

CONTOURS OF AMBIVALENCE

Iqbal and Ibn 'Arabi:

Historical Perspective

Part II

Muhammad Suheyl Umar

(Continued from the previous issue)

Let us now consider the objections listed earlier. The order of listing has not been observed.

Objection no. 1

This is an oversimplified statement. The sufis do not regard the individual self or the microcosm an illusion in the literal sense. Only God is absolutely real. Everthing else, since it exists, has a reality on its own level. To quote Ibn 'Arabi, “**الرب حقٌ والعبد حقٌ**”³²

Concerning the entities of the cosmos, it is said that they are neither identical with the Real, nor other than the Real. On the contrary wujud is all Real. However, some of what is Real is described as created, and some is described as not created, while all of it is existent.³³ Several other quotations are referred to in the notes.³⁴

³² This statement is found in four of his works; Mawaqi' al-Nujum. Al-Tanazzulat al-Musiliyyah, Kitab al-Masai'l and on the first page of Futuhat, see M.M.al-Ghurab, al-Rad'ala Ibn Taimiyyah, p.10 as well as Sharh Kalimat al-Sufiyah, p.367. Both the works have been published in a single volume from Damascus, Dar-al-fikr, 1981. see also S.H.M. Anwar, "Shaikh-i-Akbar our Iqbal" op.cit.p.153,154;

³³ See Futuhat. (Bulaq) Chap.III,p.419.34.

³⁴ See Futuhat, II 248.24; II 587.32; II 56.3; II 484.32: See S.H.M. Anwar op.cit.p.153, which runs as follows;"

Ibn 'Arabi's position on the status of created things, and of human individuality among these, has been summarized as follows:

Things, entities, possible things, loci of manifestation, forms, attributes--- these are all names applied to that which is other than Being, to non-existence. But, "non-existence" does not mean absolute nothingness, since the things---whether as objects of Gods knowledge "before" they are found in the cosmos or as existent entities within the cosmos itself--- possess certain modes of relative existence."³⁵

In his earlier exposition *Fusus*, in a more elliptical manner, he had said, "اوجد الاشياء وهو عينها"³⁶. This is usually interpreted by the critics as the acceptance of identity between the Absolute and the relative or the Creator and the creation. 'Ayn has many meanings in Arabic the common being that of identity. But here Ibn 'Arabi has in mind the other meaning i.e. **مابه القوام** that the existents receive their entification from the Absolute and exist not in themselves but through the Real. Apart from the Absolute they cannot exist.

This presence of the Absolute in the relative and the prefiguration of the relative in the Absolute forms the mystery that has given rise to human responses that have a - striking similarity with one another with out there ever being any historical connection between them. Civilizations as far removed from each other, in time and space, as Islam and Taoism or Islam and the plain Indian religions are unanimous, despite apparent differences, about the essential identity and substantial discontinuity between the principle and its manifestations.³⁷

ان العالم ما هو عين الحق تعالي- اذ لو كان عين الحق تعالي ماصح كون تعالي بديعاً-

See the following quotation from *Futuhat*, II 614.4.

تعال الله ان تحله الوداث او يحلها-

³⁵ See Chittick, op.cit, p.79. See also his chapter on "Ontology".

³⁶ See Faiz, *Mehr-i-Munir*", op.cit.,p.468.

When Ibn 'Arabi speaks about the ephemeral nature of the cosmos and the created things it contains, he is pointing, towards their metaphysical reality and it would be useless to search for a categorical denial of the existential status, within their own realm, for the created entities in his works. In his own words:

As for us [creatures], though we exist, our existence is through him. He whose existence is through other than himself is in effect non-existent.³⁸

It is God Himself who has given the name wujud to the cosmos so how can Ibn 'Arabi ascribe to a view that posits an illusory status for the cosmos and the human self.

Just as God gave the cosmos the name wujud, which belongs to him in reality, so also He gave it the Most Beautiful Names through its preparedness and the fact that it is a locus of manifestation for Him."³⁹.

Objection no. 15 & 6

In this perspective, when we consider the objection no.15, which is perhaps the most worthy of attention, it becomes abundantly clear that Iqbal in principle agrees with what we have said, the misunderstanding having arisen by assimilating pantheism with Wahdat al-Wujud. He is right when he says that "pantheism pertains to philosophy" and seems to support the same doctrine that Ibn 'Arabi upholds when he declares that "The multiplicity that we observe in the world all belongs to the created order though in reality and

³⁷ See Izutsu, T. *Sufism and Taoism*, University of California Press, 1983, which is a comparative study of the key concepts of Ibn 'Arabi and Taoism. See also J.C. Cooper, *Taoism, The Way of the Mystic*, Acquarian Press, U.K.,1972. For the religion of the Red Indians see, F. Schuon, *Language of the Self*, Ganesh, Madras, 1959.Chap.II;Esoterism as Principle and as Way. London 1981. p.21; *Logic and Transcendence*, London 1975,p.152; J.E. Brown, *The Sacred Pipe* Penguin, 1971, rep.1984; also, *Black Elk Speaks*, University of Nebraska Press, 1961.

³⁸ See Futuhat op.cit., I 279.5.

³⁹ Ibid. II 167.32

in essence it may be one."⁴⁰ One wonders as to how does it differ from the positions we have described regarding Ibn 'Arabi?

The orthodox sufis, contrary to what Iqbal has attributed to them here, (in objection 15) have always maintained that Wahdat and Tawhid have a relationship of part and the whole or particular and universal. These are not synonymous terms. On the other hand, multiplicity (Kathrah) is an ontological principle where as association (Shirk) is a "prescriptive Command" (amr taklifi or amr hukmi). To posit multiplicity in Necessary Being is Shirk.

As for Ibn 'Arabi he did not employ the term Wahdat al-Wujud though the idea permeates his work.⁴¹ Before him the idea certainly existed with its roots in the Quran and the Prophetic sayings.⁴² He formulated it in a detailed and elaborate form. In fact, when Ibn 'Arabi himself explains this 'concept.' he provides,

one of the most sophisticated and nuanced expressions of the 'profession of Gods Unity' (tawhid) to be found in Islamic thought. His teachings did not dominate the second half of Islamic intellectual history because people were simple-minded and therefore ready to accept 'pantheism,' in place of tawhid-- quite the contrary. What Ibn 'Arabi provides is an inexhaustible ocean of meditations upon' the Unity of God . and its relationship with the manyiness of all things."⁴³

⁴⁰ Italics my own.

