

## Article

# Munājāt and Ibn al-ʿArabī's Unity of Being

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**Abstract:** This paper looks at the mystical topic of *munājāt*, or intimate dialogue, typically between a worshipper and their Lord, and how it relates to Ibn al-ʿArabī's *waḥdat al-wujūd* (Unity of Being). The paper first works to situate *munājāt* within the current surrounding body of Sufi devotional literature and within the Islamic intellectual tradition. Then the paper goes on to examine how *munājāt* as prayer reflects and relates to Ibn al-ʿArabī's larger metaphysical treatises, particularly *waḥdat al-wujūd*, using crucial concepts such as *Barzakh*, Imagination, and *dhikr* (remembrance). From this it may be understood that *munājāt* is direct communication occurring from God to Himself through the form of man.

**Keywords:** Islam; mysticism; Ibn ʿArabī; prayer; Sufism; metaphysics

## 1. Introduction

Muḥyī l-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) was arguably one of the most influential Islamic mystics, also traditionally known as al-Shaykh al-Akbar. Many Sufis after the thirteenth century believe Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings “constitute the apex of mystical theories” (Schimmel 1975, p. 632). He once wrote, “Your Lord is from yourself to yourself” (Ibn al-ʿArabī 1988, p. 166). This quote encapsulates the very concept of *munājāt* (intimate dialogue) as well the multidimensional doctrine derived from his works, the Unity of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), which this paper will examine. For the purposes of this paper, *munājāt* is defined as “intimate dialogue” from an addresser to an addressee (Corbin 1969, p. 249).

First, this paper will situate *munājāt* texts in the context of Sufi devotional literature and provide a background on *munājāt* as a literary genre within the Islamic intellectual tradition. This paper will then explore how *munājāt* may be seen as an ideal form in understanding Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology by examining *munājāt* as a form of prayer between the servant and their Lord.

Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings present certain difficulties to the reader due to the “sheer volume and variety of his writings”, his non-linear writing style, and the “extreme diversity of symbols” he employs (Morris 1986, p. 540). By extrapolating various components crucial to understanding the Unity of Being doctrine, such as *kashf* (unveiling), Imagination, *Barzakh*, and *dhikr* (remembrance) in order to engage in a more nuanced understanding of the Unity of Being doctrine, this paper will demonstrate how *munājāt* reflects Ibn al-ʿArabī's larger metaphysics. Through drawing on *munājāt* by Niffarī, Hallaj, and other mystics, alongside Ibn al-ʿArabī's own texts relating to *munājāt* as well as his texts devoted to the topic of prayer, this paper will work to reveal where the characteristics of these texts overlap with the core components of the Unity of Being doctrine.

## Etymology

*Munājāt* (*munājāt*, ending in *tā' marbūṭa*) is the verbal noun of the third form of the root *n-j-w*. This root connotes safety and saving, and the verb in the third form means ‘to entrust a secret’ when used with the preposition *min*, ‘to whisper, to confide in, to converse intimately’. Thus, the verbal noun *munājāt* refers to a ‘secret conversation’, ‘confidential talk’, ‘dialogue with God’, or ‘fervent prayer’ (esp. in mysticism). It may be translated as an intimate dialogue, such as in Manheim's translation of Corbin's *Creative Imagination in*



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the Sufism of Ibn ʿArabī. However, a dialogue is more suitable here, as a soliloquy is when one speaks one's thoughts aloud, while one of the defining characteristics of a *munājāt* is that it has an addresser and addressee, which we will see below.

## 2. History of *Munājāt*

*Munājāt* can be seen not just as a form of address between the speaker and listener, but used in everyday practice, in society at large, and in one's private life. *Munājāt* typically takes the form of a prose dialogue. However, due to the intimacy woven within the dialogue itself, *munājāt* is "a talk closer to silence or confidentiality" (Khairy 2015, p. 289). It can take place between a person and their sheikh, or even a person and their enemy, and so on—yet in all cases features a level of deep intimacy.

*Munājāt* may also be performative, such as the *munājāt* of devotional songs and narratives in Khorasan. For example, *munājāt* is used as a poetic technique to narrate *Mīʿrāj*, the narrative of ascension, and other tales, as it is recorded and passed down orally as well as in written form (Youssefzadeh 2022).

### 2.1. Literary Genre

In literature, the *munājāt* genre itself has split into two directions. The first is found in Sufi circles; Sufis' own conversations with God dominate their *munājāt* literature, as found in the poetry of Suhrawardī (587/1191), Rūmī (672/1273), Niffarī (360/970), and Ḥallāj (309/922). Ḥallāj wrote, "My beloved, you covered me insofar as you wanted to, so by your grace, even if they were to torture me with all kinds of afflictions, I would see nothing but the best of blessings" (Khairy 2015, p. 291). These may serve as extractions from longer *munājāt* work. The other, wider genre encapsulates prayers to God attributed to a select few prophets and holy figures, such as *munājāt* Mūsā, *munājāt* ʿĪsā, *munājāt* ʿAlī, etc., with the *munājāt* Mūsā genre developing as an individual sub-genre, which we will explore later (Ali-de-Unzaga 2004, p. 376).

*Munājāt* as a literary genre has been largely overlooked in both modern and classical Arabic literature. As with any literary genre, it has undergone changes over time. It was in the first three centuries of Islam that it was used by Sufis and thus came to be considered a literary genre. In the Islamic tradition, Prophet Muhammad can be said to be the first one who conducted *Munājāt* (Khairy 2015, p. 289). After Muhammad went to Ṭāif to spread the word of Islam and to invite people to Islam, they threw rocks at him and injured his head and feet. He then said a prayer, a *munājāt* to God, lamenting his woes, which became "the seed for the tradition of *munājāt*" (Khairy 2015, p. 289).

