

Muḥyiddīn Ibn ‘Arabī

The Alchemy of Human
Happiness

(fī ma‘rifat kīmiyā’ al-sa‘āda)



Introduction and Translation
STEPHEN HIRTENSTEIN



ANQA PUBLISHING • OXFORD

Published by Anqa Publishing
PO Box 1178
Oxford OX2 8YS, UK
www.anqa.co.uk

© Stephen Hirtenstein, 2017
First published 2017

Stephen Hirtenstein has asserted his moral right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the author of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data.
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978 1 905937 59 2

Cover design: meadencreative.com

Back cover MS: Opening page of the chapter in Evkaf Müzesi MS 1859, fol. 16b, in the author's own hand. Courtesy of the Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum, Istanbul, Turkey.

Printed and bound in England by Martins The Printers, Berwick upon Tweed

CONTENTS

Abbreviations	vii
Acknowledgements	viii
The Translation	ix
INTRODUCTION	1
Chapter 167 within the <i>Futūḥāt</i>	5
Alchemy and the Hermetic Tradition	7
Transmutation into Gold	12
Cosmic Order	14
The Elixir	17
Chapter 167: Contents and Themes	19
The Two Travellers	22
The Private Face (<i>al-wajh al-khāṣṣ</i>)	28
Idrīs, the Prophet of Alchemy and Medicine	30
TRANSLATION	43
Part I	45
Part II	59
The 1st Heaven: Adam & the Moon	65
The 2nd Heaven: Jesus, John & Mercury	68
The 3rd Heaven: Joseph & Venus	73
The 4th Heaven: Idrīs & the Sun	76
The 5th Heaven: Aaron & Mars	77

The 6th Heaven: Moses & Jupiter	84
The 7th Heaven: Abraham & Saturn The Lote-Tree	89
The Lunar Mansions	95
The Constellations & Gardens	97
The Footstool & the Supreme Light	99
The Throne & Its Bearers	104
	107
The Universals	109
The Cloud & Beyond	112
The Return	114
Faith & Knowledge	116
Appendix A: The Cycle of Creation according to Ibn 'Arabī	155
Appendix B: Macrocosmic and Microcosmic Correspondences	161
Bibliography	164
Arabic text (begins at the end of the book)	

ABBREVIATIONS

- Divine Sayings = Ibn 'Arabī, *Divine Sayings (Mishkāt al-anwār)* (Oxford, 2004)
- EI2 = *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edition, P. Bearman et al. (Leiden, 1991–2004)
- Fuṣūṣ* = *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. Kiliç and Alkiş (Istanbul, 2016)
- Fut.* = *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, 4 vols. (Beirut, n.d.)
- JMIAS = *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* (Oxford, 1982–)
- SPK = Chittick, William, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany, NY, 1989)
- SDG = Chittick, William, *The Self-Disclosure of God* (Albany, NY, 1998)
- Seal of Saints* = Chodkiewicz, Michel, *Seal of the Saints* (Cambridge, 1993)
- Secrets of Voyaging* = Ibn 'Arabī, *The Secrets of Voyaging (K. al-Isfār)* (Oxford, 2015)
- Seven Days* = Ibn 'Arabī, *The Seven Days of the Heart (Awrād al-usbū')* (Oxford, 2008)
- Unlimited Mercifier* = Hirtenstein, Stephen, *The Unlimited Mercifier* (Oxford, 1999)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have benefited enormously from the suggestions of many, many others, especially those with whom I first embarked on the task of translating this chapter (Layla Shamash, Cecilia Twinch, Jane Clark and Rosemary Brass), the readers who have been kind enough to comment and give feedback, and the students with whom I have studied the text. Without their help and encouragement, I would not have dared to publish. My heart-felt thanks also go to Yusuf Mullick, Abdul-Rahim Hassan, Andrew Meaden and the ever-calm hand of Michael Tiernan. And my eternal gratitude to my wife and companion Carla, without whose love, support and encouragement this project would never have been completed. Any errors that remain are entirely my own, and will, I trust, be covered by the One whose forgiveness is without end or limit.

IBN 'ARABI

The Alchemy of Human Happiness

TRANSLATION

by Stephen Hirtenstein

Part 1

ALCHEMICAL ELIXIRS¹ are an evident proof,
showing what can be altered and replaced
in [the realm of] existence.

If an enemy² has the elixir of divine Grace³
cast upon him in a proper balanced measure,
he can truly pass in time from his [state of]
enmity to [the degree of] His friendship⁴
with the power of judgment and decree.

Correct the weight, [using] the scales of our
revealed Law – I have explained clearly, so
be on your guard!

Alchemy is [a science of] determined measures –
how much or how many is a figure⁵ in the
world of forms.

Be aware of that if you are someone who reflects,
and do not let desires remove you from clear
observation.

