Article

Ibn ʿArabī and the Spiritual Sīrah of Prophet Muḥammad

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Abstract: While most traditional works on the life of Prophet Muḥammad focus on how his ostensible teachings and actions can be used as a template for human conduct, the thirteenth-century Sufi thinker, Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), turns his attention to the spiritual significance and inner reality of Prophet Muḥammad. Ibn ʿArabī argues that as the seal of the prophets, Muḥammad was not only given the Qurʾan, which incorporated elements from previous revelations, nor was he just given a religion that had elements from prior religions; rather, in his very spiritual essence, he combined the essences of previous prophets. It is in this sense that Muḥammad represents the culmination of the prophetic life. In his *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, Ibn ʿArabī reveals the spiritual significance of all the prophets mentioned in the Qurʾan, with the exception of Khālid ibn Sinān, whom Ibn ʿArabī considers to be a prophet and dedicates a chapter to, but who is not mentioned in the Qurʾan. The present paper explores how the spiritual essences of previous prophets are manifested in Prophet Muḥammad, and the ways in which this comprehensiveness is exhibited in his life. This 'spiritual *sīrah*' is all the more significant in the modern context, where spirituality is privileged over religiosity. Ibn ʿArabī demonstrates that the spiritual basis of the life of Prophet Muḥammad cannot be extricated from his external actions. The 'spiritual *sīrah*' thus provides an antidote to the religious associational formalism that is rejected by many modern Muslims.

Keywords: Sīrah; Sufism; Ibn ʿArabī; Fuṣūṣ; spirituality; Prophet Muḥammad; mysticism

1. Introduction

The Qurʾan affirms time and again that it corroborates what was revealed to prophets before Muḥammad. In Q5:48, God declares, '*And We revealed the Book to you with the truth, confirming the books that came before it*'. Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), possibly the most influential classical exegete (Saleh 2016), writes in his commentary of this verse that it means, 'the Qurʾan confirms everything that God revealed in the Torah, or the New Testament (*Injīl*), or the Psalms (*Zabūr*)' (Al-Ṭabarī 2000, vol. 10, p. 380). In the same vein, the highly influential Naqshbandī-Mujaddidī Sufi exegete, Muḥammad Thanāʾ Allāh Pānipatī (d. 1225/1810) (Qadri 1988), in his commentary of Q3:3, which employs the same phrase of the Qurʾan '*confirming what came before it*', explains that believing in the Qurʾan is required by all those who believed in prior revelations due to their single message, and because the Qurʾan is the consolidation of all revelations that came before it (Pānipatī 1991, vol. 2, pp. 5–6). Pānipatī emphasises the unity of religions—of Islam being the culmination of prior religions—but also the unity between religions, intimating that they share a common core, and the major differences between them are due to the machinations of Satan (Engineer 1988, p. 22).

The lamentably overlooked Naqshbandī exegete, Niʿmat Allāh ibn Maḥmūd al-Nakhjiwānī (d. 920/1514) (Tosun 2014, p. 322), goes even further when he says in his commentary of this verse that the Qurʾan

> is comprehensive (*jāmiʿ*) and comprises (*shāmil*) all things in existence—its most lofty and its most lowly, its first and its last—[deliberately] ambiguous (*multabis*) about [the nature of] God, congruent with the material world (*al-muṭābiq liʾl-wāqiʿ*),

confirming that which came before it from the earlier books which were revealed to previous prophets, peace be upon them all. And He also revealed the Torah and the New Testament to Mūsā and 'Īsā, peace be upon them, confirming what generally was already mentioned in earlier books before the Qur'an was revealed to you. (Al-Nakhjiwānī 1999, vol. 1, p. 98)

Al-Nakhjiwānī claims that not only is the Qur'an the culmination of all the previous revelations and so it contains 'generally what was mentioned in earlier books', but that it contains 'all things in existence'. This is an allusion to the idea that the Qur'an is the universe in written form (Lala 2023a). However, unlike other Sufi scholars who just claim that the Qur'an is the microcosmic universe in written form (Lala 2023a), al-Nakhjiwānī insinuates that it is the entire history of the universe, not just the current manifestation of it, since its essence encompasses the very essence of the phenomenal world, which is why it contains the first and the last of all existence. He goes on to assert that the Qur'an is deliberately 'ambiguous' about (the nature of) 'God' because this lies beyond the ken of human comprehension, and so it is only 'congruent with' what humankind can grasp—the material world. All of these exegetes agree, then, that the Qur'an is the culmination of previous revelations and contains the major points of all those revelations.

Unsurprisingly, then, scholars likewise argue that, just as the Qur'an contains all the important aspects of previous revelations, Islam contains the principal directives from previous religions. Pānipatī's emphasis on the current religion being the latest manifestation and culmination of all prior religions (Engineer 1988) correlates with the commonly held view that there is a parallel between the Qur'an, as the culmination of God's revelation, and Islam, as the culmination of God's religion. Indeed, Bülent Şenay argues that the universality of religion goes hand-in-hand with the universality of revelation (Şenay 2000, p. 414). Ibn 'Arabī is unequivocal about this when he says,

If Muḥammad, peace be upon him had been sent in the time of Ādam then all the prophets and all peoples would have been under the directives of his religious law (*sharī'a*) to the Day of Resurrection . . . . And all the messengers other than him were sent to specific nations so their messengerhood was not general like his [Muḥammad's] messengerhood. (Ibn 'Arabī n.d., vol. 1, p. 135)

Muḥammad's religion thus contains all prior religions. This means that (1) the essence of the Qur'an contains what was in the essence of previous revelations, and (2) the essence of Islam contains what was in the essence of previous religions. If that is the case, then it is axiomatic that the essence of the messenger to whom the Qur'an and the religion of Islam were given would, likewise, contain the essence of previous prophets. And this is precisely what Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240), who many believe is among the most important mystics of all time (Corbin 2008; Ghurāb 1985; Izutsu 1983; Knysh 1999; Landau 2008), argues.

2. Ibn 'Arabī's Mystical *Sīrah* of Prophet Muḥammad

Ibn 'Arabī is naturally not the first to suggest that Prophet Muḥammad is the culmination of human history. Indeed, the author of the first complete *sīrah*, Ibn Isḥāq (d. 152/769) (Iqbal 2011, p. 198), 'perceived the history of the world as a history of the prophets and *sīrah* as its last hoop' (Sertkaya 2022).[1] Nevertheless, Ibn 'Arabī's approach is completely unique as he claims that the essence of Prophet Muḥammad actually encompasses the essences of all prophets. This is because, as Ibn 'Arabī tells us, the purpose for the creation of the universe was the divine desire for His knowable aspect to be seen in the form of contingency (Ibn 'Arabī 2002, pp. 48–49; n.d., vol. 2, p. 303). This knowable aspect is expressed in the Qur'an as His 'most beautiful Names' (Qur'an 7:180), which is the way in which God—despite being entirely beyond the ken of human understanding—makes Himself known to His creation (Lala 2023b).

