

The Vision of God

'You shall not see Me!' (*lan tarâni*). The divine reply to Moses' request (*arinî unzur ilayka*) 'Let me see, so that I can behold You', Q. 7:143), seems final. It is no less categorical in its formulation than the one that Exodus gives in a parallel account (Ex. 33:18-23):[1] 'Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.' Another verse seems, moreover, to extend to all creatures the impossibility of seeing the Face of God, as the Prophet of the Banu Isra'il was informed: *lâ tudrikuhu 'l-absâr wa huwa yudriku 'l-absâr*, 'The looks do not reach Him but it is He who reaches the looks' (Q. 6:103).

Despite their evident meaning, these two verses are interpreted in many ways within the Islamic tradition and, more often than one would expect, in a way which safeguards the possibility of vision. The *lan tarâni* addressed to Moses, in particular, provokes numerous commentaries. The verse continues: 'But look at the mountain; if it remains firm in its place, then you shall see Me. And when his Lord manifested Himself to the mountain, He reduced it to dust and Moses fell down, thunderstruck. When he came to himself he said, Glory be to You! I turn to You with repentance and I am the first of the believers. For Tabari, the theophany at Sinâi which reduces the mountain to dust and which even so, he says, 'had only the strength of a little finger', demonstrates the fundamental inability of creatures to bear the vision of God, and the repentance of Moses testifies that his request was presumptuous and unacceptable.[2] But another classic commentary, by Qurtubi, whilst avoiding taking sides too explicitly, favours a very different opinion. For some people, he says, *lan tarâni* means: 'you shall not see Me in this world'. But, he adds, according to others, whose views Qadi Iyad has recorded, 'Moses sees God and that is why he falls down in a swoon.' Similarly, commenting on the verse which states that 'the looks do not reach Him', Qurtubi, who obviously tends towards an admission of the possibility of vision, sets out the arguments of those who defend this point of view: the ordinary look cannot reach God but God creates in certain beings - and such is certainly the case of the Prophet Muhammad - a look by which He can be seen. Besides, if the impossibility were definitive, would Moses, who is an Envoy, have had the audacity to ask God for an absurd favour? Concerning Muhammad, Qurtubi relates the contradictory assertions of Aysha, on the one hand, and of Abu Hurayra and Ibn Abbas on the other, and favours the latter. The question, for him, is not to know if the Prophet saw God but to know *how* he saw Him: *bi'l-basar? aw bi-ayni qalbihi?* With his physical eyes or with the eye of the heart? [3] However, the great theologian Fakhr al-din Razi, Ibn Arabi's contemporary and correspondent, dismisses the possibility that Moses saw God, but affirms that vision is possible in principle.[4]

The position of the *mutakallimûn* - the theologians - on this question is generally left fairly open, at least if one discounts the case of the Mu'tazilites.[5] For the Ash'arites, it is rationally conceivable and scripturally established that 'the looks' (*absâr*) will see God in the future life. Does the Qur'an not assert: 'On that day, there will be radiant faces which shall see their Lord' (75:22-3)? Did the Prophet not say: 'you shall see your Lord just as you see the moon on the night of the full moon'? [6] Verse 6:103, according to which 'the looks do not reach Him', cannot justify any conclusive objection. For some theologians, it is exclusively a question of this lower world and does not apply to the heavenly status of the chosen ones. For others, it is necessary to distinguish between *idrâk*, 'all-embracing perception' (*ihâta*),

effectively forever forbidden to the creatures, and *ru'ya*, vision itself, to which they have access but which will never exhaust the divine infinity. As for the vision of God here below, whilst it is ruled out by some, others reserve it for exceptional individuals: again, a saying of Aysha's, according to which the Prophet did not see God at the time of his *mir'âj* comes up in the debate and also an equally categorical assertion of Ibn Abbas's to the contrary, which relies in particular on two verses of the *sûra Al-najm* (Q. 53:11,13). Moreover, a *du'â* is attributed to the Prophet in which he addresses God in the following terms which are very similar to those of Moses: *as'aluka ladhdhat al-nazar ilâ wajhika*, 'I beg of You the joy of seeing Your face'.[7]

