

SHAYKH AL-AKBAR MUḤYIDDĪN IBN ‘ARABĪ

A brief Biography of Shaykh al-Akbar Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi. Collected from the most authentic sources available today.

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*A Brief
Biography*

Chapter 1

Biography of Shaykh al-Akbar Ibn ‘Arabī

Born in the Spanish township of Murcia on 17th of Ramaḍān 561 AH (27th or 28th of July 1165 AD) with respectable family roots of *Banū Ṭayy*,¹ this unique mystic of Islam, *Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Ṭā’ī al-Ḥātmī* is universally known as *al-Shaykh al-Akbar* (The Greatest Master).

His father, *‘Alī ibn Muḥammad* served in the Army of *Ibn Mardanīsh*, and later when *Ibn Mardanīsh* died in 1172 AD, he swiftly shifted his allegiance to the Almohad Sultan, *Abū Ya’qūb Yūsuf I*, and became one of his military advisers. While still a lad of eight years the family of Ibn ‘Arabī left Murcia and took Seville for their home. In Stephen Hartenstein’s words: “Ibn ‘Arabī spent his youth age in the most advanced city of that time, an atmosphere steeped in the most important ideas – philosophical, scientific and religious – of his day. For the young Ibn ‘Arabī, twelfth century Seville was no doubt the equivalent of today’s London, Paris and New York” (Hirtenstein 36).

EDUCATION

Ibn ‘Arabī’s dogmatic and intellectual training began in the cultural and civilized centre of Muslim Spain as Seville was known in 578 AH. Most of his teachers mentioned in the *ijāza* wrote to King *al-Muẓaffar* were the ‘*ulamā*’ of the Almohad era and some of them also held the official posts of *Qāḍī* or *Khaṭīb* (Addas 97). He was just a young boy when his father sent him to the renowned jurist *Abū Bakr ibn Khalaf* to study Qur’ān. Ibn ‘Arabī learnt the recitation of the Qur’ān from the book of *Al-Kāfi* in the seven different readings (*qirā’āt*). The same work was also transmitted to him by another *muqrī*, *‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Ghālib ibn al-Sharrāt* (Addas 44). At the age of ten, he was well-versed in the *Qirā’āt*; afterwards he learned the sciences of *Ḥadīth* and *Fiqh* from the famous scholars of the time. He studied *Ḥadīth* and *Sīra* with the *muḥaddith* *‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suhaylī*, who taught him

¹ An important Arab tribe of Yemenite origin, related to which was Ḥātim at-Ṭā’ī who was famed for his generosity in pre Islamic age.

all of his works. He also attended lectures of *Qādī Ibn Zarkūn*, who transmitted to him *Kitāb al-Taqaṣṣī* of *Al-Shāṭibī* and issued him an *Ijāza* (permission of transmission to others.)

Later he studied under *‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Azdī al-Ishbīlī* his works on *Ḥadīth*; these are *Alḥkāṁ al-Kubrā*, *al-Wuṣṭā* and *al-Ṣughrā*. In addition to his own works, he also transmitted to Ibn ‘Arabī the writings of the famous *Zāhirī* scholar, *Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī* (Addas 45). The complete list of his teachers and masters can be found in a scholarly certificate *Ijāza* given to *Sultan al-Ashraf al-Muẓaffar*, in this document Ibn Arabī mentioned 70 of his teachers and masters (Ibn ‘Arabi, “*Ijāza li Malik al-Muẓaffar*” 7).

THE SUFI PATH

Ibn ‘Arabī was about sixteen when he went into seclusion. He himself never explicitly mentioned the reasons behind it. Yet the following factors are worth considering:

There goes a story, heard after 150 years of his death, Ibn ‘Arabī was at a dinner party which rounded off with wine. As he took the wine cup to his lips, he heard a voice: “O *Muḥammad*, it was not for this that you were created!” (Addas 36). This gave him an urge to quit worldly pursuits and to embark upon the search of God.

Another important cause of this retreat was a vision of the three great Prophets, Jesus, Moses and Muḥammad (PBUT). Ibn ‘Arabī says: “When I turned to this path, it was accomplished through a dream-vision (*mubashshira*) under the guidance of Jesus, Moses and Muḥammad (PBUT). In it, Jesus urged him to take to asceticism (*Zuhd*), Moses divulged to him that he would get to the infused knowledge called “*al-ilm al-ludunnī*” and the Prophet Muḥammad advised him to follow him step by step; “Hold fast to me and you will be safe!” (Addas 41).

As a consequence of this retreat and the spiritual insights granted to him, two things seem to have happened: firstly, he began to study *Qur’ān* and *Ḥadīth* and secondly, Ibn ‘Arabī was sent by his father to meet the great philosopher *Ibn Rushd* (Averroes, 1126-98).

The meeting was very significant in the sense that Ibn ‘Arabī answered his questions in ‘Yes’ and ‘No,’ and *Ibn Rushd* declared: “I myself was of the opinion that such a thing (i.e. spiritual knowledge without learning) is possible, but never met anyone who had experienced it” (OY: II, 372).

SPIRITUAL MASTERS

Ibn ‘Arabī’s contact with spiritual masters began in Seville. At that time the pursuit of the spiritual life normally involved keeping company with many different masters instead of only one master. Ibn ‘Arabī has described brief biographies of his masters in his book *Rūḥ al-Quds. Al-‘Uryabī*² of ‘Ulya³ was one of those masters who visited Seville nearly in 1184, and Ibn ‘Arabī met him at that stage of his life when he had already embarked on the Path. One can call *al-‘Uryabī* as his first teacher (*al-murshad al-awwal*), a relationship which is always of significance in Sufism. *Shaykh al-‘Uryabī* had reached the high spiritual state of total servitude (*‘ubūdiyya*), which in Ibn ‘Arabī’s eyes surpass all others. Later on meetings with his Shaykh transformed Ibn ‘Arabī’s life so quickly that he wrote in *Futūḥāt*: “While our *Shaykh al-‘Uryabī* was *‘Isawī* at the end of his life. I was *‘Isawī* at the beginning of my life on this path. I was then taken to the states of *Mūsawī* sun illumination. Then I was taken to *Hūd*, and after that to all the Prophets, there after I was taken to *Muḥammad*. That was the order for me in this path” (OY: III, 361-2). Some of his masters are:

1. *Abū al-Abbās al-‘Uryabī*
2. *Abū al-Ḥajjāj al-Shubarbulī*
3. *Abū Ya’qūb Yūsuf al-Kūmī*

² There are two version of his nisba mentioned in the books some says it Al-‘Uraynī and other Al-‘Uraybī but the autograph copy of *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* and manuscript sources of *Rūḥ al-Quds* clearly mention the nisba as Al-‘Uraybī.

