

Appendix Two



THE TRADITION OF
THEORETICAL SUFISM
AND GNOSIS



Are they equal, those who know and those who
know not?

Quran 39:9

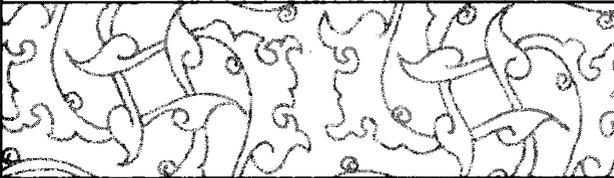
An hour's contemplation is better than a year's
adoration.

Hadīth

The heart that through gnosis has the light of
God seen,

Whatever it sees, it first does God see.'

Mahmūd Shabistārī



About the same time that the Sufi orders were taking shape, the doctrinal aspect of Sufism was being crystallized into a body of knowledge consisting of pure metaphysics of the highest order and the application of metaphysical principles to the cosmos and the human state, or cosmology, anthropology, and psychology as these terms are understood in the traditional sense. This body of knowledge is not philosophy, as this term is usually used today, although it had profound impact on later Islamic philosophy. Nor is it theology, although many Muslim theologians, both Sunni and Shi'ite, have embraced it over the ages. It is in reality gnosis or theosophy if these terms are understood in their original sense. It is what I have called elsewhere a *scientia sacra*, a sacred and an illuminative knowledge attainable through noesis and intellection combined with spiritual training. Almost all its true masters over the ages have been outstanding Sufis and/or esoterists, but not all Sufis have been its adherents, and also many who studied this science over the centuries were not active practitioners of Sufism. In chapter two we dealt with truth as understood in Sufism. Gnosis or doctrinal Sufism, whose tradition will be briefly outlined in this appendix, is an intellectual crystallization of that truth in the form of an organized science and a distinct intellectual discipline that corresponds in many ways to the writings of a Śankara in Hinduism or an Eriugena in the Christian tradition.

Usually contrasted to practical Sufism (*al-taṣawwuf al-'amalī*), theoretical and doctrinal Sufism (*al-taṣawwuf al-naẓarī* and *'ilmī*) or gnosis (*al-ma'rifah* in Arabic and *'irfān* in Persian) is associated most of all with the name of the incomparable thirteenth-century Andalusian Sufi sage, Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn 'Arabī. He did not establish an ordinary *ṭarīqah* like the Qādiriyyah or Shādhiliyyah, although there is definitely an Akbarian current in later Sufism, the name "Akbarian" coming from the title of Ibn 'Arabī as Shaykh al-akbar, that is, the greatest master. This current is seen within many other Sufi orders that embraced his teachings. In fact, one could say that with the possible exception of al-Ghazzālī, there is no single intellectual figure more influential than Ibn 'Arabī during the last eight centuries of Islamic history.

This theoretical gnosis (known also as doctrinal Sufism) does not mark progress over earlier Sufism but is a crystallization in more explicit terms of the *ma'rifah* attained by earlier Sufi masters, this event having been made necessary by the spiritual and intellectual needs of the Islamic community under new historical conditions. Earlier Sufis

had spoken more or less through allusions to the reality of the Garden of Truth while Ibn 'Arabī and his followers provided a full map of the nature of the Garden along with the means of reaching it. In any case, in a book devoted to the Garden of Truth it is also necessary to deal with this tradition, whose knowledge in many ways complements that of the Sufi orders. This tradition has had its opponents and detractors over the centuries, among some exoteric scholars of the Law, theologians, philosophers, and even certain practitioners of Sufism who have emphasized that it is not necessary to master the writings associated with this tradition in order to follow the Sufi path and attain sanctity. This assertion is true, but nevertheless the tradition of theoretical gnosis, which contains a metaphysics of the highest order, has remained a vibrant reality to this day, not only because it is true but also because it has been the indispensable guide for many on their journey to the One.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TRADITION OF THEORETICAL GNOSIS

The Earliest Foundation

Before turning to theoretical gnosis itself, its subject matter, and its significance today, it is necessary to provide a brief history over the ages in the Islamic tradition of the expressions of this Supreme Science, which itself stands beyond history and temporal development, being at the heart of the *philosophia perennis* as understood by traditional authorities, and not bound in its essence by the local coloring of various epochs and places. Of course, the wisdom with which this Supreme Science deals has always been and will always be, but it has received distinct formulations in the framework of various traditions. In the Islamic tradition this knowledge was handed down, albeit not in explicit form and externally but in a principial manner by the Prophet to a number of his companions, chief among them 'Alī, and in later generations to the Sufi masters and the Shi'ite Imams. Besides being transmitted orally, this knowledge was often expressed in the form of allusions, elliptical expressions, symbolic poems, and the like.

Gradually from the tenth century onward some Sufis, such as Ḥakīm Abū 'Abd Allāh Tirmidhī, began to write more systematically on certain aspects of Sufi doctrine. During the century after him Abū Ḥāmid

Muḥammad Ghazzālī wrote on divine knowledge in the *Iḥyā'* and in such shorter treatises as *al-Risālat al-laduniyyah* (*Treatise of Knowledge of Divine Proximity*, only attributed to him according to some scholars), and he also wrote the already-mentioned esoteric and gnostic commentary on the Light Verse of the Quran titled *Mishkāt al-anwār* (*Niche of Lights*). Shortly afterward, 'Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī dealt with the subject of divine knowledge and a philosophical exposition of certain Sufi teachings in his *Maktūbāt* (*Letters*) and *Tamhīdāt* (*Dispositions*) while in his *Zubdat al-ḥaqā'iq* (*The Best Essence of Truths*) he criticized the existing rationalistic currents in the thought of some philosophers and pointed to another way of knowing, which is none other than gnosis. These figures in turn prepared the ground for Ibn 'Arabī, although he is a colossal and providential figure whose writings cannot be reduced to historical influences of his predecessors.

Many have rightly considered Ibn 'Arabī the father and founder of theoretical gnosis or doctrinal and theoretical Sufism. This remarkable figure was born in Murcia in the Andalusian province of Almería. He carried out his early studies in Seville and other major centers of Islamic Spain, within which he traveled extensively as a young man. At an early age he also met many Sufi saints and masters and already by the age of sixteen had theophanic visions. His meeting at this age with the venerable master of discursive philosophy, Ibn Rushd (Averroës), in which he predicted the latter's death, is one of the peaks of Islamic intellectual history. As the result of a vision, Ibn 'Arabī left his land of birth for the east, journeying for some time in the Maghrib, where he absorbed the spiritual heritage of Abū Madyan, and then to Cairo, where he was not well received. He therefore left Egypt for Mecca, where he composed his magnum opus, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah* (*The Meccan Illuminations*). He finally settled in Damascus, where he wrote the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (*Bezels or Ringstones of Wisdom*) and where a number of important disciples assembled around him. In this city he died, and his mausoleum in the northern part of the city remains a major site of pilgrimage to this day.