Then you will be admitted to the degree of pure
angels,⁶ and you will ascend in rank beyond the
world of mere human.⁷

‘Alchemy’ is an expression for the knowledge that pertains to weights and measures, as regards all the bodies and meanings, in the sensible and intelligible realms, that can be quantified and measured, and their power to change and be transformed – by which I mean the changing of

states that come upon the one essence.⁸ It is a knowledge that is at once natural, spiritual and divine. We call it divine because there appears [the attribute of] being seated,⁹ descending,¹⁰ ‘withness’¹¹ and the numerousness of the divine Names in relation to the One Named by virtue of the diversity of their meanings.

The cosmic order is either concealment
or unfoldment,¹²
just as mode and quantity are states of
measurement.

Our constitutions¹³ pride themselves over
their constituent elements,
extolling their degree of distinction due
to an inviolate mystery.¹⁴

Revelation¹⁵ brings down rules, manifested
as law;
judgment contains both prohibition and
command.¹⁶

The science of alchemy, which is knowledge of the elixir, has two parts, I mean in terms of its action. On the one hand, there is the originating of something,¹⁷ like gold ore; and on the other hand, there is the eliminating of a defect and ailment, like alchemical gold,¹⁸ which is classed as equal to natural gold – this is like the development of the other world and this world in the search for equilibrium.¹⁹

Know that all minerals²⁰ stem from one fundamental source, and that source by its inherent nature always seeks to be united with the rank of perfect completion and fulfilment, which is ‘goldenness’.²¹ However, since [the source] becomes conditioned by the natural world

on account of the effects of the divine Names, with all their various properties, then on its journey [through the degrees] defects and ailments²² befall it due to differences in time, such as the warmth of summer, the cold of winter, the dryness of autumn or the moisture of spring, and due to variations in the nature of places, like the heat or cold of the mine.²³ In general, there are many defects [which may affect the source].

When one of these defects predominates over [the source] during its journey as it evolves from one phase of development to another, leaving the property of one cycle for the property of another, and the power of that [new] abode is consolidated within it, then there appears within it a form that translates [the source's] substance²⁴ into [the form's] reality. This [form] is called sulphur²⁵ or quicksilver.²⁶ These are [known as] the two progenitors, because on the one hand, other metals appear from their conjunction and union,²⁷ resulting from certain defects that can befall offspring. On the other hand, these two may unite together and conjoin with each other in such a way that there results from them a most noble substance, perfect in constitution, which is called 'gold', something by which the two progenitors are ennobled – this is the rank that each of them is seeking in terms of their own minerality.²⁸ That original source is a 'breath' in the divine [realm] and a 'vapour' in the [realm of] Nature.²⁹ Likewise, the two progenitors are both a spiritual principle and a natural element.³⁰

The reason why we say that this matter [of becoming gold] is sought by the two progenitors by virtue of their substance, not by virtue of their form, is that the property in the primordial substance belongs only to the forms. When the defect that befalls [the source] occurs within its mine, it makes it into sulphur or quicksilver. We also know

that it is in their inherent potentiality – when there is no defect which might remove them from the power of natural equilibrium and make them deviate from that [middle] path – that the product which results from [their union] is one that transmutes their two essences into itself. Then they reach the stage of completion, which is gold, the object of their quest from the very beginning.

So [the two progenitors] are conjoined and united in the mineral, with the natural property of that particular mineral and with the property of being receptive to the natural effects of time. Then it is *on a straight path*,³¹ like the primordial nature according to which God has created human-kind: *it is the parents who make the child a Jew or a Christian or a Zoroastrian*.³² Likewise, if the quantity of one progenitor becomes more prevalent over [the substance] due to a mineral disease³³ that comes from the temporal side, causing one particular characteristic to predominate over the others, then [that characteristic] grows and flourishes, while the rest [of the characteristics] become too weak to resist the one that is dominant. As a result this determines over the substance, holding it back [from completion] due to what the reality of that [particular] character bestows, and making it deviate from the path of equilibrium – which is the goal – that brings you to the Virtuous City³⁴ of Gold and Perfect Fulfilment. The one who reaches [gold] will never again be subject to those transformations that lead to lesser levels. When that particular character dominates the substance, it alters its essential nature,³⁵ and then there appears the form of iron or copper or tin or lead or silver, depending on what predominates over it.

Then you will come to know God's Word in its deeper meaning³⁶ *perfectly formed and imperfectly formed*:³⁷ in other words, fully formed,

which refers only to gold, and not fully formed, which refers to all the other metals.

During that time³⁸ the spiritual entity³⁹ of one of the seven planets takes charge of it. This is one of the angels of that [particular] heaven, circulating with the planet which is subservient⁴⁰ in its movement – for it is God who directs it to an end intended by the command of the One who gave it its nature⁴¹ – who maintains the nature of that substance. Thus the form of iron is ruled over by an angel whose steed is the planet traversing the heaven which is the seventh from here.⁴² The form of tin and of other [metals] – and it is the same for all metallic forms – is ruled by an angel whose steed is a planet traversing the heaven and celestial sphere⁴³ that is specific to it and in which its Lord directs it.

