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## THE THREE REALITIES

In most of our texts, three basic realities are kept in view: God, the cosmos or macrocosm, and the human being or microcosm. We can picture these as the three angles of a triangle. What is particularly interesting is the relationships established among the angles. God at the apex and source brings the two angles at the base into existence, since both macrocosm and microcosm are derivative realities. Each angle can be studied in relation to one or both of the other two angles.

The triangular picture is made more complex by the fact that each of the three realities has two basic dimensions and can be pictured as a cross. The vertical axis represents one kind of relationship, the horizontal axis another kind. At the apex, the vertical axis is set up by the distinction between the Divine Essence and the divine attributes, while the horizontal axis reflects the relationships between complementary divine names, such as Exalter and Abaser, or Life-giver and Slayer. Parallel distinctions can be drawn in both microcosm and macrocosm. "Heaven and earth" or "spirit and body" represent the vertical axis, while interrelationships among realities at each level set up a number of horizontal axes. For the moment, it is important to bring out this basic triangular structure of the whole of reality. Later chapters will deal with internal and external relationships.

### *Signs in the Horizons and the Souls*

The most common terms in our texts for macrocosm and microcosm are the literal Arabic translations of the Greek expressions: *al-'ālam al-kabīr*, the "large world," and *al-'ālam al-ṣaghīr*, the "small world." Often *larger* and *smaller* are used instead of *large* and *small*. Sometimes primacy is given to the human being. Then the macrocosm becomes the "large human being" (*al-insān al-kabīr*) and the microcosm the "small human being" (*al-insān al-ṣaghīr*).<sup>1</sup> The term *macrocosm* is synonymous with *world* or *cosmos*, which is usually defined as "everything other than God." When our authors use the term *macrocosm* instead of *cosmos*, they do so in order to set up a contrast with the microcosm. The microcosm is the human individual, who epitomizes all the qualities found in God and the macrocosm.

Many authors allude to the macrocosm and microcosm through the expression "the horizons and the souls" (*al-āfāq wa'l-anfus*). This expression goes back to the Koranic verse, "We shall show them Our signs upon the horizons and within their own souls, until it is clear to them that He is the Real" (41:53). These "signs" (*āyāt*) of God found both outside and inside human beings are one of the basic recurring themes of the Ko-

ran. The Book employs the term *sign* in singular or plural form 288 times in several closely related senses. A sign is any phenomenon that gives news of God. It may be a prophet, a prophetic message, a prophetic miracle, or simply the things of the natural world. It may pertain to the outer, macrocosmic realm, or the inner, microcosmic realm. "In the earth there are signs for those having sure faith, and in your souls. What, do you not see?" (51:20–21). In short, everything in the universe is a sign of God.

Dozens of Koranic verses express the idea that all natural objects are God's signs. It is important to grasp this idea as fundamental to Islamic thought, since it sets up relationships between God and the cosmos in no uncertain terms. The verses where the term is employed usually mention in addition the proper human response to God's signs: remembering, understanding, seeing, having gratitude, reflecting, using the intellect, fearing God, and so on. I cite a few examples to make this point completely clear:

It is He who has appointed for you the stars, that by them you might be guided in the shadows of land and sea. We have distinguished the signs for a people who know. (6:97)

And the good land—its vegetation comes forth by the leave of its Lord. And the corrupt—it comes forth but scantily. Even so We turn about the signs for a people who have gratitude. (7:58)

In the alternation of night and day, and what God has created in the heavens and the earth—surely there are signs for a godfearing people. (10:6)

And that which He has multiplied for you in the earth of diverse hues—surely in that is a sign for a people who remember. (16:13)

Have they not regarded the birds, which are subjected in the air of heaven? Naught holds them but God. Surely in that are signs for a people who have faith. (16:79)

And of His signs is that He shows you lightning, for fear and hope, and that He sends down out of heaven water and revives the earth after it is dead. Surely in that are signs for a people who have intellect. (30:24)

God takes the souls at the time of their death, and that which has not died, in its

sleep. He withholds that against which He has decreed death, but looses the other till a stated term. Surely in that are signs for a people who reflect. (39:42)

When the Koran commands people to see all things as God's signs, it is encouraging them to make use of a particular type of mental process that is not oriented toward objects, things, or data. On the contrary, the Koran tells us that we must perceive things not so much for what they are in themselves but for what they tell us of something beyond themselves. The things are likenesses, similitudes, symbols. As Lane tells us in his classic Arabic dictionary, quoting an ancient authority, the word *āya* "properly signifies any apparent thing inseparable from a thing not equally apparent, so that when one perceives the former, he knows that he perceives the other, which he cannot perceive by itself."<sup>2</sup> God is invisible by definition. Yet, traces and intimations of His awesome reality can be gleaned from all things, if only we meditate upon them.

Attention to the signs of God encourages a sensitivity toward the unseen dimensions of existence. The approach is hardly "scientific," since material and quantitative considerations are of no intrinsic interest, unless they too become pointers to the One (as in the Pythagorean approach of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'). This idea might be expressed by saying that the Koran discourages "scientific" thought while encouraging "poetic" thought. It asks people to look at the meaning and inner significance of things in relation to God. It warns them against imagining that the significance of phenomena is limited to their form and appearance, or to their relationships with other phenomena. Attention must be turned primarily toward those qualities of existing things that tell us of the ultimate reality beyond the things. These qualities provide intimations of God's modes of activity or of His own names and attributes.

In short, discussions of the significance of the phenomena found within microcosm and macrocosm often have nothing to do with what we would call a "scientific evaluation" of the human being and the world.

The texts are concerned rather with a qualitative appraisal of interrelationships between the realms of the visible (*al-shahāda*) and the unseen (*al-ghayb*). The unseen is a domain that is not only inaccessible to the senses at this moment, but inaccessible to them by definition, no matter what scientific instruments may be employed to search it out. However, the unseen domain of the macrocosm is not inaccessible to the corresponding realms in the microcosm. The human spirit may, under certain circumstances, perceive realities of the unseen realm.

At times the terminology employed in the texts may remind us of a scientific approach. There is frequent discussion of things in the world that can be observed, measured, and counted. But as a general rule, Muslim thinkers were not primarily interested in the things themselves. Rather, they were concerned with showing how the signs or attributes of God can be observed in different creatures and various domains of existence. When the qualities found in the outside world coincide with the qualities of the inside world, this is even more reason for pondering, reflecting, and meditating upon God's signs.

Many if not most of the Muslim cosmologists studied the outside world in order to bring out what we can learn about God from the qualities present in the visible universe. Few of the Western scholars who have looked at cosmological texts have appreciated this approach. They have been interested mainly in the "history of science," considering Islamic cosmology as a primitive form of science. This may help explain why so few Muslim scholars have taken Islamic cosmology seriously in the past century. It is usually dismissed as unscientific, or symbolic at best, though few have attempted to investigate in what manner that symbolism might be useful in the contemporary world. Most Muslim scholars, either because of a hereditary literal-mindedness deriving from the juridical tradition or an acquired literal-mindedness stemming from popular scientism, have not looked at cosmology in the way in which it has been taught by the great theoreticians. The study

of Islamic cosmology can gain a great deal if we perceive it as built upon a world of images, of qualitative and not quantitative entities, of correspondences and hidden analogies.

Certainly modern science tells us that phenomena are not what they appear to be, but its methodology precludes taking help from anything beyond itself to enter into the unseen realms. From the beginning Islamic cosmological thinking has been based on the idea that things are pointers and not of any ultimate significance in themselves. Once we recognize that the qualities that things manifest rather than the things in themselves are of primary interest, then we will be able to perceive that Islamic cosmology presents us with a perspective that has no relationship with the changing viewpoints of scientific cosmology. We are dealing with a scheme of qualitative correspondences that depict the relative standing of God, the cosmos, and the human being. Whether the earth goes round the sun or vice versa is irrelevant. "Up and down" or "heaven and earth" are pairs of terms explicating a certain set of relationships that hold true regardless of changes in "scientific truth."

In *Kashf al-asrār*, a commentary on the Koran written in 520/1126, Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī takes the verse, "We shall show them Our signs upon the horizons and within their souls," as an explicit command to meditate upon the qualities of existence. Though he does not discuss the correspondences between microcosm and macrocosm as such, his qualitative evaluation is typical. He begins by comparing the human body to a tablet, a place wherein God writes, an analogy that we often meet:

In this verse, God says: Why do you not look into yourself and meditate upon your own structure? The Lord of the worlds has recorded many fine points of wisdom and realities of handiwork with the pen of eternal gentleness upon the tablet of this structure. Upon it He has inscribed various kinds of artistry and different varieties of ennoblement. He made the round head—the tent of intellect and the meeting place of knowledge—into a monastery of the senses. If anyone has con-

sidered this hollow structure, this compound person, to have any worth, he has done so because of the person's intellect and knowledge. The worth of a human being lies in intellect and his importance in knowledge, his perfection in intellect and his beauty in knowledge.

God created the forehead of the human being like a bar of silver. He strung the two bows of his eyebrows with pure musk. He poured the two dots of his eye's light into two cups of darkness. He made a hundred thousand red roses grow up in the garden of his two cheeks. He concealed thirty-two teeth like pearls in the oyster shell of his mouth. He sealed his mouth with glistening agate. From the beginning of his lip to the end of his throat He created twenty-nine waystations, making them the places of articulation for the twenty-nine letters. From his heart He brought a king into existence, from his breast a royal parade ground, from his aspiration a fleet-footed mount, from his thought a swift messenger. He created two taking hands and two running feet.