### 2.2. *Munājāt* Mūsā

Upon discussion of *munājāt*, one must examine the prophet Mūsā. In the Qurʾān, God said, "and to Moses Allah spoke directly" (Q 4:164) (Ḥakīm 1981, p. 401). Ibn al-ʿArabī writes of Mūsā having intimate conversation, *munājāt*: "... and He favoured him [Mūsā] with His intimate conversation (*munājāt*)" (Jaffray 2015, p. 37).

In the *Rasāʾil* of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *munājāt* is approached as a type of conversation which occurs in an elevated state of the soul, and looks at three events linked to Mūsā's *munājāt* with God: Mūsā's ascension, Satan's whispering, and after the incident of the calf-worshippers.

Mūsā converses with God in many passages in the Bible, such as at the Burning Bush and on Mount Tur where God appears as a pillar of smoke, i.e., "God spoke to Moses directly" (Q 4:164) and "we brought him [Moses] near to converse" (Q 19:52).

Consequently, Mūsā's reputation as God's interlocutor, *Kalīm Allāh*, has been solidified by subsequent scholars and theologians, similarly to Ibrahim's name as God's friend (*khalīl Allāh*), and Mūsā's *munājāt* with God are central to his prophethood. Early Muslim authorities, such as Kaʿb al-Aḥbār (32/652) and Wahb b. Munabbih (110/728), coined this the "*munājāt* tradition", denoting the accounts of conversation and stories and legends of Mūsā's conversations with God (Ali-de-Unzaga 2004, pp. 372–73).

When Mūsā saw the Burning Bush, God spoke to him for the first time. On the mountain, Mūsā asks to see God, Satan's whispering and planting the seed of doubt in Mūsā's mind resulting in Mūsā's request, "My Lord! Reveal Yourself to me so I may see You" and God responds: "'You cannot see Me! But look at the mountain. If it remains firm in its place, only then will you see Me". When his Lord appeared to the mountain, He levelled it to dust and Moses collapsed unconscious"' (Q 7:143). In this way, Mūsā's *munājāt* with God is characterised by his bold curiosity to know God. God also asks Mūsā why he has hastened to Him:

"And what made you hasten from your people, O Moses?"

He said: "They are close on my footsteps, and I hastened to You, O my Lord! That you might be pleased" (Q 20:83–84).

In the wisdom of Mūsā in the *Fuṣūṣ*, Ibn al-ʿArabī's *taʾwīl* of Mūsā denotes that his being carried down the river in a *tābūt* (chest) alludes to the "chest" as the *ẓāhir* (outer manifestation) of Mūsā's physical body, while the water is the knowledge he obtained, the *bāṭin* (inner) form. He extends his *taʾwīl* further by saying the "chest"—Mūsā's humanity, his sensual and mental faculties—determines the nature and extent of the higher knowledge given to him (Ibn al-ʿArabī 1946). This played a role in determining his predisposition (*istīʿādā*) for direct communication with God later on.

### 2.3. Sufi Devotional Literature

As Kafka wrote, writing is a form of prayer (Barnard 1973). *Munājāt* became associated with Sufism as many Sufis used *munājāt* to record their experiences with God, to their prophets and to their followers, which then led to a flourishing of the literary genre, as seen in the writings of Ibrāhīm ibn Adham (161/778), al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (110/729), Bishr al-Ḥāfi (150/768), and Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawīyya (235/850) (Khairy 2015). Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawīyya, a slave, was freed when her master heard her *munājāt* to God—such as her *munājāt*, "My God, the stars have been lit, the eyes have slept, the kings have closed their doors, every lover is alone with their beloved: this is my station before you" (Wakil 2021, p. 23).

Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (311/923), although not considered a Sufi but someone who greatly admired and revered the Sufi tradition, wrote *al-Ishārāt al-ilāhiyya* (the Divine Signs), which may be the longest work consisting of *munājāt*, exceeding five hundred pages, where he bases a direct revelation of an imagined speaker to an imaginary addressee (Khairy 2015, p. 293). Although these *munājāt* begin with a wide variety of addresses, such as "O God", "My Beloved", "O brother", "O listener", these may also be understood as forms of the writer themselves, as a soliloquy, or as an imaginary person, an addressee necessary for the dialogue to take place, a mere literary invention (Khairy 2015, p. 295). However, this paper will focus on the interpretation of *munājāt* as a worshipper speaking to their Lord as a form of prayer.

Within the school of Ibn ʿArabī, Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (604/1207), the son-in-law and close disciple of Ibn ʿArabī who was responsible for collecting and, in large part, for the early transmission of Ibn ʿArabī's works, also wrote a text consisting of *munājāt*: *Nafaṭ al-Maṣdūr*. A line from his *munājāt* denotes, "carry me God, in my existence" (Qūnawī 1680, p. 9).

### 2.4. *Munājāt*, *Mawāqif* and *Mukhāṭabāt*

When examining *munājāt* within Sufi devotional literature, Niffarī's works become useful. For example, al-Niffarī's *al-Mawāqif wa-l-Mukhāṭabāt* (*Spiritual Sayings and Spiritual Addresses*), which consists of seventy-seven *mawāqif* and fifty-six *mukhāṭabāt* addressing the servant directly by the phrase, "O my servant", is considered one of the most important of his works.

While both *mawāqif* and *mukhāṭabāt* are forms of addresses between God and a faithful servant, *munājāt* is primarily different from the concepts of *mawāqif* and *mukhāṭabāt* in that, while *munājāt* is a dialogue from the worshipper to their Lord, *mawāqif* and *mukhāṭabāt*

tend to revolve around God's divine revelations to His servant. An obvious signifier of the differences between the three forms of prose is the form of the opening address, typically either *qāla lī* ("he said to me") or *yā ʿabd* ("O my worshipper") in which case it is either a *mawāqif* or *mukhāṭabāt*, but when it is *allāhumma* ("O God"), or *ilāhī* ("O God"), then it may be defined as *munājāt*.

