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**THE ASCENT TO GOD AND THE RETURN
FROM HIM IN ISLAMIC MYSTICISM**

Allow me to begin with a few personal remarks.¹ Some of you may remember that fifteen years ago, in 1989, I gave a talk entitled “A Forerunner of Ibn al-‘Arabī: Ḥakīm Tirmidhī on Sainthood”. The talk was in fact published in the *Journal of the Ibn ‘Arabī Society* 8 (1989).

Now, in this regard, I have always said one author like al-Ḥakīm at-Tirmidhī² is enough for a lifetime. By that I mean Ḥakīm Tirmidhī and his extensive œuvre have proved to be so demanding that I haven’t really had any time left over for “other figures”.

By “other figures” I particularly have in mind Ibn al-‘Arabī and his huge work, and it has seemed advisable to keep well clear of him — especially in view of what I have remarked elsewhere, that Ibn al-‘Arabī’s language is complicated and highly developed, at times even manneristic.³ Understanding his language presupposes years of familiarity with his œuvre, as well as mystical, theological and philosophical literature. It is not something for beginners, and I have always felt myself to be a beginner in this regard. In this I was following the example of my teacher Fritz Meier,⁴ possibly the greatest twentieth-century scholar and researcher of Islamic mysticism, who scarcely wrote anything about Ibn al-‘Arabī, because, as he said in all modesty, he had not fully understood him. An attitude which perhaps others as well should have been adopted.

On the other hand, my friend Richard Gramlich, whose colossal work has unfortunately remained almost completely unknown in the English-speaking world,⁵ remarked to me twenty years ago — I was forty at the time — that

¹ This paper was read to the Ibn ‘Arabī Society at Oxford in May 2004.

² He died around 300/912. For more information see my article “Some Recent Research on al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī” // *Der Islam* 83 (2006). P. 39–89.

³ Cf. my remarks in *OLZ* 96 (2001). P. 745–746.

⁴ Meier died in 1998. For his works see *Meier F. Essays on Islamic Piety and Mysticism*. Translated by John O’Kane with editorial assistance of Bernd Radtke. Leiden: Brill, 1999. P. xi ff.

⁵ Richard Gramlich died in September 2006, see *ZDMG* 159 (2009). P. 1f. For further information I give a short bibliography of Richard Gramlich: *Die schiitischen Derwischorden Persiens*. Wiesbaden, 1965–1981. — *Die Gaben der Erkenntnisse des ‘Umar as-Suhrawardī*.

I should make Ibn al-‘Arabī my life’s work. After all, it must be possible to get at what “the fellow” really means. I did not follow his advice. It has sometimes seemed to me a mistake.

In any case, *allāh bidabbir*, as one says in Arabic. Two years ago a friend drew my attention to a German translation of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Risālat al-anwār*. I took a look at it and found it rather strange, in fact scarcely understandable.⁶ I realized it was completely impossible once I compared it against the Arabic original. I then found out that the German translation was based on an English translation by Rabia Terri Harris,⁷ and I also found that a Spanish translation from 1931 by Miguel Asín Palacios also existed⁸ — and likewise that Michel Chodkiewicz offered a partial translation of the text in the final chapter of his book *Le sceau des saints*.⁹ A quick look in the 1948 Hayderabad edition of the *Rasā’il Ibn al-‘Arabī* convinced me that I ought to undertake to produce a critical text edition with translation and commentary. With the help of friends and colleagues I was able to obtain copies of a number of manuscripts and so it became possible to produce a critical edition. The edition, with German and English translations, as well as with a commentary, was published in 2005.¹⁰

Now, finally, let us turn to the content of the *Risālat al-anwār* — *Epistle on the Light of Secrets Which are Conferred on a Person During Spiritual Retreat* — which is the best form of the title. Other titles have been transmitted as well.¹¹

