Qur'ānic Knowledge and Akbarian Wisdom: Ibn 'Arabī's Daring Hermeneutics in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*

Kur'anî Bilgi ve Ekberî Hikmet: Fusûsü'l-Hikem'de İbn Arabî'nin Cesur Hermenötiği

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Abstract: Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ʿArabī is arguably the most influential Ṣūfī theorist in Islam. In his most enduringly popular work, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, he conspicuously and persistently demonstrates that whatever our perception of a prophet in the Qurʾān, the wisdom associated with him and derived from him is very different. This is not to suggest that Ibn ʿArabī denies the literal text of the Qurʾān. Quite the contrary. He simply asserts that there are different levels of perception of and reception to the Qurʾān: The outer reality (*ẓāhir*) of the Qurʾān is for mass consumption and is the knowledge one derives from, according to Ibn ʿArabī, a superficial understanding of the Qurʾān. There is, nevertheless, a deeper understanding of the inner reality (*bāṭin*) of the Qurʾān that is the preserve of the gnostics (*ʿārifūn*). Through this reading of the Qurʾān, one that goes beyond the outer reality but is inextricably bound to it, Ibn Arabī perpetuates the tradition of mystical interpretation of the Qurʾān whilst doing so in his own way and executes his primary objective in every chapter of the *Fuṣūṣ*: Highlighting the antithesis between the *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* of the Qurʾān, whilst maintaining the legitimacy of both, and even going as far as to assert that the *bāṭin* may only be accessed through the *ẓāhir*. This paper scrutinises four chapters of the *Fuṣūṣ* in which we find the most explicit cases of this mutually-dependent knowledge (*ʿilm*)/wisdom (*ḥikma*) antithesis, and have been selected for specific reasons: The chapter of Ādam was chosen as it is the first chapter of the *Fuṣūṣ* and in it Ibn ʿArabī's objective and approach for the work in its entirety comes into sharp focus. The chapters of Lūṭ and Hārūn were singled out as they constitute the most perspicuous examples of the Andalusian's binary hermeneutic principle. Finally, the chapter of Nūḥ was selected because it displays that even when Ibn ʿArabī seems to contradict the *ẓāhir* of the text, he is actually elucidating a more advanced interpretive model that builds on the primary exoteric one. In the chapter of Ādam, Ibn ʿArabī suggests that the Qurʾānic representation most consistently associated with Ādam is of his humanity as he is the father of mankind. Yet his wisdom is of divinity. This is because it is only in the human that the divine finds His starkest and fullest expression. The Qurʾānic symbol of Nūḥ, on the other hand, is the flood in which the vast majority of his people drowned. His wisdom, according to the Mystic, is making things swim—the wisdom of *subbūḥiyya/ sabbūḥiyya*. For Ibn ʿArabī, drowning, rather than a cause of death, becomes a source of life. Lūṭ's most abiding image in the Qurʾān is of his powerlessness because of his seeming inability to curb the transgression of his people. His wisdom, nevertheless, says Ibn ʿArabī, is power. Finally, Hārūn is portrayed in the Qurʾān as being obedient to Mūsā. He was granted prophethood to aid his brother, to assist him in bearing his burden. Even when Mūsā goes to Sinai and leaves him in charge, he is only fulfilling his role as Mūsā's helper and is subordinate to him. Yet his wisdom is the antithesis of subordination, it is of leadership.

Keywords: Ṣūfism, Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, Qurʾān, Prophets, *Tafsīr*.

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Öz: Muhyiddin ibn Arabî, İslam'daki tartışmasız en etkili sufi teorisyendir. Kalıcı şekilde en popüler çalışması olan Fusûsül-hikem'de, Kur'an'da bir peygamber hakkında algımız ne olursa olsun, onunla ilişkilendirilen ve ondan türetilen hikmetin çok farklı olduğunu açıkça ve ısrarla göstermektedir. Bu, İbn Arabî'nin Kur'an'ın literal metnini inkar ettiği anlamına gelmez. Tam tersine, O sadece Kur'an'ı farklı algılama ve alımlama düzeylerinin olduğunu iddia eder: Kur'an'ın dış gerçekliği (zâhir) kitlesel tüketim içindir ve İbn Arabî'ye göre kişinin Kur'an'ın yüzeysel bir anlayışından elde ettiği bilgidir. Bununla birlikte, Kuran'ın, ariflerin (arifûn) korumasında olan daha derin bir anlayışı vardır. İbn Arabî, dış gerçeğin ötesine geçen, ancak ona (dış gerçekliğe) ayrılmaz bir şekilde bağlı olan Kur'an'ı bu şekilde okumasıyla, Kur'an'ın tasavvufi tefsir geleneğini kendi tarzında sürdürür ve birincil amacını Fusûs'un her bölümünde uygular: Her ikisinin de meşruiyetini korurken, Kur'an'ın zâhir ve

bâtını arasındaki antitezi vurgulamak ve hatta bâtına ancak zâhir yoluyla erişilebileceğini iddia edecek kadar ileri gitmek. Bu makale, bu karşılıklı bağımlı bilgi ('ilm)/hikmet (hikma) antitezinin en açık örneklerini bulduğumuz ve belirli nedenlerle seçilmiş Fusûs'un dört bölümünü detaylı şekilde incelemektedir: Adem bölümü, Fusûs'un ilk bölümü olduğu için seçilmiştir ve bu bölümde İbn Arabî'nin eserin tamamına yönelik amacı ve yaklaşımı net şekilde belirginleşir. Lût ve Hârûn bölümleri, Endülüs'ün ikili hermenötik ilkesinin en bariz örneklerini oluşturdukları için seçilmiştir. Son olarak, İbn Arabî metnin tahiriyle çelişiyor gibi görünse bile, aslında birincil zahiri modele dayanan daha gelişmiş bir yorum modelini açıkladığı için Nûh bölümü seçilmiştir. Âdem bölümünde İbn Arabi, Adem ile ilişkilendirilen en tutarlı Kur'anî betimlemenin insanlığın babası olduğu için onun insanlığının olduğunu öne sürer. Oysa onun hikmeti ilahi vasfıdır. Bunun nedeni, İlahi en katıksız ve tam ifadesini ancak insanda bulabilmesidir. Diğer taraftan, Nuh'un Kuranî sembolü ise kavminin büyük çoğunluğunun boğulduğu tufandır. Sufî'ye göre (İbn Arabî) onun hikmeti, şeyleri yüzdürmesidir-subbūḥiyya/sebūḥiyya hikmeti. İbn Arabî için boğulma bir ölüm nedeni olmaktan çok bir yaşam kaynağı olmuştur. Lut'un Kur'an'daki en kalıcı imgesi, kavminin günahını dizginlemedeki yetersizliğinden dolayı güçsüzlüğüdür. İbn Arabî, ama yine de onun hikmetinin güç olduğunu söylüyor. Son olarak, Hârûn, Kuran'da Mûsâ'ya itaat eden biri olarak tasvir edilir. Kardeşine yardım etmesi, yükünü taşımasına yardım etmesi için kendisine peygamberlik verildi. Mûsâ, Sina'ya gidip onu sorumlu bıraktığında bile, o sadece Mûsâ'nın yardımcısı rolünü yerine getirir ve ona tabidir. Oysa onun hikmeti itaatin, liderliğin antitezidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tasavvuf, İbn Arabî, *Fusûs*, Kur'an, Peygamberler, *Tefsir*

