

The Beauty of Oneness witnessed in the emptiness of the heart (about Ibn Arabi)

by Cecilia Twinch

I nearly called this talk "Going in I found that I was really going out" after a famous statement of John Muir's who founded the American National Parks Movement. On observing the beauty of the natural world he said, "Going out I found that I was really going in," because the beauty found in nature was like a mirror to his soul. Beauty can be witnessed because beauty is within and similarly, going in, going into the self seems to be like a fractal unfolding - you voyage into the infinitely small in the same way that the heavens are infinitely large. In Ibn 'Arabi's *Kernel of the Kernel* (1), Hazreti Ali' is quoted as saying, "You thought you were a part, small, but in you there is a universe, the greatest." Similarly, retreat is like going into the self in order to discover that what is hidden there is displayed outwardly in the universe.

I would like to begin by saying something about the meaning of the word 'retreat' and obviously, in the context of this symposium, we are primarily concerned with what Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi means by retreat. However, this title does not necessarily correspond directly with the Arabic word 'khalwa' which is usually used to translate retreat, since, in Arabic as in English, there are many other words and ideas associated with retreat. Retreat refers to a withdrawal to a place of seclusion or safety: a place of refuge. It may refer to the spiritual practice of retreat as seclusion in a cell or to the general principle of withdrawing or fleeing to God.

Fleeing to God, in the context of Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine on the unity of existence, is not a flight away from one thing towards another, since there is nothing in existence but God; fleeing to God is merely a way of expressing the flight from ignorance to knowledge (2) - a theme which runs through all of Ibn 'Arabi's writings. However, Ibn 'Arabi also wrote specifically about the spiritual practice of retreat in the *Futuh al-Makkiyya* (3), in the *Risalat al-anwar* which Rabia Terri Harris has translated into English under the title *Journey to the Lord of Power* (4) and in at least one other treatise which he devotes to the subject, the *Kitab al-khalwa*. (5).

The practice of physically withdrawing from the world to a cell or some other isolated place is inevitably associated with asceticism. Ibn 'Arabi mentions some of the methods associated with retreat as a practice of withdrawing from the world in the *Hilyat al-abdal* (6) which refers specifically to seclusion or solitude, 'uzla. This kind of seclusion is characterised by abstinence, in particular refraining from speech, refraining from the company of people and refraining from food and sleep, described here by Ibn 'Arabi as silence, solitude, hunger and wakefulness. Ascetic elements of the retreat are described not as something in which to remain for their own sake, thereby conditioning what might be given freely, but as a means to an end, for they loosen the grip that the animal self exercises by curbing the natural appetites and they help in the cutting of worldly ties in order to bring the realisation of one's dependence on God Alone: that in silence and solitude conversation may take place with the Real One, for His is the Company, and through hunger and wakefulness it is known that God is the Nourisher and God is the One who gives repose.

Ibn Sawdakîn reports that Ibn 'Arabi told him, "Retreat and seclusion is all for the preparation of the place by cutting the ties. It is agreed that the one who finds intimacy with God the Most High in retreat has really [only] become intimate with retreat, not with God (Allâh), and He is the Truth (al-haqq)." The physical cutting away from worldly attachments and severing from dependence on secondary causes (7) may be helpful as a means of approaching God. However, Ibn 'Arabi seems to indicate that the means should not be taken as important in themselves, lest the seekers familiarize themselves with a method instead of finding closeness to God, and limit Him by trying to approach Him through something other than Himself. Much of what Ibn 'Arabi writes in his letters, treatises and books address a particular individual or group of people, at a certain stage and for a specific reason, all of which is incidental to its purpose of helping others to withdraw from their belief in the existence of anything besides the One and Unique existence. The physical practice of retreat needs to be undertaken within careful guidelines and Ibn 'Arabi makes it clear, in the Risalat al-anwar, which is addressed to someone who is already advanced in spiritual disciplines, that caution needs to be exercised. He says, "...do not enter your cell until you are aware of your station and of the extent to which you are able to oppose the power of the imagination. If your imagination has power over you, you must go into retreat only under the guidance of a teacher who is trained in discerning spirits and familiar with the Way. If, on the other hand, your imagination is under your control, do not fear to go into retreat." (8)

