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The Society

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ABSTRACT

This short treatise contains the knowledge of the divine name of Majesty (*al-jalāla*), which is the all-inclusive name, Allah. Ibn al-‘Arabī explains the meaning of each component letter of the word ‘Allah’ and the significance of the implied *wāw* in *Allāh(ū)* as it relates to the Supreme Identity (*huwiyya*). After revealing some of the secrets contained in the *huwa* (He), the author remarks that the distinguishing characteristic of this name is the bewilderment that one feels when trying to know it or witness it. Thus, in the final section, he illustrates that since Allah is hidden behind veils of light and darkness, ‘everything enters bewilderment’.

KEYWORDS

Allah, Majesty, *Jalāla*, Veils of Light and Darkness, Bewilderment, Throne, *Rahmān*

The Book of Majesty
Which is the Word ‘Allah’
(*Kitāb al-Jalāla wa huwa kalimat Allāh*)

By Ibn al-‘Arabī

Translated by Mukhtar H. Ali¹

INTRODUCTION

The *Kitāb al-Jalāla* (RG 169) is a short treatise on the mysteries contained in the divine name Allah. According to the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society’s archive, which has catalogued Ibn al-‘Arabī’s works, there are nine historic manuscripts. The best is Yusuf Aḡa 4868, which is a holograph (in the author’s hand) dated 13 Šafar 615H. Others include Yusuf Aḡa 7838, which was probably written during Ibn al-‘Arabī’s lifetime; Milli A571, dated 668H, which was copied and checked against Ibn al-‘Arabī’s copy; and Carullah 2111, which was copied from a holograph dated 628H and collated with an autograph dated 637H. According to Osman Yahia, it was composed in 601H in Jerusalem, but there is no evidence to support this assertion. The treatise has been translated into French by Michel Valsan;² into Spanish by Pablo Beneito and Mario Vieira, who have also produced a critical edition of the text;³ and into Urdu by Abrar Ahmed Shahi.⁴ Abdel Baki Meftah has also written an important study in Arabic entitled *Kitāb al-Ism al-a‘ẓam* (The Book of the Supreme Name).⁵

1. The translation of this treatise is based on the Yusuf Aḡa 7838 manuscript which was generously made available to me by the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society. I am sincerely grateful to Stephen Hirtenstein for his comments, corrections and insightful clarifications of this singularly difficult text.

2. Michel Valsan, *Le Livre Du Nom De Majesté: Allāh* (Paris, 1948).

3. See Ibn ‘Arabī, *El libro de la Majestad sobre el Nombre Allāh* (*K. al-Jalāla*), trans. and critically ed. Pablo Beneito and Mario Vieira (Cordoba, 2023).

4. Abrar Ahmed Shahi, *Rasail Ibn al-Arabi*, 4 vols. (Rawalpindi, 2021).

5. Abdel Baki Meftah, *Kitāb al-Ism al-a‘ẓam* (Beirut, 2007).

A key theme throughout the work is Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teaching that letters represent the whole cosmic order and are the building blocks of existence. From the absolute Unseen, God engenders existence through the Breath of the Merciful (*al-naḥās al-raḥmānī*), the form of manifestation that produces sounds, letters and divine words (*al-kalimāt al-ilāhiyya*). Ibn al-‘Arabī writes, ‘God described Himself as having a Breath, and it is the emergence from the Unseen as the manifestation of letters in the Visible. The letters are containers for meanings, while the meanings are their spirits.’⁶ While there is no discussion of the Breath in the present treatise, he does speak of the Throne and its relation to the name the Merciful (*al-raḥmān*).

Because ‘Allah’ is the name that God has chosen for Himself, the word has a special meaning, as does each component letter. The author highlights the existential correspondences of each letter implicitly rooted to their numerological significances. The title of the treatise contains the word ‘*Jalāla*’, which means ‘majesty’ from the Arabic root letters *j-l-l*, but in a technical sense, it refers to the name Allah. After discussing its mysteries, the author expounds on a few key themes: the unknowability of Allah; His relation to His names and to the divine Ipseity (*huwiyya*); and the distinguishing characteristic of this name in the world, which is the bewilderment one experiences when one tries to know and witness Him.

The original contains untitled sections which generally correspond to the following headings that I have introduced in the translation to add structure for the English reader.

1. The Name Allah and Its Elements, and the Superiority of Vision over Intellect
2. The Throne of Allah
3. There is Only *Huwa*
4. The Meaning of the Six Component Letters
5. *Huwa* and Weak Letters
6. Allah and the Divine Names
7. The Bewilderment (*ḥayra*) Produced by the Name Allah
8. *Huwa* and the Supreme Identity
9. Veils of Light and Darkness and Bewilderment in the Divine Attributes

6. Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, 4 vols. (Beirut, n.d.), III.95.19.

Kitāb al-Jalāla

In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Benevolent. Blessings be upon Muḥammad and his family. Praise be to God by God, a praise that neither the [innermost] secrets (*asrār*) come to know,⁷ nor the spirits recognise, nor the intellects perceive, nor the hearts harbour (*adhmara*), nor the souls catch sight of (*istashrafa*), nor the mouths utter. A [praise] that comprehends all beginningless (*azal*) praise and one that extends to every endless (*abad*) praise; a sanctified [praise] of both like and similitude. Blessings be upon the Master who was given the comprehensive words (*jawāmi' al-kalim*),⁸ Muḥammad – peace and blessings upon him – before whose noble quality of subsistence (*qayyūmiyya*) faces bow and foreheads prostrate. May the blessing be eternal and sustained as long as the tongues utter his glory and lips move to bless him. Peace be upon him and the chosen among the magnanimous and imploring!⁹

The Name Allah and Its Elements, and the Superiority of Vision over Intellect

Now, to proceed: in this book I mention some secrets and allusions contained in the *Jalāla* [the divine name Allah]. I say that 'Allah' denotes the Essence in relation to the [divine] names, insofar as it embraces the attributes.¹⁰ Every name is subsumed under it,

7. The *sirr* refers to the station of the secret in the human being, which is the inward aspect of the spirit, according to some. Ibn al-'Arabī says, 'The secret (*sirr*) is the divine spirit breathed into man when he was created.' *Fut.*I.168.

