

A LIVING LIBRARY: AMADOU HAMPÂTÉ BÂ AND THE ORAL TRANSMISSION OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents three previously unpublished texts that provide insight into Amadou Hampâté Bâ's personal understanding of Islam and Sufism. Two of the texts are examples of Hampâté Bâ's earliest attempts to translate the oral teachings of his spiritual teacher, Tierno Bokar, into French; the third text consists of extracts from interviews with Hampâté Bâ in 1978 during which he reflected on themes that appear in the earlier texts, as well as more broadly on Islamic theology and Sufism.

In addition to contributing to our understanding of Hampâté Bâ's own religious ideas, these texts illustrate something of both the content and the intellectual vitality that can inform the oral transmission of religious knowledge, an aspect of Islamic religious culture that has been less explored by students of Islam and Muslim history in Africa than the region's rich literary heritage. An introduction contextualizes the texts and analyzes their content.

Introduction

Relatively few scholars have sought to explore the religious ideas of Amadou Hampâté Bâ, and most who have done so have focused their attention on his ecumenical views.¹ One reason that might account for this

¹ See, for example, S. Grodz, "Towards Universal Reconciliation: The Early Development of Amadou Hampâté Bâ's Ecumenical Ideas," *Islam et Christian-Muslim Relations* 13, no. 3

apparent lack of interest in Hampâté Bâ as a Muslim thinker or teacher is that he rarely committed his own religious reflections to writing, and virtually never in print. One major exception, of course, is *Jésus vu par un musulman*,² which offers the reader both an insight into his ecumenism as well as a demonstration of his interest in numerology.

By contrast, Hampâté Bâ wrote and published extensively about the religious and theological ideas of others, in greatest detail of course about Tierno Bokar, but also more generally about Islam and “traditional” religion in Africa. The most prevalent theme that emerges from his writings on Islam is his loyal devotion to his “master,” Tierno Bokar, and his commitment to transmit accurately and faithfully to others what he received from him. He makes no claims to originality in the content of this transmission, and he was always very reticent to speak or write about his personal religious commitments.

In fact, most scholars who have written about “the Muslim Hampâté Bâ” have regarded him more as a political actor than a religious figure.³ This approach is quite understandable, given that he was deeply embroiled in “religious politics” at least from 1937, when he followed Tierno Bokar in pledging his spiritual allegiance to Sheikh Hamallah, and then subsequently in the 1950s when he spearheaded the counter-reform movement in opposition to growing Wahhabi influence in Soudan français (now Mali). But more than this, a reading of his published memoirs clearly illustrates the extent to which his entire life was deeply affected by political

(July 2002): 281–302; Marie Miran, *Islam, histoire et modernité en Côte d’Ivoire* (Paris: Karthala, 2006), pp. 156–7, 233, and 313ff.; and Jean-Louis Triaud, “D’un maître à l’autre: L’histoire d’un transfert: Amadou Hampâté Bâ entre Tierno Bokar et Théodore Monod (1938–1954),” *Sociétés politiques comparées: Revue européenne d’analyse des sociétés politiques*, no. 20 (December 2009), online at <http://www.fasopo.org/reasopo/n20/article.pdf>.

² Abidjan-Dakar: Les Nouvelles Éditions Africaines, 1976.

³ See, for example, Lansiné Kaba, *The Wahhabiyya: Islamic Reform and Politics in French West Africa* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 22ff.; L. Brenner, “Amadou Hampâté Bâ, Tijani francophone,” in *La Tijâniyya: Une confrérie musulmane à la conquête de l’Afrique*, ed. J.-L. Triaud and D. Robinson (Paris: Karthala, 2000), 289–326; L. Brenner, “Becoming Muslim in Soudan Français,” in *Le temps des marabouts: Itinéraires et stratégies islamiques en Afrique Occidentale Française, ca. 1880–1960*, ed. J.-L. Triaud and D. Robinson (Paris: Karthala, 1997), 467–92; and L. Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge: Religion, Power and Schooling in a West African Muslim Society* (London: C. Hurst; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), especially the section entitled “The Politics of Counter-Reform,” 102ff.

forces, in the broad sense of this term: the tragic history of his own paternal lineage, the exile of his “adoptive father,” and all the many colonial intrigues in which he was implicated.

But perhaps the most important reason that Hampâté Bâ has not been viewed as a religious thinker or teacher, either by many of his Muslim contemporaries in Africa or by members of the research community, is because he did not pursue a classical Islamic education, and because he was not an accomplished Arabist. He had attended Qur’anic schools briefly as a child, but at a young age he entered the French-language school system, and of course French became the essential vehicle for his future public career as a researcher and writer. And his first efforts to disseminate the teachings he had received from Tierno Bokar were not as a teacher but as a translator, from Fulfulde into French.

But because Hampâté Bâ had not studied classical Islamic texts at the feet of the ‘ulama in the time-honored manner, one should not conclude that he was unfamiliar with these texts. He conscientiously pursued his study of Islam as an adult with various teachers, some of whom are named in his memoirs, as well as through his own reading. Similarly, he surrounded himself with competent Arabists who could assist him with Arabic texts when necessary. And he seems to have engaged in his study of Islam and of Islamic texts with the same energy and tenacity that he devoted to his many other endeavors.

Although Hampâté Bâ may have acknowledged the special place that Arabic occupied universally within Islamic culture and practice, Fulfulde was the religious language of his own personal faith. Fulfulde was his mother tongue, it was the language in which he had received the teachings of his beloved master, Tierno Bokar, and it was the language in which he sought to record his deepest religious feelings, in verse. Unfortunately, the original Fulfulde of Tierno Bokar’s teachings has not been preserved; and the vast majority of Hampâté Bâ’s Fulfulde verse has been neither translated nor published.⁴

⁴ The original versions of his religious verse in Fulfulde are preserved in his personal archives, but to my knowledge, the only religious poem of his own composition in Fulfulde to have been published was translated by Christiane Seydou in “Élégie pour la mort de Tierno Bôkar Sâlif composée par Amadou Hampâté Bâ en 1940,” *Journal des Africanistes* 63, no. 2 (1993): 57–60. See also L. Brenner, “Fulfulde Religious Verse: Cultural Context and Mystical Inspiration,” introduction to *La poésie mystique peule du Mali*, by Christiane Seydou (Paris: Karthala, 2008), 11–35.

Until his corpus of religious verse becomes more widely known, it will not be possible to make a comprehensive assessment of Hampâté Bâ as a Muslim thinker. The present paper, which makes available to the research community several previously unpublished texts, is intended as a contribution to such an assessment. These are:

- I. An extract from a letter from Hampâté Bâ to Théodore Monod in 1941 on the subject of *rumzu*, which is described in the letter as “our teaching of the science of numbers.”
- II. A text entitled “Notes on a Discovery by [Working with] Numbers,” that Hampâté Bâ wrote specifically for Monod in 1941, in which he illustrates how *rumzu* is applied to provide insight into the nature of the Divine.⁵
- III. Excerpts from interviews that I conducted with Hampâté Bâ in 1978.

The Form of the Texts

The three texts are closely interrelated thematically, but before addressing their content, I wish to say something about their form. All three are oral texts that have subsequently been committed to writing. The two 1941 documents are translations from Fulfulde into French of teachings that Hampâté Bâ received from Tierno Bokar. The comments on *rumzu* (text I) are presented as a direct translation of Tierno’s words. No such claims are made for text II, which may be a reworking by Hampâté Bâ of Tierno’s ideas; it is prefaced by the statement that “what follows is from the teaching received from my initiator, the rightly guided of pure spirit of a higher level.”

The interviews (text III), which were conducted in French, were recorded and transcribed over thirty-five years later, in 1978. They can be read almost as a gloss on the 1941 material, so closely related are the concepts and the manner in which they are explored. But the interviews are an expression of Hampâté Bâ’s thoughts in his own words, the result of many years of further study, reflection, and religious practice. Certainly, the presentation is much more relaxed and fluent, although none the less profound for that.

⁵ The two 1941 documents are located in Monod’s personal papers. In summer 1995, Professor Monod offered me access to a dossier (referred to subsequently as the Fonds Monod) which he had maintained since his first contact with Hampâté Bâ in 1938; it includes over 100 letters to him from Hampâté Bâ, as well as many manuscripts of both published and unpublished materials.

The conversational style of the interviews reflects the informal conditions in which they took place. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, when I was conducting research for *West African Sufi*,⁶ Hampâté Bâ graciously granted me the opportunity to interview him, often at considerable length. We met on numerous occasions, in Bamako, Sévaré, Paris, and Abidjan, and all the interviews were relatively informal.⁷ Other persons were almost always present: members of his family, friends, and Tijani disciples, all of whom felt free to ask questions if they were so inclined. However, most of the questions that appear in text III were posed by me.

The interviews focused primarily on the life and teachings of Tierno Bokar, but our discussions ranged over many other subjects, either because someone present would ask a question, or because Hampâté Bâ would digress in order to elaborate on one or another point. It was not unusual for him to return to a topic that he had discussed on an earlier occasion, either to elaborate it further or to explore it from another perspective. In order therefore to present a coherent sampling of his religious reflections, selected passages have been extracted from the interviews and rearranged thematically.⁸

All three texts are examples of the oral transmission of Islamic religious knowledge, although subsequently committed to writing. They document aspects of the oral teaching that Hampâté Bâ received from Tierno Bokar as well as his efforts to pass on this knowledge to others, both orally and in writing. They also provide insight into Hampâté Bâ's own religious reflections and his personal style of instructing and informing others.

Of profound significance is the fact that the original version of each of these texts is in the French language (and here translated yet again into English!).⁹ That Hampâté Bâ became a transmitter of Islamic knowledge in French was the result both of social and political "accident" and of

⁶ L. Brenner, *West African Sufi: The Religious Heritage and Spiritual Search of Cerno Bokar Saalif Taal* (London: C. Hurst; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984; paperback edition, C. Hurst, 2005).

⁷ The excerpts presented here are from interviews that took place in May 1978 in Hampâté Bâ's Paris apartment. Copies of tapes and transcriptions of all the recorded interviews are held in the Fonds Amadou Hampâté Bâ, deposited in the Institut Mémoires de l'Édition Contemporaine, in St. Germain-la-Blanche-Herbe, France, but unfortunately are not presently available for consultation.

⁸ The dates inserted in the text of the interviews indicate from which interviews the extracts are drawn.

⁹ The French originals of all three documents can be made available to readers who wish to consult them.

purposeful intention. Although he was a highly accomplished and talented product of the French-language colonial school system, his attendance in those schools had diverted him from the classical Islamic religious studies that he might otherwise have pursued. Unusually for a Muslim cleric at that time, Tierno Bokar encouraged Hampâté Bâ to pursue his French schooling as well as his administrative career in the colonial service. At the same time, however, Tierno used every opportunity to influence Hampâté Bâ to deepen his personal faith as a Muslim, and eventually he selected him as a primary repository of his own teaching. In 1933, Hampâté Bâ spent some months in Bandiagara where he underwent what might be described as an intensive course of oral religious instruction with Tierno Bokar, after which he was encouraged to transmit the teachings that he had received.¹⁰

The idea to translate the teachings into French and to publish them seems to have originated with Hampâté Bâ himself, although he sought and received permission from Tierno Bokar to do so.¹¹ It was in pursuit of this aim that in 1938 he first wrote to Théodore Monod, founding director of the Institut Français de l'Afrique Noire (IFAN) in Dakar, seeking support for the publication of an oral text based on the teachings of Tierno Bokar that he had translated into French. Hampâté Bâ referred to this text in his letter as a "brief esoteric study of the Tijaniyya,"¹² and it was most likely a version of Tierno's oral teaching known as the *ma 'd-din*, Arabic for "What is religion?"¹³ Monod's enthusiastic and encouraging response initiated a lengthy correspondence between the two men and ultimately led to a close personal friendship, which in turn prepared the way for Hampâté Bâ's eventual transfer to the staff of IFAN.¹⁴ No copy of this 1938 text has come to light, and the first two texts presented here (texts I and II) are among the earliest surviving examples of Hampâté Bâ's efforts to communicate the teachings of Tierno Bokar in French.

