

Invocation and illumination
(*al-adhkâr wa-l anwâr*)
according to Ibn 'Arabi

Souad Hakim

Rare are those who have left the noisy crowd and clung to the door of His Presence. They have displayed the 'stations' (*maqâmât*) of those who came before and the 'spiritual states' (*ahwâl*) of those who followed. They have followed the way of purification and spiritual training and that of love and invocation; they have waited to hear the question 'Who is at the door?' . . . 'It's so and so' . . . 'Open', says a voice. But between the withdrawal of the heart and the hearing of the word 'Open' there is a garden of paradise and a portion of hell.

Abu Yazid al-Bistami, for example, spent more than thirty-five years in the hell of struggling with his soul and the paradise of spiritual states. For twelve years he was the blacksmith of his soul: he cast it into the furnace of spiritual training, burnt it in the fire of struggle and pounded it with the hammer of blame, until he had made of it a 'Mirror', which he polished with worship and devotion for five years. When his soul became a polished mirror capable of reflecting his reality to him, he looked at himself in it, and then discovered a 'girdle' of wonder, pride, and satisfaction with respect to his own acts. He worked another five years to erase these attributes from the surface of the mirror of his soul, all that without ever hearing the word 'Open'. Then he had the revelation. He looked at people and found they were dead; he recited *Allâhu akbar* four times over them, returned from their funeral¹ and came out of himself like a snake discarding its skin; he saw that love, the lover and the beloved were one,² all that without ever hearing the word 'Open'.

I have given the example of Abu Yazid before he made his famous ascension (*mi'râj*),³ to show the dialectic between

heaven and hell for the Sufi during his journey, in the period of time which precedes his access to the Holy Presence (*hadrat al-quds*). During his journey we see the hell of 'struggle' and the heaven of 'vision' alternate their sway over him. We find him oscillating between 'struggle' and 'vision', between the 'stations' and the 'spiritual states', between 'acquisition' and 'gift', between 'purification' and 'love'. There are many names, but the named is one. There are two terms which mark out the path: 'station' and 'spiritual state', and there is a dialectical relationship between them which renders their dissociation purely theoretical. So we say: a station is any interior attribute which God has ordered us to acquire,⁴ such as repentance, piety and trust. Since human nature is an obstacle to the acquisition of these attributes, it is by our will and intention that we train our soul and rid it of the constraints of nature so that it can gain the 'stations'. The 'stations' are therefore gained and acquired by will and effort, and are held permanently, whilst the 'spiritual states' are gifts which cannot be earned and do not last. There may come from the Holy Presence an inspiration (*wârid*), bringing fear or hope or witnessing or certainty, which overwhelms the traveller completely and directs him away from that which is perishing (*fâni*) towards that which is eternal (*bâqi*), freeing him from the constraints of nature, but all this passes. It is important to point out that this separation of station and state is theoretical, because it is actually impossible to separate what man acquires from what God gives to him.

One may observe that before Ibn 'Arabi the interest of the Sufi was focused on acquisition through action, which explains their many writings on spiritual exertion and struggle. The stations of the Way increase from seven to a hundred, to a thousand and one. So the stations have appeared in their writings in the form of a series of actions which follow on from one another. The simplest division of these stations may be found in Tusi (*Kitâb al-Lumâ'*), where he divides the Way into seven stations: repentance (*tawbah*), devotion (*wara'*), renunciation (*zuhd*), poverty (*faqr*), patience (*sabr*), trust in God (*tawakkul*) and satisfaction (*ridâ'*). And if we follow the Sufi in his struggles, we see him train his soul, breaking it with hunger, wakefulness, silence and retreat, until he can advance in the stations without being a prisoner of nature, self or desire. We have learnt through his observance, that the training of the soul, by shaking it and breaking it, is the very principle of the stations and their beginning.

If we consider the final result of the struggle and the journey through the stations, we notice that in the end the servant becomes the clear and absolute property of God; nobody has any power over him, and he becomes like a divine land, which has left behind all the power of others, the lower world and destiny, and now faces the lights. But the 'servant' can spend an eternity between repentance and satisfaction, the last of the stations without ever reaching the divine proximity (*janâbu-l aqdas*). Therein lies the importance of the spiritual states, whereby inspirations (*wâridât*) come to him, pervading his being far more in one instant than that which pervades in years and years of effort and spiritual training.⁵

The Sufi texts agree on the fact that the spiritual states are gifts; gifts are not acquired, but is it not possible to put oneself in the way of these gifts? Here we may find an answer in the writings of Ibn 'Arabi on the 'invocations'.

By placing the invocations in their context we can put ourselves in the way of the Sufi by saying that: spiritual training constitutes the principle of the 'stations', and invocation constitutes the principle of the 'spiritual states';⁶ and the traveller whose heart has clung to the door of His Presence and seeks to enter, has only two paths to follow: that of spiritual training and that of invocation.

I have divided this study into 3 parts: in the first I have defined invocation and spoken of the different sorts of invokers. In the second part I have studied invocation and action, and tried to show the conditions for effective invocation. And in the third part I have followed our Shaykh al-Akbar to see the effect of invocation on the body and heart, and to see how the invoker is transformed into a gnostic, how this latter arrives by means of invocation, and how the vicegerency (*khilâfah*) is bestowed upon him. He converses with Him and then returns.

I General points

1. DEFINITION OF INVOCATION

All that we can grasp of God are His Holy Names: for this reason we may picture invocation as words which resemble a grappling hook that the Sufi flings from our world down here up to the Higher World, hoping to attach it so that he can climb up. And if we try to define invocation, we may say: invocation is ritual verbal worship, not tied to time, place or state, and if man applies himself

to it, it produces knowledge and vision in him and enables him to create (*takwīn*) through the word.