All the aforementioned is but the robe of creation and the beauty of the outward realm. Beyond this is the perfection and beauty of the inward realm. For a moment ponder the Lord's subtleties and kindnesses and the traces of the divine solicitude and care that have arranged this handful of earth. Look at the different kinds of honor and the special privileges of nearness that He has placed within human beings. For He created the whole cosmos, but He looked not upon a single creature with the eye of love, He sent not a single messenger to any existent thing, He sent no message to any creature. When the turn of the children of Adam arrived, He pulled them up through gentleness and caressed them through bounty and quarries of light. He made their inmost mystery the place of His own glance, He sent them messengers, He set angels over them as guardians, He placed the fire of love in their hearts, and He sent them continuous incitements to yearning and motives for desire.

The purpose of all these words and allusions is to show that a human being is a handful of earth. Whatever ennoblement and honor people have received derives from the gentleness and care of the holy Lord. When He gives, He gives because of His own generosity, not because of your worthiness. He gives because of His magnanimity, not because of your prostration. He gives through

His bounty, not because of your good works. He gives because He is Lord, not because you are lord of the manor.<sup>3</sup>

The signs of God provide the means to know God, and this, for the sapiential tradition, is the goal of human life. In the Koran, God says, "I created jinn and mankind only to worship Me" (51:56). The Prophet's companion Ibn 'Abbās explains that the words "to worship Me" mean "to know Me."<sup>4</sup> For sapiential authorities, this knowledge of God depends upon knowledge of the signs in oneself. These authors must have known that the alleged hadith, "He who knows his own soul [or "himself"] knows his Lord," is not found in the standard works, but they frequently cite it, since it expresses in the most succinct way the goal of acquiring knowledge. The saying is certainly supported by the Koranic verses that point to the signs within the microcosm as the key to understanding. Maybudī provides a poetic explanation for the necessity of knowing the signs in oneself while commenting on the Koranic verse, "And among His signs is that He created you of dust. Then lo, you are mortals, all scattered abroad" (30:20):

God is saying, "O child of Adam! If you want to know the signs and banners of God's Oneness and recognize the marks of His Singularity, open the eye of consideration and intelligence, roam in the world of the soul, and gaze upon the root of your own creation.

"You were a handful of earth, a shadowy stem fixed in the darkness of your own unknowing, bewildered in the darkness of attributes. Then the rain of lights began to fall from the heaven of mysteries: 'He poured His light down upon them.'" That earth turned into jasmine and that stone became a pearl. That dense stem gained value through this subtle graft. The earth became pure, the darkness became light.

"Yes, it is We who adorn and paint. We adorn whom We will with Our light. We adorn the Garden with Our friends, We adorn Our friends with the heart, and We adorn the heart with Our own light. We do this so that if they do not reach the pavilions of Our inaccessibility through the carcass of their own misfortune, they will reach Us through the

ray of the good fortune of Our majesty's light."

A shaykh was asked, "What is the sign of that light?"

He replied, "Its sign is that through that light the servant knows God without finding Him, loves Him without seeing Him, turns away from being occupied with and remembering himself through being occupied with and remembering Him. He finds ease and rest in His lane, he tells secrets to His friends and asks favors from them. By day he is busy with religion's work, by night intoxicated with certainty's tidings. By day he dwells with creatures of good character, by night with the Real, fixed in sincerity."<sup>6</sup>

### Qualitative Correspondence

To say that all natural phenomena are the signs of God is to say that everything in existence tells us something about God. The more common Koranic meaning of the word *sign*, however, is not that of a natural phenomenon, but of a divine revelation. All the prophets, from Adam down to Muhammad, were sent in order to manifest the signs of God, to deliver His messages. The great message that begins Islam in the specific historical sense, the Koran, is a collection of God's signs. The word employed for verse of the Koran is precisely this term *sign*.

The fact that the word *sign* means both natural phenomenon and divine revelation implies that the knowledge that phenomena, whether macrocosmic or microcosmic, make available to human beings corresponds to the knowledge given by the prophets in general and the Koran in particular. This is one reason that Muslims have, by and large, seen no contradiction between seeking knowledge of the natural world and receiving knowledge of the invisible world through revelation. The greatest proof of God is the way things are. The natural order is so astonishing that it can only be the result of God's own order.

The fundamental Koranic teachings about God are phrased in terms of His activities and names. In other words, if the Koran

tells us through linguistic signs what God does and who He is, the whole of the cosmos says the same thing in a sign language aimed at "those who have eyes." By its very existence, creation announces the divine attributes and acts. When the various schools of the Islamic intellectual tradition attempt to summarize the Koran's teachings about the nature of God's activities and His relationship to the world, they commonly do so by mentioning and explaining God's names or attributes. Books on the "ninety-nine names of God" were written by proponents of Kalām, philosophers, and Sufis.<sup>7</sup>

For our purposes here, we can consider the term *name (ism)* of God synonymous with the term *attribute (ṣifa)*, though some theologians distinguish between the two. It is useful, however, to draw a grammatical distinction between them, since a name is an adjective (serving as a proper noun), while an attribute is an abstract noun. For example, God is called by the name Merciful, while the corresponding attribute is mercy. His name is Just and His attribute is justice.

When Muslim thinkers look upon the signs of God on the horizons and within their own souls, they frequently express what they find in terms of divine attributes. For example, if we look at the world, we find some things that are inanimate, some that are alive, and some that are dead after having been alive. In the distinctions set up here we have signs of the divine attribute life, which manifests itself in some creatures but not in others. As Maybudī remarks in typical fashion in the passage quoted above, human beings—and all other things of this world—are but handfuls of earth. They have nothing of their own. If people, in contrast to the dust in the street, are alive, this life must derive from God's intervention. Human life can only come on loan from the divine life. Moreover, if some people were once alive and are now dead, this must be because they had their life on loan from God, who has now taken it back. Hence, by meditating upon the quality of life, we understand that God is Alive (*al-ḥayy*), and that He is also the Life-giver (*al-muhyī*) and the Slayer (*al-mumīt*). Three

of the “ninety-nine names of God” have thus been established.

It would be possible, with the help of the numerous treatises that have been written on the “names of God” and the views of various Koran commentators, Sufis, philosophers, and proponents of Kalām, to derive all the names of God from the macrocosmic and microcosmic signs. But my purpose here is simply to show that it is characteristic for many if not most of the great representatives of the Islamic intellectual tradition to perceive the qualities of things in terms of their relationship to divine attributes. On this basis, the qualitative analogies that are found among things in the cosmos and things in the soul, and between the soul and the world, become a significant if not primary mode of knowledge, since these analogies tie all things back to the Real.

As pointed out in the introduction, the mode of Koran commentary known as *ta'wīl* (esoteric hermeneutics) depends in many of its forms upon qualitative analogies among things, especially between the microcosm and the macrocosm. If one is not aware of the internal logic of these analogies and correspondences, this mode of commentary appears arbitrary. But if one has a background in the cosmological literature dealing with the relationship between the signs in the horizons and the signs in the souls, one will see that a work such as 'Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī's *Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān* is embedded in this tradition and draws few analogies that could be called original.

In order to introduce examples of this type of thinking, I provide below a few passages setting up analogies between microcosm and macrocosm. I quote first from the *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* or “Brethren of Purity,” the famous sages of the fourth/tenth century who were thoroughly influenced by Greek philosophical texts translated into Arabic, especially works on the numerical symbolism of Pythagoras. In the following, from the treatise “On the saying of the sages that the human being is a microcosm,” the *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* draw analogies between the structure of the microcosm and various structures observable in the outward world. I repeat that I quote this and other passages

below merely to familiarize the reader with the type of thought processes and analogies that infuse the tradition. The information as information is not the point. What is important is the qualities perceived within phenomena and the type of relationships that are then set up. Note that the authors themselves make explicit that they are looking for likenesses (*mithālāt*) and similarities (*tashbīhāt*), that is, relationships on a qualitative level. They are not interested in the phenomena as such, but in the qualities that the phenomena manifest.

The first sages considered this corporeal world with the vision of their eyes and witnessed the manifest dimensions of affairs with the perception of their senses. Then they reflected upon the states of the cosmos with their intellects, scrutinized the scope of the activity of its universal individuals with their insights, and took cognizance of the varieties of the cosmos's individual things with their deliberation. They did not find a single part of the cosmos more complete in structure, more perfect in form, and more similar to the totality than the human being.

The human being is a totality brought together from a corporeal body and a spiritual soul. Hence the sages found likenesses for all the existent things of the corporeal world in the condition of his body's structure. These existent things include the wonderful compositions of the world's celestial spheres, its different kinds of constellations, the movements of its planets, the composition of its pillars and mothers, the diversity of its mineral substances, the various kinds of plants, and the marvelous bodily frames of its animals.

The pillars (*arkān*) or mothers (*um-mahāt*) are the four elements, which combine to produce the children (*mawālīd*) or “the things that are born” (*muwalladāt*), that is, the three kingdoms: inanimate objects, plants, and animals.

