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***“Maternal Communities Like Unto Yourselves”***

***On Animality from the Muslim Intellectual Point of View***

***Pro. Rusmir Mahmutćehajić***

*Amman - The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan*

## “MATERNAL COMMUNITIES LIKE UNTO YOURSELVES”

On Animality from the Muslim Intellectual Point of View

Rusmir Mahmutćehajić  
International Forum Bosnia

Hast thou not seen how to God prostrate  
all who are in the heavens and all who are in the earth,  
the sun and the moon, the stars and the mountains,  
the trees and the beasts, and many of mankind?

Qur'an, 22:18

No creature is there crawling on the earth,  
no bird flying with its wings, but they are  
maternal communities like unto yourselves.  
We have neglected nothing in the Book;  
then to their Lord they shall be mustered.

Qur'an, 6:38

This present life is naught but a diversion  
and a sport; surely the Last Abode is Life,  
did they but know.

Qur'an, 29:64

### Preface

The Muslim intellectual tradition includes voluminous writings on the animal world and humanity's animal nature. Some of the tradition's best-known works are pervaded by discourse on animals and their nature and to understand them requires some knowledge of perennial philosophy in its Muslim expression and how it views the animal kingdom. I have in mind such works as: al-Djāhiz, *Al-Kitab al-Hajawan*; Ikhwān al-Safā', *Rasā'il*; Sanā'i, *Hadīkat al-hakīka*; Al-Suhrawardī, *Risālat al-tayr*, 'Attar, *Mantiqū't-Tair*; Djalāl al-Din Rūmi, *The Mathnawī*; al-Kazawīnī, *'Adjā'ib al-makhlūkāt*; *Kalila wa Dimna*; al-Damīrī, *Hayāt al-hayawāal-kubrā*.

Any investigation of the place or meaning given to life *per se* and the animal world in the Muslim intellectual tradition presupposes an understanding of the main elements of that tradition's metaphysics, cosmology, anthropology, and psychology.

This material is generally little known to the viewpoints of the main modern worldviews. Many things are termed Muslim which in terms of their content in fact belong to one of the modern ideologies, but in certain cases important elements of the Muslim worldview have actually been incorporated into those intellectual articulations of the questions of God, the world, and man that provide a formal framework for that sentimentalism and moralism that has taken such strong root amongst Muslims.

The confession of the unity of God, the apostleship of the Praised (the Prophet Muhammad), and the return of all things to God are essential elements of the Muslim intellectual tradition. They are to be found in whatever has a claim to be part of this tradition, whose historical manifestation has incorporated and combines content, symbols, and linguistic expressions from many, if not all the other major traditions. This is not least because the Muslim intellectual tradition holds that everything revealed to the Praised had already been revealed to all the other prophets.

The essential matter never changes, regardless of the multitude of forms assumed, in different times, places, and tongues. As this suggests the term *Muslim* has a double aspect such that it is not simply bound by geographical, temporal, or cultural limits, whether in or beyond history. Semantically, *islam* and *muslim* both refer to peace, and when we say we are concerned with the *Muslim* form of perennial wisdom, what we mean is that we are concerned with perennial wisdom as our mode of relating to God in the key of peace.

The religious movement begun by Muhammad and commonly referred to as Islam is a historical manifestation of this mode of relating to God in the key of peace, but that key is not exclusive to this historical movement. All who relate to God as Peace through being-in-peace are people of peace, *Muslims*. This is not a bid for hegemony amongst traditions. It is simply recognition that the many paths to God are ultimately one path.

It is a central aspect of any intellectual tradition that it views the human condition in terms of Existence or Being. The intellectual traditions generally agree that we cannot know ourselves or realise our destiny unless we know Ultimate Reality, culminating in the Divine Self's self-revelation through humanity. To understand human nature we must accept the reality of the First and the Last and the ways He manifests Himself in the cosmos. It was Ultimate Reality's desire to be known that led to both the world and humankind being created.

Muslims believe that unity, prophecy, and return to the Divine centre comprise the core of all sacred traditions. In the following lectures, we will be particularly concerned with those of the sacred traditions that may be considered “prophetic” and will return repeatedly to three key elements of prophecy, namely the sacred, wisdom, and knowledge. While certain metaphysically-based traditions appear to lack an explicit concept of “prophecy” at least of the sort that exists in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the three elements of the sacred, wisdom, and knowledge are common to them all.

Muslims also believe that God sent prophets to all the peoples, whom they addressed in their own languages. Their number was 124,000. The Praised is their original or maternal principle and the essential matter of all these prophecies is contained within the Recitation, which was sent down to the Praised during his historical existence. The entire heritage of prophetic wisdom, disseminated throughout time and the nations, is therefore also Muslim.

Research into how the animal world has been represented within the Muslim intellectual tradition has tended to concentrate on Arabic, Persian, and Turkish sources. This approach has no basis in the historical or cultural realities of the Muslim world. There has through the ages been no language or people who have not participated in this tradition in some way. When I say “through the ages”, I mean it to be understood in the strongest possible sense – that is “since the beginning of the ages.” This is because all sacred doctrines, rituals, and virtue are, have always been, and will always be essentially one.

Modern rationalism requires clear (analytical) distinctions and boundaries which tend to reduce the traditions to their horizontal and quantitative relations. They are of little use, however, for research into and the representation of the traditions’ intellectual content, if we understand “intellectual” in terms of the mediaeval concept of the *intellectus* as that which connects everything in existence with the transcendental source. Only traditional ontology, in the light of Intellect as the unifying principle of all the differences of the world, can assign their relative positions to the various ways in which the One is revealed, so that the roles and meanings of the animal creation can be determined.

Our topic in these lectures is animality in the Muslim intellectual tradition. As the Qur’anic quotation in our title indicates, we have defined our subject as maternal communities like ourselves. The term “maternal community” has been used, rather

than “nation”, as more closely reflecting the semantic fields of the Recitation and as bringing to the surface an important principle. “Maternal community” refers to a diversified receptive phenomenon within integral ontological strata. We are constantly faced, sometimes astonished, by the diversity of animal life around us.

Animals form a key context of the external world, informing from our first steps our understanding of who we are and how life integrates and reflects myriads of different forms. In looking for knowledge of them, we discover our own selves. The predominant modern perception of life, however, reduces it to the external world, to an animal world that is different, opposed, and subject to us. In this way, we break our link with life and Being, positioning ourselves above and against Being rather than within it. We ourselves have a primarily maternal nature. What we have received establishes a debt which we must return. This debt is governed by precepts that belong to the same level as the Source. Because we first received, we can give.

We thus partake of the paternal principle of giving as well as the maternal one of reception. These two aspects are found together in any human being, just as they are within the phenomenal order as a whole. Nothing is excluded from this totality, regardless of its position within differentiated Being. To see how all living phenomena belong to the same maternal diversification of the Divine Principle, sent down and given to the worlds, is a precondition for understanding the human condition and the individual nature of self realization through the search to answer the questions of who, where, and when we are.

It is clear that the reflections presented in the following lectures deal with the metaphysical, cosmological, anthropological, and psychological treatment of the animal world in the perennial tradition and more particularly in what may be considered formally its Islamic or Muslim branch. The resulting framework may be applied to any cultural tradition. Recent studies of the Muslim traditions in China – with their Buddhist, Taoist, and neo-Confucian idioms – have shown how this ontological, cosmological, and anthropological legacy can be translated from one tradition to another.

In future studies, the author will demonstrate how the animal world has been integrated into the anthropo-cosmological picture of the Bosnian Muslims throughout their history. Even a cursory review will make clear that their oral and written heritage cannot be understood or interpreted without taking into account the symbolic

meanings assigned to the animal world. These meanings are, however, inseparable from the Muslim intellectual tradition as a whole.

### Note on Terminology

Following my practice on other occasions and in my published works in both Bosnian and English, I avoid using certain (in this case English) terms and phrases which have become “standard” in works on the Muslim intellectual tradition. I do this in order to combat the ideological reification of concepts, processes, and persons which I believe to be a sickness common to all the Abrahamic traditions in modernity. I have particularly in mind terms whose calcified form obscures the relatively simple and clear underlying meaning of the Arabic original and its inclusion into extensive semantic and metaphorical networks of meaning that inform the text of the Qur’anic Recitation and Muslim religiosity. This includes both potentially misleading or archaic translations and the unnecessary retention of Arabic terms which have a perfectly normal translation, the main function of which appears to be to accentuate the ‘strangeness’ of the text and obscure its common points with the texts of the other traditions.

In their place, I propose a number of new (and I hope accurate) translations of key terms, including the Recitation for the Qur’an, the Praised for Muhammad (reflecting the meaning of the Prophet’s name), the debt for religion (reflecting one of the basic meanings of the Arabic *din*), being-in-peace for *islam*, etc. It is hoped that further examples will be clear from the context. Certain other translation choices are deployed to stress the common ground between the traditions at precisely those points where the normal translation widens the gap. These include the use of servant and service instead of the common slave and servitude, or being-in-peace and peace for submission and the people of peace for Muslims. Quotations from the Recitation are adapted from Arberry’s version accordingly.

An important additional reason for pursuing this strategy is that the resultant defamiliarization actually brings us closer to the text. It helps us to gain a truer insight into the core message of *islam* as the practice of being-in-peace, as well as into the fundamental similarities between the Abrahamic traditions (which are often obscured by the choice of linguistic options that create the appearance of difference where none

exists), as it also helps us in the urgent task of deconstructing the contemporary distortion of *islam* as a religion of fatalistic surrender which, by some perverse mechanism, serves as the main generator of religious violence, fundamentalism, and radical otherness directed towards the destruction of the civilized world order. These are consequences of the ideology and processes of modernity (including postmodernity and globalization), which run counter to the true spirit of the religious traditions and which can be opposed only on the basis of a continuous re-discovery of our authentic nature and role in God's creation.

### A Doctrinal Prelude

The main question treated in this essay is: what are the meanings associated with the animal world in the Muslim intellectual tradition? Clear answers are possible only to clear questions. Before answering this question, we must pose another: what is the Muslim intellectual tradition? And then a third: what does the Muslim point of view stress most and most correctly, always and everywhere?

Across the centuries, Muslim speakers and writers have very frequently dealt with this third question by reference to the well-known story of the Archangel Gabriel and the questions he asked the Praised. Its content and the narrative framework have been worked on in various ways so as to provide a teaching considered specifically Muslim. This has and will continue to be the case, as it is well known to the vast majority of Muslims throughout the world and it encapsulates the essential matter which forms the lifeblood of the Muslim intellectual tradition. It reads as follows:

'Umar ibn al-Khattab said: "One day when we were with God's messenger, a man with very white clothing and very black hair came up to us. No mark of travel was visible on him, and none of us recognized him. Sitting down before the Prophet, leaning his knees against his, and placing his hands on his thighs, he said, 'Tell me, O Praised One, about being-in-peace.' He replied, 'Being-in-peace means that you should bear witness that there is no god but God and that the Praised is His messenger, that you should perform the ritual prayer, pay the alms tax, fast during Ramadan, and make the pilgrimage to the House if you are able.' That man said, 'You have spoken the truth.' We were surprised at his questioning of him and then declaring that he had spoken the truth. He said, 'Now tell me about faith.' He replied, 'Faith means that you have faith in God, His angels, His books, His messengers, and the Last Day, and that you have faith in the measuring out, both its good and its evil.' Remarking that he had spoken the truth, the man then said, 'Now tell me about doing what is beautiful.' He replied, 'Doing what is beautiful means that you should worship God as if you saw Him, for even if you do not see Him, He sees you.' Then the man said,

‘Tell me about the Hour.’ The Prophet replied, ‘About that he who is questioned knows no more than the questioner.’ The man said, ‘Then tell me about its marks.’ He said, ‘The slave girl will give birth to her mistress, and you will see the barefoot, the naked, the destitute, and the shepherds vying with each other in building.’ Then the man went away. After I had waited for a long time, the Prophet said to me, ‘Do you know who the questioner was, ‘Umar?’ I replied, ‘God and His messenger know best.’ He said, ‘He was Gabriel. He came to teach you your debt.’”<sup>1</sup>

As the text cited above makes clear, the questioning of the Praised is related by ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab, one of his closest and most familiar companions. It took place in the presence of many who recognized the Praised as a prophet. The Archangel Gabriel came to him in human form and asked him about peace (*islam*), faith or belief (*iman*), doing what is good and beautiful (*ihsan*), and the hour (*sa’at*). The Praised responded to these questions, while the Archangel confirmed the correctness of what he said. Later, the Praised informed ‘Umar that the stranger had been the Archangel Gabriel, who had used his questions to instruct those assembled on the nature of their debt (*din*).

This text includes the key elements of perennial tradition – desire, love and knowledge, and virtue or sanctity. They are expressed in Arabic, but we recognize the same concepts as are present in all the traditions and languages of the world. The framing event is also of crucial importance. The mediator who brings news to the prophet is in human form, but his essence partakes of a higher level of existence. His taking human form has the symbolic significance of active intellect. He knows the All-Praised, and the All-Praised knows him.

No phenomena that belong to this tradition, as determined by these elements, fail to refer to its three expressions – the unity of God, the apostleship of the Praised, and return to God. In the interrogation narrative, these three go to make up the debt as indebted humanity’s way of relating to the indebted God. In this tradition, human indebtedness is discussed in terms of three relations – being-in-peace, faith, and doing what is good and beautiful. Our voluntary turn towards our most profound needs corresponds to the first of these relations, the integration into the self of such knowledge as confirms and reinforces this orientation to the second, and approximation to the Real as it appears in the two preceding relations to the third.

Once we understand our relationship with God as one of debt or indebtedness, we can talk of God as the Giver or the Source of being-in-peace, faith, and good and beautiful action and of ourselves as recipients of peace, faith, and beauty. Once we

have accepted this as the source of our being, God reveals Himself through both the fact of giving and the fact that we receive what is given through His names. A search for answers to these questions can, therefore, focus on those of His names that determine being-in-peace, faith, and doing what is beautiful and good, the very names given explicitly in the story.<sup>2</sup>

The text mentions a fourth element, the hour, usually viewed as the eschatological resolution of the human and cosmic drama within Time. Other interpretations are possible, however. The hour can be defined and represented in any number of ways. If one supposes it to mean the “now” in its most absolute sense, it may be more concerned with the real as the gathering of all time and space and so with a view point on existence for which past and future become one. Understood in this way, the hour is the esoteric now-ness or *co-presence* of both this and the other world, of both paradise and hell.

Properly understood, the concept of eternity, which means being outside of all quantity, comprehends the now as fullness. Taken in this way, time is principally quality, and not, as the modern worldview has it, divisible and measurable quantity. One consequence of this necessary homogeneity, eternity, and contemporaneity is the circular flow of time within which all visible things are a standing revelation of the One, while every human self is always on either the arc of descent or that of ascent to the revelation of God as the Creator and the Universal Ruler, who is both absolutely near and absolutely far.

The story also shows how the Muslim tradition stresses the confession of the unity of God first and the apostleship of the Praised second. Everything else in this tradition depends on that. The first tenet is not separable from the second, however. As a result, any questions being viewed from the Muslim intellectual point of view must necessarily be related to both these two – the unity of God and the apostleship of the Praised. Whenever this link becomes obscured, so does the answer, however hard we look.

Given the primacy of the confession of God’s unity and the Praised’s apostolate within the Muslim tradition, it is clear that no discourse arising from or within that tradition will carry much conviction unless it starts from and returns to that principle. This is because the tradition, according to its adherents, is rooted in the revelation of Intellect within the human order. Although occupied with particular human being as the key theatre for the drama of existence and the “link” between the

created and the Uncreated, the many and the One, the tradition does not derive from particularity.

Once concrete human particularity has been revealed in its highest moment, where first and last become one, all the hearts of humankind are revealed as one heart and one Intellect. As the Praised said: “The hearts of all of Adam’s children are but a single heart held between the All-mighty’s two fingers. He turns them where He will.”<sup>3</sup> This tradition may be understood as equating each individual with humanity as a whole, and the converse. It also intimates that full human self-realization requires everything in the external world, just as we, human beings, are necessary to creation as a whole.

It is this, our interdependence with the world, that provides the context for the drama of human self-realization, starting with our descent from the perfect cosmic harmony of paradise to the lowest depth, through our turn out of remorse for what we have done, and culminating in our return up through the levels of existence to union with God, guided by His signs, which lead us to understand the essential unity of the world and the self as two aspects of the self-revelation of the One. This is the context against which one must understand the Muslim view of animality and our animal nature.

