

# An Exegesis of Shaikh Ibn Al Arabi's Concepts of the Perfect Human and the Hierarchy of Existence

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**Acknowledgement of Research Material Used:** The *Makkan Unveilings (Al Futuhat Al Makkiyyah)* is considered Shaikh Ibn Al Arabi's (رضي الله تعالى عنه) magnum opus. It comprises 147 books in 27 volumes. This work has been made available in modernized English and an easy-to-understand format with helpful explanations by Shaikh Mir Asedullah Quadri, as part of his *Tarajeem Al Asedi* series.

The *Tarajeem Al Asedi* is a series of books on Tasawwuf (Islamic mysticism) authored by Shaikh Mir Asedullah Quadri. In this series, the Shaikh has translated and explained most of the foundational books on Tasawwuf written by the *Shuyookh of Ihsan* (Awliya Allah and scholars of Tasawwuf), including the works of Shaikh Ibn Al Arabi (رضي الله تعالى عنه). A hallmark of the *Tarajeem Al Asedi* is its commitment to preserving the meanings of original terminologies used by these scholars, while presenting the content in modern English. This approach allows readers to access these texts in their purest form, without unnecessary simplification or alteration of the original concepts. All books in the *Tarajeem Al Asedi* series are available for free download at [sahihiman.com](http://sahihiman.com).

## Abstract

Shaikh Ibn Al Arabi (رضي الله تعالى عنه), in his defining work *Makkan Unveilings (Al Futuhat Al Makkiyyah)*, has expounded upon the hierarchical structure of the greater world. In this study, we analyze the ontological gradations of existence, i.e., from the Divine Throne (*Arsh*) and the Chair (*Kursi*), through the celestial spheres, angelic intelligences, *jinnic* realms, and finally, the human domain, in which the cosmos achieves self-awareness. The paper argues that this structure is not a vertical hierarchy of power. Rather it could be understood as a concentric order of divine manifestation, wherein each level represents a distinct mode of God's self-disclosure.

We further expound upon the concept of the *Perfect Human (Insan-e-Kamil)* i.e., the microcosmic synthesis of all realities and the conscious mirror of divine unity. Drawing on textual evidence from the *Makkan Unveilings* as translated and explained by Shaikh Mir Asedullah Quadri in his work *Tarajeem Al Asedi*, we aim to demonstrate that the *Perfect Human* functions as the ontological mediator between the unseen and manifest worlds, through whom divine knowledge, mercy, and governance are actualized in creation.

**Keywords** – Shaikh Ibn Al Arabi, Makkan Unveilings, Insan-e-Kamil, Cosmological Hierarchy, Tajalli

## Introduction

The *Makkan Unveilings (al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyyah)* of Shaikh Muḥiuddīn Ibn Al Arabī (رضی اللہ تعالیٰ عنہ) remains one of the most profound metaphysical syntheses in Islamic intellectual history, combining Qur’anic cosmology, spiritual psychology, and mystical ontology into a unified system of divine manifestation. In his 27 volume opus, Shaikh Ibn Al Arabī (رضی اللہ تعالیٰ عنہ) articulates a vision of the universe as a graded hierarchy of being, from the Divine Throne (*Arsh*) and Chair (*Kursi*), through the angelic and jinnic worlds, down to the elemental forms of the physical realm in which each reflects a mode of divine self-disclosure (*tajalli*). The *Makkan Unveilings*, as translated and explicated by Shaikh Mir Asedullah Quadri, makes this vast metaphysical edifice accessible through its careful exposition of the inner logic of Shaikh Ibn Al Arabī’s (رضی اللہ تعالیٰ عنہ) cosmology and its spiritual implications for the human being as the “*mirror of all realities.*”

