

The Kitâb al-inbâh

Part One, introduction

The author of this treatise, 'Abdallah Badr al-Habashi [Note 1], would have remained unknown to us had he not been one of the closest disciples of the Shaykh al-Akbar Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi [2], to whom we owe the little that we do know about him. The biographical and bibliographical compilations are almost totally unaware of this freed slave of Ethiopian origin [3]. His humble background may explain the sources' silence in relation to him, but it is also a reflection of the spirituality, in terms of humility and self-effacement, with which the Kitâb al-inbâh is stamped. It is significant that in his only work, the disciple stands aside completely for the master, and contents himself with quoting his words. Moreover, Ibn 'Arabi responded to these qualities with deep affection [4] and lavish praise [5].

We do not know the date of his birth, nor where he came from, nor how and when he met the one he was to follow faithfully to the end of his life.

When he appeared in Fez in 595, for the first time it seems, at the side of Isma'il b. Sawdakin, both of them must already have been close disciples of the Shaykh al-Akbar, since they were present at their master's accession to the position of 'Seal of Muhammadian Sainthood' [6]. The same year, Ibn 'Arabi returned to Spain in the company of 'Abdallah al-Habashi. On an inspiration from the Holy Spirit (rûh al-quds), confirmed by a dream of 'Abdallah's, he wrote his important treatise, the Mawâqî' al-nujûm, certain teachings from which are found in the Kitâb al-inbâh [7].

During this journey, he made a point of introducing to Badr his principal Andalusian teachers mentioned in the Rûh al-quds [8]. Badr then followed his shaykh on all his peregrinations. In 598 in Tunis, Ibn 'Arabi wrote the Inshâ' al-dawâ'ir [9] for him. Shortly after, he was in Mecca. In 599 in Ta'if he wrote the Hilyat al-abdâl, for Badr and another disciple [10]. Still in the same year, he composed a collection of hadîth qudsî, in which he related certain traditions according to 'Abdallah al-Habashi himself [11].

Several samâ' of copies of the Rûh al-quds tell us that he was at the side of his master in 600 in Mecca, in 601 in Mosul, in 603 in Cairo [12]. Then in Aleppo in 611, at the request of 'Abdallah and of Isma'il b. Sawdakin, Ibn 'Arabi wrote his commentary on the Tarjumân al-ashwâq [13].

After accompanying his master for twenty-three years, 'Abdallah Badr al-Habashi passed away in Malatya around 618 [14]. Thus we can see how much his life intermingles with that of his shaykh and how much the latter involved him in his work.

The significance of this text is first and foremost that it provides us with an example of Ibn 'Arabi's teaching for initiates just as he gave it out to his disciples. In this it can be distinguished from the various treatises or passages where the Shaykh al-Akbar sets out the rules of the way for novice or advanced disciples, even if the same concerns, the same pieces of advice, are sometimes found there [17].

Moreover, it is the work of one of his dearest and closest disciples. We can therefore be certain of finding in it a very direct, albeit incomplete, reflection of the most characteristic features of his spirituality.

'Abdallah al-Habashi does not appear to have followed a strict structure in his compilation. The first instructions certainly concern the beginning of the way: restraint of the senses, mastery of the soul, the role of reason (1, 2), and the last ones wisdom, ultimate goal of the Way. Sometimes the instructions are in pairs, but it is rather to their actual content that one must look for the coherence of the whole. An analysis of the main subjects dealt with by the master will be found here.

In gathering together these instructions, 'Abdallah Badr declares that he wishes to give freely some sincere (*nasîha*) advice to those who are following the path of Allah. He distinguishes the latter from the *'ubbâd*, pious persons or hermits dedicated to worship without seeking knowledge (16, 32, 33). The first category of initiate is the *murîd*, disciple, literally 'he who desires' to follow the path, whether he is a novice or has already acquired some experience. Most of the Shaykh al-Akbar's advice and warnings are aimed at him. Sometimes the instructions are of a general nature, such as those regarding the duties (*wazâ'if*) (29) of the disciple, sometimes precise such as those regarding the rules of retreat (*khalwa*) (63).

Three fundamental qualities emerge from the teachings of Ibn 'Arabi. The disciple's intention must be pure, his aspiration high and nothing must turn him away from Allah (1, 12, 63). He must submit totally to the words and instructions of his shaykh, and he must under no circumstances contradict him, (56, 61, 51) nor feel that he is worthy of replying to a question about the Way (60). He must regard himself as ignorant and must show total submission (*taslîm*) (50). Lastly, his detachment must be absolute. Poor and suffering through his state (19), he refrains from all resort to causes (*asbâb*) and divests himself of everything (34), abandoning all hope in this world in order to find it in the next (53).

Conversely, the bad disciple is conceited and restless and is not afraid of talking about the divine favours bestowed on him (14, 15).

By progressing along the path of stations and states (*maqâmât-ahwâl*), the disciple becomes a traveller (*sâlik*). Ibn 'Arabi reminds him of what above all, his principal qualities should be: poverty and humility (13, 57). Through spiritual practice and struggle (*riyâda-mujâhada*) and what they achieve, contemplation and intuitive unveiling (*mushâhada-mukâshafa*) (9), the initiate grasps the Essential Reality (*haqîqa*). This knowledge of the Unity, or the Supreme Ipseity, leads him to the end of the path, union (*wusûl*). For the gnostic (*'ârif*) however, union is only outwardly an end for the divine realities and their theophanies (*tajalliyyât*) are as limitless as Allah Himself (55, 71). The gnostic therefore is he whom nothing separates from Allah (18) but the man of knowledge (*'âlim bi-llâh*) is beyond this state.

Whereas most of the writers on Tasawwuf regard the *'ârif* as superior to the *'âlim*, for Ibn 'Arabi it is the other way round. He who has knowledge through Allah has, in addition to knowledge of the Unity, knowledge of the Duality. Thus he becomes the place or the instrument of the divine manifestation. The heir of the Prophet (*wârith*), he manifests the attributes of rigour and mercy (13). Unlike the gnostic, he does not oscillate between the *haqq* and the *haqîqa*, that is between the legal and cosmic status of beings and their essential reality, but goes beyond these two aspects and synthesizes them in himself (52). Whereas the disciple should refrain from resorting to secondary

causes and the gnostic should return to them, the man of knowledge is beyond this distinction (31). For the latter poverty and wealth must be the same (35). In short, he who has knowledge through Allah has knowledge of both unity and multiplicity, of both the primary cause and manifestation.

Among the spiritual virtues to which initiates should conform, patience (sabr) and its counterpart satisfaction (ridâ') are high on the list (21, 22, 23, 28). Trust in God (tawakkul) (27), renunciation and acceptance (tafwîd–taslîm) (28), wealth and poverty (35, 58, 59), are equally virtues which allow one to progress along the path of knowledge, whether by assimilation of a divine quality, or by the rejection of all individual pretension. Along the way, the initiate may be tempted to become attached to a particular form of worship which becomes a veil (32). In this case the remedy is the surrender and extinction of the self (tabarrî–fanâ') (16) or the renunciation (zuhd) not only of this world but of everything other than Allah (17). All these qualities are in fact those of the servant ('abd). Servanthood ('ubûdiyya) is the path which leads most directly to Allah (37, 38), for by denying any divine aspect in himself, by affirming his own names of servanthood and poverty, the servant allows the Divine Names to manifest themselves in him (43, 44).

The path is therefore to discover all the initiatory and metaphysical significance of this idea of servanthood. Whether it is at the beginning or at the end, the conditions are the same (25). In a kind of digest of his teaching for initiates (46), Ibn 'Arabi describes not so much spiritual progress itself as its necessary and inviolable elements. On the one hand, each person follows a path which is right for him; on the other hand, the path must not be seen as a linear development but as the completion of a cycle, in other words as a return to the source. In this sense there is no one who is not on the path of Allah (65, 66, 76, 70).

