esp. Nazmi, 69–74; and Pellat, 297.

24 Chodkiewicz is citing from Muḥyī l-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Isrā ilā al-maqām al-asrā* (1948), no page number provided.

FIGURE 10.1 *Mappa mundi*, with the "dome of the earth" at the centre, the Kaʿba next to it, and the Lighthouse of Alexandria at the perimeter. From an unidentified late medieval Persianate manuscript. Gouache and ink on paper
SOURCE: AL-MŪJĀN, 31

traditions, it makes sense to consider the Creation these early traditions narrate as unfolding less from the Kaʿba qua Creation's hub, and more from the Kaʿba qua Creation's matrix.[25] That is because a hub denotes an impersonal object, whereas a matrix denotes a living organ, a womb. As the exegete Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767) explains the epithet: "Mecca is called *umm al-qurā*, because from under the Kaʿba the entire earth was spread out" (Muqātil (2003), 1:359).[26] On this view, the world was born of the Kaʿba: a vertical—traditional—accouchement.[27]

25 Cf. Antrim, 37–8.

26 Cf. al-Nahrawalī, 18 (lines 2–3); and the epithet's treatment in both Wensinck, 38; and Livne-Kafri, Women, 320–1.

27 As also noted in Vâlsan, 221. On traditional childbirth in the medieval Arab world, see Guthrie, 157–61.

Although it is true that this graphic birthing image is also found in Islamic traditions regarding Jerusalem's Rock of the Temple Mount (*ṣakhrat bayt al-maqdis*), these traditions appear to be considerably fewer than those for the Kaʿba.[28] More importantly, precarious though it is to argue *ex silentio*, to the best of my knowledge, in Islamic sources none is as early.[29] Rather, the two earliest recorded instances both date from the fourth/tenth century. The first comes from *The Abridged Book of Countries* by Ibn al-Faqīh al-Hamadhānī (d. after 290/903) (al-Hamadhānī, 97). The second comes from *The Merits of Jerusalem*, a work written in 410/1020 by the preacher of the Temple Mount's al-Aqṣā Mosque, Abū Bakr al-Wāṣiṭī (fl. 410/1020), but which is largely based on a lost work by al-Walīd b. Ḥammād al-Ramlī al-Zayyāt (d. 299/912) (Kaplony, 353 n. 2).[30] The dates of these two recorded instances mean that the Rock's cosmogonic representation as, what might lightly be termed, *matrix mundi* comes approximately 150 years after the Kaʿba was portrayed thus by Muqātil b. Sulaymān and effectively portrayed thus (missing is the preposition "under") by Ibn Isḥāq (d. ca. 150/767) (Ibn Isḥāq, 73) and, allegedly, Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767) (al-Muqaddasī, 75; trans. 69).

As a result of the cosmogony at the Kaʿba, a cosmic axis connecting the infraterrestrial, celestial, and supracelestial realms was established through the terrestrial Kaʿba, at the terrestrial Kaʿba.[31] By way of the axis, these cosmic realms communicate.[32] At the Kaʿba, their communication breaks into the terrestrial world.

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28 This is not a scientific conclusion, for it was undertaken using only the computer-searchable database *al-Maktaba al-shāmila*. Examples of the image include the following tradition in which God addresses the Rock with the words: "From under you I spread the earth," which is recorded by both Abū Bakr al-Wāsiṭī (fl. 410/1020) and Ibn al-Murajjā (fl. 429–39/1038–48), as cited in Kaplony, 353 n. 2. For midrashic and earlier instances of a very similar image in Judaism (missing is the preposition, under), see Alexander, 114–16; and Koltun-Fromm, 243–5.

29 Note, however, that in a specific edition of the exegesis by Muqātil b. Sulaymān, there is the following tradition: "The Rock which is in the Temple Mount is the centre of the entire world" (Muqātil (2002), 2:513 n. 1 (lines 14–15); trans. Hasson, View, 383). Although this tradition does not reference the image of the earth spreading out from under the Rock, it could be taken to imply that the Rock was the birthplace of the world. One could, of course, say the same thing for all the aforementioned navels of the Islamic world. The tradition is similar to one misquoted by Kister, namely, "The Rock is the navel of the universe," which Kister dates to the late first/seventh century. See Kister, Comment, 1:185. This latter tradition actually says: "The Temple Mount is the navel of the world." See al-Hamadhānī, 94 (line 4).

30 On al-Wāsiṭī and the dating of his text, see Hasson, Literature, 1:172. On the relationship between al-Wāsiṭī and al-Ramlī al-Zayyāt, see Mourad, 88ff.

31 Cf. Akkach, *Cosmology*, 183, whence the terms for these realms come.

32 Cf. Eliade and Sullivan, 1501.

FIGURE 10.2 Diagram of the Islamic cosmos with the Kaʿba at the centre. From a copy of *The Book of Gnosis* (*Maʿrifetnāme*) by the Ottoman Sufi İbrahim Hakkı (d. 1194/1780), dated 1235/1820. Gold, gouache, and ink on paper; 8.5 × 18.5 cm

COURTESY: THE BRITISH LIBRARY. MS OR. 12964, FOL. 23V

This cosmic axis is spoken of in a number of *ḥadīth*s and traditions (Wensinck, passim). For present purposes, the most telling of these reports is the following one, because it or a variant of it is directly referenced by Ibn al-ʿArabī and plausibly referenced by the Ottoman Sufi, İbrahim Hakkı (d. 1194/1780), in his diagram of the cosmos, a later reproduction of which is shown here (fig. 10.2):

> The Apostle of God said: "This House is one of fifteen, seven in the heavens up to the Throne and seven up to the limits of the lowest earth. The highest situated one, which is near the Throne, is the Frequented House (*al-bayt al-maʿmūr*). Every one of these Houses has an inviolable precinct (*ḥaram*), like the inviolable precinct of this House. If anyone of them fell down, the rest would fall down, one upon the other, to the limits of the lowest earth."
>
> AL-AZRAQĪ, 1:71; trans. WENSINCK, 51–2 [modified][33]

Concerning the diagram, the explanation for how it might plausibly reference the foregoing cosmic axis *ḥadīth* depends on the oddly distorted, non-cuboidal shape of the clearly labelled, terrestrial Kaʿba at the centre of it.[34] The explanation is that, because of the diagram maker's decision to show cosmological elements of the uppermost terrestrial realm, for example, Mount Qāf, as well as the two-dimensional limitations of his medium, he was unable to show the other fourteen Houses directly above and below the Kaʿba of Mecca. He thus represented, distortedly, just the eighth of these Houses, the middle one, the Kaʿba of Mecca, and thereby he effectively represented them all.

2 Mecca Replicas

If Mecca is a cosmological centre in Eliade's sense of the term, then we should expect the cosmogonic actions that first established it as this centre to form the model that is ritually replicated in the formation of other cosmological centres in the Islamic world. In the preceding section, we saw that those actions pertained exclusively to the Kaʿba, such that in looking for Mecca replicas in the Sufi universe, we should be looking for the ritual replication of the Kaʿba. To reduce Mecca to the Kaʿba in this *pars pro toto* manner is not an interpretive violation of Mecca; for early Islamic traditions allege that the precincts of

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33 Ibn al-ʿArabī's references a variant of it here: Ibn al-ʿArabī, 2:258.

34 This diagram has recently been analysed in Savage-Smith, 234–8, its legends translated in Savage-Smith, 281–2.

Mecca either came into existence or took definition only because of the presence of the Kaʿba. They recount how at the time of Adam, the celestial Kaʿba, or Frequented House, temporarily descended to where the terrestrial Kaʿba would one day stand. This descent led to the precincts taking either definition or existence (al-Azraqī, 1:80–1; al-Fākihī, 2:274–6; al-Ṭabarī, *Qirā*, 653).[35]

In two interpretive, predominantly ahistorical essays concerning in part the correspondences between the pilgrimage to Mecca, or Hajj, and pilgrimages in general (sing. *ziyāra*) to saints' (sing. *walī*) tombs across the Islamic world, Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen draws the following equivalences between the two types of pilgrimage. She sees the cenotaph within the tomb as referencing the Kaʿba; its cloth cover as referencing the robe, or *kiswa*, of the Kaʿba; and the pilgrims' circling and touching of it as referencing the *ṭawāf*, or the ritual circling, and, crowds permitting, touching of the Kaʿba (Mayeur-Jaouen, Identité, 197; Mayeur-Jaouen, Tombeau, 140–1, 145). In her view—and that of others, both Muslims and non-Muslims alike (Iványi, 78–92; Meri, 134–7)—the *ziyāra* is a substitute for the Hajj, and an imitation of it. In this imitation, she argues, the tomb substitutes for the Kaʿba, with which it is in (cosmic) communication. This communication, she continues, explains why the site of the tomb, the pilgrimage centre itself, is often called a "second Mecca" and sometimes blessed with a spring said to be linked to Mecca's spring, Zamzam (Mayeur-Jaouen, Identité, 197–8).[36]

Mayeur-Jaouen's interpretation is far reaching, primarily because it is not specific to Sufism but concerns visits to saints' tombs in general, which may or may not be done in the name of Sufism.[37] It is, however, based on a limited number of sources. Does that fact undermine it? At least with regard to Sufism, in the account of Sufi-specific, tomb-based Kaʿba replicas that shortly follows below, her interpretation will be seen to be amply corroborated.[38]

A second reason her interpretation is far reaching is because it undermines the rather unimaginative academic commonplace that views the phenomenon of Kaʿba substitutes as something specific to the peripheries of the Islamic world: regions in which making the official Hajj to the official Kaʿba is the most arduous because of the distance to be traversed.

35 Most of these traditions are discussed in Bin Dehaish, 23–5.

36 She also says the cenotaph is sometimes taken by "certain pilgrims" as the Prophet's tomb, but without citing evidence for this. See Mayeur-Jaouen, Identité, 199.

37 See, e.g., Mayeur-Jaouen, Identité, 195.

38 Simultaneously, the argument that the Kaʿba was either rarely or never copied will be refuted. On this art historical argument, see Flood, 33–4; Rabbat, Beginning, 58; and Hillenbrand, 8.

Interestingly, Mayeur-Jaouen's interpretation is advanced without reference to Eliade's notion of the replicability of cosmological centres. Also, although she talks of sacred space and thereby invokes, implicitly but unavoidably, Eliade's aforementioned typology, she argues that the ultimate model for *all* this sacred space is the Kaʿba and Mecca more generally (Mayeur-Jaouen, Tombeau, 145).[39] Her argument is thus in keeping with the above-cited cosmogonic traditions in which the Islamic world, including its space, unfolded from the Kaʿba.

In the following account of Sufi-specific, tomb-based Kaʿba substitutes that the sources make clear have been taken as Kaʿbas (by calling them, for example, "the Kaʿba of so-and-so a region"), no attempt is made to separate substitutes that the sources specify as resembling the Kaʿba from substitutes where no such specification is made. This decision is based on the fact that what counts as architectural resemblance in medieval and pre-modern Islamic culture is not necessarily what modern science counts as resemblance (Bloom; Flood, 45–63).[40] Lastly, the account is not intended to be exhaustive.

Commencing with medieval and pre-modern Central Asia, as this region is expressly mentioned by Mayeur-Jaouen, a number of Kaʿba substitutes, or ritually realised replicas, are said to have existed, some of them built long after the saint they commemorate had died. These substitutes include the tombs of Yūsuf Hamadhānī (d. 535/1140); Aḥmad Yasawī (d. 562/1166), eponym of the Yasawiyya Order; Ḥakīm Atā (fl. early seventh/thirteenth century), a disciple of Aḥmad Yasawī; and Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband (d. 791/1389), eponym of the Naqshbandiyya Order. Visits to these tombs involved Hajj-derived rituals, including the donning of the pilgrimage garb (*iḥrām*) at Aḥmad Yasawī's tomb (Subtelny, *Timurids*, 194; Tyson, 26; Zarcone, 262–8).[41]

At three more Central Asian sites, this trend continued into the twentieth century. The first of these three sites, the tomb of Najm al-Dīn Kubrā (d. 618/1221), eponym of the Kubrawiyya Order, was named "a second Mecca" by the president of Turkmenistan, Saparmurat Niyazov (d. 1427/2006); about it pilgrims circumambulate (O'Dell, 120; Petersen, 976).[42] At the second of

39 On spatial practices that are modelled on Meccan rituals other than the circumambulation of the Kaʿba, see Goitein, Sanctity, 137; and esp. Kister, Concessions, 31–3.

40 This fact is nicely illustrated by an anecdote concerning Ibn Masarra (d. 319/931), the Andalusian philosopher and mystic, who allegedly reproduced in his house the room of one of the Prophet's wives on the basis of hand measurements he had made of it when visiting Medina. The reproduction had a dimensional, not visual, resemblance to the original. See Fierro, 129–30.

41 I gratefully acknowledge Péter Nagy for bringing both Zarcone's and Iványi's texts to my attention.

42 O'Dell is citing from Turkmenbashy, 26.

these sites, in a district north of the city of Turkistan, Kazakhstan, a scaled-down but otherwise formal Kaʿba copy (as photographs show) was built in 1994 in memory of the reputed ancestor of the Khwājas of Khurasan (Zarcone, 268–9, 277).[43] Approximately forty-five kilometres north of Turkistan is the third site: the shrine of one Ukasha-ata (perhaps originally ʿUkāsha-ata), an otherwise unknown legendary, proselytising Arab warrior who was allegedly decapitated here, his head falling through a crack in the earth and ending up in Zamzam, with an offshoot of Zamzam simultaneously springing up at the crack. According to Azim Malikov, this spring and other Islamic features of the circumambulated shrine indicate that it has been "transformed into [the] Kaʿba" (Malikov, 164). The site is not, however, specific to Sufism.

Moving westwards, at Alinja (Alıncak) in Iranian Azerbaijan, Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī (d. 796/1394), the founder of a mystical community known in external sources as the Ḥurūfiyya, was buried within a shrine that was called the "true Kaʿba" (*Kaʿba-yi ḥaqīqī*). About the tomb devotees circumambulated and performed other Hajj-derived rituals, including, once more, the donning of the pilgrimage garb (Bashir, Enshrining, 294–5; Bashir, *Fazlallah*, 87–8). South of Alinja, at Ardabīl, the tomb the Ṣafawiyya Order's eponym, Shaykh Ṣafī al-Dīn (d. 735/1334), is called in a tenth/sixteenth-century source the Kaʿba and a site for the *ṭawāf* (Rizvi, 219 n. 78).[44]

Further west, at Umm ʿUbayda in Iraq, the mausoleum of Aḥmad Rifāʿī (d. 578/1182) is alleged to have been taken as a Kaʿba substitute, at least at some point in its history (Post, 44). Also in Iraq, at the town of Zarīrān, the tomb of Shaykh ʿAlī b. al-Hītī (d. 564/1168) was apparently taken as a Hajj destination, at least during the final decades of the sixth/twelfth century and the first decades of seventh/thirteenth century. It was especially used this way when the Meccan Hajj was in progress (Ibn al-Mustawfī, 1: 54).

Much further west, in The Gambia, the anthropologist Marloes Janson witnessed Sufis circling a saint's tomb "which was covered with a black cloth so that it resembled the Kaaba," and she heard a reformist preacher railing against the Sufi practice of seeing tombs as substitute Kaʿbas (Janson, 511 n. 24). Perhaps the preacher had Ahmadou Bamba's (d. 1345/1927) tomb in mind, for a visit to the mosque in Touba, Senegal, that contains the tomb is viewed by his order's followers, the Mourides (Ar. *murīd*: novice), as the equivalent of the Hajj (Flynn). The mosque is popularly known as the Mecca of the Mourides, and the pilgrimage to it involves rituals reminiscent of the Hajj (Bava and Gueye, 424–5; Cantone, 333). In Sudan, an early thirteenth/nineteenth-century

43 No mention is made of Hajj-derived rituals occurring there.

44 Rizvi is citing from Qummī, 617.

Sufi biographical dictionary mentions at least three tombs being used this way, as substitute Kaʿbas (*kaʿba maḥjūja*) (Ibn Ḍayf Allāh, 143, 146, 181).

Although not restricted to self-identifying Sufis, in North Africa, some forty kilometres north of Safi on Morocco's Atlantic coast, there is an isolated shrine (*qubba*) dedicated to one Sīdī Shāshkāl (lifetime unknown). Here is staged an annual "Hajj of the poor" (*ḥajj al-masākīn*) that coincides with the Day of ʿArafāt of the Hajj of Mecca. The rituals performed during it include circumambulation of the shrine, standing in worship (*wuqūf*) at "little ʿArafāt," and drinking from a well called Zamzam.[45]

Moving eastwards from Africa and Central Asia to Indonesia, at Tembayat in central Java, the saint (Jv. *wali*), Sunan Bayat (d. ca. 918/1512), is buried in a tomb that is shaped and draped like the Kaʿba and pitch black inside. This darkness is explained on the grounds that "in the Kaʿba there is no light either" (Van Doorn-Harder and Jong, 340). A visit to the tomb is said to replace the Hajj (Van Doorn-Harder and Jong, 346). In Aceh, circling the tomb of the first Habib Seunagan (fl. thirteenth/nineteenth century) on the tenth day of the month of the Hajj is a practice initiated by one of his descendants; it is intended to substitute for the circumambulation of the Kaʿba (Bowen, 603).

Were one to expand the remit of this account to include Sufi-related Kaʿba substitutes not based on a saint's tomb, one would add to the list the scaled-down Kaʿba which al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922) is said to have built in his house and used to celebrate the Hajj (Massignon, 1:67–8; Miskawayh, 1:80; trans. 4:89). One would also add the Marinid royal necropolis at Shālla, Morocco, which seems to have functioned as a state-sponsored Kaʿba analogue for at least part of the eighth/fourteenth century (Nagy, 279–82). One would add, too, the *Kedaton* section of Yogyakarta's pre-modern palace (*kraton*), which became "simultaneously the Kaʿba, the sanctuary of the heart and the site of the divine throne" during a particular Sufi-informed royal ritual there (Woodward, 160). Above all, one would add the human heart. In the words of al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072): "The Kaʿba is the House of the Real in stone and the heart is the House of the Real in the innermost self" (al-Qushayrī, 311). For some Sufis, the Kaʿba of Mecca is itself a substitute for this heart. "The meaning of the Kaʿba," says Rūmī (d. 671/1273), "is the heart of the prophets and saints, the locus of God's inspiration, of which the Kaʿba is but a derivative (*farʿ*). If there is no heart, what purpose is served by the Kaʿba?" (Rūmī, 165; trans. 172 [modified]).[46]

45 I gratefully acknowledge Kholoud al-Ajarma for informing me of this shrine and the Hajj-practices occurring there, and for confirming that Sīdī Shāshkāl is not the only place in Morocco where a "Hajj of the poor" is held. Moroccan newspapers occasionally report these pilgrimages; for example, concerning the one at Sīdī Shāshkāl, see https://tinyurl.com/r9ujp44.

46 For further discussion of Rūmī's words, see Subtelny, Templificatio, 206–8.

3 Other Medinas, Other Jerusalems?

On the basis of Eliade's notion of the ritual replicability of cosmological centres, we should not expect to find the replicability of Mecca, specifically the Kaʿba, a phenomenon unique to Islam. Well known, for example, is the extensive replicability of Jerusalem in Christianity (Krautheimer; Stroumsa). As noted by Philip Alexander:

> [F]or most Christian writers, Jerusalem was a spiritual entity which the Christian could experience anywhere. Other great cities, Rome, Constantinople, Aachen, could become "Jerusalem." "Jerusalem" could even be created in one's local church by the erection of stations of the cross and of "calvaries."
>
> ALEXANDER, 112[47]

Given this culturally widespread replicability of cosmological centres, why do we not find, in addition to Mecca, Medina and Islamic Jerusalem extensively replicated in the Islamic world and specifically in the Sufi universe? As mentioned earlier, there is some evidence that Medina, specifically the Prophet's tomb, was replicated elsewhere in the Islamic world. For example, according to Shaun Marmon, the Prophet's tomb was the charismatic centre of the Mamluk Empire and was mirrored in the mausoleum complexes of a number of the Mamluk rulers, thereby creating "a ceremonial axis between Cairo and the Hijaz, between Sultan and Prophet" (Marmon, 28–30).[48] At Tinmal, Morocco, the sixth/twelfth-century Almohad mausoleum, now lost, of the dynasty's founder, the Mahdi Ibn Tūmart (d. ca. 524/1130), and the Friday mosque that was likely once adjacent to it, are spoken of in a contemporary source in terms of the tomb and mosque of the Prophet (Buresi, 436).[49] The unusual architecture of the Tinmal mosque indicates that most probably one or both buildings there were used for some sort of pilgrimage-based, royal-cum-religious ceremony or ceremonies, the details of which have not been recorded but to which the aforementioned source seems to allude (Calvo Capilla, 599–605, 616–21).

47 The Ethiopian pilgrimage site of Lalibela exemplifies a more permanent replication of Jerusalem.

48 See also Juan Campo's discussion of domestic inviolability (*ḥurma*), which concludes: "Local mosques, Mecca, Medina, and ordinary houses are obviously not totally segregated localities. They would be of little use to anyone if they were" (Campo, 99).

49 Cf. Bennison, 307–10; and Laroui, 179. The source Buresi refers to invokes the *ḥadīth* alleging that a garden of paradise lies between the Prophet's house—later his tomb—and minbar in Medina. On this *ḥadīth*, see Lange, 250.

Neither of these foregoing examples, however, is specific to Sufism. What is specific to Sufism is the following principle of ritual etiquette when visiting saints' tombs, written by the Moroccan Sufi Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar al-Kattānī (d. 1345/1926):

> [The one who visits a saint's tomb] should believe that he is requesting succour (*istimdād*) from the Prophet. For in truth, it is [the Prophet] who is visited (*huwa al-mazūr ʿalā al-ḥaqīqa*).
>
> AL-KATTĀNĪ, 1:43

Here we begin to find at least some evidence of a Sufi universe comprising both Medina and Mecca substitutes.

Regarding Islamic Jerusalem, specifically the Noble Sanctuary, or the *Ḥaram al-Sharīf*, Christian Ewert has argued that the plan of the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqṣā Mosque are schematically replicated in the third/ninth-century rebuilding of the Great Mosque of Kairouan in modern-day Tunisia (Ewert, 136–42; Ewert and Wisshak, 42–54).[50] The argument has, however, since been disputed, especially with regard to the schema's legibility and use (Grabar, Review).[51] Moreover, the replication does not relate to Sufism. In central Java, in a town called Kudus, there is a mosque that an inscription from 956/1549 calls al-Aqṣā (Bin Tajudeen, 1015).[52] Both the name of the town and the name of the mosque reference Islamic Jerusalem (*al-Quds*), most especially the *Ḥaram al-Sharīf*.[53] There is another al-Aqṣā mosque in Rabwah, Pakistan, Masjid-e-Aqṣā, which was founded in 1966 and serves as the headquarters of the persecuted Aḥmadiyya movement (Arjana, 33). An earlier mosque with the same name was founded in 1876 in Qadian, India, by the father of the movement's eponym (Roose, 43–4). These examples, too, though, are not specific to Sufism, and additionally neither obviously pertains to ritual replication.

Against these possible examples of Jerusalem replicas, one might conceivably argue that the *Ḥaram al-Sharīf*, specifically the Dome of the Rock,

50 As well as this allegedly extensive and unusually direct reference to the Dome of the Rock in Islamic architecture, other instances of both direct and indirect references to the Dome of the Rock are recounted in Hillenbrand. None pertains to Sufism.

51 Note, however, the positive assessment of the argument in Hillenbrand, 7–8.

52 Cf. Grabar, Jerusalem, 175.

53 On the relationship of the two names with the *Ḥaram al-Sharīf*, see Goitein, Quds, 323. The early medieval trading centre in northern Mali, Tadmakka, is an equivalent to Kudus, in that it is named, not after Jerusalem, but Mecca (*Makka*). On this town, see Nixon, passim; and de Moraes Farias (unpaginated). In modern Spain, a village near to Cadiz, Los Caños de Meca, has its origins in a medieval Islamic settlement there, Bakka—a Qur'ānic name traditionally taken to mean Mecca (*Makka*). On this settlement and its archaeology, see Sánchez-Molero.

was itself built as a Kaʿba substitute; something first proposed academically by Ignaz Goldziher and later defended by Amikam Elad (Elad, ʿAbd al-Malik; Elad, Why; Goldziher, *Muslim*, 2:44–5). In the light of this conceivable argument, the reference in the travel memoirs of the Sufi ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731) to the Rock as "the Kaʿba of the spirits, around which our innermost secrets circumambulated" (*kaʿbat al-arwāḥ ṭāfat ḥawlahā asrārunā*) (Akkach, Poetics, 127 n. 65) would be more than just a rhetorical flourish.[54]

The answer to the apparent lack of Medina and Jerusalem substitutes in the Sufi universe cannot be that they were not considered to be *cosmogonic* centres. That argument might perhaps hold true for Medina, as alluded to decades ago by Gustave von Grunebaum;[55] but it is not true for Jerusalem, as proved by the aforementioned Islamic traditions concerning the world's creation from the Rock. Nor can the answer be that Medina and Jerusalem were not esteemed highly enough by Sufis. The evidence against that possibility is prodigious;[56] and when this evidence is coupled with the fact that widely circulated *ḥadīth*s and traditions speak of both centres having a share in paradise, it is overwhelming (Lange, 247–50). The eponym of the Barelwis, Aḥmad Raẓā Khān (d. 1340/1921), for example, considered Medina the holiest place on earth, surpassing even Mecca.[57] In a poem addressing pilgrims in Mecca, he exhorted them thus:

> O Pilgrims! Come to the tomb of the king of kings
> You have seen the Kaʿba, now see the Kaʿba of the Kaʿba.
>
> SANYAL, 99[58]

Later, the Sufi-leaning poet Muḥammad al-Faytūrī (d. 2015) spoke of the tomb of this "king of kings" as a structural element of the cosmos:

> Over the Prophet's bones every speck of dust
> Is a pillar of light,
> Standing from the dome of his tomb
> to the dome of the skies.
>
> SCHIMMEL, Geography, 168[59]

54 Akkach is citing from al-Nābulusī, 121.
55 See n. 5 above.
56 See nn. 9, 11 above.
57 Cf. Kister, Sanctity, 40.
58 Sanyal is citing from Khān, 96.
59 Schimmel provides no citation information.

Perhaps the answer to the apparent lack of Medina and Jerusalem substitutes in the Sufi universe lies in the Kaʿba's deceptively simple geometric structure. That is to say, its quaternary form possibly lent itself to mystical conjecture regarding the structure of the cosmos in ways that neither the Prophet's tomb in Medina nor the *Ḥaram al-Sharīf* in Jerusalem could; it captured the mystical imagination.[60] On this hypothetical view, the paucity of Medina substitutes and the seeming total absence of Jerusalem substitutes in the Sufi universe are explicable on the grounds that neither centre was *formally* comparable to Mecca as a cosmological centre, and so neither could be readily espoused as an ordering principle of the cosmos. Presented in the chapter's final section below is evidence in support of this supposition.

4 The Kaʿba as a Structuring Principle of the Cosmos

According to the historian of Islamic science David King, the Kaʿba's four corners (*arkān*) took their names from the geographical regions of the world (King, Makka, 181). On this plausible but historically undocumented explanation, the south-western, *Yamānī* corner is called thus because it abuts Yemen; the north-western, *Shāmī* corner is called thus because it abuts Syria (*al-Shām*); and the north-eastern, *ʿIrāqī* corner is called thus because it abuts Iraq (King, Makka, 181).[61] The south-eastern corner, in which is set the Black Stone, is the exception to this view, because it seems to have no geographically derived nomenclature, and instead is commonly called just *al-Rukn*, the Corner.[62]

Undermining this explanation is a tradition that dates to at least the time of the *ḥadīth* compiler al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870). In it, two regions of the world are said to take their names from the Kaʿba. "Yemen," al-Bukhārī says, "was called so because it is situated at the right hand (*yamīn*) of the Kaʿba. Syria was called so because it is situated at the left hand (*yasār*) of the Kaʿba" (al-Bukhārī, kitāb al-manāqib, bāb qawl Allāh taʿālā [#3499]).[63] This naming and world-orienting

60 With reference to this possible explanation, Christian Lange notes (personal communication, 30 August 2019): "Another [explanation] might be that Mecca is more axial than Medina, and arguably also more than Jerusalem, and that this axiality resonates with Sufi conceptions of saints as poles/axes." On Sufi conceptions of saints as poles/axes, see below.

61 Cf. Herrera-Casais and Schmidl, 280–1.

62 On this name, see Hawting, 38.

63 This anonymous tradition is not asserted by al-Bukhārī as a *ḥadīth*; rather, he gives it on his own authority. It is later cited by al-Muqaddasī (d. after 380/990), an anonymous fifth/eleventh-century author, and Ibn Manẓūr, although in all three of these citations the

capacity of the Kaʿba is also alleged to be behind a wind schema referenced in a tradition attributed to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728): a four-wind compass-rose schema, with the Kaʿba at the centre, which King considers to be the most popular of the early Islamic wind schemas (King, Maṭlaʿ, 840).[64] As the nomenclature of this schema is explained by the jurist and philologist Abū Isḥāq al-Aṣbaḥī (d. ca. 660/1262):

> The *ʿulamāʾ* say the winds are named thus on account of God's Inviolable House (*sumiyat al-riyāḥ bi-hādhihi al-asmāʾ bi-bayt Allāh al-ḥarām*), because it is the *qibla* of the world. When the Arabs observed the wind that came and struck the wall of the Kaʿba's left hand (*shimāl*), they named it "Shamāl" (the North wind). When they observed the wind that came from the other side (*al-jānib*), they named it "Janūb" (the South wind). When they observed the wind that struck the Kaʿba's front (*wajh*), they named it either "Ṣabā" (viz., the East wind) because it struck (*aṣābat*) the Kaʿba's face or "Qabūl," because it came from in front of (*min qubuli*) the Kaʿba. When they observed the wind that came from the Kaʿba's back (*ẓahr*), they called it "Dabūr" (viz., the West wind; literally, the rear-comer).
>
> SCHMIDL, 141[65]

In Sufism, the mystic Ibn al-ʿArabī says something similar to al-Aṣbaḥī when he talks of the cardinal directions being "apportioned from (*taqsīm min*) the Kaʿba" (Ibn al-ʿArabī, 11:276–7; trans. Gilis, 53). Preserving these directions, he continues, are the four divinely appointed saints known as the Pillars, or *awtād* (Ibn al-ʿArabī, 11:277; trans. Gilis, 53). These cosmic figures commonly comprise the second highest degree in the Sufi hierarchy of saints, just below the Pole, or *quṭb*.[66] No matter who or where they actually are in the cosmos at any one time, the Pillars carry out their universe-preserving duties at the centre of the world, namely, Mecca (Gilis, 53–5).[67] There, each one of the four Pillars corresponds to one of the four corners of the Kaʿba (Ibn al-ʿArabī, 2:401; trans.

word "left hand" is given as *shimāl*. See Ibn Manẓūr, 15:462 (s.v. "yaman"); al-Muqaddasī, 152; trans. 248; and Rapoport and Savage-Smith, 436 (Arabic: 167).

64 The schema is cited in Heinen, 157.

65 Schmidl is citing from al-Aṣbaḥī.

66 An exception is Ibn al-ʿArabī, who counts the *quṭb* as one of them. See Ibn al-ʿArabī, 11:269; trans. Chodkiewicz, *Seal*, 93. Cf. Goldziher, Awtād, 772.

67 Cf. Goldziher, Awtād, 772.

Addas, 66–7).[68] By extension, therefore, each Pillar also corresponds to one of the four corners of the celestial Kaʿba, the Frequented House (Gilis, 40–62).[69]

It is beyond the scope of the present chapter to discuss the overlap of Ibn al-ʿArabī's Kaʿba-centric cosmology with mystical currents in Shīʿism or to attempt to chart the progress of this cosmology in Sufism and Islamic culture more broadly.[70] Rather, this section on the quaternary geometry of the Kaʿba concludes by returning to the heart of the Kaʿba—the geometry of the cosmic "Kaʿba of the heart." With reference to another of Ibn al-ʿArabī's engagements with the Kaʿba's corners, Stephen Hirtenstein notes:

> [Ibn al-ʿArabī] depicts the correspondence between the four [corners] of the Kaʿba and the four Divine Names that govern existence (First, Last, Manifest, and Hidden), and the four elements of the Qurʾanic Light verse (niche, lamp, glass, and olive oil), all in relation to the meanings of the heart.
>
> HIRTENSTEIN, 37

It is hard to imagine Medina or Jerusalem inspiring such a geometrically configured cosmology.

5 Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the apparently paradoxical phenomenon, as reported in the medieval Islamic geographical literature, of the existence of more than one *axis mundi* in the Islamic oecumene. Referring to the ideas of Mircea Eliade, the chapter observed that this phenomenon was paradoxical

68 Cf. Chodkiewicz, *Seal*, 93, 100 n. 22.

69 Against this account of the four Pillars corresponding to the four corners of the Kaʿba, one should note that Ibn al-ʿArabī also speaks of the *Ḍurāḥ*: the allegedly divine model for the Kaʿba that a number of traditions say was built by Adam on earth. This model, Ibn al-ʿArabī says, was a ternary structure. See Akkach, *Cosmology*, 188–91.

70 Concerning Shīʿism, see Corbin, 65, 198–227. (In Shīʿism, mystical cosmological conceptions of the Kaʿba long antedate Ibn al-ʿArabī. See Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*, 142.) Concerning Sufism, one place to look would be the Kaʿba-centric cosmology of the Naqshbandī shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1033/1624), in which a hierarchy of cosmic "Realities" (*ḥaqāʾiq*) is set forth, culminating in the "Reality of the Kaʿba" (*ḥaqīqat-i Kaʿba*). See Friedmann, 14–16. Another place to look would be the cosmology of the Ḥurūfiyya. See Bashir, Enshrining, 295–7; and Mir-Kasimov, passim. Concerning Islamic culture more broadly, see Yılmaz, 200–6.

only to modern scientific thought, and that the ritual replication of a culture's cosmological centre, above all its *cosmogonic* cosmological centre, was a widespread occurrence in history. Said occurrence was additionally rational: replication enabled an individual's life to be lived, in Eliade's words, "at the heart of reality."

With reference to the culture of Islam, the chapter then pursued the question of the ritual replicability of this culture's prime cosmogonic cosmological centre, Mecca. Establishing first that Mecca was indeed this centre, it demonstrated the extent to which it was ritually replicated within the Sufi universe. Asking if the same replicability was also true of other centres in the Islamic world which could be considered cosmological, either in Eliade's technical sense or more generally, the chapter additionally looked at Medina and Jerusalem. It argued that the evidence for both appeared to be limited, and with regard to Jerusalem in the Sufi universe specifically, apparently non-existent.

In an attempt to explain this last finding, the chapter finally pursued two more questions. It firstly asked whether the Kaʿba's geometric form might have acted as a stimulus for cosmological thought, both Sufi and non-Sufi; and secondly, whether this stimulus had, in turn, helped established Mecca as the cosmological centre in the Sufi universe to be ritually replicated. To both questions, the answer was tentatively affirmative.

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CHAPTER 11

Macrocosm and Microcosm in Sufi Thought

Pierre Lory

The conception of a general correspondence between the human constitution (microcosm) and the whole of the universe (macrocosm) penetrated Islamic culture during the first Hijra centuries. It was adopted by philosophers, occult scientists, and also within the framework of Islamic mysticism. This came about when Sufism had become an important religious movement; the experience of divine nearness with God had to be doctrinally explained to learned disciples and anchored in a structured vision of the world. "Microcosmism" became a central point in Sufi doctrines, because it helped to define the profound meaning of humanity, its nature, and function in the whole of creation.

The idea that the human being is an image or a compendium of the universe was not new. It was widespread in many pre-Islamic world visions. For a long time, Hellenic philosophy had been alluding to an overall comparison between human nature and the whole universe. Doctrines attributed in particular to Pythagoras (sixth century BCE) and Democritus (d. 370 BCE) suggested such conceptions. In his *Timaeus*, Plato (d. 347 BCE) developed in more detail the idea that the structure of the human individual reflected that of the whole universe, the *kosmos*, both being a body animated by a soul, and that man is appointed to mirror the universe as a model of harmony. Later, Plotinus (d. 270 CE) evoked the existence of an "intelligible man" generated by the First Intellect prior to the emanation of concrete human beings in the sensible world. This idea enabled Plotinus to conceive the possibility of an ecstatic union of the human soul with its spiritual origin and with the One. During the same period of Late Antiquity, the Hermetic current, whose boundaries are rather vague, developed doctrines that emphasized a general correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm. The intellect of man is divine by origin, his body and soul reflect the harmony of the universe, of stars and earthly elements. According to a commonly held belief, human dispositions and organs were influenced by their hidden relations with celestial bodies in particular. It is important to stress that most of the analogies between man and universe were not considered metaphors, but actual correspondences. Fields as varied as astrology, alchemy, medicine, and magic received a mystical dimension in this perspective.

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In a more specifically religious framework, the idea that man was created according to the same rules as the universe was also widespread. Mazdaist texts describe the formation of the world as a partition of the body of the first cosmic human with Gayomarth, the first earthly man, originating from his seed. The Manichean myth proposed a narrative where a primordial man (*insān qadīm*, Ibn al-Nadīm, 392–7) was sent to fight against the Devil. Last but not least, the biblical tradition asserting that Adam was created according to God's own image and likeness (*Genesis* 1:26–7) became also a basis for numerous essential developments on this topic in Judaism and Christianity.

Islamic mystical thought developed its conceptions in contact with this intellectual and religious legacy. Three different ideas that were generally brought together were adapted to the Muslim creed: (1) the earthly human being is an emanation of a metaphysical state he may be able to recover; (2) the human being was created according to a divine image; (3) the human being is physically and spiritually a compendium of the whole spiritual and material universe.

The first idea found its way to Islamic culture through various philosophical texts. Among the most important, the Arabic "Theology" wrongly attributed to Aristotle—the Plotinian text entitled *Uthūlūjyā Arisṭāṭālīs*, translated into Arabic during the third/ninth century—mentions the conception of a universal idea of man, the "intelligible man" (*insān ʿaqlī*) as a complete perfect being including all qualities, while the "sensorial man" (*insān ḥissī*) living on earth is but an incomplete image of this intelligible reality. The "sensorial man" is, however, potentially able to free himself from the prison of the body and to join his model. The Islamic philosophers (*falāsifa*) offered their own version of these ideas. In his philosophical system, al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) defended the idea that the perfection of man can be reached by the union of his intellect with the Active Intellect. After him, Avicenna (d. 428/1037) proposed a conception of the soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqa*) as an incorruptible substance by essence, in which the knowledge of the intelligible world may become imprinted or identified with by means of the Active Intellect. Hence, this soul becomes a world in itself, in correspondence with the whole of the universe.

The second idea—the divine image of man—is not Qurʾānic, but was received through a set of well-known *ḥadīth*, including the saying that "God (*Allāh*) created Adam according to His form." Another version says: "… according to the form of the All-Merciful" (al-Bukhārī, *Istiʾdhān*, 1; Ibn Ḥanbal, 2:244, 251, 315, 323; Muslim, *Birr* 115 and *Janna* 28). Sunnī theologians commented on these *ḥadīth* differently (Gimaret, 123–36; Melchert; for the Shīʿī positions, see Amir-Moezzi, *Religion discrète*, 100). Trying to avoid anthropomorphic interpretations, they often suggested that "his" form is referring to Adam's own form, or to the form of another man.

The third idea of a general correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm appeared quite early in Arabic Hermetic literature. For instance, it is mentioned in the *Book of Secrets of Creation* (*Sirr al-khalīqa*) attributed to Apollonyus of Tyana (Ar. Balīnās; second–third/eighth–ninth century, dates uncertain), and in several other texts on the "science of nature." It was further theorized in Arabic alchemical texts. The corpus attributed to the alchemist Jābir b. Ḥayyān (second/eighth–fourth/tenth centuries, dates uncertain), for example, explicitly professes this conception, building up a system where the human structure is placed in parallel with mineralogy, astrology, and so on (Kraus, 50–1). Jābir sees the accomplishment of human history in the venture of "the great man" (*insān kabīr*), clearly alluding to the Shīʿī idea of the ultimate rising of the last Imam, the *qāʾim* (Lory, 117–20). We find similar conceptions in treatises on magic and hidden sciences, such as the famous *Aim of the Sage* (*Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*) written by Abū l-Qāsim Maslama al-Qurṭubī (d. 353/964), which clearly evokes the concept of an archetypal human being (*al-insān al-kullī*), the form of the universal man being found in the form of an individual man and corresponding to all the elements in nature.

In all these works and theories, we notice adaptations of antique conceptions, but molded in a clearly Islamic framework (Massignon, *Ecrits mémorables*, 536–56). These ideas spread in classical Arabic and Persian literature. The micro-macrocosm theory was by no means considered a strange or foreign doctrine, and many testimonies can be found in texts of contemporary literature (*adab*). The very necessity of explaining the text of the Qur'ān, the references of the Holy Book to the heavenly spheres, the angels, the signs of natural phenomena also gave a sufficient impulse to a religious meditation on the rules that govern the cosmos (Schimmel).

We must, however, emphasize here the specific perspective taken in the framework of mystic doctrines. The most important and original synthesis of these three ideas in Sufi thought is to be found in the doctrine of the "Perfect Man" (*al-insān al-kāmil*). The general idea of correspondence between micro- and macrocosm is deeply linked here to that of hagiology (*walāya*) and Muḥammadan prophetology. We first have to distinguish here the concept of Perfect Man, in uppercase letters, from that of perfect man, in lowercase letters. The first is the universal synthesis of humanity, the first of all beings created by God, model of the whole creation, whereas the latter is a concrete historic saint who has fully developed the potentialities invested in him by God. The two are of course correlated. We will first tackle the subject of the universal Perfect Man.

The central idea here is that the first being created by God was a universal one, containing in itself the seeds of all other beings to come; and that this Universal Spirit/Intellect had a human form. We find here the synthesis of the

Plotinian conception of Universal Spirit and the biblical idea of Adam, created in the image and likeness of God. This conception is not directly Qurʾānic but is not foreign to the Islamic tradition. The Qurʾānic verse 2:30 asserting that Adam was created as vice-regent (*khalīfa*) on earth provides a general basis for the idea of man's central place in the universe. Another verse (33:72) mentions the acceptance by mankind to bear a mysterious divine trust (*amāna*). Several *ḥadīth* may be quoted in that sense such as the aforementioned: "The All-Merciful created Adam in His form (*ṣūra*)." It is not quite clear how this idea of the Perfect Man first developed in Sufi thought. It is likely, however, that the general conception of the Perfect Man appeared very early among the Shīʿīs. A majority of Shīʿī believers of that time were not only demanding that their Imams should be given political power; they also contended that their Imams, together with Muḥammad and Fāṭima, were divine entities, that they had existed even before the creation of the world and of Adam (Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide*, 29–59). Adam, the other prophets, and the believers were in a sense deriving from the Light of the Imams. The historical link between these Shīʿī doctrines and Sufi teachings on the Perfect Man is not obvious, but several clues may be found (see Corbin, chap. 1; Ebstein, 13–27, 132; al-Shaybī).

As these ideas developed progressively in Sufi milieus, they were adapted to Sunnī doctrinal precepts. Eventually, they received a full realization in the works of Ibn al-ʿArabī and his followers, but the idea had obviously grown in earlier times. The Sunnī dogma of the pivotal function of Muḥammad, increasingly confirmed during the third/ninth century, gave the prophet of Islam the character of a totally perfect, supra-human being. The belief that the Prophet was indeed not an ordinary human being was based on an interpretation of several *ḥadīth*. Among the most ancient of them is "I have been sent [as an apostle] in the best of all the generations of Adam's offspring, century after century, up to this period I am living now" (al-Bukhārī, *Manāqib*, *Wafāt al-nabī*). According to another *ḥadīth*, Muḥammad was questioned about the time of his investiture as a prophet, and he answered: "When Adam was between his spirit and his body" (Ibn Ḥanbal, 4:66, 5:379; al-Tirmidhī, 3609). This *ḥadīth* was transmitted with variants and may be interpreted simply as the divine predestination of Muḥammad's mission as a prophet. At the same time, it provided a foundation for the idea of Muḥammad's pre-existence before all created beings.

The doctrine of Muḥammad's pre-existence was developed by early Sufi masters. The first one known to us is Sahl b. ʿAbdallāh al-Tustarī (d. 283/896). Al-Tustarī did not propose a full-fledged theology of Muḥammad as origin of the macro- and microcosm. However, he proposed the conception of the "Muḥammadan Light," *nūr Muḥammadī*, created by God before everything else. His exposition was based on an unattested *ḥadīth* "The first thing God created was my Light," and on quoting Q 5:15 ("… A light from God has come

to you, and a clear Book"), 33:45–6 ("O prophet! We have sent you as a … caller towards God by His leave, and an illuminating beacon"), and the famous light verse (24:35). From this light were created Adam, the other prophets, and then all humans. The extant passages of al-Tustarī's teachings, however, are very brief. The idea of a correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm is implicitly present but difficult for us to reconstruct in detail (Böwering, 149–57). Another important mystical thinker of the period, al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. ca. 295–300/907–12), described Muḥammad as the first created being; he also suggested that in every human individual there is an image of the macrocosm (Radtke and O'Kane, 48, 64–5, 102–3). Al-Tirmidhī does not seem, however, to have linked the two ideas in one unified doctrine and to have viewed Muḥammad as the origin or model of the whole universe. More audacious in this respect, al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922) proposed in his *Kitāb al-ṭawāsīn* a complete prophetology applied to Muḥammad as origin, way, and purpose of creation. For al-Ḥallāj, Muḥammad is really a light emanating from the divine Light. He existed before all beings; he is the guide to humankind; and he is simultaneously the very purpose of creation, because of his inner perfection. He is a cosmic manifestation of God (*huwa Huwa*), and hence, the only possible way to Him. The imitation of the Prophet's "Ascension" (*miʿrāj*) is the expression of the mystic's pilgrimage to God (al-Ḥallāj, 191–93, 200–1; Massignon, *Passion*, 3:300–23).

