

Ibn al-‘Arabī

The Doorway to an Intellectual Tradition¹

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By ‘intellectual tradition’ I mean the branch of Islamic learning that puts its primary effort into actualizing the intellect (*‘aql*), understood as a living awareness of the way things actually are. Those who can be classified as members of this tradition have usually been looked back upon as philosophers or Sufis. They held that the final goal of all Islamic learning – and, indeed, of all religion – is to awaken people to their own intellectual and spiritual nature, which is the divine image found in the heart. One of the most famous members of this tradition – al-Ghazālī – sums up its role in the title of his magnum opus, *Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*: ‘Giving Life to Religious Knowledge.’ It is certainly not without relevance that Ibn al-‘Arabī came to be called Muhyi’l-Dīn (‘He who gives life to the religion’).²

When we talk about Ibn al-‘Arabī’s ‘living legacy,’ we are suggesting that the life in question was passed on to those who came later and that it continues today. If a legacy is ‘living,’ then it surely is not the legacy of books, for books in themselves are dead. It only makes sense to speak of the *life* of a legacy if it is found in living souls. What sort of legacy, then, can properly be called that of the Greatest Master, Muhyi’l-Dīn ibn al-‘Arabī? Perhaps we can find a succinct answer in a saying of one of the early Sufi teachers, Abū Bakr al-Wāsitī (d.932), who died

1. This paper was originally delivered by Professor Chittick as the keynote speaker at the 2015 Annual Conference of the Ibn ‘Arabi Society USA: ‘A Living Legacy: Ibn ‘Arabi in Today’s World’, held on 23–4 October 2015 in the Presidential Rooms of The Faculty House on Columbia University campus, New York.

2. On the significance of this name and the likelihood that Ibn al-‘Arabī used it to refer to himself, see Stephen Hirtenstein, ‘Reviving the Dead: Ibn ‘Arabi as Heir of Jesus,’ *JMIAS* 57 (2015), 37–56.

two hundred years before Ibn al-‘Arabī’s birth: ‘Anyone who lives through himself is dead, and anyone who lives through the Real will never die.’³

This aphorism is a straightforward statement of *tawhīd*, the assertion of divine unity that is the first principle of Islamic thought. Al-Wāsiṭī is saying that what we call life is not in fact life because it is inseparable from death. God, however, is ‘the Living who does not die’ (Q.25:58). It follows that there is no true life but God’s life, no true being but God’s being, and no true reality but the reality of the Real. Hence only those ‘who live through the Real will never die.’

In short, if Ibn al-‘Arabī left behind a *living* legacy, it will be present only in the awareness and consciousness of people who ‘live through the Real.’ Participation in this legacy demands passing beyond illusory life and joining with real life. The many thousands of pages that Ibn al-‘Arabī wrote provide ways of accessing this life. I want to focus on one way in particular – the way that forms the core of the intellectual tradition. It is nicely expressed in a maxim cited by Ahmad Sam‘ānī, a great teacher from Persia in the generation before Ibn al-‘Arabī: ‘Recognition is the heart’s life with God.’⁴

The heart is the center of human life and consciousness. The Qur’an and the Hadith talk repeatedly about the need to have a healthy and wholesome heart, which is an awareness that sees things as they truly are and acts appropriately.⁵ By placing awareness and understanding in the heart and not in the brain, Islam links up with much of the ancient world. This is perhaps most obvious with China, where both Confucians and Daoists tell us that the primary human task is to rectify the heart – even if most translators render the Chinese word for heart (*xin* 心) as ‘mind’ in an attempt to make sense to modern readers.

3. ‘Attār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā’*, ed. Muhammad Isti‘lāmī (Tehran: Zuwwār, 1346/1967), p.736.

4. Cited in Chittick, *Divine Love: Islamic Literature and the Path to God* (Yale University Press, 2013), p.125.

5. On the central role of the heart in Islamic thought, see Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam* (SUNY Press, 1992), Chap. 10.

In Sam‘ānī’s terms, achieving ‘the heart’s life with God’ – an achievement that I take as the goal of the intellectual tradition – demands *ma‘rifa*, ‘recognition.’ Scholars like myself typically waffle when translating this word. In verbal form we use ‘know’ or ‘recognize,’ and as a noun we translate it as knowledge, science, and, particularly in the context of Sufism, gnosis. The active participle of the word, ‘*ārif*, is typically translated as ‘gnostic.’ Another noun from the same root, ‘*irfān*, which in classical texts means exactly the same thing as *ma‘rifa*, has come to be used in recent centuries to designate Sufism in its more theoretical forms.