When there comes one who is versed in alchemical procedure,⁴⁴ he investigates what will be the easiest operation for him. If what is simplest for him is the elimination of defect from the metallic body,⁴⁵ in order to bring it back into the natural course of equilibrium from which it had deviated, then this is the first way. An astronomer will observe the planet, now in its true position in the heavens and now deviating from it, either above or below that position, and then the alchemist will turn to the cause that has made it into iron or whatever metal it is. He knows that this element has only dominated the whole substance because of the quantity [of different elements] in it.⁴⁶ So he decreases the amount where it is too much and increases it where it is too little. This is [called] ‘physic’,⁴⁷ and the one who employs it and is knowledgeable of it is a ‘physician’.

By means of such an operation he eliminates from [the mineral substance] the form of iron, for example, or whatever form it has taken. When he has brought it back to the path [of equilibrium], he seeks to

preserve it in a state of good health so that it will remain in it. When it is cured of its ailment, it is convalescing, and so he is concerned about it, treating it with soothing nourishment and protecting it from draughts.⁴⁸ Thus it proceeds along the direct path of health,⁴⁹ until that substance is clothed in the form of gold. When that has happened to it, it goes beyond the domain of the physician and beyond its illness, for after [reaching] that complete perfection it cannot regress to a degree that is one of lack, nor will it be subject to it. Even if the physician wished to, he would not be able to [make it return to its previous condition].

Equally, [in law] a judge⁵⁰ has no [textual] authority in such a case, that he could pass judgment in it according to what he sees. The reason for that in reality is that a judge is imbued with justice and impartiality. Therefore he can only pass judgment against someone who deviates from the path of truth.⁵¹ But this person [of truth] is clothed in gold, and no judgment can be made against him, because no-one who contends against him possesses any right. This is the cause of it.⁵² One who adheres to the path of truth goes beyond the level of being judged and becomes [himself] a judge of things.⁵³

Such is the [alchemical] method of eliminating defects, and I have not seen anyone on that [path] who was aware of this, pointed it out or [even] alluded to it. Indeed you will not find it except in this chapter or in our discussions.

On the other hand, when the master of this Art wishes to produce the essence which is called an 'elixir', in order to apply it to those mineral bodies that he wishes [to treat], he will transpose it according to what is determined by the natural constitution of that receiving body. [In this case], there is only one remedy, and that is the Elixir.

Among the mineral bodies there is one which the Elixir can bring back to its own property, so that it becomes an elixir doing the job of the Elixir, in which case it is called an ‘agent’.⁵⁴ It rises up⁵⁵ within the other metallic bodies and governs [them] by virtue of [the Elixir’s] own authority. For example, he may take a *dirham*’s weight,⁵⁶ or any other measure you like, of the elixir essence, and cast it upon 1000 measures of whichever metallic body you like. If it is tin or iron, it gives it the form of silver. If it is copper or black lead or silver, it gives it the form of gold. If the body is quicksilver, it gives it its own power and leaves it as an agent for it: it can govern over the bodies with [the Elixir’s] authority, but this is done through a different measure to that used with the other bodies, and that measure is a *dirham*’s worth of elixir. So he casts it upon a portion⁵⁷ of the wisdom which is particular to quicksilver, making it all into elixir.⁵⁸ Then he casts a measure of that substitute upon a thousand measures of the other metallic bodies, just as he did with the elixir essence, so that it acts in the same manner in terms of governing. This is the mode of originating,⁵⁹ while the first [mode of alchemical work] is the art of eliminating ailment.

We have brought this up so as to explain to you how [spiritual] wisdom is connected to what is called ‘the alchemy of the two ways’.⁶⁰ But why is it called the alchemy of [true] happiness? Because happiness inevitably lies within it, and in addition, according to some of the people of God, there is nothing better than it, for it brings you to the degree of complete perfection which belongs to the real human male.⁶¹ Not everyone who has found happiness is accorded perfection, for while all who are perfect are happy, not every happy one is perfect. Perfection means reaching and joining with the highest degree, and that is assuming the likeness of the Source.⁶² So do not imagine that when the

Prophet said that ‘there have been many men who attained perfection’,⁶³ he meant the [sort of] perfection that ordinary people talk about – rather, it is what we have mentioned here, and this is as much as can be given to the knowing aptitude in this low world. Now, after this introduction we shall go on, if God wills, to speak of the alchemy of true happiness.

And God is the One who brings success,
and there is no lord but Him.

Notes

1. It should be noted that Ibn ‘Arabī uses the plural form here to indicate that there are several (more than two) kinds of elixir, both in the visible realm and in the invisible.

