

Kitâb al-fâna' fi-l mushâhadah
The Book of Annihilation in the Contemplation
Ibn 'Arabi

Introduction

"The Book of Annihilation in the Contemplation" is one of the numerous short treatises by the Shaykh al-akbar, elucidating themes which also appear at various times in the Futûhât al-Makkiyyah. Its central topic is, as its title suggests, the path of mystical unveiling which leads to the contemplation of God. Although at first sight it may seem like a defense of the spiritual way against the attacks of rationalists and dogmatic theologians, on closer inspection it turns out to be a set of indications and exhortations for those on the path to undergo the spiritual death (fanâ') and be realised in the contemplation. More than this: it is nothing other than the inner meaning of the Bayyinah (clear proof) which is the 98th Sura of the Quran.

The long section on the manâzil (abodes or waystations) in the Futûhât al-Makkiyyah, comprising chapters 270 to 383, corresponds to the 114 Suras of the Quran and presents their details in reverse order, so the first manzil illuminates the last Sura and so on (for this correspondence we are indebted to Michel Chodkiewicz's brilliant analysis at a recent conference in Murcia). The 98th Sura, the Bayyinah, corresponds to the 14th manzil, which is chapter 286, entitled "Of the knowledge of the one who is ordered to become, refused and so is not from the Muhammedian Presence." In this chapter we find "The Book of Annihilation in the Contemplation" mentioned as being a portion of this manzil, and when we look closely at the Sura in question, we can discern the illuminations that the Shaykh produces. Indeed we might add that the text of this treatise is itself a bayyinah in so far as the meanings impress themselves upon the alert reader.

The term bayyinah (related to the word "baina" meaning "between") is used to indicate a messenger from God to the heart of the gnostic, bearing knowledge of divine truths, which allows the eye of the contemplator to see things exactly as they are. We have translated it as "clear proof", since it carries the meaning of both incontrovertible evidence and something brilliantly clear. There is a definite emphasis both in the Sura and the treatise upon the importance of purity: in the Quranic passage there are four separate words used, mutahhar (immaculate), mukhlîs (liberated, from ikklâs), zakawât (usually translated as alms-giving, but carries more the sense of purification), and sâlihât (unblemished, proper in action). The following translation of the Sura, with notes of how this appears in the text, is an attempt to indicate a little of the extraordinary depth of exposition by the Shaykh, but we are sure others will find fresh meanings for themselves.

Sura 98 (al-Bayyinah)

"Bismillah ar-rahmân ar-rahîm"

The introduction to the text is in praise of God and His saints, whose hearts have been purified, the people of rahmah, those of the rahmân (the dressed) and those of the rahîm (the undressed) who are from the Mercy of Light (rahmati nûr) in the station of elevation and satisfaction, who take the Prophet as their model.

"Those who cover up from among the people of the Book and those who associate would not stop until the clear proof came to them."

Throughout the treatise the Shaykh makes an interplay between two levels or groups: those who say they believe in Islam but actually do not, and those seekers on the path who strive for real understanding but inevitably fall into a kind of polytheism. For each group the bayyinah comes in an appropriate mode: to the seeker as direct confirmation from God, annihilating him in contemplation, while to the philosopher or theologian in the form of the writings and proofs of the gnostics.

"A Messenger from God reciting immaculate texts"

"therein books of the true faith (qayyimah)"

This messenger may be a human like Abu Bakr or Abu Hurayra, who gives news of the Truth to the people of form, or it may be a Divine form by means of which God speaks directly to the heart in the station of Understanding the Address. The Shaykh gives an example of an annihilating address.

"Those to whom the Book was given did not differentiate until after the clear proof had come to them."

For the seekers this differentiation occurs as the bewilderment that all paths of the Book lead to God, for the bayyinah shows them that "He is the One who is approached from every side, even if He is not known." For the rationalists this division happens when they hear or read what the mystics have explained to them, but can only accept a part of it and reject the rest because it does not accord with their viewpoint.

"And there is no order except to worship God, in liberated devotion to Him in the hanifian religion, and to stand in prayer and to observe purity of action (zakawat)."

This is the religion of the true faith. For both kinds of people the order is the same. So the seekers should devote themselves to God alone, following the special and pure Abrahamic religion in every aspect, so that they may "act in complete concordance to the divine order and become of the world of light".

