

NOTION OF INTANGIBLE INHERITANCE IN IBN 'ARABI

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'Affifi has noted three ways to knowledge in Ibn 'Arabi¹: (i) Reason, (ii) Prophets' example and the Scriptures, (iii) Spiritual experience². He has shown that according to Ibn 'Arabi, the philosophers' reason and blind following of the example of the prophets and the scriptures may lead to some truth, but a complete awareness of the way of the prophet becomes possible only through direct experience.

The following discussion seeks to make a brief exploration of the issue of the role of spiritual experiences involving the notion of intangible inheritance with a view to beginning an examination of whether the spiritual experiences are conservative or radical in nature. That is, whether they merely reconfirm the scripture-prophet or add to them new knowledge. The idea of intangible inheritance adding to the knowledge of prophets and the scriptures is termed as 'developmental knowledge' in this paper.

1. Two types of Cognitive 'Inheritance' (*warath*): Indication of Developmental Knowledge³

Ibn 'Arabi speaks to two types of *warath*:

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¹Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muh yid din-Ibn 'Arabi*, Cambridge: The University Press, 1939, pp.149-151.

²*Ibid.*, p.149.

³*Futuhat III, 501. Mahus* deals with something that is sensed and thus is perceivable through the senses. The reference is to the kind knowledge, which are graspable by the senses like the knowledge of words and actions. Ibn 'Arabi gives an example: [sensory inheritance is like the knowledge of] what the Prophet used to do. The inheritors [of this level of inheritance] look at what the messenger of God used to do and [this knowledge makes them decide that the same is] permissible for them to do..."

[In contrast to the *mahus* (tangible or perceptible inheritance)], the intangible/supersensory (*ma'nawi*) inheritance is concerned with the non-manifest states (*ahwal*)...[it is instantiated by] the Prophet's states of *dhikr* (remembrance) [his object of intangible knowledge]. [This level of knowledge is that of] the Presence and [this Presence's] supervision (*muraqaba*) of the [presence's] effects upon the heart and in the world. So there is nothing that you do not see and hear. There is nothing comparable to your abilities of the Divine sight and consideration (*I'tabar*)⁴.

If the term *hadra* denotes the Presence of the supreme object of knowledge and *warath* denotes deeper human awareness of this Presence (*hudur*), the quotation shows that in contrast to *mahus*, *na'nawi* inheritance reveals that there is a world of non-manifest existing in the layers of *ahwal* leading to *hudur*. The multiplicity of *ahwal* contains the idea of the possibility of developmental knowledge. But, the phrase "so there is nothing that you do not see and hear" may suggest that these *ahwal* are present in the human heart. The *ahwal* also in some sense, remain a cognitive goal ("there is nothing comparable to your abilities of the divine sight ... and consideration..."), to be gradually realised. This was true also in the case of Muhammad⁵.

If one assumes that the scriptures contain the intangible inheritance, then one will need to say that they also contain perfection. It has been said that the non-manifest exists in multiple states. Thus, it is possible that intangible inheritance also comes in stages. That is to say that there is a possibility of degrees of knowledge of *ahwal*, which are perfect for the level at which they occur. Perfection here may mean true knowledge of the object of finding meant for that particular level of human

⁴*Futushat III*, p.502. In general use of language it refers to meaning or import of a word etc. It also refers to mental or spiritual as opposed to the material. Since the word *ma'nawi* is used as an opposite of *mahus*, it primarily means ability to know things beyond the capacity of senses. In this sense it may refer to 'spiritual' objects. W.C. Chittick translates *ma'nawi* as 'intangible'. See "Presence with God, in JMIAS, Vol.XX, 1996, pp.15-32.

⁵*Ibid.*

preparedness contained in the tangible inheritance of the scriptures. It does not seem to indicate the end of what is there to be found⁶.

The rationale for developmental knowledge is indicative also in the camouflaged way in which Ibn 'Arabi critiques the scriptures and the prophets.

If the distinction between the objects of tangible and intangible inheritance is applied to the scriptures, the plain external scriptures could be represented as the object of *mahus*. The possible layers of 'deeper meanings' could be represented as the objects of intangible inheritance. The layers of meanings are assumed even though there is no direct connection between the plain outward and the inner meanings. The direct experience is understood to be the final criterion of the knowledge being claimed to issue from the scriptures.

