

Ibn al-Arabī; Some Biographical Reflections¹

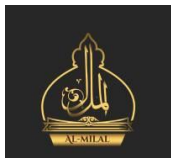
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Abstract: This research article is an academic endeavour to collect and compile details related to the life and family of Muhammad ibn al-Arabī, the representative par excellence of Islamic spirituality and mysticism. A specific portion of this study is designated for a detailed discussion of Ibn al-Arabī's early life and education in Andalusia. While discussing his many journeys undertaken for theological education and spiritual training, the researcher seeks to shed light on his early mentors who shaped Ibn al-Arabī's spiritual thought. As a result of his long journeys, he has mastered numerous sciences and has become able to address both aspects of an issue, namely the physical and the metaphysical. This paper also addresses essential issues concerning Ibn al-Arabī and his family. These minor issues play a vital role in colouring various aspects of Ibn al-Arabī's biographical sketches. These minor concerns centre on his name, his date of birth, and his close family members, i.e., his parents, sisters, uncles, and his wives.

Keywords: *Ibn al-Arabi, Biography, Andalusia, Medieval Muslim Mysticism,*

¹ This is an abridged form of an introductory section of my Ph.D. thesis. See, Siddiq Ali Chishti, "The Origin And Sources Of Ibn Al-Arab's Sufi Meta-Physics: A Textual Analysis Of His Cosmological Doctrine" (Ph.D. thesis, International Islamic University Malaysia, 2020).

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Introduction

It is not an easy task for a serious researcher to portray a clear and real version of the past events especially when there is a lack of adequate empirical evidences. The intricacies involved in this process become more complex as it involves the efforts to eliminate exaggerated and illusive materials from the actual event, especially when it comes to religious tradition. We are, from this aspect, very fortunate to have sufficient reliable materials regarding various stages of Ibn al-Arabī's life i.e., from his birth till his death. Through these materials, one can draw an accurate sketch of major events of his life.

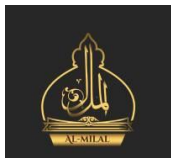
At this early stage of our work, we must acknowledge that putting a succinct and comprehensive account of Ibn al-Arabī's life is very significant. Through this exercise, we try to shed some light on the majestically louder and broader personality of this great Sufi of medieval Islam. One can only grasp the breadth and depth of this genius's achievements by knowing about his personal life. S.H. Nasr, has rightly added that "his greatest 'masterpiece' was his own life, a most unusual in which prayers, invocation, contemplation and visits to various Sufi saints were combined with the theophanic vision of the spiritual world in which the invisible hierarchy of the universe was revealed to him."³

The Existing Biographical Sources

The materials on his biography could be divided in the following three essential categories:

1. In the first category, we have a good number of written works produced by Ibn al-Arabī himself, where he described a variety of his life events for example, regarding his devout masters, family members, travels, and spiritual events which occurred to him. Even though this kind of materials are available in a good length, the only problem is that it is scattered all around in his writings. Furthermore, one must go through conscientious readings on the passages to locate the information regarding the events of his life directly and sometimes indirectly. As a result, one cannot grasp a wholesome sketch of his biography in his writings without an intense challenge to read

³Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna, Suhrawardi, Ibn Arabi*, (New York: Caravan Books, 1997), 92.



all scattered passages within a multitude of his available works. In this regard, his magnum opus "*al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyyah*" (*The Meccan Revelations*) is considered a primary source which provides valuable passages regarding Ibn al-Arabī's life.⁴

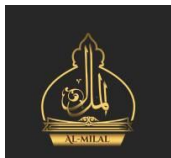
2. The second category in this regard consists of texts produced by Muslim scholars, either in support of views of Ibn al-Arabī, or in opposition to him. Many Muslim historians have also made - though partially - good biographical accounts of Ibn al-Arabī. Since he was also well versed in *Ḥadīth* tradition, he was thus considered worthy to mention in the works of *ʿIlm al-Rijāl* and *ʿIlm al-Jarḥ wa al-Taʿdīl*.⁵ A good number of materials in this category consist of the works of his immediate disciples and his later devoted supporters, among them are theologians, polemicists and well-reputed pious personalities, starting from the period of his life time i.e., 7th century A.H./13th century C.E., until the end of the Ottoman Caliphate at the beginning of twentieth century of the common era. It includes not only his famous and most influential disciple and step son Ṣadr al dīn al-Qunawī (d.673/1273), Muʿayyad al-Dīn al-Jandī (d. 700/1300) and ʿAbdal Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d.735/1334) for example, but also includes his certain opponents like Ibn Taymiyya (d.728/1328), Taftazānī (d.791/1390) and others. The numerous exertions in this category were produced in a multitude of modes, longer and shorter treatises, with apologetic and, occasionally, polemical approaches.⁶

3. Works found in the third category are relatively more diverse and focused in its nature. It covers the work of twentieth century Muslim and non-Muslim intellectuals who were able to produce a good number of academically sound and scholarly research. This compact collection deals with various aspects of the life, works and thoughts of Ibn al-Arabī. The interest of modern scholars - both Muslim and non-Muslim - keep growing as more and more research are being produced in different parts of the world.

⁴ Furthermore, his *Rūḥ al-Quds*, *Al Durrat al-Fākhīrah* and *Muḥāḍḍarāt al-Abrār*, also provide satisfactory amount of information regarding various aspects of his life. In addition, at the beginning of almost each of his work, he usually makes some informative points regarding intended audience, reason for writing and date etc, which sheds some light on chronology of his writing career which lasted until his death.

⁵ *ʿIlm al-Rijāl* and *ʿIlm al-Jarḥ wal Taʿdīl* are important branches of *ḥadīth* sciences which essentially deal with the authenticity and moral status of narrators found in a chain/*sanad* of *ḥadīth* or Prophetic tradition. See, Muhammad Siddiq Hasan al-Qinnujī, *Mawsūʿah Muṣṭalahāt Abjad al-ʿUluūm*, Maktabah Lubnān Nāshirūn; Beirut, 521.

⁶ Some of these crucial works can be listed as: *al-Durr al-Thamīn fī Manāqib Shaikh Mohyī al-Dīn*, of Alī Ibrāhīm al-Baghdādī, *Mīzān al-ʿitidāl* of Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalānī, "*Naḥḥ al-Ṭīb*" of al-Maḥarrī al-Talīmī, "*al-Wāfī bil Wafāyāt*" of al-Safadī, "*al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*" of Ibn Kathīr, "*Bustān al-ʿArīfīn*" of al-Nawawī, "*Shadharāt al-Dhahab*" of Ibn al-ʿImād, "*al-Tabaqāt al-Kubrā*" of al-Shaʿrānī, "*Lisān al-Mīzān*" of al-Dhahabī.



Another astonishing feature of this category is that the works produced in this category are not limited to a specific language, rather in a variety of languages⁷ encompassing not only Ibn al-Arabī's biographical sketches but also dealing with his thought from the perspective of modern sciences.⁸ The production of meaningful academic works is now in full swing and one can expect more useful literature in the future regarding Ibn al-Arabī and his thought.⁹

All three above-mentioned categories of works related to Ibn al-Arabī's biographical sketches, are very much useful in a broader sense but the third category is more useful in terms of having more consistent, systematic and integrated pieces of his biographical accounts. The most invaluable and indispensable work in the third category is Addas's *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, which is considered by almost all modern scholars as a very comprehensive work on Ibn al-Arabī's biography so far, but it would have not been easily possible without the help of and to a great extent, Othmān Yaḥiā's work.¹⁰ In this research paper, however, we are going to benefit from all these three categories for a comprehensive outline of the issue in question.

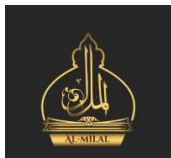
Before we proceed further, it is worth to shed some light on the social, political, religious and historical milieus of the region at the time of Ibn Arabī's early childhood.

⁷ Some relatively earlier good reads are worth to mention here, such as: "El Islam Cristianizado" of Asin Palacios, "The lives of Umar Ibnul Fārid and Ibnul Arabi," of R. A. Nicholson, "Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi" of Henry Corbin, "Ibn 'Arabi" of Ṭāhā 'Abd al-Baqi Surūr, "al-Tasawwuf fil-islam" of 'Umar Farrukh. The most important, updated and, to a great extent, comprehensive biographical work is done by Claude Addas entitled "Quest for the Red Sulphur: The life of Ibn Arabi". This monumental biography covers almost all important phases of Ibn al-Arabī's life. Nonetheless, Su'ād al-Ḥakīm's extra-ordinary work entitled "al-Mu'jam al-Sufi" should be appreciated here for outstanding efforts in gathering bibliographical sketches of Ibn al-Arabī.