⁴¹ See Chittick, "Rumi and Wahdat al-Wujud", The Hesitage of Rumi, (ed.) A. Banani and B. Sabagh. Cambridge University Press.

⁴² See Lings, M. A Sufi Saint of the 20th Century, ch.V, "Oneness of Being," Suhail Academy, LHR, 1981, p.121: also Lings, "Sufism" in Cambridge History of the Middle East, chap.13; Naqd-i-Iqbal, op.cit.; Zakariyyah op.cit; Chittick, op.cit; Anwar, op.cit; several works of A.A Thanvi, and M.M.al- Ghurab. especially, Sharh Kalimat al-Sufiyyah, Damascus, 1981.

It is evident that Iqbal accepts Ibn 'Arabi's views on these points with the difference that he leaves out the highest level that of the transpersonal and absolutely transcendent Self which is even beyond Being, perhaps for practical purposes. Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine is more comprehensive. A reconciliation could be brought about by taking into consideration the universal doctrine of multiple states or levels of Being.⁴⁴

A Sufi Shaikh, while discussing the objection of Iqbal mentioned above, commented that Iqbal, with a pure intention, misunderstood the issue but refuted it rightly. What we have said in the foregoing pages regarding objection no.15 also covers objection no.6 (see also note 61).

Objection No.2

As for objection no.2 regarding Ibn 'Arabi's interpretation of the Quran, it is now quite well known that Ibn 'Arabi's commentary of the Quran has been lost. The work usually attributed to him is most probably written by A. Razzaq Kashani.⁴⁵ We may understand this statement as pointing towards the Quranic hermeneutics of Ibn 'Arabi. In that case it would be dealt under objection no.14. But still the point regarding his affinity with Shankara is not resolved. Iqbal did not know enough Sanskrit to use the original texts directly and Kunhayya Lal's Urdu translation, if he consulted it, was misleading and substandard.⁴⁶ Edgerton⁴⁷, Radha Krishnan⁴⁸ and R.C. Zaehner⁴⁹ had not yet

⁴³ For details, see Chittick, op.cit., especially his chapter on "ontology".

⁴⁴ See Guenon, R. The Multiple States of Being, Larson, N.York,1984, rep. Suhail Academy, LHR, 1989.

⁴⁵ Abd ar-Razzaq al-Kashani, Tafsir ash-Shaikh al-Akbar, 1867; (Bulaq, Cawnpore, 1883). See also, M.M.al-Ghurab, Sharh Fusus al-Hikam, Damascus, 1985. p.417: and Rahmatu min-al Rahman fi Tafsir wa Isharat al-Qur'an.

⁴⁶ I have myself compared it with Zaehner's translation and transliterated text at various places and found it often wide the mark. An other example of his using erroneous English translations instead of original sanskrit could be seen in the case of Bhartiri Hari's verses for which he followed Prohat Gopi Nath's English rendering. See S.S.M. Rizvi, "Iqbal and Bhartiri Hari", in Iqbal Centenary Papers Lahore,1977,Vol.II,p.19.

⁴⁷ F. Edgerton, Gita, Harward, 1944.

published their English translations. Hill's translation had twelve more years to appear.⁵⁰ Faizi's Persian translation was not reliable in Iqbal's view:⁵¹ he himself wanted to translate Gita; but how, this is still to be resolved. As for Shankara's point of view the readers may consult the masterly exposition of E. Schuon.⁵² The similarity is without historical influences as we have pointed out in the case of Taoism and the Red Indians.

Objection No. 14 & 11

This objection brings us into the arena of a difficult and problematic issue. Hermeneutics or gnostic interpretation of the Quran is a vast subject. Iqbal's objection, on the other hand is not clear enough. If some thing is "logical and sound according to the transmitted knowledge", as he himself gives the margin, what could possibly be the basis of criticism? Perhaps Iqbal is showing a distaste for the use of the symbolic language which included symbols ranging from poetical to the geometrical and mathematical. Ibn 'Arabi uses it to penetrate to the innermost meaning of the sings (ayat) of the Quran as well as of the macrocosm.

Ibn 'Arabi, for the most part, considers ta'wil as interpretation of the Quran and the sayings of the Prophet in a way that will not compromise the principles of rational thought. This, according to him, tantamounts to accepting the supremacy of reason, making it the scale in which every thing else may be weighed. Generally Ibn 'Arabi is critical of ta'wil.⁵³ It weakens

⁴⁸ Radhakrishnan's Gita, Unwin, 1948.

⁴⁹ R.C. Zaehner, The Bhagvad Gita, Oxford, 1969.

⁵⁰ W.D.P. Hill, Gita, Oxford, 1928.

⁵¹ See Iqbal's Letter to K.P. Shad, 11th Oct. 1921, in Iqbal Banam Shad, ed.' Abd Allah Qureshi, Lahore, 1986, p. 257.

⁵² F. Schuon, Esoterism As Principle and as Way. Perennial Books, England, 1981, p.21. Also see, Rene Guenon,; Man and his Becoming According to Vedanta, Luzac,1945; An Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines, Luzac,1944; A.J.Alston(ed.) Samkara on the Absolute; Samkara on the Soul: Samkara on the Creation, Shanti Sadan, London, 1981.

faith,⁵⁴ imprisons one within one's limitations,⁵⁵ misleads in ego's caprice,⁵⁶ offers partial view of reality⁵⁷ etc. According to him, to suggest that God's "real meaning" lies below the surface or has to be found through interpretation is to cast aspersions upon God and amounts to balatant ill manners and discourtesy (Su'al-adab). The literal sense of the text must always be honored. If, after that. God opens up one's understanding to perceive other meanings which preserve the literal sense while adding new knowledge. one accepts the new understanding and thanks God. The requirements of the Law are to be fulfilled before any interpretation is searched and that only through faith, practice and God fearing (taqwa).