Ibn 'Arabi himself recounts that he went into retreat whilst still "a beardless youth." He relates that Averroes wanted to meet him because he had heard of the amazing illumination he had received whilst on retreat. By his own admission (9), Ibn 'Arabi was one of those few people who had gone into seclusion, apparently without the usual long period of initiatic training, and had been granted a spiritual opening. During this retreat, Jesus, whom he calls his first teacher and the master through whom he returned to God, appeared to him in a vision and told him to practise asceticism (zuhd) and self denial (tajrîd) (10). When he was still only about twenty years old, Ibn 'Arabi recounts in the Ruh al-quds, he was asked by his first earthly master, al-Uryani, if he was firmly resolved to follow God's Way. Ibn 'Arabi replied, "The servant may resolve but it is God who decides the issue." He was then advised, "Shut the door, sever all ties and take the Bounteous alone as your companion; He will speak to you without a veil"(11). This, we are told, is the course which Ibn 'Arabi pursued until he succeeded. He does not make explicit whether this advice was followed only in his interior or also exteriorly in the form of a physical retreat, but we do know that Ibn 'Arabi spent many periods of time in retreat throughout his life (12). Considering some of the apparently disparaging remarks he makes about retreat being only for the person who is veiled this may be surprising, yet it only serves to underline the varying physical and metaphysical dimensions of retreat which we intend to explore further in what follows.

A tradition of going into retreat had continued amongst the descendants of Ishmael throughout the generations (13). The Prophet Mohammed used to spend periods of retreat in a cave in Mount Hira near Mecca in order to devote himself to God and, Ibn 'Arabi writes, to "flee from seeing people, since he used to find in himself straitness and constriction in seeing them. Had he gazed upon the face of God within them," Ibn 'Arabi comments, "he would not have fled from them, nor would he have sought to be alone with himself. He remained like this till God came to him suddenly. Then he returned to the creatures and stayed with them." (14)

So long as a person does not see the reality of things, his state is such, Ibn 'Arabi says that "he must withdraw and flee from those affairs which divert him from (the real) situation, so that God may unveil his insight and his sight"(15). At one level it would seem that this unveiling of the insight and the sight coincides with the spiritual station of retreat which, once possessed, is never effaced (16). Yet at the same time the one who possesses it moves between gazing inwards and gazing outwards. Gazing upon God within oneself is deemed to be a necessary preliminary to recognizing Him in the exterior, within the secondary causes. Ibn 'Arabi writes, "Every seeker of his Lord must be alone with himself with his Lord in his inmost consciousness, since God gave man an outward dimension (zahir) and an inward dimension (batin) only so that he might be alone with God in his inward dimension, and witness Him in his outward dimension within the secondary causes, after having gazed upon Him in his inward dimension, so that he may discern Him within the midst of the secondary causes. Otherwise, he will never recognize Him. He who enters the spiritual retreat (khalwa) with God does so only for this reason, since man's inward dimension is the cell of his retreat."(17)

This cell of retreat is therefore always present with us. The physical withdrawal from all the distractions encountered in daily life is evidently helpful towards concentrating on the oneness of being and occupying oneself with nothing other than God. Yet a person's relative state of fragmentation or integration may persist whether in retreat or in company. Some people find themselves highly distracted by their own thoughts and imaginings whilst alone, hence the prayer, given in Ibn 'Arabi's Wird, O Lord "I take refuge in You from myself" (18). Others may be highly focussed on the essential even in the midst of daily life, like those people mentioned in the Quran (24:37), "whom even buying and selling does not distract from the remembrance of God."