Human being is not set against the world or in opposition to the animal. It is the role of existence and, consequently, of animals to reveal and to worship God, to praise Him and to be praised by Him as good in His eyes. Human being encapsulates existence, as microcosm to macrocosm, but also as its crowning glory. We are the only beings with free will, capable of choosing or rejecting our proper relationship with God. We are, moreover, the only creature in which Intellect is present as an active rather than just a passive principle. For the Muslim tradition, our animal nature is not a source of sin. Just as the Praised was carried on his night journey by the *buraq*, our animal nature is the worldly vehicle of the self on the path back to God and, so, the means of our redemption.

This is only possible, however, in so far as we accept, integrate, and transcend our animal nature, without rejecting it. Just as the ascending levels of being are so many signs of God, existence as a whole is the most perfect expression of the divine self-revelation, culminating in each individual’s realization of creaturehood in sublime dependence on God. It is then, and only then, that we are truly at home in Creation.

The most beautiful names of God are dispersed across the levels of existence, while all things within the horizons of the world reveal one or other of them. This is why taken together through their respective signs in the world they make up the universal human being, while serving each individual as a reminder of what is in us. When we realise them within ourselves, we return as individuals to most beautiful uprightness precisely by discovering it within ourselves.

## 1. God and human being

Everything in existence was created with Truth.<sup>4</sup> The creation of the world was an expression or externalization of Truth. Human self-realization is its internalization. Through this pair, the world and human being, the Creator is manifest as both Outer and Inner. Two things, however, are specific to human being – God breathed His Spirit into us and He offered us confidence or mutual faith as the form of our relationship with Him. In all creation, human being is the only form of being to possess these two– the Divine Spirit at the heart of the self and Confidence, which we have accepted, though we might have refused.

Inspired by the Divine Spirit and having willingly accepted divine confidence, we are capable of contracting alliance or covenanting with God as our Lord within the heart of the self, as is made clear by the oath in pre-existence:

And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their seed, and made them testify, touching themselves, “Am I not your Lord?” They said, “Yes, we testify” – lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, “As for us, we were heedless of this”, or lest you say, “Our fathers were associaters aforetime, and we were seed after them. What, wilt Thou then destroy us for the deeds of the vain-doers?”<sup>5</sup>

The True God asks us about Himself. In this way, our self knowledge depends on knowledge of the True or Real, Who is both our reason and purpose. We gather together and focus existence as a whole, but also have our own original nature, determined by the inspiration of the divine Spirit, confidence, and our covenant with God. Our original nature is to bring together and contain all of the beautiful divine names, so that human self-realization may be defined as the discovery of this act of cosmic gathering.

Just as God is revealed throughout existence by His names, so the human self is pregnant with the fullness of His revelation. This is the meaning of the teaching that

we were created in the image of the Creator and have received His Spirit. Nothing else in existence gathers all His names. Existence, otherwise, lacks comprehension of the Divine Spirit or any warrant of confidence. Only with such a warrant can creation as a whole fully reveal God and that requires humanity. That is why human being is the highest form of being and is necessary for His love to reveal Himself.

If we wish to know God, we must turn to ourselves: “He who knows himself, knows his God.”<sup>6</sup> This is because the revelation of God requires that unity be distinguished from absolute multiplicity and the absolute from the void, along with all phases or stages between. As it is with creation as a whole, so it is with us. We too find ourselves stretched between two poles – our mortal self and God’s Immortal Self. Everything that lies within the horizons of the external world reminds us of this differentiation from the uncreated kernel of the inspired Divine Spirit to the furthest boundaries of time and space.

While it is usual in the Muslim intellectual tradition to speak of the 99 most beautiful names of God, it is generally agreed that the number is not in fact limited. The normal view is that “99” symbolizes infinite number, which can thus be intimated through the finite.<sup>7</sup> The beautiful names or attributes reveal the Essence. Consequently, the two aspects of creation (human being and the cosmos) are vehicles or signs of these names. There are thus three concepts – Essence, Attribute, and Actualization – that together make up the core of the Muslim intellectual tradition.

The Muslim intellectual tradition tells us that God said: “I was a Treasure but was not known. So I loved to be known, and I created the creatures and made Myself known to them. Then they came to know Me.”<sup>8</sup> Consequently, everything in existence came into being out of God’s love for self-knowledge. Human being is the centre-piece of this existence, as God said through the Praised:

By the fig and the olive and the Mount Sinai and this land faithful! We indeed created Man in the most beautiful uprightness. Then We restored him the lowest of the low – save those who believe and do righteous deeds; they shall have a wage unfailing.<sup>9</sup>

The intention behind this creation of humankind is spoken of in the Recitation, as is the knowledge of it, which was not shared with the Angels. When God spoke of his intention to create humankind, the heavenly choir of angels expressed its surprise: “What, wilt Thou set therein one who will do corruption there, and shed blood, while We proclaim Thy praise and call Thee Holy?”<sup>10</sup>

God's answer to the Angels exemplifies His all-embracing knowledge. This knowledge is inaccessible to mere creatures, but its realization is the only reason for existence in the first place. This is the reason for Adam, with his given capacity to arise and grow in knowledge, to rise up to a level which transcends the angelic, but also to descend or fall to the lowest position in all of existence. God spoke of this to the Praised:

Assuredly I know that you know not. And He taught Adam the names, all of them;  
then He presented them unto the angels and said, "Now tell me the names of these,  
if you speak truly." They said, "Glory be to Thee! We know not save what Thou hast taught us. Surely Thou art the All-knowing, the All-wise." He said: "Adam, tell them their names." And when he had told them their names He said, "Did I not tell you I know the unseen things of the heavens and earth? And I know what things you reveal, and what you were hiding."<sup>11</sup>

The essence of humanity, our authentic nature, is determined by this knowledge of all the names. This is the above-mentioned creation of humanity in the most beautiful uprightness, Adam's bearing witness to knowledge of all the names. Just as God is the truth of all creation, His most beautiful names are its essential core. They are originally gathered and made one within that core. The process of making them manifest includes descent through all the ontological levels and so their differentiation into worlds and the things within those worlds.

These names are manifest in the external world in an unending play of concealment and discovery. This external manifestation recalls their presence within our essence. No matter how removed we are from our authentic and most beautiful uprightness, we never lose our possession of some of the most beautiful names. They remain with us, because they are real, and their contraries unreal. Beauty is irresistibly attractive, so that knowledge of it and response to its manifestation are how we discover our own authentic nature and realize ourselves in God as the possessor of the most beautiful names.

## 2. The most beautiful names

It is from those around us that we learn of the act of witness to the unity of God, expressed in the phrase: "I bear witness that there is no god but God." The nature of

our relationship with these others and the language in which it takes place formally determine our witness as received knowledge. But what is essential does not depend on the form. It is equivalent to the essence of humanity. It is the nature of the human self as such, so that it is known in itself and of itself and as such is being. The oath made to God as our Lord in pre-existence is testimony to this.

The witness to the One borne within the heart of the human self is perennial wisdom and reflects God Eternal, Who reveals Himself through creation. This knowledge may be said to be uncreated, as regards its metaphysical content, and to be revealed in creation. We have access to it through our relationship to the uncreated and in our very nature as a being inspired by God with His Spirit, so that we received differentiation between our mortal self and the Immortal Self.

We can deal with this split of existence into visible and invisible, so that the visible reveals the invisible, by accepting the illusion that the visible world is the only existing one. Should we choose this illusion, the attraction of the beautiful, which is simply the revelation of the beyond, the eternal, and the infinite within the finite world, ceases to assist us in lifting ourselves beyond the boundaries of the visible to realize our own uncreated essence.

Within this illusion, the signs of God are taken as principles in themselves, as little gods. The world and the things of the world cease to be signs, for there is nothing beyond the visible world to be revealed. The illusion strips phenomena of their significance as signs, reducing them to quantity or the sensible level of being. Then, we no longer experience the signs within ourselves and in the world in a way that promotes unification, as expressed in the tenet that there is no god but God. The world becomes closed within “certain”, albeit indeterminate boundaries.

Confession that there is no god but God, however, gives rise to the question of the self that confesses and the Divine Self confessed. Bearing witness is a relationship between a witness and the Witnessed or Confessed. The witness may ask him or herself about the Witnessed. Such questioning can receive an answer in three ways: first, from the world as the witness sees it; second, from the witness him or herself; and third, from the discourse sent down by the Witnessed in the tongue of the witness. Testimony to the unity of God will be available in a given language to the extent it has been received somehow from someone, a conscious or unconscious chain of reception that can extend in many directions, to contemporaries and ancestors, from teacher to student, into the remote or the recent past, from generation to generation.

This chain of reception must reach back to the individual from whom it began. This individual must have received his or her knowledge from a supra-individual source, whose prophet he or she is. Such a prophet never presents this knowledge as originally his or hers. It belongs to no individual, however inseparable it may be from our essential nature as individuals. This knowledge of witness entails the shaping of something that *is* independently from anything outside itself – the Uncreated Essence Which irradiates the countless multitudes of Its manifestations.

That we are at all capable of bearing witness to the unity of God is not an achievement attained *a posteriori* in existence. It is of our very essence. We lack nothing that might be required for the act of witness. We were created with Truth, and we bear witness to It both within and through our selves. Truth is everywhere present. It is we, as created beings, who are absent. Together with existence as a whole, of which we form a part, we act as a reminder of that Truth at the heart of each and every thing. This presence and absence coexist at every moment. The presence is real, the absence unreal. Bearing witness that there is no god but God is to “grasp” the truth of creation.

As the Witnessed, God speaks to the witnesses in their own tongue through His prophets, who number 124,000. They were raised amongst people at different times and in different places. They spoke in the languages of the people to whom they belong. Their discourses may differ in form, but they share the same metaphysical basis. If that basis were to be considered a language, then it is the metaphysical essence of all human languages. All languages are, accordingly, dialects of the perennial language.

The second part of the confession which informs whatever is called Muslim is witness that the Praised is the messenger of God. According to this act of witness, God speaks through the Praised. That he is praised and messenger entails that he received this form of his being from God. It is, Muslims believe, due to this form of being that he experienced and transmitted God’s discourse into human language. Consequently, God reveals Himself to humanity through the Praised, and more precisely through the Book He revealed to the Praised in his own language and through the Praised’s own account of what he had received as a revelation from God. In the Book borne down to the heart of the Praised by the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit, God told him:

Say: “The Holy Spirit sent it down from thy Lord in truth, and to confirm those who believe, and to be a guidance and good tidings to those who are in Peace.”<sup>12</sup>

Truly it is the sending down of the Lord of all Being, brought by the Spirit of the Truth upon thy heart, that thou mayest be one of the warners, in a clear, Arabic tongue. Truly it is in the Scriptures of the ancients.<sup>13</sup>

He Who sent down the Book to him as His discourse says of Himself in it:

He is God; there is no god but He. He is the knower of the Unseen and the Visible; He is the All-merciful, the Ever-merciful. He is God; there is no god but He. He is the King, the All-holy, the All-peaceable, the All-faithful, the All-preserver, the All-mighty, the All-compeller, the All-sublime. Glory be to God, above that they associate! He is God, the Creator, the Maker, the Shaper. To Him belong the Names Most Beautiful. All that is in the heavens and the earth magnifies Him; He is the All-mighty, the All-wise.<sup>14</sup>

Each one of the divine names is real, while their contraries are not real. These names are revealed in the world of multiplicity by comparison with their contraries. What is contrary to the real is not real. God is Good. Revelation of good by contrast to evil does not mean that evil is real. God is Light. Revelation of God as Light does not mean that the darkness is real. God is Beauty. The revelation of His beauty by contrast to ugliness does not mean that ugliness is real. God is the Living. The revelation of life by contrast to death does not mean that death is real. Ibn al-'Arabi expresses this as follows:

There is nothing in supra-sensory (*ma'nawī*), sensory, and imaginal existence but the Real, for everything comes into existence from the Real, and the Real brings nothing into existence but the Real. That is why the Prophet said in his supplication, addressing his Lord, “The good, all of it, is in Thy hands, while the evil does not go back to Thee.”

Evil is the opposite of good and nothing emerges from good but good; evil is only nonexistence, since it is the manifestation of that which has no entity in reality.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. The people of peace – being-in-peace – Peace

God is the hidden Treasure. Creation expresses His will to be known. Concealment and discovery thus coexist. Did they not, concealment would limit discovery, and vice versa. He is therefore revealed in and through pairs. Only in this way is revelation possible. This is the meaning of His statement that everything is created in pairs.<sup>16</sup> He is the Living, so revelation includes life as well as death. Given that life is His reality, death cannot be real in any full meaning of the term. That is why both death and life are His signs – life as that which reveals His reality and death as its apparent opposite.

His most beautiful names include two which give us some insight into the meaning of the animal kingdom for both the world and for us. These are the names “the All-peaceable” or “Peace” and “the All-faithful.” The maternal witness of the Praised referred to above as primary for everything Muslim, in line with the answer given to Gabriel, can be formulated using these two names, like any other divine names: Being-in-peace requires we bear witness that there is no peace but the Peace of God and that the messenger of the All-peaceable is the first of the people of peace.

Having received being from God as Peace, we are people of peace and relate to God the All-peaceable through being-in-peace. This is the form in which we have received being, and we are indebted by it, just as everything else in existence is, as God said through the Praised: “What, do they desire another debt than God’s, and in Him found peace whoso is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly, and to Him they shall be returned?”<sup>17</sup>

God is the All-peaceable. His being so is revealed throughout existence. Everything in existence which has voluntarily given up its will is, accordingly, a perfect image of the reception of being-in-peace from the All-peaceable and of return to Him. We can either confirm or reject what we have received through our own will. Confirmation means taking part voluntarily in the revelation of the All-peaceable through our authentic creaturehood by being-in-peace and so rising up through the levels of existence to the All-Peaceable Himself, realizing ourselves in knowledge of this one of His names.

Rejection means lowering ourselves down, through our own resistance, to the lowest depth of existence, because our will cannot overcome God’s. Our decision simply strips us of the possibility of rising up, forcing us to descend and removing us from our authentic and original nature and from the knowledge of His most beautiful names. God spoke of this through the Praised: “Today I have perfected your debt for you, and I have completed My blessing upon you, and I have approved being-in-peace for your debt.”<sup>18</sup>

Every individual thing in existence is at peace, because it is with God the All-peaceable in a relationship of being-in-peace. This is the case for everything which voluntarily abjured free will, which is the precondition for the covenant of confidence. Accordingly, man is the only animal not naturally at peace. Unlike us, they cannot rise or fall from their level. Were we too without free will and our relation to God the

Faithful not based on confidence or mutual good faith, we too would be fully at peace. It is free will that makes both ascent and descent possible for us.

We have only one debt to God, but it is never symbolized in quite the same way twice. It appears to differ from moment to moment and cannot be settled in an unchanging form. It cannot, because no individual human self is identical for two moments. The debt cannot be independently of the self. No one becomes indebted except through the capacities of the self. Beauty indicates this impossibility. Beauty may appear in all things, but it can never be seized in any particular and confined there. The constant play of disclosure and concealment is what makes every human moment unique, while also always a revelation of the Real.

Accordingly, being-in-peace is the perennial content of our debt to God the All-peaceable, by which we are redeemed from sensory relation with the world and ascend on the upright path from the lowest to the highest level of existence. This debt takes on different forms from prophet to prophet. The variety of these forms does not entail any type of betrayal of the debt. Were it reduced to a single form, the self-realization of human being in most beautiful uprightness would become impossible.

Just as none of us can escape our unique individuality, the fully human realization of each of those individual selves is made possible by adopting the most beautiful example, regardless of when, where, or how the symbol of this example is revealed to us, and it always entails the differentiation of the self into its mortal and immortal aspects. Everything on the horizons of the world around us reminds us of this split and the fact that it can be resolved. It reminds us, because everything required for us to rise to the level of most beautiful uprightness lies already within us. We may be reminded or find support from outside, but our authentic nature is never cut off from the goal our path leads towards – the perfection that is both the reason and the goal of our existence.

At no moment of our existence do we find ourselves at perfect peace, nor engulfed by its absolute opposite. In fact, what we find so difficult to bear at any given moment is this coexistence of peace and non-peace. To the extent that we sense peace, we are relaxed. Each such relaxation into the feeling of peace gives birth to a tension, however, a reinforcement of the will to direct ourselves towards the source of peace. Consequently, given our need for peace, we are in a constant balance of relaxation and tension, remaining and departing. Our goal is absolute knowledge, but it ever evades us, so that our will and our love to attain it grow ever stronger.