(a) As invocation, in terms of its basis, belongs to a verbal category,⁷ it includes every simple or composite word which contains the Name of God, either explicitly or implicitly. Whoever says this word has the intention of invoking the named one, that is God, and being with Him, with or without a specific reason. Thus invocation also encompasses specific invocations, all our worship such as the words of prayer, like *takbīr*, praise, glorification and recitation, including the whole of the Qur'an,⁸ all the glorifications⁹ and the prayers (*awrād*).¹⁰ As a result of the fact that invocation is verbal worship, regular invocation makes every expression of the servant active in the universe, making him capable of acting by his word. Therefore he can say 'Be' and 'it is' (without meaning that this leads to creation from nothing, which is God's special function alone).¹¹

(b) Since invocation is prescribed worship, it is not a question of good traditions but is included in the clear Divine injunctions: 'Invoke Me', 'Invoke *Allāh* often'. The invocation 'There is no god but *Allāh*' has been prescribed, and since invocation is worship it is transformed into a means of reaching God and His proximity.

(c) Since invocation is not tied to time, place or state, it is therefore the only worship permanently required of man at every instant, and has not undergone the apportioning of duties expected in all forms of worship. In other words, it is not proper for the servant to invoke God for one hour and then forget Him the next. The invoker should hold on to the invocation of God just as to his breath, so that the invocation does not leave him as he goes about his business in the world. Thus Ibn 'Arabi considers invocation to be the highest of all the ranks, and the invoker is 'man' who possesses the degree above the people of stations.¹²

(d) Since invocation produces knowledge and the power of creation, we find that Ibn 'Arabi points out the effectiveness of invocation, its masculinity amongst the stations, and he employs unusual linguistic derivations: in Arabic, the word invocation (*dhikr*) comes from the three-letter verbal root '*dh-k-r*', which means 'to invoke' in the sense of 'to refer to by name', or 'to

remember', but if this root is read as another noun *dhakar* (by modifying the inflections) its meaning becomes 'male' (as opposed to female), and Ibn 'Arabi passes from the verb to the noun to say that the word 'male' is derived from invocation. This is how invocation appeared to Ibn 'Arabi as the highest of the ranks, having the rank of maleness and action, as opposed to femaleness and receptivity.¹³ Through invocation the invoker enters the Holy Presence and becomes a lordly servant, able to say 'Be' and 'it is'.

From all this we can deduce the importance that the Sufis have accorded to individual and collective invocation.

2. THE DIFFERENT SORTS OF INVOKERS, AND THEIR DEGREES OF INVOCATION

God has said: 'Invoke Me and I will invoke you', and also: 'There is nothing which does not exalt His praise', and Muhammad (S.A.) has said: 'Oh my God I cannot enumerate all Your praises, as You have praised Yourself.' Thus we come to know that man invokes God, that God invokes God, and that every element of nature invokes God. And we are going to look briefly at each of these three invocations to try and differentiate their degrees.

(a) *Man's invocation of God*

We begin with man because the most obvious knowledge is that which we have of ourselves. The servant begins with the verbal invocation of God, an invocation which is recorded in the list of his acts of worship. He will be rewarded for it in this lower world before being rewarded in the other world, whether he is aware of it or not. The servant can limit himself to this objective and continue with verbal invocation, being satisfied with an overwhelming feeling that God is present, close and always the witness.

We may notice that the Sufi is not satisfied with this objective, but has transformed the letters of the invocation into ships and seas, and navigated oceans without shores. And Ibn 'Arabi has gone beyond the high stations by insisting on the fact that the greatest benefit from our invocation of God is God's invocation of us, in all that that contains of apparent and direct meaning.

We invoke God and God invokes us equally. If we invoke Him in ourselves, He invokes us in Himself, and if we invoke Him in a world, He invokes us in a much better world, the world of the Divine Names and the world of the angelic hosts.¹⁴

The invocation of the servant is subject and verb: if the servant

invokes God, this action produces the invocation of God for him, and this invocation is His Name the Last (*al-Ākhir*), because every divine station is subsequent to a station of creation, and this springs from His Name the Last.¹⁵ The servant is an invoker and God is too. We invoke Him, then He invokes us; we forget Him, then He forgets us;¹⁶ a conforming recompense,¹⁷ good for good and bad for bad.

Moreover, since the servant's invocation is subject and verb, it is also in ascension and in evolution. It ascends through four successive orders:¹⁸ its first appearance in the servant is verbal, secondly it infiltrates him to arrive thirdly in the depths of his heart, and there reaches the 'limit' (*hadd*). For Ibn 'Arabi, after the 'limit' there is only 'emerging' (*matla'*), since the invoker emerges from the invocation of the heart to the annihilation in the One invoked, to a vision of the One invoked. To summarise the levels of invocation: the first is verbal invocation, where the traveller verbally repeats one of the Divine Names or one of the forms of Qur'an or prophetic invocation – however, this verbal invocation is not the objective of the one who has chosen the way of invocation. For this reason the traveller elevates himself in his retreat from verbal invocation to invocation within himself: in his imagination he forms the words of the invocation, since the invocation is composed of letters, which the imagination can grasp in hearing and in vision. Then the traveller rises from the imaginal invocation (or the invocation within himself) to the third level which is the invocation of the heart, which is an invocation of meaning without image, since the heart of the traveller invokes God without imagination. From the invocation of the heart, the traveller emerges from his limits to a vision of the One invoked.¹⁹ He passes away from the invocation to the One invoked, that is God.

(b) God's invocation of Himself

God is the Unknown,²⁰ and everything about Him is also unknown and forms part of the hidden secret for Ibn 'Arabi. Divine information reaches human beings, drawing back the veil of the hidden (*ghayb*), but all that we are left with are names and concepts. For this reason the position of Ibn 'Arabi with regard to the Divine Essence is the same as that of Imam Malik: all that was said by God of Himself has been communicated to us, our duty is to believe it, the how is unknown and the why is impossible. We know from the Qur'an that God invokes us, prays for us: 'invoke

Me and I shall invoke you', and 'He prays over them', and we know from the prophetic tradition (*hadith*) that God Himself praises Himself. All that we believe in without why or how . . .