2. Critique of the Texts and the Doctors of Religion

Ibn 'Arabi says, "What we learn from tradition is mere words, and it is left to us to find out what such words mean"⁷. Implication being that the external sense of the text is empty in itself. The limitation of the scope of possible meanings is not indicated. It is to be assumed that the scope of new knowledge, which may be notionally connected to the text, is unlimited. Ibn 'Arabi does not veil his critique of *ahadith*, which according to him are found to be unreliable, because heedless craving for self-seeking drives their collectors. Heedless self-seeking blocks one's motive for seeking deeper truths. To avoid this extreme, traditionalists tend to swing to excessive literalism instead of taking recourse in intangible inheritance.

⁶For instance the question of abrogation may be seen as a way of continuing revelation. The rationale for continuing revelation seems to be found in the Qur'an itself. See Surah 2:142 ff.

⁷Affifi, *Mystical Philosophy of Ibn 'Arabi*, Lahore: 1979, p.165, and in "Penetrating Meaning" by Cecilia Twinch, in *Journal of Muhiyid-din Ibn 'Arabi Society*, Vol.XX, 1996, p.68. Cecilia Twinch observes: "What is attractive about Ibn 'Arabi's thought is his passion for truth and holding to the Essential" (p.68).

The need for reports arose because the rational inquiry could not reach the outcomes promised by the reports of the messengers in the first place. The rational faculties have a place in the scheme of faith. Its task is to help human beings to become aware of the impossibility of arriving at the knowledge of certain things:

The messengers and the divine knowledge-giving brought that which rational faculties declare impossible. Hence the rational faculties were forced to interpret some of it in order to accept it and to submit and admit their incapacity...⁸

In a sense all plain senses of the text involve human reason. Reason has a role in showing the limitation of the rational enterprise (often tempted by craving for self-importance), and thereby showing a need for an alternate way to lead to the supposed layers of knowledge.

Since reason is employed by the religious doctors who not only fix the meaning of the texts, but also prohibit development of knowledge, Ibn 'Arabi critiques the religious doctors:

When the [heedless] craving [for the pleasure of recognition and places of honour] overcomes the soul, the 'ulama' seeks high ranks [in the king's company], they abandon the 'white evidence' and are drawn to far-fetched interpretations to please the desires of the king. [It is possible therefore that] the jurist may not believe [in his own interpretations], but may issue edicts about it⁹.

The most scathing critique of a jurist is found in the same passage:

Know that God has given Satan a firm control and authority in the area of [human] imagination. Thus, if he sees a jurist who shows a

⁸*Futuhāt*, I, p.218.

⁹*Futuhāt*, III, p.69. Chittick uses the term 'caprice' meaning 'whim', 'impulse', or a 'silly thought'. Here however, it seems that the idea of 'longing' or 'craving' for high position is being referred to. The point being that the jurists seek to gain high position through making claims of knowledge which is much lower than the intangible knowledge. They seem to have no awareness of that. See in *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1989, p.202. Henceforth this book cited as SPK.

craving for honor or pleasure, he knows that [such a jurist] will fail when he faces God; [yet] he arranges his evil deeds in attractive form by the use of strange interpretations and makes it seem good to the jurist. [He] will say to [the jurist] that the first generation believed in God by opinion, 'Ulama' used analogy in ordinances and provided rational reasons for everything...¹⁰.

Ibn 'Arabi's judgement of the traditionalists as caprice driven self-seeking individuals is not fully justified. A majority of the traditional scholars contributed their bit, being conscious of a sense of mission and the integrity of heart. Al-Baidawi¹¹, for instance, wrote his commentary, because *tafsir* writing was considered highest of sciences of religion ('*ulum al-diniya*)¹². He did it, probably not in order to seek popularity, but to contribute to the genuine understanding of the Qur'an. In his Qur'anic interpretation he uses insights from Arabic language and the literary arts. The precondition for engaging in interpretation is:

Best of what I had learned from the greatest Companions, the learned Followers, and others, from the righteous *salaf* who were of lesser rank. (A Book) which would contain excelled allusions, which I and those before me derived from the predecessors and exemplary scholars¹³.

