

## Article

# Miracles and the Holy Spirit in the Sufi Metaphysics of ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī

Fitzroy Morrissey

Pembroke College, University of Oxford, Oxford OX1 1DW, UK; fitzroy.morrissey@ames.ox.ac.uk

## Abstract

In this paper, I analyze the account of miracles given by ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 811/1408), one of the major interpreters of the Sufi metaphysics of Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240). Al-Jīlī outlines his theory of miracles in chapter fifty of his major work, *al-Insān al-kāmil fī ma‘rifat al-awākhir wa-l-awā‘il*, which is devoted to the Holy Spirit. Based on a close reading of this chapter and other relevant sections of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, I suggest that al-Jīlī’s interest in miracles reflects the miracle-saturated Yemeni environment in which he wrote, and find that he most often uses *taṣarrufāt* (“acts of free disposal”) to denote saintly miracles, rather than the more common *karāmāt*. Most significantly, I show how, based on his threefold categorization of humanity (into those dominated by their physical form, spiritual things, and divine things), he articulates a hierarchy of the miraculous, distinguishing between bodily miracles, which indicate the dominance of the Holy Spirit, and the higher level of creative speech acts, which reflect the dominance of God’s creative attributes. Finally, notwithstanding the fact that his account of miracles and the Holy Spirit chimes with certain Christian ideas, I show that miracles, in his view, point to the spiritual pre-eminence of the Prophet Muhammad.

**Keywords:** miracles; the Holy Spirit; Sufism; sainthood; Ibn ‘Arabī; al-Jīlī; the Perfect Human (*al-insān al-kāmil*)



Academic Editor: Shoaib Ahmed Malik

Received: 29 September 2025

Revised: 3 November 2025

Accepted: 4 November 2025

Published: 7 November 2025

**Citation:** Morrissey, Fitzroy. 2025. Miracles and the Holy Spirit in the Sufi Metaphysics of ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī. *Religions* 16: 1423. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16111423>

**Copyright:** © 2025 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## 1. The Miracles of the Saints in Sufism

Belief in the miracles of the saints or friends of God (*karāmāt al-awliyā’*)—defined in the classical Sufi manuals as a contradiction (*naqd*) or break (*kharq*) in the customary course of events (*al-‘ādah*) (al-Qushayrī 1989, p. 562; Hūjwīrī 1911, p. 218)—is a widespread feature of mainstream Sunni Sufism. According to the *Risālah* of al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), the most widely studied manual of Sufism, “professing the possibility of [miracles] appearing through the saints is obligatory (*fa-l-qawl bi-jawāz zuhūrihā ‘alā al-awliyā’ wājib*)” (al-Qushayrī 1989, p. 569). This belief, al-Qushayrī explains, is agreed upon by the majority of the people of esoteric knowledge (*jumhūr ahl al-ma‘rifah*). They possess a “strong knowledge” (*‘ilm<sup>an</sup> qawīyy<sup>an</sup>*) that is free of doubts about the reality of saintly miracles, on account of the abundance (*tawātur*) of reports relating the saints’ performance of different kinds of miracles (al-Qushayrī 1989, p. 564). Such reports, al-Qushayrī observes, are found in the Qur’an and Sunnah, among other sources (al-Qushayrī 1989, pp. 568–73). Their possibility can also be conceived by the intellect (al-Qushayrī 1989, p. 562). Similar statements and arguments are also found in the classic Sufi manuals of al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988), al-Kalābādhī (d. between 380–384/990–994), Hūjwīrī (d. between 465–469/1072–7), and others. Like al-Qushayrī and non-Sufi theologians in the Ash‘arite tradition (Malik

and Kocsenda 2025), these authors also take care to draw a distinction between the miracles of the saints (the *karāmāt*) and the miracles of the prophets, which are termed *mu'jizāt* (al-Sarrāj 1914, pp. 315–32; al-Kalābādhi 1935, pp. 57–66; Hūjwīrī 1911, pp. 218–39). In affirming the possibility of saintly miracles, these authors were responding principally to the Mu'tazilites, who denied the *karāmāt* of the *awliyā'* (Chodkiewicz 1999, p. 34), though, as Jonathan Brown has shown, there were also “faithful dissenters” within the Sunni tradition who adopted a more sceptical view on miracles (Brown 2012), and, as we shall see, certain Sufi authors downgraded physical *karāmāt* in favour of what they saw as a higher and purer kind of miraculous deed. That said, as Brown further notes, “the miracles of the saints expanded in scope and importance dramatically during the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods” and were “ubiquitous” in the early Ottoman context (Brown 2012, pp. 128–29).

## 2. Miracles in Yemeni Sufism

While saintly miracles are a common feature of Sufism, the Sufis of certain regions seem to have had a special predilection for the miraculous.<sup>1</sup> Yemeni Sufi literature, for instance, is full of miracles. “The period of the seventh/thirteenth century,” writes Muhammad Ali Aziz in his study of medieval Yemeni Sufism, “is characterized by a multitude of mystics who had a divine opportunity to perform miracles according to the constant demands of their communities ... In general, all the mystics of this century are credited with *karāmāt* and instances of Sufi unveiling (*mukāshafāt*)” (Aziz 2011, pp. 48–49). “Many Yemeni Sufis,” Alexander Knysh confirms, “enjoyed the reputation of miracle-workers and rainmakers, which created great demand for their services both in the countryside as well as in the towns” (Knysh 1999, p. 228). Within the Yemeni hagiographical tradition, particularly important is the biographical dictionary compiled by Abū l-'Abbās Aḥmad al-Sharjī al-Zabīdī (d. 893/1487), *Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ ahl al-ṣīdq wa-l-ikhlās*. Al-Sharjī includes 415 biographies of Yemeni saints, with a special focus on their miraculous feats (al-Zabīdī [1406] 1986).

Among those Yemeni saints whose miracles are recorded in this text is Ismā'īl al-Jabartī (d. 806/1403), the leading Sufi of the later Rasūlid period of Yemeni history. The Rasūlids ruled the Tihāmah coastal plain and southern highlands of Yemen (up to Sanaa) between 626/1228 and 858/1454, a period which has been described as “without doubt the most brilliant in the mediaeval history of the country” (G. R. Smith 2021). Al-Jabartī lived in Zabīd, the winter headquarters of the Rasūlids, and a major centre of Islamic learning and piety at the time. He was on intimate terms with the Rasūlid sultans, who reportedly became his disciples in Sufism and regularly attended his mystical concerts (al-Hībshī 1976, pp. 32, 49–50). His pre-eminence among the Yemeni Sufis of his time is indicated by the effusive terms in which he is described by al-Sharjī, who calls him “the great *shaykh*, the knower of God (May He be exalted), the spiritual director (*al-murabbī*), the *shaykh* of the *shaykhs* of the path without qualification, the imam of the people of divine reality (*ahl al-ḥaqīqah*) by common agreement, the performer of miracles which broke [the ordinary course of events] (*sāhib al-karāmāt al-khāriqah*), and the possessor of truthful states (*wa-al-ahwāl al-ṣādiqah*)”. “He became,” al-Sharjī goes on to say, “the solitary one of his age and the unique one of his time (*farīd dahrihi wa-wahīd 'asrihi*). Many people became his companions and benefitted from him. There was no one comparable to him among the *shaykhs* of Yemen in terms of the number of his followers and companions from among the kings, governors, and religious scholars, as well as the common people of the country. His miracles (*karāmāt*) are too famous to be mentioned and too many to be counted” (al-Zabīdī [1406] 1986, p. 101). Nevertheless, al-Sharjī notes, one of al-Jabartī's disciples had tried to collect the reports of all of his miracles. This is a reference to *al-Itṭ al-wardī fī karāmāt wa-bishārāt wa-'ulūm sayyidī Ismā'īl al-Jabartī* by Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr Al-Ashkal, about whom little is known other than that he was a follower of al-Jabartī from the village of al-

Nāshiriyyah on the Tihāmah coastal plain. This text records no fewer than 319 miracles of al-Jabartī, testifying to his ability, among other things, to be in two places at once, to miraculously foretell dangerous occurrences, and to spread the effects of the divine mercy (*rahmah*) resulting from the Sufi mystical concert (*samā'*) through all the people of his town (al-Ashkal 2008, pp. 232, 275, 287).

