

Meetings with Imaginal Men

by William C. Chittick

Among the thousands of verses found in Ebno'l-'Arabi's *Fotuhāt al-makkiya* are the following. They describe some of his encounters with embodied spirits:

One embodied himself to me in the earth,
another in the air.
One embodied himself wherever I was,
another embodied himself in heaven.
They gave knowledge to me, and I to them,
though we were not equal,
For I was unchanging in my entity,
but they were not able to keep still.
They assume the form of every shape,
like water taking on the color
of the cup.

(*Fotuhāt* I 755)

Spirits 'embody' themselves through imagination. To understand what this embodiment implies, we need to have a clear understanding of imagination's characteristics, the most outstanding of which is ambiguity, the fact that it escapes the logic of either/or.

The universe has three fundamental worlds: The highest is the world of the simple (or 'noncompound') spirits, who are pure life, intelligence and luminosity. The lowest is that of bodies, which are inanimate and compound, or made of parts. The middle domain is the world of imagination, whose inhabitants are both simple and compound at the same time. Hence, they are not totally different from either spirits or bodies, and through them the two sides are able to interrelate.

Before we go further in this discussion, it is necessary to point out that we should not think of the basic characters in this drama—spirit and

body—as discrete and autonomous things. Rather, the two terms designate configurations of certain tendencies found in existence, or certain divine qualities that are reflected in the created worlds. Both spirit and body are associated with a series of attributes, and no absolute distinction can be drawn between the two sides. The discussion of imagination itself alerts us to the fact that the qualities of spirit and body—which at first sight appear to be different—interpenetrate and intermingle. There can be no absolute differences, except when God as the absolutely Real is contrasted with cosmos as nonexistence. Within the many worlds existentiated by the Breath of the All-merciful, things can be different only in a relative sense.

The World of Imagination allows spirits to become embodied and bodies to become spiritualized. On the microcosmic level, our minds spiritualize the objects of the outside world simply by perceiving them. The spiritualized nature of these objects becomes evident in the world of dreams, where we perceive sensory objects drawn from the outside world in a kind of never-never land between the inanimate matter of the corporeal world and the living and luminous substance of the spirit.¹

The five senses always remain operative in imagination. As the Shaykh remarks, "The reality of imagination is that it gives sensory form to everything that becomes actualized within it" (*Fotuhāt* II 375.34). But the five senses that perceive imagination are not quite the same as the senses that function in the corporeal world. Hence, the Shaykh distinguishes between the 'eye of sense perception', which sees

during wakefulness, and the 'eye of imagination', which sees during sleep. However, the eye of imagination may also see during wakefulness (*Fotuhāt* I 305.3). The Shaykh frequently tells us that "The person who undergoes unveiling sees while he is awake what the dreamer sees while he is asleep" (*Fotuhāt* I 305.1). In other words, both the dreamer and the 'unveiler' (*mokāshef*) perceive imaginalized objects (*motakhayyalāt*), which are neither purely sensory nor purely spiritual.

Discerning Imaginal Realities

It is not always easy to tell the difference between an imaginal object and a sensory object. Although some people claim to experience the unveiling of luminous or fiery spirits—that is, angels or jinn—few of them know how they perceive what they perceive, nor do they know for certain the source of what they perceive. The Shaykh tells us that both the eye of imagination and the eye of sense perception function through the sense of sight, and the science of distinguishing between the perceptions of the two eyes is subtle (*Fotuhāt* I 305.10). After all, Moḥammad's Companions, including 'Omar, did not possess this science when Gabriel appeared in the form of a bedouin and asked several questions from the Prophet. And one of the most perfect of human beings, the Virgin Mary, did not possess it at the time of the Annunciation, when Gabriel "imaginalized himself to her as a man without fault" (Koran 19: 17). The Shaykh alludes to these two events while explaining the difficulty of discerning

between the two kinds of perception:

