

2. See A. M. M. Mackeen, "The Early History of Sufism in the Maghrib Prior to Al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258)," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 91 (1971) 398–408.
3. His *Mahāsīn al-majālis* (*The Beauties of Spiritual Gatherings*), on the inner life and the contemplative virtues, has been translated by W. Elliott and A. K. Abdulla into English (Amersham, England: Avebury, 1980).
4. See L. Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallāj, Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, trans. H. Mason (4 vols.; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982).
5. See E. H. Douglas, "Al-Shādhilī, a North African Sufi, According to Ibn Ṣabbāgh," *Muslim World* 38 (1948) 257–79; and A. M. M. Mackeen, "The Rise of al-Shādhilī (656/1258)," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 91 (1971) 477–86.
6. Examples of these litanies can be found here and there in C. Padwick's *Muslim Devotions* (London: S.P.C.K., 1961).
7. For Ibn 'Arabī's ideas, see T. Burckhardt, *An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine* (Wellingborough, England: Thorsons, 1976), Part Two, 57–97; and M. Asín Palacios, *El Islam cristianizado* (Madrid: Editorial Plutarcho, 1931), a long account of Ibn 'Arabī's life and teachings.
8. O. Depont and X. Coppolani's *Les Confréries religieuses musulmanes* (Algiers: A. Jourdan, 1897) has a wealth of material on the orders, as does J. Spencer Trimingham's *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).
9. See P. Nwyia, *Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh (m. 709/1309) et la naissance de la confrérie šādilite* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashreq, 1972), a translation and study of the *Hikam*; and V. Danner, *Sufi Aphorisms* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), for an English version of these famous spiritual maxims.
10. North African Sufi spirituality influenced also Spanish Christian mysticism indirectly, as we see in Asín Palacios, "Šadhiliés y alumbrados," vols. 9 (1944) to 16 (1951) of *Al-Andalus*, and his *Saint John of the Cross and Islam*, trans. H. W. Yoder and E. H. Douglas (New York: Vantage, 1981).
11. See E. Lévi-Provençal, s.v. "Shorfā," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1st ed.
12. T. Burckhardt gives numerous translations from Sufi and other works that depict the spiritual vitality of Morocco in its traditional setting (*Fes, Stadt des Islam* [Olten: Urs Graf Verlag, 1960]).
13. In *Letters of a Sufi Master* (Bedfont, Middlesex: Perennial Books, 1969), T. Burckhardt has translated some of al-Darqāwī's treatises on the spiritual path.
14. See J. L. Michon, *Le Soufi marocain Ahmad ibn 'Ajība et son mi'rāj* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1973), for a study of one of the Darqāwī teachers who sought to restore primitive Shādhilism to the order.
15. F. de Jong's *Turuq and Turuq-Linked Institutions in Nineteenth-Century Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1978) has numerous references to the Shādhilis in that country and their social and religious structures.
16. See B. Martin, *Muslim Brotherhoods in Nineteenth-Century Africa* (Cambridge: University Press, 1976).
17. A biographical and doctrinal treatment of the great Sufi shaykh is to be found in M. Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975). See also his article on the Algerian sage in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Ahmad b. 'Alīwa."
18. 'Abd al-Halīm Maḥmūd, former rector of the Azhar in Cairo, who knew Guénon personally, has written an important Arabic work on contemporary Shādhilism, wherein he mentions the work of Guénon as a Western offshoot of Shādhilī intellectuality: *al-Madrasah al-shādhiliyyah al-ḥadīthah wa imāmuhā Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī* (Cairo: Dār al-kutub al-ḥadīthah, 1968).

## 3

## Ibn 'Arabī and His School

WILLIAM C. CHITTICK

### Life, Works, and Influence

IBN 'ARABĪ (560/1165–638/1240) is probably the most influential author of works on Sufism in Islamic history. Known in the Arabic world as Ibn al-'Arabī with the definite article *al-*, he indicates in his autographs that his full name was Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn al-'Arabī al-Ṭā'ī al-Ḥātimī. He was called Muḥyī al-Dīn, "The Revivifier of the Religion," and al-Shaykh al-Akbar, "The Greatest Master." Though he is not considered the founder of a Sufi order, his influence quickly passed beyond his immediate disciples to all Sufis who expressed their teachings in intellectual or philosophical terms. He was able to combine the various esoteric currents existing within the Islamic world—such as Pythagoreanism, alchemy, astrology, and different viewpoints within Sufism—into a vast synthesis shaped by the Quran and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet.

Ibn 'Arabī's father 'Alī was apparently employed by Muḥammad ibn Sa'īd ibn Mardānīsh, the ruler of Murcia in Spain. In 567/1172 Murcia was conquered by the Almohad dynasty and 'Alī took his family to Seville, where again he seems to have been taken into government service. His high social standing is indicated, among other things, by the fact that one of his wife's brothers, Yaḥyā ibn Yughān, was the ruler of the city of Tlemcen in Algeria. More interesting is the fact that this uncle renounced all worldly power in the midst of his reign and became a Sufi and an ascetic. Ibn 'Arabī mentions two other uncles who were also Sufis.

In his youth Ibn 'Arabī was employed as a secretary by the governor of Seville and married a girl named Maryam from an influential family. When he was thirty he left Spain for the first time, traveling to Tunis. Seven years later, in 597/1200, a vision told him to go to the East. In 599/1202 he performed the pilgrimage at Mecca and became acquainted with a shaykh



from Isfahan, whose beautiful and spiritually accomplished daughter became, like Dante's Beatrice, his inspiration in the composition of the *Tarjumān al-ashwāq* (*Interpreter of Desires*). Also in Mecca he met Majd al-Dīn Ishāq, a shaykh from Malatya whose yet unborn son was to be Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (606/1210–673/1274), Ibn 'Arabī's greatest disciple.

Accompanying Majd al-Dīn back to Malatya, Ibn 'Arabī stayed for a time in Mosul, where he was invested with the power of spiritual initiation by Ibn al-Jāmi', who himself had received it from the hands of al-Khidr. For some years Ibn 'Arabī traveled from city to city in the regions of Turkey, Syria, and Egypt, and the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. In 608/1211–12 he was in Baghdad, perhaps accompanied by Majd al-Dīn, who had been sent there by Sultan Kay Kā'ūs I (607/1210–616/1219) of Konya on a mission to the caliphal court. Ibn 'Arabī himself was on good terms with this sultan and wrote him a letter of practical advice. He was also a companion of the ruler of Aleppo, al-Malik al-Zāhir (582/1186–615/1218), a son of Saladin (Salāh al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī).

In 620/1223 Ibn 'Arabī settled down permanently in Damascus, where a circle of disciples, including al-Qūnawī, served him until his death. According to a number of early sources, he had married Majd al-Dīn's widow, al-Qūnawī's mother. Among those who studied with him during this time was the Ayyūbid Muẓaffar al-Dīn (d. 635/1238), the ruler of Damascus. In a precious document dated 632/1234, Ibn 'Arabī grants him permission (*ijāzah*) to teach his works, of which he lists 290; he also mentions seventy of his own masters in the sciences, noting that the list is incomplete. It is clear from this source that, as a complement to his Sufi studies, Ibn 'Arabī had spent long years learning the exoteric sciences such as the seven recitations of the Quran, Quranic commentary, jurisprudence, and especially *Hadīth*.

Ibn 'Arabī's outward life demonstrates nothing very exceptional for a Muslim man of learning. His special place in Islamic history is determined more by his life's inward events, his writings, and his encounters with spiritual men. In this respect, his youthful meeting with the great philosopher Ibn Rushd (Averroes) is of great symbolic importance, since it demonstrates the wide gulf Ibn 'Arabī perceived between the formal knowledge of the "men of reason" and the mystical "unveiling" (*kashf*), or vision of spiritual realities with the eye of the heart, that characterizes his own doctrines and teachings. It is significant that Ibn 'Arabī says he was a "beardless youth" when the meeting took place. Though certain authorities have inferred from an ambiguous passage in his *Futūḥāt* that he did not enter Sufism until he was twenty, the meeting with Ibn Rushd certainly took place before he had reached this age, and in recounting it he alludes to specifically Sufi

practices that he had undertaken. Ibn Rushd "had wanted to meet me because . . . of what had reached him concerning the 'opening' (*fath*) God had given me in the spiritual retreat (*khalwah*)." The spiritual retreat, performed exclusively by the Sufis, is never undertaken without initiation and the guidance of a shaykh; "opening," defined for example as "the unveiling of the uncreated Lights," is constantly mentioned in the works of Ibn 'Arabī and his followers as a primary goal of the Sufi. One of Ibn 'Arabī's closest disciples, Ismā'īl ibn Sawdakīn, relates that when his master first entered the Path, he went into the spiritual retreat in the early morning and attained to opening before dawn. He remained in the retreat for fourteen months and received, through an overpowering attraction to God (*jadh-bah*), everything that he was later to write down in his works. Al-Qūnawī's disciple al-Jandī (d. ca. 700/1300) provides a similar account on the authority of his master.<sup>2</sup> These points help to explain the significance of the exchange that took place during Ibn 'Arabī's meeting with Ibn Rushd:

He said to me, "Yes." I replied, "Yes," and his joy in me increased. When I perceived why he had become happy, I said, "No." He became constricted, his color changed, and he began to doubt himself. He asked, "How have you found the situation in unveiling and the Divine Effusion? Is it the same as is given to us by rational consideration (*al-nazar*)?" I replied, "Yes and no. Between the yes and the no spirits fly from their matter and heads from their bodies." . . . He used to thank God that in his own time he had seen someone who had entered the spiritual retreat ignorant and had come out as I had come out, without study, discussion, investigation, or reading.<sup>3</sup>

The idea put forth by certain authorities that Ibn 'Arabī's initial spiritual growth took place at the hands of al-Khidr is unfounded. In fact, his earliest encounter with the "Men of the Unseen World" was with Jesus, as he states repeatedly, and his first spiritual master, Abu'l-'Abbās al-'Uryabī, was dominated by Christ's spiritual influence.<sup>4</sup> Jesus is considered the "Seal of Universal Sanctity," while Ibn 'Arabī, at least in certain passages of his works, claimed to be the "Seal of the particular, Muḥammadan Sanctity" (see below), so the connection between the two is not fortuitous.