³ Now a days called Loulé, near Silves in Portugal.

4. *Abū Yahyā al-Ṣanhājī*
5. *Abū ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Qassūm*
6. *Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Sharafī*
7. *Abū ‘Abbās al-Kashshāb*
8. *Abū ‘Imrān al-Mirtulī*
9. *Ṣāliḥ al-‘Adawī*
10. *‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Mahdawī*
11. *‘Abd Allāh al-Mawrūrī*
12. *Abū Madyan al-Ghawth*

Detail about his masters and their relationship with Ibn ‘Arabī can be found in *Rūḥ al-Quds*, *Durrat al-Fākhira* and *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*.

MEETINGS WITH KHIḌR

Factually speaking, *Shaykh al-‘Uryabī* initiated Ibn ‘Arabī’s contact with *Khiḍr* in Seville, when he was only a youth. Ibn ‘Arabī says: “I met *Khiḍr* in *Qūs al-haniyya* in Seville, and he said to me: “Accept what the Shaykh says!” I immediately turned to the Shaykh [*‘Uryabī*] and before I spoke he said: “O *Muḥammad*, does that mean that every time you contradict me, I will have to ask *Khiḍr* to instruct you in submission to the masters?” I replied: “Master, was that person *Khiḍr*?” He answered: “Yes!” (I, 331; Addas 63). That was his first meeting with *Khiḍr*. Later Ibn ‘Arabī met *Khiḍr* several times. In 1193 at the age of 28 Ibn ‘Arabī visited Tunis and the main intention behind this visit was to meet with the great disciples of *Abū Madyan*, notably *‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Mahdawī* and *Abū Muḥammad ‘Abdallāh al-Kinānī*. He stayed there for less than a year during which he realized the station of pure servant-hood and the Muhammadian inheritance. On return

from Tunis, he met *Khidr* for the second time; it happened when he was returning from Tunis by boat, on a lunar night he saw a man walking on the water towards him. On reaching the boat, *Khidr* stood on the sea and showed him that his feet were still dry. After that *Khidr* conversed with Ibn ‘Arabī in a language which is peculiar to him (OY: III, 182).

On reaching Andalusia in late 590 AH, Ibn ‘Arabī had his third meeting with *Khidr*, this time *Khidr* performed a miracle to provide evidence to a companion of Ibn ‘Arabī who denies the existence of miracles. A common feature of all these meetings with *Khidr* was that they took place in the presence of a high rank spiritual master initiating Ibn ‘Arabī into the knowledge of Divine mysteries.

GREAT VISION IN CORDOBA

In the year 586, Ibn ‘Arabī had a rare vision in Cordoba, in which he met all the Prophets from the time of *Adam* to *Muḥammad* (PBUT) in their spiritual reality. Prophet *Hūd* (AS) spoke to him and explained him the reason for their gathering. We can trace what *Hūd* told him in *Rūḥ al-Quds* when *Abū Muḥammad Makhlūf al-Qabā’ili* – a saint of Cordoba – died, the Prophet *Hūd* said: “We came to visit *Abū Muḥammad Makhlūf al-Qabā’ili*” (Ibn ‘Arabī, “Rūḥ al-Quds” 116). According to a tradition among the direct disciples of Ibn ‘Arabī, *Hūd* (AS) explained that the real reason for their gathering was to welcome him (Ibn ‘Arabī) as the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood (*khatm al-wilāya al-muḥammadiyya*), the supreme heir (Addas 76).

Stephen Hartenstein writes in *Unlimited Mercifier*: “It is from his return from Tunis, we find the first evidence of Ibn ‘Arabī beginning to write; later in 1194, he wrote one of his first major works, *Mashāhid al-Asrār al-Qudusiyya* (Contemplation of the Holy Mysteries) for the companions of *al-Mahdawī* and perhaps around the same time, in a space of four days, also composed the voluminous *Tadbīrāt al-Ilāhiyya*⁴ (Divine Governance) in

⁴ We can say that he started writing this work or wrote it in this year but some evidences like the name of other later works – i.e. *Insha’ al-Dawā’ir* written in 598 according to OY mentioned – in it

Mawrūr (Moron⁵) for *Shaykh Abū Muḥammad al-Mawrūrī*” (Hirtenstein 91).

IBN ‘ARABĪ IN FEZ

The next five years were a time when Ibn ‘Arabī entered into a different world. Having been brought up under the instruction and guidance of various spiritual masters of the West, he now came into his own as a Muhammadan heir. As from this point the real genius of Ibn ‘Arabī began to emerge and he became universal. Shortly after his return to Andalusia from North Africa in 1194 AD, Ibn ‘Arabī’s father died and within a few months his mother also died. Now the responsibility of the upbringing of his two young sisters fell upon his shoulders. His cousin came to him with the request that he should take up his wordly duties, and give up the spiritual life (Hirtenstein 110). It was a time of great uncertainty for Seville because of War. The third Sultan, *Abū Yūsuf Ya’qūb al Manṣūr* offered him a job but Ibn ‘Arabī refused both the job and an offer to marry off his sisters and within days he left Seville heading toward Fez, where they settled.