Introduction

Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn 'Arabī is arguably the most influential Şūfī theorist in Islam.[1] The numerous biographical works devoted to him make even an outline of his life redundant.[2] Of his enviably large corpus,[3] none has arrested the attention of the Western gaze more than his inscrutable *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*.[4] Yet, despite the vast effusion of scholarly books and articles it

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[1] See Ismail Lala, *Knowing God: Ibn Arabī and 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī's Metaphysics of the Divine* (Leiden: Brill, 2019) in which the author highlights the enormous influence the Şūfī has exerted in the history of Islamic intellectual thought. See also Alexander Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabī in the Later Islamic Tradition* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1999).

[2]   For a detailed biography, Claude Addas' *The Quest for the Red Sulphur* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993) remains unmatched. Another work, though far more perennial in flavour, but which combines the Şūfī's biography with important elements of his thought is Stephen Hirtenstein's *The Unlimited Mercifier: The Spiritual Life and Thought of Ibn 'Arabī* (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 1999).

[3] Osman Yahya attributes over 900 books (1395 titles) to the Andalusian (Osman Yahya, *Histoire et classification de l'oeuvre d'Ibn 'Arabī: étude critique*. Paris: s.n., 1964).

[4] Many works about Ibn 'Arabī focus on the *Fuṣūṣ* due to its brevity, as opposed to *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, which runs to many volumes. Some of the notable works on Ibn 'Arabī and his mystical outlook are: Abu'l-'Alā' 'Afīfī, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muḥyīd'Dīn Ibnul-'Arabī* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939); Michel Chodkiewicz, *An Ocean without Shore: Ibn 'Arabī, The Book, and the Law*, trans. David Streight (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993); Maḥmūd Maḥmūd Ghurāb, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam min kalām al-Shaykh al-Akbar Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn al-'Arabī* (Damascus: Maṭbaʿat Zayd ibn Thābit, 1985); Denis Gril, "Ibn 'Arabī et les categories". Logik und Theologie. *Das Organon im arabischen und im latinischen Mittelalter*, ed. Dominik Perler and Ulrich Rudolph (Leiden, Brill, 2005), 147-65; Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1983); Rom Landau, *The Philosophy of Ibn 'Arabī* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008); Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994); Mustafa Tahrali, "L'Expression en alternance dans les *Fusûs al-Hikam*". Tasavvuf 28 (2011), 1-11. There has been a tendency in Western scholarship to interpret Ibn 'Arabī's works, particularly the *Fuṣūṣ*, through a pantheistic lens (see, for instance, Henri Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Ṣūfism of Ibn 'Arabī*, trans. Ralph Manheim. London: Routledge: 1969; Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Ṣūfism of Ibn 'Arabī*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press,

has generated, the consistent objective of its author: To highlight the mutually-dependent antithesis between Qurʾānic knowledge and mystical wisdom, has been largely overlooked.[5] Ibn ‘Arabī conspicuously and persistently demonstrates in the *Fuṣūṣ* that whatever our perception of a prophet in the Qurʾān, the wisdom associated with him and derived from him is very different. This is by no means to suggest that Ibn ‘Arabī denies the literal text of the Qurʾān. Quite the contrary. He simply asserts that there are different levels of perception of and reception to the Qurʾān: The outer reality (*ẓāhir*) of the Qurʾān is for mass consumption and is the knowledge one derives from, according to Ibn ‘Arabī, a superficial understanding of the Qurʾān. There is, nevertheless, a deeper understanding of the inner reality (*bāṭin*) of the Qurʾān that is the preserve of the gnostics (*ʿārifūn*). He writes,

It is known that when the divine tongues of religions (*alsinat al-sharāʾiʿ al-ilāhiyya*) say about God, the exalted, what they say, they do so in a way that conveys the immediate [apparent] meaning to layfolk (*al-ʿumūm*). As for the adepts, they understand each word in many ways, no matter what language it is expressed in. God is thus manifested (*ẓāhir*) in every knowable thing while He is concealed (*bāṭin*) from all comprehension, except he who says that the cosmos is His form and His essence.[6]

Scripture, Ibn ‘Arabī declares, is expressed in immediately discernible language for the layfolk (*al-ʿumūm*), this is the outer reality (*ẓāhir*) of the Qurʾān that reflects the outer reality of God Himself, as conveyed by His Name, *al-Ẓāhir*. Yet there is a deeper message that Scripture imparts, which in no way negates the immediately discernible one, just as God's hidden reality, expressed by His Name, *al-Bāṭin*, in no way negates His Name, *al-Ẓāhir*. In every chapter, the Mystic endeavours to establish that Qurʾānic knowledge is only the outer reality (*ẓāhir*); there is also a co-existent but antithetical inner reality (*bāṭin*), meant for the spiritually adept alone, as only they are able to discard the law of the excluded middle and simultaneously accept these contradictory realities.[7] Lest there be any confusion, Ibn ‘Arabī

1997). This view has been seriously challenged by recent scholarship (see Gregory Lipton, *Rethinking Ibn ʿArabi*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[5] This is not to suggest that some works do not mention the opposition between the Qurʾānic narrative and the wisdom expounded by Ibn ‘Arabī. Ronald Nettler, for instance, correctly observes this very fact in his chapter on Lūṭ (Ronald Nettler, *Sufi Metaphysics and Qurʾānic Prophets*, Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2003, 204-16). The assertion of the author is that this is the purpose of the Ṣūfī in *every* chapter of the *Fuṣūṣ*.

[6] Ibn ‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. Abu'l-ʿAlā' ‘Afīfī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 2002), 68. Ibn ‘Arabī is referring to al-Ḥadīd 57/3, in which God is described as "*the First, the Last, the Manifest, the Hidden*".