Wiesbaden, 1978. — Muḥammad al-Ghazzālī’s Lehre von den Stufen der Gottesliebe. Wiesbaden, 1984. — Das Sendschreiben al-Qushayrī. Wiesbaden, 1989. — Schlaglichter über das Sufitum. Wiesbaden, 1990. — Alte Vorbilder des Sufitums. Erster Teil: Scheiche des Westens. Wiesbaden, 1995. The work deals with Muḥammad b. Wāsi‘; Thābit al-Bunānī; Farqad as-Sabakhī; Mālik b. Dīnār; ‘Aṭā’ as-Salīmī; Ibrāhīm b. Adham; Dāwūd aṭ-Ṭā‘ī; Abū Turāb an-Nakhshābī; ‘Amr b. ‘Uthmān al-Makkī; Abu l-Ḥusayn an-Nūrī; Ruwaym b. Aḥmad; Abū Muḥammad al-Jurayrī; Abū Bakr ash-Shiblī. — Zweiter Teil: Scheiche des Ostens. Wiesbaden, 1996. This part deals with Shaqīq al-Balkhī; Ḥātim al-Aṣamm; Aḥmad b. Khidrūya; Abū Ḥafṣ al-Ḥaddād; Ḥamdūn al-Qaṣṣār; Abū ‘Uthmān al-Ḥūrī; Abu l-Ḥusayn al-Warrāq; Muḥammad b. al-Faḍl al-Balkhī; Abū Bakr al-Wāsiṭī; Abu l-‘Abbās as-Sayyār. — Ahmad Ghazzali. Gedanken über die Liebe. Wiesbaden, 1976. — Fakhr ad-dīn ar-Rāzī’s Kommentar zu Sure 18, 9–12 // *Asiatische Studien* XXXIII (1979). P. 99–152. — Muḥammad al-Ġazzālī’s kleine islamische Fundamentaldogmatik // *Saeculum* XXXI (1980). P. 380–398. — Der Urvertrag in der Koranlegung (zu Sure 7, 172–173) // *Der Islam* 60 (1983). P. 205–230. — Abū Sulaymān ad-Dārānī // *Oriens* 33 (1992). P. 22–85. — Die Lebensweise der Könige. Adab al-mulūk. Ein Handbuch zur islamischen Mystik. Stuttgart 1993. — Die Wunder der Freunde Gottes. Wiesbaden, 1987.

⁶ *NkG*. Introduction. P. X f.

⁷ Radtke B. Neue kritische Gänge. Zu Stand und Aufgaben der Sufikforschung. — New Critical Essays. On the Present State and Future Tasks of the Study of Sufism. Utrecht, 2005 [Henceforth: *NkG*]. P. 30f.

⁸ *NkG*. P. 32.

⁹ *NkG*. P. 31f.

¹⁰ *NkG*.

¹¹ *NkG*. P. 27.

The *Risāla* combines two subjects: 1) the proper conditions for spiritual retreat (*khalwa*) and 2) what one experiences during it, namely the subject of *mi'rāj* or the heavenly journey. There are parallels for both subjects in Ibn al-'Arabī's other works. Chapters 78–81 of the *Futūḥāt* deal with retreat, whereas Chapters 167 and 367 of the *Futūḥāt*, as well as the *Risālat al-isrā' ilā maqām al-asrā*, deal with the *mi'rāj*. A description of all four texts on the *mi'rāj* is found in the anthology *The Meccan Illuminations*.¹²

Our text, the *Risālat al-anwār*, is quite different from the other three, in particular because of its short size and omission of the first person narrator.

This work belongs to the genre “heavenly journey of the soul or the spirit” in Islam, the history of which still remains to be written. In the meantime we may mention the article of the *EI*, s.v. *mi'rādj* and of the *EQ*, s.v. *Ascension*; the works of scholars like Tor Andrae, Fritz Meier and Josef van Ess, and the collective volume edited by Amir-Moezzi, *Le voyage initiatique en terre d'islam*.¹³

Ibn al-'Arabī opens his *Risāla* with an exposition that explains to the addressee what he intends to deal with:

“Here is my answer to your questions: How the journey to God is constituted; how one reaches His plane of being, how one through Him returns from Him to the created world again, yet without separating from Him.”¹⁴

He goes on to clarify this further:

“First, I shall explain how the journey to God is constituted. Then, how one gets to Him, stands before Him, and takes one's place on the carpet of seeing God. Further, what God shall say to you. Then, how you return from Him to the plane of His deeds. This returning happens through and to Him — or how you get annihilated in God; and that is a station which lies before the return.”¹⁵

Thus Ibn al-'Arabī wants to describe four things: 1) the journey to God, 2) beholding God, 3) the return from God, 4) complete annihilation in God, without returning to the world and one's fellow-men.

He speaks now about helpful and hindering factors for advancing on the mystic path. Then about the different stages of men's being (*mawāṭin*). This journey to God is arduous, and one should have no illusions about its difficulties.

There follows a lengthy discussion about the appropriate place and point in time for beholding God and annihilation.¹⁶

¹² *NkG*. P. 28.