In Fez Ibn ‘Arabī met two men of remarkable spirituality, one of them was a sufi Pillar (*awṭād*), his name was *Ibn Ja’dūn* and the second one known as *al-Ashall* (literally, “the withered” for the reason that he had a withered hand) who was the Pole (*qutb*) of his time. It was a happy period of his life, where he could utterly dedicate himself to spiritual work. In Fez in 593 AH, he entered a new degree of vision in the form of light. In that vision, when he was leading a Prayer in the *al-Azhar* Mosque, he saw a light which was more visible than what was in front of him, he says:

“I lost the sense of behind [or front]. I no longer had a back or the nape of a neck. While the vision lasted, I had no sense of direction, as if I had been completely spherical (dimensionless).” (II, 486)

supports this argument that Ibn ‘Arabī reviewed and amended his works years after they were written.

⁵ A town near Seville.

THE MI'RAJ

This light vision is a kind of foretaste of his great journey of light; in 594 AH at the age of 33, Ibn 'Arabī was taken on one of the most extraordinary journeys of all: the ascension (*al-mi'rāj*). Ibn 'Arabī wrote a book named *Kitāb al-Isrā* (Book of the Night Journey) immediately after this spiritual experience. Some sections of *Futūḥāt* and *Risālat al-Anwār* (Epistle of Light) also elaborate the hidden meaning of these ascensions. It is quite interesting that Ibn 'Arabī's (the Muhammadan heir) ascension is an exact and faithful replication of the Prophet Muhammad's ascension; while the Prophet's ascension took place bodily, his ascension was a dream, vision of a heart or the vision of forms. These divine events are determining the way forward for his ultimate role as the Seal of Muhammadian Sainthood. Ibn 'Arabī tells us that in 594 AH, in Fez Allah laid bare to him its true import and showed him the signs of his function. In *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* Chapter 43 starts with an open claim to the Seal of Muhammadian Sainthood, he says:

I am the Seal of Sainthood without any doubt, أنا ختم الولاية دون شك
by virtue of the inheritance of the Hashimite, لورثي الهاشمي مع المسيح
along with the Messiah (OY: IV, 71; Elmore, "Islamic Sainthood" 56).

These lines have no possible room for doubt: Ibn 'Arabī is identifying himself categorically and explicitly with the Muhammadan Seal like Jesus (AS).

A LIFETIME FRIEND

In Fez 594 AH, 'Abdallāh Badr al-Habshi first met Ibn 'Arabī and for the rest of his life became a soulemate and a faithful friend, accepting Ibn 'Arabī as his master and guide. *Al-Shaykh al-Akbar* said about him in *Futūḥāt*:

"[He is a man] of unadulterated clarity, a pure light, he is a *Habashī* named 'Abdallāh, and like a full moon (*badr*) without eclipse. He acknowledges each person's right and renders it to him; he assigns to each his right, without

I saw that your father, *Ishāq ibn Muḥammad*, would be my companion and you as well” (Hirtenstein 127).

In the year 597 AH/1200 AD, he was in Morocco and took his final leave from his master *Yūsuf al-Kūmī*, who was living in the village of Salé at that time. This shows that he had finally completed his training under the teachers of his early years and was now ready to go to a new world. On his way to *Marrakesh* of that year he entered the Station of Proximity (*maqām al-qurba*).

“I entered this station in the month of *Muḥarram* in 597 AH... In joy I began to explore it, but on finding absolutely no one else in it, I felt anxiety at the solitude. Although I was realized in [this station], but I still did not know its name” (II, 261).

Later Ibn ‘Arabī finds *Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī*⁶ in it and he told Ibn ‘Arabī that this station is called, the station of proximity (*maqām al-qurba*) (Hirtenstein 128).

VOYAGE TO CENTRE OF EARTH

Having left behind all the traces of his past, Ibn ‘Arabī began his long journey to the East from *Marrakesh* where he had a marvellous vision of the Divine Throne. In that vision, he saw the treasures beneath the Throne and the beautiful birds flying about within them. One bird greeted Ibn ‘Arabī, saying that he should take him as his companion to the East. This companion was *Muḥammad al-Ḥaṣṣār* of Fez. He started travelling with his friends towards the East. After visiting the tombs of his uncle *Yahyā* and *Abū Maḍyan* in *‘Ubbād* near Tlemcen, he stopped at *Bijāya* (Bougie) during *Ramādān* and saw a remarkable dream about the secrets of letters and stars. He saw himself united like the union in marriage with all the stars of heavens, after the stars the letters were given his union, and he united with

⁶ Famous Sufi and the author of the *Tabaqāt al-Awliya’*. who died in 421/1030.

all of them (Ibn ‘Arabī, “Kitāb al-Bā” 10-11). This dream was later interpreted as the great Divine knowledge which was bestowed upon Ibn ‘Arabī.

His next stop was Tunis 598 AH where he happened to see *Syakh ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Mahdawī* whom he had met about six year ago. At the same time he continued writing works like *Inshā’ al-Dawā’ir*⁷ for his friend *al-Ḥabashī*. Resuming his travels, he arrived in Cairo in 598 AH/1202 AD where he met his childhood friends, the two brothers, *‘Abdallāh Muḥammad al-Khayyāt* and *Abū al-Abbās Aḥmad al-Ḥarrārī* and stayed at their house in the month of *Ramaḍān*. That was a period of great devastation, terrible famine and plague for Egypt. Perhaps the death of his companion *Muḥammad al-Ḥaṣṣār* was due to this plague. Ibn ‘Arabī saw this devastation with his own eyes and a passage of *Rūḥ al-Quds* tells us that when people made light of Allāh’s statutes He imposes the strictures of His Law upon them (yūsuf 240).