As if to underline its importance, the author concludes his treatise with some comments on wisdom (hikma), the culmination of the Path of the initiate. In metaphysical terms, wisdom is as much knowledge of manifestation and its primary cause, as it is knowledge of the symbols of the Primary Cause in manifestation. The truly wise man is he who contemplates the work of the Wise without allowing himself to be limited by any particular form. In terms of spiritual attitude, it is harmony, active or passive depending on the person, with the Divine Will.

It is not without reason, therefore, that 'Abdallah Badr al-Habashi concludes this compilation with the teachings of his master on Wisdom. When he compares the latter with a king's daughter in love with a man of lowly status, it is easy to see, beyond the religious forms, with which universal and gnostic tradition the teaching of the Shaykh al-Akbar Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi is connected (69 and 73–79).

Notes

1. His full name is al-Mas'ud Abu Muhammad 'Abdallah b. Badr b. 'Abdallah al-Habashi al-Yamani, the freed slave of Abu-l-Ghana'im b. Abi-l-Futuh al-Harrani. Cf. Futûhât, Cairo edn, 1329 AH, I, p. 10; Mishkât al-anwâr, Cairo, 1369 AH, p. 7 etc... Back to the text
2. Born in Murcia in 560/1165 and died in Damascus in 638/1240. Back to the text
3. Recently the Mu'jam al-mu'allifîn (Vol III, p. 39) mentions him due to the existence of a manuscript of the Inbâh at the Zâhiriyé in Damascus. Back to the text
4. As demonstrated by this verse (Futûhât, I, p. 198, Ch. 29.):
For your love I love all the Abyssinians
As for your name I have become enamoured of the luminous full moon (badr).

5. Ibn 'Arabi dedicated the *Futûhât al-Makkiyya* to 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Mahdawi and to Badr whom he describes at this point in time as follows (*Futûhât*, I, p. 10.):
As for my companion, he is (a man) of unadulterated clarity, a pure light, he is an Abyssinian, called 'Abdallah and like a full moon (badr) without eclipse. He acknowledges each person's right and renders it to him, he assigns to each his right, without going further. He has attained the degree of 'discrimination' (*tamyîz*). He was purified at the time of fusion (*sabk*) like pure gold. His word is true, his promise sincere. Elsewhere he calls him: 'the most noble son, blessed, most pure, full moon of the faith...' *Mawâqî' al-nujûm*, Cairo, 1965, p. 7. Back to the text
6. See the *Futûhât*, II, p. 49. On Isma'il b. Sawdakin see the edition of the *Tajalliyât al-ilâhiyya* by Osman Yahya, al-Mashriq, 1966, Part I, p. 106. Back to the text
7. *Mawâqî' al-nujûm*, p. 5. The following verses reveal the high spiritual degree of the disciple:
We are the secret of the 'Pre-eternal' (*al-azâlî*)
Through the 'Post-eternal' existence (*abadî*)
We have raised ourselves up and established ourselves
At the most holy station
And we have given what we have received
To the inmost secret of Badr al-Habashi...
8. *Rûh al-Quds fî muhâsabat al-nafs*, litho. Cairo edn, 1281 AH. These are 'Abdallah b. Qassum (p. 54), 'Abdallah al-Mawruri (p. 63), 'Abdallah al-Baghi al-Shakka (p. 65), 'Abdallah al-Qattan (p. 67), Ibn Ja'dun al-Hinnawi (died in Fez in 597 AH, p. 67), Muhammad b. Ashraf al-Rundi (p. 69) and Ibrahim b. Ahmad b. Tarif al-'Absi (p. 74). Back to the text
9. In *Kleinere Schriften des Ibn 'Arabi*, ed. Nyberg, Leiden, 1919, p. 4:
When Allah – Glory be to Him – made known to me the realities of things as they are in their essence and He taught me through intuitive unveiling (*kashfan*) the realities of their relationship and attributions (*nisab-idâfât*), I wanted to pour these realities into the mould of tangible representation, so that they would be easier for my companion and friend 'Abdallah Badr al-Habashi to grasp.
10. *Hilyat al-Abdâl*, p. 1, in *Rasâ'il Ibn 'Arabi*, Hyderabad, 1948, no. 26. Back to the text
11. *Mishkât al-anwâr fî mâ ruwiya 'an Allâh min al-akhbâr*, Cairo, 1329 AH, hadîths no. 10, 21, 25, 33, 35, 39, and 40. Back to the text
12. Cf. O. Yahya, *Histoire et classification de l'oeuvre d'Ibn 'Arabi*, Damascus, 1964, pp. 448–9. Back to the text
13. *Dhakhâ'ir al-a'lâq*, Beirut, 1312 AH, pp. 2, 196. Back to the text
14. Cf. *Futûhât*, ed. O. Yahya, I, p. 72, no. 1, Cairo, 1972; from the manuscript of al-Durra al-Fâkhira, Esad Efendi, 1777 (ff. 120–1216), which we have unfortunately been unable to consult. Ibn 'Arabi records a remarkable occurrence, which he himself witnessed, concerning the death of Badr (*Futûhât*, I, Ch. 35, p. 221). Back to the text
15. O. Yahya mentions four of them (see *Histoire et classification*, p. 311, no. 287.) We have not been able to consult the manuscript at Istanbul University nor that of Yusuf Aga in Konya, since the catalogue number indicated by O. Yahya currently relates to another work. O. Yahya does not mention the *Zâhiriyyé ms.*, nor the two *Tal'at mss.* Back to the text
16. We wish to thank Mme Regina Pascual for giving us a copy of this manuscript. Back to the text
17. Among these treatises we should mention in particular:

The Kitâb al-inbâh of 'Abdallah Badr al-Habashi

Part Two, translation

In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate.

Lord, facilitate our task!

The indigent slave to the mercy of his Lord, al-Mas'ud 'Abdallah Badr b. 'Abdallah al-Habashi, freed slave of Abu-l-Ghana'im b. Abi-l-Futuh al-Harrani – may God Most High forgive him – says:

Praise be to Allah who makes the hearts of those who have knowledge through Him, the treasure-house of His knowledges and His wisdoms. He deposits in their hearts His

knowledge and His most secret words and raises them up to be the place of His contemplation and His blessings. And may the grace of unity and peace descend upon Muhammad and his family.

In this book which I have called: 'The awakening to the path of Allah', I shall quote some words heard from our master, our shaykh and our guide, the imam, the most pure man of knowledge, the Red Sulphur, Abu 'Abdallah Muhammad b. 'Ali b. Muhammad b. Ahmad al-'Arabi al-Ta'iy al-Hatimi al-Andalusi – may Allah be pleased with him. Here are his comments and instructions on the path of Allah, on the relationship with Allah, on the secrets which lead to eternal felicity, to closeness and to intimacy. In writing down these instructions, I wish to give sincere advice to muslims, to safeguard knowledge in them and to remind them of God, when their attention is lacking. And may Allah, by His grace, make this of use to all.

1 'Abdallah Badr says: I heard our shaykh Abu 'Abdallah Ibn al-'Arabi say one day: He who restrains his limbs, rests his heart, he who releases them, exhausts his heart. Know that repose of the heart lies in restraint of the senses, until the moment when they are released in accordance with the revealed Law and its secret. When a man allows his gaze to wander, it may perhaps fall on something pleasing and unobtainable: a beautiful slave girl or a handsome male slave, an elegant dwelling and other similar things; if he gives free rein to his hearing, he may perhaps hear melodies which will captivate his spirit, without him being able to remember them, or else he may hear words which are forbidden to him. If he unleashes his tongue, he may utter words which will cause his ruin. So it is with all the senses that in unleashing them one is led either to the inaccessible or to the unavoidable. In any case, the heart is exhausted, the spirit preoccupied and life diminished.

The limbs only act on orders from the heart. In this state how can the heart strive towards its salvation in Allah – praise be to Him – when it is preoccupied with securing its immediate interest? It will only make the limbs move in order to achieve this. See how he who has the help of God and is a man engaged in spiritual struggle shall feel weariness and discomfort in his heart. The source of all this is only the releasing of the limbs, or some of them, to no purpose, without reflection or forethought. Assuredly, he who restrains his limbs and their (sensory) perceptions, or only releases them to a certain extent, does not exhaust his heart.

