

Ibn 'Arabi's *Book of the Quintessence Concerning What Is Indispensable For the Spiritual Seeker*¹

Ibn 'Arabi on Our Discovery of 'Revelation' (*shar'*)

Ibn 'Arabi's *Book of the Quintessence* is so condensed that almost each line deserves further commentary. However, since he so often refers here—with intentional and very pointed ambiguity—to what is given or even 'said' to the seeker by 'revealed prescription' (*shar'*), it is very important to understand how broadly, but also very individually, he understands the actual reality/process to which that central term corresponds. The following famous passage is a particularly detailed and important expression of this understanding which is at the very foundation of all his writing:²

Now you must know that if a human being (al-insān) renounces their (own personal) aims, takes a loathing to their animal self (nafs) and instead prefers their Sustainer/Teacher (rabb), then the Real will give (that human being) a form of divine guidance in exchange for the form of their carnal self... so that they walk in garments of Light. And (this form) is the Sharī'a of their prophet and the Message of their messenger. Thus that (human being) receives from their Lord what contains their happiness--and some people see (this divine guidance) in the form of their prophet, while some see it in the form of their (spiritual) state.

In the former case, he continues,

'that (form) is the inner reality of that prophet and his spirit, or the form of an angel like him, (who) knows his sharī'a from God... And we ourselves have often received in this way the form of many things among the divinely revealed judgments (ahkām shar'iyya) which we had not learned about from the learned or from books. For if the form is not that of (that person's) prophet, then it still necessarily refers to their spiritual state or to the stage of the shar' with regard to that moment and that (particular) situation in which (that person) saw that vision....'

And even in that instance, *'apart from what is forbidden or enjoined (by the Sharia), there is no restriction on what (that person) accepts from (that vision), whether with regard to beliefs or other things--for God's Presence includes the totality of beliefs (jamī' al-'aqā'id).*

²*Futūhāt*, chapter 318 (III, 70.21 ff.). The language used throughout this passage pointedly emphasizes the universality of this situation. The repeated use of 'his prophet' or 'the form of his messenger' also refers to Ibn 'Arabi's insistence, throughout the *Futūhāt*, that the Friends of God (and ultimately all human beings) are 'following in the footsteps' of a certain prophet or prophets with whom they have a special spiritual affinity. (This understanding is also reflected, e.g., in his association of certain spiritual stages with Moses, Jesus, or Muhammad, etc. and in his description of certain friends and other Sufis as *'isāwī*, *mūsawī*, etc.). For a more detailed discussion of Ibn 'Arabi's very personal—and highly controversial—attitude toward the foundations of the Islamic 'legal sciences' (*fiqh*), see the longer study of *Ibn 'Arabi's "Esotericism": The Problem of Spiritual Authority*, *Studia Islamica*, LXXI (1990), pp. 37-64.

Subject Outline of Ibn 'Arabi's *Book of the Quintessence Concerning What Is Indispensable For the Spiritual Seeker*³

1. God's Unicity and Transcendence
2. Faith in the messengers, companions, 'people of this Path' (Friends of God), and serving the poor
3. Silence, focus on *dhikr*/remembrance of God, and good deeds
4. Right companion on the spiritual Path
5. Sincere intention (*Sidq*) in seeking the right guide
6. Right livelihood
7. Eating little
8. Filling the day with prayer
9. Sleep, eat, and dress only as really needed
10. How to read the Qur'an
11. Keeping track of one's animal self (*muhāsaba*) and shame before God
12. Staying Conscious: being aware of demands of the 'Instant' and eliminating inner distractions
13. Purity (*tahāra*)
14. Striving for good moral character traits
15. Right attitude toward spiritual 'opponents'
16. Right Behavior (*adab*) toward animals, dependents and children
17. Avoiding the powerful and worldly, while practicing *insān* and *Sabr*
18. Being present with God at every instant
19. Generosity (and avoiding stinginess) [Incomplete]
20. Controlling anger and learning how to (not) react to 'negative' encounters
21. Practicing *ihsān*

³ Printed text ([Cairo?], 1967, Mu'ammad 'Alí Sabīh and Sons), kindly provided by Michel Chodkiewicz. This 'Table of Contents' and corresponding numbered subdivisions in the translation are entirely the translator's additions, for ease of reference. For ease of reading, this translation omits the honorific Arabic phrases normally following each mention of God, the Prophet, the Companions, etc.