In fact, this idea of Muḥammad's pre-eternity did not remain purely esoteric; it became popular among a large number of devout Muslims. Many *ḥadīth* to this effect were quoted. The *Book of Healing* (*Kitāb al-shifāʾ*) of Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ al-Yaḥṣubī (d. 544/1149) provides such examples. Following the ideas of al-Tustarī, he quotes a tradition going back to Ibn ʿAbbās claiming that Muḥammad's spirit was present as a light praising God and praised by the angels two thousand years before Adam was created, and that this light was then placed into the loins of Adam, and then generation after generation in the loins of Abraham, up to Muḥammad's own parents (ʿIyāḍ al-Yaḥṣubī, 1:56). Many popular Sufi litanies, although not being doctrinal texts per se, express the same idea of Muḥammad as the first created being. Let us quote the famous *Ṣalāt al-ṣughrā* of ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 561/1166): "O my God, pray for the prophet Muḥammad whose light preceded the creation …" The idea that Muḥammad was the first created being and Perfect Man gained a vast circulation. We find it, first and foremost, of course in Sufi circles. For example, it is present in the famous book of prayers to the Prophet, *The Guide toward Good Deeds* (*Dalāʾil al-khayrāt*) of Muḥammad al-Jazūlī (d. 875/1470). These litanies and praises do not just express abstract theological concepts. Rather, every Sufi is actually invited to follow the example of Muḥammad. Every disciple

(*murīd*) is encouraged to acquire Muḥammad's perfection according to his own possibilities. The definition of Muḥammad's nature, and of the nature of ways to follow him (*mutābaʿa*), is thus of paramount importance. In sum, these conceptions are not restricted to Sufi circles and literature. The "prayer for the Prophet" (*al-ṣalāt ʿalā l-nabī*) is very common among Muslims, establishing a link between the ordinary believer and the living Prophet Muḥammad, conceived as a superior being present in the world and endowed with supernatural powers.

The importance of this belief for Sufi spirituality led many thinkers and masters to develop in more detail the ideas of "perfection" (*kamāl*) and "completeness" (*tamām*) among the followers of Muḥammad. The famous theologian and Sufi al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) devoted several passages of his works to "microcosmism." His "Marvels of the Heart" (*ʿAjāʾib al-qalb*), the twenty-first book of his *Revival of Religious Sciences* (*Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*), contains meditations on the nature of man's intermediate composition between animal and angelic entities, and the complexity of "the city of the (human) soul." The connection between the faculties of the soul and the higher levels of being is an essential point. It enables al-Ghazālī to explain the very possibility of a mystical knowledge: the mystic can perceive divine realities because their images are already present in him. The idea that human self-knowledge is the key to knowledge of the macrocosm and the Lord is further summarized in other treatises like the *Alchemy of Happiness* (*Kīmiyāʾ al-saʿāda*) and in *The Balance of Action* (*Mīzān al-ʿamal*, chap. 4). In his *Niche of Lights* (*Mishkāt al-anwār*), al-Ghazālī proposes a general theory of correspondences. He writes: "God showed beneficence to Adam. He gave him an abridged form that brings together every sort of thing found in the cosmos. It is as if Adam is everything in the cosmos, or an abridged transcription (*nuskha*) of the world" (al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*; trans. 31). The visible world is, according to al-Ghazālī, a likeness of the celestial Realm (*mithālan li-ʿālam al-malakūt*): every entity in this world has its correspondence in the angelic world. This last point plays an important role in Sufi spiritual life. It provides a necessary theoretical basis to the science of the interpretation of dreams. Dreams are a decisive means of communication between divine worlds and the individual conscience of the mystics. How can images that appear in dreams be intelligible? How can they give a coherent message and be correctly interpreted? The answer lies in the correspondence between heavenly worlds and terrestrial entities, producing obvious symbolic images in the mind of the dreamer. Dreaming of the sun or the moon, for example, makes sense because they simultaneously refer to coherent individual symbols, cosmic reality, and divine meanings (for more details on al-Ghazālī's microcosmism, see Takeshita, 26–49).

Nonetheless, it is clear that the definitive theoretical conceptualization of this belief was developed by Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240). The Shaykh al-Akbar may be considered as a summit, a climax in the evolution of the macrocosm/microcosm idea and the conception of the Perfect Man within Sufism. As we have seen, he was not the "inventor" of the concept. As was recently pointed out by Michael Ebstein, a clear and coherent doctrinal elaboration of it was given during the fourth/tenth century in the *Epistles* of the Sincere Brethren (*Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*), who proposed a synthesis between Hellenic and Shīʿī conceptions. The general Hellenic idea that the purpose of man's life is the imitation of God (*al-tashabbuh bi-l-ilāh*) runs through their work. Two of the *Epistles*' fifty-two treatises are devoted to the topic of human perfection (treatises 26 "Concerning the Saying of the Wise Men That Man Is a Small World" and 34 "On the Meaning of the Wise Men's Saying That the World Is a Great Man"). They identify the "absolute man" (*al-insān al-muṭlaq al-kullī*) as the vice-regent (*khalīfa*) of God on earth. Every human is an individual manifestation of this absolute man (Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil*, 1:306). He is the Universal Soul present in every particular human being. According to the *Risāla jāmiʿa* (276–79), he is the Universal Complete Man (*al-insān al-kullī al-tāmm*), the purpose of the creation of mankind. He is also called the "Way" (*ṣirāṭ*), the "Holy Spirit," the "Balance" (*mīzān*). He is present on earth within accomplished people. Ebstein has highlighted the influence the *Epistles of the Sincere Brethren* had in the Islamic West in general, and especially in Ibn al-ʿArabī's works. Inka Nokso-Koivisto has also noted the similarities between the two systems, mainly leaning on Ibn al-ʿArabī's *Divine Governance of the Human Kingdom* (*al-Tadbīrāt al-ilāhiyya*; see Nokso-Koivisto, 202–3). We find here, again, the particular emphasis on cosmology characteristic of Shīʿī/Ismāʿīlī thinkers.

Let us go back to the Shaykh al-Akbar. Several studies have been devoted to the subject of Ibn al-ʿArabī's doctrine of the Perfect Man and his macrocosm/microcosm conception. Masataka Takeshita published his PhD work "Ibn ʿArabī's Theory of the Perfect Man and Its Place in the History of Islamic Thought" in 1987. He analyzes in detail Ibn al-ʿArabī's ideas, relying mainly on the *Bezels of Wisdom* (*Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*). He also provides a comparison between these conceptions and the doctrine of the Sincere Brethren and al-Ghazālī. In 1989, William Chittick published an article on "Microcosm, Macrocosm, and Perfect Man in the View of Ibn al-ʿArabī," where he stresses the link between the two ideas (microcosm/macrocosm and Perfect Man), the latter being the spirit of the whole universe, the very purpose of the entire creation (see also Chittick, *Self-disclosure*, 269–370; Chittick, *Sufi Path*, 274–88).

Let us summarize. Based on the *ḥadīth* asserting that Adam was created according to God's image (*ṣūra* = form, shape), Ibn al-ʿArabī built up an entire

cosmological doctrine. In several chapters of his works—mainly *The Meccan Illuminations* (*al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, esp. chs. 6 and 371), *The Bezels of Wisdom* (*Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*), *The Divine Governance of the Human Kingdom*, and in several other treatises (e.g., *ʿAnqāʾ Mughrib*)—he presented the idea of microcosmism, arguing that the whole universe is generated from a primordial matrix created by God called the "Muḥammadan Reality" (*ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya*). This Muḥammadan Reality may be said to be an image/form of God, because it sums up all the divine Names that God wants to manifest, the whole creation being nothing else than the disclosure of all these Names. In other words, the essences of all beings manifested in the universe at all times are virtually present in the Muḥammadan Reality. This matrix is also called the First Intellect, the Spirit, or the Highest Pen (*qalam*) writing everything in the Book of existence (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, ch. 6, 117–21). The Muḥammadan Reality manifests itself partially in every existent entity of the universe: minerals, plants, animals. However, human beings are the most complete creatures, containing in themselves virtually all the divine Names. In this sense, every human being is a small world in total correspondence with the greater world. Thus, we find in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought a complete microcosm/macrocosm system. Man, being endowed with a body and a soul, participates simultaneously in two main levels of reality as an intermediate creature (*barzakh*). Both man's body and his spirit are part and reflections of the different levels of existence in universe, from the lower earth to the divine Throne. Ibn al-ʿArabī provides abundant details on these physical and spiritual correspondences. In the *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, especially in chapters 198 and 371, he draws numerous parallels between the celestial spheres, the signs of the zodiac, the structures of paradise and hell, the letters of the alphabet, with the limbs and faculties of the human body (Tyser). We should underline that man, according to the Shaykh al-Akbar, not only summarizes the macrocosm as was done in Hellenic thought, but also reflects God's own Names, being a living mirror of all divine qualities. This is an essential point: self-knowledge may lead to knowledge of God Himself.

In the first chapter of the *Bezels of Wisdom*, Ibn al-ʿArabī writes:

> This [above mentioned] formation is called Man and Vice-Regent [of God]. As for the first term, it stems from the universality of his formation and the fact that he embraces all realities. For the Reality, he is as the pupil is for the eye through which the act of seeing takes place….: it is by him that the Reality looks at His creation and bestows the Mercy [of existence] on them. He is the Man, the transient [in his form], the eternal [in his essence]; he is the perpetual, the everlasting, the [at

> once] discriminating and unifying Word. It is by his existence that the Cosmos subsists.... The Cosmos is preserved so long as the Perfect Man remains in it.
>
> IBN AL-ʿARABĪ, *Fuṣūṣ*; trans. 51

All other beings are thus like parts, fragments of this universal matrix. Ibn al-ʿArabī explains in the same text that the angels, for instance, are a spiritual faculty of this universal form called by the Sufis "the great man" (*al-insān al-kabīr*). The great man is nevertheless "one," reflecting also divine oneness. Most humans of course do not actualize completely all the potential virtual qualities included in their constitution. The divine qualities placed by God in the Muḥammadan Reality are only fully completed in prophets and saints; the prophet of Islam being the last and of course the most perfect of them. These human manifestations of the divine qualities in human beings may also be considered instantiations of the "perfect man" (*insān kāmil*) (here in lowercase letters) in Ibn al-ʿArabī's works. "Perfect" does not only mean here "virtuous" or "saint" in the current sense, but "having accomplished in act all the degrees of being that were virtually present in their original nature." In that sense, each of these holy persons (men or women) may be called "perfect."

The historical figure of the Prophet Muḥammad, as we have mentioned, is the most accomplished form of this perfection. As "perfect man," Muḥammad represents both the origin and finality of the whole of creation. Ibn al-ʿArabī writes in chapter 27 of the *Bezels of Wisdom*, devoted to the "Wisdom of Muḥammad":

> He is the most perfect creation of this humankind, for which reason the whole affair [of creation] begins and ends with him. He was a prophet when Adam was still between the water and the clay and he is, by his elemental makeup, the Seal of the Prophets.
>
> IBN AL-ʿARABĪ, *Fuṣūṣ*; trans. 272

All the friends of God or saints (*awliyāʾ*) are, however, holding important ranks within the framework of this cosmic project of human "perfection." They reflect at different levels the Muḥammadan Reality. According to Sufi tradition, for every generation there exists a perfect saint, accomplishing this Muḥammadan perfection on earth. His is called the Pole (*qutb*), the Help (*ghawth*). He is surrounded by a whole hierarchy of saints with each saint serving a specific function in the cosmic project. This project refers to an eschatological vision. The very purpose of creation is the actualization of all virtual qualities contained in the divine Names. Therefore, a distinction can be made

between the term "Muḥammadan Reality" as the original matrix of all beings in their virtual state at the "beginning" of the divine Self-disclosure—and that of "Perfect Man," the latter referring to the accomplishment and finality of all creation (Chodkiewicz, 70–1).

In short, we see that the originality of Ibn al-ʿArabī lies not so much in the invention of new concepts, but in bringing ancient ideas together in a coherent system. This system is linked organically to the mystical endeavor, which is the purpose of *walāya*. The Sufi principle "know yourself to know your Lord" is here greatly expanded: know the world you are living in and which is living inside yourself, meditate on it—and a manifestation from your Lord will be unveiled to you.

The doctrine of Perfect Man was adopted and elaborated by many other great Sufi thinkers who formed what came to be known as the "school" of Ibn al-ʿArabī. We find, for instance, important developments of the microcosm/macrocosm idea in the works of al-Qūnawī (d. 671/1272) and ʿAzīz al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d. between 690/1291 and 700/1300). The former was a student of Ibn al-ʿArabī, the latter was clearly influenced by his *Bezels of Wisdom* (*Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*). In his *Perfect Man* (*al-Insān al-kāmil*) and *The Quintessence of Realities* (*Zubdat al-ḥaqāʾiq*), al-Nasafī explains that all that exists outside man in the macrocosm is also present and active in his own soul. He suggests, however, that the human microcosm is superior to the macrocosm because his actions derive from his own choices (Ridgeon, 39, 66–7).

One of the most famous followers of Ibn al-ʿArabī is ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 805/1403), author of a treatise called precisely *The Perfect Man* (*al-Insān al-kāmil*). Al-Jīlī adopts the main outlines of Ibn al-ʿArabī's cosmology. Like his master, he expresses the idea that God is the only real existence; the whole universe is but a revelation of God to Himself, a divine thought taking shape, a divine imagination (*khayāl fī khayāl*). He then explains the different levels of divine self-disclosure of the unknowable God. At the level called *wāḥidiyya*, God manifests His attributes. These attributes may refer to His essence (Unity, Eternity, Reality), to His qualities of Beauty (Guide, Forgiver) or to His qualities of Majesty (Almighty, Avenger), or to His Perfection (the First and the Last, the Apparent and the Hidden). The complete image containing all the divine attributes is the human form, more precisely Muḥammad, the archetype of the entire creation (chaps. 60 and 53). This "Perfect Man" is also called the "First Intellect," "Supreme Pen." All created beings emanate from him. The purpose of the mystic path is to understand and take on the meaning of each divine attribute. The Sufi has to become a knower through divine knowledge, living through divine life, and so on. He becomes gradually united with the divine Essence, which is, in the end, his own true reality (Nicholson, 77–142).

The correspondences between macro- and microcosm are also frequently found in mystical poetry. They permeate Rūmī's conceptions and poetic expressions, for example:

> The pure, starlike spirits replenish the stars of the heavens.
> The outward form of these stars maintains our world, but our inward reality maintains the heavens.
> So you are the microcosm in form, the macrocosm in meaning.
> The outward form of the branch is the origin of the fruit; but inwardly the branch came into existence for the fruit's sake.
>
> *Masnavi*, 4:519–23; trans. CHITTICK, *Path of Love*, 67

In fact, the idea of Perfect Man became widespread in late Islamic culture, in which Sufi conceptions occupied a very large place up to the nineteenth century. It became nearly a commonplace truth. We find its definition in al-Jurjānī's (d. 816/1414) well-known *Book of Definitions* (*Kitāb al-taʿrīfāt*), which contains an entry on *al-insān al-kāmil*:

> It refers to the reality encompassing in himself the divine and created realms, both in regard to universals and particulars. He is an all-inclusive book that contains divine and cosmic books. With reference to his spirit and intellect, he is a book related to the Universal Intellect and known as "Mother of the Book" (*umm al-kitāb*). With reference to his heart, he is the book of the Preserved Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*). With reference to his soul, he is the book of negation and affirmation.... The relation of the First Intellect with reference to the macrocosm and its realities is similar the relation of the human spirit (*rūḥ*) with reference to the body and its faculties. The Universal Soul is the heart of the macrocosm, just as the rational soul is the heart of man. The universe is therefore named "great human being" (*al-insān al-kabīr*).
>
> AL-JURJĀNĪ, 39–40

We could also say a few words about the deep links between the microcosm/macrocosm theory and the practice of "hidden sciences" like alchemy, astrology, esoteric science of letters (*ʿilm al-ḥurūf*), and Sufism. According to the microcosm/macrocosm theory, the discovery of divine wisdom in one's inner world may also come about by an acquisition of the knowledge of the larger Book of creation, since every element of the universe is corresponding to a human reality. Meditation on the signs of the universe is an efficient way to know human truth. Each science could become a bridge to mystical knowledge. Jābir

b. Ḥayyān, for example, described alchemical work as a “mesocosm” (*ʿālam awsaṭ*). In trying to transmute metallic elements is his laboratory, the alchemist is also acquiring a higher wisdom, and transforming himself. Many Sufis seem to have practiced alchemy, although this practice was said to become useless at a certain stage of their mystical growth. For the sake of comprehensiveness, we should also mention the role of meditation on the Qurʾān in these conceptions of macrocosm and microcosm. Since human nature expresses all the divine Names, and since the Qurʾān is believed to be a divine and eternal book containing all wisdom, the spiritual reading of the Qurʾān is also considered to be a “mesocosm” whose interpretation may lead to the comprehension of the human self, because it likewise points to the same divine knowledge.

1 Social Consequences

All these conceptions may seem theoretical and abstract. We must, however, not overlook the social dimensions of the microcosm/macrocosm theory in Sufism. The “world” here (*kosmos*, *ʿālam*) implies not only the universe as a whole and man as a complete individual, but also harmony within human society. The idea is not new, and was developed extensively by Plato, in the fourth chapter of his *Republic*. In the Islamic cultural sphere, the political conceptions of al-Fārābī, or the Sincere Brethren, are also well known: the city of humans has to be built on the same universal foundation, in harmony with the rules governing the universe. At its summit stands a perfect ruler, wise and inspired by God. Actually, the existence of individuals considered perfect by their disciples could lead to important political consequences. The most dramatic example is that of Shīʿism, where the claim to absolute authority of the perfect Imams often implies that the actual (Sunnī) rulers are illegitimate. The Ismāʿīlī-oriented *Epistles of the Sincere Brethren* were in that sense not devoid of political consequences.

In mainstream Sufism, however, the perspective is rather different. The saint as the perfect man maintains harmony between human societies and the whole universe, but not directly on a political level. Since the third/ninth century and maybe earlier, the Sufis believed that a secret hierarchy of perfect human beings was reflecting the divinely ordained harmony in society. As mentioned above, the Pole (*quṭb*) rules from its summit. He and the other saints beneath him, the *awliyāʾ*, certainly provide humankind with spiritual guidance, but they are also bridges or mediators between the divine providence and the material world. Without these saints, harmony could not be achieved, and the universe would collapse. We must emphasize this point: a

human being is not only an element of the cosmos, but also of a social entity, within humankind. Humankind, or at least the *umma*, may be considered as a giant body with its different organs and faculties, with holiness (*walāya*) being its spirit, heart, and *raison d'être*.

This conception of sainthood had indirect social and political consequences. In the eyes of Sufis, kings, sultans, and *amīr*s wield only an apparent and superficial power. The only real power belongs to God; and on earth, to His saintly friends (*awliyā'*). The great saints—the "pillars" (*awtād*), "substitutes" (*abdāl*), and of course the Pole (*quṭb*) himself—are the ones who are actually ruling over each province of the world. The *quṭb* is the real vice-regent of God on earth, in the same way Adam was (Q 2:30). Famous saints may be seen as protectors of a city, or a province. Even after their death, people continue to consider them powerful. These conceptions of *walāya* were shared by not only the Sufis and their followers, but also ordinary believers searching for blessings and mediation. For this reason, a real struggle could occasionally arise between Sufis and jurists, Sufis and politicians. We can even assert that the main criticisms of Sufism by outsiders resulted from the claim of the Sufi masters to absolute religious authority (see de Jong and Radtke). The social success of al-Ḥallāj—considered as a divine representative of the divine Intellect (*al-muṭā'*) by some of his disciples—was probably one of the main reasons for his execution in Baghdad in 309/922.

After al-Ḥallāj's trial, however, political implications became more subdued. Sufis often were responsible citizens, calling for obedience to the sultan, even if he was unjust. Ibn al-ʿArabī's meditations on the topic of the human city in his *Divine Governance* (*al-Tadbīrāt al-ilāhiyya*) lies beyond the scope of direct political aims. They were not primarily meant to achieve concrete changes in society. This does not mean in any way that the Sufi masters observed the problems of their societies passively; they could occasionally play very important roles in politics. As mentioned, the Sufi brotherhoods considered their masters to be perfect human beings, or saints. In times of political troubles and upheaval, and even in times of peace, their prestige could complicate things for political leaders or colonial administrators. Many Sufi masters were credited with the eschatological function of a "restorer" (*mujaddid*) of religion or even that of a messiah (*mahdī*). Many examples of Sufi masters exercising strong social authority, and even political power, can be found in Asia (Papas), in the Middle East (van Bruinessen, 204–64), and Africa (Robinson and Triaud).

In modern times, the idea of "perfect man" continues to circulate almost exclusively among the Sufis. However, its reappearance in the thought of a synthetic thinker such as Muhammad Iqbal (Iqbal; see also Yilmaz) should be noted. For the latter, in whom the vitalist philosophy of a Nietzsche or a

Bergson is palpable, man is called by the Islamic message to surpass himself, to assimilate the divine attributes, and to become truly God's collaborator in creation. For this purpose, Iqbal reappropriates the concept of the "Perfect Man" (*al-insān al-kāmil*) as expounded notably in al-Jīlī; but whereas the Sufis valued the obliteration of human characters in the realization of the divine project, Iqbal exalts the greatness of the human "self" (*khūdī*) and thus shifts the focus of Muslim mysticism. We have noted, however, that for Ibn al-ʿArabī and his followers, the "Perfect Man" is referring to a reality to come, to the final realization of God's project of creation. When this finally happens, the universe will lose any reason to exist. Everything on earth will collapse, ushering in the greater Resurrection.

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CHAPTER 12

The Cosmo-Eschatology of Saints and *Mahdī*s

Noah Gardiner

1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 1 of this volume, Sufi thought on the structure of the cosmos is deeply intertwined with ideas about death, the end of the world, and the afterlife, giving rise to what can be termed a Sufi cosmo-eschatology. Drawing on various aspects of the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth*, including the complex body of apocalyptic logia that emerged from the internecine conflicts of the Umayyad and early ʿAbbāsid periods (*malāḥim wa-fitan*, as well as some eschatological *akhbār* of the Shīʿī Imams), Sufi thinkers dwelt frequently on the secrets of the Unseen world(s) (*al-ghayb*) said to underlie the merely apparent reality of this one, urging aspirants on the path to die to this world so as to gain the other. While the "inward turn" of early Sufism—a newfound focus on introspection and personal salvation (Karamustafa, 2, 17, 21)—helped domesticate the theological and political fervor of early Islamic apocalypticism, Sufi thinkers nonetheless retained claims to types of quasi-prophetic/visionary spiritual authority that frequently discomfited and sometimes outraged religious specialists of other stripes, as is most evident in controversies around Sufi notions of sainthood (*wilāya*). Sufi claims of spiritual authority sometimes spilled over into implicit or explicit assertions of divinely granted political authority as well, most dramatically in claims of *mahdī*-ship; that is, of a messianic role of restoring justice to the earth prior to its final destruction.

The two main parts of this chapter explore cosmo-eschatological elements of Sufi sainthood and *mahdī*-ship with a primary emphasis on their this-worldly manifestations. The first addresses the "cult of saints" centered around the tomb-shrines of deceased masters and ways that, with the rise and spread of the Sufi orders from the late medieval period onward, Sufi shrine culture reordered the space-time of daily life across much of the Muslim world in accordance with the deathless powers of the saints. The second addresses various aspects of Sufi *mahdī*-ship, including the apparent emergence of such claims in the sixth/twelfth-century Islamic West, the ever influential Ibn al-ʿArabī's (d. 638/1240) ideas on the topic, Ibn Khaldūn's (d. 808/1406) critique of Sufi mahdism, and various Sufi *mahdī*s from across the early modern, colonial, and postcolonial Muslim world.

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2 Saint Veneration

Visitation to the tombs of the honored dead is attested from early in the history of Islam, and can be seen as an extension of common practices of visiting the graves of deceased family members to pray for and converse with the dead. It is difficult to discern a specific connection between such practices and early Sufism, though Sufi writers are mostly absent from the ranks of religious authorities who condemned them as being among the pagan impieties of the rabble. No less an authority than Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) seems to have been among the first Sufi authors to actively defend visiting and praying at the tombs of saints (Meri, Ziyāra). By the end of the late medieval period, visiting the tombs of saints to seek the benefits of their *baraka*—their sacred power—and their intercession with God in matters large and small, as well as the erection of shrines for the saints and the establishment of annual festivals in their honor, were integrally associated with Sufism and with the Sufi orders that by then were proliferating across the Muslim-ruled world. Indeed, the shrine culture that grew up around the saints came to be one of the most widespread expressions of Muslim piety throughout most of the Muslim-majority world up into the early twentieth century, before withering in many places under the combined (and interconnected) onslaughts of colonial disapproval and condemnation by the forces of rising reformist/“fundamentalist” (*salafī*) movements. These practices nonetheless remain a vital element of Muslim life in many parts of the globe (on various elements of Sufi shrine culture, see Blair; Bowen; Ewing and Corbett; Gilmartin; Hallenberg; Hodgson, 2:217–18; Meri, *Cult*, 12–58, 120–213; Smith and Ernst, xi–xxviii).

The tomb of a Sufi saint was, as Scott Kugle has written, “a permeable boundary between this world and the next,” a place imbued with special potency due to the *baraka* attributed to its inhabitant (Kugle, 46). The close relationship in Sufi thought between the microcosmic body/structure of the human being and that of the macrocosm has been discussed in Chapter 1 with regard to Adam—concepts that, as we have seen, are rife with eschatological and apocalyptic implications. As Kugle notes, this relationship is seen as well in Qurʾānic references to mountains as the *awtād*, “pegs,” that hold the world in place (Q 78:7), and the common use of the same term to denote key members of the hierarchy of saints, who, as discussed in Chapter 1, are seen to perform a similar function of stabilizing the world’s existence as an abode for humanity through the occasional exercise of their miraculous gifts, beneficent interruptions of the natural order. Just as the mountains are the bones of the earth, Kugle ruminates, so the bones of the saints held in place the social geography

of Muslim life (Kugle, 44–6). The world of the living came to be structured around the remains and remembering of dead saints.

Though the architecture of Sufi tomb-shrines varies in significant ways across different parts of the Islamic world, they were—and in many places still are—one of the most recognizable and consistent elements of the human landscape with regard to their social and religious functions. The shrine serves as a social gathering place, often being one of the few major permanent structures in a given settlement, and helps anchor the local economy due to the travel and commerce that accompanies *ziyāra* (visitation) practices and annual festivals. For many Muslims, the shrine is the most accessible point of contact with the divine, a "privileged interruption of the flat tyranny of distance" from the divine imposed by formal theology (Peter Brown, quoted in Kugle, 46). This is particularly the case for women, who are often excluded from the mosque and certainly from leadership roles there, but who can find opportunities to participate in and lead public religious activities at many shrines (Chaudhry; Mayeur-Jaouen, passim; Pemberton). The shrine is a site for organized, communal Sufi activity (*dhikr, samāʿ*, etc.), but also for private retreat. In the face of personal and family hardships, it is a conduit for appeals to God through the intercessory powers of the saint. Such appeals might be delivered through invocatory prayer (*duʿāʾ*), written requests slipped into the crevices of shrine walls, or practices such as dream incubation, in which the supplicant spends the night at the tomb in hopes of dreaming of the saint, the Prophet, or some other emissary of the Unseen (Katz, 190).

Shrines are vital to the corporate life of the Sufi orders, the living leaders of a given group drawing much of their authority from their initiatic and/or blood-relationship to the entombed. As Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen documents, the maintenance of shrines and the mounting of festivals associated with them could indeed be the foremost raison d'être of a Sufi order, as with the various branches of the Aḥmadiyya Order in Egypt whose activities have long been centered around preparations for the annual cycle of *mawlid*s for Sayyid Aḥmad al-Badawī (d. 674/1276), the pillar of Egyptian Sufism, and the large cohort of local saints associated with him (Mayeur-Jaouen, 61–108).

2.1 *The* Mawlid *and* ʿUrs *and the Remaking of Time and Space*

The tradition of celebrating a saint's *mawlid* (*mūlid*, *milād*) emerged in Egypt during the period of the Cairo sultanate (Mamlūk sultanate, 648/1250–922/1517). Celebrations of the birthday of the Prophet, *mawlid al-nabī*, had been popular since the Fāṭimid period, but the festivals devoted to saints—first and foremost the enigmatic Sayyid Aḥmad al-Badawī—lent a new sense to the term (Kaptein; Mayeur-Jaouen, 37–59). While the word *mawlid* is often translated as

"birthday," it can mean any sort of anniversary, and in the case of saints often marks the day of his or her death. It can nonetheless be considered a birthday celebration in that it celebrates the rebirth of the saints into the world of the Unseen, a transition to the *barzakh* considered to greatly strengthen their powers of intercession. Similarly, on the Indian subcontinent and environs, the festival held annually at a saint's *dargāh* (tomb-shrine) is called an *ʿurs*, a wedding. It too is celebrated on the anniversary of the saint's death, marking his or her joyful transition into a new stage of life through marriage with the divine. The generic term *mawsim*, a "fixed day," is also sometimes used to denote a saint's festival day, as in the famous *mawsim nabī Mūsā* held in Palestine. In Yemen, the word *ḥawl* (pronounced *ḥol*), a "period" or "season," is often used as well.

As it developed across the Muslim-majority world, shrine culture effected a remaking of space and time, one that explicitly bound the manifest world to that of the Unseen, with relations between worlds mediated by the saints and the Sufi orders that functioned to memorialize them. As Mayeur-Jaouen has demonstrated with regard to the Aḥmadiyya Order(s) in Egypt, the calendar of *mawlid*s for al-Badawī and other saints associated with him was a dominant organizing force in the social and economic life of Lower Egypt for centuries, driving the movements of massive numbers of people throughout the region—far greater numbers than the Hajj—and attracting at turns the approval and ire of political leaders and "orthodox" religious authorities. Little wonder, as the powers of the Unseen world were said to emanate from the shrines and festivals of the region, guaranteeing the fertility of crops and women and the maintenance of a just social order, even if some viewed the *mawlid*s themselves as a source of disorder and immorality due to their potent blending of ecstatic devotion and bacchanalia.

As networks and calendars of shrines and festivals grew to be highly complex, a genre of pilgrimage guides (*kutub al-ziyāra*) emerged beginning in the period of the Cairo sultanate, detailing itineraries of visits to shrines in Egypt, the Shām, and the Ḥijāz. Typically focused on a single city, region, or route, such guides offer a combination of practical advice and critical reflection, and aim at least as much at "armchair" pilgrims as itinerant ones. Sufi authors were active in the genre. Shams al-Dīn Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Zayyāt's (d. 815/1412) *al-Kawākib al-sayyāra fī tartīb al-ziyāra fī l-Qarāfatayn al-kubrā wa-l-ṣughrā* (*The Journeying Stars regarding the Organization of Visits to the Greater and Smaller Qarafa Cemeteries*) details tombs in the Qarāfa cemeteries, two of Cairo's largest "cities of the dead," along with advice on specific types of spiritual and earthly benefits to be gained from visiting them. In a combination of *ziyāra* guide and travelogue, the Damascene scholar and mystic ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī's (d. 1143/1731) *al-Ḥaḍra al-unsiyya fī l-riḥla al-qudsiyya*

(*The Intimate Presence regarding the Sacred Journey*) meticulously recounts "a 44-day journey from Damascus to Jerusalem in which he visited numerous shrines" (Meri, Ziyāra; cf. Taylor). The genre demonstrates that, for many, the landscape of the Muslim-majority world was perceived through a topography of the saintly dead, shrines acting as living points of connection between this world and the next, pins holding the fabric of the world in place.

The Indian *ʿurs*—an often multi-day celebration of a dead saint with music, prayer, sermons, feasts, and other entertainments—is a similarly powerful institution, on the basis of which Sufi orders in the region have long consolidated and expressed their social-religious authority. As Sarah Ansari notes in her study of the role of Sufi *pīr*s in British colonial administration of the Sind, the *dargāh* and *ʿurs* were, in Weberian terms, key instruments by which the charismatic authority of a saint was institutionalized following his death, such that his (spiritual and/or biological) descendants could benefit, "even when they were not men of the same spiritual calibre as their forebears" (Ansari, 23). Much like the *mawlids* of Egypt, the *ʿurs* functioned as a major site of intertribal consultation and trade, with living *pīr*s acting as mediators in disputes and negotiations—a natural extension of their roles a mediators of the powers of the Unseen world. This allowed the *pīr*s to play key roles in ideological conflicts of the colonial period, whether by encouraging or disallowing the expression of certain views at the *ʿurs* or negotiating directly with colonial administrators on behalf of their regions (Ansari, 101–28 et passim). This is typical of ways that the power of dead saints has continued to interact with and shape temporal sociopolitical structures.

As Pnina Werbner discusses in her anthropological study of the life, death, and cult of the modern Pakistani saint Ḥażrat-i Shāh Zinda-pīr, the establishment of a recently deceased saint's *ʿurs* is a potentially treacherous period of transition, as it marks "the moment at which the reality of sainthood is publicly proven." While many of the saint's followers insisted to Werbner that they did not mourn his passing, on the grounds that "[the *pīr* is] a hundred times more powerful now that he is in the grave," and indeed "is still alive" in the Unseen world, there was nonetheless significant concern among his family members and other close associates that a poorly attended first *ʿurs* would signal the dissipation of the saint's authority—and thus their own—rather than its consolidation. A well-attended *ʿurs* is a sign of the enduring power of the deceased saint in this world and the next, a power that, so long as the festival is successfully maintained, also accrues to his living descendants and others who attend to the *dargāh* (Werbner).

As various studies of hagiographical practices have shown, the establishment of a saint's reputation is a complex process that can differ widely between

cases. For example, in contrast to the process Werbner describes of transferring the authority of a famous living saint to his *khulafāʾ*, Ismail Alatas' study of the identification of saints in central Java focuses on the role of a living Sufi master, Habib Muhammad Luthfi (b. 1947), in using dreams to establish the identity of previously unknown saints interred in unmarked graves. As Alatas argues, this demonstrates the authority a living master can possess over historical matters, as well as over the spiritual and economic benefits that accompany the construction of shrines over newly identified saints' tombs (Alatas). This authority is, of course, grounded in the long-established ability of living saints to navigate the *barzakh* and the secrets it holds. The living saint thus acts as a mediator along numerous vectors: between past and present, the state and the people, and the living and the blessed dead.

3 Sufi *Mahdī*s

In discussing the pre-Islamic tradition of apocalyptic literature as it developed from ancient Near Eastern and Hellenistic texts to Jewish and Christian ones, John Collins argues that there are two fundamental types within the genre, which he terms "historical" and "cosmic/mystical." The first type, represented most famously by the Christian Book of Revelation, looms largest in the Western popular imagination and is "concerned with the rise and fall of nations and with the end of history and the world." The second, which Collins traces primarily to the Enoch corpus, deals with "the eschatology of the individual and the fate of the soul after death" (Collins, xiv). The two types are non-exclusive, most texts being a blend of both, but a given text will typically emphasize one over the other. Thematically speaking, the Sufi cosmo-eschatological materials discussed in Chapter 1 relate most strongly to Collins' "cosmic/mystical" category, being mostly concerned with the individual's path to salvation and the ability to discern or venture into the worlds of the Unseen and partake of the divine secrets concealed there. With the saints, tomb visitation practices, and the rise of the Sufi orders, however, we have seen that these individual eschatological concerns and spiritual accomplishments can translate into collective action and spatiotemporal transformations of the human world that wed it more closely to the Unseen in the perceptions of believers. What follows addresses more radical attempts by Sufis at remaking the world, ones in which "historical-apocalyptic" concerns come to the fore in the form of "mahdism"; that is, claims that a Sufi leader is *al-mahdī*, the messianic figure whom various early sources promise will arise in the world's terminal period to battle the forces of Antichrist (al-Dajjāl) and restore justice to the world.

Mahdist claims first emerged in early conflicts between pro-ʿAlid forces and the Umayyad caliphate. In Twelver Shīʿism such claims were eventually domesticated and codified under the doctrine that the Twelfth Imam will return as the *mahdī*, while in Ismāʿīlism the idea was revised many times over by various factions, each of which reconciled the concept to their own history and leadership (Daftary; Sachedina). Sunnī thinkers achieved less coherence regarding expectations of the *mahdī*, with some scholars even denying the validity of the *ḥadīth*s that had given rise to the idea; however, the approving speculation of various medieval Sunnī authorities on the topic testifies to its enduring salience (Madelung).

The ambiguity of Sunnī thought on the matter was an opportunity for a wide range of interpretations regarding what sort of person the *mahdī* would be, the precise conditions under which he would arise, and even whether his appearance was a one-time event or a periodic one; that is, something akin to the emergence of a *mujaddid* (renewer [of religion]) at the beginning of each century (Madelung; cf. Jansen; Landau-Tasseron). Without wishing to call into question the sincerity of those involved, it can be observed that the Sufi leaders discussed in this section took advantage of this fuzziness to craft heroic eschatological roles for themselves and their communities of followers. This trend marks, then, a partial reversal of that discussed in Chapter 1 and rehearsed at the outset of this chapter, where the emergence of Sufism played a role in domesticating the apocalyptic discourses that had sprouted from the military-political conflicts of the early centuries of Islam. Unsurprisingly, these later developments also correspond significantly with political upheavals. As with some other paradigm shifts in Sufism from the sixth/twelfth century onwards, Sufi mahdism seems to take shape first in the Islamic West, in the context of the intra-Muslim and interconfessional contests for power that roiled the region in that period. It then moved eastward, gaining considerable strength, as various cataclysms befell those regions in the seventh/thirteenth century and beyond, most notably the Mongol invasion (on the radically altered religio-political landscape of the post-Mongol East, see Melvin-Koushki).

3.1 *Mahdism in the Islamic West*

Modern scholarship has noted a particular penchant for "historical apocalypticism" among the religious communities of the medieval western Mediterranean arising from interconfessional and intersectarian contestation, and in Muslim communities this sometimes took the form of mahdism (Akasoy; Fierro; García-Arenal; Green-Mercado; Poole; Williams, 21–2). The paradigmatic episode of mahdism in the Islamic West is the emergence of the Ismāʿīlī Imam ʿAbdallāh al-Mahdī in Sijilmāsa in 296/909, after his emissary Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Shīʿī had routed the last of the Aghlabid emirs (Brett, 100). This successful

seizure of power and the challenge it posed to Sunnī hegemony helped set the stage for many of the unique cultural developments in the West, including the apparent influence of Ismāʿīlī thought among some dissident Sunnī intellectuals. While the immediate eschatological implications of the Imam al-Mahdī's appearance were attenuated all but completely as the Fāṭimid regime was institutionalized in Ifrīqiya, the enduring potency of the rhetoric of mahdism in the West is suggested by Ibn Tūmart's (d. 524/1130) successful harnessing of it in his campaign against the Almoravids roughly two centuries later. Esoteric pro-ʿAlid literature such as the *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* had a deep impact on Islamic (and Jewish) mystical-philosophical thought in the West. In their studies on medieval Andalusian thought, Yousef Casewit and Michael Ebstein both suggest that, beyond the *Rasāʾil*, Ismāʿīlī texts on cosmology and related topics must also have been in circulation, given the deep engagement with such topics as emanationist ("Neoplatonic") cosmological models and quasi-cyclical schemes of sacred history in the works of Andalusian mystics such as Ibn Barrajān (d. 536/1141) and Ibn Qasī (d.546/1151), as well as those of Ibn al-ʿArabī and other Westerners of his generation. Elements of mahdism also appear, to varying degrees, in the works of all three.

There is a lengthy history in the Islamic West of mystical-philosophical thinkers with conflictual relationships to the state. The mystical philosopher Ibn Masarra (d. 319/931) pointedly withdrew from public life during the reign of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Nāṣir (r. 300/912–350/961), decamping to a hermitage in the mountains outside Córdoba, and in doing so helped set the stage for an Andalusian trend of renunciant intellectuals (*munqabiḍūn*) disdainful of urban life, the state, and court-oriented culture (Casewit, *Mystics*, 25–39). His ideas and followers were eventually condemned by the authorities due to their *bāṭinī* nature; that is, a tendency toward esoteric readings of scripture that some perceived as too reminiscent of Ismāʿīlī thought and a breeding ground for heresy. Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064), for example, alleged that he had heard *masarrī*s of his day advocate that prophethood could be obtained through effort, a contravention of the doctrine that it could only be freely given by God and, in any case, had ceased with Muḥammad. He specifically accuses a *masarrī* by the name of Ismāʿīl b. ʿAbdallāh al-Ruʿaynī of this heresy, stating that al-Ruʿaynī's followers had proclaimed him "an Imam to whom spiritual and temporal obedience were compulsory for all Muslims" (García-Arenal, 131–3). Similar charges of claiming to be an Imam—with the implication that this constituted an extraordinary and unwarranted religious-political claim—would be leveled at later mystics in the region as well.

In the Almoravid period, members of the Mālikī *fuqahāʾ* who were embedded within the regime ordered all copies of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's (d. 505/1111) Sufi-philic summa *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* destroyed (Casewit, *Mystics*, 50–6; Garden,

144–89). This apparently was an effort to stave off challenges to their authority from a rising movement of scholars engaging with a potent blend of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, Ashʿarī *kalām*, and Sufism, disciplines that were relatively new to the region and surging in popularity. The destruction of al-Ghazālī's books would loom large in the ideology of the Almoravids' successors, the Almohads, the state that grew out of an uprising instigated by the Berber religious scholar and self-proclaimed *mahdī* Ibn Tūmart (d. 524/1130). Indeed, later Almohad sources have it that a young Ibn Tūmart met al-Ghazālī while sojourning in the East.

When told by Ibn Tūmart at this alleged meeting that the Almoravids had ordered the *Iḥyāʾ* burned, al-Ghazālī is said to have called upon God to destroy the regime and, at Ibn Tūmart's fervent request, prayed that God would allow this to occur by Ibn Tūmart's hand. It is further claimed that Ibn Tūmart received the book *al-Jafr al-jāmiʿ* (*The Comprehensive Prognosticon*) from al-Ghazālī, a divinatory text foretelling the events of the end-times that is often attributed to the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661) (Ibn Abī Zarʿ, 180; Gardiner, Jafr). Beyond al-Ghazālī's imprimatur and an aura of preternatural knowledge, this obviously fabricated datum also lent the Berber rebel and the regime founded on his memory a degree of ʿAlid credibility.

The burning of the *Iḥyāʾ* was the beginning of what has been termed an Almoravid "inquisition" against certain mystics and others perceived to threaten state authority (Faure). This occurred in a period in which the Almoravids were already battling the Almohad movement, and in which their northern territories were being lost to the Christian kingdoms of the rising *Reconquista*. Millenarian expectations were reaching a peak, particularly in al-Andalus, though also to the East in the wake of the Crusades. Ibn Barrajān, for example, "expected the coming of the Mahdī to take place within his century." In the same passage in which he famously—because accurately—predicted the reconquest of Jerusalem in 583/1187, he also "tacitly implies that the Mahdī would return" at roughly the same date (Casewit, *Mystics*, 122, 299–306; cf. Bellver). As recounted in later centuries, the central event of the Almoravid inquisition was the summoning to Marrakesh in 536/1141 of Ibn Barrajān, his fellow mystic Ibn al-ʿArīf, and the Granadan Ẓāhirī jurist Abū Bakr al-Mayūrqī. The details of precisely what transpired are lost save that Ibn Barrajān "was perceived as a threat and was interrogated by a jury owing to his leadership role"; that is, there were suspicions that he was gaining a potentially seditious popular following on the basis of his spiritual rank (Casewit, *Mystics*, 123).

According to Casewit's analysis, there is no evidence that Ibn Barrajān called for any sort of uprising against the Almoravids. He was, however, a frequent critic of the regime, and clearly asserted in his writings a principle of "spiritual

supremacy over temporal power" that derived in part from the spiritual adept's ability to discern God's "cycles of determination" (*dawāʾir al-taqdīr*), the cyclical motions of the divine command that are the true engine of history, whatever the pretensions of temporal rulers (Casewit, *Mystics*, 125–6; on "cycles of determination," 266–306). None of the three prisoners survived the encounter to return home, though the exact circumstances of their deaths are hazy. Almoravid authorities disposed of Ibn Barrajān's corpse on a refuse heap with orders that no funeral prayers should be performed for him, but this attempt at posthumous humiliation was met with outright disobedience. At the bidding of a revered Maghribī Sufi shaykh, Ibn Ḥirzihim (d. 559/1164), a large crowd assembled to honor and bury the martyred Andalusian mystic (Casewit, *Mystics*, 122–7). Although, according to Casewit, Ibn Barrajān did not consider himself a Sufi per se, later Sufi hagiographers cast him as a martyred saint, and his ideas took on new life in the works of Ibn al-ʿArabī, Aḥmad al-Būnī, and other Sufis of later generations whose ideas made deep and lasting impacts on Sufi thought.

The Andalusian mystic who in fact was an insurrectionary was Ibn Qasī (d. 546/1151). Roughly a year after the deaths of Ibn Barrajān and company in Marrakesh, Ibn Qasī gathered a contingent of disciples (*murīdūn*, per the sources) and mounted a successful campaign against the Almoravids in the Algarve, where their power was already in serious decline. Ibn Qasī's mahdist claims were entirely explicit. As Ebstein notes, he "claim[ed] to be the *imām* ('leader') who enjoys *walāya* ('friendship with God') and *ʿiṣma* ('infallibility'), the *mahdī* ('the rightly-guided one'), and *al-qāʾim bi-amr allāh* ('he who upholds Allāh's command' and 'he who rises by means of Allāh's command')." The adventure was relatively short-lived. He was unable to make further military gains beyond his initial success and thus allied himself first to the newly powerful Almohads and then to the Christian ruler Alfonso I of Coimbra. In 546/1151 he was assassinated in his residence by some party he had aggravated, whether local notables, his own followers, or the Almohads (Ebstein, 198).

3.2 *Ibn al-ʿArabī on the* Mahdī

These events in the sixth/twelfth-century West mark a turning point in Sufi thought that resulted from the blending of a specifically Andalusian tradition of mystical-philosophical thought, stemming from Ibn Masarra and culminating with Ibn Barrajān, with the eastern Sufi tradition, that is, the tradition that runs through Sahl al-Tustarī, al-Junayd, al-Qushayrī, and others. The Andalusian tradition, as noted above, was distinctly inflected by the *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* and Ismāʿīlī sources, factors which, along with the religious-political tensions

that pervaded medieval Andalusian life, help account for the strain of mahdism there that seems not to have been similarly expressed in eastern Sufism at this juncture, as well as cosmologies featuring quasi-cyclical notions of the unfolding of history. The burning of al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyāʾ*, the strife of the Almoravid inquisition, and the rise of the Almohads helped fuse these traditions, as demonstrated, for example, by the Moroccan *qāḍī* and hagiographer al-Tādilī's (d. 627/1229–30 or 628/1230–1) incorporation of the martyred Ibn Barrajān into the lineage of Sufi saints in the region (Casewit, *Mystics*, 88–90). From this point forward, elements of mystical speculation inherited from the Masarran/Barrajānian tradition—e.g. emanationist cosmologies, cosmo-historical cycles, the science of letters, and mahdism—would become nearly inescapable elements of Sufi thought and practice. This fusion is evidenced most famously and voluminously in the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī, but is also apparent in the works of other western Sufis of the period, such as al-Būnī, Ibn Sabʿīn (d. 668 or 669/1269–71), and al-Ḥarrālī (d. 638/1241) (on al-Būnī, see Gardiner, *Esotericism*; Gardiner, Stars; on Ibn Sabʿīn, see Akasoy; Cook; Massignon; on al-Ḥarrālī, see Casewit, *Harmonizing*). The curious fact that the massively influential Maghribī saint Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258) was once expelled from Kairouan on charges of being a *fāṭimī* may suggest that he too traded in such ideas (Lory). This possibility is further supported by Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī's (d. 709/1309) assertion that al-Shādhilī's chief disciple, Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī (d. 686/1287), was a master of "the science of names and letters and cycles" (Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh, 23).

