



Farghānī on the Muhammadan Reality

Farghānī sobre a realidade Muhammadiana

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Resumo

Perhaps the closest parallel to the Johannine Logos in Islam is found in the notion of the “Muhammadan Reality” (al-ḥaqīqat al-muḥammadiyya). The term was probably first used by Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 1240), but the earliest detailed explanation of what it implies was provided by Sa‘īd ibn Aḥmad Farghānī (d. 1300), an outstanding student of Ibn ‘Arabī’s foremost propagator, Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī. Farghānī wrote a dense, two-volume commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s famous 760-verse qasida, Naẓm al-sulūk. Deeply rooted in Islamic metaphysics, theology, and spiritual psychology, the commentary explains how the poet is describing Muhammad’s eternal archetype in God as both the means whereby God creates the universe and the ultimate returning place of all things.

Palavras-chave: Mística islâmica. Realidade Muhammadiana. Farghānī. Ibn ‘Arabī.

Abstract

Talvez o paralelo mais próximo do Logos joanino no Islã seja encontrado na noção da "Realidade Muhammadana" (al-ḥaqīqat al-muḥammadiyya). O termo foi provavelmente usado pela primeira vez por Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 1240), mas a explicação detalhada mais antiga do que ela representa foi fornecida por Sa‘īd ibn Aḥmad Farghānī (d. 1300), um excelente aluno do principal propagador de Ibn ‘Arabī, Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī. Farghānī escreveu um comentário denso, em dois volumes, sobre a famosa qasida de 760 versos de Ibn al-Fāriḍ, Naẓm al-sulūk. Profundamente enraizado na metafísica islâmica, na teologia e na psicologia espiritual, o comentário explica como o poeta está descrevendo o arquétipo eterno de Muhammad em Deus como o meio pelo qual Deus cria o universo e o lugar de retorno final de todas as coisas.

Keywords: Islamic mystic. Muhammadan reality. Farghānī. Ibn ‘Arabī.

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Introduction

Western scholars have sometimes remarked that, if for Christians “the Word became flesh,” as stated in the Gospel of John, then it is fair to say that for Muslims “the Word became book.” It would be hasty to conclude, however, that all Muslims have seen the Quran as God’s Word and relegated Muḥammad simply to the role of God’s messenger. In fact, from early times, many Muslim scholars, while accepting the Quran as God’s Word, also held that Muḥammad had a cosmic, even divine role to play, and they cited various Quranic verses and hadiths (sayings of Muḥammad) to support this view.¹

The best-known term that suggests the Prophet’s divine role is “the Muhammadan Reality” (*al-ḥaqīqat al-muḥammadiyya*). The various explanations that were offered suggest that theologians were talking about the Logos concerning which John says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

The first person to have used the exact expression *Muhammadan Reality* seems to have been the famous Sufi Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 1240). His voluminous and unprecedented writings synthesized the various strands of Islamic learning, not least philosophy and Kalam (dogmatic theology), while demonstrating their intimate interweaving with the Quranic revelation. In a handful of places where he mentions this term, he considers it a synonym for various other expressions and gives it no special significance.² In one passage, he makes clear that it is also called the “Reality of Realities” (*ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqā’iq*).³

The first detailed and focused explanation of the meaning of the Muhammadan Reality was probably provided by Sa‘īd ibn Aḥmad Farghānī (d. 1300), a student of Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī (d. 1274). Qūnawī, who was Ibn al-

¹ See, for example, SCHIMMEL (1985), especially Chapter 7, “The Light of Muhammad and the Mystical Tradition.”

² On Ibn al-‘Arabī’s few mentions of this specific expression, see CHODKIEWICZ (1993), Chapter 7. See also HAKĪM (1981, p. 347-52).

³ Chapter Six of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s magnum opus, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* (Cairo, 1911) is the most detailed passage in which he mentions the Muhammadan Reality (see also *Futūḥāt*, vol. 2, p. 433, vol. 3, p. 199, and vol. 4, p. 311). He describes it in a way that is similar to his description of the Reality of Realities in an earlier passage (vol. 1, p. 77). Chapter Six also has many similarities with a passage in his short *Inshā’ al-dawā’ir* that describes “the Third Thing” (*al-shay’ al-thālith*), which he says is the same as the Reality of Realities, the First Hyle, and Prime Matter. For my translation of Chapter 6, see Chodkiewicz et al. (1989, p. 78-90). Reprinted in Ibn ‘Arabī (2002, p. 29-40). A translation of *Inshā’ al-dawā’ir* by Paul B. Fenton and Maurice Gloton is available in *Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi: A Commemorative Volume*, edited by S. Hirtenstein and M. Tiernan (Shaftesbury, 1993), p. 12-43.

‘Arabī’s stepson and his most influential disciple, demonstrated in several books the essential harmony between the visionary unveiling (*kashf*) achieved by the great Sufi teachers and the arguments and demonstrations offered by the philosophers, in particular Avicenna (d. 1037), the greatest of the Muslim Aristotelians. Farghānī, who hailed from Kāsān in the Ferghane Valley (modern-day Uzbekistan), produced the first and longest commentary on *Nazm al-sulūk* (“The Versification of the Wayfaring”), a 760-verse qasidah by ‘Umar ibn al-Fāriḍ of Egypt (d. 1234), and in the process offered a relatively systematic version of his teacher’s worldview.

Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s qasidah is the most famous Sufi poem in the Arabic language. It is astoundingly beautiful and notoriously obscure. Although it has been translated into English three times by well-known scholars (and into other European languages as well), the English translations do not throw much light on the poem’s meaning. (NICHOLSON (1921); IBN AL-FĀRIḌ (1952; 2001)). The translators looked at some of the poem’s Arabic commentaries but did not make significant use of Farghānī’s work, even though he was the closest of the commentators in time to Ibn al-Fāriḍ and the nearest in intellectual vision. The translators’ failure to utilize Farghānī’s book may have been because the edition available to scholars was published in 1876 with thousands of errors.⁴ Moreover, Farghānī’s prose is convoluted and full of the technical language that characterizes the writings of Qūnawī and his students, not only Farghānī himself, but also ‘Afīf al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī (d. 1291) and Mu’ayyid al-Dīn Jandī (d. ca. 1300). Tilimsānī wrote several books, including a relatively short commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s qasidah. Jandī is the author of the longest early commentary on Ibn al-‘Arabī’s famous *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (“The Ringstones of the Wisdoms”), and there he has a good deal to say about the Muhammadan Reality.⁵

Farghānī wrote his commentary in two versions, the first of which he composed in Persian. Called *Mashāriq al-darārī* (“The Rising Places of the

⁴ Two new editions of the Arabic text appeared in 2007, one in Beirut and one in Qum. Both are simply reproductions of the first edition with all of its errors. In my references to the text, I provide page numbers from the Beirut edition by ‘Āṣim Ibrāhīm al-Kayyālī, which is available at Archive.org (and does not provide Farghānī’s correct first name). My translations are based on a text that I have established on the basis of three excellent manuscripts from the Süleymaniye Library in Istanbul (Carullah 1107, Ragip Paşa 670, and Kadizademehmed 273).

⁵ See Jandī (1982, especially p. 234-35, 246-47). His date of death is given variously in the sources, from 1291 to 1311.

Lodestars”), it takes up 600 pages in the printed edition.⁶ He wrote it as a clean copy of the notes he took when Qūnawī lectured on the *qasidah* to a group of students over a number of years; Qūnawī himself wrote a foreword to the book. Farghānī produced the much longer Arabic version, called *Muntahā l-madārik* (“The Final End of the Perceptual Tools”), when he was teaching in Cairo, probably in the 1260s. One of the many ways in which he rewrote the Persian text was to add a 150-page introduction clarifying the worldview that lies in the backdrop of Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s poem. In contrast to the writings of Ibn al-‘Arabī and Qūnawī, his introduction offers a systematic and comprehensive discussion of the Islamic vision of reality in one place.

In the introduction to his commentary Farghānī dedicates the first and longest section (about sixty pages) to the Divine Reality while combining the viewpoints of negative, apophatic theology and positive, cataphatic theology. He calls these two viewpoints “stripping away” (*salb*) and “affirming” (*thubūt*). Much of this section is devoted to explicating the meanings of 125 of God’s “most beautiful names” (*al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā*). In the next two sections, he explains the structure of the entire universe—that is, “everything other than God” (*mā siwā Allāh*)—in terms of its two basic worlds, which are the invisible, intelligible World of Spirits and the visible, sensory Worlds of Images and Bodies. He concludes this discussion with the appearance of the human being (*insān*), who is the “form” (*ṣūra*) of God as named by all of the divine names detailed in the first section. In the last part of the introduction, he describes the divine and cosmic functions of perfect human beings (*insān kāmil*), that is, those who have actualized the human potential represented by the divine form. Historically these perfect humans appeared as the “124,000” prophets from Adam down to Muḥammad; after Muḥammad they have continued to appear as God’s “friends” (*awliyā’*). Farghānī also details the obstacles that prevent people from achieving the perfection of friendship and explains why they cannot eliminate these obstacles without prophetic guidance. Finally, in the longest part of this last section, he describes many of the basic stages that human beings must traverse in their “wayfaring” (*sulūk*), that is, when they walk in the footsteps of the prophets with the aim of actualizing the divine form latent in their souls. Here he draws from

⁶ Edited by S. J. Āshtiyānī (Mashhad, 1978).

the classic statement of one hundred stations on the path to God, namely *Manāzil al-sā'irīn* (“The Waystations of the Voyagers”) by ‘Abd Allāh Anṣārī (d. 1088).

Most of Farghānī’s book is then dedicated to explaining each line of Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s 760 – verse qasidah, with constant reference to the overall worldview detailed in the introduction.

1 Entifications and Self-Disclosures

By the beginning of the fourteenth century, the term *Muhammadan Reality* seems to have been well established. ‘Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī (d. ca. 1330), a student of Jandī and the best known of the more than one hundred commentators on Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, provided a terse definition of the term in his book *Iṣṭilāḥāt al-ṣūfiyya* (“The Terminology of the Sufis”): “The Muhammadan Reality is the Essence along with the First Entification, so ‘to it belong the Most Beautiful Names’ [Quran 17:110], all of them. It is the Greatest Name.”⁷ (KĀSHĀNĪ, 1992, p. 82). The meaning of this definition should become clear as we look at Farghānī’s discussion of the term.

