IBN ‘ARABI’S LETTER TO
FAKHR AL-DIN AL-RÂZÎ: A STUDY
AND TRANSLATION*

MOHAMMED RUSTOM
Carleton University

INTRODUCTION

A popular story tells us that one day the great theologian Fakhr al-Din al-Râzî (d. 606/1210) decided to take the spiritual path. He thus went to the well-known Sufi master and founder of the Kubrawi order Najm al-Din Kubrâ (d. 618/1221), and asked to be initiated into the Way. Kubrâ received Râzî and immediately put him into a khalwa or spiritual retreat with particular instructions on how to invoke the name of God. Râzî went into the cell and undertook the rites assigned to him. After some time, the master entered the room and, with his powers of spiritual concentration, looked directly at Râzî and began to extract all of his book learning from his soul. Since he could not accept that all of his knowledge be stripped away from him, Râzî forced himself up and left the room.¹

* Author’s note: I am very grateful to Stephen Hirtenstein and Ayman Shihadeh for their helpful suggestions and comments on my translation of Ibn ‘Arabi’s letter to Râzî. Thanks also go to the Journal of Islamic Studies’ anonymous reviewer, and to Wahid Amin, Ryan Brizendine, Jane Clark, Davlat Dadikhuda, and Ramzi Taleb for their essential feedback on aspects of this article.

It is highly likely that there was an actual encounter between Rāzī and Kubrā. Yet there are so many legendary variations of the meeting that it becomes almost impossible to disentangle myth from reality. Despite this fact, these stories serve to indicate one thing most clearly: Rāzī, who left behind a number of highly influential works in rational theology (kalām), was a major critic of Avicenna (d. 428/1037), and wrote a monumental and profound commentary upon the Qur’ān, had a problem—he could


4 One of the more useful studies of Rāzī’s tafsīr is Michel Lagarde, Les secrets de l’invisible: essai sur le Grand commentaire de Fāhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (1149–1209) (Beirut: Albouraq, 2008). See also Tariq Jaffer’s review article of this work in the Journal of Qur’anic Studies, 15/2 (2013): forthcoming (I am grateful to the author for sending an unpublished version of this piece for my perusal). Copious translations from Rāzī’s tafsīr can be found in Feras Hamza, Sajjad Rizvi with Farhana Mayer (eds.), An Anthology of Qur’anic Commentaries (Volume 1: On the Nature of the Divine) (Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2008). It can also be noted that Rāzī may have
not give up his book learning in place of spiritual knowledge, to which he was, in some fashion, attracted (it is well-known that some of Rāżī’s writings evince a pronounced presence of Sufi themes and ideas\(^5\)). Indeed, in Central Asia and Anatolia during the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries, Rāżī had become a sort of representative of the excessively cerebral scholar who was blind to spiritual truths because he could not see past his bookishness.\(^6\)

This negative Rāżī image features quite interestingly in a number of Sufi texts from this aforementioned period. In the \textit{Ma’ārif} of Bahā’-i Valad (d. 628/1231), the father of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273) and a well-known Sufi and preacher in Balkh, Rāżī is referred to as someone who is given to religious innovation (\textit{bid’a}).\(^7\) As for Rūmī himself, he too is critical of Rāżī, as reflected in a couplet from his \textit{Mathnāvī}. Referring left parts of his commentary upon the Qur’ān unfinished at the time of his death, only to be completed by his students. See Griffel, ‘On Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāżī’s Life’, 325, and the references on pp. 325–6, n. 49.


\(^6\) This Rāżī polemic might also be connected in some way to a number of widespread myths about his political involvement in bringing about the demise of certain prominent Sufi figures in his day. For a preliminary discussion, see Pourjavady, \textit{Dū mujaddid}, 477ff.

\(^7\) Bahā’-i Valad, \textit{Ma’ārif} (ed. Bādi’ al-Zamān Furūzānfar; Tehran: Vizārat-i Farhang, 1954–9), i. 82. See also Fritz Meier, \textit{Bahā’-i Valad: Grundzüge seines Lebens und seiner Mystik} (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 20–8; Pourjavady, \textit{Dū mujaddid}, 461–4, 485–9. Rāżī’s patron, Muḥammad Khwārazmshāh, is on the receiving end of Bahā’-i Valad’s criticisms here as well. For more on Rāżī’s patrons, see Griffel, ‘On Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāżī’s Life’, 332–40. Although outside the scope of the present study, it should be noted that this negative image of Rāżī in Sufi literature extends well beyond the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries. See, for example, a poem from the Safavid period (which also targets Aristotle...
to the intellect’s limitations in grasping the true nature of things, Rūmī says:

If in this inquiry the intellect could discern the way,
then Fakhr-i Rāzī would be the mystery-knower of religion. ⁸

We even find references to Rāzī in the discourses of Shams-i Tabrīzī, Rumi’s beloved companion who mysteriously disappeared in 644/1247. In one passage of Shams’s *Maqālāt*, Rāzī is portrayed in an extremely negative (and distorted) light: ‘What gall Fakhr-i Razi had! He said, “Muhammad Tazi [the Arab] says this, and Muhammad Razi says that”. Isn’t he the apostate of the time? Isn’t he an absolute unbeliever, unless he repents?’ ⁹ And in another passage similar to Rūmī’s poem, Rāzī the intellectual is juxtaposed with two of the greatest early Sufi figures, Abū Yazīd Baṣṭāmī (d. ca. 260/874) and Junayd (d. 298/910):

If it were fitting to perceive these meanings by study and debate, then it would be necessary for Abu Yazid and Junayd to rub their heads in the dirt out of regret before Fakhr-i Razi. They would need to become his students for a hundred years! ¹⁰

In at least two noteworthy cases, letters were even sent to Rāzī, encouraging him to take the inner life seriously. One of these was written by Shihāb al-Dīn ’Umar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234), the celebrated author of the ‘Awārīf al-mā‘ārīf. ¹¹ The other one, which is far more direct than Suhrawardī’s letter in calling Rāzī to Sufism, was written by none other than the influential Sufi figure Ibn ’Arabī (d. 638/1240).


¹⁰ Cited, with a slight modification, from Chittick, *Me and Rumi*, 61. Yet in another passage (66), Shams appears to laud Rāzī’s intellectual acumen, albeit in an indirect and humorous way.

¹¹ The text has been published in Pourjavady, *Dū mujaddid*, 515–17.
Over five decades ago, Michel Valsan produced a French translation of Ibn ‘Arabi’s letter to Rāzī.12 Since then, it has been translated into Persian twice,13 and parts of it have been translated and/or discussed in passing by a number of noteworthy scholars, including William Chittick,14 Franz Rosenthal,15 Nasrollah Pourjavady,16 and Ayman Shihadeh.17 However, we still lack a comprehensive examination and complete English translation of this text, which is as important for the wider discipline of Islamic intellectual history as it is for Ibn ‘Arabi and Rāzī studies. I therefore offer here, for the first time in English, a study and translation of Ibn ‘Arabi’s letter to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī.