Ibn al-ʿArabī devotes considerable attention to the topic of the *mahdī*, one important locus being chapter 366 of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (*The Meccan Openings*). As James Morris discusses, Ibn al-ʿArabī focuses in this chapter on the "helpers" or "ministers" (*wuzarāʾ*) of the *mahdī* mentioned in various apocalyptic *ḥadīth*s, using the topic to explore certain qualities of the saints as well as the contentious issue of the inspiration-based authority of the saints versus that of the conventionally educated *fuqahāʾ*. The *mahdī*, according to Ibn al-ʿArabī, is God's "vicegerent (*khalīfa*) who will come forth when the earth has become filled with injustice and oppression, and will then fill it with justice and equity … He will reinvigorate Islam after its degradation and bring it back to life after its death." As a central part of this process of reinvigoration, "He will eliminate the different schools [of religious law] so that only the *Pure Religion* (Q 39:3) remains, and his enemy will be those who follow blindly the *fuqahāʾ*, the people of *ijtihād*" (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 3:327, trans. Morris, End of Time, 69). His statements on the relationship of the *mahdī* to the *fuqahāʾ* entail a cutting critique of the latter, who he says will obey the *mahdī* outwardly because he bears the sword of worldly authority but elsewise would issue rulings demanding that

he be killed, as they regard any person claiming divine inspiration on legal matters as being "a madman whose imagination has gone wild" (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 3:336, trans. Morris, End of Time, 84–5). The shaykh confesses that he does not know how long the *mahdī* will rule but insists that this is because he has not sought such knowledge, due to his fear that "during the time when I am asking God to inform me about some engendered or temporal thing I will miss out on some portion of my awareness of Him" (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 3:331, trans. Morris, End of Time, 71). The implication is not to be missed that he surely could divine this information if he so chose.

As for the *mahdī*'s helpers, they will be a group of men whom God "has kept hidden for him in the secret recesses of the Unseen," and whom "God has acquainted, through unveiling and immediate witnessing, with the [Divine] Realities." The *mahdī* "makes his decisions and judgments on the basis of consultation with them, since they are the true Knowers" (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 3:328, trans. Morris, End of Time, 70–1). Indeed, so certain is the divinely given wisdom of the helpers that they are possessed of freedom from error (*ʿiṣma*), as are most or all of the saints, according to the shaykh (Morris, End of Time, 73). He goes on to discuss further special qualities of the helpers, such as their ability to see into the world of the Unseen, while also discussing in detail the superiority of their knowledge over that of the conventional *fuqahāʾ*. As Morris observes, it is clear that the special qualities of the helpers are already possessed by the highest ranks of the saints, those "who have already reached the end of time" (Morris, End of Time, 67). The authority of the saints is unchanging, and is the same authority by which they will guide the *mahdī*. As with Ibn al-ʿArabī's assertion that the ranks of the blessed dead in paradise can already be seen by those with eyes to see, it is, in a sense, as if the end of time has already arrived—the end, like the beginning, being always already present.

Another issue of relevance to Ibn al-ʿArabī and his school's thinking on the *mahdī* is that of the seal of the saints (*khatm al-awliyāʾ*), that is, a figure who is or will be the last and greatest of the saints, much as Muḥammad was the seal of the prophets. The notion of the seal of the saints seems to have originated with al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. probably 298/910), and Lisa Alexandrin has argued that the idea had clearly messianic/eschatological implications in his writings, but that these were suppressed by later Sufi commentators (Alexandrin). The topic is elaborated upon at far greater length by Ibn al-ʿArabī. While he and most other Sufi authors who broach the topic are adamant that the seal of the saints is not the same person as the *mahdī*, there are still eschatological implications to the arrival of such a figure. As discussed above, it is commonly asserted that the world would cease to exist if entirely bereft of saints, such that the arrival of the final saint would suggest the end was near at

hand. Indeed, for Ibn al-ʿArabī, the seal of the saints to whom al-Tirmidhī was referring is none other than Jesus (ʿĪsā), who will come to seal both sainthood and the "cycle of the Kingdom (*al-mulk*)," that is, the foreordained span of the world's existence. As Jesus is not an Arab, he asserts, he cannot be the *mahdī*, who will be a blood descendant of Muḥammad (Chodkiewicz, 117–18).

Ibn al-ʿArabī further distinguishes, however, between Jesus as the seal of "universal sainthood" and another figure who is the seal of "Muḥammadan sainthood," which constitutes a distinct category. Within Ibn al-ʿArabī's conception of saints being the heirs of specific prophets (see Chapter 1 of this volume), the seal of Muḥammadan sainthood will be the final and greatest saint to inherit directly from Muḥammad. New saints will continue to proliferate after him, but they necessarily inherit from other prophets, and thus only indirectly from Muḥammad. As Chodkiewicz has discussed in detail, it is clear the Ibn al-ʿArabī considered himself to be the seal of Muḥammadan sainthood, as indicated by his (in)famous vision of the missing silver and gold bricks of the Kaʿba, where the silver brick represents Muḥammad's completion and perfection of prophecy and the gold brick Ibn al-ʿArabī's sealing of Muḥammadan sainthood (Chodkiewicz, 122–24, 128–41). While Ibn al-ʿArabī's claiming of this title does not seem to indicate that he felt the eschaton was imminent, it nonetheless marks a significant milestone in the history of the world, a point after which things will never be the same. Chodkiewicz avers that, given the massive influence the shaykh has had on Sufism and Islam, this claim can hardly be disputed. As he puts it, "Through his invisible presence, beyond death itself, he maintains and transmits a spiritual impulse or *baraka* which, when the circumstances require it, comes to quicken individuals and groups, to re-establish the ways of sainthood, and to restore what can be restored of the traditional Islamic order" (Chodkiewicz, 140).

A final aspect of Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought on the seals, and one that drives home the point about the necessity of the saints to the world's continued existence, is the haunting notion of the "seal of children" (*khatm al-awlād*), that is, the last person born to the human race. This person, who will be born in China as a twin, his sister emerging just before him, will also be the last saint born, an inheritor from the prophet Seth (Shīth). His mission on earth will apparently be fruitless, and his death will be followed by the swiftly descending twilight of human history. Ominously, the very humanity of humanity, as represented by reason and religion, will predecease its namesake:

> He will call people to God and they will not respond to his call. When God takes his soul and the soul of the believers of his time, those who live after him will be like beasts … They will obey only the authority of their animal

> natures, and will follow only their passions, deprived of all reason and all sacred law. And upon them the Hour will dawn.
>
> IBN AL-ʿARABĪ, *Fuṣūṣ*, 1:67, trans. CHODKIEWICZ, 126

3.3 *Mahdism and Critiques of Sufism*

Critics of Sufism counted the current of mahdism in the thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī and others of that cohort among the many dangers they attributed to them. Ibn Khaldūn offers a particularly vehement critique in his famous *al-Muqaddima*, various parts of which are devoted to excoriating the Sufis of his day (Gardiner, *Ibn Khaldūn*; Morris, Arab Machiavelli). He includes a section on Sufi *mahdī*s, prefacing it with a discussion of *ḥadīth*s about the *mahdī*—"the Fāṭimid," as he calls him—and various weaknesses in their chains of transmission, with the seeming intent of calling into question the fundamental validity of the figure. The "ancient" Sufis, he avers, never broached the topic; rather it was the Shīʿa who were most concerned with it early on. This is typical of his polemic on Sufism, which tends to uphold the Sufism of the early centuries of Islam as ideal and then use it as a foil against which to unfavorably compare Sufis of his own period. It also sets the stage for the accusation that follows: that contemporary Sufism is essentially a form of crypto-Shīʿism. As later Sufis came to be centrally concerned with *kashf* "and matters beyond the veil of perception," he argues, they increasingly spoke of union with the divine and the incarnation of divinity, much like some Imāmī and "extremist" (*ghulāt*) Shīʿa "believed in the divinity of the imams and in the incarnation of the deity in them." This, he implies, is the source of the notion of the hierarchy of saints: "The Sufis also came to believe in a 'pole' (*quṭb*) and in 'saints' (*abdāl*). This [belief] looked like an imitation of the opinions of the extremist Shīʿah concerning the imam and the ʿAlid 'chiefs' (*nuqabāʾ*)." He further links this to Sufi pro-ʿAlidism generally, and specifically to the practice of investing Sufi initiates with the cloak (*khirqa*), "based … on the [alleged] fact that ʿAlī clothed al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī in such a cloak and caused him to agree solemnly that he would adhere to the mystic path." In Ibn Khaldūn's estimation, this positioning of ʿAlī at the head of Sufi initiatic chains "smells strongly of pro-Shīʿa sentiment." Later Sufi literature is "full of ideas concerning the expected *Fāṭimid*," he asserts, just like the books of "the extremist Ismāʿīliyya" (Ibn Khaldūn, trans. Rosenthal, 2:186–7); there is, of course, a long tradition of Sufi claims on the Shīʿite Imams (Algar, Sunni Claims).

Ibn Khaldūn specifically names Ibn al-ʿArabī's *ʿAnqāʾ Mughrib* (*The Griffin of the West*) and Ibn Qasī's *Khalʿ al-naʿlayn* (*The Shedding of the Two Sandals*, itself an allusion to the seen and Unseen worlds) as discussing the *mahdī* (Ibn Khaldūn, trans. Rosenthal, 2:187–91). He is particularly critical of the former

author's vision of the gold and silver bricks, though it seems obvious he read little or nothing of Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings, as he mistakenly states that the gold brick represents the Prophet (Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, 193). An important part of his discussion rests on a commentary of *Khalʿ al-naʿlayn*, since lost, by an otherwise unknown individual named Ibn Abī Wāṭīl, allegedly a disciple of Ibn Sabʿīn. Along with prognostications of the date of the eschaton attributed to Ibn al-ʿArabī and others, Ibn Khaldūn claims, the book discusses a cycle of historical periods in order to predict an overthrow of the current political order at the hands of the saints. According to this cyclical scheme, the age of Muḥammad's prophecy was followed by that of the caliphate, which in turn was succeeded by the age of royal authority—being the era in which Ibn Khaldūn was writing. Ibn Abī Wāṭīl's prediction was that, as the era of royal authority degenerated inevitably into one of "tyranny, presumptuousness, and worthlessness," it would be overthrown by a revival effected by the saints, giving rise to the caliphate of the *mahdī* and, eventually, the rise of Antichrist in the final days (Ibn Khaldūn, trans. Rosenthal, 2:188). For Ibn Khaldūn, predictions of this sort from Sufi sources plainly indicated the threat that recent forms of Sufism posed to the established order—that is, the rulers for whom he worked and wrote (Gardiner, *Ibn Khaldūn*, 31–3). He goes on to give some examples of minor mahdist movements in the Islamic West from the late seventh/thirteenth and early eighth/fourteenth centuries, though much of this section devolves into fretting about the backwards and treacherous bedouin of the region, who he feels are the most susceptible to manipulation and military mobilization by Sufi (and Shīʿite) pretenders to the office of the *mahdī* (Ibn Khaldūn, trans. Rosenthal, 2:196–200).

3.4 *Mahdism in the Early Modern and Modern Periods*

Although Ibn Khaldūn's polemics had a negligible impact on his own era, he was quite correct about the rising tide of Sufi mahdism and other expressions of apocalypticism. The popularity of these sentiments in the late Cairo sultanate and early Ottoman realms is captured most voluminously in the writing of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bisṭāmī (d. 858/1454), an Antioch-born Sufi, occultist, *ḥadīth* specialist, and littérateur who circulated among the courts and salons of Egypt, Syria, and Anatolia, and whose works were widely copied until long after his death. His summa on the science of letters, *Shams al-āfāq fī ʿilm al-ḥurūf wa-l-awfāq* (*The Sun of the Horizons regarding the Science of Letters and Magic Squares*), for example, claimed to reveal the mysteries of that science of the saints to the educated public in a coherent and accessible form, an unveiling he justified on the grounds that such knowledge was necessary to face the challenges of the imminent end-times. His *Miftāḥ al-jafr al-jāmiʿ* (*Key to the Comprehensive Prognostication*) is a large compendium of eschatological

texts, including Prophetic *ḥadīth*s; texts attributed to the Israelite prophets, especially Daniel; and various works attributed (spuriously in some cases) to Ibn al-ʿArabī, including ones labeled as his *Malḥama* (*Apocalypse*) and *Jafr* (*Prognosticon*), as well as *Ṣayḥat al-būm fī ḥawādith al-Rūm* (*The Cry of the Owl on the Roman Events*) (Gardiner, Jafr). As Cornell Fleischer puts it, the *Miftāḥ* "effectively codified all that al-Bisṭāmī's generation did know, and that several subsequent generations would care to know, of apocalyptic prophecy" (Fleischer, Mediterranean, 44–8). Per Fleischer, it and other of al-Bisṭāmī's works would go on to be influential in the formation of the imperial ideology of the Ottoman sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (r. 926/1520–964/1566), who, early in his reign, was positioned as a sovereign destined to rule until the eschaton, in keeping with anticipation of the *hijrī* millennium (1591–2 CE). The writings of figures at Süleyman's court such as the Khalwatī shaykh and judge Mevlānā ʿĪsā and the geomancer Ḥaydār are rife with Sufi terminology in describing the sultan's role at the end of time, framing him as a disciple of al-Khiḍr and the *quṭb al-aqṭāb* (pole of poles, i.e. head of the hierarchy of saints) as well as the *ṣāḥib-qīrān* (master of conjunctions, an astrological-eschatological title) and possibly even the *mahdī* himself (Fleischer, Ancient Wisdom; Fleischer, Mahdi and Millennium; Fleischer, Mediterranean; cf. Chahanovich). Süleyman was hardly the first or only ruler lavished with titles indicating an eschatological role, as a Sufism-inflected apocalyptic fervor had taken hold in much of the late medieval/early modern Islamic east in that period.

The ninth/fifteenth century saw various Sufi shaykhs making explicit messianic claims, sometimes going beyond claims of *mahdī*-ship to ones of outright self-divinization. The Kubrawī shaykh Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh (d. 869/1464), for example, eponym of the Nūrbakhshiyya Order, either proclaimed himself the *mahdī* or was appointed to the role in a dream by his *pīr*, Isḥāq Khuttalānī (d. 826/1423). He seems to have rescinded the claim after some abortive attempts to establish himself politically, along with resultant bouts of imprisonment at the hands of various Tīmūrid authorities, but he nonetheless left a rich corpus of poetry and theoretical writings that weave together Sufi and Twelver Shīʿī thought on the *mahdī*, the hidden Imam, and related topics (Algar, Nūrbakhshiyya). As Shahzad Bashir discusses, Nūrbakhsh argued that "the bodies of the elect among prophets and saints can contain multiple spirits simultaneously," and that his own was "host to the spirits of Jesus, Muhammad, the expected messiah, and many great Sufi masters of the past." Earlier Sufi thinkers, such as Ibn al-ʿArabī, had largely confined their interactions with discarnate prophets and saints to the realm of interior experience, discussing them primarily in relation to their own spiritual advancement. Nūrbakhsh, however, "thought that his physical work in the world was

an exteriorization of all the spiritual work carried out in the imaginal sphere in previous times," God having "decreed this transfer of salvation from the interior to the exterior world as the mark of the end of time" (Bashir, 40). Sayyid Muḥammad b. Falāḥ al-Mushaʿshaʿ (d. 870/1465–6) was another Shīʿī thinker who laid claim to being both the *mahdī* and "the greatest Sufi master of his age," and, unlike Nūrbakhsh, he successfully established a small state in Khūzistān (Luft). His theoretical writings depict the prophets and Shīʿī Imams as "veils for the presence of God's essence," and his own incarnate being as "a veil over the veil of the messiah" and thus the divine essence as well. As Bashir observes, such ideas were "the ultimate inversion of the normative pattern since divinity and spiritual entities of the higher spheres were seen to descend into the material sphere rather than spirits imprisoned in material bodies using corporoeous bodies to ascend the cosmic hierarchy to reach higher levels" (Bashir, 40–1).

Messianic claims also permeate the rise of the Ṣafawiyya, the Turkic-Persian Sufi order-cum-religio-political movement that eventually became the Safavid dynasty. The order took its name from Ṣafī al-Dīn Ardabīlī (d. 735/1334) who, along with his son Ṣadr al-Dīn (d. 794/1391–2), transformed a small Sufi order in Gīlān into a religious movement that spread its *daʿwa* across much of post-Mongol Persia, Anatolia, and Syria, growing large enough to attract both patronage and persecution from the Mongols and other political actors. It is with Shaykh Junayd (d. 864/1460), the successor to Ṣadr al-Dīn in leadership of the order, that apocalyptic/messianic elements akin to the ideas of Nūrbakhsh and Mushaʿshaʿ become apparent, including the taking up of arms to accomplish religio-political ends. Junayd gained numerous Turcoman disciples who waged war on his behalf, and who openly referred to him as "God" (*ilāh*) and his son Ḥaydar (d. 893/1488) as "son of God" (*ibn Allāh*). The order's teachings also came to incorporate elements of Twelver Shīʿism during this period, including veneration of the Imams, which soon became central to the group's identity. Ḥaydar's grandson Shāh Ismāʿīl (d. 930/1524) would later write poetry that was "unequivocal on the subject of [his own] divinity," thus placing the movement squarely within the current of Shīʿī "extremism" (*ghuluww*) that was a prominent feature of the post-Mongol religious landscape of the region (Savory). With the establishment of the Safavid dynasty under Ismāʿīl and his descendants, the rulers often portrayed themselves as the representatives of the Twelfth Imam, that is, the *mahdī*, thus affirming their own status as eschatological actors. Historians have noted numerous other instances of Sufism-inflected mahdist claims among leaders and polities across the early modern Islamic world, in settings ranging from small tribal groups to empires. Each one is tuned to its specific time and place, demonstrating the utility and

flexibility of mahdist claims as a resource in times of sociopolitical and/or environmental upheaval (e.g. DeWeese; García-Arenal, 193–351; Melvin-Koushki; Thomas).

Much as living saints and their communities of followers were often portrayed or perceived typologically as echoing the Prophet and his Companions (see Chapter 1), movements centered around Sufi *mahdī*s specifically elicited images of the Prophet at war against the forces of paganism and the immorality of *al-jāhiliyya*, the pre-Islamic age of ignorance. Such sentiments were particularly salient in anti-colonial mahdist movements of the modern period, when communities were facing non-Muslim invaders and/or their Muslim imitators or clients. Among the most successful of these was that led by the Sudanese *mahdī* Muḥammad Aḥmad b. ʿAbdallāh (d. 1302/1885), a leader of the Sammāniyya Sufi order—a branch of the Turkish Khalwatiyya then well established in the Sudan and Ethiopia (Knysh, *Mysticism*, 267). As P. M. Holt discusses, Muḥammad Aḥmad was one of a handful of *mahdī*s who arose in the Sudan and Egypt in the face of various social and political upheavals that wracked the region in the late twelfth/eighteenth and early thirteenth/nineteenth centuries—such as Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, the rise to power of the modernization-minded Muḥammad ʿAlī Pasha (r. 1220/1805–1264/1848), and the British occupation of Egypt in 1882—and who embodied a rising "popular consciousness that traditional Islamic society was threatened both by infidels from without and despots within." As Holt further notes, the goals of the Sudanese *mahdī* were not entirely dissimilar to those of the firebrand Ḥanbalī fundamentalist of the previous century, Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb (d. 1206/1792), in the sense of a notional return to the ways of the Prophet and the original Muslim community. Unlike the Arabian reformer, however, who targeted Sufism as a prime cause of Islam's alleged deterioration, Muḥammad Aḥmad's thinking was thoroughly invested in Sufi paradigms, such that he conceived of his movement "not merely as the revival of Islam, but as … a divinely ordained correspondence between *Urzeit* and *Endzeit*"—that is, a conjunction of the historical advent of Islam with its apocalyptic conclusion, a typological fusion of beginning and end (Holt). His soldiers were thus his *anṣār* and the strategic withdrawal to Jabal Qadīr his *hijra*. Upon his death soon after establishing a sizeable territorial state, his followers applied the same logic of typologization in likening his successor, *khalīfat al-mahdī* ʿAbdallāh b. Muḥammad (d. 1317/1899), to Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (d. 13/634). Such ideas resonate with those on the Day of Covenant and the Day of Judgment discussed in Chapter 1, though, much as Bashir observes with regard to Nūrbakhsh and al-Mushaʿshaʿ, the emphasis is shifted from the non-time of those metaphysical events to

the historical time of the manifest world. Modern reform and militant movements, including certain "Neo-Sufi" movements, arguably carry this shift in emphasis forward, *mutatis mutandis*, into the modern period (see Weismann's compelling discussion of the Sufi characteristics of some modern Salafi militant movements; Voll).

In many respects, the colonial period indeed did spell "the end," or at least the beginning of the end, of the Islamic world in which Sufism had come to be ascendant, transmogrifying the long-term political and economic frameworks within which the Sufi orders had become powerful institutional mediators between humanity and the Unseen, the living and the dead, the rulers and the ruled, humanity and the natural world, and so on. Diverse "fundamentalist" movements with anti-Sufism agendas, emerging largely in reaction to colonization and despotic post-colonial states, combined with the tendency of modernization-minded Muslim thinkers to regard Sufism as representative of the "*ancien régime*" standing in the way of progress, have helped speed a decline in the socioreligious authority and visibility of Sufism in many parts of the Muslim-majority world (Knysh, *Sufism*, 180). Fundamentalist critiques of Sufism, and violence against Sufis by extremists, have often been leveled at saints' shrines and practices centered around them, a dismantling of the sacred geographies and temporalities with which Sufi shrine culture had suffused the manifest world since the late medieval period.

Sufism has adapted and survived, of course, as has Sufi engagement with ideas about the *mahdī*. Marcia Hermansen notes that modern Sufi groups and thinkers of a Perennialist outlook "are characterized by an anti-modern and somewhat millenarian vision," in keeping with the ideas of René Guenon, Frithjof Schuon, and others of that twentieth-century intellectual tendency (Hermansen, 156). She further notes that, hewing more closely to traditional eschatology, the leaders of the Naqshbandī-Ḥaqqānī order place a distinctive "emphasis on the imminent coming of the Last Days of the world and the appearance of … the Mahdi." While based in Lebanon during that nation's sprawling civil war (1975–90), the order's Turkish Cypriot founder, Shaykh Mehmet (Muḥammad) Nāẓim ʿĀdil al-Qubruṣī al-Ḥaqqānī (d. 1340/2014), claimed to be in contact with the *mahdī*, an individual who he said had been born in 1941 and, since the age of fifteen, had resided in a cave guarded by angels in the Arabian desert region known as the Empty Quarter (*al-rubʿ al-khālī*), where he was prepared to publicly assume his role following an inevitable Cold War nuclear conflict (Filiu, 168–71; Habibis, 604–6). The anthropologist Daphne Habibis, who interviewed a number of Shaykh Nāẓim's followers in the early 1980s, noted that not all of the shaykh's followers attached literal meaning to such messages, and that they were not central to his teachings.

According to her analysis, Shaykh Nāẓim seemed to allow that the primary value of such teachings lay less in their prognosticative value than in encouraging adherents to be "ready" for the *mahdī*'s arrival, forsaking their connection to this world and focusing their energies on that to come (Habibis, 617–18). The failure of nuclear cataclysm to appear has not harmed the fortunes of the Naqshbandī-Ḥaqqānī Order founded by Shaykh Nāẓim in the decades since. As Knysh has discussed, it "boasts a truly international outreach" and has "gained a large and diverse following in the West," particularly in England, Germany, and the United States (Knysh, *Sufism*, 110).

4 Conclusion

Every cosmology is a bid for power in some respect, a pretension to having already encompassed the world(s). The claims of Sufi masters and orders to have knowledge and experience of the deathless world of the Unseen was a cornerstone of their social and religious authority, one they sometimes deployed to great effect in reshaping the social and political environments in which they lived and died—or died only to become more powerful, as the case may be. The tomb-shrines of dead saints, manned by their living disciples as points of contact with the divine, were the physical manifestations of this authority, nodes about which massive numbers of people and goods circulated according to regional calendars of pilgrimage and celebration. Sufi claims that their visible or invisible masters were the "pegs" (*awtād*) that held the fabric of the world in place were thus far more tangible and plausible in landscapes defined by networks of shrines than they might now seem from reading dusty hagiographies. Indeed, Sufi shrines and lineages retain at least a trace of that power in many parts of the Muslim-majority world today, posing a tenuous and enchanted counter-reality to that of post-colonial states, Salafī "orthodoxy," and the behemoth of globalized Western modernity with its multifarious tendrils of suasion and compulsion.

Sufi mahdism arguably was a natural outgrowth of the burgeoning power of Sufi communities and leaders from the seventh/thirteenth century onward. As heirs to creative and flexible exegetical and theological traditions, Sufi leaders were able to draw on the deep well of Islamic apocalyptic materials to craft powerful narratives of divine election and map contemporary events onto well-known salvation-historical templates, and to thus mobilize popular support for their military-political exploits. Though only a few such adventures led to the establishment of enduring polities, Sufi mahdism reshaped the lives of countless people, deeply influenced the ideologies of early modern Muslim rule, and proved a key vehicle of anti-colonial resistance.

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PART 3

Levels of Being in Sufi Thought

CHAPTER 13

Sufi Hierarchies of the Worlds or Levels of Existence: *Mulk*, *Malakūt*, *Jabarūt*, and Related Concepts

Mathieu Terrier

1 Introduction

Since the early age of Islam up to modern times, within the esoteric currents of Shīʿism, Sufism, and philosophy (*falsafa*), thinkers have speculated on the hierarchy of worlds and levels of existence, both external and internal to human beings, using terms such as *mulk*, *malakūt*, *jabarūt*, *lāhūt*, and *nāsūt*. Some of these terms appeared first in the Qurʾān, others in *ḥadīth* attributed to the Prophet, others still are of non-Islamic origin. Qurʾānic expressions such as *ʿālam al-shahāda*, "world of sensory perception," *ʿālam al-ghayb*, "world of the Unseen," *ʿālam al-khalq*, "world of creation," and *ʿālam al-amr*, "world of command," were also associated with them. The cosmological and metaphysical system built on these notions was not to be found in the Sacred Book, however. Rather, it resulted from a long process of separate developments and various syntheses. There is therefore not one but several systems and nomenclatures of the worlds and levels of existence in Islamic thought. This chapter aims to give an overview of the various elaborations of these systems, their diversity, and shared features. In this way, we intend to shed light on the persistence of a cosmology and a psychology both based on metaphysics in the Muslim East, in contrast to what happened in the Western world. This will confirm the imprint of Sufism and, more generally, of esotericism, on the intellectual history of the Islamic world.

2 Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Roots

2.1 Mulk, Malakūt, *and* Jabarūt

The first cosmological speculations in Islam were likely motivated by the search for a deeper understanding of the Qurʾān, where God is designated as "the Lord of the worlds" (*rabb al-ʿālamīn*). The first Qurʾānic terms giving rise to such a reflection are *mulk* and *malakūt*, both related to the same Arabic root *m-l-k*, associated to the idea of kingship. *Al-malik*, "the King," is one of the divine

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Names attested in the Book (Q 20:114, 23:116, 59:23, 62:1). The term *mulk* appears twenty times in the Qurʾān to designate God's sovereignty over heaven and earth, but also means, in as many occurrences, the kingship that God can confer on or withdraw from human beings: "O God! Master of the Kingdom (*mālik al-mulk*)! You give the Kingdom to whom You will, and seize the Kingdom from whom You will" (Q 3:26; see also 2:247). As for the term *malakūt*, it appears only four times in the Qurʾān. In two identical verses, it apparently refers to the sovereignty over the entire physical universe: "So We were showing Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and earth (*malakūt al-samawāt wa-l-arḍ*)" (Q 7:185 and 6:75), and in two other verses (Q 23:88 and 36:83), to the "sovereignty over all things." The Qurʾān, therefore, does not clearly suggest by *mulk* and *malakūt* two different levels of reality, but seems to mean by *mulk* a sovereignty that God may delegate to men, and by *malakūt* a sovereignty proper to God alone, although "visible" to the eyes of a prophet.

The root *j-b-r* is present in the Qurʾān through the noun *jabr* meaning "domination" or "compulsion"; the name *al-jabbār* means, when applied to man, a "tyrant" (Q 11:59 and 14:15), and as God's name, "the Supreme Compeller" (Q 59:23). As for the term *jabarūt*, it is not Qurʾānic but appears in a *ḥadīth* attributed to the Prophet: "Glory to the One to whom *jabarūt* and *malakūt* belong" (*subḥān dhī l-jabarūt wa-l-malakūt*) (Ibn Manẓūr, 5:113). Here again, there is no clear distinction between these two notions, which may refer to attributes of God rather than to worlds under His rule. In early Shīʿī traditions, *jabarūt* is mentioned as a divine attribute, in the sense of "almighty power" (al-Barqī, 181; al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, 591, 1139).

Commentators questioned the origin of these terms with their strange *-ūt* suffix. The lexicographer Muḥammad b. Mukarram Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/1311), in his dictionary *Lisān al-ʿArab*, derives *malakūt* and *jabarūt* respectively from *mulk* and *jabr*, according to the form *faʿalūt*, and respectively meaning "absolute kingship" and "omnipotence" (Arnaldez; Ibn Manẓūr, 4:113, 10:492). However, for modern scholarship, *malakūt* and *jabarūt*, like also *lāhūt* and *nāsūt*, should be traced to an Aramaic origin through Syriac and/or Geʿez, the Semitic language of Ethiopia (Arnaldez), although the presence of *malakūt* in the Qurʾān shows that at least this term was already Arabicized at the time of the Prophet.

2.2 *The Worlds of the Unseen* (Ghayb)*, the Visible* (Shahāda)*, the Command* (Amr)*, and the Creation* (Khalq)

The terms *ghayb*, literally "absence," often translated as "mystery" or "unseen," and *shahāda*, "testimony" or "visual witnessing," rendered as "the visible," appear many times in the Qurʾān. The former, in more than twenty occurrences, obviously refers to a level of reality whose knowledge belongs to God

alone: "To God belongs the Unseen in the heavens and the earth" (Q 11:123, 16:77, 17:26; see also 2:33); "With Him are the keys of the Unseen (*mafātiḥ al-ghayb*); none knows them but He" (6:59). Only a prophet can be instructed by God about this realm: "Knower of the Unseen, and He discloses not His Unseen to anyone, save only to such a messenger as He is well-pleased with" (72:26–7; see also 3:44, 11:49, 12:102). As for *shahāda*, it refers in several verses to a legal testimony before God. Finally, both terms are mentioned together in ten verses where God is designated as "the Knower of the Unseen and the Visible" (*ʿālim al-ghayb wa-l-shahāda*) (6:73, 9:94, 105, 13:9, 23:92, 32:6, 39:46, 59:22, 62:8, 64:18).

The terms *khalq*, "creation," and *amr*, "command," appear in the Qurʾān many times separately, and jointly at the end of 7:54: "Verily, His are the creation and the command." Philosophers and mystics based themselves on this verse to distinguish two modes of divine existence-giving, defining the *amr* as a creation from nothing with reference to Q 3:47: "When He decrees a thing, He does but say to it 'Be' (*kun*) and it is," and to 17:85: "They will question you about the spirit. Say: 'The spirit is of the bidding of my Lord'" (see also 16:2, 40:15, 42:52).

In sum, the Qurʾān suggests a distinction between *malakūt* and *mulk*, attests to a dichotomy between *ghayb* and *shahāda*, the Unseen and the visible, and allows to distinguish between "natural" creation and divine existence-giving through the sole command "Be" (*kun*). The correspondence between the *malakūt*, the Unseen (*ghayb*), and the world of command (*amr*), on the one hand, and the *mulk*, the visible world (*shahāda*), and the world of creation (*khalq*), on the other, has therefore some Qurʾānic foundation. However, extra-Islamic sources clearly influenced the interpretation of these concepts.

2.3 Nāsūt *and* Lāhūt

The terms *nāsūt*/*nāsūtiyya* and *lāhūt*/*lāhūtiyya* do not appear in the Qurʾān. *Nāsūt* and *nāsūtiyya*, meaning "human nature," are related to the Arabic root *a-n-s*, and may come from *nās*, "men" or "humankind." *Lāhūt* and *lāhūtiyya*, meaning "divine nature," are apparently related to the root *a-l-h*, that of *ilāh*, "divinity," and *Allāh*, "God." The morphology of these terms suggests a Syriac origin, even if Ibn Manẓūr still advocates an Arabic origin of *lāhūt* (Ibn Manẓūr, 13:539). According to Roger Arnaldez, the terms *lāhūt* and *nāsūt* were probably borrowed from Syriac sources by Nestorian Christians writing in Arabic, since Muslim scholars had many relationships with Nestorians in second/eighth- and third/ninth-century Baghdad (Arnaldez).

Indeed, these terms first appear in polemic accounts of the creed of Christians about the dual nature of Christ. Christians were known for claiming that the Messiah was the meeting of *lāhūt* and *nāsūt*, divine and human natures. Jacobites held that "God united with the Messiah in a unification of essence

forming a single and one thing, so that the *nāsūt* becomes *lāhūt*" (al-Majlisī, 9:81), and Nestorians that only Jesus' *nāsūt* was crucified and killed, while his *lāhūt* rose to heaven (al-Shahrastānī, 1:206).

Both terms are also found in early Shīʿism, within the so-called extremist (*ghulāt*) movements, accused of divinizing the first Imam, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), and his offspring. According to a *ḥadīth* of the seventh Imam of Twelver Shīʿism, Mūsā al-Kāẓim (d. 183/799), transmitted by a leader of the *ghulāt*, Jābir b. Yazīd al-Juʿfī,

> God created the Light of Muḥammad with a Light He drew from that of His Greatness and Immensity. It is the Light of His *lāhūtiyya*.... It was it which appeared to Moses on Mount Sinai and whose vision he could not bear to see.... When God wanted to create Muḥammad from this Light, He divided it into two halves. From the first half, he created Muḥammad, and from the second half, ʿAlī. No one but these two were created by God from this Light. Their outside (*ẓāhiruhumā*) is human (*bashariyya*) while their inside (*bāṭinuhumā*) is divine (*lāhūtiyya*). They appear to creatures in the form of human nature (*nāsūtiyya*) so that men are able to see them.
>
> AL-ASTARĀBĀDĪ, 394

This divine Light is also transmitted to Fāṭima, the daughter of the Prophet, and through her union with ʿAlī, to the eleven following Imams. Because of this doctrine, Sunnī theologians commonly accuse the Shīʿīs of applying to Imam ʿAlī the features that Christians apply to Jesus. To be sure, the problem of the union of divinity and humanity in Christ, so crucial for the first Christians, was analogous for the Shīʿīs regarding the Imam (Amir-Moezzi, 272).

In another Shīʿī *ḥadīth*, Imam ʿAlī differentiates four human souls: the vegetative soul, the animal sensory soul, the sanctified rational soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqa al-qudsiyya*), and the divine malakūtian soul (*al-nafs al-lāhūtiyya al-malakūtiyya*). He defines the latter as a divine power (*quwwa lāhūtiyya*), a simple substance living by itself, having its origin and destination in the Universal Intellect, which is the first entity created by God (al-Kāshānī, 92–3; al-Qummī, *al-Arbaʿīniyyāt*, 93–5). Such a tradition, like many others, suggests an early penetration of Neoplatonism into Shīʿism.

3 Separate Developments

3.1 Nāsūt *and* Lāhūt *in al-Ḥallāj*

The terms *lāhūt* and *nāsūt* are found in the works of the famous mystic Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (executed in 309/922) when expressing his relation to God. According

to Louis Massignon, he borrowed these words from the *ghulāt*'s lexicon, but Arnaldez argues that he could have taken them directly from Christians (Arnaldez; Massignon, 3:51).

In al-Ḥallāj's thought, divine Essence and human attributes, referred to as *lāhūtiyya* and *nāsūtiyya*, are irremediably distinct:

> My observance of what is rightfully Yours differs from Your observance of what is rightfully mine; indeed, Your observance of what is rightfully mine is divinity (*lāhūtiyya*), and my observance of what is rightfully Yours is humanity (*nāsūtiyya*); and, just as my humanity is lost in Your divinity without merging with it, so Your divinity takes hold of my humanity without having any contact with it.
>
> AL-ḤALLĀJ, *Akhbār*, 8; MASSIGNON, 3:53

However, al-Ḥallāj also assumes the epiphanic unity of human and divine natures referred to as *nāsūt* and *lāhūt*: "Glory be to the One whose human form (*nāsūt*) manifested the secret of His radiant divinity (*lāhūt*), then He emerged among the creatures in the form of one who eats and drinks," that is, in the bodily form of a prophet or a saint (al-Ḥallāj, *Dīwān*, 67).

It is likely that his sayings—especially, "I am the Truth" (*anā l-ḥaqq*)—led to al-Ḥallāj's excommunication (*takfīr*), and the Sufis who wanted to insist on their Sunnī orthodoxy addressed the same criticism to those who supported this doctrine that the Shīʿī "moderate" scholars leveled at the so-called "extremists". ʿUmar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234) thus stated: "Among [the Sufis], there is a group that professes indwelling (*ḥulūl*). They claim that God indwells in them and in the bodies He chooses. Their interpretations have the same meaning as what Christians profess about *lāhūt* and *nāsūt*" (ʿUmar al-Suhrawardī, 1:91). To be sure, the word *ḥulūl*, "indwelling" or "descent," used to translate the Christian term "incarnation," has long been a mark of heresy within Islamic theology.

3.2 Mulk, Malakūt*, and* Jabarūt *in* Falsafa

Among the Hellenistic philosophers (*falāsifa*) of Islam, Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) and Abū ʿAlī Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037), alias Avicenna, interpreted the distinction between *mulk*, *malakūt*, and *jabarūt*, the world of creation and the world of command, according to the Neoplatonic paradigm. Their textbook was an early Arabic paraphrase of parts of Plotinus' (d. 270 EC) *Enneads* known as the *Theology of Aristotle* (*Uthūlūjiyyā Arisṭāṭālīs*). According to Plotinus, the universe comes into being through a process of emanation (Gr. *prôodos*, Ar. *fayḍ*) from the One, following a series of three hypostases: Intellect, Soul, and Nature. The distinction between the sensible (*ḥissī*) world and the intelligible

(*ʿaqlī*), which was inherited from Plato's work, is coupled with a division of the intelligible between a world of intellects (*ʿuqūl*) and a world of souls (*nufūs*) governing the bodies. The *Theology of Aristotle* presents this three-stage process of emanation of the worlds while identifying the First One (*al-awwal*) with God (*Allāh*), and the consecutive process of reversion of all things to Him, what Islamic philosophers would refer to as "the origin and return" (*al-mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*) (al-Badawī, 3–164).

Al-Fārābī is the first Muslim philosopher to identify Aristotle's active intellect (Ar. *al-ʿaql al-faʿʿāl*, Gr. *nous poétikos*) or the tenth intellect emanated from the One, whose function is to take care (*ʿināya*) of the rational animal, that is, man, with "the holy Spirit" or "the angel Gabriel," whose rank is in the realm of *malakūt* (al-Fārābī, *Siyāsa*, 32). After him, Avicenna describes the prophetic revelation (*waḥy*) as a knowledge of *malakūt* bestowed by the active intellect into a soul freed from the body (Ibn Sīnā, *al-Taʿlīqāt*, 218). Both philosophers also distinguish, as Ismāʿīlī theologians usually do, between creation from nothing, called "innovation" (*ibdāʿ*), and creation in the phenomenal existence (*khalq*). They refer to the reality produced without mediation by the sole divine imperative, as the "world of command," and to the physical world of natural beings, "the world of generation and corruption" of Aristotle (*ʿālam al-kawn wa-l-fasād*), as the "world of creation."

In a book attributed to al-Fārābī, *Bezels of Wisdom* (*Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikma*), the aspiring philosopher is called upon to lift the veil of the body, to move away from the concerns of the senses and the imagination to the world of command, in order to contemplate "the highest *malakūt"* (*al-malakūt al-aʿlā*) and to enjoy the ultimate pleasure (al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 10–11, 16–17). The human spirit is defined as a "substance of the world of command," independent of any form, able to live in the *malakūt*, and to receive impressions from the *jabarūt* (al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 11–12). The human being is said to be the conjunction of both worlds of creation and command, his body coming from God's phenomenal creation and his spirit from His absolute command (al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 12). This philosophical conception would eventually merge with the Sufi doctrine of the Perfect Man (Lory and Terrier).

3.3 Mulk, Malakūt*, and* Jabarūt *in Sufism before Ibn al-ʿArabī*

The terms *mulk*, *malakūt*, and *jabarūt* are attested in Sufism since the fourth/tenth century. According to al-Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 298/910), one of the main founders of classical and "sober" Sufism—in contrast with the "drunken Sufism" of al-Ḥallāj—God created the bodies of His friends (*awliyāʾ*) from the matter of this world (*dunyā*) and their spirits from the nature of Light, and He gave

them access to "the mystery of the *malakūt*" (*ghayb al-malakūt*) (al-Baghdādī, 149). As for the *jabarūt*, it is first defined by Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/998), the author of *The Nourishment of the Hearts* (*Qūt al-qulūb*), quoted in ʿAlī al-Jurjānī's (d. 816/1413) *Book of Definitions* (*al-Taʿrīfāt*), as follows: "the *jabarūt* is the world of divine Greatness (*al-ʿaẓama*), that is, the world of divine Names and Attributes. For many, it is the intermediate world, the isthmus (*barzakh*) encompassing all the realities created by the divine command (*amriyyāt*)" (al-Jurjānī, 77). In the Qurʾān (23:100), the term *barzakh* refers to a barrier, later interpreted as the interval between death and the hereafter (Halevi, 197–240). Al-Makkī's statement echoes a disagreement about the upper or median position of the *jabarūt* in the hierarchy of worlds. ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī (d. between 730–6/1329–35), in his *Vocabulary of the Sufis* (*Iṣṭilāḥāt al-ṣūfiyya*), seems to uphold its upper position:

> The world of *jabarūt* is the world of divine Names and Attributes. The world of the divine command, the *malakūt*, or the Unseen, is the world of spirits and spiritual entities, since they exist by the command of God the Real (*al-ḥaqq*), without mediation of any matter or duration. The world of creation, *mulk*, or the visible world (*shahāda*), is the world of bodies and bodily things, that exists after the command with matter and duration.
>
> AL-QĀSHĀNĪ, *Iṣṭilāḥāt*, 44

The famous mystic and theologian Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) is the first Islamic scholar to carry out a systematic synthesis of the data issued from philosophy and Sufism about the hierarchy of worlds. In his *Revival of the Religious Sciences* (*Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*), he defines the *malakūt* as the infinite kingdom of the invisible; and the *mulk* as the visible and finite world. He refers to them together as the "presence of the Lordship" (*al-ḥaḍra al-rubūbiyya*) encompassing all that exists (al-Ghāzālī, *Iḥyāʾ*, 3:18). Moreover, he stresses the correspondence (*munāsaba*) between *mulk* and *malakūt*: the latter is the world of archetypal essences, definitions, and noetic entities (*maʿānī*), referred to in the Qurʾān as "the guarded tablet" (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*) (Q 85:21–2: "Nay, but it is a glorious Qurʾān, in a guarded tablet"); while the former is its imitation, similar to its reflection in a mirror. As an architect, God wrote the original of the universe in the guarded tablet, then brought the universe into existence according to this original (al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ*, 3:25). This is a clear echo of the conception of the Demiurge in Plato's *Timaeus*, with reference to Qurʾānic terms. Al-Ghazālī develops this conception in his commentary on the "Verse of Light" (*āyat al-nūr*) (Q 24:35):

> Know that the universe (*ʿālam*) is [actually] two worlds: a spiritual and a bodily, or, if you like, a sensible and an intellectual, or, if you like, a lofty and a base.... Perhaps you would call one of them the world of *mulk* and sensory perception, and the other the world of *malakūt* and the Unseen.... The divine Mercy fashioned the visible world as a parallel [world] to the *malakūt*. For there is nothing in this world that is not an image (*mithāl*) for something in that world, just as if [the spiritual referent] were [the thing's] spirit and meaning.
>
> AL-GHAZĀLĪ, *Mishkāt*, 78–80; NAKAMURA

According to al-Ghazālī, the heart is the spiritual or mystical organ par excellence, and it leaves man hovering between the two worlds: "The heart has two doors: one open to the world of *malakūt*, which is the guarded tablet and the world of angels, and the other open to the five senses, attached to the world of *mulk* and sensory perception" (al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ*, 3:26). As for the organ of sight, he states:

> The eye is actually two eyes: one that is outward (*ẓāhira*) and one that is inward (*bāṭina*). The outward eye belongs to the sensible world, the inward eye to the *malakūt*. For each one, there is a sun or light through which it gets a perfect vision, external or internal. The outward [light] belongs to the visible world, it is the sensible sun; the inward [light] belongs to the world of *malakūt*, it is the Qurʾān and the Books revealed by God.
>
> AL-GHAZĀLĪ, *Mishkāt*, 67

In this conception, the Qurʾān plays more or less the same role, as the principle of intelligibility, as the Good in Plato's *Republic* and as the active intellect in Aristotle, al-Fārābī, and the *falāsifa*.

Al-Ghazālī also assimilates the *mulk* and *malakūt* respectively to this world (*al-dunyā*) and the hereafter (*al-ākhira*): man cannot see the events of the tomb, that is, the "lesser resurrection" between death and the great resurrection, because "[his] eye is not fit to observe the things of *malakūt*, and everything that depends on the hereafter belongs to the world of *malakūt*" (al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ*, 5:255). Commenting on Q 6:75, al-Ghazālī states this exegetical principle: "Everything that is grasped by the [outward] sense of sight the Qurʾān designates by the *mulk* and sensory perception (*shahāda*), and everything that is invisible to the eye it designates the Unseen (*ghayb*) and the *malakūt*" (al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ*, 5:187). We can see here both an Islamization of

Neoplatonic concepts and a "Platonization" of Qur'ānic notions. The distinction between *mulk* and *malakūt* also corresponds to that of creation and command: what exists with quantity and measure belongs to the world of creation, and what exists without quantity and measure belongs to the world of command (al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, 3:468). The heart belongs to the latter and is identified with the spirit (*rūḥ*):

> If you ask yourself about the essential truth of the heart, know that in the Revelation God only says: "They will question you about the spirit. Say: 'The spirit is of the bidding of my Lord'" (Q 17:85), for the spirit is a part of the power (*qudra*) of God as a whole, and it comes from the world of command. God [also] says: "Verily, His are the creation and the command" (7:54). Humankind comes from the world of creation, on the one hand, and from the world of command, on the other. Anything with a surface, a measure, and a modality belongs to the world of creation. As for the heart, it has neither surface, nor measure.
>
> AL-GHAZĀLĪ, *Kīmiyā'*, 126

Al-Ghazālī finally distinguishes three worlds: (1) the *mulk*, which is apparent (*ẓāhir*), perceptible by senses, and gradually generated; (2) the *malakūt*, which is hidden (*bāṭin*), accessible only to spirits or intellects, originated in the pre-eternal divine command (*al-amr al-azalī*), and always in the same state; (3) the *jabarūt*, an intermediary world or *barzakh*, borrowing from one aspect of the previous worlds. Man, therefore, has also three aspects: one similar to the *mulk*, that is, his organs of sensory perception; one similar to the *malakūt*, that is, his spirit, intellect, and will; and one similar to the *jabarūt*, that is, his emotions and imagination (al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, 5: 350–1; Lange, 188).