It is in starting from these principles that Ibn 'Arabi makes allusion to two of God's invocations for Himself: God invokes Himself, by Himself, for Himself; He does it for Himself equally in the creature (*makhlûq*). The former invocation of God by Himself is greater than His invocation for Himself in the appearance, and it is this which is mentioned in the Qur'an: 'Indeed the invocation of God is greater'.²¹

The greatest and highest invocation in the universe is the invocation of God of Himself, by Himself, for Himself.

(c) Invocation of the worlds of nature – invocation permeating every creature

Ibn 'Arabi's relation to nature is through experiential taste. He tastes the world of nature from the cup of his own body, because the body is the natural dimension, the first dimension, in man.²² Apart from humans and *jinn* for whom invocation and praise is an order, Ibn 'Arabi observes that every being in the universe, by its very nature, is created to glorify God, including the members of the body of humans and *jinn*. Every being adores God with a natural, primordial and essential adoration, neither aiming for nor resulting in closeness. This adoration is like the breath in the breather or the scent in the perfume: it is established and endless, flowing continuously from the natural reality of the created to the station of the Essence of the Creator, without any interruption from human or *jinn*, and without seeking closeness or vision.²³

II *Invocation and action*

Ibn 'Arabi transposes invocation from static worship to creative, effective worship. The traveller continues to invoke the name of God until his 'In the name of God' becomes like God's 'Be'.

Let us pause with the invoker at the moment of invocation; as we go into this moment in depth, we shall try to distinguish the elements of the action, with a view to knowing the conditions and factors of creative, effective invocation.

The Shaykh al-Akbar lives in a prescribed and ordered world,

where everything is subservient to known and repeated rules. However, only two of these rules of the universe are important here: the rule of the action of creation and the rule of the structure of the created.

We see that the action of creation for Ibn 'Arabi is subject to tripling: the coupling of two is always necessary in order to produce a third; the 'one' in its unicity is sterile, and so two elements are needed to bring about a result. This tripling is a condition for any production, and the result of this tripling, which is made up of two elements, is subject by its very structure to the rules of quadruplication. And if we wish to apply these two obligatory rules to invocation, we see that invocation is only productive in reality if the condition of tripling is satisfied on the part of the invoker on the one hand, and if, on the other hand, the invocation in itself is based on quadruplication. In other words, it must be found in four different, separate and related orders which are: the apparent order (verbal invocation), the inner order (invocation of the self or the imagination), the order of the limit (invocation of the heart or meaning), and the order of the emerging (annihilation in the One invoked). So let us pause at the tripling of the invoker which produces invocation, so that we can extract the ideal state for each of the pillars of tripling in the invoker.

TRIPLING OF THE INVOKER

When the philosophical human mind thinks about the creation of the world, it finds itself incapable of giving definite solutions. How did God create the world from nothing? How does He make something appear from nothing? How also does multiplicity come from unity, seeing that the One in the station of unicity is sterile? Our objective here is not to explain creation theory in general, but simply to look at Ibn 'Arabi's contribution to the meaning of tripling. The world is the result of a tripling. God says: 'when We will a thing, We only have to say to it "Be", and it becomes' (Q. 16:41). In this verse a triad has appeared, which is composed of: Essence, Will and Word. Opposite this triad is the triad of the created thing, through which it comes into being and is described as existent: its reality, its hearing and its obedience. In this way, there is tripling on both sides.²⁴ In the beginning the first existent was the result of a tripling, that is the tripling on both sides, since every 'first' permeates what follows, according to Ibn 'Arabi.²⁵

Therefore tripling permeates every production, and nothing can be brought into existence except through the number three.

If we look for the triad in the invoker at the moment of invocation, we see that it is limited to essence, will and word: the essence of the invoker, his will (that is, his intention and aim) in the invocation, and his word or the formulation of the invocation. I am now going to focus on each of the three pillars so that we may reach some clarification of their most desired state, the state which is most active and conducive in the action of creation and production.

1. FIRST PILLAR: THE INVOKER

Man thinks he is a little planet but the whole world is included in him. Every time we remove the veil from an attribute, another attribute appears. Every time we remove the veil from a knowledge, a station or a spiritual state, other knowledges, other stations and other spiritual states appear. And this man of complex composition is tied to God, to the universe and to other human beings by a network with an even more complex structure than his own.

Man is like a ball in which all the elements of the great universe are mixed together, thrown into space, and from each constituent element a phenomenon of attraction to or repulsion from the elements in the surrounding environment is produced. Because of this we can imagine the difficulty involved in the Sufi project for 'serenity of the heart' and we can equally deduce that human action varies with the changing of state in the subject. It is as if each human action is the result of millions of natural, chemical reactions which have occurred inside him.

Starting from this diverse vision of man, invocation for Ibn 'Arabi is an action which follows the subject; it rises with him, is glorified with him and is superficial when he is. The more the essence of the invoker is spiritually aspiring, knowing,²⁶ sanctified, pure,²⁷ absorbed in love, devoid of everything created,²⁸ the more his invocation becomes productive, strong, active and capable of reaching knowledge and being. Ibn 'Arabi affirms in the *Futûhât* that God looks at the rank of his servants and not at what they are in their essential reality. He emphasises that people are preferred according to their dwellings, not according to their essence (*'ayn*) because the essence of humanity is one in every human being.²⁹ Thus man's invocation is according to his rank.

2. SECOND PILLAR: THE WILL

The will of man extends as far as sight extends. Everything that the eye, the heart or the imagination can see, can be reached by the will of man through desiring it and then asking for it. Herein lies the difficulty of having a will which is like a ray of sunshine, entering unblemished into these worlds, traversing the kingdoms, and remaining pure without any of their matter clinging to it. This 'ray' makes straight for God, without diverging from the object aimed at or being extinguished.

Ibn 'Arabi contrasts invocation with prayer in order to show us the difference between the one who asks for God and the one who makes demands of Him. Prayer is a call, and calling implies distancing and separation, and it is 'worship'. Invocation, on the other hand, is 'dominion' because he who invokes is seated in God's Presence.³⁰ There is a world of difference between the one who invokes God to be healed, become rich or be shown some of God's signs, and the one who invokes God solely for His Generous Face, far beyond the valleys of material and spiritual desires.