⁸ In this regard, worth to study these works e.g. "Ibn Arabi - Time and Cosmology" by Mohamed Haj Yousef, "Ibn Arabi and Modern Thought: The History of Taking Metaphysics Seriously" by Peter Coates, and "Mystical Astrology According to Ibn Arabi" by Titus Burckhardt.

⁹ For a detailed account about some good works in this category, see further, James W. Morris' "Ibn Arabi and His Interpreters: a Review on, Contemplation of the Holy Mystries and the Rising of the Divine Lights" (Anqa Publishing, Oxford: 2001).

¹⁰ See, Othman Yahya's "*Histoire el Classification de l'Oeuvre d'Ibn 'Arabi*" (Damascus: Institut Francais de Damas, 1964). The book is, fortunately, translated from French to Arabic by A.M. al-Ṭayyeb as "*Mu'allafāt Ibn Arabī: Tārīkhuhū wa Ṭaṣnīfuhū*" (Idārah al-Turāth, Cairo:2001). In addition to this, Su'ād al-Hakim's "*al-Mu'jam al-Sufi*" is also considered a genuine work which essentially deals with mystical vocabulary found in Ibn al-'Arabī's 78 works including *al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyya*.



Religio-Political And Social Milieus

Ibn al-Arabī was born in the South-eastern Spanish city of Murcia. By the time of his birth, it was under the reign of the last ruler of the Almoravid dynasty¹¹, Muḥammad bin Sa'd Mardanish. Although there was a political split among regional communities of Muslims, it was a flourishing period of Muslim mystical scholarship in Spain, in particular.

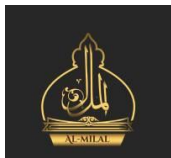
The very early period of Ibn al-Arabī's childhood witnessed an interesting political milieu of the Muslim world while it was divided into three different but vigorous political units. In Baghdad, the Abbasid Caliphate was struggling hard to tackle the internal and external threats to its sovereignty. While the Fatimid Caliphate, on the other hand in Egypt, was totally reliant on the exercise of military tactics by its famous Muslim commander Salāḥuddīn Ayyūbī (590 A.H./d.1193 C.E.) against its adversaries. The third active political theatre was in its full-fledged mode in Muslim Spain where the segregated Muslim groups of different ethnicities were assembled together under the flagship of Almohad's Sultan named Abu Ya'qūb Yūsuf (d.1184 C.E). In such scenario, with the richness of charm in its military, the young Ibn al-Arabī who was still a child started to admire the life and activities of the military.¹²

Early Life And Family

Ibn al-Arabī's complete name, Abū Abdillāh Muḥammad ibn Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Arabī al-Ṭāī, reflects a full manifestation of traditional Arab name which is usually combined with nick name, family name and titular names. In the later Islamic tradition, however, he is well known with an abridged form of his name as "Ibn Arabī" without using a definite article of "*al*". But, as a matter of fact, in the writings of his immediate followers and other earlier works his name was constantly depicted with the definite article as "Ibn al-Arabī". Even the same is true for Ibn al-Arabī himself as, according to many available manuscripts, he used to write his name with definite article. Thus,

¹¹ *Almoravid* daynasty came into power after the fall of caliphate in Cordova. They were from Berber descendants and were taken over by *Almohads* under the headship of Abū Ya'qūb Yusuf. Cf. Addas, *Quest ...*, 18.

¹² His inclination, at a very young age, towards military life can be seen through a paragraph quoted by C.Addas from a manuscript of Ibn al-Arabī's book *Dīwān al-Ma'ārif* where Ibn al-Arabī made a statement about his childhood that: " Since I was old enough to wear a sword-belt, I did not cease mounting steeds, [...] examining sabre blades, parading in military camps (*al-'Asākir*), instead of pouring over the pages of books." See, Addas, *Ibn al-Arabī: The Voyage of No Return*, (Cambridge: The Islamic Text Society, 2000) 11.



following the footsteps of Ibn al-Arabī, we adopted to deal with his name in this paper according to Ibn al-Arabī's own autograph.¹³

There is unanimity among the scholars that he was born in 1165 C.E/560 A.H., but there is a diminutive disagreement about his precise date of birth among two groups of scholars. Scholars in the first group (e.g. Chittick, Addas, and Asin) are very much confident about the exact date of his birth as 17th of *Ramaḍān*. In fact they are relying on a passage being quoted by al-Maqarrī that this date of birth was given by Ibn al-Arabī himself to a reliable but neglected historian named, Ibn al-Najjār (d.643 A.H), who visited him in Damascus.¹⁴ Furthermore, one of the earliest biographers of Ibn al-Arabī, named Alī Ibrāhīm al-Baghdādī (d. 835 A.H) also suggested the same date, thus, making this opinion stronger.¹⁵ While, on the other hand, the second group of scholars (e.g. Austin and Michel Chodkiewicz) are much comfortable with another date as 27th of *Ramaḍān* instead of 17th as his date of birth. This group is essentially relying upon a manuscript found in Konya (Turkey) supposedly written by the immediate disciple and step-son of Ibn al-Arabī, Ṣadrudḍīn al-Qunawī. Austin asserts that:

"this date (i.e. 27th *Ramaḍān*) is given on p.675 of MS. 5624 (7838) in the Yusuf Aga Library in Konya. The Manuscript formed part of the private library of one of Ibn Arabī's closest disciples, Ṣadrudḍīn al-Qunawī. The entry is almost certainly in al-Qunawī's hand."¹⁶

Apparently both views have their own supportive material which makes it difficult for a reader to accept one while ignoring the other. Whatever the case would be, the issue does not pose a serious problem for depicting the rest of the events of his life since both views makes the difference of 10 days only.¹⁷

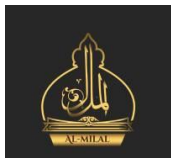
¹³ While elaborating the actual reason(s) behind familiarity of the abridged form of his name as Ibn Arabī with no definite article, some would say that since his philosophy and thought became more popular in Persia and Turkish dominant areas where it was in fashion to drop definite articles. Rather, the others would say that the shorter form of his name was adopted to distinguish him from another Muslim Spanish scholar with a similar name as "Qāzī Abū Bakr Muḥammad Ibn al-Arabī" (d.543 C.E/1148 A.H). Cf. Stephen Hirstenstein "Names and Titles of Ibn al-Arabī" in "Journal of Mohyiddin Ibn Arabi Society" Vol.41, 2007.

¹⁴ See, al-Maqarrī, "*Naḥḥ al-Ṭīb Min Ghaṣn al-Andalus*." (Dār al-Fikr: Beirut, 1998). p.306/2.

¹⁵ Cf. Alī bin Ibrāhīm al-Baghdādī, "*al-Durr al-Thamīn fī Manāqib al-Shaikh Mohyī al-Dīn*" (Dār al-Kutub al-ʿImeyya: Beirut: 2007). 13.

¹⁶ R.W.J.Austin, "*Sufis of Andalusia: the 'Rūḥ al-Quds' and 'al-Durrat al-Fākhira' of Ibn Arabī*" (Routledge: New York, 2008), 21.

