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### The exoteric vicegerency (Khilafat al-Zahir) in the thought of Shaykh Muhyi 'L-din ibn al-Arabi

Maha Abdel Megid Maamoun

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**THE EXOTERIC VICEGERENCY  
(KHILAFAT AL-ZAHIR)  
IN THE THOUGHT OF SHAYKH  
MUHYI 'L-DIN IBN AL-'ARABI**

**MAHA ABDEL MEGID MAAMOUN**

**2001**



2001/13

THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO  
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

THE EXOTERIC VICEGERENCY (Khilafat al-zahir)  
IN THE THOUGHT OF SHAYKH MUHYI 'L-DIN IBN AL-<sup>c</sup> ARABI

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
DEPARTMENT OF ARABIC STUDIES  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR  
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN  
MIDDLE EASTERN HISTORY

BY  
MAHA ABDEL MEGID MAAMOUN

JANUARY 2001



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THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO  
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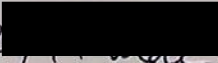
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR  
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## Introduction:

Though one of the main subjects in the history of Muslim thought, the issue of political authority, or the Imamate, has rarely been considered to be one of the subjects which concern Sufis, who are commonly viewed as focusing on purely spiritual goals and to have no input or interest in political issues. Despite this widespread perception of the Sufi approach, writers frequently comment on Sufis' attitudes towards historical political authorities, and often vary in their assessment of Sufi behavior, as supportive of or hostile to the holders of political power.<sup>1</sup> Disagreement on the Sufi position towards political authority (and activity) is linked to a wider disagreement on the Sufi stance with respect to the laws of the *shari'ah*. It should be born in mind that the holders of political authority in Islam have religious duties and rights that are defined by the *shari'ah*. The Qur'an and hadith enjoin Muslims to obey, counsel, and support those in charge of their affairs (*ulu al-amr*). Hence, the position of Sufis, as Muslims, towards the state and its representatives is inevitably connected to, or derived from, the ordinances of the *shari'ah*. Writers who present Sufis' attitude towards political authority as one of disdain or indifference tend to believe the same thing with respect to Sufis' attitude towards the *shari'ah*, despite the numerous studies that have elucidated the centrality of the *shari'ah* in the thought and practice of some of the leading Sufis.<sup>2</sup> To neglect Sufi views on the place and role of

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<sup>1</sup> See, for e.g., 'Ammar A. Hassan. *Al-Sufiyya wa al-Siyasa fi Misr*. Cairo: al-Mahrusa, 1997; M. Jamil Ghazi. *Al-Sufiyya wa al-Wajh al-Akhar*. Cairo: al-Markaz al-Islami al-'Amm li-Du'at al-Tawhid wa al-Sunna, 1980. Michel Chodkiewicz. "The Esoteric Foundations of Political Legitimacy in Ibn 'Arabi." *Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi: A commemorative Volume*. Shaftesbury: Element, for Ibn 'Arabi Society (1993).

<sup>2</sup> See, for e.g., Michel Chodkiewicz. *An Ocean without Shore - Ibn 'Arabi, the Book and the Law*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.



temporal authority is to reinforce the assumption that all Sufis are detached from matters of this world. Moreover, such neglect tends to accentuate the perceived polarity between exoteric (*zahir*) and esoteric (*batin*), *shari'ah* (in the sense of revealed Law) and *haqiqa* (spiritual truth), whereas in Sufi belief they are closely interrelated. The result is to exaggerate the apparent exoticism of Sufis with respect to other Muslim groups whose positions on the question of the Imamate, are clearly presented, whereas the Sufis are made to appear silent. Hence the importance of understanding the place of the *shari'ah* in Sufi thought, and of studying the beliefs and attitudes of leading Sufis regarding political authority and its representatives.

One of the most prominent and influential Sufi masters is Shaykh Muhyi al-Din Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi (560/1165 - 638/1240), widely known as the Shaykh al-Akbar. His writings have influenced and continue to influence both Sufi and anti-Sufi thought, making him one of the most important writers in the Islamic literary tradition. Probably more than any other Sufi Shaykh, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's conformity to the *shari'ah* has been greatly contested, yet is being increasingly revealed in recent scholarship.<sup>3</sup> Connected to his position towards the *shari'ah* is his position towards political authority. As yet, very few studies have dealt with this aspect of the Shaykh's life and thought.

Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi lived in a time of great political instability in the Islamic territories from East to West. In the central Islamic lands, the Shi'i Fatimid empire was in chaos, and was finally replaced by the Sunni Ayyubid rule. Syria and Egypt were exposed to new Crusade

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<sup>3</sup> See, for e.g., William C. Chittick. *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989. Michel Chodkiewicz. *An Ocean without Shore - Ibn <sup>c</sup>Arabi, the Book and the Law*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.



attacks, and the Mongols grew in power and posed an increasing threat. In the West, the Almohads (*al-Muwahhidun*) had succeeded in consolidating their power and ending the rule of the Almoravids (*al-Murabitun*). They, nevertheless, faced the threat of the Christian Reconquest from north of their territories, the menacing Arab tribes from the center and east, and pockets of Almoravid and Almohad dissidents from within.<sup>4</sup>

During those troubled times, Ibn al-ʿArabi was born and lived his early childhood in Murcia - Eastern Andalusia, which was one of the last regions to submit to the Almohads. Ibn Mardanish, the ruler of Murcia at the time, employed large forces of Christian mercenaries, and established close relations with the kings of the northern Christian kingdoms, to resist the Almohad conquest till the year 567/1172.<sup>5</sup> Ibn al-ʿArabi's father (d. c. 1194) was apparently a high ranking official in Ibn Mardanish's government.<sup>6</sup> He later joined the service of the Almohad Abu Yaʿqub Yusuf I (r. 1163-1184) and his successor Abu Yusuf Yaʿqub al-Mansur (r. 1184-1199).<sup>7</sup> In his quest for learning, Ibn al-ʿArabi spent the first half of his life travelling extensively in the Muslim West between Andalusia and North Africa. It was not until 598/1201 that he left permanently for the East, travelling across North Africa to al-Hijaz in the south, to as far north as Konya in Anatolia in the north. He finally settled in Syria in 620/1223 where he lived until his death in 638/1240.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> C. E. Bosworth. *The Islamic Dynasties; a Chronological and Genealogical Handbook*. Edinburgh: University Press, 1967.

<sup>5</sup> Despite the notorious depictions of Ibn Mardanish in the sources, Ibn al-ʿArabi mentions him in passing without criticism in two autobiographical notes.

<sup>6</sup> Claude ʿAddas. *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn ʿArabi*. Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993, p. 18; Chodkiewicz, p. 190.

<sup>7</sup> ʿAddas, p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> ʿAddas, pp. 296-310.



Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's extensive travelling, and increased prominence as master of the religious and spiritual sciences, brought him in contact with several of the Muslim rulers of the time, of whom he names: the Almohad Abu Yusuf Ya<sup>c</sup>qub (r.1184-1199), the Ayyubid al-Malik al-Zahir Ghazi of Aleppo (r.1186-1216), al-Malik al-<sup>c</sup>Adil of Egypt (r.1200-1218), Damascus (r.1196-1218) and Aleppo (r.1183-1186), al-Malik al-Ashraf Muzaffar al-Din of Damascus (r.1229-1237) and Diyar Bakr (r.1210-1220), and the Seljuk Kay Ka'us I of Rum (r.1211-1220). Yet Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi gives us very little information on his relationship with these rulers. The information that he presents hardly exceeds his mention of his refusal of the Almohad Caliph al-Mansur's offer to appoint him<sup>9</sup> and, later on, to marry off the Shaykh's sisters,<sup>10</sup> his refusal to accept the food sent to him by the ruler of Ceuta,<sup>11</sup> the esteem bestowed on him by the governor of Tunis,<sup>12</sup> the favorable relationship he kept with al-Malik al-Zahir who apparently frequented the Shaykh and yielded to his intercession on behalf of the people,<sup>13</sup> his appreciation of al-Malik al-<sup>c</sup>Adil's possession of the praiseworthy quality of humility and playfulness with children which he noted while in his court one day,<sup>14</sup> his granting an *ijaza* to al-Malik al-Ashraf Muzaffar al-Din, and his advisory correspondance with the Seljuk Kayka'us I.<sup>15</sup> It is often from this little information that Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's political perspective is mainly understood.

<sup>9</sup> <sup>c</sup>Addas, pp. 147-8.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> <sup>c</sup>Addas, pp. 165-6.

<sup>12</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, *al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyya*. Bulaq, 1876, vol. IV, p. 634.

<sup>13</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 699.

<sup>14</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 288.

<sup>15</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, *Muhadarat al-Abrar wa Musamarat al-Akhyar fi al-Adabiyyat wa al-Nawadir wa al-Akhbar*. Damascus: Dar al-Yaqaza, 1968, pp. 454-7; *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 692, *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, pp. 710-1.



Of the many studies done on Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi, the four that, to my knowledge, address Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi's relationship with the political rulers and the place given to political authority in his spiritual worldview are those by: Miguel Asin Palacios,<sup>16</sup> in which he studies the Shaykh's life and doctrine, making a few remarks on Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi's relationship with the rulers of his time; Claude Addas,<sup>17</sup> whose valuable biography of the Shaykh addresses, amongst other issues, Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi's relationship with his contemporary rulers, and attempts to understand this somewhat unclear relationship by studying Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi's life in light of his thought; Masataka Takeshita,<sup>18</sup> who does not directly address Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi's position towards political authority and its holders but whose discussion of Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi's doctrine of the Perfect Man and man's vicegerency of God on Earth is pertinent; and Michel Chodkiewicz,<sup>19</sup> whose brief article is the only study completely devoted to the issue of political authority in Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi's thought, and the most accurate, in my opinion, among the few studies that touched upon this issue. The first two studies answer the question of Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi's position with respect to political authority and its representatives mainly by making use of the Shaykh's autobiographical notes on his relationship with the contemporary rulers. This approach, however, throws light on only one facet of the Shaykh al-Akbar's political views, that is, his relationship to these rulers or his presumed views on the subject-ruler relationship in general, without giving due

<sup>16</sup> Miguel Asin Palacios. *Ibn 'Arabi: Hayatuhu wa Madhabahu*. Tr. Abd al-Rahman Badawi. Kuwait: Wakalat al-Matbu'at, 1979.

<sup>17</sup> Claude Addas. *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn 'Arabi*. Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993.

<sup>18</sup> Masataka Takeshita. *Ibn 'Arabi's Theory of the Perfect Man*. Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1987.

<sup>19</sup> Michel Chodkiewicz. "The Esoteric Foundations of Political Legitimacy in Ibn 'Arabi." *Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi: A commemorative Volume*. Shaftesbury: Element, for Ibn 'Arabi Society (1993) pp. 190-198.



attention to the relevant material found in Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi's works concerning the role and place of the vicegerency of God (*khilafa*) in his spiritual worldview. This is the case even in those secondary sources which concede the importance of studying the Shaykh's life in relation to his thought. Chodkiewicz, on the other hand, addresses the question of political authority by studying the place of the ruler in Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi's spiritual world-order, and his relationship to the Pole (*al-qutb*), or the spiritual ruler. His article does not however present Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi's position on the various questions raised in literature on the Imamate, such as: the method of selecting the ruler, or whether he is infallible, or the relationship of Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi's ideas to those held by other writers on the Imamate. As for the Arabic sources on Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi which I consulted, none studied his position towards political authority. This study will therefore attempt to investigate Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi's political views through understanding the importance of the role and place accorded to the exoteric vicegerency (*khilafat al-zahir*) in the Shaykh's spiritual worldview. It will attempt to place them in context by comparing them to representative Sunni and Shi'i views on the Imamate. This will, in turn, inform our understanding of his behavior towards political rulers as presented by his autobiographical notes that pertain to our subject. These may be misinterpreted if they are not read in the context of his general worldview. Of the numerous works by Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi, this study consults and bases itself mainly on relevant material in his *Futihat al-Makkiyya*, *Fusus al-Hikam*, *al-Tadbirat al-Ilahiyya fi Islah al-Mamlaka al-Insaniyya*, *Muhadarat al-Abrar wa Musamarat al-Akhyar fi al-Adabiyyat wa al-Nawadir wa al-Akhbar*, *'Anqa' Mughrib fi Khatm al-Awliya' wa Shams al-Maghrib*, *Risalat Ruh al-Qudus*, *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq*, and *Istilahat al-Sufiyya*.



The first chapter of this study gives an overview of Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi's general hierarchy of *al-khilafa*, the highest rank of which is Man's vicegerency over the universe (*al-khilafa al-kubra*), while the lowest rank is man's vicegerency over his body (*al-khilafa al-sughra*). Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi's concept of *khalifat Allah* will be discussed, and how it revolves around three main concepts that are central to both the Shaykh's worldview in general and his conception of the Imamate in particular. These are "creation upon the Image," "knowledge of the Names," and "manifesting the Names." Realising these three states defines *khalifat Allah*, or the *qutb*, and differentiates him/her from the rest of the "saints" (*al-awliya'*) and from *khalifat al-zahir* when the latter is not also the *qutb*. The chapter will then proceed to define Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi's concept of *khilafat al-Rasul*, by which the Shaykh refers to inheritance of the knowledge of the Prophet. It will be shown that the *qutb*, by definition, is both a *khalifat Allah* and amongst the *khulafa' al-Rasul*, while *khalifat al-zahir* is only possibly *khalifat Allah* (in which case he is the *qutb*) or *khalifat al-rasul*.

In the second chapter, the holder of *khilafat al-zahir* (or Imamate), his qualities and the method of his appointment will be discussed in more detail. Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi's views on some of the important issues of the Imamate will be presented, particularly the necessity of the Imamate, whether it is necessary by reason or by *shari'a*, the qualifications of the *khalifa*, the question of selection of the Imam by electors versus his designation by the ruling Imam, the question of infallibility and justice, the issue of superiority in merit, the oneness of the Imam, and the different types of Laws and rulers. In order to situate Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi's thought on the Imamate within the general context of literature on the Imamate,



comparisons shall be drawn between his positions on these issues and those of some other representative writers. A thorough comparison with all the main works of Muslim political thought is obviously beyond the scope of this study. However, I have chosen for comparison some representative works on the Imamate: for the Sunni position, al-Mawardi's *al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah* will be used. As for the main stream Imami Shi'i position, Ibn al-Mutahhar al-Hilli's *Kashf al-Murad fi Sharh Tajrid al-I'tiqad*, and Miqdad-i-Fadil's commentary on Ibn al-Mutahhar's *al-Bab al-Hadi 'Ashar* will be consulted as an example of the Twelver Shi'i thought, whereas al-Qadi al-Nu'man's *Da'a'im al-Islam*, and Ibn Ya'qub's *al-Risala fi al-Imama* will be consulted as examples of Fatimid Isma'ili views. In this chapter, I will also attempt to draw comparisons and parallels between Ibn al-'Arabi's concepts of *khalifat al-zahir* and *khalifat al-batin* in order to illustrate the relationship between these two *khalifas*, and, concurrently, the relationship between the *zahir* and the *batin*, the *shari'a* and the *haqiqa*.

The third and last chapter discusses the *adab* (rules of conduct) of the subject-ruler relationship and their rationale as presented by Ibn al-'Arabi. The three main *adab* of the subjects towards the ruler are obedience, counselling (*al-nasiha*), and abstaining from reprimanding him (*'adam al-dhamm*). Ibn al-'Arabi allows accompanying (*musahabat*) rulers and approaching them to obtain a benefit (*al-sa'y 'inda al-hukkam*), although subject to certain conditions. He also allows accepting and asking money from the rulers. In the course of this presentation, Ibn al-'Arabi's own relationship with the rulers, and his adherence to the pertinent *adab* rules, which he advocates to his disciples, will be made clear.



In sum, this study will attempt to clarify the centrality of the *shari'ah*, in both its esoteric and exoteric dimensions, in the thought and world order of Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, and the function of both *khalifat al-zahir* and *khalifat al-batin* as preservers of the divine Order expressed in the Law. Finally, it will also show how Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's concept of *khalifat al-zahir* is compatible with Sunni juristic poicition.

## 1. The Term "Shari'ah"

According to the *Magnum as-Sayid al-Ashraf*,<sup>1</sup> *shari'ah* is one who is appointed by Allah as a prophet or by consensus, and one who exercises power as a guardian of the Law. The term *shari'* is also used for the chief ruler of political authority (the sultan or the caliph), while *shari'ah* is used for the Law. The *Magnum as-Sayid al-Ashraf* also states that the term *shari'* is used for the chief ruler of political authority (the sultan or the caliph), while *shari'ah* is used for the Law. The *Magnum as-Sayid al-Ashraf* also states that the term *shari'* is used for the chief ruler of political authority (the sultan or the caliph), while *shari'ah* is used for the Law.



# Chapter One

## The Vicegerency of God (*khilafat Allah*)

The concepts of vicegerency (*al-khilafa*) and vicegerent (*khalifa*) are very important concepts in Islamic thought. The recurrence of the word *khalifa* in the Qur'an, and the influence of its Qur'anic meaning on the later usage of the term in reference to the political and religious leader of the *umma* have made the concept of *al-khilafa* central in theological and juristic studies. The concept of *al-khilafa* is also central in the thought of Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi. By it he refers essentially to the vital cosmic function of man as the link between God and His creation. He also uses the term in the various senses and levels of meaning associated with it in language, the Qur'an, and in Islamic literature. Thus, in order to present Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi's concept of *al-khilafa*, it is necessary to begin with the linguistic and Qur'anic meanings that necessarily inform and influence his general and more technical usages of the term, before examining the various meanings and usages that the Shaykh employs in the works consulted here.

### 1. The Term "*khalifa*"

According to Ibn Manzur's *Lisan al-<sup>°</sup>Arab*,<sup>20</sup> a *khalifa* is one who is appointed to a place or a position by another, and one who succeeds another in a place or position. The term *khalifa* also signifies the chief holder of political authority (*al-sultan al-a<sup>°</sup>zam*), while

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<sup>20</sup> Muhammad Ibn Makram Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-<sup>°</sup>Arab*. Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi, 1988, "kh.l.f", vol. IV, pp. 182-3.



"*khulafa' Allah*" (the vicegerents of God) refers to the Imams, as deduced from the Qur'anic verse in which God appoints David as a *khalifa* on Earth (38:26). As for *al-khilafa*, it means leadership (*al-imara*) in something.

In the Qur'an, the term *khalifa* occurs twice. Its first occurrence is in reference to Adam (2:30), where God informs the angels that He shall place a *khalifa* on Earth, while the second occurrence is in the above mentioned verse referring to David (38:26). Various interpretations of the meaning of *khalifa* in these verses have been offered in Qur'anic exegesis. Three commentaries will be consulted here: al-Tabari (d.923),<sup>21</sup> al-Zamakhshari (d.1144),<sup>22</sup> and al-Baydawi (d.1286).<sup>23</sup>

In the verse of Adam, the term *khalifa* has been variously interpreted to signify: Adam, his descendants in general, those of his descendants who are prophets, or those of them who rule by God's rule (*khulafa' Allah*). In language, al-Tabari notes that *khalifa* means successor of someone in something. With respect to the meaning of the term in the verse of Adam, al-Tabari cites several of the interpretations that were given of it, and seems to favor three in particular, yet does not show clear preference for any of them. He states that the term *khalifa* in this verse may refer to: a) Adam - he was to succeed the *jinn*, his predecessors, on Earth, b) the human race in general - as one generation follows the other in inhabiting the Earth in succession to their father Adam, or c) Adam and his descendants in general or only those of them who do justice and do not cause unjust bloodshed - these

<sup>21</sup> Abu Ja'far Muhammad Ibn Jarir. *Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil al-Qur'an*. Ed. Muhammad M. Shaker. Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1954-69; Cairo: al-Matba'a al-Maymaniyya, 1900.

<sup>22</sup> Abu al-Qasim Mahmud Ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhshari. *al-Kashshaf 'an Haqa'iq Ghawamid al-Tanzil wa 'Uyun al-Aqawil fi Wujuh al-Ta'wil*. Riyadh: Maktabat al-'Abikan, 1998.

<sup>23</sup> Nasir al-Din Abu al-Khayr 'Abdallah Ibn 'Umar al-Baydawi. *Anwar al-Tanzil wa Asrar al-Ta'wil*. Cairo: al-Matba'a al-Maymaniyya, 1902.



are *khulafa'* in the sense of agents or vicegerents of God on Earth (*khulafa' Allah*) whom God has instated on Earth to rule between creation in accordance to His ruling.<sup>24</sup> *Khalifa* in this latter sense meaning deputy rather than successor. As for al-Zamakhshari, he interprets the term *khalifa* to signify Adam and his descendants as they are successors of the angels in inhabiting the Earth.<sup>25</sup> al-Baydawi, on the other hand, cites the above meanings and adds that the term refers to Adam and the prophets "since he [Adam] was *khalifat Allah* (the vicegerent of God) on His Earth, and so is every prophet; God has made them deputies (*istakhlafahum*) in the flourishing (*'imarat*) of Earth, governing (*siyasa*) of the people, perfecting (*takmil*) themselves, and executing (*tanfidh*) His command over them. This [deputyship] is not due to His need, exalt Him, for a deputy, but to the incapacity (*qusur*) of that over which He appointed a deputy to receive His bounty (*faydahu*) and His command without an intermediary."<sup>26</sup> As will become clear in this study, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's understanding of the *khalifa* revolves around much the same principles as those summarised here in al-Baydawi's interpretation.

As for the meaning of "*khalifa*" in the verse of David, it is noteworthy that emphasis is placed by the consulted commentators on *hukm*,<sup>27</sup> as a main qualification or responsibility of the *khalifa*. Whereas al-Tabari reports the term here to mean successor of the preceding prophets in the matter of judging or arbitrating between people,<sup>28</sup> al-Zamakhshari adds to

<sup>24</sup> al-Tabari, vol. I, pp. 449-52, Cairo 1954 ed.

<sup>25</sup> al-Zamakhshari, vol. I, pp. 251-2.

<sup>26</sup> al-Baydawi, vol. I, p. 35.

<sup>27</sup> The term *hukm* is understood and used to denote a wide range of meanings depending on the context. It may refer to governing control, rule, power of dispensation, the capacity to issue judgements, judgement, or arbitration.

<sup>28</sup> al-Tabari, vol. XXIII, p. 87, Cairo 1900 ed.



this the sense that the *khalifa* is a deputy of God on Earth "like those whom some of the sultans appoint as deputies over part of the lands and give governance to (*yumallikahu*)."<sup>29</sup> He adds that David is ordered in this verse to rule by *al-haqq*, that is, by God's ruling because he is God's *khalifa*.<sup>29</sup> As for al-Baydawi, he similarly reports *khalifa* to mean successor of the preceding prophets who had enjoined truth (*al-qa'ima bi al-haqq*). He adds that it also means a deputy or delegate in governance (*'ala al-mulk*).<sup>30</sup> *Khalifa* in this verse is hence interpreted to mean agent or deputy of God in ruling or judging in creation, or successor of the preceding prophets in ruling justly between people. Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's usage of the term draws on both these senses, as will become evident below.

## 2. The *khalifa* in Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's thought

In Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's thought, *al-khilafa* and *al-khalifa* refer to a variety of "offices" and "office-holders." Though Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi typically expands the meanings that are traditionally associated with the concepts of "*al-khalifa*," and "*al-khilafa*," it will be noted that he bases himself largely on the linguistic and Qur'anic meanings of the term. The realm of *al-khilafa* ranges, according to Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's usage of the term, from God's *khilafa* over man, and man's vicegerency on behalf of God on Earth, down to man's vicegerency over his body. While *al-khalifa* may be understood to refer to Allah, the Muhammadan Reality (*al-haqiqa al-muhammadiyya*), the Perfect Man (*al-insan al-kamil*), the Pole (*al-quthb*), the political ruler (*al-khalifa*), or the spirit of man (*al-ruh*).

<sup>29</sup> al-Zamakhshari, vol. V, pp. 261-2.

<sup>30</sup> al-Baydawi, vol. XIII, p. 18.



Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi considers God to be a *khalifa* over mankind because he holds "*khalifa*" to be one of the divine names.<sup>31</sup> In evidence, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi cites the Prophetic supplication in which the Prophet calls upon God saying: "O Lord, You are the companion (*al-sahib*) in travel, and the *khalifa* [guardian] over family [left behind]." He explains that the meaning of God being the *khalifa* of the traveler over the latter's family is that God ensures that the family receives the dues which God obliged the family-man to provide had he been present.<sup>32</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi adds that God is surely the *khalifa* but that it is God who sets Himself as the *khalifa* not the traveler who appoints Him (*bi ja'lihi la bi ja'l al-musafir*).<sup>33</sup> In this sense, God's *khilafa* over man is His guardianship and care for mankind's welfare.

On the other hand, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi asserts that man is a *khalifa* of God, and uses the term *khalifa* in different senses. Amongst those whom he refers to as *khulafa'* are Adam - Perfect Man (*al-insan al-kamil*), the prophets, the friends of God (*al-awliya'*), the successors of the prophets - whom Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi defines as the "Poles (*aqtab*) and

<sup>31</sup> In Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's thought, the divine names represent, as will be discussed in more detail below, the different relationships in which God stands with respect to His creation. Each name represents a quality or action which is made manifest in creation, and collectively they are the divine source or cause of everything that exists; thus everything in creation is a manifestation of one or more divine names - hence Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's doctrine of the "sharing" of the divine names by God and His creation. Epistemologically, knowledge of the divine names is the utmost level of man's knowledge of God, since knowledge of what is beyond the names, that is, the divine essence (*dhat*) is, in Islamic thought, inaccessible to man.

<sup>32</sup> "*fama 'ayyana Allah lil-rajul wa al-qa'im fi ahlihi min al-huquq allati lahum 'alayhi, fa inna Allah yatacaffala lahum bi dhalik ma dama musafirun gha'iban 'an ahlihi*," *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, pp. 345-6.

<sup>33</sup> See also instances where God refers to Himself as our *wakil*. For example, the Qur'anic verse in which God tells the Israelites: "*ala tattakhidhu min duni wakilan*" (17:2), and the divine injunction to the Prophet: "*la ilaha illa huwa fa 'ittakhidhahu wakilan*" (73:9), *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, pp. 345-6. On the different explanations by Sufis on how God is the *wakil* of man, see *Futuhāt*, vol. I, p. 844.



Commanders of the Faithful (*umara' al-mu'minin*)”<sup>34</sup> - as well as the deputies of these last two.

This study is concerned mainly with the political *khalifa*, whom Ibn al-<sup>o</sup>Arabi refers to as “*khalifat al-zahir*.” However, to understand his concept of *khilafat al-zahir*, it is important to examine the relationship of this *khalifa* to the other types of *khilafa'* which he discusses. Hence, in what follows, I propose to examine Ibn al-<sup>o</sup>Arabi's fundamental concept of man as *khalifat Allah*, vicegerent of God, and the nature and function of his *khilafa*, since for Ibn al-<sup>o</sup>Arabi every type of *khilafa* derives from and is an aspect of this. Attention will be given to differentiating between two main senses in which Ibn al-<sup>o</sup>Arabi uses the term *khalifat Allah* - one that refers to man in his capacity to attain to the level of human perfection and manifest the divine attributes, whereas the other refers, in addition, to his execution of a cosmic function - since it is to the latter sense of vicegerency that *khilafat al-zahir* is connected. This will be followed by a presentation of Ibn al-<sup>o</sup>Arabi's closely related concept of *khilafat al-rasul* (the vicegerency of the Prophet). Ibn al-<sup>o</sup>Arabi's concepts of *khilafat al-batin* (the esoteric vicegerency) and *khilafat al-zahir* (the exoteric vicegerency), and their relation to *khilafat Allah* will then be discussed. By the end of this chapter, a general understanding will be attained of the place of *khilafat al-zahir* in the hierarchy of *khilafa*, and its place with respect to the overlapping concepts of *khilafat Allah*, *khilafat al-rasul*, and *khilafat al-batin*. *Khilafat al-zahir* as such will be the concern of the next chapter.

## 2.1 *Khilafat Allah*: Man's vicegerency on behalf of God

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<sup>34</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 33.



In accordance with the Prophetic tradition "Each of you is a shepherd, and each of you is responsible for his herd (*kullukum ra'in wa kullukum mas'ulun 'an ra'iyyatihi*),"<sup>35</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi perceives *al-khilafa*, man's vicegerency on behalf of God, as a responsibility in which everyone shares, though in different degrees<sup>36</sup> - each degree of *khilafa* marking a different level of responsibility, authority, and perfection. The highest level of *khilafa* is that which Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi refers to as "*al-imama al-kubra*," "*al-khilafa al-kubra*," "*al-imama al-ulya*," "*khilafat Allah*," or simply "*al-khilafa*." This is the true vicegerency, since every other level of vicegerency is only an aspect of it. It is for the assumption of this function that God created man, and it is for man's vicegerency to be operative that God created creation.<sup>37</sup> As mentioned earlier, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi bases his concept of *al-khilafa* largely on the Qur'anic verses which refer to the *khilafa* of man on Earth. The most important verse in this respect is that in which God informs the angels of the *khilafa* of Adam:

Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: "I will create a vicegerent (*khalifa*) on Earth." They said: "Wilt Thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? - whilst we do celebrate Thy praises (*nusabbih bi-hamdika*) and glorify Thy holy (Name) (*nuqaddis laka*)?" He said: "I know what ye know not."<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> See Wensinck, vol. II, p. 273, hadith in al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, Tirmidhi, Ibn Hanbal.

<sup>36</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 6. Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi states that: "There is a greater and a smaller vicegerency (*khilafa*); the greatest, over which none is greater, is the Greater Imamate (*al-Imama al-kubra*) over the world, while the smallest is his [man's] *khilafa* over himself. What is in between these [two *khilafas*] is smaller with regards to what is above it, and is itself greater with regards to what is below it," *Futuhāt*, vol. III, p. 536. See also, *Futuhāt*, vol. III, p. 243.

<sup>37</sup> "For everything was created for him and for his sake and was subjected to him." See Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, in William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989, p. 46.

<sup>38</sup> Qur'an 2:30. *The Holy Qur'an*. Tr. A. Yusuf <sup>c</sup>Ali. Cambridge, 1946. All subsequent quotations from the Qur'an will be in Yusuf <sup>c</sup>Ali's translation.



In commenting on this verse Ibn al-ʿArabi explains the nature of the vicegerency of God, ignorance of which instigated the angels' initial objection:

Then He made them know (*ʿalamahum*) his [Adam's] vicegerency (*khilafa*) on Earth, yet they did not know for whom he acts as a vicegerent; for they may have presumed that he is the *khalifa* [i.e., successor] of those who preceded him in inhabiting it and making it flourish (*ʿimaratiha*). Hence, they objected because of the opposedness that they perceived in his natural constitution (*taqabul taba' ihi*) . . . When He informed them that He, praise be to Him, has created him in His Image, and has taught him all the [divine] names that have directed themselves towards (*al-mutawajjiha*) bringing the elemental world (*al-ʿalam al-ʿunsuri*) and others into being, He then displayed the named [things] (*al-musammayat*) to the angels, and said [to the angels]: 'Inform Me of the [divine] names that have brought those [created things] into being - have you glorified (*sabbahtumuni*) and sanctified (*qaddastumuni*) Me by them [those divine names]; for you have claimed that you "celebrate My praises" (*tusabbihun bi-hamdi*) and "glorify Me" (*tuqaddisun li*) ? So the angels said: "Of knowledge we have none (*la 'ilm lana*)."<sup>39</sup> So He told Adam 'Inform them of their names [that is, the divine names that have brought them - the created things (*al-musammayat*) - into existence], hence making him their teacher (*ustadh*), and so he taught them all the names. Then they came to know that he is the vicegerent of God (*khalifa ʿan Allah*) on His Earth, not a successor (*khalifa*) of those who preceded him."<sup>40</sup>

So, initially the angels did not understand the nature of man's vicegerency. Only when God informed them that: i) He created man in His Image; ii) taught him all the names (the divine names which are linked to both God and creation, as will be discussed below); and finally iii) taught the angels 'the names' through him, only then did they come to know that he was the vicegerent of God. Thus, creation in His image, knowledge of the names, and manifestation of this knowledge by the *khalifa* appear to be the defining characteristics of Ibn al-ʿArabi's concept of Man as *khalifat Allah*. Apart from constituting the basic principles of his concept of *khilafa*, these themes are central to the Shaykh al-Akbar's thought in general. Attempting to explain each of these concepts independently is not easy, for the one defines the other; to be 'in the Image,' as explained

<sup>39</sup> Qur'an, 2:30.

<sup>40</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. III, p. 525.



below, is to have perfect knowledge of the divine names, while the capacity to know the names comes from being initially created 'in the Image.' Keeping in mind this interdependency, these three defining qualities of *khalifat Allah* will be examined in brief below.