[7] Ibn ‘Arabī exults in the obscurity of his *Fuṣūṣ*, making it clear that his primary audience is the spiritually enlightened. See Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Tanbīh al-ghabī bi-tabriʾat Ibn ʿArabī* (Beirut: s.n., 1980). There seems to be somewhat of a dichotomy between the objective of the author and the provenance of the work, as articulated by him. The Ṣūfī writes that the *Fuṣūṣ* was given to him by the Prophet Muḥammad, either in a dream or while he was awake (for details on whether he was awake or asleep, see Fitzroy Morrissey, "The Origins of the *Fuṣūṣ*: Early Explanations of Ibn ‘Arabī's 'Vision' of the Prophet", *The Maghreb Review* 45/4 (2020), 763-94). "This is the book of *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, take it, and go with it to people so they may benefit from it", Ibn ‘Arabī quotes the Prophet Muḥmmad as having said to him (Ibn ‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 47). He claims that he dutifully fulfilled this command without adding or removing a single word. It is evident from the author's consistent objective displayed in this work that people refers to spiritually advanced mystics and not layfolk.
Ibn ‘Arabī's claim that he was given the *Fuṣūṣ* by the Prophet Muḥammad demonstrates that he views his spiritual unveiling (*kashf*) as a continuation of divine communication with Man, without making any claims to prophecy. Indeed, he declares that God reveals to His chosen servants verification of unsubstantiated Prophetic sayings through spiritual unveiling (Suʿād al-Ḥakīm, *al-Muʿjam al-ṣūfiyya/ al-Ḥikma fī ḥudūd al-kalimāt.* Beirut: Dandara, 1981, 906). Gershom Scholem writes that the phenomenon of a personal revelation is observed on a wide scale in the mystical tradition (Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York: Schocken Books, 1995, 28). Ibn ‘Arabī's self-anointment as "the Seal of Saints" in imitation of the Prophet Muḥammad's designation as "the Seal of Prophets" bears further testimony to this tendency (see Michel Chodkiewicz, *The Seal of the Saints*,

is explicit that these two levels of Qurʾānic understanding are not competing realities; rather, they are simultaneous but opposite truths. Indeed, as is his wont, the Ṣūfī predicates the latter on the former: There can be no understanding of the deeper wisdom of the Qurʾān without first breaching its ostensible façade. This means that Ibn ʿArabī's Ṣūfī metaphysics is *even more* Qurʾānic than asserted by some scholars.[8]

Through this reading of the Qurʾān, one that goes beyond the outer reality but is inextricably bound to it, Ibn Arabī perpetuates the tradition of mystical interpretation of the Qurʾān whilst doing so in his own way and executes his primary objective in every chapter of the *Fuṣūṣ*: Underscoring the divergent levels of Qurʾānic perception. Although the tradition of mystical Qurʾānic exegesis may be traced back to the eighth century CE and esoteric interpretations were first collated in the work of Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 203/ 818) and subsequently by Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021),[9] Ibn ʿArabī makes a unique contribution by highlighting the antithesis between the *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* of the Qurʾān, whilst maintaining the legitimacy of both, and even going as far as to assert that the *bāṭin* may only be accessed through the *ẓāhir*.[10] There are instances when the mystical wisdom is explicitly antithetical to the Qurʾānic knowledge of a prophet, but others where it is less obvious. This paper scrutinises four chapters of the *Fuṣūṣ* in which we find the most explicit cases of this mutually-dependent knowledge/wisdom antithesis. While these chapters are a small sample of a forthcoming monograph investigating this issue, they have been selected for specific reasons: The chapter of Ādam was chosen as it is the first chapter of the *Fuṣūṣ* and in it Ibn ʿArabī's objective and approach for the work in its entirety comes into sharp focus. The chapters of Lūṭ and Hārūn were singled out as they constitute the most perspicuous examples of the Andalusian's binary hermeneutic principle. Finally, the chapter of Nūḥ was selected because it displays that even when Ibn ʿArabī seems to contradict the *ẓāhir* of the text, he is actually elucidating a more advanced interpretive model that builds on the primary exoteric one.

However, in order to establish a firm contrast between the Qurʾānic knowledge of each prophet and his underlying mystical wisdom, Ibn ʿArabī must first proffer an overarching idea or Qurʾānic knowledge about each one. Nettler writes that the Andalusian has a "Qurʾānic

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Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn ʿArabi. Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993, 128-47).

8 Nettler, *Sufi Metaphysics*, 13-16.

9 Alexander Knysh, "Sufi Commentary: Formative and Later Periods" in *The Oxford Handbook of Qurʾanic Studies*, ed. Mustafa Shah and Muhammad Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 747-48.

10 The early commentaries of al-Tustarī (*Tafsīr al-Tustarī*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2002), al-Sulamī (*Haqāʾiq al-tafsīr*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2001), and ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072?) (*Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt*. Egypt: Al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya liʾl-Kitāb, 2010) are outstanding examples in which mystical exegesis is given pride of place, but although they focus on the *bāṭin*, they do not deny the *ẓāhir*. The rejection of the *ẓāhir* of the Qurʾān is seen by many orthodox scholars as the dividing line between acceptable and unacceptable exegesis. See Muḥammad al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr waʾl-mufassirūn*. 3 Volumes (Cairo: Maktabat al-Wahbiyya, n.d.), 2/297-98. See also Kristin Zahra Sands, *Ṣūfī Commentaries of the Qurʾan in Classical Islam* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006). Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) writes that this is the difference between legitimate Ṣūfī commentaries of the Qurʾān and illegitimate commentaries of the *Bāṭiniyya* (Farouk Mitha, al-*Ghazāli and the Ismailis: a Debate on Reason and Authority in Medieval Islam*. London: I.B. Tauris in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2001, xiii; al-Ghazālī, *Faḍāʾiḥ al-bāṭiniyya*. Kuwait: Dār al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyya, n.d.). Further, the very categorisation of the *Fuṣūṣ* as a work of Qurʾānic exegesis may, according to some scholars, be somewhat of a stretch as it does not adhere to the verse-by-verse commentary paradigm that is the hallmark of the genre (see Norman Calder, "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr: Problems in the Description of the Genre, Illustrated with Reference to the Story of Abraham". *Approaches to the Qurʾan*, ed. Gerald Hawting and Abdul Shareef. 101-40. London: Routledge, 1993). Yet adoption of a looser definition allows it to be considered as very much a work of *tafsīr* as it is nothing but Ibn ʿArabī's understanding of the Qurʾān (Nettler, *Sufi Metaphysics*, 14).

framework ... as the core round which Ibn ʿArabī builds and explicates his Ṣūfī metaphysics".[11] This Qurʾānic framework forms the basis for the general knowledge associated with that prophet for Ibn ʿArabī, and it is to this knowledge that the mystical wisdom is diametrically opposed. In each of the chapters under consideration, an explicit paradox may be observed between this Qurʾānic knowledge and Ibn ʿArabī's mystical wisdom. We begin with the first chapter of the *Fuṣūṣ*, that of Ādam.

