

The Shahadah as Truth and as Way

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The Shahadah and the Human Situation

Man, endowed with reason, is by nature a thinking being. In light of this, every tradition has recognized that the formation of man's thought – in terms of appropriate content, manner and concentration – is a matter of immense, even central, importance. A fundamental insight of the great sapiential traditions is that man's reason is insufficient of itself to address issues of transcendent concern, but rather must be informed by either revelation or intellection. In this way, a tradition teaches man how to “think rightly”; thus the emphasis of religions upon orthodoxy, from *orthodoxos* – having right thought or correct opinion. In a profound sense, the very purpose of the sapiential traditions is to convey sacred truths to man so that his thought and being might be shaped in light of those truths.

In Islam, the central truths of the Quranic revelation are Unity and Mercy. These two great themes, which both dominate and permeate the Islamic tradition, are given their most concise expression in the *Shahâdah*, the two statements that form the Islamic testification of faith. In reciting the Shahadah, the Muslim bears witness that “There is no god but God” (*lâ ilâha illâ 'Llâh*) and that “Muhammad is the messenger of God” (*Muhammadun rasûlu 'Llâh*).

The first statement of faith – termed the *tahlîl*, first *kalimah* or first Shahadah – describes the nature of reality as such, dominated by an essential Unity, by God as the sole deity. The Arabic word for God, *Allâh*, does not signify a deity with particular characteristics or for a particular people, but rather etymologically simply means “the God”. The name *Allâh* is particular to Arabic, but not particular to Islam; Yemeni Jews and Syriac Christians – who speak Arabic as their native tongue – have prayed to God as *Allâh* for centuries. In addition, the Quran is explicit that Allah is not a deity particular to either Arabs or Muslims, but is the One God, God of Abraham, Moses and Jesus and of all peoples.

The second statement of faith – the second *kalimah* or second Shahadah – illustrates God's essential Mercy, identifying Muhammad as the bearer of Divine guidance for the Islamic community. Here, there is no implication that Muhammad is the sole prophet, or messenger of God; rather, the Quran insists upon the universality of prophethood and upon the essential equivalence between prophets.

Given the primacy of thought in establishing the nature of man's volitive and active life, the nature and content of his thought essentially determines man; if he is purified or corrupted, he is so first in his thoughts. In the most basic sense, man *is* his thought; it is his thought that impels both his character and condition. As Jalâl al-Dîn Rûmî reminds us:

Brother, you are this very thought –
the rest of you is bones and fiber.
If roses are your thought, you are a rose garden,
if thorns, you are fuel for the furnace.
If rosewater, you will be sprinkled on the neck,
if urine, you will be dumped in a hole.¹

In this respect, the human being faces a double challenge: not only does reason in isolation lack intrinsic guidance with respect to matters of ultimate concern, but there are other forces – most notably passion and distraction – that are operative within man. The Quran characterizes these typical mental tendencies by the words heedlessness (*ghafla*) and forgetfulness (*nisyân*); in this, it recognizes that the fundamental problem of man is at root a problem of thought – of consciousness, attention and awareness.

To the degree that man's thought fails to conform to reality, to the degree that his mental tendencies render him insensate both to his true nature and vocation as well as to God, to that degree he is characterized by both heedlessness and forgetfulness. Man's attention is too often both circumscribed by the circle of his limited preoccupations and scattered outward in attraction to the phenomenal world. He is dominated by habits and passions that dull his intellect and disperse his will. Heedlessness and forgetfulness, far from being isolated in their significance, affect the whole of man. In a sense, these tendencies arise from the inherent multiplicity that man is immersed in; the very nature of the phenomenal world – its multifaceted glamour – bears the potentiality of leading man toward passionate dispersion.

Unity and the Adequation of Intelligence

In the face of the undirectedness of reason and the heedlessness and forgetfulness of passionate dispersion, the Shahadah serves to orient thought in harmony with the nature of the Real. The inherent content of the Shahadah serves as an integrative center for mental understanding, grounding man in the verities of his situation, acting as an anchor of certainty against confusion or dissipation. In a sense, forgetfulness and heedlessness represent a failure of thought; in this sense also, the inculcation of the Shahadah and its concomitant ramifications represent thought brought to its proper consummation.

The first Shahadah – “There is no god but God” (*lâ ilâha illâ 'Llâh*) – is a succinct summary of essential truth to which human thought may be conformed. Its words vehicle a meaning that is homologous to the most fundamental nature of reality, and these words, in their brevity, depth, precision, density and synthesis, have the capability of impacting their meaning upon human awareness, consciousness, mental structures and habits of thought in such a way as to effect human transformation.

Although man stands in need of the truth of Unity as expressed in the first Shahadah, it is a truth for which he already bears an inherent intuition. This fundamental truth of Unity – termed *tawhîd* in the Islamic tradition – is in a sense self-evident: it stands behind our expectations that the world is ordered and not chaotic, that it is comprehensible and not incoherent; it lies at the root of both our innate convictions and our formal sciences. This inherent intuition of Unity not only serves to confirm the truth of *tawhîd*, but also indicates the adequation of man's intelligence to the comprehension of the essential nature of the Real. Further, the very fact that the fundamental truth of Unity is taught to man in the first Shahadah implies that man's intelligence is adequate to grasp this truth:

The real nature of intelligence is ultimately to come to realize that *lâ ilâha illâ 'Llâh*, that is to come to know that in the end there is only one Absolute Reality. It is to realize the absolute nature of Allah and the relativity of all else that is other than He. Moreover, it is only this truth which the intelligence can know in an absolute sense.²

This adequation is necessarily predicated on the essential conformity of the human substance to reality, a conformity indicated in the Prophetic *hadîth*, “He who knows himself knows his Lord.” Thus the first Shahadah is in essence a reminder of what is already grasped by the innate human intellect, namely the truth of *tawhîd*.

The Shahadah as Viaticum

In Latin, the word *viaticum* refers at once to the provisions for a journey as well as to the Eucharist, or Word of God, particularly when given in danger of death. In an analogous sense, the Shahadah may be considered as a *viaticum*, as at once provision and Word. Thus, the second Shahadah, essentializing Prophetic guidance in the context of the Divine Mercy, is provision for man's spiritual life; the first Shahadah, essentializing the Divine Unity and containing the Divine Name, presents the Word to man. Alternatively, the Shahadah as a whole is at once provision and Word; indeed, the very provision of the Shahadah is in the Word and words that it bears.

Together, the two Shahadahs convey in essence what is of greatest import for man: the oneness of God and the reality of Divine guidance. In addition, the return of man to God is implicit in the statement of Divine unicity, while the proper modality of that return is implicit in the statement of Divine guidance. In this sense, the Shahadah – in its witnessing – is not only the most fundamental ritual act, but also serves as a summary statement encompassing the three domains of Islamic faith: oneness, prophethood and the return to God. This centrality of the Shahadah for both activity and faith is attested to in the saying of the Prophet, “I have brought nothing more important than the Shahadah.”

While the Shahadah essentializes both right activity and right faith, it also temporally encompasses and pervades the life of the Muslim. The first words that the child of Muslim parents will hear upon being born are those of the Shahadah, whispered as part of the call to prayer into his ear. The first words that a convert to Islam will say, the very words that mark his entry into the community, are those of the Shahadah, spoken before witnesses. The last words that a dying Muslim will speak on his deathbed are those of the Shahadah, reciting them repeatedly as he awaits his return to God. Five times each day, the Shahadah is called out from the minarets as part of the call to prayer, and is recited by every Muslim as part of the ritual prayer. The first Shahadah is often recited continually, either silently or aloud, both by Sufis and by other Muslims as a means of sustaining the remembrance of God.

The first Shahadah permeates the temporal experience of Muslim life, but it is radically atemporal in content, evoking a sense of timelessness and eternity. For man, immersed in multiplicity – in externalization, reification and fragmentation – the first Shahadah is a refuge that unifies the soul and draws it out of its inherent dispersion. It vicariously reestablishes the vision of man's true situation through impressing on the mind and heart that God is ultimately the sole reality, power and help. The concrete sense of the presence of the first Shahadah in Muslim life is eloquently described in the following passage:

To understand how decisive this formula is one must observe the place it occupies in the life of the ordinary Muslim, who will pronounce these words in every crisis and at every moment when the world threatens to overwhelm him, as he will when death approaches. A pious man, seized by rage, will appear suddenly to have been stopped in his tracks as he remembers the Shahadah and, as it were, withdraws, putting a great distance between himself and his turbulent emotions. A woman crying in childbirth will as suddenly fall silent, remembering; and a student, bowed anxiously over his desk in an examination hall, will raise his head and speak these words, and a barely audible sigh of relief passes through the whole assembly. This is the ultimate answer to all questions.³

Between Submission and Faith

Just as right thought is a necessary precondition for right activity, so the Shahadah is at once the first and most essential ritual activity as well as the necessary precondition for Islamic ritual engagement and religious life generally. The witnessing of the Shahadah both defines a given

individual as a Muslim and binds that individual to the observance, in principle, of the other Islamic rites; the acceptance of both the reality of God and the guidance brought by the Prophet carries with it the inherent demand to draw out all of its implications for worship and servanthood. Through its acceptance, the Shahadah informs all the other Pillars of Islamic ritual practice – prayer, fasting, charity and pilgrimage: without the underlying truths enunciated by the Shahadah, they would be meaningless and without purpose. In addition, the Shahadah serves as a decisive threshold that an individual crosses over, the function of which is to strengthen and confirm the will towards the new end that has been embraced by the soul.

The Islamic tradition distinguishes between the categories of right activity (*islâm*) and right faith (*îmân*). Strictly speaking, to be a Muslim implies engaging in right activity, as embodied in the Pillars and more generally in the guidance of the Quran and the Prophet; it does not strictly imply right faith. The Quran speaks of this in the context of a particular incident:

The Bedouins say, “We have faith.” Say, “You do not have faith. Rather say, ‘We have submitted,’ for faith has not yet entered your hearts. If you obey God and His messenger, He will not diminish you anything of your works.” (49:14)

The faith of an individual is intrinsically private, known only to himself and God; when a man once questioned the faith of another Muslim, the Prophet’s sharp response was, “Did you open the heart and look?” The Pillars, embedded within the realm of human activity, do not directly engage the realm of faith, which is the realm of the heart itself. Yet, the very reason for the Pillars is to enable the heart to be purified so that faith may enter into it and be strengthened in it. The Shahadah itself lies within the domain of activity, corresponding to right speech or “the work of the tongue.” At the same time, the Shahadah is directly concerned with the domain of faith and directly enunciates the essential content of faith. In this way, the Shahadah works to bind faith with activity at the very root of Islamic *praxis*.