Ibn 'Arabī relates innumerable inward experiences and visions that helped determine the course of his life and the nature of his teachings; a number of these have been translated into English in *Sufis of Andalusia*. Here allusion can be made to a few similar accounts provided by al-Qūnawī. Ibn 'Arabī tells us that his decision to go to the East resulted from a command he received during a vision of the Divine Throne. Al-Qūnawī's account makes clear that he had known about this journey when he first decided to leave Spain permanently. Arriving at the Mediterranean, he decided not to sail without knowing the details of what was to come. He turned his



attentiveness toward God with total presence and was shown everything that would happen to him inwardly and outwardly until the end of his life. "Then I set sail on the sea, with vision and certainty. What has happened has happened and what will come to be will come to be, without defect or deficiency." In a similar vein al-Qūnawī writes that the great saints have knowledge of what is destined to come about. Hence, they never pray for something whose existence is not predestined. "I witnessed that in our shaykh for many years in innumerable things. He told me he once had a vision of the Prophet, who said, 'God answers your prayers more quickly than you can utter them!'" Again, al-Qūnawī writes that Ibn 'Arabī used to contemplate the objects of God's knowledge at the ontological level of that knowledge itself. He would gaze at anyone whose innermost reality he desired to perceive and then "give news about his future becoming until his final resting place. . . . He was never wrong."<sup>5</sup>

### Ibn 'Arabī's Works

In his comprehensive study of the 850 different works attributed to Ibn 'Arabī, Osman Yahya estimates that 700 are authentic and that of these, over 400 are extant. Though many of these are only a few pages long, many more are full-sized books, and the *Futūḥāt* alone contains more words than most authors write in a lifetime. Ibn 'Arabī provides the reason for his almost miraculous output. He never set out to write a single book. "On the contrary, influxes from God have entered upon me and nearly burned me alive. In order to find relief . . . I have composed works, without any intention on my own part. Many other books I have composed because of a divine command given during a dream or unveiling."<sup>6</sup>

Among Ibn 'Arabī's well-known works are the following:

(1) *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah* (*The Meccan Openings*). This compendium of all the religious and gnostic sciences in Islam is a vast and bewildering ocean of inspirations. Among the subjects treated are the meanings of all the Islamic ritual observances, the stations and states the travelers undergo on their journey to God and in God, the significance and nature of each ontological level in the cosmos, the spiritual and ontological meaning of the letters of the Arabic alphabet, the meaning of different Quranic verses and *ḥadīths* from the points of view of various stations of mystical knowledge, the sciences embraced by each of the ninety-nine Names of God, and the "psychological" states of those travelers who are dominated by the spiritual influences of various prophets.

(2) *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (*The Ringstones of Wisdom*). Judging from the more than one hundred commentaries written on this work and the great esteem

in which it has always been held by Ibn 'Arabī's followers, one can accept H. Corbin's view that it is "no doubt the best compendium of Ibn 'Arabī's esoteric doctrine." In al-Qūnawī's view, it is "one of the most precious shorter writings of our shaykh."<sup>8</sup> Basing himself on the Quran and the *Hadith*, Ibn 'Arabī discusses the divine wisdom revealed to twenty-seven different prophets or Words of God from Adam to Muḥammad; he shows how each prophet is the theophany of the wisdom implied by one of the Divine Names. The first to comment on the *Fuṣūṣ* was al-Qūnawī, although he discusses only the general themes of each chapter.

A second early commentator was 'Afīf al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī (d. 690/1291), a direct disciple of Ibn 'Arabī and then a constant companion of al-Qūnawī; so close were they that al-Qūnawī willed all of his own works to 'Afīf al-Dīn. In his commentary he deals with a few salient points which appear unclear or with which he is in disagreement (such as the question of the immutability [*thubūt*] of the entities). Undoubtedly, the most influential of the commentators was al-Jandī, who tells us that when al-Qūnawī was explaining to him the preface of the work, he was overcome by his spiritual influence and was given an opening through which the purport of the whole work was revealed to him. When apprised of this experience, al-Qūnawī told him that the same thing had happened to him when Ibn 'Arabī had begun to explain the work to him.

A famous commentator is al-Jandī's student al-Kāshānī (d. 730/1330); T. Izutsu's outstanding exposition of Ibn 'Arabī's ontology is based largely on al-Kāshānī's work. More influential in Iran and the eastern lands of Islam has been the commentary of al-Kāshānī's student al-Qayṣarī (d. 751/1350), who directed a *madrasah* in Anatolia. Bābā Rukn al-Dīn Shīrāzī (d. 744/1344) studied with both al-Kāshānī and al-Qayṣarī and wrote the first Persian commentary. Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. ca. 786/1384) in *Nasṣ al-nuṣūṣ* (*The Text of Texts*) integrated the *Fuṣūṣ* into the context of Shī'ite gnosis. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 898/1492) wrote both an Arabic commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ* and a mixed Persian and Arabic commentary on Ibn 'Arabī's own summary of the *Fuṣūṣ*. In India Muḥibb Ilāh Ilāhābādī (d. 1058/1648) wrote commentaries on the *Fuṣūṣ* in both Arabic and Persian; his many works on Ibn 'Arabī's teachings earned him the title of "the Second Ibn 'Arabī." In the Turkish-speaking part of the Islamic world 'Abd Allāh of Bosnia (d. 1054/1644), known as 'Abdī Efendī, wrote several Arabic treatises showing a remarkable spiritual and intellectual affinity with al-Qūnawī and is the author of commentaries on the *Fuṣūṣ* in Arabic and Turkish, both of which have been published. Perhaps the most widely read commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ* in the Arab world was written by the prolific Sufi author 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1730); his care to define and



explain practically every single word and his often questionable interpretations suggest that already by his time the general ability to read and understand the *Fuṣūṣ* in the Arab world had severely declined.

(3) *Tarjumān al-ashwāq*. This short divan of love poetry referred to above was the first of Ibn 'Arabī's works to be translated into English. It is particularly famous because he himself wrote a commentary on it to prove to certain exoteric 'ulamā' that it dealt with spiritual truths and not profane love. Ibn 'Arabī is also the author of at least two other divans and many thousands of verses scattered throughout his prose works; he is one of the best and most productive of all Arab poets.

(4) *Shajarat al-kawn* (*The Tree of Engendered Existence*). Developing the symbolism of the Quranic verse, "a good word is like a good tree . . ." (XIV, 24), this relatively short treatise on cosmology, extant in English translation, describes the Prophet Muḥammad as the embodiment of the Perfect Man.

Among the many works wrongly attributed to Ibn 'Arabī, *Risālat al-aḥadiyyah* (*The Treatise on Unity*) has been translated into English. It has recently been shown to be the work of Aḥmad al-Dīn Balyānī; though influenced by Ibn 'Arabī, Balyānī interprets a number of his teachings in a manner unacceptable to the mainstream of his school.

### Ibn 'Arabī's Influence

Ibn 'Arabī's doctrines have been taught either in conjunction with a practical spiritual method, or independently as "mystical philosophy." It is highly likely that Ibn 'Arabī himself taught his own works both to initiated Sufis and to those who were intellectually attracted to Sufism but had not taken the practical step of swearing allegiance to a shaykh. The chief disciple to whom he transmitted both his spiritual and intellectual authority was al-Qūnawī; all sources agree that he was the major spokesman for Ibn 'Arabī's teachings. Al-Qūnawī himself refers to his special role in recounting a vision of Ibn 'Arabī fifteen years after his death. He asked from him the "attainment of the direct vision of that theophany after which there is no veil and which does not endure for any other Perfect Man," that is, apart from Ibn 'Arabī. After granting this request, Ibn 'Arabī tells him that he has had many sons and disciples, especially the son of his own loins, Sa'd al-Dīn (d. 656/1258, the author of a divan), "but what you have asked was not made possible for any of them. How many sons and disciples have I killed and then revived! But he who died, died, and he who was slain, was slain, and none of them attained to this!"<sup>9</sup>

Al-Qūnawī is the author of about thirty works, of which five or six are

of central importance for the spread of Ibn 'Arabī's teachings, since they determined how he was to be interpreted by most of his followers. In style of expression, he stands at the antipodes of his master. While Ibn 'Arabī's works are torrents of inspiration, continual flashes of light often with no apparent interconnection, al-Qūnawī provides a model for the systematic and rational formulation of ideas, though he constantly deals with the world of unveiling. In the words of the great Sufi poet Jāmī, "It is impossible to understand Ibn 'Arabī's teachings concerning the Oneness of Being in a manner consistent both with intelligence and with the religious law without studying al-Qūnawī's works."<sup>10</sup> Among the most important of these are *Miftāḥ al-ghayb* (*The Key to the Unseen*), a systematic account of Ibn 'Arabī's metaphysics and cosmology; *Tafsīr al-fātiḥah* (*Commentary on the Opening Chapter of the Quran*), an exposition of the nature of the "three books" (the Quran, the cosmos, and man); and a correspondence with Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Tūsī (d. 672/1274), the foremost representative of Ibn Sīnā's Peripatetic philosophy. In this last work, al-Qūnawī demonstrates concurrences between Ibn 'Arabī's teachings and those of the Peripatetics, while clearly showing where they diverge.

Al-Qūnawī directed a flourishing center in Konya, where he was a close friend of Rūmī, though he represents a very different mode of formulating Sufi teachings. Scholars came from much of the Islamic world to study *Hadīth* with him. Often, after delivering a formal lecture on this subject in Arabic, he would change to Persian and comment on Sufi poetry. This was his method in teaching the great *Poem of the Way* of Ibn al-Fārid (d. 632/1235). Al-Qūnawī's disciple al-Farghānī (d. 695/1296) took careful notes during these lectures and then rewrote them in the form of the Persian work *Mashāriq al-darārī al-zuhār* (*Orients of Radiant Stars*), to which al-Qūnawī added a short introduction. Later al-Farghānī revised his own work in Arabic with the title *Muntahā'l-madārik* (*The Utmost Limit of Perception*); concerning the latter work Jāmī writes, "No one else has ever been able to explain the intricacies of the Science of Reality with such interconnectedness and order."<sup>11</sup>

Another important disciple of al-Qūnawī was al-Jandī, referred to above; his Persian *Nafḥat al-rūḥ* (*The Breath of the Spirit*) provides valuable information concerning the practices connected with Ibn 'Arabī's teachings. A third student, Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī (d. 688/1289) was inspired by al-Qūnawī's lectures on the *Fuṣūṣ* to write *Lama'āt* (*Divine Flashes*), a digest in exquisite Persian prose of Ibn 'Arabī's teachings on metaphysics and divine love. A fourth, Abū Bakr 'Alī al-Malaṭī or al-Sīwāsī is known only because he transmitted al-Qūnawī's power of initiation to later Sufis.<sup>12</sup> Among later members of the same *silsilah* is Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Shīrīn



Maghribi (d. 809/1406-7), whose Persian divan has long been highly esteemed for its exposition of Ibn 'Arabī's teachings. Famous later masters descended from Ibn 'Arabī's line include the prolific Moroccan author Abu'l-'Abbās Aḥmad known as al-Zarrūq (d. 899/1493), and the *amīr* 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā'irī (d. 1300/1883), exiled from Algeria to Damascus by the French for his role in leading the resistance to their rule and author of a number of important works.