His fundamental verdict can be summarized as follows:

"Any knowledge, tasting, insight, witnessing, self disclosure: or what ever that contradicts the literal sense of the Quran and the Hadith must be abandoned. Unveiling (Kashf), like reason must submit itself to the scale of Law".⁵⁸

These observations also cover objection eleven. For details the readers are referred to William Chittick's remarkable work.⁵⁹

Objection No. 12

This objection, though connected with the former, draws our attention towards an other aspect of the issue. There is no question of a separate, secret knowledge transmitted to some of the companions by the Prophet

⁵³ For his definition of ta'wil see Futuhat, II 594.28.

⁵⁴ Ibid. II 660.7.

⁵⁵ Ibid., I 218.21.

⁵⁶ Ibid., III 69.30.

⁵⁷ Ibid., II 523.2.; III 46.27,47.25.

⁵⁸ See next note.

⁵⁹ The Sufi Path of Knowledge, op.cit. chapters.9-15.

which they divulged to their close followers only. Ibn 'Arabi like other Sufi's does not accept such an idea. In fact the basic data of a religion are the same for every one. The difference arises in levels of comprehension and depth of understanding to which the Quran and the sayings of the Prophet often testify.⁶⁰

Objection No. 13

This objection declares followers of wahdat al-wujud to be spiritually affiliated with the batinis or the Qaramitah. This is a criticism that goes completely wide the mark. At present, however, we are concerned with Ibn 'Arabi himself and his followers. How can some body be affiliated to a sect which he disapproves and mentions it always with a certain amount of hostility?⁶¹

Objection No. 17

Here we are presented with an interesting issue that should be taken into consideration by research scholars of Iqbal's original texts. The objection gives us to understand that Iqbal regarded Sufism as an accretion and a foreign importation in Islam. This is a blatant contradiction of what he has said about Sufism at numerous other places and of which we have quoted copiously. The letter published in Iqbal Nama⁶² reads as follows:

"The very phenomenon of Sufism " تصوف کا وجودی

which is given in translation (objection 17). The original letter, preserved in manuscript in Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad (Department of Iqbal Studies), gives the following reading:

⁶⁰ See M. Zakariyya, Shari 'at ur Tariqat ka Talazum, Karachi, 1399 H. Also see F. Schuon who has clarified this point in his numerous works.

⁶¹ Futuhat, I 282.4 [Y 4,280.8]; II 8.19; III 36.15, 138.9. For a discussion of Ibn 'Arabi's kinship with Shi'ism see M. Chodkiewicz, Le Sceau des saints, prophetic et saintete dans la doctrine Ibn'Arabi, Paris, Gallimard, 1986. pp.15,134, 67-68,174.

⁶² See note 42.

The pantheistic Sufism " تصوف وجودی "

The readers can decide for themselves what difference occurs with the slight change of a phrase!

There is an underlying idea in Iqbal's statements and writings which is reflected here as well. He had misgivings about the origins of Sufism in that period though he appreciated its positive contribution. Later, perhaps under Massignon's influence,⁶³ he changed his views. We cannot enter here into a discussion concerning the origins of Sufism. The readers may consult the works given in the notes.⁶⁴

Objection No. 16

This objection is simply inexplicable. It is the only example in all his writings where he has descended very harshly on Ibn 'Arabi and the general tone and content of his statement goes against all his other statements. Moreover it is quite unbecoming of such a civilized man of letters as Iqbal to comment like this, in clear contradiction to his other statements of the same period, and even that in extremely disparaging terms. My leaning is towards giving more weight and importance to the whole body of praise and appreciation statements and to offer a probable explanation for this pejorative and dismissive comment to the research scholars.

Iqbal had quoted and used D.B. Macdonald's works. In his works Macdonald has extensively quoted from Ibn Khaldun, especially his views on sufism (e.g. *The Religious Attitude and life in Islam*, Khayats, Beyrouth, 1965; originally given as Haskell lectures, Chicago, in 1906). Iqbal may have been informed that Ibn Khaldun, in one of his unpublished works, had denounced Ibn 'Arabi and declared his books as 'full

⁶³ See Massignon, *La Passion d 'Al Hallaj*, p.480.

⁶⁴ See M. Lings, "The Origins of Sufism," *A Sufi Saint of the 20th Century*, op.cit. p.34; "Abu Bakr Siraj ad-Din The Origins of Sufism," *Islamic Quarterly*, Vol.III, No.1, p.53; also see by the same author, *What is Sufism*, LHR. 1983, chaps. 1&2; -V. Danner, *Islamic Tradition*, I.I.C, LHR, 1991, chap.IV.; G. Maqdisi, "Ibn Taimiyah: A Sufi of the Qadiriya Order," in *The American Journal of Arabic Studies*, Leiden, 1-1973, p.118.

of heresy and deviation'. The same reprot was reflected in Iqbal's letter though the manuscript appeared in print in 1957 under the title, *Shifa'al-Sa'il li Tahdhib al-Masa'il* (Istanbul, Osman Yalcin Matbasi. p. 110-11). It may also be noted that Ibn Khaldun denounced these works in 'public interest' (*Al-Maslahah al-'ammah*).

Objection Nos. 4 & 15

The objections concerning (Sukr) 'intoxication', that appear in nos.4 and 15 are important since these pertain to the 'method' or the practice of the Sufis. Sukr, in the sense in which Iqbal has used it in these writings, could only mean a self induced in-rush of states; mental, psychic or even physical, that would disturb or stop the normal working of the rational and sense faculties, in order to grasp the pantheistic idea that God is one with the universe and the multiplicity observed in the world is an illusion.

Before turning to Ibn 'Arabi to find his views on the he subject let us consider what do the sufis themself teach about it? After all, they should have the final say on something which is attributed to them as a part of their method. Sufis have never regarded intoxication (Sukr) as an integral or even provisional part of their method. It may occur, as a result of the divine attraction or divine self-disclosures, to the traveller on the Path' but it is never self induced and never used as a means of reaching a spiritual station; Even when one is seized by a state of sukr the ideal is to observe outward sobriety (*sahw*).⁶⁵

As for the wakefulness of the 'heart', an elementary reading of the sufi literature would reveal that the sufis are the foremost to emphasize the requirement to 'polish' the 'heart' and to aspire for a constant wakefulness of the 'heart' through invocation of the divine name and observance of the Law.