¹⁷ However, quite interestingly, each of these dates are having its own symbolic importance i.e. 17th *Ramaḍān* is also the date of famous battle of *Badr* fought between Muslims and the pagans of Mecca in the 2nd year after migration to Medina. While 27th Ramadan is usually considered among Muslims as the date for the 'night of fate' (*lailatul Qadr*). This one night, according to the Qur'an, is better than one



He was born in Spanish city of Murcia in a noble and well to do Arab family. From father side, his family lineage goes back to a famous *Yemenite* tribe of "*Banū Ṭai*". He had not only frequently used this family name in his autographs but also a kind of proud of his family lineage. This tribe was famous for its chivalry and generosity even before they embraced Islam.¹⁸ As he mentions in his *Dīwān*:

أنا المحي لا أكنى ولا أتبلد أنا العربي الحاتمي محمد

Translation: "I am the Reviver- I speak not allusive nor foolishly- I am the *Hātimite* Arab, Muḥammad!." Elsewhere in his *Dīwān*, he says:

لأني حاطمي الأصل ذوكرم من طي عربي عن أب فأب

Translation: "I am pure *Hātimite* - the generous. Having a continuous chain of blood with clan of *Ṭai*."¹⁹

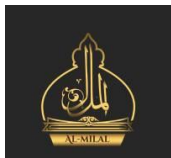
His family received great honor and respect for their nobility and piousness. Alī Ibn al-Arabī (d.1194 C.E./590 A.H), the father of Ibn al-Arabī, was not only holding an aristocratic standing in the ruling class but also had close relations with the elite and noble celebrities of that time including great intellectuals and scholars such as Ibn Rushd (Averroes d.1198 C.E.). This was also the reason due to which Ibn al-Arabī was able to have made connections, in his very young age, with such learned personalities. Alī Ibn al-Arabī, in later times of his life, devoted himself for ascetic life and died while he was enlightened with spiritual path of purity. It was not a mere coincident that Alī Ibn al-Arabī also got inspiration from one of his son's spiritual masters, named Abū Muḥammad Abdallāh al-Qattān. In this regard, Ibn al-Arabī himself has portrayed an anecdote of a brief account of his father's conversion to spiritual path by stating that:

"Once I invited Shaikh al-Qattān to spend the night at our house. [...] At dinner my father also joined us in order to benefit from the Shaikh's spiritual grace. After a while the Shaikh looked at him and said, 'O unhappy old man, is it not time you felt some shame before God? [...] How can you be sure that death will not come upon you in your evil state?' Then, pointing to me, he said, 'There is a lesson for you in your son, for here is a young man with all his bodily appetites in full bloom, who has nevertheless subdued his lusts, cast out his devil, turned to God and associates with God's people, while you, an old man, are on the brinks of

thousand months and this is the night in which the Qur'an was revealed at once on the heart of Prophet Muḥammad. See, The Holy Qur'an, 97:1-3.

¹⁸ At the time of Prophet Muḥammad, Adī ibn Hātim al-Ṭā'ī was the leader of this tribe who embraced Islam and became a devoted companion of the Prophet Muḥammad (S.A.W.)

¹⁹ Ibn al-Arabī, "*Dīwān Ibn Arabī*" (Dār al-Kutub al-Elmiyyah: Beirut, 1996), p.46 and 244. And also, Stephen Hirtenstein "Names and Titles ..." 10



the abyss.' My father wept at his words and realized plainly his plight."²⁰

Thus, Alī Ibn al-Arabī set aside all his worldly concerns and devoted himself for pursuit of 'the right path' until he attained at the end of his life what he was looking for. Ibn al-Arabī also illustrates an account of spiritual gains of his father and his saintly status while describing a spiritual station of a person who has realized "the station of the Breaths" (*Manzil al-Anfās*). He elaborates some of the characteristics of such people who attained to know the divine Breaths that 'there is no difference between their life and their death. In the state of their death, they are like the person whose state is alive.' Furthermore, these people who comprehended this spiritual station of the divine Breaths, if someone looks at their face, once they are dead, he will say that person is surely alive - even though the lack of pulse indicates they are dead! So the person who sees them is bewildered.' He further claims this station for his father stating that:

"Now I saw that (happen) with my father—God have mercy on him!, so that we almost didn't bury him, we were so unsure, because his face seemed so alive, even though his lack of pulse or breathing indicated he was dead. Some fifteen days before he died, he told me that he was dying and would die on a Thursday, and that is how it was. When the day of his death came—and he was terribly ill—he sat up without any support and said to me: 'O my son, today is the journey and the meeting (with God)! So I said to him: 'May God grant you a safe journey in this, and may He bless your meeting (with Him)!'"²¹

As far as Ibn al-Arabī's mother is concerned, there is very little known to us about her. According to Ibn al-Arabī, her name was Nūr.²² Ibn al-Arabī made an account of her in

²⁰ Austin, "Sufis of Andalusia ..." 113-114.

²¹ Ibn al-Arabī, "al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya" (Dār Ṣādir: Beirut, n.d.) p.222/1. And James Morris, "Body of Light: Ibn 'Arabi's Account of His Father's Death", in Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society Newsletter, 1999, 8-9.

²² Most of the biographers of Ibn al-Arabi ignored to mention her name, and quite surprisingly, it happened with Claude Addas as well in her famous "Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn Arabi", (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society. 1993).



al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya, when she once came to visit him while he was in the company of one of his female spiritual master called Fātima of Cordova. Fātima used to call Ibn al-Arabī as her 'spiritual son'.²³

Ibn al-Arabī himself made a very few references to her in his works which does not demonstrate any details about her background and personality. These few accounts only express a very good liaison between a mother and her son and that, the son is very kind and close to his mother.²⁴

Stephen Hirtenstein in his book "*The Unlimited Mercifier*" assumes about Ibn al-Arabī's mother that she seems to have come from a *Berber* family of some standing. He further stresses upon his assumption on the basis of a specious supportive argument that his mother can be of a Berber origin because one of his maternal uncles [named, Yaḥia ibn Ughān, d.537 A.H] was the ruler of the city of Tlemcen in the modern Algeria until his conversion to the Sufi way.²⁵

While Ibn al-Arabī's mother was, in fact, from Arab descendant for sure, as it is confirmed by Ibn al-Arabī's own account about her. He asserts that: "And my mother belonged to *al-Anṣār*"²⁶ As he made this statement while he was producing a poem in favor of *al-Anṣār* and to show their greatness. There he says:

وكانت أُمِّي تنسب إلي الأنصار فقلت [...]

إني امرؤ من جملة الأنصار فإذا مدحتهم مدحت نجاري²⁷

After this statement of Ibn al-Arabī himself about his mother that she belonged to *al-Anṣār* (the Arabs) and not the *Berber*, there is no room left for any other argumentation in this regard. It is worthy to mention that Ibn al-Arabī does make some references to

²³ See, "*al-Futūḥāt ...*", p.348/2 where Ibn al-Arabī asserts that Fātima was used to tell me 'I am your spiritual mother and Nūr is your earthly mother and whenever my (real) mother used to visit me, Fātima would have told her "O Nūr! This is my (spiritual) son ...".

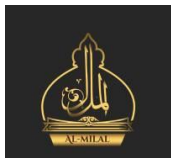
وكانت تقول لي أنا أمك الإلهية و نور أمك الترابية و إذا جاءت والدتي إلى زيارتها تقول لها يا نور هذا ولدي و هو "أبوك فبريه و لا تعقيه"

²⁴ Stephen Hirtenstein, "*The Unlimited Mercifier: The Spiritual Life and Thought of Ibn al-Arabī*" (Anqa Publishing: Oxford, 1999) 33.

²⁵ Ibid., 252.

²⁶ "*al-Futūḥāt ...*", 267/1.

²⁷ Ibid.



his so called maternal uncles in various passages of his works²⁸ but it is quite strange that most of the modern biographers of Ibn al-Arabī have taken these statements in its literal meaning, which is quite hard to justify and needs further investigation. Addas, who could be counted as one of the pioneers of scientific investigation of Ibn al-Arabī's biography, also did not give a slightest heed to this metaphorical usage of Ibn al-Arabī's wording.