1. Ādam and the Wisdom of Divinity (*Ilāhiyya*)

Ibn ʿArabī sees knowledge— *ʿilm*—as the first step in the dark towards wisdom— *ḥikma*. But although it is a necessary step towards wisdom, it divulges information that is paradoxical to it. The Qurʾān transmits knowledge, but intimates wisdom. It affirms Ādam's humanity,[12] yet, as the first human, gainsays what knowledge of his humanity divulges. For his wisdom is that of divinity, since it is only in the human that the divine finds His starkest and fullest expression.[13] Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274), the adopted son and spiritual heir of Ibn ʿArabī, in his commentary of this chapter asserts that Man is the intermediary (*barzakh*) between the phenomenal and the divine: it is only through Man that the divine Names of God, or the knowable God, can be known.[14] Ādam, as the father of mankind, emblematises this most lucidly. The wisdom of Ādam, thus, is: Insight (*baṣīra*) of human reality yields insight of divine reality; know yourself to know your Lord. "For a thing seeing itself within itself is not like it seeing it in something else, which is like a mirror for it",[15] pronounces Ibn ʿArabī.

Yet a mirror can only provide a reflection. Ibn ʿArabī repeatedly emphasises this because the reflection furnished by the mirror is only the outer reality (*ẓāhir*). As a mirror for the divine, mankind, and Ādam as its archetype, reflects the *ẓāhir* of God, that is, His Names. These are not He. Not as He essentially is, anyway. They are merely manifestations of nominal connections (*nisbat al-asmāʾ*)[16] by which the creation can forge a bond with its Creator. Expunge the absolute supra-rationality of God, as He truly is, the Names do not, to say nothing of their reflection.[17] A mirror does not reflect the divine, but it still has worth, even if the value does not meet that of the Names. Ādam, as the first instantiation, and Muḥammad, as the culminating exemplification, the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) *par excellence*,[18] absorb and reflect the Names of God.[19] Yet there is an indissoluble difference between they and the Names. And there is an indissoluble difference between them and He.[20] The reflection is not the

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[11]   Nettler, *Sufi Metaphysics*, 14.

[12]   al-Baqara 2/30-38.

[13]   See Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 48-58.

[14]   al-Qūnawī, *al-Fukūk fī asrār mustanadāt ḥikam al-fuṣūṣ* (Beirut: Kitāb Nāshirūn, 2013), 12.

[15]   Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 48.

[16]   Ibn ʿArabī explains this idea more fully in the chapter on Yūsuf. See Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 104-05.

[17]   The assertion that God, in His truest essence, is essentially unknowable to humans has a rich pedigree that, according to Harry Wolfson, goes back to Philo (d. 50 CE) (Harry Wolfson, "Philosophical Implications of the Problem of Divine Attributes in the Kalam". *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 79 (1959), 73-80, 76).

[18]   Though not entirely consonant with Ibn ʿArabi's conception, the work of ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 812/1408?) is the fullest exposition of this idea. See ʿAbd al-Karīm al -Jīlī, *al-Insān al-kāmil fī maʿrifat al-awākhir waʾl-awāʾil*, ed. Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ṣalāḥ ibn Muḥammad ibn ʿUwayḍa (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1997).

[19]   For a detailed explanation of how the Muḥammadan locus (*al-maẓhar al-Muḥammadī*) absorbs the divine outpouring and then transmits it to the rest of the creation, see Lala, "Outpourers and Receptacles: The Emergence of the Cosmos in the Sufi Thought of Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ʿArabī and ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī". *The Maghreb Review* 44/2 (2019), 223-272. See also Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 273.

[20]   One of the few explicit stances that we find in the *Fuṣūṣ* is the categorical difference between God in His Absolute purity and humans who are a mere reflection of the divine Names. Ibn ʿArabī writes in this very chapter, "And even if we describe ourselves, in every way (*jamīʿ wujūh*), as He describes Himself, there is still a difference (*fāriq*) [between us and Him]: it is nothing but our being in need of

Names. The Names are not God. There is a difference, too, in fidelity.[21] The dizzying elevations of reflection are potentiality that may not, and often do not, find their way in to the granite masonry of sensible reality.

"Be perfumed by the traits of God (*takhallaqū bi akhlāq Allāh*)",[22] the Prophet Muḥammad urges, because the more one adopts, the more faithful as a reflection one becomes. "Zayd is not as knowledgeable as 'Amr",[23] Ibn 'Arabī illustrates, which means that he reflects the Name *al-'Ālim* (the Knower) with less precision than 'Amr. Interestingly, form V, *takhallaqa*, also carries the sense of feigning a thing that is not in your nature.[24] The tradition, thus, while exhorting humankind to acquire divine qualities, also implicitly concedes that this is something it cannot ever fully do. It must only feign acquisition. Ibn 'Arabī agrees. 'Amr, then, is a better actor than Zayd. But actions matter.[25] The more traits man feigns, the more in sync with the divine Names he becomes.

The story of Ādam's creation is the story of humanity. His wisdom is of divinity. Creation, being the most potent Ādamic symbol, is the topsoil the mind reaches for. It could not be otherwise, from the earliest commentaries, the abiding connection of Ādam is with his creation from earth. Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/767) asserts that God created Ādam "from the surface of all land (*adīm al-arḍ kullihā*)—from sweet and salty; black, white, and red clay".[26] Ādam, derived from *adīm*, surface, is the façade your intellect first corrals, and though it may be tinged with myriad colours and soaked with various waters, the surface is all we first recollect. Ibn 'Arabī is unequivocal: Knowledge is a false friend and a myopic guide, while wisdom "sees true".[27] It is this wisdom that he audaciously conveys.

2. Nūḥ and the Wisdom of Making Swim (*Subbūḥiyya*)

The symbol of Nūḥ is the flood in which the vast majority of his people drowned. His wisdom, according to Ibn 'Arabī, is making things swim.[28] This wisdom, then, Ibn 'Arabī apprises us, is that of *subbūḥiyya/ sabbūḥiyya*. From the root *s-b-ḥ*, this word is of the *fa''ūl* form, one of the rarest in the Arabic language. It is fitting, then, that it denotes, "being far removed from, or free from, everything evil",[29] since this is an epithet most commonly attributed to God alone. Frequently, this term is translated as "exaltation".[30] Yet this word, though also hailing from form II, is closer to the Arabic term *tasbīḥ*, though both connotations

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Him (*iftaqārunā ilayh*) for existence (*wujūd*) and our existence being dependent on Him (*tawaqquf wujūdinā 'alayh*) in order for us to be possible, and His independence (*ghinā'*) of the like of which we are in need of Him" (Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 54).

[21] How faithful the human reflection of the divine Names is, or can be, is expounded by the Ṣūfī in the chapter of Ibrāhīm. See Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 80-84.

[22] Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) intimates that this tradition is weak; it appears in none of the highly-regarded compilations of ḥadīth. See al-Suyūṭī, *Ta'yīd al-ḥaqīqa al-'aliyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2006), 83.

[23] Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 153.

[24] Edward Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (New Delhi/ Chennai: Asian Educational Services, 2003), "takhallaqa", 2/800.

[25] A more punctilious and persistent observer of religious ordinances there was none. See Addas, *The Quest for the Red Sulphur*. See also William Chittick, trans., *Faith and Practice of Islam: Three Thirteenth Century Sufi Texts* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), xii-xiii; Maria De Cillis, *Free Will and Predestination in Islamic Thought: Theoretical Compromises in the Works of Avicenna, al-Ghāzālī and Ibn 'Arabī* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 169.