22. Constantly practicing *Dhikr*/remembrance of God and asking His forgiveness
23. Repentance and untying the ‘knots’ of persistence (in opposition to God) [Incomplete]
24. *Taqwā*: Awareness of God and its practical consequences
25. Avoiding self-deception/Iblis [Incomplete]
26. Practicing spiritual conscientiousness (*wara‘*)
27. Practicing ‘non-attachment’ to this lower world (*zuhd*)

*The Book of the Quintessence, Concerning What Is Indispensable for the Spiritual Seeker*⁴

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

Praise be to God, Sustainer of the Worlds! And may God bless our master Muhammad and all his Family and Companions!

You asked, O seeker, about the quintessence of what the seeker must do, so I have answered you in these pages. And God is the One Who brings fulfillment, there is no *rabb*⁵ but He!

Know, O seeker—may God bring you and us to the fulfillment of freely obeying Him, and may He cause us and you to know what pleases Him!—that (our) closeness to God is only known through His informing us of that⁶. Now He has already done that—all thanks and praise be to God!—through His sending the Messengers and sending down the Scriptures and making clear the Paths leading to the eternal happiness. So once we have faith and hold (all that) to be true, there only remains putting into practice in their proper place those (prescribed) actions set down by the revelation in which we have faith and which have become established in the souls of those who have faith.⁷

⁴ *Murīd* has been translated here in its broad sense of anyone who is ‘seeking’ God, but it is important to keep in mind as well its more technical, ‘sociological’ sense (in Ibn ‘Arabī’s time) of the person who is at a relatively early stage of spiritual ‘journeying’, normally under the close supervision of a spiritual guide (*shaykh*). Ibn ‘Arabī writes in very different ways for different readers, and the language and presuppositions of this work make it clear that he is writing neither for intellectuals nor for more ‘advanced’ companions. It is important to keep these broad qualifications in mind when considering a number of the points mentioned below. [These cautions will be considerably expanded in the Introduction to the forthcoming book which includes this translation.]

⁵ *Rabb*: the ‘personal (individual) God’ and the Sustainer and spiritual ‘Teacher’ of each soul.

⁶ Alluding, for example to many Qur’anic verses such as ‘**He is with you-all wherever you-all are,**’ or ‘**We are closer to him than his jugular vein,**’ etc.—and also possibly to more direct and individualized forms of God’s ‘causing us to know’ (see following note)

⁷ In the original Arabic (as in the English), this sentence includes a very complex—and no doubt intentional—set of spiritual preconditions: they emphasize *three times* the necessity of one’s first having

[1.] Next it is incumbent on you, o seeker, to realize the Unicity (*taw^oid*) of your Creator and His Transcendence and what is befitting of Him—may He be glorified and exalted!

As for realizing His Unicity, if there were a second god alongside God it would be impossible for any action to occur from those two gods, because of the difference between their acts of Will, both in being and actual determination. So the order (of all being) would be destroyed, as in His saying: *If there were among them (the heavens and earth) gods other than God, both of them would have been destroyed*' (21:22). And don't argue, o my brother, with anyone who associates (other creatures with God), nor do you need to establish any proof of (the divine) Oneness and Unicity. For the associator has already joined you in affirming the existence of the Truly Real, while he is the one who goes beyond you in adding an 'associate (god)': so he is the one who needs to give a proof for what he has added. This is enough for you concerning the realization of (His) Unicity, since time is scarce and the connection (you have with God) is sound—while there is really nothing underlying (the claims of) the (associator) who disagrees with you, thank God.

As for realizing His transcendence (of any likeness to creation), which is urgent for you because of the literalist (*zāhhirī*) anthropomorphists and 'corporealists' in this age, just hold to His saying: *There is no thing like Him/like His Likeness* (42:11), and that is sufficient for you: whatever description (of God) contradicts this verse is to be rejected, and do not add to or go beyond this 'homeland'. This is why it has come down in the tradition (of the Prophet, his saying): *God was, and there was no thing with Him*'—may God be far exalted above what the wrongdoers/darkeners say! So every (scriptural) verse or hadith which makes us imagine a likening (of God to the creatures), whether that expression has come in the language of the Arabs, or in the language of anyone else upon whom God has sent down some revelation or information, you must simply have faith in it to the extent of what *God* has taught and sent down through that—but not like those falsely imagine something (about God) and then ascribe their 'knowledge' of that (imagination) to God. Nothing is beyond *There is no thing like Him/His*

certainty (*imān*, in the Qur'anic sense Ibn 'Arabī almost always intends) that the actions in question are indeed those given as part of the eternal, ongoing process of divine 'revelation' (*shar'*, again in the special sense that term usually has in Ibn 'Arabī).

