



Ar-Rûh

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According to the traditional doctrine of the 'science of letters', Allah created the world not by the *alif*, which is the first of the letters [of the Arabic alphabet], but by the *ba*, which is the second; and, in fact, although unity is necessarily the first principle of manifestation, it is duality that manifestation immediately presupposes, and it is between the two terms of this duality as between the two complementary poles of manifestation represented by the two extremities of *ba*, that all the indefinite multiplicity of contingent existences will be produced. It is therefore *ba* which is properly the origin of creation, and the latter is accomplished by it and in it, that is to say it is both the 'means' and the 'place,' according to the two meanings that the letter has when taken as the preposition *bi* [i.e., 'by' and 'in']. The *ba* in this primordial role represents *ar-Rûh*, the Spirit, which one must understand as the total Spirit of universal Existence, and which is essentially identified as Light (*an-Nûr*); it is produced directly by 'divine commandment' (*min amri 'Llah*), and after it is produced, it is in every way the instrument by which this 'commandment' brings about all things, which are thus all 'ordered' in relation to it; prior to it, there is then only *al-amr*, the affirmation of pure Being and the first formulation of the Supreme Will, since before duality there is only unity, as before the *ba* there is only the *alif*. Now the *alif* is the 'polar' letter (*qutbâniyyah*), of which the very form is that of the 'axis' through which divine 'order' is carried out; and the upper point of the *alif*, which is the 'secret of secrets' (*sirr al-asrâr*), is reflected in the dot of the *ba*, inasmuch as this dot is the center of the 'first circumference' (*al-dâirah al-awwâliyyah*) that defines and envelopes the domain of universal Existence, a circumference, moreover, which seen in simultaneity in all possible directions, is in reality a sphere, the primordial and total form from which all particular forms will be born through differentiation.

If one considers the vertical form of the *alif* and the horizontal form of the *ba*, one sees that their relationship is that of an active principle and a passive principle; and this conforms to the axioms of the science of numbers on unity and duality, not only in the Pythagorean teaching, which is generally best known in this regard, but also in all other traditions. This character of passivity is effectively inherent in the double role as 'instrument' and universal 'place' of which we have just spoken; thus *ar-Rûh*, in Arabic, is a feminine word, but here we must be careful, for according to the law of analogy, what is passive or negative in regard to Divine Truth (*al-Haqq*) becomes active or positive in regard to creation (*al-Khalq*). It is essential to consider here the two opposing faces, since it is precisely a question, if one may so express it, of the very 'limit' posed between *al-Haqq* and *al-Khalq*,

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a 'limit' by which creation is both separated from the divine Principle and united to it at the same time, according to the point of view from which it is envisaged; it is thus, in other words, the *barzakh* par excellence, and just as Allâh is 'the First and the Last' (*al-Awwal wa al-Akhir*) in the absolute sense, so is *ar-Rûh* 'the first and the last' relative to creation.

This is not, of course, to say that the term *ar-Rûh* may not sometimes be taken in its more specific meanings, like the word 'spirit' or its more or less exact equivalents in other languages; it is thus that, notably in certain Koranic texts, some are led to think that it might represent a name of the Angel Jibrîl (Gabriel) or of another angel to whom this name of *ar-Rûh* might more especially be applied; and all this can assuredly be true according to the case or the application, for everything that is a participation or a specification of the universal Spirit, or that plays its role in a certain respect and in varying degrees, is also *rûh* in a relative sense, comprising the spirit insofar as it resides in a human being or any other particular being. However, there is a point to which many exoteric commentators seem not to have paid sufficient attention: when *ar-Rûh* is expressly and distinctly mentioned as beside the angels (*al-malâikah*), how is it possible to admit that in fact it is simply another angel itself? The esoteric interpretation is that in such a case it is then a question of *Mîtatrûn* (the *Metatron* of the Hebrew Kabbalah); moreover, this allows one to explain the ambiguity that arises in this regard, since *Metatron* is also represented as an angel, although, being beyond the domain of 'separate' existences, he must be truly something else and more than an angel; and this, moreover, corresponds once again to the double aspect of the *barzakh*.

Another consideration which agrees completely with this interpretation is this: in the representation of the 'Throne' (*al-Arsh*), *ar-Rûh* is placed at the center, and this place is effectively that of *Metatron*; the 'Throne' is the place of the 'divine Presence,' that is, of the *Shekinah* which, in the Hebrew tradition, is the 'twin partner' [*parèdre*] or complementary aspect of *Metatron*. Moreover, one can even say that in a certain fashion *ar-Rûh* is identified with the 'Throne' itself, for by surrounding and enveloping all worlds (from which the epithet *al-Muhîr* is given it), it coincides with the 'first circumference' mentioned earlier. This again recalls the two faces of *barzakh*: on the side of *al-Haqq*, it is *ar-Rahmân* [the Infinitely Good] who sits on the Throne; but on the side of *al-Khalq* [creation], it appears in a way rather as a refraction of *ar-Rûh*, which is in direct agreement with the meaning of the *hadith*, 'He who sees me sees the Truth'. There, in fact, lies the mystery of 'prophetic' manifestation, and it is known that according to Hebrew tradition, also, *Metatron* is both the agent of 'theophanies' and the very principle of prophecy, which, expressed in Islamic language, amounts to saying that he is none other than *ar-Rûh al-muhammadiyah* [the spirit of Muhammad], within which all the prophets and divine messengers are one, and which, in the 'lower world,' finds its ultimate expression in him who is their 'seal', that is, the one who reunites them into one final synthesis that is the reflection of their principal unity in the 'higher world' (where it is *awwal Khalq* 'Llah, the last in the manifested order by being analogically the first in the principal order), and who is thus the 'lord of the first and the last'. It is thus and only thus that all the names and titles of the Prophet can be understood in their profundity, which names, in fact, are those of 'Universal Man' (*al-Insân al-Kâmil*), ultimately totalizing in him all the degrees of Existence as they have all been contained in him since the beginning: *alayhi salatu Rabbil-Arshi dawman*, 'May the prayer of the Lord of the Throne be upon him forever!'