This will to attain Peace and to realize our selves within It entails the question: how great is our freedom in this process of self-realization, compared to the will of the Real? The example of the Praised is the most beautiful answer to this question. God commanded him: “Say: ‘My prayer, my ritual sacrifice, my living, my dying – all belongs to God, the Lord of all Being. No associate has He. Even so I have been commanded, and I am the first of those that are in Peace.’”<sup>19</sup>

Two wills are mentioned here – one which commands and another which accepts. The commanding will is primary. According to it, a certain nature has been given to everything, with a role and a destiny. Through the second will, we may either include ourselves in the first or stand against it. To acquiesce in the first will and so respond to the command by which we were brought into existence, we must first accept that being-in-peace is given us as our way of turning towards Peace. This entails coming into harmony with nature or the order of everything through the building up of the self, the modulation of the heart as the core of our essence, and the explanation of our first reality.

The prophetic teaching enables us to do this, as well as to engage willingly in the order established by the Creator’s instituting command and His guidance to all things that they may return to the One. Carrying out the original command is to return to the One. On this path of return, we realize our nature as received at our creation. Accepting this command, we are in peace. We have adopted the prophetic teaching, through which we realize ourselves and our return to Peace, Faith, and Beauty.

Return and ascent presuppose our becoming aware of our humanity in all its possibilities. This includes awareness of our position as being between two extremes – the most beautiful height and the lowest depth. We were created of the earth – first it was selected and gathered and moistened and then formed into the unit that makes up a human body. In to this unit, formed by both of His hands, God breathed His Spirit. In this way, human being was established at the boundary of two worlds, the visible and the invisible, belonging at the same time to both.

The earthly nature of humanity binds us to the depth, but thanks to the Spirit inspired within us we are turned towards the uncreated and uncreatable principle of all things. Thanks to our earthly aspect, we are at once earth and vegetable and animal, but also always more than that. Depending on which of those two extremes we are oriented towards, we constantly confirm and transcend our animal nature or, in the

opposite case, we descend through the animal levels toward the lowest depth, where we betray and obscure our original nature.

Our bond with God transcends the visible world and passes through all the levels of being. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth descends on us. Our heart receives Him, taking Him as light, intellect, and knowledge. From there, light, intellect, and knowledge spread through the entire self, making clear that there are signs in the self that correspond to the signs in the outer world and that they too reveal the One. When progressing in this direction, from above towards the below, and when our actions are in line with what was sent down to dwell in our hearts, we reveal our authentic perfectability. When progressing in the opposite direction, taking the depth for our principle, darkness and ignorance spread, rising up in the self, enveloping and covering over the heart.

Repeated action on the basis of ignorance thickens the veils over the heart, so that the penetration of light within the self becomes ever weaker. Somewhere in the depths of our descent, the self fails to recognise the similarity of the signs in the self and those on the horizons. The self sees these two regions, the inner and the outer, as separate and independent. We come to be at war with the world, and so with our own selves. There is no egress from this condition without God's help. Liberation from the concealment of the core of the self presupposes awareness of the order of existence from its most beautiful height to the lowest depth and of return by the upright path.

A precondition of this awareness is witness of our perfect potential in and through the praise of God, throughout existence, together with all things. The Cosmos and all its signs, the heavenly and earthly horizons and the flora and the fauna, affect our self discovery on the path that links the two poles – the most beautiful height and the lowest deep. This discovery is the precondition for our turn from the deep to the height, from the dark to the light, and from the myriad animal levels of the self to its most sublime human faculties.

#### 4. The faithful – faith – the All-faithful

As people of faith, it is through faith that we relate to God the Faithful. If one considers the name of “the All-faithful” in the context of the Praised's response to Gabriel on the question of faith, one is led to the act of witness: Faith means that you

should bear witness that there are no faithful but the All-faithful and that the faithful is His messenger.

If faith is the relationship between the believer and the believed, it presupposes that the believer's knowledge of the believed is insufficient and that this insufficiency or falling short is supplemented by a mutual attraction. Anyone who has faith necessarily falls short in knowledge of the object of belief, but nonetheless loves it on the basis of that knowledge. God took the name of the All-faithful, but His knowledge is absolute and he loves absolutely what he knows absolutely, allowing us to act on our free will, forming relationships throughout creation in ever new ways.

We can never know God absolutely, but we can love him regardless of our lack of knowledge. Whatever our knowledge of the things of the external world or in ourselves, it remains small. We can grow in knowledge. And as long as we remain in this sphere of duality, our knowledge remains small. God spoke of this through the Praised: "They will question thee concerning the Spirit. Say: 'The Spirit is of the bidding of my Lord. You have been given of knowledge nothing but a little.'"<sup>20</sup>

This spirit is the essence of humanity. Through it, our self is in connection with God, Who inspired it, and so retains the ultimate potential for immortality. Everything that we can have knowledge of recalls our essence as the unification of all the names and of all beauty. No knowledge can exhaust this unification. This is why knowledge offers a path towards the essential centre, in its irresistible attractiveness. This path can end only in the unification of the self and the Divine Self, as we ascend towards our most beautiful uprightness and liberation from duality. The attractiveness of the Divine Self, as the bearer of all beautiful names, is also the love through which we may pass from sign to the Divine Signified.

This love which attracts us to the Beloved nonetheless reduces our ignorance of the Beloved. The All-faithful is All-knowing and All-willing. Faith is thus our relationship with God, our Lord and Superior, as His servant and steward. We cannot find satisfaction in any state of divorce from God. Given that our knowledge is always so little, while God's is complete and absolute, our love of God is in fact a desire to resemble Him – to be nothing but what we know and to know nothing but what we are.

So long as we are what we are, a thing of the world of duality, such resemblance is impossible: servant is servant, while Master is Master. So long as we remain within duality, only a few of His most beautiful names are within our reach.

But it is in our nature to want all of them, for deep down they are there, within, no matter how hidden. Consequently, the path of ascent, of approach to the Beloved, is open. For, the beauty through which God reveals himself within the world and the self is inexhaustible. This is the meaning of the prayer uttered by the Praised: “O, my Lord, increase me in knowledge!”<sup>21</sup>

Increase in knowledge is a consequence of our love of the Known: the better loved, the better He is known; the better known, the better He is loved. This relationship is predicated on our original confession of God’s mastery<sup>22</sup> and our free acceptance of His offer of confidence: “We offered confidence to the heavens and earth and the mountains, but they refused to carry it and were afraid of it; and man carried it. Surely he is violent, very ignorant.”<sup>23</sup>

This authentic human confession of God’s Lordship, which is voluntary and serves to confirm our original nature, establishes our relationship with God as servant and Master. This is the same relationship that exists between everything in existence, as God told us through the Praised: “None is there in the heavens and the earth but he comes to the All-merciful as a servant; He has indeed counted them, and He has numbered them exactly.”<sup>24</sup>

All things in existence relate to God through service and being-in-peace. Consequently, nothing in existence has any attributes other than those given by the Lord. Recognizing this entails returning what we have received as our debt. As servants and people of peace, we do not, in principle, differ from any other thing in the heavens, on earth, or between them. Becoming aware of our situation of service and being-at-peace as an expression of our authentic nature is a starting point for us, not a condition enclosed within a single ontological level. Our love for Him who reveals Himself through creation leads us to Him, so that we grow in knowledge and thus transcend each level we reach.

Our position at a given level of existence can be changed by ascent or descent. This change takes place in the self, as discovery of its inner core is the path of ascent or return, so that on each level we shed our animal nature, transcending it as we migrate, in line with the prophet’s words: “He is a traveller who leaves evil behind.”<sup>25</sup> But human being is the only thing in existence which relates to God through the act of faith. By accepting this relationship, we agree that our relationship to God, Whose knowledge is all embracing, be based on our own limited knowledge.<sup>26</sup>

In this relationship, we come up continuously against our own ignorance, for, as a servant, we have only what our Lord has given us. Whenever we make a decision on the basis of this little knowledge, we commit an act of violence. But whatever our condition, we are always capable of distinguishing truth from lies. This is a capacity that derives from our authentic nature. We do, however, require help from within our nature, if we are to cleave to the truth. When that nature is obscured by ignorance, we receive reminders of it, as our Treasure, from without, from God's discourse through His prophets. This is an ongoing discourse that takes place continuously through God's presence and His most beautiful names.

God says that the most beautiful names are His. Through them and through His works, He is revealed in the world. The creation and government of all things reveal Him. Both the names and his works are disseminated throughout whatever is external to us –the heavens, the earth, and everything between. And whatever is disseminated through the external world also gathers within our own form of being. The names are united within our original nature, as we realize them in our forms of expression, following the Praised's instruction: "It is right that you clothe yourselves in the attributes of God the Most High."<sup>27</sup>

Clothing ourselves in this way means discovering and realizing our two original oaths – the first regarding God's Lordship and the second regarding confidence as the form of relationship binding servant and Master. This is the way in which the most powerful nature and the most beautiful example are formed, which is possible only within the human self. Confessing that the messenger of the All-faithful is the first of the faithful means accepting that his historical existence is simply a symbolic reminder of his real presence within the self of each individual, a presence which is our common heart, as God said through the Praised: "How can you disbelieve, seeing you have God's signs recited to you, and His messenger within you?"<sup>28</sup>

In this way, faith relates the self to the Divine Self as its highest moment. The Divine Self exerts an irresistible attraction in this relationship, being both beautiful and possessing the beautiful names. In everything we do, we sacrifice our lower self for this higher Self. Only the Divine Self towards which we ascend has value for us. This ever present higher possibility is the Praised in his role as the faithful who is a standing revelation of the All-faithful. This is why he is more precious to the faithful than his or her own self: "The Prophet is nearer to the believers than their selves."<sup>29</sup>

Love is the attraction between the lover and the Beloved. Perfect love is the coexistence of being lover and beloved. When we are lovers, and God the Beloved, it is to Him we wish to approach. When God loves us, He is absolutely close to us, so that the two wills, His and ours, become one. In this love, we follow constantly behind the Praised as our highest moment. We follow him because we love God Who ordered the Praised to say to us: “Say: ‘If you love God, follow me, and God will love you, and forgive you your sins; God is All-forgiving, Ever-merciful.’”<sup>30</sup>

This relationship between the one who loves God, following the Praised, and God’s love of us sublimates the relationship of the faithful and the All-faithful, as understood by Fakhruddin ‘Iraqi:

All that exists is the mirror of his Beauty; so everything is beautiful, and He loves everything. Or to be precise, He loves Himself. In fact, any lover you see loves only himself, for seeing but his own face in the mirror of his beloved, he must needs come to self-amorousness. The Prophet said: “The faithful is the mirror of the faithful” – and God is the “Faithful.”<sup>31</sup>

The Praised is the most sublime moment of humanity. He is the first of the people of peace, and therefore present in all things in existence, which are related to God as Peace through being at peace. The Word is in his heart. There is no thing in all existence that is at peace and praises and that does not speak in its way of the Praised. The Word in the heart of the Praised bears the Spirit of Truth or the True Spirit, the Spirit of Faithfulness or the Faithful Spirit,<sup>32</sup> and the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of Holiness.<sup>33</sup>

In that pure heart, a mysterious conversation is taking place between God and Himself. In his role as prophet, the Praised publishes this conversation as God’s discourse in human language. The Spirit through whom this conversation is conducted in the heart of the Praised is true, faithful, and holy. He is one, while these epithets signify the nature of his role as God’s prophet to divine humanity. Faithfulness is the relationship of the faithful and the Faithful. Both sides are free in this relationship, free to establish, maintain, or deny their mutual contract.

God is absolutely True, Faithful, and Holy. That he is Faithful signifies that he comprehends all with His knowledge and that he knows what he loves. Moreover, there is nothing that can be known but Him as the Hidden and Revealed, while our bringing together of all that has been revealed acts to bind and unite us with Him as the Beloved. Human beings are true, faithful, and holy only in reference to their sublime potential, in their endeavour to rise above each animal level to a higher one

and so find the True, Faithful, and Holy within themselves in the countless multitude of His revelations.

Our capacity to obscure our own truthfulness takes the form of ignorance instead of knowledge and hate instead of love, which is contrary to and against holiness. As we experience our descent, we remember everything, from our starting point to the lowest depth we reach. The presence of the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit, guarantees us the possibility of returning beyond all spatial and temporal boundaries, as God told us in the Recitation: “To Him the angels and the Spirit mount up in a day whereof the measure is fifty thousand years.”<sup>34</sup>

##### 5. The beautiful – doing what is beautiful – the All-beautiful

This confirmation of God’s Lordship determines our highest potential. As rightful owner of the most beautiful names, God “inscribes” them within our essential being, as part of our covenant. They are given as His mastery and received as our service. This is what underwrites the affinity between God and humankind: God loves us and we love God. This love is made possible by our realization of the most beautiful names. The perfect example is precisely this highest possibility, wherein all the divine names are revealed in human form.

God is the Gathering and the Gatherer,<sup>35</sup> and His names are united in His Unity, as they are dispersed by His revelation through creation. Through us, as beings of collected collection, they come into being in both ways, as gathered or collected and as dispersed. This is why the external horizons matter to us. They belong to us, we to them. These are the two ways in which human being is revealed. Through the horizons and on them, we discover the identity of all things dispersed within them with all that is gathered within us: whatsoever is dispersed upon the horizons is gathered in the human self, and whatever is gathered within us is dispersed on the horizons. There are no things in creation that do not belong to us as such and which do not uncover us in our bond with the Creator.

In Gabriel’s questioning of the prophet, the following sequence is established: being-in-peace – faith – doing what is beautiful – the hour. It is part of the human condition to be split between being-in-peace and not being-in-peace, so that being-in-peace is all of our desire. No peace is to be found with the ugly and the false. Only what is true and beautiful can be a source of peace. Consequently, distinguishing the

true from the false offers an escape from the specious for the real, from peacelessness to peace. Nor can we find any confirmation of our original and authentic nature in any peaceless condition.

We relate to the All-peaceable through being-in-peace, but we desire more. In so far as being-in-peace is voluntary submission, knowledge of Him to Whom one submits and love of Him Who is known are its fruits. But for this too we require confirmation. The love of the Divine Known and knowledge of the Divine Beloved take on existential form within us as the doing of whatsoever we do in a beautiful or fine manner. This beauty in action expresses the unity of knowledge and being. It is the mature fruit of being-in-peace and faith.

For one who has reached the level of doing whatsoever one does as though in the presence of God, time is transfigured: it is no longer an objective flow within which external phenomena take on existence and disposition independently of the observing self. The external and the internal are united in the reality of the hour, as experienced by any individual mindful of the ways of being in the presence of God. The divine names are at a higher level than mere phenomena. Knowing them all, we may, through them, become a complete image of the Gatherer.

The names of humanity are reflections of the divine names, as they are all received in essence. As a result, each individuality is like all others. When on the basis of such knowledge we consider the animals as communities, it is as species. We do not know them as individual members of those communities. While it is obvious that they have their own tongues, we see them from our point of view as dumb, because we do not know their language. They are creatures like us, but their attribute of dumbness, which is a condition of human being, is a manifestation of the inner mystery of the self which is ineffable in ordinary human discourse, a mystery which, once expressed in prophecy, most take for poetry, sorcery, madness, sickness, or something similar. Prophets, who know the discourse of the animals, address them as complete individuals, indicating in this way their role in the realisation of our humanity.

Humanity was originally created in the most beautiful sublimity and uprightness, a condition in which all the names were united in the oneness of knowledge and being – in the universal prostration, as focused and epitomized in our own act of prostration. As a result, the self, in its original purity, comprises all the most beautiful divine names. It is from this point that we have descended to the lowest

depth, where our original, authentic purity is obscured, veiled, but not destroyed. We feel a constant sense of regret for what we have lost, but can find again. No joy is possible, without this feeling of regret. Every condition of the human self contains the possibility of regret and mourning for that higher principle which we know as something contained or possessed within the inner recesses of our own self. This is one way of explaining the Greek word *tragōdia* or the goat song.

Any given condition of the self may be symbolized in relation to a higher possibility through the goat and the goat song, which are to be sacrificed to that higher condition. Our misgivings over the sacrifice are nonetheless also joy at attaining this higher stage on the path of ascent to the Divine Self.

Holding any one of our achievements or a level on the path so dear and so valuable that we cannot bear to leave it behind, we become vain and prodigal. We become our own judge and jury. Our knowledge is small, however, and so our judgement is a sin and violence against the self.