After al-Ghazālī, 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 561/1166), the eponym of the Qādiriyya Sufi order, proposes another hierarchy based on a personal revelation:

> God told me: "Any conduit (*ṭūr*) between humanity (*nāsūt*) and *malakūt* is a revealed law (*sharī'a*), any conduit between *malakūt* and *jabarūt* is a spiritual path (*ṭarīqa*), and any conduit between *jabarūt* and divinity (*lāhūt*) is an essential truth (*ḥaqīqa*)."
>
> AL-JĪLĀNĪ, 445

The *jabarūt* is here resituated and put above the *malakūt*, which is surpassed by the *lāhūt*, that is, the pure divine Essence. As for the triad of law, path, and truth, this is a frequent pattern in Sufism based on the Prophetic *ḥadīth*

according to which “The law is my word, the path my actions, and the truth my inner states” (al-Aḥsāʾī, *ʿAwālī*, 4:124)—a conception that we will find again later on, albeit in an even more syncretic perspective.

After al-Ghazālī, the above-mentioned ʿUmar al-Suhrawardī, the eponym of the Suhrawardiyya Order, evokes a three-fold procession of the worlds, spiritual organs, and mankind:

> The heavenly higher spirit comes from the world of command and the human animal spirit from the world of creation. The latter is the locus of indwelling and the offshoot of the higher spirit. Through the God-powered generation, the soul was generated from the higher spirit belonging to the world of command. The generation [of the soul] from [the spirit] in the world of command is analogous to the generation of Eve from Adam in the world of creation. And the generation of the heart from the spirit and the soul in the world of command is analogous to the generation of [human] offspring from Adam and Eve.
>
> ʿUMAR AL-SUHRAWARDĪ, 2:499–500

All these examples are testament to the early encounter between Neoplatonic philosophy and Islamic mysticism regarding the issue of the hierarchy of worlds and spiritual levels.

3.4 **Mulk, Malakūt, *and* Jabarūt *in the School of* Ishrāq**

The mystical philosopher Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (executed 587/1191), founder of the school of *Ishrāq* (“Illumination”), proposes a different system of an equally Neoplatonist inspiration. In his *Philosophy of Illumination* (*Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*), he reformulates the hierarchy of reality levels in terms of a metaphysics of light coupled with an angelology. At the top of this hierarchy stands the Light of lights (*nūr al-anwār*), that is, God. Below, the first emanated light gives birth to the world of “dominating lights” (*anwār qāhira*), or pure intellects identified with cherubins (*karūbiyyūn*). They are free from any relationship with matter and emanate from each other in a longitudinal or vertical order. This world is referred to as the *jabarūt*. Below, the “commanding” or “managing lights” (Pers. *anwār-i isfahbad*, Ar. *anwār mudabbira*), or souls assimilated to celestial and terrestrial angels, govern bodies and form together a latitudinal or horizontal order. They are divided in two groups: the lights governing the material species of the earthly world, called “angels” or “lords of the species” (*arbāb al-anwāʿ*), which appear as personifications of the Platonic ideas; and the soul-lights whose function is to animate material bodies, such as the souls

of the celestial spheres and human souls. This second layer of the world of lights is the *malakūt*. Below is the world of material bodies, essentially tenebrous, referred to as "barriers" (Pers. *barzakhiyyān*, sing. *barzakh*) shielding the light. This world is identified with the *mulk* (al-Suhrawardī, *Philosophy*, 108; al-Suhrawardī, *Livre*, 575, Mullā Ṣadrā's commentary).

Al-Suhrawardī thus takes up the distinction of the philosophers (*ḥukamāʾ*, literally "sages") between *jabarūt*, *malakūt*, and *mulk*, as corresponding respectively to the worlds of intellect, soul (or soul and word), and bodies, all of which mirrors the Neoplatonist system of emanation. He adds: "The body obeys the soul, which obeys the intellect, which obeys its Creator" (al-Suhrawardī, *Iʿtiqād al-ḥukamāʾ*, 270; al-Suhrawardī, *Kalimat al-taṣawwuf*, 117–18).

After having "trustworthy experiences," the *Shaykh al-Ishrāq* finally arrives at a distinction between four worlds: the world of the dominating lights, that is, pure intellects; that of the managing lights, that is, souls; that of the barriers, that is, bodies; and that of the suspend images, dark and illumined (al-Suhrawardī, *Philosophy*, 149–50). These four worlds correspond respectively to the *jabarūt*, the *malakūt*, the *mulk*, and what al-Suhrawardī's commentators call the "world of the image" or "imaginal world" (*ʿālam al-mithāl*). The latter is perceptible only by the active imagination; its reality was attested by sages such as Hermes and Plato; it is in this world that the resurrection of the bodies, the prophetic promises and threats, do really occur, and that the prodigious cities of Jābalqā (or Jābulq), Jābarṣā (or Jābarṣ, Jābarsā, Jābars) and Hūrqalyā, mentioned in Prophetic *ḥadīth*, are situated (al-Suhrawardī, *Philosophy*, 160). Although prefigured in Ibn Sīnā's *Epistle on the Return for the Feast of Sacrifice* (*Risāla aḍḥawiyya fī amr al-maʿād*) (Ibn Sīnā, *Epistolla*; Michot), and in al-Ghazālī's conception of the *jabarūt*, this concept of an "imaginal world" has therefore to be regarded as an invention of the *Ishrāqī* school.

3.5 *The Hierarchy of Worlds and Levels of Existence in the School of Ibn al-ʿArabī*

The Andalusian Sufi Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) is the founder of a school of thought that is as influential as it is contested, in Sunnī and Shīʿī circles alike. Its most famous teaching is the "Oneness of Being" (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), according to which, since God's Being is one, everything that exists is one and its existence is nothing but a manifestation of God's own Being.

In his most commented work, the *Bezels of Wisdom* (*Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*)—not to be confused with the aforementioned work ascribed to al-Fārābī—Ibn al-ʿArabī adopts al-Ḥallāj's doctrine of the indwelling of divinity (*lāhūt*) in humanity (*nāsūt*):

> Know that one of the traits of the spirits is that everything they tread on becomes alive and life permeates throughout it … This measure of life which permeates things is called divine nature (*lāhūt*), and human nature (*nāsūt*) is the substrate in which this spirit dwells. *Nāsūt* is called spirit, because of that which inheres in it.
>
> IBN AL-ʿARABĪ, *Fuṣūṣ*, 138; IBN AL-ʿARABĪ, *Bezels*, 104–5

ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī, one of the main commentators of the *Bezels*, elaborates that "all being is an utterance of God, be it generated [material entities], like bodies, or fixed [noetic] entities, like spirits, or unified and conjoining the apparent and the hidden, the *nāsūt* and the *lāhūt*, like the Perfect Man" (al-Qāshānī, *Sharḥ*, 211).

The concept of the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) is another major tenet of Ibn al-ʿArabī's school. Commenting on the Prophetic *ḥadīth*: "God created Adam upon His form," Ibn al-ʿArabī describes Adam as the synthesis of the fundamental degrees of the divine Presence (*al-ḥaḍra al-ilāhiyya*) that are, according to the categories of Islamic theology, God's Essence, Attributes, and acts; and the Perfect Man as a compendium of all God's Names and the realities which derive from them (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 199; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Bezels*, 157–8).

In his *Bezels*, Ibn al-ʿArabī distinguishes between two kinds of God's self-disclosure (*tajallī*) corresponding with two worlds of levels of reality:

> God has two ways of self-manifestation: concealed [unseen] (*ghayb*) and unconcealed [visible] (*shahāda*). The concealed [unseen] self-manifestation bestows the heart with predisposition. This is the essential self-manifestation whose essence is concealed [unseen] … When the heart possesses this predisposition, the unconcealed [visible] self-manifestation appears in the sensible world and the heart sees the Real in the form mentioned above.
>
> IBN AL-ʿARABĪ, *Fuṣūṣ*, 120–1; IBN AL-ʿARABĪ, *Bezels*, 87; see also CHITTICK, *Sufi Path*, 338

In his *Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, he briefly discusses the three-fold hierarchy of world:

> The world of *malakūt* is that of the noetic entities (*maʿānī*) and the Unseen (*ghayb*). The gradual rise towards it begins in the world of *mulk*.… The *mulk* is the world of the visible and the letter (*al-shahāda wa-l-ḥarf*). Between these two is the intermediate world of the isthmus

> (*ʿālam al-barzakh*).... The isthmus is the world of [separated] imagination (*khayāl*) that some are calling *jabarūt*, and this is my view.
>
> IBN AL-ʿARABĪ, *Futūḥāt*, 3:228

Thus, Ibn al-ʿArabī ascribes to the *jabarūt*, like al-Ghazālī before him, the median position between the visible world and the Unseen, and like al-Suhrawardī and his school, treats the realm of imagination as a world in its own right.

On this basis, Ibn al-ʿArabī's commentators created a system of five divine Presences (*al-ḥaḍarāt al-ilāhiyya al-khams*). If the existence is unique and if the worlds are in fact infinite in number, they can be divided in five Presences or God's self-disclosures, corresponding to five worlds or levels of existence. For Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274), the first Presence is that of the Unseen including names, attributes, noetic entities, and all that God's knowledge comprehends. Opposite it is the world of sense-perception (*shahāda*). Between these two is the central Presence of the Perfect Man, which partakes in two sides. Between the Perfect Man and the Unseen is the Presence of the spirits; between him and the visible world is the Presence of the limited imagination (*khayāl muqayyad*), that is, the imaginal world (*ʿālam al-mithāl*) (al-Qūnawī, 94).

As for ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī, he distinguishes (1) the Presence of the Essence, the absolute Unseen also called the "Unseen of the unseens" (*ghayb al-ghuyūb*); (2) the Presence of the Names and Attributes, that is, the Presence of divinity (*ulūhiyya*); (3) the Presence of the acts, that is, the Presence of lordship (*rubūbiyya*), that is, God as manifested in the form of a personal Lord (*rabb*); (4) the Presence of the image and imagination; and (5) the Presence of sensory perception. Each lower level is an image and a locus of manifestation for the higher (al-Qāshānī, *Sharḥ*, 134).

Finally, for Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī (d. 751/1350), there are five universal divine Presences. The first is the Presence of the absolute Unseen (*al-ghayb al-muṭlaq*), whose world is that of the noetic fixed entities (*al-aʿyān al-thābita*) in the Presence of God's knowledge. Opposite it is the Presence of the absolute visible (*al-shahāda al-muṭlaqa*), whose world is the *mulk*. Between these two is the Presence of the relative unseen (*al-ghayb al-muḍāf*), which is divided into two parts: the one closer to the absolute Unseen is the world of the spirits of *jabarūt* and *malakūt*, that is, the immaterial intellects and souls; and that which is closer to the visible realm is the imaginal world. The fifth Presence, which partakes in the above four ones, is that of the human world. The *mulk* is the locus of manifestation (*maẓhar*) for the *malakūt*, that is, the world of the absolute image (*al-mithāl al-muṭlaq*), which is, in turn, the locus of manifestation for

the *jabarūt*, that is, the world of immaterial intellects and souls, which is, in turn, the locus of manifestation for the world of noetic fixed entities, which is the locus of manifestation of the divine Names and the Presence of inclusive unity (*al-ḥaḍra al-wāḥidiyya*), which is a locus of manifestation of the Presence of exclusive unity (*al-ḥaḍra al-aḥadiyya*) (al-Qayṣarī, 90; Corbin, *Imagination*, 237–8, 353–4; Chittick, Five Divine Presences, 107–28).

Thus, the school of Ibn al-ʿArabī has given rise to several systems of five divine Presences, most of them including the imaginal world and the Perfect Man. The latter is generally identified by the Sufis with the Prophet Muḥammad. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 812/1409), in the introduction to his book *On the Perfect Man* (*al-insān al-kāmil*), writes:

> I testify that our master Muḥammad … is the locus of self-disclosure (*majlā*) for God's Essence, the extreme limit of His Names and Attributes, the destination of the lights of *jabarūt*, the dwelling of the secrets of *malakūt*, the gathering of the realities of *lāhūt*, the spring of the subtleties of *nāsūt*.
>
> AL-JĪLĪ, 6

4 The Final Synthesis

4.1 *In Pre-Safavid Shīʿism*

These philosophical and mystical conceptions of the hierarchy of worlds were adopted and adapted from the eighth/fourteenth century onwards by Shīʿī Imami theologians such as Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsāʾī (d. after 906/1501). Obviously inspired by Ibn al-ʿArabī's speculations on Arabic letters, but also by Neoplatonist philosophy, he analyzes the first three letters of the opening formula of the Qurʾān, *bi-smi-Llāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*, "In the Name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate," as follows:

> The *bāʾ* is the first stage of the world referred to as the first intellect. The *sīn* comes at the second stage, that is, the universal soul referred to as "the guarded tablet" and "the Book manifest" (*al-kitāb al-mubīn*, Q 5:110, 6:59). The *mīm* is at the third stage, that is, the universal nature. Some [scholars] matched the first intellect with the *bāʾ*, which they call the world of *jabarūt*; the universal soul with the *sīn*, which they call the world of *malakūt*; and the universal nature with the *mīm*, which they call the world of *mulk*.

AL-AḤSĀʾĪ, *Mujlī*, 1:139

Similarly, the three divine Names contained in this formula, *Allāh*, *al-Raḥmān*, and *al-Raḥīm*, are interpreted as the respective loci of manifestation of the *jabarūt*, *malakūt*, and *mulk*. These three letters and three Names also match respectively the three Presences of the exclusive unity, inclusive unity, and lordship (*rubūbiyya*); the three Presences of divine friendship (*walāya*), prophecy (*nubuwwa*), and messengerhood (*risāla*); the three worlds of the divine Essence, Attributes, and acts; and the truth (*ḥaqīqa*), path (*ṭarīqa*), and law (*sharīʿa*) (al-Aḥsāʾī, *Mujlī*, 1:140–3). It is noteworthy that the triad of divine friendship, prophecy, and messengerhood is shared by Sufism and Shīʿī esotericism, enabling both of them to support the esoteric (*bāṭin*) sovereignty of the friend of God (*walī*), that is, the shaykh (for the Sufis) and the Imam (for the Shīʿīs), while maintaining the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) superiority of the Prophet. The same applies to the triad of truth, path, and law—already encountered in al-Jīlānī—meaning exoteric jurisprudence, esoteric spiritual initiation, and the esoteric of the esoteric (*bāṭin al-bāṭin*), that is, gnosis (*ʿirfān*) or wisdom (*ḥikma*) (Terrier, 44–52). From this perspective, the hierarchy of the worlds and degrees of reality actually mirrors that of the inherent dimensions of Islam, and cosmological speculation echoes the defense of Islamic esotericism.

4.2 *In the Safavid Renaissance*

In eleventh/seventeenth-century Iran under the dynasty of the Safavids, we witness a renaissance of philosophy combined with Sufism and Shīʿī esotericism. Mīr Dāmād (d. 1040/1631), a master of philosophy and theology in Isfahan, conducted a systematic reflection on creation, the hierarchy of worlds, and the levels of temporality. Developing some of Avicenna's views, he distinguishes between creation from nothing, called "innovation" (*ibdāʿ*), and creation in the world of generation and corruption, called "invention" (*ikhtirāʿ*). He also makes a three-fold distinction between the exclusive eternity (*sarmad*) of the divine Essence, the inclusive eternity (*dahr*) of the divine act, and the time (*zamān*) of the created world. He states that the world of intellect and the world of soul, referred to as the two "climates" (*iqlīm*, from Gr. *klima*) of the world of command and as the two spheres of the *malakūt*, come into being through innovation, while the worlds of matter and forms, referred to as "the two climates of the world of creation" and as the two spheres of the *mulk*, that is, the world of sensory perception, come about through invention (Mīr Dāmād, *Jadhawāt*, 279). These worlds or layers of reality do not process successively one from each other, but God created or poured them out all at once (*dafʿatan*): the world of

command and praise (*ʿālam al-amr wa-l-ḥamd*) regardless of time and place, in the "vessel of inclusive eternity" (*waʿāʾ al-dahr*), and the world of creation and *mulk* in a measured space-time (Mīr Dāmād, *Qabasāt*, 125, 166).

The philosopher Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1045/1635), the most influential thinker of this philosophical renaissance, in a work entitled *The Keys of the Unseen* (*Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*) (cf. Q 6:59), offers an original reflection on the hierarchy of worlds alluded to in the Qurʾān. He distinguishes between the word (*kalām*) of God, created directly by divine command, and His writing (*kitāb*), emerging gradually from creation in the world of generation and corruption. The world of command is devoid of any form of contradiction, multiplicity, renewal, or change, in accordance with Q 54:50: "Our Commandment is but one word," while the world of creation includes contradiction and multiplicity (Mullā Ṣadrā, 40). The word of God, as such, has therefore an original rank above the intellect and the senses, before its descent into the world of command, identified with the "guarded tablet," then into the heavens of this world, identified with the "tablet of clearing and establishing" (*lawḥ al-maḥw wa-l-ithbāt*) (in reference to Q 13:39: "God blots out and establishes whatsoever He wills; and with Him is the Essence of the Book"). In conclusion, Mullā Ṣadrā states that only a prophet, having reached the station of unity beyond the two worlds of creation and command, can grasp the word of God in its original level of reality (Mullā Ṣadrā, 67).

Mullā Ṣadrā reiterates the double equivalence between the world of creation, the *mulk*, and the sensory perception, on the one hand, and the world of command, the *malakūt*, and the Unseen, on the other (Mullā Ṣadrā, 544). He also distinguishes between the higher (*al-aʿlā*) and the lower (*al-asfal*) *malakūt*, according to al-Suhrawardī's correspondences between the hierarchies of worlds and angels. The higher *malakūt* includes spiritual beings who are free of any relationship of indwelling (*ḥulūl*) or government (*tadbīr*) with the world of bodies. They are called cherubins (*karūbiyyūn*) and divided into two kinds: the "ecstatic angels" (*al-malāʾika al-muhayyamūn*), absorbed into the exclusive unity and humbled by God's almighty power (*jabarūt*); and the "inhabitants of *jabarūt*," mediators of divine Generosity, whose leader is called "the supreme spirit" according to Q 78:38: "Upon the day when the spirit and the angels stand in ranks," or "the supreme pen (*qalam*)" according to the *ḥadīth*: "What God created first was the pen," or "the first intellect" according to the *ḥadīth*: "What God created first was the intellect." The lower *malakūt* includes spirits attached to the world of bodies, which are also of two kinds: the first governing and moving celestial bodies, the second in charge of material bodies (Mullā Ṣadrā, 546–7).

Based on this hierarchy, Mullā Ṣadrā insists on individual salvation and the mission of God's men:

> No one can know the states of *malakūt* as they are until he has abstracted himself from the world of *mulk*, delivered from the captivity of nature and the chains of passion.... Only he whose spirit has come out of the womb of this lower world through spiritual [re-]birth can contemplate the states of *malakūt*, as the Messiah said: "He who is not born twice shall not enter the kingdom (*malakūt*) of heaven" (John 3:3) ... The states of the world of *malakūt* cannot appear clearly to the people of the worlds of *mulk* and *nāsūt*.
>
> MULLĀ ṢADRĀ, 544–5

Thus, God has sent prophets and Imams to humankind in order to guide His creatures on the path of their return to Him, from the *mulk* in which they were generated to the *malakūt* in which their intelligent and imaginative souls originate (Mullā Ṣadrā, 1010).

Among Mullā Ṣadrā's students, Muḥsin al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī (d. 1090/1679) sought to reconcile even more deeply philosophy and mysticism with the teaching of the Shīʿī Imams, especially on the subject of their own divine nature. Among others, he reports and comments on this *ḥadīth* attributed to the fourth Imam, ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn (d. around 95/714):

> God created the hearts and bodies of the prophets from the clay of ʿIlliyūn; He created the hearts of the believers [that is, the Shīʿīs] from the same clay and their bodies from below; He created the hearts and bodies of the unbelievers (*kuffār*) from the clay of Sijjīn. Then He mixed the clays of the believers and unbelievers.
>
> AL-KĀSHĀNĪ, 85–6

The terms ʿIlliyūn and Sijjīn are two enigmatic hapax legomena in Q 83:7–8: "No, indeed; the book of the libertines is in Sijjīn; and what shall teach you what is Sijjīn?" and 83:18–19: "No, indeed; the book of the pious is in ʿIlliyūn; and what shall teach you what is ʿIlliyūn?" It is noteworthy that this Shīʿī account of the creation of the Imams is akin to that of the creation of "God's friends" (*awliyāʾ*) by the Sufi al-Junayd al-Baghdādī (see above).

Al-Kāshānī identifies the "higher ʿIlliyūn" with the higher *malakūt*, that is, the world of intellects and spirits, devoid of matter and form; the "lower ʿIlliyūn" with the lower *malakūt*, that is, the world of souls and immaterial forms

(*ashbāḥ*); and the Sijjīn with the *mulk*, that is, the material world (al-Kāshānī, 85–6). Thus, in accordance with Shīʿī doctrine, he states that all the prophets and Imams are pure malakūtian beings. Further on, he writes:

> The matters are under the domination (*qahr*) of the natures, which are in turn under the domination of souls, which are in turn under the domination of intellects, which are in turn under the domination of the magnificence of the First, God the One, the Dominator (*al-qahhār*). Likewise, the earth is under the influence of the heavens by God's authorization, the heavens are in turn under the domination of the *malakūt*, which is in the captivity of the *jabarūt*, which is under the constraint of the Supreme Compeller's (*al-jabbār*) command.
>
> AL-KĀSHĀNĪ, 122

We have therefore a hierarchy of five worlds and levels of reality: (1) the One and His command; (2) the *jabarūt*, that is, the "higher *malakūt*" and "higher ʿIlliyūn," or the world of intellects; (3) the *malakūt*, that is, the "lower *malakūt*" and "lower ʿIlliyūn," or the world of souls; (4) the higher *mulk*, that is, the world of nature; (5) the lower *mulk*, that is, the realm of *materia prima* (*hayūlā*, Gr. *hylé*).

Finally, another Shīʿī philosopher and mystic of Safavid Iran, Qāḍī Saʿīd al-Qummī (d. ca. 1103/1691–2), synthesized this system in a commentary on the *Theology of Aristotle*. He describes the correspondence between Plotinus' concepts, Qurʾānic notions, and *Ishrāqī* topics as follows: (1) the world of intellect is the higher *malakūt*, the world of the Unseen and deity (*ulūhiyya*); (2) the world of the soul is the lower *malakūt*, the world of image, lordship (*rubūbiyya*), and command; (3) the world of nature is the *mulk*, the world of bodies-barriers and creation (Saʿīd al-Qummī, *Taʿlīqāt* 167–8; Corbin, *Philosophie*, 258).

4.3 *In Modern Esoteric Shīʿsm*

Such speculation continued in Iran after the Safavid period, particularly within the Shīʿī Sufi Dhahabiyya Order and the Shīʿī mystical school of the Shaykhiyya. Mullā ʿAbd al-Raḥīm Damāwandī (d. between 1150/1737 and 1170/1757), one of the heads of the Dhahabiyya, defines the Perfect Man, be he a prophet, an Imam, or a "pole" (*quṭb*), as the one whose heart is able to contemplate the three worlds of *malakūt*, *jabarūt*, and *lāhūt*, meaning respectively the world of the soul and image, that of the intellect, and that of the non-manifest Divinity (Damāwandī, 805–6; Corbin, *Philosophie*, 350). This leads him to draw up a hierarchy of spiritual human natures: (1) the pilgrims of *lāhūt*, who contemplate the light of the divine Essence, are the perfect men, prophets, and Imams;

(2) the pilgrims of *jabarūt*, who contemplate the lights of the divine Names and Attributes, are the elite of the sages; (3) the pilgrims of the *malakūt*, who contemplate the manifestation of God's acts, are the religious scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*); then come (4) the men lost in the world of *mulk* and (5) the pure unbelievers (*kuffār*) (Damāwandī, 838; Corbin, *Philosophie*, 361–2).

The Shaykhī school is characterized by a mystical and esoteric approach to the original teaching of the Shīʿī imams. Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsāʾī (d. 1241/1826), the founder of the school, refers to the legendary city of Hūrqalyā as the intermediate world (*barzakh*) between *mulk* and *malakūt*, that is, the world of material realities and that of souls and immaterial substances. He states that this intermediate world is necessary so that the gradation of being (*tashkīk al-wujūd*)—a principle of Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophy—would not have a gap. It is in this world, he argues, the resurrection of the bodies takes place and the twelfth Imam, Muḥammad al-Mahdī, remains in occultation (since 329/940–1) (Corbin, *Corps spirituel*, 220–1; Hermann, 37, 49). Although this doctrine caused al-Aḥsāʾī to be excommunicated in his time, it remains influential among Iranian Shīʿīs up to nowadays.

5 Conclusion

The hierarchy of worlds and levels of existence has always been a major concern in Islam, particularly within the esoteric currents of Shīʿism, Sufism, and philosophy. To be sure, all the speculations discussed above are rooted first and foremost in meditations on the meanings of the Qurʾānic text. However, they also reflect the influence of ancient sources as well as the innovative potential inherent in philosophical thought. Over the centuries, the hierarchy of *mulk*, *malakūt*, and *jabarūt*, although never fixed in a uniformly accepted form, has become a shared heritage not only of philosophers, theologians, and mystics, but also of a large number of ordinary believers. The anthropological implications of such speculations, crystallized in the concept of the Perfect Man, may explain their longevity and continuing appeal. Indeed, cosmology, here, is not the rational study of an object external to the subject, as in Descartes' philosophy, nor independent of the Creator God, as in Newton's physics, but, rather, the exploration, at the same time, of what encompasses human beings and of what human beings encompass in their soul and nature. It is certainly not a science based on empirical observation, but neither does it remain a purely conceptual system, since its abstract concepts require a certain level of spiritual experience. In other words, the Sufi, Shīʿī, and philosophical hierarchy of worlds discussed in this chapter has not been elaborated as an abstract

scheme, but represented as a quite concrete framework for the aspiration and movement of the human soul and, possibly, for its salvation. This may explain why in Islamic thought, contrary to what happened in the West after Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, the link between cosmology, psychology, and metaphysics has never been severed.

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CHAPTER 14

Emanation (*Fayḍ*) in Classical Islamic Mysticism

Michael Ebstein

The idea of emanation (*fayḍ*) and related concepts, ultimately originating in the Neoplatonic tradition, played a central role in the development of Islamic mystical thought. The nature of this role and the ways in which Muslim mystics adapted and incorporated the idea of emanation into their respective teachings will be the focus of this chapter.

1 Introduction: "Neoplatonism" and "Emanation"

The use of the terms "Neoplatonism" and "emanation" is not self-evident as might seem at first and, therefore, merits clarification. In recent scholarship, the accuracy and utility of the term "Neoplatonism," which was coined in the eighteenth century, have been called into question, given the exceedingly wide-ranging array of writers and works—stretching from the third century to the modern period, and originating in diverse cultural, religious, and philosophical contexts—that is often subsumed under its umbrella (see, for example, Adamson, Neoplatonism, 206–7; Catana; Remes and Slaveva-Griffin, 2–5). Accordingly, the use of "Neoplatonism" and "Neoplatonic" in what follows will be restricted mainly to the Islamic domain and within the latter to mystics who were inspired in one way or another, directly or indirectly, by certain Arabic Neoplatonic writings that were produced in the ninth and tenth centuries. These writings (on which see below) formed a continuation of the rich literary tradition initiated by Plotinus, the third-century Greek philosopher, his immediate disciples, and Late Antique heirs (on Plotinus and Neoplatonism in general, see the articles and bibliographies in Gerson, *Plotinus*; Remes and Slaveva-Griffin).

There are other difficulties, however, related to the use of the terms "Neoplatonism" and "Neoplatonic" that are specific to the field of Islamic mysticism. While scholars of previous generations did not hesitate to speak of Neoplatonic "influences" on Islamic mysticism in general and on specific figures in particular (see, for instance, Affifi; Arberry, 31; Asín Palacios; Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, index, "Neoplatonism" and "Plato/Platonism"; Corbin, *History*, 223, 294; Goldziher, 4, 135–8; Nicholson, Historical Enquiry, 316–20, 330; Nicholson,

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Mystics, 12–13, 112; Smith, 253–4; Whinfield and Qazvini, vii–xiv), academics in the last few decades have tended to steer clear of such a discourse. Their reticence stems primarily from a justified dissatisfaction with earlier scholarship, which more often than not had presented a simplistic and distorted picture of the relationship between Islamic mysticism and pre-Islamic traditions; one may mention, for instance, Asín Palacios's theories regarding Andalusian mysticism and its so-called Pseudo-Empedoclean roots (for references, see Ebstein, *Mysticism*, 12). Yet the falling-out-of-favor of "Neoplatonism" and "Neoplatonic" can perhaps also be explained by political trends in postcolonial academia, especially following the revolution caused by Edward Said's *Orientalism*: one cannot speak of a "foreign" impact (let alone "Western," whether Hellenistic or Christian) on Islam. Additionally, in an attempt to defend Islamic mysticism from its Muslim opponents in the past and present (on these opponents, see de Jong and Radtke; Knysh; Sirriyeh), some scholars have sought to advocate this tradition by portraying it as an authentic Islamic phenomenon that is uncontaminated, as it were, by non-Islamic teachings; a phenomenon originating—as Massignon had already claimed (see his *Essay*)—exclusively in the Qurʾān. However, a middle ground can be found: one may view Islamic mysticism as an original and distinctively Islamic phenomenon that derives, *inter alia*, from the Qurʾān, and, at the same time, may reasonably acknowledge the major transformations in Islamic mystical thought that were generated by the encounter with the teachings of Plotinus and his followers. True, contrary to what previous scholars have claimed, and notwithstanding the eastern provenance of various Arabic Neoplatonic texts, the decisive encounter with Neoplatonic teachings did not occur among all mystical movements and circles in the classical period of Islamic mysticism (roughly the third/ninth to sixth/twelfth centuries), but rather took place initially in the West, in al-Andalus or Muslim Spain. Certain Neoplatonic conceptions—for example, those concerning the relation between the physical and spiritual dimensions of reality, Divine and created beauty, psychology and the taxonomy of the soul—most likely had at least some impact on eastern mysticism as well. Yet the first and crucial encounter with Neoplatonic teachings and specifically with the idea of emanation occurred in al-Andalus. At any rate, we may regard those mystics of Islam who were indeed deeply inspired by Neoplatonic thought as belonging to the same tradition that began with Plotinus and was continued by his pre-Islamic heirs; these mystics contributed much to the development of the Neoplatonic tradition and in many ways transfigured it, producing a unique, Islamic form of Neoplatonic mysticism that in turn inspired thinkers in other religions.

As to "emanation" (from the Latin *emanare*), this term reflects Plotinus's poetic description of the way in which the non-corporeal, cosmic entities—namely, the intellect (*nous*) and soul (*psychē*)—emerge from the One (*to hen*). According to Plotinus, the One is so perfect that It "overflows" (*hypererryē*), causing the intellect to come into being; in the same manner, the intellect produces or "pours forth" (*procheas*) the soul from which the world is eventually generated (see, for instance, Gerson, Metaphysics, 559; Plotinus, 3:395–7 [*Ennead* iii. 8. 10], 5:59–61 [v. 2. 1]). The Arabic *fayḍ* and other terms from the same semantic field, which were first employed in this context by the famous ninth-century Arab philosopher al-Kindī and which simultaneously appeared in the Arabic Neoplatonic translations produced in his circle (see Adamson, *Arabic Plotinus*, 185), etymologically signify this very idea of abundance, overflowing, and gushing forth. Certainly, not every mystic who employs *fayḍ* in his writings is necessarily a "Neoplatonist"; this term and its derivatives may simply mean Divine profusion and generosity, rather than point to a Neoplatonic cosmological scheme and a Neoplatonic ontology (see, for example, al-Tirmidhī, 45; Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, *Bawāriq*, 162, 165, 174). Here I will deal primarily with Muslim mystics who either adopted the classical triad established by Plotinus and which consists of the One—universal intellect—universal soul, or otherwise devised idiosyncratic cosmologies that are nevertheless grounded in the worldviews of Plotinus and his successors. Contrary to a common misconception, such mystical adaptations of Neoplatonic or Neoplatonic-based cosmologies are not insignificant and devoid of mystical import; quite the opposite—they entail a specific vocabulary (including *fayḍ* and related terms) and reveal a distinctive perception of the relationship between God and His creation. Broadly speaking, most Muslim mystics of the Sunnī denomination, who belonged to what became known as *taṣawwuf* or Sufism (and perhaps apart from eccentric figures like al-Bisṭāmī [third/ninth century] and al-Ḥallāj [d. 309/922]; see Ebstein, Organs of God; Massignon, *Passion*), viewed their intimate connection with the Divine in psychological-epistemological terms: the goal of the mystic was to focus his mind solely on God, so that His mighty and majestic presence would overwhelm him and gain control over his consciousness. True, in such instances God may communicate with His chosen ones, both prophets and their heirs, "God's friends" (*awliyā'*, sing. *walī*), the mystics. However, by no means does this communication reduce the ontological gap between the human and the Divine; God remains in essence transcendent, utterly different from created beings. With Neoplatonic cosmology and its notion of emanation, epistemology turned into ontology: the interconnectedness of the spiritual and physical worlds, their emanation from one another

and their ultimate origination in God Himself, meant that even the lowest physical object in the sublunary world partakes in the Divine flow; God's unity and the multiplicity of created phenomena thus became integrated, intertwined (on the typological differences between eastern Sufi mysticism and Neoplatonic-oriented mysticism, especially as it developed in al-Andalus, see Ebstein, Classifications).

To be sure, the belief in the transcendence of the One was strictly upheld by Plotinus and his disciples; negating all human attributes from the One and maintaining His absolute detachment from anything created or conceivable to humans have always been part and parcel of Neoplatonic thought. Still, scholars all too often overlook the aspect of immanence in the Neoplatonic perception of the One (see Bussanich); although the One is above and beyond the worlds, separated from them by a series of cosmic echelons that emanate from one another, He is also present everywhere, imbedded, so to speak, in the life and being of every existent creature. The dialectical relationship, indeed tension, between the two seemingly opposing poles of transcendence and immanence (or *tanzīh* and *tashbīh* as they came to be known in the Islamic tradition) is already evident in the thought of Plotinus himself, who states, for example, that

> All these things are the One and not the One: they are he because they come from him; they are not he, because it is in abiding by himself that he gives them. It is then like a long life stretched out at length; each part is different from that which comes next in order, but the whole is continuous with itself, but with one part differentiated from another, and the earlier does not perish in the later.
>
> PLOTINUS, 5:63–5 [*Ennead* v. 2. 2]; see also PLOTINUS 3:412–13 [iii. 9. 4] and more

Inspired by such teachings, various Muslim mystics—above all, the well-known Andalusian author Muḥyī l-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240)—began reinterpreting their own personal experiences and Islamic heritage, viewing henceforth their close relationship with the Divine not only as a unique spiritual state enjoyed by a select few (prophets and *awliyāʾ*), but also as an ontological reality that is relevant, at least in certain respects, to all beings in the universe.

2 Distinctive Features of Emanation Schemes in Islamic Mysticism

The idea of emanation attracted many mystics and philosophers throughout the ages since it provided what seemed to be a successful and elegant

solution to the perennial problem of unity versus multiplicity in existence. According to Plotinus and his followers, the multitude of phenomena in the universe issues forth from the One as light shines from the sun (for instance, Plotinus, 5:29–33 [*Ennead* v. 1. 6]), like the radii and circumference of the circle in relation to its central point (see Ebstein, Circular Vision), or like rivers flowing from a wellspring (Plotinus 3:395–7 [*Ennead* iii. 8. 10])—metaphors that were to become leitmotifs in Christian, Islamic, and Jewish mystical writings. Multiplicity thus originates in and is constantly dependent on the One, which nevertheless remains unchanging, never decreasing or lacking in its eternal essence and everlasting abundance. However, such a notion posed a challenge for Christian, Muslim, and Jewish thinkers, given that the perception of God that they inherited from their respective traditions and sacred texts was that of an omniscient Creator who both generates the worlds deliberately and governs them directly in line with His Divine knowledge and will. Despite the fact that Plotinus is somewhat ambiguous on the issue of the One's will and intentionality, and although the relationship that he envisioned between man and the One is much more intimate and religious-oriented than is often realized (see Bussanich; Ebstein, *Mysticism*, 39–40; Gerson, Metaphysics), the tension between the notion of emanation and the belief in an omniscient Creator and Governor was unavoidable and indeed is characteristic of many Christian, Islamic, and Jewish adaptations of Neoplatonic thought.

The mystics in Islam devised a number of mechanisms in order to resolve this tension. One such mechanism was the theory of God's command (*amr*) and word (*kalima*), which first appeared in the history of Sunnī mysticism in the works of the Andalusian author Ibn Masarra (d. 319/931) and his heirs, particularly Ibn al-ʿArabī; this theory, as we shall see below, had originated in both the longer version of *The Theology of Aristotle* and in Ismāʿīlī works. In the cosmologies of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī, the realm of the Divine command and word is situated between God and the universal intellect (the first created being in classical Neoplatonic philosophy). This intermediate realm, which Ibn al-ʿArabī likewise refers to as God's merciful breath (*nafas al-raḥmān*), is linked to the creative fiat "be!" (*kun*) and to the Divine will (*irāda*) and knowledge (*ʿilm*); it functions as a Divine means for the creation (*ibdāʿ*) and management of the cosmos, from the universal intellect down to the sublunary world. In this manner, the problem of God's will and omniscience was solved within the framework of Neoplatonic cosmology: the different worlds that comprise the universe emanate from one another and are interconnected through a Divine flow, yet are intentionally generated and continuously governed by God through His *amr-kalima*. The *amr* and *kalima*, which manifest the Divine will, knowledge, and power (*qudra*), are situated at the top of the universal

hierarchy, and, at the same time, pervade all its strata. Another mechanism, introduced or formulated systematically by Ibn al-ʿArabī, is the theory of *al-wajh al-khāṣṣ*, "the specific [Divine] face." According to this theory, God governs His creation through two parallel systems: (1) a universal hierarchy in line with Neoplatonic cosmology, consisting of various levels (*marātib*) that emanate from one another and that function as cosmic "means" (*asbāb*) or "secondary causes" (*asbāb thawānin*) for the Divine management of the world; and (2) a direct and intimate relationship between God and each created being via a Divine aspect that is unique and specific to that being (Chittick, *Self-disclosure*, 91–120, 135–55, and index, "face"). One should bear in mind, however, that such a double vision of the relationship between God and the universe is not foreign to Neoplatonic thought and is already found in the teachings of Plotinus himself (see, for example, Plotinus, 5:48–51 [*Ennead* v. 1. 11], 7:330–5 [vi. 9. 8]). Similar to *al-wajh al-khāṣṣ* in this regard is Ibn al-ʿArabī's notion of *ẓuhūr* (the "manifestation" of God among created beings and within creation at large) or *tajallī* ("revelation" in an ontological sense). According to this notion, every created being is the fruit of a Divine self-disclosure, serving as a platform (*maẓhar*, pl. *maẓāhir* and *majlā*, pl. *majālin*) for the manifestation or revelation of God's names (see *ẓuhūr* and *tajallī* in the indices of Chittick, *Path of Knowledge* and *Self-disclosure*). I will return to this point below.

Cosmological theories and emanation schemes in Islamic mystical literature have other distinctive features, such as the notion of Divine writing and the Neoplatonic interpretation of the Qurʾānic pairs "pen" (*qalam*)–"tablet" (*lawḥ*) and "Divine throne" (*ʿarsh*)–"footstool" (*kursī*); the significance of the Divine names and their integration into emanation schemes; and the function of the "perfect human being" within Neoplatonic or Neoplatonic-based cosmologies (for a detailed discussion, see below). These unique features set mystical theories apart from strictly philosophical ones, though obviously the lines separating philosophy and mysticism in medieval thought are not always easy to draw. Mystical systems of thought in this context are more mythical (consider, for instance, the perception of reality as an ongoing product of Divine speech and writing); they place much less emphasis on intellectual-rational aspects of existence and stress instead intuitive and experiential processes; they employ a more poetic rather than a purely logical-philosophical discourse; and they focus on the figure of the "perfect human being" and his centrality in creation, more so than on human perfection per se and the means of achieving it. As stated above, the decisive encounter with Neoplatonic philosophy in the history of Islamic mysticism occurred initially in al-Andalus, where many of the distinctive teachings mentioned here first emerged and crystallized; they received their full elaboration in the oeuvre of Ibn al-ʿArabī,

from whence they passed to the East. There they met with other developments in Islamic mysticism, some of which likewise owed much to the impact of Neoplatonic thought. I shall now turn to a more detailed, diachronic survey of these historical processes.

3 Beginnings and Crystallization: Andalusian Mysticism

Muslim thinkers in medieval times became acquainted with the teachings of Plotinus primarily via the famous *Theology of Aristotle* (*Uthūlūjiyā Arisṭāṭālīs*), an Arabic translation and adaptation of parts of *Enneads* 4–6. The *Theology* and related texts were produced in the circle of al-Kindī (d. ca. 256/870). The idea of emanation as reflected in *fayḍ* or similar terms like *inbijās* ("springing," "gushing forth") figures prominently in this Pseudo-Aristotelian corpus (see, for instance, *al-Khayr al-maḥḍ*, 12; *Uthūlūjiyā*, 7, 51, 85–6, 92, 108–9, 134), although various nuances and significant changes were introduced due to the religious milieu in which the *Theology* was produced; some of these nuances and changes were meant to solve the aforementioned problem of emanation versus creation (see Adamson, *Arabic Plotinus*; D'Ancona, Emanation; D'Ancona, Greek into Arabic; D'Ancona, *Libraries*; D'Ancona, Theology; Morewedge).

An important variant of the *Uthūlūjiyā* that is vital for understanding certain developments in the history of Islamic mystical thought is the text known in scholarship as the longer version of the *Theology of Aristotle*. The most noteworthy difference between the shorter and longer versions of the *Theology* is the longer version's doctrine of the *kalima*, that is, the Divine word or *logos* that is situated between God and the universal intellect and is linked with God's knowledge, will, command, and power. Significantly, this doctrine is also expounded in Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic writings that were composed from the early fourth/tenth century onwards, including the famous *Epistles of the "Sincere Brethren"* (*Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ*). The latter were an unknown group of Muslim Neoplatonists who were active in the fourth/tenth century (presumably in Iraq) and who were affiliated in one way or another with the Shīʿī and perhaps Ismāʿīlī milieu. Although scholars disagree as to whether the longer version of the *Theology* was originally produced in an Ismāʿīlī environment or perhaps only influenced Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonists at a later stage, it is clear that the Ismāʿīlīs played a central role in the development of the particular brand of Islamic Neoplatonism that is reflected in the longer *Theology* and which was to have a major impact on Andalusian mystics (for a detailed discussion of these matters and for references, see Ebstein, *Mysticism*, 33–76). To be sure, we do not know if Ibn al-ʿArabī and his Andalusian predecessors were

directly acquainted with the longer version of the *Theology of Aristotle* (or the shorter version for that matter) nor whether they were familiar with Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic texts (cf. Fenton, Versions, 257–8, 259–60 n.2). We do know for certain, however, that the distinctive type of Neoplatonism reflected in these sources reached the mystics in al-Andalus via the *Epistles of the "Sincere Brethren,"* which were extremely popular among Muslim and Jewish thinkers in medieval Spain (see the studies by De Callataÿ; Eliyahu; Zonta). In addition to reading their *Epistles* directly, Ibn al-ʿArabī (and perhaps Ibn Qasī and Ibn Barrajān as well; see below) may have also become acquainted with the Ikhwān's thought via secondary sources such as *Kitāb al-dawāʾir al-wahmiyya* (*The Book of the Imaginary Circles*) by the Muslim Andalusian poet, grammarian, and philosopher Ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyawsī (d. 521/1127), who incorporated into his work the Neoplatonism of the Ikhwān (see Eliyahu). One may add that while Ibn al-ʿArabī was doubtlessly influenced by the concept of *wujūd* ("existence") as formulated by Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, d. 428/1037) and, following the latter, by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), his cosmology was derived from the Ikhwān, not from Ibn Sīnā's decimal system of ten intellects, which he inherited from al-Fārābī (d. 339/950).

Apart from Ibn al-ʿArīf (d. 536/1141), whose writings exhibit the classical Sufi type of mysticism that developed in the East up to that period (for references, see Addas, Andalusī Mysticism), the works of the other four major representatives of Andalusian mysticism—Ibn Masarra, Ibn Barrajān (d. 536/1141), Ibn Qasī (d. 546/1151), and Ibn al-ʿArabī—reflect their authors' familiarity with Ikhwānian teachings (see Böwering and Casewit, 43; Casewit, *Mystics*, index, "Brethren of Purity"; Casewit, Reconsideration, 113–14; Stroumsa and Sviri; and the studies by De Callataÿ and Ebstein). Despite the presence of Ikhwānian concepts in his oeuvre, Ibn Barrajān on the whole adopted neither the Ikhwān's cosmology nor its related Neoplatonic terminology; Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī, on the other hand, did. Ibn Qasī was similarly inspired by Neoplatonic thought, yet chose to devise an idiosyncratic cosmology consisting of six cosmic echelons, as against the classical triad of God—universal intellect—universal soul that is found in the writings of the Ikhwān, Ibn Masarra, and Ibn al-ʿArabī.