Ibn 'Arabi presents man with the responsibility for his choice and says to him:

There is invocation and prayer on the part of God, and there is invocation and prayer on the part of the creature. If you invoke God, He invokes you; and if you say to Him: 'Lord', He says to you: 'servant'; and if you say to Him: 'give me', He says to you: 'give Me'. In the Qur'an God says about invocation: 'invoke Me and I will invoke you', and on prayer He says: 'keep the Covenant faithfully towards Me and I shall keep My Covenant faithfully towards you'. What will you choose? If you invoke Him, He invokes you, and if you make demands, He makes His!³¹

If only things were as simple as that! Then everybody would have opted for invocation, but: 'Do men think that they will be left to say "we believe" without them being tried?' Because of that, from the moment that the servant chooses invocation, all sorts of difficult trials and seductions stream towards him. If he keeps a sincere will towards God, he enters the Holy Presence and his secret is sanctified. He is summoned to the confidential converse and all his wishes are granted.

Ibn 'Arabi says:

From the moment that a person is born into a community which has been given a prophet, he is automatically surrounded from his birth by two companions, 'angel' and 'devil', and each of these is given a means of

intervention over him, every aspect of evil being an order of the devil and every aspect of good being an order of the angel. . . . As for the person who is in a community without a prophet, he is not accompanied by angel or devil, and acts according to his nature and is held in the hands of his own Lord.³²

In addition to the angel who accompanies the man all his life, Ibn 'Arabi gives him another spiritual aide, who is none other than the Imam seated to the left of the Pole. This Imam, who severs hearts from the world and its desires, leads them back to God, transmitting spiritual states from his heart to the heart of the servant, which the servant finds in himself without knowing where they come from, but their origin is indeed from the heart of this Imam.³³ And besides the angel and the Imam of the Left, there are many 'men'³⁴ who provide the heart of the servant with spiritual provisions, to facilitate the preservation of his sincere intention towards God. Thus for Ibn 'Arabi man is not left alone in this world to face the devil, but is supported by spiritual and angelic forces. The awareness in man of such spiritual support is necessary because it strengthens his spiritual aspiration.

To summarise, we may say of the second pillar involved in the action of invocation, that invocation – for the one who has chosen it – only allows the invoker to reach the Holy Presence if it is done sincerely and purely for God without any trace of desire for the world or knowledge or opening or some spiritual power.

3. THIRD PILLAR: INVOCATION

The formulation of the invocation is the third pillar active in the production by invocation. To clarify the importance of this pillar I shall discuss three areas: the word and its meaning; the effect of the letters and their combination; the effect of the number and its multiplicity.

(a) *The word and its meaning*

According to Ibn 'Arabi, speech is an effective attribute. Through being pronounced the word has an effect upon the one who listens to it. In Arabic the word *kalâm* (speech) 'is derived from the word *kalam* (wound). For this reason we say that just as the wound affects the body of the wounded person, so [the word affects the person who hears it, and] the first speech which "pierced" the hearing of contingent beings was the word "Be". The entire world

appeared from the attribute of speech. Thus all creation is an external appearance of the word: "Be".³⁵

Not everyone who combines letters is a speaker, and Ibn 'Arabi advises us to differentiate between the one who speaks (*mutakallim*) and the one who pronounces (*lâfiz*),³⁶ between cases where something else happens as a result of the construction of speech (that is, through sound certain things result in the hearer in terms of images and meaning) and other cases where the sounds have no effect upon the hearer, falling on the ears but nothing being made of them (that is, the hearer hears it, but remains unaffected and does not respond).

Invocation is speech, letter and pronunciation, and the letter for the Sufi is a veil. So invocation is a veil which the Sufi works to remove in order to see the One invoked. But one cannot remove the veil without first passing through the world of meaning, and then meanings and images disappear, and the humanity of man vanishes in his Lord.³⁷ Through words invocation brings us to meaning. For Ibn 'Arabi the One designated is single but that which is understood is multiple. And there the invoker is perplexed: should he invoke the One designated or that which is understood? The Divine Names are not many by chance, and that which is understood by the Hearer (*al-Samî'*) is not the same as that which is understood by the Living (*al-Hayy*).³⁸ Hence, he who has chosen invocation with the aim of gaining access to His Holy Presence, finds equally that meaning is a veil. So, the letter is a veil and the meaning is too. The letter is a call and the meaning is an image, the letter and the image are veils. For this reason the invoker rises through his spiritual will above the valleys of words and meanings to vanish in an invocation without letters or images.

(b) Effect of letters and their combination

Letters for Ibn 'Arabi are a community amongst so many others; their images are governed by spirits; they are living and thinking, praising and glorifying God; some form part of the world of *jabarût*, some the world of *malakût*, and others the world of *mulk*.

When a man composes words from letters, and pronounces them, he is the 'creator' of these words. If for example he says: 'There is no God but Him', he has produced words with their own independent existence. From his breath he has produced beings which praise God, but the merit of these praises and of every other word returns to the man who produced them.³⁹ Thus we can

understand why the great Sufis watch and count their breath, so that no breath is sent out absent-mindedly; likewise we can understand their attentiveness to speech and silence, for they are afraid of producing by their breath a living word, which hangs about in space, which concretises the moment of distraction, which disturbs them until the resurrection.