This cosmological vision should not be misunderstood as an abstract doctrine of metaphysics as it provides the ontological foundation for understanding the purpose and status of the human being within creation. Shaikh Ibn Al Arabī’s (رضی اللہ تعالیٰ عنہ) teaching situates the *Perfect Human (Insan-e-Kamil)* at the very center of the cosmic hierarchy, as the comprehensive alchemy of all divine names and attributes. As Shaikh Mir Asedullah Quadri’s translation emphasizes, the world in Shaikh Ibn Al Arabī’s (رضی اللہ تعالیٰ عنہ) vision is “*in the form of the Truth,*” while “*man is in the form of the Truth*” as well. Hence the human being is the “*small world (alam-e-saghir)*” that contains all the realities of the “*great world (alam-e-kabir)*”. The entirety of existence is reflected within the totality of the human form, which is simultaneously a microcosm of creation and a mirror of divine unity. It is through this mirroring that man attains the rank of *khalifah* (vicegerent), entrusted with maintaining harmony among the degrees of existence.

In the *Makkan Unveilings*, the structure of the greater world is not depicted as a static ladder of ascent. It is more akin to an interwoven network of realities governed by *Divine Names of Allah*. The *Throne* represents the supreme locus of divine comprehension, encompassing all creation. The *Chair* signifies the unfolding of governance and decree. The *celestial spheres* embody the motion and regulation of existence. The angelic orders serve as instruments of divine command. And then there are the more subtle creations, i.e., the jinn and the spirits of fire and air, whose intermediate nature reflects the dynamic polarity between light and darkness, obedience and rebellion. Yet, all these ontological levels find their meaning and completion in the being of man, who alone synthesizes them in himself.

The question of man’s position within this vast hierarchy, therefore, becomes one of metaphysical necessity rather than moral privilege. The *Perfect Human* is the “*axis (qutb)*” of existence, the locus through which divine self-knowledge is revealed in the realm of manifestation.

Shaikh Mir Asedullah Quadri explains that “*the desired perfection for which man was created is the caliphate, and it is a station more specific than the message among the Apostles*”. Thus, the caliphal station

does not represent political authority or power in the worldly sense. Instead, it can be understood as an ontological function of being the mirror in whom all realities converge.

## The Hierarchical Structure of the Greater World

### The Throne (Arsh) and the Chair (Kursi)

The *Throne (Arsh)* and the *Chair (Kursi)* form the supreme levels of the created world, i.e., the two encompassing realities through which the *Divine command (amr)* manifests into creation. The *Throne* is described as the most comprehensive locus of divine containment, “*the great form of all existence,*” in which the realities of all created beings are enfolded in unity. It is associated with the Name *Ar Raḥman*, the All Compassionate, for compassion/mercy in Shaikh Ibn Al Arabi’s (رضى الله تعالى عنه) ontology is the essential principle of existence itself, “*for every created thing is born of the mercy of being.*”

The *Chair* represents divine governance and articulation, i.e., the *realm of decree (qaḍa)* and *execution (qadar)*. Whereas the Throne embodies the synthesis of all *Divine Names*, the Chair manifests the differentiation of those *Names* into laws and measures that govern the cosmos. Thus, the following Qur’anic verse is interpreted in *Makkan Unveilings* as signifying the total presence of divine order through all planes of creation.

It is in the Qur’an - وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ [His Throne (of Sovereignty) encompasses heavens and the earth] (Al Baqarah, Verse 255, Tafseer Al Asedi).

Shaikh Ibn Al Arabi (رضى الله تعالى عنه) writes that “*the order is between folded and unfolded, like quality and quantity, the conditions of destiny*”. The *folded* realities correspond to the unmanifest potentials within the *Throne*, while the *unfolded* are the realized forms within the *Chair* i.e., the visible cosmos.

In this sense, the *Throne* and *Chair* are not spatial regions but ontological stages. The first being the principle of *divine self-manifestation (tajalli-e-zaati)*, and the second being the principle of *cosmic administration (tadbir)*. The *Throne* is the first form of Divine self-knowledge i.e., the mirror in which God beholds the totality of His Names, and the *Chair* is the articulation of that self-knowledge in the language of creation. Through these, the structure of the “greater world” (*alam-e-kabir*) is established as a descending hierarchy of light and command.