Comparing the two great mystics is useful for a deeper understanding of *munājāt* by drawing out the characteristics of the three. Let us take a work attributed to Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Tawajjuhāt al-ḥurūf*, as an example as it consists entirely of *munājāt*, of his own speech to God, indeed one for each letter of the Arabic alphabet. Under letter *qāf*, his *munājāt* begins, "My God, you are the one who is in charge of every soul" (Ibn al-ʿArabī 2004, p. 16). Many of the *munājāt* in this work begin by addressing "My God", "O God", "My Lord", and so on, and contain verses from the Qurʾān interspersed throughout.

Here, the author employs a linguistic method of using the repetition of sounds aesthetically. This is also reminiscent of the chapter "Qāf" in the Qurʾān, which likewise does the same, purposely using words with the letter *qāf* in it. This rhymed prose, or *sajʿ* in Arabic, is prevalent throughout Ibn al-ʿArabī's prose as he often plays with language, almost as though it were another fluid dimension.

On the other hand, while *mukhāṭabāt* and *mawāqif* are similar, in that they are both addresses from God to His servant, they differ in context. *Mawāqif* typically has a specific context, while *mukhāṭabāt* is not usually constrained to one topic, and is more generalized and variant. The mystic who pauses (*wāqif*) between stations must reach an elevated station (*maqām*) where he does not see anything other than God (Niffarī 1935, p. 15). The beauty of Niffarī's *mawāqif* is experienced through his words, "I met you, so you know me [ . . . ] and I was veiled, so you knew me [ . . . ] I am the veil of my knower, and I am the indication/proof of my knower" (Wakīl 2021, p. 32).

The other side of the conversation can therefore be understood as *munājāt*, wide-ranging equivocations to God. In *al-Aʿmāl al-Ṣūfiyya*, Niffarī begins one *munājāt*, titled under "*duʿāʾ*" (prayer), "*allāhumma*" ("O God"), "that I ask you by your shadow that does not ever disappear" (364). Later on, he writes, "I ask you by your names that are hidden from all the exoteric knowledge, and I ask you by your names that are hidden from all the esoteric knowledge" (Niffarī 2007, p. 364).

Niffarī's other work containing *munājāt* has been compiled into a collection titled *al-Nāṭiq wa-l-Ṣāmit* (ed. Qāsim Muḥammad ʿAbbās). Here, Niffarī has *munājāt* beginning with the phrase, "O God" (*ilāhī*), as he then continued, "you created me from weakness, and you, oh Lord, raised me with gentle kindness" (Niffarī 2001, p. 74). Under "*Munājāt* (p. 48)", he starts each sentence with "I ask you by your separation that separates between . . . " twenty-one times (pp. 75–77), ending the phrases by extending the description, such as "between the Real and the unreal".<sup>1</sup>

## 2.5. Ibn al-ʿArabī's Works Relating to *Munājāt*

*Kitāb al-Isrāʾ*, one of Ibn al-ʿArabī's earliest and longest works, composed in 594 H., culminates with a series of *munājāt* (Morris 1988, p. 5). The autobiographical way in which *K. al-Isrāʾ* was composed depicts Ibn al-ʿArabī's own *munājāt* with God, where the narrator is a wayfarer (*sālik*) on his voyage through the heavenly spheres, where the *sālik* meets Adam, Moses, Jesus, Ibrahim, Yusuf, and Muhammad in each sphere, mimicking the journey of *Miʿrāj*. The sixth section consists of dialogue between two parties. The prior section (Section 5) clearly contains *munājāt* between the *sālik* (wayfarer), who may be considered as Muhammad, or perhaps Ibn al-ʿArabī himself, talking to their God, and what God is saying to them (and therefore what God is also saying to the inheritors of the prophets). Ibn al-ʿArabī repeatedly begins phrases with "The wayfarer (*sālik*) said . . . " For example, "The wayfarer (*sālik*) said: When he heard my poetry, translated from what resided in my chest, while I was stationed at the truth of my command, he opened the gate for me, and lifted the veil" (Ibn al-ʿArabī 1988, p. 161).

Ibn al-ʿArabī also refers to *munājāt* in his shorter and relatively unknown treatise, *Mawāqīʿ al-nujūm*, composed in eleven nights during Ramadan for his disciple, where at one point he encourages the reader to be wary of gluttony and greed, and instead urges the reader to “free the heart for *munājāt*” and to “free the tongue for recitation and remembrance (*dhikr*)” (Ibn al-ʿArabī 2016, p. 96).

In the *Futūḥāt*, Ibn al-ʿArabī occasionally mentions *munājāt*. In one instance, he wrote:

“The worshipper says, Praise be to God, Lord of all the worlds, and God says, my worshipper praised me. So He divided the *munājāt* between Him and between His worshipper, so *munājāt* is the essence of prayer and *munājāt* is an act of two agents, such that He says and he (the worshipper) says. God said: remember me and I will remember you” (3.2226).

These are some of the works in which Ibn al-ʿArabī refers to the topic of *munājāt*.

### 3. Understanding *Munājāt* as Prayer

Did Ibn al-ʿArabī himself write prayers? Although much of his works are yet to be studied, thus far the study of Ibn al-ʿArabī shows that he did not write prayers, unless we consider devotional poetry as prayers. Yet, within the corpus of literary works attributed to him—but whose authorship has not been proven—we find texts related to the topic of prayer, such as *al-Dawr al-aʿlā*, also known as *Ḥizb al-wiyāqa* (the Prayer of Protection), and *Tawajjuhāt al-hurūf*.

