

Unraveling the Mystery of  
*The Hidden Treasure:*  
The Origin and Development of a Ḥadīth  
Qudsī and its Application in Sūfī Doctrine

By

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## Abstract

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The tradition of the Hidden Treasure is the most widely used *ḥadīth* in the field of speculative mysticism. It states: “I was a Hidden Treasure; I loved to be known, so I created the creation in order to be known.” From the 5<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century onward this tradition has occurred in major Ṣūfī texts, and the great Ṣūfī masters like Ibn al-‘Arabī and Rūmī have made abundant use of it to build their mystical philosophy. Although it is very brief, this tradition refers to such themes as *wujūd* (being), God as the Absolute Being, names and attributes of God, the self-disclosure of God, love as the motive for creation, the concept and process of creation, and the concept of knowledge. These themes are among the most fundamental concepts in speculative mysticism. Aside from Ṣūfīs, Islamic philosophers and theologians also have mentioned this tradition in their writings. A few brief commentaries have been written on this tradition by some Ṣūfīs and theologians, the translations of which are provided in the appendices. However, in spite of the popularity of this tradition no systematic study of this *ḥadīth*, and of its influence on the development of Ṣūfī thought has been undertaken so far. It is hoped that this research will address this deficiency and open the way for further studies. This research is based mostly, though not exclusively, on study of the writings of Ibn al-‘Arabī and the prominent Ṣūfīs among his students who more than any other Ṣūfī have referred to this tradition, and built some of their mystical concepts around it.

# Table of Contents:

Abstract

Introduction

## Chapter One: Historical background

- The Origin of the Tradition of the Hidden Treasure and discussion of authenticity
- *Ḥadīth* Evaluation and Criticism
- Western Scholarship on *al-Aḥādīth al-Qudsiyya*
- Earliest Sources of the Tradition of the Hidden Treasure
- Objections to the Tradition of the Hidden Treasure

## Chapter Two: “I Was a Hidden Treasure...”

- The Ontology of Divinity
- Ibn al-‘Arabī and the Concept of Hidden Treasure
- Ibn al-‘Arabī on the Ontology of Being and its Relation to the Hidden Treasure
- Primary Ṣūfī Texts and the Tradition of the Hidden Treasure
- Stations of the Hidden Treasure

## Chapter Three: Station of *Aḥadiyya*

- The Realm of Absolute Essence

- *Aḥadiyya* and Related Concepts
  - Only God Existed
  - The Ultimate Purity of Devotion
  - Fancies! Not True Recognition
  - Everything Perishes but His Face
  - The Beloved, the Love, and the Lover
  - *Al-‘Amā’*, The Cloud
  - The Most Holy and the Holy Effusions
- *A’yān Thābita*, Intelligible Archetypes
- The True Being and *A’yān Thābita*: Some Analogies

#### Chapter Four: Station of *Wāḥidiyya*

- The Domain of Attributes and Names
- The Distance of Two Bows
- The Intelligible Archetypes: Further Considerations
- Divine Flashes

#### Chapter Five: The Concept of Love

- The Etymology of Love
- Love as the Motive for Creation
- Classification of Love

- Sūfī Views on Love: Further Considerations

## Chapter Six: The Concept of Creation

- Perpetual Creation and Renewal
- Ibn al-‘Arabī and the Ash‘arite Doctrine of Creation

## Chapter Seven: *Ma‘rifa*, Knowledge and True Understanding

- *‘Ilm* and *Ma‘rifa*
- Ibn al-‘Arabī on *Ma‘rifa*

## Conclusion

## Appendix I: Translation of Najm al-Dīn Rāzī’s Commentary on the Tradition of the Hidden Treasure

## Appendix II: Translation of al-Aḥsā’ī’s Commentary on the Tradition of the Hidden Treasure

## Appendix III: Translation of the Treatise on the Immutable Entities

## Bibliography

## Acknowledgement

I was a teenager when for the first time I learned of the tradition of the Hidden Treasure. Over the years I found many references to this tradition in various texts but they were quite brief, and very little explanation was offered. As I continued my study of the Ṣūfī writings the need for a systematic study of this tradition, and its influence on the development of speculative mysticism, became clear to me.

It is not possible to express adequately my gratitude to all those who have been instrumental in inspiring and guiding me to complete this dissertation. Many teachers and mentors have helped me over the years, some of whom have left this physical domain for a better realm. As for my formal studies, I would like to express my gratitude to my dissertation advisor Professor Hamid Algar, who guided this research and carefully provided detailed guidance at every stage. Over the years Dr. John Hayes has assisted me with expert analysis of Arabic texts, and also served on the dissertation committee; I am much indebted to him. I am grateful to Professor Munis Faruqi from the department of South and South East Asian Studies who kindly accepted to serve on the dissertation committee and provided valuable recommendations.

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# Introduction

Few Islamic mystical traditions have enjoyed the widespread usage of the tradition of the Hidden Treasure. Fewer still have been as controversial and instrumental as this *ḥadīth* in the development of Ṣūfī theology. It might arguably be the most popular tradition found in scores of Ṣūfī books of both *Sunnī* and *Shī‘ī* literature. Although its authenticity as a true *ḥadīth* has been questioned from textual and historical points of view its content has been accepted, almost universally, as being sound and concordant with Islamic theology.

In spite of its popularity, so far no major study of the tradition of the Hidden Treasure has been undertaken. In recent years passing references have been made to this *ḥadīth* in a few books published in the West, but a critical review and detailed study of it are wanting.

The origin of this tradition has been subject to polemic discussion over the centuries. In some Ṣūfī texts it has been reported that the Prophet David addressed God, saying: “O Lord! Why didst Thou create the world?” In response God uttered the *ḥadīth* of the Hidden Treasure: “I was a Hidden Treasure; I loved to be known; therefore, I created the creation to be known.” Although this is a short *ḥadīth*, it relates to some of the most fundamental themes of speculative mysticism.

This study is by no means comprehensive, whether historically, philologically, or in its scope. To offer even a brief account of the major texts, and the contexts in which this tradition is quoted, would be beyond the scope and intent of this study. The purpose of this work is to discuss major themes in Ṣūfī theology that have been linked to the tradition of the Hidden Treasure. Some of the themes are:

1. The concept of being (*wujūd*), the Absolute Being or God as the Hidden Treasure, and the Ontological categories of existence:
  - *Aḥadiyya*: the station of unicity of God, wherein divine names and attributes are non-existent. This is the station of pure essence.



- *Wāḥidiyya*: the station of oneness of God, wherein divine names and attributes find existence.
  - Other themes such as *A'yān Thābita*, 'Amā' or the Primordial dust, and holy emanations.
2. The concept of self-disclosure of God and loci of manifestation.
  3. The concept of love, divine love as the motive for creation, manifestation of divine love in the physical world, and forms and stages of love.
  4. The concept and process of creation, and the purpose behind Creation.
  5. The concept of knowledge and *Ma'rifa* (true understanding), knowledge of the Divine, and levels and forms of knowledge.

In addition to the above, the origin and historical background of this tradition will be discussed, particularly the religious and intellectual environment in which this *ḥadīth* has caused polemic discussion. The earliest documents containing this *ḥadīth* will be surveyed, and its role in the development of theoretical Ṣūfism will be investigated.

A brief philological study of this tradition will be undertaken in order to assess validity of the claims which refute this *ḥadīth* purely on the basis of grammatical objections. Also, other objections to the validity of this tradition will be reviewed.

The translation of three commentaries (two in Arabic and one in Persian) on the tradition of the Hidden Treasure by early Ṣūfis and theologians will be provided in the appendices.

For the transliteration of certain names from the Persian sources I have used either the Persian or the Arabic pronunciation based on the source used. For example, in referring to one of the works of a Persian poet 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, I have used *Mathnavī* or *Mathnawī* depending on the printed version from which I have quoted. Also, in quoting names or words

from a particular publication, whether Arabic or Persian, the transliteration complies with the version printed in the source even though the transliteration may not be accurate or up-to-date. For example, *Abdal Ḥakīm Murād* rather than *‘Abd al-Ḥakīm Murād*, or Koran instead of the Qur’ān have been used to comply with the source quoted.

Finally, in this work, the term “tradition” is used as the English term for *ḥadīth*.

The pool of material used for this study includes the earliest extant Islamic mystical literature, as well as other religious writings from that period onward. This *ḥadīth* occupies prominent position in the writings of the mystical school of Ibn al-‘Arabī and his followers in the seventh Islamic century. Several chapters of *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* of Ibn al-‘Arabī are in fact elaborations of the themes found in this tradition. Therefore, those writings form the major sources of study for this work.

Ibn al-‘Arabī (560/1164-638/1242) is quite likely the most influential Ṣūfī writer in Islamic history. Although he did not start any particular Ṣūfī order, his influence is felt in the entire domain of speculative mysticism. Of the nearly 850 texts attributed to Ibn al-‘Arabī, Osman Yahya believes that about 700 are authored by him and the rest by his students. His doctrines have dominated nearly all the schools of mystical philosophy. He came to be known as *al-Shaykh al-Akbar* (The Greatest Master) and *al-Muḥyi al-Dīn* (The Reviver of the Religion). Two of his writings have become prominent in the Ṣūfī writings, viz, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* and *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*.

*Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* is the most widely read book of Ibn al-‘Arabī. This book, written in 627/1231, is considered as the spiritual testament of Ibn al-‘Arabī. In the introduction of the book he says that the Prophet Muḥammad appeared to him in a vision and handed him a book to be delivered to the people of the world. It is arguably the most important book in the field of speculative mysticism. Many commentaries have been written on this book; the most famous among them are those by Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, Dāwūd Qayṣarī, Mu’ayyid al-Dīn al-Jandī, ‘Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī, ‘Abd al-Ghanī Nāblusī, Tāj al-Dīn Khwārazmī, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, and Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, all of which have been used for this research.

*Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (The Meccan Openings) is the largest work of Ibn al-‘Arabī, and is like an encyclopedia of various concepts and terms. It is interesting that in this massive work, Ibn al-‘Arabī uses the tradition of the Hidden Treasure on different occasions while discussing many diverse themes and concepts.

# Chapter One: Historical Background

## The Origin of the Tradition of the Hidden Treasure and Discussion of Authenticity

The history of the origin and development of *ḥadīth*, the science of *ḥadīth* evaluation and criticism, and the role *ḥadīth* has played in the development of Islamic thought comprise a vast body of literature. Study of *ḥadīth* literature sheds light on topics as diverse as pre-Islamic Arabia, the history of the early period of the Islamic community, and the development of Islamic law.

In this work we will summarize some of the major points of *ḥadīth* scholarship which are relevant to the study of that genre of traditions that are popular among the Ṣūfīs, and in particular to the tradition of the Hidden Treasure. The purpose is not to introduce the topic of *ḥadīth* and its classification, but to consider some of the reasons why certain *ḥadīth* became popular among the Ṣūfīs even though they are not found in the standard *ḥadīth* collections. We will start with a brief introduction and then look at some of the potential reasons.

The word *ḥadīth* has a variety of meanings. The Arabic verb *ḥadatha* means to happen, occur, take place, and come to pass; the verb *ḥadutha* means to be new, recent, or to be young. Dihkhudā in his famous encyclopedic dictionary, *Lughat-Nāmih*, has listed over fifteen categories of definitions for the word *ḥadīth*, each category comprised of several meanings.<sup>1</sup> Among the meanings are: new word, something new, novel, young, issue, job, subject, event, condition, worthy, belief, news, awareness, story, narrative, myth, biography, and many more. In combination with other words it finds multiple other meanings.

In the Islamic literature two categories are defined for the sayings of Prophet Muḥammad. The first category consists of those sayings narrated

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<sup>1</sup> Dihkhudā, ‘Alī Akbar, *Lughat-Nāmih*, Vol. 18, Tehran, 1330/1951, pp. 395-400.

by the Prophet that came to him through Jibrā'il. This type of *ḥadīth* is called *al-ḥadīth ilāhī* or *al-ḥadīth al-qudsī*.

The second and infinitely larger group represents those sayings that are the words of Prophet Muḥammad himself; this form of *ḥadīth* is called *al-ḥadīth al-Nabawī*, meaning the prophetic saying. Ibn al-Ḥajar<sup>2</sup> makes a distinction between the recited Revelation, which is the Qur'ān, and the Revelation from God narrated by Prophet Muḥammad, but is not recited Revelation. This latter category is *al-ḥadīth al-qudsī*. According to Ibn al-Ḥajar, *al-aḥādīth* (plural of *ḥadīth*) *al-qudsiyya* were revealed to the Prophet on the night of *Mi'rāj* (ascension to heaven). The number of *al-aḥādīth al-qudsiyya* has been estimated at around one hundred by at-Tahānawī in his *Kashshāf Iṣṭilāḥāt al-Funūn*<sup>3</sup> on the authority of Ibn al-Ḥajar, although some authors have said the number is close to forty. For example, Sayyid Ḥossein Naṣr in *Ideals and Realities of Islam*<sup>4</sup> puts the number at forty.

On a different occasion Ibn al-Ḥajar describes what he calls the three forms of the Word of God (*Kalām Allāh*), and defines *al-ḥadīth al-qudsī*. Here is a brief section of what he says:

The words of God are of three forms. The first and most honored is the Qur'ān which is the most eloquent and miraculous form of the words of God. This form is immune to changes and distortions, every letter of it is equal to ten letters of other words, and it is superior to other words of God. The second form consists of the books of the earlier prophets, before they were distorted. The third form refers to those words of God known as *al-aḥādīth al-qudsiyya*; these are in the form

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<sup>2</sup> Ibn al-Ḥajar al-Haythamī, born in Egypt in 909/1504 and died in Mecca in 974/1567, was a famous traditionist. His commentary on al-Nawawī's *Arba'ūn*, known as *al-Fath al-mubīn* is the earliest work in which *Aḥādīth Qudsiyya* have been treated to an appreciable extent.

<sup>3</sup> Tahānawī, Muḥammad 'Alī, *Kashshāf Iṣṭilāḥāt al-Funūn*, vol. 1, Beirut, 1996, p. 629.

<sup>4</sup> Naṣr, Sayyid Ḥossein, *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, New York and Washington, Frededrick A. Praeger, 1967, p. 83.

of *al-Akhhbār al-Āḥād* (the individual or isolated narrations) which the Prophet has narrated to us from his Lord.

Hence, this form of words is attributed to God even though at times it is attributed to Prophet Muḥammad since he narrated them from God. In referring to quotations from the Qur’ān it is typically said: “God, exalted be He, has said. ” On the other hand, when referring to *al-aḥādīth al-quḍsiyya* one of the following two forms of narration is used: either it is said “The Prophet of God narrating from his Lord said” or “God, exalted be He, according to that which has been narrated from Him by the prophet of God, may peace be upon him and his family, said.”<sup>5</sup>

The distinction between the word of God revealed in the Qur’ān and the word of God revealed in the form of *ḥadīth* is important from a theological perspective. Graham refers to this distinction in his *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam*:

The distinction represents an attempt to preserve the absoluteness and uniqueness, the “partnerlessness”, of God by careful separation of His word from the limited, human words of His apostles and prophets. The Qur’ān as divine word is immutable and absolute; in due course, Muslim theology even insisted that it was uncreated, existing eternally as the divine attribute of speech (*kalām Allāh*). The *ḥadīth* as vehicle of the prophetic *sunnah* is mutable and historically contingent; thus the Islamic Science of tradition (*ilm al-ḥadīth*) maintained that an *ḥadīth* from Muḥammad is divinely inspired in its meaning, but not verbally revealed (and hence not “fixed” as to wording) like the Qur’ān.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in *Kashshāf Iṣṭilāḥāt al-Funūn*, Vol. 1, Beirut, 1996, pp. 629-630.

<sup>6</sup> Graham, William A., *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam*, The Hague and Paris, 1975, p. 14.

## Hadīth Evaluation and Criticism

*Al-aḥādīth al-qudsiyya* have been very popular among the Ṣūfīs. In the classification of *ḥadīth*, this genre of traditions have been characterized as *al-āḥād-al-munfaṣil* (the singulars-disconnected). A brief description of certain *ḥadīth* terminology should prove helpful before discussing this category, and its implication for the tradition of the Hidden Treasure.

One of the subjects in the field of the *Science of the Study of Ḥadīth* deals with the methods of criticism and authentication of traditions. Early Muslim scholars based their practice of *ḥadīth* criticism on quotations from the Qur’ān. For example, in verse 6 of *Sūra al-Ḥujurāt* it is stated: “O you who believe! If an evil-doer comes to you with a report, look carefully into it, lest you harm a people in ignorance.”<sup>7</sup> After the passing of Prophet Muḥammad some of the *Companions* (*ṣaḥāba*) began to apply strict criteria for acceptance of *aḥādīth* and reports, and thereby rejected some of the transmissions. Ṣiddīqī reports a few instances from the time of the *Companions*:

‘Ali refused to accept a *ḥadīth* told by Ma‘qil ibn Sinān. ‘Ammār ibn Yāsir once reported a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet with regard to the *tayammum* ablution, in a gathering of the *Companions*, and ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb spoke up and said: “Fear God!”- thereby indicating his disagreement with what ‘Ammār had reported. When Maḥmūd ibn al-Rabī‘ reported in an assembly of the *Companions* that the Prophet had said that no-one who professed that there was no god but God would be sent to hellfire, Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī remarked that he did not think that the Prophet had ever said such a thing.<sup>8</sup>

The practice of *ḥadīth* criticism was emulated by the *Followers* (*tābi‘ūn*) and eventually led to the development of the *Science of the*

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<sup>7</sup> The Qur’ān, Translated by H. M. Shakir, New York, Tahrike Tarsile Qur’ān, Inc., 1991.

<sup>8</sup> Ṣiddīqī, Muḥammad Zubayr, *Ḥadīth Literature: Its Origin, Development and Special Features*, Cambridge, Abdal Ḥakīm Murād, 1993, p. 107.

*Principles of Ḥadīth Criticism.* As the result, two disciplines of formal criticism developed: the *Science of ḥadīth narration*, or technical *ḥadīth* vocabulary (*‘ilm riwāyat al-ḥadīth*, or *muṣṭalah al-ḥadīth*), and the *Science of the criticism of the reporters* (*al-‘ilm al-jarḥ wa’l-ta’dīl*). Early scholars of *ḥadīth* such as al-Shāfi‘ī developed the qualifications for assessing the transmitters of the *ḥadīth*. Detailed steps were laid out for critical review of the *isnād* (the chain of transmitters) and the *matn* (the text).

Most *ḥadīth* scholars have divided the traditions into three main groups based on the quality of the *isnād*, the validity of the *matn*, and acceptance or rejection of the particular *ḥadīth* by the *Companions* and the *Followers* (or *Successors*).<sup>9</sup> These three groups are called *ṣaḥīḥ* (sound), *ḥasan* (fair), and *ḍa‘īf* (weak). From the perspective of the *isnād* the traditions have been further subdivided into several groups based on the degree of authentication they received during the time of the three generations mentioned above. This is a vast topic and depending on the criteria used numerous forms of classifications have been offered in the texts dealing with *ḥadīth*. Among them, and of relevance to our discussion, is the classification of *ḥadīth* into either *Mutawātir* or *Āḥād*.

The word *mutawātir* means successive, and in this context refers to the type of *ḥadīth* transmitted by a group of trustworthy individuals. Moreover, other conditions have been considered to make sure that each person has independently narrated the *ḥadīth* without the possibility of meeting the other narrators and colluding to forge the *ḥadīth*.<sup>10</sup> This type of *ḥadīth* has its own divisions based on the form (*Lafẓ*) and content (*Ma’nā*), and each of these two has been the subject of further division and analysis.

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<sup>9</sup> The term *Companions* in Islamic literature refers to those believers who had the opportunity to be in the company of the prophet. Muslim scholars have disagreed on the number of *Companions* since there is not a consensus on the acceptance criteria into this rank. Some have held that only through a long association with the prophet could one be considered as a *Companion*. However, the term has come to include everyone who had been in his presence regardless of the length of time. The *Companions* reported the *ḥadīth* corpus from Prophet Muḥammad. The *Successors* or *Followers* are those who did not see the prophet but associated with the *Companions* and related the traditions from them.

<sup>10</sup> Shānihchī, Kāzim Mudīr, *‘Ilm al-Ḥadīth*, Mashhad, 1966, p. 105.



But in general, *mutawātir* refers to the type of *ḥadīth* that has been narrated by a large number of transmitters in the first three generations of Muslims such that the possibility of fabrication is absent.<sup>11</sup>

Still another classification deals with *Muttaṣil* (connected) vs. *Munfaṣil* (disconnected) forms of traditions. Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī in his dictionary, *al-Taʿrīfāt*<sup>12</sup> gives a description of these forms which can be summarized as follows: *muttaṣil* is a type of tradition whose chain of narrators is complete, i.e., each of the narrators has transmitted from the preceding narrator and there is no omission of any narrator in the chain of transmission. In the case of a *munfaṣil* tradition, on the other hand, one or more of the narrators are missing in the chain of transmission from the *Companions* to the *Followers*.

*Al-ḥādīth al-qudsiyya* have been characterized as *al-āḥād-al-munfaṣil* (the singulars-disconnected) traditions. Therefore, most of them either do not have a standard *isnād* or their chain of transmission is weak. The important point for our discussion is that for these reasons the *ḥadīth* scholars have paid little attention to most of such traditions. Furthermore, both the *isnād* and the form of these traditions have been subject to variation and change over the centuries. The reason is that most *ḥadīth* collectors did not list them in their collection, and as the result these traditions were not closely watched or guarded.

Another relevant point is that the process of formal collection and recording of *ḥadīth* did not begin until the middle of the second Islamic century. Kāzīm Mudīr Shānihchī in his *ʿIlm al-Ḥadīth* reports that Abū Bakr, the first caliph, toward the end of his life destroyed about five hundred *ḥadīth* which he had recorded of the words of the Prophet because of the fear that he might have made a mistake in the way he had recorded

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<sup>11</sup> Kamālī, Muḥammad Ḥāshim, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, Cambridge, 1991, pp. 68-70. There is no consensus on the number of transmitters from each of the first three generations in order to establish *tawātur* (succession) for a tradition. The number of needed transmitters has been put at a minimum of seven by some authorities and at as many as seventy by others. On the other, hand *āḥād* are those traditions that have been narrated by only one person or by a few individuals, not exceeding four people.

<sup>12</sup> ʿAlī b. Muḥammad Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, *al-Taʿrīfāt*, Beirut, 1969.

them, or the fear that he might have forgotten the exact words the Prophet had used.

The second caliph, ‘Umar al-Khaṭṭāb, was among the people who opposed the collection of *ḥadīth* for the fear that such efforts might undermine the authority of the Qur’ān. At that time the process of collection and distribution of the Qur’ān as a uniform book had not been completed.<sup>13</sup> It is also reported that he was wary of the history, effect, and role of Jewish traditions in the Jewish community and did not wish the same to happen in the Islamic community.<sup>14</sup> Such prohibition against the collection of *ḥadīth*, for the most part, prevented the recording of traditions in the first century. Therefore, in this period the preservation of *ḥadīth* was basically in the form of memorization. So a valid question would be whether the tradition of the Hidden Treasure did exist but was not recorded.

## Western Scholarship on *al-Aḥādīth al-Qudsiyya*

In general, *al-aḥādīth al-qudsiyya* have received relatively minimal attention in Western scholarship. Although the first reference to *al-ḥadīth al-qudsī* was made by Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall<sup>15</sup> in 1851 in an article on Rūmī, it was not until 1922 that a serious discussion of this genre of *ḥadīth* was undertaken in an article by Samuel Zwemer. Over this period of 71 years passing references were made to the topic by various Western scholars including E. W. Lane, Ignaz Goldziher, Nöldeke, and Schwally. In 1922 Samuel Zwemer wrote an article exclusively on *al-ḥadīth al-qudsī* and

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<sup>13</sup> Richard Bell, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān*, Revised and edited by W. Montgomery Watt, Edinburgh, 1970.

<sup>14</sup> See Shānihchī, Kāzīm Mudīr, *‘Ilm al-Ḥadīth*, Mashhad, 1966, p. 15; Azmī, *Studies in Early Ḥadīth Literature*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>15</sup> See Graham, William A., *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam*, p. 51.

discussed three collections of such traditions by Ibn al-‘Arabī, Muḥammad al-Madanī, and Muḥammad al-Munāwī.<sup>16</sup>

None of the aforementioned three collections offer complete *isnāds* for the traditions listed. Hence, Zwemer concludes that all *al-aḥādīth al-qudsiyya* suffer from a weak chain of transmitters. He does not refer to any of the *al-aḥādīth al-qudsiyya* that exist in the canonical *ḥadīth* collections with complete *isnāds*. Zwemer was of the opinion that all such traditions are forged. At the end of his article he raises a few questions about the relation of *ḥadīth qudsī* to the Qur’ān and other scriptures. In general, his article does not offer substantive information about such traditions, but its significance lies in the fact that he addresses this category of *ḥadīth*.

In the 1950s, Louis Massignon treated *ḥadīth qudsī* in his works, specifically their usage in the Islamic mystical writings.<sup>17</sup> His focus was on the mystics’ use of *al-aḥādīth al-qudsiyya* which he classified as a form of *shaṭḥ*, ecstatic expression. Massignon considers *al-aḥādīth al-qudsiyya* as one type of *ḥadīth murṣal*, a type of *ḥadīth* which lacks proper *isnād* (one or more links are missing in the chain of transmitters). He concludes that such traditions were developed by the mystics to give credence to Ṣūfī beliefs and ecstatic sayings. Hence, he believes that *al-aḥādīth al-qudsiyya* did not exist in the early period of Islam, rather they were developed from the third/ninth century onward. Those who circulated these traditions had pious intentions, nevertheless they forged them.

After Massignon, Gardet and Anawati arrived at similar conclusions in the early 1960s.<sup>18</sup> James Robson appears to be the first Western scholar who considers *ḥadīth qudsī* as a category of *ḥadīth* based on their form and

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<sup>16</sup> See Samuel M. Zwemer, “The So-called Ḥadīth Qudsī”, *The Muslim World*, Vol. XII, 1922, pp. 263-275.

<sup>17</sup> See Massignon’s article in *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, edited by H.A.R. Gibbs and J.H. Kramers for Royal Netherlands Academy, Cornell University Press, 1953, p. 533.

<sup>18</sup> See *Mystique musulmane. Études musulmanes*, edited by Gilson and Gardet, no.8, Paris, 1961.

*matn* rather than their source and *isnād*. Robson treats *ḥadīth qudsī* in the context of discussing various forms of revelation in Islam, and stresses the fact that the canonical *ḥadīth* collections contain a number of such traditions.<sup>19</sup> Yet, most of his focus is on later traditions, which in his opinion have a strong Biblical influence on them. Nabia Abbott was the first among the Western scholars to discuss the possibility of *ḥadīth qudsī* as one of the sources of Islamic revelation in the early periods of Islam. She focuses on these traditions as important documents existing in the first two centuries of Islam rather than as inventions by the mystics from the third to the sixth century.<sup>20</sup>

The most extensive treatment of the *al-aḥādīth al-qudsiyya* is offered by William Graham in 1975 in *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam*. His purpose is to establish *al-aḥādīth al-qudsiyya*, which he calls Divine Sayings, as an authentic form of revelation in the early period of Islam. He cites a number of such traditions and gives references from the canonical *ḥadīth* collections. He argues that two factors have led Western scholars to dismiss *al-aḥādīth al-qudsiyya*. The first factor is the form of such traditions, particularly the weakness of *isnād*. The second is the undue attention given to those traditions that resemble the ecstatic sayings of the Sūfīs, as well as those traditions that reflect borrowings from Jewish and Christian sources.

Several of the *ḥadīth qudsī* in the Islamic sources, particularly in mystical writings, that lack proper *isnād* have contributed to the position taken by the Western scholars, viz., that all *ḥadīth qudsī* are basically late and adventitious, products of the third/ninth century onward. Implicit in this assumption, however, is the notion that there are very few (or none at all) *ḥadīth qudsī* in the sources of early *ḥadīth* collection. For these reasons, Graham does not address the case of *ḥadīth qudsī* that are popular among the mystics.

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<sup>19</sup> See James Robson, "The Material of Tradition", *The Muslim World*, 41, pp. 166-180.

<sup>20</sup> See Nabia Abbott's "Qur'ānic Commentary and Tradition", *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri*, Vol. II, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1967, pp. 7-8.

Graham assesses the treatment of *ḥadīth qudsī* by Muslim scholars and finds it to be deficient also. It appears that, more than any other discussion, Graham is occupied with the question of whether *al-aḥādīth al-qudsiyya* were considered by Muslims in the early centuries of Islam as a form of revelation from God or not. He concludes that in the early periods (from the first to the fourth Islamic century), *ḥadīth qudsī* was seen as a special type of report in relation to or differentiation from the Qur’ān. In other words, during those early centuries the discussions centered around the similarities and differences between the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth qudsī* rather than whether *ḥadīth qudsī* were a form of *ḥadīth* or not.

The tendency to view *al-aḥādīth al-qudsiyya* as a sub-genre of the formal *ḥadīth* is a late development in Islam, approximately from the sixth/twelfth century. Quoting from several Islamic sources of the early periods, Graham makes a strong argument that *al-aḥādīth al-qudsiyya* were early primal elements in Islamic traditions, that deal with the sphere of personal piety. Although Graham is not specific on this topic, he implies that the early, practical mystics, who were extremists in piety, relied greatly on *ḥadīth qudsī*. He says:

“The Divine Saying is one specific genre of early material that reflect those spiritual concerns that were at a later date subsumed under the rubric of *taṣawwuf*. Not only is the Divine Saying *not* a late blossom of some movement called Ṣūfism; it is a strong argument for the deep roots of Ṣūfī piety in early Muslim spirituality and the prophetic-revelatory event itself .”<sup>21</sup>

## Earliest Sources of the Tradition of the Hidden Treasure

In the Islamic literature the earliest book in which we encounter the tradition of the Hidden Treasure appears to be the *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*<sup>22</sup> of

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<sup>21</sup> See Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam*, p. 109.

<sup>22</sup> See *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, edited by Sarvar Mawlā’ī, Tehran, Ṭūs Publications, 1983.

‘Abdullāh Anṣārī<sup>23</sup>, a book written in Persian in the fifth Islamic century. On two occasions in the chapter, “*On the Recognition and Tawḥīd of God*” this tradition is quoted in the following forms:

Recognition is of two types: it is a light that penetrates the heart. It cannot be described in either of the two worlds. He has said: “I was a Hidden Treasure, I loved to be known.”<sup>24</sup>

That reality is recognizable only through the “evident recognition” not the “descriptive recognition” (meaning, that reality, can be recognized only when it manifests itself, otherwise it cannot be recognized by any description). Description is when the *eye* is able to witness from *azal* (the beginning which has no beginning) that the *pen* cannot assist the utterance. Although you are able to hear the description, yet you cannot comprehend its meaning. Tradition is the proof and the recognition (of God) is the goal, and with respect to the reality of God the servant is like a drop of spittle on the ocean bed. “I was a Hidden Treasure to be known.”<sup>25</sup>

In the above passage the *eye* is a reference to true insight; the *pen* is an instrument for writing to explain the reality. Anṣārī is saying that unless one acquires true insight (possess the *eye*) he cannot understand the reality regardless of the efforts (by the *pen*) to describe it.

As mentioned earlier, since *al-aḥādīth al-quḍsiyya* belonged to the category of *Āḥād-Munfaṣil*, they were not subject to close scrutiny by *ḥadīth* scholars. Hence, both the *isnād* and the *matn* of these traditions have been subject to variations. The *ḥadīth* of the Hidden Treasure has had a

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<sup>23</sup> ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī was a famous Hanbalite traditionist of the 5<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> century who had mystical tendency. In addition to *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya* he wrote other mystical works that are well known such as *Ṣad Maydān* (Hundred Fields) and *Munājāt Nāmih* (The Prayer Book).

<sup>24</sup> See *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, p. 639.

<sup>25</sup> See *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, p. 645.

similar fate and several versions of it have been reported in Islamic literature. The most often quoted form of this *ḥadīth* is:

*Kuntu kanzan makhfiyyan, fa'aḥbabtu 'an u'raf, fakhalaqtu al-khalq li u'raf.*

“I was a Hidden Treasure; I loved to be known, so I created the creation in order to be known.”

Najm al-Dīn Rāzī<sup>26</sup> is among those who believed this *ḥadīth* had been revealed in response to a question posed by the prophet David to God. In *Marmūzāt-i Asadī dar mazmūrāt-i Dāwūdī*, meaning *Asadic mysteries in Davidic Psalms*, Rāzī writes:

“David, may peace be upon him, asked: O’ my God! What for didst Thou create the creation? (God) said: I was a Hidden Treasure, I loved to be known, so I created the creation to be known.”<sup>27</sup>

As mentioned earlier, ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī in his *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya* has given two versions of this *ḥadīth*. Shaykh ‘Azīz Nasafī<sup>28</sup> in his *Kashf al-Ḥaqā’iq* gives the following from:

“I was a Hidden Treasure; I willed (*aradtu*) to be known.”<sup>29</sup>

Furūzānfar has collected traditions of Rūmī’s *Mathnawī* with references for every tradition. He quotes the following version:

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<sup>26</sup> Naj al-Dīn Rāzī, a mystic of the 6<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century, is mostly known for his *Mirṣād al-Ibād*; See Hāmid Algār, *The Path of God’s Bondsmen*, New York, 1982.

<sup>27</sup> See *Marmūzāt-i Asadī dar mazmūrāt-i Dāwūdī*, University of Tehran Publications, Tehran, 1973, p. 12.

<sup>28</sup> Shaykh ‘Azīz Nasafī was a mystic of Kubrawī persuasion from the 7<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>29</sup> See *Kashf al-Ḥaqā’iq*, edited by A.M. Dāmghānī, Tehran, 1965, p. 151.

“I was a Hidden Treasure; I loved to be known, hence I created creation and made myself known to them, so as to gain recognition through Me.”<sup>30</sup>

Kamāluddīn Khwārazmī, a mystic of the ninth Islamic century, offers the following form:

“I was a Hidden Treasure; I loved to be known, so I created the creation to know Me, and showed My love to them through My bounties so that they would recognize Me.”<sup>31</sup>

In addition to the above forms and sources, this tradition has been quoted in numerous other texts, poems, and writings of notable Ṣūfīs and men of letters, either directly or through allusion.

## Objections to the Tradition of the Hidden Treasure

A perusal of *al-aḥādīth al-qudsiyya* and their *isnāds* shows that the weakness of *isnād* and variations in the *matn* is not uncommon for this genre of Islamic traditions. Therefore, the tradition of the Hidden Treasure is not unique in this sense; rather, it shares in these features with most Divine Sayings or *al-aḥādīth al-qudsiyya*.

It should be remembered that it was not until the fourth century of Islam that the Ṣūfī books began to appear. In the first three centuries the mystics for the most part did not write books or treatises. They were mostly concerned with the requirements of a pious life, rather than formulation of theoretical concepts. These early pious Muslims formed the nucleus of the Ṣūfīs that appeared later on.

‘Aṭṭār in *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā*<sup>32</sup> gives a brief account of some of these early mystics among whom we find the saintly woman, Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiya,

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<sup>30</sup> Furūzānfar, B. Z., *Aḥādīth Mathnawī*, Amīr Kabīr Publications, Tehran, 1991, p. 29.

<sup>31</sup> Kamāluddīn Khwārazmī, *Jawāhir al-Asrār wa Zawāhir al-Anwār*, Iṣfahān, Vol. I, 1981, p. 151.



and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. These people shunned debates and arguments on theosophical subjects such as the nature of God, stages of divine love, and so forth. Toward the end of the third and the beginning of the fourth century of Islam gradually we witness the emergence of books and articles on the theoretical aspect of mysticism, which by this time was called Ṣūfīsm. This trend continued in the fifth and the sixth centuries of Islamic calendar, and the theoretical base of mysticism was greatly expanded through the works of a number of famous Ṣūfīs such as Ḥasan Kharaqānī, Abū Sa‘īd b. Abī’l Khayr, ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī, ‘Aynu’l-Quḍat Hamadānī, Sanā’ī, ‘Abdu’l-Qādir Gilānī, Shihābuddīn Suhrawardī, and Rūzbihān Baqlī.

By the seventh Islamic century the speculative form of Islamic mysticism reached its zenith through the appearance of a number of other mystics, particularly the two most influential mystics of the entire Islamic mysticism, viz., the “Great Master”, Shaykh al-Akbar Ibn al-‘Arabī and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī. The traditions that were popular among the Ṣūfīs naturally have appeared from the fourth and fifth century onward in the Ṣūfī books, and the tradition of the Hidden Treasure is one such *ḥadīth*.

The debate over the authenticity of this *ḥadīth* has lasted for several centuries and it is not likely to be resolved easily or at all. However, the fact that Shaykh al-Islam ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī has quoted this tradition should not be taken lightly. Some have written that the traditions quoted in Anṣārī’s *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya* should not be given credibility<sup>33</sup>, because Anṣārī has modeled this book after a book by ‘Abdu’l-Raḥmān Sulamī who was an earlier mystic. It is argued that Anṣārī basically translated most of Sulamī’s book (which had the same name) from Arabic to Persian. It is further argued that Sulamī is not trusted as a transmitter of *ḥadīth*, and therefore, since Anṣārī has relied on his book the traditions in Anṣārī’s book are not trustworthy either. Moreover, it is said that Anṣārī’s book, which is a collection of his sermons and lectures, does not give the *isnād* for the traditions quoted in the book.

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<sup>32</sup> See *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā’*, edited by M. Esti‘lāmī, Tehran, Zavvār Publications, 1999.

<sup>33</sup> See introductory comments of Sarvar Mawlā’ī in *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, pp. 10-12

The above arguments, however, need to be further examined. First of all, although *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya* of Anṣārī resembles the book of Sulamī, it would be totally erroneous to believe that Anṣārī has either copied or merely translated Sulamī's *Ṭabaqāt*. Although both books give brief biographies of some famous mystics of the early centuries of Islam a close examination of the two books reveals that Anṣārī's book treats three times as many mystics as does Sulamī's book. In addition to this point, Anṣārī's book contains sections on prayers and meditation. Furthermore, Anṣārī does not merely give a biography of mystics, but often comments on the life of these mystics and critiques their acts and sayings.

Second, 'Abdullāh Anṣārī was considered a trustworthy transmitter of *ḥadīth*. Mawlā'ī, who has written an introduction to the life of Anṣārī based on later sources like Jāmī's *Nafahāt al-Uns* (written between 881/1476-883/1478), writes:

“Shaykh al-Islam Anṣārī had established certain criteria for transmitting prophetic traditions from different people, and if someone's transmission did not meet those standards he would not use his transmission even if his *isnād* were very strong. With such hard and difficult standards he was able to write traditions from three hundred people all of whom were Sunnī and people of *ḥadīth*, and no one has been able to accomplish such a feat.

He knew all those traditions from memory including the chain of transmitters and the life and reputation of the transmitters. He would not read out a *ḥadīth* unless he would offer its complete *isnād*. Ibn Ṭāhir Ḥāfiẓ has quoted Shaykh al-Islam Anṣārī as having said that he had memorized twelve thousand *ḥadīth*, and *Nafahāt al-Uns* of Jāmī states that he knew three hundred thousand *ḥadīth* by heart along with a thousand thousand (one million) *isnāds*.

It was because of his skill and expertise in *ḥadīth* that Ismā'īl Ṣābūnī was in awe of him, and Ishāq Ghurāb Ḥāfiẓ would prefer to attend his classes rather than those of other

traditionists, and would request Anṣārī to read *ḥadīth* for him. It was this Ishāq Ghurāb who had said regarding Shaykh al-Islam that as long as ‘Abdullāh (Anṣārī) is alive it would be impossible for anyone to succeed in attributing a false *ḥadīth* to the Messenger of God.”<sup>34</sup>

It is difficult to believe that one could memorize twelve thousand *ḥadīth*, let alone three hundred thousand with one million *isnāds*! Perhaps these numbers should not be taken literally, rather as indication of a large number of *ḥadīth* memorized by Anṣārī.