Moreover, within the human soul and the permeation of the structure of the body by its faculties they found similarities with the different kinds of spiritual creatures, such as the angels, the jinn, the human beings, the satans, the souls of other animals, and the activity of their states in the cosmos.

When these affairs became clear to them

in the human form, they named this form a "small world." Here we want to mention a few of these likenesses and similarities. . . .

As we said, the human being is a totality brought together from a dark body and a spiritual soul. If one takes into account the state of the body and the marvels of the composition of the organs and the modes of the conjunction of the articulations, the body resembles a house prepared for an inhabitant. But when one takes into account the state of the soul, the wonders of its controlling powers in the structure of the bodily frame, and its faculties' permeation of the body's articulations, the soul resembles the inhabitant of the house along with his servants, wife, and children.

If one considers the human being in another respect, one finds that the structure of the body with the diversity of the shapes of its organs and the variety of the composition of its articulations is similar to the shop of an artisan. In respect of the permeation of the structure of the bodily frame by the soul's faculties, its marvelous acts in the organs of the body, and the various movements in the bodily articulations, the soul is similar to an artisan in his shop with his disciples and apprentices, as we explained in the treatise on "The practical crafts."

In another respect, if one considers the structure of the human body in respect of the multiplicity of the combinations of the strata of the bodily frame, the wonders of the composition of the bodily articulations, the many diverse organs, the branching out of the veins and their extension into the regions of the organs, the disparity of the containers in the depths of the body, and the activity of the faculties of the soul, the human being resembles a city full of bazaars with various crafts, as we explained in the treatise on "The composition of the body."

In another respect, when the human being is considered from the point of view of the soul's governing control over the states of the body, its good management, and the permeation of the structure of the body by its faculties and activities, then the human being resembles a king in a city with his soldiers, servants, and retinue.

In another respect, if one considers the state of the body and its being engendered along with the state of the soul and its configuration with the body, the body resembles the womb and the soul resembles the embryo, as we explained in the treatise on "The configu-

ration of the particular soul and its emergence from potentiality into actuality."

In another respect, if one considers, one finds the body like a ship, the soul like the captain, works like the goods of traders, this world like the ocean, death like the shore, the next world like the city of the merchants, and God the king who gives recompense.

In another respect, if one considers, one finds the body like a horse, the soul like the rider, this world like a racecourse, and works like the race.

In another respect, if one considers, one finds the soul like a farmer, the body like the farm, works like seeds and produce, death like the reaping, and the next world like the threshing floor, as we explained in the treatise on "The wisdom in death."<sup>8</sup>

Elsewhere in the same treatise, the *Ikh-wān al-Şafā'* point out similarities between the human body and the existent things of the visible world, where the four pillars or mothers combine to produce the children. The correspondences between the great and small worlds mentioned here have resonated down through the Islamic intellectual and poetical tradition to recent times. It should be kept in mind that the four elements—earth, air, water, and fire—are qualities rather than concrete substances. They are not identical with the substances that go by these names in the visible world, since the elements are noncompound or "simple" (*basīṭ, mufrad*), which is to say that they are not found in the visible world, which is made totally of compound things (*murak-kabāt*). Even when our authors do not state this explicitly, they discuss the elements in order to bring out the qualities pertaining to the different elements that are found in the compound things.

Below the moon there are four pillars. These are the mothers through whom the things that are born—the animals, plants, and minerals—subsist. In the same way, within the structure of the body are found four members that make up the whole of the body: the head, the breast, the belly, and the area from the abdomen to the bottom of the feet. These four correspond to those four. This is because the head corresponds to the element fire in respect of visual rays and sensory movement.

The breast corresponds to the element air because of the breath and the breathing of air. The belly corresponds to the element water in respect of the moistures within it. The area from the abdomen to the bottom of the feet corresponds to the element earth, because it is established upon the earth, just as the other three are established above and around the earth.

These four pillars give rise to vapors from which winds, clouds, rain, animals, plants, and minerals are engendered. In the same way the four members give rise to vapors in the human body, like mucous from the nostrils, tears from the eyes, and saliva from the mouth, the winds born in the belly, and the liquids that come out, like urine, excrement, and others.

The structure of the human body is like the earth, its bones are like the mountains, its bones' marrow like the minerals, its abdomen like the ocean, its intestines like rivers, its veins like streams, its flesh like the land, its hair like plants, the places where hair grows like good soil, the places where it does not grow like briny earth, the face down to the feet like a flourishing city, the back like a ruins, the front of the face like the east, behind the back like the west, the right hand like the south, the left hand like the north, the breathing like the winds, the person's speech like the thunder, his shouts like lightning, his laughter like daylight, his weeping like rain, his despair and sorrow like the darkness of night, his sleep like death, his wakefulness like life, the days of his youth like days of spring, the days of his young manhood like the days of summer, the days of his maturity like the days of autumn, the days of his old age like the days of winter.

His movements and acts are like the movements and turning of the planets, his birth and his presence like ascendent constellations, his death and his absence like constellations that have set. . . .

Just as the sun is the head of the planets in the celestial sphere, so also among men there are kings and leaders. Just as the planets are connected to the sun and to each other, so also are people connected to kings and to each other. Just as the planets turn away from the sun through strength and increase of light, so also people turn away from kings through power to rule, robes of honor, and high degrees.

Just as Mars is related to the sun, so is the head of the army related to the king. Just as

Mercury is related to the sun, so are scribes and viziers related to kings. Just as Jupiter is related to the sun, so are judges and possessors of knowledge related to the kings. . . .

Just as the moon is related to the sun, so also are rebels related to kings. That is because the moon takes light from the sun at the beginning of the month until it stands face to face with it and resembles it in light, becoming similar to it in its condition. In the same way, rebels follow the command of kings. Then they refuse to obey them and struggle against them in the kingdom.

In addition, the states of the moon are similar to the states of the things of this world, that is, animals, plants, etc., since the moon begins increasing in light and perfection at the beginning of the month until it becomes complete in the middle of the month. Then it starts to decrease and dissolve and is effaced by the end of the month. In the same way, the states of the inhabitants of this world increase in the beginning. They never cease growing and being configured until they are complete and perfect. Then they begin to decline and decrease until they dissolve and come to nothing.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Azīz al-Dīn Nasafī (d. ca. 695/1295) demonstrates the same type of analogical thinking within the context of a simplified and more or less popularized version of the teachings of Ibn al-'Arabī:

When the sperm drop falls into the womb, it represents the First Substance. When the embryo has four strata, it represents the elements and the natures. When the members appear, the outward members—like the head, the hands, the stomach, the private part, and the feet—represent the seven climes. The inward members—like the lungs, the brain, the kidney, the heart, the gallbladder, the liver, and the spleen—represent the seven heavens.

The lungs are the first heaven and represent the sphere of the moon, since the moon is the lungs of the macrocosm, the intermediary between the two worlds. There are many angels in this sphere, while the angel who is in charge of temperate water and air is the leader of these angels.

The brain is the second heaven and represents the sphere of Mercury, since Mercury is the brain of the macrocosm. There are many angels in this sphere, while the angel who is in charge of learning to write, acquiring



knowledge, and managing livelihood is the leader of these angels. His name is Gabriel, and Gabriel is the secondary cause of the knowledge of the people of the world.

The kidneys are the third heaven and represent the sphere of Venus, since Venus is the kidney of the macrocosm. There are many angels in this sphere, and the angel who is in charge of joy, happiness, and appetite is the leader of these angels.

The heart is the fourth heaven and represents the sphere of the sun, since the sun is the heart of the macrocosm. There are many angels in this sphere, and the angel who is in charge of life is the leader of these angels. His name is Seraphiel, and Seraphiel is the secondary cause of the life of the inhabitants of the world.

The spleen is the fifth heaven and represents the sphere of Mars, since Mars is the spleen of the macrocosm. There are many angels in this sphere, and the angel who is in charge of severity, wrath, beating, and killing is the leader of these angels.

The liver is the sixth heaven and represents the sphere of Jupiter, since Jupiter is the liver of the macrocosm. There are many angels in this sphere, and the angel who is in charge of provision is the leader of these angels. His name is Michael, and he is the secondary cause of the provision of the inhabitants of the world.

The gallbladder is the seventh heaven and represents the sphere of Saturn, for Saturn is the gallbladder of the macrocosm. There are many angels in this sphere, and the angel who is in charge of taking spirits [at death] is the leader of these angels. His name is Azrael, and he is the secondary cause of the taking of the spirits of the inhabitants of the world.

The animal spirit is the Footstool and represents the sphere of the fixed stars, since the sphere of the fixed stars is the Footstool of the macrocosm. There are many angels in this sphere.

The psychic spirit is the Throne and represents the sphere of the spheres, since the sphere of the spheres is the Throne of the macrocosm.

The intellect is the vicegerent of God.

As long as the bodily members do not grow and develop, they represent the minerals. When they grow and develop, they represent plants. When sensation and volitional movement appear, they represent animals.<sup>10</sup>

## Qualitative Levels

Different things in the universe give news of God in diverse ways and various degrees. God is Light, and "There is no light but Light." Nevertheless, the unreal light of others is somehow similar to His light. Wherever the quality of luminosity is found, this is a trace of the divine Light. A glowing ember manifests light, as does the sun. Neither of these is true light, but all the same, the light of the sun is more intense and more real than the light of the ember.