The second restraint, in conformity with the revealed Law, consists in allowing one's gaze to alight on the beauty of one's wife or concubine. This relaxation (of the gaze) is in accordance with the revealed Law, yet this sight leads to the heart being filled with other than Allah, whereas the heart is the place of Allah's gaze – praise and glory be to Him. If a person were always to lower his eyes and keep his head down, he would see nothing that is in his heart and it is the same for all the senses. A heart occupied with other than Allah falls below the level of the heart that contemplates Him. Fixed on the object of its attention, it is the prisoner of this contingent beauty which the eye sends to it. The owner of such a heart exhausts himself with the vision of a spiritual station of which he has theoretical knowledge but which he has not reached through unveiling and experience. How far is this heart from the heart that is in contemplation! This is the meaning of what I said above: in accordance with the secret of the revealed Law. What is expected of man is that he will raise his aspiration from the contemplation of beautiful women to contemplation of the Most Merciful.

2 The soul is a restive horse, saddled, bridled, ready to be mounted. If you mount it and entrust the bridle to the hand of reason, you are saved, but if you surrender it to the hand of passion, you are lost. It is up to you to choose. While delivering the bridle into the hand of reason, put a spur on each foot: on the right foot the spur of hope and on the left foot that of fear. If one day the bridle should slip from the hand of reason and the soul wish to stray from the path to the right or the left, dig your spur in on the opposite side. When it feels something touch it which hurts, it will in fact by nature turn away from it, which will bring it back to walking straight along the road. If it stops, reason will master it, take the bridle again and continue on its way.

3 Reason can follow two paths: one path which it can know independently and of its own accord and another which it only knows through being shown it by another. It is up to the individual to see which path he chooses.

If he commits himself to the path of gratitude towards the Benefactor, the path which brings him near to the Divine Presence through the imposition of legal conditions which reason only acknowledges on the authority of Tradition, reason cannot accompany him so long as he does not see the light of the revealed Law shining in front of him and guiding him. If you do not see this light, rein in the bridle, stay where you are, (and) dispatch a messenger carrying the wick of the effort of interpretation (ijtihâd) which you will light at the lamp of the revealed Law. If the messenger brings it back to you lit, then entrust the bridle to reason; it will lead you to joy.

If you follow the path of knowledge of the Beloved and of the essential realities of Being, which is also that of verification of the divine origin of the light of the Law, you will not then need this light. It is the intellect which should seek this path and find the lights which will guide it to this spiritual station. Rein in the bridle, come to a halt and send an emissary in search of this demonstrative light and this speculative proof. If he finds it and secures it, you will know, thanks to him, that the light of the Law taken as a guide truly allows you to attain eternal joy and the spiritual degrees. If you do not have this knowledge at the outset, you will plunge into the darkness of ignorance and you will stumble in the obscurity of a night without shelter or source of water; you will lose yourself and cause the loss of those who have been led astray by you and have followed you.

Seek therefore these two lights, take as a guide these two kinds of knowledge, (and) you will find the right path, if it pleases God.

4 A burn is caused by fire and suffering by sins.

5 There are four kinds of thoughts (al-khawâtir): lordly, psychic, angelic and satanic [Note 1].

Lordly thought gives you knowledge of secrets, sciences and states. Psychic thought incites you to accomplish that which involves neither good nor evil for you, for the proper reality of the soul is to attract benefit to itself and to drive away without delay that which causes harm. Satanic thought will drive you to perpetrate that which will cause you sorrow in the dwelling-place of the Hereafter, whereas angelic thought prescribes for you that which will be the cause of happiness in your final resting-place.

6 One is not 'a desirer' (murîd)[2] so long as one is not 'desired' (murâd), one is not 'desired' so long as one is not 'a desirer'.

7 When the gnostic opposes the course of things, the Essential Reality (haqîqa) causes his destruction; when he submits to it, it is the Real (haqq) which causes his destruction. So he is lost for ever as long as he remains a gnostic. But since one has to choose, to be destroyed by the Real is to be saved for eternity whereas to search for salvation in the Essential Reality, is to cause one's eternal destruction [3].

8 If he who no longer has anything intelligible and imaginable in his heart and who then returns to reason and the senses, finds no impression in his heart, this is the slumber of the heart in relation to everything; should he find an impression there, this is essential contemplation which is given (to him) from the time of this staying.

9 Intuitive unveiling is more subtle and more complete than contemplation. All contemplation involves an unveiling, more complete and more subtle than it (contemplation) is. It is possible to have unveiling without contemplation, or to contemplate without unveiling.

10 Weigh up your soul before it is weighed for judgment.

11 He who is desired (murâd), who is granted a blessing even though he deserves a punishment, is warned of the hidden ruse which this would involve for anyone other than him. So he does acts of penitence and repentance for his misbehaviour and acts of gratitude for the blessing which was bestowed upon him instead of punishment.

12 When the murîd wishes to know whether he is with the Commander – Glory be to Him – or with the deeds which He commands him to do, let him look into his soul. If he differentiates between the deeds that have been ordered by saying: this one is more arduous than that one, this one is more trivial than that one, then he is with the creation and not with Allah. If his soul accepts all the deeds equally without preferring one over another, he is with Allah – Glory be to Him – and not with the creation.

13 The path to Allah is twofold: that which precedes Union and that which follows it. On the path which precedes (Union), the initiate pledges himself to the attributes of servanthood: humiliation, poverty, need, necessity, indigence, subjection, humility and other similar qualities.

If the path which follows Union is followed by an 'heir' [4] (wârith), he will be clothed in the attributes of lordship, such as authority, interdiction, power, transcendence, majesty, guidance, teaching, tenderness and compassion, severity and rigour, sovereignty. If he is not an 'heir', he will follow it through acceptance, renunciation, the denial of his own attributes, being permanently in the company of Allah on the carpet of contemplation and serenity throughout the fluctuations of destiny without speaking a word.

14 When you see the murîd inclining towards the pleasurable things allowed by the Law (rukhas), resorting to interpretations, being greedy for the things of everyday life like food, drink etc..., constantly turning towards the ornaments of this world, becoming

agitated, being unstable, preferring one shaykh to another [5], regarding this one as more perfect than that one, being satisfied with the state of his soul, know that all of this is the result of a weakness in him of which he is unaware and that he will never achieve anything.

15 When of his own accord the murîd recounts how he has been granted a special power, Satan is mocking him, knowing that this murîd will never achieve anything.

16 Everything has its failing (âfa). The failing of knowledge is the neglect of practical application, the failing of practical application is the neglect of purity of intention, the failing of the latter is the expectation of recompense. Every person endowed with a quality is subject to the corresponding failing.

The failing of the devout ('ubbâd) is the frequenting of pious assemblies, searching for a place in the front row during prayers, attachment to the same mosque and to the same place in it.

The failing of disciples is spiritual audition (samâ').

The failing of the anchorites in the desert is longing for (the company of) men.

The failing of the sufis is generosity and self-sacrifice with the knowledge of the person at whom it is directed.

The failing of the gnostics is the weighing-up of their souls with the Lord.

The failing of those who have knowledge through Allah is spiritual direction and guidance.

The remedy for all these failings is surrender (tabarrî) and extinction (fanâ').

17 Detachment is not the renouncing of possessions and honours but the renouncing of being occupied with other than Allah, while administering justice to that which is other than Him.

18 He who claims to have knowledge and is separated from Allah by anything whatsoever is a liar. The gnostic through Allah brings everything back to Allah. Nothing turns him away from Allah. When he turns away, he turns towards Allah. In any state, he is with Allah; if he speaks it is according to Allah; if he sits down it is with Allah; if he comes it is from Allah; if he goes away it is towards Allah; if he sits down in company, it is in the company of Allah. He is through Allah, according to Allah, with Allah, from Allah, towards Allah, in Allah, he knows only Allah. If he says: Allah! everything says with him: Allah! If he is silent, everything is silent under his dominion, with Allah's permission.