Another means by which the “right activity” of the Pillars is coupled to “right faith” is through the *niyyah*, or formal statement of intentionality that precedes each rite. In pronouncing the *niyyah*, the Muslim states his intention to worship only for the sake of God and for no other end; in this way, the *niyyah* serves to both gather the attention and orient the heart. Every pillar is preceded by its appropriate *niyyah*, except for the Shahadah itself; the Shahadah incorporates the *niyyah* and is its own *niyyah*, and this is true of no other pillar. Just as the other pillars are meaningless without the truths embodied in the Shahadah, so the *niyyah* is impossible without the acceptance of the Shahadah and the essential truths that it bears. Just as the Shahadah incorporates the *niyyah*, so the *niyyah* implicitly bears the Shahadah within it, since it acknowledges both the reality and unicity of God as well as the guidance of God brought by the Prophet in the context of the specific rite that it addresses.

Thus, when a Muslim states his intention to “pray *salât* for the sake of Allah and Allah alone,” he implicitly bears witness to both the unity of God and the guidance of the Prophet, of which the *salât*, or ritual prayer, is a part. Even when the Shahadah itself is not integrated into a given rite, as it is in the *salât*, still, the *niyyah* serves as a kind of spoken echo of the silent presence of the Shahadah as it accompanies the rite. As indicated in the Quranic passage above, the Islamic tradition often denotes right faith as a further level of human maturation beyond that of right activity or submission to God. Nevertheless, the fact that the Shahadah is the first pillar to be embraced and the one that defines a Muslim as such, while the *niyyah* is spoken prior to each rite, indicates that right faith, at least in a nascent sense, precedes right activity. Ultimately and practically, activity and faith cannot be truly separated, except conceptually; the Shahadah, in its close association of both, bears witness to this.

The Metaphysics of the Shahadah

The Quran, in its language, is traditionally understood to be miraculous; the Shahadah, which may be taken as the quintessence of the Quranic message, possesses, in its phrasing, a miraculous quality of its own, yielding an interpretive richness and depth that belies its brevity. From its few words, there spring a profusion of inherent meanings – to ask which of these meanings is “correct” is to miss the point; the Shahadah, like a faceted gem, may be viewed from a variety of perspectives, each of which displays a certain aspect of the whole, none of which is exhaustive. Since knowledge of God is an “ocean without shore,” the Shahadah cannot be reduced to a flat, monolithic understanding: its very adequation to the task of bearing such essentialized knowledge – a task assigned by revelation itself – demands that it be open to the richness of the Divine Self-disclosure. Just as a religious tradition must possess the capability to address diverse human capacities and temperaments, so the Shahadah, in its inherent polyvalency of meaning, is able to address the whole of the diverse spectrum of human types and possibilities, for “We shall test no soul save to its capacity.” (23:62)

Unity and its Ramifications

As discussed above, the content of the first Shahadah – “no god but God” – is termed the doctrine of *tawhîd*, or the unity of God. The word *tawhîd* does not simply mean “one” or “unity” as does the related noun *wâhid*; rather, *tawhîd* is the verbal noun of the verb *wahhada* and signifies “asserting one,” “declaring one” or “making one.” To say that “there is no god but God” may be understood on several levels. Most immediately, *tawhîd* signifies a straightforward assertion of monotheism and refutation of polytheism. In addition, other levels of meaning may be brought out by a consideration of what might constitute a “god”. The Quran addresses this issue with particular clarity in two passages: “And We never sent a messenger before thee save that We revealed to him, saying, ‘There is no god but I, so worship Me’,” (21:25) and “Have you seen him who has taken his own caprice to be his god?” (25:43) Here, a “god” is identified as what one worships, and such a “god” is not necessarily an external deity or idol, but may be something as internalized as one’s own caprice. In this sense, even the committed atheist may “worship” and be in thrall to the “god” of nationalism, democracy, technology or any of the other shibboleths that men give their souls to, not to mention the far more intimate “gods” of lust, wealth and power. The statement of *tawhîd* denies through the phrase “no god” the ultimate reality or claim of those “gods” that are social, psychological or imaginary in character and asserts through the phrase “but God”, the One God, who is ontologically real and holds true claim to the human heart.

Ultimately, the term “god” in the declaration of *tawhîd* may be taken to apply to anything claiming independent existence or qualities. Just as the Prophet asserted that, “There is no power and no strength but in God, ” so the Quran states, “Oh people, you are the dependent upon God, and God – He is the Independent, the Praiseworthy” (35:15). In short, everything in the cosmos, in so much as it is inherently perceived through the veil of multiplicity as self-existent and independent, is a “god” that is denied by *tawhîd*, which asserts the vision of unity, of God as the source of all qualities and the sole Existent and Real. Thus, “there is no god but God” was modified by some members of the Islamic intellectual tradition to read “there is nothing existent but God” (*lâ maujûda illâ 'Llâh*). In this sense, the phrase “no god” (*lâ ilâha*) indicates the annihilation of all phenomena as self-existent, while the phrase “but God” (*illâ 'Llâh*) indicates the subsistence of all phenomena through God. As the Quran reminds us, “Everything upon the earth is undergoing annihilation, but there subsists the Face of your Lord, Possessor of Majesty

and Generous Giving.” (55:26-7) God is the “Possessor of Majesty” in that, ultimately, He is the only Real; God is the “Possessor of Generous Giving” in that He bestows contingent reality upon the creation.⁴ Far from denying the existence of the created world, the declaration of *tawhîd* in the first Shahadah rather insists on acknowledging the world as created, as finding its ultimate ground in God.

We ourselves, as phenomena in the domain of multiplicity, are subject to the truth of *tawhîd*. The surprising consequence of this situation is that we cannot affirm *tawhîd* without embracing inherent contradiction, since the very act of affirmation implies the duality of subject and object. As the Sufî Ansârî of Herat pointedly remarks, “None has affirmed the Unity of the One, since all who affirm it deny it.”⁵ To say “I bear witness that there is no god but God” (*ashhadu an lâ ilâha illâ 'Llâh*) is to arrogate to oneself the capacity to truly say “I”; but ultimately, God is the only “I”, just as God is the sole Existent. As the Quran states, “God bears witness that there is no god but He” (3:16). In other words, *tawhîd* necessarily embraces both the objective and subjective poles of existence – both unity of being (*wahdat al-wujûd*) and unity of witnessing (*wahdat al-shuhûd*).⁶ In this respect, the Islamic spiritual tradition refers to a realized sage not as a knower of God, but as a knower by or through God (*'ârîf bi 'Llâh*). In a more mundane sense, the doctrine of the unity of witnessing asserts that all knowledge, all witnessing, is ultimately through God. As the Quran states, “Vision grasps Him not, but He grasps vision” (16:104). The full statement of the first Shahadah in the testimony of faith binds these two perspectives together; the unity of witnessing is denoted in the phrase “I witness that” (*ashhadu an*), whereas the unity of being is denoted in the phrase “there is no god but God” (*lâ ilâha illâ 'Llâh*).

While the doctrines of unity of witnessing and unity of being address the fundamental subject-object polarity inherent in experience, they may also be viewed as specific examples of the general situation in which all manifested qualities find their root in God. Thus, “The Witness” (*ash-Shahîd*) and “The Real” (*al-Haqq*) – corresponding to God as subject and object, respectively – are merely two of the many Divine names found in the Quran that denote the manifested Divine qualities. The first Shahadah was often reformulated by the Islamic intellectual tradition in terms of specific Divine qualities, such as mercy or power, resulting in such formulas as “There is no mercy but the All-Merciful (*ar-Rahmân*),” or “There is no power but the All-Powerful (*al-Qâdir*).” In this way, the deep implications of meaning embedded in the first Shahadah were drawn out by the tradition far beyond the simple claim of monotheism to encompass a profound understanding of God as the source and ground of all being, all knowledge and all qualities.

Guidance and the Messenger

Just as the other Islamic rites are meaningless outside of the context of the truths embodied in the first and second Shahadahs, so the second Shahadah does not stand alone, but is predicated on the first Shahadah. Only when the truth of God as the sole divinity and real is established may the function of Divine guidance be addressed. Thus, when a Muslim witnesses to the truths of the two Shahadahs, the declaration of the first Shahadah necessarily precedes that of the second; this verbal ordering is reflective of the actual ontological ordering in which God precedes the Prophet, and in which reality precedes guidance. The form of the second Shahadah – “Muhammad is the messenger of God” (*Muhammadun rasûlu 'Llâh*) – points to this predication in the first Shahadah through its final word, “God”. From God comes the function of guidance reflected in the word “messenger” (*rasûl*), and this guidance is particularized in the Islamic tradition in “Muhammad”. Thus, in its formulation, the second Shahadah reaches backwards from the absolute to the contingent, from the universal to the particular, from the

eternal to the temporal – from the absolute reality of God (*Allâh*), to the universal function of messengership (*rasûl*), to the specific role of Muhammad.

The declaration that “Muhammad is the messenger of God” carries a number of distinct connotations. Most immediately, as mentioned above, the second Shahadah acknowledges the reality of Divine guidance for man, guidance that has been historically embodied – as taught in the Quran and as evident in history – in the Divinely appointed messengers sent to different human communities.⁷ The second Shahadah, then, identifies Muhammad as a messenger appointed by God; the community to which he has been appointed is evident from context as the historical community of Islam.

Muhammad, as messenger, is the bearer of guidance for his community most immediately through his being the recipient of the Quranic guidance itself. In addition, he is recognized by the tradition as the embodiment, in his inner nature and lived example, of that guidance; as his wife ‘Â’ishah stated, “His character was the Quran,” while the Quran asserts, “You have a beautiful example in the messenger of God for whosoever hopes for God and the Last Day, and remembers God often.” (33:21) The Prophet, in his embodiment of the Quranic guidance, is, for Muslims, the foremost exemplar of the normative human state, and for this reason, the emulation of the Prophet has always been close to the heart of Islamic piety and spirituality. The sayings (*ahadîth*), activities and manner of comportment of the Prophet, collectively referred to as his *Sunnah*, were meticulously recorded by the early Islamic community, serving as the basis by which a Muslim might participate in the Prophetic example – an example that encompasses Islamic ritual and devotional life generally.⁸

The Marriage of Wisdom and Method

Taken together, the two Shahadahs comprise an essential summary and resolution of our human situation. Immersed within the domain of multiplicity with its diverse qualitative possibilities, we often take the things of this world, including ourselves, as self-existent and ultimately real, while also tending to wander in the space of possibilities open to us. The first Shahadah reminds us that the reality of the world is fundamentally contingent upon God, the one and absolute reality; the second Shahadah reminds us of those human possibilities that lead both to God and to human felicity. The first Shahadah is essentially static and ontological, whereas the second Shahadah is essentially dynamic and soteriological. The first Shahadah, in its claim to absoluteness and unicity, vertically pierces through the veil of multiplicity, whereas the second Shahadah, through its evocation of the Prophetic function, horizontally guides the soul within the very domain of multiplicity. The first Shahadah is like a lightning flash that illumines a dark plain; the second Shahadah is like a narrow road that is thereby made visible.