¹³ Amir-Moezzi M.A. (ed.). *Le voyage initiatique en terre d'Islam*, Louvain–Paris: Peeters, 1996. More literature on *mi'rāj* can be found in *NkG*. P. 28.

¹⁴ *RA*. § 3. P. 45f. I have divided the text of the *Risālat al-anwār* — quoted as *RA* — into 73 chapters. I give the number of the chapter and the page number in *NkG*.

¹⁵ *RA*. § 5. P. 49f.

¹⁶ *RA*. P. § 11–14. P. 62–74.

The spiritual retreat is dealt with: finally the necessary preparation. This means, to begin with, withdrawing from people.¹⁷ Likewise, acquiring the religious knowledge necessary to fulfill the legal prescriptions: praying, fasting, etc. A further step consists of ascetic practices. The highest of these is absolute trust in God (*tawakkul*).¹⁸ As a result, miracles can be granted to the mystic: shortening of distances, walking on water, etc.¹⁹

A further pre-condition for beginning spiritual retreat: controlling one's fantasy.²⁰ If one cannot accomplish this alone, one must find a shaykh.²¹ Generally speaking, one must train the soul and restructure it (*riyādat al-nafs*).²²

Retreat means abandoning all contacts with one's fellow-men. Whoever cannot or does not wish to do so is only seeking worldliness.²³

Next, the *dhikr*-formula employed during retreat is discussed²⁴ and advice is given concerning nourishment while in retreat.²⁵ Likewise, one must learn to distinguish between different random thoughts (*wāridāt*) which may occur during retreat. They may be of spiritual-angelic or of hellish-satanic origin.²⁶

Similarly, false "gods" may reveal themselves to a person's consciousness. In general, everything which appears in the way of random thoughts and visions during retreat is a test from God which one must undergo.²⁷

Among such tests there are unveilings (*kashf*, *mukāshafa*) which a person experiences in meditation. This can occur throughout the hierarchical stages of being. The cover of the perceptible world is removed for the meditating person. His inner vision penetrates the walls of houses and sees what people are doing inside. However, this must not seduce him into divulging these secrets to others.²⁸

At this point Ibn al-'Arabī injects a short remark about the various kinds of unveiling, which I will not enter into here.²⁹ After this he returns once more to nourishment during retreat³⁰ and then speaks in general terms about ascension from the world of imagination (*'ālam al-khayāl*) to the world of pure ideas and to God.³¹

¹⁷ RA. § 15. P. 75.

¹⁸ RA. § 16. P. 77.

¹⁹ RA. § 17. P. 79.

²⁰ RA. § 18. P. 81.

²¹ RA. § 18. P. 81.

²² RA. § 19. P. 83.

²³ RA. § 20. P. 85.

²⁴ RA. § 22. P. 88.

²⁵ RA. § 23. P. 90.

²⁶ RA. § 24. P. 92.

²⁷ RA. § 26. P. 96.

²⁸ RA. § 27–28. P. 98–100.

²⁹ RA. § 29. P. 102–108.

³⁰ RA. § 30. P. 108.

³¹ RA. § 31. P. 110.

Ascension through the perceptible world advances from the mineral realm to the realm of plants and on to the realm of animals. The occult characteristics (*khawāṣṣ*) of each realm are unveiled for the meditating person.³²

There then follows an interim observation:

“You see the modes of remembrance of God which you use. Now you see that the other worlds use the same remembrance of God as you do, and so the unveilings (which have been shown to you) remain merely as imagination and are not real. Your (own) state becomes manifest to you in these things. However, when you see their different mode of remembrance of God in the other worlds, then you experience real unveilings. This ascension is a dissolution, but at the same time a contraction.”³³

The last sentence means, among other things, that the meditating person has left behind the realm of natural elements and now begins his ascension through the planetary spheres. In another work where Ibn al-ʿArabī speaks of his own heavenly journey, he describes stripping away the elements as follows:

“When God wished to travel by night with me, he removed me from my place and conducted me upward on the Burāq of my capacity. I did not see that any earth accompanied me... When I lost the element water, I lost a part of me. When I came to the element air... I lost it. When I came to the element fire... I pushed forward to the first heaven, and of my corporal nature nothing that I could find support in remained with me.”³⁴

The ascension through the planetary spheres — in the classical order: the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn — is described in the following sections.³⁵ In each case Ibn al-ʿArabī indicates the particular effect that each planetary sphere exerts on earthly events and which prophet plays the leading role in the sphere concerned.