### 2.1.1 Creation in the Image

One of the defining characteristics of *khalifat Allah* is that he is created "in the Image" (*‘ala al-sura*). Much of Ibn al-‘Arabi's discussion of the concept of "creation in the Image" revolves around the prophetic hadith: "God created Adam in His Image."<sup>41</sup> To be created in the image of God means, as Ibn al-‘Arabi explains, to be created "upon the form of the name Allah."<sup>42</sup> The name Allah is, according to Ibn al-‘Arabi, the "all-comprehensive name;" the name that encompasses all the divine names, for "every other name is included within the scope of the name Allah."<sup>43</sup> Thus, describing Adam, or *khalifat Allah*, as being "created upon the form of the name Allah" means that he encompasses all the divine attributes or names as it does. To further explain what Ibn al-‘Arabi means by this, it is of help to go back to his description of the 'cause of creation'.

Ibn al-‘Arabi describes the cause behind creation as the divine names' desire to manifest the effects of their names in other entities. The name *al-karim* (The Generous), for example, cannot manifest itself if there is nothing to be generous towards, and the name *al-ghafur* (The Forgiver) cannot exhibit its property if there is nothing to forgive,

<sup>41</sup> See A. J. Wensinck and J.P. Mensing. *Concordance et Indices de la Tradition Musulmane: Les Six Livres, le Musnad d'al-Darimi, le Muwatta' de Malik, le Musnad de Ahmad Ibn Hanbal*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1943, vol. III, p. 438, hadith in Ibn Hanbal, al-Bukhari, and Muslim.

<sup>42</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabi, *Futuhāt*, in Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. 276 (from *Futuhāt*, vol. II, p 123, Cairo 1911 ed.).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 66.



and so on with the rest of the names. For this reason the divine names desired the existence of 'loci of manifestation' - the cosmos - in relation to which their effects would become actualised. Hence, they directed themselves towards bringing into being, the related creatures or loci of manifestation. In this way everything in creation was created as a locus of manifestation for one or several of the divine names, in other words, creation took place so that the divine names, comprising God's *uluhiyya*, became manifest.<sup>44</sup>

Now only man, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi states, was created with the capacity to manifest all the divine names, for he was created as the 'epitome' of creation, containing within him all the names that seek and are sought by creation, hence his description as being created in the form of the name Allah, the all-comprehensive name.

Man, who is Adam, consists of an individual in whom the cosmos is brought together (*majmu'*), for he is the small man, the epitome of the "great man" [i.e., the macrocosm] . . . God arranged within him everything outside of him other than God [i.e., every thing in creation]. So the reality of the divine name [Allah], which caused him to appear and from which he became manifest, is connected to every part of him. Hence all the divine names are related to him; not a single name eludes him. So Adam emerged upon the form of the name Allah, since it is this name which comprises all the divine names.<sup>45</sup>

Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi describes man as the "mirror" in which is reflected the realities of both the divine names and the universe, or as the "isthmus" (*al-barzakh*) that both stands between and brings together God and the universe. Given man's possession in himself of the "two forms," the form of the physical world and the form of the divine form, he was fit to receive the vicegerency that God offered to him, referred to in the Qur'an, according to

<sup>44</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi frequently draws upon the hadith *qudsi* highly significant in Sufi theology: "I was a Treasure but was not known. So I desired to be known, and I created the creatures and made Myself known to them. Then they came to know Me." Cited in Chittick, p. 66.

<sup>45</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, in Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. p. 276 (from *Futuhāt*, vol. II, p. 123, Cairo 1911 ed.).



Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, as the "Trust (*al-amana*)."<sup>46</sup> As Chittick notes, "the Trust is precisely to manifest the name Allah and act as His vicegerent (*khalifa*) in creation."<sup>47</sup> In manifesting all the divine names comprised in the name Allah, man acts as the vicegerent or deputy of God, appearing with the image of his Appointer, and thereby he preserves creation, since creation is vitally connected with the divine names. In the words of the Shaykh:

The created eternal man (*al-hadith al-azali*), that genesis which is everlasting without end (*al-nash' al-da'im al-abadi*), the word that separates and unites; the world subsists by his existence, for he is to the world like the bezel of the ring to the ring, the place of the inscription (*naqsh*) and sign by which the king seals his treasures. It is for this that He called him "*khalifa*," because it is by him [man] that He, exalt Him, preserves (*yahfaz*) His creation, as the seal preserves the treasures. For as long as the king's seal is on it, no one dares to open it except by His permission. So He set him up as a vicegerent (*istakhlafahu*) in the preservation of the kingdom (*al-mulk*). And so the world remains preserved for as long as the perfect man subsists therein.<sup>48</sup>

In A.E. <sup>c</sup>Affifi's book on Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's mystical philosophy, he explains that the reason why the world depends in its existence on man is that the world was created for man, the latter being, as such, almost the "cause" for the creation of the world - and so, when the "cause" ceases to exist, that which was caused by it, or that which depends in its existence on it, also ceases to exist.<sup>49</sup> As Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi writes, man is to the world like the spirit (*ruh*) to the body, when it departs the body death ensues. As will be discussed below, the preservation of the world by man, as God's vicegerent, is also the result of the

<sup>46</sup> "We did indeed offer the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains." (33:72) and what trust is greater than the deputyship of *al-Haqq* in His servants such that he does not dispense in them (*fa la yusrifahum*) except with *al-Haqq*," *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 236.

<sup>47</sup> Chittick, pp. 275-6.

<sup>48</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, *Fusus al-Hikam*. Commentary by A.E. <sup>c</sup>Affifi. Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, n.d., vol. I, p. 50.

<sup>49</sup> A. E. <sup>c</sup>Affifi. *The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyid Din-Ibnul 'Arabi*. Cambridge: University Press, 1939, pp. 82-5.



latter's preservation of the divine order of existence. If this is not preserved, anarchy and annihilation ensue.

It is important to underline, however, that not every man is a vicegerent of God because not every man has fulfilled his potential to be "in the Image of God." As Chittick explains,

Though man is made in the form of all the names of God, he does not actualize these names until they become an established and deeply rooted part of his character (*khuluq*).<sup>50</sup>

This is what Sufis mean by "assuming the traits of the divine names" (*al-takhalluq bi al-asma'*). Those who have actualised, or assumed the traits of, the divine names attain the level of being in the divine Image, and are, in the words of the Shaykh, the Perfect (*al-kummal*). The level symbolized by the term "Perfect Man" (*al-insan al-kamil*) is the level of human perfection of the divine form. Those who fall short of actualising this Image have only physical resemblance to Perfect Man, and are referred to by Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi as "Animal Man" (*al-insan al-hayawan*):

When God desired to be known,<sup>51</sup> He could not be known except by the one who is in His Image. And God has created none in His Image but the Perfect Man (*al-insan al-kamil*), not the Animal Man (*al-insan al-hayawan*).<sup>52</sup>

So, only *al-insan al-kamil* has assumed God's Image, and only he can fulfil the purpose of creation, which is to know God.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, only the Perfect Man can be the vicegerent of God, which is stressed recurrently by Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi.

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<sup>50</sup> Chittick, p. 283.

<sup>51</sup> Reference to the hadith *qudsi* "I was a Treasure but was not known. So I desired to be known, and I created the creatures and made Myself known to them. Then they came to know Me." Cited in Chittick, p. 66.

<sup>52</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. III, p. 352.

<sup>53</sup> Knowledge of God is discussed in the next section.



It is important to note that the assumption of the divine attributes by this *khalifa* does not make him a god. Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi points out that as man is created in the image of Allah, *al-ilah*, he sometimes claims to be an *ilah* in his own right, rather than vicegerent of the *Ilah*.

As man is a small world (*alam saghir*) in terms of his body, so is he a base god (*ilah haqir*) in terms of his temporal origination (*al-huduth*). He was able to claim divinity because he is the vicegerent of God in the world, and the world is subjected and in thrall (*ma'luh*) to him like man is in thrall to God, the Exalted.<sup>54</sup>

Man becomes thus like the Pharoah, ascribing the Image, or divinity, to himself rather than to its Source.<sup>55</sup> However, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi warns that he must not forget his essential contingency and need. Because the divine names require engendered existence for the manifestation of their power, they are said to be poor towards, or in need of, creation. In the same way man, is in need of existents, his need or poverty being in fact the uttermost degree of poverty, since he contains in himself all the names that are in need of creation. And as man can not be lord without something to lord over, his lordship actually attests to his total servitude and poverty towards creation; in other words, towards God who manifests Himself in creation.

The highest divine level becomes manifest within perfect man, and the highest level is that of independence from all things. But that level is only appropriate for God in respect of His Essence. The highest cosmic level is independence through all things; or if you want, call it "poverty toward all things." This is the level of perfect man, for everything was created for him and for his sake and was subjected (*taskhir*) to him, since God knew of his need toward all things. So he has no independence from anything.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. I, p. 152.

<sup>55</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, in Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. 316 and p. 320.

<sup>56</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, *Futuhāt*, in Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. 46 (from *Futuhāt*, vol. II, p. 469, Cairo 1911 ed.).



Hence, man's manifestation of divinity should not be dissociated from his essential contingency. This duality of his nature is a trial (*fitna*) in which God has placed man "so that He may see whether he would abide by his [essential] servanthood and potentiality or take pride in the rank (*makana*) of his Image."<sup>57</sup> As Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi states:

The [perfect] servant says: "Part of the perfection of the Image, upon which God said He had created me, is that I do not forget the state of my potentiality (*imkani*), the level (*manzila*) of my servitude (*'ubudah*), and my condition of poverty (*faqr*) and need (*haja*) . . ." The Haqq is with His servant when the servant actualises this condition; He praises him for being "an excellent servant (*ni<sup>c</sup>m al-<sup>c</sup>abd*), one who has ever turned to Us (*awwab*):"<sup>58</sup> for this divine proximity (*walaya*) [bestowed on him] had not affected him, nor diverted him from [the realisation of] his poverty and compulsion (*idtirar*). One who exceeds his limits in proximity is reversed to the opposite, and that is remoteness (*al-bu<sup>c</sup>d*) and aversion (*al-maqt*) from God. So, beware of yourself, for temptation (*al-fitna*) at [the level of] vastness (*al-ittisa<sup>c</sup>*) is greater than temptation at [the level of] limitedness (*al-haraj wa al-diq*).<sup>59</sup>

Hence, the perfect man is at once he who is in the image of God, actualising in himself all the divine attributes, and he who has realised perfect poverty or servanthood towards God, realising that everything ultimately returns to God - *uluhiyya* and *ubudiyya* in him being two sides of the same reality.

To sum up, for Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, the vicegerent of God or *khalifa* must be a Perfect Man, created upon both the divine image and the image of the universe, encompassing in himself the realities of all the divine names that have brought the cosmos into being, as well as the

<sup>57</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. II, p. 250. Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi finds pride of office and forgetfulness of the essential poverty a common pitfall for many of Islam's kings, sultans, amirs, and holders of office in general: "Even if he [man] followed (*akhadh 'an*) the command/instruction of God, yet when he appeared with them [the divine attributes] in creation, he took pride in them, in himself, over his likes, he then joins the greatest losers (*al-akhsarin a'malan*); and those are the kings, Sultans, and Amirs of Islam. For they take pride, due to their ignorance, in leadership over those beneath them. That is why there are none more degraded (*adhall*), both in themselves and before others, than they are when they are deposed from this level (*martaba*)."<sup>58</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 294.

<sup>58</sup> Qur'an, "*ni<sup>c</sup>m al-<sup>c</sup>abd innahu awwab*," (38:30,44) with amendments in Yusuf <sup>c</sup>Ali's translation.

<sup>59</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. II, p. 250.



realities of the physical world that were brought forth by these names. Though the *khalifa* is the representative of God on Earth, and the most complete locus of His manifestation on Earth, he is not a god in himself. In fact, the *khalifa*, according to Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, while being the perfect representative of the level of divinity or sovereignty, is concurrently the perfect servant, ultimately poor towards everything in creation and towards God.

### 2.1.2 Knowledge of the Names

The second characteristic of *al-khalifa* is knowledge of the divine names. Due to the vastness of this subject, this section will be limited to a brief presentation of two aspects that pertain to the knowledge of the *khalifa* and define him as such: 1) knowledge of the Law regulating the manifestation of the divine names; 2) the *khalifa*'s mode of reception of this knowledge.

As explained above, man was entrusted with the divine Image or the totality of the names. His manifestation of these names is, however, restricted and guided by the measures set in the Law (*shar<sup>c</sup>*). If man transgresses these measures, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi states, he becomes a contender (*munazi<sup>c</sup>*) of God's divinity and exceeds his limits as a servant of God.<sup>60</sup>

Know that it has become established among the "people of reflection" (*ashab al-afkar*) that God has attributes and names that have ranks (*maratib*), and that the servant may assume and adorn them to a specified limit (*hadd makhsus*), in a prescribed manner (*na<sup>c</sup>t mansus*), and in a particular state (*hal mu<sup>c</sup>ayyan*). If the servant exceeds these, he becomes a contender of *al-Haqq*, and he deserves expulsion and banishment from the felicitous proximity (*al-qurb al-sa<sup>c</sup>adi*), as mentioned in His saying, exalt Him: "Magnificence is My Cloak and Tremendousness My Shawl; if anyone contends with Me in either one, I will Smash him."<sup>61</sup>

<sup>60</sup> *Futuhat*, vol. IV, p. 3.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. For the hadith, see Wensinck, vol. IV, p.279, hadith in Abu Dawud, Ibn Majah, Ibn Hanbal.



Thus, it is incumbent on every man to know the names of God, their ranks (or how they relate to each other, to creation, and to the Creator), the prescribed limits which the servant must observe in assuming the names, and the names that God prohibits him from assuming, such as the two attributes mentioned in the above quoted *hadith qudsi*, that is, "Magnificence" (*al-kibriya*) and "Tremendousness" (*al-izza*). By observing these limits, man admits and confirms his essential servanthood or contingency, and thus preserves himself from contending with God's divinity. More than any one else, it seems that those who need the most to know and abide by the limits set on the manifestation of the names are the vicegerents of God and those who actualize the Image, for, according to Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi, it is those two states of being that give rise to contention with God. The reason for this appears to be that both states require realising and manifesting the divine Image, and thus they expose man to the divine "*fitna*" of forgetting his essential contingency, and attributing the divine names to himself rather than to their rightful Owner and Bestower, and consequently to transgressing the divine limits set on him as a "servant" in taking on the names. In order to check such contention, Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi states that God entrusted to His *khalifa* the Law (*shar<sup>°</sup>*) of manifesting the divine names so that the *khalifa* may know the divine limits and measures governing the manifestation of the divine names both in himself and in creation.

Know that the cause of dispute and contention is two matters: the appointment of a vicegerent, that is, *al-imama*, and creation in the Image. For the *khalifa* must appear with every form with which his Appointer appears. So, the *khalifa* must encompass all the names and attributes demanded by the world over which *al-Haqq* has appointed him. As it so required, He sent down a decree (*amran*) from Him to him (*minhu ilayhi*) which He called Law (*shar<sup>°</sup>*) and in which He specified (*bayyana*) the means of dispensing (*masarif*)



these divine names and attributes with which the *khalifa* must appear, and He entrusted (*ahada*) them to him.<sup>62</sup>

Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi also states that the true *khalifa* must be one who knows how to rule or arbitrate between the opposing divine names. As explained earlier, everything in creation is a locus of manifestation of, or is ruled by, one or more divine names. Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi points out that as some of the divine names are contraries, like Harmer (*al-darr*) and Benefiter (*al-nafi<sup>c</sup>*), Life-giver (*al-muhyi*) and Slayer (*al-mumit*), they have opposing effects in creation. Without a Law regulating the rule of these names in creation, their opposing effects might negate or subjugate one another, leading eventually to the destruction of creation. For if in the contention between the opposing names, one name subjugates the other, that would result in the disappearance from existence of the loci of manifestation of the subjugated name. For example, if God's attribute of Wrath overcomes His attribute of Mercy, there will no longer remain in existence anything which manifests God's Mercy.<sup>63</sup> The *khalifa*, according to Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, must therefore be one who knows how to balance between the opposing effects of the names, to preserve creation:

The possessor of divine courtesy (*sahib al-adab al-ilahi*)<sup>64</sup> is not a contender, rather he translates for the contender[s] (*tarjuman munazi<sup>c</sup>*); those from whom he translates are the divine names from whence contention originates in the world, and for whom the Scale of the Law (*al-mizan al-shar<sup>c</sup>i*) was established in this world and the Fundamental Scale (*al-mizan al-asli*) in the next world. For Exalter and Abaser are disputants (*khasm*), as are Harmer and Benefiter, Life-giver and Slayer, and Bestower and Withholder. Facing every name stands one of the other names which is its contrary in property. The Scale established among the names is the name Arbitrator (*al-Hakam*); this Scale decrees justly. Arbitrator

<sup>62</sup> *Futuhat*, vol. IV, p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> On the existents request for a divine law that would preserve their existence from the destructive effects of the contention between the names, see *Futuhat*, vol. I, pp. 422-3; quoted in the next chapter, p. 34.

<sup>64</sup> The terms "*adab*" and "*adab ilahi*" have been translated by Chittick as "courtesy" and "divine courtesy" respectively. I follow his translation, though "courtesy" misses on the broader connotations in Arabic. Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi uses these terms to refer to proper spiritual and ethical standards, deriving ultimately from the Law, which define the state of being and the behavior of their possessor in relation to God and to creation. The relation of divine courtesy and Law shall be discussed further in the last chapter.



looks upon the preparedness of the locus (*istiʿdad al-mahall*) and judges it according to its preparedness by placing it in the party of one of the two contrary and contending names. So if you know how the Scales are set (*wadʿ al-mawazin*), with their different forms, in both the spiritual and the material [realms] (*fi al-maʿani wa al-hiss*), you are then the ruler by them (*ʿayn al-hakim biha*), and you are fit for the deputyship of God in that the Scale is in your hand.<sup>65</sup>

Hence, the one "fit" to be the deputy, or *khalifa*, of God is the one who knows how to regulate or balance in creation the opposing properties of the names, by judging between them in favor of the name whose effect is called for, at that moment in time, by the divine Law (*al-mizan al-sharʿi*) and the "preparedness" of the locus. However, not all rulers are true *khulafa'*, for whereas the vicegerents of God are divinely entrusted with the *sharʿ* and guide their rule by it, not all rulers are necessarily entrusted with the *sharʿ*, nor does their rule necessarily conform to it.<sup>66</sup>

The second aspect of knowledge pertaining to the *khalifa* that is discussed here concerns the mode in which the *khalifa* receives divine knowledge of the divine names and Law. Ibn al-ʿArabi distinguishes the *khalifa* by the mode through which he receives this knowledge. In a passage already quoted,<sup>67</sup> Ibn al-ʿArabi states that knowledge of the *sharʿ* descends onto the *khalifa* "from Him to him" (*minhu ilayhi*)<sup>68</sup> - implying direct revelation of knowledge without mediation. In a more explicit passage in the *Fusus*, Ibn al-ʿArabi describes *khalifat Allah* as the one who "takes" (*ya'khudh*) knowledge directly from God, as do the prophets, rather than through the mediation of another.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Ibn al-ʿArabi, *Futuhāt*, in Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. 67 (from *Futuhāt*, vol. III, p. 98, Cairo 1911 ed.) with amendments in translation, and *Futuhāt*, vol. III, p. 129.

<sup>66</sup> The different types of rulers will be discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>67</sup> See above, pp. 26-7.

<sup>68</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 3.

<sup>69</sup> *Fusus*, vol. I, p. 163.



Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi explains that the knowledge of the *khalifa* is not reached through his rational faculties or through study, but is rather bestowed upon his heart through divine unveiling (*kashf*). And even if the knowledge attained by the rational thinker equals that attained by the one who was given *kashf*, only the latter can be the *khalifa*, or *imam*;<sup>70</sup> for the reception of knowledge directly from God is more elevated than receiving it through a mediator:

If the one who investigates (*al-nazir*) the form[s] of creation and receives knowledge through rational thought (*tafakkur*) and interpretation (*i<sup>c</sup>tibar*) thinks he is the Imam of the age (*imam waqtihi*),<sup>71</sup> [let him know that] he is not so unless the forms give him knowledge by their selves (*min dhatiha*) through unveiling (*kashfan*) without reflection or interpretation. And even if it so happened that the follower of rational thought (*sahib al-fikr*) equals him in that revealed knowledge (*al-ilm al-kashfi*), he is not an Imam because of the difference of the path (*al-tariq*). For the Imam does not acquire knowledge (*al-ulum*) through his rational faculty (*fikrihi*) - in fact, if he resorts to his reflection (*nazarihi*) he will err, for his soul (*nafsuhu*) is only accustomed to receiving [knowledge] from God. And God did not wish, out of his care (*inaya*) for that servant, that he receive knowledge through the path of his reflection - which veils him (*yahjibahu*) from his Lord. For in every state, God wishes that he receives from Him that [knowledge] concerning every matter he is in, in every breath, so that he does not cease from (*la faragh lahu*), nor reflect upon (*la nazar*) any other than Him.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>70</sup> In his *Tadbirat*, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi uses the terms Imam and *khalifa* to refer to the vicegerent, yet he states that the term *khalifa* is more precise than the term Imam in designating the vicegerent, and that it is also the term by which God designates the vicegerent in the Qur'an (2:30). See Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, *al-Tadbirat al-Ilahiyya fi Islah al-Mamlaka al-Insaniyya*, in *Kleinere Schriften des Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi*, ed. H.S. Nyberg, Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1919, p. 125. Like the term *khalifa*, we find Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi using the term Imam sometimes in reference to the vicegerent of God, who may hold both the exoteric and esoteric vicegerencies, and whom Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi believes to be the true vicegerent. At other times he uses the term to refer to the exoteric vicegerent, who may or may not be the true vicegerent. Cf. *Futuhāt*, vol. III, p. 185; *Futuhāt*, vol. III, pp. 182-3; *Futuhāt*, vol. III, p. 106.

<sup>71</sup> Meaning the *khalifa* of God at that point in time.

<sup>72</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. III, p. 185. Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi goes on to explain in the remainder of this passage that "Any rational man if he considers, will find a proof which happened and which shows the truth of what we have said, when the Prophet, God's peace and blessing upon him, forbade the fertilization of the palm trees, and [as a result] they were barren because it [his knowledge in this matter] was not by way of divine revelation (*wahy*). Also, his taking up position in the day of the [battle of] Badr at a place where there was no water, then his, God's peace and blessing upon him, following the advice of his companions [to change position]- for he, God's peace and blessing upon him, was not accustomed to receiving knowledge except from God. He did not rely on his own unaided deductions. This notwithstanding that he is the most perfect person (*al-shakhs al-akmal*) whom no one exceeds in perfection. So what do you think of those beneath him, God's peace and blessing be upon him?"



Hence, only those who receive their knowledge directly from God, without the mediation of reason or of man, can be called *khulafa' Allah*. Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi explains further that while prophets are *khulafa' Allah* by virtue of their being recipients of revelation, there are after the prophets some on whom God directly bestows knowledge, and who are as such *khulafa' Allah* "in the esoteric expression" (*bi lisan al-kashf*).<sup>73</sup> These posterior *khulafa' Allah* are amongst the *awliya'*<sup>74</sup> or, in Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's words, the inheritors (*waratha*) of the Prophet's knowledge.<sup>75</sup> This will be discussed further in the section on *khilafat al-rasul*. It suffices here to note that Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi defines *khalifat Allah* as one who receives knowledge directly from God, and that he refers by this term to the messengers (*rusul*) and to a particular rank, if not all, of the *awliya'*.

### 2.1.3 Manifestation of the Names

Now, while in the passages quoted above, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi defines *khulafa' Allah* solely through knowledge and its mode of reception, at other times Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi considers it necessary that knowledge be coupled with *hukm*<sup>76</sup> for one to be called *khalifa* - hence his statement that "not every messenger (*rasul*) is vicegerent (*khalifa*),"<sup>77</sup> in apparent contradiction to his above identification of the two. There is no contradiction, however,

<sup>73</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, *Fusus*, in Masataka Takeshita, *Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's Theory of The Perfect Man and Its Place in The History of Islamic Thought*. Tokyo: Institute for The Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1987, p. 124 (from *Fusus*, p. 162-3, Cairo 1946 ed.).

<sup>74</sup> The term *wali* (pl. *awliya'*) is an important technical term which covers a range of meanings including: the friend of God, the one close to Him, the one protected by Him. For a full discussion, See M. Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, pp. 17-46.

<sup>75</sup> *Futuh*, vol. IV, p. 33.

<sup>76</sup> For definition, see above, p. 13.

<sup>77</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, *Futuh*, in Takeshita, *Perfect Man*, pp. 118-9 (from *Futuh*, vol. II, p. 272, Cairo 1329H ed.).



once one differentiates between two different senses in which Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi uses the term "*khalifa*," one that is solely epistemological and that denotes a particular spiritual rank (I call this *khalifat al-<sup>c</sup>ilm*), while the other is both epistemological and functional (I call this *khalifat al-hukm*). In terms of knowledge, the *rusul* and those who similarly attain knowledge are *khulafa' Allah*. However, in terms of *hukm* they can only be called *khulafa'* if in addition to possessing this level of knowledge, they possess the function of ruling in creation (*al-hukm, al-tahakkum*) in accordance with this knowledge. This section will cover, firstly the distinction between *khalifat al-<sup>c</sup>ilm* and *khalifat al-hukm*, and secondly, the nature and purpose of the *khalifa*'s manifestation of the divine names, and his assumption of *hukm* on behalf of God. The following two passages clarify Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's differentiation between the *rasul*, whom he describes as a *khalifa* with respect to his knowledge, and the *khalifa* who possesses *hukm*:

Know that the desired perfection (*al-kamal al-mathub*) for which man is created is the vicegerency (*al-khilafa*). Adam, peace be upon him, attained it through divine providence (*'inaya ilahiya*.) This (i.e. vicegerency) is more particular (*akhass*) than the messengership (*risala*) of messengers, because not every messenger is vicegerent. The rank of messengership lies especially in transmission [i.e. of God's message] (*al-tabligh*) . . . He (i.e. the messenger) does not have (his own) domination (*tahakkum*, i.e. autarchic action); he has only legislation (*tashri'*) of ordinances from God . . . If God gives him dominion over those to whom he was sent, then this is [the case of] the appointment of a vicegerent (*istikhlaf*) and vicegerency. Not every one who is sent [as messenger] has dominion. Yet if he is given the sword (*al-sayf*) and the execution of action (*al-fi'l*), then he possesses perfection.<sup>78</sup>

His [Moses'] saying: "my Lord has (since) invested me with *hukm*"<sup>79</sup> refers to vicegerency (*al-khilafa*), "and appointed me as one of the apostles (*al-mursalin*)"<sup>80</sup> refers to messengership (*al-risala*): for not every messenger is a *khalifa*. The *khalifa* is the possessor of the sword (*al-sayf*), and [the power to] dismiss (*al-<sup>c</sup>azl*) and appoint (*al-wilaya*). Whereas the messenger is not so: he is only to transmit what he was sent with. If

<sup>78</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, *Futuhat*, in Takeshita, *Perfect Man*, pp. 118-9 (from *Futuhat*, vol. II, p. 272, Cairo 1329H ed.) with amendments in translation.

<sup>79</sup> Qur'an, 26:20.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.



he fights for it and protects it by the sword, then this is the vicegerent-messenger (*al-khalifa al-rasul*). For as not every prophet (*nabi*) is a messenger (*rasul*), likewise, not every messenger is a *khalifa* - meaning he [the *rasul*] was not given the kingdom (*al-mulk*) nor ruling (*al-hukm*) therein.<sup>81</sup>

Hence, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi differentiates between two "types" of *khulafa' Allah*, whom I will henceforth call, for the sake of clarity, a) *khalifat al-<sup>c</sup>ilm* - who receives divine knowledge directly from God, without mediation, and which refers to the *rusul* and those similarly endowed with knowledge amongst the *awliya'*, and b) *khalifat al-hukm* - who, as will be discussed below, has direct divine knowledge like *khalifat al-<sup>c</sup>ilm* yet exceeds that *khalifa* in possessing a cosmic function in addition.<sup>82</sup>

The difference between these two *khalifas* corresponds to the difference or duality that Chodkeiwicz notes in the linguistic meaning of the term *wali* and its verbal noun, be that *wilaya* or *walaya*. The term *wali*, as Chodkeiwicz explains, has an active and a passive sense: "the *wali* is simultaneously one who is close, the beloved, he who is protected, taken in charge, and the protector, the 'patron' (in the Roman sense), the governor."<sup>83</sup> Chodkiewicz adds that the double meanings of the term *wali* is reflected in the indecision about whether the most appropriate noun for the state of the *wali* is *walaya* or *wilaya*; for whereas the term *walaya* is constructed on the *fa'ala* pattern and thus "expresses a *state of being*," *wilaya* is constructed on the *fi'ala* pattern which "is normally used to express the execution of a *function*."<sup>84</sup> This is relevant to our discussion of the two types of *khalifas*.

<sup>81</sup> *Fusus*, vol. II, p. 207.

<sup>82</sup> Discussion of the *khalifa's hukm*, defined in the above two passages in terms of the possession of the sword, the power to execute action, the power to appoint and dismiss will be deferred to the following section on *al-hukm*.

<sup>83</sup> Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in The Doctrine of Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi*. Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993, p. 24.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.



Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi found it necessary at times to clarify to his readers the difference between the possessor of <sup>c</sup>*ilm*, on the one hand, and the possessor of the attributes of sovereignty, or *hukm*, on the other. He stresses that the possession of divine knowledge does not necessarily indicate, or result in, the possession of sovereignty, and vice versa. For example, he writes in the *Futuhat*:

There is a disagreement among the Sufis concerning the station of gnosis (*ma<sup>c</sup>rifa*). Does the one who is qualified by it possess all the stations or not? The correct answer is that this knowledge does not demand a governing control or that its possessor own all the stations in respect of the states and the exercise of free disposal in the cosmos which they bestow. Its only condition is that the station be known. If the one who dwells in this station desires to exercise governing control, he descends to the state - since governing control belongs to the states - for he knows that his descent will not affect his station. But he will not descend to the state except by divine command. If a verified shaykh in this way says that the possessor of this station owns all the stations, he means through knowledge, not through state. He may be given the state, but that is not a condition.<sup>85</sup>

So, according to the Shaykh al-Akbar, possession of knowledge does not necessarily entail the exercise of governing control or free disposal in creation; attributes which Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi associates with *khalifat al-hukm*.<sup>86</sup> In fact, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi explains that knowledge impedes action or dispensation (*tasrif*),<sup>87</sup> and that the highest in knowledge amongst the

<sup>85</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, *Futuhat*, in Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. 266 (from *Futuhat*, vol. II, p. 319, Cairo 1911 ed.);

<sup>86</sup> See, quotation pp.37-8.

<sup>87</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi relates in his *Futuhat* that: "Shaykh Abu <sup>c</sup>Abd Allah b. Qayid said to Shaykh Abu al-Su<sup>c</sup>ud b. Shibl: "Why don't you act (*tatasarruf*)?" "I left God to act (*yatasarruf*) for me as He wills," said Abu al-Su<sup>c</sup>ud, in reference to His command, exalt Him: "take Him (therefore) for (thy) Disposer of Affairs (*wakil*)" (73:9). For the *wakil* is the one who acts (*al-mutasarrif*), especially that he heard God saying: "and spend (in charity) out of the (substance) whereof He has made you heirs (*mustakhlafin*)" (57:7). So Abu al-Su<sup>c</sup>ud knew then, and the knowers, that the matter in his hands is not his, and that he is a deputy in it (*mustakhla<sup>c</sup>fih*). God then told him that: concerning that matter over which I deputized you, and which I handed over to you (*istakhlaftuka fih wa mallaktuka iyyah*); make Me and take Me in it as a *wakil*. So, Abu al-Su<sup>c</sup>ud complied to God's command and took Him as a *wakil*. Hence, how can there remain, to one who witnesses this matter, any resolve to act with - when resolve can only act when there is [a sense of] wholeness (*jam<sup>c</sup>iyya*) which leaves no room to its possessor for anything other than that on which he is concerted. And this knowledge divides this wholeness. Thus the knower who is perfect in knowledge appears in utter inability and weakness," *Futuhat*, vol. I, pp. 128-9.



*awliya* 'refrain from manifesting God's dispensation.<sup>88</sup> What "compels" the knower to act, or to be a vehicle of God's dispensation, is, according to Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, the divine command; "for knowledge does not decree it [*al-hukm*] (*la taqtadih*) by choice (*bi hukm al-ikhtiyar*)," but rather "by divine command (*amr*) and compelling (*jabr*)."<sup>89</sup> Thus, what ultimately differentiates between the *wali* "in the passive sense" and the *wali* "in the active sense," and similarly between *khalifat al-<sup>c</sup>ilm* and *khalifat al-hukm*, is the divine command to the latter *wali* and *khalifa* to become "active," or to exhibit God's rule. It is the "active" *khalifat Allah* who carries out the cosmic function of *al-khilafa*, that is, to *manifest* the divine image in creation, and it is this type of *khilafa* with which this study is primarily concerned.