Likeness, and there is no one can better affirm His Transcendence, since He Himself has already affirmed His own Transcendence, and that is the most fitting expression of His Transcendence!

[2.] Then after that, o seeker, you should have faith in the Messengers—God's blessings be upon them—and in what they have brought and what they have informed us about Him: that He is far greater and more exalted than anything you have either known or been unaware of!

Next, you should love absolutely *all* the Companions, may God be pleased with them. There is no way at all that they could be charged with any offense or criticized, and no one of them should be raised in excellence above the others, except as his Lord has established that excellence in His Noble Book or through the words of His Prophet—may God's blessings and peace be with him. And you should respect and esteem whoever God and His Messenger have respected and esteemed.

Next, you should accept and acknowledge the people of this Path, with regard to all the stories⁸ that are recounted about them, and also with regard to everything you *see* from them which the (ordinary) mind and (worldly) knowledge cannot encompass.

In general, you should hold a good opinion of everyone, and your heart should be at peace with them. You should pray specially, in secret, to/for the people of faith.⁹ And you should serve the poor, recognizing their excellence and nobility in that they are content with letting you serve them, and in their bearing patiently with their burdens, troubles and difficulties.¹⁰

[3.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is keeping silent (*ḥamt*), except for 'mentioning' God (*dhikr Allāh*), reciting the Noble Qur'an, guiding in the right way someone

⁸ Of their spiritual qualities and accomplishments, the *karāmāt*: a good illustration of what Ibn 'Arabī has in mind can be found in his *Sufis of Andalusia* (tr. R. Austin)—and to a far greater extent throughout the *Futūhāt*.

⁹ As indicated in n. 4 above, in Ibn 'Arabī ordinarily uses the expression *mu'minūn* in its specifically Qur'anic sense, to refer to the elite group of the prophets, saints and spiritually accomplished souls of the 'Friends of God', the *awliyā'*. Thus the *du'ā* prayers mentioned here are probably referring to *asking for their help and intercession*, not simply to blessings on them.

¹⁰ The special place of caring for 'the poor' here—and Ibn 'Arabī seems to refer to those who are literally *fuqarā'*—is no doubt connected with one of his favorite 'divine sayings' (*hadīth qudsī*), the one which begins: '*I was sick, but you didn't visit Me (...feed Me; ... give Me to drink...)*'

who has gone astray, exhorting to do what is right and forbidding what is wrong, reconciling those who have broken up, and strongly encouraging acts of voluntary charity—indeed every form of good.

[4.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is searching for someone who is in harmony with your essential nature, in accord with what you are aiming for and the way leading there. For so much comes to the person of faith from his brother.¹¹ And watch out for the company of the person who is fundamentally opposed (to your quest).¹²

[5.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is an actively guiding spiritual master (*shaykh murshid*). (With regard to finding such a guide), pure inner sincerity of intention (*sidq*) is the essential watchword of the spiritual seeker, because if the seeker is truly sincere with God, He will turn every (outward) ‘devil’ for that person into an angel rightly guiding them to the Good, and He will inspire in that (sincere seeker the awareness of) what is good. For inner sincerity is the Greatest Elixir¹³(the ‘perfect cure’), which can only be applied to the heart of our essential being (*qalb al-‘ayn*).

[6.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is seeking out the (spiritually licit) source of support¹⁴, since the very foundation of this Path is the licit livelihood. The supporting Pillar of this Path rests on that foundation (of right livelihood): do not be a burden to anyone, and do not accept (inappropriately) from anyone. Always earn your own living and be spiritually conscientious¹⁵ about what you acquire, and about what you say, look at, listen to—indeed in all

¹¹ Alluding to the famous hadith: ‘the person of faith is the mirror of the person of faith[or ‘God’: *al-mu>min*].’ To avoid cumbersome and inaccurate English paraphrasing, we have kept in this translation the literal gender references of the original Arabic, which should of course always be understood in their intended universal sense.

¹² See further elaboration of this point at section 15 below.

¹³ I.e., the ‘perfect (spiritual) Cure’ or the ‘Philosopher’s Stone’ that turns the lead of experience into the gold of spiritual wisdom.