### The Spheres and the Celestial Orders

Below the *Chair* are the *Spheres (aflak)*, the luminous rotations that constitute the dynamic body of the universe. In Shaikh Ibn Al Arabi’s (رضى الله تعالى عنه) metaphysics, the celestial spheres are beyond just

astronomical layers. They can be thought of as degrees of divine manifestation that transmit spiritual influxes through motion. In *Makkan Unveilings*, these rotations are the rhythmic expressions of the divine breath (*Nafs-ur-Rahman*), through which being is perpetually renewed. The movement of the spheres, like the movement of the heart in the human microcosm, symbolizes perpetual praise, i.e., the ceaseless *tasbih* of the cosmos.

Each sphere is associated with a corresponding angelic intelligence or a “king” (*malak*) who governs the nature of that heaven under divine command. Shaikh Ibn Al Arabi (رضى الله تعالى عنه) elucidates that every metallic form in the sublunar world (iron, tin, silver, gold) is ruled “by a king whose mount is this floating planet in its heaven,” because “Allah is the One who directed it to a goal that it intends, on the command of its Creator”. Thus, cosmological order is inseparable from angelic governance. Every natural process is, in truth, an angelic act. An expression of consciousness within matter.

The *spheres* form the mediating bridge between the divine decrees in the Chair and the particularized phenomena of the terrestrial world. Their constant motion is the sign of their servitude. They obey the divine will through rotation, ensuring that every being receives its appointed sustenance, form, and rhythm of existence. In Shaikh Ibn Al Arabi’s (رضى الله تعالى عنه) system, the universe is a living organism of praise. Its celestial hearts (the spheres) pulse with remembrance (*dhikr*), while its angelic intellects articulate divine wisdom in movement.

## Angels and Jinn as Subtle Realities

Within this cosmological order, *angels* and *jinn* occupy two contrasting yet complementary realms of subtle existence. The angels embody pure obedience and luminosity, while the jinn embody transformation, desire, and imagination. Yet both are reflections of divine wisdom, for even the apparent opposition between light and fire serves a unifying purpose in the divine scheme.

Shaikh Ibn Al Arabi (رضى الله تعالى عنه) describes the *royal prophecy* (*nubuwwah malakiyyah*) as a station inhabited by “*the exalted spirits*,” among whom are angels and certain jinn who serve as divine messengers. Allah’s command to Iblis to prostrate to Adam (عليه السلام) reveals that prophecy itself is not confined to the human or purely angelic orders but extends across classes of beings that serve the divine message, i.e., “*The meaning of the angels is the Messengers... so Iblis was included in the address, for he was among those who were used in the message*”.

This revelation positions the *angelic order* not as a fixed species but as a function of beings whose essence is *risalah*, i.e., the transmission of divine knowledge. Each angelic hierarchy corresponds to a specific Name of Allah. Their stations are “*limits at which they stand and do not transgress*,” for “*the law has no meaning*”.

*except this*". The angels of the *Throne* and the heavens transmit pure praise (*tasbih*), while the "*angels of the earth*" attend gatherings of remembrance and sustain the equilibrium of the world.

The *jinn*, on the other hand, are beings of smokeless fire, intermediaries between spirit and matter. They occupy the subtle plane of transformation and are subject to the same spiritual laws as humanity, though their awareness is veiled by passion and elemental heat. Both angels and *jinn* are integrated within the universal hierarchy as modes of divine energy. One is stable and luminous, while the other is fiery and in motion. Each necessary for the cosmic praise of Allah that maintains creation's harmony.

## The Lower World and the Reflective Order

The final strata of the greater world consist of the elemental spheres, i.e., the world of nature and form, where divine light condenses into matter. Here, multiplicity achieves its fullest differentiation, yet even this plane is animated by spiritual realities. Shaikh Ibn Al Arabi (رضي الله تعالى عنه) repeatedly reminds the reader that "*there is nothing in existence except Allah and the rulings of entities*". Thus, the apparent independence of the natural world is illusory. Its laws are divine preferences, its continuity the reflection of divine constancy.