Besides these, the famous readings of the Imams, variant readings from the trustworthy *qira'at* (recitations) form part of the complex process of interpretation. It is pointed out by some that al-Baidawi

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹See Yusuf Rahman, "Hermeneutics of al-Baidawi in his *anwar al-tanzil wa al-asrar al-ta'wil*" in *Islamic Culture*, Vol.LXXI, No.1, January 1887, pp.1-14. Al-Baidawi is a well-known Muslim commentator. His commentary is understood to be one of the best after al-Suyuti and al-Mahalli's *tafsir al-jalayn*. Rahman points out that this commentary is not wholly original. It borrows from others such as al-Zamakhshari and Fakhr al-Din Razi and al-Isfahani.

¹²*Ibid.* See notes 21 and 22. It was meant to be written by those who had already had an exposure to all the other sciences like scholastic theology, grammar, '*usul al-fiqh*, logic and metaphysics. Rahman points out that al-Baidawi wrote *Anwar* towards the end of his life as a sort of a crowning of his achievements.

¹³*Ibid.*, p.5.

borrowed heavily from the traditional commentaries apart from all the other sources he mentions¹⁴. Though, he uses the Qur'an to comment on the Qur'an, he is primarily informed by the sources quoted above¹⁵. He went to great extents and took care to be as correct as possible. One could not therefore question his integrity. But, all this effort would yield little, according to Ibn, if one does not rely on intangible inheritance.

The principle of gaining knowledge of the meanings of the Qur'an through intangible inheritance leads to a different sort of interpretation than that of al-Baidawi. Here the interoperation has nothing to do with reflection, but tasting (*dhawq*). It assumes involvement of intangible source. In order to show support for this way to knowledge Ibn 'Arabi shows how even among those who belong outwardly to the opposing point of view, there are some who secretly subscribe to the way of tasting:

Some of the people of reflection (*i'tibar*)¹⁶ are followers of tasting (*dhawq*). They reflect using tasting as the medium and not speculation (*fikr*)...¹⁷. [Thus] both speculation and tasting use reflection [those unfamiliar with this distinction often confuse between the two]. [The truth is that] reflection among the people of tasting is primary, whereas among the people of speculation it is secondary... And is there something, which cannot be understood through unveiling (*kashf*) and finding (*wujud*)?¹⁸ We say no! And

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p.6.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p.7.

¹⁶*Futuhat*, II.523. The term comes from the root verb 'a bara, meaning to cross or ford; the VIII form of the verb means to be taught a lesson, to consider, to regard. Chittick takes the word in the sense of regarding, esteeming (see SPK p.203). The fundamental idea however is more dynamic. It is not just looking at the possibility of crossing a river, but rather actual process of consideration or reflection leading to certain predictable outcomes.

¹⁷The idea is that of mental cogitation; trying to reach an understanding by using one's mind.

¹⁸The word 'wujud' is taken in the sense Chittick translates it (SPK, p.203). It seems that *Kashf* and *wujud* are taken as aspects of *dhawq*. The unveiling and finding of the object of knowledge is experientially found and not just in abstract sort of way.

forbid reflection (*fikr*) absolutely, because it causes delusion (*talbis*) and insincerity ('*adam al-sidq*)... Involvement in reflection causes a veil.

Clearly, then Ibn 'Arabi is judging not only the texts, but also the traditional disciplines of his time that attempted to interpret texts. The critique above envelopes the Islamic discipline like the *Kalam* and *falsafa*, for he further says:

[Though] the others prevent this [ie., they say that there is no *kashf*], the people of the way of Allah [of *dhawq*] cannot do so ... Those who prevent [*dhawq*] are the scholars of letters who have themselves not experienced any stage of tasting. If the people of reflection (*fikr*) did have taste, like Plato, the theologian [undoubtedly] had, it is a rare [phenomenon]. [Plato] followed the same path as the people of *kashf* and *wujud*. People of Islam [traditional scholars] hated him because of his affiliation with philosophy ... [and] their ignorance... The people of reflection make more mistakes than actually hit the mark in theology (*ilahiyyat*) than actually achieve – whether such persons are philosophers, Mu'tazilites, Ash'arites or other shades people of *nazar* (speculation/reflection)¹⁹. The philosophy is not condemned for the sake of the name philosophy, but for the mistakes in the divine knowledge, opposing the message the messengers brought²⁰.

Even the prophets and messengers were not immune from making mistakes.

3. Intangible Inheritance Correcting Prophet Abraham's Vision

The following discussion shows that Ibn 'Arabi does indeed see a possibility of error in prophecy or scriptures. Knowledge based on intangible inheritance judges the plain external meaning of the texts as right or wrong:

¹⁹Both *nazar* and *fikr* are to be taken as synonymous in this context.

