

A Brief Introduction to Ibn Arabi



1.1 Biography

Muhyi al-Din Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Abdallah ibn Hatim al-Ta'iy, more famously known as Ibn Arabi or 'the Greatest Shaykh', is the most influential and well-known Islamic mystic. He was born on the 17th of the Blessed Month of Ramadhan in the year 560 AH in the city of Murcia, Andalusia – current day Spain. He remained in this city up until the age of seven, when he then travelled to the city of Seville, which was the seat of the Andalusian government. It was in this city that he completed his education and remained until he was thirty years of age. It was then that his travels began. The period of his travels lasted for about thirty years, during which he visited many of the Islamic lands, taking in their knowledge and culture. Eventually, in the year 620 AH, he settled in the city of Damascus. It was here that he busied himself with writing books and training students. Ibn Arabi passed away in the year 638 and was buried in the Northern Damascus suburb of Salihiyah.

1.2 Works

Ibn Arabi authored many books throughout his academic life. From amongst his works, the most well-known are the 'Futuh al-Makkiyah' and the 'Fusus al-Hikam'. It has been mentioned by some that his works total 511 books and articles. The lengthiest of his works is the Futuh al-Makkiyah, which consists of 560 chapters. This book contains discussions on mystical ontology, various Islamic sciences and teachings that are related to spiritual wayfaring. The book Fusus al-Hikmah, which is one of the most renowned books in theoretical mysticism, is based off of Ibn Arabi's mystical unveilings on various subjects. Every chapter of this book is named after one of the divine prophets; for example, the Bezel of Musa (Moses), the Bezel of Isa (Jesus) and so on.

Some of his other books that are worthy of mention are, *Unqah Mughrib fi Ma'rifah Khatam Awliya wa Shams al-Mughrib*, *al-Aqaid*, *al-Aqd al-Mandhum wa Sirr al-Makhtum*, *Mahzarah al-Abrar wa Musamirah al-Akhbar*, *Mushahidah al-Asrar al-Qudsiyah* and *Mutali'a al-Anwar al-Ilahiyah*, *Tarjuman Ashwaq*, *Jami al-Ahkam fi Ma'rifah al-Halal wa al-Haram*, *Tanazzal al-Amlak fi Harakat al-Aflak*, *al-Durrah al-Baziyah fi al-Jafr al-Jami'a*, *Mawaqi' al-Nujum wa Mutali'a Ahallah al-Asrar wa Ulum*.

1.3 Opinions

Ibn Arabi, by means of his precise analysis and reflection, and supported by his clear mystical unveilings, was able to propose new and ingenuine ideas in the field of theoretical mysticism. Some of his original ideas can be seen in subjects such as the unicity of existence, the perfect man, divine proximity, mystical interpretations of religious tenets, etc.

1.4 Method

One of the major differences between Ibn Arabi and the mystics that preceded him was that he was able to explain the teachings of theoretical mysticism in a very precise and demonstrative manner that was void of any sort of ambiguity. In this way, he was able to answer many of the critiques and questions posed by the opponents of mysticism. As an example, he was able to solidify the concept of the unicity of existence, a concept that was proposed before him, by presenting a correct argument for it and defending it intellectually.

1.5 Influence of his Thought

One of the unique distinctions of Ibn Arabi is the influence that his thought, by means of his books and treatises, had on the mystics that proceeded him; such that the majority of them occupied themselves with elucidating and expounding his works and treatises. Further, the book *Fusus al-Hikam* became and has remained a core textbook for the study of theoretical mysticism.