Ibn 'Arabi is not satisfied with this production of words which glorify God, yet remain static. He thinks that for every letter there are particularities and effects in the universe, and that some letters can be effective in the universe by means of a particular composition, which he calls 'action by letter' in contrast to 'action by will' (*himma*).⁴⁰ The best example of 'action by letter' is the famous dialogue between the Sufi masters and the common believers about the 'Supreme Name': if this Divine Name is directed towards something, it affects it just by being pronounced, no matter what the rank of the pronouncer. The effect and the action arise from the particular composition of the letters, rather than from the sincerity of the speaker, his rank or his spiritual will. Now, for man, the knowledge of the 'Supreme Name' of God is clearly attractive. Is it not tempting to know the letters which allow us all fulfilment just by pronouncing them? But the Sufi always insists on drawing the attention of the petitioner to sincerity, spiritual will and realisation, not to the sound, pronunciation and word.⁴¹

Taking the particularity of letters and their composition as a starting point, the importance and the danger of invocations and prayers (*awrâd*) given by masters to disciples becomes clear. According to Ibn 'Arabi, the first 'opening' (*fath*) of invocation is that it should be in conformity with the aptitude of the invoker.⁴²

In Ibn 'Arabi's books one finds various passages on invocations: in the *Futûbât* for example [II. pp. 396–421], he lists the invocations from the Qur'an (such as *ta'awwudh*, *basmalah*, *tahlîl*, *tahmîd*, *tasbîh*, *hawqalah*, *takbîr*); in other passages he advises the traveller to persevere in the invocation of a Name composed of two Names, such as '*ar-Rahmân ar-Rahîm*', God having no other composite name, and he who invokes God by this composite name will never suffer;⁴³ and in other texts he advises him to invoke the singular Name such as *Allâh*, without adding anything – this is the highest of invocations.⁴⁴

All these invocations mentioned above form part of the many kinds of invocation. Because of this, the invocation 'There is no

God but Him' is the required invocation, whose result consists in chasing from the heart of the invoker everything which is not God, for as long as the servant continues to see the universe, he has to invoke God by negation and affirmation.⁴⁵

(c) Effect of numbers and their multiplicity

In addition to the arrangement of words of invocation and the preservation of their literal form, especially when it comes from a prophetic tradition, the Sufis have been greatly concerned with numbers. This interest is perhaps due to the tradition which makes the invocations and praises which follow the prayers prescribed in terms of number and time of day. Ibn 'Arabi did not insist on number in invocation, but rather on profusion: profuse invocation, according to him, is the degree of sainthood (*walāyah*), and those who invoke God profusely are His friends (*awliyā'*).⁴⁶ Ibn 'Arabi is concerned with the profusion of the invocation, which he called *hijjîr*, and this is the profusion and perseverance of the servant in the invocation, whatever it may be. Of all the divine invocations which are on offer to him, he only receives what his aptitude can accept. He perseveres in this, with the breath, and no breath leaves him in wakefulness or in sleep except through the invocation. If the state of the invoker is not like this, then he is not a person of *hijjîr*.⁴⁷ Ibn 'Arabi devotes a good number of passages in the *Futūhāt* to the *hijjîr* of the twelve Poles, and he declares that the *hijjîr* of the Pole is the simple name: *Allāh*.⁴⁸

CONCLUSION OF THE SECOND PART

Thus the three pillars – the invoker himself, his intention in the invocation and his words – interlink. It is an almost organic interlinking, producing *in toto* the force of the invocation and the ability to carry the traveller above the valleys and mountains and protect him from the 'temptation of what is permissible and what is forbidden'. As the temptation of what is forbidden is clear, I take the 'temptation of the permissible' to refer to everything that is revealed to the traveller in the invocation, such as high stations, sacred knowledges, and fascinating spiritual visions which make him want to linger in them. Because of that, the Sufis have developed a hierarchy of rules of conduct and good form (*adab*): conduct of disciples, conduct of His friends (*awliyā'*) and conduct

of the vicegerents and heirs. What is proper for the faithful may or may not be proper for those brought close.

These three active pillars are those which make the invoker ascend at the time of the invocation, and carry him on his journey from invocation of the tongue to invocation of the soul, to invocation of the heart, and to annihilation in the One invoked. They carry him on his journey from the land of multiplicity, distance and separation to the Presence of proximity, witnessing and address. The traveller by invocation returns to us, the glow of serenity on his face, returning without returning, himself and not himself, as if it is him.

Our words above should not be interpreted to mean that invocation is active solely by the combination of these three pillars in the invoker, since what is really intended in invocation is the Divine answer granted to the invoker. When the invoker summons up his strength by invocation, it is as if he is preparing to make a leap on high, but this is not a leap into the unknown. It is a question of a leap towards a real existence which awaits him and which is ready to help him. God seeks us just as we seek Him.

III Effect of invocation

The traveller works in the invocation – in true invocation, because not every repetition of the Name of God is invocation. Unless the invocation lifts the veil, for Ibn ‘Arabi it is not an invocation and cannot be relied upon.⁴⁹ But here is a point to be noted: the removal of the veil, or more generally, any other result of an invocation results in reality from God’s invocation of the servant and not from the servant’s invocation of God.

Now, when we invoke God He invokes us. God’s invocation of us is the origin of all good things, for He is the source of all light which lightens our body, makes our spirit ascend and reveals to us the rank of our existence. So the result is due to God’s invocation and not to ours, even though His invocation is the result of our invocation of Him. God says in the Qur’an: ‘If you were to count the blessings of God, you would not be able to enumerate them.’ Thus one cannot make an inventory of the effect of invocation on man, but I am speaking here in sweeping lines, leaving the detail to the knowledge of the reader, to his imagination and awareness, to draw in the curves, the downward slopes and the bifurcations, and

I shall content myself with dwelling on three matters: the body; the heart; learning and knowledge.

1. THE BODY

Sufism has been accused of murdering the body so that the spirit may be victorious. But whoever accompanies Ibn 'Arabi will clearly see the injustice of such an accusation. He sees the complete reverse: he sees a fusion of the body with the spirit, the body following the spirit in its ascent and in its descent, and he details its every movement. When asked in the *Kitâb al-Isrâ'*: 'What do you think of the fusion of bodies?', Ibn 'Arabi replies: 'It is the result of a spiritual fusion'.⁵⁰ Man is never detached from his body, and Ibn 'Arabi totally rejects the idea that the spirit is prevented from ruling the body, for if it were, its lordship would be void, and that cannot be. So detachment is impossible, and a body and a spirit are necessary, in this lower world below and the beyond, and in every dwelling according to what is suitable to its composition.⁵¹

There are, in Ibn 'Arabi's work, some expressions which at first glance allude to the 'effacement of the body'. For example, he says: 'If you do not flee and you remain standing, He effaces your shadow and you remain completely as light. The Prophet (S.A.) says: "Make me into light", and this means precisely the effacement of the shadow, the darkness of the body.'⁵² However, if we look further, we can see that this expression confirms the existence of the body and denies its effacement. What disappears is the darkness of the body, not the body itself, which remains as light without shadow.