²⁰*Futuhāt*, II.523.

Have you not taken into account what the Apostle of God said to Abu Bakr while explaining the [phenomenon of] visions? He said, 'you were right in some instances and wrong in the others.' So Abu Bakr asked him [Muhammad] to tell him about the cases he was right and the cases he was wrong, but the prophet did not tell him²¹.

This Hadith also appears in *Sahih Muslim*. It cautions the believers about errors in mere external scriptural sense. The tendency therefore is to leave the matter of external sense vague and not fix it, in keeping with Muhammad's silence on the matter²².

Muhammad's comment about Abu Bakr being partly right and partly wrong about the interpretation of a vision occurs in the context of his discussion of Abraham's attempt to interpret his vision. Though Abu Bakr attempted to interpret the vision received by Muhammad, Abraham attempts to interpret his own vision and yet makes a mistake. Thus, the mistake in the interpretation is not just made by those who interpret others' visions or record of others' vision, but also by those who receive the vision in the first place.

Ibn 'Arabi takes the example of Abraham to demonstrate the role of intangible inheritance in correcting the errors of sensory inheritance²³. The passage seems intended to be a critique of the prophets and what

²¹Ibn 'Arabi, *Fusus al-hikam, - kunuj asrar al-kidam*; Intro. *Mufid al-'alam*; commentary on the margin *khajain asrar al-kalim*; by Shah Muhammad Mubarak al-'Ali, edited by Maulana Muhammad 'Abd al-Ghaffar Lucknawi, under the supervision of Muhammad 'Abd al-Samad, Kanpur: al-Matba' al-Ah madi, 1311 AH, p.64. Henceforth cited as *kunuk*. The context of this statement is Abraham's vision of Ram, which appeared to him as his son while he was asleep. A vision which Abraham did not understand. Thus the reference to Muhammad's comment to Abu Bakr about his mistakes in interpretations of the vision are given the Shaykh as a justification of his critique of Abraham, prophets' and esoteric prophecy contained in the traditional sources in general.

²²*Sahih Muslim*, see n.2620 on p.1227: "Allah alone knows what is most correct. When the Holy Prophet ... did not elaborate further, who else can?"

²³Muslims historically believe the reference to son to mean Ishmael. Ibn 'Arabi however, seems to take this to mean Isaac in line with the Old Testament record. See Surah 37:102. Ibn 'Arabi does not identify Isaac in the text of the chapter, but only in the title of the chapter.

they bring to the common believers as sources of beliefs – namely, scriptures. Abraham, his son and the ram are part of the Qu'ranic stories. Ibn 'Arabi attempts to show how these particular and fixed entities represent deeper levels of meaning not obvious without engaging intangible inheritance.

Abraham himself was expected to rely on the intangible inheritance when he saw his son. "...Abraham did not interpret [what he saw correctly/perfectly], for it was a ram that appeared in the form of Abraham's son in the sleep (*manam*). Abraham [sought to] authenticate what he saw [merely at face value]..."²⁴. This suggests that his son had already been protected from possible murder, for the son had been ransomed. What appeared to Abraham as his son was actually the ram. As a prophet, however, he was expected to be cognizant of this, but it is clear that he had no awareness of this fact. He committed a blunder by relying on the fixed and external meaning. God had to rescue the son from Abraham's "misapprehension." The reality of the vision was the ram in the guise of the son. Abraham lacked what he calls "additional knowledge", an intangible ability by which to understand the meaning behind forms; intention behind signs.

The purpose of this vision was to test Abraham's knowledge or to determine to what extent he would be able to go higher in his preparedness to receive knowledge²⁵. Abraham's son represents to relative truth, whereas the ram represents the truth, which Abraham was expected to have known²⁶. Ibn 'Arabi makes it seem that though the traditional external sense is less than perfect, it is right at its own level. It is this external sense, which Abraham accepted and is then accepted also by the traditionalists. Thus, Ibn 'Arabi quotes the Qu'ran, "O Abraham,

²⁴*Kunuj*, p.64.

²⁵*Ibid*. See also n.109 where the quote is from Surah 2:9, "This is indeed a clear test." Thus the traditional notion of test shows Abraham succeeding in the test, whereas here Abraham seems to fall short.