[26] Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth, 2002), 2/79.

[27] Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 88.

[28] For a work on this topic in the *Fuṣūṣ*, as well as 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī's (d. 730/1329?) commentary of it, see Ismail Lala, "Reflections on 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī's Commentary on *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*". *The Maghreb Review* 37/1 (2012), 33-57.

[29] Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, "subbūḥiyya", 4/1291.

[30] Ralph Austin, *Ibn al-'Arabī: The Bezels of Wisdom* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1980), 25.

are possible. Ibn 'Arabī, a recidivistic linguistic potter, moulds the language to connote form II of the verb *sabaḥa*, to swim. Form II of verbs that are transitive (*mutaʿaddī*) in form I become doubly transitive or causative in form II, such as *kataba*, to write, and *kattaba*, to teach to write, or *ḥamala*, to carry, and *ḥammala*, to make carry.[31] *Sabbaḥa* would thus mean "to make swim", as *sabaḥa* denotes "to swim". The wisdom of Nūḥ, therefore, is making the ark swim, something that was unprecedented before him as he was the first to construct such a vessel, according to many exegetes of the Qur'ān.[32]

Ibn 'Arabī, in an act of characteristic contortion, focusses on making the ark swim rather than those who drowned. He writes that due to the transcendence-heavy nature of Nūḥ's call, his people were less congenial to accepting his message.[33] Many have misunderstood this as a denunciation of Nūḥ's call.[34] Ibn 'Arabī is clear: The call could not have been otherwise. Indeed, the very term "call", which betrays directional specificity is a fallacy when it comes to One who is beyond such spatial circumscriptions. If there is a reproof, it is reserved for Nūḥ's people who, due to their insistence on idolatrous immanence, made themselves less amenable to the transcendental Reality.[35] Indeed, Ibn 'Arabī berates the people of Nūḥ:

So nothing is worshipped but Allāh in everything that is worshipped. The man of lowly understanding (*al-adnā*) is he who imagines that in it is divinity, and were it not for this conception, he would not worship stones or anything else. And this is why He said, "*Say: Name them!*" [36] For if they had named them, they would have named them a stone or a tree or a star. And if it were said to them, "Who are you worshipping?" they would have said, "A god". They would not be saying "Allāh" or even "The God".

The man of higher understanding (*al-aʿlā*) does not think this way; rather, he says, "This is a locus of divinity (*majallā ilāhī*), which it behoves us to venerate". So he does not restrict [himself to that object].[37]

Ibn 'Arabī classifies the people of Nūḥ as being of lowly understanding as they believed the idols they worshipped to be imbued with divinity. They adulated them without realising that they were but one locus of divine manifestation. This is why they would call them gods, without acknowledging that they were God Himself as manifested in the cosmos through His divine names because nothing is worshipped but God.[38] This is the key to understanding a passage that has fostered turmoil and consternation amongst the orthodoxy, Ibn 'Arabī writes, "The gnostics vis-à-vis God know what Nūḥ, peace be upon him, alludes to, in respect of his people, when he praises them in the language of censure".[39] The assertion that Nūḥ actually praises his people seems almost heretical but it makes perfect sense in terms of the dichotomy between the Divine Will and the Divine Wish.[40]

Ibn 'Arabī alludes to the competing realities of the Divine Will, which is always expressed, and the Divine Wish, which may not be. Nūḥ's call to monotheism is a manifestation of the Divine Wish. When his people reject this call, he censures them. But their rejection is in perfect accord with the Divine Will because things cannot be otherwise. Their disobedience,

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31 William Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1/31.
32 This is one of the reasons given by Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272) for the ridicule Nūḥ endured from his people. Due to never having witnessed a structure like the ark Nūḥ was building, they excoriated him relentlessly and mercilessly (Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2004, 9/23).
33 Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 68-74.
34 Austin, *Ibn Al 'Arabi: The Bezels of Wisdom*, 71-73.
35 Lala, *Knowing God*, 88-89.
36 al-Raʿd 13/33. All translations of the Qur'an in this work are my own.
37 Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 72.
38 In accordance with al-Isrāʾ 17/23 ("*Your Lord has decreed that you do not worship anything but Him*").
39 Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 70.
40 For more details on this, see the chapter of Yaʿqūb, 94-99.

thus, is a manifestation of their ineluctable obedience to the Divine Will, in accordance with the Divine Will's decree that nothing but God be worshipped.[41] ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī (d. 736/1335?), one of the most influential commentators of Ibn ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ*,[42] elaborates,

> The gnostic censures him with the [divine] Name, "the Guide" (*al-Hādī*) but the censure is the same as praise in the language of oneness because of his knowledge that their response to the preacher is on a higher level.[43]

Al-Qāshānī makes his point even more vociferously when he claims that the more vehemently one disobeys the command of God, the more obedient he is to the Divine Will, to the extent that when Satan refused to bow to Ādam, he was simultaneously entirely obedient to the Divine Will.[44] This is because the Divine Will cannot be disobeyed. Maḥmūd Ghurāb, the recently-deceased, influential scholar who has authored around ten books on Ibn ʿArabī's mystical outlook, in his commentary of the *Fuṣūṣ*, puts it succinctly: "Worship is an essential (*dhātiyya*) part of the creation, it does not need [one to fulfil his] obligation (*taklīf*)".[45] But there are consequences for rejecting the divine command.

The men of higher understanding obey the divine command because they do not restrict the manifestation of the divine Names in any way. They, therefore, do not limit themselves to worshipping God in idols, or anything else, as they are aware of His existence and manifestation in all things.[46] This is what Ibn ʿArabī refers to as combining divine loci of manifestations and not separating them into individualised forms, such as idols. He explains,

> The [truth of the] matter is in combining (*qur'ān*) not separating (*furqān*).[47] And whoever maintains combination does not incline towards separation, though he maintains that too. For the Qurʾān includes the Furqān, and the Furqān does not include the Qurʾān.[48]

Rejecting the common derivation of Qurʾān from the root, *q-r-ʾ*,[49] the Ṣūfī believes it comes from *q-r-n*, which means to combine or connect.[50] The people of understanding combine all the Names of God and see the multiplicity of the Names manifested in all things. They do not separate the Names and select only some loci to worship. This is because combination is bringing together of disparate things and, as such, Ibn ʿArabī asseverates that combination

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[41] al-Isrāʾ17/23.

[42] Such is al-Qāshānī's influence that Izutsu is more reliant on al-Qāshānī's interpretation of Ibn ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ* than the text itself in order to elucidate the thought of the Andalusian mystic in *Sufism and Taoism* (see ft. 4).

[43] al-Qāshānī, *Sharḥ ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī ʿalā Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. Bālī Khalīfa al-Ṣūfiyāwī (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Ẓāhira, 1892), 50.