Outside of the small number of *silsilahs* that trace a line of descent to Ibn 'Arabī, practically all Sufis who have expressed themselves in intellectual terms have followed the lead of his school. Even those Sufis who opposed certain of his teachings, such as 'Alā' al-Dawlah Simnānī (d. 736/1336), employed his terminology and concepts. In the same way, Rūmī's commentators lived in Ibn 'Arabī's intellectual universe and employed his teachings to explain those of their own master. Besides the commentators on the *Fuṣūṣ* mentioned above, the majority of whom are also authors of independent works, Ibn 'Arabī's most important followers include 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. ca. 832/1428); in contrast to most authors of this school, he shows relatively little influence from al-Qūnawī and represents an independent reinterpretation and revivification of Ibn 'Arabī's teachings. The most famous of his thirty or so works is *al-Insān al-kāmil* (*The Perfect Man*). In contrast, the writings of Shah Ni'mat Allāh Walī (d. ca. 832/1429; see chapter 7) are dominated by the influence of al-Qūnawī's followers, especially al-Kāshānī and al-Qayṣarī. Shaykh Maḥmūd Shabistarī (d. 720/1320) is famous for his one-thousand-verse Persian poem *Gulshan-i rāz* (*The Rose-garden of Mystery*); its lengthy commentary by Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Lāhijī (d. 912/1506-7) is one of the most masterly presentations of Ibn 'Arabī's teachings in Persian.

In the Arab world 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī, who died in Cairo in 973/1565, did much to popularize Ibn 'Arabī's teachings through more than fifty works written in an easily intelligible style. Two figures in Turkey well known to historians for their political role but not yet widely recognized as members of Ibn 'Arabī's school are Qādī Burhān al-Dīn (d. ca. 800/1398), the sultan of Sivas and author of an important summary of al-Qūnawī's teachings, and Sultan Mehmet, the conqueror of Istanbul (855/1451-886/1481). At the latter's command, several important commentaries were written on al-Qūnawī's works and his *Miftāḥ al-ghayb* was translated into Persian.<sup>13</sup> Among the numerous followers of Ibn 'Arabī who lived in the subcontinent, one should mention Muḥammad ibn Faḍl Allāh Burhānpūrī (d. 1029/1620), who wrote a ten-page "Gift addressed to the Prophet's Spirit," which is a summary of Ibn 'Arabī's teachings seen largely through the eyes of Jāmī. It was the object of several commentaries both in the Arab

countries and farther east, was translated into Javanese, and according to its English translator, is one of the most important texts for the history of the development of Sufi thought in Indonesia. Although Burhānpūrī's famous contemporary Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1034/1624) criticized Ibn 'Arabī on certain points, he supported him on many others and must be considered an adherent of his school. In Indonesia, Ḥamzah Fansūrī (fl. tenth/sixteenth century) wrote extensively on Ibn 'Arabī's doctrines. In Iran and farther east, numerous figures who are known primarily as philosophers, such as Ṣā'in al-Dīn Turkah Iṣfahānī (d. ca. 836/1432) and Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1051/1641), were deeply influenced by Ibn 'Arabī's teachings. Finally, let it be mentioned in passing that Asín Palacios and others have suggested that Ibn 'Arabī exercised considerable influence in the medieval West, especially on Raymund Lull and Dante.

### Ibn 'Arabī's Teachings

In formulating his teachings, Ibn 'Arabī made use of every available source, beginning with the Quran and the *Hadīth*. He borrowed extensively from the written and oral tradition of Sufism that had been developing for several hundred years; his works are a vast repository of references to the words of earlier shaykhs, including such lesser-known but important Andalusian masters as Ibn Masarraḥ (d. 319/931) and Ibn Qasī (d. 546/1151). He made free use of the terminology of the philosophers, especially those belonging to the more esoteric schools, such as the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' and various pre-Islamic schools such as Hermeticism and Neoplatonism. He was thoroughly versed in *Kalām*, especially Ash'arism. But all these schools of thought were so many building blocks that became part of Ibn 'Arabī's own intellectual edifice; his repeated testimony and the very nature of his writings and influence show that his unveiling and mystical perception gave a new form to the raw material with which he worked.

Most of Ibn 'Arabī's works remain unedited, unpublished, and/or unstudied. Though the *Futūḥāt* was first printed in the nineteenth century, a critical edition has begun to appear only recently. Even if this were finished, years of effort on the part of a large number of scholars would be needed before a thorough analysis of its contents could be carried out, and there would still remain his other works. Thus, all scholars who have attempted to explain Ibn 'Arabī's thought have pointed out the tentative nature of their endeavors. Nevertheless, certain central themes, highlighted for example in the *Fuṣūṣ*, can be discerned throughout his works. We can be sure of their primary importance because they were emphasized by his immediate disciples and followers. These same themes have been taken up



and elaborated upon by generations of Sufis and philosophers. It is to some of these that we will limit our attention here.

### *The Divine Names*

As early as 1914, Asín Palacios saw that "the whole of the *Futūḥāt* is based on "belief in the esoteric virtue of the divine names."<sup>14</sup> Other authorities, such as T. Burckhardt, H. Corbin, and S. H. Nasr, have in their turn called attention to the primary importance of the Names in Ibn 'Arabī's doctrines. According to the Quran and the *Hadīth*, God is the Merciful, the Wise, the Generous, the Forgiving, the Living, the Hearing, the Avenger, and so on. His Names epitomize the knowledge of Him that has been revealed to mankind; through them we can grasp something of the Divine Nature, though we must remember the Prophet's saying: "Meditate upon God's blessings [e.g., upon the effects of His Bounty and Generosity], but not upon His Essence (*dhāt*)," since God as He is in Himself is unknowable to us, at least in terms of discursive thought. Here we should recall Ibn 'Arabī's well-known teaching concerning transcendence and immanence—or, more precisely, "incomparability" (*tanzīh*) and "similarity" (*tashbīh*): On the one hand, God is unknowable; on the other, we can understand Him through the Names. True knowledge of Him must combine the two points of view. Ultimately, this coincidence of opposites can be grasped only at the stage of unveiling. The apparent incompatibility of the two standpoints is one reason that the highest stage of mystic knowledge is often referred to as "bewilderment" (*ḥayrah*).

Everything we can know about God, and ultimately everything we can know about "other than God" (*mā siwa' Llāh*)—that is, "the world" or "the cosmos" (*al-ālam*)—is prefigured by the Names. They delineate God's perfections inasmuch as He is Being (*al-wujūd*) and the source of all that exists. Ranked in a hierarchy, some are broader in scope than others; the "Universal Names" are said to number 99, 300, or 1001, whereas the "particular Names" in the last analysis correspond to all things. Hence Ibn 'Arabī can say that the Divine Names are infinite in keeping with the infinity of the creatures (*Fuṣūṣ*, chap. 2).

The formula "In the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate," which begins practically every chapter of the Quran, mentions three Names: *Allāh*, *al-Raḥmān*, and *al-Raḥīm*. The latter two both derive from the word *raḥmah*, "mercy" (which in turn derives from the same root as *raḥim*, "womb"). For Ibn 'Arabī, mercy is Being. When God says, "My Mercy embraces all things" (Quran VII, 156), this means, "I bestow existence on all things," since existence is the only quality in which all things share.

In a *ḥadīth* the Prophet refers to the "Breath of the All-Merciful" (*nafas al-Raḥmān*). According to Ibn 'Arabī, the All-Merciful's exhalation of His Breath is equivalent to the bestowal of existence (*ījād*). In the same context he and his followers constantly quote the *ḥadīth* in which God says, "I was a Hidden Treasure and I wanted to be known, so I created the creatures that I might be known." The Hidden Treasure refers to the possibilities of outward manifestation prefigured by the Names. Since "God encompasses all things in knowledge" (Quran LXV, 12), the Hidden Treasure corresponds to all things as known by Him before their creation.

The All-Merciful, whose very nature is to have mercy on all things (*al-ashyā'*) and thus bring them into existence, feels distress (*kurbah*) within Himself; by the "possibility" (*imkān*) the things possess to display their own special qualities, they beg Him to bestow existence upon them. So God "exhales" and relieves His distress; He deploys His Breath and the cosmos is born. But this is not a simple exhalation. It is articulated speech: "Our only word to a thing, when We desire it, is to say to it 'Be!' and it is" (Quran XVI, 40). The myriad types and grades of existents can be divided into letters, words, phrases, sentences, and books. Ibn 'Arabī and others have developed a complicated cosmology based on the symbolism of letters and words understood in this ontological sense.

The "things embraced by God's Knowledge" (*al-ma'lūmāt*) are also referred to as the "nonexistents" (*al-ma'dūmāt*), the "immutable entities" (*al-a'yān al-thābitah*), and the "possible things" (*al-mumkināt*). They are "non-existent" as long as they remain only in God's Knowledge and do not appear in the world, "immutable" since He knows them for all eternity, and "possible" because He may or may not bestow existence upon them in any given circumstances. They are also called "concomitants" (*lawāzim*) of the Names. All of these "realities" (*ḥaqā'iq*) can be divided into the "divine" (*ilāhī*), which are the Names and the immutable entities, and the "engendered" (*kawnī*), which are the entities when given existence by the Breath.

The Universal Divine Names or Attributes can be classified from a number of points of view. According to one such classification, four of them are the most fundamental, the "pillars" (*arkān*) of Divinity: Will, Knowledge, Power, and Speech. Other formulations add three more Attributes—Life, Generosity, and Equity—to give the "seven Leaders" (*al-a'immat al-sab'ah*). The remaining Names derive from these four or seven. The Leaders or Pillars are then embraced by the Name Allah, the All-Comprehensive Name (*al-ism al-jāmi'*) that points to the Divine Essence.<sup>15</sup>

The hierarchical relationship among the Names is reflected in the structure of the cosmos, which is composed of descending levels of existence (*marātib*), though from creation's viewpoint they are ascending. Thus, we



have the "arc of descent" (*qaws al-nuzūl*) and the "arc of ascent" (*qaws al-su'ūd*), which together make up the "Circle of Existence" (*dā'irat al-wujūd*). At each descending level, different realities interrelate or "marry" (*nikāḥ*) to bring about the production of succeeding levels. Ibn 'Arabī envisages this hierarchical structure from several different standpoints. In the scheme illustrated by the diagrams accompanying the creation myth (I-V), he describes each higher reality as active and masculine in relation to the next lower reality, which is passive and feminine. The higher is in a state of undifferentiation (*ijmāl*), while the lower is in a state of differentiation (*tafṣīl*). Thus, for example, the Supreme Pen contains all spiritual realities in undifferentiated form; then it deploys them in their differentiated details by writing them out in the Guarded Tablet. But Ibn 'Arabī indicates that every reality in the scheme is a pen from one point of view and a tablet from another.