¹⁴ *Luqma*: literally, sustaining ‘morsel’ of food, identical to ‘our daily bread’ in the Lord’s Prayer; ‘licit’ refers to the notion of what is spiritually ‘permissible’ (*halāl*). Of course translating *luqma* as ‘livelihood’ or ‘source of support’ also falsifies Ibn ‘Arabī’s original emphasis on what God provides us at every instant, and it is essential not to ‘objectify’ the English concepts here: what is spiritually ‘licit’ and appropriate one day (for one person, etc.) may *not* be so on another occasion....

¹⁵ The root is *wara*‘, explained further at section 26 below.

of your actions. Do not be excessive in your clothing or housing, or in what you eat, for what is spiritually appropriate (*halāl*) is very little, without allowing for any excess. Know that once human beings have planted (animal) desires in their carnal selves (*nafs*), it is very hard to uproot them after that. There is no need for wealth and abundance in any of this.

[7.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is eating little. For hunger brings about an increase in (spiritual) energy for obeying God, while it takes away (spiritual) laziness.

[8.]¹⁶ You should properly cultivate and make fruitful¹⁷ the moments of the night and the day:

As for those hours to which the revelation (*shar‘*) has called you, for standing before your Sustainer/Teacher,¹⁸ those are the five moments (of ritual prayer) that are obligatory for you. As for the rest of the moments lying between those (five obligatory prayers), if you have a trade, then strive to work in that time (enough to earn your living) for several days, like the son of (the Abbasid caliph) Harún al-Rashíd—God's Mercy upon him! And do not leave your place of prayer after the pre-dawn prayer until the sun actually rises, nor between the afternoon prayer and sunset, (filling that special period) with remembrance of God (*dhikr*) and humility and submission.¹⁹ Nor should you let pass the period between the noon and afternoon (prayers) and between the evening and final night (prayers) without standing in prayer for twenty (extra) prostrations. Remember to keep the four (supplementary cycles of) prostrations at the

¹⁶ Although we have divided up this and the following two sections (8-10) in our translation, in the original Arabic they are all presented as a single section on ‘filling’ the day with religious devotions, much like Christian monastic ‘rules’.

¹⁷ *Ta‘mír* is an interesting expression here: the underlying verb means to ‘fill with life’ (give long life), build or construct, repair and restore, and to fill up something (so that it will work properly). All those meanings are relevant to Ibn ‘Arabí’s intention here, where ‘time’ is considered as a sort of field (or ‘building site’) that must thoughtfully used for the best possible purposes. ‘Moment’ (*waqt*) here refers to the Ibn ‘Arabí’s characteristic understanding of each instant as a distinct ‘creation’ and (potentially realized) connection between each soul and its Source.

¹⁸ For *rabb*, see n. 3 above; ‘before’ in English is not nearly as immediate as the literal Arabic (Qur’anic) expression: ‘between the two Hands...’.

¹⁹ The Islamic prayer-terminology here—and our very recent collective exclusion from the ongoing rhythms of the wider natural world—may obscure Ibn ‘Arabí’s actual point concerning the special spiritual intensity and sensitivity of the two periods of twilight surrounding the sunset and sunrise. A single day’s observation of what happens around us at those time, at least in a rural area or other natural setting, will suffice to illustrate what he is indicating here.

beginning of the day, before noon, and before the afternoon (prayer). And make your concluding night prayer (*witr*) another thirteen prostrations, nor should you finish those until you are overcome (by sleep).²⁰

[9.] And you shouldn't eat except when you really need to, nor should you wear anything but what you need to protect you from the heat and cold, or to cover your nakedness and avoid any discomfort that would keep you from worshipping your Sustainer/Teacher.

[10.] And if you are among those who are literate, then impose on yourself reading a section (*wird*) of the Qur'an from the written text. (While you are) in your place of retreat, pick up the Qur'anic text, placing your left hand under the book, while your right hand follows the letters as you are looking at them, raising your voice enough so you hear yourself while you are reciting the Qur'an.

Ask and inquire (of God), with regard to each Sura, what it is you ought to ask about regarding that. Try to figure out for every verse its special relevance and lesson for you.²¹ Meditate and put into practice, for each verse, what is its relevance and connection (to your situation), and what those qualities and attributes²² are indicating (that you should now learn or do). Reflect on those qualities and attributes you have and on those which you are missing. Then give Him thanks for those which you have and those which you haven't (yet) attained! And when you read a description of (the contrasting attributes of) the hypocrites and those who ungratefully reject (God), then reflect as to whether there is not also something of those attributes in you.