The third principle characteristic of the perfect *khalifat Allah*, in addition to the assumption of God's Image and divine knowledge, is manifestation of the divine names (*al-zuhur bi al-asma*). "Manifestation of the names," or simply "manifestation," is the attribute most distinctly used by Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi in connection with the vicegerency of God.

Vicegerency (*al-khilafa*) requires [the *khalifa*] to appear (*al-zuhur*) in the form of the appointer who made him His vicegerent.<sup>90</sup>

Know that he who wants to send a deputy to his servants, one who would act as his lieutenant (*yaqum fihum maqamahu*), must clothe him with His attributes. The *khalifa* thus becomes the manifest (*al-zahir*) and his appointer the hidden (*al-batin*).<sup>91</sup>

<sup>88</sup> "If the "Great Ones" (*akabir al-rijal*), with their knowledge of the purpose of their creation, wanted to make manifest the engendering ability, they are made able to (*law waqafu ma'a al-takwin qubilu*). Yet they left to *al-Haqq* the dispensation of His creation, as the matter is in itself, and refrained from being a locus for the manifestation of [the ability of] dispensation. If anything of this [dispensation] appears in them, it is not by their will, rather, God granted it to them, and made it manifest in them for a reason (*hikma*) that He, exalt Him, knows, and of which they are unaware (*bi ma'zal*)." *Futuhāt*, vol. II, p. 127. See also, *Fusus*, vol. I, pp. 128-9.

<sup>89</sup> *Fusus*, vol. I, p. 129.

<sup>90</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. III, p. 538.

<sup>91</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 59.



By manifestation of the divine attributes, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi means the actualization of the divine image, however he does not always associate this actualization with the exercise of sovereignty or *hukm*.

People may apply the word "state" and mean by it the servant's becoming manifest in the attribute of God by engendering (*takwin*) things and producing effects through his resolve (*himma*).<sup>92</sup> This is the becoming similar (*tashabuh*) to God which is called "assuming the traits of the names" (*al-takhalluq bi al-asma'*). This is what the people nowadays mean by "state," and we also use the term in this sense. However, we do not maintain that the state produces an effect. We maintain that the servant has the power to produce it, such that, were he to desire to make it manifest, he could do so. However, courtesy prevents him, since he wants to realize his servanthood (*'ubudiyya*) and keep himself hidden through his worship, so that he will do nothing disapproved.<sup>93</sup>

In other passages, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi directly associates manifestation of the names with exercise of sovereignty - *al-zuhur* here becomes almost a synonym for assuming the function of the vicegerency of God.

If the servant (*al-'abd*) is a vicegerent of *al-Haqq* (*khalifa 'an al-Haqq*), or a vicegerent of a servant like him, his appointer must bestow on him those of his attributes that are required by the level of vicegerency (*martabat al-khilafa*). For if he does not appear with the form (*sura*) of his appointer, he shall not have rule (*hukm*) over his likes (*amthalihi*). His appearance with the form of his appointer is nothing other than what is given by the level of sovereignty (*al-siyada*).<sup>94</sup>

It is precisely by the manifestation of attributes of sovereignty, such as, "engendering" and acting through "resolve," that Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi describes the *khalifa* (in the sense of *khalifat al-hukm*) in the following passage. In the context of his discussion of two of the forms of knowledge of God, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi states:

<sup>92</sup> <sup>c</sup>Affifi explains *al-himma* as "the knower's (*al-'arif*) instrument of creating. It is a strange power (*quwwa*), whose nature we do not know exactly, that the knower projects onto that in which he wants to produce an effect, and thence that effect is produced, or onto anything that he desires to exist, and that thing comes into existence. He [Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi] says in his *Futuhat* (pt. I p. 77) that it is known to the *mutakallimun* as sincerity (*al-ikhlas*), and to the *sufis* as [the state of] presence (*al-hudur*), and to the knowers as resolve (*al-himma*), yet he prefers to call it divine providence (*'inaya ilahiyya*)," *Fusus*, pt. II, pp. 78-9.

<sup>93</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, *Futuhat*, in Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. 265 (from *Futuhat*, vol. II, p. 385, Cairo 1911 ed.);

<sup>94</sup> *Futuhat*, vol. III, p. 536.



[The first form of knowledge] is the form of the knowledge of declaring God's incomparability . . . , while [the second] is the form of the knowledge of declaring His similarity, that is, it is the servant's assumption of the traits of the divine names and his becoming manifest in His kingdom through the lordly attributes. In this station the created thing is a creator (*khaliq*) and manifests vicegerency (*khilafa*) and the deputyship (*niyaba*) of the Real (*al-Haqq*) in the kingdom. Through it the servant can exercise governing control (*tahakkum*) among the existent things by acting through his Resolve, by touching (*mubashara*), or by speech (*qawl*).<sup>95</sup>

The differentiation between these two modes of manifestation corresponds to the above noted differentiation between *khilafat al-ilm* and *khilafat al-hukm*. Similarly, in the following passage Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi states that the potential *khalifa*, the one who manifests the divine image in himself, is given the choice of remaining "hidden," a total servant both in himself and before others, or of accepting the function of *al-khilafa* and appearing before others with the attributes of lordship, outwardly concealing his servanthood with "the mantle of sovereignty":

The one of each age (*wahid al-zaman*) is the one who appears in creation (*al-akwan*) in the divine Form; this is his sign in himself (<sup>c</sup>*alamatuhu fi nafsih*) so that he knows that it is he himself [who is the *khalifa*]. He then has the choice of realizing that property (*hukm*) or not, and appearing with it to others. This [choice] is his. So some of them are manifest (*zahir*) and some of them are not manifest (*la yazhar*), and [each one] remains a servant unless *al-Haqq* commands him to appear [with the function of *al-khilafa*]. He appears then to the degree of the divine command (*al-amr al-ilahi*) to him, and does not exceed it. This is the elevated station (*al-maqam al-<sup>c</sup>ali*) upon which this Way rests. For the servant was not in the first place created except to be a constant servant (<sup>c</sup>*abdan da'iman*) to God. He was not created to be a lord. So if God bestows on him the mantle (*khil<sup>c</sup>a*) of sovereignty and commands him to appear (*yabruz*) with it, he appears; a slave in himself and a sovereign in the eye of his beholder. For this [sovereignty] is the adornment (*zina*) of his Lord, and His gift to him.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, *Futuh*, in Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. 313 (from *Futuh*, vol. II, p. 667, Cairo 1911 ed.); *Futuh*, vol. II, p. 882. In the remainder of this passage Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi goes on to explain: "As for Resolve, the servant desires something and that which he desires becomes imaginalized before him as he desires without increase or decrease. As for speech, he says to what he desires, "Be!", and it comes to be. Or he himself touches it, if it is a work, just as Jesus touched the clay in creating the bird and giving it form as a bird. [The divine root for this touching is found in] God's words, "Him whom I created with My own two hands" (38:75). He who understands will recognize that man has a share in every divine presence."

<sup>96</sup> *Futuh*, vol. III, p. 180.



Not every *khalifat Allah* is given complete *tasrif* (or power of dispensation). In a brief classification of some of the prophets with regard to their *hukm*, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi states that whereas some *khulafa'* are given *tasrif* in both the esoteric and exoteric realms, others are only given it in the esoteric realm.

As for those given power of dispensation (*al-tasrif*), they are of two kinds: some were given power of dispensation in both the exoteric (*al-zahir*) and the esoteric (*al-ma'na*) [realms] - that is perfect dispensation . . . , and others were given dispensation in the esoteric and not the exoteric . . . and so were restricted to the esoteric [realm] to the exclusion of the exoteric one.<sup>97</sup>

Moreover, he mentions that God gives His *khalifa* the choice of appearing with both the exoteric and esoteric vicegerency, or with the latter only.<sup>98</sup> It is important to note in the above passage(s) that, for Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, the dispensation of the *khulafa'* is either in the exoteric and the esoteric realms combined, or in the esoteric realm only. He does not count amongst those *khulafa'* who are "given dispensation" those who have *hukm* over the exoteric realm only, to the exclusion of the esoteric. Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi does not appear to consider those who have *hukm* over the exoteric realm alone to be true *khulafa'* - the basic characteristic of whom is *walaya* - nor is their political rule what Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi means by *al-hukm*. In the following passage, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi describes the nature of the true vicegerents *hukm*:

If God gives him [the messenger] dominion over those to whom he was sent, then this is [the case of] the appointment of a vicegerent (*istikhlaf*) and vicegerency [i.e., in this case he is both the messenger and the vicegerent.] Not every one who is sent [as messenger] has dominion. Yet if he is given the sword (*al-sayf*) and the execution of action (*al-fi'l*), then he possesses perfection. He appears then with the sovereignty (*sultan*) of the divine names - so he bestows (*yu'ti*) and withholds (*yamna'*), exalts (*yu'izz*) and abases (*yudhill*), gives life (*yuhyi*) and slays (*yumit*), harms (*yadurr*) and benefits (*yanfa'*), and appears with the opposite names (*yazhar bi asma' al-taqabul*) along with possessing prophethood (*al-*

<sup>97</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. II, p. 851.

<sup>98</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. III, p. 182.



*nubuwwa*) necessarily. If he shows dominance without prophethood (*nubuwwa*), then he is a king (*malik*) not a vicegerent.<sup>99</sup>

Here, the *hukm* which defines the *khalifa*, distinguishing him from both *rasul* and *malik*, and which sets him at the "level of perfection," is defined by four characteristics: first, the possession of "the sword" (*al-sayf*) - which signifies political or "physical" power. Second, the execution of action (*al-fi'l*) - which signifies spiritual authority and refers to the power of acting by resolve (*al-fi'l bi al-himma*) which Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi explains as the power of effecting one's purpose through the sheer power of will.<sup>100</sup> Holding only the latter kind of *hukm* renders the *khalifa's hukm* less complete or perfect, while holding only the former kind of *hukm* (or having "dominance without prophethood") excludes that "*hakim*" from the rank of *khulafa'*.<sup>101</sup> Thus Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's *khalifa* is differentiated from those who are commonly considered by the people as *khulafa'*, most of whom do not qualify as vicegerents of God in the Shaykh's sense.

The third dimension to the *khalifa's hukm*, in addition to possessing both *al-sayf* and *al-fi'l*, is the *khalifa's* manifestation of the opposing divine names (*asma' al-taqabul*) and their properties in creation. In many passages, he characterizes the *khalifa* through this attribute alone. For example, he states that:

The perfection (*tatimmat*) of vicegerency (*al-khilafa*) and deputyship (*al-niyaba*) is in ruling (*al-hukm*) in accordance with what the realities of the divine names require (*taqtadi*) in the way of subjection (*al-qahr*), terrifying (*al-ir'ad*), threatening (*al-ibraq*), seizure (*al-akhdh*), mercy (*al-rahma*), pardon (*al-<sup>c</sup>afw*), leniency (*al-tajawuz*), avenging (*al-intiqam*), calling to account (*al-hisab*), and confiscation (*al-musadara*).<sup>102</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, *Futuhāt*, in Takeshita, *Perfect Man*, pp. 118-9 (from *Futuhāt*, vol. II, p. 272, Cairo 1329H ed.).

<sup>100</sup> See above, footnote no. 92.

<sup>101</sup> The difference between the *khalifa* and the *malik* will be discussed further in the following chapter.

<sup>102</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. II, p. 739. See also, *Futuhāt*, vol. II, p. 733.



By stressing the *khalifa*'s manifestation of the opposing divine names or *asma' al-taqabul*, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi underscores the *khalifa*'s preservation of the balance between the effects of these names, which would otherwise tend to overpower one another, and hence the *khalifa*'s manifestation of the *totality* of the divine names. Another reason for describing the *khalifa* in terms of his manifestation of *asma' al-taqabul* may be that "God is only known by His bringing together the opposites . . . for He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden,"<sup>103</sup> in the words that Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi ascribes to al-Kharraz,<sup>104</sup> and so it may follow that His *khalifa*, who appears with His form, is primarily known by the manifestation of *asma' al-taqabul*.

The fourth important characteristic of the *khalifa* which distinguishes him and his *hukm* from the *malik* is possession of *al-nubuwwa*. By *al-nubuwwa* Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi does not seem to be referring to the prophethood of legislation (*nubuwwat al-tashri'*) that is the prerogative of the *rusul*, but rather to the general prophethood (*al-nubuwwa al-<sup>c</sup>amma*) or Sainthood (*walaya*)<sup>105</sup> - which is bestowed on the *awliya'* and on the *rusul* (in their capacity as *awliya'*). For according to Takeshita, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi states that the earth is never devoid of a *khalifa*.<sup>106</sup> As Takeshita notes, if the *nubuwwa* referred to above as a necessary requirement of the *khalifa* means *nubuwwat al-tashri'*, then there would be no vicegerents after Prophet Muhammad, and the the earth will thereafter remain without a vicegerent, which contradicts Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's above affirmation of the impossibility of such

<sup>103</sup> *Fusus*, vol. I, p. 77.

<sup>104</sup> Abu Sa'id Ahmad b. 'Isa al-Kharraz, d.277 H.

<sup>105</sup> Takeshita, pp. 119-21.

<sup>106</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, *'Uqlat al-Mustawfiz*, in Takeshita, *Perfect Man*, p. 119 (from *'Uqlat al-Mustawfiz*, p. 97, Leiden 1914 ed.).



a situation. Hence, as Takeshita notes, the *nubuwwa* which Ibn al-°Arabi cites here as a necessary quality of the *khalifa* apparently refers to what Ibn al-°Arabi calls *al-nubuwwa al-°amma* or *al-walaya* which, contrary to *nubuwwat al-tashri°* that was sealed with Prophet Muhammad, is not sealed and continues through the *awliya°*.<sup>107</sup> "General prophethood," according to Takeshita, "has the function of receiving the divine knowledge directly from God, as its other name 'prophethood of divine instruction' indicates."<sup>108</sup> According to Ibn al-°Arabi, the knowledge thus received by the *wali* is knowledge of the "[divine] secrets which was given to the prophets" yet does not include the reception of legislation which is the prerogative of the *rusul*.<sup>109</sup> Hence, Ibn al-°Arabi's assertion that the *khalifa* must possess *nubuwwa*, without which he would be a *malik*, means that he must be a *wali*.

In conclusion, it appears that what unites the various ranks of *khulafa°* discussed above and defines them as *khulafa° Allah* is their receiving of direct divine knowledge, and their manifestation, however varied, of the divine Image in creation. They differ from each other in the level of knowledge and degree of *hukm*, and range from those who possess knowledge but do not govern in creation, to those who combine divine knowledge with *hukm* in both the material and spiritual realms.

## 2.2 *Khilafat al-rasul*

As mentioned above, Ibn al-°Arabi describes *khalifat Allah* as the treasurer of existence,

<sup>107</sup> Takeshita, p. 121.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibn al-°Arabi, *Futuhat*, in Takeshita, *Perfect Man*, pp. 121-2 (from *Futuhat*, vol. III, p. 251, Osman Yahia ed.). The difference between the knowledge of the prophets and the *awliya°* will become clearer in the section on *khilafat al-rasul*.



and states that the world will never be without such a *khalifa*. However, with the seal of Prophethood by Prophet Muhammad, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi states that an aspect of *khilafat Allah* is sealed, and *khulafa' Allah* become, with respect to the content of their knowledge, *khulafa' al-rasul*. Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi does not use the term *khilafat al-rasul* in the traditional sense of successorship of the Prophetic (political) leadership of the community. Rather, he refers by it to the successorship of the Prophet in divine knowledge, though not necessarily in governing authority. In the following passage, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi explains his understanding of the concept and points to the difference between it and *khilafat Allah*:

God has on earth His vicegerents (*khala'if*); they are the messengers. As for the vicegerency of the present day, they are [vicegerents] of the prophets, but not of God. They do not judge (*yahkumun*) except through the laws which the Messenger gave them; they do not go outside this law. However, here is a subtle point (*daqiqah*) which only people like us know. This [subtle point] concerns [the manner of] receiving the law brought by Muhammed by which they judge. The vicegerents of the prophet are those who take legislation (*hukm*) through transmission from him [i.e., Muhammed] or through *ijtihad*, whose basis is also transmitted from him. However, among us, there are those who receive it from God. Then he [such a man] is as such a vicegerent of God. Thus he takes [knowledge] from the selfsame source from which the prophet took. Such a man outwardly (*fi al-zahir*) follows [the Prophet] because he has no contradiction in his judgement (*hukm*) [against the sacred Law] . . . he is with regard to what he knows, and in respect of the manner (*sura*) of reception [of knowledge], special (*mukhtass*) and in complete agreement [with the prophets] . . . Thus [the manner in which] the vicegerent receives from God is the same as that of the messenger. We say of him [such a man] in the esoteric expression (*bi lisan al-kashf*) "the vicegerent of God" and in the exoteric expression (*bi lisan al-zahir*) "the vicegerent of the messenger of God . . . For God has vicegerents (*khulafa'*) in His creation who take from the source (*ma'dan*) of the Prophet and the prophets that which the messengers, peace be upon them, had taken. And they know the excellence (*fadl*) of the[ir] predecessors [the *rusul*] in this [acquiring of knowledge] because the messenger is receptive (*qabil*) to increase [in knowledge], whereas this *khalifa* is not receptive to the increase which, had he been a messenger, he would have received. Hence, he is not given, of knowledge and judgement in what has been legislated, except that which has been legislated to the messenger; thus, he is outwardly (*fi al-zahir*) a follower (*muttabi'*) and not



an opposer (*mukhalif*), in contrast to the messengers [who are not followers of their predecessors but are, rather, Imams of a new path].<sup>110</sup>

Hence, the *khulafa'* after the Prophet are, according to Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, *khulafa' al-rasul* in the sense that their knowledge is derived from the Prophet and the Law with which he was sent. And even though some amongst the *khulafa' al-rasul* receive knowledge directly from God, as the prophets did, and are as such *khulafa' Allah*, yet they do not exceed in legislative knowledge the knowledge of the Prophet, but, rather, measure all their "revelations," or direct knowledge from God, against transmitted prophetic knowledge.<sup>111</sup> So, they are in respect of the content of their knowledge *khulafa' al-rasul*, for the content of their knowledge does not exceed nor deviate from that revealed to the Prophet. However, in respect of their mode of reception of knowledge, they are *khulafa' Allah* - as the path of divine "revelation" remains open to them.

In another passage, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi points out that had not legislation been sealed by the Prophet, such *khulafa'* would have been legislators. But as legislation has been sealed with Muhammad, they become "heirs" (*waratha*) of the legislation of the Prophet. In that passage, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi reserves to the prophets the title of *khalifat Allah*, calls Muhammad the seal of vicegerents (*khatam al-khulafa'*), and denotes his successors as *khulafa' al-khalifa min <sup>c</sup>ind Allah* (vicegerents of the vicegerent who proceed from God) and as his deputies (*nuwwab*). By "*khulafa' al-khalifa*," Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi is referring to a category wider than that of *khulafa' al-rasul*, for he states, in the following quotation, that only some of

<sup>110</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, *Fusus*, in Takeshita, *Perfect Man*, p. 124 (from *Fusus*, pp. 162-3, Cairo 1946) with amendments in translation; *Fusus*, vol. I, p. 163.

<sup>111</sup> This is Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's most important differentiation between the *awliya'* and the *rusul*. For discussion of this, see Takeshita, pp. 118-31.



the *khulafa' al-khalifa* are *khulafa' al-rasul*. According to Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, the *khulafa' al-khalifa* are "the Qutbs and the Commanders of the Faithful," in other words, those who have inherited the Prophet's spiritual and/or political leadership of the community. Only some of those are *khulafa' al-rasul*, in Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's sense of the term defined above. Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi makes this point in the following passage:

The divine decrees (*al-tawqi<sup>c</sup>at al-ilahiyya*) continue to descend from God to His vicegerents [the prophets] with the good (*al-khayr*) which God promises to them and those who believe in God and His messengers, and the evil (*sharr*) with which He threatens (*taw<sup>c</sup>ada*) those who disbelieve in all this. From the time of his [each vicegerent's] *khilafa* till the end of his life, the divine decrees continue to descend to him. When he dies, he appoints (*istakhlaf*) whom he wishes according to divine revelation [in this matter] or else leaves the matter to the council (*shura*) of his companions who then appoint the one on whom they agree. [This continues] until God sends from His side a messenger, thus setting for them another *khalifa*, until the time of the seal of vicegerents (*khatam al-khulafa'*) [Prophet Muhammad], after whom God sets in his stead deputies (*nuwwaban<sup>c</sup> anhu*), who become then the vicegerents of the vicegerent of God (*khulafa' al-khalifa min<sup>c</sup> ind Allah*) rather than the vicegerents of God (*khulafa' Allah*). They are the *qutbs* and the Commanders of the Faithful (*umara' al-mu'minin*) till the Day of Judgement. Amongst those deputies, there are some whom God had unveiled, and who are thus from the People of Witnessing (*ahl al-<sup>c</sup>ayn wa al-shuhud*); who call to God "on evidence clear as the seeing with one's eyes" (*'ala basira*)<sup>112</sup> as the Prophet had called. If only the age had not required that there be no legislators (*musharri<sup>c</sup>in*) after the Messenger of God, God's peace and blessings upon him, those would have been legislators, even though they may not bring anything other than the *shar<sup>c</sup>* of the Messenger, God's peace and blessings upon him. For they would have been in it [legislation] as the Messenger, God's peace and blessings upon him, had been with respect to the *shar<sup>c</sup>* of those before him; when he gave judgement according to it, he [the Prophet] was in the position of the former [legislator] and not his deputy, even if he confirms it [*shar<sup>c</sup>*]. As God has disallowed (*mana<sup>c</sup>a*) this in this *umma*, we came to know that they are the vicegerents of the Messenger (*khulafa' al-rasul*), God's peace and blessings upon him, even though they call to God *'ala basira* as he had, God's peace and blessings upon him, and as God, exalt Him, has said about him in the Qur'an: "I do invite unto God, - on evidence clear as the seeing with one's eyes, I and whoever follows me."<sup>113</sup> And he called us "heirs" (*waratha*) and said that we have not inherited except knowledge (*al-ilm*).<sup>114</sup>

<sup>112</sup> Reference to Qur'an, 12:108.

<sup>113</sup> Reference to the Qur'anic verse: "Say thou: 'This is my way (*sabili*). I do invite unto God, - on evidence clear as the seeing with one's eyes (*'ala basira*). - I and whoever follows me. Glory to God, and never will I join gods with God'," (12:108).

<sup>114</sup> *Futuhat*, vol. IV, p. 33.



Hence, *khilafat Allah*, in the sense connected with messengership, is passed on from prophet to prophet until it reaches Prophet Muhammad with whom it is sealed. The leadership of the community is then inherited by the Qutbs and the Commanders of the Faithful. These are called *khulafa' al-khalifa*. Some of these are *khulafa' al-rasul*, and so inherit both the Prophet's knowledge and governing (spiritual and not necessarily political) authority. The *khilafa* of these *khulafa' al-khalifa* or *khulafa' al-rasul* is more restricted, or less complete, than that of the prophets in terms of both knowledge and *hukm*. For with respect to knowledge, they are limited, as noted above, to that which has been revealed to the Prophet. As for *hukm*, since according to Ibn al-°Arabi it proceeds from or is dictated by knowledge,<sup>115</sup> then, followingly, the *hukm* of *khulafa' al-rasul* misses the perfection of the *hukm* of the Prophet to the extent that their knowledge falls short of the perfection of the knowledge of the Prophet.

Though Ibn al-°Arabi here appears to rank the "Qutbs and the Commanders of the Faithful" equally as *khulafa' al-khalifa*, the evidence of other passages suggests that there is usually a difference between these two categories of *khulafa'*. This is because the *qutbs* inherit the cosmic function of *al-khilafa*, whereas most of the Commanders of the Faithful, who are the political rulers or *khulafa' al-zahir*, to use Ibn al-°Arabi's terminology, are at best the deputies of the *qutbs*, except when they are themselves the *qutbs*.

Ibn al-°Arabi describes the *qutb* in terms very similar to the *khalifa*. In his *Istilahat al-Sufiyya*, he defines the *qutb* as "the locus of God's gaze (*mawdi° nazar Allah*) in the world in every time," and as the "center of the circle as well as its circumference, the mirror of

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<sup>115</sup> *Fusus*, vol. I, pp. 131-2.



*al-Haqq*, and that around which the world rotates.”<sup>116</sup> It is through him that the vicegerency of God on Earth continues and, in Ibn al-‘Arabi’s words, “the world is sustained”:

The *qutb* is known (*ma‘lum*) but is not specified by name (*ghayr mu‘ayyan*). And he is the *khalifa* of the age (*khalifat al-zaman*), and the locus of [God’s] gaze (*mahall al-nazar*) and manifestation (*al-tajalli*). From him proceed the effects (*al-athar*) on the inner and outer aspects of the world, and through him God has mercy on whom He wills, and punishes whom He wills. He [the *qutb*] has characteristics that if found combined in the *khalifa* of a time (*khalifat ‘asr*) then he [the latter] is the *qutb* and the pivot of God’s divine provision. Otherwise, he is other than him, and by him the world is sustained.<sup>117</sup>

The distinction between the *qutb* (the true *khalifa*) and the political or exoteric ruler, who may not be a *qutb*, is also evident in the following passages where Ibn al-‘Arabi states that the *qutb* may hold both the esoteric and exoteric *khilafas*,<sup>118</sup> or he may hold only the esoteric *khilafa*, in which case whoever assumes the apparent or the exoteric *khilafa* is merely his deputy, while the *qutb* remains the true *khalifa*.

For the *qutb* of the time maybe himself the Imam, like Abu Bakr, may God be pleased with him, and others in his time, or he [the Imam] may be other than the *qutb* of the time, the *khilafa* belonging then [in fact] to the *qutb* of the time, who does not appear except with the attribute of justice. This exoteric vicegerent (*al-khalifa al-zahir*) is in reality (*fi al-batin*), and unknowingly, one of the deputies of the *qutb*.<sup>119</sup>

Similarly, Ibn al-‘Arabi states that:

God has not forced anyone into being in the station (*maqam*) of vicegerency, rather He has given him the potential (*a‘tahu al-ahliyya*) for filling that station, and has offered him [the opportunity] to appear therein with the sword, in whatever manner He orders him (*hasbama amarah*). The one who accepts it appears with the sword, and is thus an exoteric and esoteric vicegerent (*khalifa zahiran wa batinan*) - there being none other than him (*ma thamma ghayruhu*). And if he chooses not to appear (*‘adam al-zuhur*) [with the sword], for a good reason (*maslaha*) that he envisages, God conceals him and sets in his

<sup>116</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabi, *Istilahat al-Sufiyya*. Cairo: Maktabat ‘Alam al-Fikr, 1987, p. 10.

<sup>117</sup> *Tadbirat*, pp. 111-2.

<sup>118</sup> These are the perfect *qutbs* amongst whom Ibn al-‘Arabi counts the first four caliphs of the Islamic state. *Futuh*, vol. II, p. 8. See quotation below, p. 66.

<sup>119</sup> *Futuh*, vol. III, p. 182. In another passage, Ibn al-‘Arabi affirms that the *qutb* is the *khalifa* whereas “*khalifat al-zahir* is one of the deputies (*nawwab*) of the *qutb*.” *Futuh*, vol. IV, p. 392.



stead (*aqama 'anhu*) a deputy (*na'iban*) in the world who is called (*yusamma*) "khalifa."<sup>120</sup>

Thus, while nominally there may be two *khalifas*; one of the *zahir*, or exoteric sphere, and the other of the *batin*, or esoteric sphere, for Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi there is effectively only one *khalifa* - the *qutb*.<sup>121</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi explains that it is rare that the *qutb* hold both *al-khilafa al-zahira* and *al-batina*, and that usually the *qutb* holds *khilafat al-batin* only. This is probably why the *qutb* is usually referred to as *khalifat al-batin*. *Khalifat al-zahir* is the *qutb* only in those instances when both *al-khilafa al-zahira* and *al-batina* are bestowed on the same person.

Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi places the *qutb* at the head of the spiritual hierarchy to whom is assigned the function of governing creation,<sup>122</sup> and relates to him, or precisely to one of his two viziers or "Imams," the function of assigning and deposing the rulers of the people (*wulat umur al-khalq*) who would include the *khulafa' al-zahir*.<sup>123</sup> It is thus apparent that *khalifat al-zahir* belongs to a level of vicegerency different from that of the *qutb*. Although Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi appears to place both the *qutbs* and the Commanders of the Faithful on the same level as *khulafa' al-khalifa* or *khulafa' al-rasul*, it is evident that in terms of function this level belongs essentially to the *qutb*, and belongs to the exoteric rulers only partially and through the delegation by the *qutb*, except when he himself assumes the exoteric rulership. Thus, although called a *khalifa*, *khalifat al-zahir* is usually one of the deputies of the *khalifa* who is the *qutb*.

<sup>120</sup> *Futuhat*, vol. III, p. 182.

<sup>121</sup> The ultimate *khalifa* is of course God, the *qutb* His deputy.

<sup>122</sup> For an exposition of this hierarchy, see Chodkeiwicz, *Seal of the Saints*, pp. 89-98.

<sup>123</sup> "The rulers of the people (*wulat umur al-khalq*) are the responsibility of that Imam [*al-imam al-adna*]. He appoints and deposes, and God wards off (*yadfa'*) evil by him." *Futuhat*, vol. II, p. 756.



It may also be surmised from the above passage that the *qutb* and the *khalifat al-zahir* may differ in terms of knowledge. Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi states that among the category of *khulafa' al-khalifa min 'ind Allah* there are some who are *khulafa' al-rasul* in the sense of receiving knowledge directly from God. While the *qutb* by definition conforms to the Shaykh's description of *khulafa' al-rasul*, both in the sense of receiving direct divine knowledge<sup>124</sup> and in conforming completely to the Prophetic Law, this is not necessarily true of *khulafa' al-zahir*. However, in his *Fusus*, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi states that the possessor of *khilafat al-zahir* may be considered "*khalifat rasul Allah*", despite the fact that he is a deputy and only a nominal *khalifa*, on condition that he is just (*in 'adala*).<sup>125</sup>

\* \* \*

In conclusion, it appears that by the term "*khalifat Allah*," or simply "*al-khalifa*," Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi is referring essentially to the *wali*. And as there are two types of *awliya'*, there are respectively two types of *khulafa'*: a) the hidden, "passive," servants in both their inner and outer selves, and b) the manifest, "active," servants in themselves and superior before others. The latter, who are sometimes for the sake of differentiation referred to in this study as "*khulafa' al-hukm*," are divinely assigned with the function of governing in creation in accordance with His Law. The *hukm* of these follows divine knowledge and keeps to the divine Law, in other words, is divinely guided. Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi also differentiates between two types of "*khulafa' al-hukm*": a) those who have rule over *al-*

<sup>124</sup> In the *Futuhat*, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi states that the *qutb* receives divine knowledge through divine unveiling rather than reason. *Futuhat*, vol. III, p. 185.

<sup>125</sup> "The killing [of the illegitimate pretender to *al-khilafa*] pertains to *al-khilafa al-zahira* - even though this *khalifa* does not possess that station [of *al-khilafa*], and is a vicegerent of the Messenger of God (*khalifat rasul Allah*). God's peace and blessing upon him, if he is just," *Fusus*, p. 165.



*batin* only, and b) those who have rule over both *al-zahir* and *al-batin*, and so are more complete or perfect. After the Prophet, *khilafat Allah* continues through the *awliya'* who, in terms of the content of their knowledge, are *khulafa' al-rasul*, and, in terms of the mode of their reception of knowledge, are *khulafa' Allah*. As described above, some *awliya'* inherit only knowledge or divine "instruction" and so are *khulafa' Allah* only in the epistemological sense, whereas others inherit both the knowledge and the cosmic function of *khilafat Allah*. These are the *qutbs* who, as stated, rule either in *al-zahir* and *al-batin*, or as is more common, rule in *al-batin* only, delegating their rule over *al-zahir* to others, known then as *khulafa' al-zahir* to distinguish them from *khulafa' al-batin* who are the *qutbs*. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the rule of the *qutbs* is always just or divinely guided, whereas the rule of *khulafa' al-zahir* may or may not be just.

Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi thus moves most of the *khulafa' al-zahir*, with some exceptions, from the rank of *khalifa* (with which they are popularly associated) to that of deputy-*khalifa*, thereby assigning them a lower level of authority than commonly attributed to them. Yet as will be shown in the rest of this study, Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi constantly affirms the authority of these rulers, as long as their actions conform with the *shari'at*. Having discussed at some length the person and function of *khalifat Allah*, and how *khalifat al-batin* and *khalifat al-zahir* stand in relation to him, we can now turn towards the primary subject of this study - the exoteric vicegerent and vicegerency or *khilafat al-zahir*.