The case of the Persian poets regarding intoxication (sukr) is an other issue which may send us at a tangent from our subject. Some aspects of this

⁶⁵ See Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the 20th Century*, op.cit. Moreover we can testify to the fact by our personal experience. Having 'lived' the inner life of four Sufi orders we can say with confidence that it is no where regarded a part of the Sufi practices.

issue would be dealt when we discuss Hafiz and the problem of his influence on the masses.

Ibn 'Arabi has described three types of intoxication, (sukr) namely, natural⁶⁶ (tabi'i), rational ('agli) and the divine (Ilahi)⁶⁷. The latter, which he mentions approvingly, is equated by him to bewilderment (hayrah) which we find in the saying, "O' Lord increase my bewilderment in thee".⁶⁸ More over, on an other place, he mentions that the gnostics are sober either through God or through themselves;⁶⁹ the sobriety (sahw) of the gnostic through God being superior to the other. This statement, apart from establishing the internal hierarchy, also elucidates the point that Ibn 'Arabi regarded sobriety as the ideal state of the soul.

Objection No. 19

This objection, concerning the piety and salvation of Pharoah, refers to the statements that we find in the Fusu-al-Hikam⁷⁰ to this effect. Ibn 'Arabi has advanced several arguments that try to prove the issue. His position on this question, as it appears from the Fusus, is in clear contradiction with the consensus of the Muslim authorities. Leaving aside its metaphysical interpretation, which explains the point in terms of an interplay of polar

⁶⁶ Nature, in the sense Ibn 'Arabi uses the term, includes the corporeal as well as the imaginal worlds since both these world take bodily forms in their own ways; the first is elemental ('unsuri) also apart from being natural. See Chittick, 'The Sufi Path of Knowledge, "Cosmology"; "Death and the world of Imagination", The Muslim World,78,(1988):p.51-82.

⁶⁷ See. Futuhat, 11 544.16.

⁶⁸ رَّبِّ زِدْنِي تَحِيْرًا فَيْدُ. Usually regarded as a prophet saying, it is not found in the standard sources. Ghazali regards it a hadith, see Stead al-Hakim, Al-Mu'jam al-Sufi, Beirut 1981. Also see M.M.al Ghurab, Sharh Kilimat as-Sufiyah, Dar al-Fikr, Damascus, 1981,pp.48, where he has discussed the point with reference to Ibn Taimiyah's criticism.

⁶⁹ See Futuhat,II 547.24.

⁷⁰ See Fusus al-Hikam, Arabic text with Urdu translation with notes and explanations by Zahin Shah Taji, Karachi, 1976, p.66; M.M. al-Ghurab, Sharh Fusus al-Hikam, Damascus, 1985,p.380-419; also see R.W.J. Austin, (Tr.) Ibn al-'Arabi: The Bezels of Wisdom, rep. Lahore, 1988,p.249.

principles of the creative Will and the spiritual Wish of God,⁷¹ we find that even on the plane of textual criticism, the statement in question has given rise to a difference of opinion among the scholars. Sha'rani claimed that he did not find the statement in the manuscript copy he read.⁷² This is the point of view that M.M. Ghurab has also adopted in his studies, especially in his sharh *Fusus al-Hikam* where he has discussed the problem of the authenticity of the text.⁷³ More over, even if we accept the authenticity of the passages in question, Ibn 'Arabi is not unique in his views. Before him Abu Bakr Baqillani, the famous theologian, and a number of other scholars had maintained a similar position.⁷⁴ Lastly, Ibn 'Arabi, in his *Futuhāt*, has enumerated four different abodes of hell. One of these contains the damned who would never escape it. Pharaoh is among the eternally tormented souls.⁷⁵ This is Ibn 'Arabi's final position. Scholars have suggested that either the passages in the *Fusus* were interpolated or, else, he earlier followed Baqillani and then changed his views.

Objection No. 20

"Saints are higher in rank than the prophets", which forms Iqbal's objection no. 20, is perhaps the most often repeated objection against Ibn 'Arabi. Nevertheless, the passage in chapter XIV of the *Fusus* (The Wisdom of Destiny in the Word of Ezra) which contains this statement, is so abundantly clear that anybody reading the Arabic text or a good translation

⁷¹ See Austin, op.cit p.250.

⁷² 'Abd al-Wahhab Sha'rani, *Kitab al-Yawaqit wa al-Jawahir*, Cairo, 1305, opening, also, part 51, Vol.II,p.112; c.f. Ashraf 'Ali Thanvi, *Al-Tanbih al-Tarbi fi Tanzih Ibn 'Arabi*, Thana Bahawan, India,1346h, p.128; Al-Hall al-Aqwam li 'Uqdi *Fusus al-Hikam*, Thana Bhawan, India, 1338h,p.92. Also see Taji, *Fusus al-Hikam*,op.cit.p.685.

⁷³ See M.M. al-Ghurab *Sharh Fusus al-Hikam*, op.cit., Introduction and postscript where he has provided useful information regarding the textual criticism of the *Fusus*. In his explanatory notes as well,he has indicated the passages that contradict the doctrines and ideas of the Shaikh al-Akbar.

⁷⁴ See Sha'rani, op.cit.

⁷⁵ *Futuhāt*, Chap.62.

cannot miss the real intent of Ibn 'Arabi's words. The passage runs as follows: " if he says that the saint is superior to the prophet and the apostle, he means only that this is so with in one person".⁷⁶ The context leaves no doubt as to what the Shaikh had in mind. Moreover, authorities like 'Izz ud-Din 'Abd as-Salam also uphold his views.⁷⁷ Futuhat also clearly indicates what Ibn Arabi intended to say.⁷⁸ Iqbal seems to have registered the popular view which could not be attributed to the Shaikh al-Akbar.