²⁰ The supplementary prayers Ibn 'Arabí refers to here are established practices which Islamic tradition attests to as part of the Prophet's own practices (*sunna*), followed by many of his close followers, though they were not imposed as obligations on the wider community. The references to particular numbers or cycles of prostration (*rak'a*) are a familiar shorthand expression in such a context, and should not be taken as 'quantitative' or formal in their intention. Such personal prayers can be extended indefinitely in length, depending on the passages of the Qur'an recited and the actual internal content of the prayer, and that 'extension' through the waking day is of course Ibn 'Arabí's intention here.

²¹ Its *i'tibār*: i.e., the essential personal 'lesson' (for you at that particular occasion), and the connection between that verse and your own situation at that instant.

²² The word *sifāt* ('qualities') here can refer specifically to the divine Attributes (and clearly, in this context, to the 'positive' attributes of 'the Most Beautiful Names') or—since they are the archetypes of all existence—to the broader range of characters, situations and exhortations mentioned in the Qur'an which are their dramatic 'exemplifications'.

[11.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is that you should observe and take account of your animal self (*muhāsabat al-nafs*) and pay close attention to your inner thoughts and impulses (*khawātir*) at every moment. Then you will feel a shame in your heart that comes directly from God.²³ For if you are ashamed before God, then He will prevent your heart from experiencing any thought or impulse that is contrary to the revelation (*shar‘*) or keep you from carrying out an action that is not pleasing to the Real (*al-Haqq*). Indeed we once had a master who would record his actions (during the day) in a notebook, and then when night came he would set them out before him and take an account²⁴ of his animal self according to what was noted there. And I added to my master's practice by recording my inner thoughts and impulses as well.

[12.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is to constantly be aware of (the correspondence between your) inner thoughts and impulses and the (spiritual demands of) every moment. That is, you should reflect on the moment you are in and consider what it is that the revelation (*shar‘*) has said to you that you should do, and then you should do that. So if you are in the moment of a prescribed duty, then you should carry that out—or else regret (your having missed) it and then hurry to make it up. But if you are a time that is ‘open’,²⁵ then busy yourself with performing all the different kinds of good which the Real has assigned to you. But if you start to do a prescribed²⁶ action that bestows closeness (to God), don't tell yourself that you will be alive after that to do another action. Instead, make that your last action in this world, the one in which you will encounter your Sustainer/Teacher. For if you do that, you will be released (or ‘finished’: *khalast*), and with that release comes (God's) acceptance.

²³ I.e., as opposed to all the other (often conflicting and confusing) social, familial and other sources of such feelings.

²⁴ The (originally Qur’anic) language here refers to taking note of one’s good and bad actions (or inclinations, as Ibn ‘Arabi pointedly adds) and responding accordingly.

²⁵ *Mubāh*: in the technical terminology of *fiqh*, this refers to all actions which are simply religiously ‘permissible’; Ibn ‘Arabi’s own understanding of that term is infinitely more extensive. See the additional explanations in the article cited in n. 1 above.

²⁶ Or ‘revealed’: *mashrū‘* (see the opening passage from the *Futūhāt* on this key concept).

[13.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is that you should always sit down in a state of Purity. So whenever you become impure, purify yourself;²⁷ and once you have completed your ablutions, pray two (cycles of) prostrations—unless it is one of those three disapproved moments when you are forbidden to do the ritual prayer: at sunrise until exactly at noon, except on Fridays, and after the evening prayer until sundown.

[14.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is striving for the noble virtues of character²⁸ and actually carrying them out in the specific situations calling for them—and likewise avoiding all the bad traits of character. For know that whoever abandons a noble virtue of character (already) possesses a vice of character through abandoning (that corresponding virtue). And know that the virtues of character are of different kinds, just as there are different sorts of creatures. So it is indispensable for you to know which virtuous trait you should employ (in each specific situation), and which virtue(s) extend to most of the other kinds, in order to bring relief (*rāḥa*) to the creatures and keep harm away from them.²⁹ But (all this must also be only) for the Contentment of God!