Not all those who witness imaginalized bodies discern between these bodies and bodies that are 'real' in their view. That is why the Companions did not recognize Gabriel when he descended in the form of a bedouin. They did not know that the bedouin was an imaginalized body until the Prophet told them so when he said that it had been Gabriel. They had not doubted that he was a bedouin. The same was the situation with Mary when the angel "imaginalized himself to her as a man without fault," because she had no mark by which to recognize spirits when they become embodied. (*Fotuhāt* II 333.27)

The Shaykh tells us that this 'mark' (*'alāma*) plays a fundamental role in discerning the nature of an imaginal apparition. Without it, people cannot even distinguish between the imaginal manifestation of spirits and that of God Himself. As the Shaykh remarks, when people experience unveiling without possessing the mark, "The property of the divine and spiritual sides is exactly the same [in their eyes]" (*Fotuhāt* II 333.31). Without the mark, they have no way of discerning among the three types of created spirits that can manifest themselves in imaginal form—those of angels, jinn and human beings.²

The Shaykh often employs the term 'mark' in relation to a *ḥadīth* that describes God's 'self-transmutation' (*taḥawwul*) at the Resurrection.³ God reveals Himself to each group of people, but they keep on denying Him until He transmutes Himself into a form that has the mark which they recognize. In one place, the Shaykh defines the mark as "the form of their belief concerning God" (*Fotuhāt* I 266.18). In the context of the unveiling of imaginal realities, he apparently has something similar in view. He does not tell us what the mark is, because it is established between God and His servant and differs in each case. But he does tell us something about the circumstances of marks. For example, he says that God in His jealousy (*ghayra*) may decide that one of His lovers should love Him alone, even though the lover is still dominated by

the natural world and has not yet escaped the constraints of imagination.

God desires to deliver the soul from everything but Himself, so that it will love nothing else. Hence, He discloses Himself to it in a natural form and gives it a mark that it is not able to deny. This mark is what is called 'incontrovertible knowledge'. The soul comes to know that God is this form. Hence, it inclines toward this form in spirit and bodily nature. When God comes to own the soul and teaches it that secondary causes must have an effect upon it in respect of its nature, He gives it a mark whereby it will recognize Him. He discloses Himself to it through that mark in all secondary-causes without exception. The soul recognizes Him and loves the secondary causes for His sake, not for their sake. (*Fotuhāt* II 331.12)

Unless God has revealed the mark to spiritual seekers, they can always be deceived by visionary experiences. This is not only the case for beginners, but even for advanced adepts. Thus, for example, the Shaykh explains that a person can be deluded (*talbis*) by the satans and evil jinn (*marada*) even during a spiritual ascent or *me'rāj*, during which the traveler passes through the invisible worlds following the example of the Prophet. He writes that many Sufis have been mistaken on this point. Even Ghazālī was of the opinion that a person can be deluded only in the world of the elements; once the adept ascends beyond this world, and the doors of heaven are opened for him, he will be protected from being deluded by the satans. The Shaykh, however, does not agree. He writes:

Let us explain to you the truth in that: Some of the Sufis hold the view that [during a *me'rāj*] all delusion in what is seen will be eliminated, because the travelers ascend into places where the satans cannot enter, places that are holy and pure, as described by God. This is true. The situation is as they suppose. However, this is so only when the *me'rāj* takes place in both body and spirit, as was the *me'rāj* of the Messenger of God. Another person will ascend through his mind or spiritual reality without the separation that occurs through death,

but rather through an annihilation (*fanā'*) or a faculty of vision that has been given to him, while his body stays in his room. He may be absent from his body through annihilation, or present with it through a power he possesses. In this case, there must be delusion if this person does not possess the divine mark between him and God. Through that mark he stands "upon a clear sign from his Lord" (Koran 11: 17) in what he sees and witnesses and in everything that is addressed to him. Hence, if he has a mark, he will stand "upon a clear sign from his Lord." Otherwise, delusion will occur for him, and there will be a lack of certain knowledge in that, if he is just. (*Fotuhāt* II 622.22)