¹⁰ This period of intense instruction, as well as the nature of Tierno Bokar's religious influence on Hampâté Bâ, is described in the second volume of the latter's memoirs, *Oui, mon commandant!* (Paris: Actes Sud, 1994).

¹¹ Letter from Hampâté Bâ to Monod, January 8, 1941, Fonds Monod.

¹² Letter from Hampâté Bâ to Monod, July 10, 1939, Fonds Monod.

¹³ For the content of the *ma 'd-din*, see A. Hampâté Bâ, *Vie et enseignement de Tierno Bokar, le sage de Bandiagara* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1980), translated into English as *A Spirit of Tolerance: The Inspiring Life of Tierno Bokar* (Bloomington, Ind.: World Wisdom Books, 2008); and Brenner, *West African Sufi*.

¹⁴ For a discussion of the relationship between Monod and Hampâté Bâ, see Triaud, "D'un maître à l'autre"; and Brenner, "Amadou Hampâté Bâ, Tijani francophone."

As suggested above, texts I and II have lost much of the “oral flavor” which is present in the interviews, precisely because they have been translated and committed to writing. None the less, all three texts illustrate a kind of intellectual engagement and experimentation that is markedly different from most religious works written in Arabic, which tend to be highly formulaic in style even if they often reflect profound scholarship and learning. The texts offer us an insight into the intellectual vitality that can inform the oral transmission of religious knowledge, an aspect of Islamic religious culture that has been largely unavailable to us and consequently largely ignored by students of Islam and Muslim history in Africa. And they illustrate a remarkably dynamic approach to the transmission of religious knowledge that extended over at least two generations.

The Content of the Texts: Teaching Theology by Means of Metaphors, Analogies, Numbers, and Symbols

Although the interviews took place over thirty years after the 1941 letters were written, the three texts taken together present a coherent and consistent interpretation of Islamic theology from a specific Sufi perspective, that of the Hamawiyya Sufi order. Some of the concepts that are introduced are common to most Sufi orders, whereas others are peculiar to the Tijaniyya or the Hamawiyya, and all are presented and explained in a manner that bears the mark of Tierno Bokar’s personal approach to teaching, which so profoundly influenced Amadou Hampâté Bâ in his own approach to teaching.

The style in which each man taught can be seen as an active response to the changing historical conditions in which they were living. During the nineteenth century Islam had been extended to new populations and regions of West Africa by militant jihad, but by the early decades of the twentieth century, widespread conversion was beginning to proceed by more peaceful, voluntary means. These developments were accompanied by educational initiatives intended both to transmit a basic knowledge of Islam to converts and to deepen the religious understanding and commitment of existing Muslim populations.

Tierno Bokar was an active participant in these initiatives. His invention of the *ma ’d-din* was initially designed to teach the fundamentals of Islam to new Muslim converts, especially Dogon. However, he also used the same method for teaching Muslims who did not have an opportunity to pursue formal studies, especially women. The *ma ’d-din*

was an oral teaching in the Fulfulde language, addressed to those who would be unlikely ever to learn Arabic. From Hampâté Bâ's accounts, it seems probable that Tierno decided to transmit this teaching to him for the same reasons: to deepen his understanding of and commitment to Islam. Tierno's subsequent authorization for Hampâté Bâ to transmit the teaching in French can be seen as part of the same pattern of seeking to spread a deeper knowledge of Islam to a broader population of Muslims.

The Sufi orders were affected by social forces similar to those that were shaping the broader contours of Muslim society and culture in West Africa, where in earlier centuries the practice of Sufism had been largely limited to the scholarly classes. Sufism (*tasawwuf*) was a subject of academic study undertaken at the most advanced levels of the classical religious curriculum when students read the books of the great Sufi masters, such as al-Ghazzali and Ibn al-'Arabi. Tijani students would also read the biography of Ahmad al-Tijani, the founder of the order, and the *Rimah* of al-Hajj 'Umar Tal, who was the primary catalyst for the spread of the Tijaniyya Sufi order in West Africa in the nineteenth century, and also the uncle of Tierno Bokar.¹⁵ But an advanced student's engagement with Sufism was both academic and "practical." *Tasawwuf* is the quest for inner purity, the internalization and actualization in everyday life of the religious principles that one has learned, and for this the student would become affiliated with and practice the spiritual exercises prescribed by one or more of the Sufi orders.¹⁶

By the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries adherence to the Sufi orders was no longer limited to the scholarly classes. In a movement initiated in large part by the leadership of the Tijaniyya, affiliation to the orders became increasingly more accessible to the wider Muslim population and to persons whose only formal religious schooling may have been no more than a few years in a Qur'anic school as a young child, which of course was the case with Hampâté Bâ.

The three texts presented here are examples of how Sufi concepts and

¹⁵ The *Rimah* of al-Hajj 'Umar (*Rimah hizb al-rahim 'ala nuhur hizb al-rajim*) is published in the margins of 'Ali Harazim's *Jawahir al-ma'ani wa-bulugh al-amani* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), which is a biography (hagiography) of Ahmad al-Tijani. For the influential career of al-Hajj 'Umar, see D. Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal: The Western Sudan in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985).

¹⁶ For an overview of Sufi concept and practice in Africa, see L. Brenner, "Sufism in Africa," in *African Spirituality*, ed. J. Olupona (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 324–49.

teachings were transmitted orally to audiences of non-scholars. The aim of both Tierno Bokar and Amadou Hampâté Bâ was to speak to people in a language they understood, in the Fulfulde and French languages respectively, but also at a level of discourse that they understood. According to Hampâté Bâ, Tierno was guided in his teaching by a hadith in which the Prophet is reported to have said: “One must speak to people according to the level of their understanding.” For Tierno, a person’s understanding was formed through personal experience: experience drawn from one’s social environment and from the events of daily life.

Many examples have been published of how Tierno employed his observations of the world around him as analogies and metaphors to illustrate religious concepts.¹⁷ We see in the interviews how Hampâté Bâ adopted a similar approach, using analogies and metaphors drawn from life experience, as well as geometrical symbols and numerological calculations, as a means to explain theological concepts. As he explained, “This is a teaching. It is a pedagogical expression to help a man to grasp what otherwise he is unable to understand. The symbol is not a truth in itself, but a means for us to grasp an abstract idea.” Such “pedagogical expressions” often contain several different levels of meaning, each of which can be introduced according to the “level of understanding” of those receiving the teaching.

But if the form of their teaching was the product of an age when Islam and Sufism were becoming increasingly popularized, and perhaps more significantly, when profound social and political changes were sweeping through the region, the content of their teaching remained embedded in an esoteric understanding of the nature of knowledge and its transmission.

According to this esoteric epistemology, all knowledge, like all creation, is perceived as a unified whole which has its ultimate source in God and is divided into that which is manifest and visible to human beings (the *zahir*) and that which is hidden (the *batin*). Knowledge, again like creation, is thus ordered in a kind of hierarchy: the closer its proximity to its source in God, the more “hidden,” or esoteric, it is. The source itself, however, remains unknown to us; text II opens with the statement that “the divine essence is inscrutable. . . . It encompasses a very holy and completely sealed mystery.” The text further asserts that one can know God only through His attributes, a concept which is at the foundation of

¹⁷ Examples are to be found in many of Hampâté Bâ’s writings, but see especially *Vie et enseignement (A Spirit of Tolerance)*; see also Brenner, *West African Sufi*.

the kind of reasoning and explication by analogy that is characteristic of an esoteric epistemology.

These variations in the nature of knowledge, whether manifest or hidden, determine the possibility of its acquisition and how it can be transmitted. Manifest knowledge is acquired through the intellect, but hidden, esoteric knowledge is acquired through a process of direct experience that is not mediated by the intellect. For example, we read in text II:

One can observe Allah only through the eyes of the spirit and of faith. This is what justifies the creation of the theory of existence by those who seek God by following the mystical path.

Several references are made in these texts to the hidden knowledge that is accessible only to those who are “pure in spirit.” Spiritual purity is not a given; it must be sought through the prayers, recitations, meditations, and other spiritual exercises of the Sufi orders. Sufi guides or teachers cannot transmit the more hidden forms of esoteric knowledge; they can only help their disciples to prepare themselves possibly to receive it. Finally, according to this epistemology, all knowledge is not equally accessible to all persons. The transmission of knowledge, as well as the preparation to receive esoteric knowledge, is a personal, initiatic process that takes place between an individual who has been authorized to teach and a student or disciple who is deemed worthy to receive.¹⁸

Our three texts are rich examples of a Muslim teaching that is rooted in an esoteric epistemology. Texts I and II both focus on *rumzu*, defined here as the Muslim “science of numbers” or numerology. Text I offers both an explanation and a justification for the practice of *rumzu*, and text II illustrates the application of *rumzu* to the analysis of basic theological concepts from a Sufi perspective and concludes with a discussion of mystical meanings associated with the number 11, which is of course of major significance in the Hamawiyya Sufi order, the so-called “eleven-bead” branch of the Tijaniyya order to which first Tierno Bokar and then Hampâté Bâ gave their allegiance. This text is a consummate expression of the quest

¹⁸ For a fuller discussion of the esoteric epistemology, see Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge*, 6ff. See also L. Brenner, “The Transformation of Muslim Schooling in Mali: The Madrasa as an Institution of Social and Religious Mediation,” in *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education*, ed. Robert Hefner and Muhammad Qasim (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007), 217ff.

to engage with the mystery of the Divine from a Sufi perspective, to try to approach what is “hidden” (the *batin*) by understanding and engaging with what is “manifest” (the *zahir*).

In other words, *rumzu* is employed here as a pedagogical tool for the intellectual transmission of knowledge or, as Hampâté Ba expressed it, “to help a man to grasp what otherwise he is unable to understand.” Tierno Bokar applied the principles of *rumzu* to all aspects of his teaching. His formal oral teaching consisted of three lessons, the first of which was the *ma`d-din*. Each lesson was accompanied by a mnemonic diagram that was informed by the analogical reasoning characteristic of an esoteric epistemology. The third lesson, entitled “Synthesis of the Esoteric Teaching,” can be read as a kind of intellectual introduction or accompaniment to the Sufi quest for inner purification.¹⁹

Texts I and II demonstrate the central role that numerological and symbolic reflection occupied in Tierno Bokar’s understanding of Islam and of Sufism, and they explain the prominence that *rumzu* would assume in the way in which Hampâté Bâ would understand and teach about Islam. In this, as in so much else, he seems to have been trying to follow the guidance of his teacher. His own most extensive published reflections on numerology are to be found in *Jésus vu par un musulman*, but many more examples appear in the interviews presented here.

Hampâté Bâ’s deep interest in *rumzu* may be yet another reason why contemporary scholars, both Muslim and non-Muslim, have found it difficult to approach him seriously as a Muslim thinker. Some of his numerological musings in *Jésus vu par un musulman* have given many readers pause for thought, and one Malian critic complained to me that his numerological manipulations seemed primarily aimed at mystifying his audience. These attitudes reflect the extent to which esoteric epistemologies have become marginalized in Africa (and elsewhere). Given this fact, Hampâté Bâ’s persistence in transmitting the religious knowledge that he had received from Tierno Bokar in the form in which he had received it, regardless of the many criticisms that he brought upon himself by doing so, is further evidence of his profound loyalty to his teacher.

Despite its marginalization, *rumzu* in its various forms continues to be a significant component of Islamic religious culture in Africa, as it has

¹⁹ See Hampâté Bâ, *Vie et enseignement*, especially the section entitled “L’enseignement,” 191ff.; *A Spirit of Tolerance*, the section entitled “His Teachings,” 163ff.

been in the past, and is therefore deserving of serious attention.²⁰ *Rumzu* and the practices associated with it have been applied in many ways, for example, in the manufacture of protective talismans, for predictive purposes, for healing, and so forth. All these practices and applications are informed by the same underlying principle of the unity of God and of His creation, outlined above. Thus, the patterns of relationships that one finds among numbers, like everything else in the created world, are seen as expressions of divine laws, laws which may not be immediately evident to us but which nonetheless exist and bring order into the world in which we live. Viewed from this perspective, *rumzu* can be seen to be but one form of the kind of analogical reasoning and teaching method that can be produced by an esoteric epistemology.