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Shihadeh gives 598/1201–2 as the earliest date for Ibn ‘Arabi’s letter to Rāzī, citing the fact that this corresponds to the period in which Ibn ‘Arabi travelled to the East and is likely to have encountered the negative Rāzī image and come into contact with his students.18 Shihadeh’s proposed terminus post quem for the letter also matches up well with another piece of evidence from Ibn ‘Arabi’s life. Towards the end of his letter Ibn ‘Arabi complains of the ‘scholars of evil’ (‘ulamā’ al-sū), blaming them for preventing him from outlining to Rāzī the details of the spiritual path. It would be hard to determine exactly when and where this would have been in the period dating from Ibn ‘Arabi’s arrival in the East (598/1201) to Rāzī’s death, especially since 600/1204 to 617/1220 marks Ibn ‘Arabi’s period of rapid movement in which he continuously

16 Pourjavady, Dū mujaddid, 473–5.
18 Ibid.
travelled between Syria, Palestine, Anatolia, Egypt, Iraq, and the Hijāz.\textsuperscript{19} But it would nevertheless be safe to assume that by the ‘scholars of evil’ Ibn ‘Arabi is referring to some moment and place during his time in the East, especially because we know that, unlike his experience in the East, in the Muslim West he had not encountered the hostilities of the ulema.

In his letter to Rāzī, Ibn ‘Arabi states that he had come across some of his writings, and then goes on to praise Rāzī’s intellectual prowess. But exactly how aware of Rāzī’s ideas was Ibn ‘Arabi? According to Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), the answer is clear. In his Bugḥyat al-murtād (also known as the Sabʿīniyya), in the context of his attempt to demonstrate Ibn ‘Arabi’s reliance upon rational theology, Ibn Taymiyya narrates a report in which Rāzī’s Muḥṣal is seen in Ibn ‘Arabi’s own handwriting.\textsuperscript{20} And, in modern scholarship, it has even been suggested that Rāzī may have influenced Ibn ‘Arabi’s understanding of God’s attributes.\textsuperscript{21} In the absence of concrete textual evidence, however, it would indeed be very difficult to make any definitive judgments concerning Ibn ‘Arabi’s knowledge of Rāzī’s writings, let alone to postulate Rāzī’s influence on any aspect(s) of Ibn ‘Arabi’s thought. The little that we can state for certain is what Ibn ‘Arabi himself says. In his magnum opus al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya, he mentions Rāzī in passing three times;\textsuperscript{22} and, in another passage, with great approval.\textsuperscript{23} Rāzī also


\textsuperscript{20} See Ibn Taymiyya, \textit{Bugḥyat al-murtād fi radd ʿalā l-mutafalsifa wa-l-qارāmita wa-l-bāṭiniyya} (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Kurdistān al-ʿIlmiyya, 1911), 106. My thanks to Karim Crow for alerting me to this passage.

\textsuperscript{21} See Robert Wisnovsky, ‘One Aspect of the Akbarian Turn in Shīʿi Theology’ in Shihadeh (ed.), \textit{Sufism and Theology}, 49–62, at 61–2, n. 10. However, this suggestion is problematic because, for Ibn ‘Arabi (and contra Rāzī, as well as so far as I can see, every other Muslim theologian before Ibn ‘Arabi), although the divine names (and hence the divine attributes) do possess a relative reality, they are fundamentally speaking, not ‘ontological entities’ (\textit{al-umūr al-wujūdiyya}). Rather, they are relations (\textit{nisab}) between the manifest face of God and the loci of His self-disclosures (\textit{mażāhr}), that is, the ‘fixed entities’ (\textit{al-ayān al-thābita}) in their objectivized mode. For more on this point, see Mohammed Rustom, ‘Philosophical Sufism’ in Richard Taylor and Luis López-Farjeat (eds.), \textit{The Routledge Companion to Islamic Philosophy} (New York: Routledge, in press).

\textsuperscript{22} Ibn ‘Arabi, \textit{al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya} (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1968), i. 162 (Muḥammad b. ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭīb al-Rāzī); i. 253, ii. 692 (Ibn al-Khaṭīb). Rāzī was known as Ibn al-Khaṭīb because his father was a preacher (khaṭīb) at the main mosque in Rayy. See Shihadeh, ‘Introduction’, xi.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibn ‘Arabi, \textit{Futūḥāt}, ii. 507 (Ibn Khaṭīb al-Rayy). Here, Ibn ‘Arabi relates a story from Rāzī (where he was thrown into prison and had no one to turn to but
appears in a chronologically later part of the Futūḥāt, where Ibn ‘Arabī mentions a ‘different’ letter that he wrote to him. In this passage Ibn ‘Arabī also includes the formula ‘God have mercy upon him’ (raḥimahu Allāh) after Rāzī’s name, which is a clear indication that he had already passed on.

Such is the extent of what Ibn ‘Arabī has to say about Rāzī. Now what can be said about Ibn ‘Arabī’s influence upon him? Contrary to what has been suggested by Michel Lagarde, there is nothing in Rāzī’s writings which would unequivocally indicate that he was in fact influenced by Ibn ‘Arabī. To be sure, Ibn ‘Arabī’s two most influential and best-known works, the Futūḥāt and the Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam, would see the light of day some two decades after Rāzī’s death. With respect to the letter that Ibn ‘Arabī wrote to him, we have no record of Rāzī’s even having received it.

God), which Rāzī conveyed to one of his students who then retold it to Ibn ‘Arabī.

See Ibn ‘Arabī, Futūḥāt, i. 241 (Fakhr Muhammad b. Umar b. Khaṭīb al-Rayy). I say that this letter is ‘different’ because, in the passage in question, Ibn ‘Arabī refers to the letter as Risālat al-akhlāq, and then tells us that he will mention in this chapter (which runs from pp. 241–4) some of the contents of the letter. Based on what he relates in this chapter, it is safe to say that he had another letter to Rāzī in mind. Maḥmūd Ghurāb also intimates this much in his introduction to Ibn ‘Arabī, Rasā’il (ed. Maḥmūd Ghurāb; Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1997), 12; incidentally, none of the manuscripts of Ibn ‘Arabī’s letter to Rāzī carry the title Risālat al-akhlāq. It should also be noted that elsewhere in the Futūḥāt (iv. 459), Ibn ‘Arabī speaks of a certain Risālat al-akhlāq that he had sent to one of his brethren (ikhwān). Based on the way Ibn ‘Arabī describes this Risālat al-akhlāq, he either (1) has in mind his other letter to Rāzī mentioned in Futūḥāt, i. 241, or (2) is referring to a letter on the topic of akhlāq that was written for someone other than Rāzī, but which coincidentally bears the same title as this other letter that he had sent to him. I am inclined to accept the latter possibility, especially since Ibn ‘Arabī dates this second Risālat al-akhlāq to 591/1195, which would correspond to the period when he was still in the Muslim West and was likely not familiar with Rāzī’s writings or image. Another possible reason that this second Risālat al-akhlāq is different from the one sent to Rāzī is that, according to Osman Yahya (Histoire et classification de l’oeuvre d’Ibn ‘Arabī [Damascus: Institut français de Damas, 1964], ii. 493), it is under the main title Tahdhib al-akhlāq, with the alternative title al-ʾAlāq fi makārim al-akhlāq, both of which fit the description of this work given at Futūḥāt, iv. 459 better than what is revealed at Futūḥāt, i. 241–4 about the Risālat al-akhlāq sent to Rāzī.

See, Lagarde, Les secrets de l’invisible, 15; 142, n. 87; 119.

Concerning the lack of Ibn ‘Arabī’s presence in Rāzī’s work in general, see the observation in Shihadeh, ‘The Mystic and the Sceptic’, 118.