As a matter of fact, Ibn al-Arabī mentioned Abū Muslim al-Kholānī (d. 684 C.E.) and Yaḥia ibn Ughān both as his maternal uncles on the basis of certain far-sighted spiritual or ethnic (i.e. as dwellers of the ascetic path and Arabism respectively) connections with them. Else there is a clear distinction of background of these three persons e.g. Ibn al-Arabī's mother, Abū Muslim al-Kholānī and Yaḥia ibn Ughan. Ibn al-Arabī's mother was a pure Arab, from *al-Anṣār* while Abū Muslim al-Kholani was a *Yemenite* Arab, who used to be settled in Damascus but had not, for sure, belonged to any of *al-Anṣār* tribes. Thus he was nominated by Ibn al-Arabī as his maternal uncle due to his *Yemenite* Arab background perhaps. Likewise, he cannot be a real brother of Ibn al-Arabī's mother, by any means, because of four and a half centuries long difference of time period between them.²⁹ This can be further testified by Ibn al-Arabī's another statement about Abu Muslim al-Kholānī in "*Rūḥ al-Quds*" where he mentioned him without showing any kin-relationship with him.³⁰

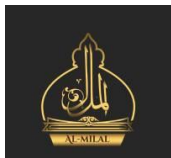
Yaḥia ibn Ughān, on the other hand, could possibly be in resemblance with Ibn al-Arabī in his lineage of *al-Anṣār* from mother side but, again, it is not very much sure whether he was the real brother of Ibn al-Arabī's mother. Yahia ibn Ughān had died in 537 A.H. while Ibn al-Arabī was born in 560 A.H. Thus Ibn al-Arabī never had the chance to see Yaḥia ibn Ughān. Likewise, Ibn al-Arabī did not use a straight forward wordings for mentioning this uncle, in a strict sense, rather he used a free way of calling him as one of his close relations i.e. "one of my maternal uncles."³¹ Those who have good understanding of the Arabic can get the underlying tone of the passage which reveals clearly that the passage does not confirm at all a tie of real maternal uncle. Furthermore, it must be taken into consideration that the usage of metaphorical titles is in fashion in

²⁸ Such as "*al-Futūḥāt ...*", p.18/2, and "*Muḥāḍḍrat al-Abrār*", 67/2.

²⁹ Ibn al-Arabī's mother died somewhere between 1190 C.E., while Abu Muslim al-Kholānī died in 684 C.E.).

³⁰ Ibn al-Arabī, "*Risālah Rūḥ al-Quds Fī Muḥāsīhat al-Nafs*", 69,70.

³¹ The precise wording used by Ibn al-Arabī is as "*ba'dhu akhwālī/بعض أخوالي*" being used to show a far sighted relation. See, "*al-Futūḥāt ...*", 18/2 and "*Muḥāḍḍrat ...*", 67/2



Ibn al-Arabī's writings. Thus, we saw earlier that he supposedly calls one of his female spiritual masters as "mother" while she was not his real mother.³² Furthermore, when he mentions one of his close relations he outspokenly make it clear that what kind of connection he has with that person precisely. This is what we can clearly see in the passage when he talks about his real paternal uncle, saying that: "I had a paternal uncle, brother of my father, his name was Abdallāh bin Muḥammad Ibn al-Arabī".³³ So, in conclusion, we can say that Ibn al-Arabī's mentioning of his relationship with these two spiritual masters as his maternal uncles, is based on its metaphorical usage, being employed to point out certain far-sighted spiritual or ethnic connections with them.

From the above mentioned passage, we find another family member of Ibn al-Arabī, that is his paternal uncle named Abu Muḥammad Abdallāh bin Muḥammad Ibn al-Arabī. He is discussed by Ibn al-Arabī with great respect in his works³⁴ which shows immense affection between uncle and his nephew.

The picture of Ibn al-Arabī's family would have not completed if we did not mention about his two sisters named Umm Sa'd and Umm 'Alā.³⁵ Their details are not mentioned anywhere in his writings but there is a small account about them that their hand were given in Fez by Ibn al-Arabī as their guardian after their father passed away.³⁶ It is quite evident that Ibn al-Arabī was very caring and respectful toward his sisters. His deep emotional concerns about his sisters can be seen in his letter which he wrote to the elder sister upon the death of their younger sister.³⁷

Another important aspect in the great picture of Ibn al-Arabī's family is made by his wives. Though we cannot be certain about the precise number of Ibn al-Arabī's wives, yet we find some passages in his own writings (and other related sources) sharing some ideas about his (at least) four wives. Two among them are known by their names as Maryam bint Muḥammad bin 'Abdīn al-Bijā'ī and Fātima bint Yousuf, who was the daughter of the Amīr al-Ḥaramain (Custodian of the two great Mosques), at that time.³⁸

³² Ibn al-Arabī, "*al-Futūḥāt...*", 348/2.

³³ Ibn al-Arabī, "*al-Futūḥāt...*", 185/1, and A.Badawi, "*Ibn Arabī, Ḥayātuhū wa Madhhabuhū*", 8.

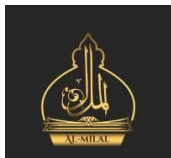
³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Claude Addas made a reference to a manuscript of Ibn Arabī's "*Kitāb al-Mubashshirāt*", where Ibn Arabī mentioned names of his two sisters. See, "*Quest for the Red Sulphur...*", 85.

³⁶ Austin, "*Sufis of Andalusia ...*", 75.

³⁷ Ibn al-Arabī, "*Kitāb al-Kutub*" in *Rasā'el Ibn Arabī*, Haidarabad, 1948, p.35-40. For more good reflections about his ties with female family members, see further, Sa'diyya Shaikh, "*Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn Arabi, Gender, and Sexuality*" (University of North Carolina Press, 2012), third chapter.

³⁸ Ibid.



In his writing, he also used to refer to a deceased wife without naming her. He praises her beauty and feels great sorrow over her death. The later sources also mentions that he married a widow of his friend named Majduddīn Iṣḥāq ibn Muḥammad and Ibn al-Arabī adopted his son Ṣadruddīn Qunawī (d. 1274 C.E./673 A.H.) and he became one of the most influential pupils of his teachings and doctrine.

Ibn al-Arabī also had, at least, a daughter and two sons named Zainab,³⁹ ‘Imāduddīn Muḥammad and Sa‘duddīn Muḥammad respectively.⁴⁰

These are some close relations of Ibn al-Arabī as he mentioned them in his writings. By having a real picture of his family members one can feel comfort while dealing with his personality and his thoughts in a wider sense.

Early Education And Theological Training

After spending eight years of his early childhood in Murcia, Ibn al-Arabī moved with his family to the city of Seville (*Ashbīlyā*) where he grew up and received his early education.⁴¹ Perhaps from the entire life of Ibn al-Arabī, the first eight years of his life which he spent in Murcia, is not well known to us in terms of its detail. Ibn al-Arabī himself did not speak of this period of his life, unlike other detailed accounts of his own biographical sketches. However, fortunately, the *Shaykh* provides good detailed accounts about his educational activities and theological training in Seville. Some of his biographers view his initiation of formal education in the city of Lisbon in Portugal while the *Shaykh* along with his family were there for few months when the ruler of Murcia passed away and the city was taken over by the *Almohads* in 1172 C.E./568 A.H.).⁴² The veracity of this account, however, cannot be testified. On the contrary, the available sources divulged, to some extent, that Ibn al-Arabī lived his early life as an ordinary child and started his education in a very traditional mode in Seville.

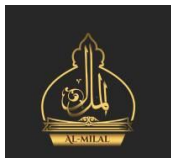
As it was the usual practice of Muslim culture that he started formal education with learning the Holy Qur’ān. This formal education of the Holy Qur’ān was very important in his forthcoming years as it provided the very basis for his spiritual doctrines. Ibn al-Arabī has made an account of his earliest teacher named Abū ‘Abdallah al-Khayyāt, a man of piety and virtue, with whom he studied the Holy

³⁹ Ibn al-Arabī, "*al-Futūḥāt...*", 117/4.

⁴⁰ Badawī, *Ibn al-Arabī ...*, 94.

⁴¹ Austin, "*Sufis of Andalusia ...*", 22.

⁴² Rom Landau, "*The Philosophy of Ibn al-Arabī*" (Routledge: 2008) 3.