2. Ar: *‘aduww*, which means both a hostile party and someone who is remote. It is the opposite of the term *walī*, which means both a friend and someone who is close. These terms are commonly used to describe the enemies and friends of God.

3. Ar: *‘ināya*, divine providential care or grace. In addition to the well-known attributes of being Knowing, Willing, Powerful etc., God is profoundly Caring towards His creatures, an idea which is founded upon the all-embracing divine Mercy (*rahma*). The divine solicitude or providential grace which God lavishes on certain beings occupies a central place in Ibn ‘Arabī’s teaching. It conveys the sense of a special divine favour, given directly to a servant without any intermediary, and ultimately is what determines whether a person becomes a knower of God – see, for example, *Fut.II.289*: ‘the light of faith bestows felicity, and in no way can it be gained through proofs. It derives only from a *divine grace* towards the one in whom it is found’ (quoted in *SDG*, 169). Later in this chapter, Ibn ‘Arabī describes how the giving (or withholding) of this grace is the real cause of superiority appearing among human beings in this world.

4. That is to say, he becomes a friend of God, in other words a saint (*walī*). The personal pronoun here is ambiguous. So this line could also be read as: he can pass from his state of enmity or distance to his state of friendship or closeness (i.e. a movement from a negative quality to a positive one) by the power of God’s decree.

5. Ar: *‘adad*, literally a number or something that can be counted. In other words, it is a quantity composed of units and therefore different to the simple nature of the One.

6. The model of the human angelic realisation is the prophet Idrīs, of whom it is said ‘We raised him up to a high place’ (Q.19:57).

7. Ar: *bashar*, meaning the ordinary, unregenerate human being. The *bashar* level is below the angelic purity and represents what the angels saw when they spoke of mankind as ‘sowing corruption’ (Q.2.30), while the true human being (*insān*) is the Adamic level to which they were commanded to prostrate.

8. Ar: *al-‘ayn al-wāḥida*. ‘*Ayn* means both essence and source.

9. Ar: *istiwā’*, a word associated with the Compassionate Mercy being seated or establishing Himself upon the Throne (Q.20.4–5: ‘A revelation (*tanzīl*) from Him who created the earth and the high heavens, the Compassionate (*al-Raḥmān*) who seated Himself upon the Throne’).

10. Ar: *nuzūl*, a word indicating the descent of God to creation and the sending-down of inspiration and guidance to the human being. For example, see the hadith ‘Our Lord descends to the heaven of this world every night and asks: “Is there any repentant? Is there any supplicant? Is there anyone asking for forgiveness?”’ Cf. *Mishkāt al-anwār; khabar* 16 (*Divine Sayings*, 65).

11. Ar: *ma‘iyya*, alluding to Q.57.4: ‘He is with (*ma‘a*) you wherever you are.’

12. Ar: *bayna al-maṭwī wa al-manshūr*, literally ‘between rolling-up and unrolling’. Both terms refer to the way parchments were rolled up (closed) or unrolled (open), and are used in connection with the Day of Resurrection in the Quran: ‘and the whole earth shall be His Handful [i.e. in His sole possession] on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens will be rolled up (*maṭwiyāt*) in His right Hand’ (Q.39.67). Likewise, the ‘unrolling’ alludes to the revealing of the truth of one’s actions in the next world: ‘Every human being’s fate have We fastened to his own neck; and on the Day of Resurrection We shall bring forth for him a book which he will see spread open (*manshūr*); [it will be said to him] “Read your record! Today your soul is a sufficient reckoner against you”’ (Q.17.13–14). These correspond to what the physicist David Bohm called the implicate (enfolded) order and the explicate (unfolded) order of reality (see his *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*). We may note that this poem plays on various opposites (mode vs quantity, constitution vs element, prohibition vs command).

13. Ar: *marākib*, plural of *markab*, a term that also suggests a mount or steed, something which is ridden or which allows one to travel. It is contrasted with the simple elements (*basā’it*, i.e. earth, air, fire and water), which constitute all things.

14. This seems to refer to the idea that our human constitution is composed of, or evolves from, bodily elements, into which the soul or spirit has to descend from the intelligible realm. Thus the individual self-consciousness has a greater rank than what he or she is composed of, because it is the ‘place’ where the divine mystery is manifest.

15. Ar: *wahy*, a term which covers many kinds of revelation: ‘revelation may be given to every kind of creature, including angel, jinn, human, animal, plant and inanimate object. Among animals God mentioned the bee (Q.16.68) and among the inanimates He mentioned the heaven (41.12) and the earth (99.5)’ (*Fut.*II.631–2). More specifically, it refers to what the angel brings to a prophet or messenger, which no longer takes place after Muhammad, and to what the friends of God receive directly from the Real without intermediary (see *SPK*, 403–4).

