

## Qūnawī on the One *Wujūd*

*William C. Chittick*

Thirty years ago I published an article called 'Sadr al-Dīn Qūnawī on the Oneness of Being'.<sup>1</sup> At the time I took it for granted that 'Oneness of Being', *wahdat al-wujūd*, was a good designation for the basic perspective of Ibn 'Arabī and his followers. I had not yet realized that Ibn 'Arabī's writings did not provide any reason to think that this would be an appropriate name for his school of thought. Nonetheless, the secondary literature was practically unanimous in calling him the founder of this doctrine – even if nothing else about him seemed to be so clear – so I went along with the received wisdom. Eventually I came to understand that speaking of Ibn 'Arabī as if he and 'the Oneness of Being' were inseparably linked was a serious distortion of the historical record.<sup>2</sup>

A good portion of the mentioned article on Qūnawī is based on the passage that is translated in its entirety in what follows. This passage provides one of the earliest mentions of the expression '*wahdat al-wujūd*' in Islamic literature, though not in any of the technical senses that it picked up later. Qūnawī is discussing *tawhīd*, the assertion of divine unity expressed most succinctly in the formula 'There is no god but God'. He wants to show that the moment we think of God as the Real Being, *al-wujūd al-haqq*, this means that this One Being has no multiplicity whatsoever. The expression *wahdat al-wujūd*, or 'the Oneness of *Wujūd*' as I translate it there, comes up in passing. It certainly has no specific technical sense.

1. 'Sadr al-Dīn Qūnawī on the Oneness of Being', *International Philosophical Quarterly* 21 (1981), pp. 171–84.

2. I have traced the history of the term in 'Rūmī and *Wahdat al-wujūd*', in *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam: The Heritage of Rūmī*, edited by A. Banani, R. Hovannisian and G. Sabagh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 70–111; reprinted in Chittick, *Quest for the Lost Heart* (Albany: State University of New York Press, forthcoming).

The translated passage is the first chapter (*fasl*) of Qūnawī's book *Miftāh al-ghayb*, often considered the most complete exposition of his metaphysical and philosophical position. Qūnawī also included it in his treatise *al-Nusūs* ('The Texts'), which is a short, late book in which he gathered some twenty passages from his previous writings.<sup>3</sup>

Most of the manuscripts of *al-Nusūs* end by providing a more complete title: *al-Nusūs miftāh al-fusūs*, 'The Texts: the Key to the *Fusūs* (*al-hikam* of Ibn 'Arabī)'. As a technical term in the religious sciences, the word *nusūs* (plural of *nass*) designates a clear and explicit text that leaves no room for interpretation. In the final chapter, Qūnawī writes, 'Everything I mentioned in this book ... is the explicit truth of the actual situation'. In Text 5 he explains that all of the included passages pertain exclusively to 'the station of most-perfectness' (*maqām al-akmaliyya*), which he also calls the station of 'equilibrium' (*i'tidāl*) and 'the center point of the circle of existence' (*nuqta wasat al-dā'irat al-wujūdiyya*).<sup>4</sup> By using the word *nusūs* he means to imply that the discussions pertain to the purest metaphysical perception, unsullied by any individual perspective or any specific station of wisdom, virtue or understanding.<sup>5</sup>

\* \* \*

3. The passage is excerpted from my translation of *al-Nusūs*, which will appear in a forthcoming volume of S.H. Nasr and M. Aminrazavi, *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia* (The Institute of Ismaili Studies).

4. On the importance of this expression in Qūnawī's writings, see Chittick, 'The Central Point: Qūnawī's Role in the School of Ibn 'Arabī', *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 35 (2004), pp. 25–45.

5. The translation is based on the edition by Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī, *Risālat al-nusūs* (Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Mashhad, 1362/1983), supplemented by two excellent manuscripts kindly provided by the Ibn 'Arabi Society: Şehid Ali Paşa 1351, copied in 690, sixteen years after Qūnawī's death; and Ayasofya 1724, copied in 813. *Miftāh al-ghayb* was published by M. Khwājāwī along with its commentary by al-Fanārī (Tehran: Mawlā, 1374/1995).