There are major problems, however, with using the words *gnosis* and *gnostic*, the least of which is that people associate these words with an ancient Christian heresy. A deeper problem is simply that Arabic *ma‘rifa* is an everyday verb and noun, whereas English *gnosis* is never used in daily conversation – except perhaps among readers of this journal. Another problem can be observed in practically all translations of Sufi texts available in English. In discussions of the recognizers – the ‘gnostics’ – the verbal form of *ma‘rifa* is often used to explain the sort of knowing in question, which is to say that the sense of the passage hinges on using the word *ma‘rifa* as a verb. But English has no verb for gnosis, so the specific characteristics of *ma‘rifa* get lost in translation.

In Arabic the primary word for knowing is ‘*ilm*. Scholars translate the word variously according to context – knowledge, learning, science. The distinction between ‘*ilm* and *ma‘rifa* coincides more or less with that between ‘knowing’ and ‘recognizing’ in English.⁶ ‘Knowing’ is such a basic human experience that it cannot be defined, not least because it is presupposed in every definition. ‘Recognizing’ is then a specific sort of knowing, namely recovering in yourself a knowledge that you already

6. I discussed the way Ibn al-‘Arabī understands the relationship between ‘*ilm* and *ma‘rifa* in *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), pp. 47ff., but in my various translations over the years I have made little attempt to distinguish between the two roots (except in the case of ‘*ārif*, ‘gnostic,’ as contrasted with ‘*ālim*, ‘knower,’ or ‘scholar’).

know. To speak of recognizing God is to suggest the Qur'anic notion that knowledge of God pertains to human nature – we are born with it but tend to forget it. The goal of human learning is then to remember and recognize what we have forgotten. Here the Qur'anic teaching recalls Plato and his notion of anamnesis – the elimination of our amnesia. Parallels are abundant in ancient texts, such as the teaching of Mencius (6A11) that the goal of life is to recover our lost heart.

When we look at the use of *'ilm* and *ma'rifa* in Arabic, we see that a clear distinction was commonly drawn between the two words. Knowledge that comes from the outside is called *'ilm* – it is the information that we gain from a lecture or a book or a Google search. Knowledge that comes from the inside is called *ma'rifa* – it is an unmediated knowing, not received from any book or teacher. Its truth is self-evident to the knowing heart. It may come to be known because of an outside stimulus, but, once it is found, it is as if the heart has always known it. In terms of the Islamic creation myth, recognition of the true nature of things is latent in the heart because God taught Adam the names when He created him.

In discussions of epistemology, Muslim scholars often called knowledge from the outside *naqlī*, 'transmitted.' Those who gain a firm grounding in this sort of knowledge are then called the '*ulamā*', the knowers or scholars. In contrast, knowledge that is discovered inside the heart was called '*aqlī*, 'intellectual.' Those who found intellectual knowledge were commonly called '*urafā*', 'recognizers' – or, as translators usually render the term, 'gnostics.' The word *recognizer* was probably used for great Sufi teachers more often than the word *Sufi* itself, which suggests that Sufism was considered the pre-eminent path for achieving unmediated knowledge of things as they truly are.

The *locus classicus* for the intellectual tradition's use of the word *ma'rifa* is the famous maxim, 'Whoever recognizes himself recognizes his Lord.' Most people, including myself, have translated this as 'Whoever knows himself knows his Lord.'⁷

7. Ibn al-'Arabī (and many others) attributes this saying to the Prophet and quotes it repeatedly. Al-Ghazālī says that the saying is by 'Alī, and

But when we use the word *know* in this saying and then bring up the topic of *gnostics*, we miss the connection – especially when the verb ‘recognize’ is used repeatedly in the discussion, as is so often the case.

In terms of this saying, the ‘recognizers’ are those who have recognized themselves for who they truly are and, as a consequence, have recognized the Real for who He truly is. Once they achieve this recognition, they have reached what Sam‘ānī calls ‘the heart’s life with God,’ a point that can be inferred from a saying of Abū Yazīd Bastāmī (d.ca.874) often cited by Ibn al-‘Arabī: ‘You take your knowledge dead from the dead, but I take my knowledge from the Living who does not die.’



It should be clear that when I say that Ibn al-‘Arabī is a doorway to the *intellectual* tradition, I am using the word *intellectual* in the specific meaning to which I have been alluding, that is, intellectual as contrasted with transmitted, or recognized truth as contrasted with information. In order to grasp the significance of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s living legacy, it is important to have a clear understanding of the difference between these two sorts of knowing.