²⁶See 'Abd al-Rah man Ibn Ah mad Jami, *Nadq al-nus us; fisharh naqsh al-Fus us*. Selected Texts to comment the "Imprints of the Fusus, ed. with notes and Intro. in Persian and English, by W.C. Chittick, Tehran: Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1977, pp.155-156.

you believed what you saw", and says, "you were right concerning what you saw."

Ibn 'Arabi's courtesy for the traditional sources/role models or his effort to veil his true object, namely, the critique of the texts and the prophets, which probably makes him say that the story above does not amount to falsehood or error for each sign has its external sense²⁷. Ibn 'Arabi is inconsistent here for he has already stated that error is attributed to Abraham as already pointed out. In the following Hadith related by either Abu Huraira or Ibn 'Abbas, while it is noted that Muhammad received the vision, the error was attributed to Abu Bakr.

... I saw while I was sleeping during the night (this vision) that there was a canopy from which butter and honey were trickling and I also saw people collecting them ... Abu Bakr said: 'Allah's Messenger, ... allow me to interpret it. [After the permission was granted Abu Bakr said] 'The canopy signifies the canopy of Islam ... tell me whether I have interpreted it correctly or I have made an error'. [Muhammad replied] 'You have interpreted a part of it correctly and you have erred in interpreting a part of it. [Abu Bakr responds] ... 'Tell me that part where I have committed an error. Thereupon he [Muhammad] said: 'Don't take oath'²⁸.

Muhammad seems to be aware of the inevitability of error, which suggests that error was also part of his experience prior to its correction through the intangible inheritance. The fundamental nature of error is epistemological. It does not affect the practice of esoteric beliefs, for the principle of redemption, as in the case of Abraham, comes into play. When asked if he could now say which of the interpretations were mistaken, the prophet does not reply. The reason for prophet's silence may be to underline the fact that all traditional records are at best provisional. They are a reduction of a level of spiritual achievement that may be abrogated in the light of a higher level of spiritual knowledge subsequently received or their true intention revealed through such direct knowledge.

²⁷Surah 37:105.

²⁸See *Sah ih. Muslim*, p.1227; see also nos. 5644, 5645 & 5646.

The awareness of being mistaken does not mean that prophet was professing untruth, but rather that what he professed then seems less true in the light of the higher knowledge. Just like Abu Bakr, Abraham's, and possibly Muhammad's, knowledge of the plain sense was overwritten by intangible inheritance. The higher knowledge became possible because both Muhammad and Abraham were open to the intangible inheritance.

Further, in the same context of reference to Abraham, the Shaykh informs that though it is true that every vision requires interpretation, unlike the methodologies of the rationalists and the traditionalists, the mystic epistemology involves its unique method of interpretation of vision. The nature of intangible objects is different from the nature of the sensory objects and hence the methods of understanding the objects need to follow the rules appropriate to the order of objects making their appearance²⁹. The Shaykh begins with a rhetoric question: "Did he know that vision implies interpretation or not?" The answer is predictably in the affirmative. If therefore Abraham knew that visions need interpretations why did he not interpret what he saw as his son? This is where the prophet's saying is used as a justification of the fact that even prophets are not infallible; they make mistakes in interpretation and sometimes just ignore the need to interpret. That is to say that they behave in just the same way as the traditionalists behave: "[but indeed] he [Abraham] knew that visions require interpretation, but he forgot and did not address the matter well [*fama waffa al-mawt an haqqahu*]"³⁰.

Abraham's behaviour is found similar to the traditionalist's way and amounts to 'not addressing the matter well' or as earlier pointed out, it amounts to plain error or mistake. Despite this Ibn 'Arabi tries to protect the integrity of the prophetic message. He diagnoses the prophets' lapses in interpreting visions as erroneous or mistaken and makes it sound as if the prophets deliberately do not address the matter of visions adequately.

²⁹*Kunuj*, p.65. Ibn 'Arabi says, "Does he [Abraham] know that vision implies interpretation or not? The subject here continues to be the question of vision and its interpretation. Abraham, the prophet, continues to be an instance of the general principle of knowledge Ibn 'Arabi is trying to articulate.

³⁰*Ibid.*

If this is true then it would seem that the Shaykh intends to say that the prophets like the traditionalist and rationalist are guilty of heedlessness.