If one now turns towards the spiritual masters who preceded Ibn 'Arabi, one finds there, too, many differences of interpretation, but this time they rely on spiritual experience rather than knowledge from books. A comparative clarification is taking place which is conveyed by the increased precision of the vocabulary. For Sahl al Tustari, in the 9th century, vision *stricto sensu* is the privilege of the elect in the heavenly abode: *kushûf al-'iyân fî-l-akhira*. But the men of God benefit in advance from the *kushûf al-qalb fî'l-dunyâ*, from the 'lifting of the veil of the heart here below'.[8] In his *Kashf al-Mahjûb*, Hujwiri relies on the words of Dhu'l-Nun, Junayd and Abu Yazid al-Bistami among others, to assert that God can be *contemplated* in this world and that this contemplation *resembles* vision in the future life.[9] To the notion of 'unveiling' (root *k sh f*) that we have just come across, that of 'contemplation' (root *sh h d*) is therefore added. I shall come back, with regard to Ibn 'Arabi, to the problems posed by the vocabulary of these authors who are careful to distinguish precisely between all modes of mystical knowledge.

In his famous *Risâla*, Qushayri envisages three degrees in the progression towards knowledge of God: *muhâdara*, 'presence', *mukâshafa*, 'unveiling', and *mushâhada*, 'contemplation'.[10] These stages correspond to a standard model and, with the same or other names, one finds them almost everywhere in the literature of the *tasawwuf*. However, if one consults the great commentary of the Qur'an of which Qushayri is also the author, it confirms what the *Risâla* hinted at: that vision as such remains forbidden in this life. It is worth quoting what he writes about the incident at Sinai: 'Moses came like one of those who are consumed by desire and lost in love. Moses came without Moses. He came when nothing of Moses remained in Moses.' But, Qushayri adds, it is under the sway of this amorous drunkenness that he had the audacity to ask for vision. It was refused him but, because of this state where he no longer had control over what he was saying, he was not punished for his boldness. Muhammad himself hoped for this supreme favour, without expressing his wish, however. But he was not granted his wish either, Qushayri maintains.[11]

If we next examine the words of two other great Sufi contemporaries of the Shaykh al-Akbar, we notice that for them a direct perception of Divine Reality is definitely possible. But is it a question of anything other than what spiritual Christians called 'an advance payment of beatitude', that is, of a still confused and imperfect vision? Najm al-din Kubra describes the stages of contemplation, the last of which is the contemplation of the Unique Essence.[12] Ruzbehan Baqli, in his *Tafsîr*,[13] concludes from the Qur'anic text that Moses did not obtain vision. In another of his works, however, he too maintains that the *viator* can arrive at the point where his *sirr*, the secret centre of his being, 'is immersed in the ocean of the Divine Essence'.[14]

There are, therefore, considerable differences amongst the authors whom I have cited. The very meaning of the word 'vision' (*ru'ya* - not to be confused with *ru'yâ*, vision in a dream) remains, nevertheless, rather vague. Should one understand it literally as designating a perception identical to the apprehension of material objects by the organ of sight? Or is it on the contrary only necessary to retain the suggestion of an analogy, the relation between its two terms then remaining to be clarified? In the latter case, is there a radical difference in nature between 'unveiling', 'contemplation' and 'vision'? A *contrario*, if these terms only express differences of degree - and since the highest contemplation seems accessible to some people who are neither Envoys nor Prophets - what does the *lan tarânî* addressed to Moses mean? The abrupt Qur'anic phrase is variously understood but it evidently inspires a great deal of uncertainty.

The picture I have just drawn from a few examples is extremely scanty, leaving out many subtleties. I think, nevertheless, that it faithfully draws the outlines of the landscape which opens out around this Sinai where Moses, called by his Lord, is not satisfied with hearing Him and demands to see Him. Ibn 'Arabi is the heir of this long and complex tradition. He is, in particular, going to take up the rich vocabulary of spiritual phenomenology such as the men of the Way have gradually built up, without stinting nevertheless on inflecting the meaning or drawing out the significance. But above all, one is going to discover, disseminated in the immense body of his works, a teaching which, nourished by his intimate experience, illuminates the whole field of the knowledge of God, in all its forms and in all its degrees.

Before attempting to discern the essential points of his doctrine, it would be worthwhile going over the account of his own meeting with Moses, in the sixth heaven, as he relates it in Chapter 367 of the *Futûhât*. 'You asked to see Him', he says to Moses. 'Now, the Prophet of God has said: no-one will see God before he dies.'[15] 'That is so', replies Moses. 'When I asked to see Him, He granted my wish and I fell down thunderstruck. And it was whilst I was struck down that I saw Him.' 'Were you dead, then?' 'I was, in fact, dead.'[16] One already notices here that, for the Shaykh alAkbar, the *lan tarânî* is not, under certain conditions, an insurmountable obstacle.