Although the seminal figure in the tradition of gnosis, Ibn 'Arabī did not write works concerned only with pure metaphysics and gnosis. His writings also deal extensively with Quranic and *Ḥadīth* commentary, the meaning of religious rites, various traditional sciences, including the science of the symbolic significance of letters of the Arabic al-

phabet, ethics, law, and many other matters, all of which are also of an esoteric and gnostic nature.

Ibn 'Arabī was, moreover, a major poet, in fact, as already mentioned, one of the greatest Sufi poets of the Arabic language. One of his most significant poetic works is the *Tarjumān al-ashwāq* (*Interpreter of Desires*), wherein he expounds the highest meaning of love. To demonstrate that in Sufism knowledge is not separated from love, in one of the poems of this work he, who was the proverbial exemplar of the path of gnosis and illuminative knowledge in Islam, calls his religion the religion of love. In verses that have become justly famous even in the West he sings:

Receptive now my heart is for each form;
For gazelles pasture, for monks a monastery,
Temple for idols, Ka'bah to be rounded,
Tables of Torah and script of Qur'ān.
My religion is love's religion: where'er turn
Her camels, that my religion is, my faith.²

Discussion here is confined to works of Ibn 'Arabī and his school that are devoted completely to theoretical gnosis and metaphysics, works that deal directly with the Supreme Science of the Real. Otherwise, every work of Ibn 'Arabī and his school is related in one way or another to gnosis or *ma'rifah*, as are numerous writings of many other Sufis. The groundbreaking work of Ibn 'Arabī on the subject of gnosis, and a work that is foundational to the whole tradition of theoretical gnosis in Islam, is the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, along with certain sections of *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah* and a few of his shorter treatises, including *Naqsh al-fuṣūṣ* (*Exposing the Fuṣūṣ*), which is Ibn 'Arabī's own commentary upon the *Fuṣūṣ*.

In any case, the *Fuṣūṣ* was taken by later commentators as the central text of the tradition of theoretical gnosis or doctrinal Sufism. Many of the major later works of this tradition are in fact commentaries upon this text, which Ibn 'Arabī believed was inspired directly by the Prophet. The history of these commentaries, many of which are "original" works themselves, stretching from the thirteenth century to this day, is important for understanding this tradition and also reveals how

widespread was the influence of this tradition, from Morocco to the Malay world and China. Unfortunately, despite so much scholarship carried out in this field during the past few decades, there is still no thorough history of commentaries upon the *Fuṣūṣ*, any more than there is a detailed history of the tradition of theoretical gnosis and/or Sufi metaphysics itself.

Ibn 'Arabī's teachings were first disseminated from Damascus. Some of his immediate students who were particularly drawn to pure metaphysics and gnosis, with a number also having had training in Islamic philosophy, began to interpret the master's teachings and especially his *Fuṣūṣ* in a more systematic and philosophical fashion, thereby laying the ground for the systematic formulation of that Supreme Science of the Real with which the tradition of theoretical gnosis is concerned. The first commentator upon the *Fuṣūṣ* was Ibn 'Arabī's immediate student and Qūnawī's close companion, 'Afīf al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī (d. 1291), who commented upon the whole text but in summary fashion. It is of interest to note that he also wrote a commentary upon the *Kitāb al-mawāqif* of al-Niffarī. But the most influential propagator of the Murcian master's teachings in the domain of theoretical gnosis and metaphysics and the person who gave the systematic exposition that characterizes later expressions of theoretical gnosis is Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī (d. 1274). This most important student of Ibn 'Arabī did not write a commentary on the text of the *Fuṣūṣ*, but he did write a work titled *al-Fukūk* (*Openings*), which explains the titles of the chapters of the *Fuṣūṣ* and was considered by many later Sufis and gnostics as a key to understanding the mysteries of Ibn 'Arabī's text. Qūnawī is also the author of a number of other works of a gnostic ('*irfānī*) nature, chief among them the *Miftāḥ al-ghayb* (*Key to the Invisible*), a monumental work of theoretical gnosis that, along with its commentary by Shams al-Dīn Fanārī known as *Miṣbāḥ al-uns* (*The Lamp of Familiarity*), became one of the premier texts for the teaching of theoretical gnosis especially in Persia.

Qūnawī trained a number of students who themselves became major figures in the tradition of theoretical gnosis. But before we turn to them, it is necessary to mention a poet who was a contemporary of Ibn 'Arabī and who played an exceptional role in the later history of this tradition. This poet is 'Umar ibn al-Fārīd (d. 1235), whose *al-Tā'īyyah* (*Poem Rhyming in Tā'*) is considered as a complete exposition of the doctrines of '*irfān* expressed in sublime poetry and the

subject of several commentaries that are themselves seminal texts of gnosis. There were also many important Persian poets such as Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī (d. 1289), Awḥad al-Dīn Kirmānī (d. 1238), Shams al-Dīn Maghribī (d. 1406–07), Maḥmūd Shabistarī (d. circa 1318), the author of the *Gulshan-i rāz* (*The Secret Garden of Divine Mysteries*), one of the greatest works of Persian Sufi poetry, and 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, whom we have already mentioned, who followed Ibn 'Arabī's teachings. There are also many Turkish poets and those from the Subcontinent who expressed Ibn 'Arabian teachings in the medium of poetry. The poetry of these figures, however, does not belong strictly to doctrinal texts of the tradition of theoretical gnosis with which we are concerned here, although some of the commentaries on their poetry do, such as *Sharḥ-i gulshan-i rāz* (*Commentary upon the Gulshan-i rāz*) of Shams al-Dīn Lāhijī (d. before 1494) and also some poetic texts such as *Ashī'at al-lama'āt* (*Rays of Light*) and *Lawā'ih* (*Gleams*) of Jāmī.

Returning to Qūnawī's students, as far as the subject of this essay is concerned, the most notable and influential for the later tradition was first of all Sa'īd al-Dīn Farghānī (d. 1296), who collected the commentaries of his master in Persian on the *Tā'iyyah* and on their basis composed a major work in both Persian and Arabic (which contains certain additions) with the title *Mashāriq al-darānī al-zuhar* (*Orients of Radiant Stars*) and *Muntaha'l-madārik* (*The Utmost Limit of Perception*), respectively. Second, one must mention Mu'ayyid al-Dīn Jandī (d. 1300), the author of the first extensive commentary upon the *Fuṣūṣ*, which also influenced the very popular commentary of his student 'Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī (d. 1330). Both of these men also wrote other notable works on theoretical gnosis, such as the Persian treatise *Nafḥat al-rūḥ wa tuḥfat al-futūḥ* (*The Breath of the Spirit and the Gift of Spiritual Illuminations*) of Jandī and the Arabic *Tā'wīl al-qur'ān* (*Esoteric Hermeneutic of the Quran*) of Kāshānī, which has been also mistakenly attributed to Ibn 'Arabī himself. This work illustrates a whole genre of writings that explain the principles of gnosis and metaphysics on the basis of commentary upon the inner levels of meaning of the Quran. During this early period, when the school of theoretical gnosis was taking shape, there were other figures of importance associated with the circle of Ibn 'Arabī and Qūnawī although not the students of the latter, such as Sa'd al-Dīn Ḥamūyah and his student 'Azīz al-Dīn Nasafī, who wrote several popular works based on the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the transcendent unity of being) and *al-insān al-kāmil* (*Universal Man*), which are

pivotal to Ibn 'Arabī's teachings. It is not possible, however, in this short historical review to deal with all such figures.