Thus we begin to distinguish the outline of the Sufi project which aims to eradicate the darkness of the body, and to transform all of it into light, the 'clay' into 'light', the 'dense' into the 'subtle' and the body from an earth of man into an earth of the Divine in which God can be invoked.⁵³ In our opinion, Ibn 'Arabi goes much further than the Sufi objective of transporting the body from clay to light. He goes so far as to lift the veil from the body, and lift away every obstacle which prevents it from returning to its real world, the world of Nature which constantly praises God in its primordial and eternal origin, uninterrupted by angels, humans or *jinn*.

Although the body praises God in its origin, invoking with the

universal invocation,⁵⁴ the traveller, on the other hand, veiled by himself and his state, cannot feel this invocation. For this reason, the traveller will not only benefit from the state of awareness of this invocation, but will also hear and feel the praises of his body,⁵⁵ praises which surpass letters and images. The servant is brought to tranquillity, each particle praising God in its own tongue. The veins praise God, as does the flesh, the bones and even the nails.⁵⁶ That is why according to the custom of the 'friends of God' (*awliyâ'*), nails and hair are not cut when one is impure, because the nail or any other element of the body is transformed into an independent invoker.

Thus we can understand the ability of the great *awliyâ'* to continue in the profuse and continuous invocation of God, without distraction. They invoke God whatever they are doing: they speak to us, and their bodies, which are at peace, raise up to God in their own language praises and glorifications without letter or image.

So for Ibn 'Arabi, we see the body sharing in the process of arriving. The Shaykh al-Akbar recommends particular food to the traveller, affirming that hunger is identical to satisfaction of hunger.⁵⁷ And we see Ibn 'Arabi leave his body, give it back to Nature during the ascension and retrieve it on his return. Once it is made clear what is the place of the body and the passage it makes from clay to light, from a human earth to a Divine earth, we can understand the words of the Sufis who say that the earth does not consume the bodies of prophets or *awliyâ'*. How could clay consume light?

2. THE HEART

The Sufis have invented a whole vocabulary devoted to the heart and its attributes: we find hearts as receptacles,⁵⁸ as dwellings,⁵⁹ we have been shown their sensitivity,⁶⁰ their softness,⁶¹ their hardness, their serenity,⁶² their constancy,⁶³ their thoughts,⁶⁴ their sickness⁶⁵ and finally their death through incessant chatter and unawareness, and we have been told about various states,⁶⁶ sicknesses and veils of the heart, etc.

Ibn 'Arabi, like all Sufis, has made the heart of the servant the centre of his real existence and action. He emphasises that God has made the heart of his servant into a dwelling-place, making it the place of gnosis and not that of theoretical knowledge. God has

protected this heart and wanted it for Himself alone, and through His Divine Jealousy, which allows no otherness, He has revealed Himself to him as the real truth of everything. Thus the heart of the servant contains everything.⁶⁷ Before the heart of the servant reaches the rank of 'the Dwelling of God' guarded by the Divine Jealousy, it is hard, veiled, closed and rusty,⁶⁸ and the origin of all that is his preoccupation with the multiplicity, and these preoccupations with other than God are responsible for his 'incomprehension of God'. Ibn 'Arabi considers that besides spiritual training, the treatment for these sicknesses of the heart is invocation; it is through invocation that the heart shines and becomes tender and its locks are opened.

The heart, according to Arabic vocabulary, signifies the centre and the middle; it is thus, for Ibn 'Arabi, the centre of man and the pole of his existence,⁶⁹ just like Mecca, and the fruit of everything becomes its nourishment.⁷⁰ Inasmuch as the heart is the centre of man, one can see the importance of invocation in the life of the traveller. By the prescribed invocation, he frees his heart of all other than God, and by the superabundance of invocations he makes lights descend and attracts graces and illuminations. The heart is purified by the lights and is cleansed of the worlds.⁷¹ And when the heart is cleansed, man becomes unified and realises the Divine Oneness. No-one realises the One except the One. God preserves his heart in a way which spares him from thoughts of evil, and all his thoughts become divine and of the Lord.⁷²

Following Ibn 'Arabi in his conception of the effectiveness of invocation, we find that invocations purify the heart and orientate its face towards God; but the most important result is that the invoker is blessed with God's invocation of him. This Divine invocation is the reason for the repose of the hearts which is mentioned in the Qur'an: 'Do not the hearts come to repose and tranquillity through the invocation of *Allāh*?' (Q.13:28). According to the Shaykh al-Akbar, this repose and tranquillity resides not in being fixed and immobile in one state, but in composure within the changing of state, and that happens when it is at rest in the changing of the breaths.⁷³

3. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

We come now to the final point, crucial for our subject, which is the end of the way of invocation. Where does the invoker arrive by

invocation? Where does his invocation lead him? If we can transform our breath and our words into spiritual energy, where does it lead us?

The replies to these questions are to be found scattered throughout the *Futûhât* and in other works, especially *Risâlat al-Anwâr*, and we will keep our discussion within the general and allowed limits, since Divine grace is not limited to style nor form.

After much spiritual exertion and effort, the one who travels by invocation enters stations, sees worlds, has secrets and meanings revealed to him, is intercepted by spiritual temptations, but he stops nowhere. Ibn 'Arabi advises perseverance in invocation, for as long as he invokes God he is unharmed and his journey is not interrupted. So invocation is his protection, shield, transport and strength.

During his journey, the invoker begins to see the first results of invocation; contemplations, illuminations, Divine presence and teaching. In all these stages, and despite the gnosis yielded by these illuminations, we still cannot call the traveller a 'gnostic' or a 'knower'.