This call on the self, in mourning for its higher possibility, to sacrifice itself recalls us to the source and wealth of everything we have received, as God announces it through the Praised: “Surely We have given thee abundance; so pray unto thy Lord and sacrifice. Surely he that hates thee, he is the one cut off.”<sup>36</sup> When the self hates that which must continuously be sacrificed to its higher moment, it detaches from the full potential of self-realization through the knowledge of the divine names – knowledge in which the non-duality of the Spirit breathed into us by God is realized.

That God comprehends everything through His knowledge and mercy entails that we cannot, whatever our condition, remove ourselves from that knowledge or that mercy. As creatures born into existence as a result of God’s love to be known we are never helpless. There is no reason for us to lose hope. God Himself told us this through the Praised: “Say: ‘O my people, who have been prodigal against yourselves, do not despair of God’s mercy; surely God forgives sins altogether; surely He is the All-forgiving, the Ever-merciful.’”<sup>37</sup>

God said of the Praised that he was our best and most beautiful example, having realized within himself all of His most beautiful names: “You have a beautiful example in God’s messenger for whosoever hopes for God and the Last Day, and remembers God oft.”<sup>38</sup> Being the most beautiful example and the most sublime possibility of humanity means having found or discovered our having been originally and truly created for the most beautiful height and in the most beautiful uprightness.

At the most beautiful peak of being, we are a revelation of God as the Beautiful, in the fullness of the mutual attraction or affinity that exists between us and God. We, in our beauty, see and know only God as the All-beautiful, while God is revealed both in and through His own self as the All-beautiful and in us as beautiful. And then, all that we do acts to reveal the principle, the most beautiful divine names. Wherever we may find ourselves, it is always in a state of mourning for our original condition, which we have lost, and in a state of hope that we may find it again.

The paradox that we are always before the face of God, no matter where we turn, but nonetheless fail to see God, no matter how hard we look within our own selves or the horizons of the external world, may be resolved by consideration of how He is manifest through His signs. For, everything we see within the horizons of the world or in our own selves is a sign of God. These signs have neither reason nor purpose beyond the Divine Signified. That we exist in this world of signs allows us to make constant progress towards the Signified in all things. There is nothing so great or small that it does not serve us as a sign on our way back. Any obscurity about these signs is due not to the world and its horizons, but the fatality of the self.

The path of love for the Divine Known and knowledge of the Divine Beloved lies through following the Praised. By this path we may ascend from the depths of existence towards the most beautiful height. The praised serves as the most beautiful example on each station of this path, for he is the first of the people of peace.<sup>39</sup> His primacy is crucial to any understanding of our place in the world. Everything that exists does so in peace. This includes all of God's prophets from Adam to the Praised, who is both maternal principle and an historical individual.

The primacy here referred to is related to our original and authentic nature by means of which universal self-realization is expected as a result of the return of all things to God the All-peaceable, a process which entails the realization of the mighty nature or character of the Praised as the most sublime possibility attainable by human beings.

That the Praised is first recalls faith as our attraction for what we know and what is revealed to us in beauty. Once we have travelled this road, our process of learning to be at peace is complete. Wherever we find ourselves on the upward path, the external world appears to us as beautiful, but always against its contrary, ugliness. If one considers this opposition in relation to the foundational tenet that "there is no god but God", as one in which the beautiful, the good, the real, and so forth, may be

posited, but not the ugly, evil, or unreal, it is evident that ugliness, evil, and unreality do not return to God.

So long as beauty is experienced as enjoyment, and not as the revelation of the All-beautiful, our relationship with the world remains at the level of the animal. We see beauty as a property of the world and as something experienced through our senses, and not as an aid to our growth in knowledge. The animal cannot forsake its sense of beauty and attraction, being as incapable of rising above as of falling below it. *Our* purpose is higher than this, however: we can both rise above and descend below any level at which we experience the signs in the world or the self. This possibility is determined by faith as the form of bond possible with God the Faithful.

## 6. The Hour

Of two things we may be entirely sure. The first is the present moment, the second death. To the extent that this is the case, one of these two certainties must reveal the other, or both some third thing, because absolute certainty is one. They are both absolute, but we cannot encounter either of them *per se*. This is why they always appear to us through shadows – the present through yesterday and tomorrow, and death through the possibility of deferral. Seen in this way, there is a shift from certainty to uncertainty. But the path of realization runs counter to this: the human condition is uncertainty from which we are saved or redeemed into certainty. This is why our focus should be on the present and death, because, no matter how apparently certain they may be, it is impossible for there to be two certainties.

The illusion of yesterday and tomorrow seems at first to offer us the possibility of determining in and for ourselves whither and where in time and space to realize our purpose. To make this the more certain, we imagine a certain presence in history, a presence that has no existence, just as it cannot exist in the future either. Such projections regarding the past and the future are images of how Essence is manifest through Its attributes and acts. Knowledge of this is possible only in so far as it takes the Principle as its object. Thinking about the Principle will either save or destroy the thinker.<sup>40</sup>

That our being is really in the moment or present entails that all existence is really simultaneous. The images of this existence, however, appear to us as distinguished in temporal sequence. In this way, we find ourselves split between past

and future, so that they obscure the one absolute certainty – presence and the indeferrable nature of death. Whenever we find ourselves in history or in the future, it is as thought from our present. From the reality of the present, we can escape only into seeming.

Our being in the past or the future, which is being in what appear to be but are not certainties, results in a conversion of the apparent into the real, the lower into the higher, the ontic into the passing, the individual into the undifferentiated, and so forth. In this inverted view, one seeks the cause or the principle in the consequence and takes the uncertain and conditional for certain and unconditioned.

All things are divided into pairs, as reflected in the self by the opposites of life and death. Each self, accordingly, is split between two aspects – one mortal, the other immortal, one turned towards the un-real, the other towards the Real. As God is the absolutely Real, death can in no way comprehend or reach Him. Our confession that there is no self but the Divine Self includes the self-sacrifice of each individual self as an image of the Divine Self, dedicated for its own sake in the Absolute. The absolute is not divisible, with neither yesterday nor tomorrow. Everything partakes of Its present. Accordingly, death is but a way in which existence, as duality through which the Divine Self reveals Itself, appears in human aspect.

Death kills seeming and confirms the Real. This is why sacrifice is to be found in every traditional ritual as a way of relating to the Real and the Hour. The participant in ritual sacrifices appearance that pollutes purity of service to the Lord and the immediacy of having received life as the means of return to God. This is why the Divine Self is irresistibly attractive, but each image of It fleeting and even repulsive. We escape death by murdering any condition of our own self that threatens to take the place of God.

Existence as a whole is, from the perspective of our individual present, divided into past and future. We cannot think of anything in existence without assuming a beginning and an end. The same is true for all aspects of human existence. While the end may be entirely certain, our ignorance of it remains a source of fear. The end is sure, both as death and as the presence of that Spirit breathed by God into mortal matter. What came into being departs, what did not remains. Fear in the face of unbegotten certainty distorts our nature, removing it further from answers to the question of how we relate to that aspect of the self which is beyond death. Distortion

or deformation entails losing our original or authentic and beautiful uprightness. As a result, the deformed self seems harrowed by its own imaginings, and so ugly.

Mere appearance disappears in the Hour, which is unbearable revelation, enlightenment full of light. The need for it is made clear by the transformation of cause or principle into derivative consequence, of the maternal into the begotten, of mastery into service, and of reception of the perfect order and abundance as a gift from God into construction. In this way it is denied that there is One Creator both of our humanity and of what we do.<sup>41</sup>

The question of the Hour is crucial for all sacred tradition. Its pregnancy fully signifies the human capacity referred to as our authentic nature. Human existence involves difference – both the whole and the varied and constantly changing ways in which it is manifest. This manifestation is complete when it comprises all the most beautiful names. In this way, our return from the perfection of Unity to Unity Itself takes place through difference which accommodates all the forms through which the One may appear.

This manifestation of the One takes place through duality and countless multitudes of pairs. In duality, the Hour appears as time. In so appearing, it allows phenomena to be compared, in so far as what stands against the manifestation of the Real is never actually the same as the Real itself, but is nothing else either. The Hour remains the principle of time, as the point does of space. This principle is present in all things in the world or self, revealed by its difference.

The basic presupposition of our knowledge of the world is contained in the statement that everything comes from God and everything returns to Him, and He holds it, as it comes from and returns to Him. The reality of everything is comprised within this coming from, returning to, and being held, in the fullest meaning of the term. Our knowledge of them may be in time and space, but coming, return, and being held exist within the Hour.

Self-realization means to know them as such and to be what one knows. Time and space correspond to the dissemination of the divine manifestation throughout all the great world, both now and to come. This dissemination is absolute, in so far as it corresponds to God as the Outer. But so too is the gathering, as God is also the Inner. The Hour corresponds to this gathering, as return on the upright path from the world to the Spirit, which is to say beyond space and time.

In speaking of the world, one does well to recall the need for a multitude of worlds, such that each is an image of the one above and the principle for the one below. They are all determined by their horizon, its openness in extension and duration, and its articulation with the vertical axis along which the world gathers through ascent to the One. Consequently, each world is a more or less clear manifestation of the divine names. Manifestation is possible only where the names are present, as there is nothing to be manifest or found but the Real.

God says that all creatures are maternal communities like us.<sup>42</sup> If we consider our position as the focus of all creation and of the animal communities, understood by the human imagination as species without the internal differentiation that would allow each individual its own name – this may be interpreted as a condition of humanity within which interiority has not found linguistic expression capable of comprehending existence fully. The mystery of interiority and its link with externality is not removed by this condition. In fact, it is confirmed by it, as one may say that in it we sense other possibilities of space and time beyond those customary to us. Consciousness of this is a precondition of our ability to see ourselves as being on a given station of ascent within the self.

When God said “it was two bows’ length away, or closer”,<sup>43</sup> He was referring to the arc of descent by which we came down into the world and the arc of ascent by which we return– the full cycle of human self-realization symbolized by the Praised as the maternal prophet. It is creation through descent (emanation) from the spiritual to the corporeal, from the invisible to the visible that makes the worlds and beings. Just as they descended on one arc, so all things ascend on the other. Once the course of existence has reached its lowest or most remote level on the arc of descent, everything turns and begins to ascend towards the principle.

Ascent begins from the inanimate world in which existence has reached the extreme of dispersal and is in deepest darkness, and so is at the furthest remove from the Principle. Then come the vegetal, then the animal, and finally human being. Each of these levels symbolizes return to the principle. Full return is liberation from all that is not truth. This is the condition of the self in which the Hour appears or is manifest as release from duality, as liberation from contradiction, as is said in the Recitation: “The truth has come, and falsehood vanished away; surely the falsehood is always bound to vanish.”<sup>44</sup>

## 7. Intellect

The second question raised at the beginning of our discussion relates to the viewpoint of the Muslim intellectual tradition. While it is enough to say “tradition”, we add the qualifier “intellectual” for the sake of clarity. The concept of “tradition” has been given so many meanings in the post-Renaissance period that simply referring to it runs the risk of being misunderstood. By tradition, we mean that relationship of the debt or state of indebtedness towards God as the Indebting. In this relationship, we find ourselves ontologically impoverished, in the position of a servant who depends on God, Who alone is both Independent and All-sufficient.

One may say of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam that they are traditions in the full meaning of the concept. They are not grounded in any human imagining, although their theatre is human in the widest sense of that term. The metaphysical basis of all these traditions is the same, though they differ with regard to the languages in which they are expressed. Their truth is uncreated, while none of the ways in which they are revealed, however different, betrays. Comparing tradition to language, one may say that they are, as it were, dialects of a single metaphysical language. And we may say of this initial tradition, revealed in these different places, different times, in different languages, and to different witnesses, that it did not arise within any individual self.

The source of the discourses of the prophets of the various traditions is supra-individual. When the prophets announced what they had received to the peoples of their times in their own languages, what they had to say shook, harrowed, and transformed behaviour and desires, because it was aimed at the common essence of human being, the maternal nature that is fit to be realized in perfection. Prophetic discourse is replete with blows by unexpected news and images, turnings from received ideas and values towards views which have been forgotten, in spite of our profound intimacy with them.

Prophetic discourse confirms the level to which we have sunk, turning us from it to the whole in relation to which acts and things become signs and names of the One. Human languages appear as means within a countless multitude of different languages or discourses, and the gathering of people into communities appears as part of a world of countless different communities. Only by being linked to the One can things speak to each other, bearing witness of their position within existence as a whole, for God has given them the faculty of speech.<sup>45</sup>

Once the truth of this bequest is revealed in human language, the unintelligibility of their discourses makes of us strangers towards the other communities of creation, as we do not know their languages. But as God's vicar, we are responsible for the creatures amongst whom we are placed: they have a claim on us, which corresponds to our debt to them.

Although become a stranger, we are also host to all creatures, as our role as gatherer and vicar may be understood and realised only through creation as a whole, and so through those non-human communities that are of such crucial importance for our humanity. We are ignorant of their languages because of our station on the path of ascent. As is clear from most of the sacred traditions, these languages can be known. In fact, intellect, as the faculty of gathering or collection, comprehends all knowledge, but differentiation in creation marks it.

According to the Muslim tradition, intellect was the first thing God created.<sup>46</sup> Many will also remember that it is often said in the same tradition that the pen was the first thing God created.<sup>47</sup> Or the light of the Praised.<sup>48</sup> The praised said: "I was with God when not one of the angels was near nor did any of the messengers embrace me."<sup>49</sup> He also said: "I was a prophet already when Adam was between water and earth."<sup>50</sup>

This initial or first gathering, which we may term Intellect, the Pen, or the Light of the Praised, was the created and maternal principle of all existence, which may be said to comprise the universal Treasury, as God said through the Praised:

Naught is there, but its treasures are with Us, and We send it not down but in a known measure. And We loose the winds fertilizing, and We send down out of heaven water, then We give it to you to drink, and you are not its treasurers. It is We who give life, and make to die, and it is We who are the inheritors. We know the ones of you who press forward, and We know the laggards; and it is thy Lord shall muster them, and He is All-wise, All-knowing.<sup>51</sup>

These treasures are the different levels on which the One is manifest, in the descent through the totality of existence. The heirs of each lower level are the levels above it. And each higher level is at the same time lower in relation to the one which represents its treasury, and so on to the Divine One as the principle of them all. His most beautiful names are revealed at each level, more or less clearly – less clearly the lower the level, more clearly the closer it is to the One. This process of descent and ascent is the manner in which the One is revealed in Its difference, as the One in creation as the differentiation of signs.

Everything that is revealed in difference on the horizons corresponds to possibilities within the self and serves self-realization. The outer things signify the world of the self as differentiated from the lowest depth to the most beautiful height. The heart of the Praised comprehends all this, so that his self ascends to the One. This ascent does not take place on a given tomorrow or yesterday: it is in the Hour, the ever present potential of human beings. On this potential of the human heart signified by the apostleship of the Praised, he says: “My eyes sleep while my heart is awake.”<sup>52</sup>

These characteristics are attributes of the fundamental epistemology of the Muslim tradition. Human being is within a world of multitudes, constantly seeking its principle. Bearing witness to each difference of the revelation of the One brings us towards the One as the source of all knowledge. This source is revealed through the world, human being, and the Book. We are connected to these revelations of the Source through Intellect. “Connection” is the literal meaning of the Arabic word *al-'aql*, which denotes both Intellect and Reason (understood as the lower, analytical form of intellect).<sup>53</sup>

Given that nothing in existence abandons its connection with the Creator, its archetype is to be found in the Treasury, Intellect. Through each individual thing and through them all together, we focus and realise ourselves within our own hearts, through which Intellect reveals itself on each of the levels of existence. For, properly understood, the heart and Intellect are one and the same. When Intellect reveals itself within the world of multiplicity, the heart is the organ through which it does so, so that one may speak of it as having multiple levels.

Intellect is, at its first level, the Treasury of all existence. It will appear differently on the various levels of the revelation of being. As a result, we are linked to it in a variety of ways as the source of knowledge. The first level is the immediate possibility of knowledge within the inner recesses of the self. The second level is through contact with the world. The third is prophetic knowledge passed down through a chain of individuals from the prophet. This is why Intellect not infrequently appears as (analytic) reason, acuity, understanding, and so on.

Let us suppose that Intellect and Reason represent different but related concepts and address the question of how the relationship between them is to be conceived. This question has many answers, but they can be summed up in the expression: Intellect is the unifying subject of all the revelations and manifestations of the One and is that which links all existence and everything within it to the Principle,

while Reason is the reflection of Intellect at the human level, through the heart, which is the focal point of being. Intellect is, accordingly, the first and original revelation of the One, while Reason is its image in the world of multiplicity.