A comparison of Niffarī’s writings under the titles “Prayer” and “*Munājāt*” within his *al-nāṭiq wa-l-ṣāmit* reveals the similarities of the two. Under “Prayer (p. 49)”, Niffarī begins sentences with “I seek refuge in you . . . ” and he continues with, for example, “that I truly know you”, or “that I contemplate only in fear of you” (p. 78). Similarly, under “Prayer (p. 52)”, Niffarī begins each sentence with “I ask you by . . . ” and continues with, for example, “I ask you by your Names that are not able to be listened to”, or “I ask you by what is in your throne” (p. 82).

It is notable that the prayers and *munājāt* are similar in their written form and in their meaning, as both are addressed to God, and both contain words of praise, confession, or of asking for things from God. Throughout *al-nāṭiq wa-l-ṣāmit*, Niffarī intersperses “*munājāt*” and “*duʿā*” (prayer), which include many overlapping characteristics and qualities. Aside from the opening word of direct address (for example, between ‘*ilāhī*’ and ‘*allāhumma*’, both of which may be translated as “O God”), there are no discernable differences between the two. Ibn al-ʿArabī states this in the *Futūḥāt*, as he wrote, “prayer is *munājāt*”, going on to write, “God says, I divided prayer between me and my worshipper into two halves, half belongs to me, and half belongs to my worshipper” (Ibn al-ʿArabī 1911, p. 287). Understanding the concept of prayer as *munājāt* may shed further light on the Unity of Being doctrine, which we will examine below.

#### 3.1. The Role of the Heart in Prayer

Prayer as *munājāt* occurs in the heart of the mystic. For Sufis, “the heart is the locus of revelation and inspiration” (Hakīm 1981, p. 917). In the *Futūḥāt*, Ibn al-ʿArabī describes three ways to acquire knowledge (through reflection, unveiling, and scripture) in relation to two different modes of knowing: the intellect, and the heart as the “seat of knowledge” (Chittick 1989, p. 159). The limiting intellect perceives God’s immanence and transcendence as irreconcilable, but to the limitless heart of the mystic, they are contradictory only on an outer level. Those that believe only in God’s transcendence is “either foolish or ill mannered” while those who only believe in God’s immanence “restricts Him and does not know Him” (Ibn al-ʿArabī 2015, pp. 36–37).

In *Mawāqīʿ*, as in the *Futūḥāt*, Ibn al-ʿArabī elaborates on the “stations” of *maʿrifa* (intimate knowledge/gnosis) and *ilm* (knowledge)—for example, in differentiating the Knower’s *himma* (desire) as attached to God or to the world. Ultimately, the heart of the Knower is not limited to a spiritual station, as he witnesses and recognises the Beloved in all forms. It is in the heart that the worshipper should visualize their Lord during prayer,

therefore it is in the heart of the mystic that *munājāt* takes place. That is why the Ḥadīth Qudsī says: “The heavens and earth could not encompass me, but the heart of my believing servant did.”

### 3.2. The Three Steps in Prayer

Ibn al-ʿArabī employs an analysis of *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* (“the opener”), the first chapter in the Qurʾān, to provide an exemplar for how prayer is a *munājāt* between the worshipper and his God (Corbin 1969, p. 249). *Al-Fātiḥa* is composed of seven verses, with three steps, which he defines as corresponding to the phases of *munājāt*.

The first is whereby the servant places themselves at the company of their Lord, to converse with Him, and open the conversation. The second, intermediary position is prostration, whereby the servant is in prayer and must imagine (*takhayyul*) their Lord as present. The third and final position is whereby the servant should witness (*shahāda*) or visualize (*ruʾyā*) their Lord.

These three steps of prayer as *munājāt* correspond to three categories of movements Ibn al-ʿArabī identifies in the World of Witnessing (*ʿālam al-shahāda*). The first is the ascending, vertical movement, which is the erect stance (*takbīr/qiyām*) signifying the growth of man. The second movement is a horizontal one, whereby the worshipper is bowing (*rukūʿ*), which is the direction in which animals grow. The third movement is an inverse, descending movement, signified by prostration (*sujūd*), signifying the movement of the plants, which sink their roots into the earth (Corbin 1969, p. 260).

The first verse in *al-Fātiḥa*: “In the name of God, the All-Compassionate, the All-Merciful”, is where the faithful sets his intention, preparing for the way of the reciprocal action. The second part is denoted by verse five: “It is You we worship and You we ask for help”, the center of the action, the keystone of the dialogue; while the third part is the rest of the chapter, verses six and seven result from this action. Most importantly, Ibn al-ʿArabī encourages the servant to imagine God’s response as he is praying (Corbin 1969).

Prayer should not be addressed to the Godhead Himself, but to a manifestation under a name or a form, in other words, to the servant’s Lord. Prayer is, indeed, a return to Him, and it is shared between the one praying and the one who is prayed to, which is, in fact, existence itself, a “dialogical situation” or a “method of theophanic prayer” (Corbin 1969, pp. 247–48). While the Prayer of God, as referenced by Corbin, is a yearning for his unknownness to be known, the prayer of man accomplishes this through theophany.

## 4. Ibn al-ʿArabī’s Metaphysics

*Munājāt* is related to many essential components of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s theories within his metaphysics, such as *Kashf* (unveiling), Imagination and *Barzakh*, and *Dhikr* (remembrance), all of which relate back to the Unity of Being, a correct understanding of which “provides the key to most of his other theories” (Schimmel 1975, p. 639).

### 4.1. Kashf (Unveiling)

*Munājāt*, this intimate dialogue with the Divine, may be understood as unveiling or *kashf*, an “intense mode of prolonged, prayerful meditation on the ultimate reality” (Shah-Kazemi 2006, p. 117). The Persian Sufi Hujwīrī (465/1072–3) classified *kashf* (unveiling)—a crucial concept in the practice and thought of Sufism and becoming a Sufi (*taṣawwuf*)—into four kinds: the veils of this world, of the self, of the people, and of Satan. For Ibn al-ʿArabī, the veil of the world veils creatures from the next world; people are a veil of obedience; the self as the veil of the Real (God); and Satan as the veil of religion (Chittick 2000, p. 65). Niffarī also discusses the unveiling of this veil that occurs in certain waystations on the Path of Redemption, as he wrote in one passage that God said to him, “Your veil is everything I make manifest [ . . . ] Your veil is yourself, and it is the veil of veils. If you come out of it, you will come out from the veils [ . . . ] You will not come out from your veil except through My light” (Chittick 2000, p. 73).