16. This poem is also included in Ibn ‘Arabī’s poetic collection, *Dīwān al-ma‘ārif*, Paris BN 2348, fol. 201b.

17. Ar: *inshā’ dhāt*, meaning that something (literally, an ‘essence’ or ‘substance’) is brought into being or produced for the first time; it also suggests the idea of development or evolution according to the thing’s inherent nature.

18. Literally, produced or worked gold (*ṣinā’ī*). This refers to the production of gold through the alchemical process of removing ‘sickness’, i.e. the gold that results from transformation, which is not exactly the same as gold ore but equivalent to it according to Ibn ‘Arabī.

19. Ar: *i’tidāl*, the principle of right proportion, or the golden mean, the desirable balance between excess and deficiency, an idea emphasised by the Greeks, especially the Pythagoreans, Plato and Aristotle. It is also alluded to in the Quran: ‘the One who created you, formed you beautifully and proportioned you well’ (Q.82.7) and ‘We have created everything in due measure’ (54.49). Inherently the spirit is always in harmony and balance, but through its connection with the body, it comes into the relative world, where there is both equilibrium and disequilibrium. It is the job of the divine physician to cure the imbalances of the soul, just as the physical doctor seeks to cure the sickness of the body and restore the natural equilibrium. At the divine level, the divine Names yearn for existence and seek fulfilment through the manifestation of their effects, and it is by this that both worlds are brought into being. See *Fut.*II.236–7, trans in *SPK*, 304–5.

20. Ar: *ma‘ādin*, plural of *ma‘din*, which means originally the place where mineral ores (*jawāhir*) are found, i.e. the mine or source from which they originate. It can be used metaphorically, as in English, to describe someone as a ‘mine’ of information or goodness. It also sometimes, as here, designates the mineral substance itself.

21. Perfection (*kamāl*) is associated with gold, both as a principle of perfection and as a completion – it is undifferentiated potentiality, and by journeying through the degrees it arrives at the point of its own fulfilment, which is goldenness. Gold is its fullest manifestation. The first two degrees, crucial to its further development through the phases, are sulphur and quicksilver, which act as catalysts for the other metals.

22. Both these terms refer to the ‘sicknesses’ of individuation: *‘illa* (pl. *‘ilal*) = defect, deficiency, flaw, malady (or philosophically, cause); *marad* (pl. *amrād*) = sickness, ailment. We may note that elsewhere Ibn ‘Arabī remarks that the existence of a thing is due to a combination of the self-subsisting quality of spiritual reality (its verticality), which is its inherent cause (*‘illa*, or defect?), and the inclination to manifest (its horizontality), which is its ailment (*marad*). See *Fut.II.122* (trans in *Seven Days*, 164).

23. Ar: *ma’din*.

24. Ar: *jawhar* (substance), which is contrasted with *ṣūra* (form).

25. Sulphur (*kibrīt*): regarded as hot and dry, the solid element of metals.

26. Quicksilver (*zi’baq* or *zaybaq*, metal mercury or *argentum vivum*): considered to be cold and moist, the liquid element of metals.

27. The conjunction of these two opposing principles, the masculine sulphur and the feminine quicksilver, is the ‘chemical wedding’ required to produce the philosopher’s stone (often represented as the hermaphroditic offspring of this union). Cf. Ibn ‘Arabī’s alchemical description of his close companion Badr al-Ḥabashī: ‘He was purified at the time of fusion like pure gold. His word is true, his promise sincere’ (*Fut.I.10*).

28. Ar: *jawhariyya*.

29. Spiritual breath manifests as vapour, i.e. damp air, in the exterior. According to Aristotle, metals grew from seeds and were produced within the earth by the action of ‘vapour’. The vapour of quicksilver was also known as ‘spirit mercury’, ‘the spirit that moves upon the face of the waters’, showing how the physical and spiritual substances were always considered together. The vapour was said to have noxious properties, causing tremors, fainting, madness and so on.

30. Ar: *amrun wa ṭabī’atun*.

31. Recalling the oft-repeated Quranic imagery of a ‘straight path’ upon which each creature walks, which symbolises its natural unfettered development in time. See for example: ‘Whomsoever He wishes, He places upon a straight path’ (Q.6.39), or: ‘There is no creature that moves which He does not hold by the forelock, for indeed my Lord is upon a straight path’ (11.56).

32. A hadith often quoted by Ibn ‘Arabī: ‘Every child is born according to primordial nature (*fiṭra*); then his parents make him into Jew, a Christian or a Zoroastrian.’ See *Fut.II.616*, where Ibn ‘Arabī defines ‘original faith’ as ‘the primordial nature in accordance with which God created mankind, which is their testifying to His Oneness at the taking of the Covenant’ (see *SPK*, 195).

33. Ar: *‘arad*, literally something that befalls or happens to the substance, which is ‘accidental’ and not related to its inherent nature, i.e. through the effects of time, which

involves change and development.