**[20] An Eminent Text. It is among the greatest of the texts.**

Know that the Real is Sheer *Wujūd* without any diversity within Him. He is one with a true oneness that is not intellected as the contrary of manyness; its realization in itself and its conception in sound, realized knowledge does not depend upon conceiving of an opposite. On the contrary, it is fixed in itself; it affirms and is not affirmed [by any 'others']. We say 'oneness' to assert incomparability, to make understood, not to denote the notion of oneness as it is conceptualized by the minds of the veiled.

Now that you have recognized this, we say: From the standpoint of His mentioned oneness and His disengagement [*tajarrud*] from loci of manifestation, from the descriptions ascribed to Him in respect of these loci, and from His manifestation within them, He is not perceived, encompassed, known, depicted or described.

Whenever something is perceived in the entities and whenever any engendered thing is witnessed, in whatever way man may perceive it and in whatever Presence witnessing occurs – except the perception connected to the disengaged meanings and the realities in their unseen Presence by way of unveiling (which is why I said 'in the entities', that is, what is perceived in any locus of manifestation whatsoever) – that perceived thing is colors [*alwān*], lusters [*adwā'*] and surfaces [*sutūh*], diverse in quality and disparate in quantity. Or, it is their images, which become manifest in the world of images [*'ālam al-mithāl*] conjoined [*muttasil*] with man's configuration or disjoined [*munfasil*] from him in a certain respect,<sup>6</sup> just as they are in the external realm [*al-khārij*] or just as their individuals are in the external realm; the manyness of all is sensory [*mahsūs*], and the unity within it is intelligible [*ma'qūl*] or conjectured [*mahdūs*].

All of this is the rulings [*ahkām*] of *Wujūd*; or, you can say that it is the forms of the relations of Its knowledge and Its requisite attributes in respect of Its linkage [*iqtirān*] with all

6. On these two sorts of imagination, conjoined and disjoined, or contiguous and discontinuous, see Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979), p.117.

existent entities because of the mystery of Its manifestation within them, through them, for them, and according to them – however you wish to put it. It is not *Wujūd*, for *Wujūd* is one, and It is not perceived by anything in the respect that It differs from it, as was mentioned. For the One qua One is not perceived by the many qua many, and vice versa. Nor is this perception correct for man inasmuch as he is one with a true oneness, like the oneness of *Wujūd*. Rather, it is correct for him only inasmuch as he is a reality described by *wujūd*, life, the inherence [*qiyām*] of knowledge within him, the fixedness of correspondence between him and what he wishes to perceive, and the removal of the obstacles preventing perception. Hence he perceives what he perceives only in respect of his manyness, not in respect of his unity [*ahadiyya*]. So, in respect of himself, he cannot perceive that which has no manyness whatsoever, because of what was mentioned.

This point has precious mysteries that I have mentioned in greater detail in my book called *Lifting the Curtain of Jealousy from the Mystery of Bewilderment*.<sup>7</sup> Also, in the midst of this book will come additional clarification of what we have mentioned and described, God willing.

Now let us return to the completion of what we were busy with. We say: *Wujūd* in the case of the Real is identical with His Essence, but for everything else, it is something added to its reality.

The reality of each existent consists of the relation of its beginningless entification [*ta'ayyun*] in its Lord's knowledge. In the terminology of the Realizers among the Folk of God, it is named 'A fixed entity' [*'ayn thābita*]; and, in the terminology of others, 'A quiddity' [*māhiyya*], 'the nonexistent known thing' [*al-ma'lūm al-ma'dūm*], 'the fixed thing' [*al-shay' al-thābit*], and the like.

In respect of the oneness of His *Wujūd*, nothing emerges from the Real except one, because it is absurd for the One, inasmuch as He is one, to make manifest and give existence to what is more than one. However, in our view that 'one' is the general

7. This work is not known to have survived.

*wujūd* [*al-wujūd al-‘āmm*] effused [*al-mufād*] upon the entities of the engendered things [*al-mukawwanāt*], both those that have come into *wujūd* and those that have not yet come into *wujūd* but of whose *wujūd* the Real has precedent knowledge. This *wujūd* is shared by the Supreme Pen, which is the first existent, also named ‘the First Intellect’, and by the other existents. It is not as the folk of theory among the philosophers mention, for, in the view of the Realizers, there is nothing but the Real, and the cosmos is nothing in addition to the realities known in the first place by God – as we pointed out before – and qualified [*muttasif*] in the second place by *wujūd*.