"Those who cover up from among the people of the Book and those who associate are in the fire of hell, remaining there, and these are the vilest in creation."

"Those who have faith and act in purity, these are the best in creation."

Hell is lack of submission, be it to the explanations of His friends or as an imagined distance between the seeker and God, and so all are in that condition until they follow Him who says "I am your Lord." Faith is an inscription on the heart which can never be removed; if someone speaks of revelation and subsequent veiling, then it is a matter of the exterior of the heart, not its interior. Those who accept a part and reject a part of what the gnostics bring are "the vilest in creation", and the Shaykh gives an example from his own experience of an interchange between a man of God and an ordinary philosopher.

"Their reward with their Lord is the Gardens of Eden, beneath which rivers flow. They shall remain in them eternally. God is well-satisfied with them, and they are well-satisfied with Him. This is (the reward) for the one who fears his Lord."

The people of God have purified their worship from any notion of reward, and have become of the world of Light, in which there are rivers of knowledge. They see Him directly in contemplation, and this is the real meaning of the Ihsân (worship God as if you see Him). The Shaykh notes that he will discuss elsewhere the divine satisfaction and the fear of the Lord, but we could add that the qualification of rahmah, mentioned at the beginning, is implied in the divine satisfaction, since the saints who are both satisfied and satisfying (murdhî) are "Mercy to the Universes". The qualification of this presence by Light is discussed in further detail in Chapter 286 of the Futûhât.

In this chapter "The Book of Annihilation in the Contemplation" is spoken of as already having been written. Although we do not know the exact date of its composition, it was probably written in Baghdad in the early 600s AH, either just before his visit to Anatolia or just after. There are several extant manuscripts, of which one, the Carullah, was written during the lifetime of the author. It was printed in the Rasâ'il Ibn 'Arabi in Hyderabad in 1948, and translated into French by M. Valsan in ...tudes Traditionelles, under the title "Le Livre de l'Extinction dans la Contemplation". This present translation has been made from a copy in the Shehit Ah library (no: 1348) in Istanbul, undated, which has significant variations from the text in the Rasâ'il and those studied by M. Valsan. The alternative readings have been marked in the notes with (R) for Rasâ'il, (P) for Paris and (U) for Uppsala.

The Book of Anihilation in the Contemplation

In the Name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful, Praise to God who destines and predestines (qadara wa qadâ'), who determines and executes His decisions, who is satisfied and bestows satisfaction, who is too holy in His grandeur and majesty to be contingent ('aradan)[1] upon that which He transcends, be it a substance or an accident. He has purified the hearts of those whom He has chosen among His servants, and He has not placed in them [i.e. the hearts] the causes of doubts and illusion that render them sick.

He has not set them up as a target[2] for the arrows of argument and enmity. He has illuminated for them, with the essence of penetrating acumen (madâ')[3], the unsheathed sword of guidance so that (even) the vastness becomes confining. There are some amongst them who have dressed and have undressed, and some who are the diggers into the origin[4] and the radiant ones. Those who wear their clothing consider what is conferred upon them as a loan (qardan)[5]; and those who have discarded it transform the essence of prophetic precedent[6] into inner obligation. He displays them vying in beauty in the Highest Assembly and establishes their authority in the high and low universe, making them heirs of Heaven and Earth. Thus they traverse it with the precedence of the ancient[7], its length and breadth[8], and they govern in their seat of judgment by ratifying and denying.

And may the blessing be upon him (the Prophet) to whom it was said: "And your Lord will bestow upon you in order that you are satisfied." He is distinguished in this station from him (Moses) who said: "I hasten towards You, O Lord, so that You be satisfied." And may that blessing be constant upon the tongue of eternity[9] and never know an

end. And may it also extend upon the members of his family and his companions, who are favoured with satisfaction, and his brothers, who have fided in him, from the station of elevation and satisfaction.

The Divine Reality is too elevated to be contemplated by the eye which must contemplate; for there is a trace of the creation in the eye of the contemplator. Thus if that which never was passes away, being transient, and that which ever is remains, being subsistent, then the Sun of clear proof will rise for evident comprehension. There occurs the absolute transcendence (tanzîh), realised in the absolute beauty. And that is the eye ('ayn) of Synthesis and Being, and the station of Tranquillity and Stillness (khumûd)[10]. Thus the numbers are seen as the One (wâhid), which none the less journeys in the degrees and by this journeying are the realities of the numbers manifest.