[44] al-Qāshānī, *Sharḥ*, 50-51.

[45] Maḥmūd Ghurāb, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam min kalām al-Shaykh al-Akbar Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn al-ʿArabī* (Damascus: Maṭbaʿat Zayd ibn Thābit, 1985), 71.

[46] In his commentary on this passage, al-Qāshānī writes that they only worshipped their own conception of God, which led them to explicit polytheism as they could not gain the deeper understanding that God, the One, is worshipped in "the form of multiplicity" (*ṣūrat al-kathra*) (al-Qāshānī, *Sharḥ*, 55).

[47] This is another example of Ibn ʿArabī's fastidious adherence to etymologies, and adoption of a literal approach to texts (James Morris, "Ibn ʿArabī and his Interpreters", part II-B. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107 (1987), 101-19 (Access 16 December 2014). This approach is also discernible in his juristic hyperliteralism, which is why many believed him to be of the *ẓāhirī* school of thought, although Ibn ʿArabī himself denied this (Ibn ʿArabī, *Dīwān Ibn ʿArabī*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1996, 48).

[48] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 70.

[49] Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, "q-r-ʾ", 7/2504. It is noteworthy that Lane cites many authorities as also maintaining that Qurʾān is so called because it collects or combines all the disparate chapters (*surah*, pl. *suwar*). Yet he asserts that it is an informal contraction of *qara't al-shay'*, which he translates as "I collected together the thing". This means that, according to Lane, the root is still *q-r-ʾ*, but it has the denotation of *q-r-n*.

[50] Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, "q-r-n", 8/2987.

includes separation.[51] The people of Nūḥ did not do this so when the flood came, they perished and the only survivors were the few with Nūḥ on the ark. The Ṣūfī thus intimates that the Qurʾānic image of drowning has the wisdom of *subbūḥiyya*, making the ark swim.

Yet there is another meaning to "making swim". Ibn ʿArabī writes, "*Because of their transgressions*,[52] and it is that which moves along with them, they drowned in the seas of the knowledge of God, and this is perplexity (*ḥayra*)".[53] Metaphysical perplexity is profound gnosis that comes from a deep appreciation of the divine oneness as expressed in the multiplicity of creation. Ibn ʿArabī's categorisation of drowning as being immersed in this deep metaphysical gnosis has led to the greatest misconception in the *Fuṣūṣ* specifically, and his works generally, for many have wrongly accused the Ṣūfī of affording the disobedient people of Nūḥ this exalted rank, when this, according to a holistic reading of the chapter, is not what he meant at all.[54]

Two explanations have been proffered for what the Andalusian means. Al-Qāshānī takes it for granted that the recipients of metaphysical perplexity are the Muḥammadan heirs of gnosis (*al-Muḥammadiyyīn*), and not the people of Nūḥ, since Ibn ʿArabī names the Muḥammadan heirs directly after mentioning metaphysical perplexity.[55] Nūr al-Dīn Jāmī (d. 898/1492), on the other hand, countenances the possibility that it is indeed the people of Nūḥ who are the referents, but explains that it is because their drowning allows them to "be liberated from the darknesses of corporeality and bodies (*ẓulumāt al-juthath wa'l-abdān*) and their deeds, even if it is after a long period of time".[56] Jāmī stresses that because it was their drowning that brought an end to their contumacy, it was actually a blessing as it became a conduit for their receiving divine knowledge and metaphysical perplexity, even though this happens after they are punished for their deeds. He seems to be in lockstep with his Ṣūfī master that *all* denizens of hell will, after completing the sentence for their sins, enter paradise.[57] In this sense, drowning, rather than a cause of death, becomes a source of life. The Qurʾānic image of drowning or dying, then, has the wisdom of making swim or giving life.

3. Lūṭ and the Wisdom of Power (*Mulkiyya*)

There are few prophets in the Qurʾān whose image is epitomised in just one verse, fewer still, whose knowledge and wisdom are so ostentatiously antithetical. "*Would that I had power to oppose you or recourse to some strong support*",[58] bemoans Lūṭ, as his angelic guests, outfitted as pulchritudinous men, capture the attention of his people. Lūṭ's portrayal, it is plain, is of powerlessness. His wisdom is power.[59]

Ibn ʿArabī excavates the wisdom of Lūṭ from the prophetic tradition, "May God have mercy on my brother Lūṭ! For surely, he was having recourse to a strong support".[60] The Prophet Muḥammad here seemingly chides Lūṭ slightly for employing words that may be construed as being inimical to the unwavering patience that is the calling card of apostles. But

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[51] Ibn ʿArabī expatiates on why Qurʾān includes *Furqān* (another name for the Qurʾān) in the *Futūḥāt* where he mentions that the Qurʾān is generic and is intended for everyone, as opposed to the *Furqān* (Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d., 4/28; 4/219-20; 4/360).

[52] al-Jinn 71/25.

[53] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 73.

[54] Austin, *Ibn Al ʿArabi: The Bezels of Wisdom*, 71-73; Ian Almond, "The Honesty of the Perplexed: Derrida and Ibn 'Arabi on 'Bewilderment'". *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 70/3 (2002), 515-37 (Access December 12 2020).

[55] al-Qāshānī, *Sharḥ*, 57.

[56] Nūr al-Dīn Jāmī, *Sharḥ Jāmī ʿalā fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2009), 136.

[57] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 172; Chittick, "Death and the World of Imagination: Ibn al-ʿArabī's Eschatology". *The Muslim World* 78 (1988), 51-82, 77-80.

[58] al-Hūd 11/80.

[59] Nettler identifies this paradox in his masterful chapter on Lūṭ. See Nettler, *Sufi Metaphysics*, 204-16.

[60] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 127. Muḥammad b. Yazīd ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, ed. Muḥammad Fuʾād ʿAbd al-Bāqī (Egypt: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, n.d.), "al-Fitan", 23.

the Prophet's faint rebuke also recognises that this was only a superficial remonstrance which did not contravene supreme faith in the divine plan. For the Prophet Muḥammad's comment expounds that, notwithstanding his doleful protestation, he was still enjoying recourse to divine support. 'Alī ibn Khalaf ibn 'Abd al-Malik ibn Baṭṭāl (d. 444/1054), the renowned commentator of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, makes the same observation:

This [complaint] does not exclude Lūṭ from trusting in God (*al-mutawakkilīn 'alā Allāh*), but anger was kindled in Lūṭ, peace be upon him, ... which happens with humans, so the ostensible meaning of Lūṭ's statement made it appear he did not trust in God, even if his aim was the aim of those who trust in God. So the Prophet drew attention to the apparent meaning of Lūṭ's statement, ... even though his aim was not doubting [the divine plan], as they [i.e. prophets] are friends of God, imbued with utmost nobility.[61]