For his part, the Shaykh makes it clear that he possessed the mark that allows the gnostic to distinguish among the various kinds of imaginalized beings. He always knew if his imaginal eye was observing God, an angel, a jinn, or another human being. He writes:

Some people see the spiritual reality that becomes embodied in the outside world and are able to distinguish between it and a human being or any form in which it manifests itself. They also distinguish between an embodied, supraformal, spiritual form and an imaginal form from within, by means of various marks that they know. I have come to know and realize these marks, for I discern between the spirit when it becomes embodied in the outside or inside world and a true corporeal form. But the common people do not discern that. (*Fotuhāt* III 44.12)

Note that by 'common people' (*al-'amma*) the Shaykh does not mean the man in the street, but rather the vast majority of Sufi adepts, the spiritual travelers who have experienced the unveilings of the imaginal world (see Chittick 1989, p. 387, no. 17).

It is perhaps worth remarking here that unveiling is absolutely unreliable as a source of knowledge so long as people are unable to perceive the 'marks' and thereby discern the true nature of the experience. As the Shaykh tells us, "Any unveiling that is not unmixed, completely untainted by



Drawing by Sherko

anything of the bodily constitution, cannot be relied upon, unless the person already possesses the knowledge of the thing that takes form" (*Resāla*, p. 18). No one but the prophets and the greatest friends of God can know who or what becomes embodied to them in imaginal form during a visionary encounter.

The Shaykh reminds his readers that Satan and his followers among the jinn have a vested interest in leading people astray. This is their cosmic function, after all, just as the cosmic function of the prophets is to guide. The result of being led astray is to fall into 'distance from God', which is the most concise definition of hell. In contrast, to follow guidance is to be brought near to God, that is, to end up in paradise.

This is not the place to go into detail concerning the Shaykh's views

of the imaginal activity of satans, even though nowadays this is a topic that seems to have special relevance. It is worth noting, however, that he maintains that the jinn "play games with the rational faculties of certain people," making them think that they are receiving special knowledge (*Fotuhāt* II 621.29). Thereby the jinn keep people confused in order to prevent them from finding the right path. The Shaykh even offers criteria for distinguishing whether or not a person's knowledge of invisible things comes from the jinn. He writes:

Of all beings in the natural world, the jinn are the most ignorant of God. They report to their sitting companion the occurrence of events and what is happening in the cosmos, because they acquire that through listening to the Higher Plenum by stealth.⁵ Then their

[human] companion supposes that God has honored him. He should be careful about what he thinks! This is why you will never see any of those who sit with the jinn having actualized any knowledge of God whatsoever. The most that can happen is that the man who is provided for by the spirits of the jinn is given knowledge of the characteristics of plants, stones, names and letters. This is the science of *simiā'*.⁶ Hence, this person will acquire from the jinn nothing but a knowledge that is blamed by the tongues of the revealed religions. So, if someone claims to be their companion—and if he speaks the truth in his claim—ask him a question concerning his knowledge of the divine things. You will find that he has no tasting in that whatsoever. (*Fotuhāt* I 273.35)

Varieties of Imaginal Perception

Given the fact that the Shaykh was able to recognize the distinguishing marks of imaginal phenomena, it is especially interesting to see how he describes his own perceptions. His writings are full of accounts of visionary experiences, and it would be possible to classify these into various types. Here, simply to suggest some of the range of the texts, I can offer a preliminary and incomplete attempt at such a classification.

Visionary experience can be divided according to four basic criteria.

1. The state of the subject who observes the vision.
2. The reality of the object that undergoes imaginalization.
3. The form taken by the imaginalized object.
4. The cosmic 'location' of the embodiment.