Meister Eckhart talks of a similar idea in his sermons. When he was asked about detachment and those who keep apart from others, he replied: "If all is well with the man then truly, wherever he may be, whoever he may be with, it is well with him but if things are not right with him, then everywhere and with everybody it is all wrong with him. If it is well with him, truly he has God with him but whoever really and truly has God, he has Him everywhere, in the street and in company with everyone, just as much as in church or in solitary places or with himself. But if a man really has God and has only God, then no-one can hinder him. Why? Because he only has God and his intention is towards God alone and all things become for him nothing but God...No one can hinder this man who intends and seeks and takes delight in nothing but God, for God has become one with the man in all his intention. So just as no multiplicity can disturb God, nothing can disturb or fragment this man, for he is one in that One where all multiplicity is one and one is 'unmultiplicity'."(19)

Taking refuge with God from multiplicity may be pursued by anyone, whatever their spiritual station and whether in a cell or in society. Withdrawing to a place of safety and security is integral to the notion of retreat, whether physically or simply as a movement of the heart. In the Wird, the daily prayers which Ibn 'Arabi gave to his students, it is affirmed "there is no place of retreat nor safety save in You" (lâ malja' wa lâ manja' illa ilayka) (20), so the place in which retreat really takes place is in God.

The real meaning of this withdrawal to God is drawn out by Ibn 'Arabi when he asks, "From whom dost thou flee and there is nought in existence but He?" He warns that it is necessary to be wary of separating God from the world and fleeing to a divinity of one's

own imagining. The cause of this imaginary flight, Ibn 'Arabi says, "is the lack of tasting (dhawq) of the things" and "the fact that the one who flees heard in the recitation (of the Quran) (51:50) "So flee to God!" This verse is correct except that the one who is fleeing did not pay attention to what is mentioned in the following verse, that is, His words, "And set not up with God another God." Had he known this completing verse, he would have known that God's words, "So flee to God!" refer to the flight from ignorance to knowledge. The situation is one and unitary." (21)

So beyond and within the exterior retreat is the idea of going inwards or withdrawing to an interior state where one may occupy oneself with God Alone and not with anything else, because indeed there is nothing else. In this way, the one who withdraws may realise their total dependence on God Alone and see that everything that comes to one, comes from Him alone and that everything that one sees as a secondary cause is nothing but a manifestation of God in a particular form. In reality, nothing can happen to one that is not within the order, that does not come from God and yet we perceive some things to be 'other' and flee from them. (Then maybe end up like Bob Dylan sings in one of his latest songs: "I can't even remember what it was I came here to get away from." [in Time out of Mind '97]!) Due to the effects of God's Names in manifestation and because of relativity, there are some Names which are less attractive than others: some positive names which we like to affirm and some which we try to avoid. It may be that God sometimes manifests Himself to us under the aspect of rigour in order to make us turn to His Mercy. In this way we seek God in His manifestation as the Merciful and try to avoid Him in His manifestation as the Avenger.

Fleeing from the effects of God's Names to that which is more essential and all-encompassing is exemplified by the making of armour by David, explained by Ibn 'Arabi in the Chapter on David in the Fusus al-Hikam (22). David learnt how to protect himself from spears and swords and other weapons made of iron, by softening iron to make protective armour. The material that weapons are made of thus becomes a covering and protection from weapons. This, Ibn 'Arabi explains, was consequent to God's bringing to David's awareness that "nothing protects a thing except with itself." David's softening of the iron with fire is likened to the softening of hardened hearts through restriction and threat. Since God is both the Avenger and the Merciful, protection is sought from the Most Merciful against the rigour of His Name the Avenger. Acknowledging that there is nothing in existence but God, and yet recognising that God's Mercy precedes His Anger and is all-encompassing, then one protects oneself from God by God. Because of this, with the coming of the the Mohammedian Way, the Prophet said, " I take refuge in You from You"(23).

The fact that this example demonstrates taking refuge in the All-Merciful from the Avenger, as opposed to any of the other Divine Names which appear in opposition, such as the Creator and the Destroyer, or the Expander and the Constrictor, is not incidental. The Merciful is the all-encompassing Name which is specifically mentioned by God in His words, "Call Me Allâh, call Me the Rahmân/the Merciful..." This is the Name which mercifies all the other names and the Name through which creation takes place. Hence it encompasses all the other Names and goes beyond and unites the opposing Names.