Al-Jabartī's intimacy with the ruling Rasūlid dynasty afforded his Sufi party a measure of protection for their more controversial activities. These included their use of *Sūrah Yā' Sīn* as a panacea for almost all ills; their regular engagement in *samā'*; and, most controversially of all, their devotion to the ideas of Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240), an Andalusian mystical theorist whose Sufi metaphysical writings, in the view of "most of the Sufis after the thirteenth century ... constitute the apex of mystical theories" (Schimmel 1975, p. 263). Al-Jabartī is said to have required his disciples to carry a copy of *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, Ibn 'Arabī's major work on Sufi metaphysics, with them at all times. He instructed them in the *Fuṣūṣ* and its commentaries by Mu'ayyid al-Dīn al-Jandī (d. 700/1300/711/1312), 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī (d. 730/1329), and Dāwūd al-Qaysarī (d. 751/1350/1), as well as in Ibn 'Arabī's other major work, the encyclopaedic *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah* (Knysh 1999, pp. 242–43). According to al-Jabartī's follower al-Mizjāī (d. 829/1425), an autograph copy of the *al-Futūḥāt* was kept in the Rasulids' royal library, while the Shāfi'ī jurist Ibn al-Muqrī (d. 838/1434), a prominent Yemeni critic of Ibn 'Arabī and his followers, relates that the books of Ibn 'Arabī were being bought and sold in the market of Zabīd (al-Ḥībshī 1976, pp. 81–82). In light of this enthusiasm for Ibn 'Arabī's thought, as Alexander Knysh has shown, Yemen became a hotspot for the Ibn 'Arabī polemic in this period (Knysh 1999, pp. 225–69). For example, the 15th-century Shāfi'ī jurist and Ash'arī theologian Ḥusayn ibn al-Ahdal (d. 855/1481) alleges that, as a result of their admiration for the works of Ibn 'Arabī and his commentators, al-Jabartī and his followers claimed that they were united with God (*ittihād*) and descended into antinomianism (for instance, by sleeping with each other's wives) (Knysh 1999, p. 243; al-Yamanī 1964, p. 214).

Within al-Jabartī's pro-Ibn 'Arabī party, Ibn al-Ahdal singled out 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 811/1408) for special criticism, describing him as "the most perishing of them in this sea" (that is, of the metaphysical thought of Ibn 'Arabī), and reporting his alleged belief in the lordship (*rubūbiyyah*) of everything he encountered, including men, birds, and trees (Knysh 1999, p. 243; al-Yamanī 1964, p. 214). A Sufi of Indian origin who travelled widely in the Muslim world from his base at Zabīd, al-Jīlī was undoubtedly the most important articulator of the Sufi metaphysics of Ibn 'Arabī in Rasūlid Yemen. He is the author of around twenty works, of which twelve are extant. His *magnum opus*, *al-Insān al-kāmil fī ma'rīfat al-awākhir wa-l-awā'il*, was later widely used across the Muslim world as an introduction to the Sufi metaphysics of the school of Ibn 'Arabī. It is generally regarded as the most important theoretical exposition of Ibn 'Arabī's key idea of the Perfect Human (*al-insān al-kāmil*), which, as its title indicates, is the central focus of the text (Morrissey 2021, pp. 5–18).

### 3. Al-Jīlī on Miracles and the Holy Spirit

#### 3.1. Terminology

A disciple of Ismā'īl al-Jabartī, whom he regarded as the Perfect Human of his age, al-Jīlī's works reflect a particular interest in the miracles of the saints.<sup>2</sup> This interest, I would contend, was shaped by his Yemeni context. As we have seen, miracles were central to Yemeni Sufism, and many miracles were attributed both to al-Jīlī's teacher al-Jabartī and to major figures in the history of Yemeni Sufism such as the "semilegendary" saint Abū al-Ghayth ibn Jamīl (d. 651/1253), whom al-Jīlī cites in his work (Knysh 1999, p. 236; al-Jīlānī 1876, 1:85–6). As with other topics treated in *al-Insān al-kāmil*, al-Jīlī seeks to in-

tegrate saintly miracles into his theory of the Perfect Human. According to this theory, which is a development of Ibn ‘Arabī’s and his early followers’ conception of *al-insān al-kāmil*, the perfection (*kamāl*) of man consists in becoming a comprehensive locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) for the divine names and attributes—what al-Jīlī refers to as *nuskhat al-ḥaqq*, “the copy of the Real”. The Perfect Human is also a microcosm of the universe—that is, *nuskhat al-khalq*, “a copy of creation”. In this regard, he is the final level of the forty levels of existence (*marātib al-wujūd*), which synthesizes all of the preceding levels, and the “pole” (*qutb*) around which creation revolves and which ensures its continued existence.

Importantly, in al-Jīlī’s view, the term *al-insān al-kāmil* can only properly be assigned to the Prophet Muḥammad. The Prophet’s cosmic spiritual reality—termed *al-ḥaqīqah al-muḥammadiyah* (“the Muhammadan Reality”)—is a reflection of the divine essence, being created from the uncreated light of God, and is the light from which the rest of creation is created. It appears in a variety of “garments” (*malābis*) and bodies (*kanā’is*), who can also be called “perfect ones” (*kummal*), albeit in a derivative sense, the Prophet Muhammad relating to them as the “most perfect” (*al-akmal*) relates to “the perfect” (*al-kāmil*) (Morrissey 2020). Thus al-Jīlī records that he met with Muḥammad when the Prophet’s spiritual reality appeared in the form (*ṣūrah*) of his *shaykh*, Ismā‘īl al-Jabartī, in Zabīd in 796/1393/4, “and I did not know that he was the Prophet, but knew him as the *shaykh*” (al-Jīlānī 1876, 2:50).

As noted above, the usual term for saintly miracles in classical Sufi literature is *karāmāt*, denoting actions performed by a saint that break the customary course of events. Yet the term that al-Jīlī uses most often when speaking of saintly miracles is not *karāmāt* but *taṣarrufāt*, meaning acts over which an agent has complete discretion. “Each one of the ‘unique ones’ (*afrād*) and ‘poles’ (*aqtāb*),” he writes in chapter thirty-seven of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, referring to those at the highest rank in the hierarchy of sainthood, “possesses a discretionary power (*taṣarruf*) over the whole of the existential kingdom (*al-mamlakah al-wujūdiyyah*)” (al-Jīlānī 1876, p. 1:84). As an example of this power, he quotes a statement attributed to the early Sufi of Baghdad al-Shiblī (d. 334/946): “Were a black ant to crawl over a solid rock at night and I weren’t to hear it, I would say, ‘I have been deceived or duped,’” indicating the saint’s power to hear all things. These *taṣarrufāt*, he explains in chapter fourteen of the same work, are a consequence of the manifestation of God’s attributes (*tajallī al-ṣifāt*) within creation (the topic of the chapter): “From this manifestation,” he writes, “come the discretionary powers of the people of spiritual concentration (*ahl al-himmah*) ... and from this manifestation comes walking on water, flying through the air, turning a little into much and much into a little, and other breaks in the customary course of events (*khawāriq*)” (al-Jīlānī 1876, p. 147), a statement which indicates the connection between the terms *taṣarrufāt* and *khawāriq*. Later, in the chapter on the heart (*al-qalb*) (chapter fifty-two), he writes that if a person’s heart “corresponds to the primordial disposition according to which God created it (*‘alā fiṭratihī al-ladhī khalaqahu Allāh ‘alayhā*), then things come under its disposal (*taqallabat lahu al-umūr*), according to what it wants, and it has a discretionary power over existence (*yataṣarraf fī l-wujūd*), just as it wishes” (al-Jīlānī 1876, 2:15). One kind of capacity (*wus’*) of the heart, he goes on to explain, is “the capacity of the viceregency” (*wus’ al-khilāfah*)—meaning the “greater”, spiritual viceregency of the Perfect Human, who is qualified by the divine names and attributes. The possessor of this viceregency, al-Jīlī claims, realises his essential identity with God, with the result that “he has a discretionary power over existence (*yataṣarraf fī l-wujūd*), just as a successor (*khalīfah*) has discretionary power over the property of the one he succeeds” (al-Jīlānī 1876, p. 2:17). Finally, in the chapter on the estimative faculty (*wahm*) (chapter fifty-four), he asserts that man’s faculty of estimation possesses a “discretionary power over all existents (*al-taṣarruf fī jamī‘ al-mawjūdāt*)”; hence it is by exercising this faculty that “the one who walks, walks on water, and the one who flies, flies through the air” (al-Jīlānī 1876, 2:22). The Prophet Muhammad’s estima-

tive faculty, according to al-Jīlī, was created from the light of God’s name “the Perfect” (*al-kāmil*), and God made it as “a mirror for His self and the locus of manifestation of His holiness (*mir’āh li-nafsīhi wa-majlā qudsīhi*)”; hence the supernatural powers associated with it (al-Jīlānī 1876, pp. 2:20, 22).<sup>3</sup>

Based on the above, we can derive the following taxonomy of saintly miracles in Sufi literature: whereas *karāmāt* is used for saintly marvels in the classical manuals, and *khawāriq* are generic breaches of God’s customary ways of acting in the world, *taṣarrufāt*, at least in al-Jīlī’s usage, denotes the discretionary scope proper to “poles” and “unique ones”, that is, the figures at the top of the saintly hierarchy who constitute “the perfect ones” (*al-kummal*). In using the term *taṣarruf* in this way, al-Jīlī seems to be following Ibn ‘Arabī, who uses the same term to denote the discretionary power that arises from the spiritual concentration (*himmah*) of the Perfect Human (Affifi 1939, p. 133, n. 2)—a connection that al-Jīlī also makes when he writes of the *taṣarrufāt* of *ahl al-himmah*. Later authors who came under Ibn ‘Arabī’s influence also use the term frequently in this sense (e.g., al-Lamaṭī 2007, p. 980).