It is important to understand that the word “reality” (*ḥaqīqa*) was used to designate something that is real and unchanging. “The Real” (*al-ḥaqq*) is one of the Quranic names of God. *Tawḥīd*, the assertion of divine unity that is the first principle of Islamic thought, is encapsulated by the formula *lā ilāha illā Allāh*, “No god but God,” which means among other things that there is nothing real but the truly Real. In the words of Avicenna, “By Its Essence the Necessary Existence is the Real constantly.... Hence everything other than the One Necessary Existence is unreal in itself.” (AVICENNA, 2005, p. 38 – my translation). It follows that, if we speak of something as having realness (*ḥaqqiyya*), this realness must pertain to God, the Real Existence, not to the thing understood as something other than God. As Ibn al-‘Arabī often explains, a thing’s realness is God’s eternal knowledge of the thing, and this knowledge is a concomitant of God’s eternal knowledge of Himself. By knowing Himself, God knows everything that may

⁷ *Iṣṭilāḥāt al-ṣūfiyya*, edited by ‘Abd al-‘Āl Šāhīn (Cairo, 1992), p. 82. Right next to this definition, Kāshānī also defines the Reality of Realities, which Farghānī understood as its synonym: “The Reality of Realities is the One-Only Essence [*al-dhāt al-aḥadiyya*] that gathers together all realities. It is named the Presence of Gathering [*ḥaḍrat al-jam*] and the Presence of Existence [*ḥaḍrat al-wujūd*].”

possibly be known and everything that may possibly exist. It follows that those who spoke of “the Muhammadan Reality” had in view God’s beginningless, unchanging knowledge of Muḥammad.

Theologians with a Sufi bent often spoke of the relationship between the Real (*ḥaqq*) and creation (*khalq*) by employing the word “self-disclosure” (*tajallī*), which Western scholars have usually translated as theophany, epiphany, or manifestation. The term is derived from the Quran’s account of Moses’s encounter with God at Mount Sinai, when God “*disclosed Himself* to the mountain...” (7:143). It gradually became a general designation for the manner in which God displays His names and attributes, whether in the universe as a whole (the macrocosm) or in the human soul (the microcosm). Ibn al-‘Arabī sometimes describes self-disclosure with the Quranic term “new creation” (*khalq jadīd*), explaining that the Creator is eternally saying “Be!,” so His self-disclosure is new at every moment forever. He often cites a maxim by Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 998), one of the early Sufi authors: “There is no repetition in the Self-Disclosure.”

An almost synonymous term that Farghānī commonly employs—a word that became standard terminology because of the writings of Qūnawī and his students—is “entification” (*ta‘ayyun*), which is derived from the word “entity” (*‘ayn*). An entity is a “thing” (*shay’*). Hence any “thing” can be called an entity, including God Himself (as in the expression “the One Entity,” *al-‘ayn al-wāḥida*). Ibn ‘Arabī, Qūnawī, and Farghānī all say that this term has the same meaning as “quiddity” (*māhiyya*), a word that historians of philosophy often translate as “essence,” though Arabic *māhiyya* means exactly the same as Latin *quidditas*, that is, “whatness.”

The entities or quiddities — also known as things, realities, and meanings (*ma‘ānī*) — are the objects of God’s knowledge, which, in themselves, are nonexistent (*ma‘dūm*). Nonetheless, “God knows each thing,” as the Quran says in several places, and given God’s eternity, His knowledge of each thing is also eternal. It follows that each and every entity is “fixed” (*thābit*) in God’s knowledge forever. God’s creative act is to say “Be!” (*kun*) to these realities. As the Quran puts it, “Our only word to a thing, when We desire it, is to say to it ‘Be!’ so it

comes to be” (16:40).

When God says “Be!” to the fixed entities, they come into “being” (*kawn*), a word that I usually translate as “engendered being” in order to differentiate it clearly from the word “existence” (*wujūd*). In the strict sense of the word, existence belongs only to God, who is the Real, Necessary Existence. The specific nature of engendered being is clearly indicated by the well-known term *al-kawn wa-l-fasād*, “generation (= engendered being) and corruption,” an expression that goes back to Aristotle. Every engendered thing—that is, every existent thing other than the Necessary Existence—is “unreal,” as Avicenna put it, and hence it comes into engendered being and then disappears. If an engendered thing were real, it would exist eternally. It follows that the existence of anything other than God pertains not to the thing itself but rather to the Real Existence, which discloses itself by means of the thing. As Jandī (1982, p. 62) put it, “From its beginning to its end, existence is the levels of God’s self-disclosures, for in reality there is nothing in existence but God.” (JANDĪ, 1982, p. 62).

As for “entification,” it is the process whereby entities come to be differentiated and known. When the word *self-disclosure* is used, its connotation is that God is making Himself manifest by means of the properties (*aḥkām*) and traces (*āthār*) of His names and attributes. When the word *entification* is used, it reminds us that every “engendered being” or “existent thing” manifests a distinct entity, different from every other entity. Moreover, each entification, according to a principle voiced by Qūnawī, must be preceded by the lack of entification. Though God may be called “the One Entity,” in Himself He is “the non-Entification” (*al-lā-ta’ayyun*), that is, the absolutely unknowable Essence (CHITTICK, 2012, p. 417).