It should be pointed out that *al-aḥādīth al-qudsiyya* found in Ṣūfī literature do not represent a different type of tradition than those found in other Islamic sources, including classical *ḥadīth* collections. Rather, *al-aḥādīth al-qudsiyya* that appear in Ṣūfī writings offer a cross-section of traditions found in other Islamic documents and contain a considerable amount of concepts and materials in common with them. A major difference is that the Ṣūfī texts typically do not offer *isnād* for traditions while the same traditions found in non-Ṣūfī sources do have *isnād*. The lack of adherence by the Ṣūfīs to the criteria for formal reporting of traditions does not necessarily mean that they invented the traditions; rather it is primarily the indication of the fact that the Ṣūfīs were not overly concerned with the science of formal reporting of *ḥadīth*. Graham reports a number of traditions that are found in Ṣūfī texts without *isnāds* and in other sources with the proper *isnāds*.<sup>35</sup>

The authenticity of the *ḥadīth* of the Hidden Treasure has been questioned by some Muslim scholars such as Ibn Taymīya, Ibn Ḥajar, and Zarkashī.<sup>36</sup> The most outspoken among them is Ibn Taymīya (d. 720/1328) who was a reputable Hanbalite theologian. He was determined to fight against everything that he considered to be deviation from the true belief

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<sup>34</sup> See *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyya*, p. 12

<sup>35</sup> See *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam*, part III.

<sup>36</sup> See Hamid Algar (Ḥāmid Algār), *Ḥadīth in Sūfism*, *Encyclopedia Iranica*, Vol XI, Columbia University, New York, 2003, p. 451.

and teachings of Islam. He refuted Şūfism as one such deviation, and wrote against Şūfī doctrine of Unity of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). He had studied the works of Ibn al-‘Arabī and openly rejected several of his teachings including the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, which he considered to be an invention of Ibn al-‘Arabī.<sup>37</sup>

Even though Ibn Taymīya did not consider the *ḥadīth* of the Hidden Treasure to be authentic he has been reported by Shams al-Dīn Qāwuqjī (d. 697/1305) to have said that its meaning is in compliance with Islamic belief.<sup>38</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Ibn Taymīya rejected the tradition of the Hidden Treasure due to its lack of *isnād*, not its content. After Ibn Taymīya almost everyone that has rejected this tradition due to its lack of *isnād*, has quoted him as the reference.

The authenticity of the *ḥadīth* of the Hidden Treasure has also been challenged from a grammatical point of view by a Persian historian by the name of Aḥmad Kasravī. Although he is not considered a scholar of Islamic studies or *ḥadīth*,<sup>39</sup> yet due to the popularity of his works on the history of Constitutional Movement in Iran (*Mashrūṭih*), the other books of his, including the ones in which he attacks Şūfīs, have also gained some notoriety among some Iranians.

Before we address Kasravī’s objection to the tradition of the Hidden Treasure it should be noted that *ḥadīth* scholars have come up with a set of qualifications to distinguish an authentic tradition from those that are

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<sup>37</sup> See the treatise titled “Ḥaqīqat Madhhab al-Ittiḥādiyyin aw waḥdat al-wujūd” by, Ibn Taymīyah in *Majmū‘a al-Rasā’il wa al-Masā’il*, Vol. 4, Lajna al-Tarāth al-‘Arabī, no publication date given, pp. 4-17.

<sup>38</sup> Shams al-Dīn Qāwuqjī, *al-Lu’lu’ al-Marṣū’*, printed in Egypt, no publication date, p. 61.

<sup>39</sup> Aḥmad Kasravī was an Iranian activist who advocated reform in religion and language. He wrote several books on history, religion, and social issues. He was killed by an assassin in 1945 due to his views on religious issues.

forged. One of these qualifications is that a true *ḥadīth* should not violate the rules of Arabic grammar.<sup>40</sup>

In a book with the sarcastic title of *Şūfīgarī*<sup>41</sup>, meaning *pretension of Şūfī practice*, Kasravī attacks all Şūfīs, and accuses them of having gone against the religion of Islam. In one occasion he writes:

One of the things that we have been able to ascertain through rigorous research is that the Şūfīs have made up some expressions and attributed them to God. So, they have spread them among people as *ḥadīth qudsī*. For example, consider the expression “I was a Hidden Treasure, I loved to be known, so I created the creation to know Me.” Mawlavī (Rūmī) and numerous other Şūfīs have quoted the expression of “I was a Hidden Treasure” in their poems and books, and on that basis they have developed far fetched illusions. Even more strange is that the use of the word *makhfī* (hidden) in the phrase “I was a Hidden Treasure” is grammatically wrong. The word “hidden” in Arabic should be expressed as *khafī*. Therefore, it is clear that whoever made up this saying, was not an Arab, and did not know Arabic proficiently.<sup>42</sup>

Later, in the footnote section of the same book, Kasravī adds the following comment:

Those who have studied Arabic grammar are aware of the rule that a passive participle cannot be formed from an intransitive verb. The root of this word is *khafiya-yakhfā* which is intransitive; so, a passive participle cannot be made from this verb.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> For example, see Muḥammad Zubayr Şiddīqī’s *Ḥadīth Literature: Its Origin, Development and Special Features*, Cambridge, Islamic Texts Society, 1993, p. 110.

<sup>41</sup> Aḥmad Kasravī, *Şūfīgarī*, Germany, Navīd Publications, 1989.

<sup>42</sup> Aḥmad Kasravī, *Şūfīgarī*, Germany, Navīd Publications, 1989, p. 271.

<sup>43</sup> Aḥmad Kasravī, *Şūfīgarī*, Germany, Navīd Publications, 1989, p. 319.

Kasravī's argument is not correct, however. Before responding to his argument, we need to review briefly one of the rules of Arabic grammar. One of the classifications of verbs in Arabic is that of transitive and intransitive verbs. An intransitive verb does not require an object in the sentence, and a passive participle cannot be formed from such a verb. So, once the verb and the subject are mentioned the meaning of the sentence is complete. For instance, in the sentence *raja'a al-'ustādh*, “the professor returned”, *raja'a* is an intransitive verb that does not require an object, and *al-'ustādh* is the subject. In this sentence which is composed of an intransitive verb and the subject of the sentence, the meaning is complete. On the other hand, transitive verbs in Arabic require an object without which the meaning of the sentence would be incomplete. In the sentence, *shariba Samīr qahwatan*, Samīr drank coffee, the verb *shariba* is a transitive verb, and it requires an object in the sentence for the meaning to be complete. By rule, a passive participle can be formed from transitive verbs, which then acts as the object in the sentence. We can also say *shariba Samīr mashrūban*, Samīr had a drink. In this sentence *mashrūb* is passive participle formed from the transitive verb *shariba*.

Kasravī's error lies in his assumption that the root verb of the passive participle *makhfī* is an intransitive verb. The fact is that the tri-radical verb of *khafī* has two forms. One form is *khafā yakhfī*, like *fa'ala yaf'ilu*, which is a transitive verb. In this form the tri-radical verb has the meaning of “to hide something” or “to make something hidden.” The other form of this verb is *khafiya yakhfā*, like *fa'ila yaf'alu*, which is an intransitive verb. In this form the tri-radical verb has the meaning of “to hide.”

The passive participle *makhfiyan*, meaning “hidden”, used in the tradition of the Hidden Treasure is formed from the transitive verb of *khafā yakhfī*, and grammatically is correct.

Aside from the above points, however, the question of the authenticity of the tradition of the Hidden Treasure is secondary to the role it has played in the development of Ṣūfī thought and the spread of speculative mysticism. One has to look at the scores of Ṣūfī books, treatises, poems, and sermons to grasp the influence of this *ḥadīth* in this field. One

of the goals of this study is to make this point clear by demonstrating the influence of this tradition on the breadth and depth of Şūfī themes and concepts.

# Chapter Two: “I Was a Hidden Treasure”

## The Ontology of Divinity

One of the topics that has created much discussion in speculative Ṣūfism is the concept of the essence of God and its relation to His names and attributes. As will be discussed in this and the following chapters many Ṣūfī writers have used the tradition of the Hidden Treasure to expound on the above themes.

Moreover, in numerous other works, the Ṣūfī writers have referred to the concept of the Hidden Treasure; even though they have not specifically mentioned the tradition concerning it, it is clear that the topics discussed are derived from the themes in this tradition.

Indeed, the topic of the Hidden Treasure has served as an umbrella concept that encompasses many subjects. Ṣūfī writers and Muslim philosophers from various mystical and philosophical schools have used the terminology and the concept of the Hidden Treasure to describe abstract concepts such as stations on the path toward Divinity, names of God, attributes of God, essence vs. being, knowledge, love, and creation.

It is noteworthy that this tradition has been quoted frequently by Ibn al-‘Arabī and those Ṣūfī writers who are considered to be among his students; those who have written commentaries on his writings; and in general those who have followed his school. For the purpose of this research the discussion is primarily, although not exclusively, focused on analysis of the works of Ibn al-‘Arabī, and other works identified with or influenced by his school of thought, insofar as they relate to the tradition of Hidden Treasure and some related topics.

## Ibn al-‘Arabī and the Concept of Hidden Treasure

Before we discuss Ibn al-‘Arabī and his views on the concept of Hidden Treasure it should be pointed out that reading Ibn al-‘Arabī is a



challenging experience. William Chittick points out that it is relatively easy to have Ibn al-‘Arabī say one thing in one place and quite a different thing on the same topic in another. “If we make no attempt to take (all) those views into account, we will misrepresent him.”<sup>1</sup>

While it is important to study the works of students of Ibn al-‘Arabī and those who have commented on his views, it is equally important to distinguish between his views and those who followed him. Ibn al-‘Arabī is neither a systematic philosopher like Avicenna, nor a methodical theologian like al-Ghazālī. He writes to provide spiritual guidance so that the human soul can develop and grow. Thus the purpose of knowledge and writing for Ibn al-‘Arabī is to enrich spiritual life. We will attempt to make this point clear in the following pages.

The theme of the Hidden Treasure is related to the concept of being (*wujūd*) in the writings of Ibn al-‘Arabī. According to him, all that the human being can seek and find is God. In the philosophical discipline the term *wujūd* refers to the metaphysical concept of existence. In the writings of Ibn al-‘Arabī this term - *wujūd* - becomes identified with God, the True One. Ibn al-‘Arabī's idea of metaphysics and creation of the cosmos is also tied to his theories on being. Like some gnostic and Neoplatonic thinkers before him, Ibn al-‘Arabī regards the creation of metaphysics and the cosmos as a series of theophanies from God, the real Being. At the same time, there is a desire on the part of the cosmos to return or revert to its origin through knowing its Creator.

These two processes of descent and ascent are captured for Ibn al-‘Arabī in the tradition of the Hidden Treasure: “I was a Hidden Treasure; I loved to be known, so I created the creation that I might be known.” God was the Hidden Treasure; He became manifest through love. In turn the creation, which is the result of that original love, seeks to know itself and return to the Hidden Treasure. This longing on the part of creation to return to its origin is expressed in another prophetic tradition: “whosoever knows his self, knows his Lord.”

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<sup>1</sup> William C. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God, Principles of Ibn al-‘Arabī's Cosmology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. ix.

In his works, Ibn al-‘Arabī focuses upon the reality, which is *wujūd*, and for him the real *wujūd* or the Real is God or *al-Ḥaqq*. In itself, the Real is hidden and concealed, that is, it is a Hidden Treasure. Only those who are perfect human beings or Perfect Men can know *wujūd* in a perfect sense. But unless *wujūd* makes itself known to people they cannot know it, even in an incomplete sense. Therefore, since God loved to be known, through a series of theophanies He made Himself - the Real *wujūd* - known.

Ibn al-‘Arabī's concept of being is based on the idea that the entire universe may be regarded as an eternal chain of divine manifestations. These theophanies display many perfections and divine properties. Creation is the process of manifestation of the Hidden Treasure in the physical realm. Ibn al-‘Arabī presents a complex system composed of beings and non-beings, and draws upon this system to explain the relationship between God (the Absolute Being), the permanent or immutable archetypes, and the external beings or the cosmos. These concepts will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. The process is composed of a series of theophanies or self-disclosures. In fact, the greatest master, Ibn al-‘Arabī, was regarded as one of the proponents of self-disclosure (*aṣḥāb al-tajallī*).<sup>2</sup>

For Ibn al-‘Arabī every thing that exists in the physical world lacks real being, *wujūd*. The term that he uses to refer to them is *khayāl*, which means “an imagining.”

God is both transcendent and immanent; He manifests in the mirrors, namely, the permanent or immutable archetypes, bringing them from the mode or state of non-being into being. Hence the external beings or the cosmos is created.

A doctrine that is closely related to, or even could be considered an outcome of, the concept of the Hidden Treasure is *waḥdat al-wujūd* or the Unity of Existence or Being. Much has been written about this doctrine, and simply put it is based on the idea that there is no distinction between the existence of God and that of creation. The ontological relationship of God

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<sup>2</sup> William C. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God, Principles of Ibn al-‘Arabī's Cosmology*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998, p. 52.

and universe has been debated by the mystics and Islamic philosophers for a long time.

In this regard two views have emerged on the nature of existence, or more precisely on the nature of relationship between the existence of God and that of the universe. If creation is not distinct from God, then it is assumed that it has the same essence as God and is therefore uncreated, since God is uncreated and has always existed. In this sense God encompasses the entirety of being and there is no distinction between God and the universe. This view is known by many designations including the Unity of Being. On the other hand, if creation is distinct from God, then there is a dualism of being. The latter view has many variations, but regardless of the variant forms, this view considers that all being is at the behest of God. That is, even though the universe has a distinct being, God is immanent in the universe or creation through the manifestation of His names and attributes.

Though there are flaws in any generalization, one could make the general observation that of the Ṣūfīs, theologians, and the Islamic philosophers, most Ṣūfīs have subscribed to the view of Unity of Being, while the theologians have rejected it, and the Islamic philosophers are divided on the two views.

Though he did not coin the term *waḥdat al-wujūd*, Ibn al-‘Arabī is often characterized as the originator of the doctrine of Unity of Being. As mentioned earlier, for Ibn al-‘Arabī every thing that exists in the physical world is on loan from God, or expressed differently, has imaginal existence, lacking real being or *wujūd*. Creation is the process of manifestation of The Hidden Treasure, or real *wujūd*. In *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya*, he states:

“It is impossible for the thing other than God to come out of the grasp of the Real [Ḥaqq], for He brings them into existence, or rather, He *is* their existence and from Him they acquire existence. And existence is nothing other than the Real, nor is it something outside of Him from which He gives to them...

Concerning the existents in all their differentiations, we

maintain that they are the manifestations of God in the loci of manifestation...”<sup>3</sup>

Some have argued that although Ibn al-‘Arabī often makes statements tantamount to *waḥdat al-wujūd* his view on ontology cannot be regarded as monism since he often stresses the view of “manyness of reality.”<sup>4</sup>

Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī, a mystic of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, tried to offer a correction to Ibn al-‘Arabī’s view on Unity of Being. He advanced the doctrine of unity of witnessing or unity of appearance (*waḥdat al-shuhūd*), formerly formulated by ‘Alā’ad-Dawlah Simnānī as a correction to *waḥdat al-wujūd*. He maintained that creation is not identical with God; rather it is a shadow or reflection of the names and attributes of God. He held the view that creation does have a distinct existence though the believer may subjectively perceive unity of existence of God and creation. In other words, *waḥdat al-wujūd* may exist purely in one’s mind but it has no objective reality in the external world.

Among the Islamic philosophers Mūlla Ṣadrā (978/1571-1049/1640) promoted the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. He argued that creation’s existence differed from God’s existence only in terms of intensity, not nature. Creatures subsist as the result of God’s ultimate being, and they are merely expressions or manifestations of His hidden being.<sup>5</sup> We can see the influence of the doctrine of the Hidden Treasure in the ontology described by Mūlla Ṣadrā in his *Kitāb al-Mashā’ir*.

This influence is also quite visible in the thinking of a follower of Mūlla Ṣadrā, viz., Mūlla Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī in his *Kalimāt-i Maknūnah*.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, translation from *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, William C. Chittick (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 94-95.

<sup>4</sup> For example, see Julian Baldick in *Mystical Islam: An Introduction to Sufism*, New York, New York University Press, 1989, p. 83.

<sup>5</sup> For an analysis of Mūlla Ṣadrā’s ontology of God see Fazlur Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mūlla Ṣadrā*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1975.

On the other hand, the Muslim physician and philosopher Ibn Sīnā, Latinized during the Middle Ages as Avicenna (980/1573-1037/1628) advanced an ontological argument based on the duality of existence. Avicenna does not see existence as a monolithic creation but as a series of contingent existents proceeding from a necessary existent. The former are described as a process of intellection manifesting as a hierarchy of Intellects from the First Intellect to the Ninth Intellect comprising the creation. God is the Necessary Existent from whom the creation emanates by virtue of His abundant intellect.

Whether affected or not by non-Islamic influence, such as Platonic, Neo-Platonic, and so forth, the influence of the concept of God as a Hidden Treasure manifesting Himself because of His love or necessary intellectualism, is evident in the writings of both Ṣūfīs and Islamic philosophers.

## Ibn al-‘Arabī on the Ontology of Being and its Relation to the Hidden Treasure

Returning to Ibn al-‘Arabī and the concept of being, in *Kitāb Inshā’ al-Dawā’ir*<sup>6</sup> he mentions that there are three ontological beings. The first is the Absolute Being or the being that exists by itself (*al-wujūd li dhātih*). The next is the Limited Being or the being that exists by virtue, or at the behest, of another, i.e., the Absolute Being (*mawjūd bi Allāh*). The third is the being that somehow exists between the first and the second beings and exhibits a peculiar characteristic of neither existence nor non-existence but a combination of both beings (*lā yattaṣif bi al-wujūd wa lā bi al-‘adam*).

Ibn al-‘Arabī expresses the view that the first ontological being is the only being whose existence is the same as its essence (*wujūduhu ‘aynu dhātihī*). Thus, it is the only real being. If the existence of the first being were an adjunct to its essence then the notion of Absolute Being would be

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<sup>6</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Kitāb Inshā’ al-Dawā’ir wa al-Jadāwil* in H. S. Nyberg (ed.), *Kleinere Schriften des Ibn al-‘Arabī*, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1919, p. 15.

violated. In comparison to this level all others lack real being, their existence is merely a loan (from the first ontological level) or imaginary and not part of their essence. In this sense, real being is identified with the Divine essence; if others were to have real being, they would be partners with the Absolute Being in the Divine essence.

In *Kitāb Inshā' al-Dawā'ir*, Ibn al-'Arabī identifies the first ontological being with God or *Allāh*.<sup>7</sup> He states that this Absolute Being is completely incomprehensible and unapproachable. No description can define or explain Him because it transcends all qualifications conceivable to human mind. For this reason it is called *ankar al-nakirāt*, the most indeterminate of the indeterminates.<sup>8</sup>

Many mystics including Ibn al-'Arabī have accepted that no one can ever find a clue to knowing the essence of God. In fact, he forbids us to think about the Being and essence of God. In *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya* Ibn al-'Arabī writes: "God Exalted is He, is described as Absolute Being for He sanctified by His name is not caused by anything nor anything is derived from Him. To know Him means knowing His Being. And His Being is not other than His Essence. But His Essence cannot be known. Only His attributes are subject to knowledge... Knowledge of the truth of His Essence is forbidden (*mamnū'*). It is known neither by proof nor by intellectual argument, and cannot be defined... The Revealed Law (*shar'*) forbids (*mana'a*) thinking about the Divine Essence."<sup>9</sup>

Ibn al-'Arabī's concept of Divine Being created much controversy because if the only real Being is Divine then everything else besides the Absolute Essence must be part of that Divine Being since they exist. This simplistic understanding of Ibn al-'Arabī's view on the concept of Divine Being led to some people accusing him of heresy. We will address this issue

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<sup>7</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *Kitāb Inshā' al-Dawā'ir wa al-Jadāwil* in H. S. Nyberg (ed.), *Kleinere Schriften des Ibn al-'Arabī*, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1919, p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, Abū al-'Alā' al-'Afīfī, (ed.), Cairo, Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabīyyah, 1946. p. 188.

<sup>9</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya*, Vol. I, Dār Ṣādir, Beirut, p. 118.

later in this study.

The second category of existence, unlike the first category is limited. It exists by virtue or grace of the first category. This level of existence is also called the *possible being* because the first ontological being decides to give it preference to exist rather than not to exist. The cosmos and all that is in the physical world belong to this second level.

The third ontological group, according to Ibn al-'Arabī, is the substance from which the cosmos is fashioned. Again, in *Kitāb Inshā' al-Dawā'ir* he gives an interesting description of this category:

The third (ontological) being is the essence of the cosmos, and the root of the atom and sphere of life. To it are attached all created things and the worlds which comprise the absolute. It is from this third being that the universe came into existence. It is the reality of realities, the universal world conceived by thought, a thing that appears as the eternal in the eternal and as the temporal in the temporal. If you say that this thing is the universe, you are right. If you say that it is God who is eternal, you are right. If you say that it is neither the universe nor God but it is something conveying some additional meaning, you are right.

All these views are correct, for it is the whole comprising the eternal and the temporal. It does not multiply with the multiplication of things, and it is not divided with the division of things. It is divided by the division of conceptions. It is neither existent nor non-existent. It is the universe, yet it is not the universe. It is the other and yet it is not the other, for otherness is between two things. Relation is connecting one thing with another by which a third factor comes into being.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *Kitāb Inshā' al-Dawā'ir wa al-Jadāwil*, p. 17. (Translation with some modification from S.A.Q. Hussani, *The Pantheistic Monism of Ibn al-'Arabī*, Lahore, Asharat Publications, 1970, pp. 53-54).

This third category is in reality the invention of Ibn al-‘Arabī; before him other authors had written about the ontological categories of God and universe, but the concept of an intermediate level of being was devised by him. This category has also been referred to by many other expressions and names such as *al-‘Ayn al-Thābita*, commonly translated as Intelligible Archetype or Immutable Entity; ‘*Amā*’ meaning cloud; *Nafas al-Rahmān* meaning Breadth of the All-Merciful; *al-Fayḍ al-Aqdas* meaning the Most Holy Effusion; *al-Insān al-Kāmil*, the Perfect Man; and *Ḥaqīqat al-Ḥaqā’iq*, the Reality of Realities. Although not all Ṣūfī masters have used these expressions and names as synonymous, some of them have done so.

Ibn al-‘Arabī and some of his followers have developed further schemes aside from the main three categories in explaining the ontological order. For example, in describing the relationship between the first and the third category other levels or domains known as Presences (*Ḥaḍarāt*) have been presented. Ibn al-‘Arabī speaks of two and three Presences while his disciples like Qūnawī, Farghānī, Kāshānī, Qayṣarī and others mention the concept of Five Divine Presences, although the names and descriptions of the five Presences listed by them are not always the same.

Aside from the above, Ibn al-‘Arabī uses the singular term *Ḥaḍra* in more than one sense. He often uses *Ḥaḍra* in conjunction with some divine names or attributes. In such cases, the intention is apparently that the particular name or attribute referenced has a domain of its own where it exerts influence.

In *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya* he devotes chapter 558, which is a very long chapter comprising more than 120 pages in the folio edition printed in Beirut, to the explanation of about 100 *Ḥaḍra* of the type of the Presences mentioned above.<sup>11</sup> Essentially, they include many of the names and attributes of God, starting with the *Ḥaḍra* of the All-Merciful (*al-Rahmān*) and ending with the *Ḥaḍra* of the Patient (*al-Ṣabūr*). In each of these Presences God manifests Himself, but the theophany of God as the All-Merciful is not the same theophany as God the Slayer (*al-Mumīt*), and so forth.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya*, Vol IV, Dār Ṣādir, Beirut, pp. 196-326.



However, Ibn al-‘Arabī has also used the term *Ḥaḍra* and its plural *Ḥaḍarāt* to refer to a set of domains (two or three) in the ontological hierarchy as mentioned earlier. In this sense the *Ḥaḍarāt* are intended to represent a hierarchy which at one end shows the absolute sublimity and remoteness of God from other beings or from any form of comprehension and relation, and at the other end points to the various manifestations of His names and attributes down to the level of very concrete deeds done by creatures. In this context Ibn al-‘Arabī speaks of the Presence of *al-Ghayb* (the Hidden) and the Presence of *al-Shuhūd* (the Manifest) in the discussion of cosmology. He also refers to the Presence of *al-khayāl* (the Imagination) which is derived from the interaction of the Hidden and the Manifest Presences. He states:

The cosmos is composed of two worlds and the presence composed of two presences, though a third presence is born between the two presences from their coming together. The first presence is the presence of the Unseen, and there exists for it a world called the World of the Hidden. The second presence is the presence of sensing and witnessing; its world is called the World of the Manifest which is perceived by physical sight, whereas the World of the Hidden is perceived by insight.

That which is born from the gathering together of the two presences is also a presence and a world. This latter presence is the presence of imagination, and its world is the world of imagination, which is the appearance of meanings in the sense perception frameworks.<sup>12</sup>

Qūnawī, like some other disciples of Ibn al-‘Arabī, expounded on the concept of the Presences. While Ibn al-‘Arabī wrote about Presences quite extensively he did not present them as a systematic scheme or doctrine. Qūnawī appears to be the first person who has used the expression of The Five Divine Presences (*al-Ḥaḍarāt al-Ilāhiyyat al-khams*), and discussed *Ḥaḍarāt* as a systematic and related set of concepts. After him, other disciples like Kāshānī, al-Jandī, Āmulī, and Qayṣarī have also mentioned

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<sup>12</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol III, Dār Ṣādir, Beirut, p. 42.

the Five Presences even though the names and descriptions they have used for the presences vary from each other.

Al-Farghānī, another disciple of Ibn al-‘Arabī, even mentioned Six Presences. In his seminal article on this topic, *The Five Divine Presences: From Al-Qūnawī to Al-Qayṣarī*<sup>13</sup>, Chittick briefly discusses the views of a few of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s disciples. For the purposes of this study a brief explanation and classification of the topic will be presented based on Kāshānī’s treatment of the subject, since his explanation is more relevant to the main theme of this work.

In his widely studied book, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts*, Toshihiko Izutsu also relies heavily on the interpretations of Kāshānī to explain major themes from Ibn al-‘Arabī, since Kāshānī has a systematic and philosophical approach to mysticism, a genre that has come to be known as speculative mysticism .

Kāshānī’s discussion of the Five Presences is more philosophical in nature, which is not surprising given his philosophical training and the influence of Avicenna’s philosophical teachings on him. He offers his explanation of the Five Presences in the commentary he has written on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* of Ibn al-‘Arabī.<sup>14</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the presences are domains or strata between the first and third ontological categories of being. The first domain is the presence of Essence (*dhāt*). In this domain God remains in His Absolute mode without any manifestation whatsoever. It is the plane of absolute remoteness and hidden mystery. It is called the plane of *al-ghayb al-muṭlaq* (mode of absolute hidden) and *ghayb al-ghuyūb* (the most hidden of the hidden). At the plane of *dhāt* God remains as the Hidden Treasure because no access to Him, no description of Him, no relation to Him, no manifestation from Him, or any conception of His Essence or names, is possible. God is the source of all *tajalliyāt* (manifestations) but since at this

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<sup>13</sup> William C. Chittick, “The Five Divine Presences: From Al-Qūnawī to Al-Qayṣarī”, *The Muslim World*, 72, 1982, pp. 107-128.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī, *Sharḥ al-Kāshānī ‘Alā Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, Cairo, 1321 A.H.

presence no *tajallī* is possible, no trace or shadow of multiplicity exists. Ibn al-‘Arabī on occasions refers to God in this plane as *al-ghanī*, the All-sufficient.<sup>15</sup> The Absolute Being in this mode is considered to be on the plane of *aḥadiyya* (absolute unity or unicity) which is the plane of the Essence of God in His state of *al-kanz al-makhfī*.

The second *Ḥaḍra* is the plane of names and attributes. The first *tajallī* from God begins to occur on this plane. In other words, the Absolute Being emerges from behind the veil of the Hidden Treasure and manifests Himself in the plane of *wāḥidiyya* (oneness). Using the terminology of the tradition of the Hidden Treasure, this presence is the first stage or plane in the process of “being known”. It is also known as the *Ḥaḍra* of names and attributes. The process of manifesting starts with the appearance of Divine names and attributes on this plane. Ibn al-‘Arabī believes that every existent being manifests something from the Divine presence, and this process starts with the *ḥaḍra* of *wāḥidiyya*.

Since it is impossible to have any relation with the first presence (*ḥaḍrat al-dhāt*) which is the plane of Divine Essence, the only conceivable relation, including knowledge of God, is only possible through His names and attributes. Ibn al-‘Arabī expresses this idea quite clearly in *Kitāb Inshā’ al-Dawā’ir*:

When we examined the universe as to what it is, and understood its reality, its setting and origin, and when we researched in detail the Divine manifestation in the universe, we found the Divine Essence to be too pure to have any semblance of or relation with the mundane world or the creation or the spirit for the reality forbids this. And when we examined as to which force operates in this world we found that it is the Beautiful Names whose manifestations and effects are openly and clearly realized, not by themselves but through their semblances, not through their realities but through their qualities. Thus we found that the Holy Essence remains holy

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<sup>15</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, ed. Abū al-‘Alā’ al-‘Afīfī, Cairo, Dār Iḥyā’ al-kutub al-‘Arabīyah, 1946, p. 144.

and pure.<sup>16</sup>

Ibn al-‘Arabī goes on to mention a few of the names of God and explains how each name has its own presence and manifests a particular mode of the Divine Essence. Through each name and attribute we learn a particular presence of God since for example, knowing God as the All-Knowing (‘*Alīm*) is not the same as knowing God as Living (*Ḥayy*) or God as the Abaser (*Mudhill*). In summary, once the curtain of *al-kanz al-makhfī* is lifted, God manifests Himself to His creatures in various modalities of names and attributes. A more detailed explanation of the plane of *Wāḥidiyya* will be presented later in this study.

The third *ḥaḍra* is called the plane of *Af‘āl*, meaning Acts or Deeds. This domain represents further theophanies of Divine Being in the form of acts. In other words, this is the plane for the theophany of those specific names and attributes that deal with Divine action in sustaining, maintaining, and regulating the world of creation. As such, it is also known as the presence of *Rubūbiyya* (Lordship), since the Arabic word *rabb* means both sustainer and master.

The fourth *ḥaḍra* is also known by more than one name, viz., the *Ḥaḍrat al-Amthāl* (presence of Image Exemplars, or Idea Images, or Similitudes) or *Ḥaḍrat al-khayāl* (presence of Imagination). This is the domain wherein the Divine Being manifests as semi-spiritual and semi-material.

Of the Five Presences the first three are considered to be spiritual, and the fifth is purely material. The fourth presence is the border domain between spiritual and material, and has characteristics of each. The concept of Imagination (*khayāl*) plays a significant part in the writings of Ibn al-‘Arabī, and he has used it in a variety of contexts since it is the frontier between the spiritual and material worlds. At times it is treated as counterpart to ‘*aql* (intellect). On this point he criticizes philosophers for their reliance on intellect alone, for ‘*aql* is prone to see separation and

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<sup>16</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Kitāb Inshā’ al-Dawā’ir wa al-Jadāwil*, p. 17. (Translation with some modification from S.A.Q. Hussani, *The Pantheistic Monism of Ibn al-‘Arabī*, Lahore, Asharat Publications, 1970, p. 166).

differences while *khayāl* is apt to see similitude and connections.

The fifth *ḥadra* is the presence of *ḥiss* (Sense-Perception) or *shuhūd* (the Manifest World). This is the lowest domain for the Divine theophany and is a purely material level.

A systematic relationship exists among the presences; each lower presence acts as a repository of signs and symbols for the higher presence. For examples, all the entities found in the material domain of the fifth presence (the physical world) are images and signs of the realities that exist in the fourth presence, the domain of *khayāl* or Image Exemplars. In short, in the process of *tajallī* every name and attribute is a theophany from the Divine Essence in a particular domain or presence. This is a descending movement from the level of Absolute Unknowable Reality toward the concrete and sensible level of the material world.

Earlier we mentioned that the Five Presences are considered to be domains or levels between first and third ontological beings, but this distinction is not necessarily maintained by all Ṣūfī authors. For example, Kāshānī identifies the first presence with the first ontological Being, i.e., the Divine Essence.

Not only the Presences have been called by different names; various groupings and classifications of them have also been offered by these Ṣūfī masters like *ḥaqīqī* (true) vs. *idāfī* (relative); *ḥādith* (created) vs. *qadīm* (uncreate); *basīṭ* (simple) vs. *murakkab* (composite); *ma'nawī*, (supra-formal), *rūḥānī* (spiritual), *mithālī* (imaginal), and so forth. For the purpose of this study, however, it suffices to say that these planes and levels represent different theophanies of the Hidden Treasure (the Divine Being in its Absolute state) in the mirrors of creation.

## Primary Ṣūfī Texts and the Tradition of the Hidden Treasure

As the foundation of theoretical or speculative mysticism was being laid down from the fourth Islamic century onward, certain themes and concepts began to be discussed in the early Ṣūfī treatises and books. Shortly after this period, the tradition and the doctrine of the Hidden Treasure surfaced in these writings and gradually found more prominence in later books and epistles.

First, we will look at examples of primary texts from the early and middle formative period of speculative mysticism in which the subjects important to this genre of mysticism are laid out, and then examples of the use of the tradition of the Hidden Treasure in relation to those themes will be considered.

Al-Qushayrī<sup>17</sup>, one of the early Ṣūfī authors from the 5th century A.H. (d. 466/1074), in his *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, commonly regarded as one of the earliest methodical books on Ṣūfism, has given the following description:

*Chapter in Explanation of the Belief of This Group on the  
Issues of Principles:*

Know thou (may God's mercy be upon you) that the elders of this group laid the pillars of their cause upon sound principles in *Tawḥīd* (the Oneness of God), by which they protected their beliefs from heresy, and borrowed those principles which they found the ancestors and the people of Sunna to have been following, with respect to a *Tawḥīd* for which there is no likeness or disruption. And they recognized that which was the

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<sup>17</sup> Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (376/986 - 465/1072) is among the earliest mystics who have written methodically on Ṣūfism. His *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, also known simply as *al-Risāla* (the Treatise or Epistle), written in Arabic, is one of the early books of mysticism that categorizes the beliefs and practices of the Ṣūfīs. He wrote this book, and according to his introduction to the text, sent it to the Ṣūfīs in Islamic cities in order to warn them against the deeds of those whom he considered false mystics. At the beginning of the book he laments the deeds of those who claim to be Ṣūfīs, but who are a disgrace to the tradition of Ṣūfism.

right (characteristic) of the uncreate<sup>18</sup> and established that which distinguishes existence from non-existence. And it is for this reason that Junayd, the master of this path (may God's mercy be upon him) said: “*Tawḥīd* is to distinguish the uncreate from the created...”

Ruwaym<sup>19</sup> was asked of the first duty that God (exalted and glorified be He) enjoined upon His creation. He said: “it is the recognition (of God), as it is His word”, glorified be His mention, “and I did not create the Jinn and the human except that they worship Me.”<sup>20</sup> Ibn ‘Abbās said, “except that they recognize Me.” And Junayd said that the first thing the servant needs, from the pact of wisdom, is the recognition of the creator by the created, and the recognition by the created as to how it was actualized, so that the attribute of the creator may be differentiated from that of the created, and the attribute of the uncreate from that of the created.<sup>21</sup>

The Prophet (may peace and greetings of God be upon him) said: “Indeed, the pillar of the house is its foundation and the pillar of the religion is the recognition of God, the Exalted... ” The teacher said (this may be a reference to al-Junayd, whom the author calls the master--*qāla al-ustādhu*): “In the language of the learned, “recognition” is the same as “knowledge”. Therefore, every knowledge is a (form of) recognition and every recognition is a (form of) knowledge, and every knower

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<sup>18</sup> In this context, *qadīm* (uncreate) is used in contrast to *accident* (that which is subject to the concept of time).

<sup>19</sup> Abū al-Muḥammad Ruwaym was one of the mystics of the third century A.H. He was from the city of Baghdād. Qushayrī in *al-Risāla* gives a short biography of Ruwaym and narrates some of his sayings, and relates some stories about him.

<sup>20</sup> See Chap. 51:56 in the Qur’ān.

<sup>21</sup> Al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, Chapter One, without date and place of publication, p. 12.

of God, exalted be He, is a recognizer (gnostic) and every recognizer (gnostic) a knower, and among this group recognition is the attribute of the person who has recognized the Truth (God), sanctified be His name, through His (God's) names and attributes.”<sup>22</sup>

Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī<sup>23</sup>, another notable commentator on the writings of Ibn al-‘Arabī has offered a more detailed description of the subject studied by Ṣūfīs, whom he calls *people of God*:

Know thou that the subject of the sciences of intellectual philosophy, the speculative sciences of *Kalām*, theology, and the sciences of divine truth<sup>24</sup>, are in reality a single thing (subject), even though the wording is different and the allusion is diverse. The difference in wording and diversity of allusions do not suggest difference in the subjects or essences.

As regards to the intellectual sciences, their proponent is the philosopher (*ḥakīm*), who deals with the divine knowledge. This (divine knowledge) is in essence the object of various types of philosophy. Existence and its understanding culminate in the recognition of God (the Truth), exalted be He, and that which pertains to it from among the learnings and the truths. As regards to the speculative sciences, their proponent is the theologian (*mutakallim*) who deals with the science of *kalām*. This (theology) is the recognition of the Truth (God), exalted be He, and recognition of His essence, and His attributes, and His acts, and that which belongs to it from the related subjects, as these matters are not hidden from this people (theologians).

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<sup>22</sup> See the chapter on “The Recognition of God” in Qushayrī's *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, without date and place of publication, p. 81.

<sup>23</sup> Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī integrated some of the teachings of Ibn al-‘Arabī into Shī‘ite gnosis. For this reason his commentaries on the works of Ibn al-‘Arabī, particularly the one on the *Fuṣūṣ*, are well known.

<sup>24</sup> Āmulī is referring to mysticism or *‘Irfān* as “the science of divine truth”.



The science of *kalām* is the most respected and the most exalted of sciences for the theologians. And how could it not be so since its subject is the recognition of God, Exalted be He, and His essence, and His attributes, and His acts? As regards the sciences of truth, their proponent is the mystic (*mutaṣawwif*) who deals with the science of mysticism. This (mysticism) is the recognition of the essence of God, exalted be He, and His names, and His attributes, and His acts, and that which pertains to it from related subjects.

And all these (the three forms of sciences of Islamic philosophy, theology, and mysticism) are a single thing, referring to a single truth which is the recognition of God, exalted be He, and His essence, and His attributes, and His. The difference among them is due to the method of establishing knowledge and not because of the definition of the subject.<sup>25</sup>

Dāwūd Qayṣarī (d. 751/1351), a prolific theosophical writer and one of the primary commentators on the writings of Ibn al-‘Arabī, in the introduction to his Commentary on the *Tā’īya* of Ibn al-Fāriḍ<sup>26</sup> (d. 635/1235) while giving a brief description of some of the fundamental concepts on which the Ṣūfī writers have focused, mentions the tradition of the Hidden Treasure on several occasions as he explains the modes of the Divine Being, the process of self-disclosure, and God’s essential love:

Clearly the people of this group (Ṣūfīs) discuss and study such topics that deal with the essence of God, and His names and attributes insofar as each of these names and attributes acts as a

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<sup>25</sup> See Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, *al-Muqaddimāt min Kitāb Naṣṣ al-Nuṣūṣ*, Vol. I, Tehran, 1974, pp. 478-479.

<sup>26</sup> Ibn al-Fāriḍ (576/1181-632/1236) was born and raised in Egypt. He has been hailed as one of the greatest composers of mystical poetry in Arabic. He was a contemporary of Ibn al-‘Arabī, and his *Tā’īya*, also known as “The Poem of the Way”, is well known among students of Islamic mysticism. Over the centuries a number of mystics have written commentaries on this poem.

mirror and manifestation for the essence of God. Therefore, the subject of this branch of knowledge (Şūfism) is the essence of Divinity, His uncreate qualities, and His everlasting attributes<sup>27</sup> ...

First (the Absolute) manifested in His inwardness, and in the realm of His essential knowledge in the form of *al-a'yān al-thābita* (the Intelligible Archetypes) by means of *al-fayḍ al-aqdas* (the Most Holy Effusion) and through the first manifestation in accordance with the essential love, of which He has said “I was a Hidden Treasure, I loved to be known...”<sup>28</sup>

Like the mystics and philosophers of his generation Qayṣarī is concerned with the concept of being. Since for him the only real being is the Absolute Being he declares that the true mystics are those who devote themselves to the study of the Essence of Divinity and His theophanies in names, attributes, and the cosmos.