Ibn ‘Arabī resumed travelling toward Palestine, and his route took him to all the major burial places of the great Prophets: Hebron, where Abraham (AS) and other Prophets are buried; Jerusalem, the city of David (AS) and the later Prophets; and then Madīna, the final resting place of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

PILGRIM AT MAKKAH

At the end of his long journey he finally arrived at *Makkah*, the mother of all cities, in 598 AH (July 1202 AD). The Makkan period of Ibn ‘Arabī’s life can be viewed as the fulcrum of his earthly existence; he spent 36 years of his life in the West and the upcoming 36 years in the East, with about 3 years in *Makkah* in between. This three year period both connects and differentiates the two halves of his life. It was in *Makkah* that he started writing the very best of his works *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, It was in *Makkah* that his status as Seal of Muhammadian sainthood was confirmed in the glorious vision of the Prophet; it

⁷ *Risāla Inshā’ al-Dawā’ir* describes the fundamentals of his metaphysics, discussion about existence and nonexistence, manifestation and nonmanifestation and the rank of human being in this world.

was in *Makkah* that he had the dream of the two bricks and his encounter with the *Ka'ba*; (Hirtenstein 148) it was in *Makkah* that the love of women was first evoked in his heart by the beautiful *Nizām*, (Hirtenstein, 149) who became the personification of wisdom and beauty. It was in *Makkah* that he first savoured the pleasures of married life, marrying and becoming a father. His first wife was *Fāṭima bint Yūnus* and their first son *Muḥammad 'Imāduddin* was probably born in *Makkah* (Hirtenstein 150). Again it was in *Makkah* that he produced the very best of his works, like the first chapters of *Futūḥāt*, the *Rūḥ al-Quds*, the *Tāj al-Rasā'il*, the *Ḥilyat al-Abdāl* and a collections of hadīth qudsī named "*Mishkat al-Anwār*". It is also worth mentioning that in *Makkah* he met some of the eminent scholars of *Ḥadīth* of his time. Amongst them was *Abū Shujā' Zābir bin Rustam*, father of the beautiful *Nizām* and *Yūnus ibn Yaḥyā al-Ḥāshimī*, who had been a pupil of the great *'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī* in Baghdad. He not only introduced Ibn 'Arabī to the Prophetic tradition but also transmitted to him the teachings of the most famous saint in Egypt in the ninth century, *Dhū'l-Nūn al-Miṣrī*. *Yūnus ibn Yaḥyā* also invested him in front of the *Ka'ba* with the *Khirqā* (Mantle) of *'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī*.⁸ (Ibn 'Arabī, "Nasab al-Khirqā"; Elmore "Mantle of Initiation" 1-33). It is believed that after wearing this *Khirqā* Ibn 'Arabī formally joined the *Qadriyya Traīqa*.

VISIONS AT KA'BA

Apart from all this, several visions were granted to him in *Makkah*. The first took place at night during his circumambulations of the *Ka'ba* when he met a young beautiful girl *Qurrat al-'Ayn* (Hirtenstein 148). In the second vision, during his circumambulations of the *Ka'ba*, he met the mysterious figure who had appeared at the beginning of his ascension and here at *Makkah*. He said to Ibn 'Arabī, you should circumambulate in my footstep and observe me in the light of my moon, so that you may take from my constitution that which

⁸ A copy of the Mss dated 814, copied from Ibn 'Arabī's hand is present at Ibn 'Arabī Foundation's digital archive.

you write in your book and transmit to your readers⁹ (OY: I, 218). The third vision also occurs at *Ka'ba* in a spiritual conversation with the *Haram* and the *Zamzam* stream; *Ka'ba* ordered him to circumambulate it and the *Zamzam* told him to drink this pure water but a soft refusal made *Ka'ba* angry and he took revenge on a cold and rainy night in the year 600 AH. Shaykh heard the voice of *Ka'ba* loud and clear; later in a meditation God taught him the lesson and to express this gratitude Ibn 'Arabī composed a collection of letters in rhymed prose, entitled the *Tāj al-Rasā'il*, in homage to the *Ka'ba*. The next vision is also related to *Ka'ba*, in the year 599 AH in *Makkah* Ibn 'Arabī saw a dream which confirms once again his accession to the office of the Seal of the Muhammadian Sainthood. He saw two bricks – one of Gold and the other of Silver – were missing from two rows of the wall of *Ka'ba*. He says: “In the mean time I was observing that, standing there, I feel without doubt that I was these two bricks and these two bricks were me And perhaps it is through me that God has sealed sainthood”¹⁰ (Addas 213). In the year 599 AH during circumambulating the *Ka'ba*, he encountered the son of Caliph *Hārūn al-Rashīd*, who had been dead for four centuries and was famous for choosing Saturday for work to gather food for rest of the week. Ibn 'Arabī asked him: “Who are you?” He replied: “I am *al-Sabtī*¹¹ *ibn Hārūn al-Rashīd*.” Later Ibn 'Arabī asked him: “What was the reason of choosing Saturday for work?” He replied: “As God has made this universe in six days from Sunday to Friday,

⁹ That book was *al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*, a faithful transcription of all the things he was allowed to contemplate on that particular day in the form of the Spirit he encountered. It has been claimed by Ibn 'Arabī that in the *Futūhāt*, the content of the message and the form of its presentation has been determined by Divine Inspiration. Regarding Chapter 88 he writes that: “it would have been preferable to place this chapter before the one I wrote on the ritual acts of worship, but it was not of my choosing” (II, 163).

¹⁰ Addas says that to understand we need to remember that 599 was the year when Shaykh Akbar entered in the 40th year of his life which is quite similar to Prophet Muḥammad, as he received his first revelation in the 40th year of his life (213).

¹¹ Ibn 'Arabī explained his name to be called *al-Sabtī* because he worked only on Saturday (*al-Sabt*) to gather food for the rest of the week.

and he rested on Saturday, so I, as His servant worked on Saturday and devoted myself to worshipping Lord for the rest of the week.” In another glorious vision at *Ka’ba* Ibn ‘Arabī saw his forefathers and asked one of them his time, he replied he had been dead around forty thousand years ago. Finally, at *Ka’ba*, behind the wall of Hanbalites, Ibn ‘Arabī was granted the privilege of being able to join a meeting of the seven *Abdāl* (Addas 216).