The two Shahadahs are at once an adequate essentialization of both a true metaphysics and an efficacious soteriology, and in this respect stand in direct contrast to modernity, which has rejected metaphysics and is insensate to soteriology. The entirety of the Islamic sciences may be viewed as the unfoldment and adumbration of the implications of the two Shahadahs, in terms of the intellectual and realizative traditions and the juridical and ethical traditions, respectively. In this sense, the Islamic tradition may be seen metaphorically as a flowering tree that has grown from the two Shahadahs, which respectively contain, seedlike, the summation of those metaphysical truths and soteriological ways pertinent to the tradition.

The Shahadah at once confronts man and means to transform him; in their meeting, the partitioning of the Shahadah may be seen to providentially conform to the natural distinctions of the interiority of man, recognized traditionally as consisting of intellect, will and virtue. The first Shahadah, as the bearer of essential truth, informs man’s intellect; the second Shahadah, as the

bearer of essential guidance, informs man's will and virtue.⁹ The ordering of the two Shahadahs reflects the primacy of the function of intellect in man,¹⁰ while their conjoining corresponds to the conjoining of doctrine and practice – of *orthodoxos* and *orthopraxis* – in “the marriage of wisdom and method.”¹¹

Discrimination and Conformity

In respect of man's interiority, both Shahadahs deal with discrimination: the first Shahadah discriminates between the Real and the unreal; the second Shahadah discriminates between moral beauty and moral ugliness, between felicity and wretchedness. In this respect also, both Shahadahs deal with conformation: the discrimination of the intellect between the Real and the unreal *is* the conformity of the intellect to the Real; the “discrimination” of the will and virtue – if we may employ such an expression – makes possible the conformity of the will and virtue to beauty and felicity. In a sense, both Shahadahs address distinctions between greater or lesser existence: the first Shahadah addresses the absolute distinction between absolute existence and contingent existence, Unity and multiplicity; the second Shahadah addresses the relative distinction, within contingent existence, between guidance and misguidance, felicity and wretchedness, Mercy and Wrath. Just as the Divine Unity possesses a greater degree of reality than the multiplicity of creation, so, within the created order, Mercy possesses a greater degree of reality than Wrath; thus the *hadith qudsi*, “My Mercy has precedence over my Wrath.”

In respect of man's knowledge of God, the two Shahadahs may be seen as indicative of the fundamental conjoining of *kataphatic* and *apophatic* knowing – of saying and unsaying – inherent in the very nature of the Divine Self-disclosure. The first Shahadah may be interpreted as essentially an *apophatic* statement: all positive, knowable qualities are stripped from our conception (*la ilaha*), and we are left with only a name (*Allah*) signifying the Divinity as such. The second Shahadah, in contrast, may be seen as an entirely *kataphatic* statement: God (*Allah*) speaks of Himself and delivers his recitation, his Quran, to man, through the intermediary (*rasul*) of the Prophet (*Muhammad*).

Unity and Mercy, Transcendence and Immanence

The two Shahadahs may also be viewed from each of the two interrelated perspectives of transcendence and immanence.¹² Viewed with an eye towards transcendence, the first Shahadah denotes God as absolute and transcendent, while the second Shahadah denotes God's creative and merciful act in the manifestation of creation. Viewed with an eye towards immanence, the first Shahadah denotes God as at once transcendent *and* immanent, while the second Shahadah denotes God's guidance and mercy as operative in creation. Essentially, there is Unity and there is Mercy, and the conjoining of Unity/Mercy characterizes the fundamental nature of things; the two perspectives considered above place the demarcation between Unity and Mercy in slightly different locations, the first giving emphasis to ontology, in which the creative act itself is an essential act of mercy, the second giving emphasis to the human situation, in which mercy is viewed within creation; in this respect, the mention of Muhammad in the second Shahadah may be understood to refer at once to both the Prophet and the function of revelation, as well as to the creation itself, of which Muhammad is, in a sense, the plenary symbol.

Either demarcation between Unity and Mercy is necessarily indefinite: in reality, Unity and Mercy are bound up together and are subject to no such division, a fact that is reflected in the very binding together of the two Shahadahs. Put another way, to say absoluteness is to imply infinitude; the transcendent Unity by its very nature effulges into multiplicity and in that effulgence of creation, we find the essential Mercy of God. It is here that we find the mystery of

the Hidden Treasure: “I was a Hidden Treasure and I loved to be known, so I created the creatures that I might be known.”¹³

Another means of approaching the conjoined meaning of the two Shahadahs is through the traditional metaphor of existence as an image in a mirror,¹⁴ in which the object reflected is real whereas the image, in comparison, is unreal; in this sense, “there is no god but God.” However, the image, while possessing only an illusory and contingent reality, is nevertheless a true image of the object reflected; in this sense, “Muhammad is the messenger of God.” The first Shahadah denotes the provisional reality of the image; the second Shahadah denotes the perfection of the image as a symbol of the reality that it reflects. In this respect, according to a *hadith*, “No one sees God who has not first seen his Prophet.” The metaphysical understanding of created existence – suspended between relative unreality and symbolic transparency, between negation and perfection – is only complete when both Shahadahs are considered. The Quran further clarifies this understanding in two key verses: “Everything upon the earth is undergoing annihilation, but there subsists the Face of your Lord,” (55:26) which witnesses to the provisional reality of existence denoted by the first Shahadah, and “We shall show them our signs on the horizons and in themselves until it is clear to them that He is the Real,” (41:53) which points to the symbolic perfection of existence denoted by the second Shahadah.

The Islamic intellectual tradition makes use of the terms *tanzih* and *tashbih*, respectively, to describe the incomparability or similarity of God with respect to creation. The first Shahadah is the decisive statement of *tanzih*, of abstraction, distinction and incomparability; the second Shahadah is the decisive statement of *tashbih*, of analogy, integration and similarity.¹⁵ And yet to say *tanzih* is to also say *tashbih*, since the world is, and the perspective of God as incomparable demands as corollary that God be similar to the created existence of which He is the sole cause and source. Likewise, to say *tashbih* is also to say *tanzih*, since God is the Real, and the perspective of God as similar to contingent existence demands as corollary that He stand incomparably beyond it. Put more concisely, there is at once similarity *and* incomparability; there is neither absolute difference nor absolute identity. The unicity of God – *tawhid* – must necessarily be grasped as the integration of the perspectives of *tanzih* and *tashbih*, incomparability and similarity, transcendence and immanence.¹⁶ The perspective of *tanzih* is that of *exclusive* unicity; the perspective of *tashbih* is that of *inclusive* unicity.¹⁷ In this way, the two Shahadahs, as reflective of these two conjoined perspectives, are of necessity bound together as a concise yet comprehensive statement of *tawhid*.

The Mystery of He / not He

The first Shahadah, taken in a more compressed sense, may be seen to witness at once to both *tanzih* and *tashbih* through its partition into the *nafy*, or negation – corresponding to *lâ ilâha* (“no god”) – and the *ithbât*, or confirmation – corresponding to *illâ 'Llâh* (“but God”).¹⁸ The *nafy* asserts the transcendence and incomparability of God with respect to created existence, whereas the *ithbât* asserts God’s immanence and similarity. Here, the field of *lâ* and *illâ* – of “no” and “if not” – to which the Shahadah is addressed is that of created existence: “no god” is present in creation because He is transcendent, “but God” is present in creation because He is immanent. This dual witnessing to transcendence and immanence is reflected in a phrase employed by Ibn ‘Arabî – *huwa lâ huwa*, He/not He.¹⁹ The answer to whether the created order is real must of metaphysical necessity be “Yes and no,” since it is at once God and other than God. Here, *lâ ilâha* corresponds to *lâ huwa* (“not He”), whereas *illâ 'Llâh* corresponds to *huwa* (“He”). Viewed from a slightly different perspective, if the “Yes and no” is reexpressed as “No, but yes” we find the *ilâha* of the first Shahadah, balanced between the “no” of the *lâ* and the “but

yes” of the *illâ 'Llâh*. In this sense, *ilâha* – “god” – may be understood positively as *huwa lâ huwa* (or more precisely as *lâ huwa huwa* – not He/He) which is the character of creation as such, suspended between the Divine and nonexistence. The one perspective places the locus of the simultaneity of He/not He in the entirety of the first Shahadah, whereas the other places it in the *ilâha*.

From the human perspective, the first Shahadah must of necessity begin with a negation (*nafy*) and proceed to an affirmation (*ithbât*), given man’s inherent false affirmation, or reification, with respect to the world: the negation counters this false affirmation and clears the ground for a true affirmation regarding the Real; as such, the negation necessarily precedes this second, true affirmation. From the perspective of ontology, however, there is no sequentiality with respect to negation and affirmation: rather, there is of necessity a simultaneous juxtaposition or superposition of both, since things are, in themselves, at once not God and God. The very nature of language imposes a sequential understanding of the first Shahadah, since the words must be taken in one at a time, rather than as a simultaneous whole; nevertheless, the very brevity of the *lâ ilâha illâ 'Llâh* may be seen as an approximation to simultaneity within the sequential bounds of language. One concomitant of this simultaneity of negation and affirmation is that the inverse of the evident understanding of the first Shahadah arrives at the same understanding: in the sense taken above, everything is not god (*lâ ilâha*), since things possess no independent self-existence, but everything also is God (*illâ 'Llâh*), since the Divine Being pervades all that is; taken inversely, everything is not god (*illâ 'Llâh*), since only the Divine Being is self-existent, but everything also is God (*lâ ilâha*), since the world is, but cannot be so by virtue of its own self-existence.

Parallels between illâ and rasûl

In one sense, the second Shahadah, which points to the manifestation of created existence from the Divine absolute, may be seen to be implicit in the *illâ* (“if not”) of the first Shahadah, which, as it were, opens the conditional possibility for this manifestation.²⁰ In another sense, the *illâ* of the first Shahadah and the *rasûl* (“messenger”) of the second Shahadah form a complementary pairing: the function of *illâ* ascends from created existence upwards toward God; the function of *rasûl* descends from God downwards toward created existence. In this latter case, we must consider not only *rasûl* but also *risâlah*, the message, which is not only the Quran but also the cosmos itself, for the verses (*âyât*) of the Book have their direct counterparts in the signs (*âyât*) of the manifest world.

The *illâ* of the first Shahadah is grammatically constructed from a conditional,²¹ *in* (“if”), and a negation, *lâ* (“not”), in which the conditional faces relative reality (*lâ ilâha*) and the negation faces absolute Reality (*Allâh*).²² The *illâ* stands between the two realities and is a *barzakh* – an isthmus – that at once separates and conjoins them. Viewed from the side of absolute Reality, the negation *lâ* of the *illâ* denotes the ultimate unreality of created existence in the Face of the Absolute; viewed from the side of relative reality, the conditional *in* denotes the absolute Reality as prefiguring the conditional possibility of created existence. The *rasûl* of the second Shahadah evokes the two complementary relationships that stand at its heart: that of vicegerent (*khalîfah*) and servant (*‘abd*). With respect to absolute Reality, the *rasûl* is the perfected servant and is, in a sense, effaced in the Face of the Absolute; with respect to creation, the *rasûl* is the perfected vicegerent and is the representative of the Absolute in creation. These two relationships – servanthood and vicegerency – are, as it were, the human ramifications of *tanzîh* and *tashbîh*, respectively;²³ in other words, the structure of the Prophetic function – which, in respect of servanthood and vicegerency, is that of man as such – is a reflection of the structure of the Real.