It is worth noting that the terms *names* and *attributes* are frameworks for describing the modes and nature of God, and studying the process of self-disclosure or outward manifestation of God in the world of creation. To validate his viewpoint, Qayṣarī quotes the tradition of the Hidden Treasure. In the later sections, detailed explanation will be offered for some of the concepts mentioned above like *al-a'yān al-thābita* (the Intelligible Archetypes), *al-fayḍ al-aqdas* (the Most Holy Effusion), and so forth.

In another commentary that Qayṣarī wrote on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* of Ibn al-‘Arabī, he uses the doctrine of Hidden Treasure in some novel and ingenious ways in several chapters, each dealing with a different theme. For example, in the chapter titled “The Wisdom of Prophecy in the Word of

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<sup>27</sup> Muḥammad Dāwūd Qayṣarī (d. 751/1350), is among the foremost Islamic mystics and commentators on the writings of Ibn al-‘Arabī and mystical poetry of Ibn al-Fāriḍ. His books on speculative mysticism are widely studied by the students of this field. He grew up in Egypt and became well versed in the Islamic sciences such as the science of study of *ḥadīth* and Islamic jurisprudence.

<sup>28</sup> See Dāwūd Qayṣarī’s Commentary on the *Tā’īya* of Ibn al-Fāriḍ printed in *‘Irfān-i Nazārī* by Yaḥyā Yathribī, Qum, 1995, p. 296.

Jesus”, in the section on the birth of Jesus by means of the Holy Spirit he quotes this tradition. Here he relates the doctrine of the Hidden Treasure to the concept of the essential love of God as the motive for all creation, and in this particular case, to the creation (meaning the birth) of Jesus.<sup>29</sup>

Another example is found in the chapter titled “*The Wisdom of Unity in the Word of Hūd*”, in the section discussing the concept of real Being (God) and its manifestation in the world. Here Qayṣarī gives an explanation of some poetry from the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* in which Ibn al-‘Arabī had said that his existence is nourishment for God. Qayṣarī explains that existence (survival) of any living being in the world is dependent on nourishment or food. The theophanies of God’s names and attributes in the external world are made possible, or sustained, by the appearance of various forms of creation. So, in this sense creation acts as nourishing food by which names and attributes of God are made manifest. He goes on to say that if the world did not exist we would not have any knowledge of God and His names, because our knowledge of God is dependent on the manifestation of His names in the world. To support this notion, he quotes the tradition of the Hidden Treasure and relates it to the purpose of creation, viz., God created the creation in order to be known.<sup>30</sup>

Tāj al-Dīn Ḥusayn Khwārazmī (d. 840/1440) is another Ṣūfī who wrote an extensive commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* of Ibn al-‘Arabī.<sup>31</sup> In several places, he goes out of his way to quote the tradition of the Hidden Treasure and somehow relate it to the topic under discussion. In the chapter titled “*The Wisdom of Rapturous Love (muhayyamiyya) in the Word of Abraham*”, Khwārazmī mentions this tradition to explain the reason for the selection of the title in that chapter. His line of reasoning seems to be somewhat disjointed as he tries to relate seemingly unrelated themes to each

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<sup>29</sup> See Dāwūd Qayṣarī in the *Commentary on the Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* of Ibn al-‘Arabī, published in *Sharḥ-i Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* edited by Āshtiyānī, Tehran, 1996, p. 855.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 735.

<sup>31</sup> Taj al-Dīn Ḥusayn Khwārazmī was a mystic and poet of the 8-9th/14-15th century. In addition to his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* he has written a number of other books in the field of mysticism. In particular, he has authored a commentary on the first three chapters of Rūmī’s *Mathnawī*.

other. If we ignore the non-related topics he presents here, essentially he argues that rapture is the result of extreme love (*‘ishq*), and love is the foundation of creation and the cause of perpetuity of the realities. The source of love is the emanations from the Absolute Beauty (God) which cause rapture, and Abraham was the first to whom God disclosed this emanation.<sup>32</sup>

Another example of the use of this tradition by Khwārazmī is found in the chapter titled “*The Wisdom of Eminence in the Word of Moses*”. Commenting on the statements of Ibn al-‘Arabī about the fear of Moses after having killed an Egyptian, Khwārazmī explains that although on the surface it may appear that Moses fled from Egypt because of the fear of reprisal, in reality the cause of his departure was love.

It was the love of life that made Moses flee, not the fear of death. Here Khwārazmī makes an interesting connection between the departure of Moses from Egypt (Moses *moving* out of Egypt) and the concept of movement. He says the cause of movement is love, even though on the surface the movement may appear to be taking place as the result of fear, anger, or some other cause. The underlying cause of all movements is love because the essence of all movements is the movement of the world from non-existence towards existence. Just as the cause of the movement from non-existence to existence is love, so too is the case with any other movement in the world. Here Khwārazmī quotes the tradition of the Hidden Treasure once again in support of his argument.<sup>33</sup>

Although the doctrine and tradition of the Hidden Treasure have been quoted in a variety of Ṣūfī writings, more often they are used in the context of the following themes:

- The concept of Being/Existence

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<sup>32</sup> See Taj al-Dīn Ḥusayn Khwārazmī in the *Commentary on the Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* of Ibn al-‘Arabī, published in *Sharḥ-i Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* edited by Najīb Māyel Herawī, Tehran, Mawlā Publications, 1996, p. 235.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 741.

- Absolute Being: Divine Essence
- Divine Theophany: God's Names and Attributes
- Knowledge or Recognition of God (*Ma'rifa*)
- The concept of Love
- The concept of Creation

A review of the literature of speculative Ṣūfīsm, as shown by the few examples mentioned above, indicates that these topics form the main themes of this particular branch of Ṣūfīsm, and the doctrine and tradition of the Hidden Treasure have been effective tools in the promotion of some of the fundamental concepts of this genre of Ṣūfīsm.

Although the main focus of this study is to discuss the role of the doctrine and tradition of the Hidden Treasure in Ṣūfī writings, it should be pointed out that the use of this concept is not limited to the Ṣūfī field. Islamic philosophers on their part have made extensive use of the doctrine and the tradition of the Hidden Treasure in order to advance their various viewpoints.

For Islamic philosophers one of the most fundamental topics of discussion is the distinction between "existence/being" vs. "essence/quiddity." The Peripatetic (*Mashshā'ī*) philosophers,<sup>34</sup> much like those mystics influenced by the school of Ibn al-'Arabī, believe that in every being two aspects can be distinguished: existence or being (*wujūd*), and essence or quiddity (*māhiyya*).<sup>35</sup> Of these two aspects, "being" is considered

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<sup>34</sup> The introduction of Peripatetic philosophy into the Islamic world was made possible by al-Kindī, an Arab philosopher of the third/ninth century.

<sup>35</sup> Philosophers from both Eastern and Western traditions make a distinction between the thing itself, i.e., its essence or quiddity, and its existence. We can discuss anything, whether it exists or not. For example, our mind is capable of discussing imaginary things. When we discuss a thing, we are talking about its quiddity. From the perspective of Muslim philosophers the only thing we cannot discuss is God. In other words, God's existence is identical to His quiddity because we cannot distinguish between Him and His Being.

to be the primary or real aspect by these philosophers, and it is the source or origin of everything in the external world. On the other hand, "quiddity" is an arbitrary concept that is of secondary importance and it is dependent on "being."

For Avicenna<sup>36</sup>, the most notable Peripatetic Islamic philosopher, the concept of the Necessary Being is the central theme to be studied in philosophy.<sup>37</sup> Necessary Being is the true reality in the world, and the study of this subject is therefore fundamental to philosophy. However, the Necessary Being can only be studied through its names and attributes. Hence for Avicenna, much like the Şūfīs, the foremost subject worthy of study is God, His names and His attributes.

On the other hand, for the Islamic philosophers who subscribe to the school of Illumination (*Ishrāq*)<sup>38</sup> the most primary concept is quiddity not being. For them, being is an arbitrary concept derived from quiddity. For Suhrawardī, the founder of the Illumination school of Islamic philosophy, the origin or source of everything is the "Light of Lights", a designation

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<sup>36</sup> Ibn-Sīnā, known in the West as Avicenna, has been regarded by some as the most influential Muslim philosopher. It has been written that toward the latter part of his life he set aside his Peripatetic tendency and advocated another brand of philosophy called the Eastern Philosophy. However, not much is known about this philosophy as he did not elaborate much on it.

<sup>37</sup> The Necessary Being or *Wājib al-Wujūd* is a term used by Muslim philosophers to refer to God.

<sup>38</sup> The *Ishrāqī* philosophy is based on both logic and inspiration. Suhrawardī (549/1154 - 587/1191) believed that this type of philosophy existed in different forms among the ancient Iranians, Indians, Babylonians, Egyptians, and Greek up until the time of Aristotle. He and some other medieval writers believed that divine philosophy was revealed by God to the prophet Idris (Hermes). After him philosophy branched into two parts: one branch developed in Iran, and the other spread in Egypt. From the latter it spread into Greece and then entered into the Islamic world. Suhrawardī considered himself the true heir to the two branches of philosophy, viz., ancient Iranian and Greek. His aim was to integrate the teachings of Zoroaster and Plato, the two influential figures of the two branches of philosophy.

reserved in his writings for God. According to this school God is the Absolute Light (true essence) from which all other lights emanate.<sup>39</sup>

Mullā Hādī Sabzavārī<sup>40</sup>, himself a proponent of the Peripatetic school, has summarized the approaches of the various groups as follows:

The attainment of seekers to the truth is either through intellection alone, or internal purification alone, or through both of them. Those who benefit from both, i.e., intellection and internal purification, are the Illuminationist philosophers. The group that engage in internal purification alone are Ṣūfīs; and those who base their work on reason and intellection alone, if they are bound by religious laws are called theologians; otherwise they are Peripatetic philosophers.<sup>41</sup>

It is not the intention of this study to explain the features of the above mentioned philosophical schools. Each of these schools relies on different vehicle or faculties for understanding the realities of creation and existence. Yet the ultimate goal of both schools is to enable the student or seeker to gain a higher understanding of the ultimate truth, God.

In summary, for the majority of the mystics, theologians, and Islamic philosophers, the most important endeavor worthy of undertaking is the study of those subjects related to God, His essence, names and attributes, and Divine theophanies in various loci. The doctrine and tradition of the Hidden Treasure have been effective tools in describing such concepts as

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<sup>39</sup> According to Suhrawardī, the realities of everything are in the form of light. Every reality is different from the other according to the intensity of its light. Everything in the world is defined by light because light makes things visible. The most exalted light or the *Light of Lights* is the reality of God. All that exists is nothing but different degrees of light and darkness, and God, the supreme light, is the source of all other lights.

<sup>40</sup> Mullā Hādī Sabzavārī (1212/1798 - 1289/1878) is arguably the most famous Shī'ī philosopher of the past three centuries. He was one of the proponents of the philosophical school of Mullā Ṣadrā, and the author of a number of books on Islamic philosophy, as well as many poems.

<sup>41</sup> Mullā Hādī Sabzavārī, *Sharḥ-i Manẓūmih*, publication date unknown, Tehran, p. 79.

the stations of God before and after creation, the appearance of names and attributes, and so forth, not only in the writings of Ṣūfīs but also the theologians and philosophers.<sup>42</sup>

## Stations of the Hidden Treasure

One of the themes in the writings of speculative mysticism<sup>43</sup> that employs the motif of the Hidden Treasure is the stations (*maqāmāt*) of Divinity. A survey of such writings, particularly those influenced by the school of Ibn al-‘Arabī, reveals that these mystics believe in several stations (*maqāmāt*) for God. Since God is unchangeable, both in His Essence and Attributes, it would be false to think that He would assume different stations, or move from one state to another. Therefore, the term “station” (*maqām*), in these writings, refers to a particular set of conditions or characteristics on the path towards recognition (*ma‘rifā*) of God, rather than to different stations being occupied by God.

Since the mystics speak of different stations of God it follows that different sets of characteristics are believed to exist for recognition of God. According to this belief at one point God was in the station of *Aḥadiyya* which is the station of absolute essence. Some Western scholars have suggested that essence is not an appropriate translation for *dhāt* because it implies quiddity, whereas God is devoid of quiddity.<sup>44</sup>

In this station, names and attributes are non-existent. More precisely, they exist but are not distinguishable from the essence of God. Furthermore,

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<sup>42</sup> Throughout this study references will be offered to the books and treatises which contain discussion and analysis of the tradition and the doctrine of the Hidden Treasure.

<sup>43</sup> I have used the expression of "speculative mysticism" for *‘Irfān-i Naẓarī*. The term refers to a brand of Islamic mysticism developed as the result of interaction of *Taṣawwuf* (Islamic mysticism) and *Hikmat* (Islamic philosophy).

<sup>44</sup> See Michael Sells' *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, p. 244. The term "*dhāt*" corresponds to Godhead (Eckhart's *Gottheit*) that is beyond any name, attribute, or quiddity.



no understanding or recognition of God is conceivable in this station. When He decided to behold His own image, names and attributes began to manifest, and they served as mirrors manifesting the beauty of God. The station wherein the Divine theophany in the mirrors of names and attributes takes place is called *Wāḥidiyya*. In this station names and attributes are distinguishable from God's essence. These two stations of *Aḥadiyya* and *Wāḥidiyya* are known as the “Stations (*maqāmāt*) of the Hidden Treasure.” No creation is conceivable at either of these stations; only the Divine Essence and archetypes of names and attributes exist.

Ibn al-‘Arabī begins the very first chapter of his celebrated *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* with the concept of Divine self-disclosure<sup>45</sup>:

*The Ring Setting of Divine Wisdom in the Word of Adam*

God, sanctified by His name, wanted to behold the essences<sup>46</sup> of His most beautiful names, which cannot be counted, in other words, to behold His own essence in an inclusive entity encompassing the whole Command, for when characterized by being, it would manifest through Him His own mystery. For truly, beholding of the thing, itself by itself, is not the same as beholding it in something else, as if it (the latter) were a mirror for it. For it manifests itself to it (something else) in a form that is determined by the site of the image, which would not appear to it without the existence of this site, and without its self-disclosure to it.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, Abū al-‘Alā’ al-‘Afīfī, (ed.), Cairo, Dār Iḥyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabīyyah, p. 48.

<sup>46</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī makes use of the term *a’yān* to imply different meanings depending on the context. In this context I have translated the term as “essences” since he is referring to the realities of His names. Other meanings of this term are presented in chapter 3 of this work.

<sup>47</sup> For accuracy of translation it should be noted here that Ibn al-‘Arabī begins this section with a time clause which is not completed. Although it would sound odd in English, it is a common feature of Arabic language to have an incomplete temporal clause.

An important point that should be mentioned here is that the term *al-Ḥaqq* taken literally means the real, or the reality, or the true one. Some translators of the works of Ibn al-‘Arabī have opted for one or the other of these terms in their translation, perhaps because some Ṣūfīs have used *al-Ḥaqq* in a more general, non-personal sense to refer to an abstract entity.

In the Qur’ān, this term has been used exclusively to refer to *Allāh*. The same notion has been adopted in many Islamic texts, and unless otherwise noted, it is quite clear that the term refers to the Deity.

Based on the context, Ibn al-‘Arabī uses *al-Ḥaqq* to imply different meanings. For example, when he speaks of the Absolute in the state without any determination, the term *al-Ḥaqq* is used rather than *Allāh* because the latter designates some determination. In some contexts he uses *al-Ḥaqq* in contradistinction to *al-khalq* (the creation). When the discussion is about truth in general, Ibn al-‘Arabī uses *al-Ḥaqq* in contrast to *al-bāṭil* (the false or the unreal). In this work, based on the context I have translated *al-Ḥaqq* either as the Absolute or as God.

In the *Faṣṣ* mentioned above, Ibn al-‘Arabī identifies the motif of Adam with an image that he uses frequently, that of the mirror. The name Adam is symbolic of man being in his most perfect form. Ibn al-‘Arabī uses the names of prophets in the title headings of *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* as examples of more perfect creations. Each prophet manifests specific divine names and attributes. Adam is the source or archetype from which the rest of mankind was created. The role or function of Adam is on the one hand to serve as the mirror for Divine theophany, and on the other he functions as a symbol of the subject that manifests, i.e., God.

The chapter begins with the concepts of divine names which describe the complex modalities of the Divine Essence and its reflection in the mirrors. From one perspective the Divine names are infinite, hence there are infinite loci of manifestations for Divine Essence; these are known as *al-asmā’ al-juz’iyya*, the particular names of God. From another perspective there are certain limited Divine names and attributes which number 99 or 150 or so, based on the *ḥadīth* or the Qur’ān, which are called *al-asmā’ al-kullīyya*, the universal names of God.

Ibn al-‘Arabī and his disciples frequently refer to the idea that each of the names and attributes is a locus (*majlā*) of Divine self-disclosure, each manifesting its own reality as the result of the Divine Essence manifesting in them, just as a mirror would reflect the light based on its own capacity, i.e., the degree of polish it has achieved.

Jāmī in a book called *Naqd al-nuṣūṣ fī sharḥ naqsh al-fuṣūṣ*, which is a commentary written on another commentary by Ibn al-‘Arabī on his own *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* called *Naqsh al-fuṣūṣ*, comments on the first passage of *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* quoted above giving a concise description of the role of the names as mirrors of the Divine theophanies and unveiling of the Hidden Treasure:<sup>48</sup>

Know that the Most Beautiful Divine Names, which if considered in principle number 99 or 101, but if considered individually and in detail are beyond reckoning, for the Names are the determinations of the Name “Allāh” within the realities of the contingent beings (*mumkināt*), and they are infinite because of the infinity of the contingent beings, demand in themselves the existence of the world in order that it become a mirror for their concealed lights and the locus of manifestation of their hidden secrets, in respect to which God said, “I was a Hidden Treasure and I wanted to be known, so I created the world.”

And verily the Shaykh (i.e., Ibn al-‘Arabī ) attributed this demand to the Names - which are the Essence qualified by attributes - and not to the Essence Itself, because the Essence in respect of Its absolutivity (*iṭlāq*) can have no property attributed to It, nor does It become determined by any quality or delimitation.

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<sup>48</sup> Translation from William Chittick, *Journal of Muḥyiddīn Ibn al-‘Arabī Society*, Vol. 1, 1982.

Ibn al-‘Arabī and his followers frequently refer to the stations of *aḥadiyya* and *wāḥidiyya* in the context of discussing the Divine Essence and its process of self-disclosure.

A point of interest about the concept of *aḥadiyya* and the text of the tradition of the Hidden Treasure is that some mystics have quoted a variation of this *ḥadīth* in which the motive for creation is the will of God rather than His love. Of course, the notion is that in the realm of *aḥadiyya* all the names and attributes, such as *will* and *love*, are one and the same since they are not distinguished from God's essence.

Al-Jandī<sup>49</sup>, another primary commentator of Ibn al-‘Arabī's writings, in his commentary on *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* equates the will of God with His love insofar as it relates to the motive of creation, viz., for the purpose of knowing God<sup>50</sup>:

He said: “I was a Hidden Treasure, I loved (*‘aḥbibtu*) to be known,” and in another narrative it is said: “I wanted to” (*‘aradtū*), instead of, “I loved to” (*‘aḥbibtu*). The *will* is the search for My *love*.

Likewise, Shaykh ‘Azīz Nasafī<sup>51</sup> in his *Kashf al-Ḥaqā’iq* says:

The (prophet) David, while praying asked: “O’ God! For what purpose didst Thou create the creation? He said: I was a Hidden Treasure, I *wanted* (or decided) to be known.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Mu‘ayyid al-Dīn al-Jandī, a mystic of the 7th/13th century, was one of the students of Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, and one of the well-known commentators of the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* of Ibn al-‘Arabī. In his commentary, he states that through association with his teacher he received inspirations in his heart and decided to write the commentary on *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*.

<sup>50</sup> See *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* of Mu‘ayyid al-Dīn al-Jandī, p. 33.

<sup>51</sup> Shaykh ‘Azīz al-Dīn Nasafī was a mystic of the 7th/13th century. He seems to have adopted the teachings of Ibn al-‘Arabī as the ultimate in the field of mysticism. In his book, *Kashf al-Ḥaqā’iq*, he ends each section with a statement from Ibn al-‘Arabī as the final word on that topic.

In the section quoted from the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, one passage has been translated as “(He) would manifest through Him His own mystery.” In the original Arabic, the passage is not quite clear; it could also be translated as “(He) would manifest through it His own mystery”. This is because it is not clear what the pronoun refers to. Perhaps Ibn al-‘Arabī deliberately left the case ambiguous, because both meanings fit into his theological theory about the stations or modes of God.

If taken as in the first case, it implies that God manifested to Himself through Himself. This is the station of *aḥadiyya* which is the first mode of the Divine Essence. In this mode, the essence, *dhāt*, is beyond any relationship or multiplicity (*kathra*). So, here the antecedent of the pronoun would be God.

And if taken as in the second case, it refers to the mode of *wāḥidiyya* where *dhāt* is considered in relation to the names and attributes. Hence, the passage means God manifested through "it" (the mirror of names and attributes) His own mystery. In this case, the antecedent of the pronoun would be that mirror.

Dāwūd Qayṣarī in the introduction to his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* offers this description of the stations of *aḥadiyya* and *wāḥidiyya*:

The Reality of Being, when considered with the stipulation of non-existence of things, is called the station of *aḥadiyya* among the people, wherein all the names and attributes are perished. This station is also called Union of the Union (*jam‘ al-jam‘*), and the Reality of Realities (*ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqā‘iq*), and the Cloud (*al-‘Amā‘*).

And if considered on the condition that something else should also exist, or if considered with the stipulation of all the things that are necessary for it, universals and particulars, which are the names and attributes, then it is called the Realm of Divinity

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<sup>52</sup> See *Kashf al-Ḥaqā‘iq* of Shaykh ‘Azīz al-Dīn Nasafī, p. 151.

(*al-martabat al-'Ilāhīyya*), and it is also called the Station of *wāḥidiyya*, and the Station of Union (*maqām al-jam'*) among the people.

And if this station is regarded in the light of the attainment of manifestations of names, which are the Intelligibles or Instantiations (*A'yān*), to the perfections commensurate with their capabilities in the external world, it is called the Realm of Lordship (*al-Martaba al-Rubūbiyya*).<sup>53</sup>

Qayṣarī continues his description of other ontological stations, which we will refer to later.

Similar explanations are offered by Taj al-Dīn Ḥusayn Khwārazmī in his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*. His commentary follows the same pattern laid out by Qayṣarī. The differences are that Khwārazmī's commentary is primarily in Persian, and he has quoted mystical poetry-Arabic and particularly Persian- throughout his work to support his arguments.

We can conclude this section by saying that *aḥadiyya* is the station of Unicity or Exclusive Unity that negates any consideration of multiplicity, and *wāḥidiyya* is the station of Oneness or Inclusive Unity that considers the ontological levels of names, attributes, the cosmos, and so forth.

For the theologians the discussion of divine names and attributes poses a problematic question. The Qur'ān emphatically affirms the unity of Allāh (*Tawḥīd*). God is described in terms of certain names and attributes, such as Creator, Hearer, and Powerful in the Qur'ān. Are the divine names and attributes eternal or not? For example, God is called the Creator. Is creation eternal or not? If it is eternal, it implies that other things besides God are eternal. This poses a problem in that the theologians believe only God is eternal. If creation is not eternal then it implies that God was not

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<sup>53</sup> See Dāwūd Qayṣarī's commentary in the book, *Sharḥ-i Muqaddima Qayṣarī* by Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī, p. 84.

creator at some point (before creation existed) and then acquired that attribute. This would pose a more serious problem in that God has changed.

Ibn al-‘Arabī’s response to this dilemma is the concept of *al-a’yān al-thābita*, the Intelligible Archetypes, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Here, suffice it to say that Ibn al-‘Arabī makes a distinction between the Divine attributes and names, and their actualization. In other words, he believes there are two modes for the names and attributes. One mode is that of *al-a’yān al-thābita* which exist only in the mind of the Creator, and the other as actualized forms, *al-a’yān al-mawjūda*, that have existence in the physical world.

Ibn al-‘Arabī uses the concept of the mirror and the polishing of the mirror to describe the process of the appearance of names and attributes. When we look at an unpolished mirror we will see the glass, that is to say, the mirror. But, when the mirror is polished it becomes invisible and we will only notice the image reflected in the mirror. Before creation took place, God did not behold Himself in anything besides Himself; the names and attributes, which imply some relationship with the universe, did not exist. The names and attributes were created through the entities of the universe.

The Ṣūfīs that follow Ibn al-‘Arabī’s school call the process of creation *nafas al-Raḥmān* (the breath of the Beneficent). Through this process the names and attributes are actualized. They are like keys to the treasury of the knowledge of God; once they are actualized in the world through *nafas al-Raḥmān*, the Hidden Treasure is made manifest.

The depiction of the mirror is extended by the Ṣūfīs to man or the perfect man (*al-insān al-kāmil*). Adam is equated with the metaphor of polishing of the mirror, while the cosmos is represented by the mirror. When the mirror is polished the mirror itself vanishes (the cosmos becomes invisible). At the completion of the polishing the names appear in the mirror of the human heart.

In summary, the complex concept of Divine Essence and its relation to names and attributes, and how they relate to the phenomenal world, can be summarized as:

1. Before the appearance of ontological names and the cosmos God had not manifested Himself, and knew Himself only through Himself, not through any other name or locus;
2. The names were non-existent;
3. God willed (loved) to behold Himself in something other than His Essence, so He emerged from the mode of Hidden Treasure;
4. Ontological names appear through the process called *nafas al-Rahmān*;
5. The object of the divine names is God Himself (the Hidden Treasure);
6. The cosmos is created, but it is like an unpolished mirror which needs to be polished, so that Adam (the perfect man) can appear and thereby the divine names can become manifest in the physical world.



# Chapter Three: Station of *Aḥadiyya*

## The Realm of Absolute Essence

In the previous chapter some reference was made to *Aḥadiyya* as one of the stations of the Divine Being in the mode of the Hidden Treasure. In this chapter we will elaborate further on this topic, and review a number of other concepts related to it.

It appears that some Ṣūfīs have considered the mode of *aḥadiyya* synonymous with the Absolute Being, i.e., the level of Divine Essence in its absoluteness, while some others regard *aḥadiyya* as the first stage of metaphysical creation. Examples from proponents of these two groups will be offered later in this chapter, but it can be stated here that some outstanding disciples of Ibn al-‘Arabī such as al-Farghānī and al-Kāshānī have maintained that the mode of Absolute Being at the highest philosophical level could be divided into the station of Absolute *dhāt* (Essence), and the station of Absolute as it is about to turn into the stage of self-manifestation.<sup>1</sup>

In any case, this may be a subtle distinction of no consequence because both of these levels are considered to be inconceivable, beyond approach, and without any actual manifestation of names or attributes.

I have referred to the highest stage of the Hidden Treasure as the Absolute in the stage of *dhāt* or Essence. Let us explore what is meant by *dhāt* in undetermined state of absoluteness, in the technical terminology of Ibn al-‘Arabī and his disciples. The only thing that can be said about the Absolute at its highest level is that it exists. In the terminology of Ibn al-‘Arabī this is called the Being; technically speaking, even the use of this

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<sup>1</sup> For an expanded discussion of the different views held by Ṣūfī masters on the concept of *aḥadiyya* see Izutsu’s discussion of “The Absolute in its Absoluteness” in his *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts*, University of California Press, Berkeley, California, 1983, pp. 23-38.

word is inappropriate because no predication is possible at that level. This is so because any word used to predicate must exist, and by definition except for the Absolute nothing exists, not even the word Being.

Nonetheless, Ibn al-‘Arabī describes the Absolute in its non-manifest mode as Being. The Being in that indescribable state is called *dhāt* or Essence since it does not have quiddity. So, we can imagine a state where the Absolute Being exists but nothing can be explained, not even its existence.

In the commentary that al-Kāshānī has written on *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, he explains the complex concept of Absolute or Necessary Being vs. other beings:

The Reality called the ‘Essence at the level of unity’ in its true nature is nothing other than Being pure and simple in so far as it is Being. It is conditioned neither by non-determination nor by determination, for in itself it is too sacred to be qualified by any property and any name. It has no quality, no delimitation; there is not even a shadow of multiplicity in it. It is neither a substance nor an accident, for a substance must have a quiddity other than existence, a quiddity by which it is a substance as differentiated from all other existents, and so does an accident which, furthermore, needs a place (i.e., substratum) which exists and in which it inheres. And since everything other than the Necessary Being (*wājib*) is either a substance or an accident, the Being *qua* Being cannot be anything other than the Necessary Being.

Every determined (i.e., non-necessary) being is existentiated by the Necessary Being. Nay, it is essentially no other than the Necessary Being; it is entitled to be regarded as ‘other’ than the Necessary Being only in respect of its determination. (Properly speaking) nothing can be ‘other’ than it in respect to its essence. Such being the case (in the case of Necessary Being) existence is identical with essence itself, for anything which is

not Being *qua* Being is sheer non-Being.<sup>2</sup>

Whether or not we consider the Absolute in its state of absoluteness to be different from the Absolute in the mode just prior to any form of self-manifestation, the fact remains that any expression of words or any thoughts about the Absolute can only be possible when the process of self-manifestation begins. Before that, the absolute remains as the hidden treasure behind the veil of absoluteness.

The word *Aḥadiyya* was not coined by Ṣūfīs, yet they wrote a great deal of material to devise a particular set of notions around it. The word *aḥad* or “one” occurs in the Qur’ān as in the verse (112:1), “Say: He, God, is One (*aḥad*)”. The word *wāḥid* also means “one”, and it occurs in many verses in the Qur’ān, as in the verse (2:163), “And your God is One (*wāḥid*)”, and in the verse (13:16), “Allāh is the Creator of all things, and He is the One (*wāḥid*), the Almighty”.

God is called by both of these names, *aḥad* and *wāḥid*. However, while *aḥad* is used without consideration of any other beings, *wāḥid* is used in relation to others; and as it will explained later in this chapter, even though the *others* do not have external existence they still exist in the form of immutable entities.

In *Kitāb al-Alif*, Ibn al-‘Arabī offers a discussion of *aḥad* and *wāḥid* in the context of *tanzīh* and *tashbīh*. He says that God as *aḥad* should be considered in respect of *tanzīh* and God as *wāḥid* should be considered in relation to *tashbīh*. In the state of *tanzīh* no relation and attribute could be considered for God. To explain this further, in *Kitāb al-Alif*, Ibn al-‘Arabī cites worship by people as an example of relations that do not refer to *aḥad* because no relation is conceivable in the station of *aḥadiyya*.<sup>3</sup> One may

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī, *Sharḥ al-Kāshānī ‘Alā Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, Cairo, 1321 A.H., p. 3. (Translation from Toshihiko Izutsu in *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts*, p. 25)

<sup>3</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Kitāb al-Alif*, in *Rasā’il Ibn al-‘Arabī*, Vol. I, Dār Iḥyā al-Tarāth al-‘Arabī, Beirut, pp. 2-4.

wonder how Ibn al-‘Arabī would have responded to the fact that in *Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*, recited in the *Ṣalāt* the word *aḥad* is mentioned.

In brief, *aḥadiyya* is the first or the highest level of the Hidden Treasure. According to this doctrine before God loved (or willed, according to some interpretations) to observe His own beauty the only mode of existence was the station of *aḥadiyya*.

The Ṣūfī literature on this topic uses metaphors and expressions to show the futility of man’s effort in the hope of gaining some understanding of this level. None of the methods of search and recognition are capable of revealing anything about *aḥadiyya*. Human reason, intellect, inspiration, observation, meditation, logic, and all other means of understanding fall short at this threshold. Many mystics after years of search and meditation have sighed in vain and given up the hope of gaining any understanding of this station. One metaphor used in this connection describes man’s abilities as feet made of wax, and the domain of *aḥadiyya* as a field made up of boiling metal; anyone who attempts to walk into this field finds his feet of understanding melting right away into a state of utter confusion.

For this reason, the station of *aḥadiyya* has been called *al-Munqaṭ‘ia al-Wujdāniyya*, meaning the mode where human consciousness (understanding) is cut short or stops functioning. In short, there is no path for a human being towards recognition of this mode.

## *Aḥadiyya* and Related Concepts

In the Ṣūfī literature we come across a few other themes that are expressed either in the forms of Qur’ānic verses, *ḥadīth*, sayings, or doctrines that are related to the concept of *aḥadiyya*. A few of the concepts that we will review, as examples of this genre of writings dealing with the concept of the Hidden Treasure, include: the Islamic traditions (*Aḥādīth*) of “Only God Existed”, “the Ultimate Purity of Devotion”, and “the True Recognition”; the Qur’ānic verse (28:88), “Everything perishes but His

*Face*”; the concept relating the three entities of the Beloved, the Love, and the Lover of God; the concept of ‘*Amā*’ (the Cloud); and the concept of *al-Fayḍ al-Aqdas* (the Most Holy Effusion).

- Only God Existed

Among the often quoted *Aḥādīth* in Ṣūfī literature is the *ḥadīth* of “*kān Allāh wa lam yakun ma’ahu shay’*”, [God was (existed) and nothing was (existed) with Him], which is primarily related to the station of *aḥadiyya*. Ibn al-‘Arabī has quoted this tradition typically in the discussion of topics involving *Aḥadiyyat al-aḥad* (Unity of the One), *Aḥadiyyat al-‘ayn* (Unity of the Entity), and *Aḥadiyyat al-kathra* (Unity of the Manyness).

God’s oneness in respect of incomparability of His unity is described as *Aḥadiyyat al-aḥad* or *Aḥadiyyat al-‘ayn*, while his oneness in respect of unity of His names and attributes is described as *Aḥadiyyat al-kathra*. In *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, the author offers the following explanation for this tradition:

What is the meaning of his (the Prophet's) saying, peace be upon him: "God was and nothing was with Him." The answer is: nothing accompanies Him and we cannot ascribe anything to Him. That is how He is and nothing exists with Him. An essential description of Him is denial of existence of anything with Him, just as is the denial of (the notion of) accompanying with (the notion of) thing. Yet, He is with the things and the things are not with Him, because the (notion of) accompaniment is subject to the (notion of) knowledge. So, He knows us, therefore, He is with us, and we do not know Him, therefore, we are not with Him.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, p. 56.

In another place Ibn al-‘Arabī points out that the Arabic word *kāna* implies existence or *wujūd*, and therefore the tradition could also be read as “God is” rather than “God was”.<sup>5</sup> He further explains that the “nothing” which was with God is the Intelligible Archetype in the knowledge of God. This explanation is surprising because the text of the *ḥadīth* says “*wa lam yakun ma‘ahu shay’*”, yet Ibn al-‘Arabī derives a different meaning from the concept of “nothing was with God”. As will be described later in this chapter, he offered this explanation in order to resolve the contradiction between this tradition and the fact that other entities besides God do exist.

The above *ḥadīth* has been quoted with some variations by others. Aside from the discussion of *Aḥadiyyat al-aḥad* and so forth, the context for discussing this tradition, is sometimes the concept of the Hidden Treasure. For instance, Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, one of the followers of the school of Ibn al-‘Arabī, gives the following two versions:

I- The Prophet, God's peace and greetings be upon him, said: “God was and nothing was with Him”. And the mystic<sup>6</sup> said: “and He is now as He was then”.<sup>7</sup>

II- God (the Truth) Himself reported, as it is His word in the holy tradition: “I was a Hidden Treasure, I loved to be known, therefore, I created the creation.” The meaning of this is that He says: “I was an essence or inner being, abstract and hidden”... (until it says): God was, and nothing else besides Him was with Him; and He is now, and there is nothing else besides Him, as it was reported by the mystic who recognized

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<sup>5</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, p. 692.

<sup>6</sup> This is a reference to Shiblī who, reportedly upon hearing this *ḥadīth*, proclaimed: “and He is now as He was”.

<sup>7</sup> See *Jāmi‘ al-Asrār wa Manba‘ al-Anwār*, Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, edited by Henry Corbin and ‘Uthmān Yaḥyā, Anstītuī Irān va Farānsih, Tehran, 1969, p. 56.

Him and His existence befittingly. In his words: “God was and nothing was with Him” and another mystic reported: “and He is now as He was then”.<sup>8</sup>

Another version of this tradition is found in the *ḥadīth* collection of *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī* by renowned Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* scholar Muḥammad Kulaynī al-Rāzī<sup>9</sup> (d. 328/939), where he offers the following version:

The father of Ja‘far (Imām Bāqir), peace be upon him, said, I heard him saying: *kān Allāh, ‘azza wa jalla, wa lā shay’un ghayrahu...*(God was, glorified and magnified be He, and nothing was besides Him), and from eternity He has been knowledgeable of whatever comes into being; so, His knowledge of it (anything that comes into being) before its existence is the same as His knowledge of it after its existence.<sup>10</sup>

Al-Ḥāfiẓ Rajab al-Bursī<sup>11</sup> is an *ḥadīth* scholar with Ṣūfī tendencies. In

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<sup>8</sup> See *Risāla Naqd al-Nuqūd fī Ma‘rifa al-Wujūd*, Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, edited by Henry Corbin and ‘Uthmān Yaḥyā, Anstītuī Irān va Farānsih Tehran, 1969, pp. 665-667.

<sup>9</sup> Muḥammad Kulaynī al-Rāzī is one of the foremost authorities of Shī‘ī *ḥadīth*. He lived during the period which among the Shī‘a is known as the *Lesser Occultation*, and passed away in 328A.H. Four people in succession were recognized as the intermediary between the Hidden Twelfth Imām and the Shī‘ī community during the *Lesser Occultation*. Since Kulaynī lived in this period, some believe that his collection of *ḥadīth*, titled *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī*, was blessed by the Hidden Twelfth Imām, and therefore, has special significance.

<sup>10</sup> See *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī*, Muḥammad Kulaynī, Vol. I, Tehran, no publication date, p. 144.

<sup>11</sup> Al-Ḥāfiẓ Rajab al-Bursī has quoted a number of traditions from the Prophet Muḥammad and Imām ‘Alī in his Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* collections. Many Shī‘ī scholars have relied on him and have quoted some of the *ḥadīth* from his collections in their books, while a few others have doubted the authenticity of some of the *ḥadīth* in his collections.

*Mashāriq Anwār al-Yaqīn* he gives the following interesting explanation, linking this tradition to the tradition of the Hidden Treasure:

The Existence of the Absolute Being is none other than *al-Ḥaqq*, sanctified by His Name, for the reason that His Being is the same as His Essence...

The Essence of *al-Ḥaqq* is unknown to human beings otherwise the possible being would supersede the Necessary Being, which is not possible. How far apart are the position of dust and the station of the Lord of the Lords! Therefore, the only thing which could be understood (by people) is the limited being...

The reason for this is provided in the holy traditions, one of which says: “I was a Hidden Treasure, I loved to be known, so I created creation in order to be known.” This statement is astonishing from the One who was hidden and nothing existed with Him; they are His words that proclaim: “I was a Hidden Treasure,” i.e., hidden behind the veils. No one can have any knowledge of Him at that level. Therefore, this statement (i.e., I was a Hidden Treasure) is a reference to the unity at the level of the Essence, which is also alluded to by the statement “God existed and nothing existed with Him”. And His pronouncement “I loved to be known” is a reference to the disclosure of attributes. And the statement “so I created creation in order to be known” is a reference to the manifestation of the acts and the diffusion of the creatures.<sup>12</sup>

Al-Bursī expresses astonishment that the Absolute Being, Who existed without anyone or anything accompanying Him, would love (or

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<sup>12</sup> See *Mashāriq Anwār al-Yaqīn* of al-Ḥāfiẓ Rajab al-Bursī, Qum, Iran, 1996, p. 27.



want) to manifest Himself. He voices his astonishment when he says:

This statement is astonishing from the One who was hidden and nothing existed with Him; it is His words that: “I was a Hidden Treasure,” i.e., hidden behind the veils.

Perhaps al-Bursī saw a contradiction between the two sayings, and attempted to offer a unified view of the two traditions, one of which states that God existed (and still exists) in a mode that nothing could conceivably exist with Him, and the other which describes God in a mode desiring to be known by others.