Further, the Ṣūfī explains that the power of prophethood is expressed in the world as powerlessness. It is precisely because the prophets can exercise their power in the world that they do not; this being the deepest display of their power, and the highest expression of their servanthood (*'ubūdiyya*) to God. He elaborates on this in the context of prophetic miracles:

The messenger knows that if something miraculous is shown to people, there will be those who believe what is before them, and those who will recognise it but [still] reject it so they do not affirm [his prophethood] out of oppression, arrogance and envy.[62]

Even miracles, the most perspicuous emblems of their prophethood and the clearest demonstrations of their power, cannot bring about any essential change in people unless their hearts have been "illuminated with the light of faith" by God.[63] Prophets, who are given prophethood only after they reach forty, precisely when their physical ability to effect change in the world declines, says Ibn 'Arabī,[64] are all too aware that it is in the recognition of powerlessness that true power resides. This is the "weakness of gnosis (*ḍu'f al-ma'rifa*)", which is real strength.[65]

Ibn 'Arabī views the Prophet Muḥammad's pronouncement, not as chastisement but as averment, of the deeper reality of Lūṭ's possessing God's support; it is not exceptive, it is declarative. The duality in this statement, of affirming support, and censuring proclamation of its lack, for the Ṣūfī, bespeaks the duality of the prophetic mission, of attempting to guide, but knowing it is futile, of exerting power, but recognising powerlessness, of being powerless, but having power.

4. Hārūn and the Wisdom of Leadership (*Imāmiyya*)

"*Surely We gave Mūsā the Book, and We made his brother an assistant for him*", declares God in the Qur'ān.[66] The Qur'anic image of Hārūn is one of obedience to Mūsā. He was granted prophethood to aid his brother, to assist him in bearing his burden.[67] Mūsā supplicated to his Lord, "*And my brother Hārūn is more eloquent than me in speech, so send him with me as a support (rid') to confirm me*".[68] Indeed, only twice of the twenty places that

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[61] Abu'l-Ḥasan ibn Baṭṭāl, *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Riyad: Maktabat al-Rushd, 2003), 9/526.
[62] Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 130.
[63] Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 130.
[64] Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 127.
[65] Jāmī, *Sharḥ Jāmī*, 133.
[66] al-Furqān 25/35.
[67] Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, "wazīr", 8/2939. Lane comments that wazīr is someone who helps a person with their burden (*wizr*).
[68] al-Qaṣaṣ 28/34.

Hārūn is mentioned in the Qur'ān does he appear on his own and not along with or in conversation with Mūsā.[69] Even when Mūsā goes to Sinai and leaves him in charge, he is only fulfilling his role as Mūsā's helper and is subordinate to him, something that becomes abundantly clear when Mūsā returns and immediately takes his brother to task. "*Did you then disobey my command?*"[70] enquires an outraged Mūsā upon witnessing his people's transgression. This makes it plain that Hārūn was under orders, he was not a leader, he was a follower. So this is the Qur'ānic image of Hārūn, it is an image of subordination. His wisdom is leadership.

Ibn 'Arabī begins,

Know that the existence of Hārūn, peace and blessings be upon him, was from the plane of mercy, as evidenced by His, be He exalted, saying, "*And We gave him*", meaning Mūsā, "*from Our mercy, his brother, Hārūn, as a prophet*".[71]

Mercy is Hārūn's *raison d'etre*, leadership his *modus operandi* for its dissemination.[72] This manifests itself in divergent guises in the narrative of the two brothers. But through the changing lustre of Hārūn's at times active, at times passive, interventionism, the permeation by, and appeal to, mercy is constant.

Hārūn is the nexus of ontological and obligatory mercy, of *raḥmat al-imtinān* and *raḥmat al-wujūb*, respectively. As a human, his existence embodies ontological mercy; as a human who is a prophet, his existence typifies obligatory mercy, the mercy granted Mūsā in response to his supplication. Here, he *follows* Mūsā, both in prophecy and the entailment of that prophecy, he confirms Mūsā's prophecy. This is his primary function, to be a support (*rid'*) for his brother. However, when he acts as Mūsā's vicegerent, his *khalīfa*, he becomes a leader. Hārūn's job specification has dramatically altered, and so must his comportment. Hārūn, now, leads the Israelites, whilst doing so under the instruction of his brother. He is both a leader and a follower. Nevertheless, his leadership is one of subjugation. He keeps the seat warm for Mūsā while he is on his *sojourn* at Sinai. It is in this role that, though he is most actively a leader, he is least influential. Paradoxically, upon the return of the real leader and lawgiver, Hārūn exerts his true leadership, and upon the leader himself. "*Take not me by my beard or my hair*",[73] his pitiful remonstrance, whilst indicative of subjugation, is actually true leadership, says Ibn 'Arabī, as it allows Mūsā's wrath to abate so that he may be directed to the "*guidance and mercy*"[74] contained in the tablets.

Hārūn, as a leader, was a mercy for his brother. Mūsā, as a leader, was also mercy for his entire nation since he led them to the mercy of God. Muḥammad, as the leader of mankind ("I am the leader of the children of Ādam ..., *ana sayyid walad Ādam ...*"[75]) is a "*mercy for all that exists (raḥmat li'l-'ālamīn)*".[76] Ibn 'Arabī alludes to a direct proportionality between the rank of a prophet, his capacity for mercy, and the potency of his leadership. If Hārūn was a mercy for Mūsā, then Mūsā, "who was greater than him in terms of prophethood",[77] must have a greater facility for, and inclination to, mercy. So, if it is true that Mūsā was greater than his brother in prophetic terms, it must also be true that his mercy towards Hārūn was greater than Hārūn's mercy towards him. And we find that this is indeed the case, for, not only does

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[69]   Of these two places (al-Nisā' 4/163 and Maryam 19/28), the latter may or may not refer to the Hārūn, the brother of Mūsā (See Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī, *Tafsīr al-Nasafī*. Beirut: Dār al-Kalim al-Ṭayyib, 1998, 2/333).
[70]   Ṭā Hā 20/93.
[71]   Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 191.
[72]   For a lucid and detailed analysis of this chapter, see Nettler, *Sufi Metaphysics*, 38-68.
[73]   Ṭā Hā 20/94.
[74]   al-Aʿrāf 7/154.
[75]   Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Muḥammad Fuʾād 'Abd al-Bāqī (Cairo: s.n., 1374-75/1955-56), "al-Faḍāʾil", 2.
[76]   al-Anbiyāʾ 21/107.
[77]   Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 191.

he lead to the mercy of God, not only does he seek pardon for his brother,[78] but, as Ibn Kathīr writes, "no one interceded for anyone with a greater intercession (*shafāʿa*) in the world than Mūsā's intercession for Hārūn that he be a prophet".[79]

Ibn ʿArabī continues,

So Mūsā knew more of the matter than Hārūn, as he knew that the people of the calf did not worship it, due to the knowledge that God has ordained that nothing be worshipped but He, and He does not decree a thing but it occurs.[80]

Here the Andalusian makes a seamless transition from the particular to the esoteric, from the physical to the metaphysical. As God has ordained that none but He be worshipped, and since the Divine Will is always followed, nothing *can* be worshipped that is not He, because all is He. And just like that, the entire ethical edifice of Islam could fall apart. Idolatry, *shirk*, the *one* transgression God will not forgive ("*Surely God does not forgive that partners be ascribed unto Him, and He forgives anything short of that for whomever He wills*"[81]) could be excused. Yet there is something amiss about this interpretation.