It would be absurd for the realities – in the respect that they are known and their forms are entified in the Essential, beginningless knowledge of the Real – to be ‘made’ [*maj‘ūl*], because of the absurdity of the inherence of newly arrived things in the Real’s Essence; the absurdity of the Real being a container for or contained by something else; and because of other corrupt ideas not hidden from the clear seer. Hence, in the view of the Realizers among the folk of unveiling and also of theory, He is not described by making [*ja‘l*], for the ‘made’ is the existent. When something has no *wujūd*, it is not made. Were it so, the eternal knowledge would exert an influence upon the beginningless entification of the things known within itself, even though they are not outside their Knower, for they are non-existent in themselves and have no fixity save in the self of their Knower.

So, if it were to be said that they are made, this would require either that they are coextensive [*musāwīq*] with their Knower in *wujūd*, or that their Knower is a locus of receiving influences from Himself in Himself and also a container for other than Himself, as was mentioned. But all this is false, because it detracts from His utter oneness and demands that the effused *wujūd* fall upon things that are existent rather than non-existent. But all that is absurd, for it would be to gain what is already there [*tahsīl al-hāsīl*], and in other ways as well, but there is no need to draw this out by mentioning them. So understand! Thus it is affirmed that, in respect of what we mentioned, [the realities] are not made. There are not two *wujūds*, as was mentioned,

but rather one *wujūd* shared by all of them, acquired [*mustafād*] from the Real.

Now, this one *wujūd* that falls [*'ārid*] upon the created contingent things is no different in reality from the Real, Nonmanifest *Wujūd* that is disengaged from the entities and loci of manifestation, except through relations and standpoints, such as manifestation, entification, the plurality that comes through linkage, the reception of the ruling of sharing, and similar descriptions that join up with It by means of the connection to the loci of manifestation.

The springhead of *Wujūd*'s loci of manifestation from the standpoint of Its linkage, the Presence of Its self-disclosure, and the domicile of Its entification and Its coming down [*tadallī*] is the Cloud [*'amā*'] mentioned by the Prophet.<sup>8</sup> It is the station of the Lordly descent [*tanazzul*] and the arising place [*munba'ath*] of the Essential, All-Merciful munificence [*jūd*] from the unseen He-ness [*huwīyya*] and the exalted Ipseity [*inniyya*]. In this Cloud becomes entified the level of the First, Unseen, Covenantal Marriage [*nikāh*], which opens up the Presences of the divine names through Essential, beginningless attentivenesses. We shall break the seal of the key of its keys shortly, God willing.<sup>9</sup>

So, if you have understood, there are two standpoints on *wujūd*. One is inasmuch as It is *Wujūd* alone, and that is the Real. In this respect, as was pointed out, within Him there is no manyness, composition [*tarkīb*], attribute, depiction [*na't*], name, impression, relation or ruling – rather, mere *Wujūd*. And, our saying '*Wujūd*' is to make understood; this is not a true name for Him. Rather, His name is identical with His attribute, and His attribute is identical with His Essence. His perfection is the same as His Essential *Wujūd*, fixed for Him by Himself, not by someone else. His life and His power are identical with

8. On the Cloud in Ibn 'Arabī, see Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, pp. 125–27.

9. The 'breaking of the seal' is a reference to extensive later discussions of divine and cosmic marriage in *Miftāh al-ghayb*, not to the rest of this passage. On marriage in this school of thought, see Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 147–51.

His knowledge. His beginningless knowledge of the things is identical with His knowledge of Himself, in the sense that He knows Himself through Himself and knows everything through His very knowledge of Himself.

In Him the diverse things are unified, and from Him the many things arise, without their containing [*hawāya*] Him or His containing them; they do not make Him appear from a prior non-manifestation, nor does He set them apart from Himself so as to make them appear. He has a oneness that is the source of every manyness, and a simplicity [*basāta*] that is identical with every composition at last or at first. Whatever is contradictory [*tanāqud*] for something else is fixed for Him in the most perfect way.