When Ebno'l-'Arabi takes the observing subject into account, he usually distinguishes between visions that occur during normal, waking consciousness and those that do not. Waking visions can be divided into two types according to the eye that perceives—the eye of sense perception or the eye of imagination. Non-waking visions can also be divided into two types according to the mode of consciousness: The person may be asleep and perceive imaginal realities while dreaming, or he may have been overcome by a spiritual state (*hāl*)—such as 'absence' (*ghayba*) or 'annihilation'

(*fanā'*)—that breaks his contact with the world of sense perception.

The realities that undergo imaginalization are the four things mentioned above: God, angels or luminous spirits, jinn or fiery spirits, and human beings. Each has the power—or may have the power—to manifest itself to others in imaginal forms. In the case of human beings, it is clear from the Shaykh's accounts that the person who imaginalizes himself may either be alive and present in this world or dead in this world but alive in the next.

The objects perceived can take any form whatsoever, with the sole qualification that the form must be sensory, like any imaginal phenomenon.

The cosmic location of the vision is often the most difficult of the four criteria to discern. I mean by 'location' the world in which the embodiment occurs. On one level, this has to do with the distinction between the macrocosmic and the microcosmic worlds of imagination, what the Shaykh refers to as 'discontiguous imagination' and 'contiguous imagination' (Chittick 1989, p.117). However, although he provides a theoretical distinction between these two worlds, he seldom draws the line in his writings. The difference between the two may be connected to the question of which eye perceives the imaginal apparition. If this is so, then the imaginal being perceived by the eye of sense perception would be located 'out there' in the world of discontiguous imagination, while the being perceived by the eye of imagination would be 'in here' in the world of contiguous imagination. However, I have not yet found a clear statement of these distinctions in the Shaykh's writings.

Also related to the question of cosmic location is the distinction between an imaginal embodiment that has the power to leave a concrete effect, and one that has no such power. Here the Shaykh discerns between certain operations that sorcerers are able to perform through the science of *simiā'* and the experience of the friends of God. For example, a sorcerer may provide food through *simiā'*, but the person who eats the food will not

become full. In contrast, when it is a question of the imaginalization experienced by the friends of God,

if you eat, you become full, and if you receive something in this station, like gold or clothing or whatever, it stays with you in its state without changing... We have found this station within ourselves. We experienced it through tasting with the spiritual reality of Jesus at the beginning of our wayfaring. (*Fotuhāt* III 43.20)

Imaginal Men

If one were to employ the suggested criteria to classify all the accounts of imaginal perception that the Shaykh provides in the *Fotuhāt*—not to mention his other works—the result would be a major monograph. In some cases the Shaykh merely alludes to the visions, in others he provides many details, and usually he draws some conclusions relevant to his discussions. Here I want to discuss four instances of visionary experience mentioned by the Shaykh in which the second and third criteria are the same. The reality that undergoes imaginalization and the object that appears to imagination are both human beings. In one of the four accounts, the fourth criterion—that of location or world—seems to be different from that in the other three.

As for the first criterion—the state of the observer—this also is not made completely clear by the accounts. The Shaykh's imaginal visions often took place during dreams. He refers to many of these visions with the term *wāq'e'a* or 'incident' (a word which was derived from the first verse of Koran 56). In defining 'incidents', he tells us that they may be seen during sleep or wakefulness (Chittick 1989, p. 404, no. 24), so it is rarely clear whether he himself was asleep or awake during the Incidents that he describes.

In the first account, the Shaykh may have been awake during the apparition, and it seems clear that the imaginalized man is observed in the World of Imagination, because he is dwelling in another country.

During the night when I was writing this chapter, the Real showed me through an incident a light-complexioned man of medium height. He sat before me, but he did not speak. The Real said to me, "This is one of Our servants. Benefit him, so that this may be in your scales [on the day of resurrection]."

I said to Him, "Who is he?"

He said to me, "This is Abo'l-'Abbās ibn Judī, a resident of al-Bōshārrāt" [Alpujarras in Spain].

At this time I was in Damascus. I said to Him, "O Lord, how will he take benefit from me? How do I relate to him?"