To explain this seeming contradiction, Ibn al-‘Arabī had earlier affirmed that the “nothing” mentioned in the tradition is a reference to *A’yān Thābita* (Intelligible Archetypes or immutable entities). As will be explained later, this concept is central to Ibn al-‘Arabī’s notion of how so many things come into existence from God while He maintains His oneness, *aḥadiyya*.

In some Ṣūfī texts, a phrase follows this *ḥadīth*, which some Ṣūfīs, including Ibn al-‘Arabī and his disciple al-Qaysarī, thought if left unexplained could cause conceptual confusion in understanding the ontological scheme about God and His stations. The additional phrase is:

“And He is now as He was (before)”

The confusion has to do with the existence of creation which necessitates a relationship with the Creator. So, does the statement “*God was and nothing was with Him*” still remain valid today even though things now do exist? Some of the Ṣūfīs offered explanations as we saw in the passage from al-Bursī. Although Ibn al-‘Arabī dislikes this additional saying, and mentions that it does not add anything to our understanding of the *ḥadīth*, and in fact states that it was uttered out of ignorance<sup>13</sup>, on a few

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<sup>13</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. I, p. 41, V. II, p. 56.

occasions he quotes it himself.

The origin of the section added to this tradition apparently dates back to the time of Junayd of Baghdād, as al-Qayṣarī states that this additional saying was uttered by Junayd, the famous Ṣūfī of Baghdād in the third Islamic century (d. 299/910).<sup>14</sup>

Reportedly, someone read the *ḥadīth* of “God was and nothing was with Him” in a gathering; upon hearing it Junayd stated that He (God) exists today the same way He existed before, meaning before anything was created. So some of the mystics keep referring to this statement of Junayd as if it were part of the tradition or had the same validity.

Below are some examples of how Ibn al-‘Arabī uses different versions of this *ḥadīth* along with other themes to argue that God has always existed, there has been no change in Him, and no event or action, even the creation of the cosmos, can cause a change in God. This is the concept of *aḥadiyyat al-aḥad*. The idea is that God was Creator even before any creation was manifested. The same is true of other names and attributes of God, i.e., even though some of the names and attributes of God are understood in relation to His creation, God possessed all of them even before any creation appeared physically:

I- The Prophet, may peace be upon him, described Him (God) by saying: *kān Allāh, wa lā shay’un ma’ahu* (God was and nothing was with Him), and he went to say *Huwa al-’ān ‘alā mā ‘alayhi kāna* (and He still is today the same way that He was then).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Dāwūd Qayṣarī, *Rasā’il Qayṣarī*, edited by S.J. Āshtiyānī, Mashhad: Dānishghāh, 1978, p. 13.

<sup>15</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. I, p. 65.

II- God was and nothing was with Him; then it is recorded about Him that, He still exists today the same way that He existed before. No attribute, deriving from His creating the cosmos, refers to Him.<sup>16</sup>

III- God was and nothing was with Him; and He still is the same way that He was before, even though things (*'ashyā*), exist.<sup>17</sup>

The essence of these expressions is that God existed and nothing existed with Him, and the same is true today, i.e., He exists and nothing with real *wujūd* exists with Him.

This tradition has also been used in relation to the Ṣūfī principle of the Unity of Being, *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*, which states that the only real existence is that of God and everything else compared to Him is unreal, like a shadow. In this work, however my focus is on subjects connected to the concept of the Hidden Treasure; the discussion of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* is beyond the scope of this study.

### • The Ultimate Purity of Devotion

Another *ḥadīth* that has been used quite frequently by Ṣūfīs in the texts that discuss the station of *aḥadiyya* is a tradition attributed to Imām 'Alī. This tradition states:

“*Kamāl al-ikhhlāṣ nafy al-ṣifāt 'anhu*”,

which means the ultimate *ikhhlāṣ* (purity of devotion), is to reject the attributes from Him.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. I, p. 119.

<sup>17</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, p. 591.

Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī in the introduction to his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* quotes this tradition and explains its connection to the concept of *aḥadiyya*, as well as *wāḥidiyya*:<sup>18</sup>

The Being in the station of *aḥadiyya* rejects all the instantiations, and there does not remain, in this station, any attribute or any entity that could be described, nor any name, neither any thing that could be named, except for the Essence (of God). In the station of *wāḥidiyya*, which is the station of the names and attributes, there exists the attribute, and the one described by it, as well as the name, and the one named, and this is the station of Divinity...

Therefore, the Commander of the Faithful, may God honor him, said: the ultimate purity of devotion is to reject the attributes from Him.

Different versions of this *ḥadīth* are recorded in the literature; the version often quoted by Ṣūfīs is *Kamāl al-tawḥīd nafy al-ṣifāt ‘anhu* (The ultimate affirmation of the oneness of God, *tawḥīd*, is to reject the attributes from Him).<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, all the versions essentially convey the same

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<sup>18</sup> See Dāwūd Qayṣarī in the introduction to his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* of Ibn al-‘Arabī, published in *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* edited by S.J. Āshtiyyānī, Tehran, 1996, p. 24. For those who are not familiar with the works of Qayṣarī the titles of some of the books might be confusing. Qayṣarī is one of those who wrote a commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* of Ibn al-‘Arabī. He also wrote another book explaining some of the themes he had discussed in that commentary; he called the latter book *Muqaddima Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*. Later on other people, like Āshtiyyānī, wrote books explaining the themes of *Muqaddima Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* of Qayṣarī. The practice of writing a commentary, to explain commentaries written by others is not unusual, but the titles chosen by the authors for their works at times could be confusing. Another example of such a sequence of commentaries is the set of books written by Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*.

<sup>19</sup> For example, Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, and Shaykh Aḥmad

concept that the believer at the stage of ultimate devotion or belief in *tawhīd* will negate all the attributes from God, which is the belief in the station of *aḥadiyya*.

The earliest form of this *ḥadīth* is quoted in the *Nahju'l Balāgha*<sup>20</sup> of Imām 'Alī as follows:

The beginning of faith, *Dīn*, is His recognition (recognition of God), the ultimate recognition of Him is to attest, *taṣdīq*, to Him, and the height of *taṣdīq* toward Him is to believe in His oneness, and the height of belief in His oneness is the devotion towards Him (*Kamāl tawhīdihi al-ikhhlāṣ lahu*), and the ultimate purity of devotion towards Him is to negate the attributes from Him (*Kamāl al-ikhhlāṣ nafy al-ṣifāt 'anhu*), because every attribute testifies that He cannot be described, and every described one testifies that the attribute cannot describe Him (God).

Typically, in the Ṣūfī texts wherein this tradition is mentioned, the doctrine of the Hidden Treasure, in the context of the concept of *aḥadiyya*, is also mentioned; but since the connection between these concepts has been described before, no further textual examples are needed at this point.

- Fancies! Not True Recognition

The third *ḥadīth*, seen mostly in the texts of Shī'ī writers with Ṣūfī inclination that is sometimes used in the context of the Hidden Treasure and the station of *aḥadiyya*, is a tradition attributed to Imām Muḥammad Bāqir.

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Aḥsā'ī have used this version in their writings.

<sup>20</sup> See *Nahju'l Balāgha*, Tehran, 1989, p. 14. *Nahju'l Balāgha* is a collection of sermons, counsels, and letters of Imām 'Alī collected by Sharīf Raḍī.

Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī<sup>21</sup> in *Kalimāt-i Maknūnah*, a mystical work written in Persian, quotes one version of this *ḥadīth*:

Just as the depth of the essence of God is unknowable the depth of His attributes is also unknowable... Our master, the (Imām) Bāqir, upon him be peace, said: “*kullamā mayyaztamūhu bi awḥāmikum fī adaqqi ma‘ānīhi fa huwa makhlūqun maṣnū‘un mithlakum mardūdun ilaykum*” (all that which you have perceived, in your fancies with regards to Its [God's] subtlest meaning, is a manufactured creation like you, it is sent back to you.)<sup>22</sup>

On several occasions in *Kalimāt-i Maknūnah*, the author mentions this tradition in the context of the doctrine of the Hidden Treasure, and argues that since neither God nor His attributes could be perceived or understood by man, whatever we think we have understood about God is like us, created and fashioned.

Several variations of this *ḥadīth* have been quoted by various Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* scholars like Kulaynī in *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī*<sup>23</sup>, and by Shaykh Ṣadūq in the collection of tradition called *Khiṣāl Ṣadūq*.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī is a Shī‘ī scholar of *ḥadīth* who has also written mystical books. His most famous Ṣūfī work is *Kalimāt-i Maknūnah*, The Hidden Words. He lived in the 11<sup>th</sup> century A.H. and died in 1091/1690.

<sup>22</sup> See *Kalimāt-i Maknūnah*, edited by Qūchānī, Tehran, 1963, p. 19.

<sup>23</sup> Kulaynī, M., *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī*, see the chapter, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, Tehran, without date.

<sup>24</sup> Shaykh Ṣadūq; see the section on *Tawḥīd* in *Khiṣāl Ṣadūq*, Tehran, 1998.

Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī, the founder of the Shaykhī school<sup>25</sup>, in *Sharḥ al-Fawā'id* cites this ḥadīth with his own embedded description. He argues that not only our thoughts and imaginations fall short of understanding God, but our faculty of reason is also inadequate to provide us with any such understanding:

All that which you have perceived, in your fancies, or conceived in your thought, or intellectualized with regards to Its [God's] subtlest meaning, in relation to your reasoning, or with respect to His first instantiation (*ta'ayyun*), is a fashioned creation like you, just as yourselves are created.<sup>26</sup>

- Everything Perishes but His Face

In addition to the above traditions, the Islamic mystics have also quoted the Qur'ānic verse of “*Kullu shay'in hālikun illā wajhahū*” (Everything perishes but His Face)<sup>27</sup> frequently in support of the concept of *Aḥadiyya*. Some of the Ṣūfīs have interpreted *wajh* (countenance or face) in the above verse as the ontological level of the Absolute Being. For example, Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī has related this verse to the station of *aḥadiyya*, and equated *wajh* with the Essence of God. Here is a brief section of his commentary on this verse:<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī, who founded the Shaykhī school, has authored many books on various subjects like theology, jurisprudence, ḥadīth, and so forth. He offers unique views on some doctrines like the knowledge of God, Ṣūfīs and some of their beliefs, eschatology, and so on.

<sup>26</sup> See *Sharḥ al-Fawā'id*, name of the publisher, date, and place of publication not given, p. 193. *Sharḥ al-Fawā'id* is one of the several books that Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī wrote on the subject of ontology.

<sup>27</sup> The Qur'ān, Chap. 28:88.

<sup>28</sup> See *Jāmi' al-Asrār*, Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, Tehran, 1969, p. 55.

Alluding to the eternity (*baqā'*) of His essence and the annihilation (*fanā'*) of that which is besides Him, God, exalted be His words, said: “Everything perishes but His Face; His is the judgment, and to Him ye shall return.” And its real meaning is that everything besides the Absolute Being - that is, besides His countenance (*wajh*) and His essence (*dhāt*) - are perishing from pre eternity to eternity, because their existence is incidental and unreal, and the incidentals do not exist externally<sup>29</sup> ...

It is with regard to this station that the masters of unveiling and witnessing (*arbāb al-kashf wa al-shuhūd*) said: “*Tawhīd* is to discard the incidentals (*al-tawhīd isqāṭ al-idāfāt*).” And the Prophet, may God's peace and mercy be upon him and his family, said “God was and nothing was with Him.” And the mystic said: “[and He] is as He was before”; the incidentals do not exist as mentioned before.

Ibn al-‘Arabī and his disciples have interpreted the Qur’ānic references such as the face of God, the eye of God, and so forth symbolically, as shown in the above statement from Āmulī . From their perspective, since no names or attributes exist at the ontological station of *aḥadiyya*, such references to God could only be interpreted as an indication of His essence as Absolute Being.

- The Beloved, the Love, and the Lover

In Islamic mystical literature God is depicted as the Beloved who is in

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<sup>29</sup> This means that the incidentals do not have physical existence. They are merely relations that exist when considered in association with the real Being.



love with His own essence. However, since the station of *aḥadiyya* is the level of the absolute essence without any trace of names, attributes, or other beings, He is the Love and the Lover as well. Hence, this is the station of the union of the Beloved, Love, and the Lover. Jāmī<sup>30</sup> in his collection of *Mathnavīs* known as *Haft Awrang*<sup>31</sup> has depicted this concept in beautiful poetic manner:

In that realm where there was no sign of existence  
Where the cosmos was relegated to the corner of nothingness

There was a Being sanctified from the image of duality  
Far removed from the discussion of you and us

A Beauty unfettered by the bound of manifestation  
Manifested to Itself through Its own light

A Beautiful Bride in the unseen precinct  
Her essence sanctified from the calumny of defect

Mirror had not visited Her face  
Hand had not combed Her locks

Wind had not scattered Her hair

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<sup>30</sup> ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī is the last of the greatest Ṣūfī poets of Persia, like Sanā’ī, ‘Aṭṭār, and Rūmī, that contributed to the development of speculative mysticism in Islam. He is one of the prominent expounders of the works of Ibn al-‘Arabī.

<sup>31</sup> *Haft Awrang* is composed of seven *Mathnavīs* that Jāmī composed at different times. The section translated here is from the beginning of the *Mathnavī of Yūsuf va Zulaykhā*. For the text of this see *Jāmī: Aḥwāl va Āthār*, edited by ‘Alī A. Ḥikmat, Tehran, 1941.

Her eye had not seen dust of mascara

Her flower-like beauty had not associated with buds

Her verdure had not wreathed with flower

Her face devoid of any line or mole

No eye had seen any image of Her

She was composing music of love for Herself

She was engaged in the gamble of love with Herself

An interesting point should be mentioned here that affects the choice of pronouns referring to God in translating mystical literary works from Persian into English. One can observe that in Arabic religious texts the pronouns used in reference to God are masculine. At the same time, in the mystical writings, God is depicted as the Beloved, and the object of love and devotion of His servants. In the Persian and Arabic literary works the beloved is sometimes depicted in terms of attributes that are typically used for a feminine entity. For example, the great poets of Persian literature have composed volumes of love poetry in which the beloved is described as a bride, or in such terms that typically (though not exclusively) are descriptive of the beauty of a feminine beloved, like “bow-like eyebrows”, “beautiful eyes”, the “long braided hair”, “jet-black hair”, and so forth. This presents a dilemma in translation when God is considered as the Beloved; He is described in terms that are typically associated with a feminine beloved. In reading the Persian literature there is ambiguity about the object of the pronoun because there are no separate pronouns for masculine and feminine in that language. Yet in translating the Persian love poetry into other languages which do have separate pronouns for masculine and feminine one is faced with having to make a decision about the pronoun gender. In translating the poem from Jāmī, since he uses the word “bride”, I have used feminine pronouns. Theologically, however, God is considered to be exalted above the duality of masculine and feminine.

The concept of the union of the three entities, i.e., the Beloved, Love, and the Lover, has also been addressed by Rūzbihān Baqlī<sup>32</sup> a mystic of the 6th century A.H. (d. 605/1209), in *Sharḥ-i Shaṭḥiyyāt*<sup>33</sup>:

In pre-eternity He fell in love with His own beauty, therefore,  
the Love, the Lover, and the Beloved became one.<sup>34</sup>

‘Irāqī<sup>35</sup> is another mystic poet (d. 685/1289) who is known for his love poetry in Persian. In his *Lama’āt*, which is one of the masterpieces of Persian prose and poetry, and several people including Jāmī have written commentaries on it, he alludes to the same concept in a couplet<sup>36</sup>:

Nay, I was wrong because He is the Lover and the Beloved here  
Even though we are a legend in the world because of His love

Who are we, what are we capable of, lest you assume that we

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<sup>32</sup> Rūzbihān Baqlī was a mystic-poet from the city of Fasā in Iran. He is the founder of a mystic order that is named after him as *Rūzbihāniyya Order*.

<sup>33</sup> *Sharḥ-i Shaṭḥiyyāt* of Rūzbihān Baqlī has been hailed as a significant Ṣūfī book for understanding the mystical philosophy of Maṣṣūṣ Ḥallāj. This book was composed in Persian.

<sup>34</sup> See *Sharḥ-i Shaṭḥiyyāt*, edited by Henry Corbin, Tehran, 1995, p. 90.

<sup>35</sup> Fakhruddīn ‘Irāqī (d. 685/1289) is a leading Ṣūfī poet who is known for his love poetry. The *Lama’āt* or Divine Flashes, is the best-known work of Fakhruddīn ‘Irāqī written in the language of mystical love; it is a mixture of poetry and rhymed prose.

<sup>36</sup> See *Risāla-yi Lama’āt Fakhruddīn ‘Irāqī*, edited by Jawād Nūrbakhsh, Chāpkhānih-i Firdawsī, Tehran, 1972, p. 47.

Are a mirror for His face or a comb for His locks.

In the same book, Irāqī gives a more detailed description of the triple concepts of Love, the Lover, and the Beloved in the station of *aḥadiyya*, and how this divine love led to self-disclosure in the station of *wāḥidiyya*. A translation of a short portion of it will be provided later in the chapter on *wāḥidiyya*.

- *Al-‘Amā’*, The Cloud

The station of *aḥadiyya* is sometimes called ‘*Amā*’ among the mystics. However, this term has been used also by Ṣūfīs in reference to other concepts including the station of *wāḥidiyya* and the station of the Perfect Man. This term seems to have been derived from a tradition, as quoted by Ibn al-‘Arabī, that says:

It is recorded in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* that the Messenger of God, may God's peace and greetings be upon him, was asked: *ayna kāna rabbunā qabla an yakhlūqa khalqahu* (where was our Lord before He created His creation)? He said: “*kāna fī ‘amā*” He was in a Cloud; neither above Him nor below Him was there any air.<sup>37</sup>

Similar to most other traditions that Ṣūfīs have used, different versions of this *ḥadīth* are quoted in their writings. For example, Dāwūd Qayṣarī quotes this *ḥadīth* with a slight variation in his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*.<sup>38</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* gives his own

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<sup>37</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. III, p. 506; Vol. II, p. 150 and p. 310.

<sup>38</sup> The version that Qayṣarī quotes is as follows: [The station of ‘*Amā*’ which the Prophet, may peace be upon him, referred to when asked by an ‘Arab: *ayna kāna rabbunā qabla an yakhlūqa al-khalqa* (where was our Lord before He created the creation)? He said: He was in a Cloud, above and below which was no air]. See Dāwūd Qayṣarī's commentary on *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*; edited by S.J. Āshtiyyānī, Tehran, 1996, p. 295. The person who

description of the concept of the Cloud and God's existence before creating the creation. He says the ordinary cloud is made of vapor, is surrounded by air, and is controlled by air, whereas the Cloud mentioned in the *ḥadīth* is different from the ordinary cloud because there is no air above or below this Cloud. Therefore, this Cloud is not subject to any control by the air, rather it is the closest thing to God, and is controlled only by Him.<sup>39</sup>

Ibn al-‘Arabī’s explanation of ‘*Amā*’ is complex, and at times could be confusing. He says that the cosmos and all creation take form in the Cloud, not in a physical sense but in the form of imagination. At times, he suggests that the Cloud is the same as the intermediary between the Absolute Being and the non-existent, ‘*adam*. Before any self-disclosure or manifestation takes place the not-yet conceived engendered entities are imagined in this Cloud. In this sense, he claims that the Cloud would be identical with *Nafas al-Raḥmān*, the Breath of the All-Merciful. On other occasions Ibn al-‘Arabī suggests that the ‘*Amā*’ has come to be through the Breath of the All-Merciful and is not identical with it.

In the ontological sense, God has no relation to non-existents; He is incomprehensible and beyond comparison. God comes *to be* in this Cloud, according to Ibn al-‘Arabī, but he does not explain how this occurs. Through the intermediary role of the Cloud, the immutable entities in God’s knowledge produce the form of the cosmos, not in the physical sense but as images, just as in imagination concepts can take form and become distinct from each other.

Ibn al-‘Arabī uses an interesting analogy to explain why ‘*Amā*’ has been likened to *Nafas al-Raḥmān*; he says that the act of breathing, in the case of the human being, relieves pressure in the breast by exhaling the air. The same act of breathing also makes it possible to sound words. In the same way ‘*Amā*’, within which the cosmos takes form, is the Breath of the

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asked the question in the above passage was reportedly Abū Razīn al-‘Aqīlī.

<sup>39</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, p. 310.

All-Merciful. When the *Nafas al-Rahmān* is activated the creation finds existence through the vehicle of God's speech, *qawl*. When God desires to bring something into existence He addresses that thing, in its state of non-existence, with the word "Be!", *Kun*. According to the Qur'ān (2:117) God creates the creatures by addressing them with the command "Be!", and they are.<sup>40</sup>

The cosmos which finds form, *taṣwīr*, in the Cloud is in the imaginalized state, not external existence. So the Cloud is the realm between the Absolute Being and 'adam. Ibn al-'Arabī says that 'Amā' is in a constant state of transformation in its appearance or form, though in its substance it stays the same. In essence, every thing becomes manifest in the Cloud in the form defined by the immutable entity.<sup>41</sup> He relates the notion of the manifestation of engendered things through the Breath of the All-merciful to the Qur'ānic verse: "He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Non-Manifest".<sup>42</sup>

Another important point that Ibn al-'Arabī raises in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (and this point will be discussed in detail later in the context of the concept of Creation) is that the notion of God before creation should not be taken in the sense of time; rather this is simply a relational description:

Know that God, exalted be He, existed before He created the creation, but not before in the sense of time. Rather, that is a description pointing to a relationship by which the listener can

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<sup>40</sup> This statement occurs in several places in the Qur'ān. For example see the following verses: 2:117; 3:47; 3:59; 6:73.

<sup>41</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī discusses the concept of the Cloud in various places in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*. For examples see the following locations: Vol. II: pp. 310-311, p. 331, pp. 394-395, p. 401, p.404; Vol. III: p. 95, p. 443.

<sup>42</sup> The Qur'ān, 57:3.

understand the meaning.<sup>43</sup>

- The Most Holy and the Holy Effusions

In the Ṣūfī literature that discuss the station of *aḥadiyya* one often sees the term *al-Fayḍ al-Aqdas*, the Most Holy Effusion, in contrast to another term called *al-Fayḍ al-Muqaddas*, the Holy Effusion, which is often used in the context of the station of *wāḥidiyya*.

Fundamentally, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s scheme of ontology depends on the concept of emanation, *tajallī*, of God. So, in a sense, the structure that we have discussed, comprised of the stations of *aḥadiyya*, *wāḥidiyya*, the Hidden Treasure, and so forth, hinges on the process of *tajallī* or emanation from one level to another. We have referred to this process using various terms like emanation, manifestation, effusion, self-disclosure, and so forth. It is the process through which the Absolute Being, which is the unknowable and beyond any description, discloses Itself in a more concrete way.

As the result of a series of emanations, the Absolute manifests in determined forms; this self-disclosure is called *ta‘ayyun*, or self-determination. The process of emanation from one stage to another should not be understood in terms of time, but in the sense of relation. Therefore, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s ontological scheme about God and the cosmos is not temporal, but relational.

God’s holy effusion has two forms. The first is the Most Holy Effusion, *al-Fayḍ al-Aqdas*, which is the hidden effusion because it takes place in the realm of unseen in the form of intelligible archetypes in the Divine knowledge. The second form is the Holy Effusion, *al-Fayḍ al-Muqaddas*, which is the effusion leading to the creation of the cosmos. The

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<sup>43</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. I, p. 148.

passage in the chapter on Shu‘ayb in the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* of Ibn al-‘Arabī is in reference to these two forms of effusion: *inna li-Allāhi Tajalliyān; tajalliyun ghayban, wa tajalliyun shahādatan* (There are two self-disclosures for God, a hidden self-disclosure, and a visible self-disclosure).<sup>44</sup>

Dāwūd Qayṣarī in his commentary on the above passage from the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* relates the two forms of the self-disclosures of God to two names of God from the Qur‘ān, *al-Bāṭin* (the Inward) and *al-Zāhir* (the Outward):

There are two emanations for God according to the names of *al-Bāṭin*, the Inward, and *al-Zāhir*, the Outward: the first is the hidden emanation that is the manifestation of the essence by which God reveals His Reality, as the result of which an intelligible archetype with all its capabilities is instantiated. The second is a visible emanation, which is the manifestation of the name *al-Zāhir*; this latter manifestation proceeds after the first emanation.<sup>45</sup>

To express these concepts in relation to the stations of *aḥadiyya* and *wāḥidiyya*, we can say that through *al-Fayḍ al-Aqdas* the Absolute emanated from the station of *aḥadiyya* to the station of *wāḥidiyya*, where the realities of things manifested, not in the external world, but in the Divine knowledge in the form of *A‘yān Thābita*, the intelligible archetypes. And, by *al-Fayḍ al-Muqaddas* through the rules and effects of the intelligible archetypes, and commensurate with their capabilities, the cosmos was created. To state this differently, *al-Fayḍ al-Aqdas* is the effusion of the Divine Essence, responsible for, or the cause of the

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<sup>44</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, edited by A. ‘Afifī, Beirut, 1946, p. 120.

<sup>45</sup> See Dāwūd Qayṣarī’s commentary on *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*; edited by Āshtiyyānī, Tehran, 1996, p. 774.



appearance of, *A'yān Thābita*, and *al-Fayḍ al-Muqaddas* is the effusion of the Absolute through the intelligible archetypes that gives rise to the creation of external beings.<sup>46</sup>

Ibn al-'Arabī in the chapter of Adam in *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* refers to God's Most Holy Effusion in the station of *aḥadiyya* as *al-Fayḍ al-Aqdas*.<sup>47</sup>

Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī in a treatise called *Naqd al-Nuqūd*<sup>48</sup> offers interesting comments on that section of the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, relates the two types of emanations to the concept of the Hidden Treasure, and in a concise statement ties the concept of divine love to the ontological process of self-disclosure:

By *al-Fayḍ al-Aqdas* the Shaykh, Ibn al-'Arabī, intended the mystery of love in the station of the essence (of God), *sirr al-tajallī al-dhātī al-ḥubbī*, which is the cause of the existence of the things and their (innate) capabilities while existing in the realm of knowledge (of God), and then in the realm of creation, as it is said in the holy tradition: "I was a Hidden Treasure; I loved to be known." In the vocabulary of the people (meaning Ṣūfīs) the effusion is of two types: "*al-Aqdas*" and "*al-Muqaddas*." You have already learned of *al-Fayḍ al-Aqdas*. As for *al-Fayḍ al-Muqaddas*, it is the manifestation of the names (of God) which is the cause of the appearance of that which is necessitated by the capabilities of the *A'yān* (instantiations) in the external realm. *Al-Fayḍ al-Muqaddas* proceeds after the

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<sup>46</sup> See Chapter Six on Creation for more explanation of the existence of archetypes vs. external creation.

<sup>47</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, edited by A. 'Afifī, Beirut, 1946, p. 49.

<sup>48</sup> Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī in works like *Jāmi' al-Asrār* and *Risāla Naqd al-Nuqūd* attempts to create a close tie between Ṣūfīsm and Shī'ism.

emanation of *al-Fayḍ al-Aqdas*, and the latter is dependent on the divine names, and the divine names proceed from the eternal holy perfections of the essence (of God).<sup>49</sup>

Finally, a reference should be made to another term that appears in the literature in connection with the concept of emanation, which is *qābil* (its plural *qawābil* or *qābiliyyāt*), meaning recipient.<sup>50</sup> As explained earlier, *al-Fayḍ al-Aqdas* is the emanation of the Absolute Being to Itself. This is the first stage of the process that started with the desire of the Absolute to emerge from the mode of Hidden Treasure in order to be known. As the result of this self-disclosure all possible things begin to appear, not externally, but in the potential, in the Divine knowledge. Until that point, there is essential unity (*aḥadiyyat al-aḥad* or *aḥadiyyat al-dhāt*) in the realm of Absolute Essence, But, the result of *al-Fayḍ al-Aqdas* infinite possible things appear in the Divine consciousness or knowledge in potential form. There is still unity, but now the possibility of other beings exists, hence the term *Aḥadiyyat al-kathra* (unity of many) is used for this unity. The infinite possible things are called *qawābil* or *qābiliyyāt* in that they are recipients of the future things to exist.

Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī in *Kalimāt-i Maknūnah* explains the process of emanation as consisting of two disclosures, and the concept of recipients existing in potential in the Divine consciousness:

(God) first manifested according to the *Fayḍ al-Aqdas* in the forms of capabilities and *qābiliyyāt* (*A'yān Thābita*), and in the (conceptual) realm of knowledge appeared in the color of all *A'yān* (instantiations). Then by *Fayḍ al-Muqaddas* He bestowed upon the *A'yān* the robe of existence according to

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<sup>49</sup> Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, *Risāla Naqd al-Nuqūd*, Tehran, 1969, p. 682.

<sup>50</sup> The term *qābiliyyāt* (plural of *qābil*) literally means capacities. In the Ṣūfī terminology it is synonymous with *A'yān Thābita* since they are capable of receiving the *Fayḍ* (effusion) from God.

their capabilities, and clothed them with the garment of being. Therefore, the *qābil* (*Ayn Thābit*) is from His *Fayḍ al-Aqdas*, and the *maqbul* (the potential thing which has gained external existence) is from His *Fayḍ al-Muqaddas*.<sup>51</sup>

## A'yān Thābita, Intelligible Archetypes

We have made several references to the concept of *A'yān Thābita* on various occasions, and some aspects of this theme have been discussed. Now we will describe *A'yān Thābita* in a more methodical way and consider various issues related to this important topic.

One of the most fundamental concepts proposed by Ibn al-'Arabī with respect to the structure of ontological beings is *al-A'yān al-Thābita*, the Intelligible Archetypes. Over the years Western scholarship has used different terms such as Intelligible Archetypes, Immutable Entities, Fixed Entities, and so forth as translations for *A'yān Thābita*. In my view, none of these terms completely describe the original meaning in Arabic, and yet each term provides a particular angle to the understanding of this concept; therefore, I have used one of the three translations depending on the context. The explanations that follow hopefully will help to make the concept clear, and assist with understanding the terms used for translation.

The expression of *A'yān Thābita* was popularized by Ibn al-'Arabī, and later on his followers expanded the range of its meaning. Ibn al-'Arabī seems to have borrowed the concept from the Mu'tazilites; however, as explained later in this section, his views on this concept are different from those of the Mu'tazilites. In *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Ibn al-'Arabī talks about this concept and relates it to the tradition of the Hidden Treasure:

The Prophet of God, may God's peace and greetings be upon

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<sup>51</sup> Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Kalimāt-i Maknūnah*, Intishārāt-i Farāhānī, Tehran, 1963, p. 48.

him, related that God, sanctified by His name, said: "I was an unknown Treasure, I loved to be known, therefore, I created the creation and made Myself known to them, hence they came to know Me." Thus, in His words, "I was a Treasure" lies the proof of *A'yān Thābita*, the Intelligible Archetypes, that the Mu'tazilites believed in.<sup>52</sup>

One of the topics that has been debated among the theologians, philosophers, and Ṣūfis is that of creation. An important question in this discussion was whether creation as a whole existed from pre-eternity or not. If we say it existed, then it would follow that the cosmos is *uncreate* (meaning it has always existed) and temporally ancient. This would contradict the concept of creation described in religious texts. If we say that creation is not *uncreate* -- meaning it did not exist from pre-eternity -- then we would be faced with the dilemma that God was not *Creator* from pre-eternity and later on acquired that attribute.

This conclusion would contradict the notion of God as the Perfect Being. Ibn al-'Arabī's response to this question is that the creation existed in the form of Intelligible Archetypes in the knowledge of God. In other words, creation, including humans and the cosmos, had existence in the knowledge of God, like mental images, but they did not exist externally. The term used by Ibn al-'Arabī to distinguish the mental images from external beings is *'Ayn Thābit*, its plural being *A'yān Thābita*. In this context the word *Thābit* refers to something which exists in the form of knowledge but lacks external existence. It is in this sense that Ibn al-'Arabī uses the term *A'yān Thābita*, in contrast to *A'yān Mawjūda*, the external beings or instantiations. From this perspective Chittick's translation of *A'yān Thābita* as "Immutable Entities", given in the following passage, although not technically inaccurate, falls short of defining the concept adequately:

... God creates the cosmos in accordance with His eternal

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<sup>52</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, p. 232.

knowledge of it. Thereby He gives each thing known by Him -- each entity “immutably fixed” (*Thābit*) within His knowledge - - existence in the universe.<sup>53</sup>

The word *Thābit* in Arabic means immutable or fixed. However, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s notion of *Thābit* is something which subsists only in God’s knowledge, rather than an entity that is merely unalterable or fixed. Ibn al-‘Arabī describes the concept of *Thubūt*, the verbal noun from the same root as *Thābit*, in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* as follows:

“*al-Thubūtu amrun wujūdiyyun ‘aqliyyun lā ‘ayniyyun bal nisbiyyun*”, *Thubūt* (subsistence) is a mental (intellectual) existent, not an external (visible) thing but a relational one.<sup>54</sup>

In the ontological scheme, *A’yān Thābita* constitute an intermediary state between the Absolute and the external existence. Because of their intermediate nature they have active and passive roles. With respect to the higher stage of the Absolute, *A’yān Thābita* are passive; they serve as the recipients of the possible existents in potentia, *mawjūdāt mumkinah*, or as the loci of manifestation of the Absolute within the Divine consciousness or knowledge. In relation to the sensible world, *A’yān Thābita* are active since in the next stage of the self-disclosure of the Absolute, through *al-Fayḍ al-Muqaddas*, the external world comes into existence based on the definite forms of *A’yān Thābita*.

The number of immutable entities is infinite, and thus the Absolute at this level of self-disclosure assumes infinite forms of *tajallī* in order to bring forth the external world. Such a description may imply that these self-manifestations occur sequentially in time; however, as mentioned earlier,

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<sup>53</sup> William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, State University of New York Press, Albany, New York, 1989, p. 84.

<sup>54</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. I, p. 202.

this is not the case. Instead, the process of self-manifestation is a relational concept, in the sense that it represents the ontological ranking of various beings based on the form of *tajallī*. Ibn al-‘Arabī points out that the process of self-disclosure is independent of time; it has been going on since pre-eternity and will continue for ever.

Another topic of concern about *A’yān Thābita* is the nature of their existence or *wujūd* with respect to the Absolute Being and the cosmos. On a few occasions, Ibn al-‘Arabī says that they are *ma’dūm*, non-existent, but in many other instances in his writings he ascribes some kind of *wujūd* to them. He describes them as “the essence of possible things”, *A’yān al-Mumkināt*; since they have a state intermediate between the Absolute and the cosmos, they are designated as having a dark color because they have not seen the light of external existence. Ibn al-‘Arabī reserves the light color for the beings that have external existence, i.e., they are luminous:

The essences of possible things, *A’yān al-Mumkināt*, are not luminous things because they (intelligible archetypes) are *ma’dūm*, although they do have *thubūt* (subsistence), but they may not be described by the designation of existence because *wujūd* is Light.<sup>55</sup>

In this and similar passages that address the intelligible archetypes, Ibn al-‘Arabī reserves the designation of *wujūd* for things existing in the external world. Although *A’yān Thābita* have existence in the knowledge of the Absolute, from the perspective of the external existence (*wujūd*) they are non-existent. So, it is neither true to say that intelligible archetypes are existent, nor accurate to state that they are non-existent. That is why Ibn al-‘Arabī’s description of them may sound confusing. He ascribes a state to *A’yān Thābita* as neither existence, nor non-existence, but something in between, described by the designation *thubūt*, just like mental images in human mind.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, the chapter on “The Wisdom of Light in the Word of Joseph” edited by A. ‘Afifī, Beirut, 1946, p. 102.

Yet Ibn al-‘Arabī emphasizes that *A’yān Thābita* have always been *uncreated*, and from pre-eternity have existed in the state of ‘*adam*, nothingness. They are *uncreated* because they have existed in the knowledge of God, and in the station of *aḥadiyya* there is no distinction between the essence of God and His attributes (knowledge, might, etc.). Therefore, they are eternal.

Ibn al-‘Arabī’s explanation of *A’yān Thābita* in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* and *Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam* is theological, but in *Kitāb Inshā’ al-Dawā’ir wa al-Jadāwil* he offers a more philosophical explanation for them. Here, he describes three ontological levels of beings, viz., the Absolute Being, the world of existence, and a state between the two, which he calls *Hayūlā*, or the primeval matter. Using terminology similar to that drawn from Aristotle’s philosophy, Ibn al-‘Arabī explains the nature of the *Hayūlā*, as being temporally uncreated, but not the same as essentially *uncreate*, which is true of only the Absolute Being.

He uses two analogies to elucidate further the relationship of *A’yān Thābita* with the external world. In one analogy he compares the immutable entities to the concept of timber (not the physical timber itself but the concept of it, which we may call timber-hood), and the physical world to the objects made of timber, such as chair, bier, pulpit, and the litter.

The other analogy he uses is that of the concept of silver in relation to the objects made from silver like vessels, rings, ear-rings, and so forth. He warns us not to think of physical timber or silver but of the concepts timber and silver like mental conceptions. When physical objects are made of timber or silver, nothing is diminished from the mental concepts of timber and silver. He says this concept is true of the immutable entities; while they are the primeval matter or *ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqā’iq* (the reality of realities), from which the physical world has been created, nothing is diminished from them because they are like mental concepts.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> For Ibn al-‘Arabī’s philosophical discussion of the immutable entities see *Kitāb Inshā’*

The intelligible archetypes have both attributes of eternity and temporality because of their intermediate state. On the one hand, Ibn al-‘Arabī points out that *A’yān Thābita* are considered as the content of Divine knowledge, and as the result of this relation they are regarded as eternal. On the other hand, their eternity is not the same as that of the Absolute Being. In other words, the eternity of *A’yān Thābita* is not essential but it is derived from that of the Absolute. In *Kitāb Inshā’ al-Dawā’ir wa al-Jadāwil* we come across this explanation with respect to eternity-temporality of *A’yān Thābita*:

This third thing (intelligible archetypes) is the root of the Universe... the universal world conceived by thought, a thing which appears as the eternal in the eternal and as the temporal in the temporal.<sup>57</sup>

Ibn al-‘Arabī goes on to explain that if we say *A’yān Thābita* are the same as the cosmos, which is temporal, it is true. And if we say that they are God, Who is eternal, it is also true. And if it is said that it is neither the cosmos nor God, rather, it is something between the two, it is also true. This is because intelligible archetypes have the characteristic of eternity-temporality. Insofar as their relationship with the Absolute Being is concerned, they are eternal; and as far as their relationship with the cosmos is concerned they are temporal.

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*al-Dawā’ir wa al-Jadāwil* in H. S. Nyberg (ed.), *Kleinere Schriften des Ibn al-‘Arabī*, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1919, pp. 15-19. For example, on the relationship of *A’yān Thābita* to the cosmos where he uses the analogy of timber to the objects made from it, he says: “The relation between the thing (immutable entities)...and the cosmos is like that of the timber to the chair, the bier... Understand this relation. Do not think of the lessening of timber by separating the ink-pot from it. Know that timber, in its turn, is but a special form of wood. Never think of wood except as a comprehensive reality which covers all wooden things. You should see that it (wooden-ness) does not lessen or get divided. It is found in every chair and ink-pot in its entirety without any diminution or excess.”

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*



So in the scheme that Ibn al-‘Arabī and his followers have devised for the concept of *A’yān Thābita* we could observe a matrix composed of four cells; on one axis are existence-nonexistence, and on the other axis are eternity-temporality. We may consider *A’yān Thābita* to reside in the central corner of the matrix; they are neither existent nor non-existent but something in between; and likewise, they are neither eternal nor temporal but possess both attributes. That which determines their characteristic in the ontological order is the direction of their relation to the Absolute or to the cosmos.