### *The One and the Many*

The Names, and so also the immutable entities, are no different in their existence from God Himself; there is only one Being, God, who is called by many Names, each of which denotes one of His ontological modes. But God in His very Essence, which is beyond the limitation implied by any of the Names, is One in a different sense than God considered as the Possessor of Names (*dhāt al-asmā'*). Here lies a distinction fundamental to Ibn 'Arabī's teachings. At the beginning of chapter 7 of the *Fuṣūṣ*, he writes, "Know that He who is called Allah is one in His Essence and all through His Names." He often refers to the Oneness of the Essence as *al-aḥadiyyah* ("Exclusive" or "Absolute Unity") and the Oneness of the Names, through which God is all, as *al-waḥdāniyyah* ("Inclusive" or "Infinite Unity"), although for the second kind his followers usually prefer the term *al-wāḥidiyyah*.

Ibn 'Arabī is well known as the founder of the school of the "Oneness of Being" (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). Though this teaching permeates his works, he does not himself employ the term. One of the first members of his school to use it in a technical sense is al-Farghānī, who normally contrasts it with the "Manyness of Knowledge" (*kathrat al-'ilm*): One in His Reality, God possesses the principle of manyness in His knowledge. He is One and All.

In God's knowledge, the nonexistent things are known in all their differentiated details. This is the level of the "Most Holy Effusion" (*al-fayḍ al-aqdas*) or the "Unseen Theophany" (*al-tajallī al-ghaybī*). It is also the level of the Hidden Treasure and the "distress" of the All-Merciful. The manifestation of the Hidden Treasure, or the exhalation of the Breath, is called the

"Holy Effusion" (*al-fayḍ al-muqaddas*) or the "Visible Theophany" (*al-tajallī al-shahādī*). The entities, still nonexistent and immutable within God's Knowledge, are manifested outwardly within the various levels of existence.

The One Being does not, through the manifestation of the entities, become many beings, since Being is a single reality. True, the entities are now provisionally called "existents" (*mawjūdāt*) or "engendered things" (*kā'ināt*), but Being/Existence retains Its original property of nondelimitation (*iṭlāq*) and transcendence. Light remains eternally unaffected by Its outward effusion, just as the sun is unaffected by its rays. As Ibn 'Arabī and his followers explain through many images, "the entities have never smelt—and will never smell—the fragrance of existence." "The possible existents remain nonexistent in their original state; existence is nothing but the Being of God" (*Fuṣūṣ*, chap. 8). The entities we perceive are only the different modalities of the One Being. In the words of al-Qūnawī,

The greatest obscurity and veil is the plurality that arises in the One Being because of the effects of the immutable entities within It. People imagine that the entities become outwardly manifest in existence and through existence. But only their effects (*athar*) become manifest in existence. Manifestation and outwardness belong only to Being, but on condition of having become plural through the effect of the entities.<sup>16</sup>

Each entity displays a perfection of Being, thus veiling and revealing It at one and the same time: "God made the creatures like veils (*ḥijāb*). He who knows them as such is led back to Him, but he who takes them as real is barred from His Presence" (*Futūḥāt*, II, p. 460). As long as we do not perceive the things for the veils that they are, the whole world is naught but fantasy.

Everything engendered in existence is imagination (*khayāl*)  
—but in fact it is Reality.  
Whoever understands this truth has grasped the mysteries  
of the Way. (*Fuṣūṣ*, chap. 16)

One mark of the essential nonexistence of all "existent" things is that they must be recreated at each instant. According to Ibn 'Arabī, God places dreams in the animal world so that people may witness the ontological level of Imagination and come to know that there is another world, similar to the sensory world. Through the rapid transformations of imaginal forms in dreams, God wants to show us that the sensory world is changing at every instant. "If the world were to remain in a single state for two units of time, it would possess the attribute of independence from God. 'But men are in doubt as to the renewed creation' (Quran L, 15)" (*Futūḥāt*, III, p. 199).

Here two basic meanings of the term "imagination" can be discerned. In



the first sense, everything that is "other than God" is "imaginary" and in the ultimate sense unreal. This is the level of "nondelimited imagination" (*al-khayāl al-mutlaq*), which Ibn 'Arabī identifies with the Breath of the All-Merciful. Through it "That which can not possibly exist [since it is not Allah, the only Being there is] comes to exist" (*Futūḥāt*, II, p. 312). "The reality of imagination is change in every state, and manifestation within every form. There is no true being that does not accept change except Allah. So there is nothing in realized existence (*al-wujūd al-muḥaqqaq*) except Allah. As for everything else, that is in imaginal existence. . . . So everything other than the Essence of God is imagination in the process of change" (*Futūḥāt*, II, p. 313). It is from this point of view that all things in the world must be "interpreted" (*ta'bīr*) as if they were dreams (*Fuṣūṣ*, chap. 9).

Second, "imagination" refers to an ontological realm between the spiritual world and the corporeal world, also called the "isthmus" (*barzakh*) and the world of "image-exemplars" (*mithāl*). Here spiritual realities become manifest as sensory forms, and, after death, the attributes and moral qualities of men become personified. Just as the animal soul acts as the means whereby the disengaged (*mujarrad*) spirit can maintain a connection with the corporeal body, so the world of imagination acts as an intermediary between the disembodied spirits and the corporeal world. This intermediate world is in turn divided into two kinds of imagination, one of which is "contiguous" (*muttaṣil*) to our psyches, and the other of which is "discontiguous" (*munfaṣil*).

The difference between contiguous and discontiguous imagination is that the former disappears with the disappearance of the imaginer, while the latter is a self-subsistent ontological level which continuously acts as a receptacle for disengaged meanings and spirits, to which it gives corporeal forms, though only in accordance with their specific characteristics. Then contiguous imagination derives from discontiguous imagination. (*Futūḥāt*, II, p. 311)

The nature of the realities that become manifest within nondelimited imagination or the cosmos is determined by their preparedness (*isti'dād*), that is, the extent to which they are able to act as receptacles (*qābil*) that display the perfections of Nondelimited Being. Preparedness in turn is determined by the "Lord" (*rabb*) of each existent, the particular Name that governs it, its immutable entity. "The All becomes entified in keeping with each existent; then that entification (*ta'ayyun*) is that thing's Lord. But no one takes from Him in respect of His Absolute Unity" (*Fuṣūṣ*, chap. 7). The difference between the prophets and saints on the one hand and ordinary people on the other is that the former are loci of manifestation (*mazhar*, *majlā*) for Universal Names, while the latter manifest particular Names.

The former display the myriad perfections of Being, while the latter only display a few, and these imperfectly.<sup>17</sup>

Closely connected to the entity's preparedness is the question of "destiny" (*qadar*). Since each existent thing is determined by its Lord, its destiny is foreordained. But the "mystery of destiny" (*sirr al-qadar*) is that God does not do the foreordaining; on the contrary, the entity foreordains itself. The entity, after all, is in essence a nonexistent object of God's Knowledge. God did not make (*ja'l*) it the way it is, since it is uncreated—He has known it for all eternity. "So no one possesses in himself anything from God, nor does he have anything from any other than himself" (*Fuṣūṣ*, chap. 2). God's only role is to bring the entity from nonexistence in knowledge to existence in the world, that is, to show mercy upon it through His Breath. Once in existence, the entities themselves determine how they will act and what their ultimate destiny will be. "So let them blame none but themselves, and let them praise none but themselves: 'God's is the conclusive argument' (Quran VI, 149) through His Knowledge of them" (*Fuṣūṣ*, chap. 8).

Here Ibn 'Arabī distinguishes between God's engendering command (*al-amr al-takwīnī*), through which He gives existence to the entity, and His prescriptive command (*al-amr al-taklīfī*), through which He requires men to follow the religious law. In the practical terms of human experience, men freely choose whether or not to follow the latter. Since they cannot know their destiny until it overcomes them, they must follow the command of God and trust in Him; but in the final analysis, their ends are determined by their beginnings. This is one significance of such Quranic verses as "To your Lord you shall return" (VI, 164).

In the same context, Ibn 'Arabī states that men worship "the God created by their beliefs." Men can only conceive of Nondelimited Being—God—to the extent allowed by their own preparedness, which is determined by their immutable entity, their Lord. The prophets and saints are theophanies of God's Universal Names, through which they know and realize Him. In the same way the sciences and laws which they bring for mankind are manifestations of these Names—this is the whole theme of the *Fuṣūṣ*. Other men are theophanies of particular Names, which do not manifest the same ontological perfections. Thus, their "beliefs" concerning God will be determined by their own preparedness for knowledge and existence. In effect, the God they worship—their own Lord—will be "created" by their limited preparedness. Only the greatest prophets and saints—the Perfect Men—worship God as such, since they are loci of manifestation for the All-Comprehensive Name *Allāh*.

Each "existent" in the world is a mixture of existence and nonexistence, or of light and darkness. To the extent that it exists, it is a theophany of



Being; to the extent that it is nonexistent, it is a veil over Reality. "So you are situated between existence and nonexistence, or good (*khayr*) and evil (*sharr*)" (*Futūḥāt*, II, p. 304). "Existence is light, while nonexistence is darkness. We are in existence, so we are encompassed by good" (*Futūḥāt*, III, p. 486). God or Nondelimited Being is Sheer Good (*al-khayr al-mahd*); hence the Prophet said, "All good is in Thy hands, while no evil is ascribed to Thee." Ibn 'Arabī concludes that evil has no fundamental reality, even though it is totally relevant to our everyday lives; otherwise, religion would have no role to play and God's prescriptive command would be meaningless.

To whom can evils be ascribed? For the cosmos is in the hand of Sheer Good, which is Total Being. However, the possible existent can be envisaged as nonexistent; to the extent this is so, evil is ascribed to it. For it does not possess in its very essence the property of Necessary Being; hence evil befalls it. (*Futūḥāt*, III, p. 315)

The creatures are given existence through the Breath of the All-Merciful, and in the end they return to Mercy. "God showed us favor through the Name All-Merciful, thus bringing us out of evil, which is nonexistence, to good, which is existence. . . . So from the beginning, He entrusted us to Mercy" (*Futūḥāt*, II, p. 157). From this point of view Ibn 'Arabī maintains that hell itself is a mercy and that the chastisement (*'adhāb*) of the unbelievers will eventually be changed to "sweetness" (in accordance with the root meaning of the word *'adhāb*; cf. *Fuṣūṣ*, chap. 10).