Transmitted knowledge includes language, history, scripture, and everything that we study in schools and universities or learn from our environment and the media. In contrast, intellectual knowledge must be discovered and recognized within ourselves. The usual example is basic mathematics. At the beginning we may receive it from others, but in principle we can discover it within ourselves; once we find it, it is self-evident. In contrast, as a general rule transmitted knowledge remains hearsay, so it never belongs to us and we can never be sure that it is true.

In short, you cannot acquire intellectual knowledge by transmission, and you cannot discover transmitted knowledge within yourself. When Muslim philosophers discussed the distinction between these two sorts of knowing, it was often

scholars of the transmitted learning consider this more likely.

because they wanted to distinguish between knowledge transmitted from prophetic revelation and knowledge discovered by self-recognition. What most people call 'religion,' after all, is based entirely on transmitted knowledge. Religion offers a worldview and a manner of living traced back to a divine intervention in history. We know about it because it has been transmitted to us.

It is worth keeping in mind that in terms of being based on transmitted knowledge, there is no difference between a religious worldview and our own scientific worldview. The difference lies rather in the nature of the prophets who set the worldviews in motion. Our own great scientists and thinkers may have made no explicit claim to supra-human sanction, but their followers see them as true prophets.

By far the most important of the intellectual sciences is metaphysics. Its importance derives from the status of its subject matter, that is, the Real, the only reality that truly is. The philosophers acknowledged that the object studied in metaphysics and the object studied in Kalam (dogmatic theology) were identical. But the philosophers held that the Kalam experts were hemmed in by their insistence on rooting their knowledge in the transmitted knowledge of scripture, whereas they themselves strove to know the Real without dependence on transmission. They did this by disciplining their souls in order to gain access to supra-individual intelligence. Classical Islamic philosophy was nothing if not a spiritual discipline, much in the manner of classical Greek philosophy.⁸

If we look at the overall worldview of the Muslim philosophers, it was not significantly different from that of the Kalam experts or the Sufis. What was different was the language in which it was posed and the relative degree to which transmitted knowledge and intellectual knowledge played roles in its formulation. This general worldview was given its most extensive and elaborate treatment by Ibn al-ʿArabī. One of his great contributions was to show that spiritual practice, moral develop-

8. See, for example, Pierre Hadot's *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

ment, ethical foundations, and ritual behavior were all rooted in the same Real Being that was understood as the source of the objective universe by the philosophical tradition. In other words, for him there was no way to justify a sharp separation between ethics and ontology, or subjectivity and objectivity.⁹

When Muslim scholars set down the Islamic worldview, they did so with the time-honored purpose of explaining the manner in which the One interrelates with the many. They typically described the descent of all things – their ‘devolution’ if you like – from the Real. This descent begins with a first manifestation that was called by many names, such as the First Intellect or the Muhammadan Spirit. As things move farther from the Real, they are sustained by the Real at every stage of their unfolding. Eventually everything that emerges from the One reaches a furthest limit, and then it reverses direction and is gradually re-integrated into its origin. In briefest terms, this worldview held that the One gives rise to the many, the One sustains the many, and the One brings the many back to Itself.

Ibn al-‘Arabī offers several versions of this scheme. In one of the better-known schemes, he describes the entire cosmos as ‘the Breath of the All-Merciful.’ Each thing in the universe is a letter, a word, a sentence, or a book uttered by God and situated at an appropriate level of deployment within the Breath, just as our own spoken words are situated within our breath in a specific manner. Each created thing is thus a precise enunciation of the Real Being, and each has its own role to play in the book of creation. Once the spoken things are deployed in God’s Breath, they move back to their origin in a series of stages. This process might be called an ‘evolution,’ since it reverses the prior devolution and brings about the completion of the great circle of being (*dā’irat al-wujūd*).¹⁰

9. I touch on this issue in some detail in ‘Time, Space, and the Objectivity of Ethical Norms’ in *Ibn ‘Arabī: Heir to the Prophets* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), Chap. 6.

10. On existence as a circle in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teachings, see Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), pp. 220–34.

The ascending ladder back to the One reaches its fullest outward manifestation in human beings, each of which has the potential to undertake an inner ascent leading back to the First Intellect and beyond. This ascent is prefigured in Islam's sacred history by the Prophet's *mi'rāj*, literally, his 'ladder'—the night journey during which he rose up through the cosmos and entered into the presence of God.