The interviews illustrate how Hampâté Bâ employed different metaphors and analogies in an effort to explain a single theological concept from several different perspectives. For example, an idea central in his thinking is that everything existing in the created universe consists of a combination of both spirit and matter. This idea is first illustrated by means of various simple numerological manipulations and mathematical calculations: the number 1 represents pure spirit, God, as well as the uniqueness of the Divine, and the number 9 represents pure matter. The intervening numbers between 1 and 9 represent differing proportions of the mixture of spirit and matter in all created entities between these two extremes.

The proportion of “spirit” that is present in any created entity is said to determine its capacity for “movement” (*haraka*), or its capacity for transformation, such as its potential for growth and reproduction, and in the case of human beings, for work and effort, an idea that is elaborated with reference to the hierarchy of the “three kingdoms,” animal, vegetable, and mineral. The inanimate mineral kingdom contains the least proportion of “spirit,” and can only be transformed by being “worked on,” as when iron ore is smelted to produce iron. The plants of the vegetable kingdom have the capacity to transform themselves through growth and reproduction, but they do not have the capacity for independent movement. Members of the animal kingdom can also grow and reproduce, and they possess the

²⁰ Although condemned by some Muslim scholars as illicit innovations, numerology and other esoteric practices constituted a significant factor in the dissemination of Islamic religious culture in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as elsewhere in the Muslim world. See, for example, Constant Hamès, ed., *Coran et talismans: Textes et pratiques magiques en milieu musulman* (Paris: Karthala, 2007); and L. Brenner, *Réflexions sur le savoir islamique en Afrique de l'Ouest* (Centre d'Étude d'Afrique Noire, University of Bordeaux I, 1985).

additional capacity to move of their own accord. The potential for purposeful movement, *haraka*, for work and effort, gives human beings the possibility for the spiritual development that is the aim of all Sufis.

On a subsequent occasion, the concept of the mixture of spirit and matter is introduced from a different perspective. In a discussion of the symbolism of the phrase *bismillah* (in the name of God), Hampâté Bâ illustrates how the letters of these Arabic words are a metaphorical representation of the act of divine creation, which he describes as the materialization of an emanation from “God as Light.” As the divine Light of creation descends (represented by a vertical line), it becomes increasingly materialized and concentrates in the point beneath the initial letter of *bismillah* (the *ba'*), from where the material world (represented by a horizontal line) emanates to form the three kingdoms of the created world, represented symbolically by the three “teeth” of the second letter of *bismillah*, the *sin*.

The opening lines of text II state that divine light is the active creative force that gives life to the universe and that its influence in the created world is mediated through the name Allah.

The divine essence is inscrutable . . . It is surrounded by a light that appears to us through the mysterious substances that flow from the sacred name [Allah].

This name springs forth from the light of the essence in order to give life to the Universe, and its numerous refractions constitute the divine attributes governing the contingent world.

Later in the text, we read:

. . . the existence of nature in its entirety is manifested through the effect of the attributes of God, which are related to the name “Allah.”

The central aim of text II is to demonstrate what one can learn about God and his creation through the study of his name in its various metaphorical and symbolic manifestations. For example, the name Allah can be represented by the number 66, which is the sum obtained by adding the numerical value of the four letters that constitute the word Allah.²¹ The number 66 is also obtained by adding the “mystical lights” of the numbers 1 – 2 – 3,

²¹ According to Muslim numerology, each Arabic letter has a numerical value; the addition of these values in the name “Allah” produces the number 66.

which represent three dimensions of existence, respectively divine existence, the creation of humankind, and the future life of reunion with God.

The name Allah can also be represented geometrically as a hexagram, or six-pointed star. The six-pointed star is produced by the interlacing of two triangles, also derived from the letters of the name Allah: the first triangle is formed by the last letter of the name, the *ha'*, and the second triangle by the first three letters: *alif*, *lam*, *lam*. The symbol of the hexagram is employed in various ways to explore and to explain aspects of the unity of creation and the relationship of this unity to the name Allah; taken together, these symbolic demonstrations can be understood as a commentary on the statement quoted above that “nature in its entirety is manifested through the effect of the attributes of God, which are related to the name ‘Allah.’”

The hexagram is also a symbolic representation of the relationship between the hidden and the manifest, and by extension, between the spiritual and the material. Hampâté Bâ asserts that the movements performed during *salat* (prayer) inscribe a hexagram in the space occupied by the person praying, who thus represents the name Allah with his or her body. Each *raka'* (prostration) of the *salat* consists of movements that form two triangles, the first while standing, the second while kneeling on the ground. The first of these triangles is described as “celestial” and the second as “terrestrial.” “The celestial triangle descends upon the terrestrial triangle to form the six-pointed star, or the name of God.” Elsewhere, it is said that the two triangles symbolize respectively “the knowledge of the essence, of which Allah is the sole possessor,” and “contingent knowledge, which we acquire here [in this life], either through divine gift or by sustained effort.”

The Content of the Texts: The Sufi Quest: Haraka, Work, and Effort

“Sustained effort” refers to the work of the Sufi quest. As Hampâté Bâ explains, during *salat* as the body traces the name of God through the movements of the prayer, and the mouth enunciates the name, one can try at the same time to be conscious of the name in one’s thought. He calls this “the work of the *raka'*.” Awareness of the meaning of the words being recited during prayer is an example of *haraka*, the movement or purposeful effort that is essential to any possible spiritual development.

However, not everyone is capable of this kind of effort, even though they may possess the potential for it. For this reason, concentration on the meaning of one’s prayers during recitation is one of the “optional”

obligations for all Tijani Sufis, optional in the sense that it is expected only of those who are able to do it. In the Tijaniyya, according to Hampâté Bâ, one is expected to do as much as possible, and the more one can do, the greater the benefits. He notes that a person can recite their prayers automatically or absentmindedly, but in such a case only the body “listens.” However, if one attends to the sound of the words that the mouth is enunciating, the intelligence also comes to listen, resulting in a greater inner harmony. And if the person who is praying can also concentrate on the meaning of the words while they are being recited, then the divine spirit that is in one comes to listen. “It is the particle of God, . . . the divine atom that is within you” that listens. This kind of complete engagement with one’s prayers and devotional exercises produces what Hampâté Bâ calls a greater presence (*hudur*); one is more present to oneself and to God.

Sufis seek to achieve a greater proximity to God;²² the Sufi *tariqa* or Way is often described as the path that leads toward God. In the preceding example, Hampâté Bâ is suggesting that a greater proximity to God can take place through the mediation of the divine particle that is within oneself. Elsewhere, he speaks of “receiving God in the heart,” an imagery that implies that this proximity comes by opening to God, who is external to oneself. Both these views have their foundation in Muslim theology. That God is completely “Other” from the human being is a central tenet in Muslim theology. This idea is reflected throughout our texts, especially with respect to any possible knowledge of God: that God can be known only through his attributes, and that the Divine Essence is unknowable. However, according to some Sufis, God has placed within each human being a particle of the divine Spirit, which longs to be reunited with its Source. But this movement of “return” is possible only if the divine particle is liberated from the constraints imposed upon it by the nature of its human host.

The work of the Sufi adherent is directed toward removing these constraints; it is a work on oneself, the work of “inner purification” that is comprised both of devotional exercises and of the *jihad al-nafs*, or “struggle against oneself,” which Hampâté Bâ describes in some detail. This work prepares the Sufi adherent to open to God; it prepares the ground to receive what can only come from God: one “receives” God in the heart; the divine spirit “comes to listen.”

²² In fact, the emphasis in most West African Sufi orders is placed on achieving a greater proximity to the Prophet Muhammad as intermediary between man and God. Hampâté Bâ’s focus on an adherent’s direct relationship with God is therefore worthy of note.

Once again, Hampâté Bâ's explanations of the nature of this work and its effects resonate with other themes that he addresses. For example, he demonstrates how the efforts of the Sufi adherent are simultaneously directed both inward and outward, recalling the notion of the hidden and the manifest. For example, when performing *salat*, one tries to concentrate outwardly on the required movements and recitations of the obligatory prayers and inwardly on the meaning of those prayers. Each level of additional concentration brings what he describes as a greater inner harmony and a greater presence to the divine particle that is within oneself; one is therefore better prepared to "receive God in the heart."

The *jihad al-nafs* also demands that attention be directed toward both the inner and the outer. The *jihad al-nafs* might be described as the moral component of the Sufi quest: the personal internalization of the moral tenets of Islam through the struggle against one's own faults and weaknesses. But moral rectitude and doctrinal conformity are the external, outer aims of the *jihad al-nafs*. The inner aim is the liberation of the divine particle that is within one from the constraints of the "carnal soul," the *nafs*.

According to Hampâté Bâ's description, these constraints extend well beyond one's moral behavior. The vocabulary that he employs to describe this "struggle against oneself" reflects its demanding nature: readiness, wakefulness, attentiveness, and watchfulness. It is a struggle to know and accept the truth about oneself; a struggle against love of material things, but also against spiritual ambition. It demands vigilance: one must be constantly aware that one is engaged in this struggle, always ready, always awake to what one does and awake to how what others do affects oneself so as not to react precipitately and inappropriately. In other words, the *jihad al-nafs* demands a constant inner presence to oneself, a presence that one is helped to acquire through one's devotional exercises.

Significantly, in his discussions of the devotional practices of the Sufis, Hampâté Bâ places primary emphasis on the representation of God through his name, Allah. For him, the most effective way fully to "receive God in the heart" is the recitation of the *kalima*, *la ilaha illa Allah* (There is no god but God). He explains how in his own meditations he placed the name Allah in his heart by envisaging each of the four letters of the name in the four cavities of his heart. He also describes how some Sufis increase their concentration on the name Allah by accompanying their recitation of the *kalima* with specific movements of the head. Tierno Bokar had recommended that people write the name Allah above their bed so that it would

be the first thing they see in the morning upon awakening and the last they see at night before falling asleep. Such religious exercises, he explains, produce an inner refinement by increasing one's inner "vibrations."

These devotional exercises, in which the central feature is concentration on the name Allah, complement the pedagogical methods that are employed to explain intellectually the nature of God and his creation through symbolic and metaphorical permutations of the name Allah. Such prayers and meditations explore the power and mystery of the name through the personal experience that arises from one's efforts and actions. These and other spiritual exercises of the Sufis are vehicles for the acquisition of a "knowledge" that is not mediated through the intellect, but which is internalized and "embodied" through the purposeful movement of *haraka*, the conscious efforts of the adherent.

Concluding Remarks

Following my presentation at the Leiden colloquium, a question was raised about which of the religious ideas that Hampâté Bâ addressed in the interviews, if any, was original with him. There is no suggestion anywhere in the available evidence that he was seeking to be either original or creative in the religious concepts that he sought to transmit. Quite the contrary, in fact; his aim, like that of any Muslim religious teacher, was to keep alive and to transmit as accurately as possible the content of the teaching he had received from Tierno Bokar. Of course, the efficacy with which any teacher is able to do this varies considerably, even if the aim remains constant.

But for a Sufi adherent like Hampâté Bâ, and Tierno Bokar before him, an effective teacher is more than the faithful transmitter of religious concepts and doctrine. The teacher, or Sufi guide, is meant to have internalized these teachings and to live by them in everyday life; he is meant to be both a guide and an example for his followers. Although it would be unwise to venture a judgment about the extent to which someone has "internalized" such teachings, Hampâté Bâ did confide in me on one occasion that there were times when he was no longer sure which were Tierno's ideas and which were his own. From the perspective of the Sufi quest, this observation might be considered evidence for the success of both the teacher and the disciple; it suggests that Hampâté Bâ had thoroughly absorbed Tierno's teachings and made them his own, making it possible for him to

transmit the teachings to others “from himself.” His consummate ability to do this is clearly illustrated in the interviews.

On the other hand, by translating into French the teachings that he had received and by committing an essentially oral teaching to writing, Hampâté Bâ was certainly innovative in his methods and in the audiences that he chose to address. But as we have tried to demonstrate above, this was a change in form, not in content. These changes were his response to the constraints, and opportunities, of the social environment in which he lived and worked. In this, too, he was following the example of Tierno Bokar, who had invented his own methods for teaching the esoteric dimensions of Islam and of Sufism orally to the population among whom he lived. And indeed, Tierno encouraged him to innovate in this manner; he had identified Hampâté Bâ as someone who could effectively pass on this teaching in a new form, and he made a special effort to prepare him for this task.