8. The Prophet said, 'I was given comprehensive words (*jawāmi' al-kalim*) and speech (*kalām*) was shortened for me.' Muḥammad b. Ismā'il al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Damascus, 2002), no. 7273.

9. The reference is to the attributes of Abraham in the verse 'Abraham was forbearing (*ḥalīm*), imploring and penitent' (Q.11:75). It is noteworthy that Ibn al-'Arabī would subtly reference Abraham in the opening paragraph of this treatise. Jāmī remarks in *Naqd al-nuṣūṣ* that 'Abraham was the first place of human manifestation to perfect the degree of gnosis of the Essence'. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, *Naqd al-nuṣūṣ fī sharḥ naqsh al-fuṣūṣ*, ed. William Chittick and Jalāl al-Dīn Ashtiyānī (Tehran, 2001), 148.

10. Lexically, *Allāh* is derived from the Arabic root letters *a-l-h*, whose most basic meaning is 'to be perplexed', from the verb *aliha*. *Allāh* is the proper name

emanates from it and ascends to it. According to the realised ones (*muḥaqqiqīn*), one can only attach to it (*ta‘alluq*), not take on its character (*takhalluq*), for its reality indicates the Essence and nothing else.¹¹ Furthermore, it manifests in various places and multiple degrees, for it is not useful to fathom the Essence in these places due to the meanings and properties these degrees necessitate. The *Jalāla*, insofar as it embraces the meanings of all the names, gives only what a name gives by virtue of the meaning specific to it. It has thus the honour of hosting the *Jalāla* in that place, given that the *Jalāla* dominates all the names and encompasses their properties. Thus, if the sinner calls out, ‘O Allah, forgive me!’, the *Jalāla* is the deputy of the name the Forgiver and only the Forgiver responds and the *Jalāla* remains pure from limitation. Furthermore, it is totally unseen with respect to the visible world except during the exhalation of the final vocalisation [*ḍamma*] when you utter ‘Allah’. The *huwa* only manifests in this case, I mean, in speech; otherwise in writing and script it is the absolute Unseen, and nothing else.¹²

He says (*qāla*) ...¹³ and know that it (*innahā*) consists of six letters,

applied to the Being who exists necessarily, by Himself, comprising all the attributes of perfection, a proper name denoting the true God ... The ‘*al*’ is inseparable from it and not derived. See E.W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (Cambridge, 1984). The word signifies the passive participle *ma’lūh* which means ‘to be perplexed’. See Muḥammad Husayn Ṭabāṭabā’ī, *al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān* (Beirut, 1997), 1:21.

11. This is in reference to Ibn al-‘Arabī’s theomorphic ethics describing man’s threefold relationship with the divine names or wayfaring in the names (*al-sayr fī-l-asmā’*): attachment (*ta‘alluq*) to the names, taking on the divine character (*takhalluq*) and their realisation (*taḥaqquq*). He writes, ‘*ta‘alluq* is your absolute neediness towards God with respect to the Essence; *takhalluq* is that you attribute what is appropriate to yourself and attribute to Him what is worthy of Him; and *taḥaqquq* is to understand the meanings [of the names] as they apply to God and as they apply to you’. Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Kashf al-ma’nā ‘an sirr asmā’ al-ḥusnā* (Qum, 2004), 26.

12. The vowel *ḍamma* is akin in sound and script to the letter *wāw*, and in pronunciation it is *Allāhū*.

13. ‘He says (*qāla*) ...’ is in the text, but it is not clear who is being referred to by ‘he’. Stephen Hirstenstein notes that numerologically, *qāla* has the value of five and that *hā* also has the value of five, then if you add the *wa* (and), it becomes *huwa*. Then *innahā* adds the feminine pronoun, the *hā*’ having a value of six, which is the number of letters in the word ‘Allah’. The pronoun *innahā* likely refers to the word (*kalīma*) as in *kalimat allāh*, referring to the Essence (*dhāt*), which is also a feminine noun in Arabic.

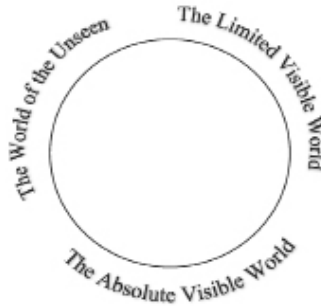
a-l-l-a-h-w, four of which appear in script: the initial *alif*;¹⁴ the *lām* of the beginning of the unseen (*ghayb*), which is contracted with the *lām* of the beginning of the visible that is pronounced and doubled (*mushaddada*); and the *hā'* of the *huwiyya* (Ipseity). The four which are pronounced are the *alif* of power (*qudra*), the *lām* of the visible, the *alif* of the Essence and the *hā'* of *huwa*. One letter neither appears in pronunciation nor in script but is only alluded to. With respect to the pronunciation, it is the *wāw* of the *huwa*, and with respect to script, it is the *wāw* of the Ipseity.¹⁵ Thus, the letters [of the *Jalāla*] are reduced to the *lām* of the middle world, which is the *barzakh* (isthmus) and the intelligible (*ma'qūl*), the *hā'* of the unseen and the *wāw* of the visible world. Since Allah denotes the absolute Unseen containing therein the *wāw* of the visible world, and because it is vocalised and cannot manifest in Allah, it does not appear in pronunciation or in script, so it remains hidden in the unseen; thus, it is the unseen of the Unseen (*ghayb al-ghayb*). From this we can justify the superiority of the senses¹⁶ over the intellect ('*aql*), for today the senses are hidden in the intellect and the intellect is manifest. However, if tomorrow the governance in the Hereafter belongs to the divine presence and that vision is reserved for the senses, then all will be gazing upon Him. Therefore, the ends are for vision and beginnings are for intellects. Were it not for the ends, no one would pay attention to beginnings, so look at the mysteries here with respect to the Hereafter being better than worldly life, as God says, 'You desire the transient goods of this world, but God desires the Hereafter' (Q.8:67) and 'the Hereafter is better and more enduring' (Q.87:17).