34. Ar. *al-madīna al-fāḍila*, a phrase drawn originally from the 'Just City' of Plato's *Republic*, a book which was commented on by several Andalusian philosophers, including Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198, whose commentary has survived in Hebrew). It was also made famous by the great philosopher and polymath Abū Naṣr Muḥammad al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) in his work *Fī mābādī' ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila*, where he wrote of how the city's inhabitants should co-operate in order to achieve happiness, i.e. the fulfilment of their potential. One may note that the idea of perfect social organisation found form in the physical layout of medieval Islamic cities, with the heart of the city being the mosque and the metal workers ranged according to their rank around it.

35. Ar: *qalaba 'aynahu*, a phrase that can be interpreted in various ways. Literally, 'it inverts/overturns its essential nature'. In other words, the nature of the essence is to be in equilibrium or to be gold, while the nature of the particular characteristic is the inverse, i.e. to deviate and become a metallic form.

36. Ar: *al-i'tibār*.

37. Q.22.5: 'O mankind! If you are in doubt concerning the resurrection, surely We created you of dust, then of a sperm-drop, then of a blood-clot, then of a lump of flesh, perfectly formed and imperfectly formed, that We may make clear to you'.

38. In other words, when the particular metal is formed within the womb of the earth by the marriage of sulphur and quicksilver, it develops under the influence or dominance of one of the seven planets. As there were only seven metals known, there was a natural connection between the metals and the planets. This is also paralleled in the hadith quoted above, where it is the parents who make their child the follower of a specific religion other than primordial submission. Here we may note the contrast with the conception of Jesus at the moment of Mary's state of dilation when Gabriel announced himself to her.

39. Ar: *rūḥāniyya*.

40. Referring to Q.7:54: 'the sun and the moon and the stars have been made subservient by His command'.

41. Ar: *khāliqihī*, literally, 'its Creator' or 'the One who created it'. The two aspects of directing and creating (or giving something its created nature) here refer to Q.20:50, where Moses describes the Lord to the Pharaoh as 'the One who gave everything its nature (*khalqahu*) and then guided it'.

42. Iron (*ḥadīd*), which is the name of the 57th Sura (see Q.57.25), is traditionally associated with the planet Mars in the fifth heaven. However, here it appears that Ibn 'Arabī is associating it with the cold and dryness of Saturn and the spirituality of the seventh heaven, to emphasise iron's inherent hardness. My thanks to Abdel Baqi Miftah for pointing this out to me.

43. Ar: *falak*, which can mean both celestial ‘sphere’ and ‘body’, i.e. the planetary body. The root means ‘to turn or be round’. The universe was conceived of as consisting of concentric spheres, in which the planets or other celestial bodies are carried at varying distances from the Earth.

44. Ar: *al-‘arīf bi’l-tadbīr*. The alchemical procedure (*tadbīr*) refers to the processes used in transformation, i.e. solution (*tahlīl*), distillation (*taṣ‘īd*), sublimation (*taqtīr*) and so on.

45. Ar: *jasad*.

46. The fact that a metal takes a particular form such as lead or iron was thought to be due to the balance of its constituent elements, i.e. the proportions of heat, cold, moisture and dryness that were in it.

47. Ar: *ṭibb*.

48. Ar: *ahwiya*, ‘draughts’, but related etymologically to the word *ahwā*’ in the human realm, i.e. passions, earthly desires. Thus, the alchemist’s role is to cure the metal of ‘disease’ and then provide the right elemental conditions, just as a doctor tends to a patient after an operation. Protecting a metal from ‘draughts’ is the equivalent of safeguarding a human being from the domination of earthly desires.

49. Ar: *al-ṣirāṭ al-qawīm*.

50. Ar: *qāḍī*.

51. Ar: *ḥaqq*. This can also be translated as ‘the path of God’.

52. That is, the reason why there can be no case against the man of truth is that there is nothing else than truth by which to judge him or her. This could also be translated as: ‘this [truth] is his road’. The syllogistic proof which Ibn ‘Arabī adduces here shows an equivalence between the physician who treats the sick and the judge who judges the wrongdoer, and between health and acting rightly or justly. Illness or lack of health is then, logically, akin to a deviation from truth.

53. This could also be understood as: ‘he becomes that by which things are judged’.

54. Ar: *nā’ib*.

55. Ar: *yaqūmu*, a word which echoes ideas of standing up and resurrection. Ibn ‘Arabī appears to be alluding to the fact that this ‘agent’ is equivalent to a prophetic heir.

56. Every weight was supposed to consist of a particular number of weight *dirhams* (not to be confused with the silver coin of the same name). When the French came to Egypt with Napoleon, they found one *dirham* to be just over 3g (the Syrian *dirham* was considered to be a little lighter).

57. Ar: *raṭl*, the most common weight in the Near East for weighing small quantities. The exact weight of a *raṭl* varied from city to city and from century to century: the Damascus *raṭl*

was approximately 600 *dirhams*, i.e. 1.8kg.