He replied, "Speak, for he will benefit from you. Just as I have shown him to you, so I am showing you to him. He sees you now just as you see him. Address him and he will hear you. He says the like of what you say. He says, 'I have been shown a man in Syria called Moḥammad ebno'l-'Arabi. If he benefits me in a certain affair that I do not now possess, he will be my master.'"

I said to him, "O Abo'l-'Abbās! What is this affair?"

He said, "I was struggling in my search. I exerted the utmost efforts and struggled mightily. When I experienced unveiling, I came to know that I was desired. Hence, I relaxed in that effort."

I said to him, "My brother, to a man who was better than you, more in union with the Real, more complete in witnessing, and more perfect in unveiling it was said, 'And say: My Lord, increase me in knowledge' [Koran 20: 14]. So where is ease in the abode of religious prescription? You did not understand what was said to you. You said, 'I came to know that I was desired,' but you do not know *for* what. Yes, you are desired for your struggle and effort. This is not the abode of ease. When you are finished with the affair with which you are busy, exert yourself in the affair that comes to you with each breath. How can anyone be finished?"

He thanked me for what I said. Look at God's solicitude toward me and toward him! (*Fotuhāt* III 431.20)

In three more visions, the Shaykh was unquestionably awake, and the visions seem to be of the type in which the imaginalized object is perceived in the external world. In the first account, others were present but were not able

to see the imaginal apparition. In the second account, a third party may or may not have seen the visionary form. In the third account, it is stated that the imaginal apparition was perceived by at least one other person. The second and third accounts have to do with the vision of human beings who existed in previous centuries.

The following vision appears to pertain to the year 590/1194. Note that the imaginal form remained in the Shaykh's view until he turned away from it for a moment. The significance of this will become clear toward the end of this paper.

One day in Seville I was in the congregational mosque of al-'Adīs after the afternoon prayer. A person was telling me about a great man among the People of the Path, one of the truly greats, whom he had met in Khorāsān. As he was describing his excellence to me, suddenly I was gazing upon a person near us, but the group with me did not see him. He said to me, "I am he—the person whom the man who met me in Khorāsān is describing to you."

I said to the man giving the account, "This man whom you saw in Khorāsān—do you know his description?"

He replied that he did. Then I began to describe the man's distinguishing features and the embellishments of his physical constitution.

My speaking companion said, "By God, he does have the form that you have described. Have you seen him?"

I said to him, "He is sitting right there, confirming to me the truth of the account you are giving of him. I described to you only what I saw as I was gazing upon him and he himself was making himself known to me." He did not cease to sit with me until I turned away. Then I sought for him, but I did not find him. (*Fotuhāt* III 339.7)

Some years later, in 597/1200, the Shaykh was traveling in the Maghrib when he entered into the station of nearness to God (*maqām al-qorba*), the highest spiritual station that can be achieved by someone who is not a prophet. He found himself alone in the station and felt a terrible isolation. To

'reach a station,' it needs to be understood, does not imply any sort of absence from the world of everyday experience. In any event, at this time the Shaykh had already been living in the 'Wide Earth of God' for seven years, and his universe was not one that any of us would necessarily recognize (Addas 1993, ch. 5). But he still walked and talked like other human beings. He interrelated with them, though they could have no idea of how he perceived the world. He tells us that on the day that he entered into this new station, he happened to run into an amir with whom he was friendly, and the amir invited him to stay at the home of his secretary, who was also an old friend. To the secretary the Shaykh complained of his loneliness. But suddenly, he tells us,

While my friend was keeping me entertained, the shadow of a person appeared to me. I rose up from my seat, hoping to find relief in him. He embraced me, and I looked at him carefully. I saw that through him the spirit of Abu 'Abd al-Rahmān Solami had embodied itself for me. God had sent him to me out of mercy. (*Fotuhāt* II 261.9)

Solami had died 170 years before this event. He was a great Sufi master and wrote many works, including one of the most famous collections of Sufi biographies. The Shaykh recounts their conversation, in which Solami explains to him certain aspects of the station of nearness.