## Chapter Two

### The Exoteric Vicegerency (*khilafat al-zahir*)

In the preceding chapter, the nature and functions of *khalifat Allah* was discussed. In this chapter, we shall turn to *khilafat al-zahir* and the characteristics of its holder. As shown above, the *khalifat al-zahir* is associated by Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi with possession of the sword, that is to say he has political authority, and is the actual ruler. He corresponds to the Imam or Caliph whose qualifications and functions are discussed in juristic works on the Imamate. As already explained, if he possesses all the requisite qualifications, he may himself be *khalifat Allah*, in which case he has the cosmic function of preserving the universe, and as is the case of Prophet Muhammad, he may also have the additional functions of prophet, legislator, and messenger. The *khalifat al-zahir* usually shares the functions of *khilafat Allah* with the Qutb, or *khalifat al-batin*, the former taking on the functions of governing the community in accordance with the divine Law (*al-shar<sup>c</sup>*), while the latter maintains the cosmic role of God's vicegerent. The two thus share in the governance of the world in accordance with the divine Order, although Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi considers the *khalifat al-zahir* in such cases a deputy of the *khalifat al-batin*.<sup>126</sup> Thus, it is not possible to view *khilafat al-zahir* and *khilafat al-batin*, or the *qutbiyya*, as two mutually exclusive domains.<sup>127</sup>

<sup>126</sup> See, for e.g., *Futuhāt*, vol. III, p. 182; *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 392.

<sup>127</sup> It is noteworthy that in his *Tadbirat*, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi states that he will structure his exposition of *khilafat al-batin* "*unbubān ʿala unbub*" (tube on tube), that is, "upon the same structure" of the generally better known layout of juristic writings on *al-khilāfa al-zahira*, in other words on the *imama*. In addition, he



None of Ibn al-ʿArabi's works are devoted exclusively to a detailed study of the functions and nature of *khalifat al-zahir*, since his main focus is the general cosmic role of *khalifat Allah*, rather than the specific functions of the exoteric vicegerency which jurists discuss in works on government. Like the jurists, he perceives the principal function of the exoteric ruler to be the implementation of God's *shariʿa*, yet he emphasizes the cosmic aspect of this rather than the practical and legal aspects. Nevertheless, in scattered passages here and there in the works reviewed for this study, Ibn al-ʿArabi addresses several of the main questions raised in the juristic literature on the Imamate. In order to understand better Ibn al-ʿArabi's thought on *khilafat al-zahir*, which corresponds to the Imamate, and to situate it within the general context of literature on this topic, his views on these issues will be discussed and comparisons will be drawn between his positions and those of some of the most prominent writers in this field. As an example of the Sunni position, al-Mawardi's *al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah*<sup>128</sup> will be used. As for the mainstream Imami Shiʿi position, Ibn al-Mutahhar al-Hilli's *Kashf al-Murad fi Sharh Tajrid al-ʿItiqad*,<sup>129</sup> and Miqdad-i-Fadil's commentary on Ibn al-Mutahhar's *al-Bab al-Hadi ʿAshar*<sup>130</sup> will be consulted as examples of Twelver Shiʿi thought, and al-Qadi al-Nuʿman's

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applies the technical terms used by jurists discussing the *imama* to *khilafat al-batin*, and often explains the latter *khilafa* in terms of the former. *Tadbirat*, p. 119. Hence, this presentation of *al-khilafa al-zahira* will make references to, and draw inferences from, the Shaykh's exposition of *khilafat al-batin*.

<sup>128</sup> ʿAli b. Muhammad b. Habib al-Basri al-Mawardi. *Al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyya wa al-Wilayat al-diniyya*. M. F. Al-Sirjani (Ed.). Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiyya, n.d.

<sup>129</sup> Jamal al-Din Abi Mansur al-Hasan b. Yusuf b. ʿAli b. al-Mutahhar al-Hilli. *Kashf al-Murad fi Sharh Tajrid al-ʿItiqad*. Qumm: Maktabat al-Safawi, n.d.

<sup>130</sup> al-Hasan b. Yusuf b. ʿAli b. al-Mutahhar al-Hilli. *al-Bab al-Hadi ʿAshar*, with commentary by Miqdad-i-Fadil al-Hilli. Tr. by William McElwee Miller. London: The Royal Asiatic Society, 1928.



*Da'a'im al-Islam*<sup>131</sup> will be consulted as an example of Fatimid Isma'ili views. Though one of the most important works expounding Isma'ili doctrine, al-Qadi al-Nu'man's *Da'a'im* is silent on several of issues pertinent to the Imamate, hence another Isma'ili work, Ibn Ya'qub's *Risala fi al-Imama*,<sup>132</sup> will be used in those occasions where *al-Da'a'im* is silent. A full comparison of Ibn al-'Arabi's thought with the beliefs of the numerous other Isma'ili Shi'i and ghulat groups is beyond the scope of this study.

Among the main issues relating to *khilafat al-zahir* addressed by both Ibn al-'Arabi and writers on the Imamate are: whether the function of the Imamate is necessary or not, and if so whether it is deemed necessary by rational or scriptural reasons; whether the Imam is selected by an electoral body or is rather designated by the Prophet or a preceding Imam; the qualifications of the Imam; whether the Imam is infallible; the issue of superiority in merit (*al-afdaliyya*) between the first four caliphs; and the issue of deposition. The presentation here will follow, more or less, the general structure used in juristic writings on the Imamate. Through presenting Ibn al-'Arabi's position on the main issues relating to the Imamate which the jurists discuss, many of his views on the office and qualifications of both *khalifat al-zahir* and *khalifat al-batin* will become clear.

## 1. The Necessity of the Imamate

One of the points on which Ibn al-'Arabi agrees with the Sunni and Shi'i jurists studied here is the necessity of the Imamate. We find al-Mawardi, Ibn al-Mutahhar, Miqdad-i-

<sup>131</sup> Abi Hanifa al-Nu'man b. Muhammad al-Tamimi al-Maghrabi. *Da'a'im al-Islam wa Dhikr al-Halal wa al-Haram wa al-Qadaya wa al-Ahkam 'an Ahl Bayt Rasul Allah 'Alayhi wa 'Alayhim Afdal al-Salam*. Ed. Asef b. 'Ali Asgharfaydi. Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1951.

<sup>132</sup> Abu al-Fawaris Ahmad Ibn Ya'qub. *The Political Doctrine of the Isma'ilis: The Imamate*. Ed. Sami Nasib Makarem. New York: Caravan Books, 1973.



Fadil, implicitly al-Nu'man, and Ibn Ya'qub, asserting the necessity of the Imamate. Disagreement did occur, however, amongst those who believe in the necessity of the Imamate about whether the necessity of the Imamate is known by force of reason (*al-ʿaql*) or from the sources of the *shariʿa* (*al-sharʿ* or *al-samʿ*), and on the reasons for the necessity of the Imamate.

al-Mawardi presents both positions, explaining that those who believe that the Imamate is necessary by *ʿaql* argue that people are prone by nature to delegate the governing of their affairs to one whose function is to prevent them from committing injustices to one another and to judge between them in their disputes, otherwise anarchy will subsist.<sup>133</sup> On the other hand, he states that those who believe it necessary by *sharʿ* rather than *ʿaql*, as al-Mawardi himself appears to believe, present an argument based on the Qur'anic command to obey those in authority: "O ye who believe, obey God, and obey the Apostle and those charged with authority among you."<sup>134</sup> From this verse, it is deduced that the *shariʿa* rather than reason necessitates the existence of an Imam: the Imam is needed to implement God's ordinances in many matters which are not accessible to reason, and this is why God commands obedience to those in authority, who are the rulers.<sup>135</sup>

As for the Shi'i position, both Ibn al-Mutahhar and Miqdad-i-Fadil state that Twelver Imamis believe the Imamate is necessary by reason, since people need someone to restrain them from contention and corruption, and to guide them to good-doing and salvation. It

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<sup>133</sup> al-Mawardi, p. 5.

<sup>134</sup> Qur'an, 4:59.

<sup>135</sup> al-Mawardi, p. 5.



is, moreover, a kindness (*lutf*) from God,<sup>136</sup> which He is bound to provide (*wajib 'ala Allah*) because He is just and desires the guidance of His creation.<sup>137</sup>

al-Nu'man does not state his position on this point, while Ibn Ya'qub states that it is necessary by both scripture (*al-shar'*) and reason. For scriptural evidence, he cites several Qur'anic verses and Prophetic hadiths that attest to the necessity of the Imams. As for rational evidence, he argues that "understanding and knowledge are the culmination of creation . . . everything else is their instrument and the tool for bringing them about," and that the Imam is "[the] teacher, elected and supported by God."<sup>138</sup> He adds that the Imam is the necessary instrument of divine knowledge and acts as a guide among God's creation.<sup>139</sup>

In answer to the question of whether the Imamate is necessary by reason or by scripture, Ibn al-'Arabi states that it is necessary by both:

Having (*'ittikhadh*) an Imam is necessitated by the Law (*shar'*) as well as by the primordial nature (*fitra*) of the world; I mean the need to set up (*nasb*) an Imam. If you say: "The legislator (*al-shari'*) has not stated the necessity (*ma nassa bil-amr*) of taking up an Imam, so whence is it obligatory (*wajib*)?" We say: God, The Almighty, has commanded us, no doubt, to uphold religion, and there is no way to uphold it except with the presence of security in the people's minds (*anfus*) over themselves, their money, and their families from the transgression of others. This can never be if there is no one whose might is feared and whose mercy is pleaded.<sup>140</sup>

Every one, in every village, country, or group, has resolved on having a head to whom they can turn and be under his authority. The Messenger, God's peace and blessing upon him, whenever he sent out a troop, even if the troop were of two men, used to appoint one person as a leader.<sup>141</sup>

<sup>136</sup> *Lutf*, explains Miqdad-i-Fadil, is "that which brings the creature near to obedience and keeps him far from disobedience, and this idea is realized by the Imamate," p. 63. Such is also the view of Ibn al-Mutahhar, p. 254.

<sup>137</sup> Ibn al-Mutahhar, p. 284; Miqdad-i-Fadil, p. 63.

<sup>138</sup> Ibn Ya'qub, p. 23.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., pp. 23-5.

<sup>140</sup> *Futuhat*, vol. III, pp. 106-7.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.



He states that the Imamate is necessary as a guarantor of the security and stability needed by the people to fulfil their religious requirements:

Upholding religion is what is required, and that is not possible except when there is security (*aman*). Hence, taking up an Imam is necessary in every age.<sup>142</sup>

Every kingdom (*mulk*) in which there is no Imam who is obeyed (*imam muttaba'*), will soon fall apart. That is why all nations found reason to have Imams.<sup>143</sup>

In other passages Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi explains at more length the necessity of the Imamate by referring to his theory of the divine names, the essential opposition of their effects, and hence the cosmic need for a Law that balances between them, and for one to whom is assigned the function of implementing this Law in creation. As shown in the preceding chapter, many of the divine names have contrary effects, and the failure to balance their manifestation would lead to contention and subjugation of the opposing effects, and ultimately to chaos and to the destruction of creation. Hence the importance of the *khalifa*, for by his rule order ensues. With respect to *khilafat al-zahir*, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi explains that since men are innately prone to dispute, the root cause of disputes being the initial opposition of the divine names, there is a need for an Imam of *al-zahir* to settle these contentions:

Know that man is one of the trees (*shagara min al-shagarat*) that God had planted; a tree not a *najm* (a trunk-less plant) because he has a trunk (*qa'im 'ala saq*). And He made him a *shagara* from *al-tashagur* (dispute) that is within him, due to his creation from opposites (*addad*). Opposites entail discord (*al-khisam*), dispute (*al-tashagur*), and contention (*al-munaza'a*). This is why the higher plenum (*al-mala' al-a'la*) dispute. The origin of its [dispute's] existence in the world is the effect (*hukm*) of the divine names of opposing properties - nothing other than this. The divine support of this (*mustanaduha al-ilahi*) is God's saying, exalt Him, that Muhammad, God's peace and blessing upon him, said: "I

<sup>142</sup> *Futuhat*, vol. I, p. 50.

<sup>143</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, *'Anqa' Mughrib fi Khatm al-Awliya' wa Shams al-Maghrib*. Cairo: Maktabat 'Alam al-Fikr, 1997, pp. 58-9.



had no knowledge that the higher plenum dispute",<sup>144</sup> until God, exalt Him, informed him. He then came to know that Nature has an effect (*athar*) in them. . . . As people are *shagarat*, God made there be rulers (*wulah*) amongst them, to whom they can turn to if they dispute, to judge between them in order to alleviate the property of contention. He set for them one Imam in the exoteric realm (*al-zahir*) who is responsible to all for establishing the righteous way of life (*yarja' ilayhi amr al-jami' li-iqamat al-din*), and commanded His servants not to contend with him. God commanded us to fight the one who rises against and contends with him, because of His knowledge that his contending would lead to corruption [or damage] to the righteous way of life which God has commanded us to uphold.<sup>145</sup>

As mentioned above, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi argues that the divine law by which the *khalifa*, whether *al-zahir* or *al-batin*, should rule is created to balance the opposing properties of the divine names. Hence, the *khalifat al-zahir*, like the *khalifat al-batin*, partakes in the necessary function of preserving creation according to the divine Law. The necessity of the Imamate in Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's thought is thus evident, since the *khalifa* has a vital role in the cosmic order, and his conclusions are based on both reason and scripture.

## 2. Qualifications of the *Khalifa*

In the works on the Imamate reviewed here, the discussion of the necessity of the Imamate is usually followed by the discussion of the person of the Imam; his qualities and the method of his appointment to office. Because of the difference between the Sunni and Shi'i perspectives with regard to the identity of the Imam and the way of his appointment - Shi'is believing in the divine designation of the Imam, as opposed to the Sunnis who believe in the appointment of the Imam by an electoral body or a preceding Imam<sup>146</sup> - we find that Sunni writings on the Imamate, as represented by al-Mawardi, go into the details

<sup>144</sup> Qur'an, 38:69.

<sup>145</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. III, p. 182.

<sup>146</sup> Technically, they nominate a candidate for appointment, and the appointment is ratified when the Muslims give their *bay'a*, or oath of allegiance, to the candidate.



of the qualifications which distinguish the eligible candidates for the Imamate, whom al-Mawardi calls *ahl al-imama*, so that the electoral body - those eligible to appoint or "select" the Imam, referred to by al-Mawardi as *ahl al-ikhtiyar*<sup>147</sup> - could choose from amongst them the one who is most suitable for assuming the office of the Imamate. The Shi'i writings, on the other hand, follow their discussion of the necessity of the Imam with the discussion of the necessity of the Imam's infallibility (*'isma*), that being the defining characteristic of the Imam. They do not need to define for an electoral body the qualifications which distinguish the Imam, because they believe in the divinely-guided designation (*nass*) rather than human election of the Imam. Infallibility, and the differences between the Sunni and Shi'i modes of appointment of the Imam will be discussed further on in the relevant sections. What is of note here is that Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi lists, in conformity with Sunni tradition as represented here by al-Mawardi, the qualifications which distinguish the Imam (in the sense of *khalifat al-zahir*) and validate his nomination for the office. These are similar to the qualifications that al-Mawardi lists, which are: probity (*'adala*), religious knowledge (*ilm*), soundness of the senses (*salamat al-hawass*), soundness of the body (*salamat al-a'da'*), good judgment, bravery, and Qurayshite descent.<sup>148</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's list of qualifications, which he states have been agreed on by the scholars is as follows:

The conditions (*shara'it*) of the Imamate, as mentioned by the *'ulama'*, are ten: six of which are natural (*khulqiyya*), that can not be acquired, and four of which can be acquired. The natural ones are adulthood (*al-bulugh*), sanity (*al-'aql*), freedom (*al-hurriyya*), maleness (*al-dhukuriyya*), Qurayshite descent - over which there is disagreement and some of the *'ulama'* have not necessitated it - and soundness of the senses of hearing and vision.

<sup>147</sup> al-Mawardi, p. 6.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.



As for the four that can be acquired, they are bravery (*al-najda*), competence (*al-kifaya*), religious knowledge (*al-ilm*), and piety (*al-wara'*).<sup>149</sup>

If all the conditions are met, then the contract is valid, and the world is obliged to be loyal to the covenant. These [conditions] are: maleness, maturity, sanity (*al-'aql*), religious knowledge, freedom, piety, bravery, competence, Qurayshite descent, and soundness of the senses of hearing and vision. Such has been stated by the people of knowledge and speculation (*ahl al-'ilm wa al-nazar*).<sup>150</sup>

It is interesting to note that in his *Tadbirat al-Ilahiyya*, Ibn al-'Arabi requires the *khalifat al-batin* to fulfil similar qualifications as those he listed above for *khalifat al-zahir*, though he adds to the exoteric sense of these qualifications a spiritual sense.<sup>151</sup>

The one qualification which Ibn al-'Arabi cites as a source of debate among the 'ulama' - the Sunni 'ulama' since for the Shi'i ones the issue is not a subject of debate - is

Qurayshite descent. In a passage of the *Futuhāt*, Ibn al-'Arabi states that:

The Messenger, God's peace and blessing upon him, has said: "The vicegerents (*al-khulafa'*) are from Quraysh."<sup>152</sup> *al-Taqarrush* is *al-taqabbud* (being "drawn, collected, or gathered together")<sup>153</sup> and *al-ijtima'* (assemblage, congregation). As this tribe had combined in itself several tribes, it was called Quraysh, meaning a group of tribes (*majmu' qaba'il*). From it [the linguistic root of "Quraysh"] comes a marine animal that is called "*al-qirsh*" (shark). I have seen it gathered onto itself (*wa huwa mutaqabbid mujtami'*). And so is the Imam; if he is not attributed with the character traits (*akhlaq*) of his appointer, possessing all of them that are needed by those over whom he appointed, then his vicegerency is not valid. For he is the one and the summation (*al-wahid al-majmu'*), his oneness being the oneness of aggregation (*ahadiyyat al-jam'*).<sup>154</sup>

<sup>149</sup> *Tadbirat*, p. 20.

<sup>150</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. I, p. 50.

<sup>151</sup> For example, Ibn al-'Arabi states that the (physical) soundness of the senses of hearing and vision is evident for one who is to govern both himself and others. He adds that the spiritual interpretation of the soundness of these senses is that the Imam listens and sees through God (*sama'ih bil Haqq, wa nazarihi bil Haqq*), as referred to in the hadith *qudsi* (found in Muslim, Ibn Maja, and Ibn Hanbal), known as hadith *al-nawafil*, in which God says that He becomes the hearing and the seeing of the servant who draws close to Him by performing, in addition to the obligatory acts of worship, supererogatory works. As for the requirement of Qurayshite descent, Ibn al-'Arabi states that the spiritual meaning of this is the Imam's actualization of the various stations of Muhammadan spirituality. *Tadbirat*, p. 120-2.

<sup>152</sup> See Wensinck, vol. II, p. 70, hadith in Tirmidhi; similarly, vol. II, p. 70, hadith in Ibn Hanbal.

<sup>153</sup> E. W. Lane. *Arabic-English Lexicon*. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1955, vol. VII, p. 2482, "q.b.d."

<sup>154</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. III, p. 106.



In linking the Prophetic hadith that the Imams should come from Quraysh with the linguistic root of the term Quraysh and the meanings of comprehensiveness associated with it, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi reasserts his previously stated definition of the *khalifa* (in the sense of *khalifat Allah*) as the encompasser of the totality of the divine names. Moreover, in citing this hadith, al-Shaykh al-Akbar appears to be asserting the necessity of Qurayshite descent.

Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's views on the condition of maleness require further comment, since though he believes the *khalifat al-zahir* should be male, as do the jurists, this is evidently not an essential requirement for the *khalifat al-batin* or *qutb*. In the *Tadbirat*, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi stresses the necessity of the condition of maleness both for *khilafat al-zahir* and for the *khilafa* of the soul over the human body, the spirit (*ruh*) being masculine while the soul (*nafs*) is feminine:

The fourth condition - maleness. The Imamate is not contracted to a woman. What has prevented this is that she cannot be given the office of judge (*mansib al-qada'*) nor of official witness (*mansib al-shahadat*) according to most of the judgements (of the jurists) regarding the *shari'a*. The reason for this is evident in itself and does not need explanation. What prevented the soul (*al-nafs*) from being an Imam despite its attribution with the attributes of perfection (*al-kamal*) is that she is, in existence, under the veil of protection (*hijab al-sawn*), and she is the daughter of this Imam (the spirit (*al-ruh*)), and the locus of immorality (*al-fujur*) and piety (*al-taqwa*). This reason applies to both vicegerencies (the inner vicegerency of the soul over the bodily kingdom, and the exoteric vicegerency).<sup>155</sup>

If you see a people empowering (*wallu*) a woman over their affairs, do not join them in this. (*wa idha ra'yta qawman wallu amra'ahum imra'ahum fa la tadkhul ma'ahum fi dhalik*.)<sup>156</sup>

The implication here is that this condition of maleness applies also to *khilafat al-batin*. However, in the *Futuhat* he affirms the possibility of women fulfilling the office of *al-qutb*

<sup>155</sup> *Tadbirat*, p. 121.

<sup>156</sup> *Futuhat*, vol. IV, p. 647. This refers to the Prophetic hadith in Wensinck, vol. VI, p. 186, hadith in Ibn Hanbal.



or *khalifat al-batin*. In section 324 of the *Futuhāt* entitled: "On the knowledge of the way-station (*manzil*) of the sharing of women and men in some of the divine stations (*al-mawatin al-ilahiyya*), and this is from the Muhammadan Presence," Ibn al-ʿArabi states:

These are all states that are shared by women and men, and they share in all the levels (*al-maratib*), even in Polehood (*al-qutbiyya*). You should not be veiled [from this fact] by the Messenger's words, God's peace and blessing upon him: "A nation that has empowered a woman over their affairs shall not prosper." For we are speaking of the appointment by God (*tawliyat Allah*) not of the appointment by the people (*tawliyat al-nas*), and the hadith addresses the one appointed by the people. If there was nothing on this matter besides the Messenger's saying, God's peace and blessing upon him: "Women are the sisters (*shaqa'iq*) [i.e. like the other halves] of men,"<sup>157</sup> it would suffice. That is, everything that can be attained by man, of stations, levels, and attributes, can be [attainable] to whom God wills of the women, just as this is possible to whom God wills of the men.<sup>158</sup>

Ibn al-ʿArabi explains in the same chapter that "were it not for the perfection of the Image, vicegerency (*al-khilafa*) would not have been possible."<sup>159</sup> As both men and woman can attain perfection - "men and women join (*ijtimaʿ*) in the rank of perfection"<sup>160</sup> - it follows that *al-khilafa* may also be received by women. However, they may not assume *al-khilafa al-zahira* because there are restrictions on their assumption of the functions of *al-qadaʿ* (adjudication of disputes) and *al-shahada* (giving evidence in court), and this in turn disqualifies them from holding political authority.<sup>161</sup> It thus seems evident that for Ibn al-ʿArabi the condition of maleness holds for *khilafat al-zahir* but not for *khilafat al-batin*.

In sum, Ibn al-ʿArabi's presentation of the qualifications of *khilafat al-zahir* follows closely in the Sunni tradition as represented by al-Mawardi.

<sup>157</sup> See Wensinck, vol. III, p. 162, hadith in Tirmidhi, al-Darimi, Ibn Hanbal.

<sup>158</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. III, p. 117.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. III, p. 115.

<sup>161</sup> *Tadbirat*, p. 121.



### 3. Selection or Designation

A major point of debate in Muslim political thought has been whether the Imam should be chosen through selection or by designation, in other words, whether the source of the Imam's legitimacy comes from God, through the prophet or the Imam's predecessor, or whether it comes from the leaders and representatives of the people. The Imami Shi'a believe in the Prophet's designation (*nass*) of 'Ali as his *khalifa*, and in the pre-designation of all the subsequent Imams till the end of time. Accordingly, they do not believe in consultation (*shura*) as a means of choosing the Imam. By contrast, the *ahl al-sunna wa al-jama'a*, or Sunnis, do not believe that the prophet designated 'Ali as his successor, and they recognize *shura* as a legitimate channel for choosing the Imam. Thus they recognize the legitimacy of the choice of the *khalifa* by an electoral body consisting of *ahl al-hall wa al-'aqd*, that is, people who have authority, and they also accept the legitimacy of his designation by a preceding caliph. In both cases, the choice should be ratified by the *bay'a* (oath of allegiance) given by the people.

Al-Mawardi discusses these two ways through which the office of the Imamate is contracted. With respect to the first mode of appointment, the choice by *ahl al-hall wa al-'aqd*, al-Mawardi specifies the qualities required in *ahl al-hall wa al-'aqd*, and states the varying opinions amongst the '*ulama*' as to the number of them required for contracting the Imam - the number varying from a minimum of one person to the sum of *ahl al-hall wa al-'aqd* in each country.<sup>162</sup> When this electoral body convenes, they select the candidate who best meets the qualifications required in the Imam. In the case of the

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<sup>162</sup> al-Mawardi, pp. 6-7.



eligibility of more than one, al-Mawardi discusses the various secondary conditions that should then be considered. He then discusses the various problems that arise, such as the simultaneous election of two Imams in two different areas, whether the Imam should be the best candidate (*al-afdāl*) or could he be the second-best (*al-mafdūl*), the legitimacy of an Imamate taken by force without the contract of *ahl al-hall wa al-ʿaql*, and other issues some of which will be addressed below. As for the second mode of appointment, that is, the designation by a preceding Imam (*nass*), al-Mawardi asserts its legitimacy on the basis of Caliph Abu Bakr's designation of ʿUmar, and, later on, ʿUmar's designation of an electoral body (*ahl al-shura*) (to whom he left the task of appointing an Imam from amongst themselves).<sup>163</sup>

As for the Shiʿi position on the appointment of the Imam, we find that both the Twelver Shiʿis, represented here by Ibn al-Mutahhar and Miqdād-i-Fadil, and the Fatimid Ismaʿili Shiʿis, represented by al-Nuʿman and Ibn Yaʿqub, affirm that the only legitimate mode of appointment of the Imam is designation by God, in the sense that the Prophet, who is infallible, being guided by God, appointed a successor, who is likewise divinely guided and infallible, and so on through the line of Imams, who by being infallible also have the capacity to appoint their successors in the Imamate. These Imams are believed to be predestinated by God, since they must be infallible in order to guide the community and save them from erring, and only God could identify one who has this quality.<sup>164</sup> This is the reason why the first three Caliphs are not considered legitimate by Imami Shiʿa who

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> See, Ibn al-Mutahhar, p.288; Miqdād-i-Fadil, pp. 68-9; al-Nuʿman, pp. 54-5; Ibn Yaʿqub, pp. 27-33. These writers give slightly different versions of the same principle.



consider them to have disobeyed the Prophet's instructions and to have usurped 'Ali's right to the successorship of the Prophet.<sup>165</sup>

Ibn al-'Arabi's position on this issue conforms to, or is compatible with, Sunni doctrine. He denies the fundamental Shi'i assertion of Prophet Muhammad's designation of a successor, and firmly believes that *shura* is the legitimate method of selecting the Imam (of *al-zahir*), hence that the exoteric Imam should be appointed by the people. He also recognizes the legitimacy of the first four Caliphs,<sup>166</sup> contrary to the general Imami Shi'i condemnation of the first three as usurpers. of 'Ali's right to the successorship of the Prophet.

In the important passage in the *Fusus* where Ibn al-'Arabi gave his definition of *khulafa' al-rasul* and *khulafa' Allah*, he explains why the Prophet did not designate a successor because, in Ibn al-'Arabi's words, the Prophet did not want to confine the matter to his choice when there is the possibility of God choosing whom He pleases for the *khilafa*:

The Messenger of God, God's peace and blessing upon him, died without designating (*nass*) nor specifying (*'ayyana*) anyone as his *khaliifa* because of his knowledge that there is among his people (*umma*) one who receives the *khilafa* from his Lord and who is thus the *khaliifa* from God (*khaliifa 'an Allah*), in addition to complying with the [Prophetic] Legislation (*al-hukm al-mashru'*). So when he, God's peace and blessing upon him, knew this, he did not confine the matter.<sup>167</sup>

This *khaliifa*, as explained earlier, receives knowledge directly from God, like the prophets, though his knowledge proceeds from, and does not exceed, the knowledge of

<sup>165</sup> Ibn al-Mutahhar, pp. 288-312; Miqdad-i-Fadil, pp. 69-81; al-Nu'man, pp. 48-57; Ibn Ya'qub, pp. 36-40.

<sup>166</sup> See, for e.g., *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 355. On excellence of first four Caliphs, see below, pp. 74-8.

<sup>167</sup> *Fusus*, p. 163.



the prophet. He is therefore described by Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi to be *khalifat Allah* "in the esoteric expression" and *khalifat Rasul Allah* "in the exoteric expression"<sup>168</sup> Hence, according to Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, the Prophet refrained from appointing a successor so that he did not preclude by his choice the appointment of one who is divinely "instructed" and guided. It is thus noteworthy that Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi considers Abu Bakr, the successor to the Prophet - whom he states was not designated by the Prophet - to have indeed been amongst the most perfect Imams and Qutbs who have authority over both the esoteric and the exoteric realms.<sup>169</sup> It is also noteworthy that unlike the Imami Shi'a, he does not give the Imams the right or, perhaps, the capacity, to designate a successor despite their being *khulafa' Allah*.

Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi thus apparently believes in the divine designation of the *khalifa*. However, he differentiates here between the two types of *khilafas* - *khilafat al-batin* and *khilafat al-zahir*, and two paths of divine designation - one that is direct, without an intermediary, from God to the *khalifa* in case of *khilafat al-batin*, and one that is through the intermediation of the people (*al-nas*) in case of *khilafat al-zahir*. For whereas *khalifat Allah* or the *quthb* is, according to Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, directly appointed by God, and can not be appointed by the people, *khilafat al-zahir*, on the other hand, must be appointed by the people through *shura*. In the case of *khilafat Allah*, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi states, as mentioned in the previous chapter, that God gives a sign in the heart of the one whom He has qualified for this *khilafa*, then He either gives him the choice or commands him to assume the

<sup>168</sup> *Fusus*, p. 163.

<sup>169</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. II, p. 8.



*khilafa*.<sup>170</sup> In either way, it is a direct method of appointment. In another passage, Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi asserts that *khalifat Allah* is appointed by God not by the people:

No one is vicegerent [in the real sense of the word as opposed to nominal *khalifas*] except the one whom God appointed vicegerent (*istakhlafahu*) over His slaves. The one who was elected by the people (*aqamahu al-nas*), acknowledged by them (*baya'uh*), and appointed by themselves over themselves (*qaddamuh li-anfusihim wa 'ala anfusihim*) is not such. This [the true vicegerency] is the rank of perfection.<sup>171</sup>

However, in the case of *khilafat al-zahir*, Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi believes it necessary, as will be discussed shortly, to resort to *shura*, and states that the one who is appointed by the people is the divinely chosen *khalifa*.<sup>172</sup> In this he seems to agree with the Sunni view that the choice of the *khalifa* through the consensus of the community is, in a sense, guided by God, on the basis of the Prophetic hadith: "My *umma* will not agree upon an error." He disapproves, however, the designation of the *khalifa* by the preceding one, which is the second method mentioned by the Sunni al-Mawardi for the appointment of the Imam. This is evident in the following important passage where he states that the choice of the ruler by the people is the true or the divine rulership (*wilayat al-Haqq*), and such a ruler is the divinely-chosen *khalifa* (*al-khalifa al-ilahi*), whereas the one appointed by a predecessor is only a deputy (*na'ib*) rather than a ruler (*wali*):

The ruler's (*al-wali*) designation [of a successor] after his death is deputyship (*niyaba*) not rulership (*wilaya*), while the one appointed by the people (*man wallahu al-nas*) is the divinely chosen vicegerent (*al-khalifa al-ilahi*), and [this appointment] is the true [or divine] rulership (*wilayat al-Haqq*). So be like al-Siddiq (*Siddiqiyyan*) or <sup>°</sup>Uthman (<sup>°</sup>*Uthmaniyyan*), and do not be like <sup>°</sup>Umar (<sup>°</sup>*Umariyyan*) except in what he did, and that is leaving the matter to council (*shura*).<sup>173</sup>

<sup>170</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. III, p. 180.

<sup>171</sup> Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi, *Futuhāt*, in Takeshita, *Perfect Man*, p. 119 (from *Futuhāt*, vol. II, p. 72, Cairo 1329H ed.) with some amendments in translation); *Futuhāt*, vol. II, p. 359.