After the sphere of Saturn, the *ʿilliyyūn* or the loftiest heights are dealt with. This sphere is the sphere of the lotus-tree (*sidrat al-muntahā*). Here the mystic looks at Paradise and Hell in their particulars and sees spirits which have become annihilated in beholding God. Here he also sees himself and his destiny. Then he is granted sight of the Celestial Throne and Universal Intelligence.³⁶

What Ibn al-ʿArabī experiences next, he describes as follows:

“If you do not stop here, the Mover of the Pen will disclose Himself to you. Then if you do not stop here, you will be eradicated, made to vanish, be extinguished, annihilated. When the effects of the divine name ‘the Eradica-

³² *RA.* § 32–34. P. 113–118.

³³ *RA.* § 35. P. 118.

³⁴ *NkG.* P. 120, in the commentary on *RA.* § 35.

³⁵ *RA.* § 36–45. P. 122–141.

³⁶ *RA.* § 45–48. P. 141–147.

tor' and the companions of this name come to an end within you, then you will receive sure footing, will be brought before the divine presence, will be made firm, will be united with God, then be made essential. You will be dressed in robes of honor, which you need variously, for they will be of different kinds. After that, you will be returned to your origin. Everything you have seen you will now perceive in a different manner. Either you will be returned to the narrow world of earthly perception or you will remain where you were transferred into the state of absence."³⁷

The effect of the Divine name "Eradicator" is to wipe out the remaining human characteristics so that the mystic reaches the state of *fanā'*, annihilation. In the wake of this there follows "permanence" in God — and now the return to the "world" can take place. For this reason Michel Chodkiewicz in his commentary speaks of a *double échelle*, a double ladder, which the mystic must negotiate: he must ascend to God but then descend into the world again and be active in the latter while still remaining in God.³⁸

This is alluded to in the following:

"As long as the path strider lingers at the goal of the path, he is one 'who stands at rest', if he does not return (to the world, to normal consciousness)...

Others are sent back (to the world), and they are more perfect than those who stand at rest and who were annihilated, but both occupy the same station."³⁹

In another section Ibn al-'Arabī says:

"There are other people whom God takes unto Himself when He descends over them, and does not send back into the world, but keeps them completely with Himself. This recurs quite often. The perfect prophetic, apostolic inheritance consists in being sent back into the world."⁴⁰

The rest of the *Risāla* describes the effect of "being sent back" and chiefly the relationship of such people to the prophets. I will not enter into that subject here. Nor do I wish to enter into further questions concerning spiritual retreat. For those interested in further information on this topic I recommend the article *Two Sufi Treatises of Aḥmad Ibn Idrīs*, which contains a translation of a small 19th-century treatise on retreat with references to parallel works on the subject.⁴¹

³⁷ *RA*. § 50. P. 151.

³⁸ *Chodkiewicz M.* Le sceau des saints: prophétie et sainteté dans la doctrine d'Ibn 'Arabi. Paris: Gallimard, 1986. P. 181 ff.

³⁹ *RA*. § 53. P. 158.

⁴⁰ *NkG*. P. 161, commentary on *RA*. § 54.

⁴¹ *Radtke B., S. O'Fahey, and J. O'Kane.* Two Sufi Treatises of Aḥmad Ibn Idrīs // *Oriens* 35 (1996). P. 143–178.

The basis for Ibn al-'Arabi's account of the ascent to God is the *ḥadīth* about the Prophet's heavenly ascension which first appears in the 3rd/9th century in the canonical *ḥadīth* collections, and then becomes ever more embellished in later literature. One can read more about this in the above-mentioned collective volume *Le voyage initiatique en terre d'islam*.⁴² The *ḥadīth* in question tells how the Prophet was escorted by Gabriel through the seven heavens. In each heaven the corresponding prophet greets him. The same prophets are mentioned by Ibn al-'Arabi. The heavenly journey in the *ḥadīth* ends for the time being at the lotus-tree of the extremity.

Thus, Ibn al-'Arabi, in addition to his exposition, prefaces the contents of the *ḥadīth* with a treatment of spiritual retreat and before the actual heavenly journey presents a passage through the realm of the elements. The end of the *Risāla* forms what one could call a prophetology and a theory of saints. I may note in closing that Ibn al-'Arabi's complex ontology plays scarcely any role in the *Risāla*.