Whatever we apprehend from the world of multiplicity with our Reason, as our link with what is external, necessarily has its archetype in the unification carried out by Intellect. The organ that corresponds to Reason is the brain. It is the capacity to discover particularities and to relate them. To Intellect corresponds the heart as the recess from which all things and all their names pass into the external world, whence they ceaselessly return to Intellect in confirmation that all the things in creation are simply signs of that which resides within the Treasury.

Intellect, the original Treasury, contains all of the things sent down as news of the One. This is why it may be said to be the maternal prophet who possesses the maternal book. This maternity of both the prophecy and the book relates to all the prophets raised amongst all the peoples. There is nothing in all existence that is not related somehow to this maternal principle. In this way, all the individual things at every level of existence are “mustered” for the One, as His signs. In so being mustered they form maternal communities. They are a multitude revealing the One as their Source and as the House to which they are returning, such that all together and each separately they are images of the possibilities open to us in the invisible and the visible worlds, throughout the entire cosmos, and in the self.

Our acceptance of the covenant of confidence as the form of our relationship with God entails an ability to deny and, on the basis of our opinions of the Lord, to disturb or destroy our inclusion within the maternal community. This ability lies within the limits of the freedom given to us. As they return to the One, all things realize their maternity through the act of being mustered, so that it may be clearly seen in this perfect ordering of the ending of all things that there is nothing that does not partake of the role of sign and which does not speak in that role. God speaks of this as of the day “when God’s enemies are mustered.”<sup>54</sup> Nor is there anything in existence which does not have its treasury in the maternal book, nor anything that shall not be mustered to its Lord.<sup>55</sup>

For these two viewpoints – the invisible revealed through the visible, Intellect revealed through Analytical Reason, order apparent in disorder, etc – space and time take on different, but connected aspects. While our immediate experiences of time are bound up with the cycles of the Sun and Moon, the alternation of day and night, the

monthly cycle, and the seasons, for the modern worldview time flows in linear fashion. The ceaseless cycles of coming and going which point unfailingly to the centre that is everpresent but cannot be reduced to a given place, are almost entirely excluded.

In this linear stream of time, stretching from yesterday through today to tomorrow, for this reduced framework from some ancient beginning through the present to some remote future, eternity has the attributes of antiquity in the past and novelty in the future. The Real is not taken over into history or prediction. In this way, the representation of eternity becomes its denial. Eternity, properly understood, corresponds to Intellect and comprehends the now, just as the now comprehends eternity.

To resolve this apparent contradiction, we must oppose cyclical time, in which every ebb is a flow, every descent an ascent, every now an eternity, to linear time, which necessarily loses quality as it is reduced to quantity and measure. Such an understanding of time allows for the creaturehood of each thing in truth, which has neither beginning nor end, and so neither expression in quantity or number, but is fully aware and fully comprehends the heart of the Praised.

Such expressibility conditions the visible world and differentiation into duality, which is to say the region of Analytical Reason. In this image, all things great and small stand in relation to the One, as the centre of all revelation within the manifold. Nothing in all of creation is unaffected by the One, whether through repulsion or attraction. Looked at in their temporal aspect, all things are signs of the One – they have no reality beyond their connection to the One.

#### 8. None praised but the All-praised

Responding to God's announcement that He was establishing man as His steward on Earth, the Angels confirmed that they did "proclaim Thy praise and call Thee Holy." They bore witness of their relationship with God on the basis of praise and witness. Existence, whether as a whole or through each thing within it, relates to God as its Creator and Governor exclusively through the relationship of descent, of giving and receiving.

What the things of the world have received they can never make authentically their own. This is because He is the only authentic donor. Their connection with God

is a restoration of what they have received as it is a return to Him. Their relationship with God involves returning what has been received and so returning to Him. But they cannot do so, for He is the only true giver. This is the significance of calling the messenger the maternal prophet, for he can give, but only after he has received, and so mediates the various levels of existence in the mode of descent and differentiation, while remaining true to the sublime goal of the universal return to the One.

The Praised links all existence to God the All-praised, as He says:

To God belongs all that is in the heavens and in the earth. We have charged those who were given the Book before you, and you, “be conscious of God.” If you conceal, to God belongs all that is in the heavens and in the earth; God is All-sufficient, All-praised.<sup>56</sup>

And it is He who sends down the rain after they have despaired, and He unfolds His mercy; He is the Protector, the All-praised.<sup>57</sup>

All that is in heavens and the earth magnifies God. His is the Kingdom, and His is the praise, and He is powerful over everything.<sup>58</sup>

And He is God; there is no God but He. His is the praise in the former as in the latter; His too is the Judgment, and unto Him you shall be returned.<sup>59</sup>

Proclaim thy Lord’s praise, and be of those that prostrate, and serve thy Lord, until the Certain comes to thee.<sup>60</sup>

Surely thou art before Our eyes. And proclaim the praise of thy Lord when thou arisest, and proclaim the praise of thy Lord in the night, and at the declining of the stars.<sup>61</sup>

But those who believe and do righteous deeds and believe in what is sent down to the Praised– and it is the truth from their Lord – He will acquit them of their evil deeds, and dispose their minds aright.<sup>62</sup>

The Praised is not the father of any one of your men, but the messenger of God, and the Seal of the Prophets; God has knowledge of everything.<sup>63</sup>

This discourse of being-in-peace and faith rests on two assumptions. The first is that we already have absolute knowledge within us. This knowledge is, however, hidden, obscured by the current condition of humanity, so that we need reminding, guidance from outside, which will meet with confirmation in those inner recesses of humanity, as it uncovers them.

The very possibility of such recollection is inseparable from the two directions in which the human self is split – first on the up-down axis and then on the horizontal at right angles to the first. The principle is revealed from above towards below, from the higher to the lower, and from the greater to the lesser, while realization takes place

in the opposite direction. It is in the nature of all sacred tradition to draw on two sources of knowledge – intellectual and received. Intellectual knowledge does not depend on anything external. It is the kernel of each individual self.

Received knowledge does come from outside, and traditional ontology considers it as belonging to a lower level than intellectual knowledge. We can check and confirm the analytical and rational only on the basis of intellectual knowledge. When the train of differentiation is open from above to below, there is perfect equality between them; but when the heart, as the centre of intellectual knowledge, is darkened and veiled thanks to the break-out of the lower levels towards the higher, these forms of knowledge are opposed.

The people of all times have always faced the mystery of their individual and group differences. Even when they accept that the prophets are telling them news revealed by God, they still face the difficult challenge of understanding the differences between them. God ordered the Praised to say: “Say: ‘I have been commanded to serve God making my debt His sincerely; and I have been commanded to be the first of those who are-in-peace.’”<sup>64</sup>

Given that God is the All-peaceable, his being first transcends all the levels of existence, serving each of them as reason, content, and goal. The praised is not the first of the people of peace that there might be anything prior to him in existence. God is both First and Last, so that there is nothing and no one before or after Him. When we say that the Praised is first, this means that the descent into creation begins from him, that he is the last possibility, the final moment of whatsoever is in existence. His progress along the two arcs most closely signifies his primacy at the beginning of the descent and his finality at the end of the ascent through all of existence. In this way, the Praised, as the first of the people of peace, is the maternal prophet to each and every one of the prophets, known and unknown. Through him God said:

Those who follow the messenger, the maternal prophet, whom they find written down with them in the Torah and the Gospel, bidding them to honour, and forbidding them dishonour, making lawful for them the good things, and making unlawful for them the corrupt things, and relieving them of their loads, and the fetters that were upon them. Those who believe in him and succour him and help him, and follow the light that has been sent down with him – they are the prosperers.<sup>65</sup>

It was to such a prophet that all the prophets made their oath, as to their eternal principle, in pre-existence. He is, thus, their seal in all languages and in all ages. The

differences between them, which relate to place, time, and language, never betray the one and only maternal book from which various copies are continuously being made in existence – whether as something newly sent down to the prophets, which is ended, or as the continuing new interpretation of His friends, who have always followed the prophets in all times. God spoke of this oath made by the prophets to God that they would bear witness to the Praised:

And when God took compact with the prophets: “That I have given you of Book and Wisdom; then there shall come to you a messenger confirming what is with you – you shall believe in him and you shall help him; do you agree?” He said: “And do you take My load on you on that condition?” They said, “We do agree.” God said, “Bear witness so, and I shall be with you among the witnesses.” Then whosoever turns his back after that – they are the ungodly.<sup>66</sup>

It is in this perfect example of humanity, towards which we are all turned and of which all the prophets remind us, that we find the relationship of reception as indebtedness and return as requital. God is the All-praised, and it is as such that He reveals His being throughout existence. All things receive praise as the form of His revelation of Himself and of indebtedness whereby He is revealed. Through the return of what has been received that it may be revealed in the purity of original and authentic receptivity, existence is both praised and praise, which is the only way it can repay its debt to the All-praised.

When being praised and praise within the totality of existence focus within human being, then we are both the recipients of praising and praised ourselves and, as givers of what we have received, also praisers. Humanity is perfected, that is to say its highest moment, in the Praised. As God’s servant, the Praised relates to the All-praised, our Master or Lord, through praise. As a result, the form of witness referred to above with regard to the angel Gabriel’s questions may also be expressed as follows: I bear witness that there is no praised but the All-praised and that the Praised is His messenger.

Possessing the divine names, God reveals Himself to the world as the stage for their manifestation. He also reveals Himself to us, as the ones who gather these names together, because He gifted them to us when He inspired us with His Spirit. Ibn al-’Arabi said of this relationship between human being and the world:

Distinguish yourself from the cosmos and distinguish the cosmos from yourself. Distinguish the manifest from the nonmanifest and the nonmanifest from the manifest. For within the cosmos, you are the spirit of the cosmos, and

the cosmos is your manifest form. The form has no meaning without a spirit. Hence the cosmos has no meaning without you.<sup>67</sup>

In accordance with God's discourse, the cosmos has meaning through the act of praising Him as Creator. The Praised is the perfect focus of this act of praise, and so the highest human moment. All things in existence confess him and discourse of him, as there is nothing in the heavens or on earth or between them that does not praise and glorify its Lord. God called the supreme moment of humanity at the beginning and the end of existence and whatsoever lies between by the name of the Praised,<sup>68</sup> the same name as was revealed by the heavenly herald to his mother Amina before he was born.<sup>69</sup>

Once it has been accepted and incorporated in the second of the two tenets known as one, as the Word of Witness, that the name cannot be understood without reference to its place in the complex of semantic chains that make up the Recitation, and in particular the semantic fields organized around the verbal root *h-m-d*, it becomes clear that following it means participating in the act of praise that binds all things in existence to God as the All-praised.

This participation allows the discovery of self knowledge, knowledge of our humanity which focuses this act of universal praise and so discovers itself in and through its highest moment, in witness that the Praised is God's servant and His apostle, in the fullest sense, in which act of witness the self discovers itself. All the signs on the horizons recall us to this, while witness is realized in the self that is guided by its sublime potential on the upright path.

## 9. Debt and Right

The above-mentioned forms of the relationship between human beings and God, designated as being-in-peace, faith, and doing what is good and beautiful, represent three important aspects of the debt. To this has been added the matter of the Hour as the realization of that relationship beyond any doubt or denial. Everything in existence is both at peace and peaceable and thus related to God the All-peaceable through the mode of being-in-peace. God reveals Himself in and through them. Accepting it as people of faith, we relate to God the Faithful through this faith. Rejecting it, we mistake one of the objects of our knowledge as ultimate, bind ourselves to it and its physical form by our passions, and so take a god or gods in the place of God.

In our now, in the Hour, given this relationship with God, all the things in all the worlds speak in their different ways of this supreme possibility of faith. Being-at-peace, faith, doing what is beautiful, and the hour are represented in the relationship of the angel Gabriel and the man who was God's servant and chosen to be the most beautiful example to us all and a mercy to the worlds. The angel Gabriel addressed him by the name God the All-praised gave him in His decision to reveal Himself through creation: "Tell me, O Praised, about being-in-Peace."

We may say of anything that it relates to God as Lord and Peace through service and being-in-peace. They all express this relationship through their absolute service:

None is there in the heavens and earth but he comes to the All-merciful as a servant. He has indeed counted them, and He has numbered them exactly.<sup>70</sup>

Hast thou not seen how to God prostrate all who are in the heavens and all who are in the earth, the sun and the moon, the stars and the mountains, the trees and the beasts, and many of mankind?<sup>71</sup>

Existence as a whole and everything it contains reveal God. This act of revelation is its only purpose, so that the ways in which it does so are characterized by the relations of being-in-peace and service. So, they are debtors, while their Creator is the Indebting. The relationship between them is the debt or indebtedness. As this relationship informs the nature of all things, all things have both a debt and a claim on or rights with regard to each other – the debt is the obligation to recognize the creaturehood and the guidance of every other thing, while the claim is the right that all other things recognize our creaturehood and guidance.

These two, the debt and the right, differ from self to self. None can force another to comply with its debt. This is because the highest human moment is in the self, so that each individual is, in terms of his or her original values, equal to all the others together.<sup>72</sup> But each self can force itself, as its underlying reality, the side that is in peace, overtops all the deep. Concern for its own debt opens up the space for the transformation of the self and its return to the One on the upright path, through growth in knowledge.

By repaying our debt to the One, we each realize our right to victory over death and to become fully happy. This is so, for God says through the Praised: "Our Lord is He who gave everything its creation then guided it."<sup>73</sup> Every individual thing has received both its creaturehood and its purpose in accordance with this. Neither is,

however, an original attribute. For all things are in service to the Lord. The relationship of the creature to the Creator is the debt through which God reveals His will to be known.

It is by being a servant and a person of peace in relation to God as our Lord and as Peace that we participate in existence as a whole. But we have something more than this, too: for we have been offered confidence, which we have accepted. In this way, we assumed the possibility that we might fall lower than anything else in existence, but also that we might rise above all else. God spoke of this to the Praised in the Recitation: “Hast thou seen him who has taken his caprice to be his god? Wilt thou be a guardian over them? Or deemest thou that most of them hear or understand? They are but as the cattle; nay, they are further astray from the way.”<sup>74</sup>

Our position on the vertical axis from the lowest depths to the most beautiful height is determined by our admission of the rights of everything in existence. There is nothing which is within reach of our understanding that is not relevant in some way to our authentic nature. When it is said that we are viceroys or stewards and that the external world is subordinated to us, this means only that everything in the world has a rightful claim on us. These are signs on our path to realization, as God says in the Recitation: “And He has subjected to you what is in the heavens and what is in the earth, all together, from Him. Surely in that are signs for a people who reflect.”<sup>75</sup>

The self is informed by this indivisibility of the debt and the claim. Everything in existence is a sign of the Creator, and it is our debt or obligation that we recognize the rights that He has guaranteed to everything and to all. Selman the Persian, a close companion of the Praised, said of this confession: “Your Lord has a claim on you, your soul has a claim on you, and your family has a claim on you; so you should recognize the claims of all those who have a claim on you.”<sup>76</sup> When he heard what Selman had taught, the Praised confirmed its truth.<sup>77</sup>

This pattern of rightful claim and debt determines the sequence of being, from above to below, from the most beautiful height to the lowest depth. Whatever is higher has a claim on what is lower, and what is lower a debt towards the higher. This sequence is absolute. Both the claims of the higher and the debts of the lower are directed towards the One, Who possesses an absolute claim on everything which reveals Him. All things stand in debt, a debt towards every other thing.

Each individual has as many debts as there are things. But each individual thing and all things together have one irrevocable right or claim. This is the right to return to God, the All-merciful, the All-knowing. Return involves ascent from the debt towards our right, to the fullness of our right to self-realization and redemption, to which corresponds the discovery that everything is in perfect order, a discovery that is concealed or distorted within any human self that fails to fall in worship before God.

God is One and shows Himself in the many. God reveals Himself as the Gatherer through this “being One” and “showing Himself in the many.” According to His revelation to the Praised, those firmly grounded in knowledge will declare: “Our Lord, it is Thou that shall gather mankind for a day whereon is no doubt; verily God will not fail the tryst.”<sup>78</sup> This gathering of mankind is the universal return to God as He says: “Unto God all matters are returned.”<sup>79</sup>

When the messenger said: “You should give the rights of all those who have a right on you” – he confirmed that there is nothing in the external world that is irrelevant to our self-realization. The command that we recognize the claims of everything that has a claim, and that means of everything in existence, is simply a reminder of the way in which we are to realize our right to return, to liberation from thoughts of our Lord that close off and harrow the self. The primary claim of all things is for their creation with the truth to be recognized<sup>80</sup> and then that it be confessed that the Creator leads in both directions – in descent from the One to the many and in ascent from the many to the One.