Although our goal in this appendix is to provide a survey of the tradition of doctrinal or theoretical Sufism and gnosis, it is necessary to say a few words about what Ibn 'Arabī's doctrinal teachings involve, although these have been treated in another manner in the main text of this book. The central teaching of Ibn 'Arabī concerns the doctrine of unity, which is also the heart of the message of the Quran. But for him the assertion of this unity means not only that God is one but that ultimately Reality is one. This is what is called the doctrine of "the transcendent unity or oneness of being," with which we have already dealt and which is the hallmark of his school and of much of Sufism in general. This single Reality manifests all the levels of existence through reflections of Its Self-Determinations upon what he and other Sufis call the mirror of nothingness. Everything in the cosmos is the result of this reflection or theophany (*tajallī*). Ibn 'Arabī also discusses the doctrine of human nature in this context. The human being, both male and female, contains potentially all levels of existence within and is the mirror in which God contemplates Himself. The reality of this archetypal human being, who is called by Ibn 'Arabī the Universal or Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*), is contained potentially in every human being but is actualized only within the being of prophets and the greatest saints of not only Islam but all authentic religions. On the basis of these two doctrines, Ibn 'Arabī develops an elaborate cosmology, sacred psychology, eschatology, epistemology, and prophetology—all bound together by the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujūd*. He even deals with the inner meaning of alchemy, astrology, and other so-called occult sciences on the basis of the metaphysical principles that he elucidates. Furthermore, he explicates the meaning of "the imaginal world" and its reality within us related to the power of "creative imagination," which is so important in the spiritual life.

The Arab World

From the early foundation of this school in Syria and Anatolia, the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī spread to different regions of the Islamic world. In summary fashion we shall deal with some of the most important figures belonging to this tradition in each region of the Islamic world. Let us begin with the Arab world, proceeding from west to east. As

we have seen, in the Maghrib a very strong Sufi tradition has been preserved over the centuries, but as mentioned, Maghribī Sufism, although devoted to gnosis in its purest form, as we see in such figures as Abū Madyan, Ibn Mashīsh, and Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, was not given to long theoretical expositions of gnosis as found in the East. Most works from this region were concerned with the practice of the Sufi path and explanation of practical Sufi teachings. One had to wait for the eighteenth century to find in the works of Aḥmad ibn 'Ajībah (d. 1809–10) treatises that belong to the genre of theoretical gnosis. But the oral tradition based on Ibn 'Arabian teachings was kept alive in this region, as we see in the personal instructions and also written works on Sufism of such celebrated twentieth-century Sufi masters of the Maghrib as Shaykh al-'Alawī and Shaykh Muḥammad al-Tādilī (d. 1952). Maghribī works on gnosis tended, however, to be usually less systematic and philosophical in their exposition of gnosis than those of the East.

A supreme example of Ibn 'Arabian teachings emanating from the Maghrib is found in the writings of the celebrated Algerian prince (*amīr*) and Sufi master 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā'irī (d. 1883), who taught the works of Ibn 'Arabī in Damascus, to which he was exiled by the French after being captured on the battlefield in Algeria after a long struggle. Amīr 'Abd al-Qādir also composed a number of independent works on gnosis, such as the *Kitāb al-mawāqif* (*The Book of Halts*, as it is usually translated into English). To this day the text of the *Fuṣūṣ* and the *Futūḥāt* are taught in certain Sufi centers of the Maghrib, especially those associated with the Shādhiliyyah Order, which has continued to produce over the centuries its own distinct genre of Sufi literature going back to the prayers of Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī and especially the treatises of the third Pole or Axis of the order, Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh al-Iskandarī. In later centuries these two currents, the first issuing from early Shādhilism and the second from Ibn 'Arabian gnosis, met in many notable figures of Sufism from the Maghrib as well as other regions.

There was greater interest in theoretical gnosis and Sufism in the eastern part of the Arab world as far as the production of written texts is concerned. Strangely enough, however, Egypt, which has always been a major center of Sufism, is an exception. In that ancient land there has always been more interest in practical Sufism and Sufi ethics than in speculative thought and doctrinal Sufism although Akbarian teachings spread to Mamluk Egypt in the thirteenth century. There were also

some popularizers of Ibn ‘Arabī’s teachings in Egypt, perhaps chief among them ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha‘rānī, whose well-known works present a more popular version of the *Futūḥāt* and *Fuṣūṣ*. He tried also to link Shādhilī teachings with those of Ibn ‘Arabī. Fewer notable commentaries on classical texts of gnosis are found, however, in Egypt than in many other lands. Theoretical gnosis was, nevertheless, taught and studied by many Egyptian figures. In this context it is interesting to note that even the modernist reformer Muḥammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905) turned to the study of Ibn ‘Arabī later in life. However, opposition to these writings has remained strong to this day in many circles in that country, as one sees in the protests in front of the Egyptian Parliament some years ago on the occasion of the publication of the new edition of the *Futūḥāt* by Osman Yahya, who had edited the text critically.

In the Yemen there was great interest in Ibn ‘Arabian gnosis in the School of Zabīd, especially under the Rasūlids up to the fifteenth century. Ismā‘īl al-Jabartī (d. 1403), Aḥmad ibn al-Raddād (d. 1417–18), and ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 1428) were particularly significant figures of this school in the Yemen. Al-Jīlī, who was originally Persian but resided in the Yemen, is particularly important because of his magnum opus, *al-Insān al-kāmil* (*The Universal Man*), a primary work used to this day from Morocco to India as a text for the instruction of theoretical gnosis and Sufism. It is a more systematic exposition of the teaching of Ibn ‘Arabī.

In the eastern Arab world, one finds in greater Palestine and Syria continuous interest in theoretical Sufism and gnosis and the writing of important commentaries on Ibn ‘Arabī, such as that of ‘Abd al-Ghaṇyī al-Nābulusī (d. 1731) on the *Fuṣūṣ*. Also, the defense by Ibrāhīm ibn Ḥasan al-Kūrānī (d. 1690), a Persian Kurdish scholar who resided in Mecca, of the gnosis of Ibn ‘Arabī had much influence in Syria and adjoining areas. Although, as in Egypt and elsewhere, many jurists and theologians in Syria going back to Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328) and also students of Sa‘d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 1389) opposed the doctrines of Ibn ‘Arabian gnosis, this school remained very much alive and continues to survive to this day in that region. One of the most remarkable contemporary Sufis who died in Beirut just a few years ago, the woman saint Sayyidah Fāṭimah al-Yashrutīyyah, whom we already mentioned, gave the title *al-Riḥlah ila’l-Ḥaqq* (*The Journey to the Truth*) to her major work on Sufism on the basis of a dream of Ibn ‘Arabī.