In the works of Ibn Masarra, Ibn Qasī, and Ibn al-ʿArabī, one encounters in addition to *fayḍ* and its derivatives (like *ifāḍa*, "pouring," "filling") other terms that reflect the notion of emanation such as *inbiʿāth* ("flowing," "pouring out") and *inbijās*; *sarayān* ("pervading," "permeating"); *mādda* (pl. *mawādd*, "continuous increase," "[spiritual] substance"), *imdād* ("increasing," "aiding," "supplying"), and *istimdād* ("drawing," "deriving"); and *fāʾida* (pl: *fawāʾid*, "[spiritual] benefit/profit"), *ifāda* ("bestowing [spiritual] benefits/profits"), *istifāda* ("deriving [spiritual] benefits/profits") (for references, see Ebstein, Ibn Qasī,

203–6; Ebstein, *Mysticism*, index; see also Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿAnqāʾ*, 41; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 55; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 1:302, 2:246–7, 4:283–4, 419, 7:284, 418, 9:341; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿUqlat*, 51–2, 56; Ibn Masarra, 60–1, 69, 86–8). Such emanationist terminology had originated in the aforementioned Arabic Neoplatonic literature of the third/ninth century (see, for instance, *Nuṣūṣ*, 186–7; *Uthūlūjiyā*, 20, 26–7, 56, 90, 115, 120, 129–30), and was then adopted and elaborated upon by the Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonists and Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, whose *Epistles* inspired our Andalusian mystics (see, for example, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa*, 2:5, 307–8; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil*, 1:146–7, 3:37, 88–9, 182, 184–6, 189–90, 342, 354–5, 4:199–205, 212–13; al-Kirmānī's *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* throughout; al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār*, 85–6, 110, 121, 127, 139–40, 145, 211, 214, 223, 226, 255; al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ*, 3, 33, 50). The terms listed above all signify the same idea: every echelon in the cosmic hierarchy receives or derives (*istimdād*, *istifāda*) the *mawādd* and *fawāʾid*—i.e., the Divine flow of life (*ḥayāt*), existence, powers (*qiwā*), knowledge, lights (*anwār*), virtues (*faḍāʾil*) or the good in general (*khayr*, *khayrāt*), blessings (*barakāt*), forms of all that is (*ṣuwar*, sing. *ṣūra*), and so forth—from the level situated above it, and transmits it (*imdād*, *ifāda*, *ifāḍa*) to the level below it. God's goodness or benevolence (*jūd*; cf. Greek *agathon*) as well as His mercy (*raḥma*), which generate creation and sustain it, never cease flowing (see, for example, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Inshāʾ*, 37–8; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 8:481, 9:311; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa*, 1:24, 74–6, 235–6, 2:285–9). This Divine flow continuously descends through the different levels of the universe down to the sublunary world; on the other hand, its reception (*qubūl*) among created beings (the "receptacles," *qawābil*) is dependent on their constitution (*mizāj*) and spiritual aptitude or "preparedness" (*istiʿdād*) to receive it (see Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿAnqāʾ*, 57–8; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 49; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 10:24, 52–3; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Tadbīrāt*, 126–7; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa*, 2:255–8, 326–7; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil*, 1:148–9, 2:9–12, 3:75–6, 357–8; *al-Khayr al-maḥḍ*, 20–1, 24; Plotinus 6:306–9 [*Ennead* vi. 4. 11]). The process described here likewise pertains to the spiritual hierarchy of mankind, whether that of the Ismāʿīlī Imams (descendants of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, Muḥammad's cousin and son-in-law, and his wife Fāṭima, the Prophet's daughter) and their subordinates, members of the *daʿwa* (the missionary organization of the Ismāʿīlīs), or that of the *awliyāʾ* according to Sunnī mystics like Ibn al-ʿArabī. Each and every rank in these spiritual hierarchies receives the Divine flow from the level that is situated above it and transmits it to the level below. In this manner, the physical existence and spiritual well-being of creation in general and the world of human beings in particular are maintained.

Emanation in the sense of generation or coming into being begins only at the level of the universal soul and continues from there downwards; the

universal soul emanates from the universal intellect and the remaining cosmic echelons issue forth from the soul. Indeed, following Ismāʿīlī and Ikhwānian teachings, Ibn al-ʿArabī claims that the universal intellect was created by God *ex nihilo* (*ibdāʿ*), while the universal soul emanated from the intellect (*inbiʿāth*; see, for example, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 1:306; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa*, 1:257, 2:293). As mentioned above, Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī posited the existence of a mediating realm between God and the universal intellect, that of the Divine command and word. The theory of the *amr-kalima*, traces of which are found in the works of Ibn Qasī and Ibn Barrajān (see Casewit, *Mystics*, 280–94; Ebstein, Ibn Qasī, 212–15; Ibn Barrajān, 1:73–4, 309, 311–15, 2:353, 355–6), originated in the longer version of the *Theology of Aristotle* and in Ismāʿīlī works, though one must remember that already Iamblichus (third–fourth century) and Proclus (fifth century) had added entities or hypostases between the One and the intellect (Ebstein, *Mysticism*, 39).

The theory of the *amr-kalima* may also be linked to the concept of God's cosmic writing; both reflect the notion that creation is generated by Divine language, in the forms of speech and writing alike. Like the Qurʾān, reality at large is a Divine text that is composed of God's names, words, and letters. The mission of the mystic is to decipher both texts (the Qurʾān and reality), to decode their miraculous signs or verses (*āyāt*), and to pass or even ascend from their external-manifest aspect (*ẓāhir*), which concerns the lower-corporeal worlds, to their inner-hidden dimension (*bāṭin*), which pertains to the upper-spiritual and Divine realms as well as to their God-chosen representatives on earth; the mystic's spiritual voyage thus becomes essentially a hermeneutical project. Such ideas—namely, the centrality of Divine language; creation as a Divine text replete with God's names, words, and letters; the relation between the *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* aspects of reality; and the hermeneutical mission of the mystic—are likewise central to the Ismāʿīlī tradition and to the Ikhwānian worldview, and their echoes are found in the writings of Ibn Barrajān as well (Casewit, *Mystics*, 206–44, 266–306; Ebstein, *Mysticism*, 33–122, 168–72, 212–29). Moreover, they are reminiscent of the Jewish *Sefer Yetsīra* (*The Book of Creation*; see Liebes, *Ars Poetica*; Weiss) and are also characteristic of various Kabbalistic works that were composed from the thirteenth century onwards, many of which were produced in northern Spain—that is, in close geographical and chronological proximity to Ibn al-ʿArabī and his world (see, for instance, Idel, Reification; Idel, *Kabbalah*, 97–103; Idel, *Language*; Lachower and Tishby, 1:292–5, 3:1077–121; Lifshitz, 154–82; Oron; Scholem, *Elements*, 36–85; Wolfson). In addition, following the Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic tradition and specifically the teachings of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī identified the Qurʾānic pairs "pen"–"tablet" and "Divine throne"–"Divine footstool" with the

Neoplatonic universal intellect–universal soul; Ibn al-ʿArabī also identified the throne and footstool with the ninth and eighth celestial spheres respectively (the pen–tablet and throne–footstool, it should be emphasized, likewise play a central role in Ibn Qasī's cosmology). The identification of the pen–tablet with the intellect–soul is of course deeply connected to the notion of Divine, cosmic writing. One may also note the significance in this context of the aforementioned Arabic root *m-d-d* and its derivatives. The process whereby every echelon in the cosmic hierarchy receives the Divine flow from above and transmits it to the level below is viewed as a continuous act of universal writing: each level draws (*istimdād*) the Divine flow or "ink" (*midād*) from the source above it and delivers it (*imdād*) to the level below. Creation is thus a text that is composed—and is, from a certain perspective, continuously composed—in accordance with the Divine knowledge and will (for details, see Ebstein, Ibn Qasī, 206, 208–12; Ebstein, *Mysticism*, 50–3, 56–7, 62; and see, for example, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 5: 505–6).

Beginning with Ibn Masarra, mystics in al-Andalus attempted to integrate various philosophical, theological, and mystical beliefs related to the Divine names and attributes (*al-asmāʾ wa-l-ṣifāt*) into their Neoplatonic or Neoplatonic-based systems of thought. Once again, we may observe a shift, due to the impact of Neoplatonic philosophy, from an epistemological to an ontological understanding of the Divine names. In the works of Ibn al-ʿArabī and his Andalusian forerunners, the issue of Divine names is no longer approached from a strictly linguistic and hermeneutical perspective or solely from the vantage points of logic and monotheist principles as in Islamic *kalām* (theology) and philosophy, nor is this issue relevant only to the inner-psychological realm of the mystic, to his personal relationship with God, as in many Sufi writings composed in the East. Rather, the Divine names are viewed as crucial elements of reality, as powers or energies that play a central role in cosmogonic and cosmological processes as well as in sacred human history; they function as the manifest and dynamic aspect of Divinity, which is immanent within creation and bound up with its fate (see Ebstein, In Truth). A detailed and comprehensive history of this Andalusian "shift" in the mystical understanding of the Divine names remains a desideratum in modern scholarship. We may say, however, that in general, the discussions on the Divine names that are found in the writings of Ibn Masarra, Ibn Qasī, Ibn al-ʿArabī, and to some extent Ibn Barrajān tend to combine or oscillate between philosophical and theological doctrines, on the one hand, and mythical thinking, on the other. In either case, the immanence of God's names in creation is often explained in accordance with Neoplatonic or Neoplatonic-inspired cosmologies. For example, according to Ibn al-ʿArabī, creation comprises twenty-eight cosmic levels that extend

from the universal intellect down to man in the sublunary world; each level is ontologically paired with a letter of the Arabic alphabet—creation, after all, is a product of God's merciful breath and the ensuing Divine letters and words—and with a Divine name (Ebstein, *Mysticism*, 53–7, 92–6). Furthermore, the interaction between the Divine names and created beings is at times described in terms of emanation: the benevolent or merciful Divine names cause their benefits or mercy to flow (*ifāḍa*) on created beings (see, for instance, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿAnqāʾ*, 34; Ibn Masarra, 60; cf. Elmore, 360 n. 64). A similar attempt to assimilate God's names and attributes into a Neoplatonic-based cosmological scheme is reflected in Kabbalistic theosophical literature, which developed in northern Spain from the thirteenth century onwards. In this literature, the ten Divine emanations (the *sefīrōt*), which stand between the hidden-transcendent aspect of God (the "Infinite," *ein-sōf*) and creation, are linked to God's attributes and names (including the letters of the latter) as revealed in the sacred and canonical texts of Judaism (Idel, *Kabbalah*, 136–53; Lachower and Tishby, 1:229–55; Scholem, *Elements*, 39–40).

The relation between the idea of emanation and Ibn al-ʿArabī's theory of *ẓuhūr-tajallī* (see above) merits attention. The theory of *ẓuhūr-tajallī* is central to Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought and to the teachings of his followers in the East, yet its origins and prehistory as well as the intellectual links in this context between Ibn al-ʿArabī and earlier, eastern mystics (like al-Tustarī [(d. 283/896); see Böwering, *Mystical Vision*], al-Ḥallāj, or Rūzbihān Baqlī Shīrāzī, on whom see below) have yet to be studied in a satisfactory manner. Some scholars see a contradiction between the idea of emanation and the notion of *ẓuhūr-tajallī*; while emanation presumably implies an indirect connection between the Creator and created beings, *ẓuhūr/tajallī* entails a direct, intimate, and uninterrupted relationship. Such an assumption has lead scholars either to underestimate and even ignore Neoplatonic elements in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought or to claim that emanationist terms like *fayḍ* essentially signify the same as *ẓuhūr* and *tajallī* (see Affifi, 59–65; Izutsu, 1:37, 127, 145–6; Netton, *Allāh Transcendent*, 280–4; cf. Dagli, 62, 85–7, 94 n. 80, 101). However, it is problematic to disregard large sections of Ibn al-ʿArabī's oeuvre that do contain Neoplatonic cosmology and emanationist terminology (see, for example, the long chapters 198 and 371 of the *Futūḥāt* as well as *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz* and *al-Tadbīrāt*). It is equally difficult to assume that a profound thinker and brilliant writer like Ibn al-ʿArabī was unaware of the difference in meaning between *ẓuhūr-tajallī* and terms like *fayḍ*. Accordingly, we may say that although *fayḍ* and *ẓuhūr/tajallī* are not at all synonymous, Ibn al-ʿArabī sees no contradiction between the two notions that these terms reflect and at times employs such terms together (see, for instance, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 49; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 1:302, 7:418).

In fact, the idea according to which the One (or God) is manifested in creation is by no means alien to Neoplatonic thought; on the contrary, it is a recurrent theme in Neoplatonic teachings, albeit one that stands in constant tension with the seemingly contrasting theme of Divine transcendence (see also above). Both themes are indeed present in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought: while God's essence (*dhāt*) stands above and beyond creation, His names—Divinity's manifest, revelatory aspect—are embedded in the universe. Strict Neoplatonists like Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ similarly held that the Divine attributes are present and engrained in our world (*Rasāʾil*, 4:206–10); and it was only natural for a pre-Islamic Neoplatonist like Proclus to assume that the Good (*agathon*) is revealed or appears in the world in the form of the beautiful (*kalon*), and that when the human soul "sees the unutterable as appearance (*ekphanen*), it rejoices and admires what appears" (*to phanen*, from *phainō*, "cause to appear"; Beierwaltes, 308). Furthermore, heralding Ibn al-ʿArabī's theory of *Nafas al-raḥmān* and his description of the cosmic Descent of the Divine *amr/kalima* (see Ebstein, Human Action), the Ikhwān portrayed creation as an ongoing product of the manifest-revelatory dimension of Divinity, namely, God's speech:

> The whole world—with its lofty celestial spheres and sublime heavens; with all that is within it: spiritual lights, souls in motion, and powers that pervade the bodily elements, the natural bodies, all existents, and other creatures; that which is contained between the heavens and the earth, from the highest to the lowest domain—it is all a single body, prepared to receive the universal emanation (*al-fayḍ al-kullī*) from its Creator, glory be to Him. The word of Allāh, may He be exalted, is continuously attached to [the world], supplying it with abundance and benevolence (*tumidduhu bi-l-ifāḍa wa-l-jūd*) in order that it be complete and will continue to exist. [The word] begins its emanation through its unification with the first created being, the active intellect [= the universal intellect]; then, through the mediation of the intellect, [the word reaches] the universal soul, the passive intellect; then, through the mediation of the universal soul, [it reaches] prime matter; then, through the mediation of prime matter, the absolute body; and finally, [the word] is scattered throughout the world.
>
> IKHWĀN AL-ṢAFĀʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa*, 1:635–6

It is not difficult to see how a mystic like Ibn al-ʿArabī was inspired by such a discourse and, subsequently, why he chose to reinterpret his Sufi heritage in a novel and radical way, investing the concept of "revelation" with an ontological

rather than a strictly epistemological meaning: not only does God reveal Himself to prophets and mystics, but He also manifests Himself within creation at large and among all created beings. Certainly, Ibn al-ʿArabī went one step further than the Ikhwān in emphasizing in a more mythical way the direct link and inseparable bond that unite God with each and every creature (see above concerning *al-wajh al-khāṣṣ*); this he accomplished, however, within the framework of Neoplatonic thought, not in isolation from it.

Finally, a major theme in the mystical teachings of at least Ibn Qasī and Ibn al-ʿArabī is the centrality of the mystic himself within the cosmic processes that regulate the relationship between Divinity and creation. Ibn al-ʿArabī, who was the first Sunnī mystic to formulate the theory of the "perfect human being" (*al-insān al-kāmil*) in a systematic way, perceived the hierarchy of saints as paralleling the cosmic hierarchy, which he portrayed in line with Neoplatonic cosmology. By the same token, Ibn al-ʿArabī identified *al-ḥaqīqa l-Muḥammadiya* (the "True Reality of Muḥammad")—a mythic concept that he derived from earlier mystics, including Ibn Qasī, and which signifies the Divine-metaphysical root of the "perfect human being"—with the universal intellect. The hierarchy of saints plays a central role in the Divine management of creation; the Divine flow of life, power, knowledge, and so on is dependent on God's elect and particularly on their leaders, headed by the "pole" (*al-quṭb*; on Ibn al-ʿArabī's theory of *walāya*, "friendship with God" or sainthood, see Chodkiewicz). One may note that once again, such conceptions seem to have one of their roots in Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic thought, in which very similar beliefs are maintained in relation to the prophets and their heirs, the Imams (see Ebstein, Ibn Qasī, 217–21; Ebstein, *Mysticism*, 123–88). Such a tendency to associate religious personalities in the past and present—whether spiritual or political leaders, historical and mythical figures alike—with the upper-spiritual worlds and to envision the Divine flow in creation as dependent on them, in the framework of a Neoplatonic or Neoplatonic-based cosmology, is likewise reflected in Druze theosophy, which, as is well known, emerged from Ismāʿīlī-Fāṭimī Shīʿism (see De Smet, *Épîtres*). Similar conceptions are also characteristic of Jewish theosophical elaborations of the old Rabbinical idea of "the righteous man is the foundation of the world" (*tsaddīq yesōd ʿōlam*; based on Proverbs 10:25), as found in Kabbalistic, Sabbatean, and Hassidic teachings or writings (see, for instance, Idel, *Hasidism*; Lachower and Tishby, 1:288–9, 3:1249; Liebes, Messiah; Liebes, *Sabbateaism*; Scholem, *Elements*, 213–58; Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*). The developments delineated here in the perception of holy figures and their connection to the Divine world were to have significant, long-term consequences for the religious, social, political, and even economical status of God's chosen ones—be they Ismāʿīlī Imams,

Sufi *walī*s/shaykhs, or Jewish *tsaddiq*s. It is important to bear in mind that these developments across diverse traditions and in different periods and geographical areas all share a similar Neoplatonic background, in the formation of which Ismāʿīlī thinkers and Spanish mystics (both Muslim and Jewish) played a central role. Indeed, various scholars have attempted to demonstrate the significance of Arabic and specifically Ismāʿīlī and Ikhwānian Neoplatonism for the emergence and crystallization of Kabbalah—a mystical phenomenon that, as mentioned above, is close in both time (twelfth century onwards) and place (the Iberian Peninsula) to the rise of Andalusian Sunnī mysticism and the appearance of Ibn al-ʿArabī (see, for example, Altmann and Stern, 130–2; Ebstein and Weiss; Fenton, Hierarchy; Goldreich; Heller-Wilensky; Idel, Sefirot, 270–7; Krinis; Pines, 243–7; Werthmann). This important avenue of research naturally demands further study.

4 al-Ghazālī and Later Developments in the East

The oeuvre of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, a central figure in the history of Islamic theology and Sufism, poses several problems, not least of which is his precise position regarding Neoplatonic or Neoplatonic-based cosmologies and the idea of emanation. Scholars differ as to the correct interpretation of al-Ghazālī's attack in his famous *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (*The Incoherence/Precipitance of the Philosophers*) on Avicennian philosophy in general and on the philosophical perception of causality in particular. Did al-Ghazālī reject secondary causality as such in favor of occasionalism, or did he merely criticize the philosophical understanding of secondary causality as a necessary and exclusive mode that functions irrespective of Divine will? Correspondingly, did al-Ghazālī discard Neoplatonic or Neoplatonic-based cosmologies outright, or was he willing to accept their validity, however relative it may be (see the discussions and bibliographies in Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*; Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*)? Whatever answers scholars give to these questions, it is clear that in the bulk of al-Ghazālī's oeuvre, which belongs to the *kalām* and Sufi genres of writing, no coherent and consistent Neoplatonic or Neoplatonic-inspired cosmology can be found, nor does this oeuvre reveal an extensive and systematic use of emanationist terminology.

From this perspective, al-Ghazālī—particularly in his famous and popular *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* (*Revival of the Religious Sciences*)—was a true heir of his Sufi predecessors in the central and eastern parts of the Islamic world, many of whom were less interested in issues like cosmology and focused more on the inner-psychological realm of the individual and on his ethical conduct (*adab*)

vis-à-vis God and fellow man. In addition, following in the footsteps of the famous mystic-theologian al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857), prominent Sufis came under the sway of Islamic theology (see Mayer; Nguyen; Picken; Van Ess). The heavy influence of *kalām* meant that many eastern Sufis up to the twelfth–thirteenth century—including al-Ghazālī himself—were less willing to adopt Neoplatonic thought and were less inclined towards the idea of emanation. Statements like "all these things are the One and not the One" and "the whole is continuous with itself" (see above) did not tally with accepted theological doctrines, nor, given their ontological context, could they be interpreted as "ecstatic utterances" (*shaṭaḥāt*) that are relevant solely to the subjective-rapturous experience of the mystic and are therefore excusable (see Ernst, *Ecstasy*). In al-Andalus, on the other hand, mystics were much more receptive to Neoplatonism, owing primarily to the impact of writings like *Rasāʾil ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ* and perhaps also due to the presence of the Fāṭimī Empire in North Africa; Neoplatonic works were circulating among Ismāʿīlī Fāṭimīs from a relatively early period in the tenth century, and eventually the Fāṭimī Imam-caliph al-Muʿizz (r. 341/953–365/975) adopted Neoplatonism as the official "state philosophy" (see Ebstein, *Mysticism*, 76). This is not to say of course that mystics in the West were entirely divorced from the influence of *kalām* (see Casewit, *Mystics*, 145, 313, and index, "Theology"; Serrano Ruano; Stroumsa; Thiele); but as Neoplatonic writings were widespread there, Andalusian mystics—at least those discussed in this chapter—were relatively more at liberty to embrace Neoplatonic thought without the inhibitions of Islamic theology. This may explain why al-Ghazālī's teachings were apparently less influential in the intellectual formation of Ibn Qasī, Ibn Barrajān, and Ibn al-ʿArabī than has hitherto been thought (see Casewit, *Mystics*, 59–66; Casewit, Reconsideration, 113–15), though naturally these figures were aware of and read various works by al-Ghazālī (see, for instance, Abrahamov, *Ibn al-ʿArabī*, 117–34; Addas, *Quest*, index, "Ghazālī").

The situation, however, is much more complex when we turn to the corpus of allegedly esoteric writings that are attributed to al-Ghazālī and which seem to exhibit the impact of Neoplatonic thought, including the idea of emanation (see, for instance, Treiger, Dionysius; on the "Maḍnūn" corpus in general, see al-Akiti, *The* Maḍnūn; Griffel, *Formation*, 442–58). Let us consider specifically al-Ghazālī's well-known and enigmatic treatise *Mishkāt al-anwār* (*The Niche of Lights*). In the *Mishkāt* and on the basis of the famous "light verse" (Q 24:35), al-Ghazālī refers to God as the "true light" (*al-nūr al-ḥaqq*), the "supreme farthest light" (*al-nūr al-aʿlā l-aqṣā*), the "first" or "universal light" (*al-nūr al-awwal/al-kullī*), and the "light of lights" (*nūr al-anwār*, a Divine epithet found already in Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, in a paragraph replete with emanationist

vocabulary [*Rasāʾil*, 3:342]; on light imagery in general in Neoplatonic writings, see Bussanich, 52; Schroeder, 341–3). God, according to al-Ghazālī, is the ultimate source or the "emanator" of lights (*fāʾiḍ al-anwār*). The Divine lights in creation emanate from the upper-spiritual to the lower-corporeal worlds; in the former they are embodied in the luminous substances (*jawāhir*) of angels, which are organized in a hierarchal fashion (*tartīb*), and in the lower worlds they materialize in the form of physical light, that is, the light of the sun, moon, and stars. The Divine knowledge of the prophets and the *awliyāʾ* similarly emanates from the sublime realms of reality to the inferior world of human beings. One may also note the occasional use by al-Ghazālī of the Arabic Neoplatonic terms *istimdād* and *istifāda* or his references to the Divine writing of creation and the cosmic pen and tablet (see *Mishkāt*, 115, 119, 133, 136, 142–4, 154–5, 158–9, 166, 170–1; on the cosmic pen–tablet in al-Ghazālī's works, cf. Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 193–4, 280; Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 105–7).

Despite the presence of these familiar Neoplatonic motifs, the *Mishkāt* is both an idiosyncratic and an ambiguous work. Idiosyncratic—given its use of distinctive terms like *iqtibās* ("seeking" or "acquiring" light; see Q20:10, 57:12–13, and compare to the aforementioned terms *istimdād* and *istifāda*) and its exclusive focus on light imagery; and ambiguous due to the problems related to its cosmological scheme. When speaking of the upper-spiritual world and the luminous substances that inhabit it, did al-Ghazālī have in mind the Fārābian-Avicennian decimal system of ten intellects (as Griffel has suggested; see *Philosophical Theology*, 247, 253; Griffel, Cosmology, 34–5, 44–5), or was he referring to the classical Neoplatonic triad of the One—universal intellect—universal soul (as others have held; see Andani; Landolt)? Furthermore, is the celebration of Divine unity in the *Mishkāt* an ontological statement about the unified nature of reality as in Ibn al-ʿArabī's theory of *ẓuhūr/tajallī* ("He is the whole," *huwa l-kull*; *Mishkāt*, 144), or should it rather be understood in strictly subjective-epistemological terms, in line with classical Sufi thought—as an account of the sublime mystical experience in which the greatness of God, whose existence alone is truly real and self-sustaining, overwhelms the consciousness of man, whose existence is relative and contingent (see in particular *Mishkāt*, 137–41, 185; cf. Abrahamov, Supreme Way, esp. 159–60; Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 254–5; Treiger, Monism)? In an attempt to clarify such issues and elucidate the background against which al-Ghazālī might have composed his *Mishkāt*, some scholars have pointed to Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonism as a possible source of inspiration for al-Ghazālī. The latter, after all, was heavily engaged with Ismāʿīlī thought in the framework of his anti-Ismāʿīlī polemical project (see Mitha), and there is strong evidence that he was familiar with and was drawing from the *Epistles of Ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ* as well as from the writings

of the Ismāʿīlī Persian Neoplatonist Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. between 465/1072–481/1088–9; see Andani; De Smet, L'Attitude; Ebstein, *Mysticism*, 191 n. 14; Landolt; Treiger, Dionysius, 212 n. 52). Other scholars are more skeptical and less convinced of the Ismāʿīlī impact on al-Ghazālī and specifically on his *Mishkāt* (Griffel, Cosmology; Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 245–64, 281–4). Whatever the case may be, the exact relation between the Neoplatonic-oriented *Mishkāt* and al-Ghazālī's theological and Sufi works remains unclear (cf. Dagli, 30–9, 50–1, 142–3).

Another example of an intriguing Neoplatonic-inspired work is *Maʿārij al-quds fī madārij maʿrifat al-nafs* (*The Stairways to Holiness in/concerning the Paths of Self-knowledge*), which was either written by al-Ghazālī himself (perhaps in the early stages of his career) or was composed by an anonymous author who was influenced by al-Ghazālī's thought (see al-Akiti, Three Properties; Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 289 n. 35; Janssens; Tritton; Vajda). In the *Maʿārij*, Neoplatonic schemes and terminology, including *fayḍ* and its derivatives, figure prominently (see, for instance, *Maʿārij*, 10, 15, 53, 55–6, 64, 86, 93, 109–11, 133, 135, 140, 149, 168). It should be emphasized that in addition to Sufi ethical teachings, this philosophical work clearly exhibits a mélange of Avicennian and Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic conceptions (see esp. *Maʿārij*, 175–81).

Notwithstanding the probable influence of al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt* on al-Suhrawardī *l-maqtūl* (on whom see below), Ibn al-ʿArabī (see, for instance, *al-Futūḥāt*, 11:526–8), and even Jewish authors (see the studies by Elqayam), the two main channels through which later mystics in the East became acquainted with Neoplatonic teachings and the idea of emanation were the *Ishrāqī* and Akbarian schools, that is, the followers of al-Suhrawardī and of Ibn al-ʿArabī respectively. Mystical theories of beauty and love that were current in the Arabic and especially in the Persian Sufi world during the twelfth–thirteenth centuries likewise served to spread Neoplatonic conceptions in the East, though such theories prior to the encounter with *Ishrāqī* and Akbarian teachings were much less centered on cosmological schemes and on the idea of emanation. For example, in the writings of Rūzbihān Baqlī Shīrāzī (d. 606/1209; active mainly in Shīrāz), beauty in creation and among created beings is perceived as a manifestation or revelation (*ẓuhūr*, *tajallī*) of Divine beauty and therefore as conducive to the Love of God—a notion quite reminiscent of Platonic and Neoplatonic conceptions (see Beierwaltes; Corbin, *En islam iranien*, 3:9–146; Ernst, *Rūzbihān*; Murata, *Beauty*). In his discussions on beauty and love, Rūzbihān Baqlī was inspired by the earlier work *Kitāb ʿaṭf al-alif al-maʾlūf ʿalā l-lām al-maʿṭūf* (roughly, *The Book on the Inclining of the Familiar* [*Letter*] Alif *towards the Conjoined* [*Letter*] Lām), composed by Abū l-Ḥasan al-Daylamī (active in the fourth/tenth century, mainly in Shīrāz; see

Böwering, Deylamī). *Kitāb ʿaṭf al-alif* exhibits certain Neoplatonic ideas (see, for instance, al-Daylamī, 10–11) that Rūzbihān later adapted and incorporated in his works, albeit in a less philosophical and in a more poetical language (Murata, *Beauty*, 37–40, 54–5, and index, "manifestation," "self-disclosure," and "tajallī"; see also Takeshita).

Perceptions of beauty and love that are very similar to those of Rūzbihān Baqlī Shīrāzī are found in the Arabic poetry of the famed ʿUmar Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 632/1235), whose popular *al-Tāʾiyya al-kubrā* (*The Poem Rhyming in the Letter Tāʾ*) received several commentaries by a number of Akbarian scholars (see the studies by Homerin). Indeed, the notion that beauty and love in creation are a manifestation of Divinity is quite compatible with Ibn al-ʿArabī's teachings (see Zargar), and, unsurprisingly, it was to become a central theme in the Persian poetical writings produced in the Akbarian tradition, particularly those composed by Fakhr al-Dīn ʿIrāqī (d. 688/1289; active, *inter alia*, in Multān and Konya), Maḥmūd Shabistarī (d. ca. 740/1339–40; active mainly in Tabrīz), Muḥammad Lāhījī (d. 912/1507; active mainly in Shīrāz), and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 898/1492; active mainly in Herat; for references see below). These Persian mystic-poets, beginning with ʿIrāqī, were likewise inspired by the teachings on love of Aḥmad al-Ghazālī (d. ca. 520/1126), the brother of the aforementioned Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, especially as reflected in his *Sawāniḥ* (roughly, *Inspirations*; see Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, *Sawāniḥ*; Lumbard). In addition to Rūzbihān Baqlī Shīrāzī, the famous Persian mystic-poet Rūmī (d. 672/1273; active in Konya) is likewise known for his focus on beauty and love. In his writings, one may find Neoplatonic motifs such as *fayḍ* (see, for instance, Rūmī, 2:3202; cf. 1:1133, 2862–3), the universal soul (*nafs-i kull* or *jān-i kull*; for example, Rūmī, 2:173, 1183), and universal intellect (*ʿaql-i kull/kullī*; for example, Rūmī, 3:1145, 4:2178, 3643). The idea according to which all beauty and love in the world derive from and are a shade of their Divine source is also reflected in Rūmī's works (see Chittick, *Path of Love*, 35–7, 66, 125, 135, 138, 200–6, 220–6, 282, 346). Like Rūzbihān Baqlī, however, Rūmī was less interested in cosmology per se and in the idea of emanation as such, and in general, his works are far removed from the philosophical genre of writing. Still, the impact of Neoplatonism on Rūmī's thought—perhaps via Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274), who was likewise active in Konya (Lewis, 285–7)—is a matter that requires further research.

The foremost representative and propagator of Ibn al-ʿArabī's teachings in the East was his close disciple (and presumably stepson), the aforementioned Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī. Although al-Qūnawī was in theory critical of the Avicennian understanding of emanation, he wholeheartedly embraced Ibn al-ʿArabī's Neoplatonic cosmology with its emanationist terminology

(see Todd, 57, 60, 89, 97–8, 102 n. 85, 108, 122, 136; see also Chittick, Circle). Certainly, like Ibn al-ʿArabī, al-Qūnawī sought to alleviate the difficulties that Neoplatonic thought posed to the religious conception of God as Creator and direct Governor of the universe by espousing (albeit in a more philosophical manner) his master's theories regarding *al-wajh al-khāṣṣ* and *nafas al-raḥmān* (Todd, 55–80, 89, 105). Al-Qūnawī attempted to explain the relationship between the One and the many in additional ways; central to his thought in this context are the terms *ẓuhūr-tajallī*, which, as mentioned above, are already prominent in Ibn al-ʿArabī's oeuvre, and *taʿayyun*, "determination" or "entification," that is, the emergence of the delimited, created entity from the Unlimited and Absolute. *Taʿayyun* likewise appears in Ibn al-ʿArabī's works, but it is not as central to his teachings as it is to al-Qūnawī's thought and does not carry the same range of meanings. In fact, from al-Qūnawī onwards, the concept of *taʿayyun* (together with *ẓuhūr-tajallī*) became very popular in the Akbarian tradition (see Rustom, 405, 408; Todd, index, "determination"; and "entification" in the indices of Chittick and Wilson; Dagli; Murata, *Gleams*; on Ibn al-ʿArabī's "school" in general, see Chittick, School). However, *ẓuhūr-tajallī* and *taʿayyun* did not entirely supersede the use of emanationist vocabulary in the Akbarian school, and Neoplatonic cosmologies resurface in the works of Ibn al-ʿArabī's followers (see, for instance, regarding Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī [d. 751/1350; active in Anatolia], Shabistarī, and Lāhījī, Dagli, 127–8; Lewisohn, 153, 235, 255–7; Shabistarī, 75, 101 [trans. 54–5, 149]). To be sure, one encounters various nuances and idiosyncrasies in their adaptations of Ibn al-ʿArabī's teachings and of Neoplatonic cosmology. For instance, ʿAzīz-i Nasafī (active in Central Asia and Iran during the seventh/thirteenth century) claims that contrary to the philosophers, the true mystics realize that earth was created first whereas the first intellect was created last. Accordingly, man, who inhabits the earth and is the microcosm, stands at the center of the universe, the macrocosm (Ridgeon, 38–9, 54–70, 148–9). It is worth emphasizing, however, that the idea according to which man, "the first in thought" and "last in action," is the goal of creation—marking the crucial turning point at which the descending movement of the universe is reversed and assumes an ascending course—is quite typical of Neoplatonic thought. This idea is reflected in both Ismāʿīlī and Ikhwānian writings and is also evident in the works of Ibn Qasī and Ibn al-ʿArabī (see Ebstein, Circular Vision; cf. Todd, 109).

Another idiosyncratic development within the school of Ibn al-ʿArabī concerns the theory of the five worlds or "presences" (*ḥaḍarāt*). According to al-Qūnawī, existence and its various echelons can be divided into the following worlds: the world of Divine knowledge, including God's names or attributes and the eternal objects of His knowledge (*al-aʿyān al-thābita*, the "permanent

entities"); the world of spirits; the world of forms (*ʿālam al-mithāl*); the sensory or corporeal world; and the all-encompassing presence, that is, the perfect human being. Variations of this theory are found in the writings of Saʿīd al-Dīn al-Farghānī (d. ca. 699/1299) and Muʾayyid al-Dīn al-Jandī (d. 700/1300)—two direct disciples of al-Qūnawī—as well as in the works of al-Jandī's student ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. ca. 730/1330), al-Qayṣarī (al-Kāshānī's student), and latter mystics. The relation between the different worlds or presences is described in terms of *ẓuhūr-tajallī* and *taʿayyun*: the Absolute manifests Himself through the descending worlds, delimiting Himself in the constrained entities of created beings (see Chittick, Divine Presences; Chittick, Perfect Man, 146–7, 155–7; Chittick and Wilson, 6–17, and index, "presences"; Jāmī, 26–33, 44–8 [trans. 158, 160, 162, 180, 182]; Murata, *Gleams*, 116–21; Todd, 98–101, 175–6). This vision of reality and the division of existence into five worlds contradict neither Neoplatonic cosmology nor the notion of emanation. Thus, two Akbarian terms that figure in this context and that designate the two uppermost stages of Divine activity are *al-fayḍ al-aqdas* / *fayḍ-i aqdas* ("the holiest emanation"), which pertains to God's eternal knowledge and to His attributes and names in their non-revelatory or pre-revelatory mode, and the lower *al-fayḍ al-muqaddas* / *fayḍ-i muqaddas* ("the holy emanation"), which concerns the externalized-manifest aspect of Divinity, that is, creation (see, for instance, Dagli, 62; Chittick and Wilson, 11; Jāmī, 55, 73–5 [trans. 188, 206, 208]). The term *al-fayḍ al-aqdas* originally appears in Ibn al-ʿArabī's works, albeit without its later, distinctive meaning (see *Fuṣūṣ*, 49; *al-Futūḥāt*, 1:302).

In general, similar (although obviously not identical) divisions of reality are familiar from other mystical systems of thought that have likewise incorporated Neoplatonic or Neoplatonic-based cosmologies. Ibn al-ʿArabī himself speaks of four worlds: "the upper world" (*al-ʿālam al-aʿlā*, consisting of *al-ḥaqīqa l-Muḥammadiyya*, the celestial spheres, and the seven planets); "the world of changes" (*ʿālam al-istiḥāla* = the spheres of the four elements and the seven layers of earth in the sublunar world); "the world of inhabitants" (*ʿālam al-taʿmīr* = the angels, animals, plants, and inanimate beings); and "the world of relationships" (*ʿālam al-nisab* = the ten Aristotelian categories; see *al-Futūḥāt*, 1:366–7). Similarly, the Fāṭimī-Ismāʿīlī philosopher Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. after 411/1020), who devised his cosmology on the basis of al-Fārābī's decimal system of ten intellects, divided the universe into four worlds: the spiritual world of the ten intellects; the world of the celestial spheres; the world of religion with its spiritual hierarchy (the Prophet and his heirs, the Imams); and numbers (see al-Kirmānī, 121–31; on al-Kirmānī, see De Cillis; De Smet, *Quiétude*; Walker). His writings contain other divisions as well (see Ebstein, *Mysticism*, 197–8). In Kabbalistic literature too one finds such fourfold

divisions; for example, various Kabbalists from the thirteenth century onwards refer to four worlds (*ʿōlamōt*): the world of Divine emanation (*atsīlūt*), that is, the ten *sefīrōt*; the world of creation (*berīʾa*), which includes the Divine throne, palaces (*heychalōt*), and chariot (*merkava*), as well as their angelic inhabitants; the world of formation (*yetsīra*), the main domain of angels; and the world of making (*ʿasiyya*), that is, the corporeal parts of the universe (see Idel, *Angelic World*, 66–72; Idel, *Kabbalah*, 146; Idel, Sefirot; Lachower and Tishby, 2:555–8, 686–90; Scholem, *Major Trends*, 272). In fact, echoes of the Akbarian theory of the five worlds or presences are found in at least one Kabbalistic work that seems to have been composed in the thirteenth—fourteenth century, presumably in the eastern part of the Mediterranean, that is, in Palestine or the Land of Israel (for details, see Idel, *Studies*, 85–110). However, an Islamic impact (whether direct or indirect) on the development of Kabbalistic theories of four or so worlds may have also occurred earlier and in the West, viz. in thirteenth-century Spain; this possibility should be investigated further.

In sum, their idiosyncratic and innovative theories notwithstanding, followers of Ibn al-ʿArabī's teachings in the East continued to be inspired by Neoplatonic conceptions. Distinctive themes that appear in their works such as the Divine "breath" or God's speech and command, which generate and sustain the worlds; creation as God's book and Divine-cosmic writing; the principal of *qubūl-istiʿdād*; and, of course, the metaphysical root of the "perfect human being"—these themes, as we have seen, ultimately originate in Ibn al-ʿArabī's Neoplatonic-based teachings (see Chittick, Circle, 187; Chittick, Perfect Man; Dagli, 83–5, 89, 101; ʿIrāqī, 43–4, 100 [trans. 69–70, 105; see also index, "perfect man"]; Jāmī, 37–8, 51–6, 65–70 [trans. 170, 186, 188, 190, 200, 202, 204]; Lewisohn, 159–66; Ridgeon, 22–4, 32, 35–6, 38, 45–7, 60–1, 171–205, 211–12; Shabistari, 67, 75, 79–83 [trans. 25, 54, 71–80]; Todd, 32–5, 65–9, 80, 83–169; and, concerning the Yemenite ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī [d. 811/1408], see Morrissey, esp. 33–47).

Finally, it is important to mention Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā l-Suhrawardī, known as *Shaykh al-ishrāq* ("The Master of illumination"; d. 587/1191 in Aleppo). In his writings, al-Suhrawardī presents us with a unique cosmology that echoes Neoplatonic conceptions and emanationist imagery (see his *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, 114, 119–20; cf. 181 n. 1). The uniqueness of al-Suhrawardī's cosmological scheme can be summarized in three main points. First, reminiscent of al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt*, al-Suhrawardī describes the entities that populate the upper-spiritual realm as lights, referring to God Himself as the "light of lights." The centrality of the light motif in al-Suhrawardī's metaphysical system and the significance of distinctive light-related concepts like *ishrāq* and *ishrāqī* ("illumination," "illuminative") set al-Suhrawardī apart from his Neoplatonist predecessors

and contemporaries (on the relation between al-Ghazālī and al-Suhrawardī, see Sinai; Walbridge, *Wisdom*, 54–7; Ziai, Illuminationist Tradition, 467–8). Secondly, according to al-Suhrawardī, the number of spiritual entities or lights in the upper world is greater than two (as is common in classical Neoplatonic systems of thought) and even greater than ten (as one finds in the Fārābian-Avicennian tradition), though it is not infinite. Thirdly, in addition to being organized in a descending, hierarchal order as one finds in many Neoplatonic schemes, the sublime entities are also positioned on a horizontal axis; the horizontal lights are identified by al-Suhrawardī with the Platonic forms (*muthul*, sing. *mithāl*; on al-Suhrawardī's cosmology, see mainly the second part of his *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, 76–163; Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. 2; Netton, *Allāh Transcendent*, 260–8; Netton, Neoplatonic Substrate; Ziai, *Knowledge and illumination*; Ziai, Suhrawardī).

However, although al-Suhrawardī attempted both in his personal life and in his teachings to base his philosophical system on the idea of mystical experience and mystical intuition, his discourse in general and the bulk of his works are closer to the philosophical, peripatetic-Avicennian genre of writing than to the mystical one. Moreover, despite the fact that al-Suhrawardī held Sufi masters such as Dhū l-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. ca. 245/859–60), Sahl al-Tustarī, and al-Ḥallāj in high regard, he was not a Sufi but rather a Neoplatonic philosopher, much in line with Late Antique Neoplatonists like Proclus or Muslim ones like Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ (see Walbridge, Devotional and Occult Works; Walbridge, *Leaven*; Walbridge, Suhrawardī's *Intimations*; Walbridge, *Wisdom*; cf. Dagli 39–43). On the other hand, al-Suhrawardī's teachings did have a tremendous impact on subsequent generations of mystics (and of course philosophers), especially in Iran and India, though his distinctive light-cosmology was less influential than his discussions on logic (see Van Lit; Walbridge, *Science*; Ziai, Illuminationist Tradition). Al-Suhrawardī's teachings influenced in particular Shīʿī thinkers such as Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsāʾī (ninth/fifteenth century) and the members of the so-called school of Isfahan (eleventh/seventeenth century). Together with the works of Avicenna and Ibn al-ʿArabī, al-Suhrawardī's writings formed one of the three main intellectual foundations on which al-Aḥsāʾī and the "school of Isfahan" established their systems of thought. One may also note in this context the renewed interest in the *Theology of Aristotle* and related texts during the Safavid period (see Pourjavady and Schmidtke; Rizvi, (Neo)Platonism). The mélange of Avicennian, Suhrawardian, and Akbarian teachings continued to exert its influence on Shīʿī philosophers and mystics in later times—primarily via the oeuvre of the famous Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1045/1635–6)—for instance, on the nineteenth-century "school of Tehran" and on the Shaykhiyya, from which the Bābī and eventually

the Bahāʾī movements developed. The idea of emanation is part and parcel of the Avicennian-Suhrawardian-Akbarian heritage; unfortunately, a detailed discussion concerning the reception, adaptation, and modification of this idea by the Persian-Shīʿī schools and movements mentioned here falls beyond the scope of this chapter (for details and further references, see Amir-Moezzi; Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. 4; the relevant articles in Lewisohn and Morgan; MacEoin, Cosmogony; MacEoin, Shaykhiyya; Meisami and the bibliography cited there; Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā*; Schmidtke, al-Aḥsāʾī; Schmidtke, *Theologie*).

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CHAPTER 15

Levels of Being in Sufi Thought

Richard Todd

From the seventh/thirteenth century onwards, the concept of a world stratified into multiple levels of being (*marātib al-wujūd*) takes on an increasingly prominent role, not just in Sufi cosmology, but in Sufi theory generally. Articulated by figures associated with the school of the great Andalusian mystic Muḥyī l-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), this ontological model becomes, as we shall see, a key feature of some of the quintessential Sufi texts of the post-classical period.

What part, then, did Ibn al-ʿArabī himself play in the elaboration of a theory that came to be regarded as one of the hallmarks of his school? Although he provides much of its conceptual and terminological framework—from the notion of hierarchical worlds and "presences" to the detailed cosmological schema onto which the fundamental levels of being would subsequently be grafted—the classic articulation of the *marātib al-wujūd* would not emerge until some decades later in the writings of his chief disciple, the *shaykh al-islām* of Seljuk Anatolia, Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274).[1] Before turning, however, to the latter's onto-cosmological system, with its "five divine presences" or "universal levels of being," it seems appropriate—if we are to put al-Qūnawī's doctrine into historical context—to begin with a synopsis of the cosmological model he inherited from his master.

1 Ibn al-ʿArabī

In its broad outlines, this model is the Greek cosmological ladder of intellects, souls, and celestial spheres, albeit in the largely Islamicised form popularised by the *Epistles of the Sincere Brethren* (*Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*),[2] a work known to have circulated in Ibn al-ʿArabī's native al-Andalus.[3] Though primarily Hellenistic in origin, it was deemed compatible in core respects with the

1 On al-Qūnawī's life and thought, see Todd.

2 See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, 3:181–2, 202. For the purposes of the present study, it is worth noting that the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ refer to the cosmological hierarchy as the ranks or levels of beings (*marātib al-mawjūdāt*) (3:200).

3 See al-Andalusī, 80. On the reception of the *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* in Muslim Spain, see de Callataÿ, Ibn Masarra; de Callataÿ, Philosophy.

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cosmological teachings gleaned from the Qurʾān and the *ḥadīth*, especially by philosophically minded Muslims such as the Sincere Brethren, who were keen to appropriate for Islam the intellectual legacies of the ancient world.[4] After all, like Aristotle and Ptolemy, the scriptures too spoke of "seven heavens,"[5] and where the Greek system had the planetary heavens circumscribed by the heaven of the fixed stars, the Qurʾān spoke of the divine pedestal (*al-kursī*) which was "as broad as the heavens and the earth."[6] Similarly, there were Prophetic reports that seemed to provide grounds for a natural assimilation between the scriptural pen (*al-qalam*)[7] and the first intellect on the top rung of the Neoplatonic ladder.[8] With this basic structure in place, it was then possible to locate, between the rungs, specifically Islamic (as well as broadly Abrahamic) cosmological degrees such as the angelic hierarchies or the Lote Tree (*sidra*)[9] that forms the boundary between the lower realms subject to elemental nature and the non-elemental domains above.