The final encounter with an imaginal man took place two years later. This person, Ahmad al-Sabti, was the son of the famous Abbasid caliph Hārūn al-Rashid (d. 193/809) and had died some 400 years earlier. He was well known in his own time for his piety. He used to fast six days a week and then work at a craft on Saturday, living on the proceeds for the rest of the week. This explains the name Sabti, which means "[he who is connected] to the Sabbath." According to the Shaykh, he was the 'pole' (*qoṣb*) of his time, like Abu Yazid Bastāmi in another time (*Fotuhāt* II 6.31, IV 12.16). In this meeting, the Shaykh's vision was shared at least by one other

person. Hence he compares the meeting to the embodiment of Gabriel to the Prophet and the companions.

Among the Men [of God] are six souls in every time [who are given charge over the first six days of the week, during which God created the world]. They never increase or decrease in number. Sabti, the son of Hārūn al-Rashid, was one of them. I met him while circumambulating the Ka'ba on Friday after the prayer in the year 599 [1203]. He was circumambulating. I asked him questions and he answered me while we continued to circumambulate. His spirit became embodied before me in sense perception during the circumambulation, just as Gabriel became embodied in the form of the bedouin. (*Fotuhāt* II 15.27)

In another passage, the Shaykh provides a few more details about this event:

I met him during the circumambulation after the prayer on Friday. I was circumambulating and did not recognize him. However, I saw that he and his state were strange during the circumambulation. For I did not see him pushing or being pushed. He would pass between two men without separating them. I said to myself, "This is a spirit that has become embodied, without doubt." I seized him and greeted him. He returned the greeting. I walked along with him and we spoke and conversed...

When I returned to the place where I was staying, one of my companions... said to me, "I saw a strange man whom we do not know in Mecca talking to you and conversing with you during the circumambulation. Who is he, and where does he come from?" So I told him the story. Those who were present were amazed. (*Fotuhāt* I 638.32)

In a third passage the Shaykh provides a still more detailed account of his meeting with Sabti:

I had begun to circumambulate when I saw a man of beautiful men who possessed gravity and dignity. He was circumambulating the House in front of me. I turned my gaze toward him thinking that I might recognize him. But I did

not recognize him as one of those who live in the neighborhood, nor did I see upon him the mark of a newly arrived traveler, for he looked fresh and full of vigor. I saw that he was passing between two contiguous men during the circumambulation. He would pass between them without separating them, and they were not aware of him. I began to place my feet in the places where he left his footprints. He did not lift his foot without my putting my foot in its place. My mind was turned toward him and my eyes were upon him, lest he slip away. I would pass by the two contiguous men between whom he was passing and would pass them by in his tracks, just as he was passing them by, and I would not separate them. I was amazed at that. When he had completed his seven turns and wanted to leave, I seized hold of him and greeted him. He returned the greeting and smiled at me. All this time I did not take my gaze off him, fearing that he would slip away from me. For I had no doubt that he was an embodied spirit, and I knew that eyesight kept him fixed. (*Fotuhât* IV 12.1)⁸

Elsewhere the Shaykh explains what he means here by the fact that "eyesight kept him fixed." Embodied spirits are controlled by human eyesight. As long as a person keeps a spirit fixed in view, it cannot change its shape and slip away. The Shaykh refers to this in the midst of a discussion of the fact that spirits have the ability to assume any imaginal shape that they desire:

When this spiritual world assumes a shape and becomes manifest in sensory form, eyesight fixes it so that it cannot leave that form as long as sight is gazing upon it with this characteristic—and here I mean the eyesight of the human being. When a person's sight fixes such a spiritual being and continues to gaze upon it, so that it has no place in which to hide, the spiritual being makes manifest a form to the person, and this form is like a covering over it. Then it makes him imagine that the form is going in a specific direction. His eyesight follows the form, and when this happens, the spiritual being emerges from fixation and disappears. When it disappears, that form also disappears from the gaze

of the viewer who had been following it with his eyes.