It is at this station that the one who professes unification (ittihâd)[11] falls into error: for this person, seeing the journeying of the One through the imaginary degrees so that the names differ in accordance with the various degrees, does not see any number except the One and Only (ahad), and therefore he professes identity. Now if He manifests in His Name (One), He does not manifest in His Essence (dhât) as well except in His own private degree which is the Oneness (wahdâniyya)[12], so that in whatever degree He is manifest in His Essence, He does not manifest His (own) Name. He is named in that degree by that which the reality of the degree gives to Him, so that it is through His Name in that degree that there is extinction, and it is through His Essence that there is subsistence. Therefore if you say "One" (wâhid), everything other than He is annihilated through the reality of that name; and if you say "two", its essential reality ('ayn) manifests through the being of His Essence, of the One, in that degree, not through His Name (One), and His Name (One) denies the existence of this degree, whereas His Essence does not.

This particular kind of insight and knowledge ought to be veiled from the majority of the creatures, because of what there is in it of elevation and exaltedness. It is a profound abyss and destruction therein is imminent. For the one who does not have the knowledge of the (divine) realities and the extension of developing sweet expression (raqâ'iq)[13], and comes upon this contemplative condition through the mouth of someone who has realised it, while he himself has not tasted of it, (such a one) perhaps will say: "I am He whom I love, and He whom I love is me." It is for this reason that we veil and keep secret this kind of teaching.

When Hasan al-Basri[14] wanted to speak of these mysteries, which no-one should come upon unless they are travelling on their path, he would call to Farqad al-Sabakhi and Malik Ibn Dinar as well as those present of the people of taste, close his door upon the people and then sit talking to them about this particular kind (of knowledge). If there was no necessity for secrecy, he would not have acted in this manner. This is also borne out by Abu Hurayra[15] who said, according to what al-Bukhari relates in his book of hadiths: "I brought from the Prophet (S. A.) two boxes of treasure; the one I have shared out among you, and the other, were I to share it, my throat would be cut." And also Ibn Abbas[16], when speaking about the Quranic verse ("He who created seven heavens and likewise of the earth, His order descends amongst them" Q.65.12), said: "Were I to explain its real meaning, you would stone me and say that I was an unbeliever." And 'Ali bin Abu Talib used to beat his chest and say: "Ah, in here is exaltedness in abundance. If only I could find people who could carry it!" And he (i.e. the Prophet),

peace be upon him, said: "Abu Bakr is superior to you, not by the number of prayers or fasts but by something which has taken place in his breast", and he did not reveal what that thing was but remained silent on the subject. Not all science is necessary for the world to have revealed to it. And the Prophet (S. A.) said: "Speak to people according to the capacity of their understanding." So when someone comes across a book of knowledge which he does not comprehend and whose path he has not travelled, he should neither disclose it nor repeat it, but should return it to its people, without believing it or disbelieving it, and he should never get into a discussion about it.

"Many a bearer of legal knowledge who is not a jurist" (hadîth);

"They speak lies of that knowledge which they do not encompass" (Quran 10.39);

"Why do you dispute among yourselves concerning that about which you have no knowledge? " (Quran 3.66).

Thus people have been criticised when they have talked of that whose path they have not followed. I am relating all this because the books of the people of our path abound in these mysteries, and the people of reflective thought[17] seize upon them according to their own viewpoint, while the people of externals interpret (ta'awwala) the possible meanings of the words and fall into error. If they were asked, these people, simply about the technical terms agreed upon by our community, which they have demeaned in their discussions, they would not know the answer. How is it that they can speak of something when they have not mastered its principle?