19 Any disciple who exhibits neither sadness nor poverty, is wandering in a desert of ignorance and drowning in a sea of perdition. How could he not grieve when he is no longer able to attain the Grace which has eluded him? How could he not be poor when there is not a single moment when he does not have need of Him? But if a state (hâl)

takes hold of him, his sadness and poverty will disappear; so let him beware of the divine ruse.

20 This world is an uncertainty, the Hereafter a proof and the objective is Allah – may He be exalted and praised. He who seeks Him through a path of uncertainty will not reach Him. Allah – may He be exalted – has said: 'Indeed, on that day, they will be separated and veiled from their Lord' (Q. 83:15). He who seeks Him through the path of proof, reaches Him and sees Him. Allah – may He be exalted – has said: 'On that day, countenances will be illuminated, as they look towards their Lord' (Q. 75: 23).

21 He who is patient (sâbir) is he who suffers misfortune without complaint while searching for solace. He who is satisfied (râdî) is he who when tested does not think of complaining nor of seeking a source of comfort and who, once comforted, does not think of making a distinction between the two situations, unlike the one who is patient. He who is patient, once his patience is confirmed and his state assured, may only complain to his Lord and to no one else. Allah – may He be exalted – has said; 'Most certainly, We have found him to be patient' (Q. 38: 44); and God caused it to be said of Job: 'When he called upon his Lord to say: misfortune has struck me!' (Q. 21: 83). There is neither harm nor sin for the person who is in a certain state, the maqâm of which he has fully achieved, in asking to be detached from it, if he wishes. Then the state disappears and the maqâm remains. Witness the fact that if the state reappears to him at another time, he will not fail in this maqâm and will take on, as is proper, patience or any other maqâm.

22 Patience, in spite of the diversity of its modalities, is always connected to a test. The latter is not such obvious things as burning by fire or lashings of the whip; it is simply the pain felt by the soul in whatever manner. Likewise happiness is not horseriding or beautiful slaves, it is the pleasure felt by the soul in some way or another. Patience therefore cannot be genuine if there is no pain.

23 Men of patience are of several kinds:

He who endures being separated from Allah (sâbir 'an Allâh) is either a man who contravenes all the orders and interdictions of Allah – may He be exalted – and endures separation from Allah because he turns away from that which brings him close to Him; or a man who endures separation from Allah, but for whom the quality of patience is the same as that attributed to Allah by His name the Most Patient (sabûr); this is the highest station and the most exalted state of patience.

He who endures with Allah (sâbir ma'a-llâh) contemplates the one who chastises him even at that very same moment; thus contemplation is with him in chastisement.

He who endures through Allah (sâbir bi-llâh) asks Allah to give him patience when a trial arises.

He who endures in Allah (sâbir fî-llâh) is he who undergoes harsh treatment in Allah. No sooner does he say: I have believed in Allah, than Allah tests him.

He who endures for Allah (sâbir li-llâh) suffers the trial in the hope of encountering Allah. The trial is not what is commonly called a trial. Allah may test His servants with

good fortune as well as misfortune. The status of each person differs according to the state he is in. Patience is required of him who is tested with misfortune and gratitude of him who is tested with good fortune. That is the way it must be externally and internally. So that if someone experiences pleasure in burning himself, only gratitude is required of him, since he has a feeling of well-being. In the same way, if he experiences pain, even though outwardly blessings are showered on him, patience is required of him at this moment in time. Such are the essential realities of things.

24 The real fire is not ordinary fire but the fire of desire (irâda). When it installs itself in the heart, it makes everything that is not the object of its desire disappear, unlike ordinary fire which only consumes the place where it is burning.

25 To think that the end of the path towards Allah involves more conditions (ahkâm) than the beginning, is to be ignorant about the path.

26 Illnesses result from the pursuit of personal interest (gharad). He who has no personal interest, has no illness.

27 Those who trust in God (mutawakkilûn) are of five kinds.

For some, trust in Allah is like that of a child in his father, for others like that of the slave in his master. Yet others are like the agent and his employer, he draws his salary and serves him conscientiously. Allah – may He be exalted – has said: 'Expend of that of which He has set you up as lieutenant' (Q. 57: 7). Another kind, superior to the three preceding kinds, is with Allah like the corpse in the hands of the layer-out of the dead. Yet another is of such a high degree, that he cannot be mentioned. He who has tasted it, has realised it. Allah – may He be exalted – has said: 'Do not take other than Me as an agent' (wakîl) (Q.17:2).

28 Renunciation, acceptance, satisfaction, and patience are four essential realities. He who does not have these in him is not of the people of the path of Allah – may He be exalted. The essential reality of renunciation is to restore the choice to Allah, making one's own choice disappear. Acceptance is to submit obediently to what He has chosen for you: good fortune or misfortune, whether you like it or not. To do something gladly is satisfaction, one of the states of acceptance. The essential reality of patience is to prevent the soul from complaining. He who moans, is no longer patient; he who whines, complains.

29 Any disciple who does not assume twelve obligations at the beginning of his vocation (irâda), is not a true disciple and will attain nothing.

The first of these obligations is to seek a shaykh and, once he has found one, to revere him and then to commit himself to him, come what may, through an initiation agreement. Then he must lay blame on his soul and not defend it; he must not pass a single night owing a debt to anyone; he must serve the brethren regarding them as doing him a favour in accepting him as a servant; he must avoid riches; he must stay in the company of the poor in God; he must be eager to comply with what they command in order to satisfy their personal needs; he must practise invocation (dhikr) unceasingly; he must watch over his heart and call upon his soul to account for the most trifling thoughts and glances.

If the disciple fulfils his obligations, may the future bode well for him; if not, let him look at how to improve his soul.

30 The generous person (jawâd) is not he who gives away his possessions to the poor, but he who gives his soul to knowledge and makes it a slave to it.

31 If any disciple returns to secondary causes after having detached himself from them, this is due to a weakness of his soul. If any gnostic stays detached from secondary causes and does not return to them, that is also due to a weakness of his soul. If any knower through Allah who is subject to various states makes a distinction between the moment when God obliges him to have resort to the causes and the moment when He obliges him to detach himself from them, that results from a weakness of his soul.

To save oneself from these weaknesses, one must plunge into the sea of eternity, break away from the tribulations of hope and be as though it were one's last moment.

32 The devout person is the slave ('abd) of a service (khidma), the disciple the slave of an aspiration (himma), the grateful person the slave of a blessing, the patient person the slave of an injury, the gnostic the slave of a conjecture, the knower the slave of light and darkness and the wise man the slave of wisdom. As for the slave of Allah, he is rare, or his existence impossible even.

33 The knowers are both those who receive and those who impart the Revealed Word; the gnostics neither receive nor impart; the disciples watch and wait but neither receive nor impart. Those who are devout are dedicated to obeying orders and interdictions, without failing; they neither receive nor impart, they neither watch nor wait.

34 A disciple who, in the sight of Allah, has divested himself of everything externally and internally and who, having done that, keeps something superfluous to the state in which he is at that very moment, keeps it because he needs that thing. The light of divestment leaves him, to be replaced by the darkness of acquisition. He who claims otherwise has never inhaled the perfume of the company of Allah, once resort to secondary causes has been ended.

35 He who claims to have riches through Allah (ghinâ' bi-llâh), and regards himself as superior to the servants of Allah by virtue of the knowledge he dispenses to them or the possessions he gives them, has only a pretension to knowledge. As for the essential reality, he is a long way away from it. How can the knower through Allah claim to be superior to the creatures of Allah by virtue of the good he does them, when there are five truths to refute his so-called superiority?