Descent from the One appears on the first level as Intellect, the first reception of Light, the maternal prophet. All the other stations of descent spread out in descending order from that one, each containing within itself the unity of God and the maternity of the prophet. On their return, as they realize themselves in their original purity, they attain the level of the first maternity as their passage and return to the One. This is the meaning of the revelation that there are prophets in all the peoples and of the sending down of the books. Nothing in existence evades this. All things are linked to the One through the maternal prophet and the maternal book. All creatures in existence are distinguished, as God said, into maternal communities similar to ours.<sup>81</sup>

When we say, then, that all things shall muster, it reminds us of our own selves, who willfully opposing God’s will, brought disorder into a world originally created in perfect order. The sun and the moon, the stars and the mountains, the trees

and the animals, all are part of this order. Participating in it, we rise from one level to another. Each thing is a pointer on our way. When this is not the case, when our own will seems sufficient in itself, our hearing and our sight are blocked in regard to these things. For, God gave speech to each thing. Violence towards any of them is action on the basis of ignorance. Acting thus, we prevent our own self-realization in accordance with our own authentic nature.

Like all living creatures, people are maternal communities. Only human beings, however, are selves which focus all of God's names in each thing and so in each maternal community. Looking at the external world, we see there something of ourselves, but only in partially realized form. God compares us in our confinement by the passions with cattle, the name for those species to which we are connected by our various needs. Cattle are members of an overall maternal community: situated on a given level of existence and confined in the material flux which begins and ends with consumption. In this flux, the passions are confined within a single level confined to a cycle of arousal and satisfaction.

Confined in a single form of knowledge, regardless of its scope, we are compelled to sacrifice that selfhood open to the Self at the altar of the group and to find in the laws of the external world mere titillation of the passions. While cattle remain at their level regardless, if we embrace our confinement we descend ever lower into the dark of our own selves. In the cycle of arousal and satisfaction, our passions become our god, who demand of us that we serve the lower, rather than the higher.

Sacrificing a given isolated member of the flock and identifying with that individual allows us to find in ourselves that nature which knowledge of the names necessarily transcends. We can thus escape our confinement to the group identity and open up to confession of the claims of all things on us and our debt to them. In saying that we are like cattle, and even worse than they, we signify our being on the vertical axis up and down which the self rises and falls and recognise the randomness of movement on any given level of existence.

## 10. The Upright Path

After the words testifying to the unity of God and the apostleship of the Praised, the most common phrase and text in Muslim life is the *al-Fatihah* ("The Opening"). It is

also called *Fatihah al-kitāb* (“the Opening of the Book”), *Umm al-kitāb* (“the Mother of the Book”), *Surat al-hamd* (“the Sura of Praise”), *Asas al-Qur’an* (“the Foundation of the Recitation”). In the Recitation itself it is referred to as *As-sab al-Mathani* (“The Seven Repeated”). In English it reads:

In the Name of God, the All-merciful, the Ever-merciful: Praise belongs to God, the Lord of all Being, the All-merciful, the Ever-merciful, the Master of the Day of Debt. Thee only we serve; to Thee alone we pray for succour. Guide us upon the upright path, the path of those whom Thou hast blessed, not of those against whom Thou art wrathful, nor of those who are astray!<sup>82</sup>

One sees from these seven verses, which include the initial invocation of the two most beautiful names of God – the All-merciful and the Ever-merciful – the possibility that our self find connection with God as the All-praised, directed from the lower to the higher levels of Being. The traveler does not determine his place on this path, but his goal, his sublime potential. The pettiness of human knowledge is but an indication of the impossibility of nothing, of absolute dark. Within that impossibility is revealed the immortal Self of the Creator, to Whom and before Whom it is right to sacrifice everything, as two immortalities are impossible. This is why the final verdict on our debt remains with Him who is the Source of all indebtedness.

As God has the most beautiful names, realizing those names means restoring them from the darkness in the self. Our return to God involves ascending from one level of Being to the next. This ascent is only possible through and thanks to the signs in the world and the self. Their final meaning lies with God, so that the upward path which unfolds within the self is really the ceaseless exchange of the little knowledge we have attained for more, or growth in knowledge. On this upward path, we must leave behind and sacrifice whatever seems of crucial importance to the self for the sake of the Divine Self.

These seven verses of the image of the Opening correspond to the two levels of human potentiality – the one of ascent and the other of descent. Wherever we may be, there are seven stations of the upright path above us, and seven stations of descent below us. At each of these stations or in each potential state of the self, the human heart is the centre at which the paths of ascent and descent meet, as we wander over a given level of existence. The heart or centre of existence is symbolised by the Ka’ba at each station or level.<sup>83</sup>

We are guided upon the upright path only by the fullness of its goal. Only this goal can guide the wayfarers, attracting irresistibly even those who know it only

imperfectly, since the wayfarers love Him towards Whom they make their way, and He loves them. The wayfarer can know the Goal only imperfectly, but the Goal knows the wayfarer absolutely. This is the bond between the faithful and the Faithful, as the Lover/Beloved says to His lover/beloved: “O believers, look after your selves. He who is astray cannot hurt you, if you are rightly guided. Unto God shall you return, all together, and He will tell you what you were doing.”<sup>84</sup>

Wherever we may be, there are signs on the horizons and in ourselves to urge us onto the upright path. Their meaning inspires only because of the goal of the journey. Separated from this goal or from the One Who reveals Himself through them, the signs inspire movement away from the goal, as God says: “Decked out fair to men is the love of lusts – women, children, heaped-up heaps of gold and silver, horses of mark, cattle and tillage. That is the enjoyment of the present life; but God – with Him is the most beautiful resort.”<sup>85</sup>

At the immediate level of manifestation, the beauties of the world are sensible. But tangible beauties are not there for the sake of enjoyment in sensation; such enjoyment is just a stimulus towards understanding the Lord as the Master of good and beauty and so a stimulus to return to Him as such. This is why we are expected to turn from each experience towards the centre and make our way towards it as to an image or sign of the centre of our being. The surfaces of the self, and so all feeling on those surfaces, reveal the inspired Spirit, the uncreated and uncreatable centre, with its inviolate regions to which we journey on our return to our original most beautiful height.

During this turn to the Ka’ba – making our way towards the inviolate region, attaining it, and circling it as the sign of the human heart, which is done in consciousness every day, but only once in bodily form – we are expected to renounce mastery over the signs and confess their inviolate nature, as our relationship with the inviolate order of the Sacred is a relationship with our own selves, care and concern for our own selves. All the signs in this order are images of our condition, each with its own fullness of meaning and claim on us. God spoke to us of this inviolate state: “Forbidden to you is the game of the land, so long as you remain in pilgrim sanctity; and fear God, unto whom you shall be mustered.”<sup>86</sup>

At any given level of existence, three possibilities appear for the relationship of the self with the Divine Self. The confession that there is no self but the Divine Self cannot be separated from the sacrifice we must make of every state or condition of the

self for the sake of the Divine Self. Binding the self to God's Self, through our highest moment, the self of the Praised, is to ascend upon the upright path. On that path, human perfection always lies at some point beyond the level reached.

So long as the traveller feels separation from the Beloved, he or she is in alienation and at risk of losing connection with the Seventh. Connected to the world through our five senses, its beauties may appear enough, causing us to desist in our quest for its fullness in all six of its dimensions as the revelation of the One. But all the beauties of the world are nothing without the One, Whom they reveal and confess.

Given that all things in the world praise God, participating in that praise is to find and discover our most sublime moment, for which we were created in the most beautiful uprightness. Realizing our creaturehood is our path back from the depths and the multitude to the One. We are made for this return, but our capacities are not enough. Turning towards the One allows us to liberate ourselves from the mortal self and to die in its death, that we may receive life from Him Who is untouched by death.

Our primary option is to ascend and return. In everything beautiful, we recognize the attribute of the immortal Self. This Self exercises an irresistible attraction through His most beautiful names, an attraction which appears in all things, for there is no thing that has not received its creaturehood and its guidance from Him. This upright path announces God as Upright. Realizing the goal of this path is the state of blessedness or bliss in which all separation is left behind, as only He has no other.

The other option is to descend along the axis of being. Given that we were originally created in the most beautiful uprightness, whatever our condition in the world of duality, it necessarily takes place on a surface, a surface from which we may rise or fall. By falling, we may reach the lowest depth. We are led to it by opposing God, Who is on the upright path, and denying His signs in the world and our selves. So long as we remain within our individuality, which is to say our mortal selves, we run the risk of falling lower than the level on which we currently find ourselves.

None of these levels is more than a depth in comparison to the higher possibilities, our goal. On no level, however, do we lose our quality of having been created by God the All-merciful, the Ever-merciful. Nothing in existence, not the sun, not the moon, not the stars, not the mountains, not the trees, not the animals ever abandons its proper level in Being as a whole. As we relate to them, we express our acceptance or denial of the claims on us of everything that is in the world and within

us. This acceptance or denial determines whether we will ascend or descend on the upright path.

A third possibility is to remain on a given level. But we remain capable of both more and less. When we are on a given level, we rule over the animal world in it. If passage to the higher levels is blocked, we are the worst of all animals, as God said through the Praised: “Surely the worst of beasts in God’s sight are the concealers, who will not believe, those of them with whom thou hast made compact then they break their compact every time, not being conscious.”<sup>87</sup>

Given that everything in existence, except humankind, willingly refused to take confidence as their form of relation to the Creator, they are become signs throughout Being through which we may determine our position on the boundless journey upwards. And so, we bring together everything that is dispersed in both the visible and the invisible worlds. Whether we rise, sink, or err depends on how we do this. Failing to meet our obligation to recognise the claims of everything that has a rightful claim, we darken and obstruct the view of our ascent. Then the heavens and the earth and what lies between them cease to speak to us of the reason and purpose of our journey. Instead of a sign, the world becomes our prison, in which we imagine our own self to be sufficient to find answers on the purpose of life and how it may be attained.

## 11. The Nocturnal Journey

We are both traveller and journey. Depending on how we face the confession of our supreme potential, we find ourselves ascending, descending, or adrift. None of this follows on the principle of our creation. Our ability to distinguish the self from the Divine Self urges us to cleave to one or the other. If we choose our own self, then, on our journey, we necessarily associate it with God as possessor of the most beautiful names. But God is our only guide through His revelation of Himself to Himself. The purpose of all the signs on the horizons and within the self is to reveal this relationship between the revealed and the Divine Revealing. Every human condition is a depth in which are to be found signs of the Revealed/Revealing. A higher possibility is always visible from that depth.

The earth, the heavens, and all that lies between them reveal this distinction into depth and height, descent and ascent. Every valley on the Earth’s surface

symbolizes this depth within humanity, just as every hill symbolizes the possibility of ascent. Both valley as symbol of the depth and hill as symbol of the height are signs of the earth as a whole and the heavens as on high. Moreover, all of existence is a depth or valley, for there is only the One, Who is truly High. His real sublimity transcends all comparison, as He said through the Praised:

Say: “He is God, One, God, the Flow, who has not begotten, and has not been begotten, and equal to Him is not any one.”<sup>88</sup>

Like Him there is naught; He is the All-hearing, the All-seeing.<sup>89</sup>

As neither like nor comparable to any thing, God has no other. But His revelation takes place in duality, which means that He is always One. We can only leave behind the world of duality by bearing witness that there is no self but the Divine Self if we also bear witness that the Praised is His messenger. His apostolate is perfect duality, so that the receptive and donative aspects of it are an order which is revealed at every moment as both descent and ascent, as arrival and return. The return from the depths to the height, from having fallen to the lowest level to our original and most beautiful uprightness, and so exit from the sensible and visible world, from the body for the Intellect and Spirit, takes place within a perfected relationship with God, a relationship between human being as under a debt of praise of the All-praised, Who possesses the most beautiful names.

This connection between the suprasensible and the sensible is the most important attribute of traditional metaphysics. Ascent or return from the sensible to the suprasensible world is symbolized on the earthly level by two major signs – one in the Valley and the other on the Hill. These signs correspond to the signs of the Earth and the heavens and the stations on the path back to God. As the perfect servant, the Praised passed this path and so is a proof that it is possible. Of this God spoke in the Recitation: “Glory be to Him, who carried His servant by night from the Holy Mosque to the Further Mosque the precincts of which We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs. He is the All-hearing, the All-seeing.”<sup>90</sup>

On this ascent, on the night journey through all things to realization in Intellect and the return of all that is to the One, three pairs are shown to us as signs on the horizons of the world and in our own selves – animals and trees, mountains and stars, the Moon and the Sun. It is important to note that animals are the first sign on the vertical axis of the upright path looked at from the perspective of the human depth,

but the last when looked at from above, from the Sun as the symbol of Intellect. This is indicated by two signs of particular importance for this meditation.

When Mary's son Jesus entered Jerusalem, the donkey or ass on which he was seated was the symbol of his Messiah-hood.<sup>91</sup> When the Praised rose up from the Holy Mosque to the Further Mosque, which is the key symbol of his ascent from the lowest depths to the most beautiful height, from Earth through all the heavens to the One, he rode on a *burāq*, an animal larger than a donkey but smaller than a mule.<sup>92</sup> The selves of the Messiah and the Praised are, in these two cases, represented in terms of the animal/human distinction: the full realization of humanity means confession and acceptance of the animal as its vehicle.

Both the Praised and the Anointed ascended on mounts which, at least with regard to their characters, were similar to each other. Looking at the ascending movements of the following sequences, animals-trees, mountains-stars, Moon-Sun, we find the refer to return to the One Who revealed Himself through the arc of descent from above towards what is below – the Sun-the Moon, stars-mountains, trees-animals – leading in both cases to the perfect human being as the cornerstone of both descent and ascent. This corner stone may seem ultimate to existence as a whole, but is in fact just a beginning, maternal.<sup>93</sup>

“The corner stone” is first in the plan of revelation and consequently present throughout the revelation and all its signs. In him are all things gathered and through him they return to the One. This return is not and cannot be a current determined by the countless multitude of causes and effects. It is the potential outside of time and space of the inner human self, the perfect moment of perfected humanity which reveals itself in time and space in innumerable forms.

Human ascent begins from animality. This why animal sacrifice is a precondition of transfer up the degrees, while trees signify the upward path or vertical axis, the indivisibility of the seed and the fruit, and the mountain signifies the coming together of all earthly ways to the One as the First and Last. Our orientation towards Him, marked by the peak of the mount, entails the discovery of the light of revelation in the countless multitude of its reflections and images.

This multitude of images of light in each self, signified by the stars, conveys analytical Reason as a reflection of Intellect in individual selves. The relationship of analytical Reason to Intellect is signified by the relationship of the Moon to the Sun: the first receives light from the second, and is thus a sign of the receptive principle;

the other gives, and is the sign of the donative principle. What is in existence, however, can give only what it has received from the One. This is true of Intellect, which is symbolised by the Sun and in relation to the One is first a recipient and then a donor.

Only by confessing the right or claim of our animal, with due recollection of God, can we attain self-realization on the path back. Through the Praised, God has revealed to us that He has given us vehicles and animals, including beasts of burden to be ridden, calling on us, when seated upon them, to recall the blessing he has given us, saying: “Glory be to Him, who has subjected this to us, and we ourselves were not equal to it; surely unto our Lord we are turning.”<sup>94</sup>

Whatever level we find ourselves on, the animal impels us towards the horizontal, towards closure of the level. Without knowledge of the horizontal, we cannot come to know the upright path towards which the trees are turned, rooted in the Earth, branches towards the sky. The mountains on the horizons also point to the upward path and to the convergence of all earthly paths in the One, at the end of the material world, “the place” at which all dualities merge.

The other world begins at that boundary, higher, more open. There we cannot be as we were on earth and in our body. This is the world of heavenly expanses, of stars. To view it we require inner light, received among our rational capacities. This is the light in the night, of which the moon speaks. But the moon has no light of its own. It receives light from the sun, which it then reflects and sends into the darkness. The sun is the sign or symbol of the light that resides in the human heart, the Intellect in which all the possibilities of the horizons and the self are gathered, the present enlightenment which comprehends all of space and time at all levels of existence.