When interviewed in 1978, it was forty years since Tierno Bokar had died and over thirty-five years since Hampâté Bâ had translated and committed to writing the 1941 texts. Although he had therefore been exploring these ideas for many years, the reader should keep in mind that his observations during the interviews were entirely extemporaneous. Having themselves been committed to writing, the transcripts cannot possibly convey to a reader the atmosphere of the interviews, in which the conversation was constantly moving from one, often unrelated, subject to another, nor how Hampâté Bâ was able to discuss each topic in considerable depth and detail almost without a pause for reflection. Clearly, he possessed both a sound knowledge of the subjects about which he spoke and the sensitivity and flexibility to be able to speak in a manner that those listening could understand. The interviews illustrate something of the subtlety, complexity, and even the elegance that can be achieved through an oral teaching in which analogy, symbol, and number are juxtaposed in various combinations and complement one another in an effort to demonstrate the content and interrelationship of what are often very abstract ideas. Perhaps even more remarkable is how the content of these reflections forms a coherent whole. All the concepts, ideas, and explanations relate to one another with an internal consistency that one usually finds only in a carefully prepared written text. Hampâté Bâ’s intelligence, memory, and ability to communicate were nothing short of extraordinary. He was a living confirmation of the validity of his own well-known dictum that “in Africa when an old man dies, it is as if a library has burned down.”

I. *On Rumzu*

[Excerpt from a letter written by Hampâté Bâ to Théodore Monod, January 8, 1941, in response to comments made by Louis Massignon about the possible theosophical and other European influences in the text of the *ma 'd-din*, a part of which Hampâté Bâ had translated into French.]²³

... This work [of translation into French] was not done all at once, and I think it might be of interest to explain to you how we proceeded in deciding on the three principal theosophical terms: “Material – Astral – Spiritual.”

It is my uncle [Tierno Bokar] who speaks here (and my remarks are in parentheses).

Our teaching of the science of numbers is called *rumzu*. (An Arabic word that is best translated into French as *cryptographie* [cryptography].) All religions have their *rumzu*, so why shouldn't the Muslims have theirs? And especially us, the adepts of the Tijani Way, who are the most modern, the most rationalist and the most eclectic of Muslims.

Rumzu can be:

1. a combination of letters from the alphabet of a language;
2. more or less unusual signs obtained by the ingenious interweaving of lines;
3. or represented by the nine mother numbers developed to infinity (1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9).

The three systems are analogous to one another and correspond in the meanings of the secret that they conceal.

There are two major divisions of *rumzu*: the Divine and the human.

Human *rumzu* is a symbol, a receptacle that contains or that can encapsulate a mystery that discriminating Masters have deemed it appropriate not

²³ Massignon was a preeminent French scholar of Islam and Sufism who suggested to Monod that the text contained European theosophical references and was unlikely to have been composed independently by an African Muslim. See Triaud, “D’un maître à l’autre.”

to make available to everyone. It is sometimes a means of communication and of recognition among the adepts of the same congregation, etc.

Every *rumzu*, either graphic or numerical, that is contained in one of the Revealed books of the three great Religions is Divine.

Every word whose meaning shocks the intelligence, if it is contained in a Revealed book, is *rumzu*.

Divine *rumzu* is an enigma with which the Divinity confronts us in order to stimulate our mind to work, to explore, so that in every age the human mind uncovers a marvel. Every effort opens a door for us that leads to the Truth and that establishes in us the conviction of the Existence of the Necessary Being: God.

The knowledge of *rumzu* prevents our faith from being shaken.

The most engaging, the most mysterious *rumzu*, and the one most likely to give us an idea of the Immensity of Divine Infinity is the *rumzu* of numbers. We must believe that God only swore “in the Qur’an” by the numbers because of the mystical power that it pleased Him to place in them.

The *rumzu* of numbers, like everything that relates to the Divinity and to mysticism, consists of three major divisions, which are none other than the states through which the human soul passes successively:

- a. The first part of *rumzu* is analogous to the intermediate state of our present (corporeal) life, from which we take the word *jassadi*, “of the body” (which I translated with the word “material”).
- b. The second part is analogous to the intermediary state between the contingent life here below, and the real and eternal life of the beyond. This state begins on the day one is buried and ends on the day of resurrection. Traditionalists do not agree about where the soul resides during this time; some contend that it is in one of the seven heavens. In this state, the soul is clearly comparable to a star, from which we take the word *kawkabi* (from the word “star,” which I have translated as “astral”).
- c. The third part of *rumzu* is analogous to the immutable, that is, the immortal state. In effect, the Divine Verdict, according to the weight of one’s good and bad actions, establishes the eternal sojourn; it is the recompense. It places

the blessed in a state of pure spirit, enabling them to contemplate the Divinity in all Its Majestic and Mysterious glory. In this state, the human becomes entirely spirit; it is *Ruhi*, the spirit (which I chose to translate with the French word “spiritual”).

This is the end of the remarks of my uncle. Such is the work of transcription that my uncle and I did together.

II. Notes on a Discovery by [Working With] Numbers

In the name of God, the Merciful and Compassionate.

O God! Pour out Your grace and peace upon our Lord Muhammad, who opened that which was shut and who sealed that which came before, who makes truth triumph through the Truth and who guides on the path of rectitude, and (pour out Your grace) also on his family according to their merit and the immense measure due to them.²⁴

Oh God! There is neither Knowledge nor Power except in You.

What follows is from the teaching received from my initiator, the rightly guided of pure spirit of a higher level.

I submit this text for the consideration of my master and friend, M. Th. Monod, who adores God in spirit and in truth, and who knows how to identify the indisputable light regardless of the colors it may take on when refracted through the prism of religions.

The Divine Essence

The divine essence is inscrutable. There is no benefit from trying to identify it. It encompasses a very holy and completely sealed mystery. It is surrounded by a light that appears to us through the mysterious substances that flow from the sacred name.

This name springs forth from the light of the essence in order to give life to the Universe, and its numerous refractions constitute the divine attributes governing the contingent world.

The divine creative force, which causes being to appear from

²⁴ This prayer is the *salat al-fatih*, which is part of the Tijani *wird*, or liturgy. The English translation given here follows the French wording that appears in text II, which varies slightly from that in Hampâté Bâ, *Vie et enseignement*, 231 (*A Spirit of Tolerance*, 201).

non-being, is found in its entirety in a sentence that God need only enunciate in order for His will to be accomplished, as quick as the wink of an eye.

The divine Essence is unchanging in time, space, and in number. It is eternal. Its existence is without any cause external to itself.

It has been, it is, and it will be.

This [threefold] state demonstrates that, without ceasing to be unique, the existence of the Supreme Being, our God the Eternal, rests upon a triad, the precise spiritual name of which is “trinity.” The exclusive secret of this trinity will forever remain divine and unfathomable.

This threefold state recalls a secret of the trinity that exists at the foundation of all religions, and most especially of the three great Eastern monotheisms: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Divine existence in the past is a fact of which neither the origin nor how it came about can be explained. This existence, which is the cause of all that exists, is symbolized by the first irreducible and indivisible number, 1. In fact, God was One before the creation of contingent beings. He was this solitary “1,” found at the origin of everything, without ceasing to be the cause of everything, without compromising His exaltedness.

God created humankind and he breathed into them a particle of the secret of life, of which He is the source. Through this action, [this particle] exists in us as a second existence, which can be symbolized by the number 2.

The future life, which will result in our reunion with God, will be for mankind existence 2, and for God, existence 3.

To make this intelligible to us, these three phases of divine existence are symbolized by the numbers 1–2–3.

These three numbers are meant to contain the secret of everything: past, present, and future, that is, of Eternity, to which the master gave the name: Eternal. By placing these three numbers alongside one another, we obtain the number 123. What is 123?

It is the value of the impenetrable mystery, of *ma’iyyat Allah*: divine essence. The value of these nine Arabic letters, taken from right to left, is:

$$40 + 1 + 1 + 10 + 5 + 1 + 30 + 30 + 5 = 123$$

It was said above that the Essence is surrounded by a name, which is a light, and it is this name that we must know. It is equal to the numerical value of the light that emanates from the Essence. This light is represented by the [mystical] lights of the elements 1–2–3.

Considering that the mystical light of each of the first nine numbers is obtained by duplicating the given number and placing the two digits side

by side, then the [mystical] light of 1 will be 11, that of 2, 22, and that of 3, 33.

The light springing forth from the divine Essence will be, numerically, $11 + 22 + 33 = 66$.

What is 66? It is the value of the four letters chosen from ancient times to name the divinity in the Arabic language, predestined to serve God for speaking to the world through the mediation of Muhammad (peace be upon him). 66 is the numerical value of the name Allah. [$1 + 30 + 30 + 5 = 66$].

According to the secret correspondence of the letters of the alphabet to the elements, the four letters of the name of Allah are found in the signs of water and fire. The two *lam* are of water, and the *alif* and *ha'* are of fire. This corresponds to the water and the fire of life.

The water of life, which is contained in the Divine name, is written in numbers by 60 (each of the two *lam* equals 30), and the symbolic fire by the number 6 (*ha'* = 5, *alif* = 1).

Man comes from water and his occult principle is: ADAM, which equals 45, and EVE [*Hawa*], which equals 15 (i.e., $45 + 15 = 60$).

And the celestial fire that drives away and burns those who violate the celestial secrets is symbolized by the number 6, sign of divine work, which corresponds numerically to the hexagram [six-pointed star], graphic symbol of the name Allah. This name is the great mystery, the alpha and omega of the world, the foundation of the Universe.

Now that we have obtained the Divine name, its numerical value, and its numerical and linear signs, it will no longer be very difficult to study it with reference to the general harmony and correspondences by means of analogy.

The Name

Of all words, the name is that which contains the greatest mystery and is thus the most charged with mystical power.

The doctors of the inner way who have reflected attentively on divine matters, not visually, but by means of the eyes of the spirit, and who have felt the unity of truth in all its universal beauty and grandeur, are unanimous in claiming that the word that serves to designate animal, vegetable, or mineral contains in abbreviated form the secrets of the essence of this animal, vegetable, or mineral.

Surely, a being without a name appears to be nonexistent, because the human mind finds it difficult to represent to itself the image of something

without a name. It is an entity lost in chaos. Similarly, man, the masterpiece of creation, cannot but feel the need to have a name for himself and to name the other created beings that surround him.

Baptism, both religious and secular, testifies to the importance that we attach to the name.

We can also mention the need we feel to know the name of people and objects that we see for the first time.

The names of [created] beings are as many as are the reflections that contain the virtues of the attributes of the name Allah.

In order for a being to depart from the chaos, in order for the mind to be able to represent the being to itself, it must be named, or to put it another way, it must receive a luminous ray from one of the divine attributes. From this we derive tangible proof that the existence of nature in its entirety is manifested through the effect of the attributes of God, which are related to the name "Allah." He is the foundation of the Universe, and outside of Him nothing either sacred or secret exists. No human being can plumb the depths of all the secrets of this name.

Those who have been initiated rely upon two facts to relate the name to the essence of the mystery of being:

1. God chose for Himself the Most Beautiful Names to express the attributes of His being.
2. The Qur'an reveals to us that as a special favor Adam, the first man, received from the Creator the privilege by virtue of which all the heavenly spirits were invited to bow down before him as testimony to his precedence over them, regardless of their private thoughts.

We think it useful to cite the Qur'anic passage:

"And He taught Adam all the names, then showed them to the angels, saying: Inform Me of the names of these, if ye are truthful" (II, 31).²⁵

The stupefied angels returned to their Master and sincerely repented, as is said in the Qur'an:

"They said [the angels]: Be glorified! We have no knowledge saving that which Thou hast taught us. Lo! Thou, only Thou, art the Knower, the Wise" (II, 32).

God responded to the angels as follows: "He said: O Adam! Inform

²⁵ Translations of Qur'anic verses are from the bilingual edition of *The Glorious Koran*, with English translations by Marmaduke Pickthall (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1976).

them of their names . . . (the names of all the [created] beings). He said, “Did I not tell you that I know the secret of the heavens and the earth?” (II, 33).