For Ibn al-ʿArabī it is, moreover, a specifically Islamic concept—namely the "primordial mist" (*al-ʿamāʾ*) wherein, according to tradition,[10] God resides prior to the creation of the world—that forms the summit of this hierarchy,[11] beyond

4 On the Sincere Brethren's assimilation of Greek and Hellenistic thought, see de Callataÿ, *Ikhwan al-Safaʾ*; Netton.

5 For example, Q 41:12: "So He determined them as seven heavens in two days and revealed in every heaven its command," and 67:3: "and He is the Almighty, the All-Forgiving, who created seven heavens one upon another."

6 Q 2:255: "His Pedestal comprises the heavens and the earth; the preserving of them oppresses Him not; He is the Most High, the Mighty."

7 Q 68:1–2: "Nūn. By the pen and what they inscribe, thou art not, by the blessing of thy Lord, a man possessed." This brief Qurʾānic mention notwithstanding, the notion of the pen as a cosmological principle derives chiefly from the *ḥadīth* which states that the "first of God's creation was the pen." When used in a cosmological context it is typically qualified by the adjective "sublime" (*aʿlā*).

8 See, for example, al-Jīlī, *Marātib*, 27: "The thirteenth level of existence is that of the first intellect. [The Prophet,] God's peace and grace be upon him, has said 'the first thing God created was the intellect.' Now the intellect is also the sublime pen, even as he has said 'the first of God's creation was the pen.' The intellect is the Muḥammadan spirit likewise, for he—peace and grace be upon him—has said 'the first thing God created was the spirit of your prophet, O Jābir.' From these three *ḥadīth*s we therefore know that the intellect, the sublime pen (*al-qalam al-aʿlā*), and the Muḥammadan spirit betoken one and the same thing."

9 Q 53:14–16: "Indeed, he saw him another time by the Lote Tree of the Boundary, near which is the Garden of the Refuge, when there covered the Lote Tree that which covered: his eye swerved not, nor swept astray. Indeed, he saw one of the greatest signs of his Lord."

10 Having been asked where God was before He created the world, it is related that the Prophet replied, "in a mist with no air above or below it."

11 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 1:201, 3:416.

the boundaries of the cosmos proper. Enveloped in the mist is the highest category of angels, lost in the contemplation of God;[12] and below them is a quintet of Neoplatonic principles—universal intellect, soul, nature, matter, and body[13]—with the latter encompassing the concentric celestial orbs and elemental spheres[14] drawn from Aristotelian and Ptolemaic astronomy. Finally, at the bottom of Ibn al-ʿArabī's scale come the three terrestrial kingdoms of nature, ending with man as the final rung and culmination of God's creation.[15] Based, then, on a comparison of the topographies described in Ibn al-ʿArabī's chief cosmological writings—namely the *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz* and the cosmological chapters in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*—the principal strata of his schema, along with the Islamic scriptural terms with which they were identified, are as follows:

1. Primordial mist
2. Enraptured angels
3. Supreme element
4. Intellect = sublime pen
5. Universal soul = guarded tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*)[16]
6. Nature
7. Matter
8. Universal body
9. Throne (*al-ʿarsh*)[17]
10. Pedestal
11. Lofty pavilions and stairways, comprising the world of human semblances
12. Sphere of the zodiac (*falak al-burūj*) or outermost celestial sphere (*al-aṭlas*)
13. Gardens of paradise = the world of contentment[18]

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12 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 1:201.

13 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 1:367.

14 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 1:201.

15 In the *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz* Ibn al-ʿArabī draws an architectural analogy to explain why man occupies the final rank in the cosmological hierarchy. Just as the roof is the last part of the house to be put in place, though the shelter it provides is the house's primary purpose, so man comes last in the cosmic order, though as God's vicegerent he is the primary purpose of the world's existence (*ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz*, 50–1).

16 Q 85:21–2: "Nay, but it is a glorious Qurʾān in a guarded tablet."

17 Q 20:4–6: "A revelation from Him who created the earth and the high heavens; the Most Merciful settled upon the Throne; to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, and all that is underneath the soil."

18 In the *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz* Ibn al-ʿArabī specifies that the "world of contentment" or paradise has been created between the sphere of fixed stars and the sphere of the zodiac, such that the latter constitutes paradise's ceiling whilst the roof of the sphere of fixed stars constitutes paradise's ground. See *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz*, 65, 67.

14. Heaven of fixed stars
15. Ceiling of hell[19]
16. Lote Tree
17. Heaven of Saturn
18. Heaven of Jupiter
19. Heaven of Mars
20. Heaven of the Sun
21. Heaven of Venus
22. Heaven of Mercury
23. Heaven of the Moon
24. Ethereal/fiery sphere
25. Sphere of air
26. Sphere of water
27. Earth
28. Minerals
29. Plants
30. Animals
31. Human beings

While this model broadly conforms to the Graeco-Islamic hybrid promulgated by the *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*, there are key points at which Ibn al-ʿArabī's hierarchy either expands upon, or diverges from, that of the Brethren. As already indicated, such differences begin at the divine apex of his schema. Whereas the Brethren identify this degree simply as that of the "Creator" (*al-bāriʾ*), whose role vis-à-vis the cosmos they briefly liken in typically Neo-Pythagorean terms to that of arithmetical unity in relation to the series of numbers it generates,[20] Ibn al-ʿArabī paints a more intricate picture whose traits are shaped by the characteristic language and imagery of the Abrahamic traditions. Unlike the Brethren, the *shaykh al-akbar* posits two additional degrees between the created intellect and the divine Creator, namely, that of the cherubim (*karūbiyyūn*), or angels "enraptured by the majesty of God's beauty,"[21] and that of the sublime entity he refers to as the "supreme element" (*al-ʿunṣur al-aʿẓam*).[22] Though

19 According to the *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz* (65), the bottom of the sphere of fixed stars "will be the ceiling of hell" (*yakūnu saqfan lil-nār*). In chapter sixty-one of the *Futūḥāt* Ibn al-ʿArabī holds that, before the Day of Judgement, hell remains in a state of potentiality, like an empty house, and as such it is "both created and not yet created." See *Futūḥāt*, 1:372.

20 See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, 3:181–2, 200–1.

21 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 1:201; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz*, 54.

22 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz*, 49, 50, 82. A concept that features prominently in the *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz*, the "supreme element" would appear to be evidence of pseudo-Empedoclean influence on Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought. As Daniel De Smet has shown,

notionally distinct from the divine object of their devotion, the cherubim are so enraptured by the beauty of their Beloved as to have no inkling of their own existence or that of each other,[23] a state that distinguishes them from all lesser angels and, notably, from the first intellect, whose awareness of its own existence thus gives rise—in both the original Plotinian system and those of the Muslim Neoplatonists—to the subsequent chain of contingent beings.[24]

Together with the primordial mist in which they are shrouded, the enraptured angels and supreme element collectively constitute what Ibn al-ʿArabī

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according to the Arabic writings ascribed to Anbaduqlīs or Empedocles, God created prime matter (*ʿunṣur*) out of which arise intellect, soul, nature, secondary matter, and the four elements (see De Smet). In the *ʿUqlat* Ibn al-ʿArabī states that in relation to the world the supreme element and first intellect are like a circle's central point and circumference, respectively. By the time that Ibn al-ʿArabī composed the *Futūḥat*, the term "supreme element" seems to have given way to that of the "form of the perfect human being in the substance (*jawhar*) of the [primordial] mist."

In this connection, it is worth adding that although current scholarly consensus tends to reject the theory—famously championed by Miguel Asin Palacios—which sought to identify the enigmatic fourth/tenth-century Andalusian esotericist Ibn Masarra al-Jabalī (d. 319/931) as the source of the pseudo-Empedoclean ideas discernible in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings, there seems to be little doubt nonetheless that the *shaykh al-akbar*'s cosmology has been influenced by Masarrian doctrines in other respects. This is evidently the case in the thirteenth chapter of the *Futūḥāt*, devoted to the Qurʾānic concept of the "bearers of the [divine] throne" (*ḥamlat al-ʿarsh*), in which the latter is interpreted in the broad sense of God's kingdom (*mulk*) or creation. Ibn al-ʿArabī explicitly invokes Ibn Masarra's authority at both the start and end of this chapter, ascribing to him the view (partially modelled, perhaps, on Aristotle's four causes) that the four throne bearers in question are in fact the four universal principles that support God's kingdom, namely, body (*jism*) or form (*ṣūra*), spirit (*rūḥ*), nourishment (*ghidhāʾ*) envisaged as the cause that sustains the union of body and spirit, and finally the specific function (*martaba*) or end (*ghāya*) for which individual beings have been created, which thus corresponds to Aristotle's teleological cause. Ibn al-ʿArabī's elaboration on the first of these Masarrian categories, that of form, adumbrates a doctrine that would become an integral feature of later Akbarian thought, viz. the distinction between subtle/imaginal and elemental/sensorial modes of manifestation. Ibn al-ʿArabī writes: "The first point of discussion is form. It is divisible into two categories: [the first consists of] forms composed of elemental bodies (*ṣūra jismiyya ʿunṣuriyya*), which also comprise forms composed of imaginal corpora (*ṣūra jasadiyya khayāliyya*), whilst the other category consists of forms of bodies made of light (*ṣūra jismiyya nūriyya*)" (*Futūḥāt*, 1:201–2).

23 For Ibn al-ʿArabī the different ranks of the esoteric hierarchy of saints (the *quṭb*, *awtād*, *abdāl*, *nuqabāʾ* etc.) reflect affinities with the gradations of the higher world. In the *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz*, he links the enraptured spirits to the enigmatic category of saints known as the "solitary ones" (*afrād*). "After the hearts (*ʿalā qulūb*)," he says, "of the [enraptured spirits] are the solitary ones among us, who are outside the Pole's (*quṭb*) circle of jurisdiction" (*ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz*, 54).

24 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 3:416–17; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz*, 51–2.

calls the "world of rapture" (*ʿālam al-haymān*),[25] a realm of unitive beatitude beyond the dualities and consciously distinct modes of existence that characterise the created cosmos proper. Significantly, for the purposes of the present study, the world of rapture is the first of several broad categories into which Ibn al-ʿArabī groups individual rungs on his cosmological ladder. Although he rarely refers to such categories—which clearly developed out of the classical Islamic binary of the "world of command" and the "world of creation"[26]—as "levels of being,"[27] the basic concept of a hierarchy of fundamental matrixes or "worlds," each comprising several gradations apiece of the cosmological scale, may be considered an important stage on the way to the fully-fledged doctrine of the *marātib al-wujūd* developed by later generations of Akbarian Sufis.

What, then, for Ibn al-ʿArabī, are the chief bands into which the cosmological schema may be divided? The collective picture that emerges from the *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz* and the *Futūḥāt* is one of an integrated system of generic and sub-generic divisions with the broadest such split being essentially threefold: all degrees above that of matter belong to the "world of pure [spiritual] light" (*ʿālam al-nūr al-khāliṣ*), those below it to the "world of [material] creation" (*ʿālam al-khalq*), while matter itself pertains to a state of "pure darkness" (*ẓulma maḥḍa*) negatively conceived of as a privation of spiritual light in the same way that non-existence (*ʿadam*) is a notional privation of being. The world of creation is therefore, so we are told, a "twilight" realm made manifest—like the breaking of dawn—through the admixture of pure (and hence intrinsically invisible) light and darkness, a fusion that brings about the existence of universal body.[28]

It is the somewhat narrower bands, however, of Ibn al-ʿArabī's spectrum that more readily invite comparison with the dominant ontological taxonomies of post-classical Sufism, such as al-Qūnawī's "five presences." For the *shaykh al-akbar*, as we have seen, the first such category, at the topmost end of the scale, is the divine and angelic world of rapture. Beneath it—comprising the sublime pen, guarded tablet, and universal nature—is the "world of the [sublime] chancellery and registry" (*ʿālam al-dīwān wa-l-tasṭīr*) or "world of governing intellects" (*ʿālam al-ʿuqūl al-mudabbira*), a spiritual and intelligible domain in which the divine ideas (or inchoate essences of created beings) comprised in a summative mode in the first intellect or pen are inscribed in detail, line by

25 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz*, 43.

26 See Boer and Gardet.

27 Ibn al-ʿArabī does use the term *marātib al-wujūd* at the start of the *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz* (48) in reference to what he calls the levels of cognitive existence (*marātib al-wujūd al-ʿilmī*).

28 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 1:201.

line as the term *tasṭīr* suggests, in the universal soul or tablet.[29] Here the symbolic imagery of writing and recording is worthy of note, as it is often used by al-Qūnawī, too, in his discussions of the fundamental degrees of existence. Both master and disciple, therefore, liken the phases involved in the creation of corporeal entities, such as human beings, to writing a book: just as an idea takes composite form in the shape of words, first in the author's mind and then as physical words on the page, so are the simple essences of beings vested in bodily forms.[30]

In harmony with this symbolism, the next world in Ibn al-ʿArabī's cosmos—below the spiritual realm of the sublime chancellery—is that of "composition" (*tarkīb*),[31] encompassing all cosmological degrees characterised by composite bodily forms, as distinct from the simple abstract spirits and intelligibilia that populate the higher echelons of the cosmic ladder. Later Akbarians, as we shall see, routinely distinguish between subtle (*laṭīf*) and gross (*kathīf*) composite forms, a distinction closely connected with an ontological realm that plays a key role in al-Qūnawī's onto-cosmological system, namely, the "world of imagination" (*ʿālam al-khayāl*).[32] Although, in the *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz* (a relatively early work), Ibn al-ʿArabī makes no explicit distinction between subtle and gross composite forms, inchoate glimmers of this distinction are discernible nonetheless in brief references to the *ʿālam al-khayāl*, which he links to the fiery elemental sphere and the nature of the jinn,[33] and the "world of human semblances" (*ʿālam al-muthul al-insāniyya*), which he situates within the paradisiacal "pavilions" (*rafārif*) and "stairways" (*maʿārij*) that occupy the intermediary realm between the outermost celestial sphere and the divine pedestal[34]—thus placing both these presumably subtle worlds within the general category of the world of composition. Elsewhere, moreover, he speaks of the three basic categories of formal entities, namely, the luminous (i.e. angelic), the elemental, and the imaginal, identifying the latter as the modality specific to the world of dream images, reflections, and the posthumous states of limbo.[35]

In one capacity or another, then, the world of composition comprises all remaining cosmological degrees, from God's throne to earthly humanity. Within this broad gamut, however, our author sketches further subdivisions,

29 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 1:201; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz*, 50, 51, 55.
30 al-Qūnawī, *Fukūk*, 189.
31 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz*, 57, 59.
32 For a study of the concept of the *ʿālam al-khayāl* in Islamic thought, see van Lit.
33 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz*, 88–9.
34 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz*, 60.
35 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 1:201–2.

starting with this "lower world" (*ʿālam al-dunyā*),[36] another comprehensive category—and a familiar Qurʾānic term too—extending from the highest planetary heaven to the earthly kingdoms of nature, and culminating in humankind. Finally, this lower world is, in turn, subdivided into the seven planetary heavens at the upper end and the "world of elements" (*ʿālam al-arkān*) at the lower,[37] with Ibn al-ʿArabī famously calling the former the "fathers above" and the latter the "mothers below,"[38] in reference to their roles in generating the formal and material aspects respectively of earthly human beings.

As indicated earlier, Ibn al-ʿArabī also provides many of the basic terms and concepts from which his disciple, al-Qūnawī, will construct his doctrine of five presences. For his part, as illustrated by the following passage from the *Futūḥāt*, the *shaykh al-akbar* speaks not of five presences, but of two, corresponding to the Qurʾānic binary of the non-manifest (*ghayb*) and the visible (*shahāda*).[39] Between these correlatives, however, is born an intermediary presence, that of imagination (*khayāl*); and in keeping with its function as a *barzakh* or common boundary, which shares in the nature of both the domains that it demarcates (a classic Akbarian concept),[40] the presence of imagination is subsequently described as the broadest presence of all, a breadth evident in imagination's ability to give subtle forms both to material bodies (from the realm of the visible) and formless spirits and meanings (from the realm of the non-manifest). Ibn al-ʿArabī writes:

> The world is two worlds (*ʿālamān*), and the presence is two presences (*ḥaḍratān*), even though a third presence is born between them by dint of their conjunction. One presence, then, is that of the non-manifest, and to it pertains a world called the world of the non-manifest (*ʿālam al-ghayb*), whilst the other is the presence of sense perception and the visible, whose world is called the world of the visible (*ʿālam al-shahāda*). This [latter] world is apprehended by the faculty of sight (*baṣar*) whereas the world of the non-manifest is grasped through inner intellectual vision (*baṣīra*). Now that which is born of their meeting is [likewise] both a presence and a world. The presence is the presence of imagination, and the world is the world of imagination (*ʿālam al-khayāl*),[41] which consists in intel-

36 Literally, the world of the closest or lowest.
37 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz*, 59.
38 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz*, 82; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 1:190.
39 Q 59:22: "He is God; there is no god but He, knower of the unseen and the visible; He is the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate."
40 See Todd, 95–8.
41 On Ibn al-ʿArabī's concept of the *ʿālam al-khayāl*, see Akkach, World.

> ligible meanings becoming manifest in sensorial receptacles (*al-qawālib al-maḥsūsa*), such as knowledge in the form of milk, steadfastness in religion in the form of a shackle, peaceful submission [to God] (*islām*) in the form of a handhold, and Gabriel in the form of Diḥya al-Kalbī and in the form of the desert Arab.[42] Similarly, [Gabriel] appeared to Maryam by taking on the semblance (*tamaththala*) of a handsome mortal, just as blackness appears in the body of [alkaline] galls and vitriol when they are combined,[43] though neither possess this quality when separate. Hence the presence of imagination is the broadest (*awsaʿ*) of the presences since it combines the two worlds within itself, namely, the world of the non-manifest and the world of the visible.[44]

Elsewhere in the *Futūḥāt*, Ibn al-ʿArabī expands on the special character of imagination, a concept that can be applied to several ontological levels. In its highest sense, imagination represents the very locus of existential possibilities, identical as such with the primordial mist, or breath of the All-Merciful, in which all possibilities of manifestation are comprised. However, at the same time, insofar as such possibilities are conceived of as "other than God," *khayāl* represents the stuff of illusion, since in reality nothing exists outside the Real. Ibn al-ʿArabī writes:

> After this you should know that the underlying essence (*ḥaqīqa*) of absolute imagination (*al-khayāl al-muṭlaq*) is what is called the [primordial] mist, which was the first container (*ẓarf*) to receive the localised being (*kaynūna*) of the Real … It was in that mist, then, that God Most High opened the forms of everything in the world that is other than He. Is the mist, therefore, not absolute imagination [and illusion] (*khayāl muṭlaq*)? Do you not see how it both receives the forms of all beings and gives forms to that which has not come into being (*laysa bi-kāʾin*)? This is on account of its all-enveloping nature, which is the very essence of mist and of naught else. Therein all beings become manifest, and this is what is expressed by the outwardly apparent aspect of the Real (*ẓāhir al-ḥaqq*) when He says: "He is the First and the Last, the Outwardly Apparent and the Inwardly Hidden."[45]

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42 These examples are drawn from the Qurʾān (in the case of the "handhold") and the *ḥadīth*.

43 A reference to an alchemical process, viz. mixing green vitriol of copper with an alkaline tincture of galls to produce a deep black dye.

44 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 3:43.

45 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2:305–6.

2 al-Qūnawī

Such, then, in brief, is the contextual backdrop to al-Qūnawī's onto-cosmological system. But before we examine his five presences in detail, it is worth noting that these are not the only broad categories into which al-Qūnawī groups the various levels of his cosmological schema. A major consideration, too, in his treatment of the cosmological hierarchy, is the extent to which its strata fall under the sway of nature. In this respect, al-Qūnawī envisages a basic three-fold division. The higher echelons of soul, intellect, and the primordial mist (or "fold of possible beings" as he also describes it) transcend nature—at least insofar as the latter's influence is made manifest in bodies—and are therefore properly metaphysical.[46] Corporeal realms, by contrast, from the throne or "first bodily form" downwards, are all subject to nature, though a key distinction is drawn between those degrees that are physical yet non-elemental[47]—viz. the throne, the gardens of paradise, and the pedestal or heaven of fixed stars[48]—and those that fall under the sway of nature and the four elements, namely, the layers of hell,[49] the seven planetary spheres, and the sublunary world.[50]

For al-Qūnawī, moreover, this taxonomy has a fundamental bearing on the character and purpose of the sacred laws (*sharāʾiʿ*) that have been revealed throughout human history, since he depicts the posthumous salvation (*salāma*) which is their final goal as consisting in liberation from the turbulent dominion of elemental nature, with its inherent oppositions and conflicting impulses.[51]

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46 al-Qūnawī, *Miftāḥ*, 51, 106.

47 al-Qūnawī, *Sharḥ al-aḥādīth*, fol. 41a.

48 Like the Sincere Brethren, but unlike his master Ibn al-ʿArabī, al-Qūnawī expressly equates the scriptural throne and pedestal with the diurnal (or outermost) sphere and the sphere of fixed stars, respectively (see Todd, 72). As for the gardens of paradise, al-Qūnawī, invoking a *ḥadīth* in support, states that they extend from the "roof of the pedestal" to the throne, which constitutes their "ceiling" (*Sharḥ al-aḥādīth*, fol. 41b).

49 In al-Qūnawī's cosmology, hell—which exists solely in potential prior to the Resurrection—extends from the "bottom of the pedestal," which marks its upper limit, to the *markaz* or centre of the earth, conceived of as the centre of the Ptolemaic system of concentric orbs (*Sharḥ al-aḥādīth*, fol. 41b). For al-Qūnawī, hell's span is therefore coextensive with that of elemental nature; and in this connection it is to be noted that the concept of elemental nature plays an important part in his treatment of the differences between the posthumous constitutions of the blessed and the damned, with the latter being characterised by the gross corporeity of the elemental world whilst the blessed are depicted as having been freed from the dominion of the elements. See Todd, 134.

50 al-Qūnawī, *Sharḥ al-aḥādīth*, fol. 41a.

51 al-Qūnawī, *Sharḥ al-aḥādīth*, fols. 43b–44a. Al-Qūnawī identifies this state of liberation from elemental nature with the Qurʾānic *ʿilliyyūn* or lofty heights (see Q 83:18).

Indeed, in cosmological terms, the domain under the revealed laws' jurisdiction is coextensive, in al-Qūnawī's system, with the elemental world; while the laws themselves stem from the point in the cosmic hierarchy that marks the boundary between the realms of elemental and non-elemental nature respectively—namely, the *sidra* or Lote Tree,[52] which is likewise identified as the spiritual station (*maqām*) specific to the angel of revelation, Gabriel.[53]

As for the hierarchical degree of nature itself, it brings into play another key criterion (one, as we shall see, that had an impact on later generations) applied by al-Qūnawī to the various rungs of the cosmic ladder, namely, the distinction between those degrees—such as the first intellect and universal soul—that exist *in concreto* and those, such as nature, that have only a notional rank in the hierarchy since in themselves they are not susceptible to manifestation. This is the case, too, so al-Qūnawī continues, with the hierarchical ranks of matter and universal body. As purely notional principles, they remain in the primordial state of non-manifestation (*ghayb*)—though their sway (*ḥukm*)[54] is made manifest in corporeal existents.[55]

Applied, then, to al-Qūnawī's cosmological schema, the criteria outlined above yield the following broad categories:

Metaphysical	The primordial mist = breath of the All-Merciful[56] = locus of the first matrimonial union[57] First intellect = sublime pen = manifestation of divine name "the Organiser"[58] Universal soul = guarded tablet = manifestation of divine name "the Detailer"[59]
Notional degrees	Nature Matter Universal body

52 al-Qūnawī, *Iʿjāz*, 216; al-Qūnawī, *Sharḥ al-aḥādīth*, fols. 48a, 49b.

53 al-Qūnawī, *Nuṣūṣ*, 63.

54 Comprising a range of meanings (judgement, jurisdiction, rule, statute, legal consequence, control, dominion, power, government), the term *ḥukm* (pl. *aḥkām*) features prominently in al-Qūnawī's writings, where it tends to convey the ideas of dominion and influence. This being the case, the English term "sway" seems preferable to restrictive renderings such as "rule" since it contains both these nuances.

55 al-Qūnawī, *Miftāḥ*, 51.

56 al-Qūnawī, *Miftāḥ*, 56.

57 al-Qūnawī, *Miftāḥ*, 22.

58 al-Qūnawī, *Miftāḥ*, 57.

59 al-Qūnawī, *Miftāḥ*, 57.

Physical but non-elemental	Throne = first simple body[60] = definer of direction[61] = diurnal sphere[62] The gardens of paradise Pedestal = heaven of fixed stars[63]
Boundary	The Lote Tree = wellspring of the revealed laws[64]
Physical and elemental	The elements The seven planetary heavens The sublunary world The layers of hell

This schema occupies a prominent place in al-Qūnawī's writings—not least because of the specific importance he attaches to cosmological and cosmogonic models insofar as they chart the Sufi wayfarer's spiritual itinerary. Indeed, typical of al-Qūnawī's thought is his tendency to situate the Sufi path or *ṭarīq* within the overarching framework of the existential journey undertaken by those capable of achieving human perfection.[65] This journey, so we are told, comprises two chief phases. The first is an ontogenetic descent through the various levels of the cosmological hierarchy—from the divine mind to the corporeal world of earthly humanity—culminating in the attainment of full maturity at the mid-point of man's earthly life (around the age of forty).[66] The second is a spiritual reditus achieved by "casting off"—in each of the cosmological and ontological levels through which the human spirit rises—the respective qualities and characteristics (likened to so many bonds and shackles) it acquired during its formative exitus.[67]

When explaining, therefore, the Sufi path's theoretical underpinnings, al-Qūnawī—under the influence, no doubt, of Neoplatonism[68]—often favours adopting a cosmological perspective[69] over the psychological introspection (the

60 al-Qūnawī, *Iʿjāz*, 91.

61 al-Qūnawī, *Iʿjāz*, 320.

62 al-Qūnawī, *Iʿjāz*, 205.

63 al-Qūnawī, *Miftāḥ*, 56.

64 al-Qūnawī, *Sharḥ al-aḥādīth*, fol. 49b.

65 al-Qūnawī, *Miftāḥ*, 115.

66 al-Qūnawī, *Miftāḥ*, 106.

67 al-Qūnawī, *Miftāḥ*, 105.

68 See Chittick, Circle. On the parallels between al-Qūnawī's concept of the *miʿrāj al-taḥlīl* and Proclus' notion of *anagoge*, see Todd, 161.

69 An antecedent of this cosmological perspective can be found in the writings of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111). In his *Mishkāt al-anwār* (*Niche of Lights*)—a mystical treatise that seems to have served as the blueprint in several core respects for the theosophical doctrines elaborated by Ibn al-ʿArabī and his followers—al-Ghazālī portrays the mystic's progress as a *miʿrāj* from the visible world of the senses (*ʿālam al-shahāda*) to the angelic

classic doctrine of psychological states and spiritual stations) that characterised Sufism's formative period.[70] This cosmic perspective is especially noticeable in what is probably the earliest (the precise chronology of al-Qūnawī's oeuvre is difficult to determine with certainty) of al-Qūnawī's major doctrinal works, the *Miftāḥ ghayb al-jamʿ* (*The Key to the Non-manifest Aspect of Synthesis*), which treats of the nature and teleological end of the perfect human being (*al-insān al-kāmil*). Building upon Ibn al-ʿArabī's concept of the perfect human as both an encapsulation (*mukhtaṣar*) of the cosmos and a mirror or synoptic copy (*nuskha jāmiʿa*) in which God's names and attributes are made manifest,[71] the *Miftāḥ* takes the form of a metaphysical and cosmological summa in which the fundamental levels of existence and cosmological degrees are conceived of both as constituent aspects of the perfect human being and as specific modes whereby the divine is reflected or "present" in the world of creation. Accordingly, in the following passage from the *Miftāḥ*, our author portrays the perfect human's ontogenesis—the gradual formation of its essential and material characteristics prior to its birth in this world—as a descent through each of the metaphysical realms and cosmological degrees that make up the full span of human existence. Especially noteworthy is the brief reference to the "universal levels of being" (*al-marātib al-kulliyya al-wujūdiyya*),[72] a doctrine that would later, in the guise of the "divine presences" (*al-ḥaḍarāt al-ilāhiyya*), come to epitomise al-Qūnawī's thought. He writes:

> The perfection and highpoint of its [the perfect human's] earthly genesis is reached when it turns forty or forty-one, as previously mentioned. Now the journey to this point can be of various kinds, one of which is a spiritual progression (*sayr rūḥānī*), though not in a celestial form.

world of the spirit or *al-malakūt*. Like al-Qūnawī, al-Ghazālī conceives of the lower world as a trace and symbol of the upper world whence it stems. The mystic's ascent from the corporeal world to that of spirits is made possible, so al-Ghazālī asserts, by the presence of a measure of correspondence between these otherwise distinct domains, namely, the relationship that exists between physical symbol (*mithāl*) and spiritual archetype. See al-Ghazālī, 118, 129. On the traditional Islamic concepts of *mulk*, *malakūt*, and *jabarūt*, see Boer and Gardet.

70 For an overview of the development of the doctrine of stations and states in classical Sufism, see Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 40–1, 120–2, 132.

71 See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz*, 45.

72 Al-Qūnawī makes a point of stressing that, in themselves, *marātib* are purely notional constructs (*Miftāḥ*, 16). We should be wary, therefore, of interpreting his *marātib al-wujūd* as some sort of reified structure. Rather, he envisages the *marātib* as a conceptual model that accounts for different modes of being.

> This consists in its being comprised in the [creative] command (*amr*) that issues forth from the presence (*ḥaḍra*) of the non-manifest depths of the [divine] essence (*dhāt*) to the presence of the [primordial] mist (*al-ḥaḍra al-ʿamāʾiyya*) and thence to the station (*maqām*) of the sublime pen, then the tablet, then the rank of nature—insofar, that is, as its sway (*ḥukm*) is evident in bodies, according to the view of some of the folk of intuitive taste (*ahl al-dhawq*)—wherefore it joins the world of subtle exemplars (*ʿālam al-mithāl*) in which are determined the [formal] loci of manifestation of [formless] spirits. This is the intermediary world whose rank (*martaba*) is between the world of spirits and that of sensorial bodies. We have already drawn attention to it when mentioning the universal levels of being, the first of which is the world of meanings, then the world of spirits, then the aforementioned world of exemplars, then the world of external sense perception; and in the human being all four [of these levels] are combined—so know this. Thereafter [the human being] descends to universal matter (*al-hayūlā al-kull*) then to the rank of universal body in which is determined the all-encompassing throne (*al-ʿarsh al-muḥīṭ*).[73]

Although at this stage in its development, al-Qūnawī's signature ontological framework appears under the rubric of "four universal levels" rather than "five divine presences," its basic features are nonetheless in place. As we shall see from his subsequent writings, the realms of intelligible essences, immaterial spirits, and external senses correspond exactly to three of the five presences. At the intermediary level, however, of formal exemplars, al-Qūnawī would later introduce a distinction between, on the one hand, the domain of subtle manifestation insofar as it exists in its own right—unfettered (*muṭlaq*) as such by the human imagination's participation therein—and, on the other, insofar as it is connected with the "shackled" or delimited (*muqayyad*) imaginative faculties of human and animal souls,[74] a distinction that yields the presences of unfettered or absolute exemplars (*al-mithāl al-muṭlaq*) and delimited imagination (*al-khayāl al-muqayyad*) respectively.

Noteworthy, too, in the passage quoted above is the brief indication of where the fundamental levels of being fit in relation to the stock cosmological ladder. By linking the world of exemplars to the cosmic function of nature, al-Qūnawī provides a reference point around which the other presences fall into place. Further confirmation of their respective positions can be found

73 al-Qūnawī, *Miftāḥ*, 106.

74 Farghānī, 39–40; al-Qūnawī, *Fukūk*, 205.

in the Persian reportatio of al-Qūnawī's oral teachings compiled by his student Saʿīd al-Dīn Farghānī (d. 699/1299).[75] Hence, according to the latter, the world of sense perception extends from the throne—conceived of as the first sensorial form—to the earth,[76] whereas the world of spirits encompasses the domains of the universal soul and the first intellect. As for the presence of the non-manifest it pertains to the divine realm[77] beyond the border between necessary and contingent being.

By the time al-Qūnawī came to compose his major scriptural commentaries—on the *Fātiḥa* and a collection of *ḥadīth*s—the doctrine of the five presences had taken definitive shape.[78] The following passage, from his *Sharḥ al-aḥādīth*,[79] is typical of the way that he presents this doctrine to his readers:

> As for the five presences, they are [firstly] the presence of the non-manifest (*ḥaḍrat al-ghayb*) which comprises the [divine] names and attributes as well as abstract meanings (*al-maʿānī l-mujarrada*) and all other knowable objects (*maʿlūmāt*) contained within the Real's knowledge. Opposite this presence is [that of] external sense perception (*al-ḥiss*), which is called the world of the visible (*ʿālam al-shahāda*). Between these two extremes (*ṭarafayn*) is an intermediary presence (*ḥaḍra mutawassiṭa*), which is part of all that is specific to the perfect human being (*al-insān al-kāmil*). Between this intermediary and the aforementioned world of the non-manifest is a presence whose relationship to the world of the

75 On Farghānī's record of al-Qūnawī's oral teachings, see Todd, 19–20.

76 Farghānī, 36.

77 Farghānī, 36.

78 At the outset of his commentary on the opening sura of the Qurʾān—the *Iʿjāz al-bayān fī taʾwīl umm al-Qurʾān*—al-Qūnawī identifies this schema as a fundamental hermeneutical key. Like the manifestation of the physical world itself, the revelation of the Qurʾān occurs, so we are told, through a descent via the five presences—from the divine mind to the world of bodies—such that the sacred text reflects the manifold ontological degrees through which it passes. Al-Qūnawī's repeated emphasis on their importance as a conceptual tool suggests that he was especially keen to commend the five presences to his students and readers. So often does he summarise this doctrine in the *Iʿjāz al-bayān* that, on one occasion, he apologises for what might be construed as needless repetition. For a study of the historical development of the theory of the five presences, see Chittick, Presences.

79 The five presences also play a prominent role in al-Qūnawī's final (unfinished) work, a commentary on a collection of Prophetic traditions. Here, again, he seeks to elucidate the metaphysical and cosmological dimensions of scripture by interpreting the Prophet's words—including one famously anthropomorphic vision of God—in the light of the universal levels of existence.

> non-manifest is stronger and more complete. This is what is referred to as the world of spirits. [Finally] between the middle to which allusion was made earlier and the world of the visible, which we called the presence of sense perception, is a presence whose relationship to the world of the visible is stronger, namely, that of delimited imagination (*al-khayāl al-muqayyad*). Thus, all presences and levels of existence assigned to the Real and the world, whether individually or conjointly, follow on from these five—so understand [this].[80]

Here it is noticeable that, in keeping with his usual practice, al-Qūnawī says little about the actual nature of the enigmatic "intermediary presence," apart from its intrinsic connection with the perfect human being. We know, however, from one brief mention in the *Iʿjāz al-bayān*, that he identifies this presence with the world of absolute exemplars (*ʿālam al-mithāl al-muṭlaq*),[81] and we also know that he conceives of the latter as an aspect of the world of imagination (*ʿālam al-khayāl*).[82] The intermediary character that al-Qūnawī assigns to the world of exemplars is thus broadly in harmony with the central role ascribed to *khayāl* in the writings of his master. What differentiates, though, the world of exemplars—or world of "separate imagination" (*al-khayāl al-munfaṣil*) as al-Qūnawī also appears to have called it, judging by Farhgānī's reportatio of his lectures[83]—from its lesser reflection, the world of delimited imagination, is, as we have seen, the idea that the world of exemplars exists independently of the individual's (whether human or animal) imaginative faculty. Hence, rather than the intimations and imperfect images that are the stuff of delimited imagination, the semblances that populate the world of exemplars are the "true" subtle forms of the beings that are made manifest therein.[84] Emphasising, moreover, the notion that it constitutes an indispensable link between two radically different domains, those of spirit and body, al-Qūnawī likens the cosmic function of the *ʿālam al-mithāl* to the microcosmic role played by the human mind (*dhihn*) in giving composite form to simple intelligibilia.[85]

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80 al-Qūnawī, *Sharḥ al-aḥādīth*, fols. 42b–43a.

81 al-Qūnawī, *Iʿjāz*, 60. For a brief study of the concept of the *ʿālam al-mithāl* in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought, see Rahman.

82 al-Qūnawī, *Fukūk*, 205–6.

83 Farghānī, 34, 36. Farghānī identifies three degrees of imagination: (1) non-delimited imagination = presence of the primordial mist = the reality of realities; (2) separate imagination = the world of image exemplars; (3) the streams and tributaries of separate imagination = the imagination of all humans and animals.

84 al-Qūnawī, *Fukūk*, 206; al-Qūnawī, *Sharḥ al-aḥādīth*, fol. 72.

85 al-Qūnawī, *Fukūk*, 206; al-Qūnawī, *Sharḥ al-aḥādīth*, fols. 70b–71a.

TABLE 15.1 Al-Qūnawī's five divine presences

Inwardness (*buṭūn*)	1. The presence of the non-manifest, of divine names and meanings.
	2. The world of spirits, the relative non-manifest.
Boundary	3. The world of absolute exemplars.
	4. The world of delimited imagination.
Outwardness (*ẓuhūr*)	5. The presence of the visible, of sensory perception, the world of bodies.

If we assign, therefore, the *ʿālam al-mithāl* its place in the hierarchy—and include, too, the odd terminological variant gleaned from al-Qūnawī's writings—the five presences arranged in descending order from the inward and non-manifest to the outwardly apparent can be seen in Table 15.1.

For our author this hierarchy may be envisaged from more than one point of view. On the one hand, as we have seen, it represents the fundamental levels of being, within which all individual worlds are comprised. From this perspective, those presences at the upper end of the scale are deemed superior, by dint of their relative indeterminacy and absence of constraint, to those below. The loftier presences are, after all, the preserve of universal intellects and angelic spirits, entities that transcend the bonds of time, space, and corporeal matter (unlike the visible world of the senses) as well as those of form (unlike the world of the imagination).

At the same time, the levels of being also represent the fundamental phases of manifestation (*ẓuhūr*) or existentiation (*ījād*); and under this dynamic aspect, the lower presences at the end of the process of manifestation are deemed to have a certain superiority over those inchoate realms above. The superiority in question is connected, so we are told, with the underlying purpose of existence, namely, that of making manifest the hidden possibilities of being. Al-Qūnawī characteristically expresses this goal as the "perfection of clearing and elucidation" (*kamāl al-jalāʾ wa-l-istijlāʾ*), a phrase that consciously evokes not only the famous *ḥadīth* whereby God was a hidden treasure that loved to be known[86] but also the symbolism that likens the world's creation to the manifestation of an image in a mirror or to the writing of a book. According, therefore, to this perspective, it is in the concrete existence of corporeal beings—actual letters on the pages of the *liber mundi*, as distinct from ideas in the mind—that the

86 On the *ḥadīth* of the hidden treasure, see Eschraghi.

self-disclosure (to use William Chittick's translation of the Arabic *tajallī*)[87] of being is rendered complete. Al-Qūnawī writes:

> I have already expounded, in the *Book of Divine Breaths*[88] and the *Commentary on the Exordium*, the mystery of how the self-disclosure of being (*al-tajallī l-wujūdī*) travels from the non-manifest depths of the divine ipseity in search of the perfection of clearing and elucidation (*kamāl al-jalāʾ wa-l-istijlāʾ*). Its first point of descent is the world of meanings, followed by the world of spirits, in which the manifestation of existence is more complete than in the world of meanings. This is followed by the world of exemplars, which is the third stage of descent, in which the manifestation of existence is more complete than in the world of spirits. [Finally] there follows the world of sense perception, which is the fourth station of descent, wherein existence is made completely manifest.[89]

But that is not all. For our author, any entity that has descended to the world of the senses—in its journey from intelligible essence to concrete existence—will necessarily remain connected to the multiple levels of being through which it has passed. Indeed, the higher states of existence remain constituent aspects of the corporeal being's reality, which is why al-Qūnawī holds that all bodily entities—minerals included—are animate, regardless of whether the sway (*ḥukm*) of the world of spirits is discernible in them or not.[90] Thus, whether conscious of them or otherwise, every corporeal individual—so al-Qūnawī asserts—has higher dimensions to its being, extending through the hierarchy of presences to the domain of immutable and eternal essences, a notion to which he refers when he says that every heart (*qalb*) has five levels

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87 See Chittick, *Self-disclosure*.

88 On al-Qūnawī's *al-Nafaḥāt al-ilāhiyya* (*Divine Breaths*), see Todd, 21, 42.

89 al-Qūnawī, *Fukūk*, 205. Al-Qūnawī adds: "This is why the throne—i.e. the first sensorial form, which encompasses all others—is the station where the All-Merciful settled [Himself] (*maqām al-istiwāʾ al-raḥmānī*), since with it the self-disclosure of being is established and completed; for mercy (*raḥma*) is the soul of being and the All-Merciful (*al-raḥmān*) is the Real insofar as He is being. Wherefore, whenever it appears [in the Qurʾān] settling [on the throne] is ascribed to no other [divine] name." For his part, ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jazāʾirī identifies another four levels of divine throne in addition to that of the All-Merciful. Thus, his five levels of throne are (1) throne of life = throne of ipseity = throne of the will = the primordial mist; (2) the glorious throne = the first intellect; (3) the mighty throne = universal soul; (4) All-Merciful throne = throne of God's sitting = the first body; (5) the noble throne = the pedestal.

90 al-Qūnawī, *Nafaḥāt*, fol. 8.

(*marātib*) and five facets (*awjuh*) by which it is connected to the five fundamental worlds.[91]

In this regard, it is to be noted that although the presences are conceived of as levels of being, some of the terms used to describe them are essentially phenomenological—the world of bodies is primarily the world of sense perception and so on—suggesting that their defining conditions are, to some extent at least, a function of the subject's perception.[92] This impression is further reinforced by what al-Qūnawī says about the relationship between existence, envisaged as the self-disclosure of being (*al-tajallī l-wujūdī*), and the individual receptacles (*qawābil*) or vessels (*maḥāll*, pl. of *maḥall*) of consciousness, through which it is apprehended. Though this self-disclosure may appear to be multiple and variegated, this—so our author asserts—is simply due to the various limitations restricting individual receptacles, not to any intrinsic differentiation in the nature of being.[93] "In reality," he explains, "there is but a single self-disclosure, though it appears in [manifold] determinate forms in accordance with [different] receptacles and their [diverse] ranks (*marātib*) and dispositions."[94]

What this means, therefore, is that for al-Qūnawī contingent entities, such as human beings, play their own part in determining and sustaining the conditions that define the level of existence or "onto-consciousness" (to use Bakri Aladdin's nuanced translation of *wujūd*)[95] to which they belong. Not only that; human beings are also, by the same token, capable (in theory at least) of casting off the conditions that bind them to a particular state. This latter premise has, as we shall see, a crucial bearing on al-Qūnawī's concept of spiritual ascent (*miʿrāj*) from one level of being to the next. Indeed, his treatment of the nature and efficacy of the Sufi path revolves to a large extent around the idea of the Sufi wayfarer (*sālik*) shedding—via the methods of invocation and meditation—the "accidental bonds" that tied their consciousness to the world of the senses and the realm of delimited imagination, such that they thereby rediscover the higher levels of their being.[96]

91 al-Qūnawī, *Fukūk*, 250.

92 Here, again, there are close parallels in the works of al-Ghazālī. As Nakamura has shown, al-Ghazālī envisages an intrinsic link between the hierarchical worlds of *mulk*, *jabarūt*, and *malakūt*, and corresponding modes of human cognition, ranging from sensory perception to supra-rational intuition. See Nakamura.

93 al-Qūnawī, *Iʿjāz*, 33–5; al-Qūnawī, *Miftāḥ*, 47–8, 86.

94 al-Qūnawī, *Iʿjāz*, 34.

95 See his introduction to al-Nābulusī, *Wujūd al-ḥaqq*, 68.

96 al-Qūnawī, *Hādiya*, 148, 171.

When discussing the possibility of ascending from one state of being to another, al-Qūnawī sometimes refers to his own experience. In support, for example, of his claim that it is possible to access the mind-independent world of exemplars (*ʿālam al-mithāl*) via the point at which the individual's imaginative faculty (located in the brain)[97] is connected therewith—since individual imaginations are related to this realm like tributaries to a river[98]—he adds that this is something he himself has done, and that from the world of exemplars he was then able to enter the world of spirits.[99] For some, so we are told, entrance to the realm of spirits will mark the limit of their ascent. Though they are not qualified to achieve the highest degree of human perfection, they will nonetheless have realised an "angelic" state of existence.[100] Others, though—and again al-Qūnawī alludes to his own experience—will continue to ascend via conjunction (*ittiṣāl*)[101] with the hierarchy of universal intellects and souls until, at the summit of their ascent, they reach the divine realm or "expanse of the source of lights" beyond the contingent cosmos.[102]

As we have seen, within the framework of the five presences, the domain of the divine is comprised within a single category, that of the non-manifest. Elsewhere, however, al-Qūnawī distinguishes between different ways of envisaging divine being. His treatment of this question brings into play concepts that have a central role in his metaphysics, namely, those of *iṭlāq* or absoluteness and *taʿayyun* or ontological determination.[103] Conditioned existence, such as that of the human individual, is, he explains, determinate by its very nature. Hence, inasmuch as He is the cause of existence in the world, God is also, by the same token, the cause of ontological determination. That this is the case, moreover, is due to God's being essentially absolute and indeterminate, for only absolute indeterminacy (*al-lā taʿayyun*) can comprise the realm of the determinate within itself.[104]

Conceived of, however, as the absolute, the divine essence bears no relation to anything else[105]—the world included—since the absolute admits of nothing outside itself. It is only, therefore, from the relative standpoint whereby He is envisaged as the principle of existential determinations that God can be

97 al-Qūnawī, *Fukūk*, 206; al-Qūnawī, *Sharḥ al-aḥādīth*, fol. 70.
98 al-Qūnawī, *Fukūk*, 206; al-Qūnawī, *Sharḥ al-aḥādīth*, fols. 70b–71a.
99 al-Qūnawī, *Fukūk*, 207; al-Qūnawī, *Sharḥ al-aḥādīth*, fols. 70b, 71b.
100 al-Qūnawī, *Fukūk*, 296–7.
101 al-Qūnawī, *Hādiya*, 171.
102 al-Qūnawī, *Fukūk*, 207; al-Qūnawī, *Sharḥ al-aḥādīth*, fols. 70b–71b.
103 al-Qūnawī, *Hādiya*, 143; al-Qūnawī, *Nuṣūṣ*, 6–7.
104 al-Qūnawī, *Nuṣūṣ*, 17–18.
105 al-Qūnawī, *Hādiya*, 144.

thought of as the necessary being and the cause of the world's existence.[106] In his epistolary exchange with the philosopher and astronomer Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274), our author identifies two hypostases below the absoluteness of the pure essence, viz. non-duality (*aḥadiyya*), whereby the Real is envisaged as the principle of determination, and oneness (*waḥdāniyya*), whereby God is conceived of as knowing both divine and created realities and as therefore having a cognitive relationship (*nisba ʿilmiyya*) with the world. Al-Qūnawī writes:

> The purity of the [Real's] essence (*dhāt*) possesses absolute freedom (*iṭlāq*) from all description (*waṣf*),[107] as indicated earlier, whilst the Real's non-duality (*aḥadiyyat al-ḥaqq*) possesses simply determination itself (*nafs al-taʿayyun*). Though this implies relativity, it nonetheless overrides all other relative perspectives [regarding the Real]. As for its oneness (*waḥdāniyyatuhu*), it is predicated [of the Real] from the secondary relative standpoint whereby it is envisaged in terms of its cognitive relationship [with objects of knowledge]. It possesses the determination that embraces all determinations (*al-taʿayyun al-jāmiʿ lil-taʿayyunāt*), and it is in this respect that the Real is conceived of as the principle, the necessary [being], and as the existent (*mawjūd*) and bestower (*fayyāḍ*) [of existence] per se. Hence, unification (*tawḥīd*) belongs to being, and distinction (*tamyīz*) to knowledge, at least insofar as it is envisaged in respect of [the Real's] oneness, not in respect of the non-duality that necessitates the union of knowledge, knower, and known. Absoluteness, however, belongs to the essence [alone].[108]

Further elaborations on this doctrine can be found in Farghānī's reportatio of al-Qūnawī's lectures. In this account, Farghānī distinguishes between a first and second determination. The first determination (*taʿayyun-i awwal*) is the conceptual boundary (*barzakh*) between the Real's essential non-duality and its unicity (*wāḥidiyya*) and is deemed identical with the metaphysical essence of the Prophet Muḥammad (*ḥaqīqat-i Muḥammadī*).[109] As for the second determination (*taʿayyun-i thānī*), it is the conceptual boundary between the manifest aspect of [the Real's] existence (*ẓāhir-i wujūd*), whose property is necessity (*wujūb*), and the manifest aspect of [the Real's] knowledge, to which pertains

106 al-Qūnawī, *Hādiya*, 153.

