Know yourself, According to Qur'an and Sunnah:

Ibn Arabi's View

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Abstract

"Know yourself" is a principle that many theosophists, even before Socrates, have emphasized upon it. But, the philosophers' approach to this principle is different from that of mystics. According to the philosophers, the self is nothing but the soul in a genera concept (al-nafs); so for them, self-knowledge is known as a kind of psychology, a branch of knowledge among others. But for the mystics, especially for Ibn 'Arabi, the real Self is much deeper than the soul, and self-knowledge is the ultimate goal of mysticism.

This paper will address the following questions from Ibn 'Arabi's point of view:

1-What is the source of this principle: "Know yourself"?
2-What does it entail in terms of a goal?
3-What is meant by self in it?
4-What is meant by knowledge?
5-How can we know ourselves?

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In this paper, the importance of self-knowledge in Ibn 'Arabi's philosophy, the reliability of the two above mentioned hadiths for him, and his different interpretations of them will be discussed in the context of his theory of oneness of Being (wahdat al-wujud). Also, "fanaa" which is the result of self-knowledge will be discussed from Ibn 'Arabi's point of view and his understanding of this term will be compared with the doctrine of the annihilation, according to other philosophical and mystical traditions.

Key Words: Ibn Arabi   Soul and Body    Union with God Oneness of Being

1-The Importance of knowledge

The search for knowledge is one of the most central concerns to Islam. The value of each human being is determined by the degree of his knowledge. The Qur'an asks: "Are they equal those who know and those who know not?" The answer is self evident. That is why that Rumi says: "Oh my brother you are nothing but knowledge / other than this you will be only bones and flesh" (9, vol.2, 277).

Hence, as the Prophet (s) said: "The search for knowledge is incumbent upon every Muslim." Knowledge is so important that God, counting and reminding His graces and favors, the first thing that mentions is knowledge and He Introduces Himself as "Giver of the knowledge". He Says: "The all merciful. He taught (and gave the knowledge of) the Qur'an." After that He Says, "He created human being." (55:1-3). It means that Knowledge is more important than the creation of human being. In another verse God says: "I created Jinn and mankind only to Worship me" (51:56). Many commentators such as Ibn Abbas have reported from the Prophet (s) that the meaning of "to worship me" is "to know me". So, knowledge is the goal of the creation of mankind. And this goal has no an end and is not limited, such that the most Knowledgeable of all human beings, the Prophet (s), has been commanded to pray: "My Lord increase me in knowledge" (20:114). That is why, in contrast to many Sufis who emphasize love more than knowledge, Ibn Arabi emphasizes knowledge. He says:

God never commanded His Prophet to seek of anything except knowledge, since all good lies therein. It is the
greatest charismatic gift. Idleness with knowledge is better than ignorance with good works. Knowledge is a divine attribute of all encompassingness, so it is the most excellent bounty of God. Hence God said (in the story of Moses and Khizr): "[Then they found one of our servants, whom we had given mercy from us], and whom we had taught knowledge from Us", that is, as a mercy from Us. So knowledge derives from the mine of mercy (4, vol.2:370).

2-The Object of Knowledge

There are infinite things in the world which we do not know and which can be the object of our knowledge. On the other hand, we have a limited life and can not seek knowledge of everything. We must seek the important knowledge and we must begin from the most important one. And the most important and the most necessary knowledge is the knowledge of God and knowledge of everything which is in relation to God. The Prophet (s) used to pray, "I seek refuge in God from a knowledge which has no use" (11, vol.5,70). Useless knowledge is that which is disconnected from its source and origin, that is Divine Reality. That is why Ibn Arabi says: "By knowledge I mean only knowledge of God, of the next world, and of that which is appropriate for the world, in relation to that for which this world was created and established" (4, vol.2,370). And as we saw, the aim of creation was knowledge of God. Ibn Arabi says:

The Prophet (s) said, "When God struck His palm between my shoulders, I came to know the knowledge of late ancients and the later folk through that placing of the palm." So through that striking, God gave him the knowledge of God. Knowledge of other than God is a waste of time, since God created the cosmos only for knowledge of Him. More specifically, this is the case with what is called "mankind and jinn", since He said clearly that He created them to worship Him (4, vol.4,221).