Qur'ān. Ibn al-Arabī describes the nature of his contact with him as: "He was also a man of great spiritual influence and power and when I was young and studying the Qur'ān with him I was very fond of him, he being one of our neighbors."⁴³ He further availed himself the opportunity to sharpen his specialization in the recitation of the Qur'ān (*'ilm al-Qirā'at*) with another sagacious figure named Abū Bakr ibn Khalaf, while for a complete command over seven different styles (*al-Qirā't al-Sab'ah*) of recitation of the Holy Qur'ān, he had gone under the auspices of 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Ghālib ibn al-Sharrāt. Since his father was a man of good social connections, it thus provided Ibn al-Arabī a golden chance to train under great scholars of his time. His dogmatic and theological trainings were done in the best manner while specializing in the Qur'anic exegesis (*Tafsīr*), the Tradition of the Prophet (*Ḥadīth*), Jurisprudence and its Principles (*Fiqh wa Uṣūl al-Fiqh*), Grammar (*al-Naḥw*), History (*al-Tārīkh*) and Arabic Literature (*al-Adab*) with the best mentors such as Ibn Zarqūn al-Anṣārī, Abū al-Walīd al-Ḥaḍramī, 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Khizrajī, Abū Ja'far ibn Moṣālī, Abū 'Abdallah ibn al-'Āṣ and Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-ḥaq al-Ashbīlī etc.⁴⁴ Due to Ibn al-Arabī's great skills of learning and the progress he made in his studies, almost all of his teachers gave him license to teach what he learnt and listened from them.⁴⁵ He was not confined to the scope of limited traditional Islamic sciences, rather he was also well versed in the broader realm of *Kalām* (Scholastic Theology) and Philosophy. The above-mentioned personalities are some of those who have played important roles in the shaping of Ibn al-Arabī's theological perspective while there is another list of those spiritual mentors who shaped different levels of his saintly life.⁴⁶

Traveling and Spiritual Journeys (*Sayr wa Sulūk*)

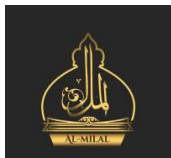
The Sufi path which can be rendered as the spiritual or mystical dimension of Islam, has its various aspects. In fact, in the lives of all beloved and chosen people of Allāh the Almighty i.e. Prophets, Messengers and Saints, 'traveling' (*sayr*) is always considered very significant, as it makes up an important aspect of their spiritual training

⁴³ Austin, *"Sufis of Andalusia ..."* 92.

⁴⁴ Badawī, *Ibn al-Arabī ...*, 8 and Ibn al-Arabī, *"al-Futuḥāt ..."*, 526/1.

⁴⁵ Austin, *"Sufis of Andalusia ..."*, 22.

⁴⁶ Details are given about his spiritual mentors in the forthcoming pages under the title "Spiritual and Philosophical Influences".



and growth. Thus, traveling or *sayr* is considered as an indispensable means in the field of spiritual realization.

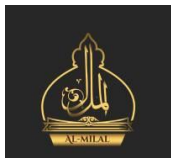
The dweller of the spiritual path must go through certain stations and levels of spiritual realization and it cannot be achieved, in most cases, except under the guidance of perfect spiritual masters. Similarly, it is a familiar practice in Sufi tradition to finding perfect mentors who can nourish and fulfill the spiritual requirements of the traveler of this way, which has never been an easy task. In most of the cases, it requires intense struggle, both physical and spiritual, to reach the relevant master. This is similar to Ibn al-Arabī's case, for he spent the best parts of his life in traveling and meeting spiritual masters of different places and levels. Here it must be noted that extensive traveling played a central role in the spiritual nourishment and pious endeavors of Ibn al-Arabī. Through his long journeys, Ibn al-Arabī was able to taste variant 'holy springs' and strolled in a range of places for the attainment of sacred goals.

Due to an exhaustive track record of his journeys, the 'theme of traveling' in his life can be categorized into three separate stages based on geographical regions which he visited. Apparently, it seems that he began the journey of life in a very ordinary manner like any other child of an elite family. He enjoyed, in his early life, the luxury and easiness of his affluent family and had no intentions for an ascetic life. However, after moving to Seville, he started to visit many teachers who constituted his theological training within the city. After getting some maturity in age, he started seeing various masters in the surroundings and outskirts of the city and then, extended his study visits to the whole of *Andalusia*. This is considered as the first stage of his traveling.

The second stage of his traveling begun when he started meetings with spiritual mentors of different caliber beyond the borders of his home city, covering the whole Western part of the Muslim world at that time. At the age of twenty, he started traveling in different parts of the region with the main purpose of seeking knowledge of the spiritual path.⁴⁷

The third stage of his traveling was initiated through a spiritual commandment in a vision which he received in *Marakesh*. At this point, he concluded his widespread trips in the West and concentrated his focus on the Eastern part of the Islamic world. He remained in the East for the rest of his life. During this period, he was able to

⁴⁷See further, Addas, "*Quest ...*", 61-73.



continue with his long journeys in different spiritual centers of the East. He visited the holy city of Mecca for the first time in 1201, where he was "commanded" by God to begin the composition of his magnum opus "*al-Futuḥāt al-Makkiyyah*" (The Meccan Revelations).⁴⁸ From Mecca, Ibn al-Arabī traveled to different places including Quniya, Armenia, Aleppo and Baghdād. Finally, he decided to settle in Damascus, where he died in 1240. As a result of these journeys he was not only able to enhance his own spiritual experience of divine realization but also to develop different Sufi circles in many cities and to train a good number of devoted pupils. Through these devoted and sincere followers, as a matter of fact, Ibn al-Arabī's spiritual legacy and philosophical doctrines not only survived but also spread to other corners of the world.⁴⁹

Michel Chodkiewicz has made a brief outline of his travel events as follows: At first, his travels were confined to Andalusia, they extended after 1193/590 to the *Maghrib*. Until the age of sixty, in fact, he was constantly on the move, thus in 590 he was in Tunis and *Tlemcen*, in 591 at Fez, in 592 at Seville, in 593 and 594 once more in Fez, and in 595 at Cordoba. In 597 he returned to Morocco. In 598 he went to Murcia, then to Sale and then to Tunis. [...] a vision which came to him at Marrakesh directed him to go to the East, and he left the *Maghrib*, never to return. During this same year, he went successively to Cairo, Jerusalem and finally Mecca [...]. In 599-600 he stayed in the *Hijaz*, before resuming his way: Mosul, Baghdad, Jerusalem, (601), Konya, Hebron (602), Cairo (603). In 603 he was in Mecca, in 606 at Aleppo, in 608 at Baghdad. [...] Ibn Arabi nevertheless travelled without pause over Anatolia and the fertile Muslim East [...]. The journeys continued, with several sojourns in Asia Minor until 1223/620, when he settled in Damascus.⁵⁰

In a nutshell, one can say that his life was full of long journeys, not only inside Andalusia but covering from West to East.

Turning to the Path

Although there was not a single sign in his very early age that he would adopt an ascetic lifestyle and would become a pattern-setter⁵¹ in the field of Muslim spirituality⁵² but there were certain incidents in his teens which turned the course of his life. One cannot

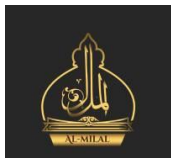
⁴⁸Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages* ..., 95-96.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Michel Chodkiewicz, "*Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn 'Arabi*", trans. Liadain Sherrard." (Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 1993), 6-7.

⁵¹Pattern-setter, in a sense that he was the first who made a detailed account of the issue of the 'Transcendent Unity of Being' and led the path for subsequent generations.

⁵² He personally made a short passage in which he states an account of his very young age, full of childish and light attitude towards religious rituals and observances. See, Addas, "*Quest ...*", 31.



precisely pinpoint the incident when a "conversion" to this path occurs to Ibn al-Arabī. Though many scholars would claim that it was a sudden conversion for him, inspired by a sudden event but this was not the case.⁵³ According to the sources, he came to this line gradually and most probably while he was receiving his theological training in his early teens. There are many evidences which clearly show that he did not suddenly choose this path. Fortunately, we have good sources from his writings in which he frequently cited names and encounters with most of his spiritual masters.⁵⁴ These accounts demonstrate a colorful range of mentors, from Andalusia to Anatolia, Tunis to Mecca, both male and female stars of the spiritual Path.

In the spiritual path, his first encounter was with his teacher with whom he studied the Qur'an, named Abū Abdallah al-Khayyāt. We have previously mentioned his name in earlier pages but here we would like to add another passage about him as Ibn al-Arabī personally has stated:

"He held firmly to the faith and when I came to the Way I wished most to be like him and his brother. I attached myself to him and derived great benefit from his conduct and example."⁵⁵

His Writings

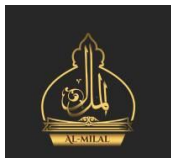
Ibn al-Arabī was a genius, not only in his spiritual practices and vision but also in his writing skills. It will not be an overstated avowal that he is still alive, intellectually speaking, because of his vivid and vital writings, of which a good number survive until today. Although there is no precise date that marks the beginning of his writing, it is assumed that he started this important task right after his formal involvement with the path of devout life while he was only twenty years old. Apparently his famous book named "*Mashāhid al-Asrār al-Qudsiyah Wa Maṭāli‘ al-Anwār al-‘Ilāhiyah*" is considered as one of his earliest works in his early Andalusian life.⁵⁶ The most in-depth and an exemplary work on the bibliography of Ibn al-Arabī was conducted by Osmān

⁵³ Most of the biographers considered a statement of Ibn al-Arabī in which he states that he came to this Path when he was twenty years old. Cf, Ibn al-Arabī, "*al-Futuḥāt ...*", 559/2.