It is clear that any worldview depends on transmitted knowledge. We think the way we do and believe what we believe because of what we have received, much of it unconsciously, from our social and cultural environment. We accept certain truths as self-evident not because they are in fact self-evident but because our culture has inculcated a way of thinking that makes them appear as self-evident. Once we step outside of our specific cultural limitations, we see that so-called facts and truths turn out to be situational. This statement sounds like 'relativism,' which is sometimes taken as a self-evident truth of academia. But for Ibn al-'Arabī, to speak this way is simply to situate relative, perspectival truth in the context of the Absolute Reality, which in itself allows for no relativism whatsoever. To relativize our own supposed certainties is to affirm the most basic of all truths, the only truth that is completely self-evident to a healthy human soul. That truth is that there is nothing truly real but the Real, that nothing truly exists but the One Being, or, as the transmitted learning puts it, 'There is no god but God.'

If we keep on believing in what we have received by hearsay after having reflected on the fact that it is, after all, hearsay, this is no doubt because we trust the source from which we have heard it. The ulama take such trust as an important asset of the believer. Those who subscribe to the religion, they say, need to have *taqlīd*, 'imitation.' This is because people must imitate their teachers in order to gain access to any knowledge, not least knowledge of the religion's teachings and scriptures. In the science of jurisprudence, the word *taqlīd* has the specific meaning

of following the authority of a *mujtahid*, that is a jurist who is supposed to have achieved a complete mastery of Islamic law.

Notice, however, that the imitation discussed in jurisprudence pertains only to the Shari‘a – that is, the do’s and the don’ts that the jurists themselves have established on the basis of the scriptural sources. Without such imitation people will not be able to perform Islamic rites and observe the law. But one cannot imitate the jurists or anyone else in the foundational article of faith – that is *tawhīd*, the assertion that God is one. In other words, if one believes in God’s unity in imitation of others, that is no better than not believing. As the theologians maintain, faith demands acknowledging the truth in the heart (*al-tasdīq bi’l-qalb*), not blind acceptance. The intellectual tradition takes this mindful acknowledgement of *tawhīd* as the first stage in recognizing the Real.

The Muslim philosophers had no quarrel with the notion that religious guidance is transmitted and that it must be learned as such. They insisted, however, that intellectual knowledge cannot be achieved by way of imitation – it demands a living awareness of its truth. No matter what you may have been told about the nature of things by prophets or theologians or scientists, you cannot know the truth or falsity of what they are saying without discovering the reality of things within yourself. Until you do that, your knowledge is simply hearsay.

Discovering the truth of things in the heart was commonly called *tahqīq*, ‘realization.’ The word is derived from the same root as *haqq*, which I have been translating as Real, but which also means true, correct, appropriate, right, and rightfully due. Realization is to know the Real along with the reality (*haqīqa*) of things. Ibn al-‘Arabī frequently points out that the reality of a given thing is the manner in which it participates in the Real Being and makes rightful demands on the subject who knows it. Ultimately, a thing’s reality is the thing as known eternally by God. Hence, knowing things as they actually are demands recognizing them in the Real, not outside the Real. Such recognition will never be found outside ‘the heart’s life with God.’

Ibn al-‘Arabī is usually called a Sufi, but he does not apply this word to himself, nor does he often use it to speak of others.

In fact we can just as well call him a philosopher, or a Kalam expert, or a jurist, except that he is all of these things and none of them. Given the frequency with which he stresses the importance of realization, I think one of the few titles that he would accept is *muhaqqiq*, 'realizer' – someone who has realized the truth and reality of things by recognizing them in the Real and acting in the appropriate manner in the world. Ibn al-ʿArabī's most important and influential disciple – his step-son Sadr al-Dīn Qūnawī – refers to their perspective precisely as *mashrab al-tahqīq*, the school of realization.¹¹



Western historians are inclined to classify Muslim philosophers as rationalists. In order to make this claim, they need to translate the word *ʿaql* – intelligence or intellect – as reason. Unless we are careful about qualifying this translation, we will end up suggesting that *ʿaql* for Avicenna meant the same as *raison* for Descartes. This is to ignore the ontological dimension of intelligence, which is much discussed by the philosophers and central to the Islamic worldview.