<sup>172</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 529.

<sup>173</sup> "Tawliyat al-wali ba'd mawtihi niyaba, ma hiya wilaya, wa man wallahu al-nas fa hiya wilayat al-Haqq, wa huwa al-khalifa al-ilahi. fa kun siddiqiyyan aw 'uthmaniyyan wa la takun 'umariyyan illa fima fa'ala fa innahu taraka al-amr shura," *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 529.



Ibn al-<sup>o</sup>Arabi hence considers *shura* to be fundamental to the choice of the ruler (in the sense of *khalifat al-zahir*). He denies the legitimacy of designation of authority by a predecessor, whether the Sunni designation by the ruling caliph of his successor or the Imami belief in the transfer of the Imamate by designation from one Imam to the next.<sup>174</sup> Rather, he affirms his preference for the community's election of the ruler by favoring the selection of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq and of <sup>o</sup>Uthman over the designation of <sup>o</sup>Umar. It is known that both Abu Bakr and <sup>o</sup>Uthman were elected; the first by a number of the *sahaba* (the companions of the Prophet) and the second by the council of six *sahaba* chosen by <sup>o</sup>Umar for this task. <sup>o</sup>Umar on the other hand was, more or less, designated by Abu Bakr although the choice was ratified by community *bay'a*. Ibn al-<sup>o</sup>Arabi's disapproval of Abu Bakr's designation of <sup>o</sup>Umar, must have been, and still would be, considered a very bold point to make in view of <sup>o</sup>Umar's eminence amongst both the *sahaba* and the Rightly Guided Caliphs. Yet despite the designation of <sup>o</sup>Umar, the Shaykh does not dismiss or devalue his *khilafa*, and counts him among the most perfect *qutbs* - those who hold both *al-khilafa al-zahira* and *al-batina*.

It appears then that even in the case when *khalifat al-batin* is at the same time *khalifat al-zahir*, he should receive *khilafat al-zahir* by way of the people through the *shura* of *ahl al-shura* (that is, *ahl al-hall wa al-'aqd*). In this connection, it is interesting to note which historical caliphs Ibn al-<sup>o</sup>Arabi considered to be simultaneously *khalifat al-zahir* and *khalifat al-batin*. In a passage in his *Futuhāt*, he states:

<sup>174</sup> Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina. *The Just Ruler (al-Sultan al-<sup>o</sup>Adil) in Shi'ite Islam: The Comprehensive Authority of the Jurist in Imamite Jurisprudence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 59.



Some of them [the *qutbs*] have manifest rule, and they possess the exoteric vicegerency (*al-khilafa al-zahira*) as they have possessed the esoteric vicegerency (*al-khilafa al-batina*) in terms of station (*min jihat al-maqam*), like Abu Bakr, °Umar, °Uthman, °Ali, al-Hasan, Mu°awiya b. Yazid, °Umar b. °Abd al-°Aziz, and al-Mutawakkil, while some others of them possess *al-khilafa al-batina* particularly, and have no rule over *al-zahir*, like Ahmed b. Harun ar-Rashid al-Sabti, and Abu Yazid al-Bistami. Most *qutbs* have no rule over *al-zahir*.<sup>175</sup>

Although the reasons for Ibn al-°Arabi's considering all these caliphs to have been *qutbs* are unclear, it is noteworthy that several of them did not seek after the office of *khilafa* nor were they designated by their predecessor without *shura*, which, according to Ibn al-°Arabi predisposes them to infallibility, which is a quality that the *qutbs* have, as will be discussed in the section on infallibility.<sup>176</sup>

A side issue relating to the subject of the choice of the Imam, and which is addressed by Ibn al-°Arabi, is the case when the Imamate is contracted to two Imams simultaneously, and the question of which of the two should be deposed. While this is not an issue for the Shi'i writers whose Imam is divinely appointed, al-Mawardi states that the imamate should be given to the one was given the oath of allegiance (*bay°a*) first. If they were both given the *bay°a* at the same time, their contracts are nullified, then allegiance is given to someone other than them, or to one of them.<sup>177</sup> As for Ibn al-°Arabi, he agrees with the view that allegiance should be given to the first Imam, and cites the Prophetic hadith

<sup>175</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. II, p. 8.

<sup>176</sup> The selection of the first four Caliphs, with the exception of °Umar, was based on *shura*. As for al-Hasan, "°Ubayd Allah b. °Abbas invited the people to nominate him as Caliph, and [was] given the *bay°a* by the supporters of °Ali" (EI2, "Hasan b. °Ali"). As for °Umar b. °Abd al-°Aziz, he was nominated by Raja' b. Haywa al-Kindi, councillor to the preceding Caliph Sulayman, in opposition to the Caliph's prior wish to secure the Caliphate in his own descendants. (EI2, "°Umar b. °Abd al-°Aziz"). Finally, al-Mutawakkil, whose reign came in succession to that of his brother Caliph al-Wathiq who had died without naming a successor, is said to have had initially no political ambitions, and that his succession "was decided by a council consisting of the wazir . . . , the Chief Kadi . . . , two other bureaucrats, and two leading Turkish military men . . ." (EI2, "al-Mutawakkil").

<sup>177</sup> al-Mawardi, p. 9.



which states that if two Imams were given the *bay'at*, the later (*al-akhir*) should be deposed.<sup>178</sup> Yet, interestingly, the "*akhir*," according to Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, is not necessarily the one who was chosen later. Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi states that the "later" is the one who does not fulfill the *shar'at* qualifications of the Imamate, even if this one received the *bay'at* first. In *al-Tadbirat*, where he discusses the opposition of Selfish Desire (*al-hawa*) and Reason (*al-<sup>c</sup>aql*) in the human kingdom, he argues that if the Imamate of *al-hawa* preceded the Imamate of *al-<sup>c</sup>aql*, to depose the later Imam would mean deposing *al-<sup>c</sup>aql* in favor of *al-hawa*. However, since the Imam of *al-hawa* does not meet the *shar'at* qualifications of the Imamate, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi states that he should be deposed in favor of the later Imam (of *al-<sup>c</sup>aql*) who meets the qualifications:

(An objection for the unveiling of secrets): the contender might surmise from this talk something and say: "he has said 'kill the later (*al-akhir*).'"<sup>179</sup> Maybe Selfish Desire came first and Reason last." Precedence here, however, is in fulfilling the conditions, I mean the conditions of the Imamate. Whomsoever fulfills them is the one forwarded to the Imamate. While the other who does not fulfill these conditions is deposed and killed if he does not submit to the divine command. Time [i.e. precedence in time] is therefore not taken into consideration.<sup>180</sup>

Hence, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi supports the qualified Imam irrespective of his primacy in receiving the *ba'ya*, since the first Imam is not by virtue of his precedence in office better than the later Imam.

To sum up, it is clear that Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi believes that the community must elect *khalifat al-zahir*, this being the indirect form of divine designation of this *khalifa*, while he holds that God directly designates *khalifat al-batin*. In case of the opposition of two Imams, the

<sup>178</sup> Reference to the Prophetic hadith: "if allegiance (*bay'at*) was sworn to two *khalifas*, the later one (*al-akhir*) is to be killed." See Wensinck, vol. II, p. 70, hadith in Muslim.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> *Tadbirat*, pp. 119-20.



*bayʿa* should be given to the one who fulfills the qualifications of the Imamate. As shall be shown in the following section, Ibn al-ʿArabi argues that the method of assumption of power both affects and reflects the ruler's level of knowledge and justice.

#### 4. Infallibility and Justice

Strongly connected to the discussion of the methods of choice of the Imam is the question of infallibility and justice. The question of infallibility remains perhaps the essential point of divergence between the Sunni and Shiʿi perspectives. Whereas the Sunnis, though they accept the principle of the legal validity of community consensus, totally reject the concept of human infallibility, and deny it even to the Prophet outside the realm of his prophethood, the Imami Shiʿis believe in infallibility and ascribe it to their Imams. Belief in the infallibility of the Imam, or rejection of this concept, has direct implications on such important issues pertaining to the Imamate such as the election and deposition of the Imam. For if, as the Imami sources used here claim, the Imam is infallible,<sup>181</sup> and infallibility, as Ibn al-Mutahhar and Miqdad-i-Fadil assert, is an inner quality that only God can identify in a person, then identifying and appointing the Imam is impossible except by some form of divine designation.<sup>182</sup> As for the issue of deposition of the Imam, it becomes irrelevant since the Imam is divinely designated and infallible, and therefore cannot become unfit for his position. Sunnis, on the other hand, do not believe in the infallibility of the Imam - al-Mawardi does not even mention the word - or his divine appointment by God. Rather, they leave the matter of selecting the Imam, as they believe the Prophet had, to *ahl*

<sup>181</sup> Ibn Yaʿqub, p. 33; Ibn al-Mutahhar, pp. 286-8; Miqdad-i-Fadil, pp. 64-8;

<sup>182</sup> Ibn al-Mutahhar, p. 288; Miqdad-i-Fadil, pp. 68-9.



*al-shura* or to the preceding Imam. Since they do not believe in the infallibility of the Imam, they acknowledge the possibility that he may come to lose any of the qualifications essential to his position, and therefore debate the appropriate course of action in such a situation, as will be outlined below.

In Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's characteristic assimilation of the various strands of Islamic thought, he brings together aspects of both the Sunni and Shi'i perspectives on the infallibility of the Imam and its implications. For in congruence with the Sunnis, he does not dismiss the possibility of the Imam (in the sense of *khalifat al-zahir*) losing the qualities which qualify him for the Imamate.<sup>183</sup> But neither does he deny the possibility that the exoteric ruler may be infallible, even when he is other than the esoteric ruler, as long as certain conditions are met, as will be discussed shortly. Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi points out that this view of his is contrary to the Imami Shi'i denial of the quality of infallibility to the exoteric ruler when he is other than the esoteric Imam.<sup>184</sup> He thus ascribes infallibility to both the exoteric and the esoteric rulers, though in his view the latter are infallible by definition, whereas the former may be infallible only under certain conditions.

To Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, infallibility means preservation from sin and from error with respect to the observance and implementation of the *shar'c* laws.<sup>185</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi states in the following passage that infallibility is bestowed on the Imam to whom God "offers" the

<sup>183</sup> *'Anqa'*, p. 59.

<sup>184</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. III, pp. 182-3.

<sup>185</sup> He differentiates between two types of infallibility: one which pertains to the prophets, and which he calls "*isma*," while the other pertains to the *awliya'*, and he calls preservation (*hifz*). Although it may not always be different from the *isma* of the prophets, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi prefers to refer to it by a different name "out of courtesy (*adab*) to the prophet." He adds, however, that while the devil can not even access the *zahir* or the *batin* of the prophets, he may be able to reach some of the *awliya'* yet does not succeed in deluding them. *Futuhāt*, Osman Yahia ed., vol. VII, pp. 440-3. See also, *Futuhāt*, Osman Yahia ed., vol. IV, pp. 285-6.



Imamate, be it the exoteric or the esoteric, as opposed to the one who pursues the office. While the *qutb* is necessarily infallible,<sup>186</sup> the exoteric Imam or *khalifat al-zahir*, when other than the *qutb*, is infallible only if he did not pursue the office of the Imamate, but rather found himself compelled to accept it, without as much as desiring it in himself.

Because the Imamate [in the sense of *khilafat al-zahir*] is an offer (*ʿardan*), like the Trust (*al-amana*) [*khilafat Allah*] is an offer, and the Imamate is a trust, therefore some of the *qutbs* have manifested it [*khilafat al-zahir*] and some have not. God has given the *qutb* the capacity [to uphold the *khilafa*] (*nazar al-Haqq li hadha al-qutb bi al-ahliyya*). If God had looked upon the Imam [of *al-zahir*] with this [sanctioning] eye, no Imam would have ever erred (*jara*), as the Imamiyya believe of the Infallible Imam (*al-Imam al-maʿsum*); for it is a condition [in the Imami opinion] of the esoteric Imam to be infallible while the exoteric (*al-zahir*), if other than him, does not have the station of infallibility. This is where the Imamiyya are wrong because if the Imamate was not desired by him, and God commanded him to uphold it, God shall, without doubt on our part, make him infallible. The Messenger of God, God's peace and blessing upon him, has pointed to all that we have said. He indicated that it is an offer by his act; for he did not force anyone to assume rulership (*wilaya*). Rather, he mentioned that whoever refused office, it was better for him because on the day of judgement it will be a matter of regret and grief,<sup>187</sup> except for those who were able to perform their duties with justice. And he, God's peace and blessing upon him, pointed to the infallibility of the one who is commanded to uphold it by his saying: "he who is given it [the office] at his request (*ʿan mas'ala*) is assigned to it (*wukkila ilayha*), while he who is given it without his asking for it, God assigns to him an angel to guide him (*yusaddidahu*)."<sup>188</sup> This is the meaning of infallibility. Asking (*al-suʿal*) here means acceptance of (*rida*) and desire for (*mahabba*) that office; for he asks for it in his innermost self (*batinihi*). While the other who hates it, is forced to accept it by those who have authority (*ahl al-hall wa al-ʿaqq*). He then perceives that it is incumbent on him to assume it because of what he sees, if he does not take it up, of the rise of corruption. This realization becomes to him as the divine compulsion (*al-jabr al-ilahi*) to take on that position. Thus he is made infallible, and so he becomes just, for the angel that guides him does not order him except with good (*khayr*).<sup>189</sup>

<sup>186</sup> Note that, as mentioned earlier, the *qutb* is, according to Ibn al-ʿArabi, either divinely offered or divinely commanded to assume the Imamate. In either case he is given the Imamate without pursuing it himself.

<sup>187</sup> See Wensinck, vol. VI, p. 391, hadith in Muslim, Ibn Hanbal; also vol. VI, p. 391, hadith in al-Bukhari, al-Nisa'i, Ibn Hanbal.

<sup>188</sup> See, Wensinck, vol. I, p. 105, hadith in al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, Tirmidhi, al-Nisa'i, al-Darimi, Hanbal. See also, Wensinck, vol. VII, p. 303, hadith in Abu Dawud, Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, Ibn Hanbal; and Wensinck, vol. VII, p. 304, hadith in al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, al-Nisa'i, al-Darimi.

<sup>189</sup> *Futuhat*, vol. III, pp. 182-3.



Thus Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi is saying that the ruler who had not aspired for reaching the office of rule, but was rather chosen by *ahl al-hall wa al-<sup>°</sup>aqd* and persuaded by them to accept office, is made infallible - that is, divinely guided in his rule in respect of the application of the *shari<sup>°</sup>a*. Whereas the rule of the Qutb is, according to Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi, one of "pure justice (*°adl mahd*)"<sup>190</sup>, or infallibility, the rule of the exoteric ruler is only possibly just.

Injustice (*jawr*) and justice (*°adl*) occur in in the exoteric Imams, whereas the *qutb* can only be just . . . . [The one] who is called (*yusamma*) "*khalifa*," rules with injustice and justice (*yajur wa ya<sup>°</sup>dil*), and may be just to the extent that God, praise Him, assists him.<sup>191</sup>

What Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi means by just or infallible rule may be understood better from his discussion of divine knowledge and rule in chapter 60 of the *Futuhāt* entitled: "On the knowledge of the elements, and the power of the higher world (*al-<sup>°</sup>alam al-<sup>°</sup>ulwi*) over the lower world (*al-<sup>°</sup>alam al-<sup>°</sup>sufli*)." In this chapter Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi explains that God deposited the knowledge of "what He, glory be to Him, wished to occur in His creation up till the Day of judgment" in the Preserved Tablet (*al-lawh al-mahfuz*).<sup>192</sup> The Will of God towards His cosmos, as revealed in His Preserved Tablet, is then carried out through an intricate structure or hierarchy of agents or "governors" (*wulah*). The first level of this hierarchy consists of the 12 *wulah* placed in the most encompassing cosmic sphere (*al-falak al-aqsa*).<sup>193</sup> Of these Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi states: "God has removed the veil between them and the Preserved Tablet so they saw registered in it their names and ranks (*maratibahum*)

<sup>190</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. III, p. 182.

<sup>191</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. III, p. 182.

<sup>192</sup> *al-Lawh al-mahfuz* refers to the "tablet kept in heaven" on which is registered "the decisions of the divine will . . . [and] the archetypes of all things past, present and future." See, "*Lawh*" in *EI2*, p. 698.

<sup>193</sup> For Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi's astrology see, Titus Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology According to Ibn <sup>°</sup>Arabi*. Tr. Bulent Rauf. England: Beshara Publications, 1977.



and what *al-Haqq* wishes to conduct through them in creation till the Day of Judgment . . .  
 . . .” From this level of *wulah* follows numerous levels of other “*wulah*,” “*hujjab*,”  
 “*muwwab*,” “*muqaba*,” “*sadana*,” and various other types of angels, all of whom carry out  
 their various assignments in maintaining the divine Order of the cosmos. This line of  
 agents extends in the elemental world (*al-alam al-unsuri*) and through the earthly rulers  
 (*al-wulah al-ardiyyun*). Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi describes this as follows:

God made in the elemental world (*al-alam al-unsuri*) creatures of the same kind (*khalqan min jinsihim*) [referring to the celestial *wulah*]; amongst them are the messengers, the vicegerents (*al-khulafa*'), the Sultans, the Kings, and those in command in the world. God made between the spirits of those whom he had made rulers in the Earth, from amongst its inhabitants, and between those rulers in the celestial spheres, affinities (*munasabat*) and tenuities (*raqa'iq*)<sup>194</sup> that extend to them from those [celestial] rulers, with justice that is devoid of impurities, and clear of defects. The spirits of those earthly rulers receive from them to the extent of their propensity (*isti'dad*). He whose preparedness is strong and good accepts that matter as it is, pure and sanctified (*tahiran mutahharan*), becoming thus a just ruler (*wali 'adl*) and a virtuous Imam (*imam fadl*). While he whose propensity is bad, accepts that sanctified matter and turns it into evil and badness (*al-rada'a wa al-qubh*) commensurate with his nature. He becomes thus an unjust ruler (*wali jawr wa na'ib zulm wa bukh*l.) He has only himself to blame.<sup>195</sup>

Just rule is thus, according to Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, that which corresponds to the divine Order pre-ordained in the Preserved Tablet. It is from this understanding of justice that the ethical obligation of the ruler to purify himself flows. For God is the ultimate Ruler, and to rule in accordance with His Order, the earthly rulers must purify themselves so as to become unobtrusive vehicles of the divine rule. The repercussion of the rulers' self-purification thus goes beyond their serving as models of perfect character for their subjects, to actually determining the extent of accordance of their rule to the divine Order

<sup>194</sup> Chittick explains the term as follows: “*Raqqa'iq*, sing. *raqiq*. Literally, the term designates something thin, delicate, or flimsy. Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi employs it to describe subtle forms or relationships which tie together different levels of existence,” Chittick p. 406n6.

<sup>195</sup> *Futuhat*, vol. I, p. 386.



- in other words, their justice. The Order that Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi describes above as deposited in *al-lawh al-mahfuz* and carried out by the celestial rulers and the just earthly rulers may be understood as the divine wisdom (*al-hikma al-ilahiyya*) which the Shaykh calls elsewhere "*al-tartib*."<sup>196</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi defines wisdom in a section on the meanings of the divine names in which he explains that God is The Wise (*al-hakim*): "by ascribing everything to its place and level."<sup>197</sup> Just rule is then that which accords with the divine wisdom or Order (*tartib*), and injustice is to rule otherwise.

Similarly, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi describes just rule as that which accords with knowledge. In his *Risalat Ruh al-Qudus*, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi names among the afflictions of his time: "unjust rulers who rule without knowledge."<sup>198</sup> Injustice here is to rule without knowledge or contrary to Knowledge (or divine wisdom). The just ruler does not, however, have to be one who has knowledge of the divine wisdom in creation, rather, it appears is that all he need to do is follow the *shari'c*a and abide his rule by it. For in the following passage Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi states that even though the ruler or judicial authority (*al-hakim*) may not have knowledge, if he rules according to the *shari'c*a, he is then ruling in accordance to divine Knowledge. In the words of the Shaykh, his ruling is then "*musib lil-hukm*," i.e. coincides with the divine Ruling:

All the offerings of God are blessings, and blessings are, in general, the concordance with the purpose (*al-gharad*). Of this is the confirmation of the ruling that is made without knowledge (*ithbat al-hukm 'an ghayr 'ilm*) [discussed] in chapter 402. The founding of the judicial authority's (*al-hakim*)<sup>199</sup> ruling on eye-witness (*al-shahid*) and oath evidence (*al-*

<sup>196</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 332.

<sup>197</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 417.

<sup>198</sup> "*umara' jawr yahkumuna bima la ya'lamuna*." Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi. *Risalat Ruh al-Qudus*. Cairo: Maktabat

<sup>c</sup>Alam al-Fikr, 1989, p. 34.

<sup>199</sup> The term "*al-hakim*" applies to anyone with political authority to give judgment, whether ruler, governor or judge (*qadi*).







to both the exoteric and the esoteric rulers, though in his view the latter are infallible by definition, whereas the former may be infallible only if they did not seek the office.

### 5. The Issue of Superiority in Merit (*al-Afdaliyya*)

One of the questions that caused much dispute in the history of the Muslim community is that of *al-afdaliyya*. Is it necessary that the *khalifa* be *al-afdal* (the best qualified candidate) or may he be the *mafdul* (the second-best)? al-Mawardi permits the Imamate of the *mafdul* as long as he fulfills the qualifications of the Imam,<sup>202</sup> whereas Ibn al-Mutahhar and Miqdad-i-Fadil assert that the Imam must be *al-afdal* or else "the worse (*mafdul*) would have to take precedence over the better, and that would be evil (*qabih*) according to reason and scripture."<sup>203</sup>

In the works of Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi reviewed here, he was not found to have addressed this question of *al-afdaliyya* directly, although with respect to the interrelated issue of whether the Imam of prayer should be *al-afdal*, he upholds the leadership of *al-afdal*, and allows the leadership of *al-mafdul* only when the latter has been put forward by *al-afdal*, that is, only as a delegate of the qualified Imam:

If the Imam [in the sense of prayer leader (but also in its wider sense)] prays knowing that there is one behind him who is more deserving of taking the lead (*al-imama*) than he is, yet he does not put him forward and puts himself forward instead, this one keeps falling in rank until the Day of Judgement. Unless he had been put forward by that better one (*al-afdal*), and is as such put forward by his command, as in the prayer of Abu Bakr in front of the Messenger, God's peace and blessing upon him, and the prayer of <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Rahman Ibn <sup>c</sup>Awf in front of the Messenger. God's peace and blessing upon him.<sup>204</sup>

<sup>202</sup> al-Mawardi, p. 8.

<sup>203</sup> Miqdad-i-Fadil, p. 69, with personal amendments to Miller's translation; Ibn al-Mutahhar, p. 288.

<sup>204</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. III, p. 526.



The issue of whether the *khalifa* had to be the most excellent candidate was raised particularly with respect to the relative merits of the first four caliphs of the Islamic state. The question of who was more excellent (*afdal*) than whom caused much dispute at the time and in later works of history and Imamate, and led to the querying of the order and legitimacy of their succession. The Imami Shi'a, as mentioned above, argue that 'Ali was by far the best one of his age (*al-afdal*), and was therefore designated as successor by the Prophet. He should therefore have been given the Imamate when the Prophet died, and thus the Imamis criticize the other caliphs for usurping 'Ali's right to the Imamate.<sup>205</sup> The Sunnis, on the other hand, believe in the excellence of all the first four caliphs and that they were all *rashidun* (rightly-guided), yet they often disagree as to the ranking in merit of the *rashidun*, particularly 'Uthman and 'Ali, generally conceding that their ranking in merit follows the order of their succession - the most excellent being Abu Bakr, and 'Ali the least excellent.<sup>206</sup>

In a section on the divine name *al-Shafi* (the Healer), Ibn al-'Arabi provides the "divine cure" for the dispute on the order of succession of the *khulafa'* and the relationship of that to their comparative merit. He explains that order of succession in general, but more specifically in the case of the first four caliphs, has nothing to do with *al-afdaliyya* - the first four caliphs are all equal in level of merit irrespective of their order of succession - for precedence in time (*al-taqaddum*) is not the factor which determines the degree of merit (*al-martaba*). What made one Caliph precede the other, according to al-Shaykh al-Akbar,

<sup>205</sup> See above, footnote no. 162.

<sup>206</sup> EI2, "Imama," p. 1164.



is not the merit of the first, but the divine Will that all four should have *al-khilafa*, along with the divine knowledge of the time of their death. Hence, God ordered the succession of the first four caliphs in accordance with the time of their death so that none should die without having held *al-khilafa*:

Time (*al-zaman*) is the factor (*hukm*) in precedence (*al-taqaddum*) not the level [of merit] (*al-martaba*) as [shown] in the *khilafa* after the Messenger of God, God's peace and blessing upon him. It was God's wisdom, exalt Him, that He gave it [*al-khilafa*] to Abu Bakr, then 'Umar, then 'Uthman, then 'Ali, according to their lifespan (*a'marihim*), while each one of them was fit (*ahl*) for it in the time of their predecessor, and each one of them has [in God's knowledge] to be appointed. [Otherwise,] the deposal of the later one (*al-muta'akhhir*), if he came first (*taqaddama*), would have been necessary in order that the one who must, in God's prior knowledge, assume sovereignty be appointed. Thus, God ordered (*rattaba*) *al-khilafa* according to the order of time of their lifespans (*tartib al-zaman lil a'mar*), so that there would be no deposal of any who deserved [*al-khilafa*] . . . The Companions did not know this [divine wisdom] except by death. By this divine explication, daylight has dawned for one who has "a pair of eyes, and a tongue, and a pair of lips,"<sup>207</sup> while partisans of deluded viewpoints (*ahl al-hawa*) remain "plunge[d] in vain discourse and trifling (*fi khawdihim yal'abun*)."<sup>208</sup> We ask God to protect us from vain desires (*al-ahwa*). These are all divine cures (*ashfiya*) that remove from the one who uses them the diseases of fanaticism, and the violence (*hamiyya*) typical of the Jahiliyya. Verily God speaks the Truth and guides the way.<sup>209</sup>

Similarly, Ibn al-'Arabi states that "had anyone other than Abu Bakr assumed *al-khilafa*, Abu Bakr would have died during the vicegerency of the one preceding him. And since it is certain in God's knowledge that he would be His *khalifa*, he therefore preceded them [in *al-khilafa*] as he was going to be the first to die."<sup>210</sup> As for the opposition that arose against the Imamate of these four caliphs, Ibn al-'Arabi states that it does not detract from their authority or legitimacy, for even God's divinity was not unanimously accepted, and it is impossible that there be an Imam on whom there is unanimous agreement.

<sup>207</sup> Qur'an, 90:8-9 in reference to Man.

<sup>208</sup> Qur'an, 6:91.

<sup>209</sup> *Futuhat*, vol. IV, p. 355.

<sup>210</sup> *Futuhat*, vol. III, pp. 20-1. Ibn al-'Arabi makes this same argument again under the divine name *al-Akhir* (the Last), *Futuhat*, vol. IV, pp. 382-3.



God says "whatever beings there are in the heavens and the earth do prostrate themselves to God (acknowledge subjection) - with good will (*taw'ān*) or in spite of themselves (*karhan*)."<sup>211</sup> Hence, if the Creator, in whose hands is the dominion (*malakut*) of everything, is prostrated to unwillingly, then what would the case be with His vicegerent and deputy over His creation who are the messengers? And what then would be the case with Abu Bakr and others? So, there must be a willing (*ta'ī'*) and an unwilling (*karih*) one who submits reluctantly because of some suspicion that arises in him [with respect to the fulfillment of the conditions of the Imamate], if he is religious, or because of selfish desire, if he is not religious.<sup>212</sup>

As noted earlier, Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi not only considers the first four caliphs to have been legitimate, but in fact counts them amongst the most excellent *qutbs*.<sup>213</sup> Ultimately, Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi refers the whole question of the comparative merit of the first four caliphs to God, the Knower, for only He who knows whom is better.<sup>214</sup>

So, Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi believes in the Imamate of the most excellent, yet allows the Imamate of the less excellent when this has been consented to by the most excellent or, as noted below, when deposal of the *mafdul* is too difficult. In the dispute over the Imamate of the first four caliphs and their order in excellence, Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi states that they are all equally excellent, and that the order of their succession reflects the divine will and knowledge, rather than their ranking in excellence. The fact that he recognizes all of them as legitimate, and indeed as *qutbs*, shows that he sides here with Sunni doctrine not Shi'i.

## 6. One Imam - Many Deputies

On whether there could be one or more Imams, Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi asserts the oneness of the Imam. Like al-Mawardi, he quotes the Qur'anic verse "if there were, in the heavens

<sup>211</sup> Qur'an, 13:15.

<sup>212</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. III, p. 20..

<sup>213</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. II, p. 8.

<sup>214</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. III, pp. 20-1.



and the earth, other gods besides God, there would have been confusion in both”<sup>215</sup> in support of there being only one *khalifa* at a time.<sup>216</sup> He explains the reason for the oneness of the Imam in the following passage:

God, praise Him, has forbidden that there be two of them at one time, affirming this in his [the Prophet's] saying: “if allegiance were sworn to two *khalifas*, the later is to be killed.”<sup>217</sup> For a kingdom cannot be upheld by two rulers (*mudabbirayn*) even if their intentions coincide. God, exalt Him, has said: “if there were, in the heavens and the earth, other gods besides God, there would have been confusion in both”<sup>218</sup> because one of the two *khalifas* may command that which the other forbids. The command of one of them only will be obeyed, as it is not possible to obey both commands. Yet, if they neglect [a command] they are punished, and if they obey one of them, they are punished by the other, because when they obey the one, they disobey the other, and are thus punished by the one whom they disobeyed. This obliges the one whom they obeyed to back them, which then leads to wars and strife that hinder the governance of the kingdom and lead to its destruction. That is why it was stated that there be one *khalifa*. Objection: if it were said: “We had heard God say: ‘it is He who hath made you (His) agents (*khala'if*), inheritors of the earth,’ and you say that he is one according to the Law (*shar'ean*), then how could this be?” We say that the essence of vicegerency is one, and that it is inherited, and transmitted from one person to another. If it appears in a person, that person continues to bear its attributes, and it is impossible by the Law that there be another in the same time. If someone else claims it, he is a false (Imam) and his claim is rejected and he is the anti-Christ (*dajjal*) of that age. And if that person is lost, the essence [of the *khilafa*] transfers to another person, and with it the name “*khalifa*” is transferred. That is why it was said “*khala'if*.”<sup>219</sup>

This explains why Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi considers the true *khalifa* to be the *qutb*, by virtue of his divine knowledge and *hukm*, while the *khalifat al-zahir*, if not himself the *qutb* can be no more than the *qutb*'s deputy or delegate. Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi seems to maintain for *khalifat al-zahir* what he does for the *qutb*; that there should only be one at a time. For as noted earlier, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi states that God “made for them [the people] one Imam in the exoteric realm (*al-zahir*), who is responsible for the upholding of religion . . . and He ordered us to

<sup>215</sup> Qur'an, 21:22.

<sup>216</sup> al-Mawardi, p. 29.

<sup>217</sup> See Wensinck, vol. II, p. 70, hadith in Muslim.

<sup>218</sup> Qur'an, 21:22.

<sup>219</sup> *al-Tadbirat*, pp. 125-6. See also, *Futuhat*, vol. IV, p. 345 and *Futuhat*, vol. III, pp. 106-7.



fight the one who rises against him and contends with him."<sup>220</sup> And in another passage, in which Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi states that *khalifat al-zahir* is the deputy of the *qutb*, he adds that the rule of this deputy is like that of the Imam; the *khalifat al-zahir* is therefore to be obeyed, even if he is unjust, and his rivals are to be killed.<sup>221</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi thus does not allow duality in either *khilafat al-zahir* or *al-batin*.

## 7. Different Types of Laws and Rulers

Unlike the above sections, this section does not have a clear equivalent in works on the Imamate, or at least in the ones reviewed in this study. It refers to Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's discussion of two different types of Law; that which was revealed to the prophets, and that which was and continues to be revealed to the wise of each age. These correspond roughly to *shari'at* and wise customary law or rulers' legislation (*'urf*). Connected to this discussion is Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's differentiation between several types of rulers based on his differentiation between the Laws which these rulers apply and the degree of their complying to them. Following is a brief outline of the two types of Law that Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi discusses in order to understand how he differentiates between rulers.

The Law (*al-shar'c* or *al-shari'at*) was set, according to Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, to guide and balance the manifestation of the effects of the divine names in creation, and hence to preserve creation. In chapter 66 of the *Futuhat* entitled: "On the knowledge of the secret of the *shari'at*, outwardly and inwardly, and which of the divine names brought it into

<sup>220</sup> *Futuhat*, vol. III, p. 182.