The word Essence (*dhāt*) was used to designate God as the Real Existence that knows all things forever. Although “essence” is the standard translation of the word, it can be misleading, because the Arabic word is grammatically a pronoun meaning “possessor.” It was originally used in phrases like *dhāt al-asmā’*, “possessor of the names.” As a pronoun, it is what grammarians called a “pointing name” (*ism ishāra*), for a pronoun turns attention toward something else. According to both grammar and etymology, when the word “essence” is

used, it tells us that there is something that is a “possessor” (that is, something that possesses names) and that we are pointing at that something. We designate “what” that thing is by mentioning its names and attributes and by describing its quiddity. Thus, in Islamic theology, God is typically discussed in terms of His Essence, His attributes (*ṣifāt*), and His acts (*af‘āl*).

2 Two Sorts of Oneness

At the beginning of Farghānī’s discussion of the divine names and attributes, he says that our first inkling of the unknown Essence is the notion of Oneness (*waḥda*). This notion is voiced by the two divine names *al-aḥad* and *al-wāḥid*, words from the same root that both mean one. *Aḥad*, however, is understood to designate God as the transcendent One, which can only be known by the apophatic approach. *Wāḥid* designates God as the immanent One, which comes to be known by the cataphatic approach. In order to catch the connotations of these two words, I translate them as the One-Only and the One-All. Farghānī frequently discusses the abstract nouns derived from the two, namely One-Onliness (*aḥadiyya*) and One-Allness (*wāḥidiyya*), and these two became common in later Sufism, though they do not seem to have been paired before him and other students of Qūnawī.

Farghānī writes, “The first regard and entification that becomes entified from the Unseen [*ghayb*] is this Oneness from which are configured the One-Onliness and the One-Allness, while this Oneness remains an isthmus [*barzakh*] gathering the two together.... Or, you can say that the One-Onliness is the One-Allness.” (FARGHĀNĪ, 1293/1876, v. 1, p. 24). The One-Onliness is the same as the One-Allness inasmuch as both designate the unknown Essence. They are distinct inasmuch as the former highlights the Essence’s unknowability and absoluteness and the latter highlights Its omnipresence and infinity. The “first entification” (*al-ta‘ayyun al-awwal*) to which Farghānī refers here seems to be a term coined by Qūnawī. It is much discussed both by him and his students. Farghānī calls it “the First Level of the Most Holy Essence and the first of the levels of Knowledge in the respect that Knowledge is the same as the Essence, not an attribute or a depiction added to It.” (FARGHĀNĪ, 1293/1876, v. 1, p. 28).

Farghānī also says that this First Entification is called “the Reality of Realities,” an expression which he, like Ibn al-‘Arabī, takes as a virtual synonym for the Muhammadan Reality.⁸ It is called the Reality of Realities because of “its universality [*kulliyya*] and the fact that it is a root of every regard and entification, the inward of all Godly and engendered realities, and the root from which all are configured. With its universality it pervades everything. Hence it is Godly [*ilāhī*] in the Godly and engendered [*kawnī*] in the engendered, while all things are the loci of its manifestation [*mazāhir*] and the forms of its differentiation [*ṣuwar tafṣīli-hi*].” (FARGHĀNĪ, 1293/1876, v. 1, p. 28-29).

Farghānī tells us that the Second Entification, which follows upon the First, is also identical with the Divine Essence. It is distinct from the First Entification in the same way that the One-Onliness is distinct from the One-Allness. Thus, the First Entification is God’s Eternal Knowledge of Himself as the One-Only such that the Knower, the Known, and the Knowledge are simply one, with no distinction whatsoever to be drawn between them. The Second Entification is God’s Knowledge of Himself as the One-All, that is, as the Reality of Realities that is named by all the Godly and engendered names.

Each Godly Name designates a universal attribute of God in a certain regard (*i’tibār*), that is, from a certain perspective or standpoint. Farghānī says that the Quran alludes to God’s One-Onliness mainly by using pronouns, such as “He” (*huwa*). Pronouns tell us that something is there, not “what” is there. This is why Ibn al-‘Arabī and others use the word “He-ness” (*huwīyya*) as a synonym for the unknown Essence. In this discussion Farghānī often cites the Quranic verse, “With *Him* are the Keys of the Unseen—none knows them but *He*” (6:59).

All Godly Names, whether understood apophatically or cataphatically, refer precisely to “God” (*Allāh*). This name is often called the “all-gathering name” (*al-ism al-jāmi‘*) because it embraces the meanings of all names, attributes, and realities. In itself it designates “the One- Onliness of Gathering” (*aḥadiyyat al-jam‘*), another term frequently employed by Qūnawī and his students. Kāshānī (1992, p. 5) explains its meaning in *Iṣṭilāḥāt*: “It is the Essence

⁸ Farghānī states that the Muhammadan and/or Ahmadan Reality is identical with the Reality of Realities in several passages, such as *Muntahā* (FARGHĀNĪ, 1293/1876, v. 1, p. 39, 106, 141, 402, 423; v. 2, p. 3-4, 44, 91, 139, 197-98).

in the regard that It is It, without eliminating or affirming the names and attributes, inasmuch as the relations of the Presence of One-Allness are incorporated within It.” In other words, the One-Onliness of Gathering is a designation for the Essence inasmuch as it is regarded as possessing both the stripping-away and the affirming names.