In Sufi thought, the wayfarer is on the *path* (*ṭarīq*), which consists of a multitude of stations (*maqām*) and abodes (*manāzil*), infinitely unique for each wayfarer. Ibn al-ʿArabī reiterates al-Niffarī's point: "There is nothing in existence but veils hung down. Acts of perception attach themselves only to veils, which leave traces in the owner of the eye that perceives them" (Chittick 2000, p. 74). *Munājāt* is one form of unveiling these veils.

"The Knowers are the inheritors of the prophets" is another Ḥadīth Ibn al-ʿArabī frequently quotes. For Ibn al-ʿArabī, the way the prophets, saints, messengers, and the ʿulamāʾ ("men of knowledge") achieve knowledge is not through the intellect, nor the senses, but through unveiling (*kashf*) and taste (*dhawq*), or direct experience. This is necessary to understand the phrase the Sheikh repeats, "He/not He" (*huwa lā huwa*), which is beyond logic and reason, and is the answer to every significant question concerning God.

#### 4.2. Imagination and Barzakh

Imagination is an expansive topic within the works of Ibn al-ʿArabī. Engaging in *munājāt* occurs in the *Barzakh* with the use of imagination. The imagination Ibn al-ʿArabī is concerned with is not the imagination of artistic creativity, but rather an energy and power that is part of existence and that plays an important role in the creation of existence, in the transmission of forms to the intellect. In the wisdom of Elias, Ibn al-ʿArabī states that "the power of imagination is stronger in this world than the power of the intellect" (Ibn al-ʿArabī 1946, p. 142). For Ibn al-ʿArabī, imagination is the organ of prophetic hermeneutics and theophanic perception. Ibn al-ʿArabī examines imagination's role on a cosmic level as well as in the microcosmic level of man. On a cosmic level, for Ibn al-ʿArabī, the world is God's *tajallī* (divine self-manifestation) from God's "unceasing theophanic Imagination" (Corbin 1969, p. 187).

Ibn al-ʿArabī divides existence into two parts: truth and imagination; "True being is God; Imaginal [being] is everything else" (Ḥakīm 1981, p. 450). The world, therefore, is imagination, and all of existence is an imagination within an imagination (Ḥakīm 1981, pp. 450–51). That is why Ibn al-ʿArabī says, "there is nothing except what is indicated by the Unity, and nothing is in imagination except what is indicated by the multiplicity" (Ḥakīm 1981, p. 451).

The function of imagination is vital when speaking in regards to Ibn al-ʿArabī's examination of prophetic knowledge and in Prophetic Revelation. In the wisdom of Yūsuf, Ibn al-ʿArabī propounds that as life is, itself, the imagination of the Real, so when one dreams, it is really a dream within a dream (*manām fī manām*). He supports this by quoting the Ḥadīth, "People are asleep. When they die, they wake up." Furthermore, all of creation is God's imagination, and therefore creation is God looking at Himself (Chittick 1989, p. 207).

The Ḥadīth, "worship God as though you see Him," oft quoted within Sufi circles and the Islamic intellectual tradition, has profound ramifications when discussing imagination. The focus here falls on the "as though", which Muhammad used as he knew of man's internal ability of imagination. As Morris translated Ibn al-ʿArabī: "God is in the *qibla* of the person who is praying", in other words, the worshipper should imagine Him in their direction of prayer and *munājāt* (Morris 1995). However, at the same time, "Wherever you turn, there is the Face of God" (Q 2:115).

Imagination's role in the microcosm of man, as it exists in the spiritual journey of the believer, relates to the elusive and multi-faceted concept of the *Barzakh*—literally meaning a veil or barrier between two things—which further refines his framework of prophetic knowledge and revelation. The "Great Barzakh" is Imagination itself (Ḥakīm 1981, p. 196).

The term may be defined and considered in many ways. Qūnawī postulates the *Barzakh* as the "Muhammadan Reality" between Creation and God (Morrissey 2020, p. 55). Ibn al-ʿArabī also conceptualises the *Barzakh* as the World of Imagination, between the World of Corporeal Beings and the World of Spirits, or as the Qurʾān itself, as ultimately it refers to a separation of two things—in this case, man's intelligence and God's knowledge of things (Chittick 1989, p. xv).

Ibn al-ʿArabī even goes so far as to say, “there is nothing in existence but *barzakhs*, since [ . . . ] existence has no edges” (Ibn al-ʿArabī, trans. Chittick 1989, p. 14). The *Barzakh* is where, through visualization, dreaming, and/or the function of imagination, the servant may receive divine knowledge from God. Imagination holds sway in the World of Idea-Images, and the heart of the intuitive mystics (*ahl al-kashf*) “see” God through the heart, as the heart, for Ibn al-ʿArabī, is limitless.

This *Barzakh* is a theatre for *munājāt*, *mawāqif* and *mukhāṭabāt* to occur. Arberry also discusses *waqfa* (to pause) in the introduction of Niffari’s book, *Mawāqif* and *Mukhāṭabāt*. There he says *waqfa* is the source of ʿilm, the spirit of *maʿrifa*, beyond farness and nearness, and is what “sets [us] free from the slavery of this world and the next”; it is the light of God. The knower (ʿālim) sees his knowledge (ʿilm) but not intimate knowledge (*maʿrifa*), the knower (ʿārif)<sup>2</sup> his gnosis (*maʿrifa*) but not God (Niffari 1935, p. 14). The *wāqif* (one who pauses) is in a *Barzakh* of sorts, where the wayfarer receives ʿilm between two stations, and this is the place where he is prepared and prepares for the next station, and is a place where the wayfarer engages in *munājāt*.