Every divine attribute exhibits the same characteristic: It is found in varying degrees throughout creation. When we consider the cosmos as a hierarchy of the differing intensities of a specific attribute, we see that the hierarchy grows up out of the distinction between God and the cosmos. God possesses the attribute fully. In and of itself the "other"—anything in the cosmos, or the cosmos itself—has nothing of the attribute. If we can speak of the attribute as being present in the cosmos, we do so inasmuch as the attribute is borrowed from God, much as light is borrowed from the sun.

Take, for example, the distinction between Light (*nūr*) and darkness (*ẓulma*). God is sheer and utter Light, with no admixture of darkness. Light is God, Being, Reality. In contrast, darkness is utter nonexistence, utter unreality. The cosmos in itself is darkness, since "in itself"—without God's support—it does not exist. But inasmuch as the cosmos may be said to exist and act as a locus within which the signs of God are manifest, it is a mixture of light and darkness, often called "brightness" (*diyā*). What is more, the cosmos manifests brightness on an indefinite number of levels in every conceivable intensity. Each thing in the cosmos reflects light in a different degree. There is a vast if not infinite hierarchy ranging from the least luminous created thing to the most luminous. Hence, on the basis of the initial distinction between absolute light and absolute darkness, we quickly reach a spectrum ranging from the brightest to the darkest. And between the two absolutes, all qualities are relative.

Each thing is bright in relation to absolute darkness, or dark in relation to absolute Light."

Many divine attributes can be analyzed in a similar way. Thus, for example, God is absolute Power, while nothingness is absolute lack of power. The cosmos is the place of a hierarchy ranging from the strongest to the weakest.

God is absolute Life, while nothingness is absolute death. The cosmos is a hierarchy ranging from the weakest degree of life—or the most intense degree of existing death—to the most intense degree of life, manifest in those angels who are everlasting. But of course, in the last analysis, "Everything is perishing but His face" (28:88) or His reality, so everything is touched by death except God Himself.

Gradation in the cosmos always has to do with qualitative distinctions. Different qualities allow for different degrees. The most fundamental gradation is that of light or its synonym, Being or existence (*wujūd*), and this is the hierarchy of existing worlds. We will return to the question of ontological hierarchy later. Here I want to stress the different degrees in which the things of the cosmos manifest various divine attributes.

The same basic attributes are found in the whole cosmos, and each thing by force of its circumstances must manifest certain attributes in some mode. Hence analogies can be established among outwardly disparate realities by the fact that they manifest the same qualities. It is these qualitative analogies that form the fundamental subject matter of the sapiential tradition with which we are concerned. Upon them is built the Tao of Islam.

It is important to grasp here that the same attributes are found (or concealed) in every domain of existence. Distinctions among domains are related to the fact that different domains reflect or manifest the divine attributes in different degrees. The *Ikh-wān al-Ṣafā'* provide an early and clear explanation of this principle:

Know, brother, that the attributes of God in which none of His creatures share and the knowledge whereby nothing else is known

are that He is Beginner, Deviser, Creator, Engenderer, Powerful, Knowing, Alive, Existent, Originator, Eternal, and Active. Moreover, out of His generosity toward existence, He gives these attributes to existence in an appropriate and fitting way.

Hence He effuses upon the Intellect [the first creation] that it be beginner, effectuator, alive, powerful, deviser, knowing, active, existence. Hence the Intellect acts as beginning for that which appears from it. It is active while being the object of an act. It effectuates while being effected and caused. It gives life to that which is below it just as life was given to it. It exists through the existence of the acts that emerge from it.

The same thing can be said about the sharing of His attributes by the spiritual and corporeal beings. These are particular attributes that are said metaphorically (*maqāla majāz-iyya*) to belong to these beings. The attributes are connected (*iqtirān*) to them along with their opposites, just as existence is connected with nonexistence, knowledge with ignorance, life with death, power with incapacity, movement with rest, and light with darkness. All the existent things described by these attributes are connected to their opposites, by which God is not described. No, He is Creator of existence and nonexistence, so He alone possesses subsistence. He brings knowledge and ignorance into existence, so He possesses knowledge exclusively.

So also is the existence of the acts and works of both the spiritual and the corporeal creatures. These acts and works correspond to the deposits placed within them and the traces effused upon them through the fact that some of them acquire from others. This is true to the extent that He brings all of them into existence and gives life to them. Then He is not described by the meaning of their attributes, nor are they worthy of sharing with Him in them. But they possess degrees and stations. Each of them has an attribute through which it is greater than what lies below it. Each possesses the excellence of this attribute exclusively. This attribute is an existent thing that is not hidden from those who ponder. For example, take the attribute of power in all animals, from a minnow to the human being. Every individual animal has a power whereby it is distinguished from the others. The final stage is the power of the human being over all of them, whether through a corporeal strength, or through a disposition of the soul.

Then there is the knowledge that is pos-

sessed exclusively by human beings whereby they are distinguished from animals. All human beings share in this knowledge, but this is not an equal sharing, rather a sharing of incomparability, separation, exaltation in ranks, and ranking in degrees.<sup>12</sup> The final stage is their gnosis of God, achieved by the prophet in his own time and the sage in his time. It is effused upon them by the strength of the person's connection to that upper world which is singled out for knowledge, a world that can rightly be the teacher of everyone below it. And you should know that the human being who gives people knowledge of what they need is the vicegerent of God among them, His trustee over them.

Then there is life, which is also shared by all animals, all those described by movement from place to place. And every animal possesses movement and life. But they are not equal, since they do not exist in a single state. Some of them have short lifespans, others long lifespans, and others between the two. The one singled out for everlasting life is the one who passes from the form of humanity to the form of the angels, from what is below the sphere of the moon to what is above it.

So also is the attribute of the spiritual beings and the angels. They also share in these attributes in differing degrees. Each one of them has an apportioned part and a known limit.<sup>13</sup>

### *Human All-Comprehensiveness*

Within the created world, human beings occupy a peculiar position not shared by any other creature. The nature of this position is expressed in many ways, such as the "Trust" accepted by humans but rejected by the heavens, the earth, and the mountains (33:72). In seeking to explain the ontological and cosmological roots of this unique human situation, our authors frequently contrast the manner in which qualities appear in the macrocosm and the microcosm. Though they constantly speak of similarities and correspondences, these are not seen to be matters of human convention or linguistic accidents. Rather, they are ontological realities, much more deeply embedded in

the structure of the universe than those quantitative attributes that keep macrocosm and microcosm separate, such as temporal and spatial factors.

In the Sufi tradition, especially Ibn al-<sup>5</sup>Arabī and his followers, the qualitative analogy between macrocosm and microcosm is established primarily in terms of the divine names. The macrocosm is viewed as the locus of manifestation for all the names of God, but spread out in an indefinitely vast expanse of time and space. God was a Hidden Treasure wanting to be known, so He made the Treasure manifest. Every jewel in the infinite treasury was placed within the domain of "otherness," which can be divided into two fundamental worlds, the unseen and the visible. Or, if we want to be more careful about protecting the divine incomparability, we can say that every jewel remained hidden in the Divine Treasure, but the infinite Light of God, by shining through the jewels, spread the qualities of each jewel throughout the worlds. Jāmī (d. 898/1492) has this analogy in mind in the following quatrain. He explains his meaning in the prose passage that follows:

The entities were all colored windows  
upon which fell the rays of Being's Sun.  
In every window—red, yellow, blue—  
the light appeared in the window's color.

The light of God's Being—"And God's is the highest likeness" [16:60]—is like sensory light, while the realities and immutable entities are like different colored pieces of glass. The variegations of the self-manifestation of the Real within those realities and entities is like the diverse colors.

The colors of light show themselves according to the colors of the glass, which is light's veil. But in actual fact, light has no color. If the glass is clear and white, light appears within it as clear and white. If the glass is dark and colored, light appears dark and colored. At the same time, light in itself is one, simple, and all-encompassing. It has no color and no shape. In a similar way, the light of the Real's Being has a self-manifestation with each reality and entity. If that reality and entity should be near to simplicity, luminosity, and clarity—such as the entities of disengaged intellects and souls—Being's

light appears in that locus of manifestation in extreme clarity, luminosity, and simplicity. If instead it is far from simplicity, like the entities of corporeal things, then Being's light will appear dense, even though, in itself, it is neither dense nor subtle.

Hence it is He—exalted and holy is He—who is the true One, free of form, attribute, color, and shape at the level of unity. And it is also He who manifests Himself within the multiple loci of manifestation in diverse forms, in accordance with His names and attributes.<sup>14</sup>

Once the light of God brings about the manifestation of the jewels of the Hidden Treasure within the cosmos, we can discern different levels of intensity in manifestation. The further we move away from the Treasure itself, the closer we get to dispersion and darkness. The further we ascend toward the Treasure, the closer we approach Unity and luminosity.

To return to the analogy of the jewels being brought out of the Hidden Treasure, one might expand upon it as follows: The jewels are kept in a single infinite safe under lock and key. As the Treasure is revealed, they are taken out in sacks to the spiritual world, the rubies in one sack, the emeralds in another, the pearls in another. Then the sacks are opened and the jewels are poured individually into the rest of the universe, where they mix together and are covered with grime. Few indeed are those who recognize them for what they are. The analogy cannot do justice to the actual situation, of course, since the jewels we know cannot occupy more than one place at one time. But these jewels from the Hidden Treasure remain in safekeeping, while also being distributed in sacks. They remain in the sacks, while also being scattered throughout the visible universe.

