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### An introductory analysis of Sitt 'Ajam's commentary on Ibn 'Arabi's Mashāhid al-Asrār al-Qudusiyya wa Matāli' al-Anwār al-Ilāhiyya with a translation of the chapters on divinity (al-Ulūhiyya) and Uniqueness (al-Ahadiyya)

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##### MLA Citation

Langhi, Fatima al-Zahra' Ahmad. *An introductory analysis of Sitt 'Ajam's commentary on Ibn 'Arabi's Mashāhid al-Asrār al-Qudusiyya wa Matāli' al-Anwār al-Ilāhiyya with a translation of the chapters on divinity (al-Ulūhiyya) and Uniqueness (al-Ahadiyya)*. 2005. American University in Cairo, Thesis. AUC Knowledge Fountain.  
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**AN INTRODUCTORY  
ANALYSIS OF SITT  
'AJAM'S COMMENTARY  
ON IBN 'ARABI'S  
MASHAHID AL-ASRAR  
AL-QUDUSIYYA WA MATALI'  
AL-ANWAR AL-ILAHIIYYA  
WITH A TRANSLATION OF THE  
CHAPTERS ON DIVINITY  
(AL-ULUHIYYA) & UNIQUENESS  
(AL-AHADIYYA)**

**FATIMA AL-ZAHRA'  
AHMAD LANGHI**

**2004**



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2004/87

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The American University in Cairo

School of Humanities and Social Sciences

**An Introductory Analysis of**

**Sitt 'Ajam's Commentary on Ibn 'Arabi's**

***Mashâhid al-Asrâr al-Qudusiyya wa Matâli' al-Anwâr al-Ilâhiyya***

**With a Translation of the Chapters on**

**Divinity (*al-Ulûhiyya*) and Uniqueness (*al-Ahadiyya*)**

A Thesis Submitted to

The Arabic Studies Department

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Master of Arts

By

Fatima al-Zahra' Ahmad Langhi

Bachelor of Arts

under the supervision of DR. Huda Lutfi

December/2004



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Has been approved by

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Affiliation *Assistant Professor*

Department Chair

Date

Dean

Date

Program Director



## TRANSCRIPTION OF ARABIC WORDS

In the interest of technical simplification and economy, emphatic consonants are written the same as the others. No distinction is made between the aspirate glottal *hâ'* and the aspirate pharyngeal *hâ'*. The transliteration system used is thus as follows:

ا	'	ض	d
ب	b	ط	t
ت	t	ظ	z
ث	th	ع	'
ج	j	غ	gh
ح	h	ف	f
خ	kh	ق	q
د	d	ك	k
ذ	dh	ل	l
ر	r	م	m
ز	z	ن	n
س	s	ه	h
ش	sh	و	w
ص	s	ي	y

Vowels: a, â, i, î, u, û, ay, aw.

Articles: al- and l- (even when the article precedes a "sun letter").



## CHPATER ONE

### INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Sitt 'Ajam, a Sufi woman living in the thirteenth century, tells us in her work that she had a vision in which the famous Sufi sage and master, Muhyi al-Din Ibn 'Arabi, appeared to her, asking her to write a commentary on one of his earliest works, *Mashâhid al-Asrâr al-Qudusiyya wa Matâli' al-Anwâr al-Ilâhiyya* (*Witnessing of the Holy Mysteries and the Rising of the Divine Lights*). *Al-Mashâhid* is considered to be one of the earliest of Ibn 'Arabi's works, one which he wrote a long time before he wrote his other major works: *Fusûs al-Hikam* (*The Bezels of Wisdom*) and *al-Futûhât al-Makkiyya* (*The Meccan Revelations*). The *Mashâhid*, like his other works, may also be viewed as a collection of metaphorical allusions, inspired by Ibn 'Arabi's mystical experiences. In an allegorical style, reminiscent of al-Niffari's *Mawâqif*, Ibn 'Arabi's *Mashâhid* deals with a series of 'stations of witnessing' and fourteen 'places of witnessing', each representing an intimate dialogue between the Divine and the human subject. In this text, paradox is used to blur the distinction between the worshipper and the worshipped, the servant and the master. Ibn Sawdakîn (d.1248A.D), who was his disciple and intimate friend, was the first to write a commentary on Ibn 'Arabi's *Mashâhid*.<sup>1</sup> He wrote his commentary some thirty years before Sitt 'Ajam wrote hers; much later, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century A.D, a third commentary on the

<sup>1</sup> Ibn Sawdakîn al-Nûri was "one of Ibn 'Arabi's closest companions. His name first appears in connection with Ibn 'Arabi on a reading certificate for the *Rûh al-Quds* in Cairo in 1206 and subsequently appears on numerous other certificates for readings, many of which took place at his house in Aleppo. Besides his commentary on the *Contemplation of the Holy Mysteries* (مشاهد الأسرار), Ibn Sawdakîn wrote commentaries on the *Kitâb al-Isrâ'*, with which it is closely linked, and the *Kitâb al-Tajalliyât*. In these commentaries, he informs us, he wrote down what Ibn 'Arabi told him." (Twinch and Beneito, *Contemplation*, P. 12.)



*Mashâhid* was written by the Egyptian Sufi Zayn al-'Abidîn 'Abd al-Ra'ûf al-Minâwi (d. 1621A.D).<sup>2</sup>

There are several manuscripts of Sitt 'Ajam's *Sharh al-Mashâhid* preserved in Turkey (Ayasophia), Berlin, Syria and Egypt. I will use here the three manuscripts that are preserved in the Manuscript Institute of Damascus. These copies are: Istanbul Ayasophia 2020, dated Damascus, 1287A.D; Ayasophia 2019, dated 1287 A.D; Istanbul Bayazid 3705, dated 1802 A.D. Some of the manuscripts appear to have been copied during the last two centuries, which suggests that earlier Sufi scholars continued to regard the work as important and relevant to later Sufi teachings. Whereas some copies are very difficult to read, others are more readable and are fairly clear in terms of handwriting and diacritical signs. The two chapters that I have translated are based on the Istanbul Bayazid 3705 copy, which I found to be the most clearly written. To the best of my knowledge, Sitt 'Ajam's commentary was neither translated nor studied in any language. However, Su'ad Hakim and 'Ala' al-Dîn Bakri are presently preparing a critical edition of the manuscript in Arabic. Fortunately, Ibn 'Arabi's *Mashâhid* itself was recently translated by Pablo Beneito and Cecilia Twinch.<sup>3</sup> My translation of her commentary was greatly facilitated by the availability their translation of Ibn 'Arabi's *Mashâhid*, but I have chosen to differ from their translations where the meaning of the text was not properly conveyed. This was made possible through comparison with William Chittick's two works, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*,<sup>4</sup> and *Self*

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<sup>2</sup> Abd al-Ra'ûf al-Minawi is an Egyptian Sufi in the seventieth century who wrote a famous hagiographical work called *al-Kavâkib al-durriyya* (The Glittering Spheres).

<sup>3</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, *Contemplations of the Holy Mysteries and the Rising of the Divine Lights*, trans. Cecilia Twinch and Pablo Beneito (London, Anqa, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (New York, The State University of New York, 1989).



*Disclosure of God*,<sup>5</sup> as well as Titus Burkhardt's translation of 'Abd al- Karim al-Jili's *al-Insân al-Kâmil*.<sup>6</sup>

Sitt 'Ajam's manuscript, *Sharh al-Mashâhid*, is about five hundred pages long. It does not include a clear reference as to when exactly it was written. As mentioned earlier, her work represents the second commentary known to us on Ibn 'Arabi's *Mashâhid*. In his biographies of famous Arab Muslim women, Rida Kahhala suggests that Sitt 'Ajam wrote *Sharh al-Mashâhid* during the last years of her life.<sup>7</sup> What we know is what she tells us in her commentary, that when Ibn 'Arabi appeared to her in a vision he told her that the mystery of *Al-Mashâhid* has not yet been unlocked, and conveyed to her that he considers her to be the only one capable of unlocking its mystery.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to her commentary on Ibn 'Arabi's *Mashâhid*, Sitt 'Ajam appears to have authored two more works. The first is *Kashf al-Kunûz (Unveiling Treasures)* which is mentioned in Othman Yahia's catalogue of Ibn 'Arabi's works, and where he corrects the confusion of attributing the work to Ibn 'Arabi himself.<sup>9</sup> The manuscript of *Kashf al-Kunûz* is juxtaposed together with *Sharh al-Mashâhid*. Sitt 'Ajam's third work is *Kitâb al-Khatm (The Book of the Seal)*, which she refers to in her commentary but which has not been so far located.

The historical information that is available on Sitt 'Ajam is rather scarce. Her full name is Sitt 'Ajam bint al-Nafis ibn Abi al-Qasim ibn Taraz al-Baghdâdiyya. There is no mention of her in most hagiographical works, such as *Tabaqât al-Sûfiyya* of 'Abd al-Wahhâb al-Sha'arâni, where he mentions several other Sufi women. We know, however, that Sitt 'Ajam lived in the

<sup>5</sup> William Chittick, *The Self Disclosure of God* (New York, The State University of New York, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> 'Abd al- Karim al-Jili, *Universal Man*, ed. Titus Burkhardt ( Paris, Beshara Publications, 1983).

<sup>7</sup> Rida Kahhala, *A'lâm al-Nisâ'* ( Beirut, Dar Sader, 1989), p. 228.

<sup>8</sup> Sitt al-'Ajam, *Kashf al-Kunûz fî Sharh al-Mashâhid al-Qudûsiyya* ( MS .no. 2019, Turkey, Ayasophia), p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Othman Yahia, *Histoire et classification de l'oeuvre d'Ibn Arabi*( Damascus, I.F.D., 1964), p. 527.



same century as Ibn 'Arabi, but died forty years after his death, around 1287 A.D. Her place of death is also disputed. Modern scholars disagree on exactly when and where she died. Sitt 'Ajam is only mentioned in a few works including Brockleman's *History of Arabic Literature* and Rida Kakhâla's *'Alâm al-Nisâ' (Notable Women)*. Both works date her death in 1490 A.D. She is also mentioned in Othman Yahia's work, *Mû'allafât Ibn Arabi: Tarîkh wa tasnîf (Bibliography of Ibn 'Arabi: Dates and Classification)*. Unlike the former two authors, Yahia dates Sitt 'Ajam's death in 1287 A.D, which I believe to be more accurate, because it is specified as the date of her death in the oldest manuscripts of *Sharh al-Mashâhid* (Ayasophia 2019 and 2020). Kakhâla also suggests that in her final years, Sitt 'Ajam moved from Baghdad to Aleppo where she eventually died. However, it is not evident from her manuscripts whether she had moved to Aleppo or not.

### Framework of Study

The main part of this thesis is to make available an English translation of two chapters from Sitt 'Ajam's text: chapters eleven and twelve on 'Divinity' and 'Uniqueness'. In addition, I will include an introductory chapter on her biographical, cultural and historical context. In the third chapter, I will examine Ibn 'Arabi's *Mashâhid*, and in the fourth, I will analyze Sitt 'Ajam's text as a whole, providing a general description of the content that constitutes the narrative, as well as the major conceptual themes elaborated by Sitt 'Ajam. However, in this chapter, my analysis will focus more on the two translated chapters.

The availability of Sitt 'Ajam's manuscript, *Sharh al-Mashâhid*, offers us the rare possibility to examine women's contribution to the Sufi conceptual tradition. The common view in Sufi scholarship acknowledges women mainly as transmitters of the mystical experience, but not as contributors to its conceptual vocabulary. The Sufi hagiographical tradition does acknowledge the fact that women have pursued the Sufi path, and that some of them were



pioneers in exploring some of its experiential dimensions, for instance, Râbi'a al-'Adawiyya (d.801 A.D) has been recognized earlier as an important adherent to the experiential path of 'Divine Love'. Furthermore, women Sufis appear as teachers in the Sufi literature, a fact acknowledged by Ibn 'Arabi himself, whose works identify numerous *shaykhas* as his teachers. Also, the role of female worshippers (العابديات) in conveying Sufi wise sayings is equally acknowledged in the Sufi tradition. However, in the field of formulating and analyzing the conceptual horizons of the mystical experience, the role of women Sufis still remains unrecognized. This makes Sitt 'Ajam's commentary of *al-Mashâhid* an important work to study for those scholars interested in the contribution of women to the history of Sufi ideas

I want to examine Sitt 'Ajam's commentary of *al-Mashâhid* because it represents a serious commentary of one of Ibn 'Arabi's important, but least recognized works, *Mashâhid al-Asrâr*. In addition, I would like to address the question whether a woman's interpretation provides a different reading from that by other male Sufi scholars. In order to deal with this question, a comparative analysis of Sitt 'Ajam's interpretive concepts and Ibn Sawdakîn's may be useful. This will primarily be dealt with in the systematic notes accompanying the text of the two translated chapters. But it is useful to note at this point that whereas Ibn Sawdakîn restricts his commentary to Ibn 'Arabi's own explanations, Sitt 'Ajam seems to depend more on her own experiential knowledge in interpreting *al-Mashâhid*. In order to examine this experiential dimension of Sitt 'Ajam's commentary, I have chosen the chapters on "Divinity" and "Uniqueness" because, more than any of her other chapters, they reveal this dimension of her work.

For several centuries, scholars who came after Ibn 'Arabi have continued to explore and interpret his Sufi concepts and worldview. His scholarship has had a tremendous influence on



these later Sufis who looked upon him as al-Shaykh al-Akbar (the Great Shaykh), and his ideas directly or indirectly influenced their writings. Though Ibn 'Arabi did not establish a specific Sufi order, he had many spiritual disciples who "consciously rooted their perspective in their own understanding of his theoretical framework ... (and) referred to their specific way as "verification" (تحقيق), and called themselves "the verifiers" (المحققون)."<sup>10</sup> However, the *Akbari* school was not structured in an institutionalized fashion like other Sufi orders. Members of this school did not adhere to a specific set of doctrines, or follow the same set of Sufi rules. As James Morris observes, uniformity was not held among the followers of Ibn 'Arabi.

The real philosophic and theological unity and diversity of these writers have not begun to be explored in modern research ... none of the writers are mere "commentators" of Ibn 'Arabi ... As with "Aristotelianism" or "Platonism" in Western thought, Ibn 'Arabi's writings were only the starting point of the most diverse developments in which reference to subsequent interpreters quickly became at least as important as the study of the *Shaykh* himself.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, we may argue that the ample literature of commentaries, including that by Sitt 'Ajam, may also involve a creative process of interpretation and reinterpretation of the original text. However, I would like to argue that, in contrast to male Sufi commentators, such as Ibn Sawdakîn, Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi (d. 1274) and his disciples, who write in a rather systematic conceptual metaphysical language, Sitt 'Ajam's commentary makes expert use of Sufi metaphysical concepts interspersed with personal experiences. Thus, what makes the study of Sitt 'Ajam's commentary fascinating is this artful combination of abstract metaphysical analysis and scriptural allusions with personal anecdotes and accounts of her own spiritual milieu and experiences. Her style of writing takes off with a theological beginning (الحمدلة), proceeds to a cosmological elaboration (صلعمة) then turns into an increasingly personal mystical revelation (كشف).

<sup>10</sup> William Chittick, "Ibn 'Arabi's School of Thought," *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (London, Routledge, 1996), p. 497.

<sup>11</sup> James Morris, "Ibn 'Arabi's Interpreters," *The American Journal for Social Studies* 106 (1986): 752.



## Review of the Literature

In recent Sufi scholarship, there has been a trend exploring the feminine dimension of the Sufi tradition, as well as the historical legacy of women Sufis in different parts of the Islamic world. Margaret Smith's classical work on Rabi'a, the early Muslim Sufi, along with her accounts of other early Muslim mystics, was one of the first endeavors to study women Sufis. The recent translation of Abu 'Abd al-Rahman Al-Sulamî's (d.1021A.D) hagiographical work, *Dhikr An-Niswa al-Muta'abbidât as-Sufiyyât*,<sup>12</sup> by Rkia Cornell, contains accounts of eighty-four early Sufi women, reflecting the importance of female spirituality in the Sufi tradition, and casting doubt on the stereotypical image depicted of Muslim women in the medieval period. Sachiko Murata's work, *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relations in Islamic Thought*,<sup>13</sup> digs deeply into the Sufi tradition, revealing the pivotal place of the feminine element in speculative Sufi thought. One must not forget to mention Annemarie Schimmel's works in reconstructing the role of Sufi women in general, and Sufi spirituality in particular. In her works, *As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam*,<sup>14</sup> *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*,<sup>15</sup> and finally *My Soul is a Woman*,<sup>16</sup> she argues for the equality of men and women in the Quran and the Prophetic traditions. Moreover, she focuses on the feminine language of the Sufi tradition, as well as the role played by mothers and unmarried women symbolizing certain Divine Attributes.

All such works bring to life the presence of early Sufi women, through the reconstruction of biographical anecdotes, sacred songs, poetry, dreams and visions, or stories recounting their

<sup>12</sup> Abu 'Abd al-Rahman Al-Sulamî, *Dhikr An-Niswa al-Muta'abbidât as-Sufiyyât*, ed. Rkia Cornell (Louisville, Fons Vitae, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relations in Islamic Thought* (New York, The State University of New York, 1992).

<sup>14</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1982).

<sup>15</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1975).

<sup>16</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *My Soul is a Woman: The Feminine in Islam* (New York, Continuum, 1999).



miracles (كرامات). Yet, this reconstruction of the lives of early Sufi women provides no more than a glimpse into the mystical experiences of such women Sufis, which renders the study of Sitt 'Ajam's commentary important to undertake.



## CHAPTER TWO

### BIOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

By the middle of the thirteenth century, determining factors shaping the history of Dar al-Islam were taking place: the disintegration of the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad, the Crusades and the weakening of the Ayyubid state. These political factors paved the way for the Mongol invasions of Iraq and Syria in the middle of the thirteenth century A.D., which drastically changed the political scene of this region. The weakened Ayyubids, who were in control in Syria, sought help from the newborn Mamluks of Egypt, who won a decisive battle over the Mongols at 'Ayn Jâlût in 1260 A.D.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Baybars (d. 1277A.D), the Mamluk sultan, managed to defeat the Crusaders, and to wipe out most of their strongholds in Syria. Sultan al-Ashraf Khalil (1290-1293A.D.) expelled the last Crusaders from Syria. Thus in time, the Mamluks came to be portrayed as the "Muslim power that has defeated a hostile pagan strong force," earning for themselves the title of 'the Protectors of Islam'.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, they failed to regain some parts of Syria as there were sporadic but continuous Mongol attacks from Iran on several Syrian towns. Baghdad, of course, was fully taken by the Mongols at that time. As a result, masses of Muslims were displaced, many of whom took refuge in Egypt during Sultan Baybars' reign, which also witnessed the revival of the Sunni Abbasid Caliphate in the Mamluk capital of Cairo.<sup>3</sup>

These grand historical events created an atmosphere of insecurity, fear and guilt among Muslims; for on the one hand, Muslims viewed the Mongol invasion as a 'divine punishment' for their weak faith, their adoption of 'alien' beliefs, and their neglect of the *shari'a*. In addition, the conversion of most of the Mongol population, fostered a 'defensive spirit' on the part of Muslim

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition* (New York, State University of New York, 1999), p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 49-50.



scholars, since the former were blamed for introducing these 'alien beliefs'. Consequently, some of the *'ulama* reacted to these changes by calling for a puritanical view of Islam.<sup>4</sup> The Mamluks, in an attempt to legitimize their leadership, began to patronize the popular Sufi institutions and figures, following in the steps of their predecessors, the Ayyubids, who used to give protection to individual Sufis who were traveling from west to east, such as Al-Harrali (d. 1240), Ibn Hûd (d. 1299), and Ibn 'Arabi. The Ayyubids were known to have patronized unconventional Sufis, such as the case of the Ayyubid ruler al-Malik al-Zâhir in Aleppo who because of his liking for Sufis and philosophers patronized Shihab al-Dîn Yahia al-Suhrawardî known as *al-maqtûl*.<sup>5</sup> However the latter was later imprisoned by the father of al-Malik al-Zâhir for his philosophy that juxtaposed Platonic, Zoroastrian and Hermistical beliefs with Islamic ones. According to G. Makdisi, the political pressures that faced the Muslims in the form of the Mongol attacks and the Crusades, fostered 'the scholastic opposition' to Greek philosophy which was represented by Ibn Sina's school.<sup>6</sup> Hence, *falsafa*, *kalâm*, and speculative Sufi doctrines began to be held as 'alien' ideas to the Islamic faith. The Muslim *'ulama* indulged in polemical debates about 'true Islam' as opposed to 'heretical Islam', and launched strong attacks on the general practices of innovations (بدع), which corrupted the pristine Islam of the pious ancestors (السلف الصالح). The famous religious scholar, Ibn Taymiyya and his followers, represent good examples of this *salafi* trend.

Although scholars of the Sufi tradition continued to develop their own conceptual and theological frameworks, their ideas continued to be regarded as controversial. Consequently, Ibn 'Arabi and his disciples came under strong attack by the more puritanical religious scholars. As a strategy, these Sufi scholars tended to conceal their ideas by adopting a *fiqhî* Sufi discourse,

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 49-50.

<sup>5</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina, 1975), pp. 259-260.

<sup>6</sup> George Makdisi, "The Hanbali School and Sufism," *Humaniora Islamica* (the Hague), 2(1974), pp. 61-72.



which was basically apologetic, or by adopting a deliberately discrete discourse.<sup>7</sup> This was in brief the intellectual environment in which Sitt 'Ajam lived, and of which, as will be shown, she was critical.

Despite the scarcity of biographical information on Sitt 'Ajam, we are able to glean some information about her educational and spiritual background in her commentary on the *Mashâhid*. In her final chapter, she reiterates the importance of direct intuition as opposed to acquired knowledge in the spiritual path:

I am an unlettered (أمية) common (عامية) woman who is deprived of all the sciences except for the knowledge of Almighty *Allah*. And I have not gained this knowledge of *Allah* by learning, nor from reading books, nor from a knower (عارف). But it is a gift from the Almighty *Allah* which led me out of ignorance to knowledge...[an experience] other interpreters may lack. And since I am of Arab origin, I offer this knowledge complete with its meanings in a work to be witnessed by both the predecessors and the successors from the 'arifin and the 'ulama.<sup>8</sup>

From the above statement, we can infer that Sitt 'Ajam was an unlettered woman, however, though the word *ummî* is usually translated in modern use as illiterate or unlettered, it is used in the Quran in a different sense. It is used several times in the Quran to refer to the Prophet himself as '*al-Nabyyi al-Ummyyi* (7:157-58). It is also used in the Quran in the plural to refer to the community to which Prophets were sent (62:2). Etymologically, according to *Lisân al-arab* the word '*ummî*' is derived from the root *umm*, which means mother. So, in a sense the word *ummî* may signify, as Chodkiewicz points out, the person "who is as when his mother gave birth to him."<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, Ibn 'Arabi defines the word '*ummî*' in one of the chapters of the *Futûhât* on

<sup>7</sup> Alexander Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition*, p. 53.

<sup>8</sup> Sitt al-'Ajam, *Sharh al-Mashâhid*, p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> Ibn Manzur, *Lisân al-'Arab* (Beruit, n. d.), vol. 12, p. 34.



the concept of '*Ummyya*' as follows: "*Ummyya* consists in renouncing the use of rational speculation and judgment in order to give rise to meanings and secrets."<sup>10</sup>

This definition is also illustrated in an anecdote about the encounter of the famous theologian Fakhr al-Dîn al-Razî (d. 1209) with the great Sufî saint Najm al-Dîn Kubra (d. 1221).<sup>11</sup> One day Fakhr al-Dîn Razî went to Najm al-Dîn Kubra to ask him for initiation. Najm al-Dîn Kubra asked one of his disciples to take Fakhr al-Dîn Razî to a *khalwa*, and to stay there for a while to practice invocation. It is said that Najm al-Dîn Kubra stripped Fakhr al-Dîn Razî, through his mystical powers, from the knowledge Fakhr al-Dîn Razî earned from books. Realizing that he was losing his hard-earned knowledge, of which he was so proud, al-Razî shouted for his release, and his spiritual experience ended here.<sup>12</sup> This anecdotal detour symbolizes the state of '*ummyya*' or 'spiritual illiteracy'. In Sufî hagiography, there are many examples of unlettered Sufî saints, such as 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Dabbâgh (d.1717 A.D.), the Moroccan saint Abû Ya'zâ (d. 1177), who only knew the *Fâtiha* and the last three Suras of the Qur'an. Indeed, two of the greatest Sufis, Ibn 'Arabi and Abû Yazîd al-Bistâmî (d. 874), are known to have had unlettered masters. Abû l-'Abbâs al-'Uryabî, who was the first master of Ibn 'Arabi, and whom the latter loved very much, was a farmer who could neither read nor write. Nonetheless, it was through him that Ibn 'Arabi got to meet al-Khidr (the immortal spiritual figure mentioned in the Quran and whom Sufis with no *shaykhs* consider as their guide and claim to have been initiated into the path, i.e. invested with the *khirqâ*, by him).<sup>13</sup> Abû 'Ali al-Sindî, who initiated Abû Yazîd al-Bistâmî, learnt the basic rules of rituals from Abû Yazîd himself later in his life. Sha'rânî (d. 1565 A.D.) as well talks

<sup>10</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, *al-Futûhât al-Makkiyya* (Beirut, Dar Sadr, n.d), vol. 2, p. 644.

<sup>11</sup> Najm al-Dîn Kubra was a great Sufî master who was given the title *Walî-Tarâsh* (Sculptor of Saints) for he had many followers.

<sup>12</sup> Chodkiewicz, *An Ocean Without Shore* (New York, State University of New York, 1993), p. 29

<sup>13</sup> Claude Addas, *The Quest for the Red Sulphur* (Cambridge, the Islamic Text and Society, 1993), p. 62.



about two Sufis: Ibrahim al-Matbulî and 'Ali al-Khawwâs, who were also *ummîs* and commoners. Yet, we are told they could interpret obscure verses with such originality that baffled the learned exegetes.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, as Chodkiewicz puts it, in order to be a receptacle of divine lights and secrets, one should be in a 'state of infancy'.<sup>15</sup> To hear Him, man must thus return to [this] state of infancy. The Prophet, *al-nabyyi al-ummî*, as Allah calls him in the Quran, was as it were a 'virginal receptacle of the Revelation'. Maryam, mother of Jesus, was also described in the Quran as the one who kept her "virginity" in tact, and hence was able to receive and even conceive the divine word or 'logos'. The legacy of Maryam is her virginity. And her virginity, corresponding to the Prophet's *ummîyya*, is the symbol of this 'state of infancy'. Hence, the *ummiyya* of Sitt 'Ajam, if understood in this sense, may be perceived as a positive attribute of her spiritual knowledge and understanding.

The above lines by Sitt A'jam also tell us that Sitt 'Ajam was of Arab origin, she regarded herself as an illiterate commoner, lacking the knowledge of acquired sciences, except for the experiential knowledge of Allah. I believe that her stress on her Arab origin is not only to prove her command of the Arabic language, which would qualify her to understand and to author a commentary on Ibn 'Arabi's *Mashâhid*. But it also echoes Ibn 'Arabi's own stress of his Arab *nasb* as he often asserts that he is *al-ta'i al-hatimî*.<sup>16</sup> According to Laila Khalifa, "Si le Prophete et le Coran sont arabes, le langage du Coeur ne peut que L'etre lui aussi: c'est-a-dire clair, lumineux (oriental)."<sup>17</sup> In his *Tabaqât*, al-Sha'rânî writes that according to a *shâdhi* shaykh, "the language

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<sup>14</sup> Chodkiewicz, p. 32.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>16</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, *Futûhât*, vol. 2, p. 49.

<sup>17</sup> Laila Khalifa, *Ibn 'Arabi: L'initiation a la Futuwwa* (Paris, *Al-Bouraq*, 2001), p. 56.



of the senses is a *'ajamî* (obscure) while the language of the heart is Arabic (clear).<sup>18</sup> In light of this, we can understand Sitt 'Ajam's stress on her Arab origin. Moreover, based on my reading of her commentary, it can be argued that Sitt 'Ajam, though an illiterate woman, demonstrates in her work that she was exceptionally knowledgeable in her field. Despite what she says, we can infer from her work that she must have received solid oral instructions in the religious sciences based on the Quran and Sunna. From her commentary, we can also infer that she was familiar with the teachings of earlier Sufi masters, such as al-Niffari (d. 965),<sup>19</sup> Sahl Ibn 'Abd Allah al-Tustari (d. 896).<sup>20</sup> Moreover, she seems to have been knowledgeable of the Sufi classics. For she often mentions works such as, 'Abd al-Karîm al-Qushayrî's (d. 1072) writings,<sup>21</sup> especially his *Risalah*, and Abû Tâlib al-Makki's (d. 996) book, *Qût al-Qulûb*.<sup>22</sup>

She also discusses the discourse of the 'intoxicated' Sufis who are famous for their ecstatic utterances (*شطحات*), such as Abû Bakr al-Shiblî who is reported to have made the controversial statement: "nothing is under the gown except for Allah";<sup>23</sup> Abû Yazîd al-Bistâmî, who scandalized his contemporaries with his statement: "Glory be to me! How great is my nature! (سبحاني ما أعظم شاني)";<sup>24</sup> al-Hallâj (d. 922), who eventually brought death upon himself by utterances such as the problematic statement: "I am the Truth! (أنا الحق)".<sup>25</sup> Sitt 'Ajam eloquently explains their *shatahât*, both metaphysically and mystically. Metaphysically, she refers to these utterances as a result of a process through which the inward of the Sufi overtakes the outward (*ظاهرة باطنه على ظاهره*), and since there is nothing in the inward of the heart but Allah, the Sufi is thus

<sup>18</sup> Sha'arânî, *Tabaqât*, vol. I, p. 197.

<sup>19</sup> Sitt 'Ajam, p. 98.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 47.



speaking from this vantage point, that is Allah. Mystically, the Sufi becomes immersed in a *hâl* in which the tools of expression are no longer adequate to transmit his/ her ineffable experience.<sup>26</sup> As Claude Addas puts it in explaining the real meaning of *wahdat al-wujûd*, "from the point of view of spiritual realization, this saying shows the degree of perfection of the 'pure servant' who, engulfed in the Deity, no longer knows that he is, from a metaphysical point of view, it illustrates the idea that 'existing beings' (موجودات) have no being of their own, that 'Being' (وجود), belongs only to God."<sup>27</sup> What is more interesting here, is Sitt 'Ajam's comparison of the intoxicated Sufi tradition with the sober *'irfanî* tradition initiated by al-Junayd (d. 910), and continued by Ibn 'Arabi. Here she classifies herself as a member of the sober tradition of knowledge, arguing that she is one of those who control themselves when they experience such a *hâl*. In this regard, she states that, "we are content with addressing Allah in secret since we have gotten over the *hâl*."<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, Sitt 'Ajam ably discusses the views of philosophers, such as the mysterious Alexandrian Hermes Trismagistes, the Pre-Socratic Thales, and those to whom she refers as (الحكماء).<sup>29</sup> For instance, in the 'Eighth Witnessing' referring to "the light of the Rock as the star of the sea rises," Sitt 'Ajam makes reference to the view of Thales that "everything arises from water,"<sup>30</sup> and the view of *al-hukamâ' al-kudamâ'* concerning the nature of water which they called the moon because of its humid nature.<sup>31</sup> She also refers to the views of Aristotle, mentioning him by name when she states that rationality and animal nature are conditions of the human state.<sup>32</sup> Also, in the 'Third Witnessing' she discusses in a rather sophisticated manner, one of the most controversial philosophical issues in Islamic philosophy and theology, the eternity

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>27</sup> Claude Addas, *The Voyage of No Return* (Cambridge, The Islamic Texts Society, 2000), p. 80.