<sup>221</sup> *Futuhat*, vol. III, p. 182. What Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi thought of the concurrent rule during his time of three rival Caliphs; the Muwahhid, Fatimid, and <sup>c</sup>Abbasid, is not clear.



existence," Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi graphically describes how the created things pleaded God for the setting of a law that would save their existence from the threat of extinction posed by the oppositeness of their natures. God responded to their plea by revealing two types of law, or, as Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi puts it, by making known the law "in two parts (*qismayn*)" - the prophetic law and the sages' law:

When the entities (*a'yan*) and the effects (*athar*) appeared in creation, they overpowered (*tasallata*) and subjugated (*qahara*) each other according to their supporting names. This led to contention and disputation, so they said: "We fear the ruin of our order and our return back to the state of non-existence in which we had been." So the possible existents (*al-mumkinat*) alerted the names to what has been cast to them by the names "The Knower" (*al-<sup>c</sup>Alim*) and "The Governing" (*al-Mudabbir*), and they said: "O you names, if your rule accorded to a known scale (*mizan ma'lum*) and a decreed limit (*hadd marsum*), with an Imam whom you can consult so as to preserve our existence and your effects on us, it would be better for you and us. So resort to Allah, perhaps He would put forward one who would set for you a limit (*hadd*) to abide by, or else we shall perish and your effects shall be suspended (*ta'attaltum*)." So they said: "This is the very essence of welfare and good sense, and they did that. . . So the name *al-Rabb* set for them the *hudud* and the regulations (*marasim*) for the betterment (*islah*) of the kingdom and to test which of them is better in works (*li-yabluwahum ayyahum ahsan <sup>c</sup>amalan*).<sup>222</sup> God made this in two parts: one part called "wise management of affairs" (*siyasa hikmiyya*); this He has cast in the primordial constitution (*firat mufus*) of the great ones (*al-akabir*) amongst people, and hence they set up the *hudud* and laid down the laws (*nawamis*) by a capacity (*quwwa*) that they found within themselves - each city, district and province according to what is required by the temperament and disposition of this area, because of their knowledge of what wisdom (*al-hikma*) prescribes. Thus, peoples' money, blood, families, kin and relatives were preserved. And they called them [these legislations] "*nawamis*" meaning causes of good (*asbab khayr*), because "*al-namus*" in the common usage of the term is what brings forth good (*al-khayr*), while "*al-jasus*" is what brings evil (*al-sharr*). So these are the laws of wisdom (*al-nawamis al-hikmiyya*) that the rational thinkers (*al-uqala'*) have laid down, by the inspiration of God in themselves from whence they do not perceive, containing the welfare of the world, its order, and its coherence in those situations for which they had no revealed divine Law (*shar' ilahi munazzal*). And the setters of these *nawamis* have no knowledge that these matters may bring them closer to God (*muqarriba ila Allah*) nor that they lead to heaven or hell.<sup>223</sup>

<sup>222</sup> Reference to Qur'an 18:7 and 67:2.

<sup>223</sup> *Futuhat*, vol. I, pp. 422-3



In the remainder of this passage, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi continues to describe the limitation of the divine knowledge of the sages (<sup>c</sup>*uqala'*), adding that their knowledge is completed by the knowledge revealed to the prophets. The Law revealed to the latter, which Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi calls "*al-siyasat al-nabawiyya al-mashru<sup>c</sup>a min <sup>c</sup>ind Allah*," is what constitutes the other part (*qism*) of law that God revealed to creation. It differs from and surpasses the *hikmi* laws in that it brings forth knowledge of God and the hereafter which could not be reached by the path of reason.

Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi thus recognises two types of law: that which was revealed to the prophets, and that which was inspired in the hearts of sages ("*al-akabir*" or "*<sup>c</sup>uqala' al-zaman*" or "*al-hukama'*"). Both the "rational" laws ("*al-siyasat al-hikmiyya*")<sup>224</sup> and the prophetic laws ("*al-siyasat al-nabawiyya al-mashru<sup>c</sup>a*")<sup>225</sup> are of divine origin, inspired in the hearts of men for the welfare of people in this life and the next:

(The twentieth section) and this is from the storehouses of generosity, and this is the storehouse of the divine ordinances (*al-ahkam al-ilahiyya*) and the positive and *shar<sup>c</sup>i* laws (*al-nawamis al-wad<sup>c</sup>iyya wa al-shar<sup>c</sup>iyya*). God, exalt Him, has two ways of revealing, to the hearts of His servants, that which is to be legislated for each nation. One way is by sending the spirit (*al-ruh al-amin*) named Jibril, or [whom He wills] from the angels, to a servant of the servants of God. This servant is then called, by virtue of this revelation, a messenger and a prophet. And it is incumbent on those to whom he has been sent to believe in him and in what he has brought forth from his Lord. Another way is through the wise one of the time; God inspires him in himself and breathes into him the Holy Spirit (*al-ruh al-ilahi al-qudsi*) in the intermittant time between prophets, and the absence of other means. God inspires him with what is necessary for welfare, with regards to preventing unjust killing, protecting property and [regulating] sexual intercourse, because of what God had instilled in the animal souls of jealousy. So he paves for them a path by which they may return, if they traverse it, to their welfare, and they feel secure about their families, lives, and money. He sets for them limits (*hudud*) in this, and frightens them, and warns them, and gives them hope, and orders them to obey his commands and prohibitions and to not oppose him. And he sets for them deterrents; including execution, flogging and fining in order to inhibit by this the causes of corruption and dispersion, and to encourage unity. God rewards him for this in the absence of prophets. As for the nation in which there

<sup>224</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. I, p. 423. Also, "*al-nawamis al-wad<sup>c</sup>iyya*," *Futuhāt*, vol. III, p. 526.

<sup>225</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. I, p. 424. Also, "*al-nawamis al-shar<sup>c</sup>iyya*," *Futuhāt*, vol. III, p. 526.



is a messenger or which has been addressed by a messenger, it is unlawful for him to do that, and it is unlawful for him to transgress the law (*sharʿ*) of the messenger. The capacity of setting these positive laws which are required by Wisdom has not appeared in any species except in the human kind especially, because of its creation in the Image. Hence, he finds in himself a divine capacity (*quwwa Illahiyya*), calling upon him to legislate affairs. If someone other than him, that is the messenger, legislates for them, he continues to confirm and elucidate for his people what this messenger has set for them, clarifying any part of his message that remains obscure to them due to the limitedness of their understanding. If he does not do this, despite of his capability to so, he continues to fall in rank until the Day of Judgement.<sup>226</sup>

Hence, Ibn al-ʿArabi emphasises that positive law (*al-siyasa al-hikmiyya*) is divinely inspired, and should be followed if the time is not under the law of a prophet. Otherwise, prophetic laws should be followed since they are more complete than the rational laws; providing in addition to governing rules of the world, knowledge of God and the hereafter - knowledge that could not be attained by the limited reach of reason.<sup>227</sup> By the people of reason (*al-ʿuqalaʾ*), whose laws he considers divinely originated, Ibn al-ʿArabi is referring specifically to the people of spiritual exercise and divine inspiration. His definition of *al-ʿuqalaʾ* is made clear in the following passage.

The origin and reason for laying down the law (*al-shariʿa*) in the world was the demand for the welfare (*salah*) of the world and the knowledge of what is not known of God of the matters that are not accepted by reason - meaning [the matters] that are not reached by reason. Hence, the knowledge of this was descended in the revealed Books, and was spoken by the tongues of the messengers and prophets. The men of reason (*al-ʿuqalaʾ*) then came to know that they have missed in the knowledge of God matters that were completed for them by the messengers. I do not mean by the men of reason (*al-ʿuqalaʾ*) those who speak these days of wisdom (*al-hikma*). Rather, I mean those who follow their ways and method of self-discipline, ascetic exertion, subduing the self, solitary retreats, and preparation for the incoming of what comes to their hearts when pure; of the higher knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-ʿulwi*) revealed in the skies above. Those are whom I mean by "*al-ʿuqalaʾ*" . . . . As for those whom we have in these days, they have no value [in the eyes of] every [true] sage (*ʿaqil*), for they ridicule religion, and make fun of the servants of God, and they do not value anyone except those who share their ways. Their hearts having been possessed by love of the world and the pursuit of honor and leadership. God therefore

<sup>226</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. III, p. 526. Also, *Futuhāt*, vol. I, pp. 422-4, *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 547 and *Futuhāt*, vol. II, p. 327.

<sup>227</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. I, pp. 423-4.



debased them (*adhallahum*) as they have debased knowledge, and He degraded (*haqqarahum*) and belittled them, and led them to resort to the ignorant amongst the kings and rulers (*wulah*). Consequently, they were debased by the kings and rulers, for the words of the like of these are not taken with consideration (*la yu'tabar qawluhum*), for God has sealed off their hearts and deafened them and blinded their sight. All this, yet they claim in themselves to be the best of people.<sup>228</sup>

Hence, *al-<sup>u</sup>qala'* are not those whose knowledge comes as a result of intellectual study, rather they are the ones to whom divine knowledge is revealed in their hearts. The laws that they bring, "*al-siyasa al-hikmiyya*," serve to answer to those particular issues that have not been addressed by the prophetic laws, and they are, according to Ibn al-<sup>u</sup>Arabi, the "praiseworthy innovations (*al-bida' al-hasana*) whose observer is praised by God."<sup>229</sup>

Now in accordance with his belief in the divine root of both types of Law, Ibn al-<sup>u</sup>Arabi acknowledges the rulers who rule by either. In chapter 402 of the *Futuhat*, Ibn al-<sup>u</sup>Arabi classifies rulers according to the compatibility of their rule with the prescribed "*masarif*" or Law of the divine names. The most elevated ruler in his classification is the *khalifa* - the deputy of God - who is divinely entrusted with the Law (*shar'*) of the manifestation of the Names in creation, and who appears in creation with the attributes of his Appointer. Ibn al-<sup>u</sup>Arabi then discusses other types of rulers or deputies (*muwwab*). He states that there are those who have assumed rule by themselves (*man qama fi al-mulk bi nafsih*); i.e. without God's given *shar'* of the names. Ibn al-<sup>u</sup>Arabi discusses two kinds of these: the first are those who, despite not being entrusted with the *shar'* like the *khalifa*, rule with

<sup>228</sup> *Futuhat*, vol. I, p. 424. In the remainder of this quotation Ibn al-<sup>u</sup>Arabi counts Ibn Rushd, one of the most important Muslim philosophers and political thinkers contemporary to the Shaykh, among the divinely inspired *uqala'* rather than among the worthless scholars.

<sup>229</sup> *Futuhat*, vol. II, p. 343.



justice. Their rule conforms with "*al-haqq*" or "*al-khayr*" or "*makarim al-akhlaq*," for it does not transgress the measures set in the Law. Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi notes that God acknowledges and praises these rulers. And even though God did not reveal to them their divine entrustment, these rulers are "His deputies from behind a veil (*nuwwabuh min wara' al-hijab*)":<sup>230</sup>

One who performs the actions that are considered to be praiseworthy by God, which are called "*khayr*", and which comply with what has been advocated in the laws (*al-shara'i*), yet this Imam had not assumed them (*ittasafa biha*) because of their being legislated nor because God had commended them, but rather because they are commonly established, noble character traits (*makarim akhlaq 'urfiyya*) - God knows their value and praises the one who acquired them. So, the Prophet, God's peace and blessing upon him, said concerning the date of his birth and Kisra, who is one of the deputies who are kings (*al-nuwwab al-muluk*): "I was born in the time of the just king." So, he called him "king" and described him as "just", although he [the king] was not [guided] in it [justice] by a revealed law (*shar'*); for it is a quality well-regarded by God (*sifa mar'iyya 'ind Allah*). And he called them "kings", although *al-Haqq* had not appointed them by direct divine speech (*al-khitab al-ilahi 'ala al-kashf*), yet they are His deputies from behind the veil.<sup>231</sup>

He adds that these rulers remain, despite their self-appointment to the level of rulership, subordinate and obedient to the *khalifa*; or in other words their rule remains compliant with the *shar'*. The other group of *nuwwab*, on the other hand, are those who do not observe *makarim al-akhlaq*; that is they transgress the divine measures of dispensing the names in creation. Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi cites the Pharoah of Moses' time as one of those rulers.

Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi then lists another type of *nuwwab*, who are the Imams whom God has appointed through the prophets; entrusting them with enforcing the prophetic Laws. These Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi also presents in two categories: those who observe the divine measures set

<sup>230</sup> *Futuhat*, vol. IV, p. 4.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*



for them; and those who verbally acknowledge the Law yet do not enforce it as they should, knowing in themselves, nevertheless, that they have thus disobeyed. Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi describes these latter as "contenders in terms of the manifest form" (*hum min hayth al-sura al-zahira mughalibun wa munazifun*) - possibly meaning that despite their apparent disobedience they are innately believers; for they "know" that in not observing the Law they are being "unjust oppressors (*ja'irun qasitun*)."<sup>232</sup>

So, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi bases his concise typology of rulers on their relationship to divine Law, the perfect ruler being the *khalifa* who is guided in his rule by the divine Law that God entrusted to him, while the other rulers vary in their correspondence to the Law and so in the quality of their rule. As noted above, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi acknowledges two types of Law; one that was revealed to the prophets, and another that is revealed to the sages of every age. The Shaykh al-Akbar affirms the divine source and purpose of both Laws, the root of both being the cosmic need for a regulating Order. Yet, it is the former Law that is to be followed after the seal of prophethood and legislation. The latter, however, continues to serve the function of elucidating the prophetic Law and answering to the particular issues that arise which have not been addressed specifically in the prophetic Law. Finally, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi ultimately seems to recognize those rulers whose rule abides by the Law known through the Prophet or by other means, although he denounces those who overlook the Prophetic Law once it has been revealed.

## 8. Deposition

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid.



As already discussed, Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi believes that a *khalifat Allah*, who has actualized the divine qualities and has divinely-bestowed knowledge of the Names and the Law governing their manifestation, is infallible, that is, with respect to the application of the Law. However, the *khalifat al-zahir*, if not himself a *qutb* who possesses divine knowledge, may or may not err, depending on the extent of the divine guidance and knowledge of the Law that is bestowed on him. Therefore, Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi, like Sunni writers, discusses the correct course of action if a *khalifat al-zahir* (or Imam) loses the qualities which fit him for rule, or if an unqualified person assumes power. Closely linked with this, is the issue of which contender for the Imamate should be supported if there is a fight for power. For Shi'i writers, however, the Imam is divinely designated and, being divinely guided, can not err. Therefore, these issues do not arise, and are not discussed in the works consulted for this study.

According to Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi, should the appointed Imam later on fall short of any of the qualifications, he should be deposed at once, and replaced with another who meets the qualifications. Furthermore, in any power-struggle, the best qualified candidate should be supported.

It is necessary to take up an imam to be followed in the matters over which he is instated. If another contends with him, he perishes, and the first [ruler] (*al-awwal*) remains sovereign, unless he falls short of the qualifications of the imam, and the sign [of the imam] (*al-<sup>°</sup>alama*) [ceases] to appear in him. He is then to be deposed before he is despised, and the one who meets the conditions of this contract [of the Imamate] should be put forward. For the Imam of all other Imams is their guide and their deluder. "If there were, in the heavens and the earth, other gods besides God, there would have been confusion in both."<sup>233</sup> God associated corruptedness with sharing (*ishtirak*) [of power], and said that it brings ruin. He [the Imam] must then be alone in ruling his realm. And there is

<sup>233</sup> Qur'an, 21:22.



no way to contend with or question him except in what pertains to the fulfillment of the conditions [of the Imamate].<sup>234</sup>

Now in the language of the divine names, the just Imam is, according to Ibn al-ʿArabi and as noted above, the one who observe the *sharʿi* measures of assuming the names, while the contender (*al-munazir*) is the one who does not subscribe to the divine prescription for the assumption of the names.<sup>235</sup> This ruler is a contender against God and His Law. Ibn al-ʿArabi states that God will give the transgressors time to return to their *sharʿi* limits, ultimately subduing them if they persist in their contention of the divine prerogatives. He adds that God shall depose the non-observant Imam by setting before him a contender who calls to *al-Haqq*.<sup>236</sup> The people are divinely commanded to support the latter and fight with him against the unjust Imam.

[As for those unjust Imams who have transgressed the divine limits], God gives them time to return [to their *sharʿi* limits]. During that respite, they appear to have supremacy over the legislated truth (*al-haqq al-mashruʿ*) that pleases their Appointer. In another time, supremacy goes to *al-Haqq* over them by way of raising a contender (*munazir*), who calls to *al-Haqq* and to the straight path, in opposition to him [the first contender]. Should that one rise, *al-Haqq* makes it incumbent on His servants to fight with him, and to rise in his support and restrain the unjust.<sup>237</sup>

Yet, Ibn al-ʿArabi admits that for fear of civil strife and breakdown of government, the rule of the lesser qualified Imam should be conceded if it is impossible to depose him safely:

If two imams stand in opposition, then the contract [of the Imamate] is made with the one who has more followers. And if the deposition of an imperfect imam (*imam naqis*) is not

<sup>234</sup> *ʿAnqaʾ*, p. 59. See also *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 636.

<sup>235</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, pp. 3-4. This is the passage, quoted above, in which Ibn al-ʿArabi differentiates between the kinds of rulers with respect to their conformity with the divine measures of ascription of the names.

<sup>236</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, pp. 3-4.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*



possible because it is certain to cause complete disorder (*fasad shamil*), then it is incumbent to keep the contract with him and not to oppose him.<sup>238</sup>

Thus, on the question of deposition, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi believes ideally in the deposition of the Imam who falls short of the *shar<sup>c</sup>i* qualifications. And in case of the opposition of two Imams, he believes that the one who fulfills the qualifications should be appointed, even if the other one was given the *bay<sup>c</sup>a* first. However, the rule of the lesser Imam is conceded if his deposition would entail great turmoil. Hence, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's position on these issues is close to that of al-Mawardi', who takes the view that the people owe the Imam obedience and support unless he loses his probity or becomes physically deficient, or becomes otherwise incapable of performing the functions of the Imamate. In this case he should be replaced.<sup>239</sup>

## 9. Functions of *Khalifa* and Duties of Subjects

Both Sunni and Shi'i sources consulted consider the principal function of the Imam is to "preserve religion and manage mankind's worldly affairs," as al-Mawardi puts it,<sup>240</sup> in other words, to provide for mankind's spiritual and material well-being by the implementation of the *shari<sup>c</sup>a* and whatever other measures compatible with the Law may be necessary. al-Mawardi discusses the practical functions of the Imam in some detail. These may be summed up briefly as: observance of religious rituals, defence and *jihad*, provision of Law and order, settling disputes, and collection and expenditure of taxes in the proper manner, that is to say, following ordinances and principles laid down in sources

<sup>238</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. I, p. 50.

<sup>239</sup> al-Mawardi, pp. 17-22. Later Sunni writers such as al-Ghazali, like Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, preferred the rule of the unjust Imam to civil strife in order to remove him.

<sup>240</sup> al-Mawardi, p. 5.



of the *sharʿ*.<sup>241</sup> Shiʿi sources consulted do not go into the practical functions of the Imam, but rather state generally that the Imam is needed to guide the people, draw them closer to obedience, and spread justice.<sup>242</sup> As for the subjects' obligations towards the ruler, all the sources consulted concur that these are loyalty, sincere counsel and obedience to the ruler's commands.<sup>243</sup>

Ibn al-ʿArabi for his part, dwells less on the expected practical functions of *khalifat al-zahir* which he appears to regard as common knowledge, and more on the cosmic functions of the *khalifa*, which includes implementing the Law, as already referred to, and leading his subjects to observe it. He also discusses the *adab*, or rules of conduct, governing the relationship between ruler and ruled. These aspects of Ibn al-ʿArabi's thought are examined in more detail in the next chapter.

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To sum up, Ibn al-ʿArabi's views on *khilafat al-zahir* and its representative combines elements of both Sunni and Shiʿi thought, although in its totality it falls within the Sunni tradition. He agrees with the qualifications of the Imam listed by al-Mawardi, believes them applicable to both *khalifat al-zahir* and *khalifat al-batin*. He ascribes infallibility to *khalifat al-batin* and adds that it may be bestowed on *khalifat al-zahir*. He asserts that the *khalifa* who was sought after and assigned the office of *khilafa* without his desiring it is divinely guided and is made infallible with respect to applying the Law. He states that his belief in the possible infallibility of an exoteric ruler, who is not *khalifat al-batin*, stands in

<sup>241</sup> al-Mawardi, pp. 16-7.

<sup>242</sup> Ibn al-Mutahhar, p. 284; Miqdad-i-Fadil, p. 63; Ibn Yaʿqub, pp. 22-4.

<sup>243</sup> al-Mawardi, p. 5, 17; Ibn al-Mutahhar, p. 286, Ibn Yaʿqub, p. 8.



opposition to the Twelver Imamis' conviction that only the true Imam, the *khalifat al-batin*, has *ʿisma* or infallibility. Yet his position on infallibility also seems to differ from the Sunni position, as represented by al-Mawardi, who does not mention infallibility as an attribute of the *khalifa*. Ibn al-ʿArabi conforms to Sunni doctrine in denying the fundamental Shiʿi assertion that the Prophet designated ʿAli as his successor. Rather, he believes that he left the matter open for the community to decide, and that the selection of *khalifat al-zahir* should be through *shura*. He believes that the selection of the *khalifa* through *shura* is divinely guided, and so is the *khalifa* thus chosen. This belief accords more with Sunni doctrine than Shiʿi. He believes in the Imamate of the superior candidate (*al-afdal*), yet concedes the Imamate of the less qualified candidate (*mafdul*) if it had been consented to by the *afdal*. This is, again, contrary to the Shiʿi position that asserts the absolute necessity of the Imam being the *afdal*. Moreover, he maintains that the first four Caliphs combined the qualities and functions of *khalifat al-batin* and *khalifat al-zahir*. However, in his discussion of all these issues, Ibn al-ʿArabi does not confine himself to the exoteric characteristics of the *khalifa* but explains their significance in the cosmic order. Lastly, Ibn al-ʿArabi believes that the Imam should ideally be deposed once he falls short of the conditions of the Imamate, which is again in harmony with Sunni position, as opposed to the Shiʿi position to which the issue of deposition is irrelevant. However, he also adds that the Imam should not be deposed if civil strife would result, in agreement with later Sunni writers like al-Ghazali.

The place of *khilafat al-zahir* in Ibn al-ʿArabi's thought will be further elucidated in the following chapter through examining the subject-ruler relationship advocated by the







## Chapter Three

### The Subject-Ruler Relationship

In a study that is mainly concerned with Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's concept of *khalifat al-zahir* and its place in his spiritual worldorder, it is important to examine not only the relation of *khalifat al-zahir* to *khalifat al-batin* and the cosmic order, but also his relationship with his subjects. Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's discussion of the subject-ruler relationship pertains to his wider concern with Law, Order, *adab*,<sup>244</sup> and spiritual discipline. The Law, as discussed previously, sets the divine balance between the names, preventing their overpowering one another and the consequent destruction of creation, by prescribing to every name its measure of manifestation, both in itself and in relation to the other names. The Law is thus a vessel of the divine Order. The Law is also described by Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi as "God's rules of courtesy."<sup>245</sup> Observing the Law in oneself and with others is to be obedient and courteous, both in oneself and with God. In the words of the Shaykh:

"Divine Courtesy" (*al-adab al-ilahi*) is that which God has laid down as Law for His servants through His messengers and on their tongues. The revealed religions (*al-shara'ic*) are God's rules of courtesy (*adab Allah*) which He set up for His servants. He who gives God's Law its full due (*haqq*) has gained the courtesy of the Real (*al-Haqq*) and come to know the friends of the Real.<sup>246</sup>

Among the divine rules of courtesy is everything that has come in the Koran in the mode of "Do this" and "Avoid that." So consider this in the Koran and gain a share of the Divine Courtesy, then put it into practice. Then you will be given success, God willing.<sup>247</sup>

<sup>244</sup> For definition of the term "*adab*," see above, footnote no. 64.

<sup>245</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, *Futuhāt*, in Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. 175 (from *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 58, Cairo 1911 ed.).

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, *Futuhāt*, in Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. 175 (from *Futuhāt*, vol. II, p. 655, Cairo 1911 ed.).



Among the "divine rules of courtesy" set in the Qur'an and *hadith* are those defining the subject-ruler relationship. For example, the *khalifa* is commanded to rule with justice and not to follow selfish interests: "We did indeed make thee a vicegerent on earth: so judge thou between men in truth (and justice), nor follow thou the lusts."<sup>248</sup> The subjects, on the other hand, are ordered: "O ye who believe, obey God, and obey the Apostle and those charged with authority among you."<sup>249</sup> Observing these, as any of the other rules of the *shari'at*, should lead, as Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi states above, to acquiring divine courtesy and proximity to "the friends of the Real," the *awliya'*. From here derives the importance, in Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's world-order, of observing the *adab* of the subject-ruler relationship.

This chapter will present both the *adab* of the *khalifa* with the subjects, and of the subjects with the ruler, as described by Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi. It will also discuss the relationship of Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi with his contemporary rulers as presented by the Shaykh al-Akbar in his autobiographical notes and in the secondary sources.

## 1. The Subject-Ruler Interrelationship

Before presenting the *adab* of the *khalifa* and subjects respectively, it should be noted that the relationship between the ruler and the subjects, and likewise the relation of their respective *adab* rules, is not simply a relationship between two opposing levels or entities. Rather, it is an essentially more interdependent relationship; one that is between different levels of Servanthood and their inner reality. For as the Shaykh describes, each level of *imama* is in itself a level of Servanthood; the highest level of *imama* in man - that is,

<sup>248</sup> Qur'an, 38:26.

<sup>249</sup> Qur'an, 4:59.



*khilafat Allah* - being at once the highest level of Servanthood to the real Imam who is God. The perfect *khalifa* is the one who is at once the perfect servant and the perfect "ilah." Similarly, and to varying degrees, each human being is both an Imam (Each one of you is a shepherd, and each one of you is responsible for his herd)<sup>250</sup> and a servant ordered to serve and obey (Obey God, and obey the Apostle and those charged with authority among you).<sup>251</sup> Because of the interrelationship of the levels of Imamate and Servanthood, each man is addressed by and bound to "divine rules of courtesy" that pertain both to rulers and to subjects, for each man is both ruler - essentially over himself and possibly over others, and subject - to the *khalifa* of his inner kingdom, that is, his Spirit (*al-ruh*), to those in command, and ultimately to God. Consequently, neither the levels of Imamate and servanthood, nor their pertinent rules of courtesy, can be discussed separately without referring to their inherent interrelationship.

Moreover, the governance of the cosmos and its guidance to felicity addresses and relies upon both the Imam and the subjects of the micro and macrocosms, rather than on the Imam alone. This interdependency is evident in Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's book on the divine governance of the human kingdom - entitled *al-Tadbirat al-Ilahiyya fi Islah al-Mamlaka al-Insaniyya* (The Divine Ordinances for the Amendment of the Human Kingdom). For although Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi addresses almost the entire book to the *khalifa* of the microcosm, *al-ruh*, using a language that reads equally for *khalifat al-zahir*,<sup>252</sup> he ends his book with a

<sup>250</sup> See Wensinck, vol. II, p. 273, hadith in al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, Tirmidhi, Ibn Hanbal.

<sup>251</sup> Qur'an, 4:59.

<sup>252</sup> In describing *al-khilafa al-batina* in this book, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi uses the same terminology and structure as those used in works written on *al-khilafa al-zahira*, which makes the book readable and applicable for either *khilafa*.



chapter on the disciple (*al-murid*) and his *adab* both in himself and with his shaykh. In other words, both the disciple or subject and the *khalifa* are addressed in order to achieve the desired amendment of the human realm. The dependence of amendment on both Imam and subject is more directly addressed in one of the passages of the book where, in the context of describing the abode of *al-khalifa* - in this case the *ruh* and its abode in the heart, the Shaykh writes:

The Prophet, may God bless and save him, has said: "There is in the body a piece of flesh which when sound (*salah*), the whole body becomes sound, but if corrupt (*fasad*), the whole body becomes corrupt. That is the heart."<sup>253</sup> . . . Likewise, we say, if the Imam is good, his subjects shall accordingly be good, and if he is corrupt, so shall they become. Such has been the custom and the divine wisdom.

As for the secret of this correlation between his corruptness or his goodness, and those of his subjects is that God, when He appoints a *khalifa* over a people, gives him their 'inmost consciousnesses' (*asrar*) and minds (*'uqul*). The *khalifa* thus becomes the aggregate of his subjects (*majmu' ra'iyatihi*). Hence, whenever he betrays their *asrar* and *'uqul*, this shows on them. And if he fears God [in their respect] it shall show on them. It may happen that the *asrar* of his subjects, at the time they were given to him, were base and imperfect. This is what is referred to by the saying of the Prophet, may God bless and save him, "Those appointed over you shall be the likes of you."<sup>254</sup> If the goodness (*salah*) of the Imam surmounts them [*al-asrar*] (*ghalaba 'alayha*), they shall become well (*salahat*), and the effects of this shall appear in the subjects and the state officials, by a transcendental divine will (*mashi'a ghaybiyya ilahiyya*). Man shall find this [amendment] in himself, where he previously had not, and shall know not from whence this came upon him nor how it became his. This is the secret of the Prophet's saying, may God bless and save him, "when it is sound, the whole body becomes sound."<sup>255</sup>

From the above passage it appears that the *islah* and perfection of the subjects, of creation in general, is dependent on the Imam, just as the perfection of the Imam is dependent on the subjects. In addition to being causes and reflections of each other's perfection, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi describes the *khalifa* and the subjects as being causes and victims of each other's imperfection. The almost inseparable interrelation of the *adab* of rulers and

<sup>253</sup> See Wensinck, vol. VI, p. 235, hadith in al-Bukhari, Muslim, Ibn Majah, al-Darimi.

<sup>254</sup> Hadith not found in Wensinck.

<sup>255</sup> *Tadbirat*, p. 112.



subjects, and their partaking in *al-islah*, is evident. Bearing in mind this interrelatedness, the *adab* of the Imam and the subject shall be presented respectively in what follows.

## 2. The *Adab* of the *khalifa*

In his *Tadbirat* and *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq*,<sup>256</sup> Ibn al-°Arabi provides almost a "Mirror for Princes" for the *khalifa* instructing him on the manner and ethics of governance. Although the *khalifa* addressed in the *Tadbirat* is man's Spirit (*al-ruh*), Ibn al-°Arabi's text reads equally well for *khalifat al-zahir*, as noted earlier. Of the numerous *adab* commended to the *khalifa*, only those explicitly pertaining to the ruler-subject relationship will be examined here.

The first and most encompassing of the list of advices that Ibn al-°Arabi gives to the *khalifa* is *al-takhalluq bil-asma'*. Almost every other *adab* rule derives from, and is covered in, this one piece of advice. According to Ibn al-°Arabi, the *khalifa* must appear in his realm with the attributes of his Appointer (*mustakhlif*) for the benefit of the people:

It is incumbent on this *khalifa* to assume the traits of the names of his Appointer, so that it may show in the character traits (*akhlaq*) and acts (*af'al*) of his subjects.<sup>257</sup>

Whereas in *al-Tadbirat* Ibn al-°Arabi states that in the presence of a perfect *khalifa* the subjects shall find themselves embettered from whence they do not know, in *Risalat al-Akhlaq* he ascribes their being influenced by the attributes of the ruler to their tendency to imitate and take on the attributes of those in power.<sup>258</sup> Either way, the *khalifa's*

<sup>256</sup> Ibn al-°Arabi. *Tahdhib: al-Akhlaq*. Cairo: Maktabat °Alam al-Fikr, n.d.

<sup>257</sup> *Tahdhib*, p. 126

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid*, p. 22.



assumption of the divine attributes is reflected in the character traits and acts of his subjects, hence the importance of the ruler's self-perfection.

Self-perfection is imperative on the ruler not only because he serves as a model of perfect character traits for the subjects to emulate, but also because he acts as an agent of God's Order and Justice in creation. Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi makes this point in his discussion of the hierarchy of celestial and earthly rulers, referred to in the previous chapter. In this hierarchy, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi presents the celestial rulers, various types and ranks of angels, as perfect vessels of the divine Order. Each carries out its specified task. The earthly rulers, on the other hand, are not perfect vessels of the divine Order. Their conveyance of the Order and conformity to it depends upon the degree of the perfection of their constitution (*istifdad*); the better or the purer that is, the more they rule in accordance with the divine Order - that is, the more they become agents of Justice. According to Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, if the ruler's *istifdad* is "good and sound" (*qawiyyan hasanan*), he will receive and manifest the Justice transmitted to him, becoming thus a just Imam. Otherwise, the ruler's imperfection taints that which should be transmitted through him, making him an unjust Imam.<sup>259</sup> The ruler's *istifdad*, which determines his justice, does not seem to be an innate disposition and hence is not out of the ruler's hands, for the Shaykh ends his discussion here by holding the ruler accountable for his imperfection and consequent injustice. He thus enjoins self-perfection on the rulers for both their and the subjects' benefit, as the rulers' self-

<sup>259</sup> *Futuhat*, vol. I, pp. 386-7. Relevant here is Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's affirmation that the one who harbored a desire for the office and reached power through personal striving - which in a way reflects his imperfect constitution - is not blessed with the divine assistance and direction which bestows infallibility on the one who did not seek the office and was free of these selfish desires.



perfection not only affects their subjects' perfection but also the conveyance of justice and Order in creation.