58. This implies that quicksilver is not a simple substance like the others, but somehow ethereal or spiritual, a 'wisdom' since it is metamorphosed into the elixir itself. In other words, being utterly passive to the action of the elixir, it is enabled to become a substitute elixir.

59. Ar: *inshā'*, which carries the idea of forming and constituting as well as the form which is produced; in addition, it conveys a sense of natural development or growth. This is not simple transformation from one form to another, but the evolution from one form to another. The elixir transforms and causes evolution into a superior form, based on the potential inherent in the being.

60. These two ways of alchemy (elimination and original formation) correspond to two forms of spiritual teaching which Ibn 'Arabī received from his Andalusian masters, al-Martulī and al-'Uraybī: to 'concern yourself with your soul' (eliminating defects) and to 'concern yourself with God alone' (original formation). See *Rūḥ al-quds*, 126 (R.W.J. Austin, *Sufis of Andalusia* (London, 1971), 88–9).

61. Ar: *rajul*, a technical term in Ibn 'Arabī's teaching, indicating the spiritual 'male', one who is 'virile' through being completely open to the action of God. He stresses that this degree of true humanity is open to men and women equally.

62. This likeness (*tashabbuh*) is the image or form of God in which the human being is created.

63. 'There have been many men who attained perfection, but none were perfect among women except 'Āsiya, the wife of Pharaoh, and Mary, the daughter of 'Imrān' (al-Bukhārī *anbiyā'*, 62). The word 'men' (*rijāl*) here picks up Ibn 'Arabī's earlier mention of 'male' (*rajul*).



Part II¹

Know that the perfection for which the human being is created, which is the [ultimate] object of desire,² is really the rank of [divine] representation. It was obtained by Adam through divine providential Grace.³ It is a more specialised station than [the degree of] messengerhood in the messengers,⁴ since not every messenger is a [divine] representative.⁵ The only specification for the rank of messenger is announcement, as He says: *There is no obligation upon the messenger except to announce.*⁶ It is not his task to exercise command over one who opposes [him]. Rather, his role is to simply promulgate the ruling that is enacted by God or according to what God causes him to see. If God should grant him the authority to judge those to whom he has been sent, then that means he has been appointed as, and has the position of representative, and the person is then a messenger-representative. But not everyone who is sent [by God] passes judgment. If he is given the sword and wields it, only then does he possess full perfection, for he manifests with the authority and power of [all] the divine Names: he bestows and prevents, honours and humbles, gives life and brings death, causes harm and brings benefit.⁷ He appears with opposing Names, as well as prophethood – and that is necessary, for if he manifested this power of judgment without being a prophet, he would be a[n earthly] king but not a [divine] representative.

No-one can be a representative except one whom God appoints as such over His servants. It is not someone whom the people set up over them, pledging allegiance to him, making him lead and giving him priority over themselves.⁸ It is [the divine appointment that constitutes] the rank of perfection.

Ordinary people may legitimately work towards attaining the station of perfection, but it is not for them to try to be a prophet. For while [divine] representation may be earned,⁹ prophethood cannot. Some people, however, having seen the way that leads to prophethood as the external condition of such a property, and that whoever God wishes is able to follow [such a path], imagine that prophethood is earned, but they have erred. There is no doubt that the path is a matter of acquisition,¹⁰ but when someone arrives at the door [of the divine Presence], [what they receive] will be according to whatever is set out for them in their own authorisation,¹¹ and that is a matter of divine specification. There are some people who are invested with the authority of friendship,¹² while others are authorised as a prophet or a messenger, or as a messenger and representative; others again are authorised as representative alone. When an outsider¹³ observes that this investiture is only given to such people after they have followed [the path], through actions, words and states, until they come to this door, then they imagine that this [appointment] is something earned by the servant, but they are mistaken.

Know that with regard to its essential nature, the soul is prepared to receive the aptitude for whatever it is given by divine authorisation.¹⁴ There are some who possess the aptitude to be specifically authorised with friendship, and do not go beyond it. Others are endowed with an aptitude for what we have mentioned of the spiritual stations, for either

all of them or just some of them (wholly or partially). The reason for this is that souls are created from a single source, exactly as He says: *He has created you all from one Soul*,¹⁵ and He says that after the aptitude of the creation of the body, *And I blew into him of My Spirit*.¹⁶ So from a single spirit there comes about the inbreathed mystery within that into which it is blown, and this is the soul.¹⁷ When He says: *composing you in whatever form your Lord wished*,¹⁸ [by ‘form’] He means the aptitudes, since it is by virtue of the aptitude that the divine order is received.