When they (the gnostics) have been observed concealing (yatakattamûna)[18] their experiences together with their friends, people may say that it is a concealed religion, an inauspicious religion, for they do not know the implications of this religion. The former not only conceal the religion itself but also its consequences and what God the Most High has bestowed upon them with regard to His obedience when they were obedient to Him. It may happen they ascertain in themselves some of the traditions of the Prophet regarding religious duties which have been generally thought of as deficient and of dubious authenticity, but they (the gnostics) hold such traditions to be correct because they have reached this through insight directly from the one who pronounced it. Thus they worship in themselves in accordance with something which has not been accepted by the knowers of form, who accuse them of being outside the religion, and that is unjust, since God the Truth has many aspects through which He can be reached and this is one of them. Equally, many a tradition which has been (generally) verified and accepted, is not verified and accepted through the way of unveiling, and they (the gnostics) do not follow it in their practices. How proper and beautiful is the one who submits and surrenders and disciplines himself until he leaves his own place of abode for His Abode! Such a person is happy and rewarded with the realities of Being.

Those who conceal these mysteries with agreed technical expressions, as a precaution against those who are outsiders, and those who profess the bringing-about of effects (a1-athâr)[19] by the spiritual powers, continue without pause on their clearly established paths, until there appear to them the signposts in the hands of the sublime spiritual realities who reside at that degree of approach to the station of Understanding the Address[20], in which place there are inscribed sacred books which act as witnesses for the verification of their state. The movement from this quality (wasf) to another quality

gives them a movement of transcendence (munazzahan)[21]. The veil of the Veiler is split asunder and what has been veiled is revealed; the hidden meaning is opened up, the lock is broken and the bolts are pulled back. The spiritual powers of that other (quality) are unified by facing the Reality of the One and Only (haqîqatu-l ahadiyyah) and nothing is perceived other than one single purpose and nothing else, and from it the effects are immanenced according to the Reality. Sometimes they happen independently, and sometimes they happen according to the generation of the spiritual powers. He is the One who is approached from every side, even if He is not known; who is sought with every intention, even if He is not reached; who is spoken of by every tongue, even if He is not mentioned. Oh what powerful perplexity and oh what great affliction, when the cover has been removed and the sight unified and the sun and the moon brought together, when the Effector has appeared in the effect and is known through the eyes of the human being[22] and has varied Himself in the images, when trickery has befallen the trickster and the believer has benefited and the unbeliever has lost.

The Divine Address is expressed by the most holy tongue, interpreted as purity of motive [in worship] ('ibârati al-ikhâlâs)[23]. He who purifies his worship from any motive of reward and has become of the true faith (hanif al-madhhab), the faith close to God, thus acts in complete concordance to the divine order and has become of the world of light and not of the world of recompensing.

"God is the light of the heavens and the earth" (Q.24.35).

"They have their recompense and their light" (Q.66.8).

"Their light gleams before them" (Q.57.12).

And He says: "I am your Lord" and they follow Him. The matter of reward for the people of verification (muhaqqiqin) is left to God; they are not able to seek it due to lack of time and to their preoccupation with Him, the Most High, who has clearly pointed out to them that "he who misses his portion from God is a loser".

The action, which is the way by which one carries out the obligatory and the customary tradition (sunnah), requires by its simple existence the recompense. Do not worry yourself with this, because movements of bodies have their own inevitable effects. Do not ask what the movements afford (of reward) in themselves, because you will be wasting your time, since God, glory to Him, is "every day in a business" (Q.55.29). So the "day" is a unit of time and His "business" is in what is due to you. It is for you that He brings into being and creates, not for Himself, because He is transcendent of self-interests and partiality, and nothing returns to Him from His creation that does not already belong to Him. There is no creation except as a sign to you (fiman adallaka)[24]: so remain facing this matter and occupy yourself with it. And you become every day in the business of your Lord, as He indeed is in your business. He has not created you except that you worship Him and you realise yourself in Him. Do not occupy yourself with other than Him. And whatever is other than you and other than Him is nourishment for you, for it is to you that it comes.

"I do not seek nourishment from them, nor do I want them to feed. It is God who is the Nourisher." (Q.51.57) So if He says to you: "Take!", say: "(It is) You (who should

take)." And if He says to you: "Return!", say: "From You to You". And if He says to you: "How can I say to you 'Take' and you say 'You take and I do not take? '", then say to Him: "This is how I am in reality. I do not take because taking is an action, and I have no action. You are the Taker because You are the Doer. So You take for me what You give me, and do not tell me to take, O You who do not take, for by taking, You veil me from Yourself, and there is no taking for me for You are not mine; and there is no taking possible for me unless it be gaining non-existence, and that is the worst of all ills! I ask for exemption from this annihilating address, O You who understand and are never understood, and who possess and are never possessed!"