In connection with his role as an agent of Order, the *khalifa* should ensure the implementation of both the exoteric and esoteric aspects of the *shari'at*, and so should his vizier, *katib*, and every official in his kingdom.

O you noble master, protect your Law (*shari'at*), and make your kingdom serve it; and do not do the opposite so that it does not turn against you. Do not neglect observing, in every instant, the maintenance of the exoteric ordinances and the esoteric secrets that result from them . . .<sup>260</sup>

Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi quotes "the sages" (*al-hukama'*) as stating: "There are no more than four kinds of kings: one generous (*sakhi*) to himself and his subjects, one mean (*la'im*) to himself and his subjects, one generous to himself and mean to his subjects, and one mean to himself and generous to his subjects. Every king belongs to one of these four categories." Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi applies this to the *khalifat al-zahir*, and explains that if the *khalifa* combines both knowledge and good deeds, he is generous both to himself and his subjects. To have knowledge is to be generous to the self, filling it with happiness, while implementing and enjoining the subjects to fulfill the *shari'i* obligations is to be generous to the subjects, because by fulfilling the *shari'i* duties the subjects gain the divine knowledge embedded therein.<sup>261</sup> The *khalifa* should thus work on bringing himself and his subjects closer to felicity by applying the *shari'at* and actualizing its inherent knowledge.

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<sup>260</sup> *Tadbirat*, p. 126.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 135-6.



Likewise, the *khalifa* should draw close to his subjects, facilitate obedience and fulfillment of the Law for them, and extend to each class of people that by which it is amended.

O you noble master (*al-sayyid al-karim*), draw close (*tahabbab*) to your subjects and be generous in your offerings to them, [giving] each kind that which improves it. This is by restraining them from those things forbidden by God, and providing for them, as abundantly as possible, propensities for obedient acts (*mawahib al-ta'at*) . . . and enjoin the good, and forbid the evil . . .<sup>262</sup>

Instead of indulging in this world and its desires, the *khalifa* should concentrate on saving his subjects and himself by following God's commands:

Strive to save your subjects and your self by occupying yourself with [implementing] the Commands (*al-awamir*), Prohibitions (*al-nawahi*), and Restrictions (*hudud*) that your Appointer had charged you with.<sup>263</sup>

The *khalifa* is also advised to assign everything its place and secure his subjects' livelihood.<sup>264</sup> Lastly, the *khalifa* is advised to appear (*tajalli*) only briefly before his subjects in order to preserve in their hearts the awe of his level - *al-khilafa*. Hence their position towards the *khalifa* would remain one of moderation rather than one of excessive fear or excessive ease.<sup>265</sup>

### 3. The *Adab* of the Subjects

Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi discusses more extensively the *adab* of the subjects with the ruler. His teachings revolve around three main rules of conduct: refraining from reprehending (<sup>c</sup>*adam al-dhamm*), good counsel (*al-nasiha*), obedience (*al-ta'a*). He also discusses the

<sup>262</sup> *Tadbirat*, p. 132.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid*, p. 129.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 132-3.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 127-8.



*adab* of associating with the rulers (*al-suhba*) and approaching them for favors (*al-sa'y ind al-hukkam*), and accepting their money and gifts (*al-akhdh minhum*).

### 3.1 *Adam al-dhamm*

Most of all, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi recurrently stresses the necessity of not reprehending, or censuring, the rulers (*adam dhamm al-wulah*), even when the ruler is unjust. This *adab* rule is supported by the prophetic hadith addressed to Abu Hurayra, where the Prophet advises: "Do not curse the rulers, for God assigned a nation to hell because of their cursing their rulers."<sup>266</sup> In several passages of the *Futuhat*, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi discusses the importance and inner meaning of this *adab* rule. Firstly, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi describes *al-dhamm* as ingratitude (*kufir*), for it is the "inverse of praise" (*maqlub al-hamd*) - all praise being ultimately praise of God.<sup>267</sup>

The inverse of praise (*al-hamd*) is ingratitude (*kufir*), and such is reprehending (*al-dhamm*), because praise is laudation of the praised for what qualities he has, and for what proceeds from [his] noble character traits (*makarim al-akhlaq*). Reprehension is the opposite of what we have here mentioned.<sup>268</sup>

Thus *al-dhamm* is denying praise to God and hence *kufir*. Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi adds that the reason why people reprehend is that they do not perceive that acts (*al-af'al*) are from God, relating the acts to people rather than to the Doer:

People have fallen into reprehending (*dhamm*) actions (*al-af'al*) and blaming (*al-lawm*) because they do not see the acts [as proceeding] from God, but rather from those through whom the acts have appeared (*mimman zaharat ala aydihim*). And so they attributed blame and reprehension to them. If the veil were to be uplifted and [so] they were to see that the acts belong to God, then blame would not be directed (*ta'allaq*) to those who

<sup>266</sup> Hadith not found in Wensinck. Cited in *Futuhat*, vol. IV, p. 667.

<sup>267</sup> *Futuhat*, vol. IV, p. 367.

<sup>268</sup> *Futuhat*, vol. II, p. 760.



brought forth [these acts], and all the acts would then become in their view noble and good.<sup>269</sup>

Realising that all acts come from God induces praise and inhibits *al-dhamm*. An incident that embodies the above reality is found in the section of the *Futuhāt* on the divine name *al-Hamid* and the presence (*hadra*) of praise:

Our friend Sayf al-Din, son of the *amir* ‘Aziz, may God grant him success, told me on the day of my registering this presence (*hadra*) in this book, that he saw the governor of the town (*wali al-balad*) beating someone severely. So he stood amongst the people, hating the ruler in himself for beating that person. He then swooned (*ukhidha ‘an nafsihi*) and he saw the ruler, like himself, as one of the crowd, looking at the beaten person as the crowd was looking, while the one who commanded the beating was not the ruler. So he forgave him and left. The reason for him telling me this story was that the governor did him injustice in a certain judgement (*hukuma*). So I told him: “Report it to the Sultan.” So he told me: “the governor has no choice,” then he told me of what he saw. Such is the matter in itself. For here is a person who, when [his understanding was] veiled, ascribed injustice to the ruler. Yet when God lifted the veil off his sight, he no longer perceived this as injustice, but rather came to see the excuse (*‘udhr*) of the ruler, and so [his prior impression] turned into praise and laudation (*thana*). Hence, the one to whom criticism (*dhamm*) was directed was acquitted, and praise returned to God.<sup>270</sup>

Hence, *al-dhamm* reflects incomplete knowledge. When God lifted the veil from the eyes of the beholder, the latter realised that all acts come from God. He then came to know that the ruler is only a vessel, in this way excusable, and that everything reverts to God. The governor was (presumably) only implementing a beating commended by God’s Law. Besides reflecting an incomplete knowledge of the Source of everything in creation, *al-dhamm* also reflects ignorance of the divine *hikma*. The Shaykh explains that God gave everything the perfection required for the divine purpose of creation - “gave to each (created) thing its form and nature.”<sup>271</sup> Seeing imperfection in creation thus reflects

<sup>269</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. III, p. 46.

<sup>270</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 367.

<sup>271</sup> Qur’an, 20:50.



ignorance of the divine purpose<sup>272</sup> - this being the difference between the knowers of God and others. Whereas the former know that everything that occurs in creation accords to the divine Wisdom (*hikma*) or Order, the latter see imperfection and disorder:

And a person may resent a matter which does not agree with his interests, deeming he who has ordained it unjust. However, when the benefit of such an ordinance which he had resented becomes apparent, he is thankful to God and grateful for the ordinance and its ordainer for what he has done. For through him God has warded off a great evil that would, otherwise, have befallen the person. This happens often. The ultimate goal of the knowers of God is to wholly know that all that which occurs and appears in existence is the requisite of divine wisdom. Thence will all resentment and discontent vanish, and submission to and trust in God, regarding all matters, ensue. And so we have it that: "my (own) affair I commit to God: for God (ever) watches over His servants."<sup>273</sup> Thus dictates wisdom to he whose understanding comes from God.<sup>274</sup>

In line with this understanding of *al-dhamm*, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi forbids the criticism of the rulers. He adds that the rulers' hearts are "in the hands of God"<sup>275</sup> - He "turns" them as He wills. They are thus ultimately helpless, and should be obeyed and forgiven, leaving their judgement to their Appointer:

The one who knows the Imam's standing will not fault him, even if he were unjust. Why, leave him to his Appointer; if He gives him peace (*ammanahu*) so He has given him peace, and if He strikes him with fear (*khawwafahu*), so He has stricken him with fear. The one who knows the sultan's standing will not disobey him. And even if the sultan disobeys God with regard to his affairs, he does not take him to task. View him as being compelled and pre-destined. Do not view him as having choice or free-will. Lean against him, he is the shade; he who takes refuge with him will be out of harm's way.<sup>276</sup>

"Know that the hearts are in the hand of God between two of the fingers of *al-Rahman* (The Merciful),<sup>277</sup> like one heart which He dispenses (*yusrifahu*) as He wills. The hearts of the kings (*al-muluk*) are also in the hands of God; He turns their hearts against us if He so wills, and turns them towards us if He so wills. They [the rulers] are helpless. So forgive them, and pray for them (*id'u lahum*), and do not slander them (*la taqa'u fihim*) for they are the deputies of God (*nuwwab Allah*) in His servants, and God holds them in high position. So leave His rulers (*wulatahu*) to Him, exalted, to treat as He wills;

<sup>272</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. II, p. 126.

<sup>273</sup> Qur'an, 40:44.

<sup>274</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, pp. 332-3.

<sup>275</sup> In reference to the Prophetic hadith quoted in passage below.

<sup>276</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 515.

<sup>277</sup> See Wensinck, vol. I, p. 64, hadith in Tirmidhi, Muslim, Ibn Majah, Ibn Hanbal.



forgiving them, if He wills, in what they have fallen short of doing (*fima qassaru fih*), or punishing them, if He wills, for He knows them best.<sup>278</sup>

So beware of slandering (*al-wuqu<sup>c</sup> fi*) those in charge of the affairs of the Muslims (*wulat umur al-muslimin*).<sup>279</sup>

Moreover, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi warns that censuring (*al-ta<sup>c</sup>n*) those appointed is to censure their Appointer, which is why we have been forbidden to criticise the rulers.

Advice (*wasiyya*): Beware of giving preponderance to your opinion over God's knowledge of His creation, with respect to those rulers whom He charges with the handling of the affairs of Muslims - even if they were unjust. For therein lies a secret unknown to you: the evil that God wards off through them and the benefit that is realised through them are greater than their injustice, should they be unjust. This occurs often; people giving preponderance to their own opinions with regard to that which God has ordained in His creation. The devil finds his way to them and directs their derision towards those in charge. He thus comes between them and the truth that it is God Who has appointed [those rulers], making them forget, moreover, the prophet's injunction to obey and not be disputatious. And so the devil approaches them with such interpretations of this and other prophetic sayings as would make them part ways with Islam and forget the saying of the Prophet, God bless and save him: "If [the rulers] are unjust, it is counted for you and against them; if they are just, it is counted for you and for them,"<sup>280</sup> and "God wards off through them what He may not ward off by the Qur'an."<sup>281</sup>

Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi states that the benefit that befalls us from the rulers exceeds the harm done to us by their injustice (*jawr*), and that they remain the deputies of God "whether they were unbelievers (*kuffar*) or believers, just or unjust; this does not exclude them from *itlaq hukm al-niyaba<sup>c</sup> alayhum* [i.e. their injustice does not exclude them from being His deputies ]."<sup>282</sup> Furthermore, criticising the rulers is to object to the divine appointment, and reflects incomplete knowledge. This is because, in the language of the divine names, *al-dhamm* is conducive to "*ta<sup>c</sup>til al-'uluhiyya*" (obstructing (the effects of) the divine

<sup>278</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 639.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>280</sup> Prophetic hadith. Not found in Wensick. This hadith is also quoted, though with slightly different wording, by al-Mawardi in support of the obligation of obedience to those in authority, p. 5.

<sup>281</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 628.

<sup>282</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. III, p. 420.



qualities of Divinity). As discussed previously, everything in creation was brought into existence to manifest a divine name. The totality of the names is represented by the level of *al-uluhiyya*. To desire the change or the disappearance from creation of something is in effect to desire to obstruct (*ta'til*) the effects of the affiliated divine names and, by extension, of their totality - *al-uluhiyya*.<sup>283</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi mentions *al-ta'til* in course of his discussion of the meaning of "Gave to each (created) thing its form and nature."<sup>284</sup> He explains that as everything in creation serves to manifest a divine name, nothing in creation should incur criticism:

This [that God created everything perfectly] is not known except to those who said: "O Lord, You have encompassed everything with your mercy and knowledge."<sup>285</sup> As for those who said: "Wilt Thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood?"<sup>286</sup>, these have not comprehended the purpose of *al-Haqq* in His creating creation. And if the matter [of the creation of one who would shed blood on Earth] were different from how it was [created], many of the names of the divine presence would have been obstructed (*ta'attala*); their effect (*hukm*) in creation not appearing. The Messenger of God, God bless and save him, said: "If you did not do wrong (*tudhnibu*), God would bring forth a people who would do wrong then ask for forgiveness (*tastaghfirun*), then God forgives them."<sup>287</sup> So, he [the Messenger] pointed out (*nabbaha*) that everything that occurs in the world is for the manifestation of the effect of a divine name. As the matter is as such, contingent existence (*al-imkan*) could not have been better (*abda'*) nor more perfect than this world.<sup>288</sup>

The connection between "*ta'til al-asma'*" and the *dhamm* of the rulers is made while discussing the *adab* rule of thinking well of people (*husn al-zann bi al-nas*), where Ibn al-

<sup>c</sup>Arabi relates an incident that occurred to one of the Folk of God:

It is far from the Folk of God (*ahl Allah*), especially the people of beholding the Face (*ashab mushahadat al-wajh*), to think badly (*yusi'u al-zann*) of the servants of God, or that any of their [the servants'] ugly character traits (*qaba'ih*) occur to the mind of the

<sup>283</sup> See also, *Futuhāt*, vol. I, pp. 952-3.

<sup>284</sup> Qur'an, 20:50.

<sup>285</sup> Qur'an, 40:7.

<sup>286</sup> Qur'an 2:30.

<sup>287</sup> See Wensinck, vol. II, p. 186, hadith in Muslim, Tirmidhi, Ibn Hanbal.

<sup>288</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. II, p. 126.



holder of this state who is firm in his station. One of the Folk had met one of the Substitutes (*abdāl*)<sup>289</sup> in his travelling, and went on telling him of the corrupt state of the people, be it the kings, the rulers (*al-wulāh*), or the subjects. The *badal* was angered and said to him: "What have you to do with God's servants? Do not interfere between the Master and His servant, for mercy, forgiveness, and perfection (*ihsan*) are to be asked for them. Do you want the effect (*hukm*) of divinity to remain suspended (*mu'atalla*)? Mind your own business (*ishataghil bi-nafsika*) and avoid such things, concentrate on God, and do not busy yourself with any other than Him."<sup>290</sup>

Hence, instead of judging and criticizing other people, the servant of God should concentrate on his own self-perfection and servitude to God. He should understand that everything in creation is a divine manifestation. Another reason forbidding *al-dhamm* arises from Ibn al-ʿArabi's conception of affliction (*al-balaʿ*). According to the Shaykh, God has afflicted his servants only so that they may plead Him to lift this affliction from them - that being the divine cure for what the Shaykh calls their illness of claiming the qualities of the Image before fully realising them:

Know, may God teach you, that there is in the patience (*al-sabr*) shown by the general public (*al-ʿamma*) resistance to divine subjection (*al-qahr al-ilahi*); and that is bad behavior (*suʿ adab*) towards God. For God had not afflicted His servants save for them to implore (*yatadarruʿu*) and ask Him for the uplifting of that affliction, because it [supplication] is a medicine for the illness that may befall their souls from the Image upon which they were created - [when the Image is] claimed by the one in whom it has not perfected. Vicegerency (*al-khilāfa*) is of its [the Image's] perfection, and they [the vicegerents] are the perfected (*al-mukammalun*) amongst men. The one who has not attained the rank of *al-khilāfa* is not upon the Image, for it is by the summation (*al-majmuʿ*) [of the divine attributes] that he is upon the Image.<sup>291</sup>

So, affliction should be met with supplication to God (*al-tadarruʿ li-Allah*) for mercy instead of with *dhamm*, the latter signifying ignorance and lack of courtesy. Indeed, a

<sup>289</sup> The *abdāl* (sing. *badal*), or the substitutes, are those, seven in number according to Ibn al-ʿArabi, through whom, in the words of Chodkiewicz, "God preserves the seven climes." Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, p. 103. For more information on the *abdāl*, see Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*.

<sup>290</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. II, p. 234. The same incident is referred to in another passage of the *Futuhāt* where the *badal*'s angry reply is "ma laka wa ʿibād Allah, la taqul illa khayran, wa li hadha sharaʿa Allah al-shafaʿa wa qabila al-ʿudhr." *Futuhāt*, vol. I, p. 889.

<sup>291</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. II, p. 275.



distinct function of affliction seems to be to induce those on whom it befalls to call upon the divine names of mercy, thus inviting the manifestation of these divine names in creation. By contrast, protesting at being afflicted and abstaining from calling upon divine mercy is, in effect, another form of *ta'ṭil al-uluhiyya* or obstructing the effects of the Names. For *al-uluhiyya*, as Ibn al-ʿArabi mentions, includes, or brings about, both affliction (*al-bala'*) and well-being (*al-ʿafiya*).<sup>292</sup> In other words, it is from the level of *al-uluhiyya* that *bala'* and *ʿafiya* proceed. Demanding the disappearance from creation of *al-bala'*, or any other existent for that matter, is to demand the *ta'ṭil* of the divine names connected with it, and hence limit the scope of the level of totality- *al-uluhiyya*. Moreover, there is a hidden mercy in *al-bala'*, and that is in its capacity to cure the illness, referred to above, of unrightfully claiming the Image.

Another reason that Ibn al-ʿArabi provides for not censuring the *khulafa'* is that the *khalifa* possesses the most complete form of mercy, even though he may be perceived by his subjects to be without mercy. He explains that there are two kinds of mercy: one that is natural (*tabiʿiyya*), which one finds in oneself in accordance with one's temperament, and the other is given (*mawduʿa*), and that is the one which God bestows on those created in the Image - those who comprise all the names, that is, the *khulafa'*. The mercy proceeding from *al-khulafa'* is, according to Ibn al-ʿArabi, the most complete mercy because it

<sup>292</sup> "The locus of witnessing (*mashhad*) divinity is more comprehensive [or widely known] (*ʿamm*) since it is acknowledged by everyone because of its encompassing both affliction and well-being - and both of these exist in creation, and are not denied by anyone. Whereas the locus of witnessing Mercy (*al-rahmaniyya*) is only known by those who are bestowed the mercy of faith (*al-marhumun bil iman*), and is denied only by the deprived . . .," *Futuhat*, vol. I, p. 839.



comprises the one hundred mercies affiliated with the one hundred divine names - ninety nine apparent names and one hidden:

The merciful (*al-rahim*) amongst us has two mercies: a natural mercy (*rahma tabi'iyya*); that proceeds from his own temperament, and a bestowed mercy (*rahma mawdu'a*); which God put in him because of his creation upon the Image. This [latter] mercy includes the one hundred mercies that belong to God. For to God belongs one hundred mercies in accordance with His one hundred names. For He has ninety-nine manifest names and He hid one name in keeping with the odd number principle (*al-watriyya*), for He likes the singular (*al-watr*) because He Himself is singular. So, to each name belongs a mercy, even though the Avenger (*al-muntaqim*) is one of His names; for in His vengeance there is mercy . . . .

The intercession (*al-shafa'a*) of the intercessors proceeds from natural mercy not from bestowed mercy, because bestowed divine mercy (*al-rahma al-mawdu'a al-ilahiyya*) is accompanied, in the servant, with pride and power - for it [bestowed mercy] does not proceed from pity (*al-shafaqa*) whereas it is from natural mercy that pity proceeds. If divine mercy were not accompanied by pride and distance from pity, God would not have punished anyone of His creation in the first place. So, this mercy which the servant finds [in himself] towards God's creation results from natural mercy because bestowed mercy is not found except in the vicegerents (*al-khilafa*). Don't you see how man (*al-insan*), if he sees the vicegerent oppressing people and punishing them unjustly, how he feels pity for the oppressed and unjustly punished, and says: "He [the vicegerent] has no mercy, and if I were in his place I would have had mercy on them, and relieved them of that oppression." But if he who said this were appointed to that same office, God then veils him from natural mercy which engenders (*tuwrith*) pity, and puts in him the mercy which is accompanied by pride and power, and so he does have mercy, but through volition, not through pity nor need, for he is, in himself, the inaccessible (*al-'aziz*) and the independent (*al-ghani*). So he does injustice and punishes, may be more than the other whom he reprehended for doing the same thing before he received the station of vicegerency (*al-khilafa*). When this is pointed out to him, he says: "By God, I do not know," if he does not have this knowledge, "for I do not find in myself except what you behold. Now I perceive the justification (*'udhr*) for what he did; that for which I had reproved him." I had been told by a trustworthy one (*sadiq*) that the like of this happened to the Imam al-Nasir li-Din Allah. God's mercy upon him, with his father al-Mustadi, in the presence of the vizier. He had reproved his father to the vizier. Then when the vicegerency devolved on him, he acted as his father had, in the manner for which he had reproved him. When the vizier pointed out this to him (*nahbahahu*), he said: "The state (*hal*) which I had at that time has departed from me, and I do not find [in myself] at this moment except that the effect of which you behold. Now I perceive the justification of my father, God's mercy upon him."<sup>293</sup>

Thus, the level of *al-khilafa* affects the rulers' actions, bidding them to act in ways, though innately merciful, that they would not have condoned while outside that level, and

<sup>293</sup> Futuhat, vol. IV, p. 59.



that are not often understood by the subjects. This is Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's conclusive argument against censuring the rulers and for obedience to them.

### 3.2 Obedience

While the level of *al-khalifa* is the level of sovereignty, the level of the subjects is that of obedience. On the necessity of obedience to the rulers, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi bases himself mainly on the Qur'anic verse "Obey God, and obey the Apostle and those charged with authority among you (*ulu al-amr*)."<sup>294</sup> In this verse, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi notes, the Prophet and *ulu al-amr* are joined under the same ordering command "Obey;" that being due to the oneness of their legislation, for *ulu al-amr* are commanded to follow the revealed prophetic legislation. Because of the Qur'anic order to obey *ulu al-amr*, it has become both imperative and blessed to do so; for obeying them is to obey the divine order. In the words of the Shaykh:

It is not for those in command (*ulu al-amr*) to set a *shari'a*, rather, they are to command and prohibit in [the realm of] that which is licit (*mubah*) for them and for us. So, if they commanded us with that which is licit, or prohibited us from that which is licit, and we obeyed them in that, we are thus rewarded the reward of one who obeyed God in that which He commanded and prohibited. This is from God's generosity to us, yet this is not perceived by the heedless amongst us.<sup>295</sup>

Give the Sultan (i.e. ruler) what is due to him of listening and obeying in that which you are permitted to do or to omit. It is incumbent upon you, according to His command and prohibition, to hear and obey him [the sultan]. Thus, the commands and prohibitions of the Sultan cause what had previously been licit (*mubah*) to become obligatory (*wajib*) or forbidden (*mahzur*) according to God's *shari* ruling saying: "[obey God, the Prophet] and those charged with authority among you (*ulu al-amr*)."<sup>296</sup>

<sup>294</sup> Qur'an, 4:59.

<sup>295</sup> *Futuh*, vol. I, p. 344.

<sup>296</sup> Qur'an, 4:59, *Futuh*, vol. IV, p. 602.



The divine blessing in obeying the rulers, when their command complies with the Prophetic legislation, is that despite the restriction of their legislation to those matters not addressed by the Prophetic laws, their legislation becomes as obligatory as the Prophetic laws, and following it as rewarding; for God has commanded obedience to *ulu al-amr*. Besides, Ibn al-'Arabi explains that following the divine command brings us closer to obedience and felicity, and perfects our submission and consignment to God:

The wise (*al-'aqil*) amongst us does not object to whatever God ordains for His servants: he does not object to His appointing of a ruler who rules according to selfish desire (*al-hawa*) and not divine legislation. For God has *hukm* and *tadbir*, and He has commanded that we listen and obey those in charge, and not dispute their authority. For it is God Who has appointed them to that position of authority. "If [the ruler] is just it is counted for him and for us; if he is unjust it is counted for us and against him."<sup>297</sup> And so we are fortunate, as we benefit in both cases. We need not worry, as God has secured happiness for us in His creation. But if we speak ill of our rulers and kings on account of their injustice, we would be forfeiting the reward that is our due as a result of that injustice. Moreover, we would be discourteous to God, having given preponderance to our opinions over His doing in that matter. The reward that is our due as a result of their injustice is, without doubt, a reward to be reaped in the hereafter. Thus we will have deprived ourselves of this reward, and he who deprives himself of the reward of the hereafter is, indeed, amongst the losers. However, whatever we may gain when the rulers are just is but a worldly gain. And the world will come to nought. We have rejoiced and, unwittingly, set greater value by this life than the life hereafter, overcome as we were by forgetfulness (*al-ghafla*). In that we were amongst those who sought the harvest of this world. If the rulers are just, they will be rewarded in the hereafter. Yet, by their injustice they have foresaken that reward, and the bane of their injustice will turn back upon them. The (true) Muslim is the one who has submitted and entrusted himself to God and seen that all matters are in His hand. He does not protest except where he is ordered to protest, in which case his protesting is an act of worship. In fact, if he kept silent where it is incumbent upon him to protest, he would be as he who protests when he should keep silent.<sup>298</sup>

And you have to listen and obey them, "even if he were a mutilated (*mujda' al-atraf*) Abyssinian slave."<sup>299</sup>

<sup>297</sup> Prophetic hadith. Not found in Wensinck.

<sup>298</sup> *Futuhat*, vol. I, p. 946.

<sup>299</sup> *Futuhat*, vol. IV, p. 639. For the Prophetic hadith on obedience to the Imam "even if he were an Abyssinian slave," see Wensinck, vol. IV, p. 42, hadith in Ibn Majah, Ibn Hanbal; also, Wensinck, vol. I, p. 327, hadith in al-Bukhari.



Hence, the felicity of the subjects lies in obeying the rulers and accepting their rule, that being equivalent to obeying and accepting God's command, for it is God's command that the rulers be obeyed whether they are just or not.

The high value of obedience to the Sultan is also evidenced by Ibn al-<sup>o</sup>Arabi's marking it amongst the *akhlaq* of the *fata*.<sup>300</sup> The *fata* (pl. *fityan*) - one who has attained the exalted spiritual level of *al-futuwwa* - is described by Ibn al-<sup>o</sup>Arabi in chapter 42 of the *Futuhat*, "On the knowledge of *al-futuwwa*, *al-fityan*, their way-stations, ranks, and the innermost consciousness of their *qutbs*." In the words of the Shaykh:

... this is the state and station of chivalry (*al-futuwwa*). Its holders are called *al-fityan*; and they are those who have attained all the noble character traits (*makarim al-akhlaq*). It is not possible for anyone to be in the state of noble character traits unless he knows the loci of their dispensation and of his appearance with them. For *al-fityan* are people of abundant knowledge. . . So, only one who knows the measures (*maqadir*) of the engendered things (*al-akwan*) and the measure (*miqdar*) of the divine presence, and hence treats every existent in accordance to its [prescribed] measure of treatment, putting forward (*yuqaddim*) whom must be forwarded, and putting back (*yu'akhkhir*) whom must be put back, [only that one] should be called a *fata*.<sup>301</sup>

So, the *fata* has the knowledge of the proper place and rank of everything in creation, treating everything and everyone accordingly. He who conforms with the divine Law in both its esoteric and exoteric aspects treats everything in creation according to the place designated to it in both the cosmic Order and in the "divine rules of courtesy" set in the revealed Book. In the relationship of the *fata* to the ruler, Ibn al-<sup>o</sup>Arabi notes that the *fata* must treat the Sultan with the respect due to the exalted level of Sultanship (*al-saltana*),

<sup>300</sup> *Fata* literally means "young man." It came to signify one who has perfect character traits. See *El2*, "*futuwwa*."

<sup>301</sup> *Futuhat*, vol. I, p. 315.



irrespective of the quality of the ruler's rule, for it is to the level of rule, rather than the person assuming it, that exaltedness and respect attach. Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi writes:

The *fata* should (*yanbaghi*) know the eminence of the level of sultanship, and that he [the Sultan] is God's deputy in His servants and His vicegerent (*khalifa*) in His countries (*biladahu*). [Accordingly] he should treat the one whom God has set in it [Sultanship], even though he may not be just (*wa in lam yajri al-haqq 'ala yadayhi*), with the hearing and obeying that is due to the level, in the pleasant (*al-manshat*) and undesirable (*al-makrah*) [deeds], in accordance with what his Master has prescribed . . . . So, the *fata* should pay the Sultan his due, that which God has ordained. And he should not demand what God has made his own due if the Sultan withholds it from him - provided it is among what [the *fata*] is allowed to forgive him - out of magnanimity, mercy, and exaltation of [the Sultan's] rank. For he [the *fata*] may ask him [the Sultan] for it [his rights] on the Day of Judgement. For the *fata* is one who has no adversary (*khasm*) because he carries out what he is obliged to do, and forgives in that which is due to him, and so he has no adversary.<sup>302</sup>

Hence, the *fata*, the one who has attained *makarim al-akhlaq*, treats the ruler, whether just or not, with the respect and obedience due to the level because that is his duty, pardoning when he can, out of generosity, the ruler's infringement of his rights, for which God will ultimately hold him to account. Obedience to the rulers is restricted, however, to his rulings in the sphere of what is legally *mubah*. In all other spheres the *shar'c* ruling must be followed, irrespective of the ruler's commands.

You have to obey those amongst the people who are in command (*ulu al-amr*), whom the Sultan has appointed over your affairs, for obedience to those in command is made obligatory (*wajiba*) by explicit statement in the Qur'an. We are only obliged to comply with their commands which order what is licit, and not to those which order disobedience (*al-ma'asi*.) If they coerce you (*ghasabuk*), accept their coercion in some of your states (*fi ba'd ahwalak*), yet if they order you to coerce, do not coerce, and do not part from the majority (*al-jama'a*), or disobey them, and do not dispute the authority of those holding it or else you shall "die as a disbeliever (*tamut mawta jahiliyya*)"<sup>303</sup> according to the explicit statement of the Messenger of God, God bless and save him: "do not break with the *umma*, nor dispute the authority of those holding it, and fight with the one of the two who has

<sup>302</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. I, p. 316.

<sup>303</sup> In reference to the Prophetic hadith: "*man farāqa al-jama'a shibran fa mata illa mata mita jahiliyya*." See Wensinck, vol. I, p. 393, hadith in al-Bukhari, al-Nisa'i, al-Darimi, Ibn Hanbal.



probity, and return a trust to him who entrusted you with it, and give to everyone his due."<sup>304</sup>

The necessity of obeying the rulers, even if they are unjust, is thus evident, as long as it is not in disobedience to God's Law. If the ruler orders that which is not permissible by the Law, the subject should not obey. And though the subject may accept the ruler's coercion of him, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi asserts that he should not obey the ruler if he ordered him to coerce others. The one who has gained perfect character traits bestows on the ruler the respect and obedience due to the latter's level, forgiving his shortcomings, if it is only his not God's rights that are neglected. If the ruler orders the transgression of a divine right, he should not be obeyed in that particular order. However, when the ruler defies the divine Law, and a pretender rises against him calling to *al-Haqq*, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi states, as noted earlier, that the people should rise to the support of that pretender, deposing the defiant ruler.