Turning to the Turkish part of the Ottoman world, we find a continuous and strong tradition in the study of theoretical gnosis going back to al-Qūnawī himself and his circle in Konya. Foremost among these figures after the founding of this school are Dā'ūd Qayṣarī (d. 1350) and Shams al-Dīn Fanārī (d. 1431). A student of Kāshānī, Qayṣarī wrote a number of works on gnosis, including his commentary on the *Tā'iyyah* of Ibn al-Fāriḍ, but chief among them is his commentary upon the *Fuṣūṣ*, which is one of the most thorough and remains popular to this day. He also wrote an introduction to this work called *al-Muqaddimah* (*The Introduction*), which summarizes the whole cycle of gnostic doctrines in a masterly fashion and has been itself the subject of many commentaries, including fairly recent glosses by Ayatollah Khomeini and a magisterial commentary by Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī (d. 2005).

As for Fanārī, besides being a chief judge (*qāḍī*) in the Ottoman Empire and a major authority on Islamic Law, he was the author of what many Turkish and Persian students of gnosis consider as the most advanced text of *'irfān*, namely the *Miṣbāḥ al-uns*. It is strange that today in Bursa where he is buried, as elsewhere in Turkey, he is known primarily as a jurist and in Persia as a gnostic. In addition to these two major figures, one can mention Bālī Efendī (d. 1553), well-known commentator of Ibn 'Arabī, and many other Sufis who left behind notable works on theoretical Sufism and gnosis up to the twentieth century. In fact, the influence of this school in the Ottoman world was extensive, including in such areas as Bosnia, which produced outstanding gnostics such as 'Abd Allāh of Bosnia (d. 1644), and is to be found in many different types of Turkish thinkers into the contemporary period. Among the most famous of them is Ahmed Avni Konuk (d. 1938), who wrote a four-volume commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ*; his contemporary Ferid Ram (d. 1944), who was at the same time a gnostic, philosopher, and political figure and the author of several works on Ibn 'Arabian gnosis; and Ismail Fenni Ertugrul (d. 1940), a philosopher who used the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī to refute the errors of modern Western philosophy, especially materialism. His writings contributed greatly to the revival of interest in metaphysics in twentieth-century Turkey.

Muslim India

We have been moving eastward in this brief historical survey, and logically we should now turn to Persia and adjacent areas, including Shi'ite Iraq, which has been closely associated with Persia intellectually since the Safavid period, as well as Afghanistan, which also belongs to the same intellectual world as Persia. Because, however, of the central role played in Persia in the cultivation of theoretical gnosis or *'irfān-i nazārī* during the past few centuries, we shall turn to it at the end of this survey and first direct our attention farther east to India, Southeast Asia, and China.

Although a thorough study has never been made of all the important figures associated with the School of Ibn 'Arabī and theoretical Sufism and gnosis in the Indian subcontinent, the research that has been carried out so far reveals a widespread influence of this school in that area. Already in the fourteenth century Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī (d. 1385), the Persian Sufi who migrated to Kashmir, helped to spread Ibn 'Arabī's ideas in India. He not only wrote a Persian commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ* but also composed a number of independent treatises on *'irfān*. A century later 'Alā' al-Dīn 'Alī ibn Aḥmad Mahā'imī (d. 1432) not only commented upon the *Fuṣūṣ* and Qūnawī's *Nuṣūṣ* (*Texts*) but also wrote in Arabic several independent expositions of gnosis of a more philosophical nature. These works are related in approach to later works on theoretical gnosis written in Persia. He also wrote an Arabic commentary upon Shams al-Dīn Maghribī's *Jām-i jahānnamāy* (*The World-Revealing Cup*), which some believe received much of its inspiration from the *Mashāriq al-darā'ī* of Farghānī. It is interesting to note that Maghribī's poetry, which like that of many other poets such as Kirmānī, 'Irāqī, Shabista'ī, Shāh Ni'mat Allāh Walī, and Jāmī, was based on basic gnostic theses such as *waḥdat al-wujūd*, was especially appreciated by those followers of the School of Ibn 'Arabī in India who were acquainted with the Persian language, as the poetry of Ibn al-Fāriḍ was appreciated among Arab as well as Persian, Turkish, and Indian followers of that school who knew Arabic.

Notable exponents of theoretical gnosis in India are numerous, and even the better known ones cannot all be mentioned here. But it is necessary to mention one figure who is probably the most profound master of this school in the Subcontinent. He is Muḥibb Allāh Ilāhābādī (also known as Allāhābādī) (d. 1648). Author of an Arabic and

even longer Persian commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ* and also an authoritative commentary on the *Futūḥāt*, Ilāhābādī also wrote independent treatises on *'irfān*. His writings emphasize intellection and sapience rather than only spiritual states, which many Sufis in India as elsewhere claimed as the sole source of divine knowledge. The significance of the works of Muḥibb Allāh Ilāhābādī in the tradition of theoretical gnosis under consideration in this chapter and his later influence in India are immense. He marks one of the major peaks of the school not only in India, but in the whole of the Islamic world.

The central thesis of Ibn 'Arabian gnosis, that is, *waḥdat al-wujūd*, had a life of its own in India. While certain Sufis, such as Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī, opposed its usual interpretation, it was embraced by many Sufis, including such great saints as Gīsū Dirāz and Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā' and many of their disciples. One can hardly imagine the history of Sufism in the Subcontinent without the central role played by *'irfān-i nazari*. Even notable Indian philosophers and theologians such as Shāh Walī Allāh (d. 1762) of Delhi wrote works highly inspired by this school, and its influence continued into the twentieth century, as we see in some of the works of Mawlānā Ashraf 'Alī Thanwī (d. 1943). Moreover, once the philosophical School of Illumination (*ishrāq*) of Suhrawardī and the Transcendent Theosophy or Philosophy (*al-ḥikmat al-muta'āliyah*) of Mullā Ṣadrā reached India, there were many interactions between these schools and the school of *'irfān*, as we also see in Persia itself. Also the very fact that a body of knowledge similar to *'irfān* existed in Hinduism in the school of Advaita Vedānta brought about many dialogues and discourses of a gnostic nature between the two traditions in a special spiritual and intellectual ambience.

Southeast Asia

Turning to Southeast Asia and the Malay world, we encounter a unique phenomenon, namely the role of the School of Ibn 'Arabī, sometimes called *wujūdiyyah*, in the very formation of Malay as an intellectual language suitable for Islamic discourse. Ḥamzah Faṣṣūrī (d. 1592), the most important figure of this school in that region, was a major Malay poet and played a central role in the development of Malay as an Islamic language while he also had a command of both Arabic and Persian. He was, moreover, a master of the doctrines of the School of Ibn 'Arabī. He was followed in his attachment to this school by Shams al-Dīn

Sumātrānī (d. 1630). Although this school was opposed by certain other Malay Sufis, such as Nūr al-Dīn Rānirī, and most Malays paid more attention to the operative rather than the doctrinal aspect of Sufism, the school of theoretical Sufism and gnosis continued to be studied in certain places in the Malay world and even today there are circles in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia where the teachings of this school are followed and many of the classical texts continue to be studied.