Objection No. 8

This objection also falls into that category of statements which can not be traced back to Ibn 'Arabi's works. Eternity of the souls of the perfect is a concept that gives rise to many questions. Metaphysically it is a contradiction in terms. When we speak of 'the souls' of the perfect we imply that we are talking of the manifest order and about the principle of individuality. Whereas the realm of eternity transcends the individual order. The unmanifest spirit, which has an 'uncreated' aspect to it, cannot belong to the order of subtle manifestation which is the realm of the individual souls. A gnostic of Ibn 'Arabi's stature and a metaphysician par excellence can not maintain such an idea. It seems that this statement also belongs to those popular views that have been attributed to Ibn 'Arabi. A reference to it is nevertheless, found in Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi's letters where he has refused to accept it as authentic and has advised to interpret it in a way as it may not clash with the accepted opinion. "Our Shaikh (Muhammad Baqi billah) used to say that Shaikh Ibn 'Arabi accepted the notion of the oternity of the souls of the perfect".⁷⁹ No further reference is made to any of Ibn 'Arabi's works. We can safely conclude that the Shaikh al-Akbar did not support this idea.

⁷⁶ See Austin, op.cit., p.168-69; also see Taji, op.cit.,pp.407 and 417; M.M. al-Ghurab, Sharh Fuses pp.218-224 where he has gathered other references as well from different works of the Shaikh, especially from Futuhat.

⁷⁷ Thanvi, Al-Tanbih..... op.cit,p.92; Al-Hall,..... op.cit.,p.85

⁷⁸ Futuhat, Chap.14; II 229;II 246; II 256; II 24,26; also see Kitab al-Qurbah c.f. Ghurab, op.cit. p.219.

Objection No. 5

Iqbal regarded doctrine of the Five Divine Presences as un-Islamic.⁸⁰ We have translated his statement in the standard contemporary terminology. However it would provide us with a better insight into the matter if we take into consideration his own words.- "This doctrine which teaches that 'Allah from His spirit of Absoluteness, descends (tanazzul) in the valley of delimitation (ta'ayyun) and from a undeferentiated (mujmal) mode becomes deferentiated (mufassal) through- traversing the levels and states of multiplicity, reaching in the end at the delimitation of the corporeal state', in our view, is pure heresy and deviation."⁸¹ At an other place he terms it as the "doctrine of the six alightments".⁸²

Iqbal's objection is two fold. One the one hand the terminology is neoplatonic and, on the other, its content and meaning is heretical.

As is obvious, the statement is couched in anthropomorphic symbolism, which, as we would see presently, is not the way Ibn 'Arabi would have described it. Secondly, the terms employed (i.e. Tanazzul, Ta'ayyun) are surely of a later origin since Ibn 'Arabi never employed them in the context with which we are concerned at the moment.

The discussion regarding the possible origin and sources of the doctrine in question could be postponed till we come to objection no.7 which deals with the philosophic concerns of the Sufis. A definition of the doctrine is, nevertheless, required to examine the objection.

The world ('alam) is defined as "that which is other than God" (ma .siwa Allah). With in the world we observe different things, entities, realities that could be devided into various categories. The doctrine of the five divine

⁷⁹ Shaikh Ahmed Sirhindi, . Maktubat-i-Imam Rabbani, Ist Vol (Durr-i-Ma'rifat), letter No.266, Lahore, N.D., p.135; see also Thanvi, Al-Tanbih op.cit.p.56.

⁸⁰ See note 29.

⁸¹ See Kalurvi, ed., Tarikh-i-Tasawwuf, op.cit..

⁸² Mu'ini, Maqalat-i-Iqbal, op.cit.,p.161-2.

presences is one of the major methods of explaining and referring to the different kinds of entities and things. The doctrine. Therefore, originates from a genuine human need for causality. In a more philosophic manner, these existents are some times referred to as levels (maratib) by the school of Ibn 'Arabi. The "levels of existence" may be infinite in number but their general categories (kulliyat) may be reduced to five or six, i.e.. the Divine Presences⁸³ (al-Hadarat al-Ilahiyyah). A general category of existence, encompassing innumerable specific things, is precisely a hadrah, presence. i.e.. the mode and the 'location' in which one of the Divine Names exercises its influence. Ibn 'Arabi employs this term in the aforementioned context; the "Presence of the Merciful" (hadrat al-Rahman), the "Presence of the self subsistent" (hadrat al-qayyum). But he refers to the presences individually and does not seem to discuss the "Five Divine Presences" as a separate doctrine. Nor does he state clearly and explicitly how they are related to a single whole.⁸⁴

There is another aspect to the problem. God is al-Wasi' (He who contains) and al-Muhit, (He who encompasses). So, in the last analysis, there is but a single presence known as the Divine presence (al-hadrat al-Ilahiyyah) which comprehends every thing. Ibn 'Arabi defines it as the Essence, Attributes, and the Acts of Allah,⁸⁵ thus embracing all that is. The Essence is God in Himself without reference to the relationship that can be envisaged between him and the existent or nonexistent things. The acts are the created things. The attributes or names are the barzakh or isthmus between the Essence and the cosmos. The Essence (dhat) is the transcendent Self which is beyond Being and beyond manifestation; the attributes (sifat) of Allah are the relationships that can be discerned between the Essence and everything

⁸³ For a detailed discussion of the doctrine see W.C. Chittick, "The Five Divine Presences: From al Qunawi to al-Qaysiri". *The Muslim World*, 72(1982):107-128. Also see his *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, op.cit., "The Divine Presence".

⁸⁴ This is being said on the testimony of W.C. Chittick, one of the finest and most erudite scholars in this field; "I have not been able to discover any reference to the Five Presences as such in the works I have read", see his "The Five Divine Presences", op.cit., p.125(n.7).

⁸⁵ *Futuhat*, II 114.14;IV 196.11;c.f.II 579.14.

other than he; and the acts (af' al) which are all the creatures in the cosmos along with everything that appears from them. Hence the term 'Divine Presence' designates God on the one hand and the cosmos, inasmuch as it can be said to be the locus of His activity, on the other.