⁵⁴ Two of his famous works known as "*Rūḥ al-Quds*" and "*al-Durrah al-Fākhirah*" are specifically reserved for his account of spiritual masters and their interactions with him. In these two works, Ibn al-Arabī has mentioned about seventy-one saints with whom he made acquaintance and benefitted from them.

⁵⁵ Austin, "*Sufis of Andalusia ...*" 92.

⁵⁶ Cf. James Morris, "*Ibn Arabi and his interpreters: A Review on, Contemplation of the Holy Mysteries and the Rising of the Divine Lights*", translated by Cecilia Twinch and Pablo Beneito. (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 2001).



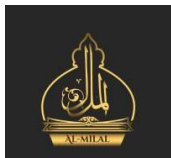
Yahîā in his two volumes "*Histoire el Classification de l'Oeuvr d'Ibn 'Arabi*",⁵⁷ where he mentions around eight hundred and forty-six works being attributed to this great mystic and prolific writer. Osmān Yahîā has treated well all these works attributed to Ibn al-Arabî and has found that among all these eight hundred and forty-six works, five hundred and fifty of his works have survived and are available to us today in the form of two thousand one hundred and seventeen manuscripts.⁵⁸ There is an immense need of serious work in this regards as less than one hundred of these available works are obtainable in printed form so far, most of which are published without any critical editing. An important point here is that some of these works are wrongly attributed to Ibn al-Arabî and there is also replication in the titles of many of his works, which means that many of his works are given more than one name and title. Thus, after cross examining, the number of his enormous works are narrowed down to more than four hundred pieces. Yet one may have a question in mind that this vast amount of scholarly work is quite difficult to be produced by one man, if not impossible. However, it ought to be clear that not all works are necessarily in book form or are huge works. Rather, much of this collection are small pieces of works which sometimes even consist of only one page. Similarly, it is factual that his collection of written materials is also contained in a huge encyclopedic piece of work named "*al-Futuḥāt al-Makkiyyah*", consisting of three thousand two hundred pages of full size and covering almost nineteen million words.⁵⁹ Despite the fact that Ibn al-Arabî wrote extensively on many themes covering the essentials of Islamic theology, cosmology, psychology and ethics etc., a central theme of his philosophical doctrine is the "Unity of Being" or *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* which can be seen in almost all of his writings. He was also an eloquent poet who was able to capture his thoughts in poetic expressions.

In the same manner, he was majestically fluent in articulating his intricate mystical experiences while most of the mystics and sages were not capable of doing this as excellently. In his writings, Ibn al-Arabî has touched several literary genres and has covered important sciences of Islamic intellectual tradition. Since he had a firm grip on a multitude of sciences, it made it harder to count him from a specific group of scholars being specialized in a field or to restrict him to a certain Islamic school of

⁵⁷ See, al-Tayyeb, "*Mu'allafāt Ibn Arabî: Tārīkhuhū wa Taṣnīfuhū*" (Idārah al-Turāth, Cairo:2001).

⁵⁸ Henry Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, (2014), Routledge: New York, 295.

⁵⁹ According to our own calculation while with a soft copy of "*al-Futuḥāt al-Makkiyyah*" in MS Word format.



thought. All researchers and scholars of Ibn al-Arabī are well aware of the fact that due to his dynamic mystical experiences and observations, it is not easy to detect the nature of his personality. Similarly, by virtue of his grand collection of writings, it is also difficult for them to have a firm grip of his intellectual stature. It would not be incorrect if, among a great corpus of his writings, two of his works namely "*al-Futuḥāt al-Makkiyyah*" and "*Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*" are considered as extracts of his doctrines and interpretations of the Islamic worldview. These two celebrated works of the *Shaykh* can be considered as the efforts of his last thirty years of saintly life.

Ibn al-Arabī was able to continue his writing activity with his extra ordinary travels across the vast region of Muslim land at that time. At the end of his life and travels in the West, he was able to produce at least sixty works by 1201 C.E/598 A.H.⁶⁰ Thus, most of his works came into existence while he was on the move between different cities of the East and when he settled down in Damascus. There are certain monographs which were composed in response to someone's question or certain allegations or upon the request of one of his disciples or friends. One of the essential characteristics of his collection of works is the involvement of divine inspiration in their compositions. This is true for almost all of his written pieces in general, particularly for "*al-Futuḥāt*" and "*Fuṣūṣ*".⁶¹

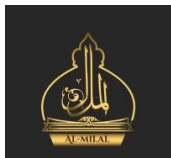
Spiritual and Philosophical Influences

Ibn al-Arabī was a poet, philosopher, theologian, ascetic, spiritual master, writer and jurist due to his dynamic and multi-dimensional personality. It is not so easy to pinpoint a single source which made a decisive influence in the formation of his spiritual and philosophical doctrines. Due to the complex nature of Ibn al-Arabī's personality, it involves a vast corpus of influential agents working actively in shaping his majestic character. Usually there are three basic societal elements which are primarily held responsible for influencing the character of any individual.

The first major contributing factor is the role of parents and immediate family members. A young child is more adoptive of his parents' characters and their lifestyle

⁶⁰Austin, *Sufis of Andalusia*, 21-50.

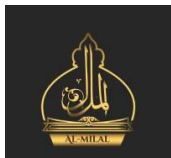
⁶¹ Regarding "*al-Futuḥāt*" Ibn al-Arabī clearly declares the divine nature of its composition while the same is true for *Fuṣūṣ* as he mentions in its preface that he was ordered by Prophet Muhammad to write and spread the Word. See further, Ibn al-Arabī, "*al-Futuḥāt*...", p.83/1, and *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, (Preface).



which initiates the grooming of the child's thoughts. The second element from which a person really gets its imprint is the circle of teachers and mentors. In one way or another, consciously or unconsciously, teachers have a great impact on their pupils. That is why most of the students prefer to follow the footsteps of their mentors, especially in the spiritual path where this impact is more evident as compared to other sciences. The third and most important element in the nourishment of thought of an individual is the surrounding environment of the society in terms of its intellectual sophistication or otherwise.

Ibn al-Arabī was so fortunate that he could assimilate all these three essential elements in their best possible manners which accordingly act in shaping his personality and thoughts. His parents and other close family members (i.e. a paternal uncle, in particular) have good impact on the personality and early growth of Ibn al-Arabī. Through the elite status of his father, he was able to become familiar with knowledgeable personalities of that time. It is also due to his father's status that allowed the scholar to have access to good opportunities to be in the circles of excellent mentors in various fields of traditional sciences. From a very young age of his life, Ibn al-Arabī had acquaintance with a good circle of teachers and this circle was growing even after he moved to the East when he was more than forty years of age. Due to the vast number of teachers in various disciplines, Ibn al-Arabī received a blend of inspiration from them and became masterful at what he studied with his teachers.