It is the Merciful (al-rahmân) to whom Mary turned when she went into retreat from her people and veiled herself from them.(Q.19:16-18). When the Angel Gabriel appeared

before her, she went into a state of contraction, imagining that he was a man wanting to know her carnally. In this state of not knowing what the reality of the situation was, she turned to God with all her being, saying, "I take refuge in the Merciful (rahmân) from you". "Consequently," Ibn 'Arabi says, "she was overwhelmed with a perfect state of the Divine Presence"(24). That complete presence was the spiritual Spirit. Then, having withdrawn to that state she was able to perceive the truth of Gabriel's words and remembered the announcement of the joyful news, the beshara, that God had promised. She relaxed from her state of constriction and then Gabriel blew Jesus, which is the spirit of God, into her (25). The commentary attributed to Ismail Hakki Bursevi adds, "that complete presence is the spiritual spirit which expanded that which is binding and constricting. There can be no expansion except in the revelation of the Breath of the All-Merciful (rahmân) in the spirit of the person."(26) These are the conditions in which Jesus, the Spirit of God, came about in Mary.

In this account of the conception of Jesus there is also a beautiful example of taking refuge in the Essential from the effects of God's Names in manifestation, in order to know how to respond. The turning is to God as the source of help in responding to the situation, knowing that there is no power nor strength save in Him. This withdrawing and refraining from action of one's own, seems to be a vital aspect of retreat. God's presence cannot be felt in a place that is cluttered with thought, ingrained patterns of action and fanciful imagination. But in that moment of acknowledging only God's Lordship by turning to Him and by withdrawing to that space where God is always present, God may appear as He wishes. He can only appear in this unconfined way in a place that is pure, cleansed and ablated like the place of Mary, free of selfhood, free of desires, free of imposition, a place that is clear, clean and empty. This is why the heart, the spiritual centre of the human being, the place where Reality can appear in all its Beauty, must be clean and free.

The whole question of what it means to withdraw from the world and worldly things raises the question of what creation and created things are. Withdrawal from the creation may be seen in the context of the three journeys, described in detail in *Kernel of the Kernels*, which may be summarized as the process of coming into creation, the return or ascent to God, and the return to the creation. The ascent to God thus corresponds to the retreat or withdrawal from creation and the return to creation corresponds to the return to 'society'. This correspondence is made explicit in the *Risalat al-anwar*, whose full title may be translated as "The treatise on the Lights granted to one who undertakes retreat." Ibn 'Arabi states that it was written in reply to a question about "the modes of the journey to the Almighty Master, the arrival in His presence and the return, from and through Him to His creatures - a return which yet involves no separation, for nothing exists other than God, His attributes and His acts. Everything is He, is through Him, proceeds from Him, returns to Him."(27)

Whilst these journeys, which describe a person's spiritual development, describe a linear progression in time they may simultaneously be regarded as a constant process of return to the source and recreation with each breath. Retreat as seclusion with God, is then likened to a process of decreation or returning to one's uncreated state, whilst the return to the creation is the manifestation according to the revelation of God at that instant. Whether visualized as an ascent and a descent, or as a turning inwards followed by a turning outwards, this retreat and return to creation may be regarded both as spiritual stations of the perfect ones and as a practice at every moment for anyone who wishes to

witness the truth, whatever their state, whether far or near, since, Ibn 'Arabi reminds us, it has been affirmed that God is with us wherever we are.

From this point of view, withdrawal from creation to God, is really nothing more than withdrawal from illusion to the Real and from the belief that we have acquired existence, not from acquired existence itself since, Ibn 'Arabi affirms, 'there is none' (28). He explains that the meaning of the command, related in the Quran, "[Be!] And it is" (Q.36:82) is not that things acquire existence but that that which hears the command acquires the property of being a place of manifestation. Ibn 'Arabi remarks, "Those people of Wayfaring (ahl al-sulûk) without knowledge of this, not knowing who is the Manifest and the Witnessed and who is the world, have chosen retreat (khalwa) in order to be isolated with God." (29)

Ibn 'Arabi maintains that when these people choose retreat, they are not able to withdraw from the forms of things, like the walls and door of the room of their retreat. What they wish to withdraw from is the words that people speak, whereas if they really understood the speech of things they would recognise the gift that God gives in imparting knowledge through it. Therefore, Ibn 'Arabi says, "For him whom God has given understanding, retreat and society (khalwa and jalwa) are the same. Rather, it may be that society is more complete for a person and greater in benefit, since through it at every instant he increases in sciences about God that he did not possess."

