

Binyamin Abrahamov

Ibn al-'Arabī
On Five Influential Stations

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IDRA PUBLISHING



IDRA

**Idra Series of Islamic Religion,
Philosophy and Culture**

Series Editor: **Prof. Avi Elqayam**

Academic Board:

Prof. Binyamin Abrahamov

Prof. Meir M. Bar-Asher

Prof. Joseph Fenton

ISBN: 978-965-7773-58-1

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E-mail: IdraPublisher@gmail.com
idra.org.il

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Printed in Israel 2023
by E. Oren Ltd.

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Introduction

The Sufi stations (*maqām*, pl. *maqāmāt*) are the spiritual stages which lead one on the mystical path (*ṭarīqa*) toward God. According to most Sufis, these stages are acquired by the mystic, whereas the states (*ḥāl*, pl. *aḥwāl*), which are also spiritual stages, are bestowed upon the Sufi by God. They also hold that the stations are stable, while the states are momentary.¹ The stations can be classified according to various criteria. For example, there are stations that are positioned in a hierarchical manner in the first place of the mystical path. In many Sufi manuals, this station is repentance (*tawba*).² Al-Ghazālī states that some stations, like love and satisfaction (*maḥabba*, *riḍā*), are required because of their essence (*li-dhātihā*), hence, they are the loftiest stations. Other stations, such as repentance and abstinence (*tawba*, *zuhd*) are intended to lead to another aim. Accordingly, repentance means return from the path of remoteness from God in order to reach the way of nearness to God.³ Another criterion is expressed by Ibn al-‘Arabī. In his view, some stations are conditioned by specific circumstances.

1 Schimmel, *Dimensions*, pp. 98-100, 109-130. Knysh, *Mysticism*, pp. 303-306.

2 See, for instance, al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, pp. 91. Al-Sarrāj, *al-Luma’*, p. 43.

3 Al-Ghazālī, *Kitāb al-arba‘īn*, p. 264.

For example, *waraʿ* (scrupulousness) applies to forbidden or doubtful things. If one or more conditions do not exist, one does not need to use this station. He adds to this criterion the stations that potentially remain till death and others that accompany one in the next world.⁴

In this book we intend to put forward another criterion or perspective relating to certain stations, namely, their influential nature on other stations or on acts, sayings, etc. of the Sufi.⁵ To implement this program I shall discuss five stations: *ikhhlāṣ* (purification, or truthfulness, or sincerity), *taqwā* (God-fearingness), *tawba* (repentance), *waraʿ* (scrupulousness), and *mujāhada* (striving). These five stations have different measures of influence on one’s deeds and performance of precepts. *Ikhhlāṣ* as truthfulness and negation of hypocrisy accompanies human acts and other stations. Thus, one’s abstinence (*zuhd*) is worthless if it is not done for God’s sake. This issue is connected to the relationships between the stations. As we shall see, *taqwā* leads to *waraʿ*,⁶ just as *ikhhlāṣ* is responsible for the creation of *waraʿ*.⁷ Al-Qushayrī regards *waraʿ* as the beginning of *zuhd*.⁸ Ibn al-‘Arabī opines that *waraʿ* accompanies the Sufi in all his actions.⁹ In like manner, the influence of *taqwā* on other stations and acts is discussed by the Sufis.¹⁰ *Waraʿ* accompanies the Sufi so long as he is obligated. This notion applies to all

4 *Futūḥāt*, IV, p. 23. Chapter 3, p. 31. In the chapter on *waraʿ*, Ibn al-‘Arabī indicates only the criterion of doubtful things.

5 Chapter I, pp. 21f.

6 Chapter 4, pp. 110f.

7 Ibid.

8 *Risāla*, p. 111.

9 Chapter 5, pp. 133f.

10 Chapter 2, p. 42.

the stations discussed here. Sometimes the connection between the stations is a relationship of cause and effect.

Each chapter begins with the principal notions of the Sufis regarding the specific station studied. It is followed by a summary of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s notions of this station. At the end of each chapter, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s discussion of the station appears in the form of an annotated translation of the relevant chapters in the *Futūḥāt*.

Ibn al-‘Arabī’s originality is shown in all the stations he discusses, and his mystical philosophy permeates his understanding of each station. According to one of his principal ideas, God is the creator and also the agent of the human being’s acts. This notion affects his understanding the abandoning of a station as a station like any other.¹¹

11 It is worth noting that there is no chapter of abandoning *taqwā*. Probably, Ibn al-‘Arabī regards this station so effective for the purpose of worshipping God so that one cannot relinquish it.