The manifestation of God's 'most beautiful Names', then, is the *raison d'etre* of all existence, so all things are a locus for one of God's Names, but with regard to Prophet Muḥammad, Ibn 'Arabī says we have the culminating instantiation of the Perfect Man

(*Al-Insān al-kāmil*), who manifests all of God's Names with the highest level of clarity in one locus of divine manifestation (Al-Jīlī 1997; Ibn 'Arabī 2002, pp. 48–50, 214; Morrissey 2020). Ibn 'Arabī bases this on the tradition in which God declares,

> 'But for you, O Muḥammad, I would not have created the heaven or the earth, and not created paradise or hell'. He thus mentioned His creation of everything besides God, so he [Muḥammad] is the first separation (*awwal munfaṣil*) in which is contained the spirit of everything. (Ibn 'Arabī n.d., vol. 1, p. 137)[2]

The divine objective of viewing the Self through the Other, therefore, is only achieved by the creation of Prophet Muḥammad. This being the case, not only does Muḥammad represent the pinnacle of creation, but, in a more literal sense, he encompasses all the distinguishing features of all the prophets who came before him (Al-Qūnawī 2013). Ibn 'Arabī is clear about this when he declares that 'his [Muḥammad's], peace be upon him, spirituality (*rūḥāniyya*) is present with the spirituality of all prophets who are helped by this pure soul' (Ibn 'Arabī n.d., vol. 1, p. 137). The reason for this is that, in Ibn 'Arabī's emanationist cosmology—redolent of the Plotinian model (Plotinus 2018; Lala 2019a, 2019b)—all the essences of the prophets are nothing but further differentiations of the knowable divine essence mediated through the essence of Prophet Muḥammad (Al-Jāmī 2005, pp. 177–78; Al-Qayṣarī 1955, p. 1153; Al-Qūnawī 2013, pp. 117–19). Ibn 'Arabī clarifies this in the aforementioned passage when he states that Prophet Muḥammad is the first differentiation that contains 'the spirit of everything' that will come into being.

As the source of their essences, the essence of Muḥammad contains within it the essences of previous prophets, which is exhibited in his spiritual *sīrah*. In his most studied work, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, Ibn 'Arabī reveals the 'wisdom' (*ḥikma*) of each prophet that is associated with his essence (Al-Qūnawī 2013). These essences are displayed in the spiritual reality and life of the prophets, which Ibn 'Arabī typically extracts from the Qur'an and, less frequently, from the prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*) (Nettler 2012, p. 14). Since Prophet Muḥammad's spiritual essence contains all the essences of previous prophets, his spiritual *sīrah* is distinguished by all the defining features of his predecessors. This article explores how the spiritual essences of eight of the prophets mentioned in the *Fuṣūṣ* are displayed in the spiritual essence and *sīrah* of Prophet Muḥammad. We begin with the first chapter in which the spiritual essence of Ādam is interrogated.

3. The Spiritual Essence and Spiritual *Sīrah* of Prophet Muḥammad

3.1. Ādam and the Spiritual Nature of Prophet Muḥammad's Essence

Ādam is not only the first human; for Ibn 'Arabī, he is a sign. Su'ād al-Ḥakīm explains that 'he is a symbol for the reality of humankind and the Perfect Man' (*ramz li'l-ḥaqīqa al-insāniyya wa'l-insān al-kāmil*). As such, 'he combines in his reality, all the realities that are dispersed in existents, so he is the "comprehensive being" (*kawn jāmi'*) . . . and the vicegerent (*khalīfa*) of God on earth' (Al-Ḥakīm 1981, p. 54). In the famous beginning of the *Fuṣūṣ*, Ibn 'Arabī writes that

> When God, be He praised, wanted to see His most beautiful Names (*Al-Asmā' al-ḥusnā*) . . . and to see their essences (*a'yānahā*) . . . He originated the universe as an indefinite and undifferentiated form of existence without a soul, so it was like a mirror without any polish, . . . thus Ādam was the polish of that mirror and the soul of that form. (Ibn 'Arabī 2002, pp. 48–49)

As the first human, Ādam is the first one to be a locus of manifestation of all of God's most beautiful Names. This is why Ibn 'Arabī clarifies that his wisdom is of 'divinity' (Ibn 'Arabī 2002, p. 48) because his essence is the divine Names that he manifests, which is what qualifies him to be 'God's vicegerent on earth'.

The mystical poet and key promulgator of Ibn 'Arabī's ideas, Nūr al-Dīn al-Jāmī (d. 898/1492) (Rizvi 2006), writes that the most beautiful Names of God are 'differentiations of the divine in the realities of contingent beings (*fī ḥaqā'iq al-mumkināt*)', but these are not the 'essence itself', which could never be expressed in the form of contingency (Al-Jāmī

2005, p. 70). Hence, it would appear that, in Ibn 'Arabī's emanationist cosmology, Ādam is the differentiation after the differentiation from the divine essence (*dhāt*) that brings about the most beautiful Names. Nevertheless, this is incorrect because, as stated above, the first differentiation of the divine Names is the essence of Prophet Muḥammad. Ibn 'Arabī is explicit about this in the chapter of Muḥammad when he cites the tradition in which it is stated that 'he [Muḥammad] was a prophet while Ādam was between water and clay (*bayn mā' wa'l-ṭīn*)' (Ibn 'Arabī 2002, p. 214).[3]

Al-Jāmī elaborates that this is why the 'wisdom' associated with Prophet Muḥammad is that of 'uniqueness' (*fardiyya*) (Ibn 'Arabī 2002, p. 214), because he is unique in combining in his essence the essences of all the prophets, for even though 'each one of them [i.e., prophets] is a locus of manifestation (*maẓhar*) for . . . all the universal Names, which are subsumed under the Name "Allāh"', Prophet Muḥammad is the first differentiation through the mediation of whom they become loci of divine manifestation (Al-Jāmī 2009, p. 508). This means that, even though Ādam is temporally first, he is ontologically posterior to and dependent on Prophet Muḥammad, as Dawūd al-Qayṣarī (d. 751/1350), arguably the most influential of Ibn 'Arabī's commentators (Rustom 2005), explains when he says that 'the first of the essences upon which flowed the most holy effulgence (*al-fayḍ al-aqdas*)[4] was his [Muḥammad's] fixed essence (*'ayn thābit*)'[5] (Al-Qayṣarī 1955, p. 1153).

Ibn 'Arabī's insistence on elaborating the spiritual essence of Prophet Muḥammad is a characteristic that runs through all his works. He maintains that the outer reality (*ẓāhir*) is the point of departure that leads to the inner reality (*bāṭin*), and the spiritual elites are able to make this 'cross over' (*'ubūr*), which is why they are endowed with 'wisdom' (*'ibra*) that comes from the same linguistic root ('—b—r) (Winkel 1996; Lala 2022b, 2022c). What one finds in the *Fuṣūṣ*, therefore, is a counterweight to the *shamā'il*, which is 'the branch of science or a sub-discipline that deals with the humanity of the Prophet and describes his physical appearance as well as moral conduct' (Sertkaya 2022). Instead of only focussing on the outer aspect, or *ẓāhir*, of Prophet Muḥammad, which Ibn 'Arabī consistently chastises exoteric scholars for doing (Ibn 'Arabī n.d., vol. 1, p. 280),[6] he reveals his inner aspect, or *bāṭin*. So just as works on the *shamā'il* typically start with the outer form (*khalq*) of Prophet Muḥammad (Al-Tirmidhī 1993, p. 1), Ibn 'Arabī begins his *Fuṣūṣ* by explaining the inner reality of God's vicegerent on earth, who, ultimately, is not Ādam, but Muḥammad, since the former derives his essence from the latter. This inner reality permeates every action of Prophet Muḥammad, principal among which is the nature of his call to God.

3.2. Nūḥ and the Spiritual Nature of Prophet Muḥammad's Call

Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274), Ibn 'Arabī's adopted son and disciple (Dagli 2016, p. 5; Todd 2014), explains in his commentary on the chapter of Nūḥ that this messenger found himself in a unique situation because, prior to his era, polytheism was not something that people had ever considered. The prophets before him, therefore, were focussed on proving the existence of God, not on proving His oneness. This meant that the nature of Nūḥ's call to God was fundamentally and radically different to his predecessors as it underscored the transcendence (*tanzīh*) of God, and not His comparability (*tashbīh*) (Al-Qūnawī 2013, pp. 20–21). Indeed, the commentators of the *Fuṣūṣ* agree that the 'wisdom' of Nūḥ is the accentuation of transcendence in his call to react to the polytheism of his people (Al-Jandī 2007, p. 230; Al-Nābulusī 1886, p. 97; Al-Qāshānī 1892, p. 45; Al-Qayṣarī 1955, p. 497; Al-Qūnawī 2013, pp. 20–21). Ibn 'Arabī explains that the reason Nūḥ's call was rejected by his people was because it was too transcendence-oriented, yet the nature of his call was an ineluctable reaction to his people's polytheism (Ibn 'Arabī 2002, pp. 68–74). Al-Qayṣarī elaborates that because polytheism took hold of his people, Nūḥ *had to* underscore the transcendence of God, even though he knew that the idols were also 'a locus of divine manifestation', as all things are nothing but God (Al-Qayṣarī 1955, p. 497).