Similarly, the third element which had also provided a good space for Ibn al-Arabī in terms of the development of his thoughts was overall environment of the Muslim West that was very supportive and in terms of producing and developing innovative and creative ideas. To know the level of influence of Andalusian intellectual environment upon the spiritual and intellectual upbringing of Ibn al-Arabī, one must analyze the nature of existing religious schools and great names of Muslim intellectuals in various fields at that time. A quick survey of the relevant materials leads us to know at least two most influential trends especially in the Islamic spiritual sciences. One of them is the famous school of 'Almeira' which was supposedly bearing the doctrinal legacy of Ibn al-Masarraḥ (d.931 C.E.), and the other is the spiritual school of thought established and lead by Abū Madyan (d.1198 C.E.) Both schools were actively involved in the currents of Sufī circles of Andalusia at that time. And due to the innate desire for knowledge, Ibn al-Arabī also quenched his thirst for knowledge from these schools. Most of his masters, both in traditional and spiritual sciences were directly or indirectly



related to these schools. In addition, he was also in touch with other eminent contemporaries such as the famous Muslim theologian and philosopher al-Rāzī (d.1209 C.E.), Ibn Rushd,⁶² Suhrawardī,⁶³ (d.1191 C.E). Furthermore, Ibn al-Arabī was also inspired by the works and ideas of distinguished scholars of the century such as al-Ghazālī (d.1111 C.E.), Abdul Qādir al-Jīlānī (d.1166) and Abū Madyan.⁶⁴

It is quite evident that a vast number of Ibn al-Arabī's masters and their inclinations to different schools made good impression in the wider intellectual development of Ibn al-Arabī. In the above-mentioned passages, we have discussed three essential elements which have shaped the spiritual and philosophical development of Ibn al-Arabī. From the three elements, one can conclude that the first element i.e. his parents and family members, were the first organizing element of his spiritual thoughts. Although his father, in his early life, was not a man of the spiritual path, at the end of his life he was fully devoted to the path of purity and became among those who possessed a good place in spiritual world.⁶⁵ Similarly, another close family member, as we already discussed above, was his paternal uncle; Abū Muḥammad ‘Abdallah bin Muḥammad Ibn al-Arabī. He was a devoted spiritual person who left good impressions on his young nephew (i.e. Ibn al-Arabī). Ibn al-Arabī was introduced by him to another spiritual master named as Abū ‘Alī al-Ḥasan al-Shakkāz. He was a friend of his paternal uncle and often visited his home. Shakkāz had a very good influence upon Ibn al-Arabī and helped him nourish his initial spiritual grooming.⁶⁶

The second element i.e. teachers and mentors, needs to be further divided into two separate categories of mentors. The first category of his teachers consistsof those who taught Ibn al-Arabī the traditional Islamic sciences. While the second category comprises those spiritual mentors and masters with whom Ibn al-Arabī kept company and with whom he experienced various stages of his spiritual voyage. Since it is one of

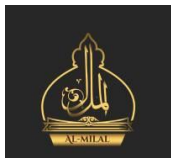
⁶² Shaykh gives us a detailed account about his first meeting with this great philosopher Ibn Rushd. In this meeting both scholars exchange their views and came to know about each other positions. Cf, *al-Futūḥāt...*, 153-154.

⁶³ There is only one instant when Ibn al-Arabī came across this great sage of the time in Baghdād. Apparently, it was a strange meeting that none of them spoke to each other rather stared in each other's eyes and then separated. Al-Baghdādī reserved a passage for the details of this event in his *Manāqib*.

⁶⁴ Ibn al-Arabī's refers abundantly in his writings to those whose ideas or personality he got inspired, especially these three personalities. Quite interestingly we did not find any trace in Ibn al-Arabī's writings about a famous Andalusian philosopher and theologian i.e. Ibn Tufail (d.1185 C.E.).

⁶⁵ Ibn al-Arabī himself mentions that his father had attained the station of "*Raḥmāniyūn*" cf, "*al-Futūḥāt...*", 222/1.

⁶⁶ Austin, "*Sufis of Andalusia ...*" 92.



the basic requirements of 'the path' to become knowledgeable of the traditional religious sciences⁶⁷, Ibn al-Arabī, in this regard, was very fortunate to have the best teachers in such sciences.⁶⁸ There is a good list of those teachers with whom Ibn al-Arabī studied traditional sciences. These were not only the best specialists in their respective fields but also were men of great character and piety. Even among his mentors in traditional sciences, there were few personalities who made great influence in shaping Ibn al-Arabī's mind towards the spiritual path. Some of them were also practicing spiritual masters, who left great impact on young Ibn al-Arabī which include Abū 'Abdallāh al-Khayyāt and Abū 'Alī al-Ḥasan al-Shakkāz that were important in the development of Ibn al-Arabī's spirituality.

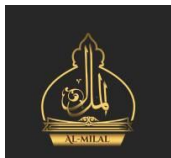
The second category of his teachers, which comprises spiritual masters, is very much important in terms of knowing their impact on Ibn al-Arabī's spiritual and philosophical doctrines. Fortunately, Ibn al-Arabī wrote a whole book named *al-Durrah al-Fākhira* in which he listed names of those spiritual masters whom he accompanied and benefited from. Another work entitled *Rūḥ al-Quds* is also a good source where one can find Ibn al-Arabī discussing about fifty-four of his spiritual mentors with whom he made acquaintance and benefited from. Some traces of other mentors of his spiritual journey can be found in his other works such as *Muḥāḍarat al-Abrār*. Based on the figures mentioned and the account Ibn al-Arabī gave about each of them; one can see the depth of influence of these characters upon the spiritual growth and doctrinal developments of Ibn al-Arabī. Although Ibn al-Arabī remained keeping company with pious and well-learned people even after he moved to the East, it is evident that he obtained a specific level of realization at the age of thirty in 1190, which made him self-sufficient in the path of spiritual realities.⁶⁹ Thus, all of his spiritual mentors mentioned in his works "*al-Durrah al-Fākhira*" and "*Rūḥ al-Quds*", belonged to the Muslim West or the *Andalusia*.

A detailed scrutiny of these figures also reveals the fact that these figures were the highly adept class of the spiritual path at that time. They had different abilities of spiritual practices and all of them had attained specific spiritual stations (*maqāmāt*) and

⁶⁷ Joining the path of Islamic spirituality without acquiring prior traditional Islamic sciences is not recommended by almost all the great figures of Islamic intellectual legacy.

⁶⁸ See, Badawi, *Ibn al-Arabī ...*, 8-28.

⁶⁹ Ibn al-Arabī himself proclaims that he attained that level in Fez which made him complete and independent of teachers any more, in this Path. See, "*al-Futuḥāt...*", 616/1.



achieved various levels of spirituality. The numerous numbers of his spiritual teachers shed light on his broader vision of the realities of the universe. However, the number of his spiritual guides is not restricted to those whom he mentioned in his writings, rather there were many more of them whom he did not mention. Here in this one passage it would make it clear how wide his circle of spiritual mentors was. He states that:

One day in Mecca, I met seventy-two of the saints from all of whom I witnessed miraculous powers. I also met a large group of both men and women, remarkable for their spiritual power and knowledge.⁷⁰

He also wrote about four of his female spiritual guides, stating that

"وأصدق من رأينا في هذا الباب من النساء فاطمة بنت ابن المثنى بإشبيلية خدمتها
و هي بنت خمس وتسعين سنة وشمس أم الفقراء بمرشانة وأم الزهراء بإشبيلية
أيضا وكلبهار بمكة تدعى ست غزالة"⁷¹

Most of them were not known to the ordinary people as a good number of them lived an ascetic life. Most interestingly, none of them were blamed for anything which goes against the basic teachings of Islam. Thus, Ibn al-Arabī had been making progress in his spiritual path in good hands fully equipped with Islamic injunctions and tradition.

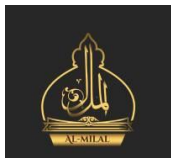
Prior to his spiritual expedition at the age of 20, Ibn al-Arabī underwent a long route of a spiritual journey. Various passages from his writing suggest that in the beginning, Ibn al-Arabī had no master to learn from and he was wondering to whom he must consult in different situations of his divine inspiration. Al-Baghdādī and Ibn Sodakīn's accounts state it clearly that Ibn al-Arabī's coming to the Path was a sudden accident.⁷² This is also supported by some passages of the *Futuḥāt* where Ibn al-Arabī reinforced this by saying that his conversion to the path was a sudden move (*kāna Faṭḥī Jadhbatan...*).⁷³ However, it must be considered that this opening of his heart for this path was, no doubt, a sudden act but it was followed by a gradual process of significant spiritual practices until he reached the state of self-sufficiency. In addition, it is said that even before his conversion to this Path in a restricted sense of the term, Ibn al-

⁷⁰Austin, " *Sufis of Andalusia ...* ", 160.

⁷¹Ibn al-Arabī, " *al-Futuḥāt...* ", 363/1.

⁷²al-Baghdādī, " *al-Durr al-Thamīn fī Manāqib...* ", and also, Addas, " *Quest ...* ", 36.

⁷³Ibn al-Arabī, " *al-Futuḥāt...* ", 616/1.