Thus, *lâ* finds its parallel in *‘abd*, *in* finds its parallel in *khalîfah*; the *illâ* is the *barzakh* between realities, the *rasûl* is the *pontifex* between them.

Parallels between ilâha and Muhammad

This consideration may also be extended to the *lâ ilâha* of the first Shahadah and the *Muhammad* of the second Shahadah. Here, *Muhammad* – in reference to the Prophet, who is viewed traditionally as a “beautiful example” (33:21) and a “mercy for the worlds” (21:107) – may be understood as a plenary symbol of all that is positive in creation. In contrast, *lâ ilâha* refers to the whole of creation, both positive and negative; the *lâ* (“no”) is absolute negation and the absence of God, whereas the *ilâha* (“god”) is the symbolic reflection of the Divine in the created order. Creation, understood traditionally as hierarchically stratified into degrees of reality, is bounded between these two limits, recognized respectively as the domains of Wrath and Mercy, of separation from and nearness to God. According to a *hadîth qudsî*, “My Mercy has precedence over My Wrath.” This “precedence” bears ontological implications, in that that which falls under the domain of Mercy is more *real* than that which falls under the domain of Wrath; in this respect, evil and ugliness are privations not only of the good and the beautiful, but also of reality and of God. In this sense, *Muhammad* finds its parallel in *ilâha*:²⁴ both pertain to the Divine Mercy, for Mercy (*Rahmah*) is the nearest attribute to God. Muhammad, as Prophet, at once clarifies the domains of Mercy and Wrath for man while being himself necessitated by that very ontological Mercy that he demarcates in human terms.

Just as Unity encompasses both transcendence and immanence, both absoluteness and infinitude, so Mercy is inherent both in the cosmogonic act – since existence is itself a mercy – as well as in the return to God. Mercy is like the breathing of Unity, the outbreath of infinitude giving existence to the creation, the inbreath of absoluteness drawing all things back to God. From the human perspective, the outbreath is the creation of man in the Divine form, the inbreath is the Divine guidance given to man to assist his actualizing of the form, which is precisely the journey of return for man; put another way, with respect to man the outbreath is indeterminateness and possibility, the inbreath is integration and conformation. The conjoining of these two poles of Mercy is reflected in the *hadîth qudsî*, “If it were not for you [Muhammad], I would not have created the worlds.” Here, the full breath of Mercy is present, both the inbreath of Prophetic necessity and the outbreath of Divine creation.²⁵

The first Shahadah may be seen to bear a double discrimination, one nested, as it were, within the other: it distinguishes not only between God as absolute Reality (*Allâh*) and created existence as relative unreality (*lâ ilâha*), but also distinguishes, within created existence, between that which is less relatively real (*lâ*) and that which is more relatively real (*ilâha*). Each of the four elements of the first Shahadah may, in fact, be seen as a progression of ever increasing reality, beginning with the absolute unreality of the *lâ*, to the plenary contingent reality of the *ilâha*, to the effulgence into contingent reality of the *illâ*, to the absolute Reality of the *Allâh*.²⁶ In a stronger sense, the relationship between the domain of Mercy and the domain of Wrath may be seen to precisely parallel, on a lower ontological level, the relationship between absolute Reality and relative or contingent reality. In this respect, the Quran asserts “I strike with my chastisement whom I will, but My mercy embraces all things.” (7:156) Just as the Absolute precedes, encompasses and dominates over the relative, so Mercy does so with respect to Wrath; once again, there is ultimately only Unity and Mercy – all else is contingent upon them.

The First Shahadah and Human Possibilities

The parallel between *Muhammad* and *ilâha* bears specifically human ramifications, given the traditional understanding of the central state of man in creation. According to a *hadîth*, “God

[Allah] created Adam upon His own form (*sûrah*)"; the Quran, expressing the same truth mythopoetically, affirms "He taught Adam the names, all of them." (2:31) The specific task of man is to actualize that which he bears potentially, and in so doing become perfected as a vicegerent (*khalîfah*), as a representative – or representation – of God in the creation. The symbolic representation of the Divine form in creation is precisely the positive meaning of *ilâha* with respect to man, and it is this that Muhammad, as the paradigm of human perfection, represents. The role of man is to transform himself – with the grace of God and the example of the Prophet – from an admixture of *lâ* and *ilâha*, of negation and plenary representation, into an *ilâha*, thereby fulfilling the form of his creation.

We have denoted above that both *in* ("if") and *ilâha* ("god") may be interpreted as indicative of the function of vicegerency. Both, in fact, must be taken together if this function is to be properly understood: the *in* denotes the contingent possibility, with respect to God, of the Divine representation; the *ilâha* denotes the perfection of the represented form. Similarly, both the *lâ* ("not") of the *illâ* and *Allâh* must be taken together if the function of servanthood is to be properly understood: the *lâ* denotes the negation or effacement of one's being and qualities; the *Allâh* denotes the Absolute, the source of all being and qualities, to which servanthood is oriented. The *lâ* must be taken together with *Allâh* since servanthood is only conceivable with respect to Lordship; taken in its ultimate sense, in the mystery of the *lâ 'Llâh* there is at once absence from self and presence with God.

There remains the initial *lâ*, which stands alone as a singular negation: whereas both vicegerency and servanthood stand in relation to the Absolute, the initial *lâ* is outside of such relation. This initial *lâ* is placed in diametric opposition to the final *Allâh*, while also standing in contrast to the second *lâ* of the *illâ*; if *Allâh* indicates true Lordship and the second *lâ* indicates true servanthood, then the initial *lâ* might be said to indicate "false lordship". Both false lordship and true servanthood – indicated by *lâ* – are negations, but the negation of the second *lâ*, through its association with *Allâh*, is paradoxically full, while the negation of the first *lâ* is simply empty. The negation of the initial *lâ* stands maximally distant from the plenitude of the final *Allâh*, and is, in a sense, its inverse. This false lordship is at once an arrogation and reification of the self in respect of God, and is the natural concomitant of heedlessness and forgetfulness. It is the all too common human state, although certainly not the normative one; it could be said that the existential fact of the initial *lâ* necessitates the revelation of the entirety of *lâ ilâha illâ 'Llâh*.

In the false lordship of the *lâ*, the vicegerency of the *ilâha in*, and the servanthood of the *lâ 'Llâh* we find in summary the entirety of human possibilities. Further, these are ordered by the first Shahadah with respect to rank and contingency: vicegerency is only possible through servanthood, which stands as the highest human possibility, whereas false lordship, the lowest possibility is contingent upon the inherent function of vicegerency and is, in a sense, its radical misappropriation.

The Interpenetration of the Two Shahadahs

The first Shahadah is most evidently a statement regarding the cosmos, just as the second Shahadah is most evidently a statement regarding paradigmatic man. Nevertheless, as the above considerations have demonstrated, the first Shahadah may also be understood from the perspective of man, just as the second Shahadah may be understood from the perspective of the cosmos, while both exhibit close parallelisms with respect to one another. This remarkable openness of the Shahadah to the intermixing of these two perspectives is reflected in the traditional understanding of the relationship between man and the cosmos, in which the cosmos, taken in its entirety, is the macrocosm or macroanthropos, whereas man is the microcosm or

microanthropos.²⁷ Both reflect the Divine form, the one in a dispersed and passive mode, and the other in a concentrated and active mode. This combination of parallelism and polarity marks the relationship between the cosmos and man, just as, in a general sense, it may also be said to mark the relationship between the two Shahadahs.

Similarly, although the first Shahadah primarily addresses metaphysics, while the second Shahadah primary addresses soteriology, viewed from another angle, both Shahadahs deal at once with both domains. Both Shahadahs, in their full testification, begin with *ashhadu an* – “I witness that” – while both end with *Allâh*; as such, both span the expanse between man and God. Taken from left to right,²⁸ the two Shahadahs denote the soteriological movement from man to God. Thus, in the first Shahadah, the saving act of the intellect is to negate the naïve conception of the world as opaque and self-subsistent (*lâ ilâha*) and affirm the truth of the overwhelming reality of God in the Face of which the world is at once transparent and contingent (*illâ 'Llâh*); in the second Shahadah, the saving act of the will and virtue is to assimilate oneself to the Muhammadan paradigm (*Muhammad*) and in so doing, realize one’s nature *in potentia* as both servant and vicegerent (*rasûl*) in respect of God (*Allâh*). Taken from right to left, the two Shahadahs denote the cosmogonic and revelatory movements, respectively, from God to man. Thus, in the first Shahadah, the creative act of God (*Allâh*), which, paradoxically, is necessary for the very comprehensiveness of His Unity, is the essential and eternally renewed cosmogonic act (*illâ*) of creation (*ilâha*) from nothingness (*lâ*); in the second Shahadah, the revelatory act of God (*Allâh*), which is necessary for the primacy of His Mercy, is through the function of message and messenger (*rasûl*), instantiated in the Prophet (*Muhammad*). This dual movement, at once from man to God and from God to man, recalls the *hadîth qudsî*, “...And if he takes one step towards Me, I take ten steps towards him. And if he comes to Me walking, I go towards him running.”

The Methodic Use of the Shahadah

If the common human situation is one characterized by heedlessness (*ghafla*) and forgetfulness (*nisyân*), the Divine response is that of reminder (*dhikra*), a term that also refers to the Quran itself. Central to the Quranic message is the exhortation of man to *dhikr* – meaning remembrance, mention and invocation. The intended human response to the Divine reminder is remembrance, and this remembrance is precisely the conformity of human thought, attention and awareness to man’s actual existential situation in the Face of God. The Quran speaks of this in many verses: “Oh you who have faith! Remember God often, and glorify Him at dawn and in the evening”; (33:41) “The remembrance of God is far greater.” (29:45) As the above meanings of *dhikr* imply, this remembrance is effected through mention and invocation: as the Prophet said, “Let your tongue stay moist with the remembrance of God,” while the Quran, in several verses, exhorts man to “the mention of God’s name” (*dhikr ism Allâh*).