Ibn 'Arabī makes the same point himself when he writes,

> Nothing but God is worshipped in all things that are worshipped (*ma'būd*). The people of basic understanding are the ones who suppose that there is divinity

(*ulūhiyya*) in them . . . while the people of elevated understanding (*al-a'lā*) do not suppose this. Instead, they say, 'this is a locus of manifestation of God (*majlā ilāhī*) that should be worshipped', without restricting themselves [to that thing]. (Ibn 'Arabī 2002, p. 72)[7]

This means that after the introduction of polytheism in the human consciousness, there was a fundamental shift in the nature of the prophetic call, which was characterised by a strict bifurcation between what the outer call was, and what the true call signified. The ostensible call, says Ibn 'Arabī, was expressed as a call towards the absolute transcendence of God, but the inner reality of the prophet's knowledge about God intimated that He was represented in all things, including the idols that were being worshipped. And this is also the true nature of Prophet Muḥammad's call.

Specialists on the *sīrah* of Prophet Muḥammad write that he was commanded by God to '*proclaim the greatness of your Lord*' (Qur'an, 74:3) and 'in this is an instruction (*tanbīh*) that the call to God (*al-da'wa ilā Allāh*) and the cognisance of His transcendence (*tanzīh*) takes precedence over all other types of call' (Al-Dabīsī 2010, p. 301). The outward (*ẓāhir*) call of Prophet Muḥammad was therefore marked by the same insistence on transcendence as that of Nūḥ because the introduction of polytheism merited it. In the *Futūḥāt*, Ibn 'Arabī explains that the call to God is

> tailored to the state of the person called (*ḥāl al-mad'ū*), like the person who is hungry and cries out, 'O God, feed me!' But God, Whom he cries out to, is the One Who gives and the One Who withholds. It would thus be problematic to answer his cry if the person meant both denotations of the term 'God'. Thus the person only refers to the denotation, 'the One Who feeds' (*Al-Muṭ'im*) and 'the One Who gives sustenance' (*Al-Razzāq*), and not 'the One Who withholds' (*Al-Māni'*). So if God gives Him food, He only responds as the One Who feeds'. (Ibn 'Arabī n.d., vol. 1, p. 669)

Ibn 'Arabī explains that, just as in the state of hunger, a person does not cry out to God in terms of His comprehensiveness as the One Who feeds and withholds sustenance; rather, they focus only on God as the One Who feeds; likewise, a prophet's call has to be concordant with the state of the people he is calling to God. If they are mired in polytheism, then his call is characterised by just the transcendence of God, even though all things in existence are loci of divine manifestation.

This means that there is an outer (*ẓāhir*) dimension and an inner (*bāṭin*) dimension to the call. The outer dimension merely corresponds to the state of the audience, while the inner dimension reveals what the true reality is. Ibn 'Arabī makes this explicit in the chapter of Nūḥ in the *Fuṣūṣ* when he writes,

> It is known that when the divine religious scriptures say what they say about God, the Exalted, they do it in a way that articulates the ostensible meaning to common people (*al-'umūm*). But the spiritual elite comprehend each utterance in numerous ways, irrespective of how it is uttered. So God appears in all created things and He is 'the Manifest' (*Al-Ẓāhir*) in all knowable things, and He is also 'the Hidden' (*Al-Bāṭin*) from understanding for all but those who realise that the universe is nothing but His form and essence. (Ibn 'Arabī 2002, p. 68)

Referring to the divine Names 'the Manifest' and 'the Hidden' mentioned in Q57:3, Ibn 'Arabī explains that divine scriptures specifically, and the call of prophets to God more generally, have multiple layers. While common people only understand the apparent or *ẓāhir* meaning, which corresponds to God's transcendence, the spiritual elite understand the apparent *and* the hidden (*bāṭin*) meaning, which corresponds to God's transcendence and His comparability in terms of His divine Names. It is worth pointing out that Ibn 'Arabī is very clear that the comparability and immanence of God is only in terms of His most beautiful Names, and not in terms of God as He is in His pure essence, which is entirely beyond the ken of human comprehension. He writes, 'Even if we describe ourselves like God describes Himself in every way, there remains an enduring difference: we are

dependent on Him for our existence . . . and He is free of this dependence' (Ibn 'Arabī 2002, p. 54). God's absolute existence, as opposed to the contingent existence of humans and all other forms of creation, marks an abiding difference between God and His creation that precludes the identification of one as the other in an essential way.

Ibn 'Arabī is not the first to suggest that there are different levels to the divine call. Abū 'Alī al-Ḥusayn ibn Sīnā (d. 429/1037) articulated that there are two levels of understanding scripture, including the lower level for the masses that expresses the cosmological and teleological proofs adduced in the Qur'an, and the higher level for the 'veracious' (*ṣiddīqīn*), which reveals the ontological proof for God's existence (Erlwein 2015, p. 115; Ibn Sīnā 2005, p. 483).[8] Ibn 'Arabī, nevertheless, pronounces that the nature of the call itself is framed according to the audience, which may emphasise one aspect of it to the exclusion of the other. In the case of Nūḥ's call, the comparability of God is sacrificed at the altar of transcendence due to his nation's polytheism. The Prophet Muḥammad, too, focussed on God's transcendence because, as the works on *sīrah* mention, the Meccan community to which he was sent was also engaged in polytheism (Ibn Hishām n.d., vol. 1, p. 277; Ibn Isḥāq 1978, p. 175; Ibn Kathīr 1976, vol. 1, p. 454). While this may have been the outer aspect of his call, Ibn 'Arabī reminds us that there is also an inner spiritual aspect that acknowledged the immanence of God and His comparability—at least in terms of His most beautiful Names—in the same way as that of the call of Nūḥ. This dichotomy between the outer aspect and inner aspect was also expressed in Prophet Muḥammad's asceticism, which was outwardly expressed by his renunciation from the world whilst inwardly emblematised by his love for it.

3.3. Idrīs/Ilyās and the Spiritual Nature of Prophet Muḥammad's Asceticism (Zuhd) and Love for the World

Ibn 'Arabī concentrates on Q19:57, where God declares, '*And We raised Idrīs to an elevated place (makān 'alaiyy)*' (Ibn 'Arabī 2002, p. 75). The reason for this is due to Idrīs' asceticism (*zuhd*). Al-Qayṣarī explains that Idrīs carried out

> onerous religious exercises (*riyāḍa shāqqa*) and cleansed himself from all the traits of bestiality (*ḥayawāniyya*) to the point that his spiritual nature became dominant over his beastly nature and he was able to shake off his mortal coil and ascend to the heavens to associate with spirits and angels. (Al-Qayṣarī 1955, p. 542)

It was on account of Idrīs' absolute and complete renunciation from the physical world that he was afforded this 'elevated rank'. Al-Qayṣarī adds that Idrīs was so fervent in his renunciation that 'he did not sleep or eat for sixteen years', and this was what enabled him to become 'a pure intellect' ('*aql mujarrad*) (Al-Qayṣarī 1955, p. 542).