COUNSEL MY SERVANTS

The message was clear and it was from God; in a passage of *Kitab al-Mubashshirāt*¹² Ibn ‘Arabī admits that one evening in *Makkah* he experienced a brief spell of despondency on the face of his disciples, he thought of leaving all counselling, abandon men to their fate and to devote his future efforts to himself alone as those who truly enter the Path are rare. On the same night, he saw himself in dream facing God on the Day of Judgment. In that dream, He said: “I was standing in front of my Lord, head lowered and fearing that He would punish me for my short comings but he said to me: “Servant of Mine, fear nothing! All I ask of you is that you should counsel My servants” (Addas 218). Faithful to this assurance he would spend the rest of his life giving advice to people from all walks of life, direct disciples, religious authorities and political rulers. This vision probably occurred in the year 600 AH at *Makkah*, as the very first page of the *Rūḥ al-Quds*, written following this revelational order mentions it vividly. According to Osman Yahia; Ibn ‘Arabī produced 50 of his works after this Divine order, some of which are short epistles of less than 10 pages but all of these are rooted in the Divine order: “Counsel My servants.”

JOURNEYS TO THE NORTH

Ibn Arabī’s life, spanning between 600 to 617 AH is full of journeys, he frequently kept crossing and re-crossing Syria, Palestine, Anatolia, Egypt, Iraq and the *Ḥijāz*, yet this

¹² A short work about glad tidings and visions that Ibn ‘Arabī had in dreams.

physical activity stood in no way in his spiritual pursuits and obligations. The two dimension activity had indeed the same spiritual provenance and was motivated by the sublime purpose of higher life unrelated to egocentricity. The year 600 AH witnessed a meeting between Ibn Arabi and *Shaykh Majduddīn Ishāq ibn Yūsuf*, a native of Malatya and a man of great standing at the Seljuk court. This time Ibn ‘Arabī was travelling north; first they visited the city of the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) and in 601 AH they entered Baghdad. This visit besides other benefits offered him a chance to meet the direct disciples of *Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī*. *Shaykh al-Akbar* stayed there only for 12 days because he wanted to visit Mosul to see his friend ‘*Alī ibn ‘Abdallāh ibn Jāmi*’, a disciple of *Qaḍīb al-Bān*. There he spent the month of *Ramaḍan* and composed *Tanazzulāt al-Mawṣiliyya*, *Kitāb al-Jalāl wa’l-Jamāl* and *Kunh mā lā Budda lil-MurīdMinhu* (Hirtenstein 176). Here he was invested with the *khirqā* of *Khidr* (AS), transmitted to him by ‘*Alī ibn ‘Abdallāh ibn Jāmi*’. Later the group travelled north and arrived at Malatya, *Majduddīn*’s hometown and then to Konya. In Konya Ibn ‘Arabī met with *Awḥaduddīn Ḥamīd Kirmānī*, who became his friend like *Majduddīn*. He transmitted to Ibn ‘Arabī teachings and stories of the many great spiritual masters of the East. Over the next 20 years Ibn ‘Arabī and *Kirmānī* remained close friends and companions (Hirtenstein 179).

After spending 9 months in Konya, he returned to Malatya where *Kaykā’ūs*, one of the *Kaykhusraw*’s sons, had been made ruler of Malatya. *Majduddīn* was appointed as his tutor and Ibn ‘Arabī also became involved in the young prince’s education.

RETURN TO SOUTH

In the year 602 AH he visited Jerusalem, Makkah and Egypt. It was his first time that he passed through Syria, visiting Aleppo and Damascus. In Jerusalem, he continued writing, and 5 more works were completed. These are: *Kitāb al-Bā’*, *Ishārāt al-Qur’ān*. In May 602 AH he visited Hebron, where he wrote *Kitāb al-Yaqīn* at *Masjīd al-Yaqīn* near the tomb of Prophet *Ibrāhīm* (AS) (Yūsuf 307). The following year he headed toward Cairo,

staying there with his old Andalusian friends , including *Abū al-‘Abbās al-Ḥarrār*, his brother *Muḥammad al-Khayyāt* and *‘Abdallāh al-Mawrūrī*. In Cairo *Rūḥ al-Quds* and *Kitāb Ayyām al-Sha’n* were read again before Ibn ‘Arabī, with the reader this time being a young man named *Ismā’il ibn Sawdakīn al-Nūrī* (Yūsuf 309). Like *Badr al-Ḥabashī*, *Ibn Sawdakīn* attached himself to Ibn ‘Arabī forever. He left value-oriented commentaries on the works of Ibn ‘Arabī notably *Mashāhid al-Asrār*, *Kitāb al-Isrā’* and the *Kitāb al-Tajalliyāt*. His house in Aleppo was often used for the reading of Ibn ‘Arabī’s works over the next 40 years (Yūsuf 311).

Later in 604 AH he returned to Makkah where he continued to study and write, spending his time with his friend *Abū Shujā bin Rustem* and family, including the beautiful *Nizām* (II, 376; Hirtenstein 181). The next 4 to 5 years of Ibn ‘Arabī’s life were spent in these lands and he also kept travelling and holding the reading sessions of his works in his own presence.

BAGHDAD, CITY OF THE SAINTS

In the year 608 we find him in Baghdad with his friend *Majduddīn Ishāq* and there he met the famous historian *Ibn al-Dubaythī* and his disciple *Ibn al-Najjār*. In Baghdad, he had a terrifying vision regarding the Divine deception (*makr*), In which he saw the gates of heaven open and the treasures of Divine deception fell like rain on everyone. He awoke terrified and looked for a way of being safe from these deceptions. The only safe way he found is by knowing the balance of the Divine law.

According to Osman Yahia in Baghdad Ibn ‘Arabī met with the famous Sufi *Shihābuddīn Suharwardī* (d. 632), author of the *‘Awārif al-ma’ārif* who was personal advisor to Caliph *al-Nāṣir*. In this meeting, they stayed together for a while, with lowered heads and departed without exchanging a single word. Later Ibn ‘Arabī said about *Suharwardī*: “He is impregnated with the *Sunna* from tip to toe” and *Suharwardī* said about Ibn ‘Arabī: “He is an ocean of essential truths (*baḥr al-Ḥaqāiq*)”.