### 3.2. The Holy Spirit

Al-Jīlī’s most sustained elaboration of the metaphysics of miracle working appears in chapter fifty of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, which is devoted to the Holy Spirit (*rūḥ al-quds*). His treatment of miracles is prefaced by a discussion of the nature of the Holy Spirit, which plays an essential role, as he sees it, in the process through which miracles occur. This discussion is complemented by a passage in the following chapter, which is titled “On the Angel called the Spirit (*al-rūḥ*)”. Together, these two chapters cover the two major conceptions of the Holy Spirit put forward by the Qur’an, namely, “the spirit as a quasi-angelic intermediary or agent of God”, and “the spirit as a vivifying or fortifying principle emanating from God” (Sinai 2023, pp. 354–62). In chapter fifty, it is the second conception of the Holy Spirit that al-Jīlī seeks to develop. Four major characteristics of the Holy Spirit can be drawn from this discussion, these being: (1) It is uncreated; (2) It is the medium by which God brings creation into existence; (3) It is all pervasive; and (4) It is especially visible in man. Before turning to al-Jīlī’s treatment of miracles, we shall look at each of these in turn.

#### 3.2.1. The Uncreatedness of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit, al-Jīlī explains at the beginning of the chapter, is “the Spirit of Spirits” (*rūḥ al-arwāḥ*) (al-Jīlānī 1876, 2:9). Ibn ‘Arabī uses this term, along with terms including “the First Intellect” (*al-‘aql al-awwal*) and “the Muhammadan Reality” (*al-ḥaqīqah al-muḥammadiyyah*), to describe the first created thing, and the thing from which the world is created (al-Ḥakīm 1981, p. 542). In al-Jīlī’s understanding, by contrast, “the Spirit of Spirits” is uncreated. The Holy Spirit is not created, al-Jīlī explains, because it is “a specific face of the Real” (*wajh khāṣṣ min wujūh al-ḥaqq*) (al-Jīlānī 1876, 2:9). For Ibn ‘Arabī, the “face” (*wajh*) of a thing denotes that thing’s essence (*dhāt*), reality (*ḥaqīqah*), or self (*nafs*) (Chittick 1998, pp. 91–92). Al-Jīlī repeats that definition here. The face of God, he states, is the spirit (*rūḥ*) of God, “and the spirit of a thing is its self (*nafs*) ... and His self (*nafs*) is His essence (*dhāt*)” (al-Jīlānī 1876, 2:9). Since to say that the essence of God is created would be to fall into absurdity and unbelief, the Holy Spirit, insofar as it is a face of the Real, cannot be created. At the same time, despite emphasizing the uncreatedness of the Holy Spirit, al-Jīlī is not positing the Holy Spirit as a separate uncreated entity *alongside* God. To say that *rūḥ al-quds* is a specific face of the Real is to say that it is a name for the divine essence as that essence is revealed in creation.

Another way of explaining the uncreatedness of the Holy Spirit is to think of it as identical with God's word (*kalimah*). The Holy Spirit, al-Jīlī writes, "is above and beyond (*munazzah 'an*) the enclosure of 'Be!' (*kun*), so it is not permitted for it to be said about it that it is created (*makhlūq*)" (al-Jīlānī 1876, 2:9). If the Holy Spirit does not come under God's creative *fiat* (that is, the imperative *kun* ["Be!"], as in Q 2:117, etc.), then it would seem to follow that it is either God's essence (as above), or the very word through which God creates. In chapter fifty-one, al-Jīlī leads the reader in the direction of identifying the Holy Spirit with God's creative word. Among the names of the Spirit, he writes, is "the command of God" (*amr Allāh*), a term which, in Ibn 'Arabī's usage (which is probably inspired by the usage of Neoplatonist Ismailis), signifies the divine *kalimah*, through which God speaks things into existence (Ebstein 2014, pp. 33–76; Nicholson 1921, p. 110).

As noted above, Ibn 'Arabī identifies "the Spirit of Spirits" with "the Muhammadan Reality", the cosmic spiritual reality of the Prophet (Affifi 1939, p. 75). In chapter fifty-one, al-Jīlī likewise says that one of the names of the Spirit is *al-ḥaqīqah al-muḥammadiyyah*. Yet he also states that the spiritual reality of the Prophet, which is the light from the which the world is created, is *created* from the light of God (al-Jīlānī 1876, 2:10). At first sight, this characterization of the Muhammadan Reality is hard to square with al-Jīlī's insistence that the Holy Spirit is uncreated. A plausible resolution is offered by Nicholson, who proposes that al-Jīlī "considers the created *Rūḥ* or the archetypal Spirit of Mohammed as a *mode* of the uncreated Holy Divine Spirit" (Nicholson 1921, p. 110, emphasis mine). In the language of Ibn 'Arabī's school, the Muhammadan Reality should therefore be seen as a "delimitation" (*ta'ayyun*) of the uncreated Holy Spirit, that is, as a restriction of its unlimited being in a particular created entity ('*ayn*). In this way, al-Jīlī preserves the Creator-creature distinction when discussing the Muhammadan Reality, for delimitation, in the metaphysics of the school of Ibn 'Arabī, yields *created loci* of manifestation.

Finally, it should be noted that, for al-Jīlī, the uncreatedness of the Holy Spirit is signified by its very name. To call the Spirit of God "the Holy Spirit", he observes, is to say that it is "too holy (*muqaddasah*) for the deficiencies of the created world (*al-naqā'is al-kawniyyah*)" (al-Jīlānī 1876, 2:9). The term *muqaddasah* which he uses here is part of the same semantic field as *munazzah*, which he used earlier: both are used to signal that God is far removed from any likeness to His creation and its deficiencies and is therefore set apart from creation (Lane 1984, pp. 2496, 3032).

### 3.2.2. The Holy Spirit as the Medium by Which God Brings Creation into Existence

We have seen that the Holy Spirit is defined by al-Jīlī as a "specific face" of God. More particularly, it is the "specific face" through which God brings creation into existence. "Existence," he writes, "was established through that face" (al-Jīlānī 1876, 2:9). This idea can be explained if we return to the notion that the Holy Spirit is identical with God's creative word. In chapter fifty-one, al-Jīlī explains it by employing another term taken from Ibn 'Arabī. Besides "the Muhammadan Reality", he says, another name for the Spirit is "the Real through which [the world] is created" (*al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq fihi*) (al-Jīlānī 1876, 2:10). This term is used by Ibn 'Arabī, who took it from the earlier Andalusian Sufi Ibn Barrajān (d. 536/1141), as a synonym for the "breath of the All-Merciful" (*nafas al-rahmān*). This latter term denotes the "breathing" (*nafkh*) through which creation "takes shape" (*tashakkala*) within God, who bestows phenomenal existence on the latent entities of created beings as an act of mercy (Chittick 1989, pp. 133–34; Ebstein 2014, p. 55).<sup>4</sup> For al-Jīlī, much as we saw above, then, the Holy Spirit is a kind of *logos*, a term used by Philo of Alexandria to denote the "powers" (*dunameis*) of God or "the instrument by which He created the world" (Lévy 2022), and in the Gospel of John to denote the divine word through which all things came into being (John 1:3).<sup>5</sup>