Instead of attributing evil to nonexistence, al-Qūnawī follows the lead of many passages in the *Futūḥāt* by calling attention to the ontological qualities evil does in fact reflect and the manner in which religion protects mankind from evil's consequences. The various phenomena connected with religion and salvation—such as the prophets, the Scriptures, religious teachers, mosques, faith, the remembrance of God, and piety—are loci of manifestation for the Divine Name the Guide (*al-Hādī*), while phenomena that manifest evil—such as satanic men and *jinn*, unbelievers, immorality, and thoughts that turn the mind away from God—display the properties of the Name the Misleader (*al-Mudill*). Al-Qūnawī is thus able to discuss suffering and damnation without minimizing their practical significance. In this context, he recalls Ibn 'Arabī's definition of evil as "that which is incompatible with man's goal and disagreeable to his nature and constitution" (*Fuṣūṣ*, chap. 11). Al-Qūnawī remarks that when the soul leaves the state of equilibrium established by the *Sharī'ah* and the *ṭarīqah*, it falls under the sway of the Names of Severity, such as the Misleader, the Wrathful, He-who-harms (*al-Dārr*), and the Avenger. "As a result, the effects of these Names become manifest in this world, or in the next world, in forms disagreeable

to the soul, such as suffering, chastisement, illness, punishment, distance from God, and veils."<sup>18</sup>

As the theophany of Sheer Good, the cosmos is the locus of beauty and the object of love (*maḥabbah*). The root of all love, whether for God or for "others," is God's Love, through which the world was created. In the *ḥadīth* of the Hidden Treasure, God does not in fact say that He "wanted" to be known, but that He "loved" (*aḥbabtu*) to be known. "Through this Love God turned His Will toward the things in the state of their nonexistence . . . and said to them 'Be!'" (*Futūḥāt*, II, p. 167). In God Himself, Love, Lover, and Beloved are one, since the nonexistent objects of Love are none but the perfections of His own Self. So also in creation, Love manifests Itself in all things, each and every one of which is both lover and beloved.

Nothing is loved in the existents except God, since He is manifest within every beloved to the eye of every lover. And nothing exists but lovers. So all the cosmos is lover and beloved, and all is reducible to Him. . . . No one loves any but his own Creator, but he is veiled from Him by the love of Zaynab, Su'ād, Hind, Laylā, the world, dirhams, position, and all other objects of love. (*Futūḥāt*, II, p. 326)

Ibn 'Arabī's teachings on love, expressed poetically by such figures as 'Irāqī, extend explicitly to the domain of sexuality. He views man's contemplation of God in himself and in woman during the sexual act as one of the highest forms of spiritual vision (*Fuṣūṣ*, chap. 27).

### *The Perfect Man*

The Perfect Man, a key term in Ibn 'Arabī's vocabulary, is the all-comprehensive engendered existent (*al-kawn al-jāmi'*) discussed at the beginning of the *Fuṣūṣ*. Ontologically the origin and goal of the cosmos, he is also the model of spiritual perfection and the guide of men. In his inmost reality, he is known as the Cloud (*al-'amā'*). The Prophet was asked, "Where was God before He created the creatures?" He replied, "In a cloud, neither above which nor below which was any space." The Cloud in fact is the All-Merciful Breath, the theophany of Sheer Being, within which letters and words become articulated. The Cloud surrounds God "before" He creates the creatures and is thus the intermediary between Him and them; it is the Reality of Realities (*ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqā'iq*), within which all immutable entities are englobed.

But the Perfect Man is both "all-comprehensive," in the sense that he embraces all realities, and "engendered," that is, he belongs to the world of created things, at least in his outward dimension. He is an isthmus (*barzakh*)



between God and the cosmos, since he comprehends both the divine and the engendered realities. In God, the One and the Many are united; in the cosmos the Many are dispersed, but in the Perfect Man the One and the Many are reunited in the midst of their very separation and dispersion.

As al-Qūnawī makes explicit, the Perfect Man contains within himself the "Five Divine Presences," the five universal levels where God makes Himself known. Al-Qūnawī enumerates these as (1) the Reality of Realities, or the Presence of Knowledge; (2) the World of the Spirits; (3) the World of Imagination; (4) the World of Corporeal Bodies; (5) the All-Comprehensive Presence, that is, the Perfect Man in his total deployment. The Perfect Man is the macrocosm, while individual man is the microcosm. "God only created the cosmos outside of man to strike an example for him and so that he might know that everything manifest in the world is inside himself, while he is the goal. . . . In him all the Divine Names and their effects are displayed" (*Futūḥāt*, III, p. 417).

If the Perfect Man is the ontological prototype of both the cosmos and the individual man, he is also man perfected, the human state realized in its full breadth and depth. According to the Prophet, "Allah created Adam upon His own Form"; in the Quran God says, "He taught Adam the Names, all of them" (II, 31). As the Name that embraces all other Names, *Allāh* is the Reality of Realities. To say that man is created upon Allah's form means that God is the "meaning" (*ma'nā*) or immutable entity of mankind, while man is God's outward form or existent entity; though other things also reflect Him, they do so incompletely, since they manifest lesser Names. But it is only the Perfect Man who is able to live up to this human potential and truly actualize this station. He alone is the "vicegerent of Allah" (*khalīfat Allāh*; cf. Quran II, 30). A human being who does not attain perfection in this world is only a "rational animal," not a "man." He is related to humanity as a corpse is related to a living person. "He is a man in shape, not in reality, for a corpse lacks all faculties. Thus is he who does not attain perfection. . . . Only the Vicegerent is worthy to act as a receptacle for (all) the Divine Names" (*Futūḥāt*, II, p. 441).

According to the Quran, God "governs the Command (*al-amr*) from heaven to earth; then it ascends to Him in a day whose measure is a thousand years of your counting" (XXXII, 5). This descent of the Command is the exhalation of the All-Merciful's Breath. When it reaches its lowest point, at the level of mankind, it reverses. If a man is destined to become a Perfect Man, he will enter the spiritual path, through which he can return to his Source and complete the Circle. Then he becomes established at the "Point at the Center of the Circle" (*nuqṭah wasat al-dā'irah*), also known as the station of Equilibrium (*al-i'tidāl*), since the Perfect Man is equidistant from each and every reality, whether created or uncreated. Having realized

the full human potential, he manifests the All-Comprehensive Name *Allāh* and escapes the domination of every limited Name and entity. Al-Qūnawī writes that Equilibrium is the center from which no one deviates except him who is attracted to what is less than himself. "If a man veers away from the Center to one side because of an attracting and overpowering affinity, and if the property of certain Names and levels predominates so that he leaves Equilibrium, . . . then he will worship God from the standpoint of that [limited] Name's level. . . . It will become the utmost limit of his hopes . . . unless he passes beyond it."<sup>19</sup>

The spiritual stature of the Perfect Men, those who truly act as God's vicegerents, explains the meaning of such Quranic verses as "He has subjected to you what is in the heavens and what is in the earth, all together, from Him" (XLV, 13; cf. *Fuṣūṣ*, chap. 16).

Through the activity of his mind every human being is able to create in his imagination that which has no existence in the outside world; this is the situation with all of us. But through his concentration (*himmah*) the gnostic creates that which possesses existence outside of the locus of his concentration so long as his concentration continues to preserve it. (*Fuṣūṣ*, chap. 6)

If the saints normally refrain from employing this power, it is because of their knowledge that everything occurs according to God's Will. "Whenever the gnostic does exercise his concentration in the world, it is because of a divine command; he does so because he is compelled to do so, not out of free choice" (*Fuṣūṣ*, chap. 13).

In order to turn his concentration toward its ultimate object and actualize its creative power, man must follow the path of purification and perfection. For Ibn 'Arabī, as for all Sufis, the basis of this path is the practice of Islam. He takes the daily prayers, the fast during Ramadan, etc.—in short, the "pillars" of Islam—for granted. In words of advice to disciples, we even find him telling them, "Do not play with your beard or any part of your clothing during the ritual prayer . . . , and make sure that your back is straight when you bow down" (*Futūḥāt*, IV, p. 497). A work like *Kunh mā lā budd minhu'l-murīd*, translated into English as *Instructions to a Postulant*, shows that he considered the sincere and scrupulous practice of both the mandatory commands of the *Shari'ah* and the supererogatory acts recommended by the *Sunnah* as the *sine qua non* of all Sufism.

Ibn 'Arabī also explains in great detail the practices specific to Sufism, which amount to extensions and intensifications of the required practices of Islam. Al-Jandī summarizes Ibn 'Arabī's teachings in ten principles: (1) constant ritual and moral purity, (2) unceasing remembrance/invocation (*dhikr*) of God, (3) the elimination of all distracting thoughts, (4) constant examination of conscience (*murāqabah*), (5) daily review of one's actions



(*muḥāsabah*), (6) attentiveness to the inward consciousness of one's shaykh, (7) hunger, (8) vigil, (9) silence, and (10) inward humility and tears. If there is anything remarkable about these instructions, it is that they are basically the same as those found in most other Sufi orders.

### The Seal of the Muḥammadan Saints

Islam calls the Prophet of Islam the "Seal of Prophecy," meaning among other things that no prophet will come after him until the end of time. In a number of passages, Ibn 'Arabī speaks of two "Seals of Sanctity": the Seal of General Sanctity, or Jesus when he returns at the end of time, and the Seal of Muḥammadan Sanctity. Sometimes Ibn 'Arabī declares that he himself is the latter, and most of his followers held this to be the case; elsewhere he implies that someone else is this seal, as in a passage where he says that the Seal of Muḥammadan Sanctity is an Arab whom he met in the year 595/1198-99. He goes on to explain the function of this person:

Just as, through Muḥammad, God has sealed the prophecy of Law-giving, so, through the Muḥammadan Seal, He has sealed the sanctity which derives from the Muḥammadan inheritance, not that which derives from other prophets—for among the saints there are those who inherit from Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Such will continue to be found after the Muḥammadan Seal; but after him, there will no longer be found any saint "upon the heart of Muḥammad (*'alā qalb Muḥammad*)." (*Futūḥāt*, II, p. 49)

One of the clearest explanations of how Ibn 'Arabī's title as the Seal of Muḥammadan Sanctity was understood by those of his followers who ascribed it to him is provided by al-Jandī. He writes that true knowledge of God's Essence, Attributes, and Acts and of the realities of things as they are in God's Knowledge cannot be acquired in the most perfect and complete manner from secondary stations, sources, and doctrines, but only from the doctrines of, first, the Seal of the Prophets, and second, the Seal of the Saints, who is the perfect inheritor of Muḥammad. The spiritual vision of the seals comprehends all spiritual perceptions, contains all doctrines, and encompasses all stations and levels. Just as there must be a Name more perfect and comprehensive than all others—that is, the Name *Allāh*—so also there must be a prophet and a saint more perfect than all other prophets and saints, and these are the seals.<sup>20</sup>

The claim that Ibn 'Arabī was the Seal of the Muḥammadan Saints thus implies that his teachings embrace all Islamic teachings. And, in fact, practically every intellectual formulation of Sufism after him derives directly or indirectly from his own works or those of his followers. In this respect, at least, it is difficult to dispute this claim. In the words of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ibn 'Arabī "has provided over the centuries the precious doctrinal

language in terms of which Sufi masters have sought to expound the mysteries of gnosis,"<sup>21</sup> and to explain their vision of the Truth as gained through mystical perception and the unveiling of the Uncreated Lights.