This, then, is a brief sketch of the doctrine that we find in Ibn 'Arabi. It was systematized and elaborated by his followers over the centuries. Neither is the doctrine devoid of its Quranic 'premisses'.⁸⁶ We can neither undertake a description of details of the different schemes as expounded by the followers of Ibn 'Arabi nor can we, possibly, elaborate upon its Quranic premisses as well as its parallels in other traditions. Suffice to say that neither Ibn 'Arabi, nor his authentic commentators seem to present the doctrine in the fashion in which we encountered it in Iqbal's statement. Iqbal must have come across the definition in some works far removed from the original sources and was rightly put off by the anthropomorphic air of its diction which made 'Allah' 'descend' in the 'valley where as, in Ibn 'Arabi. We have observed that the manifestation is always of the Divine Acts and the Essence remains absolutely transcendent with regard to its manifestations. The word *nuzul*⁸⁷ (descent, alightment) is used by Ibn 'Arabi, but in an other context and in the sense we find it used in the prophetic saying.⁸⁸ No wonder if Iqbal hesitated to accept the doctrine as Islamic in the form in which he came across it. He suspected that the doctrine advocated the idea of a 'substantial' continuity (*saryan*) between the Principle and its manifestations, where as, in its original form the doctrine was, perhaps, the most sophisticated analysis of the ontological levels of the whole spectrum of manifestation.

⁸⁶ See F.Schuon, "Five Divine Presences" in *Dimensions of Islam*, reprint, Lahore, 1985,p.142, where he has discussed the Quranic premisses of this doctrine and has provided an overview of the different schemes in which the Sufis have envisaged it. Extremely important are the comparisons that he has made with different expositions of the doctrine in other traditions.

⁸⁷ *Futuhat*, II 578-1;III 408-11,28,32.

⁸⁸ See, Muslim, *Musafirin* 172.cf. Ahmad II 433, III 34 for other versions see A.J. Wensick, and others, *Concordance* Leiden, Brill, 1936-1969, II 152.

It remains to be seen as to what did Iqbal propose by way of his own exposition/solution of the problem? I would like to put my readers to a test in this regard. Following are the two statements that expound the views of Ibn 'Arabi and Iqbal on the issue of the Divine Presences. The readers may try to differentiate between the two.

1) The "Presence of Power" is everything in existence that comes under the sway of His Power, including the whole of creation.⁸⁹

2) Different ontological levels, which include the whole of creation, are a manifestation of the "Presence of Power".⁹⁰

The readers may refer to the notes to identify the exact reference. It would, nevertheless, be clear that very little difference exists between the two ideas. Hence we may draw the conclusion that, like so many other cases, Iqbal is in agreement with Ibn 'Arabi on the question though he could not ascertain the exact position of al-shaykh al-Akbar.

The quotation that we mentioned in the foregoing paragraph is taken from the period of the polemical writings of Iqbal to which we have referred earlier during the course of our study.⁹¹ In one of his later writings, separated from the already quoted statement by a further period of 10 years, we find the following views regarding the question of the Divine Presence in the cosmos.

"To the Absolute self... the universe is not a reality confronting Him as His 'other'; it is only a passing phase of His consciousness, a fleeting moment of His infinite life."⁹²

⁸⁹ This is Ibn 'Arabi. c.f. Chittick, *The Sufi Path* op.cit.,p.5.

⁹⁰ This is Iqbals statement, see Kalurvi, *Tarikh* op.cit.,p.57.

⁹¹ See notes 22 and 23.

⁹² See M. Iqbal, "Self in the light of Relativity." *The Crescent*, Lahore, Dec.1925, VoI.XX,No.79; rept. Lahore, 1988,p.3.

"... the Amr is not related to God in the same way as the Khalq is. The amr is distinct but not isolated from God. But I confess, I can not intellectually apprehend this relationship any more than Rumi, who says:⁹³

اتصال بے تکلیف بے قیاس ہست رب الناس راباجان ناس

"... Reality lives in its own appearances, and that the surest way to reach the core of it lies through its appearances"⁹⁴

There is no essential difference between Iqbal and Ibn 'Arabi' with reference to the first quotation given above. Rephrased, it could be read as follows: "The cosmos is encompassed by the Divine Presence. It is a locus of manifestation of the divine attributes of consciousness and life". For Iqbal, as for Ibn 'Arabi' then, the cosmos is not 'other' than God. It is a presence, though not of the Acts (hadrat al-af al), as Ibn 'Arabi maintains, rather of the attributes (hadrat al-Sifat); but we can, for the moment, afford to ignore this distinction between the two ontological levels. This enables us to see that, despite differences of terminology, Iqbal is essentially in agreement with Ibn 'Arabi.

The second quotation, perhaps as a complement to the first, focuses its attention on the microcosm, that is, the human individuality. Iqbal describes the presence of God in the macrocosm as well as in the microcosm with the help of two Quranic terms.⁹⁵ The macrocosm is a presence of the divine creative act (khalq) where as the microcosm, the human substance, is the

⁹³ Ibid.,p.3-4. For the verse quoted from Rumi see, Mathnawi ed. Nicholson (Pourjawady edition) Amir Kabir, Tehran, 1363, Vol.1, p. 130, verse 2128.

It may be noted that Iqbal, though himself a philosopher, often prefers to follow Rumi in his expositions who, unlike Ibn 'Arabi and his school, tried to avoid philosophic terminology to expound his mystical experience. Rumi, instead of employing a philosophic jargon, appeals primarily to mans religious instinct and employs images and symbols as the primary means of exposition.

⁹⁴ Ibid. p.5. (Italics mine)

⁹⁵ Quran, 17:85:7:54

locus of manifestation of the presence of the divine command (amr), which is 'distinct' yet not 'isolated'. Here we enter the realm of perhaps the most universal and oldest of mysteries, namely, the 'presence' of the Principle in the manifestation or the Absolute in the relative. God is not in the cosmos but the universe is some how mysteriously plunged in the divine presence. Discursive thought cannot comprehend the complex problem and Iqbal, at this point, while announcing its inability, draws upon Rumi to elucidate this point.