14. The *alif* represent the divine Essence, the station of comprehensiveness (*jam'*), being associated with the number one. Neither *alif* is a letter nor is one a number (*Fut.I:102*). This is because *alif* is the line that all letters are formed from and to which they return once they are decomposed. *Alif* is the root of all letters. *Fut.III:182-3*.

15. Stephen Hirtenstein points out that the *wāw* is less about the *wāw* of *huwa* and more about the sound-*hū* (at the end of *Allāhū*), since this is about pronunciation. In writing, it is a *ḍamma* which may be considered a hidden *wāw*, equivalent to the Ipseity or identity that is non-manifest or the *wāw* that is hidden within the letter *hā'* (◌).

16. 'Senses' refers to the vision by which one ascertains immediate knowledge of reality.

Subsistence belongs to the Hereafter and evanescence and annihilation belong to the world. Subsistence and permanence are better and nobler than transience and annihilation. Furthermore, knowledge (*ma‘rifa*) of God is the beginning of the knowledge of certainty (*‘ilm al-yaqīn*) and its end is the eye of certainty (*‘ayn al-yaqīn*).¹⁷ The vision of certainty is nobler than the knowledge of certainty. Knowledge is for action and the eye is for vision; sensation is nobler than intellection for it is vision that the intellect seeks, and because of the eye it sees. Thus, the visible world is the unseen of the Unseen and, for this reason, it appears in the world due to a circular [order]. Its end connects the beginning, so the manifest is the beginning conditioned by its absoluteness. The eye does not see except in a direction and the ear does not hear except by proximity. In contrast, one who walks in the Real and removes this condition, like Sāriya’s hearing ‘Umar’s [voice] and ‘Umar – may God be pleased with him – looking at him from Medina, and the sound reaching him and other similar things.¹⁸ The unseen world becomes the middle, which is the world of the intellect because it takes its proofs from the sensory world whenever it wishes to know something about it. The absolute visible world thus becomes unseen in the Unseen and that which the intellect seeks and serves. The circular order is as follows:



17. The degrees of certainty are in reference to verses in the Quran: ‘*Nay! If you only knew with knowledge of certainty. Then you shall certainly see it with certainty of vision*’ (Q.102:4–5).

18. Sāriya commanded one of the Muslim armies in Persia at the time of Caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. On Friday, when he was surrounded by the enemy and threatened with annihilation, he heard the voice of ‘Umar, who was then in Medina, shouting to him, ‘Sāriya, the mountain, the mountain!’

The Throne of Allah

Everything has a shadow, and the shadow of Allah is the Throne.¹⁹ However, not every shadow is cast, and the Throne in divinity is a shadow that is not cast but hidden.²⁰ Do you not see that bodies that possess sensible shadows are surrounded by light within which their shadows lie? Light carries its shadow within itself, just as brightness is within darkness. When God seated Himself upon the heart of the servant He said, 'Neither My earth nor My heaven encompass Me but the heart of My believing servant encompasses Me.'²¹ The name *al-Raḥmān* (the Merciful) sits on the known, outer Throne, for the outer Throne is the shadow of the name *al-Raḥmān* and the human Throne is the shadow of Allah.²² The difference in degree between the two Thrones is analogous to the difference between Allah and *al-Raḥmān*, for He has said, 'Say: Call upon Allāh or call upon the

19. The Quran mentions the divine Throne in the verse 'The Merciful ascended upon the Throne' (Q.20:5). Ibn al-'Arabī relates the Throne to the comprehensive knowledge of the Merciful (*al-raḥmān*). According to a hadith, 'The heart of the believer is the Throne of the Merciful.' Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār li-durar akhbār al-a'immah al-aḥḥād* (Beirut, 1983), 55:39. Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī explains, 'The Throne, which is the first sensory form and encompassing all others, is the station where the Merciful (*al-raḥmān*) ascended (*istiwā*)', for it marks the completion and settling of divine theophany.' Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī, *al-Fukūk fī mustanadāt ḥikam al-Fuṣūṣ*, ed. M. Khwājavi (Tehran, 1992), 205.

20. The shadow is another Quranic image found in the verse 'Have you not seen how your Lord has extended the shadow, and if He had so willed, He would have made it stationary?' (Q.25:45). Ibn al-'Arabī refers to it as Expansive Being (*al-wujūd al-munbasit*), which is the origin of individuation. It also refers to the Breath of the Merciful (*al-naḥās al-raḥmānī*). Qayṣarī writes, 'Expansive Being (*al-wujūd al-munbasit*) that expands over the Permanent Archetypes in the [divine] knowledge is a shadow of the [Essence] since it is qualified by generality.' Dāwūd b. Maḥmūd Qayṣarī, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, trans. Mukhtar H. Ali, *The Horizons of Being: The Metaphysics of Ibn al-'Arabī in the Muqaddimat al-Qayṣarī* (Leiden, 2020), 37. According to 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī, 'The shadow is relative existence manifest in the individuation of contingent entities, the properties of which are non-existent.' 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī, *Iṣṭilāḥāt al-ṣūfiyya* (Cairo, 1992), 184.

21. Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, ed. A. al-Sayyrawān, 5 vols. (Beirut, n.d.) 3:1.5; 3:12; Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Maḥajjat al-bayḍā'* (Beirut, 2005), 5:26.

22. The *ḥadīth qudsī* states, 'The heart of the believer is the Throne of God.' al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 55:39.

Merciful [al-Rahmān]. Whichever name you call upon, to Him belong the Most Beautiful Names' (Q.17:110). The difference in rank between the two names will not remain hidden to any intelligent person. For this reason, those subject to obligations (*mukallaf*) ask, 'What is the Most Merciful?' when it is said to them, 'Prostrate to the Most Merciful.' They do not ask, 'What is Allah?' when it is said to them, 'Worship Allah.'²³

Since the Throne is a seat, it became hidden in Mercy and since the divine ascendancy was upon the heart according to 'he encompasses Me', divinity became hidden in man, so his appearance is human but his hiddenness is divine. And because of the hidden divinity that courses within the individual, he claims divinity in God's name, as the Pharaoh said, 'I have not known you to have a god other than me' (Q.28:38). Because he spoke out of volition rather than a state or a [divine] command, he did not dare to say, 'I am Allah' or 'the deity', but used the phrase 'other than me'. He claimed lordship (*rubūbiyya*) because it does not have the same power as divinity (*ulūhiyya*), saying, 'I am your supreme lord' (Q.79:24). Whereas someone who says it in a state, through a command and assisted by volition, [the claim] is all-inclusive, such as Abū Yazīd Bisṭāmī, who said, 'Verily I am Allah, there is no god but Me so worship Me,' and at another time, he said, 'I am Allah.'²⁴ Due to its total pervasiveness, no place remained within him for divinity to cast its arrow. Thus, the mightiness of divinity over every degree of the names is manifest and decisive. No name can compete with it.

There is Only Huwa

'Allah' is a word of negation attached to the higher world, and through it the interpreter (*tarjumān*) is removed, for one who

23. The Quran says, 'If you ask them, "Who created the heavens and the earth?" they will certainly reply, "Allāh"' (Q.31:25). This is because the knowledge of Allah is innate (*fiṭra*), as the Quran describes, 'fiṭrat Allāh ...' (Q.30:30).

24. These ecstatic utterances known as *shatahāt* were characteristic of 'intoxicated' Sufis such as Maṣūr Ḥallāj and Abū Yazīd Bisṭāmī. The ecstatic utterance is the disclosure of a mystical secret or profound truth in the open. While such words contravene the traditional theological notions of divine transcendence, they express the inward state of annihilation in God.

returns to negation after affirmation has no entity to speak of, just as He has negated an associate by saying, 'He has no associate (*lā sharīka lahu*).'²⁵ Thus, 'entity' ('*ayn*') cannot be applied to [associate] though a word for it exists. What remains after the negation '*lā*' (not) are the two *alifs* of the name Allah which are the First and the Last.²⁵ Multiply the two of them together, the *hā*' comes out of them and they are negated. It is the *huwa*.²⁶ The First with respect to Allah is a relational name that does not have an essential reality, for it only has governance in relation to our existence and the primordality of the origination of our entities.²⁷ Likewise, the Last is in relation to the extinction of our entities. With respect to our reality, we are as the verse states, 'I created you from before while you were not even a thing' (Q.19:9); 'You were not a thing mentioned' (Q.76:1). That is,

25. The divine names the First and the Last, along with the Hidden and the Manifest, are considered the Mothers of the names, which Qayṣarī points out 'are subsumed under the comprehensive name *Allāh*, and the Merciful (*al-rahmān*)'. Qayṣarī, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 73.

26. It is not clear how this works since *alif* is worth one and *hā*' is worth five. Michel Vālsan notes in his translation, 'to arrive at a symbolically equivalent result to $1 \times 1 = 1$, it is necessary to consider a certain similarity between *hā*' and *alif*, and this similarity is primarily of a phonetic nature, which is even more evident when a *hamza* is placed on top of the *alif*.' The result, nonetheless, is *huwa*, which is the seal of divine names as Ibn al-'Arabī states, 'As for the seal of the divine names, it is the same as the beginning and it is *huwa*, as He says, "He is God, there is no god but He!" (Q.59:22). He began with *huwa*, then brought forth the name *Allāh*, which encompasses all the names in detail, then a negation. He negated this degree for anyone but Him, and necessitated it for Himself by saying, "except Him". Thus, He began with *huwa* and ended with *huwa*, and all the individual divine names are subsumed under the name *Allāh*, which comes after His saying "*huwa*". Thus, the word *huwa* is more general than the word *Allāh* for it alludes to God and every unseen thing, and to all things that have an identity (*huwiyya*); there is nothing that does not have an identity, whether it is known or mentioned, existent or non-existent.' *Fut*.III.514.19.

27. Purely relational attributes are those that take into consideration their opposites, such as the First and the Last, and the Manifest and the Hidden. Each attribute presupposes the existence of its opposite and is not conceived in relation to any object. Relational attributes are those that presuppose an object when conceiving them, such as the Knower, which is conceived in relation to objects of knowledge. These attributes also relate to contingent existence since God is known as the Creator only when creation takes place, whereas life is essential to His Being and is conceived independently. See Mukhtar H. Ali, *Philosophical Sufism: An Introduction to the School of Ibn al-'Arabī* (London, 2021), 58.

before we existed there was nothing either prior or posterior. Thus, if we did not exist, then only He existed, and this is what we sought to prove.