And we saw that the meaning of "to worship" was "to know".

3-How can we have Knowledge of God?

We live in this physical world and we have not any direct access to God who is infinitely beyond this world. We only can know this
world directly. And this world is other than God. So, is knowledge of this world a waste of time according to Ibn Arabi? The answer is no. Since no knowledge of God can be gained without an intermediary which is other than God. So other than God is as important for knowledge as God Himself(2,148). According to Qur'an, all things are "signs" of God. They refer to God and point to Him. According to Ibn Arabi, the root of the word 'Alam (cosmos) is 'alama (mark). He says: "We mention the "cosmos" with this word to give knowledge that by it we mean that God has made it a mark" (4,vol.2,473).

Ibn Arabi usually employs the term *dalil* which is a synonym to *aya* (sign) and it means that everything is a guide, directive, pointer, indication, signifier, evidence, proof, and denotation of God. It is important that the verses of Qur'an are also referred to as signs or 'ayat.

"For the one whose soul is in the manifestation of God/ the whole cosmos is a book of God, the Sublime"(12,52)

4-Knowledge of the Signs

The signs and verses of God are found in the Qur'an. But they are also found in the outside world (macrocosms) and within our selves (microcosms). The Qur'an says, "We shall show them our signs upon the horizons and in themselves, until it is clear to them that He is the Real"(41:53). "Horizons" refers to the world that we see outside us, while "themselves" refers to the world of inner experience. In Ibn Arabi's view the basic sense of this verse is: "Your signifier to the Real is yourself and the cosmos"(4:307.1). Self and cosmos are two realities within which the Reel's self-disclosure may be witnessed. He says:

The Law-giver turned you over the knowledge of yourself in knowledge of God through His words, "We shall show them our signs (which are the signifiers), upon the horizons and in themselves." Hence He did not leave aside anything of the cosmos, for everything of the cosmos that is outside of you is identical with the horizons, which are the regions around. "until it is clear to them that it is the Real" nothing else, because there is nothing else(4,vol.3,275).

So the world which is other than God comes into the picture only to the extent that one must know the other in order to gain knowledge
of God. It means that the other must be known with a view toward God. All things must be taken back to the one, which is God.

Knowledge of other than God, the knowledge of horizons and of ourselves, is an intermediate for knowledge of God. Philosophers and theologians deduce the existence of God from the existence of the world. They also deduce God's attributes from the attributes of the world. They have different arguments for this purpose. Each one of these arguments appeals to one of the aspects of the macrocosms or microcosms. For example, from the existence of the good order in the world they deduce the existence of a knowledgeable designer. Or from the existence of the motion in the world they deduce the existence of an unmoved mover. And from the existence of "possible beings" which is the world, they deduce the existence of a necessary being which is God and so on. All of these arguments approach to the knowledge of God from the knowledge of the horizons.

5-Knowledge of the Self

Although both the horizons and the selves are God's signs and guide to God, in many Sufi texts the emphasis is upon the knowledge of the self. Ibn Arabi sees knowledge of the cosmos as secondary to the knowledge of the self.

There is a very famous saying in this relation which is usually quoted as a hadith of the Prophet (S). The Prophet confirmed the importance of seeing the signs of the self by saying: "He who knows himself (his soul) knows his Lord". This hadith is not accepted by the specialists, but it has a very important role for Sufis, especially for Ibn Arabi. In another hadith the Prophet (s) said: "He who knows himself best, knows his Lord best"(13, 4). In a third hadith the Prophet (s) said: "God created Adam in His form". This hadith is used by Sufis as a reason for the other two hadiths. Why we can gain knowledge of God from the knowledge of ourselves? The answer is: Because God created Adam in His form.