#### 4.3. Dhikr (Remembrance)

Ibn al-ʿArabī extensively discusses the “openings” (hence the title of the *Futūḥāt*), or spiritual unveilings, for the worshipper, as he urges the worshipper to follow the prophetic paradigm under the guidance of a sheikh or spiritual master, and to devote themselves to *dhikr* and prayer (Chittick 2005, p. 32). This “opening” for the Sufi takes on various forms, with different degrees and existences, such as *mushāhada* (witnessing), truly seeing the Truth of Unity (*tawḥīd*).

Literally meaning “remembrance” or “mentioning”, *dhikr* refers, in the Sufi tradition, to the practice a true worshipper should do. The importance of performing *dhikr* is also prevalent in the Ḥadīth and in *Sīra* literature. In the Sufi tradition, it is often believed that *dhikr* should also be done during prayer, in order to “worship God as though you see Him”.

Different forms of *dhikr* were developed by various masters, appropriate for each state of the soul (Al-ʿAbidīn 2006). In Shaykh Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn’s *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya* he includes fifteen *munājāt*, or what is translated as “whispered prayers”, such as the Whispered Prayer of the Beseechers, the Whispered Prayer of the Hopeful, and the Whispered Prayer of the Thankful. After all, as it is recorded in the Qurʾān, “prayer should deter one from indecency and wickedness. The remembrance (*dhikr*) of God is an even greater deterrent” (Q 29:45). *Munājāt*, or prayer, requires *dhikr* and the role of imagination, a *Barzakh* between stations, to converse with God.

The one that worships God as though he sees Him, or speaks directly to God, becomes *jalīs al-Ḥaqq*, literally meaning the one sitting with the Real (Ḥakīm 1981, p. 256). Here this may be interpreted as a companion of God. Therefore, the one that is engaging in *munājāt*, a kind of prayer, or *dhikr*, is *jalīs al-Ḥaqq* (Ibn al-ʿArabī 1911, p. 2225). “The ones that remember God [ . . . ] they are with God” and “the ones that remember God, God is with them” (Ḥakīm 1981, p. 256; *Futūḥāt* 4/334). That is why God says in the Qurʾān, “remember me; I will remember you” (Q 2:152). As Ibn al-ʿArabī wrote in the *Futūḥāt*, “the one who prays converses with his Lord, and *munājāt* is a remembrance” (Ibn al-ʿArabī 1911, p. 2225).

#### 4.4. Unity of Being

The Unity of Being doctrine expounds the one in the many and the many in the one, in that there is no existence but God. It is ascertainable from his own writings that Ibn al-ʿArabī would not have denoted himself a philosopher, neither would he define his ideas as philosophical treatises as, for him, they are beyond reason and logic. The Unity of Being theory was derived from statements he made, such as “all existence is one”, “there is nothing in existence except God”, and so on (Ḥakīm 1981).

The term has, thus far, not been found to have originated from his own works and is generally treated as a philosophical position. The Unity of Being is a doctrine “often taken

as encapsulating his perspective" (Chittick 2000, p. 76). Ibn al-ʿArabī discussed *waḥdat* as "possessing the attributes of oneness or unity", and as for *waḥdat al-wujūd*, has, as far as it is known, never employed the term in its entirety. Furthermore, attempting to delineate his meaning of *waḥdat al-wujūd* is futile, as Ibn al-ʿArabī explains it in "hundreds of different contexts, each time adding nuances" (Chittick 1994, p. 73).

The term "*wujūd*" is particularly difficult to translate into English, as no term directly corresponds to it (Chittick 1994, p. 74). However, it is commonly translated as "Being" or "Existence". It is derived from the root *w-j-d*, meaning "to find", which refers to the subjective experience as well as the objective. In other words, finding God Himself (Chittick 1994, p. 74). Yet there are concepts that *wujūd* relate to that help us understand the concept *waḥdat al-wujūd*, such as *tajallī*, or God's self-disclosure. *Waḥdat al-wujūd* also relates to *tawḥīd* (Divine Unity), which refers to the existence of one God. *Waḥdat al-wujūd* is "one of the many dimensions of the overall vision Ibn al-ʿArabī wants to convey", as chosen by his followers (Chittick 1994, p. 73). This term was "crystallized with later commentators" and may be understood, when simplified, as the idea that there is no God but God (Ali 2022, p. 43).

The Unity of Being doctrine is the fruit of Ibn al-ʿArabī's reflections on the Sunna and the Qurʾān, in that all existence is, in its truth, One, as "should you follow the Book and the Sunnah, you will find nothing but One; that is He" (Ḥakīm 1981, p. 1147). The Unity of Being doctrine is not dependent on seeing unity in manifestations, but rather in rejecting the existence of plurality, which he deems a mere illusion (Ḥakīm 1981, p. 1149). For example, from the perspective of creation, there seems to be punishment and rewards from God, but from the point of view of the Godhead, these are just some of the possibilities within the Divine Imagination (*khayāl ilāhī*). The things that are created return to the witnessing of the one reality.

Ibn al-ʿArabī employs the metaphor of a mirror to illustrate the Unity of Being. The mirror may be understood to be all of creation and what God uses to see Himself. When a man sees himself in a mirror, he sees his own form, yet it is not himself, therefore "I saw my form, I did not see my form" (*Futūḥāt I* 304.16; Chittick 1989, p. 118). God is both the sight of the cosmos and the viewer (Chittick 1989, p. 127). While the Real is the mirror for creation, and creation is a mirror for the Real, "and so, He is your mirror when you see yourself, and you are His mirror in His vision . . ." (Wakīl 2022, p. 39). As such, "the world: is a mirror" (Ḥakīm 1981, p. 500).