The Meaning of the Six Component Letters

The first *lām* of this name is the *lām* of knowledge (*ma‘rifa*)²⁸ for the *alif* and *lām* are for making definite, [where] the first *alif* belongs to ‘Allah was, and nothing was with Him’.²⁹ What remains is the second *lām* and the *hā’*, and our discussion is on the written form: this is the *lām* of possession (*al-milk*).³⁰ When the first *alif* and *lām* are removed, the form ‘*lahu*’ remains which is the *lām* of possession and the *hā’* that symbolises the unseen aspect of the absolute Essence. The *hā’* is the first of the letters and denotes origination which is the unseen aspect of the human being, rather the utmost Unseen. Through all these allusions this name came to comprise ‘Allah was, and nothing was with Him’ with respect to the *alif*. With respect to the first *lā*, it contains the station of knowledge; with respect to the second *lām*, it contains the station of possession in which everything other than Him manifests; and with respect to the *hā’*, it contains a reminder that the world belongs to Him, because

28. It might be significant that *ma‘rifa* comes to a value of thirty like the *lām*, and the reason for the *lām* corresponding to *ma‘rifa* rather than ‘ilm.

29. This refers to the hadith, ‘God was, and nothing else was with Him, and His Throne was over the water. He then created the heavens and the earth and wrote everything in the Book.’ al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, no. 7418.

30. In the created order of Being, Ibn al-‘Arabī and his commentators identify five universal planes of manifestation called the divine Presences. The Quran refers to the Kingdom (*al-mulk*) in the verse ‘*Blessed is He in whose hand is the Kingdom, who has power over all things*’ (Q.67:1). In contrast to the Kingdom is the Dominion (*al-malakūt*), mentioned in the verse ‘*We showed Abraham the Dominion of the heavens and earth so that he might be among the certain*’ (Q.6:75). Qayṣarī summarises their relationships here: ‘The first universal Presence is the absolute Unseen, and its world is the permanent realities on the plane of [divine] knowledge. Opposing it is the Presence of the absolute visible (*al-shahāda*), and its world is the Kingdom (*al-mulk*). The Presence of the relative unseen can be divided into that which is closer to the absolute Unseen. Its world is the spirits of Invincibility (*al-jabarūt*) and Dominion (*al-malakūt*), that is, the world of immaterial Intellects and souls; and what is closer to the visible, which is the Imaginal World (*al-mithāl*).’ Qayṣarī, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 133.

it is an indicator of the Unseen that is hidden from them so they cannot name Him, the Exalted, except as *huwa* (He). Therefore, by the *alif*, He mentions Himself and, by the *hā'*, the creatures mention Him. From the face that follows the *alif* of the *lām* of knowledge, He knows Himself without beginning (*azal*), and from the other face, which is the *lām* of possession, His creatures know Him without end (*abad*), with an originated knowledge. With respect to the *lām* itself, which is the *lām* of knowledge, knowledge becomes known. Therefore, in this name, temporal and eternal existence, quality and qualified, are united. So, look how complete and perfect this name is!

As for the *alif* that is manifest in speech, [which comes] after the *lām* of possession [and] is connected to the *hā'* in script and the unseen *wāw* in the *hā'*, when the spirit articulates the *hā'*: if the body utters it, the *wāw* becomes *yā'* and if the imaginalising soul utters it, it becomes *alif*.³¹ Thus, the property of this spoken *alif* and the *wāw* which changes forms according to the speaker has another property (*ḥukm*). That is because when the *hā'* looked at the first *alif* and its station which was not connected to anything, an *alif* appeared after the *lām* so that *lām* could be connected in speech; the *hā'* remains and nothing with her, as long as creation endures, without mentioning *hā'*, for *hā'* is silent with the silence of life, not the silence of death. If the created world does utter or mention it, then the one who mentions it can only be as we have explained before. So that after *hā'*, there appear the letters just as we have mentioned it.

31. Here, there is interplay between the vowels and what they represent. Only at the level of the spirit does the *wāw* remain the *wāw*, which is unchanged and unseen. This completes the *hā'* with the *wāw* which is *huwa*, but the *wāw* becomes *yā'* because it represents the *kasra*, which is prostration and becomes the servant ('*abd*'). It becomes *alif* because of the erectness of the *alif* and creating divinity in one's imaginalising. Stephen Hirtenstein comments that it is important to note that the word *ḍamma* means 'uniting', which is why it is such a powerful symbol of the union of God in Man. One might infer also that since *kasra* comes from the root meaning 'breaking', it emphasises the distinction between God and Man, and *fatha* the 'opening' of the relationship.

Huwa and Weak Letters

Verify what we have mentioned in the *Book of Huwa* about *huwa*, *hā’* and *hiya* with respect to the union of essences and the engendering of the cosmos. If you vocalise it with a *kasra* as in *billāhi*, a *fatha* as in *Allāh* and a *ḍamma*, you will find *huwa* in the *ḍamma*, *hā’* in the *fatha* and *hiya* in the *khafḍ*. As for the state of non-vocalisation (*sukūn*), we have said that it represents fixity (*thubūt*) [of unseen essences].

Allah and the Divine Names

Since [the name Allah] has ascendancy over the rest of the names, the names flow in it when it manifests and it flows in them when they manifest, like water flows in water. Allah’s becoming specified in one of these names or their becoming individuated in [Allah] is due to the property, effect and orientation [of the names] towards it. Stories reveal the names and divinity in the knowledge of the names, and divinity gives rise to stories, so the affair is circular.