This is the view from below up, from the Valley towards the Crown of the Hill, from the lowest depth to the most beautiful height. The praised is positioned at the start of the descent and so at the high point of the ascent. Nothing in existence is without him or his seal. To discover his presence as maternity, mercy, illumination, and exemplarity is to turn towards the most beautiful nature/character, as he himself said, while standing in prayer:

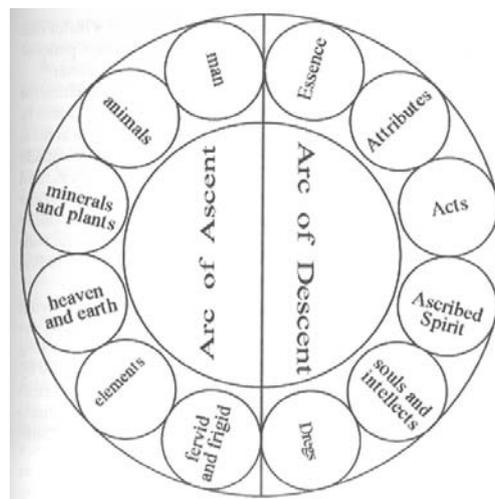
You lead me to the most beautiful character; none lead to the most beautiful character but You; You drive bad character from me; none drive bad character from me but You. I respond to You and rejoice: good, all this, is in your hands, and evil does not return to you; I am with You and I returned to You; for You are Blessed and the Most High, and I turn to You!<sup>95</sup>

In this prayer, the Praised speaks of himself to himself as the most sublime moment of humanity, as that which is bequeathed to each of us that we may discover perfection as the reason and purpose of our being. Najm al-Din Rāzī said of this:

There is a strange and subtle truth which now occurs to us. The Prophet, upon whom be peace and blessings, said: “The first that God created was the Pen; the first that God created was the Intelligence; the first that God created was my Spirit.” All three statements are true, and all three are the same. Many are confused by this mystery and wonder at it. When he said, “the first that God created was the Pen”, the Pen intended is not an ordinary human pen, but the Pen of God, a pen befitting His might and glory, and identical with the pure Spirit and Light of Mohammad. When God Almighty created the Mohammadan Spirit and looked upon it with the gaze of affection, shame overcame it and caused it to split in two. The Intelligence was the half that fell away from the Spirit.<sup>96</sup>

This speaks of the divine Spirit revealed in the pair of giver and receiver. God is the Giver. What He gives is received as both Spirit and as Intellect. With our creation existence as a whole was brought to a point. Existence is whatever is not God. But God alone is Real. He revealed this through the Praised: “And He originated the creation of man out of clay, then He fashioned his progeny of an extraction of mean water, then He shaped him, and breathed His spirit in him.”<sup>97</sup>

“His Spirit” is the Spirit of the Praised, the unbroken presence of the Uncreated in all of creation. Creation is descent from the Uncreated but also ascent and realization in the presence of His Spirit. The cycle of creation, with its two arcs, the arc of descent and the arc of ascent, is itself contained within that inspiration of His Spirit into humanity.<sup>98</sup>



*The circle of creation*

## 12. Anthro-cosmological outlook

From the citations given, which largely deal with the relationship between humankind and God, we may conclude that human being is the focus or epitome of all creation, while the cosmos is human being writ large. As a result, humanity and the cosmos are set one against the other, as two images of the one thing: we are reflected in the cosmos, and the cosmos is reflected in us. And both are pictures of the truth of creation. Given that we have voluntarily accepted confidence as our relationship with God the Faithful, the full range open to us is in existence – both the most beautiful height and the lowest depth. Wherever we are, the cosmos reveals itself to us as our other side. This revelation is perfect only in so far as we become perfect, realizing our authentic and original nature.

Reviewing the horizons and the self, we discover the truth of our creation and realize the most beautiful names as the most central core of the self. We discover ourselves through these names in relation to God as Truth, Who says: “We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and in themselves, till it is clear to them that it is the truth.”<sup>99</sup> Accordingly, in order to know ourselves we must know our Lord as truth. But knowledge of the self cannot be separated from knowledge of the signs within the world.

The signs which we may see through the world correspond to signs within ourselves. Both are signs through which God reveals Himself. Through the simple act of creating us, these signs were gathered within the Spirit which God breathed or inspired into humanity, in our original nature which is in touch with Intellect, and in the heart as the organ of Intellect. Through our very creation, we already know everything which the signs in the world remind us of. This is why we are in a constant process of discovering this knowledge within ourselves, as independent of the outside world or its horizons, as a differentiated form of what is in our heart.

First knowledge is gnosis or intuition, while second knowledge is sensory perception or rational deduction and synthesis. There is also knowledge handed down to us by linguistic habituation, from other people, and from various histories. The prophets and the knowledge associated with them remind us of both. These forms of knowledge are manifest as listening to, memorizing, writing, and reading the Book revealed by God to us through His prophets. Their meaning is to remind us of what is always and has always been within us, even if forgotten.

Just as the signs are disseminated from the earth to the furthest heaven, so they are distributed in us, from our visible exterior to the most inaccessible recesses of the heart in which they are all gathered. Accordingly, we may speak of visible signs as revelations of the Invisible, of transcendence which is both constantly being discovered and hidden in immanence. There is a Treasury of the full meaning of all these signs in the Invisible. This disclosure and occultation point to the descending and ascending scales of the signs of Being. It is usual to talk of essence as affirmed by the One or God. The unity of God is affirmed by His most beautiful names. His acts and all creation affirm His most beautiful names.

To the most beautiful divine names correspond the realities of the imaginal world, of all multiplicity beyond the boundaries of the visible world. The signs on the horizons and within us are the level below that world. And the things of the sensible world are the lowest level of all. Our capacity to scale the upright path, from the lowest level to the most beautiful uprightness, is not limited to the visible world. In its fullness, this possibility entails return from the many to the One, from the depths to the Most High. This descent and ascent through all the levels is human self-realization as the attainment of human perfection, which is the reason and the goal of all existence.

There is nothing in the world or within us, whether on the visible or the invisible side, which does not serve this purpose of ascending through recollection of the reason and purpose of creation. The Praised is the perfect example of realization through ascent. He is the purpose of descent and making the One manifest through multiplicity, but also the most beautiful example of ascent and self-discovery in authentic and perfect uprightness. The Word was sent down to him that in It and through It he might attain his principle.

Ascent and descent are one within the Praised. He has become the same as the two arcs, the arc of ascent and the other of descent. On his nature as the scene on which this experience is played out, God says:

By the Star when it plunges, your comrade is not astray, neither errs, nor speaks he out of caprice. This is naught but a revelation revealed, taught him by one terrible in power, very strong; he stood poised, being on the higher horizon, then draw near and suspended hung, two bows'-length away, or nearer, then revealed to his servant that he revealed. His heart lies not of what he saw; what, will you dispute with him what he sees?<sup>100</sup>

The revelation of God as One includes sacrifice. Nothing can be revealed without being distinguished – the One reveals Himself in duality, but is not Himself dual. The One is the Living, as He says: “God, there is no god but He, the Living, the Standing!”<sup>101</sup> Consequently, it is the opposition of life and death which reveals Him. There is nothing in existence that does not begin to live and is not subject to dying. But the God so revealed does not die.<sup>102</sup> And so one can say that even His revelation of life does not die. Dying is a view seen from the perspective of those who are within this revelation: they are living, but mortal.

All violence against life is also violence against The Living. The Living One reveals Himself in the countless variety of species and forms of life: they are all His, while our knowledge of all the names is how we participate and are involved in all this manifestation of the Living. Within this manifestation, we are steward and servant of the Living – steward because we have been entrusted with the treasure of knowledge of all the names; servant, because there is nothing that is ours, either in the self or in the world, not even our creaturehood nor the guidance towards our goal.

This first impels us to understand ourselves as the central being of all creation, a being which realizes itself by liberation from oblivion and ignorance. The second stimulates us to responsibility towards God as the First and Last, Inner and Outer, Giver both of creation and of guidance. And so we find ourselves always split between feeling our power over the world and life within it and feeling both ourselves and the world as the revelation and manifestation of the One. Primacy resides in it, signified by being on the most beautiful outcropping, as does ultimacy, which is signified by the lowest depth.

Confidence is a form of our relationship with our Lord. The Faithful Lord offered it to us, and we accepted it. We could have refused it, because God had revealed Himself as Faithful through the very offer. Thus, in all of His manifestation God established faithful humanity, which is to say that we can always be true to our faithfulness, or betray it, and this is how we discover our Lord and His guidance in our own belief.

The conditions for remaining true to the confidence we assumed are memory and knowledge, as obstacles to betrayal, forgetting, and ignorance. Whenever we face some horror in the self or the world, there is refuge for us in that confidence in the Creator’s guidance of everything that reveals Him, as Thomas Berry has put it:

“Sensitized to such guidance from the very structure and functioning of the universe, we can have confidence in the future that awaits the human venture.”<sup>103</sup>

The visible world reveals the invisible, so that the heavens and the earth and everything that lies between present signs of the invisible sent down into the visible world. The sending down of the invisible world into the visible and ascent in the opposite direction represent the two arcs of a perfect whole, the invisible and the visible together. Liu Zhi, a Muslim teacher of the 18th century, represented these two arcs of the ontological totality on a diagram illustrating this advent or descent and return or ascent.<sup>104</sup>



*Diagram of Descent and Ascent,  
Coming and Going Back*

### 13. Realization

Bearing witness that there is no god but God and the Praised is His messenger refers us to the question of the opposition between humanity and God. That we can know ourselves as participating in creation as a whole necessarily leads to the question of the opposition between the individual and willful I and the primal or Divine I. No matter our condition, however close to oblivion and ignorance, we cannot accept that our I is the principle of our self, any more than that our principle is so remote from us as to be out of reach. The same is true of existence as a whole, the entirety of the external world and everything that lies beyond it. For, there is only one principle to both the human self and the external world. The primary I comprehends all things in both inner and outer existence. There is not and can be nothing outside of this I.

Humanity is made true and realized in the principle or Divine Self Which reveals Itself in every condition of the individual self. This is because the absolute Self possesses the most beautiful names. This is truth, and everything it creates abides with it. Whatever condition we may find ourselves in, we are both regretful and joyful – regretful, because we feel and know that always and everywhere we are simply travellers who have not yet returned to their own selves as to fullness; joyful, because we recall and know that we are capable of more than we are and that the way back lies open to us.

The revelation of truth takes place within the opposition of self to Divine Self. Once we have accepted that the Divine Self is the principle, we see that the individual self is only His image, always, in a countless multitude of unrepeatable possibilities. Both this and everything within the horizons of the world signify or testify to truth as that with which and for which it was all created. Consequently, realization in truth involves admission of the truth of creation in everything accessible to our knowledge. This means that the self testifies in and to itself of the distinction between seeming and the real, cleaving in each case to the Real. The way in which it cleaves is not of the self. Even this is given to us by the Real, as all of existence is simply the revelation of the Real.

Realization is the relationship of showing or revealing reality and the Divine Real as One. As the Real is manifest in multiplicity, seeing It as such cannot mean that the One and the many represent two realities. In all multiplicity, which may be reduced to duality, the One is revealed and confirmed. Human self-realization lies in coming to know the One and coming to resemble It. There are many names for this knowledge and act of approximation. They include: finding, return, discovery, dying to be reborn in the Spirit.

Finding oneself in the One and returning to It mean realization within the self and the redemption of the self from all death. There is only one way to confirm or justify this claim. This is to accept that we have in ourselves a primal revelation of the One. Amongst the many different names for this principle are Intellect, Light, Word, Spirit, and Pen. There is no way to fully determine it, for we relate to it always at a particular level of its manifestation, differentiation, or emanation.

Given that we here are dealing with something that is absolutely primal and primary, there is no way for us to find ourselves or return to the Self without it. All we have is the chance to rise up through all the levels in which God is manifest. The

perennial question regarding this ascent, as the discovery of our humanity at its fullest, is well expressed by William C. Chittick in the following passage:

Part of learning how to be human involves differentiating the qualities of the human soul from the qualities of other souls, which represent limiting and confining possibilities of soulish existence. The moral injunctions to overcome one's instincts rise up from the understanding that animals cannot manifest the fullness of intellectual and ontological possibility. This is not to denigrate animal qualities, since they play positive and necessary roles in the world and in human make-up. The issue is rather one of priorities. People need to put things in their proper places. They must order the world and their own selves in an intelligent manner, and this means that they must understand everything in terms of the ruling truths of the cosmos. They must give to everything that has a *haqq* its *haqq*, and all things have their *haqq*s, both outside and inside the soul.<sup>105</sup>

In this demand made by the Praised on all of us, that we accord whatever has a claim on us its right, we find set out the proper realization of the self in relation to the Divine Self. Realization is, accordingly, understanding of the real, the true, and the rightful claims of God, the cosmos, and the human self, and the incarnation of that understanding through righteous and appropriate action at all times. That is how we may accord to God, the cosmos, and to ourselves what we owe them – what is rightfully theirs. In this way, we realize the self in line with its most sublime moment: by following the Praised as our highest possibility, we free ourselves from dependence upon received knowledge, knowing what we need to know in our hearts and minds, just as the Praised knows the Real.

Realization is a drama of the self where nothing can take place without the self, but neither can it on the basis of the self alone. Wherever we are, we are within existence, but we are also somehow outside of it. In order to attain our higher possibilities, which requires us to rise out of conditionality, we need the aid of the Unconditioned. With this help, we rise on the upright path towards our own happiness, so long as we commit ourselves to it as a gift of the Unconditioned, in line with the prayer: “Guide us in the upright path, the path of those whom Thou hast blessed, not of those against whom Thou art wrathful, nor of those who are astray!”

We can rise only when the self is in accord with the Self. There is nothing in the self or on the horizons of the world that does not speak of the Self. Understanding this discourse, which entails recognizing the claims all things have on the self of the traveller, sets the scene for self-realization in happiness. All other possibilities stand against this, as God says in the Recitation: “And those who cry lies to Our signs We will draw them on little by little whence they know not.”<sup>106</sup> Whatever point on this

downward path we have reached, the self retains the power to turn, a turn that takes place through the witness that there is no self but the Self and that the Praised is the apostle of the Self. However deep the depth, the reason for the Creator's mercy cannot be annulled in the human self.

As the maternal prophet and seal, the Praised is the light sent down, the shining lamp, the Warner, and the mercy to the worlds, the most beautiful example abiding in every heart and the dearest thing to each of the faithful, who know God as the Faithful and love Him as such. The Praised's nature is mighty, an ocean in which all human consciousness is submerged. To drown in this sea of knowledge and mercy is to return and to achieve realization.

Suffering which is the necessary consequence of individual willfulness and the desire that the world unfold in accordance with our personal agenda cannot be removed without the voluntary finding of peace in the will of the All-peaceful. The Praised is the first of those who have found such being-at-peace and so liberation from suffering – suffering that is sustained and multiplied by remoteness from the All-peaceful and tarrying on any given level of existence – comes with following him on the upward path. In this way, his followers are brought into relation with him who possesses the most beautiful names.

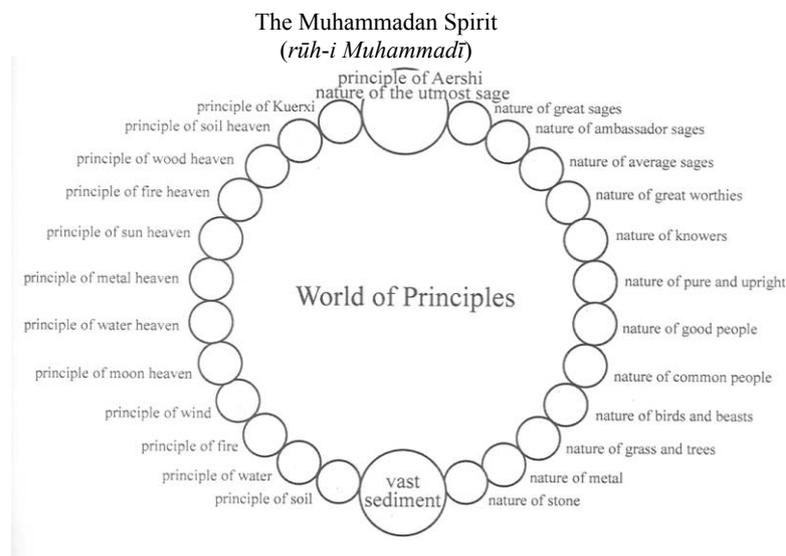
The Praised loves God as the Possessor of these names, and God loves the Praised. When we realize ourselves through our following him as our highest moment, we surrender to that same love. This love is signified in the name of the Praised [Muhammad]: praise is the mode of relation between the Praised as the perfect recipient and giver of the praise in all things that belongs to God as the All-praised, which excludes no thing on the horizons of the world or in the self from participation in the universal hymn of praise.