Also in regards to the manifestation of *A’yān Thābita* in the external world, it may appear that Ibn al-‘Arabī makes contradictory statements. On some occasions he states that *A’yān Thābita* do appear in the phenomenal world in the form of the cosmos and beings. For example, in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* he states:

Through the self-disclosure, the condition (*ḥāl*) of *A’yān Thābita* changes from *thubūt* (subsistence) to external existence.<sup>58</sup>

However, in the majority of cases he states that *A’yān Thābita* have existed in the state of nothingness, ‘*adam* (because they have never existed outside the knowledge of God) and will continue to remain in that mental state forever, i.e., they will continue to exist only in the knowledge of God as intelligible archetypes. An example of this type of statement can be seen in a passage in *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* in the chapter on the *Wisdom of Holiness in the Word of Enoch (Idrīs)*:

The *A’yān*, which are non-existent, are *thābit* (subsistent) in that they have not smelled a fragrance from that which is

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<sup>58</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, p. 304.

existent (*mawjūd*); and they remain in that state (of non-existence) despite the many forms which they disclose in the existent beings.<sup>59</sup>

In spite of such seemingly inconsistent statements, Ibn al-‘Arabī concludes that the external beings and the cosmos are the manifestations of the effects and properties of the intelligible archetypes, and not the result of the transition of *A’yān Thābita* to the external world. His followers likewise have offered contradictory opinions on the manifestation of *A’yān Thābita* in the external world, but overall they have agreed with their teacher on this issue. Part of the reason for such confusion in the study of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings on the concept of *A’yān Thābita* is that often he uses the term *A’yān* without specifically mentioning whether he is referring to *A’yān Thābita* or *A’yān Mawjūda*, the external beings in the cosmos.

As mentioned earlier, Ibn al-‘Arabī did not coin the terminology of *A’yān Thābita*, but he seems to have borrowed it from the Mu‘tazilites. In *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Ibn al-‘Arabī provides an extensive description of his concept of *A’yān Thābita*, contrasting it with the views of the Ash‘arītes and the Mu‘tazilites. Here is a short section of his explanation:

The possible intelligible archetypes have a ranking in the state of non-existence just as a temporal ranking has taken place and will continue to take place in the world of existence. Every ‘Ayn (archetype) accepts changes of states, qualities, and accidents...

And in this way the knowledge of the Creator is associated with the archetype from pre-eternity. He (the Creator) does not give it existence except in the form which He knew while the archetype was in the form of intelligible non-existence, in state after state, in a state among states, and in the states that are not

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<sup>59</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, edited by A. ‘Afīfī, Beirut, 1946, p. 76.

opposite of each other...And here, the minds are astonished; is the thing described as existence, which is fathomed by these perceptions, the intelligible archetype, that is transferred from the state of non-existence into the state of existence? Or is it its (intelligible archetype's) attribute that has become connected to the real existence visibly, like the association of the image of something that is visible with the mirror while the thing continues to be in that state, and characterized by the attribute of non-existence?

As for others (other people), they form two groups. One group says that there is no archetype (*‘Ayn*) for the possible thing (*mumkin*) in the state of non-existence; there is *‘Ayn* for it only when God creates it. They are composed of Ash‘arītes and those who follow them.

And another group says that there are intelligible archetypes for the possible thing (*mumkin*), which find existence, whereas it (the *mumkin* itself) does not. As for the thing whose existence is impossible (*muḥāl*) there is no intelligible archetype for it. These are (the beliefs of) the Mu‘tazilites.

The seekers among the people of God confirm the intelligible archetypes through the intelligibility of things; and likewise, there are intelligible attributes for these archetypes through which every single one of them appears in existence.<sup>60</sup>

In the above passage we see one of the points of departure of Ibn al-‘Arabī (who refers to himself as one of the “seekers among the people of God”) from the Mu‘tazilites insofar as the concept of *A‘yān Thābita* is concerned. We can summarize his statements on the concept of *A‘yān Thābita* as follows:

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<sup>60</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. IV, pp. 210-211.

1. The Ash‘arītes believe that the possible thing (*mumkin*) in the state of non-existence, i.e., before its creation, has no archetype (‘*Ayn*); only at the time that God decides to create it in the phenomenal world does it acquire an archetype. This would imply that *A‘yān Thābita* are completely temporal, not eternal.
  
2. The Mu‘tazilites believe that the possible thing before its creation in external existence has an intelligible archetype. At the time of creation it is the intelligible archetype itself that is created in the phenomenal world. Further, they believe that the impossible thing (*muḥāl*) lacks intelligible archetype.
  
3. The seekers among the people of God believe that all things have intelligible archetypes, and the latter have certain attributes or properties. At the time of creation these attributes find existence in the phenomenal world while *A‘yān Thābita* continue to subsist in the knowledge of God purely as archetypes.

The range of topics related to the concept of *A‘yān Thābita* is not limited to what we have covered so far in this study. Other subjects, whether theological, philosophical, or mystical, have been discussed in the Ṣūfī literature in relation to *A‘yān Thābita*. For example, Particulars (*juz‘iyyāt*) and Universals (*kulliyyāt*), predestination and free will, reward and punishment for man’s deeds, and necessity and possibility of creation are among an array of topics addressed by Ibn al-‘Arabī and his followers in this context.

For purposes of illustration, I will make brief reference to a couple of these topics by citing from works by two of the students of the school of Ibn al-‘Arabī.

One of the topics discussed in the school of Ibn al-‘Arabī in relation

to *A'yān Thābita* is that of Particulars and Universals. In this context the influence of the Ideas of Plato is visible.<sup>61</sup> Without going into the details of this topic, we can state that the concept of Universals is similar to *A'yān Thābita*, and Particulars are analogous to the instantiation of intelligible archetypes in the external world. Dāwūd Qayṣarī has offered a concise explanation of *A'yān Thābita*, where he discusses the concepts of Universals and Particulars, and manages to mention several other concepts we have studied thus far:

Know that there are intelligible forms for the Divine names in His exalted knowledge, since He has innate knowledge of His essence, names, and attributes. And since these intelligible forms are the same as the Essence, which has manifested with specific instantiation (*ta'ayyun khāṣṣ*) and determined relation (*nisba mu'ayyana*), whether they be Universal or Particular, they are called *A'yān Thābita* in the terminology of the people of God. The Universals of *A'yān Thābita* are called quiddities (*Māhiyyāt*) and realities, and the Particulars are called individualities (*Huwiyyāt*) by the people of speculation (mystical philosophers).

Hence, the quiddities are the universal forms of the archetypal divine names in the realm of knowledge in the first order of manifestation. And these forms emanate from the divine Essence through the Most Holy Effusion and the first self-disclosure (*tajallī*) as the result of the essential love and the search for the hidden keys, which no one knows except He Who is Its manifestation and perfection (i.e., God Himself).

The divine effusion is of two types: the Most Holy Effusion and the Holy Effusion. Through the first, the *A'yān Thābita* and

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<sup>61</sup> For further discussion of this topic, see Izutsu's *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts*, pp163-166; and Chittick's *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, pp. 134-139.

their essential capabilities are formed in the realm of (Divine) knowledge, and by the second, those archetypes find external existence with their necessities and subsidiaries. To this, the Shaykh (Ibn al-‘Arabī) has alluded: “The *qābil* (intelligible archetype) cannot exist except through His Most Holy Effusion...”

As for the things which do not come to exist in the realm of knowledge their existence in the external world will be impossible. The archetypes are divided into two groups according to the possibility of their existence, or lack of it, in the external world: first the *possible beings*, and second, the *impossible ones*.<sup>62</sup>

The second example is from al-Jandī, who has written extensively on the topic of *A’yān Thābita*. In the following passage from his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, he relates *A’yān Thābita*, as well as many other key topics that we have discussed so far, to the concept of the Hidden Treasure:

The shaykh, Ibn al-‘Arabī, said: “When God (*al-Ḥaqq*) willed...”. By this (opening statement) he joined the attribute of Volition (*Mashiyya*) or Will to the name of *al-Ḥaqq*. The domain of this volition is the world of existence. All the names existed in potentia in the form of *A’yān*, then they became manifest, and their effects were disclosed in a visible form in the loci of manifestation. Truly, the name of *al-Ḥaqq* bestows reality on instantiation and existence. The divine names were in the controlling grasp of the station of *Aḥadiyya al-jam’iyya*, which is the realm of the Oneness of Divine Essence; no manifestation is possible in this realm because there are no loci for manifestation.

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<sup>62</sup> See Dāwūd Qayṣarī’s commentary on *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*; edited by Āshtiyānī, Tehran, 1996, pp. 61-62.

This is the realm referred to by the saying, “*God was and nothing was with Him*”, and in this realm of *aḥadiyya*, which is the domain of Essence, the multiplicity of names is annihilated. (The phrase of) “*kuntu kanzan makhfiyyan*” refers to this determination (*ta’ayyun*) as it is indicated by the pronoun “Tā” in “*kuntu*”; and this phrase is a reference to the determination of the Divine Essence, which is a comprehensive Treasure containing the essences of the realities of the names (*kanzan jāmi’an li jawāhir al-asmā’*).

(The phrase of) “*fa ’aradtu an ’u’raf*” means to know Me in every determination in the loci, mirrors, and places of My manifestation, which are not the Divine Essence, but related to It. Therefore, this *Mashiyya* has emanated from God because the realities of the determined names are consumed in the *A’yān*. Know that this statement, “when He willed...” implies precedence in the sense of position, reality, and determination, not in a temporal sense or external existence.<sup>63</sup>

Given the range of issues addressed by the concept of *A’yān Thābita*, it can be stated with confidence that it is one of the most important concepts (if not the most important concept) in the ontological scheme and the world view of Ibn al-‘Arabī and his followers.

## The True Being and A’yān Thābita: Some Analogies

A number of analogies have been used in Ṣūfī literature in order to describe the relation between the True Being, *al-Ḥaqq*, and *A’yān Thābita*.

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<sup>63</sup> See al-Jandī’s commentary on *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*; edited by Āshtiyyānī and Dīnānī, University of Mashhad Publication, Mashhad, 1982, pp. 125-126.

The following are some of the analogies with a brief description for each:

1. The True Being is like the light of the sun, and the *A'yān Thābita* and *Māhiyyāt* (quiddities) are like manifold colored glasses of various sizes and shapes. Each glass according to its particulars reflects the light. Even though there is only one light the reflections are many and varied, each according to the shape, size, smoothness, and color of the glass. 'Irāqī has captured this thought in a Persian couplet<sup>64</sup>:

The sun's reflection in a thousand glasses  
In each colored glass producing a different reflection  
  
All are one light but different colors  
Producing differentiation between this and that!

2. The True Being is like wine, and the *A'yān Thābita* and *Māhiyyāt* like the chalice. Ibn al-'Arabī makes use of this analogy in a couplet that he quotes in the Book of Emanations, *Kitāb al-Tajalliyyāt*<sup>65</sup>:

The glass (chalice) becomes delicate and the wine pure  
They resemble each other and make the case complicated  
As if there is only wine and no chalice  
Or, as if there is only chalice and no wine!

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<sup>64</sup> See *Risāla-yi Lamā'āt-i Fakhruddīn 'Irāqī*, edited by Jawād Nūrbakhsh, Chāpkhānih-i Firdawsī, Tehran, 1972, p. 23.

<sup>65</sup> See Ibn al-'Arabī, *Kitāb al-Tajalliyyāt* in *Rasā'il Ibn al-'Arabī*, Vol. II, Dār Ihyā al-Tarāth al-'Arabī, Beirut, 1997, p. 43. This couplet is from Ṣāhib Ibn 'Ibād (see *'Irḡān-i Nazārī* by Sayyid Yaḥyā Yathribī, Islamic Publications of Qum, 1993, p. 301).



Here the idea is that when a pure wine is poured into transparent, colored cups of various shapes and sizes it conforms to the shape of each cup, and is seen in the color of the cup. This is how the wine is seen; however, regardless of the cup the wine maintains its form and purity. Likewise, the True Being, that has appeared in accordance with the rules and exigencies of *A'yān Thābita* does not change in its essence, and does not become many. Although manifesting in different forms, the True Being maintains its unity.

3. The True Being is like the image that is reflected in a variety of mirrors of different shapes, sizes, and reflectivity. Although the source of the image is one, in every mirror a different reflection is observed according to the particular settings of that mirror. In some mirrors it might be seen as a long image, while in some others as a shorter image. In some mirrors the image is clearer than in others. In short, the mirrors, which in this case are *A'yān Thābita*, determine how the image is reflected.

4. The True Being is considered as water in the sea, and *A'yān Thābita* as various forms which the water can turn into. For example, steam, fog, cloud, vapor, ice, rain, and wave, each have a different form, density, and characteristic. Yet their substance is one and the same. Just as the essence of water does not change, even though it takes different shapes and forms, the True Being does not descend and become many, even though it is manifested in the diversity of *A'yān Thābita*. A Persian couplet<sup>66</sup> has expressed this analogy beautifully:

Many diverse waves come out of the sea

They accept various forms even though they were formless

At times they appear in the garb of Laylī

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<sup>66</sup> Quoted by M. Jahāngīrī in *Muhyī al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī*, University of Tehran Publications, Tehran, 1984, p. 284.

At times they appear in the form of Majnūn

5. Another analogy seen in this regard is that of the relation of the *dot* to the letters of the alphabet and words. From the extension of a *dot* first letters and then words appear. Here again the idea is that the True Being is like the *dot*, and *A'yān Thābita* like the letters of the alphabet and words. Although there are many letters and words, they are all extensions of the same reality which is the *dot*.

6. The last, but perhaps the most frequently occurring analogy, I found is that of the numbers. Here the Ṣūfīs have argued that all the numbers have come into existence from number *one*. The argument goes something like this: add a *one* to another *one* and the result is *two*; continue the process and you get number *three*, and so forth. Therefore, all the numbers need number *one* in order to acquire existence. At the same time, although the other numbers have different quantitative value, number *one* is manifested to different degrees in all of them. Here the analogy is intended to imply that *one* represents the True Being, and the other numbers *A'yān Thābita*.

In closing we may speculate that Ibn al-'Arabī found it appropriate to use the concept of *A'yān Thābita* to support the doctrine of the inalterability of God. This doctrine is true of not only God's Essence but of His attributes as well. Among the attributes of God, mentioned in the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth*, are Omniscience and Knowledge, both of which are understood to be unchanging. In other words, God has knowledge of all things, and His knowledge does not increase, diminish, or change in any way. On the other hand the Qur'ān describes the process of creation in a temporal sense. The point is that the changes in cosmos and creation cannot be ascribed to the knowledge of God otherwise His knowledge would be changing. Obviously Ibn al-'Arabī was concerned with this issue, therefore, the changes had to be equated with something immutable and unalterable.

The concept of *A'yān Thābita* is intended to resolve this dilemma.

Since the tradition of the Hidden Treasure could imply a temporal self-disclosure of God, the concept of *A'yān Thābita* has been used by Ibn al-'Arabī and his followers to explain the process described in this tradition as a relational concept rather than a temporal one.

# Chapter Four: Station of *Wāḥidiyya*

## The Domain of Attributes and Names

As stated in the previous chapter, the Ṣūfīs have identified two stations on the path towards the recognition of Divinity: *aḥadiyya* and *wāḥidiyya*. While *aḥadiyya* was the mode of absolute Divine Essence, in the mode of *wāḥidiyya* the station of Divinity is considered in the light of names and attributes. There is no sign of external existence yet, but now God manifests His beauty in the mirror of His names and attributes.

The terminology of *wāḥidiyya* was not coined by Ibn al-‘Arabī, but by al-Farghānī, one of the followers of his school. The second manifestation of the Divine Essence was called *waḥdāniyya* by Ibn al-‘Arabī. Al-Farghānī changed the expression and provided a more detailed and methodical explanation of this second manifestation of the Absolute Being.<sup>1</sup>

In the station of *aḥadiyya* everything is submerged in the ocean of the essence of God. In other words, each attribute, without being distinguishable from the other attributes, is part of the Essence. The mode of *wāḥidiyya* indicates the Oneness of the Absolute Being in its multiplicity (*kathra*) rather than in its absoluteness. Therefore, in contrast to *aḥadiyya*, in the mode of *wāḥidiyya* not only attributes are now distinguishable from each other, but the names of God that are associated with the divine attributes also find expression. For example, while in the mode of *aḥadiyya* God might be thought of as having the attribute of “Power” (*qudra*), still not distinguishable from the Essence, in the mode of *wāḥidiyya* He is the “Powerful” (*qādir*). In fact, the word *wāḥid*, from which the word *wāḥidiyya* is derived, is an active participle in Arabic, meaning “the one who possesses (the attribute of) Oneness.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Giuseppe Scattolin, “The Key Concepts of al-Farghānī’s Commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s Sufi Poem, *al-Tā’iyyat al-Kubrā*”, *Journal of Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabī Society*, 2006, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> For the form of this word see *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, edited by J.M. Cowan, Spoken Language Services, Ithaca, New York, 1976, p. 1055. W. Wright also gives this form of the word *wāḥid* in *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*,

The same is true of the attribute of *qudra* and its active participle of *qādir* in Arabic. Of course, not all active participles in Arabic have the same form, because their form depends on the verb form from which they are derived, but the point is that in the mode of *wāḥidiyya* the names (whatever may be their form in Arabic language) become manifest and find expression. For example, in the state of *wāḥidiyya*, God could be perceived by the name *al-‘Alīm*, an elative form in Arabic, which means the Omniscient or the All-Knowing.

In discussing the concept of the Divine names, Ibn al-‘Arabī and his students use three terms, viz. Attributes (*ṣifāt*), Names (*asmā’*), and Relations (*nisab*). We have discussed these terms before, but we can review them in a more methodical way here. Quite often Ibn al-‘Arabī uses the above three terms interchangeably. Names and attributes have been discussed extensively in Islamic theology. William Chittick states that Muslim theologians (*mutakallimūn*) preferred to use “attributes” instead of “names” but the upshot was the same.<sup>3</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī makes a distinction between the names of the names, *asmā’ al-asmā’*, and the names or attributes. The former are the names that have been revealed in the Qur’ān and other scriptures, which we use in our language to refer to the Divine Names or Attributes which are realities in the divine world. He says:

Know that these divine names that are presented to us are really the names of the divine names by which God named Himself since He is the Speaker (*mutakallim*).<sup>4</sup>

Man is capable of understanding the names and attributes, but not the Essence named by the names. Ibn al-‘Arabī refers to names as relations also, because names are specific qualities manifested when *al-Ḥaqq* is considered

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and considers it to be interchangeable with the word *aḥad*, Cambridge at the University Press, 1967, p. 236.

<sup>3</sup> See William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, State University of New York Press, Albany, New York, 1989, p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> See Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, p. 56.

in relation to *al-khalq*.

But if we were to draw a distinction between names, attributes, and relations it could be said that attributes are abstract qualities such as (power, knowledge, mercy) by which God is described; the names refer to the One Who possesses these qualities (like Powerful, Knowing, All-Merciful). So, an attribute is the manifestation of a divine name in the external world. We can conceptualize the attributes and distinguish them from the names which possess them. For instance, it is possible to conceptualize knowledge from the one who is knowledgeable. The attributes point to relations between the Divine Essence and creation. For example, the name “The All-Merciful” refers to God’s attribute of “mercy”, and the latter describes the relation of “mercifulness” between the Divine Essence and everything in the world of creation. Relations necessitate *wujūd*; there must be something other than God in order for relations to exist.

Ibn al-‘Arabī also points out that the names are not *ā’yān*, which means they do not have external existence, otherwise there would be multiplicity in the One God. That is why on some occasions he uses attributes or relations instead of names, to emphasize that the names are relationships between the Essence and the cosmos:

Are there ontological entities (*ā’yān wujūdiyya*) for the names or not? There is a difference of opinion among the speculative people (*ahl al-naẓar*), but for us there is no disagreement. They are relations and names which refer to intelligible non-existent realities (*ḥaqā’iq ma’qūla ghayr wujūdiyya*). Therefore, there is no multiplicity (*kathra*) in the Essence through them.<sup>5</sup>

Divine names are the most important concepts in the writings of Ibn al-‘Arabī; everything that we know, or can know, about God is through them. Ibn al-‘Arabī maintains that the knowledge of cosmos is also dependent on understanding of Divine names.<sup>6</sup> Miguel Asin Palacios

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<sup>5</sup> See Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. IV, p. 294.

<sup>6</sup> For examples see Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. III, p. 441, and Vol. II, p. 665.

commented that “the whole of the *Futūḥāt* is based on the esoteric virtue of the divine names.”<sup>7</sup>

Even though the importance of the divine names is clear throughout the writings of Ibn al-‘Arabī at least on four occasions (in chapters Four and Sixty-Six of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, in *Kitāb ‘Anqā’ Mughrib*, and in *Kitāb Inshā’ al-Dawā’ir wa al-Jadāwil*) he offers an extensive discussion of the hierarchy of the Most beautiful Names (*al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā*) and their relation to the Divine Essence.<sup>8</sup> It appears that his purpose is to show the significance of names for the understanding of God and the cosmos. While each name refers to a specific attribute the most comprehensive name is Allāh which refers to all the attributes of God at once.

There are two aspects to the names; on the one hand they are all the same since they point to the same Essence. We recall that each name is a special aspect of the self-manifestation of the Absolute, and in this sense, it is not separate from, but identical with, the Divine Essence. On the other hand, each name and its attribute refer to a particular relation between the Absolute and the world of creation; in this sense each name can be considered independent of all other names, because it points to a specific reality (*ḥaqīqa*) that is not shared by other names in the Essence. Ibn al-‘Arabī explains this concept in the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*:

Every Divine Name is invested with all the Divine Names and their Attributes (*kullu ismin ilāhiyyin yatasammā bi jamī’ al-asmā’il ilāhiyya wa yun’atu bihā*). This is so because every

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<sup>7</sup> See Asin Palacios, *The Mystical Philosophy of Ibn Masarra and His Followers*, trans. E. H. Douglas and H. W. Yoden, Leiden: Brill, 1978, pp. 174-175.

<sup>8</sup> See Gerald Elmore, “Four Texts of Ibn al-‘Arabī on the Creative Self-Manifestation of the Divine Names”, *Journal of Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabī Society*, Vol. XXIX, 2001, pp. 1-43. The way Ibn al-‘Arabī presents the topic of Divine Names in these texts is in the form of a dialogue which occurs among the names. The names appeal to the Divine Essence, through the name Allāh, to bestow on them existence through self-disclosures of God. Although the dialogue is imaginary, it points to the hierarchical nature of the Divine Names and their importance in the understanding of God and the cosmos.

name alludes to the Essence as well as to the particular meaning it entails. Therefore, insofar as every Name indicates the Essence Itself, it enshrines all the Names; but insofar as it points to the particular meaning of its own, every name is distinct and different from all the rest, like the Lord (*al-rabb*), the Creator (*al-khāliq*), the Fashioner (*al-muṣawwir*), and so on. From the perspective of the Essence, the Name is the same as the object it refers to; but with respect to the specific meaning of its own the Name is not the same as the object it represents.<sup>9</sup>

When we consider the Divine Essence and the cosmos, a relationship becomes necessary between them. Every time an attribute or name is mentioned, a specific relation is envisioned between the Essence and the external world. In short, the cosmos is the sum of the manifestations of the Divine Names in concrete form. However, Ibn al-‘Arabī states that the Absolute does not need the world; rather, it is the cosmos that is in need of the Divine Essence. Saying that the Essence is in no need of the world implies that It is completely independent of the names and attributes. In fact, it is the need on the part of the created world that leads to the relations with the Absolute. Ibn al-‘Arabī emphasizes the independence of the Absolute from the names and the world in a number of places in the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to discussing the dual aspects of the Divine Names, Ibn al-‘Arabī also considers some type of ranking for the names and attributes. The ranking is meaningful insofar as their relation to the concrete world is concerned, otherwise in terms of their relation to the Absolute there is no distinction and ranking among them. For example, he argues that the attribute of *‘Ilm* (Knowledge) has a higher ranking than *Irādah* (Will), and that the latter ranks higher than *Qudrah* (Power). This is so, presumably because one has to have knowledge before exercising the *will*; and the will to do something comes before the *power* to act. Of all the names of God,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, edited by A. ‘Afīfī, Beirut, 1946, pp. 79-80.

<sup>10</sup> For example see *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, pp. 104-105.



Ibn al-‘Arabī states, the name of *al-Raḥmān* (The All-Merciful) is the most perfect, because it encompasses (*shāmil*) all other names, and unites them all under the name Allāh.<sup>11</sup>

Since the Absolute Being is infinite in its Essence, the attributes and names associated with the Essence are also infinite. The reason for this is that each attribute (and the name associated with it) describes the Essence in one aspect or form of Its self-disclosure. By definition, the Absolute Being is infinite, and there are infinite aspects to the infinite Essence. Therefore, it follows that the number of attributes and names are infinite. Moreover, we recall that in the mode of *aḥadiyya*, although the names and attributes exist, they are not distinct from the Essence, and since the Essence is infinite the names and attributes must also be infinite.

When these names and attributes are considered in the mode of *wāḥidiyya* the relations described by them are also infinite. Although ninety-nine names mentioned in the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth* are designated as the most beautiful names of God, it is understood that these are only some of the names that have been revealed by God, and there are many others that have not been mentioned in any Text. Moreover, everything that occurs in the world, finds expression, or actualization, through one of the Divine Names; no two events or two beings are exactly the same. Even the same being changes from one moment to the next. All these actualizations in the concrete world are made possible through the names of the Absolute. Hence, it follows that the number of names must be limitless. To express this concept another way, it can be said that in the next stage of manifestation, which occurs through the Holy Effusion, *al-fayḍ al-muqaddas*, the relations or self-disclosures of God to the world must be infinite in number.

The concept of *wāḥidiyya* and the self-disclosure of the Absolute is depicted beautifully by Jāmī in his *Yūsuf va Zulaykhā*, where he describes,

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<sup>11</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī devotes chapter 21 of *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* to the discussion of the name of *al-Raḥmān*, and its relation to other names of God. For further discussion, see Izutsu’s *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts*, University of California Press, Berkeley, California, 1983, pp. 116-138.

in Persian poetry, why the mode of *wāḥidiyya* comes into existence. Below is the opening section of the poem, the first few lines of which dealing with the mode of *aḥadiyya*, were quoted in chapter three:

In that realm where there was no sign of existence  
Where the cosmos was relegated to the corner of nothingness

There was a Being sanctified from the image of duality  
Far removed from the discussion of “you” and “us”

A Beauty unfettered by the limitation of manifestation  
Manifested to Itself through Its own light

A Beautiful Bride in the unseen precinct  
Her essence sanctified from the calumny of defect

Mirror had not visited Her face  
Hand had not combed Her locks

Wind had not scattered Her hair  
Her eye had not seen dust of mascara

Her flower-like beauty had not associated with buds  
Her verdure had not wreathed with flower

Her face devoid of any line or mole  
No eye had seen any image of Her

She was composing music of love for Herself

She was engaged in the gamble of love with Herself

But since the rule of beauty governs that realm  
Beauty has no tolerance for veil

The beautiful cannot bear to remain veiled  
If you close the door she will raise her head to the aperture

Observe the tulip on the mountainside  
How it becomes verdant in spring season

Stem of flower from underneath splits the rock  
So that she may show her beauty

When you conceive of a meaningful thought  
That is rare in the field of ideas

You cannot bear putting it aside  
You will show it forth in written or oral form

This is the request of beauty wherever it resides  
This movement arose from the ancient Beauty

Pitched out Her tent from the realm of sanctity  
Manifested Herself to the cosmos and people

A glimmer of Her shone upon spirit and matter  
Spirit found itself as bewildered as matter

In every mirror She reflected an image of Hers  
In every spot talk about Her sprang up

All the holy ones praising the Lord  
Forgetting their selves began to search for the Lord

From the divers in the sea of firmament  
Rose the cry: Sanctified be God, Lord of the world

He<sup>12</sup> created mirrors from every element in the cosmos  
He reflected an image of Himself in each one of them

From this reflection a glimmer fell upon the rose  
From the rose an excitement befell the soul of the nightingale

Candle lit her face from that fire  
In every dwelling it burned a hundred moths

A light of Her shined upon the sun  
Lotus raised its head from under the water

From the beauty of Her face Laylī learned to beautify her face  
Every single strand of Her hair created a longing in Majnūn

She opened the sugared lips of Shīrīn  
She stole the heart of Parvīz and took away the life of Farhād

It is Her beauty manifested everywhere  
Removing the veil from the beloveds in the world

She raised her head from the bosom of the Canaanite moon  
She tortured Zulaykhā to death

She is the cover in every veil that you see  
She decrees the outcome of every love story

Life of the heart is due to Her love  
Prosperity of the soul is because of longing for Her

Anyone who is in love with the loved ones  
Knowingly or unknowingly is in love with Her

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<sup>12</sup> There are no separate pronouns for masculine and feminine in Persian language; I have chosen to use masculine or feminine pronoun in the translation based on the theme or the object of reference. However, the appearance of inconsistency in translation is unavoidable.

Beware not to fall into the fallacy of saying  
Ours is to love, Hers to be the Beloved

You are the mirror and She is the beauty in the mirror  
You are hidden and She is the manifest

Hence the ability to praise and love  
Has emanated from Her and is reflected in you

If you observe keenly She is also the mirror  
Not only She is the treasure but also the treasure chest

You and I have no role in this affair  
Aside from vain imagination we have no other thought

Be quiet, as this story has no end  
No words can adequately describe Her

It is better that we take shield in love  
Because without the converse of love we are absolutely nothing<sup>13</sup>

The topic of names and attributes, and their relationship to the essence of God, has been one of the important subjects discussed at length among the *Hukamā*, the Islamic philosophers. For example, concepts such as God's knowledge of His own Essence, and God's knowledge of the cosmos before and after creation have led to many speculations among the Islamic philosophers. The *Ṣūfīs* on their part, have offered their speculations on these topics. Later in this work we will discuss some of these views in connection with the topic of creation.

As mentioned above, some of the terms seen in *Ṣūfī* literature in relation to the station of *aḥadiyya* have also been used at times in relation to the station of *wāḥidiyya*. One explanation for this could be that all these

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<sup>13</sup> 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, *Yūsuf va Zulaykhā* in *Jāmī: Aḥwāl va Āthār*, edited by 'Alī A. Ḥikmat, Tehran, 1941, pp. 328-329.

concepts and terms are relative. Afetr all, this is the domain of speculative mysticism, and a common definition of terms and concepts is the exception rather than the rule. For example, al-Farghānī (d. 699/1300) is one of the Ṣūfīs that has used the term ‘*amā*’ (Cloud) to refer to both stations of *aḥadiyya* and *wāḥidiyya*.<sup>14</sup> Sayyid Yaḥyā Yathribī has made the same observation about the use of some terms in Ṣūfī literature to refer interchangeably to *aḥadiyya* and *wāḥidiyya*.<sup>15</sup>

Numerous Ṣūfī writers have used the tradition of the Hidden Treasure to explain the mode of *wāḥidiyya*. For example, al-Farghānī has written extensively on both *aḥadiyya* and *wāḥidiyya* in his *Muntahā al-madārik*, an Arabic commentary he wrote on the *Tā’iyya* of Ibn al-Fāriḍ.<sup>16</sup> After quoting the tradition, he presents the four major themes contained in it:

- I. *kanzan makhfiyyan*, composed of the stations of *aḥadiyya* and *wāḥidiyya*;
- II. *aḥbabbtu*, referring the concept of love;
- III. *an u’raf*, explaining the theme of true recognition;
- IV. *khalaqtu*, discussing the concept of creation.

Then he offers a detailed classification of the different aspects of Oneness under each station of *aḥadiyya* and *wāḥidiyya*.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See Giuseppe Scattolin, “The Key Concepts of al-Farghānī’s Commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s Sufi Poem, *al-Tā’iyyat al-Kubrā*”, *Journal of Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabī Society*, 2006, p. 50.

<sup>15</sup> Yathribī, Sayyid Yaḥyā, *‘Irfān-i Nazārī*, Islamic Publications of Qum, 1993, p. 248.

<sup>16</sup> Sa’īd al-Dīn al-Farghānī wrote a commentary in Persian on the *Tā’iyya* of Ibn al-Fāriḍ. Later he revised it in Arabic under the title of *Muntahā al-madārik wa mushtahā lubb-i kull-i kāmil wa-‘arīf wa-sālik*. The introduction of this work contains a methodical explanation and classification of some of the Ṣūfī concepts.

<sup>17</sup> Al-Farghānī, *Muntahā al-madārik*, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1971, Vol. I, pp. 18-36. Apparently, this book has been published under slightly different titles. It is also

Al-Kāshānī also has written a detailed explanation of the station of *wāḥidiyya*. Here is a short passage from his detailed explanation of the concept:

The real self-disclosure is the manifestation of the Absolute Being as the *a'yān thābita*, which are prepared to accept existence. This is the realm of Knowledge and Names, which is also the domain of *wāḥidiyya*.<sup>18</sup>

Although in the station of *wāḥidiyya* we can speak of the self disclosure of the Absolute in the loci of names and attributes, this station is still considered one of the two levels of the Hidden Treasure; for everything that we have discussed in this realm exists only in the knowledge of God in the form of the Intelligible Archetypes. So as far as the lower ontological levels are concerned, God is still a mystery, the Hidden Treasure.

## The Distance of Two Bows

Another concept encountered in Ṣūfī writings in relation to the station of *wāḥidiyya* is called *Qāb Qawsayn*, [the distance of] “two bows.” This phrase is taken from the Qur’ānic reference to the Prophet’s Night Journey and his subsequent Ascension, *mi’rāj*, to the divine presence.

“Then he drew near and came close, until he was at the distance of two bows or less.”<sup>19</sup>

According to well-documented traditions<sup>20</sup>, about a year before the

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called *Muntahā al-madārik fī sharḥ Tā’iyya Ibn al-Fāriḍ*.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī, *Sharḥ al-Kāshānī ‘Alā Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, Cairo, 1321 A.H., p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> The Qur’ān, 53:8-9.

<sup>20</sup> For example, al-Bukhārī cites several *ḥadīth* reported by Anas Ibn Mālīk and Abū Dharr about *mi’rāj*; see *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Dār al-‘Arabīa, Beirut, 1985, Vol. IX, pp. 449-

departure of the Apostle of God from Mecca to Medina, he was transported one night in the company of the Angel Gabriel from Mecca to the site of the Masjid al-Aqṣā in Jerusalem. There, he led a large congregation of people in prayer, among whom were many prophets of the past. Then the Apostle and the Angel Gabriel went on the *mi'rāj* until they came within a distance of two bows from the throne of God. Most interpretations of the narrative suggest that the Prophet alone attained to the divine throne, leaving Jibrīl behind.

The Muslim theologians maintain that both these events were bodily as well as spiritual in nature, as do Ṣūfīs.

The term *Qāb Qawsayn*, used with respect to other than the Prophet, means the ultimate degree of proximity to God. The Ṣūfīs use the term to refer to the station of *wāḥidiyya*, for to go any further would imply that one could gain access to the realm of the Essence of God, which is impossible for other than the Prophet. In other words, the highest point in the *arc of ascent*<sup>21</sup> that anyone other than the Prophet can attain is to understand the

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454.

<sup>21</sup> Islamic philosophers and mystics in their writings have spoken of the *Arc of Ascent* and the *Arc of Descent*. A detailed description of these two *Arcs* is beyond the scope of this work. The origin of the concept of *Arc of Descent* may be seen in the Shī'ī tradition attributed to the sixth and seventh Imāms. Kulaynī in *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī*, in the chapter on *Tawḥīd* quotes a *ḥadīth* from the sixth Imām and another from the seventh Imām, both saying that nothing is created in the heaven or on the earth unless it goes through seven stages: Volition (*mashiyyah*), Will (*irādah*), Determination (*qadar*), Decree (*qaḍā*), Permission (*idhn*), Term (*ajal*), and Book (*kitāb*) [see *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī*, Vol. I, Tehran, no publication date or name of publisher, p. 149, and p. 206]. These seven stages constitute the *Arc of Descent*. Although these seven stages are not listed in the Qur'ān, many references can be found in the verses of the Qur'ān to the concepts of Will, Decree, Determination, and so forth. More detailed description of these stages could be found in the writings of Islamic philosophers and mystics like Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, and Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī. The *Arc of Ascent* refers to the stages that the seeker or wayfarer has to traverse from this abode of dust to the realm above, in order to return to his spiritual home. These stages have been described by Ṣūfīs that have written about the stages of spiritual search. For example, 'Aṭṭār in *Mantiq al-Ṭayr*, describes seven stages, although he does not use the term *Arc*. At the end of the *Arc of Ascent* the seeker attains his goal which is the knowledge of divine names and attributes.



attributes and names of God, but not to penetrate the realm of the Essence.

For Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Qāb Qawsayn* is a meeting place for God and His servant: God comes down by a distance of an arc, and His servant rises by a distance of another arc to meet Him. Ibn al-‘Arabī uses the analogy of a circle that is composed of two arcs in a poem:

*Qāb Qawsayn* is nothing except the diameter of a circle  
It distinguishes between the *existence* and God;  
God said the distance of “two bows or closer”  
Is an allusion to the formal nearness.<sup>22</sup>

We have already noted that the station of *aḥadiyya* is the mode of pure Essence, so there is no way for any individual to reach that station. The closest that he can come is within a distance of *Qāb Qawsayn*, which is the mode of *wāḥidiyya*, because in this station God can be described in terms of His attributes and names.

## The Intelligible Archetypes: Further Considerations

It is clear that the concept of the *a’yān thābita* is the lynch pin in the ontological scheme of Ibn al-‘Arabī, explaining the relationship of the Absolute Being to other realms and levels. The Immutable Entities are “the non-existent objects of God’s knowledge”, to quote William Chittick<sup>23</sup>; of course, non-existence in this context refers to the lack of existence in the external world. This does not mean that they are unreal; they exist in the form of knowledge. For this reason it is said that they have subsistence (*thubūt*), which means their existence is not in the cosmos.

From the perspective of their relationship to the essence of God, *a’yān thābita* are considered as *images* residing in God’s knowledge, as

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<sup>22</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. IV, p. 39.

<sup>23</sup> William Chittick, “*The Sufi Path of Knowledge*”, State University of New York Press, Albany, New York, 1989, p. 11.

mentioned above. However, insofar as their relationship to the external beings is concerned, they are considered *realities* that precede creation. To use an analogy, it can be said that they are like mental images (like the image of a structure in the architect's mind) that exist only in one's mental faculty and do not have any external existence. Ibn al-'Arabī regards *a'yān thābita* as relationships, rather than as beings, that exist between God and the cosmos.<sup>24</sup>

The reason Ibn al-'Arabī elaborated this concept is that the Absolute Being is unchanging whereas the world is changing. If the cosmos and all therein did not exist in immutable form in God's knowledge, logical problems would arise with the notion of God being Omniscient. So the knowledge of the changing cosmos must have existed in immutable form before acquiring external existence. While the creatures in the physical world diminish, increase, or change in some form, their immutable entities cannot change, otherwise they would not be immutable.

While the Immutable Entities have always existed in the knowledge of God, they are not part of His Essence. Lack of correct understanding of this issue could lead to the false conclusion that Ibn al-'Arabī is a pantheist. The means by which the names and attributes become differentiated from the Essence is the self-disclosure of God in the form of the Most Holy Effusion, *al-fayḍ al-aqdas*. This self-disclosure or effusion of the names and attributes in the form of *a'yān thābita* is also known as "the self-disclosure in the form of knowledge." This means that in the station of *wāḥidiyya*, the names and attributes gain existence, even though that existence is merely in God's knowledge, not in the external world. In the next stage of *tajallī*, the things of the cosmos come into being based on their immutable forms. Explaining the relationship of the existents to their immutables, Ibn al-'Arabī says:

In His kingdom there is that which is described by existence and that which is described by immutability. That which is both immutable and existent must be finite, but the immutable is infinite. That which is infinite cannot be qualified by

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<sup>24</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, p. 68.

diminishment, since that of it which gains actuality in existence is not diminished from immutability. The reason for this is that the thing in its immutability is identical to the thing in the state of its existence, except that God has clothed it in the robe of existence through Himself. So, the existence belongs to God, the Real, while the thing remains in its immutability, neither diminishing nor increasing.<sup>25</sup>

Another set of terms that the Ṣūfīs have used in reference to the self-disclosure of God is the appearance of *Isti'dādāt* (Preparednesses) and *Qābiliyyāt* (Capacities). In other words, even though the names and attributes have found existence in the station of *wāḥidiyya*, they do not yet have external effects; however, they are prepared and have the capacity for producing effects. These *Isti'dādāt* and *Qābiliyyāt* become the source of the appearance of the cosmos and external beings through the self-disclosure of God in the form of the Holy Effusion, *al-fayḍ al-muqaddas*.