The Bewilderment (ḥayra) Produced by the Name Allah

The distinguishing characteristic of this name in the world, apart from its station of comprehensiveness and ascendancy, is bewilderment pervading all things that try to know and witness it. Its active Presence is a place of witnessing that is witnessed by none other than Him. All those who speak about it are ignorant concerning it. He imagines having spoken correctly, but he is mistaken. This existential place of witnessing and Presence of activity is worthy of divinity and no one else. Even the great intellectuals and rationalists among our companions such as Abū Ḥāmid [al-Ghazālī] and others imagine that knowledge of Him precedes knowledge of ourselves, but this is wrong. Of course, they know Him via a theoretical division, that existent things are divided into two types: that which has a beginning and that which does not, and so on. This is all correct, but they will never know that before attempting to know Him, one must establish Him as a deity (*ilāh*). His being an Essence is conceptually correct, but it is other than His being a deity. Here, we are speaking about

[the quality of] divinity, not that He is an eternal Essence whose non-existence is inconceivable. Those who profess the opinion above could not have affirmed the knowledge of divinity whose name is Allah, except after knowing Him. For this reason, scripture (*shar'*) speaks of Lordship saying, 'He who knows himself knows his Lord,'³² and did not say, 'He who knows the Lord, knows himself.' It is incorrect because even though Lordship is the closest thing to us, we cannot know it except through ourselves. So, what business do you have with divinity, for scripture called this divine station the Presence of Bewilderment in the hadith when [the Prophet] was asked, 'Where was our Lord before He created the heavens and the earth?' He replied, 'In a Cloud (*al-'amā'*), through contraction (*qaṣr*) and expansion (*madd*);³³ neither above it nor below it was there any air.'³⁴ 'Below any air' expresses a negation and *qaṣr* expresses bewilderment, which is reserved for the name Allah. For this reason, sights and minds are perplexed in perceiving Him in whatever way they seek Him, as He is not confined to place. Expansion (*madd*) refers to the clouds, the atmosphere that carries water which is life and the origin of everything, and it cannot be said that He Himself is in it. He indicated an isthmus-like existent between the heavens and the earth to describe Himself, and in the isthmuses (*barāzikh*), bewilderments are bewildered, so what about the bewildered themselves? This is like the line between the shade and sunlight, or the imaginary [space] between two dots, lines, planes or any two things. The isthmus-like

32. 'Abd al-Wāḥid Āmidī, *Ghurar al-ḥikam wa-durar al-kalim* (Tehran, 2000), no. 7946. Ibn al-'Arabī says, 'The Sea of the Cloud is the isthmus between God and creation.' *Fut.*I.41.31. Because it is a veil and isthmus between the unknowable Essence and the multiplicity of the names and attributes, it also refers to the exclusive Singularity (*al-ahādīyya*). Qayṣarī writes, 'The Degree of Singularity effaces all the attributes and names; it is called the Comprehensive Union (*jam' al-jam'*), the Ultimate Reality (*ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqā'iq*) and the Cloud (*al-'amā'*).' Qayṣarī, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 53. It also relates to the Breath of the Merciful (*al-naḥas al-raḥmānī*), which, as Ibn al-'Arabī describes, 'The Cloud derives from His breathing, while the forms, which are the worlds, derive from the word "Be!"' *Fut.*II.331.23.

33. 'Through contraction (*qaṣr*) and expansion (*madd*)' is not part of the original hadith but interpolated by Ibn al-'Arabī.

34. Abū 'Īsā Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ wa-huwa Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, ed. A.M. Shākir (Cairo, 1975), 5: book 44, no. 3109; Muḥammad Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah* (Beirut, 2018), 1: book 1, no. 182.

word (*al-kalima al-barzakhīyya*) returns to bewilderment itself,³⁵ so there is nothing but bewilderment. A person only obtains what he has, not something external; nor should he. Thus, if you say it is He (*huwa huwa*), then He is, and if you say He is not, then He is not, so one is bewildered.

When God wants to bewilder some of the creatures from afar, He creates a temporal power in a temporal agent (creature). He creates an effect within it and causes it to orient itself towards an action that it performs. So, what did not exist previously comes into being. This agent then says, ‘This act belongs to me,’ and another says, ‘I have earned this (*kasb*),’ and a third one says, ‘It is neither my action nor my doing.’ But the eternal Agent says, ‘The action belongs to Me,’ and He speaks the Truth. It is not difficult for the sound of mind to comprehend that it is possible for there to be a single action from two agents but not a single effect from two causes. Understand this section and you will be guided, God willing!³⁶

Allah is not known, nor can be known, nor unknown, nor can be made unknown. He is not witnessed, unveiled, encompassed through sight, intellected or perceived, because these forms of perception are attached to the names of divinity and to their appropriate properties, such as the Lord (*al-rabb*), the Owner (*al-mālik*), the Faithful (*al-mu‘min*). Thus, the Book and Sunna have affirmed seeing Him in the Hereafter and in this world, as Moses said, ‘My Lord, allow me to see you’ (Q.7:143), and He said, ‘When his Lord revealed Himself to the mountain’ (Q.7:143). He did not give divinity an entry, rather negated it, saying, ‘Eyes do not perceive Him, but He perceives vision’ (Q.6:103). He used ‘He’ and affirmed that He cannot be perceived, which is correct, [whereas] He says, ‘Faces on that day will be bright, gazing at their Lord’ (Q.75:22–3), which also connect to the veil, ‘Nay, on that day they will be veiled from their Lord’ (Q.83:15). [The Prophet], peace be upon him, also said, ‘You will see your Lord as you see the Moon’, and in [another] hadith,

35. *Al-kalima al-barzakhīyya* may refer to the *Jalāla*.

36. This is because the real agent is Allah who acts through the creature. The relationship between Allah and the creatures is not through cause and effect, but through a type of identification between the Eternal and the temporal. God manifests through the creatures and is not the *cause* of them in the philosophical sense. This is because there is only One thing in existence, which is Allah.