### 3.2.3. The All-Pervasiveness of the Holy Spirit

Since the Holy Spirit is the medium through which God brings all things into existence, it follows that it is present in all things. As with the uncreatedness of the Holy Spirit, al-Jīlī again explains this idea with reference to the concept of God's "face". The notion of the "specific face" (*wajh khāṣṣ*) of God's being was developed by Ibn 'Arabī's leading disciple, Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274), to denote "the facet by which things are directly connected to [God]" (Todd 2014, p. 58). For al-Qūnawī, the concept explains the diversity of the phenomenal world that we see in spite of the underlying unity of being, for each existent has its own "specific face" that determines how the unrestricted divine being is delimited (*yata 'ayyan*) or manifested (*yatajallā*) within it. Al-Jīlī uses the term in a slightly different way here. The Holy Spirit, he indicates, is a "specific face" of God that appears in *all* things, and so is a principle of unity rather than diversity. It is "the divine face in created beings" (*al-wajh al-ilāhī fī l-makhlūqāt*), and when the Qur'an declares, "Wherever you turn, there is the face of God (*wajh Allāh*)" (Q 2:115), it refers to "this sanctified spirit (*al-rūḥ al-muqaddas*) through which God established created existence (*al-wujūd al-kawwī*)" (al-Jīlānī 1876, 2:9). In the chapter on Hūd in the *Fuṣūṣ*, Ibn 'Arabī uses this verse to support his view that God "is too great and all-encompassing to be limited (*an yahṣarahu*) to any one belief" (Ibn 'Arabī 1946, p. 113). While al-Jīlī's interest in this chapter is not in religious diversity, for him, similarly, the verse signifies the basic unrestrictedness of God as uncreated Holy Spirit, whose existence underlies all things. Adopting a term that became central in the Sufi metaphysics of Ibn 'Arabī's school after al-Qūnawī (Dagli 2016, pp. 60–62), he describes how the unrestricted existence of the Holy Spirit is "delimited" (*yata 'ayyan*) within specific created forms: "wherever you turn, — whether to sensible matters with your senses, or to intelligible matters with your rational thought —," he writes, "the perfect sanctified spirit is delimited (*muta 'ayyan*) within it" (al-Jīlānī 1876, 2:9).

Another way of thinking about the all-pervasiveness of the Spirit is to consider the nature of created things. Everything in the world of the senses, al-Jīlī says, has a created spirit (*rūḥ makhlūq*), through which its form (*ṣūrah*) is established, for the spirit is to the form like the meaning of a word is to a word. That created spirit, he explains, is itself established through an uncreated divine spirit, which is the Holy Spirit. Even if the Holy Spirit, being the spirit of God (*rūḥ Allāh*), is "a spirit unlike other spirits", it is still the foundation of all other spirits, and so pervades them all (al-Jīlānī 1876, 2:9).

### 3.2.4. The Appearance of the Holy Spirit in Man

Though the Holy Spirit underlies the existence of all things, it has a special connection to man, who, according to al-Jīlī's theory of the Perfect Human, is the microcosm who incorporates all other levels of existence into himself. This special connection is signified by those Qur'anic verses that relate how God breathed (some of) His spirit into Adam (Q 15:29, 32:9, 38:72) (al-Jīlānī 1876, 2:9).<sup>6</sup> Since, as noted above, the form of created things is based on their spirit, man's special relationship with the Holy Spirit is also signified by a Hadith that is often cited by Ibn 'Arabī and his interpreters in connection with the idea of the Perfect Human: "God created Adam in His form (*'alā ṣūratihī*)" (Morrissey 2020, p. 52).<sup>7</sup> In chapter fifty-one of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, al-Jīlī recounts a mystical vision he experienced in which the Muhammadan Reality related this Hadith to him, declared "there is neither doubt regarding this [viz., that God created Adam in His form] nor discussion", and went on to explain that the Hadith means that Adam was nothing but one of the Prophet's own loci of manifestation (*mazḥar min mazāhirī*) (al-Jīlānī 1876, 2:12; Nicholson 1921, p. 113). Since, as we saw above, al-Jīlī views the Muhammadan Reality as a mode of the Holy Spirit, it can also be said that Adam is a locus of manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, he insists, though the uncreated Holy Spirit has been breathed into man, who thereby

became its locus of manifestation, it should not be imagined that the human spirit is itself uncreated. “Whoever looks at (*nazara ilā*) the Holy Spirit in man,” he writes, “sees that it is created, because the existence of two eternal realities (*qidmayn*) is refuted, and there is nothing eternal but God alone—May He be exalted. All of His names and attributes are attached to His essence due to the impossibility of [their] being separated [from it], and everything other than that is created and originated” (al-Jīlānī 1876, 2:9).

Again, al-Jīlī here seeks to preserve the distinction between God and His creation. Yet while each individual human spirit is a created delimitation of the uncreated and unrestricted Holy Spirit, it retains a special connection to that all-pervasive divine spirit. Al-Jīlī expresses this special connection with reference, once more, to the concept of *wajh*. Man, he says, “has a body, which is his form, a spirit, which is his meaning, a secret, which is the spirit, and a face (*wajh*), which is what is referred to as the Holy Spirit, the Divine Secret (*al-sirr al-ilāhī*), and the existence that flows [through all things] (*al-wujūd al-sārī*)” (al-Jīlānī 1876, 2:9). Given that the “face” of a thing is its essential reality, it follows that the essence of man is the uncreated and all-pervasive Holy Spirit. As we shall see below, it is this essential connection to the Holy Spirit that makes miracles possible.

#### 4. Miracles and the Three Kinds of Human Beings

At the heart of chapter fifty of *al-Insān al-kāmil* is a threefold classification of human beings that is crucial to al-Jīlī’s treatment of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and miracles. Al-Jīlī classifies humans according to what is “most dominant” (*al-aghlab*) over them, distinguishing between those who are dominated by their physical appetites, those who are dominated by the Holy Spirit, and those who are dominated by “divine things”.

##### 4.1. Those Dominated by Their Physical Form

The lowest of the three categories consists of those humans in whom what is most dominant is “those matters that are entailed by their form” (*al-umūr al-latī taqtaḍihā ṣūratuhu*), meaning their physical form. Such people, al-Jīlī remarks, are ruled by what is called “humanness” (*al-bashariyyah*) and “voraciousness” (*al-shahwāniyyah*). The need to escape the base qualities associated with man’s physical nature is a common feature of classical Sufi literature. Though al-Sarrāj, for instance, criticizes those mystics who speak of “the annihilation of humanness” (*fanā’ al-bashariyyah*), he writes in positive terms about the annihilation of the *traits* (*akhlāq*) or *attributes* (*ṣifāt*) of humanness (al-Sarrāj 1914, p. 421; see also Melchert 2014, p. 21). In their mystical Qur’an commentaries, both al-Qushayrī and Rūzbihān Baqlī (d. 606/1209) speak more openly about the “extinguishing” or “purification” of *bashariyyah* (al-Qushayrī 2017, p. 18; Sands 2006, p. 100). The notion of the annihilation of humanness is important in al-Jīlī’s conceptualization of the theory of the Perfect Human: in chapter thirty-four of *al-Insān al-kāmil* (on the Qur’an), he writes of “the exhaustion of the remnants of humanness” (*istifā’ baqāyāt al-bashariyyah*) in the Prophet, his body instead bearing the traces (*āthār*) of the “divine realities” (*al-ḥaqā’iq al-ilāhiyyah*) (al-Jīlānī 1876, 1:78). In his usage, the term *bashariyyah* primarily denotes the concupiscence of human nature. In this sense, it is closely synonymous with *shahwāniyyah*. In the psychological theory of the Greco-Arabic philosophical tradition, the faculty of voraciousness or desire is presented as a sub-faculty of appetitive faculty (*al-quwwah al-nuzū’iyyah*) of man’s animal soul (Al-Attas 2000, p. 62). Adopting this usage, Ibn ‘Arabī observes in the *Futūḥāt* that “the locus of [*shahwah*] is the animal soul”, and that it involves the desire for food, sex, and other base forms of pleasure (Chittick 1989, pp. 339–40). In chapter fifty-nine of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, which is on the lower self (*al-nafs*)—which al-Jīlī characterizes as Satan’s portion of mankind—al-Jīlī identifies voraciousness (*al-shahwah*) as one of the “tools” (*ālāt*) by which Satan leads man astray (al-Jīlānī 1876, 2:47).