<sup>28</sup> Sitt 'Ajam, *Sharah al-Mashâhid*, p. 122.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 297.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 297.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 301.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 238.



of the world (قدم العلم).<sup>33</sup> As for the 'Last Witnessing', we find Sitt 'Ajam discussing the views of the different philosophical discourses known during her time. For example, she severely attacks the materialists (الظالمين), the naturalist philosophers (الطبيين), the spiritualists (الروحانيين), and the *Mu'tazilites*.<sup>34</sup> Like other Sufi masters before her, she is critical of the limiting approaches of *kalâm* and philosophy, which bind all understanding and knowledge to reason (عقل). Instead, she stresses, in her chapter of 'the light of argument as the star of justice rises', the fact that Sufi experiential knowledge is basically derived from the heart.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, she argues that it is only this knowledge that can combine paradoxical truths in the endeavor to describe the highest states of spiritual contemplation and realization; whereas philosophic knowledge tries to explain paradoxical truths only externally, without taking enough account of the inward nature of things.<sup>36</sup> For Sitt 'Ajam, a person can always generate by means of mystical revelation (كشف) a full and deep knowledge.<sup>37</sup> What is important to underline here, is that she was able to cultivate a sophisticated Sufi metaphysical vocabulary through orally transmitted information, perhaps without having the skills of either writing or reading, which is rather remarkable in the tradition of philosophical Sufism, but not so surprising in an educational system which stresses personal ties in the transmission of knowledge from master to disciple. In the introduction to her other work, *Kashf al Kunûz*, she reveals more about her identity:

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. 339-402.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 339-402.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 42, 183.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 226.



Since Allah the Almighty knew that I am an unlettered common woman, deprived of whatever is related to exoteric knowledge (علم الظاهر), even of writing and whatever pens draw, He provided me with a companion (صاحب) who is knowledgeable in the rules of calligraphy and its meaning.. He made him my male guardian as he is (قيوما على) with his masculinity over my femininity. This is my spouse, my *shar'i* companion. Therefore, he is always prepared whenever there is need to respond. So whenever Allah the Almighty throws in my heart anything of expression or emanation, I ask for his help, one that is out of companionship (مخاللة), and I recite to him what is being delivered. He responds to the call immediately without complaint or tedium. And that acceptance on his part is another gift of Allah's gifts to me.<sup>38</sup>

The above lines not only introduce Sitt 'Ajam's identity but also reflect her special relationship with her husband and cousin, whom we know nothing about, except his name, Muhammad Ibn Muhammad al-Khatîb.<sup>39</sup> It seems that she was not merely concerned with revealing the identity of the person who helped her put down her thoughts in writing. Rather, she wanted to reveal something of the special actual relation that bound her to him, which helped her immeasurably in her spiritual quest.

Her relation with her husband reminds us of Ibn 'Arabi's relation with his wife, Maryam bint 'Abdûn, and the tenth century Sufi Hakîm al-Tirmidhi's relation with his wife. All have experienced a special mystical relationship between them, united in marriage as well as in the spiritual quest. What is interesting is that they all were essentially concerned with the concept of *walâya*. Al- Tirmidhî is the first to theorize about the concept of the Seal of the Saints. As Claude Addas explains, al- Tirmidhî is the first to assert that "from a certain point of view, sainthood is superior to law-giving prophethood. The latter, he maintained, will lose its *raison d'être* at the end of the world, while *walâya*, sainthood, will eternally survive both in this world and the next. However, this does not mean that saints are superior to prophets, but only that in each of the

<sup>38</sup> Sitt 'Ajam, *Kashf al-Kunûz* (MS. No.2019, Istanbul, Ayasophia), p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> The title *al-Khatîb* may indicate that he had a *fiqhî* background.



prophets, sainthood is superior to the prophetic function."<sup>40</sup> Though al- Tirmidhî investigates the term Seal of the Saints, he never actually reveals the identity of the Seal. It is Ibn 'Arabi who was the first to take up the challenge and declare that he is the Seal of the Saints:

I am the Seal of the Saints, just as it has been shown That the Seal of the Prophets is Muhammad The specific Seal, not the Seal of General Sainthood, For that is Jesus, the Assisted One.<sup>41</sup>

Sitt 'Ajam as well not only discusses the concept of sainthood and its differences from prophethood, but also declares that there is only one (الواحد المتفرد في عصره) who can know the slightest difference between *al-walâya* and *al-nubuwwa*, and hints that she is that 'one'.<sup>42</sup> According to Ibn 'Arabi, the saint can only reach the state of union with God through marriage, as will be further discussed later in the chapter. Thus, Sitt 'Ajam, Ibn 'Arabi, and al- Tirmidhi all share the Sufi view of sainthood which was reflected in their lives as a whole and in their marital relationships in particular.

Maryam bint 'Abdûn al-Bija'i was the first wife of Ibn 'Arabi, who is known to have shared with her husband her spiritual aspirations. In the *Futûhât*, Ibn 'Arabi wrote, "my saintly wife, Maryam... said to me: 'In my sleep I saw someone who often comes to visit me in my vision, but whom I have never met in the world of sense-perception. He asked me: Do you aspire to the way?' I replied: I most certainly do, but I don't know how to reach it! He said: "Through five things, namely trust (التوكل), certainty (اليقين), patience (الصبر), resolution (العزيمة) and sincerity (الصدق)."<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Claude Addas, *The Voyage of No Return*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>41</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, *Dîwân* (Bulaq, 1855), p. 39. CF. Claude Addas, *The Voyage of No Return*, p. 47.

<sup>42</sup> Sitt 'Ajam, *Sharh al- Mashâhid*, p. 272.

<sup>43</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, *Futûhât*, vol. I, p. 278.



Al- Tirmidhî, the author of *The Way of the Friends of God* (سيرة الأَوْلِيَاء), wrote also his autobiography entitled 'The Beginning of the Matter' (بدء الشَّأْن).<sup>44</sup> In it, he describes the most important events in his life, his spiritual quest, mystical experiences, including dreams. The role of his wife here cannot be ignored. Her presence in recalling his experiences and dreams is very important. However, he discreetly refers to her only as my family (أهلي), without mentioning her by name. According to al- Tirmidhi, "Good tidings are like a veridical dream... the dream of the faithful is God's word spoken to him and her in their sleep."<sup>45</sup> As can be observed, he took his wife's dreams seriously. He states:

Now my wife kept dreaming about me, dream after dream, always at dawn. It was as if she, or the dreams, were both messengers to me. There was no need for interpretation, because their meaning was clear.<sup>46</sup>

In fact, most of the dreams he mentions in his autobiography are his wife's dreams for him. She also used to dream of herself as well as for her husband. In one of her dreams, she saw al-Khidr, who told her to tell her husband to purify his house. Perplexed by what he meant, she asked him, he replied by pointing to his tongue, she was to tell her husband to care of the purity of his speech. In another dream, she saw the Prophet Muhammad while she and her husband were sleeping in the same bed. The Prophet came and lied down with them. These dreams, recounted among other dreams of al- Tirmidhi's wife, show that she was not only a 'mediumistic messenger' for him in his spiritual journey, but also she herself was undergoing her own inner spiritual development. They also crystallize the mystical union of two souls united by love for God and his Messenger.

<sup>44</sup>Both texts have been edited by Othman Yahia, and published together in the same book.

<sup>45</sup> Hakim al-Tirmidhi, *Kitâb Khatm al-awliâ'*, ed. O. Yahia (Beirut, 1965), p. 19.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 21. For the English translation see Sara Sviri, *The Taste of Hidden Things: Images on the Sufi Path* (California, Golden Sufi Center Publishing, 1997), pp. 61-76.



This special marital relationship, based on love, faith and vision, and which was experienced by al-Tirmidhi, Ibn 'Arabi, and Sitt 'Ajam, may have had its roots in the Prophetic tradition. In this connection, the Prophet states that, "al-Nikâh (marriage) is my Sunna."<sup>47</sup> He also said, "when the servant marries, he completes half of his religion."<sup>48</sup> Moreover, The Prophet specifically named three things which were made lovable to him in the world: "Three things of this world of yours were made lovable to me: women, perfume and the coolness of my eye was placed in the ritual prayer."<sup>49</sup> Abû Hanifa, the founder of first of the four *fiqhi madhhabs*, called marriage the best of the supererogatory acts (نوافل). And since for the Sufi, the purpose of creation is to make the Hidden Treasure manifest, the marital bonding, and specifically the sexual act (معاينة)<sup>50</sup> was seen as providing the occasion for what Ibn 'Arabi calls "the greatest Self-disclosure."

It is not a coincidence that Ibn 'Arabi devotes the last chapter of his most celebrated book, *Fusûs al-Hikam*, the bezel of Muhammad, entirely to his interpretation of the above mentioned hadith of "women made loveable to him most in this world". Ibn 'Arabi argues that the character of the Prophet can be legitimately summed up in this hadith. The Prophet, as Sachiko Murata explains, who is the Perfect Man,

manifests the divine name Allah, since he brings together all the divine names in a comprehensive unity [الخصرة الجامعة]. At the same time, his innermost reality, called by such names as the 'Muhammadan Reality' and 'the Reality of Realities', is the principle that gives rise to the cosmos and is manifest in the Breath of the all-Merciful, the Supreme Barzakh, as well as in the Supreme Pen. Hence the Prophet's innermost reality is identical with the marriage act that gives rise to the cosmos.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Ibn Maja, *Nikâh*, 1.

<sup>48</sup> Al-Hindi, *kanz al-'ummâl*, 21:193.

<sup>49</sup> Al-Nisâ'i, 74.

<sup>50</sup> The Arabic word *jimâ'* literally means bringing together, or uniting.

<sup>51</sup> Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam* (New York, State University of New York, 1992), p. 188.



Moreover, marriage for the Sufi seeker is the status in which one fulfills oneself. Man's perfection lies in woman, and woman's perfection lies in man. According to Frithjof Schoun, "Man stabilizes woman, woman vivifies man; furthermore, and quite obviously, man contains woman within himself and vice versa."<sup>52</sup> As Huda Lutfi argues, according to Ibn 'Arabi's cosmogony, there is a polarity which is the Creator and creation who are both in a perpetual downward and upward movement of attraction. Since Allah created the world because He loved to be known, He manifested Himself in concrete form (the creation) to Himself through the dynamic force of love.<sup>53</sup> Ibn 'Arabi argues, "Through the inherent power of love to appear in concrete manifestation, the Absolute brings forth existence. In turn, these manifestations, driven by the same power of love, seek to return to their origin. The circle of creation is a non-ending one that perpetuates creation (حلق جديده)."<sup>54</sup> Thus Ibn 'Arabi views the relation between Adam and Eve as one that is governed by the mutual longing to unite, culminating in the sexual intercourse.

Parallel to the emanation of the ontological Adam from the Absolute who desired to see Himself in concrete form, "Eve was extracted from Adam to make Divine manifestation possible."<sup>55</sup> Therefore, the love of the male for the female is the love for himself, since Eve is the inward part of Adam and Eve's love for Adam is the love for Allah which is a longing to go back to his or her essence. Their mutual longing for each other, according to Frithjof Schoun, is "a search for the Essence and the lost paradise."<sup>56</sup> Hence, through the dynamics of love the One

<sup>52</sup> Frithjof Schoun, *Esoterism as principle and as Way*, trans. William Stoddart (London, Perennial Books, 1981), p. 139.

<sup>53</sup> Huda Lutfi, "The Feminine Element in Ibn 'Arabi's Mystical Philosophy," *Alif* (1985): p. 10. CF. Ibn 'Arabi, *'Uqlât al-Mustâwfiz*.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>56</sup> Frithjof Schoun, *Esoterism as principle and as Way*, p. 38.



becomes the many, and the many becomes the One. And it is only the Qutb (the Pole) who can undergo such an experience.

Through God's self-disclosure in marriage, the Pole knows what encourages him to seek marriage and become completely enamored of it. For neither he nor any other Gnostic realizes his servant-hood more thoroughly than in what he realizes in the marriage act... The marriage act of the possessor of this station is like the marriage act of the people of the garden, strictly for appetite, since it is the greatest Self-disclosure of God.<sup>57</sup>

This special relationship that the gnostic experiences, which is based on complementarity, seems to be what Sitt 'Ajam has experienced with her husband. This is shown by the fact that her ideas could not have been exteriorized without the help of her husband. While she represents the interior, the inward dimension, her husband represents the exterior (outward) form. She has *'ilm al-bâtin*, whereas her husband has *'ilm al-zâhir*, through which her revelation (*kashf*) were made manifest. According to Sitt 'Ajam, woman is the inward reality whereas man is the outward reality. This idea will be further discussed in my analysis of her ideas in *al-Mashâhid*, where she identifies Adam as a manifestation of Divine Oneness (واحدية) and identifies Eve as a manifestation of Uniqueness (آحادية).

Another important aspect revealed in the mentioned passage, which concerns her relationship with her husband, is what Sitt 'Ajam describes as her husband's "*qayyûmiyya*" over her. Here she echoes the Quranic verses which state that, "men stand over women" (4:34), and that "men have a degree over women" (2:228). But does Sitt 'Ajam here intend the superficial meaning of the word, upon which the exegetes usually focus? The one concerned with a social interpretation? Or could it be, that Sitt 'Ajam was more concerned with the inward meaning of the term (قيوماً على)? Sitt 'Ajam's employment of the concept brings to mind al-Qushayrî's

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<sup>57</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, *Futûhât*, vol.2, p. 574.



interpretation of the concept in his commentary on the Quran, *Latâ'if al-Isharât*, in which he offers an esoteric interpretation for these verses.

They have [rights] similar to those over them, with honor. In other words, he has the obligation to expend property for her, and she has the obligation to serve him because of this. But the men have a degree above them in excellence, while the women have the advantage (میزة) of weakness (ضعف) and the incapacity of mortal nature (عجز البشرية).<sup>58</sup>

Though Qushayrî does not ignore the *shar'i* exoteric aspect, he alludes to a more esoteric dimension in interpreting the verse. As Sachiko Murata argues, in pointing to women's weakness, he is alluding to the feminine receptive side of women, which is 'the Yin quality' in the Taoist sense. To be conscious of one's weakness (ضعف) and incapacity (عجز), is actualizing the Yin quality in relation to the Real, which is the state of servanthood (عبودية).<sup>59</sup> Indeed, actualizing the Yin qualities that pertain to servanthood is a necessary step towards attributing to oneself the Yang qualities, which pertain to vicegerency (خلافة).<sup>60</sup> Thus, al-Qushayri's esoteric interpretation of the verse alludes to the great delusion men may be entrapped in because of their 'natural state' of actualizing the Yang attributes. So they claim authority and vicegerency, without having first attained to the state of servanthood. Unlike women, who due to their "natural" or "conditional" 'weakness' and 'incapacity', both of which are symbolic of positive qualities, attain naturally to the state of servanthood, which surpasses all other stations in the Sufî path. According to Claude Addas, "[Servanthood] is the state that every disciple must aspire to and the goal of spiritual realization, because it represents the return to the original state: to the ontological nothingness of the creature or created being. Whoever has realized 'ubûdiyya or servitude has stripped himself of rububiyya, of the 'Lordship' which really belongs to God alone, yet ordinary men in their

<sup>58</sup> Qushayri, *Latâ'if al-Isharât* (Cairo, al-Hay'a al-Misrya al-'Ammah li al-Ta'lif wa al-Nashr, n.d.), vol. I, p. 322.

<sup>59</sup> Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam*, p. 177.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 177-178.



arrogance claim it for themselves.”<sup>61</sup> Hence, as one Sufi has put it: “one should have the soul of a woman in order to be a real seeker.”<sup>62</sup>

It is therefore incumbent on the gnostic to recognize the Yin qualities within himself or herself, in the face of Allah, as it helps him or her to attain the understanding of Truth. It is in this sense that Sitt ‘Ajam stresses twice, in her commentary on *al-Mashâhid* and in her other text *Kashf al-Kunûz*, the nature of the relationship she had with her husband, who “stands over her” (قيوماً على). She did not find it degrading to describe her husband as *qayyiûman ‘alayya*. It seems that she may have been aware of the discourse of al-Qushayri and of Ibn ‘Arabi on this matter.<sup>63</sup> Thus she knows that by her attaining to the Yin qualities in herself and actualizing the state of servanthood, it would in turn empower her to actualize the state of vicegerency (خلافة) which she claims to have attained.<sup>64</sup> Hence, as we have illustrated, Sitt ‘Ajam belongs to a line of Sufi thought, like Ibn ‘Arabi’s and al- Tirmidhi’s, that views marriage from the vantagepoint of its metaphysical and cosmological dimensions, an indispensable state in the realization of the gnostic quest.

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<sup>61</sup> Claude Addas, *The Quest for the Red Sulphur* (Cambridge, The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), p. 62.

<sup>62</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *My Soul is a Woman: The Feminine in Islam* (New York, continuum, 1999).

<sup>63</sup> Sitt ‘Ajam quotes both al-Qushayrî and Ibn ‘Arabi several times in her commentary, a fact which may demonstrate she was aware of their ideas. For more details on Ibn ‘Arabi’s discussion on this matter, see Ibn ‘Arabi, *Futûhât*, vol. II, p. 182.

<sup>64</sup> Sitt ‘Ajam, *Sharh al- Mashâhid*, p. 272.



### The Spiritual *Silsilah* of Sitt 'Ajam

Sitt 'Ajam holds that she has taken the *hâtimî* guidance and support (*al-madad al-hâtimî*) from Ibn al-Arabi himself who came to her in a vision. Thus, we can legitimately argue that she is an *Akbari* disciple. She states:

I examined closely his name and his biography (سيرته), for a way to draw from him the definition [for my state], but I found that the similarity between us is in receiving the very same '*hâtimî* generosity' (العطاء الحاتمى), that leads to attraction (جذب). This, despite not having the same state of distinction (حال عدم الخصوص), nor following the same path, nor having the same life; similarity is [only] that of character (الخلق) and of [divine] bestowal (الودع), which is the privilege of the saints (الولياء). Thus, his luminous form (صورته النورانية) could not but witness the knowledge of union that exists between us.<sup>65</sup>

This reminds us of Ibn Arabi's own meetings with other saints and shaykhs in the Imaginal World. In these, he talks about the several instances in which he met prophets and had conversations with earlier saints discussing certain Sufi themes, such as al-Hallâj, Abû Madyan (d. 1198), Dhu'i-Nûn al-Misri (d. 861), Sahl al-Tustari, etc.<sup>66</sup> The fact that she has taken the '*madad al-hâtimî*' from Ibn 'Arabi himself does not deny that she had a shaykh with whom she had a direct physical interaction. Tracing the spiritual *silsila* of Sitt 'Ajam is quite interesting, for in her commentary she points to the fact she and her husband had a shaykh called Fakhr al-Dîn ibn Izz al-Qudât (d. 1290). His full name is Fakhr al-Dîn Abû al-Fida' Abû Tâhir Isma'il ibn Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wâhid ibn Abi al-Yumn ibn Izz al-Qudât al-Dimashqi.<sup>67</sup> He was born in Damascus in 1232 A.D. According to al-Dhahabi, Ibn Izz al-Qudât began his career as an author and a poet in the court of the Ayyûbid king, al-Nâsr, in Damascus. However, during the

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>66</sup> Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints* (Cambridge, The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), p. 18. Cf. Ibn 'Arabi, *Kitâb al-Tajalliyat* (Hayderabad, 1948).

<sup>67</sup> Thanks to Dr. Bakri 'Ala al-Dîn for the biographical background of shaykh Izz al-Qudât. See Al-Dhahabi, *Tarikh al-Islam* (Beirut, 2000), vol. 53, pp. 361-366.



Mongol invasions, he was summoned by Hulagu to work in Cairo. He became a Sufi in the full sense of the word when he was introduced to Ibn 'Arabi's teachings by the Sufi *faqîh*, Muhyi al-Dîn Ibn Surâqa (d. 1264), in Cairo, and through Muhyi al-Dîn Ibn Zaki (d. 1270) in Damascus. Sitt 'Ajam also mentions the relationship between the two in her commentary.<sup>68</sup> It is important to note here that Muhyi al-Dîn ibn Zaki belonged to the family of Banu Zaki, one of the respectable families in Damascus who were known to hold high positions as judges. They were also known for their Sufi affiliations, a fact which courted harassment in the lands of Sultân al-Mu'azzam. Nonetheless, Muhyi al-Dîn ibn Zaki offered his protection to Ibn 'Arabi.<sup>69</sup> During Izz al-Qudât's stay in Cairo, he met Muhyi al-Dîn ibn Surâqa, who used to live in Aleppo where he attended a *samâ'* and read some chapters of *al-Futûhât* under the supervision of Ibn Sawdakîn. An interesting aspect about Ibn Surâqa, is that according to al-Sakhawî, he was a Sufi with affiliations to Shihâb al-Dîn Suhrawardî (d. 1235), the author of *'Awârif al-Ma'ârif* and the personal advisor to caliph al-Nâsir.<sup>70</sup> Interestingly, Yâfi'i (d. 1369) in *Mir'ât al-Jinân* mentioned that Ibn 'Arabi and Suhrawardî had actually met one another. He wrote:

The two masters and guides, Ibn 'Arabi and Suhrawardî, met each other. They stayed together for a while, with lowered heads, and then parted without exchanging a single word. Subsequently Ibn 'Arabi was 'asked: what is your opinion of Suhrawardî?' He replied: 'He is impregnated with the Sunna from head to toe.' Suhrawardî was questioned as to what he thought of Ibn 'Arabi, and he replied: 'He is an ocean of essential truths (بحر الحقائق)'.<sup>71</sup>

It was through Ibn Surâqa that Izz al-Qudât was introduced to Ibn 'Arabi's thought as the former advised him to read the Shaykh's books. Izz al-Qudât followed the advice of Ibn Surâqa, read Ibn 'Arabi's books, and even copied them. According to al-Dhahabî, "Izz al-Qudât used to copy

<sup>68</sup> Sitt 'Ajam, *Sharh al-Mashâhid*, p. 133.

<sup>69</sup> Claude Addas, *Quest For The Red Sulphur*, pp. 254-255.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., pp. 192.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 240.



two pages of Ibn 'Arabi's words every day."<sup>72</sup> When Izz al-Qudât returned to Damascus, he established a relationship with Muhyi al-Dîn Ibn Zaki al-Qurashi, who was a close friend of Ibn 'Arabi, Izz al-Qudât remained in Damascus until he died and was buried near Muhyi al-Dîn ibn Zaki and Ibn 'Arabi.

Finally, it is interesting to note that Ibn Izz al-Qudât was praised by Ibn Taymiyya who is known for his animosity towards Ibn 'Arabi. However, according to al-Dhahabi, Ibn Taymiyya held Izz al-Qudât in high esteem until he read a poem written by the latter alluding to mystical union (الاتحاد).<sup>73</sup> It is important to note here that Sitt 'Ajam explicitly discusses the concept of *ittihâd* in her commentary. She even criticizes Ibn 'Arabi in the Twelfth Witnessing for using the term *irtibât* instead of *ittihâd* in describing the relationship between the Lord and the servant. Yet al-Dhahabi continued to defend Izz al-Qudât, assuring his audience that he was only alluding to the meaning established in the hadith of *al-nawâfil*.<sup>74</sup> This glimpse into the intellectual background of Sitt 'Ajam and her shaykh, Izz al-Qudât, serves as an indicator to the intellectual scene in her time. The case of her Shaykh, Izz al-Qudât, is a very special one. On the one hand, he was a disciple of Ibn 'Arabi, on the other, he was a scholar of hadith who gained the respect of Ibn Taymiyya's closest circle like al-Dhahabi. This in fact confirms what has been mentioned earlier about the intellectual atmosphere during the time of Sitt 'Ajam in which Sufis, as a strategy of concealment, tended to use a *fiqhî* discourse in order to avoid *salafî* accusations of heresy. I believe that it is such an approach which Sitt 'Ajam was very critical of. This explains her assertion in her commentary that she is focusing on the inward rather than the outward reality

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<sup>72</sup> Al-Dhahabi, *Tarikh al-Islam*, p. 365.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 365.

<sup>74</sup> The hadith states that: "When I love him (My slave), I am the hearing wherewith he hearth and the sight wherewith he seeth." (Bukhârî, *Kitab al-Raqâiq*, 37).



without being afraid of accusations.<sup>75</sup> In contrast to other Sufis, including Ibn 'Arabi himself, Sitt 'Ajam tends to be less compromising as well as apologetic in communicating her ideas.

### Women in the Sufi Tradition

It is not surprising for a woman to reach a high spiritual station in the Muslim tradition, as Sitt 'Ajam claims for herself. As has been shown, from the earliest days onwards, women have played important roles in the development of Sufism. Indeed, the spiritual legacy of Sufism attests to the honor of many female saints and spiritual heroines. Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet, may Allah preserve her secret, was thus referred to as the 'resplendent one' (الزهراء) due to the fact that her face was so luminous that it is said it radiated light when she prayed in her *mihirâb*.<sup>76</sup> It is also said that she never menstruated, an aspect, which attest to her constant state of ritual purity. She is also called *al-batûl* (the virgin or the devoted one) because of her asceticism.<sup>77</sup> Fatima is also regarded by Sufis as the first Qutb (Spiritual Pole).<sup>78</sup> She was also called '*umm abihâ* (mother of her father). She, moreover, is the great generatrix or ancestor of the Twelfth Shi'î Imams. It is, thus, through Fatima that the deeper mystical dimension of Islam is unfolded. It is in this sense that she is like the Virgin Mary, who was also the mother of the 'logos', thus a divine manifestation in her own right. It could be argued that Fatima, parallel to the Virgin Mary in certain Christian denominations, represents the Creative Feminine principle, the Essence of which is Mercy or Goodness.<sup>79</sup> Maryam is also revered in the Quran, and specifically in Sufism as she is the symbol of devotion in the prayer-niche (*al-mihirâb*), and since

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<sup>75</sup> Sitt 'Ajam, *Sharh al-Mashâhid*, pp. 28, 272, 362.

<sup>76</sup> Camille Adams Helminski, *Women of Sufism* (Boston & London, Shambhala, 2003), p. 8.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 8. Cf. I. Goldziher, "Muhammedanische Studien," *Halle 2* (1989): 300.

<sup>79</sup> Laleh Bakhtiar, *Sufi Expressions of the Mystic Quest* (Britain, Thames and Hudson, 1997), p. 82.



esoterically 'the *Mihrâb* is the heart', she herself is perceived a 'the Holy of Holies'.<sup>80</sup> Maryam also expresses the mystery of *al-Khalwa* (spiritual retreat) and of contemplative prayer. In the Quran, it is stated that,

Whenever Zachariah went into the sanctuary (محراب) where she was, he found that she had food. He said: O Mary! Whenever cometh unto thee this food? She answered: It is from Allah. Verily Allah provideth sustenance beyond all reckoning for those whom He will (3:37).

According to Sufi interpretation, the celestial food here is the symbol of *Futûhât* or revelations. Thus Ruzbahân Baqli (d. 1209), a saint of Shiraz, states, "The substance of Mary is the substance of original sanctity."<sup>81</sup>

Râbi'a al-Adawiyya (d. 801), a Sufi woman, played an important role in the determining the Sufi discourse on Divine love. She was the first Sufi to express the love relationship between the servant and Allah in 'Sufic' language, one in which Allah is referred to as the Beloved. Rabi'a claims to love Allah for his being Allah not out of fear of Hell or desire for Paradise. She states that:

I have loved thee with two loves, a selfish love and a love that is worthy (of Thee).<sup>82</sup>

Fatima of Nishapûr (d. 838 A.D.) was another great female Sufi who was the master of the two great Sufis, Ba Yazîd al-Bistâmi (d. 874 A.D.) and Dhû-l-Nûn al-Misri. Al-Bistâmi said about her: "There was no station about which I told her that she had not already undergone."<sup>83</sup> Moreover, Dhû al-Nûn al-Misrî, once was asked, "who, in your opinion, is the highest among the Sufis?" He answered, "A lady in Mecca, called Fatima of Nishapûr, whose discourse displayed a

<sup>80</sup> Frithjof Schuon, *Unpublished Text* 328. Cf. James Cutsinger, "The Virgin," *Sophia* 6 (2000): 138.

<sup>81</sup> Frithjof Schuon, *Dimensions of Islam* (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1969), p. 9.

<sup>82</sup> Margaret Smith, *Rabi'a The Life & Work of Rabi'a and other Women Mystics in Islam* (Oxford, Oneworld Publications, 1994), p. 126.

<sup>83</sup> Javad Nurbakhash, *Sufi Women* (New York, Khaniqahi-Nimatullahi Publications, 1990), p. 162.



profound apprehension of the inner meanings of the Qur'an which were astounding."<sup>84</sup> She once said to him, "In all your actions, watch that you act with sincerity and opposition to your lower *nafs*."<sup>85</sup> She also is known to have said, "Whoever does not have God in his consciousness is erring and in delusion, whatever language he speaks, whatever company he keeps. Yet, whoever holds God's company never speaks except with sincerity and assiduously adheres to humble reserve and earnest devotion in his conduct."<sup>86</sup>

Another example of a Sufi women who followed the path of asceticism and love, and who was also, like Sitt 'Ajam, a married woman, is Sha'wana. She was a Persian Sufi woman who used to constantly weep. Men and women would gather around her and listen to her plaintive songs, some of which used to say: "The eyes, which are prevented from beholding the beloved, and yet are desirous of looking upon Him, cannot become fit for that Vision without weeping."<sup>87</sup> She was not only "blinded by tears of penitence, but dazzled by the radiant glory of the Beloved."<sup>88</sup> Her intimate experiences of the Beloved have influenced dramatically her husband, and her son who himself became later on a saint.<sup>89</sup> A different example of a female married saint was Fidda, for instead of weeping, she used to rejoice. She used to say, "Joy of heart should be happiness based on what we inwardly sense; therefore, we should always strive to rejoice within our heart, till everyone around us also rejoices."<sup>90</sup> Ibn 'Arabi also tells us in his writings about several women saints, whom he met and who had a great influence on him: Shams Umm al-Fuqara' of Marchena, and Fatima bint Ibn al-Muthanna of Cordova. About Shams Umm al-

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>87</sup> Margaret Smith, *Rabi'a the Mystic and Her Fellow-Saints in Islam* (Cambridge, Cambridge University, 1928), p. 146.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>90</sup> Nurbakash, *Sufi Women* (New York, Khaniqahi – Nimatullahi Publications, 1990), p. 165.



Fuqra' in *Rûh al-Quds*, he said: "She had a stout heart, noble spiritual energy and great discrimination. She concealed her spiritual state, but sometimes she would reveal an aspect of it to me in secret because she had been granted a revelation about me, and this would give me great joy."<sup>91</sup> Moreover, Fatima bint Ibn al-Muthanna, a ninety years old woman, whom Ibn 'Arabi mentioned in *Rûh al-Quds*, as "a mercy for the worlds"<sup>92</sup> is another example of Sufi *shaykhas* with whom Ibn 'Arabi spent a long time learning from her:

I served as a disciple one of the lovers of God, a gnostic, a lady of Seville called Fatima bint Ibn al-Muthanna of Cordova. I served her for several years, she being over ninety-five years of age... She used to play on the tambourine and show great pleasure in it. When I spoke to her about it she answered, "I take joy in Him who has turned to me and made me one of His friends (saints), using me for His own purposes. Who am I that He should choose me among mankind? He is jealous of me for, whenever I turn to something other than He in heedlessness, He sends me some affliction concerning that thing." ... With my own hands I built for her a hut of reeds as high as she, in which she lived until she died. She used to say to me, "I am your spiritual mother and the light of your earthly mother." When my mother came to visit her, Fatima said to her, "O light, this is my son and he is your father, so treat him filially and dislike him not."<sup>93</sup>

Not only did Ibn 'Arabi have women *shaykhas*, but he also had women disciples to whom he transmitted the *khirqā*. In his *Diwān*, Ibn 'Arabi names fifteen women upon whom he had invested the *khirqā*. Fourteen out of the fifteen mentioned in the *Diwān*, are women disciples; the only male disciple mentioned in this company was Badr al-Dīn al-Habashi who was one of the earliest of his devout *murids*. In most of these cases, Ibn 'Arabi invested these women disciples with the *khirqā* in his sleep. He would have a vision in which he would invest them with the *khirqā*, on this, Ibn 'Arabi states: "here ends what happened in the world of senses; what I will now describe took place during sleep."<sup>94</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, *Sufis of Andalusia*, trans. R. W. J. Austin (Oxford, Beshara Publications, 1988), pp. 142-143.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., pp. 25-26.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., pp. 25-26.