The opposition of khalwah and jalwah, retreat and society, are examined in the chapters of the Futuhat on retreat and the abandonment of retreat. Jalwa or jilwa, also has the meaning of 'the unveiling of a bride' so that her beauty, as one 'dressed in the Divine qualities' may be displayed. Retreat as it is ordinarily understood is only suitable for the person who is veiled, Ibn 'Arabi says, since the people whose insight is unveiled are always 'in society', even in the cell of their retreat (30.) A person is veiled so long as 'otherness' is perceived to exist. Einstein called man's perceived separation of himself from the rest of existence an 'optical delusion of his consciousness'. This would seem an apt description of the altered perspective which regards the creation as apart from the Creator.

Bulent Rauf, the founder of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society, when pondering on Ibn 'Arabi's denial of creation ex nihilo, asked "Can it be that what we call 'creation' or 'creature' is just another dimension of the 'uncreated'? Can it be that the 'uncreated' looked at from another relative point of view, 'appears' only appears, to be 'created' due to a relative vision?" (31). Perhaps, then, in this sense, withdrawal from the created things is a withdrawal from what we ourselves have created through our illusory idea of self. For Ibn 'Arabi, there is no visible thing which is not a manifestation of God capable of imparting knowledge (32). In this way, all so-called things are regarded as places of theophany rather than distractions which hide God from sight. He writes, "Know that for the Tribe withdrawal is to choose the retreat and to turn away from everything that distracts from God. But for us withdrawal takes place in relation to acquired existence (since the creed holds this to be so;) and in reality, there is none but True Being" (33). Ibn Sawdakîn was told (in the Kitab wasâ'il al-sâ'il Book of means/aids for those given to asking questions) by Ibn 'Arabi that the aim and intention of one who is in retreat and seclusion from people is "to prepare the place for what is required by Lordship and the cutting of ties" but "when this happens to him, he can dispense with retreat, and his retreat and his unveiling (khalwa wa jalwa) become just like someone recited: O you,

my companion at night when mankind are sleeping and my confidant in the day while I am among them. " (34)

One of the purposes of retreat, then, is for witnessing the Beauty of Oneness without as well as within, so that there is not seen to be this separation, this differentiation, between within and without. Everything that is without is a reflection of what is within, so that wherever you turn, there is the Beauty of His face, whether in the interior or whether in manifestation, so that one is not preferred over the other but Reality is accepted however It shows Itself. The definition of *khalwa* given by Ibn 'Arabi in his *Istilah al-sufiyyah* is "conversation of one's secret awareness with the Real One in such a way that there is neither any material world [present] nor any person"(35). Yet since conversation (*muhâdatha*) is defined as "the Real One's addressing the knowers from the visible world, as in the summons from the (bush) to Moses"(36), it is clear that the usual distinctions between what is interior and what is the visible world do not apply. God says, "We will show them Our signs in the horizons and in themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the Truth (*al-haqq*)" (Q. 41:53-4). In this way, the human being is shown that all that appears manifest in the world is encompassed and summarized within himself (37). Within and without then become merely ways of describing the witnessing of the One existence.

The Void in which the world was created is in fact the metaphysical foundation of retreat, for Ibn 'Arabi points out that the Arabic word '*khalwa*' is derived from the same root as the word (*khalâ*) meaning emptiness. He reminds us of the saying of the Prophet, "God was and there was not with Him a thing [and He is now as He was]" and also of the question, "Where was our Lord before He created creation?" to which the Prophet replied, "He was in a cloud ('*ama*') above which and below which there is no air" (38). The emptiness or void in which there is no creation and yet in which creation is created can be understood both as a metaphysical explanation and an experiential reality. It refers to God and yet, insofar as I am no other, it refers to the state in which I was before I was created.