The words of God, “Inform them of their names . . . ,” and then, “Did I not tell you that I know the secret of the heavens and the earth?” permit us to infer that the secrets of the universe, that is of the heavens and the earth, are without doubt connected to the science of names.

We have said above that the names of beings are reflections of the divine attributes, which have their source in the name Allah. It is therefore the name Allah in Arabic that must interest us and which we are going to study “esoterically.”

A secret divine name was revealed to each of the Prophets. Still today, the believers of the three monotheistic revealed confessions are in agreement in saying that there is a hidden name for the Divinity. This name is the mainspring of the Universe.

In its essence, the divine name is ineffable. Nevertheless, two words have been chosen because of their mysterious properties to designate the divinity, and to make possible invocations that facilitate the communion between the soul and the Creator.

The first of these names is YAHWAHU (JEHOVAH), which in Arabic letters is the number 26, and the second is Allah, which in Arabic letters is the number 66.

The first of these two names is exclusively Judaic and the second specifically Islamic, which according to the Muhammadan way is the key to the revelation that confirms all previous revelations, and whose linear [geometrical] representation is the sign that seals the Universe. Full knowledge of the secrets of the name Allah, we repeat, is impossible; this would be to know the essence of God Himself.

Theology accepts that one can know three states of God, which is to say that one can know three things about the divine name.

If a name allows [one to know] the identity of the named being, this is not the case for the Eternal. One can observe Allah only through the eyes of the spirit and of faith. This is what justifies the creation of the theory of existence by those who seek God by following the mystical path.

Knowledge of existence in its entirety can be expressed through three propositions:

1. That which is possible.
2. That which is impossible.
3. That which is contingent.

For the traditionalist theologians who interpret [the texts] literally, the possible with respect to God consists of twenty-five propositions, and the impossible also consists of the same number.

Whereas the contingent is in effect either possible or impossible. It can exist or not exist.

The fifty propositions of the possible and the impossible are summarized by the first formula of the profession of faith: *la ilah illa Allah* (There is no god but God), which is written numerically as 165.

For the initiated, the three propositions have another meaning:

1. The impossible is the knowledge of the essence of Allah. It will forever remain unfathomable to every human being;
2. The possible is the knowledge that those of pure spirit can have of God;
3. The contingent is the intuition of the existence of a higher force that each rational human being possesses in himself, whatever his faith or his confession.

All men, jinns, and angels are consequently divided into two large groups:

- a. The group of those who have given the higher force the name of Allah (God);
- b. and the group of those who refuse to name it thus.

There are therefore two large families: those who confess [their faith in] God and adore Him, and those who deny and blaspheme Him.

The divine name has symbolic correspondences, of which the most widespread are linear [geometric] and numerical.

The mystery of the name Allah is made known in part:

1. By working out the value of the letters of the name itself, that is, by engaging in arithmological reflections, which one must not confuse with divination by means of numbers.
2. By the esoteric graphic representation of the Divine name: the hexagram, that is to say, two equilateral triangles interlaced with one another.

One of the two triangles represents the *ha'*, last letter of the name of Allah, and symbolizes the triangle of the knowledge of the essence, of

which Allah is the sole possessor. The other is the triangle of contingent knowledge, the one that we acquire here [in this life], either through divine gift or by sustained effort.

The two triangles united as a hexagram express perfect knowledge and symbolize, among other meanings, the name “Allah” and the seal of Solomon.

The last letter of the name Allah, *ha*’, has the letter *waw* as a sign of prolongation. The two connected together give the pronoun *huwa*, “he,” the most mystical and most mysterious in the history of Muslim mysticism. This pronoun *huwa*, which means “He,” is expressed numerically by $5 + 6 = 11$. This number is the key to the name Allah and to all mystical arithmology. When one combines the number 11 with the hexagram, one obtains the symbolic figure below, which contains the secret through which all contingent beings receive divine mercy and grace.

Also, to know the secret of the number 11 and all its symbolism is to know how to make God smile, to deserve to see Him with the eyes of the heart, and to know the law of the general movement of the Universe.

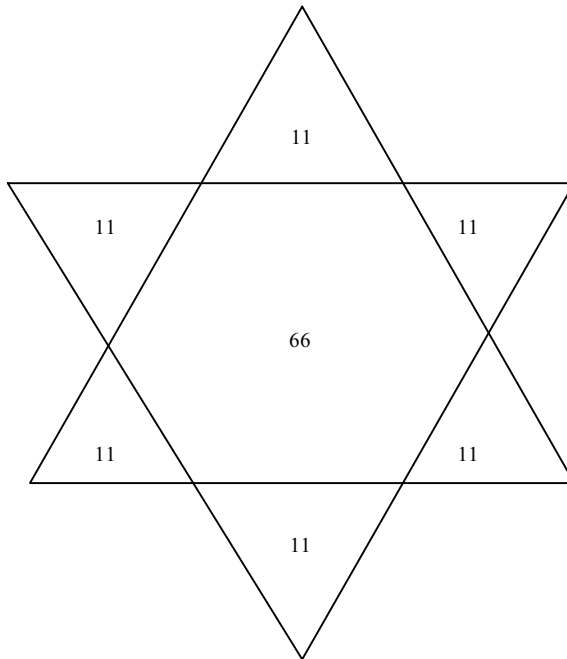


Figure 1

This figure is not only the expression of absolute knowledge, but also the symbol of divine strength and Power. It symbolizes the principle of creation, and as such it is the pentacle [talisman] that God used to seal the six points of space.

Moreover, these two interlaced triangles form seven spaces. Each of the six peripheral spaces represents one day of the creation, and the central space represents the seventh, holy, and sanctified day. This day is Saturday for the Jews, Sunday for the Christians, and Friday for the Muslims.

Combining the hexagram with the days of creation gives figure 2:

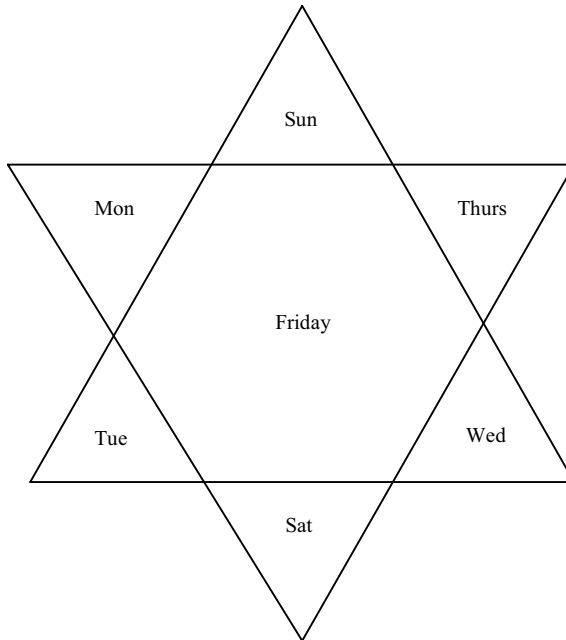


Figure 2

Figure 2 helps us to see how time, of which the day and the week are [constituent] units, is contained within the Divine name. It is well known that the Muslim year is lunar, and that the months are either 29 or 30 days in length. This difference of one day [in each month] makes the length of the Muslim year 11 days shorter than the solar year.

The following combination shows this other mystery:

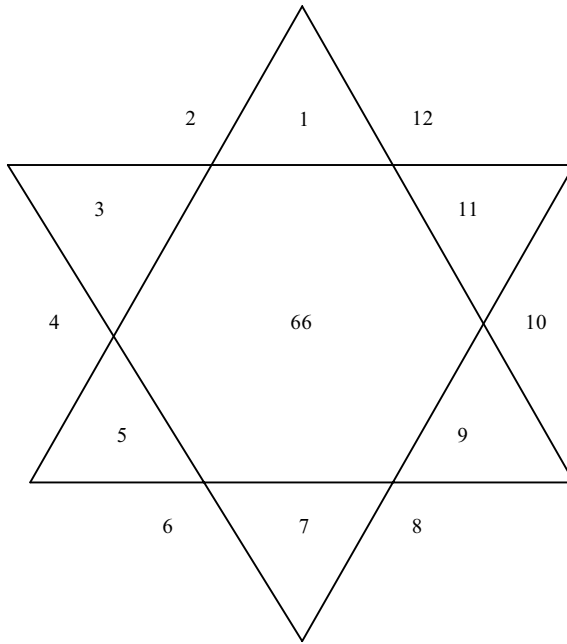


Figure 3

The twelve lunar months are divided as follows: each projecting angle of [the hexagram in] figure 3 is assigned to a month of 30 days, and each indented angle is assigned to a month of 29 days. The number 11, or the key to the mystery of this mechanism, occupies the center and transmits to the universe a considerable number of movements, of which our earth is clearly affected by 11.

In the pentacle above, the months are replaced by the numbers 1 to 12. The odd numbers are the “full” months, and the even numbers the incomplete months.

Thus, the arrangement of days, weeks, and months within the parts of the sacred hexagram gives the symbol illustrated in Figure 4.

The duration of time in our universe, that is, from Adam until the resurrection, is sealed in the pentacle [talismán] of the name above.

When the Eternal created the Universe, he placed the seven symbolic planets in the following astronomical positions:

The moon, in the 3° of Taurus

Mars in the 28° of Capricorn

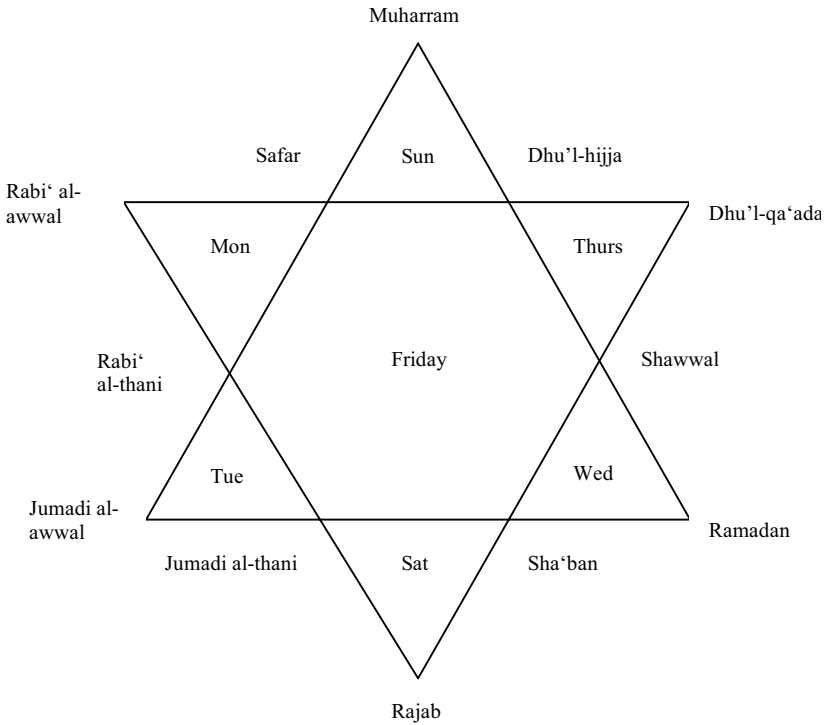


Figure 4

Mercury in the 15° of Virgo

Jupiter in the 15° of Cancer

Venus in the 27° of Pisces

Sun in the 19° of Aries

And finally, Saturn was at its culminating point, that is, in the 27° of Libra.

Time was thus fixed before it was put in motion.

It sufficed for God to command by His word, which contains the principle of all contingent existence: *كُنْ فَيَكُونُ* *Kun fa-yakun*, “Be, and it is.” Everything came to life and became a gigantic mechanism evolving in an extraordinary harmony.

This divine word is expressed in numbers by: $20 + 50 + 80 + 10 + 20 + 6 + 50 = 236$.

The reduction of this number gives the essential number: $2 + 3 + 6 = 11$.

The secret of the number 11, which embraces the entire world, has its cardinal secret in the sun of the Throne, which rules the life of our planet by its heat.

The son of the Holy Virgin, Jesus, ascended to Heaven from where he descended again, but before ascending, he entrusted 11 disciples with the spiritual power and the mystery of the hidden meaning.

All serious occultists know the power hidden in the symbolism of the number 11.