Whoever speaks of Him and not through Him, negating [*nafy*] from Him everything dubious and restricting Him within what he perceives, will be a silent mute, a perplexed ignoramus, until through Him he sees every opposite in its very opposite, or rather as identical with it, while he distinguishes between its reality and Him. [He will see that] His oneness is identical with His manyness, and His simplicity is the same as His composition. His manifestation is the same as His nonmanifestation, and His lastness identical with His firstness. He does not become restricted by what is understood from 'oneness' or '*wujūd*', nor is He apprehended by a witnesser or in something witnessed. It belongs to Him to be as He has said and to become manifest as He desires without restriction in nondelimitation or delimitation. He has the meaning that encompasses every letter and the perfection that fully embraces every description.

Whenever the beauty [*husn*] of something is concealed from the veiled because of what is imagined to be a stain and defect within it, once its 'leg is unveiled' [Qur'ān 68:42] such that the correctness of its ascription to Him is perceived, the form of perfection will be found within it, and it will be seen as a platform [*minassa*] for the self-disclosure of majesty [*jalāl*] and beauty [*jamāl*].

All the names and attributes are many for Him in a oneness that is His very Entity. He is not incomparable with what is fixed for Him, nor is He veiled from what He brings into appearance so that it may be perfected. His veil, His exaltation [*'izza*],

His independence, and His holiness [*quds*] express His reality's distinction from everything that is opposed to it, His lack of connection with anything, and His lack of need for anything in the fixedness and subsistence of His *Wujūd*. Nothing has any realization through itself or anything else, only through Him. So pay heed!

In this respect intellects and thoughts do not perceive Him, directions and regions do not contain Him, and insight [*basīra*] and eyesight [*basar*] do not encompass the contemplation and recognition of Him. He is incomparable with formal and supra-formal limitations; hallowed beyond the reception of every measurement connected with quantity or quality; transcendent beyond encompassment by conjecture, understanding, supposition and knowledge; and veiled by the perfection of His exaltation from all His creatures, the perfect among them and the defective, those who presume that they are approaching, and the withdrawing.

All declarations of incomparability by intellects in respect of their thoughts and their insights are negatory rulings that do not convey recognition of His reality; despite this, they are less than what His majesty demands and His holiness and perfection rightfully deserve.

The fountainhead of the connection of His knowledge to the cosmos is from His very knowledge of Himself. This connection becomes manifest through the manifestation of the relations of His knowledge, which are the things known by Him. He knows the infinite in respect of encompassment in His knowledge and the fact that from Him everything emerges, for He knows His Essence, the requisite of His Essence, and the requisite of the requisite – together and individually, undifferentiatedly and differentiatedly – and so on ad infinitum. When He entifies something, or He knows that something's level will be entified by a condition or a cause, He knows it with its condition, its cause, and its requisite – if He has precedent knowledge of it and its entification. Otherwise, He knows it through Himself and how He wills. Knowledge, however, does not come to Him newly, and no affair or ruling by which He would be restricted becomes entified for Him.



His perfection is through Himself. His *wujūd* is actual, not potential; necessary, not contingent. He is incomparable with known change or new arrival [*hudūth*]. Newly arrived things do not contain Him so as to make Him appear or to keep Him safe. He does not engender them because of needing something other than Himself, nor because the things are tied [*irtibāt*] to Him in respect of what becomes entified from Him. He is not tied to them in respect of their distinction from Him through their plurality. The *wujūd* they have for themselves depends [*tawaqquf*] upon Him, but He does not depend upon them.

He is independent of everything through His reality, and everything is poor [*muftaqir*] toward Him in its *wujūd*. There is no relation between Him and the things save solicitude, as was mentioned. There is no veil but ignorance, obscurity and imagination because of His utmost nearness and closeness and the excess of His exaltation and highness.

In reality His solicitude is the effusion of the light of His *wujūd* upon what is reflected in the mirror of His Entity – the relations that are known by Him – and prepared for the reception of the ruling of His existence-giving and being His locus of manifestation.