To be dominated by *bashariyyah* and *shahwāniyyah*, then, means to be governed by one's body and lower soul and prone to the wiles of Satan. The spirit of a person in this state, al-Jīlī goes on to explain, acquires the "mineral sediment" (*al-rusūb al-ma'dinī*) that is the foundation of man's physical state (al-Jīlānī 1876, 2:10). The term *rusūb*, meaning the sediment or "dregs" that settle at the bottom of a vessel of liquid, evokes a non-canonical Hadith describing the inhabitants of Hell: "When the fire brings them to the surface (*tafat bi-him*), their shackles will make them sink to the bottom (*irtasabathum aghlāluhum*)" (Lane 1984, p. 1079; Ibn al-Athīr n.d., p. 1602). This association with Hell is made explicit when al-Jīlī explains that the spirits of those who are dominated by their physical form are trapped in "a prison of nature and habit" (*sijn al-ṭabī'ah wa-l-'ādah*) which is a type or "similitude" (*mithāl*), in the lower world, of Sijjīn in the next world. Sijjīn is a Qur'anic term which, though seemingly defined by the Qur'an itself as a "book inscribed" (*kitāb marqūm*) (Q 83:7–9), is sometimes taken to signify (on account of the association of the root *s-j-n* with imprisonment) the everlasting imprisonment of the Hellfire (Sinai 2023, p. 367; O'Shaughnessy 1961, p. 444; Jeffrey 1938, p. 165). Using the term in a different sense, in the verses that open the chapter on Jesus in the *Fuṣūṣ*, Ibn 'Arabī declares that, with the conception of Jesus, "the Spirit came into being in an essence that had been made pure of nature (*takawwanat al-rūh fī dhāt mutahharah min al-ṭabī'ah*), which is called Sijjīn" (Ibn 'Arabī 1946, p. 138).

Exploiting both the term's Qur'anic association with the eternal prison of Hell, and its association in the *Fuṣūṣ* with physical "nature" (*al-ṭabī'ah*), al-Jīlī explains that Sijjīn in the next world is a prison perceived by the senses, in a fire that is likewise perceived by the senses (*sijn mahsūs fī nār mahsūṣah*), since the world to come is a place in which ideas (*al-ma'ānī*) appear in sensible forms. In this life, by contrast, to be trapped in Sijjīn means that the original unrestrictedness (*itlāq*) of one's spirit—which derives from its being based on the all-pervasive Holy Spirit—is lost, the spirit becoming restricted (*taqayyadat*) by its physical form. In this way, the spirit is distanced from God and resides in a place that is "almost opposed to its original realm" (al-Jīlānī 1876, 2:9). To be dominated by the concupiscence of the body and lower soul, in other words, is to have lost touch with one's original, essentially perfect nature.

#### 4.2. Those Dominated by Spiritual Things

Totally different is the situation of those people who are dominated by "spiritual things" (*al-umūr al-rūhāniyyah*). Such a state, al-Jīlī writes, comes about through "engaging in correct thought (*al-fīkr al-ṣahīh*), eating, sleeping, and speaking little, and abandoning those matters which are entailed by their humanness (*al-bashariyyah*)" (al-Jīlānī 1876, 2:10). These physical austerities are characteristic of *al-zuhd fī l-dunyā*, "unconcern with the lower world". They were the typical marks of the early Islamic renunciant movement, and were adopted into classical Sufism, the exponents of which claimed the leading figures of the renunciant movement as their forbears (Melchert 2020). For instance, al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), in his collection of rules of Sufi conduct (*Jawāmi' ādāb al-sūfiyyah*), advises that, among the "exterior rules of conduct" (*zawāhir al-ādāb*), "Sufis ought to eat little, drink little, sleep little, speak little, share food, wear rags, and behave properly" (Yazaki 2014, p. 92).<sup>8</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, for his part, sees renunciation of the world as connected with a stress on divine transcendence or incomparability (*tanzīh*), and associates it in particular with the prophet Idrīs. In his commentary on the chapter on Idrīs in the *Fuṣūṣ*, Ibn 'Arabī's interpreter al-Qāshānī observes that, through superhuman feats of renunciation, such as not eating or sleeping for sixteen years, Idrīs reached a state whereby "spirituality dominated his soul (*ghalabat al-rūhāniyyah 'alā nafsīhi*), he took off his bodily form (*khala'a 'an badanihi*), mingled with the angels, and made contact with the spiritual realities of the spheres (*ittasāla bi-rūhāniyyāt*

*al-aflāk*”, for “he had lost his voraciousness (*saqatat ‘anhu al-shahwah*), his nature had become spiritual (*tarawwahat ṭabī‘atuhu*), and its governing effects had been replaced by the governing effects of the spirit (*al-ahkām al-rūhiyyah*)” (Lala 2023; al-Qāshānī 1892, p. 60).

Using very similar language to al-Qāshānī, al-Jīlī likewise describes how, by engaging in physical austerities, a person can escape the prison of corporeality, nature, and concupiscence, such that his or her body (*haykal*) acquires what he terms “spiritual subtlety” (*al-lutf al-rūhī*) (al-Jīlānī 1876, 2:9). In the *Futūhāt*, Ibn ‘Arabī explains that spirits possess an essential subtlety (*lutf*), yet become “dense” when embodied (*tajassud*), because bodies are created from “nature” (*ṭabī‘ah*) (Chittick 1989, p. 141). To acquire the subtlety of the spirit, then, means to escape the physical restrictions associated with the body.

Crucially for our purposes, it is thus by transitioning from “dense” bodily nature to the “subtlety” of the spirit that a person is able to perform miracles. The person who is dominated by his spirit, al-Jīlī says, “walks on water (*yakhtuw ‘alā al-mā*’), flies through the air (*yaṭīr fī al-hawā*’), sees through walls (*lā tahjubuhu al-judrān*), and makes light of the distance between countries (*lā yuqṣīhi bu‘d al-buldān*). His spirit is able [to leave] its locus due to the absence of hindrances, which are those things that are entailed by humanness (*al-bashariyyah*)” (al-Jīlānī 1876, 2:9). Miracles of this kind, in which the saint demonstrates an ability to transcend the limitations of his or her own physical form, are a common trope of Sufi literature, and are pervasive in the Yemeni hagiographical sources mentioned above (Ernst 1997, p. 68; Knysh 2015, p. 238; Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh 2012, p. 65; Ivanyi 2020, p. 128). A useful point of comparison from the school of Ibn ‘Arabī is found in one of the dictionaries of Sufi technical terms compiled by al-Qāshānī. In his entry on the term “the fruit of annihilation” (*thamrat al-fanā*’), al-Qāshānī explains that the physical forms (*al-ashbāh*) of those who achieve mystical annihilation “become subtle and light (*khafīfah laṭīfah*), in the way that their spirits are subtle and light, with the result that their physical forms become able, on account of their subtlety (*bi-laṭāfatihim*), to fly through the air without falling, and to walk on the surface of the water without plunging into it and drowning”. Such a state of subtlety, al-Qāshānī asserts, is achieved by travelling God’s path with such haste—meaning practising extreme renunciation—that nothing of “the traces of the lower self (*āthār al-naḥs*) or its shares that are connected to the physical forms” remains (al-Qāshānī [1426] 2005, 1:314).

For both these followers of Ibn ‘Arabī, then, miracles that involve overcoming the limitations of one’s bodily form can be explained by the subtlety of one’s spirit overwhelming, and thus rendering irrelevant, the materiality of the body, a state achieved through renunciation of the world. Based on the passage on *wahm* that was quoted earlier, it can be deduced that, for al-Jīlī, those people who are dominated by their spirits are able to fully exercise their faculty of estimation, the faculty which intuitively sees things as they really are and thus has free disposal (*taṣarruf*) over them. Such a person, al-Jīlī further explains, lives in “the world of spirits that are not restricted by the limitations occurring on account of proximity to the body” (*‘ālam al-arwāḥ al-muṭlaqah ‘an al-quyūd al-hāṣilah bi-sabab mujāwarat al-aṣām*), which is “the highest of the levels of created beings (*a lā marātib al-makhlūqāt*)”. It is to people who have achieved this state that God refers when He promises: “The pious shall truly be in bliss (*innā al-abrār la-fī na‘īm*)” (Q 82:13) (al-Jīlānī 1876, 2:9–10). This verse is usually taken to refer to rewards of paradise (see, e.g., al-Rāzī [1401] 1981, 31:85). Just as those who are dominated by their bodies are in a state of this-worldly hell, so too, in al-Jīlī’s view, are those who are dominated by their spirits living in a state of this-worldly paradise, in which they judge things to be as they truly are, the restrictions of the body are rendered effectively meaningless, and they enjoy free disposal over the rest of creation.

### 4.3. Those Dominated by Divine Things

Though the state of being dominated by the spirit is described as “the highest level of created beings”, it is not the highest level per se. Here, al-Jīlī seems to echo a note of ambivalence towards bodily miracles that, notwithstanding what we have seen regarding the prominence of the motif of saintly miracles in Sufi literature, runs through the Sufi tradition. Abū Yazīd Bisṭāmī (d. 261/875?), for instance, is reported to have said, “The saints do not rejoice at the answers to prayers which are the essence of miracles, such as walking on water, and moving in the air and traversing the earth and riding on the heavens, since the prayers of unbelievers receive an answer and the earth contains both Satans and men, and the air is the abode of the birds, and the water of the fish” (M. Smith 1984, p. 31). Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) quotes a similar statement attributed to Abū Yazīd in his critique of the extravagant miracle-working of the Rifāʿiyyah Sufi order (Ibn Taimiyya 2013, p. 64).