The Abbasid jurist, Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058), writes in his work on the *sīrah* of Prophet Muḥammad that one of his defining traits was also asceticism. He relates a tradition in which God said to Prophet Muḥammad, 'If you wish, I will give you such treasures of the world (*khazā'in al-arḍ*) that I have not given anyone before you nor will I give anyone after you, and it will not diminish anything that you will be given in the hereafter'. To this, Prophet Muḥammad replied, 'Just gather it all for me in the hereafter' (Al-Māwardī 1989, p. 218). He also recounts another incident when the would-be second caliph, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23/644?), enters the chamber of Prophet Muḥammad to find him lying on a rough mat on the ground with the imprint of the mat etched on his back. He asks why the Prophet does not find a bed to feel more comfortable. Prophet Muḥammad retorts,

> 'What have I got to do with this world? By He in Whose hand my soul resides, my relationship to the world is just like a rider who travels on a summer's day and seeks shade under a tree for an hour of the day, then he departs and leaves it'. (Al-Māwardī 1989, p. 218)

Such examples abound. Yet, Ibn 'Arabī reveals that Prophet Muḥammad simultaneously loved the world in the same way that Idrīs loved the world when he returned

as Ilyās (Ibn ʿArabī 2002, p. 181). Ibn ʿArabī elaborates that Ilyas's desire (*shahwa*) for the world dominated his intellect because this desire was for the divine, and the divine is expressed as the universe in terms of God's most beautiful Names (Ibn ʿArabī 2002, p. 186). Prophet Muḥammad, too, loved the world. The entire chapter of Muḥammad in the *Fuṣūṣ* is devoted to the saying of the Prophet that three things of the world were made beloved to him: women, perfume, and prayer (*ṣalā*) (Ibn ʿArabī 2002, p. 214). While prayer (*ṣalā*), though performed in the world, maintains a connection with the Lord, women and perfume are very much part of the world. Ibn ʿArabī conveys in this chapter that Prophet Muḥammad's love for women and perfume were also expressions of his asceticism in the same way that his love of prayer (*ṣalā*) was. He focusses especially on the love Prophet Muḥammad had for women, explaining that he did not love women because of the sensual pleasure that could be derived from them; rather, he loved them for being a pellucid locus of manifestation of the divine Names. He writes,

> Whoever only loves them [women] due to their innate desire (*shahwa ṭabīʿiyya*) does not have the knowledge of that desire. She is nothing but a form without a soul for him. Although that form does indeed have a soul, it is not witnessed (*ghayr mashhūda*) by he who goes to his wife or any woman, no matter who she is, only for corporeal pleasure. (Ibn ʿArabī 2002, p. 218)

Ibn ʿArabī clarifies that a man who only loves women for their outer (*ẓāhir*) beauty has missed their true, inner (*bāṭin*) beauty, which is on account of their being a locus of all the most beautiful Names of God; this is their essence and soul, which a man governed by his base desires does not even witness. Prophet Muḥammad, in contrast, loved women only because they were loci of divine manifestation (Lala 2022a). Ibn ʿArabī states that 'Muḥammad's, peace be upon him, love for women emanated from divine love (*taḥabbub ilāhī*)' (Ibn ʿArabī 2002, p. 219) because 'witnessing God in women is the greatest and most complete form of witnessing' (*aʿẓam al-shuhūd wa akmalah*) (Ibn ʿArabī 2002, p. 217). It is in this way that his asceticism was also expressed as love for the world because he loved proximity to the divine in all its forms. Muḥammad's love for the divine is most perspicuously articulated in the chapter of Ibrāhīm, which expatiates on the ecstatic and rapturous nature of it.

3.4. Ibrāhīm and the Spiritual Nature of Prophet Muḥammad's Divine Love

Ibn ʿArabī begins the chapter on Ibrāhīm with the claim that

> the intimate friend of God (*Al-Khalīl*) was only named the intimate friend of God due to his permeation (*takhallul*) by and his bringing together (*ḥaṣr*) of all those things by which the divine essence (*al-dhāt al-ilāhī*) is characterised. (Ibn ʿArabī 2002, p. 80)

Most scholars believe that Ibrāhīm was called '*Khalīl Allāh*' because he was an intimate friend of God. ʿImād al-Dīn ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), for instance, writes that 'he arrived at the extreme limit (*ghāya*) of how close a servant can get to God so he ended up at the rank of friendship (*darajat al-khulla*), which is the highest of the stations of [divine] love' (*maqamāt al-maḥabba*) (Ibn Kathīr 1999, vol. 2, p. 422). Ibn ʿArabī, however, asserts that it is more than this. He clarifies that Ibrāhīm was named '*Al-Khalīl*', not from form III, which denotes an association with someone as a friend (Lane 2003, vol. 2, p. 778), but from form V, which means that one thing is penetrated or passed through something else (Lane 2003, vol. 2, p. 778). He writes that 'just as colour permeates the thing that is coloured (*al-mutalawwan*) . . . God permeated the physical form of Ibrāhīm, peace be upon him' (Ibn ʿArabī 2002, p. 80). The basis of his assertion, Ibn ʿArabī proclaims, is the prophetic tradition in which God states,

> I declare war against whoever takes an associate of mine (*walī*) as an enemy. My slave does not draw near to Me with anything more beloved to Me than the things I have made compulsory for them. And they continue to draw near to Me with supererogatory forms of worship until I love them. And when I love them, I am

their hearing through which they hear, their sight through which they see, their hand with which they grasp, and their foot with which they walk. (Al-Bukhārī 1987, vol. 8, p. 105)

Ibn 'Arabī explains that 'nothing permeates a thing except that it is carried within it (*maḥmūlan fīh*). The thing that permeates (*al-mutakhallil*)—which is the agent—is thus concealed within the thing that is permeated (*al-mutakhallal*)', and the above prophetic tradition bears testimony to this (Ibn 'Arabī 2002, p. 81).

The works on the *sīrah* of Prophet Muḥammad state that he, too, was '*Khalīl Allāh*'. The Prophet declared, 'My Lord has taken me as a *khalīl*, just as He took my forefather, Ibrāhīm, as a *khalīl*' (Al-Bayhaqī 1988, vol. 7, p. 176; Al-Maqrīzī 1999, vol. 14, p. 440). Most scholars understand this as an indication of the proximity of Prophet Muḥammad to God due to his obedience (Ibn Kathīr 1999, vol. 2, p. 422), or because he thought only of God and nothing else ('Iyāḍ 1998, vol. 2, p. 452). Ibn 'Arabī, nevertheless, alleges that this is a proclamation of the divine having permeated Prophet Muḥammad, much like He permeated Ibrāhīm.

He goes on to say that the inner meaning of the aforementioned prophetic tradition recorded by Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) in his canonical compilation is that 'if the created being is what is manifest (*ẓāhir*) and God is concealed in its inner (*bāṭin*) self, then God becomes the hearing, sight, hand, foot, and all the faculties of the created being' (Ibn 'Arabī 2002, p. 81). This means that it is not just the obedience of Prophet Muḥammad and Ibrāhīm to God, or their unwavering devotion to Him, on account of which they are known as '*Khalīl Allāh*'; rather, it is because their very essence was permeated by the divine since they were loci of manifestation of all of God's most beautiful Names. As they attained the rank of the Perfect Man (*Al-Insān al-kāmil*), in which their essence became a mirror wherein all the divine Names were reflected and God permeated them completely, the honorific '*khalīl*' was bestowed on them (Al-Jīlī 1997; Morrissey 2020). The epithet of '*Khalīl Allāh*', therefore, outwardly (*ẓāhiran*) betrayed their obedience to God and their devotion to Him, but the inner (*bāṭin*), spiritual reality was that they were perfect loci of divine manifestation. If this was true for Ibrāhīm, then it was even truer for Prophet Muḥammad, who was the reason for the existence of Ibrāhīm and everyone and everything else, as stated previously. Thus, Prophet Muḥammad did not just show his love for God through his obedience to Him, nor did he display it through constantly thinking about Him, but his very existence was an unadulterated manifestation of his love for the divine. And since his existence was the clearest manifestation of all the divine Names, he had power over all the other loci of divine manifestation that constitute the universe.