<sup>94</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, *Diwān* (Bulaq, n.d.), p. 56.



Another example is the daughter of the well-known Shafi'ite *qâdi* Ibn Zaki al-Qurashi (d. 1220) whose daughter, according to some sources, was married to Ibn 'Arabi.<sup>95</sup> Two other examples, which Ibn Arabi mentions to have been among those upon whom he invested the *khirqa* are those whom he calls his daughters, Dunya<sup>96</sup> and Safra.<sup>97</sup> It is not known whether these were his real or metaphorical daughters. Another example is a beautiful slave girl whom Ibn 'Arabi described as a beauty.<sup>98</sup> These examples support Sitt 'Ajam's claim in her introduction to her commentary of seeing Ibn 'Arabi in a vision asking her to interpret his book of *al-Mashâhid* and in turn she asked him for his *madad*. As we have seen, women were always present either as *shaykhas* or as *muridât* in his life. They were even the source of inspiration for some of his poems, as is the case of Nizâm to whom Ibn 'Arabi dedicates his *diwân* of *Turjumân al-Ashwâq*. This aspect was also emphasized in Jalaluddin Rumi's *Mathnawi*, who speaks beautifully of the feminine and sees women as a divine manifestation. As he says in his *Mathnawi*, "woman is a ray of Allah. She is not just the earthly beloved: she is the creator, not created."<sup>99</sup> Ibn 'Arabi even argues that the perfect way of seeing Allah's manifestation is through the feminine element. This is why he perceived sexual union as indispensable for a seeker who strives after full knowledge. This dimension of the feminine principle in Ibn 'Arabi mystical philosophy, however, will be further discussed in the following chapter.

According to Ibn 'Arabi, "Men and women have their share in every level [of mystical attainment], including the function of the Pole (قطب)."<sup>100</sup> However, the path of knowledge (طريق) among Sufi women was less known than the path of love (طريق العشق). With the exception of

<sup>95</sup> Claude Addas, *The Quest of the Red Sulphur*, P. 146.

<sup>96</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, *Diwân*, P. 54.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., P. 57.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Rumi, *Mathnawi*, Trans. R. A. Nicholson (London, Lozak, 1925-4-), V. 2, P. 520.

<sup>100</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, *Futûhât*, III, P. 89.



Ibn 'Arabi's *shaykhas* (Shams umm al-Fuqara' and Fatima bint Ibn al-Muthanna) as well as Fatima of Nishapur, who represent the path of knowledge, most Sufi women have taken the path of love. Moreover, none of the above mentioned cases are known to have conveyed their mystical experience in written form. As in the case of earlier Sufi masters, it was their disciples who later came to transmit their teachings.

Nevertheless, there were some Sufi women, who recorded their mystical experiences and teachings, either in poems, journals, or in critical commentaries, as in the case of Sitt 'Ajam. Additional examples include Fatima, or Jahanara, the beloved daughter of Shah Jahan (1592-1666), the Mughal emperor of India. Fatima recorded her mystical experience in an exposition entitled *Risala-i Sahibiyya*. In her work, she talks about her initiation and her following of the path of love in her heart.<sup>101</sup> Aisha of Damascus is one of the well known Sufis of the fifteenth century. She wrote a commentary on 'Abdallah Ansari al-Harawi's *Stations on the Way* (منازل السالكين), entitled *Veiled Hints within the Stations of the Saints* (الإشارات الخفية في منازل الأولياء).<sup>102</sup> Just as we shall argue with regards to Sitt 'Ajam's commentary on *al-Mashâhid*, it seems that 'A'isha's commentary was also an esoteric interpretation (تأويل).

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<sup>101</sup>Nurbakash, *Sufi Women*, p. 147.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., p. 147.



### CHAPTER THREE

#### AN OVERVIEW OF IBN 'ARABI'S

#### MASHÂHID AL-ASRAR AL-QUDUSIYYA

*Mashâhid al-Asrâr al-Qudusiyya wa Matâli'a al-Anwâr al-Ilahiyya* is one of Ibn 'Arabi's earliest writings. It is considered one of the key works of his early Andalusian period. He wrote it in the city of Seville in 590 H. 1194 A.D. when he was at the age of 29. After Ibn 'Arabi's return from Tunis, it is argued that he wrote two works in all: *al-Mashâhid* and *al-Risâla fi-l-nubuwwa wa al-walâya*,<sup>102</sup> the latter was addressed to the companions of the Shaykh, 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Mahdawi, to whom Ibn 'Arabi later dedicated his magnum opus, *al-Futûhât al-Makkiyya*. Claude Addas argues that contrary to what was believed before, *al-Mashâhid* and *al-Risâla fi al-Nubuwwa wa al-Walâya* were not composed as two separate works, but were in fact two parts of a single work, *al-Risâla* being only a preface to *al-Mashâhid*. It seems that Ibn 'Arabi wrote his this introductory treatise (*al-Risâla fi al-Walâya*) to justify what may be considered as unorthodox in his treatise *al-Mashâhid*.<sup>103</sup> For instance, in commenting on Shaykh Mahdawi's statement: "The saints of this community are the prophets of the other communities,"<sup>104</sup> he underlines the idea of God's bestowal of gifts unto his saints, as they are also recipients of divine inspiration, light, and secrets, which are gifts that place them in a similar status to that of prophets, who have the privilege of receiving communications from God.

In a similar vein, Ibn 'Arabi recounts in his *Fusûs al-Hikâm* a vision in which he saw all of the prophets accompanied by all their followers, a fact which made him believe that the saints (أولياء) follow "in the footsteps of the prophets" (على قدم الأنبياء). Michel Chodkiewicz argues that this expression '*alâ aqdâm al-anbiya*' is by no means a metaphorical term. Rather, he argues, the term has a special technical connotation. Commenting on Ibn 'Arabi's

<sup>102</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, "Risâla fi-l-walâya wa al-nubuwwa," ed. H. Taher Alif (1985): 7-38.

<sup>103</sup> Claude Addas, *The Quest of the Red Sulphur*, p. 128.

<sup>104</sup> This statement echoes the prophetic *hadith*: "The learned are the heirs of the prophets." [33:4].



ideas, Addas also states in this regard: "As all the saints are heirs of the prophets, each one incarnates a particular form of sainthood, the model and source of which are represented by one of the 'major prophets'. A saint may therefore be 'Mosaic' (موسوي), 'Abrahamic' (إبراهيمي) or 'Christic' (عيسوي) in spiritual essence, etc. He may even combine in himself several of these 'inheritances'."<sup>105</sup> It is interesting to note here that Ibn 'Arabi's early Shaykh, Abû al-'Abbâs al-'Uraybî was said to be *'alâ qadam 'Isa*, which means that his Sufi type (مشرّب) was that of Jesus.<sup>106</sup>

It may be argued that the intended focus of Ibn 'Arabi, in *al-Mashâhid*, is in fact these 'heirs' (الوارثون). In the introduction of his *Risâla fî al-Walâya* he basically deals with the notion of 'prophetic inheritance.' Ibn 'Arabi also provides more elaborations in *al-Mashâhid*, as well as in his later writings, such as the *Futûhât*, on the concept of sainthood and the classification of saints into two categories: those who 'remain' in the Divine presence (الواقفون) and those who return to people so as to guide them (الراجعون).<sup>107</sup> In *Risâlat al-Anwâr*, Ibn 'Arabi explains these distinctions:

Among them there are those who are sent back [to created beings], those who are not sent back, and those who are left to choose. He who is not sent back is called in our technical vocabulary by the term *waqîf*. He who is sent back specifically [i.e. for his own sake] is called '*ârif*'. He who is sent back in a general sense [i.e. in order to guide created beings] is called '*âlim* and *wârith*'.<sup>108</sup>

It is this return that signifies, in Ibn 'Arabi's terms, the fullness and perfection of the station of inheritance.

Ibn 'Arabi, as one of the *wârithun*, explicitly states in his introduction that *al-Mashâhid* was divinely inspired:

The [divine] address reached me from the presence of the [hidden] identity (حُضْرَةُ الْهُوِيَّةِ) making this writing appear and take form in the sensory world. But I wish to make known that this book has descended from the presence of Holiness to reveal Itself to the precious essence [...] I was told "take it with

<sup>105</sup> Claude Addas, p. 277.

<sup>106</sup> Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints* (Cambridge, Islamic Texts Society, 1993), p. 17.

<sup>107</sup> Claude Addas, *The Voyage of No Return* (Cambridge, The Islamic Texts Society, 2000), p. 62.

<sup>108</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, *Risâlat al-Anwar* (Hayderabad, 1948). CF. Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, p. 171.



strength and make it known to every one you see; verify it, examine it thoroughly and be precise [in communicating it], and if anyone asks you, 'how can you claim that it is a revealed book, inspired by the divine speech, if after Muhammad there can be no more [prophetic] inspiration (وحي)? then reply: 'Although Gabriel, the Angel of Revelation, no longer descends after the ending of the prophetic cycle, that does not mean that [divine] inspiration (إلهام) has ceased descending on the hearts of the saints (أولياء) [...], because Divine Reality (الحق) has not ceased, nor will it cease to inspire them with His mysteries (أسرار), making the suns and moons of His knowledge rise in the sky of their hearts. The sudden illuminations (موارد), which God causes to reach their hearts are infinite and unlimited, like oceans without shores [...]'<sup>109</sup>

In the above, Ibn 'Arabi explains the process whereby divine inspiration or divine speech is received. Lest we have any doubt about the inspirational source of *al-Mashâhid*, Ibn 'Arabi begins every witnessing with the statement of: "The Real made me witness [...]", and phrases like "He said to me", and "I said to him". In *al-Mashâhid*, he further points out that what actually appears in his soul are meanings and not letters or voices:

The Maker (البارئ), Glory be to Him, is far above the existence of voices and letters in His essence; rather He, Glory be to Him, is speaking unconditionally through the ancient speech (الكلام القديم) which is an attribute of meaning that He has attributed to Himself. One does not say that it is Him nor that it is other than Him... His speech, Glory be to Him, is far above voice or letter, priority or posteriority. Every word which appears in existence is newly arrived, and it is His creation and invention.<sup>110</sup>

Ibn 'Arabi also explains the process by which the saint receives divine inspiration. Here he identifies the heart, with its boundless ability to receive infinite images, as the organ of witnessing and the place that receives divine inspiration. He authenticates his view by referring to the Prophetic tradition: "My Heaven containeth me not, nor My Earth, but the heart of my faithful servant doth contain Me."<sup>111</sup> In this regard, he states:

The heart of the Gnostic has no discernible limit and is the seat of God's vision, through the servant and the places of His divine revelation, the presence of His secrets, the place to which His angels descend and the treasury of His lights... The forms of the Meanings appear to the people of this way in the depth of their hearts... so they contemplate the divine impressions and the secrets of predestination and how it holds sway over the created beings.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, *Kitab Mashâhid al-Asrar*, ed. and trans. into English Cecelia Twinch and Pablo Beneito, p. 112.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 114

<sup>111</sup> Hadith Qudsi.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 115.



In this connection, Seyyed Hossein Nasr argues that the heart is in fact the isthmus (برزخ), between the Divine and the human, between the world of *ghayb* and the world of *shahâda*, between "the horizontal and vertical dimensions of existence."<sup>113</sup> Just as in Christianity, the vertical and horizontal lines of the cross symbolize Jesus, who is half Divine and half human, in the Sufi tradition, the Perfect Man is regarded as the isthmus, in which the vertical and the horizontal lines meet in the point of the heart.<sup>114</sup> "The heart, then, is our unique center, the place where the supreme axis penetrates our microcosmic existence, the place where the All-Merciful resides, and the locus for the Breath of God."<sup>115</sup> This is how witnessing takes place in the heart of the *ârif*. In this spirit al-Hallâj says, "I saw my Lord with the Eye of the Heart. I said: 'Who art thou?' He answered: 'Thou'."<sup>116</sup>

It is important to mention first that Ibn 'Arabi distinguishes between *tajalli*, *kashf*, *ru'ya*, and *mushâhahda* which is synonymous with *shuhûd*. Ibn 'Arabi, who is known as one of the companions of self-disclosure (أصحاب التجلي) places *tajalli* a central role in his philosophy. As Chittick points out, "In using the word *tajalli*, sometimes the Shaykh stresses the side of manifest reality, thereby emphasizing that everything is as it is because God has disclosed Himself in that form. At other times he employs the term self-disclosure as a synonym for unveiling (كشف), thereby stressing the awareness or "witnessing" (شهود) that is the human perception of God's self-display."<sup>117</sup> Thus, *Tajalli*, seen from the point of view of man, is *shuhûd*. However, there is another important term which Ibn 'Arabi employs in expressing this experience of *tajalli*, which is the Quranic term *ru'ya*.<sup>118</sup> Nonetheless, Ibn 'Arabi differentiates between vision (رؤية) and witnessing (شهود). According to him, "*shuhûd*

<sup>113</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The Heart of the Faithful is the Throne of the All-Merciful", *Paths to the Heart*, ed. James S. Cutsinger (Bloomington, World Wisdom, 2002), p. 37.

<sup>114</sup> In the same spirit, the Quran reads as follows: "Allah does not create two hearts in a person's chest." [33:4].

<sup>115</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, p. 37.

<sup>116</sup> Al-Hallâj, *Diwân* (London, Dar al-hikma, 2005), p. 295. Cf. Martin Lings, *What is Sufism* (Cambridge, The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), p. 49.

<sup>117</sup> William Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God* (New York, State University of New York, 1998), p. 52.

<sup>118</sup> The Qur'an in recounting of the story of Moses uses the term *ru'ya*. The divine reply to Moses' request (أرني) "Let me see, so that I can behold you" was that (لن تراني) "You shall not see Me!" (7:143).



is preceded by knowledge about the object of contemplation, and this is the knowledge envisaged when speaking about beliefs (عقائد), a term whose etymology suggests a limitative representation. Consequently, the Object contemplated can be either affirmed, whereas in the case of vision, strictly speaking, there can be only affirmation or denial..... All contemplation is vision but all vision is not contemplation."<sup>119</sup>

Since a face to face encounter with God is the core theme of *al-Mashâhid*, the treatise is structured into 'fourteen abodes of witnessing', wherein an intimate dialogue with God takes place, in the form of a series of seemingly paradoxical divine 'addresses', to a mysterious servant (عبد), who may be Ibn 'Arabi himself, but who may also be any human soul that may be potentially predisposed to be the 'Perfect Man'. These divine addresses are, in their turn, followed by some paradoxical human responses to the Divine. It is as if we are being offered a kind of interplay between the Divinity and the Perfect Man in *al-Mashâhid*, one that takes on a highly paradoxical symbolic style. In one of these Divine paradoxical statements, Ibn 'Arabi writes:

you are My Names, the sign of My Essence... He who sees you sees Me. He who honors you honors Me. He who treats you with spite treats himself with spite. He who humiliates you humiliates himself. You are My mirror, My house, My dwelling place; you are the treasure of My self, the place of My knowledge. If you had never been, I would not be known, worshipped, thanked, or denied.<sup>120</sup>

Ibn 'Arabi often uses these paradoxes in *al-Mashâhid*, a meaning and its opposite, both being - at a certain level - true. He points out that the affirmation of opposites (الأضداد) and the validity of each is an inevitable feature of Divine Knowledge (علم إلهي). But opposites unite at the point of the singularity of truth, which cannot but express itself in multiple forms.<sup>121</sup> One of the forms in which the singularity of Truth manifests Itself is the Perfect Man, since he is the summation of all things. Al-Qaysari (d. 1359), an earlier *akbari* and

<sup>119</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, *Futûhât al-Makkiyya*, V.II, p.494-96. The translation is from Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, p. 175, n. 17.

<sup>120</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, *Kitâb Mashâhid al-Assrar al-Qudusiyya*, ed. S. Hakim and P. Beneito (Murcia, 1994), pp. 58-59. The translation is from Claude Addas, *The Voyage of No Return*, p. 62.

<sup>121</sup> Twinch and Beneito, *Contemplations*, p. 14



disciple of Kashâni (d. 1329), in his introduction to his commentary on Ibn 'Arabi's *Fusûs*, argues that all the worlds are divine books, and the Perfect Man is the book that combines all other books (الكتاب جامع) since he is the image of the macrocosm (العالم الكبير).<sup>122</sup> A good illustration of this view may be found in the verses that were attributed to 'Ali ibn Tâlib:

Your medicine is within you,  
Yet you feel it not...  
And your sickness is [also] within you,  
Yet you [vigorously] deny it...  
You have [really] no need for that which is external,  
As you have [prior] knowledge of all that is written therein...  
Indeed, you are the all-clearing book (الكتاب المبين)  
Within whose letters all hidden [realities] are contained...  
Yet you believe that you are but a midget of bodily mass  
Even when all the Great universe is enfolded within you.<sup>123</sup>

In this very vein Ibn 'Arabi states:

I am the Quran and the seven doubled [verses],  
The spirit of Spirit [itself] and not [merely],  
The spirit that animates bodies.<sup>124</sup>

Beneito and Souad Hakim state in their introduction to the Arabic/Spanish edition of *al-Mashâhid*, that the fourteen chapters relating to the fourteen abodes of witnessing, symbolize the macrocosm, i.e. the Perfect Man, and the Quran, especially the opening chapter *al-fâtiha*. The number fourteen (the doubling of seven) represents the seven heavens and the seven earths of Islamic cosmology, which are all combined in the Divine Throne.<sup>125</sup> In his epilogue to *al-Mashâhid*, Ibn 'Arabi alludes to the Quranic verse: "God is the One who created the seven heavens and of the earth a similar number. Through them His command (أمر) descends so that God comprehends everything in His knowledge."<sup>126</sup> He also makes reference to Ibn Abbâs's famous statement: "If I explained this verse, you would stone me."<sup>127</sup> There is also another aspect of correlation between the fourteen abodes of witnessing and the

<sup>122</sup> Dawud al-Qaysari, *Matla' Khusûs al-Kalim fî Ma'ani Fusûs al-Hikam* (Qum, Intisharat Anwar al-Huda, n.d), pp. 70-71.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>125</sup> Hakim and Beneito, *Contemplaciones*, pp. XVIII-XX.

<sup>126</sup> Quran. [65:12].

<sup>127</sup> Twinch and Beneito, *Contemplations*, p. 15.



macrocosm, the seven heavens and the seven earths, for according to a prophetic *hadith*: "I bring before you as witness the seven heavens and the seven earths."<sup>128</sup>

Similarly Chittick points out, that Ibn 'Arabi argues that there is a correspondence between the breath of the All-Merciful (نفس الرحمن), through which God discloses Himself, the cosmos thus becoming manifest, and the human breaths, making the Arabic alphabet becoming manifest.<sup>129</sup> Ibn 'Arabi seems to arrange the universe in twenty-eight letters, a cosmological view which Titus Burckhardt elaborates on in his study "Mystical Astrology According to Ibn 'Arabi," where he shows Ibn 'Arabi's scheme of cosmic degrees corresponding to the twenty eight letters of Arabic.<sup>130</sup>

To understand the metaphysical principle of the 'science of letters', it may be useful to consider Rene Guenon's view that Ibn 'Arabi has in fact viewed "the universe as symbolized by a book."<sup>131</sup> The letters of the book are written by the 'divine pen' (القلم الإلهي), which categorizes them as 'transcendent letters'. Then, the all-Merciful Breath makes these 'transcendent letters' - which include the creation after having been condensed in the divine Omniscience' - descend to 'lower planes' and compose the manifested universe.<sup>132</sup> This explains the correspondence between the twenty eight Arabic letters and the manifest universe, the macrocosm (الكون الكبير) and the microcosm (الكون الصغير).<sup>133</sup>

The 'Brethren of Purity', whose writings may have influenced Ibn 'Arabi's cosmology, are known to have made important contributions to the esoteric interpretation of Arabic letters. According to them, fourteen is not only half of the twenty eight letters of the Arabic alphabet, of which there are fourteen solar and fourteen lunar numbers, but the number also

<sup>128</sup> Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, V. 135. Cf. Hakim and Beneito, *Contemplaciones*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>129</sup> William Chittick, *The Self Disclosure of God* (New York, The State University of New York, 1999), pp.

XXVIII-XXXII. Cf. Twinch and Beneito, *The Contemplations*, p. 14.

<sup>130</sup> T. Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology According to Ibn 'Arabi* (Aldsworth, Glos., 1977), p. 35.

<sup>131</sup> Rene Guenon, *Fundamental Symbols: The Universal Language of Sacred Science*, ed. Michel Valsan, and trans. Alvin Moore, JNR (Cambridge, Quinta Essentia, 1995), p. 36.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.



corresponds to the fourteenth night, in the lunar cycle, in which the moon reaches its fullness.<sup>134</sup> In this regard Ibn 'Arabi remarks: "It is not like people think, that the mansions of the moon represent the models of the letters; it is the twenty-eight sounds which determine the lunar mansions."<sup>135</sup> In *Tarjumân al-Ashwâq*, Ibn 'Arabi poetically alludes to this full moon as: "Between 'Adhri'at and Busra a maid of fourteen rose to my sight like a full moon."<sup>136</sup> Here he interprets the maid of fourteen as "the perfect soul."<sup>137</sup> The perfect soul, which is symbolized by the full moon, is the Perfect Man, the Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet has many names, among these the name *Ta-Ha*, which is also a name of a Chapter in the Qur'an. The enigmatic letters *Ta-Ha* have the numerical value of fourteen (Ta=9, Ha= 5). In addition, the enigmatic letters in the beginning of some of the chapters of the Quran are also fourteen.<sup>138</sup>

It is also worth mentioning, in this connection, that the numbers of the chapters in *Fusûs al-Hikam* is twenty eight (the most perfect number), the doubling of the chapters of *al-Mashâhid*. As 'Abd al-Baqi Miftah points out, the chapters of *al-Fusûs* become twenty eight by including the introduction, the latter relates to *khatam al-walâya al-Muhammadiyya*, who is Ibn 'Arabi himself.<sup>139</sup> He argues that the chapters of the *Fusûs*, manifest different aspects of *الإنسان الكامل* (Perfect Man). There are twenty seven prophets mentioned in *al-Fusûs*, corresponding to *ليلة القدر* (the Night of Power) in the twenty seventh of Ramadan which represents "the half circle of *Qur'anic*<sup>140</sup> descent", and to the night of ascension (*إسراء*) in the

<sup>134</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *The Mystery of Numbers* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 211. See also Hakim and Beneito, *Contemplaciones*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>135</sup> Twinch and Beneito, *The Contemplations*, p. 14. CF. T. Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology According to Ibn 'Arabi*, p. 35.

<sup>136</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, *Tarjumân al-Ashwâq*, trans. R.A. Nicholson (London, 1978), pp. 12-13. CF. Twinch and Beneito, *The Contemplations*, p. 15.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>138</sup> Hakim and Beneito, *Contemplaciones*, P. XI. CF. Chodkiewicz, *Meccan Illumination*, p. 425, and Schimmel, *The Mystery of Numbers*, p. 211.

<sup>139</sup> Abd al-Baqi Mustafa, *Mafatih Fusûs al-Hikam* (Marakesh, Dar al-Quba al-Zarqa, 1997), p. 32.

<sup>140</sup> As Chodkiewicz in *An Ocean Without Shores*, explains: the *Qur'an* is "Revelation in its synthetic aspect", p.141, n. 52.



twenty seventh of the month of *Rajab*, which represents "the half circle of *Furqanic*"<sup>141</sup> ascension."<sup>142</sup> Both halves of the circle, represent a complete circle which is the circle of *kamâl al-zuhûr al-Muhammadi* (the Perfect Muhammadan Manifestation), which is the abode of *qâb qawsayn aw adnâ* [53:9] (the distance of two bows, or closer).<sup>143</sup> The twenty eighth bezel of wisdom is dedicated to the Perfect Man in general and to *khatm al-walâya al-muhammadiyah* in particular, who is, as we mentioned earlier, Ibn 'Arabi. It may be interesting to note that when Ibn 'Arabi made his famous claim that he was "the Quran and the seven doubled [verses]," he was twenty-eight years old, which was just before he wrote *al-Mashâhid*.

Just as the Perfect Man is the logos (the divine manifestation), the Quran is also the logos, since it is the Divine Word of God. Ibn 'Arabi explains the correspondence between the Quran and the Perfect Man as follows: "The Total Man, according to the essential reality, is the incomparable Quran descended from the Presence of Itself into the presence of the One who gives existence..."<sup>144</sup> Just as the Perfect Man is the summation of everything, the *fâtiha* is the summation of the Quran. It is the perfect prayer, as Ibn 'Arabi says: "It is the Seven Doubled Ones, for it includes the [seven] attributes [of the Essence],<sup>145</sup> which are Knowing, Willing, Ability, Living, Speaking, Seeing and Hearing."<sup>146</sup> The *fâtiha* is also called doubled because it is shared between God and the servant, as asserted by a Prophetic hadith: "I have divided prayer between Me and My Servant into two halves, one being due to Me, and the other to My servant; and My servant will receive that for which he asks."<sup>147</sup> Hence, the relation between the Lord and the servant is a dialectical one in the *Fâtiha*, as Ibn 'Arabi

<sup>141</sup> According to Chodkiewicz, *Furqân* is "Revelation in its distinctive mode.", p. 141, n. 52.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., pp. 32, 139.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>144</sup> Twinch and Beneito, *The Contemplations*, p. 16. CF. *Kitâb al-Isfâr 'an Natâ'ij al-Asfâr*, ed. And trans. D. Gril, p. 22.

<sup>145</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, *Tanazzulât*, p. 95. CF. Chodkiewicz, *Ocean without Shores*, p. 111. Twinch and Beneito, *The Contemplations*, p. 16.

<sup>146</sup> Twinch and Beneito, *The Contemplations*, p. 17.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 17.



argues: It "is as though He doubled praised Himself, He is the praiser and the praised."<sup>148</sup> One may argue that *al-Fâtiha* is also the point of the singularity of Truth, as it is the case with the Perfect Man. In both cases, opposites unite. Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi (d. 1274), one of Ibn 'Arabi's famous disciples, and to whom the term *wahdat al-wujûd* is attributed, discussed in his work, *Mir'at-l-ârifîn*, the symbolism of *al-fâtiha*. He referred to the well-known saying: "what is in the entire Quran is in its Opening. What is elaborated in the Quran is epitomized in the Opening (فاتحة). The opening is in fact a summation (جمال), and hence the point under the letter, *ba*, is the final symbol of the epitome of all knowledge."<sup>149</sup> Hence, *al-Fâtiha*, or *Umm al-Kitâb*, as well as the Perfect Man, represent the Comprehensive Book, among the other books of God, reflecting the Divine Essence, and acting as the isthmus between Divine and Cosmic Realities.

The Perfect Man is once again the main theme in another work written by Ibn 'Arabi, *The Divine Ordinances* (التدبيرات الإلهية),<sup>150</sup> which he also wrote in the early Maghribi period. However, even though the theme in the two works may be the same, the stylistic approach and structure are totally different. The *Mashâhid* is characterized by a personal, lyrical and poetical style, due to its visionary nature, whereas *The Divine Ordinances* is characterized by its discursive prose quality. Whereas the latter is a 'didactic expose' on how the intellect, the soul, and the body may restore the original state of theomorphism, which is the nature of the Perfect Man, *al-Mashâhid* is about "the exaltation of the theomorphic man."<sup>151</sup>

*Al-Mashâhid* is also linked closely to another work of Ibn 'Arabi, which was composed in his early period, that is, *Kitâb al-Isrâ*. In fact, *al-Mashâhid* is accompanied by *Kitâb al-Isrâ* in the manuscript collections. Ibn Sawdakîn, who wrote commentaries on both of these works, observes that the two works are inseparable. He argues that the *isrâ'* journey

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p.17. Cf. *Ibn 'Arabi, Wird*, ed. And trans. Stephen Hirtenstein and Pablo Beneito (Oxford, 1979), p. 41.

<sup>149</sup> Saddrudin Qunawi, *Mir'at-l-ârifîn*, trans. Sayyid Hassan Askari (London, Zahra Trust, 1938).

<sup>150</sup> It is not known for certain whether Ibn 'Arabi wrote this book before or after *al-Mashâhid*.

<sup>151</sup> Claude Addas, *The Voyage of No Return*, p. 63



to God is of three kinds: *سفر إلى الله* (journey to God), *سفر من الله* (journey from God), and *سفر في الله* (journey in God). And while Ibn Sawdakīn considers *Kitāb al-Isrā'* to be representative of the first level of the spiritual journey, which is *al-safar ila Allah*, he considers *al-Mashāhid* as representative of the third and highest level of the journeys, which is *al-safar fi Allah*.<sup>152</sup> This may explain to us the presence of paradoxes in the work, for it is pointing to different spiritual levels. Both works, *al-Mashāhid* and *al-Isrā'*, belong to the Sufi literary tradition of the *mi'raj*, recalling the ascension journey of the Prophet, when he was transported by night (*إسراء*) from Mecca to Jerusalem (the horizontal journey) by a miracle, then, he ascended from there to heaven (the vertical journey). The notion of *mi'rāj*, which is tackled by both *al-Mashāhid* and *Kitāb al-Isrā'*, is also the symbol of the ascension of the 'abd to his Lord, corresponding to the Night of Power (*ليلة القدر*), where the Spirit and the angelic powers attendant upon it descend on the soul and marry it, as in the case of the Prophet. In this connection, Abū Bakr Siraj ad-Din argues that "the child of this marriage of the soul and spirit was the Quran."<sup>153</sup> Even though, as was mentioned earlier, both *Al-Mashāhid* and *Kitāb al-Isrā'* belong to the literary tradition of the *mi'rāj* inspired by *surat al-isrā'* [sura 17], Ibn 'Arabi only cites the first verse of this *sura*, which reads: "Glory be to Allah who did take His Servant for a journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque whose precincts We did bless, in order that We might show him some of Our Signs for he is the One Who heareth and seeth." However, Michel Chodkiewicz points out that this celestial journey corresponds more to *surat al-najm* [sura 53]: "the lote-tree of the limit" (*سدره المنتهى*), 'the distance of two bows, or even closer' (*قاب قوسين أو أدنى*), and the verb *awhā* (he revealed)."<sup>154</sup> This correspondence between *al-Mashāhid*, *Kitāb al-Isrā'*, and *surat al-najm* is confirmed by a passage, in which Ibn 'Arabi argues that the Quranic *suras*, from *surat al-baqara* to *surat*

<sup>152</sup> Ibn Sawdakīn, *Kitāb al-Naāj min Hujūb al-Ishṭibāh fī Sharḥ Mushkil Fāw'id min Kitābay al-Isrā' wa al-Mashāhid* (MS.Fatih5322).

<sup>153</sup> Abu Bakr Siraj ad-Din, *The Book of Certainty* (Cambridge, The Islamic Texts Society, 1992), p. 47.

<sup>154</sup> Chodkiewicz, *An Ocean without Shore*, p. 78.