Arabī had already started various kinds of retreats and spiritual practices. There are many accounts in *Futuḥāt* which suggest that Ibn al-Arabī started spiritual retreats during his very young age of adulthood.⁷⁴

It is also evident that Ibn al-Arabī's practice of spiritual realization took place while he was taking classes of traditional sciences in Seville. In a passage from *Futuḥāt*, Ibn al-Arabī mentions that he started the voyage in 580 (while he was twenty years old).⁷⁵ This was the actual time when he officially came to the path and studied under the guidance of a proper mentor called Abu Ja'far al-'Urainī.⁷⁶ Then, he frequently came in contact with a great number of spiritual mentors in different parts of the Muslim West and became acquainted with masters, both male and female. He remained in this state of spiritual practices and retreats for almost ten years until he reached the point where he found the most suitable spiritual place for him.⁷⁷ But even after attaining the stage, he did not stop his practices and went on with his vast number of journeys in the Muslim West and later on in the East as well.

However, our main concern about his spiritual inspiration and roots of his spiritual engagements are present in his young age when he started to receive visions from the holy personalities of the Prophets. This was certainly at the age before he started spiritual retreats in abandoned places like cemeteries, caves and deserts.⁷⁸ This is the most influential phase which shapes his later spiritual life. Here at this stage, Ibn al-Arabī received various visions from different spiritual Prophetic personalities such as Moses, Jesus and Prophet Muḥammad (Peace be upon them) and thus, he became aware of his spiritual status.⁷⁹ From here onwards, Ibn al-Arabī remained under the direct spiritual influence and guidance of these personalities until he conveyed his spiritual legacy to his pupils in the form of his spiritual practices and teachings, which were also made available in the form of his texts for the forthcoming generations.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ Usually the age between thirteen to fifteen is considered an average for adulthood of boys, speaking in theological terms.

⁷⁵ Ibn al-Arabī, "*al-Futuḥāt...*", 177/2.

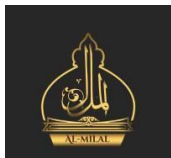
⁷⁶ For further details, see "*Sufis of Andalusia*". 63-68.

⁷⁷ It happened in 590 in Fez. See, Addas, "*Quest ...*", 74-81.

⁷⁸ There are many accounts which suggest that Ibn al-Arabī had started some sort of seclusion or certain spiritual practices in abandoned and alone places where he could spend his time in meditations far from humans. Cf. "*al-Futuḥāt...*", chapters 78-79, also, Addas, "*Quest ...*", 35-37.

⁷⁹ فإن رجوعنا إلى هذا الطريق كان بمبشرة على يد عيسى وموسى ومحمد

⁸⁰ Ibn al-Arabī considered Jesus as his first spiritual mentor as he got inspirations from him in his visions before he started his voyage in the Path. He also mentioned that the essence of Jesus' Divine instructions remained continued in the form of his first spiritual master named al-'Urainī, who was on the foot of



Here, an important passage of the *kitāb al-Mubashshirāt* must be taken into consideration which shows Ibn al-Arabī's great affiliation and unbounded relation with the Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) and his teachings. Ibn al-Arabī states about one of his visions in which he saw that 'he is in danger from many armed people surrounding him but finally he gets refuge beside the Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) and the Prophet advised him to continue with his way (the *Sunnah*) so he would remain unharmed and protected. And he would not be astray from the right path of the Prophet.⁸¹

This was the advice which Ibn al-Arabī took and practically applied upon himself and throughout his life he remained conscious about following the footsteps of Prophet Muḥammad. It was not only the Prophetic tradition that Ibn al-Arabī was so attached with, but he was also very much involved in following the divine text of the Holy Qur'an. From the very beginning of his spiritual journey, he was very much into this idea that the divine Qur'anic text reveals its secrets to those who make close acquaintance with it. It was the Qur'an which provided its guidance to Ibn al-Arabī in his youth when he had just started severe spiritual and ascetic practices. Ibn al-Arabī in different passages explains his strong relation with the Qur'an. He had sometimes experienced the direct reflections of the Qur'an on his heart. This direct experience had a strong effect that Ibn al-Arabī came to know how the Qur'an was revealed on the heart of Prophet Muḥammad.⁸² Ibn al-Arabī had a strong conviction that the Qur'an does not disappoint its faithful readers in terms of showing the right path and revealing its secrets to them.⁸³

Although there were great personal efforts and spiritual practices involved in the process of Ibn al-Arabī in choosing this spiritual path, one can eventually conclude that his conversion or return to the path was, in fact, a mere grace and blessing from Allah. Ibn al-Arabī plainly mentioned that his conversion to the path happened in the form of a vision he saw. There was also a series of visions in which he received guidance from the most prominent figures i.e. Prophet Moses, Prophet Jesus and Prophet Muḥammad

Jesus, in his spiritual status and inner realization. Cf. "*al-Futuḥāt...*", p. 49/2, and also, Adaas, "*Quest...*," 39.

⁸¹ Ibn al-Arabī, "*kitāb al-Mubashshirāt*", 109-110. Retrieved on October 10, 2015. http://rodin.uca.es/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10498/15146/004_kara.pdf.

⁸² Ibn al-Arabī, "*Kitāb al-Esfār 'An Nataaej al-Asfār*", 16; Adaas, "*Quest...*," 92.



(peach be upon them. The role of visions and *Kashf*⁸⁴ have played vital role in the spiritual upbringings of Ibn al-Arabī. He initiated this path through the vision (which was followed by a series of it until his death) and came across different phases and places of the Path through his divine inspiration or illuminations.⁸⁵

These visions and illuminations made Ibn al-Arabī's inner self so bright that he could reveal mysteries of life and cosmos, which others could not realize through their conventional way of learning. This was essentially through his visions that he presented a very detailed account of his cosmological doctrine. His doctrine about life, being, universe, cosmos and God was inspired by his divine visions supported by the Qur'ān and Prophetic Tradition. The details which he provides for his cosmological doctrine, made him unique in a sense that his work has no precedent before it.

A thorough study of major life events of Ibn al-Arabī depicts a three-fold pattern of his character. In the first role, one can see him as a dedicated student and devoted seeker of knowledge and truth. A great quest of getting familiar with the Truth makes him a 'lifetime' student, who bows his knees before all whom he discovered as specialized experts and masters of the Path. Hence, we observe him making acquaintance with great '*Ulamā*' and *Mashā'ikh* even after attaining higher spiritual realization. This state of his great devotion for spiritual and Islamic traditional sciences continues even after he moves from Muslim West to the East.⁸⁶ The second role of Ibn al-Arabī is as a teacher or spiritual guide. He makes this role very evident in most of his available texts. There is no single moment where he thinks he cannot provide some sort of guidance and advice for his followers in particular and for seekers of the Truth in general. The third role that he plays can be identified as 'active polemist' who makes well-built critique of his opponents on one hand, and on the other, defending his point of views while clarifying his position. One can see his utter humbleness in arguing for his stance but in many places, he appears firm on his opponents with severe critique and lodging against them a plethora of evidences and arguments. Ibn al-Arabī, in all these three roles, is seen as actively involved in different sciences, whether spiritual or traditional.

⁸⁴*Kashf* or unveiling, as described by William Chittick, is knowledge given to Sufis by God without the interference of that rational ('*aqlī*') or considerative (*naẓarī*) faculty known as reflection. See, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, State University of New York Press: Albany: p.63; we shall be dealing with this issue in detail in the forthcoming sixth chapter.

⁸⁵Ibn al-Arabī, "*al-Futuḥāt...*", 491/2.

⁸⁶Adaas, "*Quest...*," 97.

**Conclusion**

As we made it clear at the beginning of this research article that our present work mainly deals with the life of Ibn al-Arabī and his achievements. Thus, in this paper we tried to gather essential information about various important aspects of the spiritual personality of Muslim history and his achievements. It concludes that one should be very careful when reading Ibn al-Arabī and his spiritual ideas, for without having a concise view of all the accounts of the various fields; one could get a completely wrong impression of him and his thoughts. We also tried to uncover the fact that why enough knowledge about his personal life, academic and spiritual upbringing, family relations, social and political milieu are important for knowing or unearthing the complete picture of Ibn al-Arabī's doctrine. This paper concludes with his educational background in various sciences. It also provides enough details about his numerous travels not only to the Muslim West but also to the East. Thus, this paper provides basis for any researcher who intends to know about Ibn al-Arabī's personal life and scholarly achievements or want to get familiarity about his spiritual thoughts.



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