The Fuṣūṣ was composed in 627/1230, and the final version of the Futūḥāt was completed in 636/1238.
(although it was undoubtedly sent to him). Assuming that the letter did reach Rāzī, there would still be no way to verify that its contents in any way influenced his own spiritual inclinations.28

**ASPIRATION AND POVERTY**

Ibn ‘Arabi’s letter to Rāzī deals with the nature of aspiration and what a life of lofty aspirations entails. Since Rāzī was notorious for his excessive rationalism in all matters religious, Ibn ‘Arabi first attempts to pull him away from over-reliance upon reflection (fikr) in understanding the true nature of things. In order to demonstrate how other the reality of things is from what the intellect affords Rāzī, Ibn ‘Arabi makes a key distinction between knowledge of God’s existence and knowledge of God. The intellect can discern God’s existence, and this only by way of negation and affirmation. But knowledge of God is something quite different.

Positively construed, the Arabic term himma or aspiration can entail devotion to something that is important, worthwhile, essential, fundamental and, in some cases, even all-consuming. The person who aspires to God is thus after the most important, worthwhile, essential, fundamental, and all-consuming ‘thing’ of all. Ibn ‘Arabi does not at any point in the letter tell Rāzī that he does not have any aspiration. He is careful to let Rāzī know that he is aware of his search after certainty and ultimately knowledge of God. Yet Ibn ‘Arabi wants to suggest to Rāzī that since he has the loftiest of all aspirations, he should not busy himself with those things that are not commensurate to his goal, namely that he should not occupy himself with ways of coming to know God and understanding Him which are not appropriate to Him except in a limited sense.

The intellect (aql) is a case in point. It can only delimit God, confine Him, put Him in particular systems of thought, and ultimately trap Him and bind Him to its own limited perspective. Thus, if one has the loftiest of aspirations, God, then one cannot attempt to attain this Object of aspiration by way of something which, by definition, limits and confines. Since the intellect essentially entails limitations, Ibn ‘Arabi suggests to

Rāzī that by virtue of it alone he will not be able to attain his goal of knowing God. What is required then is for one who aspires to know God to do so on God’s ‘terms’. In light of Q. 47. 38, which states that ‘God is the Rich, and you are the poor’; God’s terms require that people aspire to the infinitely Rich with that which is the very opposite of Him, namely what they are—fundamentally poor and essentially nothing.

Ibn ‘Arabī is not simply calling Rāzī to give up his intellectual learning. As already mentioned, Rāzī’s aspirations are legitimate, and the means by which he obtains most of them are also appropriate to these goals. Yet these aspirations, whether they are rational proofs for the existence of God or other, intricately-argued points in theology, are finite. Thus, one should only invest so much time and energy in them. Their finite nature entails that they be dealt with ‘according to the measure of need’ (bi-qadr al-hāja). In other words, these forms of learning have importance and efficacy in this world, where rational proofs and intellectual arguments are meaningful and necessary. Yet the only kind of science that requires all of our aspiration, and which thus demands that we give all of ourselves to it (by realizing our nothingness), is that science which will remain valid when we die, namely knowledge of God.

Ibn ‘Arabī thus tells Rāzī that if he aspires to know God, he should attempt to do so in a manner that will actually take him to God such that he can witness Him, that is, through kashf or ‘unveiling’. Even if one can attain knowledge of God through the use of the intellect alone, which Rāzī had attained at an exceptionally sophisticated level, one is still liable to obfuscation or doubt. With this thought in mind, Ibn ‘Arabī

29 Translations of all Qur’ānic verses are taken from Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Caner Dagli, Maria Dakake, Joseph Lumbard, and Mohammed Rustom (eds.), The HarperCollins Study Quran (San Francisco: HarperOne, in press).

30 Cf. the famous encounter that Baštāmī has with God, where God tells him to approach Him through that which He does not have, namely lowliness (dhilla) and poverty (iftiqār). Ibn ‘Arabī draws on this encounter frequently (see Futūbāt, i. 690, 739; ii. 53, 263, 487, 561; iii. 207, 316, 364; iv. 231, 529). For Ibn ‘Arabī’s use of this saying in the context of his treatment of the key Sufi concepts of qurb and bu’d, see Rustom, ‘Ibn ‘Arabī on Proximity and Distance: Chapters 260 and 261 of the Futūbāt’, Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society, 41 (2007): 93–107, at 104.

31 For a discussion of this point with respect to Ibn ‘Arabī’s explication of beneficial knowledge, see Chittick, In Search of the Lost Heart, 102ff.

32 Consider these lines from Rūmī (Mathnawi, bk. 1, l. 2834):

Of all the types of knowledge, on the day of death, it is the science of poverty that will provide provisions and supplies for the way.

33 For which, see n. 78.
cites an incident, transmitted to him by one of Rāzi’s students who was also an acquaintance of Ibn ʿArabī, which has Rāzi weeping as a result of the doubt caused by his all-too-human intellectual knowledge. Thus, rather than trying to convince Rāzi that he should properly situate his aspirations in a way that is commensurate with his Object of pursuit, citing the intellect as an impediment along the way to his goal, Ibn ʿArabī provides a concrete example from Rāzi’s own life that illustrates his point—we have here Rāzi weeping over an obvious state of confusion caused by his intellect, serving to indicate that he cannot entirely rely upon it for any certain kind of knowledge, let alone knowledge of God.

Interestingly, Rāzi’s crisis of certitude recounted by Ibn ʿArabī is in keeping with what we know of Rāzi’s life. Rāzi’s philosophical know-how and ability to debate with any opponent and cause them to doubt their knowledge eventually began to affect him as well.34 Along with his bouts of doubt concerning the bases for what he took to be certain knowledge in rational theology, as mentioned earlier, Rāzi’s writings reveal an attempt on his part to engage mysticism on some level. It has even been argued that Rāzi eventually accepted the superiority of spiritual practice over discursive means of knowing, a view which was the direct result of his increased intellectual scepticism.35 Yet Rāzi’s view of Sufism’s superiority did not entail a rejection of discursive knowledge on his part.36 Rather, he seems to have viewed it as a complement to the kind of knowledge afforded by spiritual practice.37 At the same time, we have no concrete evidence to suggest that Rāzi actually took the spiritual path.38 Could Rāzi’s knowledge of Sufism therefore have been limited solely to a personal form of piety, the possible encounters he had with Sufis during his lifetime, and the ideas and works of some of his Sufi predecessors and contemporaries? If so, then Rāzi’s knowledge of Sufism was quite theoretical, which would explain the tone of, and indeed underlying argument in, Ibn ʿArabī’s letter to him.

35 Shihadeh, ‘The Mystic and the Sceptic’, 114 (see also the discussion on pp. 115–17).
38 Cf. ibid, 117–18.
What we can know for certain is that the aforementioned report concerning Râzî’s doubt gives Ibn ‘Arabi the perfect opportunity to drive home an important teaching: a life devoted to God but exclusively in terms of theoretical knowledge (even a deep theoretical knowledge of mysticism) will result in unrest, and will lead to serious shortcomings in attaining one’s Object of aspiration. This calls to mind Q. 13. 28, which speaks of the attainment of tranquillity through the remembrance of God. That is to say, constant remembrance of God naturally engenders a state of repose and ease. It can thus be said that the realization of one’s utter poverty before God is tantamount to the emptiness or nothingness of the heart (qalb),\(^39\) which is the seat of human consciousness. This state of emptiness paradoxically acts as the catalyst for the heart’s beholding the Object of its aspiration.\(^40\) Beholding this Object and being in constant remembrance of It thus renders the one who comes to God through his poverty as, in fact, actually rich, since he is with the Source of all aspirations and the End towards which all people tend.