The cosmos as a whole displays every jewel in the Treasure, but in a mode of indefinite deployment. In other words, every divine name finds many loci of manifestation in the universe. In contrast, the microcosm also contains every jewel, but here they are found in a mode of unity and concentration. One might say that God placed in the human being one jewel from each

sack. Since all diamonds are fundamentally the same, by having one diamond in their makeup, human beings have a kinship with all diamond entities.

Most commonly our texts explain this doctrine by expanding upon the idea of the divine names, thus avoiding the drawbacks and limitations of concrete imagery. Each name represents a quality. Each name can be analyzed in terms of its scope (*ṣā'a*), or the degree to which it is reflected within the multiple phenomena of the universe. Some attributes are reflected in all things, some in many things, some in a few things, some in only one species.

In short, the macrocosm manifests all the names of God, but in a differentiated mode. The microcosm manifests all names, but in a relatively undifferentiated mode. On the divine level, the undifferentiation of the names is represented by the Hidden Treasure, locked and sealed. But we know that the jewels are in God, waiting to manifest their properties. It is this level of reality that is designated by the name Allah, the "all-comprehensive name" (*al-ism al-jāmi'*). This name refers both to God as such, without regard to the names, and to God as possessing all the names. Each name refers to Allah. Each denotes the single Essence (*al-dhāt*), other than which there is no true reality. But each denotes that Essence in terms of a specific relationship that the Essence assumes with created things. Only the name Allah denotes that reality as embracing all relationships and non-relationships.

The cosmos as a whole manifests all these names. So also does the human being. Hence Ibn al-<sup>ʿ</sup>Arabī calls the human being "the all-comprehensive engendered thing" (*al-kawn al-jāmi'*).<sup>15</sup> That is why, our authors tell us, the Prophet said that Adam was created in the image or form (*ṣūra*) of "Allah," not any other divine name. All this is implied in the story of Adam's creation in the Koran, where he is taught "all the names" (2:31).

But why was the human being created? This also is explained by the hadith of the Hidden Treasure. God "wanted [or "loved"] to be known," and it is human beings alone who can know God in His fullness, as com-

prehending all the names, since only they were created in the form of the all-comprehensive name. God's love for the type of knowledge that can be actualized only by human beings brought the world into existence. Jāmī speaks for the whole sapiential tradition when he recounts the story of the creation of Adam from the Koran (2:30–34), drawing a number of conclusions about the nature of human beings. The passage is from his *mathnawī*, *Silsilat al-dhahab*. Each poetical section is preceded by a short summary in prose.

Explaining that the children of Adam do not know their own perfection and imperfection, since they were not created for themselves. On the contrary, they were created for other than themselves. He who created them created them only for Himself, not for them. He gave them only what would be proper for them in order to belong to Him. Were they to know that they were created for their Lord, they would know that God created the creatures in the most perfect form. . . .

People always believe  
that they were created for themselves.  
Whatever appears to them as appropriate,  
they consider to be good and perfect,  
But whatever they imagine as inappropriate  
they put into the category of imperfection.  
But this belief is error itself,  
since they were created for God.  
The goal of their creation, whatever it might  
be, cannot be surpassed.  
In reality the human being's perfection is that  
which is desired from his existence by  
God.  
From the existence of the things God only  
wanted  
the manifestation of His names or  
attributes.  
No matter what appears in the courtyard of  
the cosmos,  
the goal is manifesting the property of a  
name.  
If we suppose that a thing did not come to  
exist,  
how could the property of the name be  
shown?  
That is why the Prophet addressed  
his Companions long ago, saying,  
"If there were to appear from you no work  
within which there was the taint of sin,

God would create people of error  
so that they might sin and err,  
And then ask forgiveness for that sin,  
making manifest the property of the  
Forgiver."<sup>16</sup>

Here Jāmī voices one of the typically Islamic arguments in theodicy: Since God is forgiving, sins must exist, or else there would be nothing to forgive. It is His quality of forgiveness which, in the last analysis, brings about sinfulness. Aḥmad Sam'ānī (d. 534/1140) gives us a more poetical rendition of the same principle (even though he writes in prose) as follows. He quotes God's hidden command to all things:

"O tree, put up your head next to Adam's throne! O appetite for the fruit, enter into Adam's heart! O accursed one, let loose the reins of your whispering! O Eve, you show the way! O Adam, don't eat the fruit, have self-restraint! O self-restraint, don't come near Adam!"

O God, God, what is all this? "We want to bring Adam down from the throne of indifference to the earth of need. We want to make manifest the secret of love."

"O servant, avoid disobedience and stay away from caprice! O caprice, you take his reins! O world, you display yourself to him! O servant, you show self-restraint! O self-restraint, don't come near him!"

O God, God, what is all this? "We want to make the servant plead with Us. We want to make manifest Our attribute of forgiveness."<sup>17</sup>

Ibn al-ʿArabī and his followers employ the same line of reasoning to argue for the necessity of that which is. Everything depends upon God's names. And God's names are not accidents, deducible by us because of the nature of phenomena. On the contrary, God's names—revealed in that self-manifestation of God known as His Word, the Koran—designate the very nature of Reality. It is we and phenomena that derive from the names, not the names that derive from our speculation. Hence sin itself, which God defines through the Sharia, is brought about by God's desire to show His mercy and forgiveness. As Ibn al-ʿArabī writes,

The power of the form in which human beings were created demands that God threaten them with punishment. But God's wisdom demands that the divine names be given their rights. The names All-forgiver, Forgiver, and their sisters have properties only because of opposition to the Sharia. If no one acted against the Sharia, these names would not receive their rights in this abode.<sup>18</sup>

Jāmī continues his discussion of human all-comprehensiveness by explaining why the angels objected to God's creation of Adam: Since they were limited in their configuration and knew only some of the divine names, they could not grasp God's wisdom.

Explaining that the angels were not able to grasp this meaning. Hence they loosed the tongue of criticism against Adam and gave witness that he would "do corruption in the earth and shed blood" [2:30].

It was outside the plane of the angels  
for them to comprehend this subtlety.  
When Adam was honored with his robe,  
they had to speak with arrogance and  
pretension:

"O God, we call Thee glorified,  
we sing Thy praises, we put things in  
order.

"Why dost Thou stir up a form from water  
and clay,  
one who will work corruption and shed  
much blood?"

"Here in Thy threshold Thou hast the most  
excellent.  
What is the wisdom in creating the less  
excellent?"

"When you have a rose, what good are thorns  
and twigs?  
When you have a phoenix, why do you  
need a fly?"

Then God taught Adam the names,  
all of them—that is, the realities of things.  
In the gnostic's view, the "names of God"  
are nothing but the realities of all that  
exists.

God taught Adam each of these names,  
He let him understand the attributes of His  
Essence.

Then He said to the angels,  
"Tell Me about these names."  
They all turned away from their own  
arrogance.  
Each one admitted its own incapacity.

"We know nothing beyond what Thou hast  
taught,  
we grasp nothing beyond what Thou hast  
given.

"Our creation is Thy handiwork,  
our knowledge and vision are Thy mercy.  
"Whatever Thou hast shown us, we know—  
whatever lies beyond that, we know not."  
Then for the second time He made this call,  
now to Adam: "Tell Me the names,  
"Those names through which you become  
manifest,  
since you have knowledge of all their  
mysteries."

At the command of God, Adam spoke,  
detailing those names, one by one,  
For of everything  
Adam is the whole, all else the part.  
Everything in the parts is found in the whole,  
but the part cannot encircle the whole.  
No part has a perfect grasp of the whole,  
but the whole knows the situation of every  
part.

When the whole comes to know itself  
all the parts become the objects of its  
knowledge.  
But if the part comes to know itself  
it cannot know more than itself—  
Even if it should gain knowledge of itself,  
it will remain ignorant of the other parts.

Explaining that the child of Adam is the  
whole, while all other things are like parts:

What is a child of Adam? An all-comprehen-  
sive isthmus [*barzakh*],  
the form of creation and the Real found  
within;  
An undifferentiated transcription, announcing  
the Essence of the Real and His ineffable  
attributes;

Connected to the subtleties of the  
Invincibility,  
comprising the realities of the Dominion;  
His inward self drowned in the ocean of  
Oneness,  
his outward self dry-lipped on the shore of  
separation.

Not a single attribute of God  
escapes manifestation within his essence.  
He is knowing, hearing, and seeing,  
speaking and desiring, alive and powerful.  
So too of the realities of the cosmos,  
each is found embodied within him,  
Whether the celestial spheres or the elements,  
the minerals, the plants, or the animals.  
Written within him is the form of good and  
evil,

kneaded into him is the habit of devil and  
 beast.  
 Were he not the mirror of the Abiding Face,  
 why did the angels prostrate themselves to  
 him?  
 He is the reflection of the beauty of the Holy  
 Presence.  
 If Iblis cannot fathom this, what does it  
 matter?  
 Whatever was concealed in the Hidden  
 Treasure God made manifest in Adam.  
 His existence is the final cause  
 of the manifestation and appearance of  
 creation,  
 For knowledge was the motive for creation,  
 and he is the outward locus for its  
 perfection.<sup>19</sup>

### *Children of the Elements*

Everything in the cosmos manifests the names and attributes of God, while the macrocosm as a whole manifests the properties of all God's names. In the same way, everything in the human being manifests God's names and attributes, while the individual human being as a whole—at least in the case of those who are fully human and have become God's vicegerents—manifests all God's names. Hence the difference between a human being and any other individual creature goes back to human wholeness (or potentiality for such) and the partialness of everything else.