3.5. *Lūṭ and the Spiritual Nature of Prophet Muḥammad's Power*

Ibn 'Arabī subverts the ostensible powerlessness of Prophet Lūṭ in the chapter dedicated to him in the *Fuṣūṣ* (Nettler 2012, pp. 206–16). He explains that even as the outward demeanour (*ẓāhir*) of Lūṭ expressed that he was powerless against his people, his inner (*bāṭin*) spiritual reality was that he wielded incredible power, as alluded to by Prophet Muḥammad (Ibn 'Arabī 2002, p. 127). The source of this power was his spiritual concentration known as *himma* (Lala 2023c). Ibn 'Arabī explains why Lūṭ did not manifest his power by stating that it behoves a prophet to remain in the 'station of servanthood' (*maqām al-'ubūdiyya*) and not exhibit the full extent of the power he is imbued with (Ibn 'Arabī 2002, pp. 127–28). In addition, a prophet is cognisant of the underlying reality of the universe as simply loci of divine manifestation, which prevents him from actively seeking to change the natural course of the universe (Ibn 'Arabī 2002, p. 128).

It is due to the recognition of this fundamental truth that the most powerful prophet, Muḥammad, only used his unparalleled spiritual power under certain circumstances. Ibn 'Arabī offers the following account of the nature of God's Messenger, 'If it was revealed to him to display his power, he resolved to do so; and if he was prevented, he refrained. But if he was given the choice (*khuyyir*), he chose not to display his power' (Ibn 'Arabī 2002, p. 129). The messengers of God, generally, and the greatest and most powerful Messenger, specifically, chose not to display their spiritual power in the form

of miracles unless they were commanded to do so. Al-Qūnawī elaborates that all the prophets before Muḥammad—although they were loci of manifestation for all of God's most beautiful Names—had a specific type of power, whether that be the power over water, as in the case of Nūḥ, or fire, as in the case of Ibrāhīm, or both water and fire, as in the case of Mūsā (Lala 2023a; Al-Qūnawī 2013, p. 119). Prophet Muḥammad, on the other hand, had power over all the elements and all things in the universe because all other prophets were only further differentiations of the divine outpouring through the mediation of the spiritual essence of Prophet Muḥammad, as stated above. Therefore, his miracles included all of theirs, and there were no spatial or temporal limits to his power (Lala 2023a; Al-Qūnawī 2013, p. 119–20). Yet, whenever he was given the choice, he did not display this power.

In making this assertion, Ibn ʿArabī subverts the entire subgenre of 'proofs of prophethood' (dalāʾil al-nubuwwa). Sertkaya writes,

> As a result of encountering new cultures through conquests, Muslim scholars produced books under the title of *dalāil al-nubuwwa* (proofs of prophethood) and other names (like *Aʿlām al-Nubuwwa*, *Bashāir al-Nubuwwa*, *Ithbāt al-Nubuwwa*, *Tathbit Dalāil al-Nubuwwa*). This resulted in the creation of a vast body of literature. These works were especially written to convince Jewish and Christian religious leaders and clergy of the proof and status of the Prophet in the Qurʾan and demonstrate countless reports on his various miracles. The miracles were compared to those performed by previous prophets in these collections. (Sertkaya 2022)

The Shafiʿī ḥadīth specialist, Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1038), for instance, compares the numerous times water sprang from the fingers of Prophet Muḥammad with Mūsā's striking a rock with his staff and water gushing out of it, as mentioned in the Qurʾan (Qurʾan 2:60). He states that even though the miracle of Prophet Muḥammad 'resembled' (shākalat) the miracle of Mūsā,

> it was more emphatic in terms of being a marvel (*ablagh fiʾl-uʿjūba*) because the gushing forth of water from in between flesh and bone is more wondrous and greater than its springing from a rock, since one of the well-known sources (*sinkh min asnākh*) of water is rocks . . . yet is has never been reported nor ever been heard before that water gushed forth and flowed from a human being. (Al-Iṣfahānī 1986, vol. 1, p. 405)

Al-Iṣfahānī uses the familiar formula of excavating similarities between the miracles of Prophet Muḥammad and a revered prophet for the Jewish community, Mūsā. Subsequent to this, he explains that the miracle of the former is even greater than the latter, intimating that Muḥammad is the greatest prophet. Ibn Kathīr reproduces a list from the polymath, Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066), of the various times Prophet Muḥammad cured his companions from illnesses, diseases, and physical injuries, like burns (Ibn Kathīr n.d., p. 465). The insinuation, much like in the case of al-Iṣfahānī, is that Prophet Muḥammad also had the same gift of healing as ʿĪsā. But for Ibn ʿArabī and his followers, it is more than that; since all the spiritual essences of all the prophets came from Prophet Muḥammad, his spiritual power is the undifferentiated form of all their powers. In this sense, then, his miracles contain all other miracles (Ibn ʿArabī 2002, pp. 126–31; Al-Qūnawī 2013, pp. 119–25).

Al-Bayhaqī, prior to citing the numerous miracles of Prophet Muḥammad, attaches the caveat that, due to the unimpeachability of his character and the purity of his message, he did not require miracles to prove his prophethood (Al-Bayhaqī 1988, vol. 1, p. 17). Yet, he does not pursue this, and somewhat undercuts his own argument when he focusses on miracles in the rest of his work as the primary conduit for proving the veracity of the Messenger. Ibn ʿArabī also believes that the miracles of Prophet Muḥammad, even though they were greater and more comprehensive than those of his predecessors, were not required. He goes a step further, however, when he claims that whenever Prophet Muḥammad was given a choice, he preferred not to showcase his awesome spiritual power.

He seems to subvert the *dalā'il* subgenre, which seeks to highlight the miracles of Prophet Muḥammad and compare them to those of other prophets in order to proselytise Jewish and Christian communities, instead playing down Prophet Muḥammad's miracles.

The reason Prophet Muḥammad did not display his power was not only because he wanted to remain in the 'rank of servanthood' (*maqam al-'ubūdiyya*), or due to his spiritual awareness of the cosmos as a manifestation of the divine Names, but also because this awareness allowed him to come to terms with the essential immutability of the divine process, and the knowledge that miracles would not alter its course. Ibn 'Arabī writes,

> The messenger knows that if miracles are performed in front of a community, there will be some who believe what they witness; some who know it [to be miraculous] but deny it and not believe due to immorality, pride, and jealousy; and others who attribute it to magic and deception (*īhām*). So when the messengers saw this, and understood that no one but those whose hearts God had guided with the light of faith would believe, and they comprehended that these people would not see with the light called faith, and that miracles would not benefit them, then their spiritual concentration (*himma*) did not seek miracles. (Ibn 'Arabī 2002, p. 130)

Ibn 'Arabī, thus, comes full circle. A prophet may seem powerless in the world, but wields awesome spiritual power to affect the physical world. Prophet Muḥammad—as the primary receptacle of the divine outpouring and comprehensive form of all the prophets that would come to be from his essence—had mastery over all the elements and all things in the physical world. Yet, despite this power to manipulate the phenomenal world, he only used it when he was commanded to do so because he realised that his power, though incredible, could ultimately only influence the physical world and not the hearts of onlookers; he could perform the most marvellous miracles, but did not have any control over their reception. Whether the miracle would be effective in guiding people depended only on God (Al-Jāmī 2009, pp. 305–6; Al-Mahā'imī 2007, pp. 372–73). This represents the paradox of the miracle: at once powerful and impotent. It is this spiritual awareness that was the source of Prophet Muḥammad's equanimity.