On the other hand the Shaykh also tries to defend the outcome of prophets' interpretations as right. For instance, immediately after his statement of critique of Abraham he adds, "He who sees me in sleep has seen me in waking, for the Satan cannot take my form upon himself"³¹. In the traditional interpretation of this Hadith, Muhammad is seen as fortified against the devil. Devil is absolutely powerless against Muhammad. The devil may not counterfeit Muhammad's form, but he may impersonate as prophets other than Muhammad. If the devil claimed to appear as Muhammad, only those who had seen him alive could tell the difference. Now the traditional interpreters of the Hadith probably did not think it was a possibility that Muhammad could appear to people after the time of the early companions, etc. If one accepts the fact that vision is possible, one will have to accept that the devil can still lead those people in error that did not have the opportunity of seeing Muhammad's earthly form.

This is another instance of Ibn 'Arabi making a general critique of the traditional role models and their message and then trying to make an exception in the case of Muhammad, and his immediate traditional role model. Ibn 'Arabi makes a distinction between prophet's physical form and the spiritual form. What the traditionalists see is the form of the body of Muhammad, which died and is buried in Madina³². The spirit of the prophet, which is not touched by death, enlivened this form. It is this spirit of the prophet that can not be duplicated by the devil. In other words, Ibn 'Arabi is trying to assure the readers that the prophetic scriptures are preserved by God himself, in that though mistakes may have occurred in prophets' perceptions, God has taken care of them by intervening on their behalf, just as He did in the case of Abraham. The perception of knowledge as mistake is a necessary process of growth in God's knowledge. Mistake in this case is to be understood as abrogation

³¹*Ibid.*

³²*Ibid.* "It is known that the image of the prophet which the saints witness is buried in Madina. The image of his spirit no one has witnessed. What appears to you is the spirit impersonating."

of the lower knowledge in the light of the higher – so that the prophet at least, was aware of them.

In the context of the general question of vision and its interpretation abrupt appearance of a reference to Muhammadan infallibility seems a little out of place. It seems that though Ibn 'Arabi wishes to convey his critique of all traditional prophets and their interpretations contained in the scriptures, he makes a vain attempt to make an exception in the case of Muhammad and the Qu'ran, almost as an afterthought.

It has been pointed out that earlier in the story of the vision of Abraham the Shaykh tried to lessen the impact of its critique of the prophets and their interpretation by his ingenuous representation of ram appearing as Abraham's son. Clearly in Abraham's case presenting the ram in the likeness of the son was caused by God. The ram was provided as a ransom for the son, a fact Abraham remained heedless about. But, since what Abraham was going to sacrifice was the ram in the image of his son, even if he had gone ahead with the sacrifice, he would not have committed an actual murder. His guilt has to do with knowledge and not actuality.

Ibn 'Arabi here seems to be protecting the notional validity of all the traditional sources and all the traditional role models. None of the traditional sources, according to him, contain actual error and none of the role models engage in actual error. Their error is to do with understanding or knowledge. The following discussion, however, shows that the prophets' error in the awareness of the true interpretation of visions do have some actual fallout. Ibn 'Arabi speaks of a vision of the prophet reported by Taqib Mukhlad. He saw the prophet offering milk to him. Being faithful to his traditional upbringing he takes the vision literally and tries to vomit the milk drunk in vision to prove its authenticity. Ibn 'Arabi presents a critique of this traditional way. "If he interpreted his vision [adequately he would have realised] that milk [represented] knowledge. So God prevented his access to a great [potential] knowledge". That is, his access to knowledge was determined by the amount of milk he drank. The assumption is that if he realised that milk represented knowledge he would have asked for more and more till he received all that was possible and would not have vomited it. Thus his

knowledge remained less than perfect because of his lack of awareness of the meaning of milk.

The true intention of the milk was *knowledge*. Thus, our traditionalist was denied knowledge because he did not seek to go beyond. That is, he remained ignorant. This story is an explicit critique of traditional sources, as they are understood. It is not clear why God intervened in the case of his prophets and not in the cases of mistaken perception of others like this traditionalist except to say that this was the Shaykh's way of lessening the impact of his critique. It may be added that because the traditionalists do not perceive milk to mean knowledge does not fully discredit the vision. The vision remains true and necessary. The ones who see it and attempt to understand it cause its reduction.

4. Camouflaging Radical Nature of the Developmental Knowledge: Principle of Hermeneutics

Ibn 'Arabi adopts a veiled method of critique when it comes to Muhammad and the Qu'ran. He critiques them in general terms and then proceeds to defend them. Like in saying that there is no possibility of error in the message itself and that the Qu'ran is perfect in containing all possible knowledge which needs discovery through intangible inheritance.