TARJUMĀN AL-ASHWĀQ

In the year 611 he was again in *Makkah*, where his friend *Abū Shujā* had died two years before. Ibn ‘Arabī performed *Hajj* and started compilation of his most famous poetic work the *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq*. After *Hajj* Ibn ‘Arabī left *Makkah*, travelling north towards the Roman lands, probably Konya or Malatya and in the year 610/611 he returned to Aleppo. In Aleppo this work caused uproar and consternation in certain quarters, since he came under the blame of writing erotic verses under the cover of poetic allusions. The jurists from Aleppo severely criticized the claim that this poetry was a mystical or expresses Divine realities, which made his disciples very upset. Later on the request of his two disciples, *Ibn Sawdakīn* and *Badr al-Ḥabashī* he wrote a commentary on these poems by the title of “*Dhakhā’ir al-A’lāq*” in a great hurry. It was completed in Anatolia in 612. When the jurists heard this commentary, they felt sorry for unjustly exposing Ibn ‘Arabī to scathing criticism (Yūsuf 335).

IN SIVAS AND MALATYA

The period of extensive travelling came to an end and for the next few years he seems to have made his home in the Seljuk Kingdom. In the year 612 AH, at Sivas he had a vision anticipating *Kaykā’ūs* victory at Antioch over the Franks. He wrote a poem in which he enlightened the Sultan of the vision and his future victory. Later Ibn ‘Arabī returned to Malatya and according to Stephen Hartenstein he met *Bahā’uddīn Walad*, father of the famous Persian Poet *Jallaluddīn Rūmī*. the famous Persian poet of that time. Little *Rūmī* was with his father and after the meeting when *Bahā’uddīn* left with his son tagging along behind him, *Shaykh al-Akbar* said: “What an extraordinary sight, a sea followed by an ocean!” (Hirtenstein 188).

His reading and writings continued in Malatya, where in 615 AH, we find hearings of *Rūḥ al-Quds*, finalization of The *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq* and compilation of a short epistle on the technical terms of Sufism: the *Iṣṭilāḥāt al-ṣūfiyya*. The year 617 was the year of

mourning for him as he lost one of his best friends *Majduddīn Ishāq*, Ibn ‘Arabī took charge of the upbringing of the young *Ṣadrūddīn* and married the widow as it was necessary according to the customs of the time. (Hirtenstein 189). Lastly his close companion and valet, friend and fellow, traveller on the way of God *Badr al-Ḥabashī* died.

DAMASCUS, THE LAST DAYS

After criss-crossing the east for a period of 20 years Ibn ‘Arabī now decided to settle in Syria and spent the last 17 years of his life in Damascus, the city was already known quite well to him, he had several contacts with leading notables there. He was greeted in Damascus as a spiritual master and a spacious house was provided to him by the Grand *Qadi* of the town Ibn Zakī. In Damascus, he devoted himself to writing and teaching to fulfil the commandment of his Lord: “Counsel My servants.” The first thing he did was to collect and disseminate the works which had already been written, copies were made and reading sessions took place in his house. *Kitāb al-Tajalliyāt* was one of these first books to record such a certificate (*simā’*) in the presence of his disciple *Ibn Sawdakīn*. In the year 621 AH eight more works bore these hearing certificates, among these were: *Kitāb al-Yaqīn*, *Al-Maqsid al-Asmā’*, *Kitāb al-Mīm wal-Wāw wal-Nun*, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayūb* and *Kitāb al-Ḥaqq*. At the same time, Ibn ‘Arabī devoted his attention to complete the lengthy *Futūḥāt*, many volumes of this book came into being in this period.

During this period of his life, he imparted direct instructions to many of his disciples including *Ṣadrūddīn al-Qūnawī*. He brought up alongside Ibn ‘Arabī own family in Malatya and after the death of his real father *Qūnawī* joined Shaykh al-Akbar in Damascus. He accompanied and served *Kirmānī* on his travels in Egypt, Hijaz and Iran. In his private collection *Ṣadrūddīn* wrote that he had studied 10 works of Ibn ‘Arabī under him and later Ibn ‘Arabī gave him a certificate to freely relate them on his authority. He studied and discussed with Ibn ‘Arabī no less than 40 works, including the whole text of *Futūḥāt* in 20 volumes.

VISONS AT DAMASCUS

Ibn ‘Arabī had several visions of the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) at Damascus. In 624 AH he had been told by the Messenger of Allah that angels are superior to men. In the same year, he had another discussion with the Prophet, this time Prophet replied to him regarding the resurrection of animals: “Animals will not be resurrected on the Day of Judgement.” (I, 527; Addas 275) In the third vision he was ordered by the Prophet to write a poem in favour of *al-Anṣār*. In this vision Ibn ‘Arabī was informed that his mother was from *al-Anṣār*’s tribe (I, 267). In the fourth vision, at the end of *Muḥarram* 627 AH the Prophet came to him once again and handed him the book *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* (The Bezels of Wisdoms). Ibn ‘Arabī started writing this book with all the purity of his intentions and his deepest aspirations. He said: “I state nothing that has not been projected toward me; I write nothing except what has been inspired in me. I am not a Prophet nor a Messenger but simply an inheritor; and I labour for my future life” (Ibn ‘Arabī, “*Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*” 47). In the same year just over two months after receiving the book of the *Fuṣūṣ* he had a vision of Divine Ipseity, it’s exterior and interior which he had not seen before in any of his witnessings.