3.6. Ya'qūb and the Spiritual Nature of Prophet Muḥammad's Equanimity

Ibn 'Arabī demonstrates the duality of the outer and inner aspects of religion in the chapter on Ya'qūb. Just as this duality is displayed in the comportment of Ya'qūb, it is shown in the comportment of Prophet Muḥammad because he was the undifferentiated form of Ya'qūb's essence. Ibn 'Arabī begins by explicating this duality in terms of 'two religions' as follows:

> The religion is two religions (*dīnān*): the religion that is with God, and those who are made aware of it by God, and those whom they have made aware of it; and the religion that is with the creation, which God gives credence to. (Ibn 'Arabī 2002, p. 94)

The religion that is with God, Ibn 'Arabī goes on to explain, is the religion of the divine Wish (*mashī'a*). This is the religion that is formally articulated in scripture, and adherence to it is demanded by the prophets. Ibn 'Arabī's proof text for this is Q2:132, in which God says, '*And Ibrāhīm exhorted his sons to do so [i.e., submit to God], as did Ya'qūb [when he said], "My dear sons, God has chosen for you the Religion, so let none of you pass away except that you are submitting to Him"*.' This exhortation is proof, says Ibn 'Arabī, that there is only one religion that is acceptable according to the divine Wish, which is the formal religion. The reason for this is that the definite article is employed with 'the Religion' (*al-dīn*), which means that it is 'the known (*ma'lūm*) and conventionally accepted (*ma'rūf*) religion, as intimated by His saying, '*Surely the religion with God is Islam* (Q3:19)' (Ibn 'Arabī 2002, p. 94). Al-Qūnawī elaborates that this aspect of the religion is performative and predicated on outward adherence. The deeds that are earned through such adherence make this the 'earned (*kasabī*) religion' (Al-Qūnawī 2013, p. 42).

Nevertheless, Ibn 'Arabī says there is another aspect to the religion, which is the religion of the divine Will (*irāda*). He writes,

> The divine command for the servant is manifested in accordance with what the will of God (*irādat al-Ḥaqq*) necessitates. And the will of God is related to what the knowledge of God necessitates. And the knowledge of God is related to what the essence of the known object imparts. (Ibn 'Arabī 2002, p. 98)

This means that the divine Will is never violated because it is in accordance with the infallible knowledge of God which, in turn, is predicated on the 'essence' of the created being. This is the 'essential (*dhātī*) religion', according to al-Qūnawī (Al-Qūnawī 2013, p. 42). So, there are two religions. The religion of the divine Wish is the formal religion, which only those who follow Islam adhere to. Thus, the divine Wish is violated by all those who do not follow Islam. Yet, there is also the religion of the divine Will, which is God's Will for all created beings in accordance with their fixed essences (*a'yān thābita*), and the divine Will is never violated (Al-Jandī 2007, p. 332).[9] Consequently, in those people who follow the formal religion of Islam, the divine Wish and the divine Will are carried out, whereas in those who do not, only the divine Will is executed, as it can never be thwarted (Ibn 'Arabī 2002, p. 98).

These two religions are also expressed by Ibn 'Arabī as the outer (*ẓāhir*) religion and the inner (*bāṭin*) religion (Ibn 'Arabī 2002, p. 96). If the outer aspect of the religion is the formally instituted religion, its inner spiritual reality is the manifestation of all things in the phenomenal world as loci of the divine Names (Ibn 'Arabī 2002, p. 96). The former corresponds to the religion of the divine Wish, whereas the latter is the religion of the divine Will. Ibn 'Arabī writes,

> Since the [formal] religion is Islam, and Islam means to submit, so a person submits to that which makes them happy and to that which does not, and they are requited accordingly. This is the outer (*ẓāhir*) facet of this issue. As for its secret and hidden (*bāṭin*) facet, it is that it [i.e., the requital] is manifested in the mirror of God's existence (*mir'āt wujūd al-Ḥaqq*). (Ibn 'Arabī 2002, p. 96)

The outer facet of the religion is the reward and punishment that is meted out in accordance with submission to the formal religion or lack thereof, respectively. However, the inner spiritual aspect reveals that even the rejection of the formal religion is only a manifestation of the divine Names and is in accordance with the divine Will. It is this duality, of the outer religion and its inner reality, or of the divine Wish and the divine Will, that is demonstrated in the duality of Prophet Ya'qūb's command to his sons, and in the duality of his ostensible yearning for Yūsuf and his inner equanimity with the divine Will. It is this same duality that Prophet Muḥammad exhibits in the works of *sīrah*.

One of the principal early sources of the *sīrah* genre and a student of Ibn Isḥāq who produced a bowdlerised version of his teacher's work (Sertkaya 2022), Ibn Hishām (d. 218/833), writes that Prophet Muḥammad was almost a 'destroyer of your own self' (*muhlik nasfak*) on account of the recalcitrance of his people (Al-Suhaylī 2000, vol. 3, p. 73). Muḥammad Sulaymān al-Manṣūrfawrī (d. 1348/1930) elaborates on this in his work on the *sīrah*, where he writes,

> The insistence of the people who had gone astray on unbelief, their persistence in polytheism, their rejection of auditory and visual proofs (*al-dalā'il al-sam'iyya wa'l-barāhīn al-mar'iyya*), their perseverance in imitating their forefathers, their fleeing from recognising God, the high volume of their evil acts, their dissemination of false creeds, their loss of humanity, and their drowning in animality was really hard for the Prophet, peace be upon him, to hear and see; and his heart was in severe pain because his people were marred by such impure practices. (Al-Manṣūrfawrī n.d., p. 614)

This, then, displays the outer facet of the religion, the religion of the divine Wish. In the same way as Ya'qūb yearned for Yūsuf and enjoined his sons to adhere to Islam, Prophet Muḥammad yearned for all his nation to believe in Islam. Yet, there is also

Prophet Muḥammad's spiritual equanimity through the vicissitudes of life because he recognised that all the things that happened in the world were manifestations of the divine. This was his adherence to the inner spiritual aspect of the religion, just like Yaʿqūb also recognised this underlying reality (Al-Qayṣarī 1955, p. 666). Al-Bayhaqī mentions that Prophet Muḥammad commanded Khālid ibn Walīd (d. 21/642) not to engage in combat at the conquest of Mecca, but he did so. When Prophet Muḥammad found out, he asked, 'Why did you fight when I forbade you from fighting?' Khālid answered that their opponents initiated the attack and he only engaged in combat out of self-defence. Prophet Muḥammad replied, 'The decree (*qaḍāʾ*) of God is best' (Al-Bayhaqī 1988, vol. 5, p. 48). This is an allusion to the religion of the divine Will, and an appreciation that it can never be thwarted. Prophet Muḥammad was perfectly at peace with all occurrences in the world because he knew that this was the divine decree. Ibn Kathīr writes in his *sīrah* on the authority of Zayd ibn Thābit (d. 45/665?) that 'the decree of God will inevitably occur' (Ibn Kathīr 1976, vol. 3, p. 260). Prophet Yaʿqūb and Prophet Muḥammad express this spiritual reality in their inner comportment even as they outwardly enjoin the religion of the divine Wish. This duality is observed in every aspect of Prophet Muḥammad's life, especially in his leadership.