In the chapter of Luqmān in the Qurʾān, God describes *shirk* as "*a grave injustice*" (*ẓulm ʿaẓīm*).[82] The term, *ẓulm* (injustice), signifies putting "a thing in a place not its own".[83] The worship of the calf, Ibn ʿArabī maintains, was not wrong, it was the execution of the Divine Will that none be worshipped but He. But the perpetrators of this act were sinful. How can this be? The reason is that in the commission of the act, they were engaged in *ẓulm* because they "put a thing in a place not its own", they put divinity in a calf, but nowhere else. The crime was not seeing divinity in the calf; it was *not* seeing it everywhere else. By worshipping the golden calf alone, they denied divine ubiquity and, most importantly, divine numinosity; they denied the true nature of God Himself. "Actions are but by their intentions (*innama'l-aʿmāl bi'l-niyyāt*)", says the Prophet, as recorded by Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) in his celebrated compilation.[84] Another way of articulating this would be: Actions are only led by their intentions. Adoration of the calf with the intention that it is but one of the innumerable loci of divine manifestation, but certainly not as God truly is, is worship. Adoration of the calf with the intention that it *only* is a locus of divine manifestation is "a grave injustice". Al-Sāmirī and his followers, unwilling to understand this, belong to the latter camp.[85] Al-Sāmirī also led his adherents, but he led them to theophanic myopia, to deific parochialism. He led them to *ẓulm*.

So, in the crepuscular contours of intentions, do we encounter the resolution to, ostensibly, one of the starkest dichotomies in the Akbarian tradition: Ibn ʿArabī's punctilious

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[78] al-Aʿrāf 7/151.

[79] ʿImād al-Dīn ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm* (Damascus: Maktabat Dār al-Fīḥāʾ, 1998), 3/169.

[80] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 192. The *mā* in this sentence may be read as the negatory *mā* (*mā al-nāfiya*), as I have done so here, or as the pronominal *mā* (*mā al-mawṣūlā*). The meaning, however, remains the same.

[81] al-Nisāʾ 4/48.

[82] Luqmān 31/13.

[83] Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 5/1920.

[84] Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Muḥammad Zuhayr b. Nasr (s.l.: Dār Tawq al-Najāt, 1422/2001), "Badʾ al-waḥy", 1 (no.1). See Jonathan Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunnī Ḥadīth Canon* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

[85] Ṭā Hā 20/95-97.

orthopraxy[86] and his supposedly permissive monism, for there is no straightforward monism.[87] God in His absoluteness operates far beyond the ken of human understanding. But there is a ubiquity of divine manifestation of His Names, which only the spiritually enlightened perceive.

Conclusion

The foregoing cursory analysis of four chapters of the *Fuṣūṣ* has shown that, for Ibn ʿArabī, the Qurʾānic image of a prophet, the knowledge that we gain from him or through him, is antithetical to his underlying wisdom. These chapters are the starkest examples of this dichotomy. While never denying the ostensible meaning of the Qurʾān, indeed, regarding it as the indispensable first step towards wisdom, the Ṣūfī intimates that wisdom and knowledge are antithetical realities. Whether it is the humanity of Ādam imbuing wisdom of God's divinity, or Nūḥ's people drowning furnishing wisdom of how he made things swim. Whether it is the impotence of Lūṭ imparting wisdom of his power, or Hārūn's subordination to Mūsā affording wisdom of his leadership. Through all these instances, the Ṣūfī explains that knowledge and wisdom are contradictory, yet mutually-dependent. They are simply different levels of perception: The perception of the intellect and the perception of spiritual unveiling (*kashf*).[88] Those who brave the winding byways of Ibn ʿArabī's thought rely on their intellect to decode and demystify the potent arcana they will inevitably encounter. Yet intellect alone is not enough the Ṣūfī warns. "We are a people in whose books it is forbidden to look!" He announces triumphantly.[89] Forbidden for the benighted layfolk who bank on their intelligence, is the implication. The spiritually enlightened gnostics (*ʿārifūn*), according to Ibn ʿArabī, while never denying the utility of the intellect, go beyond its ultimately circumscribed frontiers. To know the higher truth, we must divest ourselves of the lower world and throw out the law of the excluded middle, stresses the Ṣūfī. To fathom divine opacity, he bids we renounce profane clarity.[90] To acquire deep mystical wisdom, he demands we acquire, but go beyond, ostensible Qurʾānic knowledge.

Acknowledgements

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[86]   Toby Mayer, "Theology and Sufism". *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 258-87; Ghurāb, al-*Fiqh ʿind al-Shaykh al-Akbar Muḥyi al-Dīn ibn ʿArabī* (Damascus: Maṭbaʿat Zayd ibn Thābit, 1981), 14-18.

[87]   I prefer to characterise Ibn ʿArabī's stance as qualified monism (Lala, *Knowing God*, 37). That God in His absoluteness is entirely transcendent and cannot be comprehended much less manifested in phenomenal loci is one of the few points about which Ibn ʿArabī is unequivocal (Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 54). Indeed, he goes as far as to issue a stark warning against incarnationism (Ibn ʿArabī, Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad. *Divine Governance of the Human Kingdom (At-Tadbirat al-ilahiyyah fi islah al-mamlakat al-insaniyyah); What the Seeker Needs (Kitab kunh ma la budda minhu lil-murid); The One Alone (Kitab al-ahadiyyah)*, trans. Tosun Bayrak al-Jerrahi al-Halveti. Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae: 1997), 234.

[88]   Ibn ʿArabī never tires of reminding his audience that knowledge gained by the intellect is but an initiatory stage that needs to be traversed to attain the deeper understanding that spiritual unveiling bequeaths. This is yet another reason that knowledge and wisdom are mutually dependent: the former is a necessary stage on the path to the latter (Chittick, "Mysticism versus Philosophy in Earlier Islamic History: The al-Ṭūsī, al-Qūnawī Correspondence". *Religious Studies* 17/1 (1981), 87-104, 96. See also Mahmud Kiliç, "Mysticism". *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Oliver Leaman. London and New York: Routledge, 2007, 949, 956).

[89]   Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Tanbīh al-ghabī*, 3.

[90]   This aspect of Ibn ʿArabī's conception of God bears significant parallels with his illustrious predecessor, al-Ghazālī. See Fadlou A. Shehadi, *Ghazali's Unique Unknowable God* (Leiden: Brill, 1964), 3-4.

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