THE FUTUHAT AL-MAKKIYYA

In 629 AH the first draft of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* was completed. The book has hundreds of manuscript in various libraries of the world, the most important of them is the manuscript of Konya, written by its author. This book had taken the best part of his thirty years and Ibn ‘Arabī dedicated it to his eldest son, *Imāduddīn Muḥammad*. It contains 560 chapters of esoteric knowledge and is truly the encyclopaedia of Islamic Sufism. The book is divided into six sections and these are:

13. Spiritual Knowledge (*al-ma‘ārif*)
14. Spiritual Behaviour (*al-ma‘lūmāt*)

15. Spiritual States (*al-aḥwāl*)
16. Spiritual Abodes (*al-manāzil*)
17. Spiritual Encounters (*al-munāzalāt*)
18. Spiritual Stations (*al-maqāmāt*)

Chapter 559 contains the mysteries and secrets of all the chapters of the book, so we can say that it is like a summary of the whole *Futūḥāt*. In the 48th chapter of the *Futūḥāt*, he says that the content of the message and the form of its presentation have been determined by Divine Inspiration.

Three years later in 632 AH, on the first of *Muḥarram*, Ibn ‘Arabī embarked on a second draft of the *Futūḥāt*; this he explained, included a number of additions and a number of deletions as compared with the previous draft. This revision completed in the year 636 (Addas 286). After completion of this 2nd draft, he started teaching it to his disciples. Dr. Osman Yahia has mentioned hundreds of these hearings or public readings that occur between the year 633 AH and 638 AH. These hearings show that the *Futūḥāt* was a primary document of his concepts and was widespread in his life in comparison with the *Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam*, which has only one *Samā’* given to only *Ṣadruddīn al-Qūnawī*.

DEATH

Finally on 22 Rabī‘ al-Thānī 638 AH at the age of seventy-five, Ibn ‘Arabī’s terrestrial life came to an end. He was present at the house of *Qaḍī Ibn Zakī* at the time of death, *Jamāluddīn ibn ‘Abd al-Khālīq*, *Imād Ibn Naḥḥās* and his son *Imāduddīn* performed his funeral rites. He was buried in the family tomb of the *Banū Zakī* in the small beautiful district of *Ṣāliḥiyya* at *Jabal Qāsiyūn*.

MAJOR WORKS OF IBN ‘ARABĪ

Ibn ‘Arabī wrote at least 350 works, ranging from the enormous *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, which fills thousands of pages of Arabic, to innumerable small treatises no more than a few pages long. Verification of these works as Ibn ‘Arabī’s works is still an ongoing process which started when the shaykh first wrote an *Ijāza* for Sultan *Al-Ashraf al-Muẓaffar*, and a booklist; the *Fihrist al-Mu‘allafāt*. These two documents contain lists of his works. The *Ijāza* was a teaching certificate in which Ibn ‘Arabī listed 290 works alongside 70 of his spiritual teachers. According to Osman Yahia, who compiled the first detailed study of Ibn ‘Arabī’s works in 1964 AD, there are 317 works cited by Ibn ‘Arabī in his books of which only one-third are known in manuscript form at present. Now 40 years later in Ibn ‘Arabī Society, Stephen Hirtenstein and Jane Clark has successfully completed the first phase of the MIAS archiving project, which has the aim of creating an online catalogue for the historic manuscripts of Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi and his school. The catalogue builds on the pioneering work of Osman Yahia in the 1960s, and seeks to establish the real corpus of Ibn ‘Arabi’s writings that has survived. In so doing, it will provide a solid and comprehensive basis for future researchers by clarifying those works written by Ibn ‘Arabi, resolving the many anomalies in Osman Yahia’s work, and including new manuscripts which have come to light in the last 50 years and research done by various scholars in the field. Their findings have substantially reduced the verified no of works written by Ibn ‘Arabī and are present in manuscripts form in different libraries of the world. They says: “As regards the updating of the bibliography, Osman Yahia identified 841 works by Ibn ‘Arabi, many of them without a surviving manuscript (and several scholars have used his listings to claim that he wrote 300–700 works). Our figures for the different categories listed above, based upon the 1580 Ibn ‘Arabi manuscripts that we have investigated, are as follows:

Verified:	83
Probable:	12
Unverified:	66

Not by Ibn 'Arabi:	79
Extracts:	33
Commentaries:	26
Osman Yahia duplicates:	28

It hardly needs saying that this constitutes a radical amendment to current conceptions of Ibn 'Arabi's output and surviving corpus” (MIAS Archiving Project Report 2009). This present selection of the Shaykh's works has been arranged under short titles and in approximate chronological order for benefits of the reader. Although some of the works took many years to write and some were rewritten. (Hirtenstein 267-272)

Mashāhid al-Asrār al-Qudsiyya (Contemplations of the Holy Mysteries)

Written in 590 AH/1194 AD, it is dedicated to the disciples of *Shaykh 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Mahdawī* and to his paternal cousin, *'Alī b. al-'Arabī*. It describes a succession of fourteen contemplations in the form of dialogues with God.

Al-Tadbirāt al-Ilahiyya (Divine Government)

Written in the space of four days while staying with *Shaykh al-Mawrūrī* in Moron (Andalusia), this work describes the government of the human empire as the microcosm which summarises the macrocosm.

Kitāb al-Isrā' (The Book of the Night-Journey)

Written after a great visionary experience in Fez in 594 AH. It describes in rhymed prose Ibn 'Arabī's mystical ascension, encountering the spiritual realities of the Prophets in the seven heavens and being brought to the fullest realization of his own reality.

Mawāqī' al-Nujūm (Settings of the Stars)

Written in eleven days at Almeria in Ramadan 595, for his companion and disciple *Badr al-Ḥabashī*, it explains what all spiritual masters need to teach, in fact the teachers need it. It includes a detailed discussion of how all the faculties and organs of man participate in Divine praise.

'Anqā' Mughrib (The Fabulous Gryphon of the West)

This work was written around 595 during his final year in Spain. It describes in rhymed prose the meaning of the station of the *Maḥdī* and the Seal of the Saints, and the rank of the Muhammadian Reality.

Inshā' al-Dawā'ir (The Description of the Encompassing Circles)

It was written in 598 in Tunis for *Badr al-Ḥabashī*. It describes the fundamentals of his metaphysics, discussing existence and non-existence, manifestation and non-manifestation, and the rank of the human being in the world, using diagrams and tables.