Besides some personal additions, Ibn al-'Arabi's account of the *mi'rāj* contains one important divergence from the *ḥadīth*: he equates the heavens with the planetary spheres. This was only possible after ancient cosmology, the Ptolemaic worldview, had become assimilated into the Islamic intellectual tradition.⁴³

The subject of "annihilation and return", one may note, once again takes up the old motif of *fanā'* and *baqā'*, annihilation and permanence in God, which had also been discussed in Sufi literature since the 3rd/9th century.⁴⁴

Here I would like to consider two Islamic predecessors of Ibn al-'Arabi, both of whom lived in the 3rd/9th century, i.e. around 300 years before him. One is the famous Abū Yazīd al-Baṣṭāmī/al-Biṣṭāmī who died 874.⁴⁵ The other, the previously mentioned al-Ḥakīm at-Tirmidhī who died around 910. Both these mystics were eastern Iranians.

The first, Abū Yazīd, is famous precisely for his heavenly journeys. What we know about this, however, does not come from himself but was recorded at a later date on the basis of oral tradition within his family. The earliest accounts originate in the period around 100 years after his death, i.e. from the second half of the 4th/10th century.⁴⁶

I do not wish to enter into details but it is worth pointing out that the cosmic locations through which Abū Yazīd travels are entirely different from those of Ibn al-'Arabi. Indeed, he travels through the heavens and the divine veils but not through the elements and the planetary spheres. All this has to do with the development of cosmological ideas in Islam, as already stated. Further information

⁴² Cf. also *Nünlist T. Himmelfahrt und Heiligkeit im Islam*. Bern, 2002, especially chapt. I.

⁴³ Cf. my *Weltgeschichte und Weltbeschreibung*, Beirut–Stuttgart, 1993. P. 196 and passim.

⁴⁴ See *Gramlich*. *Derwischorden*. Vol. 2. P. 334.

⁴⁵ See *EI*, s.v. Abū Yazīd.

⁴⁶ *Böwering G. Beṣṭāmī, Bāyazīd // Encyclopedia Iranica* (www.iranica.com).

about Abū Yazīd al-Baṣṭāmī can be found in Pierre Lory's contribution "Le mi'rāğ d'Abū Yazīd Baṣṭāmī" in the collective volume *Le voyage initiatique en terre d'islam*.⁴⁷

More interesting, at least with regard to Ibn al-'Arabī, is Ḥakīm Tirmidhī. He portrays the mystic's ascent through the cosmos — through a cosmos whose structure is determined by the concepts of the so-called Islamic cosmology. Here I can only recommend that one consult my immortal book *Weltgeschichte und Weltbeschreibung im mittelalterlichen Islam*.⁴⁸ The first stage which the mystic reaches in his ascent to God is the lowest heaven (*samā' ad-dunyā*) — in Ibn al-'Arabī identified with the sphere of the Moon. From there he ascends — further details are not given — to the seventh heaven, above which extends "the loftiest heights" (*'illiyūn*) — Ibn al-'Arabī identifies these with the sphere of the *sidrat al-muntahā* — all the way upward to God's Throne. The latter is the boundary between the created and the uncreated — for above this extend the light-realms of God's qualities, the divine veils, which the mystic travels through and understands. In his *Sīrat al-awliyā'* Tirmidhī describes the mystic's ascent as follows:

"When he proves true to God in fulfilling the condition and does not seek to undertake works [while] in the place of divine closeness, then he is transported from that place to the realm of tyrannical might in order to be made upright there. And God compels his carnal soul and subdues it through the power of tyrannical might so that it becomes submissive and humble. Then He transports him from the realm of tyrannical might to the realm of dominion so that he is refined. Now those dispositions which are in the carnal soul melt away, and they were the foundations of the lusts which had become the carnal soul's fixed nature. Then God transports him from there to the realm of loftiness so that he may be disciplined. And from there He transports him to the realm of friendliness so that he may be purified, and then to the realm of majesty so that he may be cleansed, and then to the realm of splendor to be rendered sweet-smelling, and then to the realm of joy to be broadened, and then to the realm of awesomeness to be educated, and then to the realm of mercy to be refreshed and strengthened and promoted, and then to the realm of divine Singleness to be nourished.