This cloud (*al-'ama*), Ibn 'Arabi explains elsewhere, is nothing other than the Breath of the All-Merciful (39). He writes, "the first form assumed by the Breath of the All-Merciful was the Cloud. So it is an All-Merciful Vapour within which there is mercy; or rather, it is mercy itself..." (40). Ibn 'Arabi explains that "the Breath emerges from a root which is Love for the creatures, to whom [God] desired to make Himself known, so that they might know Him. Hence the Cloud comes to be; it is called the Real Through Whom Creation Takes Place" (41). Breathing is caused by love as "a movement of yearning towards the object of love" (42), so the Breath becomes manifest and the Cloud comes into being, as in the Holy Saying, "I was a hidden treasure and I loved to be known (so I created the creatures)." This is the love of God to be known and recognized as He really is, displayed in all His Beauty and which manifests in the one who yearns to see Him.

Ibn Sawdakîn reports that his master, Ibn 'Arabi, said that "the aim of retreat is emptiness and preparation of the place"(43). The endeavour to prepare and purify the heart as the place of God's revelation means emptying it of all the clutter acquired by giving importance to the many things that seem to have a hold over our lives, instead of concentrating on the single Source on which we are totally dependent. The heart needs to be empty in order to receive (- as my T'ai Chi teacher used to say: "emptiness is a

prerequisite for receptivity.") The purification of the heart comes about only through God's help and any notion that one could achieve this by one's own efforts would lead to disappointment. Nevertheless our endeavour is nothing other than a display of the same love to be known.

Ibn 'Arabi explains that "the relationship between the human being (insân) and (retreat) is that between God the Real (al-haqq) and 'the heart of the servant which contains God' and where nothing else enters, under any aspect belonging to worldly realities, so that the heart being empty (khâlî) or free of every worldly reality, God manifests Himself there with His Being"(44). This is a manner of looking towards the Creator rather than the created, towards the source of one's being rather than towards a fixed idea of the world, allowing God the Real to be present in the heart according to how He wishes to reveal Himself rather than imposing our own mental construct on reality. So long as we continue to give existence to things besides God and indulge in them by attributing power to them, and allow our hearts to turn towards anything other than the knowledge of Truth, we restrict and limit what we really are and remain imprisoned by our own desires and beliefs. Ibn 'Arabi says, "...if you want to enter the presence of the Truth and receive from Him without intermediary, and you desire intimacy with Him, this will not be appropriate as long as your heart acknowledges any lordship other than His. For you belong to that which exercises authority over you."(45)

Ibn 'Arabi gives advice for positive action towards this end when he says "Base the whole matter of your seclusion (khalwah) upon facing God with absolute unification which is not marred by any (form of) polytheism, implicit or explicit; and by denying with absolute conviction all causes and intermediaries, whole or part..." (46). But perhaps the simplest advice for protection against attachment to belief in the separate existence of any created form is that given in the Risalat al-anwar when Ibn 'Arabi says, "let go and occupy yourself with dhikr (the remembrance of God) and take refuge at the side of the Remembered"(47). The importance of dhikr , invocation or remembrance, in retreat is fundamental. The heart's emptiness of any worldly concern and its total preoccupation with the Real is reflected in Ibn 'Arabi's opening remarks in the chapter of the Futuhat which is devoted to retreat when he states that the principle of retreat is in the Holy Saying, "Whoever remembers Me in themselves, I remember them in Myself and whoever remembers Me in company, I remember them in a Company better than theirs" (48). This, Ibn 'Arabi says, is an established Divine Saying which contains the notions of both retreat and society (khalwa and jilwa.). The remembrance of God in oneself corresponds to retreat and gives a sense to retreat as prayer or meditation, as well as the invocation of God by Name: a time set aside exclusively for the remembrance of God. Insofar as "prayer is a contemplation," Ibn 'Arabi says, and "a secret call exchanged between God and his adorer ; it is then also an invocation (dhikr)" and "whoever invokes God finds himself in the presence of God" (49) which is re-establishing the unified state. The return to the quiet centre, empty and totally receptive, is the return to the void in which creation takes place. There in the emptiness of the heart the Beauty of Oneness may be witnessed.