In explaining how the all-gathering name *God* embraces the meanings of all names, Farghānī says that the stripping-away names are indicated by the “inward” (*bāṭin*) of this name, while the affirming names are designated by its “outward” (*zāhir*). He goes on to say that the name *God* designates both the Real Existence and the distinct realities of all things, which are differentiated in God’s beginningless knowledge. This name’s near synonym, *the All-Merciful* (*al-raḥmān*) designates only the Real Existence, which embraces all reality in keeping with the Quranic verse, “My mercy embraces each thing” (7:156). Then the entire cosmos — everything other than God—is governed by the Seven Leader Names (*al-asmā’ al-a’immat al-sab’a*), which designate the root attributes (*al-ṣifāt al-aṣliyya*) of the One-All. The rest of the Most Beautiful Names — commonly numbered as “ninety-nine” — are branches of these seven roots. In one passage Farghānī depicts the relationship between the two names *God* and *the All-Merciful* and the Seven Leader Names like this:

The gathering place for all of the Seven Names is the outward of the word that is the name *God* in two respects—in respect of Existence and in respect of their realities that are designated by their names. This is because the reality of the Godhead [*ulūha*]— which is the same as the Second Entification and is designated by the outward of the word that is the name *God*—is the gathering place of all realities of root and branch, of Godly and engendered; it is their source and the place to which they go back and return. So the outward of the name *God* gathers together the names in these two respects.

As for the outward of the name *All-Merciful*, it is their gathering and returning place in one respect, and that is Existence. For the All-Merciful is a name in respect of the all-inclusive mercy, and that is the same as Existence.

The Alive [*al-ḥayy*] gathers them together and is their returning place in respect of the perfection that fully comprises all perfections.

The Knowing [*al-‘alīm*] gathers them together because of the generality of connection.

The Desiring [*al-murīd*] is their gathering place in seeking and inclining toward perfection.

The Speaker [*al-qā’il*] gathers them together in the respect that each of them is one of the entifications of the All-Merciful Breath.

The Powerful [*al-qādir*] is inclusive of them because of the soundness of the ascription of the ability to display traces to each one of them with a trace specific to it and appropriate to its reality.

The name *the Munificent* [*al-jawwād*] gathers them together in respect of the soundness of the ascription of the effusion of existence to each of them, for it is a source of the existence of everything under its compass in terms of the realities of engendered being and the existentiated entifications.

The name *the Impartial* [*al-muqsiṭ*] is inclusive of them inasmuch as each of them watches over its own property of intermediateness between the standing forth of True Oneness and relative manyness. (FARGHĀNĪ, 1293/1876, v. 1, p. 37-38).

3 The Ahmadan Reality

The Divine Essence can be regarded both as the One-Onliness, in which case all regards are stripped away from It, and as the One-Allness, in which case all regards are affirmed for It. In the former regard, called the First Entification, there is absolute sameness. In the latter regard, called the Second Entification, all things are differentiated. Many names are applied to the Second Entification, including the Level of the Godhead, the World of the Meanings, the Presence of Delineation (*ḥaḍrat al-irtisām*), and the Presence of Beginningless Knowledge (*ḥaḍrat al-ilm al-azalī*).

Given that the Essence can be regarded as a Oneness from which are configured both the One-Onliness and the One-Allness, It is an isthmus (*barzakh*) that gathers the two together. This Quranic term *isthmus* plays an important role in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teachings. For example, he describes the Reality of Realities as an isthmus that stands between the Real and creation while bringing together the perfections of both. In contrast, God has perfection only in eternity, and the cosmos has perfection only in contingency.⁹ Farghānī’s understanding of the term is similar. In one passage he refers to the Muhammadan Reality as the Highest Isthmus. He writes, “The Universal, Muhammadan Reality, which is inclusive of all and is named the Reality of Realities, pervades all, just as the universal pervades its particulars. It is the same as the First, Greatest, Most Prior, Root Isthmus.” (FARGHĀNĪ, 1293/1876, v. 1, p. 39). In another passage he says that the specific and exclusive attribute of the Muhammadan Reality is “most-perfectness” (*akmaliyya*), whereas the furthest limit of the realities of other human beings is perfection (*kamāl*) (FARGHĀNĪ,

⁹ On the various meanings of isthmus in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought, see Chittick (1989), Chapter 6. On its general significance see also Salman H. Bashier (2004).

1293/1876, v. 1, p. 41).

In sixteen passages Farghānī refers to “the Ahmadan Reality” (*al-ḥaqīqat al-aḥmadiyya*), an expression that was rarely used by later authors. In another four passages, he mentions the “Ahmadan, Muhammadan Reality.”¹⁰ He identifies both the Ahmadan Reality and the Muhammadan Reality with the Reality of Realities. Interestingly, he does not mention the Ahmadan Reality in *Mashāriq al-darārī*, his Persian recension of Qūnawī’s lectures, though he does mention the Muhammadan Reality in at least a dozen passages, often identifying it with the Reality of Realities. In the following passage from the Arabic text, he describes the Ahmadan Reality in terms that apply equally to the Muhammadan Reality:

You have realized from what has already been explained that the first thing to become entified from the True Unseen is the True, Essential Oneness in which the relation of the One-Onliness that nullifies regards from It is equal to the relation of One-Allness that affirms all of them for It. This Relation of Equality [*nisba sawā`iyya*] is the same as the First Isthmusness, which we said is the Ahmadan Reality and the Reality of Realities, receptive to the One-All/One-Only’s Self-Disclosure to Itself. This Self-Disclosure, which has the One-Onliness of the Gatheringness [*aḥadiyyat al-jam`iyya*] of the two relations, is the same as the Ahmadan Light alluded to in his words (God bless him and give him peace!), “The first that God created is my light.” In other words, He “determined” it, in keeping with the lexical coinage.¹¹ (FARGHĀNĪ, 1293/1876, v. 1, p. 102).