First truth: the knower through Allah only acts on His orders. When he gives away a part of the knowledge of Allah or the property of Allah, it is solely in response to a divine order which he has received in his inmost being. If he refrains, he disobeys. What merit has someone who only gives when ordered to by Allah? If he refrains, he disobeys from the point of view of the essential reality. Can he not be compared to the Messenger who has not conveyed to men the revealed message?

Second truth: the eternal apportionment (al-qisma al-azaliyya) objects to him: how can you claim to be superior to a(nother) creature when you have only given him the share of your possessions envisaged from time immemorial? This share must therefore be transferred to him by hook or by crook. By Allah! I would even say that he who receives this gift from you is superior to you because he has saved you the trouble of ensuring it reaches him. Give thanks to Allah who has guided him to you in order to claim the right which it has been determined he is entitled to from you. What merit is there in giving to someone that which is his right?

Third truth: we, the brotherhood (ukhuwwa), are all sons of the same father, God (al-Haqq). When a brother gives to his brother the property of their father, what merit is there, since the property belongs to his father and not to him?

Fourth truth: servanthood ('ubûdiyya). We are all slaves and Allah is the master. What merit is there in a slave giving a share of his master's property to another slave? He either gives at the direction of his master or without his direction. In the first instance, what merit does he have, since it is the person who orders it who earns the merit for the gift? In the second instance, he is a thief who merits punishment. (Strictly speaking) it is impossible to give without having been ordered to do so, from the point of view of the essential reality. But from the point of view of the Law, it is conceivable that one could give without having been specifically ordered to do so.

Fifth truth: lieutenancy (istikhlâf). Allah – may He be exalted – has said: 'Expend of that of which He has set you up as lieutenant' (Q. 57: 7). We are all lieutenants of the knowledge and the property which we have at our disposal. Yet ownership belongs to Allah the Real. What merit does a lieutenant have if he makes a gift to someone of something that does not belong to him? Does not the merit revert solely to the one who set him up as lieutenant and said to him through the mouth of his messenger: give so much to so-and-so? His only merit is in having been obedient.

So how could the knower through Allah consider himself to be superior to one of Allah's creatures? He who makes such a claim has never smelt the slightest scent of the knowledge of Allah – may He be exalted.

Such is the failing of riches through Allah and of scant regard for poverty in Allah. That is why we say that poverty in Allah is more secure than riches through Allah. One could imagine that haughtiness towards the servants of Allah might go hand in hand with riches through Allah. For this reason the Prophet – Peace be upon him – said: 'I will be the lord of the sons of Adam, let it be said without pride' [6]. If, in this maqâm, haughtiness could not entail pride, the Prophet – may Grace and Peace be upon him – would not have needed to say: 'let it be said without pride'. Poverty in Allah is not like this, it is not accompanied by haughtiness nor by pride. Of what could the servant and the poor person humbled in slavery to and need of Allah the Inaccessible, the Rich in the absolute sense, be proud? But he who has received, together with the grace of poverty in Allah, that of riches through Him, without imbalance, has attained a degree that is beyond expression.

36 The knowers through Allah are permanent through the divine permanence because they are qualified by the opposite of the attributes of Allah. Those who are other than

the knowers through Allah are permanent because Allah causes them to exist, because they are qualified by the attributes of Allah. [7]

37 It is astonishing! How can he who knows himself to be the servant of Allah say: How far away is the path towards Allah!

38 If those who are making their way towards Allah were to turn away from the numerous stations which elongate this path and also from the trials which make its course difficult, and if they turned above all to the station and state of servanthood, the path would be made short and easy for them. They would know that Allah is closer to them than their jugular vein [8] and that they are likewise close to Him, if only they realised that they are His slaves – may He be glorified and exalted.

39 The exposition of knowledge makes it useful, accessible and pleasing to the intelligent listener, because his intellect can grasp this knowledge independently, through reflection. But the knowledge of secrets is not like this; when it is expounded, it changes, its meaning becomes obscure, reason rejects it because it is outside the scope of its perception and it cannot reach it. This is the difference between the knowledge of secrets and the knowledge of the intellect.

As for the knowledge of states, it is in between these two knowledges. The people of experience (ahl al-tajârib) are those who believe most strongly in the knowledge of states. This latter knowledge, like the knowledge of ecstasy, clairvoyance, intoxication and other similar states, is closer to the knowledge of secrets than to the knowledge of the intellect.

Then know that, if you appreciate the knowledge of secrets when it is expounded and explained, then you have a certain intuition for it and you perceive certain stations. But this is only on condition that the heart is convinced of it and really sure. There is no way in for the mind unless this knowledge is imparted by an infallible being (ma'sûm), in which case the heart of the intelligent man is reassured. But the words of a fallible being can only be appreciated by a man of experience and taste (sâhib dhawq).

40 If you sit close to someone who is speaking of secrets whilst weighing up his words against your understanding, you are with your understanding and not with the reality of the knowledge which the holder of the secret is bringing. In order to benefit from the words of the people of the path of Allah, one must enter into their presence poor and needy, as if one was entering into the presence of Allah, because they are the people of Allah (ahl Allâh). They speak of no one except Allah; they look towards nothing except Allah; they receive nothing except what comes from Allah; those who listen to them, listen to Allah; those who receive from them, receive from Allah; those who contradict them, contradict Allah. 'He who obeys the Messenger, obeys Allah' (Q. 4:80); 'And he does not speak from passion' (Q. 53:3). May he who enters into their presence see what they bring him, may he take what he can carry away, and may he leave them what he cannot bear, they are more worthy of it than he. But let him not take it to anyone other than these people because evil consequences will come back onto him.

41 The results of invocation are bestowed (mawhûba), those of meditation are acquired (maksûba), for every station and from all points of view.

Among those who invoke Allah – may He be exalted – some invoke (Him) in the inmost secret (fî-l-sirr), others in a loud voice (fî-l-'alâniyya). The latter are of two kinds: those who learn dhikr from Allah Himself and those who cleanse their thoughts of everything other than Him.

Those who invoke (Him) in the inmost secret are also of two kinds: some are knocking on the door of intuitive unveiling, the others conceal their dhikr out of fear of being interrupted.

Those who devote themselves to meditation (mutafakkirûn), meditate either on the Attributes or on the Acts, since the Essence cannot be the object of meditation. He who devotes himself to meditation is veiled and he who invokes (Allah), if he is in a state of emptiness (fârigh), is equally veiled, but if he contents himself with reproducing the dhikr, he is not veiled in relation to He whom he invokes with His dhikr.

42 To veil oneself with the ways of communicating with God (mu'âmalât) and with deeds which bring one closer to Allah, without obeying His orders, as received by the knowers through Allah, in relation to this, is the sign of weakness and sickness of a heart wherein dwell pretensions and egotism. To veil oneself in this way is, on the path of the travellers, a manifestation of the divine beauty (jamâl); for the elite, it is a deficiency and a moment of distraction.

43 The names that bring you closer to Allah – may He be exalted – are the same as those that separate you from Him. One can only draw near to Allah through His names by complying with His orders. Yet to draw near to Allah through other than His names is to reach Him. The Almighty can in fact only be seen as such by a humble being, the Rich can only be seen thus by a poor person. His names are His veil; beyond, there are your names. Your names are for you more exalted taking into account your worth, and likewise His names taking into account His. Just as He only comes to you through His names, you only come to Him through yours. Such is the union sought by the knowers through Allah.

44 The prayer of a person who is in a state of extreme necessity (al-mudtarr) is answered, whether he is impious or a believer. This is the proof that the greatest proximity is achieved through your names and not through His. You can draw near to Him through your names in any way at all whereas only a gnostic believer (mu'min 'ârif) can draw near to Him through His names.

45 This world is too contemptible in the eyes of the truthful person (siddîq), for him to expect from God the notion of making use of it, and in comparison to Allah this world is too insignificant for him to even dream of making use of it. Yet, he is zealous and competitive in the accomplishment of good works, through the hand of Allah, not with his own. This is the difference between the truthful person and those who strive for reward.