According to the Quran (Q.13:28), 'Only in the remembrance of God do the hearts find satisfaction and tranquillity' (ilâ bi-dhikr allâh tatma'inna al-qulûb) . This total occupation with God protects the one who remembers from worldly concerns and absolves him from guilt and blame so that he is brought into the closeness of God's

remembrance. In this remembrance, God remembers His own Self in Himself, so that all otherness disappears.

The confident heart which is in repose and at peace with itself, is invited to return to its Lord and find sanctuary in Him, in the call, "O soul at peace, return to your Lord, content, accepted, enter amongst My servants and enter My paradise" (Q.89:27-30). Paradise, Ibn 'Arabi explains in the chapter on Ishmael in the *Fusus al-hikam*, is what God veils Himself with, since the word for paradise derives from the same root as covering. He continues "and what is My paradise other than you, and it is you by your self that covers Me (which is My mystery)... if you have entered [God's] paradise you have entered your self" (50). The knowing servant sees that he both veils the Lord and is the place of manifestation for his Lord. Whilst everyone is accepted by their Lord at one level, the address is to that potential in everyone to agree to the total Lordship which goes beyond the narrow confines of a particular manifestation. Rather, the Lordship that his heart acknowledges frees it from limitation, so that it becomes a place of total manifestation of the Lordship. In this way, God may be known and witnessed in that unlimited place and fulfils the purpose of creation. The commentary of this text attributed to Ismail Hakki Bursevi responded to this line, "if you have entered His paradise you have entered your self", with the following poem:

And He never stops agreeing to us with all His Love, And His passion never fades from being all-loving affection. He forbids me separation from Him and necessitates My joining Him without possibility of distance or closeness. (51)

From this point of intimacy with the Real, there is nowhere which is not encompassed by Love. There is nowhere to retreat from or to, since God's presence is seen everywhere. The heart which is empty of otherness is filled with God, for it has a largeness and generosity capable of receiving Reality in whatever form it reveals itself. The possessor of such a heart is of those who "are not veiled from the witnessing of the Beauty of Oneness by the witnessing of the plurality of the images of this world and the other world" (52). Such a heart is not bounded or constricted by desires for anything other than the Essence Itself which is free, and being large enough for the Real, it is also large enough for what the Real One has created in Himself (53).

"God has made it clear," Ibn 'Arabi says, "that He is in every direction turned to" (54) when he said, "Wheresoever you turn, there is the face of God" (Q.2:115) and not defining it in any way, it is always Him and His Ipseity". The commentator of the *Fusus* explains, "He meant that when you look at the things of the world, go on seeing His Ipseity and do not for a moment be unaware of His Ipseity. Yet there are times of delusion while you are busy with the things of this world, which means at the moment of non-seeing of Reality and the non-awareness of the Ipseity in your heart, you can be taken away, die, in that moment....Therefore it is necessary in every moment of wakefulness [or vision], one must be facing Him, until in one's heart, there is the quietude of one's awareness that, whatever one does, consciously or not, all will be directed to Him...." (55).

I would like to finish by reciting the verses which Ibn 'Arabi composed at the beginning of the chapters on retreat in the *Futûhât*:

I withdrew with He whom I love passionately, and there was no one but us,
for if there had been another than me, the retreat would not have been one.

When I imposed on my soul the conditions of her seclusion,
the souls of the creatures all at once became her slaves!

But if there were not in her an Other than herself,
my soul would have made a gift of herself to He who overwhelms her with His gifts.
(56)