Mishkat al-Anwar (The Niche of Lights)

Composed throughout the year 599 in *Makkah*, it comprises a collection of 101 *ḥadīth qudsi* (Divine sayings). The work itself conforms to the tradition that recommends the practice of preserving 40 *ḥadīth*s for the community.

Ḥilyat al-Abdāl (The Adornment of the Substitutes)

Written in 1203 (599) in the space of an hour during a visit to *Ta'if*, for *Badr al-Ḥabashī*, it describes the four corner-stones of the Way: seclusion, silence, hunger and wakefulness.

Rūḥ al-Quds (The Treatise of the Spirit of Holiness)

Written in 600 in *Makkah* for *Shaykh al-Mahdawī*, it is one of the best sources for our knowledge of Ibn 'Arabī's life in Andalusia and the people he knew. It contains three sections: a complaint about the lack of comprehension of many people practicing the Sufi Way, a series of biographical sketches of some fifty-five Sufis in the West and a discussion of difficulties and obstacles encountered on the Way.

Tāj al-Rasā'il (The Crown of Epistles)

Written in 600 in *Makkah*, it consists of eight love letters composed for the *Ka'ba*, each one corresponding to a self-disclosure (*Tajalli*) of a Divine Name which appeared in the course of the ritual circumambulations.

Kitāb al-Alif, Kitāb al-Bā', Kitāb al-Yā'

A series of short works, using an alphabetical numbering system, begun in Jerusalem in 601 and composed over three years or more. They discuss a range of different Divine principles, such as Oneness Compassion and Light.

Tanazzulāt al-Mawṣiliyya (Descents of Revelation at Mosul)

Written in April 601 in Mosul, it describes the esoteric secrets of the acts of worship in terms of ablution and Prayer, and how each phase of this everyday ritual is imbued with meaning.

Kitāb al-Jalāl wa'l-Jamāl (The Book of Majesty and Beauty)

Written in the space of one day in 601 in Mosul, it discusses various Quranic verses in terms of two apparently opposing aspects, Majesty and Beauty.

Kitāb Kunh mā lā Budda lil-Murīd minhu (What is Essential for the Seeker)

Also written in April/May 601 AH/1205 AD in Mosul, it outlines the essential practices for someone embarking on the spiritual Way, in terms of holding fast to the Unity of God, having faith in what the Messengers have brought, practising *dhikr*, finding a true spiritual teacher, etc.

Risālat al-Anwār (Treatise of Lights)

Written in 602 in Konya in answer to a request from a friend and companion that he should explain the journey of ascension to the Lord of Power and return to creatures. It describes the spiritual quest in terms of a non-stop ascension through the various levels of existence and knowledge, leading to the level of human perfection.

Kitāb Ayyām al-Sha'n (The Days of God's Work)

Composed sometime around or before 603 AH, this work is a meditation on the structure of Time and the ways in which the hours and days of the week interrelate. It is founded on the Quranic verse "Everyday God is at work." [55:29]

Kitāb al-Tajalliyāt (The Book of Self-disclosures)

Written sometime before 606 AH in Aleppo, it describes a series of self-disclosures on subjects such as Perfection, Generosity and Compassion, based on insights into the second Sura of the Qur'ān. These visions often involve dialogues with deceased saints such as *Hallaj*, *Junayd* or *Sahl al-Tustarī*.

Kitāb al-Fanā' fi'l-Mushāhada (The Book of Annihilation in witnessing)

Written in Baghdad, probably during his second stay there in 608 AH, it is an extended meditation on the ninety-eighth Sura, describing the experience of mystical vision and the difference between people of real knowledge and people of intellect.

Tarjumān al-Ashwāq (Interpreter of Ardent Desires)

Compiled in Ramadan 611 AH in Makkah, although written over a longer period, with a subsequent commentary composed later in the same year in Aleppo, it comprises sixty-one love-poems dedicated to the person of *Nizām*, alluding to the real secrets of mystical love and prophetic inheritance.

Iṣṭilahāt al-Ṣūfiyya (Sufi Technical Terms)

Written in Malatya 615 AH is an answer to a request from a dear friend and companion. It consists of 199 brief definitions of the most important expressions in common use amongst the people of God.

Kitāb al-Isfār (The Unveiling of the Effects of Journeying)

This work is a meditation on the meaning of the spiritual journey in general and the journeys of the Prophets in particular. These journeys are without end, in this world and the next, and are described as "a reminder of what is within you and in your possession that you have forgotten".

Kitab al-'Abādilah (The Book of the Servants of God)

Written sometime before 626 AH, probably in Damascus, it consists of 117 sections devoted to individuals called '*Abd Allah*', the work conforms to a *Ḥadīth* that man possesses 117 characteristics, and explains the realisation of these characteristics in terms of Divine Names.

Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam (Bezels of the Wisdoms)

Written sometime after a vision of the Prophet in 627 AH in Damascus, and in accord with his (the Prophet's) order that it be written. Considered to be the quintessence of Ibn 'Arabī's spiritual teaching, it comprises twenty-seven chapters, each dedicated to the

spiritual meaning and wisdom of a particular Prophet. The twenty-seven Prophets, beginning with Adam and ending with Muhammad, are like the settings of a ring, holding the Bizels of Wisdom, and represent all the different communities of humankind, under the spiritual jurisdiction of Muhammad, their Seal.

Kitāb Nasab al-Khirqa (The Line of the Mantle of Initiation)

It describes his own spiritual affiliation and how he has been awarded the mantle of Sufism in the different orders of *Tasawwuf*.

Al-Dīwān al-Kabīr (The great Diwan)

Written over a period of many years, it consists of vast collections of poems he had written.

Al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya (Makkan illuminations)

His magnum opus, begun in Makkah in 598 AH and completed its first draft in 20 manuscripts volume in 629 AH. A second draft of 36 volumes was completed in 636 AH. It contains 560 chapters in six sections, and it was evidently intended as a kind of encyclopaedia of Islamic Spirituality.

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