And it is divine grace which nourishes him and God's gentleness which gathers him and protects him, and God's love which brings him into divine proximity. And God's longing brings him close. Then He makes him draw near. Then He brings him close. And the divine will conveys him to God, and the Mighty and the Magnanimous One receives him and so He makes him draw near. Then He brings him close. Then He makes him draw near. Then He brings him close. Then He neglects him. Then He conveys him to Him-

⁴⁷ Amir-Moezzi M.A. (ed.). *Le voyage initiatique*.

⁴⁸ See P. 165.

self. Then He speaks with him intimately. Then He loosens His hold on him. Then He tightens His hold on him. Wherever he goes now, he is in God's grasp and one of God's trustworthy agents. Once he has reached this place, descriptions cease, and words and expressions cease. This is the limit of hearts and intellects."⁴⁹

I think that Ḥakīm Tirmidhī's text causes one to recall that of Ibn al-'Arabī. Tirmidhī, however, does not yet distinguish between those "who stand still" and those who "are sent back". But in his work "the one sent back" acts as God's agent in the world as well.

There is one further question to be posed: Who actually makes this journey? Of course, I have already said: a person engaged in meditation, the mystic — but which part of the meditating person? A peculiarity of the Prophet Muḥammad's heavenly journey is the assertion that he made the journey in his own body. This is a distinguishing feature of being a prophet and is out of the question for the mystic.

Unfortunately, Ibn al-'Arabī is not clear about this point, at least not in the *Risālat al-anwār*. However, one may conclude that the part of a human being which undertakes the journey is the "spirit-being" (*rūḥāniyya*),⁵⁰ i.e. a form of spirit, for Ibn al-'Arabī in a passage right at the beginning of the *Risāla* says that the success of the journey to God depends on the strength of the *rūḥāniyya*. In another passage, he says that the Prophet's heavenly journey takes place by means of the primordial light, while the mystic's heavenly journey occurs through the light that flows forth from that light.⁵¹ But it is never explained just what that light actually is. It is also maintained that the *rūḥāniyya* of the mystic receives everything through the *rūḥāniyya* of the Prophet.

In this respect, Ḥakīm Tirmidhī leaves matters even less clear. He does say that in a dream the spirit — or the soul — ascends to God's Throne and there receives dream images.⁵² But which part of a human being participates in the ascension, during a mystical experience in a waking state, is not made clear. All that is said is that "man, the path strider, etc." travels to God. Thus it is unclear whether in this case a "real" journey is meant, i.e. an actual traveling through the cosmos, or merely one in the imagination⁵³ — questions which for the time being cannot be answered.

The idea of a heavenly journey is not an exclusively Islamic phenomenon. In particular it appears in the context of Gnosticism. There one also deals, for instance, with traveling through the planetary spheres — though within a very dif-

⁴⁹ Radtke B. and J. O'Kane. *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism*. Richmond, 1996. P. 194f.

⁵⁰ *RA*. § 6. P. 51.

⁵¹ *RA*. § 59. P. 172f.

⁵² Radtke. *Concept*. P. 136f.

⁵³ Radtke. *Concept*. P. 50f.

ferent cosmological context. Likewise, Judaism and early Christianity are familiar with heavenly journeys.⁵⁴ In the case of Christianity we may mention *The Book of the Holy Hierotheos* which was composed in the 5th century. It displays forms of dependence on the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.⁵⁵

How all this affected Islamic mysticism and spirituality has not yet been seriously studied — and our *Risālat al-anwār* can be taken as a building block in any project to answer such a question.

But before coming to grips with mysticism, here as well the good Lord has imposed the task of sound philology. And philology means that a person endeavors to understand what a text says — and not what he might like it to say. What Ibn al-‘Arabī describes in the following way in the *Risālat al-anwār* may then become unveiled for a receptive seeker:

“If you don’t stop at this point, the levels of the speculative sciences and correct ideas will be unveiled for you, as well as the forms of error which can afflict the understanding. And likewise the difference between knowledge and fantasy.”

Let us hope that many a student of Ibn al-‘Arabī is granted this experience on his heavenly journey.

⁵⁴ See the literature quoted in *NkG*. P. 28.

⁵⁵ See now *Pinggéra K.* All-Erlösung und All-Einheit. Studien zum “Buch des heiligen Hierotheos“ und seiner Rezeption in der syrisch-orthodoxen Theologie (*Sprachen und Kulturen des Christlichen Oriens* 10). Wiesbaden, 2002. The *Syriac Book of the Holy Hierotheos* has been edited by F.S. Marsh (*Marsh F.S.* The Book of the Holy Hierotheos. London–Oxford, 1927).