*at-tur* signify the Universal message or Revelation addressed to the entire community of prophets, including the Prophet Muhammad. On the other hand, the Muhammadan message is specified in the last part of the Quran starting from *surat al-najm*, and in *al-Mashâhid* Ibn 'Arabi starts off by quoting the eighteenth *sura*: "and he saw some of the sublime signs of his Lord."<sup>155</sup>

Ibn 'Arabi elaborates on the meaning of the verse by arguing that the *'ârif* does not seek to reach God, for He is always with us. Rather, the goal of the *'ârif*'s spiritual ascension is to witness God's signs and wonders. Here Ibn 'Arabi states:

[God] says, I only made him journey by night in order that he see the signs, not [to bring him] to Me: because no place can hold Me and the relation of all places to Me is the same. For I am such that [only] 'the heart of my servant, the person of true faith, encompasses Me', so how could he be made to journey to Me while 'I am with him wherever he is'?!<sup>156</sup>

Hence, as in the case of the Prophet, who, according to *surat al-najm*, ascended to see God's signs, the *'ârif* journeys within himself in order also to witness God's signs. Furthermore, according to Ibn Sawdakîn's commentary of *al-Mashâhid* the star also symbolizes Abraham's quest for permanent Reality, as there is correspondence between the verse "by the star, when it sets,"<sup>157</sup> and *surat al-an'âm*, verses [76-78] which read, "When the night covered him over, he saw a star. He said: "this is my Lord," but when it set, he said: "I love not those that set," when he saw the moon rising in splendor, he said: "This is my Lord," but when the moon set, he said: "Unless may Lord guides me, I shall surely be among those who go astray." In these verses, Abraham observes the setting of celestial bodies, rejecting their evanescent ephemeral nature and ultimately turns towards the Absolute Truth, which is the eternal source of all. Similarly, as Twinch and Beneito observe in their introduction to Ibn

<sup>155</sup> Chodkiewicz, p. 79.

<sup>156</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, *Futûhât al-Makkiyya*, P. 340; CF. Ceelia Twinch and Baplo Beneito's introduction, and J.W. Morris, "Ibn 'Arabi's Spiritual Ascension", in M. Chodkiewicz, ed., *Les Illuminations de la Mecque*, P. 358.

<sup>157</sup> Ibn 'Arabi also uses the symbolism the "star" and "setting", echoing the first verse of *Surat al-Najm*: "By the star, when it sets", in another work of his, *Mawâqî' al-Nujûm*. This work is characterized by its enigmatic dense style in discussing the relationship between *shari'a* rules on the different parts of human body and the blessing that results from them. CF. Claude Addas, *The Voyage of No Return*, P. 67.



'Arabi's *Mashâhid*, the "detachment from everything transitory, and attachment only to the origin of all existence is an underlying theme of the contemplations, for, as Ibn 'Arabi says in his epilogue: 'The one who stays with the image is lost, and the one who rises from the image to the reality is rightly guided'."<sup>158</sup> The witness, that is Ibn 'Arabi, arrives to the conclusion that the world is nothing but an illusion, an imagination, and the real *wujûd* is God's only. This may be the same conclusion al-Ghazâli reached in interpreting the creed of *Tawhid*, 'there is no God but God', to signify that "there is nothing in *wujûd* but God."<sup>159</sup>

In terms of content, what we encounter in Ibn Arabi's early Maghribi writings may be considered similar themes to those in his later ones, *al-Futûhât al-Makkiyya* and *Fusûs al-Hikam*, for instance, the notions of prophetic inheritance, of sainthood and the Perfect Man, of *shuhûd* and God's self disclosure. Indeed, these Maghribi writings may be considered as being seminal to his later writings, for in them he expressed in synthetic form what he later elaborated in analytic form. In terms of style, *al-Mashâhid*, is an example of his Maghribi writings, it displays the same mastery of encompassing an infinitely detailed web of symbolic understandings of the Islamic scriptures and cosmology, but interpreted in a personalized fashion, which renders the work deeply personal and experiential, even when being elaborately cosmological and metaphysical.

Finally, *al-Mashâhid* reflects one of the rare spiritual sciences in the sciences of mysteries (علوم الأسرار). Only those mystics who have earned the station of sainthood (الصادقين), may be shown these sciences of mysteries. Of these, a disciple of the famous Sufi master, Abû Yazid al-Bistâmi said: "I have carried three hundred words taken from Abû Yazid to my grave, because I never found anyone worthy of them."<sup>160</sup> These *'ulûm al-asrâr* have also been alluded to by one of the famous Companions of the Prophet, Abû Hurayrah, who said: "I have treasured in my memory two stores of knowledge which I had from the

<sup>158</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, *Contemplation of the Holy Mysteries*, trans. Cecilia Twinch and Pablo Beneito, p. 3.

<sup>159</sup> William Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds* (New York, State University of New York, 1994), p. 16.

<sup>160</sup> Quote in Twinch and Beneito, *Contemplations*, p. 115.



Messenger of God. One of them I have made known, but if I divulged the other you would cut my throat."<sup>161</sup>

However, many Sufis, like Ibn 'Arabi, al-Niffari, Ibn Barrajan, Abû Musa al-Dubayli, attempted to reveal these secrets to those who are worthy of them. For these secrets, as Ibn 'Arabi points out, are not to be disclosed to anyone except those who are capable of receiving them, those who pursue serious seeking, passionate yearning, and submission of heart.<sup>162</sup> This brings us to Sitt 'Ajam, who a few decades later, and upon the request of Ibn 'Arabi himself, embarks on a lengthy interpretation of *al-Mashâhid*. According to her, he informed her in a dream vision, that the meaning of *al-Mashâhid* has not been unlocked yet, and conveyed to her that she is the only one capable of unlocking its mystery.<sup>163</sup> It is Sitt 'Ajam who will, as she claims, inherit *al-walâya* and becomes herself the Pole of her time (قطب الزمان), and who will present a full interpretation of *al-Mashâhid*, "complete with its meanings", and which "will be witnessed by both the predecessors and the successors, among the *'ârifin* and the *'ulama*."<sup>164</sup> As could be demonstrated from the dates of Sitt 'Ajam's copied manuscripts, her *Sharh al-Mashâhid* seems to have been already widely read among some Sufi circles during her life. There is evidence also that a continued interest in her commentary was shown among later Sufis, especially by the followers of Shaykh Abd al-Ghani al-Nabûlsi, who belonged to the *Akbari* school, and who seems to have read Sitt 'Ajam's commentary to his disciples in his private circle. This is evidenced from the *hâshiyya* (a commentary on the margin) which was written on the margins of one of Sitt 'Ajam's *Mashâhid* manuscripts. But this point will be further discussed later in a closer examination of Sitt 'Ajam's text. However, it is important to point out here, that although Sitt 'Ajam seems to have been one of Ibn 'Arabi's important

<sup>161</sup> Bukhari, *Ilm*, 42.

<sup>162</sup> Twinch and Beneito, *Contemplations*, p. 115.

<sup>163</sup> Sitt 'Ajam, *Sharh al-Mashâhid*, p. 3.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 410.



interpreters and transmitters of his teachings, she was given little attention in the more recent scholarly studies of Ibn 'Arabi's school of thought.

### Ibn 'Arabi's Interpreters

Ibn 'Arabi's thought is known to have had a great influence on the history of Islamic thought. This influence was tremendous from East to West, on the popular level as well as on the intellectual. As Chodkiewicz argues, "the age of Ibn 'Arabi must be regarded as the start of a new era,"<sup>165</sup> for that age is characterized by the production of Sufi theoretical frameworks and institutions (Sufi orders). It is Ibn 'Arabi who defined and synthesized many of the main concepts for later Sufi thinkers. His followers and, ironically, his opponents as well, such as Ibn Taymiyya, helped in the dissemination of his ideas. Ibn 'Arabi's legacy, as Alexander Knysh notes, remains "unchanged in different historical theological contexts."<sup>166</sup> Michel Chodkiewicz traces Ibn 'Arabi's influence, not only on the intellectual elite, but also in popular literature, to which writings like those of 'Abd al-Wahâb al-Sha'rânî (d. 1565) belong. Other Sufi writings were also influenced by the ideas of al-Shaykh al-Akbar, some of these include *Shams al-Ma'ârif* by al-Bunî, *Kitâb al-Ibrîz* by Ahmed ibn al-Mubârak, the disciple of the great illiterate (أُمِّي) saint, 'Abd al-'Azîz al-Dabbâgh (d. 1717), and the writings of the Moroccan Shâdhilî Shaykh, Ahmad ibn 'Ajîba (d. 1809). Needless to say, their writings must have contributed further to the dissemination of Ibn 'Arabi's thought.<sup>167</sup>

Ibn 'Arabi's influence also extended to Sufi schools in the Eastern parts of Dar al-Islam. Contemporary scholars, such as William Chittick,<sup>168</sup> James Morris,<sup>169</sup> and Jane Clark,<sup>170</sup> preferred to focus on Ibn 'Arabi's Persian school of thought, initially founded by Sadr al-Din

<sup>165</sup> Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, p. 10.

<sup>166</sup> Alexander D. Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition*, p. 5.

<sup>167</sup> Michel Chodkiewicz, *An Ocean Without Shore*, pp. 9-15.

<sup>168</sup> William Chittick, "Ibn 'Arabi's School of Thought," *Islamic Philosophy* ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 1999.

<sup>169</sup> James Morris, "Ibn 'Arabi's Interpreters," *JAOS* 106 (1986).

<sup>170</sup> Jane Clark, "Early Best Sellers in the Akbarian Tradition," *UK Symposium* (Worcester College, Oxford, May, 2002).



al-Qunawi (d. 1274), Ibn 'Arabi's step son and disciple. In fact, it is this branch of Ibn 'Arabi's school, beginning with the most important figure, al-Qunawi, who initiated the attempts to reconcile Sufism and Peripatetic philosophy, and whose main focus was on the Sufi notion of being (وجود). As Chittick argues, *wahdat al-wujûd*, a term first coined by al-Qunawi and his disciple Sa'd al-Dîn Farghânî (d. 1296), "was built from the word *wahda* (derived from the same root as *tawhîd*), the "assertion of unity" as the first principle in Islam, and from a second word that delineates the central concern of philosophy.... a synthesis of the religious and philosophical traditions."<sup>171</sup> Thus from early on, we find that Ibn 'Arabi's teachings were interpreted in later treatises outlining his philosophical doctrines. These kinds of writings, as Claude Addas points out, have contributed to transmitting Ibn 'Arabi's teachings to the Western audience interested in the legacy of Sufism. However, these Persian interpreters, from al-Qunawi to al-Qaysari, were as much influenced by the philosophical ideas of Avicenna, as they were influenced by Ibn 'Arabi's, and in time "they tended to freeze the teachings into a closed system."<sup>172</sup> As evidenced from the increasing number of recent scholarly studies, the philosophical bent of Ibn 'Arabi's Persian school of interpreters seems to have had more appeal among Western contemporary scholars.

Thus, while much attention by these contemporary scholars was given to the study of the Persian school, the writings of the Baghdadi Sufi woman, Sitt 'Ajam appear to have been ignored. I would like to argue that Sitt 'Ajam, being an early disciple of Ibn 'Arabi, succeeded in interpreting Ibn 'Arabi through close following of his own spirit which was, like hers, a 'free one'.

<sup>171</sup> William Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, p. 178, n. 1.

<sup>172</sup> Claude Addas, *The Voyage of No Return*, p. 81.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF SITT 'AJAM'S COMMENTARY

#### An Overview of the Commentary

Sitt 'Ajam's commentary is comprised of several parts: an introduction that includes an opening text (خطبة الكتاب), and which explains the intention behind writing her commentary; her interpretation of Ibn 'Arabi's preface to *al-Mashâhid*; her interpretation of Ibn 'Arabi's fourteen chapters of *al-Mashâhid* itself; and finally, a conclusion in which she refers to the Divine inspiration which enabled her to take on the task of writing the commentary. What is immediately noticeable about Sitt 'Ajam's commentary is that it is by much longer than Ibn Arabi's *Mashâhid* itself, and Ibn Sawdakîn's commentary of the same book.

Sitt 'Ajam opens with the traditional *khubta*, which normally offers odes of praise to God (الحمدلة), and eulogies to the Prophet (الصلوة). Historically, Muslim authors structured their *hamdalahs* and *sal'ama* in light of the themes discussed in their treatises. Their objective from such an exercise is to introduce the reader to the subject matter of their work, attributing it to the Divine Essence, which they view as encompassing all subject matters. Hence, they would emphasize particular Divine Names and attributes, as well as specific features of the Prophet that are pertinent and relevant to the issues at hand.

Sitt 'Ajam's *hamdalah* is a condensed metaphysical praising formula of Allah, one that is comprised of two related parts. The first part is an invocation and an explanation of four intimately related Divine Names, which seem to be central in terms of Sitt 'Ajam's commentary. Those Names include 'The First' (الأول), alluding to the Divine Essence in that state, which the Sufi tradition, refers to as the blind cloud (العماء) in which the Divine Essence exists prior to Its manifestation. Secondly, there is the Name, 'The Last' (الأخر), which complements the Name 'The First', alluding to the eternal nature of the Divine Essence.



Thirdly, there is the Name 'The Outward' (الظاهر), allug to the manifestation of the Divine Essence in all objects. Finally, there is the Name 'The Inward' (الباطن), which complements the Name 'The Outward', allug to the inner penetration of the Divine Essence into everything. Sitt 'Ajam refers to those four Divine Names as the Kings amongst the Divine Names (*al-Mulûk*). Their centrality in her commentary indicates that Sitt 'Ajam chose them as the most appropriate in interpreting the major concepts of Ibn 'Arabi's *Mashâhid*.

The Second part of her *Hamdalah* is concerned with praise in its eternal form (أزلي), one that is initiated, not in this world, but in that world in which the stage of the first witnessing (شهود) is witnessed. What is meant by the First witnessing (شهود) is the state of witnessing the Divine Essence, which humankind experienced upon creation, when Allah asked humankind Am I not Your Lord? (أأست بربكم), and humankind answered, yes indeed (لى). Sitt 'Ajam's emphasis on the concept of *shuhûd* in her *hamdalah* is but an introduction to the reader of its thematic centrality in her commentary.

As for Sitt 'Ajam's *salma'a*, it is also made up of two parts. The first part is a praise of the Prophet that conceptualizes him in his universal capacity. It emphasizes what Sufi literature refers to as the Muhammadan Reality (الحقيقة المحمدية), that reflects the human/Divine qualities related to the person of the Prophet, both in the previous heavenly life preceg his own physical and historical birth, as well as his birth in the world. The Muhammadan Reality is usually viewed by Sufis as the framework encompassing the Reality of realities, and thus the ultimate in realizing the potentialities of human perfection. As Laleh Bakhtiar explains:

Although the Prophet was the last prophet in the present cycle of existence, and is thereby known as the seal of prophecy, in essence he was the first. This refers us to a Tradition in which he says: I was the logos when Adam was between water and clay.<sup>173</sup>

<sup>173</sup> As Laleh Bakhtiar, *Sufi Expressions of the Mystic Quest*, p. 10.



In the second part of her *salma'a*, Sitt 'Ajam conceptualizes the Prophet as the first and last in the chain (سلسلة) of *walâya*. From here comes the notion of prophetic inheritance whereby, as mentioned earlier, the saint directly inherits his spiritual chain from the prophet. Moreover, just as she identifies the Prophet Muhammad as the Seal of Prophets, Sitt 'Ajam identifies Ibn 'Arabi as the Seal of Muhammadan Sanctity (خاتم الولاية المحمدية). Needless to say, giving the latter such a recognition in her *salma'a* demonstrates the exceptional status Sitt 'Ajam gives to Ibn 'Arabi.<sup>174</sup>

In her *khutba* Sitt 'Ajam also speaks about her own spiritual status, stressing the depth of her spiritual relation to Ibn 'Arabi, and asserting that she is a saint equal to the saints who came before her.<sup>175</sup> Furthermore, she stresses that in her capacity as an inheritor, God chose that she incarnates the model of Ibn 'Arabi's sainthood. As the following statement illustrates, Sitt 'Ajam seems to have been convinced that her relation to Ibn 'Arabi is characterized by a special kind of spiritual unity:

I examined closely his name and his biography (سيرته), as a way to draw from him the definition [for my state], and I found that the similarity between us, is in receiving the very same [quality of] *Hatimi* generosity (العطاء الحاتمي) that leads to attraction (جذب). This is so, despite the fact of not having the same state of distinction (حال عدم الخصوص), nor following the same path, nor the same life. Similarity is [only] that of character (الخلق) and of [divine] bestowal (الوهب), which is the privilege of the saints (الأولياء). Thus, his [Ibn 'Arabi's] luminous form (صورته النورانية) could not but witness the knowledge of union that exists between us.<sup>176</sup>

The *salma'a* is followed by Sitt 'Ajam's explanation of the intention behind writing her commentary. Here, she recounts that at some point in time, she had a vision in which she saw Ibn 'Arabi, where she asked him to transmit to her from his *walâya*. In response, Ibn 'Arabi extends to her his spiritual guidance, and prior to their separation, he asks her to unlock the mysteries of his work, *Mashâhid al-Asrâr*, for he considered her to be the only one who could

<sup>174</sup> Sitt 'Ajam, p. 4.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p. 3.



achieve this uneasy task. Sitt 'Ajam specifically mentions that her encounter with Ibn 'Arabi was witnessed by a group of prophets, as well as by Satan, who appeared to be at odds with both of them, and with those prophets who were present.<sup>177</sup>

This introductory section is followed by a selective interpretation of Ibn 'Arabi's preface to the *Mashâhid*. Perhaps the reason why her interpretation was of a selective nature is that she was solely concerned in interpreting only those points that may seem paradoxical.<sup>178</sup> Hence she overlooks those parts in his preface which she views as straightforward to the reader.

As for the remaining, and larger, part of the commentary, this is comprised of a thorough and detailed interpretation of Ibn 'Arabi's *Mashâhid*. Sitt 'Ajam devotes an interpretive chapter to every chapter of his *Mashâhid* in her commentary. Her textual structure is quite simple. Each one of the fourteen chapters begins with a quote of Ibn 'Arabi's text describing each *mashhad*, which is then followed by her own longer elucidations. Clearly, Sitt 'Ajam considered every line that Ibn 'Arabi wrote to be of paramount importance, making her interpretation not only worthwhile in and of itself, but also important for later examination by scholars.

The conclusion of Sitt 'Ajam's commentary is rather concise, it focuses on asserting her spiritual "credentials", especially those ones that would qualify her to write the commentary. In these concluding remarks, she reiterates her eligibility as a commentator, which makes it possible for her to tackle a work of such sophistication, as Ibn 'Arabi's *Mashâhid*. Given that she is a woman, it is almost as if she is anticipating possible contestations from her fellow male Sufis. However, she also insisted on adding the Divine factor; underlining that writing her commentary was based on Allah's choice, not on hers. For her, the Divine inspiration behind writing that commentary did not only induce her to embark

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p. 10.



on writing it, but it also inspired her all the way till she finalized it. That is why she considers the whole matter of writing her commentary as a Divine illumination (فتوح).<sup>179</sup>

In order to analyze some of the major themes in Sitt 'Ajam's text, I chose to use two relevant and intimately interrelated analytical categories, used by Sufi scholars such as M. Lings and T. Burckhardt in examining Sufi ideas. These are the interrelated concepts of 'doctrine' and 'method'.<sup>180</sup> 'Doctrine' may be defined as the theoretical formulation that describes the ultimate nature of reality, to which the seeker subscribes, whereas 'method' may be defined as those practical arrangements that are used by the seeker to experientially assimilate the particulars of the doctrine.

Sufi teaching is essentially concerned with what Sufis refer to as the Truth of Certainty, (حق اليقين). It is the stage to which the aspiring seeker finally arrives by attaining 'knowledge' or 'gnosis' (معرفة); herein the seeker, better still the gnostic, interacts with his Lord as if all the veils between them have vanished.<sup>181</sup> Lelah Bakhtiar explains the Truth of Certainty thus: "One who attains the Truth of Certainty is in the aspect of the Hidden, in which one relates inwardly from the body or form, through the soul, to the inmost center. The movement is through the contained (which exists between circumference and center) to the

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 409.

<sup>180</sup> The analytical categories of the "doctrine" and the "method" are employed by Martin Lings in his work, *What is Sufism*, as well as Titus Burckhardt in his work, *Introduction to Sufism*.

<sup>181</sup> The spiritual journey, properly speaking, takes place in the two preceding stages; the one immediately before the Truth of Certainty, which is referred to by Sufi Scholars as stage of "the Eye of Certainty (عين اليقين), to which the seeker arrives after having journeyed through a path of "love" (محبة); it is also known as the state of *iman*, because the seeker develops a voluntary and deep conviction about the unseen realities. Both the above stages are in fact transcendent to the first one, which Sufi scholars call the stage of "the Lore of Certainty (علم اليقين). The seeker at this stage gets the basic ammunition for the journey, which initially consists of a path of "fear" (مخافة); that is of purification and self-renunciation, on the one hand, and of perseverance in ceaseless spiritual practices, on the other hand. In this first stage, which is religiously known as the state of *islam*, the seeker comes to a disturbing awareness of the Divine Essence and its limitless greatness and so hastens to submit and surrender himself to his Lord.



Spirit or Secret (سر), the center of consciousness which is the point of contact between an individual and the Divine Principle."<sup>182</sup>

As mentioned above, the acquisition of 'doctrine', as a learning process, is intimately related to the practicing of 'method'. This is explained further by Bakhtiar as follows:

The gaining of doctrine is thus a centrifugal learning process, outward from the individual human form; the gaining of method is a centripetal learning process, which must actually be experienced in order that the knowledge gained through doctrine may come to illuminate. Through spiritual practices one gains concentrative contemplation and thereby discovers the inner microcosmic secret.<sup>183</sup>

Accordingly, the *shahâda* that all Muslims pronounce, "there is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah," may be said to reflect the acquisition of 'doctrine' and the practice of 'method'. The first part of the *shahâda* which constitutes the 'doctrine' refers to the Unity of Being, affirming the unity of the One and annihilating multiplicity. The second part refers to the concept of the Universal Prototype or the Perfect Man, affirming the concept of 'multiplicity in unity', since the Prophet is the point in which opposites unite. The Prophet represents the spiritual model of human perfection in which all forms are dissolved into the One Universal Reality.<sup>184</sup>

In terms of 'doctrine', Sitt 'Ajam's commentary focuses on the doctrine of the Uniqueness of Being (أحدية الوجود), a major theme which permeates her interpretative commentary. This mainly tackles the idea of the assimilation of the Divine attributes (الاتصاف) (بالصفات الإلهية), and the idea of sharing (اقتسام) the Divine Names, while elaborating on the ideas of the One and the many. In terms of 'method', Sitt 'Ajam makes use of the notion of the Perfect Man, where she illustrates the difference between sainthood (الولاية) and prophethood (النبوة), and where she concentrates on a thorough explanation of the process of witnessing (شهود), which is shared by both prophets and saints.

<sup>182</sup> Laleh Bakhtiar, *Sufi Expressions of the Mystic Quest*, p. 8.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 8. See also Martin Lings, *What is Sufism* (Cambridge, The Islamic Text Society, 1993), pp. 63-91.



*Sitt 'Ajam's Doctrine of Ahadiyyat al-Wujûd (Uniqueness of Being)*

Although Sitt 'Ajam does not specifically use the later Sufi term, *wahdat al-wujûd*, she uses a term that may come close to it: *ahadiyyat al-wujûd*. The same may apply to Ibn 'Arabi, who is considered by his followers to be the great spokesman of the notion of *wahdat al-wujûd*, despite the fact that the term itself was never literally used by him. It is argued that the first coinage of the term as such is attributed to al-Qunawi and was later disseminated by his disciple Sa'id al-Dîn Farghânî. In this connection Chittick argues:

In attempting to trace the history of this expression (وحدة الوجود), I found that Qunawi uses it on at least two occasions in his work, while his disciple Sa'id Al-Farghani (d. 1296) employs it many times. But neither uses the term in the technical sense that it gained in later centuries. At the same time, certain relatively peripheral members of Ibn Arabi's school, such as Ibn Sab'in (d. 1270) (writing in Arabic), and Aziz al-Nasafi (d. before 1300) (writing in Persian) were employing the term *wahdat al-wujûd* to allude to the Worldview of the sages and the Sufis. Then the Hanbalite Jurist Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), well known for his attacks on all schools of Islamic intellectuality, seized upon the term as a synonym for the well known heresies of "Unificationism" and "incarnationism" (اتحاد وحلول). From Ibn Taymiyya's time onward, the term *wahdat al-wujûd* was used more and more commonly to refer to the overall perspective of Ibn 'Arabi and his followers.<sup>185</sup>

Sitt 'Ajam, it may be argued, was one of the earliest followers of Ibn 'Arabi to systematically use a doctrinal term such as (أحدية الوجود) in a technical sense. Her contemporary al-Jandi (d. 1300), Qunawi's disciple, mentions the term *ahadiyyat al-wujûd* only once in his *sharh al-fusûs*, where he considers it as "the very essence of the purity in the creed of those who are of the crème de la crème" (عين صفاء خلاصة خاصة الخاصة).<sup>186</sup> According to Jandi, "commoners only profess to *Tawhîd*; the elite only profess to Oneness; the crème de la crème profess to Oneness in multiplicity; the elite amongst the crème de la crème profess to multiplicity in Oneness; The very essence of purity of the creed of the crème de la crème combines the last two witnessing [which is Uniqueness of Being]."<sup>187</sup> In the Twelfth Chapter of her commentary,

<sup>185</sup> William Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, p. 179, n. 1.

<sup>186</sup> Mu'ayyid al-dîn al-Jandi, *Sharh al-Fusûs* (Qum, Bustan Kitab, 2001), p. 274.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p. 274.



Sitt 'Ajam uses this term in order to explain the idea of Uniqueness (أحدية), and her perception of the Uniqueness of being. One of the interrelated ideas that Sitt 'Ajam develops in examining the notion of *ahadiyyat al-wujûd* is what she calls *al-ittisâf bi-sifât Allah* (assimilation of the Divine qualities). In explaining, this concept of *ittisâf*, she makes the following two statements: "I am assimilated to the totality of being" "إنني متصّف بمجموع الوجود", and "I am annihilated in the Essence of God" "أنا فان في ذات الله تعالى".<sup>188</sup> However, she emphatically asserts that this assimilation (إتصاف) cannot be revealed because it is inexpressible:

It [*al-ittisâf*] cannot be revealed since the listener will not understand it. The Perfect One may conceal it, because of the inadequacy of all expression, or because he has to be restricted in expression (شج), due to certain interests or fears. However, since he [the Perfect One] cannot veil the incoming revelations, he expresses them in an even more obscure form; therefore, people become more confused about them; thus it is preferable to conceal such things altogether.<sup>189</sup>

Moreover, Sitt 'Ajam uses the doctrine of *ahadiyyat al-wujûd* in interpreting Ibn 'Arabi's statement: "You are annihilated to yourself, but to me you are existent" "أنت عند نفسك فان وعندي",<sup>190</sup> by explaining that "the listener should not think that these are two contingent existents, but rather a One [non-dual] existent" (فلا يظن السامع أنهما وجودان محدثان، وإنما وجود واحد).<sup>191</sup> She also affirms her doctrine, that though there is One *wujûd*, the true source of this *wujûd* is the Divine Essence itself. This, she explains through use of paradoxes: "He is every thing and every thing is not Him" (هو كل شيء وكل شيء ليس هو);<sup>192</sup> "I am the world but the world is not Me" (أنا العالم والعالم ليس أنا);<sup>193</sup> "God completes every thing whereas they [things] do not complete Him" (الله تعالى يكمل الأشياء وهي لا تكمله).<sup>194</sup> In other words, Sitt 'Ajam argues that all

<sup>188</sup> Sitt 'Ajam, *Sharh Al-Mashâhid*, p. 228.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>190</sup> *Muhdath* is the opposite of *qadim* "eternal". *Muhdath* is translated by Chittick as "newly arrived" in the self Disclosure of God. Yet, Quran translators render it as "Fresh" (Arberry, Pickthall), "new" (Muhammad Ali, Pickthall), "recent" (Palmar), and "of late" (palmer). CF. William Chittick, *The Self Disclosure of God*, p. 35.

<sup>191</sup> Sitt 'Ajam, p. 38.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., p. 333.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., pp. 58, 266.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., p. 156.



things are God, if seen from the point of view of their 'essential reality', but God cannot be reduced to these things or beings if He is considered in the light of 'His infinity', for here their reality becomes 'nil'.<sup>195</sup> It may be argued that Sitt 'Ajam had a subtle and most probably an experiential understanding of the inner meaning of *ahadiyyat al-wujûd*. The latter should not be confused with pantheism, which "conceives the relationship between the Divine Principle and things from only one point of view, that of substantial or existential continuity, and this is an error which is explicitly refuted by every traditional doctrine."<sup>196</sup> According to Burckhardt, the continuity of the Divine Principle and things, or God and the world, is parallel to the symbolic relationship between a branch and the trunk, which is also an image that Ibn 'Arabi uses in his Twelfth Chapter of *al-Mashâhid*. Thus, it would be this continuity or unity that amounts to God. Burckhardt clarifies this point by stating "now it might be said that God is himself this continuity, or this unity, but in that case it would not be conceived of as outside Him, so that He is in reality beyond compare and therefore distinct from everything manifested, but without the possibility of anything being 'outside' or 'beside' Him."<sup>197</sup>

Sitt 'Ajam further investigates the doctrine of the Uniqueness of Being in light of degrees of existence (مراتب الوجود). In the light of this, we may understand Sitt 'Ajam's concept of "God's assimilation to delimitation" (اتصاف الله بالتقييد), which she explains as follows:

If (God) wanted to be assimilated to delimitation, He would turn deterministically, so that his Essence would manifest qualities or attributes (*sifât*) (تحصل لذاته صفات), and if (He) wants to manifest to these qualities, he would then make His light of Essence as a mirror and would look at it. So, the imprinted image would be the image of the witness, while the onlooker would be the image of the witnessed. However, in reality, there is neither witness nor witnessed. This manner of qualification (كيفية), which stems from delimitation (تقييد), necessitates two entities, 'you' and 'I', since it is an address between a quality (صفة) and a qualified (موصوف). But the reality of Uniqueness (أحدية)<sup>198</sup> nullifies all of this.

<sup>195</sup> Titus Burckhardt, *Introduction to Sufism*, trans. D.M. Matheson (London, Thorsons, 1995), p. 20.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>198</sup> Sitt 'Ajam, p. 336.



Sitt 'Ajam further explains that "even if the 'ârif is assimilated to (تصف) annihilation (فناء), it is not possible to refer to him as Allah [for the 'ârif is not there]. And although Allah is Absolute, He manifests through qualities that can determine Him with delimitation or relativization (تقييد)."<sup>199</sup> Sitt 'Ajam often uses the terms delimitation (تقييد) and absoluteness (طلاق) to explain Ibn 'Arabi's concepts of immanence (تشبيه) and transcendence (تنزيه). While acknowledging that "both manifested and non-manifested Being is nothing but Allah,"<sup>200</sup> Sitt 'Ajam still affirms the duality (ثنوية) between the gnostic witness and God, the witnessed, but she restricts this duality to the level of qualities (الصفات). The following statements are additional affirmations of her doctrine of *ahadiyyat al-wujûd*: "Real being is only that of Allah,"<sup>201</sup> "there is nothing in being except for the He-ness or the 'ipseity' of Allah (هوية),"<sup>202</sup> "I am One with no other, unique with neither differentiation in My Essence nor multiplicity."<sup>203</sup>

However, as is acknowledged by Sitt 'Ajam, Divine Reality also tends towards being assimilated in delimitation (الاتصاف بالتقييد). She attempts to explain the process by which the Unique Divine Reality becomes assimilated in delimitation, in other words, how the Unique Divine Essence becomes manifest and thus multiple. First of all, she perceives the Essence through two aspects: the Divine 'Me' (أنيّة), which is essentially One, and the Essence through the 'He-ness' (هوية) which becomes multiple. For According to her, "*huwiyyah* is not established except through multiplicity (الكثرة)."<sup>204</sup> Thus, it is from the 'He-ness' that the world emanates. But she also links the existence of the world with the Divine Name 'the Outward' (اقتسام الأسماء) (الظهور). Here, Sitt 'Ajam introduces her notion of sharing the Divine Names (اقتسام الأسماء) (الظهور), wherein she focuses on the four Divine Names mentioned earlier: 'The First', 'The

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., p. 337.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., p. 344.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., p. 338.