The practice of invocation is central to Islamic spirituality,²⁹ as it is to that of every other sapiential tradition.³⁰ The foundational necessity for the practice of remembrance lies in the absolute and all-encompassing nature of the Divine Itself: as a Totality, God is ineffably absent but also totally present to us; this absoluteness and totality of presence demands as the necessary human response that man in turn become totally present to God; in this respect, the act of remembrance is, according to Ibn ‘Arabî, precisely that of having “presence with the One Remembered,”³¹ while Ibn ‘Atâ’ Allâh defines it as “purification from heedlessness and forgetfulness by the constant presence of the heart with God.”³² The fundamental human necessity of remembrance implies a concomitant universality, one not only observed in other

traditions, but also indicated by the Quran itself, which refers to “cloisters, churches, synagogues and mosques, wherein is mentioned the name of God.” (22:40)

Ritual observance, such as formal prayer, draws man repeatedly out of the flow of the world, just as it draws his heart out of the flow of worldliness. As essential as such periodic observance is, however, its very punctuatedness prevents it from serving as a vehicle by which man may totally and continuously turn to God. The Quran clarifies this well: “When the *salât* [ritual prayer] is finished, scatter in the land and seek God’s bounty, and remember God often.” (62:10) In another verse, the Quran clarifies the possibility of continuity of remembrance, speaking of those who “remember God standing, sitting and lying on their sides.” (3:191) The *dhikr* is the means by which the gap between the necessity of remembrance in principle and the actuality of ritual observance in practice may be drawn closed. Taken as a general term denoting the remembrance of God, one may speak of *dhikr* in *salât*, just as one may also speak of the *salât* as *dhikr*; more specifically, however, *dhikr* refers to invocation, to the repeated and, in principle, continual remembrance of God with the tongue and in the heart.

The Form of Remembrance

To remember God with the tongue requires a verbal declaration that is adequate to such a role, and it is here that the Shahadah plays what is perhaps its most vital function within Islamic *praxis*. The very qualities that exemplify the Shahadah as a summary creedal statement and occasional *viaticum* find their consummation in the invocation. Here, doctrine is combined with method, discrimination with concentration; both are refined in the systematic practice of *dhikr* and perfected in the awareness of the saints (*awliyâ*). Here, the Absolute and relative are distinguished, and in that very distinguishing, the awareness and attention are conformed to the Real. As *viaticum*, the Shahadah is structured for invocation – it is a rope laid near at hand that man may cling to in his need, a talisman that he may carry always near to his breast. Islam flows forth from the Quran, and in a sense, *is* the Quran.³³ The Quran, although a book, is first a recitation – for this is the very meaning of *qur’ân*, while its first revealed word was “Recite” (*iqra*); the Shahadah, as the essentialization of the Quran, naturally finds its expression in the essentialization of recitation which is invocation itself. In a sense, the nature of man demands that the Shahadah be accompanied by an associated method of integration and assimilation. Otherwise the Shahadah would predominantly address the intellect alone and fail to integrate the will and virtues. The extension of the Shahadah into the *dhikr* is precisely what enables the Shahadah to transform the entire being of man and not only the intellect.

While the second Shahadah may be applied in invocation in certain circumstances,³⁴ the most common form applied in invocation is the first Shahadah (*lâ ilâha illâ ’Llâh*) or its essentialization, the Divine Name (*Allâh*). While the second Shahadah is not typically verbally present in the invocation, it *is* operatively present in that the invocation is the epitome of the guidance brought by the Prophet, who called it “the best of all deeds, [and] the best act of piety in the eyes of your Lord.” Here, the second Shahadah, the quintessential summary of salvific activity, is subsumed into the quintessential saving act itself. In this way, the invocation represents the fusion of doctrine and method, in which the two Shahadahs necessarily remain conjoined; the practice of the invocation is the congruent point where the two Shahadahs are bound together, where the way of the Prophet is *lâ ilâha illâ ’Llâh*.

Form and the Expression of Meaning

The Arabic sound form of the first Shahadah (*lâ ilâha illâ ’Llâh*), based upon the Arabic letters *alif*, *lâm* and *hâ*, weaves the same basic units of sound through one another in a remarkable display of formal economy, symmetry and harmony.^{35,36} Just as the meaning of the

first Shahadah affirms unity in the midst of apparent multiplicity, so the form of the first Shahadah parallels its meaning, being a kind of miniature in sound of the interpenetration of unity and multiplicity. The first Shahadah serves as a particularly adequate essentialization of the Quranic message not only in doctrinal content but also in its form of expression, characterized by “a rhythm and assonance that capture in particularly condensed form the distinctive rhythmic and assonantal character of Quranic language.”³⁷

The connection between meaning and form in the first Shahadah is also displayed in its written expression, where the vertical strokes of the *alif* and *lâm* letters suggest the essentially transcendent meaning of the verse both by their vertical directedness as well as their vertical demarcation, which present, as it were, so many barriers between the absolute Reality of the *Allâh* and the relative reality of all in the verse apart from this. Similarly, the first *lâ*, which orthographically resembles a scissors or blade, has often been compared poetically to a sword which “cuts off” or negates nonexistence,³⁸ thus reflecting both its grammatical and metaphysical meaning.

In a more profound sense, the first Shahadah may be understood as an expanded articulation of the Divine Name (*Allâh*) Itself.³⁹ Orthographically, the Name is made up of the four letters *alif*, *lâm*, *lâm* and *hâ'*;⁴⁰ so also, the first Shahadah consists of four words, each composed from the same three letters – *alif*, *lâm*, *hâ'* – from which the Name Itself is composed. Here, the doctrinal exteriorization of the meaning of *Allâh* which the first Shahadah represents is reflected in its orthographic expansion from the Divine Name. Further, the Divine Name may be understood as carrying the first Shahadah within Itself: *Allâh* may be rendered grammatically as *al-ilâh* (“the God”), where *al* is a definite article (“the”); this definite article may be inverted to form *lâ ilâh* (“no god”); thus, “the Name *Allâh*, the symbol of the Universal Being as much as it is an affirmation, contains in an implicit or subjacent manner the symbol of the absolute indetermination of Non-Being.”⁴¹

The implicit embeddedness of the first Shahadah within the Name may also be seen in the distinction between the initial *alif* and final *hâ'* of *Allâh*. Expressed orthographically, the *alif* – written as a vertical line – suggests the breadth and infinitude of created multiplicity, while the *hâ'* – written as a small circle – suggests the concentratedness and absoluteness of transcendent unicity. Expressed vocally, the initial cry of the “a” leading to the extended exhalation of the “h” to the final ending in silence signifies the reabsorption of manifestation into its Principle; in this way, the very sound of *Allâh* is a verbal symbol of the return of man to God through his cleaving to the Name. This symbolic distinction within the form of *Allâh* may also be understood in the larger context of the first Shahadah. Here, the *alif* and *hâ'* of the Name signify, respectively, the externalization of the Divine Essence and the Divine Essence in Itself: in the gatheredness of the *hâ'*, God alone knows God; in the extension of the *alif*, God faces the creation – signified by the remainder of the verse – as Lord. Here, the final *hâ'* of the Name has often been taken to signify *Huwa* (“He”), the Name of the Divine Essence⁴² or Divine Self.⁴³ The *Allâh* may be said to signify the articulation of *hâ'* – the Divine Essence – as it extends toward the created order, just as the *lâ ilâha illâ 'Llâh* signifies the articulation of *Allâh* – the Divine – into the creation itself.

A Darqâwî Shaykh, Muhammad Bushârah, further expresses the manifold layers of meaning contained within the Name *Allâh*:

The Name is made up of four letters which are read *Allâh*; if you remove the first letter those which remain are read *Lillâh* (“to God”); if you remove another letter – the first *lâm* – what remains is read *Lahu* (“to Him”). Finally, there remains only the letter *Ha'*, which vocalized, is the Name “He” (*Huwa*: the Name of the Essence). In the same way, when

we invoke the Name of God, its form gradually melts into the breath itself. The same happens to the dying man whose soul is resolved into breathing alone and leaves the body with the last breath.⁴⁴

The Name, the Shahadah and Man

Just as the first Shahadah is the summary of all metaphysical doctrine, so the Name is the synthesis of the entirety of the Self-designation of God with respect to man. The Name *Allâh* is understood by the tradition as the all-comprehensive Name (*al-ism al-jâmi'*), “since it alone designates God as He is in Himself in the widest possible sense, leaving out nothing whatsoever of His Reality.”⁴⁵ Although God may be called by many names – of which the Quran explicitly mentions ninety-nine – the Name *Allâh* is the “coincidence of opposites” (*jam' al-addâd*),⁴⁶ what Ibn 'Arabî terms the “totality of the contrary names” (*majmû' al-asmâ' al-mutaqâbila*),⁴⁷ since it gathers together all the Names – with their mutual tensions and contrarities – within itself. The very nature of the Divine Name as synthesis demands that the first Shahadah, as its doctrinal exteriorization, also be essentially synthetic in character.

As adequate expressions of the Real revealed to man, both the first Shahadah and the Divine Name are bound to a specifically human context. Given this, it is perhaps unsurprising that the interrelationship between the two finds a correlate interrelationship in man himself, where the verbal expression of the first Shahadah and the Divine Name correspond to the two fundamental human rhythms: the breath and the heartbeat. The *lâ ilâha illâ 'Llâh* is patterned to the rhythm of the breath, with the alternation between *lâ ilâha* and *illâ 'Llâh* corresponding to that between outbreath and inbreath; the *Allâh* is patterned to the rhythm of the heart, with the alternation between *al* and *Llâh* corresponding to the heart's contraction and expansion. Further, the ratio of syllables in the first Shahadah and the Name – 7:2 – conforms closely to the typical ratio of breath duration to heartbeat duration – again roughly 7:2, and itself the inverse of the ratio of breaths per minute to heartbeats per minute, falling in the approximate range (16-20):(60-80). In addition, the natural duration of the invocation of *lâ ilâha illâ 'Llâh* closely matches that of the breath, while the natural duration of the invocation of *Allâh* closely matches that of the heart, although it is also often drawn out in the practice of invocation to accompany the breath.

If the first Shahadah may be understood as being doctrinally unfolded from the Name, the practice of the invocation of the first Shahadah most often precedes that of the Name.^{48,49} Thus, the Algerian Shaykh al-'Alawî guided his disciples in the following way:

The *khalwah* is a cell in which I put the novice after he has sworn to me not to leave it for forty days if need be. In this oratory he must do nothing but repeat ceaselessly, day and night, the Divine Name (*Allâh*), drawing out at each invocation the syllable *ah* until he has no more breath left. Previously he must have recited the [first] Shahadah (*lâ ilâha illâ 'Llâh*) seventy five thousand times.⁵⁰

This movement from the first Shahadah to the Divine Name in the practice of invocation in a sense parallels the movement from the invocation with the tongue (*dhikr al-lisân*) to the invocation with the heart (*dhikr al-qalb*),⁵¹ the engagement of the mind with the doctrinal truth of the first Shahadah prefigures the engagement of the entire being with the presence of the Name.⁵² This parallel is further suggested in that the invocation with the tongue recalls the rhythm of the breath, corresponding to the first Shahadah, just as the invocation with the heart recalls the rhythm of the heart, corresponding to the Divine Name.