But the issue of the vision of God and what it means for Ibn 'Arabi is not separable from an axiom which, in Akbarian doctrine, governs all methods of spiritual realisation. In accordance with the *hadîth qudsî* often quoted by the Shaykh al-Akbar: 'I was a hidden treasure and I loved to be known...,[17] God is known *because He wants to be known*. He is *only* known because He wants to be known and He alone determines the form and the extent of this knowledge. One must never lose sight of this point if one is concerned with correctly interpreting everything that Ibn 'Arabi writes on the steps of the Way and on the charismas that correspond to them. In fact his teaching, like that of all the great masters of the Islamic tradition, presents two complementary aspects and this polarity can be a source of confusion: in so far as it is metaphysical, it explains the principles and aims; in so far as it is initiatory teaching, it explains the means and therefore takes as point of departure the awareness that the ordinary man has of himself. Now, whatever his theoretical knowledge, the disciple, when he undertakes the *sulûk*, does not escape from the voluntarist illusion. He considers himself to be autonomous. He is *murîd* - willing, desiring. He still does not know that he is *murîd* because he is *murad* - willed, desired by Him whom he claims to reach by his own

powers. The initiatory teaching, therefore, in order to be realistic, displays an apparent aspect that one could call Pelagian. Read without discernment, it risks giving the impression that by putting certain precise techniques into practice - such and such a form of invocation or type of retreat (*khalwa*) - specific results will definitely be obtained. The literature of the *turuq*, in later times, unfortunately also contributes to reinforcing this impression, despite some rhetorical precautions. The Shaykh alAkbar's work, so long as one does not make selective use of it, constantly warns against this naïve and dangerous interpretation. The *hadīth qudsī*, the beginning of which I have already quoted, is perfectly clear about this: 'I therefore created the creatures and I made Myself known by them and it is *through Me* that they have known Me (*fa-bī 'arafūnī*).'

At the core of the vocabulary of spiritual experience, there is, therefore, in the Shaykh al-Akbar's doctrine, a term which is its key: *tajallī* (a word that, for the Arab Christians, designates the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor), which can be translated, according to the context, as 'epiphany' or 'theophany'. It was already used in the works of the Sufi authors whom I have mentioned but one finds it constantly in Ibn 'Arabi's writings. Moreover, it is directly linked to the verse with which this paper begins: the Divine Manifestation which reduces the mountain to dust and strikes Moses down is expressed in the Qur'an by the verb *tajallā*. *Tajallī* is a divine act and it is by virtue of this divine act that man can attain a direct perception of God, whatever degree or form that may take.

The Akbarian doctrine of theophanies is complex.[18] I would merely like to recall here the essential features, commencing by quoting some lines which appear at the beginning of a chapter of the *Futūhāt* which is precisely devoted to the Pole (*qutb*) whose 'initiatory dwelling-place' is the phrase of verse 7:143 'and when his Lord manifests on the mountain:

*God - there is nothing Apparent but He in every similar
and every contrary*

*In every kind and every species, in all union and all
separation*

In everything that the senses or the intellect perceive

In every body and every form.[19]

These lines express synthetically what many others explain in detail: that is, that theophanies which proceed from the divine name *al-Zâhir*, the Apparent[20] never cease, even if men do not know it,[21] since the universe is only the theatre where they are shown and our look, wherever it may turn, only meets with them. If this world is varied, if it is perpetually changing, it is because God does not appear twice in the same form, nor in the same form to two beings.[22]

But the perfect gnostic (*al-'ârîf al-kâmil*) recognises God in all these forms, unlike other men who only recognise Him when He presents Himself to them in the form of their the mental image that they make of Him.[23] This '*ârîf al-kâmil* himself, however, even if he perceives the perpetual succession of theophanies, even if he distinguishes one from the other and knows *why* they are produced, does not know *how* they are produced for that is a secret which belongs only to the Essence.[24] This has already been pointed out by Henri Corbin and Toshihiko Izutsu[25] and I shall not dwell on it, my intention being limited to determining the effects of the doctrine of the *tajallyât* on the faculty given to man to 'grasp'

God - and on this point I think it moreover necessary to correct Corbin's interpretation somewhat.