China

A word must also be said about China. Until the seventeenth century, Chinese Muslims who dealt with intellectual matters in general and Sufism in particular did so on the basis of Arabic and Persian texts. It was only in the seventeenth century that they began to use classical Chinese and to seek to express Islamic metaphysics and philosophy in the language of neo-Confucianism. Henceforth, there developed a significant body of Islamic thought in Chinese that is being systematically studied only now. It is interesting to note that two of the classical Islamic works to be rendered the earliest into Chinese are, first, the *Lawā'ih* of Jāmī, which is a masterly summary of 'irfān in Persian, translated by Liu Chih (d. circa 1670) as *Chen-chao-wei* (*Displaying the Concealment of the Real Realm*) and, second, the *Ashi* 'at al-lama'āt also by Jāmī and again, as already mentioned, dealing with 'irfān, translated by P'o Na-chih (d. after 1697) as *Chao-yüan pi-chüeh* (*The Mysterious Secret of the Original Display*). Also the first Chinese Muslim thinker to expound Islamic teachings in Chinese, that is, Wang Tai-yü (d. 1657 or 1658), who wrote his *Real Commentary on the True Teaching* in 1642 and several later works, was steeped in the same 'irfānī tradition. The school of theoretical gnosis therefore has been destined to play a major role in the encounter on the highest intellectual level between the Chinese and the Islamic traditions during the past few centuries.

Persia

Persia was to become one of the main centers, if not the central arena, for the later development of theoretical gnosis. The circle of Qūnawī was already closely connected to the Persian cultural world, and many of its members, including Qūnawī himself, wrote some treatises in Persian. Qūnawī's student Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī is considered one of the greatest poets of the Persian language. Among other early members

of the school were Sa'd al-Dīn Ḥamūyah; his disciple 'Azīz al-Dīn Nasafī, who wrote on gnosis in readily accessible Persian; Awḥad al-Dīn Balyānī (d. 1288) from Shiraz, whose famous *Risālat al-aḥadiyyah* (*The Treatise on Unity*) was for a long time attributed to Ibn 'Arabī; and 'Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī, who, as mentioned, is a major figure of the school of theoretical gnosis and a prominent commentator upon the *Fuṣūṣ*. From the fourteenth century on in Persia we see, on the one hand, the continuation of the school of theoretical gnosis through the appearance of prose works in both Arabic and Persian, either in the form of commentaries upon the *Fuṣūṣ* and other seminal texts of this school or as independent treatises. On the other hand, we observe the deep influence of this school in Sufi literature, especially poetry. A supreme example is the *Gulshan-i rāz* of Maḥmūd Shabistārī, which as mentioned is one of the greatest masterpieces of Persian Sufi poetry and which summarizes the principles of Ibn 'Arabian gnosis in verses of celestial beauty. That is partly why its extensive commentary by Muḥammad Lāhijī in the fifteenth century is such a major text of theoretical gnosis. Here, however, we are concerned only with the prose and systematic works of theoretical gnosis and Sufism and not the poetical tradition, but the nexus between the two should not be forgotten, as we see in the works of 'Irāqī, Shāh Ni'mat Allāh Walī, Jāmī, and many others.

Another important event that took place in the fourteenth century and that left its deep influence upon the history of the school during the Safavid, Qajar, and Pahlavi periods was the integration of Ibn 'Arabian gnosis into Shi'ism, which possesses its own gnostic teachings, to which scholars refer as *'irfān-i shī'ī* (Shi'ite gnosis). These two outwardly distinct schools are inwardly connected and go back to the original esoteric and gnostic dimension of the Islamic revelation. It was most of all Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. 1385) who brought about a synthesis of these two branches of the tree of gnosis, although he also did make certain criticisms of Ibn 'Arabī, especially concerning the question of *walāyah/wilāyah*. Many others walked in his footsteps. Āmulī was at once a major Twelve-Imam Shi'ite theologian and a Sufi devoted to the School of Ibn 'Arabī. His *Jāmī' al-asrār* (*The Sum of Divine Secrets*) is a pivotal text for the gnosis of Ibn 'Arabī in a Shi'ite context. He was also the author of a major commentary upon the *Fuṣūṣ* as well as independent metaphysical treatises. The later development of theoretical gnosis in Persia, as well as the School of Transcendent

Theosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā cannot be fully understood without consideration of Āmulī's works.

The fourteenth to the fifteenth century marks a period of intense activity in the field of theoretical gnosis and the School of Ibn 'Arabī in Persia. Commentaries upon the *Fuṣūṣ* continued to appear. The first in Persian was most likely that of Rukn al-Dīn Mas'ūd Shīrāzī, known as Bāhā Ruknā (d. 1367). But there were many others by such figures as Tāj al-Dīn Khwārazmī (d. circa 1435), Shāh Ni'mat Allāh Walī, Ibn Turkah Iṣfahānī (d. 1432), and Jāmī. This extensive activity in the domain of gnosis associated specifically with the School of Ibn 'Arabī took place in addition to, on the one hand, the flowering of the Sufism of the School of Khurasan and Central Asia and profound gnostic teachings, mostly in poetic form, of figures such as 'Aṭṭār, Rūmī, and perhaps the greatest poet of the Persian language, Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn Ḥāfiẓ (d. 1389) and, on the other hand, the Kubrawiyyah School founded by Najm al-Dīn Kubrā. We can hardly overemphasize the metaphysical importance of the Khurāsānī and Central Asian schools, but in this appendix we shall not deal with them, being concerned only with *'irfān-i nazārī* in its association with the School of Ibn 'Arabī.

Among the gnostic figures of this period, Ṣā'in al-Dīn ibn Turkah Iṣfahānī stands out as far as his later influence is concerned. The author of many independent treatises on metaphysics and the traditional sciences, he also wrote a commentary upon the *Fuṣūṣ* that became popular. But the work that made him one of the pillars of the school of theoretical gnosis in Persia during later centuries is his *Tamhīd al-qawā'id* (*The Disposition of Principles*). This masterly treatment of the cycle of gnosis became a popular textbook for teaching the subject in Persia especially during the Qajar period and has remained so to this day, as one sees in the extensive recension of it by the contemporary Persian philosopher and gnostic 'Abd Allāh Jawādī Āmulī.

The figure who was given the title of the Seal of Persian Poets, that is, 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī from Herat, was also in a sense the seal of this period in the history of theoretical gnosis in Persia. Also, in a sense, he synthesized within his works the two distinct currents of Islamic spirituality that flowed from Ibn 'Arabī and Rūmī. Jāmī belongs to the poetic tradition of Rūmī while being also the author of a number of commentaries upon the works of Ibn 'Arabī, such as the famous *Naqd al-nuṣūṣ* (*Glancing upon the Texts*). He also authored summaries of the

teachings of this school in works already mentioned, which are used as texts for the teaching of *'irfān* to this day.