It may happen that you are presented in some of these places with (a standing in) the straight, authoritative, prophetic religion which is special and pure, and also with a religion which is not straight and authoritative and is intermixed, of the mind and intellect. And then you are bewildered (tahayyar)[25] by them, for you see that the ultimate goal of each of these paths is the Real, glory to Him, as concerns your felicity, not from the point of view of your wretchedness. So content yourself with following the religion which is special and pure, because it is more beneficial and elevated. Even though the other (path) is of high illumination, yet because of the existence of the former (path), its form weakens, even though it may be true[26]. And perhaps the founder of a path, were he to be alive, would himself return to the religion which is special and pure. For we see that the special religion elevates under one aspect or several aspects through the special religion of purity. Is it not so that the religious laws which nations like the nation of Moses and the nation of Jesus, peace be upon them, have followed in the past, have taken[27] from the religious law (sharī'ah) of Muhammed (S. A.), who said: "If Moses were alive he would do no other than follow me." All the more reason for it to be so for the religious decree which is created through the mind and which deserves to be removed despite it being true from one particular aspect. Moreover, know that the most miserable of beings is the one who has a Book and has lost his way, following his passions in spite of his belief in his Book.

But here is a point that I would like to clarify, to which very little attention has been paid, and it is possible that many people may have erred in this matter, in respect of the scope of the possibility (jawâza-l imkân): Being is established upon one of the two sides of the possible and there is no way of altering it. Indeed God (al-haqq), glory be to Him, does not ever reveal Himself to a thing and then veil Himself from it; equally He does not inscribe faith in a heart and then erase it. If someone says that He has veiled Himself after revelation, then in fact God has never revealed Himself to him but some light was shown to him and he says it is He (huwa huwa). There is no permanence for the world in any state, because it changes, and thus this person talks of the veil. All the same, if the inscription of faith and the attribution of signs (âyat) and proofs (bayyinât) is given in the hearts, and if the witnesses of these are established in the hearts, then these are never removed. Should it be removed from a particular person, then know that these things have never been written upon the tablet of his heart and he has not become a cloak (ridâ') for them; rather, they have become a cloak for him. He is given their expressions and the ability to speak of their essences and realities - such a gift can be taken back and removed. It is because of this that Allah has mentioned: "Recite to them the affair of the one to whom We have given Our signs and who has cast them off." (Q.7.174)²⁸ The words "cast them off" (insalakha) can be compared to the man removing his garment and the snake shedding its skin. So these matters are responded to as an external garment, as we have mentioned.

All that he has to do is to articulate; so if he articulates, the hidden cause (mukawwin)[29] of the word is manifest as well as its effect in its particularity. There are no stipulations for particular individual words, with regard to ritual purifications or personal sanctity or consciousness or concentration; nor are there any with respect to not believing or believing, except that which happens through the mere pronouncing of certain letters, where the effect appears even when the speaker is unaware of what he is saying. And this has occurred to some of our companions: one of them, when he was reciting the Quran, went through a certain verse and found an effect in it, which surprised him, and he did not know the cause of it. So he turned his attention to his reading and returned to the earlier verses and started reading again. When he arrived at the specific verse, he observed in himself the same effect upon him[30]. Then he recognised that this verse, whenever it happened to be recited, found its own place where it could act specifically (on him), and so he took it as a "name" and would produce the particular effect (athâr) whenever he wanted. However, the real verifier (muhaqqiq) does not allow himself to be seduced by this, and indeed his pleasure lies in what he has realised in it: when asked "What is the greatest Name of God? ", Abu Yazid replied "Be truthful (asdaq) and take whatever divine name you like", drawing the attention of the questioner to the verification involved, not just its utterance, just as God the Most High has said: "those in whose hearts is written the faith (imân)" (Q.58.22).