This type of state starkly contrasts with the confusion and uproar caused by the discursive faculty which, as Ibn ‘Arabi insists to Râzî, is in a constant state of agitation and unrest, and therefore can never be in a state of tranquillity. It is very likely that Ibn ‘Arabi is also alluding here to Râzî’s aforementioned theoretical knowledge of Sufism, which gave him at least an abstract understanding of what the Sufis mean by such terms as mushâhada or ‘witnessing’.\(^41\) Yet this kind of knowledge evinces passive aspiration; it only becomes active aspiration when one does something about it, and here the advice given to Râzî is that he divest himself of his psychological attachment to his discursive abilities as a step in the right direction.

Establishing that the intellect cannot yield the tranquillity and rest that human beings seek, and by extension cannot truly come to know God except in a limited sense, Ibn ‘Arabi seizes the opportunity to call Râzî to the spiritual path itself. He insists that it is only by entering the Sufi path


\(^41\) See n. 90 for a pertinent passage from Râzî’s tafsîr.
that Rāzī will be able to free himself from his predicament of doubt, confusion, ignorance, and restlessness. Ibn ʿArabī also seems to want to tell Rāzī that, without spiritual realization, he will only perpetuate his incorrect understanding of God and His self-disclosures, both in this life and the next life.

TEXT AND TRANSLATION

Since 2001 the Muḥyiddin Ibn ʿArabī Society (MIAS) has been engaged in a massive archiving project wherein they intend to establish, on the basis of research into thousands of manuscripts from libraries all over the globe, a definitive database of works authentically by Ibn ʿArabī. According to their recently-published preliminary results, 42 writings historically believed to have been by Ibn ʿArabī fall into seven broad categories: (1) Verified A (71 works); (2) Verified B (13 works); (3) Probable (11 works); (4) Unverified (62 works); (5) Not by Ibn ʿArabī (73 works); (6) Extracts (36 works); (7) Duplicates (20 works).

Our concern here is with works which fall into the first two categories. The first of these (Verified A) are reserved for works which are definitively by Ibn ʿArabī on account of their fulfilling one of the following three criteria:43

(a) Texts written entirely in Ibn ʿArabī’s hand (holographs)
(b) Manuscripts which include a statement of authentication by Ibn ʿArabī (including his signature [autographs]), and/or manuscripts written by one of Ibn ʿArabī’s close companions during his lifetime
(c) Texts clearly traceable back to (a) or (b), that is, manuscripts that were copied from (a) or (b) and which explicitly state from which copy they are derived; or manuscripts which are copied from copies that were made directly from (a) or (b) and likewise explicitly state from which copy they are derived.

In the second category (Verified B) fall manuscripts whose ‘internal evidence’ (i.e., content, style, etc.) indicate that they are certainly by Ibn ʿArabī, but which are not, technically speaking, on the same level of authenticity as those in the first category (Verified A).44

43 I infer this based on close adherence to Clark and Hirtenstein, ibid, 5–7, 11.
44 Ibid, 12.
With respect to Ibn ‘Arabī’s letter to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, it is classified under the second category (Verified B). That is to say, manuscript copies of this text do not meet the criteria of (a) or (b). However, two of the three earliest manuscripts do meet the criteria of (c), but still cannot be placed in the first category (Verified A). This is because, although they in some way tell us that they are copied from ‘originals’, they do not tell us which originals.

Despite the fact that there are no critical editions of Ibn ‘Arabī’s letter to Rāzī, the Arabic text has been printed a number of times, the first of which was in 1925. Another edition of the letter based on a late manuscript was then published in 1948. When making his French translation of the letter, Vâlsan used the 1948 edition, but supplemented his reading with another manuscript. Ibn ‘Arabī’s letter to Rāzī has been printed numerous times since 1948, most notably by the well-known Ibn ‘Arabī scholar Maḥmūd Ghurāb. Ghurāb does not tell us upon which manuscript his text is based, but it seems to rely solely upon the 1948 text and/or a late manuscript dated to ca. 950/1543.
Thanks to the MIAS, a number of manuscript copies of Ibn ‘Arabi’s letter to Râzî, dated from 690/1291 to 950/1543, are in my possession.54 Upon close examination, one discovers that there are no substantial textual differences amongst these manuscripts and the various printed editions of the letter. On account of this fact, and since Ghurâb’s text is the most widely available, I have based my translation of the letter on his edition. I have nevertheless drawn attention to the few noteworthy (albeit minor) instances in which the three earliest (and most authentic) manuscripts of the letter55 differ with Ghurâb’s reading.

A LETTER TO IMĀM AL-RÂZĪ

In the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the Compassionate

This is the letter by the master, the leader, the firmly rooted in knowledge, the unique, the verifier (muḥaqqiq), the unveiler of divine reality (ḳāshīf al-ḥaqiqā),56 the reviver of the community and the religion, Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muhammad b. ‘Alī b. al-ʿArabī al-Tāʾī al-Andalusī al-Maghribī57 (God sanctify his soul); to the leader, the learned, the adept, the erudite, the pride of the community and the religion,

54 I list them in chronological order: (1) Şehit Ali 1351 (ca. 690/1291), fols. 240a–1a; (2) Ayasofiya 2063 (ca. 703/1303 or 708/1308), fols. 69a–73a; (3) Şehit Ali 1341 (724/1324), fols. 146b–8a; (4) Ayasofiya 4875 (ca. 753/1352), fols. 203b–5b; (5) Veliyuddin 1826 (ca. 824/1421), fols. 43b–5a; (6) Şehit Ali 1342 (ca. 837/1433), fols. 204b–5a; (7) Şehit Ali 1344 (ca. 949/1542), fols. 176a–7b; (8) Fatih 5332 (ca. 950/1543), fols. 109b–10a. The remaining fourteen mss. in the MIAS archives are all of late provenance, i.e., ca. 900/1494 to 1333/1914. I also have (9) a copy of a ms. of the letter (similar to the others in my possession, most notably Şehit Ali 1344) that was given to me by Atif Khalil in October 2010, who received it from the personal library of Shaykh Maḥmūd al-Hudā of Aleppo.

55 That is, Şehit Ali 1351, Ayasofiya 2063, and Şehit Ali 1341, which respectively correspond to numbers (1), (2), and (3) in the previous note.

56 The terms muḥaqqiqūn (pl. of muḥaqqiq) and ḳāshīf (the noun from which the active participle ḳāshīf derives) come up in the context of the letter. See n. 79 and n. 78 respectively.

Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-Khaṭīb al-Rāzī (God grant him peace and make Paradise his abode).

Praise is for God and peace be upon His chosen servants, and upon my dear friend in God, Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad (God elevate his aspiration (himma) and shower His mercy and blessings upon him).

Now, to proceed: Before you I praise God, other than whom there is no God. The Messenger of God (God bless him and grant him peace) said, ‘When one of you loves his brother, let him know about it’. And I love you. God says, [those who] exhort one another to truth [Q. 103. 3].