But there are some debates on the "sanad" or "authenticity" of this third hadith. In addition, some of those who have accepted the "sanad" of the hadith have said that the pronoun "his" in the hadith refers to Adam and not to God, which means that God created Adam in Adam's own form. At best, the meaning of the hadith is ambiguous because of these two different possibilities(7,283). So in order to use the first and
the third hadith, we must firstly show their authenticity and, secondly, remove the ambiguity from the third hadith. How does Ibn Arabi do that?

6-Authenticity of the Hadith

In the Qur'an God, referring to human being, says: "We are nearer to him than the jugular vein" (50:16). Ibn Arabi inspired by this verse says to the scholars: "If He is with you through this kind of nearness, while you claim to have knowledge of that and faith in it, why do you fail to take from Him? Instead you take from others and you do not take from Him" (1:280). Then he quotes the famous saying of Abu Yazid that addressed the esoteric scholars with his words: "You take your knowledge dead from the dead, but we take our knowledge from the Alive who does not die" (Ibid).

In this way, Ibn Arabi sometimes has an extraordinary method in quoting a hadith. It means that sometimes the sufi or the mystic in his unveiling, visits the Prophet (s) and hears a hadith or saying directly from the Prophet. So he is exactly in the same situation of the companions of the Prophet who visited him and heard the hadith directly from him. Unveiling provides the means whereby the authenticity of such hadith has been tested.

So, Ibn Arabi quotes in this way, the hadith, "He who knows himself knows his Lord", directly from the Prophet (s). In the case of the ambiguity of the pronoun "his" in the hadith "God created Adam in His form", Ibn Arabi points to another version of the hadith. He says: "In a saying that has been shown to be sound (sahih) by unveiling (kashf), it has been said that "God created Adam in the form of the All-merciful (al-Rahman)" though this version isn't accepted by the authorities of the transmission of the hadith. Thus the ambiguity is removed (4, vol.2, 490).

Hence according to these hadiths, the best way for gaining knowledge of God is the knowledge of the self, because God created Adam in His form. Ibn Arabi says:

_The messenger of God said that there is no path to the knowledge of God but knowledge of self, for he said: "He who knows himself knows his Lord". He also said: "He who knows himself best knows his Lord best." Hence He made you a signifier. That is he made your knowledge of_
you signify your knowledge of Him (4, vol2, 298.).

He also said in another place:

There is nothing outside of you, so do not hope to know yourself through other than yourselves, for there is no such thing. You are the signifier of you and of Him, but there is nothing that signifies you (4, vol.3, 319).

7-Different Interpretations of the hadith

There are different interpretations of the above hadiths. Even Ibn Arabi himself interprets them in different ways. We can divide them into two main approaches: Philosophical and mystical. It seems that the differences between these interpretation rise from the following questions:

What is meant by "nafs" in the hadith: Soul or self? Because the word, "nafs", in Arabic means "soul", but when it is added to a pronoun, it can be a reflexive pronoun, which may be animate or inanimate. In this case it is like the word "self" in English. So "nafsah" can be translated either as "his soul" or as "himself". Consequently, the above mentioned hadith can be translated as: "He who knows his soul knows his Lord", or as "He who knows himself knows his Lord". We will discuss the difference between these two meanings later.

1. Does the hadiths talk about the "similarity" between the self and God, or they imply the "union" or the "unity" of them?

2. The third question is about the meaning of "his Lord". Does it mean the essence of God or it means God as a creator? Why does it say "his Lord" and not "the Lord"?

3. Finally, what kind of knowledge is meant here? Does the hadith talk about knowledge by gaining which is "knowledge of something" or it talks about knowledge by presence that is "knowledge which is something"? In the former, the known, the knower and the knowledge are different things but in the latter, the known, the knower, and the knowledge are one and the same thing.

8-Philosophical Approach and Interpretations

In this approach the meaning of the "nafs" is the "soul", which is a spiritual substance beside the body. The "similarity" between soul and
God is emphasized here, and "knowledge of God" means knowledge of God's activities and attributes, not knowledge of his essence.

Many philosophers referring to this hadith have seen a similarity between soul's activity in body and God's activity in the world. So soul-body relation has been considered as a metaphor of God-world relation. There are many similarities between these two relations which help us in a better understanding of God's activity.