We have explained that the self-disclosure led to multiplicity, *kathrat*. While in the mode of *aḥadiyya* there was only Oneness (in the form of Essence), in the mode of *wāḥidiyya*, unity in multiplicity finds expression. The multiplicity finds expression first in the form of attributes, and then the latter become the source of the multiplicity of the names.

Furthermore, each attribute has a specific self-disclosure; for example, the self-disclosure of God in the attribute of Knowledge is different from the self-disclosure in the attribute of Mercy. The first attribute leads to the manifestation of the name *al-'Alīm* (The All-Knowing), and the second to the expression of the name *al-Raḥīm* (The All-Merciful). Likewise, all other attributes and their corresponding names contribute to the unity in multiplicity.

Earlier we explained that the theologians as well as the Ṣūfīs have classified the names of God according to various criteria. According to one criterion the names are classified as the names of the *Essence*, the

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<sup>25</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. IV, p. 320 (Translation from William Chittick, "The Sufi Path of Knowledge", p. 85).

*Attributes*, and the *Acts*. The names in each of these categories denote that particular mode. The names such as Allāh and the Lord (*al-Rabb*) denote the mode of the *Essence*. On the other hand, names like the Almighty (*al-qādir*) and the All-Merciful (*al-Raḥīm*) are the names of the *Attributes*. Some examples of the names of the *Acts* are the Creator (*al-khāliq*) and the Protector (*al-Hāris*).<sup>26</sup>

With regard to the cosmos and external beings, the *a'yān thābita* have been classified as the *mumkin* (possible) and *mumtani'* (impossible). The *mumkin* is capable of external existence whereas *mumtani'* is not capable of such existence. The *a'yān thābita* of the type of *mumtani'* are so because of one of two reasons. Either their external manifestation is logically impossible, such as considering a “partner for God”, or they are of the type that by necessity cannot have external existence, like the hidden names of God that by necessity cannot be manifested. An example of the latter is the name *al-bāṭin* which means the inward or non-manifest as in:

He is the First (*al-Awwal*) and the Last (*al-Ākhir*) and the Outward (*al-Zāhir*) and the Inward (*al-Bāṭin*) and He is Cognizant of all things.<sup>27</sup>

Another point that we encounter in the Ṣūfī literature is whether the *a'yān thābita* are created or not. The specific Arabic term used in this connection is *ja'l* (creation). In speculative Ṣūfīsm this term has a non-temporal meaning associated with it; when something is considered to be a *maj'ūl*, it means that it has not been created in time. Of course this does not mean that such things have never existed; rather it implies that time-wise they are ancient, that is, have always existed.

At least for two reasons, *a'yān thābita* are not considered to be *maj'ūl*. First, because they lack external existence, and hence cannot be considered creations; since they were not subject to the act of creation their reality has

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<sup>26</sup> For a detailed explanation of various types of names see Dāwūd Qayṣarī, *Sharḥ-i Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, edited by Āshtiyānī, Shirikat Intishārāt 'Ilmī va Farhangī, Tehran, 1996, pp. 43-46.

<sup>27</sup> The Qur'ān, 57:3.

always existed. Second, *a'yān thābita* are essential necessities for divine names in the station of *wāḥidiyya*, and since the divine names have always existed (whether in non-differentiated or differentiated form from the Essence) their corresponding Intelligible Archetypes must have also existed forever.<sup>28</sup>

To close this section, we can summarize what we have captured so far from the Ṣūfī literature on the two stations of the Hidden Treasure and the process of self-disclosure. First, the station of *aḥadiyya* is the mode of absolute Essence. All the attributes and names are submerged in this state in non-differentiated mode from the Essence. Through the self-disclosure of God known as *al-fayḍ al-aqdas* the names and attributes become differentiated from the Essence in the form of *a'yān thābita*. Each name and attribute has its corresponding *'ayn thābit*. These *a'yān thābita* can be thought of as mental images existing not externally but in the knowledge of God. Through the second self-disclosure of God known as *al-fayḍ al-muqaddas*, the external beings and the cosmos are created. As discussed before, Ibn al-'Arabī believes that *a'yān thābita* do not appear in the external world; but their effects will be manifested through the act of creation, which is another stage in the process of self-disclosure.

## Divine Flashes

As promised in chapter three, below is a translation of two sections of Fakhruddīn 'Irāqī's *Lama'āt*, "Divine Flashes", one of the masterpieces of Persian Ṣūfī prose and poetry.<sup>29</sup> 'Irāqī (d. 685/1289) was a contemporary of

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<sup>28</sup> Egbert Meyer has published a facsimile of a treatise on the concept of the Immutable Entities, that has been attributed to Ibn al-'Arabī. Whether it is authored by Ibn al-'Arabī or not, the treatise is interesting since it addresses some issues about *a'yān thābita*. Four interesting reasons are offered in this treatise as to why it was necessary to devise the concept of *a'yān thābita*. Jaakko Hameen-Anttila has provided an English translation (from the German translation by Meyer) of this treatise in the *Journal of Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī Society*, Vol. XXXIX, 2006, pp. 15-32. The English translation by Jaakko Hameen-Anttila, along with a brief explanation, will be provided in Appendix III.

<sup>29</sup> See *Risāla-yi Lama'āt-i Fakhruddīn 'Irāqī*, edited by Jawād Nūrbakhsh, Chāpkhānih-i

Ibn al-‘Arabī and Rūmī, and in this work he provides another view point on the stations of *aḥadiyya* and *wāḥidiyya*, employing the triple concepts of the *Love*, the *Lover*, and the *Beloved*. Using rhymed prose and poetry in the form of a highly allegorical language, he describes the various stages of the Divine self-disclosure, starting with the realm of eternity (where no being, physical or otherwise, could be conceived), the stage of desire or volition to manifest the Divine beauty, the stage of witnessing that beauty in the mirror of the names and attributes, and the stage of the creation of the world. All of these concepts are represented through the triple motifs of the *Love*, the *Lover*, and the *Beloved*.

A close examination of this work reveals that the approach used by ‘Irāqī is to identify the real *Love* as God. Everything else is some form of manifestation of this *Love*. Therefore, the only real thing that exists is God. When God decided to reveal Himself, the concepts of the *Lover* and the *Beloved* manifested from the *Love*, first in the mirror of names and attributes, and then in the loci of all creatures. We will provide the translation for each Flash, and then offer an analysis of the themes and symbols.<sup>30</sup>

### The First Flash

*Lover* and *Beloved* are derived from *Love*, but in its realm of glory *Love* is sanctified from determination (*ta‘ayyun*), and in the sanctuary of its essence (*‘ayn*), it is freed from inwardness and outwardness. Yet, for the purpose of manifesting its perfection, considering that *Love* is the same thing whether viewed from the perspective of its essence or attributes, it displayed itself to itself in the mirror of *Lover* and *Beloved*,

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Firdawsī, Tehran, 1972, pp. 5-9.

<sup>30</sup> Five manuscripts of the *Lama‘āt* have been identified so far, dating to the 8th/14th-9th/15th centuries. Jawād Nūrbakhsh gives a list of these manuscripts in the introduction of his edition of *Lama‘āt*, p. 16. The manuscript he uses is the oldest extant version dating to the year 730/1334. In the footnotes he mentions the variations of the other manuscripts; I have used his version for translation. However, on a few occasions I have opted to replace a word or a short phrase with the ones from the other manuscripts in order to provide a more accurate meaning of the text.

thereby manifesting its beauty to its own eyes.

For the sake of *beholding* (*nāẓirī*) and *being beheld* (*manẓūrī*), the names *Lover* and *Beloved* came into existence. Thus, the attributes of *seeking* (*ṭālibī*) and *being sought* (*maṭlūbī*) appeared. *Love* revealed inward to the outward, and thereby the fame of *Lover* was noised abroad; then it adorned the inward with the outward, and the name of *Belovedness* became famous.

Not an atom existed  
Besides that unified Being

Once it manifested Itself  
All these others came into being

O Thou whose outward is *Lover*  
Whose inward *Beloved*

Who has ever seen  
The one *Sought* become the *Seeker*?

The essence of *Love* by means of *Belovedness* appeared as the mirror of *Lover* so that it might contemplate in *Lover* its own beauty. Likewise, *Love* because of *Lover* appeared as the mirror of *Beloved* so that it might behold its names and attributes in the mirror of *Beloved*. Even though to the eye of the beholder there is no more than one image visible [in the mirrors], yet when a face is shown in two mirrors, in each mirror truly a different image will appear.

A poem:

What is the face,  
Except one, however

When you multiply the mirrors,

It turns into many.

Another poem:

How can otherness show its face,  
For whatever exists

Is like the other one,  
Which has become manifested.<sup>31</sup>

Clearly, in the above section 'Irāqī identifies the mode of *aḥadiyya* with the concept of absolute *Love* which is sanctified from any determination, and is the source of all being. He points out that *Lover* and *Beloved* are derivatives of *Love*, yet in the station of *aḥadiyya* God is sanctified from every name, attribute, determination and so forth. Therefore, for 'Irāqī absolute *Love* signifies the realm of the Divine Essence.

'Irāqī employs the symbol of the mirror and the reflection of the Divine beauty in various mirrors, to point to the next mode, which is *wāḥidiyya*. We recall that in the station of *wāḥidiyya*, the names and attributes come into subsistence, hence *Lover* and *Beloved* emerge from *Love* and find their identity.

'Irāqī also uses two other terms, viz., inward (*bāṭin*) and outward (*ẓāhir*), which require some explanation. In the above section 'Irāqī is discussing these terms in the context of the Divine Essence in the mode of *aḥadiyya*. He says that:

“...in its realm of glory *Love* is sanctified from determination, and in the sanctuary of its essence it is freed from inwardness or outwardness.”

Here inward or inwardness refers to the potential for existence. This potential in Ṣūfī terminology is expressed in the concept of *a'yān thābita*.

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<sup>31</sup> See *Risāla-yi Lamā'āt-i Fakhruddīn 'Irāqī*, edited by Jawād Nūrbakhsh, Chāpkhānih-i Firdawsī, Tehran, 1972, pp. 5-6.



The term outward or outwardness, in this context, is a reference to the fulfillment of those potentials; in other words, they allude to the stage of existence or creation.

We know that the station of *wāḥidiyya* is the domain of *a'yān thābita*. When these Intelligible Archetypes find external existence, creation takes place, i.e., the cosmos and everything within it are created. This concept is symbolized by the term *outward*. Since in the mode of *aḥadiyya* neither *a'yān thābita* nor creation is conceivable, 'Irāqī says that *Love* (the symbol signifying the Essence of God) is sanctified from *inwardness* and *outwardness*.

### The Second Flash

The sovereign of *Love* wanted to pitch his tent in the field. He opened the gate of his treasury, and scattered its treasure on the world:

Raised his parasol,  
Hoisted his banner

In order to intertwine,  
Existence with non-existence

Lo, the restlessness,  
Of Love euphoric

Threw the world,  
Into agitation and chaos.

Otherwise [if *Love* had not brought the world into being], the world was at repose with its non-existent existence, and it rested in the refuge of witness, the station where “*God was and nothing was with Him*”,

In those moments where

There was no sign of either of the two worlds<sup>32</sup>

When upon the tablet of existence,  
There was no trace of *others*

The Beloved, the Love, and Us,  
Were co-existing together

In the corner of refuge,  
Where none other existed.

All of a sudden, *Love* grew impatient, and in order to show forth [its] perfection raised the veil from its affairs, and disclosed itself to the reality of *Lover* as *Beloved*.

When the ray of its beauty revealed itself,  
The world appeared in a breath's moment

Borrowed a glimpse from its beauty,  
Thus saw its beauty and fell in ardent love

Borrowed sweet from its sugared lips,  
As soon as it tasted its sweetness, became eloquent.

The radiance of that beauty bestowed a light on the reality of *Lover*--which you call existence--so that through that light its beauty could be seen. This is so because the existence cannot be seen without the light [of *Love's* beauty]. So it has been said: "Their gifts could not be carried except by their riding animals."

Once *Lover* found the joy of witnessing, and discerned the taste

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<sup>32</sup> This is a reference to the outward and the inward worlds, i.e., this world and the next world, or possibly to the manifest (*shahāda*) and unseen (*ghayb*) worlds respectively.

of existence, it heard the chant of the call “BE!”<sup>33</sup>, while dancing hastened towards the gate of the tavern of *Love*, and exclaimed:

O cupbearer! From that wine which is my heart and my religion,  
Fill up a chalice for it is my sweet life

If wine drinking is anyone’s faith,  
Drinking *Beloved* from the chalice, is my faith.

Within a moment the cupbearer poured so much of the wine of non-existence in the chalice of existence that:

From the purity of the wine and the clarity of the chalice,  
Converged the color of the chalice and the wine

As if everything is the chalice, no wine to be found,  
Or, everything is the wine, no chalice to be seen

When the sky is stained with the color of the sun,  
Darkness removes its garment from the world

Day and night come to terms with each other,  
The affairs of the world are ordered by that.

The morning of manifestation breathed, the sun of beneficence dawned, the breeze of guidance wafted over, the sea of existence came into motion, and the cloud of effusion poured so much the rain of “Thus He sprinkled upon them from His light” upon the soil of potentialities such that “...the earth will shine bright with her Lord’s Light”.<sup>34</sup> *Lover* became satiated

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<sup>33</sup> This is a reference to the Qur’ānic concept that when God wills to create something He addresses its reality and says BE!, and it comes into existence. For example, see verses 2:117 and 3:47 of the Qur’ān.

<sup>34</sup> The Qur’ān, 39:69.

with the water of life, rose from the slumber of non-existence, put on the mantle of being, wore the hat of witnessing, girded up the loins of rapture, stepped into the valley of search; he came from knowledge to witnessing, and from the ear to the bosom.

First he opened his eye and beheld the countenance of *Beloved*, and said: “*I have not seen anything without seeing God in it.*”<sup>35</sup> Then it looked at itself, and only found himself; and said “*looking with my own eye I do not see anything but my own reality.*” This is a strange affair:

Since I have totally become the *Beloved*,  
Then who is the *Lover*?

Here *Lover* appeared as *Beloved*, because he [*Lover*] had no existence of his own to be able to appear as *Lover*. He is still -- *as if he did not exist*-- in the state of non-existence, while *Beloved* --*as if forever*-- rests in the state of eternity. “*He still is as He always was.*”<sup>36</sup>.

*Beloved, Love, and Lover*  
All three are one in this place,

Even *union* does not fit here  
Let alone *separation*.<sup>37</sup>

In this second Flash, ‘Irāqī explains the further unveiling of the Hidden Treasure: *Love* manifests itself, in the form of *Beloved*, to *Lover*,

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<sup>35</sup> This saying, mentioned frequently by Ibn al-‘Arabī, has most commonly been attributed to Imām ‘Alī. For further description, see Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1975, p. 147.

<sup>36</sup> This is a reference to a saying from the famous mystic, Junayd of Baghdād.

<sup>37</sup> See *Risāla-yi Lama‘āt-i Fakhruddīn ‘Irāqī*, edited by Jawād Nūrbakhsh, Chāpkhānih-i Firdawsī, Tehran, 1972, pp. 6-9.

and the world comes into existence. This process is depicted in the form of a series of beautiful images: “the breathing of the morning of manifestation”, “the dawning of the sun of beneficence”, “the wafting of the breeze of guidance”, “the movement of the sea of existence”, and “the rain pouring from the cloud of effusion.” At this stage, the process of the unfolding of the Hidden Treasure takes place through the Holy Effusion, referred to as “the rain pouring from the cloud of effusion.” This process is synonymous with creation.

Moreover, ‘Irāqī explains that after *Love* manifests itself in the world, *Lover* discovers that he has no real existence. The only thing that does have real existence is *Beloved*. *Lover*, described as having risen from “the slumber of non-existence” is the whole of creation which comes into existence in the knowledge of God. Creation, symbolized as *Lover*, does not have an independent existence, but is a reflection of *Beloved*. And *Beloved* is manifested in *Lover*, as expressed by: “I was Hidden Treasure, I loved to be known.” Therefore, ‘Irāqī concludes that even in this world the reality of the *Lover* and the *Beloved* is *Love*, hence all three are one and the same. Since for ‘Irāqī, *Love* symbolizes the essence of God, the conclusion is that even in this world the only real being is God.

In concluding this chapter, we should mention that in the Ṣūfī texts the station of *wāḥidiyya* has been alluded to by other terms and analogies than we have mentioned above.<sup>38</sup> One such term is *Ḥaḍrat al-‘Ilm*, the Presence or Realm of Knowledge. The sources of beings, before the physical creation, are the mental images having intelligible forms in the knowledge of God. The source of a painting is the mental image that the painter has visualized before actually getting to the act of painting. Likewise, the cosmos and all the creation existed in the form of mental images in *Ḥaḍrat al-‘Ilm*. Although the word *‘Ilm* does not appear in the tradition of the Hidden Treasure, a derivative of its corollary, *Ma‘rifa* (from

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<sup>38</sup> Other themes and analogies mentioned is the Ṣūfī literature that allude to the station of *wāḥidiyya* and the concept of *a‘yān thābita* include: i) The realities of things in the knowledge of God; ii) The immutable images of existents which have existed from pre-eternity; iii) The archetypes of beings in the state of nothingness; iv) The meanings in the knowledge of God; v) The inward modes of the outward entities.

the verb *'arafa*), is mentioned twice; this provided the opportunity for the Ṣūfīs to use this tradition to elaborate on the station of *wāḥidiyya*. We will discuss the topics of *'Ilm* and *Ma'rifa* extensively in chapter Seven.

## Chapter Five: The Concept of Love

The theme of Love is one of the fundamental concepts in Ṣūfīsm. From the fifth/eleventh century onward, when the focus of Ṣūfīsm turns gradually from asceticism to speculative mysticism, the concept of love assumes a central role in the Ṣūfī texts. For example, Aḥmad Ghazzālī (d. 528/1126) devotes his *Savānih*, a treatise in Persian, to the theme of love. After him, several other Ṣūfī authors follow his lead. His student, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī (d. 533/1131) spends chapter six of his *Tamhīdāt*, consisting of about fifty pages, on the concept of love. ‘Aṭṭār (d. 623/1221) writes about love as one of the seven *valleys* of search in the *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr*. The theme of love finds its highest expression in the writings of Ibn al-‘Arabī and Rūmī, the two most famous masters of Ṣūfīsm. However, in spite of the fact that countless pages of Ṣūfī literature have been devoted to this topic the mystics have generally professed their inability fully to describe true love and its relations. Ibn al-‘Arabī provides the following statement about love in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*:

Whosoever defines love has not realized true love, and whosoever has not drunk a sip from the chalice of love has not recognized it, and whosoever claims that he has fully drunk from that chalice has not known true love, because love is a type of wine that does not satiate any one.<sup>1</sup>

The point of this statement is that until a person benefits from a personal experience with true love he will not have a real understanding of it. Even when one develops a personal experience of true love, his understanding of love will be quite limited because of the vastness and nature of love. Rūmī has expressed this notion throughout his poetry. On one occasion he says:

Whatsoever I say to describe and express love,  
I find that my description is shamefully inadequate  
Even though word commentary is clarifying,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, p. 12.

Yet, love without word is more illuminating  
While the pen was attempting to describe,  
When it came to the theme of love it burst asunder  
The intellect was stuck like a donkey in the mud when it  
attempted to describe love,  
Only love itself could offer a description of love and  
loverhood.<sup>2</sup>

On the one hand, love is a reality that is manifest everywhere. Without love, and the force of attraction emanating from it, existence would not be conceivable. On the other hand, the true meaning of love is infinitely hidden. In this sense, much like the concept of existence (*wujūd*), love cannot be defined or described.

The Islamic philosophers claim that any word used to define existence is itself part of existence; therefore the definition will be circular. Hence, they have concluded that existence is beyond any definition or description.<sup>3</sup> In a similar manner, Ṣūfīs believe that love is analogous to existence in the sense that it cannot be defined or adequately described. In spite of all the complaints and lamentation by Ṣūfīs that love cannot be described or understood, they have not neglected the task of writing about love, and introducing themes such as the types of love, stages of love, and so forth. Just as *wujūd* can only be described in terms of its attributes, so is the case with the concept of love.

Many Ṣūfī authors have quoted the tradition of the Hidden Treasure to write about the theme of love. Ibn al-‘Arabī, who frequently mentions this tradition, on one occasion comments that because of His love for creation, God turned his attention towards things so that they would acquire a temporal knowledge:

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<sup>2</sup> Rūmī, Jalāl al-Dīn, *Mathnawī*, edited by M. Estelami, Tehran, 1996, Vol. I, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī has discussed this issue in *Sifr Awwal* (the First Book) of his *Asfār Arba‘a*, which is dedicated to the concept of *wujūd*. For example, see *Asfār Arba‘a: Safar Awwal az khalq bi Ḥaqq*, translated by Muḥammad Khwājawī, Intishārāt-i Mawlā, Tehran, 1999, p. 29.



He (God) loved to be known, so He directed His will, as the result of this love, toward things in their state of non-existence while they were standing in their level of origin (*maqām al-aṣl*) in the preparedness of their possibility (*isti'dād imkānihā*). So He said to them “Be!” And they came into existence so that He might be known through all types of knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

Rūmī has also invoked the tradition of the Hidden Treasure in the discussion of love. In *Fīhi mā Fīhi* he offers the following view:

God says, “I was a Hidden Treasure, so I loved [desired] to be known.” In other words, “I created the whole cosmos, and the goal in all of it was to make Myself manifest.”... God is not the sort of king for whom a single herald would be sufficient. Were all the atoms of the universe His heralds, they would fall short and be incapable of making Him known.<sup>5</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the theme of love is expressed extensively in two schools of Ṣūfī thought, viz., the school represented by Ibn al-‘Arabī and his students, and the one represented by Rūmī and his followers. Given the focus of this study, we will analyze the theme of love mostly from the perspective of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s school, and then we will briefly review Rūmī’s. It will be explained later that while Rūmī’s focus is more on the practice of love, Ibn al-‘Arabī writes extensively on the theoretical aspects of love, while at the same time not ignoring the experience and the practice of it.

While Western scholars like Hans Heinrich Schaeder<sup>6</sup> in the earlier

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<sup>4</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, p. 167.

<sup>5</sup> Rūmī, Jalāl al-Dīn, *Fīhi mā Fīhi*, ed. B. Furūzānfar, Tehran, Amīr Kabīr, 1348/1969, pp. 176-177; A.J. Arberry (trans.), *Discourses of Rūmī*. London: John Murray, 1961, pp. 184-185.

<sup>6</sup> Hans Heinrich Schaeder contrasted Ibn al-‘Arabī and Ḥallāj in an article written in 1925; see *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Annemarie Schimmel, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1975, p. 274.

part of the twentieth century portrayed Ibn al-‘Arabī as a philosophical mystic who was concerned with systematization and the theoretical discussion of concepts and doctrines like existence and love, more recent Western scholarship gives a more balanced portrayal of him as a practitioner as well as a theoretician of spiritual love.<sup>7</sup>

## The Etymology of Love

The English word “love” has been used to translate several Arabic words that although their meanings overlap could also imply different concepts to the reader in the original language. In this section we will review the etymological background of some of the Arabic words in this connection. Chapter 178 of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* is on the recognition (*ma‘rifā*) of the station of love. At the beginning of this long chapter, Ibn al-‘Arabī mentions that the station (*maqām*) of love could be referred to by four different names or titles.<sup>8</sup> The first word mentioned is *ḥubb*, which is the root and original word for love, and also means affection and attachment. The serenity (*ṣafā*) of *ḥubb* is not subject to the pollution of accidental changes (*kudūrāt al-‘awāriḍ*), and it brings sincerity to the heart. This is the most important of the names used for the station of love, one of whose derivatives has been used in the tradition of the Hidden Treasure as *aḥbābtu*, “I loved to.”

The second title for love is *wadd*, which means affection and amity. One of its derivatives is a divine name, *al-wadūd*, the friendly and always loving.

The third word is *‘ishq*, which implies the extreme of love and union between lover and beloved. The word *‘ishq* is said to have been derived from the name of a plant called *‘ashaqah*, which apparently grows on a tree and draws water and food from it, thereby weakening the tree, and at times

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<sup>7</sup> For example, see “The experience and doctrine of love in Ibn ‘Arabī”, by Claude Addas; translated from French by Cecilia Twinch for *Journal of Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabī Society*, 2002, pp. 25-44.

<sup>8</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, p. 323.

destroying it. Some have written that ironically *'ishq* does the same thing to the lover!

The fourth title is *hawā*, which means a sudden affection or surge of passion. It also implies the exertion of the will to reach the beloved.

Two of these four names, viz., *ḥubb* and *'ishq*, and their derivatives have been used more often in the Arabic and Persian Ṣūfī texts dealing with the theme of love. While the word *ḥubb* and its various derivatives occur in many verses in the Qur'ān, the same is not true of *'ishq*. In fact some Muslim scholars have written that the use of the word *'ishq* in reference to God is inappropriate. For example, Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī in his *Sharḥ al-Ziyāra* says that it is the practice of the “people of error” to use the word *'ishq* in relation to God.<sup>9</sup> Yet, the Ṣūfī literature has made abundant use of the word *'ishq*, and its derivatives, and the distinction between the two is not always clear. My search of various Ṣūfī books and dictionaries for the most part did not reveal much distinction being made between these two words insofar as their usage in mystical context is concerned.

An exception to the above is the distinction made between *'ishq* and *ḥubb* by Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī in *Risālah fī Ḥaqīqat al-'Ishq*, “Treatise on the Reality of Love”.<sup>10</sup> In this work he essentially concludes that when *ḥubb* reaches its zenith it becomes *'ishq*. So for him *'ishq* occupies a higher station than *ḥubb*. However, in the works of almost all other Ṣūfīs these two words (and their derivatives) have the same meaning. In fact, in many places these words are used interchangeably.<sup>11</sup> One exception is in the use of *'ishq* when it is classified into *'ishq*, viz, *'ishq-i ḥaqīqī* (real *'ishq*) vs. *'ishq-i majāzī* (un-real or figurative *'ishq*), whereas

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<sup>9</sup> Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī, *Sharḥ al-Ziyāra al-Jāmi'a al-Kabīra*, Vol. I, Beirut, 1999, p. 207.

<sup>10</sup> Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī, *Risālah fī Ḥaqīqat al-'Ishq*, in the *Collection of Persian Writings of Suhrawardī*, Vol. III, edited by S. H. Nasr, Tehran, 1970.

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed description of usage of these two words in the Ṣūfī literature see *Lughat-Nāmih* of 'Alī Akbar Dihkhudā, Tehran University Publication, Tehran, 1962, large edition, Vol. 34, pp. 265-267, and Vol. 43, p. 504.

one does not encounter such a classification for *ḥubb*, viz, *ḥubb-i ḥaqīqī* vs. *ḥubb-i majāzī*. On the other hand, in the non-Şūfī Islamic texts one typically encounters *ḥubb* or its derivatives rather than *‘ishq*.

As mentioned earlier, the word used for love in the tradition of the Hidden Treasure, is a derivative of *ḥubb*, viz., *aḥbābtu*. In this *ḥadīth*, God speaks in the first person singular form. We have mentioned several times in this study that the tradition of the Hidden Treasure is an expression of the self-disclosure of the Divine Essence at various phases of the ontological order. In other words, the manifestations of the Divine Essence, first from the highest level of Absoluteness to the level of the names and attributes, and then in the other levels, are represented in this *ḥadīth* through the concepts of *kānz makhfī*, *ḥubb*, and so forth. The derivative form of *ḥubb* (the first person singular) in this tradition, used to express God’s love, signifies one of the stages of self-disclosure; in this context, God speaks in the first person singular, which is an indication of the *tajallī* of the Absolute Essence to the level where names (as well as attributes) are differentiated from the Essence and manifested.

## Love as the Motive for Creation

Many Şūfīs have expressed the idea that the cause or motive for creation was the love of God. According to this notion, the basis of creation is love and beauty. The Divine Essence was in love with His own beauty; in the station of *aḥadiyya* He was love, the lover, and the beloved. Then God loved (willed) to behold His own beauty in something other than Himself; however, there was no creation in which His beauty could be reflected. Therefore, in the beginning His names and attributes became the mirrors reflecting His beauty. Then this love was extended and creation was brought into existence. So, when we speak of existence, whether in the form of God’s names and attributes, or in the form of external creation, the motive for it is love. In other words, the purpose for creation was to be the instrument of reflecting the Divine beauty.

While most Şūfīs have accepted the above notion, Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī, the founder of the Ishrāqī school of mysticism, and his

followers believe that love is secondary to intellect insofar as the motive for creation is concerned. In *Risālah fī Ḥaqīqat al-‘ishq*, Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī offers his view of the creation of the intellect and the subsequent creation of three other realities as the result of the activities of the intellect, one of which was love.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, among the Ṣūfīs this is a minority view.

Both Ibn al-‘Arabī and Rūmī have quoted the tradition of the Hidden Treasure to argue that the motivating force of creation was love. Often when Ibn al-‘Arabī quotes this tradition, he presents a discussion of the theme of love related to the process of the self-disclosure of God. For him, the reality (*al-Ḥaqq*) is equated with *wujūd*, and his view of love has many similarities to the concept of existence. He offers the following view in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*:

Know that the known things are of two kinds. One kind can be delineated, and the other kind cannot be delineated. And among those who are learned about the topic of love, and speak about it, love is of the type that cannot be delineated. He within whom love abides and becomes one of his attributes, will recognize it; even though he cannot understand love, he cannot deny its existence (*wujūd*).<sup>13</sup>

In *Muntahā al-madārik*, al-Farghānī explains that the Absolute Essence, before any self-disclosure, was in balance between two possibilities: either remain in the state of non-disclosure (*lā zuhūr*) and hidden (*khafā*), which was the natural and innate state of the Divine Essence, or move to the state of manifestation (*zuhūr*) and self-disclosure (*tajallī*). The primary reason that the Divine Essence moved toward the state of self-disclosure was Original Love (*al-maḥabbat al-aṣliyya*). There were two inclinations in the Divine Essence, which maintained the balance: the

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<sup>12</sup> Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī, *Risālah fī Ḥaqīqat al-‘Ishq*, in the *Collection of Persian Writings of Suhrawardī*, Vol. III, edited by S. H. Nasr, Tehran, 1970, pp. 268-270.

<sup>13</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, p. 325. For further discussion of this topic see William Chittick’s article on “The Divine Roots of Human Love”, *Journal of Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabī Society*, Vol. 17, 1995, pp. 55-78.

inclination to remain as a Hidden Treasure, and the inclination to manifest the Hidden Treasure. It was the motivating impulse of love, flowing from the depth of the Divine Essence, that moved the Absolute to manifest Itself.

This theme is repeated several times by al-Farghānī, and every time he invokes the tradition of the Hidden Treasure to explain the concept.<sup>14</sup> Since love was the motivating force behind the first manifestation of the Absolute from hiddenness, al-Farghānī concludes that the subsequent self-disclosures are also the result of that original love.

In order for the self-disclosure to take place, certain loci for manifestation of the Divine Essence were needed. In the language of the tradition of the Hidden Treasure, creation took place as the result of God's love; but Ibn al-'Arabī offers a complex argument and claims that the object of this love is non-existent. In a number of places in the chapter on love in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* he mentions that the object of love, viz, the beloved, is a non-existent thing (*amrun 'adamiyyun*).<sup>15</sup> The non-existence that Ibn al-'Arabī talks about is a relative concept; it is non-existent in relation to the lover. In any love situation, the lover wishes to achieve nearness to someone or something. As long as the lover has not achieved union with the beloved, the object of his love does not exist in relation to him.<sup>16</sup> Thus Ibn al-'Arabī comments:

The love of God connects (*yata'allaqu*) with the created thing,

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<sup>14</sup> Al-Farghānī, *Muntahā al-madārik*, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1971, Vol. I, p. 19. For further discussion, see Giuseppe Scattolin, "The Key Concepts of al-Farghānī's Commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sūfī Poem, *al-Tā'iyyat al-Kubrā*", *Journal of Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī Society*, 2006, pp. 43-45.

<sup>15</sup> For example, Ibn al-'Arabī says: "There are many mistakes made about the theme of love. Many assume that the beloved is an existent thing, whereas it is a non-existent thing (*amrun 'adamiyyun*), to which the love connects (*yata'allaq al-ḥubb bihī*)"; *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, p. 337.

<sup>16</sup> William Chittick discusses Ibn al-'Arabī's concept of the non-existence of the object of love, extensively in *The Sūfī Path of Knowledge*, and also in the article, "The Divine Roots of Human Love", *Journal of Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī Society*, Vol. 17, 1995, pp. 55-78.

because the latter is non-existent (*ma'dūm*). Therefore, the created thing (which is *ma'dūm*) is the beloved of God.<sup>17</sup> So long as there is love, the existence of the created thing cannot be imagined with it (*lā yutaṣawwar ma'ahu wujūd al-makhlūq*). Thus, the created thing does not find existence ever.<sup>18</sup>

The objects of love, in the first stage of self-disclosure, are the non-existent immutable entities (*a'yān thābita*). By definition, immutable entities do not have existence; they subsist (have *thubūt*) in the knowledge of God. Therefore, the objects of His love are non-existent.

In discussing the concept of the original love as the motivating force of creation, Ibn al-'Arabī introduces another concept, that of Divine beauty. The notion of beauty (*jamāl*) often accompanies the discussion of love in his works. God created the cosmos because of love, but this love in the first place is for His own beauty (*jamāl*), which He wanted to display; and then it was directed towards creatures, so that they could reflect it. For Ibn al-'Arabī the concepts of love and creation are closely connected to the concept of beauty. The motive for creation is love, and creation reflects the beauty of the name of God *al-jamīl*:

Know that the divine beauty (*al-jamāl al-Ilāhī*) by which God is called Beautiful (*jamīl*), and by which through the words of His Messenger He described Himself as “He loves beauty” (*innahu yuḥibbu al-jamāl*)<sup>19</sup> exists in all things. There is nothing except beauty, for God created the world only in His form, and He is beautiful (*mā khalaqa al-'ālam illā 'alā ṣūratihī*). Therefore, the whole world is beautiful (*fa al-'ālam*

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<sup>17</sup> By “non-existence” in this context Ibn al-'Arabī means the lack of external existence, not complete non-being. The *a'yān thābita* lack external existence but do have existence in the ontological scheme of beings presented by Ibn al-'Arabī.

<sup>18</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, p. 113.

<sup>19</sup> This is an allusion to the *ḥadīth Nabawī* which states: “Truly God is beautiful and He loves beauty...” (*inna-Allāh jamīl yuḥibbu al-jamāl...*); reported in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Matba'a Muḥammad 'Alī Ṣabīḥ, Cairo, 1915-16.

*Kulluhu Jamīl*).<sup>20</sup>

God is Beautiful and He loves beauty; He, Exalted be He, is the fashioner of the world (*Ṣāni' al-‘Ālam*), and bestowed on it existence in His form. Therefore, the entire world is in utmost beauty (*ghāyat al-jamāl*) and there is no ugliness (*qubḥ*) in it whatsoever.<sup>21</sup>

In one section of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* the Shaykh connects the concepts of love, beauty, and light together, and says that the Absolute Hidden Treasure is luminous and beautiful.<sup>22</sup> Further he relates the concepts of beauty and light to *wujūd* and states that the immutable entities lack the capacity to perceive the Divine beauty because they have no existence. In order for them to gain the capacity to perceive the Divine beauty, His light must shine upon them. Once the immutable entities are able to see the Divine beauty they fall in love with Him; beauty creates love. Though the immutable entities do not come into existence, according to Ibn al-‘Arabī they gain the capacity to love God.

So Ibn al-‘Arabī explains the concept of love in the context of the relationship between the immutable entities and *wujūd*. God loves beauty, and He is beautiful; hence He loves Himself and wishes to display this beauty. He wanted to see this beauty in something besides Himself; therefore He created the cosmos because of His love. Thus, love and beauty have primordial roles before any creation takes place. The self-disclosures (*tajalliyyāt*) are the results of this desire to see His beauty in something other than Himself. Hence, the loci of self-disclosure (*majālī*) had to be created to manifest and reflect this beauty; this led to the creation of the world.

To recapitulate the statements of Ibn al-‘Arabī on the concept of love,

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<sup>20</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, p. 542.

<sup>21</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. III, p. 449.

<sup>22</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, p. 112.



we can say that God was in love with His own beauty, so the object of His love was Himself. But God wanted to contemplate His beauty in other objects; therefore the immutable entities, which are non-existent, became the objects of His love. The next stage in the process of manifestation of love as the motivating force of creation was to bring the cosmos from non-existence into existence. This movement, from non-existence toward *tajallī*, is the movement of love, bringing out the Hidden Treasure from the realm of Absolute Essence. Stated differently, this means that by having love for the non-existent, God gives existence to the Hidden Treasure. This point is also elaborated in the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*:

The movement which is the coming into existence of the world is the movement of love (*al-ḥarakat allatī hiya wujūd al-‘ālam ḥarakat al-ḥubb*). And that is what the Apostle of God reported (in the saying), “I was a Treasure unknown (*kuntu kanzan lam u’raf*); so I loved to be known.” Thus, had it not been for this love (of God) the cosmos would not have been manifested in itself. So the movement of the cosmos from non-existence to existence is the movement of the love of its Creator.<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, the movement of love dissociates the cosmos from nothingness and gives it existence because of God’s love to behold His beauty.

## Classification of Love

In Ṣūfī literature we encounter a few classifications for love. On the one hand love cannot be classified because it is a Divine attribute, which is without form. On the other hand, as far as the creatures and their love towards God and towards other parts of creation are concerned, the concept of love could be classified and categorized, as some Ṣūfīs have done so in their texts. Up until the time of Ibn al-‘Arabī, the Ṣūfīs who had written about love had used mostly imagery and metaphors in their writings; people like Aḥmad Ghazzālī in *Sawāniḥ*, and ‘Aṭṭār and Sanā’ī in their poetry had

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<sup>23</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, edited by A. ‘Afifī, Beirut, 1946, p. 203.

used this form of writing. Ibn al-‘Arabī and his followers used a new language style to explain and expound on the concept of love; a language which was more philosophical in nature, and quite methodical.

The most basic type of classification of love is the division into the Real love, (*‘ishq-i ḥaqīqī*) vs. the Figurative or Metaphorical love, (*‘ishq-i majāzī*). The Real love is the love of the lover (or the servant) towards God, that is, towards the Divine Essence. The Figurative love is the love towards the loci of manifestation or the mirrors that reflect one or more of the divine attributes. Since the entire creation was created to act as mirrors reflecting the beauty of God, in a sense the Figurative love is a reflection of the Real love.

There is also another form of love called the Natural or Physical love, (*ḥubb ṭabī‘ī*), which is the love of the individual for his own self or desires. This form of love has been abhorred by the Ṣūfīs.

Still another classification for love is that of the *station* vs. *state*. For a Ṣūfī the instinct of love is a gift from God. With its aid he can get closer to Him and discover the purpose of his own creation. Some of the Ṣūfīs have considered love as one of the *maqāmāt* (stations) on the mystical path towards God<sup>24</sup>, while others have regarded it as one of the *aḥwāl* (states). The distinction is that a *station* is a stage on the path which the wayfarer (*sālik*) arrives at through his own efforts. On the other hand, a *state* is a condition which descends upon the seeker as a bounty from God without any effort on his part, or without him having any control over it. The *sālik* has some control over the length of the time he spends at a *station* (in moving toward his goal). However, he lacks any control over his stay at a *state*; therefore he may remain in a *state* for a short or long period of time, without having any control over the length of his stay.<sup>25</sup>

Ibn al-‘Arabī on one occasion in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* says that

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<sup>24</sup> For a list of such Ṣūfīs see *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* by Annemarie Schimmel, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2000, pp. 130-132.

