

The Alchemical Marriage of Intellect and Soul **Ibn al'Arabi**

Translated by Gerald Elmore

Introduction:

Ibn al'Arabi wrote the *K. 'Anqâ' mughrib*, or *The Fabulous Gryphon* (to be published in December 1998) in his native Andalusia in 596/1200, less than two years before his decisive move to the East following his first pilgrimage to Mecca. Thus, like its mythical namesake, the apocalyptic Gryphon itself - which will arise out of the West to announce the end/beginning of an age - the book was intended to mark the exodus from the author's early life in the Maghrib and to proclaim his advent in the Islamic heartland where he would achieve lasting fame as the Shaykh al-Akbar and Seal of the saints. The '*Anqâ'*' is written in a highly symbolic language, of which the following translated selection is a typical example. Here a complex allegory of mystical-creative realization is consummated in a vision of the nuptial union of the Prophet Muhammad and his favorite wife, A'ishah (the "Little Fair One"). Chosen to keep the certified dower as the bridegroom entered the marriage-chamber with his new bride for the night, when the dawn broke Ibn al-'Arabi realized that the symbolic lovers had enacted the initiatic union of his own soul and higher mind. This orgic celebration of the alchemical marriage of opposites is developed further in the ensuing poem, where the author, again, assumes the role of male and female, active and passive, in the wholeness of that "Peace which passes understanding."

From: The Fabulous Gryphon ('Anqâ' Mughrib)

Since that which is true in Vision is a major part of Prophecy, we swore our belief in what such Vision confers and conveys of the Favors of the Real (Praised be He!). For I entered the House of Lights and let down the curtains and the veils, jealously protective of the harem. Then, while I was conversing intimately with the Real in His presence, the attraction of a Mighty One attracted me to him, and the Real installed me in the Station of the 'Ocean' - the waves of which heave and overflow, one entering into another and rising aloft. And I was in a State which no one can know but he who has borne it, and no one describe but he who has seen it, as has been said:

No one knows Desire except for one who bears it,
nor fervent Longing, but he who suffers from it.

... Now, consider and contemplate, O Most-perfect Saint, a Prophet whose body had been lost, while the memorial of his Way remained in Tradition: Called up from his tomb by night, he was led forth to his Gathering, the Living one joining with the dead - who, then, was 'gathered up,' the Lord of the House remaining in the House, which thus was filled with life!

Then [the Prophet Muhammad] requested the hand of his 'Little Fair-One' [A'ishah] from his 'Noble One' [Abû Bakr al-Siddîq], plucking her from the hand of his Friend (*sadîqu-hu*). He proposed for her a bridal-price (*sadâq*) the figure of which was unknown to me, and requested of me a testimony to that effect. So he wrote on a piece of red silk a document in shining gold, and I was the first, by his permission and command (May God bless him!), to witness his dower - that being in his highest Stopping-place and most-manifest Station. When he had so commanded, [the Prophet's]

dower was left in my care, and he entered his dwelling with his Bride, secluding himself with her, while the dower remained in my possession till the expiry of my term.

Then, when the Dawn broke for him who has two eyes, bringing together for me the Two Lights, I did not find a 'Bride' (*'irs*) or a 'Husband' (*ba'l*) other than my own Essence, nor a dower other than my own Nature and attributes. For I was myself both the Husband and the Bride, and I married together the Intellect and the Soul. And the 'Little Fair One' became purified by her Husband, supported by the firm will of her Intellect.

I marveled at my affair - that there was none but me! Thus, I arrived at the lifting of the veils on matters concealed: And I marveled at a Shore which has no sea for its complement to seek refuge in, and at a Sea without a shore for its waves to break upon; and at a Speaker of realities without a tongue and places of articulation, and a Silent One who ceases not to summon and show the Way to God; and a Sphere without location which is not known to anyone, nor does anyone not know it; and a Dome without supports, and a rich Earth which is not based on causes desecrated by being mentioned and adulterated by Thought. For its Causes are, rather, from the Presence of That which occurs not to the mind of man, nor does the attentive ear hear its report, nor eye-sight perceive it truly.

An Ocean without Shore

I marveled at an Ocean without shore,
and at a Shore that did not have an ocean;
And at a Morning Light without darkness,
and at a Night that was without daybreak;
And then a Sphere with no locality
known to either fool or learned scholar;
And at an azure Dome raised over the earth,
circulating 'round its center - Compulsion;
And at a rich Earth without o'er-arching vault
and no specific location, the Secret concealed...

I courted a Secret which existence did not alter;
for it was asked of me: "Has Thought enchanted you?"
- To which I replied: "I have no power over that;
I counsel you: Be patient with it while you live.
But, truly, if Thought becomes established
in my mind, the embers kindle into flame,
And everything is given up to fire
the like of which was never seen before!"
And it was said to me: "He does not pluck a flower
who calls himself with courtesy 'Freeborn'.
"He who woos the belle femme in her boudoir, love-beguiled,
will never deem the bridal-price too high!"

I gave her the dower and was given her in marriage
throughout the night until the break of Dawn -
But other than Myself I did not find. - Rather,

that One whom I married - may his affair be known:
For added to the Sun's measure of light
are the radiant New Moon and shining Stars;
Like Time, dispraised - though the Prophet (Blessings on him!)
had once declared of your Lord that He is Time.