

IV

THE MOST profound significance of astronomical cycles consists in the fact that they offer an image logically analogous to all successive developments of possibilities ruled by the pole of one and the same principle, so that they symbolise no matter which order of manifestation, be it that that order is conditioned by time or be it that the succession it implies is of a purely logical nature. Consequently it is possible to conceive of a whole hierarchy of cosmic 'cycles' analogous among themselves, but situated at different levels of existence and each reflected simultaneously and in different relationships, in an astronomical cycle such as the one traversed by the Sun or the Moon on the sky of the fixed stars. In his book 'The Revelations of Mecca' (*al-futuhât al-makkiyah*), Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi cites a series of cosmological correspondences which allows the tracing of a symbolic diagram which will be found as an inset in this book. This diagram is built upon the juxtaposition of the zodiac and the cycle of the lunar mansions, beginning with the Spring Equinox, and the different orders of analogies are indicated by concentric circles.

The first reason of all cycles of manifestation is the deployment of the principal possibilities of manifestation, symbolised by the series of Divine Names. On the other hand, the science of the Names or the Divine Qualities – the former being no other than the logical determinations of the latter – constitute the supreme conclusion of all sacred science, because universal

qualities are in some ways the distinctive contents of the Divine Essence, whereas the Divine Essence in Itself can never be the object of a science, that is to say the object of a knowledge which could yet again imply what so ever distinction. The qualities or the Divine Names are necessarily innumerable; but due to the simplicity of this Being, which is one of the aspects of Its Unity, they can be symbolically summarised in a determined group, which would all the same be more or less numerically large, according to the principles of logical differentiation that one would like to apply. As there is no distinction without implicit hierarchy, the series of Names would always have the character of a logical chain, and it is by this that it becomes the model of all cyclic order.

In the present case, the Master makes the 28 mansions of the Moon correspond to as many Divine Names. On the other hand, these, which all have an active or creative character, have as complements or as direct objects the same number of cosmic degrees, so that their connection forms a second analogous cycle. The series of these cosmic degrees produced by the series of the Divine Names go from the first manifestation of the Intellect down to the creation of man. In its hierarchy it also comprises the cosmic degrees which correspond to the different heavens, that is to say to the heavens of the zodiac, to the heavens of the fixed stars, and to the seven planetary skies. But these degrees which are here related to certain regions of the zodiac, measured by lunar mansions, should in reality be conceived as a 'vertical' succession in relation to the zodiacal cycle, and one must understand well that there is, in this attribution of a series of cosmic degrees to the lunar 'stations' and consequently to the zodiacal regions, something like a projection of a 'vertical' hierarchy on a 'horizontal' plane.

The Divine Names represent the determining essences of the corresponding cosmic domains. As to the production of these domains, starting with their principal determinations, it is the effects of the Divine Breath (*an-nafas al-ilâhî*), which

deploys all the possibilities of manifestation implied in the principal determinations of the Names. According to a symbolism which is at the same time verbal and figurative, before the creation of the world the Divine Names were in a state of divine constriction (*al-karb al-ilâhî*), and then they 'demand' their created complements, until the Divine Spirit 'relieved' (*tanaf-fasa*) them, by deploying all the amplitude of their consequences. In other words, as soon as the Being conceives, in Its first auto-determination (*ta 'ayyun*), the principal distinctions which are His Names or His Qualities, these require their logical complements, the totality of which will constitute the world. It is the Divine Breath which 'extends' this logical connection in an existential manner, and it identifies itself in this respect to the First Substance and to Universal Nature. It is thus that we can summarise in a few words the theory of the Divine Breath, a theory which takes into account the symbolic correspondence which ties together between themselves the cycle of the Divine Names, that of the cosmic degrees and that of the 28 sounds of the Arabic alphabet, the cosmic degrees being the determinations of the Universal and Macrocosmic Breath and the 28 sounds those of the human and microcosmic breath; the sounds of the language are carried by the physical breath, just as the cosmic degrees are 'carried' by the Divine 'expansion'. We have explained above the reason for the analogy which relates these 28 sounds to the lunar sphere.