3.7. Hārūn and the Spiritual Nature of Prophet Muḥammad's Leadership (Imāmiyya)

The duality of the divine Wish and the divine Will is manifested in the leadership of Prophet Muḥammad just as it was manifested in the leadership of Hārūn. Ibn ʿArabī begins the chapter by alluding to this duality:

> Know that the existence of Hārūn, peace be upon him, was from the plane (*ḥaḍra*) of mercy, as stated by God, the Exalted, '*And We provided him from Our mercy*', that is, for Mūsā, '*his brother, Hārūn, as a prophet*'. . . . And it was on account of the prophethood of Hārūn being from the plane of mercy (*ḥaḍrat al-raḥma*) that he said to his brother, Mūsā, peace be upon him, '*O son of my mother*'. So he called him by his [association to his] mother and not his father because mercy is more abundantly displayed (*awfar fiʾl-ḥukm*) from the mother than the father. And were it not for this mercy, she would not be able to put up with bringing up [the child] (*mubāsharat al-tarbiya*). (Ibn ʿArabī 2002, p. 191)

Ibn ʿArabī points out that the trait which characterised the leadership of Hārūn was mercy (Lala 2021), and this was reflected in the reference to their mother by which Hārūn addressed Mūsā when he returned and found his people worshipping the golden calf, as mentioned in Q7:148–150. The mercy of the mother, intimates Ibn ʿArabī, is an unconditional mercy that allows her to raise the child, irrespective of their behaviour. This unconditional mercy is derived from the unconditional divine mercy that brings everything into existence. Ibn ʿArabī calls this 'the mercy that is graciously bestowed' (*raḥmat al-imtinān*) (Ibn ʿArabī 2002, p. 151). It is the creative divine mercy that brings everything into existence, which is also why it is connected to the creative power of the mother. This type of mercy stands in contrast to the fatherly mercy, which is 'the mercy of obligation' (*raḥmat al-wujūb*), and is bestowed in response to the actions of human beings (Ibn ʿArabī 2002, p. 151). Ibn ʿArabī elaborates that the mercy that is graciously bestowed is denoted by the divine Name 'the Compassionate' (*Al-Raḥmān*), and the mercy of obligation is denoted by the divine Name 'the Merciful' (*Al-Raḥīm*) (Ibn ʿArabī 2002, p. 151). He continues,

> So God graciously bestows by the Name, 'the Compassionate', and He is obligated by the Name, 'the Merciful'. Nevertheless, this obligation derives only from gracious bestowal, thus, [the Name] 'the Merciful' is subsumed under [the Name] 'the Compassionate'. (Ibn ʿArabī 2002, p. 151)

Since the mercy that is graciously bestowed brings humankind into existence, and it is only after this that they can possibly receive the mercy of obligation that is imparted in accordance with their actions, the mercy that is graciously bestowed is ontologically prior to the mercy of obligation, which is why the divine Name 'the Merciful' is subsumed under the Name 'the Compassionate'.

The duality of divine mercy—one that is never denied, and the other that is only given in response to actions—is the same duality of the divine Will, which is never thwarted, and the divine Wish, which only refers to formally prescribed actions. This duality is reflected in the leadership of Hārūn and Prophet Muḥammad. Ibn ʿArabī elaborates on these two types of leadership when he says,

> Subjugation (*taskhīr*) is of two types: Subjugation through the volition of the one who subjugates . . . like the master who subjugates his servant . . . and the sultan who subjugates his subjects. . . . The other type is subjugation by circumstance (*bi'l-ḥāl*), like the subjugation of the subjects to the king who has control over their affairs. . . . And in . . . subjugation by circumstance, the subjects [also] subjugate their king. (Ibn ʿArabī 2002, pp. 193–94)

In his capacity as the lawgiver, Prophet Muḥammad exercised subjugation through volition, by which he commanded his nation to the ordinances of the formal religion, or the religion of the divine Wish. However, because he was the one responsible for the needs of his companions, it was his companions who 'subjugated him', directing him to what they needed from him. It is in this regard that the leadership of Prophet Muḥammad was active and passive, just like that of Hārūn. Ibn ʿArabī intimates that the leadership of Hārūn was passive because he was only sent as a prophet to support his brother, Mūsā, as stated in Q19:53. Nevertheless, Hārūn became an active leader when Mūsā departed for Sinai and left him in charge (Ibn ʿArabī 2002, p. 191).

The works on the *sīrah* of Prophet Muḥammad show that, while he was an active leader and called his nation to the religion of the divine Wish, he was also passive because he was commanded by God to consult them, as stated in Q3:159, '*And consult with them on matters*'. The contemporary scholar, Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, has a section in his popular *sīrah* work, *Al-Raḥīq al-makhtūm*, entitled 'The obligation (*iltizām*) of the Prophet, peace be upon him, to the principle of joint consultation (*mabda' al-tashāwur*) with his companions' (Al-Mubārakpūrī 2006, p. 165). He elaborates that Prophet Muḥammad consulted his companions in all affairs, from military matters to agricultural ones (Al-Mubārakpūrī 2006, p. 165). This means that although his commands were law, the spiritual essence of his leadership was also passive, and this was due to divine mercy, as stated in the following part-verse that precedes the part of the verse which issues the divine command for consultation: *So it is by the mercy of God that you are gentle towards them* (Qur'an 3:159). This gentle leadership was emblematic of not only Prophet Muḥammad, but also of his descendants through whom the spirituality of the Prophet lived on.

3.8. Yaḥyā and the Spiritual Nature of Prophet Muḥammad's Descendants

Ibn ʿArabī attaches mystical importance to the name of Yaḥyā, which is the imperfect form of the verb and, thus, has two significations, 'he lives' and 'he will live', since the present tense is also employed to denote the future tense in Arabic (Al-Dobaian 2018). He begins the chapter with this emphasis on the name 'Yaḥyā',

> This is the wisdom of firstness (*awwaliyya*) in names because God named him 'Yaḥyā' as the remembrance of Zakariyya 'lives on' through him. [God says] '*And We did not give anyone that name before*'. So God combines in him the quality of he who passed away and left a son through whom his remembrance lives on with the name to that effect. Thus He named him 'Yaḥyā' so his [father's] name lives on [through him], just like his knowledge of spiritual tasting (*al-ʿilm al-dhawqī*). (Ibn ʿArabī 2002, p. 175)

The close attention Ibn ʿArabī pays to the precise significations of terms is on full display here (Sands 2006, p. 41). James Morris extols the virtues of Ibn ʿArabī's 'literality' and laments that it is not replicated by his commentators (Morris 1987).

Ibn ʿArabī suggests that because Yaḥyā's father, Zakariyya, specifically supplicated for a son '*who will inherit from me, and inherit from the house of Yaʿqūb*' (Qur'an 19:6), God named his son 'Yaḥyā' to reassure him that his legacy would 'live on' through him. It is for this

reason that even though the legacies of prophets before Zakariyya were carried on by their sons, Yaḥyā was the first to be given this name (Ibn ʿArabī 2002, p. 175). Ibn ʿArabī is clear that the legacy he refers to is 'the knowledge of spiritual tasting' (al-ʿilm al-dhawqī). It is not only formal religious knowledge or the outer (ẓāhir) aspects of the religion that are passed on to the son, since that knowledge is passed on to all followers of a prophet; rather, it is the inner (bāṭin) spiritual knowledge of which he, specifically, is the recipient. Ibn ʿArabī declares that it was this spiritual knowledge that was passed on to Yaḥyā, just as it was passed on from Ādam to his son, Shīth, and from Nūḥ to his son, Sām. He explains that it was in this way that the spiritual essence of Ādam and Nūḥ lived on through their sons (Ibn ʿArabī 2002, p. 175).

Although there are differences in the practices of devotion to them and various opinions on their significance in the socio-political context, the descendants of Prophet Muḥammad are generally accepted as holding a special rank due to the spiritual essence of the Prophet living on through them (Bernheimer 2013; Hoffman-Ladd 1992).[10] Kazuo Marimoto clarifies that both the Sunnīs and Shīʿa revere the family of Prophet Muḥammad, writing that 'at the level of the day-to-day practice of believers, there has been no significant difference between the behaviors that advocates of the special treatment of the sayyids/sharīfs in either sect have promoted' (Marimoto 2012, p. 17).