Glory be to Him! 'Nothing is as His likeness' in the first respect, 'but He is the Hearing, the Seeing' [42:11] in the second respect: when He is perceived or witnessed, when He addresses or is addressed, this is from behind the veil of His exaltation and the afore-mentioned level of Himself; [it takes place] through the relation of His being the Manifest and through the ruling of His self-disclosure in the domicile of His coming down [*tadallī*] in respect of the linkage of His complete *wujūd* to the contingent things and the shining of His light upon the entities of the existents. It is nothing other than this.

In this respect, when the entification of His *wujūd* is looked upon as delimited by the attributes requisite to all the entified contingent entities, which are in reality the relations of His knowledge, together and individually; [as delimited] by what follows upon these attributes, that is, the affairs named 'tasks, characteristics, and accidents'; [as delimited] by the influences that follow upon the rulings of the name Aeon [*al-dahr*] called

'moments' [*awqāt*]; and [as delimited] by the levels and homesteads; then that entification and individuation [*tashakhkhūs*] is named 'creature' [*khalq*] and 'other' [*siwā*]. You will recognize the secret of that shortly, God willing.

Then every description is ascribed to Him and He is named by every name. He becomes manifest in every impression, He receives every ruling, He becomes delimited in every station by every impression, and He is perceived by every means of awareness [*mash'ar*], whether eyesight, hearing, intellect, understanding, or any other of the potencies [*quwā*] and perceptual means [*madārik*]. So remember, and know! This is because He pervades everything through His Essential Light, hallowed beyond partition [*tajazzu'*], division [*inqisām*], and indwelling [*hulūl*] in spirits and bodies. So understand! But all of this when He loves and how He wills.

In every moment and state, He receives these two mentioned universal, opposite [*mutadādd*] rulings by His Essence, not by something added to It. He comprehends every two diverse things, whether absent or present, emerging or entering. If He wills, He becomes manifest in every form, and if He does not will, no form is ascribed to Him. His entification and individuation in forms and His being qualified by their attributes do not detract from the perfection of His *wujūd*, His exaltation, and His holiness. His becoming manifest, His making manifest, His entification, His delimitation in and through the things and their rulings as they are, do not preclude His elevation, His nondelimitation by any limitations, and His independence in His Essence from everything that is described by *wujūd*. Rather, through the self-disclosure of His *wujūd* He comprehends the realities that are similar to each other but different, so they combine, and those that are averse to each other and incompatible, so they stay apart.<sup>10</sup>

Through the self-disclosure of His *wujūd* hidden things become manifest and blessings descend from the Unseen to the

10. Qūnawī probably has in mind the sound hadith, 'Spirits are assembled troops. Those who recognize each other become familiar, and those ignorant of each other diverge.'

Visible in respect of His names Expander [*bāsīt*] and Originator [*mubdī'*]. By the lifting of the ruling of His coming down, the existents become hidden and cease to exist, through the names Contracter [*qābid*] and Returner [*mu'īd*]. When He is veiled by His exaltation, He is 'the Forgiver'; and when He loves to be known, He comes down and becomes manifest in whatever He wills just as He wills, so He is 'the Loving' [*al-wadūd*]. As Lover [*muhibb*] He makes appear through love [*mahabbā*], and it makes Him appear; and through it as Lover and Beloved He makes return. Everything is in His grasp and subjugated under the strength of His hold because of the strength of His act and the weakness of what is acted upon.

The locus of manifestation for His power, the instrument of His wisdom in His acting by His wont [*sunna*], the locus of manifestation for the mystery of contraction and expansion, making appear and making hidden, the Unseen and the Visible, and unveiling along with the formal, relative veil through which He acts as mentioned – not in an unqualified sense – is His splendid Throne. This is why He says, making apparent the mystery of this affair 'for him who has a heart or gives ear while he is a witness' [50:37], 'Surely thy Lord's hold is severe. Surely it is He who originates and makes return. He is the Forgiver, the Loving, the Possessor of the Splendid Throne, Doer of what He desires' [85:12–16] in the two levels of nondelimitation and delimitation. His words, 'Doer of what He desires', are the answer to a supposed question, known to appear from a veiled protester.