The Master points out that the hierarchy of the cosmic degrees that he enumerates according to the order of the lunar mansions, should not be understood as a series of successive productions, but as a definite scale of degrees of existence; because the order of production does not correspond to the definitive hierarchy; it is inverse according to whether it is the degrees of universal and informal existence, or the degrees inferior to the sky of the fixed stars, that is to say the degrees of the individual world, and this is easily understandable, seeing that the production of the superior states cannot be conceived ex-

cept in a purely logical fashion, in the sense of an essential differentiation beginning with the Unity of the Being; the production of the formal and individual worlds, on the other hand, would necessarily be envisaged with respect to their substantial reality, or even 'material', therefore like an opening up of forms and states of existence, beginning with the potentiality of an undifferentiated *materia*, which, because of its shadowy passivity, is situated at the lower degree of an ascending scale of states of existence. Therefore the result of this is that the ontological level of the Prime Matter, or of the plastic substance of the body of manifestations, can be conceived and represented in different ways, according to whether one considers it as the first term of a series of successive productions, or as the beginning of the series because all the successive entities draw their plastic substance from it, or again whether one assigns to it the last level of a static hierarchy or whether it will play a role in the inferior root or whether it is as the anchor thrown into an abysmal depth.

This double hierarchical situation of the Prime Matter, or of the passive substance, is expressed in the level that it occupies in the cosmological schemata which we will study, the principal that Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi calls *al-jawhar al-habâi* – which corresponds to the Prime Matter – or again *al-hayûlâ*, the Arabic term for 'hylé'. The Master writes that this cosmic entity here holds the fourth level because it is the necessary premise of the following level, assigned to 'Universal Body', secondary substance, which fills the intelligible 'space' as ether, or the *akâsha* of the Hindu doctrine, fills the sensible space. It is in this respect, that is to say as the immediate origin of 'Universal Body', that cosmology generally conceives of the reality of the Prime Matter. Nevertheless, according to its most profound meaning which Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi exposes, the Prime Matter, conceived as the Universal Substance which is the support of all the principal determinations, should be represented outside this hierarchical succession, because it is either superior or inferior

to all the other degrees; its place in the interior of the hierarchy is all the same justified by the fact that it represents the last term of the first quaternary which summarises in itself alone all Universal Existence: the Universal Soul (*an-nafs al-kulliyah*), which occupies the second degree, is in some way a result of the action of the First Intellect (*al-'aql*) on the First Substance (*al-Habâ*); and Universal Nature (*at-tabî 'ah*), which is situated at the third level, appears like a modification of this substance. On the other hand, the Prime Matter (*al-jawhar al-habâi*) is attributed to the Divine Name 'the Last' (*al-akhir*), which expresses the divine 'faculty' of being 'Last' without temporal ulteriority, or being 'other' without essential altereity, this meaning obviously corresponding to the function of the passive substance which is the indefinable root of all manifestation.

This explanation of the hierarchical level of the Prime Matter was necessary in order to indicate how one should envisage the cosmic degrees of succession. As to the other terms of this same hierarchy, their explanation would take us beyond the framework of this study; we will limit ourselves therefore to the indication of some general distinctions. One will notice that the cycle of the Names of the cosmic degrees and the lunar mansions can be divided into quarters, each of which comprises seven mansions corresponding to a definite total of degrees of existence: the first quarter symbolises the world of principals or the totality of Divine Degrees: this quarter is symbolically terminated at the Summer Solstice, and at the degree of the Divine 'Throne', which is the complement of the Divine Name *al-muhit*, 'He who englobes all', is the model of the letter *qaf*, sign of the pole and name of the polar mountains that the Hindus call *Merû*; and, let us add, in there it is as if it were a verbal image of the fact that the Divine 'Throne' is at the same time the sphere which englobes all and the pole around which revolves the circumambulation of the angels. The next two quarters symbolise all the formal worlds, but in only one res-

pect, that of the 'elementary' and direct existence of each of their degrees; because it is the last quarter of the cycle which represents the hierarchy of the composite beings, that is to say beings whose forms draw from a synthesis of many degrees of existence. The two middle quarters constitute therefore a single 'world'; but they can be divided with respect to the centre of this world, this centre being the sphere of the Sun, which is the 'heart of the world', and which is here placed in analogical relation to the Autumn Equinox.