One of the most common ways in which human wholeness is illustrated is by comparing the human being to the other children of the elements: minerals, plants, and animals. In minerals, we find few divine qualities, and those only through employing imagination and metaphor. We can say that inanimate things show the effect of God's creativity and power, while precious minerals, such as gold and diamonds, stand at the pinnacle of mineral possibilities, since they manifest the divine qualities of light and beauty in the manner most appropriate to inanimate existence.

In plants certain divine attributes are clearly reflected, such as life and power, while others can be discerned without a great stretch of the imagination. For exam-

ple, plants reflect the divine attribute of knowledge, since they "know" how to find nourishment and light. Many of them manifest God's bounty and generosity through their produce and fruit.

Animals have a still greater concentration of divine attributes, since they manifest in a rather clear way the "four pillars of divinity": life, knowledge, desire, and power. Traces of other attributes can also be found. But it is in the human being that the divine perfections begin to manifest themselves in full abundance and with great intensity. All the divine attributes are present, at least potentially, in all humans. And the degree to which these attributes can be actualized can be guessed only by studying the lives of the greatest exemplars of the human race, who, in the Islamic view, are the prophets and the friends of God. So also great heroes, kings, artists, poets, statesmen—all manifest in more limited domains the extent to which the divine qualities can be actualized.

The four children of the elements—minerals, plants, animals, and human beings—are ranked in a natural hierarchy on the basis of the qualities that they can manifest. A clear progression can be seen in most of these attributes by meditating upon the qualities present in the ascending degrees of the children. Knowledge, for example, increases steadily through the levels, and on the human level no limits to the degree of its actualization can be imagined.

In the early Muslim philosophical tradition, the ontological levels represented by the four children are seldom discussed explicitly in terms of divine attributes, but rather in terms taken over from Greek philosophy. In the following passage, I quote from the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', who look at the ascending levels of macrocosmic existence, all of which are repeated in the microcosm, in terms of the qualities they manifest. An uninformed reader might see this discussion as a primitive form of evolutionism, but that would be to mix the quantitative approach of modern science with the qualitative approach of the Muslim sages. In fact, it is a question of the progression and increasing intensity of qualities on different levels of manifestation. This is a static, ever-present

phenomenon, not one to be observed over vast stretches of time.

The existent things below the sphere of the moon are of two kinds: simple and compound. The simple things are the four pillars: fire, air, water, and earth. The compound things are the things that are born from them, the engendered, corruptible things: animals, plants, and minerals. The minerals are the first to be engendered, then plants, then animals, then the human being. Each kind possesses a characteristic that it is the first to acquire. The characteristic of the four pillars is the four natures—heat, cold, wetness, and dryness—and the transmutation of some of them into others. The characteristic of plants is to take nourishment and to grow. The characteristic of animals is sensation and movement. The characteristic of human beings is rational speech (*nutq*), reflection (*fikr*), and deducing logical proofs. The characteristic of the angels is that they never die.

Human beings may share the characteristics of all these kinds. Human beings have the four natures, which accept transmutation and change like the four pillars. They undergo generation and corruption like the minerals. They take nourishment and grow like the plants. They sense and move like the animals. And it is possible that they will never die, like the angels, as we explained in the "Treatise on Resurrection."<sup>20</sup>

The Sufi tradition usually formulates these same ideas in terms of divine names and attributes. In the following passage, 'Aziz al-Dīn Nasafī explains that the children of the elements differ among themselves according to the degree in which they manifest the attributes of the "spirit" (*rūḥ*). *Spirit* is the most common term our authors use for the direct reflection of the divine Unity on the created level. The inherent qualities of the spirit include luminosity, life, intelligence, desire, power, and the rest of the divine attributes. On its own level of existence, the spirit brings together all the attributes of God into a unified, created whole. Then the attributes of spirit are differentiated and projected into the visible world through the body. Neither body nor spirit can achieve its full perfection without the other. In the last analysis, the body is

merely the manifestation of the invisible qualities of the spirit within the visible world. Behind the four children stand four kinds of spirit, while the children manifest their qualities. But in fact, the four kinds of spirit are a single spirit.

A thing's constitution, literally its "mixture" (*mizāj*) of the four elements, allows the spirit to manifest itself in different intensities. A constitution near to "equilibrium" (*i'tidāl*) is able to bring together in a balanced way loci of manifestation for most or all the divine names. A constitution far from equilibrium can manifest only a few of the names. Nasafī refers to the names here in terms of what Ibn al-ʿArabī and his followers sometimes call the "seven leaders," the seven principle names upon which the existence of the cosmos depends: life, knowledge, desire, power, hearing, sight, and speech.

Constitutions are of two kinds: in equilibrium or not in equilibrium. The former kind is not found below the sphere of the moon. . . . Constitutions that are not in equilibrium have no more than three states: near to equilibrium, far from equilibrium, or intermediate between near and far.

The mineral body and mineral spirit appear from that which is far from equilibrium. The plant body and plant spirit appear from that which is intermediate. The animal body and animal spirit appear from that which is near to equilibrium. The human being is one kind of animal.

O dervish! It is this animal spirit which, by means of training and nurturing, by learning and repetition, and by spiritual struggle and invocations, rises up through the levels. At each level it takes on another name. . . . The spirit is not more than one. The body is with the spirit and the spirit with the body. The two are not separate.

O dervish! Each of the individual existent things has what is necessary for itself within itself. The spirit does not come from someplace, nor does it go anyplace. The spirit is light, and the cosmos is overflowing with this light. This light is the spirit of the cosmos, and this light takes the cosmos to perfection and keeps it moving—through nature at the level of plants, through volition at the level of animals, and through the intellect at the level of the human being. Thus a poet has said,



Go, find an eye! Every speck of dust,  
when you look, is a world-displaying cup.

O dervish! At one level this light is called "nature," at another level "spirit," at another level "intellect," and at another level "Non-delimited Light." All creatures of the cosmos are seeking this light. They seek for it outside of themselves, and the more they seek, the further from it they move. . . .

In the first level, life, knowledge, desire, power, hearing, sight, and speech do not exist in actuality. But as the levels ascend, gradually life, knowledge, desire, power, hearing, sight, and speech come into actualized existence. Perfection lies where the thing appears. Moreover, there is no doubt that the fruit is the subtlest and noblest level of a tree, and the fruit of the existent things is the human being. The Greatest Electuary, the Highest Elixir, the World-displaying Cup, and the Universe-displaying Mirror is the human being who possesses knowledge.

In other words, the light found in the spirit of the cosmos that is overflowing into the cosmos does not have actualized knowledge, desire, and power. Then the light ascends through the levels. As it does so, life, knowledge, desire, and power gradually come into actualized existence. That light is not separate from the locus of manifestation. It is related to it as cream is related to milk.<sup>21</sup>

### *The Myth of Adam's Creation*

Islamic thought puts human beings at center stage, but not human beings "objectively considered," but rather "qualitatively recognized." Muslims should seek for knowledge in order to know God, cosmos, and self. Ultimately, the highest knowledge lies in knowing ourselves, since "He who knows his own soul, knows his Lord."<sup>22</sup> Knowing one's own self means, among other things, knowing what it means to be human. Hence the myth of Adam is a constant point of reference in our texts. The question of its historicity is not brought up, since that is totally irrelevant to the story's meaning. And the story's meaning is found in the qualities that are ascribed to Adam and the other characters who are mentioned in the narrative.

Najm al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 654/1256), the author of one of the great Persian prose classics of Sufism, *Mirṣād al-ʿibād*,<sup>23</sup> retells the story of Adam's creation with close attention to the qualities that the tradition ascribes to human beings and other creatures. In so doing, he expresses in abbreviated form many of the major topics that will be brought out in the course of this book. He explains how the divine attributes become manifest within human beings and illustrates the close relationship between the microcosm and the macrocosm. Like Jāmī in the passage quoted above, he wants to clarify the meaning of the Koranic verses that refer to human all-comprehensiveness and the fact that the most luminous of creatures, the angels, were unable to fathom human nature.

At the beginning, Rāzī looks at the two grand movements that our authors observe in the macrocosm as a whole: the descent from the Origin (*mabdaʿ*) and the ascent to the Return (*maʿād*). The whole cosmos is frequently pictured as a circle made up of two arcs (*qaws*), the Arc of Descent and the Arc of Ascent. The top of the circle corresponds to the First Intellect, while the bottom corresponds to the corporeal human body. Human beings as human beings begin ascending from the bottom point of the circle. If they reach the end of their journey, they join with the Active Intellect, which is identical in a certain mode with the First Intellect.