It is also through the mirror that one witnesses one's own existence, as "the person with the mirror sees in it the scale, the weighing, and the weigher" (*Futūḥāt III* 239.23; Chittick 1989, p. 178). Ibn al-ʿArabī extends this metaphor, whereby the mirror represents the presence of man (*ḥadrat al-insān*), the scale represents the "presence of the Real", the "weighing belongs to God", and the one who weighs is, of course, God (Chittick 1989, p. 178).

The world is a mirror, an illusion, and thus "finding" God means unveiling, but at the same time, God is everywhere, as all of creation is a theophany. This paradox is only a paradox on the surface level, but on the esoteric level it both is and is not, as Ibn al-ʿArabī would say. Therefore, there is only the Oneness of Being, *waḥdat al-wujūd*. This theophany, and manifestation of God's Divine Names, is also referred to as *tajallī*, God's Self-Disclosure, a term used by scholars such as Chittick. The material world, or the world of witnessing, is merely a shadow, the *āthār* (traces) emanating from God, as *wujūd* is light (Sumbulah 2016, p. 57).

This "finding" constitutes falling into a mystical perplexity (*ḥayra*). As Izutsu wrote, "the man in 'perplexity' draws the same circle" pivoting around the center (*markaz*), God, and so "his distance from God remains exactly the same" (Izutsu 1984, p. 70). This is why al-Qāshānī asks, "how can a man be advised to go to God when he is already with God?" (Izutsu 1984, p. 60).

The predisposition of the servant, although fixed in their entity, may be altered along the stages of unveiling according to one's *adab*. The man in perplexity moves in a circle,

walking around the center, or *quṭb* (pole), which is God. The circle represents that all things are equally distant from God, and his movements are identical with the movements of God himself. Meanwhile, the veiled man walks along a straight road to where he believes his God is, deceived by his own imagination (Izutsu 1984, p. 71).

The Ḥadīth Qudsī often quoted by Sufis and by Ibn al-ʿArabī, “I was a hidden treasure and I yearned to be known, so I created the world”, suggests that, without man, there would be no world (Chittick 1979, p. 153). This ḥadīth is crucial in understanding some of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s ideas (Chodkiewicz 1993). Creation “is God’s empirical reflection” (Nettler 2003, p. 82). Ibn al-ʿArabī also writes in the *Futūḥāt*, “the Real is the mirror for the Perfect Man [ . . . ] and the Real is the mirror for creation” while simultaneously, “the world is the mirror of the Real” (*Futūḥāt* 4/430; Ḥakīm 1981, p. 501). Therefore, Creation and God are both mirrors for each other.

Man is a form of God (*ṣūrat al-Ḥaqq*) and, relating back to the aforementioned *Barzakh*, man may also be considered as the *Barzakh*, or intermediary, between Creation and God. The mirror is a form for the relationship between the Real (God) and Creation (Ḥakīm 1981, p. 499). There is an ongoing dialogue, as Man is the mirror of God, and God created Adam so He could better “see” Himself. God yearned to see Himself through a mirror, so He created the world as an unpolished mirror, then breathed into it, and Adam is the polishing of that mirror (Ibn al-ʿArabī 2015, p. 17). In the *Fuṣūṣ*, Ibn al-ʿArabī expounds that mankind and creation are a mirror that allows God to see Himself (Morrissey 2020, p. 51).

The understanding of the Unity of Being doctrine argues there is no separation between Creation and God, since it is in the multiplicity and vastness that one believes he or she perceives separation, as, from the perspective of the Godhead, there is no separation. For Ibn al-ʿArabī, God is the encompassing of all the Divine Names, of the opposites and the non-opposites (Ḥakīm 1981, p. 78). Multiplicity veils us from the truth and witnessing the truth may be obtained through unveiling and tasting, *dhikr* and prayer, or *munājāt*.

#### 4.5. *Munājāt* in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s Metaphysics

As, within Ibn al-ʿArabī’s metaphysics, all of creation is a theophany, then all that is created is a mirror for God. Therefore, *munājāt* as an intimate conversation, as prayer, between Beloved and Lover, Creator and Created, the worshipper and their Lord, can also be seen as reflective of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s metaphysical discussions, which the Unity of Being doctrine permeates throughout. Ibn al-ʿArabī writes, “you and I are the letter and meaning, but rather the meaning and the meaning”, as from the perspective of creation, both creation and God are the “Real”, denoted here by the word “meaning” (Ibn al-ʿArabī 1988, p. 168). In this way, *munājāt* is direct communication occurring from God to Himself through the form of man.

The Unity of Being envelops Ibn al-ʿArabī’s other theories and treatises, as Ibn al-ʿArabī’s “entire system is generally designated by the term *waḥdat al-wujūd*” (Schimmel 1975, p. 267). Ibn al-ʿArabī has been accused of being pantheist, or a disbeliever; some have argued that he identifies God with the world (Kamal 2017, p. 409). Yet it becomes apparent, upon closer examination, that these accusations suffer from a lack of deep understanding of his works. For Ibn al-ʿArabī, God is the only reality, and His existence is all-inclusive, including the world, but he does not advocate for the absolute identity of God with the world (Kamal 2017, p. 420).

The long-standing discussions on God’s attributes and God as transcendent or immanent is a common point of contention in the Islamic intellectual tradition and in Hellenistic and Greek philosophy. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī ontology, the world is not equal to God’s essence. Rather, the world is a theophany (*tajallī*), an outward manifestation of God. In this way, Ibn al-ʿArabī professes a unity with what he argues is a seeming paradoxical contradiction between God’s immanence and God’s transcendence.