First of all, a double distinction between theophanies is essential, according to their origin on one hand and according to their form on the other. The first is standard: it is the one which establishes a hierarchy between the theophanies of the divine acts, those of the attributes and those of the Essence.[26] One already finds it in the works of authors whom I have cited, for example Najm al-din Kubra and Ruzbehan Baqli. The second, although it did not escape the masters of the past, finds its most precise and complete formulation in Ibn 'Arabi. *Tajallî* can appear in a sensible form or in an imaginal form. It can also be a manifestation transcending all form. When the Prophet declares, 'I have seen my Lord in the most beautiful of forms'[27] it is evidently a question of a *tajallî fî 'âlam al-khayâl*, in the imaginal world where 'spirits take bodies and bodies become spirits'. When Ibn 'Arabi describes his own vision of Divine Ipseity and even adds in the margin a diagram showing the figure in which the *Huwiyya* appeared to him,[28] there too it is a question of a theophany taking place in this intermediary world (*barzakhî*), which' he also calls 'Land of Truth' (*ard al-haqîqa*).[29]

But nothing would be more contrary to the Shaykh al-Akbar's thought than to believe that this imaginal world constitutes the nec plus ultra. By insisting on the importance for Ibn 'Arabi of the notion of the *'âlam al-khayâl*, Corbin filled a serious gap in previous studies. By paying too much attention to this discovery, he was led to overestimate its importance and reduced the field of perceptions of the divine to the domain of formal theophanies. Many of Ibn 'Arabi's works overrule this limitation which would prohibit all access to the absolute nakedness of the Divine Essence: forms, be they tangible or imaginal, are created and cannot confine the uncreated. The highest knowledge is beyond every image; it requires what Meister Eckhart calls *entbildung*. If the perception of the *tajallî suwwarî* or *barzakhî* represents, relative to the blindness of the majority of human beings in their earthly condition, a considerable privilege, it remains very imperfect. If, under different names - most often *mushâhada* - it occupies an important place in the account of the spiritual experience of Ibn 'Arabi himself or other *awliyâ'*, it is because theophany, when it is formal, can, up to a point, be described. Speaking of a famous contemporary Sufi, 'Umar Suhrawardi, Ibn 'Arabi emphasises several times that his *tajallî* was *only barzakhî* for otherwise he would not have maintained that it was possible to look at God and hear Him at the same time.[30] 'When He (God) allows Himself to be gazed upon, He does not speak to you', he wrote in another passage, 'and when He speaks to you, He does not allow Himself to be seen *unless it is a question of a theophany in a form*':[31] this wording obviously implies the possibility of a supraformal theophany.

Some important information about this can be found in the 'Book of Theophanies', of which Osman Yahya has compiled an excellent critical edition accompanied by a commentary by Ibn Sawdakin, which transcribes the explanations which he received from Ibn 'Arabi's own mouth, and by an anonymous commentary, the *Kashf al-Ghayât*, sometimes attributed to 'Abd al-Karim al-Jili but which is probably not his work.[32] Chapters LXX, LXXI and LXXII describe successively the theophanies of 'red light', 'white light' and 'green light' and the meetings that the Shaykh al-Akbar had at each of these stages: with 'Ali b. Abi Talib in the first, then with Abu Bakr and finally with 'Umar. Here we are at the closest to the

mystery of the Essence which is symbolised by the 'radiant light (*al-nûr al-sha'sha'ânî*) by which one apprehends but which cannot itself be apprehended' because of its blinding brilliance.[33] The red light, the *Kashf al-Ghayât* tells us, is only a reflection of this light of the Essence in the immensity of the *khayâl mutlaq*, and it is still only a question here of a *ru'ya mithâliyya*, of a vision in imaginal form. The white light represents a more elevated degree than the red and green for, Ibn 'Arabi tells Ibn Sawdakin, 'the colour white is the only one which includes all the others. Its rank is that of the Name of Majesty [*Allâh*] amongst the other Names and that of the Essence amongst the attributes.'[34] But Abu Bakr, however, who is standing in this white light, has his face turned towards the west - the place of occultation of light for the west is 'the mine of secrets': thus it is clearly pointed out to us that it is beyond the highest formal theophanies, beyond created lights, that the uncreated light of the Divine Essence is revealed to him who turns towards the 'occidental' darkness.[35]