### Notes

1. Although the name of this sage in Arabic is Ibn al-'Arabī, he is often referred to as Ibn 'Arabī among his Muslim disciples and also in European languages. We have therefore kept the Ibn 'Arabī version throughout the Islamic volumes of this series.—Ed.
2. M. Profitlich, *Die Terminologie Ibn 'Arabīs im "Kitāb wasā'il as-sā'il" des Ibn Saudakīn* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1973), Arabic text, p. 21. Al-Jandī, *Sharḥ fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (ms), commentary on the word *mubashshirah* in the *khutbah*; also *Nafḥat al-rūḥ* (ms Istanbul, Hacı Mahmud 2447) f. 23b.
3. *Al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.) I, 153–54.
4. Ibn 'Arabī's encounter with Jesus in the spiritual world and his repentance (*tawbah*) at his hands are mentioned by Ibn 'Arabī in *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah*, I, 155.26; III, 43.20, 341.22; IV, 77.30. On al-'Uryabī's connection to Jesus, see I, 223.21 (cf. II, 365.19); he is the same as the Abū Ja'far "Uryani" discussed as no. 1 in R. W. J. Austin, *Sufis of Andalusia* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971). See Michel Chodkiewicz, *Le Sceau des saints* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986) 98–99.
5. Al-Qūnawī's three accounts are found respectively in al-Jandī, *Sharḥ fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, commentary on the second chapter; al-Qūnawī, *al-Nuṣūṣ*, appended to al-Kāshānī, *Sharḥ manāzil al-sā'irīn* (Tehran: Ibrāhīm Lārījānī, 1315/1897-98) 284; al-Qūnawī, *al-Fukūk*, on the margin of the previous work, 233.
6. Ibn 'Arabī, *Fihrist al-mu'allafāt*, ed. A. E. Affifi, "The Works of Ibn 'Arabī," *Revue de la Faculté de Lettres de l'Université d'Alexandrie*, 8 (1954) 194.
7. H. Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Ṣūfism of Ibn 'Arabī* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969) 73.
8. Al-Qūnawī, *al-Fukūk*, 184.
9. Al-Qūnawī, *al-Nafḥāt* (Tehran: Shaykh Aḥmad Shīrāzī, 1316/1898-99) 152–53.
10. Jāmī, *Nafḥāt al-uns*, ed. M. Tawḥīdīpūr (Tehran: Sa'dī, 1336/1957) 556.
11. Ibid., 559. For an excerpt, see p. 71 below.
12. This name is to be found in different forms in a number of *silsilahs*; see Claude Addas, *Ibn 'Arabī* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989) 374–77. See also M. Chodkiewicz (trans.), Emir Abd al-Kader, *Ecrits spirituels* (Paris: Seuil, 1982) 183. A *silsilah* apparently drawn up by 'Alī himself or by one of his disciples is found appended to three manuscripts of al-Qūnawī's works in Istanbul: Şehid Ali Paşa 1441/1, Yeni Cami 1196/1, Laleli 1499/1.
13. On these two figures, see W. Chittick, "Sultān Burhān al-Dīn's Sufi Correspondence," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 73 (1981) 33–45.
14. M. Asín Palacios, *The Mystical Philosophy of Ibn Masarra and His Followers*, trans. E. H. Douglas and H. W. Yoden (Leiden: Brill, 1978) 174–75.
15. See "An Islamic Creation Myth," p. 70 below.
16. Al-Qūnawī, *al-Nuṣūṣ*, 299.
17. See "The Lord of Men and the Lords of Men," p. 71 below.
18. Al-Qūnawī, *Marātib al-taqwā*, Istanbul mss Şehid Ali Paşa 1340/3, Carullah 1001/3, Feyzullah 2163.
19. *I'jaz al-bayān fī tafsīr umm al-Qur'ān* (Hyderabad-Deccan: Osmania Oriental Publications Bureau, 1949) 271.



20. Al-Jandī, *Nafḥat al-rūḥ*, f. 4b.  
 21. S. H. Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964) 121.

### Excursuses

#### *An Islamic Creation Myth*

The Names gathered together in the Presence of the Named and, gazing upon their own realities and meanings, sought the outward manifestation of their properties. They desired that their own entities might become mutually distinct through the effects that they make manifest. The Creator, who makes ordainments, the Knower, the Governor, the Deployer, the Producer, the Form-giver, the Nourisher, the Life-giver, the Slayer, the Inheritor, the Grateful, and all the rest of the Divine Names gazed upon their own essences but found none created, none governed, none deployed, none nourished. So they said, "What can be done so that these entities might become outwardly manifest? For through them our properties and authority are deployed."

So the Names, having seen their own entities, . . . had recourse to the Name the Producer. They said, "Perhaps you can give existence to our entities so that our properties may appear and our authority be established. For at the moment we reside in an ontological degree that allows us no effectivity." The Producer replied, "That depends upon the Powerful, for I am under His sway. . . ."

Then the Names had recourse to the Powerful, who said, "I am under the sway of the Willing. I can not bring into existence a single one of your entities without His designation. The possible existent in itself is not sufficient for me. First the command of the Commander must come from its Lord. Once He commands that a possible existent enter into engendered existence—once He says to it 'Be!'—then I will be able to act upon it. . . . So have recourse to the Name the Willing. Perhaps He will choose the side of existence over the side of nonexistence. Then I will join with the Commander and the Speaker and give you existence."

[After hearing similar words from the Willing, the Names proceed to the Name the Knowing, who tells them that the entities under their sway are indeed destined for outward manifestation. But first courtesy (*adab*) must be observed.]

So all the Names came together in the Presence of the Name *Allāh* . . . and told Him about their state. He said, "I am the Name that comprehends all your realities and I denote to the Named (*al-musammā*), who is an All-Holy Essence, possessing qualities of perfection and transcendence. Stay here while I enter upon the object of my denotation. So the Name *Allāh* entered that Presence and repeated the words of the possible existents and the Names. He was told, "Go out, and tell all the Names to undertake among the possible existents what their realities require. . . ."

So the Name *Allāh* went out, next to Him the Name the Speaking, acting as His spokesman to the possible existents and the Names. He related to them what the Named had said. So the Knowing, the Willing, the Speaking, and the Powerful

undertook their tasks and the first possible existent became outwardly manifest. (Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah* [Beirut: Dār Ṣādir], n.d., I, 323)

#### *The Lord of Men and the Lords of Men*

The Universal Name "Lord" courses through all other Names, whether universal or particular, principal or derivative, down to the least of the derivatives. It manifests itself in every Name in keeping with the properties of that Name. . . . The Name from which any human being derives his existence . . . is in reality his "Lord". . . . It will also be his place of return and his ultimate end. The theophanies he receives in keeping with his states within this world's plane, and his vision of God in the next world, are tied specifically to this Name and take place through it.

But . . . "Lordship" has two properties, one general and one specific. The general property derives from the fact that, for example, the Name *Allāh* is related to all worlds and ontological levels and to all their inhabitants, in respect both to the receptive reality, i.e., the entity, and to the existence that it receives. Hence the Lordship attributed to the Name *Allāh* is all-comprehensive. This is indicated, for example, by God's words, "Praise belongs to *Allāh*, the Lord of the worlds" (Quran I, 1). . . . As for the specific property pertaining to Lordship, that is what we said above: Whenever a thing's existence becomes entified from the Presence of a Name, that Name is its specific Lord. This is why we find that in the Quran and the *Hadīth*, vision of God is attributed only to Lords ascribed to various levels. For example, "Upon that day faces will be radiant, gazing upon *their* Lord" (LXXV, 23). . . .

The source of the outward existence of the Perfect Men among the prophets and saints is the Ocean of the Second Entification, i.e., the level of the Name *Allāh* in respect of the Second Isthmus, which englobes the seven principle Names, which in turn embrace the realities of each Perfect Man. However, a faint trace of that Perfect Man's distinguishing characteristics remains, so his Lord is the Second Entification in respect of the faint trace peculiar to him. Then the source of the existence of those prophets, messengers, and saints who are near to the Perfect Men in receptivity, preparedness, scope, universality, spiritual perception, and contemplation is those Seven Principles themselves, but in respect of their manyness and their special relationship with particular effects and properties. . . . Finally the existence of other human beings below the prophets and saints in rank derives from the tributaries of these Oceans, i.e., these Seven Principles, or the rivers of the tributaries, or the streams of the rivers, or the brooks, or the pools, or the tankards, or the jugs, or the infinite drops. So their original entification and their ultimate return follow their preparedness as determined by their Lords.

As for our Prophet Muḥammad—God bless him and give him peace—he possesses the Supreme Watering Place, which is the First Theophany. That is his Light and his Lord. It is the source, origin, return, and end of all Names and all entifications within knowledge and existence. That is why God says, addressing the Prophet specifically, "Surely unto thy Lord is the ultimate end" (Quran LIII, 43), and, "Surely



unto thy Lord is the return" (Quran XCVI, 8). (al-Farghānī, *Muntaha'l-madārik*, Cairo: 'Abd al-Rahīm al-Bukhārī, 1293/1876, I, 43-44).

### I. The Divine Names and the Cosmos

(See diagram I, p. 75.)

The outward existence of the entities presupposes these nine Names. The Living is the "Lord of the Lords," while the next four are often called the Four Pillars, though sometimes the Four Pillars are said to include the Living. They are the principle of all "quaternity" in creation. Among the correspondences Ibn 'Arabī points out are the following:

Attribute	Existent	Element	Humor	Power of the Soul
Knowledge	First Intellect	Earth	Melancholy	Sustaining
Will	Universal Soul	Air	Blood	Attracting
Power	Universal Nature	Water	Phlegm	Repulsing
Speech	Materia Prima	Fire	Choler	Digesting

He-who-governs and He-who-deploys are the "primary Names related to the cosmos"; the other Names are called the Seven Leaders or the Seven Mothers and are their daughters. Just as the spirit "governs" the body, while the body "deploys" the properties of the spirit, so the Unseen World becomes manifest from He-who-governs, while the visible world becomes manifest from He-who-deploys. By means of these two Names God creates male and female, activity and passivity, generation and corruption. The Generous and the Just bring about the existence of well-being and misfortune, the Garden and the Fire, profit and loss. (*al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah*, I, 100, 120, 260; II, 232, 430, 685; III, 198, 427, 441)

### II. From the Cloud to the Dust

(See diagram II, p. 76.)