Notes

1. Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi, *Kernel of the Kernel*, Beshara Publications -Sherborne, 1981, p. 14
2. See Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, Albany, NY, 1989, p.158
3. See Ibn 'Arabi, *Futuh al-Makkiyyah*, notably Chapters 78, 79 and 205
4. Ibn 'Arabi, *Journey to the Lord of Power*, translated by Rabia Terri Harris, New York, 1981
5. Unpublished manuscript (MS Bayazid, 1686, fos. 6b-11)
6. *Hilyat al-abdal*, Hyderabad 1948, translated into French by M. Valsan with the title "La parure des abdal" in *Etudes traditionnelles*, nos. 286-7, Sept.-Oct., and Nov. 1950.
7. To depend on secondary causes is to depend on something which appears to be other than the First Cause or God (e.g. God is the only provider of nourishment, however many intermediate means or secondary causes may apparently be involved in food reaching our mouths.)
8. See Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, pp. 44-46 for a fuller explanation of secondary causes.
9. Ibn 'Arabi, *Risalat al-anwar*, extract transl. by M. Chodkiewicz in *Seal of the Saints*, Cambridge, 1993, p.151-2
10. See C. Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, Cambridge, 1993, p. 35
11. See *Ibid.*, p. 39
12. R. Austin, *Sufis of Andalusia*, London, 1971, p.
13. See Addas, *Quest*, p.38
14. See Lings, *Muhammad*, London, 1983, p.43
15. Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, p.158
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Futuh*, chapter 78. See Michel Valsan's translation into French in *Etudes Traditionnelles*, no. 412-13, March-June 1969, p. 83
18. Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, pp. 158-9
19. Ibn 'Arabi, *Wird*, publ. Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society, London, 1979
20. Dom Sylvester Houedard, *Commentaries on Eckhart Sermons*, publ. The Beshara Trust, Chisholme, undated, p.42
21. *Wird*, Tuesday morning prayer.
22. Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, p.158
23. Ismail Hakki Bursevi's translation of and commentary on *Fusus al-hikam*, rendered into English by B. Rauf, 4 vols., Oxford, 1986-91, p. 825
24. See *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*, trans. R.A.Nicholson, London, 1978, p.53
25. *Wisdom of the Prophets*, (extracts from Ibn Arabi's *Fusus al-hikam* translated into the French by Titus Burckhardt and into the English by Angela Culme-Seymour, Beshara Publications 1974, p. 69
26. See Ismail Hakki Bursevi's translation of and commentary on *Fusus al-hikam*, p.686
27. *Ibid.*, p. 683
28. See *Seal of the Saints*, M. Chodkiewicz, Cambridge, 1993, p.149
29. *Les Illuminations de la Mecque/The Meccan Illuminations*, ed. M. Chodkiewicz, Paris, 1988, p. 277
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Futuh*, chapter 78. (*Etudes Traditionnelles*, p. 83)
32. Bulent Rauf, *Addresses*, Beshara Publications, 1986, p.20
33. Cf. *Les Illuminations de la Mecque/The Meccan Illuminations*, p. 278
34. *Ibid.*, p. 275
35. Ibn Sawdakin, *Kitab wasâ'il al-sâ'il*, ed. M. Profitlich, Freiburg, 1973. Passage translated by Stephen Hirtenstein in the *Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society Newsletter*, Spring 1997, p.2
36. Ibn 'Arabi, *Al-Istilah al-Sufiyyah*, translated by Rabia Terri Harris in *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*, Vol. III, 1984, p. 45
37. *Ibid.*, p.39
38. *Futuh*, chapter 78. (*Etudes Traditionnelles*, p. 80)
39. See Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, p. 125
40. *Ibid.*, p. 127
41. *Ibid.*, p. 132
42. *Ibid.*, p. 128
43. *Ibid.*, p. 126
44. Ibn Sawdakin, *Kitab wasâ'il al-sâ'il*, loc. cit.
45. *Futuh*, chapter 78. (*Etudes Traditionnelles*, p. 78)
46. *Journey to the Lord of Power*, p. 29
47. *The Twenty-Nine Pages: An Introduction to Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi's Metaphysics of Unity*, The Beshara School, undated, p.14
48. *Journey to the Lord of Power*, p.39

49. Futuhat, chapter 78. (Etudes Traditionelles)
50. Wisdom of the Prophets, p. 127-8
51. Ismail Hakki Bursevi's translation of and commentary on Fusus al-hikam, p. 485
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid., p. 45
54. See ibid., p. 447
55. Ibn 'Arabi, The Bezels of Wisdom, translated by R. Austin, New York, 1980, Chapter on Hud, p.138
56. Ismail Hakki Bursevi's translation of and commentary on Fusus al-hikam, p. 578
57. Futuhat, chapter 78. (Etudes Traditionelles)

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