In the chapter devoted to the *karāmāt* of the saints in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, Ibn ʿArabī likewise displays a decidedly ambivalent attitude towards bodily miracles. There are, Ibn ʿArabī says, two kinds of miracles, the “sensible” (*ḥiṣṣiyyah*) and the “spiritual” (*maʿnawiyyah*). Examples of the sensible type of miracle include knowing another person’s hidden thoughts, conveying information about unknown events, walking on water, traversing through the air, teleportation, and becoming invisible. Ordinary people (*al-ʿāmmah*), he explains, only know this type of miracle. Spiritual miracles, by contrast, are known by the elite (*al-khawāṣṣ*) among God’s servants. They consist in perfect adherence to the divine law and the cultivation of moral excellence (Ibn ʿArabī 1911, 2:369). This understanding of the higher kind of miracles, it should be noted, is consistent with the view of al-Qushayrī, who says that among the greatest of the miracles of God’s friends is “continuous divine assistance for the performance of acts of obedience, and protection from the performance of acts of disobedience” (al-Qushayrī 1989, p. 568). It is one that Ibn ʿArabī repeats elsewhere—for instance, when he observes that those who have attained true knowledge avoid exercising the discretionary power (*taṣarruf*) arising from their spiritual concentration (*himmah*) because they realise that, first, they are merely servants of God, and second, that the one who exercises discretionary power (*al-mutaṣarrif*), and the object of that discretionary power (*al-mutaṣarraf fihi*) are in essence one and the same (Affifi 1939, p. 136). This ambivalence towards the physical *taṣarrufāt* is also taken up by other followers of Ibn ʿArabī. For instance, Aḥmad ibn al-Mubārak al-Lamāṭī (d. 1156/1743), in his biography of the North African saint ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dabbāgh (d. 1132/1719/20), goes so far as to say that the “people of darkness” enjoy *taṣarruf* over “ephemeral matters”: “You see the liar walk on the sea,” he writes, “fly in the air, and have sustenance conferred on him from the Unseen” (al-Lamāṭī 2007, p. 845–6).

Though he does not go this far, al-Jīlī follows Abū Yazīd and Ibn ʿArabī in not regarding physical or sensible miracles as the highest kind of miracle. Yet, in contrast to Ibn ʿArabī, he is not so much concerned with moral perfection as with man’s ability to manifest God’s lordship (*al-rubūbiyyah*), power (*al-qudrah*), and creation (*al-khalq*), in accordance with his theory of the Perfect Human. The third category of human beings, he explains, consists of those who are dominated by “divine things” (*al-umūr al-ilāhiyyah*), which is to say that they have witnessed God’s most beautiful names and attributes and recognize their appearance in all things. Perceiving the universality of the theophany enables these people to pass beyond *both* their humanness (*al-bashariyyah*) and their spirituality (*al-rūḥāniyyah*), the former, as we have seen, being associated with the voracious appetites of the body, while the latter being the basis of “man’s reputation (*nāmūs*) for dignity, superiority, and eminence”. Those who pass beyond these states, al-Jīlī asserts, “become holy (*qudsiyy<sup>am</sup>*)”, a term which, as we saw in the aforementioned discussion of the term *munazzah*, denotes being pure of the attributes and defilements of createdness. Their physical

form and spirit, he writes, “move from the low ground of humanness (*ḥadīd al-bashariyyah*) to the peak of the holiness of divine incomparability (*awj quds al-tanzīh*)”, and God, as the *ḥadīth qudsī* beloved of the Sufis puts it, becomes their hearing, their sight, their hand, and their tongue.<sup>9</sup> As a result, writes al-Jīlī, when such a person “wipes with his hand (*masaha bi-yadihi*), he heals the blind and the leper, and when his tongue utters the bringing into being of a thing, it [happens] by the command of God—May He be exalted. He is supported by the Holy Spirit (*mu’ayyad<sup>an</sup> bi-rūh al-quds*), just as God said in the case of Jesus, since this was how he was qualified: ‘We supported him with the Holy Spirit’ (Q 2:87, 2:253, 5:110)” (al-Jīlānī 1876, 2:10).

While al-Jīlī affirms physical miracles as real and regards them as marks of being dominated by the Holy Spirit, such miracles pale in comparison to the creative speech acts that manifest God’s *rubūbiyyah*, for those miraculous deeds are not human, but divine. They are, moreover, marks of the Perfect Human, which is al-Jīlī’s true concern throughout his work. In this respect, it is noteworthy that al-Jīlī identifies Jesus, rather than Muhammad (who, in chapter sixty of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, he declares to be the *only* human being who is truly worthy of the title of Perfect Human), as a model of the friend of God who is dominated by “divine things”. This identification, of course, is rooted in the Qur’an’s accounts of Jesus’ miracles, which include breathing life into a clay bird, healing the blind and the leper, and raising the dead (Q 3:49; 5:110). Significantly, these miracles are not of the physical kind (though Islamic tradition does relate the story of Jesus walking on water) (Khalidi 2001, pp. 78, 111), but rather demonstrate Jesus’ ability to manifest God’s creative power. As al-Jīlī puts it in an earlier chapter of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, “from his first step, Jesus manifested [the divine] power (*al-qudrah*) and lordship (*al-rubūbiyyah*), namely through his speaking in the cradle, his healing of the blind and the leper, and his raising of the dead” (al-Jīlānī 1876, 1:80). In chapter fifty, his ability to perform “creative” miracles is explained with reference to the Qur’anic idea that he was “supported” by the Holy Spirit, which, as we saw above, al-Jīlī regards as the “specific face” or essence of God through which all things are established.

In the chapter on Jesus in the *Fuṣūṣ*, Ibn ‘Arabī likewise discusses Jesus’ raising of the dead, his healing of the blind man and the leper, and his giving life to a clay bird. Similar to al-Jīlī, Ibn ‘Arabī explains these miracles in terms of Jesus being a “divine spirit” (*rūh ilāhī*). At the same time, he stresses that, as the Qur’an says, Jesus was only able to perform these miracles “by God’s permission” (*bi-idhn Allāh*), and criticizes the Christians for deducing from Jesus’ miracle working that he was God (Ibn ‘Arabī 1946, pp. 139–41).<sup>10</sup> Al-Jīlī likewise observes that it was because Jesus revealed the “mysteries” of divine power and lordship, through his miracles, that his followers “fell into error” and “worshipped Him” (al-Jīlānī 1876, 1:80; Morrissey 2021, pp. 71–75). To say that Jesus exemplifies a human being who is “dominated by divine things”, then, is not the same as to say that Jesus is God incarnate or that God dwells in him. Instead, it is to recognize Jesus as a locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) for God’s creative and lordly attributes—that is, as a Perfect Human.

## 5. Miracles, the Holy Spirit, Jesus, and Muhammad

While al-Jīlī rejects the Christian understanding of Jesus’ nature and miracle-working, from a comparative Christian-Muslim perspective, it is noteworthy both that al-Jīlī assigns a special place to the miracles of Jesus, and that he connects the performance of miracles to the working of the Holy Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul explains that, among the Gifts or instances of the “manifestation” (*phanerōsis*) of the Spirit are wisdom, knowledge, faith, “gifts of healing”, “the power to do miracles”, “the ability to prophesy”, “the ability to tell spirits apart”, and “the ability to speak in different kinds of languages they had not known before”. For al-Jīlī, likewise, the ability of the friends of God to perform miracles derives

from the manifestation of the Holy Spirit within them. This ability is exemplified by Jesus, meaning that those saints who, like him, are supported by the Holy Spirit, follow in Jesus' footsteps. In Ibn 'Arabī's terms, they are "Jesus-like" (*'īsawī*), a status which enables them to perform miracles that are similar to Jesus' own (Chodkiewicz 1999, pp. 75–88).<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, as noted above, al-Jīlī's view of miracles needs to be put in the context of his theory of the Perfect Human, and the same goes for his focus on Jesus here. For al-Jīlī, the Prophet Muhammad is the one true Perfect Human, while other perfect friends of God—Jesus included—are embodiments of the Muhammadan Reality, the first created thing and the light through which the world was created. As we have seen, the Muhammadan Reality is also the principal mode or delimitation of the uncreated Holy Spirit. To say that, in performing miracles, the saints are supported by the Holy Spirit, is to say that they draw their miracle-working capacities from the spiritual reality of the Prophet Muhammad. This holds true both for Jesus and for those saints who, in emulating him, might be described as "Jesus-like". From al-Jīlī's Sufi metaphysical perspective, in other words, the miracles of the saints are a testimony to the uniquely exalted spiritual station of Muhammad, and it is to the Prophet that the Holy Spirit points. Just as al-Jīlī saw Muhammad in the form of al-Jabartī in Zabīd in 1393/4, so too does he see Muhammad, the one true Perfect Human, at work in the miracles of the *awliyā'*.