The first creatures to become manifest within the Cloud are the Enraptured Angels; their attention is turned totally toward God such that they have no knowledge of any "others." Through a special theophany, one of them, called the First Intellect or the Supreme Pen, is given knowledge of everything that will come into engendered existence until the Day of Resurrection. Perceiving the Perfect Man in the Cloud, it turns its attention toward creation to bring his potentiality into actuality. There it sees its own shadow, the Universal Soul, whom it "marries," just as Adam married Eve. According to another image, it looks for something upon which to write and the Guarded Tablet is born from its search. The union of the Pen and the Tablet gives rise to the Throne, where the All-Merciful Breath, having created all things, comes to rest: "The All-Merciful sat Himself upon the Throne" (Quran XX, 5). The Tablet possesses two basic attributes, which manifest He-who-governs and He-who-deploys: knowledge of itself and action; the latter is attributed to it just as light is attributed to the sun. Knowledge is connected to destiny; action to

the bestowal of existence upon the known entities; the first is the father, the second the mother. Universal Nature has no existence as such, only through the ontological modalities prefigured in the Soul: heat (which is a manifestation of Life), dryness (Will), cold (Knowledge), and wetness (Speech). In a similar way, the Dust exists not in itself but through the forms that appear within it as a result of Nature's activity. (*Futūḥāt*, I, 139-40; II, 427-31; III, 90, 390, 399, 420-21, 429-30)

### III. From the Dust to the Footstool

(See diagram III, p. 77.)

The marriage of Nature and Materia Prima results in the birth of the Universal Body; its length reflects the Intellect, its breadth the Soul, and its depth the Void, which it fills. Within the Body's compass God brings all the world's forms into existence in an order that comes to be known as "time." The first sensory form to appear is the Throne; supported by four columns, it encompasses all sensory existents. Its parents, the Intellect and the Soul, look upon it with the eye of mercy, the attribute that defines its nature. Within the Throne stands the Footstool, upon which God places the Foot of Surety (Quran X, 2) and the Foot of the All-Compeller (*ḥadīth*), the first of which is in the Garden, and the second in the Fire. The Two Feet mark the division of pure mercy into mercy on the one hand and mercy mixed with wrath on the other. God mixes these two because He wants to manifest all the opposites embraced by His Names, such as He-who-exalts and He-who-debases, the Contractor and the Expander, and the Bestower and the Taker. (*Futūḥāt*, II, 433-37; III, 431-32)

### IV. From the Footstool to the Sphere of the Fixed Stars

(See diagram IV, p. 78.)

On the underside of the Footstool, God creates a transparent, spherical body divided into twelve parts. It is referred to by the verse "By the heaven of the constellations!" (Quran LXXXV, 1). In each constellation dwells an angel; the twelve of them play the same role toward the inhabitants of the Gardens as the elements play for the inhabitants of the earth. Hence each angel is related to one of the four elements: earth, air, water, and fire. When the Shī'ites refer to the infallibility of the Twelve Imams, says Ibn 'Arabī, in fact they are referring to these angels. The angels construct six of the Gardens, while, according to the *ḥadīth*, God constructs Eden with His own hand. Each of the Gardens has 100 degrees, reflecting the Divine Names (the ninety-nine "Most Beautiful Names" plus the Greatest Name); the number of stations in each Garden is equivalent to the number of verses in the Quran. The floor of the Gardens is the surface of the sphere of the fixed stars, which in turn is the roof of hell. Hell, however, does not become manifest until the Day of Resurrection, "The Day the earth shall be changed into other than the earth, and [in the same way] the [seven] heavens [shall be changed]" (Quran XIV, 48), since they become the locus of hell. (*Futūḥāt*, II, 440; III, 433-35)



## V. From the Sphere of the Fixed Stars to the Darkness

(See diagram V, p. 79.)

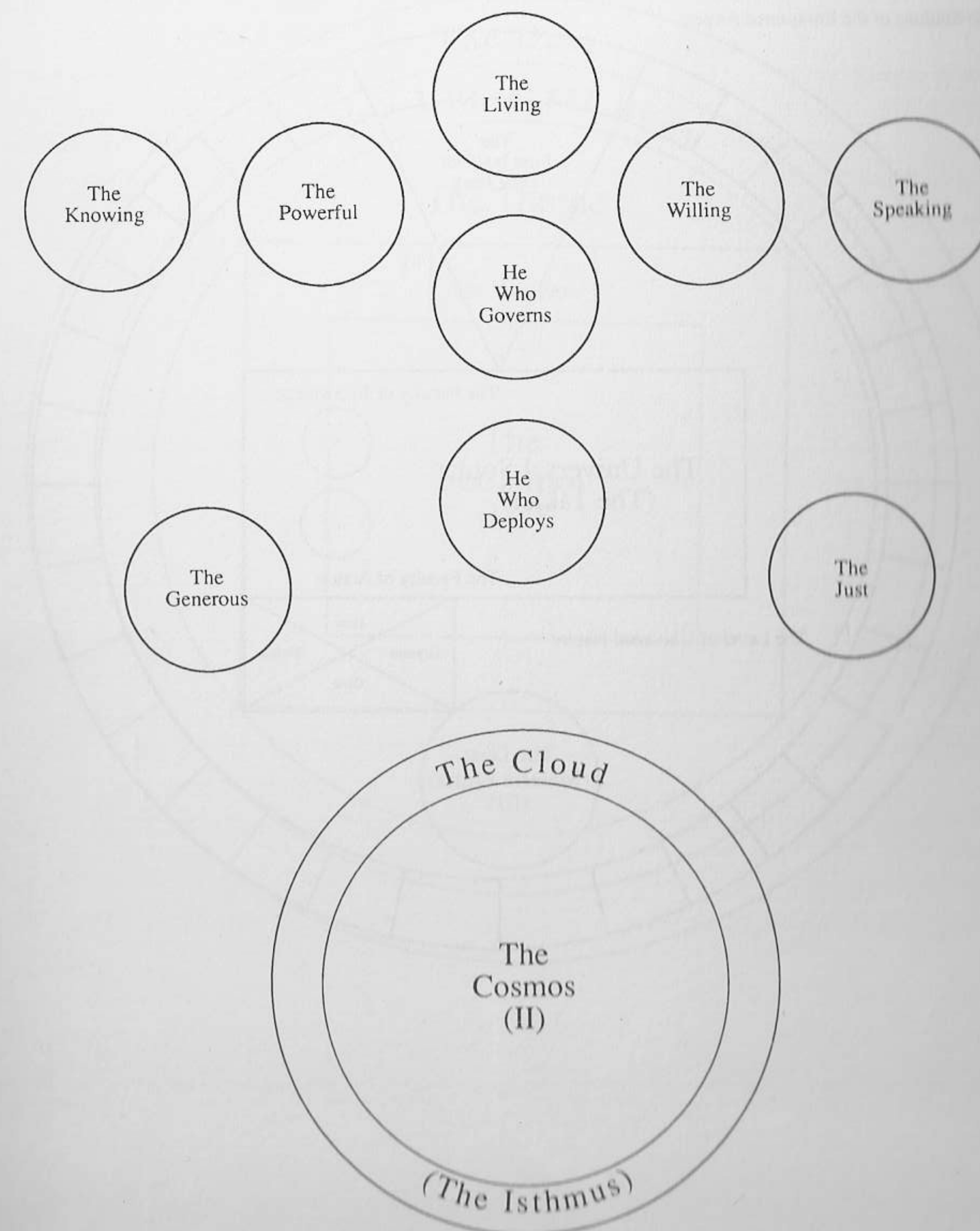
The twenty-eight mansions of the moon correspond to the twenty-eight letters that become articulated in the Breath of the All-Merciful. To each of them pertains a Divine Name, a letter of the Arabic alphabet, and an ontological level (see the diagram in Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology According to Ibn 'Arabi* [Gloucestershire: Beshara, 1977] pp. 32–33). Each constellation possesses thirty treasures of generosity (cf. Quran XV, 21), from which it sends down effusions upon the four elements, which combine in varying proportions to yield the three kingdoms. The last existent is animal man, who comprehends all created realities, just as the Perfect Man comprehends all uncreated realities. The latter is the Pillar extending from earth to heaven upon which the world's preservation depends (cf. Quran XIII, 2). The seven spheres reflect the Seven Leaders and have affinities with various other realities:

Sphere	Planet	Attribute	Prophet	Day of the Week	Clime
1	The Moon	Life	Adam	Monday	7
2	Mercury	Will	Jesus	Wednesday	6
3	Venus	Knowledge	Joseph	Friday	5
4	The Sun	Hearing	Enoch	Sunday	4
5	Mars	Sight	Aaron	Tuesday	3
6	Jupiter	Power	Moses	Thursday	2
7	Saturn	Speech	Abraham	Saturday	1

The seven earths are referred to in the Quran (LXV, 12), while the Water, Air, and Darkness upon which they rest are mentioned in a *hadīth*. Below the earths, which mark the lowest limits of the world embraced by the Throne, is the Water about which God says, "His Throne is upon the Water" (Quran XI, 7). The Water is in fact ice; it rests upon frigid Air that is exhaled by the Darkness. This last is the Unseen, which none knows but God. (*Futūḥāt*, I, 155; II, 438–40; III, 432, 437)