When Farghānī uses the expression “the Ahmadan, Muhammadan Reality,” he seems to be implying that this Isthmus, while gathering together the One-Onliness and the One-Allness, is “Ahmadan” inasmuch as it is identical with the One-Onliness and “Muhammadan” inasmuch as it is identical with the One-Allness. In a few passages he explains that the eternal reality of Muhammad known as the Reality of Realities became manifest in Muhammad’s historical embodiment not only as flesh but also as heart. He says that

¹⁰ The name Aḥmad, which means “most praised,” is one of the several epithets by which the Quran refers to Muḥammad (a name that itself means “praised”). In the one instance in which this name is mentioned, the speaker is Jesus: “And when Jesus son of Mary said, ‘Children of Israel, I am indeed the messenger of God to you, confirming the Torah that is before me, and giving good tidings of a messenger who shall come after me, whose name is Aḥmad’” (61:6). As is well known, Muslim scholars in the past thought that the name Aḥmad in this verse referred to the Paraclete mentioned in John 14:16. Some modern scholars have speculated that the word *parakletos* in John’s Gospel was originally *periklytos*, “praiseworthy,” but they have not provided textual evidence.

¹¹ By saying that “created” should be understood in terms of the “lexical coinage” (*waq` lughawī*), Farghānī means that the Prophet is not using the word in the later, theological sense, according to which it means “to give existence” (*ijād*) to something that has no existence (i.e., *creatio ex nihilo*). Rather, he is using the word in its original sense, which dictionaries give as *taqdīr*, that is, to measure, determine, and ordain.

Muhammad’s body or constitution (*mizāj*) manifested the differentiation (*tafṣīl*) of the One-Allness, while his heart (*qalb*) displayed the aggregation (*ijmāl*) of the One-Onliness. In several places in the text he makes clear that in talking about the heart, he has in mind the famous divine saying, “Neither My earth nor My heaven embraces Me, but the godwary, immaculate heart of My faithful servant does embrace Me.” Here are three of several passages in which he makes this distinction between Muhammadan and Ahmadan:

This most gathered, most inclusive constitution is nothing but the most equilibrrious Muhammadan constitution and the most inclusive Ahmadan heart (God bless him and give him peace!). (FARGHĀNĪ, 1293/1876, v. 1, p. 233).

His sensible eyeball is ascribed to his constitution, which is his Muhammadan form. But his heart (God bless him and give him peace!) is the form of his Ahmadan Reality. (FARGHĀNĪ, 1293/1876, v. 1, p. 420).¹²

This true locus of manifestation [for the Divine Essence] has a form [*ṣūra*], and that is the same as the purified, most equilibrrious, Muhammadan constitution. It also has a meaning [*ma’nā*], and that is his “godwary, immaculate heart,” which embraces the Real in respect of His mentioned First Self-Disclosure because of the perfection of its gatheringness and its conformity with the entity of the First Isthmusness. For “neither His earth nor His heaven embraces Him,” because these two are delimited by a specific meaning and description. So, his elemental form is a Muhammadan form, just as his meaning, inward, and reality – which is the same as the First Isthmusness – is his Ahmadan Reality (God bless him and give him peace!). (FARGHĀNĪ, 1293/1876, v. 1, p. 103).

4 The Lord of Lords

At the end of his lengthy explanation of the Most Beautiful Names, Farghānī turns his attention to the name *Lord (rabb)*. He had already explained this name’s special significance in an earlier passage:

Whenever the configuration and entification of a thing’s reality is related to a Godly Reality—whether its roots or its branches, or the branches of its branches, and so on—the configuration and entification of its entified existence, by which it becomes manifest in the levels as spirit, image, and sense perception, comes from a Godly Name entified from that Godly Reality in keeping with its distinctiveness and description.

Hence that name is the thing’s Lord. The thing takes only from it, bestows only through it, and returns only to it in its attentivenesses and supplications, whether by state or by speech, in all the homesteads, and

¹² See also Farghānī (1293/1876, v. 1, p. 15, 421; v. 2, p. 139, 258).

it sees only it. (FARGHĀNĪ, 1293/1876, v. 1, p. 40).

In other words, each thing, whether it is regarded as fixed in God's knowledge or existent in the cosmos, has its own Lord, which is God's knowledge of its reality, specificness, meaning, and quiddity. This Godly knowledge governs and controls the thing forever; it is the thing's origin in God and the object toward which the thing is oriented in its engendered being. It is also the Lord to whom the thing will return after the Resurrection. Whether or not the thing is aware of its own "state" (*ḥāl*) or situation, it is determined by its Lord.¹³

When Farghānī comes back to the name *Lord* at the end of his discussion of the divine names, he begins by explaining the literal meaning of the word according to the lexicographers. Having remarked that it includes the meaning of *mālik* (owner), *sayyid* (master), *muṣliḥ* (that which sets aright and makes wholesome), and *murabbī* (nurturer, caregiver), he asserts that it pervades the meaning of all the Godly Names.