This sublunar realm is the mirror in which all higher realities are imaged. The *Throne* and *Chair* correspond to the soul and intellect of the cosmos, the spheres to its heart and movement, the angels to its intellective light, and the elements to its body. The *Perfect Human* will emerge, as Shaikh Ibn Al Arabi (رضي الله تعالى عنه) shows, as the comprehensive reflection of all these planes, i.e., the living summary of the greater world. For the hierarchy is not a mere order of being but a ladder of consciousness. Every level perceives the level above it, and the human being, placed at the intersection of all, becomes the eye through which the cosmos beholds the glory of Allah.

In this ordered cosmos, the *Throne* and *Chair* represent divine unity and decree, the spheres express motion and praise, the angels and *jinn* articulate obedience and imagination, and the elements provide form and receptivity. Together they constitute the ontological organism of the greater world, whose final perfection is achieved only through the presence of the *Perfect Human Being*.

## The Perfect Human (al-Insan al-Kamil)

As per Shaikh Ibn Al Arabi's (رضي الله تعالى عنه) metaphysics, the *Perfect Human (al-Insan al-Kamil)* occupies a position of synthesis that unites the entirety of the cosmos within a single form. The world itself is considered "*a large human being*," while man is "*a small world*" that contains the full spectrum of divine realities within himself. The macrocosm and microcosm mirror one another. Every divine Name manifested in the greater world finds its reflective locus within the human constitution.

The *Perfect Human* is thus a comprehensive summary. The *isthmus (barzakh)* through which the Divine Reality (*Al Haqq*) contemplates Its own manifestation. As Shaikh Ibn Al Arabi (رضى الله تعالى عنه) expresses, “*the world is in the form of the Truth, and man is in the form of the Truth.*” Man’s ontological distinction lies in his reflection of the total form of existence (*Surat-ul-Wujud*). He comprises the realities of the mineral, vegetal, animal, and spiritual realms within a single entity. In him, the multiplicity of the cosmic hierarchy achieves unity without collapse. Every plane of being, from the angelic to the elemental, is internalized and reconciled.

This doctrine of man’s comprehensiveness is not metaphorical but ontological. Ibn Al Arabi (رضى الله تعالى عنه) affirms that “*all divine morals and attributes are in the nature of man and appear to the one who knows them, just as they appear in the Divine aspect*”. The divine Names, i.e., *The Knowing, The Seeing, The Merciful, The Subduer, The Giver, The Withholder*, all unfold within man’s being.

In this capacity, man assumes the role of the *cosmic mirror*. Through the Perfect Human, creation becomes self-aware. The mirror of existence turns toward its Source and recognizes the One it reflects.

## The Caliphal Station and Divine Representation

The central designation of the Perfect Human is that of *khalifah* or the vicegerent of God on earth. This station, as articulated in *The Makkan Unveilings*, represents the perfection for which man was created, “*Know that the desired perfection for which man was created is the Caliphate*”.

This statement encapsulates the ontological rather than political sense of *khilafah*. The Caliphate here is not a social or temporal authority but a divine trust. A metaphysical appointment by which the human being becomes the medium of divine governance in the world. The Caliph reflects the totality of the Divine Names, not selectively as the angels do, but integrally. In him, the Names of *Beauty (jamal)* and *Majesty (jalal)*, of *Mercy* and *Wrath*, of *Giving* and *Withholding*, are harmonized without contradiction.

In the same text, Shaikh Ibn Al Arabi (رضى الله تعالى عنه) distinguishes between prophethood (*nubuwwah*) and caliphate (*khilafah*). Prophethood conveys divine law, but caliphate manifests divine action. “*The Apostle has no duty except to convey,*” he writes, but “*if Allah gives him control over those to whom he is sent, then that is the Caliphate*”. Hence, the prophetic function is legislative, while the caliphal function is ontological.

This insight leads Shaikh Ibn Al Arabi (رضى الله تعالى عنه) to assert that caliphate may be acquired, whereas prophethood is not acquired. The human soul, by virtue of its comprehensive preparedness (*istidad*), may be elevated to the caliphal station. Such a human becomes the “*axis*” (*quṭb*) of the cosmos, the one in whom divine will is perfectly mirrored in action. Through him, God’s Names are balanced, and the cosmos is maintained for, as he writes, “*souls work to achieve the station of perfection; they do not work to achieve prophethood*”.