## I. The Divine Names and the Cosmos

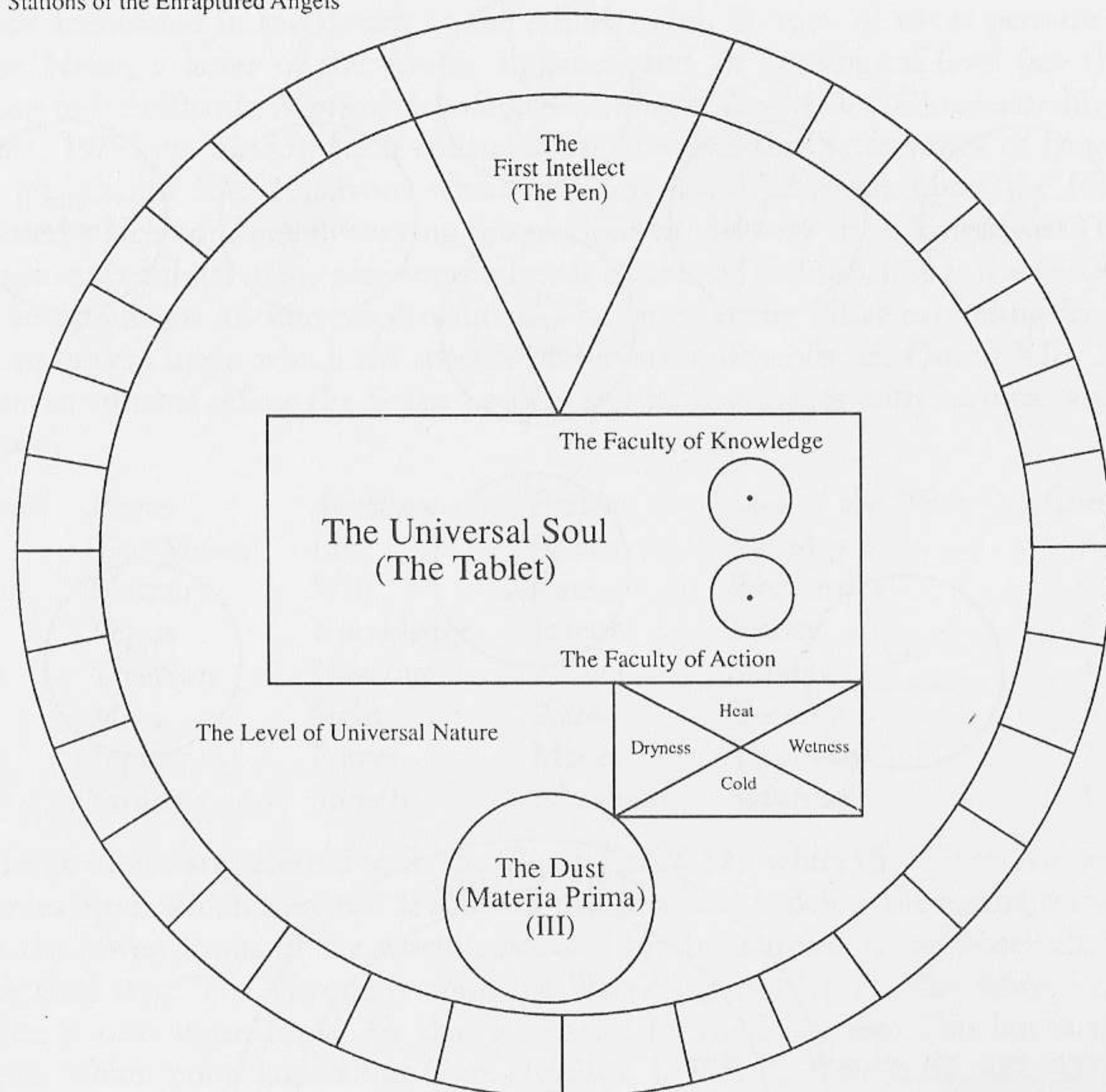
(Diagram I)



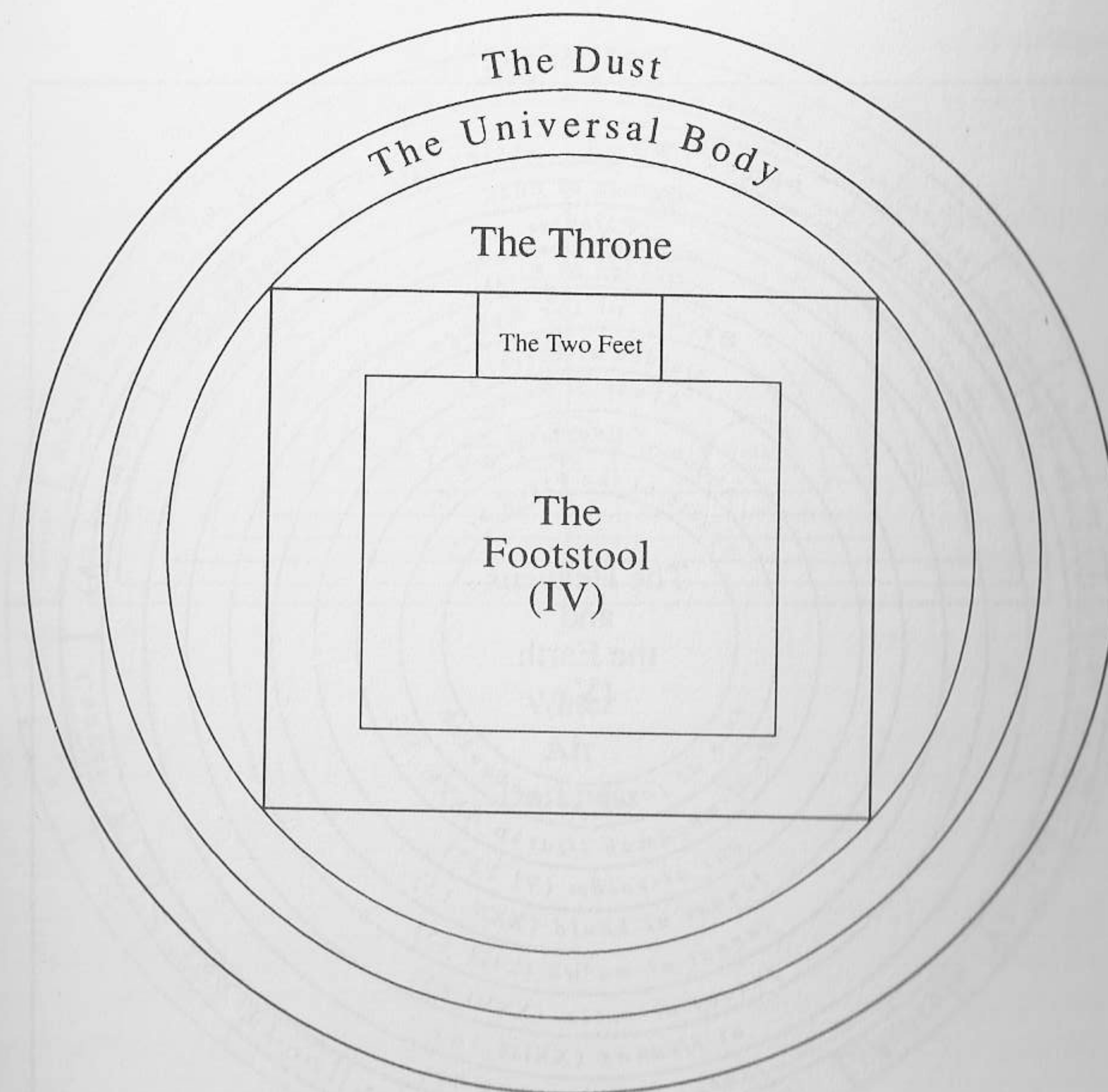


## II. From the Cloud to the Dust (Diagram II)

The Stations of the Enraptured Angels



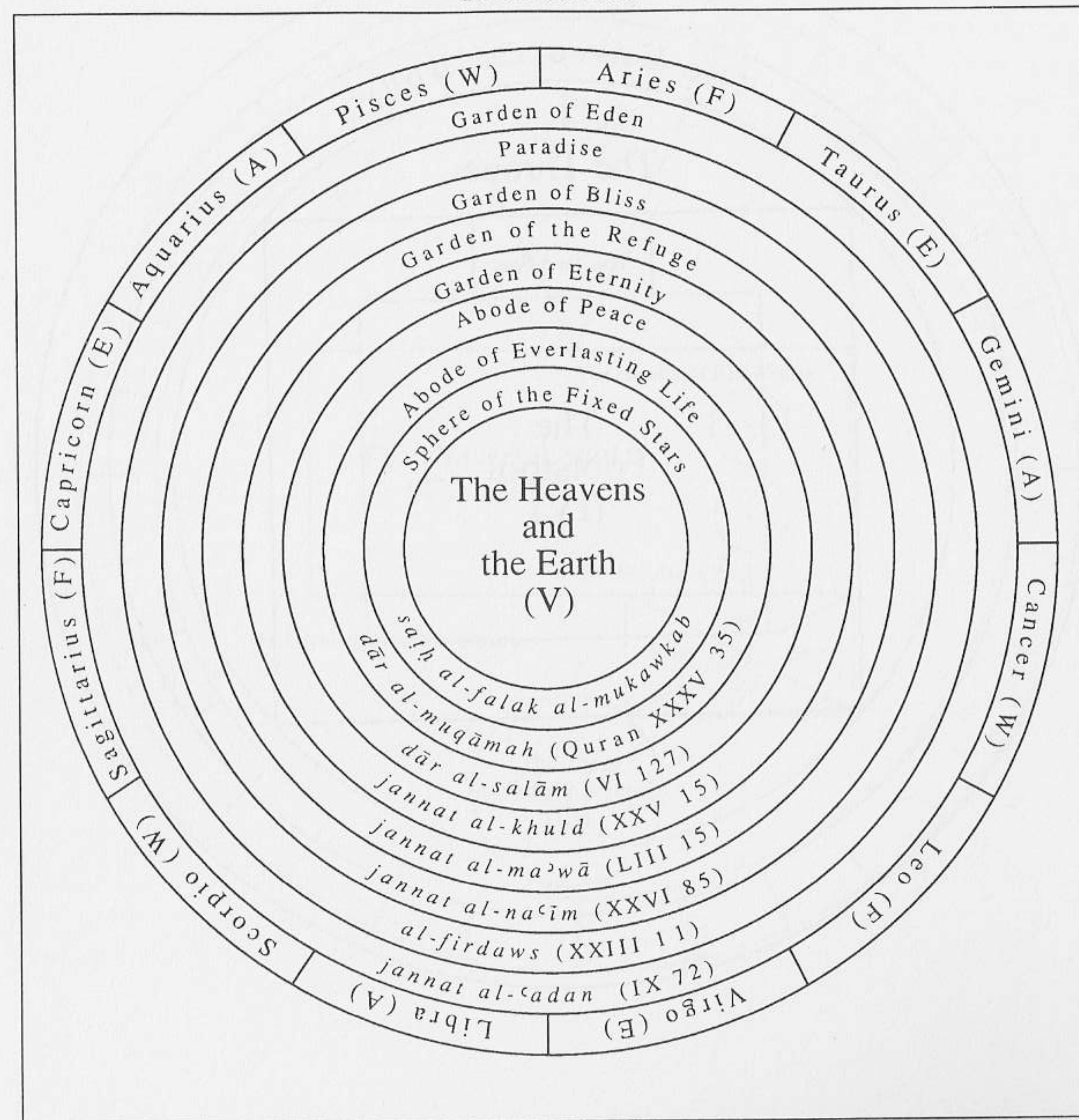
## III. From the Dust to the Footstool (Diagram III)





IV. From the Footstool to the Sphere of the Fixed Stars  
(Diagram IV)

The Footstool



V. From the Sphere of the Fixed Stars to the Darkness  
(Diagram V)