All vision assumes a commensurateness (*munâsaba*) between that which sees and that which is seen. Between the divine infinity and the limitedness of the creature, this *munâsaba* is evidently lacking and all possibility of 'seeing God' other than in an indirect way, in the forms in which He manifests His names, seems then to be excluded.[36] If *mushâhada* is like that, the contemplation accessible to mortals is not even an 'advance payment' of the beatific vision promised to the elect who will see God 'like the moon on the night of the full moon': it is only a very imperfect prefiguration of it. That is what the definition that Ibn 'Arabi gives of it seems to confirm: contemplation, he says, is indeed vision (*ru'ya*), but a vision which is preceded, on the part of he who sees, by a knowledge of what he is going to see. It is then strictly limited since the contemplator refuses to recognise the theophany as such if it presents itself other than in conformity to his previous conception, with his *î'tiqâd*. Vision *stricto sensu*, on the contrary, presupposes the absence of this preliminary conditioning of which the contemplator is the prisoner. It receives all theophanies without subjecting them to the test of *recognition*, without referring them to a previous model.[37] One may note, however, that Ibn 'Arabi, despite these very rigorous technical definitions, does not feel obliged to respect the distinction thus established between *mushâhada* and *ru'ya* and, on many occasions, employs one or the other word indifferently. Nevertheless, the context allows one, as we shall see, to clear away the apparent ambiguities and contradictions.

When Ibn 'Arabi writes that 'theophany only occurs in the forms of beliefs (*î'tiqâdât*) or needs (*hâjât*)',³⁸ or again that 'the Theophany of the Essence can only take place in the form of mental images and conceptual categories (*ma'qûlât*)',^[39] these remarks only apply to contemplation taken in its limited sense. But he also says, 'God has servants whom he has allowed to *see* Him in this life without waiting for the future life';^[40] now, to describe what, this time, is indeed vision, he often uses the terms *shuhûd* and *mushâhada*. This is the case in a passage of the *Futûhât* where, speaking of the *muqarrabûn* (those who are brought close), a term which for him designates the highest degree of sainthood, he states that they are in perpetual contemplation and never come out of it although 'the tastes of it are varied'.^[41] How can such people overcome the obstacle which the total absence of proportion between God and man presents? 'The looks do not reach Him' states the Qur'an. Although he often has recourse to the traditional distinction between 'interior sight' (*basîra*) and 'exterior sight' (*basar*), Ibn 'Arabi overlooks it here; what he retains is the fact that the Qur'an uses the plural *absâr* and not the singular *basar*.^[42] The multiplicity inherent to the creature cannot in fact

grasp the One. It follows that 'it is God's look which reaches God and sees Him and not yours'.[43] 'He is the One who sees, He who is seen and that by which He is seen.'[44]

Therein resides the paradox of vision. Only he who has lost everything, he whose contemplation is free from all form, attains to the Being in His absoluteness. Nothing remains of 'he who has lost everything' (*al-muflis*): in contradistinction to formal theophanies, which are compatible with the subsistence (*baqâ'*) of the creature, this *tajallî* which is beyond forms implies the annihilation (*fanâ'*) of the one to whom it is granted.[45] It prevents by that very fact all appropriation of vision - and that is the true sense of the *lan tarânî* the grammatical 'second person' has no place besides the divine 'I'. 'The Essential Divine Reality is too elevated to be contemplated... whilst there remains a trace of the creatural condition in the eye of the contemplator.'[46] This extinction of the contemplator in the most perfect contemplation has a logical consequence which may, however, seem strange: in this *mushâhada* - or to give it its real name, this *ru'ya* - there is neither joy, nor knowledge.[47] A logical consequence in fact since 'joy' and 'knowledge' would imply a reflexive action, a turning back on oneself which is incompatible with the *sine qua non* of vision of God. But would it not then be a question of a sort of coma of which one would ill understand that it constituted a privilege?

Ibn 'Arabi gives a reply to this in several of his works:[48] joy and knowledge are the fruits of *mushâhada* but these fruits cannot be garnered except on coming out of the contemplative state. For, corresponding to every true *mushâhada* (otherwise it would only be 'a drowsiness of the heart', *nawmat al-qalb*) there is necessarily a 'witness' (*shâhid*). This witness, who takes over the evidence of the vision and authenticates it (allusion to Q. 11:17, *wa yatlûhu shâhidun minhu*), is 'the trace left in the heart of the contemplator by the contemplation'.[49] Having regained consciousness, like Moses after the *tajallî* which struck him down, the individual then delights in this supreme knowledge whose price is precisely the unconditional submission to the mortal splendour of theophany. 'No one will see his Lord before he dies', the Prophet said.[50] But he also said: 'Die before you die.'[51] And that is why Ibn 'Arabi, echoing this *hadîth*, unhesitatingly wrote in the *Kitâb al-Tajalliyât* [52]: 'Demand vision and do not be afraid of being struck down!'