46 Know that the path followed by the elite of the people of Allah involves four modalities: motivations, incitements, character traits and realities. There are three rights to which this elite are subject in order that they may conform to these modalities, and these are: the right of Allah, the right of creatures, the right of souls. The right of Allah over the people of this elite is that they shall worship Him without associating anything

with Him; the right of creatures over these people is that they (the latter) shall refrain from doing them wrong, that they shall do good towards them as far as possible and that they shall give them preference over themselves within the limits of the Law; the right of their souls in relation to them is that they (the latter) should not lead them along a path other than that which will give them felicity and eternal salvation, even if the soul refuses out of ignorance or ill-temper. Only religion or nobility of the soul (muruwwa) lead the rebellious soul to be of a virtuous disposition. Ignorance is the antithesis of religion as ill-temper is the antithesis of nobility of the soul.

Let us return to the four modalities of the path:

Incitements (dawâ'î), are five in number: the sudden idea (hâjis) or 'tinkling' of thought, will, resolution, aspiration and intention. The motivations (bawâ'ith) of these incitements are desire, fear or glorification (ta'zîm). Desire is either a desire for closeness or of direct vision, or again the desire may be for that which is close to Him, or for Him. The fear is of punishment or of the veil. The glorification is of seeing Him incomparable to you and seeing yourself united with Him.

Character traits (khulq) are of three kinds: transitive, intransitive and general. A transitive character trait is either one which brings a benefit, such as liberality, generosity, self-sacrifice, or one that averts injury, such as forgiveness, indulgence, forbearance, reconciliation. An intransitive character trait is one like trust, scruple, detachment. A general character trait is one like patience, graciousness, etc....

As for the realities (haqâ'iq), they are of four kinds, in connection with the Essence, the Attributes, the Acts or beings which have been brought into existence. The latter are of three kinds: the higher world or intelligible beings, the lower world or sentient beings, the intermediate world or imaginal beings. The essential realities are all the place of contemplation (mashhad) where God establishes you without likeness or mode beyond expression and allusion.

The realities of the Attributes are all the place of contemplation where God establishes you and from where you can know Him as the All-Knowing, the All-Powerful, the Compeller, the Hearing and the Seeing.

The existential realities are everything that God causes you to contemplate and from where you acquire knowledge either of the realities of the higher world: spirits, elemental bodies and elements; or of the lower world: (corporeal) bodies, connections, separations and corruptible beings; or of the intermediate world: the descending of spiritual ideas into tangible forms. The perceiving of the forms of this latter world takes place during sleep for the majority of mankind or through intuitive unveiling for initiates. Amongst the latter, the weak perceive these forms through an extraordinary occurrence, the others through the power of their imagination.

The realities of the acts are all the place of contemplation where God establishes you and where you examine the relationship between the Infinite-Capacity and the capacitated (qudra-maqdûr), between knowledge and the known and all the other forms of similar relationships.

All the things that we have just spoken of are known as states (ahwâl). The stations (maqâmât) that correspond to them are qualities that are permanently acquired and which one must not relinquish, such as repentance. A state is a quality realised in an intermittent way, such as intoxication or clairvoyance; its existence is connected to a condition, as patience itself is connected with a trial. The perfection of these qualities is achieved either externally and internally, such as scrupulous piety and repentance, or only internally, without impinging on what the exterior is attending to as well, such as detachment and destitution. But on the path of Allah – may He be exalted – no maqâm is achieved externally without being achieved internally.

Amongst these maqâm there are some which man achieves in this world and in the other, such as contemplation, majesty, beauty, intimacy, awe and expansion; others which the servant achieves from the time of his death until the Resurrection and until the first steps in Paradise where they disappear, such as sadness, contraction, fear and hope; others which man achieves until the moment of death, such as detachment, repentance, scrupulous piety, spiritual struggle and practice, renunciation and adornment. Finally, other maqâm go away and return depending on the absence or presence of their particular condition, such as patience, gratitude and other similar qualities.

47 Hearts are the fields of secrets. Till them with spiritual practices and the improvement of character traits and do not let them lie fallow like pasture for beasts of burden and herds of animals.

48 Do not sit in the company of Allah as the Creator of sustenance nor as its Perfecter, Determiner of its destiny, and its Apportioner; sit in His company as a King with freedom of choice, acting in His kingdom as He pleases. And do not turn around but stay seated before Him on the carpet of 'I created thee before when thou wast nothing' (Q.19:10).

49 Any mortal or venial sin may be committed by the travellers, gnostics and men of knowledge who have achieved Realisation, except for four sins: lying, even in the interest of someone else, disloyalty even due to an interpretation, failing to keep one's promise, even if caused by a state, and ostentation, even if the intention is good.

I visited a shaykh and heard him lie; so I lost all respect for him. I visited another shaykh; I saw him drink wine but he did not forfeit my respect and I prayed to God for him.

50 He who acknowledges his ignorance of what he does not know knows his soul better than he who acknowledges knowing what he knows. Indeed he who is ignorant of something denies it and to deny something is to assert that he has a knowledge which leads to denial of that thing. This knowledge is correct and vitiates the relationship established with the thing that is not known, in the form of denial. Yet the denial shows that this man belongs to the people of speculation and reflection. He who acknowledges knowing what he knows is not like this and this distinction is found again in the hierarchy of the people of knowledge, except on the path of Allah. On this path, there is no place for denial but only for pure submission and acknowledgment of one's ignorance. In fact, by attaching your soul to what you do not know, you predispose it to receive an increase in knowledge, but if you occupy yourself with what you know, you

are unaware of the inflowing of the (present) moment, preoccupied as you are with your existing knowledge. The disciple who adheres to his ignorance rather than to his knowledge is more perfect. That is why we said earlier that he who acknowledges his ignorance of what he does not know, knows his soul better than he who acknowledges what he knows.

51 Any disciple who argues with his master or contradicts him, or else challenges the inflowing of his (present) moment (wârid waqtihi), if he is among those who are subject to such inflowings, is heading towards a breach with his master and being renounced by his companions. He reveals his shame and the unseemliness of his action.

52 Continual separation from Allah unbroken by return to Him, is a cause of breach between Him and you. Be careful, therefore, and be present with Him on the carpet of the conventions of the Law, while watching with the eye of the Essential Reality, in order to unite these two aspects. If you do not have the strength for this, observe now one, now the other of these aspects; one will counterbalance the other. If you do not even have the strength for this, there is no good in you.

53 The disciple who always has the prospect of his death before his eyes kills his hope in this world. He finds it again perfectly constituted and of fine appearance, in the next world. He will rejoice in it at the moment when the one who in this world has made his hope his guide and has followed it will be grieving.

54 To see something and conceal it, even if it is right, is to be a man of faith. To suppose something and divulge it, is to be disloyal, even if this speaking of it has a useful outcome. You must therefore keep secrets, since this is one of the qualities of men of faith and free men. Conceal yourself from ordinary men as much as possible, until your spiritual station is known. Only reveal yourself to people to the extent of their faith in you. If you reveal to them more than what they believe they know of you, and more still, they will reject it and that will turn back on them, because the person who acknowledges that which is beyond him is extremely rare. 'Indeed, by your Lord, they will not believe you, until they make you judge their dispute, then they will feel no resentment in themselves against your judgment and will accept it completely' (Q.4: 65).

55 Gnostics who do not look towards the divine realities but towards the realities of the higher world which emanate from it, defer their knowledge of things [9]. He who gives good counsel to his soul must approach these realities with an understanding beyond which nothing can be attained; then he will be someone who is sought after and not someone who seeks.

56 The disciple who associates with his opposites is in regression. If he associates with his equals, he is in (a state of) distraction; if he associates with his soul, he is in (a state of) perplexity, if he associates with his Lord, he is under a veil, but if he associates with his shaykh, the doors are open to him, the means are made easier for him and the divine name the Most-Lavish (al-Wahhâb) will manifest itself to him. God has said: 'Such is Our gift, be lavish with it or keep it, without keeping account' (Q.38:39) [10].