<sup>25</sup> See *Tārīkh-i Taṣawwuf dar Islam* (The History of Mysticism in Islam) by Q. Ghānī, Zavvār Publications, Tehran, Vol. II, pp. 325-346.

there are three types of love; one type is the natural love, *ḥubb ṭabīʿī*, which he describes as physical love. The second type is the spiritual love, *ḥubb rūḥānī*, which is the love of the servant for his Lord. The third type is the divine love, *ḥubb ilāhī*, which is the love of God for His servants.<sup>26</sup>

Farghānī and Jāmī are two of the proponents of the school of Ibn al-ʿArabī that have provided some systematic classification for the concept of love. Farghānī offers various classifications for love; he speak of the love for divine acts (*fi al-fiʿl*), the love for divine attributes (*fi al-ṣifa*), and the love for the Essence (*fi al-dhāt*). In referring to the theme and types of love, Farghānī invokes the tradition of the Hidden Treasure repeatedly in support of his argument.<sup>27</sup>

Jāmī's classification of love in *Lawāmiʿ* appears to follow the exposition of Farghānī in *Muntahā al-madārik*. He classifies love into love for the Essence of God (*maḥabbat-i dhātī*), love for the divine names of God (*maḥabbat-i asmāʿī*), love for the Divine attributes (*maḥabbat-i ṣifātī*), and love for Divine signs (*maḥabbat-i āthārī*).<sup>28</sup> Both Farghānī and Jāmī offer further classifications for the forms of love mentioned above in the respective texts listed.

As far as the choice of literary language is concerned, it appears that poetry, rather than prose, has more often been the preferred choice of the Ṣūfis to write about love. The poetry of many great Ṣūfis like Sanāʿī, ʿAṭṭār, Rūmī, Jāmī, and scores of others are rich examples of this medium as the instrument for expressing the theme of love. This is true whether we speak of divine love, of the famous epic love stories, or the love among other forms of creation like the oft-repeated story of the love of the moth for the candle.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, p. 111.

<sup>27</sup> Al-Farghānī, *Muntahā al-madārik*, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, Beirut, 1971, Vol. I, pp. 144-145.

<sup>28</sup> Jāmī, *Lawāmiʿ*, Ed. By H. ʿAlī Āqā, Tehran, 1962, pp. 19-23.

<sup>29</sup> Many Persian poets have written about the story of the love of the moth for the candle describing how the moth sacrifices itself by burning in the candle fire. A few poets

## Ṣūfī Views on Love: Further Considerations

Although the masters of Ṣūfī thought have all written about love to varying degrees, the emphasis they place on this theme, and the way they view its role in mysticism, vary considerably in their writings. We have discussed the views of several Ṣūfī authors so far. In this section we will further explore and compare the views of two major Ṣūfī schools on love: the school of Ibn al-‘Arabī and his followers, and the school represented by Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī and those who follow his line of thought. Also, some references will be made to other Ṣūfī masters.

For Ibn al-‘Arabī and those who follow his school, love is one of the attributes by which man can gain some understanding of the Truth (God), but it is not any more important than other attributes.<sup>30</sup> In fact, Ibn al-‘Arabī considers the attribute of knowledge more exalted than the attribute of love:

Knowledge (*‘ilm*) is more exalted than love; for this reason God instructed His Prophet to seek from Him more knowledge. This is so because knowledge is the same as the divine guardianship (*al-Wilāya*) whereby God guards (*yatawallī Allāh*) His servants and ennoble them. Through knowledge the servants recognize that they cannot know Him. However, if the lover is not a gnostic he creates within himself (i.e., in his mind) an image whereby he becomes ecstatic and with which he falls in love. Therefore, he desires nothing except that which

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however, have sided with the candle claiming that it is the candle that burns and melts away in order to attract the moth whereby illustrating its love for the moth.

<sup>30</sup> In general, it is possible to find within Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings exceptions to some of the statements he makes on different themes. This appears to be true of the relative importance of love and knowledge as well. Overall, it could be said that he regards both these attributes highly, but gives precedence to the attribute of knowledge (that is rooted in religion) over the attribute of love.

is under his control. Nothing can remove him from this state except knowledge (true understanding).<sup>31</sup>

When explaining the concept of love and its relation to the Beloved and to the lovers, on several occasions Ibn al-‘Arabī quotes the tradition of the Hidden Treasure, perhaps in order to emphasize that love should be accompanied by knowledge or true understanding. Seeking divine love without the benefit of knowledge will lead to vain imagination or illusion (*wahm*).<sup>32</sup> Because of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s emphasis on the role of knowledge and its relation to love, it may appear that for him the concept of love belongs mostly to the field of theoretical or speculative discussion. This conclusion is not valid however; he is concerned with both theoretical discussion, and the experience and practice of love, as we will attempt to show later in this chapter.

Ibn al-‘Arabī makes it clear that in his view the knowledge that should accompany love is not merely the outcome of rational thinking, because this form of knowledge bars one from the love of God. Instead he is speaking of a type of knowledge that while relying on rational faculty, is rooted in religion:

By God, were it not for religion which brings divine glad tidings, no one would have recognized God. If we were to stay with the rational arguments that in the opinion of the rational thinkers lead to the knowledge of God’s Essence, debating that “He is not like this” or “He is not like that”, no creation would have ever loved Him. However, the voices of religions (*al-sharā’i*) brought the divine glad tidings saying that “He is like this” and “He is like that.” While these statements outwardly are contradictory to rational arguments, we came to love Him through such affirmative qualities.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> See Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, p. 661.

<sup>32</sup> For example, see *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, p. 322 and p. 333.

<sup>33</sup> See Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, p. 326.

Ibn al-‘Arabī goes on to say that God made it possible for us to love Him, and this would not have been possible if we were to rely solely on our rational faculty. Then he says this is the meaning of the tradition of the Hidden Treasure; God created the creatures and made Himself known to them. This happened because of God’s love, mercy, compassion, and kindness for us. We have come to know Him because His love provided the knowledge to us to know Him. We would not have known Him solely through our rational faculty.

Though Ibn al-‘Arabī speaks highly of the role of knowledge in relation to love, this should not be taken to imply that he thinks little of the attribute of love. Quite the contrary; he has written extensively about the importance of love. For example, Ibn al-‘Arabī devotes several chapters of his *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* to the discussion of love, the types of love, and so forth. He describes various dimensions of divine and human love, and analyzes several verses from the Qur’ān about the love of God for man. God loves man, hence He manifested His names and attributes to him. By virtue of having been given certain characteristics of God man is the only creature that can truly love God.<sup>34</sup>

In another place, Ibn al-‘Arabī speaks of the human heart as the chalice of love; just as a crystalline chalice can reflect the color of wine, the human heart can reflect the color (the degree of love) for the Beloved. Then he goes on to speak of the importance of the heart in relation to love because only the heart, not the reason, can truly reflect the love of God.<sup>35</sup>

For Rūmī and those that have followed his views, love is the essence of religion and the heart of all spirituality; it forms the central theme in their writings. Although they have filled many pages of books with the theme of love, the essence of their view is that love cannot be explained; it has to be experienced. Therefore, love is not a theoretical theme to be discussed and analyzed. No word or expression can adequately describe love. It is like

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<sup>34</sup> For example, see *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, pp. 320-362.

<sup>35</sup> See Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, pp. 113-114.

trying to describe the taste of honey to a person who has never partaken of it. At the same time, one cannot stop talking about love!

The world of creation was brought into being because of love, and its foundation is laid upon the love of God. As long as existence endures, the love of God will be the motivating force for it. All forms of creation, minerals, vegetation, animals, and humans, exist because of the cohesive force of love. If any other motive besides love were to be considered for creation it would imply some need on the part of the Creator, whereas by definition God is beyond all needs. To love for the sake of love itself does not imply any need. Hence for these Şūfīs love is the greatest of all Divine attributes, and that is one of the reasons they have quoted the tradition of the Hidden Treasure so often in their works.<sup>36</sup>

Every single internal and external movement and motion of every created thing is an attempt to seek the eternal Beloved from whom all creatures have become separated. Just as the motive for creation was love, so is the desire of the created to become united with Creator. The true seeker is engaged in an endless search for the love of God, yet he should be aware that his love for the Beloved can never equal that of the love of God for His creation. The precedence of “He shall love them” over “they shall love Him” mentioned in sūra *Mā'idah* of the Qur'ān<sup>37</sup> testifies to the supremacy of God's love.

Besides being the motive for creation, the love of God is like the soul for the whole of creation; therefore, every being, small or large, finds existence in the light of God's love. This is the meaning of the Qur'ānic

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<sup>36</sup> On numerous occasions Rūmī mentions God's love as the motivating force of creation, and the only motive that does not imply any need on the part of Creator for creating the world. Often he quotes the tradition of the Hidden treasure in support of his argument. For example, see his *Majālis-i Sab' ah*, in the introduction to *Mathnawī-yi Ma'nawī*, ed. M. Ramaḍānī, Tehran, Kulāla-yi Khāwar, 1319/1930, p. 28.

<sup>37</sup> This is a reference to the verse of the Qur'ān (5:54) that has been quoted by many Şūfīs in support of their belief about speculative mystical notions including the concept of love. It says: “... God will bring a people, He shall love them and they shall love Him...”

verse, “God is the light of the heavens and the earth”.<sup>38</sup> Just as in the physical domain all beings become visible when light shines upon them, in the mystical sense love of God bestows true meaning on all existence.

Although one may argue that the theme of love has a more central position in the thoughts and writings of Rūmī than it does in those of Ibn al-‘Arabī, for both of these Ṣūfī masters love is fundamental to understanding the relation of Divinity to the creation, and the means by which the servant can attain nearness to God. In fact, for Ibn al-‘Arabī the theme of love is very critical because it is related to the most important concept in his speculative mysticism, viz., the self-disclosure of Absolute Being. The whole concept of *wujūd* is based on the notion of the Divine self-disclosure, and the cause of self-disclosure, as Ibn al-‘Arabī repeatedly reminds us by mentioning the *ḥadīth* of the Hidden Treasure, is love.

It may be surprising to some to hear that the concept of love is not merely a theoretical or philosophical issue for Ibn al-‘Arabī; in fact he is very much a practitioner of love. On many occasions, whether in the form of poetry or prose, he has written about his experience with love, by which of course he means spiritual love. For example, we come across this statement of him in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*:

By God, I have so much love that if I were to expose it the heaven (*samā’*) would be rent asunder, the stars would be darkened (lose their light), and the mountains would pass away; this is my experience of love.<sup>39</sup>

Asides from *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, in other works of Ibn al-‘Arabī like *Tarjumān al-ashwāq*, *Diwān al-ma’ārif*, and *Tajalliyāt* we read about his numerous experiences of love.

Both Ibn al-‘Arabī and Rūmī have stated that the true form of love, on the part of man, is the love for God. Other forms of love in the physical

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<sup>38</sup> The Qur’ān, sūra of Light (24:35).

<sup>39</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, p. 346.



world are signs and symbols that should guide man to the divine love; otherwise love could become a veil preventing the servant from attaining nearness to the Beloved (God). On this point Ibn al-‘Arabī writes:

No one except God is loved among the existents. He is the One who is manifest in every beloved to the eye of every lover (*kullu muḥibbin*), and there is nothing in the world of existence except lover. In fact, the world in its entirety consists of lover and beloved; and all of this refers back to Him (God). Likewise, none is worshipped but Him because no servant worships anything except by imagining the divinity in it (*illā bi takhayyuli al-ulūhiyyat fīhi*). Otherwise, he (the servant) would not worship the thing. Hence God said: “And Thy Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him.”<sup>40</sup> The same is true of love; none loves anyone except his (own) Creator, though he is veiled from Him by love of Zaynab, and Su‘ad, and Hind, and Laylī, and the world, and money, and rank, and all that is loved in the world... The mystics (*‘ārifūn*) never hear a verse, or a riddle (*lughz*), or a praise (*madīḥa*), or a love poem (*ghazal*) except that God is in it, (even though) hidden behind the veil of forms (*khalf hijāb al-ṣuwar*).<sup>41</sup>

Rūmī in numerous works has emphasized the same concept. On one occasion he says:

All the hopes, desires, loves, and affections that people have for different things--fathers, mothers, friends, heavens, the earth, gardens, palaces, sciences, works, food, drink--the saint knows that these are desires for God and all those things are veils. When men leave this world and see the King without these veils, then they will know that all were veils and coverings, that the object of their desire was in reality that One Thing. All their difficulties will be solved, all the questions and

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<sup>40</sup> The Qur’ān, 17:23.

<sup>41</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, p. 326.

perplexities they had in their breasts will be answered. They will see all things face to face.<sup>42</sup>

There is no need to argue the emphasis that Rūmī places on experiencing and tasting love personally. But more research is needed to show that for Ibn al-‘Arabī the same holds true; even though he is known for his philosophical approach to the understanding of love, careful study of his writings reveal that he is very much concerned with personal experiencing of love. From his perspective love is an ever-present reality in the world, yet because it is reflected in various loci people may not realize that they fall in love with the Beloved’s reflections.

The role of knowledge is to guide people such that they realize they have fallen in love with the true Beloved through Its reflections, and not with the physical objects. For Ibn al-‘Arabī the most profound understanding of love does not occur merely on the intellectual level but through a combination of knowledge and personal experience and tasting of love.

Although love is one of the stages on the mystical path some mystics view the entire path and its many stages as various manifestations of love. The *adept* is not merely a seeker but in reality a lover enduring the pains of the path in order to attain to the true Beloved. In this path those who are focused on the *form* instead of *meaning* will not find their way to true love. So no amount of schooling will be useful to the seeker because love is like a pure mystical wine that can only be experienced by tasting and drinking, not by listening and studying.

‘Abdullāh Anṣārī, has written extensively on the theme of the love of God and its connection to the stages (*marātib*) and states (*aḥwāl*) of the mystical path that the wayfarer (*sālik*) traverses.<sup>43</sup> In the first stage of the

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<sup>42</sup> Rūmī, Jalāl al-Dīn, *Fīhi mā Fīhi*, edited. B. Furūzānfar, Tehran, Amīr Kabīr, 1348/1969, p. 35; translation from *The Ṣūfī Path of Love*, by W. Chittick, p. 201.

<sup>43</sup> For example, see ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī, *Muḥabbat Nāmih*, in *Majmū‘a-yi Rasā‘ili Fārsī-yi Khwāja ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī*, Vol. I, Intishārāt-i Ṭūs, Tehran, 1993, pp. 337-372.

path, which is the stage of search (*ṭalab*)<sup>44</sup>, the seeker is drawn as the result of *shawq* (longing). *Shawq* is a spark derived from divine love, which enraptures the seeker and aids him through the difficult stage of search. The stage is arduous because the seeker will experience many hardships without the possibility of being able to attain his Beloved in this valley. Nonetheless, the seeker does not give up and with great patience and fortitude meanders through the rocky valley of search, until as the result of his search he is guided to the next stage. In the next stage again love manifests itself in the form of a different state and aids the steadfast wayfarer through that difficult stage to the next. In short, love is a *stage* as well as a condition manifesting itself to the wayfarer in the form of different *states* in various *stages*.<sup>45</sup> Until finally, as the result of perseverance, aided by love and the hope of attaining the object of his quest, the *adept* arrives at the threshold of the true Beloved.

In closing this chapter it would be interesting to note that from the perspective of Ṣūfism only love could be considered as the motive for creation, because any other reason would have implied some logical inconsistency on the part of the Creator. By definition, God does not act out of any need because He is absolutely Self-Sufficient (*al-ghanī*). To say, for example, that God created the world in order to become Creator, is to say that there was a need to become Creator. However, when the motive for an act is love, it does not imply any need.<sup>46</sup> God loved to bring the creation into being, therefore He created existence. This is one of the reasons for the tradition of the Hidden Treasure being so popular among the Ṣūfīs; “God

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<sup>44</sup> In the Ṣūfī literature the number of stages on the mystical path has been recorded from seven to ten stages. However, if we consider *Ṣad Maydān* (Hundred Fields) of ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī as description of one hundred stages on the mystical path we could say that he has put the number of stages as one hundred. Aṭṭār in *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr* lists seven stages as *Search, Love, Knowledge, Contentment, Unity, Wonderment, and Poverty and Annihilation*.

<sup>45</sup> See ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī, *Muḥabbat Nāmih*, in *Majmū‘a-yi Rasā‘ili Fārsī-yi Khwāja ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī*, Vol. I, Intishārāt-i Ṭūs, Tehran, 1993, pp. 341-344.

<sup>46</sup> Al-Farghānī in *Muntahā al-madārik*, under the topic of love (*maḥabba*), discusses this idea of Self-Sufficiency of God and His absolute independence from creation; see pp. 19-20 and pp. 25-26.

loved to be known”, so the motive is love, and there is no discussion or implication of any need to be known.

## Chapter Six: The Concept of Creation

The third major theme expressed in the tradition of the Hidden Treasure is the concept of creation: “*fa khalaqtu*” (therefore, I created). In fact, the tradition of the Hidden Treasure reportedly was revealed in response to a question by Prophet David in relation to the concept of creation: “O Lord! Why didst Thou create the world?” In response the *ḥadīth* of the Hidden Treasure was uttered by God.

The concept of creation has been very important to the Islamic view of the world, and to the Ṣūfī view of existence. The act of creation belongs to God, and several passages in the Qur’ān emphasize this concept by describing God as *al-khāliq*, the Creator. In Islamic theology, the world is considered to be temporally created as the result of Divine creation, and this notion of temporality (*ḥudūth*) stands in opposition to the concept of pre-eternality (*qidam*) which is an attribute reserved for God.<sup>1</sup> From a Ṣūfī perspective, God created the world through love; since He never ceases to love, He never ceases to create.

From the perspective of Ibn al-‘Arabī, the concept of creation, like several other themes, is related to the concept of Being. As we have discussed before, for Ibn al-‘Arabī the real *wujūd* belongs only to the Absolute Being, because His Being is the same as His Essence (*wujūduhū ‘ayn dhātihī*). He concludes that the being of all other things is a loan from God, because their existence is not the same as their essence. In other words, they cannot be said to possess real being; for that reason, they are called *mumkināt* (possible entities). As long as God wishes to bestow existence on them they exist, otherwise, they reside in the category of non-existence or the state of *imkān* (possibility).

Ibn al-‘Arabī mentions that there are other stages in the process of creation before the actual physical creation takes place. First, we should

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion, see Izutsu’s *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts*, University of California Press, Berkeley, California, 1983, pp. 197-198.

point out that for him creation is another stage in the overall process of self-disclosure. Often Ibn al-‘Arabī uses the term *fayḍ* to refer to the process of creation, though this word has a broader connotation. So, to create is to make manifest, or to bring out an entity from its immutable non-existent state to a lower stage in the hierarchy of *tajallī*. As we had discussed before in this work, there are two stages associated with the notion of *fayḍ*. The first is the Most Holy Effusion (*al-fayḍ al-aqdas*); in this stage the Absolute Essence, which is the Real Being, manifests Itself to Itself in the form of *a’yān thābita*; this is existence in the Divine knowledge, which is called subsistence or *thubūt*.

For Ibn al-‘Arabī, this first disclosure of the Divine Essence is part of the process of creation. Although no external creation occurs at this stage, the potential or possibility for existence in the intelligible form becomes manifest; the term *Qābil*, and its plural *Qawābil*, are used by Ibn al-‘Arabī to refer to this potential for existence. So, in a sense, the immutable entities are the origin of creation even though they themselves are not existent in the external world. Each creature is created by God according to its *a’yn thābit*, and since the latter is eternally fixed, the actual creature is created according to a pre-existing pattern or model which exists in the knowledge of God. In other words, by “fashioning the creatures”, in the on-going process of creation, is meant the fashioning of the actual creatures (their substance), not their form or immutable entities that are fixed. Thus any invention occurs only at the level of physical creation, not at the level of *a’yān thābita*. On this issue Ibn al-‘Arabī says:

Clearly, He fashioned us (*awjadanā*) in the act (*bi al-fīl*) of creation, not that He fashioned our forms in Himself (*lā annahū ikhtara’a mithālanā fī nafsīhi*)... He fashioned us according to the immutable forms of us in His knowledge (*awjadanā ‘alā al-ṣūratī al-thābitati fī ‘ilmīhi binā*).<sup>2</sup>

Ibn al-‘Arabī gives a further explanation of this concept in chapter 325 of *al-Futūḥāt*. The gist of his point is that God brings forth the creatures from the state of non-existence to knowable existence. That which changes in this process is that each creature finds a unique actuality in the external

<sup>2</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. I, p. 91.

world. God's knowledge of the creatures does not change in this process, for He knows the creatures before their outward existence; but the creatures become differentiated from others by their physical entities.

The second stage of *fayḍ* is The Holy Effusion (*al-fayḍ al-muqaddas*). It represents the manifestation of the Divine names through the act of creation in the external world. Each entity brought into creation in the external world is the bearer of a Divine name. In the previous stage the self-disclosure consisted of the manifestation of names and attributes in the realm of Divine knowledge; in this stage those names and attributes are reflected in the loci of the cosmos and the entire creation. Ibn al-'Arabī says that the most perfect of all creation is man, who is capable of *ma'rifa*, knowing (or more appropriately striving to know) his Creator.<sup>3</sup>

The last stage in the process of creation is the physical appearance of creatures; this is done when the command word of God *kun* (Be!) is addressed to a *mumkin* entity.

At times Ibn al-'Arabī refers to the above mentioned three stages of creation with the term *thalāthiyya* (triplicity) or *tathlīth* (triple). For example, he offers the following comment:

Know, may God aid you, that the affair (*amr*) (i.e., creation) in itself is based on the singleness (*fardiyya*), but there is a triple structure (*tathlīth*) for this singleness. For the singleness starts to appear only from 'three' (*thalātha*).<sup>4</sup>

In the above passage, Ibn al-'Arabī uses the term *fardiyya* to refer to the Absolute Being, from which the process of creation begins. In the remainder of this section he delves into a mathematical discussion, trying to

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<sup>3</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī gives a description of the creation of man and the reason he is called *insān* in Arabic; he plays with the word *insān*, a derivative from *ins* (human), and relates it to the Arabic word *uns*, which means intimacy and friendship. He does this to show that man is the most perfect creation of God, and the best locus manifesting the Divine names in the external world. See *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, pp. 642-643.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, edited by A. 'Afīfī, Beirut, 1946, pp. 115-116.

explain how the One or Singleness projects Itself into many or multiplicity. The Absolute Being in the state of singleness or being “One” cannot bring about creation. In order for creation to take place there needs to be another being besides the One, like the cosmos, even though it would be in the state of immutable entity. But if these two beings exist in isolation from each other no creation can occur. So there needs to be a relationship between the One and the cosmos; the relationship is the third being in this process which Ibn al-‘Arabī discusses. This is what he means by triplicity in the structure of singleness. So in the process of creation, the triplicity would be composed of the *Creator*, the process or act of *creation*, and the *created* (the cosmos).

The Absolute Being in the state of singleness wanted to manifest Itself, thus the process of creation or self-disclosure was set in motion, which consisted of connecting the three entities in the triple structure of being. Even though at the ontological level of Absolute Essence no description or criterion can be imagined, Ibn al-‘Arabī considers a triple structure for the process of manifestation of Absolute Being when the issue of creation is discussed.

## Perpetual Creation and Renewal

In Ibn al-‘Arabī’s view, creation is a perpetual process of effusion. There are infinite numbers of *a’yān thābita*, and although they never change, the act of their manifestation, which gives rise to physical creation, is perpetual. At every moment the world of creation is renewed (*al-khalq al-jadīd*), and the cosmos is in a constant, never ending process of annihilation and re-creation. Therefore, we never experience the same created thing more than once because that thing (creature) is being renewed at every moment, although our faulty perception may lead us to think that we are seeing or experiencing the same thing continually.<sup>5</sup> By the term “annihilation” (*fanā*) in this context is meant that the creatures return to their state of non-existence which is their essence. The reason for this

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<sup>5</sup> For further discussion of the concept of perpetual creation by Ibn al-‘Arabī, see *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. III, pp. 452-453.



process of perpetual re-creation of the creatures is that being or existence is not a constant attribute of their essence but a state (*ḥāl*), which is not permanent. Moreover, there is no temporal aspect to this process of disappearance and re-appearance of creatures; God continually replaces their images with new ones, and therefore, God is continually the Creator.<sup>6</sup>

For Ibn al-‘Arabī the expression of *a’yān thābita* implies continual possibility (*imkān*). This means that there is no end to the process of the manifestation of the immutable entities; in becoming manifested (being created in the physical world) the *a’yān thābita* do not leave the state of immutability. Thus, the possibility of becoming manifested remains forever. Since the creatures do not have real being, only essence, possibility or *imkān* is their reality. God is continuously manifesting that possibility in the physical world, and so the process of creation continues forever.

The concept of creation, in the thought of Ibn al-‘Arabī, rests on the notion of the infinity of *mumkināt* (possible entities). *Imkān* (possibility) is a non-depletable source for creation. Ibn al-‘Arabī refers to it as the Treasury (*khizāna*) from which God continues to fashion the creation. While the individual forms in the state of *imkān* are infinite, in their manifest forms they are finite. He says:

Within the Treasuries there are the individuals of the various species (*ashkhāṣ al-anwā’*). These individuals are infinite, and that which is infinite does not enter into existence.<sup>7</sup> The possible things are infinite, and there cannot exist more than the infinite. However, the infinite does not enter into existence all at once; but it enters little by little, without any end to this process.<sup>8</sup>

To sum up the above concept, we can state that the creation is finite

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<sup>6</sup> For discussion of disappearance and re-appearance of creatures and images see Soaud Ḥakīm, “Unity of Being in Ibn al-‘Arabī - A Humanist Perspective”, *Journal of Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabī Society*, Vol. 36, 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. III, p. 361.

<sup>8</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, p. 482.

insofar as the external world is concerned. However, considered in terms of the possibility of various forms and entities, the creation is infinite because *a'yān thābita* are infinite.

## Ibn al-'Arabī and the Ash'arite Doctrine of Creation

It should be pointed out that in discussing the concept of creation, Ibn al-'Arabī adopts two approaches (or two modes of language) to address the issue. In most cases he uses the Ṣūfī language, and he presents creation as the necessary outcome of the process of self-disclosure. This is the approach that we have briefly discussed above. In a few other cases, Ibn al-'Arabī takes a philosophical approach and adopts the Muslim philosophers' terminology such as *jawāhir* (substances) and *a'rāḍ* (accidents) to discuss the process of creation. In the latter case he compares and contrasts his view of creation with views held by Ash'arite theologians, and by a group of philosophers called *Ḥisbāniyya*.<sup>9</sup> Although his own view has similarities to those of the Ash'arites and the Ḥisbanites, he criticizes both groups for their limited and incomplete view of creation.

Ibn al-'Arabī's idea of continuous creation is partly based on the Ash'arite doctrine; however, he makes certain changes to their view.<sup>10</sup> The major difference between his view and that of the Ash'arite theologians on

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<sup>9</sup> The *Ḥisbāniyya* were a group of philosophers in the third/ninth century that lived in some Islamic countries. They were followers of the Greek school of Skeptics (*Shakkākān*) and a certain philosopher by the name of Pheron. They believed in the existence of only physical entities, i.e., the things that could be perceived by senses, but denied the existence of any form of being beyond the physical entities (see *Lughat Nāmih Dihkhudā*, Vol 19, p. 47). They held the view that changes do occur in the forms (*ṣuwar*) of the physical entities, and in this sense Ibn al-'Arabī's view of constant change in creation agrees with theirs, but clearly he disagrees with them about their denial of realities or beings besides the physical realm. In the chapter on Shu'ayb in *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, Ibn al-'Arabī refers to the views of *Ḥisbāniyya* (see *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, p. 125). Dawūd Qayṣarī in his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* says that they were a group of philosophers influenced by the Greek school of philosophy called *al-Sūfastāiyya* (see *Sharḥ-i Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, edited by Āshtiyyānī, Tehran, 1996, p. 792).

<sup>10</sup> For further discussion of this issue refer to *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 97.

this issue is that the latter had considered the universe to be composed of substances (*jawāhir*) and accidents (*a'rāḍ*), and maintained that while the substances are constant, the accidents are in a continuous state of flux. Ibn al-'Arabī believes that both the substances and the accidents are continuously being created over and over again. This is so because he regards the substances as accidents also in respect to a higher ontological level--the realm of immutable entities.

In *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* he makes the following statement about the Ash'arite theologians:

They did not understand that the whole cosmos is a collection of accidents; hence it undergoes change (*tabaddul*) at every moment, the accident does not remain for two moments.<sup>11</sup>

Every possible thing, in Ibn al-'Arabī's view, has the power to emerge from the realm of non-existence and join the world of existence; for this to happen, however, the command of God, *kun* (Be!) must be addressed to it. The fine point that should be appreciated here is that although the possible things exist in the realm of non-existence, ontologically this non-existence is a relative concept; in other words, it does not mean complete and unconditional non-existence.

Another theme that Ibn al-'Arabī mentions in the context of creation is the concept of *nuzūl* (descent). This theme is analogous to the concept of self-disclosure; however, Ibn al-'Arabī mentions this in juxtaposition with the concept of *taraqqī* (ascent) of creatures. The process of ascent is the necessary counterpart of descent; in other words, every creature is on its path of ascent towards the source of creation. This is particularly true of man who has been blessed by God with the capability to know his Creator. In fact, the very purpose of his creation, according to the tradition of the Hidden Treasure, is to know his Creator. With regards to the process of ascent Ibn al-'Arabī says:

The most remarkable of all causes is that man is ascending

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<sup>11</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, edited by A. 'Afīfī, Beirut, 1946, p. 125.

perpetually (*fī al-taraqqī dā'iman*). However, he is not aware of this because of the extreme delicateness and fineness of the veil and the extreme similarity of the forms (*lā yash'aru bi-dhālika li liṭāfati al-ḥijāb wa diqqatihi wa tashābuhī al-ṣuwar*).<sup>12</sup>

Presumably, by *ḥijāb* and *tashābuhī al-ṣuwar* Ibn al-'Arabī is referring to the process of perpetual ascent (as a counterpart to the perpetual descent), that even though from one moment to another the entity is changing, man is being prevented, as though by a veil, from recognizing the change due to the extreme similarity in the successive forms of the entity.

In the process of *nuzūl* the Absolute is ever manifesting Itself through infinite possibilities of creation that act as the reflecting mirrors, each according to its capability. This constitutes the process of creation. On the other hand, each creature is continuously ascending (*taraqqī*) towards the Absolute; this is the inverse, but the necessary counterpart, of the process of creation.

While Ibn al-'Arabī offers many views about the concept of creation, he often points to the central idea that the purpose of creation is for man to come closer to God and to know Him. In fact he states that the creation of everything in the cosmos was for the sake of man, and man has been created for God, meaning to gain knowledge and understanding about God. For example, in chapter 146 of *al-Futūḥāt* he mentions two traditions about creation, one of which is the tradition of the Hidden Treasure:

In a Prophetic tradition (*khābar*) related from Moses it is said that God created the things for our sake and created us for His sake (*khalaqa al-ashyā' li ajlinā wa khalaqanā li ajlihi*)... And in a second tradition related from the Messenger of God, peace be upon him, it is said that God said, "I was a Hidden Treasure not known; so, I loved to be known. Therefore, I created the creation, and made myself known to them. So, they came to know me."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, edited by A. 'Afifī, Beirut, 1946, p. 124.

<sup>13</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, p. 232.

It is interesting that Najm al-Dīn Rāzī gives the title of “*On the Wisdom of the Creation of Cosmos and Man*” to the first chapter of his commentary on the tradition of the Hidden Treasure, a translation of which will be presented as Appendix I of this thesis.

# Chapter Seven: *Ma'rifa*, Knowledge and True Understanding

## *'Ilm and Ma'rifa*

The last major theme of the tradition of the Hidden Treasure that we will discuss is the concept of *ma'rifa*. The word *u'raf*, derived from the same root as *ma'rifa* occurs twice in the tradition of the Hidden Treasure: *fa-aḥbibtu an u'raf*, “I loved to be known”, and *li u'raf*, “that I might be known”. The word *ma'rifa* has been translated both as “knowledge” and as “gnosis” in English; in this study the term will be translated as “knowledge”, “experiential understanding” or “true understanding” based on the context, to emphasize that *ma'rifa* is more than a mere intellectual knowing of something. In the Islamic theological and mystical contexts it implies a precise experiential knowledge, derived from immediate apprehension of the thing known by the knower. It is a deeper and spiritual, form of understanding that comes through faith, inspiration, spiritual practice, or unveiling

Two terms have been used in the Islamic writings for knowledge: one is *'ilm* and the other is *ma'rifa*. Of the two terms only the word *'ilm* appears in the Qur'ān for knowledge; although the word *ma'rifa* does not occur, verbs derived from the same root occur frequently in the Qur'ān with the general sense of “recognizing”. The word *ma'rifa* appears to have been used more often than *'ilm* in the Sūfī writings. Although the two words have many common meanings, some dictionaries have made specific distinctions between them. For example, al-Tahānawī says that *ma'rifa* is used with respect to perceptions (*taṣawwurāt*), and *'ilm* is used with respect to confirmations (*taṣdīqāt*). In this sense, *taṣawwurāt* are considered to be a broader category of learning, and *taṣdīqāt* are more specific but a narrower range of understanding.<sup>1</sup> *'Ilm* is an attribute that is used for God, but *ma'rifa* is only used as an attribute for man; thus God is called *al-'Ālim*, but not *al-*

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<sup>1</sup> See al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf Iṣṭilāḥāt al-Funūn wa al-'Ulūm*, p. 1583.

‘*Ārif*.<sup>2</sup> The dictionaries of Ṣūfī terms offer numerous categories for *maʿrifa*, however, the classifications and definitions are not precise because they simply tend to quote statements from various Ṣūfī authors without clear distinction and systematic classification of words and concepts.<sup>3</sup>

It appears that the concept of *maʿrifa* was developed in contradistinction to *ilm* as early as the second century A.H. in the writings of Ibrāhīm b. Adham (d. 160/777). Margaret Smith makes the following statement about him:

His mystical teaching included the development of the ideas of meditation (*murāqaba*), of contrition (*kamad*), of the Divine friendship (*khulla*), and of gnosis (*maʿrifa*).<sup>4</sup>

It appears that as various Islamic sciences such as jurisprudence, Kalām, philosophy, history, and so forth were being developed in the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries, the Ṣūfīs felt the need to use another term for the pursuit of the knowledge of God which would distinguish the spiritual search from those of scientific and intellectual investigations.

Among the early Ṣūfīs, Dhū l-Nūn al-Miṣrī is credited with having offered a definition and classification for *maʿrifa*, and for associating a particular group of people with each type. He says that the *maʿrifa* of Oneness is associated with the common people; the *maʿrifa* of arguments belongs to the learned (*ulamā* and *ḥukamā*), and the *maʿrifa* of attributes of Divinity is pursued by the saints (*awliyā*).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See *Lughat Nāmih Dihkhudā*, Vol 45, p. 715.

<sup>3</sup> For examples, see *maʿrifa* and its classification in al-Tahānawī’s *Kashshāf Iṣṭilāḥāt al-Funūn wa al-ʿUlūm*, al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī’s *al-Taʿrīfāt*, and Dihkhudā’s *Lughat Nāmih Dihkhudā*.

<sup>4</sup> Margaret Smith, *Al-Muḥāsibī: An Early Mystic of Baghdad*, Islamic Book Foundation, Lahore, Pakistan, 1980, p. 73.

<sup>5</sup> Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*, M. Estelami, (ed.), Zavvār Publications, Tehran, 1999, pp. 150-151.

Hujwīrī in his *Kashf al-Mahjūb* also writes extensively on the topic of *ma'rifa*, offers a classification for it, and discusses at some length the cognitive (*'aqlī*) *ma'rifa* and the emotional (*ḥālī*) *ma'rifa*.<sup>6</sup>

Najm al-Dīn Rāzī gives a classification of various types of *ma'rifa* in *Mirṣād al-'Ibād*, and quotes the tradition of the Hidden Treasure repeatedly. In chapter two of section three of his book, he uses an analogy by saying that just as the purpose of the earth is to bring forth seeds and fruits, the purpose of human being is to attain the true understanding:

*Ma'rifa ḥaqīqī* (True understanding) is the *ma'rifa* of the essence and attributes of God, as it has been said, *fa-aḥbabtu an u'raf*, "I loved to be known". *Ma'rifa* is of three kinds: *ma'rifa 'aqlī* (intellectual understanding), *ma'rifa nazārī* (speculative understanding), and *ma'rifa shuhūdī* (understanding based on witnessing).<sup>7</sup>

He goes on to explain the characteristics and limitations of the first two types of *ma'rifa*, and concludes that the perfect form of *ma'rifa* is that of witnessing. Using a language full of allegories and metaphors he explains that this third type of *ma'rifa* belongs to the elite of the elite, *khāṣṣ al-khāṣṣ*, and it is the main reason that human soul is connected (*ta'alluq*) with the body; in other words, the purpose of the creation of man is to arrive at this type of understanding. Though it is difficult to understand precisely his description of *ma'rifa shuhūdī* because of his use of a highly allegorical language, in essence his notion of this type of understanding is similar to the unveiling or *kashf* often used by Ibn al-'Arabī. The vehicle or receptacle for *ma'rifa shuhūdī* is *qalb* (heart).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, pp. 341-342.

<sup>7</sup> Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, *Mirṣād al-'Ibād*, M. A. Rīyāḥī, (ed.), Tehran, Bungāh-i Tarjamih va Nashri Kitāb, 1973, p. 114.

<sup>8</sup> In Ṣūfī terminology, *qalb* is a reference to the spiritual heart which is one of the inner perception senses (*ḥawās bāṭinī*). It is capable of witnessing (*shuhūd*), and is one of the subtle organs of perception (*laṭāyif*).



Before we discuss the views of Ibn al-‘Arabī, it should be mentioned that although the Islamic theologians and Sūfīs before and after him have written about *ma‘rifa* (and for that matter about ‘*ilm*), his treatment of these two concepts, and in particular the proper balance that he assigns to them, are unique and of particular interest.

## Ibn al-‘Arabī on *Ma‘rifa*

For Ibn al-‘Arabī there is no higher attribute than that of knowledge. He has emphasized the importance of knowledge in several places. In *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* he refers to it as the greatest blessing:

There is no bounty (*ni‘ma*) greater than the bounty of knowledge, even though the bounties of God cannot be counted with regard to the causes that make them appear.<sup>9</sup>

On several occasions Ibn al-‘Arabī discusses the concept of knowledge, and compares and contrasts the two terms that have been used in the Islamic writings for knowledge: ‘*ilm* vs. *ma‘rifa*. With the exception of the concept of *wujūd* perhaps no other theme has been as central to the works of Ibn al-‘Arabī as knowledge (in both the senses of ‘*ilm* and *ma‘rifa*) as will be discussed in this chapter.

Ibn al-‘Arabī says that there are only two ways to knowledge of God open to man, and there is not a third path. The first is the path of *kashf*, unveiling; this is the method whose outcome is an inescapable and necessary knowledge. Man finds this outcome or knowledge, which cannot be rejected or discarded and is not in need of any proof, within himself. This is so because the proof of this form of knowledge lies within itself, and is immune to any form of doubt (*la yuqbalu ma‘ahu shubhatun*) or conjecture. The second is the path of thought and argumentation through logical reasoning. The knowledge gained through this method is inferior to the knowledge from the first path because it is prone to doubt (*shubha*); therefore it is less reliable, even though it requires a more rigorous effort.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, p. 620.

Ibn al-‘Arabī goes on to say that the confidence in the knowledge gained through the first path is due to the fact that this form of *ma‘rifa*, which is *shuhūdī*, is the result of *tajallī* from God; hence it is based on reality. On the other hand, the knowledge gleaned from the second method is based on *nazar*, which although it follows certain rules of logic and reasoning, is not completely reliable.<sup>10</sup>

Ibn al-‘Arabī says that the knowledge gained through witnessing belongs to *ahl al-Ḥaqq* (people of truth) or *ahl Allāh* (people of God), which constitutes true *ma‘rifa*. On several occasions Ibn al-‘Arabī mentions the themes that form the core subjects of true *ma‘rifa*; however on two occasions he gives a categorization and systematic definitions for the *ma‘rifa* of seven concepts.<sup>11</sup> These seven subjects, according to their rank or priority, are:

1. *Ma‘rifa* of Divine names: he further divides this *ma‘rifa* into four groups such as the *ma‘rifa* of names referring to the Divine Essence, the *ma‘rifa* of names referring to Divine attributes, and so forth. In turn each of the four groups is further classified in a cascading fashion. He also provides a table of eighty three names of God which are among the names mentioned in the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth*.
2. *Ma‘rifa* of *tajalliyāt* of God: we have discussed some of the aspects of this topic in the earlier chapters on the self-disclosure of God.
3. *Ma‘rifa* of utterance (*khiṭāb*) of God: this type of *ma‘rifa* is about the utterances of God addressed to His obligated servants (*‘ibād al-mukallaḥīn*), which are in the language of religious jurisprudence.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. I, pp. 319-320.