I have come across some of your writings, and [have witnessed] the imaginative faculty (al-quwā wa-al-mutakhayyila) with which God has assisted you and the sound thinking that it evinces. When a soul seeks nourishment through its own acquisition (kasb) it does not find the sweetness of generosity (jūd) and bestowal (waḥb), and is amongst those who eat from beneath themselves. But a spiritual man (rajul) is

58 Lit., ‘The soil of his grave be watered’.  
59 al-Tirmidhī, Sunan, k. [32] al-Zuhd, b. [54] mā ja‘a fi īlam al-hubb. (The ḥadīths cited and referred to in these notes were read in the Jam‘ jawāmi‘ al-aḥādīth wa-l-asānid wa-maknaz al-ṣiḥāh wa-l-sunan wa-l-masānid [Vaduz, Liechtenstein: Jam‘iyyat al-Maknaz al-Islāmī, 2000]. Tirmidhī’s sunan is in volume 6 of this compendium; Bukhārī’s Sahih, volume 2; and Muslim’s Sahih, volume 4.)  
60 This verse and the one preceding it read: ‘Truly mankind is in loss, save those who believe, perform righteous deeds, exhort one another to truth, and exhort one another to patience’.  
61 Spiritual stations (maqāmāt) are earned through human effort (makāsib), while spiritual states (abwāl) are bestowed upon one directly by God (mawāḥib). Here, Ibn ʿArabī is relating this distinction to a more general discussion concerning knowledge of God—one can either come to know God through his own intellectual efforts, or God can cause him to know Him directly from Himself (i.e., without any intermediary). In this sense, knowledge that is bestowed by God, which Ibn ʿArabī will advocate to Rāzī throughout the letter, is a synonym for ‘unveiling’ (kashf) and ‘tasting’ (dhawq), although that does not necessarily preclude the need for human effort. See Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabī’s Metaphysics of Imagination (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 222. For Rāzī’s understanding of the same phenomenon, see n. 90.  
62 For Ibn ʿArabī as well as many other Sufis, the technical term rajul (pl. riжал) is a synonym for a realized Sufi or one of the people of God (ahl Allāh), and can equally apply to men and women. See Chittick, The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s Cosmology (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 400, n. 24; Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge, 395, n. 16; Murata, The Tao of Islam, 266–8.
one who eats from above himself, as He says, *Had they observed the Torah and the Gospel and that which was sent down unto them from their Lord, they would surely have received nourishment from above them and from beneath their feet* [Q. 5. 66].

My friend (God grant him success) should know that the complete inheritance (*al-wirāthā al-kāmilā*) is that which is [complete] in every respect, not in some respects, for ‘The knowers are the heirs of the prophets’. An intelligent person (*āqil*) should strive to be an heir in every respect and not be deficient in aspiration. My friend (God grant him success) already knows that the beauty of the human subtle reality (*al-lār al-insānīyya*) can only be [attained] through the divine knowledge (*al-mā‘ārif al-ilāhiyya*) that it bears, while its ugliness is the opposite of this.

A person with lofty aspirations (*‘āli al-himma*) should not waste his life with contingent things (*muḥdathāt*) and their exposition, lest his share from his Lord escape him. He should also free himself from the authority of his reflection (*fikr*), for reflection can only know from its own point of reference; but the truth that is sought after is not that.

Knowledge of God is contrary to knowledge of God’s existence. For the intellect knows God insofar as He is existent and by way of negation (*salb*), not affirmation (*ithbāt*). This is contrary to the [view of the] majority of sound-minded people (*‘uqal*) and the theologians (*mutakallimīn*), except our master (*ustadh*) Abū Ḥāmid66 (God sanctify his spirit), for he is with us on this issue. 67

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64 This is a reference to the soul (*nafs*). I take the translation of this term from Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 159.

65 In strictly-speaking theological and philosophical contexts, *muḥdathāt* (pl. of *muḥdath*) refers to ‘originated things’, and can alternatively be translated as ‘contingent things’ on the logic that all things that are originated are contingent. It can also be noted here that Şehit Ali 1351, Ayasofiya 2063, and Şehit Ali 1341 have *mā‘rifā* before *muḥdathāt*, thus rendering the construction, ‘in knowing novelties’.


67 Cf. the famous saying of Abū Sa‘īd al-Kharrāz (d. ca. 286/899) (which has many cognates in earlier Islamic thought), ‘None knows God but God’. Ibn ‘Arabī tells us elsewhere that Ghazālī was amongst those who adhered to this principle. See Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 62.
God (great and glorious) is too exalted to be known by the intellect’s [powers of] reflection and rational consideration (naẓār).** The one with high aspiration should not learn this [kind of knowledge] from the world of imagination (‘āḻam al-khayāl),** which contains embodied lights (al-anwār al-mutajassada) that point to meanings beyond them. For imagination causes intellectual meanings (al-mā‘āni al-‘aqliyya) to descend into sensory forms (al-qawā’il al-ḥissiyya), just as knowledge [appears] in the form of milk, the Qur‘ān in the form of a rope, and religion in the form of a shackle.

68 Lit, ‘by the intellect with its [powers of] reflection and rational consideration (naẓār)’. For Ibn ‘Arabī’s understanding of these terms and their limitations in knowing God, see Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge, 159–66, as well as the discussion throughout Rosenthal, ‘Ibn ‘Arabī between “Philosophy” and “Mysticism”’.

69 For Ibn ‘Arabī, mushāhada is a near synonym for kashf or ‘unveiling’ (for which, see n. 78). For one of his definitions of mushāhada, see Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge, 227.

70 Despite the exalted status of imagination, for the one who aspires to know God, imaginal forms can be a distraction. This seems to be the basis of Ibn ‘Arabī’s caution to Rāżī. Also consider this passage from Futūḥāt, iii. 361: ‘Yet in spite of this tremendous wideness by which it exercises its properties over all things, imagination is incapable of receiving meanings disengaged from substrata as they are in themselves . . . . Hence imagination is the wide/narrow, while God is the “Wide” absolutely’ (cited, with slight modifications, from Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge, 122). For Ibn ‘Arabī’s treatment of imagination, see, inter alia, Chittick (transl.), ‘The World of Imagination’ in Ibn ‘Arabī, The Meccan Revelations (ed. Michel Chodkiewicz; New York: Pir Press, 2002–4), i. 170–80; Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge, ch. 7; Corbin, Creative Imagination in the Šūfism of Ibn ‘Arabī, part 2; Ibn ‘Arabī, Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam (ed. A. E. Aḥfī; Cairo: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyya, 1946), 99–106; Toshihiko Izutsu, Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1984), 7–22.

71 One of the properties of imagination is that it causes spiritual meanings to become corporealized. By the same token, it also allows corporeal forms to become spiritualized.

72 A reference to a ḥadīth in which the Prophet interprets the milk given to him in a dream (which he drinks and also gives to ‘Umar to drink) as symbolizing knowledge: al-Bukhārī, Saḥīḥ, k. [92] al-Tā’bīr, b. [15] al-laban.

73 Cf. Q. 3. 103, where the ‘rope of God’ is understood to be a reference to the Qur‘ān. See the commentary upon this verse in Nasr et al. (eds.), The HarperCollins Study Quran.

74 In al-Bukhārī, Saḥīḥ, k. [92] al-Tā’bīr, b. [26] al-qayd fi l-manām, a shackle seen in a dream is said to symbolize firm-footedness (thabāt) in religion. It can
A person with lofty aspirations should not have, as his teacher and witness, a female (μαμαθ) who is given to taking from the Universal Soul (النفس الكلي)، just as he should not be given to taking [something] from one who is, fundamentally, poor (فقر). Whatever does not have perfection except through what is other than itself is poor. Such is the condition of everything other than God (اله). Thus, elevate your aspiration so that you only take knowledge from God by way of unveiling (كشف)!