'as you see the Sun', as Muslim relates in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*. Another sound hadith in Muslim's book says, 'The Lord will reveal Himself to a group at the Resurrection, saying, "I am your Lord." They will say, "We seek refuge in Allah from you. We will stay here until our Lord arrives, and when He arrives we will recognise Him." Allah will come to them in the form that they know and say, "I am your Lord," and they will say, "You are our Lord."' Only the Lord appeared, and they only recognised the Lord, and they only spoke to the Lord; He says, 'Your Lord came and the angel ...' (Q.89:22). If Allah comes, it only means that the Lord has come, as we have mentioned. States and signs through their realities seek their specific names from Allah, and Allah is the Comprehensive and All-encompassing.

Huwa and the Supreme Identity

What an excellent exhortation God gives when He commands his Prophet, and includes us with him, when He says, 'Know that there is no god but Allah,' which shows that the negation is the affirmation itself.³⁷ The negator is the affirmer, and the affirmed is identical to the negated, for it was only divinity that he negated and it was only divinity that he affirmed.³⁸ The affirmer and the affirmed are only the divine, for if the affirmer did not affirm itself, then others could not affirm it. If something that is not affirmed affirms something else, it is false, so in reality, [divinity] affirms itself. Our words originate from the plane of truths (*maqām al-ḥaqā'iq*), of which there are six foundations, but they ultimately reduce to one. Likewise, Being is but one reality and 'nothing else is with it'. A subtle allusion can be found in Scripture: 'He who has a heart or lends an ear while he is a witness' (Q.50:37) and the witness is He (*huwa*). He says, 'Allah was, and nothing was with Him' and 'He is now as He always was.' Thus, the 'now' means He is Him just as He 'was' (*kāna*) Him. So, there

37. This is because the affirmation of divine Unity occurs through the negation of all otherness.

38. Sheer Being is not conditioned by either absoluteness or restriction. It is one, but not with a oneness superadded to its Essence, nor a multiplicity. Therefore, even condition of 'divinity' must be negated to affirm Sheer Being. But only Being affirms itself since all those who affirm are 'other'.

is nothing but Him (*huwa*) despite the fact that we also exist.³⁹ It is clear that what is transient is transient and what is [essential] reality is [essential] reality. There is only an unseen that manifests then disappears, then it reappears to disappear again, and so on. If you follow the Book and the Sunna, you will only ever find the One who is He (*huwa*), yet the *huwa* never ceases to be Unseen.

The realised ones unanimously agree that God does not reveal Himself twice in the same form to the same being, or in the same form to two beings. This is because of the expansiveness of *huwa* as Abū Ṭālib [al-Makkī]⁴⁰ said, ‘Only He who has no like sees Him who has no like.’ Therefore, the one who sees is identical to the seen, as He said, ‘*There is nothing like Him (laysa ka-mithlihī shay’)*’ (Q.42:11). Even if someone claimed that there is not a ‘thing’ like Him, the thing (*shay’*) is He Himself; it is irrelevant whether the particle *kāf* is necessary for comparison (*ṣifa*) or is superfluous (*zā’ida*).⁴¹ If it is necessary for comparison, the meaning relates to what Abū Ṭālib has said earlier, and if it is not necessary for comparison, then there is no ‘thing’ since ‘thing’ is identical to Him; He is He, and nothing is but Him.

Veils of Light and Darkness and Bewilderment in the Divine Attributes

Whatever we have stated about Allah has been confirmed by the Prophet’s saying, peace and blessing be upon him, ‘God has seventy thousand veils of light and darkness. If He were to remove them the glories of His face would burn wheresoever His gaze would reach among His creation.’⁴² This is the Allah referred to by *huwa* as we have mentioned. How learned the Prophet is with respect to stations and how enlightened he is with respect to things! The

39. The only Real Being is Allah and all ‘other’ are His manifestations; it is multiplicity within unity.

40. Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d.382/993 or 386/996) is the author of *Qūt al-qulūb* (Nourishment of the Hearts), the definitive work on Sufi ethics.

41. Ibn al-‘Arabī is remarking on the particle *kāf* attached to the word *mithl* and its possible semantic consequences. In either case, the conclusion is the same: ‘There is nothing in existence except Allah.’

42. See *Fut.*II.80, 460, 488, 542, 554. Ibn Mājah relates a similar version of this hadith in his *Sunan*.

purpose [of his statement] is not to indicate the number [of veils] but that Allah cannot appear. He supported his words by [mentioning] vision (*baṣar*). Vision is ennobled because it is a description for God whereas the intellect is not, given that the intellect is attached to the unseen.⁴³ There is no unseen for God, the Creator, all is visible to Him. This is why vision [has been mentioned] and not the intellect.

Accordingly, as we have set forth regarding the Presence of Bewilderment (*ḥayra*), the people of speculative thought, rationality and reflection have no share in bewilderment in the attributes, I mean, to affirm or negate their essences (*a'yān*) for Allah. As for their properties, there is no disagreement among the intelligent. If there is bewilderment in this regard, it occurs when one affirms their essences superadded to the qualified Essence; one implicitly affirms plurality, multiplicity and neediness towards God, whereas He is Unique in all respects. So how can this be admitted? If we say, for example, this affirmation [of essences] does not necessitate a multiplicity [in the Essence], there is a graver implication than multiplicity, namely, that the Essence is perfected by something else. Everything 'perfected-by-another' is 'imperfect-in-itself'. Those who deny the essences [for the attributes], avoiding the objections of multiplicity or imperfection, fall into another dilemma which deals with their properties. Based on what has been established concerning the knowledge of Allah, one cannot argue that the properties only pertain to the Essence. If it is posited that He is Able in Himself, it would imply His 'act' is eternal, which is impossible. Thus, it is absurd to posit that He is Able only in Himself.