The invocation of the Name *Allâh* enacts the truth of *lâ ilâha illâ 'Llâh* with respect to the consciousness of the one who invokes (*dhâkir*); the Name, when resonant in the heart of the *dhâkir*, displaces all other thoughts. Subjectively, we “worship” our “gods” (*ilâha*) – and such

“gods”, particularly in the modern world, are legion⁵³ – through the attention and allegiance of our thought; to the extent that we give our thought to the Divine Name alone, we make *lâ ilâha illâ 'Llâh* true for ourselves. The purpose of *lâ ilâha illâ 'Llâh* is to carry the truth of *Allâh* as the Real to the domain of human awareness and consciousness so that the corollary truth of *Allâh* as the worshiped may be achieved; in this way, the *lâ ilâha illâ 'Llâh* forms a bridge between the objectively Real and our subjective commitment. In the words of Ibn ‘Atâ’ Allâh, “No one says ‘no god but God’ correctly unless he negates everything other than God from his soul and heart.”⁵⁴ Just as the second Shahadah is operatively present in the invocation of the first Shahadah, so both Shahadahs are operatively present in the invocation of *Allâh* in the heart of the *dhâkir*.

The invocation of *Allâh* in the heart parallels, in a subjective mode, the nature of the Real Itself: ontologically, multiplicity is ultimately absorbed into the Unity of the Divine Essence; psychologically, the *dhikr al-qalb* absorbs the diverse thoughts to the Divine Name. Similarly, outside of the Divine Essence there is multiplicity in Unity, whereas outside of the *dhikr al-qalb*, there are diverse thoughts underlain by the remembrance of God. In this respect, the Sufi Abû Sa‘îd affirms, “... the ‘true saint’ goes in and out amongst the people and eats and sleeps with them and buys and sells in the market and marries and takes part in social intercourse, and never forgets God for a single moment.”⁵⁵

The Reality of the Name

The significance of the Name *Allâh* lies precisely in that it has been revealed by God as His Self-denotation to man. Although God has named Himself by many names, these are, in a sense, superseded and encompassed by the all-comprehensive Name *Allâh*. Both the Name *Allâh* and these other names are verbal denotations of ontological realities, as the entire creation is described by the Quran and understood by the Islamic intellectual tradition as God’s Speech. The Divine names mentioned in the Quran are the “names of the names” (*asmâ’ al-asmâ’*); the names themselves are the ontological relationships between God and the created order. Ibn ‘Arabî clarifies this matter:

You should know that the divine names which we have are the names of the divine names. God named Himself by them in respect to the fact that He is the Speaker (*al-mutakallim*) [who reveals by means of His Speech].⁵⁶

The relationship between the Divine names and the names of the Divine names finds its parallel in the relationship between the Divine Self-disclosures of creation and revelation. Just as both the cosmos and man are comprised of “signs” (*âyât*), so also the Quran itself is comprised of verses (*âyât*) which are themselves signs; in the one are found the names (*asmâ’*), in the other are found the names of the names (*asmâ’ al-asmâ’*).

Just as the manifestation of the cosmos from the Divine Essence is only possible through the mediation of the Divine names – the manifold ontological relationships bridging Unity and multiplicity – so also God’s knowledge of the cosmos is only possible through the names. As Ibn ‘Arabî explains:

Were it not for the names, God would remember nothing, and nothing would remember God. So, God remembers only through the names, and He is remembered and praised only through the names.⁵⁷

Here, the *dhikr* is revealed as a twofold remembrance, at once God’s remembrance of man through the Divine names, and man’s remembrance of God through the names of the Divine names: as the Quran states, “Remember me, and I will remember you.” (2:152) It is man’s

speech, in the *dhikr*, which closes and sustains the circle of Being, for the Prophet has said, “The Hour will not come as long as there remains in the earth someone who is saying ‘*Allâh, Allâh*’.” The creation of man in the cosmos is through the Divine Speech in respect of him; the return of man to God is through man’s speech – both on the tongue and in the heart – of the Name in respect of Him.

The essential relation between the ontological reality of a name and its verbal denotation in human language, as established by the Divine Self-disclosure in revelation, is what gives the names of the names – and in particular the Supreme Name (*al-ism al-a’zam*) *Allâh* – their inherent saving force, for they are, in Ibn ‘Arabî’s expression, “like robes upon the names”:

Every name has two forms. One form is with us in our breaths and in the letters we combine. These are the names by which we call upon Him. They are the “names of the divine names” and are like robes upon the names. Through the forms of these names in our breaths we express the divine names. Then the divine names have another form within the Breath of the All-Merciful in respect of the fact that God is the Speaker (*al-qâ’il*) and is described by speech (*al-kalâm*).⁵⁸

The Name *Allâh*, present in the invocation, bears a spiritual power (*walâyah*) by virtue of its all-comprehensive ontological root; in this respect, Ibn ‘Atâ’ *Allâh* envisages the Name as the concrete embodiment of ultimate metaphysical reality.⁵⁹ The invocation of the Name, whether alone or as part of the invocation of the first Shahadah, brings this spiritual power to bear upon the consciousness of the *dhâkir*. God, in addition to His inherent Mercy (*ar-Rahmân*), also possesses a specifically active mercy (*ar-Rahîm*) that might also be termed compassion or grace. The invocation of the Name opens the *dhâkir* to this mercy or grace through the conjoining of his consciousness – ultimately derived from the Divine Self-awareness – with the transforming power of the Name. It is not that the Divine mercy must be attracted, but rather that we must open ourselves to it; the Name, through the invocation, vehicles this grace to the *dhâkir*. The Quran clarifies this interplay between human invocation and Divine response: “When My servants question thee concerning Me – surely I am near. I respond to the call of the caller when he calls to Me.” (2:186) Similarly, according to a *hadîth qudsî*, “I am with My servant whenever he remembers Me and his lips move [in mention of Me].”

Both the names and the names of the names are *barzakhs* – or isthmuses – between man and God: the names, through their ontological mediation between the Divine Essence and the creation, and the names of the names, through their dual verbal mediation, both in revelation and invocation, between the Divine and man. It is the Name *Allâh* – the name of the ontological name Allah, the all-comprehensive *barzakh* between the Divine and creation – which is at once the fulcrum and unifying element upon which the two Shahadahs are established. The presence of the Supreme Name *Allâh* sanctifies and vivifies the two Shahadahs through its inherent conjunction with the ontological reality which it robes; it is this conjunction that underlies the potentiality for human transformation through the methodic inculcation of the two Shahadahs in the practice of invocation. It is through the invocation of the Name in the heart that both Shahadahs find their consummation, not as verbal expressions, but as embodied operative truths present in the heart of the *dhâkir*.

The Realization of the Shahadah

The first Shahadah, as discussed previously, is the declaration of *tawhîd*, of Divine Unity, but *tawhîd* – as a verbal grammatical form – implies the act of unifying, rather than simply Unity *per se*. To declare *tawhîd*, then, is to unify and make one, but clearly this “making one” does not

apply to God; rather, man must make himself “one”. In this regard, the Sufi author Jâmî pointedly comments that “unification consists in unifying the heart.”⁶⁰ There is a kind of homologous relationship between man and God in that the Unity of God as absolute and all-encompassing necessarily demands a unity and totality of response from man through worship, servanthood and the unification of the heart. In this way, the declaration of *tawhîd* reaches all the way from the ground of right activity (*islâm*) in the witnessing of the first Shahadah, to right faith (*îmân*) in the conviction of the Unity of God, to the pinnacle of piety and spiritual excellence (*ihsân*) in the unification of one’s heart and the purification of one’s intentions from all that is other than God. Put succinctly, God is a Unicity; man also must become unified if he is to be brought into proper relation to Him: as the Quran asserts, “Your Lord decreed that you should worship none but He.” (17:23) The fundamental relation between Divine Unity and concomitant human unification is clarified in the most well-known Quranic passage on *tawhîd*, the short one hundred and twelfth chapter, titled at once *al-Tawhîd* and *al-Ikhlâs*, the latter meaning sincerity or purity – the attainment of *ikhhlâs* is precisely the unification of the heart (*tawhîd*) in respect of the Divine Unity.

Vision and Virtue

The perfection of man is to *live* the Shahadah, so that the words don’t merely “stop at the throat,” but rather are an expression of an overwhelming self evidence of the actual nature of things and a continual awareness and alignment of one’s being in accord with this nature:

The Shahadah must be repeated and lived until the implicit realization has penetrated to the center of one’s being, until through concentration upon the truth, and virtue, the individual substance is transformed and made itself adequate to the truth.⁶¹

It is here that the disproportion between mere verbal expression and accompanying inner transformation is found: the words of the Shahadah as spoken by an insincere man and a great saint are identical; their accompanying inner states, however, are completely different. On the face of it, the Shahadah is after all merely words – a collection of sounds accompanied by specific denotations of meaning. Yet on such words are civilizations built and souls saved – the received Quran is also “merely” a collection of words, yet with the most profound impact both upon the historical stage and in the lives of countless individuals. The potential range of inculcation of the Shahadah is inherent in its very derivation, from the verb *shahida*, meaning at once testification and perceiving: what the ordinary man testifies to, the saint perceives; what to the ordinary man is theory, to the saint is *theoria*.

Just as truth and way intersect in the practice of invocation, where the quintessential norm of the Prophet *is* the continual recollection of the absolute and all-pervading reality of God, so also in the profound realization of the Shahadah, there is a necessary fusion of knowing and being, vision and virtue. The realization of Unity is an integral knowledge, and as such, embraces the whole of man. Just as the two Shahadahs respectively inform man’s intellect and his will and virtue, so they find their conjoined completion in the union of *’irfân* (or *ma’rifah*) – gnosis or illuminative knowledge – and *ihsân* – moral beauty or virtue. The essential concordance between the two is established in the *hadîth* of Gabriel, where the Prophet spoke of *ihsân* as to “worship God as if you see Him”; here, to “see God” is precisely *’irfân*. The saint strives to realize *lâ ilâha illâ ’Llâh* through perceiving the truth of *tawhîd* and strives to live *Muhammadun rasûlu ’Llâh* through following the Prophetic *Sunnah*, or norm; just as he embraces the vision of *lâ ilâha illâ ’Llâh*, so also he embodies the virtues of *Muhammadun rasûlu ’Llâh*. In this sense, the *walî Allâh* – the “friend of God” – is at once sage and saint.

Degrees of the Soul

The Quran, in speaking of human maturation in the return to God, makes reference to the *nafs* – the self or soul; it speaks particularly of three distinct stages in the development of the self: the “soul that enjoins to evil,” (*al-nafs al-ammarâh bi-s-sû*) (12:53) the “reproachful soul” (*al-nafs al-lawwâmah*) (75:2) and the “soul at peace.” (*al-nafs al-mutma’innah*) (89:27) These three stages represent degrees of discrimination and conformation with respect to the Real, and as such, implicitly refer to the first and second Shahadahs, respectively. The “soul that enjoins to evil” has reified itself and is heedless of God, blown by the wind of its own passions and oblivious of the Prophetic norm; the “reproachful soul” has begun to see itself with objectivity and to recognize God as the Real, struggling against its tendencies toward corruption and dissipation; the “soul at peace” has turned fully from the unreal to the Real, having mastered its passions and cleaved to God. Here, the Quran voices, “O soul at peace, return unto thy Lord, well-pleased, well pleasing! Enter thou among My servants! Enter thou My Paradise!” (89:27-30) The mutuality of “well-pleased, well pleasing!” recalls the mutuality between those whom “He loves and who love Him,” (5:59) a mutuality attained through the Prophetic example: “Say [O Muhammad], ‘If you love God, then follow me, and God will love you.’” (3:31) The relation between the “soul at peace” and the inculcation of the two Shahadahs is further indicated in relation to the essential conjoining of the two Shahadahs in the *dhikr Allâh*: the Quran speaks of “Those who have faith, their hearts being at peace in God’s remembrance”; (13:28) here, the same verb, *tama’na* – to be at rest – is used to describe both the “soul at peace” and the heart of the *dhâkir*.