So know that the (human) creatures are (God's) servants, constrained and compelled in their actions and their destinies by the hand of the what/Who moves them. So the Prophet brought us all relief in respect to this condition, when he said: '*I have been sent to complete the noble virtues of character.*' For in every situation about which the revelation has said that if you want, you can carry it out, and if you want, you can leave it alone (not do it), choose *not* to do it. Or if (the revelation) has said to you that if you want, you can exact a compensating (punishment, fine, etc.), and if you want, you can pardon (the offense), then prefer the side of pardon and forgiveness, and your *reward is with God* (42:40). And beware of seeking revenge

²⁷ The terms used here, in the technical terminology of *fiqh*, are those referring to the 'lesser' impurities and the corresponding partial ablutions (*wudū*).

²⁸ *Makārim al-akhlāq*: the expression is a pointed reminder of the famous hadith Ibn 'Arabī goes on to cite here, in which the Prophet explained: 'I have been sent to help perfect the *makārim al-akhlāq*.'

²⁹ Note the numerous illustrations of this difficulty for the specific 'social' virtues which Ibn 'Arabī goes on to discuss here—and the extreme relevance for each of them of his final point here about the essential role of our *intention* (being for *God's* sake).

for yourself³⁰ against whoever has done evil to you, for God has called all of that ‘evil’,³¹ even including the evil done by the person exacting their revenge.

But in every situation where the revelation has told you to be angry, then if you fail to be angry, that is not a praiseworthy character trait, because anger for God’s sake is among the noble virtues of character, for God.³² So blessed are those who proceed in that way and keep company with (those divine principles), for they hear God saying:³³ ‘*Certainly you have an extraordinary character!*’ (68:4)

[15.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is to stay away from those who are *opponents* (of God)³⁴ and those who are not of your (spiritual) kind—but without your believing them to be evil, or even ever having such a thought occur to you! Instead, (what is truly essential is) having your intention (*nīya*) on keeping company with the Truly Real and His people, and preferring Him to them (i.e., His opponents).

[16.] Likewise³⁵ you should treat these animals with tender sympathy and compassion (*rahma*) for them, because they are among those whom God has caused to be of service (or

³⁰ Or: for your animal, carnal self (*nafs*, in either case).

³¹ Referring, among others, to 17:38: ‘*All of that is evil and detestable with your Lord.*’ Even closer to the discussion of the specific topic of revenge (*qisās*) here is the explicit saying at 42:40: ‘*The recompense of an evil (deed) is an evil like it. But whoever pardons and improves/corrects, their reward is incumbent on God. Verily He does not love the wrongdoers!*’

³² One of the classic illustrations of this quality is of course the cleansing of the Temple.

³³ This famous verse from an early Sura (68:4) clearly refers directly to the Prophet. From Ibn ‘Arabī’s perspective, since that ‘nature’ is the very source of all revelation (the ‘Muhammadan Reality’), everyone who attains that state of spiritual perfection has likewise become or realized that same state of being.

³⁴ Literally ‘opposites,’ *addād*: the stress of this rare Qur’anic term (only used at 19:82) is on an absolute opposition of ends, not on outward relations or emotional states of mind (for which there are many more common Arabic expressions). Its distinctive spiritual meaning is becomes clear in that context (19:82-83), speaking of those who ungratefully and angrily attack God (*kufr*): *And they have chosen gods other than God so that those (gods) might be a support for them. But no, they will surely deny their worship of them and they will be absolute opponents to them!* The ‘kinds’ in question here become clear in that context.

³⁵ In the original text, the rest of this section (‘16’ here) clearly belongs with the preceding point as part of a long series of illustrations of ethical/spiritual ‘testing’ situations in which people commonly find themselves.

‘subjugated’: *taskhīr*) to you. So don't impose on them (work) that is beyond their capacity,³⁶ and do not heedlessly ride (or ‘load’) those of them you ride/load.

And act likewise with regard to whatever slaves your right hand possesses, because they are your brothers and God has only given you possession of their bodies so that He can see how you treat them.³⁷ For *you* are *His* servant, so whatever way you love for Him to act toward you, then you should act precisely like that with your own male and female servants. Indeed God is requiting you (accordingly). And whatever evil and ugly deeds you would love to have Him avert from you, then act precisely that same way with regard to them. For all (of those creatures) are *God's* family, and you are (a member) of that Family.