The plain meanings of the texts are to be treated as 'signs', thus leaving the possibility of additional inputs without having to reject the traditional texts. Thus visions, whether what is now contained in the way of the prophet or any fresh visions, have two aspects: the form of the vision itself and the meaning of the vision – both are legitimate, but the latter sees truth. Thus, if one assumes the traditional sources – Qu'ran and Hdith - as levels of knowledge, each will have two levels of truth, one the plain sense and two the meaning. The plain sense may be achieved through methods of the traditionalists, theologians or philosophers. The meaning level may be achieved through the intangible inheritance. The latter is understood to be confirming the true intention of the traditional sources, but it is true from Abraham's story that what was revealed to Abraham through the intangible inheritance was not even

remotely connected to the scriptural account. Thus the intangible inheritance added to the scriptural story a new dimension which is supposed notionally to be rooted in the scripture, but is in reality only an assumption probably serving to traditionalise the radical input.

The notion 'hidden' and 'manifest' are applied to show the notional connection between the scripture and the knowledge gained through intangible inheritance:

In every abode [of being, becoming] the Unique, the Merciful has forms,
whether hidden or manifest.
If you say, "This is the Reality", you have spoken the truth,
if "something other" you are interpreting.
His determination applies in every abode equally,
indeed, He is [ever] unfolding His Reality to creation.
When He manifests Himself to the sight, reason rushes to
bring proof against it [Him].
He is accepted as manifested in the intellectual plane as also
in the imagination, but direct vision sees truth³³.

Each level of knowledge through the direct vision, comes related to the antecedent traditional records, which act as signs leading to confirmation of the record and then to the higher level of direct visions of truth³⁴. Thus, the prophetic tradition may be said to be reliable, but it is possible for the followers of the tradition to miss the true object these traditions point to, at higher levels of knowledge.

It is known that when the scriptures speak of the Reality they speak in a way that yields to the generality of men the immediately apparent meaning. The elite, on the other hand, understands all the meanings inherent in that utterance, in whatever terms it is expressed³⁵.

³³Bezels, Chapter VI.

³⁴*Ibid.* The rest of the Chapter VI dwells on how such a direct vision becomes possible and hence it will not occupy us here.

³⁵Kunuj. See Chapter III on "The Wisdom of Exaltation in the Word of Noah".

The reference to "all meanings inherent" attempts to show that the knowledge gathered through intangible inheritance is really not radical, but rather it is a confirmation of all the meanings already contained in the Qu'ran. It has been pointed out that this sort of supposition is notional and probably driven by the desire to remain within the traditional environment. The quotation below shows that the nature of the intangible inheritance is such that it overcomes all 'obstructions' between the source of knowledge and the saint. The quotation defines the nature of "obstruction". The nature of this inheritance is such that it comes in abundance. If a prophet holds on to one form of vision and fixes it as final, it would 'obstruct' the further movement of visions and thus prevent such a person from the progressively growing knowledge.

Then the prophet informed us that every one of us will see his Lord and speak to Him without any obstruction (*kifalan*) [between them] ...³⁶. That [more] vision will appear is certain on the basis of the fact that there is tasting and reports ... Neither the prophet nor the friends of God have the knowledge of God, for it is not an outcome of reflection. God has prevented them from [being satisfied with mere knowledge of reflection]. They have [instead] the knowledge of unveiling [lit. opening of unveiling] (*futuh al-mukashifa*) of the Truth...³⁷.

If intangible knowledge is multi-layered one may assume that not all prophets and traditional sources are on the same knowledge level. It is right therefore, to say that expansion of the traditional texts is understood to be normative by Ibn 'Arabi and that the new inputs through intangible inheritance are radical in nature even though they are notionally connected to the texts.

³⁶Ibn 'Arabi makes a comparison between the messengers like Moses and the followers like Abu Bakr to say that though certainty of vision is affirmed, there are levels of visions based on levels of tasting. Know with certainty that the tasting (*dhawq*) of the messengers is above the tasting of the followers... So do not think that when Moses asked for his Lord's vision, he lacked vision (Surah 7:143). [His situation was not similar to Abu Bakr who says] 'I saw God before I saw anything else'. This is not the vision that Moses asked from his Lord, because it [this stage of knowledge] is obtainable on account of his high status. See *Futuh at* III, p.116.

³⁷*Futuh at*, III, p.116