If he does not stop at any of these contemplations, he will be shown the 'Throne of Mercy' and 'all' that is upon it. He will look into everything, and if he does not stay with it, he will be shown the 'mover' (*al-muharrrik*). And if he does not stop there either, the transfer takes place; and there the traveller changes. One could say that he is thrown into every form of annihilation (*fanâ*⁷⁴) and comes out of them through every corresponding form of remaining (*baqâ*⁷⁵). His constitution changes, he is completely annihilated from all that he was before, and he returns to a new existence through God. After this change robes of honour are bestowed upon him, and he enters the Presence.⁷⁴

Although the relation of places to God is identical, and no place contains Him while another doesn't, the journey's end for the one who travels by invocation is admission to what is called the Holy Presence; there where the Angels of the Throne are, there where he is to be addressed, there where his secret is to be sanctified, there where every gnostic and heir stands, according to the teachings of Ibn 'Arabi. 'God's visitors come to him from everywhere and settle down in his presence, God proffers them His knowledge.'⁷⁵

There, at the entrance to His Holy Presence, the essences (*a'yân*) of the travellers can be distinguished, according to the Shaykh al-

Akbar: there is the perished one and the returned one. Ibn 'Arabi is interested in the one who has returned to the creation from the Holy Presence, and he puts them into two categories: the gnostic (*al-ʿarif*), and the knower (*al-ʿālim*).

The gnostic is brought back for himself. As for the knower, he is an heir who was addressed in the Holy Presence according to the prophet he follows, and is brought back for us. The allusions to this are numerous in the *Futūhāt*, and they allow us to make distinctions between the gnostic and the knower. The gnostic is lordly while the knower is Divine; the gnostic is under the domination of the spiritual state, while the knower is a sage (*hakīm*) who dominates his state and gives each one their due.

The end of the way of invocation is *walāya* which has three things in common with prophethood: knowledge without acquired learning, action by spiritual energy, and perception of the imaginal world through the senses.

Conclusion

The traveller returns to us, he has come down in the river of light running from eternity to eternity, he has drunk from the real source of life. He has fought the dragon and come back with the elixir – the Elixir of the gnostics, by which all creatures (*khalq*) become Divine (*haqq*) in their eyes. They see the 'Light of the Sacred' in the darkness of clay. They read the book of existence which is wide open in all four directions – every letter there is an invocation of God. They only see a thing if they see God before it. Every thing which God has placed in existence is invoking Him.

Translated from Arabic by Layla Shamash and Stephen Hirstenstein

Notes

1. Farid al-Din Attar, *Tadhkirat al-Awliyâ*², critical edn, London, 1905–7, 2 vols, I, p. 139; *Risâlat al-Qushayri*, (printed in Cairo, 1330H), p. 48.
2. *Tadhkirat al-Awliyâ*², I, p. 160.
3. Abu Yazid had a spiritual ascension, in which he traversed heaven upon heaven and passed host upon host of angels. At the end of this ascension he heard ‘Open’, but before he heard this and before his entrance to the ‘Holy Presence’, struggling and vision continued in a dialectic of heaven and hell. For the ascension of Abu Yazid, see *Kitâb al-Mi‘râj* by al-Qushayri, printed in Egypt, 1964.
4. Ibn ‘Arabi says in the *Futûhât* (II, p. 157): ‘So everything which we have been ordered to do is a station that is to be acquired, and for this reason the People of the Way have said that the stations are acquired and the states are given.’ Later he says: ‘Stations are acquired, and they are the complete fulfilment of the duties prescribed by law. If the servant takes on, in the appointed moments, what is prescribed for him in terms of relationships, kinds of spiritual struggle and effort, which the law-giver has ordered him to accomplish, and which have been specified in terms of qualification and duration and of what they require and their conditions which are complete, perfect and have to be done properly, it is then that he can be the possessor of a station.’ (II, pp. 385–6.)
5. *Al-Anwâr al-Qudsiyya*, Sha‘rani, p. 39.
6. The invocations continue to be the principle of the states only, because there is no relationship of recompense between the state and the invocation, on the one hand; and on the other, man invokes God and does not know the nature (*mâhiyyah*) of the One who answers him. Does the answer come through renunciation or love or unification, etc.? If we see that we cannot know the what or the how of these inspirations (*wâridât*), and that there is no relationship between them and the invocation, then they remain in the circle of states and gifts and Divine sustenance.
7. The basis of the invocation is the invocation of the tongue, which then progresses to the invocation of the breath and ascends to the invocation of the heart, ending in the annihilation in the invocation.
8. The whole of the Qu’ran is invocation of God, according to Ibn ‘Arabi.
9. See the *Futûhât* for *awliyâ*² and *hijir*.
10. See the *Wird* of Ibn ‘Arabi. Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society, Oxford, reprinted 1988.
11. ‘For every obligatory act that relates to speech, He gives you its supererogatory aspect, and through continuing in it, you are given to say, to that which you desire in the world, “Be” and “it is”.’ (*Futûhât*, II, p. 168.)