God said, "I am about to create a mortal from clay" [38:71]. The Prophet said, narrating the words of God, "I kneaded the clay of Adam with My two hands for forty days."<sup>24</sup>

You should know that when it was desired to fashion the human frame from the four elements—water, fire, wind, and earth—these were not kept in the attribute of simplicity. Rather, they were carried down through the descending degrees. The first descending degree was that of compoundness, for the element at the stage of simplicity is closer to the World of the Spirits, as was explained. When it is desired to bring the element to the station of compoundness, it must leave simplicity behind and advance to compoundness. Thereby it moves one descending degree away from

the World of the Spirits. When it comes to the vegetal station, it must pass beyond the station of compoundness and inanimateness. Hence it falls one descending degree further from the World of the Spirits. When it leaves the vegetal realm to join with the animal realm, it goes down one more descending degree. When it reaches the human station from the animal realm, it descends one more degree. There is no degree lower than the human person. This is the “lowest of the low.”

The “lowest of the low” is mentioned in the Koranic verse, “We created the human being in the most beautiful stature, then We drove him down to the lowest of the low” (95:4–5). In Rāzī’s interpretation, this “driving down” has to do with increasing multiplicity, dispersion, and distance from the World of the Spirits. These qualities become more and more manifest during the movement toward the outermost realm of existence, which in modern terms is called the “material world.” Elements are noncompound and invisible, belonging to a subtle domain of existence rather than the realm of density that can be seen. Minerals, plants, and animals display increasing diversity and distance from the original oneness of the elements.

But this is only to speak of the visible world, called the “Kingdom” (*mulk*). When we take the invisible world or the “Dominion” (*malakūt*) into account, the picture is different. Instead of a descent, an ascent is taking place. The elements themselves are nonmanifest, so the divine attributes are totally hidden within them. Inanimate objects display practically none of the luminous properties of the divine names. However, the “Dominion” or unseen dimension of plants is clearly ruled by the divine attribute life, and this becomes manifest in growth and reproduction. The “Dominion” of the animals adds to life such attributes as knowledge and desire. In short, although there is a descent into multiplicity, a corresponding ascent takes place through which creatures are able to manifest more and more of the divine names. This ascent reaches its peak in the human being, or rather, in perfect human beings. Rāzī continues his discussion:

These words have to do with the elements, which, through changing states, go down through the descending degrees that mark distance from the spirits. However, if you look at the Dominion of inanimate objects, after passing through several levels it reaches the human level. Hence, this is a question of ascending degrees, not descending degrees. At each station, the Dominion moves closer to the spirits, not further from it. However, we were talking about the form of the elements, which is the Kingdom, not the Dominion of the elements. . . . Thus it is clear that the highest of the high is the human spirit, while the lowest of the low is the human frame. . . .

My shaykh, the king of his age, Majd al-Dīn Baghdādī, said in a collection of his writings: “Glory be to Him who brought together the nearest of the near and the farthest of the far through His power!”

The human frame belongs to the lowest of the low while the human spirit belongs to the highest of the high. The wisdom in this is that human beings have to carry the burden of the Trust—knowledge of God. Hence they have to possess the strength of both worlds to perfection. For there is nothing in the two worlds that has their strength, that it might be able to carry the burden of the Trust. They possess this strength through attributes, not through form.

Since the human spirit pertains to the highest of the high, nothing in the World of the Spirits can have its strength, whether angels, satans, or anything else. In the same way the human soul pertains to the lowest of the low, so nothing in the World of the Souls can have its strength, whether beasts, predators, or anything else. . . .

In the kneading of the clay of Adam, all the attributes of satans, predators, beasts, plants, and inanimate objects were actualized. However, that clay was singled out for the attribution of “My two hands.” Hence each of these blameworthy attributes was a shell. Within each was placed the pearl of a divine attribute. You know that the sun’s gaze turns granite into a shell that contains pearls, garnets, rubies, emeralds, turquoises, and agates.

Adam was singled out for “I kneaded the clay of Adam with My two hands” for the period of “forty days,” and according to one tradition, each day was equivalent to one thousand years. Consider then—for which pearl was Adam’s clay the shell? And this honoring of Adam was before the spirit was blown into him. This was the good fortune of

the bodily frame, which was to be the palace of the vicegerent. For forty thousand years He labored through His own Lordship. Who knows what treasures He prepared there?

This passage expresses, among other things, the great respect that Muslims in general accord to God's creation. That human beings are made in the form of God extends to the bodily frame. Earth, in spite of all its lowliness, has a tremendous rank in the eyes of God. Rāzī deals with this issue within one context, and in later passages we will see Ibn al-ʿArabī and others bringing out the divine roots of the fact that the earth, the body, and all yin realities are eminently honorable. The general principle reverberates throughout Islamic thought and, of course, goes back to the fact that on one level the Tao of Islam demands equal respect for yang and yin.

Rāzī next provides some of the accounts that are given about God's sending the various angels to gather the earth from which Adam would be molded. In spite of all the angelic entreaty, the earth refused to come.

The first honor that was bestowed upon the earth was that it was called to God's Presence by several messengers, but it pretended not to care. It said, "We know nothing of the mystery of these words." . . . Yes, such is the rule: The more people deny love, the higher they rise once they become lovers. Just wait, everything will be turned upside down.

For a while I denied love for the idols—  
My denial threw me into days like this.

In this state, all the angels were biting the fingers of wonder with the teeth of astonishment: "What kind of mystery is this? Lowly earth has been summoned to the Presence of Inaccessibility with all this honor. In spite of its perfect lowliness and despicableness, the earth keeps on pretending not to care and makes itself unapproachable. Nevertheless, the Presence of Independence, Utter Freedom, and Perfect Jealousy does not leave it. He does not summon anyone else in its place. He does not discuss this mystery with anyone else." . . .

The Divine Gentlenesses and Lordly Wis-

dom spoke softly into the inmost mystery of the angels, "I know what you know not" [2:30]: "How should you know what business I have with this handful of earth from eternity without beginning to eternity without end? . . . Be patient for a few days while I show the handiwork of My power through this handful of earth. I will polish the rust of creation's darkness from the face of the mirror of its original nature. You will see the changing pictures of a chameleon in its mirror. The first picture will be that all will have to prostrate themselves before it."

Then from the cloud of generosity the rain of love fell down on Adam's earth, making the earth into clay. He made a heart of clay within clay with the hand of power.

Love's dew made clay of Adam's earth,  
throwing uproar and tumult into the world.  
Love's lancet pierced the spirit's vein—  
out fell a drop. They called it heart. . . .

According to some traditions, for forty thousand years the divine power, in accordance with perfect wisdom, exercised its handiwork on the water and clay of Adam between Mecca and Tā'if. In his outward and inward dimensions the divine power set up mirrors corresponding to the divine attributes. Each mirror was the locus of manifestation for one of the attributes of Divinity. It is well known that one thousand and one mirrors corresponding to one thousand and one attributes were employed. . . .

Strange to say, God's uncaused solicitude showed several thousand kindnesses and tenderesses to the soul and heart of Adam in the Unseen and the Visible, but none of the angels brought nigh were told the secret. None of them recognized Adam. One by one they passed by Adam. They would say, "What strange picture is this that He is painting? What kind of chameleon is He bringing out from behind the veil of the Unseen?"

Beneath his lips Adam was saying, "Though you do not know me, I know you. Just wait till I lift my head from this sweet sleep. I will list your names one by one." For among the pearls that had been buried within him was the knowledge of all the names: "And He taught Adam all the names" [2:31].

Up until this point, Rāzī has explained that human beings are set apart from all other creatures because they are made in the

divine form, comprehending all the attributes of God. Now he turns to the great consequence of having been created in God's form: Everything found in differentiated form in the macrocosm is found in an undifferentiated mode within the microcosm. Rāzī makes this point by telling how Iblis—Satan—attempted to discover Adam's mystery. Note the qualities attributed to Iblis as soon as he appears: deceit and having only one eye. The first quality is perhaps to be expected, the second is not so clear. It alludes to the fact that Iblis—or the microcosmic equivalent, which is the lower soul, called "the soul that commands to evil"—perceives only the "form" (*ṣūra*) of things, not their "meaning" (*mā'nā*). Iblis lacks the light of intellect (*'aql*), though he is clever and cunning, and hence he is unable to perceive the signs of God for what they are. He sees the immediate context of things, but cannot grasp the beginnings and ends of things. Rūmī often refers to Iblis as one eyed, as in the following:

With both eyes, see the beginning and the end! Beware, be not one eyed, like the accursed Iblis!<sup>25</sup>

Close your Iblis-like eye for a moment. After all, how long will you gaze upon form? How long? How long?<sup>26</sup>

The reader will remember that—according to most authorities—Iblis was one of the jinn and not one of the angels, since he is made of fire, while they are made of light. However, his aeons of piety had brought him into their proximity, so he mixed freely with them.

However much the angels examined Adam, they did not come to know what sort of all-comprehensive reality he was. But Iblis the deceitful was once walking around Adam. Gazing upon him with his one squint eye, he saw that Adam's mouth was open. He said, "Just wait. Now I have found a way to undo the knot of our problem. I will enter this hole and see what sort of place this is."

When Iblis went in and traveled around Adam's makeup, he found it to be a small world. He found there a representation of everything that he found in the large world. He found the head like the heaven with seven

strata. Just as the seven planets are in the seven heavens, so also he found that in the seven strata of the head are seven human faculties: imagination, intuition, reflection, memory, recollection, governing, and *sensus communis*. Just as there are angels in the heaven, there were in the head the sense of sight, hearing, smell, and taste. Iblis found his body to be like the earth: Just as in the earth are found trees, plants, flowing streams, and mountains, so there are found corresponding things in the body. The longer hair, such as the hair on the head, is like trees, while the shorter hair, such as the hair on the body, is like plants. There are veins like running streams and bones like mountains.

