CHAPTER 16

The Mihrab

Always and everywhere, we are in multiplicity, but multiplicity manifests Unity as First and Last, Inward and Outward. In multiplicity, any condition not fully confessional of Unity and the Praised’s apostolate is a mihrab or battlefield.¹ The war in multiplicity for unification with Unity and the Praised’s perfection has no solution that does not pull back that in the world which veils Unity. To pull back the veils is to reveal them as signs through which to see or know the Signified. Confessing Unity and the Praised’s apostolate we are in mihrab and mosque, the battlefield and the place of annihilation of the self.

The theatre of war is to face the world as veiling. We have Spirit or Light in our centre and reject concealment of Unity, striving to draw away the veils and reveal the world as manifesting Truth. In so doing, we find our original nature outside ourselves, in the knowledge of the names our Lord taught us.

Existence is nothing compared to God but everything when God is manifest in it. It ranges from nullity to plenitude, from earth, or the depths, to the heavens, or the height. The range outside is mirrored by the range in us from body to Spirit. We fell from Spirit to the body. Spirit and the height remain the goal of our return, so we pray to God: “Guide us on the upright path, the path of those

¹ The Arabic noun miḥrāb means “theatre of war” or “battlefield”; and the noun masjid means “place of prostration” or “place of sajda,” a place of self-abnegation. The Arabic miḥrāb (pl. maḥārib) designates the niche or recess in the wall of a mosque, opposite the entrance door, oriented towards the Ka’ba. In fact, there are two doors – one for us to pass through in the body, the other for our spiritual passage. The mosque is entirely formed, both literally and meaningfully, around the miḥrāb. The word miḥrāb derives from the root ḥrb of the verb ḥariba, the primary meaning of which is to be furious or enraged. In another form, it means to fight, combat or wage war. Commentators associate this root meaning with the great war against the self, the war against evil and malign influences. Linguists state that the word miḥrāb can also mean a building, a recess or a room. In the fact that, in the prophet’s Mosque in Medina, where, as God’s apostle, he dictated all the forms and contents, there had once been a miḥrāb where a door was later opened and doors where the miḥrāb would later be “closed,” one should recognize the relationship between bodily and spiritual passage to the Ultimate, or emerging from war into Peace, from illusion into Reality. The original decree to face in prayer the Further Mosque on Mount Sion in Jerusalem, the second mosque built, was later altered to one to face the Inviolable Mosque in Becca, the first mosque built. This meant that all things face the First, which is also the Last, for all time.
whom Thou hast blessed, not of those against whom Thou art wrathful, nor of those who are astray."²

Our goal is the end of that path, the direction of realization in the testimony to His Unity and the Praised’s apostolate. On earth, we are bound to its surface. The heavens above and the earth we live on are two signs of one path of return to God. Nothing in them fails to signal that path. The signs may be more or less clear, but together, they reveal nullity in the face of God. That we may the more willingly participate in that nullity in the place of worship of creation, God decrees the path of our ascent from the depth to most beautiful uprightness.

The bottom of the valley in the midst of the desert corresponds to the depth. Each of us is called upon to acknowledge and become aware of our baseness and turn from it to God, as God said through the Praised: “The first house established for the people was at Becca, a place holy and a guidance to all beings.”³ God calls on us all to turn towards that house and become aware of our baseness as where ascent begins: “Turn thy face towards the Inviolable Mosque; and wherever you may be, turn your faces towards it.”⁴ Those who accept that call and turn towards the Inviolable Mosque form a circle around it. Those who visit it walk around it seven times, then walk seven times from one of the two nearby hills to the other, and stand on the plain of Knowledge.

To face the house and journey towards it is the turn to the centre of the self that knows its Lord in its original nature. The seven circuits signify ascent to the Lord throughout existence, through all seven heavens, while walking seven times from one hill to another designates our liberation from duality and realization in Unity. Standing on the plain of Knowledge affirms our faith in God and the Day of Judgment.

The bottom of the Valley corresponds to the depth or existence after violating the inviolable. Turning towards it and relating to it at all reminds us of our violation of the inviolable, which must be restored as the inviolability of the vulnerable. As a sign of the nadir, the Kaʿba is a visible work of God’s hands, a reminder that He created us and our works. Our highest option is to journey to Him.

The opposite to baseness is most beautiful uprightness, remote, beyond all seven heavens and the entire visible world. It is signified by the house

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² Qur’an, 1:6–7.
³ Ibid., 3:96.
⁴ Ibid., 2:144.