The precise consonance between the parts of the hexagram and the numbers is proof that this sign contains the secret of the Universe, the fundamental law of which is harmony, in conformity with this passage from the Qur'an:

"Allah it is Who hath created seven heavens, and of the earth, the like thereof. The commandment cometh down among them slowly, that ye may know that Allah is able to do all things, and that Allah surroundeth all things in knowledge." LXV, 12.

This verse teaches us very clearly that divine power manifests itself through harmony.

That the number 11 is the key to harmony and to the universal secret [can be shown] by adding up all the numbers from 1, unity, to the number 11, thus obtaining 66, which is the sacred name ALLAH.

It is therefore no longer surprising to see the contemplative soul of the initiate who falls into ecstasy when he articulates the divine pronoun, 11 or *huwa*, and who vibrates because of the effect of the power of this word, just like the atom vibrates under the effect of the rays of the Sun.

[Signed] Amadou Hampâté Bâ
Bamako, July 29, 1941.

III. Interviews (1978)

On Jihad Al-Nafs

[May 3, 1978] The *jihad al-nafs* is the struggle against oneself. I told you that for this, one has above all to be courageous with oneself. And man is not courageous when he faces himself. Why does man fear himself?

God was not obliged to create. He did not create in order to benefit from it. He is not like the farmer who cultivates [his land] in order to harvest [the crop] and feed himself. He accomplished His work because it pleased Him to do so.

Given that God was not forced to work, then why did He create? He created because He loved. He knew Himself, but He was alone in knowing Himself. He wanted to be known. Thus, He had to create that which was not Him in order to be known . . . Thus, the reason for our creation was love. It was God's love that caused Him to create. It was not through force, or need, or any ulterior motive. He created for love.

And He placed this love, which had caused Him to create, between the created being [man] and himself. He loved the human being, but as soon as He created him, He placed this love in him in such a way that man loves himself. Man loves himself more than anything else in the world. This is inherent to his nature. Man loves himself so completely that he deems everything associated with himself, everything that he prefers, to be the best. He wants everyone to be like him, to agree with him and never to oppose him. He loves his children because they come from him. He loves his village because it is *his* village. He loves his country because it is *his* country. Always me, me, me! That is man's love for himself . . .

That is why man fears himself, because he does not want to tell himself the truth. The *jihad al-nafs* is to struggle against that and to tell himself the truth. The *jihad al-nafs* begins with the war against oneself. There is training for this; you have to practice. For example, to tell yourself the truth, so that when you have done something wrong, you immediately ask to be forgiven. Even to your son, you have done something wrong, you recognize that you have done something wrong, and you ask to be forgiven. Sometimes that is very difficult. But you begin with what is easier, with children or those close to you, and little by little, little by little, it is possible.

Also, man reacts very strongly to any kind of reprimand. When someone reprimands you, for whatever it might be, right away a defensiveness appears, which can become quite aggressive, or at the least produce a disagreeable response. Understand? But you do that instinctively, without knowing it . . .

Someone says something that hurts you; then you struggle, you accept it, not because of cowardice, but because you accept it for yourself. The *jihad al-nafs* is the struggle against these bad reactions and support for good reactions.

That is the *jihad al-nafs*. And so it continues, continues, and now you reach the stage of meditation. Because at first one must struggle against

love for material things, and then one struggles against love of spiritual things, because that is even more dangerous. Always asking, “Have I not advanced, have I not succeeded? I am not succeeding.” It is Satan who encourages you to say that . . . Temptation accompanies man to the highest degrees [of the spiritual path]; one can become *qutb*,²⁶ and still temptation is following you. Temptation continues as long as one breathes. As long as one is breathing, Satan still has hope. One says to oneself that even with my last breath, Satan is always going to be with me. It is only at the moment that one does this . . . [he sighs deeply] that he says, “Ouf, it is finished!”

That is why one must be vigilant all the time, all the time, all the time. And one must always be fearful, not the fear of cowardice, but a kind of apprehensiveness. It has been said that one must not trust totally in God. This statement seems blasphemous, but in reality, no. If you have total trust in God, you will say: I cannot do anything wrong; that is a total trust in God, and it is very dangerous. Because when the day comes that He does something to you, you will say, “How could God have done that to me?” That is why one must trust in God without trusting in Him. That is the confusion of the intellect [*l’embarras des intelligences*]. One must be bewildered by God. God is the confusion of the intellect; and one must be bewildered, that is, to have total trust in Him and totally to distrust Him. This contradictory statement is difficult for a Cartesian mind! . . .

We must be sure that God loves us, because if He did not love us, He would not have created us. Thus, we must love Him, because He is our Creator. He assures our life; He gives us many things, such as the four basic elements, water, air, fire, and earth . . .

Therefore, you engage in your struggle, the *jihad al-nafs*, in all these ways. And you wait for whatever God gives you, but this does not prohibit you from doing everything that God has commanded you to do. But don’t expect to see any result right away, because no one can force the hand of God. Nor must one show any disappointment in God because He has not answered. Sometimes He can respond to you without your being aware of it . . .

[A Sufi disciple] must always be ready, that is, he must not forget that he is always engaged in the *jihad al-nafs*. He must also be awake to what he does and what is done to him. He must be fully attentive, fully

²⁶ *Qutb* is the Sufi designation for an individual of exceptionally elevated and venerated spiritual rank, and can be translated as “pole” or “spiritual pole.”

focused, exactly like the hunter when he loads his gun when he is hunting. Something happens to you; instead of reacting, you must first control yourself in order to know: “Is this how I should respond to that?” It is very difficult, because sometimes responses come out of us without our knowing anything at all about it. We are not in harmony with our intellect. It is only later that our intellect tells us “You have done something wrong.”

But by watching, watching his body . . . I will take al-Hajj ‘Umar as an example.²⁷ Al-Hajj ‘Umar succeeded in this to such a degree that no part of his body moved without his express permission . . . To attain that, many years of preparation are necessary . . . This is a big thing, which is why you are being given a kind of training through the *lazim* and the *wazifa* [prayers in the Sufi liturgy, or *wird*]. For example, [when reciting] the *jawharat al-kamal*,²⁸ once you have done four beads, if you do the eleven [beads], or once you have done five, if you do the twelve, you must not even blink your eyes. You just remain still. At this moment, your heart takes a photograph of the idea of God, just like the photographer; when he snaps the photo, you do not move . . . You stay like this and you repeat [the prayer]. You feel yourself; you must relax . . .

He must completely *yurnyinde* [Fulfulde word], that is, loosen the reins, just like when you are on a horse and you give it its head. He must loosen the reins of his nerves . . . And little by little you willingly move out of yourself, so much so that at certain moments you seem to be observing yourself. You are some distance away, but you are observing yourself. It is as if you are here and yet your body is there, and you are watching your body. You forget yourself. It is only then that one can forget oneself. And that is a kind of training.

[Q: But you said that man must remember himself . . .]

Yes, remember himself, . . . he must not react precipitately. For example, I can do that with strangers, but I have never been able to do it with members of my family. A stranger can come and do no matter what, and it doesn’t bother me at all. But if it is a member of my family, I cannot

²⁷ Al-Hajj ‘Umar was a highly venerated Tijani Sufi, the person most responsible for the spread of the order in nineteenth-century West Africa; see note 15 above. He was also the great-uncle of Tierno Bokar, Hampâté Bâ’s mentor.

²⁸ See Hampâté Bâ, *Vie et enseignement*, 234–36; *A Spirit of Tolerance*, 207–10.

manage to contain myself. Immediately, it comes out. What is it? Is it love? I place them above their mistakes; that's it, it is pride. I cannot tolerate that in them, but I can tolerate it in others.

But when you are able [to remember], that is what is called "presence," *hudur*; that is truly presence. You are always there, and when you start to do something, "Op, attention! I must not do that!" When you have that . . . take, for example, courage. When someone is said to be brave, it is not true. All men have the same degree of fear; it is the mastery [of self] that varies.

On the Recitation of Prayers

[May 2, 1978] For the *jihad al-nafs*, the *kalima*, *la ilaha illa Allah*, is considered to be the best weapon for fully receiving God in the heart. When your heart is filled with God, nothing else can enter there. And there is nothing like the words *la ilaha illa Allah* to bring God into the heart.

[Q. There are other orders, for example, the Naqshabandis, in which they are given very specific places on which to concentrate. Is it similar for the Tijanis?]

I don't know about other *turuq*, but for me the only concentration is on the heart. For example, when you say *la ilaha illa Allah*, you can move your head with each word. [He demonstrates: *la*, the head up; *ilaha*, head down; *illa*, head right; *Allah*, head left.] You do that if you can, but no matter what, you follow [the words] with your mind. There are people who can do that, and others who do it only automatically . . . But you should always concentrate on the heart . . .

[Q. Is it better to empty one's thoughts completely, or to concentrate on the name of *Allah*?]

In the Tijaniyya, one must do as much as possible. If you are not able to understand the meaning, you must listen to the sound. That is in the rules [for reciting] the *jawharat al-kamal*. They say that if you don't understand the meaning, at least your heart should hear the sound . . .

During the *dhikr*, I concentrate on the name of God and on my heart. Why? Because my heart has four cavities, and I place one letter of the name of God in each cavity. That is how I concentrate on my heart.

[Q. How does one do that?]

You must learn to divide [the letters] in your thought. The image of your heart must be in your head. It is as if you bring out your heart and place it in front of you, and you see it in your imagination, and you see the *alif* and *lam* in the two upper cavities, and *lam* and *ha'* in the two lower cavities. You concentrate on the heart, you have the four cavities, and sometimes you will manage to see the letters in your heart.

[Q. Where do you represent your heart? Is it better inside your chest or outside?]

What is best is the experience that you find for yourself. One way might be better for one person, and another way better for another person. It depends. What is best is to manage to concentrate and to see the four letters in the four cavities.

You do this during all recitations and meditations. Tierno recommended that it is good that the name of God be the last thing you see before going to sleep, and the first thing you see when you wake up. You must write the name of God in large letters opposite your bed. And you must have a constant presence. That is, before getting up [in the morning], rather than getting up suddenly, you arise slowly and open your eyes in such a way that the first thing you see is the name of God. And then, when you are going to bed, when you are lying down, you see it. And then try all the time to meditate on the name right up to the moment when you fall asleep. In this way, the name of God is the first image that enters you when you awake, and the last image that enters you when you go to sleep. That is part of what we call presence, *hudur*. There is *hudur al-ism*, the presence of the name, or of the image of the name, and there is *hudur al-ruh* [presence of the spirit]. It can be written, or for someone who does not know how to read Arabic, you can draw a six-pointed star; the name of God can be drawn in that form.

[May 3, 1978] That is why in the *shurut*²⁹ it is said that when reciting the prayer [*jawharat al-kamal*], you should listen to the sound of your voice. I do not recite without my mind listening to what my mouth is

²⁹ The regulations to which all adepts of the Tijaniyya must adhere; see Hampâté Bâ, *Vie et enseignement*, 233ff.; *A Spirit of Tolerance*, 203ff.

saying. You cannot recite a prayer automatically like that. Whereas, if the mind monitors what you are saying, and if sometimes you listen to the words, then nothing will come from outside to disturb you. Otherwise, you can recite your prayer while looking at a horse! But if you are in the habit of forcing your mind to listen to what your mouth is saying, there is a harmony. And if you understand the meaning of what you are saying, it is even better; then it is your *dhat* that comes to listen to you—it is the particle of the Divine that is in you that comes to listen.³⁰ If it is only the sound, it is your intelligence that comes to listen. And if you recite your prayers absentmindedly, it is your body that listens. The difference is very big. If you recite a prayer absentmindedly, it is the body. If you concentrate on yourself, the intelligence listens to you, but if you know what you are saying, then it is the divine spirit that is in us: your *dhat*. And your *dhat* owes its existence to the *dhat* of God; it is immortal, it is God. It is the particle of God, the ray, the divine atom that is within you.

On the Nature of the Created World, Its Permutations and Transformations

[May 3, 1978] [Q. You mention both *adh-dhat* and the intelligence. Are they the same for you?]