Take, for example, the word *wujūd*, which is used by philosophers and theologians to designate existence or being. Literally it means finding, perceiving, and knowing; it came to mean existence in the usage of the philosophers. After all, to exist is to be found and perceived (if not by us, certainly by the Real). It follows that recognition, which is intelligence finding the truth and reality of things within itself, is not just the knowing awareness of the mind and heart; it is also the very existence of the mind and heart. Inasmuch as intelligence is identical with its source, it is the radiance of God. By giving systematic form to *philo-sophia*, 'the love of wisdom,' philosophers were striving

11. He uses this expression in *al-Nusūs* ('The Texts,' p.28; <https://sbsuniversityacademia.edu/WilliamCChittick>). In the Persian part of his correspondence with Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī, he uses the equivalent expression *madhhab-i ahl-i tahqīq*; *Annäherungen (al-Murāsālāt)* ed. Gudrun Schubert (Beirut: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1995), p.133.

to discipline their souls and to *find* the light of the universal intellect inside themselves, thus joining with the infinite light of the One Being. To put it mildly, this has not been a goal of modern rationalists.

Ibn al-‘Arabī did not ally himself with the philosophers. Although he recognized the legitimacy of their pursuits, he saw the human reality as much more extensive than what they envisaged. They aimed at union with the First Intellect, but he considered this a stunted view of human nature. His goal was to open up people to the boundless potential of their own selves, made in the image of the Infinite Being. The title of his magnum opus, *al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*, alludes to this goal. The word *Futūhāt* means ‘Openings.’ It is often translated as ‘relations,’ but this suggests that Ibn al-‘Arabī was claiming prophetic status, which is by no means the case. In fact ‘opening’ was a well-established technical term that designates the heart’s sudden reception of direct recognition of the Real.

In many passages Ibn al-‘Arabī explains that the heart’s door will not be opened unless the seeker has patiently knocked. Knocking at the door is a process that typically takes years and carries no guarantee that the door will be opened, certainly not before death. The way to knock is to follow in the footsteps of the Prophet. This means not simply adhering to his external Sunna, but also climbing the ladder – the *mi‘rāj* – of his inner realization. The ultimate goal is to achieve the status of the perfect human being (*al-insān al-kāmil*), who stands in what Ibn al-‘Arabī often calls ‘the Muhammadan Station.’ This station embraces every possible human perfection, not least the stations achieved by the greatest exemplars of human possibility, that is, the 124,000 prophets, particularly Adam, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, whom Ibn al-‘Arabī seems to discuss more than any of the others. As for Muhammad, given that he reached every possible human perfection, his station encompassed all the perfections of all the prophets. Hence the Muhammadan Station is the fullest possible manifestation of divine and human perfection in the universe.

Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Meccan Openings* is nothing if not a delineation of the multifarious dimensions of the Muhammadan Station.

He wanted to describe these prophetic perfections so that people may aspire to them. His great book is a God's-eye view of all the gates to realization, all the possible ways of coming to be who we are in our deepest selves. It is a catalogue of the various standpoints of those who have achieved the life of the heart, summarized under the headings of the book's 560 chapters – even if, as he frequently points out, in discussing any given station he is only alluding to bits and pieces of the vision that it bestows on the realizers.

Ibn al-ʿArabī's stress on the importance of the prophets as the source of guidance in the path of realization cannot be overestimated. One of the many places where this can be seen is in the manner in which he distances himself from the Muslim philosophers. I began by saying that philosophers and Sufis share the goal of achieving intellectual knowledge. Both groups are striving for knowledge of the Real along with insight into how to put this knowledge into practice. In other words, both philosophers and Sufis set themselves the task of understanding the absolute *Haqq*, the Real, and learning how to give each thing its own relative *haqq*, its own 'rightful due.'

The philosophers held that they could achieve realization by disciplining the soul and actualizing the intellect, but Ibn al-ʿArabī criticized them for thinking that they could see the full self-disclosure of the Real with only one eye of the heart, that is the intellect, which quickly perceives God's necessity and transcendence. But the heart has a second eye, illumined imagination. Only this eye can perceive the reality of God's immanence and presence in all things. The role of the prophets is to provide the means to open *both* eyes and to see the Real with a balanced vision of transcendence and immanence. Reliance on intellect alone, which understands transcendence but falls short in grasping immanence, prevents full realization of the human potential. Thus Ibn al-ʿArabī criticized the Muslim philosophers, even while acknowledging that they were correct in their vision of the Necessary Existent.