The 'intermediary' world comprises the seven planetary skies, and their attribution to an equal number of Divine Names indicates with precision the cosmic principles of which the planetary rhythms are an expression.

The sky of Saturn is attributed to the Divine Name *ar-Rabb*, 'the Lord', the meaning of which implies a reciprocal relationship, because a being has no quality of lordship except in relation to a servant, and the servant is not thus a servant except in relation to a lord. For the created being, this relationship has a necessary and unalterable character whereas the other divine qualities can in some ways vary in colour according to the individual. The sky of Jupiter is the complement of the Divine Name *al-alîm*, 'the Knower' or 'the Learned'. Mars corresponds to the Divine Name *al-qâhir*, 'the Conqueror' or 'the Tamer'; Jupiter reigns over the intellectual faculty and Mars the volitive faculty. The Sun is analogous to the Divine Name *an-nûr*, 'the Light', whereas the Moon corresponds to the Divine Name *al-mubîn*, 'the Apparent' or 'the Evident'. The Sun symbolises the principal of Intellect itself, whereas the Moon represents manifestation; there is between these two names the same relationship as that between 'Truth' and 'Proof', or between 'Revelation' and 'Commentary'. Venus is attributed to the Divine Name *al-musawwir*, He who forms, a word which equally signifies the painter and the sculptor, and the feminine form of which signifies the imaginative faculty. As for Mercury, it is the

analogy of the Divine Name *al-muhsi*, 'He who counts', the significance of which is related to numbers and to distinctive knowledge.¹

The two middle quarters of the cycle, symbolised by the zodiacal hemicycle situated between the Summer and Winter Solstices, englobes all the hierarchy of the celestial spheres, starting in an ascending order with the Divine 'Throne'; and this hemicycle effectively corresponds to the descendent phase of the solar trajectory. The last mansion before the Winter Solstice is attributed to the element earth; the point itself of the Solstice symbolises therefore the centre of gravity, lowest point which would be the level of the passive matter of the human world – not of the Prime Matter of all the universe – because this centre of gravity is not the lowest point except with respect to the world of men. From this point on, the meaning of the hierarchical order changes and becomes ascending, going from the elementary towards synthesis. First comes the three kingdoms of minerals (or metals, because the pure mineral is always reduced to metal), of plants, and of animals, and after that the degrees of angels, genii, and men. It would seem strange that the angels should precede the genii (*jinn*); since the genii belong only to the psychic world, whereas the angels belong to the informal world and thereby should surpass them in knowledge and in power; but the order of succession goes from that which is more simple towards that which is more composite, from that which is less individualised towards individuation. Because of this, man represents the last synthesis in this world, because the cyclic degree which follows and which terminates all the hierarchy is no more, to be precise, a degree of existence; it symbolises the reintegration of all the preceding degrees in the First Intellect. Therefore the Master says of this last mansion of the cycle that it corresponds to the 'determination of all the degrees', that is to say to their

¹This refers to a perspective other than the one which envisages the prophetic functions in their correspondences with the seven planets.

intellectual hierarchisation, 'but not to their manifestation'. This hierarchisation identifies itself on the other hand to the 'Universal Man (*al-insan al-kâmil*), whose existence is purely virtual with respect to the domain of distinctive manifestation, being as it were the ideal model of the return of man to the Principle.

From another point of view, one should not lose sight of the fact that this cosmological hierarchy, projected into a cycle, is at the same time determined by the encatation of macrocosmic degrees and by the human perspective: this is perfectly licit, given that the human being occupies a central position in the cosmic atmosphere which surrounds him, and that he has a right to consider this position, since he is obliged to make of it a starting point for his spiritual realisation, as he is situated on the axis itself which unites the poles of the universe, passing from the lowest centre of 'material' gravity up to the supreme centre of 'First Intellect'.

The system of correspondences that Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi gives us permits us to relate each mansion of the Moon to a Divine Quality; on the other hand, these mansions are superimposed on the twelve zodiacal regions, according to an unequal but rhythmic superimposition, and in a manner where each zodiacal sign comprises seven-thirds of lunar mansions. We still have to consider the following modes according to which the cosmic and intellectual qualities of these mansions are combined, so as to give the qualities inherent to the zodiacal regions.