The origin of these individual souls¹⁹ is pure by virtue of their ‘parents’,²⁰ but an individual reality cannot appear for them except through the existence of this physical body. As a result, [Universal] Nature becomes the second ‘father’, and they come about as a mixed constitution. There appears in them neither the radiance of the pure Light that is detached from matter nor the deepest darkness which is the province of Nature.²¹ Nature can be compared to the elemental mine, while the Universal Soul is similar to the celestial bodies, which have an active function and whose movements have direct effects upon the [various] elements.²² The metallic body that is brought into being in the mine corresponds to the human body.²³ The specific characteristic that is the spirit of the metallic body corresponds to the individual soul belonging to the human body, and this is the inbreathed spirit.²⁴

Just as metallic bodies are graded in degrees because of the defects that befall them while they are being formed, and yet they [all] seek the rank of completion, for which their realities became manifest, likewise, the human being is created for perfection. Nothing can divert him from this completion except the defects and ailments that befall people,

whether that is within the provenance of their own nature or due to accidental matters.²⁵ So be aware of this!

Now let us begin with what is necessary and appropriate to deal with in this particular chapter, by saying as follows. God has empowered the particular souls to have management of this body and appointed them to be in charge of it, making clear to them that they are a *khalīfa*²⁶ over it, so that they might become aware of the fact that they have a Creator who has put them in charge of it. Therefore it is incumbent upon them to seek out knowledge of the One who appointed them in such a way. Is He one of their own kind? or is He similar to them in some way? or does He have no likeness to them at all? In their search for knowledge of Him, questions abound of their own accord. They are in this situation, looking for the way that leads to that [knowledge], when there arises among the individual souls someone who has been given a greater rank in being than they have.²⁷ They feel comfortable in his company because he is just like them. They ask him: ‘You have been given a higher dignity than us in this realm, so has what occurred to us also struck you?’ He asks: ‘And what is it that has occurred to you?’ They reply: ‘To seek knowledge of the One who has appointed us as *khalīfa* over the management of this corporeal body.’²⁸ Then he says: ‘On that subject I have completely sound knowledge, which I bring from the One who appointed you as *khalīfa*. He has made me a messenger to my own kind, to clarify for them the way of knowledge which leads to Him, wherein lies their true happiness.’

Then one of them²⁹ replies: ‘That is exactly what I have been looking for. So do teach me knowledge of this path that I may follow it.’ However, the other says: ‘There is no difference between me and you, so I would like to discover the path to knowing Him by myself. I do not

just want to follow you unconditionally in it. If you have obtained what you are and what you have brought through [the faculty of] reasoning,³⁰ which I also have, why should I be so lacking in aspiration as to simply imitate you? On the other hand, if it has resulted for you by virtue of some special favour from Him, just as He has favoured us [all] with the gift of existence after we were not, then that is a claim without any proper proof.' So [this person] will not heed his words, and he starts to think and theorise about that [question] with his intellect.

Such is the position of one who obtains their knowledge through intellectual proofs by rational thought. The former, on the other hand, typifies those who [consciously] follow the messenger and those who unquestioningly accept him with regard to what he explains about the knowledge of their Maker. The person whom these two people are at variance about in their manner of following exemplifies the messenger who instructs. The revealed regulations³¹ laid down by this instructor clarify the path that leads to the rank of Completion and Happiness, in accordance with what is required by the rational faculty of one of these two individuals who consider what the instructor offers³² – that is, of the one who won't follow him. Agreement with the instructor only occurs in some of the different temperaments that are necessitated by the natural order of things. Each different temperament or character only comes about by virtue of a specific measure or a determined quantity. This is why [this knowledge] is called 'alchemy', because it introduces [principles of] quantification and measurement.

So when this particular individual sees that, he is delighted by it since he feels that he is doing it on his own, without having to copy the instructor. He reckons that he is better off than his companion who is [merely] imitating him, but in that he is mistaken. As for the

‘imitator’,³³ he remains simply engaged upon faithfully copying the instructor, while the ‘non-imitator’ augments [his teaching]. The latter is someone who refuses to follow such a person because he thinks he is [already] in conformity [with him], and isolates himself with his own thought-process on account of this [supposed] agreement.

So the two men – or rather two individuals, as they might be two women or one woman and one man – follow the path, one by virtue of using rational thought and the other by virtue of being a disciple. They both begin to engage in spiritual training,³⁴ which is the refining of character; spiritual endeavour,³⁵ which is enduring bodily hardship like hunger; and devotional acts³⁶ such as standing in prayer a long time and persevering tirelessly in it, fasting, going on pilgrimage, spiritual warfare and wandering. The one does this using his own rational intelligence, and the other through what is prescribed for him by his teacher and instructor, who is called a law-giver.³⁷ When they are free from the strength of the frame³⁸ of elemental nature, they are then able to take from the property of elemental nature only as much as is necessary to preserve the existence of the physical body. It is through the existence of this body, its equilibrium and continuation, that the individual soul obtains what she desires of the knowledge of God, who gave her the particular role of being *khalīfā*.