Last', 'The Outward', and 'The Inward'. These are given a central position in her overall ontological doctrine, hence she calls them "the King Names."<sup>205</sup> However, here she emphasizes one particular Divine Name, 'The Outward', which she considers to be responsible for multiplicity.<sup>206</sup> 'The Outward' also corresponds to the responsibility of Lordship "القيام بأعباء الربوبية".<sup>207</sup> And since the One is the source of the many, Sitt 'Ajam, following Ibn 'Arabi's theory of Divine Names, views the relationship between the Lord and the servant as a dialectical and inseparable one. Here she makes reference to Ibn 'Arabi's words in *Fusûs al-Hikam*: "If it was not for Him or for us, we would not be, nor would He be."<sup>208</sup>

Moreover, in the Twelfth Chapter, her notion of 'sharing the Divine Names' falls in line with Ibn 'Arabi's view that the human being shares the Divine Names and Qualities with God, thus, establishing the potential perfectibility of man. Since God created man in His image, man shares with God his attributes and qualities. Sitt 'Ajam explains the creative process in cyclical terms just as Ibn 'Arabi does, stating that creation starts with the will of God to manifest, moving from unity to multiplicity; the human being, through sharing God's attributes returns from multiplicity to unity.<sup>209</sup>

Furthermore, this reciprocity between God and the human being, the lord and the servant, manifests itself in Divinity which she discusses in the Eleventh Chapter. According to Sitt 'Ajam, Divinity is perceived by two aspects: Uniqueness (الأحدية), and Oneness (الواحدية). On the one hand, Uniqueness (الأحدية) corresponds to the Divine Essence in its unique state denying all multiplicity. On the other hand, Oneness (الواحدية) corresponds to the Divine Essence in its creative aspect, and the relationship between the Lord (الرب) and the servant (العبد), the One and the many. In this connection, Sitt 'Ajam, gives us a long account of a controversial question, which involved Shaykh Sa'd al-dîn al-Hamawi (d. 1252), who was a

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p. 316.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., p. 316.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., p. 256.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., pp. 362-363.



disciple of both Ibn 'Arabi and Najm al-dīn Kubra as well. Jandi (d.1300), who was the direct disciple of al-Qunawi, refers to Sa'd al-dīn al-Hamawi, in his commentary on Ibn 'Arabi's *Fusūs*, as *shaykh al-shuyukh* (the master of masters).<sup>210</sup> The issue that was in question between Sitt 'Ajam and al-Hamawi concerned God's image in Adam and Eve, and which of the two corresponds to Uniqueness or to Oneness. Shaykh Sa'd al-dīn al-Hamawi held that Adam (the masculine element) corresponds to God's manifestation of Uniqueness (الأحدية), while Eve (the feminine element) corresponds to God's manifestation of Oneness (الوحدية). Sitt 'Ajam, however, held the opposite view, and in defending her point of view she demonstrated her skill in use of speculative Sufi language. For her, Adam corresponds to God's manifestation of Oneness (الوحدية), whereas Eve [the female element] is God's manifestation of *al-ahadiyya*. She bases her argument on the Prophetic hadith that states: "God has created Adam upon His own image." The image or the form, as she argues, is by definition, a delimitation.<sup>211</sup> And given that Oneness (الوحدية) is of the Names of delimitation, while Uniqueness (الأحدية) is of the Names of absoluteness, Adam becomes God's manifestation of Oneness (الوحدية), and Eve becomes God's manifestation of Uniqueness (الأحدية).<sup>212</sup> She further explains that, when Adam was created delimitation was manifest and absoluteness was hidden and even nonexistent, thus Adam is the image of Oneness. Eve, on the other hand, is the image of Uniqueness because when God created Adam and Eve, both of His attributes, absoluteness and delimitation, were manifest.<sup>213</sup> According to Sitt 'Ajam, given that Uniqueness contains at once absoluteness and delimitation, it follows that Eve would correspond to the Divine aspect of Uniqueness. Moreover, she argues that the Essence (الأحد) is feminine, and that Eve was created after perfection.<sup>214</sup> Sitt 'Ajam hence concludes that, Adam is the image of Oneness, since he only represents delimitation, whereas Eve is the

<sup>210</sup> Mu'ayyad al-dīn al-Jandi, *Sharh Fusūs al-Hikam*, p. 123.

<sup>211</sup> Sitt 'Ajam, p. 355.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., p. 355.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., p. 355.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., p. 355.



image of Uniqueness, for she is both the image of delimitation and absoluteness. In Sitt 'Ajam's words, "Eve's form is delimited, but her meaning is absolute."<sup>215</sup>

In Ibn 'Arabi's writings, the feminine element appears to be an integral part of his ontological thought. To begin with, Ibn 'Arabi speaks of two categories, the female element (Eve) which is maternal, and the Feminine essence (الذات) which is virginal. Ibn 'Arabi's view of the female element of Reality is well established in his last chapter of *al-Fusûs*, the Bezel of Muhammad. He bases his chapter on the Prophetic hadith: "Three things of this world have been made lovable to me, women, perfume, and prayer."<sup>216</sup> Ibn 'Arabi explains that the Prophet, by using the triad form, gives precedence to the feminine gender as the masculine term, perfume, is placed between the two feminine terms, prayer and woman.<sup>217</sup> Ralph Austin's discussion of this placing of the masculine between the two feminine elements may be relevant here:

Man is between the Divine Essence (feminine) from which he comes, and the human woman who comes from him. One might go on to say that this microcosmic triad is indeed a reflection of a greater one, namely one in which Allah, the creating God, the first and supreme Name, is between his own secret Essence which, from its eternal treasury of latency, provides Him with the content of His knowledge of Himself as creation and created Cosmos. And the world which comes from Him; or between His own latent wisdom, Sophia, and Universal Nature which is the theatre of His infinite Self-manifestation and elaboration. Thus, both microcosmically and in divinis man is in the first instance and the worshiped God in the second, look upon two objects both regarded as symbolically feminine, the one inner and essential, a hidden and secret mystery, the treasure of being, the other outward, apparently other and multiple, both of them providing a mirror to the observing subject, as also to each other, the one showing the reflection of potential illusion in the mirror of essential reality, the reflection of reality in the mirror of apparent illusion, the one summoning to the isolation of uniqueness and peerlessness, the other to cosmic plurality and relativity. Also, at the divine level, both objects symbolize Infinitude, the one of infinite vitality, latent and essential, the other of infinite actuality and becoming. What is established by this remarkable equation is that while the feminine is indicative of object and also of Infinitude, the observed, witnessed and known, whether inwardly or outwardly, the masculine is indicative rather of the observing subject, whether divine or human, the

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., p.355.

<sup>216</sup> Al-Nisâ'i, *Bab Hubb al-Nisâ'*, 3949.

<sup>217</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, *Fusûs al-Hikam* (Iraq, *Dar al-thaqafa*, n.d), p. 218.



focus of consciousness, awareness and identity, of Absolute Truth rather than Infinite life and experience.<sup>218</sup>

As Seyyed Hossien Nasr explains, the masculine aspect of the Divine is the one who is responsible for creation and revelation, whereas "the non-manifesting aspect of Divinity is seen as having a feminine character, the Divine Essence itself in Arabic being *al-Dhât* which is grammatically feminine."<sup>219</sup> Moreover, in Sufi literature, *al-Dhât* is often referred to as Layla which means "night" and has the connotation of the dark and mysterious, echoing the Song of Songs "black but beautiful". Shaykh al-'Alawî, an Akbari Sufi saint of the twentieth century, expresses this idea in his poem:

Full near I came unto where dwelleth *Layla* when I heard her call. That voice, would I might even hear it! She favored me, and drew me to her, took me, into her precinct, with discourse intimate addresses me. She sat me by her, then come closer, raised the cloak that hid her from me, marvel to distraction, bewildered me with all her inmost self, until I thought that she was I, And my life she took as ransom.<sup>220</sup>

It is this hidden aspect of the Divine metaphorically referred to as *Layla* that Sitt 'Ajam alludes to, and sees as corresponding to *al-ahadiyya*. However, seen from another point of view, it may be argued that the masculine element corresponds to that Divine aspect which excludes all otherness, whereas femininity corresponds to expansion. Eve (حواء) in the Arabic language derives from the verb, to encompass. Therefore, infinitude (the maternal feminine element) has within itself potentialities of creation. I believe, it is this dimension of Reality that Sa'd al-dîn al-Hamawi underlines when he argues that: Adam is the image of *al-ahadiyya* that excludes all otherness, while Eve is the image of *al-wâhidiyya*, encompassing all potentialities of creation.

It should be noted that Adam and Eve are here used as symbols to express certain levels of Reality, however, as Lings argues "there is no single symbol which can possibly

<sup>218</sup> R. W. J. Austin, "The Feminine Dimensions in Ibn 'Arabi's Thought," *Journal of Muhiyy al-dîn Ibn 'Arabi's Society* (V. 11, n. 18, 1987), p. 7.

<sup>219</sup> Seyyed Hossien Nasr, "God: The Reality to Serve, Love, and Know," *Sophia* (V. 6, N.2, Winter, 2000), p. 83.

<sup>220</sup> Martin Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century: Shaikh Ahmad al-'Alawi: His Spiritual Heritage and Legacy* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1973), p. 229.



reflect all aspects of its Archetype."<sup>221</sup> Moreover, he argues that the nature of the symbol is "by definition fragmentary in that it can never capture all the aspects of its archetype. What escapes it in this instance is the truth that the center is infinitely greater than the circumference. It therefore needs to be complemented at the back of our minds by another circle whose centre stands for this world and whose circumference symbolizes the All-Surrounding Infinite."<sup>222</sup>

From the above, one can argue that the symbol of Adam and Eve may be equally inverted. Hence, Adam may be seen as a symbol of *al-ahadiyya* as Sa'd al-dīn Hamawi holds, for he sees the matter in the light of absoluteness and transcendence. On the other hand, Sitt 'Ajam inverts the symbol when she argues instead, that Adam is the image of *wāhidiyya*, and the source of manifestation and creation. As for al-Hamawi, he considers Eve as the image of *al-wāhidiyya* in light of her maternal infinitude, while Sitt 'Ajam considers Eve as the image of *al-ahadiyya* in light of her virginal infinitude.

What is interesting here is to observe the difference in interpreting Ibn 'Arabi's view of *al-Dhāt* which he refers to as 'She' (هي), and whom he considers to be greater than 'He' (هو).<sup>223</sup> Here we have two Akbari disciples interpreting the Divine essence in different terms. Sa'd al-dīn al-Hamawi stresses the aspect of maternal infinitude which is outwardly radiating, whereas Sitt 'Ajam stresses the aspect of virginal infinitude, which is the deepest inward dimension of *al-Dhāt*. The question that may be raised here is, whether their variant interpretations have to do with gender difference.

<sup>221</sup> Martin Lings, *Symbol and Archetype: A study of the Meaning of Existence* (Cambridge, Quinta Essentia, 1991), p. 7.

<sup>222</sup> Martin Lings, *What is Sufism* (Cambridge, The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), p. 22.

<sup>223</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, *Fusūs al-hikam*, p. 22.



### *The Universal Prototype as Sitt 'Ajam's Method*

The Perfect Man, the Universal Prototype, is the one who becomes aware of the potentialities that exist within him, and who then proceeds to spiritually actualize them. The Prophet, who constitutes the second part of *al-shahâda*, serves as the spiritual model in which opposites unite. He represents "the place of gathering of all those universal and particular forms and meanings which are displayed throughout the universe."<sup>224</sup> Sitt 'Ajam's notion of the Universal Prototype is inextricably linked to the concept of witnessing (شهود), since this universal prototype is the very locus (محل) wherein *shuhûd* is actualized. I shall first examine Sitt 'Ajam's notion of the Universal Prototype in light of 'Afifi's classification of the different categories in Ibn 'Arabi's idea of the Logos. 'Afifi divides the Logos into three aspects: the metaphysical aspect, signifying the Reality of realities (حقيقة الحقائق); the mystical aspect, signifying the reality of Muhammad (الحقيقة المحمدية); and the perfected human aspect, signifying the Perfect Man (الإنسان الكامل).<sup>225</sup> With regards to the first aspect, the Reality of realities, Sitt 'Ajam explains this process as follows: "Ever since light has manifested, delimited beings became distinguished... This light rent asunder the seamless tissue of the 'blind cloud' (هذا النور فاتق رتق العماء)."<sup>226</sup> This explanation seems to echo Ibn 'Arabi's notion of God as the Self-revealing principle of the universe, and God manifesting Himself as universal consciousness.<sup>227</sup>

In terms of the mystical aspect, the reality of Muhammad, Sitt 'Ajam explains the process of the first manifestation of God, by means of using the metaphysical symbol of the mirror. She argues that, "the first distinguisher in the mirror, which is [basically] light, is [God's] delimited image as an impression. The impressed (المنطبع) is then the image of the

<sup>224</sup> Laleh Bakhtiar, *Sufi Expressions of the Mystic Quest*, p. 10.

<sup>225</sup> A.E. Afifi, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyid Ibn 'Arabi* (Lahore, SH. Mohammad Ashraf, 1979), pp. 70 – 98.

<sup>226</sup> Sitt 'Ajam, p. 28.

<sup>227</sup> A. E. Afifi, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyid Ibn 'Arabi*, pp. 68-73.



gnostic (العارف).<sup>228</sup> This seems to tally with Burckhardt's explanation of that Sufi symbol: "The mirror is the most immediate symbol of spiritual contemplation [or witnessing], and indeed of knowledge (gnosis) in general, for it portrays the union of the subject and object."<sup>229</sup> It is important to mention here that the symbol of the mirror was already used by many Sufis before Sitt 'Ajam. Shihab al-dîn Yahia al-Suhrawardi of Aleppo (d.1191), known as al-Suhrawardi *al-maqtûl* and the master of the philosophy of illumination, used the mirror as an important symbol in his philosophy of light. He explains that when the seeker journeys in the path of the Self, he comes to know that he has the entire world contained within him. Thus, he views himself as the mirror reflecting all "eternal prototypes that appear as ephemeral forms."<sup>230</sup> He, then, comes to the conclusion that "he himself has no existence; his 'I' disappears as the subject, and only God remains as the Subject of all knowledge."<sup>231</sup> In his *Fusûs*, Ibn 'Arabi also explains the metaphysical symbol of the mirror in the experience of *shuhûd* as follows: "God is the mirror in which thou seest thyself, and thou art His mirror in which He contemplates His names. There however are naught other than He, so that it is merely a case of the analogy of relationships being inverted."<sup>232</sup>

While it is clear that Sitt 'Ajam was highly influenced by Ibn 'Arabi's ideas, it is also easy to demonstrate that she was equally versed in the theosophical vocabulary of the Sufi tradition in general. Following the Sufi theosophical views, Sitt 'Ajam recognizes that the symbol of the Universal Prototype, or the Logos is not simply limited to the historical phenomenon of the Prophet Muhammad. In fact, throughout the whole of her commentary, Sitt 'Ajam refers only twice to the Muhammadan Reality (الحقيقة المحمدية). She refers to it first when she is interpreting Ibn 'Arabi's preface *Risâla fî-l-walâya*, where she equates the

<sup>228</sup> Sitt 'Ajam, p. 336.

<sup>229</sup> Titus Burckhardt, *Mirror of the Intellect*, trans. William Stoddart (Cambridge, Quinta Essentia, 1987), p. 117.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., p. 122. CF Ibn 'Arabi, *Fusûs al-Hikam*.



Muhammadan Reality to the Prophetic reality in general, since, as she says, "sanctity applies to all of the prophets."<sup>233</sup> The second instance, in which she mentions the Muhammadan Reality, is when she stresses the special status that the Prophet Muhammad has among other prophets. Here, she interprets the Prophetic hadith, "I have been given the all-encompassing words" (أوتيت جوامع الكلم) as follows: "No prophet has combined sciences as much as this magnanimous Prophet for his manifestation is a compassionate one (رحماني), since the [Divine] Name the Compassionate follows the [Divine] Name the Omniscient."<sup>234</sup> Once again, this is in agreement with Ibn 'Arabi's view, since he holds that the difference between the reality of Muhammad and the rest of the prophets and saints is like that between the whole and its parts; the Prophet unites in himself what exists in each of them separately.<sup>235</sup> In the same vein of thought, Sitt 'Ajam argues that: "The Prophet is unique in that his message is universal. His uniqueness is incomparable, since the rest of the Prophets are unique in one way but not the other; hence, their messages were not universal. This [Prophet] is unique in that he combines all paths; thus, his message is for all people."<sup>236</sup>

Finally, the third aspect of the perfected human, the Perfect Man, perceives every human soul to possess the potential of becoming the Logos. According to Sitt 'Ajam, the gnostic (العارف) is consumed in the form of Prophet the Muhammad, since his reality stems from the Muhammadan reality.<sup>237</sup> However, although she believes that saints partake of the qualities of the prophets by inheritance, she distinguishes between the saint (ولي) and the prophet (النبى) or الرسول (messenger). She explains: "Saints draw (يستمدون) from the essence of prophetic qualities. However, they are distinguished by something; the distinction of the *wali* differs from that of the messenger, since they [the prophets] are distinguished by the attribute

<sup>233</sup> Sitt 'Ajam, p. 10.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>235</sup> A.E. Afifi, p. 74.

<sup>236</sup> Sitt 'Ajam, p. 74.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., p. 77.



of delimitation, whereas the *wali* is distinguished by the attribute of absoluteness."<sup>238</sup> She asserts that, "without any fear or complicity on our part with undeclared opinions, prophets stand as the givers, while saints stand as the receivers."<sup>239</sup> However, she also adds that the gnostic may also realize the inward essence of prophethood in the full sense, for she tells us that she herself has "realized [the qualities of the prophets] and entered therein with them, putting everything in its place, and recognizing the manner in which we may differentiate between sainthood and prophethood."<sup>240</sup> Therefore, she concludes that, "the condition of the gnostic is one of servitude (عبودية), permissibility (إباحة), and empowerment (تمكين), whereas that of the messenger is one of particularity (خصوص), stemming only from power (قوة), and irresistible domination (قهر), voluntarily and involuntarily."<sup>241</sup> Finally, Sitt 'Ajam concludes that the prophets or specifically as she prefers to refer to them as messengers signifying their outward mission, are privileged with the attribute of delimitation whereas saints are specified with the attribute of absoluteness. "These two attributes contradict each other", Sitt 'Ajam holds and "no one knows this except for the Perfect One in his age."<sup>242</sup>

Viewing the *'arif* or the Perfect Man as one who could draw from the prophets and realize their spiritual station, Sitt 'Ajam believes that the Perfect One or the *'arif's* image comprises "the totality of being (مجموع الوجود)."<sup>243</sup> She also asserts that, if the *'arif* exists, being must exist also.<sup>244</sup> The Perfect One, in her point of view, "is an intermediary between Allah and the world, since he acts like the sun through which Allah supplies the world with light."<sup>245</sup> The same idea is found in Ibn 'Arabi's concept of the Perfect One, or the Pole (قطب) in the mystical hierarchy, who is the Spiritual Head of the hierarchy of prophets and saints, as

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., pp. 271-272.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., p. 272.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., p. 272.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., p. 272.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., p. 272.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., p. 286.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., p. 286.



well as the intermediary level between the Godhead and the phenomenal world.<sup>246</sup> According to Sitt 'Ajam, the vicegerency that characterizes the Perfect One is the "carrying of the burdens of being"<sup>247</sup> since "everything in its totality rotates around him [*al-'ârif*]."<sup>248</sup> The Perfect One realizes within himself the status of the *Qutb* around whom all creation turns. This notion of the *qutbiyya* of the Perfect One has gained prominence among Sufi thinkers, with which Sitt 'Ajam seems to be familiar.

Moreover, Sitt 'Ajam asserts that whenever the Perfect One or the *'ârif* is seen or witnessed, it is as if *Allah's* face is being witnessed. This is "because the form or the body of the gnostic (*جثة العارف*) is a summation of totality (*مختصر من المجموع*), since it is the image in which [*Allah*] descends in the worldly heaven."<sup>249</sup> And since the *'ârif* is the image of *Allah*,<sup>250</sup> based on the Prophetic *hadith* that says that 'God created Adam upon His Form', "there can be only one imprinted image; hence, there can be no more than one referred to as the Perfect One."<sup>251</sup> This Perfect One is the one who, through the experience of *shuhûd*, actualizes the image of *Allah*.

<sup>246</sup> A.E. Afifi, p. 74.

<sup>247</sup> Sitt 'Ajam, p. 133.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., p. 384.



### Sitt 'Ajam's *Shuhûd* as a Method

Sitt 'Ajam explains the experience of *shuhûd*, in both a detailed and experiential manner, rich in technical terms, some of which may be considered innovative. She asserts that the experience of witnessing (شهود) is based essentially on what she calls divestiture (خلع).<sup>252</sup> She explains this experientially as, "the stripping off of the outward body without pain, in a state between death and wakefulness."<sup>253</sup> In this connection, Abu Bakr Siraj al-dîn, makes the observation that: "When Moses reached the burning bush, his extinction in the Truth of certainty is represented by his taking off his sandals, that is, by removing the very basis of his apparent existence, apart from the Creator, in the two created worlds, Heaven and earth."<sup>254</sup>

Sitt 'Ajam gives us additional explanations of the experience of *shuhûd* by arguing that this divestiture (خلع) is actualized by means of a "Divine attraction (جذبة إلهية)," or by a "human volition (إرادة) to depart from orary life (الحياة المعهودة)," till the witness reaches the state of staying in the image (القيام في الصورة)" which leads him to the inner world, until such a time when he is granted life's very secret (سر الحياة)."<sup>255</sup> In further exploring the experience of *shuhûd*, Sitt 'Ajam does so by pointing to the textual description of Ibn 'Arabi's experience of witnessing in *al-Mashâhid*: "He made me witness" أشهدني as He awakened my consciousness by an increase of awareness regarg the inward dimension, so I witnessed Him therein."<sup>256</sup>

Moreover, she classifies the experience of *shuhûd* into three experiential states: The first state is gazing (الإطلاع) or "looking at God," which she defines as "what limits the perception in a near location."<sup>257</sup> The second state is stopping (الوقفة), which she defines as "looking for a glimpse," however this is a brief experience due to its limited horizon.<sup>258</sup> As for

<sup>252</sup> Abu Baker Siraj al-dîn states that "to have been divested of all 'otherness' is to have attained the degree of Universal Man (الإنسان الكامل), who is also called the Sufi," in Abu Baker Siraj al-dîn, *The Book of Certainty* (Cambridge, The Islamic Texts Society, 1996), p. 2.

<sup>253</sup> Sitt 'Ajam, p. 27.

<sup>254</sup> Abu Baker Siraj al-dîn, *The Book of Creatiny*, p. 2.

<sup>255</sup> Sitt 'Ajam, p. 27.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid, p. 25.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., p. 26.



the third state, which is the highest, she refers to as جری (to run back and forth). Sitt 'Ajam defines this last state as "the penetration from one witnessing (شهود) to another in one divestiture (خلع)."<sup>259</sup> This ability to run back and forth, she tells us, makes the horizon of the *'ârif* a dynamic, rather than a static one. Hence, the *'ârif*, at this stage of *shuhûd*, encompasses all of the Divine Names and Qualities. It is important to underline here that the concepts of *jary* and *khal'* seem to be used by Sitt 'Ajam in an experiential manner, for she explains them in a way as if to suggest that she has experienced them herself. She also stresses that the place of this witnessing is the heart of the *'ârif* who is the witness, for it is the heart that plays the role of the mirror. The more the mirror of the heart is polished, the better chance the witness may have, to become one with the witnessed.

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid., p. 26.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUG REMARKS

As we have seen earlier, Sitt 'Ajam's commentary is characterized by its highly complex metaphysical and experiential language. In her commentary, she tends to systematically discuss every point in the *Mashâhid* quite thoroughly. She tends to define every term used by Ibn 'Arabi in a manner conducive to his and her purposes. She even coins new terms in order to express certain ideas or to define a particular concept, as she did with the experience of *shuhûd*. In her interpretation of this experience, as mentioned above, she divides it into three states: (وقفه), (اطلاع) and finally (جري), reflecting her deep and intimate knowledge of this mystical experience. We can argue that Sitt 'Ajam's commentary of the *Mashâhid* seems to be accomplished in light of her own mystical experience of *shuhûd*. This is reflected in the many instances where she refers to her own experiences, which were also described in her earlier work *al-Khatm*. For instance, in her Twelfth Chapter entitled Uniqueness (الأحدية), she tells us that Allah has actually manifested to her in the station of Majesty (مقام الجلالة). What is significant, however, in Sitt 'Ajam's experiential methodology is that she writes a commentary of a text written by another author, but which is partly accomplished in the light of her own subjective experience. The details that she provides in her interpretation of *al-Mashâhid* indicate that she has actually been through the exigencies of the subjective experience of *shuhûd*. Herein, lies the difficulty of interpreting a kind of text such as the *Mashâhid*. In contrast to Ibn 'Arabi's *Fusûs*, which is more of a theoretical treatise, Ibn 'Arabi's *Mashâhid*, is more about the inner mystical experiences of his *shuhûd*. The former may be considered as a treatise of doctrine, the latter as treatise of method. Thus, even in Ibn 'Arabi's *Mashâhid*, the language appears in certain places incapable of incarnating the meaning. Hence, when Sitt 'Ajam makes an attempt to interpret it, she does so in what appears to be a subjective manner resulting in some instances to more obscurity. However, though the



language of Ibn 'Arabi was exceedingly condensed and cryptic, Sitt 'Ajam tended to be more generous in explaining the inner states of the witnessing experience, whatever subtle nuances and difficult shifts it may take. As she seems to insinuate, this interpretation derives from her own mystical experience, and therefore, it is a hermeneutic through experiential knowledge: "If it was not for inheritance (وراثة) and gift (وهب), we would not have been able to solve this book"<sup>260</sup>, "We follow the path of the preceding saints such as Ibn 'Arabi and his like"<sup>261</sup>, "The like of this witnessing happened to me and I have wrote it down in the book of *Khatm*.. Allah has said to me :I am the world and the world is not Me"<sup>262</sup>, or when she says in the Twelfth Chapter that:" We experience this kind of this witnessing so often."<sup>263</sup> Such statements help us to understand some of Sitt 'Ajam's interpretive methods in explaining her doctrine.

Sitt 'Ajam seems to put herself on equal par with her own master. And while she gives Ibn 'Arabi a very high spiritual status, describing him as "the Great Name of Allah in *wujûd*", she does not hesitate to criticize, or differ with him.<sup>264</sup> In her Twelfth Chapter, entitled Uniqueness (الأحدية), she disagrees with Ibn 'Arabi on how he views the relationship between the Lord (الرب) and the servant (*al-'abd*). Thus, whereas Ibn 'Arabi defines this relationship as one of bong (ارتباط), Sitt 'Ajam gives preference to using the term union (اتحاد) instead. As she says in her own words, "We have spoken from the point of view of Reality, and this witness [Ibn 'Arabi] has spoken from the point of view of the Outward... However, the Reality we mean is not hidden from him."<sup>265</sup> She also criticizes Ibn 'Arabi in two other instances. In the first, she declares that Ibn 'Arabi's statement is invalid regarding his differentiation between the inheritors (الوارثون) and the gnostics (العارفون), since she believes that "the gnostic cannot

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., p. 245.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., p. 356.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., p. 237.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., p. 362.



be considered as such, unless he is an inheritor."<sup>266</sup> However, as has been discussed earlier, Ibn 'Arabi refers to those who return (الراجعون) as being both gnostics (عارفون) and the 'ulama. But whereas the 'ârifun are those who come back for their own sake, the 'ulama are those who come back for others; thus, for him, the 'ulama only are the inheritors.<sup>267</sup> The second instance, where Sitt 'Ajam criticizes Ibn 'Arabi is in the first chapter of her commentary, here she asserts that his statement regarding the Divine Name, 'The Truth' or 'the Real' (الحق), as a Divine Quality, is "erroneous, as it is meant to conceal [a certain reality], either out of fear or out of a wish to make it mysterious."<sup>268</sup> Instead, she considers *al-Haqq* as a Name for the Essence that could be used interchangeably with Allah.<sup>269</sup> It is interesting to note here that Shaykh 'Abd al-Ghani al-Nâbulsi, in his *hâshiyah* (marginal commentary) on Sitt 'Ajam's commentary, criticizes in turn her critical views on Ibn 'Arabi, and argues instead, that it is Sitt 'Ajam's views that are erroneous.

As a Sufi thinker in her own right, Sitt 'Ajam expressed critical views of some of the Sufis in her own times. She holds that she is the only one who knows the meanings of the *Mashâhid*, whereas others only undeservedly allege that they do so.<sup>270</sup> She even criticizes Shaykh Sa'd al-dîn al-Hamawi who is known to be a disciple of Ibn 'Arabi and of Najm al-dîn Kubra. As we have seen, in the Eleventh Chapter, she points out her differences with him regarg the symbolic reality of Eve and Adam, in terms of which of them correspond to the two Divine Names, Uniqueness (الأحدية) and Oneness (الوحدية). In defence of her view, Sitt 'Ajam, does not hesitate to tells us: "I have never considered him [Sa'd al-dîn al-Hamawi] as one of the perfected ones."<sup>271</sup> Her statement indicates that she was convinced that he was not qualified to have a thorough grasp of the question raised.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>267</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, *Futûhât*, vol. 2, p. 318.

<sup>268</sup> Sitt 'Ajam, p. 28.

<sup>269</sup> Martin Lings, *What is Sufism*, p. 64.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., p. 355.



From the above, it may be argued that Sitt 'Ajam stood on her own grounds in the views she expounded in her commentary on the *Mashâhid*. Indeed, it could be safely argued that even though Sitt 'Ajam is a follower of Ibn 'Arabi, she remains an independent thinker. She holds that, "We are privileged with خلافة (vicegerency), مقابلة (correspondence), مماثلة (likeness), اقتسام (sharing) and اتصاف (assimilation), to the exclusion of servants other than us."<sup>272</sup> This independence may be due to her adoption of *ta'wîl* as her methodology. Generally, the Sufi literary tradition is known for its preference to use esoteric language. Sufis distinguish between two kinds of interpretation, the outward (ظاهري) and the inward (باطني), which they base on the prophetic hadith: "Every verse has an external aspect and an inner aspect: every letter has its limited, definite sense; and every definition sense implies a place of ascent."<sup>273</sup> Thus, on the one hand, we have *tafsîr*, derived from the root: *fassara*, which means to explicate, and is considered the outward interpretation. On the other hand, we have *ta'wîl*, derived from the root *awwala*, which means to interpret, and is considered the inward interpretation. According to Henri Corbin, *ta'wîl* is "the intuition of an essence or a person in an Image which partakes neither of universal logic nor of sense perception, and which is the only means of signifying what is to be signified."<sup>274</sup> In light of this definition, Sitt 'Ajam adopts Ibn 'Arabi's own methodology of *ta'wîl*, shattering the rigidities of his interpreters, so as to extricate new meanings for Ibn 'Arabi's *Mashâhid*, based on her own metaphysical understanding, as well as her mystical experience. Thus, in contrast to Ibn Sawdakîn's commentary, which is mostly a exegetical one (تفسيري), Sitt 'Ajam's Commentary may be viewed as a interpretational one (تأويلي). This distinction may correspond to the comparison which Hans-Georg Gadamer draws between exegesis and interpretation, as two quite distinct enterprises in dealing with a text. To Gadamer, exegesis presupposes that there is but a single

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., p. 272.