12. 'Invocation is the highest of all the stations, and the invoker is "man" who possesses the degree above the people of stations.' (Ibid., II, p. 31.) See also the following lines where Ibn 'Arabi discusses the origin of the stations of the travellers and the penitents.
13. 'It is from invocation that maleness comes, which is the opposite of female. So *he* is the actor and *she* is the recipient of action.' (Ibid., II, p. 31.)
14. See *ibid.*, II, p. 685, where Ibn 'Arabi points out the invocation of God of His servant in Himself and the invocation of God of His servant in the assembly. The assembly is of two kinds: the assembly of the Divine Names, and the assembly of the angels.
15. *Ibid.*, II, p. 31.
16. 'They forgot God and He forgot them... Perfect Man forgets through the forgetting of God.' (Ibid., II, p. 124.)
17. 'The invocation of the conforming recompense is that "He prays over you", that is, His invocation follows your invocation.' (Ibid., II, p. 119.)
18. Ibn 'Arabi explains the hadith 'For every *âya* there is an outward, an inward, a limit and an emerging', by applying this to all existents and worlds. So everything in existence has four orders, an outward order as well as an order of emerging, and the 'emerging into view' of a thing is the face of God in it. Here the thing is transformed from being a veil preventing the vision of God to being a place of manifestation and appearance. We look at it and see the face of God in it. See *Al-Mu'jam al-Sûfi* (Souad Hakim, Beirut, 1981), for the word *matla'*.
19. *Futûhât*, II, p. 152.
20. See *Al-Mu'jam al-Sûfi*, for the term *al-ilâh al-majhûl* (the unknown deity).
21. *Futûhât*, II, p. 119.
22. See my article 'Divine and Human Love, according to Ibn 'Arabi', where the three dimensions of man are discussed.
23. *Futûhât*, II, p. 688.
24. *Fusûs al-Hikam*, I, pp. 115–17, ed. A.A. Afffi, Beirut, 1946.
25. See *Al-Mu'jam al-Sûfi*, for the word *awwal* (first).
26. 'Invocation becomes great according to the greatness of the knowledge of the invoker.' (*Futûhât*, II, p. 301.)
27. 'Nearness to God is in accordance with the sanctity and purity of the individuation (*'ayn*).' (*Kitâb al-Tarâjim* (printed in the *Rasâ'il Ibn al-'Arabi*, Hyderabad, India, 1948, 2 vols), p. 39.)
28. 'Empty your heart of everything except the invocation of God – this is the knocking on the Door.' (Ibid., p. 39.)
29. 'God has looked at His servants according to their rank, not their essences, and it is for this reason that laws were brought down in accordance with the states.' (*Futûhât*, IV, p. 407.) 'A person is only

- considered from the point of view of their rank, and not from the point of view of their essential humanity, since humanity is single in essence in everyone. People are preferred according to their dwellings, not according to their essence.' (Ibid., IV, pp. 9–10.)
30. 'Prayer is calling, and calling is the essence of distance' (*Kitâb al-Tarâjim*, p. 52). Also, in the same place, 'prayer is worship, and invocation is dominion. Thus he who prays to Him reaches Him, while he who invokes Him is with Him, according to [the saying]: "I am seated with the one who invokes Me."' He also says in *Kitâb al-Yâ' (Rasâ'il)*, p. 13: 'Prayer allows separation . . .'. See also *Kitâb al-Shâhid (Rasâ'il)* (pp. 13–14) on invocation and prayer.
 31. *Kitâb al-Tarâjim*, p. 52.
 32. *Futûhât*, II, p. 688.
 33. See *Manzil al-Qutb (Rasâ'il)*, pp. 10–11.
 34. *Futûhât*, II, pp. 3–39.
 35. See *Al-Mu'jam al-Sûfî*, for the word *kalima*, and *ibid.*, II, p. 181.
 36. *Ibid.*, II, p. 181.
 37. See *Al-Mu'jam al-Sûfî*, for the word *khalq*.
 38. *Futûhât*, IV, p. 22.
 39. *Ibid.*, IV, p. 90.
 40. *Ibid.*, I, p. 191.
 41. Compare this with the saying of Abu Yazid when asked about the Supreme Name: 'Be truthful and every name is supreme.' See *Kitâb al-Fanâ' fi'l-Mushâhadah (Rasâ'il)*, p. 7.
 42. *Futûhât*, IV, p. 88.
 43. *Ibid.*, IV, p. 406.
 44. *Risâlat al-Anwâr (Rasâ'il)*, p. 6.
 45. See the commentary by Jili on the *Risâlat al-Anwâr* (Damascus, 1929) on the manner of invocation (*kayfiyyat al-dhikr*). See *Journey to the Lord of Power*, trans. of *Risâlat al-Anwâr* by R.T. Harris, London, 1981.
 46. *Futûhât*, II, p. 31.
 47. *Ibid.*, IV, p. 88.
 48. *Ibid.*, IV, p. 78.
 49. *Risâla La Ya'ûl (Rasâ'il)*, p. 15.
 50. *Kitâb al-Isrâ'*. Critical edn by Souad Hakim, Beirut, 1988 (*Ishârât anfâs al-nûr*).
 51. *Futûhât*, IV, p. 62.
 52. *Kitâb al-Tarâjim*, p. 46.
 53. 'The earth of your body is the spacious Divine earth, in which God has ordered you to worship.' (*Futûhât*, III, pp. 249–50.)
 54. Ibn 'Arabi says that the praise of the world is the universal invocation, and 'praise is the universal invocation according to His saying "There is nothing which does not extol His praise."' (*Ibid.*, IV, p. 95.)

55. *Kitâb al-Tarâjim*, pp. 38–9.
56. Ibn 'Arabi quotes a poem of Hallaj 'I have no member or joint that does not invoke You', and comments 'He does not mean the invocation which is veiled' (*Risâlat al-Intisâr (Rasâ'il)*, p. 16).
57. *Risâlat al-Anwâr*. See also *Al-Mu'jam al-Sûfi*, for the word *jû'* (hunger).
58. *Tabaqât as-Sûfiyya*, Sulami, Cairo, 1969, pp. 105, 214.
59. See *Al-Mu'jam al-Sûfi*, for the words *bayt* and *bayt al-haqq*.
60. *Tabaqât*, p. 54.
61. *Kitâb al-Tarâjim*, p. 37.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 54. Note the relationship between serenity of the heart and union (*tawhid*).
63. *Ibid.*, p. 53 ('There are three kinds of hearts, like the mountain, the palm-tree and the feather').
64. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 102.
66. *Futûhât*, IV, pp. 25–6.
67. *Ibid.*, IV, p. 7.
68. *Ibid.*, IV, pp. 25–6.
69. *Risâlat al-Anwâr* ('The heart is the dwelling of the Pole . . .').
70. *Kitâb al-Tarâjim*, p. 54.
71. *Futûhât*, II, p. 130.
72. 'Man is not capable of stopping his heart from having thoughts, and so the one to whom God does not give negative thoughts, is protected.' (*Ibid.*, IV, p. 35.) See also *ibid.*, II, p. 443 on the thoughts of the children of Adam.
73. *Ibid.*, IV, p. 21.
74. *Risâlat al-Anwâr*, pp. 6–13.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 15.