If you have a child, then teach them the Qur'an—but not for any purpose in this lower world! And oblige them to observe the appropriate behavior of the revealed Path (*ādāb al-sharī'a*) and the virtuous character traits of true Religion (*dīn*). Induce them to kindness and empathy, and non-attachment (to this world: *zuhd*, section 27 below) from infancy onward, so that they become habituated to those qualities. Don't encourage desires and cravings in their heart, but rather diminish the attractions of the life of this lower world. And (impress upon them) the lack of any share in the next life that is the ultimate outcome for the person who possesses this lower world, and the endless Bounty and Grace in the next life that is the outcome for the person who abandons (attachment to this lower world). But don't do any of that out of stinginess with your money or property!

[17.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is that you shouldn't even come near the gates of the powers-that-be (*al-sultān*), nor should you keep company with those who are competing for this lower world, since they will take your heart from God. But if something should oblige you to keep their company, then behave toward them with frank good counsel (*nasīha*), and don't try to fool them (by pretending to agree with them). For (in reality) you are

³⁶ In addition to reflecting the gist of a number of well-known hadith, Ibn 'Arabī's language here explicitly echoes the repeated Qur'anic insistence (e.g., at 2:286) that God does not do this to human beings.

³⁷ Here Ibn 'Arabī simply echoes and applies a constant Qur'anic teaching about the nature of the essential human situation as God's 'stewards' or 'stand-ins' (*khalīfa*) on earth: '*...He will place you-all as His khulafā' on earth so that He will see how you-all act.*'

interacting with the Real, and whatever you do, they will be made to be of service to you through (their impact on) your wider spiritual situation. Therefore always keep your intention directed toward God (asking that) *He* deliver you from the situation you are in, through the means that are best for you with regard to your true Religion (*dīn*).

[18.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is always to be present with God, in all of your actions and all your states of rest.

[19.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is always to be giving, whether you have much or little, whether you are in straightened circumstances or at ease. For that is a sign of your heart's solid confidence in what is with God.

[...]

[20.] You must restrain your anger. For that is a sign of the openness of your heart (*sadr*). Now when you restrain your anger, you please the All-Compassionate (*al-Rahmān*). And (at the same time) you outrage the devil,³⁸ since you have tamed your animal self and subdued it, so that the devil cannot conquer it. You have also brought delight to the heart of the person from whom you have restrained your anger, by not requiting them in kind for their (offending) action. And that can be a cause of their returning to what the Real (*al-Haqq*) and His just action, and for their recognizing their own unjust and offensive treatment of you. Indeed they may even regret and repent for what happened because of their misconduct.

So you must know the right ways to receive (offense and hostility), and strive to take on that character trait. Then the greatest result and the highest merit, if you restrain your anger against the person who has given rise to that anger, is that God will reward you for your (good) action. And what result is more perfect than your pardoning your brother and bearing with his harming you, while restraining your anger? And what the Real wants you to do toward (another) servant, He also wants to do precisely that toward you! So struggle and strive (*ijtihād*) to take on these qualities (of Mercifulness and Compassion), since they give rise to love and affection in people's hearts. Thus the Prophet already ordered us to practice mutual affection and

³⁸ An allusion to one a hadith Ibn 'Arabí often mentions: '*anger is the touch of Satan* (on the heart).'

to love one another. And this (restraining one's anger) is one of the highest causes that lead to mutual love.

[21.] You must practice *ihsān* (doing what is good and beautiful), for that is a sign of your shame (or ‘conscience’, *hayā*) before God, and of the glorification of God in the heart of the person who is *muhsin*. For Gabriel said:³⁹ ‘What is *ihsan*?’ And the Prophet—may God's blessings and peace be upon him—replied: ‘*It is that you should worship/serve God as though you see Him. For even if you don't see Him, He sees you!*’ And the Prophet said (in another hadith): ‘*Shame/conscience is part of true faith, and it is entirely Good.*’ So ultimately it is impossible for the person of true faith to do harm (*sharr*).

[22.] You must practice *dhikr* (remembering God) and asking His Forgiveness. For (asking His forgiveness) after you've sinned effaces and removes the sin, while doing so after you've been willingly obedient and have done good (*ihsān*) brings ‘*light upon light*’ and joy upon joy. As for *dhikr*, that unifies the (scattered) heart and purifies your inner thoughts and intentions. But if you should tire (of performing *dhikr*), then turn to reciting the book of God, reciting it deliberately and reflectively, glorifying and exalting God. (Recite the Qur'an) while asking and imploring (God), if it is a verse of imploring; or with awe and humility, if it is a verse (suggesting) fear and a threat and a warning and lesson. As for the Qur'an, the one who recites it never tires of it, because of the (constantly changing) diversity of meanings within it.