8-1-Creation from Ex-nihilo
We read in Qur'an: "Our only speech to a thing is to say to it Be!, and it is"(16:40). It means that in creation God created something not from a thing and without any intermediary, and there's not a separation in time between God's desire of a thing and the existence of that thing. In other words, God's desire for creating a thing is the same as the existence of that thing. We can find a model of this in our soul in the case of creative imagination. When we desire the existence of something in our imagination, this desire is the same as the existence of that thing in our imagination. Ibn Arabi says:

> Since God created Adam in His form, He has given him the faculty of form giving. Among the people, the "form-giver" is he who goes about creating a creation like God's creation. Though he is not a creator, he is the creator, for God says (to Jesus), when you create from the clay as the guise of a bird. The guise is its form (4, vol. 4, 212).

8-2-Omnipresence of God in the World and His Transcendence from it
Muslim philosophers referring to the above mentioned hadiths says that human soul is not ascribed to any organ of the body or to any faculty of the soul. It is not the hand, not the foot, not the faculty of seeing, or the faculty of hearing, etc. However no organ of the body and no faculty of the soul is empty of the existence, the activities and the commands of the soul. In the same way the whole world is under the continuous activity of the omnipresent creator, but we cannot ascribe God to some specific places. Also, Ibn Arabi uses this metaphor:
The cosmos is to the Real (God) as the body is to the spirit. Just as the spirit is not known except through the body [so also the Real is not known except through the cosmos]. When we look at the body and we see that its form subsists but the properties that we had been witnessing -- that is, the perception of sensory things and meanings -- disappear from the body and its form, then we know that beyond the manifest body there is another which bestows the properties of the perceptions within it. We name that meaning, the spirit of this body. In the same way, we know that, there is something that moves us or keeps us still existing its ruling properties within us as it wills, only when we look at our own souls. Then we know our souls, we know our Lord like two similar things. That is why the Prophet (s) reported in the revelation through his words: He who knows his soul knows his Lord (4, vol. 3, 314).

Fanari, one of the most famous commentators of Ibn Arabi that just as the soul governs the body and controls it through its faculties, in the same way God governs the affairs of the world by means of the divine attributes. Therefore the presence of God in the world is stronger than the presence of the soul in the body. From this similarity we can conclude another similarity.

8-3-One Entity with Many Names

In the theory of "oneness of being", we encounter several paradoxes which rise from accepting one being which has in its simplicity and unity, many different attributes, names and self-disclosures. It is one and at the same time, it is many. We can find a model of this in our souls. The soul in its simplicity and unity has many different faculties and appears in many different activities of human being. Although seeing is different from knowing or thinking, but the seer, the hearer, the knower and the thinker are one and the same simple thing which is the soul. Seeing does not prevent the soul from hearing, none of them prevents it from smelling or other activities. In the same way no activity prevents God from another activity at the same time, and no task prevents him from another task. For example He hears the prayers of all human beings, accepts and responds all of them at the same time. Ibn Arabi explains this
metaphor in the following passage:

There is nothing but a rational soul, but it is [at the same time] intelligent, reflecting, imagining, remembering, form-giving, nutritive, growth-producing, attractive, expulsive, digestive, seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and feeling. Moreover the soul perceives all these affairs, the diversity of these faculties, and the diversities of these names. Yet it is nothing extraneous to any of them; on the contrary, it is identical with the form of each. So also will you find the situation in the forms of inanimate things, plants, animals, spheres, and angels [all are identical with one Entity]. So glory be to Him who made the things while He is their entity (4, vol.2, 459).

Ibn Arabi also uses this metaphor to show how the paradoxes of the theory of "oneness of being" can be justified. God is in everything and beyond everything at the same time. He is the one-many. Everything in the world is He/not He. The model and the metaphor of these can be found in the soul. Ibn Arabi says: "How does your soul govern your body? Is your soul inside of your body or outside of it, or not inside and not outside? Does the thing that makes the animate body and by which the body sees, hears, imagines, reflects originates from the oneness or manyness?"(4, vol.3, 81). In another passage he says:

"God is manifest and outward and He is non manifest and inward. It is like this example: Behind the human form of Zayd (or Peter) there is a thing that governs this form. One who claims that Zayd is really that governor (his soul) not this apparent form says that he has not seen Zayd. And one who claims that Zayd is the whole of these two things and is both inward and outward says that he has seen him and not seen him" (4, vol.4, 105).