Just as in the macrocosm there are four seasons—spring, autumn, summer, and winter—so in Adam, who is the microcosm, there are the four natures: heat, cold, wetness, and dryness, prepared within four things—yellow bile, black bile, phlegm, and blood.

There is no need to continue with the details of Iblis's investigation, since the text is readily available and in any case it is similar to the passage from the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' quoted above. It is sufficient for our purposes to recognize that the macrocosm/microcosm relationship is common in Islamic thought and that it follows upon the idea that all qualities found in these two worlds derive from the divine names. The conclusion of this section of the passage provides a preview of the last chapter of this book, which is dedicated to the heart:

When Iblis had traveled the whole frame of Adam, he recognized the macrocosm in all the traces that he saw. However, when he reached the heart, he found it to be like a pavilion. In front of it, the breast was like the square erected before a royal palace. However much he tried to find a way into the pavilion so that he could go into the heart, he was not able to. He said to himself, "All that I have seen was easy. The difficult task is here. If I ever experience harm from this person, it will probably be from this place. If God has some special business with this frame or has prepared something within, it is probably in this place." With a hundred thousand thoughts, he turned back from the door of the heart in despair.

Iblis reports to the angels that nothing is to be feared from this hollow person, who is



being” is not the same as a “great human being.” Both are human, yet their attributes are fundamentally different. Moreover, each person undergoes transformations during his or her lifetime. One may cease being a small human being and become a great human being.

When representatives of the Islamic intellectual tradition refer to “human beings,” sometimes they have in mind what we would mean by the term today. But this is true only if they are using the term loosely, in the sense that it can refer to any child of Adam and Eve. In this meaning, no distinction is drawn between those who live up to the purpose of creation and those who do not. In the passage quoted above, Jāmī says, “In reality the human being’s perfection is that which is desired from his existence by God.” On every level, the Islamic tradition distinguishes between those who meet the expectations of God and those who do not, or those who live up to the human role in existence and those who do not. For example, on the most basic level of general belief, the Koran distinguishes between those who have faith and those who do not: the “believers” and the “unbelievers.” In all the perspectives of Islamic life and thought, people are separated into groups according to the degree to which they fulfill the purpose of life.

In the sapiential tradition, the goal of human life is frequently called “perfection” (*kamāl*). This is identified first with the station of the prophets and second, in the more philosophical perspective, with that of the great sages or, in the more Sufi approach, with the station of the “friends” of God (*awliyāʾ*). The most detailed and sophisticated exposition of the nature of this supreme human station is found in the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī. His position, here as elsewhere, has dominated the sapiential tradition down to modern times.<sup>28</sup> It is Ibn al-ʿArabī who makes the term “perfect human being” (*al-insān al-kāmil*) central to this whole discussion. Those who do not attain to perfection, he calls “animal human beings” (*al-insān al-hayawān*).

Human perfection is usually identified with the station of the vicegerents of God,

the first of whom was Adam, the object of God’s words, “I am placing in the earth a vicegerent” (2:30). As we have already seen, the particular eminence of the human being has to do with having been taught all the names of God, or acting as a locus of manifestation for the name Allah. Hence Ibn al-ʿArabī declares that only this attribute of being a “form of God” defines a true human being.<sup>29</sup>

All human beings, as children of Adam, manifest the form of God. But few human beings manifest it in its full actuality, harmony, and equilibrium. In effect, those who attain to perfection bring the name Allah, and thereby all the names of God, from potentiality within themselves to actuality in the cosmos. Those who fail to reach perfection actualize the qualities of only some of the names. Thereby they join the animals and other non-human beings, who are partial reflections of God.

The process of actualizing the names begins in the womb, where the unborn infant has the possibility of developing all the perfections of human existence. But at the beginning of the stay in the womb, the embryo does not manifest any more perfections of existence than an inanimate object. In effect, the embryo begins as a mineral, as the lowest “child” of Nature. As the embryo develops, it gradually assumes the perfections of the other children. It acquires the powers of growth and assimilation connected to plants, then various faculties connected with animals, such as sensation and volitional movement. When the infant is born, it is hardly more than an animal. The rational soul—the distinguishing mark of being human in the ordinary sense of the term—does not begin to manifest itself fully until around puberty. The human being continues to actualize potentialities throughout his or her life, in varying degrees and intensities. Those destined for perfection move even beyond the qualities usually referred to as human. They actualize qualities associated with angelic beings, such as pure intelligence and acting only according to the command of God. Ultimately they ascend beyond the angels and, like the Prophet during his *miʿrāj* (night journey) enter into the

Divine Presence. Rūmī provides many poetical accounts of this rise from the inanimate to the truly human. In typical fashion, he refers to the passage from a lower state to a higher state as a “death,” but a death that is really a birth into a higher realm of existence.

I died from the mineral kingdom and became a plant; I died to vegetative nature and attained to animality.

I died to animality and became a human being. So why should I fear? When did I ever become less through dying?

Next time I will die to human nature, so that I may spread my wings and lift my head among the angels. . . .

Once again, I will be sacrificed from angelic nature and become that which enters not the imagination.<sup>30</sup>

### *The Cosmic and Human Books*

Islamic texts frequently describe the universe as the book of God. This goes back to many Koranic passages connected to writing, such as the already mentioned fact that the Koran refers both to its own verses and to the phenomena of nature as “signs.” Human beings are made in God’s form, and mastery of speech in all its dimensions is one of the outstanding and exceptional attributes of both God and the human being. God’s speech is observed in three basic locations: the macrocosm, the microcosm, and the revealed books, the Koran in particular. The Koran employs closely related imagery to explain its own genesis and that of created things: The book is the spoken word of God, and the universe is the result of God’s saying to the things “Be!”

Though from the point of view of God’s incomparability we are forced to conclude that we do not know what it means to ascribe “speech” to God, we can also take the point of view of similarity. Since God is somehow similar to the creatures, a certain tentative validity will apply to the comparison between human and divine speech. We can learn something about the way God creates the world by investigating the way in

which we produce language. The analogy between people and God was not created in vain. It necessarily tells us something about the third term, the macrocosm, and about the relationship of all three to the true Speaker.

Since the macrocosm can be compared to a book, it follows naturally that the same image can be used for the microcosm. Thus, for example, Ibn al-‘Arabī refers to both microcosm and macrocosm as copies or transcriptions (*nuskha*) of everything found in the Divine Presence, which is the original of both copies. “The cosmos is a divine transcription upon a form of the Real.”<sup>31</sup> Human beings are “transcriptions of the Divine Presence,”<sup>32</sup> since they were created upon the form of God and reflect all the divine names. “The human being created upon the form of the All-merciful is the perfect transcription.”<sup>33</sup>

Both macrocosm and microcosm are transcriptions of the Divine Presence, so the two are copies of each other. But since the human being is equivalent to the whole cosmos, each human being is greater than any individual part of the cosmos. “The human being is the all-comprehensive word and the transcription of the cosmos. Everything in the cosmos is a part of the human being, while the human being is not a part of anything in the cosmos.”<sup>34</sup> It follows that human beings are transcriptions of both God and the cosmos: “The human being is a noble summary within which is gathered together the meaning of the macrocosm. God made him a transcription comprehending everything in the macrocosm and all the names of the Divine Presence.”<sup>35</sup>

The macrocosm manifests all the names of God in the mode of indefinite deployment, differentiation, and dispersion, while the microcosm displays them in the mode of unity, undifferentiation, and concentration. Using the analogy of the book, Nasafi explains the relationship between the small and large worlds as follows:

When God created the existent things, He called this the “cosmos” [*‘alam*], since the existent things are a “mark” [*‘alāma*] of His existence and His knowledge, desire, and power. O dervish! The existent things are in

one respect a mark, and in another respect a writing. In respect of being a writing, God called the cosmos a "book." Then He said, "Whoever reads this book will recognize Me and My knowledge, desire, and power."

At that time the readers were the angels. These readers were extremely tiny, while the book was extremely large. The readers could not see the edges of the book or all of its pages, since they were incapable of doing so. God saw this, and made a transcription of the cosmos, writing a summary of this book. He called the first the macrocosm and the second the microcosm, the first the large book and the second the small book. Whatever was in the large book He wrote in the small book, without increase or decrease, so that whosoever reads the small book will have read the large book.

Then God sent His vicegerent to this mi-

crocosm, the vicegerent of God being the intellect. When the intellect sat as vicegerent in the microcosm, all the angels of the microcosm prostrated themselves to it, save sensory intuition [*wahm*], which did not prostrate itself, refusing to do so. In the same way, when Adam sat as vicegerent in the macrocosm, all the angels prostrated themselves to Adam, save Iblis, who did not prostrate himself, refusing to do so.<sup>36</sup>

O dervish! In the microcosm, the intellect is God's vicegerent, while in the macrocosm the intelligent human being is God's vicegerent. All the macrocosm is the domain of God, while all the microcosm is the domain of God's vicegerent. When the intellect sat as vicegerent, it was addressed as follows: "Intellect, know thyself and thy own attributes and acts in order to know Me and My attributes and acts!"<sup>37</sup>