In Chapter 167 of the *Meccan Openings*, Ibn al-ʿArabī provides an extensive description of the contrast between those who see with the eye of intellectual discrimination and those who

see with both eyes. He calls this chapter ‘On Recognizing the Alchemy of Felicity.’ ‘Felicity’ is the term used by philosophers to translate the Greek work *eudaimonia* – the happiness that is to be attained by the seeker of wisdom. It is also a standard term for salvation in Islamic theology, because of a Qur’anic verse saying that at the resurrection, people will be divided into two groups, the felicitous and the wretched (11:105). And of course, *Alchemy of Felicity* is also the name of al-Ghazālī’s Persian summary of his *Ihyā’*, whether or not Ibn al-‘Arabī was aware of the book’s existence.

Chapter 167 provides a long account of a philosopher and a follower of the Prophet who set out together to climb the ladder of the cosmos to God. Just as the celestial spheres represent the descending stages of manifestation and devolution, so also they represent the ascending steps of re-absorption and evolution, steps that one must take if one is to achieve perfection. The route followed by the two companions goes up through the seven spheres toward the divine presence. When the two reach the sphere of the moon, the philosopher is granted an understanding of the moon’s real nature by the moon’s own ‘spirituality’ (*rūhāniyya*), that is, the intelligible, living, spiritual reality that the visible moon represents. In contrast, the follower is introduced to Adam, the prophet whom Muhammad met in the sphere of the moon during his ascent. Thus the philosopher comes to understand the function of the moon in relation to the entire cosmos, but the follower achieves realization of the diverse forms of knowledge actualized by Adam when he was taught the names of all things. The philosopher, in other words, sees the first heaven in terms of the eye of intellect, and the follower sees the first heaven in terms of both eyes – intellect and illumined imagination.

At each level of ascent through the spheres, the two companions meet similar scenes – the philosopher is presented with the dry bones of abstract, rational understanding, and the follower is opened up to the flesh and blood of the imaginal realm. The philosopher remains tied back by his intellect (the word ‘*aql*’ comes from the same root as ‘*iqāl*’, fetter), and the follower is opened up to multiple dimensions of the divine self-disclosure

by encountering the spiritual realities of the prophets. Once the two finish traversing the seven spheres, the philosopher is held back from ascending any farther, for intellect, despite its ability to see into the spiritual realms and to grasp *tawhīd*, has many limitations. The eye of imagination, however, is receptive to realities far outside the scope of intellect, for, as Ibn al-‘Arabī explains, it opens up to the external World of Imagination itself, the only realm of reality that embraces everything other than God.¹²

Ibn al-‘Arabī’s chapter is clearly addressed to an audience familiar with the philosophical quest to transcend human limitations and achieve union with the Agent Intellect. His purpose was to show that true recognition of self and God, full realization of the human state, will be found only by following in the footsteps of the guides sent by the Real. In other words it is not sufficient to know and realize the reality of the knowledge designated by the formula of *tawhīd*, ‘There is no god but God,’ as the philosophers do in their quest, even if this knowledge does guarantee salvation. To achieve the fullness of the human image of the divine – the status of the perfect human being, standing in the Muhammadan Station – one must also realize the knowledge embraced by the second formula of faith, ‘Muhammad is God’s Messenger.’ It is this knowledge alone that opens up true insight into the World of Nondelimited Imagination, that is, everything other than God, an ‘everything’ that has been encapsulated by the human reality ever since God taught Adam all the names.

In another account of the ascent to God, Ibn al-‘Arabī tells the story in the first person. Here he suggests with a bit more clarity that achieving perfection demands realizing the Real in the full expanse of His self-disclosure within one’s very *wujūd*, one’s existence/finding. After spending a few pages describing the stages of his own climb in Muhammad’s footsteps, he concludes with these words:

12. On imagination and the two eyes, see Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, especially Chaps. 7 and 20.

In this journey I gained the meanings of all the divine names. I saw that they all go back to One Named Object, One Entity. That Named Object was what I was witnessing, and that Entity was my own *wujūd*. So, my journey had been only in myself. I have provided no indications of anything but myself.¹³

This last sentence can stand for the entire contents of *The Meccan Openings*, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s grand catalogue of the doorways to the Real: ‘I have provided no indications of anything but myself.’ The self in question is the human essence, created in the image of God and receptive to every name taught by the Divine Teacher. Recognizing this self to whatever extent one is able to do so brings forth intimations of the life of the heart. Such recognition will never be found by blindly imitating jurists and theologians, not to speak of the thinkers and dreamers of our own times. It will only come by patient knocking at the door.

13. *Futūhāt* III:350.30; cited in Chittick, *Ibn ‘Arabi: Heir*, p. 25.