"Reality lives in its own appearances." Third quotation brings us almost in the same anthropomorphic ambiance which permeated the objectionable statement quoted by Iqbal. If Allah (Reality) lives in His own appearances (i.e. in the corporeal state) and if such a metaphorical form of expression is admissible to describe the divine presence in the cosmos what, then, would possibly be the error in saying that He (Allah) "... in the end reaches the ... delimitation of the corporeal state"? The fact that we intend to emphasize here is precisely that if Iqbal, with all his philosophic training, could not escape the inevitable mode of anthropomorphic expression, allowance should also be made for the expressions of some anonymous sufi author, separated from the times of Ibn 'Arabi by several centuries, for employing a less sophisticated method in comparison to Ibn 'Arabi who would not have expressed himself in this kind of loose terminology.

Objection No. 7

The question of terminology that Ibn 'Arabi employed in his works is intimately bound up with the question of his sources. The latter has been debated right from his own times and of his immediate followers. Even in his day he was given the surname "Son of Plato" (Ibn Aflatun), apart from his title "Supreme master" (as-shaikh al Akbar),⁹⁶ indicating the fundamentally

⁹⁶ Cf. R.W.J. Austin, (tr.) *Bezels of Wisdom*. Preface by Titus Burckhardt, Lahore, 1988, p.viii. Ibn 'Arabi himself makes an exception of Plato from the usual run of the philosophers who rely on reflection pure and simple. See *Futuhat*, II 523.2. Also see Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, op.cit.p.84. and F. Schuon, "Tracing the Notion of Philosophy", *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence*, Lahore, 1985,p.115 where the writer has clarified certain problems pertaining to the notion of philosophy with remarkable clarity and acumen.

platonian bent of his thinking. This, by no means, is the only or the primary source of Ibn 'Arabi. His two main sources were the Qur'an and the Traditions of the Prophet. In this regard he placed himself squarely in the mainstream of Islam by basing all his teachings upon the Qur'an and the Hadith and parted company with the philosophers and the proponents of Kalam (rational theology). He confirmed his logocentrism by claiming repeatedly that the knowledge gained through opening pertains to the meaning of the Qur'an. The Futuhat, like his other works is nothing if not a commentary upon the Holy Book.⁹⁷ On the other hand, to borrow the words of Dr. Austin,

"It requires only a general survey of his works to realize that he managed to combine in himself the genius and resources of the philosopher, the poet, the traumatizer, the occultist, the theologian and the practical ascetic. He combines the scholastic expertise of Ghazali with the poetic imagery of Ibn al-Farid, the metaphysical daring of al-Hallaj with the stringent orthodoxy of Muhasibi, abstract categories of the Neoplatonists with the dramatic imagination of Rumi, and the abstruse science of the Kabbalist with the practical wisdom of the spiritual guide".⁹⁸

This should, however, never be confused with an attempt at syncretism or a tendency towards apologetics striving to bring the Islamic perspective in 'conformity' with some foreign frame of thought. To grasp the full significance of this very important phenomenon of Islamic intellectual life the following remarks by S.H. Nasr are extremely illuminating:

"One cannot speak in an ordinary historical sense about the origins and sources of the works of any Sufi writer because the Sufi who has realized the goal of the Path receives inspiration directly and vertically and is not dependent upon "horizontal" influences. He receives his knowledge through

⁹⁷ Cf. Chittick, *The Sufi Path* op. cit., p.XV, 80-81.

⁹⁸ See R.W.J. Austin, *Bezels of Wisdom*, op.cit., p.24.

the illumination of his heart by Divine theophanies and only in the expression and formulation of his inner experiences may he depend upon the writings of others. In the case of Ibn 'Arabi, also, his primary source is his gnostic knowledge received in states of contemplation and made possible through the grace (barakah) of the Prophet which he received through his initiation into the Sufi Path.

But on the level of interpretation of ideas and formulations we may speak of the "historical sources" of Ibn 'Arabi in the sense that the doctrines of many schools found their profoundest interpretation in the writings of the Shaikh. Within the tradition of Islam, Ibn 'Arabi followed, most of all, the earlier Sufis, especially Hallaj, many of whose utterances he discussed in his works; Hakim al-Tirmidhi, whose *Khatam al-wilayah* (The Seal of Sanctity) became the subject of the Shaikh's special study; Bayazid al-Bastami, whose gnostic utterances he often quoted; and Al-Ghazzali whose later works he followed and whose theses he expanded in many ways. He also adopted certain cosmological ideas found among the philosophers, especially Avicenna - - not to speak of the "Neo-Empedoclean" schemes of Ibn Masarrah - - and made frequent use of the dialectic of the theologians. In addition, the influence of earlier Islamic Hermetic writings, such as those of the Jabirian corpus, as well as the Epistles of the Brethren of Purity with their Neopythagorean tendencies, and other writings associated with Isma'ilism, are to be discovered in Ibn 'Arabi's works.

As for doctrines of pre-Islamic origin, we find in Muhyi al-Din the interpretation of Alexandrian Hermeticism at its most elevated level of meaning, where the concept of Nature itself takes on a significance transcending the order of formal cosmic manifestation. We also find doctrines belonging to the Stoics, Philo, the Neoplatonists, and other schools of antiquity which are interpreted metaphysically and integrated into the vast panorama of Ibn 'Arabi's theosophy. It is

through the prism of his mind that not only gnostic doctrines but also cosmological, psychological, physical, and logical ideas gain a metaphysical dimension and a transparency which reveal the nexus that all forms of knowledge have with the sapientia possessed by the saints and sages, just as the root of all things, of all orders of reality, is plunged in the Divine."⁹⁹

Thus we can say that "for Ibn 'Arabi, the Universe is a Muslim one on whose horizons certain pre-Islamic symbols are contemplated."¹⁰⁰ More over these pre- Islamic "Candles of light" were dissolved and integrated into the dazzling light of the 'Sun'¹⁰¹ of Islamic intellectual and spiritual life.