The Praised is thus the perfect example of the countless and inexhaustible multiplicity of ways of relating to the One as transcendental, and so never one and the same, but also immanent, and so absolutely near and ever and always present, and manifest in all things. Following him means accepting the inexhaustibility of God's revelation in the world and the self, as He says: "Though all the trees in the earth were pens, and the sea – seven seas after it to replenish it, yet would the words of God not be spent. God is All-mighty, All-wise."<sup>107</sup>

These words of God are ever present. In them the unknown and mysterious and ineffable and silent are revealed always and ever, in constantly changing ways.

Each human self partakes of this discourse through its naturality. This relationship with the world, the self, and the Book cannot exhaust the maternity and receptive openness of each self on the path of return.

The Praised is the first thing of creation. In his humanity and his apostolate the entire cycle of existence is closed, realized, and this cycle contains two arcs, one of descent or externalization of the One and the other of ascent or internalization within fully realized humanity of everything sent down. All of existence, with all its levels, leads from the Praised, and towards him, so that our path of realization is impossible without knowledge of all these levels and passage through on our upward path. Translating this all-embracing role of the Praised into neo-Confucian terms, Liu Zhi represented both the descent and the ascent in a circular diagram, with the beginning of the differentiation of nature and the principle.<sup>108</sup>



*Diagram of the Beginning of the Differentiation of Nature and the Principles*

#### Epilogue: The Maternal Communities

The Praised is the maternal prophet, the seal, the Warner,<sup>109</sup> of a mighty character,<sup>110</sup> a mercy unto the worlds,<sup>111</sup> the best example,<sup>112</sup> a shining lamp.<sup>113</sup> As such, all the prophets made an oath to him in pre-existence.<sup>114</sup> These were the prophets sent unto the nations.<sup>115</sup> Each of them conducted his prophetic mission in the tongue of the people to whom he was sent.<sup>116</sup> The common essence of all prophecy and sealing nature of the Praised's character are their principle.<sup>117</sup>

In the Recitation sent down to him certain of the prophets are mentioned, but most are not.<sup>118</sup> The number mentioned is very small compared to the 124.000, which is how many the Praised says there are.<sup>119</sup> The reason for mentioning only some of them is to point out the metaphysical unity of what they all said. This unity of all the prophets is contained in the Recitation sent down through the Praised. Consequently, his primacy is the principle of all prophecy.<sup>120</sup>

In accordance with this, there is no people or language whose heritage is not informed by the bequest of prophecy, whether conscious of this or no. Those who are conscious use one or more of the books, which are the heritage of prophecy, in the process of self fashioning. But in addition to this, each people abides with the maternal prophet, for he is that aspect of human nature which allows us to receive prophecy and distinguish truth from lie and cleave to the truth.

The maternal prophet or authentic human nature dwells with and within those who do not know who and when their prophet was before they adopted one of the prophetic books revealed in a language foreign to them, but translated into theirs. He makes of all people a single community, in which each of us answers to all and all answer to each, for the creation of a single individual is the same as the creation of all people, and so it is with the murder of a single individual – who murders one murders all.<sup>121</sup>

The book sent down to the maternal prophet is the maternal book.<sup>122</sup> All the prophets reveal their maternal principle, as their messages derive from the maternal book. When it was given to him to appear as the seal in history, the maternal prophet was sent both to those who were conscious of their prophetic heritage and of the books they had received and to those who were not, but who were alone with their maternal nature (*ummiyyun*), as sent down by God in the Recitation:

It is He who has raised up from among the maternal community a messenger from among them, to recite His signs to them and purify them, and to teach them the Book and the Wisdom, though before that they were in manifest error, and others of them who have not yet joined them. And He is the All-mighty, the All-wise.<sup>123</sup>

Say: “O mankind, I am the messenger of God to you all, of Him to whom belongs the kingdom of the heavens and of the earth. There is no god but He. He gives life, and makes to die. Believe then in God, and in His messenger, the maternal prophet, who believes in God and His words, and follow him; haply so you will be guided.”<sup>124</sup>

Said He: “My chastisement – I smite with it whom I will; and My mercy embraces all things, and I shall prescribe it for those who are conscious and pay the alms, and those who indeed believe in Our signs, those who follow the messenger, the maternal prophet.”<sup>125</sup>

And of the people of the Book is he who, if thou trust him with a hundred weight, will restore it thee; and of them is he who, if thou trust him with one pound, will not restore it thee, unless ever thou standest over him. That, because they say, “There is no way over us as to the maternal people.” They speak falsehood against God and that wittingly.<sup>126</sup>

So if they dispute with thee, say: “I have reconciled my will to God, and whosoever follows me.” And say to those who have been given the Book and to the maternal community: “Are you reconciled?” If they are reconciled they are right guided; but if they turn their backs, thine it is only to deliver the Message; and God sees His servants.<sup>127</sup>

And some there are of them that are the maternal folk not knowing the Book, but only fancies and more conjectures.<sup>128</sup>

The concepts of “the maternal prophet”, “the maternal book”, and “the maternal community” are of crucial importance for understanding all the semantic fields contained within the Recitation which treat of the communities of living beings.<sup>129</sup> We can only testify to the unity of God and the apostleship of the Praised and return to Him in so far as we participate in the maternal whole, as the reception of existence and the return of what has been received. God says of this, through the Praised: “No creature is there crawling on the earth, nor bird flying with its wings, but they are maternal communities like unto yourselves. We have neglected nothing in the Book; then to their Lord they shall be mustered.”<sup>130</sup>

The maternal nature of the human community, and so of each member, which corresponds to the maternal nature of every living community, can be understood as pre-adaptation or openness to the realization of all the names received with creation. The maternal nature of all things other than human beings is partial, while the human principle alone is complete. In all other maternities, we recognize the levels through which we pass on our path back. None of them, and consequently no maternal nature in all of existence, may suffer any diminution of its claims on us, as these relate to our rising and return to the One. Deny this, and we block the upward path, being turned to descend and withdrawal from the Unconditioned with Whom alone, as the Real, redemption is possible.

In this way, we are presented with a holistic view of the Muslim intellectual tradition in its inseparability from witness of the Praised as the maternal prophet. This

maternity is the principle underlying the indivisibility of whatsoever exists from the One. It is with this maternal principle, as prior in the creation of existence, that distinct form both begins and is attained in the invisible and spiritual world. The visible world – the heavens and earth and whatever lies between them – consists of signs of the Invisible. The return of everything visible to its original principle is realization in primal maternity.

This expression comprises all living beings as revelations of the Living through the worlds. The messenger is, however, a mercy under the worlds. How is he the maternal principle for every maternal community? Not many answers are offered us to this question, but one may not be hard to find in the Recitation. This very possibility is, in fact, of crucial importance for the questions with which our discussion began. In the Recitation God says through the Praised: “Surely We have sent thee with the truth good tidings to bear, and warning; not a maternal community there is, but there has passed away in it a warner.”<sup>131</sup>

## NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Muslim, 1:2–3.
- <sup>2</sup> For the relationship of these traditional stories and the Muslim intellectual tradition, see: Murata, *The Vision of Islam*.
- <sup>3</sup> Muslim, 4:1397.
- <sup>4</sup> See Qur'an, 6:73.
- <sup>5</sup> Qur'an, 7:172–73.
- <sup>6</sup> On this phrase of the Praised, see: Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 396n22. See also chapter 19 for Ibn al-'Arabī's views on this and similar traditions.
- <sup>7</sup> The praised said: "God has ninety-nine names, i.e. one hundred minus one, and whoever knows them will go to Paradise." (Bukhari, 3:575)
- <sup>8</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī said this story "is sound as regards self discovery, but the path of transmission has not been confirmed" (*Al-Futūhāt al-makkiyya*, 2:399.28). See: Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 250–52. This particular story is found widely in Sufi discourse and writings. See also: Gibb, *A History of Ottoman Poetry*, 1:17.
- <sup>9</sup> Qur'an, 95:1–6.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:30.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:31–33.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 16:102.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 26:192–96.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 59:22–24.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūhāt al-makkiyya*, 3:376.26; cited after: Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 290. The quotation is from Muslim, 1:373.
- <sup>16</sup> See Qur'an, 43:12.
- <sup>17</sup> Qur'an, 3:83.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:3.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:162–63.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 17:85.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 20:114.
- <sup>22</sup> See Qur'an, 7:172.
- <sup>23</sup> Qur'an, 33:72.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 19:93.
- <sup>25</sup> Ghazālī, *Ihya' ulūm al-dīn*, 4:70.
- <sup>26</sup> See Qur'an, 65:12
- <sup>27</sup> Ghazālī, *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, 149.
- <sup>28</sup> Qur'an, 3:101.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 33:6.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:31.
- <sup>31</sup> 'Iraqi, *Divine Flashes*, 86.
- <sup>32</sup> See Qur'an, 26:192–95.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 16:102.
- <sup>34</sup> Qur'an, 70:4.
- <sup>35</sup> See Qur'an, 3:9 and 4:140.
- <sup>36</sup> Qur'an, 108:1–3.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 39:53.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 33:21.
- <sup>39</sup> See Qur'an, 39:11–12.
- <sup>40</sup> Through the Praised, God says of those who believe the Creator has less than full knowledge of them and that they can evade responsibility for their actions: "The thought you thought about your Lord has destroyed you" (Qur'an, 41:23).
- <sup>41</sup> See Qur'an, 37:96.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:38.
- <sup>43</sup> Qur'an, 53:9.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 17:81.
- <sup>45</sup> See Qur'an, 41:21.
- <sup>46</sup> See: Kulaynī, *Al-Usūl al-Kāfi*, 50. It is curious that the Bosnian word *Um*, which corresponds to the Greek *nous* and Latin *intellectus*, is so similar in form to the Arabic noun *umm* which means "mother."
- <sup>47</sup> See: Tabari, *The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1:198.

- <sup>48</sup> On the light of the Praised (*nūr muhammadī*) in the Muslim intellectual tradition see: Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam*.
- <sup>49</sup> Mulla Sadra, *The Wisdom of the Throne*, 149. On this well-known and much interpreted story, see: Furūzānfar, *Ahādīth-i Mathnawī*, 39. It is frequently associated with the following story: “They asked: ‘O messenger of God, when was it determined that you should be a prophet?’ And he replied: ‘While Adam was still between the Spirit and the body.’” (Tirmidhī, 5:585)
- <sup>50</sup> Ibn Hanbal, 4:66.
- <sup>51</sup> Qur’an, 15:21–25.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, 183.
- <sup>53</sup> See: Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy from its Origin to the Present*, 94.
- <sup>54</sup> Qur’an, 41:19.
- <sup>55</sup> See Qur’an, 6:38.
- <sup>56</sup> Qur’an, 4:131.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid., 42:28.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid., 64:1.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid., 28:70.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid., 15:98–99.
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid., 52:48–49.
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid., 47:2.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibid., 33:40.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid., 39:11–12.
- <sup>65</sup> Qur’an, 7:157. The Praised refers to his primacy as the maternal prophet in the creation of the world and return to the Creator. Liu Zhi refers to this maternity as “the heavenly nature of the Utmost Sage” (Murata, *The Sage Learning of Liu Zhi*, 8).
- <sup>66</sup> Qur’an, 3:82.
- <sup>67</sup> Ibn al-’Arabi, *al-Futūhāt al-makkiyya*, 3:363; in: Murata, *The Sage Learning of Liu Zhi*, 39.
- <sup>68</sup> According to the sacred tradition of the Day of Debt, God addressed him as he was prostrated before Him, saying: “Praised, raise up your head and speak, for you will be listened to; and ask, for you will be granted. And intercede, for your intercession will be accepted.” (Bukhari, 9:374)
- <sup>69</sup> See: Ibn Ishaq, *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, 69.
- <sup>70</sup> Qur’an, 19:93.
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid., 22:18.
- <sup>72</sup> See Qur’an, 5:32.
- <sup>73</sup> Qur’an, 20:50.
- <sup>74</sup> Ibid., 25:43–44.
- <sup>75</sup> Ibid., 45:13.
- <sup>76</sup> Bukhari, 3:107–108.
- <sup>77</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>78</sup> Qur’an, 3:9.
- <sup>79</sup> Ibid., 35:4.
- <sup>80</sup> See Qur’an, 15:85.
- <sup>81</sup> Ibid., 6:38.
- <sup>82</sup> Qur’an, 1:1–7.
- <sup>83</sup> The prophet the Praised said that there were seven more above and below the earthly Ka’ba. (See: Wüstenfeld, *Die Chroniken der Stadt Mekka*, 6, 1; cited in : Wensinck, “The Ideas of the Western Semites Concerning the Navel of the Earth”, 51–52.)
- <sup>84</sup> Qur’an, 5:105.
- <sup>85</sup> Ibid., 3:14.
- <sup>86</sup> Ibid., 5:96.
- <sup>87</sup> Ibid., 8:55–56.
- <sup>88</sup> Ibid., 112:1–4.
- <sup>89</sup> Ibid., 42:11.
- <sup>90</sup> Ibid., 17:1.
- <sup>91</sup> See John, 12:14.
- <sup>92</sup> See: Ibn Ishaq, *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, 182. The noun *al-burāq* is generally supposed to derive from the verbal root *b-r-q* (“to flash”, “light up”, “to shine” and so on), so that it may be translated as “lightning”, “a flash of light”, “a momentary flash” and so on.
- <sup>93</sup> On the symbolism of the corner stone in traditional science, see: Guénon, *Symboles de la Science sacré*, 260–73.

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- <sup>94</sup> Qur'an, 43:13.
- <sup>95</sup> Muslim, 1:373.
- <sup>96</sup> Rāzī, *The Path of God's Bondsmen from Origin to Return*, 78.
- <sup>97</sup> Qur'an, 32:7–9.
- <sup>98</sup> See Murata, *The Sage Learning of Liu Zhi*, 83.
- <sup>99</sup> Qur'an, 41:53.
- <sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 53:1–12.
- <sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:255.
- <sup>102</sup> See Qur'an, 25:58.
- <sup>103</sup> Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, 137.
- <sup>104</sup> See Murata, *The Sage Learning of Liu Zhi*, 429.
- <sup>105</sup> Chittick, *Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul*, 126.
- <sup>106</sup> Qur'an, 7:182.
- <sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 31:27.
- <sup>108</sup> See Murata, *The Sage Learning of Liu Zhi*, 221.
- <sup>109</sup> See Qur'an, 26:194.
- <sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 68:4.
- <sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 21:107.
- <sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 33:21.
- <sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 33:46.
- <sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:81.
- <sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:47.
- <sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 14:4.
- <sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 33:40.
- <sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 40:78; 4:164.
- <sup>119</sup> See Bayhaqī, 9:4, hadith no. 17,489.
- <sup>120</sup> Liu Zhi, a Chinese Muslim writer of the early 18th century, wrote: "What is recorded in the books of Islam (*tianfang*) is not different from what is in the Confucian canon. Observing and practicing the proprieties of Islam is like observing and practicing the teachings of the ancient sages and kings." (Liu Zhi, *Tianfang Dianli/Rules and proprieties of Islam*, 9; cited in: Murata, *The Sage Learning of Liu Zhi*, 7)
- <sup>121</sup> See Qur'an, 5:32.
- <sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:7; 13:39; 43:4.
- <sup>123</sup> Qur'an, 62:2–3.
- <sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:158.
- <sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:156–57.
- <sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:57.
- <sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:20.
- <sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:78.
- <sup>129</sup> The concept of "community", with the full range of meaning met in the Qur'an, refers back to an ancient Semitic root from which the Arabic noun *umma* derives. It is supposed to be related to the Akkadian *ummatu*, the Hebrew *umma*, and the Aramaic *umetha*. In the Qur'an, *umma* normally refers to the human community of the faithful, but also to: "any traditional collectivity of belief or values" (43:22–23); "a tribe" or "group" (7:164; 28:32); "an appointed or particular time" (11:8; 12:45); "example" (16:20); and "an animal species" (6:38). (See in: Denny, "The meaning of the *ummah* in the Qur'an")
- <sup>130</sup> Qur'an, 6:38.
- <sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 35:24. Earlier support for such an interpretation can be found, as can alternative opinions. See, for example: Foltz, "This she-camel of God is a sign to you": Dimensions of Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Culture", 151.

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