While al-Jīlī's account of the Holy Spirit contains certain resonances with Christian ideas, then, the basic teleology of his account is different from that of Christian teaching the Holy Spirit. According to the picture that emerges from the New Testament, the Holy Spirit will glorify Jesus (John 16:14) and lead believers to become children and joint heirs of God with Christ (Romans 8:16–17). The close connection between the Holy Spirit and Jesus as the Son of God is developed by the Church Fathers. For Origen of Alexandria (d. c. 253), the Holy Spirit is identical with both "the Spirit of God" and "the Spirit of Christ", which is Christ himself (Miller 2024, p. 118). For the Cappadocian Father Basil of Caesarea (d. 379), belief in the Holy Spirit is a precondition for worshipping God the Son in Christ (Meredith 1995, p. 32). For his fellow Cappadocian Gregory of Nyssa (d. 394), all that the Son does is completed and perfected by the Holy Spirit (McGrath 2017, p. 162). In the Christian view, in other words, the Holy Spirit leads to Christ. By contrast, al-Jīlī's Spirit discloses the Muhammadan Reality through Perfect Humans whose powers of free discretion extend from, and point to, the lordship of the Qur'anic God.

## 6. Conclusions

Four features of al-Jīlī's account of the miraculous seem worth highlighting by way of conclusion. First, al-Jīlī's interest in the miraculous reflects the miracle-saturated environment of Rasūlid Yemen. His conceptualization of miracles in terms of the Sufi metaphysics of Ibn 'Arabī is likewise consistent with the pervasive presence of Ibn 'Arabī's thought in that Yemeni milieu and the adoption of Ibn 'Arabī's works as teaching tools by al-Jīlī's teacher, the prominent miracle-working shaykh Ismā'īl al-Jabartī. Second, al-Jīlī prefers the term *taṣarrufāt* to *karāmāt*, signalling a departure from the treatment of saintly miracles in the classical Sufi manuals, and reflecting both his attachment to Ibn 'Arabī's thought, and his more daring and ambitious notion of what miracles are and how they relate to the divine attributes and the Holy Spirit. Third, and relatedly, al-Jīlī, again following in the wake of Ibn 'Arabī, articulates a hierarchy of the miraculous, distinguishing between physical or bodily miracles, which signify the dominance of the Holy Spirit over the saint, and the higher level of creative speech acts, which signify the dominance of God's attributes of power, creativity, and lordship, within the saint, who thus acquires the status of Perfect Human. Though he does not denigrate physical miracles in the way that some Sufi authors do, they nevertheless pale in comparison to the highest kind of miracles. Finally,

the special role played by Jesus in al-Jīlī's account of the highest kind of miracle, alongside the prominent role allotted to the Holy Spirit in his account, seems to chime with Christian ideas rooted in the letters of Paul and the Gospel of John. Yet, as important as Jesus is in al-Jīlī's account, his miracle working, like the miracles of all the prophets and saints, are in fact a testimony to the pre-eminence of the Prophet Muhammad, the "most perfect" of the Perfect Humans, whose spiritual reality is a created mode of the uncreated Holy Spirit, and the source of those miraculous deeds that manifest God's lordship. This being the case, al-Jīlī's view of miracles and the Holy Spirit is based on a fundamentally different teleology to Christian accounts of the same phenomena.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** The original contributions presented in this study are included in the article. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

**Acknowledgments:** I am very grateful to Shoaib Ahmed Malik for selecting a paper on this topic for the conference out of which this special issue arose and for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of the article.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Besides the contexts just mentioned, Brown observes that saintly miracles were "integral" to the spread of Islam in South Asia, and, conversely, that they "seem to have played less of a role in West Africa" (Brown 2012, pp. 129–30).
- <sup>2</sup> For al-Jīlī's interest in saintly miracles, see, for instance, his discussion of the topic in his commentary on the penultimate chapter of Ibn 'Arabī's *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah* (al-Jīlī 1999, pp. 152–53, 200).
- <sup>3</sup> Al-Jīlī's conception of *wahm*, it should be noted, seems to be closer to Ibn Sīnā's than to that of Ibn 'Arabī. As Nicholson observes, al-Jīlī sees *wahm* as "the faculty whereby things are judged intuitively to be what they really are" (Nicholson 1921, p. 117, n. 1). For Ibn 'Arabī and his commentators, by contrast, the term often signifies an imaginative "fantasy" or "illusion" (see e.g., Chittick 1989, pp. 122, 343; Qaysarī 2020, p. 153). For Ibn Sīnā's conception of the faculty of estimation, see McGinnis (2009, pp. 99–100, 110–115).
- <sup>4</sup> For Ibn 'Arabī's notion of the "breath of the All-Merciful", see Nettler (2003, p. 118). For Ibn 'Arabī's theory of "ontological mercy", see Izutsu (1983, pp. 116–40).
- <sup>5</sup> According to Nicholson (1921, p. vi), "the Mohammedan Logos doctrine ... is the real subject of *Insānu 'l-Kāmil*". For "Ibnul 'Arabī's Doctrine of the Logos", see Affīfī (1939, pp. 66–101).
- <sup>6</sup> In the chapter on the heart (chapter fifty-two), al-Jīlī says that the human heart is also described in the Qur'an as "the spirit of God which was breathed into the spirit of Adam when He says, 'And I breathed into him of My spirit' (al-Jīlānī 1876, 2:15; Nicholson 1921, p. 113).
- <sup>7</sup> On this Hadith, see Melchert (2011).
- <sup>8</sup> For al-Sulamī's conception of *ādāb*, see Welle (2024). As Welle observes (p. 103), al-Sulamī's understanding of renunciation is "infused" with the Malāmātī piety of his native Nishapur.
- <sup>9</sup> For the "Hadith of supererogatory works" (*ḥadīth al-nawāfil*), see Graham (1977, pp. 98, 173).
- <sup>10</sup> For further detail, see Morrissey (Forthcoming).
- <sup>11</sup> In the *Fuṣūṣ*, Ibn 'Arabī cites Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī's reported ability to revive a dead ant by breathing on it as testimony to Abū Yazīd's "Jesus-like" status (Ibn 'Arabī 1946, p. 142).

## References

- Affīfī, 'Afīfī, Abū al-'Ilā. 1939. *The Mystical Philosophy of Muḥyid Dīn-Ibnul 'Arabī*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- al-Ashkal, Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr. 2008. *Al-'Iṭr al-wardī fī karāmāt wa-bishārāt wa-'ulūm sayyidī Ismā'il al-Jabartī*. Edited by Aḥmad Farīd al-Mīzyadī. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'ilmiyyah.