And for the heart that is passionately in love (walhân)[31] there is an exterior and an interior. Its interior does not admit of erasing, it is certain establishment, unfettered and unquestionable through realisation. Its exterior does admit of erasing, and it is the very tablet of erasing and of establishing: a matter may be established in it for a certain time, then "He erases what He wishes and establishes" (Q.13.39). If the believer in a Book was a believer in the whole of his Book, he would never go astray, but when he believes in some parts and rejects others, he is a veritable disbeliever. As God the Most High has said, "they say: we believe in some and do not believe in other parts, and they want to find a pathway in between. These are the veritable disbelievers." (Q.4. 150) And "the disbelievers from among the people of the Book are the vilest in creation" (Q.98.5). In accordance with this, these are the people of exoteric knowledge ('ilm ar-rusûm): the majority of the intellectuals from among the philosophers and theologians believe in a portion of what the saints of God bring out of what they have realised in the experiences and mysteries they have witnessed and found. That which accords with their own opinions and understanding, they believe in; and that which is not in accordance with their opinions and understanding, they reject and deny, declaring that "this is false because it goes against our proof".against

An example of this attitude might be that wretched person who has not completed the basic principles (arkân) and yet imagines he is perfect. Why doesn't such a person ascribe such (words) to one who is worthy of them and not force himself to believe in them? For he would thereby gain the fruit of submission (taslîm). I, by God, fear greatly for those who reject this group (the Sufis). It is said of a person who sits with the people of essential realities among the Sufis and contradicts them upon a matter that they have realised in themselves, that God strips away the light of belief from his heart.

One of the people of rational speculation (nuzzâr), who had pretensions to wisdom, came to ask a question of some of the verifiers among the people of Being (wujûd). I was present along with his students who were sitting there. The Sufi[32] began to speak

on this question, but the rationalist said: "This cannot be true for me. Prove it to me, perhaps I am mistaken about it." The Sufi knew that this man's words might be a trap set up by him (dâhiyyah)[33], and so he fell silent in the face of the argumentation and hostility that might arise. For they, may the satisfaction of God be upon them, do not speak on the matter when this is by reason of the bad manners and the loss of the grace (baraka) involved. The Prophet (S. A.) remarked while his companions were disputing: "In my presence dispute is not desirable." And he (S. A.) also said: "I was being shown the Night of Power, but at that moment two men started hurling insults at each other, and so the Night was removed."

The path of unveiling and witnessing does not permit argumentation and refutation against the one who speaks of it. And the deprivation (of grace) falls upon the disputer, whereas the man of Being (wujûd) is blessed with what he has received. Then one of the students of this shaykh rose and addressed this rationalist: "That which our master has been elaborating is extremely clear and true, even if I myself am unable to expound upon it." Then the rationalist replied: "Beautiful words, well-chosen by the shaykh, the intellects accept it from the very first. However, if you tested it with the verification of objective reason and you sounded it with existent proofs, it would vanish, and it would have no existence since it is quite false, exactly like the matter our master exposed a little while ago." The shaykh said no more on this matter, as the rationalist had not understood what he had formulated and what his tongue had expressed. This was an indication to the verifier about what was in the soul (nafs) of the rationalist, and he saw that it was more suitable to refrain from speaking with him on such matters.

Then know that the faith which is strengthened by good deeds resides in the hand of the Holy Presence, and so one will see during one's residence in it (i.e. this presence) the pouring forth of the rivers of science and knowledge, of wisdom and secrets, and this outpouring happens between the fingers of this presence; and one will see what that hand possesses for those people of the Muhammedian connections (ta'alluqat)[34], so that the spirit of the dweller in this presence is nourished by it (tataghadha).

It is one of four (presences) all participating in this Holy Station, and this, the first, is the presence of Resurrection in Being (iqâma). The second is the presence of Light (nûr). The third is the presence of Intellect ('aql). And the fourth is the presence of Man (insân).

The presence of Man is the most complete in terms of Being. As for the presence of Resurrection in Being, if the servant arrives at it, he drinks from the river of permanence (daymûmiyya), and the result of this station in this presence is the station of the fear of the Lord and the Divine satisfaction, because the fear of the Divine opens up a presence different to this, which we shall describe in some of the chapters in the Futûhât al-Makkiyyah[35]. Similarly, the fear of the Ipseity (huwiyyah) will also be mentioned in some chapters of the Futûhât al-Makkiyyah, and this we shall not go into here.

The Abode of which we have spoken in this book is the Abode of "annihilation" and of "the rising of the Suns", and it possesses the degree of the Ihsân by which He sees you, not that by which you see Him. The Angel Gabriel, peace be upon him, asked of the Prophet (S. A.): "What is the Ihsân?" He answered: "That you should worship God as if you see Him", and he gave a sign by that to the people of allusions (ishârât) that "if you

are not, you see Him (actually)" (fa-in lam takun tarâhu)[36], that is: His vision does not occur except through your extinction from yourself.