This name is a universal name which, with all of its meanings, pervades all of the universal and particular names, both the root and the branch, as far as their furthest branches. It becomes manifest in each name in keeping with it, for the engendered realities depend upon the Godly realities and are configured from them. (FARGHĀNĪ, 1293/1876, v. 1, p. 65).

Farghānī then says that the Lord's properties and traces permeate all humans and govern their manifestation in the descending levels of engendered being, namely the levels of spirits, images (the intermediate world), and sense perception. Wherever someone finds himself, he will be governed by his Lord.

When someone's human reality has been configured from a Godly reality, whether it be a root or branch reality ad infinitum among the forms of branchness, then the existence ascribed to him—which will be manifest in the engendered levels as spirit, image, and sense perception—will have been entified from the Presence of the name that was entified through the Godly reality from which his human reality was configured. So this name—from which his existence was first entified so that he became manifest thereby in the World of the Spirits and which keeps on assisting him with existence as he descends until he becomes manifest and individualized in the form of an individualized, sensory human—is in reality his Lord who takes charge of nurturing

¹³ Ibn al-'Arabi frequently addresses the issue of the specific Lord of each thing. At the beginning of Chapter 7 of the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, for example, he writes, "Know that what is named 'God' is One-Only in Essence and All through the Names. No existent thing has anything from God except its own Lord specifically. It cannot possibly have the All.... So nothing becomes entified from the All for any existent thing except what corresponds to it, and that is its Lord. Nothing takes from Him in respect of His One-Onliness."

him and setting aright his affairs and states. And it—I mean this name—is his owner, his master, the near one inseparable from him, and the one who assists him with existence moment by moment and constantly with the New Creation. His returning place and final end at the utmost limit of the affair, and the self-disclosures to him in keeping with his states in this world’s configuration and in his vision in the afterworld, will be specific to this name and by its intermediacy.

Here, however, a fine point needs to be signaled. It is that lordhood has two properties, a general property and a specific property. The general is like the fact that the name *God* is connected generally and inclusively to all the worlds and levels and to their folk in two respects: the receptive reality and the existence manifest within this reality. Hence the lordhood ascribed to this name is all-inclusive. Thus He says, “*The praise belongs to God, the Lord of the worlds*” [Q 1:2] and “*Surely your Lord is God*” [Q 7:54].

In the same way, given that the name *All-Merciful* has a general connection in respect of existence alone, the lordhood ascribed to it is also general. Thus He says, “*And surely your Lord is the All-Merciful*” [Q 20:90]. When something is a follower, the Lord of what it follows is its Lord by the general property, not the specific.

As for lordhood’s specific property, it is what we mentioned: Whenever anything’s existence is first entified from the Presence of a name, that name is its specific Lord. This is why it has not come down to us in the Book and the Sunnah that any Lord will be seen except the ascribed. Thus He says, “*Faces on that day radiant, gazing on their Lord*” [Q 75:22-23]; and he said (God bless him and give him peace!), “You will see your Lord;” and similar things. (FARGHĀNĪ, 1293/1876, v. 1, p. 66).

By saying that the Book and the Sunnah mention only the “ascribed” Lord, Farghānī is referring to the fact that the scriptural sources never use the word *rabb* in isolation. Thus for example, the Quran mentions the name *Lord* in 1010 instances, but in each case the word is ascribed to something—such as my Lord, your Lord, the Lord of Moses, the Lord of heaven and earth, and so on.

5 The Muhammadan Reality as Lord of All

Having explained the all-inclusiveness of the name Lord, Farghānī turns to the Quranic imagery of water to explain how the traces and properties of the Lord are omnipresent—from the ocean of the Divine Essence down to the tiniest drop. Specifically, however, he is referring to the traces of the Lord that become manifest in human beings. And given that “God created Adam in His form,” human beings are forms of the Godhead arranged as a hierarchy of realities in God’s Knowledge, that is, in the One-Allness Itself, which is precisely the Muhammadan Reality.

The watering place of the existence of the Perfect among the prophets, the messengers, and the friends is the ocean of the Second Self-Disclosure in respect of the entity of the Second Isthmusness that

comprises the Roots, though the realities of each of these Roots is inclusive of the realities of all, but with a hidden trace within it of the property of its distinctiveness and specificity. So the Second Self-Disclosure, in respect of that hidden, specifying trace, is the Lord of each of the Perfect.

The wellspring of the existence ascribed to those prophets, messengers, and friends who are near the Perfect in receptivity, preparedness, compass, universality, tasting, and witnessing is these same Roots, though in respect of the properties of their manyness and distinctiveness and their specification by a specific trace and property, but also along with a hidden trace of the property — not the reality — of all-inclusiveness; this is the reverse of the state of the Perfect. So that name in respect of that distinctiveness and specification is its Lord.

The watering place of the existence of those who are beneath this class is the branches of the oceans of these Roots, or the rivers of the branches of the branches, or the rivulets of those rivers, or the streamlets, or the pools, or the jugs, or the jars, as far as infinite drops. So their entification at first and their returning place at last is in keeping with preparedness.