107 In keeping with this statement, al-Qūnawī holds that being is therefore predicated of the divine essence analogically, not univocally (see *Miftāḥ*, 22).

108 al-Qūnawī, *Hādiya*, 152–3.

109 Farghānī, 22.

contingency (*imkān*). It is to this degree that the metaphysical essences of all other perfect human beings belong.[110] According to Farghānī, then, both first and second determination are subsumed under the first of the five presences. He writes:

> These universal levels (*marātib-i kullī*) fall into four categories, whilst the fifth embraces them all, both generally and in detail. As for the first, they call it the presence and level of the non-manifest and of intelligible meanings. This is the presence of the [Real's] essence (*dhāt*), envisaged in respect of the first self-disclosure and determination, and the second, as well as, in the case of the first, the [divine] affairs (*shuʾūn*)[111] and primordial perspectives that they comprise and, in the case of the second, the divine and cosmic realities.[112]

3 al-Jīlī

In terms of historical influence, it is to be noted that it was not only al-Qūnawī's five presences that served to shape the doctrine of levels of existence in post-classical Sufism but his gradations of divine hypostases too. The impact of both these strands is discernible in a well-known treatise on the levels of being, the *Kitāb marātib al-wujūd*, by another of the great figures of the Akbarian school, ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (b. 766/1365).[113] At both the start and the end of his treatise, al-Jīlī articulates an idea that would become a recurrent topos in later works dealing with the levels of being, namely, the notion that God, *qua* pure being, is revealed through the levels of existence; and hence by understanding these levels, the Sufi initiates come to know both God and themselves,[114] since the perfect human is a mirror in which both divine being and the cosmos are reflected. In the opening line of his work, he writes:

> Praise be to God who gave the levels of being their rightful share of completeness and perfection, and then appeared in them (*fa-ẓahara fīhā*) in accordance with His knowledge of goodness and beauty, permanence and temporality, bias and equilibrium.[115]

110 Farghānī, 22.
111 On al-Qūnawī's concept of the "divine affairs," see Todd, 88–90.
112 Farghānī, 36.
113 On al-Jīlī, see Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, 248–52.
114 al-Jīlī, *Marātib*, 10, 38.
115 al-Jīlī, *Marātib*, 38.

Having established the importance of a theoretical grasp of ontological levels as an aid to spiritual realisation, al-Jīlī enthusiastically endorses the Akbarian works—or "books about essential realities" (*kutub al-ḥaqāʾiq*) as he styles them—that expound this doctrine. He writes:

> You should, nay must, persevere in the study of [these] books on essential realities and act upon the sciences they contain, as you shall thereby reach your goal and, God willing, come to know the object of your adoration. For you should know that knowledge of God Most High is contingent upon knowledge of this existence (*hādhā l-wujūd*), since those who know not existence cannot know the [supreme] Existent (*al-mawjūd*)—sublime and transcendent is He! Inasmuch, however, as they know this existence, so shall they know the existence [of God].[116]

Although al-Jīlī stops short of claiming that such books supplant the need for the guidance of a living spiritual master, he suggests nonetheless that for those with the appropriate disposition they can be remarkably efficacious.[117] "Among my brethren on the [Sufi] path," says al-Jīlī, "I have seen mere youths (*ṣibyān*) who, by reading these books, have achieved in a matter of days what grown men have failed to achieve through forty or fifty years of effort (*ijtihād*)."[118]

As for al-Jīlī's chief levels of being, they are substantially more numerous than al-Qūnawī's five presences. By expanding the hierarchy of divine hypostases and including the rungs of the cosmological ladder, too, al-Jīlī arrives at forty fundamental levels within which all others are comprised, as he explains in the following passage:

> Comprised within this existence is that which pertains to both the Real and the created. Of such things (*umūr*), some are endowed with form (*ṣūriyya*) and others are purely intelligible (*maʿnawiyya*), and so do such subdivisions continue, branching into almost innumerable categories. All, however, may be categorised into forty levels (*marātib*) of existence, which are the chief principles (*ummahāt*) of the qualities pertaining to all levels. For, innumerable though the levels of existence are, all are comprised within the forty that I shall now expound.[119]

116 al-Jīlī, *Marātib*, 34.

117 On the specific example cited by al-Jīlī, that of the Sufi poet Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Ḥakkāk, see Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, 250.

118 al-Jīlī, *Marātib*, 35.

119 al-Jīlī, *Marātib*, 34.

Given below, then, is a summary of al-Jīlī's forty levels, the first eleven of which pertain to God:

1. **The divine essence (*al-dhāt al-ilāhiyya*)**
   The absolute non-manifest (*al-ghayb al-muṭlaq*).[120]
2. **Non-duality (*aḥadiyya*)**
   The first hypostasis (*tanazzul*) of the divine essence, namely, the first theophany (*al-tajallī l-awwal*), the state of absolute being (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*).[121]
3. **Oneness (*wāḥidiyya*)**
   The second hypostasis, viz. the presence of the [divine] names and attributes, or the presence of synthesis and being (*ḥaḍrat al-jamʿ wa-l-wujūd*).[122]
4. **Divinity (*ulūhiyya*)**
   The origin of existential multiplicity and the presence of God's self-determinations (*ḥaḍrat al-taʿayyunāt al-ilāhiyya*).[123]
5. **All-Mercifulness (*raḥmāniyya*)**
   Universal existence (*al-wujūd al-sārī*) or the breath of the All-Merciful (*nafas al-raḥmān*).[124]
6. **Lordship (*rubūbiyya*)**
7. **Kingship (*malikiyya*)**
8. **The names and attributes of [God's] essence (*al-asmāʾ wa-l-ṣifāt al-nafsiyya*)**
   The four essential attributes—life, knowledge, will, and power, and three essential names, the hearing, the seeing, and the speaking. These are the principal names (*ummahāt al-asmāʾ*) and imams of all God's attributes. The keys to the non-manifest (*mafātīḥ al-ghayb*) and the second theophany.[125]
9. **The presence of the names pertaining to [God's] rigour (*ḥaḍrat al-asmāʾ al-jalāliyya*)**
10. **The presence of the names pertaining to [God's] beauty (*ḥaḍrat al-asmāʾ al-jamāliyya*)**
11. **The presence of the names pertaining to [God's] acts (*ḥaḍrat al-asmāʾ al-fiʿliyya*)**

120 al-Jīlī, *Marātib*, 34.
121 al-Jīlī, *Marātib*, 33.
122 al-Jīlī, *Marātib*, 32.
123 al-Jīlī, *Marātib*, 32.
124 al-Jīlī, *Marātib*, 31.
125 al-Jīlī, *Marātib*, 29.

These are subdivided into acts related to God's rigour and those related to His beauty. This degree, consisting of God's epiphanies through His acts, is the last of the purely divine levels of being, those pertaining to the Real alone. The next degree thus marks the boundary between the realm of the Real and creation, between the eternal and the ephemeral.[126]

12. **The world of possible existence (*ʿālam al-imkān*)**
The boundary between the realms of real existence (*al-wujūd al-ḥaqīqī*)—namely, that of the Real—and metaphorical existence (*al-wujūd al-majāzī*), that of creation. Likewise, the boundary between the pre-eternal existence of the Real and the originated existence of creation.[127]
13. **The first intellect = sublime pen = Muḥammadan spirit**
14. **The universal soul = guarded tablet**
15. **The throne = universal body**
16. **The pedestal**
17. **The world of sublime spirits (*ʿālam al-arwāḥ al-ʿalawiyya*)**
18. **Nature**
Linked in al-Jīlī's discussion to the function of the world of exemplars (*ʿālam al-mithāl*).[128]
19. **Hylé (*hayūlā*)**
20. **Matter (*habāʾ*)**
21. **Individual substance (*jawhar*)**
22. **Composite entities (*murakkabāt*)**
Included in this category are composite forms pertaining to the world of imagination (*ʿālam al-khayāl*).[129]
23. **The outermost celestial sphere (*falak al-aṭlas*)**
The first degree endowed with actual existence after that of the pedestal. The intervening degrees, such as matter, are all notional rather than concrete.[130]
24. **The celestial sphere of the notional orb al-Jawzahr (*falak al-jawzahr*)**
Al-Jawzahr is a notional heavenly body and is thus located above the sphere of the stars.[131]
25. **The sphere of the stars (*al-falak al-mukawkab*)**
26. **The heaven of Saturn**
27. **The heaven of Jupiter**

126 al-Jīlī, *Marātib*, 28.
127 al-Jīlī, *Marātib*, 27.
128 al-Jīlī, *Marātib*, 24.
129 al-Jīlī, *Marātib*, 21.
130 al-Jīlī, *Marātib*, 18.
131 al-Jīlī, *Marātib*, 17.

28. **The heaven of Mars**
29. **The heaven of the Sun**
30. **The heaven of Venus**
31. **The heaven of Mercury**
32. **The heaven of the Moon**
33. **The sphere of fire**
34. **The sphere of air**
35. **The sphere of water**
36. **The sphere of earth (*al-kurra al-turābiyya*)**
37. **Minerals**
38. **Plants**
39. **Animals**
40. **Human beings**

Worth dwelling on are al-Jīlī's comments about both the world of exemplars and the world of imagination. Like al-Qūnawī and Farghānī before him, al-Jīlī links the *ʿālam al-mithāl* to the cosmic function of nature, and in particular to the role that nature plays in bringing about the manifestation of sensorial entities: with regard to those realms that are inward and hidden, the world of exemplars, we are told, embodies the "capacity to become manifest" (*qābiliyyat al-ẓuhūr*).[132] He identifies it, too, as do others,[133] with the mysterious "land of the sesame seed" (*arḍ al-simsima*),[134] a concept that he equates elsewhere (in his celebrated *Kitāb al-insān al-kāmil*) with the "land created from the remainder of Adam's clay,"[135] of which Ibn al-ʿArabī gives a memorable account in the eighth chapter of the *Futūḥāt*.[136]

As for the *ʿālam al-khayāl*, which he ties to the world of composite entities, al-Jīlī develops a theme that is often encountered in the works of Ibn al-ʿArabī's school, namely, that the existential possibilities of the imaginal realm far exceed those pertaining to the domain of the senses.[137] To illustrate this point, he gives the hypothetical example of a gigantic tree (several times bigger than

132 al-Jīlī, *Marātib*, 24.

133 See, for example, al-Nābulusī, *Nukhbat al-masʾala*, fol. 7b.

134 al-Jīlī, *Marātib*, 24.

135 al-Jīlī, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 2:27. In the *Mashāriq al-darārī*, Farghānī explicitly identifies the *ʿālam al-mithāl* with the "land created from the remainder of Adam's clay" (126).

136 See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 1:177–82.

137 The corporeal world's breadth in relation to that of the imaginal realm is typically likened to an earring dropped in a vast desert. See, for example, Farghānī, 126; al-Qayṣarī (d. 750/1351), *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 101. For his part, Ibn al-ʿArabī uses this analogy to describe the relationship between all cosmological degrees below the throne (including paradise and hell) and the "land created from the remainder of Adam's clay" (*Futūḥāt*, 1:177).

the earth) made of emerald and ruby, whose fruits are “sweeter than honey and more pleasurable than sexual union,” and which, as such, cannot exist in the sensorial world but can exist in the imagination.[138] For Akbarian authors like al-Jīlī, then, the phantasma produced in the individual’s imagination, though non-existent in the external world of the senses (*fī l-khārij*), have their own mode of reality nonetheless, whose conditions are defined by the nature of the imaginal domain.

4 al-Jazāʾirī

In the thirteenth/nineteenth century, this point would be taken up by one of the great Sufi thinkers of the modern period, the Algerian emir ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jazāʾirī (d. 1300/1883),[139] whose voluminous *Kitāb al-mawāqif* (*Book of Spiritual Waystations*) bears witness to the extent of his familiarity with the onto-cosmological framework developed by Ibn al-ʿArabī and al-Qūnawī. In the course of a long analysis of the nature of imagination in its various modes, ʿAbd al-Qādir observes that even dream images, optical illusions, or sorcery-induced hallucinations must exist in some respect, otherwise they would not be apprehended by the subject. He writes:

> Someone who is asleep may see innumerable things, whilst around him there may be a group of people who are not asleep and who therefore see nothing of what he saw. Hence, what he saw exists only in his contiguous imagination (*fī khayālihi al-muttaṣil*). But this is not to say that such objects of perception (*mudrakāt*) are therefore non-existent (*maʿdūma*) in every respect, for if that were the case, they would not be apprehended at all. Yet nor are they existent in every respect, otherwise they would be apprehended by all those present [with the dreamer]. Nevertheless, imaginal being (*al-wujūd al-khayālī*) is still a category of being (*min aqsām al-wujūd*).[140]

5 al-Burhānpūrī

Whilst ʿAbd al-Qādir’s discussion of the *marātib al-wujūd* tends to take place within the overarching context of the traditional cosmological hierarchy, some

138 al-Jīlī, *Marātib*, 21.
139 For a brief introduction to ʿAbd al-Qādir’s life and work, see McDougall.
140 al-Jazāʾirī, 2:74.

Akbarian authors from the modern period choose to focus on the *marātib* without reference to the Graeco-Islamic cosmological ladder, an indication perhaps of a decline in the prevalence of the medieval cosmological model. This is notably true of a short treatise that proved particularly influential, *al-Tuḥfa al-mursala ilā rūḥ al-nabī* (*The Gift Addressed to the Spirit of the Prophet*). Composed by Muḥammad b. Faḍl Allāh al-Burhānpūrī (d. 1028/1619), an Indian Sufi of the Shaṭṭārī Order,[141] it ties the theory of the perfect human being to a conceptual framework consisting of seven fundamental gradations of existence drawn chiefly from the works of al-Qūnawī and Farghānī. As documented by Anthony Johns, the *Tuḥfa* played a key role in transmitting Akbarian thought, and the gradations of being in particular, to Javanese and Sumatran Sufi circles in the eleventh/seventeenth century.[142] Its legacy, though, was not confined to South East Asia alone. As we shall see, its influence extended to Ottoman lands too as evidenced by a commentary, *Kitāb nukhbat al-masʾala sharḥ al-Tuḥfa al-mursala* (*The Core of the Question: An Elucidation of the Gift Addressed*), by one of the great figures of the later Akbarian school, the Damascene ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731).[143]

In similar vein to al-Jīlī's *Marātib*, al-Burhānpūrī's text begins by establishing a key esoteric premise underpinning the doctrine of multiple levels of existence, namely, that because God is pure being, the levels of existence may be conceived of as divine self-disclosures, or theophanies, without this compromising God's essential transcendence. Al-Burhānpūrī writes:

> Know, my brothers, that the Real—transcendent and most high—is pure being (*al-wujūd al-maḥḍ*), and that this being has no shape (*shakl*) or limit (*ḥadd*). Despite this, it appears (*ẓahara*) and reveals itself (*tajallā*) through both shape and limit, though its [original state of] being intrinsically shapeless and limitless does not change [as a result].[144]

Like al-Qūnawī and Farghānī before him, al-Burhānpūrī rationalises the concept of existence as theophany by referring to the notions of indeterminacy

141 On al-Burhānpūrī, see Johns, Faḍl Allāh Burhānpūrī.

142 See al-Burhānpūrī, 8–12; Riddell, 133–5. See also Azra, 667–8.

143 For a study of al-Nābulusī's life and work, see Sirriyeh. See also Akkach, *Letters*.

144 al-Burhānpūrī, fol. 2b. The influence of the *Tuḥfa* on Malay-Indonesian Sufism is evident in the following passage from the *Jawhar al-ḥaqāʾiq* by Shams al-Dīn al-Sumaṭrāʾī (d. 1039/1630): "Being (*wujūd*) is the Real—transcendent and most high is He. There is naught like that being. It was, and nothing was with it. Rather, things are imputed to it simply by virtue of its [hypostatic] levels (*marātib*), without this entailing any change in its essence (*dhāt*) or attributes. On the contrary, it is now even as it was" (249). On al-Sumaṭrāʾī, see Johns, Shams al-Dīn al-Samaṭrānī. I am grateful to Professor Anthony Johns for sending me a copy of the Arabic text of the *Jawhar al-ḥaqāʾiq*.

and determination. As the indeterminate principle of existential determination, the Real may be said to reveal itself through the determinate conditions that characterise the levels of being:

> Know that this being has many levels (*marātib kathīra*),[145] the first of which is that of non-determination (*al-lā taʿayyun*), which is also called the level of essential absoluteness (*al-iṭlāq al-ḥaqīqī*) and the level of the pure essence (*al-dhāt al-baḥt*).[146]

Outlined below are al-Burhānpūrī's seven levels of being. These, one will note, largely correspond to the five presences surmounted by al-Qūnawī's and Farhgānī's divine degrees:[147]

1. Indeterminacy (*lā taʿayyun*) = the absolute (*iṭlāq*) = the rank of the divine essence (*martabat al-dhāt*) = non-duality (*aḥadiyya*)
2. First determination (*taʿayyun awwal*) = absolute unity (*waḥda muṭlaqa*) = God's summative knowledge of Himself, His attributes, and all beings = the Muḥammadan Reality (*al-ḥaqīqa al-Muḥammadiyya*)
3. Second determination (*taʿayyun thānī*) = oneness (*wāḥidiyya*) = God's detailed knowledge of Himself, His attributes, and all beings = the essence of humanity (*al-ḥaqīqa al-insāniyya*)
4. World of spirits (*ʿālam al-arwāḥ*) = simple and abstract cosmological entities
5. World of subtle exemplars (*ʿālam al-mithāl*) = composite and subtle cosmological entities
6. World of bodies (*ʿālam al-ajsām*) = composite and gross cosmological entities
7. All-encompassing rank of human being (*al-martaba al-jāmiʿa*) = the last theophany

Noticeable, too, in al-Burhānpūrī's exposition is his concise categorisation of the conditions defining the worlds of spirits, exemplars, and bodies respectively, a taxonomy based on whether the entities in question are composite or simple, gross (defined as capable of being fragmented or divided), or subtle (which does not admit of being fragmented, divided, torn, or patched).[148]

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145 In his commentary on this statement, al-Nābulusī refers to al-Jīlī's schema, saying "in his *Epistle on the Levels of Being*, Shaykh ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī has forty levels; here, though, the levels mentioned are seven" (*Nukhbat al-mas'ala*, fol. 5b).

146 al-Burhānpūrī, *Tuḥfa*, quoted in al-Nābulusī, *Nukhbat al-mas'ala*, fol. 5b.

147 In al-Burhānpūrī's hierarchy the first presence has effectively been divided into Farghānī's first and second determinations whilst al-Qūnawī's "middle presence," that of man, is assigned a final summative rank.

148 al-Burhānpūrī, *Tuḥfa*, quoted in al-Nābulusī, *Nukhbat al-mas'ala*, fol. 7b.

6 al-Nābulusī

This type of taxonomy is adopted and expanded by ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī in his commentary on the *Tuḥfa*. Building upon al-Burhānpūrī's division of his ontological levels into that which admits of manifestation and that which does not, al-Nābulusī articulates a set of universal categories that serve to define the mode of existence of any given entity.[149] These categories may be summarised in schematic form as seen in Table 15.2.

Thus, applying al-Nābulusī's taxonomy to a hypothetical example, an entity that belongs, for instance, to the world of exemplars is one that has a manifest form, namely, that of a subtle (*laṭīf*) body. Though it may not be subject to time as such—since it transcends the world of gross (*kathīf*) bodies to which time pertains[150]—it nonetheless falls into the category of originated (*muḥdath*) beings and hence is ultimately ephemeral (*ḥādith*). Its metaphysical essence, by contrast, is eternal (*qadīm*). Conceived of as an intelligible archetype in the divine mind at the ontological level of oneness, it therefore abides in the realm of the non-manifest (*ghayb*) but nevertheless admits of manifestation (*ẓuhūr*), that is, is capable of assuming its manifest form in the *ʿālam al-mithāl*.

TABLE 15.2 Al-Nābulusī's ontological taxonomy

Absolute and eternal,	admits of no manifestation (*lā ẓuhūr*),	non-corporeal,	principial indeterminacy (*lā taʿayyun*).	
Conditioned and eternal,	**admits of manifestation** (***ẓuhūr***),	non-corporeal,	**principial unity** (***waḥda***).	
Conditioned and eternal,	admits of manifestation,	non-corporeal,	**principial oneness (*wāḥidiyya*).**	
Conditioned and **originated,**	admits of manifestation,	non-corporeal,	**luminous,**	**spirits.**
Conditioned and originated,	admits of manifestation,	**corporeal,**	**subtle,**	**exemplars.**
Conditioned and originated,	admits of manifestation,	corporeal,	**gross,**	**bodies.**

149 al-Nābulusī, *Nukhbat al-masʾala*, fols. 7b–8a.

150 According, at least, to the Avicennan theory of time (to which al-Qūnawī, among Akbarian authors, seems to have subscribed), the realm to which time proper (*zamān*) pertains is that of the world below the outermost celestial sphere, whereas other modes of duration apply to the purely spiritual and intellectual domains.

According, then, to al-Nābulusī's model, all ephemeral entities—whether incorporeal or bodily—possess an eternal dimension to their being, an idea that evokes not just the classic Akbarian concept of the immutable essences (*al-aʿyān al-thābita*)[151] but also al-Qūnawī's notion of a continuity of multiple levels of existence within one and the same being. This latter theory is evident, too, in al-Burhānpūrī's memorable definition of human perfection, which consists in realising, through spiritual ascent, all the hierarchical levels of existence, "in all their expansive breadth" (*maʿa inbisāṭihā*).[152]

The wide diffusion of the *Tuḥfa* is indicative of the extent to which the levels of being had become a common feature of Sufi theory by the early modern period. Closely tied to a teleological perspective that identified the purpose and culmination of existence—the Real's self-disclosure—with the person of the perfect human being, the doctrine of the *marātib* informed the writings of Sufi thinkers from as far apart as Java and Bosnia.[153] Insofar as such texts weave classical Sufi theory into a complex cosmological and ontological system permeated by Neoplatonic concepts and Avicennan terminology, they epitomise the transformative impact that Ibn al-ʿArabī and al-Qūnawī had on the development of Sufi thought.

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151 On the immutable essences, see Chittick, *Sufi Path*, 11–12, 83–6; Todd, 90–3.

152 al-Burhānpūrī, *Tuḥfa*, quoted in al-Nābulusī, *Nukhbat al-masʾala*, fol. 8a.

153 See, for example, Abdullah Bosnevî's (d. 1054/1644) introduction to his commentary on Ibn al-ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. Bosnevî enumerates the five presences as follows: (1) the absolute non-manifest; (2) pure spirits, intellects, and souls, the world of *jabarūt*; (3) universal exemplars; (4) individual exemplars, the world of dream images; (5) sensory perception and the visible (Bosnevî, 97).

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CHAPTER 16

Imagination in Islamic Mystical Philosophy: The Eschatological and Ontological Case

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Philosophers ask rational questions concerning cosmology, cosmogony, the nature of the human being, and so on. However, their answers cannot always be explained in the light of a sound reason. For example, they inquire how from a pure spiritual entity, the Divine, a material world was created. One of their answers is the theory of emanation, which teaches that the world was produced after a long series of emanations, from the pure spiritual entity (the One, God), through several entities whose spirituality is descending, until a first matter is produced, and so on. Philosophers provide feeble rational proofs for this theory, adding metaphors presenting the theory in similes derived from one's experience, such as the sun and its rays (Altmann and Stern, 176; al-Ghazālī, *Incoherence*, 68–71; Madelung and Mayer, 49–53, 57–9, 87–8; Shihadeh, 74–5).

In principle, the mystical philosophers' explanation of eschatological events suffers the same difficulty. They state that from a rational point of view a bodily resurrection cannot take place and that only the soul, a spiritual entity, survives death. Now, if only the soul exists after death, how can one explain the bodily rewards and chastisements encountered in the next world, which are mentioned in detail by the Qurʾān and the Tradition (*ḥadīth*)? How is it possible to describe the bodily chastisements in the grave (*ʿadhāb al-qabr*), in the interval between death and resurrection? From the beginning of the development of Islamic mystical thought to the present, Islamic mystical philosophers have tried to answer these questions. In the present chapter we shall attempt to supply the reader with some of these answers, which focus on imagination and the world of image.

We shall conduct our discussion according to the following section headings: (1) Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī; (2) al-Suhrawardī; (3) Ibn Kammūna; (4) al-Shahrazūrī; (5) later commentators of al-Suhrawardī's theory; (6) Ibn al-ʿArabī; (7) conclusion.

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1 Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī

Probably wishing not to alienate orthodox theologians (*ʿulamāʾ*), Ibn Sīnā (d. 427/1037), one of the greatest philosophers of Islam, states that the next world (*maʿād*—literally: the place to which one returns) is known both on the basis of religion and reason. Whereas the Islamic religion teaches bodily resurrection through the Qurʾān and the Tradition, the metaphysical philosophers desired to know the happiness and the misery of the human beings' soul through demonstrative proofs. In Ibn Sīnā's view, prophecy too confirms the resurrection of the soul. According to him, the perfection of each faculty of the soul is the congruency between its activity and its object. Thus, the pleasure of the faculty of sight is seeing its object. On the other hand, the perfection or pleasure of the rational soul is attaining the intelligibles (*maʿqūlāt*) and becoming an intellectual world in which all forms of the world are imprinted. In this world, the soul by nature prefers intellectual to sensory perfection. However, often the body prevents the soul from attaining its goal. Being free of its body, the soul in the next world is more desirous to achieve its object. A failure to attain this level causes the soul a misery graver than hellfire. Ibn Sīnā points out the connection between this world and the afterlife stating that what human beings do in this world influences their position in the world to come (Avicenna, 347–54).

Simple-minded individuals, who do not desire to seek the intelligibles, are divided into two groups: (1) those who are free from evil dispositions acquired in this world and will gain comfort and some kind of rest thanks to God's mercy; and (2) those who possess evil dispositions will suffer because of their incapacity to satisfy their desires. Referring to the first group, Ibn Sīnā introduces a true view he ascribes to certain scholars, according to which the purity of these souls, their belief in the next world, and their reluctance to ascend to a higher position enable them to connect to some parts of the celestial bodies and use them as material for their imaginations. This is because the faculty of imagination needs a body to be activated. These individuals, or, rather, their souls, will imagine all their earthly thoughts about the hereafter. The principle underlying this notion is that events imagined, like in dreams, are more powerful in human feeling than events occurring in reality. It seems that Ibn Sīnā agrees with this idea, for he positively states that these are the lower levels of happiness and misery (Avicenna, 355–7), which he reiterates in *Kitāb al-najāt* (*The Book of Salvation*; Ibn Sīnā, *Najāt*, 333), in *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt* (*Intimations and Admonitions*; Ibn Sīnā, *Ishārāt*, 196), and in two epistles dedicated to the issue of the next world (van Lit, 25–7).

Most of those who responded to Ibn Sīnā's theory were negative, whether they were familiar with the arguments or not. For example, Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī (d. 560/1164?) contends that Ibn Sīnā does not supply the reader with arguments to support his thesis (al-Baghdādī, 2:442–3; van Lit, 28).

Approaches of scholars who refer to Ibn Sīnā's theory can be classified according to the following characteristics: acceptance (al-Shahrastānī, d. 548/1153), acceptance mixed with criticism (Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, d. 606/1209, and Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī, d. 631/1233), interpretation (Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, d. 673/1274), and indifference (al-Rīzī, fl. 679/1280). The main criticism of Ibn Sīnā's thesis focuses on the argument that if one attaches the faculty of imagination to a body, one can be accused of believing in metempsychosis, a grave deviation from orthodox Islam (van Lit, 31–8). It is worth noting that the absence of discussion of this theory might be construed as a form of criticism, that is, the notion is so unsustainable that it does not deserve discussion.

Influenced by Ibn Sīnā concerning some significant issues (Abrahamov, Influence), al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) uses the faculty of imagination to explain the chastisements of the grave (*ʿadhāb al-qabr*). In his view, death means a change of situation. Only the spirit or the soul survives death, and the soul is punished or rewarded. The meaning of the soul's disengagement from the body is that it no more activates the corporeal matter. In a very cautious and uncommitted manner al-Ghazālī states: "It is not impossible that the spirit will be made to return to the body in the grave, and (also) it is not impossible that it will return to the body later in the Resurrection" (al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ*, 4:494). Defining the spirit or the soul as the entity that perceives knowledge and feelings, he says that after stopping to activate the organs, knowledge and feelings do not leave the soul. The real meaning of the human being is that it is an entity that perceives knowledge, pleasure, and chastisements, and these elements do not disappear.

The torment of the grave is explained through the activity of one's imagination. Snakes and scorpions that bite the dead person in the grave are perceived by the faculty of imagination existing in the soul. According to al-Ghazālī, there is no difference between an imagined snake and a concrete snake perceived by humans in the sensory world. The activity of the imagination in death is likened to its activity in sleep, when other sensory faculties of the body are inactive (al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ*, 4:493–5, 499, 505). However, in his *Kīmiyā-yi saʿādat* he differentiates between two kinds of senses, those that exist in this world and others that exist in the world to come (Lange, 187–91). In two other works, *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa* (*The Intentions of the Philosophers*) and *Kitāb al-maḍnūn bihi ʿalā ghayr ahlihi* (*The Book That Should Be Kept from Unfit People*), he

follows Ibn Sīnā's notion of the connection between the imagination and parts of celestial bodies in the next world. However, in *al-Maḍnūn al-ṣaghīr*, on the one hand, he says that this notion is not completely proven, and, on the other, asserts that it is not impossible (van Lit, 29–30).

2 al-Suhrawardī

The mystical philosopher Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191) developed Ibn Sīnā's theory of imagination with the addition of new features. He is known as the "Master of Illumination" (*shaykh al-ishrāq*), which is a philosophy based on illumination, that is, unveiling and immediate knowledge, also called by al-Suhrawardī "knowledge by presence" (*al-ʿilm al-ḥuḍūrī*) (al-Suhrawardī, xvii–xviii; Ziai, *Knowledge*, 136–7; Ziai, al-Suhrawardī). However, al-Suhrawardī combined discursive and intuitive philosophy into one coherent system, thus challenging Aristotelian philosophy, which is built on the basis of syllogism (Marcotte, Suhrawardī; al-Suhrawardī, xx).

Usually, the philosophers divide the cosmos into three parts: intellects, souls, and bodies. Al-Suhrawardī adds a fourth part called "suspended images" (*muthul muʿallaqa*), which are "neither in a place nor a substrate" (*lā fī makān wa-lā fī maḥall*; Marcotte, Realm, 68; al-Suhrawardī, 138). This fourth part has relevance to the fate of people in the next world. Bad souls will experience events and states of the next world through the suspended images. These images are produced by the imagination that needs a substrate to activate them, or some connection to a dry body. Al-Suhrawardī rejects three possibilities of connection with the human imagination: connection with earthly materials, with celestial bodies, and with vapour and smoke. First, the situation in the next world differs from that in this world, hence, the soul cannot be connected to an earthly body. Second, although celestial bodies are made of a thin matter unlike the matter in this world, their connection to one's soul would be regarded as transmigration of souls, an idea al-Suhrawardī cannot accept. Third, also vapour and smoke cannot serve as a substrate for the imagination, which needs a dry substrate, as in this world. Consequently, our author turns to another option, that is, a spherical body situated at the isthmus (*barzakh*) between the ethereal world of celestial bodies and the elemental world of earthly bodies (van Lit, 39–46).

The suspended images are no longer connected to the celestial bodies, wherever they are, but the latter are present to the human soul as a mirror is present to a mirrored entity. The images reside neither in the mirror, nor in the air, which has no role in one's perception. Nor do they reside in the eye.

The mirror is only a place of manifestation. Notwithstanding, these images, which are seen as bodies, exist by virtue of themselves (*qāʾima bi-dhātihā*), just as the objects of sight are manifested in the faculty of imagination which exists in one's brain. In other words, each action of sight creates a suspended image (van Lit, 48–56). However, al-Suhrawardī does not explain the connection between the soul and the celestial body, whereas we know the connection between the soul and its objects of sight in this world. He only says that souls are attached to the celestial bodies in order to experience the images (van Lit, 60). How exactly this is accomplished and who affects this is not clear. All we know of this phenomenon is the notion that in the case of virtuous souls, their images correspond to their good will, whereas evil souls experience what is contrary to their will. He further states that virtuous souls can ascend from the world of image to the world of intellect (van Lit, 60–1).

Al-Suhrawardī believes that suspended images are the "matter" of jinn, demons, and angels. Angels can use suspended images to manifest themselves in various forms (van Lit, 63–4). Strangely enough, al-Suhrawardī wants to persuade people to believe in the phenomenon of suspended images by telling us that many people from some unnamed two cities have seen jinn and demons many times. Thus, like an expert in Islamic law, who avails himself of *ijmāʿ* (general juridical consensus) to establish a religious rule, he uses ordinary human experience to prove a mystical philosophical notion. Moreover, he himself points out his own experiences, which prove the existence of four worlds, the world of intellects, of souls, of matter, and of image (al-Suhrawardī, 149–50). If this has not yet convinced us, a series of prophets, mystics, philosophers, and mythical figures are recruited for this purpose (van Lit, 71). Does al-Suhrawardī feel that his rational arguments are not sufficient and that he has to employ intellectual and mystical authorities to prove the existence of the world of image? No doubt, al-Suhrawardī appears here as a mystical philosopher who uses both rational arguments and mystical experience with an inclination mainly to the mystical side.

3 Ibn Kammūna

The first thinker who wrote a commentary on one of al-Suhrawardī's important works, entitled *Sharḥ al-talwīḥāt al-lawḥiyya wa-l-ʿarshiyya* (*Commentary on Intimations of the Preserved Tablet and of the Throne*), was the Jewish philosopher Ibn Kammūna (d. 683/1284). In this treatise Ibn Kammūna points out two principles: (1) Happiness in the next world is multifaceted. Thus, wise people, who possess excellent traits, enjoy great pleasures, whereas other people

experience pleasures of a lesser degree, mainly if one believes the existence of images (*muthul takhayyuliyya*). (2) Complete intellectual pleasure of the soul is attained after its separation from its body (Ibn Kammūna, 471–3).

Ibn Kammūna's main critical comment on al-Suhrawardī's thesis of the suspended images is provoked by his use of persuasive and rhetorical instead of demonstrative arguments (van Lit, 43). Hence, Ibn Kammūna undermines al-Suhrawardī's theory of the suspended images.

4 al-Shahrazūrī

Contrary to Ibn Kammūna, the philosopher al-Shahrazūrī (d. after 687/1288), the most important commentator of al-Suhrawardī, was very fond of the latter's thesis. Al-Shahrazūrī shifts his concern from the eschatological approach of al-Suhrawardī to the ontological and cosmological sphere. Basing himself on the method of elimination, he argues that neither forms of imagination, nor dreams can be placed in the brain, because of its smallness. Nor can they reside in a physical place, for in such a case everyone would be able to see them (which they do not), and since the forms and dreams certainly exist, they constitute a separate world. He calls this world the world of image. He uses this term instead of al-Suhrawardī's "suspended images" in order to show that the images exist by virtue of themselves. Further, one can also perceive this imaginal world in one's own life. The world of image is situated between the material and the intelligible world.

According to al-Shahrazūrī, the sensory world is similar to the world of image. However, the world of image is more pleasant than the sensory world, because it lacks materiality. He assumes that just as souls are attached to bodies in the material world, so souls are attached to bodies in the world of image (van Lit, 87–104). However, this runs contrary to his assertion that everything in the world of image is a simple substance. If it were a simple substance, it would not be composed of body and soul, even if they are not sensory. Moreover, he says that even accidents in our material world become substances in the world of image because, for example, in a dream we sense the smell of a flower, but the flower does not exist. Furthermore, in the world of image there is no place in which the image is situated, and all sorts of events and situations can occur (van Lit, 105). In sum, there are some correspondences between the material world and the world of image, but it seems that the differences exceed the similarities.

Al-Shahrazūrī follows al-Suhrawardī in some eschatological issues. Like al-Suhrawardī, he states that entrance into the world of image is conditioned

by the subjugation of one's external and internal senses, just as images exist in sleep, but this entrance can only be accomplished through training. However, these two thinkers slightly differ in the fate they assign to people. Al-Suhrawardī divides people into four groups, the best people exist in the intelligible world, the intermediate in the celestial bodies, and the worst in either the sublunary domain or in a celestial body suffering from painful imaginations. Only the first class has the ability to enter the world of intellect. Al-Shahrazūrī's approach is more dynamic, for it does not allow a specific place, such as heaven or hell, to which people may go. There are stages leading to the highest world, but everyone can advance from one's current stage to a higher one, until one reaches the intelligible world, provided that they fulfil the requirements of their present stage and becomes purer. Al-Shahrazūrī does not speak of the Resurrection and accepts the transmigration of souls. This explains his statement that bad souls enter the bodies of animals (van Lit, 106–8; van Lit and Lange, 171).

5 Later Commentators of al-Suhrawardī's Theory

As against al-Shahrazūrī's favorable attitude toward al-Suhrawardī's approach, most commentators living in the 150 years after al-Suhrawardī's death vacillate between ignoring or mentioning his theory in passing, or showing hesitancy about it (Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, d. 710/1310) and rejection (Ibn Kammūna) (van Lit, 113–23). However, some thinkers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries harbor great concerns about both al-Suhrawardī and al-Shahrazūrī. Their interest in the world of image takes the shape of criticism, which derives from the lack of philosophical proofs and the contradiction between this theory and traditional dogmas. Some, like al-Harawī (d. 1008/1599), who probably lived in India, accept the theory, after making minor adjustments. For example, al-Harawī claims that bad souls connect with the atmospheric sphere (*jaww al-falak*), there receiving dark images, from which jinn and demons are produced. Also, in his view, perfect souls ascend from the atmospheric sphere to the celestial bodies and finally to the intelligible world, because each soul also has bad traits, even though such souls are few (van Lit, 123–35).

The leading Iranian philosopher of the Ṣafawid era Mullā Ṣadrā (Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shirāzī, d. 1050/1640) introduced a new approach to the issue at hand (MacEoin; Rahman, 1–7). Mullā Ṣadrā bases his thesis on the unprovable assertion that the imagination is an active immaterial faculty. Consequently, the imagination survives death, and the soul can activate this faculty after it leaves the body. Now, in this scenario, there is no need for celestial bodies to activate the imagination. As an adversary of the transmigration of souls, he vehemently

disapproves of the idea of the ontological status of the world of image, which might lead to transmigration. Contrary to al-Shahrazūrī, he believes that purely by means of the faculty of imagination every human being creates his or her own unique afterlife and that there is no real world of images, existing by virtue of themselves, towards which one can move. It is conceivable that Mullā Ṣadrā generally follows Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), who states about this issue the following: "Through the power of fancy (*wahm* = imagination) every human being creates in his faculty of imagination (*khayāl*) that which has existence only in this faculty. This is the general matter" (Abrahamov, *Fuṣūṣ*, 57).

According to this theory, the eschatological fate of human beings depends on the states and the character traits they have acquired in this world and on what the Qurʾān and the Sunna teach. Through the imagination, all souls create their own fate in the other world. People differ in the next world because of their proximity or distance from intellectual life in this world. Those who, in this world, deal with intelligible values, that is, the most elevated persons, will be resurrected to the world of image and be like angels. The second rank, those who activate their faculty of estimation, will be like demons; the third rank, those who are prone to anger, will be like wild beasts; and the fourth, those acting in accordance with their appetites, will be like dumb animals (van Lit, 136–40). Contrary to al-Suhrawardī's four-fold division of the afterlife (intellects, souls, bodies, and suspended images), Mullā Ṣadrā introduces three worlds (the world of senses, the world of image, and the world of intellect). However, the world of image is the domain through which all the four categories of people enjoy or suffer their fate. In sum, Mullā Ṣadrā builds his theory on the foundations of his predecessors, but deviates from them in the assumption of the existence of immaterial imagination and in the consequences of this assumption.

The texts of al-Suhrawardī, Ibn Kammūna, al-Shahrazūrī, and others of the same tradition have continued to be copied and taught in various areas of the Islamic world to the present day (van Lit, 142–75). It is worth noting, however, that no significant developments or innovations in their ideas have evolved in the course of the intervening centuries.

6 Ibn al-ʿArabī

Not surprisingly, Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), Islam's greatest mystical philosopher, developed different notions concerning the role of imagination. His thought comprised two basic principles. First, existence is one and includes God's essence, attributes, and names and the cosmos with all of its phenomena.

God's essence cannot be known, but His attributes and names are reflected in the cosmos like the reflection of forms in a mirror. Thus, the only real existence is God, and the cosmos is His self-manifestation. Second, all the phenomena in the cosmos can be considered according to various aspects. For example, from the point of view of reason, God is transcendent, but, from the point of view of one's feeling or imagination, God is immanent. The truth in Ibn al-ʿArabī's view is that God is both transcendent and immanent (Abrahamov, *Fuṣūṣ*, 6–13). Ibn al-ʿArabī's ideas on eschatology can be measured mainly in the light of these two principles.

Contrary to the philosophers, he tries to explain the events in the next world not as metaphors, but as real events, which should be understood literally. God could not ascribe to Himself impossible events and states. Imagination is the key term that explains eschatology. In Ibn al-ʿArabī's view, imagination (*khayāl*) has both ontological and epistemological aspects of reality. Its ambiguous character can be shown by the following sentence: "It is neither existent nor nonexistent, neither known nor unknown, neither affirmed nor denied" (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 1:459). The image in a mirror shows that from one aspect it is perceived, but from another it is not, because it is not the real form. In respect to its ontology, imagination is located between the material and spiritual domains, and has features of both. Consequently, it is called *barzakh* (isthmus), that is, what separates two entities, like the line that divides shadow from sunlight. This is the reason why imagination is regarded by Ibn al-ʿArabī as designating the whole cosmos, because it is an isthmus between the Real Existence (*al-wujūd al-muḥaqqaq*), that is, God, and nonexistence. Thus, everything except God is imagination, and imagination is God's self-manifestation (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, ch. 63, 1:460–2; Morris, Imagination, 104–9).

Imagination embodies immaterial entities and spiritualizes corporeal things. For example, angels appear in a form of persons. In dreams, spiritual entities turn into material entities, like knowledge, which appears in the form of milk (Abrahamov, *Fuṣūṣ*, 121). Another characteristic of imagination is its being subject to transmutation (*tabaddul*) in its forms and states, whereas God does not change.

The human being's state after death and before the Resurrection, that is, while still in the grave, also constitutes an isthmus between two events. In this state, one suffers chastisement (*ʿadhāb*) or enjoys pleasure (*ladhdha*) in accordance with what one did in one's lifetime. Souls become embodied in an image appropriate to one's previous deeds, knowledge, beliefs, and character traits. Humans' sojourn in the isthmus after death is regarded as the first awakening, because it shows them their true personality and prepares them for the second awakening at the Resurrection. Thus, for example, the vision of God

in paradise is established according to the connection between God and the believer in his or her lifetime, the highest rank being assigned to those who knew God because of His unveiling to them (Morris, Shadows, 62–5).

Ibn al-ʿArabī's approach to the afterlife is not clear and even self-contradictory, because we would expect the images to play a role in paradise and hell, and indeed in certain passages he talks about several such embodied images affecting the blessed and the damned (Lange, 237). However, he also states that in contrast to the isthmus, the next world is sensory without images. Two issues immediately arise: first, as said before, everything except God is in the realm of imagination, and the next world is no exception; and second, given that he says that the imagination spiritualizes the material entities, why does this not occur in the next world? Assumedly, Ibn al-ʿArabī thinks of different layers of imagination, some clearer than others. Thus, the most evident images exist in the next world (Chittick, 51–66). In sum, the imagination enables Ibn al-ʿArabī to preserve the literal meanings of paradise and hell with all their characteristics.

7 Conclusion

In conclusion, mystical philosophers tried to solve the problem of Qurʾānic verses and traditions that depict the next world as a material world in which pleasant and unpleasant events and states take place. Since these philosophers believed that only the soul, an immaterial entity, survives death, they had to explain the concrete elements of the afterlife that are sensed by human beings who have physical bodies. For this purpose, they used the faculty of imagination, which produces in human beings states and feelings, just as in dreams. When they encountered the challenge that the imagination needs to be connected to a material substrate, such as the brain, they created the notion of the attachment of imagination or images to celestial bodies, or to parts of them. However, this raises the issue of the heretical belief in transmigration of souls, because of the existence of images in a material body. The solution to this problem is to argue that imagination is a purely spiritual entity, or that the imagination is an isthmus between the True Reality (God) and nonexistence. Thus, images vacillate between being connected or disconnected with material and immaterial entities. All this refers to the human beings' fate after death and before the Resurrection and to the afterlife in paradise or hell. Another significant notion dealt with here is the relationship between the human beings' acts, states, and character traits in this world and their fate in the next world. The mystical philosophers' solutions to the contradiction between the materiality of the next world as described in the sacred texts, and the philosophical

idea of the resurrection of the soul but not the body are not free from logical difficulties. However, the various solutions to this problem proposed by the Muslim thinkers examined in this chapter demonstrate their persistent desire to remain within the confines of the Muslim dogma.