In the Perfect Human, therefore, divine self-disclosure and cosmic governance converge. He is the bridge through which the command of the *Throne* descends and through which the praise of creation ascends.

It is in the Qur'an - وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً [And when Allah addressed the angels (saying) I am going to make a Vicegerent on Earth;] (Al Baqarah, Verse 30, Tafseer Al Asedi).

This Qur'anic verse refers not to a specific individual but to a metaphysical archetype, i.e., the human being who unites divine attributes with created multiplicity in conscious harmony.

## The Ontological Mediation between the Throne and the World

The *Perfect Human* serves as the median between the Throne of Unity and the multiplicity of creation. His being is the *barzakh* or the isthmus that joins opposites without mixing them. Through him, the transcendent (*tanzih*) and the immanent (*tashbih*) dimensions of the Divine are reconciled.

In the macrocosm, the *Throne* encompasses the totality of creation, while in the microcosm, the human heart (*qalb*) serves as the seat of divine presence. Shaikh Ibn Al Arabi (رضى الله تعالى عنه) states, “*The name Allah looks at him always*”, indicating that the human heart is perpetually the object of divine attention. This correspondence between the *Throne* and the human heart reveals the structural symmetry of the greater and lesser worlds.

The human being unites in himself the three levels of existence:

1. The spiritual world (*Alam-e-Arwah*), corresponding to his intellect and angelic dimension.
2. The imaginal world (*Alam-e-Mithal*), reflected in his imagination and subtle faculties.
3. The material world (*Alam-e-Ajsam*), expressed through his corporeal nature.

Through this synthesis, man embodies the full vertical hierarchy of being, transforming it into an interior hierarchy of consciousness. He is, in Shaikh Ibn Al Arabi's (رضى الله تعالى عنه) words, “*the knower who does not know*”.

The *Perfect Human* thus stands as the inner axis of creation, mediating the exchange between divine transcendence and cosmic multiplicity. Without him, the universe would remain a dispersed reflection of divine Names. With him, it becomes a single organism united in awareness. This mediatory function gives man not supremacy over creation in the sense of dominion, but responsibility for it.

## Man as the Completion of the Cosmic Order

The culmination of the cosmic hierarchy is not found in the heavens but in the perfected heart of man. In Makkan Unveilings, Shaikh Ibn Al Arabi (رضى الله تعالى عنه) makes this explicit, “*Whoever adheres to the path of truth is raised above the degree of judgment against him... he becomes gold, which no longer accepts transformation into anything less than it*”. The metaphor of alchemical transmutation encapsulates the teleology of existence. All beings, through their motions and purifications, seek the perfection realized only in the human form. Just as base metals aspire to the purity of gold, so do the grades of existence culminate in the *Insan-e-Kamil*, the purest mirror of divine light.

At this summit, the distinction between the divine and the created attains its most subtle harmony. **The Perfect Human does not become God**, for such identification is impossible. The Perfect Human becomes the perfect locus of divine manifestation. Thus, the entire hierarchy from the *Throne* and *Chair* to the Spheres, Angels, and Jinn, exists for the realization of this final synthesis.

## Cosmological Unity and Human Centrality

### The Universe as a Manifestation of Divine Self-Disclosure

Shaikh Ibn Al Arabi’s (رضى الله تعالى عنه) stresses that existence is a single reality, i.e., a continuous self-disclosure (*tajalli*) of the Divine Being in varying modes and degrees. As Shaikh Mir Asedullah Quadri’s translation of Makkan Unveilings clarifies, “*there is nothing in existence except Allah and the rulings of entities*”. The multiplicity of the cosmos is therefore not a separation from the Divine, but a differentiation of His Names in manifestation. Each created form is a mirror reflecting a distinct aspect of the One Reality.