9-Mystical Approach to the Hadiths

All the above mentioned discussions were based on a philosophical approach to the hadiths. The discussions were about the soul and its similarity to God in its activities and attributes. And in this case our knowledge of the soul, is knowledge of something. I can observe my soul, your soul or Peter's as a metaphor and model for
God's attributes and activities. But in most cases Ibn Arabi talks about the "self" instead of the "soul", and its unity with God instead of its similarity to Him. Here this knowledge is not a "knowledge of something" but it is a "knowledge which is something". It is a kind if annihilation. Ibn Arabi referring to the hadith: "He who knows himself knows his Lord" says: "The Prophet (s) meant by nafs, your existence and your reality not the soul which is named commanding, upbraiding and pacified". So according to Ibn Arabi, himself in the hadith means his existence. He who knows his existence knows his Lord. But according to the theory of "oneness of being" there is no existence and no being but God's being and God's existence. So, himself in the hadith means his existence and his existence is not other than God's.

In another passage, Ibn Arabi referring to this hadith writes:

If one asks: How lies the way to the knowledge of the self and the knowledge of God? The answer is: The way of the knowledge of these two is that you understand that God was and there was not with him a thing, He is now as He was. So He is and there is not with Him a thing (5, 7).

So in this reading of the Hadith, we have "He who knows his existence knows his God" and because the only existence or being is the existence or being of God, He who knows his existence, has known God's existence. The way of gaining knowledge of God is to know our existence or our being.

But we can have two different kind of knowledge regarding "existence". Knowledge of existence and knowledge which is existence. The first kind is to know something but the second kind is to be something or to have something. In the former the knower, the known and the knowledge are different things, but in the latter, the knower, the known and the knowledge are one and the same thing. Here to find existence means to come into existence or to possess existence. The word "wujud" in Arabic has two meanings: "to be" and "to find". And that is why Ibn Arabi calls the philosophers and the theologians "considering" thinkers, because they look at wujud and think about it. But he calls the mystics" verifiers" or "realizes" because they have found and possessed the reality of existence not its concept.
10-Who Knows Whom!?

Now, in some famous sayings we read: "No one knows God but God himself". Is there a contradiction between this saying and the hadith "He who knows himself knows his God"? The answer is: No, there is not any contradiction. Ibn Arabi writes:

"If one says: You demonstrate that your knowledge of your self is the knowledge of God. And he who knows himself is other than God, then how can other than God know God? The answer is: He who knows himself understands that his existence is not his own existence, but his existence is the existence of God. Understand therefore that the knower's knowledge of himself is God's knowledge of Himself because his self is nothing but He (God) " (5, 20).

Hence it is God that knows Himself. And there is no soul or self or you. It is as the same thing that Hadith indicates: "My servant never cease drawing near to me ... until ... I am his hearing through which he hears, his sight through which he sees ..." (7, 135). So, we see God by God's eye. We are the mirror of God and God is the mirror of us. Who sees whom? And who knows whom?

11-Bewilderment and Incapacity of Knowledge

Can we know our existence? If we know, we are not "we", and if we are "we", we do not know. Ibn Arabi says:

God has said about Himself that He is independent of the worlds. Hence we become bewildered for we do not know what He is, nor what we are. I think, and God knows best, that He commanded us to know Him and turned us over to ourselves in gaining this knowledge only because He knew that we do not know the reality of ourselves and that we are incapable of knowing ourselves. Hence we come to know that we are even more incapable of knowing Him. This is knowledge of Him or not knowledge (4, vol.3, 412).