<sup>273</sup> Cf. Oaima Abou-Baker, "The Symbolic Function of Metaphor in Medieval Sufi Poetry: The Case of Shushtari *Alif*" (1992):41.

<sup>274</sup> Henri Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1969). p. 13



certain meaning of a text of an author of rank, which may be discovered by applying a set of rules. Interpretation on the other hand denies that there is any single, univocal meaning of a text, and is rather concerned with understanding the meaning of a body of writing in the terms of the interpreter's own experience.<sup>275</sup> Sitt 'Ajam, however, does not wish to do away with Ibn 'Arabi's textual subjectivity, but one may argue that she wants to be true to the *Mashâhid*, while at the same time maintaining her own experiential interpretation of it. This she attempts to do, by appealing to the common referent of both her experience and to that of the interpreted text.

To conclude, Sitt 'Ajam was both a learned metaphysician as well as a mystic. On one level, she successfully explains the metaphysical principles of Sufi doctrine in general terms, and that of Ibn 'Arabi in specific terms. On another level, she interprets the metaphysical doctrines through her own mystical experience. Nonetheless, her hermeneutics is not merely governed by phenomena, following only her own inspiration. Rather, she reconciles her own mystical experience (method) with her thorough knowledge of the metaphysical doctrines of the Sufi tradition of her times. In Ibn 'Arabi's terms, Sitt 'Ajam's 'sensorial revelation' (الكشف الحسى) actualizes her 'imaginal revelation' (الكشف الخيالى). In his *Risâlat al-anwâr*, Ibn 'Arabi states that, "If you preoccupy yourself with remembrance (الذكر), you will move from 'the sensual revelation' to 'the imaginal revelation' and meanings pertaining to the intellect (المعانى العقلية) will descend on you in sensorial forms (الصور الحسية); this is a difficult descent .... Only a prophet or a man of truth (صديق) may know [such an experience]."<sup>276</sup> I believe that Sitt 'Ajam was one of those who, as we have already shown, realizes meanings pertaining to the intellect in sensual forms. Ibn 'Arabi in *Al-Tadbirât al-ilâhiyya* discusses these two kinds of revelations and refer to them as the 'sensual presence' (الحضرة الحسية) and 'the Heart

<sup>275</sup> See Hans-Gregor Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Weinsheimer and Donald

Marshall (Continuum, 1987).

<sup>276</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, *Al-Isfar 'an risalat al-anwâr fi ma yatajalla li-ahl al-dhikr min anwâr* (Beirut, Dar al-kutub al-'ilimiyya, 2004), p.112.



presence' (الحضرة القلبية).<sup>277</sup> *Al-hadra al-hissiyya* is characterized by being obscure 'ajamiyya whereas *al-hadra al-qalbiyya* is characterized by being clear 'arabiyya. In his *futûhât*, Ibn 'Arabi explains that the Mosaic secrets are 'ajamiyya in the sense that it is obscure like *al-mutashâbihat* in the Quran, nobody knows its meanings. Therefore, Moses book was referred to as *al-Furqan*. What is Muhammadan, on the other hand, is Arab and hence clear like the Quran.<sup>278</sup> Interestingly, both names of Ibn 'Arabi and Sitt 'Ajam correspond to the aforementioned order of ideas. Her name (Sitt 'Ajam) and his name (Ibn 'Arabi) correspond respectively to the nature of mysteries which are by definition obscure and to the nature of meanings which are by definition explanatory and thus clear. According to Ibn 'Arabi in *Kitâb al-'Abâdila*, "*man 'a'jama afhama*."<sup>279</sup> Thus, as Laila Khalifa put it, "Pour accéder au langage 'ajami, il faut en réalité passer par la langue arabe. Celle-ci est la lumière qui fait disparaître l'obscurité. Le retour qui donne son sens au voyage."<sup>280</sup>

<sup>277</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, *Al-Tadbîrât al-ilâhiyya fî islâh al-mamlaka al-insâniyya* (Beirut, Dar al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, 2000), p. 79.

<sup>278</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, *Futûhât*, vol. I, p. 517.

<sup>279</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, *Al-'Abâdila* (Cairo, n.d.), p. 181.

<sup>280</sup> Laila Khalifa, *Ibn 'Arabi: L'initiation à la Futuwwa*, p. 61.



## TRANSLATION



## The Eleventh Witnessing

In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

The Shaykh [Ibn 'Arabi], may Allah have mercy on him, said:

The Real<sup>281</sup> made me witness<sup>282</sup> the [light] of Divinity<sup>283</sup> (نور الألوهية) as the star of *lâm-alif* arose.<sup>284</sup>

I say [Sitt 'Ajam]: His intention behind this address is [to convey] his witnessing of the Real (الحق), may He be exalted, in the very locus (محل) wherein the Divinity (الألوهية) is witnessed. It is the locus wherein it is possible to separate the names (الأسماء) from what they name (مسماهما). It is rarely that such a locus could be witnessed except through the attribute of incomparability (صفة التنزيه). Thus the name takes the place of a locus as it becomes separate; the witness (الشاهد) becomes immanent within it (مستودعا فيه), and the witnessed (المشهود) becomes transcendent (مستعليا) to both the name and the witness. It is thus that we said: whatever he witnesses [in this locus] he witnesses at the level of incomparability. Herein, the light that distinguishes between the witness, the witnessed, and the locus [of witnessing], is the one described as the light of Divinity (نور الألوهية). For whenever the witness utters words

<sup>281</sup> Sitt 'Ajam does not consider "the Real" as a Divine attribute; rather, she considers it as a name for the Essence. It is thus in a sense interchangeable with Allah. Here, Sitt 'Ajam declares her first difference in points of view with Ibn 'Arabi whom as she argues had to conceal this reality out of fear of accusation of the 'amma. (Sitt 'Ajam, *Sharh al-Mashâhid*, p. 28)

<sup>282</sup> Sitt 'Ajam interprets "made me witness" in the first chapter as, "God has awakened my consciousness by the increase of awareness regarding the inward dimension so that I witness him therein." (Sitt 'Ajam, *Sharh al-Mashâhid*, p. 25)

<sup>283</sup> This witnessing of Divinity focuses basically on two aspects. On the one hand, Divinity denies the existence of relationship; on the other, Divinity manifests the relationship between the Lord and servant. This characteristic of Divinity resembles the letter *Lâm-alif* which is pronounced as two separate letters. And yet when they are joined, they form the negative article "la", in the commencement of the Quranic verse in *surat Ta-Ha*: "La ilah illa ana" (there is no divinity but I).

<sup>284</sup> The rising of the star is the ascendant (الطالع) which Sitt 'Ajam interprets as "Every light which arises in the inward dimension on the condition of increasing certainty." (Sitt 'Ajam, *Sharh al-Mashâhid*, p. 26)



such as "He said to me or I witnessed", he is telling us thereby that there is a duality (ثنوية) that necessitates [the act of] addressing or witnessing. This duality may only be distinguished through the light.

On the whole, his saying: "He told me or I told him," pertains to the aspect of delimitation (حزب التقيد), and delimitation may not appear, unless it be through a luminosity that renders it distinct, which is referred to as the mirror (المرآة).<sup>285</sup> The luminosity that occurs to this witness in this witnessing is not the [kind of] light that distinguishes bodies, but it is of the [kind of] light that distinguishes meanings (المعاني). That is why it is said: "witnessed through the light of Divinity." It is thus that we come to know that it is from the light that distinguishes names. This is a light that derives from the light of the Essence (النور الذاتي). Hence, Allah is witnessed in it through His most intimate attribute of incomparability (التنزيه).

This belongs to the kind of witnessing in which the witness is positioned in the limit (الحد)<sup>286</sup>, that which separates between the Inward (الباطن) and the Outward (الظاهر). For whenever the witness witnesses his Lord (ربه) through the attribute of incomparability, or as an Essence free from names and attributes, or as an Essence qualified by both absoluteness (الإطلاق) and delimitation (التقيد), or as qualified by both non-being (العدم) and being (الوجود), or in bewilderment (متحيراً), then the limit (الحد) is necessarily there. Moreover, for each witnessing of these, there is a specific limit, one that pertains to the separation between the two presences (حضور) of the Inward and the Outward. In these, one witnesses the quality of separation between the names and the [things] named. This experience takes place initially in

<sup>285</sup> The mirror is a key term in Sufi literature, and more specifically so for Sitt 'Ajam who places the symbol of the mirror at the heart of her metaphysical philosophy. The Sufi, in fact, aspires to become this reflective mirror itself. Thus the mirror must be polished so as to clear up the place for the Divine Self to see Itself in it. Sitt 'Ajam argues that "The more the mirror is polished the more the hidden union (الإتحاد الخافي) is witnessed." (Sharh al-Mashâhid, p. 27)

<sup>286</sup> The limit is the isthmus between the inward and the outward which is the Perfect Man. (Su'ad Hakim, al-Mûjam al-sûfi)



the limit, which is the purpose of this [particular] witnessing. In any witnessing that occurs in the limit, the witness must necessarily be in a fixed stand (واقفا), for if he runs (جرى), he would be moving out of the domain of the limit. The same is true if he [the witness] inclines (مال) towards any particular direction (جهة من الجهات). This witnessing is such that the witness must necessarily remain fixed at the limit, in order that the witnessed (المشهود) may [remain] transcendent and predicated (محمولا) upon the witness, and so that the latter may realize (يتحقق) at this point that he stands in the attribute of incomparability. When he [the witness] is immanent in this limit, his [conscious] face would be directed towards the outward, and his back towards the inward. This is so, because the determinations (الأحكام) of the names, along with their effects and whatever emerges from them, [all] proceed from the outward.<sup>287</sup>

Moreover, absolute determination (مطلق الحكم) is only applicable to the Outward, to the exclusion of all the other names. One of these determinations is the one pertaining to the name of Divinity (اسم الألوهية). It is our view that it [the name of Divinity] means attaining stability in submission (تمكين التسليم) on the part of the servant. However, this submission in itself is not his [ultimate] goal, rather its purpose is solely to bring about an attestation (النطق) to the unity of Divinity (توحيد الإله), such as Allah's statement: "your God is verily One" [*al-Saffât* 4]. This in itself replaces the state of submission (مقام التسليم) that we mentioned, and herein submission itself vanishes. The proof that he [Ibn 'Arabi] only wanted to bring about the attestation to Divine unity, is his saying: "and the rise of the star of *La*." This term negates [all] duality with a view to the Uniqueness of this Divinity, for *La* is used for negation. But since his face is directed towards the Outward, he will witness the determinations of the names (أحكام الأسماء) and the manner in which they penetrate into the world of the Outward. Thus, the name 'Lord' has a way of penetrating specific to it, which is the determination

<sup>287</sup> It is evident that Sitt 'Ajam has gone through this experience of witnessing as she gives a vivid description of it. Therefore, her interpretation of the experience of witnessing tends to be more of a dynamic nature.



made necessary (الضروري اللزم) by its own nature (النشأة). Divinity (الإله) itself has a penetration [into the world of the Outward] specific to it – but one weaker than the determination of Lordship (الربوبية) – and this is the reality that [determines that] all things must return to the Divinity (المرجع الأمور إلى الإله). Since these two names are the very ground on which the structure of outward reality stands, he witnesses the different ways in which their actions (الفعال) are made manifest upon the rest of the names; this happens while he was in the above-mentioned limit. The route traversed by this manner of things passes to him from [the direction of] the Incomparable, coming to the outward.

His statement: “**the rise of the star of La**”, wherein he mentions this witnessing as taking place in the locus of the light of Divinity, necessitates that what arises is the star of negation (الشهود على العكس). This witnessing is called “a witnessing by inversion” (بجسم النفي). We utter [the word] Divinity, negation would have to precede it. But this [witness] has initially witnessed the form of the name (صورة الاسم) and its qualitative nature (كيفية), and whatever issues from it by way of determinations. He thus runs in his witnessing to where he meets the ascending star of *La*. The form of this inversion being that it proceeds from end (انتهاء) to beginning (ابتداء). This is not a real inversion, but only an inversion in meaning. Moreover, this is not the kind of inversion which we call a return (رجع) because it is a running back and forth from the outward to the initial stand (الأولية), but it is not his aim in this witnessing. Rather, it is simply an advancing (تقديم) and a retreating (تأخير) to and from meanings, just as in language, we place [the act of] striking before the one who strikes.

A more obvious example is when we begin with negation in the attestation of “*la ilaha illa Allah*,” where witnessing begins with a negation. This one [Ibn 'Arabi] does not begin his

<sup>288</sup> *Jary* seems to be a new term first introduced by Sitt 'Ajam. She uses it to explain an important aspect of *shuhūd* or witnessing, which is a process that consists of successive movements from one witnessing to another, during a single divesture (طلع), so as to stretch the witnessing in relation to the spiritual staying (وقوف).



witnessing with negation, thus it may be called "a witnessing of an inversion of meaning" (شهود عكس المعنى). But since he took his stand in the limit, while in the above-mentioned state of witnessing, and the witnessing was not fully stabilized, it is necessary, when willing to be stabilized in the above-mentioned investiture (خلع),<sup>289</sup> that he moves in the witnessing towards the outward, for such witnessing proceeds to the outward. This does not entail a going away from the state of investiture, but it is rather a movement within the state of investiture itself, one that proceeds to the hidden world of analogy (عالم المثال).<sup>290</sup> This [latter] is a repository of outward [things], but it is not witnessed by those who are in the outward. In this state of running back and forth (جري), he witnesses this ascendant [the star of *la*], and thereby reinforces the witnessing he already had when he was lodged in the limit, so that the witnessing may be continuous (متصل) with one another. This continuity (اتصال) is not to be found in every witnessing, but it is present in a special [kind of] witnessing; it resembles his witnessing, [Ibn 'Arabi's] in the locus of the light of intuition (نور الشعور) and the rise of the star of incomparability (نجم التنزيه). The light of the Divinity's ascendant (طالع الألوهية) does not really resemble the light of intuition, because the latter is only required for distinguishing between the witness and the witnessed. It is an ascendant that is distinct (متميز), yet not distinguishing (مميز).

Distinguishing this ascendant from previous ascendants (الطوابع) is achieved by means of the luminosity of this witnessing. The same goes for every ascendant, each is made distinct through the light of its respective witnessing. That is why ascendants are not really discerning

<sup>289</sup> *Khala'* is another term introduced by Sitt 'Ajam to explain the mystical experience of *shuhūd*. Divestiture (خلع) is "the throwing away of the bodily nature" while in a state of death or consciousness.

<sup>290</sup> The world of analogy (عالم المثال) is the imaginal realm, the intermediate world (البرزخ) between the world of the intellect (عالم العقل) and the world of matter (عالم المادة).



in themselves, they only help to stabilize the certainty of the witnessing that precedes them. Thus, the witness keeps moving in a manner that resembles a movement back and forth (التردد), until such a time when the ascendant appears. Henceforth his certitude becomes stabilized through the experience of witnessing by means of this ascendant. It is as if he [Ibn 'Arabi] says: "the Real has made me witness His Essence in the locus of the light of Divinity and I became stabilized in this witnessing by the rise of the star of Lâ."

His statement: "Expression is inadequate, and symbolic language falls short of it. Description, qualification, name and form are all annihilated, along with "He said", "I said", "approach", "got back", "stand up", "sit down" and everything else. Each thing was clear to me, yet I saw nothing. I saw things but without seeing. Address disappeared, causes were removed and the veil vanished. Nothing remained but subsistence (البقاء). Annihilation [itself] was annihilated from annihilation through I (*funiya al-fana' 'an al-fana' bi-ana*).

I say: His purpose from this descent (التنزل) is to reveal the truth of the Oneness of Divinity (وحدانية الإله). This truth originates from Uniqueness (الأحدية), which is a name for the Essence (الذات). When the Essence is characterized by Oneness, which is the reality of the Divinity, it conceals Uniqueness, which is the name for its very reality. It is as if the Essence appears to the truth of delimitation in this name, which is of the Oneness of Divinity (وحدانية الإله), concealing therein the reality of Its absoluteness. Hence we say that it belongs [Ibn 'Arabi's descent] to Oneness and not to Uniqueness<sup>291</sup> because He [Allah] said: "God is indeed One" (إن الإلهم لواحد) [Al-Saffât:4]. He did not say your God is Unique. Since Oneness is a name of delimitation (تقييد), this witness, may God have mercy upon him, tells us that he witnesses the form of Oneness which is bound by delimitation, not the form of Uniqueness,

<sup>291</sup> Oneness (الوحدانية) is derived from the One (*al-Wāhid*) which is characterized by its ability of division, whereas Uniqueness (الأحدية) is derived from the Unique (الأحد) which is a simple and indivisible unity.



which is bound by absoluteness. So, when this witness realizes that Uniqueness is concealed in the form of Oneness, he expresses it in such terms that manifest the realities originating in Uniqueness.

A question came to me from a pious man who received grace and support [from God]. This *faqîr* was one of the companions of the knower (العارف), the virtuous, and the example unto [our spiritual] patrimony (قدوة السلف الصالح), Shaykh Sa'd al-Dîn al-Hamawî,<sup>292</sup> may Allah have mercy on him. He related a story about him [the Shaykh] wherein he said that: "Allah has created Adam in the form of Uniqueness and created Eve in the form of Oneness." A question was also raised by my companion and my maternal cousin, Muhammad Ibn Muhammad, may Allah reward him well for his goodness. When I heard the question, I observed the contrary [meaning] and I said to him: "It must be that Adam was created in the form of Oneness and Eve in the form of Uniqueness. Hence, this question is inverted". My companion inquired: "How could that be?" I said: "when Adam was created, Allah was already manifesting through delimitation (التقييد); this is supported by the Prophet's saying, may God's peace be upon him: "Allah has created Adam in his own image or in the image of the Compassionate (الرحمن)".

Now the image cannot be attributed except to the limited (المقيد). Oneness is of the names of delimitation, whereas Uniqueness is of the names of absoluteness. So when Adam was created, He [Allah] was already manifested in delimited form (المقيد). Thus, the image of Adam is an imprint of this delimited form (انطباع الصورة المقيدة) that belongs to Allah. Therefore he is a similitude (مثالا) not a like (مثلا), he is in a parallel correspondence (مقابل مقابلة).

<sup>292</sup> Sa'd al-Dîn al-Hamawî is one of the disciples of Ibn 'Arabi and Najm al-Dîn Kubra. (Kahala, *Mu'jam* V. 12, p. 70)



(موازاة), positioned between Allah and the world. Now, *al-mithāl* can only be said of an image that is imprinted on a mirror, as a phantom devoid of reality. The root of all of this is the attribute of delimitation. Oneness may only be attributed to a limited object, contrary to Uniqueness which is attributed to an absolute; it may also be attributed to a delimited absolute, on the condition that the delimitation is concealed (خفاء التقيد).

Now, when Adam was created, delimitation was manifest, whereas absoluteness was concealed, even non-existent (معدوم). He [Adam] was thus in the form of Oneness. Eve, on the other hand, was created in the form of Uniqueness, because when Allah created Adam, He was assimilated to [both] attributes of absoluteness and delimitation in manifestation, whereas Eve, who was an offshoot of Adam, was created after him. At the time of her creation, Allah was manifest through the attribute of Uniqueness, in opposition (في مقابلة) to delimitation. Both names [Uniqueness and Eve] share the quality of femininity (أنثى), for the Essence (الذات) is feminine and Eve is a female (أنثى), and Uniqueness is a name of the Essence as it contains both the attributes mentioned, i.e. absoluteness and delimitation. Thus, the sharing of the name of femininity between the Essence and Eve is due to the sameness of the term, and it is she who is in the form of Uniqueness; for she was created after perfection (مقابل) [was reached]. Now, it is impossible to establish the correspondence (معنى) of Uniqueness with any form, but it may correspond to a meaning (معنى) that shares its reality linguistically (في اللفظ). Indeed, linguistically speaking, femininity is in reality the very meaning of the Essence. Thus, it is as if the Essence known by the name of Uniqueness has manifested itself when Eve was created, through her meaning, that is, femininity. Adam, however, corresponds to Oneness because he is a mere delimitation, whereas Eve corresponds to Uniqueness because she is both a reality of absoluteness and of delimitation together; her form belongs to delimitation and her meaning to absoluteness.



I also told him that this question is ill-posed, for Uniqueness has no form. So, the transmitter of this story may have either misconstrued what the Shaykh has actually said or the Shaykh has no knowledge of the judgment of the situation (أحكام الوضع). Indeed, the Shaykh al-Hamawi, of whom this story is transmitted, is not in my view one of the perfect [knowers], even though he was known for his virtue. My companion said to me that this situation was brought to me and it must be explained. I said: Shaykh Sa'ad al-Dîn has looked to the external aspect of the situation only, and he did not believe that Adam's origin was from a mere delimitation. Rather, he thought that it is both from absoluteness and delimitation. If this thought is established, it becomes necessary that Adam would be in the form of Uniqueness and Eve in the form of Oneness - which is an attribute of Adam - since she is created from him. But this is not so. Indeed, it was said of him that he was created according to the Image [of Allah], and image can only be attributed to a delimited thing. It is thus not permissible to say that a delimited thing is absolute, as long as it is described as a form. Rather, it is permissible to say that the absolute has the quality of delimitation, thus proving what we have said [earlier]. The question is thus inverted. What must be said is this, that Adam was created according to the form of Oneness, whereas Eve was created according to the meaning of Uniqueness.<sup>293</sup>

<sup>293</sup> Abd al-Karîm al-Jîlî (d. 1403) another Baghdadian disciple of Ibn 'Arabi, in his most celebrated work, the Universal Man (*al-Insân al-Kâmil*), presents a thorough analysis of the hierarchy of Being (*marâtib al-wujûd*) and its classification of the Divine Essence. Abd al-Karîm al-Jîlî explains the nature and the interrelationship of each, Divinity (*al-Ulûhiyya*), Uniqueness (*al-Ahadiyya*), and Oneness (*al-Wâhidiyya*). He defines Divinity (*al-Ulûhiyya*) as "The Divine Nature which encompasses all the Realities of the Being and maintains them in their respective degrees." As for Uniqueness (*al-Ahadiyya*), he points that it: "designates the revelation of the Essence in which appear neither the Names nor the Qualities nor any trace of their effects; it is then a Name of the Essence in so far as this is beyond all Divine and 'creatural' comparison .... And it is there the first 'descent' (*tanazzûl*) of the Essence from the darkness of the 'cloud' (*al'amâ*) towards the light of revelations' and also the first of all His revelation because of its purity and its absence of all Quality, all Name, allusion, relation or analogy; for all is contained in a non-manifested (*bâtin*) manner." Finally, as for Oneness (*al-Wâhidiyya*), he defines as: "a revelation of the Essence which appears as synthesis because of the distinction of my qualities. All in it is unique and differentiated at the same time, so admire the multiplicity essentially one!" To further explain their interrelationship, Abd al-Karîm al-Jîlî points out that Divinity (*al-Ulûhiyya*) corresponds to the 'Mother of the Book' (*Umm al-kitâb*), Uniqueness (*al-Ahadiyya*) corresponds to the 'Quran', Oneness (*al-Wâhidiyya*) corresponds to the 'Furqân'. (Abd al-Karîm al-Jîlî, *Universal Man*, pp. 16 - 24)



But let us return back to our [initial] purpose, we say, once the witness came to know that Uniqueness is immanent in the Essence of this. One Divinity, he said, while still in the state of witnessing, that he saw the vanishing of all expression because what used to be outward became inward in the witnessing, and what was hidden in the witnessing became manifest. He was certain that Uniqueness was immanent therein, and when it soon became manifest unto him, Oneness was concealed. Oftentimes it happens that we experience such a witnessing, which we call the concealing of the actually manifest (إخفاء الظاهر الحاصل), and the manifesting of the non-existent inward (إظهار الباطن المعدوم). Such witnessing leads to a certain reality, one that is existent yet hidden to our witnessing. Thus, it is not far-fetched to say that when this concealed existent appears it conceals what was already manifested in the witnessing. Thus, when Uniqueness became manifest to this witness, he said: **"no expression can contain it and allusion and symbolic language fall short of it; and all descriptions and qualifications were annihilated,"** for all these are of the attributes of Uniqueness that demands the non-existence of delimitation. Moreover, there is the annihilation and disappearance of both name and form (الاسم والرسم), which originate in opposition to Uniqueness (ينشأ عن ضد الأحدية), which is Oneness. There is also the annihilation of all speech, be it of speaker or of listener. Thus, whenever the Essence manifests itself by means of this name, both speaker and listener are annihilated (فني), so do comings and goings, standing and sitting, for all these belong to the determinations of delimitation that are contrary to Uniqueness. The same applies to the annihilation of all things, for there is nothing determined (معين) in Uniqueness.

As for the appearance of all things to him in this locus, it is like a witnessing of opposites (شهود النقيضين). For since this witnessing is manifest through Uniqueness, and the witness is in



full certitude of the concealment of all things in it through [his] knowledge, it is necessary that it becomes manifest through known things (معلومات) in the very essence of the knower (العالم). It is as if his witnessing herein was as a knowing Essence (ذاتنا عالمة) qualified only by absoluteness. This is like witnessing the meeting of opposites, but it is not he [who witnesses], for he is here an Essence that knows and is characterized by absoluteness. The things known are hidden herein, unnoticed save to that one who has previously [experienced] the witnessing of opposites (شهود النقيضين). This is the Perfect One (الواحد الكامل).

As for the above-mentioned witnessing of synthesis (الجمع), it is conditional upon witnessing the Essence as all-knowing, manifesting known things (معلومات), absolutely Unique, and possessing the quality of delimitation, yet this [latter] is combined with absoluteness. This is so, until he [i.e. the witness] witnesses multiplicity as one and unique in attributes and the One as multiple and delimited in attributes. This however, does not occur in the determination (حكم) of this witnessing, for it contains none but an Essence, absolute and all-knowing. But this does not apply except to the one who had previously attained to that witnessing as an attribute. It is thus he says: **"I did not see a thing"**, because of the non-existence of multiplicity [as such] in this witnessing, and also because of the known things being hidden (المعلومات الخافية). He thus said: **"I saw things, but did not see,"** that is to say, I did not see known things through a delimited witnessing. As for the annihilation of speech and the non-existence of all causes (فناء الخطاب وانعدام الأسباب), this is due to the opposition found therein to all delimitation. For speech can only take place between a speaker and a listener, but here there is a witness to a witnessed [reality], that is silent and non-speaking. Similarly with the annihilation of causes, which act as tools of speech, such as the tongue of



the heart (اللسان القلبي) and the like.<sup>294</sup> As for the vanishing of the veil, it is consequent upon the content of absoluteness. For herein there is neither veil nor veiled.

In his statement: **"annihilation [itself] is annihilated by means of annihilation by means of I,"** he is referring to the fact that this witnessing is a kind of synthesis of synthesis (جمع الجمع). That is why he simultaneously witnesses the annihilation of annihilation and subsistence (بقاء). For the first synthesis is the annihilation [of the ego], the synthesis of synthesis is to hold separate whatever has been annihilated, and conditional on the manifestation of Uniqueness upon them. And if this Uniqueness has firmly taken possession [of consciousness], becoming an attribute of the witness, it reverts to subsistence (بقاء). Such subsistence is the cause that annihilates annihilation. This is the meaning of his saying: **"nothing but subsistence remains."** As for his saying: **"the annihilation of annihilation,"** it is because there is no other annihilation that can enter into this subsistence, for it is an everlasting, final and eternal subsistence that annihilates every annihilation desired by its name, that is one that does not annihilate the name of annihilation.

In conclusion, we say it is One single self-subsisting continuum whose attributes are entirely those of its own Essence (دوام واحد صمدي أحدي الصفات), it is thus innocent of all creation. Yet, in this One, one witnesses a "certain particularity", that is why he spoke of an "I", referring to himself in particular as having attained to all these attributes, to the exclusion of all others during his time, for in his saying "I" one observes a specific particularity (خصوص ما).

<sup>294</sup> She perhaps refers here to the soundless and wordless speech that manifests in the knower's heart, as a result of direct or unmediated Divine fiat, *kun!* This is referred to in Ibn Arabi's terminology as *fahwani* speech. See *fahwāniyyah*, in Su'ad Hakim's *al-Mu'ajm al-sūfi*.



## The Twelfth Witnessing

In the name of the Merciful, the Compassionate

The Shaykh said - may God have mercy upon him: **"The Real made me witness the light of Uniqueness as the star of servant-hood (نجم العبودية) arose."**<sup>295</sup>

I say: He refers here to his witnessing of the Real (شهوده الحق) in the locus of the distinction (تمييز) of Lordship from servant-hood. This distinction cannot occur except through light. Moreover, this witnessing is not in a known space (مكان معروف), for it is not in any of the presences, nor in any of the names, nor in any of the attributes, nor in any of the limits. It is in the light. This witnessing contains the totality of delimited being (مجموع الوجود المقيد). Thus, if the witness should claim that he has witnessed the locus of all that is called being, it would be admissible for him to do so. That is why we say it is in no name, for it contains all the totality of names; and it is in no attribute, because it contains all the totality of attributes; and it is in no limit because it encompasses all limits; and it is in no space because no locus from which things come forth can be devoid of it. Furthermore, space as such, may only apply to a distinct, limited thing, upon which something may be predicated. This light, moreover, is devoid of that density (الكثافة) which is required for distinguishing [one thing from another], because it is that which distinguishes, but cannot be distinguished (مميز غير متميز). But its witness was imprinted on the body of the mirror (منطبعا في جسم المرآة), which was alluded to [earlier] by means of this light. And he knew in this state of witnessing that he is imprinted in the mirror, and the one witnessed looks into this mirror to his delimited image (صورته المقيدة) that has no second in its existence; this is what is called Uniqueness, solely for its singularity (لأجل التفرد فقط). This witnessing is referred to, moreover, as a correspondence to utter

<sup>295</sup> Servanthood (عبودية) which corresponds to the letter *lām* is by definition linked to Uniqueness (حداية) which corresponds to the letter *alif* being the first of letters



darkness (مقابلة العماء) [primordial chaos/ the cloud].<sup>296</sup> It may happen to the one who is not yet perfect, and he would not know that he had [actually] witnessed it. However, were it not that the perfection of this witness [Ibn 'Arabi] has been already established to us, apart from this witnessing, we would not have called this a realization of the knowledge of this witnessing (تحقيق معرفة ذات الشهود). For when it is witnessed by a commoner (عامية) he does not call it a witnessing of the form (شهود الصورة), because witnessing it is conditional upon its being preserved in tact (حفظه) upon return from [bodily] divesture (الخلع).

Moreover, this witnessing cannot be preserved in tact while in the state of divesture, or in the state of return (حال الرجوع), except to the one who is perfect and singular in his time (الكامل). He is the one who is given the power (القدرة) to remain singular despite bodily forms (التفرد في الأجسام) and obstructing veils (الحجب المانع), so that if such a veil were to rise before his face, the veil, whose body is the reality of *al-'amâ'*, he would be still aware behind what had been veiled from him. This is why the witness of this is considered to be corresponding to *al-'amâ'*, which contains a singular but limited form.

In this state of witnessing, one can never hear any address, because the interlocutor is veiled and hidden within the said darkness, where no locus can be known. As for the witness, he does not see his form except through awareness (إدراك). Speech too cannot be heard, except through awareness of the heart (إدراك قلبي), by way of being imprinted (إنتقال) therein. It is like the one who looks in a familiar mirror while speaking, he can see his imprinted mirror image, his lips moving, yet he does not understand what he says. But he imagines the imprinting of the letters that he uttered inside this image. The same may be said about this witness, address

<sup>296</sup> *Al-'amâ'* could be equally translated as Divine darkness or Divine chaos prior to Self-determination. It is the simple Divine existence, prior to Its purposeful cosmic deployment.



is sent to him here in the form of awareness (في صورة إدراك); he sees the movement of his lips and the imprinting of letters in the mirror of his heart. Thus, in order to attain an understanding of this address (خطاب), he should be of a very strong sensibility; capable of empirical definition (التحديد العلمي); the mirror of his heart well-polished, quick to discern, and of powerful attraction (قوة الجذب).