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CHAPTER 17

Otherworldly Journeys in Pre-Modern Sufism

Frederick Colby

1 Introduction

Muḥammad's night journey (*isrāʾ*) from Mecca to Jerusalem and his ascension (*miʿrāj*) to the heavens together offer a model of the structure of the cosmos for Muslims in general, and a paradigm for the stages of the spiritual path for Sufis in particular. After discussing diverse ways that a number of Sufis treat the theme of ascension (a term I will use as shorthand for otherworldly journeys of various sorts, while acknowledging that ascension consists of only a subset of the more general idea of "boundary crossings" as described by Coppens, passim), as well as examining the sources about the Prophet's ascension that are especially important to an understanding of Sufi treatments, this chapter focuses specifically on the Sufi *miʿrāj* experiences of several key figures, including Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 261/875), Rūzbihān al-Baqlī (d. 606/1209), and Muḥyī l-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240).

Mystical commentaries on the story of Muḥammad's otherworldly journey appear in a variety of Sufi sources, from the sayings of the early masters (as preserved, e.g., by al-Sulamī, d. 412/1021, and al-Qushayrī, d. 465/1074) and traditional Sufi Qurʾān commentaries, to poetic introductions to works on a variety of subjects (e.g. see Fouchécour), to the teaching sessions of Sufi *pīr*s both premodern and modern. Beyond examining Muḥammad's journey, some Sufis—especially Persian Sufis of the middle periods such as Majdūd Sanāʾī (d. 523/1131), Farīd al-Dīn Aṭṭār (d. ca. 627/1230), and Najm al-Dīn [Dāya] al-Rāzī (d. 654/1256)—composed allegorical tales of journeys from this world to the other world that make use of this narrative framework to outline a spiritual understanding of the stages of the path to God. In addition, a few select Sufis claim to have experienced their own mystical visions of ascent, drawing on the same general framework and symbols as the Prophet's journey, and these will receive special attention in what follows. In approval of this idea, one anonymous middle period Ilkhanid Persian text expresses it thus: "There are others besides the Prophet who have had an ascension with the heart, [namely,] those happy souls who in a mystical session cry out, go into ecstasy, and their state is such that they faint away. This is an expansion of the heart and an ascension of the heart …" (Gruber, 35). Despite the recognition of the possibility of

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a Sufi ascension, most insist on the superiority of the Prophet's ascension to those attributed to his later followers. While the latter are usually understood as mystical visionary and/or dream experiences, the former is most often seen as a miracle that took place physically as a special favor from God (Affifi, 24; al-Qushayrī, 75–6).

The Qurʾān uses enigmatic language to refer to Muḥammad's otherworldly journey, most notably in two places: Q 17:1 ("Glory to the one who made his servant journey by night from the sacred place of prayer to the furthest place of prayer … to show him some of our signs …"); and Q 53:1–18 ("… Taught to him by one of great power / while he was on the highest horizon / then he drew near and approached / to a distance of two bow's lengths or closer / and he revealed to his servant what he revealed … / he saw him another time / at the Lote Tree of the boundary … / when the tree was covered by what covered / his gaze did not stray nor exceed bounds / he saw among the greatest signs of his lord").[1] From the earliest period, many exegetes understood the references as describing Muḥammad's journey to and/or vision of otherworldly locations, despite the fact that, for other interpreters, the second of these passages was seen as relating to one of Muḥammad's visions—perhaps of the angel Gabriel in his true form—on earth not in the heavens. On the other side of this debate, some commentators interpreted the "signs" alluded to in both passages above as designating the Prophet's visit to the throne of God, and perhaps also his vision of God, despite nothing being said explicitly about such details in the sacred book (Arberry, 22; Coppens, passim). Such controversies played out not only among Muslim exegetes in their works of Qurʾān commentary and elsewhere, but also affected the way that different Muslims told the story of Muḥammad's night journey and ascension. While Sufis could be found on both sides of the debate, the notion that Muḥammad's journey took him all the way into the presence of God sparked the imagination of many Sufi commentators, and has informed Sufi interpretations of this paradigmatic event ever since.

From the foundational Sufi Qurʾān commentaries of al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021) and al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1074), to the middle period commentaries by Abū l-Faḍl al-Maybudī (fl. 520/1126), Abū l-Futūḥ al-Rāzī (d. ca. 556/1161), and Rūzbihān al-Baqlī (d. 606/1209), all the way through the modern mystical teachings of

1 Translations from the Qurʾān in this chapter are my own, unless stated otherwise. Throughout this chapter I generally use lowercase pronouns and adjectives when referring to the divinity, with the exception of the name of God. I avoid capitalization in these words not out of disrespect, but because the original Arabic and Persian texts do not have any distinction between upper and lowercase letters, and at times Sufis derive significant mystical meaning from the ambiguities generated in places where it is not clear whether a word refers to the human aspirant or the divine beloved.

Muzaffer Özak (d. 1989), Frithjof Schuon (d. 1998), and Muḥammad Hishām Kabbānī (b. 1945), Sufis through the ages have offered mystical interpretations of what Muḥammad experienced on his pivotal night journey and ascension. Sufi mystical commentaries on and interpretations of the Prophet's *miʿrāj* serve as a medium through which a number of Sufis come to explore the connection between outer cosmology and inner human psychology, as well as the place of the complete and fully realized human being (*al-insān al-kāmil*) in the universe.

Besides the Qur'ān's references to presumably otherworldly sites such as the "Lote Tree of the boundary," the sacred text of course includes references to yet more otherworldly details such as the throne, the footstool, the preserved tablet, the Garden, the Fire, the seven heavens, "the heights" (*ʿIlliyīn*), and so on. In the formative centuries of Islamic history, such locales were collated into the conceptions of the otherworld held by a number of Muslims, along with other similar details, such as the upperworldly realms of *malakūt* ([divine/angelic] kingdom) and *jabarūt* (realm of power?), the heavenly seas and mountains, the veils separating creation from the highest divine realm. As the story of Muḥammad's *miʿrāj* expanded in the telling over the first three centuries of Islamic history and beyond, a number of such references that on the surface seem to have nothing intrinsically to do with the story became interpreted by exegetes, storytellers, and traditionists as part of the otherworldly landscape.

According to Muslim tradition, Muḥammad himself elaborated on the sparse details that the Qur'ān provides about his night journey and ascension when narrating his experience to his companions. The reports of these narratives circulated by word of mouth, eventually coming to be collected, evaluated, and written down a couple of centuries after Muḥammad's death as *ḥadīth* (sayings of the Prophet as transmitted by his followers, together with authenticating chains of transmission) and *akhbār* (other types of reports passed on orally from Muḥammad's companions and their descendants, such as the Shīʿī Imams). The *ḥadīth* reports serve as the main source for Muslim discourse on Muḥammad's otherworldly journey, the focus of attention for exegetes, theologians, philosophers, and poets, Sufis being well represented among all these various groups. In their most simple and basic forms, the *ḥadīth* and *akhbār* reports describe Muḥammad being taken by one or more angels on a journey from Mecca either directly up through the seven heavens, or into the heavens after a horizontal journey from Mecca to Jerusalem. Muḥammad is admitted into each otherworldly realm or "heaven" (*al-samā'*, which just means a "sky" or "upperworldly realm," not necessarily identified with the idea of a realm of next-worldly bliss such as found in "the Garden" or "paradise"), one by one, greeting and being greeted by each of its inhabitants. The climax of the journey often appears after the entrance into the seventh heaven at the Lote Tree

(Q 53:14), a site where many of the accounts detail how Muḥammad received the duty of the liturgical prayers which pious Muslims come to perform five times daily. Other reports flesh out such bare bone details with many other additional scenes and encounters, a process that began quite early.

While the very same Qurʾān passages and oral *miʿrāj* reports examined by non-Sufi Muslims serve as the touchstone for many Sufi discussions of Muḥammad's otherworldly journey, an additional source deserves mention before we turn to examining the ideas of specific Sufis on the ascension. Beyond the *ḥadīth* reports that came to be considered canonical by the majority of Muslims, a sizeable number of Muslims passed on additional and often more extensive non-canonical versions, including a number of versions told in the name of Muḥammad's cousin and young companion, Ibn ʿAbbās (d. ca. 68/687). These Ibn ʿAbbās ascension narratives circulated widely throughout Islamdom, and by the sixth/twelfth century at the latest they enjoyed popular favor from Spain to Afghanistan (Colby). They became particularly important for Sufi thinking about the highest stages of the journey, for unlike in the canonical reports, the Ibn ʿAbbās versions often depict Muḥammad traveling beyond the Lote Tree to even higher levels of reality that even some of the highest angels cannot enter. The varied accounts told in the name of Ibn ʿAbbās describe the Prophet passing into an ecstatic state just before his arrival at the divine throne, allude directly or indirectly to his vision of God, detail his intimate colloquy with God in which the divine informs the Prophet of the special blessings he has been given, and recount Muḥammad's intercession with God on behalf of his followers.

The idea of ascension came to be an important symbol for Sufi mystics of nearly every period and cultural context. Metaphorically, the very concept of *miʿrāj* came to be associated with the mystical journey of Sufi aspirants on their path to the divine, as well as the journey of every human soul in its return to its divine source (ʿAbdul Haq, 53; Affifi, 23–4, 27). Already some of the earliest Muslim mystics such as Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. ca. 261/875) claimed to have themselves ascended to the divine throne, and one of the earliest Sufi treatises on the subject supports the legitimacy of the Sufi type of mystical *miʿrāj* that emulates—but not replicates—Muḥammad's prophetic *miʿrāj* (al-Qushayri, 5). This should not come as a surprise, since from the earliest periods, Sufis came to see Muḥammad's example as a model for the mystical experiences of his followers.

In his broader study of the Prophet's otherworldly journey, al-Qushayrī not only investigates the *ḥadīth* narratives about Muḥammad's *miʿrāj* in some detail, and transmits a number of the sayings of foundational Sufi figures about the Prophet's ascent drawn from his predecessor's compilation (al-Sulamī), finally

offering an in-depth commentary on Q 53:1–18 (Coppens, 236–7; Nguyen, 257–66; al-Qushayrī, 117–26), but in addition to this, he briefly touches on whether or not other human beings are able to experience similar kinds of journeys. He affirms that prophets such as Moses and Abraham have enjoyed their own ascensions, and even records an opinion that God grants every single prophet a *miʿrāj*, despite the fact that none of their ascensions reach the noble heights that Muḥammad reached (al-Qushayrī, 74–5). On the issue of whether or not Sufi saints are able to have ascension experiences, and here al-Qushayrī's interlocutor asks about Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī explicitly (see below), al-Qushayrī makes a distinction between the Prophet's outwardly bodily ascension and the more inwardly spiritual and/or visionary character of the ascension of the saints:

> As for the ascension in a bodily state, that has not been reported of any one … and the consensus is that it will not happen for any but [Muḥammad]…. As for [Sufi ascensions occurring] in sleep, it is not objectionable for some of the select to have them. I heard Aḥmad al-Ṭābirānī al-Sarkushī say: "At the beginning of my desire, I used to see each night for an entire year that I was raised up to the heaven[s], and in [these] dreams I beheld wonders."
>
> AL-QUSHAYRĪ, 75–6

Just as he distinguishes between Muḥammad's ascension and the lesser ascensions of other prophets, we see here how al-Qushayrī and many other Sufis after him explicitly distinguish the Prophet's *miʿrāj* from those of later mystics by its nature, Muḥammad's taking place in his body, while that of later Sufis taking place spiritually, such as in waking visions or dreams. This perspective opens the door for accepting Sufi visions of ascent as legitimate spiritual experiences that help to illuminate cosmic mysteries.

2 Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī's Ascensions

The earliest Sufi said to have enjoyed his own otherworldly journey similar to that of the Prophet Muḥammad is a figure from the eastern lands of Islamdom known as Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (or "Bāyazīd" in Persian, d. 261/875). No writings by al-Bisṭāmī have survived, and he may not have claimed any otherworldly journey or vision himself (Lory, 223–4), but subsequent Sufis record competing versions of his ascension in their later works, especially those by al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988), Hujwīrī (d. ca. 469/1077), ʿAṭṭār (d. ca. 618/1221), and Rūzbihān al-Baqlī (d. 606/1209). The first extant references to al-Bisṭāmī's ascension

appear in al-Sarrāj's early Arabic manual on Sufism called *al-Lumaʿ* (*The Lighting Flashes*):

> The Shaykh said … and it has often been reported of him, that Abū Yazīd said: "As soon as I arrived at his oneness, I became a bird whose body was of unity and whose wings were of everlastingness. So I continued to fly through the ether of how-ness for ten years until I came to the air of something like that one thousand thousand times. I did not cease flying until I came to the field of pre-eternity and saw there the tree of unity." Then he described its roots, trunk, boughs, branches, and fruits. Then he said, "Then I looked and knew that it was all a cheat."
>
> AL-SARRĀJ, 464; SELLS, 219

After recalling this brief anecdote, al-Sarrāj goes on to provide a series of interpretations of it, including those of the famous exponent of "sober" Sufism, al-Junayd (d. 297/910). Both al-Sarrāj and al-Junayd seek to defend al-Bisṭāmī's experience from the attacks of Sufi and non-Sufi critics. For our purposes, what is important about the anecdote is to observe how al-Bisṭāmī's experience of ascension shares both key similarities (traveling to the upper realm, arriving at the heavenly tree) and key differences (transformation into a bird, symbolic interpretation of elements such as "body of oneness" and "tree of unity") with Muḥammad's *miʿrāj*. Al-Sarrāj continues the process of taking exoteric elements of the story and substituting them with an esoteric mystical content. For instance, when al-Bisṭāmī talks about becoming a bird that flies into the heavens, al-Sarrāj understands that "the meaning he was alluding to is the loftiness of aspirations (*himam*) and the flight of the heart" (al-Sarrāj, 465; Sells, 220). That is, for al-Sarrāj, al-Bisṭāmī's journey should not be understood as taking place physically, but rather as pointing to mystical states and realities. When al-Bisṭāmī comes to the awareness that the elements of the journey were nothing more than "a cheat," al-Sarrāj similarly unpacks this phrase by explaining that "its meaning—and God knows best—is that the turning to and preoccupation with the observation of existence (*al-kawn*) and divine dominion (*al-mamlaka*) is a cheat next to the existence of the realities of *tafrīd* (affirmation of divine singularity) and the stripping bare of *tawḥīd* (affirmation of divine oneness)" (al-Sarrāj, 466; Sells, 222, trans. slightly adapted above). One main lesson that Sufis might glean from this recounting of al-Bisṭāmī's journey, as al-Sarrāj understands it, is not to focus on the wonders of creation in the heavens or the earth but instead to come to a greater realization of the truth of God's oneness, through a deeper mystical understanding of this central Muslim doctrine that this anecdote portrays Abū Yazīd as achieving at the culmination of

his ascent. There are a series of commentaries on this early anecdotal version of al-Bisṭāmī's visionary ascent that, when studied together, convey a sense of the development of Sufi thought on this narrative in subsequent centuries (see especially Hujwīrī, 238; and Rūzbihān's commentary discussed in Ernst, 98–9, 161–7). For al-Sarrāj, this brief account of al-Bisṭāmī's ascension helps to teach less about cosmology and more about the Sufi concept of focusing on God alone, leaving behind the distractions of the created universe in order to cultivate a mystical knowledge of the divinity.

This very idea was expanded and developed in a later Arabic version of al-Bisṭāmī's ascension that has only been preserved in a pair of Indian manuscripts that contain an anonymous text entitled *The Quest to God* (*al-Qaṣd ilā Allāh*). Its ninth chapter claims to transmit the story of al-Bisṭāmī's journey through the heavens as recorded by one Abū l-Qāsim al-ʿĀrif, presumably alluding to the famous Abū l-Qāsim al-Junayd (the same as discussed in al-Sarrāj with reference to al-Bisṭāmī's ascension), but this version is much more developed and likely "considerably later" (Sells, 242). Regardless of its precise authorship or dating, this fascinating text (Arabic in Nicholson, 402–15; trans. Sells, 244–50) depicts a long dream with elements that parallel reports of Muḥammad's ascension, especially in some of the Ibn ʿAbbās versions, and also parallel some of the elements from Hebrew accounts of Enoch's ascent (Sells, 242, 357–8 [##65–6]). In his dream, al-Bisṭāmī sees himself ascending from the first through the seventh heaven and beyond (now in the form of a bird, as in the previous saying) through *malakūt*, *jabarūt*, and past seas, curtains, and thrones. At each stage he is offered gifts and kingdoms by the angelic guardians, but time and time again he refuses to be tempted, realizing that each was a test, and proclaiming to God, "My goal is other than what you are showing me" (Sells, 244–50). At the climax of this long dream vision, after proving the singularity of his aspiration to reach the divine, yet another mystical transformation takes place:

> [The divinity] called out, "… You are my chosen one, my beloved, and the best of my creatures." Upon hearing that, it was as if I were melting like melting lead. Then he gave me a drink from the spring of graciousness with the cup of intimacy. Then he brought me to a state that I am unable to describe. Then he brought me closer and closer to him until I was nearer to him than the spirit is to the body. Then the spirit of each prophet received me…. I kept on this way until I was like he was before creation and only the real remained without being or relation or place or position or quality.
>
> SELLS, 249

This remarkable narrative apparently did not circulate widely in the early period, for al-Sarrāj and other Sufis of the fourth/tenth century would undoubtedly have made reference to it had it been known to them. Nevertheless, this narrative's importance to our understanding of Muslim mystical otherworldly journeys centers on the way that it combines elements from a report of Muḥammad's *miʿrāj* together with elements from al-Bisṭāmī's ecstatic sayings, the result being a narrative that highlights some key values of early Sufis (El-Azma, 95), including the aspirant's sincere focus on God alone (as witnessed in the al-Sarrāj anecdote and also here in the repeated refusal to accept any gift or station other than God's presence) and the passing away (*fanāʾ*) of the ego self into the abiding oneness of the divinity.

This last idea comes to the fore in an intriguing way in a brief anecdote from one of the biographies of al-Bisṭāmī that describes how one of his female followers went on an otherworldly journey in search of him:

> Abū Mūsā [al-Daybūlī] said: There was in Khurasan a woman of royal descent who renounced the world, practicing austerity and following the way of Abū Yazīd [al-Bisṭāmī].... She was his devoted follower and thought constantly of him.... Once she was asked: "Tell of a favor God has bestowed on you!" She replied, "I was recalling Abū Yazīd's signs of grace, and I asked the Lord that he would show me him in the hidden world. And while I asked him, in the same night I was taken up into heaven, in an ascent of perception, until I passed beyond the seventh sphere and came to the Throne. I was summoned, 'Draw near ... drawn near!' I came finally to the Throne and penetrated the veils; there I was called, 'Approach me!' Then I rent the veils and came to a place where my sight left me, and I saw God purely through his own deed, regarding his creation. I said to him who was with me, 'Where is Abū Yazīd?' He said, 'Abū Yazīd is before you.' And he gave me wings with which I might fly. My state of annihilation, accompanying me, was replaced by the emergence of godhead, until he took me through him, that is to say not him through me, until he achieved a union which is, without a hint of aught else, that union that gives no sign of any created work when such oblivion is met with. Afterwards [I walked] on the carpet of the Essence of the Truth, hence I was asked, 'At what are you aiming, while this is Abū Yazīd?' I was then taken to a green garden ... I said, 'O! That is Abū Yazid!' He said, 'This place is Abū Yazīd's, but Abū Yazīd is searching for his self but will not find it.'"
>
> SAHLAJĪ, 123, quoted in SAMARRAI, 194–5

The confusion experienced by this ascending mystic is understandable, for in a state of annihilation (*fanāʾ*) in the approach to mystical union, both everything and nothing is Abū Yazīd. At the point that such anecdotes circulated, Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī was both a paradigmatic representative of the idea of Sufi mystical ascent and also a symbol that could be deployed pedagogically for later mystics.

3 Rūzbihān al-Baqlī's Ascensions

When it comes to visionary ascension experiences of Sufis, few approach the number and complexity of those associated with Rūzbihān al-Baqlī (d. 606/1209), a towering visionary mystic from Shiraz. During his near daily visionary experiences, "the ascension functioned as a resource available at any moment" (Ernst, 101), and was for him a theme that signaled an initiation into sainthood (Ballanfat, 277). In his visionary autobiography, *The Unveiling of Secrets*, we find record of "the ascents and descents that Rūzbihān experienced in his prayers and meditations, typically during night-time vigil or at dawn. These are modeled on the example of the Prophet Muḥammad but seen in the Bisṭāmīan fashion" (Ernst, 101). The accounts of his visions in this spiritual autobiography tend to be fairly brief, although a noteworthy exception comes in one of his first otherworldly visions that has a truly initiatic character and bears intriguing comparisons to the dream ascension of al-Bisṭāmī:

> I saw all of humanity in a house holding a feast, with many lamps among them, though it was day. I could not reach them, so I went on the roof of the house, and I saw two handsome shaykhs in Sufi dress, who looked like me. I saw a kettle suspended in the air, and the firewood of the two shaykhs burned with a subtle burning, without smoke. I saw a tablecloth hanging from their tent. I greeted them, and they faced me and smiled … One of them took his tablecloth and opened it up, and on the tablecloth was a lovely bowl and some loaves of pure white bread. He broke some of the loaves in the bowl and upended over the bowl the contents of the kettle, which was like a pale oil … He gestured to me, indicating that I should eat, so I ate some. They ate a little with me, until I ate it all. One of them said, "Don't you know what was in the kettle?" I said, "I do not know." He said, "This is the oil of the [constellation] Little Bear; we got it for you …" Then later I turned toward the constellation of the Little Bear, and I saw that the stars were seven windows, from all of which God most high

manifested to me. I said, "My God! What is this?" God, who transcends every imagination, said, "These are the seven windows of the throne."

Time passed, and I was thinking about them every night, from love and longing for them. One night I saw that they were opened. I saw the Truth, who is glorious and transcendent, appearing from them, saying, "I appeared to you from these windows; these windows are seventy thousand gates to the great world of *Malakūt*. I manifested myself to you from all of them—understand that." I passed with my conscience through the regions of the created, and my spirit ascended to the heavens. I saw in every heaven the angels of God most high, but I passed them by until I reached the presence. I saw that his creations, the angels, were greater than his creatures on earth; they were performing prayer, witnessing the nearness of the Truth, with voices thundering his praise. Then I rose up to the world of shining light to ask about it, and I was told that this world is called the throne. I trembled through an atmosphere without dimension, until I reached the doors of eternity. There I saw deserts and oceans; I was being annihilated, I was bewildered, vanishing, astonished, not knowing from where the Truth appeared, for there was no where or whence (*lā ayn wā-lā hayth*).

He manifested himself to me in the form of eternity, from the dawns of the beginning, saying to me, "I traveled to you from the hidden of the hidden, and the hidden of the hidden; between you and me was a journey of seven hundred thousand years." He addressed me lovingly and was kind to me and compassionate to me. He said, "I have chosen you in your time for this station over all creatures." He unveiled the holy virtues and the chosen attributes of pre-eternity. I saw a beauty in majesty, and a majesty in beauty, which I will never be able to describe. One of the things he bequeathed to me was that perfect love and special knowledge. He placed me before him, and he appeared each moment with a thousand kinds of glory, brilliance, light, and radiance.

RŪZBIHĀN, trans. ERNST, 15–17; see further the Arabic text in PAPAN-MATIN, 12–14; French trans. BALLANFAT, 274–5

Notice how in this vision, as in al-Bisṭāmī's dream ascent, Rūzbihān's mystical passing away (*fanā'*) precedes his final entry into the divine presence and the revelation of his chosen status.

One noteworthy characteristic of Rūzbihān's visionary ascents is the way that in a number of them the divinity repeatedly appears to him and hides from him in rapid succession. The following examples illustrate this point.

> … Now one night it happened that I was sitting on the bench in my house, in the middle of the latter part of the night, in a state of meditation. My thoughts observed the throng of unveilings, and the appearance of the pennants of the world of [*malakūt*]. I was gazing with the eyes of conscience at the beings illuminated by the attributes. I gazed around the hidden heavens until an hour passed for me. The Truth [i.e. God] appeared to me in majesty and beauty from the window of pre-eternity. I saw the joy of satisfaction in the face of eternity. He made me see the majesty and beauty, the attractiveness and glory and expansiveness that he sees. I entered into ecstasy and cried out repeatedly, annihilated in his majesty. But between us lay the deserts of the hidden, and the veils of jealousy, throughout the atmosphere of *ʿIlliyyīn* [the highest heaven]. I wanted to spend time with him … and he annihilated my conscience. I melted from the sweetness of witnessing him, and from his kindness. Then he became visible to me in another form, and he drew near to his weak slave [me, Rūzbihān], to the utmost nearness. Then he hid … Then he appeared to me from beyond the throne, in the clothing of glory and beauty … He said, "Rūzbihān! Do not shed tears at the shifting flow of the shapes of the actions, and do not doubt what you have seen; *I am I* (Q 28:30), your lord, the one, the single. You do not deserve that I should distress you in the oceans of unknowing. I am yours throughout my creation, so do not worry over anything. I shall convey you to the station of the 'vision of the visions,' and I shall seat you on the carpet of my nearness forever, without a veil."
>
> RŪZBIHĀN, trans. ERNST, 25–6; PAPAN-MATIN, 20–1

Unlike al-Bisṭāmī's being tested with dominions or other distractions, the tests Rūzbihān has to face in his visionary ascents seem primarily to manifest through the shifting forms of the divine beloved whom he witnesses. In a second and apparently later visionary ascent, Rūzbihān compares his vision of God to that of Muḥammad:

> … Most of the night passed, and I saw the Most High coming; he received me from the throne and the footstool, and he manifested himself as he did to Adam in paradise, and to Muḥammad at the *lote tree of the boundary* (Q 53:14) after the great witnessing. When I saw him in that condition, states like thunderbolts descended upon me, from the effect of the sublimities of his face. He did not hide until I passed away in him, from my pleasure in him. Then he hid and appeared suddenly in a form of

> the most perfect loveliness, beauty, and majesty. He took my tranquillity away until an hour had passed, then he seized me and set me turning in the kingdoms of the hidden….
>
> He took me while I was in a state of nearness to him, and he caused me to enter the veils of the hidden, until I was hidden from the hidden. When I departed, a moment passed. I saw myself as though I were in Shiraz, and the doors of heaven opened, until I saw the throne and the footstool. I saw the master Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad Ibn Khafīf and all the masters separating and gathering, as if they were anticipating that the Truth would summon me there. The Truth (glory be to him) manifested himself to them, and they were sighing, moaning, and crying in that moment, and all of that was from their longing for me.
>
> RŪZBIHĀN, trans. ERNST, 64–5; PAPAN-MATIN, 50–1

This visionary experience, which may well describe the visions of more than one evening, presents Rūzbihān in a mystical state of passing away (*fanāʾ*) alternating with an experience of separation. The fact that he sees his famous predecessor in Shiraz, Ibn Khafīf (d. 371/981), a Sufi known for his performance of saintly miracles, together with all the other Sufi masters at the foot of the divine throne sighing and longing for him, means that at this point of his mystical experience, not only has Rūzbihān transcended the station of all other Sufis but he has become nearly indistinguishable from the divinity in whom he passes away.

To cite one final example from Rūzbihān's spiritual diary that illustrates the way in which Rūzbihān describes a visionary ascent experience following on the general pattern of Muḥammad's *miʿrāj*, the following vision elaborates even further on specific mystical themes:

> Grace seized me and made me fly in the air of *ʿIlliyyīn*. I saw the gardens [of paradise] and those who reside there, and the dwellers in the presence, who have the bodies of angels. I saw the Prophet Muḥammad with all the other prophets, with the appearance of Sufi masters, whose hair and moustaches were of snowy white, with white garments and white head scarves. They were calm, settled, and dispersed through the deserts of utmost *ʿIlliyyīn*, each one of them facing the divine might from his station, moving toward it. I was in the dress of a youth with a robe, wearing a hat, with my hair in two long tresses. In my hands was a lute, and I was facing the Truth. I saw a group of my own masters sitting on their prayer carpets, including Junayd, Ruwaym, and Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī, with a group of masters facing toward the presence of God most high. Junayd

> amidst the Sufis was like a full moon among the stars. Then I saw a group that had come from beyond the garden. When I looked at them, I saw my masters and companions. Then a crier called, "These are the people of my district."
>
> I traveled to the door of the presence, and the Truth appeared to me, facing me with his majesty and power. I saw greatness, magnificence, majesty, power, divine presence, and glory, with creation and time set in their midst. Then I saw a purse in which were things like mustard seeds, and I did not know what it was. A call came in my conscience: "These things are the throne and footstool and the gardens, and all creation from the throne to the earth, in the deserts of the hidden, crumbled and split up, small as the head of a pin." I remained astonished, without knowledge, heart, or spirit …
>
> RŪZBIHĀN, trans. ERNST, 81; PAPAN-MATIN, 65

In this vision, Rūzbihān traverses the highest realms, witnessing the prophets and the most exalted of his Sufi predecessors (the figure of al-Junayd appearing in the vision as the highest among them; compare a later vision in which al-Junayd and al-Bisṭāmī seem to enjoy that status together, although none ascend as high as Rūzbihān himself: Rūzbihān, trans. Ernst, 106; Papan-Matin, 88), and arriving finally into the divine presence. Here he receives a type of revelation showing him that the heavenly realms that he took to be immense and awesome were in truth nothing but the size of mustard seed or the head of a pin. This perspective shift causes Rūzbihān considerable astonishment, and it foreshadows his mystical experience of the following morning in which he questions God about the reason for his wife's death: "You took her and left me wild," Rūzbihān says. God replies to him in an intimate fashion, even addressing him in his native Persian language in this case, making it clear that the time had not yet come for him to be shown all around *malakūt* and caused to dwell therein, a condition that would signify his bodily death (Rūzbihān, trans. Ernst, 82; Papan-Matin, 66).

In his study of Rūzbihān's mystical autobiography, Ernst states that "it is undeniable that some of Rūzbihān's key metaphors, figures of speech, and themes occur prominently in Abū Yazīd's [i.e. al-Bisṭāmī's] ascension" (Ernst, 100). The idea of the perspective shift that appears in this last example, where even the largest of the heavenly realms and created things appearing no larger than a mustard seed to the aspiring mystic, is a good case in point. In addition, other elements are drawn from different *ḥadīth* reports transmitting diverse accounts of Muḥammad's ascent. Nevertheless, yet many other details cannot be traced so easily. The striking descriptions of God descending from on high

to reveal himself to Rūzbihān on earth, for instance, do not appear in either of these previous narratives.

4 Muḥyī l-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī's Ascensions

In his magnum opus *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, perhaps the most famous Sufi in the western Arabic tradition, Muḥyī l-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), states: "The ascensions of the friends of God are ascensions of spirits, the vision of hearts, liminal forms, and embodied spiritual realities" (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, ch. 367, 3:343). As was the position of al-Qushayrī and other Sufis from the previous centuries, Ibn al-ʿArabī affirms that the physical ascension serves to distinguish Muḥammad from the rest of humanity, for the spiritual journey describes how the friends of God—the Sufi saints—also experienced otherworldly journeys. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, Muḥammad was taken on a night journey on thirty-four separate occasions, only one of them being in his bodily state, the rest being "in his spirit, through a vision he was shown" (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, ch. 367, 3:342). This idea of Muḥammad having multiple night journeys over the course of his prophetic career did not gain wide acceptance, at least not among other mainstream Sunnī scholars. Apparently, Ibn al-ʿArabī's own visionary ascensions were similarly multiple in number, and his several works treating these experiences take different forms.

His earliest full work on the subject, *Kitāb al-isrāʾ* (*The Book of the Night Journey*), was the product of a visionary experience said to have taken place in Fez in the year 594/1198. Al-Ḥakīm has produced a critical edition of this work, but more scholarly studies of it (adding to the preliminary studies by scholars such as Chodkiewicz, Morris, and Wronecka) are needed. Some remarks will be given about its structure below, after the four other major passages where Ibn al-ʿArabī treats the theme of ascension are described more briefly.

First, of special interest among these is *Risālat al-anwār* (*The Treatise of Lights*), which offers a practical guide of ascending through the various stages by means of the focused practice of the ritual of remembrance (*dhikr*; Chodkiewicz, ch. 10; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Risālat al-anwār*, 9ff. [trans. 36ff.]). Only a small portion of this treatise is dedicated to the theme of ascension, but it is intriguing to notice how the idea of a spiritual retreat and fasting are connected here to the possibility of a heavenly ascent, similar to what one finds alluded to in the medieval Jewish ascension text, *Hekhalot Zutrati*. Second, in the 167th chapter of *Futūḥāt*, entitled "On Gnosis and the Alchemy of Happiness," Ibn al-ʿArabī offers a more complex exploration of the stages of ascension as mapped onto the different realms of the universe as explored by the follower

of the prophetic path, together with a philosopher figure called *Ṣāḥib al-naẓar*, "Person of the Rational/Philosophical Consideration [Gaze]" (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2:270–84; see also Ibn al-ʿArabī, *L'Alchimie*). The philosopher only is able to ascend so far, leaving the mystic "follower of the Prophet" to ascend without him beyond the seventh heaven. Third, the version most closely following the model of a canonical Sunnī *ḥadīth* reports of Muḥammad's ascent, and perhaps one of the most accessible versions for the modern reader, appears in the 367th chapter of *Futūḥāt*, "Concerning the Gnosis of the Stage of the Fifth Trust-in-God" (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 3:340–54; Morris, passim). This extended passage is significant in that it includes Ibn al-ʿArabī's own ascension account described in the first person, and the way it connects each of the seven heavens to a particular planet (a feature that appears only rarely in Sufi ascension narratives; for another example that links the planets and the seven heavens, see Ayesha Irani's study of a Bengali Sufi ascension attributed to Saiyad Sultān). If this autobiographical account from chapter 367 builds on a *ḥadīth* from *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, one of the latest versions of Ibn al-ʿArabī's discussion of the ascension draws most on the non-canonical Ibn ʿAbbās ascension narratives, appearing in a short independent work attributed to him—not without controversy—known as *Shajarat al-kawn* (*The Tree of Existence*; see translations by, among others, Gloton; Jeffrey). After describing the varieties of otherworldly trees in part one of this work, in part two Ibn al-ʿArabī goes on to outline the stages of Muḥammad's heavenly journey on a series of "steeds," carrying him ultimately up to the divine throne and his intimate colloquy with God.

Other scholars have examined the above texts in some detail, and it is beyond the scope of this chapter to reiterate their conclusions. At this point the reader would be advised to consult their studies, beginning in English especially with those of Chodkiewicz and Morris. For the purposes of illustrating one of the ways that Ibn al-ʿArabī makes use of the theme of ascension, we shall now offer a brief survey of a work that has received comparatively less scholarly attention by Western scholars, despite its importance, namely, his *Kitāb al-isrāʾ*, the *Book of the Night Journey.*

Ibn al-ʿArabī's *Kitāb al-isrāʾ* offers an allegorical and mystical reading of key aspects of the Prophet's ascension experience, from the point of view of the dream of an unnamed aspirant referred to as "the traveler" (*al-sālik*), which we come to understand is none other than Ibn al-ʿArabī himself, a fact he mentions explicitly elsewhere (see the reference in Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 3:343; Morris, 639). The poetical and other rhetorical features of this longer stand-alone treatise, however, suggest that it was written in a deliberately literary fashion as a youthful conceit (al-Ḥakīm, introduction to Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-isrāʾ*, 34–5). This being said, the author nevertheless presents fairly sophisticated mystical

concepts in the book, anticipating in nascent fashion many of the ideas that he develops further in the *Futūḥāt* and other later works (Morris, 632). As he makes plain near the outset, *Kitāb al-isrāʾ* was written to uncover naked truths through an ascension of the spirits (*miʿrāj al-arwāḥ*). In other words, it describes not a physical or bodily ascension as Muḥammad experienced, but rather a spiritual and inward ascension into mysteries through the vision of the heart (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-isrāʾ*, 53).

The first section of the work is divided into six separate chapters, the first four of which deal with preliminaries to the spiritual ascension. It opens with a chapter on the "journey of the heart (*safar al-qalb*)" in which the traveler first "leaves the country of al-Andalus seeking Jerusalem"—perhaps alluding to Ibn al-ʿArabī's own actual journey away from his home in the Iberian Peninsula—and soon after meets a spiritual "youth" (*fatā*), who reveals himself as the embodiment of the Qurʾān (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-isrāʾ*, 57–8). Not long after, the traveler receives a visit from the "messenger of success" (*rasūl al-tawfīq*), an epithet for the role played by Gabriel in this version of the ascension narrative, who breaks through the roof of the traveler's house in a manner found in one famous *ḥadīth* of Muḥammad's ascension. Demonstrating Ibn al-ʿArabī's approach to such reports in this work, he offers an allegorical interpretation of the experience here, understanding the angel's "breaking through" as indicating the traveler's own "demolition" and "unbinding" that occurs at the outset of the journey (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-isrāʾ*, 68).

This type of mystical allegorization appears throughout the work. For instance, once the traveler's breast is washed and filled with the abstract qualities of *tawḥīd* (affirmation of oneness) and *tafrīd* (affirmation of singularity), the chest gets stitched up with the "needle of intimacy" (*minsahat al-uns*). He gets dressed not just with a belt or robe, but with "the robe of love" (*thawb al-maḥabba*). He is introduced not just to the miraculous steed Burāq, but to "the Burāq of proximity" (*burāq al-qurba*) (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-isrāʾ*, 69). Such examples could be multiplied many times over. Ibn al-ʿArabī's version of the horizontal night journey comes to an end with the traveler praying in Jerusalem on his own, doffing his sandals on ascending into the heavens, a symbol that in the Qurʾān evokes God's telling Moses what to do in recognition of the sacred ground he is entering (Q 20:11–12), but which here in our author's view symbolizes the traveler leaving behind the bodily sphere entirely as his spirit rises into the celestial and higher otherworldly spheres.

In part two of *Kitāb al-isrāʾ*, the traveler ascends through the seven levels of the heavens, parallel to the journey depicted in Muḥammad's *miʿrāj*. In the order that comes to be standard in the *ḥadīth* of Muḥammad's ascent, he meets Adam in the first heaven, Jesus in the second (here called by his title

al-masīḥ, "the Messiah," with no mention of John the Baptist who usually accompanies him in mainstream *miʿrāj* accounts), Joseph in the third, Idrīs/Enoch in the fourth, Aaron in the fifth, Moses in the sixth, and Abraham in the seventh heaven. Along with the prophets the traveler meets, in *Kitāb al-isrāʾ* Ibn al-ʿArabī identifies each heaven with a particular quality: (1) The Heaven of Ministry (*al-wizāra*); (2) The Heaven of Writing (*al-kitāba*); (3) The Heaven of Witnessing (*al-shahāda*); (4) The Heaven of Commanding (*al-imāra*); (5) The Heaven of Policing (*al-shurṭa*); (6) The Heaven of Judging (*al-quḍāt*); (7) The Heaven of Providential Care (*al-ʿināya*). Any connection between the titles of these heavens and the prophets residing in them remains speculative, for the author does not explain the logic in the schema described here. Angels are rarely seen in any of these lower heavens, and few of the conversations between each prophet and the mystical traveler follow any typical pattern, aside from the fact that Adam is found passing initial judgment over the shades of the recently departed, sending one group toward the Garden and the other group toward the Fire, crying out with joy in the first instance and with tears of sorrow in the second, as depicted in some *ḥadīth* reports. Still, one sees the beginnings of an idea in *Kitāb al-isrāʾ* that Ibn al-ʿArabī develops much further in his later works where each prophet comes to represent or instruct about some aspect of the divinity (manifesting the divine names). For example, the traveler comes to interpret Adam's separating the souls/shades into two camps, as an esoteric allusion to the two states of existence: one type of the departed souls standing for "being," and the other type standing for "non-being." The narrative shows Adam bringing together and disbursing both groups, which evokes the idea of Adam's role as the "polishing of the mirror" as described in the crucial passage from the opening chapter of the author's *Bezels of Wisdom*. Moreover, Adam's response to each of the two sides alternates between the cry of majesty (*al-jalāl*) and the cry of beauty (*al-jamāl*). Thus Ibn al-ʿArabī, in interpreting this ascension scene as a mystical allegory, suggests that just as Adam plays this "ministerial" role of bringing together, classifying, and dismissing departing souls, he also reflects in this same function an expression of these two divine attributes, divine beauty and divine majesty, names that come to be associated with God's mercy and wrath (*Kitāb al-isrāʾ*, 135).

As he gets closer to the climax of the ascension, when passing the divine footstool and hearing the "scratching of the pens in the tablet of the erasure in eternity," a man known as the *quṭb* (axial saint or "pole") of the *sharīʿa* says to the traveler,

> If you did not see anything, you have seen. If you did not hear anything, you have heard. When the secret of the veil has been lifted, and when the

> pair unites as single (*al-watr*), that is he, not you. The Truth appears and you are concealed, hidden from the house and the owner of the house. He sees himself through himself, and the multitude returns to its ashes.
>
> IBN AL-ʿARABĪ, *Kitāb al-isrāʾ*, 126

Passing through the seven heavens to the level of the famous Lote Tree alluded to in Q 53:14, the Gabriel figure in Ibn al-ʿArabī's narrative is forced to stop while the ascending hero is allowed to continue:

> Then I reached the Lote Tree of the boundary and I said, "This is the limit." The generous messenger [the Gabriel figure] then recited to me, "'There is no one among us who does not have a known station' (Q 37:164), but it is necessary for you to *approach* (Q 53:8) and ascend, *draw near* (Q 53:8) and meet in the *praised station* (Q 17:79), the presence of the one witnessing and the one witnessed." I was then carried off from that exalted tree, and I was made to alight on the throne of pairing, and I learned there of the highest inheritance.
>
> IBN AL-ʿARABĪ, *Kitāb al-isrāʾ*, 137

Unlike in the standard canonical *ḥadīth* reports in which the Lote Tree marks the highest limit to which any creature can ascend, here in this Ibn al-ʿArabī account, as with the Ibn ʿAbbās ascension discourse more broadly, the highest of humanity receives the honor of transcending the limits of the Lote Tree, being taken beyond even the limit of Gabriel's ability to approach God's throne. Beyond the Lote Tree the traveler learns of the "inheritance," a reference that may relate to Ibn al-ʿArabī's idea of the axial saint as the inheritor of the Muḥammadan Reality.

Beyond this level of the throne, the traveler is said to be taken past three hundred further levels, and implicitly each of these states of divine "presence" (*ḥaḍra*) carries with it the temptation to turn aside from the path: "I mounted the backs of *rafraf*s [here understood as otherworldly steeds, but in some Ibn ʿAbbās reports and elsewhere depicted as flying cushions or carpets, usually green in color, that convey the ascending hero the rest of the way] and passed three hundred [states of] presence, but did not gaze nor glance at any of them" (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-isrāʾ*, 137). This statement not only evokes the Qurʾānic passage that says of the Prophet that "his sight did not swerve" (Q 53:17) when presented with a sublime vision in his heart of the "greatest signs," but also is reminiscent of the central theme of al-Bisṭāmī's dream ascension, the turning away from all distraction and maintaining consistent focus on the divine goal throughout the journey. At the culmination of the latter, when al-Bisṭāmī

passes the final test, he "melts as lead melts" and passes away. In contrast, at this point in Ibn al-ʿArabī's description of the traveler's journey, the ascending hero hears the "scratching of the pens" writing not on some heavenly tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*) but on the internal spiritual tablets of the "hearts of the inheritors" (Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-isrāʾ*, 137). This idea underscores the internal and spiritual nature of the journey, and the way Ibn al-ʿArabī depicts the process not so much happening "out there" as within the traveler himself (cf. the end of chapter 367 in the *Futūḥāt*; Chodkiewicz, 165; Morris, 73). It is with this concept of the voice of God being inscribed in the hearts of the highest Sufis that Ibn al-ʿArabī launches into the structure that dominates in the rest of the work: a series of intimate colloquies (*munājāt*) with the divine voice speaking in and through the traveler.

Indeed, from this point until the end of *Kitāb al-isrāʾ*, Ibn al-ʿArabī's discussion shifts from being a mystical interpretation of the events of the ascension of the traveler to instead offering a series of mystical inspirations revealed through the intimate colloquies. Some earlier ascension narratives have highlighted such conversations between the divinity and the ascending hero at this apex of the ascension (Arberry; Colby, 127–48). The scope is usually more modest in these earlier narratives, however, and the structure more formulaic: there are central recurring tropes which the conversation almost invariably follows, none of which appear in Ibn al-ʿArabī's much more extensive "intimate colloquy" chapters. It is almost as if the first half of his *Kitāb al-isrāʾ* serves as a type of introduction or overture that sets up and justifies the unmediated inspired revelations that follow at the end of the work, revelations that range from mystical Qurʾān exegesis to an elaboration of Ibn al-ʿArabī's mystical doctrines, through both colloquies (*munājāt*) and question-and-answer style exchanges which he terms allusions (*ishārāt*).

While al-Bisṭāmī, Rūzbihān, and Ibn al-ʿArabī are perhaps the most well-known Sufis associated with otherworldly journeys, nevertheless were space to permit, other later Sufis who similarly were said to have ascended into the heavens could be brought into this discussion. Such figures would include—but certainly not be limited to—the North African traditionist Ibn Abī Jamra (d. ca. 699/1300; see Katz) as well as the Mughul *pir*s from the Indian subcontinent, Muḥammad Ghawth Gwāliorī (fl. 932/1526; see Kugle) and Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1034/1624; see ter Haar, 56). When considered as a theme across time and space, and when taken together with the multitude of Sufi mystical interpretations of Muḥammad's ascent, one finds a certain continuity of cosmological outlook, despite the varieties of insights that various Sufi authors explore through their discourses. This consistent outlook mirrors the consistency of Muslim cosmological models more generally (Akkach, 3).

Sufi visionaries from diverse cultural contexts, drawing on descriptions of Muḥammad's *miʿrāj* from Qurʾān commentaries, *ḥadīth* reports, and oral tradition, repeatedly describe the universe as consisting of seven heavens above the earth (which these visionaries only infrequently associate with the seven planetary spheres), a Lote Tree of the boundary, realms of otherworldly pleasure and torment associated with the Garden and the Fire, and often further upperworldly locations. Even though the Lote Tree represents a final boundary in some of the mainstream non-mystical ascension narratives, most Sufi accounts follow the non-canonical Ibn ʿAbbās model of seeing it as a barrier but not an insurmountable one for Muḥammad and the most select of his saintly followers. These elect are said to be able to penetrate higher realms (associated with names such as *malakūt*, *jabarūt*, or *ʿIlliyīn*), past seas, veils, and other barriers, finally to reach the divine throne and the presence of God. They blaze a mystical path through otherworldly realities that a number of later Sufis recount and praise, and some even attempt to follow.

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