The greater world (*Alam-e-Kabir*) thus represents the outward expansion of the Divine breath, i.e., the unfolding of mercy into being. The lesser world (*Alam-e-Saghir*), the human form, represents its inward return to unity. The totality of existence is a mirror wherein God contemplates Himself through His own Names and Attributes, and man is the locus of this contemplation. Hence, *creation* and *Creator* are two perspectives within a single ontological act, i.e, *existence (wujud)* and the *witnessing of existence (shuhud)*.

It is important to emphasize that this **does not dissolve the distinction between the Divine and the created**. It defines it in terms of relational polarity. The Divine Essence remains utterly transcendent, yet its immanent reflection in the forms of creation constitutes the only reality accessible to perception. As Shaikh Ibn Al Arabi (رضى الله تعالى عنه) puts it, “*We were not veiled from You except by You*”. The very manifestation of God becomes the veil concealing His Essence. Thus, the universe is simultaneously theophany (*Zuhur-e-Haq*) and concealment (*Hijab-e-Haq*).

## The Return to Unity and the Ontological Circle

The entire cosmic hierarchy, from the Throne down to the elements, moves in a circle of return (*Al Awdat Ila Al Asl*). Every level of being proceeds from the Divine and seeks to return to it through perfection. This cyclical motion is mirrored in the human journey from ignorance to gnosis, from dispersion to unity. The Perfect Human embodies the final stage of this return.

As Shaikh Ibn Al Arabi (رضى الله تعالى عنه) states, the highest form of adab (spiritual etiquette) is “to ascribe all matters to Allah,” so that the human actor disappears into divine agency. In this annihilation of self-assertion lies the consummation of unity. When man realizes that “there is nothing in existence but Allah,” his being becomes a transparent locus of divine manifestation, and the distinction between obedience and will, between action and creation, is reconciled in the knowledge of unity (*Ilm-e-Tawhid*).

In this state, man neither claims nor renounces. He simply witnesses the Divine acting through him. As Shaikh Ibn Al Arabi (رضى الله تعالى عنه) describes, “certainty is the seat of knowledge in eternity”. The certainty that all existence, motion, and change are but the play of divine reality upon the mirrors of forms. The perfected knower thus lives in the rhythm of divine breath, neither separate from creation nor absorbed within it, but mediating its eternal renewal.

## Conclusion

The cosmological hierarchy revealed in Makkan Unveilings culminates not in the celestial spheres nor in the angelic orders, but in the consciousness of the Perfect Human (*Insaan-e-Kamil*), who stands as both the purpose (*ghayah*) and the mirror (*mirat*) of existence. As Shaikh Ibn Al Arabi (رضى الله تعالى عنه) repeatedly affirms, and Shaikh Mir Asedullah Quadri explains with clarity, there is “nothing in existence except Allah and the rulings of entities”. This means that creation, in all its multiplicity, is not an ontological other but a differentiation within the self-disclosure of Divine Being (*Tajalli-e-Haq*).

Through this vision, the hierarchy of Throne, Chair, Spheres, Angels, and Jinn find their unifying principle in man, whose heart is the *Throne of the Divine Name*, whose intellect reflects the *Chair of decree*, and whose soul mirrors the rhythmic motion of the celestial spheres. The structure of the greater world (*Alam-e-Kabir*) thus reaches its completion in the lesser world (*Alam-e-Saghir*) as the conscious synthesis of the whole.

Shaikh Ibn Al Arabi (رضى الله تعالى عنه) states that “all divine morals and attributes are in the nature of man and appear in every man to the one who knows them, just as they appear in the Divine aspect”. This statement epitomizes his doctrine of human centrality. Man, alone bears the total form of the Divine Names, uniting beauty (*jamal*) and majesty (*jalal*), mercy and rigor, will and knowledge. The angels manifest partial perfections; man embodies their unity. Hence, his Caliphate (*khilafah*) is not a political office but an ontological function. Through this caliphal station, man becomes the axis (*qutb*) of the cosmos, the one in

whom divine command (*amr*) is translated into cosmic order. The perfection of man is therefore not an ascent beyond creation but a realization of his totality within it.

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