- Al-Attas, Syed Muhammad Naquib. 2000. The Meaning and Experience of Happiness in Islām. In *Consciousness & Reality: Studies in Memory of Toshihiko Izutsu*. Edited by Sayyid Jalal al-Din Ashtiyani, Hideichi Matsubara, Tashaki Iwami and Akiro Matsumoto. Leiden: Brill.
- al-Ḥakīm, Su'ād. 1981. *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfi: Al-ḥikmah fi ḥudūd al-kalimah*. Beirut: Dandarrah li-l-tibā'ah wa-l-nashr.
- al-Ḥibshī, 'Abd Allāh. 1976. *Al-Sūfiyyah wa-al-fuqahā' fi l-Yaman*. Sanaa: Maktabat al-Jil al-Jadid.
- al-Jilānī, 'Abd al-Karīm ibn Ibrāhīm. 1876. *Al-Insān al-kāmil fi ma'rifat al-awākhir wa-l-awā'il*. 2 vols. Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Āmirah.
- al-Jīlī, 'Abd al-Karīm. 1999. *Sharḥ mushkilāt al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*. Edited by Yūsuf Zaydān. Ramallah: Dār al-Amīn.
- al-Kalābādhī. 1935. *The Doctrine of the Sūfis*. Translated by Arthur J. Arberry. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- al-Lamaṭī, Aḥmad b. al-Mubārak. 2007. *Pure Gold from the Words of Sayyidī 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Dabbāgh (Al-Dhahab al-Ibrīz min Kalām Sayyidī 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Dabbāgh)*. Translated and annotated by John O'Kane and Bernd Radtke. Leiden: Brill.
- al-Qāshānī. 1892. *Sharḥ 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī 'alā Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. Edited by Bālī Khalīfah al-Sūfiyāwī. Damascus: Al-Maṭba'ah al-Zāhirah.
- al-Qāshānī. 2005. *Latā'if al-a'lām fi ishārāt ahl al-ilhām*. 2 vol. Hejaz: Maktabat al-Thaqāfah al-Dīniyyah. First published 1426.
- al-Qushayrī. 1989. *Al-Risālah al-qushayriyyah*. Edited by 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd. Cairo: Dār al-Sha'b li-l-ṣaḥāfah wa-l-tibā'ah wa-l-nashr.
- al-Qushayrī. 2017. *Latā'if al-ishārāt = Subtle allusions: Sūras 1–4*. Translated by Kristin Zahra Sands. Fons Vitae. Amman: Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought.
- al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn. 1981. *Tafsīr al-Rāzī al-mushtahir bi-l-Tafsīr al-kabīr wa-Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*. 32 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr. First published 1401.
- al-Sarrāj. 1914. *The Kitāb al-Luma' fi al-taṣawwuf of Abū Naṣr 'Abdallāh b. 'Alī al-Sarrāj al-Tūsī*. Edited by Reynold Alleyne Nicholson. Leiden: Brill.
- al-Yamanī, al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ahdal. 1964. *Kashf al-ghitā' 'an ḥaqā'iq al-tawḥīd wa-'aqā'id al-muwahḥidīn wa-dhikr al-a'imma al-Ash'ariyyīn wa-man khālafahum min al-mubtadi'īn wa-bayān ḥāl Ibn 'Arabī wa-attibā'ihī al-māriqīn*. Edited by Aḥmad Bakīr Maḥmūd. Tunis: Aḥmad Bakīr.
- al-Zabīdī, Abū l-'Abbās Aḥmad al-Sharjī. 1986. *Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ ahl al-ṣidq wa-l-ikhlas*. In *Al-Dār al-Yamaniyyah li-l-nashr wa-l-tawzī'*. Amman: Dār al-Manāhil. First published 1406.
- Aziz, Muhammad Ali. 2011. *Religion and Mysticism in Early Islam: Theology and Sufism in Yemen*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Brown, Jonathan. 2012. Faithful Dissenters: Sunni Skepticism about the Miracles of Saints. *Journal of Sufi Studies* 1: 123–68. [CrossRef]
- Chittick, William C. 1989. *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabī's Metaphysics of Imagination*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Chittick, William C. 1998. *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-'Arabī's Cosmology*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Chodkiewicz, Michel. 1999. *The Seal of Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn 'Arabī*. Translated by Liadain Sherrard. Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society.
- Dagli, Caner. 2016. *Ibn al-'Arabī and Islamic Intellectual Culture: From Mysticism to Philosophy*. New York: Routledge.
- Ebstein, Michael. 2014. *Mysticism and Philosophy in al-Andalus: Ibn Masarra, Ibn al-'Arabī and the Ismā'īlī Tradition*. Leiden: Brill.
- Ernst, Carl. 1997. *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism*. Boulder: Shambhala.
- Graham, William A. 1977. *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam: A Reconsideration of the Sources, with Special Reference to the Divine Saying or Ḥadīth Qudsī*. Berlin: Mouton.
- Hūjwīrī. 1911. *The Kashf al-mahjūb: The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sūfiism*. Translated by Reynold A. Nicholson. Leiden: Brill.
- Ibn al-Athīr. n.d. *Al-Nihāyah fi gharīb al-ḥadīth wa-l-athar*. Edited by Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Kharāt. Doha: Wizārat al-Awqāf wa-l-shu'ūn al-Islāmiyyah.
- Ibn 'Arabī. 1911. *Al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah*. 4 vols. Doha: Dār al-Kutub al-'arabiyyah al-kubrā.
- Ibn 'Arabī. 1946. *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. Edited by Abū al-'Alā' al-'Afīfī. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī.
- Ibn 'Atā' Allāh, Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad. 2012. *Sufism for non-Sufis? Ibn 'Atā' Allāh al-Sakandarī's Tāj al-'arūs*. Translated by Sherman A. Jackson. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ibn Taimiyya, Ahmad Ibn-'Abd-al-Halim. 2013. *Ibn Taimiyya's Struggle Against Popular Religion: With an Annotated Translation of His Kitāb iqtidā' as-ṣīrāt al-mustaqīm mukhālafat aṣḥāb al-jahīm*. Translated by Muhammad Umar Menon. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Ivanyi, Katharina A. 2020. *Virtue, Piety and the Law: A Study of Birgivi Meḥmed Efendi's al-Tarīqah al-muḥammadiyyah*. Leiden: Brill.
- Izutsu, Toshihiko. 1983. *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Jeffrey, Arthur. 1938. *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*. Vadodara: The Oriental Institute Baroda.
- Khalidi, Tarif. 2001. *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Knysh, Alexander D. 1999. *Ibn 'Arabi and the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Knysh, Alexander D. 2015. *Islam in Historical Perspective*. New York: Routledge.
- Lala, Ismail. 2023. Asceticism as Renouncing and Embracing the World in Ibn 'Arabī's Radical Metaphysics. *Religions* 14: 1092. [CrossRef]

- Lane, Edward William. 1984. *Arabic-English Lexicon*. Edited by Stanley Lane-Poole. Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society.
- Lévy, Carlos. 2022. Philo of Alexandria. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Available online: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/philo/#PoweGodLogo> (accessed on 13 August 2025).
- Malik, Shoaib Ahmed, and Karim Kocsenda. 2025. Understanding Miracles in Ash‘arī Theology: A Systematic Presentation. *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 16: 174–98. [CrossRef]
- McGinnis, Jon. 2009. *Avicenna*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McGrath, Alister A. 2017. *The Christian Theology Reader*, 25th anniversary ed. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell.
- Melchert, Christopher. 2011. God Created Adam in His Image. *Journal of Qur‘anic Studies* 13: 113–24. [CrossRef]
- Melchert, Christopher. 2014. Origins and Early Sufism. In *The Cambridge Companion to Sufism*. Edited by Lloyd Ridgeon. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–23.
- Melchert, Christopher. 2020. *Before Sufism: Early Islamic Renunciant Piety*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Meredith, Anthony. 1995. *The Cappadocians*. London: Geoffrey Chapman.
- Miller, Micah M. 2024. *Origen of Alexandria and the Theology of the Holy Spirit*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Morrissey, Fitzroy. 2020. *Sufism and the Perfect Human: From Ibn ‘Arabī to al-Jīlī*. New York: Routledge.
- Morrissey, Fitzroy. 2021. *Sufism and the Scriptures: Metaphysics and Sacred History in the Thought of ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Morrissey, Fitzroy. Forthcoming. Jesus in Islamic Mysticism. In *Son of Mary: Jesus in Muslim Tradition*. Edited by Stephen R. Burge. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press.
- Nettler, Ronald L. 2003. *Sufi Metaphysics and Qur‘ānic Prophets: Ibn ‘Arabī’s Thought and Method in the Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society.
- Nicholson, Reynold A. 1921. *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- O’Shaughnessy, Thomas. 1961. The Seven Names for Hell in The Qur‘ān. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 24: 444–69.
- Qaysarī, Dāwūd. 2020. *The Horizons of Being: The Metaphysics of Ibn al-‘Arabī in the Muqaddimat al-Qaysarī*. Translated by Mukhtar H. Ali. Leiden: Brill.
- Sands, Kristin Zahra. 2006. *Sūfī Commentaries on the Qur‘ān in Classical Islam*. New York: Routledge.
- Schimmel, Annemarie. 1975. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Sinai, Nicolai. 2023. *Key Terms of the Qur‘an: A Critical Dictionary*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Smith, G. Rex. 2021. Rasūlids. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam New Edition Online*. Edited by Peri J. Bearman. Leiden: Brill.
- Smith, Margaret. 1984. *Rābī‘a the Mystic and her Fellow-Saints: Being the Life and Teachings of Rābī‘a al-‘Adawiyya Al-Qaysiyya of Baṣra Together with Some Account of the Place of Women Saints in Islam*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Todd, Richard. 2014. *The Sufi Doctrine of Man: Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī’s Metaphysical Anthropology*. Leiden: Brill.
- Welle, Jason. 2024. *Companionship and Virtue in Classical Sufism: The Contribution of al-Sulamī*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Yazaki, Saeko. 2014. Morality in Early Sufi Literature. In *The Cambridge Companion to Sufism*. Edited by Lloyd Ridgeon. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 74–98.

**Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.