On the divine level, things are similar without being the same thing. Sometimes they can play concomitant roles. What in reality is the *ruh* [spirit]? What is the *'aql* [intelligence]? They have different names, they vary from one another, but we place them on the same level of 1–2–3. All creation is found in a *muthallath*, . . . a magic square. [*Muthallath* is literally “triangle”; here the word seems to refer to a series of triads; this particular “magic square” functions as a system of three interrelated triads.]

Divine	1	2	3
Astral	4	5	6
Material	7	8	9

³⁰ *Dhat* is often translated simply as “essence,” but here and in subsequent passages Hampâté Bâ imbues the term with more specific and nuanced meanings.

1 is *ar-ruh* [spirit], thus it is God, the source itself. The 9 is composed of $1 + 8$, or of $2 + 7$, or of $3 + 6$, or of $4 + 5$. . . Thus, we know the elements that are combined to make the 9. The 7: $1 + 6 = 7$, $2 + 5 = 7$, $3 + 4 = 7$. . . In a similar way, we know the composition of all the numbers. And we come to 2: $1 + 1 = 2$. We know the composition of 2.

But the 1, where does it come from? Therefore we say it is the source. All numbers have come from 1, but the 1 has not come from any number. Thus, it is the symbol of supreme purity. It is the *quds ar-rabbaniyya* [divine sanctity]. It does not accept multiplication: $1 \times 1 = 1$. It does not accept division: $1 \div 1 = 1$. And it does not accept subtraction: $1 - 1 = 0$. But what is zero? It is 1 that has placed its alpha in its omega; it has turned in on itself, and you don't know where it began. In that way, you enter into a vicious circle. A man who says that God does not exist enters into a vicious circle. They say that zero has no value, but you only have to place it to the right of a number to make it ten times stronger.

God removes Himself from his secrecy only through revelation, that is, by addition. Thus, $1 + 1 = 2$, $1 + 2 = 3$, $1 + 3 = 4$, and so on up to 9. And up to infinity. Thus, all numbers come from God; all the numbers come from 1, and 1 does not come from any number. Thus, God is the propagator of all numbers. And He is in all the numbers, in spite of their development. He is in the 3 one time, but there are two other matters that have been added to make the 3. He is in the 4 one time, but 3 have been added to make the 4. Thus, this *dharra* [atom] of our existence is always in us whatever the mass that covers it. The thickness of this mass is the measure of our material evolution. It is like an onion. Someone who is below the number 9 must uncover nine layers [of the onion] to reach the seed. Someone who is here [at the number 8] need only uncover seven layers, and so on until you reach the 1, where you arrive at the seed itself.

[Q. Does each number have a meaning?]

Yes. The numbers 1–2–3 are at the divine level; everything here is related to God. But there are three states, three states in God, as theology tells you: what is possible, what is impossible, and what is contingent. But in fact, that is what is said for exoteric teaching. In esoteric teaching, on the level of God there is also the material, which is represented by the 3.

Let us take the three kingdoms, animal, vegetable, and mineral:

Animal	1	2	3
Vegetable	4	5	6
Mineral	7	8	9

The level of 4–5–6 is more evolved than the level of 7–8–9. And 1–2–3 is more evolved than 4–5–6. Thus, 3 represents the material in the Divine. The 2 represents the vegetable in the Divine, and the animal represents God in what He has created. That is why He said to Adam, “I wish to make you my representative.” He gave him the [power] of procreation, and in this way man became a little god, a creator, but only a created creator, whereas God is the uncreated Creator.

Thus, in theology, 1 will be God, 2 will be Jibril, and 3 will be Muhammad. And then 1 will be *Islam*, 2 will be *iman* [faith], and 3 will be *ihsan* [faultless conduct]. And if one descends to the vegetable, it will be the same. The 4 equals the 1. It is said that the number of God in the astral is 4, and the number of God in the material is 7.

How is this so? Because $1 = 1$. $4 = 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 10 = 1 + 0 = 1$. And $7 = 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 6 + 7 = 28 = 2 + 8 = 10 = 1 + 0 = 1$. That is why we say that 7 is 1, but in the material, and 4 is 1, but in the astral. And 1 is 1 itself, in God.

From which we have taken the *la ilaha illa Allah*. There is no god but God alone. But all the others are beings who can receive the light of God. So, all of this [level 7–8–9] is the material level. The intellect can be here [4–5–6]. But Tierno did not differentiate between them, in order to separate them completely. These are manifestations of one and the same thing . . .

So, 6 is the material in the astral, 5 is the astral in the astral, and 4 is the spiritual in the astral. So, we say that there is the higher 1–2–3, the intermediate 4–5–6, and the lower 7–8–9. Thus, they say that 3 is the lower within the higher.

Someone asked Tierno, “How can the lower be within the higher?” . . . 6 is the lower within the intermediate, 5 is the intermediate within the intermediate, and 4 is the higher within the intermediate. And 9 is the lower within the lower. These cannot be perfected; they do not change. Why? Because $9 \times 9 = 81$, $8 + 1 = 9$, $2 \times 9 = 18$, $1 + 8 = 9$, and so forth. No matter

what number you multiply by 9, if you add up its digits you get 9. It does not change. The lower within the lower cannot be perfected . . .

Working with the *muthallath al-Ghazzali*, we get this:

$$1 + 2 + 3 = 6$$

$$4 + 5 + 6 = 15: 1 + 5 = 6$$

$$7 + 8 + 9 = 24: 2 + 4 = 6$$

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9

Here is the famous number 666, which for us becomes the enigma. The Christians interpreted this to us as the beast, but it is not the beast. That is only an aspect. But in reality 666 is the great enigma, because it is based on the number 6, which is used to write the name of God. When we duplicate it we get 66. The value of the name of God is two sixes next to each other. And when you write 666, that gives you the esoteric number of the name of Muhammad, written in a certain way.

So you see that here [on the level of 1–2–3], 6 is obtained without any other work. But on the level of 4–5–6, there is a work. One must work on the 15 so that it becomes 6. Here again, on the level of 7–8–9, the work is heavier, because there are 24 elements. There is more work here [on the level of 7–8–9] to attain the 6 than here [on the level of 4–5–6], whereas here [on the level of 1–2–3], it is attained directly. You will not find in mathematics three numerical elements that added together will give 6 except 1–2–3. Thus, 6 becomes the number of the mystery of creation. Thus, God created the world in six days, etc. And the light of 6 becomes 66, which is the name of God, and 666 becomes the coating within which the *sirr al-Muhammadiyya* [Muhammadan secret] is encrusted.

[Q. Earlier, I asked about the difference between *adh-dhat* and intelligence or the intellect, and you placed the intellect at the astral level.]

This is a teaching. It is a pedagogical expression to help man to grasp what otherwise he is unable to understand. The symbol is not a truth in itself, but a means for us to grasp an abstract idea.

Only God possesses the true *dhat*. Our *dhat* is only a spark, or let us say a molecule, a tiny molecule of the *dhat Allah* [the essence of God] that is in us. Because only God is living.

The *dhat* of all the letters is *alif*. Why? Because it is the *alif* that lies down to make all the other letters. Thus, the *dhat* of the letters is one.

Everything is reflected in everything; everything is in everything. The infinite is found in the finite, and the finite in the infinite. That is the power of God. The laws of physics have proved that all the cosmos is found in an atom. All the world is there. Before we had the word “atom,” it is what we called the *nuqtat al-ba*’ [the point of the letter *ba*’], or *nuqtat al-‘ilm* [the point of knowledge], or the *nuqtat al-quwwa* [the point of power]. The word *quwwa* equals 111, according to Arabic numerology. That is God repeated three times. God is *quwwa* . . .

[May 2, 1978] Western science does not rest upon analogies. Western science studies each thing in its own element, so that it finds it difficult to accept opposition within the same thing. It is the contrary with African science; in each thing there is light and darkness, there is the positive and the negative together. And whether something [acts] positively or negatively depends on how it is used. But both are there, because everything is in everything. The smallest thing is found in the largest thing, just as the largest is found in the smallest . . .

[May 4, 1978] It is said that matter is in the spirit, and the spirit is in matter, contrary to the Western concept that says that matter is one thing and the spirit another. No! Tierno said that these are degrees of vibrations. A body that is at the degree of vibration of 9 is more coarse than one that is at the degree of vibration of 8, which is more coarse than one that is at vibration 7, and so on. The finest of all is at vibration 3, or vibration 2. And 1 is the vibration of vibrations. Tierno explained all that very well, but it could not enter our heads; how could we understand that all of the body is in a state of vibration? . . .

[But then Tierno explained this concept with reference to an airplane propeller.] He saw his first airplane in 1926 or ’27 . . . and what drew his attention was the propeller. When the propeller is at rest, it is at vibration 9. When it begins to turn, at a certain moment you cannot see it any more. That is the fineness of matter. The fineness of matter comes from its vibration . . .

This is how he explained vibrations. And he said that there is the spirit within it, because otherwise it could not sustain itself. There is the spirit within that causes it to vibrate. But if these vibrations were to stop, or if you were able to touch the essential vibrating molecule [of an object], then

you would see that there is no matter, there is no spirit: everything is spirit, everything is matter. There is only the degree of evolution of vibrations and of repose . . .

In everything, and in man, there is the more coarse and the more fine. But the vibrations are finer in a beautiful person, and less fine in the person who is more coarse. The density of matter depends on the vibrations, according to Tierno Bokar. That is called *haraka*, movement. The prophet said, *Kullu harakatin barakatin*, there is *baraka* in every vibration. The vibration that reaches 1 is the supreme *baraka* . . .

Every man is comparable to a piece of fabric. A piece of fabric is just a piece of cloth; until it is cut there are potentially all kinds of clothing in it. If you wish, you can cut it into a shirt. But the cloth that will be used for a shirt is no different from the rest of the fabric until it becomes a shirt. Or it could become a pair of trousers. Thus, the fabric is material [on the material level]. But the trousers are a form of material that has been worked on. The form can be more or less elegant, more or less beautiful. That is the refinement.

We are also material; it is our vibration that releases us and places us on the first or second level of the material, or we remain on the level of the material of the material, incapable of perfection. Generally, it is inanimate bodies that are on the level of the material in the material.

Take a stone, for example. When you do not work it, it always remains a stone. But when you melt it, there is iron in it; work is what releases the iron. That is how it is. It is the work that you do on your own material that releases from you a finer material.

That is why religious exercises are necessary, like meditation and different forms of concentration. All that is the work that you do on your own material.

Sufism is divided into three grades and nine degrees: *tawba*, *istiqamat*, *taqwa*, *ikhlas*, *sidq*, *tuma'nina*, *mushahada*, *muraqabatu*, *ma'rifatu*.³¹ At the degree of *tawba*, one is a novice; he has everything to do. But when he leaves the degree of *tawba*, when he arrives at *istiqamat*, it is already one degree. *Taqwa* is fear, the fear that one has of God. This is already a higher

³¹ Hampâté Bâ translated these terms as follows: repentance or “conversion,” uprightness, reverential fear, discernment, sincerity, serenity, perceptive meditation, encountering the Presence, and knowledge of God and love. See Hampâté Bâ, *Vie et enseignement*, 223; and *A Spirit of Tolerance*, 192–95.

degree; however, he does not do these things in order to be congratulated, but in order to attain a respectful fear of God. Fear of God; that does not mean to tremble before Him, but to have a respectful consideration for Him, which is also a kind of fear. Now the person has gone beyond the degree of the material and entered the astral. Thus his vibrations increase. And if his vibrations increase, the eye can no longer see him as he was before, like the airplane propeller.

All that depends on *haraka*, on movement: that is, prayer, concentration, and physical exercises that require *haraka*.

On the Symbolism of Salat

[May 5, 1978] The hajj is contained within *salat* (prayer), because when you pray, you face the Kaaba. You cannot face just any direction. Thus, the hajj is in the *salat*. And the hajj is performed around the Kaaba, just like prayer is performed around the Kaaba. There is therefore an analogy between prayer and the hajj because they are united by the Kaaba.

The hexagram [six-pointed star] represents the name of God, Allah, ﷻ.

We take the *ha* and draw it in the form of a triangle, and we write the *alif* and two *lam* in the form of the second triangle [to form a six-pointed star], which is the name of God written geometrically . . .

In reality, the Kaaba is under the protection of the name of God. We call it the house of God, and it is protected by God. They say that it is your name that defends your property, and that is why symbolically we place the Kaaba within the name of God. [He draws a black square in the center of a six-pointed star.]