The spread of Twelve-Imam Shi'ism in Persia during the Safavid period transformed the scene as far as the study and teaching of *'irfān* were concerned. During the earlier part of Safavid rule, many Sufi orders flourished in Persia whereas from the seventeenth century onward, because of special religious and social causes, opposition grew to Sufism associated with *khānqāhs* especially among most of the class of Shi'ite scholars (*'ulamā'*), who henceforth chose to speak of *'irfān* rather than *taṣawwuf*. Although other types of Sufi and gnostic writings appeared during this period written by members of various Sufi orders, such as the Dhahabīs, and *'irfān-i shī'ī* also flourished in certain circles, few new works on the subject of theoretical gnosis appeared during this period in comparison to the previous era.

The main influence of the School of Ibn 'Arabī came to be felt through the writings of Mullā Ṣadrā, who was deeply influenced by Shaykh al-Akbar and quoted from him extensively in his *al-Asfār al-arba'ah* (*Four Journeys*) and elsewhere. But technically speaking, the School of Mullā Ṣadrā is associated with *ḥikmat* and not *'irfān*, although Mullā Ṣadrā was also a gnostic and deeply versed in Ibn 'Arabian teachings. But he integrated elements of this teaching into his *al-ḥikmat al-muta'āliyah* (*The Transcendent Theosophy or Philosophy*) and did not write separate treatises on pure gnosis in the manner of an Ibn 'Arabī or Qūnawī. It is highly significant that Mullā Ṣadrā did not leave behind a commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ*, like that of Kāshānī or Qayṣarī, or write a treatise like *Tamhīd al-qawā'id* of Ibn Turkah although he was well acquainted with this book. Nor do we find major works devoted purely to theoretical gnosis or *'irfān-i nazarī* by his students such as Fayḍ Kāshānī, who was also a gnostic, or Lāhijī. The school of *'irfān-i nazarī* certainly continued during the Safavid era, but the major intellectual thrust of the period lay in creating the School of Transcendent Theosophy, which had incorporated major theses of *'irfān* such as the transcendent unity of being (*wahdat al-wujūd*) into its philosophical system, but which was distinct in the structure of its doctrines, manner of presentation, and method of demonstration from *'irfān*. Specialists in later Islamic thought distinguish between *'irfān* and *ḥikmat* by stating that the subject of *ḥikmat* is "being conditioned by negation" (*wujūd bi-shart-i lā*) while the subject of *'irfān* is totally nonconditioned Being (*wujūd lā bi-shart*). The first means being

in itself, rejecting all conditionality, and the second, being totally non-conditioned, including being devoid of negation of conditionality.

In any case, as far as Persia is concerned, one had to wait for the Qajar period in the nineteenth century to see a major revival of the teaching of *'irfān-i naza'ir* and the appearance of important commentaries on classical texts of this tradition. This revival occurred along with the revivification of the teachings of the School of Mullā Ṣadrā, and many masters of this period were both *ḥakīm* and *'arif*, while *'irfān* continued to influence philosophy deeply. The first major figure to mention in the context of the school of *'irfān* during the Qajar period is Sayyid Raḍī Lārījānī (d. 1853), who was a student of Mullā 'Alī Nūrī in *ḥikmat*, but we know less of his lineage in *'irfān*. He is said to have possessed exalted spiritual states and was given the title of "Possessor of the States of the Inner (*bāṭin*) World" by his contemporaries. We know that he taught the *Fuṣūṣ* and *Tamhīd al-qawā'id* in Isfahan and was considered a saint as well as master of *'irfān-i naza'ir*.

Sayyid Raḍī's most important student was Āqā Muḥammad Riḍā Qumshā'ī (d. 1888–89), whom many Persian experts on *'irfān* consider as a second Ibn 'Arabī and the most prominent commentator upon gnostic texts such as the *Fuṣūṣ* since the time of Qūnawī. Āqā Muḥammad Riḍā studied in Isfahan but later migrated to Tehran, which became from the middle part of the nineteenth century onward perhaps the most significant locale for the teaching of *'irfān-i naza'ir* for the next century. There he taught and trained many important students in both *'irfān* and *ḥikmat*. He also wrote a number of major glosses and commentaries on such works as the *Tamhīd al-qawā'id* and Qayṣarī's commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ* as well as some of the works of Mullā Ṣadrā, in addition to independent treatises. Like so many masters of *'irfān-i naza'ir*, Āqā Muḥammad Riḍā was also a fine poet and composed poetry under the pen name Ṣahbā. Unfortunately, much of his poetry is lost. It is also of great significance to note that Āqā Muḥammad Riḍā emphasized the importance of spiritual practice and the need for a spiritual master parallel with the study of theoretical gnosis.

One of Āqā Muḥammad Riḍā's important students was Mīrzā Hāshim Ashkiwarī Rashtī (d. 1914), commentator upon *Miṣbāḥ al-uns*, who took over the circle of instruction of *'irfān* in Tehran after Āqā Muḥammad Riḍā. He was in turn teacher of such famous *ḥakīms* and *'arifs* of the past century as Mīrzā Mahdī Āshtiyānī (d. 1953), Mīrzā Aḥmad Āshtiyānī (d. 1940), my own teacher, Sayyid Muḥammad Kāzīm

‘Aṣṣār (d. 1975), and Muḥammad ‘Alī Shāhābādī (d. 1951). Although in his later life he entered the realm of politics and departed from the traditional gnostic understanding of *walāyah/wilāyah*, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (Rūḥ Allāh Khumaynī) was a student of Shāhābādī and deeply interested in the School of Ibn ‘Arabī for many years.

The extensive political fame and influence of Ayatollah Khomeini (d. 1989) has prevented many people in the West and even within the Islamic world from paying serious attention to his gnostic works. Whatever one may think of his political views, there is no doubt that on the basis of his many works on *‘irfān*, he has a place in any objective treatment of the long history of theoretical gnosis outlined in a summary fashion above. Although he also studied the *ḥikmat* of the School of Mullā Ṣadrā, his great love remained *‘irfān* of the School of Ibn ‘Arabī, which in some of his earlier writings he combined with the tradition of *‘irfān-i shī‘ī*.

It is perplexing that although later in life he entered fully into the arena of revolutionary politics, earlier in his life Ayatollah Khomeini was very much interested not only in theoretical gnosis but also in operative Sufism with its ascetic dimension and emphasis on detachment from the world. What made him depart from the life of an *‘arīf* and his models such as Qumshā‘ī and Shāhābādī, who kept aloof from the life of this world and politics, to enter the realm of such extensive and revolutionary political action as he did seems hard to understand. But that is the subject for another day. Suffice it to say here that the key to this riddle should perhaps be sought in the stages of humanity’s journeys (*asfār*) to God mentioned by Mullā Ṣadrā, in whose thought Khomeini was also an expert. As mentioned earlier in this book, at the beginning of the *Asfār*, Mullā Ṣadrā explicates the stages of the journey as follows: the journey from creation (*al-khalq*) to God (*al-Ḥaqq*), the journey in God, the journey back from God to His creation, and finally the journey in creation with God. It is both surprising and unusual that Ayatollah Khomeini applied these stages to his own life in such a way that he thought he was already in the fourth stage of the journey when he began his tumultuous political life. This has had no precedence in Islamic history as far as one of the traditional religious scholars, or *‘ulamā’*, or Sufis are concerned. In any case, his career is an unprecedented and perplexing case of the relation between esotericism and political life acted in a new mode, and very different from the establishment of the Safavid and Sanūsiyyah dynasties by Sufi orders.