The Shāfiʿī scholar, Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Ṭabarī (d. 694/1878), explains that on account of possessing the spiritual essence of Prophet Muḥammad, his descendants have spiritual authority and spiritual insight (Al-Ṭabarī 1937, p. 16). This is echoed by the historian and exegete, Ismāʿīl ibn Muḥammad al-Iṣfahānī (d. 535/1141), who relates in his Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa that Prophet Muḥammad once saw some children from the Quraysh playing and became quite distressed. When he was asked about this, he replied, 'We are the people of the house (ahl al-bayt), God has prioritised the hereafter for us over this world, so a severe trial will befall these members of my family after me . . . ' (Al-Iṣfahānī 1989, p. 226). Prophet Muḥammad intimated that just as he was subjected to the most onerous tribulations because of his exalted spiritual essence (Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ 1988, vol. 2, p. 205), the same would happen to his descendants because his spiritual essence lived on in them, and God preferred them to have the rewards for their trials in the hereafter. Ibn ʿArabī thus underscores the special rank of Prophet Muḥammad and his family due to the spiritual reality of their essence. He writes that the descendants of Prophet Muḥammad, until the Day of Resurrection, 'are pure; indeed, they are purity itself' and they are recipients of 'providential care' (ʿināya) due to the 'nobility (sharaf) of Muḥammad, peace be upon him' (Ibn ʿArabī n.d., vol. 1, p. 196).

4. Conclusions

The foregoing demonstrates that Ibn ʿArabī approaches the sīrah of Prophet Muḥammad in an entirely different way in the Fuṣūṣ. Rather than looking at just the historical aspect, he interrogates the spiritual essence of the Prophet in order to convey his spiritual significance and the spiritual lessons that can be drawn from him for the believer. Since Prophet Muḥammad is the undifferentiated manifestation of the divine Names of God, according to Ibn ʿArabī, all the spiritual essences of the prophets were present in him. It is due to this that he encapsulated in his essence all the spiritual aspects of all prophets and messengers. This spiritual comprehensiveness is emblematised in the actions of Prophet Muḥammad that allude to his spiritual essence. In this way, each action of the Prophet has a duality: the outer (ẓāhir) aspect that imparts the formal religion, and the inner (bāṭin) aspect that imbues the formalism with spirituality.

Ibn ʿArabī's approach may be seen as an important precursor to the fiqh al-sīrah subgenre in which contemporary scholars like Muḥammad al-Ghazālī and Muḥammad Saʿīd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī question 'the purpose, wisdom and philosophy behind the acts and decisions of the Prophet' (Sertkaya 2022). Their principal objective is 'to take lessons from the Prophetic life and they are concerned more about the application of sīrah and its relevance for modern readers' (Sertkaya 2022). Ibn ʿArabī, likewise, questions 'the

wisdom and philosophy behind the acts and decisions of the Prophet' as the title of *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (*The Ringstones of Wisdom*) betrays. But rather than just looking at the formalistic 'application of the *sīrah*', he is more concerned with the spiritual significance of everything Prophet Muḥammad said and did, and the reality of his very existence. Thus, not only does Prophet Muḥammad become a 'prime historical role model' as he does for modern scholars (Sertkaya 2022), but he also becomes a prime spiritual role model for them.

Ibn 'Arabī argues in the *Fuṣūṣ* that the spiritual aspect of the religion is the true essence of it (Ibn 'Arabī 2002). This may resonate with modern readers even more, since spirituality is currently prized more than religiosity (Pew Research Center 2017). M. D. Litonjua notes the ostensible contradiction in the assertion that one is spiritual but not religious, writing that 'religion is about reaching out toward transcendence; spirituality about delving into interiority. To be spiritual, but not religious is therefore a paradox' (Litonjua 2016, p. 21). This also precludes generic spirituality because spirituality is the inner aspect of a specific religious tradition; 'our spirituality refers to the depth-dimension of our religious experience, but religious experience is always rooted in a particularity, a distinctive religion: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism etc.' (Litonjua 2016, p. 34). Despite this, there has been a rise in 'religious nones' in recent times, who are attracted by the lack of formalism and institutional regulation that is imposed by associational religion (Zinnbauer et al. 1997; Heelas et al. 2005; Bender and McRoberts 2012; Marshall and Olson 2018). Ibn 'Arabī perspicaciously underscores the inner aspect of Prophet Muḥammad's life to stress the spiritual basis of all his actions and, thus, demonstrates the inextricability of the outer and inner dimensions of religion. This provides an antidote to the anti-institutional and anti-formalistic sentiment that many modern Muslims suffer from as it imbues all actions with a spiritual essence.

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Notes

[1] Shades of the Hegelian notion of World History as 'the particular culminating stage in the career of Spirit to which Spirit has presently attained' (Martin 1971, p. 156) are perceptible, for 'Hegel's account of the World Spirit is that of development' (Martin 1971, p. 156). However, since development is not temporal, but cumulative, it is not necessary for the highest manifestation of the development to be the latest (Martin 1971, p. 157; Habib 2017, 2019). I am indebted to M.A.R. Habib for drawing my attention to this.

[2] This tradition is mentioned in many mystical works, especially in the works of Ibn 'Arabī's followers (Al-Qāshānī 2005, p. 537), but it is not in any of the canonical compilations of prophetic traditions. A tradition of similar import, nevertheless, in which God says about Prophet Muḥammad, 'But for you, I would not have created Ādam', is adduced by the Ḥanbalī jurist and traditionist, Abū Bakr al-Khallāl (d. 311/923) (Al-Khallāl 1989, vol. 1, p. 233).

[3] This tradition is not recorded in the widely known compilations of prophetic traditions. A tradition of similar import, however, in which Prophet Muḥammad says, 'I was a prophet while Ādam was between soul and body', is widely recorded (Al-Bazzār 1988–2009, vol. 11, p. 476; Ibn Abī Shayba 1989, vol. 7, p. 329; Ibn Ḥanbal 2001, vol. 27, p. 176; Al-Ṭabarānī 1994, vol. 12, p. 92; Al-Tirmidhī 1975, vol. 5, p. 585).

[4] The different types of divine effulgences are detailed in Lala 2019b.

[5] For details on this term in Ibn 'Arabī's thought, see Egbert Meyer (1981, pp. 226–65).

[6] Ibn 'Arabī goes as far as applying Q18:104 (which says that the unbelievers are *the ones whose effort in this world has been in vain, yet they think they are performing good deeds*') to the exoteric scholars (Ibn 'Arabī n.d., vol. 1, p. 280).

[7] Ibn 'Arabī is clear that the fault lies with the people of Nūḥ because they believed that divinity resided *exclusively* in the idols, and not that they were just another locus for the manifestation of the divine Names (Lala 2021).

[8] Based on the works of Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (d. 339/950), Abu'l Walīd ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198), Ibn 'Arabī's near contemporary whom he met (Stelzer 1996, p. 27), further refined this into three levels in which scripture is accepted on a rhetorical level for the unanalytic mind, a dialectic level for the theologians, and a demonstrative level for the philosophers (Black 2006, p. 11).

[9] The complex relationship between the fixed essence of the person, which, in a sense, is also earned, and in another, is predetermined, allows Ibn 'Arabī to offer an original solution to the thorny issue of predeterminism versus free will. Ibn 'Arabī expatiates on this topic in the chapters of Lūṭ and 'Uzayr (Ibn 'Arabī 2002, pp. 126–37).

10   The major difference between the Sunnī and Shī'ī schools on political succession and the infallibility of the imams, as well as their specific devotions to 'the family of the Prophet' (*ahl al-bayt*), lies beyond the scope of this study. For details on this issue, see Oloruntele (2016), *The Sunnī and the Shī'a: History, Doctrines and Discrepancies*. Marshall Hodgson observes that the emphasis on the personalities of 'Alī and Ḥusayn in Shī'ism had a profound influence on the Sunnī tradition, which adopted many of the aspects of Shi'ī devotions (Hodgson 1974, vol. 1, p. 378).

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