[23.] You must strive to loosen the knot of persistence and stubborn insistence⁴⁰ in your heart. [...]

[24.] You must remain cautiously conscious of God (*taqwā*), both with regard to your inner life and outwardly. For the meaning of *taqwā* is to take precautions to avoid His punishment. So the person who is afraid of His punishment will hasten to do what pleases God. As God says: *And God warns you all to be cautious regarding Himself* (3:27). And He said: *And know that God knows what is in all your souls, so be cautious regarding Him* (2:235). Thus (the word) *taqwā* is derived from *wiqāya* (‘taking protection’). So be cautiously aware of God

³⁹ In the celebrated hadith about the three dimensions of true Religion (*dīn*), where *ihsān* follows true faith (*īmān*) and the basic ritual actions (*islām*) of Religion.

⁴⁰ On sinning: *isrār*.

regarding God's actions, as (the Prophet, in praying) said: '*I take refuge with You from You!*' Therefore whatever it is that you fear and dread, avoid the way leading to that. For sinful-disobedience (*ma'sīya*) is the way leading to misery and distress, while willing obedience (*tā'a*) is the way leading to (eternal) happiness.

[25.] You must avoid spiritual self-deception (*ightirār*), which is when your animal self deludes you concerning God's graciousness and forbearance, while you continue to persist in your sinful-disobedience. So Iblīs deludes you by saying to you: 'If it weren't for your sinning and your opposition (to God), how could His Grace and Compassion and Forgiveness even appear?' Now that is the ultimate form of (spiritual) ignorance in whoever says such a thing. [...]

[26.] You must practice spiritual conscientiousness (*wara'*), which is an intuitive avoiding (of something wrong, illicit, etc.) that comes to you in your heart (*sadr*). The Prophet said: '*Abandon what disturbs you for what does not disturb you.*' So even if you are in need of that (which disturbs you) and you can't find anything to replace it, then leave that (need) to God: He will provide you in exchange with what is better than that. So don't be hasty⁴¹ (in rushing to do what you feel isn't right). For this conscientiousness (*wara'*) is the very foundation of true Religion (*asās al-dīn*). So as you begin to apply it in practice, your actions will become purified, your conditions (inner and outer) will become successful, your speaking will become perfected, blessings of divine grace (*karamāt*) will rush toward you, and you will be protected and preserved by a divine protection in everything you do, without a doubt. By God, by God, o my brother—(Practice) conscientiousness, conscientiousness!

[27.] And you must practice non-attachment (*zuhd*) regarding this lower world and reducing your desire for it—indeed removing that love for it from your heart completely. But if you can't help seeking (something from it), then restrict yourself to seeking from it your sustenance (acquired) in the (properly licit) way.

Nor should you compete with any of those who are devoted to it, for (this lower world) is spoiled *merchandise* (4:94, etc.) that does not remain. The person desiring this lower world will never attain their goal, since God only gives each person what He has apportioned to them. So the person desiring this lower world will be continually saddened by it, and disgusting in God's

⁴¹ Alluding to the famous Arabic proverb (or hadith): 'hastiness (*al-'ajala*) comes from the devil.'

sight. Indeed the likeness of the person seeking it is like the person who drinks sea water: the more they drink, the more thirsty they become! It should suffice you to take note of the Prophet's likening (this lower world) to a dead corpse and a dunghill: only dogs gather around those two things.

God said (in a 'divine saying'): *'O child of Adam, if you are content with what I have apportioned to you, then your heart and your body will be at peace; your daily bread will come to you and you will be worthy of (God's) praise. But if you are not content with what I have apportioned to you, your heart and body will both be wearied as you chase after (this world) like wild beasts racing in the desert. By My Glory and Majesty, you will only attain from it what I have assigned to you, and you will deserve blame!'*

For God said (2:195): *'Spend in the path of God, and do not throw yourselves into ruin with your own hands'*— which is their turning back to their possessions by worrying about them—'But do good/beauty, for surely God loves those who are doing what is good-and-beautiful' (*al-muhsinūn*) !

And Praise be to God, Sustainer of the Worlds!

And God's blessings and peace be upon our master Muhammad and on His Family
and Companions!