For Ibn al-ʿArabī, within his epistemology, his ontology, his metaphysics, and so on, he argues for a combination of *tanzīh* (the hidden) and *tashbīh* (self-revealing) in understanding the Real. After all, “He [God] is the first and the last”, as he often cites the Quranic verse

(Q 57:3). Ibn al-ʿArabī deals with the issue of God’s transcendence and immanence by combining the two. Similarly, the Unity of Being propounds a Oneness of the world.

This theme of unity is also present in the concept of prayer as *munājāt*, whereby the addressee and addresser are united in *munājāt*, a divine service shared by God and His faithful (Corbin 1969, p. 250). In other words, as man and creation are the mirror for and of God, and all of creation is a theophany, then *munājāt* may be understood as God having an intimate dialogue with Himself, as “the Lord remains, and the servant perishes” (Ibn al-ʿArabī 1988, p. 168).

Hallāj famously wrote, “I am the truth” (*ana l-Ḥaqq*), while for Ibn al-ʿArabī, as he wrote in a series of *munājāt* in K. al-isrāʾ, God says to the wayfarer, “my worshipper, you are my secret” and therefore, for Ibn al-ʿArabī, “I am the secret of the truth” (*ana sirr al-Ḥaqq*) (Ibn al-ʿArabī 1988, p. 164). This secret is in the gnostic knowledge (*maʿrifa*) of *wahdat al-wujūd*, that the Truth yearned to be known, and that there is nothing but Him. Through creation and through man specifically, with His *munājāt* and His prayer, He is known. After all, “I did not create jinn and humans except to worship Me” (Q 51:56).

Similarly, Niffarī writes, “Reality is the quality of the Real, and I am the Real” in his fourth *Mawāqif*; “You are the meaning of the whole of phenomenal existence” (Niffarī 1935, p. 30). For Tawḥīdī, *munājāt* is not merely a dialogue from the addresser to addressee, but rather it is an overlapping, an intertwining of two parties—as is creation and God in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s discourses, as encapsulated by the Unity of Being. In the exoteric layer, there is a multiplicity, a separation between God and Creation; but in the esoteric, inner, meaning, there exists only God.

Ibn al-ʿArabī wrote, “God says to his worshipper, ‘my worshipper, you are my secret’” (Ibn al-ʿArabī 1988, p. 164). For him, God is in the heart of the mystic, “closer to him than his jugular vein” (Q 50:16), and so the wayfarer that departs from himself in search of where he thinks his Lord is, paradoxically leads him further away. As all of creation is a theophany, a manifestation of God’s Divine Names, and therefore there is only God from the Godhead perspective, *munājāt* is, within Ibn al-ʿArabī’s metaphysics, God addressing Himself through the form of man. This, in turn, relates to the Sufi concept of annihilation of the ego (*fanā*), or spiritual death, a state in which the worshipper loses their sense of self and becomes entirely immersed in God (Hirtenstein and Shamash 1991).

## 5. Conclusions

Understanding *munājāt* as an intricate union reflects Ibn al-ʿArabī’s larger metaphysical positions. We have shown that *munājāt* is an effective genre for understanding Ibn al-ʿArabī’s metaphysics, as “the Worshipper is the Lord, and the Lord is the worshipper” (Ibn al-ʿArabī 2016, p. 11). Examining *munājāt* as part of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s larger metaphysics provides a nuanced way in examining his metaphysics, by use of both his devotional works relating to *munājāt* as well as his treatises discussing devotional prayer, further contributing to the literature on the Great Sheikh.

The Unity of Being doctrine permeates Ibn al-ʿArabī’s writings and other theories and treatises. The theme of unity, as explored here, is comparable to the unity within *munājāt*, this intimate dialogue between the Beloved and His servant. Exploring Ibn al-ʿArabī’s idea of prayer as *munājāt* deepens our understanding of the ideas behind the Unity of Being. Ibn al-ʿArabī wrote, “my journey was only to me, and my guide was only to me” (Ibn al-ʿArabī 1972, p. 350), as “I am the addresser to myself, from myself” (Ibn al-ʿArabī 1988, p. 175). This thought is reminiscent of the quote that opens this paper, “Your Lord is from yourself to yourself” (Ibn al-ʿArabī 1988, p. 166), encapsulating the crucial component of unity within Ibn al-ʿArabī’s metaphysics.

In this way, *munājāt* may be understood here as direct communication occurring from God to Himself through the form of man. Therefore, *munājāt* reflects this theme of reciprocity, of this mirroring, and of the notion that “everything in this world [ . . . ] is an actualization of a Divine Name, that is to say, a self-manifestation of the Absolute” (Izutsu 1984, p. 103). Understanding *munājāt* as prayer, and the addresser and addressee to be

interchangeable, is a key to then understanding the Unity of Being doctrine, in which Ibn al-‘Arabī purports that man is the mirror of God, just as God is the mirror of man.

That is why “it was not you who killed them, but it was Allah who did so. Nor was it you who threw a handful of sand, but it was Allah who did so” (Q 8:17). For this reason, when a devotional piece begins with “My worshipper” or “My lord”, they are interchangeable. *Munājāt*, *mawāqif* and *mukhāṭabāt* are parts of the same conversation. As Ibn al-‘Arabī wrote in *Tarjumān al-ashwāq*:

“He praises me, and I praise Him,  
and He worships me and I worship Him.  
How can He be independent,  
When I help Him and assist Him?  
In my knowing Him, I create Him” (‘Afīfī 1936, p. 13).

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> It should be noted that Arberry, in his introduction to Niffarī’s *al-Mawāqif wa-l-mukhāṭabāt* brings attention to the fact that Niffarī himself did not make the collection of his own writings, and therefore one cannot assume that the titles of *Munājāt* and prayer were titled by Niffarī himself.
- <sup>2</sup> The ‘arīf’s knowledge is different from that of the ‘ālim and is an important point of contention in the Islamic intellectual tradition.

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