According to the verifiers (μهتاقيقين)، there is no agent (فعل) but God, and for this reason they only take [knowledge] from God—but however, also be noted that at Futūḥāt, iii. 361 (translated in Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge, 122), Ibn ‘Arabī makes a point similar to what is found in this paragraph.

Witness (شبيحة) is absent from Şehit Ali 1351, Ayasofiya 2063, and Şehit Ali 1341.

Ibn ‘Arabī is alluding here to his earlier point concerning what is meant by being a man or رجل (see n. 62). In Islamic cosmology, the Universal Soul is feminine, as it is purely passive, whereas the Intellect (عقل) is masculine, as it is purely active. These terms are synonymous with two other symbols met with in theoretical Sufism and later Islamic philosophy, namely the Tablet (derived from Q. 85. 22) and the Pen (derived from Q. 68. 1) respectively (i.e., the Pen ‘acts’ on the Tablet by ‘writing’ upon it). See Murata, The Tao of Islam, 153–8. The point Ibn ‘Arabī is thus making is that the person seeking God should take his knowledge and testimony from someone who is spiritually ‘virile’ (i.e., who is active and can give), not someone who is spiritually ‘non-virile’ (i.e., who is passive and can only receive).

For Ibn ‘Arabī, all attributes at root belong to God (see, for example, Futūḥāt, iii. 147). Unlike God, who is Absolute Being, we possess a relative type of being, but one which is fundamentally characterized by non-existence (adam). For an explanation of this point, see Rustom, ‘Philosophical Sufism’. See also Ibn ‘Arabī, Futūḥāt, iv. 263, as well as the pertinent discussion in Denis Gril, ‘Ibn ‘Arabī et les catégories’ in Dominik Perler and Ulrich Rudolph (eds.), Logik und Theologie: Das Organon im arabischen und im lateinischen Mittelalter (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 147–66.

The literal rendering of this sentence slightly obscures the point at hand: ‘Thus, elevate your aspiration so that you do not take knowledge except from God by way of unveiling (كشف)’. By καθφ or unveiling, Ibn ‘Arabī is referring to knowledge taught directly by God, without the need of human, intellectual effort (see also the note on ιλμιαدωμι in n. 90). Since Ibn ‘Arabī insists that it is only καθφ that can bring about true knowledge of God, he is famously known for having said, ‘He who has no unveiling has no knowledge’ (Futūḥāt, i. 218; cited in Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge, 170).

Normally, Ibn ‘Arabī reserves the term μητακι for a Sufi who is thoroughly realized in his knowledge of God. Here, however, he is using the term
by way of ‘knotting’ (‘aqd), not unveiling. But the people of God (ahl Allāh),
disdaining to subsist in the knowledge of certainty [Q. 102. 5],
do not attain their goal except through arrival (wuṣūl) at the eye of
certainty [Q. 102. 7].

Know that when the people of reflection attain the furthermost goal,
their reflection takes them to the state of being deaf imitators. But the
matter is too exalted for it to halt at reflection! So long as there is
reflection, it will be impossible for one to repose and be at rest. The
intellect has a limit at which it halts with respect to its reflective powers,
for it has the quality of receiving [only] what God bestows upon it.
Therefore, an intelligent person should expose himself to the divine
breaths of generosity (nafāḥāt al-jūd) and not remain enslaved by the

in the sense of one who is realized in the intellectual sciences such that he is able
to (at least theoretically) relate all things back to God.

Ibn ‘Arabī seems to be implying that although the verifiers in question
understand God as the sole agent or efficient cause (fā‘il) and can thus relate all
manner of secondary causation back to Him, their understanding of the actual
situation remains merely theoretical. Since the ‘–q–l’ root connotes the idea
of shackling a camel, Ibn ‘Arabī likes to relate this point to the finite nature of the
intellect (‘aql)—the intellect can only tie down and ‘knot’ (from the ‘–q–d root)
that which can come under its purview, and is therefore ultimately confined in
what it can know. That is to say that the intellect can come to know that there is
no agent but God, but can only do so by virtue of a knowledge which is
ultimately fettered by its own limitations.

For the identity of the ‘people of God’, see n. 62. It should be noted that Şehit Ali 1351 and Ayasofiya 2063 read ‘people of aspiration’ (ahl al-himma),
while Şehit Ali 1341 gives it as an alternative to ahl Allāh.

The Qur‘ān also speaks of ‘the truth of certainty’ (56. 95). Generally, these
three terms are taken to refer to the different levels of realization of certainty in
God. Thus, ‘the knowledge of certainty’ is tantamount to hearing of a fire, ‘the
eye of certainty’ to seeing the fire, and ‘the truth of certainty’ to being consumed
by the fire (see the commentary upon Q. 56. 95 in Nasr et al. [eds.], The HarperCollins Study Quran). In this passage, Ibn ‘Arabī treats ‘the knowledge of
certainty’ as a synonym for knowledge afforded to one by means of reflection and
rational consideration, and ‘the eye of certainty’ as a synonym for knowledge
acquired by way of unveiling. See also Futūḥāt, ii. 628.

Şehit Ali 1351, Ayasofiya 2063, and Şehit Ali 1341 have the subject here as
‘aql, thus rendering the sentence as, ‘So long as there is reflection, it will be
impossible for the intellect to repose and be at rest’.

Ibn ‘Arabī is alluding to a hadith, ‘Verily your Lord has breaths of His mercy
in the days of your time—so expose yourselves to them’ (cited in Chittick, In
Search of the Lost Heart, 349, n. 12). Ibn ‘Arabī also cites a version of this hadith
in his Risālat rūḥ al-quds (ed. Maḥmūd Ghurāb; Damascus: Dār al-İmān,
1994), 60.
shackle of his rational consideration and learning (kashb), for he is liable
to doubt (shubha) because of these.

It has been reported to me from one of your brothers—whom I trust,
and who is amongst those sincerely disposed towards you85—that he saw
you weeping one day, and so he and those present asked you why you
were weeping.86 You replied, ‘A position to which I have adhered for the
past thirty years has become clear to me thanks to a proof which has just
dawned upon me. [It turns out that] the [truth of the] matter is contrary
to my previous position. So I cried and said to myself, “perhaps that
which has occurred to me is also like the first position!”’ This, then, is
what you said.87

It is impossible for the one who knows through the scope (martaba) of
the intellect and reflection to be at rest or tranquil, especially when it
comes to knowing God; and it is impossible for him to know His
quiddity (mabhiyya) by way of rational consideration. So, my brother,
what ails you that you remain in this predicament and do not enter upon
the path (tariq) of self-discipline (riyada), inner-struggle (mujabada), and
spiritual retreat (khalwa)88—which have been instituted by the Mess-
enger of God (God bless him and grant him peace)—so that you can
attain what was attained by the one89 about whom God said, [a servant]
from among Our servants whom We had granted a mercy from Us and
whom We had taught knowledge from Our Presence [Q. 18. 65]?90