The tradition of *'irfān-i nazārī* continues to this day in Persia. After the generation of such figures as 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1983), another of my teachers, who was a major gnostic without writing any commentaries on Ibn 'Arabī, and also one of the important masters of *'irfān*, Sayyid Muḥammad Kāẓim 'Aṣṣār, notable figures have appeared upon the scene such as Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī, Ḥasan-zādah Āmulī, and Jawād Āmulī, of whom the latter two still teach at Qom. Āshtiyānī's commentary upon the introduction of Qayṣarī to the *Fuṣūṣ*, mentioned above, as well as a number of his other commentaries, such as those on *Tamhīd al-qawā'id* and *Naqd al-nuṣūṣ*, are major commentaries upon texts of theoretical gnosis, while the recent commentary by Ḥasan-zādah Āmulī on the *Fuṣūṣ*, titled *Mumidd al-himam dar sharḥ-i fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam (Protractor of Intention in the Commentary upon the Bezels of Wisdom)*, reveals the living nature of this school in Persia, as does Jawād Āmulī's recension of *Tamhīd al-qawā'id*.

WITH WHAT DO THEORETICAL SUFISM AND GNOSIS DEAL?

Having provided a brief history of the school of gnosis and before turning to the significance of theoretical gnosis and doctrinal Sufism today, it is necessary to summarize again at the end of this discourse the subjects that Supreme Science treats, many of which have already been dealt with in one way or another in earlier chapters of this book. And before delineating the subjects made known through theoretical gnosis, one needs to know how one can gain such a knowledge. I dealt with the subject of salvific knowledge in chapter two. Here I will only mention again that the knowledge of the Supreme Reality or the Supreme Substance is itself the highest knowledge and constitutes the very substance of principal knowledge. As Frithjof Schuon, one of the foremost contemporary expositors of gnosis and metaphysics, has said, "The substance of knowledge is Knowledge of the Substance."³ To make the issue clear it is necessary to recall that this knowledge is contained deep within the heart/intellect or the Garden of Truth within, and gaining it is more of a recovery than a discovery. It is ultimately remembrance, the Platonic *anamnesis*. The faculty associated with this knowledge is the intellect (*al-'aql*), the *nous*, not to be confused with reason. To function correctly, the intellect within us in most cases needs that objective manifestation of the intellect that is revelation. In any case,

its attainment always requires intellectual intuition, which is ultimately a Divine gift, and the ability to “taste” the Truth. In the Islamic tradition this supreme knowledge or gnosis is associated with such qualities as *dhawq* (taste), *ḥads* (intuition), *ishrāq* (illumination), and *ḥuḍūr* (presence). Those who are able to understand gnosis must possess certain intellectual gifts, not to be confused with powers of mere ratiocination. Also, as should be clear from our earlier discussion, in Islam gnosis has always been related to the inner meaning of the revelation and its attainment of the initiatic and esoteric power of *walāyah/wilāyah*, about which so many Muslim gnostics from Ḥakīm Tirmidhī and Ibn ‘Arabī to Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī and from Āqā Muḥammad Riḍā Qumsha‘ī to Muḥammad ‘Alī Shāhābādī have written with differing interpretations. It should be added here that although theoretical gnosis can be mastered through instruction and one’s own intellectual powers, its full realization is possible only through spiritual practice and not through theoretical understanding divorced from spiritual realization.

Turning now to the subjects with which theoretical gnosis and doctrinal Sufism deal, I must mention that it is not my intention here to expound details of its teachings, but only to discuss the subjects of concern to this school and in fact to Islamic metaphysics as a whole. The supreme subject of gnosis may be said to be the Supreme Principle or Reality, which is absolute and infinite and not even bound by the condition of being absolute and infinite. It corresponds to what Meister Eckhart calls the Godhead and others have called the Ground of Being. The gnostics often write that it is Absolute Being without even the “limitation” of absoluteness. It is in fact the Reality that is both Beyond-Being and Absolute Being. Later gnostics called the supreme subject of this science *wujūd-i lā bi-shart-i maqsamī*, that is, the totally unconditioned Being, which is itself beyond all conditionality and the ground for all divisions and distinctions of being. Gnosis, therefore, deals not only with ontology or the science of being, but with a metaphysics that is grounded beyond Being in the Supreme Reality of which Being as usually understood is the first Self-Determination. It begins with the Divine Essence (*Dhāt*), which is above all limits and determinations and which is often referred to in Sufism as *al-Ḥaqq* (the Truth). It also deals with multiplicity within the Divine Order, that is, the Divine Names and Qualities, which are still in the Divine Order but are so many Self-Determinations and Self-Disclosures of the Supreme Essence in a reality that already partakes of multiplicity.

This Supreme Science (*al-‘ilm al-a‘lā*) or *scientia sacra*, that is, gnosis, also deals with manifestations of the Principle (or God, in religious language), with all the levels of universal and cosmic existence from the archangelic to the material, viewing all that exists in the cosmic order in light of the Principle. All creation is seen in its relation to God. Gnosis then descends from the Divine Order to the realm of manifestation and deals with cosmology as a science of the cosmos in relation to the Principle, as a form of knowledge that provides maps to guide and orient us who are situated in the confines of cosmic existence to the Metacosmic Reality. This Supreme Science also deals of necessity with the human state in all its width, breadth, depth, and height. It contains a most profound “science of the human state,” which one could call an anthropology if this term were understood in its traditional and not modern sense, as well as a “science of spirit” within us, or pneumatology, which is absent from the modern worldview but found in traditional psychology. Finally, gnosis deals with the Principle and all the levels of manifestation from the point of view of the unity that dominates over all that exists and that is especially central to the Islamic perspective. As already mentioned, one might say that Islamic metaphysics or gnosis is dominated by the two basic doctrines of the “transcendent oneness or unity of being” (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) and the Universal Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*), which includes not only a gnostic anthropology but also a symbolic cosmology on the basis of the correspondence between the microcosm and macrocosm.

Theoretical gnosis is also concerned in the deepest sense with the reality of revelation and religion. The question of the relation between gnosis and esoterism, on the one hand, and the formal and exoteric aspect of religion, on the other, is a complicated one into which we cannot enter here. What is clear is that in every traditional society gnosis and esoterism have been inextricably tied to the religious climate in which they have existed. This is as true of Luria and Jewish esoterism as it is of Śāṅkara and Hindu gnosis as well as everything in between. In any case, in this appendix, which deals with gnosis in the Islamic tradition, we need to emphasize the deepest concern of the gnostics, like Sufis in general, with the realities of religion and explanation of its teachings on the most profound level, as we observe in many well-known Sufi treatises on the inner meaning of the Quran, and also of the Islamic rites as well as on the central Islamic doctrine of Unity (*tawḥīd*).

