

Ibn ‘Arabī, from *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, Chapter on Seth.

We have said that gifts are bestowed either by the Essence or by the Names. The bounties, gifts and favours of the Essence only ever come about through a divine Self-revelation,¹ and the Self-disclosure of the Essence only ever happens in the form of the aptitude² of the one who receives the revelation. It cannot occur in any other way.

Therefore the person revealed to never sees anything other than their own image³ in the mirror of the Real. They do not see the Real, nor is it possible that they should see Him, even though they know that they only see their form in Him. This is like the example of a mirror and someone who looks into it: when you see images in it, you do not see [the mirror] at the same time, despite the fact that you know that you can only see forms or your own form by means of it. God has made this a visible symbol of His essential Self-revelation, so that the one revealed to may know that he does not see Him and he is what he sees.⁴ There is no symbol of vision and self-revelation more direct and apt than this.

Try yourself to see the image in the mirror at the same time as seeing the body of the mirror – you will never see them both together. This is so much the case that some of those who have perceived this with regard to mirror images came to the conclusion that the mirror image lies between the eye of the viewer and the mirror. That is the most they have been able to understand. However, the matter is as we have said, and we hold to this view; we have explained this in the *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*⁵. If you have tasted this, you have experienced the highest [level of vision], above which there is no further degree with respect to a created being. So do not aspire or wear yourself out in trying to progress beyond this point, as there is definitely nothing there and beyond is nothing but pure non-existence⁶.

¹ Ar: *tajallī*, from the root *j-l-y*, meaning to polish, reveal, and it is related to the idea of the unveiling of the bride on her wedding night (*jilwa*). In this form (*tajallī*), it means to reveal or disclose oneself, and for Ibn ‘Arabī the whole cosmos is a place for God’s unveiling of Himself. Here he is emphasising the aspect of the divine revealing Himself rather than His Names and Qualities.

² Ar: *isti’dād*. As Chittick explains, “When God discloses Himself, the extent to which a thing ‘receives’ the self-disclosure is determined by its ‘preparedness’ to receive it, and this in turn is determined by the thing’s own reality... Receptivity must be taken into account not only on the cognitive level but also on the existential level... each receives Being’s self-disclosure according to the measure of its own capacity” (*SPK*, p. 91).

³ Ar: *ṣūra*, which can mean ‘image’ or ‘form’.

⁴ The Arabic here, *annahū mā rāhu*, literally means either “he is what he sees” or “he does not see Him”. In a single phrase it manages to convey at least two interrelated meanings: firstly, the person is the same as what they see in the mirror, and secondly, they do not see Him. The commentators tend to emphasise one or other of these readings, showing how revelation is inherently ambiguous.

⁵ For example, in chapter 63: *Fut.I.304* (*SPK*, 118).

⁶ Ar: *al-‘adam al-mahd*. Sheer or pure non-existence is something that cannot have any being (*wujūd*): for example, impossibility or negating the thingness of something (like the “darkness within which God created the beings He creates”; see *Fut.II.62*).

He is your mirror in which you see yourself, while you are His mirror in which He sees His Names and the manifestation of their properties – and these are no other than Himself. So the matter becomes mixed up and ambiguous.