57 When the traveller knows neither his state nor his station, he is lost because he risks setting his sights higher than his state and he speaks allusively of that which is not his

station, without knowing that which he has not witnessed. This station will never unveil itself to him. When the traveller knows his station, he shows restraint and does not go beyond his limit. His words correspond to his rank or to less than it. Let him seek one who will make him know his state and let him mistrust his soul concerning knowledge. Let him not say: I have obtained knowledge, as did Abu Yazid (al-Bistami), when his soul caused him to claim to be the shaykh of Bistam. He went out in search of the one who would cause him to know his state and found the man with his eye covered with a bandage, riding a camel. The rest of the story is well-known; at the end he causes him to know his soul and he goes off. Abu Yazid tells the story himself as follows:

I was sitting one day when the thought came to me that I was the Master of the (Present) Moment. So I went out towards the road to Khurasan and sat down. I swore to myself that I would not get up until God sent to me the one who would cause me to know my soul. I stayed thus for three days and three nights. On the fourth day a one-eyed man appeared before me on a mount. I saw in him what his spiritual state was. I stretched my hand out to his camel whose hooves were sinking into the dry soil. The man looked at me and said: 'If you force me to open my closed eye, I shall submerge Bistam in the floods, together with its inhabitants and Abu Yazid.' He turned to me and I lost consciousness. (Having regained consciousness) I asked him: 'Where do you come from?' He replied: 'From the moment when you pledged yourself to God, I travelled three thousand parasangs to reach you.' Then he added: 'Oh Abu Yazid, guard your heart, turn away your face and go away from me.'

This story is taken from 'The Book of the precise method of classifying the sayings of Abu Yazid', one of the works of our shaykh, may Allah be pleased with him [11].

58 Any disciple who claims to have riches through Allah, without giving away what he owns, is a liar. Any disciple who claims to resort to secondary causes and gives away what he owns has riches through Allah without knowing it. The sign of riches through Allah is independence of the soul ('izzat al-nafs) in relation to what men possess; riches through the secondary causes is the opposite of this. In fact, the essential realities are such, that depending on the Self-Reliant (al-'Azîz) engenders self-reliance ('izza) – now there is nothing self-reliant except Allah. Just as depending on a servile being engenders subservience – now there is nothing servile except creatures. He who prefers self-reliance to subservience prefers God to (His) creatures.

59 Greed is like a body whose repose is indigence and detachment is like a body whose repose is plenitude of the soul. Whereas he who is in a state of indigence becomes exhausted, he who seeks plenitude of the soul finds repose. Any disciple who does not cast off the garment of greed in favour of that of detachment does not know deliverance.

60 When you see a disciple answering the questions that are put to him about the path of Allah, which is his own path, know that there is in his heart the desire for pre-eminence and authority. If he is questioned, it is preferable for him to send the questioner back to his shaykh, or to someone else. If the shaykh is away and he does not know of anyone in the locality to send him to, let him reply to him if it is necessary and profitable for the questioner's faith. The disciple should satisfy himself of this and should reply as follows: concerning your question, they say this and they say that. But if he knows that the question is asked out of self-interest and not for the reply to be put into practice, he should not reply at all nor send him to anyone, nor pray for this man, because if the

disciple considers himself to be worthy of interceding on behalf of others, he has lost his way.

61 The disciple must completely relinquish the control of his personal affairs (al-tadbîr), he must not speculate, nor interpret, nor direct, he must have no opinion, no view, no preference for anything at all other than the words of his shaykh. He must comply with the literal meaning of his orders. If this meaning is not clear, let him interrupt his practice of them to take the advice of the shaykh and to satisfy himself that he can continue with this practice. It may be that the shaykh has omitted some words that he deemed unnecessary, which could lead the disciple to make suppositions and to say: if that is not the case... or else I consider such and such.... The disciple thinks that this is the best way to comply with the orders of his shaykh, but he should not behave in this way. Indeed, we have said that the disciple should have nothing else in his heart except the authority of the words of his master with which he must comply even if he is an emir. The intention of the shaykh is not to control you, but only to teach you the right attitude towards Allah, not towards him. Now, in relation to Allah, you must have no individual conduct, nor opinion. Most certainly, Allah knows what He projects in you, so do not allow yourself any interpretation.

62 Spiritual practice (riyâda) consists in improving one's character traits and spiritual struggle (mujâhada) in making the soul bear hunger, thirst, vigil, penury, retreat. Without practice, there can be no struggle; without struggle, there can be no contemplation.

63 When the disciple wishes to go into retreat, he must block all the apertures in his room so that the light does not come in and darkness surrounds him on all sides and prevents him from seeing anything. Let him advise the people in his house not to raise their voices and not to walk about in wooden clogs. If there is a cat in the house, it should be kept out of the way and the door knockers should be wrapped in rags so that they do not reverberate. No one should enter the house of someone who is in retreat, if he is unaware of his state, which he could disturb through his commotion. As far as possible, only the people living in the house should be informed of this retreat; they will have received orders to moderate their movements as far as possible, even if they do not know about his retreat.

The person who goes into retreat must make provision for his food in advance and store it in his room. It should consist of light foods, containing a high proportion of moisture. If he avoids eating meat whilst in retreat, this is more beneficial. When he wants to answer a call of nature, let him put a bandage around his eyes, cover his face with a garment and wrap his hand in his clothes, so that it is not assailed by a foreign atmosphere. Let him cleanse himself with the water that he uses during his retreat for his ablutions. Back in his room, let him perform his ablutions, and perform two rak'a, short but properly done, in his usual place. Then he should sit down, put his head between his knees and start to invoke: Allah, Allah! with his tongue or his heart, depending on his strength. When he is sitting down, let him first of all undertake to Allah that he will not ask Him for anything other than Him. For the whole Kingdom will not fail to be offered to him, he will see beauties and marvels, the sight of which will fill his intellect with perplexity and he will receive as a gift all that he sees. Let him take care not to turn round towards any of these things because they are the veil that separates him from the Sought-After. Then let him undertake to affirm Allah – may He

be exalted – as incomparable, unimaginable, inconceivable, unrepresentable. If a being appears to him during his retreat and says to him: I am Allah, or your Lord!, he must answer him: You are through Allah! adding at once: Glory be to Allah! This manifestation will immediately start to vanish before him, until it disappears completely. Let him invoke (Allah) unceasingly until his heart is completely appeased, and he will then have achieved the end he was seeking and he will know it owing to a sign that he will find in himself and which he will receive immediately and certainly.

64 Even if he attains the highest station possible, the saint is still subject to the deeds prescribed by the Law, unless he is under the influence of a state which makes him like a madman or a man in a swoon. In this case, the pronouncements of the Law are suspended in relation to him until he emerges from this state. Then let him say: Glory to Thee, I return to Thee! Anyone in good physical and mental health who pretends to have attained a station which gives him dispensation from the (prescribed) deeds, utters a most serious lie and his union is in the fire of Hell (saqar).

65 He said to me: endeavour to know the path by which you came from your Lord into this existence. It is by this path that you will have to return to Him. If you know the path before returning along it, you will be a man of closeness, expansion and intimacy. If not, you will be a man of solitude, contraction and fear, because of your ignorance of this path. Allah – may He be exalted and glorified – has said: 'And to Him you will return' (Q.2:21).

66 The path to Allah corresponds to men; men correspond to their knowledge; their knowledge corresponds to their progress as an initiate (sulûk); their progress corresponds to their path and the path corresponds to men. Thus the cycle is completed.

67 There are men whose pathways are as numerous as their 'breaths' (anfâs), which are the movements of the (celestial) spheres of their existence. For others, the paths are as numerous as the minutes of the cycle of the sphere and even more numerous; for others as numerous as the degrees of the cycle of the sphere; lastly, for others as numerous as the succession of weeks and their intervals. He who does not follow one of these paths truly has no good at all in him. All beings, the first and the last, men and djinn, are on the path which leads to Allah. Only he who has no knowledge of the divine realities asserts the opposite.