It is established that the alif in "tarâhu" is for the sake of His manifestation, because of the vision's dependence upon it. If he had eliminated it and said "tarahu", the vision would not occur because the pronoun ha in the word "tarâhu" denotes the one who is absent, and the absent one cannot be seen, and if the alif had been eliminated, then He would be seen without vision, and that cannot occur. So that is why the alif was mentioned. As for the wisdom of maintaining the pronoun ha, the meaning given is that the words "if you are not, you see Him" point to the fact that while you see by the existence of the alif you do not say "I have encompassed", for He, the Most High, is too majestic and glorious to be encompassed, and such a thing would not be possible. So the ha exists as the pronoun of that which is absent from you during the vision of the Reality of the Truth (haqîqatu-l haqq), which acts like a witness for you of the impossibility of encompassing (Him).

And God is the Guide (murshid), there is no Lord other than He. This is the end of what He has ordained for me to expound in this abode. And praise be to God, and may the prayers of God be upon our master Muhammed, his family and friends, and peace upon them all.

Notes

1. 'awdan (R), in which case it would mean: "to be a replacement for that which He transcends".

2. 'aradan, literally:displayed as an exhibit. From the same root, 'urdak means a target. The alternative reading is gharadan (R), which again means a target or a goal.

3. adâ' (R),meaning "radiant light".

4.hawâfir, plural of hâfir, an unusual word. Literally it is a person who digs into the ground, especially for water. But hâfirah is the original state or constitution of a thing, that condition in which it was created. These "diggers" seem to be then in contrast to the radiant ones who are of the shining light. The alternative reading is ja'âfir (R), perhaps in reference to Ja'far the brother of 'Ali, who was killed at the battle of Mu'tah after successively losing both hands while upholding the Prophet's standard. He is reported to have been rewarded in heaven with two wings.

5. This is the reading in the Rasâ'il, preferred here to the Shehit Ali "fardan" (as an obligation) since this would involve repetition in the next line.

6. Literally sunnah, which means any word of Muhammed that was adopted as a rule in Islam. It covers all the customary acts of worship which the Prophet performed and which his followers were exhorted to take as an example. It therefore implies the ways and habits of the prophets which form the basis of the religious life. In the Futûhât al-Makkiyyah Ibn 'Arabi defines the Sunnahof the Prophet as: "comingtogether in religion, performing it and not scattering in it" (11168.26). As a verb, sunnah can also mean to circumcise or be circumcised, and it may thus refer to the essential circumcision of the heart, which is known in the Abrahamic tradition as verifying the Unity of God.

7. qadam al-qidam. Literally, the footstep of eternity or precedence. It refers to the path of Divine guidance that has been laid out by the prophetic example.

8. tûl wa-l ard. These terms describe not only the extent of our three-dimensional earth but also the dimensions of the human being, the inner and the outer, the transcendent and the immanent.

9. qadam, referring again to the constant presence of those who have come before.

10. khumûd means the quietness and calm when the fire has subsided, an image reminiscent of the "garden amidst the flames" that Ibn 'Arabi uses in the Tarjumân al-ashwâq. Also jumûd (R), self-sufficient rest.

11. ittihâd literally means "the making into one". If taken to mean that two essences become one, that is clearly impossible. But that which constitutes the relationship between the One Essence and the multiple essences, the relationship of lord and servant, does imply a certain kind of ittihâd that is inescapable until true servanthood is realised. Often the term is contrasted with tawhîd.

12. wahdâniyya, which denotes the Oneness that all mankind witnesses originally at the time of the taking of the Covenant. This verification is sometimes called by Ibn 'Arabi the coming together of opposites, "which is the existence of the opposite within its own opposite. This is the strongest knowledge by which one can know Oneness." Also, wâhidiyya (P); ahadiyya (U).

13. raqâ'q, plural of raqîqa, means literally something thin or delicate like a veil, and is often employed by the Shaykh to mean that which connects different levels of Being, like ladders.