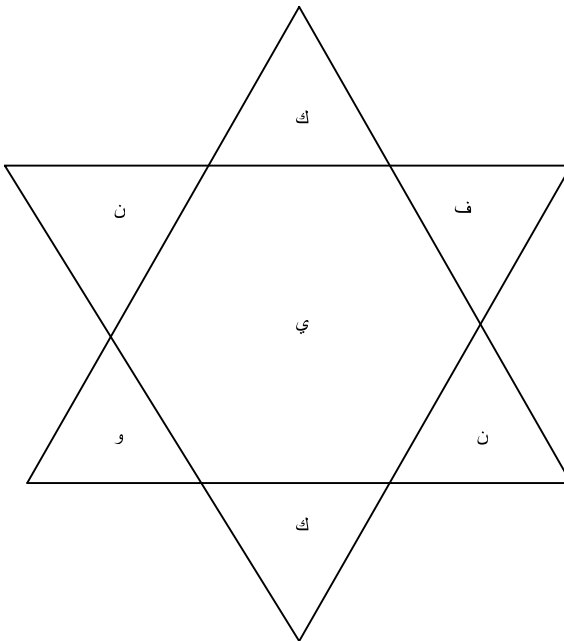
And in the same way that the Kaaba is in the name of God, our time, our human time, is also in the name of God. There is divine time and human time. Our time is relative, and it is within God's time, like a boat is upon the sea. God's time is permanent. There is no yesterday; there will be no tomorrow. It is a permanent "present." But for us, there is yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Thus, our time is contained within God's time, that is, our time is contained within the name of God.

[He draws the six-pointed star with the days of the week and months of the year arranged in and around it. See text II, figure 4, above.] And so, time has entered into the name of God . . . Time has entered into God; thus time is God.

It is also said that the word of God was with God for all eternity; the

Christians say the same. The word was with God, and it is through the word that He has accomplished all His acts. For the Christians, Jesus is the word, but for the Muslims, the word is *كُنْ فَيَكُونُ* *kun fa-yakun* [Be, and it is].

[He writes the letters of this Qur'anic phrase within the six-pointed star, explaining that the *ya'* is the only letter that is not repeated, so that it is placed in the center. He explains that the *fa'* and the *wa'* are the same because they are both conjunctions.]

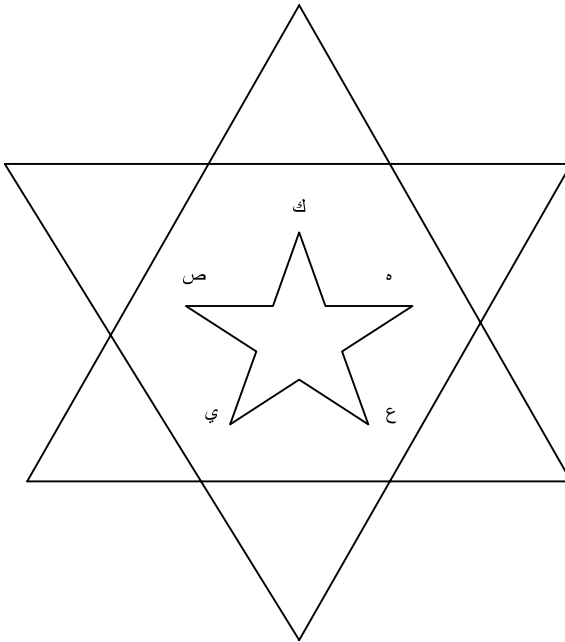


And this is how the word of God is within the name of God. And in the same way that the name of God is the clock of eternity, the word is what causes the movement of eternity . . .

All prayer is centered on the Kaaba, and the [earthly] Kaaba is only a copy of a kaaba that is located in heaven, the *bait al-ma' mur*. Thus, it is the representation on earth of the heavenly house. Because in the same way that Muslims move around the Kaaba, the angels come from all the heavens to perform a pilgrimage around the *bait al-ma' mur* in heaven. By analogy, there are six stars that move around the sun. The sun is considered to be the atom of our existence. If the sun were to be extinguished, our world would be condemned. God entrusted our life to our sun, just as

each planet is entrusted to its sun. The astronomers have recently told us that there are several suns. But our universe depends on the sun, and it is only this sun, with its [solar] system, that we have known over the ages; only recently have other stars been added to it. And the heavenly bodies in this system number seven, the sun itself and the six [planets] that revolve around it. Thus the stars move around the sun like the angels move around the *bait al-ma'mur*, and like we move around the Kaaba. The six days of the week revolve around one day, the twelve months of the year revolve around the week, and the centuries revolve around the months, the years.

The five-pointed star in the center [of the six-pointed star] shows that the *kalima*, *la ilaha illa Allah*, is the link among all believers. [He writes the letters *ka' ha' ya' 'ain sad* in the points of the star.] According to Arabic numerology, both these five letters and *la ilaha illa Allah* equal 165. Thus, *ka' ha' ya' 'ain sad* is *la ilaha illa Allah*, written in code, and the five-pointed star is *la ilaha illa Allah* written geometrically, just like the six-pointed star is the name *Allah* written geometrically.



When a man prays, his first movement is *qama* [standing upright]. The second movement is *ruku'* [bowing at the waist], and from there he returns to upright, the third movement. In this way, he has made a triangle with the upper part of his body. The fourth movement is *sujud* [prostration]; from there he comes to *julus* [sitting back on the heels], and from there for the sixth movement he returns to *sujud*. [He has made a second triangle with his body.] The *raka'* is completed; it is comprised of six movements. Why? Because each gesture thanks God for the six days of creation. The first movement thanks God for the first day of creation, the second for the second day, etc. Six therefore becomes the symbol of work. Man works six days and he rests on the seventh.

When we take the angles of these movements, $1 + 2 + 3 = 6$, the first triangle is called six. The other triangle, $4 + 5 + 6 = 15$. This triangle is called 15, but $1 + 5 = 6$. Thus, one *raka'* can be symbolized by two triangles. And what are two triangles interlaced with each other? Thus, [when he prays] a man writes the name of God with his body. In one *raka'*, the faithful has written the name of God with his body by means of these two triangles. The first was made with the upper part of his body, and the second was made on the earth. Thus, the first is celestial and the second is terrestrial. The celestial triangle descends upon the terrestrial triangle to form the six-pointed star, or the name of God. While his body describes the name of God, his mouth enunciates it, and his thought must be conscious of it. That is the work of the *raka'* . . .

[Q. Is the work of prayer analogous to *haraka*?]

Yes, all this is *haraka*. *Haraka* produces something, either something material or something spiritual. Prayer is spiritual *haraka* because the Muslim prayer has been given by God Himself; it is not something invented by men.

On the Symbolism of Bismillah

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ

[May 6, 1978] [Q. Yesterday you explained that all numbers come from the number 1, and that the number 1 comes from a point, *al-jawharat*.]

Yes, there is a ray. [He draws a figure, which is a vertical line with one dot above and one dot below it.] There are two points, the point above and the point below. The point above is transformed into light. It is as if the point above is melted, as if it were a bit of lead, and it has melted to form a line, which forms the *alif*. And then, [the substance of] the *alif* comes back together to form the second point. The first point is the mystery of the power of God. When God wanted to create, the ray [of His creation, which is represented by the *alif*] became luminous, because God is light. And then the ray became focused, reconcentrated, and it became a point again. Thus, these two points are the same, and they are not the same. The point above emerged directly from the power of God; it is mysterious. But having completed the creation, it is again a point, which contains light, but it has also taken on something of the material. It consists of both the *batin* and the *zahir* [the hidden and the manifest] because you cannot separate the *batin* from the *zahir*:

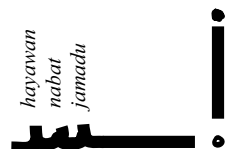


The point below is more materialized. The point above consists only of the light of God, without any mixture. It passes through the “pipe” of the *alif* like drops of melted lead. When it reaches the bottom, all these drops are reconstituted to form the point of creation. Thus, there is the light of the vertical line, and the light of the horizontal line. The point below is the junction, the meeting point, between the *alif* that is standing and the *alif* that is lying down: between the vertical and the horizontal. The vertical line descends from heaven, the horizontal line is terrestrial, and they meet in the point [of creation] . . .



The horizontal or material line [is formed by] this light continuing in order to form the *sin*. It is a movement of light. Allah is the light of the heavens and of the earth, and all creation has been created by the light of Allah. Everything comes from the terrestrial *ba'*. [The point above] is the celestial *ba'*, and the *alif* is the *alif al-wusul*, *alif al-ittisal*, the *alif* that unites. The point above is purely *nurun* '*ala nurin* [light upon light]. It is with this light that God protects. It is the central pillar of divine revelation . . .

Now, the *ba'* is divided into three to form the *sin*, [the teeth of which] become *jamadu*, *nabat*, *hayawan*. Thus, in these two points (above and below) we have the worlds: the '*alam as-samawiyya*, and the '*alam al-'ardiyya* [the celestial world and the earthly world].



Jamadu is all the minerals, the stones; *nabat*, plants that grow; and *hayawan*, all the animals. What does *jamadu* have in common with *nabat*? The trunk of a tree does not move. It sends out its branches, but the tree does not move. The *nabat* does not move, but its difference with the *jamadu* is that it lives, it develops; there is masculine and feminine in the *nabat*. This does not exist in the *jamadu*, and so the *nabat* is more complete than the *jamadu*. And the difference between the *nabat* and the *hayawan* is movement, *haraka*; *hayawan* moves. There are also men and women; one can fall ill, one can have children and grandchildren. Trees also have children and grandchildren, like animals and like man. Thus, each of these worlds has something about it that resembles the others, and something that differentiates it from the others . . .

Then there is the *mim*, the *mim al-mulk* [the *mim* of authority], which means that all of this [*nabat*, *jamadu*, *hayawan*] is found at the focal point of the authority of God, in the circle that surrounds them. Because it is said that God is the light of the circle that surrounds all created beings and intelligences. That is sovereignty, *malakut*; it is the *mulk wa' l-malakut* [authority and sovereignty]. Both are found within. Now, you have the light, the point, the three [teeth] of the *sin*, and the *mim*. All this together is found in the *mim*, just as all the light is found in the point. Because *nabat*, *jamadu*, *hayawan* are all encircled by the same point, which is the universe. The universe is a point. Our universe is a point in relation to other universes. Thus, one can consider each star as a universe, which is at the same time a point in relation to other stars . . . The *mim* represents the universe, the *mim al-mulk*; it is both *mulk* and *malakut* . . .

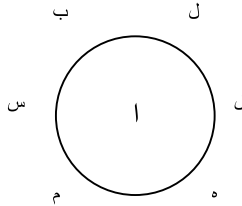
[Q. And this continues to form *bismillah*?]

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ

First, you have *ismullah* [the name of God]. Then you take away [the top part of the *alif*] and it becomes *bismillahi*, in the name of God.

The unity of God, which we do not know, is apparent here in the *alif* of Allah, to show us that it is not joined to anything, to demonstrate its *wahadaniya* [uniqueness, unity]. The three letters of *lillahi* are joined, but the *alif* is not connected to either the *bism* or to the *lillahi*. Thus, it becomes

central. [He draws a circle with the *alif* in the center and the other letters of the *bismillah* on the circumference.]



The unity of God alone, who is in the middle like the sun is in the middle of the six planets. That shows the rotation of power. Like the Kaaba is in the middle of those who move around it, and like the *bait al-ma' mur* [the Heavenly House], where the angels come in order to move around it. That is the secret of *haraka*, the secret of the circular movement . . . It is not only man that makes these movements, but so do the angels and the stars.

[Q. Is there meaning for the two *lam* and the *ha'*?]

Yes, it is ownership, of what belongs to God. To show that nothing belongs to anyone else. *Lillahi* also means “for God.” The *nabat*, *jamadu*, and *hayawan* all belong to God. The celestial point, *nuqta al-sirri* [the secret point], belongs to God, the *nuqta al-batini* [the hidden point] belongs to God, the *nuqta al-zahir* [the manifest point] belongs to God. Everything belongs to God, everything is God; we are absolutely nothing.