68 By Allah, I beseech you, accept from the people of this path, who are bound to Allah, that which may seem reprehensible on their part, for to accept it is salvation. Allah, to whom these people are bound, has the power to transform beings and, through His power, they may appear to you in the form they choose in order to test your faith or your unbelief.

69 It is for you to raise your aspiration, to leave the glowing fire of these sorrows and to emerge from this obscurity if you wish to let your eyes see the source of the bringing into existence of wisdom (asl îjâd al-hikma). Regarding this question, gnostics fall into two groups: the aim of the majority is the viewing (mutâla'a) of wisdom – now the latter only exists in the world. So they do not leave the world, the 'Umarian maqâm of 'I see no thing without seeing Allah together with it' [12], which involves a sharing (ishtirâk) in the seeing. As for the smaller number, those who attain the essential realisation, they see directly the source of the existence of wisdom (asl wujûd al-hikma). Then, from

there on, they see how wisdom spreads in the world, like the spirit in the body. In order to express this knowledge, they mention the seeing of wisdom before the seeing of its source. However, they use an expression which shows that they have seen the source of wisdom before wisdom itself. So they say: 'We have not seen any thing without seeing Allah before it'. This is the maqâm of the Truthful (Abu Bakr). It involves a realisation of unity in revealed fashion. Beyond this maqâm there are seas with rushing waves. He who plunges in there is lost, he who steps in there does not come out of there again and does not want to come out of there again. But he will continue to see the shore, because Allah, out of mercy for the psychic soul, maintains his individual form (haykal), in this world and the other.

70 I am astonished at the man who does not know from where he came and seeks to go back there. How could he get there?

71 Knowledge is a house whose four corners are His names: the First, the Last, the External and the Internal. The First contains His knowledge in the eternity-without-beginning (azal), the Last His knowledge in the eternity-without-end (abad), the External His knowledge through direct vision and unveiling, the Internal His knowledge through demonstration (burhân). He who knows Allah – Glory be to Him – through all these corners and raises up on their foundations the house of his knowledge, has no more knowledge to seek beyond that, except beneath one corner, that of direct vision perpetuated by the uninterruptedness of the epiphanies (istimrâr al-tajalliyât). This perpetuation only takes place in the other world which supports that corner. For this reason the Ka'ba rose up on three corners, even though it comprises four (today). The third corner (of the original Ka'ba) was in the hijr and was placed there by Abraham – may Peace be upon him – when he laid the foundations of the House [13].

72 He who seeks the Real (al-Haqq), must adhere to the real.

73 To remain silent rather than to speak with wisdom at the opportune moment is the sign of real honesty (amâna muhaqqaqa), insofar as that does not harm the faith. To speak with wisdom at the opportune moment when it is not necessary, is the sign of dishonesty (khiyâna).

74 The wise man is not he who speaks of wisdom or makes use of it, but he whom wisdom makes act, even if he is not aware of it.

75 Wisdom is like an animal that has strayed, quickly found again, easily recaptured by he who knows how to go about it.

76 It is astonishing! How could wisdom have got lost when it is only the deed or word of the wise man and when the only agent in existence is Allah the Absolutely Wise One? How could wisdom be lost, when the whole of existence is wisdom? If wise men set about seeking it, it is because they are seeking a particular kind of knowledge. Allah – may He be exalted – has said: 'How many signs in the heavens and the earth do they pass by, while turning away from them!' (Q 12:105) and 'Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, in the alternation of day and night, in the vessel which sails the sea for the profit of men, in the water which Allah causes to come down from the sky and with which He gives new life to the earth after its death in order to breed all kinds of animals there, in the variation in the winds and in the cloud held in place between

heaven and earth, there are signs for those who understand' (Q.2:164). The ignorant do not know any sign except miracles, but he who does not regard the course of ordinary events as so many signs and so much wisdom has no understanding for Allah – may He be exalted – has made these events into signs 'for those who understand'.

77 Look in reality, and you will find that it is man who is the object that has been lost by wisdom. It is the latter which seeks him and not the other way round. And we seek refuge in Allah from this human nature which only knows wisdom conditioned by personal interest.

78 Wisdom is more enamoured of the one who finds it than the one who seeks it is enamoured of it. But since it has no tongue to remember itself to the one who is distracted from it, it remains inaccessible to him.

79 Wisdom is a loving beloved, loving the ignorant man, beloved of the wise man. Because of his love of it, the wise man seeks it and is jealous of it. The ignorant man who is its beloved, wanders about in search of it without heading towards it, so unaware is he of the nobility of its rank. This ignorant man can be compared to a seller of cheap trinkets to whom the king's daughter comes in rags to offer herself in marriage. He refuses her and insults her on account of her wretched appearance. Once he has lost sight of her, he perceives one of the sultan's courtiers, crazy with love, looking for her, and he takes him for a madman. Then he learns that she is the king's daughter and he nearly loses his head. Passion seizes hold of him; he repents but too late, not for love of her or from desire for her beauty, because he felt nothing at the sight of her. He thinks only of the honours that his alliance with the king would have procured for him. Likewise, the imitator (muqallid) only appreciates wisdom if he hears it from someone revered by him or famous for his knowledge. If he hears it from the mouth of someone for whom he does not have the same respect, he pays no attention to it and does not follow it. If he were to appreciate wisdom in itself, he would appreciate it wherever he found it. Such is the difference between the man of knowledge and the ignorant man. Men of knowledge are of two kinds: one kind becomes attached to personal wisdom, like going in search of something one has lost; the other kind sits in the company of the Wise One, who is Allah – may He be exalted. With each breath he passes through a new stage of wisdom, for he is unable, in this state, to allow himself to be conditioned by personal wisdom. From such a being spring forth words of wisdom.

And praise be to Allah alone!

Notes

1. On this subject see the Futûhât, I, Ch. 68, p. 335, and the Istilâhât al-sûfiyya, p. 7, in Rasâ'il, no. 29. Back to the text
2. In the rest of the text murîd will be translated as 'disciple'. Back to the text
3. On the relationship between haqq and haqîqa, cf. the Futûhât, II, Ch. 263, pp. 562–3. See also Mawâqî' al-nujûm, p. 175. Back to the text
4. On the wârith and on the path after Union or 'the descending realization', cf. Futûhât, I, Ch. 45, pp. 250–3: 'On he who "returns" (to the creatures) after having reached the Higher Truth and on that which makes him return', Ch. transl. M. Valsan in Et. Trad., Paris, 1953. Back to the text
5. Cf. Mawâqî' al-nujûm, p. 176. Back to the text
6. 'I will be the lord of the Sons of Adam, the Day of the Resurrection, let it be said without pride', quotation from a hadîth cited by Tirmidhi, Sunan: Tafsir s. 17,18; Ibn Hanbal, Musnad I, 281, etc.... Back to the text

7. We are adopting here the meaning given by Veliyuddin's manuscript; the manuscripts of Emanet and Tal'at give the opposite meaning (those with knowledge are qualified by the attributes of Allah and those without knowledge are qualified by the opposite). Back to the text

8. Cf. Q. 50:16. Back to the text

9. We have omitted here a short clause whose meaning is not clear to us. Back to the text

10. This verse follows shortly after another verse in which the divine name Wahhâb is invoked by Solomon: 'Give me a kingdom which will not be fitting for anyone after me, most certainly Thou art the Most-Prodigal' (Q. 38:35). Back to the text

11. The Kitâb al-minhâj al-sadîd fî tartîb aqwâl Abi Yazid is lost. Ibn 'Arabi mentions it in the Fihrist and the Ijâza (cf. Yahya, Histoire et Classification, p. 358, no. 409). Back to the text

12. This sentence is attributed to 'Umar and the next one to Abu Bakr. They are often quoted and interpreted differently by Ibn 'Arabi. Back to the text

13. On this original Ka'ba of which the hijr (Ishmael's surrounding wall) was part, cf. Futûhât, I, p. 666. Back to the text

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