14. Hasan al-Basri, born at Medina in 21 AH (AD 642). He met many of the companions of the Prophet and lived in Basra. Respected as one of the great saints and verifiers, he died in 110 AH (AD 728).

15. Abu Hurayra, who was called 'Abd ar-Rahmân when he entered Islam and was known as "the father of a kitten" because of his fondness for cats.

16. Ibn Abbas, the cousin of the Prophet who was known as the tarjumân al-Qur'an (interpreter of the Quran), and is therefore a very powerful witness.

17. afkar, which means thought, considering, or mental examination. What the Shaykh is pointing out here is the kind of people who use the power of the mind to fathom the unfathomable and who come to an opinion which may or may not coincide with the reality. This is in contrast to those who are the real knowers, the people of taste.

18. yatakallamûna (R), which would mean "talking together".

19. Athar literally means an incision made in the foot of a camel so that its footprints may be traced, and therefore comes to mean the signs or marks which are set up to show the way. It may also refer to the traditions or accounts which describe the sayings of the

Prophet and his companions; in this meaning, therefore, it can be used as the equivalent of the word sunnah.

20. fahwâniyyah. In his *Istilâhât as-sufiyyah*, the Shaykh defines this as "the Address of the Real One by means of face-to-face meeting in the world of images ('alam al-mithâl)".

21. mayzka (R), which would mean both the act of distinguishing and the high rank by which a person is distinguished from others. For another description of this kind of unveiling, which confirms what the revealed books and prophets have mentioned,~ see William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge. Ibn 'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989, p.168, for a translation of *Futûhât I* 271.27.

22. 'uyûn al-bashar. Also, 'ayn al-basar (R) which means the eye of vision.

23. 'ibâdihi al-ikhlâs (Shehit Ali) which would mean that it is interpreted "to His true worshippers". In view of the following lines the Rasâ'il version seems to read more clearly.

24. fiman ajlaka yakkluq (R), which means: "There is no creation except that which He has created for your sake."

25. tamayyuz (R), which means that "you distinguish between them".

26. In the Rasâ'il the text adds *min wajhihi*, "from one aspect".

27. In the Rasâ'il the text adds *wujûhaha*, "some aspects". It is interesting that the Shaykh is pointing to a subtly different matter from the more obvious interpretation of the Islamic tradition having superseded previous religious laws. Here he notes that the previous laws "elevate" to God or are valid through the validity of the Muhammedian law, and that therefore there is no sense of discontinuity or disparity between the prophets. As is expounded in the *Fusûs al-Hikam*, the religion of Abraham, purified for the sons of Jacob, was completed by Muhammed, the all-inclusive prophet (see Quran 42.14).

28. This is a possible reference to Balaam, son of Beor, of Canaan, who knew the greatest name of God (see Numbers 22-24 and 31). He was pressurised by Balak, the king of the Moabites, to curse Moses and the Israelites, but he refused to do anything that God did not instruct him to do. Three times he blessed the Israelites, to the great anger of Balak. Subsequently he seems to have encouraged idolatry, and it is related that he lost the use of the Name. See *Futûhât* 73. q. 135 for references to the *sâhibu Mûsâ* (the man of Moses).

29. *maknûn* (R), which means "that which is hidden, the meaning".

30. In the Rasâ'il the text adds: "and when he repeated it, he observed the same effect".

31. *wajhân* (R), which would mean: "for the heart there are two faces: an exterior and an interior".

32. muhaqqiq (R), "verifier".

33. wâhiyyah (R), which would mean "he knew that his words would lose their significance or would be wasted".

34. maqâmât (R), "stations".

35. See, for example, Futûhât II p. 212 (Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 280) for a discussion of ridâ'.

36. The whole reply given by the Angel Gabriel is: "That you should worship God as if you see Him, for even if you do not see Him, yet He sees you." The Shaykh gives here a completely fresh meaning to the expression fa-in lam takun tarâhu, which is normally understood as "if you do not see Him". This phrase is explained in terms of annihilation (fanâ') and witnessing (shuhûd) since this is the major concern of this treatise, although the reciprocal nature of vision in union is implied by the final phrase fa-inna-hu yarâk, "and indeed He sees you". See also Futûhât chapter 54, "The True Knowledge of Allusions" (Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, pp. 246-50), for a more general explanation of the use of allusions (ishârât) by the people of God.

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