The gradual maturation of the soul in its return to God is termed *tazkiyat an-nafs*,⁶² where the verb *tazkiya* means at once purification and augmentation. *Tazkiya*, as purification, implies a necessary discrimination in one’s being between the Real and the unreal, corresponding to the discrimination inherent in the first Shahadah; *tazkiya*, as augmentation, implies the assimilation of the Prophetic character and virtues, corresponding to the conformation inherent in the second Shahadah.

Idolatry and Struggle

This moral discrimination and conformation, as applied to the qualities of the *nafs*, must ultimately be applied to the *nafs* itself. In Islam, the greatest sin⁶³ is that of idolatry (*shirk*), of associating anything with God. The Islamic spiritual tradition has long recognized that the most subtle and stubborn form of idolatry is the idolatry of the *nafs*.⁶⁴ In this respect, the early Sufi Râbi’ah remarked “Your own existence is a sin to which none can be compared.”⁶⁵ This sin is the reification of the self, the ego, which thereby obscures the Divine Self at the heart of man; as al-Junayd enigmatically remarked, “Know that you are veiled from yourself by yourself.”⁶⁶ This obscuring is suggested in the very meaning of the Arabic term for unbelief – *kufr*, to cover or to hide; here, the idolatry of the *nafs* is precisely the covering or hiding of God as the true Witness:

The ego is at once a reflection of the Self which thus conveys an idea of what the Self is, but it is also its own impediment to union with the Self when, through delusion and pride, it refuses to admit its own provisional nature and give up its claims to self sufficiency.⁶⁷

The first Shahadah may be understood as a direct rebuttal of human claims to idolatry, and as such, must also address the idolatry of the self. The struggle against the idolatry of the unregenerate self, the *al-nafs al-ammarâh bi-s-sû*, is, in the words of the Prophet, the *jihâd al-akbar* – the greater struggle or greater holy war – waged against the “greatest enemy” – “your self that is between your two sides.” In this regard, the Prophet once said, in the context of the struggle against the Arabian pagans, that “I have been commanded to fight the disbelievers until

they testify *lâ ilâha illâ 'Llâh, Muhammadun rasûlu 'Llâh...*” The weapons for the waging of the *jihâd al-akbar* are precisely the two testifications of the Shahadah, as operatively applied in the practice of *dhikr*;⁶⁸ in this respect, al-Ghazâlî teaches that the inner aspect of the one who performs *dhikr* must be exactly like that of one who is fighting for the single cause of God.⁶⁹ The greater struggle reaches its conclusion when the idolatry of the *nafs* is broken, when the self existentially testifies to the truth of *lâ ilâha illâ 'Llâh* and in so doing negates its own reification (*lâ ilâha*), while affirming the Self as Real (*illâ 'Llâh*); the self nevertheless continues to possess contingent reality, and as such, within its own contingency, conforms to the Muhammadan norm (*Muhammadun rasûlu 'Llâh*).

Annihilation and Subsistence

The idolatry of the self is, in a sense, the complement to the forgetfulness (*nisyân*) of God endemic to the human state; given this, it is perhaps unsurprising that, in the shattering of this most persistent of idols, it is the self that is forgotten in the face of the overwhelming presence of God. In the state of *fanâ'* – annihilation or passing away from self – the ego consciousness falls away, dissolved into the Self-awareness of the Real:

Fanâ' is certainly a human experience...But it is not solely a human experience. For when he does experience it, he is no longer himself. In this sense man is not the subject of experience. The subject is rather the metaphysical Reality itself.⁷⁰

As al-Junayd summarily describes, “The *wujûd* [i.e. finding, existence] of the Real occurs through the loss of your self.”⁷¹ Similarly, Ibn ‘Arabî remarks that the Prophetic phrase “if you see him not...,” in the definition of *ihsân* in the *hadîth* of Gabriel, may be also grammatically rendered, “if you are not, see Him.”⁷²

Correlate to the state of *fanâ'* is the state of *baqâ'* – subsistence in God. The first is, according to an early Sufi, “the annihilation of him who was not,” while the second is “the subsistence of Him who has always been.”⁷³ As the Quran asserts, in a somewhat broader context, “The Real [*haqq*] has come and falsehood has vanished.” (17:82) Expressed more fully:

At the stage of *fanâ'*, the pseudo-ego or the relative self has completely dissolved into nothingness. At the next stage [*baqâ'*] man is resuscitated out of nothingness, completely transformed into an absolute Self. What is resuscitated is outwardly the same old man, but he is a man who has once transcended his own determination.⁷⁴

Ibn ‘Arabî clarifies the relation between the two states when he remarks:

Subsistence is your relationship with the Real...but annihilation is you relationship with the engendered universe...None subsists in this path except him who is annihilated, and none is annihilated except him who subsists.⁷⁵

The Quran particularly points to the possibility of the experience of *fanâ'* and *baqâ'* in two verses: “And when they saw him, they so admired him that they cut their hands,” (12:32) referring to the self-forgetfulness of a group of women when faced with the beauty of Joseph, and “You did not throw when you threw, but God threw,” (8:17) referring to the Divine “overshadowing” of the selfhood of the Prophet at the battle of Badr. However, the crucial verse elucidating the conjoined reality of *fanâ'* and *baqâ'* makes clear that these are not solely subjective human states, but rather, the essential situation of all things: “Everything upon the earth is undergoing annihilation (*fanâ'*), but there subsists (*baqâ'*) the Face of your Lord.” (55:26) The conjoined reality of *fanâ'* and *baqâ'* is precisely denoted by the first Shahadah, for the annihilation of the human self and the cosmos from their own claimed realities is the *lâ ilâha*, while the subsistence of the human self and the cosmos through God is the *illâ 'Llâh*.

If the struggle against the inherent idolatry of the self is, according to the Prophet, the *jihād al-akbar*, the consummation of this struggle is at once a victory and a martyrdom. The Prophet enjoined that one should “Die before you die”: the one who dies in this struggle is a *shahīd* – at once a martyr and a witness. He is a martyr, having become annihilated from himself; he is a witness, through the subsistence of the Divine Witness at the very root of his selfhood. In another *hadīth*, the Prophet said, “Man is asleep; when he dies, he awakes”: although typically understood as a description of man’s posthumous situation, in fact, it perfectly describes this prior, voluntary death, in which “sleep” denotes man’s typical unregenerate state, “when he dies” signifies *fanâ*, and “he awakes” signifies *baqâ*.

For those who have passed through this martyrdom, the error of reification, both of the self and the world, has been expunged, and as the Quran says of those who have died and been resurrected, their “sight today is piercing”; (50:22) with that sight, they perceive the signs of God “on the horizons and in themselves,” (41:53) and wheresoever they turn, whether outwardly or inwardly, “there is the Face of God.” (2:115) Ultimately, in the full testification of the first Shahadah (*ashhadu an lâ ilâha illâ ‘Llâh*) – this very word that means “witness” – the “I” that witnesses is the Divine “I”, for “God bears witness that there is no god but He,” (3:16) and “God suffices as a Witness.” (48:28)

The Form of the Name

This profound experiential understanding of the ultimate identity between the selfhood of man and the Self-witnessing of God is, in itself, incomplete: it is true that, as the Prophet said, “He who knows himself knows his Lord,” but it is also true that “The servant remains a servant and the Lord remains a Lord.” While there is identity, there is also hierarchy, and the realization of the former in no way absolves the need for conformation within the latter. In a sense, the two Shahadahs may be understood in precisely these terms, the first giving voice to the truth of the essential identity between God and creation, the second giving voice to the demand for the conformation of man’s being to the hierarchy of the Real through cleaving to the Prophetic norm. The essential mystery of the concurrence of identity and hierarchy is equivalent to that of unity and multiplicity: within unity, there is identity; within multiplicity, there is hierarchy – both are simultaneously present, both must be taken into account. The great themes of the Islamic tradition – Unity and Mercy – are simply reflective of this inherent nature of the Real.

Man, created upon the form of Allah, having been taught all the names, bears the potential to become perfected as the Divine Self-disclosure of the all-comprehensive name, Allah. Such a perfection requires that he bring the traces of the names latent within him into a state of maturation, fullness and harmony. In this respect, the Prophet counseled, “Assume the character traits of God,” or, as understood by Ibn ‘Arabî, “Assume the traits of God’s names.”⁷⁶ Human moral traits and qualities are in fact the Self-disclosures of Divine attributes: thus faith, generosity, justice, patience, wisdom, love and many other aspects of human character coincide with the Most Beautiful Names (*al-asmâ’ al-husnâ*) of God. The names of God, the multiplicity of relationships bridging between the Divine Unity and created multiplicity, necessarily embrace hierarchy, for “My Mercy has precedence over My Wrath.”⁷⁷ Further, since they encompass multiplicity, they necessarily involve opposition and contrariety. In man, the names must be brought together (*jam*‘) such that there is at once both an appropriate balance of opposites and a conformation to the hierarchy inherent in the Real. The fruit of this harmonious gathering of the names is their completed maturation in an integrated state of all-comprehensiveness (*jam*‘*iyya*) coincident with the all-comprehensive name (*al-ism al-jâmi*‘) Allah.

The completed maturation of human character traits in concordance with the all-comprehensiveness of the Divine name represents the perfection of human possibilities, what Ibn ‘Arabî terms “perfect man” (*al-insân al-kâmil*). The possibility of this perfection is implicit in the second Shahadah, for, as the Prophet said, “I was sent [as a Prophet] to complete the beautiful character traits.” More particularly, this possibility is inherent in the operative application of the first Shahadah in the invocation of the Name, for the Name is as the robe upon the ontological name Allah. Through the invocation of the name of the name one may come into conformity with the name; one becomes all-comprehensive (*al-kawn al-jâmi‘*) though cleaving to the name of the all-comprehensive name (*al-ism al-jâmi‘*), for all-comprehensiveness (*jam‘iyya*) is the “fruit of meditation, concentration and remembrance (*dhikr*).”⁷⁸ Through cleaving to the name of the name *Allâh*, man may become a perfected locus for the name Allah, and as such, may paradoxically embrace God in the entirety of His theophany, for, according to the *hadîth qudsî*, “My heavens and My earth embrace Me not, but the heart of My believing servant does embrace Me.” Through the operative inculcation of the first Shahadah in the invocation of the Name, man conforms himself to the hierarchy of the names, and as such, places himself under Mercy, for Mercy is the highest and most intrinsic nature of the Real; as God attests, “*lâ ilâha illâ ‘Llâh* is My fortress; whosoever enters My fortress is safe from My chastisement.”