One may like to question the legitimacy and opportuneness of the aforementioned approach which found its culmination in Ibn 'Arabi though it is also discernable among the theologians, theosophers and philosophers of Islam that went before him. From our point of view, it derives its legitimacy from the inherent principles and practice of the Islamic Tradition itself. Islamic Tradition, from its vantage point of being the summer-up, incorporated ---- obviously with alterations, amendments, abrogations and adaptations ---- the "Judeo-Christian" elements; especially the legal (or Shari'ite, in the technical sense of the word) aspects of the Mosaic code and the esoteric elements of the Christian message. These elements were brought to perfection in addition to the specifically Islamic aspects of the new faith in the Islamic revelation. This process, as it was accomplished on a purely vertical plane, had the stamp of divine sanction on it which distinguished it from any subsequent attempts that the Islamic community may had envisaged in the same direction. Nevertheless it had the significant role of setting the example for integrating ideas and symbols of pre-Islamic origin into the unitary perspective of Islam and its general framework.

⁹⁹ S.H. Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, op.cit., p.100-102.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.59.

¹⁰¹ See S.H. Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, Harvard University Press, 1964, p.191.

As for the opportuneness of such an approach we can do no better than to quote S.H. Nasr again. "The importance of Ibn 'Arabi consists, therefore, in his formulation of the doctrines of Sufism and in his making them explicit. His advent marks neither a "progress" in Sufism by its becoming more articulated and theoretical, nor a deterioration from a love of God to a form of pantheism, as has been so often asserted against Ibn 'Arabi. Actually, the explicit formulation of Sufi doctrines by Muhyi al-Din signifies a need on the part of the milieu to which they were addressed for further explanation and greater clarification. Now, the need for explanation does not increase with one's knowledge; rather, it becomes necessary to the extent that one is ignorant and has lost the immediate grasp of things through a dimming of the faculty of intuition and insight. As Islamic civilization drew away gradually from its source of revelation, the need for explanation increased to the degree that the spiritual insight and the perspicacity of men diminished. The early generations needed only a hint or directive (isharah) to understand the inner meaning of things; men of later centuries needed a full-fledged explanation. Through Ibn 'Arabi Islamic esotericism provided the doctrines which alone could guarantee the preservation of the Tradition among men who were always in danger of being led astray by incorrect reasoning and in most of whom the power of intellectual intuition was not strong enough to reign supreme over other human tendencies and to prevent the mind from falling into error. Through Ibn 'Arabi, what had always been the inner truth of Sufism was formulated in such a manner that it has dominated the spiritual and intellectual life of Islam ever since."¹⁰²

This formulation was responsible, apart from other things, for "placing in the ascendancy the trend to expound the mystical experience in philosophic terminology."¹⁰³ As such it was one of the various possible

¹⁰² S.H. Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, op.cit.,p.91.

means to justify and, prove the religious teachings concerning God's unity that unfolded themselves gradually during the whole of Islamic intellectual history.¹⁰⁴ Use of philosophic terminology or discussion of philosophic positions shall never be equated, however, with the unbridled activity of the unaided reason which would imply that the norm for the mind is reasoning pure and simple, in the absence, not only of intellection, but also of indispensable objective data. It is an expression in a philosophic style and terminology of specifically Islamic positions and data obtained from mystical experience as well as from unveiling finding as a result of reading and meditating upon the Qur'an and fearing God; it can not be legitimately termed as bringing philosophic issues within the pale of Sufism, as Iqbal seems inclined to have it

(Objection no.7).

To quote Schuon,

"In a certain respect, the difference between philosophy, theology and gnosis is total; in an other respect, it is relative. It is total. when one understands, by 'philosophy', only rationalism; by 'theology' only the explanation of religious teachings; and by 'gnosis' only intuitive and intellective, and thus suprarational, knowledge; but the difference is only relative when one understands by 'philosophy' the fact of thinking, by 'theology' the fact of speaking dogmatically of God and religious things and by 'gnosis' the fact of presenting pure metaphysics, for then the genres interpenetrate. It is impossible to deny that the most illustrious Sufis, while being 'gnostics' by definition, were at the same time to some extent theologians and to some extent philosophers, or that the great theologians were both to some extent philosophers, and to some extent gnostics...."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Cf. Chittick, "Sadr al-Din Qunawi on the Oneness of Being" in *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 21 (1981): 171-184.

¹⁰⁴ For a profound discussion of the causes that emphasized this need, see S.H. Nasr. *Three Muslim Sages*, op.cit.,p.1-7.

It is against this backdrop that we claim that Ibn 'Arabi and his followers donot import the issues of philosophy¹⁰⁶ (understood in the sense of rationalism) into the fold of Sufism. They were, to quote Chittick, only helpful,

"to bring the teachings of sufism into the mainstream of Islamic intellectuality, which in any case was moving more towards philosophy than Kalam. In addition, from the 7th / 13th century onward Islamic intellectuality tends towards synthesis. Many authors contributed to the harmonization of divergent intellectual perspectives It was only logical that sufism should play a major role in this harmonization of different intellectual streams. Al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111) had begun this task long before Ibn 'Arabi and Ibn 'Arabi himself contributed to it by employing the terminology of all the intellectual perspectives".¹⁰⁷

It is true that, after Ibn 'Arabi, there have been sufis who did not use philosophic terminology. Rumi is its foremost example. Yet it is the dominant trend of the Muslim intellectuality; to the extent that commentators of Rumi's Mathnawi also used the ideas and terms of Ibn 'Arabi's school down to the present times.

Objection No. 3 & 10

The question of the Persian poets and their detrimental influence on the masses is a complex and detailed problem. A few general observations would only be possible with in the confines of this article. First of all we have to consider that the process of decadence, to which they are seen as the chief contributors, had equally overwhelmed the non-Persian peoples who could

¹⁰⁵ See F.Schuon, 'Tracing the Notion of Philosophy', Sufism: Veil and Quintessence, op.cit.p.125.

¹⁰⁶ It may be noted that philosophy had a very different role in the West as compared to the Islamic world where it was an incidental development and left the heart of the tradition intact.

¹⁰⁷ See W.C. Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge, op.cit.p.xvii-xix.

not have, possibly, received the negative influence of the "pantheistic" ideas borne by the wings of their poetry. Therefore we can surmise that the Muslim community was, as a whole, subject to more universal and profound causes of decline and decadence in which the Persian mystic poets had no special contribution.

(To be continued)