Theoretical gnosis is concerned on the intellectual level in one way or another not only with the practical aspects of religion but also with basic Islamic doctrines such as creation, prophecy, eschatology, and even Divine Law. Islamic masters of gnosis speak of both the why and the how of creation. As I mentioned in earlier chapters, they speak of “creation *in* God” as well as “creation *by* God”. They expound the doctrine of the immutable archetypes (*al-a‘yān al-thābitah*) (corresponding in many ways to the Platonic ideas) and the breathing of existence upon them associated with the Divine Mercy, which brings about the created order. They see creation itself as the Self-Disclosure of God. They also discuss the renewal of creation (*tajdīd al-khalq*) at every moment. Furthermore, theoretical gnosis speaks extensively about the end as well as the beginning of things. The deepest explanation of Islamic eschatology based on the Quran and *Ḥadīth* is found in such writings as the *Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah* of Ibn ‘Arabī.

In all traditional religions and cultural climes gnosis also provides the basis for the science of forms, including artistic forms, and makes comprehensible the language of symbolism, as we see in Hindu treatises on the metaphysics of art, Chinese treatises on the tao of painting, or the profound exposition of Islamic aesthetics and the science of symbolism in so many Sufi works, such as the *Mathnawī* of Rūmī. Although dealing at the highest level with the Formless, it is gnosis and metaphysics that can provide the basis for the science of symbols, especially in a world where the “symbolist spirit” has been lost. If Islamic treatises on theoretical gnosis do not usually deal explicitly in a separate section with forms and symbols, they do expound the principles of this science, which can then be applied when necessary. Besides the poems of Rūmī, the writings of Ibn ‘Arabī are replete with such examples. Such masters elucidate the science of spiritual hermeneutics (*ta’wīl*) as well as apply it to diverse religious and artistic forms, symbols, and myths, including of course those found in the Quran itself.

Let us now summarize what constitutes the reality of gnosis as understood in the Islamic tradition. Gnosis when realized is illuminative and unitive knowledge. It is also a *theoria* or vision of the Garden of Truth, and therefore it is natural that theoretical gnosis be concerned with knowledge as such, primarily sacred knowledge and knowledge of the Sacred but also with the grades and the hierarchy of knowledge. It is true that most traditional philosophies, including the Islamic, also deal with this issue, but it is only in works on theoretical gnosis that one

finds the most universal treatment of this subject, including of course supreme knowledge, which is gnosis itself. Theoretical gnosis or *scientia sacra* is also the metaphysics that lies at the heart of perennial philosophy understood traditionally. It has been sometimes called theosophy, as this term was understood before its modern distortion, and is also related to what is called by some mystical theology and mystical philosophy in Western languages. In the Islamic tradition it has provided the ultimate criteria for the judgment of what constitutes *philosophia vera*. It has been foundational in the development of both traditional philosophy and the traditional sciences and is key to the deepest understanding of all traditional cosmological sciences, including the “hidden sciences” (*al-‘ulūm al-khafīyyah* or *ghaībah*). As we have seen, the later traditional schools of philosophy that have persisted in the Islamic world to this day, chief among them the School of Illumination founded by Suhrawardī and the Transcendent Theosophy/Philosophy established by Mullā Ṣadrā, are closely associated with *‘irfān*. One might in fact say that while after the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in the West philosophy became more and more wedded and also subservient to modern science, as we see so clearly in Kant, in the Islamic world philosophy became ever more closely associated with *‘irfān*, from which it drew its sustenance and whose vision of reality served as basis for philosophizing. One needs only read the works of Mullā Ṣadrā, such as his *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyyah* (*Divine Witnesses*), to ascertain the truth of this assertion. Many of the works of the later Islamic philosophers lie at the borderline between *ḥikmat* and *‘irfān* although, as already mentioned, the two disciplines remain quite distinct from one another.

THEORETICAL GNOSIS AND ENTRY INTO THE GARDEN OF TRUTH

As stated earlier, in the traditional Islamic world theoretical gnosis was not only opposed by certain, but certainly not all, jurists, theologians, and philosophers, it was also opposed by certain Sufis who claimed that gnosis is the result of what is attained through spiritual states and not through reading books on gnosis. Titus Burckhardt, one of the foremost authorities on traditional metaphysics and the perennial philosophy in the twentieth century and the person who opened the door for the understanding of Ibn ‘Arabī in the West, once told me that when

he first went to Fez as a young man, one day he took the *Fuṣūṣ* with him to a great teacher to study this basic text of *maʿrifah* or *ʿiḥfān* with him. The teacher asked him what book he was carrying under his arm. He said it was the *Fuṣūṣ*. The teacher smiled and said, “Those who are intelligent enough to understand the *Fuṣūṣ* do not need to study it, and those who are not intelligent enough are not competent to study it anyway.” The master nevertheless went on to teach the young S. Ibrāhīm (Titus Burckhardt) the *Fuṣūṣ*, but he was alluding to the significance of realized gnosis and not only its theoretical understanding, a knowledge that once realized delivers us from the bondage of ignorance, being by definition salvific knowledge. Burckhardt went on to translate a summary of the *Fuṣūṣ* into French, a translation that played a groundbreaking role in introducing the school of theoretical gnosis and Ibn ʿArabī to the West. In fact, although the magisterial exposition of gnosis and metaphysics by traditional masters such as René Guénon, Frithjof Schuon, Burckhardt, and others was directly related to inner inspiration and intellection, Islamic esoterism, as well as teachings of non-Islamic origin, it was also inextricably linked (in a more particular manner) with the tradition of *ʿiḥfān* discussed in this appendix

Of course, one does not become a saint and enter the Garden of Truth simply by reading texts of *ʿiḥfān* or even understanding them mentally. One has to realize their truths and “be” what one knows. Nevertheless, the body of knowledge contained in works of theoretical gnosis and doctrinal and theoretical Sufism are a most precious science, which must be cherished as a gift from Heaven. This vast body of writings from Ibn ʿArabī and Qūnawī to Āqā Muḥammad Riḍā Qumshāʾī and Amīr ʿAbd al-Qādir and in the contemporary period from Mawlānā ʿAlī Thanwī and Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshṭiyānī to Ḥasan-zādah Āmulī contain a body of knowledge of vast richness, a knowledge that alone can provide the deepest answers to the most acute contemporary intellectual, spiritual, and even practical questions. Its very presence helps human beings avoid the mental errors that surround us today, errors whose consequences now threaten our very existence. But above all, this living tradition can provide for not only Muslims but also non-Muslims capable of understanding it the Supreme Science of the Real, the vision of the Garden of Truth whose realization and attainment is the highest end of human existence and the goal of the spiritual path. The teachings of gnosis are a fruit of the vision of the Garden and

can therefore lead to that vision which precedes, for those with an intellectual bent, the actual march upon the path to the Garden. The experience of the Garden of Truth is the realization of the teachings of gnosis that are expounded on the theoretical level. It is for those who understand such teachings to transform *theoria* into actual experience, the description of the Beloved into Her embrace.

I am the bird of the spiritual Garden, not of this world of dust;
For a few days, they have a cage of my body made.

Rūmī