### 3.3 Good Counsel

Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi counts giving good counsel and support to those in command (*al-nasiha*), as well as obedience to them, among the divisions of faith (*shu'ab al-iman*) which he partially lists in his chapter of injunctions (*wasaya*) to the disciple - the last chapter of the *Futuhāt*.<sup>305</sup> In his *wasaya*, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi calls on the disciples as follows:

(Injunction): Good counsel is [the corner stone of] religion, so be sure to offer it always. Muslim in his *Sahih* has it that the Prophet, God's peace and blessing upon him, has said: "Religion is good counsel (*al-nasiha*)."<sup>306</sup> They asked him, "To whom?" He said, "In the service of God, His Prophet, the Imams of the Muslims, and Muslims in general."<sup>306</sup> So know that good counsellors (*al-nussah*) are the thread, good counsel the needle, and each

<sup>304</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 636.

<sup>305</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, pp. 620-1.

<sup>306</sup> See Wensinck, vol. VI, p. 45, hadith in al-Bukhari and Muslim.



councillor a tailor. The tailor is the one who brings together the pieces of cloth, to make a shirt, or whatever garment, of use to others only through his labor. And so it is, in God's religion, that the giver of good counsel is he who brings God's servants to wherein lies their happiness with God, and he who brings together God and His creatures. Hence the Prophet's saying, "Good counsel is to good."<sup>307</sup>

And in another passage, the Shaykh instructs the disciple (*murid*) to:

Give good counsel to all existents, hear and obey the kings, and restrain the actions of the unjust amongst them in a manner that will not expose you to their harm.<sup>308</sup>

Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi believed that God had called upon him, more than others, to give counsel to His servants - this would naturally include the rulers :

God, exalted, has commanded us, through His Messenger, God bless and save him, to extend good counsel "in the service of God, His Prophet, and the Imams of Muslims, and Muslims in general."<sup>309</sup> This He addressed to everyone. Then He addressed me in particular, without mediation more than once, in Mecca and Damascus; He said to me in a heralding vision (*mubashshira*) that I had: "Counsel My servants." Thus it became incumbent upon me more than others.<sup>310</sup>

Though Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi does not elaborate on the subject of giving counsel to rulers, his personal life provides us with some insight into the relationship of his theory with his practice. Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi held close relations with several of the rulers' of his time who consulted him and to whom he gave counsel. The nature of the Shaykh's counsel to the rulers can be understood from his accounts of it in his work. Its basis was legal and spiritual guidance. For example, in his response to the letter sent to him by the Seljuk sultan Kay Ka'us I,<sup>311</sup> in which the latter asks for advice, he reminds the sultan of the duties pertaining to his elevated office, and enjoins him to uphold religion and ensure the

<sup>307</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 607.

<sup>308</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 657.

<sup>309</sup> See Wensinck, vol. VI, p. 45, hadith in al-Bukhari and Muslim.

<sup>310</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. I, p. 827.

<sup>311</sup> See Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's response to the sultan's letter in *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, pp. 710-1; *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 692; also in *Muhadarat*, vol. II, pp. 454-7.



prevalence of justice in his land. He stresses the necessity of implementing the Covenant of ʿUmar, which was being blatantly breached under his rule. The Covenant, as is known, is a set of regulations and restrictions, attributed to Caliph ʿUmar Ibn al-Khattab concerning the treatment of the People of the Book (*ahl al-dhimma*). Though the Covenant subjects *ahl al-dhimma* to a quite strict social code, Ibn al-ʿArabi's insistence on the implementation of these laws reflects more, as ʿAddas notes, the Shaykh's firmness in "observ[ing] the *shariʿa* scrupulously"<sup>312</sup> than what Asin Palacios interprets as animosity to Christians,<sup>313</sup> for the Shaykh's writings are full with evidence of his reverence for all forms of religion and faith. Moreover, and as noted by ʿAddas, Ibn al-ʿArabi's time was witness to the incessant attacks of the Reconquesta and Crusades threatening the Islamic realms in the West and the East respectively. Defence and fortification of the Islamic community must have been the call of the day, and hence Ibn al-ʿArabi's call for the implementation of the Covenant. Historically, it is noticeable that it is especially in times of weakness and danger that the call for the Covenant of ʿUmar is revived.

Another example of Ibn al-ʿArabi's counsel to the rulers concerns the Ayyubid King al-Zahir Ghazi of Aleppo. The King had intended to execute one of his entourage for betrayal of the royal trust. Though this offense is, according to the Shaykh, one of the offenses that Kings do not forgive, he requested the King to pardon the offender, affirming to him that the King's capacity to pardon should not be equalled by any of his subjects. And as the Shaykh perceived of no offense that he himself could not pardon, and he is

<sup>312</sup> ʿAddas, p. 235.

<sup>313</sup> Asin Palacios, in ʿAddas, *Quest*, p. 234 (from, p. 94, Madrid 1931).



only one of the King's subjects, the King should necessarily surpass him in mercy, especially as the offense was not the breach of a divine ordinance.<sup>314</sup> Convinced, the King consented, praising the Shaykh: "May God reward your being such an excellent companion (*jalīs*). It is the like of you who keep company with kings."<sup>315</sup> The Shaykh added that after that incident, the King never refused him any request, whatever it might be. Ibn al-ʿArabi mentions that King al-Zahir of Aleppo attended, in one day, to 118 appeals that were raised to him.<sup>316</sup>

The Shaykh's counsel to the rulers thus stemmed from, and reflected, his deep concern for both the implementation of the *shariʿa* and the spiritual guidance of the rulers. While everyone is enjoined, in the Prophetic hadith, to provide good counsel, Ibn al-ʿArabi found at some point that this incumbent upon him "more than others."

### 3.4 Associating with Rulers

On the permissibility of associating with rulers, Ibn al-ʿArabi is not categorical, though he makes general prohibitive statements, like the quite rhetorical one he makes in his *wasaya*:

Beware of the temptation (*fitna*) of the world, women, offspring, money, and associating with (*suhba*) the Sultan.<sup>317</sup>

It is also in his *wasaya* that he defines conditions for associating with them:

Beware (*iyyak*) of the company of kings, unless you are one to whose words they listen (*masmuʿ al-kalima ʿindahum*), so that you [may] benefit a Muslim, or defend the rights of

<sup>314</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, pp. 699-700.

<sup>315</sup> "Jazak Allah khayran min jalīs. Mithlak man yujalis al-muluk," *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 700.

<sup>316</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. III, p. 617.

<sup>317</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 648.



someone wronged (*tadfa* ° *an mazlum*), or dissuade the sultan from committing what will lead [him] to unhappiness in the hereafter (*al-shaqa* ° *ind Allah*).<sup>318</sup>

As both pieces of advice were made in the *wasaya*, they appear to be complementary rather than contradictory; the first setting the general rule, while the second defining the exceptions to it. While associating with rulers is generally prohibited, Ibn al-°Arabi permits it for those who are "listened to by the rulers (*masmu* ° *al-kalima* ° *indahum*)" because of the good that such collaboration may bring to the people. The Shaykh thus limits those who may associate with rulers to a particular category of people, those who are revered by the rulers and who are therefore able to guide them rightly and encourage their application of justice. Ability to influence the rulers and doing so for the benefit of others are the two criteria that the Shaykh sets for associating with rulers. Thus, proximity to the rulers should not be sought for selfish purposes, nor if the approacher does not possess such influence on the ruler as to fulfill the purpose of this proximity, which is, to intercede for the people, and guide the leader to the right path. Such power to influence should stem from, or be coupled with, a high level of spiritual and religious perfection. This is clear in another passage of the *Futuhāt* where, in enumerating the various sciences that were alluded to in chapter 365, Ibn al-°Arabi counts it permissible to approach the rulers (*al-sa* ° *y* ° *ind al-hukkam*) for the purpose of providing testimony (*al-shahada*) or interceding on behalf of the people (*al-shafa* ° *a*), both actions being for the benefit of others, on condition that the approacher possesses ° *adala* - ° *adala* approximately meaning a high level of integrity, probity, or "a state of moral and religious perfection"<sup>319</sup>.

<sup>318</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 636.

<sup>319</sup> *EI2*, "° *Adl*," p. 209.



In it [this section] is the knowledge of the licitness (*ibaha*) of man's approaching the rulers (*al-hukkam*), in the case of his probity (*ʿadala*), in order to give his testimony; for this belongs to *al-saʿy* for the benefit of others, and not for the benefit of oneself, when the need arises. If he is not *ʿadl*, the ruler [or judicial authority] (*al-hakim*) should not accept his testimony, for this may result in the triumph of falsehood over truth. It is for this reason that *al-saʿy* in the case of *ʿadala* is necessary.<sup>320</sup>

Hence, association with the rulers is conditional on good character and integrity in the approacher, that the approacher be respected by the ruler, and with the condition that such association be for the benefit of others. It is noteworthy that Abu Madyan, the shaykh most revered by Ibn al-ʿArabi, is reported by the Shaykh al-Akbar to have approached the Sultan in intercession for a group of people whom the Sultan was determined to execute.<sup>321</sup> It is therefore clear that Ibn al-ʿArabi does not totally prohibit the disciple from association with rulers, nor had he, as ʿAddas states, "showed himself inflexible where this principle is concerned,"<sup>322</sup> but rather he restricts this association by making it conditional on the fulfillment of certain criteria.

Accordingly, Ibn al-ʿArabi's personal association with rulers cannot be claimed to be contrary to his teachings, as ʿAddas asserts in her important biographical book on the Shaykh al-Akbar. In this, ʿAddas states Ibn al-ʿArabi's belief that he had been endowed with the spiritual function of Seal of Sainthood<sup>323</sup> as a possible cause for "the apparent change in attitude which led Ibn ʿArabi to visit palaces and rub shoulders with princes when in the East - directly contrary to his line of conduct in the West and also in

<sup>320</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. III, p. 429.

<sup>321</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. II, pp. 157.

<sup>322</sup> ʿAddas, p. 165.

<sup>323</sup> Ibn al-ʿArabi states that he has been granted the function of Seal of the Muhammadan Saints which, in brief, means that he is the last complete manifestation of the spirituality that is defined as Muhammadan. For a thorough presentation of the function and its implications, refer to M. Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*; and C. ʿAddas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*.



contradiction of his own advice to disciples.<sup>324</sup> While the apparent change in Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi's attitude towards the rulers, from a presumed negative one in the West to a better one in the East, shall be discussed further below, it is clear from the above that he did not categorically forbid approaching the rulers, and that his relationship with them conformed to the parameters that he set for his disciples. The nature of Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi's relationship with the rulers is made clearer in one of his most informative notes in which he explains how and why he associated with rulers, interestingly in the context of a discussion on tactfulness (*al-mudarah*).<sup>325</sup>

He, God bless and save him, has said that "tact (*al-mudarah*) with people is a form of charity (*sadaqa*)" . . . and God, Exalted, Has said to His Prophet, showing him His grace: "It is part of the Mercy of God that thou dost deal gently with them."<sup>326</sup> And gentleness is lowering the wing of humility (*khafid al-janah*), tactfulness, and diplomacy. Don't you see how *al-Haqq* sustains the infidel despite his infidelity, and defers his punishment. And God, Exalted, has said to Moses and Harun in reference to the Pharoah: "Speak to him gently,"<sup>327</sup> and this is the essence of tactfulness. For he [the Pharoah] imagines that you are with him in that matter. When I tasted this station and became one with it (*ittahadta bihi*), as chance would have it I accompanied kings and sultans, and I have never asked any of them a favor on someone's behalf except through this station, nor have any of them denied me the fulfillment of these requests. For whenever I wish to make a request on someone's behalf, I would lure him into thinking that it is he who is in need of this thing, and so he would hasten to accomplish it willingly and intently because of the benefit he believes will come to him from it, and so I would be doing the Sultan a favor by accepting from him the favor he has done for that person.

For I have brought before al-Malik al-Zahir bi-Amr Allah, ruler of Aleppo, 118 requests on people's behalf in one day, and he answered them all, and had I had on that day more, he would have answered willingly and gladly. And so, if one were to attain this station, he would be of great benefit to people.<sup>328</sup>

<sup>324</sup> <sup>°</sup>Addas, p. 219.

<sup>325</sup> According to Ibn Manzur, "*al-mudarah*," and more particularly "*mudarat al-nas*," is the quality of being tactful, sociable, and tolerant of people. See, "d.r.y.," *Lisan al-<sup>°</sup>Arab*, vol. IV, pp. 342-3.

<sup>326</sup> Qur'an, 3:159.

<sup>327</sup> Qur'an, 20:44.

<sup>328</sup> *Futuhat*, vol. III, pp. 616-7.



In the above passage, Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi states that when he actualised the divine quality of *al-mudarah*, he knew how to address and persuade rulers, was able to win their favor and responsiveness and, as a result, was able to fulfil all of the peoples' pleas that he brought before them. This being the case, Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi acknowledges the great benefit that anyone endowed with such capabilities can bring to the people, and at the same time, he does not confine this ability, nor the associated permissibility of associating with rulers, to himself. Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi was, no doubt, one of those "*masmū<sup>°</sup> al-kalima<sup>°</sup> indahum*," whom Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi allows to associate with rulers, as evidenced both in the above passage and by the high esteem with which he was held by the contemporary rulers, from the Almohad Caliph al-Mansur, who wished the Shaykh to be a member of his court, to the Seljuk Sultan Kay Ka'us, and the various rulers of the Ayyubid dynasty. In addition, his relationship with the rulers appears not to have gone beyond providing spiritual and religious guidance, and interceding on behalf of the people. Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi thus appears to have conformed to the conditions of associating with rulers that he had set for his disciples.

Despite of the Shaykh al-Akbar's acknowledgment of the good that may result from associating with rulers by those qualified for such a task, he, nevertheless, personally maintained, and called for, a degree of distance in this relationship. For according to him, the benefit of kings can only be enjoyed from a distance, proximity exposing the companion to the magnificence of the level of kingship and the inconstancy of its states. In his *Muhadarat al-Abrar*, Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi warns the disciple:

Beware (*iyyak*) the company of kings, for if you constantly keep them company, they get bored of you (*malluk*), and if you leave them, they debase you (*adhalluk*). They think it a



great favor merely to answer you, and they think little of executing you as a punishment. The sage said: "The Sultan is like fire; it can only be benefited from at a distance."<sup>329</sup>

Similarly, he writes in his *wasaya*:

Beware the company of kings, for accompanying them excessively will bore them, and to withdraw from their company is to invite their wrath. So give and take, and be tactful, if it is your lot to be in their company.<sup>330</sup>

Thus, despite of the good that may result from associating with, and advising, the rulers, it is better to maintain some distance from them. This possibly explains why the Shaykh abstained from holding office either in the West or East. This warning does not reflect a negative attitude on the part of the Shaykh towards the rulers, for it has been shown previously that he considers the kings to be deputies of God, and commands both obedience and respect to them, in addition to his own association with them. Rather, it reflects the apprehension, expressed by many ascetics, of the potential harm to the self, whether in spiritual or material terms, that proximity to power may induce. This, rather than a negative position towards the ruler, explains Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's turning down the Muwahhid *khalifa*'s request to appoint him:

One of the Sultans had asked and pressed upon me to assume an office of governance (*wilaya*), yet I declined until he said: "I will not depose you, and to this I pledge my word." So, I said: "States (*al-ahwal*) are as flashing sparks; they do not last, and this state of yours is not permanent, especially when the power of countering it (*sultan naqdiha*) arises."<sup>331</sup>

For even in the eastern part of his life, which is described in the secondary sources as being characterised by a more cooperative nature with the rulers, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi did not take office. So, although Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi generally advises keeping distance from the rulers,

<sup>329</sup> *Muhadarat*, vol. I, p. 400.

<sup>330</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 657.

<sup>331</sup> *Muhadarat*, vol. II, p. 11.



he permits their approach by those fit for such a task, particularly when this is done for the benefit of others.

### 3.5 Accepting Gifts from the Ruler

The legitimacy of accepting money or gifts from the rulers has been a long debated issue amongst the *‘ulama’*. Al-Ghazali, for example, opposed it because of the illegitimacy, in his opinion, of all the contemporary rulers' channels of income, and consequently, the illegitimacy of the money or gift.<sup>332</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabi, on the other hand, believed the acceptance of money and gifts from rulers to be permissible. His judgement was not based on an examination and consequent approval of the rulers' sources of revenue. But, rather, it was founded on the premise that the rulers are divinely entrusted with the duty of answering those who call on them, and thus it is they, rather than anyone else, who should be approached in need. In the words of the Shaykh:

The Prophet, God's peace and blessing upon him, hated and denounced the asking of others (*al-masa'il*). He desired that people do as God has taught them through His Prophet, God's peace and blessing upon him: to ask God, in every deed they perform, to add knowledge to the knowledge He has given them, so that He Himself may teach His servants. For God is Jealous (*ghayur*) and does not like a person to ask anything of anyone but Him. And even if he does, his heart should be with God, recalling the fact that it is He Who is responsible for everything and in Whose hand the whole universe is. And so he who asks should take his answer from God, whether that answer be the fulfillment of his request or [the reward of] supplication (*al-du‘a*). Hence, it is more appropriate for a man to ask the Sultan and not anyone else. For The Real is more manifest in him than in the common people. Therefore, the prohibition is lifted for those who ask the kings, for they are the deputies of God and are positioned such as to attend to the needs of people. They are also the ones who are ordered not to rebuff the asker: God says to His Prophet, who is His supreme deputy (*al-na'ib al-akbar*): "Nor repulse the petitioner."<sup>333</sup> On the Day of Judgement, God asks the deputies, who are the guardians (*al-ru‘ah*), about their guardianship, and He asks their subjects about what they did by them.<sup>334</sup>

<sup>332</sup> Abi Hamid al-Ghazali. *Ihya' ‘Ulum al-Din*. Cairo: al-Matba‘a al-‘Amira al-Sharafiyya, 1908, vol. II, pp. 95-96.

<sup>333</sup> Qur'an, 93:10.

<sup>334</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. I, p. 731.



The above passage comes in Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi's discussion of the question of supplication (*al-su'al*). He states that it is only God to whom the servant should turn and plead. He adds that because of the divine jealousy of pleading to others, supplication should be, if not to God, then to the one in whom the divine level is most manifest, and that is, ideally, the ruler. Hence the permissibility of accepting gifts from rulers. Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi asserts that asking money from the people, instead of the ruler, should be avoided because they consider it a favor and keep reminding the receiver of their grants of their favors upon him (*al-mann*), whereas the money asked from the ruler is a *shar'ī* due and it belongs to the bequesters.<sup>335</sup>

The Shaykh himself is said to have accepted money and gifts from rulers. As noted by <sup>°</sup>Addas, al-Maqqari (d. 1041/1631) reports, in his *Nafh al-Tib*, that the Shaykh received a daily sum of one hundred dirhams from the prince of Hims.<sup>336</sup> Addas also refers to an anecdote which holds that the Seljuk Sultan Kay Ka'us bestowed a house on the Shaykh, "who subsequently gave it in alms to a beggar."<sup>337</sup> Whether or not these reports are accurate, it is apparent in the passages quoted above that the Shaykh generally accepted receiving gifts from the rulers. This, in addition to his permission, albeit conditional, to associate with rulers, and his stress on the obedience and respect due to their elevated level, is inconsistent with <sup>°</sup>Addas' observation that the Shaykh, in line with Sufis prior to him, advocated that "everything that in one way or another is linked with power is to be held in contempt by the disciple." <sup>°</sup>Addas supports this observation by two incidents in

<sup>335</sup> *Muhadarat*, vol. II, pp. 408.

<sup>336</sup> <sup>°</sup>Addas, p. 187.

<sup>337</sup> <sup>°</sup>Addas, p. 234.



which the Shaykh al-Akbar refused to accept money or gifts from rulers; one that happened in Ceuta, the other in Tunis. The first incident is when Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, during a visit to Ceuta, refused to eat food sent to him by the local governor.<sup>338</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi writes:

One day when this shaikh [Abd Allah b. Ibrahim al-Malaqi al-Qalfat] was in Ceuta together with Ibn Tarif, Sultan Abu l-<sup>c</sup>Ala' sent me two loads of provisions when I happened not to be in. Some brothers who had come to see me helped themselves to the food and ate it, but my own disciples did not touch it. The following evening the sultan again sent me two loads of food, which I neither accepted nor refused. Some brothers had come to my place on purpose, because they knew the sultan was sending me food. I gave the call to prayer and did the night prayer itself. One of the brothers, who fancied he belonged to the rank of the Masters, said to me: "One does not perform the prayer when the meal is served". I remained silent, and my silence angered him. I then said to him: "I did not accept this food and have no intention of eating it because as far as I am concerned it is illicit (*haram*), and I cannot possibly tell you to eat it because I want for you what I want for myself." I went to explain in what respect the food seemed to me illicit, then I said to them: "This food is ready. Those who consider it licit may eat it; the rest may abstain." I returned to the house where I happened to be staying at the time, taking my disciple with me. The next day the brother in question went to the vizier and denounced me . . . . The matter was brought to the sultan, who was an intelligent man. He declared: "My intention was solely to do good, but this man knows his own condition better. Consequently, I will do him no harm and will not cause him trouble in any way whatsoever," and he had the complaint withdrawn.<sup>339</sup>

The reason for the Shaykh's abstention is ambiguous; the Shaykh did not relate to his readers the reasons which he explained to his companions for finding the food illicit. This incident is, however, constantly cited as evidence of the Shaykh's contempt for the rulers. Yet, the more lenient relations that Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi is noted to have later had with the rulers of the East indicates that Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi did not harbour a fundamentally negative attitude towards rulers. Besides, the above passage may be read differently. It is worth noting in the incident cited above, for example, the observation made by Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi that some

<sup>338</sup> <sup>c</sup>Addas suggests this sultan to be Sultan Abu l-<sup>c</sup>Ala' Idris al-Akbar, governor of Ceuta, p. 165.

<sup>339</sup> Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi, *Ruh al-Qudus*, in <sup>c</sup>Addas, *Quest.* pp. 165-6 (from *Ruh al-Qudus*, pp. 120-1, Damascus 1964 ed.).



disciples had come to his place precisely because they knew the sultan was sending him food. This, in addition to the subsequent objection to Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi's delaying the meal by one of those present, whom Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi describes as "fancy[ing that] he belonged to the rank of the Masters," might have instigated the Shaykh's refusal of the food. By abstaining from accepting the food, the Shaykh might have been asserting that the Path is to be sought in itself. Similarly, the Shaykh might have wanted to dissociate the Path from the power politics surrounding it, so that the Path may not become, in the eyes of some, a path to power, nor in the eyes of the authorities, a tool of control. The great strength and influence that Sufis, or other spiritual figures, enjoyed amongst the people of al-Maghrib and Andalusia seems to have been a source of unease for the authorities, especially as, shortly before, this had materialized in the revolt against the Almoravids led by Ibn Qasi, who claimed to be the Mahdi.<sup>340</sup> As <sup>°</sup>Addas notes, the sultan's sending the food partially reflects "the concern of the Almohad authorities to ally themselves with Sufi circles."<sup>341</sup> In this light, Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi might have considered accepting the food analogous to accepting a bribe for submissiveness and loyalty, which made the food illicit in his eyes. Hence, it may be that it was the circumstances surrounding this incident, rather than a contempt for the rulers, that led Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi to abstain from accepting the food.

The second incident that <sup>°</sup>Addas cites in support of Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi's general stance against "everything that in one way or another is linked with power" occurred in Tunis:

One of the greatest worthies of the town - his name was Ibn Mu<sup>°</sup>tib - invited me to his house to do me honour. I accepted his invitation. When I arrived at his place and we were preparing to eat, he asked me to intercede on his behalf with the governor (*sahib al-balad*)

<sup>340</sup> For Ibn Qasi see V. Lagardere, "La Tariqa et la revolte des muridun en 539/1144 en Andalus", *Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la Mediterranee*, 35.1 (1983) pp. 157-70.

<sup>341</sup> <sup>°</sup>Addas, p. 166.



because I exerted influence and a certain authority over him (*kuntu maqbul al-qawl 'indahū wa mutahakkiman*). I agreed to do so and left the room without accepting the food or the gifts he had prepared for me. I did what he asked me to do, and he was restored to power.<sup>342</sup>

Besides the evidently favorable relationship between Ibn al-°Arabi and the sultan of Tunis, what is most important is that Ibn al-°Arabi relates the above incident in the context of his discussion of the *shar°i* restrictions on the acceptance of gifts. He begins relating the incident by enjoining the disciple: "Beware of accepting the gift of one for whom you have interceded, for this is a kind of usury (*riba*) which God has forbade in the explicit statement of the Prophet to that effect . . . ."<sup>343</sup> Here, it was not out of a stand against power that Ibn al-°Arabi refused the food and gifts, but, rather, it was because the situation became such that accepting it would have been akin to accepting a bribe. Hence, while the food was essentially licit, the Shaykh had accepted the invitation and was about to eat when the host voiced his request, the situation made it illicit to accept. The case could have been the same in Ceuta; the contemporary political circumstances making the food illicit to accept.

In conclusion to this chapter, it is evident that Ibn al-°Arabi's position towards the rulers is one of respect for the level they represent - *al-khilafa*. And though Ibn al-°Arabi ascribes the level of *khilafa* to the *qutb*, he does not deny the legitimacy of the other rulers, or deputies, and calls for observing the proper *shar°i adab* with them. For in addition to the *shar°i* obligation of obedience to those in authority, the *khalifat al-zahir* and his deputies are considered by Ibn al-°Arabi to be deputies of the *qutb*, who thus participate in performing the cosmic functions of manifesting the Names and leading their

<sup>342</sup> Ibn al-°Arabi, *Futuhat*, in °Addas, *Quest.* p. 166 (from *Futuhat*, vol. IV, p.489, Bulaq 1329H. ed.).



subjects to comply with the Law. Although Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's insistence on obedience and politeness to unjust rulers may seem at first sight somewhat inconsistent with his emphasis on the observance of the *shar<sup>c</sup>*, this may be explained by his belief that on the cosmic scale even unjust rulers have a role to play which must be respected by their subjects.

Moreover, the proper observance of the rules of "divine courtesy" towards such rulers promotes cosmic balance and enables the subject to perfect his servanthood. Hence, the Shaykh al-Akbar confirms, in both exoteric and esoteric terms, the high rank of the rulers and the obligation to obey and venerate, or at least not condemn, them. Moreover, the little that is known of his relationship with contemporary rulers shows his personal compliance with his teachings.

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<sup>343</sup> *Futuhāt*, vol. IV, p. 634.



## Conclusion

The most characteristic aspect of the thought of Shaykh Muhyi al-Din Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi may be seen as his stress on unity. Creation in all its diversity and opposedness is a manifestation of God, The One, "Who brings together opposites," and knowledge of God is defined, to a large extent, in terms of the understanding of this underlying unity. It is in this context that Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi's concept of *khalifat Allah* may be conceived, as a means of understanding the unity in creation, and the relation of creation to its Creator.

According to Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi, *khalifat Allah* encompasses in himself all of the divine names that have brought about, and are manifest in, creation at large. In his manifestation of the opposing divine names, the *khalifa* reflects and harmonizes the diversity that is present in existence. By governing in creation in accordance with the divine Law, the *khalifa* preserves the order and balance of the conflicting effects of the names in creation.

The focus of this study has been Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi's concept of *khilafat al-zahir*, or rule in the exoteric realm, also commonly referred to as the Imamate. It has been shown that, in accordance with Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi's belief in the unity of creation, the exoteric ruler is ideally *khalifat Allah* who, as God's vicegerent, governs in both the esoteric and the exoteric realms with complete justice and infallibility, in harmony with divine Law and Order. However, in order to relate this cosmic ideal to actual government and to emphasize his perception of *zahir* and *batin*, *shari'at* and *haqiqa* as two faces of the same coin, Ibn al-<sup>°</sup>Arabi elaborates a theory which envisages the possibility that the governance of creation may be divided between two rulers, one for the esoteric and another for the exoteric realm. He also accommodates the possibility that the exoteric ruler may be unqualified



and unjust. Thus he argues that the true infallible vicegerent of God often chooses not to manifest himself, and although he governs the esoteric realm as *khalifat al-batin* or *qutb*, he delegates the governance of the exoteric realm to a second ruler, who is his deputy, and whom Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi calls *khalifat al-zahir*. This last is the possessor of the sword, that is, of political power, and corresponds to the ideal Imam or caliph, whose attributes and appointment are discussed in juristic works on the Imamate, and also to the majority of the historical rulers of the Muslim community. Of these, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi considers that some do in fact combine the qualities and functions of both *khalifat al-batin* and *khalifat al-zahir*, as for example the first four caliphs.

It should be noted that, although *khalifat al-zahir* is only the deputy of *khalifat al-batin* when governance is divided, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi does not set up the exoteric or political *khalifa* in opposition to the esoteric *khalifa* or *qutb*, nor does he separate their realms of authority, contrary to the assumption of those who emphasize the dichotomy between *haqiqa* and *shari'at*, or Sufism on the one hand and "orthodox" Sunni Islam on the other. As shown in this study, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi relates *khilafat al-zahir* and *khilafat al-batin* in a multitude of ways. The "exoteric" and the "esoteric" should not be understood as two mutually exclusive realms, they should be understood as complementary parts of the same reality.

Furthermore, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi does not consider the deputyship of *khalifat al-zahir* to *khalifat al-batin* as a subordination of *khilafat al-zahir* to *khilafat al-batin*, or *al-zahir* to *al-batin*. On one level, both *al-zahir*, the Manifest, and *al-batin*, the Non-Manifest, are divine names, each denoting Allah and each with a specific role in the universe: "through the name Manifest He makes the cosmos subsist, and through the name Nonmanifest we



come to know Him."<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, in placing *khalifat al-zahir* as deputy to *khalifat al-batin*, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi is not placing *al-zahir* below *al-batin* or *khilafat al-zahir* below *khilafat al-batin*. Rather, he is apparently subordinating the person of *khalifat al-zahir* as a *mazhar*, or locus of divine manifestation, to *khalifat al-batin*, while nevertheless stressing obedience to both without placing one over the other.

The way in which Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi accomodates the unjust ruler in his cosmic system is particularly interesting. He argues that the *khalifat al-zahir* unless he is the *qutb*, is not necessarily infallible or just, that is, his rule does not necessarily comply with the divine Law, nor does he always serve as a perfect vessel of divine Order. This does not mean, however, that he has no role to play in creation. In fact, the unjust ruler seems to function, despite himself, as an important instrument of knowledge of God and of the underlying unity in creation. For the belief that everything in creation is a manifestation of one or more divine attributes naturally includes those aspects of creation which are commonly regarded as negative. Rather than considering these "negative" aspects to diverge from the Order, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi regards them as part of that Order and its perfection. Hence his call to obey unjust rulers and to refrain from criticizing them is in line with his concept of divine Order, since they are, even when unjust, deputies of God and aspects of His Will. In following these precepts, the subjects learn to accept the wisdom of the divine ordinances and perfect their servanthood to God. At the same time, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi recommends them to avoid carrying out acts contrary to the *shari'a*, and to proffer sincere counsel to those in authority, should they require guidance. Judging by the information available, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi endeavored to put these precepts into practice in his

<sup>1</sup> Ibn <sup>c</sup>Arabi, *Futuhat*, in Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. 89 (from *Futuhat*, vol. III, p. 65, Cairo 1911 ed.).



personal life. The rulers, for their part are advised to perfect themselves (spiritually) in order to become vessels of divine rule and justice, and thus to rule in harmony with the *shari`a*.

By the means summarized above, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi relates his cosmic ideal to the real world and also to juristic discussions of the Imamate, to which he contributes his own views. It may be thought that Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's *khalifat Allah* has much in common with the mainstream Imami concept of the divinely-guided infallible imam appointed by God who wisely leads mankind in accordance with the *shari`a*, while his concept of *khalifat al-batin* shares some similarities with the Twelver Shi'i concept of the hidden Imam exercising his beneficial influence from *ghayba* (the non-physical or spiritual realm). Despite this, however, this study indicates that on the fundamental issues debated in works on the Imamate, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi sides with Sunni doctrine and attempts to harmonize it with his concept of the cosmic *khilafat allah*. This is shown above all by his categorical rejection of the belief that the Prophet designated `Ali as his successor, his emphasis on the importance of *shura* in choosing an imam, his recognition of all the first four caliphs as guided by God and legitimate, indeed as true *khulafa` Allah* in the full sense of the term, and by his willingness to accept the validity of government by a ruler who does not fulfil the ideal qualifications of the imam, if to depose him would cause strife and anarchy.

Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's theory of the *khilafa* is excessively complex, and some aspects of the *khilafat al-zahir* remain obscure since it is not his major focus of attention. Nevertheless it is hoped that this study may serve to throw light on Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's relationships with contemporary rulers and to show how his behaviour relates to his spiritual world-view. It



also demonstrates the inseparable interrelationship of both the exoteric and the esoteric in Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi's concept of God's vicegerent, and clarifies his views on the vital significance of the exoteric ruler, not only in implementing the *shari`a* in the usual sense of that term, but also in fulfilling the cosmic function of preserving creation and assisting mankind to know God.



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