And that is why we become bewildered. Ibn Arabi makes it more clear in the following passage:

The Prophet said: "He who knows himself knows his Lord". Some times knowledge of something is incapacity to attain knowledge of it. Here mystic knows that this thing can not be known. The aim of the knowledge of something is to distinguish it from things other than it.
Now He who can not be known is distinguished from other things which are known by the characteristic of being unknown. So here the aim of knowledge is fulfilled (4, vol.4, 432).

But in a third passage, Ibn Arabi, talks about two possibilities: both knowledge and incapacity of knowledge:

"Now man's knowledge of himself comes before his knowledge of his Lord, the latter being the result of the former, according to his saying: He who knows himself knows his Lord. From this, one may understand either that one is not able to know and attain, which is one meaning, or that gnosis is possible. According to the first interpretation, one cannot know oneself and cannot, therefore know one's Lord, while according to the second, one may know oneself and therefore one's Lord" (6, vol.1, 215).

12-How can we know ourselves? "Fana" and Annihilation

We return to the second possibility that Ibn Arabi mentioned. It means that we can know ourselves and therefore we can know our God. But how can we know ourselves? The answer is that when we know the unity of ourselves and God without distinction. However, as long as we know ourselves as a thing beside God, we do not know God as the only being and existence and we do not know unity. So the way to understand unity is "fana" and annihilation. That is why when Abu Yazid said to his Lord, "Through what shall I gain nearness to Thee? The Real said to him, 'Leave aside yourself and come'" (4, vol.2, 561).

It is important to know that "unity" is different from "union" and "indwelling". We do not become united with God and God does not indwell in us, because there is not two things. Ibn Arabi says: Understand therefore, in order that you may not fall into the error if Hululis: He is not in a thing nor a thing is in Him, whether entering in or proceeding forth. It is necessary that you know Him after this fashion, not by imagination, nor by sense, nor by the outward eye, nor by the inward eye, nor by perception. There does not see Him save Himself. By Himself He sees Himself and by Himself He know Himself (5, 3).

In another passage he writes:
There is in reality no union, nor disunion, nor far nor near. For union is not possible except between two, and if there be but one, there can be no union, nor disunion. For union requires two things similar of dissimilar. Therefore if they are similar they are equal, and if they are dissimilar they are opposite, and He spurns to have either an equal or an opposite. So the union is something else than union, and the nearness is something else than nearness, and the farness is something else than farness. So there is union without union, and nearness without nearness and farness without farness (5, 15).

Hence, in order to know God in this way we must not see ourselves. This knowledge is "passing away from our self" or annihilation.

13-Know Your "Self" or Ignore Your "Self"?

We said that in order to know God we must leave aside ourselves or ignore ourselves. But the hadith indicates that in order to know God we must know ourselves. So the question is: Do I have two "selves", that I must ignore one of them and know the other? And if it is so, the next question is: who am I? the first self or the second? Sufis say that in way-faring (suluk) we have a journey in ourselves. We leave ourselves and reach ourselves. Shabistari explains this in the form of a question and its answer beautifully in his poetry (12, 58-9):

*What am I? Give me an explanation of What is the meaning of travel into the "self"?* Then he criticizes the philosophers who think that I am soul and that the "self" is the "soul":

"You say that the word 'I' in every passage refers to the 'soul' since you have made intellect your guide, you do not distinguish between your 'self' and its part"

So according to him "self" is "existence" and the way of knowledge of it is not philosophy but mysticism:

"Go man and know well yourself. The richness of illumination cannot be compared with the swelling of intellect". "I and you are higher than body and spirit since the latters are both parts of my self"

So our travel must be from the illusive "self" to the real" self". A journey from the surface to the depth and it is "fana" or "annihilation":

"Travel beyond the world of creation and place. Abandon the world and discover yourself in the cosmos of the self"

But we must know that discovery of the new "self" is not ceasing
of the existence of the previous "self". Ibn Arabi writes:

"Most of the Sufis make a ceasing of existence and the ceasing of that ceasing a condition of attaining the knowledge of God, and that is an error and a clear oversight. For the knowledge of God does not presuppose the ceasing of existence or the ceasing of that ceasing. For things have no existence and what does not exist cannot cease to exist. For the ceasing to be implies the positing of existence and that is Polytheism. Then if you know yourself without existence or ceasing to be, then you know God, and if not, then not" (5, 5).