Furthermore, the heart does not find clarity by inducing the unseen from the visible, especially since it knows what sources the intellect draws from in how it constructs its arguments and proofs. It is inherently deficient and to proceed in this way is unsound. There are things obtained only by 'witnessing' (*mushāhada*), others by

43. Vision is also ennobled in the hadith of *nawāfil* where God's vision unites with the servant's vision, 'The servant does not cease approaching Me through supererogatory works until I love him, and when I love him, I am the hearing through which he hears, the sight with which he sees, the tongue with which he speaks, the hand with which he seizes and the foot with which he walks.' Muḥammad al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. M.D. al-Bughā (Damascus, 1987), no. 6502.

visionary experience (*ru’yā*), others by [divine] instruction (*ta‘rīf*).⁴⁴ To want to obtain them by means other than these is fabrication and impudence.

What is imperative for the rationalists is to stop and acknowledge existence and the properties of the attributes as there is no scope for objection, denying or affirming their essences. Reason is powerless to grasp such matters and even in things of lesser importance. Look at the ascendancy of this marvellous name and this strange word in all the worlds by the bewilderment and blindness it provokes. Consider how bewildered the rationalists find themselves, to the point that they cannot agree on a single point, both those who affirm and those who deny. That is why they push back against the people of witnessing and refute them. God forbid that their form of knowledge does not correspond with theirs! Their knowledge is only what they see which will always be the apparent form of things. However, if you wish to see your face properly in the mirror, you do not approach obliquely but from the front. Otherwise, you see the face of someone you cannot recognise and exclaim, ‘That’s not what I’m looking for!’, and then you place your face properly in front of the mirror and finally say, ‘That’s right!’ The fault was yours, not the mirror!

When your seeking is conditioned by preconceived ideas you forgo a great benefit. The people of witnessing are in greater bewilderment than the rationalists. The same is true for the people of vision, especially during their first vision. Vision is different from witnessing. This is why tradition speaks of vision in the Hereafter and not of witnessing. We have dealt with this topic in the *Kitāb al-‘Ayn*, so consult it there.⁴⁵ The people of vision hold fast to what occurs to them in it. If they see it again, they see something different. This is true for every vision, so they become bewildered like the people of witnessing. It is only bewilderment upon bewilderment. If the *huwa* was apparent, there would not be such diversity, and if the *huwa* was apparent then it would not be *huwa*, but *anā* (I). Since the *huwa* is necessary, diversity is necessary. We have a poem along these lines:

44. Ibn al-‘Arabī says, ‘Witnessing (*shuhūd*) is to see the things by the proofs of divine Unity (*tawhīd*), and it is also seeing God in things. It is also the reality of certainty (*yaqīn*) without any doubt; it follows unveiling or it is said that it is followed by unveiling.’ *Fut.*II.132.4.

45. It is called *K. Alif-yā’ wa-huwa kitāb al-‘ayn* (RG 17) in the *Fihris*.

When I wanted to enjoy His existence,
 I distributed what I possessed to the debtors
 I disappeared from my being, leaving my place to His Reality
 Its manifestation is therefore based on a disappearance

Therefore, the manifestation of *huwa*, which is Allah, occurs when I am no longer I (*anā*), because this prevents *huwa* from being *huwa*, for if I remain upon the manifestation of *huwa*, [there is] a 'you' (*anta*) that exists. But *huwa* is necessary, and my negation is necessary, because I have no real permanence. *Huwa* does not cease except in Itself, because *huwa* is not in Itself from Itself nor from another.⁴⁶ And from this perspective, it is [called] divine bewilderment. 'You did not throw when you threw, but it was God who threw' (Q.8:17). So, act, My servant, though you do not act, but it is I who act. Whereas I only act through you since it is not possible to do it through Me [alone].⁴⁷ You are necessary, and I am too, for I am your ineluctable necessity! So, things are dependent between me and Him. I am bewildered and bewilderment itself becomes bewildered. Everything enters bewilderment. There is only bewilderment in bewilderment. How many times I have said:

The Lord is Real and I am real
 Would that I knew who is obliged (*mukallaf*)
 If I say the servant, then this one is pure negation
 And if I say the Lord, what is He obliged with?
 Bewilderment arose from bewilderment
 Is there still anyone who is not bewildered?
 I am determined, I have no act of my own
 What I do I cannot avoid

46. That is, *huwa* is not something He assigns Himself which would be a type of condition.

47. According to Ibn al-'Arabī, divine manifestation is necessary due to the intrinsic necessity of the divine names to seek their own manifestation. The opening paragraph of the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* explains why it was necessary for God to create the world and, in particular, the human being. He says, 'God wished to see the essences (*a'yān*) of His Beautiful Names, which are infinite – or if you will, to see His Own Essence in a comprehensive being (*kawn jāmi'*) who embraces the divine order so that His mystery would be revealed to Himself. This is because the vision a thing has of itself is not the same as the vision it has through something else which acts like a mirror.' Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. A. 'Afifi (Beirut, 1980), 48.

The One to whom I attach my act
 He Himself is not free to act
 If I say ‘I’, He says ‘no!’
 If He says ‘I’ then nothing remains
 He and I are on a fixed point
 But one which has no permanence
 And how many times have I said:
 I am amazed that He puts duties on what He has created
 While no act belongs to me that I can see
 Would that I knew who might be bound by obligations
 When there is only Allah and none other than Him

Despite having said this, I am told, ‘Act!’ On the topic of divine bewilderment, He says, ‘*My Word cannot be changed*’ (Q.50:29). The intelligent person takes it as upholding and executing the divine command, which nothing can escape due to its force. But the realised one (*muḥaqqiq*) takes it as bewilderment because this is all he is capable of. Otherwise, just as [prayers] were reduced to five from fifty and could not be reduced further, likewise, it was not possible for them to remain at fifty, as we have said before.

This is a little of the majesty that characterises the *Jalāla*. We have reached the aim that time has allowed – all praise be to Allah! The Book of Majesty is thus complete – all praise be to Allah, by His favour and His help. Bless our master Muḥammad, his family and his companions.

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