Are there any favoured places or times for this vision? God is free to manifest Himself when He wishes, to whom He wishes, how He wishes. But He has let His servants know the Surest of ways that lead to Him. It is only given to the creature to see God through God's eye. Now a well-known *hadîth qudsi* teaches us, with reference to the servant whom God loves: 'When I love him, I am his hearing by which he hears, *his look by which he sees...*

We are told that this servant approaches God by supererogatory acts. But, the *hadîth* specifies: 'He does not approach Me through something which I love more *than with the acts that I have prescribed for him.*' These prescribed acts, the *farâ'id*, are therefore above all those which may lead to vision, and the reason for this is that they already represent a form of death since the will of the servant plays no part in them: it is God alone who determines their moments and their forms.[54] But, among these obligatory acts, there is one which holds a particular importance: the ritual prayer (*al-salât*) which is, as the Prophet said, *mi'râj al-mu'min*, the 'spiritual ascension of the believer'. For Ibn 'Arabi, this ritual prayer is the favoured place for the highest theophanies. These theophanies, always new, appear hierarchically in a harmonic relation to the different positions prescribed for the believer. I

have shown elsewhere[55] that some replies formulated in enigmatic terms to Tirmidhi's well-known questionnaire would be elucidated once one understood that they refer to the *salât*. The mysterious sessions (*majâlis*) during which God speaks correspond to the *julûs*, the sitting position, which symbolises stability, vigilance and permanence (*baqâ'*): conditions which are all necessary to hear the divine discourse but which exclude vision. But those to whom God thus speaks (the *muhaddathûn*) and who, in this respect, are 'behind a veil' are also in another respect *ahl al-shuhûd*, people of contemplation.

They are so when the conditions required to hear God disappear and are replaced by their opposite: annihilation, which tears the veil and of which the symbol is *sujûd*, prostration. Do not let the word 'symbol' mislead us. For most people prostration is most certainly nothing more than a gestural representation of this annihilation which must leave all the space to the One without second. For some, this symbol is operative and for them what Ibn 'Arabi writes in the *Tanazzulât Mawsiliyya* [56] is verified: 'your rising up is in your abasement'. When their body crashes against the earth, they arrive at the summit of the 'Sinai of their being'. And, there, the *lan tarânî* resounds in the void; there is no longer anyone to hear it.

Notes

1. For the biblical facts relating to the vision of God, see also Judges: 6, 22-3 and 13, 22. Cf. also the article by Colette Sirat, 'Un midrasch juif en habit musulman: la vision de Moïse sur le Mont Sinai', *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, Vol. CLXVIII, no.1, 1965, pp. 15ff.

2. Tabari, *Jâmi al-Bayân*, ed. Shakir, XIII, pp. 90-105.

3. Qurtubi, *Al-Jami li-Ahkâm al-Qur'ân*, Cairo, 1938, VII, pp. 278-80 (on 7:143) and VII, p.54 (on 6:103).

4. Fakhr al-din Razi, *Tafsîr Teheran*, undated, XIV, pp. 227-34.

5. We are summing up very briefly here a set of attitudes that, of course, present divergencies which it is not appropriate to list here. On the doctrine of the Ash'arite *kalâm* concerning this subject see Daniel Gimaret, *La Doctrine d'Al-Ash'arî*, Paris, 1990, second part, Ch. X, p.329-45.

6. Bukhari, *tawhîd*, 24, pp.1-S.

7. Darimi, *'aqâ'id*, 303, pp.11-12.

8. On Tustari, refer to the work by Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam*, Berlin-New York, 1980, pp. 165-75. Niffari's position regarding the possibility of vision here below seems to be more positive. See his *Mawâqif*, ed. A. J. Arberry, London, 1935 (see index for *ru'yat Allâh*).

9. Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Mahjûb*, trans. R. A. Nicholson, 6th edn, London, 1976, pp. 329-33.