The light which is the locus in this witnessing is that which encompasses *al-'amâ'*. From it originates the throne which was upon the waters, the route through which this address is sent to the witness is the same one in which the water runs; it gushes forth from the locus of this witnessing. This witness was desirous, in the state of [bodily] divestiture (الخلع), to enter into that form which was before the state of [primordial] beginning (الأولية), because this witnessing can only take place there. The witness becomes certain that he is prior to existence (قبل الوجود), that is, prior to "am I not your Lord?" [*al-'Arâff* - 172].

His statement: "**The rise of the star of servant-hood**", where he mentions the Uniqueness of the Lord, he felt destitute<sup>297</sup> (اضطر) for the rise of the star of servant-hood, so that such witnessing may be possible for him. This uniqueness is not the Uniqueness of the Essence which is called Absoluteness. But it is the uniqueness which distinguishes between the names and makes them one. Outwardly, uniqueness is not attributed to single names of uniqueness (أحاد الأسماء الأحادية), because whatever has a like in meaning or form cannot be given this name. This witness has given the name of uniqueness to the name of the Lord (*al-rabb*), because it possesses a singularity that is conditional on the absence of the rest of the names. Here, all the names are annihilated (فانية) in manifestation (الظهور), subsisting only (باقية) in

<sup>297</sup> *Ittirâr* is a crushing neediness or state of destitution, particularly for God, which can only be appeased by the coming of His succour [*al-An'aâm* - 145 and *al-Naml* - 6].



meaning. Uniqueness has no significance, except as a name which retains meaning, but annihilates distinction, manifesting itself as singular (يظهر منفردا).

Indeed, this address comes from the direction of [inner] reality; for it is impossible (محال) outwardly. And since it corresponds to *al-'amâ'* in this state of witnessing, and since the address in question was sent to him in the form of recognition, he was doubtful about the non-existence or the existence of the interlocutor. This is due to the fact that in conventional conversation, the two speakers appear outwardly, each one an image of the other. Thus when he experienced this address as [a state of] awareness only, without visual witnessing, he inclined towards running back and forth (الحري), in the hope he may attain certainty (*al-qat'*) about the existence of the witnessed. He thus paced a real course from back to front. Then, as he paced [the course], he witnessed the said ascendant, manifesting as the attribute of servant-hood. This [the ascendant], re-enforced his witnessing and he attained certainty of the Unicity of the Lord, the one which he alluded to by uniqueness, when he witnessed the ascendant in the attribute of servant-hood. And since this ascendant requires this witnessing as a sine qua non pre-requisite, it is necessary that its origin here should be the light that differentiates between the witness and the witnessed, and that is why it re-enforced (ممكنا) this witnessing. In this necessity, I mean the necessity of this ascendant for this witnessing, is an allusion to the origination (نشأة) of the name Lord from the servant, and vice versa. This is why each one of them depends upon the other, which is necessary for the unity of the Lord.

Whenever the servant admits to affirming the Lordship, he is bound to affirm His unity. This is so, because no one worships two Lords, since the utterance (الاستطاق) in "*alastu*" was for the admission (الإقرار) to One Lord only. In connection to this they said: "we only worship them [idols] as a means to bring us closer to God." [*AL-Zumar* – 3] Thus, whenever worship



is affirmed (ثبات العباداة), or submission, from which Divinity originates, Unity is necessitated (وجبت وجوباً). It is as if he said: "The Real made me witness His form in the name of Uniqueness that originates in the admission to Lordship. This witnessing was stabilized for me by means of the rising star of servant-hood."

His statement: "He said to me, 'Uniqueness is tied to servant-hood in the same way the *lam alif* are.'" I say: What he means by this statement is to demonstrate the reality of what he saw at the onset of this witnessing, and it confirms what we already said regarding the obligation of servant-hood in affirming the unity of the Lord Most High (التزام العبودية توحيد). This is why he used the letters of "*lâm-alif*", because each one of these two letters - which have in fact become one in appearance - depends upon the other when the combined reality of this letter is stated.<sup>298</sup> The same goes for servant-hood and Lordship, each one of them necessarily depends upon the other. Their mutual inter-dependence originates from both of them, in the same way this letter [*la*] originates when the two letters are mixed (عند مزاج الحرفين) through the designing will (إرادة الوضع). We have already mentioned in the book entitled *al-khatm* that this letter originates in Uniqueness.<sup>299</sup> This explains why he used it as a symbol to refer to the union of Lordship and servant-hood. However he referred to this union as a bond (ارتباط), because both are existent, whereas we refer to it as a union (اتحاد), since servant-hood is not lasting (فانية) and has no reality in itself. We speak here from the vantage

<sup>298</sup> Sitt 'Ajam discusses here one of the most delicate and controversial issues in Sufism, which is the relationship between the *Rabb* and '*abd*', that is the necessary reciprocity between them. There are two *hadiths* that Sufis refer to in symbolizing this aspect of their doctrine, one is: My slave ceaseth not to draw near unto Me with added devotions of his free will until I am the Hearing wherewith he heareth and the Sight wherewith he seeth and the Hand whereby he graspeth the Foot whereon he walketh." (Bukhari, *Raqa'iq*, 37), the other *hadith* is: "I am 'Arabi without '*ayn*, and Ahmad without *mim*."

<sup>299</sup> The *Khatm* (The Seal) is one of three books that Sitt 'Ajam is known to have written: *Sharh al-Mashâhid*, *Kashf al-Kunûz*, and *al-Khatm*, which unfortunately cannot be found. However, she frequently refers to it in the text of her *sharh*. From the title, it seems that it is about the 'Seal of Saints', a doctrine that forms is also an integral part of Ibn 'Arabi's mystical philosophy. Thus, Sitt 'Ajam's commentary is basically an interpretation of Ibn 'Arabi's *Mashâhid*, from within the experience of the *Qutb* or, as she often says, from the experience of "*al-'arif al-mutafarriq fi 'asrihi*."



point of Reality, whereas this witness [Ibn 'Arabi] speaks from the vantage point of the Outward, desiring to affirm a Lord and a servant, otherwise, the truth we refer to is not hidden from him.<sup>300</sup> By uniqueness, he wishes to point to the Oneness of the Lord, not to the Uniqueness of the Essence as we mentioned it at the outset of this witnessing.<sup>301</sup>

His statement: **"And He said to me: I am the Root (الأصل) and you are the branch (الفرع) thereof."** I say his intention in is descent is to point to the Uniqueness of being (أحدية الوجود).<sup>302</sup> Here, there is an allusion to what he mentioned regarding the bond (الارتباط), because he regards the servant to be equivalent to the *lâm*, and the Lord to be equivalent to the *alif*, because the *alif* is the first letter, and from it branch out all the other letters, including the *lâm*. In another place, he also mentions that: "The *alif* is silent and the other letters are speaking in it (ناطقون فيه)." By this 'speaking', he is referring to the appearance of the origin of the letters from the *alif*, because it has originated from Oneness (الوحدية), and "one" is the root of all numbers. Similarly, the One in existence is the root of all existents, as in Adam's case: he is the root, and the world is an offshoot from him. Moreover, when Allah manifested himself in a form (ظهر الله), limited existence became realized (تحقق الوجود). For form is the root of all delimitation, (تميز كثرة) and there is no point to delimitation but differentiation in the multiplicity of existence (الوجود). Thus, the Real made His Form equivalent to Adam, and made the form of this witness

<sup>300</sup> It is very interesting here to observe that Sitt 'Ajam is criticizing Ibn 'Arabi for his exoteric interpretation of the relationship between the Lord (الرب) and the servant (العبد) and which he described as one of interconnection (ارتباط) and not as one of union (اتحاد) as she claimed. Even more than that, she seems to rate her knowledge above that of Ibn 'Arabi's, at least in regard to this particular witnessing, when she claims to be speaking from the standpoint of [esoteric] Truth, whereas he [Ibn 'Arabi], is only speaking from the standpoint of the inward meaning of truth. This is, of course, a drawback for a Sufi whose mission is basically to look for the inward meaning of reality. However, she qualifies her judgment of him, when she concludes that he [Ibn 'Arabi] must also have been aware of this esoteric dimension of the Truth.

<sup>301</sup> It is important to note here that Sitt 'Ajam clarifies that Ibn 'Arabi differentiates between the Uniqueness of the Essence and the Uniqueness of Synthesis (أحدية الجمع) which is the Oneness of the Lord.

<sup>302</sup> Sitt 'Ajam introduces here her doctrine of Uniqueness of Being which is a subtle view of Oneness of Being as it not only sees everything as one but also reduces everything to the state of Uniqueness.



as one of the branches (من جملة الفروع). This is a descent that belongs to [the nature of] mercy (رحماني), originating from justice (العدل), which [in itself] is the sustainer (قيوم) of [the status of] vicegerency (خلافة). In this witnessing, Allah named Himself *Rahmân*, and through it, the witness came to recognize the truth of vicegerency (حقيقة الخلافة).<sup>303</sup>

It is thus that Allah said to him: **"I am the Root and you are the branch thereof."** I say this address came to him through the will of bestowing on him certain names and attributes. Oftentimes, the like of this witnessing occurs, through which Allah wills to manifest certain of His attributes upon the witness. We are witness to the manner of this investiture (كيفية هذا الخلع), the object of which is to appear in this investiture. I have experienced this in a revelation (كشف), in which I was made to witness the nature of the station of Majesty (الجلالة) as [a realized] attribute. He showed me the manner through which the attribute was invested upon me. I have mentioned this witnessing in "The Book of the Seal" (الخاتم). The like of this occurred simultaneously to this witness in the return from the descent to the heaven of this world.<sup>304</sup> Considering that he began this address by: **"I am the Root and you are the branch thereof,"** the names and attributes invested upon him must necessarily be those of [the nature] of mercy (رحماني), and [the nature] of form (صورية); for the names belong to mercy and the attributes to form. The proof that this occurs simultaneously after return from the descent is our saying that the descent can only be from Allah through the form of the knower (بصورة العارف), who is the

<sup>303</sup> Sitt 'Ajam eloquently interprets Ibn 'Arabi's statement: I am the root and you are the branch, by integrating the science of letters. In the light of Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysics of letters, she demonstrates the correspondence between the letter *alif* existentially and metaphysically, and the Perfect Man. In his *Futûhât*, Ibn 'Arabi presents a sophisticated interpretation of the symbol of the letter *alif* and its relationship with the other letters. He describes "*alif* as the sustainer (قيوم) of the other letters." (*Futûhât*, vol. I, p. 65) He also draws a parallel between *alif* and the Perfect Man as he explains, "These letters....like our human world....have a Pole (قطب). The letter *alif* from the point of view of its spirituality which we alone are aware of, is of the state of *qayûmiyya*." (*Futûhât*, vol. I, pp. 60 - 62) Hence, Sitt 'Ajam explains that just as *alif* is the source of letters and is parallel to the Perfect Man who is the image of Allah or *al-Rahmân*, both originating from Oneness, the form of the witness becomes as one of the branches realizing the state of vicegerency which is *qayûmiyya*.

<sup>304</sup> Once again, Sitt 'Ajam, refers to her own book *al-Khatm* where she herself experienced mystical visions. So, she recounts her own experience when Allah caused her to witness most vividly the station of *Jalâla*, to use it as yardstick for interpreting Ibn 'Arabi's experience of witnessing the descent of Names and attributes.



singular one in his time. Thus, simultaneously after return, the form of the knower comes back to him. Indeed, this is what occurred to this witness at night.<sup>305</sup>

His statement: **"He then said to me: you are the Root and I am the branch thereof."** I say that his purpose from this descent is to manifest the reality of the perfection of Existence,<sup>306</sup> which cannot be attained, except through the existence of the one knower (العارف الواحد). Indeed, this perfection cannot be attained unless it corresponds to the form of Allah, may He be exalted (مقابلة لصورة الله). Therefore, existence is characterized by both attributes: absoluteness and delimitation. Prior to this characterization, it was only characterized by absoluteness, however, its perfection amounts to the existence of both attributes. If this is admitted, then giving it [existence] only one attribute makes it necessarily imperfect. Accordingly, existence of the knower is that which completes it [existence], for through his existence, delimitation is realized (تحقق التقيد) in existence, hence, achieving the [required] correspondence. Thus, in so far as the knower is that which perfects existence, he is established as the root, whereas the witnessed (المشهود) is established as the branch, since the latter had only one attribute before that, that is, the attribute of absoluteness.

His statement: **"He then said to me: You are the One, and I am the Unique, whoever absents himself from Uniqueness perishes (من غاب عن الأحدية زال), and whoever remains**

<sup>305</sup> As has been outlined, we can notice that while Sitt 'Ajam offers a different interpretation than that of Ibn Sawdakîn, covering another deep experiential dimension, Ibn Sawdakîn was simply content to argue that in relation to existence, Allah is the root, meaning thereby the origin, whereas the servant is the branch.

<sup>306</sup> Sitt 'Ajam here offers another dimension of how her interpretation of things differs from that of Ibn Sawdakîn, as he simply argues that according to knowledge, Allah is the branch and the servant is the root, considering that he cannot know Him until he first knows himself. Sitt 'Ajam, however, alludes to a much deeper interpretation which is essentially based on the reciprocity between the witnessed and the witness, the Lord and the servant which is manifest in the following statement of Ibn 'Arabi: "If it was not for Him or for us, we would not be nor would He be."



therewith sees himself. It is the Presence of the continuum [of realities] (حُضْرَةُ التَّوَالِي),<sup>307</sup> which if it were divisible it would vanish. I say his purpose behind this descent is to manifest the truth of correspondence (المَقَابِلَة), which is the creation of the perfect in accordance to the form (عَلَى الصُّورَةِ), for the witnessed/the witness (المَشْهُودُ الشَّاهِدُ) is the one who looks upon himself in the mirror of his own existence. Moreover, the witnessed is the one looked at (الْمَنْظُورُ), the one created in form. As for the on looker (الْمُنَظِّرُ), he takes on the attribute of uniqueness, which is a name of absoluteness. Accordingly, the one looked upon, is given the name of Oneness, one of the names of delimitation. Thus, the Unique (الْأَحَدُ) is derived from Uniqueness (الْأَحَدِيَّةُ) and the One (الْوَاحِدُ) is derived from Oneness (الْوَاحِدِيَّةُ). It is as if He said to him: "you are given the name of delimitation, and I am given the name of absoluteness."

His statement: "**whoever is absent from uniqueness perishes!**" This perishing is inevitable, because when the knower experiences movement (إِطْلَاقٌ), his essence (عَيْنُهُ) is obliterated from the mirror which is the locus of correspondence. He becomes unconscious (يَغِيبُ) to his form, and is existentially annihilated in the [Divine] Essence, and his delimited essence is nonexistent. As long as he remains unmoving (بَاقِيًا لَا يَنْتَقِلُ), he is still present to his delimited self (كَيْفِيَّةً) (حَاضِرًا لِنَفْسِهِ الْمَقْدِرَةِ), witnessing the manner in which the continuum of emanation [unfolds] (تَوَالِي). This is the successive outpouring of emanation (الْفَيْضُ), little by little, uninterrupted by time. Emanations are ever continuous upon the knower, in accordance with the [different] moments (الْأَنَاءُ).<sup>308</sup> He, on his part, pours out emanations upon existents in the same measure he receives them. His real form (حَقِيقَتُهُ الصُّورِيَّةُ) is the [Divine] Presence (الْحُضْرَةُ), and the [different] manifestations (الْمُظَاهِرُ) are flowing out (الْمَتَوَالِيَّةُ). In this sense, the knower becomes

<sup>307</sup> According to Ibn Sawdakîn: "The presence of continuous procession, of the One manifesting in the degrees of numbers, and this manifestation of the unity in successive numbers is the vision of the face of the Real in everything."

<sup>308</sup> These are perhaps the moments in time in which the emanations manifest in the knower's differentiated consciousness, that is why, in time, he too pours them out to those who receive guidance from him.



an intermediary between Allah and His creation, as we said before. In another place, it has been said to him "through you I become existent". Thus, as long as the knower is existent, he finds himself to be a presence for the appearance of manifestations (حاضرة لمرور المظاهر).

His statement: "if it was divisible it would not be." I say what he means here is that the form of the knower is not divisible in this state of correspondence (مقابلة), and divisibility cannot enter here because he [the knower] is the very intermediary (الواسطة) between the divided parts (المتجزئين). If divisibility occurs, another intermediary would be established, and the One would have a second. But we already said that he [the perfect knower] can only be one in every age. As for his saying "if it is divisible it would not be," meaning that it would not correspond to the form, for Allah is One and He witnesses Himself in the mirror of existence. The witnessed form must also be one, and therefore it is not possible to have it correspond to two. It is as if he said to him, "if the form of the single knower becomes divisible in the correspondence, he would cease to be one." Now, Oneness is necessary, because the seer (الناظر), Allah most High, is One. Similarly, the seen (المنظور) is also one in the form of the knower, which is imprinted [on the mirror] and is the locus of continuous emanation (محل الفيض المتتالي).

His statement: "Then He said to me: do not sleep until you have offered the odd-cycled prayer of the night (وتر)." I say what he means by this is that his singularity encompasses the totality of attributes contained in night and day: Night, being the attribute of the Essence in its state of Absoluteness, while day is the latter's attribute in its state of delimitation.<sup>309</sup> Indeed, we

<sup>309</sup> Sitt 'Ajam uses the symbols of day and night to allude to the attribute of delimitation and the attribute of absoluteness. Similar to the way she employs both symbols of Adam and Eve alluding to Unity which is delimited and Uniqueness which is absolute, she tends to invert the symbols in a manner which reveal more of inward realities. She states that "Darkness is for the 'arif and light is for the ignorant." (*Sharh al-Mashâhid*, p. 96) For Sitt 'Ajam, the veiled inward dimension represents the absolute. Therefore, night or darkness like the feminine and *wilâya* is absolute. However, other Sufis consider light or day as "the moment when peace is annihilated in the light of the Absolute, leaving only the absolute Peace of Unity." (Laleh Bakhtiar, *Sufi Expressions of the Mystic Quest*, p. 84) Light and darkness are the archetypal symbols of Sufism. Laleh Bakhtiar explaining the metaphysical paradox of light states that, "they [light and darkness] are natural (فتاء) and immediate self-expressions of a root experienced in Divinity. They denote the stations of annihilation (فتاء) and



have no names, attributes, manifestations, affairs, emanations, or existence outside these two attributes, and both are one. It is as if He said: "sleep not until you are assimilated (متصفا) to the attribute of uniqueness, which contains the totality of attributes, but you may not attain such attributes until you are one."<sup>310</sup>

His statement: "He said to me: There cannot be two odd-cycled [prayers] in a [single] night, since [only] One of us subsists." I say, he is also referring here to Singularity in its absoluteness. We have already said that night is the attribute of the Essence in its absoluteness. In absoluteness, there is no duality of meaning, form or distinction, neither is there light or definition, as there is no luminous receptive body, but only a uniqueness of an Absolute Essence, one innocent of quantity and delimitation. It is an all encompassing fullness (صمدية) containing no emptiness (خلاء) that may be a locus for a second. In this attribute, which is the night, the witness is extinguished and the witnessed subsists in innocence of all qualities and names, for He is the Ever-subsisting (الباقى) beyond duality.<sup>311</sup>

His statement: "Then, He said to me: offer the sunset prayer, but do not offer prayer during the dark hour of the night (العتمة), so that the odd-cycled prayer (witr) becomes

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subsistence (بقاء). These are metaphysical experiences which occur only at a transcendental level of awareness. In the station of *fanā'*, there is complete lack of consciousness of object or ego; one is moving towards darkness. There is not even any consciousness of the experience itself. In the station of *baqā'* the mind awakens to the phenomenal world, but now these forms and images are objective forms in which the Divine Essence manifests Itself... [Thus] existence is light. When the Absolute appears to the consciousness of the mystic, it appears as uncontaminated unity, as light. All multiplicity disappears into darkness. Light causes the whole darkness. But because all things lose their individuality and become obliterated from consciousness, the whole world paradoxically turns into an ocean of lights. Out of the depths of this light all things that disappeared into darkness begin to be reborn in their individualities; but at this stage they are darkness that are fully saturated with Pure Light of existence. "(Sufi Expressions of the Mystic Quest, p. 90)

<sup>310</sup> From a well-known *hadith*, it is recorded that: "Allah is *witr* (odd) and loves to *witr* (in the number of things)." According to Ibn Sawdakīn: "since the sunset prayer (مغرب) is also an odd one (consisting of three ritual cycles), [do the odd prayer] to complete an even number of ritual cycles (ركعات), so that by making oddness even, you go to sleep with your own attribute (i.e. evenness, *shaf'iyya*) and not with Mine.

<sup>311</sup> Sitt 'Ajam eloquently interprets the ambiguity of Ibn 'Arabi's words by explaining, by means of the metaphysics of *Marātib al-wujūd*, the relationship between the absolute and the delimited, between Uniqueness and duality.



obligatory for you, and so that it becomes a two-cycled prayer (شفع).” I say that through this commanding address (الخطاب الأمرى) he aspires to the perfection of the attribute of delimitation (كمال صفات التقيد), which is the day. For day is the attribute of delimitation, while night is the attribute of absoluteness. However, these two attributes are not complete until the two [connecting] prayers are performed. Through the sunset prayer the attribute of delimitation is perfected, for it is thus made distinct from the night prayer. While through the dawn prayer, the attribute of absoluteness is perfected, this is the night. The purpose of this address is to draw a distinction between the two attributes, and to point out that the witness singularly possesses one of them (حديهما) in this witnessing. This is a singularity that takes possession of the attribute of delimitation, which is the day. He was thus told **“to offer the sunset prayer and not to pray during the dark hour of the night,”** there would be no actual mixing of the two attributes. The apparent meaning of this is, as if He says to him: “Do not do in the attribute of absoluteness what you do in delimitation, which is the day, because the attributes of delimitation is movement and all its outward activities.” The latter are all contrary to the attributes of absoluteness: quietude, peace and hidden activities, such as [subtle] meanings and the like. Prayer is one of the attributes of delimitations, for it can only be performed by making movements. Thus, in his saying: **“offer the sunset prayer,”** he means bring to an end the attributes of delimitation in yourself.

As for forbidding him to pray in the hour of darkness, it is because there is no movement in absoluteness. Also, if he prays in the hour of darkness, he would mix the two attributes. But as we already said, the purpose of this address is to draw a distinction between them, so that actions may not be common to both of them. Moreover, actions that take place in the one are not appropriate for the other. Thus, when he prays the dark hour prayer, a mixing would occur



between the two attributes, whereas the purpose is to make each one of them singular in the actions that are appropriate for it.

As for his saying: **“making the odd-cycled prayer (وتر) obligatory for you, thus making of it a two-cycled prayer (شفع),”** he means to say that if he performs both the sunset and dark hour prayer, a relation would occur based on this act, so that the essence of the relation (عين النسبة) would become a third attribute, intruding upon these two attributes, and causing oddness (الوترية) thereby. This, [in turn], would result in duality by way of the bond (الارتباط), because each of these two prayers depend [for its performance] upon the other, whereas they are [meant to be] outwardly distinct. Thus making duality a necessity and this is inadmissible in [the economy of] Reality (الحقيقة نابي ذلك).

His statement: **“He then said to me: “I veiled you with Uniqueness, but if it were not for Uniqueness you would not know Me; you could not know Me, ever.”** I say his purpose behind this address is to show his transcendence (استعلاؤه) over ignorance, and this transcendence in itself is a veil from multiplicity (الكثرة) by means of Uniqueness, for multiplicity depends [for its existence] upon ignorance. Indeed, its [multiplicity] necessity is based on the perfection of the ignorant in his ignorance (كمال الجاهل في جهله). We have mentioned in *The book of al-Khatm* that what makes multiplicity and differentiation [possible] is a shining light through which the ignorant becomes realized in his ignorance. For the perfection of existence is conditioned upon being both knowing and ignorant. Thus, Uniqueness is for the one who knows Allah, whereas multiplicity is for the one who is ignorant of Him. The knower is veiled by Uniqueness, so that ignorance may not be true of him, while the ignorant is veiled by multiplicity so that knowledge may not be true of him. But since the reality of Allah is one



without multiplicity, once the ignorant one recognizes this reality, the qualities of ignorance no longer apply to him (انتفت عنه صفة الجهل).

Indeed, we have said that ignorance is one of the conditions for the perfection of existence (كمال الوجود). But no one witnesses this truth, except the 'arif, who is the [true] man of knowledge (العالم). Witnessing this is his veil from ignorance. Were it not for this witnessing, the reality of Allah would not be knowable. Once this particular witnessing [of Uniqueness] takes place, and it is a sine qua non for attaining the attribute thereof, Allah cannot be witnessed from the vantage point of His Uniqueness a second time. He made a reference to this in the *al-Futûhât al-Makkiyya*,<sup>312</sup> stating that "Allah does not manifest to a person twice," meaning the theophanic manifestation (تجلي) of Uniqueness. For in the first theophanic manifestation (التجلي الأول), He appears in His [full] Reality (حقيقته), the purpose here being to extinguish the one to whom the manifestation occurs (فناء المتجلي له), which is the essence of assimilation to Qualities thereof (عين الاتصاف). Once this extinction occurs, he has no need for a second extinction. Thus, there is nothing to be gained from a second theophanic manifestation of Uniqueness.<sup>313</sup>

In his statement: "If it were not for uniqueness, you would not know Me," he means to say that if it were not for your being veiled from ignorance you would not have become extinguished in my Essence, nor would you have been qualified by its attributes. His saying: "You would not know Me, ever," refers to the moment when separation of the theophanic manifestation of Uniqueness occurs, for from the moment of this separation, knowledge cannot

<sup>312</sup> Sitt 'Ajam here refers to the *Futûhât*. Elsewhere, she refers to *al-Fusûs* and *Kitâb al-tajaliyyât*. One wonders, in fact, if she had been exposed to the whole text or only to a part of it, particularly since she was unlettered. It is possible that she had attended *majlis 'ilm* (learning sessions), where the *shaykh* read out Ibn 'Arabi's *Futûhât*, or maybe her husband read it out to her. In any case, she seems to have had a prodigious gift of memory, coupled with a most keen understanding.

<sup>313</sup> Sitt 'Ajam reinforces the doctrine of Uniqueness of Being which is similar to the Hindu Advaitic doctrine of "Non-duality".



be truly applicable to the witness, since knowledge (العالم) requires a known (معلوم), whereas he is characterized by both knowledge and the known, and the all-encompassing [attribute] (الاحاطة) as a single reality. There is thus neither distinct knowledge nor distinct known. In this, there is an allusion here to their [the Sufis] saying, may Allah have mercy on them, "who so knows himself, knows his Lord." The knower knows the reality of his own self only in the attribute of uniqueness, so that no second remains to be known to a knower.

His statement: **"Do not profess to [Divine] Unity, else you would be a Christian; if you believe you are an imitator; if you submit [to Islam] you are a hypocrite; and if you attribute partners [to God], you are a Zoroastrian."**<sup>314</sup> I say what he means by this address is to deny juxtaposition (نفي المزاج) in determining *tawhîd*, for the *tawhîd* of the Real (الحق) is not like the *tawhîd* of the Christians, who affirm three spiritual forms, superimposing on them some sort of mixed form, making such [form] as one. But according to him, the *tawhîd* of the Real (الحق) is not like this, rather it is a going back to a fundamental root (الردون إلى الأصل); a learning of a hidden truth; a manifesting in the form of return to nonexistence (رجوع إلى عدم); a deliverance from ignorance to knowledge; and a veiling by Uniqueness from multiplicity.

All these attributes return to the Principle (المبدأ). And we, in so far as we are witnesses (شاهدون), there is no mixing, adapting or making one, but we know His Oneness in reality through the evidence provided by the Messengers. Thus one acquires the attributes of this One in the initial way we were in knowledge, and the origin in this (الأصل فيه) [knowledge] is a return from an existence that is non-existent (رجوع من وجود هو عدم) to a non-existence, that is an

<sup>314</sup> Ibn 'Arabi is here echoing some other Sufi provocative utterance of annihilation in Unity, such as that of Shibli (d. 846) who said: "Alas! Whoever replies about *tawhîd* using clear statements is a deviator, whoever alludes to it is a dualist, whoever is silent about it is ignorant, whoever presumes that he has arrived has not attained, whoever points it out is an idol worshipper, whoever speaks of it is unaware, whoever thinks he is near is distant, and whoever thinks he has found it loses. Everything that you distinguish through imagination or perceive through your intellect, however complete, comes from you and returns to you: it is contingent and fabricated like you." (Quote in Twinch and Beneito, *Contemplations*, p. 94)



existence in the absolute sense, without qualification (كيفية) or quantity (كمية), will (إرادة) or strong desire (همة طلب). That is how I see Him as One (هكذا واحديته). So, if the witness acquires these attributes that we have mentioned, he can no longer be a monotheist (موحد) in reality, because a monotheist in this sense is like someone who makes numerous things into one, and we ourselves do not do so. We are no [such] monotheists, but we become monotheists through Allah making us extinct (جعل الله لنا فان). In this connection, the Imam of this sect [the Sufis], Abu al-Qâsim al-Junayd,<sup>315</sup> may Allah have mercy on him, said in a verse: "No one has known the Unicity of the One for all who hold Him as One are [tainted] by ingratitude."<sup>316</sup> Thus, once the knower (العارف) is assimilated to Uniqueness, the making of things (جعل الأشياء) is no more applicable to him. And we have said before who is the monotheist.

His statement: "if you believe (آمنت), you are an imitator." He refers here to the belief in knowledge (المعرفة) by way of imitation (تقليد). Indeed, the knower by imitation cannot be called a knower (عارف) in reality, because he is not assimilated to the [proper] Qualities thereof (ليس متصفا). He may, however, be considered in the rank of the learned according to exoteric knowledge. It is as if in this address, he [Ibn 'Arabi] is warning against taking knowledge as imitation. The totality of this address occurred to him before reaching perfection, beginning from his saying: "Do not profess the unity [of God]", to his saying: "else you would be a Zoroastrian".

<sup>315</sup> In fact, this poetic line is part of a poem attributed to Abdullah al-Harawi al-Ansâri. (Kashâni, *Sharh manâzil al-sâ'irîn*)

<sup>316</sup> This in fact echoes al-Hallâj's paradoxical statement: "Whoso testifyeth that God is One thereby setteth up another beside Him[namely his own individual self as testifier]." (Quote in Martin Lings, *What is Sufism*, p. 75)



His statement: **"If you submit (أسلمت) you are a hypocrite,"** here he is drawing attention to the taking of this knowledge by way of imitation, because the one who submits to pretenders may be considered a hypocrite. This is so, because he has no realization (لا تحقيق عنده), that brings a certainty of the heart, it is simply a hearing (سمع) and external submitting, involving no real listening. For a realized one (محققاً) can only be someone who has witnessed Reality from its own vantage point. But this one is simply a listener who imitates, and it is quite possible that in his submission he is a hypocrite, for he has no real truth. All these attributes are contrary to what is required for perfection. Indeed, he must be warned against them, if he was [in the state of] constantly witnessing forms (دائم الشهود الصوري), such as this witness before attaining perfection, for he was in constant witnessing of forms.