The term “preparedness” (*isti’ dād*) refers to an entity’s receptivity to the Self-Disclosure, that is, its capacity to manifest the traces and properties of the Godly names and attributes. The role of preparedness is encapsulated by a saying of Junayd (d. 910) that Ibn al-‘Arabī likes to quote: “The water takes on the color of its container.”

As for our Prophet Muḥammad (God bless him and give him peace!), he has the highest drinking place. It is the First Self-Disclosure, which is first his Light and second his Lord. It is the root, source, origin, returning place, and final end of all the names and the entifications of Knowledge and Existence. Hence in addressing him He says (exalted is He who speaks!), “*Surely unto thy Lord is the final end*” [Q 53:42], and “*To thy Lord is the returning*” [Q 96:8]. In other words, the final end of the affair and its return are all to the First Self-Disclosure, which is “thy” Light first and “thy” Lord second. (FARGHĀNĪ, 1293/1876, v. 1, p. 66-67).

Here Farghānī is pointing out that God addresses Muḥammad in these two Quranic verses with the singular, second-person pronoun “thy.” If these verses had mentioned the plural pronoun, “you,” God would have been addressing all human beings. Farghānī takes this as an explicit statement that all things return to God by means of the Muhammadan Light, which is precisely the Muhammadan, Ahmadan Reality.

Farghānī continues this passage by referring to a Quranic verse that compares the ocean to ink for the words of “*my Lord*,” that is, Muḥammad’s specific Lord, which is precisely “He/Him,” that is, the Divine Essence.

God alludes to something like this meaning with His words (exalted and majestic is He!), “Say: ‘Were the ocean ink for the words of my Lord, the ocean would be exhausted before the words of my Lord are exhausted’” [Q 18:109]. This is because Muḥammad’s Lord, the exhaustion of whose words is unintelligible, is only the First Self-Disclosure, which is named and understood by “He.” It is the inward of the name *God*, which is the final end of all the entifications of the Godly and engendered names and attributes, for all of them incontrovertibly return to “Him,” according to His words, “Unto **Him** the affair will be returned, all of it” [Q 11:123].

The Lord’s “words” are only the Names of the Essence, which are named “the Keys of the Unseen” and are understood from the vocables of the pronouns. These Keys are the roots of the Seven Leader Names and are the reality of the ocean that would be exhausted short of exhausting these words. Their inward is the ocean of the Second Self-Disclosure from which are configured the seven oceans, from which are configured the rivers and rivulets, whose entifications—which are their words while descending—are infinite. (FARGHĀNĪ, 1293/1876, v. 1, p. 67).

6 Returning to the Origin

In the just-quoted passages Farghānī is describing what Islamic texts commonly call the “Origin” (*mabdaʿ*) or “the Arc of Descent” (*qaws al-nuzūl*). The Quran repeatedly says that everything comes from God and returns to God. Theologians considered this return (*maʿād*) as the third of the three principles of faith (after *tawḥīd* and prophecy), though they typically explained it in terms of Quranic accounts of death, resurrection, judgment, paradise, and hell. Many scholars pointed out, however, that in order to understand the Return, we need to understand the Origin. Avicenna, for example, has a book called “The Origin and the Return” in which he describes the divine roots of creation and the road by which the soul goes back to God, thus achieving its final perfection.

Three-quarters of Farghānī’s introduction focuses on the stages of the Origin, that is, the descent from the ocean of the Divine Essence down to the infinite dispersal of created things—the tiniest drops of water. The last quarter of the introduction reviews the basic stages whereby the soul can, with the grace of God, harness its potential and ascend, stage by stage, to its final goal. Truly exceptional souls can even follow in the footsteps of Muḥammad and receive the “inheritance” (*wirātha*) of the return to the Divine Essence Itself.

When we study Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s 760-verse qasidah in its entirety, it becomes clear that the poem is an account of Muḥammad’s return to the Station of One-

Onliness. In this station, which is also his origin, he is always and forever the Ahmadan, Muhammadan Reality. The qasidah begins as a first-person account and then, as the poet ascends in the path of following Muḥammad, the voice changes to that of Muḥammad himself, narrating his unique vision of the Oneness as an Isthmus that brings together the One-Onliness and the One-Allness, a vision that is forever present in the Reality of Realities.

I make these final remarks simply to remind the reader that what I have offered here is only the bare bones of Farghānī's explication of the Muhammadan, Ahmadan Reality, not the detailed explanation found in his book.

Let me conclude with one more paragraph from his description of the Ocean, in which he sums up the main topic of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's qasidah, that is, Muḥammad's return to his own Reality and the return of all other realities by means of him:

As for ascending toward their source, it is that the drops reach the jars, the jars the jugs, the jugs the pools, the pools the streamlets, the streamlets the rivulets, the rivulets the oceans, and the seven oceans reach the ocean of the Second Self-Disclosure. These are exhausted and, upon return, reach the First Self-Disclosure, which is the encompassing ocean that is the drinking place of our Prophet Muḥammad (God bless him and give him peace!). This Self-Disclosure is entified by His Highest Names, which are His Words. It returns and reaches the Ocean of Absoluteness and the Unseen Core of the Beginninglessness. (FARGHĀNĪ, 1293/1876, v. 1, p. 68).

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