85 Lit., ‘is amongst those who have a beautiful intention towards you’.
86 More literally, this passage would mean that Razi was found in a state of
grief, having just cried: ‘he saw you one day and you had just wept (wa-qad
bakayta). So he and those present asked you why you had been weeping’.
87 Cf. Fathalla Kholeif, A Study of Fakhr al-Din al-Razi and His Controversies
in Transoxiana (Beirut: Dar El-Machreq, 1966), 18. For an alternative
translation of this paragraph, see Shihadeh, ‘The Mystic and the Sceptic’, 102.
88 Ibn ‘Arabi dedicated an entire treatise to the khalwa, as well as to two
chapters from the Futuhat (i.e., chs. 78 and 79). See the insightful discussion in
Chodkiewicz, Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of
Ibn ‘Arabi (transl. Liadain Sherrard; Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993),
151–3.
89 A reference to Khidr, the mysterious figure who is taught directly by God
and appears as Moses’ teacher in Q. 18. 66–82 (although he is not named in the
Qur’an). For this narrative in Sufi Qur’anic exegesis, see H. Talat Halman,
Where the Two Seas Meet: The Qur’anic Story of al-Khidr and Moses in Sufi
Commentaries as a Model for Spiritual Guidance (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae,
2013).
90 The special kind of knowledge ‘from Our Presence’ is referred to as ‘ilm
haduni in Sufi texts. In his tafsir upon Q. 18. 65, Razi explains that, for the Sufis,
it refers to ‘the sciences obtained by way of unveilings’ (al-‘ulum al-thila bi-tariq
indeed the likes of you who [should] take up this noble function and
majestic and lofty rank.91

My friend (God grant him success) should know that every existent
(mawjūd) exists by virtue of a cause (sabab). That cause is originated
(muḥdath) like the existent thing, which has two aspects: an aspect that
looks towards its cause, and an aspect that looks towards its
Existentiator (mūjid), namely God. All of the [common] people,
philosophers, and others look towards the causes of existent things.
But not those who are realized amongst the folk of God (ahl Allāh), such
as the prophets (anbiyāʾ), the friends of God (awliyāʾ), and the angels
(malāʾika) (upon whom be peace). Despite their knowledge of the causes
[of existent things], they look towards the other aspect, to their
Existentiator.92

Amongst them is one who looks to his Lord from the perspective of
His cause but not from His perspective. Thus he says, ‘My heart narrated
al-mukāshafāt), and also mentions a well-known treatise on the topic attributed
to Ghazālī (for a translation of which, see Margaret Smith, ‘Al-Risālat al-
Laduniyya by Abū Ḥāmid Muhammad al-Ghazālī (450/1059–505/1111)’,
353–74; partially reprinted in Nasr and Aminrazavi (eds.), An Anthology of
Philosophy in Persia, iv. 336–48). Rāzī then divides knowledge into two types:
self-evident knowledge and acquired knowledge on the one hand, and ḥadūn
knowledge on the other (cf. his other, similar divisions of knowledge outlined
definition of what ʿilm ḥadūn is. It entails that ‘man strive by way of self-
discipline and inner struggle (riyāḍāt wa-l-mujāḥadāt) in order for the sensory
and imaginative faculties to become weakened. When they become weakened,
the intellectual faculty (al-quwwa al-aqliyya) will become stronger and the
divine lights (al-anwār al-ilābiyya) will illuminate the substance (jawhar)
of the intellect. [Divine] knowledge (maʿārif) will then be obtained and the forms of
knowledge perfected, without the need for effort (saʿy wa-talab) through
reflecting (tafakkur) and pondering (taʾammul)’ (Rāzī, al-Tafsīr al-kabīr [Cairo:
al-Maʿāla al-Bahiyya al-Miḥriyya, 1934–8], xxi. 149–50). Cf. this passage with
what Rāzī says about the practice of the remembrance of God (dhikr) in his
Lawāmīr al-bayyināt, translated in Fariduddin Attar Rifai, ‘Metaphysics of
Goodness according to St. Anselm of Canterbury and Fāhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’ in
Torrance Kirby, Rahim Acar, and Bilal Baṣ (eds.), Philosophy and the Abrahamic
Religions: Scriptural Hermeneutics and Epistemology (Cambridge: Cambridge
Scholars Publishing, 2012), 157–74, at 170–1 and n. 45. See also Rāzī’s comments
on dhikr in his al-Maṭālīb al-ʿāliya, translated in Shihadeh, ‘The
Mystic and the Sceptic’, 114.
91 For an alternative translation of most of this paragraph, see ibid, 102.
92 For an alternative translation of this paragraph, see Chittick, The Self-
Disclosure of God, 124.
to me from my Lord’. But the other one, who is perfect (kāmil), says, ‘My Lord narrated to me’. It is this to which our gnostic (‘ārif) companion alluded when he said, ‘You take your knowledge as traces, dead from the dead. But we take our knowledge from the Living One who does not die’. According to us, he whose existence is derived from other than himself is nothing. So for the gnostic, there is absolutely none to rely upon except God.

Moreover, my friend should know that even though God is one, He has many different faces (wuṣūḥ) turned towards to us. Thus, be wary of the places of divine arrival (al-mawārid al-ilāhiyya) and the self-disclosures (tajālīyyāt) of the faces in the sense discussed here! God’s ruling property (bukm) insofar as He is a Lord for you is not like His ruling property insofar as He is Guardian, nor is His ruling property insofar as He is Merciful like His ruling property insofar as He is Vengeful. Such is the case with all of the divine names (asma’).

Know that the divine face, namely ‘Allāh’, is a name for all of the names, such as Lord, the Powerful, and the Grateful. The sum total of the names are like the Essence (dhāt) which brings together all of the

94 Ibn ‘Arabī is likely referring here to the Prophet, and perhaps to the phenomenon of the ḥadīth qudsī, that is, extra-Qur’ānic reports narrated by the Prophet from God (concerning which, see William Graham, Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam [The Hague: Mouton, 1977]). For Ibn ‘Arabī’s collection of ḥadīth qudsī, see his Mishkāt al-anwār, transl. as Divine Sayings by Stephen Hirtenstein and Martin Notcutt (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 2008).
95 A famous statement by Bastāmī, which Ibn ‘Arabī cites quite often. See Futūḥāt, i. 31; ii. 253; iii. 140, 413.
96 Lit., ‘his ruling, according to us, is the ruling of nothing’.
97 For an alternative translation of this paragraph, see Chittick, The Self-Disclosure of God, 124.
98 Reading ilāhiyya instead of ilāhiyyāt (sic).
99 For an alternative translation of this paragraph, see Chittick, The Self-Disclosure of God, 124 (in the second sentence of this paragraph I closely follow Chittick’s rendering). The point that Ibn ‘Arabī is trying to make here relates to his teaching that God’s self-disclosures continuously present Him in a new mode to the servant, and hence demand from the servant an appropriate response depending on which aspect or face of God is revealed to him at that moment (see also n. 105, and Chittick, The Self-Disclosure of God, 124). This teaching of Ibn ‘Arabī’s is intimately tied to the famous Sufi dictum, là takrār āl-tajālī (‘There is no repetition in self-disclosure’). For more on this point, see Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge, 103–5.
100 That is, since the divine name Allāh is an all-gathering name (ism jāmi’), it brings together all of the divine names. The cosmos being the theatre for the
attributes (ṣifāt) contained in It. But the name Allāh takes in all of the names, while they guard It from ever being witnessed. Since He addresses you through the name Allāh—as it is all-comprehensive (jāmī’a)—consider in what manner He speaks to you, and the station (maqām) that this intimate discourse (munājāt) or witnessing demands. So consider which divine name is looked upon, for that is the name which addresses you or is witnessed by you. That name is what is expressed by the transmutation in forms (al-tahawwul fi l-sūra), as is the case with a drowning man. When he says ‘O Allāh!’, it means, ‘O Helper!’, ‘O Rescuer!’, and ‘O Deliverer!’ And when a man who is in pain says ‘O Allāh!’, it means, ‘O Healer!’, ‘O Curer!’, and the like.