Also his statement: **"if you attribute partners, you are a Zoroastrian,"** this is for the purpose of forbidding the affirmation of duality (هي إثبات الثنوية), which is the very basis of Zoroastrianism, since associating partners [to divinity] is their characteristic. But this witness is required to acquire the attribute of Uniqueness, which is contrary to dualism and to all such attributes. Therefore prior to attaining it [Uniqueness], he must necessarily be warned against it [i.e. the witnessing of forms], for he [Ibn 'Arabi] was [recipient to] constant address (دائم الخطاب).

His statement: **"Then He said to me, delights are in nourishment, and nourishment in fruit, fruit is in boughs that branch out from the root, and the root is one. If it were not for the earth, the root would not be firm; if it were nor for the root, there would be no branches; and if it were not for the branches, there would be no fruit."** I say the meaning of this address is obvious enough. There is an allusion in it to the uniqueness of existence (أحدية / افتقار), and the interconnection of its parts, as well as their dependency on each other (الوجود), and the interconnection of its parts, as well as their dependency on each other (البعض إلى البعض). Thus if the perfect man attains this attribute of Uniqueness, he comes to know



that everything is essentially in need for that which is other than itself. Because of this attainment, he says that pleasures are in foods, referring thereby to tasting (الذوق). This is because the attaining of [certain] attributes is similar to tasting, since "the one who speaks about fire is not like the one who is immersed therein." Thus the one who is immersed therein possesses the attribute, whereas the one who attests [to it] is only learned [about it]. His purpose behind this is to explain that the Uniqueness of existence cannot be realized except by attaining the attributes; by tasting from the one who pours out to the one who is a recipient (من موفد إلى موفد الوحي); by a kind of subjective predisposition for drinking (شرباً ذاتياً) that both attracts and receives the outpourings. If the physical senses (الجوارح) of the perfect one become characterized by such attributes, he will be giving each of his senses its due (حقه), manifesting what should be manifested, concealing what should be concealed, and finding joy in what is to be enjoyed. All this [occurs] after attaining knowledge (بعد المعرفة), and acquiring the attributes of existents that stand in need of each other, and [acquiring the attributes] of the one life (الحياة الواحدة) that pervades the existence of multiplicity, like when he says: **"Delights are in nourishment,"** referring thereby to tasting. Moreover, in his saying: **"the nourishment in the fruit,"** he refers to the taster (الذائق), to the taste (الذوق), and to the tasted (المذاق). Here, the taster, acquiring the attribute of tasting, and the tasted are [equivalent] to the fruit, whereas taste is the quality (كيفية) the taster acquires in the [process] of mixing that takes place during eating.

His statement: **"the fruits in the boughs"** refers to the dependency (افتقار) of this tasted branch (الفرع المذاق) on an intermediary (واسطة) from which life is extracted. His statement: **"boughs which branch out from the root"** makes a clearer reference to extraction through an intermediary from the life that originates in water. For the existence of the totality of the things mentioned depends upon this root. In his saying: **"the root is one"** he returns to mentioning the



One, pointing to the Uniqueness of Existence (أحدية الوجود) and denying its multiplicity in reality. As for [what appears] in the outward, he states that **"if it were not for the One, no multiplicity would exist,"** as in the case of the fruit. Once again, his statement **"if it were not for the earth, the root would not be firm,"** points to the intermediary that necessitates multiplicity from the One. Thus, if it were not for the density of this body, which is equivalent to the earth, there would not be division (تجزؤ). The same is true of the root of the fruit, if it were not for the earth it would not appear; and if it were not for its appearance it would not branch out. His statement: **"if it were not for the root, there would be no branches,"** is by way of shortening the expression (اختصار اللفظ). It is as if he says: "on the whole, if it were not for the One, no multiplicity would exist, for He is its root (أصل) thereof.

His statement: **"if it were not for the branch there would be no fruit,"** outwardly illustrates how existents are interconnected with each other. So too is his saying in concluding this address: **"if it were not for the fruit, food would not exist,"** in which he points to the intermediary means that sustain the body, thus by means of the existence of fruits eating exists. In this regards, it was transmitted of the learned Imam, Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad Ibn Idris al-Shafi'i - may Allah have mercy on him - that he was informed [by people] of a woman who has given birth to a child without a mouth, so he informed them: "the mother of this new born is without a breast." When they examined the mother, they found her as he said. They asked him: "how did you come to know that?" He said: "since she was born without a mouth, we knew that Allah has not granted her sustenance. In the same vein, is the common proverb: "the One who opened mouths brings them their sustenance." In his statement: **"and without food, delight would not exist,"** he returns to mentioning tasting, for by means of tasting the knower comes to know such an attribute, similarly by means of eating tasting is attained. Eating here stands for assimilation to the attribute (الاتصاف). It is as if he says: "if it were not for the



acquisition of the attributes, this knower would not attain the capacity to differentiate between foods (المطاعم) and the like.

In his saying: **“so all depends on the earth,”** he refers once more to the intermediary from whom all existents extract life. For things cannot be devoid of grossness, and this is the said earth; by means of it, life is extracted. The meaning of **“earth is in need of water,”** is obvious enough, for water is life itself, since everything needs to extract its share from life, even the earth and inanimate matter. As for his statement: **“water needs the clouds,”** this points to how proximate extraction takes its supply from the distant, since clouds are but the vapor of the sea, and Allah sends it from the rich to the poor, for the sea has no need of life, whereas the inert earth is in need of it. So Allah pours on it life through water, by means of the accumulation of the vapor that rises from the sea. Once again, his saying: **“and clouds need wind,”** refers to the means whereby emanation pours out from the Independent, may He be exalted. For by means of the winds, water-laden clouds arise in the form of message-sending (صورة إرسال), as in Allah’s words: “It is Allah who sends the winds which move the clouds” [AL-Rûm – 48]. His saying: **“And the command has made the wind pliant,”** supports what we mentioned about the manner of sending life from the domain of Independence (جناب الغنى) in the direction of dependency (جهة الافتقار).

His statement: **“The [Divine] Command issues from the Lordly presence. From here, ascend, look closely, be pure, and do not utter a word.”** Here [Ibn 'Arabi] is referring to the sending of prophets, upon whom be peace, which originates from the name the Lord (اسم الرب), for there is no prophet or messenger but fully realized in servitude (متحققاً بالعبودية), as in the saying of Allah about Jesus, upon whom be peace, “he is but a servant of ours upon whom we have bestowed our favor” [Al-Zukhruf – 59]; and His saying: “say if the Merciful has a son,



then I shall be the first of the worshippers" [Al-Zukhruf – 81]. Once servitude is established, the Lord's determination becomes necessary. As for the [Divine] Command, this belongs to the tasks of Lordship. By it, Allah tests whomsoever He wills of His servants who are willed [by destiny] to enact it, such as the messengers, the prophets, the saints and others, who are qualified to carry out the tasks of this name. No command can issue unless it be from it [i.e. the name Lord], for command hangs upon determination and determination is but the reality of the penetration of the Name Lord (نفوذ الاسم الرب).

In the statement: **"from here ascend and look,"** he refers by this to the fact that from the time of his realization of servitude onwards, the prophet ascends in his prophethood in a manner that is worthy of him. This is the case also, with the messenger in his messenger-hood, and the saint in his sainthood. Herein is the origin of all ascensions (منشأ المعارج). Prophethood, messenger-hood and sainthood (ولاية), none of these are realized until the Real is witnessed from the vantage point of His name Lord. For we have said that these attributes cannot be [attained] until servitude is realized, so that the shouldering of its tasks can be realized. To this [truth] belongs the Mosaic theophany that necessitated the strike (الصعقة), the one that caused the mountain to crumble, thus the opening of address to him [Moses] in Allah's words: "I am Allah, the Lord of the worlds" [al-Qasas – 30]. This concerns the prophets and the messengers. As for the saints, from the time of their realization of servitude onwards, Allah manifests himself theophanically to them in this name. This is the first of the three hierarchical levels of perfection. From here the saint begins to ascend, traversing the [stations] of the said hierarchical levels, dropping all contention. This is what happens to him prior to perfection.



His saying: "Then He said to me, keep well-protected the intermediaries." I say what he means by the intermediaries is the witnessing that precedes perfection (الشهود السابق على الكمال), by which he points to the recurring of manifestation of the name Lord (تكرار التجلي في الاسم الرب) in the will to realize servitude. This is the witnessing in form (الشهود الصوري), by means of which the witness ascends to the level of perfection (مرتبة الكمال). Hence, in the previous address "from here ascend and look," the allusion [here] was to the Lordly presence, for it is the real intermediary between the one willed for perfection (المراد للكمال) and his perfection. And it was said to him in the witnessing of the leg (مشهد الساق) that he must depend on it, meaning the leg. This points to the witnessing of Allah's form (شهود صورة الله) coming forth from the name the Lord, which is the real intermediary. It is as if he said "retain the witnessing of forms which is the intermediary between you and your perfection."

His saying: Then he said to me [the letters] Ta-Ha<sup>317</sup> are inscribed upon the [constellation] Banat Na'sh as-Sughrâ.<sup>318</sup> I say: his aim from this descent – which is alluded to by [the word] inscribed - is to realize the reading of [the chapter] "Ta- Ha" in the station of the resurrection. For [the constellation] Banat Na'sh as-Sughrâ, as mentioned, belongs to the southern planets parallel to the Yemen. Each time I mention correspondence (مقابلة), it is in order to establish a parallel (الموازاة). And since the Yemen is the place whence the Glorious Qur'an (القرآن المجيد) issues, it must correspond to the said Banat Na'sh as-Sughrâ, in reference to him (the Prophet

<sup>317</sup> Ta-Ha is one of the enigmatic group letters in the Quran which was also considered as one of the Prophet's names. The numerical value of these two letters, if added, are 14, which are related to the macrocosm (العالم) - the copy of the cosmos or the microcosm is the Perfect Man, referring to "the seven heavens and seven earths - the copy of the cosmos or the microcosm is the Perfect Man, referring to "the seven two-folded Muhammadan Reality", and finally the Quran - in particular the Fâtiha which is called the "seven two-folded verses" (al-sab' al-mathâni). This also explains the number of chapters of Ibn 'Arabi's *Mashâhid* and Sitt 'Ajam's book of *Kashf al-kunûz*, which are in both cases 14.

<sup>318</sup> According to Ibn Sawdakîn, "Ursa Major symbolizes the universe, while Ursa Minor, in which the Pole star appears, symbolizes the copy of the universe." These two constellations are part of the ancient Zodiac (قطب). They are characterized by seven stars, one of which is the Pole star that indicates the north, and which was the means whereby the ancients measured direction in seafaring and in the orientation of prayer. It was also said that the sphere revolved around it due to the fact that it is fixed (Beneito, *Contemplations*, p. 95)



Muhammad) - an allusion that occurs in the [chapter] of "Ta Ha." "Ta Ha, We have not revealed the Qur'an unto thee to make you suffer hardship" [Ta Ha 1-2]. It is as if he refers to the inscribing [of Ta Ha upon the constellation] to [the prophetic task of] reminding (التذكير), where He says "unto thee" in reference to him - may God's peace and blessing be upon him.

His saying: **"And He said to me: The Yemenite pole is the Northern pole, and I have placed it in the beginning of surat al-Hadid."** I say this descent has an obvious meaning, because he refers in it to the Uniqueness of Being (أحدية الوجود), which is the one manifest to us. Once this Uniqueness is established, the two poles become one. And since Uniqueness possesses the attribute of multiplicity, it was made [to appear] as two in the vision of the eye, so that everything becomes distinct, yet duality is superimposed on it (دخيل عليه) reality the pole is absolutely one. And if multiplicity should occur to it, it would be in terms of conditions (الارتباط), this is why he made it the pivot around which existence revolves. However, in reality it [existence] revolves around the perfect one. In reality, the celestial spheres also revolve around a single pole, even though it appears as two to the vision of the eye, so He concealed His Uniqueness (خفاء أحديته), the same way the supports [of the universe] were concealed from vision. His saying: **"I have placed it at the beginning of [the chapter] al-Hadid,"** is a reference to God's saying: "He is the First and the Last, the Apparent and the Hidden", which, as we said, is the confirmation of Uniqueness (تأييد الأحدية).

His saying: **"Then He said to me if there were two poles, the celestial spheres would not revolve, and if there were no two poles, the structure would crumble and the celestial spheres would not move."** I say what he means by this address is to confirm what he mentioned about the Uniqueness of Being, for if there were a duality, one cannot realize the one heart (لما تحقق للواحد قلب واحد). Indeed, God said: "God did not make for man two hearts



within his loins" [*al-Ahzâb* - 4]. If existence was not one in person (واحد بالشخص), the celestial sphere would not be made its heart, and it is the form of the one person which moves this celestial sphere. However, the uniqueness of this person (أحدية هذا الشخص) is hidden within the movement's mechanism (آلات الحركة), thus everything that possesses singularity, uniqueness is concealed in its singularity. But it is not permissible to define things in terms of it [Uniqueness] because of the existence of likes (وجود المماثل), yet it is permissible to define it in terms of Oneness, especially the cyclical movement (الحركة الدورية), which is distinguished by Uniqueness outwardly and inwardly, as it has no like. And since the revolving celestial spheres are marked by their multiplicity, it is necessary then to subsume it in Oneness, which is the axis. And since it has been known that a few people believe that actions issue from these celestial spheres, it becomes necessary that it should appear to eye vision, when revolving, as being of two forms, which these people call the two poles, so as to give the ring of truth to what they say. But in reality there is but one pole to rely upon, which is called an axis in their terminology.

His saying: **"If there were no two poles, the structure would crumble and the celestial spheres would not move."** I say he refers to the appearance of things, for if there were no subject, object, or locus – which is the circumference – the revolving of the celestial spheres cannot be realized. Because it needs a mover in order to move. And since the mover is hidden, [movement] must be due to the occurrence of duality in eye vision. His saying: **"Then he said me do not look at the aspects of the two poles, but look at that which is hidden in single cycle."**<sup>319</sup> At such a time, you can say whatever you wish. If you wish [say] two or if you wish [say] one." I say he means by this statement to forbid the affirming of duality, for the existence of the two poles is their outward appearance, and existence, in its outward aspect, is

<sup>319</sup> In the original manuscript of Sitt 'Ajam this word is written *al-Bukra*, while in Hakim's edition of *al-Mashahid* its *al-Karra*.



multiple. So whenever the witness, who is predisposed for perfection, limits himself to perceiving the apparent side of existence, he would not see the inward (لما يحصل له الباطن), which is the Truth. It is thus as if he said to him: Do not look to outward multiplicity or to the existence of duality, for the root is the Uniqueness of Being, this is why He commands him to look to what is unseen in the cycle (البكرة), referring to the Oneness of the pole, which is referred to outwardly as the axis.

His statement: **“At such a time, you can say what you wish: if you wish two, and if you wish one,”** here, he is referring here to his having witnessed uniqueness by means of both vision (عيانا) and assimilation to Qualities (اتصافا). Thus, if he attains such an attribute, and reverts to perfection he becomes capable of exercising his free will. So, if he says two, he would be referring to the multiplicity of his attributes, duality being inseparable from limitation, whereas if he said one, he would be referring to his Oneness of form, characterized by the Unique Essence. For perfection is but the assimilation of the quality of the Essence (الاتصاف بأوصاف الأحد), after having become extinguished in it, and this is part of what occurred to him before realizing perfection.

His statement: **“In the bond between [the letter] *alif* and [the letter] *lâm*, there is a mystery that may not be revealed, which I placed in my reiteration [of God’s saying]: “God is He who raised the heavens without any supports [Al-Ra’d – 2]. I say he is reverting here to the first witnessing (مشهد) in full circle, which is the coupling of the First with the Last, and this is a specificity of this witnessing. At its outset, he commenced by likening the bond between servitude and Uniqueness with that between the *lâm-alif*, making this witnessing circular. So he is reverting to *lâm-alif*, closing off with it, just as he initially started. This is due to the manner of arrangement (صنعة الترتيب) because of a matter he wished to conceal, and apart from**



all the other words regarding witnessing, we have followed his example of concealing. God knows I have concealed nothing, apart from this [particular] matter. His saying: **"a mystery that may not be revealed,"** refers to the truth concerning the union between the name "Lord" and the servant, and the interdependence between them, for this union is one of the most mysterious of mysteries. It was pointed at by the most singular imam and perfect knower, Sahl Ibn Abd Allah at-Tasturi, when he said: "Lordship has a mystery, if it appears, Lordship would be undone (بطلت)?" We have referred to such words of his in many places in this book in their appropriate contexts. Each one of them [the Sufis] - may God be well pleased with them - pointed to the existing union (الاتحاد الواقع) between Lordship and servant-hood.

His statement: **"I have placed it in my reiteration of it is He God who raises the heavens without supports,"** refers to the concealment of this secret, which is the union between the Lord and the servant, just as He [God] concealed from the sights of those who eye the heavens the reality of the supports. Herein lies the very essence of union (عين الاتحاد), this concealing is the very essence of its union, just as the bond in "lâm-alif" is the reality of union. For if the supports were to appear to onlookers, they would make the Oneness of being apparent to whomsoever looks upon it, and no special mystery would remain for the One and Singular. On this mystery, which is the union of the supports, Ibn 'Abbâs, may God be well-pleased with him, said: "If I interpret for you the saying of Allah: 'It is Allah who created seven heavens and [seven] earths like them, between them the Divine command is made to descend' [*al-Talâq* - 11], 'you would stone me,' or he said, 'you would say he is a *kâfir*.'" He thus made the matter - may Allah be pleased with him - like a passage (سبيل), necessary for the descent of the [Divine] Command.



## GLOSSARY

### OF SUFI TERMS

A	Ascent	عروج ، معراج
'Abrahamic'	Assimilation	الاتصاف
Abiding	Assimilated to delimitation	الاتصاف بالتقييد
Absent (omain)	God's assimilation to delimitation	اتصاف الله بالتقييد
Absolute	Assimilated to the totality of being	
Absoluteness		متصف بمجموع الوجود
Abstruse	The assimilation of the attributes of the Essence	
Accident	الاتصاف بأوصاف الذات	
Act	In accordance to the form	على الصورة
Sexual act	Attribute	صفة
The supererogatory act	Attribute of incomparability	صفة التنزيه
Actions	Attaining stability in submission	تمكين التسليم
Actuality	Attestation	النطق
Address	Attribution	إضافة، نسبة
Advancing	Attribute	صفة
Advantage		
Allusion		
Annihilation	B	
Annihilated in the Essence of God	Balancing	تعديل
	Being	الوجود
	Bewilderment	التحير
	Beginning	الابتداء
Arrival	Being imprinted	انتقاش
Ascendants	Belief	اعتقاد، عقيدة
Ascension		



Bestowal	وهب	Correspondence	مقابلة
Blindness	العماء	A correspondence to utter darkness	مقابلة الأعمى
Branch	الفرع	Command	أمر
Breath	نفس	Come	يرجع
Breath of the All-Merciful	نفس الرحمن	Those who come back	الراجعون
Bringing together (coming)	جمع، اجتماع	Conception, conceptualization	تصور
Body	جسم، جسد، بدن	Conclusion	خاتمة
Body of the Gnostic	جثة العارف	Condition	شرط
		Constant address	دائم الخطاب
		Contradiction	مناقضة
C		Contradictory	نقيض
Cause	علة	Convent	عهد
Certitude	يقين	Covering	غطاء
Certainty	يقين	Corporeal	جسماني، جسمي
Change	تغيير، تعديل	Cosmos	العالم
Christic	عيساوي	Creation	خلق
Cognitive	علمي		
Coinciding	اتفاق، موافقة		
Command	أمر	<b>D</b>	
Commoner	عامية	Darkness	ظلمة
Companion	صاحب	Definition	حد
The Compassionate	الرحمن	Empirical definition	التحديد العلمي
Compassionate	رحيم	Delimitation	التقييد
Compassionate one	رحماني	Aspect of delimitation	حزب التقييد
Comprehensive	جمعي	Concealing of delimitation	خفاء التقييد
Comprehensive Unity	الحضرة الجامعة		



Delimited image	الصورة المقيّدة	Duality of address	ثنوية الخطاب
Density	الكثافة		
Descent	التنزل	<b>E</b>	
Description	وصف	Earning	اقتباس
Designation	تعين	Effusion	فيض
Determination	الحكم	End	انتهاء
Absolute determination	مطلق الحكم	Entity	عين
Determined	معين	Essence	ذات
The determinations of the Names	أحكام الأسماء	Essence of the relation	عين النسبة
Direction of dependency	جهة الافتقار	The Essence	(الذات)
Disclosure	تجلي	Its Essence	عينه
Disengagement	تجريد	Ecstatic utterances	شطحات
Distinct	متميز	Emanation	الفيض
Distinction	التمييز	Outpouring of emanation	توالي الفيض
Distinguishing	مميز	Emergence	خروج، بزوغ ظهور
Divine	إلهي	Empowerment	تمكين
Divinity	الألوهية	The all-encompassing [attribute]	الإحاطة
The Divine	الإله	Engendering	تكوين
Divine attraction	جذب إلهي	Existence	وجود
Divine pen	القلم الإلهي	Existence of likes	وجود المماثل
The [Divine] Presence	الحضرة	Non existence, nonexistent	عدم
Division	تجزؤ	Perfection of existence	كمال الوجود
Domain of Independence	جنان الغنى	Prior to Existence	قبل الوجود
Dust	هباء	The Eternity of the world	قدم العالم
Duality	ثنوية	Exegesis	تفسير



Exegetical	تفسيري	The Glorious Qur'an	القرآن المجيد
Existence became realized	تحقق الوجود		
Expression	عبارة	<b>H</b>	
		He-ness	هوية
<b>F</b>		Hearing	سمع
Face	وجه	Holy	قدسي
Female worshippers	العابدات	How	كيف
Femininity	أنوثة	Howness	كيفية
Female	أنثى	Human volition	إرادة
First	أول		
The form of awareness	صورة الإدراك	<b>I</b>	
The form of the Name	صورة الاسم	I-ness or Divine 'Me'	الإنية
Fixity	ثبوت	Ignorance	جهل
Form	صورة	Imagination	خيال ، وهم
Friends of God	الأولياء	Imaginal	خيالي
All encompassing fullness	صمدية	The imaginal Worlds	عالم الخيال
		Imitation	تقليد
<b>G</b>		Immanence	تسبيح
Gift	عطية	Immanent within it	مستودعاً فيه
Gift (bestowal)	عطاء	Impressed	المنطبع
Charismatic gift	كرامة	Imprint of this delimited form	انطباع الصورة المقيدة
Gnosis	معرفة	Imprinted on the body of the mirror	منطبعاً في جسم المرآة
God	الله		
"Glory be to me! How great is my nature"	"سبحاني ما أعظم شاني"	Intermediary	واسطة



In the footsteps of the prophets	على قدم الأنبياء		
Incapacity	عجز	<b>K</b>	
Incapacity of mortal nature	عجز البشرية	The Knower	العارف
Incomparability	التنزيه	The one Knower	العارف الواحد
Independence	غنى	Knowledge	علم
Infinity	ما لا نهاية، ما لا يتناهى	Knowledge	المعرفة
Innovations	بدعة	Known things	معلومات
Inspiration	إلهام	A knowing Essence	ذات عالمة
Intellect	عقل	The known things being hidden	المعلومات الخافية
Intention, intended	قصد، مقصود	Exoteric knowledge	علم الظاهر
Interpretation	تأويل		
The Inward	الباطن	<b>L</b>	
Investiture	خلع	Level	مرتبة
Ipseity	الهوية	The level of perfection	مرتبة الكمال
In opposition	في مقابلة	Light	نور
Irresistible domination	قهر	The [light] of Divinity	نور الألوهية
Isthmus	برزخ	The light of intuition	نور الشعور
		Light of the Essence	النور الذاتي
<b>J</b>		Likeness	مثال، مثل، مثلية
Journey	سفر	Limitation	تحديد
Journey to God	سفر إلى الله	The limit	الحد
Journey from God	سفر من الله	The limited	المقيد
Journey in God	سفر في الله	Locus	محل
Judgment of the situation	حكام الوضع	The locus of continuous emanation	
Justice	العدل		محل الفيض المتتالي



Lord	الرب	Mirror	مرآة
Lordship	ربوبية	Monotheist	موحد
Lute-tree of the limit	سدرة المنتهى	The Mirror	المرآة
		Movement	حركة
<b>M</b>		A movement back and forth	تردد
Macrocosm	الكون الكبير	The cyclical movement	الحركة الدورية
Majesty	جلال	'Mosaic'	موسوي
Making of things	جعل الأشياء	Multiplicity	الكثرة
The Maker	البارئ	Mystery	سر
Manifestation	ظهور	Mysteries	أسرار
Manifest	ظاهر		
The manifesting of the non-existent inward		<b>N</b>	
	إظهار الباطن المعدوم	Name	اسم
Non-manifest	باطن	Nature	طبيعة
The manner of this investiture	كيفية هذا الخلع	The Name	الاسم
Many	كثير	The Named	المسمى
Marriage	النكاح	The Name of Divinity	اسم الألوهية
Masculinity/ femininity	ذكورة	The Names	الأسماء
Matter	مادة	The naturalist philosophers	التابعين
Meaning	معنى	Nearness	قرب
Meanings	المعاني	Necessary	واجب
Mercy	الرحمة	Negation	نفي
Metaphor	مجاز	The Night	العتمة
Microcosm	الكون الصغير	Night of Power	ليلة القدر
Miracles	كرامات	Non-being	العدم



Non-existent	معدوم		
Not lasting	فانية	P	
		Passage	سبيل
O		Parallel	الموازاة
Obligation	التزام	A parallel correspondence	مقابلة موازاة
Obligation of servant-hood	التزام العبودية	Path	طريق
Obstructing veils	الحجب المانع	Particularity	خصوص
An ocean of essential truth	بحر الحقائق	Patience	الصبر
Oddness	الوترية	Common people	العامة
Other	غير ، سوى	Perfection, perfect	كمال ، كامل
Obliteration	محو	Perfection	الكمال
Occasion	سبب	Perfection of Existence	كمال الوجود
One	الأحد	The Perfect Man	الإنسان الكامل
Odd	وتر	Perfect One	الواحد الكامل
Ontological	وجودي	Perfect Muhammadan Manifestation	
The odd-cycled prayer	وتر		كمال الظهور المحمدي
Order	طريقة	The perfection of the ignorant in his ignorance	
Akbari Order	الطريقة الأكبرية		كمال الجاهل في جهله
The origin of all ascensions	منشأ المعارج	The perfection of the attribute of delimitation	
The Oneness of Divinity	واحدية الإله		كمال صفات التقيد
The One	الواحد	Perception	إدراك
Oneness	الواحدية	Perpetuation of creation	تجديد الخلق
Oneness of Being	وحدة الوجود	Place	مكان
The Opening	الفاحة	Pole	قطب
Outward	ظاهر	Praise	حمد



Presence	حاضرة	Quality	صفة
Prophecy/ prophethood	نبوة	Divine Qualities	الصفات الإلهية
Possibility	إمكان	Qualitative nature	كيفية
Provision	رزق	Qualification	اتصاف
The penetration of the Name	نفوذ الاسم	Qualified	موصوف
The Pole	القطب	Quantity	كمية
Prayer-niche	محراب	Quaddity	ماهية
Prayer of the night	وتر		
Predicated	محمولا	<b>R</b>	
Presence	حضور، حاضرة	Readiness	تهيئة
A presence for the appearance of manifestations		The Real	الحق
حاضرة لمرور المظاهر		Reality	حقيقة الحق
The Presence of the continuum [of realities]		His real form	حقيقته الصورية
حاضرة التوالي		In His [full] Reality	بحقيقته
		The reality of realities	حقيقة الحقائق
Present to his delimited self	حاضراً لنفسه المقيدة	Real	حقيقة
Presence of the [hidden] identity	حاضرة الهوية	Real	حق
Preserved intact	حفظه	Real	حقيقي
Predisposition for drinking	شرباً ذاتياً	Realization	التحقيق
Permissibility	إباحة	Realize	يتحقق
Power	قوة	Realized in servitude	متحققاً بالعبودية
Powerful attraction	قوة الجذب	Reason, rational faculty , national understanding	
Prophet	النبي		عقل
		Re-enforced	ممكناً

## Q



The recurring of manifestation of the name Lord	Seal	ختم
تكرار التجلي في الاسم الرب	Secret	سر
Religion	Self	نفس
دين	The servant	العبد
Relationship as one of bond	Servant hood	عبودية
ارتباط	Servitude	عبودية
Remaining	Sign	آية
البقاء	The seer	الناظر
Reminding	The seen	المنظور
التذكير	Sharing the Divine Names	اقتسام الأسماء الإلهية
تأخير	Similarity	تشبيه
Retreating	Single names of uniqueness	آحاد الأسماء الأحادية
Revealed	Sobriety	صحو
أوحى	Soul	نفس
وحي	Sovereignty	ملكوت
كشف	Specification	اختصاص، تخصيص
رجع	Speech, speaking	كلام، قول
رجوع إلى عدم	Spirit	روح
ذكر	The Spiritualists	الروحانيون
نسبة	Stand over her	قيوما عليها
إجابة	The station of Majesty	مقام الجلالة
وحي	The star of negation	نجم النفي
صعود	The star of servant-hood	نجم العبودية
الأصل	The star of incomparability	نجم التنزيه
حكم	The Ever-subsisting	الباقي
جري		
S		
Sanctuary		
محراب		
Sainthood		
ولاية		
صديقية		
Science		
علمي		
Sciences of mysteries		
علوم الأسرار		



A Similitude	مثالاً	Taster	ذائق
Sincerity	الصدق	Tasted	مذاق
Stand	يقف	Tongue	لسان
The initial stand	الأولية	Tongue of the heart	اللسان القلبي
The strike	الصعقة	Tool	على
Star	كوكب	Totality	مجموع
State	حال	The totality of being	مجموع الوجود
State of primordial beginning	الأولية	The totality of delimited being	مجموع الوجود المقيد
State of return	حال الرجوع	A two-cycled prayer	شفع
State of submission	مقام التسليم	Transcendence	تنزيه - استعلاء
Station	مقام	Transcendent	مستعلياً
Staying in the image	لقيام في الصورة	Throne	عرش
Strong desire	همة طلب	Truth	حقيقة
Subsistence	البقاء	Triplicity	تثليث
Subtle	لطيف	Trust	التوكل
Subtlety	لطف		
Summation	إجمال	U	
Summation of totality	مختصر من المجموع	Unbelief, disbelief	كفر
Sun	شمس	Unboundedness	إطلاق
The Sustainer	قيوم	Unbounded	مطلق
Synthesis	الجمع	Understanding	فهم
Synthesis of synthesis	جمع الجمع	Undifferntiation	إجمال
		Unification	اتحادي
		Unity	أحدية
T		The Unity of Divinity	توحيد الإله
Taste	الذوق		



Union	الاتحاد	Witnessing	شهود ، مشاهدة
The existing union	الاتحاد الواقع	The witness	الشاهد
The essence of union	عين الاتحاد	The witnessed	المشهود
Uniqueness	الأحدية	A witnessing by inversion	الشهود على العكس
Uniqueness of Existence	أحدية الوجود	A witnessing of an inversion of meaning	
The Unique	الأحد		شهود عكس المعنى
Universal	كلي	Witnessing of forms	الشهود الصوري
Unlettered	أمية	Witnessing of opposites	شهود النقيضين
Unuttered	أمي	Witnessing of the Real	شهود الحق
Unveiling	كشف ، مكاشفة	Witnessing Allah's form	شهود صورة الله
		World	عالم
V		World of analogy	عالم المثال
The Veil	الحجاب	Worship	عبادة
The verifiers	المحققون	Worshippers	الصادقون
Vicegerency	خلافة	Womb	رحم
Vicegerent	خليفة		
The truth of vicegerency	حقيقة الخلافة		
The virtuous	الصالح		
Vision	رؤية		
Human volition	إرادة بشرية		
W			
Why	لم		
Whyness	لمية		
Will	إرادة		



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