10. Qushayri, *Risâla*, Cairo, 1957, p.40.

11. Qushayri, *Lata'if al-Isharât*, ed. Ibrahim al-Basyuni, Cairo, undated, II, pp. 259-62.

12. Najm al-din Kubra, *Fawâ'ih al-Jamâl*, ed. F. Meier, Wiesbaden, 1957, paras. 42, 95, 97.

13. Ruzbehan Baqli, *Arâ'is al-Bayân*, Indian lithographed edn, 1315 H., I, pp. 271-7.

14. Ruzbehan Baqli, *Mashrab al-Arwah*, Istanbul, 1973, p.215.

15. Ibn Maja, *fitan*, p.33.

16. *Al-Futûhât al-Makkiyya*, Bulaq, 1329 H., III, p.349.

17. This *hadîth* does not appear in the canonic collections. For its use by Ibn 'Arabi, see for example, *Futûhât*, II, pp. 232, 327, 399; III, p.267.

18. There are many references to texts of Ibn 'Arabi's relating to the idea of *tajallî* in the work of Souad Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-Sûfî*, Beirut, 1981, pp. 257-67.
19. *Futûhât*, IV, p.591.
20. *Ibid.*, I, p.166.
21. *Ibid.*, I, p.498.
22. An oft-repeated statement. See, for example, *Ibid.*, IV, p.19.
23. *Ibid.*, III, pp.132-3.
24. *Ibid.*, II, p.597. Ibn 'Arabi points out that the secret of *kayfiyya* is unknown even to the prophets and the angels.
25. Cf. Henry Corbin, *L'imagination Créatrice dans le Soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabi*, Paris, 1958, Part Two; Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*, Tokyo, 1983, Ch. 11.
26. *Futûhât*, I, p.91.
27. On this *hadîth* of disputed authenticity, cf. H. Ritter, *Das Meer der Seele*, Leiden, 1956, pp. 445 ff. Cf. also Jili, *Insân Kâmil*, Cairo, 1963, Ch. 42.
28. This vision, which occurred on the night of Wednesday 4th of the month of *rabî al-thânî* in the year 627, is described in *Futûhât*, II, p. 449 (27th *fasl* of Ch. 198) but the diagram which accompanies the account has not been reproduced by the editor. It appears in the 1293 H edition, II, p.591, and is reproduced by Asin Palacios, *El Islam Cristianizado*, Madrid, 1931, p.105, by Corbin, *L'imagination*, p.175, and by A. A. Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy of Ibnu'l-'Arabî*, Cambridge, 1939, p.114.
29. This is specifically the title of Chapter 8 of the *Futûhât* which is a description of this 'imaginal world'.
30. *Ibid.*, I, p.609; III, p.213.
31. *Ibid.*, I, p. 397. Corbin's position, which excludes all informal contemplation, is defined in particular, in *L'imagination*, Part Two, Ch. 4 ('La Forme de Dieu'). It is based on a very selective reading of Ibn 'Arabi and of Jili (see, on the latter, Ch. 41 and Ch. 62 of *Insân Kâmil* where he refers to verse 7:143).
32. *Kitâb al-Tajalliyât*, Teheran, 1988. The vocabulary of the *Kashf al-Ghayât* presents significant differences from that of Jili. The text makes no reference, besides, to other works by Jili, contrary to the latter's custom.
33. *Ibid.*, pp.420-i. The Prophet said of this light: *Nûrun annâ arâhu*, 'It is a light, how should I see it?' (Muslim, *îmân*, p.291; Tirmidhi, *tafsîr* S. 53:7). On this *hadîth* see *Futûhât*, IV, pp. 38-9.
34. *Ibid.*, p.425. Cf. also the *Kashf al-Ghayât*, p.429. Note that, in the vision mentioned in Note 28, the Divine Ipseity appears to Ibn 'Arabi as a figure of white light on a background of red light.
35. On the symbolism of the west in Ibn 'Arabi, see *Futûhât*, I, pp. 67, 68,71; II, p.121; III, p.287; *Kitâb al-Intisâr*, printed in *Rasâ'il Ibn al-'Arabi*, Hyderabad, India, 1948, 2 vols, p.4.
36. *Futûhât*, IV, p.38.
37. *Ibid.*, II, p.567.
38. *Ibid.*, II, pp.277-8 and III, p.119. The episode of the Burning Bush illustrates, for Ibn 'Arabi, the theophany 'in the form of one's needs': because Moses is seeking fire, it is in the form of fire that God manifests Himself to him (cf. *Fusûs al-Hikam*, ed. A. A. Affifi, Beirut, 1946, pp. 212-13).
39. *Futûhât*, II, p.606.
40. *Ibid.*, IV, p.38.