That which I said to you about the ‘transmutation in forms’ [refers to] what Muslim [d. 261/875] has mentioned in his Šāhīb, namely that the Creator (bārī’) will disclose Himself [to His servants on the day of Resurrection] but will be denied, and refuge will be sought from Him. So He will transmute Himself for them into a form in which they will recognize Him. Then they will acknowledge Him after having display of God’s names, each name therefore connotes a different aspect of the reality of the name Allāh.

101 For an alternative translation of the first two lines of this paragraph, see Chittick, The Self-Disclosure of God, 124.

102 In other words, although all of the names are witnessed in the cosmos, the name Allāh as such is never displayed or witnessed. Cf. the saying of Kharrāz cited in n. 67.

103 Lit., ‘what it is through which He speaks to you’.

104 The well-known Sufi term maqām (lit., ‘standing place’), translated as ‘station’, here refers to the manner in which one should ‘stand’, that is, how one should be positioned vis-à-vis the divine self-disclosure at the particular moment in which God is addressing him, or when he is witnessing Him.

105 Ibn ‘Arabi’s admonishment here is not simply a theoretical point. Rather, it is intimately related to the fundamental Sufi notion of adab or correct comportment/etiquette. For Ibn ‘Arabi, being able to discern God’s self-disclosures is of utmost importance, since by virtue of this one can observe the correct adab that is demanded by each self-disclosure (recall here the famous early Sufi maxim, ‘All of Sufism is adab’). For Ibn ‘Arabi’s concept of adab, see Grill, Adab and Revelation or One of the Foundations of the Hermeneutics of Ibn ‘Arabi in Stephen Hirtenstein and Michael Tiernan (eds.), Muhyyidin Ibn ‘Arabi: A Commemorative Volume (Shaftesbury: Element, 1993), 228–63.

106 For Ibn ‘Arabi’s teaching on the manner in which God takes on different forms in accordance with the receptivity of the individual to whom He is disclosing Himself (both in this world and the next), see Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge, 99–103.
denied Him.\textsuperscript{107} This is what is meant by ‘witnessing’ in this context, as well as ‘intimate discourse’ and ‘divine addressing’ (\textit{al-mukhātabāt al-rabbāniyya}).

An intelligent person should only seek to know that through which his essence is perfected and which will depart with him when he departs. And this is nothing but knowledge of God by way of bestowal (\textit{wahb}) and witnessing. Your knowledge of medicine, for example—you only need it in a world where there is illness and sickness. When you depart to a world in which there is neither sickness nor illness, whom will you cure with that knowledge? An intelligent person does not strive [to know medicine] insofar as there is no wellbeing [in it] for him. And if he acquires [knowledge of medicine] by way of bestowal, as was the medical knowledge (\textit{tibb}) of the prophets (upon whom be peace), he should not stop there. Rather, he should seek knowledge of God. Likewise is the case with geometry—you only need it in a world where there are surfaces (\textit{misāḥa}). When you depart, you will leave it in the world appropriate to it, for the soul will leave empty-handed (\textit{sāḥbiya}), accompanied by nothing. In this way will the soul leave behind preoccupation with every science at the time of its departing to the next world (\textit{ʻalam al-ākhira}).\textsuperscript{108}

Thus, an intelligent person should only acquire knowledge that is absolutely necessary (\textit{al-ḥāja al-ḍarūriyya}) for him.\textsuperscript{109} Let him, then, strive to acquire that with which he will depart when he is made to depart. This is nothing other than two types of knowledge, specifically speaking: knowledge of God, and knowledge of the homesteads of the next life (\textit{mawāṭin al-ākhira})\textsuperscript{110} and what is demanded by its stations (\textit{maqāmāt})\textsuperscript{111} so that he may walk therein as though he would walk in his own home, thus denying absolutely nothing. For he should be one of the people of gnosia (\textit{ʻirfān}), not one of the people of denial (\textit{nukrān})! These homesteads [of the next life] are homesteads of distinguishing

\textsuperscript{107} For the \textit{hadīth} in question, see Muslim, \textit{Ṣahih}, k. [2] \textit{al-Īmān}, b. [83] \textit{maṣrīfat ṭarīq al-ruʿya}. For Ibn ʻArabi’s use of this \textit{hadīth}, see \textit{Futūḥāt}, i. 305; ii. 81, 311, 610; iii. 48, 485, etc. See also Ibn ʻArabi, \textit{Divine Sayings}, 27.

\textsuperscript{108} Alternative translations of this paragraph can be found in Chittick, \textit{In Search of the Lost Heart}, 103; Rosenthal, ‘Ibn ʻArabi between “Philosophy” and “Mysticism”’, 21–2.

\textsuperscript{109} Lit., ‘Thus, an intelligent person should not acquire knowledge except [in terms] of what is occasioned by way of absolute necessity for him’.

\textsuperscript{110} In Ibn ʻArabi’s writings (and in the works of his followers), \textit{mawāṭin} (pl. \textit{mawāṭin}) stands as a synonym for \textit{maṣḥar} or ‘locus of manifestation’.

\textsuperscript{111} That is, the correct \textit{adab} that is to be observed in accordance with what is demanded by each of God’s self-disclosures. See also n. 99 and n. 105 respectively.
(tamyz), not homesteads of admixing (imtizaj), which bestow error. When he attains this station [of the homesteads of the next life], he will be free from being distinguished by that group [in the aforementioned hadith] who, when their Lord discloses Himself to them, will say, ‘We seek refuge in God from you! You are not our Lord. We will wait until our Lord comes to us’. And when He comes to them in the form in which they recognize Him, they will acknowledge Him.\textsuperscript{112} There is no state of perplexity (hayra) greater than that!\textsuperscript{113}

An intelligent person should discover these two [aforementioned] types of knowledge by way of self-discipline, inner struggle (mujahada), and spiritual retreat under specific conditions (tariqa mashruta). I wanted to discuss, step-by-step, the spiritual retreat, its conditions, and what is disclosed in it, but the present moment (waqt) prevents me. I mean by ‘present moment’ the scholars of evil (ulamâ al-sû) who deny that of which they are ignorant, and who are shackled by bigotry (ta‘assub) as well as love of publicity and leadership on account of their obedience and submissiveness to God, even though they do not have faith (imân)!\textsuperscript{114}

This is the last part of the letter. God suffices, and praise is His—firstly and lastly, inwardly and outwardly. Prayers upon His Prophet, in gratitude and remembrance.

\textsuperscript{112} Although literally agarrû here should be rendered ‘they will acknowledge’, I add ‘Him’ since this is clearly demanded by the context. Şehit Ali 1351, Ayasofiya 2063, and Şehit Ali 1341 all have the more natural agarrû bi-hi.

\textsuperscript{113} For an alternative translation of this paragraph, see Chittick, \textit{In Search of the Lost Heart}, 103; 348, n. 13. See also Rosenthal, ‘Ibn ‘Arabî between “Philosophy” and “Mysticism”’, 22, for a part of this paragraph in translation.

\textsuperscript{114} Şehit Ali 1351, Ayasofiya 2063, and Şehit Ali 1341 all have imân bi-hi, thus rendering the last clause, ‘even though they do not have faith in Him!’