The form is related to the spiritual being just as a light that shines from a lamp into the corners of a room is related to the lamp. When the body of the lamp disappears, the light goes. So it is with the form. He who knows this and wants to fix the spiritual being does not follow the form with his eyes. This is one of the divine mysteries that is known only through God's giving knowledge. But the form is not other than the spiritual being itself; on the contrary, it is identical with it, even if it is found in a thousand places, or in all places, and is diverse in shape. (*Fotuhât* I 133.4)

This reminds us that imaginal men are merely one of innumerable imaginal apparitions that may appear to the eye of imagination or sight. As we saw at the beginning, the Shaykh writes about the inhabitants of the spiritual world,

They assume the form of every shape, like water taking on the color of the cup.

But the beings that assume imaginal shape can be any sort of creature, good or evil, angel or jinn, prophet or demon. To return to what was said at the outset, the outstanding characteristic of imagination is its ambiguity, its uncertainty, its deceptive qualities. The Shaykh could live joyfully in the knowledge that he recognized the mark of every apparition. The rest of us, lacking in marks, had best be careful.



This is a chapter from the author's forthcoming book, *Re-Imagining Religion: Ibn al-'Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity*.

Notes

1. Ebnô'l-'Arabi maintains that "Everything the human being perceives in dreams derives from that which was apprehended by the imagination through the senses in the state of wakefulness. [The contents of dreams are] of two kinds: In one kind, the form of the thing was perceived in the sensory realm; in the

other kind, the parts of the form perceived in the dream were perceived in the sensory realm. There is no doubt about this." (*Fotuhât* I 375.19)

2. These three are mentioned along with the Real as the source of imaginal apparitions in *Fotuhât* II 333.33. In a typical passage, the Shaykh speaks of the kinship of these three kinds of spirit: "The angels are spirits blown into lights, the jinn are spirits blown into winds (*rih*), and human beings are spirits blown into bodily forms (*shabah*)." *Fotuhât*, Chapter 31¹, translated into English in Chodkiewicz (1988), pp. 287ff.

3. See Chittick (1989), pp. 336-37.

4. The term 'secondary causes' refers to everything below God that acts as a cause for something else. In other words, it refers to everything in the cosmos, beginning with the First Intellect, since there is nothing that is not the cause of something else. The term is roughly equivalent to 'things' (*ashyâ'*) or 'entities' (*a'yân*). See Chittick (1989), pp. 44-46 and *passim*.

5. Allusion to Koran 15:18: "We have set in heaven constellations and decked them out fair to the beholders, and guarded them from every accursed satan, except such as listens by stealth."

6. This word, derived from the Greek *sêmeia*, is often translated as 'letter magic', but it has a far wider application, as can be seen by looking at the instances in which Ebnô'l-'Arabi uses it. Cf. Chodkiewicz (1988).

7. For a translation of the whole passage, see Addas (1993), pp. 174-75.

8. For a fuller (but not complete) translation of this passage, see Addas (1993), pp. 215-16.

References

Addas, C. (1993). *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn 'Arabi*, Cambridge, England: The Islamic Texts Society.

Chittick, W. C. (1989). *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination*, Albany: SUNY Press.

Chodkiewicz, M. et al. (1988). *Les Illuminations de La Mecque/The Meccan Illuminations: Textes Choisis/Selected Texts*. Paris: Sindbad.

Ebnô'l-'Arabi. (1911). *al-Fotuhât al-makkiya*, Cairo. Reprinted Beirut, Dâr Sâdir, n.d.

_____. (1948). *Resâla Lâ yo'awwal 'alayh*, In Ebnô'l-'Arabi, *Rasâ'el*, Hyderabad-Daccan, The Dâ'iratu'l-Ma'ârifil-'Osmaniya [sic].