<sup>11</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. I, p. 34 and Vol. II, p. 299.

4. *Ma'rifa* of the perfection (*kamāl*) and imperfection (*naqṣ*) of *wujūd*: Ibn al-'Arabī says that perfection in the world of existence is relative, and the mere fact that each creature has a degree of imperfection (*naqṣ*) points to the overall perfection in the creation.
5. *Ma'rifa* of man with respect to the realities of his existence: man is the most noble (*ashraf*) of creatures, and if he were to understand himself he would understand his Lord.
6. *Ma'rifa* of the world of imagination (*khayāl*): this type of *ma'rifa* is about knowledge of four types of non-physical beings that belong to the realm of imagination. He lists them as archetypal being (*wujūd 'aynī*), mental being (*wujūd dhihnī*), those that exist in words (*wujūd fī al-alfāz*), and those which exist in numbers (*wujūd al-raqamī*).
7. *Ma'rifa* of sicknesses, and understanding of their cure.

In chapter 177 of *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, whose title is *Ma'rifa*<sup>12</sup>, Ibn al-'Arabī gives further classifications for each of the above, and offers an extensive description. It is in the context of this chapter that he discusses some of the fundamental themes of his philosophical mysticism like *wujūd*, Absolute Being, love, creation, and the *ma'rifa* of these concepts. He mentions the tradition of the Hidden Treasure in these pages and discusses the above themes with several references to it.

Of course, Ibn al-'Arabī's treatment of the concept of *ma'rifa* is not limited to the above seven groups; on numerous other occasions he talks about *ma'rifa* of other concepts, although not in the systematic form treated in the section of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* mentioned above.

Ibn al-'Arabī frequently quotes the prophetic saying, *man 'arafa nafsahu fa qad 'arafa rabbahu* (he who knows himself truly knows his

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<sup>12</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, pp. 297-320.

Lord). The Arabic word used in this saying for *knowing* is *'arafa* which is from the same root as *ma'rifa*. The sense is that true understanding of one's self, rather than academic learning or ordinary knowledge, leads to recognition of God. This is a difficult task because in order to know one's self one has to know his reality as a locus for *tajallī* of God; however, God's self-disclosure in the universe, including man, is never the same from one moment to another. So the process of the recognition of God is a never ending one. For Ibn al-'Arabī the acquisition of knowledge about God is made possible through *ma'rifa* of His self-disclosures, not His Essence for attaining the understanding of which we have no path. And since His self-disclosures are infinite we can only gain a relative or measured *ma'rifa* of God. On this topic Ibn al-'Arabī says:

There is no manifestation of God to His creatures except in form (*ṣūra*), and His forms in each *tajallī* are diverse, since there is no repetition in His form. God does not manifest twice in the same form, nor does He manifest in the same form to two different people.<sup>13</sup>

He goes on to explain that since our understanding of God is dependent on the knowledge of His form (where self-disclosure takes place), and the forms are infinite, we can only acquire a relative knowledge of the Real. True mystics (*'arifūn*) are those who gain knowledge of both self and God.

The two concepts of *tanzīh* (transcendence) and *tashbīh* (immanence) are closely related to, and are fundamental to, Ibn al-'Arabī's view of *ma'rifa* of God. These two themes are simultaneously true, and should be understood by the seeker of the knowledge of God. Since the Essence of God is incomprehensible and unknowable it is utterly transcendent and incomparable; at the same time, since the Essence has infinite relationships with everything else, He is present everywhere, and can be perceived in terms of those relationships. The more the seeker uses his rational faculty the more he understands the incomparability of God. On the other hand, the more he relies on the gift of imagination and witnessing, the more he

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<sup>13</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. IV, p. 19.

recognizes the immanence and similarity of God through His self-disclosure. For Ibn al-‘Arabī both modes of understanding are important; however, it is through the latter that *ma‘rifa* is made possible.

A concept closely related to the themes of *tanzīh* and *tashbīh* is “Knowing God through God”. This concept was not originated by Ibn al-‘Arabī but he refers to it on several occasions. The idea is that God cannot be known through any human faculty, hence He is incomprehensible. The Ṣūfīs attest to His presence through the relationships, meaning manifestations of His Names and Attributes. In this sense God is known through *ma‘rifa* of His relationships with the creatures, not through any faculty such as human intellect.

When the mystics (*‘ārifūn*) recognize Him through Him, they become distinguished from those who recognize Him through their own speculative consideration (*naẓar*); this is so because they possess unlimited (*iṭlāq*) vision, while others are restricted. Through Him, the *‘ārifūn* see (*yashhadū*) Him in everything or in the essence (*‘ayn*) of each thing, whereas those who recognize Him through speculative consideration are distant from Him by a distance commensurate with the requirements of His transcendence and incomparability.<sup>14</sup>

Al-Farghānī has also commented on the notion of “Knowing God through God Himself.” In his commentary on the tradition of the Hidden Treasure, he mentions that *ma‘rifa* of the mystery of the Real Being can be attained only through the self-disclosure of the Real; hence there is no other way available for true understanding of the Divine Being except through His *tajallī* in the loci of His manifestation. This is what is referred to as “Knowing God through God Himself.”<sup>15</sup>

If we were to consider the concept of *ma‘rifa* in relation to the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. III, p. 410.

<sup>15</sup> Al-Farghānī, *Muntahā al-madārik*, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1971, Vol. I, pp. 19-20.

ontological scheme of being, it should be noted that according to Ibn al-‘Arabī, neither the Divine Essence nor the relation between that and *a’yān thābita* can be understood, even by the most perfect Ṣūfī. At best, one can gain some understanding of the *a’yān thābita* insofar as their relation is connected to the lower beings in the ontological scheme, but nothing above that level is accessible to human *ma’rifā*. While man cannot know the Essence of God, he is the perfect mirror in which the *tajallī* of God takes place; in this sense, from the perspective of Ibn al-‘Arabī, God knows Himself through the perfect *‘arif*. According to the tradition of the Hidden Treasure, the purpose of creation is for God to be known; this occurs through the process of self-disclosure of God in various loci, the most perfect of which is man. We recall from the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* that Ibn al-‘Arabī says God wanted to behold the essences of His most beautiful names, i.e., to behold His own essence, in an inclusive entity encompassing the whole Command, because beholding of the thing, itself by itself, is not the same as beholding it in something else, as if it were a mirror for it.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, through the manifestation in His most perfect mirror, God knows Himself.

So for Ibn al-‘Arabī the *ma’rifā* of God is limited to the *ma’rifā* of those relationships below the level of *a’yān thābita*. However, for the seeker to attain to this level of *ma’rifā*, Ibn al-‘Arabī discusses some requirements. First of all, effort alone can only take man so far in the arena of *ma’rifā*. True understanding would only be possible through a series of unveilings or witnessing; for this to happen, God must open the door of true knowledge to him. It is in this sense that Ibn al-‘Arabī uses the title to his massive book, *al-Futūḥāt*, “The Openings”, which in essence are a set of unveilings and witnessings to assist the seeker in acquiring true understanding. He makes the following statement on this theme:

When the seeker (*ṭālib*) clings to the retreat and the mention of God’s name (*lazima al-khalwata wa al-dhikr*), and empties the location (*al-maḥall*) [i.e., his heart] of the thoughts, and sits like unto a poor (*qa’ada faqīran*), without possessing anything, at the door of his Lord, then God will shower blessings upon

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<sup>16</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, Abū al-‘Alā’ al-‘Afīfī, (ed.), Cairo, Dār Iḥyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabīyyah, p. 48.

him, and grant him a gift of Him, the divine mysteries, and the Lordly sciences, by which he can praise God.<sup>17</sup>

It is interesting to note that here Ibn al-‘Arabī refers to heart as the center where God manifests the knowledge of His being to man. We recall that Najm al-Dīn Rāzī also had mentioned *qalb* as the locus of *ma‘rifa shuhūdī*, as have done many other Ṣūfī writers.

Another requirement that Ibn al-‘Arabī mentions for the seeker, if he wants to attain to the realization of true understanding, is the acquisition of discernment (*tamyīz*). This is necessary for man in order to grow spiritually towards perfection:

As the man grows in degrees of perfection, God gives him discernment in affairs, and bestows upon him understanding through the realities.<sup>18</sup>

What we have discussed so far is not meant to suggest that Ibn al-‘Arabī does not value *‘ilm*. On the contrary, he places great emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge gained through education and intellectual study. Also, in studying Ibn al-‘Arabī we have to note that he uses knowledge (*‘ilm*) to refer to at least two concepts. Sometimes he refers to such studies as philosophy, jurisprudence, logic and reasoning, and other branches of science as knowledge. At other times, by *‘ilm* he means the pure form of knowledge which belongs only to the realm of God in the state of non-disclosure. When this latter form of knowledge is manifested to man, and it is put to spiritual practice, it leads to *ma‘rifa*.<sup>19</sup>

To sum up, we can say that on the one hand God is beyond human comprehension, and the only attitude on the part of man is to remain as a silent servant. On the other hand, since God has disclosed Himself through relationships (*a‘yān thābita*, names, attributes, and so forth), Ibn al-‘Arabī

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<sup>17</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. I, p. 31.

<sup>18</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, p. 525.

<sup>19</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, p. 533 and pp. 318-319.

sees two modes of understanding God. One mode is to understand that God has disclosed His incomparability; the faculty for this mode of understanding is reason or intellect. Man can discern God's transcendence and incomprehensibility through the rational faculty. However, this mode provides a more limited knowledge of God. The other mode, which he calls 'imagination', affirms God's similarity through unveiling and witnessing. Of course, the similarity is understood only in terms of His relationships to the cosmos and man, not insofar as His Essence is concerned.

Although Ibn al-'Arabī uses different terms and concepts such as *kashf*, *'ilm*, *ma'rifa*, and so forth in discussing the acquisition of knowledge of God, he frequently states that the true knowledge of God can only be acquired through the self-disclosure of God, and never His Essence. On one occasion he says:

Indeed nothing can stand up to the Truth, *al-Ḥaqq*, insofar as His Essence and His *wujūd* are concerned. His Essence cannot be desired or sought. That which the seeker can seek or the desirer can desire is only the *ma'rifa* of Him, or the witnessing of Him, or the vision of Him; all of these are from Him, but they are not He Himself.<sup>20</sup>

Although we can never understand God's Essence, the door to the understanding of His self-disclosure is open to all. Indeed this is the only type of knowledge and understanding that is accessible to man, and for Ibn al-'Arabī and those who follow his school, this is the meaning of "knowing God" mentioned in the tradition of the Hidden Treasure.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, p. 663.



# Conclusion

The popularity of the Tradition of the Hidden Treasure in Ṣūfī writings is due to the range of themes mentioned in this *ḥadīth*. No other tradition, doctrine, or concept can be found within the field of speculative mysticism that addresses such a wide array of themes as fundamental as existence, the Absolute Being, Immutable Entities, divine names and attributes, the self-disclosures of the Absolute, love, creation, knowledge and *maʿrifa*, and several others. This tradition does not appear in any of the canonical collections of *Sunnī* or *Shīʿī ḥadīth*, and its authenticity has been challenged by *ḥadīth* scholars (*muḥaddithūn*). But this does not diminish its influence on the development of Ṣūfī thought.

Though not seen in Ṣūfī writings prior to the latter part of the 5<sup>th</sup>/12th century when for the first time ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī mentioned it in *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, it has been widely used after that time by many Ṣūfī authors. Both Ibn al-‘Arabī and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī quoted this tradition on numerous occasions, and naturally many Ṣūfī authors who have been influenced by these two Ṣūfī masters, have referred to it repeatedly.

No Ṣūfī author has quoted this tradition more often than Ibn al-‘Arabī; this set the stage for his students and those influenced by his school to also refer to this *ḥadīth* in different contexts.

The hierarchical concept of *wujūd* is the most fundamental theme in the mystical school of Ibn al-‘Arabī. At the highest ontological level this theme is referred to by the concept of the Hidden Treasure mentioned in this *ḥadīth*; this is the realm of pure essence known as the station of *aḥadiyya*. The reality at this level is pure existence, and is too sanctified to be qualified by determination or any name and attribute. Since no name can be used in the state of pure essence, Ibn al-‘Arabī often uses the term *al-Ḥaqq* to refer to the Absolute essence. The Absolute Being is humanly inconceivable. Man cannot conceive of something without giving it some determination or qualification. That is why the Absolute in that level of absoluteness remains a mystery; Ibn al-‘Arabī calls it *ankar al-nakirāt*, the most indeterminate of all determinates.

But the Absolute Being desired to reveal Itself; this led to the appearance of the names and attributes which is called the station of *wāḥidiyya* in the ontological scheme. This is the beginning of the process of the self-disclosure of the Absolute Being. The names and attributes were not completely *ma'dūm* but had subsistence as *a'yān thābita* in the knowledge of God. The concept of *a'yān thābita* is the critical theme that explains the relationship of the existents (*mawjūdāt*), insofar as their coming into creation is concerned, to the Absolute Being.

One of the difficult questions in theology, philosophy, and Ṣūfism is about time and creation, i.e., the point in time when creatures were brought into existence. If it is said that the creatures did not exist at some point in time then the attribute of God as the Creator before any creation took place would be subject to question. And if it is held that the existents were *uncreate*, meaning they have always existed, then the story of creation would be contradicted. Ibn al-'Arabī employed the concept of *a'yān thābita* to resolve this puzzling question. He says that the creation existed in the form of Intelligible Archetypes in the knowledge of God. In other words, all creatures had existence much like mental images in the Divine knowledge, but they did not exist externally. The term *'ayn thābit* is used by Ibn al-'Arabī to distinguish the mental images from external beings. Therefore, the word *thābit* refers to something which exists in the form of knowledge but does not have physical existence.

In the ontological scheme, *a'yān thābita* are intermediary states between the Absolute Being and physical creatures. Given their intermediate nature they perform active and passive roles with respect to the lower and higher stages. They have a passive function with respect to the Absolute Essence in that they are the recipients of the existent beings in *potentia*. They have an active role with regard to the lower stages in the ontological scheme in that they are the forms which define the self-disclosures in the physical world. Since the number of immutable entities is infinite there are infinite forms for *tajallī* of the Absolute in the physical world.

Through the processes of self-disclosures known as *al-fayḍ al-aqdas*

and *al-fayḍ al-muqaddas*, the names and attributes which had appeared as separate realities from the realm of Essence give rise to the appearance of external creation. The process of self-disclosure has symbolically been expressed by Ibn al-‘Arabī as breathing out of the Merciful (*al-naḥās al-Raḥmānī*). It is interesting to note that Ibn al-‘Arabī sees close relationships between the Absolute Being and everything in the world of creation in that the Absolute makes *tajallī* at various ontological levels, and at each level manifests Itself according to the capabilities of creation, which are the loci of manifestation at that level.

While the school of Ibn al-‘Arabī is not known principally as a Ṣūfī school for practice of love, a close study of his writings shows that he was both a theoretician and a practitioner of love. In this sense further study of his writings is needed.

The Hidden Treasure loved to be known. This desire within the Absolute Essence necessitated the breathing out of the Merciful (*al-naḥās al-Raḥmānī*) the infinite things that had subsistence but no existence at that level. Thus, love was the cause for manifesting the infinite things, i.e., it was the motive for creation. Love is also the force that holds the universe together. It is the only attribute which does not imply any need on the part of the Creator for creation of the world. Love played the key role between the immutable entities and *wujūd*. God is beautiful (*al-Jamīl*), and He also loves beauty. It follows that God was in love with His own beauty; however, He desired to see His beauty in something other than Himself. Therefore, He created the cosmos and all the creatures as the loci of His manifestation. Hence, love and beauty have a primordial relationship prior to actual creation. The movement from non-existence to existence is the movement of love, bringing out the Hidden Treasure from the state of pure Essence to the stage of disclosure and external creation.

The concept of creation is also related to the concept of being. The real existence belongs to the Absolute Being; this is so because the *wujūd* and Essence of the Absolute Being are one and the same. As for the others, their existence is not real but a loan from God because their existence is not the same as their essence. Hence they are called *mumkināt* or possible things.

There are several stages in the process of creation before the physical creation takes place. Creation is the process of making manifest or *tajallī* from God. There are various stages of self-disclosure of God, and all of them are considered as part of the process of creation. Ibn al-‘Arabī uses the term *faḡḡ* to refer to the concept of self-disclosure when the context or theme of discussion is creation.

Ibn al-‘Arabī sees creation as a perpetual process. Everything is constantly being created anew, and nothing in the external world stays the same from one moment to another. Creation fits into the ontological scheme of being in that it is one of the stages of *tajallī* of the Absolute. That creation is being renewed constantly means that the Absolute is perpetually manifesting Itself in infinite possible things. Therefore, the self-disclosure of the Absolute is also perpetual and infinite in form.

While the motive for creation is love, the purpose of creation is *ma‘rifa* of God. The *ma‘rifa* of the Essence of God is impossible, but the seeker can attain the understanding of His names and attributes. God’s attribute of transcendence (*tanzīh*) refers to the fact that His Essence is completely beyond our understanding; on the other hand, His attribute of immanence (*tashbīh*) alludes to the possibility of understanding Divine names and attributes. Therefore, the knowledge mentioned in the tradition of the Hidden Treasure is the *ma‘rifa* of attributes not the Essence.

Some Ṣūfīs have stated that we can only know God through God. This means that we cannot understand God by ourselves unless He makes Himself manifest to us through His manifestations. It follows that we can learn about the names and attributes when self-disclosures occur. Not only we cannot understand the Essence of God, even the knowledge of *a‘yān thābita* is not open to us. We can only understand those relationships that are below the ontological level of *a‘yān thābita*.

The seeker must prepare himself in order to attain the point where the *ma‘rifa* of self-disclosures of God is possible. In a sense, the various chapters of *al-Futūḡāt* of Ibn al-‘Arabī are the doors or “The Openings” that open the door of true knowledge and assist the seeker to attain *ma‘rifa*. *‘Ilm*

and *ma'rifa* are not contradictory concepts but complementary faculties for man to attain the understanding of the self-disclosures of God.

# Appendix I

## Translation of Najm al-Dīn Rāzī's Commentary on the Tradition of the Hidden Treasure

The following is a translation of a portion of chapter one of *Marmūzāt-i-Asadī dar Mazmūrāt-i-Dāwūdī*<sup>1</sup> by Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, a Persian Ṣūfī text of the 7<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century. It is an example of the use of the tradition of the Hidden Treasure in Ṣūfī writings during the formative period of Islamic speculative mysticism.

### The First *Marmūz* (Secret): On the Wisdom of Creation of the Cosmos and Man

David, may peace be upon him, said: "O my Lord! Why didst Thou create the creation?" God said: "I was a Hidden Treasure; I loved to be known, so I created creation that I might be known." The Creator of the world and the Sustainer of the children of Adam, glorified be His might and exalted be His word, in response to David's question, may peace be upon Him, uttered these eight words which are the keys to the doors of the eight paradises, nay rather, within these allusions are contained all the perfections of those attaining degrees of nearness [to God] and the stations of those endowed with miraculous acts.

### The First Word

He said: "*Kuntu*," meaning "I was." This word refers to the mode of being of the Divine Essence which is neither preceded by a reference to the beginning nor followed by an end, because the Arabic verb *Kāna* refers to the past, present, and

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<sup>1</sup> Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, *Marmūzāt-i-Asadī dar Mazmūrāt-i-Dāwūdī*, edited by M. R. Shafī'i Kadkanī, Chāpkhānih-i-Dāneshgāh-i Tehran, Tehran, 1973, pp. 12-16.

future. Unlike other verbs, *Kāna* thus means “it was”, “it is”, and “it will be.” No other verb in the form of the past tense has this characteristic of having present and future meaning. Therefore, the word *kuntu* implies that “I always was, I am, and I will be”; there is neither a beginning for my first-ness, nor an end for my last-hood. He is the first without beginning and the last without ending.

The Prophet Muhammad’s allusion and indication, upon him be the most generous praise and the most perfect greetings, points to this meaning when he said: “God was and nothing else was with Him.”<sup>2</sup> Devotees of form think that this allusion is a reference to pre-eternity in the sense of the past, i.e., before creation had come into existence. But, those aware of the [innermost] truth, who possess insight capable of seeing pre-eternity and post-eternity, in this expression find pre- and post-eternity to be of the same color, and regard this expression as having both past and present meaning. Those whose gaze is fixed on the form are the intellectuals stained by the maladies of sense perception and are incapable of understanding these realities. The sight of each heart that is covered by the veils of desires cannot discover this mystery. God, exalted be He, inspired David, may peace be upon him, saying: “O’ David, admonish and warn your people of passionate desires because hearts that are attached to passionate desires are veiled from me.”

### The Second Word

He said: “*Kanzan*,” meaning “I was a treasure.” This is a reference to the attributes of Lordship. It is described as a treasure for three reasons. First, treasure is a cause of making manifest. Second, treasure is the means for meeting every need and the attainment of every goal and objective. Third, treasure is the provision for self-sufficiency and viewing oneself free of

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<sup>2</sup> See the section “Only God Existed” in Chapter Three for references to this *ḥadīth*.

need, and the capital needed for generosity.

In truth, the making manifest of being of the beings is by means of the attribute of the existence of God; subsistence, fulfillment of needs, and attainment of goals and hidden objectives (*maṭālib maknūnāt*)<sup>3</sup> are made possible by Him. Self-sufficiency, viewing oneself free of need, and absolute generosity derive from the divine attribute of the One Who is Self-Subsistent, and by means of Whom all others subsist. God Almighty subsists through His own Essence, and the entire creation subsists through that attribute. His Essence is exalted above all needs, and all else is needy of Him. “Therefore, glory be to Him in Whose hand is the kingdom of all things, and to Him you shall be brought back.”<sup>4</sup>

### The Third Word

He said: “*Makhfiyyan*”, meaning “I was a Hidden (Treasure).” This is a reference to the attribute of God, the *Inward* (al-Bāṭin), as it is said: “He is the *Inward*.”<sup>5</sup> He manifested all the varieties of creation and ranks of being that were previously hidden, and yet He Himself remains the *Inward*, since no change has access to His *inwardness*. In that *inwardness* He is also *Outward* (al-Zāhir), as it is said: “He is the *Outward*.”<sup>6</sup> His *outwardness* is not contrary to His *inwardness*, and the non-being of created beings did not constitute an imperfection to His *outwardness*. Neither did bringing creation into being and making it manifest add any perfection to His *outwardness*.  
Poem:

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<sup>3</sup> It is possible that actual word is *mukawwanāt* not *maknūnāt*, as the word *mukawwanāt* occurs also in the section titled *The Eighth Word* as we will see later in this appendix.

<sup>4</sup> The Qur’ān: (83:36).

<sup>5</sup> The Qur’ān: (3:57).

<sup>6</sup> The Qur’ān: (3:57).



Indeed You manifested Yourself and so You are not concealed  
from any one,  
Except to the blind who cannot even see the moon

But You concealed Yourself, veiled by what You made  
manifest,  
How can the One, knowledge of Whom is a veil, ever be  
known?

### The Fourth Word

He said: “*fa-ahbattu*”, meaning “therefore, I loved.” This is a  
reference to the divine attribute of being the lover and the  
beloved. God is both the lover and the beloved as He loves and  
is loved. The Qur’ānic words “He loves them and they love  
Him”<sup>7</sup> arise from this attribute of loving and being loved. He,  
Almighty, is both lover of Himself and His own beloved; He is  
the prey as well as the hunter. Poem:

In the sorrow of love we are our own companion  
Bewildered and mystified are we in our own cause

Afflicted are we with the sadness of our own life  
Hunters are we yet we are our own preys.

The Qur’ānic expression, “He loves them and they love Him”  
means that He loves them so that they will love Him because  
He loves Himself and loves the one who loves Him. This is not  
because they are deserving of His love, rather He is the only  
One Who deserves to be loved. Therefore, He loves them so  
they may become worthy of love. For this reason He said:  
“Therefore, I loved to be known.”

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<sup>7</sup> The Qur’ān: (59:5).

Poem by Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya:

Two ways I love Thee: selfishly,  
And next, as worthy is of Thee.

Not mine the praise in that or this;  
Thine is the praise in both, I wis.

'Tis selfish love that I do naught  
Save think on Thee with every thought.

'Tis purest love when Thou dost raise  
The veil to my adoring gaze.<sup>8</sup>

### The Fifth Word

He said: “*an u’raf*”, meaning “that they might know Me.” This is an indication of making correct and firm knowledge (*ma’rifa*) of the Essence and attributes of God. Further, it describes His belovedness as the necessary condition for His *ma’rifa*. Gaining the degree of belovedness is proportional to one’s *ma’rifa*. The higher the station of knowledge, the more perfect the degree of belovedness. Likewise, the progress in the station of lover is proportional to the extent of the lover’s *ma’rifa* of the beloved. *Ma’rifa* is the result of love, just as love is the result of *ma’rifa*. This is a great mystery, not every one can fathom it. Poem:

The Compassionate One has a secret which He confides,  
To those worthy of it in secret; and such secret confiding is  
most beautiful.

### The Sixth Word

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<sup>8</sup> Translation is taken from A.J. Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam*, Unwin Brothers LTD, London, 1969, p. 43.

He said: “*fa-khalaqtu*”, meaning “so I created.” This is an indication of the creation and origination of created beings and existents, including both spiritual and corporeal by means of the attribute Originator (*Mubdi’i*). He created them without need for matter or substance, with no assistant or aide, helper or partner, through His will and volition rather than pre-determination and necessity, as materialistic philosophers would claim, for “God is greatly exalted above that which the unjust say.”

### The Seventh Word

He said: “*al-khalq*”, meaning “human beings.” *Khalq* is a generic name for human beings, and a collective noun, just like *insān* and *nās*, with both singular and plural meanings, as is said in the Divine Book: “Nay - who is it that creates (all humans) in the first instance, and then brings it forth anew?”<sup>9</sup>

By the word *khalq* He intended none other besides human beings, because resurrection is only true for human being. The prophetic allusion is to this meaning when he said: “Truly God created the creation in darkness; then He cast His light upon them.” In this passage also He intended only human beings, because no other created being, from angel and firmament and others besides them, is capable of being the bearers scattering (*maḥāmil rashāsh*) the light of God. It was for this reason that none except human beings became the bearer of the burdens of the load of the Trust, as is said: “Yet man took it up.”<sup>10</sup> At the same time, this allusion is a great glad tiding (*bishārat*) for human beings who became the manifestation of the essence and the revealer of the divine attributes. Therefore, from among the entire existent beings *ma’rifa* was bestowed upon him, as is said: “therefore I created the creation so that I might be

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<sup>9</sup> The Qur’ān: (65:27).

<sup>10</sup> The Qur’ān: (72:33).

known.”

### The Eighth Word

He said: “*li u’raf*”, which means “So that I might be known.” This word is the key to the door of the highest paradise, nay it is the gatekeeper (*ḥājib*) of prophets and saints, and the commander granting permission for attainment to the threshold of Divinity. However, this is not a degree for the people of arrogance and hypocrisy. Poem:

Not every beautiful one can bring her boat to this stage.

This is an allusion to the fact that the mystery behind the creation of the created beings and the wisdom of formation of existent beings (*mukawwanāt*) was the *ma’rifa* of the essence (*dhāt*) of God. The quintessence of created beings became capable recipients of this felicity since they are the bearers of the burdens of the load of the Trust. The distinguished ones in this group and highest among them were the special ones of the world of servitude, the prophets and the saints, as is said: “And I have not created *jinn* and men to any other end than that they may worship Me”<sup>11</sup>, meaning “so that they may recognize Me.” Poem:

From non-existence love was created for my sake,  
I was the object of love in the world

I will not separate from you just as fragrance does not from incense,  
Not in a year, a month, a day, or a night in spite of the envier.

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<sup>11</sup> The Qur’ān: (56:51).

## Appendix II

### Translation of al-Aḥsā'ī's Commentary on the Tradition of the Hidden Treasure

The following is a translation of a short section of *Sharḥ al-Ziyāra al-Jāmi'a al-Kabīra*<sup>1</sup> of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī (d. 1242/1826) containing a commentary on the tradition of the Hidden Treasure.<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that Shaykh Aḥmad's comments on this *ḥadīth* are not all in one section of the book but scattered in various places. On one occasion he comments extensively on the theme of love (*maḥabba*), defines various types of love, and quotes the tradition of the Hidden Treasure saying that it is the cause of the creation (*al-maḥabba 'illat al-khalq*).<sup>3</sup>

In the section that is translated here, he addresses the other themes of this *ḥadīth* besides love.

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<sup>1</sup> See Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī, *Sharḥ al-Ziyāra al-Jāmi'a al-Kabīra*, Dar-al-Mufīd, Beirut, 1999, Vol. IV, pp. 205-206. This book is Shaykh Ahmad's longest and most complex writing. There are several "visitations" that are read during pilgrimage to the grave of the Prophet, his daughter Fāṭimah, or one of the Shī'ī Imāms. These visitations are also read by non-pilgrims who desire to communicate with these holy personages. This particular visitation text, *Al-Ziyāra al-Jāmi'a al-Kabīra* (The Comprehensive Grand Visitation) composed by the tenth Imām of the Shī'a, 'Alī al-Hādī also known as 'Alī an-Naqī (d. 253/868), was addressed to Mūsā Ibn 'Abdullāh Nakha'ī who asked the Imām to teach him how to pay proper respect and homage when visiting some of the holy shrines. Shaykh Ahmad's commentary is on this visitation text by Imām 'Alī al-Hādī. For details, see *Sharḥ al-Ziyāra al-Jāmi'a al-Kabīra*, Vol. I, pp. 5-7.

<sup>2</sup> Although Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī was critical of the Ṣūfis, he was fond of the tradition of the Hidden Treasure, and on numerous occasions he quoted this *ḥadīth* in his writings.

<sup>3</sup> See *Sharḥ al-Ziyāra al-Jāmi'a al-Kabīra*, Vol. I, pp. 201-203.

God, the Exalted, said: “I was a Hidden Treasure; I loved to be known, therefore I created the creation in order to be known.” So God the Exalted alluded to three degrees (*rutab*).

The First is the station of the Hidden Treasure (*maqām al-kanz al-makhfī*), and that is the station of the pure Essence (*al-dhāt al-baḥt*), which has been expressed as that which is without determination (*lā ta’ayyun*). And He can be known (*yu’rafu*) by means of the fashioning (*ṣun’*) by which He has described Himself; and that is the attribute of deduction (*ṣifat istidlāl*) for Him, not an attribute that discloses Him. And there is no path for anyone in the creation toward Him except through that, even though the degrees of description of His Being for His creation vary with infinite diversity based on quantity (*al-kam*), quality (*al-kayf*), and number (*al-‘adad*). And this is the highest degree of mystery (*a’lā marātib al-sirr*) which He safeguards; He, sanctified by His name, does not deviate (*lā yataḥawwalu*) from this condition (*al-ḥāl*). And He reveals only to whomever He desires and whatever He desires to reveal from His signs (*āyātihi*).

The second is the station of “and I loved to be known” (*fa-aḥbabbtu an u’raf*), and this is the station of His volition (*mashiyyatihi*), and His will (*irādatihi*), and His innovation (*ibdā’ihi*), and His act (*fi’lihi*), and that is the preponderant being (*al-wujūd al-rājih*) for which there is no beginning in the [world of] possibility (*al-imbkān*). God, the Exalted, created it through itself and made it subsist through itself (*aqāmahu bi-nafsihi*). And in the prayer that says “and by your Name which resides in Your shadow so that it does not leave You for other than You”, that is His name, may it be exalted. And that is the shadow in which He made it subsist, meaning made it subsist through itself.

The third is the station of “therefore I created the creation in order to be known.” Hence, He created them, peace be upon them, and caused them to witness the creation of their beings,

by which they recognized Him (*'arafūhu*) and acknowledged His oneness (*wahḥadūhu*), and lauded Him (*hallalūhu*) [uttered *lā ilāha illā Allāh*], and glorified Him (*sabbahūhu*), and praised Him (*ḥamidūhu*), and magnified Him (*kabbarūhu*); then He created the creation according to their preparedness for existence (*qābiliyyātihim li al-wujūd*).

And every time He created something, He caused them to witness its creation, and transmitted its knowledge to them, that is, transmitted His knowledge of that thing, Exalted be He, to them, or transmitted the knowledge of that thing to them; as for the placement of the pronoun in the word *'ilmihī* (His knowledge) it refers to Him, the Exalted. By “this knowledge” is intended the knowledge related to the cosmos (*al-'ilm al-kawnī*),<sup>4</sup> and the will (*al-irādī*), and the determination (*al-qadarī*), and the decree (*al-qaḍā'ī*), and the permission (*al-idhnī*), and the term (*al-ajalī*), and the book (*al-kitābī*).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Here Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī uses a variation of some of the stages of the Arc of Descent that theologians and Islamic philosophers have discussed, viz, Volition (*mashiyyah*), Will (*irādah*), Determination (*qadar*), Decree (*qaḍā*), Permission (*idhn*), Term (*ajal*), and Book (*kitāb*).

<sup>5</sup> Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī, *Sharḥ al-Ziyāra al-Jāmi'a al-Kabīra*, Vol. IV, pp. 205-206.

# Appendix III

## Translation of the Treatise on the Immutable Entities

As mentioned in chapter four, in 1981 Egbert Meyer published a facsimile of a treatise on Immutable Entities attributed to Ibn al-‘Arabī. Jaakko Hameen Anttila provided an English translation for it in the *Journal of Muḥyiddīn Ibn ‘Arabī Society*.<sup>1</sup> No date is given for the transcript, and the treatise does not appear in any of the lists of the books attributed to Ibn al-‘Arabī, such as the ones published by ‘Afīfī and others. However, whether penned by him or one of his followers, the treatise shows the importance of the concept of *al-A’yān al-Thābita* to Ibn al-‘Arabī’s view of the ontological scheme of being.

The author responds supposedly to a series of questions (real or hypothetical) about the tradition of the Hidden Treasure. The heading of each section and the questions have been added in the margin of the text. The English translation of the text is provided below without any changes made to it.

[The] treatise, titled *The Immutable Entities*, commenting on the *ḥadīth* “I was a hidden treasure” by the shaykh Muḥyiddīn al-‘Arabī (sic!)

*In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate*

Know, may God give you success in (doing) what He loves and what pleases Him, that a certain learned man [contemporary of

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<sup>1</sup> Jaakko Hameen Anttila, “The Immutable Entities and Time”, *Journal of Muḥyiddīn Ibn ‘Arabī Society*, Vol. XXXIX, 2006, pp. 15-32.



the author] made the following divine *ḥadīth* (*ḥadīth qudsī*) most problematic: “I was a hidden treasure and I loved to be known, so I created the creation to be known” (*kuntu kanzan makhfiyyan fa-aḥbabbtu an u’raf, fa-khalaqtu l-khalqa li-u’raf*). He (also) mentioned that it had been asked from many of our contemporary scholars (*‘ulamā’*) but that they could not give a (satisfactory) answer to him.

When I looked at what he had said, God, He is Exalted, inspired me (*alhamanī*) with four answers. I will start by mentioning what (that scholar) has said and then add to that the answers which God, He is Exalted, bestowed (*an’ama*) upon me.

### Explanation of the Problem:<sup>2</sup>

The problem is that hiddenness (*khafā*) is a relational matter (*min al-umūr an-nisbiyya*), since there must be something hidden and something else from which this is hidden. It is not possible that the one from which something is hidden would be God, He is Exalted, because He is manifest to Himself, knowledgeable of His own Essence (*dhāt*) in eternity *a parte ante* and *a parte post* (*azalan wa abadan*). Neither is it possible that it could be the creation, because no creatures existed (*lam yakūnū mawjūdīn*) in eternity *a parte ante* so that God might have been hidden from them.

The *ḥadīth* says: God was and nothing was with Him (*kāna Allāhu wa-lam yakun ma’ahu shay’*). Thus, hiddenness necessitates created beings and these are the secondary cause (*sabab*) of hiddenness, not the secondary cause of manifestation. This, however, is the opposite of what the *ḥadīth* indicates, because on the surface level (*fī zāhirihi*) the *ḥadīth* indicates that He, He is Exalted, was hidden in eternity *a parte ante* in the absence (*‘adam*) of the creation. This was the

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<sup>2</sup> These headings have been added in the margin of the text.

original question.

### Solving the Problem. The First Answer:

Now I say that an answer to this question may be given in several ways. The first is that what is meant by hiddenness is the nonexistence (*'adam*) of someone knowing Him other than Himself (*siwāhu*). When He wanted there to be a plurality of knowers of Him, He created the creation. He expressed the nonexistence of a knower by hiddenness as if He had said: I was a mighty (*'azīz*) treasure and a noble (*sharīf*) jewel (*jawhar*) but there was no-one to be aware of Me except for Myself and no-one to know My existence except I. Thus He used hiddenness in a general sense, meaning that which is necessitated by it, viz. the nonexistence of anyone to know Him. Thus the meaning (of the *ḥadīth*) would be: I was a beneficent (*muḥsin*) lord and a gracious (*mun'im*) and overflowing (*mufīd*) god but no-one was aware of Me nor knew My perfection and My beauty. Thus, I loved to be known and created the creation in order to be known. This is a sound and unproblematic meaning.

### The Second Answer:

The second answer is that things have two kinds of existence, existence in knowledge (*wujūd 'ilmī*) and external existence (*wujūd khārijī*). The existence in knowledge is what is called immutable entities (*al-a'yān ath-thābita*) and they are ancient (*qadīma*) and eternal *a parte ante*.

The external existence is temporally originated (*muḥdath*) and the hiddenness of God, He is Exalted, was in relation to the immutable entities in eternity *a parte ante*, because the immutable entities existed (*mawjūda*) with God but they had no awareness of Him and thus God was hidden in relation to them. When He wanted the immutable entities to know Him, He brought them forth from the existence in knowledge into

external existence so that God, He is Exalted, would be known, because one cannot be aware of God, He is Exalted, except through external existence.

### The Third Answer:

The third answer relates to what (al-Jawāhirī) says in the *Ṣaḥīḥ*<sup>3</sup>, transmitting from al-Aṣma‘ī: *khafaytu sh-shayā* (I hid the thing) means *katamtuhū* (I concealed it) but *khafaytuhu* also means *aḥartuhu* (I made it visible), because this (verb) belongs to the *aḍḍād*.<sup>4</sup> Thus, His words “I was a *makhfi* treasure” may be understood to come from *khafā*’ in the sense of *zuhūr* (manifestation). Thus, the *ḥadīth* would mean: I was a treasure manifest to Myself but there was no-one else to know Me except Myself and I loved that someone other than Me would know Me and I created the creation (for this).

### The Fourth Answer:

The fourth answer is that the meaning may (also) be: I was manifest to the extreme (*fī ghāyat aḥ-zuhūr*) (yet at the same time) hidden, as if He had said: My self was almost hidden from Myself, not to speak of others, because of the extremity of manifestation. Thus, I created the creation as a veil to My manifestation and a curtain on My light so that part of My manifestation would be hidden and the created beings could perceive Me. Do you not know that if one wishes to look at the sun itself, he shadows his eyes with his hand and covers some of its light so that he could perceive another part of its<sup>5</sup> light?

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<sup>3</sup> Al-Jawāhirī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, edited by Aḥmad ‘Abdalqādir ‘Aṭṭār, I-VI, second edition, Beirut, Dār al-‘ilm li’l-malāyīn, 1399/1979, p. 2329.

<sup>4</sup> Aḍḍād is a technical term used by lexicographers, referring to words that have contrary meanings [quoted from footnote of Jaakko Hameen Anttila’s article listed above].

<sup>5</sup> Originally written *nūrī* but later corrected to *nūrihī*.

Thus, He created the created beings to be a veil on His light and set this as a secondary cause of His, He is Exalted, being perceived. (He continued:) I loved to be known and created the creation. Praised be He who put manifestation to hinder from perceiving and put the curtain and the veil as a secondary cause of manifestation and perceiving. This is the knowledge of the realities (*al-ḥaqā'iq*).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Jaakko Hameen Anttila, “The Immutable Entities and Time”, *Journal of Muḥyiddin Ibn ‘Arabī Society*, Vol. XXXIX, 2006, pp. 15-32.

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