Here, in the consummation of man, in his realization of his essential identity with God and his conformation to the hierarchy of Being, we find also the consummation of Unity and Mercy, and as such the consummation of the two Shahadahs.

Notes:

1. *Mathnawi* (R. A. Nicholson edition), II, 277-9, tr. William C. Chittick; on this theme, see also William C. Chittick, “The Rehabilitation of Islamic Thought,” *Iqbal Review* 41:4 (2000).
2. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1979), p. 19.
3. Charles Le Gai Eaton, *Islam and the Destiny of Man* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), p. 55.
4. William C. Chittick, *Sufism: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), p. 36.
5. Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 49.
6. For a fuller account of these interwoven themes, see Victor Danner, “Shahadah,” *Parabola* 11:1 (1987).
7. The Islamic tradition makes use of two terms – “messenger” (*rasûl*) and “prophet” (*nabî*) – to refer to this function of embodied guidance. While there have been many prophets, sent to remind humanity and confirm guidance, there have been relatively fewer messengers, corresponding roughly to the founders of the world’s great sapiential traditions. These messengers have necessarily also been prophets; that is, the role of messenger is established upon the preliminary role of prophet. Thus, Muhammad is understood to be both a messenger and a prophet. Properly speaking, his title should be “messenger” or “messenger of God” (*rasûlu ‘Llâh*), as he was addressed by his companions; nevertheless, reference to Muhammad as “the Prophet” has been long established in English usage.

8. The *Sunnah* forms an establishing matrix for the sacralization of Muslim life, from greeting one's neighbors to eating at the table to buying and selling in the marketplace. The collected sayings of the Prophet, or *Hadith*, may be considered as part of the *Sunnah*; the *Hadith* forms the first and most important commentary on the Quran and is an essential complement for unfolding its deeper meaning. Most significantly, the precise character of each pillar was not fully specified in the Quran itself; rather, each rite was established in its detail through the example of the Prophet. That is, the Islamic rites themselves, while broadly indicated in the Quran, are part of the *Sunnah* of the Prophet; in participating in the rites, one also necessarily participates in the Prophetic example. In this sense, a Muslim worships God, but worships through the Prophet.
9. Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, pp. 134-5.
10. On another level, the ordering of the two Shahadahs may also be understood in an ontological sense as reflecting the primacy of transcendence over immanence: thus, the Divine, while present in the world, can never be reduced to the world.
11. To borrow an expression from Mahayana Buddhism.
12. Frithjof Schuon, *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 1981), p. 162.
13. A well-known *hadith qudsi*, or extra-Quranic Divine saying.
14. On the metaphor of existence as an image in a mirror, see William C. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-'Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 25.
15. Here, see Frithjof Schuon, *Understanding Islam* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 1994), p. 6.
16. Here, see Sachiko Murata & William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (New York: Paragon House, 1994), pp. 72-3.
17. Here, see Schuon, *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence*, p. 134.
18. The *ithbat* may also be understood to refer to the *Allah* alone.
19. William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 4.
20. Here, see Schuon, *Understanding Islam*, p. 152.
21. Termed an *istithna*, or "exception".
22. Here, see Cyril Glassé, *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), p. 360.
23. Murata & Chittick, *The Vision of Islam*, p. 251
24. Needless to say, this does *not* imply that Muhammad is "a god": there is no divinization of the Prophet. Rather, *ilaha* may be reinterpreted positively, not as an independent and necessarily false divinity but rather as an adequate "sign of God," or *ayat Allah*.
25. This description, while somewhat poetical, is reflected in Islamic metaphysics, where the same ontological reality is termed at once the "Breath of the All-Merciful" and the "Muhammadan Reality". See Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 139.
26. See Schuon, *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence*, p. 134 for a slightly different interpretation.
27. On the relation between the macrocosm/macroanthropos and microcosm/microanthropos, see Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, p. 33.
28. As read in English, Arabic being the reverse of this.

29. As a general overview, see David Dakake, “The Practice of *Dhikr* in the Early Islamic Community” in Zailan Moris, ed., *Knowledge is Light: Essays in Honor of Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Chicago: ABC International, 1999).
30. In this regard, see Whitall N. Perry, *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1971), pp.1001-42; see also the more introductory and approachable book, Gray Henry & Susannah Marriott, *Beads of Faith* (London: Carroll & Brown, 2002).
31. Here, see William C. Chittick, “On the Cosmology of *Dhikr*” in James S. Cutsinger, ed., *Paths to the Heart: Sufism and the Christian East* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2002), p. 49.
32. Carl W. Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism* (Boston: Shambhala, 1997), p. 92.
33. See Murata & Chittick, *The Vision of Islam*, p. x: “In a very deep sense, Islam is the Koran, and the Koran is Islam.”
34. See Martin Lings, *What is Sufism?* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1981), p. 76; in addition, it almost invariably plays a modified role in the extended litany (*wird*) recited in the various Sufi orders (*turuq*).
35. In this respect, see Jean Canteins, “The Hidden Sciences in Islam” in Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed., *Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), p. 462.
36. The formal expression of the first Shahadah might well be taken as a kind of minor proof for the sacred nature of the Arabic language. In the specific context of Quranic Arabic, see also Gai Eaton, op.cit., pp. 73-6; also see Glassé, op.cit., pp. 46-8.
37. Michael A. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1996), p. 46; see also Michael A. Sells, *Approaching the Qur’an: The Early Revelations* (Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 1999), pp. 146, 151.
38. See Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, p. 62; see also Annemarie Schimmel, “The Sufis and the Shahadah” in Richard G. Hovannisian et.al., ed., *Islam’s Understanding of Itself* (Malibu, CA: Undena, 1983), p. 123.
39. See Schuon, *Understanding Islam*, p. 151: “Now the Shahadah is nothing other than an exteriorization in doctrinal form of the Name *Allâh*.”; see also Lings, *What is Sufism?*, p. 63.
40. In this paragraph and the next, many of the points made closely follow the discussion in Canteins, op.cit., p. 460-3.
41. Canteins, op.cit., p. 462.
42. Lings, *What is Sufism?*, p. 85.
43. Titus Burckhardt, *An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine* (Wellingborough, UK: Aquarian Press, 1976), p. 119
44. Glassé, op.cit., p. 37.
45. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 5.
46. Ibid., p. 188; Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, p. 63.
47. Ibid., p. 67.
48. See Joseph E. Lumbard, “The Function of *Dhikrullah* in Sufi Psychology” in Zailan Moris, ed., *Knowledge is Light: Essays in Honor of Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Chicago: ABC International, 1999), p. 266; See also Ibn ‘Atâ’ Allâh al-Iskandari, (Mary Ann K. Danner-Fadae, tr.) *The Key to Salvation: A Sufi Manual of Invocation* (Cambridge, UK: Islamic Texts Society, 1996), p. 89: “...and there are

others who choose *lâ ilâha illâ 'Llâh* in the beginning, and in the end confine themselves to *Allâh*. These latter are the majority.”

49. A notable exception to this is Ibn ‘Arabî, who began his practice with *Allâh* and moved later in his life to the invocation of *lâ ilâha illâ 'Llâh*; See Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn ‘Arabî* (Cambridge, UK: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), pp. 50, 164-5.
50. Martin Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 85.
51. Without this thereby implying any rigid association between the Shahadah and the invocation with the tongue or between the Name and the invocation with the heart.
52. See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), p. 50: “When Rumi writes in his *Mathnawi* that the adept must invoke in the spiritual retreat (*khalwah*) until his toes begin to say *Allâh*, he means precisely this final integration which includes the body as well as the mind and the soul.”
53. See William C. Chittick, “The Role of Intelligence in Islamic Philosophy” (forthcoming): “...This helps explain the modern-day “polytheism” that is so obvious in numerous abstract notions that have been turned into pseudo-absolutes, thereby providing foundations for ideology. The names of our gods, after all, are legion—freedom, progress, democracy, nationalism, socialism, equality, science, development, capitalism.”
54. Ibn ‘Atâ’ Allâh, op.cit., p.70; See also ibid. p.137: “Every man has one heart and one heart cannot be occupied with two things at the same time. When it is occupied with one of two things, it is excluded from the other thing, and this to the extent of its preoccupation with the first. Thus, it behooves the one who says *lâ ilâha illâ 'Llâh* that he intend by *lâ ilâha* the expulsion of what is other-than-God from his heart. When the heart is empty of what is other-than-God, and when the authority of God is present therein, its light shines with a complete radiance, and His possession of it is perfect.”
55. Mohammad Ebn-e Monavvar (John O’Kane, tr.), *The Secrets of God’s Mystical Oneness* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 1992).
56. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 34.
57. Chittick, “On the Cosmology of *Dhikr*,” p. 56.
58. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 34.
59. Ibn ‘Atâ’ Allâh, op.cit., p.17; see also Ibn ‘Atâ’ Allâh al-Iskandari (Mokrane Guezzou, tr.), *The Pure Goal Concerning Knowledge of the Unique Name* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, forthcoming).
60. Schimmel, “The Sufis and the Shahadah,” p. 113.
61. Glassé, op.cit., p. 360.
62. An expression derived from the Quran: see Quran 91:7-10; see also Chittick, *Sufism: A Short Introduction*, pp. 40-1.
63. See Quran 4:116.
64. For instance, see Ibn ‘Atâ’ Illah / Kwaja Abdullah Ansari (Victor Danner / Wheeler M. Thackston, tr.), *The Book of Wisdom / Intimate Conversations* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1996), pp. 132-3, n. 18.
65. Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century*, p. 125, n. 2.
66. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, p. 255.
67. Glassé, op.cit., p. 414.

68. See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The Spiritual Significance of Jihâd," *Parabola* 7:4 (1983), p. 17; see also S. Abdullah Schleifer, "Understanding Jihâd: Definition and Methodology," *Islamic Quarterly* 27:3 (1983), p. 125.
69. Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali (K. Nakamura, tr.) *Invocations and Supplications* (Cambridge, UK: Islamic Texts Society, 1990), p. xxiv.
70. Toshikito Izutsu, *Creation and the Timeless Order of Things: Essays in Islamic Mystical Philosophy* (Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 1994), p. 13.
71. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, p. 131
72. Reza Shah-Kazemi, "The Metaphysics of Interfaith Dialogue: Sufi Perspectives on the Universality of the Quranic Message" in James S. Cutsinger, ed., *Paths to the Heart: Sufism and the Christian East* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2002), p. 149, n. 21.
73. William C. Chittick, *The Self Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-'Arabi's Cosmology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 84.
74. Isutsu, op.cit., p. 14.
75. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, p. 61.
76. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 22; also *ibid.* p. 275.
77. See also *ibid.* p. 23.
78. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, p. 58.