So when illusion goes away it is not like losing some real thing. This is like awaking from sleep and awaking from a dream which has not been true. So in our case you leave your unreal self and reach your real self. The Prophet (s) said: "People are asleep and when they die they awake"(8, vol.4, 43). He (s) also said: "Die before you die"(8, vol.66, 317). Ibn Arabi says that it means know yourself before you die. It means that dying which is losing our illusive "selves" is exactly the same as knowing our real "self". We can explain it by an example: Suppose a person named "Peter" suffers from alienation. He thinks that he is not himself but he is another person (for example John). Then he becomes conscious and finds his real identity and loses his illusive identity. We can not say that his previous identity ceased to be, because he had no two identities. The previous identity had not an existence. It was not a real thing it was an illusion. And here we have not two processes, losing something and finding something else. There is only one process: It is not the case that at first John loses himself then Peter finds himself. And it is not the case that Peter loses John and then finds himself. And it is not also the case that John Knows Peter. If John knows Peter, he is not John. And if he is still John, he does not know Peter. Only Peter knows Peter. The only process is that Peter finds himself. Ibn Arabi uses an example about a person whose name is Mahmud but he thinks he is Muhammad. I have changed these names to Peter and John:

To take an example, suppose that you do not know that your name is Peter or your named is Peter (because the name and the named are in reality one.) But [suppose] you think that your name is John, and after sometime you come to know that you are Peter, then your
existence goes on, but the name John is cut off from you by your coming to know yourself, that you are Peter and you were John only by ceasing to be yourself. So nothing positive is taken from Peter, nor does John cease to be in Peter, or enter to him or proceed forth from him, nor Peter into John, but as soon as Peter knows himself, that he is Peter and not John, he knows himself by himself not by John for John never existed at all, and how could anything that does not exist be known through it? So then the knower and that which he knows are both one, and he who unites and that with which he unites are one, and seer and seen are one. For the knower is his attribute and the known is his essence and he who unites is his attribute and that with which he unites is his essence, and the attribute and that to which it is attributed are one. And this is the explanation of the saying "He who knows himself knows his Lord"(5, 16).

So according to Ibn Arabi our real "self" is our existence which is nothing but God's existence. But we have forgotten our real self and think we are something else. If this illusion is cut off from us, we will know our real self which is God.

14-Specific Lords

The Prophet (s) said: "He who knows himself knows his Lord". He didn't say he knows "the Lord" or knows "God". He said "his Lord". Ibn Arabi emphasizing on the pronoun "his", says another subtle point about the hadith. When the servant comes to know himself thereby knowing God, he does not know God in Himself rather he knows Him as "his Lord". This is the God who discloses Himself to the soul, and this self-disclosure is different from that experienced by any other soul. Each soul has his own Lord. So to say that "He who knows himself knows his Lord" means that he who knows himself knows his own specific Lord who is God as He discloses Himself to his soul not anyone else's Lord. Ibn Arabi writes:

The Prophet (s) said, "He who knows himself knows his Lord". He did not say "knows the essence of his Lord". Since the Lord's essence possesses non delimited independence. How could the delimited thing know the non delimited? But the Lord demands the vassal, without doubt. So in Lord there is a whiff of delimitation
through this the created thing knows his Lord. (4, vol.3, 72)

And here one of the differences between "fana" and "nirvana" becomes clear. In this knowledge which is fana, people are different. They are not on the same degree, the same level and the same station. Their differences are like the differences between the divine names. Ibn Arabi says in *FUSUS*:

> Know that what is named God is One in Essence but All through the names. No existent thing has anything from God except its own specific Lord. It cannot possibly have the All. That which became designated for it from the All is only that which corresponds to it, and that is its own Lord. No one takes from Him in respect of His unity. That is why the folk of Allah declare self-disclosure in unity to be impossible (6, vol.1, 90).

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