41. *Ibid.*, III, p. 104. This Chapter 328 forms part of the series of 114 *manâzil* ('spiritual abodes') which, as I have shown in a recent book (*Un Océan sans Rivage*, Paris, 1992, Ch. III; an English translation of this work has been published by SUNY Press in 1993), correspond to the *sûras* of the Qur'an in reverse order. Chapter 328 corresponds to sum 56 and the terms which are used there (*sâbiqûn*, *muqarrabûn*, etc.) are taken from this *sûra*.

42. *Futûhât*, IV, pp.37-8.

43. *Ibid.*, IV, p.2.

44. *Ibid.*, IV, p.38.

45. *Ibid.*, III, p.105 and IV, p.191. Such is also the position of Qashani in a short unedited letter (*Risâla ft Qawlihi ta'âlâ: Arinû Unzur Ilayka*) MS Yahya Ef. 2415, folios 14-15.

46. *Kitâb al-Fanâ' fi'l-Mushâhada (Rasâ'il)*, p.2. Note that this treatise is a complement to Chapter 286 of the *Futûhât* which corresponds, in the order of the *manâzil*, to sum 98 and whose theme is taken from the first two words (*lan yakun*) of this sum (*Un Océan sans Rivage*, Ch. V).

47. *Kitâb al-Tarâjim (Rasâ'il)*, p.42. See also *Futûhât*, IV, p.55.

48. See *Futûhât*, Ch. 266; *Kitâb al-Tarâjim*, p.16; *Kitâb Wasâ'il al-Sâ'il*, ed. M. Profitlich, Fribourg, 1973, pp. 43-S; see also Badr al-Habashi's *Kitâb al-Inbâh*, ed. Denis Gril, in *Annales Islamologiques*, XV, 1979, p.106, para. 8.

49. *Istîlâhât al-Sûfiyya (Rasâ'il)*, no.60. This definition is taken up by Qashani, amongst others, in a work of the same title (Cairo, 1981, pp.153-4) and by Jurjani in his *Ta'rifât*, Cairo, 1357 H, p.114.

50. Cf. note 15.

51. Tirmidhi, *qiyâma*, 25. On this theme of 'initiatory death', see *Futûhât*, II, p.187; III, pp. 223, 288.

52. Chapter 100, p.517.

53. Bukhari, *tawâdu*. Ibn 'Arabi has included this *hadîth* in his *Mishkât al-Anwâr* and quotes it and comments on it many times. (*Futûhât*, I, p.406; III, p. 68; IV, pp. 20, 24,30, 65, 312, 321, etc.)

54. That is why, for Ibn 'Arabi (cf. in particular *Futûhât*, IV, pp. 24. 449), the closeness acquired by the accomplishment of obligator) acts (*qurb al-farâ'id*) is more perfect than that obtained by the accomplishment of supererogatory acts (*qurb al-nawâfil*). It is to the former that the case of the *muqarrabûn* corresponds (*ibid.*, II, p.104) for whom 'contemplation is perpetual' and who see 'the multiplicity in the One and separation in union'. On this subject, see *Un Océan sans Rivage*, pp. 144ff. and my translation of the *Ecrits Spirituels* by Emir 'Abd al-Kader, Paris, 1982, note 84, pp. 202-4.

55. *Un Océan sans Rivage*, pp. 136ff.

56. *Tanazzulât Mawsiliyya*, Cairo, 1961 (under the title *Latâ'if al-Asrâr*), p.103.

Translated from French by Cecilia Twinch

This article appeared first in volume XIV of the Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society (1993), published as a special issue under the title "Prayer and Contemplation".

Filename: The Vision of God,Michel Chodkiewicz
Directory: C:\Documents and Settings\Hossein Moridi\Desktop
Template: C:\Documents and Settings\Hossein Moridi\Application
Data\Microsoft\Templates\Normal.dotm

Title:

Subject:

Author: Hossein Moridi

Keywords:

Comments:

Creation Date: ۱۰:۲۷:۰۰ ۲۲/۰۵/۲۰۰۹ ق.ظ

Change Number: 4

Last Saved On: ۰۲:۴۹:۰۰ ۱۱/۰۷/۲۰۰۹ ب.ظ

Last Saved By: Hossein Moridi

Total Editing Time: 89 Minutes

Last Printed On: ۰۲:۴۹:۰۰ ۱۱/۰۷/۲۰۰۹ ب.ظ

As of Last Complete Printing

Number of Pages: 10

Number of Words: 6,031

Number of Characters: 29,596 (approx.)